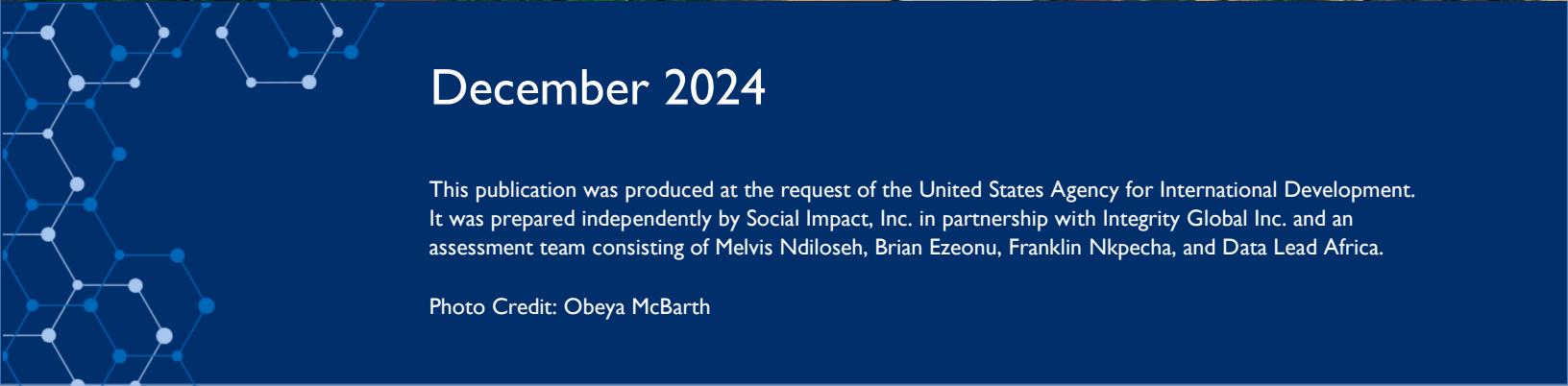




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FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT USAID/NIGERIA VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT ASSESSMENT (VCA)



December 2024

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USAID/NIGERIA VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT ASSESSMENT

FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

USAID/Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization Peacebuilding Evaluation, Analysis, Research, and Learning (PEARL)

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ACRONYMS

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
ACOR	Alternate Contracting Officer's Representative
AD	Activity Director
AO	Activity Officer
AU	Australia
BAY	Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
COR	Contracting Officer's Representative
CPS	Conflict Prevention and Stabilization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CVP	Conflict and Violence Prevention
DCF	Data Collection Firm
DEC	Development Experience Clearinghouse
ESN	Eastern Security Network
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GIS	Geographic Information System
HC	High-conflict State
HS & CB	Hotspot & Border State
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
IPOB	Indigenous People of Biafra
IRB	Institutional Review Board
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
KII	Key Informant Interview
LC	Low-Conflict State
LGA	Local Government Area

LOI	Lines of Inquiry
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
NCCSALW	National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
OAA	Office of Acquisition and Assistance
OPC	Oodua Peoples Congress
PD	Public Diplomacy
PEARL	Peacebuilding Evaluation, Analysis, Research, and Learning
PLSO	Partner Liaison Security Operations
PMU	Project Management Unit
PO	Program Office
POC	Point of Contact
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
QA	Quality Assurance
RACI	Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed
SI	Social Impact, Inc.
SNA	Social Network Analysis
SOW	Scope of Work
TL	Team Lead
TOACOR	Task Order Alternate Contracting Officer's Representative
TOCOR	Task Order Contracting Officer's Representative
UKFCDO	United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VCA	Violence and Conflict Assessment
VCAF	Violence and Conflict Assessment Framework
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

USAID/Nigeria will begin planning in earnest for a new five-year Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) in 2024 as the current CDCS lasts through August 2025. As conflict continues to spread and become multidimensional across the country, it is essential that interventions are planned with the most current knowledge of the conflict dynamics at the national and subnational levels, including but not limited to: the drivers of conflict, the key actors, hotspots, and impact of conflict.

Certain conflict dynamics remain prevalent in certain regions, while some are spreading across regions. The North West has seen a significant surge in banditry and kidnapping, while insurgencies remain prevalent in the North East. The North Central region also faces escalating farmer-herder conflicts which are spreading to the South East and South West deepening regional tensions. The Southern regions contend with rising organized crime and cultism, which is fast spreading into some parts of the North. The South East struggles with persistent separatist movements while the South- South region deals with militancy, oil bunkering, and environmental degradation, exacerbating social and economic inequalities. Additionally, political thuggery which intensifies during elections, remains prevalent nationwide, land and resource disputes remain widespread, and there has been an unprecedented rise in popular movements, civil disobedience, and nationwide protests.

ASSESSMENT PURPOSE AND ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

USAID/Nigeria's Program Office commissioned the Violence and Conflict Assessment (VCA) to: (1) improve USAID/Nigeria's understanding of the conflict dynamics across the country to support evidence-based decision making at the country strategy and activity level, (2) improve the effectiveness of programming across the mission portfolio in addressing conflict drivers, and (3) strengthen the integration of conflict sensitivity and do no harm principles into the USAID/Nigeria program lifecycle.

The assessment addresses the following lines of inquiry (LOIs):

1. What are the historical, socio-economic, and political factors that contribute to current and emerging conflicts in Nigeria? What are the diverse grievances and underlying factors that fuel conflict, violence, and disaffection? What are the main triggers that escalate conflicts in Nigeria? What external factors contribute to or mitigate conflicts in Nigeria?
2. Who are the actors involved in conflict, and what roles do they play? What are their motivations, goals, and interests in current and evolving conflicts? What are key ways actors inciting others to violence? What roles do traditional, religious, and social leaders play in conflict-related behavioral change? What is the role of the media in conflict?
3. Where are the geographic hotspots and trends for conflict in Nigeria? Are there specific regions that are more prone to conflict, and if so, why? Are there specific regions that have successfully mitigated or resolved conflict, and if so, how?
4. What are the dynamics and triggers related to conflict in Nigeria? How do these triggers evolve over time, and are there patterns in their occurrence? What keeps people from participating in violence? In areas with less conflict, what mechanisms diffuse conflict/violent behavior in the face of

- triggers?
5. How do conflicts affect local communities, especially vulnerable groups such as women, youths, persons with disabilities, and displaced populations? How are boys and men impacted by violence and insecurity socially and emotionally? How has mental trauma / exposure to violence affected individuals who have experienced conflict?
 6. How and where are USAID or USG actions influencing or exacerbating conflict dynamics? What are bright spots and opportunities to build social cohesion, peace, and improve security, particularly outside of conventional peacebuilding actors?

ASSESSMENT DESIGN, METHODS, AND LIMITATIONS

The assessment team used a mixed-methods approach that included data collected through a review of key documents, qualitative primary data collection in the form of key informant interviews (KII), quantitative and qualitative primary data collection through a mixed survey, and quantitative secondary data.

The assessment team conducted 64 KII with national and sub-national level stakeholders including security stakeholders, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), women and youth organizations, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

The mixed survey containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions was administered to 945 community-level stakeholders across 18 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to ensure broad geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic coverage. The assessment team selected states for data collection based on a high conflict and low conflict area criteria to ensure variation and facilitate a comparative analysis.

The assessment team faced a number of limitations and risks during data collection that should be considered when reviewing the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The key limitations include: 1) sampling bias, where states and LGAs were purposely selected based on high conflict and low conflict areas, making the sample not nationally representative, which the team mitigated by supplementing primary data with secondary data sources; 2) selection bias, where the assessment team is focused on identifying stakeholders that are believed to have relevant information regarding conflict dynamics in Nigeria for KII, which the team mitigated by triangulating KII data with the mixed survey data containing more diverse conflict perspectives across regions; 3) response bias, where some KII and mixed survey participants can overstate or understate certain topics and information relevant for the assessment, which the team mitigated by ensuring respondents understood that their unbiased opinions are most appreciated and emphasizing the confidentiality of any information they provide. For more detailed information on assessment design see Annex II.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Nigeria is one of the largest economies in Africa, but poverty remains rampant, especially in the North. Corruption at various levels of government prevents equitable distribution of resources resulting in wealth being concentrated among social and political elites, while vast segments of the population lack access to basic services like education and healthcare, leading to resentment and violence. Over the past

four years, Nigeria has faced a complex and interconnected web of conflict and violence, characterized by eight prevalent national and regional conflict dynamics. These include banditry and kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts, land disputes, cultism, political violence, insurgency and terrorism, resource control disputes, and separatists agitation as discussed below. Each of these issues are interlinked and contribute to overall instability in the country. While certain dynamics remain prevalent in certain regions, some conflict dynamics are spreading across regions.

DYNAMIC 1: BANDITRY AND KIDNAPPING

Banditry and kidnapping were identified as the leading violence and conflict dynamics, and a major national security challenge by both KII and mixed-survey respondents, with the North West as the epicenter. Banditry and kidnapping is a widespread issue across Nigeria, targeting civilians nationwide. However, they are most acute in the North West region, particularly in Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina states where these crimes have reached critical levels, surpassing terrorism in scale, frequency, and complexity. Kidnapping for ransom is the most prevalent, driven by the potential for quick financial gain.

Findings indicate major drivers of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria include: 1) the high rate of youth unemployment that creates a pool of disillusioned and financially desperate youths, who may resort to criminal activities as a means of survival, 2) the widespread poverty and high inflationary pressures exacerbating economic hardships and driving individuals towards criminal activities like banditry and kidnapping as a means of survival, 3) proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) creating easy access to tools used in conflicts and acts of violence, and 4) poor governance in the security sector that has resulted in weak law enforcement institutions that lack the capacity, resources, and training to effectively combat banditry. Civilian self-defense and vigilante groups, as well as government security agencies were highlighted by both mixed-survey and KII respondents as key actors in mitigating banditry and kidnapping across the country.

Findings from KIIs and mixed-survey responses indicate an increase in banditry and kidnapping in the past four years especially in the North West but has also spread to other regions in the South. Bandits in the North West have become more emboldened to attack military bases, as well as engaging in cattle rustling. The economic downturn has exacerbated poverty levels across the country leading unemployed youths to engage in criminal activities like kidnapping for ransom to survive. Without significant improvements in governance, law enforcement, and economic conditions, banditry and kidnapping is likely to worsen, potentially spreading to even more regions and destabilizing broader areas of the country.

DYNAMIC 2: FARMER-HERDER CONFLICT

Farmer-herder conflict remains prevalent in the North Central region of the country, particularly in Benue and Plateau states. Farmer-herder conflict is also becoming prevalent in some communities in Kano state in the North Western region. In Southeast Nigeria, tensions related to herder-farmer conflicts are a relatively recent issue impacting farming communities and food hubs in various states: Enugu (e.g., Adani, Nimbo), Ebonyi (e.g., Izzi, Ikwo), Anambra (e.g., Igbariam, Ebenebe), Imo (e.g., Ohaji-Egbema), and Abia (e.g., Isuochi, Ngwa). Without effective mitigation, the situation is likely to worsen, jeopardizing food security, intensifying existing religious tensions. The farmer-herder conflict is an

intractable issue in Nigeria, marked by violent clashes between agricultural communities and nomadic herders over land and resources. This long-standing struggle is exacerbated by: 1) Reduced grazing areas that are pushing herders southward into states such as Benue and Plateau for access to land and water resources, 2) population growth that has increased the demand for land, both for farming and grazing, and 3) the ethnic and religious differences exacerbating the tensions between the farmers and herders.

Traditional leaders were highlighted by KII and mixed-survey respondents as playing a role as mediators in mitigating the farmer-herder conflicts. Civilian self-defense and vigilante groups like the Amotekun in the South West and the Eastern Security Network in the South East have also emerged to mitigate the rising farmer-herder conflict by providing security and deterring herders from destroying farmlands in rural areas where clashes between herders and farmers are common. KII and mixed-survey respondents indicate that in recent years, the conflict has become more militarized, with both farmers and herders increasingly arming themselves with SAWL in response to perceived threats and insecurity. As climate change worsens, migration patterns shift and population pressures increase, competition for land and water resources is likely to increase in intensity and spread.

DYNAMIC 3: LAND DISPUTES

Land disputes, especially in the North Central, South East and South West regions, have emerged as a recurrent conflict dynamic in Nigeria, increasingly characterized by violent clashes and legal battles over land ownership and usage. Recent trends show a rise in disputes driven by population growth, urban expansion, and changes in land use. Findings indicate that land disputes are mainly driven by: 1) lack of formally recognized land boundaries; 2) oil and mineral extraction that drive conflict over land rights, environmental degradation, and the distribution of revenues from natural resources; 3) poor governance leading to inefficiency and lack of transparency in Nigeria's land registry systems, often resulting in multiple registrations for the same parcel of land and leading to disputes; and 4) the coexistence of customary and statutory land tenure systems continues to create conflicts, especially in rural areas. Traditional leaders are noted by both KII and mixed-survey respondents to play a crucial role in resolving land disputes in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas where customary practices and local governance structures remain strong. As rural populations grow and move into urban centers, competition for land will continue to increase, and will lead to increase in disputes over ownership, boundaries, and land use.

DYNAMIC 4: CULTISM

Cultism and related violence are especially widespread in Nigeria's southern states, such as Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Anambra, Lagos, and Delta, where secret cult groups frequently engage in violent clashes between cult groups, criminal activities, and political manipulation. In the Nigerian context, "cultism" refers to the activities, both violent and nonviolent, associated with secret societies or fraternities, originally confined to university campuses but since the 1980s, began to proliferate beyond campuses, seeping into secondary schools and eventually extending to the streets. Cult groups engage in criminal activities including violent enforcement of loyalty, and crimes like extortion, drug trafficking, and illegal arms possession. Findings reveal that the problem of cultism in Nigeria has increased, affecting various societal sectors, including custodial centers and prisons. Secret cults now infiltrate schools, homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods, impacting everyone, including those without formal education.

KII and mixed-survey respondents highlighted the high level of youth unemployment and economic inequality as significantly contributing to the recruitment of young people into cult groups in Nigeria. With limited job prospects and pervasive economic hardship, many young individuals face a stark choice between enduring poverty or seeking alternative means of income and social status. The lure of financial gains and a perceived enhancement of social status makes cult membership a viable option for many young people who are otherwise marginalized and economically disadvantaged. Political actors were also identified as playing a role in exacerbating the issue of cultism in Nigeria as some politicians exploit cult members to intimidate political opponents and manipulate elections.

DYNAMIC 5: POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Since Nigeria's transition to civilian rule in 1999, the electoral system has remained highly contentious, with politicians often using violence to intimidate opponents or rig elections. Political violence is seasonal and prevalent across states during election periods with organized and widespread attacks on voters and political opponents, and popular agitations and contested outcomes. Political violence in Nigeria is localized and prevalent in select states during election periods, with a notable high incidence of political thuggery. Political thuggery has become a pervasive issue, significantly impacting integrity of affected elections and democratic principles broadly. This phenomenon involves organized groups or individuals engaging in violence, intimidation, and coercion to influence election outcomes and suppress opposition. Thugs, often linked to political parties or local leaders, are known for attacking polling stations, intimidating voters, and clashing with rival factions.

Findings indicated root causes of political violence in Nigeria to include: 1) political factionalism that motivates political actors to resort to any means necessary to win elections, and 2) high youth unemployment that creates a pool of disaffected youths who are more likely to engage in or be coerced into violent political activities with promises of short term financial gain, future power, wealth, or political appointments. Political violence during Nigeria's national elections from 2015 to 2023 showed a persistent trend, with each election cycle witnessing significant violence despite efforts by the government and civil society to promote peaceful elections. The recurring violence underscores the deep-rooted challenges Nigeria faces in consolidating its democracy, including issues related to governance, the integrity of electoral processes, and the role of security forces in elections.

