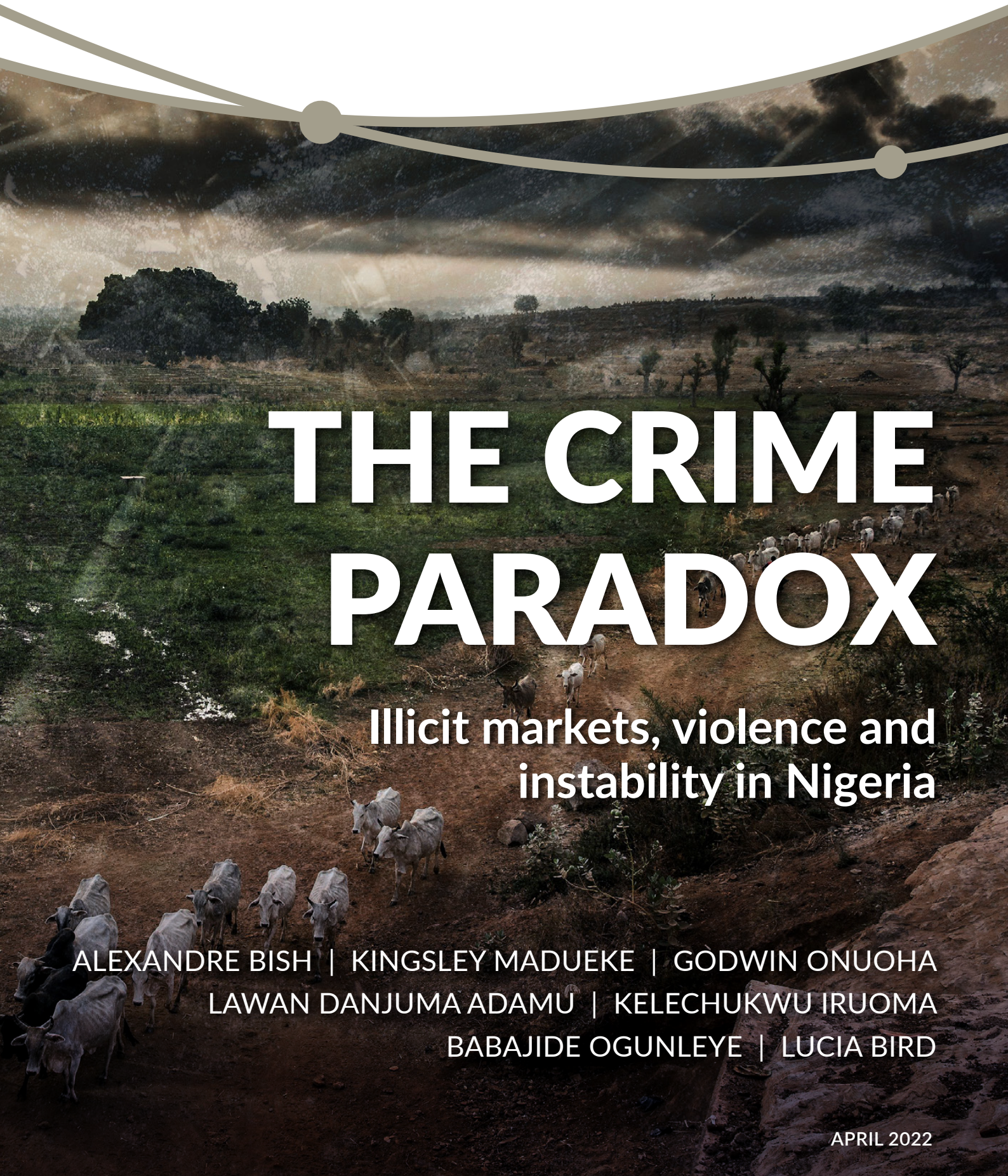
RESEARCH REPORT

GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME



THE CRIME PARADOX

Illicit markets, violence and instability in Nigeria

ALEXANDRE BISH | KINGSLEY MADUEKE | GODWIN ONUOHA
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April 2022

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Cover: Hausa-Fulani pastoralists with their cattle, Nigeria, April 2019.
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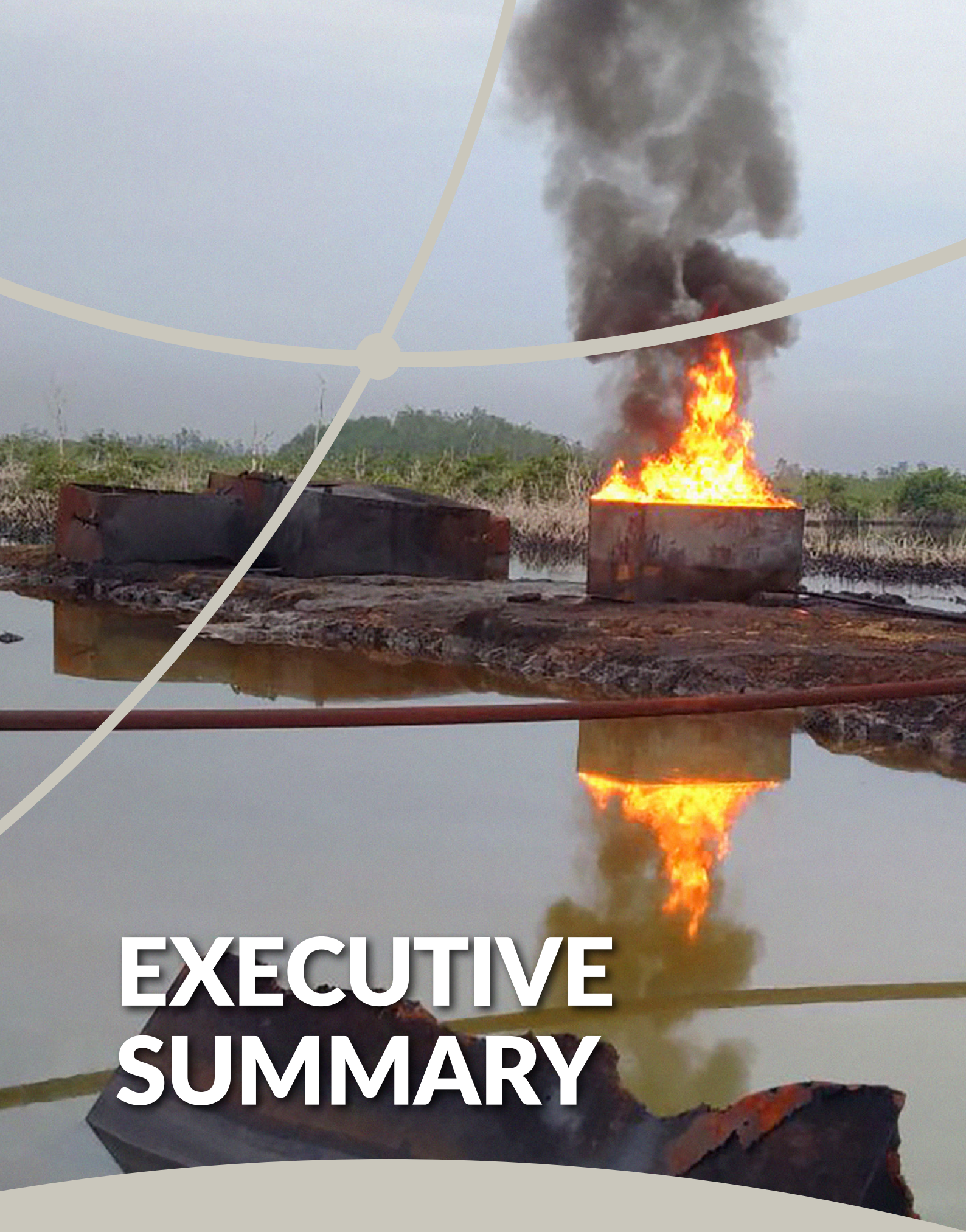


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An illegal oil refinery is destroyed by the Nigerian military. © *next24online/NurPhoto via Getty Images*

The security situation in Nigeria has generally deteriorated since around 2006, but over the period 2016 to 2021 it has experienced a particularly sharp decline. Although the causes of this deterioration are manifold, illicit markets have greatly contributed to steeply escalating insecurity in Nigeria. While their destabilizing effect is widely recognized, the role that some illicit markets have played in Nigeria to perpetuate some degree of stability for certain communities, or within elements of the state, is less well known or analyzed.

