



Multiple Nodes, Common Causes:

National Stocktake of Contemporary Insecurity and State Responses in Nigeria

Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD)
Abuja, Nigeria

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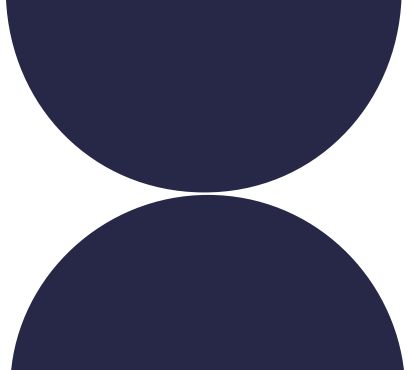
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Executive Summary



The Nigerian body politic faces a seeming epidemic of insecurity spanning jihadist insurgency, criminal banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, and violent separatist agitations. While governmental responses have overwhelming followed a militarised path to resolving these multifaceted conflicts, such interventions do not appear to have substantially diminished insecurity.

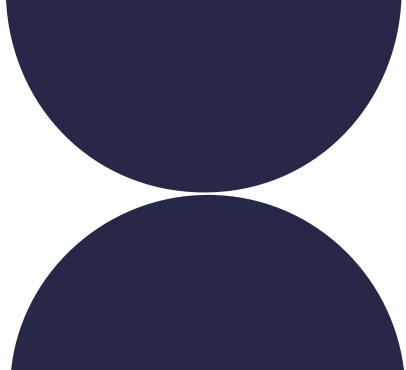
There instead appears to be a growing miscomprehension among policymakers and the wider public of the critical factors triggering and sustaining varied conflicts. The increasing prevalence of misinformation and disinformation across traditional and new media spheres has further deepened public anxiety and intergroup tensions about the mounting insecurity and state responses to it. Considering this context, there is a pressing need for strategic knowledge-driven interventions that can both improve public awareness of the drivers of insecurity and directly inform evidence-driven policymaking.

Substantial academic, journalistic, and policy knowledge exists exploring the dynamics within conflict hotspots in each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. However, only a handful of such accounts offer a holistic, national exploration of conflict in Nigeria, attempting to trace the linkages, commonalities, and divergences that characterise the violent conflicts. Whilst understanding the local specificity of conflicts remains critical for serious conflict resolution, a more holistic and national approach to generating evidence about Nigeria's conflicts is necessary. This report aims to address this gap by providing an updated analysis of the multiple nodes of insecurity and attendant state responses in Nigeria. While not able to consider the entire country in-depth, the report highlights the contested issues and responses common across Nigeria which have the most pronounced bearing on national cohesion.

To realise this aim, the study pursued a primarily qualitative approach to data gathering. It focused on grasping the linkages, and common and divergent drivers of ongoing conflicts across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, by undertaking interviews, holding focus group discussions, and conducting site visits in at least two states in each geopolitical zone. The methodological approach and study design employed, ultimately shaped our conceptualisation

of contemporary conflict in Nigeria as comprising multiple nodes, driven by common causes. The analogy of nodes, derived from biology and network analysis, implies a point in a larger network where various pathways or branches intersect. This report argues that common causes intersect with local drivers at nodes in each geopolitical zone, erupting into conflict of varying intensities and trajectories. Paramount among these causes include:

- **Land Use Disputes:** Land use conflicts are often rooted in conflicting understandings of who holds the authority to distribute land titles.
- **Shifting livelihoods:** Climate change and demography challenges are leading to a shortage of resources such as land, vegetation, for grazing, and water for fishing.
- **Reciprocal radicalisation:** Stigmatisation of Fulani herders - perhaps the most widely maligned group in Nigeria today - fuels a siege mentality among herders that contributes to hostile relations with farming communities.
- **Lack of security sector capacity and professionalism:** In each geopolitical zone, the incapacity and/or heavy-handedness of security agents is a primary driver of conflict. These two challenges - the security sector's inadequate capacity and its frequent abuses - are intricately linked.
- **Circulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW):** Though Nigerian law prohibits individuals from possessing SALWs unless, for security operatives and individuals licensed by the Nigerian police, illegal possession is rife.
- **Corruption and inadequate access to justice:** Corruption and perceptions of injustice were identified by key informants as major factors fuelling insecurity.
- **Geography and regional dynamics:** The geographical location and the proximity of Nigeria to fragile neighbouring countries such as Niger, Cameroon, and Chad have exposed the country to regional insecurity.



Ideological grievance: The Indigenous People of Biafra group, and to a lesser extent nascent Yoruba secessionists in the southwest, pose a direct challenge to the territorial integrity of Nigeria owing to their ambitions of breaking away from the republic. Even militants that are less ideologically driven such as the bandits in the northwest or criminals in the Niger Delta are pushed into militancy in large part because their political grievances go unaddressed. Many of these criminals claim their militancy is a form of protest against the marginalisation of their communities.

Politics: As the 2023 general elections draw closer, officials are liable to increasingly prioritise electoral considerations and political alliances over security priorities. Electoral competition in the Fourth Republic has been both a factor in fuelling insecurity and in influencing the state's response to insecurity.

While not able to cover in equal depth the range of issues pertinent to understanding insecurity in Nigeria, the study identified the following as crucial areas which can be covered in further research:

The origin and extent of SALW in northwest Nigeria: Though frequently the subject of speculation, the exact extent, origin, and types of weapons flowing into northwest Nigeria have yet to be adequately examined and constitute a major knowledge gap.

The nexus between banditry and jihadism: Despite growing instances of transient tactical cooperation between bandits and jihadists – including weapons and cattle trading – there is little indication that these groups have adopted the ideology of the religious militants (see CDD northwest Conflict Analysis for more on this), with several combatants, interviewed repeatedly denouncing jihadist attempts to carve a new state out of Nigeria. However, the evolving nature of the interaction between bandits and jihadists, requires further, more dedicated, assessment.

Linkages between rural banditry across regions: An important gap requiring further research will be to assess -- including through life-history interviews -- the extent to which conflict in other regions of Nigeria has directly been driven by the outflow of former residents of northwest states.

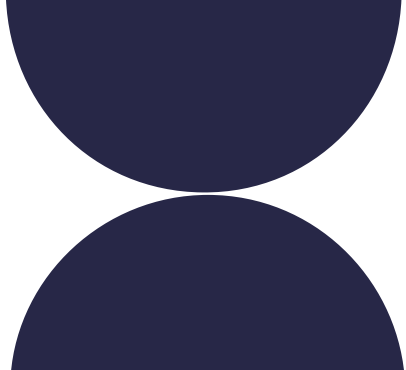
The international dimensions of rural banditry in northwest Nigeria: Increasingly, rural banditry transcends international boundaries. There is a need to investigate how the influx of foreign armed herdsmen and offenders into the region through the otherwise porous borders is connected to rural banditry. There is also a need to study how this is connected to the proliferation of arms.

Based on the findings, the study proposes a series of recommendations, which include:

Fundamental security sector reform: Any serious attempt to address insecurity in Nigeria will require fundamental reforms to Nigeria's security architecture, including overhauling the rules of engagement between civilians and armed state officials, dealing with corruption and a severe lack of transparency, and improving the capacity of the police to carry out investigations, arrests, and prosecution.

Transitional justice: Nigerian authorities should take advantage of the authority granted to them under the 1999 constitution to engage in transitional justice initiatives at both a local and national levels. Transitional justice frameworks offer the chance for all those affected by conflict to air their grievances, recount their experiences, and engage in mutual healing and reconciliation.

Reforming local vigilance: Vigilantism has long been part of the social order in Nigeria, but the recent upsurge in incidents of violence and crime has increased their popularity and



significance. However, semi-formal groups like the Vigilante Group of Nigeria are no longer the sole or even primary vigilante/self-defence outfits in most parts of Nigeria. In the northwest, for instance, the local vigilantism is primarily undertaken by the Yan Sakai which is subject to significantly less state oversight. Amidst calls for increased state policing, reforms that rationalise official vigilantism through significantly improving the funding, training, and professionalism of the local members will discourage informal forms of vigilantism while expanding the reach and local embeddedness of the security apparatus.

■ **Ending impunity:** A central thread running through all the conflict nodes examined in this study has been the concern that perpetrators of violence and crimes, be they citizens or state officials, are all-too-infrequently prosecuted. Federal and state governments should explore the possibility of inaugurating special courts dedicated to deliberating on, and trying, the perpetrators and instigators of mass violence and ethnically motivated crimes which increasingly threaten communal, state or national cohesion.

■ **Reinvigorating efforts to curb SALWs:** An effective security strategy and peacebuilding initiative should include measures to curb the proliferation of SALW as well as a comprehensive strategy for tackling crime. The federal

government recently established the National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons but it must be sufficiently empowered to carry out its mandate in collaboration with the security agencies.

■ **Curbing false narratives:** Local and international stakeholders must do more to combat the spread of fake news and curtail hate speech without infringing on Nigerians' constitutional liberties. The Twitter ban imposed from June 2021 to January 2022 is not, for example, an effective means of improving community cohesion or promoting the dissemination of reliable information. In addition to media training and sensitisations and supporting evidence-driven dissemination of knowledge on insecurity, local-level studies of how misinformation spreads both online and offline can improve stakeholders' abilities to address these challenges in a manner consistent with liberal democratic norms.

■ **Supporting coalitions for change:** Stakeholders should expand their support to local and national efforts to exert pressure on the government to deliver on their mandate to secure the lives and properties of the citizenry. These coalitions should span civil society, the media, and relevant and influential governmental agencies and forums to instigate sustainable change in the peace and security sector.



INTRODUCTION



Country Context

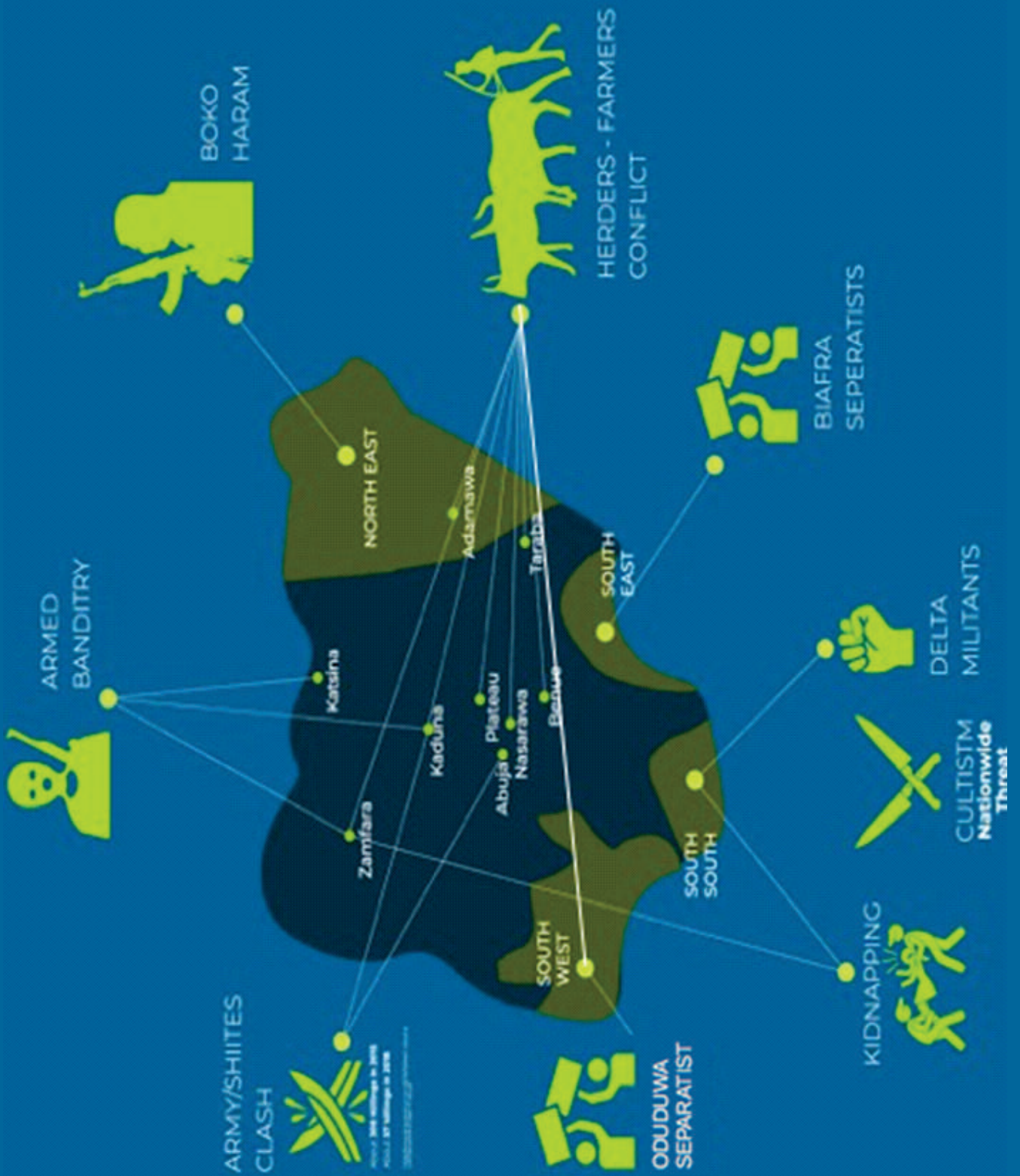
The Nigerian state faces intractable security challenges. The Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, violent conflicts between herders and farmers/host communities, militancy in the oil-rich Niger Delta, separatist agitation by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), threats of an emerging secessionist movement in the southwest, and incessant kidnappings nationwide are parts of an ever-growing epidemic of insecurity. The government response has been to initiate military operations in almost all 36 states, but these are yet to significantly reduce insecurity. In fact, there is a growing distrust of the capacity of the security agencies, the judiciary, and the government more generally to protect citizens, ensure accountability for perpetrators of violence, discourage impunity and address grievances. Unaddressed these lingering grievances, perceptions of injustice, and the waning legitimacy of state security agencies will remain fuel for insecurity engulfing ever-increasing stretches of Nigerian territory.

This security outlook in Nigeria is further worsened by a miscomprehension, often fuelled by disinformation, among policymakers and the wider public of the critical factors triggering and sustaining varied conflicts. Public outcries following news of emerging security challenges are increasingly driven more so by sensationalist and politicised media narratives that reinforce existing stereotypes rather than by rigorous, investigative reporting aimed at informing. The increasing prevalence of misinformation and disinformation across traditional and new media spheres has further deepened public anxiety and intergroup tensions without raising levels of public awareness about the mounting insecurity or state responses to it.

An atmosphere of increased public pressure spurred by poor or biased information about the complex security context contributes to knee-jerk responses from decision-makers, acting to avoid political backlash from constituents, rather than seeking to introduce measures to deal with the root causes of insecurity. Furthermore, the lack of evidence available to policymakers interested in lasting solutions to the varied security challenges further stymies responses to insecurity at both federal and state levels.

Considering this context, there is a pressing need for strategic knowledge-driven interventions that can both improve public awareness of the drivers of insecurity and directly inform evidence-driven policymaking. This report aims to address this gap by providing an updated analysis of the multiple nodes of insecurity and attendant state responses in Nigeria. It highlights the contested issues and responses common across Nigeria which have the most pronounced bearing on national cohesion.

To do so the report starts with a meta-review of the extant knowledge on conflict in Nigeria to clarify the gaps this baseline aims to fill. Subsequent sections detail the methodology and study design adopted to conduct the baseline; the key findings of the study about the drivers of conflict in each region; cross-cutting themes which link conflict across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones; and state responses to the conflict. By way of conclusion, the study highlights areas for further exploration and programming interventions for reducing insecurity.



Source: Centre for Democracy and Development, 2021



SECTION 1

IDENTIFYING THE GAPS

Substantial academic, journalistic, and policy knowledge exists exploring the dynamics within conflict hotspots in each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones.¹ This multi-disciplinary body of knowledge can enrich understandings of the specific drivers, historical underpinnings, and cultural and ideological particularities of extant conflicts. However, only a handful of such accounts offer a holistic, national exploration of conflict in Nigeria, or

attempt to trace the linkages, commonalities, and divergences that characterise the violent conflicts facing Nigeria, as well as to understand the nature of the attendant state responses that have arisen in response.² Furthermore, most extant accounts that focus on specific regional conflict geographies were largely written before the recent escalation of conflict across Nigeria, and thus require updating.

BOX 1:

Contextualising the overarching argument

The methodological approach and study design employed, ultimately shaped our conceptualisation of contemporary conflict in Nigeria as comprising **multiple nodes** but driven by **common causes**. The analogy of nodes, derived from biology and network analysis, implies a point in a larger network where various pathways or branches intersect. This report argues that common causes intersect with local drivers at particular nodes in each geopolitical zone, erupting into conflict of varying intensities and trajectories. To further shed light on these ideas, the baseline first explores our findings from each regional context before coming back to consider the larger “network” of common causes.

Whilst understanding the local specificity of conflicts remains critical for serious conflict resolution, a more holistic and national approach to generating evidence on Nigeria's conflicts is needed. This is in response to the emergence of a concurrently national public discourse, often based on partial or faulty evidentiary bases, that frames the escalation of conflict and state responses in conspiratorial terms - seeing conflicts and inadequate state responses as either part of a wider islamisation or fulanisation agenda or as evidence of an intentional campaign of marginalisation against the Fulani, not only in Nigeria but across West Africa. Such framings have meant that, though locally specific, instances of conflict across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones are having an impact on national cohesion.³

Although these narratives are often driven by false or partisan information, it is not enough to simply dismiss such narratives without examining the


empirical realities and the circumstances and dynamics that give them life. As our ongoing, practical experience in fact-checking attests, dismissing popular false narratives without accounting for their empirical bases amounts to treating the symptom rather than the cause, and is frequently not only ineffective but also counterproductive.⁴ Additionally, these narratives sustain themselves in part because they drive a self-fulfilling prophecy: As ordinary Fulani herders are increasingly seen as antagonists and religious extremists in all zones of the country, they develop a siege mentality that in turn drives them to be more hostile to host communities. Assessing the underlying dynamics which give rise to these discourses calls for a serious, updated examination of the common and divergent factors that are increasingly tying local conflicts and specific state responses into the same national narrative frame.

