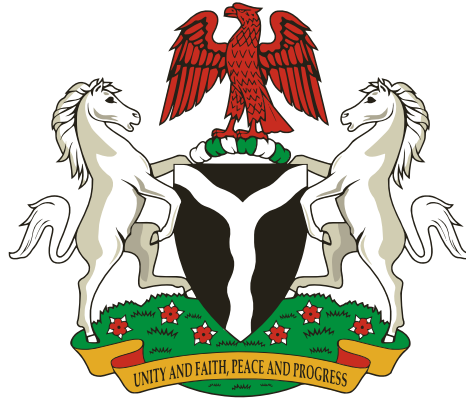


Sociocultural Fault Lines Series

Nigeria



Global Cultural Knowledge Network
G2, Training and Doctrine Command



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نيسان قوة وامان
 توكيل المبيعات في موريتانيا
 نواكشوط

Abuja City Gate
Photo by J. Shadid, USAID.

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Introduction

This sociocultural study addresses Nigeria’s (NGA) societal fault lines. GCKN defines a sociocultural fault line as an exploitable source of instability within a community, country, or region of the Operational Environment (OE). A fault Line consists of interrelated conditions that affect the centrally important issues of public governance, economic well-being, social cohesion, and communal resilience. A fault line develops over time and, like the exploitable conditions from which it forms, may be exploited or leveraged by domestic and foreign actors to advance their interests. Fault line analyses increase situational understanding of the OE and provide insight for military decision-making.

This paper proceeds in four sections followed by a description of the methodology. The first section establishes the context for the analytic judgments by introducing a background for the analysis. Section two presents the sociocultural fault line analysis. The judgments in this section predicate the intersection of several exploitable conditions within the OE, which create each of the fault lines. The section thoroughly explores each fault line, ascertaining why they exist. Section three explains how each of the fault lines may be exploited, by whom, and the significance of exploitation for the OE. Section four articulates the implications of exploitation for the U.S. Army. The final section provides a short description of the methodology for the reader to understand how GCKN conducted the analysis.

EXPLOITABLE CONDITION (EC) + EC + EC ——— time ———> **FAULT LINE**

Background

Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country and largest economy, faces regular outbreaks of violence across multiple domains, threatening national cohesion, economic security, and political stability. The violence and potential instability belie the political progress the country has made over the last two decades from military-imposed authoritarianism to participatory democracy. Within this period, Nigeria recorded improvements in several areas, including economic growth that surpassed South Africa as the continent’s largest economy; population growth—particularly in the number of youths—which, if harnessed, could translate into enormous economic opportunity; rising urbanization that is spurring lifestyle changes and contributing to demographic shifts; liberalization of the socio-political space that has encouraged the assertion of all manner of identities and rights; and increasing awareness of the socioeconomic impact of climate variability. However, each of these domains of progress also provokes deep and enduring challenges to Nigeria’s social, economic,

**SOCIOCULTURAL
FAULT LINES** are
“exploitable
sources of
instability in the
human domain;
they can be real
or perceived.”

and political stability. These warrant a distinctly different analytical approach for unpacking the issues, identifying root causes, and determining whether or how motivated actors, domestic and foreign, might exploit them to further unravel governance, undermine national security, and degrade regional stability.

This unpacking is important considering Nigeria's profile as a regional leader that was for decades the regional security exporter. Notably, Nigerian forces spear-headed peacekeeping efforts in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s¹ and participated in peace support operations in Chad, Angola, Namibia, Somalia, Rwanda, and Sudan.² Nigeria has made the largest financial contribution to peacekeeping operations in West Africa with over 13 billion US dollars committed.³ From the 1970s through the 1990s, Nigeria provided critical funding and an assortment of aid packages to support anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa and to relieve other struggling African countries.⁴

Nigeria played this “big brother” role despite being deeply divided, having trodden “a complex, turbulent and contradictory political trajectory” after gaining independence from Great Britain in 1960.⁵ The division has diverse sources, including its large population size of approximately 220 million people, which accounts for about half of the West African population and one of the largest youth populations in the world.⁶ Another source is its multi-ethnic character, which condenses its over 350 ethnic groups that speak over 800 languages and subscribe to three broad religions—Islam (50%), Christianity (40%), and African Traditional Religion (10%)—into six regions with 36 autonomous states and a Federal Capital Territory. A third source is an economy dominated by crude oil mining, which accounts for 80 percent of exports but is highly susceptible to global commodity price fluctuations and the global economic disruption caused by COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine war.⁷

Despite Nigeria's lofty regional profile, these sources—its high level of ethnic diversity, large population, low-capacity utilization of labor and resources, and low level of economic diversity—are producing poor developmental outcomes. For example, in 2016, Nigeria fell into its first recession in 25 years⁸, and then its limited buffers and policy frameworks for cushioning the adverse effects of falling crude oil prices and COVID-19 made it slide into recession again in 2020, reversing three years of recovery.⁹ Consequently, unemployment and underemployment have increased and over 85 million of its citizens are now trapped in poverty with another 53 million people extremely susceptible to poverty.¹⁰ In addition, under-investment and worsening corruption at all governance levels have weakened its human capital development.¹¹ The resulting socio-economic pressure constrains efforts to diversify the economy to reduce dependency on oil, address insufficient infrastructure, build strong and effective institutions, reduce regional inequality, increase access to socio-economic opportunities for the growing population, and mitigate vexing issues of climate variability and weak governance. All of these contribute to the erosion of citizen trust in government and pose challenges to Nigeria's stability.

A historical pattern with Nigeria since its independence from Britain in 1960 is acute socioeconomic underperformance despite the tremendous growth opportunities in the country, which motivates derision of the country as the “sleeping” or “crippled giant.”¹² From its independence through the 1970s, Nigeria showed enormous growth potentials anchored on its expansive natural resource wealth, particularly crude oil, but also on its human capital assets, which made it one of the most developed countries on the continent.¹³ However, between 1960 and 2017, Nigeria's GDP per capita averaged only about 1,700 USD, which is equivalent to 19 percent of the world's average.¹⁴ This indicates the economy has remained stagnant for

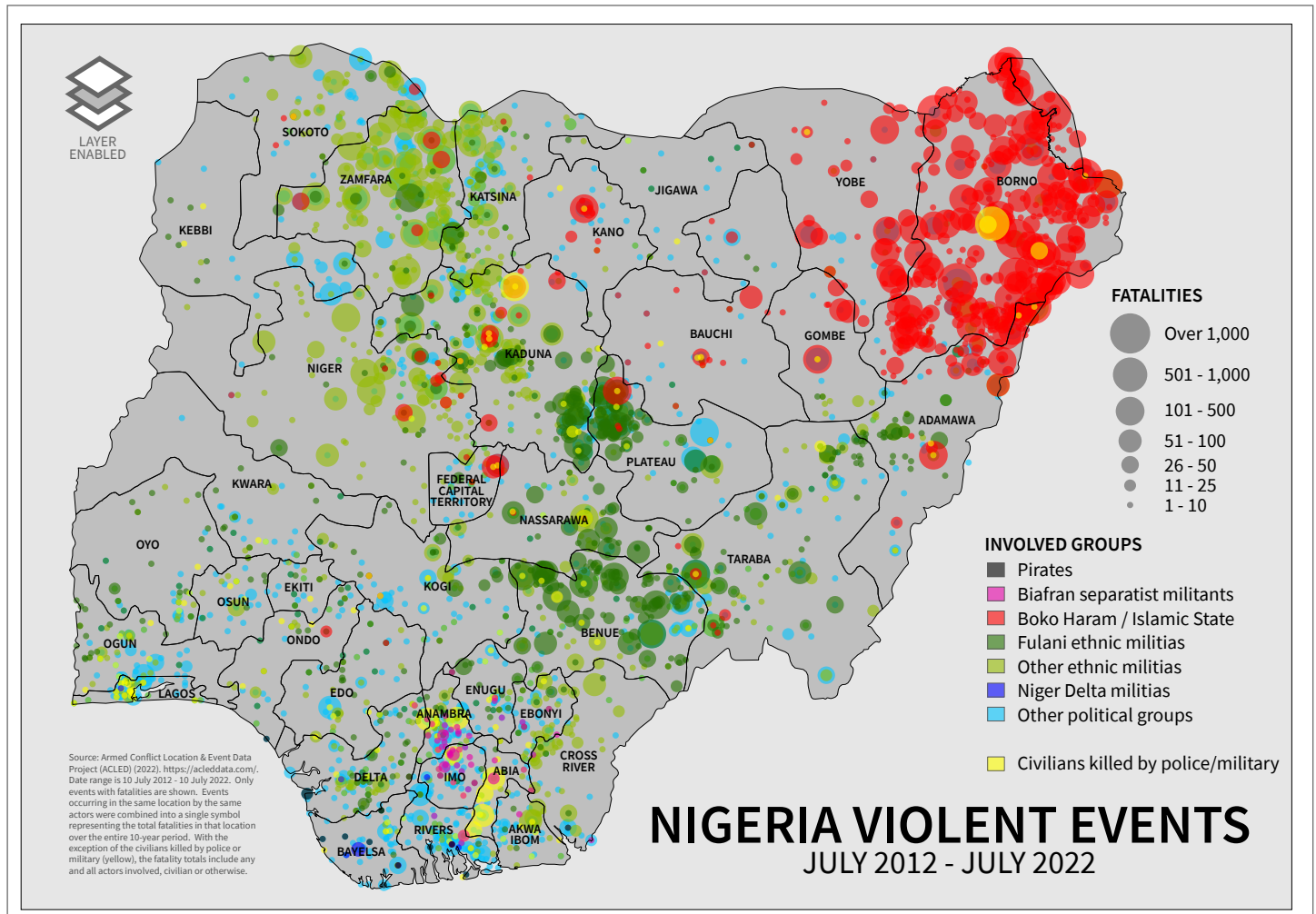


Figure 1: *Nigeria Violent Events (2012 JUL - 2022 JUL)*, GCKN.

much of its history despite the increased oil revenue that helped it to surpass the South African economy.¹⁵ Similarly, Nigeria has continued a trajectory of turbulent democratic transitions after surviving three decades of autocratic military rule. During national elections, including the 2023 general elections, national divisions—ethnic, religious, regional, etc.—corrode the electioneering process and make even the most mundane issues extremely partisan and potentially combustible.