This report finds that the impact of illicit markets on violence and instability in Nigeria is not as one-dimensional as one might assume. In reality, it is more complex: illicit markets do drive instability and violence, but they can also serve, in some contexts, to maintain a degree of stability. This report argues that the relationship between illicit markets and instability in Nigeria is best understood as paradoxical. Illicit markets in Nigeria should be seen from a dual perspective. Examining the problem through one lens only may not necessarily lead to the most appropriate response.

The role of illicit markets as drivers of instability is undeniable. In Nigeria, they have created enabling environments for conflicts. They may not be the sole cause of most armed conflicts in Nigeria, or the wider subregion, but in funding insurgent groups and eroding the good governance of the state through corruption, illicit markets have fuelled and sustained cycles of violence. In Nigeria's North West, for example, cattle rustling, kidnap for ransom and banditry have been key drivers of insecurity, escalating harms incurred in those communities. In the North East, criminal markets have helped bankroll Boko Haram, enabling the extremist group to continue its activities despite continual crackdowns by the state. Meanwhile, growing instability across Nigeria has fuelled demand for firearms, swelling the arms trafficking and manufacture markets, weaponizing parties to conflict and perpetuating the cycle of violence.

However, the converse is also true, in that illicit markets in Nigeria – and beyond – have also, paradoxically, imparted a stabilizing influence in some communities. This report looks closely at this phenomenon. Illicit markets have tended to have a stabilizing effect particularly in areas where state support has been weak. They have provided revenues for communities where few alternative sources of income exist,

The relationship between illicit markets and instability in Nigeria is best understood as paradoxical.

thus arguably containing poverty-induced instability. For example, the rice-smuggling economy on the Niger–Benin border and the illegal (largely artisanal) oil refining economy in the Niger Delta have been sources of livelihood for many in marginalized communities and therefore play a role in maintaining stability in these regions. Since 2009, violence in the Niger Delta has tangibly diminished. Keeping at bay a resurgence in violence in that region is at least partly down to the fact that the artisanal oil smuggling economy creates alternative livelihoods.

Similarly, illicit markets can also lead to a tenuous stability in state entities.[1] Illicit economies supplement poor or irregular wages paid to servants of the state, allaying resentment among personnel of the state security forces; they finance patronage networks among elements of the elite,[2] and therefore bring a veneer of stability.[3] Consequently, illicit markets, while undoubtedly corrosive of good governance,[4] can be central to maintaining the status quo by propping up existing socio-economic and political structures. Disruptions to these structures threaten sustaining interests, which can often trigger violence.[5]

Responding to illicit markets in fragile contexts, such as Nigeria, therefore presents a dilemma: tolerating their proliferation may enable myriad harms to ensue, while disrupting them may cause instability, including in some cases, violence. Recognizing these two sides of the same criminal coin may seem counter-intuitive but it is a key first step in crafting actionable policy responses that avoid magnifying violence and harms. Notably, where illicit markets do have stabilizing impacts, this should inform responses. The nature of state responses therefore plays a key role in shaping the relationship between illicit markets and potential for instability in Nigeria.

This report analyzes the Janus-faced relationship between violence and illicit markets in the country: illicit economies fuel violence and instability in some contexts, but exert a stabilizing influence in others. It uses case studies – including the prohibition of fishing in the Lake Chad area and crackdowns on rice smuggling across the Benin border – to explore the impacts on stability of two common forms of state responses to illicit markets: prohibition and militarized crackdowns.

It then explores how state responses have shaped the relationship between violence and illicit markets, reviewing a range of interventions. One intervention has been the establishment of poorly regulated anti-crime groups by some of Nigeria's states[6] to respond to illicit markets, which has accelerated the fragmentation of Nigeria's security landscape by splintering the federal government's hold over security provision, and now presents a catalogue of risks to human rights and illicit markets going forward.

Finally, the report sets out the policy implications of these dynamics and proposes a range of recommendations.

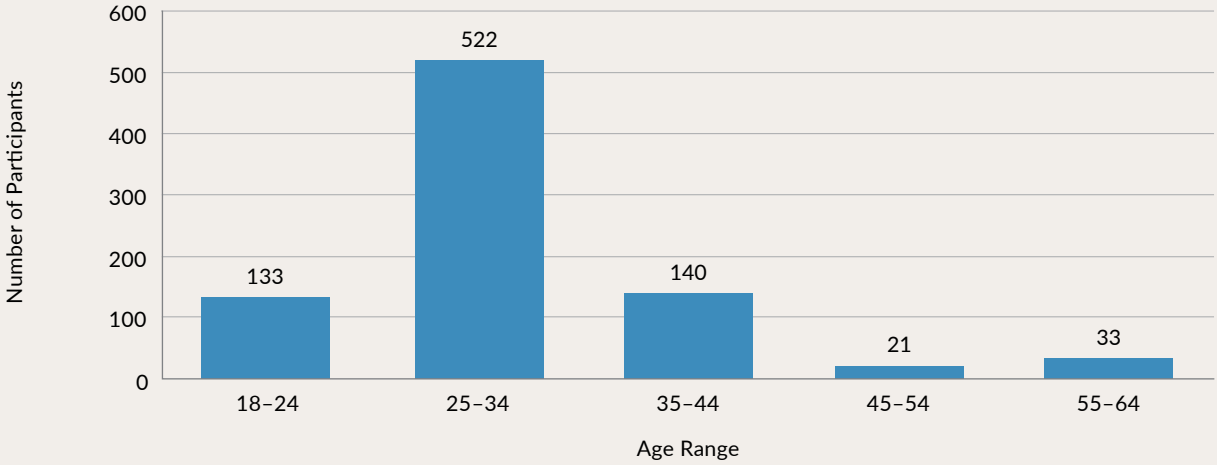
Methodology

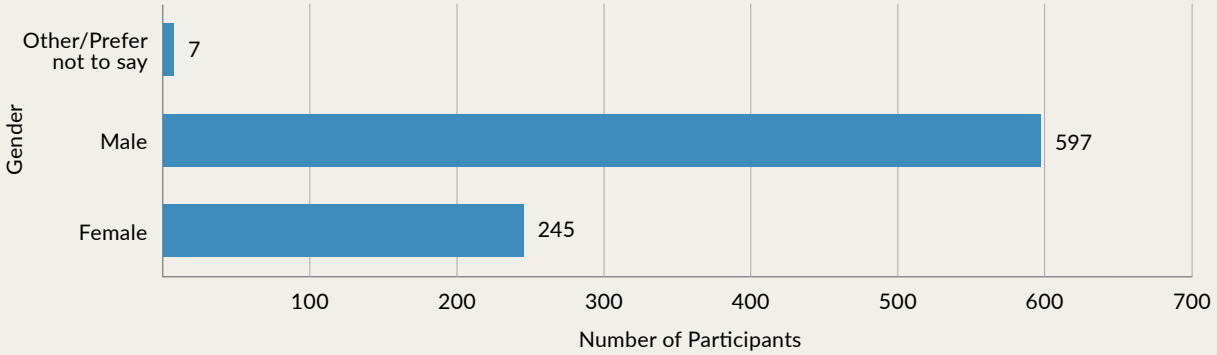
The research for this report employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data and following four main streams: a literature review, fieldwork, a survey and descriptive analysis of quantitative data.

