

3.8. Protesters, human rights defenders and activists

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: March 2026

This profile refers to individuals who participate in protests, human rights defenders, political or social activists, and bloggers, as well as persons involved in civil society organisations and civic movements.

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI report: Country Focus 2025, 2.7., 2.8.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

Freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association are guaranteed under Nigerian law. Although ruled unconstitutional, authorities continue to enforce the requirement for police approval of protests.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

Legitimate actions of law enforcement, in particular in the context of protests, would not amount to persecution. However, other acts to which protesters, human rights activists and defenders could be exposed are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution. More specifically, security forces and police have used excessive and sometimes lethal force to disperse protests. There were also documented cases of killing, physical assault, arbitrary arrest, and detention under appalling conditions, with some protesters and activists charged with treason, which could lead to death sentences.

Outside of the context of specific protests, human rights defenders and activists have faced harassment, intimidation, abduction, physical violence and widespread arrests. The government has used the 2015 Cybercrimes Act to restrict online publications and to arrest and detain activists for their online activity.

The severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts that human rights defenders and activists could be subjected to and whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures should also be considered. More specifically, raids, search of materials, state surveillance, shutdowns of communication services by state agents have been reported.

Step 2: What is the level of risk of persecution?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for protesters, human rights defenders and activists to face persecution should take into account **risk-impacting circumstances**, such as:

- **Place of activity:** The North-Central region recorded the highest levels of civic space restrictions followed by the North-West. The southern regions reported relatively lower restrictions due to stronger civic institutions and greater media freedom. However, in the South-East region, the right to free speech by citizens has been severely curtailed by fears of arrests, abductions and killings by both government security forces and by pro-Biafra armed groups (see 3.3. Members and perceived supporters of pro-Biafra separatist movements and 3.4. Individuals perceived as not supporting the pro-Biafra cause). Furthermore, risk may be higher in urban centres such as Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt, where major protests occur and where authorities deploy large police forces. For the North-East see 3.1. Individuals within the reach of Boko Haram.

- **Visibility of activities and public profile:** Individuals or activists with a high media exposure or leadership roles in civic movements are at increased risk of surveillance, arrest and physical violence.

- **Nature of activities:** Those involved in anti-corruption campaigns, political reform movements, activities critical of top government figures and public officials, as well as advocacy for LGBTIQ rights would have a higher risk of persecution.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

Where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated for an applicant under this profile, this is highly likely to be for reasons of **political opinion**, as for instance criticism of government institutions and of their practices, or advocacy for social reform is often interpreted as opposition to the authorities.

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