In this way, violence and claims of corruption have marred every national election in Nigeria. The military used these claims to justify military coups in 1966 and 1983. The 1966 coup precipitated and accelerated a destructive 30-month civil war that killed about three million people.¹⁶

¹⁷ Equally devastating is the ongoing Islamist insurgency in Nigeria’s northeast region, which has unraveled political governance and the economy, and security of the Lake Chad Basin region. This violence is a regional problem and directly affects Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. The insurgency has led to 350,000 deaths,¹⁸ displaced 3 million people,¹⁹ and exposed 7.9 million people to food insecurity. National defense constraints, worsening national divisions, dwindling legitimate economic opportunities, and poor governance are expanding the spaces of contention and opening new frontiers of violence in other parts of the country. For instance, banditry in the northwest, herder-farmer violence in the Middle Belt, separatism in the southeast and southwest, militancy

in the Niger Delta, and kidnapping for ransom across all regions are stretching the capacity of Nigeria's security forces and compelling them to prioritize threats based on limited resources.²⁰ These national security challenges highlight the country's gradual slide into ungovernability and accentuate risks for regional instability.

Given this context, understanding the sources of Nigeria's many problems—including the sociocultural elements underpinning its multiple internal and regional vulnerabilities—has become a categorical imperative. The emphasis of this paper is the fault lines and the conditions that form them. However, the paper also exposes the sources of order that contribute to the country's fragile resilience. These sources include institutional innovation, elite bargaining, and expansive civil resources, which feed the competitive factionalism that reduces the concentration of power in any political elite and prevents the condensing of Nigeria's multiple challenges on a national scale to cause complete state collapse. Therefore, there is an inadvertent juxtaposition of the forces of order and disorder in this analysis. Nigeria's historical role as the region's "natural leader" with a "manifest destiny," whose commitment to regional integration has been the decisive force behind the success of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)²¹ sits in large contrast to its current difficulty with addressing emerging threats that are overwhelming national and regional capacities.

This paper summarizes the most important fault lines that challenge Nigerian stability, including identifying and understanding the national sociocultural seams and their destabilizing motions and developing a trajectory of outcomes in the form of scenarios for Nigeria, West Africa, and the competition among great powers, including the United States, China, Russia, and Iran for regional

influence. The ensuing discussion of Nigerian fault lines centers on three core concepts: *territory*, *identity-integration*, and *demography*. Sociologists, political scientists, environmentalists, historians, geographers, economists, etc., have undertaken considerable research to understand and articulate the origin and nature of these sociocultural contradictions without exploring the significance of their exploitation. Thus, exploring these issues through fault line analysis offers a narrower, tailored explanation of how their exploitation by domestic and foreign actors affects national and regional security, and the U.S. regional influence.

In this paper, we will examine and explain the patterns that make up the territorial, identity-integration, and demographic seams, the relationship among them, the exploitative relations that can transform them from being benign to potentially destabilizing, and the impact of exploitation on national and regional cohesion as well as the United States regional and global influence. Notably, several exploitable conditions^a—divided societies (i.e., elite fracture), multiple sovereignty (i.e., secession, ethnonationalism), demographic pressure (i.e., population growth), ineffective government (i.e., hybrid federalism, corruption), infrastructural deficits (i.e., differentiated rate of development), resource scarcity (i.e., resource competition), environmental threats (i.e., drought, desertification), and economic inequality (i.e., poverty, unemployment)—combine to create the three sociocultural fault lines. Their roles in producing, maintaining, or hardening the fault lines are woven into each concept, becoming the silhouette for the analysis.

^a See Exploitable Conditions Framework.

FL1: Unbridled Territoriality

The intensification of territorial consciousness among Nigerian nationalities has produced a territorial group identity that is spurring the localization of authority and sovereignty outside the state and creating unyielding challenges for security and stability. The embedding of land use within the concept of ethnicity has strengthened ethno-territorial consciousness, weakened the national consciousness, and permitted groups to assert authority and influence that are in opposition to state authority and provide opportunities for exploitation by domestic and foreign actors.

Territory, by definition, is a bounded area that has some political character or meaning and contains people, governments, resources, and means of communication and movement.²² Territory is central to how people think about ethnicity and nationalism and is a critical dynamic in the social, economic, and political performance of identity groups in Nigeria. The intersection of geography and society has a significant impact on political stability in several ways.²³ These include the effect of regionalism on political and socio-economic transformation,²⁴ the adaptation of specific political tactics by ethnic groups,²⁵ the consequences of heterogeneous populations in large cities,²⁶ and broad regional resource inequalities.²⁷ Underpinning these conclusions are the historical development, perceptual attributes, and spatial configurations of the territorial units, which have spurred ethnic nationalists and activists to challenge the socio-political structure of Nigeria. For example, many groups have demanded the disintegration of Nigeria to correlate with the five major ethnonational blocks.^b This dismantling would fundamentally change the relationship among hundreds of ethnic groups that Britain amalgamated to create Nigeria in 1914 and have a broad regional impact across central and western Africa. Others argue against complete dismantling, preferring comprehensive restructuring that allows the country to be a true federation that harnesses ethno-territorial differences for national growth and stability.²⁸

Ethno-territorial consciousness has deepened among Nigerians, leading many Nigerians to see the country as a “mere geographical expression”²⁹ or as “a name written on a map.”³⁰ Even the efforts by national political leaders and the Nigerian Constitution³¹ to propagate Nigeria’s “indivisibility” and “indissolubility” have failed to dissuade many groups from demanding and actively working to dismantle the country because it has lost significance for them.³² Instead, groups like the Indigenous People

b The five ethnonational blocks comprise of: Hausa-Fulani and allied northern ethnicities that primarily inhabit the northeast and northwest; the minority ethnicities of Tiv, Junkun, Birom and allied Middle Belt ethnicities that primarily inhabit the northcentral; Igbo who primarily inhabit the southeast; Yoruba who primarily inhabit the southwest; and Ijaw, Edo, Efik and allied Niger Delta ethnicities who primarily inhabit the south south.

FL1: Exploitable Conditions



Divided Societies



Economic Inequalities



Environmental Threats



Ineffective Government



Infrastructure Deficits



Mobilizing Ideologies



Multiple Sovereignties



Resource Scarcity

of Biafra (IPOB), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and the Yoruba Nation Now movement are pushing secession and clashing with security forces.³³ The violence resulting from this unbridled territoriality is further hardening ethno-territorial identities, worsening competition among identity groups, and posing risks to Nigeria's security and stability.

Two related territorial issues are at the heart of Nigeria's security and stability problems: 1) the nature and scope of ethnic consciousness about territory and 2) the development and institutionalization of particular political-territorial arrangements. Both reasons involve several exploitable conditions, including resource scarcity, environmental threats, mobilizing ideologies, infrastructural deficits, and government ineffectiveness.

Nature and Scope of Ethnic Consciousness about Territory in Nigeria: The disjunction between the established federal structure and ethnic consciousness about local and national territory has weakened ethnic groups' ties to Nigeria and motivated them to assert authority and sovereignty that challenge Nigeria's political stability. For example, the reorganization of the Nigerian federation into twelve federating states in 1967c had the intended effect of fragmenting the bases of domination in the three regions and integrating the national aspirations of all ethnic groups, including minorities.³⁴ However, Nigeria's effort to create more states to promote an institutionally balanced, structurally integrated, and ethnically decentralized system of federalism³⁵ had the opposite effect of reinforcing parochial ethno-territorial consciousness, hardening sub-national identities, and weakening the Nigerian identity.

Territoriality poses significant challenges to Nigeria's stability. The first challenge involves territorial restrictions. The creation of laws by many states to restrict movements of particular identity groups,³⁶ including Fulani pastoralists, contravenes federal law and exacerbates ethnic clashes. The pastoralists native to northern Nigeria are predominantly Muslim and seasonally migrate southward in search of pasture for their cattle, which brings them into perennial conflict over land access with Christian farming communities in the south. The second challenge involves gerrymandering by Igbo separatists. Their desire to create the Republic of Biafra, which partitions the Biafra territory to include vast areas that do not correlate with Igbo traditional homestead, but were part of the former Eastern Region, has produced hostility amongst other groups who have historically laid claim to the area.³⁷ Moreover, the decision by

c The Federation of Nigeria comprised four regions—Eastern Region, Mid-Western Region, Northern Region, and Western Region—prior to 1967, when the twelve-state administrative structure was established by a decree issued by the federal military government.

