

Amnesty International and the Protection of Human Rights in Nigeria, 2015–2025

CHRISTIANA BELLO^{1*}, CANICE E. ERUNKE Ph.D² AND GODIYA ATSIYA PIUS³

Department of Political Science, Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

*Corresponding Author: CHRISTIANA BELLO

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>Despite Nigeria’s signatory to many international human rights instruments and inspiring constitutional provisions for their protection, there are varying degrees of human rights violations in the nation. The study is an examination of Amnesty International and the protection of Human rights in Nigeria (2015 – 2025). Liberalism theory was employed. Information/data for the study were generated from both primary (interview) and secondary sources. The study found that Amnesty International Nigeria has had a significant impact on Nigerian society by raising awareness, mobilizing public opinion, influencing policies and holding authorities accountable for human rights violations. Amnesty International also supports victims of human rights violations and their families, and calls for accountability and justice for perpetrators. Despite these achievements, the organization has faced considerable challenges. Critics argue that Amnesty International’s effectiveness is hampered by biases, particularly in its selection of cases and regions of focus. Additionally, operating in conflict zones presents significant risks and logistical difficulties, limiting the organization’s ability to intervene effectively. Limited financial and human resources further constrain its capacity to address the growing complexity and scale of human rights violations globally. The study recommended that there is need for Amnesty International to engage more with the Nigerian government, the military, and other relevant stakeholders to foster dialogue, trust, and cooperation on human rights issues.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Amnesty International, Human, Protection, Rights and Nigeria.</p>
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Introduction

Following the Second World War (1939–1945), human rights quickly rose to prominence as a dominating concern in international political and legal discussion. While the principles underpinning human rights existed before the modern era, their acknowledgement as an issue of universal interest is predominantly a phenomenon of the 20th and 21st centuries (Ejike, 2022). This new vision has its genesis in the tradition of natural law, which stresses that all human beings have an inherent dignity and equality and certain inalienable rights simply by virtue of being human. The universal and lasting nature of human rights is best shown by their increasing importance within a globalized, pluralistic and multicultural world. This includes the right to life, respect for human dignity, personal liberty (the right of individuals to make their own decisions), a fair hearing and freedom of thought, conscience and religion which are

essentially considered as basic claims that belong to all humans without discriminating between one another. Thus, human rights form a set of common standards that all states, institutions and individuals must hold themselves to in order to maintain justice, equality and trust amongst an increasingly interdependent global community.

Since September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, many countries have exploited the post-September 2001 atmosphere of insecurity to adopt new counter-terrorism measures that breach international human rights law in the name of national security. The attacks have heralded an era of what has been described as ‘defensive democracy’ with all its attendant violation of civil liberties and human rights as casualties of defensive measures (Hickman, 2023). Regrettably, some African governments have capitalized on post-September 11

defensive postures to suspend the rule of law at will, keep human rights in abeyance at the slightest provocation, and ruthlessly suppress critical and dissenting voices under the guise of defending the sovereignty of a state and safeguarding citizens. These find expression in flagrant disregard for the rule of law, arbitrary arrest and detention, inhuman or degrading treatment, extra-judicial killings, denial of the right to peaceful demonstration and self-determination, and suppression of the freedom of the press, all in a bid to maintain the status quo and keep the masses in perpetual servitude.

Nigeria continues to grapple with a myriad of human rights violations, despite constitutional and international legal protections. Omede and Rufai (2024) stated some of the concerns include reports on arbitrary and summary killings; enforced disappearances, torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by representatives of the government. Other issues identified range from overcrowded and life-threatening detention facilities, arbitrary arrests and a lack of judicial independence to unlawful interference with the right to privacy and Boards, etc. serious abuses related to armed conflicts such as civilian casualties, abduction, torture and other forms of physical violence. It identifies ongoing limitations on freedom of expression and media through harassment of journalists and the use of criminal libel and blasphemy laws, as well as long-standing concerns regarding corruption, insufficient accountability for violence against women, domestic violence, sexual assault; child marriage; forced marriage; female genital mutilation; allegations of coerced abortion and forced sterilization; prosecution in some places of consensual same-sex activity; the worst forms of child labor. The persistently repeated violations of these rights indicate the absence of adequate mechanisms at state institutions that can ensure a stronger guarantee for exercising fundamental rights and freedoms. Thus, this gap in governance has made independent human rights organizations and civil society groups that advocate for the protection, promotion and full realization of universally recognized human rights a key role.

One of the most powerful in this group is Amnesty International (AI), an independent worldwide human rights organization arising from a commitment to ensure respect for the rights set forth in and guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other international human rights instruments. Founded in London in 1961 by British lawyer Peter Benenson, the organisation was originally set up after he learned that two Portuguese students were jailed for merely expressing support for freedom. Amnesty International has always worked to expose, document and campaign against human rights violations such as torture, arbitrary detention, capital

punishment and other abuses of rights protected by international law since its inception. The organization aims to eliminate oppression, discrimination and inequality and to close the gap where human rights violations take place through continuous advocacy efforts as well as public awareness raising campaigns and policy engagement, ensuring that everyone is able to live with universal respect for basic human dignity and freedoms (Amnesty International, 2023). Since then, over the years Amnesty International has grown to being one of the largest and best-known human rights organisations around the world with a global network working in many countries for better international humanitarian standards.

Amnesty International is a worldwide movement of over 2.2 million members, supporters and signatories right around the world — in more than 150 countries and territories. It is an international non-governmental organization and has the institutional independence from any government, political party, religious body or commercial interest. Its funding is mainly supported by troop membership fees, donations from the general public, and voluntary contributions from people all over the world. The organization implements its mission through national sections, local branches, individual volunteers and campaign networks engaged in letter-writing campaigns, public demonstrations, advocacy efforts, policy lobbying and human rights education. Amnesty International also works with international organizations, such as the United Nations, the European Union and the International Criminal Court to ensure compliance by states of global human rights standards. It works on the basis of core principles such as international solidarity, impartiality, independence, self-governance and by mutual respect and universality/reality concept with individual rights being indivisible (Amnesty International 2023). As human rights violations continue to occur in many places around the world, assessing the achievements, significance and challenges for organisations like Amnesty International is still relevant as an academic and policy topic.