DYNAMIC 6: INSURGENCY AND TERRORISM

Since 2023, insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria have shown a slight decline, yet they remain significant concerns, particularly in Borno State in the North East region. Extremist groups such as Boko Haram, its splinter group the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and Jama'atu Ansarul Islam (JAS) continue their violent activities despite increasing defections, internal divisions, and ongoing counter-terrorism efforts by Nigerian security forces and the Multinational Joint Task Force. Notably, new extremist groups such as JAS have emerged in previously less affected areas, including parts of the North West, indicating a troubling expansion of terrorist footprints.

Findings from KII and mixed survey responses as well as secondary sources, highlight factors such as: 1) high youth unemployment leaving disaffected and financially struggling youths, facing limited job prospects and a lack of meaningful engagement, increasingly vulnerable to radicalization, 2) lack of education leaving people more susceptible to extremist ideologies, and 3) porous international borders

that have facilitated the infiltration of armed groups and criminal networks. Civilian self-defense and vigilante groups like the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and government security forces were highlighted as playing a significant and complex role in combating Boko Haram insurgency in the North East region. Religious leaders were also identified as mitigating insurgency through their messages of peace and tolerance, but some leaders have also been found to exacerbate conflict through propagation of extremist ideologies.

While there has been a decline in the prevalence of insurgency in the North East, insurgents have become increasingly active in the North West. As military anti-insurgency operations intensified in the North East, particularly in Borno State, some Boko Haram and ISWAP militants began migrating to other parts of Nigeria, including the North West. This movement was driven by the need to evade military pressure and find new areas to operate. Insurgent groups like Ansaru, Boko Haram and ISWAP have reportedly established links with local bandit groups in the North West. These collaborations are often transactional, involving exchanges of weapons, training, and logistical support.

DYNAMIC 7: RESOURCE CONTROL CONFLICT

Resource control conflicts are most acute in states with significant natural resources, such as the oil-producing South South states of Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, and Akwa Ibom, as well as the mineral-rich North Central states like Plateau and Nasarawa and North East states such as Borno and Yobe, where disputes center around control and distribution of resources like oil, tin, and limestone. Resource control conflicts in Nigeria are especially intense in the South-South states, which are rich in oil reserves, and in the Northwest, where gold-mining-related conflicts have been reported in Zamfara.

Findings from KII and mixed-survey responses indicate drivers of resource control conflicts including: 1) resource control competition as government, private corporations, host communities and other stakeholders demand for greater control and a fairer share of resource revenues; 2) the environmental degradation caused by oil exploration that has had devastating effects on the livelihoods of the Niger Delta communities; 3) bad governance that has resulted in persistent underdevelopment, environmental degradation, and social unrest; and 4) perceived inequitable resource distribution that fuels the belief that host communities do not get a fair share of the resources derived from the resources in their communities.

Armed groups and militant organizations have used various forms of resistance, including oil bunkering, sabotage of oil infrastructure, kidnapping of oil workers, and attacks on security forces, as ways to draw attention to the grievances of the local population and to demand greater control over the region's resources. Government security agencies were also highlighted by mixed-survey and KII respondents as playing a critical role in combating illegal activities such as oil theft (bunkering), kidnapping, and armed robbery, which are often linked to militant groups. The resurgence of groups like the Niger Delta Avengers in recent years is indicative of the unresolved grievances in the region and the ongoing struggle for equitable resource control. Hence, achieving lasting peace and stability in the region will require addressing the underlying socio-economic and environmental issues.

DYNAMIC 8: SEPARATIST AGITATION

Separatist agitations in Nigeria reflect a growing desire among certain ethnic groups and regions for greater autonomy or independence from the central government. The most prominent example of this

is the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which advocates for the secession of the South Eastern region. IPOB's agitation has intensified in recent years, leading to frequent clashes with security forces and raising concerns about potential escalation into wider violence.

Findings from KII and mixed-survey responses as well as secondary sources, highlight factors such as the historical grievances that led to the Nigerian civil war, including perceived political and economic marginalization; and the underdevelopment of the South East, have persisted, fueling modern-day separatist sentiments. The desire for resource control is also driving separatist agitations in the Niger Delta region led by groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). The Nigerian government has adopted a hardline stance against IPOB, characterized by military and police operations aimed at suppressing the group's activities.

IMPACT OF CONFLICT

Violence and conflicts profoundly impact local communities, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups such as women, youths, persons with disabilities, and displaced populations. Women often face increased gender-based violence and exploitation such as forced labor when they emerge as breadwinners having lost their caretakers to violent conflict, while youths may be coerced into armed groups or suffer from disrupted education and economic opportunities. Persons with disabilities experience heightened isolation and difficulty accessing aid and services, exacerbating their marginalization. Displaced populations, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), face severe challenges such as loss of livelihoods, inadequate shelter, and limited access to essential services, further compounding their vulnerability.

Mental health is perhaps the most severe impact of conflict and violence with cross- generational implications for the conflict cycle. Exposure to violence and conflict has profound impacts on individuals' mental health, often resulting in severe trauma that manifests as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Those who have experienced violence may suffer from persistent fear, flashbacks, and emotional numbness, which impairs their daily functioning and relationships. The trauma has also affected the cognitive development of children and adolescents, hindering their educational and social growth. Additionally, the pervasive sense of instability and insecurity can lead to long-term psychological scars, contributing to ongoing mental health challenges, social issues, and a propensity for substance abuse and violent coping mechanisms, thereby perpetuating a cycle of violence. The lack of people-centered justice mechanisms further exacerbates psychosocial trauma among victims, leading to persistent mental health issues that contribute to ongoing cycles of violence and conflict.

Boys and men affected by violence and insecurity often experience severe emotional trauma, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, as they grapple with the constant threat of violence and instability. Socially, they may face diminished roles within their communities, loss of social status, and increased pressure to conform to aggressive or violent norms. Additionally, the breakdown of traditional support structures and increased economic hardship can lead to a sense of helplessness and frustration, further impacting their mental health, social well-being and susceptibility to drug abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PEARL shared its preliminary findings, conclusions, and recommendations with USAID and USG in a hybrid workshop on August 8, 2024. During the workshop, participants reviewed the findings and

conclusions, providing feedback to validate and expand upon PEARL's analysis. They also assessed the proposed recommendations for relevance and feasibility, adding additional suggestions based on the assessment findings. Below are the jointly developed, evidence-based recommendations for USAID and its implementing partners (IPs).

1. Incorporation of holistic youth development programs into the Mission activities to effectively break the cycle of violence.
2. Strengthen formal and informal education programming to prevent and respond to conflict and violence.
3. Increase focus on mental health within health and other programs to address trauma caused by exposure to conflict and violence.
4. Implement programs targeting violence prevention during election seasons to effectively mitigate political violence and instability.
5. Improve agriculture/livestock management programs targeted and localized to effectively address the root causes of farmer-herder conflicts across states and regions.
6. Enhance inclusive programming for persons with disabilities (PWDs), internally displaced persons (IDPs), and women is crucial for addressing conflict and violence in Nigeria as it ensures that marginalized groups have a voice and access to support. By integrating their needs and perspectives, these programs can create more effective and equitable solutions that address the root causes of conflict and promote sustainable peace.
7. Enhance early warning and response systems to break the cycle of conflict by enabling timely interventions that address emerging threats before they escalate, thereby reducing violence and fostering stability in affected communities.
8. Update procedures to ensure that conflict sensitivity is integrated into all Mission programming.
9. Targeted governance support programming is essential to restore trust in public institutions and enhance their capacity to address critical challenges effectively.

In conclusion, the complex and multifaceted conflicts in Nigeria are deeply rooted in socio-economic, political, and environmental issues that have perpetuated cycles of violence and instability. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that focuses on improving governance, enhancing educational opportunities, and fostering economic development while ensuring that marginalized communities, including women and youth, are actively involved in the peacebuilding process. By implementing evidence-based recommendations tailored to the specific needs of affected regions, stakeholders can work towards a more peaceful and equitable Nigeria, breaking the cycle of conflict and promoting sustainable development for all.

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings and conclusions presented in this section are organized around the six key lines of inquiry pursued throughout the assessment. Data was triangulated from a large-scale mixed-survey, Key Informant Interviews (KIs), and an extensive desk study. To provide a comprehensive backdrop, it begins with an overview of the critical conflict dynamics identified by respondents, then methodically examines the underlying drivers, key actors, conflict hotspots, emerging trends, impacts, and broader development implications. This structure ensures a nuanced and thorough exploration of the conflict landscape, offering valuable insights grounded in diverse perspectives and sources.

KEY CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN NIGERIA'S EVOLVING CONFLICT LANDSCAPE

Nigeria is one of the largest economies in Africa, but poverty remains rampant, especially in the North. Corruption at various levels of government prevents equitable distribution of resources resulting in wealth being concentrated among political elites, while vast segments of the population lack access to basic services like education and healthcare, leading to resentment and violence. Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups, with the three largest being the Hausa-Fulani predominantly in the North, Yoruba predominantly in the South West, and Igbo predominantly in the South East. Historical grievances related to dominance, marginalization, and competition for resources have contributed to or exacerbated violence. Nigeria is also divided along religious lines with the North predominantly Muslim, while the South is largely Christian.

The findings reveal that Nigeria has faced a complex and interconnected web of conflict and violence,¹ characterized by eight common types observed both nationally and within different regions. These include banditry and kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts, land disputes, cultism, political violence, insurgency and terrorism, resource control disputes, ethnic and communal clashes, separatists' agitation, and popular protest as illustrated in **Figure 1** below. Each of these types are interlinked and contribute to the overall instability in the country.

While certain dynamics are limited to specific regions, some conflict dynamics are spreading to new areas. For example, the North West has seen a significant surge in banditry and kidnapping, while insurgencies remain prevalent in the North East (See **Figure 2** below). The North Central region faces escalating farmer-herder conflicts which are spreading to the South East and South West deepening regional tensions. The Southern regions contend with rising organized crime and cultism, which is fast spreading into some parts of the North. The South East struggles with persistent separatist movements while the South-South region deals with militancy, oil bunkering, and environmental degradation, exacerbating social and economic inequalities. Additionally, political thuggery intensifies during elections,

¹ Adetula, Victor A.O., "Understanding the Complexities of Conflict in Nigeria: Integrating Local Dynamics in Peacebuilding Strategies," *African Peace Review*, 29, no. 3 (2022): 185-203; Ikelegbe, Augustine, and Ehiakhamen Edosa. "Violence, Insecurity, and the State in Nigeria: Toward a Political Economy of the Fourth Republic." *African Affairs* 120, no. 479 (2021): 175-199

land and resource disputes remain widespread, and there has been an unprecedented rise in popular movements, civil disobedience, and nationwide protests.

Figure 1: Number of mixed-survey respondents that reported each conflict types in their community

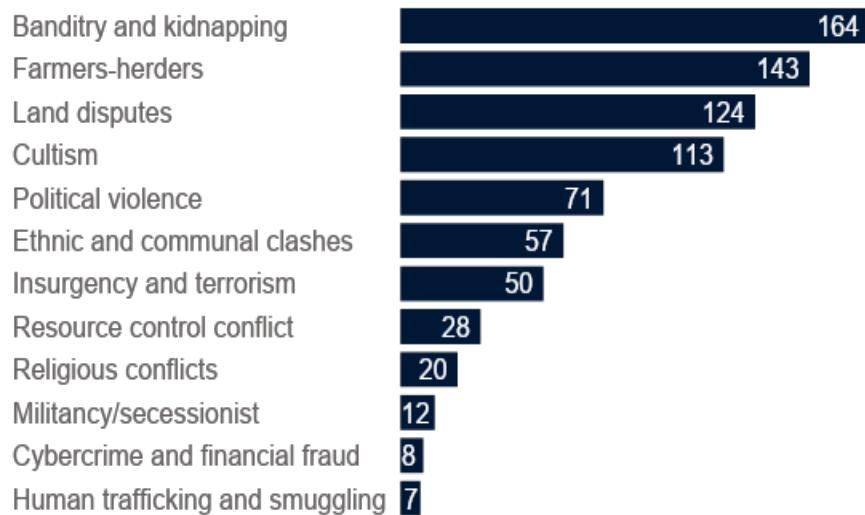
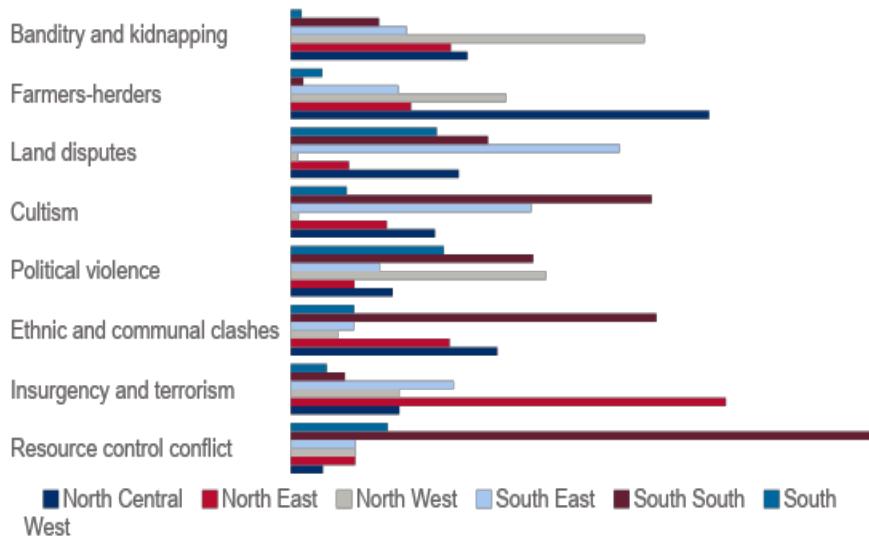


Figure 2: Number of mixed-survey respondents that reported each conflict type in their community by region



DYNAMIC I: BANDITRY AND KIDNAPPING

Headline: Banditry and kidnapping are widespread issues across Nigeria, targeting civilians nationwide. However, they are most acute in the North-West region, particularly in Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, and Kebbi states where these crimes have reached critical levels, surpassing terrorism in scale, frequency, and complexity.

All KII respondents identified kidnapping and banditry as the leading violence and conflict dynamics, and a major national security challenge, with the North West as the epicenter. According to a KII respondent, “...what is happening in the North West now is banditry, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling with some element of farmer-herder conflict. But mostly, the most present problem is the bandits.”

This finding is consistent with results from the mixed survey, where 164 respondents ranked these types as the most critical (See **Figure 1**). This further aligns with existing literature, which describes the phenomenon as an “epidemic.”² Both mass abductions and individual kidnappings have surged. For example, in the North West, three major mass abductions occurred within a single week in March 2024: 287 pupils were kidnapped from a school in Chikun, Kaduna on March 7; 15 children were taken from an Islamic school in Sokoto on March 9; and 61 people were abducted in Kajuru, Kaduna on March 12. In the North East, Boko Haram-related abductions have also been reported, including an incident on February 29, where suspected members of the group kidnapped at least 200 people, mostly women and children, in Borno State.³

As illustrated in **Figure 3**, 98 percent of mixed survey respondents in Sokoto State indicated banditry and kidnapping as a key issue in their communities, while 34 percent indicated the same in Kaduna State. Both Sokoto and Kaduna states are located in the North West region. In certain instances, bandit groups have collaborated with terrorist organizations like Ansaru, amplifying the scale and impact of their operations.