- The literature review covered extant policy reports, research articles, academic papers, international and local press materials as well as open-source platforms and databases.
- Fieldwork was conducted in multiple sites across Nigeria's six geopolitical regions between August and December 2021. The fieldwork involved key informant interviews and discussions with individuals embedded in illicit economies and stakeholders who had knowledge of local security dynamics.
- A total of 149 interviews were conducted: 38 in the North Central region (Plateau, Benue and southern Kaduna states); 16 in the North East (Borno); 31 in the North West (Zamfara and northern Kaduna); 32 in the South South (Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom and Rivers); 17 in the South East (Imo, Abia, Anambra and Enugu); 15 in the South West (Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ogun and Ekiti).

Many interviewees, identified through snowball sampling, were involved in the illicit economy, including arms manufacturers and smugglers, drug dealers and smugglers, armed bandits, cattle rustlers, oil bunkers and gold dealers. Former or current non-state violent actors were also interviewed, including vigilante members, and former and current insurgents. Finally, interviews were conducted with security forces, academics, NGO workers, journalists, traders and community leaders. In some cases, phone interviews were used to contact participants in difficult-to-reach areas due to insecurity and curfew restrictions.

- Quantitative data was mostly sourced from the Nigeria Watch database, which provides detailed insights into national, state and local trends in violence.[7] Data from the Armed Conflict and Violence Database (ACLED) was also used.
- A survey of 849 participants, located in each of Nigeria's 774 local government areas (LGAs), on perceptions of crime and violence in Nigeria was conducted by Emani for the GI-TOC. The participants were part of Emani's existing network of respondents. The GI-TOC designed the questionnaire in consultation with Emani's Nigeria team. The questionnaire was tested with 37 respondents in Nigeria and revised. The final survey was then distributed in an online form to mobile numbers and/or email addresses. Some follow-ups were done verbally, by telephone. The survey launched on 6 August 2021 and closed on 9 August 2021. The data has several limitations, including the fact that responses were written rather than spoken and the sample is not representative, meaning that the findings of the survey are indicative, not generalizable.[8]





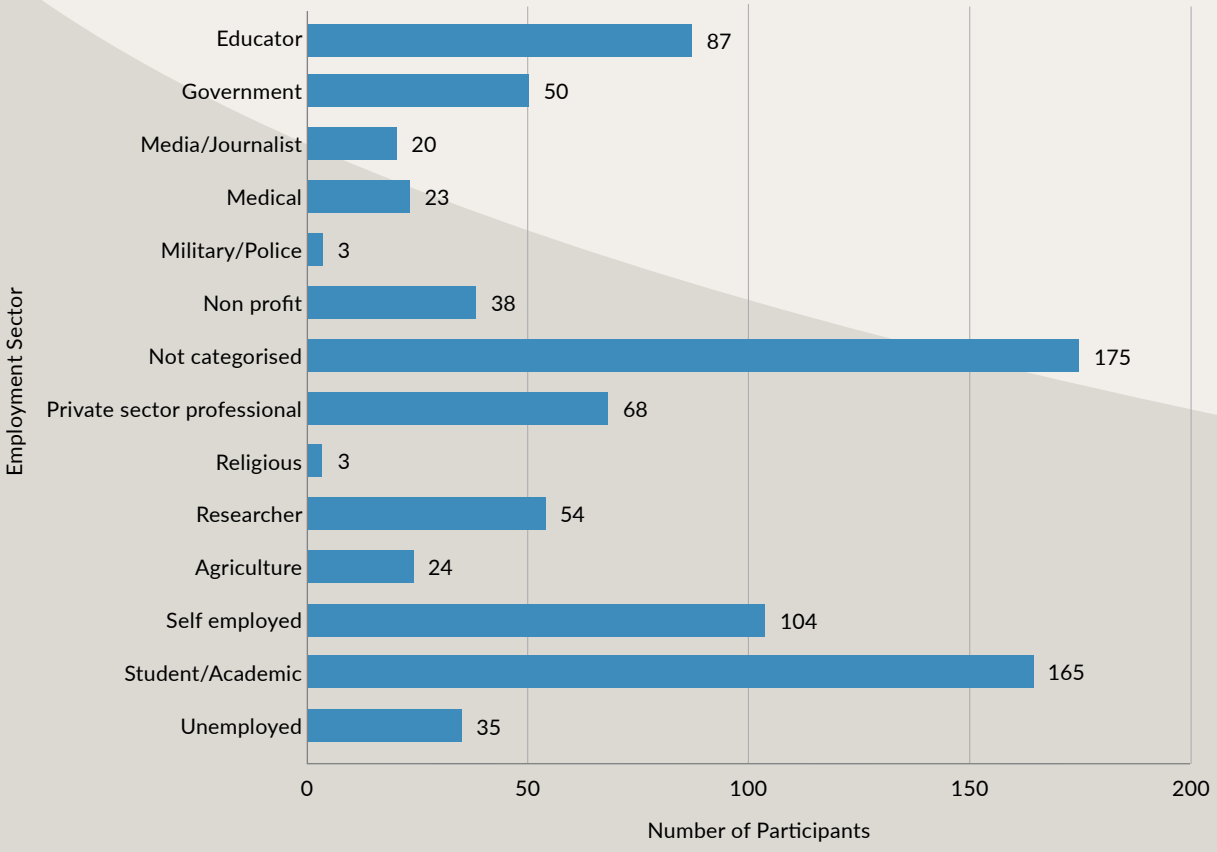


FIGURE 1 Demographics of survey participants.