Research Questions

In an effort towards addressing the research problem of this study, the following questions are considered fundamental:

- i. How does Amnesty International engages in the fight for Human rights in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the contributions of Amnesty International toward the actualization of the Universal Declaration of Human rights in Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to assess Amnesty International and the protection of Human rights in Nigeria (2015 – 2025). The specific objectives are as follows:

- i. To examine how Amnesty International engage in the fight for Human rights in Nigeria.
- ii. To assess the contributions of Amnesty International toward the actualization of the Universal Declaration of Human rights in Nigeria.

Empirical Review

Amnesty International and the fight for Human Rights

In *Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch: Evidence from Colombia* (Andrés, 2023) critiqued the human rights based reporting of Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) in regards to the Colombian conflict between 1988–2004. The study drew heavily from secondary data, exploring both quantitative conflict statistics and isolated incidents of documented conflict. To check how much credence to give the reports, details compiled by each organization were compared with an independent Colombian database on the conflict. The analysis found many deficiencies in both how quantitative human rights data are presented and interpreted. Some of these shortcomings, such as insufficient references to the sources of information, confusing definitions of key concepts, inconsistent formats for reporting results as well as representations of conflict dynamics that were deemed misleading in some aspects. The implications of the findings are that while these organizations played a significant role in documenting abuses, their quantitative reporting should be interpreted with caution.

Even with the limitations highlighted in the quantitative evidence, it was found that narrative accounts of individual conflict events were predominantly clearer, better representative and more detailed than the statistical data. The report further disputed the popular presumption that when it does criticize armed guerrilla groups Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch do so only rarely, while conceding that there is some evidence of an anti-government bias in parts of their reporting. Pointing to these results, Andrés (2023) cautioned that quantitative human rights and conflict datasets produced by such organizations (especially when deployed in cross-country comparisons or panel data analyses) be interpreted with caution. Although the study offers an in-depth analysis of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch's reporting practices regarding human rights violations in Colombia, it does not address what role Amnesty International plays in advancing and defending human rights within Nigeria. As a result, this gap is one of the several important gaps in the literature that we aim to fill with this study.

Correspondingly, Cattaruzza (2023) investigated the communication strategies undertaken by Amnesty International in response to the challenges facing modern human rights organisations in her thesis titled *Amnesty International: An Analysis of the Communication Strategy*. The study contended that the shifting global climate has forced advocacy organizations to reinvent their communication mechanisms in order to remain viable players. From a methodological perspective, the research integrated conceptual explorations of NGOs and advocacy networks with an analysis of human rights discourses, a comparison between two accountability reports, an investigation of Amnesty International's presentation manifesto communication strategy to the public in Italy and interviews with members from the Italian Section. The results showed that multidisciplinary expertise, organizational experience and creation of communication practices play a substantial role in increasing the response of human rights organizations to emerging challenges and institutional crisis.

Inspired by these results, Cattaruzza (2023) suggested that human rights defenders must enrich traditional channels of advocacy with novel instruments of communication backed by multidisciplinary cooperation. The study furthermore proposed that additional research be performed to explore other factors that could enhance organizational communication and advocacy effectiveness. However, while the research highlighted several important aspects of Amnesty International's communication framework, organisational objectives need and the impact of digital technologies on advocacy and campaigning, it did not explore how the organisation engages in human rights promotion or protection within Nigeria nor provide an understanding of precisely what challenges to its operational activities are at play in that country. The existence of this unaddressed question is yet another significant research gap that warrants the current inquiry.

Contributions of Amnesty International toward actualization of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights

An international civil society organizations contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights in Nigeria: A reflection on Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW), investigations by Oluda, 2021. The research examined the capacity of these groups to advance human rights values and the effectiveness of their advocacy strategies in Nigeria. The study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews conducted with the representatives of both organizations, while secondary documentary sources were primarily used for analysis. The study set the conceptual frame of reference for the investigation on the theoretical perspectives of

Realism experience, Liberalism and Constructivism in explaining human rights; their emergence, importance and their understanding within Nigeria» (s democracy. The results showed that the reports, campaigns and public interventions by both Amnesty International & Human Rights Watch played a considerable role in the disclosure of human rights violations & accountability measures taken to bolster protection mechanisms across the country against these grave violations of fundamental human rights.

Lastly, the comparison between Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch revealed differences in both organization relative profile and influence as well as methods used to advocate against human rights abuses in Nigeria. While the study shed important light on the advocacy actions of these organizations with policy focus, it did not fully account for how they strategically target governmental actions or the mechanisms by which they are able to result in desired public policies. As a result, the analysis yields only some insight into the ways of working that support their advocacy. It would help to better understand which strategies in this regard are effective, with what impact and how international civil society organizations contribute to the realisation of human rights. This gap that is identified, therefore justifies the need for this study which aims to explore how Amnesty International has engaged in promoting the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Nigeria.

In the same vein, Haruna (2025) carried out a descriptive and interpretive study of the institutional framework created in defence of human rights in Nigeria. It first explored the definition, nature and importance of human rights then proceeded to examine how three main institutions responsible for the protection of such rights (namely: The National Human Rights Commission, Public Complaints Commission and Truth and Reconciliation Commission) operate within their respective mandates. Focus was laid on National Human Rights Commission's statutory functions, especially complaint-handling and human rights promotion. The paper further examined the scope of authority and mandate of the Public Complaints Commission as laid out in its enabling legislation, while identifying the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a short term institutional mechanism which was any number of years established to address particular historical situations.