ROLE OF BRITAIN IN THE FORMATION OF NIGERIA'S ETHNO-TERRITORIAL FAULT LINE

In 1954, the British established a three-unit federal structure that secured political autonomy and hegemony for Nigeria's three dominant ethnic groups: Hausa-Fulani (Northern Region), Yoruba (Western Region), and Igbo (Eastern Region). The intense abuse of this ethno-regional federal structure by competing sectional political coalitions created a series of crises and antagonisms that culminated in the January 1966 military coup, the first in the country, and led to the demise of the parliamentary system of government. One immediate consequence of the coup and subsequent military rule was the "militarization and exacerbation of ethno-regional conflict" leading to the gradual isolation of the Igbo-dominated eastern region from the federation and culminating in the Nigerian civil war, also known as the Biafra War, from 1967-1970. Although how and why they fought and how the war ended provide rich lessons for toleration and understanding, which could buffer against future instability, the failure to resolve the contradictions that produced the war, including unresolved ethno-territorial issues, still haunt Nigeria and undergird the current secessionist crisis in the country.

the Nigerian government to separate the non-Igbo areas of the Eastern Region—with considerable oil wealth and access to the sea—from the landlocked Igbo areas was the immediate spark of the Nigerian Civil War, and current Igbo separatists are mobilizing against perceived socio-political marginalization based on this ethno-territorial consciousness.³⁸ The third challenge is the agitation by Middle Belt and Niger Delta minority groups for control of their resources and the social, political, and economic opportunities that open from such control.³⁹ While the Niger Delta demand for control of their oil mineral wealth has sparked militant violence targeting oil facilities and government forces, the violence between settlers and indigenous peoples in the Middle Belt over land rights and political access is one of the most destructive in West Africa.⁴⁰

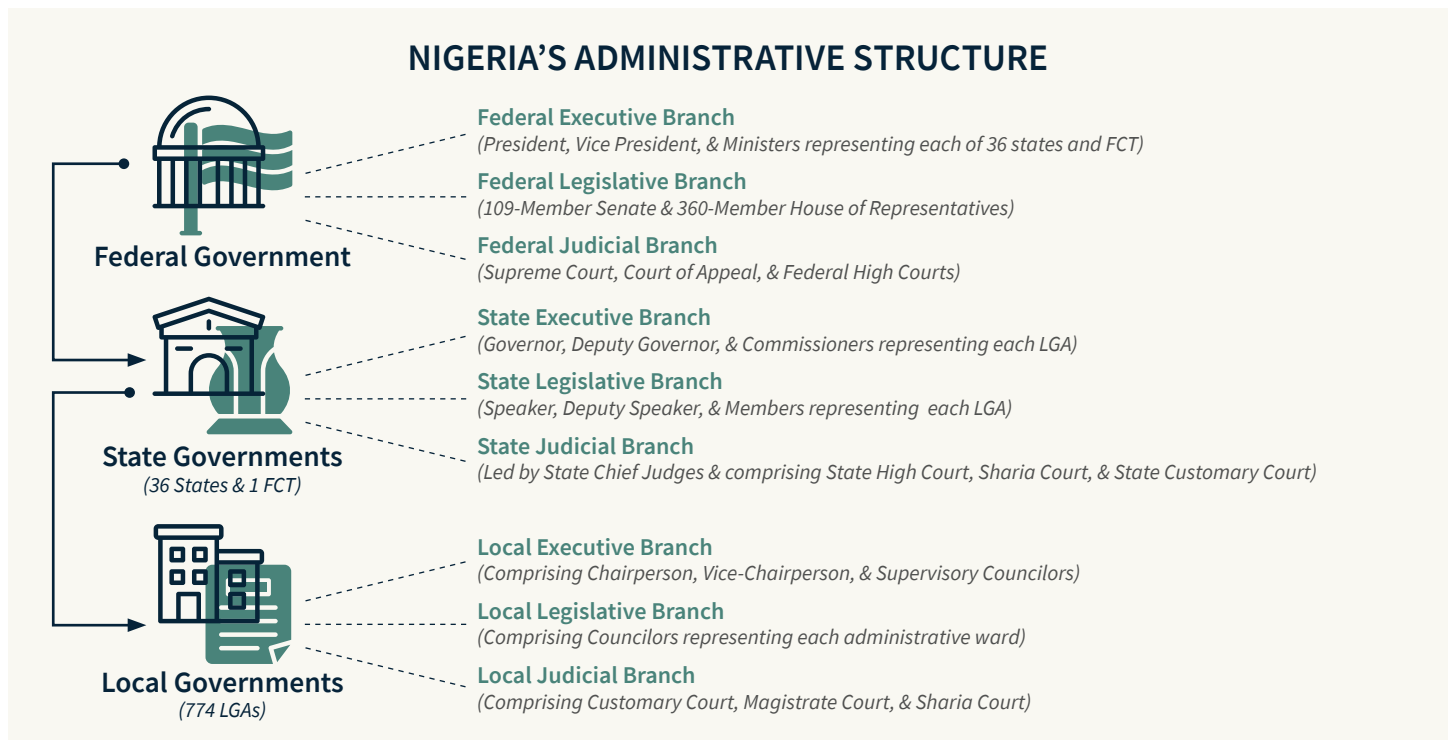
These challenges highlight the growing sensitivity about territory—reinforced by the post-civil war arbitrary definition of territory or homeland in federal administrative mechanisms⁴¹—and the growing assertion of authority and sovereignty by sub-national units that increase risks for insecurity and instability. They all reinforce the fact that territorial protectionism and ethnic sensitivity are interrelated, but also underscore the pervasive impact of resource scarcity, climate variability, poor infrastructure, ineffective governance, and ideological mobilization in hardening the territorial fault line.

Development and Institutionalization of Particular Politico-Territorial Arrangements: The issue of ethno-territorial consciousness reinforces the second core territorial issue: the development and institutionalization of territorial-based political arrangements. Ineffective

governance—corruption at all levels, failure to remediate climate factors, failure to manage and efficiently channel population growth, serial policy failures, etc.—and other national challenges have rendered federal administrative restructuring ineffective and worsened ethno-territorial suspicions, competition, and antagonism.

The Nigerian government divided the three regions it inherited at independence into six geopolitical zones, a Federal Capital Territory (FCT), 36 states, and 774 Local Government Areas (LGA). The decision to organize territory in this way was to decentralize administrative control, spur socio-economic development, create unity and strength out of Nigeria’s diversity, deconstruct the pre-existing ethno-territorial consciousness, and create a strong sense of Nigerian nationalism.⁴² The ethnic heterogeneity and intense intermingling in large cities like Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, etc., appear to buttress this approach.

Nigerians’ rooted connectedness to the land and the partitioning of it into ethnic enclaves has created an unyielding structural problem for stability. The government’s optimistic goal of using a hybrid federal administrative structure—which empowers the federal government over the federated units—to forge Nigerian unity has not worked and instead tends to reinforce ethnic/territorial division.⁴³ For example, the self-consciousness asserted by minority ethnic groups did not assume a cohesive, coordinated fashion until the creation of the Mid-Western Region in 1964.⁴⁴ Since then, minority ethnic consciousness has been forged in the context of territorially distinct characteristics. Thus, the adoption of a hybrid-federal system that mostly grafted federal power over those of federated units has failed to replace the prevailing and destabilizing ethnic consciousness that is tied to territory.



FL2: Absence of National Identity and Integration

Nigeria's failure to integrate sub-national identities into the national identity has steeped constituent groups in intense factionalism that undermines national unity and socioeconomic development and motivates ineffective governance and corruption. The struggle among distinctive population groups who support competing ideas about nationhood is occurring at the sub-national level based on groups' understanding and assertion of their own identity, the primacy or centrality of their identity to the national identity, the protections and opportunities offered by the state, and the nature and characteristics of competing identities. Over several decades, identity struggles fueled intense factionalism among national constituents, producing deep skepticism about Nigeria as a national entity and increasing hesitation among these groups to work for the country's progress. Instead of integration and socioeconomic progress, factionalism has bred disunity and encouraged poor governance, including electoral malfeasance, corruption, the dilapidation of national infrastructures and institutions, and the national despair that has provoked fatalistic fears and calls for the dissolution of the country or its comprehensive restructuring.⁴⁵

Factionalism has many manifestations but is exemplified by the Nigerian government's failure to implement the recommendations of the 2014 National Conference. Following the failure of several constitutional conferences and constitutional amendments to address the imbalances that spur anxiety about the future of Nigeria, many stakeholder groups clamored for a sovereign national conference of Nigerian ethnic nationalities to chart the way forward.⁴⁶ In 2013, on the eve of Nigeria's centenary celebration and less than two years before a potentially fractious general election, President Goodluck Jonathan yielded to the pressure and proposed a "national conversation ... in response to the yearnings of our people."⁴⁷ President Jonathan inaugurated the Conference in March 2014 with 492 delegates selected from a cross-section of Nigerian groups, which deliberated for five months, passed more than 600 resolutions, and produced 22 reports and annexes consisting of 10,335 pages.⁴⁸ He promised to send relevant portions of the conference recommendations to the Council of State and the National Assembly for incorporation into the constitution and to implement aspects that fell under his executive responsibilities and authority,⁴⁹ but he did neither.