SOURCE: Emani survey of 849 participants, August 2021

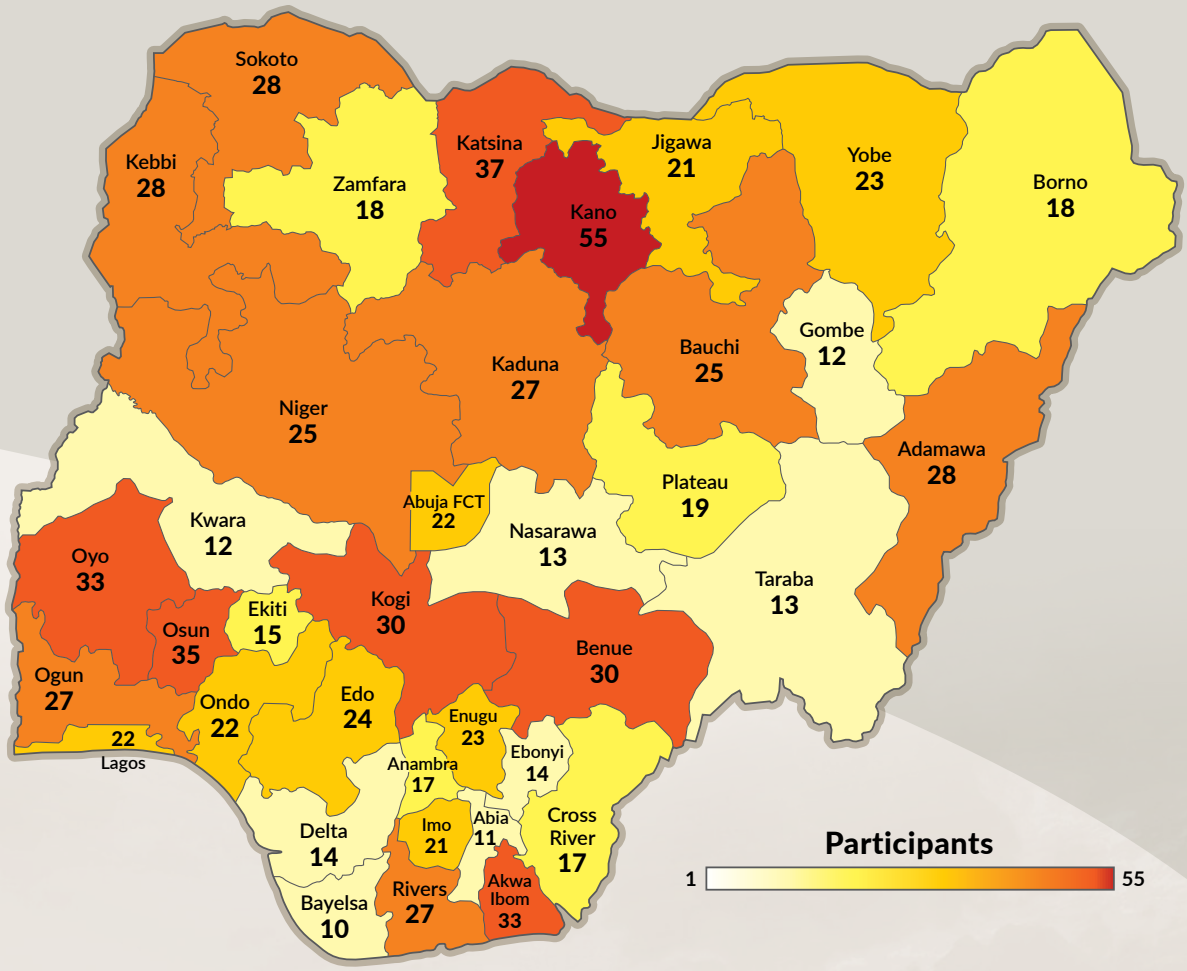
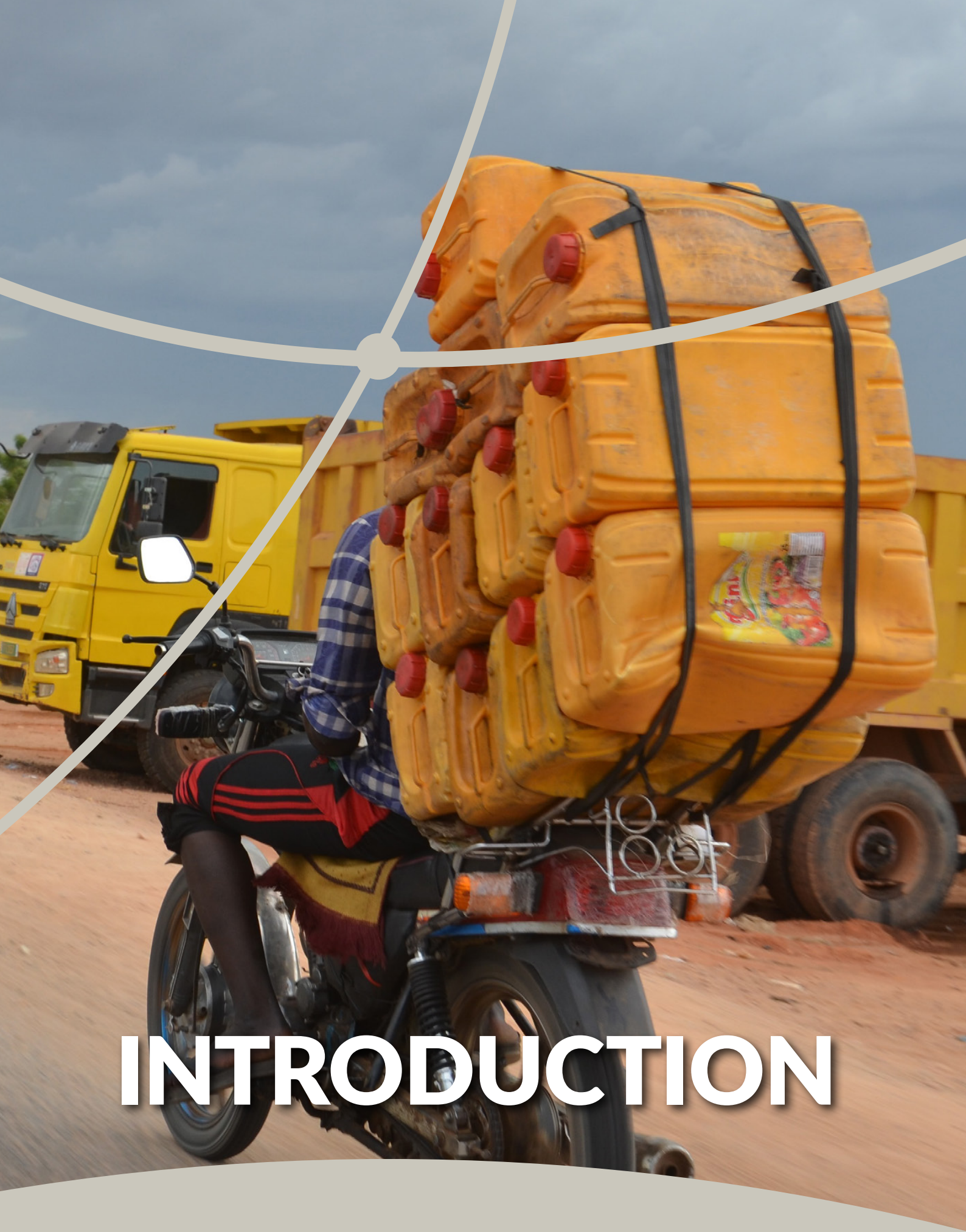


FIGURE 2 Number of survey participants per state.



INTRODUCTION

A motorcyclist in Niger with containers of petrol smuggled over the Nigerian border. © *Boureima Hama via Getty Images*

Nigeria's worsening security situation has triggered concerns, both domestically and overseas, about the impact of the country's growing internal conflicts on the wider West Africa region. Numerous commentators have sought to explain the confluence of factors behind this surge in violence in the country. While organized crime and illicit markets have been identified as among a number of factors contributing to Nigeria's increasing instability, the nature of the role played by crime in shaping Nigeria's security situation is often oversimplified.

This report therefore explores two interlinked questions: what role have illicit markets played in Nigeria's escalating security situation? And what does that mean in terms of developing appropriate responses to illicit markets? In addressing these questions, this report explores Nigeria's paradoxical criminal economy of violence.

We argue that, on the one hand, illicit markets contribute to the proliferation of violence that has been seen in Nigeria. Criminal economies are a source of revenue for armed groups, which threatens stability, create competition over illicit rents and erode good governance. The role of cattle rustling and banditry in financing Boko Haram and bandit groups, and how arms trafficking and manufacturing drive violence are explored to illustrate these dynamics.

Conversely, we find that illicit markets can also play a role in maintaining a degree of stability, both as a source of revenue for marginalized communities and in the manner in which they support the status quo of patronage networks, and consequently certain state structures. This 'stabilizing' role is examined in the context of the illegal (largely artisanal) oil refining economy of the Niger Delta and in the rice smuggling market coordinated by communities along the Benin border.

The nature of the stability perpetuated by illicit markets – including its degree of fragility and the harms it perpetuates – is shaped by the typology of the different illicit markets. For example, 'grey markets', namely the smuggling of legal commodities, such as rice and fuel, have long provided livelihoods in certain areas and can function with limited damage, besides depriving the state of taxable revenue.

While the type of illicit market is one variable shaping the relationship between illicit markets and stability, the response of the state to the illicit market is another. Ensuring responses are tailored in a manner that is appropriate to the nature of a particular illicit market, and the relative damages it incurs, will therefore be an important element in determining the development of Nigeria's security situation.

To date, responses in Nigeria, and elsewhere in the world, have principally focused on deploying law enforcement and militarized interventions to counter illicit markets.[9] In some communities in Nigeria this has improved the security situation; in many, however, it has not, and the violence has spiralled.

Some illicit markets can play a role in maintaining a degree of stability in Nigeria.

