NIGERIA

COUNTRY OVERVIEW
Nigeria Facts

**Capital:** Abuja  
**Currency:** Nigerian naira  
**President:** Muhammadu Buhari  
**Official Language:** English  
**Government:** Federal Presidential Republic  
**Population:** 200 million (2019)

Nigeria is a federal republic in West Africa, bordered by Niger on the north, Chad and Cameroon on the east, Benin on the west.

**Land and Climate**

**Size:** 356,669 sq. miles, roughly the size of Venezuela

**Geography:** Nigeria’s northern and southern areas are made up of plains, with plateaus and hills in the country’s center. The southeastern border contain Nigeria’s highest elevation points: Chappal Waddi at 7,936 feet and Mount Dimlang at 6,699 feet.

**Climate:** Nigeria’s climate is mostly tropical, interspersed with rainy and dry seasons depending on the exact locale. The southeast is hot and wet for the majority of the year, yet drier in the southwest and inland. In the north and west a savanna climate with specific wet and dry seasons can be found, while the far reaches of the north see little precipitation year round. Temperature and humidity therefore don’t vary much throughout the year in the south, but they do in the north based on seasonal shifts. The annual rainfall ranges from 20 inches in the north to 120 inches in the southeast, and the north and south have two different wet seasons: mid-May to September in the north, and March to November in the south.
Nigeria’s history has an important role to play in the differences between the northern and southern parts of the country. The trans-Saharan trade routes helped the Kanem-Borno empire around Lake Chad to flourish, aided by adopting Islam in the 12th century. The southwest existed as small states overseen by the Yoruba people. The 10th century saw the Ijebu Kingdom rise, as well as the Benin Kingdom with its revered metal artwork which helped position it as a renowned trade center. Sacred monarchies comprised the political systems here, while in the southeast agrarian people such as the Igbo opted to create confederations instead of a centralized empire.

The 15th century ushered in the first contact between Europeans and the Yoruba empires when the Portuguese began pepper trading, later moving to the slave trade. But the early 19th century saw the British stepping in to suppress the rise of the slavery abolitionist movement, leading to additional annexation to impede the French advance along the Niger River. This clash led to the birth of colonial Nigeria, with the mainly Christian south and the Islamic protectorate in the north, further intensifying ethnic divisions.

With independence in 1960, these divisions split politics along ethnic lines and disrupted the country. There were several coups and massacres throughout the 1960s, leading to Igbo secession from Nigeria and civil war which lasted for three years, eventually resulting in famine and up to a million deaths due to starvation.

The oil boon in the 1970s helped smooth reconciliation throughout the country, but ushered in more coups, assassinations, thwarted attempts at democracy, dictatorships and ethnic violence in the coming decades. The Boko Haram Islamist movement gained traction in 2009, and in 2015 current president Muhammadu Buhari became the first opposition candidate to win a presidential election in the country’s history.
**Government**

Nigeria’s government is currently a federal presidential republic where the president holds a four year term and is chief of staff, head of government, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The Nigerian constitution calls for a National Assembly consisting of House of Representatives and the Senate, with state and local government tiers existing below the federal level. Women have historically played an active role in government as well, deriving political strength and influence at the local level from precolonial traditions couched in their ethnic group status. However, the federal level does not always allow for equal participation, with women comprising only about 5% of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

**Economy**

Nigeria’s economy is one of the largest in Africa. Based largely on the petroleum industry, it also means that the agricultural sector has seen ongoing issues due to shifting oil markets and rapid population growth, primarily in urban areas. The various governments over the decades have successfully privatized many state-run enterprises, yet also had to borrow internationally to combat wavering revenue flows; this led to allocating large amounts of the national budget to debt repayment. Nigeria has a high amount of arable land, yet it’s not evenly dispersed and anywhere from one-fifth to one-half of Nigerians rely on agricultural production for their livelihood. This constitutes yams, taro, cassava, cacao and rubber trees in the south, while the northern crops consist of sorghum, millet, corn, peanuts and cotton. The top exports are processed petroleum oils and cocoa beans. The country’s wildlife reserves, cultures, museums, and coastal beaches could serve as a tourist draw, yet the instability and ethnic violence has hindered that part of the economy from truly blossoming.
**Currency**

The official currency of Nigeria is the Nigerian naira (NGN) which is comprised of 100 kobos. It has been routinely devalued since its introduction in 1973, with inflation remaining above 10%. Coins include the 50 kobos, 1 naira, and 2 naira coins, while bank notes are created in 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500 and 1,000 naira denominations. The Central Bank of Nigeria attempts to peg the naira to the current USD valuation, but not to other currencies.