The finding was that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is working partly on an ad hoc basis compared to National Human Rights Commission and Public Complaints Commission, which are permanent institutions. To reinforce the commitment of these institutions and enable them to perform their statutory mandates properly, Haruna (2025) suggested ways based on its findings. The

writer identified the judiciary as another institution that served both to protect and infringe on the first generation of human rights. However, the analysis here was limited to secondary data only, and offered little more than a cursory overview of institutional performance. An approach such as this may gloss over the nuanced nature of how state institutions and human rights organizations deal with one another in practice or a lack thereof, their successes and failures. Primary data, especially interviews with relevant stakeholders, would lend much deeper empirical evidence and nuanced understanding of these complexities. Against this backdrop, the present study fills this gap in methodology by providing primary data that yield a more nuanced understanding of the activities, strategies, successes and challenges of Amnesty International in the promotion and protection of human rights in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework: Liberalism Theory

This study implements a theoretical approach which portrays the role of Amnesty International in upholding human rights in Nigeria through the liberalism theory. A central tenet of liberalism is the idea that protecting citizens' inherent dignity, autonomy, and property should be a nation's top priority. Therefore, liberals believe that a just political system must prioritize the welfare of individuals. Political systems characterized by unbridled power, such as monarchies or dictatorships, do not safeguard citizens' lives and freedoms. Consequently, liberalism is primarily concerned with establishing institutions that safeguard personal freedom through the limitation and oversight of governmental authority. Liberalism gives a central political place to individual autonomy rather than the liberty of society, the state, or other corporate actors (Donnelly, 2023). More specifically, Donnelly (2023) explained that liberals believe people should be able to "govern" their own lives and make important decisions for themselves as long as they respect the rights and freedoms of others. This complicates liberalism, leading to the contestation of its projected orientations and values. Liberalism's interest in human rights mostly derives from its role in characterizing state-society relations (Wagner, 2024).

Universalist liberalism rests upon the idea that because everyone has rights and freedoms, all rights and freedoms must be respected regardless of political or social context. Michael Sandel states that rights-based liberalism starts from the idea that persons are self-contained moral agents, pursuing their own separate interests, goals and visions of the good. Thus, liberalism aims to construct a set of rights so that individuals can secure their freedom while not violating the equal liberty of everyone else (Woods, 2024:112). In similar spirit, Kapur (2018:5) contends that liberalism conceptualizes the human as a rational and

autonomous decision-maker; indeed, an individual who knows what goals to pursue is also seen as always capable of determining his or her ends and means of doing so — within the possible limits freedom imposes on the freedom rights due others. This line of thought emphasizes the main liberal idea that one's personal freedom is justified (and indeed, only exists) if it rights alongside the equal liberty of every other person. Dunne and Hanson (2023:63) go on as far to note that liberalism offered an intellectual history based within a Western tradition, where the individual is defined as the rightful holder of rights—public authorities were required to respect these rights rather than run roughshod over them. Related to this, liberalism calls for constitutional and legal restraint on government power so that it does not over-reach into the everyday lives of citizens, but rather allow room or space for individual freedom, civil liberties and fundamental human rights.

Liberalism therefore advocates that all humans are equal no matter the circumstances or level of authority someone is. Liberalism – being centrally about freedom from the state – inherently creates rights that protect the individual from arbitrary intervention by the state (Kapur, 2018). NGO's follow the concept of liberalism and universalism which countries in the world especially developing countries may accept the concept of liberalism but reject the concept of universalism. The liberal worldview holds a more positive view of international organizations, praising their efforts to promote justice, human dignity, and international cooperation. Liberals believe that international organizations help states work together to promote and preserve human rights by establishing common standards. Moravcsik (1995) has come up with a complete liberal theory of international relations.

International organizations like Amnesty International are fundamental to liberal ideology because they promote cooperation, interdependence, and peaceful interactions. States can greatly improve their diplomatic and economic connections, leading to a decrease in the chance of conflict by following human rights norms and participating with international organizations. International organizations exert influence by shaping public opinion and rallying global civil society, which in turn puts pressure on states to implement human rights-friendly policies. One aspect of liberalists' thesis is that promoting democracies enhances the prospects of human rights. Doyle (2011) is noted to have proposed the “democratic peace” thesis, where liberalists argue that IOs strategies that support the entrenchment of democratic ethos are systemic responses to the challenges of human rights violations. Other liberalists, such as Keck and Sikkink (2024), share the same view of naming and shaming as strategies adopted by IOs in promoting human rights.

Research Methodology

We employed a qualitative research design to enable us to: 1) conduct an in-depth investigation into the issues under examination, and 2) generate rich data from key institutional stakeholders. The study population consisted of officials selected from seven purposively sampled organizations deemed closely aligned with the research goals. Organizations for these consultations included; the Amnesty International Office, Abuja, the Public Complaints Commission, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Nigerian Military, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) Nigeria and Bereketi Family Human Rights Radio. The institutions overall constituted a targeted population of 133 officials. According to the sampling guideline outlined by Black and Champion (1976), we utilized data from approximately ten percent of the study population for qualitative studies and thus queries were sent to 13 respondents. This meant that it was determined that ten percent of the target population (133) formed a sample size, meaning that 13 participants needed to be selected through purposeful sampling. This non-probabilistic practise was deemed appropriate as it facilitated the intentional recruitment of individuals with relevant experience, expertise, and direct involvement in human rights advocacy/protection/enforcement to ensure information collected would be rich and contextually relevant.

Data for the study were collected from primary and secondary sources in order to have a complete perception of the research problem. The original data were collected from these respondents through: in-depth interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was prepared to help direct one-on-one discussions while also leaving enough leeway with the participants to elaborate on explanations and insights in line with the study aims. It allowed the researcher to generate detailed qualitative data on the role of Amnesty International and other actors in advocating for and defending human rights in Nigeria. The primary data were supplemented by secondary (documentary) data obtained through a systematic review of existing documentary sources. Including official government publications, reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organization or intergovernmental association outputs, legal documents, court decisions and other judicial records, police reports and media publications; as well as reports by prominent human rights NGOs like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

For the secondary evidence, this was augmented with further material from academic and theoretical books, peer-reviewed national and international journals as well as other periodicals such as newspapers, magazines, institutional

documents and relevant literature. These different documentary sources combined together to provide an extensive contextual insight into the subject of investigation and enhanced the credibility of results through data triangulation. Qualitative content analysis was used as the method for analyzing both primary interviews and documentary sources. This analytical approach allowed to systematically review, categorize, and interpret textual data by defining recurring themes, patterns or concepts as well as the frequency with which specific issues occurred within various sources. In doing so, worthwhile interpretations were made about the methods, proceedings, accomplishments and limitations attached to Amnesty International's influence or determinants of promoting and defending human rights in Nigeria.