The response of some Nigerian states to escalating violence has, since around early 2020, been to establish anti-crime groups, such as Operation Amotekun, a network of security outfits deployed in the South West region of the country. Although vigilante groups have a long history in Nigeria, the state-sponsored character of this new generation of anti-crime groups contrasts with their earlier grassroots origins. This new brand of state-created groups, which are often composed along ethnic lines, risks splintering the federal state's monopoly over violence, as semi-autonomous state administrations violate the constitutional separation of powers by creating their own security forces and heightening divides across ethnic lines.[10]

Responding to transnational organized crime and illicit economies is a global challenge, and the hurdles that Nigeria faces are by no means unique. In their quest to respond to organized crime and thwart illicit flows, many countries have also deployed militarized responses, leading to mixed outcomes.[11] While this report focuses on Nigeria, it is embedded in geographically varied research on organized crime, which reiterates the complex and non-linear impacts of illicit markets, and calls for more discriminate and context-sensitive deployment of force that does not lead to more violence.[12]

Nigeria's surge in violence and instability

Data from Nigeria Watch, an organization that has monitored violence in Nigeria since 2006, points to an acceleration and geographic diffusion of instability, and an increasing number of violent actors behind it.

From 2012 to 2015, the surge in deaths was driven by escalating Boko Haram violence concentrated in the North East. After 2015, when President Muhammadu Buhari took power, the number of Boko Haram-related deaths fell markedly.[13] However, the fatalities remained high, and have steadily increased since 2017. This increase has largely been driven by escalating armed banditry in the North West, later diffusing into the North Central region. Ongoing violence perpetrated by Boko Haram in the North East and increases in violence relating to kidnapping and separatist movements in the southern states have contributed to a steady growth in fatalities.

Nigeria Watch recorded almost double the deaths in the six years that followed the peak of the Boko Haram crisis between 2013 and 2015 than during the six-year period that preceded it: 54 438 deaths between 2016 and 2021 compared to 25 025 deaths between 2006 and 2012.

Nigeria Watch found the direct causes of these deaths to include crime and conflicts associated with cattle grazing, land, markets, oil production and distribution, politics, religion and sorcery/witchcraft (namely deaths linked to cult societies or human sacrifices).

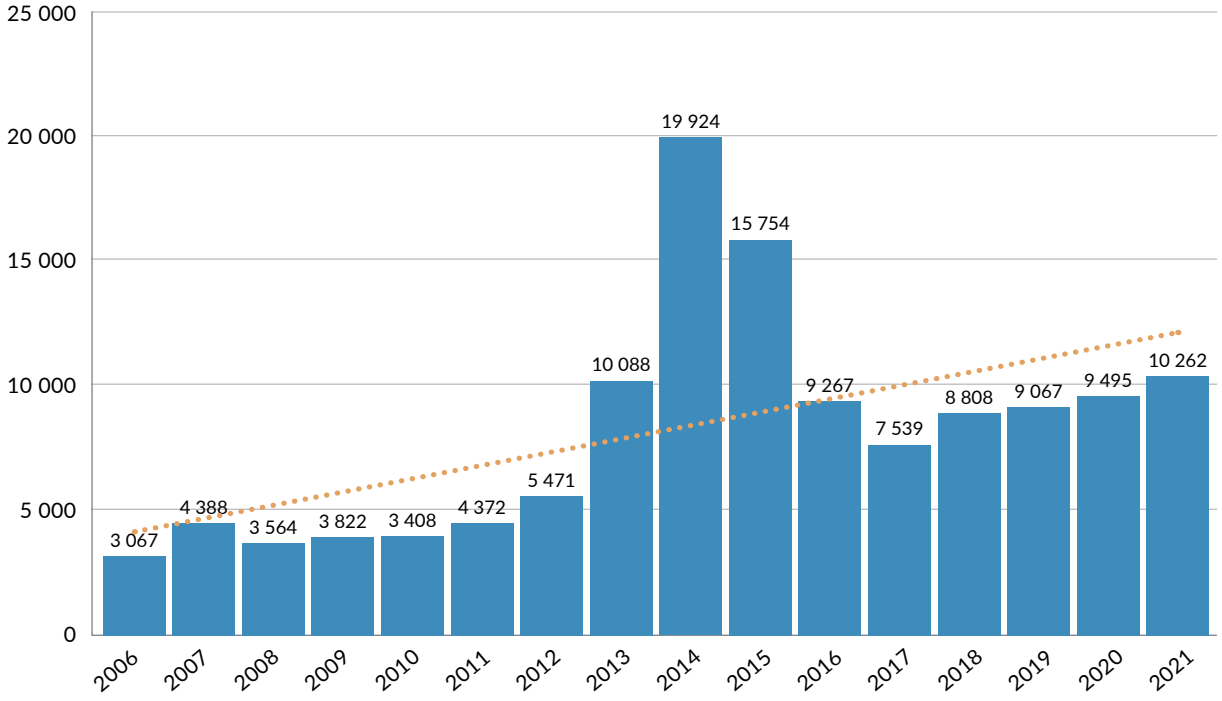


FIGURE 3 Violence-related deaths in Nigeria since 2006.

NOTE: Recorded deaths are those caused by crime, cattle grazing, land issues, market issues, oil production and distribution, political issues, convict execution, explosions, natural disasters, accidents, religious issues and sorcery. Data until 1 December 2021 was considered.

SOURCE: Nigeria Watch Database

While only indicative, a survey of 849 participants, selected from all Nigeria's 774 LGAs, which explored perceptions of the evolution of violence pointed to a similar trend: 57% of partici-pants reported an increase in violence over the past five years.

Participants' perceptions of violence are closely tied to geography. Most participants reporting an increase in violence are located in the North West and North Central regions, where armed banditry and kidnapping has increased; the South West, where herdsmen–farmer clashes and kidnapping for ransom have spread; and the South East, where violence related to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) separatist organization and farmer-herdsmen clashes have increased. Participants in the survey reporting a decrease are mostly in the North East, where violence has waned since Buhari took power in 2015, and in Rivers and Kano states, where participants reported that increased policing and vigilante group presence had had the effect of reducing crime and violence (see Figure 4).

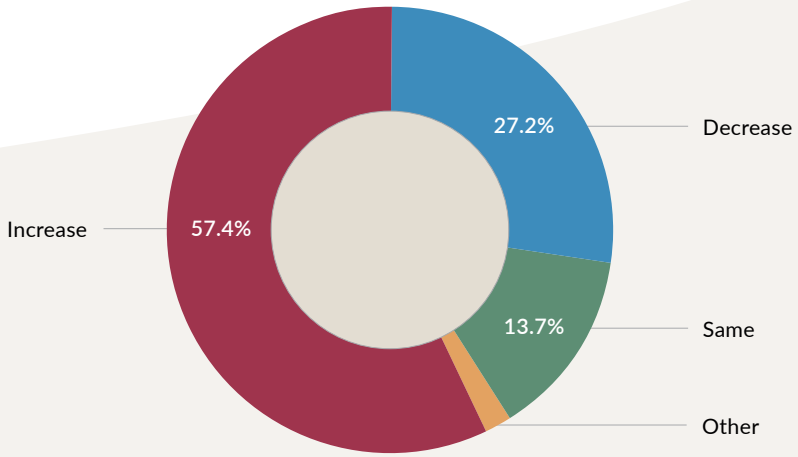


FIGURE 4 Perception of change in violence, 2016–2021.