Recognizing this dangerous synergy, the government, following a recent report⁴ by the Goodluck Foundation, “has officially labeled bandits as terrorists.” (KII Respondent). This designation not only underscores the severity of the threat but also implies a shift in the government's approach, potentially

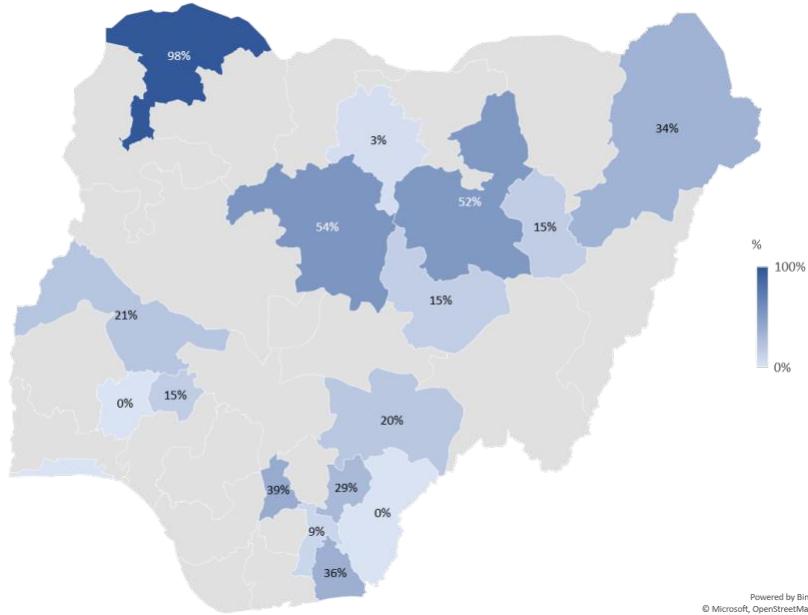
² Abdulrasheed, Ado. "The Rising Tide of Armed Banditry in Nigeria: An Epidemic." *African Security Review* 30, no. 1 (2022): 17-33; and Okoli, Al Chukwuma, and Ifeanyi Eze. "Banditry and Crisis of Public Safety in Northern Nigeria: Issues in National Security Strategies." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 59, no. 2 (2021): 145-164.

³ International Crisis Group, Nigeria: Surges in Kidnapping, Abductions – A Call for Action, March 2024.

⁴ Goodluck Jonathan Foundation (GJF) (2021). Study—Terrorism and Banditry in Nigeria: The Nexus. Kaduna, Katsina, Niger and Zamfara States Context.

leading to more aggressive countermeasures and stricter legal repercussions against these groups. (“We labeled them terrorists … we are going to deal with them as such.” Buhari, 2022.⁵)

Figure 3: Percentage of mixed-survey respondents that reported banditry and kidnapping in their community by state



Survey question: What kind of disputes, conflicts, or violent incidents has your community experienced in the last 12 months?

In terms of forms, kidnapping for ransom is the most prevalent, driven by the potential for quick financial gain. Criminals often target individuals from wealthy or influential families, demanding large sums of money for their release. In states like Kaduna and Zamfara, bandits frequently kidnap villagers, travelers, and schoolchildren, with ransoms ranging from thousands to millions of naira. High-profile cases include the 2021 kidnapping of 344 schoolboys in Kankara, Katsina State, where a significant ransom was reportedly paid for their release. This pervasive crime has become a lucrative industry for both organized criminal gangs and opportunistic kidnappers across the country with significant implication for peace and stability.⁶ Other forms of kidnapping identified by respondents include political

⁵ Aljazeera, Nigeria labels bandit gangs ‘terrorists’ in bid to stem violence. January 06, 2022.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/6/nigeria-labels-bandit-gangs-terrorists-in-bid-to-stem-violence>

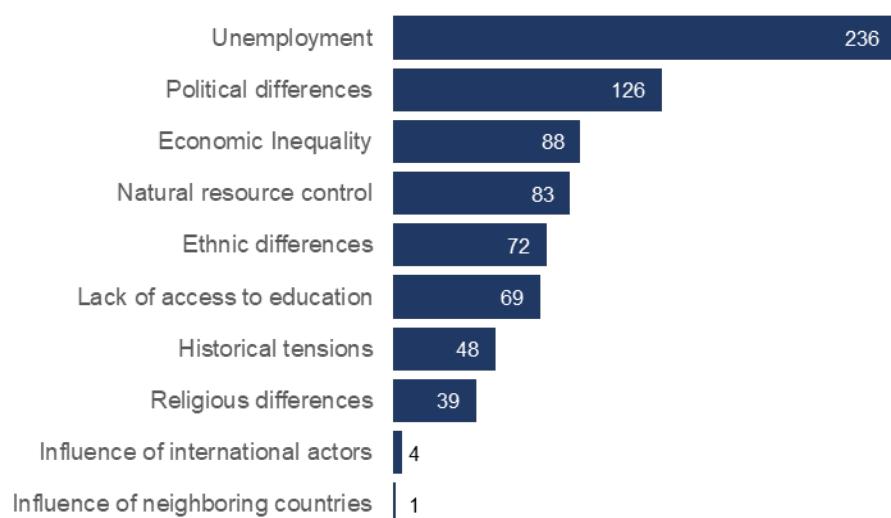
⁶ Adebayo, A. (2021, December 17). "The Impact of Kidnapping on Peace and Stability in Nigeria." Vanguard News. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/>; Akinyemi, A. (2021, December 14). "Kidnapping for Ransom: The New Criminal Enterprise in Nigeria." The Guardian Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://guardian.ng/>; Oladipo, J. (2021, March 1). "The Crisis of Kidnapping in Northern Nigeria: Banditry and Ransom." Premium Times. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/>; Adebayo, A. (2021, December 17). "The Impact of Kidnapping on Peace and Stability in Nigeria." Vanguard News. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/>.

kidnapping, used to intimidate or silence opponents and disrupt political activities; revenge or retaliation kidnapping driven by personal vendettas; human trafficking-related kidnapping, where victims are abducted for forced labor, sexual exploitation, or slavery; and kidnapping for forced marriage, particularly in Northern Nigeria, where young girls and women are abducted and forced into marriages, often with members of insurgent groups.⁷

ROOT CAUSES/DRIVERS

Like some scholars,⁸ Youth unemployment was identified by 42 out of 64 KII respondents and was the most highlighted factor among the mixed survey respondents as a leading root cause of conflict and violence as shown in **Figure 4**. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the unemployment rate among youth aged 15-24 in Nigeria rose to 8.6 percent in the third quarter of 2023, up from 7.2 percent in the second quarter and 6.9 percent in the first quarter of 2023.

Figure 4: Number of mixed-survey respondents that reported each conflict driver



⁷ Akinyemi, A. (2021, December 14). "Kidnapping for Ransom: The New Criminal Enterprise in Nigeria." The Guardian Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://guardian.ng>; Oladipo, J. (2021, March 1). "The Crisis of Kidnapping in Northern Nigeria: Banditry and Ransom." Premium Times. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com>; Adebayo, A. (2021, December 17). "The Impact of Kidnapping on Peace and Stability in Nigeria." Vanguard News. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com>.

⁸ Okon, Emmanuel, and Olatunji Alao. "Youth Unemployment and Conflict in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis." *Journal of African Security* 16, no. 3 (2023): 278-293; Adeoye, Michael, and Fatima Ibrahim. "Youth Unemployment and Its Impact on Security in Nigeria: A Study of the North-East Region." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 41, no. 2 (2023): 215-231.

Unemployment is a critical driver of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions. High unemployment levels create a pool of disillusioned and financially desperate individuals, especially among youths, who may resort to criminal activities as a means of survival.⁹ For instance, in the North West region, where the unemployment rate is alarmingly high at 41.5 percent according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) for 2023, bandit groups have expanded their presence. The lack of legitimate economic opportunities enables them to more easily recruit and sustain their operations, further driving the proliferation of banditry and kidnapping as individuals seek alternative sources of income. For example, a mixed-survey respondent explained, “*Joblessness exacerbates conflict, as unemployed individuals may resort to illicit activities for financial gain, such as kidnapping for ransom where informants receive a cut. Employment opportunities would reduce such engagements.*”

With a median age of 18 years and 70 percent of the population under the age of 30 years, Nigeria is among countries with the largest population of youths in the world.¹⁰ *For instance, if 70 percent to 80 percent of the youth are employed, it will significantly reduce the occurrence of conflicts because gainful employment decreases conflict rates*” (Mixed-survey respondent)

Poverty in Nigeria is multidimensional, encompassing not only income deprivation but also deficiencies in education, health, living standards, and access to justice and basic services.¹¹ This broader perspective shows how interconnected deprivations in these areas create a cycle of poverty, exacerbating challenges and contributing to ongoing economic and social instability.¹² Thirty-one out of 64 KII respondents highlighted poverty and inflation as significant root causes of conflict, violence, and social unrest in Nigeria, as they exacerbate economic instability and heighten social tensions.

The 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) survey indicates that 63% of Nigeria's population, or 133 million people, are multidimensionally poor, with a National MPI of 0.257 reflecting significant deprivations experienced by the poor. Of those living in poverty, 65% are in the North and 35% in the South, with state-level poverty rates ranging from 27% in Ondo to a staggering 91% in Sokoto.¹³ As of 2023, over 63 percent of Nigerians (nearly two thirds of the population) were living below the poverty line, with inflation rates reaching 34.2 percent in June 2024, up from 24.1 percent in 2023, further

⁹ UNDP. (2021). *National Human Development Report 2021: Nigeria*. United Nations Development Programme.

¹⁰ Nigerian Bureau of Statistics. "Demographic and Social Statistics Report, 2024." Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/>; World Bank. "Nigeria's Youth Demographics: Challenges and Opportunities." World Bank, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/>; TechCabal. "Unlocking the Potential of Nigeria's Booming Youth Population." TechCabal, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.techcabal.com>

¹¹ Akinyetun, T. S. (2022). *Multidimensional Poverty in Nigeria*. In A. Farazmand (Ed.), *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance* (pp. 1-6). Springer, Cham.

¹² Nogales, R., & Oldiges, C. (2024). Multidimensional poverty and conflict events in Nigeria over time. *International Political Science Review*, 45(1), 53-80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01925121231177441> ;

¹³ National Bureau of Statistics. (2022, November 17). Nigeria launches its most extensive national measure of multidimensional poverty [Press release]. Abuja. <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/news/78>

eroding the purchasing power of already struggling households.¹⁴ Persistent poverty creates a backdrop of frustration and disenfranchisement, especially in marginalized communities where access to basic needs and services is severely limited. High inflation compounds these issues, leading to increased hardship and dissatisfaction as the cost-of-living soars. For instance, the rising cost of food and fuel has strained household budgets, prompting widespread protests and unrest as people struggle to afford basic necessities.

In regions like the North East and North West, where poverty rates are estimated at 79.4 percent and 86.8 percent in rural areas, these economic pressures have intensified conflicts and driven individuals towards criminal activities like banditry and kidnapping as a means of survival. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) has been linked to the surge in the prevalence of banditry and kidnapping, heightening its risk, likelihood, and intensity.¹⁵

KEY ACTORS AND THEIR ROLE

Bandits and Unidentified Armed Men: Armed Banditry has been previously highlighted as very prevalent in the North Western region. Armed bandit groups, represent a complex network of rural gangs engaged in various criminal activities, including armed robbery and kidnapping.¹⁶ While these leaders are recognized for their criminal undertakings, the underlying motivations and dynamics of their operations are less understood. Their activities are driven by a mix of financial gain, power struggles, resource control, and a desire for revenge or retribution, particularly against the government, which they perceive as having neglected their communities.¹⁷ Findings from KIIs and mixed survey responses indicate an increase in banditry and kidnapping in the past four years especially in the North West but has also spread to other regions in the South. Bandits in the North West have become more emboldened to attack military bases, as well as engaging in cattle rustling. The increase in the prevalence of banditry and kidnapping is linked to the economic downturn as unemployed youths seek alternative routes for survival. According to a mixed-survey respondent,

“Conflicts over the past four years [have] increased. And to me, I believe the reason it increased is because of poverty and unemployment. Because of the young people we have there, killing, kidnapping and whatever name you give them, they are less busy. They are not employed. They need to survive. So,

¹⁴ World Bank. (2024). *Nigeria Economic Update: Addressing the Impact of Rising Inflation and Poverty*. World Bank, June 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org>.

¹⁵ Edeko, S. E. (2023). The Impact of Small Arms and Light Weapons on Insecurity in Nigeria: A Focus on Banditry and Kidnapping. *Journal of Security Studies*, 15(3), 210-225.

¹⁶ Ilyu, A. K. (2023). Understanding the Dynamics of Banditry in Northern Nigeria: A Comprehensive Review. *African Security Review*, 32(2), 88-112

¹⁷ Decker, S. H., & van Houten, R. (2022). The Bandit Economy: Criminal Violence and the State in Nigeria. *Journal of African Studies*, 58(1), 45-67.

I think poverty and unemployment has caused a lot of insecurity or has increased the level of insecurity and conflict in Nigeria.”

If current trends continue, banditry and kidnapping may worsen, potentially spreading to even more regions and destabilizing broader areas of the country. Without significant improvements in governance, law enforcement, and economic conditions, these crimes could further entrench themselves as chronic issues in Nigerian society.

DYNAMIC 2: FARMER-HERDER CONFLICT

Headline: Farmer-herder conflict remains prevalent in the North Central region of the country, particularly in Benue and Plateau states. Farmer-herder conflict is also becoming prevalent in some communities in Kano state in the North Western region.

The farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria is a protracted and violent struggle primarily over land use between two distinct groups: farmers and nomadic or semi-nomadic herders. This conflict, which has escalated significantly in recent years, is driven by a complex interplay of environmental and socioeconomic factors.¹⁸

ROOT CAUSES/DRIVERS

Environmental Factors: The Sahel region, where many herders traditionally graze their cattle, has been increasingly affected by desertification and rising temperatures – five times more than the global average.¹⁹ Climate change has exacerbated this by reducing the availability of water and fertile grazing lands in the northern regions, pushing herders to migrate southward into states such as Benue and Plateau for access to land and water resources. This migration often brings them into conflict with sedentary farmers. For example, a KII respondent noted, “*Farmer-Herder conflicts persists in North Central with persistent clashes between farmers and herders over land use, exacerbated by climate change and desertification, leading to competition for dwindling resources.*”

Ethnic and Religious Dimensions: The conflict often has an ethnic and religious overlay, as many of the herders are Fulani, who are predominantly Muslim, while the farmers in central and southern Nigeria are often from various ethnic groups and are predominantly Christian.²⁰ These differences can

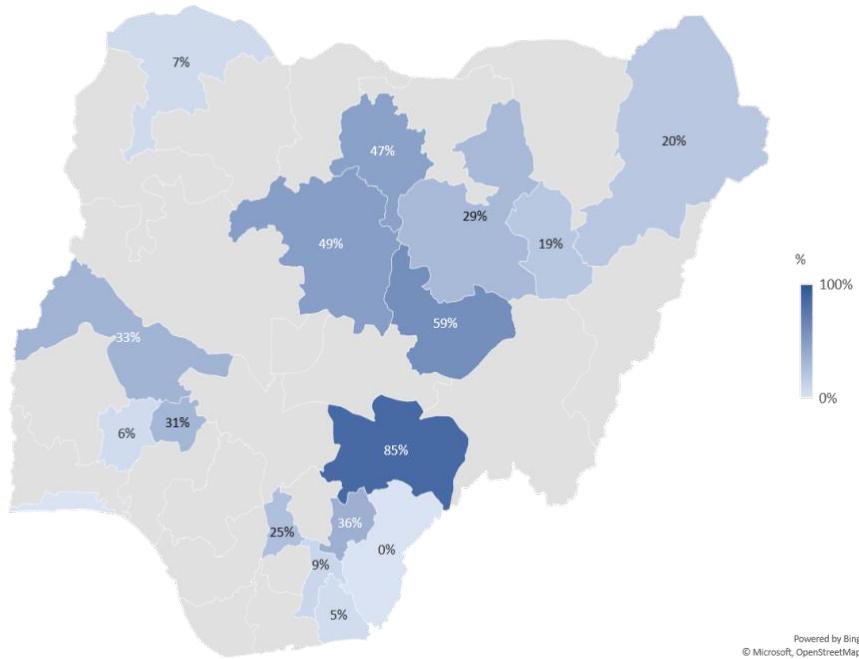
¹⁸ Olukolade, M. (2023). *The Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria: Dynamics, Impacts, and Solutions*. *Journal of Peace Research*, 60(2), 143-158.; Tadesse, T., & Keil, S. (2020). Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Nigeria: A Review of the Causes and Consequences. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 20(4), 315-338.