Data Presentation

This section provides the qualitative data from the main interviews used for this study along with an analysis. The details collected during the interviews have been triangulated with secondary source evidence based on academic literature, official reports, press releases, newspaper articles, policy documents and Amnesty International Reports in order to add richness the findings presented in this section. The findings were presented and interpreted according to the order of the two research questions that guided this study. Because of the sensitive nature of the subject matter, which could expose an individual to retaliation, all interview participants have been assigned pseudonymous identification codes (P1–P13) to protect their identities and meet acceptable ethical practice. The interview sessions were conducted using semi-structured questions, among other things, intended to elicit specific responses on the contribution of Amnesty International to promoting and defending human rights in Nigeria from 2015 to 2025. This systematic approach to their data presentation/coding was implemented so as to increase transparency, bolster credibility in the analytic process, and further validate claims from the study's results.

Data Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Objective One: To examine how Amnesty International engage in the fight for Human rights in Nigeria

According to responses from AI interviewed, they agree that what informs their organizations' interests in promoting human rights in Nigeria is linked to two related issues. The first is that many developing countries, especially those with a history of military dictatorship, generally possess weak institutions, and this feature makes it very difficult for citizens full expression of their rights and access to justice. The second is the manifest reluctance of the Nigerian government to fully support the promotion of human rights due to clash of state versus citizens'

interests. Many African governments are disposed to choose the interests of the state against the interests of the people. However, state interests, in many of these countries are merely the interests of the ruling class and despotic leadership, who enslave their citizens through draconian and self-serving policies (Interviewed April, 2026).

As you have observed from Participant 1 (Interview: April 2026), the Nigerian government has a legal duty under international human rights frameworks, regional human rights treaties and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to respect, protect and fulfil [sic] the most basic fundamental rights of everyone without distinction. Among these are the duties of protecting the right to life, which is one of the most basic human rights. However, witnesses said the participant noted that the human rights climate in his country remained one of serious and systemic violations. These include extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest and unlawful detention, torture and other ill-treatment, enforced disappearance, violence against women and girls, restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association; forced evictions; environmental degradation; and persistent failure to hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable. These pattern of violations demonstrate the recurrent challenges facing Nigeria in meeting its national and international human rights obligations.

Amnesty International is well known all over the world, which has made them one of the most recognizable organizations when it comes to protecting and promoting human rights. Eckel (2024) has previously noted that Amnesty International highlights the broader role non-state actors and private initiatives play in improving civil liberties and supporting international human rights activism. Over the course of its many campaigns, research initiatives, public education efforts and advocacy work, amnesty international has had a profound impact on global human rights discourse and frequently pushed governments and other actors to comply with internationally used human rights standards. Amnesty International, for example, is now a major player in contemporary international human rights politics due to its decades-long history of documenting abuses and galvanizing public opinion.

Participant 2 (Interview April 2026): Amnesty International is a movement of people around the world who befriend and protecting the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. Protection of prisoners of conscience, fair trial

for political detainees, abolition of the death penalty, prevention of torture and other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and investigation into politically motivated killings and enforced disappearances Besides monitoring abuses by governments, Amnesty International condemns violations against people made by armed groups and other non-state actors. These activities highlight the organization's feeling that universally recognized human rights must be honored of all identity violators.

Amnesty International Some of the work on Nigeria was brought to much wider attention with Amnesty's activities during the military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida although it had already documented incidents in Nigeria since the Nigerian Civil War. From that time forward, Amnesty International has continuously extended its advocacy efforts by applying its principles of international solidarity and human rights protection to a variety of national issues. The research is said to be based on data up till October 2023 [Amnesty International (2019)], and that the Nigerian section's interventions include: tackling violence against women and children, promoting child rights, strengthening institutional accountability, eliminating torture & other ill-treatment, protecting civic space, protecting human right defenders. These strategic priorities have been defined largely by an unrelenting cycle of human rights abuses and a perception that state institutions are unwilling or unable to deliver effective forms of accountability and the rule of law.

As articulated by Participant 3 (Interview, April 2026): "Amnesty International is a global movement of individuals and organizations who undertake advocacy work - advocating their concerns through letter-writing campaigns, protests to governments or in public spaces, lobbying government leaders and engaging with communities to promote activism and education on human rights issues. The organization also works with a range of other international entities, including the United Nations and the International Criminal Court (ICC), by strengthening implementation and enforcement of global human rights norms. It operates on basic principles of international solidarity, non-discrimination, impartiality, independence, universality and indivisibility of human rights, democracy, mutual respect and taking action for victims of human rights violations. Amnesty International funds its work primarily from voluntary donations and membership fees to safeguard the institutional independence and credibility of the organization which has a policy not to accept any funding from governments or political parties.

Wagner (2024) asserts that international relations theory often overlooks human rights, viewing them as elements of domestic rather than international politics, with realists

typically deeming them a secondary objective of the state, subordinate to security (Wagner, 2024). This argument contends that security undermines human rights, ultimately prioritizing the interests of the state. The national interest argument posits that human rights are merely a moral issue that must be strictly subordinated to essential practical state interests (Donnelly, 2023). International human rights rules frequently lack domestic applicability. Emerging democracies such as Nigeria occasionally comply with international human rights standards, primarily due to their status as signatories and the apprehension of potential consequences from developed nations. The rationale posits that actions are domestic rather than international, thus absolving them of repercussions. However, actions undertaken by authorities in the name of national interest frequently escalate uncontrollably, and with the advent of social media, information regarding committed atrocities disseminates widely across various platforms. The national interest in this instance may influence foreign relations or domestic interests, which can have global implications.