1 For an indicative review of the regional conflict literature on Nigeria, see: Centre for Democracy and Development, (2021), Annotated Bibliography for FCDO Baseline Report, 2021, Centre for Democracy and Development, Abuja, Nigeria: Accessed October 20, 2021, from [Annotated Bibliography for FCDO Baseline Report.docx](#)

2 For a now dated bibliographical counterexample, see: Herbert, S. & Husaini, S. (2018). Conflict, instability, and resilience in Nigeria. Rapid Literature Review 1427. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham. For a more journalistic counterexample, see: Ngwodo, C. (2017). The Great Unravelling: The Disintegration of the Nigerian State, The Republic. Accessed: October 20, 2021, from <https://republic.com.ng/octobernovember-2017/nigeriadisintegrating-state>

3 Ogune, M. (2021), Nigeria More Divided, Survey Reveals, The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News, 2021, <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria-more-divided-survey-reveals/>. (Accessed 2/12/2021)

4 Hassan I and Hitchen J, Centre for Democracy and Development. Driving Division: Disinformation and the new media landscape in Nigeria. Cddwestafrica.Org, 2020 Online. Accessed: October 20, 2021, from: <https://www.cddwestafrica.org/2020/04/15/driving-division-disinformation-and-the-new-media-landscape-in-nigeria>



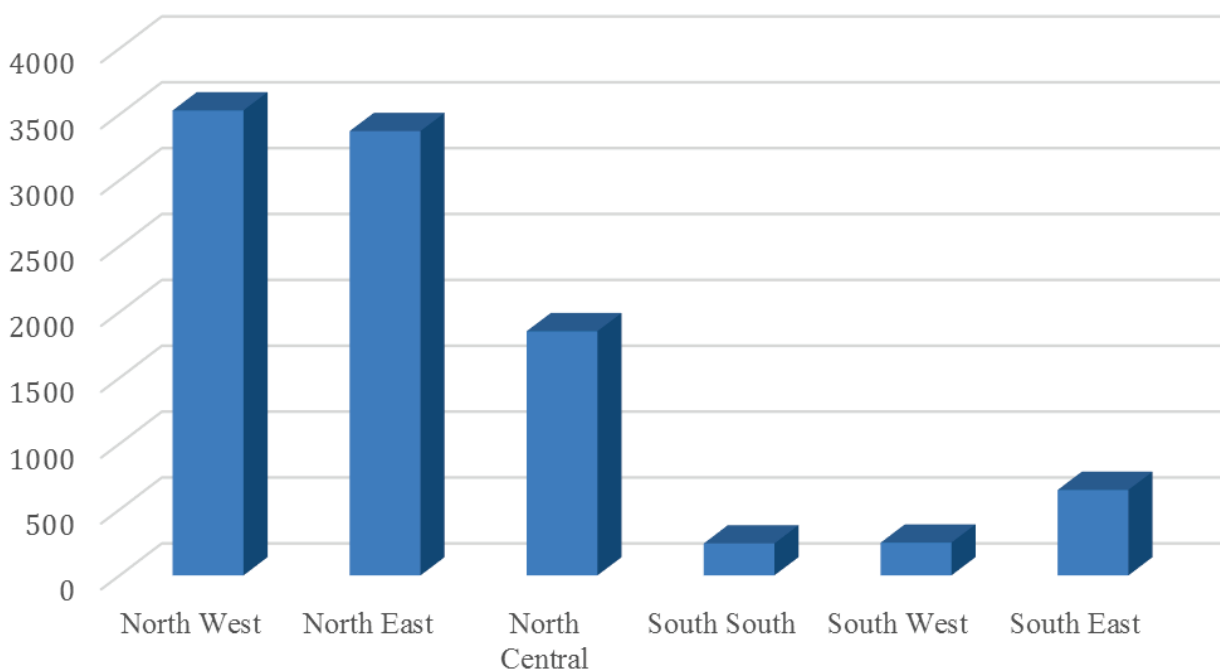
SECTION 2

METHODOLOGY & STUDY DESIGN

In addition to a desk review of existing literature, and to gain an updated understanding of the multiple nodes of insecurity and attendant state responses across Nigeria, the study pursued a primarily qualitative approach to data gathering. It focused on grasping the linkages, and common and divergent drivers of ongoing conflicts across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, by undertaking interviews, holding focus group discussions (FGDs), and conducting site visits in at least two states in each zone. Zamfara and Sokoto in the northwest, Plateau and Nasarawa in the north-central, Oyo and Lagos in the southwest, Anambra, Abia, and Imo states in the southeast, and Bayelsa and River's

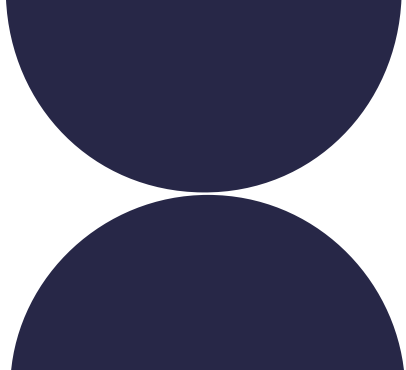
states in the south-south were selected as focal points due to their accessibility to the research teams based on previous fieldwork and the fact that they constitute the most affected conflict hotspots in their respective regions. However, given the recent escalation of insecurity in northwest Nigeria – leading to the highest national death tolls relative to other regions so far this year (see Table 1) – and given the relatively less well-developed knowledge base about conflict in the region, we conducted extended fieldwork and remote interviews in the northwest to cover six states: Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, and Kebbi.⁵

Graph 1: 2021 Conflict-Related Casualties by Geopolitical Zone



Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project ACLED, 2022


⁵ See: Centre for Democracy and Development. (2021). Conflict Dynamics in Nigeria's Northwest. Centre for Democracy and Development, Abuja, Nigeria. Accessed October 20, 2021, from: CDD_FCDO_NW CA Report_v2.docx



In each field site, the research team probed the lived experience of conflict actors and victims and spoke with state and non-state security officials, traditional leaders, local civic groups, intellectuals, and policymakers through semi-structured interviews and FGDs. To ensure the perspectives of specific demographics and groups were captured separate discussions were held with women and youth for example. Interviews with non-state armed actors were also conducted by telephone, giving additional context to understanding the perspectives of various conflict actors in the northwest. Given the study's wider focus on narratives, qualitative interviews allowed us to give voice to local perspectives, understandings, and framings of conflict, whereas survey data collection or other quantitative methodologies may have constrained the range of questions posed and responses received.

In each instance, the field researchers consciously attempted to achieve gender and ethnic balance, although this was often difficult in practice. In the northwest, for example, many government officials and civil society organisations are led by men, meaning we had to consciously seek out female participants by explicit request. During community-level interviews, we also intentionally sought to create separate spaces for women by conducting women-only FGDs and by having female research team members lead individual interviews with women respondents.

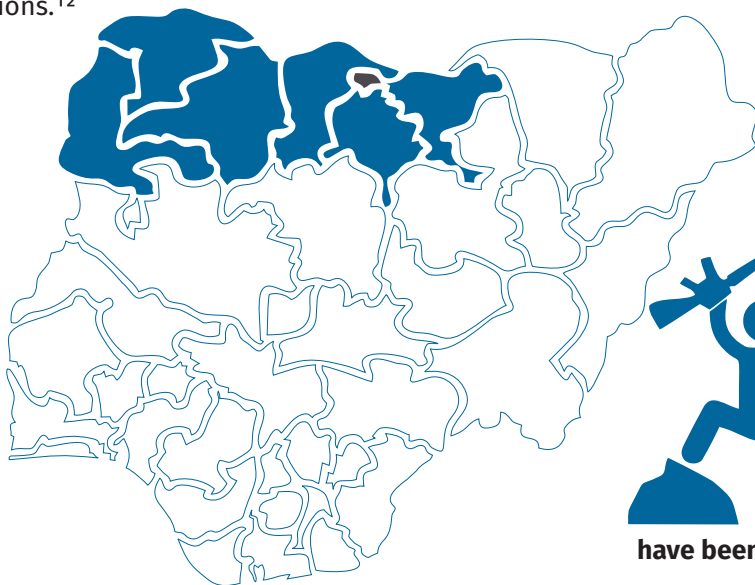
Additionally, we found that the Fulani's were often concerned about traveling to state capitals for interviews due to the risk of profiling by vigilantes or security forces on the roads. This limited the pool of Fulani participants from which the sample size was drawn, especially in the northcentral and the northwest zone. This was mitigated either by having local members of the research team travel to meet some Fulani respondents in situ when security conditions permitted or by conducting interviews over the phone. Where possible, we also made attempts to collaborate with local fixers and researchers from multiple ethnic and religious groups to ensure that the diversity of the communities under investigation was mirrored in the identity of members of the research team. This practice allowed us both to gain the trust of respondents, despite the short research time frame, and assured us that our respondents were not self-censoring based on the identities of the researchers. This combination of methods, repeat field and remote data collection in multiple sites across the country provided us with a new understanding of both the specificity of conflict in each region and the commonalities that either directly linked the conflicts or resonated across multiple regions.



SECTION 3

REGIONAL CONTEXTS

The 2021 Global Peace Index report ranks Nigeria as the 17th least peaceful country in the world.⁶ Nigeria also came third on the Global Terrorism Index's international ranking. Insurgency has persisted in the northeast as Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) continue to unleash terror on local communities.⁷ The northwest is caught up in a tidal wave of insecurity fuelled by so-called armed banditry, inter-communal conflicts, kidnapping, and violent crime with debilitating effects on security.⁸ After decades of oil militancy, the south-south is struggling with violent criminal networks and street gangs that engage in oil bunkering, armed robbery, and kidnapping.⁹ Amid growing secessionist agitations and the emergence of Amotekun – a regional vigilante force – the southwest is witnessing a major increase in the spread of communal violence and kidnappings.¹⁰ In the southeast, longstanding secessionist agitations have resurfaced, taking a deadly turn with the emergence of the Eastern Security Network (ESN) – the armed front of IPOB.¹¹ In the last two decades, the northcentral region has been the epicentre of communal clashes, farmer-herder violence, and rising levels of criminality and insecurity, in part spilling over into other regions.¹²



NORTH WEST

Sokoto Zamfara Jigawa
Kebbi Kano Kaduna



14,000 people

have been killed in the region in the last decade

Northwestern Nigeria is experiencing a complex, multi-sided, and multidimensional conflict. The conflict has received relatively limited attention from the international community and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) even as the humanitarian situation deteriorates. But over 14,000 people have been killed in the region in the last decade according to ACLED data.

At the centre of the conflict has been ever-growing, opportunistic, and autonomous gangs of armed men who have come to be known as bandits. While the term rightly emphasises the economic and criminal incentives that have contributed to driving this

phenomenon, recent indications also suggest the existence of political agendas and social and ethnic grievances among the leadership and members of some of the groups. This means that “banditry”, as such, is an analytically insufficient category to comprise the range of ideals and motivations that might drive recruitment into such groups. Despite these limitations, we deploy the term banditry in this context due to the predominance of criminal incentives and motivations in the activities of such groups, as well as due to its widespread usage by frontline communities as well as by the media and policymakers.

6 Institute for Economics & Peace (2021), Global Peace Index 2021: Measuring Peace in a Complex World, Sydney, June 2021. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-peace-index-2021> (accessed 27/ 10/ 2021).

7 Jason, W. and Lizzo, S. (2021), The “Boko Haram Disaggregation Problem” and Comparative Profiles of Factional Violence: Challenges, Impacts, and Solutions in the Study of Africa’s Deadliest Terror Group (s). *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2021): 1-30.

8 Chukwuma, O. A. and Ugwu, A. C (2021), Of marauders and brigands: Scoping the threat of rural banditry in Nigeria’s northwest. *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* 4, no. 8 (2019): 201-222.

9 Markus, S. (2017), Understanding organised violence and crime in political settlements: Oil wars, petro criminality, and amnesty in The Niger Delta. *Journal of International Development* 29, no. 5 (2017): 613-627.

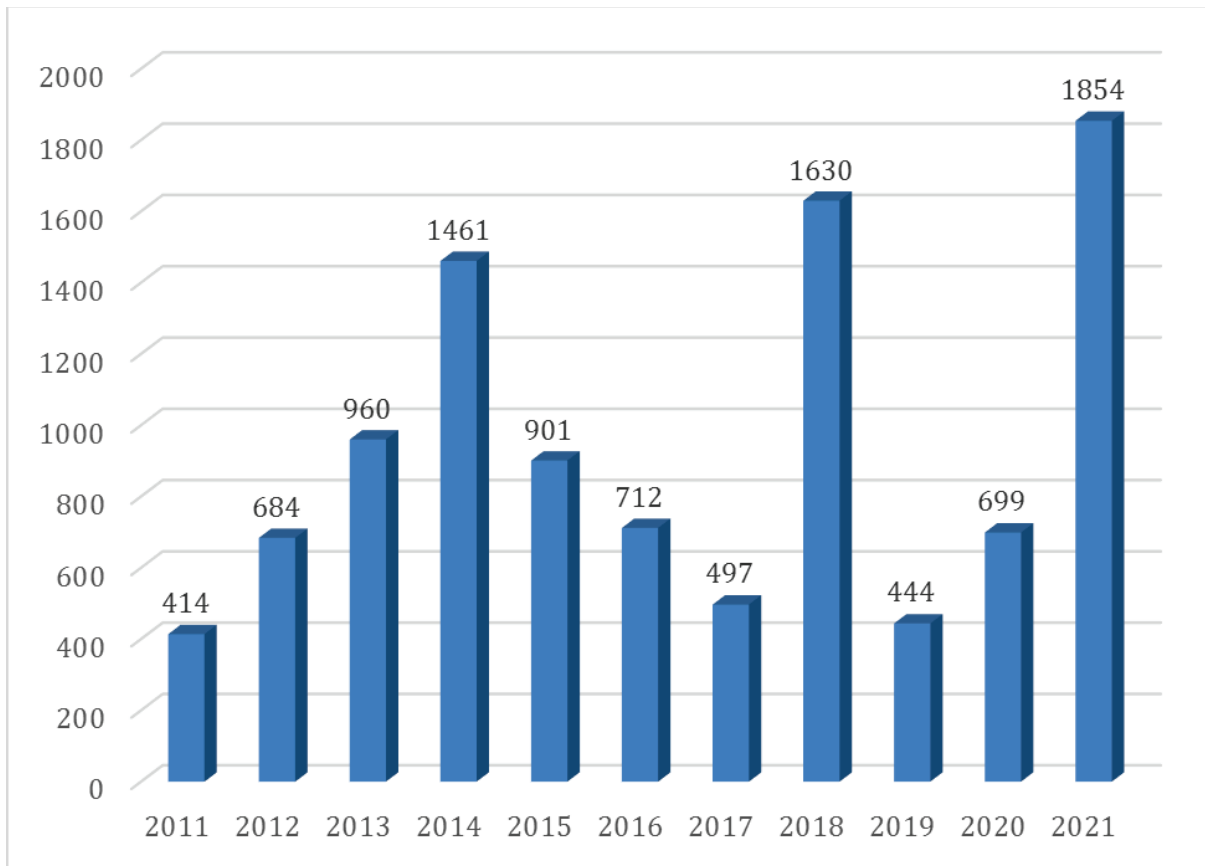
10 Olubade, O. M., and Ogunnoiki, A. O. (2020), Regional security initiative and the security challenges in Nigeria: the case of operation Amotekun” *Covenant University Journal of Politics and International Affairs* 8, no. 2 (2020).

11 Oxford Analytica. (2020), Separatists threaten Nigeria ruling party’s chances. *Expert Briefings*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OXAN-DB264189>

12 Terkemi, A. E. (2017), The resource-conflict debate revisited: Untangling the case of farmer–herdsman clashes in the North Central region of Nigeria. *African security review* 26, no. 3 (2017): 288-307.



Graph 2: Decade of Conflict-Related Casualties in Northwest Nigeria



Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project ACLED, 2022

Conflict Trajectory and root causes

The conflict in the northwest emerged gradually beginning with the dawn of multiparty politics in the northwest in 1999 before evolving in five key stages:

1999 onwards: Deterioration of intercommunal relations, gradual rise in criminal activity

2011: Bandits start recruitment push in Zamfara

2012: First instances of large-scale, tit-for-tat intercommunal violence

2015-16: Federal government response becomes increasingly militarised

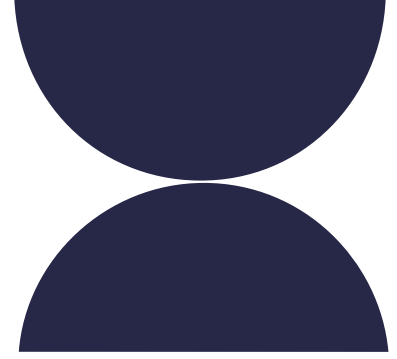
2018: Fracturing of bandit gangs accelerates
Several overlapping and intersecting root causes have driven this emerging insecure context.

Land use disputes

Competition over land resources has increased across West and Central Africa in recent years, exacerbated by climate change and general environmental degradation.¹³ Beginning around the late 2000s with Nigeria's return to electoral democracy, many politicians and emirs in the northwest began selling or distributing (as patronage) land on restricted grazing areas to farmers or developers.¹⁴ Additionally, traditional

¹³ Brottem, L. (2021), The Growing Complexity of Farmer-Herder Conflict in West and Central Africa – Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2021, <https://africacenter.org/publication/growing-complexity-farmer-herder-conflict-west-central-africa/>. (Accessed on 3/3/2022).

¹⁴ Nagarajan, C. (2020), Analysis of violence and insecurity in Zamfara. Unpublished manuscript. <https://www.academia.edu/43061328/Analysis-of-Violence-and-Insecurity-in-Zamfara> (Accessed on 3/3/2022).



symbiotic land-use arrangements between farmers and herders began to break down as farmers found they could charge herders hefty fees for use of their land and crop residue or even extort the herders with the support of local police and officials. Together, these developments helped create a sense of victimhood among many herders.

Failures of the justice system

Land-use disputes and deteriorating intercommunal relations have been compounded by a corrupt justice system that has repeatedly failed to deliver fair and impartial verdicts, leaving community members aggrieved. Many criminals have managed to escape justice by bribing themselves out of police custody. The failures of the justice system have incentivised communities to settle matters in an extra-judicial—and often violent and disproportionate—manner. Authorities failures to detain and prosecute criminals helped fuel the creation of Yan Sakai across the region throughout the 2000s and early 2010s.

Breakdown of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms

Historically, there existed social mechanisms in the northwest for resolving farmer-herder conflicts, generally involving a village head acting on behalf of farmers meeting with senior leaders of the pastoralists (known as ardo among Fulani). These mechanisms were dependent on high levels of social trust. But these mechanisms began to break down in the 2000s owing to the declining trust, as herders claimed that farmers were no longer respecting the decisions of their village heads while farmers claimed that ardo were powerless or disingenuous.

