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# Conflict, instability, and resilience in Nigeria

## Rapid Literature Review

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## About this report

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## 1. Executive summary

This paper analyses the structural challenges, root causes and dynamics of conflict, instability and resilience in Nigeria. The first half of the paper explores the overall socio-economic, socio-cultural, political and environmental factors that shape conflict, instability and resilience in Nigeria. The second half of the paper explores the specific regionalised conflicts in greater detail.

**The history of the modern Nigerian state has been characterised by turbulent, contentious and often violent politics.** The current context is no exception. The Boko Haram conflict in the north-east is now almost a decade old, and continues to destabilise the northeast populations, to be a drain on state security forces and state finances, and to increase food insecurity (see Section 7). The “frozen conflict” in the Niger Delta continues its slow revival, destabilising the lives of the Deltan populations and prompting economic instability (see Section 8). Repeated clashes between nomadic pastoralist (transhumant) and farming communities in the north and middle belt regions have caused increasing casualties and displacements in those areas (see Section 9). The resurgence of Biafran secessionist claims has reinvigorated the ‘National question’ in popular narratives (see Section 10). And in all of these situations, the state security forces have continued to use military responses, often violating human rights, and sometimes counterproductively leading to further escalations in violence (see Sections 7-9).

While each of these conflicts has its own particular logic and context, analysis of the structural challenges, causes and dynamics driving these conflicts leads to the following crosscutting findings:

**Socio-economic drivers of conflict, instability and resilience:** At the heart of Nigeria’s instability is its oil-dependent political-economy which has cultivated a national and international elite embedded in a rent-seeking system of governance. The high-stakes of this exclusive political settlement have fuelled corruption, which has delegitimised the political system and increased economic inequality. Nigeria’s impressive historic macro-economic trajectory is an important source of economic resilience, and it has led to some improvements in human development. Yet distributional injustices and exclusive growth mean that inequality, poverty and lack of access to basic services continue to drive grievances across the country and continue to hold back development for the majority. Economic disparities between the north and the rest of the country are stark.

In today’s Nigeria, the economy is slowly recovering from the 2016-17 recession, which was precipitated by low oil prices, foreign exchange shortages, disruptions in oil production, power shortages, insecurity and a low capital budget execution rate (Barungi, Odhiambo & Asogwa 2017, p.2). Falling oil prices have radically undermined the financial basis of the state, which cannot recover without a rebound in oil prices. Despite Nigeria facing serious macroeconomic challenges, increased politicking in the lead up to the 2019 elections make policy reforms less likely.

**Socio-cultural drivers of conflict, instability and resilience:** In Nigeria’s large and heterogeneous population, overlapping ethnic, religious, regional, and sub-ethnic (communal) identities mark the fault-lines along which political claims and violent conflicts are made. The political axis of power flips along the north-south regional divide, and overlaps with ethnic and religious divisions. These fissures are rooted in the colonial system of governance and have strengthened and hardened throughout the postcolonial period. Gender and youth have also emerged as important and active identities, yet they are often superseded by ethnic identities. Gender inequality drives and is exacerbated by Nigeria’s conflicts.

**Political drivers of conflict, instability and resilience:** Nigeria's diversity is frequently exploited by politicians who use chauvinistic appeals based on ethnicity, religion, and regionalism to shore up electoral support. Previous elections in 1999, 2003, and 2007 were characterised by sectional tensions and violence. While Nigerian political parties are legally required to have nationally representative memberships and are banned from making direct sectional appeals, in practice it is often assumed that

electoral candidates will govern in favour of its co-ethnics and co-religionists. Indigeneity, one of the legal instruments designed to manage Nigeria's ethnic diversity, has instead become a source of tension and conflict. Yet other innovative governance measures such as "zoning" (when the presidential candidacy alternates between a northerner and a southerner) have been successful in alleviating some of the southern secessionist pressures that had festered under decades of military rule. Political corruption has also been a recurrent motivation for conflict as well as a key reason for the Nigerian government's frequently inadequate responses to violent outbreaks. Yet recent anticorruption efforts – led by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission - have been moderately successful and serve as an example of institutional resilience.

In today's Nigeria, power politics is now taking centre-stage ahead of the next general elections in February 2019. Key discussions ensue over whether current President Muhammadu Buhari will run in 2019, and whether a 'Third Force' is emerging in Nigeria's two-party political system to contest the 2019 elections.

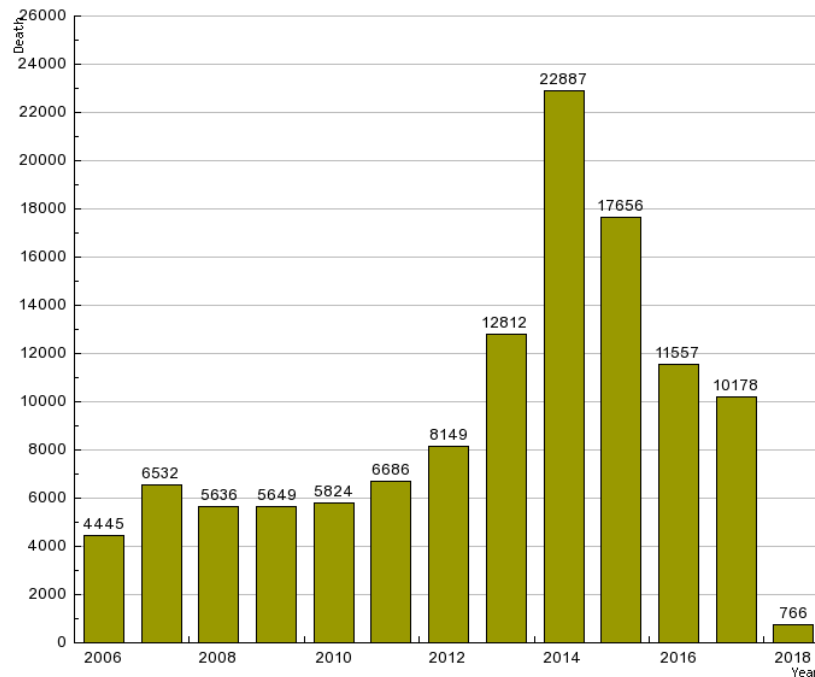
**Environmental drivers of conflict, instability and resilience:** Struggles over increasingly scarce land and water threaten peace and stability in many states, particularly in the north-east and north-central zones. These land and water conflicts intersect with ethnicity and indigeneity issues and have the potential to rapidly escalate. The severe food crisis in Nigeria's northeast continues in 2018, these emergency and famine conditions are largely due to the violent northeast conflict, rather than climate change or resource scarcity. While the middle-belt conflict threatens to increase food insecurity, so far it has proven resilient. Climate change is expected to exacerbate extreme weather in Nigeria, and to negatively impact food security and livelihoods, particularly in the north and southwest. Meanwhile, Nigeria's growing population is projected to make it the world's third most populous country in the world by 2050.

**This paper is based on a rapid literature review**, and is thus illustrative of the key issues and is not comprehensive of every issue. There is a large body of literature – from policy, practitioner and academic sources - that focuses on Nigeria and the many varied issues that can be understood to drive conflict, instability and resilience in the current day. The literature particularly focuses on Boko Haram and the Niger Delta, however the findings are limited by the difficulty in accessing areas with active conflict and high levels of criminality. And data on number of deaths and causes will be subject to certain biases - e.g. deficient official crime and violence statistics.

## **2. Profile**

**The history of the modern Nigerian nation-state has been characterised by turbulent, contentious and often violent politics** (Lewis & Watts, 2013, p.10). Ethnic, religious, regional, and sub-ethnic (communal) identities mark the fault-lines along which political claims and violent conflicts are made. Nigeria Watch recorded more than 10,000 public violent deaths in Nigeria in 2017. This has decreased from a high of almost 23,000 in 2014, at the height of the Boko Haram conflict (see Figure 1).

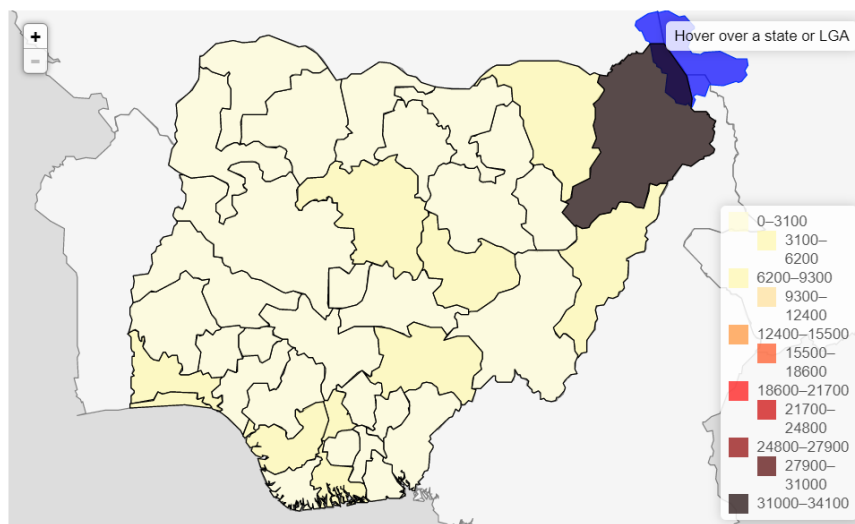
**Figure 1: Recorded number of public violence deaths in Nigeria since June 2006**



Source: Nigeria Watch database, 2018 <sup>1</sup>

The most dangerous states related to deaths are in the northeast (see Figure 2). From 2006 to 2016, the Boko Haram conflict caused approximately 33,000 fatalities, almost one-third of the 101,000 deaths recorded during this period in the Nigeria Watch database.<sup>2</sup> Roughly the same number of people were killed directly by the insurgents (16,666) and by security forces (16,000) (Nigeria Watch, 2016).<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 2: Recorded number of public violence deaths in Nigeria (June 2006-to date)**