Despite the huge investment in the conference, which cost over 10 billion Naira,⁵⁰ and the expectation that it would help forge national cohesion and spur socioeconomic growth, the Nigerian government failed to implement the conference report. The main reason the conference report and recommendations languished is the persisting division among national stakeholders. Stakeholders, including members of Jonathan's

FL2: Exploitable Conditions



Divided Societies



Ineffective Government



Mobilizing Ideologies



Multiple Sovereignities

cabinet and his ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), which heavily dominated the National Assembly at the time, either supported or opposed the conference and its report based on their ethnicity, religion, and other parochial attributes. The tenacious disagreement among influential stakeholders mirrored disagreements among the population, which convinced Jonathan to jettison the report along with the expectations and opportunities underpinning it.⁵¹

Nigeria's territorial challenges are comingling with intransigent elite factionalism to impede Abuja's ability to form a cohesive national identity that would bring the various groups, regions, and communities together as one united nation. Abuja is unable to integrate the different identity groups in the country and their disparate interests into the national interest and identity because the prevailing ethno-territorial consciousness and competitive factionalism compel Nigerians to identify at a local level first. Thus, the development of ethno-territorial identity and the assertion of local sovereignty prevents the development and expression of Nigerian nationalism.

The process by which Nigerians prioritize belonging to a particular lower-order identity (i.e., ethnic, religious, regional, etc.) over the Nigerian identity is complex. Any country's existence depends on the functioning of numerous "centripetal forces," which link people, places, and socioeconomic and sociopolitical processes.⁵² A key process in the functioning of the centripetal forces is centralization, whereby the people and their territory are 'welded' together to achieve national unification and progress. As the previous section discusses, Nigeria adopted a hybrid-federal system to counterbalance the ethno-regional fervor that derailed the country's first republic and halted the creation of a unified, developed state, with the center providing political and economic solutions to the development needs of the federating units. Nigeria's efforts to forge statehood, including numerous constitutions and a bitterly fought civil war, have not achieved the goal. Although still a country by standard, the practical objective of experiencing nationhood is proving difficult, if not impossible to achieve.

At least three exploitable conditions contribute to this fault line, including divided societies, multiple sovereignty, and ineffective government, and their effect is cumulative over the course of Nigeria's history. Even in the decade before Nigeria gained independence, the key Nigerian nationalists representing the major ethnic nationalities prioritized their ethnic nations over Nigeria.^{53 54}

The roots of this crisis lie in Nigeria's colonial past, where Great Britain's desire to propagate its imperial interests was at odds with the formation of a strong national identity within Nigeria.^{55 56 57} Indeed, the British attempt to merge over 350 groups to create Nigeria, resulted in "inconsistent cognitive elements"⁵⁸ perpetually asserting

their difference from others. Moreover, it created some damaging long-term effects by playing one group's interests and fears over the other—and exploiting one group's weakness or strength to undermine the strength or weakness of the other—for its advantage.⁵⁹ Thus, this foundation of suspicion and antagonism continues to be the base upon which constituents forge or negotiate relations with others, which frustrates national integration and the formation of nationhood.

Failed Efforts to Fully Decentralize Power. The main factor inhibiting the state's ability to truly create a national identity out of the various ethnic/territorial groups is Abuja's inability to decentralize power. Nigeria's challenges in this area are increasing because Abuja's efforts to decentralize power and integrate federated units are instead fueling the prioritization of identity over statehood.

Nigeria is a federal republic that aimed to decentralize governance and allow various centripetal forces, including geopolitical regions, states, local governments, federal policing, and other federal administrative mechanisms to contribute toward national unification and sociopolitical stability. One effect of the decentralization is the development of competitive factionalism among these centripetal forces, which prevents any single faction from dominating the others.⁶⁰ In contrast to the centripetal forces, there are countervailing centrifugal forces located at sub-national units—including ethnic, religious, and other identity constructs—which are pressuring Nigeria's federal structure and undermining Nigerian unity and national cohesion. The contrast between these two sets of forces results in continuous tension between the federal government and the regional factions. The resulting structural erosion has created a dysfunctional relationship between the federating units and has exposed the worst aspects of governance in Nigeria. These include corruption and elite factionalism that have intensified ethno-territorial consciousness and aggravated the consequential serial

agitation for sovereignty.⁶¹

In addition, the failure to balance the centripetal and centrifugal forces has further activated other local forces to challenge Nigeria's cohesion and stability. For example, the proliferation of sub-national administrative borders has exacerbated boundary and identity disputes among sub-national groupings.⁶² Consequently, settlers are engaging in activities that blur physical and ideological demarcations between them and indigenous inhabitants of a given area. This challenges Nigeria's 1999 constitution that explicitly defines a person geologically, rather than residentially, where one's "parent or... grandparent was a member of a community indigenous to that state."⁶³ Thus, the prevailing conflicts across Nigeria—involving Igbo separatists, Niger Delta militants, Middle Belt militants, herders and farmers, bandits, etc.—are boundary and identity-related. This particularly highlights how the exclusion of people from social, economic, and political opportunities because of federally mandated incongruities is weakening civil and constitutional restraints against violence and motivating internecine struggles for group survival and dominance.⁶⁴

NIGERIA'S POLITICAL TRANSITION SINCE 1960

CURRENT LEADERSHIP



(RTD) Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari
President (2015-present)
Ethnic: Fulani
Current president who is term limited by 2023

FOURTH REPUBLIC

Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan
Head of State (2009-2015)
Ethnic: Ijaw
Completed Yar'Adua's un-expired term and his own first term, but lost re-election

Alhaji Umaru Yar'Adua
Head of State (2007-2009)
Ethnic: Hausa-Fulani
He was the first example of a civilian-to-civilian power transfer. Died in office.

(RTD) **Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo**
President (1999-2007)
Ethnic: Yoruba
His government ended the period of military rule and started the building of democratic institutions

ABORTED THIRD REPUBLIC

Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar
Head of State (Jun 1998-May 1999)
Ethnic: Fulani
He succeeded Abacha and committed to transitioning to civilian rule

Gen. Sani Abacha
Head of State (Dec 1993-Jun 1998)
Ethnic: Fulani
He sacked the ING and presided over a transition to succeed himself. Died in office.

Chief Earnest Shonekun
Head of Interim National Government (Aug 1993-Dec 1993)
Ethnic: Yoruba
His government had no significant power during a period of sociopolitical turmoil. Easily overthrown by Abacha.

ABORTED SECOND REPUBLIC

Gen. Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida
Head of State (Aug 1985-Aug 1993)
Ethnic: Nupe
He overthrew Buhari & established a corrupt rule with endless transition. Protest over his annulment of 12 June elections led him to resign.

Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari
Head of State (Jan 1983-Aug 1985)
Ethnic: Fulani
He deposed Shagari, established authoritarian rule, but sacked by Babangida.

Alhaji Shehu Shagari
President (1979-1983)
Ethnic: Fulani
He presided over a corrupt and profligate government, which along with the perceived rigging of the 1983 national elections motivated the military to overthrow him

INTERREGNUM

Lt. Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo
Head of State (Feb 1976-1979)
Ethnic: Yoruba
He continued Mohammed's priority of returning Nigeria to civilian rule

Brig. Gen. Murtala Ramat Mohammed
Head of State (Jul 1975-Feb 1976)
Ethnic: Hausa
He deposed Gowon and was himself assassinated in the failed Dinka coup

Gen. Yakubu Gowon
Head of State (1967-1975)
Ethnic: Birom
He led the coup of northern officers against Aguiyi-Ironsi, leading to the Civil War. Created 12 states out of 4 regions to break the power of the regions

FIRST REPUBLIC

Maj. Gen. Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi
Head of State (1966-1967)
Ethnic: Igbo
He replaced Balewa, but was assassinated in a reprisal coup led by northern officers, setting the stage for civil war

Abubakar Tafawa Balewa
Prime Minister from (1963-1966)
Ethnic: Fulani
His assassination on 15 January 1966 triggered anti-Igbo ethnic feuds leading to civil war

Nnamdi Azikiwe
President (1963-1966)
Ethnic: Igbo
He was a ceremonial president without executive power

Figure 2. Nigeria's Political Leadership, GCKN.