The organization addresses various issues, including police brutality, the ramifications of conflict, human rights violations, children's rights, women's rights, and holds governments and large corporations accountable. These human rights organizations confront governments and large corporations to hold them accountable for violations of citizens' rights, ensuring that government agents who infringe upon human rights and corporations that exploit governmental authority are brought to justice. Their objective is for governments and corporations to adhere to international human rights dictates. A state that acknowledges the rights of its residents inherently signifies a democratic nature and adherence to nearly all democratic principles (Interview with P4 April, 2026).

The fundamental principle of liberalism asserts that individuals possess inherent rights to free expression, equitable judicial treatment, and political equality as codified in a constitutional framework (Dunne and Hanson, 2023). Citizens compete for political offices, are elected, and are sworn in to safeguard the populace. This encompasses safeguarding their essential human rights. Nigeria, with its democratic principles and constitution, is expected to function as a liberal state in practice. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have consequently been promoting, exerting pressure, and shaping human rights principles in the country through their programs. They oppose any actions that violate human rights, however their endeavors are frequently undermined by the authorities. The liberal viewpoint of international group such as AI renders it exceedingly difficult for Nigerian authorities to infringe upon the rights of its population.

The rights of those apprehended clandestinely, such as during nighttime, would have been violated prior to these organizations being aware of the circumstances. The unlawful imprisonment and arbitrary arrest of persons contravene the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which embodies a liberal viewpoint. Chapter 4 of the Nigerian Constitution delineates the fundamental human rights pertaining to the civic and political rights of citizens. The authorities' disregard for fundamental human rights demonstrates their failure to adhere to liberal norms, which, although enshrined in the constitution, do not influence their actions. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are directed by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), a comprehensive articulation of human rights that also serves as a guide for nations worldwide. This document holds the Nigerian authorities accountable to international civil society organizations and mandates the protection of citizens' rights.

Amnesty International Nigeria has played a significant role in promoting and protecting human rights through its work to raise public awareness, mobilise citizens to demand justice, influence policy decisions in favour of human rights protection as well as demanding accountability for human rights violations. With continued lobbying efforts, research collecting and public education around key human rights issues and engagement with relevant stakeholders, the organization helped to amplify the discourse on human rights both in Uganda as well as adherence to international and national human rights obligations. More generically, Amnesty International is one of the world's largest and best-known human rights organisations. It is a global NGO that fiercely endeavours to protect and ensure the rights and freedoms related to what is part of universally recognised human rights documents around the world such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Its global network of members, supporters and activists works together to ensure that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

The mission of this organization is to provide help to every individual in order to be able to enjoy all the benefits and rights that are granted with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Amnesty International hallmark is that it works with and for the people. They organise campaign to preserve and promote human rights. Through her initiatives, she truly sends messages to all nations and authorities to follow the rule of law and so effect international relations. Some of the success stories of Amnesty International Nigeria include:

- i. Securing the release of hundreds of prisoners of conscience, such as Omoyele Sowore, a journalist and activist who was arrested in

2019 for organizing peaceful protests against bad governance.

- ii. Exposing the atrocities committed by Boko Haram and the Nigerian military in the northeastern region, such as mass killings, abductions, sexual violence and forced abortions.
- iii. Campaigning for the abolition of the death penalty and the reform of the criminal justice system, which is plagued by corruption, delays and unfair trials. Supporting the victims of forced evictions and advocating for their right to adequate housing and compensation. Demanding justice for the victims of police brutality and extrajudicial killings, especially during the #EndSARS protests in 2020.
- iv. Educating and empowering young people to become human rights defenders and agents of change in their communities.

AI is funded by donations from its members and supporters, and does not accept any money from governments or political parties. One of the most prominent human rights organizations in the world is Amnesty International, which uses various methods of research, advocacy and mobilization to fight against abuses and injustices. Amnesty International conducts accurate and cross-checked research into human rights violations by governments, companies and other actors worldwide, using different sources and tools, such as reports, surveys, interviews and digital technologies (Amnesty International Report, 2019). Based on its research, Amnesty International influences and pressures decision makers to respect and protect human rights, through lobbying, campaigning, public awareness and legal action (Amnesty International Report, 2019 & 2021).

Violation of human rights undermines public confidence in the rule of law but a respect for human rights builds up public confidence in the rule of law. When there is respect for the rule of law, citizens would be disposed to take their grievances to court rather than resorting to violence. It therefore stands to reason that to maintain the rule of law is to advance human rights. The maintenance of the rule of law entails protection and promotion of human rights by the courts. Erosion of the rule of law or its flagrant disregard jeopardizes human rights and, in the long run, engenders erosion of the rights (Interview with P7 April, 2026).

Amnesty International also mobilizes millions of supporters and activists around the world, who join its global movement and take part in its actions, such as petitions, demonstrations, donations and online engagement (Amnesty International Report, 2019 & 2021). Amnesty International's methods of research, advocacy and

mobilization are guided by its strategic plan, which defines its vision, mission, values and goals for the future (Amnesty International Report, 2022).

One of the main objectives of Amnesty International is to promote and protect human rights around the world. To achieve this, the organization focuses on different thematic areas that reflect the most pressing issues and challenges faced by people in various contexts. These thematic areas include civil and political rights, such as freedom of expression, association and assembly, and the right to a fair trial; economic, social and cultural rights, such as the right to education, health, work and adequate standard of living; gender and sexuality, such as the rights of women and sexual and reproductive health; refugees and migrants, such as the rights of people who are forced to flee their homes or seek a better life elsewhere; armed conflict and security, such as the protection of civilians, humanitarian law, and disarmament; and environmental justice, such as the rights of indigenous peoples, climate change, and natural resources. Amnesty International works to expose violations, mobilize supporters, influence decision makers, and empower activists to defend human rights in these thematic areas.

Objective Two: To assess the contributions of Amnesty International toward the actualization of the Universal Declaration of Human rights in Nigeria

The impact and effectiveness of Amnesty International's work, both at the global and regional levels, can be measured by various indicators. Some of these indicators are: the number of human rights violations that are prevented, exposed, or redressed; the extent to which human rights norms and standards are promoted and implemented; the degree of participation and empowerment of human rights defenders and victims; and the level of public awareness and support for human rights issues. Amnesty International strives to achieve its vision of a world where everyone enjoys all the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments.