<sup>1</sup> Data extracted on 4 February 2018, <http://www.nigeriawatch.org>

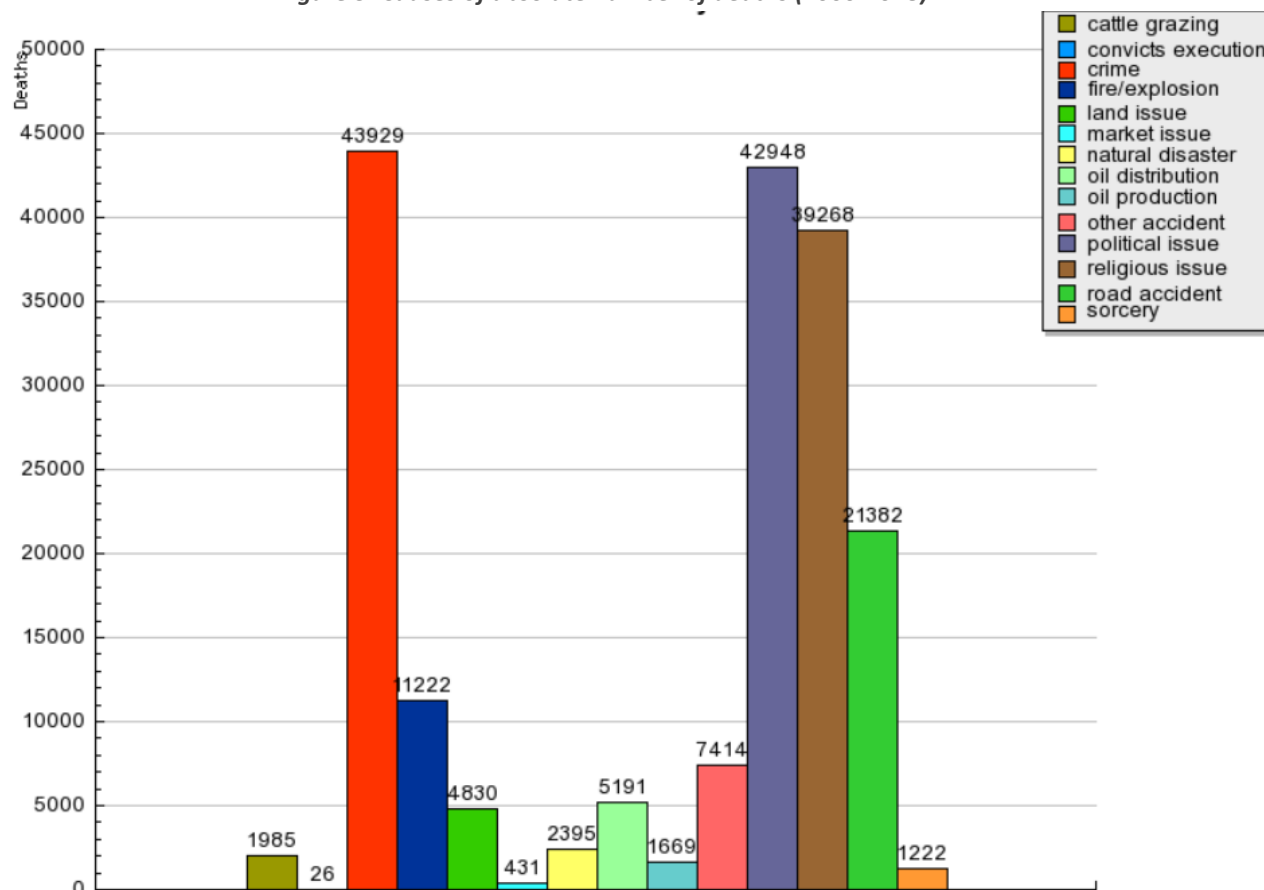
<sup>2</sup> Nigeria Watch monitors lethal violence, conflicts, and human security in Nigeria. The coding of these categories will be subject to some subjectivity. Depending on the position of journalists, for instance, the same group can be described as political or criminal. <http://www.nigeriawatch.org>

<sup>3</sup> Conflict dynamics – The Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme publishes monthly analyses of conflict dynamics in eight conflict-affected states - North West (Kaduna, Kano); North East: (Borno, Yobe); North Central (Plateau); and South South (Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta) <http://www.nsrp-nigeria.org/research/publications/conflict-briefing-notes/>

Source: Nigeria Watch database, 2018<sup>4</sup>

**Violent conflict in Nigeria relates to a variety of different causes.** Nigeria Watch data on the causes of deaths (2006-2018) records the three biggest causes of deaths to be: crime, political issues and religious issues (see Figure 3). The type of violent and crime related activities include: armed robbery, piracy, cult violence, mob action, kidnapping, domestic violence, ritual killings, herdsmen attacks, and killings by security forces (Nigeria Watch, 2016, p.13).

Figure 3: Causes of absolute number of deaths (2006-2018)



Source: Nigeria Watch database, 2018<sup>5</sup>

**Insurgency is an enduring feature of Nigerian state-society relations** (Aghedo & Osumah, 2015). ‘The growing strategic and operational effectiveness of the violent non-state actors engender enormous human and economic costs for Nigerians and visitors alike... The ineffectiveness of brutal counterinsurgency has prompted a gradual shift from the traditional military calculus to more liberal and flexible alternatives including the use of dialogue and amnesty deals in some cases (Aghedo & Osumah, 2015). Since independence, Nigeria has sometimes been analysed as if it were on the verge of the state breaking up, and secessionist claims are made by some Biafran groups. Bouchat (2013, p.49-50) argues that while the state’s breakup is a real possibility, ‘it is not inevitable, since few Nigerians want it. That both the state could fail and that few truly want it is part of the complexity of Nigeria, which must be understood and managed’.

**National security forces are often accused of human rights abuses** including: ‘unlawful killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, extortion, sexual harassment, and disappearances. This leads to mistrust and

<sup>4</sup> Data extracted on 4 February 2018, <http://www.nigeriawatch.org>

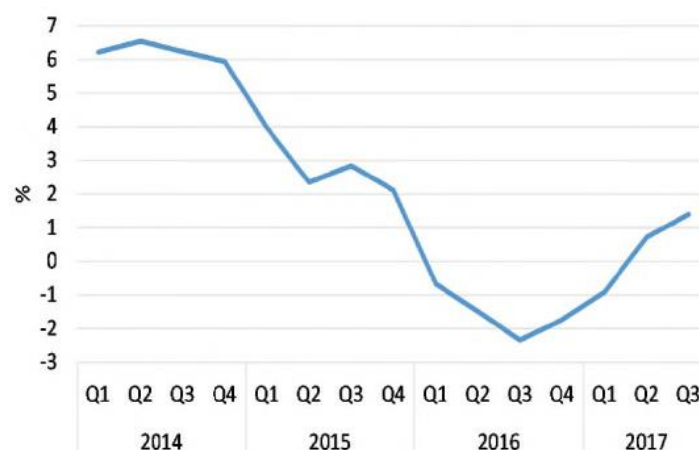
<sup>5</sup> Data extracted on 4 February 2018, <http://www.nigeriawatch.org>

negatively affects relations between security forces and the civilian population. Furthermore, civilian oversight of security institutions is ineffective and they remain largely unaccountable to civilian line ministries and the general public' (Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP), 2017a, p.2).

### 3. Socio-economic drivers of conflict, instability, and resilience

**Nigeria's economy is slowly recovering from the 2016-17 recession, and faces serious macroeconomic challenges** (see Figure 4). The 2016-17 recession was the first in 25 years, and followed a decade of strong economic growth driven by oil revenues. The recession was precipitated by 'the continued decline in oil prices, foreign exchange shortages, disruptions in fuel supply and sharp reduction in oil production, power shortages, and insecurity in some parts of the country, as well as low capital budget execution rate (51 percent)' (Barungi, Odhiambo & Asogwa 2017, p.2). ). Falling oil prices have radically undermined the financial basis of the state, which cannot recover without a rebound in oil prices. Increased politicking in the lead up to the 2019 elections make prudent policy reforms less likely, with economic growth also constrained by this weak policy environment and by the 'dire' infrastructure provision, notes the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU).<sup>6</sup> From 2020-22, with elections out of the way and oil prices strengthening, prospects for political and economic stability look stronger.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 4: Real Gross Domestic (GDP) Product Growth (2014-2017)



Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2017, p.3)

**Nigeria's oil-dependent economy is at the heart of its instability and its wealth**, what much of the literature refers to as the "resource curse".<sup>8</sup> The huge profits that are generated from oil have since the 1970s shaped a mono-product economy where oil and gas (mostly from the Niger Delta region) make up 90 percent of Nigeria's exports, and 75 percent of its consolidated budgetary revenue (Maitland &

<sup>6</sup> EIU website, Nigeria profile, accessed on 1 Feb 2018 <http://country.eiu.com/nigeria>

<sup>7</sup> EIU website, Nigeria profile, accessed on 1 Feb 2018 <http://country.eiu.com/nigeria>

<sup>8</sup> Notably, Lewis and Watts (2013, p.4-5) critique the application of the "resource curse" and "fragile state" theories to Nigeria arguing 'these simplifications overlook contradictory patterns and tendencies in the country's political economy... the concept of a resource curse typically emphasises structural determinism over political choice. Oil dependency has in fact played a contradictory role in postcolonial Nigeria, simultaneously fostering centralization within the federal system while fragmenting forms of identity and rule... Similarly, oil was a national resource deployed to finance nation- and state-building but also promoted a raft of local territorial identities (such as oil host communities, chiefdoms, and minorities). The petroleum state provoked myriad crises of authority in state and customary institutions, and yet it created forms of public authority with selective capabilities, demonstrating a combination of dysfunction and efficacy. More critically, political regimes in Nigeria have exhibited a striking durability in deploying forms of coercion and consent to reproduce, under both military and civilian regimes, patterns of class privilege and exclusion'. Lewis and Watts (2013, p.5) instead focus their analysis on the uneven (asymmetric) capabilities of different governance institutions, and wider political orders and political pacts these are embedded in.



Chapman, 2014, p.3). The literature widely argue that these factors were exacerbated by the adoption of structural adjustment policies in the 1970-80s (e.g. Asfura-Heim & McQuaid, 2015). Rent-seeking national and international elites seek to access and control these resources, neglecting developing or diversifying the broader economy (Schultz-Kraft, 2014).

**The high-stakes of this exclusive political settlement has fuelled official corruption, which has delegitimised the political system and increased economic inequality** (Asfura-Heim & McQuaid, 2015). It is estimated that '80 percent of energy revenues benefit only 1 percent of the population' (ibid). For those living in the oil-producing area of the Niger Delta, this stark economic inequality has been central to the decades of conflict between locals, the oil companies and the Nigerian political class. The grievances over how oil revenues are shared (or not shared) has consolidated regional, ethnic and religious cleavages across Nigeria.

**Nigeria's huge oil reserves and production make stability in Nigeria a geo-strategic and commercial priority** as it produces 8 percent of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Corporation's (OPEC) total daily oil production, and 3 percent of the world's volume (Nigerian National Petroleum Company in Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2017). Thus the intentions and actions of international actors in Nigeria are often oriented towards commercial and strategic interests, sometimes to the detriment of international development and human security needs (Herbert & Marquette, 2015). International oil companies are key conflict actors. Oil has also been pivotal to Nigeria's leadership roles in regional and international politics through the Africa Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the United Nations (UN).

**The lack of distribution of Nigeria's wealth means that inequality, poverty and lack of access to basic services fuel grievances across the country and hold back development.** In 2016, Nigeria was ranked at 152 out of 188 countries and territories in the world in the Human Development Index (HDI). While it has seen improvements in wellbeing – e.g. between 1990 and 2015, Nigeria's HDI value increased by 13 percent, life expectancy at birth increased by seven years, mean years of schooling increased by 0.8 years, and its GNI per capita increased by about 98 percent (UNDP, 2016). 54 percent of its population still lives in poverty, despite 50 years of oil wealth.<sup>9</sup> This 'points not only to the failure of postcolonial leadership but also to a profound crisis of governance' (Lewis & Watts, 2013, p.2).