Ethnicisation of farmer-herder conflict and tit-for-tat violence

As mistrust of formal and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms increased, farmers and herders increasingly engaged in extrajudicial violence, which often assumed an ethnic dimension as many farmers are Hausa and many herders Fulani (though the divisions are not categorical). By the early 2010s, Yan Sakai began profiling all Fulani as

bandits, while the Fulani's were quick to retaliate against Hausa for their alleged Yan Sakai sympathies. This violence has often been tit-for-tat, as best exemplified by the killing of a prominent herder, Alhaji Isheyi, in 2012. Isheyi was murdered by Yan Sakai in Zamfara in August 2012 at the behest of a local emir. Isheyi's relatives organised Fulani from around the region and engaged in a series of retaliatory attacks against the villages from which the Yan Sakai in question had been raised, killing nearly 100 people.¹⁵ Isheyi's death and the subsequent reprisals marked the first major instance of mass intercommunal violence in the northwest and helped fuel the growth of Yan Sakai across the region.

Growth in criminal activity

The breakdown in security and intercommunal relations of the last two decades has allowed bandits to grow their ranks to unprecedented levels. Two major bandits, Buharin Daji and Kundu, began a major recruitment push in 2011, luring young herders with promises of wealth, wives, or the chance to exact revenge against *Yan Sakai*.¹⁶ The wider context of multi-dimensional poverty and increased population growth intensifying competition over limited available resources have also contributed to increasing the allure of joining criminal networks.¹⁷ In addition to voluntary recruitment the gangs also forcibly conscripted many youths through kidnapping as well as through demanding that communities surrender young men and women to serve as fighters or attendants in bandit encampments.

Linked to the growth of membership has been the influx of military-grade weapons from the Sahel - many of them assumed to be of Libyan origin¹⁸, though it is speculated that the weapons economy includes armaments stolen from overrun government facilities, as well as inflows from northeast Nigeria and the Central African Republic. This has given bandits access to significant amounts of heavy weaponry. As bandits have gained a kinetic edge, they have managed to overpower security forces and loot more weapons.

¹⁵ Interviews with Yan Sakai commander, Zamfara, 2021.

¹⁶Rufa'i, A. M. (2021), "I Am a Bandit": A decade of research in Zamfara's bandit's den. (Sokoto, Nigeria: Graphic Concept Academy, September 2021), Pp:16-18.

¹⁷ Bello, B. and Abdullahi, M. M., (2021). Farmers–herdsmen conflict, cattle rustling, and banditry: The dialectics of insecurity in Anka and Maradun Local Government Area of Zamfara State, Nigeria. SAGE Open, 11(4), p.21582440211040117.

¹⁸ Though frequently the subject of speculation, the exact extent, origin, and types of weapons flowing into northwest Nigeria have yet to be adequately examined and constitute a major gap in knowledge.

Geographic scope

Zamfara state is the historical and current epicentre of the banditry crisis and is where most bandit gangs are based. But the crisis also affects neighbouring Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, Kebbi, and Sokoto states—particularly in those districts that border Zamfara—and has even spilled across the border into Niger Republic. The conflict is fluid and mobile, with bandits sometimes crossing several states in a day to conduct an operation. While banditry is a primarily rural phenomenon, the bandits have grown in strength in recent years and begun attacking markets or schools in larger towns. Bandits twice conducted large-scale operations on the edge of Kaduna city in 2021 for example, taking advantage of the fact that most military and security forces are located within the city's central neighbourhoods.

Criminal violence or ethnic insurgency? The conflict is multidimensional, involving elements of both inter-ethnic strife as well as criminality. The so-called bandits hail primarily, though not exclusively, from Fulani pastoralist communities and many espouse grievances unique to these communities. These grievances include the encroachment of farms onto traditional grazing areas; the inadequate access to justice and frequent extortion that herders face when attempting to address land use disputes; the lack of education and basic health facilities in herding communities; and the profiling and ethnically targeted violence of security forces and local vigilantes.

However, the most common activities of bandits operating in the northwest are criminal—cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, extortion rackets—that often affect Fulani communities just as much as non-Fulani. The bandits do not collectively constitute an ethnonationalist insurgency, indeed, they arguably do not constitute an insurgency in any traditional sense given that they are fractured into dozens of gangs that frequently fight each other. At the same time, the conflict is not purely criminal, as

both the bandits and the militias formed to fight them, often mobilise support around ethnic grievances, with the conflict marked by repeated bouts of tit-for-tat intercommunal violence. While the bandits are mostly Fulani, the vigilantes are drawn almost exclusively from Hausa communities who complain that state security forces are unable to secure farming communities from bandits and rogue herders. Since many vigilantes and Hausa communities see every Fulani as a bandit, bandits often position themselves as defenders of Fulani.

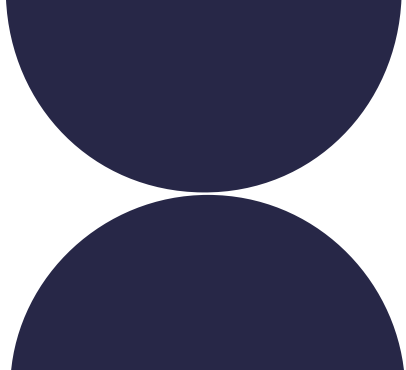
In sum, a dimension of ethnonationalism is ever-present in the conflict in the northwest, but its salience ebbs and flows over time. Beginning in September 2021, for example, tit-for-tat intercommunal violence perpetrated by bandits and Hausa vigilantes, respectively, increased across the northwest at the same time as several rival bandit gangs began cooperating, bringing the ethnic dimension to the fore in a year in which the conflict was otherwise marked by mostly criminal operations (large-scale kidnappings for ransom) and inter-bandit strife. Additionally, the bandits themselves exist along a spectrum ranging. Some bandit gangs self-identify as Fulani ethnic militias and adjust their operations to privilege certain communities while others make little effort to present themselves as anything but gangsters. Adding to the complication is the fact that the same groups and individuals might over time appear to alternate between clearly criminally motivated activities, and seemingly communally oriented initiatives.

Political economy and conflict actors: There are an estimated 30,000 militants spread across more than 100 gangs.¹⁹ The more powerful bandits operate as warlords, exercising de facto sovereignty over communities from which they may extract resources such as money, cattle, wives, and recruits.²⁰ Some bandits merely operate a protection racket while others deliver basic proto-statal services such as dispute arbitration and welfare provision. The

“Every bandit or former bandit that the research team interviewed claimed that the harassment and crimes of Yan Sakai were a major factor in pushing them to take up arms.”

19 Rufai, A. M. (2021), “I Am a Bandit,” 5; for the estimate of 30,000 bandits, see “Matawalle: There are over 30,000 bandits in the north,” The Cable, April 2, 2021, <https://www.thecable.ng/matawalle-there-are-over-30000-banditsin-the-north>. (Accessed on 23/12/2021)

20 Barnett, J. (2021), Bandits, Warlords, Or Terrorists? Analysing conflict actors in Northwest Nigeria, (Presentation, Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos, 2021).



bandits compete amongst each other for status and wealth—which may be measured in heads of cattle, the number of fighters, sophistication of weaponry, or simple public notoriety—and clashes between gangs are frequent. The fractiousness of the bandits, accelerated by the killing of one major kingpin in 2018, limits them from coalescing into a more powerful rebellion capable of existentially threatening the state. Despite growing instances of transient tactical cooperation between bandits and jihadists— including weapons and cattle trading— there is little indication that these groups have adopted the ideology of the religious militants,²¹ with several combatants interviewed repeatedly denouncing jihadist attempts to carve a new state out of Nigeria. However, the evolving nature of the interaction between bandits and jihadists requires further, more dedicated assessment.

While the few survivors among the earlier pioneers of largescale bandit encampment are now in their early 40s, we estimate that the average age of bandits is between 13 – 14 years old. This is based on the testimonies of participants and experts, as well as the observations of our research team who visited several encampments. It is also clear that recruitment is mostly drawn from rural areas, with many recruits having received neither formal nor Islamic education. Recruitment also generally appears to be through voluntary conscription based on the allure of the outlaw life itself, although there are cases of forcible conscription as well as various reported instances where communities have offered their sons and daughters as to bandit groups in exchange for protection. While most combatants among such groups are young men, bandit groups also include women who serve as informants, wives, and camp attendants, or, in rarer cases, fighters.²² Women have also smuggled food and weapons for the bandits and conduct reconnaissance and infiltrate communities disguised as traders or beggars ahead of attacks. The motivations of women collaborators vary. Some are coerced while others collaborate for money. Beyond banditry, some women are involved in criminality in the northwest on their initiative. For example, one of the biggest

drug dealers in Sokoto state is a woman by the name of Mama Jazina.²³

Historically, the primary nemeses of bandits have been local grassroots vigilantes known as *Yan Sakai* who have mobilised within Hausa communities and used extrajudicial violence in their response. *Yan Sakai* are leaderless and often engage in criminal activities themselves given the legal grey area they operate in. They are nominally banned in most northwestern states but continue to operate freely, often by superficially merging with the state-authorised Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN). Local elites have also used *Yan Sakai* as hitmen to settle personal disputes.²⁴ Every bandit or former bandit that the research team interviewed claimed that the harassment and crimes of *Yan Sakai* were a major factor in pushing them to take up arms. For example, one set of bandits in Birni Magaji LGA in Zamfara state claimed that they first took to cattle rustling in 2011 to get funds for guns to defend themselves from *Yan Sakai*. Another former bandit claimed that “there was no reason not to become a bandit”²⁵ because *Yan Sakai* were already treating him as a criminal based on his Fulani ethnicity. In the face of a persistent lack of redress, the loss of property and agricultural livelihoods due to crime or the fallout of farmer-herder conflicts remains a strong motivator for self-armament both among the bandits and the *Yan Sakai*.

Gender Dynamics

The conflict in the northwest has impacted men and women in different ways. Women have suffered heavily from sexual abuse, with some female kidnap victims kept as war brides when families cannot afford ransoms. There is a growing commodification of young women and girls as families offer up their daughters to bandits in return for protection. Women are not mere victims, however. Women serve as informants, spies, and camp attendants to bandits as well as, on rarer occasions, fighters. Women also serve in local vigilante outfits such as the VGN and hunters' associations, often in roles providing intelligence and reconnaissance.

21 For more see CDD northwest Conflict Analysis

22 Key informant interview with bandits, Birnin Magaji, Zamfara, August 22, 2021.

23 Focus group discussion with local NGOs, Sokoto, September 20, 2021.

24 There are also repeated allegations that both *Yan Sakai* and bandits have been used to secure mining operations in the region.

25 Key informant interview with bandits, Birnin Magaji, Zamfara, August 22, 2021.

Peacebuilding potential and future pathways

In a region troubled by conflict, several communities have proven notably resilient. The Emir of Gummi in Zamfara, Justice Hassan Lawal Gummi, has led a successful peacebuilding effort in his communities. In part by encouraging dialogue between farmer and pastoralist communities, and in part by taking a hard-line on *Yan Sakai* excesses, and by authorising a separate, multi-ethnic community watch in its place. He has also intervened with security forces on behalf of bandits who are party to the peace deal, getting some released from custody and in doing so demonstrating a degree of impartiality. The Emir's background in the judicial system, his inauguration of a multi-ethnic community watch, and his efforts to maintain an open channel of communication between pastoral and farming community members have further contributed to his reputation for impartiality and justice. The Emir of Argungu in Kebbi also has a reputation for mediating disputes between farmers and herders fairly. Such initiatives appear to have resulted in increased peace in both communities.

While these successes are notable, it remains a challenge to scale them up. Successful peacebuilding across the region is dependent on the goodwill, foresight, and commitment of diverse stakeholders ranging from traditional rulers to security chiefs, none of which can be guaranteed. To date, the primary non-kinetic approach local authorities have taken in trying to curtail conflict has been co-optation in the form of amnesties for bandits and the nominal subsuming of *Yan Sakai* into the state backed VGN.²⁶

Previous attempts towards disarmament and demobilisation of the bandit groups in the region have involved mirroring the amnesty programme deployed in the Niger Delta. Although criticised as offering only a short-term solution rather than addressing the root cause of the problem,²⁸ the implementation of amnesties in the southern parts of the country did lead to a ceasefire.²⁹ In July 2019, the governments of Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto officially agreed to an amnesty deal with the bandits. However, these failed despite some initial, but short-lived, success in Zamfara state.³⁰ The failure of the amnesty programme in the regions was attributed to first, unlike in the militias in the south, the bandit groups in the northwest region are not a cohesive group under a centralised leadership with similar objectives, this makes negotiations difficult and lacking, most especially in terms of reaching agreements with the various segments. Secondly, the amnesty deal was interpreted by the bandits as a sign of desperation on the part of the government and an illustration of lack of political will and military capacity to defeat banditry.³² As a result they sought to exploit the offer by making unrealistic demands and using the money received to simply buy more weapons.³³

Given current trends, it is likely that authorities will continue to privilege co-optation over other forms of conflict resolution, although with many politicians now calling for the bandits to be labelled terrorists, any future amnesties will be legally and politically fraught. While amnesties may bring short-term relief, they leave unaddressed the root causes of the conflict or exacerbate them by denying victims a right to any modicum of justice, further fuelling popular grievances.

26 While the two organisations have remained separate at the state level, the VGN at the local level has increasingly grown organisationally indistinct from local *Yan Sakai*, meaning that when the latter have been momentarily banned by state governments, this has, in practice, meant that its operatives have continued to mount checkpoints and conduct patrol wearing VGN uniforms.

27 Nextier SPD Policy Brief, (2020), Assessment of the Presidential Amnesty Program. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Presidential-Amnesty-Programme-Report-Policy-Brief.pdf> (Accessed on 17/2/2022).

28 Okunofua, B. A. (2016). The Niger Delta amnesty program: The challenges of transitioning from peace settlements to long-term peace. SAGE Open April-June 2016: 1–16 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244016654522/> (Accessed on the 17/2/2022).

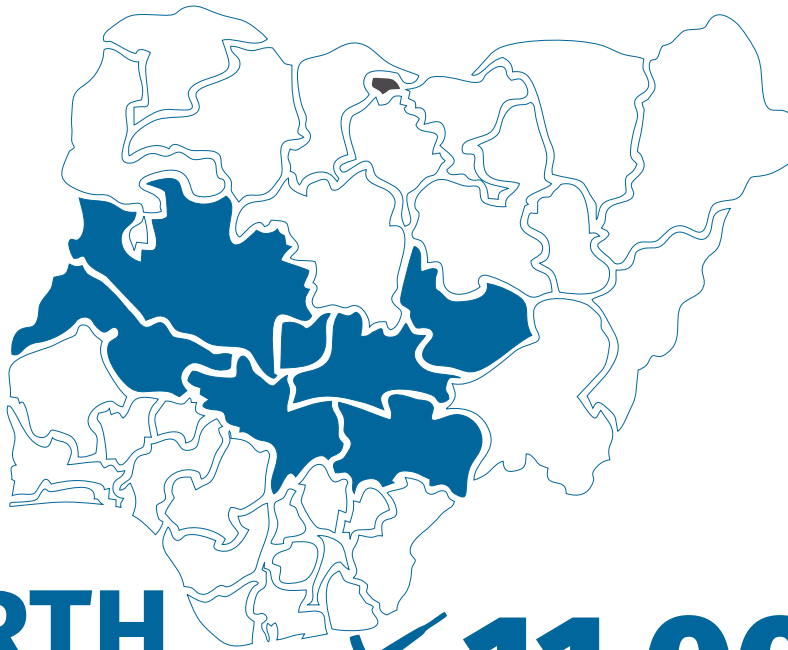
29 Campbell, J. (2020). Not all violent problems require violent solutions: Banditry in Nigeria's Northwest. Council on Foreign Relations. 23 July, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/not-all-violent-problems-require-violent-solutions-banditry-nigeria-north-west> (Accessed 22/02/2022).

30 West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (2020), Addressing armed banditry in the Northwest region of Nigeria. West Africa Early Warning and Early Response Network, Policy Brief. <https://wanep.org/wanep/policy-brief-addressing-armed-banditry-in-the-north-west-region-of-nigeria-exploring-the-potentials-of-a-multi-dimensional-conflict-management-approach/>

31 International Crisis Group (2020), Violence in Nigeria's Northwest: Rolling back the mayhem. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/288-violence-nigeria-north-west-rolling-back-mayhem/> (Accessed on 17/2/2022).

32 Omotoyi, S. (2021), Buying peace or building peace? Amnesty deals and the rising armed banditry in northwest Nigeria. Nile Journal of Political Science. Vol. 2(1). <https://njps.nileuniversity.edu.ng/wpcontent/uploads/sites/68/2021/12/Buying-peace-Or-Building-Peace-27-51.pdf> (Accessed 17/2/2022).

33 *ibid*



NORTH CENTRAL

Niger Kwara Kogi Nasarawa
Plateau Benue FCT



11,000 people

have been killed in incidents of violence and crime across the region since 2006, according to the Nigeria Watch Database.

The north-central is by far the country's most ethnically and religiously diverse geo-political zone. There are as many as 53 ethnolinguistic groups in Plateau state, 18 in Nasarawa, and about 10 in Benue.³⁴ It is estimated that about 200 languages are spoken across the region³⁵. This diversity has seen the region become a hotbed for political contestations and conflicts across group boundaries. More than 11,000 people have been killed in incidents of violence and crime across the region since 2006, according to the Nigeria Watch Database.³⁶

Over the last two decades, longstanding political tussles between predominantly Christian indigenous groups and Muslim Hausa-Fulani have spiralled into

episodic large-scale violence, with Plateau state at the centre. Within this period, land disputes between boundary communities have led to an upsurge in communal clashes and armed banditry in Benue state as well. In Plateau and Benue as well as parts of Nasarawa, struggles over land use between local farming communities and migratory Fulani pastoralists have deteriorated and sparked clashes that have left many villages deserted. Once rancour-free, Niger, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), and to some extent Kogi, have, in the last five years, witnessed a spill over of armed banditry and kidnapping from the northwestern states of Zamfara and Katsina while Kaduna is caught between the banditry crisis in its north and western zones and inter-communal conflicts in its south.³⁸

34 Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2016), Nigeria: Situation of the Eggon ethnic group, including treatment by society, armed groups and the state authorities (2011-June 2016), 8 June 2016, NGA105540.E. <https://refworld.org/docid/5843f9124.html> (Accessed on 2/3/2022).

35 Ojewale, O. (2021), What's Driving Violence In Nigeria's North Central Region – Nigeria, Reliefweb, 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeriawhat-s-driving-violence-nigeria-s-north-central-region>. (Accessed on 2/3/2022).

36 Nigeria Watch (2020). Violence and crime related deaths in northcentral Nigeria (<http://www.nigeriawatch.org/index.php?urlaction=evtStat>) (accessed 29/ 10/ 2021).

37 Vanguard (2021), Seven years of banditry in Niger State: 380 killed, 71 abducted, N79m paid as ransom. February 13, 2021 (<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/02/seven-years-of-banditry-in-niger-state-380-killed-71-abducted-n79m-paid-as-ransom/>) accessed 28/ 10/ 2021).