FL3: Unrestrained, Unchanneled Population Growth

Nigeria's inability to manage and channel its rapidly growing population into productive resources has weaponized demography as a source of disorder and destabilization, steadily elevating national security and stability risks. The country has witnessed a dramatic population increase from 45 million in 1960 when Nigeria attained independence, to its current estimate of 211-220 million, making it the most populous country in Africa and the eighth most populous country in the world.⁶⁵ The annual population growth rate of between 2.52 and 2.73 percent, is on pace to increase Nigeria's population to about 400 million by 2050.⁶⁶ By this projection it will be the fifth most populous country in the world; one in every ten children in the world will be born in Nigeria,⁶⁷ suggesting a significant increase in both the absolute number of births and children during the projected period.⁶⁸ In addition, Nigeria's population growth is occurring in conjunction with rapid urbanization, with large cities like Lagos receiving about 192 new migrants daily, mainly from rural areas. Unfortunately, Nigeria's economy has not matched the increase in population, growing less than one percent cumulatively over the last six years. Forty percent of the population (~83 million people) live in poverty,⁶⁹ making demography a source of stress that challenges—physically and ideologically—Nigeria's capacity to address a wide range of economic, social, environmental, and political issues. These include many of the fissures that endanger Nigeria's security and stability.⁷⁰

The population increase—including the rise in the urban population and widespread poverty—without corresponding increases in local and national capacity to address the needs of the growing population, particularly of youth, is creating crises and conflicts. The problems associated with this population surge are often blamed on other sources, but they likely will challenge national security and stability in the next decades. For example, the inability of Nigerian cities to meet the diverse range of needs of their growing—and differing—population groups is pitting underserved parts of cities—inhabited by the poor and disadvantaged—against the more affluent parts. The 2021 #ENDSARS protests across Nigerian cities demonstrated this,⁷¹ raising the specter of generational, classist, and partisan conflicts. Moreover, there is a wide spatial variation of population growth and poverty rates among Nigeria's six geopolitical zones where northern states are growing faster but have much higher poverty

TWO TYPES OF DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDENDS

Labor Force Dividend: This derives from the supply effects of changes in the age structure. This occurs automatically or mechanically because of the increase in the ratio of working-age adults to children. However, this dividend is transitory because per capita production will only rise if the labor market can absorb the increasing number of working-age adults.

Savings Dividend: This results from the behavior of adults who entered the labor force and remain employed until retirement. If these adults save and invest their earnings, the size of this second dividend will be huge; however Nigeria can only reap this dividend if it meets four conditions:

1. Appropriate national economic policies are in place to facilitate and encourage savings.
2. Eligible adults have jobs, earn deserved wages, and remain employed until retirement.
3. Workers save for retirement.
4. Formal retirement or pension plans, savings institutions, etc. are in place to channel savings to productive investments.



Protesters at the endSARS protest in Lagos, Nigeria.
Attribution: Kaizenify Photography

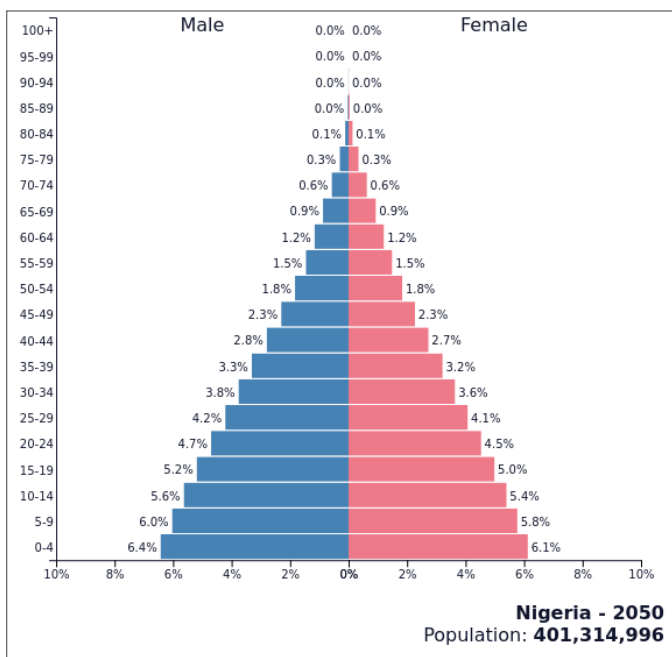
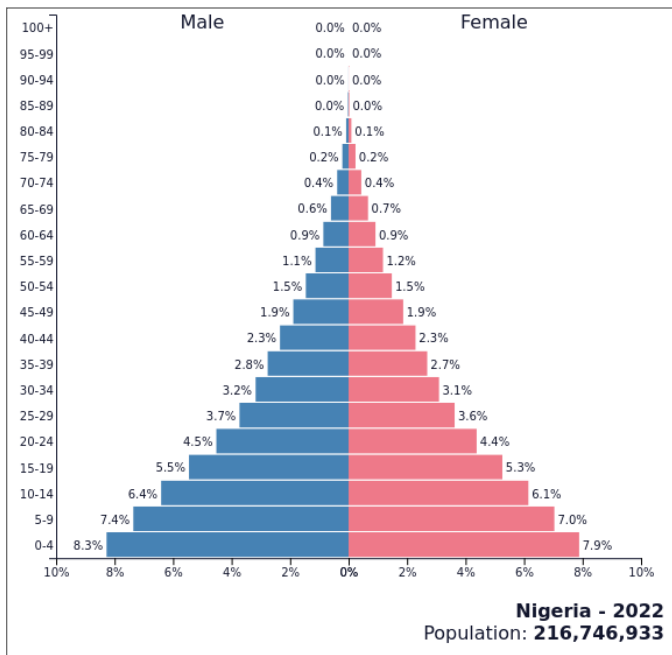


Figure 3 and 4. Predicting population growth from 2022 to 2050 for Nigeria. Source: PopulationPyramid.net

rates.⁷² Nearly three times poorer than the south,^d the north has much higher levels of insecurity than the south with Islamist insurgencies and banditry displacing youths from traditional means of subsistence and integrating many of them into criminality and violence.⁷³ The cumulative impact on Nigerian communities of rapid population growth, rising inflation, and shrinking job prospects—which is bound to significantly increase pressure on the government—alongside Islamist, criminal, and resource violence is increasing restlessness among youths. Nigeria’s inability to mitigate the unfolding demographic crisis through prudent policies and actions—that transform the population into a “healthy, educated, empowered labor force”⁷⁴—is fast making population growth its most serious national security risk.

This fault line exists because Nigeria has historically paid insufficient attention to demography in its efforts to address socioeconomic development even though Nigeria has for decades been one of the fastest-growing countries in the world. The government’s current perception of socioeconomic growth fixates on past failures to stimulate economic development through alleviating poverty, without addressing the ongoing demographic shifts as part of a broader strategy. For instance, despite huge returns from oil exports, most states in Nigeria, particularly in the north have been experiencing negative economic growth and their contributions to the national GDP have been paltry at best.⁷⁵ The economic crisis has its roots in diverse sources—environmental degradation, regional inequality, insecurity, the mismatch between patterns of economic production and consumption, oil dependence, corruption, etc.—but largely because of failure to integrate youths, which constitute about 40 percent of the population, into economically productive activity.⁷⁶ Thus, the government’s failure to channel its understanding of demography into investment in education, health, and infrastructure—and to design policies that connect these vital sectors to industry—have stymied Nigeria’s economic growth. This has resulted in balance of payment deficits and has increased the national debt, motivated a new orthodoxy that ties economic growth to the removal of structural rigidities including market safeguards, and primed millions of youths who are acutely unemployed or underemployed for integration into illegal activity and violence.⁷⁷

Two explanations frame the demographic fault line in Nigeria: 1) the demographic transition and 2) the demographic dividend, both of which highlight the failure of government to address, through policy and investments, the unrestrained growth

d Poverty rate across Nigerian regions: North West 80.9%; North East 76.8%; North Central 45.7%; South West 19.3%; South South 25.2%; and South East 27.4%. The south generally has higher levels of education and diversity and better income opportunities than the north, which is trapped in traditional subsistence activities due to underdevelopment, low educational performance, and low female participation in the labor force.

FL3: Exploitable Conditions



Demographic Pressures



Economic Inequalities



Illicit Networks



Ineffective Government



Infrastructure Deficits

in population and the needs of the populace. The need for appropriate demographic policy frameworks and investments cannot be overemphasized considering that demographics determine the potential labor supply and that the behavioral responses of working-age populations to their economic opportunities, needs, and social circumstances determine who works and why.⁷⁸ Thus, by 2050, Nigeria will have 400 million people, most of whom will be between the ages of 15 and 24 years, and in the absence of deliberate government efforts to match their employment needs and social circumstances with economic opportunities, the country will struggle with increasing youth disenchantment, rebellion, criminality, and violence. Abuja's failure to increase the rate of labor force growth is cascading the worst outcomes for demographic growth, including channeling working-age youths' hopelessness and despair into ideologies of rebellion and violence.

The Demographic Transition. The demographic transition describes the historical shift from high fertility (or high birth rates) and high mortality (or high death rate) to low fertility and low mortality.⁷⁹ As an idea, the shift characterizes the evolution of society from the traditional mode of social organization and production to the modern, industrial mode of production. Experts on demographic transition note that populations tend to progress through four stages as they move from a hunter-gatherer society to a post-industrial society.⁸⁰

STAGE 1: a pre-transition stage that is characterized by high death rate, high fertility rate, stable but small population, low life expectancy, and poor access to health care.

STAGE 2: an early transition stage that is characterized by the dramatic decline in infant mortality because of better sanitary conditions, access to medicine, and better nutrition; high birth rate; and

increased life expectancy, which produces a population pyramid with a bloated base.

STAGE 3: a late transition stage that is characterized by low death rate and declining birth rate as the result of people choosing to have fewer children because of access to birth control and better medical care, as well as women's access to paid employment.

STAGE 4: a post-transition stage that is characterized by low birth and death rates; high levels of urbanization; high life expectancy; migration as the main source of population growth (i.e., attained by developed countries with advanced economies, education systems, and healthcare systems).

