Methods note: evidence

How should you read a figure about Nigeria, and why do official numbers change?

Three of Nigeria's headline statistics changed method or base year between 2023 and 2025, with large jumps in the published figures. How to tell a break in a series from a change in the world, and how we label every figure.

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In short

- Unemployment, inflation and GDP were all re-measured between 2023 and 2025. The last unemployment rate on the old method was 33.3% (2020) and the first on the new method 5.3% (2022); the two cannot be compared, because the definition of employment changed.
- Two official poverty figures measure different things: 40.1% of Nigerians were below the national consumption poverty line in 2018/19, and 63% were multidimensionally poor in 2021–22. Neither replaces the other.
- Every figure on this site carries one of four labels, which say how much weight it can bear. A figure from an official survey is labelled a survey estimate, and remains an official statistic.

Three breaks in three years

Unemployment. In 2023 the National Bureau of Statistics published the first Labour Force Survey results on a revised method that follows the International Labour Organization's 2013 standards [1,2]. A person who 'worked for at least one (1) hour' for pay or profit now counts as employed; the old method counted 'those working between 1 and 19 hours as unemployed (including those who did nothing)', and covered only people aged 15–64 [1]. The last rate under the old method was 33.3%, for the fourth quarter of 2020 [3]; the first rates under the new method were 5.3% for the fourth quarter of 2022 and 4.1% for the first quarter of 2023 [1]. The Bureau advises against comparing results from the old and new methods [4].

Inflation. The consumer price index now uses 2024 as its base year, in place of 2009, and its basket has changed [5,6]. Headline inflation was reported at 34.80% for December 2024 on the old base and 24.48% for January 2025 on the new [7]. The two figures are on different bases and should not be read as a ten-point fall in one month.

Output. In 2025 GDP was rebased to 2019, and earlier quarterly estimates were revised to match [8]. The Bureau put rebased nominal GDP at current market prices at ₦372.82 trillion for 2024 [8]. Rebasing changes the measured size of the economy; it is not growth. Real growth in the first quarter of 2025 was 3.13% [8].

Two poverty figures, two questions

The 2018/19 Living Standards Survey found 40.1% of Nigerians below the national poverty line, defined as real consumption below ₦137,430 per person per year. The national figure excludes Borno, where data were insufficient [9,10].

The 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index, from a survey of over 56,000 households between November 2021 and February 2022, found 63% of people, about 133 million, multidimensionally poor [11]. A household counts as poor if it is deprived in more than one dimension, or the equivalent share (26%) of 15 weighted indicators of health, education, living standards, and work and shocks [12]. The Bureau publishes both

measures and notes that monetary poverty is lower than multidimensional poverty in most states [11]. They answer different questions, and one should not be used to contradict the other.

Denominators and models

Many rates depend on a population total, and Nigeria's are projections: the National Population Commission's projection for 2022, published by the Bureau in 2024, is about 2.9% lower than the UN's estimate for the same year [13,14]. Our note on sampling sets out the figures.

Producers label modelled figures. GRID3's population estimates 'are not official government statistics' [15], and the ILO publishes its modelled estimates separately from national data [16].

Models can also be used to test official figures. A 2025 study of more than 10,000 subnational food-security analyses under the IPC system, from 2017 to 2023, estimated that they miss about one in five acutely hungry people [17]. Nigeria's food-security figures come from the Cadre Harmonisé, a related but distinct process, and the study does not mention Nigeria, so we do not apply its finding to Nigerian figures.

How strong is the system behind the figures?

The World Bank's Statistical Performance Indicators score Nigeria's statistical system at 69.1 out of 100 for 2024, up from 57.1 in 2016 [18]. The sub-Saharan African aggregate in the World Bank's SPI repository is 60.25 for 2024 [19]. Nigeria scores highest on data use (100) and lowest on data sources (39.8) [19]. The weakness lies in the underlying sources rather than in their use.

How we label a figure

The UN's Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics say that data for statistical purposes 'may be drawn from all types of sources, be they statistical surveys or administrative records' [20]. So who published a figure does not tell you how it was produced. Our labels say how much weight a figure can bear, and each figure carries one.

The four labels on every figure

Label	What it means	What to check
Record or count	Counted or compiled from records rather than estimated from a sample or a model: a census, a register, a budget, administrative or operational data.	Who compiled it, the year, the definition, and what the records leave out.
Survey estimate	Calculated from a sample survey with a stated method and year, including surveys run by a national statistics office.	The margin of error, the year, and who the sample could not reach.
Modelled or projected	Estimated by a model or projection rather than measured, including official population projections.	The assumptions. Read the method note.
Sources disagree	Credible sources give different figures, usually because of different definitions, periods or methods.	Each figure, and why they differ.

- Where more than one label fits, we use the one with the larger caution, in this order: sources disagree, modelled or projected, survey estimate, record or count. Where sources disagree, each figure is still shown with its own source.
- A population total projected from the 2006 census is labelled modelled or projected, not a record or count, and so is a rate that divides recorded numbers by a projected population.
- Unemployment from the Labour Force Survey is a survey estimate. It remains an official statistic, and its source line says who published it.
- A label is never the only guide: every figure also carries its source and its date.

Our practice

These are the rules every Probatio Africa study follows. Read them as commitments you can hold us to.

- [x] For every figure we name the producer, the survey or source and its round, the period, the population covered and the definition.
- [x] We never compare across a break in a series. Where a producer publishes a back-cast series, we use it and say so.
- [x] We say which poverty, unemployment or population measure we mean, every time.
- [x] We cite the original publication. Where we could read a statistic only in a news report of the producer's own statement, we say so beside the source.

What the evidence cannot settle

- Whether the Labour Force Survey has been published for any quarter after the second quarter of 2024. That was the latest we could find on the Bureau's portals.
- How far the undercount found in IPC analyses applies to the Cadre Harmonisé.
- The size of the 2025 GDP revision as stated in the Bureau's own rebasing report, which we could not read in a machine-readable copy.

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