¹⁹ Vera, M., & Smit, B. (2023). Desertification and Climate Change in the Sahel: Analyzing the Impacts and Adaptation Strategies. *Global Environmental Change*, 78, 102581.; Harris, I., Jones, P. D., Osborn, T. J., & Lister, D. H. (2022). The Impacts of Climate Change in the Sahel: Temperature Increases and Regional Implications. *Environmental Research Letters*, 17(6), 064027

²⁰ Nigerian Human Rights Commission. (2022). *Ethnic and Religious Dimensions of the Farmer-Herder Conflict in Nigeria*. *Human Rights Report*. <https://www.nhrc.gov.ng/ethnic-religious-dimensions-farmer-herder-conflict-nigeria>

exacerbate tensions and contribute to the conflict being perceived as ethnic or religious rather than purely economic. Recent statistics show the severity of the conflict: in 2023 alone, over 2,000 people were killed and thousands more displaced. Violent confrontations between ethnic groups such as the Tiv and Fulani in Benue and the Mambilla Plateau in Taraba resulted in the destruction of over 200 villages and significant agricultural losses.²¹

Figure 5: Percentage of mixed-survey respondents that reported farmer-herder conflict in their community by state



Survey question: What kind of disputes, conflicts, or violent incidents has your community experienced in the last 12 months?

Additionally, some criminals from neighboring communities/countries (like Benin and Niger) have infiltrated the area, causing havoc, and sometimes being wrongly blamed on herders. This conflict is further complicated by ethnic and religious differences, which have led to its being framed in terms of identity and ethnic division. For example, according to one KII respondent, “...I think in the North Central, it’s identity, there is identity across farmers and herders. But at the same time, the farmers are mostly Christian while the herders are mostly Muslims. So there’s the economic division but it also aligns with ethnic and religious

²¹ International Crisis Group. (2023). *Nigeria: The Unfolding Crisis in the Middle Belt*. Crisis Group Africa Report No. 317. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/317-nigeria-unfolding-crisis-middle-belt>

division.” However, at its core, the conflict is fundamentally about growing resource scarcity and the poor management of shared resources.²²

Population Growth: Nigeria’s rapidly growing population has increased the demand for land, both for farming and grazing. This heightened competition for increasingly scarce resources has fueled conflicts between farmers, who need land for crops, and herders, who need land for their livestock.

This perspective is supported by secondary data, which describes the farmer-herder conflict as a “mediatized conflict.”²³ Kolawole et al. (2024), for instance, examine how Nigerian media shape the framing of the conflict, particularly through ethnicity and cultural identity. Their findings reveal that media coverage has often undermined peace efforts by emphasizing the cultural traits of herders, portraying them as aggressive in pursuing environmental and economic goals. This framing, whether intentional or not, has contributed to the conflict’s escalation. Aja et al. (2022) analyze the coverage of herdsmen-farmer clashes in Plateau State by The Sun, The Guardian, and Punch from March 1, 2018, to January 30, 2019, revealing predominantly negative reports framed around criminality.²⁴ Odiegwu-Enwerem & Amodu (2020 also reveal that the North-South media divide in Nigeria influenced coverage, with southern-based newspapers more frequently framing the conflict as ‘herdsmen-against-farmers,’ aligning with prevailing public perceptions in the 159 stories analyzed in the study.²⁵ Aljazeera describes the key actors and clashes as “mostly between Muslim Fulani herders and Christian farmers.”²⁶

The Nigerian government has attempted to address the conflict through various means, including proposing the establishment of grazing reserves and cattle ranches to reduce the need for migration. However, these proposals have met with resistance from both farmers and herders, who fear losing their land or way of life.

²² Phillips, E., Perkins, E., & Navarro, M. (2024, February 9). Don’t call it farmer-herder conflict. SAIS Review of International Affairs. <https://saisreview.sais.jhu.edu/dont-call-it-farmer-herder-conflict/>

²³ Kolawole, R.A., Ojebuyi, B.R. (2024). Mediatized Conflict: A Case of Nigerian Media Reportage of Farmer-Herder Conflict. In: Mlambo, O.B., Chitando, E. (eds) The Palgrave Handbook of Violence in Africa. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-40754-3_55; Kugbayi, O. (2024). Mass media reportage and herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria. Journal of Administrative Science, 21(1), 29-46. Available online at <http://jas.uitm.edu.my>

²⁴ Aja, S. U., Chukwu, J. N., Nwakpu, E. S., Ezema, V. O., & Taiwo, I. N. (2022). Conflicts and Nigeria media: A look at national newspapers’ coverage of herdsmen and farmers’ clashes. Media and Communication Currents, 16.

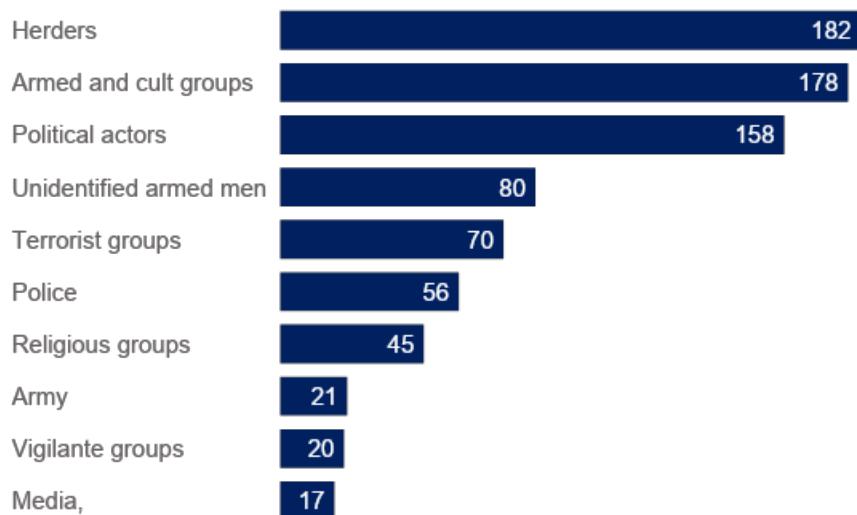
²⁵ Odiegwu-Enwerem, C., Oso, L., & Amodu, L. (2020). News sourcing, positioning and thematic focus: Examining newspaper portrayal of herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. Media Watch, 11(2), 281–295. <https://doi.org/10.15655/mw/2020/v11i2/195648>

²⁶ Olufemi, A. (2021, November 28). Horrors on the Plateau: Inside Nigeria’s farmer-herder conflict. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/11/28/horrors-on-the-plateau-inside-nigerias-farmer-herder-conflict>

KEY ACTORS AND THEIR ROLE

Herders and Farmers: Farmers and herders in Nigeria are central actors in the country's conflict landscape, with their interactions often marked by competition over land and resources (See **Figure 6**). In the North Central and North West regions, clashes frequently occur as herders migrate with their cattle in search of grazing land, leading to disputes with settled farmers over crop damage and land use.

Figure 6: Number of mixed-survey respondents that reported each group of conflict actor



This conflict is exacerbated by environmental pressures such as desertification and diminishing arable land, which intensify competition. In northern Nigeria, it is estimated that over 60 percent of the land area is at risk of desertification, reducing the available farmland by 25 percent over the past decade.²⁷ Farmers, who face significant economic losses due to cattle destruction, often resort to violence to protect their livelihoods. Conversely, herders, dealing with the loss of grazing grounds and water sources, are driven to assert control over traditional migration routes. The situation is further complicated by ethnic and religious dimensions, with both sides perceiving the other as encroaching on their territory. Historical grievances, including past conflicts and unresolved land disputes, also play a role in perpetuating tensions. This ongoing conflict not only disrupts agricultural production but also fuels broader regional instability and social unrest,

Traditional Leaders: Both KII and mixed-survey respondents indicate traditional community leaders through local community institutions play a pivotal role in conflict mitigation in Nigeria, often acting as mediators and influencers. This is especially important with conflict dynamics related to land disputes and other communal conflicts. For example, traditional rulers such as the have been instrumental in peacebuilding efforts, mediating between conflicting ethnic groups and promoting dialogue. A mixed-

²⁷ Adeoye, N. O., & Ayuba, H. K. (2023). Impact of Desertification on Agricultural Land Use in Northern Nigeria: Implications for Farmer-Herder Conflicts. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 327, 116795.

survey respondent noted, “...conflict has been able to be mitigated because of the grip of the traditional council on the people whereby they have a good interaction, and they know themselves very well so where there are issues they go in to resolve these issues.”

Civilian Self-defense Groups and Vigilantes: Vigilante groups were created to address the farmer-herder conflict by providing security in rural areas where clashes between herders and farmers are common. The outfits aim to prevent the destruction of farmlands by cattle and to mediate disputes between the farmers and herders.

TRENDS AND TRAJECTORY

KII and mixed-survey respondents indicate that in recent years, the conflict has become more militarized, with both farmers and herders increasingly arming themselves. The proliferation of small arms has exacerbated the violence, leading to more deadly and destructive clashes. Additionally, there has been a rise in the involvement of criminal elements who exploit the conflict to engage in cattle rustling, banditry, and kidnapping especially in the North West states like Sokoto and Zamfara.

Without effective intervention, the farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria is likely to continue escalating. As climate change worsens and population pressures increase, competition for land and water resources will intensify, potentially leading to more widespread and severe violence between farmers and herders in different Southern regions.

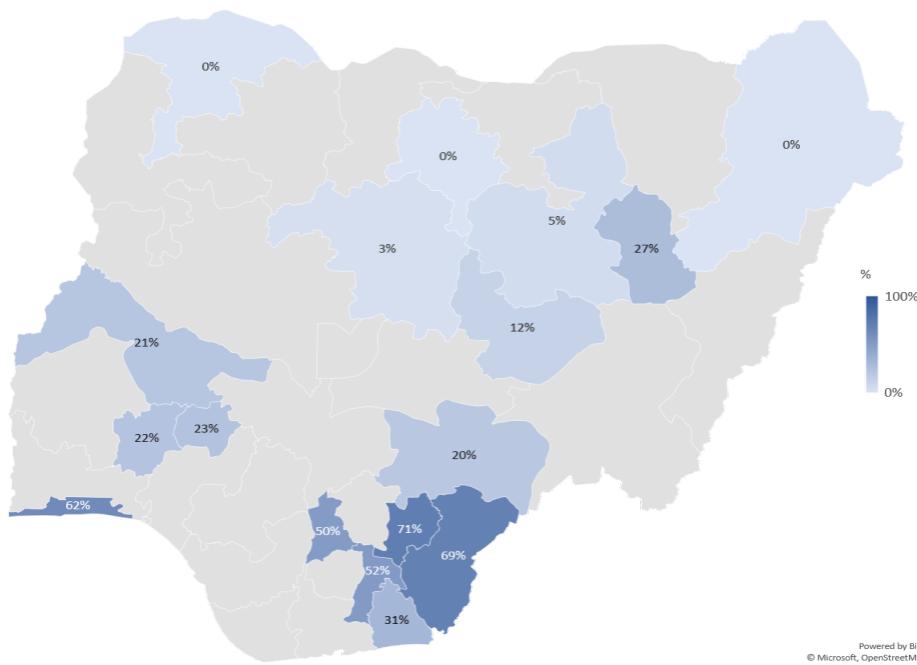
DYNAMIC 3: LAND DISPUTES

Headline: Land dispute dynamics, such as conflicts over land ownership/boundaries, resource allocation, and land use rights, vary widely based on local contexts, with such conflicts being particularly prevalent in the southern regions.

Land disputes have emerged as a recurrent conflict dynamic in Nigeria, increasingly characterized by violent clashes and legal battles over land ownership and usage. Recent trends show a rise in disputes driven by population growth, urban expansion, and changes in land use.²⁸ For example, in the Middle Belt region, particularly in Plateau and Nasarawa states, land conflicts between farming communities and pastoralists have intensified due to encroachment and competition for arable land. Similarly, in the South East, disputes over land inheritance and boundary demarcations have led to violent confrontations, notably in Anambra, Abia and Ebonyi states as illustrated by mixed survey respondents in **Figure 7** below.

²⁸ Bello-Schünemann, J., & Porter, A. (2023). Land Use Conflicts in Nigeria: The Role of Population Growth and Urban Expansion. *African Security Review*, 32(1), 50-67.; Oke, O. A., & Olaniyan, A. (2023). The Rise of Land Disputes in Nigeria: Legal Battles and Violent Clashes Over Ownership and Usage. *Journal of African Law*, 67(2), 245-263.

Figure 7: Percentage of mixed-survey respondents that reported land disputes in their community by state



Survey question: What kind of disputes, conflicts, or violent incidents has your community experienced in the last 12 months?

In the South South region, particularly in Akwa Ibom and Cross River states, land disputes often arise from conflicts between indigenous communities and government, or corporate interests involved in resource extraction and development projects. For instance, in Akwa Ibom, disputes have erupted between local communities and oil companies over land used for oil exploration, leading to violent protests and legal battles. In Lagos and Ogun states in the South West, urban expansion and real estate developments have triggered conflicts between local communities and developers.

"The driver here in Akwa Ibom is about ancestral ownership. It's not related to farmer-herder clashes. It's about the fact that lands here are basically family owned, families own lands here. Anybody trying to usurp those lands, it's like taking what belongs to their forefathers, ...those are the areas where you have the majority of those issues." (KII respondent)

In the North East, in Borno State, the displacement caused by insurgency has intensified land disputes among internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities.²⁹ According to a KII respondent, "...land is an issue, as I told you. If you come to the urban [areas], there are many people now in the host communities either looking for shelter themselves or looking for where to farm so we have some pockets of

²⁹ Ibrahim, J., & Hassan, M. (2023). Conflict and Displacement in Borno State: The Impact of Insurgency on Land Disputes Among IDPs and Host Communities. Journal of Peacebuilding & Development, 18(3), 302-318.

problems, where some will come and say this land belongs to them.” The return of displaced persons to their original lands also often leads to conflicts with those who have occupied the lands during their absence. Speaking on resettlement issues, a Maiduguri KII respondent pointed out that “The construction of new houses for returnees, sometimes in areas where traditional rulers had fled, adds layers of complexity to the resettlement process.”

ROOT CAUSES/DRIVERS

Lack of Formally Recognized Land Boundaries: In many parts of Nigeria, land is communally owned by extended families or clans. Disputes often arise within families or communities over inheritance, boundaries, or the sale of communal land. These disputes can be difficult to resolve due to the lack of formal documentation and the influence of traditional authorities.³⁰ Competing claims to land based on historical occupation or ancestral rights often exacerbate these tensions. As highlighted by a mixed-survey respondent, “*in these places there are fights in regard to community boundaries that are community border claims where it was given and assigned as part of that community and another community will not agree saying that since the time of their great grandparents it is part of their community and they are still fighting over it now.*”

Oil and Mineral Extraction: In the Niger Delta and other resource-rich areas, land disputes are often linked to oil and mineral extraction activities. Communities frequently clash with other communities, government agencies and corporations over land rights, environmental degradation, and the distribution of revenues from natural resources. A mixed-survey respondent said, “[*in a] nearby community, when they said they've now seen oil in the land and other people were saying that land is not theirs, that the boundary was somewhere else belongs to another community while the other community thought they were the owner of the land. Because of that, the thing brought about a lot of conflict.*”

Poor Governance: The inefficiency and lack of transparency in Nigeria’s land registry systems often result in multiple registrations for the same parcel of land, leading to disputes. Poor record-keeping and corruption further complicate land administration, making it difficult to resolve disputes effectively. Corruption within land administration offices, including bribery and manipulation of land records, is a significant cause of land disputes. Officials may issue fraudulent land titles or sell the same piece of land to multiple buyers, leading to protracted legal battles.³¹

Dual Legal Systems: The coexistence of customary and statutory land tenure systems continues to create conflicts, especially in rural areas. Customary landowners often find their rights undermined by statutory laws that do not fully recognize traditional land ownership patterns. This duality has led to an

³⁰ Akinola, R., & Ajayi, O. (2023). The Challenges of Land Ownership and Dispute Resolution in Nigeria: The Role of Communal Land Tenure and Traditional Authorities. *Journal of African Studies*, 59(2), 189-205.