**Economic disparities between the north and the rest of the country are stark.** The north has roughly half the GDP per capita as the south (Asfura-Heim & McQuaid, 2015, p.16-17). Poverty rates are 72 percent in the north, 27 percent in the south, and 35 percent in the Niger Delta (ibid). The Boko Haram dominated north-east has the highest poverty of any of the six ethno-regional zones (see the Annexes for a map of the geopolitical zones). And 'the government in the northeast has been unable or unwilling to provide sufficient security, roads, water, health care, or education, or reliable power' (ibid).

**Economic inclusion has been especially limiting, with little generation of wage employment.** This has become particularly acute since the economy was deregulated and shifted from agriculture to oil-dependency in the 1970s and 1980s, with far-reaching impacts, especially on the northern population (Asfura-Heim & McQuaid, 2015). Unemployment and underemployment particularly affect young people, and is compounded by Nigeria's "youth bulge", where 44 percent of its 180 million population are under 15 years of age.<sup>10</sup> Lack of employment prospects and poverty make young men particularly more likely to join violent and criminal groups, and to mobilise politically for rents.

**Nigeria suffers from huge infrastructural deficits in power, roads and rail networks,** and food insecurity results from low agricultural production and productivity. Poverty often collides with land and ecosystems degradation (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2017). E.g. in the Niger Delta, oil production has

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<sup>9</sup> Population living below income poverty line, PPP \$1.90 a day (%) <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NGA>

<sup>10</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators. See the Annexes in Section 13.

destroyed the livelihoods of many farmers and fishermen without producing new employment, as most of the oil sector jobs need skills the locals do not have (SDA, 2016).

**Yet, in focussing on the bottom-up processes of economic inclusion in northern Nigeria, Meagher (2013, p.231) finds sources of resilience**, with economic development that bridges religious divides. These processes have not emerged due to the logic of the free market, nor due to popular agency, but due to specific historical and regional contexts which have evolved over years, and centuries, of commercial relations across ethnoreligious lines. When these initiatives have come 'from above' they 'have tended to exacerbate rather than to mitigate conflict and economic exclusion' (Meagher, 2013, p.231). Meagher (2009) has also argued that economic integration via the informal economy has helped foster 'popular structures of national unity'.

#### **4. Socio-cultural drivers of conflict, instability, and resilience**

**In Nigeria's large and heterogeneous population, overlapping ethnic, religious, regional, linguistic and sub-ethnic (communal) identities mark the fault-lines along which political claims and violent conflicts are made.** Nigeria is home to 250 ethnic groups, and more than 500 different languages and dialects (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2017). The three largest ethnic groups represent around two-thirds of the population, and dominate the political system. They are: the Hausa and Fulani in the far north (approximately 29 percent of the population); the Yoruba in the southwest (21 percent); and the Igbo in the southeast (18 percent). Ethnic identity is a social construction and is subject to change and political manipulation, especially during elections; it is not a primordial ("tribal") identity (Lewis & Watts, 2013; Fearon & Laitin, 2000). Some of the ethnic groups in border regions are similar or identical to minority ethnic groups in the neighbouring countries (e.g. Niger and Cameroon).

**The political axis of power flips along the north-south regional divide**, and this also overlaps with the majority ethnic divisions, and the religious split of the predominantly Sunni Muslim north (approximately 50 percent of the population), and Christian south (48 percent) (Agbiboa, 2013). Inter-ethnic conflict between groups is common – e.g. between the Kanuri (of which most Boko Haram fighters are members) and the Hausa-Fulani majority (Asfura-Heim & McQuaid, 2015, p.8-9).

**These fissures are rooted in the colonial system of governance and have hardened throughout the postcolonial period.** Following the consolidation of the three administrative regions of Nigeria at independence, 'the huge territorial, population, and economic power asymmetries among these regions quickly proved politically debilitating' and 'political mobilization drawn along politicized ethno-religious lines has precluded the emergence of a true national identity in Nigeria' (Agbiboa, 2013, p.14, 3). This has occurred at the day-to-day micro-level of citizen relations – with high levels of social fragmentation leading to strong bonding within groups, and weak bridging between groups (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Francis, et al., 2014). This has fostered deep feelings of grievance, distrust, and animosity, especially when populations believe that they are being purposively excluded from the benefits that others are receiving (NSRP, 2017b, p.2; Aghedo & Eke, 2013, p.113; Agbiboa, 2013).<sup>11</sup> It has also happened at the state level, as competition for resources and privileges in Nigeria's oil political-economy has fostered a violent winner-takes all political system, uneven development and marginalization of large sections of the population (see Section 10) (Francis, et al., 2014; Wunti & Moniruzzaman, 2016). Thus there are two trends in Nigeria: (a) the continuation, aggravation and proliferation of violent identity conflicts; and (b) the attempt to manage identity conflicts through innovative federalist practices (see Section 5) (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

**Gender and youth have also emerged as important and active identities, 'especially in the struggle for rights and privileges'**, yet these identities are superseded by ethnic identities (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005,

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<sup>11</sup> E.g. 'Unemployed northern youth bear a strong animosity toward educated young people from the South, whom they accuse of being too sophisticated and domineering in the labor market' (Aghedo & Eke, 2013, p.113).

p.20). The same holds for economic (class) identity, Osaghae and Suberu (2005) highlight how this has stymied the development of a wider class consciousness (why “elite” is preferred to “class” as an analytical category). While women of all ages and young men, together form most of Nigeria’s population, they are largely excluded from decision-making on economic and natural resource issues (NSRP, 2017b, p.2). Thus ‘the experience and ideas of those most affected by violence triggered by resource conflicts go largely unheard’ (NSRP, 2017b, p.2). This division is seen by some youth as unfair, as the traditional hierarchies of age become less important to younger Nigerians.

**Gender inequality drives and is exacerbated by Nigeria’s conflicts** (NSRP, 2016). A key cause of conflict and physical, emotional and sexual abuse in the home is men’s inability to live up to the breadwinning role (NSRP, 2016). ‘Surveys undertaken in 2012 and 2013 indicated that around 30 percent of women in Nigeria had experienced some form of physical, sexual or emotional domestic violence during their lifetime’ (NSRP, 2017c, p.2). Violence against Women and Girls ‘is endemic in Nigeria, varying only in type and extent by geographical, cultural and conflict context. This violence takes many forms, from genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C) and domestic violence to sexual violence, kidnap and rape and forced early marriage. In the southeast over 50 percent of women have experienced FGM/C, whilst the figure in the south west is higher at nearly 61 percent. Nearly half the women in the north are married by 16 and expected to have a child within a year’ (NSRP, 2017c, p.2). Structural factors like inequality, poverty or lack of patronage networks make it hard for men to provide for their families and drive some men to participate in violence outside the household. NSRP (2017c, p.2) research found young men that joined groups that ‘protected the community’ were treated with more respect.

## **5. Political drivers of conflict, instability, and resilience**

**Nigeria’s diversity is frequently exploited by politicians who use chauvinistic appeals based on ethnicity, religion, and regionalism to shore up electoral support.** For instance, the 2011 presidential election contested between a southern Christian candidate, Goodluck Jonathan, and northern Muslim candidate, Buhari ‘split the country along ethno-religious-regional lines’ leading to dramatic levels of post-election violence (Paden 2015, p. 1). Protests followed by rioting between aggrieved Muslim supporters of defeated candidate Buhari and Christians perceived to have supported Goodluck Jonathan claimed the lives of 800 people across 12 northern states. Buhari fans alleging that the elections had been rigged led the initial protests, which began after it became clear that Buhari had lost the election (HRW, 2011).

**Previous elections in 1999, 2003, and 2007 were also characterised by sectional tensions and violence** with the latter election – which outgoing-President Obasanjo famously referred to as a ‘do or die affair’ – also having claimed the lives of up to 300 people (HRW, 2011). However, the 2015 general elections, which were once again a competition between Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari, featured minimal violence and the first peaceful transfer of power to an opposition candidate. This peaceable outcome was to a larger extent a product of both candidates having publically signed a peace agreement spearheaded by imminent Nigerians and supported by the international community before the election, as well as the widely lauded efforts of Nigeria’s electoral commission in administering credible polls (EUEOM, 2015).

**Power politics is now taking centre-stage, ahead of the next general elections in February 2019.** There has been much speculation as to whether the current President Buhari<sup>12</sup> will contest the 2019 election

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<sup>12</sup> President Muhammadu Buhari won the 2015 elections as part of the All Progressives Congress party, which was only formed in 2013. Buhari, formerly a military general, was head of state from 1983 to 1985, after a military coup. 75-year-old Buhari is likely to run for re-election, despite undergoing lengthy health treatment abroad during his presidency for an undisclosed ailment. See information about him at - <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/04/201141315393765200.html>

due to poor health (Siollun, 2017). The highly influential former-President Obasanjo<sup>13</sup> recently called for Buhari to step down in an open letter, he argues Buhari lacks sufficient knowledge and understanding of the economy, that he has not had enough success in clamping down on corruption and the insurgency, for the increase in violent conflict between the pastoralist and farming communities (Buhari is seen to have taken sides with his ethnic group, the Fulani herders).<sup>14</sup> In that letter and a subsequent open letter, Obasanjo announces his support for a new political movement – the Coalition for Nigeria Movement (CNM):

*‘[The] Coalition for Nigeria Movement is proposed as the new direction to mobilise our population for unity, cooperation, development, rule of law, employment, law and order, justice, integration, peace, security, stability, welfare and well-being. In these regards, special attention and space must be given to youths and women, who in most cases, have been victims and underlings... The CNM will remain a popular socio-economic Movement open to all Nigerians who believe in the greatness of Nigeria and are ready to contribute to it’.*<sup>15</sup>

**There is speculation over whether there is now a ‘Third Force’ in Nigeria’s two-party political system,**<sup>16</sup> as the launch of the new CNM movement is thought to have radically shifted the likely election outcome. There are also other political groups which may represent a Third Force to contest the 2019 elections.<sup>17</sup>

**Nigerian political parties are legally required to have nationally representative memberships and are banned from making direct sectional appeals,** however, it is often assumed that an electoral candidates will govern in favour of his or her co-ethnics and co-religionist. Zoning, an informal arrangement within Nigeria’s main political parties whereby the presidential candidacy alternates between a northerner and a southerner after each has served two terms is a practice intended to provide political equity across regional, religions, and ethnic divides. ‘This mechanism for alternating power helped keep the peace in a country with hundreds of different ethnic groups and more than 500 different languages’ (Siollun, 2017). By alleviating ‘the southern secessionist pressures that had festered under decades of military rule by dictators from the north,’ zoning has therefore been a source of resilience (Siollun, 2017). However, this arrangement also ends up further entrenching group cohesion and elite manipulation. As a result, ‘claims and counter-claims of ethnic domination and marginalization’ (Mustapha, 2006, p.1) are a constant feature of national political discourse as well as a recurrent source of tension and conflict.

