CURRENT SITUATION
As Africa’s most populous country, largest economy, and biggest democracy, Nigeria is a bellwether for the continent. National and state elections in 2019 were deeply competitive, with scattered instances of violence amid a mostly peaceful process. However, historically low voter turnout signals a deepening distrust in government and institutions. Overall, Nigeria has made major strides in its democratic development, but still has significant work to do in improving national, state, and local governance.

USIP’S WORK
Nigeria’s federal system gives governors great responsibilities in addressing the issues that are driving conflict and the Boko Haram insurgency. USIP brings together state governors and civic leaders to design and implement inclusive policies that mitigate violence and strengthen community-oriented security. The Institute engages a variety of influential figures, empowers citizens, and uses its expertise and convening power to inform Nigeria policy in the U.S., the region, and around the world. Recent work includes:

Nigeria Working Group on Peacebuilding and Governance. The Working Group fosters relationships between citizens, governors, and national and international figures to ensure a diverse array of voices impact decision-making processes. These relationships allow the Working Group to turn expert analysis—such as a recent Special Report that examines changes in political and conflict conditions since 2015—into tangible, actionable recommendations. The analysis from our recent Special Report informed key stakeholders’ strategies for preventing violence throughout the 2019 election season.

In October 2016, USIP convened eminent Nigerian civil society leaders to foster relationships between citizens and state governors and advise government officials on stabilization efforts in the northeast and other security challenges. At the invitation of state and national policymakers, the Working Group provided recommendations to halt communal conflicts between pastoralists and farming communities—one of Nigeria’s worst sources of violence.
Strengthening Local Security. USIP’s Justice and Security Dialogue project in Nigeria improves local, state, and national-level institutions’ ability to manage local conflict through supporting dialogues and activities that bring security and justice providers together with communities impacted by violence. The approach promotes mutual understanding, knowledge-sharing, and trust among participants, and results in better informed decision-makers, more effective and accountable security forces, and citizens who are active in the safety of their own community.

Network of Nigerian Facilitators. Community facilitators trained by USIP are holding dialogues in six states throughout the country. Dialogues focused on preventing election-related violence—including during the post-election transition period—as well as strengthening community-security relationships and other conflicts that facilitators identify as having the potential to lead to violence.

Working with State Governments and Peacebuilding Institutions. USIP helps governors and state peacebuilding institutions leverage their influence and networks to establish inclusive, cooperative strategies that prevent and resolve violent conflict, ensure policies focus on citizens’ needs, and stem the potential for electoral violence as well as play meaningful roles in the transition process.

Civilian-led Security and Governance. USIP conducted research on the transition to civilian-led security and governance in northeast Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin in the aftermath of the Boko Haram insurgency. USIP experts suggested replacing military forces with police officers—increasing both the size and capacity of the police as part of the process—and creating a formal interagency cooperation mechanism dedicated to community stabilization. In 2019, USIP will convene newly elected and re-elected politicians to discuss the findings and incorporate the recommendations in their security plans.

Researching Community Resilience to Violence. With USIP’s support, the Centre for Information Technology and Development examined the factors that make certain communities in northeast Nigeria more resistant to violence. The research showed that resilience thrives when there is a robust community platform for active citizen participation and democratic decision-making.

Convening Power

- In 2015, USIP hosted President Muhammadu Buhari in his first visit to the U.S. after his election. During his address, he stressed zero tolerance for corruption and pledged to restore trust in the country’s governance.
- Former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo spoke at USIP just weeks after that historic 2015 election, discussing Africa’s potential to overcome its leadership challenges.
- USIP hosted 11 state governors in 2016 for a symposium on developing inclusive strategies to address the drivers of violent extremism in Nigeria.
- In 2017, USIP brought together a gathering of eminent Nigerian civic leaders in Washington, D.C. for discussions with U.S. policymakers, including former Undersecretary of State Tom Shannon, about the prospects for durable peace in Nigeria and the broader Lake Chad Basin area.
- USIP convenes government officials, stakeholders, and organizations in both Washington and Nigeria to develop insights and collaborate on projects such as the premiere of “Boko Haram: Journey From Evil,” a documentary on resilience and hope in northeast Nigeria as the region faced the insurgency.