³¹ Arowolo, D. (2017). *Corruption in Nigeria’s Land Administration: Causes and Solutions*. *Journal of Land and Rural Studies*, 5(1), 57-75.

increase in disputes, particularly as formal land markets expand into areas previously governed by customary law.³²

KEY ACTORS AND THEIR ROLE

Traditional Leaders: As in the case of farmer-herder conflict dynamic, both KII and mixed-survey respondents indicate traditional community leaders play a crucial role in resolving land disputes in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas where customary practices and local governance structures remain strong. Their involvement is often rooted in historical and cultural practices, and they act as mediators, arbitrators, and enforcers of traditional norms related to land ownership and use. Traditional leaders, such as chiefs, emirs, and obas, wield significant cultural and social influence within their communities. Their authority is derived from long standing traditions and the respect they command among local populations. This gives them a unique ability to mediate disputes in a way that is culturally sensitive and accepted by the parties involved.

TRENDS AND TRAJECTORY

While there is no evidence of increase or decrease of land disputes in the past four years, factors such as rapid urbanization and population growth pressures are likely to increase the incidence of land disputes especially in urban areas. Nigeria's large and growing population exerts significant pressure on land resources. As rural populations grow and move into urban centers, competition for land increases, and will lead to increase in disputes over ownership, boundaries, and land use.

DYNAMIC 4: CULTISM

Headline: Cultism and related violence are especially widespread in Nigeria's southern states, such as Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Anambra, Lagos, and Delta, where secret cult groups frequently engage in violent clashes, criminal activities, and political manipulation. These issues significantly affect educational institutions, communities, and national security, involving ritualistic initiations, violent enforcement of loyalty, and crimes like extortion, drug trafficking, and illegal arms possession.

In the Nigerian context, "cultism" refers to the activities, both violent and nonviolent, associated with secret societies or fraternities, originally confined to university campuses. Initially, these groups were formed and maintained primarily by students within higher education institutions. However, starting in the 1980s, this subculture began to proliferate beyond campuses, seeping into secondary schools and eventually extending to the streets. Since the late 1990s, this infiltration has caused cultism to become a pervasive and alarming issue, deeply ingrained in various levels of society and continuing to evolve over

³² Benjaminsen, T. A., Alinon, K., Buhaug, H., & Buseth, J. T. (2012). Does Climate Change Drive Land-Use Conflicts in the Sahel?. *Journal of Peace Research*, 49(1), 97-111.

time.³³ Data from the Nextier Violent Conflict Database (24, July 2023)³⁴ reveals that Rivers State tops the list of reported cult activities in the country.

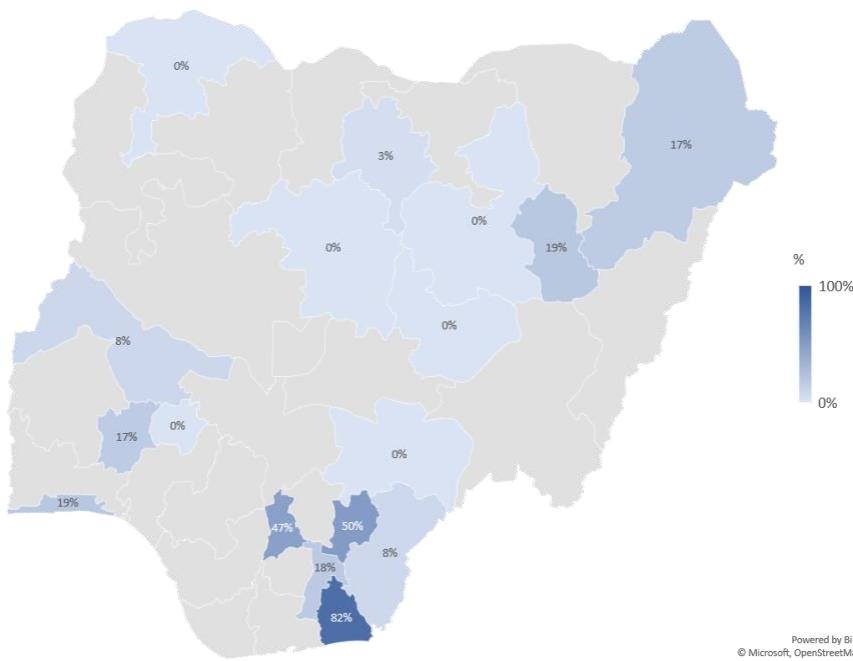
Findings reveal that the problem of secret cults in Nigeria has become increasingly pervasive and alarming, affecting various societal sectors, including custodial centers and prisons. Secret cults now infiltrate schools, homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods, impacting everyone, including those without formal education. Respondents have noted the widespread proliferation of cults across Nigeria's higher institutions, secondary schools, and even primary schools, with indiscriminate recruitment. This was reported the most in Akwa Ibom State in the South South by both KII and mixed-survey respondents. According to a KII respondent in Akwa Ibom,

"Cultism is prevalent in LGAs where you have higher institutions, much more than LGAs where you do not have higher institutions. But recently we're beginning to see a spike of cultism among some selected secondary schools, especially from the last administration where they had to even put a ceiling on the age that they can admit young people into secondary school in the state. So, cultism thrives in the higher institutions here."

³³ Oluwaseun, T. (2023). Cultism in Nigeria: From University Campuses to Broader Society. African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies, 17(2), 113-129.

³⁴ Nextier Advisory. (2023). *Nextier Violent Conflict Database Report* (24 July 2023). Nextier Advisory. Retrieved from <https://nextieradvisory.com/nextier-violent-conflict-database>

Figure 8: Percentage of mixed-survey respondents that reported cultism in their community by state



Survey question: What kind of disputes, conflicts, or violent incidents has your community experienced in the last 12 months?

According to **Figure 8**, 82 percent of mixed survey respondents in Akwa Ibom state indicated cultism as a key conflict and violence issue plaguing their communities. Cultism was also reported to be prevalent in other Southern states such as Anambra, Rivers, and Ebonyi. Experts link modern cults to dangerous activities such as suicidal behaviors, diabolic oaths, crime incitement, brutal punishments, and violent initiation ceremonies. Some KII respondents argued that cultism often leads to further crimes like rape, kidnapping, murder, robbery, theft, and political violence. For example, a KII respondent noted, “*Most cultist groups are political thugs. Politicians use them to run campaigns and after that they are abandoned with arms and no alternatives for survival.*”

ROOT CAUSES/DRIVERS

High levels of unemployment and economic inequality significantly contribute to the recruitment of young people into cult groups in Nigeria. With limited job prospects and pervasive economic hardship, many young individuals face a stark choice between enduring poverty or seeking alternative means of income and social status. Cult groups exploit this vulnerability by offering financial incentives, social connections, and a sense of belonging,³⁵ which can be particularly enticing to those struggling to make

³⁵ Nwagwu, E. J. (2016). Poverty, Unemployment, and Insecurity in Nigeria: The Role of the Police in National Development. African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies, 9(1), 43-58.

ends meet. For example, in states like Lagos and Rivers, where youth unemployment rates are high, cult groups have been known to actively recruit from disenfranchised communities and university students, promising financial rewards and social recognition in exchange for involvement in criminal activities.

The lure of financial gains and a perceived enhancement of social status makes cult membership a viable option for many young people who are otherwise marginalized and economically disadvantaged. This dynamic exacerbates the cycle of violence and criminality, as these groups often engage in violent activities and criminal enterprises, further destabilizing communities already struggling with economic disparities.

KEY ACTORS AND THEIR ROLE

Youths: As stated previously, young people, particularly those from impoverished backgrounds, may be drawn to cults as a means of gaining social status, financial benefits, or a sense of belonging. Peer pressure, particularly in educational institutions, plays a crucial role in the recruitment of new members. Students may join cults to gain protection, social acceptance, or to avoid being targeted by existing cult members.

TRENDS AND TRAJECTORY

The trend of cultism in Nigeria has evolved from a campus-based phenomenon to a major societal problem affecting many aspects of life and recently spreading from the Southern region to the North. Over the decades, cultism has expanded into communities, infiltrated politics, and increased in violence and sophistication. As narrated by a respondent, “Recently a member of a cult group was killed, and this resulted in killings of other cult members in other cults and innocent people in the community were also killed. Most times when the cult people come to attack a fellow cult member, if they [do] not find him, they will kill anybody they meet there, some of them their parents were even killed, even innocent brothers and sisters.” Despite efforts to combat it, cultism remains a persistent and growing issue, requiring concerted efforts from the government, law enforcement, communities, and civil society to effectively address it.

DYNAMIC 5: POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Headline: Political violence is seasonal and prevalent across states during election periods with organized and widespread attacks on voters and political opponents, and popular agitations and contested outcomes.

Political violence in Nigeria is localized and prevalent in select states during election periods, with a notable high incidence of political thuggery.

Political thuggery has become a pervasive issue, significantly impacting integrity of affected elections and democratic principles broadly. This phenomenon involves organized groups or individuals engaging in violence, intimidation, and coercion to influence election outcomes and suppress opposition. Thugs, often linked to political parties or local leaders, are known for attacking polling stations, intimidating voters, and clashing with rival factions.

ROOT CAUSES/DRIVERS

An analysis of quantitative data from the mixed survey also finds a significant difference in conflict levels between communities with a dominant political party relative to communities with no dominant political party. A community with a dominant political party refers to a community where only one party controls and has won the highest number of votes in all recent elections in the community while a community with no dominant political party is a community where multiple parties have won elections in recent elections.

The margins result of an ordered logit regression model as shown in Table I indicates a significantly lower probability (28 percent) of “no conflict” in communities without a dominant political party and higher probability (44 percent) of “no conflict” in communities with the presence of a dominant political party. This is consistent with qualitative findings indicating higher levels of violence in communities where there is power tussles between competing political parties.

TABLE I: PERCENTAGE PROBABILITY OF CONFLICT LEVELS FOR COMMUNITIES WITH A DOMINANT POLITICAL PARTY AND COMMUNITIES WITHOUT A DOMINANT POLITICAL PARTY

PERCENTAGE PROBABILITY OF CONFLICT LEVELS FOR COMMUNITIES	
OUTCOMES	PROBABILITIES
No conflict, No dominant party	28%
No conflict, One dominant party	44%
Low conflict, No dominant party	48%
Low conflict, One dominant party	42%
High conflict, No dominant party	24%
High conflict, One dominant party	14%

Margins result from our ordered logit model in Annex VI. *, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% level, respectively. All categories were statistically significant at the 99% level.

Youth Unemployment: Youth unemployment is a significant driver of political violence and thuggery in Nigeria, particularly evident during election periods. High unemployment rates, such as the 42 percent

youth unemployment rate reported in 2023, contribute to widespread frustration and vulnerability among young people. This economic disenfranchisement often makes them susceptible to recruitment by political thugs who exploit their desperation.

KEY ACTORS AND THEIR ROLE

Political Actors: Politicians have also been known to incite ethnic and religious violence by playing on existing tensions between different ethnic groups. This tactic is often used to rally support from a particular ethnic or religious base or to destabilize areas where an opponent has strong support.³⁶

Youths: As stated previously, youth are commonly employed by politicians as thugs to intimidate voters, opposition members, and electoral officials. During elections, youth are often involved in disrupting polling stations, snatching ballot boxes, and clashing with rival groups. This role is crucial in areas where elections are tightly contested.³⁷ Politicians often exploit at-risk youths and lure them into violent activities with promises of short-term financial gain, future power, wealth, or political appointments. This manipulation is particularly effective in regions where youth have few other avenues for social and economic advancement.

TRENDS AND TRAJECTORY

The trend of political violence in Nigeria is nuanced as it is both local and seasonality. The intensity of political violence differs across states and sometimes across communities within states for specific national and subnational elections due to factors such as party dominance in the specific community, ethnic or religious identity of specific political candidates among other factors. The recurring violence underscores the deep-rooted challenges Nigeria faces in consolidating its democracy, including issues related to governance, the integrity of electoral processes, and the role of security forces in elections.

DYNAMIC 6: INSURGENCY AND TERRORISM

Headline: While less frequent, terrorism and violent extremism continue to be a significant issue, with periodic attacks occurring in the North East, notably in Borno State, as seen more recently in Gwoza.

Since 2023, insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria have shown a slight decline, yet they remain significant concerns, particularly in Borno State in the North East region which one KII respondent describes as “marked by a tenuous calm.” Forty-six percent of mixed survey respondents in Borno State highlighted terrorism as the key issue in the state (see **Figure 9**). Extremist groups such as Boko Haram, its splinter group the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and Jama'atu Ansarul Islam (JAS) continue their violent activities despite increasing defections, internal divisions, and ongoing counter-terrorism efforts by Nigerian security forces and the Multinational Joint Task Force. Recent reports highlight the June

³⁶ Aghedo, I., & Osumah, O. (2012). *The Boko Haram Uprising: How Should Nigeria Respond?*. Third World Quarterly, 33(5), 853-869.

³⁷ Hoffmann, L., & Patel, R. (2017). Collective Action on Corruption in Nigeria: A Social Norms Approach to Connecting Society and Institutions. Chatham House.

2024 attack in Gwoza, Borno State, insurgents orchestrated three coordinated bomb attacks on civilian targets, including a wedding, a hospital, and a funeral, causing numerous casualties and widespread disruptions. This suggests that the insurgency remains intractable, with highly coordinated tactics and the ability of the groups to launch unexpected and devastating attacks.

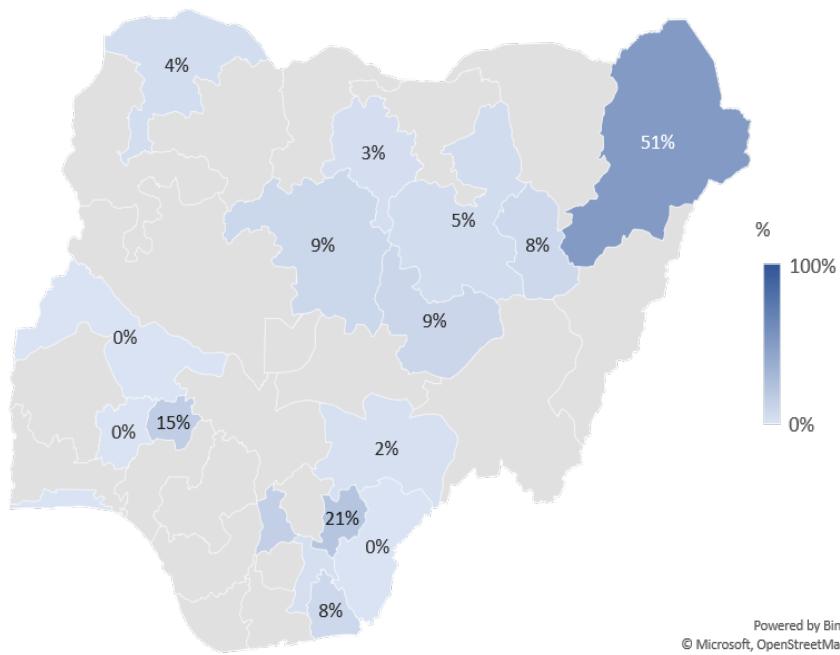
The violence has also extended to attacks on humanitarian convoys and aid workers, significantly impeding relief efforts and worsening the humanitarian crisis. Illustratively, a KII respondent pointed out that: “*...in April 2024, a convoy carrying repatriation packages was attacked by armed groups who stole food, clothing, and essential household items. This theft not only deprived returning individuals of crucial resources but also fueled further criminal activity.*” Additionally, illegal checkpoints and armed banditry linked to terrorist groups have become more prevalent. “*The rise in illegal vehicle checkpoints in Northeast Nigeria reflects increasing desperation among armed groups and criminal actors. These unauthorized checkpoints are set up to control and exploit road transport, often targeting aid trucks and civilian vehicles.*” (KII respondent).