**Indigeneity, one of the legal instruments designed to manage Nigeria’s ethnic diversity, has instead become a source of tension and conflict.** Officially, each state and local government in Nigeria recognizes a certain group of its population as indigenes and all other residents as non-indigenes. As a 2006 Human Rights Watch report explains, ‘the indigenes of a place are those who can trace their ethnic and genealogical roots back to the community of people who originally settled there (p.1). Everyone else, no matter how long they or their families have lived in the place they call home, is and always will be a non-indigene’. Indigeneity was original intended as a policy to protect the cultures of Nigeria’s diverse ethnic groups as well as grant each of them guaranteed political access in a specific state or local government of “origin”. This arrangement has led to the practical exclusion of the millions of Nigerians who live outside of their regions of origin from basic social services, ‘effectively relegates many non-indigenes to the status of second-class citizens.’ Given pervasive poverty, such discrimination has added to communal competition for resources and feelings of exclusion. ‘Many Nigerians believe that this desperate

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<sup>13</sup> Olusegun Obasanjo was President from 1999 (when democracy returned to Nigeria) until 2007. See information about him at - <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2007/04/2008525183636239264.html>

<sup>14</sup> Obasanjo’s letter is reproduced on - Channels Television (2018) The Way Out: A Clarion Call For Coalition For Nigerian Movement By Olusegun Obasanjo (FULL STATEMENT), 23 January 2018, <https://www.channelstv.com/2018/01/23/way-clarion-call-coalition-nigerian-movement-olusegun-obsanjo/>

<sup>15</sup> Obasanjo’s subsequent letter is reproduced on Premium Times (2018) Obasanjo releases more details about Coalition for Nigeria — FULL STATEMENT, 1 February 2018 <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/257341-obasanjo-releases-details-coalition-nigeria-full-statement.html>

<sup>16</sup> Ibrahim J. (2018) *The Third Force*. Daily Trust, Feb 9 2018 <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/the-third-force.html>

<sup>17</sup> Ibrahim J. (2018) *The Third Force*. Daily Trust, Feb 9 2018 <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/the-third-force.html>

competition between citizens for some basic level of economic security lies near the heart of most of the country's inter-communal conflicts' (HRW, 2006, p.2).

**Political corruption has also been a recurrent motivation for conflict as well as a key reason for the Nigerian government's frequently inadequate responses to violent outbreaks.** Nigeria is ranked by Transparency International as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, placing at 136 of 176 countries.<sup>18</sup> 'It has been estimated that close to \$400 billion was misappropriated from Nigeria's public accounts from 1960 to 1999' (Hoffmann & Patel, 2017, p. iv). This corruption has been a directly cited motivation for militancy in the Niger Delta, the region which produced most of Nigeria's often pilfered oil wealth (Peel, 2005). The corruption of the Nigerian state was also an explicit rationale cited by Boko Haram insurgency as a justification for its use of violence (Thurston, 2016). Corruption has also been a major factor contributing to poverty which has in turn heightened competition among various social groups, increasing their predisposition to conflict. The state's response to violence outbreak has likewise frequently been hampered by corruption given the public lack of trust and cooperation resulting from the perceived corruption of the security forces, as well as the fact that resources for equipment and pay have often been siphoned off by high-ranking officials (NSRP, 2012). However, Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) established in 2002 has recently led anticorruption efforts that have been moderately successful and serve as an example of institutional resilience. Though convictions have been rare, the EFCC 'has arraigned 30 prominent politicians, including 15 former state governors' (Persson, 2014, p. 17).

## **6. Environmental drivers of conflict, instability, and resilience**

**Struggles over increasingly scarce land and water threaten peace and stability in many states,** particularly in the north-east and north-central zones (see section 9). These land and water conflicts intersect with ethnicity and indigeneity issues and thus have the potential to rapidly escalate (NSRP, 2017b, p.2). Oil spills and gas flaring continue to drastically degrade the Niger Delta's ecosystem, increasing impoverishment, joblessness and health problems (see Section 8).

**The severe food crisis in Nigeria's northeast continues in 2018.** A large percentage of north-eastern households faced a "crisis" or "emergency" food security situation in January 2018 (see Figure 5). Data projections for 2018 show an elevated risk of "famine" in inaccessible areas,<sup>19</sup> and an increased risk that households in the middle-belt and northern Nigeria become food "stressed", warns the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET).<sup>20</sup>

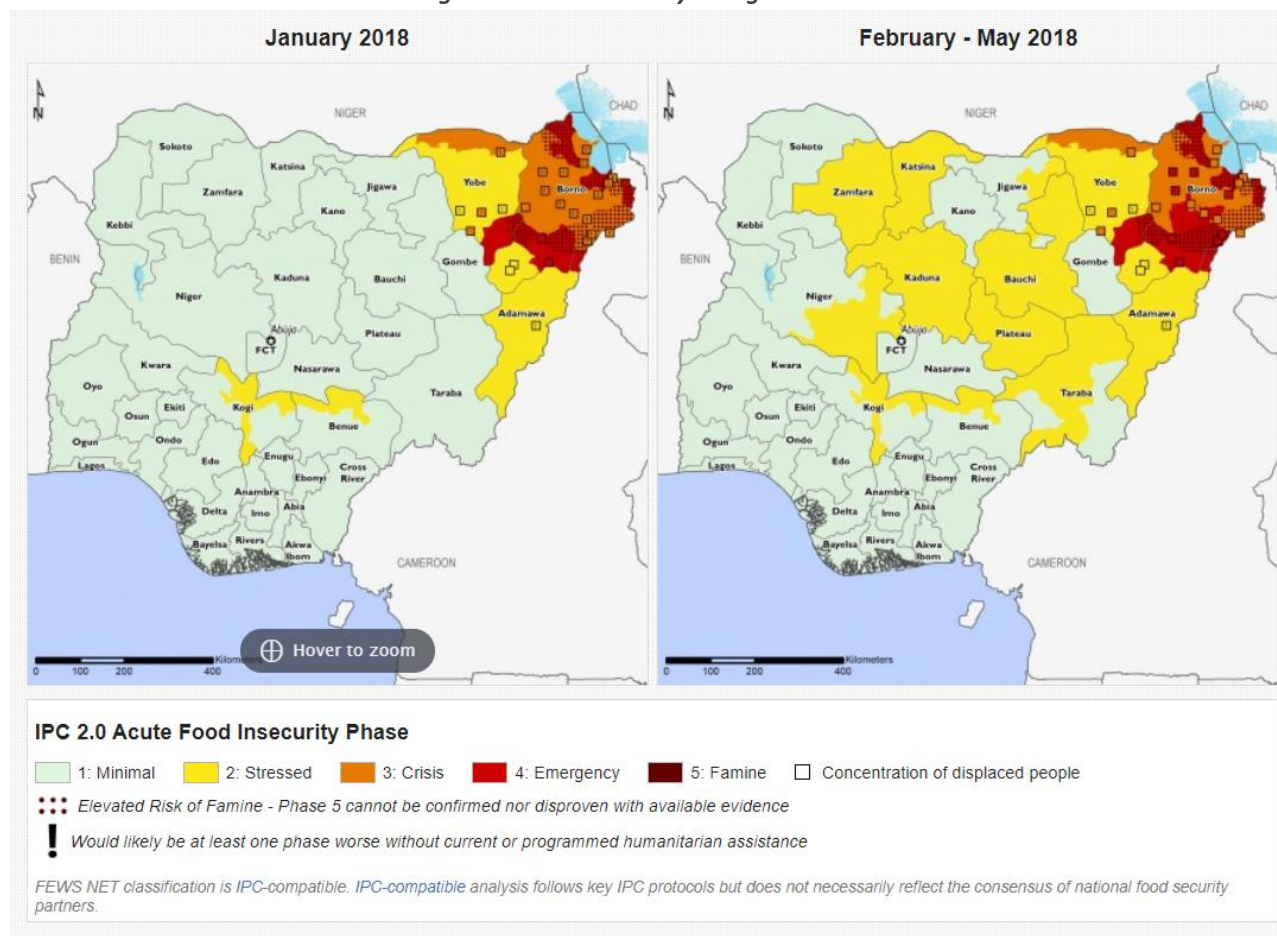
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<sup>18</sup> Transparency International, "Nigeria", Accessed on February 5, 2018, from <https://www.transparency.org/country/NGA>

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Famine may have occurred in 2016 in Borno State, but this area is inaccessible to aid workers (FEWS NET, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> FEWS NET uses the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) methodology - <http://fews.net/IPC>

Figure 5: Food insecurity in Nigeria



Source: FEWS NET (2018)

**These emergency and famine conditions are largely due to the violent northeast conflict**, rather than climate change or resource scarcity (Raleigh, 2017). The Boko Haram conflict has led to huge population displacement in Borno State and smaller areas in Yobe and Adamawa States, an influx of refugees with trade restrictions, and limited humanitarian and market access severely constraining development, livelihoods and the resilience of populations (FEWS NET, 2018). In response, humanitarian assistance and livelihoods and agricultural support increased substantially in 2017 (FEWS NET, 2018).

**While the middle-belt conflict threatens to increase food insecurity, so far it has proven resilient**, what Raleigh (2017) identifies as a case of a ‘missing conflict famine’. In this area, conflict between pastoralists and farmers has seen substantial displacement of populations, livestock killed, and constrained access to grazing areas in Benue, Taraba, Adamawa, and Plateau States (FEWS NET, 2018). Households outside of the northeast are ‘primarily consuming own-produced food, and are engaged in normal livelihood activities such as the sale of livestock, cash crops, and their own labor to earn income. Off-season activities, migratory labor work and wild food collection are providing increased access to food and income for poor households’ (FEWS NET, 2018).

**Climate change has already led to drought and desertification** across the southern Sahel of West Africa, including much of northern Nigeria, and dramatic reductions in the water levels of Lake Chad. Future projections are that climate change will exacerbate extreme weather in Nigeria, and will negatively impact food security and livelihoods, particularly in the north and southwest (Cervigni, Valentini & Santini, 2013). The likely impacts include (Cervigni, et al., 2013, p.1):

- ‘A long-term reduction in crop yields of 20–30 percent

- Declining productivity of livestock, with adverse consequences on livelihoods
- Increase in food imports (up to 40 percent for rice long term)
- Worsening prospects for food security, particularly in the north and the southwest
- A long-term decline in GDP of up to 4.5 percent’.

**With 185 million people, Nigeria is the seventh most populated country in the world**, and Africa’s most populous country.<sup>21</sup> Nigeria’s population is young - with 44 percent under 15 years of age.<sup>22</sup> Urbanisation trends mean that 48 percent of the population now live in urban areas.<sup>23</sup> The population was 38 million in 1950, and is projected to reach 410 million by 2050, which would make it the third most populous country in the world by 2050 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2017, p.26).