**Culture**

There are about 250 major ethnic groups in Nigeria; the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba, and the Igbo are considered the dominant groups. The Hausa-Fulani are primarily Muslim, one of the country’s largest ethnic groups and live in the north. The Yoruba live in the southwest and are primarily agrarian but live in urban centers away from their farmland. Each of their subgroups is ruled by an oba, or chief. The Igbo are primarily found in the southeast and live in small democratic settlements ruled by chosen elders instead of a solitary chief. There are three broad linguistic groups here: Niger-Congo, Nilo-Saharan, and Afro-Asiatic, and it’s thoughts that the majority of subgroups have been spoken for around 4,000 years in the same geographic area.

To people from other cultures, Nigerians may come across as highly emotional and demonstrative, since greeting one another with large shows of emotion can be commonplace and acceptable. Sometimes it may even appear that they’re having an impassioned argument when in fact it’s simply a friendly conversation.

Nigeria’s long history and deep cultural roots also see Nigerians observing many traditions. For example, it’s common practice for those getting married to have three weddings. The first is traditional, the second is in a court and the third is in a church or mosque to honor the fact that the marriage should be recognized in turn by tradition, law, and religion.
CUISINE: Nigerian food often includes starchy cassava and yams, meat or seafood, and many vegetables, seasoned with aromatic spices and served over rice, in stews, or fried. Many foods are spicy, especially in the south and the west.

RELIGION: Nigerians are predominantly Muslim (50.5%), although some are Christian (34.5%), Roman Catholic (13.7%), or other (1.3%).

ETIQUETTE: Nigerians tend to be relaxed about personal space and it’s not uncommon for people of the same gender to touch one another while having a conversation. Traditional familial roles also define the country’s customs, and it’s common for meals to be eaten separately by men, women, and children. Guests will be served first; do not eat or pass food with your left hand, and ensure you’re never pointing your feet toward the food. A small burp at the end of the meal shows your contentment.

When meeting Nigerians, handshakes are typical although they may last longer than typical. Because Muslim Nigerians discourage physical contact between the sexes, if you are a man it’s always best to wait and see if a Nigerian woman extends her hand to you, in which case it’s okay to shake it. Status is important, so a small bow while shaking hands will show deference to someone senior to you, and you should also avoid prolonged eye contact with a superior for the same reason. When making introductions within a group, always seek to greet the individuals in order of seniority if possible. It’s also good practice to ask after someone’s health, their family, etc. to show interest before approaching any business at hand.

CLOTHING: In most urban areas and especially in the south, western-style clothing is standard. Traditional dress also abounds, including long flowing robes and brightly hued headscarves for women, and long, loose shirts and traditional caps for men.
COMMON WORDS AND PHRASES

Nigeria’s official language is English, although there are about 520 total, and of these Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba are quite common. It’s easy to be daunted and not know which approach to take when trying to converse with locals, which is why Nigerian Pidgin is recommended as the lingua franca which bridges linguistic differences and is spoken by everyone from street vendors to doctors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGLISH PHRASE</th>
<th>NIGERIAN PIDGIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hello</td>
<td>How far?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you?</td>
<td>How you dey?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m fine</td>
<td>I dey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand</td>
<td>I sabi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>I no sabi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td>You do well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please</td>
<td>Abeg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop</td>
<td>E don do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This meal is delicious</td>
<td>This food sweet well, well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much is this?</td>
<td>How much this one cost?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where is the bathroom?</td>
<td>Where the bathroom dey?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PRINCIPAL CITIES

ABUJA

Abuja is the capital of Nigeria, and was built in the 1980s as a planned capital city on the grassy Chukuku Hills based on its central location, favorable climate, and ease of future expansion. It’s about 300 miles northeast of Lagos, the former capital city.

AREA: 683 square miles (1,768 square kilometers)

WEATHER: Annual average temperature: 78 °F

POINTS OF INTEREST: Supreme Court, The National Arboretum, Millennium Park, the National Mosque, National Children’s Park and Zoo, National Stadium.
LAGOS
One of the largest cities in sub-Saharan Africa, Lagos is the former capital of Nigeria and home to 17 million people. It sprawls over what used to be four main islands, and Apapa Quay anchors its reputation as an important port city.

**Area:** 452 square miles (1,170 square kilometers)
**Weather:** Annual average temperature: 80 °F
**Points of Interest:** University of Lagos, National Library, National Museum

HEALTH STATISTICS

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, totaling 206,125,414 people with a population growth rate of 2.58%. At their current growth rate, Nigeria is expected to become the third most populated country in the world by 2047, due in part to early marriages, high birth rates, and a dearth of family planning access. The average life expectancy for men is 53 years old and for women it’s 54 years old.

The top ten causes of death in Nigeria are lower respiratory infections, neonatal disorders, HIV/AIDS, malaria, diarrheal diseases, tuberculosis, meningitis, Ischemic heart disease, stroke, and cirrhosis.

Nigeria is faced with the “double burden” of high prevalence of communicable diseases, coupled with rising numbers of non-communicable diseases. Malaria is the biggest health challenge, responsible for 60% of outpatient visits to health facilities, 30% of childhood deaths, and 11% of maternal deaths. There are five hospital beds per 10,000 people, and the private sector provides over 65% of healthcare services.
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