38 Interview with Emir of Anka, August 23, 2021.

Root Causes: Tensions over Land, Ethnicity, and Religion

As in the northwest, tension over land use is a major root driver of violence in the north-central region. Herders have been forced south by violence in the northeast and northwest as well as environmental degradation exacerbated by climate change. As one emir in the northwest noted, the rise in anti-herder violence from Yan Sakai in Zamfara in the early 2010s pushed many herders from the state further south and east into states like Benue, Kogi, Taraba, and Nasarawa. While not a direct confirmation of this testimony, our interviews among pastoral communities in southwest Nigeria also suggested that conflict-induced herder migration from Zamfara and other northwest states has steadily increased in the past ten years. An important gap requiring further research will be to assess -- including through life-history interviews -- the extent to which conflict in other regions of Nigeria has directly been driven by the outflow of former residents of northwest states.

Owing to their experience in the northwest, some of these herders were armed and accustomed to hostile relations with farmers, which made them less likely to rely on non-violent forms of conflict resolution when disputes arose with local farming communities. Additionally, anti-grazing laws implemented in Benue and Taraba states in 2017 have pushed herders into neighbouring states where they have clashed with host communities. Herders have expressed that these laws make them feel like second-class citizens and have thus had the effect of creating “negative peace.”³⁹ At the same time, new farm and housing developments in the region have encroached onto grazing reserves and migrant routes. The combined effect of all these developments has been to increase the number of herders attempting to use diminishing grazing land, with the result being increasing clashes over access to land and compensation for crops damaged by livestock and decreasing levels of mutual trust between farmers and herders.

However, land use is not the only dimension to violence. Religion is also a salient factor in the north-central region, often referred to as the Middle Belt. In the colonial era, the Middle Belt states were administered as part of northern Nigeria under a system of indirect rule in which Hausa and Fulani emirs served as administrators over Christian populations. Even before the colonial era, some of these populations, which at the time practiced traditional religions, were victims of slave raiding from the Hausa-Fulani north.⁴⁰ As a result, many Christian communities today feel that they are the indigenes while Muslim Hausa and Fulani are interlopers and oppressors, claims that Hausa-Fulani rejects as they see themselves as indigenous as well. This tension has been exacerbated by the politicisation of religion and politics of “zoning” and new state creation in post-colonial Nigeria as well as additional migration of Hausa and Fulani into the Middle Belt since independence⁴¹. The problem grew more acute with the advent of democratic rule in 1999 and the subsequent push for Shari'a law in the northern states, which stoked fears of Islamisation from non-Muslim communities and a continuation of the “Fulani jihad” of the early 19th century. Consequently, north-central states have experienced recurring bouts of inter-religious strife in the independence era, particularly from the late 1980s onwards. With cities such as Jos and Kaduna increasingly segregated on religious lines as a consequence.

Understanding the dynamics and trends of conflict and peace

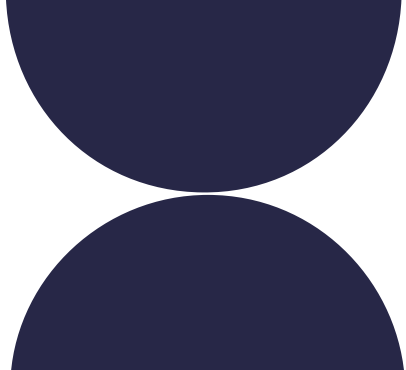
The security situation in the north-central region has been in flux over the last decade. Incidents of communal violence and farmer-herder clashes rose from 2010, increasing more dramatically between 2014 and 2016 but appear to have peaked in 2017 and 2018.⁴² However, in the last two years, the situation has become more complex as armed banditry and kidnapping have become more widespread. With state security forces having demonstrated insufficient capacity to protect the populace,

39 Centre For Democracy and Development. (2021), Farmer-Herder Conflict in Northern Nigeria: Trends, Dynamics, and Gender Perspectives. Centre for Democracy and Development, April 2021.

40 For more, see Ochonu, M. E. (2014), Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.

41 Ibrahim, J. (1989). The Politics of Religion in Nigeria: The Parameters of the 1987 Crisis in Kaduna State. Review of African Political Economy no. 45/46 (1989): 65–82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4006011>; International Crisis Group, (2012). Curbing Violence in Nigeria. Africa Report N° 196, December 17, (2012); International Crisis Group (2012) The Jos Crisis. https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2014/09/29/The_Jos_Crisis.pdf.

42 Based on analysis of violence related deaths in Nigeria between 2006 and 2021 (Nigeria Watch dataset: <http://www.nigeriawatch.org/index.php?urlaction=evtStat> accessed 29/ 10/ 2021)



communities are increasingly resorting to self-help approaches, such as stockpiling arms, to defend themselves against criminal networks and rival, often communally based, militias.⁴³

The upsurge in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has led to an increase in incidents of violent crimes, including armed robbery, cattle rustling, and gang violence. Criminal networks contribute to fuelling communal violence as they benefit from instability to carry out their illicit activities.⁴⁴

Given the complex and fraught history of religion in this region, narratives of “Islamisation” and “Fulanisation” are particularly salient in the north-central states. This has the effect of transforming violence that may be non-religious in its original nature, for example, a land-use dispute, into a religious issue as communities frame their victimisation as religious persecution and identify their antagonists as religious zealots. For example, Irigwe youth killed 22 Muslims from southwestern Nigeria in August 2021, allegedly in response to attacks from Fulani herders – unrelated to the victims – on local farmers.⁴⁵

Understanding the key actors

The main social categories and actors include indigenes and non-indigenes; traditional rulers, community leaders, and clerics; politicians; vigilantes; criminal networks; and state security forces.

Indigenes and non-indigenes: Examples of so-called indigenous groups directly involved in the conflict are the Berom, Afizere, and Anaguta in Plateau; the Tiv, Idoma, and Igede in Benue; and the Atyap, Bajju, and Adara in southern Kaduna. These groups are predominantly Christian and the main preoccupation in their villages is subsistence agriculture. They claim to be the original owners of the lands they work on. The non-indigenes category consists of all

other ethnic groups that have migrated from other parts of the country, including the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Ijaw, Ishekiri, and Ibibio. However, the main group that has been directly involved in conflict with the indigenes is the Hausa-Fulani who make up the bulk of the pastoralists in the region. The main source of rancour between indigenes and non-indigenes are tussles and competition over political power and land use. In urban areas like Jos, contestations over indigene rights have been at the heart of the conflict between the predominantly Christian Berom, Afizere, and Anaguta and the mainly Muslim Hausa-Fulani on the other.

Traditional rulers and community leaders: These influential individuals play various roles in conflict and peace. There are instances where traditional rulers and community leaders have contributed to fuelling conflict. There are also instances where these actors have used their influence to advance peaceful coexistence. Nothing points to this more than the allegations that the traditional and community leaders have ceased being leaders of the community, but that of their ethnic groups as they identify and choose to side with their tribesmen.⁴⁶

Politicians: Local politicians can play a prominent role in driving both conflict and peace. Research indicates that in socially polarised settings, local politicians champion 'ethnic agendas' to boost their popularity among certain constituents.⁴⁷ In Benue and Plateau politicians have peddled divisive rhetoric and demonised members of particular groups to boost electoral support. Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue, for example, has accused President Buhari of having a “Fulanisation” agenda,⁴⁸ hinting that Fulani herders in his state are agents of a government-backed campaign of ethnic and religious cleansing, which can be seen as a subtle nod of support to militias that fight herdsmen. Politicians in Benue and Taraba have also used anti-Fulani rhetoric in their championing of anti-open

43 Sadiq, L. et al., (2021), "Nigeria: Insecurity - Villagers Stockpile Arms for Self-Defence", AllAfrica.Com, 2021 <https://allafrica.com/stories/202108240178.html> accessed 29/10/2021).

44 Interviews with various stakeholders conducted between December 2020 and June 2021.

45 Salaamedia (2021), Community elders unite to end deadly Christian-Muslim clashes in Nigeria. Live stream on September 7, 2021. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/community-elders-unite-to-end-deadly-christian-muslimclashes-in-nigeria-49692>

46 Interviews with various stakeholders conducted between December 2020 and June 2021

47 Madueke, K. L. (2019), The emergence and development of ethnic strongholds and frontiers of collective violence in Jos, Nigeria. *African Studies Review* 62, no. 4 (2019): 6-30.

48 Agbakwuru, J. (2021), How Ortom causes death of innocent citizens – Presidency. Vanguard, August 25, 2021, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/08/how-ortom-causes-death-of-innocent-citizens-presidency/>. (Accessed on 23/12/2021)

grazing laws. Similarly, though not holding elective office, self-avowed Fulani leaders, notably President of Miyetti Allah, Kautal Hore, Bello Abdullahi Bodejo, have also stoked ethnic division, making inflammatory statements including reportedly claiming that the Fulani will “rule” Nigeria forever.⁴⁹ At the same time some politicians have played constructive roles in peacebuilding, such as those who supported the 2016 Kafanchan Peace Declaration in Kaduna.⁵⁰

Vigilantes: Vigilantism has long been part of the social order in Nigeria, but the recent upsurge in incidents of violence and crime has increased their popularity and significance. In north-central Nigeria, vigilantes play a key role in conflict and peace dynamics. For example, in Jos, the Neighbourhood Watch (NW) and VGN have prevented and quelled the unrest. However, there have also been credible allegations linking vigilante groups across Nigeria with indiscriminate assaults and human rights violations.⁵¹

Criminal networks: The growing insecurity is characterised by a sharp increase in the number and variety of criminal networks. Drug trafficking networks and arms trafficking syndicates, as well as street gangs, armed robbery, and kidnapping rings contribute to insecurity. These actors take advantage of the instability to engage in illicit trade and activities. Furthermore, criminal activities like cattle rustling and turf wars between drug trafficking networks have spiralled into communal violence in Plateau and Benue. While the origins of this criminal wave have yet to be definitively ascertained, the economic stagnation of the past half-decade and the consequent historical rates of youth unemployment have contributed to its growth.

State security forces: To quell violence the Nigerian government has, over the last two decades, deployed the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), the Mobile Police (MOPOL), the paramilitary group Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCD), and the military – the army, air force, and navy – to the region. These security organs have played a key role in restoring order but have also contributed towards instability by engaging in extrajudicial killings⁵² and conniving with criminal networks.⁵³

Peacebuilding potential and future pathways

Looking forward, conflict dynamics in north-central Nigeria are concerning for two main reasons. First, there are significantly more firearms in circulation in the hands of civilians than there were a decade ago.⁵⁴ Second, there is a sharp increase in the frequency and scale of criminal activities.⁵⁵ Based on this, it is expected that incidents of violence in the future might prove more lethal and result in more casualties within a relatively shorter period than before. As we have seen in the northwest, purely criminal violence can spiral into intercommunal conflict when it occurs along social fault-lines. Consequently, the risk that banditry or other criminal activity will further aggravate religious tensions and catalyse another “crisis” is high. This risk is heightened as general elections approach in 2023, and post-election flare-ups in the north-central states are a likely outcome particularly if election results are viewed as skewed in favour of a candidate belonging to a rival ethnoreligious group. An effective security strategy and peacebuilding initiative should therefore include curbing the proliferation of SALW as well as a comprehensive strategy for tackling crime.

49 Nwachukwu, J., (2020). Fulani will rule forever, we are flagging off security outfit across Nigeria – Miyetti Allah. Daily Post, June 6, 2020, <https://dailypost.ng/2020/06/06/fulani-will-rule-forever-we-are-flagging-off-securityoutfit-across-nigeria-miyetti-allah/> (Accessed on 23/11/2021).

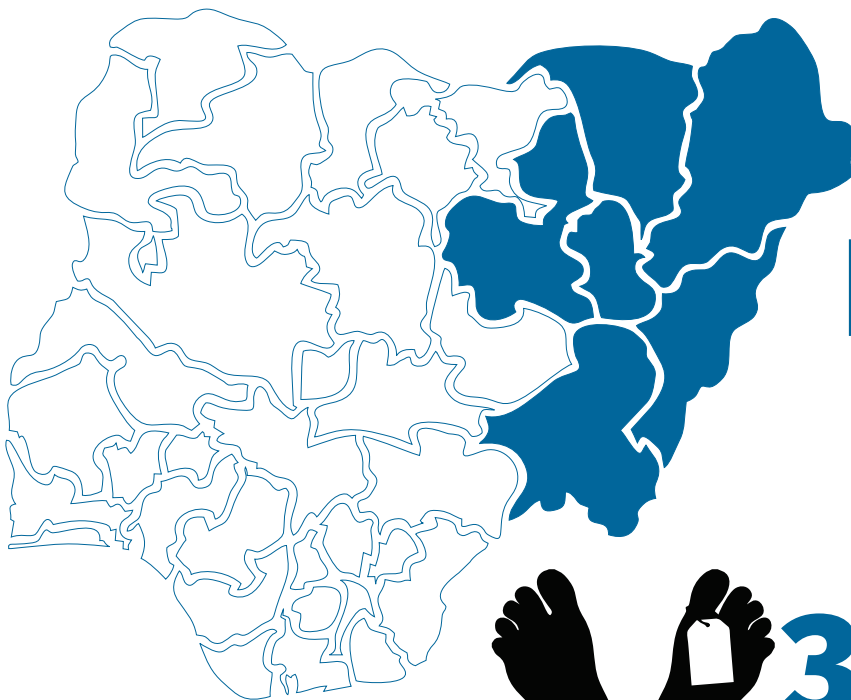
50 Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (2016), The Kafanchan Peace Declaration, March 23, 2016, <https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Kafanchan-Peace-Declaration-23.03.2016.pdf>. (Accessed on 23/11/2021).

51 Felbab-Brown, V. (2021), The greatest trick the devil played was convincing Nigeria he could protect them: Vigilante groups and militias in southern Nigeria. New York: United Nations University http://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:8285/UNU_SouthernNigeriaVigilantes.pdf (accessed 15/2/2022).⁵² Amnesty International, (2015), Stars on their shoulders. Blood on their hands: War crimes committed by the Nigerian military, 2 June 2015 <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/stars-on-their-shoulders-blood-on-their-hands-war-crimes-committed-by-the-nigerian-military/> Accessed 17/2/2022

53 The Guardian, (2017). Of ungoverned space, cattle rustling and national security. 12 April 2017, <https://guardian.ng/opinion/of-ungoverned-space-cattle-rustling-and-national53security/>.

54 Daily Trust (2021), How Arms Proliferation Fuels Insecurity In Nigeria - Daily Trust 2021, <https://dailytrust.com/how-arms-proliferation-fuels-insecurity-in-nigeria> (accessed 27/10/2021).

55 Varrella, S. (2021), Crime In Nigeria - Statistics & Facts, Statista, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/topics/7491/crime-in-nigerian> (accessed 27/10/2021).



NORTH EAST

Yobe Borno Bauchi
Gombe Adamawa Taraba



35,000 deaths

Boko Haram and its splinter group, ISWAP, has sustained a conflict against the Nigerian state that has now lasted over a decade, causing over 35,000 deaths (350,000 when second-order effects are counted) and left two million internally displaced people. Despite the death of a long-time Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau in May 2021, jihadist insurgents in the northeast continue to pose a significant security challenge. ISWAP, now the dominant faction in the northeast after killing Shekau and occupying his stronghold of Sambisa Forest in southern Borno, has a more population-centric⁵⁶ strategy and less predatory relationship with local Muslim communities than Boko Haram historically did.

Shekau's death resulted in the surrender of more than 8,000 Boko Haram fighters by the end of 2021,⁵⁷ which has rekindled contentious debate over efforts to reintegrate former Boko Haram fighters into society. The Nigerian security forces and other key actors at the local, state, and federal levels have not yet demonstrated the capacity or willpower to defeat the insurgents, making it likely that the conflict will persist with intensity for some time.

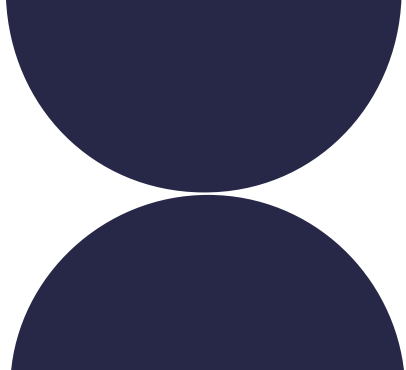
Root Drivers of Conflict

Boko Haram's formation was gradual and the product of interlinking socio-political, socioeconomic, and sociocultural factors in northeastern Nigeria in the first years of the Fourth Republic. Poverty, urbanisation, cut-throat political competition, and turbulent (and sometimes violent) debates about the role of religion in Nigerian society paved the way for a mass Salafi preaching movement led by Muhammad Yusuf in the early 2000s. After falling out with local authorities in Borno that had previously sought to co-opt him, Yusuf grew increasingly strident in his calls for overthrowing the Nigerian state, resulting in a heavy-handed military crackdown on the sect that ended in Yusuf's death in custody in 2009. From there, his movement transformed into a violent insurgency that continues to this day.

Many of the drivers that birthed the Boko Haram insurgency remain relevant today in explaining the resilience of jihadism in the northeast. The conflict has aggravated what were already high levels of poverty in the region as community members are displaced and farms and markets become

⁵⁶ This is a counterinsurgency strategy that uses community approach by working with indigenous force and sometimes allowing them to lead.

⁵⁷ The New York times (2021), Thousands of Boko Haram surrenders, they move next door. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/23/world/africa/boko-haram-surrender.html> (Accessed on 2/2/2022).



inaccessible due to insecurity. Evidence suggests that a significant number of those who join the insurgents or even return to the insurgents after surrendering to the government, do so out of desperation and the need for food. However, there are additional factors that explain why the conflict continues today.

Absence of the state: In the northeast, tangible manifestations of the Nigerian state are mostly absent in all but the larger towns and urban centres. This means that in many rural communities, ISWAP is a more attractive source of governance as it provides basic services, a modicum of security, and is seen to adjudicate local disputes and regulate commerce in a less corrupt manner than the Nigerian government.⁵⁸

Lack of education: Of all the state institutions that are absent in the northeast, none may be more important than schools, hundreds of which have shuttered because of the conflict. In both northeastern Nigeria, and across Africa more broadly, jihadists find it easier to radicalise youths and recruit members from poorly educated public.⁵⁹ The lack of formal schooling in rural northeastern communities is a gap that ISWAP has filled with Islamic education in areas under its control. As one key informant in the northeast noted, while ISWAP is friendlier to ordinary Muslim civilians than Boko Haram, “it prefers village people, because they are uneducated. ISWAP views any educated or city people with suspicion”.⁶⁰

Overstretched security forces: The military has not conducted any successful offensive operations on a notable scale since 2016. Between 2015 and 2016 the military, with support from regional countries and South African mercenaries, liberated dozens of

towns and villages from Boko Haram but was unable to establish military garrisons in each liberated community due to manpower and resource constraints. Police and other security outfits such as the Civil Defence Corps and Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), militias that were tasked with supporting the military in these communities, also often lacked the manpower, resources, or willpower to hold their ground against heavily armed insurgents.⁶¹ Consequently, many liberated communities have since fallen back into enemy hands or remain vulnerable to insurgents attacks and intimidation. The Nigerian military's decision, amid an eroding stalemate in 2019, to regroup into a smaller number of 'super camps' to fight the insurgents has reduced human and equipment losses. But it also plays into ISWAP's hands by ceding to the insurgent's large swathes of the countryside in which they may develop their governance infrastructure and build popular support.