## **7. Boko Haram conflict**

**Though now close to a decade into its existence as a violent insurgency, Boko Haram and the broader conflict it has generated, continue to top the list of the Nigerian government’s urgent priorities.** This is because the Boko Haram conflict has been an exceptionally brutal episode in Nigeria’s recent history, resulting in around 33,000 casualties, the abduction of hundreds — including the now globally renowned 270 schoolgirls from the community of Chibok— and the displacement of close to two million people mainly in north-eastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region (Nigeria Watch database).<sup>24</sup> The following section provides a review of key proximate and structural causes that have fuelled this violent conflict.

**The estimated number of Boko Haram members ranges from 5,000 to 20,000**, yet there is no reliable data on this. Boko Haram is predominantly made up of the Kanuri ethnic group. It is thought that Boko Haram has splintered into two main factions: (a) the Shekau branch - has its stronghold in the Sambisa Forest (close to the Cameroon border); is much more radical in its actions; and is currently in disarray and losing influence; (b) the Al-Barnawi branch – is based further north in the Lake Chad areas; has declared allegiance to Daesh;<sup>25</sup> is targeting its actions at military targets and Christians; is more sensitive about the civil implications of its actions; represents a serious more sophisticated threat; and has the support of some layers of the population.<sup>26</sup> However, very recent military offensives may have significantly shifted the fight against Boko Haram. The Nigerian Army has declared that it has ‘completely defeated the Boko Haram insurgents’ by dislodging and occupying its headquarters in ‘Camp Zairo’, making the Boko Haram factional leader, Abubakar Shekau, flee.<sup>27</sup>

**The Boko Haram conflict has emerged out of a wider context of recurrent sectarian strife in Northern Nigeria.** Revivalist and charismatic Islamic movements have long been a part of the socio-political landscape of this region. Such movements date at least as far back in time as the 1804 jihad, or holy war, led by Islamic scholar and preacher Shaikh Usman Dan Fodio (1754 - 1817) which founded the Sokoto Caliphate— a precolonial state encompassing present day northern Nigeria, southern Niger, and northern Cameroon (Zenn, 2015) 38. The region has been riven by numerous other religiously inspired radical

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<sup>21</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators. See Annex in Section 13

<sup>22</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators. See Annex in Section 13

<sup>23</sup> See - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NGA>

<sup>24</sup> Nigeria Watch monitors lethal violence, conflicts, and human security in Nigeria. The coding of these categories will be subject to some subjectivity. Depending on the position of journalists, for instance, the same group can be described as political or criminal. <http://www.nigeriawatch.org>

<sup>25</sup> Also known as Islamic State (IS)

<sup>26</sup> Personal communication

<sup>27</sup> Reported in the Daily Trust - <https://dailytrust.com.ng/shekau-insurgents-relocate-to-borno-villages-with-hostages.html>

movements since then. Notably, the Maitatsine sect, often cited as a forerunner to Boko Haram, was a fundamentalist movement that arose in the 1970 - 1980s in the northern Nigerian city Kano and triggered a violent clash with the authorities when it sought to mobilise local populations against the state, non-Muslims, and mainstream Muslims who the movement deemed to be 'unbelievers' (Asfura-Heim & McQuaid, 2015). Analysts also point to increased conflicts between Muslim and Christian communities in northern Nigeria during the early 2000s (Walker, 2012) and the contemporaneous popular outcry in favour of the establishment of Sharia Law across northern Nigeria (Thurston, 2016) as examples of the recurrent religious tensions that plague the region. These movements left an ideological legacy characterised by violent opposition to the state, the politicisation of Islamic radicalism, and the rejection of religious pluralism, a legacy which contributed to the social receptivity of Boko Haram's message and approach after its founding in 2002.

**Boko Haram's espousal of a specifically 'Salafi-jihadi' outlook has been a more immediate driver of the group's violent approach** (Thurston, 2016). Boko Haram's original name which translates as "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" reflects its Salafi convictions.<sup>28</sup> Much like other such movements around the world, Boko Haram also 'claims to embody the authentic legacy of the early Muslim community...asserts the right to declare Muslim leaders apostates, rebel against allegedly infidel states, and use force to impose the Salafi creed and a strict interpretation of Islamic law on civilians' (Thurston, 2016, p. 9). Though a minority amongst northern Nigerian Muslims, Salafis have attracted ardent followers by making fundamentalist appeals, through which they portray themselves 'as a vanguard of true Muslims within a wayward society,' as well as through their adept use of local media and 'urban networks of mosques and schools' (ibid). These hard-lined stances have triggered disagreements, competition, and conflict not only with other Muslim groups but also within Nigeria's Salafi movement itself. As a subgroup within this fractious community, Boko Haram's more violent approach has been understood as a means of differentiating itself amidst the 'fierce intra-Salafi competition for audiences' (ibid, p.10). Thus, from the ideological standpoint, both the much wider historical context of sectarian conflict and the more immediate and volatile impetus of Salafi-Jihadism have contributed to providing the immediate spark that has ignited this violent conflict.

**The Boko Haram crisis has also been fuelled by the confluence of the national issue of corruption and the dramatic poverty and inequality that persists in Northern Nigeria.** Nigeria's political and economic elite who have benefited from the oil political-economy have also created an almost self-sustaining status-quo marked by opulence and conspicuous consumption. At the same time, nearly three quarters of the population in Nigeria's north live in poverty while the northeast of Nigeria, the birthplace of Boko Haram, has the worst poverty rates in the country (ICG, 2014).

As a result, analysts note that 'many Nigerians in the Lake Chad area believe that the government could be doing more to share wealth, improve access to food and water, increase opportunities for livelihoods, and generally ease their burdens. They are disgusted by the corruption that they continue to see at all levels of government' (Cole et. al, 2017). These factors have therefore served to both trigger widespread anger and disillusionment amongst the northern Nigerian population and to delegitimise Nigeria's government and political system. These disappointments and grievances have been a crucial factor fuelling the growth and spread extremist ideologies in northern Nigeria, such as those espoused by Boko Haram.

**The frequently coercive responses of the Nigerian government to the Boko Haram insurgency have also been one of the driving factors of the conflict.** The deadliest phases of the insurgency only began after the police, following a skirmish with the group in July 2009, carried out a 'bloody purge of the group's members and anyone they suspected of being a Boko Haram supporter and sympathizer' (Walker, 2012, p. 4). The

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<sup>28</sup>In Arabic: *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'awati wal-Jihad*. The group only later came to be known locally as Boko Haram— a Hausa term which roughly translates as "Western education is forbidden" and was used derisively to caricature the group's belief that, in contrast to the Nigeria's democracy, only an Islamic theocracy shorn of all the trappings of western influence could govern justly.



number of people who were executed by the police in this period is said to be 'more than a hundred' (ibid). The police also executed the group's founder, Muhammed Yusuf, without trial while he was under their custody during this period. This response by the state initially dislodged Boko Haram from Maiduguri and sent its remaining members into hiding. However, this brutal crackdown ultimately gave rise to a more violent phase of the Boko Haram insurgency as the group soon emerged under a more fanatical leadership, driven by revenge and a narrative of victimhood (Asfura-Heim et. al, 2015).

The state's approach to Boko Haram has not greatly moderated since this episode. Rather, the Federal government has since launched a full military operation in the territories in which the group is most active. During their campaigns in these regions, the armed forces have frequently been accused of 'arbitrary dragnet arrests, collective punishment, illegal detentions, and, in some instances, extra-judicial killings' (ibid). This approach has been counterproductive as it has not only further alienated the local population and triggered further radicalisation, but also limited the effectiveness of the state's response thereby extending the conflict.

**The significant governance deficit in the affected region has led to the emergence of alternative conflict actors** (e.g. the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) around 2013). Analysts note that, at the peak of the conflict, such volunteers even came to 'outnumber government soldiers,' with their roles expanding 'beyond static local defence to include intelligence gathering, surveillance and tracking, and raids on homes of known and suspected members' (Asfura-Heim et. al, 2015, p. 53). While these vigilante groups have been praised for helping push back Boko Haram, they also risk further extending the conflict given that, having already taken up arms, they 'could eventually become another source of insecurity' (Asfura-Heim et. al, 2015, p. 53). Structurally, the limited state infrastructure, capacity, and presence in the north-eastern corner of Nigeria has been a dramatic constraint on the state's response throughout the crises. However, more immediate governors' failures during the crises also contributed to its extension.

**In this respect, the hesitant response of the Goodluck Jonathan administration (2011 - 2016) to the crises was an important aggravating factor.** Not till 2013 did the Jonathan administration finally designate Boko Haram a terrorist group, declare a state of emergency, and deploy troops in the three north-eastern states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe which were most under threat (Matfess, 2017). The period in which the Nigerian state responded in a hesitant and incoherent manner also coincided with the phase wherein Boko Haram pioneered its most brutal tactics, including widespread abductions and the mass slaughter of rural and small town populations. The internationally reported kidnapping of the Chibok school girls in 2014 and the 2015 massacre of up to 2000 civilians in Baga, Borno State are examples of this trend.

**The vacuum of state authority in the areas under the most severe threat from Boko Haram also meant that various criminal groups have seen the chaos as an opportunity for profit.** In this light, Matfess (2017, p.15) observes that 'the cells that developed and joined the group in this time period were less ideologically oriented than their predecessors and showed greater interest in criminality and material gain.' Instances of such criminality including, 'bank robberies robbing, cash-in-transit convoys, assassinations for hire, and trafficking illegal weapons and drugs,' have been cited as one of the sources of Boko Haram's sustained access to funding, a factor which has greatly extended the conflict (Asfura-Heim et. al, 2015, p. 30).

**The Buhari presidency has brought about a period of relative improvement in the Boko Haram's crisis marked by significant gains made by the Nigerian government but also dire humanitarian crises** as well as resistance and evolution on the part of the insurgents. The Nigerian government, through its regional collaboration through a Multinational Joint Task Force established with Cameroon, Niger, and Chad has been able to regain most of the territory initially lost to the insurgents. However, Boko Haram has innovated various new approaches to violence including its increased use of women and children as suicide bombers in civilian population centres. Yet, perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the current phase in the Boko Haram conflict is the humanitarian crises it has triggered which is said to affect up to 8.5 million people. Exacerbated by environmental challenges posed by famine and the drying-up of Lake

Chad as well as demographic pressures caused by displacement across national and international borders of large numbers of people, the scale of this aspect of the crises still remains to be fully grasped.

## **8. Niger Delta conflict**

**The Niger Delta is characterised by the paradox of vast resource wealth, widespread poverty and distributional injustices.** 35 percent of the region's 31 million live in poverty, and locals face limited employment and livelihoods opportunities, energy poverty, and limited access to basic services.<sup>29</sup> This is despite its vast resources - the region makes up only 7.5 percent of Nigeria's land,<sup>30</sup> but contains over 90 percent of its proven gas and oil reserves, and contains one of the world's most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2017).<sup>31</sup> The complex Niger Delta conflict features ethnic, regional, developmental, environmental, generational, communal and corporate characteristics.