SOURCE: Survey of 849 participants across Nigeria conducted by Emani for GI-TOC

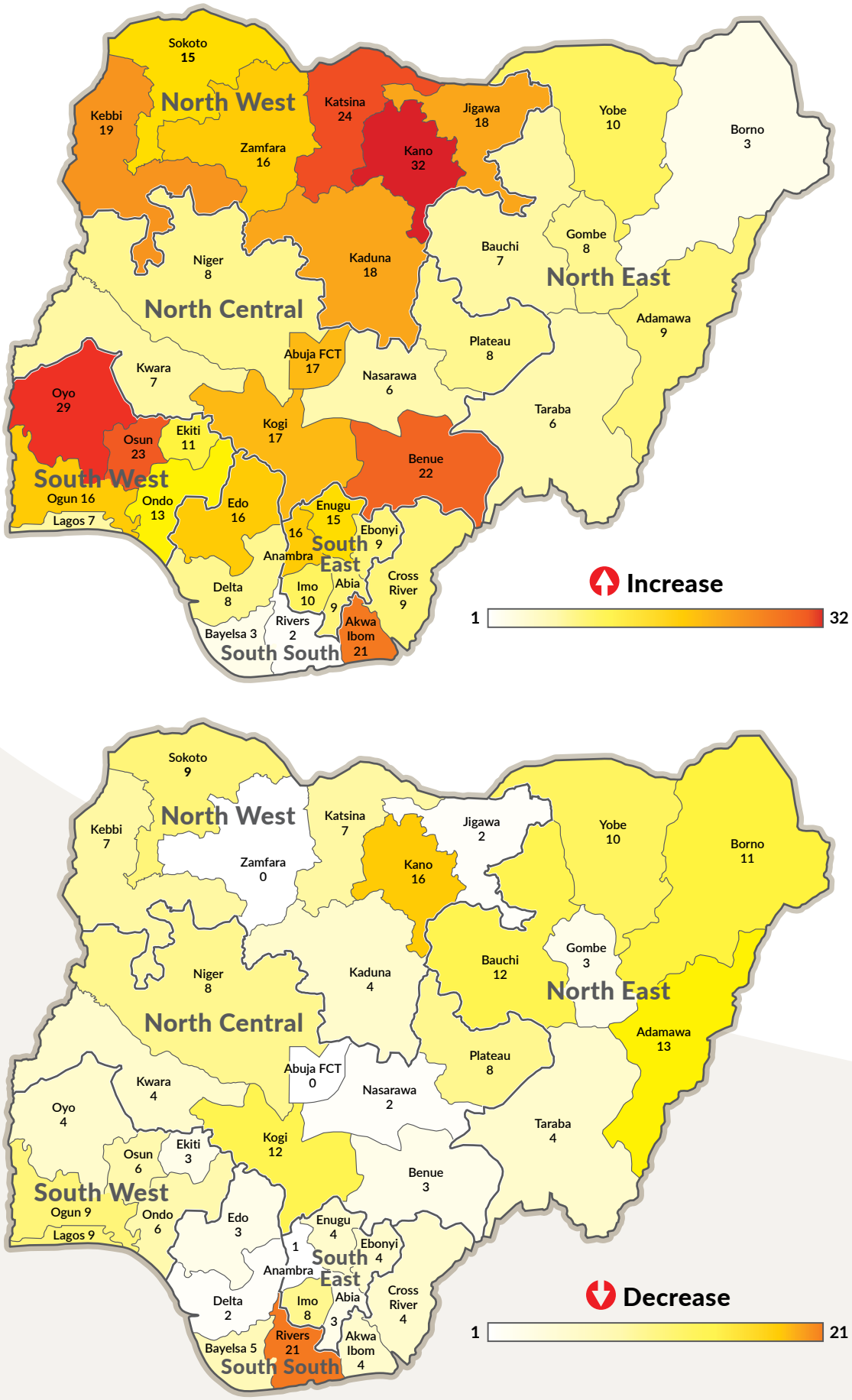


FIGURE 5 Number of local government areas per state where the majority of survey participants reported a perceived increase (top) and decrease (bottom) in violence, 2016–2021.

SOURCE: Emani survey of 849 participants, August 2021

Military commanders inspect arms and ammunition recovered from Boko Haram jihadists on display at the headquarters of the 120th Battalion in Goniri, Yobe State, in Nigeria's restive north-east, July 2019. *© Photo: Audu Marte via Getty Images*

Reflecting the impacts of growing instability on state structures, the ENACT Organized Crime Index 2021, an expert-led metric that analyzes criminality and state resilience at a national level, tracked a decrease in Nigeria's state resilience to organized crime between 2019 and 2021 of −0.77. (However, this decrease is likely not to have been driven only by the specific security challenges being faced by the Nigerian state, but also by the global impacts of COVID-19.[14])

The Index also ranks Nigeria highest for criminal markets in Africa. Nigeria's high levels of resilience have often been analyzed as existing 'despite' lucrative and powerful illicit markets. However, a slightly different perspective, one that is explored in this report, could posit that illicit markets may play a role in fostering elements of this resilience.

Although illicit markets are certainly not the only factor to consider in the growing instability affecting Nigeria, understanding their role is pivotal, partly because of their inextricable relationship with other central drivers, such as demography. For example, the failure of Nigeria's economy to keep up with the country's surging population – currently at 200 million and set to double by 2050 – and ensuing youth bulge, has driven growing unemployment. As of August 2020, one in two citizens were either unemployed or underemployed.[15] Lack of opportunities in the formal sector has driven engagement in informal, and sometimes illicit, markets, swelling the ranks of those drawing revenue from Nigeria's criminal enterprises. Yet economic growth is, in turn, hampered by violence, which is itself partly fuelled by illicit markets, creating a deteriorating cycle.[16] Since the 1970s, emigration and involvement in illicit markets have been a safety valve for Nigeria's unemployed youth, including many who have completed tertiary education, creating the reputation of a Nigerian criminal diaspora and enabling the globalization of Nigerian organized crime.[17]

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ILLICIT MARKETS AND VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

A Nigerian police officer patrols an area of houses destroyed in a Fulani attack in Kaduna State. © *Luis Tato via Getty Images*

Many factors have contributed to the growth in violence across Nigeria; however, illicit markets have played a notable role in its escalation and diffusion across the country.

Violence plays a regulatory function in illicit markets, stepping into the vacuum left by an absence of the rule of law. Where a market is operating smoothly, the threat of violence is typically sufficient to maintain market functionality, and the illicit economy can engender a degree of stability. However, this momentum is often contingent on the endurance of state-sponsored protection rackets, which often encase illicit markets, meaning violence will typically surge if the protection mechanisms are broken down.[18]

The relationship between illicit markets and violence is often generalized as positively correlated. But this fails to recognize that this relationship is not necessarily linear, and oscillates over time, or to distinguish between the different kinds of impacts that different forms of illicit markets have on stability and violence.

Where illicit markets experience low levels of legitimacy with the local communities in which they occur, they tend to fuel community tensions and exacerbate instability, driving more people to self-protect with weapons. in Nigeria, cattle rustling and kidnapping for ransom both fall within this category and are explored below.

Arms trafficking (more of which below) is known to be a consistent accelerant of instability and violence, often contributing to the fragmentation of conflict. By weaponizing illicit markets and conflicts, arms trafficking drives heightened violence as a vehicle for market control.[19]

Other illicit markets, however, often those that provide some economic utility for a significant proportion of the population (e.g. through revenue-sharing arrangements), may be considered legitimate ('licit') by communities and the market participants, but viewed as illegitimate ('illegal') by the state.[20] These are generally characterized by lower levels of violence. Good examples are illegal oil refining in the Niger Delta and cross-border smuggling of licit commodities on the Benin–Nigeria border, both of which are explored below. Where states deploy force against such 'community-approved' activities, the consequence has been surges in violence, transforming illicit economies of 'utility' into far more violent manifestations.