Nigeria is currently stuck between the first and second stages of the demographic transition where child mortality, the leading edge of the demographic transition, has rapidly declined, but the fertility rate at 5.2 compared to 7.0 in 1975 is much higher than the ideal fertility rate defined as replacement fertility. Replacement fertility is the level of fertility at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next without migration. This rate is 2.1 children per woman although it may modestly



A woman attends a health education session in northern Nigeria.
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_woman_attends_a_health_education_session_in_northern_Nigeria_\(8406369172\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_woman_attends_a_health_education_session_in_northern_Nigeria_(8406369172).jpg)

vary with mortality rates.⁸¹ This means that young people constitute the majority of the Nigerian population and the youth share of the population is growing and will far outstrip available jobs.⁸² The high fertility rate masks the vast spatial and ethnic variation in fertility rates in the country, with mean fertility significantly higher for population groups in the north than in the south.^e This variation is influenced principally by sociocultural factors, including education, particularly women’s education, religion, and traditional norms.⁸³ High fertility rates also imply high youth dependency rates, which reduce the ability of the country’s working-age population to save and invest in a way that would generate economic growth. Nigeria’s youth dependency ratio is one of the highest in the world—81 children (0-15 years) per 100 adults of working age—and this youthful population is highly dependent on the adults who work. The increasingly shrinking workspace suggests a likely bleak job prospect for millions of youths who will attain working age in the next decade. This will hurt future growth, education, healthcare, savings, consumption, infrastructure, and investments.⁸⁴

The Demographic Dividend. Nigeria’s demographic transition has been very slow, which creates enormous negative economic consequences. Instead of producing a dividend, or higher levels of economic prosperity, Nigeria is leaning into a demographic disaster where the failure to harness the demographic transition is exposing Nigeria to lower labor productivity, high unemployment and underemployment, and higher poverty rates.⁸⁵ The demographic dividend describes the relationship between changes in a population’s age structure because of the demographic transition and rapid economic growth. It portends opportunities for economic growth resulting from a decline in mortality and fertility and an increase in the ratio of the working-age population compared to

the number of dependents. By understanding how demographic dividend returns operate, the right solution can be applied to the problem.

The implications of both demographic transition and demographic dividend for Nigeria are obvious, but particularly involve two linked ideas: the source of population growth is important for economic growth (i.e., whether the growth results from a high birth rate or low death rate) and the age structure is important because people at different ages interact with the economy differently:

- Young people require heavy investments in health and education
- Working-age persons who provide most of the labor and produce far more than they consume need appropriate infrastructure including roads, electricity, a stable economic and sociopolitical climate favorable to savings and investments, and adequate healthcare systems
- Older people require specialized access to health care and retirement incomes.

Yet, Nigeria has unsuccessfully addressed the needs of the different population groups by failing to focus on efforts to speed up the slow fertility decline, address the core deficiencies in human resource development and scientific and industrial infrastructure, and increase the human capital of women and girls.

^e The fertility rate for the Hausa-Fulani in northern Nigeria is 1.725 times higher than Yoruba and Igbo (both in southern Nigeria) fertility rates. See Adebowale, A.S. (2019), “Ethnic Disparities in Fertility and its Determinants in Nigeria.” *Fertility Research and Practice*, Vol. 5, No. 3.

The Exploitation of Nigeria's Fault Lines

The three broad cleavages identified in this paper: unbridled territoriality, involving weaknesses arising from ethno-territorial alignments that provoke assertions of authority and sovereignties outside of the state; identity integration, involving the contestation of identities that undermine nationhood; and unrestrained and unchanneled population growth, involving the mass alienation of youth from productive processes and their split from leadership that undermine sociopolitical stability, can be exploited by domestic and foreign actors to unravel national security and undermine U.S. regional influence. Several actors can exploit each cleavage or fault line, potentially affecting the U.S. relationship with Nigeria—diplomatically, politically, economically, and militarily.

Factionalized local elites are the primary exploiters of Nigeria's unbridled territoriality. The localization of discontent has helped to solidify ethno-territorial consciousness, which the local elite use as a springboard to gain national political access and to unlock the socioeconomic opportunities that open from it. Feuding among elites for political and economic relevance can be very intense, often producing destabilizing local conflicts perpetrated by hapless peasants (i.e., farmers and herders) who are manipulatively inserted into the fray. Elites, in this context, refer to local political, traditional, and economic authorities, who collectively superintend the daily activities of communities. The peasants at some point may also become exploiters of the territorial fault line when they roam free of elite restraint and assert influence that gives them privileged access to local resources and opportunities. Ample examples exist of Niger Delta militants, northern bandits, and Islamists, who gained notoriety as proxies of more influential political actors until elite indifference motivated them to become “masters of their fate.”⁸⁶

Factionalized elites are the primary exploiters of Nigeria's absence of identity integration. Like the territorial fault line, elites that have proximal relations with the political state can establish the ideological parameters of identity and weaponize it for their needs. Their signifying role helps to ideologically connect peasants to locality and to use that collective connection to assert claims at the federal level. Several foreign actors, including China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Iran are secondary exploiters of this fault line. Saudi Arabia and Iran invested heavily in splitting the northern Muslim identity—between Sunnis and Shiites—and severely weaken the pan-Nigerian identity among northern Muslims. Similarly, China promotes illusionary belief among Nigerian officials that its rivals, including the United States, cannot promote Nigerian interests and that only China itself cares enough about the national seams to offer solutions without preconditions. China's efforts to logically link constant conjunction

events—i.e., insecurity and frustration with foreign military sales, etc.—to the United States, are effective at creating distance between America and Nigeria. By making causal connections, China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran deepen the divide between communities in a way that alienates people from the Nigerian government, increases skepticism about the U.S. regional role, and opens the society to the influx of capital and ideas from these countries.

Non-state armed groups, including Islamists, community militias, secessionists, and a network of fortune hunters (e.g., bandits and kidnappers), are the primary exploiters of Nigeria’s unrestrained and unchanneled population growth. Because demography is governance-dependent, the failure of Abuja to manage spiraling population growth and to offer socioeconomic opportunities to youths has opened the door for different malign actors to capitalize on weaknesses associated with demography to undermine security and stability. Typical exploiters of the demographic fault line are Islamists (i.e., Boko Haram and Islamic State

of West Africa in the Northeast and Northwest), community militias (nationwide), Niger Delta militias and cult-gangs (South-South), and secessionists (i.e., IPOB, MASSOB, and Yoruba Nation Now in Southeast and Southwest). These groups routinely recruit young people into armed rebellions and criminal enterprises. In addition, the political class routinely recruits hapless youths to steal elections—only to discard them afterward—motivating youths to extend their violent activities beyond the political arena. Finally, China capitalizes on Nigeria’s failure to channel demographic growth into socioeconomic progress by proposing massive infrastructure investments, including roads, rails, airports, seaports, and smart cities.⁸⁷ In 2019, the World Bank debarred seven Chinese construction companies for violating its fraud and corruption policy through unscrupulous dealings in Nigeria,⁸⁸ but this has not prevented Chinese companies from seizing lucrative economic opportunities in Nigeria.

COVID-19 EFFECT ON NIGERIA'S FAULT LINES

Nigeria recorded its first case of COVID-19 on 27 February 2020 and since then has experienced at least four waves of the virus with peaks in June 2020, January 2021, August 2021, and January 2022.⁹⁷ COVID-19-related disruptions, including lower oil prices and remittances, enhanced risk aversion in global markets, and mobility restrictions plunged the country into its deepest recession since the 1980s,⁹⁸ worsening human capital outcomes and eroding future socioeconomic opportunities for youths.

Economic Effects: COVID-19 slowed Nigeria's oil sector, which accounts for 80% of exports, 30% of banking-sector credit, and 50% of consolidated government revenues,⁹⁹ and drives public and private sector growth. It reduced consolidated government revenues by US \$10 billion in 2020, limiting the government's ability to fund economic recovery efforts.¹⁰⁰ It also reduced remittances, which contributed 5% to GDP in 2019, likely pushing 15 to 20 million into extreme poverty by 2022.¹⁰¹

Human Capital & Health Effects: According to the 2020 Human Capital Index (HCI), COVID-19 worsened human capital outcomes for Nigerians. A child born in Nigeria in 2020 will achieve only 36% of its potential productivity over the life course.¹⁰² HCI measures the human capital that children born today can expect to attain by their 18th birthday, highlighting the nexus between current health and education outcomes and future national productivity.¹⁰³ In addition, lockdown measures likely prevented or discouraged patients from attending health facilities, including outpatient consultations and child vaccinations.

Education Effects: COVID-19 forced school closures and reduced attendance rates after schools reopened. Dropout rates were higher for families affected by COVID-19-related economic shocks, with many withdrawing children from school so they can participate in income-generating activities.¹⁰⁴ It also increased inequality in learning as children from poor households had fewer remote learning options (i.e., tablets) than children from non-poor households.¹⁰⁵



Risk Assessment

Based on this analysis, we suggest several competitive scenarios that could impact regional stability:

Implication 1 | Reduced U.S. and Western Influence

Reduced U.S., EU, and Western Influence allows increased maneuver space for Peer, Near-Peer, and Regional Competitors.

HIGH RISK
LIKELY and MODERATE

Probability (expected likelihood)	80%
Severity (expected consequences)	70%

Implication 2 | Further Elite Factionalism

The country's inability to channel disparate sub-national identities and interests into a national ideology worsens, increasing assertion of sub-national authorities and sovereignties as well as risks for cascading instability.