War economy: A substantial war economy has developed in the northeast that threatens progress against the insurgents. Senior military officers and other officials benefit financially from the conflict by siphoning funds intended for salaries or equipment procurement, skimming from contracts intended for construction or development programmes, or engaging in black market activities.⁶² Multiple key informants in Borno suggested that military officers were profiting from the state's ban on fishing activities by extorting fishermen in return for permitting their activities or otherwise integrating into the supply chain themselves. The erection of 'super camps' facilitates such military participation in black markets, multiple key informants noted, as it forces illicit commerce to be conducted under the eyes of troops who can easily extort the traders.

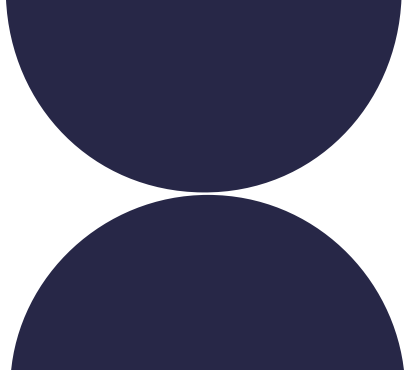
58 International Crisis Group (2019), Facing the challenges of the Islamic State in West Africa Province. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/273-facing-challenge-islamic-state-west-africa-province> (Accessed on 23/11/2021).

59 United Nations Development Program (2017), Journey to extremism in Africa. <https://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf> (Accessed on 23/11/2021).

60 Hassan, I. (2021). What is justice? Exploring the need for accountability in the Boko Haram Insurgency. Harvard Human Rights. Vol. 34(1): <https://harvardhrj.com/online/what-is-justice-exploring-the-need-for-accountability-in-the-boko-haram-insurgency/> (Accessed on 6/2022)

61 Barnett, J. (2021). Remaining Without Expanding? Examining Jihadist Insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria. The Hoover Institute: The Caravan Issue 2132, September 21, 2021, <https://www.hoover.org/research/remaining-without-expanding-examining-jihadist-insurgency-northeastern-nigeria>.

62 Freeman, C. (2019). Spoils of war: The conflicts with the Boko Haram insurgency has raged for a decade – is the war economy lucrative for peace to prevail? <https://www.tortoisemedia.com/2019/07/28/boko-haram/> (Accessed on 23/2/2021).



Given the size and scope of the war economy and the range of actors involved, there is reason to believe that many of the key actors in the northeast - military officers, state government officials, and CJTF members - have little incentive to decisively defeat the insurgents. This is not to say necessarily that each of these actors is intentionally prolonging the conflict, but rather that the status quo is tolerable if not profitable, which leads key actors to succumb to inertia rather than taking difficult measures needed to proactively resolve it.

Future Challenges

The Nigerian state and aligned stakeholders face manifold challenges in addressing insecurity in the northeast moving forward. On the military front, the Nigerian army faces a more formidable adversary in ISWAP than it has with Boko Haram. ISWAP's fighters are more disciplined than those of Boko Haram and the group has shown notable ingenuity in building, modifying, and maintaining its arsenal of sophisticated weapons and platforms such as armoured vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices. ISWAP's ranks have also grown since May with the incorporation of former Boko Haram fighters following Shekau's death.

Attacks in 2021 in Marte, Dikwa, Damasak, Monguno, and Askira-Uba LGAs underscore the groups sophisticated kinetic abilities and highlight vulnerabilities in military defences and coordination that persist after more than a decade of conflict. With insecurity rising in other parts of the country, the Nigerian military will be hard-pressed to find the resources necessary to adopt a more forward-leaning, offensive posture of the sort it employed in 2015-16 when it last achieved notable gains against

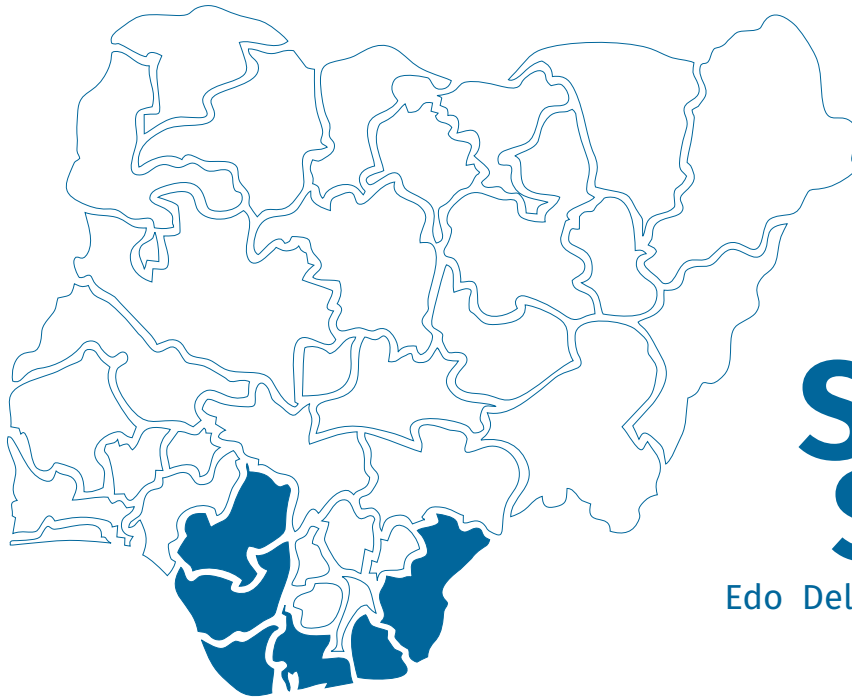
the insurgents. The current military posture will, at best, maintain a stalemate that limits attacks into the major urban centres like Maiduguri while leaving most of the rest of Borno and parts of neighbouring Adamawa and Yobe states effectively in insurgent hands.

On the non-kinetic front, federal and state authorities face the challenge of reintegrating former insurgents into local communities that have been victimised by the insurgents for over a decade. This requires careful messaging and tremendous social capital to convince victims to live side-by-side with those who have harmed them. Added to this challenge are prominent voices in the northeast and nationally that are aligned against the reintegration of former fighters and who promote misleading and polarising narratives that suggest that former insurgents are being rewarded for their actions through the government's disarmament, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DRR) programme.

Whilst the experience to date of Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) (the government's DRR programme) and CDD's *Sulhu Alheri Ne*⁶³ programme on reconciliation offer lessons for how to assuage host community concerns, and albeit slowly, changing perceptions towards the reintegration of former Boko Haram fighters. The recent decision of Borno governor, Babagana Zulum, to assume responsibility for handling the surrender of and reintegration of the 8,000-plus Boko Haram fighters outside the OSC framework is a risk owing to the lack of an overarching DRR framework, limited capacity within the state government, and inadequate processing facilities such as rehabilitation centres.⁶⁴

63 Centre for Democracy and Development (2020). How CDD's 'Sulhu alheri ne' programme enlightens Borno residents on moral etiquettes, peace. <https://cddwestafrica.org/how-cdds-sulhu-alheri-ne-programme-enlightensbor-no-residents-on-moral-etiquettes-peace/> (Accessed on 3/3/2022).

64 Brechenmacher, S. (2018). Achieving peace in northeast Nigeria: The re-integration challenge. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/09/05/achieving-peace-in-northeast-nigeria-reintegration-challenge-pub-77177> Accessed 22/02/2022



SOUTH SOUTH

Edo Delta Bayelsa Cross River
Akwa Ibom Rivers

Over the last three decades, the oil-rich Niger Delta region has remained a theatre for violent conflicts and youth restiveness. Observers and analysts have traced the intractable circle of violence in the region to the struggle for self-determination, agitations for crude oil resource control, pervasive poverty, marginalisation, and environmental degradation in the region.⁶⁵ These localised communal conflicts nose-dived into a full-blown insurgency following the emergence of ethnic militia groups in the early 2000s who sabotaged oil installations in the name of self-determination. To forestall a total collapse of the oil industry, and by extension the Nigerian economy, the federal government initiated the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) in 2009, which is a DRR programme for ex-militants in the Niger Delta that has been ongoing for over thirteen years.

While the initiation of PAP engendered relative stability, evidence suggests emergent trends of violent conflicts and insecurities have continued to manifest in the region.⁶⁶ PAP has also contributed to the integration of militants into political patronage

networks, reinforcing the idea that bearing arms is a pathway to getting “noticed” and co-opted by political leaders.⁶⁷ These dynamics suggest important lessons which must be taken into account in future amnesty initiatives by the federal government, including the need to diminish the role of cash-for-weapons exchanges relative to other initiatives - such as vocational or skills programmes.

Conflict in the South-south

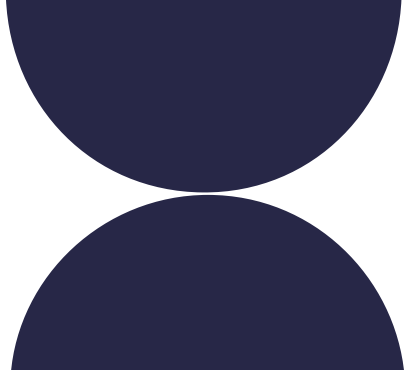
When it comes to current conflict nodes, seven key areas of latent, potential, or active conflict in the south-south are worth exploring in more detail:

Sea Piracy/ Robbery: Sea robbery/piracy has increasingly become a source of violent conflict and insecurity in the Niger Delta region. Coastal communities are disproportionately impacted by sea piracy/robbery as armed militias attack and rob commercial passenger and cargo boats within the Niger Delta as well as international vessels along the Gulf of Guinea. According to the International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau's 2020 global report on sea piracy and maritime crime, the Gulf of Guinea witnessed a 40%

65 Ojukri, C. O., and Ibaba S. Ibaba. (2008). Oil induced environmental degradation and internal population displacement in the Nigeria's Niger Delta. *Journal of sustainable Development in Africa* 10, no. 1 (2008): 173-193.

66 Ebiede, T. M., Bassey C. O., and Asuni J. B. (2021). *Insecurity in The Niger Delta: A Report on Emerging Threats in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States* (Adonis & Abbey Publishers, 2021).

67 Iwilade, A. (2017). Slipping through the net: everyday agency of youth and the politics of amnesty in Nigeria's Niger Delta (2009-2015). *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 35, no. 3 (2017): 266-283.



increase in sea piracy and kidnapping between January and September of that year, with 95% of global seafarer kidnap cases taking place in the region.⁶⁸ The flashpoints for sea piracy and robbery are Bonny, Andoni, Degema, and Akuku-Toru LGAs of Rivers state; Ekeremor, Brass, and Southern Ijaw LGAs of Bayelsa state; and Warri South LGA of Delta state.

Illegal Oil Bunkering and Artisanal Refining: Illegal oil bunkering and artisanal refining emerged in the Niger Delta during the peak of the militancy in the early 2000s as a form of youth resistance to the long-existing crude oil resource governance structure which largely excludes oil-producing communities from participating formally in the petroleum industry. These illicit operations have grown across the region and include local communities, armed militia/cult groups, security operatives, and politically exposed persons. It contributes significantly to the worsening conflict situation in the Niger Delta. Owners and operators of camps are constantly in need of protection from either security operatives or rival camp owners. For instance, in Rivers state, street cult gangs run chains of oil bunkering businesses in areas of their territorial control. The cult gangs provide the needed security for the smooth operation of their business from the tapping points to refining camps and transportation. Money accrued from stolen crude sales is invested in arms procurement, with these weapons used during inter-gang disputes or at election periods.

Cultism: Cultism has become an endemic driver of conflict and insecurity in the Niger Delta region. There are over a hundred cult gangs across the Delta, including the Deybam (Bobos), Deywell, Iceland, Greenland, Black Axe, and Vikings. Cult-related violence has contributed significantly to internal displacement. Rivers state has been the hotbed for cult-related violence over the last two decades. A 2020 Amnesty International report described a swift rise in cult-related killings in the state with more than 60 persons killed in 2019 in Khana and Gokana LGAs alone.⁶⁹

Kidnapping, Human trafficking, and ritual killings:

Kidnapping for ransom has become endemic in the Niger Delta region with top businessmen, relatives of politically exposed persons, and expatriates all primary targets. Rivers and Bayelsa states are the dens for kidnapping in the region with a recent trend being the kidnapping for ritual killings which has largely been attributed to internet fraudsters as well as those who harvest human body organs for sale.⁷⁰ Furthermore, in Edo state irregular migration and human trafficking breeds criminal violence, especially against women who are forced into prostitution within and outside the country.

Political violence: Political violence has continued to be a source of conflict and insecurity in the Niger Delta region, especially in Rivers and Bayelsa states where there is a strong presence of both the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) and the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Although political violence is seasonal, manifesting only during periods of electioneering, it has tremendous impacts on wider peace and stability. The political actors rely on the cult gangs and militias to perpetrate acts of violence and intimidation during election periods thereby entrenching a political culture of violence. As a result, there is a growing diffusion of mainstream conflict actors into the political space. Renowned militant and cult leaders have penetrated community governance structures as well as mainstream political space.⁷¹ This has further exacerbated conflict and insecurity as ex-generals who are engaged in politics, either at the community or state level, are regularly at loggerheads.

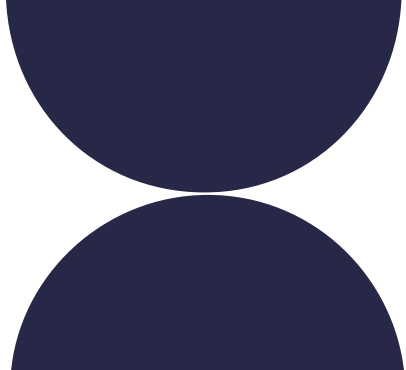
Herders – Farmers conflict: The conflict between herders and farmers appears to have cascaded into the Niger Delta with the southward migration of herders into the region in search of greener pasture. Over the past half-decade, there have been frequent instances of conflict between herders and local farmers arising from a perceived escalation of rural crime, especially in Edo, Cross River, and Delta states. Communities have been attacked and, in some cases,

68 ICC International Maritime Bureau (2020). Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships: Report for the Period 1 January - 31 December 2020. ICC International Maritime Bureau, January 2021. https://www.icccs.org/reports/2020_Annual_Piracy_Report.pdf.

69 Amnesty International (2020). Nigeria: Rise in Cult Related killings in Rivers state. Amnesty International, January 29, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/01/nigeria-rise-in-cult-related-killings-in-riversstate/> (Accessed on 23/11/2021).

70 Peterside, D. (2020). The scourge of ritual killings in Nigeria. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/05/thescourge-of-ritual-killings-in-nigeria/> (Accessed on 28/02/2022).

71 O'Neil, S. (2015). How ex-militant leader, Tompolo, emerged leader of PDP in Delta. The Nation. January 11, 2015, <https://thenationonlineng.net/entertainment/entertainment-3/> (Accessed on 1/3/2022).



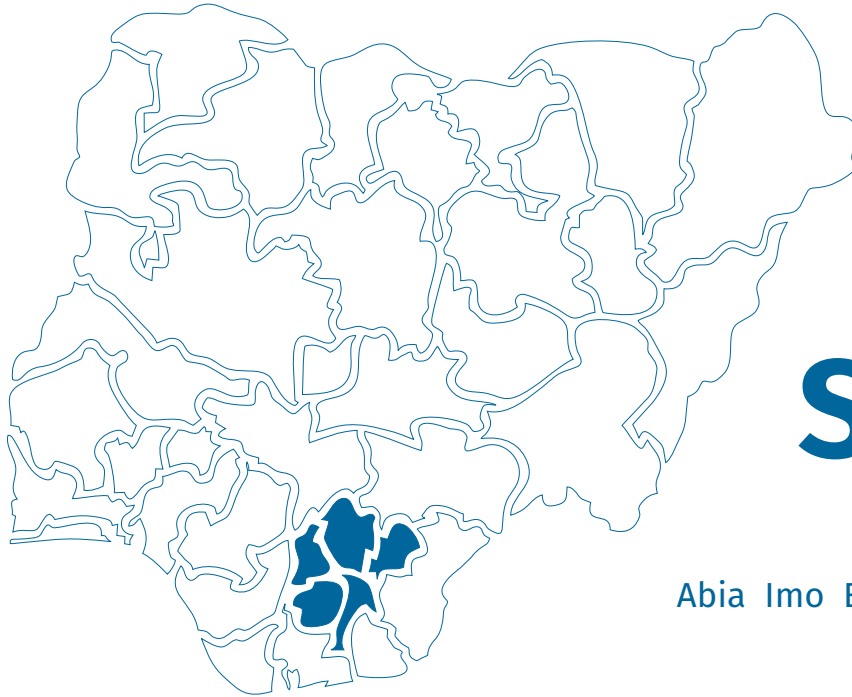
sacked by armed assailants, assumed to be herdsmen. This pushed the governors of the region under the aegis of the BRACED commission (which covers the six south-south states: Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Cross Rivers, Edo, and Delta) to announce the formation of a regional-based security outfit in October 2021 - which as of yet is unnamed and unimplemented till date - and promulgate anti-open grazing laws to curb herders-farmers crises in the region.⁷² Further research is required to disentangle the differences between farmer-herder conflict and other forms of rural insecurity in the region which are increasingly narrated and perceived within the same “herdsmen” framing.

Spill over effects of southeastern secessionists agitations: The Niger Delta region borders the southeastern region of the country and by political annexation the states of Abia and Imo are co-opted into the Niger Delta as oil-producing states. The recent secessionist agitations in the southeast have had spill over effects for the Niger Delta. For instance, attacks on police stations, prisons, and other government establishments and gunning down of security agents by “unknown gunmen” - widely believed to be operatives of IPOB's armed wing, the ESN - have impacted on the stability of the region as a whole and states like Rivers and Delta especially.

There continues to be a strong IPOB presence in Rivers, Delta and even Akwa Ibom state which raises the potential for conflict.