Notably, new extremist groups such as Ansaru, with historical ties to Boko Haram, have emerged in previously less affected areas, including parts of the North West, indicating a troubling expansion of terrorist footprints.³⁸ For example, in March 2024, Ansaru claimed responsibility for a series of coordinated attacks in Katsina State, targeting both civilian and military locations. These attacks included the kidnapping of several people from rural communities and an assault on a military outpost, highlighting the group's growing influence and capability in a region that had been relatively less affected by such extremist violence until now.³⁹ Combined with growing banditry and abduction in the region, this evolving threat adds another layer of complexity to the violence and conflict crisis in the region. As noted by a KII respondent, “*there are reports of collaboration between bandit groups and terrorist organizations like Ansaru in the North West, particularly in Zamfara, which is rich in gold. The criminal operations are increasingly sophisticated, with the government labeling some of these groups as terrorists.*”

³⁸ International Crisis Group. (2024). *Ansaru's Growing Influence in North West Nigeria: New Dynamics in the Extremist Landscape*. Crisis Group Africa Report No. 328. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/328-ansarus-growing-influence-north-west-nigeria>

³⁹ Human Rights Watch. (2024). *The Expansion of Ansaru: A New Threat to North West Nigeria*. Human Rights Watch Report. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/04/03/expansion-ansaru-new-threat-north-west-nigeria>

Figure 9: Percentage of mixed-survey respondents that reported terrorism in their community by state



Survey question: What kind of disputes, conflicts, or violent incidents has your community experienced in the last 12 months?

The socio-economic impact of this violence has deepened, with over two million people displaced in Borno State alone. The persistent violence has led to widespread destruction of infrastructure, including schools and health facilities, and has disrupted agricultural activities, crucial for the local economy. The ongoing conflict has created a protracted humanitarian crisis, with limited access to essential services and a growing need for international assistance. Efforts to combat these insurgencies are increasingly strained by logistical challenges and resource constraints, highlighting the urgent need for enhanced support and coordinated responses to stabilize the region.

ROOT CAUSES/DRIVERS

Youth Unemployment: Youth unemployment is a critical driver of terrorism and violent extremism, particularly in regions where economic opportunities are scarce. Disaffected and financially struggling youths, facing limited job prospects and a lack of meaningful engagement, are increasingly vulnerable to radicalization. Extremist groups often exploit this vulnerability by offering financial incentives, ideological training, and a sense of purpose to young recruits. For instance, in Nigeria's North East, groups like Boko Haram have successfully recruited disillusioned youths by capitalizing on their economic desperation and dissatisfaction with the state. The lack of employment opportunities not only fuels individual grievances but also creates an environment where extremist groups can easily recruit and radicalize young people, promising them a way out of poverty and a role in a cause they frame as just and transformative. As a KII respondent noted, “*Lack of quality education and illiteracy often linked to poverty, increases the risk of youths being recruited into gangs or extremist groups. Illiteracy limits job prospects and leaves many youths susceptible to exploitation.*”

This connection between youth unemployment and extremism underscores the need for comprehensive strategies to address economic disenfranchisement as a means of countering the appeal of terrorist organizations.

Lack of Education: Lack of education significantly contributes to conflict and violence across the country. As of 2023, Nigeria had an estimated 10.5 million out-of-school children, with high rates in conflict-prone areas like the North East and North West.⁴⁰ In Nigeria, lack of education often correlates with poverty and unemployment and this educational deprivation limits economic opportunities, making young people more vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups and criminal gangs. Without access to quality education, individuals lack the critical thinking skills necessary to question extremist ideologies.⁴¹ This makes them more susceptible to manipulation by terrorist groups that exploit religious or political narratives to justify violence. In the North East, Boko Haram has exploited these gaps by targeting and recruiting disenfranchised youths. Similarly, in the North West, limited educational infrastructure, poorly trained teachers, and a lack of resources has resulted in high dropout rates and low literacy levels, which contribute to violent extremism. As a respondent noted, “*Illiteracy also causes conflict because they are very easy to manipulate and lure into terrorist groups.*”

Porous International Borders: KII respondents indicated rising cross-border insecurity, including terrorist attacks, drug and arms trafficking, and human smuggling, fuels regional tensions and heightens threats in Nigeria's border areas. Rising cross-border insecurity in Nigeria has become a significant concern, driven by a range of illicit activities, including terrorist attacks, drug and arms trafficking, and human smuggling. The country's porous borders have facilitated the infiltration of armed groups and criminal networks, with only about half of the more than 364 international border points being manned, often inadequately.⁴² For instance, the Boko Haram insurgency, which originally emerged in Nigeria's North East, has expanded its reach into neighboring countries such as Chad and Cameroon, using cross-border routes to launch attacks and evade security forces. A mixed-survey respondent noted that the porous international borders “*causes conflict because people from those neighboring countries will smuggle into the country contrabands and illegal weapons. They also come in as terrorists and bandits.*”

The porous borders between Nigeria and neighboring countries like Cameroon, Chad, and Niger have been exploited by Boko Haram for cross-border attacks and supply routes. The Nigerian Army has

⁴⁰ UNICEF. (2023). Education Crisis in Nigeria: The Impact of Out-of-School Children on Conflict and Violence. UNICEF Nigeria Report. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/reports/education-crisis-nigeria>

⁴¹ World Bank. (2023). Education, Poverty, and Extremism in Nigeria: The Link Between Lack of Education and Vulnerability to Radicalization. World Bank Report. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-2212-9>

⁴² Nigeria Immigration Service. (2023). *Border Security and Management in Nigeria: Current Challenges and Recommendations*. Nigeria Immigration Service Report. Retrieved from <https://www.immigration.gov.ng/border-security-management-report> ; International Crisis Group. (2023). *Nigeria's Porous Borders and Their Role in Regional Instability*. Crisis Group Africa Report No. 320. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/320-nigerias-porous-borders-and-their-role-regional-instability>

engaged in cross-border operations, often in collaboration with the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), to curb these activities and secure the borders.⁴³

KEY ACTORS AND THEIR ROLE

Terrorist Groups: Terrorist groups such as ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province), JAS (Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, commonly known as Boko Haram), and Ansaru play crucial roles in Nigeria's ongoing conflict in the North East as shown in Figure 13 above. ISWAP, a splinter group of Boko Haram, has pledged allegiance to ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and focuses on expanding its control over territory in the North-East while imposing a strict interpretation of Sharia law. JAS, founded in 2002, seeks to overthrow the Nigerian government and establish an Islamic state, engaging in bombings, kidnappings, and assaults, and has also expressed allegiance to global jihadist networks. Ansaru, a radical faction that split from Boko Haram, is known for targeting foreign nationals and security forces, and has connections to Al-Qaeda, claiming responsibility for high-profile kidnappings and attacks. These groups are driven by ideological, political, and territorial ambitions, using violence to challenge state authority and destabilize the region while aligning with global terrorist organizations.

In the North West, temporary alliances have been observed between some armed bandit groups and violent extremist factions, including JAS, Ansaru, and ISWAP, which have increasingly established camps in the region.⁴⁴ Despite these collaborations, these groups continue to operate as distinct entities.

State Actors and Government Agencies: Security agencies such as the Nigerian Army, Police, and Department of State Services were highlighted by mixed-survey and KII respondents as playing a critical role in mitigating violent extremism in the North East especially in Borno State. The Nigerian Army has been at the forefront of direct combat operations against Boko Haram and ISWAP. Major military operations, such as Operation Lafiya Dole, launched in 2015, have been central to the Army's efforts to reclaim territories held by the insurgents. These operations have led to the recapture of key towns and villages, significantly weakening Boko Haram's territorial control.

Religious Leaders: Religious leaders have been identified as mitigating conflict and, in some cases, exacerbating conflict. According to a mixed survey respondent, religious leaders have been preaching on the dangers of conflict and the importance of peace. Many religious leaders have actively countered the extremist narratives propagated by Boko Haram. Through sermons, public statements, and community outreach, these leaders have promoted messages of peace, tolerance, and coexistence, directly challenging the ideologies of the insurgents. Conversely, some religious leaders have sometimes fueled sectarian divides, as seen in the controversial statements by certain clerics that have heightened tensions between Muslim and Christian communities. Some religious leaders have been implicated in the propagation of extremist ideologies that have fueled terrorism in the North-East. Boko Haram itself

⁴³ Musa, M. & Abbo, U. (2020). The Role of the Nigerian Army in the Fight against Boko Haram Insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria. *Journal of Contemporary Research in Social Sciences*.

⁴⁴ Nextier Advisory. (2023). *Emerging Alliances and Extremist Influence in North West Nigeria*. *Nextier Violent Conflict Database Report*. Retrieved from <https://nextieradvisory.com/emerging-alliances-extremist-influence-north-west-nigeria>

emerged from a radical Islamic movement led by Mohammed Yusuf, who was a religious leader with significant influence. Yusuf's teachings, which emphasized a strict interpretation of Sharia law and rejected Western education, were pivotal in radicalizing many followers and laying the groundwork for the insurgency.⁴⁵

TRENDS AND TRAJECTORY

Borno state in the North East region still experience periodic occurrence of terror attacks such as the three suicide bombings that occurred in Gwoza LGA in July 2024. KII and mixed survey respondents, however, noted that the prevalence of insurgency in the North East has been on the decline recently, as one KII respondent noted, “*The conflict has decreased in recent times, due to the level of security intervention by the government and the interventions by the aid actors.*”

While there has been a decline in the prevalence of insurgency in the North East, there has been an escalation in conflict and violence in the North West region. As military operations intensified in the North-East, particularly in Borno State, some Boko Haram and ISWAP militants began migrating to other parts of Nigeria, including the North-West. This movement was partly driven by the need to evade military pressure and find new areas to operate.⁴⁶ Insurgent groups like Ansaru, officially known as Jama’atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis-Sudan (Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa), Boko Haram and ISWAP have reportedly established links with local bandit groups in the North-West. These collaborations are often transactional, involving exchanges of weapons, training, and logistical support. In some cases, bandit groups have adopted terror tactics such as kidnapping for ransom, mass killings, and attacks on villages, blurring the lines between banditry and terrorism. With the majority of the Nigerian military’s focus, as well as the focus of the foreign troops supporting Nigeria, primarily on Boko Haram’s jihadist insurgency in the country’s northeast, the relative lack of resources dedicated to containing violence in the northwest may mean there are opportunities for Ansaru and other insurgent groups to exploit security gaps and continue to recruit which could further destabilize the region and spread to other regions.

DYNAMIC 7: RESOURCE CONTROL CONFLICT

Headline: Resource control conflicts are most acute in states with significant natural resources, such as the oil-producing South South states of Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, and Akwa Ibom, as well as the mineral-rich North Central states like Plateau and Nassarawa and North East states such as Borno and Yobe, where disputes center around control and distribution of resources like oil, tin, and limestone, and over gold in mining states such as Zamfara in the North West.

Resource control conflict in Nigeria primarily revolves around the struggle for the ownership, management, and distribution of natural resources, particularly oil, between the Nigerian federal

⁴⁵ Thurston, A. (2018). *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*. Princeton University Press.

⁴⁶ Ogunniyi, J. (2021). *Terrorism in the North-West: Drivers and Implications for Nigeria’s Security*. Journal of Terrorism Research.

government, state governments, and local communities. This conflict is most pronounced in the Niger Delta region, where the majority of Nigeria's oil and gas reserves are located.⁴⁷ As illustrated in **Figure 10** below, resource control conflicts were mainly reported in the South South states, Akwa Ibom and Rivers, where local communities and state governments often clash over the management and allocation of oil revenues. These conflicts are driven by grievances related to the uneven distribution of oil wealth, environmental damage caused by oil extraction, and perceived injustices in how revenue from natural resources is allocated.

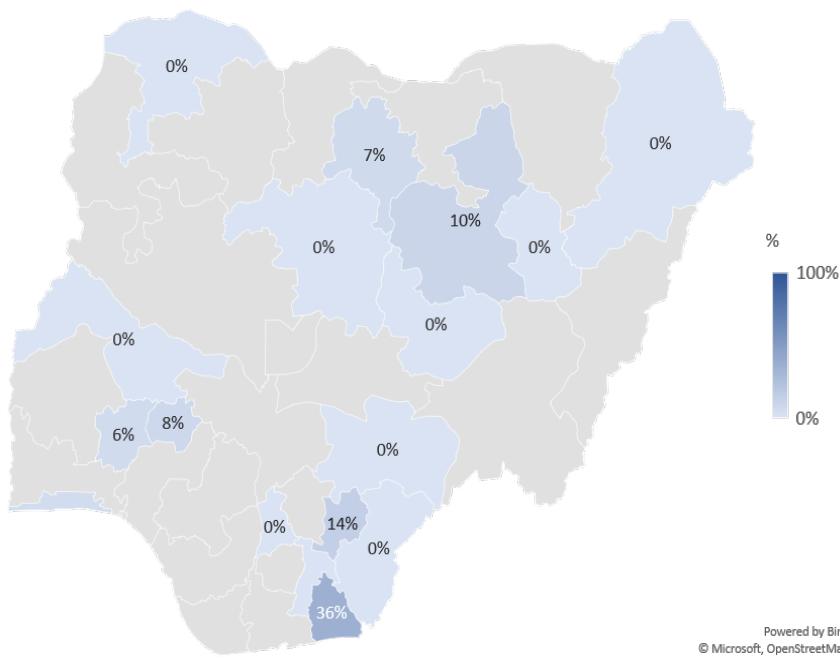
Illegal artisanal mining, primarily for gold, constitutes about 80 percent of mining activities in the North West, leading to significant community violence.⁴⁸ The strategic economic value of untapped mineral deposits has intensified conflicts, particularly in Zamfara State, where a government ban and military enforcement since April 2019 have proven largely ineffective.⁴⁹ Since 2014, violence linked to illegal mining has surged across Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Plateau, and Zamfara states, resulting in over 5,000 fatalities in Zamfara alone in the past five years. Notable incidents, including the deaths of soldiers and arrests of foreign nationals, highlight the ongoing challenges in addressing this conflict. Moreover, those who sponsor illegal mining often fund banditry and cattle rustling in these communities, further exacerbating instability and violence.

⁴⁷ Ibeanu, O., & Agbu, O. (2023). Resource Control and Conflict in Nigeria: The Struggle Over Oil in the Niger Delta. *Journal of African Politics*, 29(3), 275-291.

⁴⁸ Ogbonnaya, M. (2020, June 16). *How illegal mining is driving local conflicts in Nigeria*. ISS Today. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/how-illegal-mining-is-driving-local-conflicts-in-nigeria>

⁴⁹ Ojo, J. S., Oyewole, S., & Aina, F. (2023). Forces of Terror: Armed Banditry and Insecurity in North-west Nigeria. *Democracy and Security*, 19(4), 319–346. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924>

Figure 10: Percentage of mixed-survey respondents that reported resource control conflicts in their community by state



Survey question: What kind of disputes, conflicts, or violent incidents has your community experienced in the last 12 months?