HIGH RISK
LIKELY and CRITICAL

Probability (expected likelihood)	82%
Severity (expected consequences)	87.5%

Implication 3 | Youth Restiveness and State Fracture

Nigeria's current economic framework particularly alienates youths, rather than integrating them into meaningful economic pursuits. This deepens hostility towards government and elites, provoking rebellion worse than the Arab Spring.

HIGH RISK
OCCASIONAL and CATASTROPHIC

Probability (expected likelihood)	66%
Severity (expected consequences)	95%

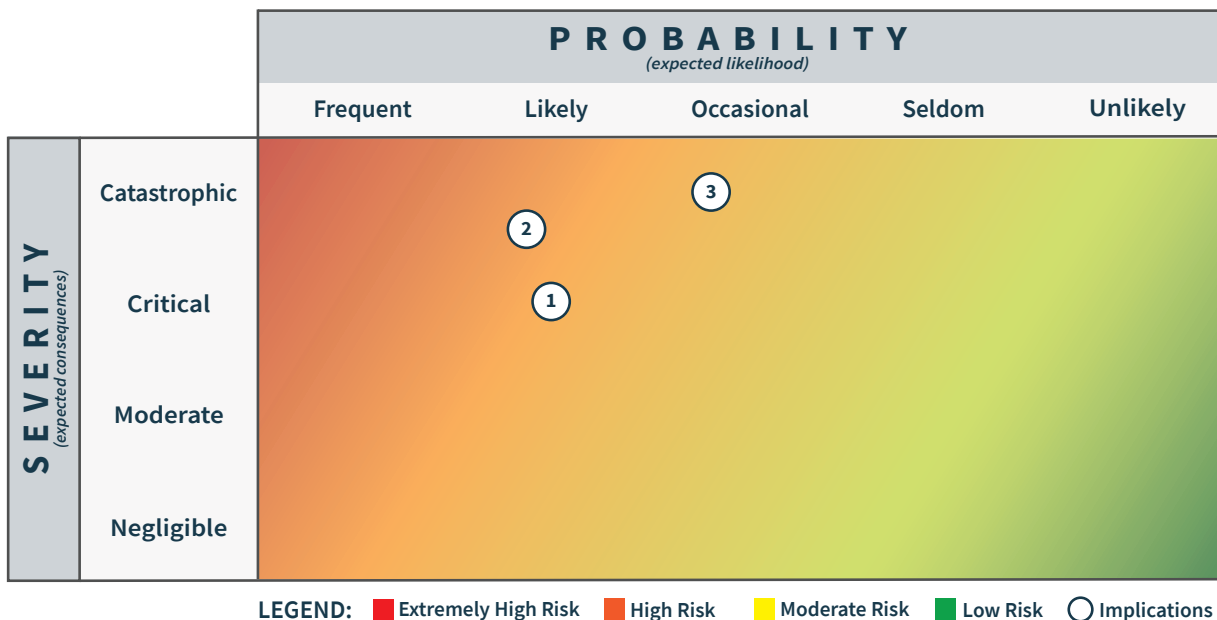


Figure 5. Probability/Severity Matrix, GCKN.

Implications of the Fault Lines

Nigeria’s fault lines are historical hinges that converge at the intersection of territory, identity, and population. If properly managed, they can be forces for unparalleled growth, improved governance, and increased societal cohesion, but unmitigated, they can be devastating, particularly when they herald crises in health, education, food, energy, and resource security, and portend national decline. Because of their observed and potentially destabilizing effects, fault lines are emerging as key issues for national stability and an increasingly salient, policy-relevant issue for national and regional governments and the international community, including the U.S. and its allies.

For Nigeria, the fault lines are nearly intransigent and contain the seeds for a future of chaos and destabilizing crisis—for the country, West Africa, and Africa—if their destabilizing motions are not properly managed. The country has been the “sleeping giant” of Africa since the 1970s but can quickly become a decapitated entity, failing to maintain territorial and political integrity, and spilling instability across its borders to upturn the fragile stability of the entire region. The fracturing of Nigeria into many entities very likely will result from youth restiveness, mass protests, and uncontrolled and uncontained violence similar to the Arab Spring protests that upturned long-standing governments in Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt, and had a cataclysmic impact on society in the Middle East. Such an uprising would need a spark, which Nigeria’s elections, many months of fuel scarcity, pervasive militia violence, nationwide currency shortage, and separatist violence that paralyzes socioeconomic activities in any of Nigeria’s six geopolitical regions, can cause.

The aftershocks of Nigeria’s disintegration could have other unanticipated consequences as well. For example, the monoethnic states that are likely to arise from the ashes of the current multiethnic state may themselves become radical and unstable as was the case with the disintegration of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires.⁸⁹ This happens when the mechanisms for counterbalancing ethnic and sectarian interests to prevent any one interest from dominating the others, erode. Absent such control systems, ethnic and sectarian grievances deepen and coalesce at the national level, undermining national security and stability. South Sudan is a poster child for this type of crisis. At independence in 2011, it was expected that its moderate ethno-sectarian diversity would facilitate national cohesion and socioeconomic development. However, the reverse has been the case—ethnic and elite differences and competition among nomadic groups, which had been relatively dormant during the larger Sudan era, rose to the fore and led to a civil war that has proven intractable since 2013.⁹⁰

Even if the state does not collapse or disintegrate, the exploitation of the fault lines could dramatically weaken the country's governance and relevant communal anchors, increasing confusion and disorder in Nigeria and regionally. A weakened Nigeria would be less able to project regional leadership, curtail the marauding Sahel-based Islamists, and protect the interests of the U.S. and its allies. Similarly, a weakened Nigeria could pose a quagmire for the U.S. as it may become less able to compete with China and Russia, who do not subscribe to the principles that often limit U.S. engagements with disintegrated, war-torn countries. The degrading of U.S. strategic influence and access could undermine U.S. commitment to institutional development in Nigeria, worsen institutional weaknesses for Nigeria and its neighbors, create sociopolitical anxiety and turmoil, and embolden regional autocrats to seize power, retain power, or transform power in ways that are inimical to regional stability.

This outcome, which is the most consequential of several possible outcomes, may set in motion other challenges, including unleashing a mosaic of complex emergencies—human, environmental, and structural—that could require the U.S. to dedicate enormous resources to address. Although the U.S. can easily mitigate risks to itself and America's near-term national interests through authorized and ordered departures of American diplomatic staff and evacuation of American citizens, it may struggle with the mid- and long-term effects on America's regional interests. These interests include the maintenance of America's strategic regional advantage over rivals, which Chinese and Russian expansionism is increasingly threatening, and access to key terrain for crisis and contingency response

operations. Moreover, U.S. companies have large investments in Nigeria's energy sector and the disintegration of Nigeria can jeopardize those investments, risk American lives, and threaten future investment opportunities.

Thus, in the near term, the U.S. and its allies would face the dual challenge of rethinking African regional security and the cascading effects Nigerian instability can have on global power competition. The U.S. and its allies would have to consider the potential for the Nigerian crisis to become a theater of competition and conflict between the U.S. and its rivals, particularly Russia and China. This may juxtapose the risks of robustly defending African regional stability and counterbalancing rival activities, including the potential for the permanent state of escalation with Russia and China, which is currently cold from a military perspective, to become economically hot. More importantly, the unraveling of Nigeria could expose American (and allies) unpreparedness for the urgent new task of (re)creating the West African security order to reestablish the bases for peace, stability, and development, while insulating the region from the Cold War era competition that could further unsettle it.

Finally, fault line exploitation, particularly by U.S. rivals can undermine the U.S.-Nigeria relationship and U.S. regional influence. For example, Nigerian officials blame the country's inability to address some of the national seams on restrictive U.S. conditions.⁹¹ The state-centric focus of U.S. foreign policy necessitates the establishment of standards to prevent U.S. taxpayer funds from being used to support regimes that govern without accountability, including regimes that are corrupt, abuse human rights, limit civil liberties, and backslide from democracy

f U.S. imports to Nigeria are the second largest for Nigeria after China and Nigerian-born immigrants in the United States account for 14 percent of the foreign-born immigrant population. The United States has committed billions of dollars to help Nigeria mature its democracy and Nigeria is vital to the U.S. goal of degrading Islamist influence in sub-Saharan Africa. Under the U.S.—Nigeria Binational Commission, both countries hold regular talks on good governance, transparency, and integrity; energy and investment; regional security; Niger Delta; and agricultural and food security. The United States and Nigeria also have enduring security cooperation (i.e., FMS, training, etc.), although Nigeria's aggressive military posturing against civilians have often strained the relationship.

to authoritarianism such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Sudan. This opens the aperture for China to offer solutions without preconditions. Thus, the perception that the U.S. is not attuned to events occurring beneath the level of the political state, where the sociocultural fault lines originate and interact, critically undermines the U.S.'s ability to compete for influence with China materially and ideologically. Each of the three fault lines poses distinct challenges on its own and can interact with others to create more complexity in the OE, which will increase opportunities for exploitation by U.S. rivals. How these rivals potentially push and pull these fault lines and the unobservable ideational impact of their behavior, have implications for the U.S. and the U.S. Army in three ways:

1. May limit U.S. access to Nigeria and the region, reducing its ability to collaborate with the Nigerian Army, anticipate changes in the OE, and effectively counter adversaries exploiting Nigeria's vulnerabilities to assert or expand their influence.
2. May degrade U.S. influence with Nigeria by making U.S. doctrine development, training, detection, standoff, and precision firepower—from which Nigeria has historically desired and benefitted—redundant. Chinese and Russian exploitation activities provide access to and influence the Nigerian Army. Nigerian equipment purchases and training requests from China and Russia have increased correspondingly to reductions in equipment purchases from the U.S.
3. Increase black spots—areas of the OE that are outside the visibility or reach of the U.S. Army but are dominated by U.S. rivals— which limits the Army's awareness and readiness to operate, exercise, and train units.