**Protests against the region's political marginalisation, underdevelopment and distributional injustice** began in the 1960s, following the 1956 initiation of oil extraction, and the 1960 independence of Nigeria with the establishment of three regional administrative divisions based on the three majority ethnic groups (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2017). The 40 ethnic groups in the Niger Delta, with their smaller populations, were thus politically and economically marginalised. Poor governance means that allocations of oil wealth for the Niger Delta are apportioned according to the political or personal agendas of those in power, and contracts serve as patronage or elite pay-offs (SDN, 2015, p.6). In today's Niger Delta, 'stark inequalities are more visible than anywhere else in Nigeria and where social indicators are significantly worse than the national average' (SDN, 2016a, p.3). Perhaps the strongest grievance of these groups is the federal government's use of oil wealth to develop other regions, at the expense of the oil-producing region (Adeyeri, 2012). And inevitably, these injustices contrast starkly with the conspicuous consumption of elites (SDN, 2015). Recurring cycles of violence have seen thousands die in the past two decades (Schultz-Kraft, 2014).

**The Nigerian state has responded to the conflicts with a range of actions** - military crackdowns, an amnesty for fighters, establishing interventionist development agencies (e.g. the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs), enacting legislation, increasing the allocation of public revenues, and appointing some elites from the region to key positions (Aghedo, 2015, p.150). It is widely criticised for its overreliance on military responses that have been counterproductive in radicalising non-state actors (e.g. Aghedo & Osumah, 2015), and for rewarding violence and incentivising kidnapping through the amnesty programme (Aghedo, 2015, p.137). While the 1999 amnesty effectively froze the conflict in a 'no war, no peace' situation, it did not build a sustainable peace (Aghedo, 2012, p.267).

**Yet recent years have seen a reemergence of the "frozen conflict". In 2017 militancy, conflict risk and lethal violence continued to increase** (see Figure 6).<sup>32</sup> Nigerian state responses 'have oscillated between a tough security strategy geared at uprooting armed militants and protecting the oil infrastructure, and measures aimed at furthering the region's development' (Schultz-Kraft, 2014, p.20). Yet it is widely acknowledged that these responses have not addressed the underlying causes of the conflict (e.g. Aghedo, 2015; Schultz-Kraft, 2014; Adeyeri, 2012; Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2017). And that the responses 'have suffered from weak design, feeble implementation and incoherent strategies, resulting in adverse consequences, particularly in relation to human rights (Schultz-Kraft, 2014, p.20).

*Figure 6: Heatmap of Conflict Incidents in the Niger Delta (Apr-Jun 2017)*

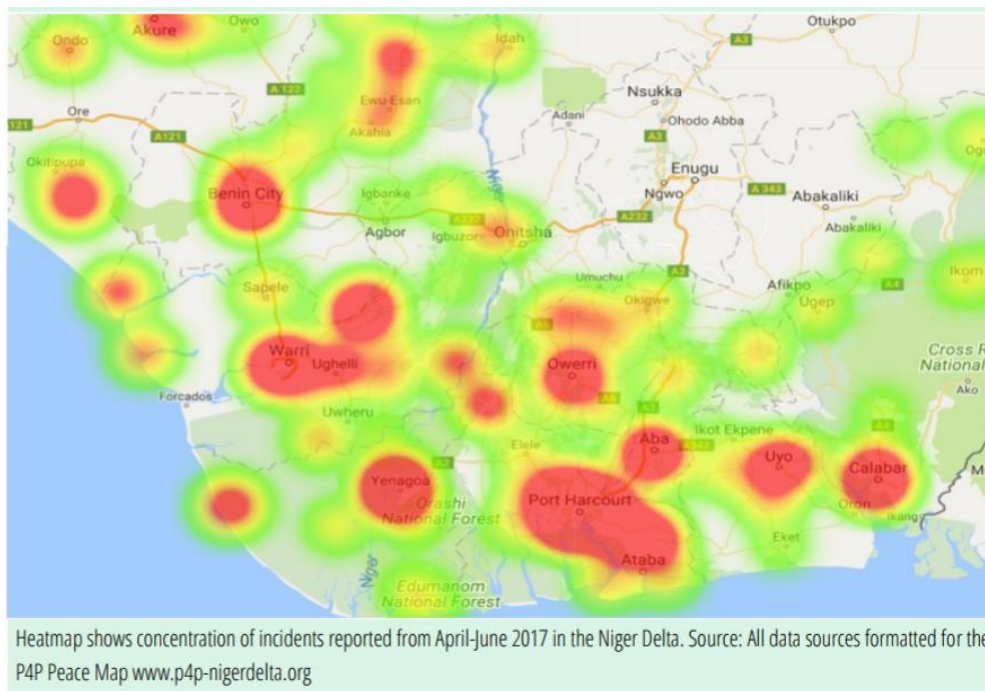
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<sup>29</sup> See <http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/about-the-niger-delta/>

<sup>30</sup> Over nine states - Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers.

<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.stakeholderdemocracy.org/about-the-niger-delta/>

<sup>32</sup> Notably in a literature review, Lucia-Lopez (2015) points to inconsistencies in the literature about whether violence is increasing or not in the Niger Delta, and the possible manipulation of this data for political means.



*Source: Fund for Peace (2017, p.1)*

**Oil spills and gas flaring continue to drastically degrade the environment, increasing impoverishment, joblessness and health problems.** Oil spills are caused by equipment failure, vandalism and theft (“oil bunkering”). Oil theft has become a way of life for many, as employment opportunities in the region are low, and oil pollution has made traditional livelihoods (agricultural and fishing) inviable (Maitland & Chapman, 2014). An estimated 150,000 barrels of crude oil are stolen every day – for international sale, and approximately 25 percent stays in the Niger Delta for refining and consumption (SDN, 2015). This combination of precarity and criminality means that conflicts easily escalate into violence, with impunity and injustice the norm. ‘Men and male youth act mostly as the conflict perpetrators and profiteers, while communities, women and children suffer consequences disproportionately’ (NSRP, 2017b, p.2-3).

**Responses to oil spills have been ‘marked by corruption, lack of effective communication, power struggles, and an almost total failure to adequately remedy oil spills** by cleaning and restoring the environment and compensating those harmed’, notes Maitland and Chapman (2014, p.3). ‘Decades of this failed response have bred resentment and distrust among oil affected communities, increasing militancy and black market oil trade as a last resort path to wealth-sharing and further complicating the possibility of a successful remediation and long-term peace. Oil companies, on the other hand, report that they struggle with sabotage and theft of oil, difficulties accessing spill sites, and complicated community dynamics that contribute to spills and confuse and undermine remediation efforts’ (Maitland & Chapman, 2014, p.3).

**Weak governance of the oil companies has fostered corporate practices that are drivers of the conflict.** To buy locals’ support, the international oil companies pay handouts to community leaders that host their oil facilities (SDN, 2016a; Amunwa, 2012). While the oil companies frame this as an example of responsible corporate social policy, in practice it has handed money to a small elite, who often have not redistributed it or invested it in the community, leaving communities divided and distrustful (SDN, 2016a). This has reinforced inequality, has led to violent winner-takes-all battles within communities, and has established a predatory culture where violence pays – the well documented example of the Rumuekpe crisis provides an important insight into how these processes have emerged at the local level (SDN, 2016a).

**The collusion between state authorities, security services, criminal networks and actors within the oil industry run in parallel with – and are enabled by – official structures** (Barrios 2013; SDN, 2015; Lucia-Lopez, 2015). The governors of the core states of the Niger Delta (Bayelsa, Delta and River States) have strategically positioned themselves at the centre of the country's oil complex (Onuoha, 2009, p. 249). In addition to their agreements with the elites at the federal government level, they have put in place a parallel structure that integrates local leaders and social pressure groups (feeding on ethnic emancipation claims and youth exclusion), and that provides the network for the illicit tapping and selling of crude oil (Onuoha, 2009, p.249). Newsom (2011, p. 3) argues that cycles of violence and elections in the Niger Delta are now inseparable and fuel each other through the instrumentalisation of youth by political actors.

**Over the course of its history, the conflict has pitted the government and oil companies against an array of resistance and armed groups**, including: advocacy groups; cults and confraternities; vigilantes; militias; and umbrella militias. It is not yet known whether the groups and individuals currently active are the same as those active in the 1990s (Fund for Peace, 2016, p.6). Nor is it understood whether these groups are collaborating with pro-Biafran groups (Fund for Peace, 2016, p.6). The motives and targets of these groups have changed over time – with initial campaigns against political exclusion, economic marginalisation and environmental insecurity, and focused on oil workers and expatriates (Aghedo, 2015). More recently, local elites have been targeted, as kidnapping has become 'a lucrative business employed by many as survival strategy amidst mass poverty, growing unemployment and underemployment', suggesting greed as a core motivation (Aghedo, 2015).

## **9. Middle-belt conflict**

**Repeated clashes between nomadic pastoralist (transhumant) and farming communities are one of the most pressing axes of conflict in Nigeria**, particularly in the country's north and middle belt regions.<sup>33</sup>

While tensions between these communities have a long history in these regions, the scale and frequency of violent outbreaks between the groups have recently risen, threatening to inflame ethnic and religious antagonisms (Onubogu, 2017). In 2016 alone, an estimated 2500 people were killed in such clashes (ICG, 2017). Indeed, several studies have indicated that this conflict caused more casualties in 2016 than did the Boko Haram Insurgency in northeast Nigeria (SB Morgen Intelligence, 2017, p. 4). These clashes have additionally led to the displacement of at least 62,000 people, most of them women and children, in the hardest hit states of Kaduna, Benue and Plateau (ICG, 2017, p. 7). These humanitarian costs are also mirrored by economic ones: Nigeria Federal Government has lost an estimated \$13.7 billion in its annual takings whilst the worst hit states have lost 47 percent of their internally generated revenue due to the conflict (Mercy Corps, 2015). This is a situation which requires urgent attention given its present scale and likely future impacts. The following sections provides an analytical review of a number of key factors which have helped cause and exacerbate this conflict.

**The conflict has been triggered by persistent drought and desertification and population growth.** The increasingly southwardly movement of herders due to persistent drought and desertification in Nigeria's far north has combined with population growth in sedentary communities and the expansion of farms into former grazing reserves. The exacerbation of these trends has heightened competition, primarily over the scarce resources of land and water, which has in turn fuelled violent flare-ups.