ROOT CAUSES/DRIVERS

Resource Control Competition: In these resource rich states, tensions are exacerbated by historical neglect, economic disparities, and environmental damage, which fuel demands for greater local control and a fairer share of resource revenues. Armed groups and militant organizations have also emerged in response to these issues, leading to frequent disruptions in oil production and attacks on infrastructure and other forms of violent resistance to demand greater control over local resources and a larger share of the revenue generated from them. This complex dynamic underscores the struggle between local communities seeking to leverage their resources for economic development and the broader national interests in managing and profiting from Nigeria's extensive oil reserves. According to a mixed-survey respondent,

“Of course, those people who own the resources, when they know that these resources are being extracted and they are not having a fair share from it, so you see them revolting, sometimes the extraction process of these resources causes damage to the soil and pollute their environment, so you see the agitating.”

Mixed survey and KII respondents also noted that in the Niger Delta, ethnic groups such as the Ijaw and the Itsekiri have clashed over control of oil resources, which has led to ongoing violence and unrest. These ethnic and communal conflicts are often intensified by external influences, including political manipulation and economic exploitation, further complicating efforts to achieve peace and stability in the region. Resource control conflicts also significantly affect Nigeria's mineral-rich North Central and

North East states, where disputes revolve around the management and distribution of valuable resources like tin, limestone, and oil. In states such as Plateau and Nasarawa in the North Central region, the extraction of tin and limestone has led to tensions between local communities, state governments, and mining companies over land rights, environmental concerns, and the equitable distribution of revenue.⁵⁰

An ordered logit regression model of community characteristics that may impact conflict levels, as shown in Table 2, indicates a significantly higher (44 percent) probability of no conflict in communities with no natural resources relative to communities that have natural resources (37 percent). This indicates that communities with natural resources are more prone to conflict and violent incidents relative to communities with no known natural resources.

TABLE 2: PERCENTAGE PROBABILITY OF CONFLICT LEVELS FOR COMMUNITIES WITH NATURAL RESOURCES AND COMMUNITIES WITH NO NATURAL RESOURCES

PERCENTAGE PROBABILITY OF CONFLICT LEVELS FOR COMMUNITIES	
OUTCOMES	PROBABILITIES
No conflict, No natural resource	44%
No conflict, Natural resource present	37%
Low conflict, No natural resource	42%
Low conflict, Natural resource present	46%
High conflict, No natural resource	14%
High conflict, Natural resource present	17%

Margins result from our ordered logit model in Annex VI. *, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% level, respectively. All categories were statistically significant at the 99% level.

⁵⁰ Adewale, B., & Oladipo, O. (2023). Resource Control Conflicts in Nigeria's Mineral-Rich States: Case Studies from Plateau and Nassarawa. *Journal of Resource Management and Development*, 42(1), 58-75.

Similarly, in the North East states of Borno and Yobe, conflicts arise from competition for control of oil and other mineral resources, further complicated by the impacts of insurgency and terrorism. These disputes are driven by competing interests ranging from economic benefits and political power to environmental protection and social justice, and inadequate regulatory frameworks to mitigate adverse impacts of resource extraction, contributing to local and regional instability and exacerbating existing socio-economic challenges.

Environmental Degradation: The environmental degradation caused by oil exploration, including frequent oil spills, gas flaring, and deforestation, has had devastating effects on the livelihoods of the Niger Delta communities.⁵¹ The government's failure to enforce environmental regulations and hold oil companies accountable has exacerbated these problems. The lack of effective governance in protecting the environment has led to widespread health problems, loss of agricultural productivity, and the destruction of traditional livelihoods, further intensifying the resource control conflict. According to a KII respondent, “*the conflict in the Niger Delta springs from the fact that the people rightfully feel like they have not received a fair share for the oil that they contribute to the economy. Oil spill continues to be a problem across the Niger Delta, destroying the farmland, destroying the water, making livelihoods difficult, and causing immediate harm to people's health.*”

Bad Governance: Bad governance was highlighted by KII and mixed-survey respondents as a significant driver of the resource control conflict in the Niger Delta. The region, which is rich in oil and gas, has experienced persistent underdevelopment, environmental degradation, and social unrest, largely due to the failure of successive governments to address the needs and rights of the local population effectively. As pointed out by a mixed-survey respondent, “*the Nigeria government relies primarily on crude oil for the Nigeria economy. The exploration of this crude oil has affected the lands of where the crude oil is located making it difficult for them to farm and produce their own food and the federal government is not providing measures in place to ensure that provisions are made for them hence resulting in conflict and disputes in Nigeria.*”

Corruption within both the federal and state governments has severely undermined efforts to improve the living conditions in the Niger Delta. Funds allocated for development projects and environmental remediation often disappear due to corrupt practices, leaving the region's infrastructure and social services in a dire state. This corruption has fueled resentment among the local population, who see the wealth generated from their land being siphoned off by political elites without any tangible benefits to their communities.

Inequitable Resource Distribution: KII and mixed-survey respondents highlighted grievances related to perception of inequitable distribution of resources by the Nigerian government especially in the Niger Delta region. Respondents in the Niger Delta indicated that their communities do not get a fair share of the resources derived from the oil in their region which is driving the activities of militant groups against the government. According to a mixed-survey respondent, “*We have the resources in this Niger Delta. If*

⁵¹ Edozie, I., & Nweke, M. (2023). Environmental Degradation and Livelihood Impacts in the Niger Delta: The Consequences of Oil Exploration. *Environmental Management*, 71(4), 486-502.

that resources are being shared equally, it can bring peace. These people are producing the oil while other people are benefitting from the oil. If all these resources can be shared equally, it can bring economic peace.”

KEY ACTORS AND THEIR ROLE

Militants: Respondents indicate that militants in the Niger Delta play a significant and complex role in the region's social, political, and economic landscape. Emerging primarily in response to perceived exploitation, environmental degradation, and marginalization, these groups have used various forms of resistance, including oil bunkering, sabotage of oil infrastructure, kidnapping of oil workers, and attacks on security forces, as to draw attention to the grievances of the local population and to demand greater control over the region's resources.

Militants in the Niger Delta have played a multifaceted role, serving as both advocates for the region's rights and agents of violence.⁵² Their actions have brought international attention to the region's issues, forced government responses, and in some cases, improved the bargaining power of local communities. However, the use of violence and the resultant instability have also had significant negative consequences for the region's development and overall security. Addressing the root causes of militancy such as bad governance, environmental degradation, and inequitable resource distribution remains crucial for achieving lasting peace and development in the Niger Delta.

State Actors and Government Agencies: Security agencies such as the Nigerian Army and Police force were highlighted by mixed survey and KII respondents as playing a critical role in combating illegal activities such as oil theft (bunkering), kidnapping, and armed robbery, which are often linked to militant groups. However, the police have been criticized for corruption, inadequate training, and poor relations with local communities, which limit their effectiveness and sometimes lead to collusion with criminal elements. State security agencies also played a role in the Amnesty Program, which was designed to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate militants into society. The program involved negotiations between militant leaders, the government, and security agencies, and was initially successful in reducing violence and improving security in the region. However, the long-term success of the program has been mixed, with some ex-militants returning to criminal activities due to the government's failure to fully deliver on its promises.⁵³ KII respondents also noted that security agencies have worked with local community leaders in some cases to mediate conflicts and promote dialogue between the government and militants.

TRENDS AND TRAJECTORY

In recent years, there has been a notable resurgence of militancy in the Niger Delta, particularly with the re-emergence of groups like the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA). These groups have renewed their attacks on oil infrastructure, citing the federal government's failure to fully implement the 2009 amnesty program and address the underlying issues of environmental degradation and economic

⁵² Ojo, O., & Usman, R. (2023). The Dual Role of Militants in the Niger Delta: Advocacy, Violence, and Implications for Development. *Journal of Peace Research*, 60(2), 143-158.

⁵³ Osaghae, E. E. (2015). *The Amnesty Programme and the Niger Delta: Overview of Four Years*. African Security Review, 24(1), 44-58.

marginalization.⁵⁴ This resurgence is indicative of the unresolved grievances in the region and the ongoing struggle for equitable resource control. The current trends in the resource control conflict in the Niger Delta highlight the complex and evolving nature of the struggle over natural resources.⁵⁵ While militancy and criminal activities remain significant challenges, there is also a growing emphasis on legal and political strategies aimed at securing environmental justice, regional autonomy, and equitable resource distribution. The continued reliance on militarization by the government, however, suggests that achieving lasting peace and stability in the region will require addressing the underlying socio-economic and environmental issues.

DYNAMIC 8: SEPARATIST AGITATION

Headline: Biafra agitation from lingering sense of political marginalization and uneven distribution of economic resources still prevalent in the South East Region.

Separatist agitations in Nigeria reflect a growing desire among certain ethnic groups and regions for greater autonomy or independence from the central government. The most prominent example of this is the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which advocates for the secession of the South Eastern region, predominantly made up of the Igbo ethnic group. IPOB's agitation has intensified in recent years, leading to frequent clashes with security forces and raising concerns about potential escalation into wider violence.⁵⁶ In October 2021, the group's leader, Nnamdi Kanu, was arrested and detained, further exacerbating tensions and prompting calls for protests and strikes in the southeastern states of Anambra, Imo, and Enugu. One KII respondent stated, "*The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement in the South East, driven by perceived marginalization and historical grievances, has escalated tensions and violent confrontations with state security forces.*"

In the Niger Delta region, where there is a strong desire for greater control over the oil resources that drive Nigeria's economy, separatist sentiments have also been significant. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and other militant groups have historically fought for more equitable resource distribution and regional autonomy. While the intensity of these movements has fluctuated, demands for greater control over oil revenues and improved local governance remain central issues.⁵⁷ The resurgence of these separatist and militant groups highlights ongoing regional dissatisfaction

⁵⁴ Beanu, O., & Agbu, O. (2023). Resource Control and the Resurgence of Militancy in the Niger Delta: Analyzing the Impact of the 2009 Amnesty Program and Environmental Degradation. *Journal of Environmental and Development Studies*, 27(4), 543-561.

⁵⁵ Ojo, T. (2023). Resurgence of Militancy in the Niger Delta: The Role of the Niger Delta Avengers and Unresolved Grievances. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 12(1), 65-80.

⁵⁶ Uzochukwu, E. (2023). Separatist Agitations and Regional Autonomy in Nigeria: The Case of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 49(7), 1312-1329.

⁵⁷ Otunba, A. (2023). Resource Control and Separatist Sentiments in the Niger Delta: The Role of MEND and Other Militant Groups. *African Affairs*, 122(488), 245-263.

and the complexities of addressing grievances related to resource control and political representation in Nigeria. For example, a KII respondent noted, “*In the Niger Delta for instance, the youth-led militancy has been driven by grievances over the exploitation of oil resources and environmental degradation, leading to violent attacks on oil installations.*”

In the South West region of Nigeria, separatist agitation is notably represented by the Yoruba ethnic group through the activities of groups like the Yoruba Nation Movement. Advocates for Yoruba secession seek greater autonomy or independence, driven by perceived marginalization and dissatisfaction with the central government's policies.⁵⁸ The movement gained prominence with protests and calls for self-determination, particularly under the leadership of figures like Sunday Igboho. Although less prominent compared to IPOB, these agitations reflect long-standing regional grievances related to political and economic disenfranchisement, as well as a desire for self-governance and control over local resources.

ROOT CAUSES/DRIVERS

Historical Grievances: The roots of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement can be traced back to the Biafran War (1967-1970), a civil war in Nigeria that resulted from the attempt by the southeastern region, dominated by the Igbo ethnic group, to secede and form the Republic of Biafra. The war ended in defeat for the secessionists, and the region was reintegrated into Nigeria. However, the grievances that led to the war, such as perceived marginalization and underdevelopment of the Southeast, have persisted, fueling modern-day separatist sentiments. A respondent highlighted that the country has always lacked a national identity with politics based on religion or ethnic identity.

Grievances prior to the civil war, the outcome of the civil war and the persistent perception of marginalization continue to drive separatist agitations in the South East region.

Marginalization: One of the most significant grievances is the perceived political marginalization of the Southeast region within Nigeria's federal structure. Since the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970, many Ibos feel that they have been systematically excluded from key positions in the federal government. For instance, since the return to democratic rule in 1999, no individual from the Southeast has been elected as President or Vice President, and the region is often underrepresented in federal appointments. This exclusion is seen as a continuation of the post-war marginalization that has left the Southeast politically sidelined. The neglect of infrastructure in the Southeast is a tangible manifestation of marginalization. Major highways like the Enugu-Onitsha and Enugu-Port Harcourt roads, which are vital for commerce in the region, have been in a state of disrepair for years. The lack of a functional

⁵⁸ Akinola, R. (2023). Separatist Agitations in the South West: The Rise of the Yoruba Nation Movement and Regional Grievances. *Journal of African Politics*, 30(2), 189-204.

international airport until recently, and the poor state of the existing seaports in the Southeast, further exacerbate feelings of being left out of national development efforts.⁵⁹

KEY ACTORS AND THEIR ROLE

Separatist Militants: Separatist militant actors in Nigeria, such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN) in the South East region, as well as the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) in the South West, are active in country's conflict landscape. IPOB, led by Nnamdi Kanu, advocates for the secession of the South East to create an independent Biafran state, employing tactics like protests, media campaigns, and sporadic violence through the ESN, which has engaged in clashes with security forces. According to a KII respondent, "*in the South-East, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has mobilized many young people in its separatist agenda, resulting in frequent clashes with security forces and disruption of social order.*" In recent times there have been a lot of attacks on the security personnels who tend to oppose their activities, as well as the enforcement of the Monday sit-at-home due to the continued detainment of the IPOB leader by the Nigerian government, as noted by another KII respondent.

IPOB's popularity in the Southeast has grown, but so have the challenges it faces. The movement has struggled with internal divisions, particularly regarding the strategy and direction of its activities. The Nigerian government's sustained crackdown has also made it difficult for IPOB to organize and mobilize openly. Furthermore, the rise of other separatist movements and violent non-state actors in different parts of Nigeria has complicated IPOB's efforts, as the government has intensified its security measures nationwide. In the South West, originally formed to protect Yoruba interests but has increasingly been involved in violent confrontations with other groups and government forces in their quest for regional autonomy and security. These separatist militants are also motivated by ethnic grievances, historical injustices, and perceived marginalization, often seeking to address what they view as systemic neglect and exploitation by the central government, thereby contributing to regional instability and conflict.

State Actors and Government Agencies: The Nigerian government has adopted a hardline stance against IPOB, characterized by military and police operations aimed at suppressing the group's activities. The government's designation of IPOB as a terrorist organization has been controversial, with critics arguing that it exacerbates the conflict and alienates the Southeast population further. The government's response has also included shutting down Radio Biafra and cracking down on IPOB's online presence.

TRENDS AND TRAJECTORY

The IPOB separatist movement remains a potent force in Southeast Nigeria, reflecting deep-seated grievances and the enduring legacy of the Biafran War.

⁵⁹ Falola, T., & Njoku, R. C. (2016). Igbo in the Atlantic World: African Origins and Diasporic Destinations. Indiana University Press.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN NIGERIA'S CONFLICT LANDSCAPE

The Nigerian media has been instrumental in disseminating information about ongoing conflicts, such as the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, the Niger Delta militancy, and the herder-farmer clashes in the Middle Belt. By reporting on these conflicts, the media provides the public with crucial updates on developments, government responses, and the humanitarian impact. However, the accuracy and objectivity of this information have sometimes been questioned, as some media outlets have been accused of bias or sensationalism.⁶⁰ The media plays a critical role in influencing conflict dynamics as they are the “*pioneers and whatever they say is what people believe and follow. They communicate information and when they pass the wrong one, it creates chaos and brings about conflict. [It] is from [the] media that you will hear both the truth and the fake news and for every fake news, it brings about agitation.*” (Mixed-survey respondent)

The way the media frames conflicts can significantly influence public perception and policy responses. KII and mixed-survey respondents highlighted that while the media mitigates conflict by creating awareness about conflict issues as well as sharing security updates, the media sometimes exacerbate conflict by creating false narratives or misinformation. For example, during the herder-farmer conflicts, some media outlets have been accused of ethnically biased reporting, which has heightened ethnic tensions between communities.⁶¹ Similarly, the coverage of the Niger Delta militancy and the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has sometimes been framed in ways that either delegitimize or overly sensationalize the issues, leading to polarized public opinions.