Discussion

The key to understanding Nigeria's sociocultural vulnerability to exploitation is locating weakness at its source. As this report details, the tensions surrounding the territorial struggles, integrative disconnects, and demographic shifts are rooted in one centrally galvanizing dynamic—identity. The inability to identify at a national level, rather than an ethnic or local level, remains the intransigent obstacle to Nigeria's stability. Identity plays this central role because it is both socially constructed and contestable. Since identity is not biologically rooted nor derived from historical origin but is instead created through sociopolitical processes, the present constructions and assertions of identity can be quickly replaced by others as the outcome of a political struggle or through the actions of a powerful domestic or foreign actor.

As an example of this tension, the Biafra separatists in 1966 resented that the Nigerian government did not do enough to protect the dignity and interests of the Igbo following the failed 1966 military coup led primarily by Igbo officers and northern reprisal attacks on the Igbo. This anger led Colonel Ojukwu—with the active support of the Igbo elite—to declare independence for the Igbo nation. This provoked the 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war. Continued anger over the perceived persistent marginalization of Igbos has provoked more recent pro-Biafra agitations, which have degenerated into armed conflict.

The above explanation applies to the young Nigerian #ENDSARS protesters, who in calling for comprehensive police reforms also challenged the bases of order and leadership in Nigeria and elite indifference to the population's socioeconomic problems. A particularly pernicious form of elite indifference is the indignity with which institutions and authorities, including the police, treat youths. Young people—under age 35—make up about 40 percent of the population, but are shut out of the political mainstream,

have difficulties securing jobs, and are routinely harassed by police on unfounded suspicion of criminality. The indignity with which the system treats them in the face of fleeting socioeconomic prospects convinced many to join the protest for institutional reform. In turn, the lack of the desired institutional change following the protests poses opportunities for malign actors to exploit youth grievances to further their agendas.

Thus, unpacking the psychology of dignity would reveal that much of what is causing problems in Nigeria revolves around identity. Many of the Biafra agitators, for example, are trapped between two cultures: their Igbo culture that emphasizes republicanism and aggressive entrepreneurship, and the more mainstream Nigerian culture that minimizes such impulses and offers a delicate balancing that does not reward such drives. Similarly, supporters of Boko Haram and other insurgent groups in the north are trapped between two cultures: the traditional one defined by the observance of piety and characterized by informal education, and the secular one modeled after Western forms, which emphasizes achievement and is characterized by formal education. Malign actors able to present a compelling ideology to answer the question “Who am I in the context of things?” and connect identity-seeking individuals to a larger community of similarly aggrieved individuals, easily exploit this identity confusion. In this respect, secessionism and Islamism simply become useful devices by which class-centered elites mobilize malcontent for their agenda, much like politicians use the symbolisms of national identity and unity (i.e., “one Nigeria”) to mobilize sociopolitical support.

Within Nigeria, sub-national integration is occurring at the expense of a broader national integration. It is made possible by the assertions of identity through territoriality, which has fragmented Nigerians into smaller and smaller groups with real social, economic, and political ramifications. It is noteworthy, however, that assertions of identity

and territoriality in Nigeria are leading not to integration, but endless fractionalization and fragmentation.

The situation in Nigeria is further compounded by the fact that the country is several decades away from achieving a demographic window conducive to more rapid economic growth. A favorable demographic window exists when the median age of the population is between 26 and 41 years. Unfortunately, Nigeria’s median age is 18.4 years, which means it can only enter the demographic transition window in 2050, at the earliest. The more consequential implication is that rapid population growth will put substantial pressure on Nigeria’s capacity to provide high levels of access to basic services, quality education, healthcare, and employment, which are currently lacking, increasing agitations at the local, regional, and national levels. This is occurring amid Nigeria’s failure to establish the preconditions that are necessary for harnessing the demographic dividend.

Considering the above context, Nigeria’s security and stability risks from the combination of identity contestation, the struggle over territory, and demographic shifts are grave. The national fissures—territory, identity-integration, and demography—are only deepening and making it much harder to achieve national cohesion and social, economic, and political progress. The only countervailing factor, in the interim, appears to be that the disparate interests of the groups—and their deep knowledge of the capabilities, intentions, and resources of each other—have made each the counterweight of the other. This, so far, has prevented the sub-national troubles from converging on a national scale to create paralysis. But that is also subject to change.

Conclusion

Nigeria suffers from three interrelated sociocultural fault lines: territoriality, identity-integration, and demography. Each fault line forms from several sociocultural conditions that are exploitable and affect the OE differently. However, together, the fault lines can have major implications for the security and stability of the OE—locally, nationally, and regionally—as well as for U.S. strategic objectives and priorities.

Whether the sociocultural fault lines assume destabilizing significance is largely dependent on their vulnerability to exploitation and their actual exploitation by any number of domestic or foreign actors. The examination of the most probable exploitation opportunities and pathways strongly suggests that local elites—political, cultural, and religious—who occupy command positions within formal structures of government and informal traditional institutions are the main exploiters of the fault lines. Their exploitation behavior, which is geared towards unlocking political and economic opportunities, has the effect of weakening local and national buffers against external predation. This can open the door to foreign state and non-state entities to engage in ways that are potentially injurious to Nigeria's sociopolitical stability and the U.S. strategic interests.

The local and foreign exploiters of Nigeria's sociocultural fault lines have great leverage. The Nigerian federal system over-concentrated power in the center, both eroding the functionality of the constituent units and empowering other sub-nationalities to assert authorities and sovereignties that are alien to the constitution. On the one hand, the multi-state system aspires to concentrate tension within sub-units to fragment the solidarity of the three majority ethnic groups, devolve resources and authority to lower tiers of government, and increase local investments in Nigerian nationhood. On the other hand,

the system condenses the authorities and functionalities of the other tiers of government under federal authority, making them mere appendages of the center. This anachronism potentially impairs some of the most important benefits of federalism, leaving in its wake a mosaic of parochial alignments that strongly connect individuals to the local territory, becoming the basis for the ethno-territorial identity constructs that have mutated over time and undermine Nigerian nationhood and stability.

One vital constituent group affected by the superficiality of structure and the fractious ethno-identarian contestation is youth. The mention of youth should conjure an image of the utter crisis of demography in Nigeria. The rapid population expansion without a corresponding increase in national capabilities and resources more profoundly affects young people—blocking access to quality education or gainful employment—thus rendering them critically impoverished. Not only is this impacting health, with many young people increasingly manifesting problems including mental health challenges, but it is also breaking down traditional social anchors that have historically grounded youths; young people are finding a replacement in alcohol, drugs, criminality, and violence. In the next few years, these youths will pose enormous risks to Nigeria's stability by their inability to fit into any national framework, becoming very pliable objects in the hands of malign domestic and foreign actors.

Research Methodology

Modified Grounded Theory

Analytic judgements in this Fault Line series are grounded in select social science research techniques comprising a specific methodology developed by GCKN social scientists. This process occurs in phases, relying on GCKN's *Exploitable Conditions Framework*, open-source research, scholarly literature, and vetted subject matter experts in the region of study. The methodology is a combination of multiple data analysis procedures fused with a rigorous co-creation process.

At GCKN, this co-creation involves leveraging expertise from social scientists, defense community researchers, geographic information system specialists, intelligence analysts and, most importantly, GCKN's Subject Matter Expertise (SME) network—the cornerstone of the GCKN's methodology. Many of these SMEs contribute under condition of anonymity to preserve working relationships in the region of interest, and so are listed in the notes by assigned numbers, rather than by name. While GCKN conducts the bulk of the research and writing, the methodology systematically guides input from regional experts to ensure maximum validity of the judgments. The final product provides a fault lines assessment grounded in a defensible methodology, able to withstand critical scrutiny.

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Image Content

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Page 8. Figure 1. Keith French, *Nigeria Violent Events (2012 JUL - 2022 JUL)*, 2022, map, GCKN, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Page 13. Susan Littleton and Benjamin Okonofua, *Nigeria's Administrative Structure*, 2022, infographic, GCKN, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Page 17. Figure 2. Susan Littleton and Benjamin Okonofua, *Nigeria's Political Leadership*, infographic, GCKN, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Page 19. Figure 3 and 4. *Predicting population growth from 2022 to 2050 for Nigeria*, 2022, infographic, PopulationPyramid.net.

Page 19. Kaizenify Photography, *Protesters at the endSARS protest in Lagos, Nigeria*, October 2020, photograph, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Protesters_at_the_endSARS_protest_in_Lagos,_Nigeria_19.jpg.

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Page 26. Figure 5. Susan Littleton, *Probability/Severity Matrix*, August 2022, infographic, GCKN, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.