Overall, the Niger Delta region continues to experience diverse manifestations of violent conflicts and insecurities. While the pre-amnesty conflict was centred on the petroleum industry, contemporary conflicts are located more within the social and political space of local communities and cities with associated human development deficits for the local population. While some observers have attributed the resurgence of conflicts in the region to the failure of the PAP to effectively re-integrate ex-combatants, and exclusion of non-violent actors in the peacebuilding process, most fundamentally, the prevailing socio-economic conditions in the region provides the incentives for violent conflicts to thrive.⁷³ Hence, the complex interaction of drivers such as youth unemployment, arms proliferation, political violence, contestation for oil rents and governance failures have all continued to breed and sustain these trends of conflict and insecurity in the region.

72 Igwe, I. (2021). South South Governors to Launch Regional Security Outfit. Channels TV, October 4, 2021, <https://www.channelstv.com/2021/10/04/south-south-governors-to-launch-regional-security-outfit/>. (Accessed on 1/3/2022)
73 Ebiede, T. M., Bassey C. O., and Asuni J. B. (2021). Insecurity in The Niger Delta: A Report on Emerging Threats in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers States (Adonis & Abbey Publishers, 2021).



SOUTH EAST

Abia Imo Enugu Ebonyi Anambra

While forms of insecurity arising from crime, inter-communal unrest, and militancy have long been endemic in the region, the escalation, since 2012 of radical separatism in southeastern Nigeria, has been one of the most significant recent conflicts trends that have had a pronounced bearing on national cohesion. Since the launch of a military operation known as “Operation Python Dance” in 2016, the region has witnessed an intensification of confrontations between IPOB and the Nigerian security forces - especially, the police, the Department of State Security (DSS), and the military.

Indeed, a report by Premium Times, noted that “between August 2015 and February 2016, about 170 “unarmed citizens” were shot dead or critically injured” allegedly in confrontations with state security forces “while about 400 others were

arrested, charged, or detained without trial.”⁷⁴ The forced incarceration of IPOB's leader, Nnamdi Kanu in 2017 marked a significant inflection point in the trajectory of the conflict and represented a call to arms for many members of the movement.⁷⁵ The pronouncement in early 2020 of the launching of the ESN, a paramilitary organisation attached to IPOB and launched ostensibly to respond to the activities of what they termed “Fulani marauders” in the region, was a further turning point.

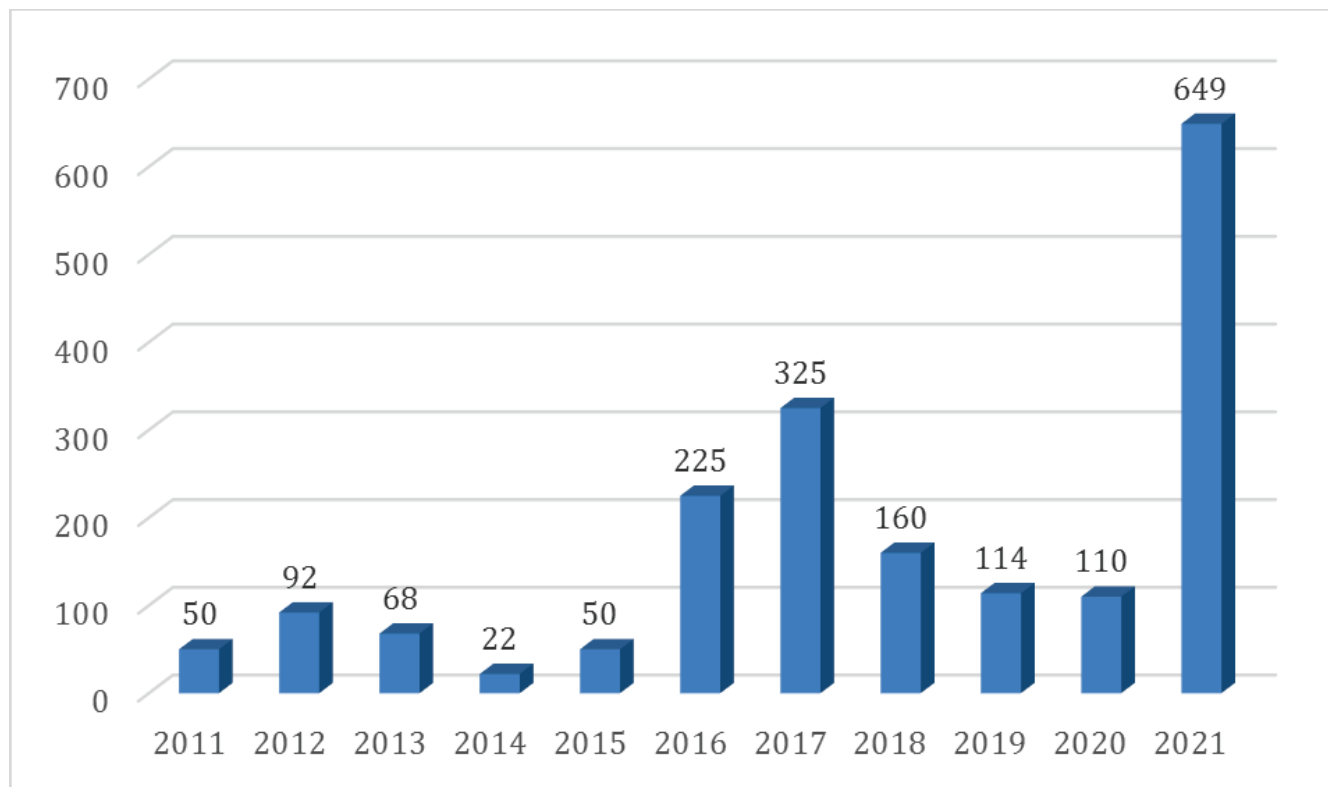
IPOB's pronouncement later in the same year of sit-at-home protests -- which garnered a significant degree of public compliance and have continued till date -- further emphasised the group's growing self-confidence as well as the waning public legitimacy of the state amid repeatedly brutal security operations in the region.

74 Mayah, E. (2016). Special report: Inside the massive extrajudicial killings in Nigeria Southeast. Premium Times, June 8, 2018. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/investigationspecial-reports/204902-special-report-inside-massiveextrajudicial-killings-nigerias-south-east.html> (Accessed on 23/11/2021).

75 Focus Group Discussion with IPOB members (Abia State, 2021).



Graph 3: Decade of Conflict-Related Casualties in Southeast Nigeria



Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project ACLED, 2022

To account for the emergence and trajectory of radical separatism in the southeast, previous research has highlighted the importance of historic feelings of “collective victimisation” arising from the festering social wounds inflicted by the Nigerian civil war (1967 - 70).⁷⁶ In addition to these long-standing grievances, our research highlighted several immediate factors that have contributed to the recent intensification of violent separatism in the region. These include a violent defensive counter-response to the state's militarised approach to dealing with the emergence of separatism; a pronounced perception of contemporary marginalisation in Nigeria's current federal political and security architecture; and the development and spread of false narratives legitimising armed mobilisation as a pathway to a regional secession.

For many interlocutors interviewed during fieldwork

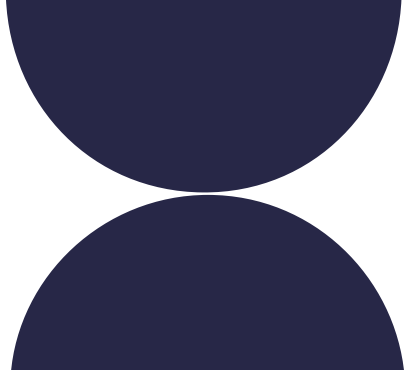
in the region -- both those identifying as formal members of IPOB and those who rejected the movement's aims -- the militarised response of the security forces to the initial emergence of separatism was frequently highlighted as a key driver of the groups counter-mobilisation.⁷⁷ Most notable among the federal governments responses to insecurity in the southeast has been the launching of Operation Python Dance, and Operation Python Dance II, both army operations nominally launched to checkmate “kidnapping, cultism, armed robbery, farmers-herdsmen clashes, violent secessionist agitations and insurgency among other identified security challenges in the southeast”.⁷⁸ The operation has led to repeated clashes with IPOB members, including the reported killing of 22 IPOB members in February 2016 during a prayer session in a school in Abia state. This incident as well as a 2015 incident, where the military allegedly shot into a crowd gathered to

76 Okechukwu, I., Orji, N. and C. K. Iwuamadi, C. K (2016), "Biafra separatism: Causes, consequences and remedies." Enugu: Institute for Innovations in Development (2016).

77 Key informant interviews, Abia state, September 24 - 25

78 Kilete, M. (2020). Army chief flags off security operations to checkmate kidnapping, banditry, thuggery, cultism, communal crisis, violent secessionist agitations nationwide. TNT Newsline. October 3, 2021

<https://tntnigeria.ng/2021/10/03/army-chief-flags-off-security-operations-to-checkmate-kidnapping-banditrythuggery-cultism-communal-crisis-violent-secessionist-agitations-nationwide/> (Accessed on 3/3/2021).



celebrate the court ruling that had come out in favor of Nnamdi Kanu,⁷⁹ were generally perceived as targeted attempts to quell the agitations of IPOB.

Indeed, most interlocutors emphasised that IPOB's members initially conducted only peaceful street processions and that the confrontation with state security officials initially only occurred when provoked by the latter. While several (particularly older) respondents disagreed with the confrontational methods recently employed by the group, most respondents agreed that the movement was more fundamentally fighting for a "just cause".⁸⁰ In short, any serious assessment of the widespread public acceptance of the 'justness' of IPOB's cause must account for the injustice of the state's response to initially largely peaceful protests.

Feelings of ongoing marginalisation -- conceived in terms of insufficient representation in the current architecture of federal institutions -- were cited as a driver of increased demands for self-determination. Interlocutors frequently asserted that the perceived absence of southeastern Nigerians in the upper echelons of state security agencies was likely one of the reasons why such force was exerted in response to the outbreak of agitations in the region. Interviewees also claimed that the southeast lacked representation among the significant ministerial portfolios in the federal cabinet. The outcome of a 2020 Supreme court case which overturned the 2019 Imo state electoral victory of the PDP candidate in favour of an APC candidate was also frequently cited by respondents as blatant evidence that the ruling party interferes in the politics of the southeast with no regard for popular legitimacy or consent.⁸¹

Alongside these narratives, overtly misleading discourses were also frequently mentioned by research respondents to account for the popularity

or justness of the separatist cause, as well as for the embrace of violent methods by its adherents. IPOB members claimed 'fulanization' and land grabbing to explain both the perceived over-representation of northern politicians in federal institutions and the state's inability to address farmer-herder conflicts in the region.⁸² While there have been media reports of farmer-herder conflict in the southeast, our team was not able to verify their nature or extent. IPOB respondents also increasingly referred to what they believed was a UN resolution, purportedly pronounced after the civil war, that granted the Biafran region a right to a referendum on secession 30 years after the end of hostilities. No such UN resolution exists. It appears the IPOB members may have been referencing an old fake news report from IPOB media that claimed the UN was going to declare Biafra an independent nation in 2020.⁸³ Nonetheless, several members of the movement cited the failure of the Nigerian state to abide by this resolution as the rationale for why "fighting for freedom" had become justified.⁸⁴

While historical grievances and structural economic factors are an undeniable driver of separatist agitation in the southeast, more contemporary narratives of marginalisation, counter-mobilisations in response to the state's violent response to the protest, and the propagation of rumours and propaganda continue to drive tacit public acceptance of the aims of secessionist groups such as IPOB, as well as their increasing capacity to employ members towards violent ends. Attempts to address conflict arising from secessionist agitations - which remain the most significant node of conflict in the region with a bearing on national cohesion - need to account for the central role of the state as a perpetrator of violence and injustice in any resolution.

79 Mayah, E. (2016). Special report: Inside the massive extrajudicial killings in Nigeria Southeast. Premium Times <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/investigations/special-reports/204902-special-report-inside-massive-extrajudicialkillings-nigerias-south-east.html> (Accessed on 23/11/2021)

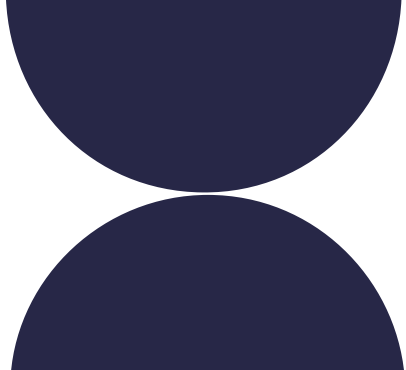
80 Focus Group Discussion with IPOB members, Abia state, September 26, 2021

81 Focus Group Discussion with IPOB members, Abia state, September 26, 2021

82 Focus Group Discussion with IPOB members, Abia state, September 26, 2021

83 Africa Check (2019), "No, UN doesn't have power to declare Biafra independent from Nigeria," Africa Check, December 3, 2019, <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/fbchecks/no-un-doesnt-have-power-declare-biafraindependent-nigeria>. (Accessed on 23/11/2021).

84 Focus Group Discussion with IPOB members, Abia state, September 26, 2021



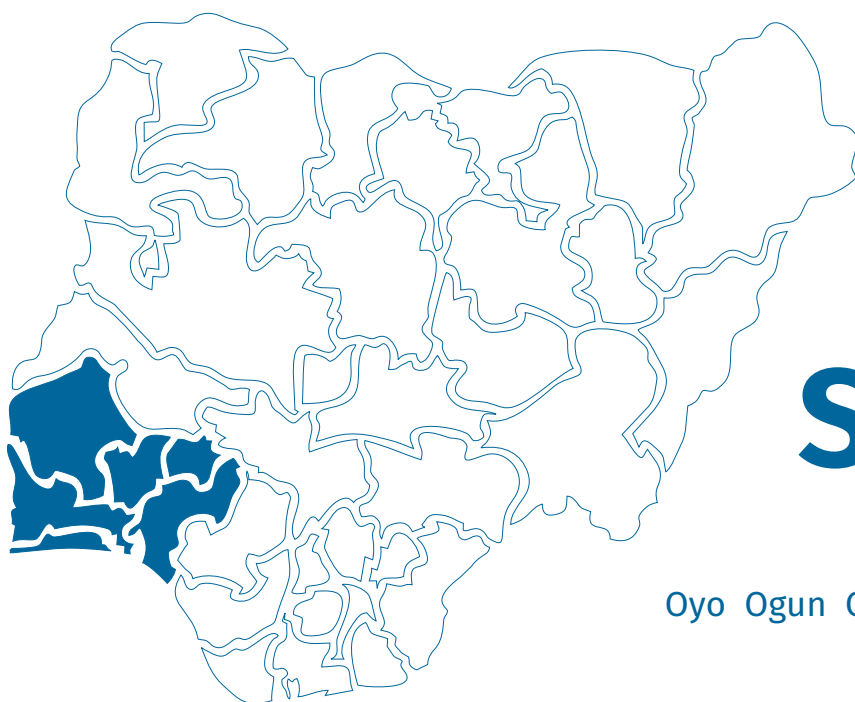
While public attention has been on the activities of the IPOB and the separatist conflict, there are several other manifestations of violence and conflict within the geopolitical zone. These include ethnic and sub-ethnic conflicts; religious and sectarian clashes; resource-based communal disputes; vigilantism; and electoral violence. Although the government attributes most armed violence to the ESN, which had publicly declared armed struggle, some of the violence can be traced to the excesses of vigilantes. Although formally disbanded, armed conflicts sporadically erupt due to their deep-seated influence, usually manifesting themselves as

political thuggery. The southeast is also not insulated from farmer-herder conflicts. In 2018, it was reported that over 50% of farmer/herder clashes recorded in the country from 2015, were concentrated in the southeast and the north-central geopolitical zones.⁸⁵ Frequent disagreements often occur between the farmers and the Fulani herdsmen leading to killings and wanton destruction of lives and property.⁸⁶⁸⁷

85 Udeh, C. (2018). How climate change is provoking clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria. *Ecologist*, February 22, 2018. <https://theecologist.org/2018/feb/22/how-climate-change-provoking-clashes-between-herdsmenand-farmers-nigeria> (Accessed 7/3/2022).

86 Njoku, L. (2016). Herdmen/Farmers clashes takes a new twist in Enugu. *The Guardian*, April 24, 2016
Herdsmen/Farmers clash takes a new twist in Enugu | *The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News* — Sunday Magazine — *The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News*

87 Odu, I. (2022). Again, herdsmen attack Enugu community, kill one, 2 others critically injured. *Vanguard*. January 24, 2022 www.vanguardngr.com/2022/01/again-herdsmen-attack-enugu-community-kill-one-2-others-criticallyinjured



SOUTH WEST

Oyo Ogun Ondo Osun Ekiti Lagos

Traditionally considered Nigeria's most peaceful region, the southwest has not been spared from the recent upsurge in inter-communal tensions and unrest. While there had previously been pockets of insecurity - primarily of a criminal nature or tied to moments of heightened political competition such as elections or coronations - the southwest has largely been spared the worst of ethno-communal, sectarian, or other forms of chronic unrest since the resumption of electoral politics in 1999. It is in part due to this legacy that the recent spike in insecurity, particularly in rural contexts in southwestern states, has generated such a heightened state of alarm.

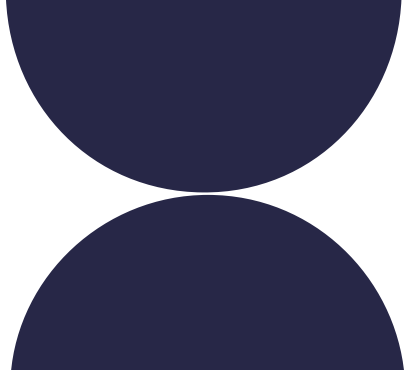
Confrontations between indigenous farming communities and criminals most especially in Oyo state, who have reportedly infiltrated largely Fulani pastoral communities have been the main new driver of unrest in the region, threatening to tear apart what had previously been a relatively tightly knit social fabric. Along with the rising crime has been an intensification of conflict between farming and herding communities due to an influx of herders moving further into the region because of insecurity and environmental changes in the Sahel region. This has turned localised and often criminal attacks -- including kidnappings, killings, arson, and rape -- into a more generalised atmosphere of inter-

communal division and mistrust. Leading to both increased community "self-help" approaches and increased mobilisation of firearms at the local level. The effect of this rising tension and mutual suspicion between (particularly northern) migrants and host communities are manifesting both in the physical interactions between both groups of citizens as well as in the increasingly conspiratorial nature of public discourse. In a worrying example of the former, the city of Ibadan witnessed clashes in February 2021 between Yoruba and Hausa communities, resulting in the deaths of as many as 20 people.⁸⁸

Increasing tensions between communities have emboldened previously dormant separatist agitators in the southwest, claiming to defend the "Yoruba nation" against the activities of the "Fulani marauders, militia and terrorists who have entered Yorubaland".⁸⁹ These primary youth-based groups, which have rallied around the idea of an "Oduduwa Republic", are also increasingly driven by the idea that the Presidency is providing support, or at least legal immunity, to pastoralists militias, fuelling conspiracy theories of a "northern agenda" to grab land after carrying out ethnic cleansing. This has, in turn, triggered attacks that have led to the destruction of the properties of Fulani community leaders and members.