“Most reports today don't come from an informed perspective you hardly get people who are unbiased you know they give one side of the story, and they don't go deep and that is why when you look at the narrative in Plateau state today it's become a narrative of religious crisis instead of criminality because for me it is trying to allow criminality to reign.” (Mixed survey respondent)

IMPACT OF CONFLICT

Headline: The most profound impact of conflict lies in its deep-seated economic and psychosocial effects, which are not only immeasurable but also profoundly enduring, leaving a legacy that reshapes communities and influences generations to come.

This subsection examines the impact of conflict on individuals and communities, with a focus on how various groups—particularly women, youths, persons with disabilities, and displaced populations—are affected. It also delves into the social and emotional consequences for boys and men, and explores the mental trauma experienced by those who have been exposed to violence and conflict.

⁶⁰ Amos Asongo, Jev & Torwel, Vitalis & Ciboh, Rodney. (2022). The Role of News Media Reporting of Conflict, National Security and Counter Terrorism in Nigeria. 4. 240-260.

⁶¹ Orji, N. (2019). *The Role of the Media in Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria*. African Studies Review, 62(3), 119-140.

Economic Impact: The economic impact of conflict in Nigeria is profound and multifaceted, encompassing significant losses in property and livelihoods, heightened inequality, and exacerbated poverty, increased military spending.⁶² For instance, ongoing violence has led to the destruction of infrastructure and homes, displacing millions and disrupting local economies. As of 2023, Nigeria's poverty rate stands at approximately 63 percent, with conflicts significantly contributing to this figure by disrupting agricultural activities, which form the backbone of many local economies. A recent UNICEF study (2023) revealed that, over a 13-year period since 2010, more than 100 billion US dollars have been lost as a result of conflict in the North East region alone.⁶³ As noted by a KII respondent, “*farming communities face severe disruption as conflict prevents them from planting, harvesting, or marketing their produce. This inability to sustain agricultural activities creates a ripple effect that exacerbates poverty, deepening food insecurity and economic hardship across the North Central region.*”

The cost of living has surged, with inflation reaching 34.2 percent in June 2024, up from 24.1 percent in 2023, further straining household budgets and eroding purchasing power. Additionally, the instability has deterred investment, both domestic and foreign, impacting economic growth and development. A notable example is the economic loss caused by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) sit-at-home orders, which have led to substantial business closures and economic paralysis in the South East region, with estimated losses running into billions of Naira. This combination of property loss, increased poverty, and inflation has created a cycle of economic hardship that is challenging to break and has long-term implications for the country's stability and prosperity. This is reiterated by a respondent noting, “*Barma, once a thriving community, now lies in ruins, with no house left standing after the conflict.*”

Social: The social impact of conflict in Nigeria is extensive, affecting various aspects of daily life and well-being. Education systems are severely disrupted, with many schools damaged or destroyed, leading to a significant rise in dropout rates and limiting access to education for children in conflict-affected areas. The violence has also hindered educational infrastructure, making it difficult for communities to rebuild and maintain functional schools. In the health sector, conflict has resulted in physical harm, spread of diseases, and limited access to medical services, exacerbating health crises. Additionally, the psycho-social effects, including anxiety, fear, and trauma, are pervasive, with increasing cases of drug abuse among those coping with the stress of ongoing violence. The breakdown in water, hygiene, and sanitation systems further compounds these issues, leading to deteriorated living conditions and increased vulnerability to disease.

“Exposure to high levels of violence leads to widespread trauma, with the normalization of violence and early initiation into violent culture becoming forms of socialization. This has resulted in a cycle of conflict reversion, with

⁶² Onyekwelu, R. U., & Mbah, P. (2023). *The Economic Impact of Conflict in Nigeria: Analyzing the Financial Costs of Insecurity and Violence*. *African Development Review*, 35(2), 210-225. ; Ikpe, E. (2017). Counting the development costs of the conflict in North-Eastern Nigeria: the economic impact of the Boko Haram-led insurgency. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 381-409.

⁶³ United Nations Children's Fund Nigeria. (2023). *The Economic Cost of Conflict in North East Nigeria*. © United Nations Children's Fund. ISSN: 1116-3518.

violence becoming pathological. Unfortunately, mental health and psychosocial support remain under-resourced, leaving a significant gap in addressing the scale of need.” (KII respondent)

Gender-based impacts of conflict are particularly severe, with increased instances of gender-based violence (GBV) and targeted kidnappings of women and girls. Female-headed households often face heightened economic and social challenges and progress in girls' education is frequently reversed as conflict disrupts schooling and increases security risks. Persons with disabilities experience significant economic exclusion and additional hardships, as the conflict exacerbates barriers to employment and access to services. Overall, the conflict creates a complex web of social issues that undermine community cohesion and individual well-being, with long-lasting effects on various segments of society. One female leader/KII respondent added, “*Long-term psychosocial trauma persists, as seen in other conflict regions like Uganda, where the mental health effects linger over four decades after the violence ended.*”

Governance and Security: Governance and security in Nigeria have been critically undermined by a series of interconnected issues that exacerbate conflict and instability. The erosion of state authority, exemplified by the government's inability to effectively assert control over its territory, has created a power vacuum exploited by armed groups and criminal networks. This is compounded by rampant arms proliferation, which floods conflict zones with deadly weapons, amplifying the scale and intensity of violence. The pervasive culture of impunity, where crimes often go unpunished, and the lack of accountability for both criminal actors and corrupt officials further erode public trust and fuel discontent. Corruption within security and government institutions not only diverts resources away from essential services but also undermines efforts to address and resolve conflict. Together, these factors create a vicious cycle where weakened governance and compromised security structures perpetuate a landscape of lawlessness and unrest, severely impacting the stability and development of the nation. A KII respondent noted, “*The pervasive insecurity affects all aspects of life, leaving no one unchanged.*” In addition, a KII respondent stated, “*Military expenditure has risen at the expense of basic service delivery.*”

Environmental: The environmental impact of conflict in Nigeria is profound, manifesting in severe degradation and widespread food insecurity. In the North East, ongoing insurgency and violence have led to the destruction of agricultural lands and irrigation systems, exacerbating soil erosion and reducing crop yields. The displacement of communities further strains local resources, as farmland remains abandoned or is repurposed for military use. For instance, in Borno State, the Boko Haram insurgency has devastated farmlands, leading to a dramatic decline in agricultural productivity and contributing to chronic food shortages. Similarly, in the North West, armed banditry and violent clashes have disrupted farming activities, causing food insecurity and driving up prices. These environmental and agricultural impacts are compounded by the increasing scarcity of resources, which fuels further conflict and exacerbates the cycle of poverty and instability.

Humanitarian: The humanitarian crisis in Nigeria is marked by extensive forced displacement, with millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees due to ongoing conflicts and violence. For example, the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East has led to the displacement of over 2 million people, with many fleeing to urban areas or makeshift camps where living conditions are dire. In Borno State, the displacement crisis has overwhelmed existing infrastructure, leading to severe shortages of

food, clean water, and medical care.⁶⁴ Similarly, conflicts in the North West have displaced thousands more, forcing individuals to seek refuge in neighboring countries such as Niger and Chad. The humanitarian impact of these displacements includes not only immediate needs for shelter and aid, but also long-term challenges related to integration, access to education, and psychosocial support for displaced populations.

Development: The developmental impact of ongoing conflicts in Nigeria has exacerbated the nation's needs and created a challenging operational context for development efforts. The persistent violence and instability have disrupted essential services and infrastructure, making it increasingly difficult for aid organizations to deliver assistance effectively. For instance, in conflict-affected areas like Borno State, frequent attacks on aid workers and infrastructure hinder the delivery of crucial services such as healthcare and education. This has led to heightened aid dependency among affected populations, as local and international organizations struggle to address the growing needs amidst a volatile environment. The continuous cycle of conflict undermines long-term development goals, perpetuating a reliance on humanitarian aid rather than fostering sustainable progress and self-sufficiency.

CONCLUSION

Conflicts profoundly impact local communities, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups such as women, youths, persons with disabilities, and displaced populations. Women often face increased gender-based violence and exploitation, while youths may be coerced into armed groups or suffer from disrupted education and economic opportunities. Persons with disabilities experience heightened isolation and difficulty accessing aid and services, exacerbating their marginalization. Displaced populations, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), face severe challenges such as loss of livelihoods, inadequate shelter, and limited access to essential services, further compounding their vulnerability.

Boys and men affected by violence and insecurity often experience severe emotional trauma, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, as they grapple with the constant threat of violence and instability. Socially, they may face diminished roles within their communities, loss of social status, and increased pressure to conform to aggressive or violent norms. Additionally, the breakdown of traditional support structures and increased economic hardship can lead to a sense of helplessness and frustration, further impacting their mental health, social well-being and susceptibility to drug abuse.

This is perhaps the most severe impact of conflict and violence with cross generational implications for the conflict cycle. Exposure to violence and conflict has profoundly impacted individuals' mental health, often resulting in severe trauma that manifests as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Those who have experienced violence may suffer from persistent fear, flashbacks, and emotional numbness, which impairs their daily functioning and relationships. The trauma also has also affected the cognitive development of children and adolescents, hindering their educational and social growth. Additionally, the pervasive sense of instability and insecurity can lead to long-term psychological

⁶⁴ Amnesty International. (2021). *Nigeria: The Human Cost of Banditry in Northern Nigeria*. Amnesty International Report.

scars, contributing to ongoing mental health challenges, social issues, and a propensity for substance abuse and violent coping mechanisms, thereby perpetuating a cycle of violence.

ROLE OF THE USG

USAID's impact in Nigeria is recognized for its visibility and local partnerships, yet there are calls for broader geographic coverage and deeper community engagement to address the root causes of conflict more effectively. While its initiatives in the northern regions are praised, given the various conflict dynamics across the country, the agency is urged to expand its geographical scope and to enhance, sustain, and upscale efforts that foster livelihoods, promote social cohesion, and directly disrupt the conflict cycle.

The awareness of USAID programs among many KII stakeholders highlights their visibility and impact. However, there is a need to scale up these initiatives at the community level to enhance their effectiveness. Respondents praised USAID's localization efforts, especially partnerships with local implementing partners, although there were calls for more direct partnerships with the growing body of credible local organizations. Additionally, the concentration of efforts in the northern regions underscores the need for a more balanced geographic approach to ensure broader coverage across the country. Key bright spots and opportunities to build social cohesion, peace, and improve security, particularly outside of conventional peacebuilding actors are captured in the recommendations section below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations from the assessment take a holistic, systems-based approach to respond to the complexity of conflict in Nigeria. This involves targeting root causes to mitigate conflict in the long term, addressing symptoms of conflict to prevent violence, and alleviating the effects of conflict on vulnerable populations. These recommendations include:

1. Break the Cycle of Violence Through Youth Development
2. Strengthen Education to Target Root Causes of Conflict
3. Emphasize Mental Health Across the Mission
4. Prevent Electoral Violence and Political Thuggery
5. Mitigate Causes and Effects of Farmer-Herder Conflict
6. Address the Effects of Conflict on Vulnerable Groups
7. Enhance Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) Programming
8. Support Conflict Integration Across USAID/Nigeria Strategies and Programming
9. Targeted Governance Support Programming

PEARL shared its preliminary findings, conclusions, and recommendations with USAID and USG in a hybrid workshop on August 8, 2024. During the workshop, participants reviewed the findings and conclusions, providing feedback to validate and expand upon PEARL's analysis. They also assessed the proposed recommendations for relevance and feasibility, adding additional suggestions based on the assessment findings.

ANNEX I: ASSESSMENT PURPOSE AND LINES OF INQUIRY

ASSESSMENT PURPOSE

USAID/Nigeria will begin planning in earnest for a new five-year Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) in 2024 as the current CDCS lasts through 2025. As conflict continues to grow and become multidimensional across the country, it is essential that interventions are planned with the most current knowledge of the conflict dynamics at the national and subnational levels, including but not limited to: the drivers of conflict, the key actors, hotspots and impact of conflict.

USAID/Nigeria Program Office commissioned the Violence and Conflict Assessment (VCA) to: (1) improve USAID/Nigeria's understanding of the conflict dynamics across the country to support evidence-based decision making at the country strategy and activity level, (2) effectiveness of programming across the mission portfolio in addressing conflict drivers, and (3) strengthen the integration of conflict sensitivity and do no harm principles into the USAID/Nigeria program lifecycle.

The assessment sought to:

1. Identify the most critical, emergent dynamics of conflict, violence, and peace across Nigeria, ascertain issues driving these dynamics and their root causes, and how they interact with and impact USAID's interventions and approaches.
2. Identify technically sound and actionable recommendations that will help USAID achieve its development objectives, advance peace and security, and adapt to the challenges to providing foreign assistance in the country.

The findings and recommendations delivered through this assessment will support the Mission's operations in the following ways:

- Inform strategic thinking particularly for the 2025-2030 CDCS.
- Support the Mission's capacity to ensure that informed, evidence-based decisions are made for ongoing and future programming.
- Serve as a resource to design activities that do no harm and follow the principles of conflict sensitivity.
- Inform activity concept and design documents, SOWs, MEL Plans, RFAs/RFPs, and evaluation and learning agendas amongst other documents.

LINES OF INQUIRY

PEARL, working collaboratively with USAID/Nigeria, developed the Lines of Inquiry (LOIs) outlined below to respond directly to the Mission's strategic priorities and programming approach, particularly to assessing conflict and violence trends and drivers.

The LOIs are listed in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3: LINES OF INQUIRY

LINES OF INQUIRY	
PRIMARY LOI	SECONDARY LOI
I. What are the root causes and drivers of conflict?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. What are the historical, socio-economic, and political factors that contribute to current and emerging conflicts in Nigeria?b. What are the diverse grievances and underlying factors that fuel conflict, violence, and disaffection?c. What are the main triggers that escalate conflicts in Nigeria (e.g., resource competition, political grievances, historical tensions)?d. What external factors (e.g., neighboring countries, international actors) contribute to or mitigate conflicts in Nigeria?
2. Who are the actors involved in conflict, and what roles do they play?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Who are the primary actors involved in conflicts (e.g., political, ethnic groups, religious organizations, armed groups, government agencies)?b. What are their motivations, goals, and interests in current and evolving conflicts?c. What are key ways actors incite inciting others to violence (e.g. use of social media, political mobs, etc.)d. What roles do traditional, religious, and social leaders (including celebrities and social media influencers) play in conflict-related behavioral change?e. What is the role of the media in conflict?
3. Where are the geographic hotspots and trends for conflict in Nigeria?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Where are the key conflict zones in Nigeria, and what are the distinguishing features of each area?b. What are the conflict trends in Nigeria over the past 4 years?c. Are there specific regions that are more prone to conflict, and if so, why?d. Are there specific regions that have successfully mitigated or resolved conflict, and if so, how?

LINES OF INQUIRY	
PRIMARY LOI	SECONDARY LOI
4. What are the dynamics and triggers related to conflict in Nigeria?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What are the main triggers of conflicts in Nigeria? b. How do these triggers evolve over time, and are there patterns in their occurrence? c. What keeps people from participating in violence? d. In areas with less conflict, what mechanisms diffuse conflict/violent behavior in the face of triggers?
5. How are individuals/communities affected by conflict?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do conflicts affect local communities, especially vulnerable groups such as women, youths, persons with disabilities, and displaced populations? b. How are boys and men impacted by violence and insecurity socially and emotionally? c. How has mental trauma/exposure to violence affected individuals who have experienced conflict?
6. How is USAID and/or United States Government (USG) presence and actions influencing or otherwise interacting with conflict, violence, or peace dynamics?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How and where are USAID or USG actions influencing or exacerbating conflict dynamics? b. What are bright spots and opportunities to build social cohesion, peace, and improve security, particularly outside of conventional peacebuilding actors?

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