Amnesty International often employs a method in its global promotion of human rights called "shaming and naming." The method is to denounce on a large scale in order to undermine the reputation of the human rights breaches in front of the relevant institutions. Amnesty International in Nigeria has been very active in denouncing human rights violators including specific government bodies. In June 2019, the group accused the Nigerian Military for torturing citizens as a breach of human rights. "Victims of torture were denied justice and the court system failed to break down the culture of impunity," the charity said. The group on August 5, 2019, called on Nigerian authorities to investigate the deaths of three members of the Islamic

Movement in Nigeria (IMN) who died in police custody. These forms of public denunciation lead to a decrease in the number of human rights violations (Interview with P6 April, 2026).

Respondent from AI also referenced the case of ElZakzaky, the leader of the Shiite Movement of Nigeria, who was arrested and detained in prison despite court rulings that mandated his release. The Shiite leader El-Zakzaky and his wife were arrested and unlawfully detained during a protest in which over 350 followers were killed by the army and interred in a mass grave in the northern city of Zaria, Kaduna State (Interview with P8 April, 2026). No individuals were held accountable for the mass killing, and the Nigerian authorities consistently refuted claims until investigations uncovered the atrocities that had been committed. The inability of the Nigerian authorities to hold individuals accountable for the deaths of numerous women, men, and children by soldiers in Zaria reflects a troubling acceptance of a culture of impunity regarding human rights violations in the country.

The Nigerian government often denies human rights allegations, despite substantial evidence. This denial appears to be motivated by a desire to maintain credibility, particularly given the significant implications of their actions. These implications extend beyond citizen distrust, which could exacerbate conflicts in affected regions, to their standing with the international community, from which they rely on various forms of support, including military and humanitarian assistance. The situation is that the government seeks to maintain its credibility as a democratic entity and a proponent of human rights within the international community (Interview with P5 April, 2026).

Through advocacy, Amnesty International has played a crucial role in securing the release of individuals who were unlawfully detained. Three human rights activists, Omoyele Sowore, Agba Jalingo, and Olawale Bakare, have been recognized as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International due to their arbitrary detention and unfair trial, which occurred as they exercised their right to freedom of expression (Amnesty International, November 20, 2019). Amnesty International was instrumental in facilitating their release. Amnesty International has collaborated with Esther Kiobel, the widow of Dr. Barinem Kiobel, along with three other women, Victoria Bera, Blessing Eawo, and Charity Levula, to initiate a civil case against Shell, the oil conglomerate. Dr. Barinem Kiobel, along with Ken Saro-Wiwa, a writer and human rights activist, and seven others, collectively known as the Ogoni 9, were executed by the military junta led by General Sani Abacha. They faced charges of treason for advocating for their rights against Shell. The Ogoni land held significant economic value for

both Shell and the Nigerian government. Both parties experienced significant concern when protests, led by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), emerged in response to environmental degradation attributed to Shell's operations (Amnesty International February 11, 2019).

Esther Kiobel alleges that Shell is complicit in the unlawful arrest and detention of her husband, as well as violations of his personal integrity, his right to a fair trial, his right to life, and her own right to family life. Amnesty International's research into the historic injustice has uncovered how Shell's requests for 'assistance' in managing environmental protests resulted in a severe government response, leading to the arrests and unlawful executions of the husbands of the women involved (Amnesty International March 23, 2022). Esther's legal team received support from Amnesty International to advance the case in the Netherlands. The legal action against Shell was initiated in 2018 following the issuance of a writ in a Dutch court in 2017. Esther Kiobel, nonetheless, faced a setback in her civil case against Shell on 23 March 2022, after dedicating 27 years to pursuing justice.

AI has relied on lobbying as a strategy in promoting human rights in Nigeria. Lobbying is a methodical and intentional strategy aimed at influencing policymakers, including lawmakers along with various public and private leaders, to endorse a specific agenda (human rights) in their policies. Lobbying is a principal strategy utilized by Amnesty International. The initial act of lobby in Nigeria was the creation of its office in Abuja (Interview with P7 April, 2026).

One of Amnesty International's historic modalities for advocating and defending human rights has consisted of letter-writing campaigns. In this way members and supporters prepare and endorse carefully formulated letters to government officials, politicians, or other key leaders urging them to review policies, change legislation or act as appropriate when there are allegations of human rights violations. For example, this strategy was evidenced by the submission to the Presidential Investigation Panel on the Compliance of the Armed Forces with Human Rights Obligations and Rules of Engagement by Amnesty International Nigeria. Amnesty (2017) clarifies that the institution sent 66 petitions over Nigerian authority from 2012 to 2017, with only 15 yielding official responses. The effectiveness of this advocacy tool is greatly enhanced by the rapid evolution of information and communication technologies. Digital platforms and social media applications (e.g. Facebook, X (formerly Twitter)) have enabled wider public participation by providing opportunities for supporters and registered members to participate in online campaigns, electronically sign

petitions and be mobilised more effectively into coordinated human rights advocacy efforts. This capability transformation has made Amnesty International's letter-writing campaigns far more widely and rapidly distributed — an accessible, increasingly effective tool for influencing public policy-makers and holding individuals accountable.

AI asserts that the promotion of human rights necessitates the delivery of comprehensive education on human rights to citizens. Individuals who are informed about their rights are more inclined to defend them. Amnesty International establishes various venues to furnish citizens with pertinent information regarding human rights as articulated in their national constitutions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The organization provides individuals with knowledge regarding the procedure of reporting human rights abuses, among other topics. Education is delivered via the organization's diverse channels, including the internet, and facilitated by volunteers in numerous nations, including Nigeria (Interview with P13 April, 2026).

While AI rarely participate in direct public demonstrations, they offer support to groups that peacefully protest to advocate for human rights issues. In this regard, Amnesty International augments the endeavours of organizations striving for human rights objectives, including the right to employment and safeguarding against various forms of governmental abuse, among others. Amnesty Nigeria has denounced Nigeria's suppression of journalist protests, asserting that this action impedes the freedom of expression, an essential right in a democratic country such as Nigeria. Another instance occurred in September 2019, when a demonstration advocating for the release of Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Zakzaky, the Leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, took place. He has been incarcerated without trial since December 2015 and received support from Amnesty International (Sahara Reporters, 2016).