Data from the survey referred to in the previous section confirms this trend. When asked about their perceptions of various crimes, a large proportion of respondents did not perceive certain illicit economies to be 'criminal' (see Figure 6). For example, almost half of the respondents (47%) did not consider oil bunkering to be a crime.[21]

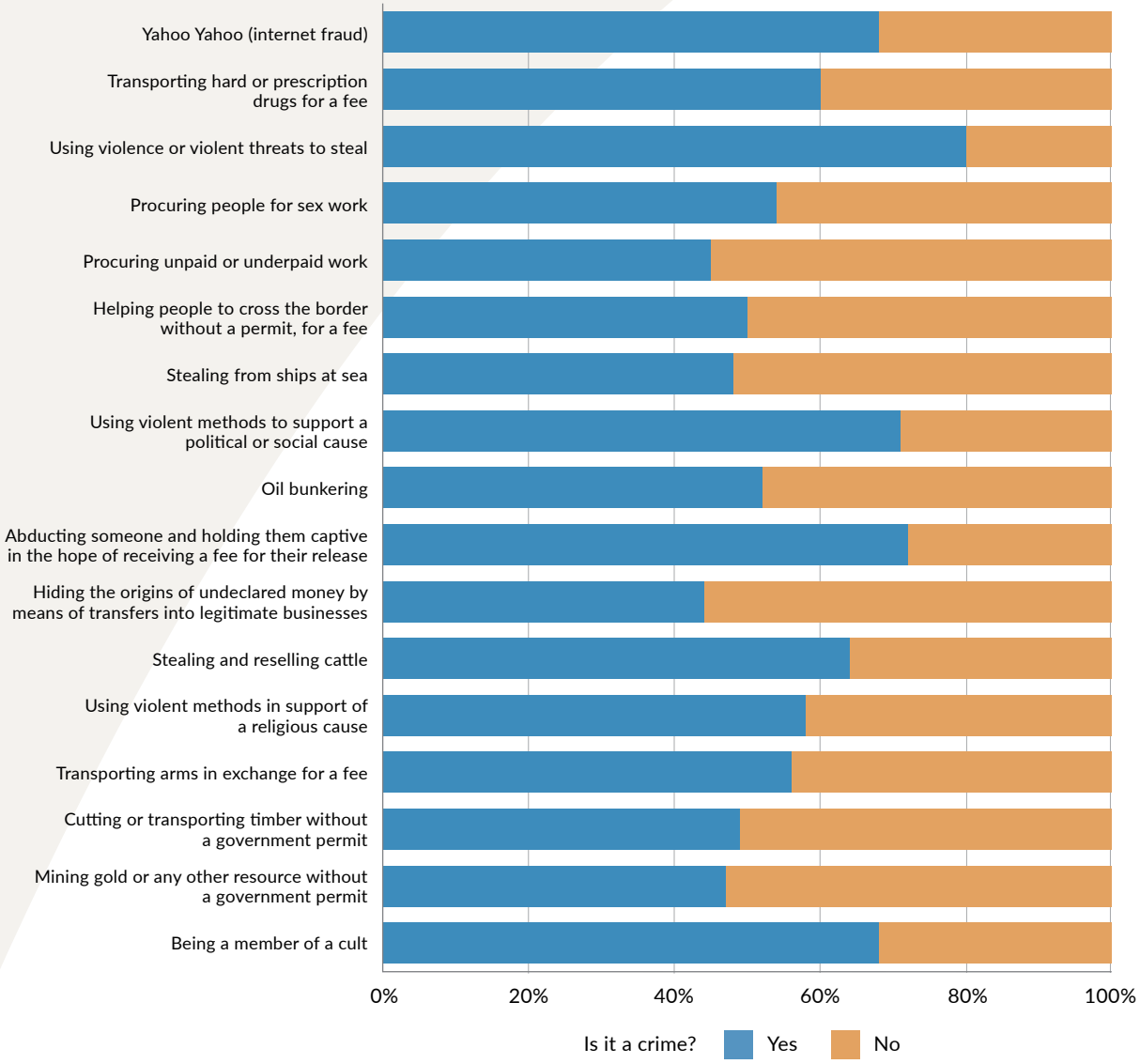


FIGURE 6 Perceptions of certain activities as crimes.

NOTE: The survey question was, 'Is it a crime?'.

SOURCE: Emani survey of 849 participants, August 2021

These varying relationships between certain types of violent illicit markets and their impact on instability and harm generation are explored in more detail below.

Illicit markets as drivers of violence and instability

Cattle rustling is an illicit market that ought to attract more urgent attention than it does, given the major role it plays in exacerbating community tensions and in arming populations. It is a market that has also been highly detrimental as a key source of revenue for conflict actors in Nigeria. Research into terrorist financing in West Africa has cited the prevalence of cattle rustling as a central feature of criminality and a key source of financing for jihadist groups in the Lake Chad Basin.[22]

Together with kidnapping for ransom, which has in some contexts evolved from cattle rustling and likewise generates harm and insecurity, cattle rustling is often a bellwether of growing insecurity and should be a key priority for state responses seeking to quash spiralling instability.

In Nigeria's North West, where the rate of killings now rivals that in the Boko Haram stronghold of the North East, limited state presence enabled the cattle rustling market to flourish. From sporadic attacks on rural communities in Zamfara State a decade ago, it evolved to envelop the entire North West.[23]

In 2011, vigilantes in Zamfara sought to eradicate criminal groups who were stealing cattle and robbing villagers in Dansadau, in Zamfara.[24] These efforts unleashed a round of violent reprisals on villages after the criminals regrouped and acquired more sophisticated weapons, which, in response, fuelled demand for weapons for self-protection.

The challenge has ballooned, and the Nigerian government is now faced with an estimated 10 000 armed bandits in north-western Nigeria, based in camps in forested areas of the region, each with somewhere between 200 and a thousand men.[25]

The market has changed, however. Depleted herds and cattle prices that have been declining since 2016 have driven the heavily armed bandits to alternative revenue streams, principally kidnapping for ransom, which has surged and become the bandits' financial mainstay.[26] The number of kidnappings soared from about 385 in 2019 to around 2 011 between January and August 2021. There was also a corresponding increase in total ransom payments demanded during the same period, which rose from 167 million naira (€356 077) in 2019 to 255.5 million naira (€544 776).[27] Levels of violence meted out by the kidnapping groups also rose sharply during this period, with some attacks targeting military facilities.[28]

In the North East, in mid-2013, Boko Haram was driven out of urban areas following government crackdowns.[29] Since then, the group has turned to kidnapping for ransom as a principal source of finance.[30] This change was necessitated in part by its urban-to-rural shift in operations, together with the closure of rural banks in the face of growing security threats (bank robberies had been hitherto a major component of the group's financing). The Nigerian military's Joint Task Force also attributes it to the 'lucrative and less dangerous' nature of kidnapping when compared to armed robbery.[31] Funds from ransoms reportedly paid following the release of some of the 276 Chibok schoolgirls infamously abducted in 2014 were used to acquire more weapons, according to an ex-Boko Haram member, demonstrating the cycle of proliferating violence associating with kidnapping.[32] Other forms of illicit economies that have been attributed to Boko Haram are arms smuggling, vehicle theft and begging networks composed of children.[33]

Kidnapping for ransom therefore multiplies harms inflicted on communities and has emerged as a prominent form of criminality in unstable areas where multiple actors and groups operate.[34] It also appears to be geographically spreading across Nigeria.[35] Since late 2020, the North Central states of Niger[36] and Kogi,[37] as well as Nigeria's capital territory, Abuja,[38] have seen

Cattle suspected to have been stolen by rustlers are discovered by the police in Kano state. © *NurPhoto via Getty Images*

a marked increase in kidnapping activities. Although armed groups are the principal perpetrators in Niger State,[39] with involvement in the abduction of over 150 students in 2021, in Abuja, various criminals who are unconnected to any such groups are believed to be engaged in kidnapping to generate revenue.[40] Meanwhile, Kogi State, labelled several years ago as a 'haven' for kidnappers of high-profile victims,[41] now faces a kidnapping resurgence, reportedly linked to herdsmen targeting random members of the communities.[42] While kidnapping for ransom has long been a source of revenue for illicit actors,[43] commentators have identified a shift from ideological-economic motives towards a more exclusively profit-driven phenomenon, which may well have facilitated its spread.[44]

How conflict duration shapes illicit markets and violence

How long conflicts or phases of instability last tends to shape how armed groups integrate into illicit economies. Longer periods of conflict lead to armed groups becoming entrenched in specific areas.[45] Similarly, the longer instability persists, the more likely it becomes that armed groups or insurgents will capture or capitalize on illicit economic activity, either by running operations, protecting and taxing existing markets, or establishing new illicit operations. Armed groups may begin with an ideological axe to grind but develop criminal interests over time, which, in turn, has the effect of prolonging the conflict.[46] Over time, conflict actors seeking to exercise quasi-governance functions are likely to shift away from activities that target communities and deplete resources to more stable protection arrangements.