88 Daily Trust (2021), "Oyo Crisis: 20 buried in Ibadan, 5,000 take refuge". Daily Trust February 15. <https://dailytrust.com/20-buried-in-ibadan-5000-take-refuge> (Accessed on 23/11/2021).

89 Kabir, A. (2021), "Insecurity: Houses, Cars Burnt As Oyo Protesters Defy Makinde, Attack Community Leader", Premium Times Nigeria, 2021, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/438135-insecurity-houses-carsburnt-as-oyo-protesters-defy-makinde-attack-community-leader.html> (Accessed November 9, 2021)



While the federal government has issued condemnatory statements in response to attacks and allegations of bias, there is not a concrete policy response for helping to address the mounting challenge in the region. For their part, state governors attempted to respond to the crisis by establishing a regional security force, known as Amotekun, in January 2021. Comprising local hunters and vigilante groups, Amotekun has received legislative backing from state assemblies, as well as recognition from the vice president and Attorney-General. However, the record of the forces has so far been mixed, amid allegations that their prosecutions have tended to target members of non-native communities.⁹⁰ Moreover, the Amotekun was accused of also engaging in the extrajudicial killings of three residents in Ibarapa, Tapa LGA, Oyo state in January 2021.⁹¹ Interlocutors frequently questioned the genuineness of the effort, pointing out that the group had been notably absent in recent intercommunal confrontations in Ibarapa community, Oyo state (see Box 2), and suggesting that the force is largely inactive outside of state capitals.⁹² Finally, the fact that the regional force lacks the powers to arrest suspects means that they still rely upon federally controlled police and security forces, raising questions about the extent to which they can be considered a viable alternative to the centralised policing structure.

While conflicts and insecurity in the region are not linked to religious extremism or terrorism, they are seen as the reflection of attempted subordination of the Yoruba by the Fulani who are perceived to be enjoying immunity due to their representation in the federal government. It is also believed that Fulani communities have the intention to dislodge the original Yoruba inhabitants from their ancestral land. This popular but false narrative is fuelled by disinformation that the Fulani is out to take over the

country.⁹³ According to the interlocutors, secession and separatist agenda are getting popular among a growing number of people and key stakeholders in the communities.⁹⁴

Like elsewhere in Nigeria land is a scarce resource and a major node of conflict in the southwest. The crises between the Fulani and host communities are tied to the competition over who owns and controls scarce fertile land. Farmers require the land for crop planting while the Fulani herders need it as a source of nutritious grass for feeding cattle. Farmers accuse the herders of intentionally grazing cattle on farmlands and thereby destroying crops and by extension source of livelihood. Herders defend their actions by stating that portions, where cattle stray into, are grazing routes are allotted to herders by the federal governments.

In the southwest the involvement or intervention of the federal government has further deepened tensions as reconciliatory efforts are usually perceived to be one-sided and biased in favour of the Fulani. Interlocutors, in both formal and informal discussions, accused the presidency of identifying with Fulani on an ethno-religious basis. For instance, the jailing of local security personnel who arrested a notorious Fulani herder was frequently cited in interviews in Ibarapa as a reflection of government support for the Fulani.⁹⁵ Policemen, in general, are accused of aiding the Fulani and allowing them to get away with committing crimes. The police have replaced the traditional system of settling disputes, especially relating to farm encroachment between the Fulani herders and the Yoruba farmers. This has increased tensions, which have only been further heightened by incidents of kidnapping, armed robbery, rape, and murder.

90 Uwachukwu, J. N. (2021), "Islamic group attacks Amotekun, makes accusations" Daily Post January 14th 2021 <https://dailypost.ng/2021/01/14/islamic-group-attacks-amotekun-makes-accusations/> (Accessed 1/3/2022).

91 Ola, A. (2021), "Three feared killed as youths clash with Amotekun operatives over carnival in Oyo". Vanguard, January 18, 2021. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/01/three-feared-killed-as-youths-clash-with-amotekunoperatives-over-carnival-in-oyo-2/> (Accessed 1/3/2022).

92 Focus Group Discussion with community members, Oyo state, January 26, 2021

93 Hassan, I. (2022). "Nigeria fake news ecosystem: An overview". Centre for Democracy and Development February 2022

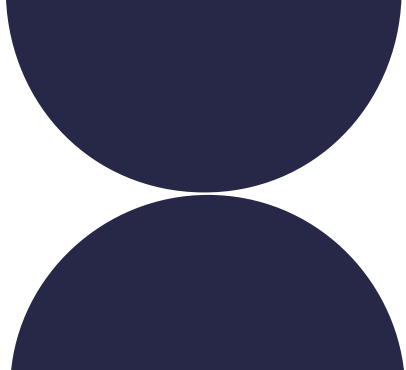
94 Focus Group Discussion with community members, Oyo s state, January 26, 2021

95 Focus Group Discussion with community members, Oyo state, January 26, 2021



SECTION 4

COMMON CAUSES AND DRIVERS OF INSECURITY



The previous sections of this report have focused on the specific dimensions of insecurity and conflict in the various geopolitical zones. While each zone's violence is rooted in local factors, there are cross-cutting challenges that Nigeria faces that drive insecurity across the country. This section highlights the common drivers of conflict identified across Nigeria.

Land use disputes: In the past five years, the farmer-herder conflict has been both more intense and more geographically dispersed than at any other point in Nigeria's history. Land tenure in Nigeria is a complex matter as traditional systems of tenure, for example, the granting of titles by emirs or village heads, often clash with the formal system that grants ultimate land rights to the federal and/or local government - as has been the case nationwide since the 1978 Land Use Decree. As one FGD participant in Sokoto noted, "land-use conflicts are often rooted in conflicting understandings of who holds the authority to distribute land titles".⁹⁶

Changing livelihoods: Climate change and demography challenges are leading to a shortage of resources such as land, vegetation for grazing, and water for fishing. The amount of arable or grazable land and sources of groundwater has diminished from overuse in recent decades - a problem exacerbated by outdated and inefficient forms of farming and animal husbandry - as well as desertification and irregular rainfall. Climate change has been acutely felt in the north, with the resulting exodus of herders southwards in search of grazing land bringing them into conflict with farmers.

Reciprocal radicalisation: Stigmatisation of Fulani herders - perhaps the most widely maligned group in Nigeria today - fuels a siege

mentality among herders that contributes to hostile relations with farming communities. Poor relations between farmers and herders in one region fuel perceptions among farmers and herders in another, producing self-reinforcing cycles, a form of "reciprocal radicalisation" in which opposing communities feed off others' words and actions in a "spiral of violence."⁹⁷

Lack of security sector capacity and professionalism: In each geopolitical zone, field researchers heard from conflict actors and relevant communities that the incapacity and/or heavy-handedness of security agents was a primary driver of conflict. These two challenges - the security sector's inadequate capacity and its frequent abuses - are intricately linked. On the one hand, the security sector lacks adequate resources to police the populous nation, combat the manifold criminals and insurgents, and secure rural communities. The ratio of Nigeria's police personnel to population is well under what the UN recommends, a challenge that is further aggravated by the misallocation of police resources.⁹⁸ The military is frequently tasked with law enforcement duties, but it is already overstretched. Troops are frequently outgunned in the northwest and northeast, where units retreat to garrison towns owing to their inability to clear and hold smaller insurgent-held communities. At the same time, the security sector frequently compensates for inadequate capacity with excessive force, ethnic or religious profiling, and human rights abuses.

As one retired general told one of the researchers, "Nigeria's military is still a colonial military" that prioritises regime security over national or community security.⁹⁹ The heavy-handedness of security agents has contributed to, if not directly catalysed, conflict on several occasions. Notable examples include the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni Nine

96 Focus group discussion, Sokoto, September 20, 2021.

97 For more on reciprocal radicalisation, see Barnett, J., Maher, S, and Winter, C. (2021), "Literature Review: Innovation, Creativity and the Interplay Between Far-Right and Islamist Extremism," International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, January 2021, <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ICSR-Report-Literature-Review-Innovation-Creativity-and-the-Interplay-Between-Far%E2%80%91right-and-Islamist-Extremism.pdf>. (Accessed on 12/11/2021).

98 Akpede, B. (2019), The Nigerian Police Force and zero accountability on the 135 billion naira VIP police revenue. Dataphyte November 2019. <https://www.dataphyte.com/latest-reports/governance/the-nigerian-policeforce-and-zero-accountability-on-135-billion-naira-vip-police-revenue/>

99 Interview with retired Major-General, June 2021.

activists which fuelled grievances that contributed to the rise of militancy in the Delta in 1995, the extrajudicial killing of Boko Haram founder Muhammed Yusuf by police in 2009, and the violent 2017 raid on IPOB founder Nnamdi Kanu's home. Daily, the security forces engage in behaviour that alienates local populations, creating grievances that fuel conflict. Examples include the near-daily airstrikes in the northwest that are poorly targeted and frequently scatter ordinary citizens' livestock and the intrusive military and police checkpoints recently erected in the southeast. Any serious attempt to address insecurity in Nigeria will require fundamental reforms to Nigeria's security architecture, including overhauling the rules of engagement between civilians and armed state officials; dealing with corruption and a severe lack of transparency; and improving the capacity of the police to carry out investigation, arrest, and prosecution independently.

Access to arms: Though Nigerian law prohibits individuals from possessing SALWs, except for security operatives and individuals licensed by the Nigerian police, illegal possession of SALWs is rife.¹⁰⁰ In 2016, the United Nation reported that Nigeria accounts for 70% of an estimated 500 million of SALWs circulating within West Africa.¹⁰¹ A recent SBM Intelligence report estimated that “the number of small arms in circulation in Nigeria, in the hands of civilian non-state actors is estimated at 6,145,000, while the armed forces and law enforcement collectively account for 586,600 firearms.”¹⁰² The proliferation of arms in southern Nigeria, coupled with other factors such as corruption and unemployment, has driven the increasing rate of violence in the region.¹⁰³

Corruption and inadequate access to justice:

Corruption and perceptions of injustice were identified by interview subjects and FGD participants as major factors fuelling insecurity. Corruption and inadequate justice are often not seen as nationwide issues affecting all Nigerians equally, however, but are instead filtered through ethnic or religious, or regional biases. For example, IPOB supporters expressed in FGDs that Igbo are unfairly targeted by police while bandits and Boko Haram are set free. Hausa farmers in the northwest believe police are corrupt and favour bandits over farmers, which they say necessitates the formation of Yan Sakai. Bandits, for their part, claim that the security forces unfairly persecute Fulani and sponsor Yan Sakai to drive herders from the land.¹⁰⁵ Such perceptions create the conditions for inter-communal conflict or insurgency because they lead people to conclude that for their community to survive, they must take up arms extra-legally to protect their interests.

Geography and regional dynamics:

The geographical location and the proximity of Nigeria to fragile neighbouring countries such as Niger, Cameroon, and Chad has heightened insecurity. Though the country has 84 official points of entry at land borders, there are more than 1,400 illegal border entry points into the country.¹⁰⁶ Boko Haram/ISWAP and the groups of bandits have made border community forests their hideouts and use a complex network of channels to move largely undetected between states and even across borders. In addition to this porosity of the land border, there are also the unmanned waterways.

Ideological grievances:

IPOB, and to a lesser extent nascent Yoruba secessionists in the southwest, pose a direct challenge to the

100 Egbuta, E. (2016), "The Proliferation Of Small Arms And Light Weapons. A Nexus To Asymmetric Threats In Nigeria", Grin.Com, 2019, <https://www.grin.com/document/461497>. (Accessed 9/11/2021).

101 Vanguard (2016), "UN: Nigeria Accounts For 70% Of 500M Illicit Weapons In West Africa", <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/08/un-nigeria-accounts-for-70-of-500m-illicit-weapons-in-west-africa/>.(Accessed November 9th, 2016).

102 Omilana, T. (2020), "How Proliferation Of Small Arms Is Enhancing Violence In Nigeria - Report | The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria And World News", The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria And World News,2020,<https://guardian.ng/news/how-proliferation-of-small-arms-is-enhancing-violence-in-nigeria-says-report/>.(Accessed 9/11/2021).

103 Morgen, S. B (2020) "Report on Small Arms, Mass Atrocities & Migration in Nigeria," April 2020, 11.

104 Focus Group Discussion with community members, Abia state, September 26, 2021

105 Focus Group Discussions with community members, Sokoto state. August, 2021

106 George, T. (2021). Nigeria Has Over 1,400 Illegal Border Routes, Immigration CG Reveals. The Cable 2021,<https://www.thecable.ng/nigeria-has-over-1400-illegal-border-routes-immigration-cg-reveals>. (Accessed 9/11/2021).

territorial integrity of Nigeria owing to their ambitions of breaking away from the republic. These problems are not new. Nigeria's founding fathers had to strive to create a sense of "Nigerianness" that would transcend the more deeply rooted notions of ethnic nationhood among Nigeria's myriad communities. Feelings of Igbo marginalisation, and faith that a Biafran nation would be more equitable and sustainable than the current republic, have never fully subsided since the end of Biafra's first secession attempt in 1970. Instead, they have grown more acute in recent years as grievances have increased surrounding insecurity, political marginalisation, and a lack of economic opportunities. In the northeast, Boko Haram and ISWAP pose a similar challenge. While not secessionist or nationalist like IPOB, these groups' ideologies are fundamentally incompatible with the religiously pluralistic federal republic they seek to overthrow. These ideologies are not entirely fringe: Boko Haram enjoyed popular support in the northeast before its turn to terrorism and to this day it attempts to exploit nostalgia for northern Nigeria's pre-colonial, Islamic empires most especially in the 12 states where Sharia was introduced.¹⁰⁷ Even militants that are less ideologically driven such as the bandits in the northwest or criminals in the Niger Delta are pushed into militancy in large part because their political grievances go unaddressed. Many of these criminals claim their militancy is a form of protest the marginalisation of their communities and some have had success in sensitising local populations by claiming to defend community interests against a neglectful or predatory state.

Politics: As the 2023 general elections draw closer, officials are liable to increasingly prioritise electoral considerations and political alliances over security ones. Electoral competition in the Fourth Republic has been both a factor in fuelling insecurity and in influencing the state's response to insecurity. For example, Boko Haram's rise was assisted by Borno governor Ali Modu Sheriff, who sought to channel Mohammed Yusuf's popularity towards his political campaigns. The groups turn towards active jihad was in part a consequence of the groups falling out with the governor.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, former President Goodluck Jonathan may have initially downplayed the Boko Haram insurgency because he suspected the insurgents were being sponsored by northern politicians to undermine his rule. His decision to wait until shortly before elections to launch an offensive in the northeast was also driven by political calculations.¹⁰⁹ Key informants in the northwest also suspected some of the bandits have had alliances with politicians in previous elections or that some of the hooligans politicians have employed during elections later turned to banditry.¹¹⁰ We are likely to see similar trends ahead of 2023, with the added challenge of the weaponisation of fake news designed to create chaos by inciting public resentment against a prospective candidate, their political party, or even their ethnic group.

107 Barkindo, A. (2016), "How Boko Haram exploits history and memory," Africa Research Institute, October 4, 2016, <https://www.africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/publications/boko-haram-exploits-history-memory/>. (Accessed 9/11/2021).

108 Daily Trust. (2011), Investigate genesis of Boko Haram. Daily Trust, <https://dailytrust.com/investigate-genesisof-boko-haram>

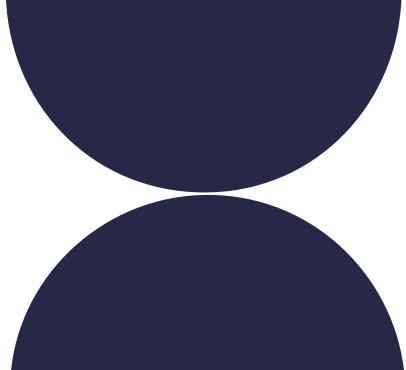
109 For more, see Parkinson, J. and Hinshaw, D. (2021), *Bring Back Our Girls: The Astonishing Survival and Rescue of Nigeria's Missing Schoolgirls* (New York: Harper, 2021).

110 KII with a community leader, Sokoto state. August, 2021



SECTION 5

STATE RESPONSES: REPRESSION & CO-OPTATION



The Nigerian state has become increasingly reliant on its armed forces for internal security. Constitutionally, Nigeria's internal security infrastructure is composed of the NPF as the lead agency for law enforcement and the NSCDC which is charged with protecting critical national infrastructure and handling related disaster management. The capacity of NPF and other officials has eroded over time due to severe resource constraints and orientation away from civilian protection to VIP protection. According to Mike Okiro, the former Chairman of the Police Service Commission (PSC), Nigeria has about 400,000 police officers.¹¹¹ However, a good proportion of these officers are not available for routine police work because more than 150,000 of them are assigned to guard VIPs and others who ordinarily would not qualify for police protection. Other officials say the real picture is even bleaker. Speaking in 2018, the Assistant Inspector-General of Police for Zone 5 in Benin City in southern Nigeria, Rasheed Akintunde, said only 20% of police officers are engaged in core duties of protecting lives and ensuring peace in the country. "The remaining 80% are just busy providing personal security to some `prominent people.," he claimed.¹¹²

The way forward for the police has been laid out by three police reform panels – the Dan Madami commission (2006), M. D Yusuf assessment (2009), and the Parry Osayande study (2012) –¹¹³ that have done extensive work on what needs to be done to improve performance. All these initiatives reported the same core problems: insufficient personnel and funding for operations; poor training; dilapidated training institutions and barracks; limited firearms skills, leading to frequent shooting mishaps; and the demeaning obligation for officers to pay for their own uniforms. Perhaps the most important factor they emphasised is the deep culture of corruption that results in salaries being unpaid because they are diverted elsewhere in addition to the lack of political will and commitments towards the reform.

Military might

In the meantime, the military has sought or been assigned to fill the gaps. Except for FCT, Jigawa and Ebonyi states, the military now is engaged in internal operations in 33 of Nigeria's 36 states, seeking to quell not only the ISWAP insurgency in the northeast but also rural banditry and mass kidnapping in the northwest, the Biafra resurgence in the southeast, ethno-nationalism in the southwest, farmer-herder conflicts in the northcentral and the militancy in the Niger Delta. These challenges are generally asymmetrical, involving relatively small groups of armed combatants attacking communities and security personnel. But the Nigerian armed forces, by their training and orientation, are more familiar with conventional warfare. The insurgency in the northeast for example, which is now more than a decade old, has shown the difficulties in winning a comprehensive military victory. Despite reclaiming much of the territory previously lost by 2016, Boko Haram and ISWAP especially continue to successfully target the Nigerian military in the northeast. The insurgents avoid large-scale battles and instead stage ambushes, lay improvised explosive devices along roads patrolled by military vehicles, and stage complex assaults on military installations and camps when they assess vulnerabilities in their defences.