Through targeted campaigns, AI has advanced the course of human rights in Nigeria. This strategy employed various communication channels, including mass media and news media, through which organizations disseminate press releases, engage in face-to-face communication, and utilize letters and communiqués, alongside opinion leaders, to inform authorities about the results of their investigations and provide recommendations concerning human rights issues or phenomena. Consequently, target campaigns, in contrast to letter campaigns, are not designed to pressure government officials or decision-makers; rather, they aim to furnish valuable information to facilitate informed judgement and decision-making processes. AI has established themselves as very trustworthy sources of information regarding human rights issues globally, providing annual reports for each country in which they operate. The annual reports in Nigeria have been crucial for

both the government and the public in identifying instances of human rights breaches while also attracting the attention of international organizations that support the preservation of human rights and robust institutions (Interview with P10 April, 2026).

Over the years, Amnesty International has achieved remarkable successes. For instance, its efforts have contributed to the abolition of the death penalty in several countries, increased global awareness of human rights violations, and strengthened international accountability mechanisms. The organization's annual reports, such as the Amnesty International Annual Report 2020/2021, have provided comprehensive documentation of human rights abuses, serving as critical tools for advocacy and reform (Amnesty International, 2020). Despite these achievements, the organization has faced considerable challenges. Critics argue that Amnesty International's effectiveness is hampered by biases, particularly in its selection of cases and regions of focus. Additionally, operating in conflict zones presents significant risks and logistical difficulties, limiting the organization's ability to intervene effectively. Limited financial and human resources further constrain its capacity to address the growing complexity and scale of human rights violations globally (Ugochukwu and Mezie-Okoye, 2025).

A critical human rights situation is taking place in the South-Eastern states of Nigeria, especially concerning its security situation following the Federal Government proscription of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and profile the group as a terrorist sect in 2017. This designation gave a legal justification for heightened security actions against the group and its alleged affiliates. That said, Amnesty International (2021)—among other human rights organizations—has claimed that the execution of these operations has led to excessive civilian deaths in some cases. The establishment of the Ebube Agu regional security outfit in 2021 by Southeast governors as part of more comprehensive community security programmes based on the Amotekun corps in southwestern Nigeria has also attracted fire for oversight and accountability concerns. Allegations of links to extrajudicial killings and other human rights abuses have surfaced against the outfit (Human Rights Watch 2022). In addition, Amnesty International (2021) also reported claims of extrajudicial executions, torture and enforced disappearances as well as indiscriminate shootings during security operations in the region. The organization's findings indicate that military operations carried out in 2021 were linked to no fewer than 115 civilian deaths and raised continuing concerns about the failure to comply with domestic and international human rights norms.

Please confirm ASAP The growing insecurity associated with armed groups referred to in the media as "unknown gunmen" has also been documented by Amnesty International, which continues to enjoy increasing prominence across states such as Imo, Anambra and other areas of southeastern Nigeria. The organization claims that between January 2019 and December, 2021 alone, over 400 were killed in Imo State. Testimonies from witnesses interviewed during the investigations stated that these armed groups regularly attacked communal events, such as burials and weddings, where they are said to have extorted money from residents and used violence against anyone refusing to pay. Amnesty International also documented more alleged unlawful killings, torture, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances by security agencies, paramilitary groups or armed criminal elements in its report on August 2015 Attacks and Unlawful Killings in Southeast Nigeria. The report estimated at least 1,844 people were killed between January 2021 and June 2023 as a result of such incidents. Together these results highlights the complexities of the security challenges in Southeastern Nigeria and further reinforces the need to ensure that no security operation violates domestic or internationally recognised human rights standards.

Amnesty International works to protect and promote human rights through research, mobilization and advocacy. Amnesty International has a presence in Nigeria since 1967 and has been documenting and campaigning on various human rights issues affecting the country. Some of the issues that Amnesty International focuses on in Nigeria include the armed conflict in the northeast, unlawful killings and violence by bandits and security forces, enforced disappearances, torture, arbitrary detention, restrictions on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, forced evictions, and climate change. Amnesty International also supports victims of human rights violations and their families, and calls for accountability and justice for perpetrators. Amnesty International's work has had an impact on Nigerian society by raising awareness, influencing policies, challenging impunity, and empowering human rights defenders (Interview with P9 April, 2026).

Similarly, in 2020, some civil society groups staged a protest against Amnesty International in Abuja, calling for its expulsion from Nigeria. They claimed that the organization was "sponsoring terrorism" and "inciting violence" in the country (AI Report, 2020). Amnesty International has responded to these allegations by reaffirming its commitment to human rights and impartiality. It has also emphasized its constructive engagement with various stakeholders in Nigeria, including the government, civil society, media, and communities. It

has highlighted some of its achievements and impacts in Nigeria, such as securing the release of prisoners of conscience, supporting the #EndSARS movement against police brutality, and providing legal aid and psychosocial support to victims of human rights violations (Daily Trust, 2020). Nigerians have diverse and complex perceptions about Amnesty International's role, credibility, and impact in their country. While some appreciate and support its work, others distrust and oppose it. Amnesty International faces many challenges and opportunities in Nigeria, as it strives to fulfill its mission of defending human rights for all.

Persecution and personality protection means loss of worth but, as Participant 11 (Interview April 2026) said: Amnesty International promotes threat within the human rights world leveraged by a squadron of volunteers and backers aiding to lower species rights spare both voluntarily and when proposed needed. It aims to facilitate compliance of governments, armed groups, public institutions and other actors with local and international human rights standards. In order to attain these aims, Amnesty International uses various advocacy mediums including: awareness campaigns, civic education programmes, policy advocacy and working with civil society actors and community members. Activities include peaceful protest and public activism, letterwriting campaigns, fundraising, educational initiatives and focused appeals on behalf of victims of human rights violations. By tapping into these varying methods, the establishment seeks to garner public influence and also action by crowd using strategy towards promoting human dignity valued beliefs while integrating ones who help reinforce fundamental rights.