**Climate change has led to drought and desertification across the southern Sahel of West Africa, including much of northern Nigeria** in which the arid or semi-arid climate had historically enjoyed very limited amounts of annual rainfall. 'In the last six decades, over 350,000 sq km of the already arid region turned to desert or desert-like conditions, a phenomenon progressing southward at the rate of 0.6km per year' (ICG, 2017, p. 3). Additionally, Lake Chad, the most significant body of water in the region and previously 'one of the largest bodies of fresh water on the African continent' has suffered 'a reduction of

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<sup>33</sup> Though incidents have been recorded in at least 22 of Nigeria's 36 states (ICG, 2017, p. 1).

approximately 90 percent compared to the recorded level in the mid-1960s' (GIZ, 2015, p. 5&7). These ecological changes have been particularly hard-felt by Nigeria's pastoralist communities given that over 90 percent of Nigeria's livestock holding is located in the affected areas across northern Nigeria (NRSP 2015 p. 4). The result of these pressures on pastoralist communities has been that herders have been forced to greatly extend the length of their seasonal migrations to Nigeria's less arid middle-belt while, 'some have chosen to graze their herds there permanently' (ICG, 2017, p.3) generating tensions between settlers and host communities.

**Simultaneously, in the middle-belt, Nigeria's high population growth over the past four decades has necessitated increased demand for farmland in previously gazetted grazing pastures as well as changes in farming practices.**<sup>34</sup> Though the northern regional government set aside 415 separate grazing reserves for transhumant cattle rearing in the 1960s, these lands have since yielded to the pressures of growing urban areas and commercial — including agricultural — interests. Improved farming techniques introduced in the 1990s have also increasingly allowed farmers to 'exploit wetlands for dry season irrigated agriculture' (ICG, 2017, p.4). This has led to the production of higher value crops such as tomatoes and onions. However, these trends have also denied herders access to these same wetlands which, 'they had previously used with little risk of livestock straying into farms.' Moreover, these high value crops have been noted to 'produce little residue for livestock feeding, further diminishing available fodder' (ICG, 2017, p.4). Cumulatively, by making more acute the competition for resources, such pressures have reduced opportunities for coexistence and heightened tensions between these differing modes of livelihood.

**The politicisation of religious and ethnic difference has also been a contributing factor to the conflict.** The majority of pastoralists in Nigeria are Muslim and ethnically Fulani while farmers tend to be Christian and non-Fulani (Higazi & Yousef, 2017). As a result media reports in Nigeria often attribute the violence to 'Fulani herdersmen'. The fact that Nigeria's President Buhari is also a Fulani Muslim is often adduced to explain the failure of the State to adequately respond to such violent outbreaks. Analysts of transhumance in Nigeria likewise observe that 'opposition politicians promote the stereotyping and demonisation of Fulani pastoralists, reinforcing and exploiting anti-Fulani sentiments in the media, and in some instances have provoked attacks on pastoralist' (Higazi & Yousef, 2017, p. 13). Divisive rhetoric on ethnic and religious grounds has thus only served to heighten tensions and increase popular misapprehensions of the conflict.

**Pervasive insecurity, crime, and impunity in insufficiently policed rural areas, has been a further source of conflict between farmers and pastoralists.** A 2015 study of rural insecurity in Nigeria noted that the disparity between the state's control in urban over rural areas, which had its origin in the mode of colonial rule employed in Nigeria, became even more pronounced with imposition in the early 1980s of neoliberal programs aimed at rolling back the State (NSRP, 2015, 5). As the study explains, 'the rise in private security organizations, the expansion of vigilante groups, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the collapse of informal channels of conflict resolution and of securing communities; all became significant channels for citizens to protect or defend themselves in the face of the State's declining capacity to impose effective control' (NSRP, 2015, 6). Both the absence of State control and the increased privatisation of violence in these settings have meant that conflicts between host and transhumant migrant communities have often escalated quickly while specific perpetrators and instigators of violence have too infrequently been brought to justice. Petty crime such as banditry and cattle rustling — in already weaponized and tense contexts— have thus become major trigger points that spiral into score settling and open the door to broader violence.

## **10. Biafra conflict**

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<sup>34</sup> Nigeria's population increased from about 33 million in 1950 to about 187 million in 2016 (ICG, 2017).

**Biafran demands for independence have reemerged since the 1999 election, building through the 2000s, with activism, protests, state reprisals, and threatening narratives.** There is very little published about this recent phase of conflict, as it is recent, and as it appears to be quite small, relative to Nigeria's other security challenges. The key actor in this recent phase is the self-proclaimed leader of the separatist Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) - Nnamdi Kanu – who has garnered increasing supporters via his London-based radio channel Radio Biafra. Igbo youth are the main supporters.<sup>35</sup> Kanu was detained on treason charges from 2015 to April 2017 (HRW, 2018), and has been missing since a military skirmish at his house in September 2017.<sup>36</sup> An opinion piece by Soyombe suggests that around 150 protestors died in clashes with the state from August 2015 – August 2016.<sup>37</sup> A number of supporters are in detention – for attempting to hold or participate in peaceful assemblies, and security forces have used excessive force against activists on several occasions (Amnesty, 2017).

**The revival of Igbo nationalism is fuelled by resentment over perceived marginalisation and perceptions that federal government corruption works against the interests of the Igbo people** (Smith, 2014; Obasi, 2017). Since the war ended in 1970, there has not been an Igbo president, and they are underrepresented in all important state institutions and positions (Ugorji, 2017). This perception of political and economic marginalisation is seen to be a punishment for the Biafran war (1967-1970) (Smith, 2014). 'Complaints about corruption are used to critique the Nigerian state and other regional or ethnic groups, but they also figure in an internally focused critique by Igbos of their own complicity in Nigeria's endemic corruption' (Smith, 2014, p.787).

**The return to democracy in 1999 'seemed to unleash considerable sentiment in south-eastern Nigeria for Igbo independence** or, at the very least, much greater representation of Igbo interests in the federal government. In more recent years the fervour for Biafra seems to have ebbed, perhaps as people realised that Nigerian democracy was no more likely to lead to an Igbo nation than was military rule' (Smith, 2014, p.787).

**But for those old enough to remember the Biafran war, there is less appeal to return to war.**<sup>38</sup> Many Igbo are still traumatised by the brutal conflict that saw at least one million die from violence and starvation in three years. While the conflict was internationally widely reported at the time, it was neglected by the international community agenda from 1970, with a recent revival in academia focusing on whether to classify it as a genocide (Heerten & Moses, 2014). The Nigerian state's recent violent crackdown against the activists, including the killing of pro-Biafran protestors, has not been investigated by the state (HRW, 2018).

**'But Igbos – and undoubtedly many other ethnic groups in Nigeria – continue to understand and voice discontents about their predicament through the language of corruption.** Whether it is corruption of the state and its perceived capture by other regions and ethnic groups put forth as the mechanism by which Igbos continue to be marginalised, or a focus on dishonesty within Igbo society, which is perceived to prevent Igbos from acting effectively to mobilise in their own interests, people see corruption as at the core of their plight' (Smith, 2014, p.787).

## **11. Other sources of conflict, instability and resilience**

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<sup>35</sup> Fisayo Soyombo (2017) Is Nigeria on the brink of another civil war? Al Jazeera, 14 Jul 2017 <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/07/nigeria-brink-civil-war-170712131405928.html>

<sup>36</sup> Daily Post (2018) Prince Niyi Sijuade: Nnamdi Kanu's trials and Python Dance, Daily Post, 3 Feb 2018 <http://dailypost.ng/2018/02/03/prince-niyi-sijuade-nnamdi-kanu-trials-python-dance/>

<sup>37</sup> Fisayo Soyombo (2017) Is Nigeria on the brink of another civil war? Al Jazeera, 14 Jul 2017 <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/07/nigeria-brink-civil-war-170712131405928.html>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

## **Nigerian Shiite Movement**

A flashpoint of possible future conflict was exposed in a 2015 clash between the Nigerian army and members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), a Shiite Sect based in the northern Nigerian state of Kaduna (NSRP, 2015). Violence erupted when a military convoy carrying Nigeria's army chief, General Tukur Burutai, confronted a procession of Shiites who had blocked a major road while participating in a religious ceremony. The ensuing clash led to the arrest of Sheik Ibraheem El-Zakzaky, the leader of the IMN, and to the deaths of members of the Shiite group, including El-Zakzaky's wife and son. A spokesman of the group claimed that as many as a thousand of its members were killed in this clash.<sup>39</sup> Although a commission of inquiry was set up in 2016 by the Kaduna State Government to investigate the incident, the IMN boycotted these proceedings asserting that the commission was biased in favour of the military (SB Morgen Intelligence, 2016). Since then, the IMN has carried out sustained protests—some of which have been forcefully dispersed by the state— in northern Nigerian cities demanding the release of their leader from state custody.<sup>40</sup> There are risks of escalation and further clashes with the state given the group's 'longstanding rejection of the secular state and Zakzaky's advocacy for an Iranian-style Islamic revolution' (Obasi, 2015). Additionally, the fierce opposition between the Shiite group and Nigeria's Sunni majority, particularly Salafi organisations, has been cited as a potential axis for future conflict (Obasi, 2015).

## **Internally displaced people**

The Boko Haram conflict has led to huge population displacements. According to the latest United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) update:<sup>41</sup>

- 1.7 million people are displaced and registered in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe
- 3.4 million are in need of nutrition assistance, of whom about 450,000 suffer from severe acute malnutrition.
- 5.2 million people are in need of food assistance are living in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe out of the 5.8 million in the north-east

Government camps are reported to have food scarcity and 'dismal healthcare', and the situation in unofficial camps is thought to be even worse (ICG, 2016). ICG (2016) warns that 'harsh treatment of IDPs in camps and detention centres could undermine military gains. If corruption in aid delivery and abuses persist, communities may harbour grievances that could lead them to reject state authority' (ICG, 2016). 79 organisations are implementing humanitarian activities in the northeast (UNOCHA, 2017).

## **Illicit arms**

Nigeria is a huge market for domestic, regional and international arms dealers and syndicates; a major destination for illicit small arms and light weapons (SALW) flows; and a centre of illicit trafficking. With the government unable to provide security for its citizens in certain regions' many have taken up arms (Ohene-Asare, Aklavon, Moussou & Ikelegbe, 2017, p.95). Ohene-Asare, et al. (2017, p.95) estimate that 1 in 50 Nigerians possess illicit arms (predominantly young males from the middle and upper classes), and that the number of illicit SALW has more than doubled since 2000-2003, based on interviews and desk-based research. Other findings from the study include (Ohene-Asare, et al., 2017, p.95):

- The demand for SALW has risen in the last decade;

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<sup>39</sup> Isuwa Sunday (2015). Shiite Muslim Sect Alleges Massacre by Nigeria's Military, New York Times, 15 Dec 2015 [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/16/world/africa/shiite-muslim-sect-alleges-massacre-by-nigerias-military.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/16/world/africa/shiite-muslim-sect-alleges-massacre-by-nigerias-military.html?_r=0)

<sup>40</sup> Ibrahim Idris (2018). Gunshots in Abuja as police forcefully disperse protesting Shiites, Premium Times, 10 Jan 2018 <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/255029-gunshots-in-abuja-as-police-forcefully-disperse-protesting-shiites.html>

<sup>41</sup> Updated Sept 2017. See - <http://www.unocha.org/nigeria>

- Legal SALW for official use have been diverted for illegal use;
- Illicit craft production of arms is increasing in Nigeria
- There is massive illicit SALW inflows across porous borders along the coast, northern borders and through south west borders.