The military's decision in 2019 to resort to establishing super camps - large, barricaded bases in major towns and local government headquarters where the civilian population is congregated for safety - has also been problematic. Not only have the insurgents been able to sustain attacks on these camps, but the approach also means that vast swathes of territory remain vulnerable to attack from the insurgents.

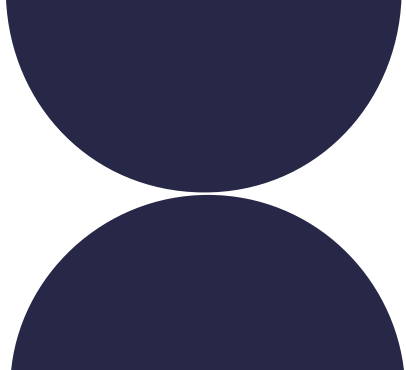
The military faces similar challenges in the northwest. Residents complain that the recent shutdown of cell networks - intended to hamper bandit's operations - leaves them unable to call for assistance from security forces when they are attacked.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the new military deploy-

111 Ochereome N, (2018)"Ruled By Jokers", Vanguard, 2018, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/03/ruled-byjokers/>. (Accessed November 9, 2021)

112 Sahara Reporters (2018), "80 Percent Of Our Policemen Are Deployed To Protect Politicians And VIPS, Says Nigeria Police Chief | Sahara Reporters", Sahara Reporters, 2018, <http://saharareporters.com/2018/02/08/80-percent-our-policemen-are-deployed-protect-politicians-and-vips-says-nigeria-police>. Egbuta, U. (2019), "The Proliferation Of Small Arms And Light Weapons. A Nexus To Asymmetric Threats In Nigeria", Grin.Com, 2019, <https://www.grin.com/document/461497>. (Accessed November 9th 2021)

113 Peter-Omale, F (2006), "Can the Police Be Reformed?" This Day, Mach 14, 2006, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200603150676.html>; Owen, O. (2014), "The Nigeria Police Force: Predicaments and Possibilities," Nigeria Research Network NRN Working Paper No. 15, July 2014, <https://www.qeh.ox.ac.uk/sites/www.odid.ox.ac.uk/files/nrn-wp15.pdf>; Sahara Reporters (2012), "Presidential Committee on Police Reform Rejects State Police," Sahara Reporters, August 14, 2012, <http://saharareporters.com/2012/08/14/presidential-committee-police-reform-rejects-state-police>.

114 Focus Group Discussions with community members, Sokoto state, August, 2021



ments in the region have only produced minor successes - the securing of individual communities, arrests of handfuls of informants, or the deaths of small numbers of bandits in individual airstrikes. Overall, the bandits continue to hold the upper hand.

Central to the limited success of the Nigerian military in these conflicts has been the lack of trust and close collaboration between civilians and security agencies. At the beginning of the conflict in the northeast, significant distrust and antagonism developed. In the northeast communities still have bitter memories about their youth being unjustly categorised as insurgents and killed, maimed, or arrested.

This has been the case in the northwest as well, where Fulani communities complain of targeted harassment, extortion, and extrajudicial killings or disappearances. The military's deployments in the southeast starting in April 2021 have also seen the use of heavy-handed tactics reminiscent of the state of emergency in the northeast such as forcing pedestrians to walk with hands raised through checkpoints. This has alienated local communities, given fuel to IPOB propaganda, and undermined the military's ability to gather reliable intelligence and support from local populations in which the insurgents operate.

Poor relations between the security sector and local populations stem from the widespread impunity that members of the security forces enjoy and the security sector's resistance to structural change. Over a year after soldiers massacred peaceful protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos, no soldier has been disciplined and the military top brass remains in denial that any wrongdoing occurred.¹¹⁵ As soldiers and police are often the most visible manifestation of the state in ordinary citizens lives, especially in conflict zones in which basic services and institutions such as schools or courthouses are lacking, any abuse that security forces engage in is liable to undermine not only the standing of these forces but the very legitimacy of the state in the eyes of its citizens.

Vigilante justice

This lack of effectiveness of the military response to insecurity has led to the emergence of a new approach emanating from state governments and community leaders in many parts of the country - to buy guns to fight back. The VGN has long existed as a semi-formal part of the security sector. Drawn from local communities, its members are registered and regulated by the governor and/or police commands in each state while many members additionally receive paramilitary training from the military, police, or intelligence services. However, the VGN is no longer the sole or even primary vigilante/self-defence outfit in most parts of Nigeria.

In the northeast, the CJTF militias emerged a decade ago to flush out Boko Haram from various communities. They have since become an essential element of the security presence in the northeast, operating through a more formalised chain of command up to the state level and partnering with the military and other security forces in joint operations (in which CJTF generally serve in intelligence and reconnaissance roles). The CJTF have consequently received training from security forces as well as weapons, including donations of shotguns from the state government - military units also loan AK-47s to CJTF for joint operations, though in some hard-hit areas the local military unit essentially lets the CJTF keep the guns around the clock.¹¹⁶ Despite their more formalised role and the greater training they receive compared to a decade ago, CJTF still engage in unprofessional behaviour such as extortion, theft, using weapons to settle personal disputes, and sexual and gender-based violence, albeit with seemingly less frequency than at the start of the conflict.

In the southwest, the governors launched Operation Amotekun in early 2021 in response to increasing farmer-herder clashes as well as rising criminality. In the southeast, the governors have announced a similar - so far inactive - initiative called Operation Ebube Agu. In this region, states must contend not only with farmer-herder clashes and crime but also the militant violence of "unknown gunmen" believed to be members of IPOB's ESN wing. The expressed

115 Lagos State Government Judicial Panel of Inquiry "Report of the Lekki Incident Investigation of 20th October 2020" <https://www.okay.ng/endsars-lagos-panel-report-on-lekki-toll-gate-incident-download-pdf/> (Accessed 23/2/2022).

116 Interview with CJTF commanders, Maiduguri, June 2021.

raison d'être of the ESN - to defend southeastern communities from herdsmen - means that ESN is not only attacking state authorities but also competing with state authorities and the Ebube Agu initiative to gain legitimacy from communities as the exclusive guarantor of local security. Governors in the south-south geopolitical zone are also looking to follow suit with a homegrown solution to combatting insecurity. In the northwest, the number of Yan Sakai militias aimed at curtailing banditry has ebbed and flowed over the past two decades with the most recent military operations leading to a resurgence. While most northwestern governors have nominally outlawed the Yan Sakai at one point or another, these outfits are tolerated if not indirectly supported by most local authorities. By merging with or even subsuming the VGN at the local level, Yan Sakai receives tacit backing for their operations and occasionally material support in the form of homemade weapons built with funds raised by local officials.

Amnesties

Another approach tried by both federal and state actors has been to provide amnesties for militants. The PAP implemented in 2009 by the Musa Yar'Adua administration in the Niger Delta was an act of desperation implemented after the state's kinetic efforts had failed to curtail militancy and criminality in the Niger Delta.¹¹⁸ The effort has been largely successful insofar as it has prevented a return to the intensity of conflict seen in the 2000s and thus kept Nigeria's oil production relatively high. However, the absence of broader socioeconomic development in the region means that insecurity remains a challenge as youths lacking better opportunities turn to criminality and, increasingly, piracy. There have also been issues with the stipend payments, with some ex-fighters claiming they are not regularly paid as outlined in the agreement. This claim is not unfounded as the sharp decline of international oil prices in 2015 made it increasingly difficult for the

government to fund the PAP.¹¹⁹ The head administrator of the programme has also acknowledged the presence of duplicate names that have been used to siphon stipend funds and launched an investigation into the matter.¹²⁰

Amnesties at the state level for bandits who agree to lay down arms have also been trialled in the northwest, beginning with former Zamfara governor Abdulaziz Yari in 2016. These amnesties have ultimately collapsed in each instance with all but a few of the bandits who "repented" resuming their armed activities. Several reasons account for the failure. For starters, the amnesties have not been well coordinated between the state and federal governments or even between state governments. On multiple occasions, a bandit who accepted an amnesty in one state has found themselves arrested in another state or fallen victim to a military operation. Several bandits claim they left the agreements after they saw that other "repentant" bandits had been arrested or killed in security operations.¹²¹ The fact that the amnesties are not even formally documented in writing also makes it easier for bandits to walk out of any agreement regardless of their reasons for doing so. Furthermore, some amnesties, notably Yari's 2016 one, contributed to conflict through a cash for guns scheme that incentivised gun ownership, even leading some Yan Sakai vigilantes who lacked AK-47s to hunt and kill AK-wielding bandits to get their rifles and cash them in.¹²²

Furthermore, many bandits claim that they never received the financial support or job training they believed they were promised as part of the amnesty, which reflects a lack of a formalised DDR process in these ad hoc arrangements.¹²³ Given how profitable banditry has become in the northwest, it is an open question whether even a more formalised and well-subsidised DDR process would be sufficient to rein in all the bandits. Some of the more powerful bandits

117 Barnett and Rufa'i, (2021) "The Other Insurgency". Based on analysis of violence related deaths in Nigeria between 2006 and 2021 (Nigeria Watch dataset: <http://www.nigeriawatch.org/index.php?urlaction=evtStat> accessed 29/10/2021).

118 Hassan, I., & Olugbuo, B. (2015). The Justice versus Reconciliation Dichotomy in the Struggle Against Gross Human Rights Violations: The Nigerian Experience. *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement*, 40(2), 123-142. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/afrdevafrdev.40.2.123> (Accessed 22/02/2022)

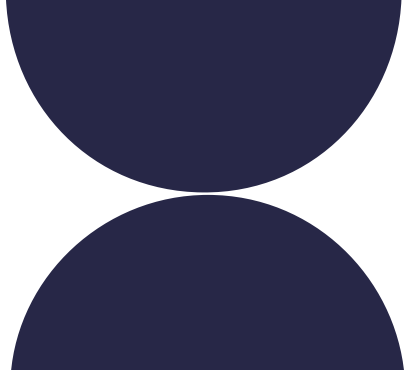
119 Nextier SPD Policy Brief, (2020), Assessment of the Presidential Amnesty Program.

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Presidential-Amnesty-Programme-Report-Policy-Brief.pdf>

Accessed 17/2/2022 Odiegwu, M. (2021), "400 duplicate names uncovered in presidential amnesty's payroll," *The Nation*, September 15, 2021, <https://thenationonlineng.net/400-duplicate-names-uncovered-in-presidential-amnestys-payroll/>. (Accessed 23/11/2021).

121 Idayat Hassan, "Nigeria's rampant banditry, and some ideas on how to rein it in," *The New Humanitarian*, November 8, 2021, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2021/11/8/Nigeria-banditry-peace-deal-jihadistshow-to-rein-it-in> (Accessed 9/11/2021).

122 Interview with Yan Sakai members, Gusau, Zamfara, August 2021.



would likely expect larger stipends and possibly semi-formalised roles within the security sector that would allow them to retain influence and possibly even arms. Further research comparatively examining the strengths and limitations of such forms of post-conflict integration in contexts like Nigeria can help shed light on possible pathways for dealing sustainably with this phenomenon.

There has been no amnesty programme per se in the northeast. But OSC, the government's DRR process, has had notable success in deradicalising and reintegrating repentant Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgents who voluntarily surrender. The program is multifaceted and coordinated between multiple federal and state agencies as well as NGOs and CSOs (including CDD). While not without its challenges, OSC provides an invaluable exit ramp from extremism that has allowed hundreds of insurgents to defect while sensitising local communities of the need for reconciliation and reintegration. However, its relevance may be somewhat limited to amnesty approaches in other parts of the country where militancy is less ideologically driven.

Building peace

State governments in Plateau, Adamawa, and Kaduna have launched peace institutions designed to develop early warning systems and to spearhead initiatives aimed at resolving ethnic, religious, and resource-based conflicts. These institutions have demonstrated some early promise in resolving tension and initiating dialogue at state and local levels in key conflict hotspots to the extent that other states are taking note.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, these commissions continue to be plagued by budgetary constraints, limited capacity to implement the outcomes of dialogues and community-level deliberations, and the reality or perception that they are beholden to the interests of state governors. This imposes a limitation on the extent to which all actors can view such institutions as politically or socially neutral.¹²⁵ Further support for such institutions by a wider variety of actors beyond the state government would both strengthen their capacity to implement

their mandates and improve public buy-in among a wider variety of interested parties in conflict.

At a more policy-level one initiative to manage farmer-herder conflicts has been the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP). Launched in 2019 by the federal government it aims to discourage the movement of cattle by establishing ranches for nomadic pastoralists. In addition to reducing competition over land and water resources, the government also expects that the ranches will benefit small scale farmers by encouraging them to grow crops that can be sold to the ranchers as fodder. Despite its ambitions, the plan has yet to be implemented three years after its announcement. This is due in part to funding constraints occasioned by the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as to distrust both among farming communities, that the plan disproportionately benefits herders, and among herders who perceive the plan as intended to change long-standing cultural practices.¹²⁶ In addition, the escalation of insecurity precisely in the locations - notably grazing reserves in Zamfara - where the NLTP is meant to help resolve tensions has made investments in ranches difficult. This suggests a more immediate conflict resolution mechanisms would need to be put in place before an initiative such as the NLTP can truly succeed.

But undeterred, federal and state governments have recently taken further steps to implement the plan. In December 2021, the federal governments granted N1billion (\$2,402,000) to Plateau, Nasarawa, Kaduna, and Adamawa states to commence the rollout of a pilot of the programme. While 22 states in total have expressed interest in participating in the pilot, only the abovementioned states have so far met the criteria - which includes making 20% counterpart funding available - to access the federal grant.¹²⁷ While still too early to assess the trajectory and prospects of the programme in respect to peacebuilding, future research should examine the NLTP pilot to identify successes and challenges.

123 Interview with repentant bandit, Gusau, Zamfara, August 2021.

124 Kew, D., 2021. Nigeria's State Peacebuilding Institutions: Early Success and Continuing Challenges. <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-s-state-peacebuilding-institutions-early-success-and-continuingchallenges/> (Accessed on 3/3/2022).

125 KII, Godwin Okoko, Director of Programmes, Plateau State Peacebuilding Agency (PPBA), November 16, 2021

126 International Crisis Group (2021), "Ending Nigeria's herder-farmer crisis: The livestock reform plan". <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/302-ending-nigerias-herder-farmer-crisis-livestock-reformplan> (Accessed 9/11/2021).

127 Nnodim, O. (2021), "FG releases N1bn grant to four states for pilot ranching". Punch <https://punchng.com/fgreleases-n1bn-grant-to-four-states-for-pilot-ranching/> (Accessed 9/11/2021).



CONCLUSIONS



Nigeria faces more diverse and geographically dispersed security challenges than at any moment in its history. In the northeast, a full-blown jihadist insurgency rages unabated in its twelfth year, with the insurgents improving military capabilities and erecting an Islamic proto-state in rural communities. The northwest is home to an even larger number of militants spread across more states than ISWAP/Boko Haram. Their objectives vary from criminal profit-seeking to ethnic self-defence, with the lines often blurred in practice, complicating both kinetic and non-kinetic efforts to quell the violence. Farmer-herder clashes continue to be a major source of instability in the north-central states but have also expanded into the three southern geopolitical zones, fuelling broader interethnic and/or interreligious violence. The southeast is also grappling with a low-intensity secessionist insurgency that has the potential to metastasize into full-blown civil war, while secessionist sentiments are also on the rise in the southwest. Criminal violence such as kidnapping-for-ransom and cultism remain persistent challenges across the country more broadly with increasing piracy in the Gulf of Guinea leading it to become the world's most dangerous waterway.

While each of these regional crises is distinct, there are common challenges that overlap and contribute to violence in each geopolitical zone. These include economic underdevelopment and youth unemployment; corruption and inadequate access to justice; a lack of capacity and professionalism from security forces that are prone to abuse and excess, indiscriminate use of force; competing nationalisms and notions of group identity and belonging; and the proliferation of SALWs across porous borders. Additionally, Nigeria's various crises are weaved together by politicians and prominent individuals into sensationalist, conspiratorial narratives that often rely on fake news and devolve into ethnic or religious hate speech. Consequently, disparate incidents - such as a Boko Haram attack in the northeast, a kidnapping by bandits in the northwest, and clashes between herders and farmers in the southeast - may be lumped together as evidence of a monolithic threat of "Islamisation" or "Fulanisation".



RECOMMENDATIONS



Moving forward, local, and national stakeholders will need to be willing to try new approaches to curtailing insecurity. The kinetic approaches favoured by the federal government have proved inadequate to address these complex security challenges. In many instances an overreliance on military power risks exacerbating the conflict by fuelling grievances that push communities towards insurgents or criminals. Future efforts to address insecurity must consider local, state, and national level solutions and ensure coordination between relevant individuals and agencies.

Peacebuilding interventions are urgently needed in most if not all geopolitical zones to improve community cohesion in conflict-affected areas. Much of the insecurity in Nigeria today falls along ethnic or religious lines, even if it is fundamentally rooted in separate issues such as land use or criminality, making it imperative to mitigate sentiments of intercommunal hostility and restore a degree of trust between communities. A failure to do so will contribute to reciprocal radicalisation and cascading incidents of violence. Relatedly, stakeholders must do more to combat the spread of fake news and curtail hate speech without infringing on Nigerians constitutional liberties. Finally, Nigerian authorities should take advantage of the authorities granted to them under the 1999 constitution to engage in transitional justice initiatives at both a local and possibly national level, beginning by implementing the recommendations of the 2002 Oputa panel

report. Transitional justice frameworks offer the chance for all those affected by conflict to air their grievances, recount their experiences, and engage in mutual healing and reconciliation.

Further research is needed to strengthen understanding in certain key areas. For example, understanding of arms flows throughout Nigeria remains imprecise and would benefit from more refined, local-level analysis and mapping of arms sources, destinations, and routes. Similarly, the relationship between narcotics production, consumption, and trafficking on the one hand and insecurity on the other remains largely subject to speculation. While militants are known to consume drugs (bandits, for example, consume notable quantities of Indian hemp and tramadol) it is worth interrogating whether production centres have also emerged within the country and whether bandits or other militants profit off the transshipment of narcotics through the country. Likewise, while our research has found that illicit mining in the northwest does not play as notable a role in fuelling banditry as some have assumed, our research points to some bandits cooperating with illegal miners. These relationships, as well as the role played by international miners and large landowners in the northwest - including retired military officials - merit greater scrutiny if Nigeria's complex insecurity challenges are to be further understood.



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