Amnesty International conducts rigorous, systematic work investigating alleged human rights abuses. It collects evidence through field missions, victim and witness interviews, judicial observation, as well as joint work with local human rights defenders and partner organizations. These investigations always undergo careful verification prior to dissemination within official reports, media publications, policy briefs and newsletters, educational materials, and digital platforms. These publications are both advocacy tools and unquestionable sources of information for governments, international organizations, researchers and the public. Amnesty International also publishes regular and annual reports evaluating the human rights situation internationally and nationally, as well as making recommendations to governments and others on what they must do to fulfil their obligations under international human rights law. These efforts have cumulatively played a significant role in raising awareness, enforcing institutional accountability and moving the human rights agenda forward globally.

Despite the work of Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, structural and institutional barriers prevent meaningful enjoyment of human rights in Nigeria. Politically, legally, administratively and socio-economically entrenched human rights violations continue to be a major challenge in many countries including here. Part of the explanation for the sustained level of abuses has been lack of political commitment and insufficient institutional capacity in translating constitutional and internationally guaranteed rights into real practice through effective implementation and enforcement. Even though successive Nigerian governments have enacted protective laws and ratified international human rights instruments, the implementation has rarely matched up to the commitment in law. Hence, there continues to be a significant gap between the legal protection of human rights and its actual implementation, calling for strong institutional accountability mechanisms, good governance and long-term partnership among state institutions and civil society actors in implementing human rights.

Discussion of Findings

1. Amnesty International makes the human rights mandate effective and operational via a large international movement composed of national sections, local chapters, thousands of volunteers as well as tens of thousands individual members and activists who take action on multiple fronts: letterwriting campaigns, peaceful demonstrations, public awareness programmes, policy advocacy and engagement with governments. Apart from ground mobilization, the organisation aids international bodies like the United Nations and International Criminal Court to promote implementation and enforcement of minimum global human rights standards. Amnesty International's work in Nigeria includes a number of goals including the prevention of violence against women and children, protecting and promoting children's rights, promoting better accountability institutions, action to end torture and other cruel, or degrading treatment or punishment; upholding civic space for human rights defenders; protecting freedom of expression; campaigning for the death penalty abolition – ending enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions; improving economic social and cultural rights. Such strategic priorities have emerged as a logical response to the ongoing prevalence of human rights violations and concerns about the accountability of public institutions to comply with the rule of law and respect for basic freedoms.

The results of the current analysis are supported by Eckel's observation (2024) based on Amnesty International's tracking of non-state initiatives, and their important contributions to national and international civil and political rights. Eckel said on October 12 that the organization had grown into "a prominent global actor in human rights advocacy, raising awareness of violations, shaping public debate and encouraging governments and others to ensure their policies and practices respect international human rights standards." By means of persistent campaigns advocating for authorities action, good and thorough documentation of human rights violations and continued interaction with governmental institutions and the international community in a timely manner, Amnesty International have facilitated substantial advancement for accountability, sustainable human rights governance at national level and greater adherence to standards such as those contained in the international human rights instruments.

2. Amnesty International Nigeria has had a significant impact on Nigerian society by raising awareness, mobilizing public opinion, influencing policies and holding authorities accountable for human rights violations. Amnesty International also supports victims of human rights violations and their families, and calls for accountability and justice for perpetrators. Despite these achievements, the organization has faced considerable challenges. Critics argue that Amnesty International's effectiveness is hampered by biases, particularly in its selection of cases and regions of focus. Additionally, operating in conflict zones presents significant risks and logistical difficulties, limiting the organization's ability to intervene effectively. Limited financial and human resources further constrain its capacity to address the growing complexity and scale of human rights violations globally (Ugochukwu and Mezie-Okoye, 2025). Through advocacy, Amnesty International has played a crucial role in securing the release of individuals who were unlawfully detained. Three human rights activists, Omoyele Sowore, Agba Jalingo, and Olawale Bakare, have been recognized as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International due to their arbitrary detention and unfair trial, which occurred as they exercised their right to freedom of expression (Amnesty International, November 20, 2019). Amnesty International was instrumental in facilitating their release.

Conclusion

This study examined the controversies surrounding Amnesty International's activities in Nigeria, especially in relation to the human rights violations committed by the security forces and the armed groups in the country. It also analyzed the arguments for and against Amnesty International's reports, campaigns, and advocacy, as well as the responses of the Nigerian government and public. The study discussed the implications of these controversies for the credibility, legitimacy, and effectiveness of Amnesty International as a global human rights organization. It also argued that Amnesty International faces a complex and challenging situation in Nigeria, where it has to balance its principles and values with the realities and sensitivities of the local context.

The importance of the protection of human rights to the attainment of peace, justice and stability in any state cannot be overemphasised. That is why a number of countries including Nigeria have put down provisions of the rights in their separate constitutions which goes to show their willingness to respect and preserve the rights. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, it has been found that government and her security agencies have continued to join forces either directly or indirectly to deny people the rights. This leads to a nearly complete loss of faith and confidence in government and security organisations. The rules and restrictions handed forth by the authorities are now being ignored with impunity resulting to a situation of anarchy and disorder in the polity. This study thus, posits that justice and peace cannot flourish in the country if the fundamental rights of the people are not preserved and honoured by the persons who are constitutionally called to do so.

Recommendations

Based on the observed challenges and criticism facing Amnesty International, this study puts forward the following recommendations:

- i. There is need for Amnesty International to engage more with the Nigerian government, the military, and other relevant stakeholders to foster dialogue, trust, and cooperation on human rights issues.
- ii. Repressive laws and policies should be repealed through a review of counterterrorism legislation (e.g., Terrorism Prevention Act) to prevent misuse against dissenters. It should be ensured also that laws align with constitutional rights to assembly, expression, and association. By integrating these measures, Nigeria can easily balance security imperatives with human rights protections,

paving the way for sustainable peace in the country.

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