## **Maritime insecurity**

A review of the literature on maritime security in the broader region of the Gulf of Guinea (GoG)<sup>42</sup> by Lopez-Lucia (2015, p.2) found that:

- Maritime security has become a key issue in the GoG following the increasing number of attacks off Nigeria's coast and spillover along the West African coast.
- Geostrategic stakes are high as the GoG is rich in both oil and gas, and is a major international trade route.
- Violence in the region is particularly concentrated in the Niger Delta; the Bakassi peninsula; and the West African coast: from Nigeria to Cote d'Ivoire.
- The Niger Delta appears to be the epicentre of violence from which criminality and violence is radiating to Nigeria's neighbours. Most criminal groups involved in piracy and oil bunkering throughout the region appear to be from the Niger Delta or are closely working with actors there.
- The many actors involved in, and that enable, criminality maintain complex relationships, they include: militant groups demanding a greater share of oil wealth; transnational criminal groups who operate along the coast and in connection with global criminal networks; the local and national elite, state officials, and police and military officers who collude with these groups; oil companies and their employees.
- The main structural causes driving maritime insecurity are very much related to the fragility of GoG states: weak governance and corruption, economic and socio-political exclusion, unemployment, and the centrality of oil in their economy. These factors interact with proximate causes such as weak law enforcement, transnational trafficking, environmental degradation, IUU fishing, etc. Further triggers are political crises and new oil discoveries along the coast. The analysis of the interactions between these different factors shows the self-reinforcing nexus between state fragility, criminality and violence. The nexus is particularly strong in the Niger Delta.

## **Cameroon border tensions**

Tensions within Cameroon between its Anglophone population (around 15%) and the majority Francophone population have heightened recently, and have spilled over into Nigeria. 'The so-called Anglophone crisis began in Cameroon over a year ago, as groups in the Anglophone community declared separatist intentions, in regards to their grievances related to political and economic discrimination in the majority French-speaking country.'<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The GoG region stretches along 6000 km of coast from Senegal to Angola.

<sup>43</sup> Reported in Reliefweb - <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/tensions-flare-camerouns-anglophone-regions>



The Anglophone separatists 'have taken up arms over the past year in an attempt to create a nation which they call Ambazonia', Reuters reports that the insurgency represents the gravest challenge yet to the 35-year rule of Cameroon's President Paul Biya, who will seek re-election this year.<sup>44</sup>

The conflict is fuelling tensions between Nigeria and Cameroon as 'more than 43,000 Cameroonians have fled as refugees to Nigeria to escape a crackdown by the government on Anglophone separatists.' In response, Cameroonian troops crossed into Nigeria in pursuit of the separatist rebels, and Cameroonian military officials and pro-government media have accused Nigeria of sheltering the insurgents.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-cameroon-separatists-refugees/at-least-43000-cameroonian-refugees-flee-to-nigeria-local-aid-officials-idUKKBN1FE246>

<sup>45</sup> <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-cameroon-separatists-refugees/at-least-43000-cameroonian-refugees-flee-to-nigeria-local-aid-officials-idUKKBN1FE246>

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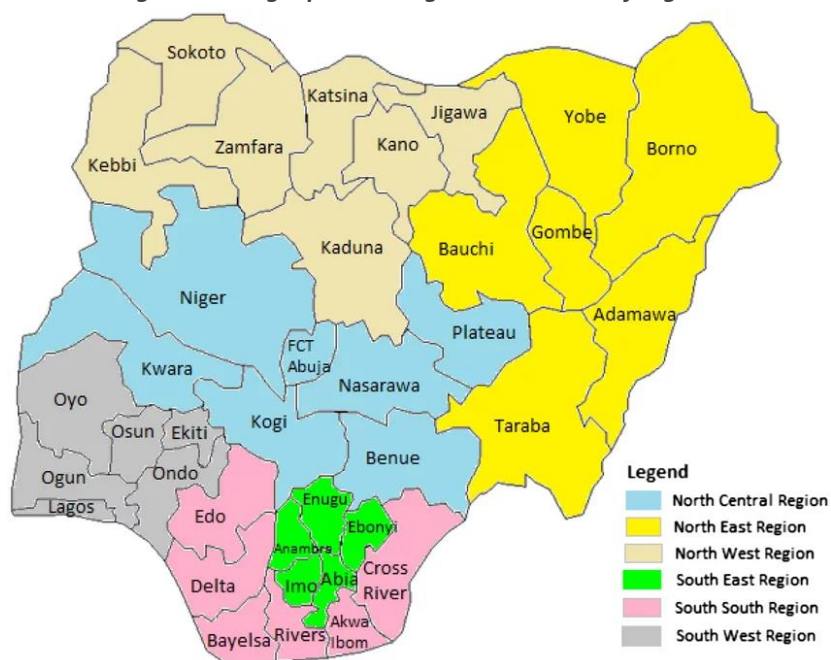
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## 13. Annexes

### Territory and political regions

**Nigeria is a Federal Republic** made up of thirty-six states, a federal capital territory, 774 local government areas, and some 9,572 political wards (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2017). It is often analysed according to its six geopolitical regions – north-west, north-central, north-east, south-east, south-west, and south-south (see Figure 7). Nigeria is located in West Africa, bordering Niger to the north, Chad to the northeast, Cameroon in the east and southeast, Benin in the west, and the Gulf of Guinea in the south.

*Figure 7: The geopolitical regions and states of Nigeria*

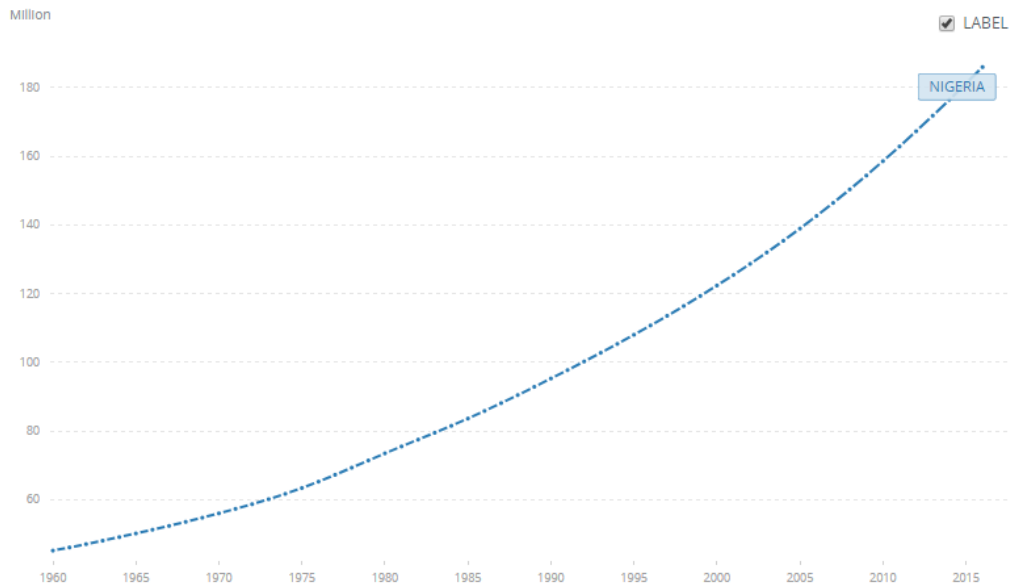


*Source: Naija website, accessed on 1 February 2018<sup>46</sup>*

### Population

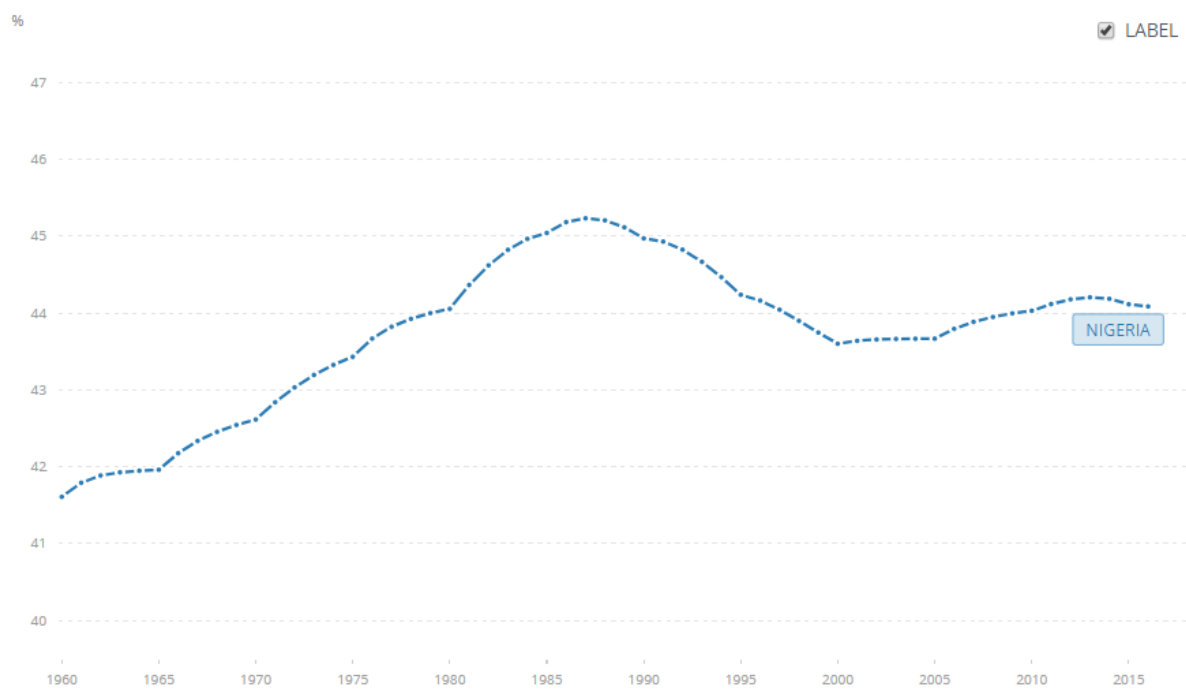
<sup>46</sup> See - <https://www.naija.ng/1117167-south-west-states-nigeria.html#1117167>

**Figure 8: Total population, Nigeria (1960-2016)**



Source: World Bank data<sup>47</sup>

**Figure 9: Population ages 0-14 ( percent of total), Nigeria (1960-2016)**



Source: World Bank data<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators, accessed on 5 February 2018 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.0014.TO.ZS?end=2016&locations=NG&start=1960&view=chart>

<sup>48</sup> World Bank staff estimates based on age/sex distributions of United Nations Population Division's World Population Prospects. (World Bank, World Development Indicators, accessed on 5 February 2018) <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.0014.TO.ZS?end=2016&locations=NG&start=1960&view=chart>