For example, since 2013, Boko Haram has been heavily involved in cattle rustling in the states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. In 2016, these states closed their cattle markets to stem this, so the group smuggled cattle over the border and sold them at markets in Jigawa. The prohibition did little to stifle its revenue flow: Boko Haram rustled an estimated 20 000 cattle in 2016, valued at 3 billion naira (€6 million).[47]

More recently, Boko Haram's splinter group ISWAP – the Islamic State's West Africa Province – has adopted a different approach, preferring to tax the owners of the livestock.[48] A vigilante leader in Maiduguri explained: 'Now the insurgents allow villagers to own livestock but tax them for it. An owner of 10 cows can be asked to give one as tax. If he has 40 goats, they can ask him to give them four.'[49] This reflects similar tactics adopted by ISWAP in taxing the fish trade in the Lake Chad Basin, as explored below.

The move to taxing the livestock trade appears to have come about in recognition that cattle rustling runs against community perceptions of legitimacy and is to the detriment of their relationship with the local communities.[50] Although this is in part due to ISWAP's differing ideology from the other faction of Boko Haram, namely its greater focus on gaining the trust and support of communities, the move also came at a later stage in the group's operations in the region, reinforcing the theory that prolonged phases of instability shape and modify the nature of criminal engagement.

More stable extortion rackets, like the taxation of cattle, are contingent on a degree of territorial control. These dynamics remain intricately connected to the threat of violence. But they do not drive the proliferation of violence to the extent that cattle theft and kidnapping for ransom do.

A band of hunters pose in Yola, state capital of Adamawa, in 2014 after taking part in an operation against Nigerian Islamist extremist group Boko Haram. © *Florian Plaucheur via Getty Images*

The arms market: Accelerating and spreading violence

The role played by the arms market in fuelling violence in Nigeria merits particular scrutiny. The proliferation of criminal groups and armed political groups, and the ensuing instability they generate, have driven demand for arms,[51] and Nigeria has become a central hub for arms. The Organized Crime Index 2021 ranks Nigeria's arms-smuggling market far higher than the average for the West Africa region (scoring 8 in contrast to 5.5).[52]

Demand has fuelled supply in conflict areas, while growing demand for self-protection has normalized access to weapons and legitimized the weapons trade, especially in areas most affected by violence. Public statements by individuals close to government may also have played a role in driving community self-armament. A former defence minister encouraged people to 'defend [their] country' against criminals.[53] Such statements appear to be acknowledgements by state representatives of the Nigerian state's fragmenting monopoly over violence.

Nigeria's arms market is supplied through three key sources. First, a large portion of arms used by armed groups in Nigeria originates from army or police stocks, raided after battles. These armouries have been a source of weapons for Boko Haram and the Eastern Security Network (ESN), the armed wing of the IPOB in the South East, who raid state stocks of weapons.[54] Secondly, cross-border smuggling brings flows of arms into the country from the subregion. Thirdly, there is a growing domestic manufacturing market for firearms.

Cross-border arms smuggling networks

Arms smuggling networks linking conflict zones in Nigeria to those in other parts of West and North Africa have readily responded to increased demand for arms in the country, expanding the arms market beyond Nigeria's borders and feeding profits from the arms market into subregional conflicts.[55]

Imported weapons, including AK-47s, anti-aircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenades and ammunition, originate mainly from key conflict zones in Mali, Libya, Chad, Niger and the Central African Republic.[56] One supplier of Boko Haram said that he sourced most of the weapons from Mali, using trafficking routes through Niger, Cameroon or Chad. Weapons were also imported through Cotonou Port, Benin, and transported overland via Niger to Nigeria through Geidam, in Yobe State, or Abadam, Borno State.[57]

As a former Boko Haram fighter explained: 'Sometimes cash is paid for the weapons, or in other situations, especially along the Cameroon and Chad borders, [stolen cattle are exchanged for the weapons] we need.'[58]

Weapons flowing to insurgent groups have been redistributed within the country. Many weapons imported by Boko Haram, for example, have been sold to bandits operating in North West and North Central Nigeria, as has also been seen in other regional conflicts, including Libya and Yemen.[59]

Redistribution has also occurred across the border with Cameroon, supplying firearms to conflict actors in Nigeria's neighbouring countries. In August 2021, the police in Cross River State arrested an arms-smuggling network that was reportedly smuggling weapons from Nigeria to the Ambazonia secessionist movement in Cameroon.[60] The police reportedly recovered assault rifles and ammunition, as well as explosives from the leader of the syndicate.[61] The Nigerian navy and other security apparatuses have been deployed between Nigeria and Cameroon since May 2021 to disrupt such flows.[62]

The Cameroonian government reported that the IPOB has been directly involved in trafficking arms to the Ambazonia movement as part of an alleged strategic alliance between the groups.[63] Such an alliance is denied by elements of the Ambazonian secessionist groups.[64] One senior police officer involved in operations against IPOB confirmed the alleged cooperation, but noted that it remains small-scale and does not include exchanges of large caches of weapons.[65]

FIGURE 7 Conflict zones and arms flows.

NOTE: To the extent that small-scale raiding of armouries occurs without being reported by the media, this is not captured. Only major arms trafficking flows are depicted. Similarly, only the prevailing driver of violence is depicted here; additional drivers are not captured.

SOURCE: GI-TOC fieldwork and media review

How religious affiliations shape arms flows

Perceptions of religious affiliations appear to play a role in shaping where and how armed groups source their arms and ammunition.

Interviews with arms smugglers suggest that many Muslim Fulani armed actors in Plateau State receive weapons that have entered Nigeria from Niger, especially through routes that transit Zamfara, Katsina and Kaduna. On the other hand, Christian indigenous communities that have been active in communal violence in Plateau State receive weapons mainly from the Niger Delta or through routes that enter Nigeria from Benin. Thus, Muslim groups seem to get their supplies from the predominantly Muslim north, while Christian groups receive them from the predominantly Christian south. The strong religious character of communal violence in Nigeria means religion is key to how some arms sellers choose their clients. One arms smuggler said, 'I can't sell weapons to Muslims – they will use [them] to attack my people.'[66]

Weapons sold by defecting soldiers have also been redistributed along religious supply lines.[67] One resident of Jos who has helped two people obtain a firearm from a defecting soldier explained, 'It's well known that soldiers running away from the North East usually return with a lot of arms to distribute to their people. Christian soldiers come back with arms and sell them to their people. Muslim soldiers also come back with arms and sell them to their people. Even though it's a business, these soldiers want the arms they bring back to [end up in their people's hands], to protect their communities.'[68]

Affiliations with armed groups have also influenced supply chains. There have been cases of soldiers active in the North East who defected and returned home to the South East with the intention of selling their weapons and ammunition to ESN militants.[69] In some cases, soldiers who discover weapons caches sell the weapons to networks supplying the ESN instead of handing them over to the military.[70]

FIGURE 8 Maps of key arms flows by religion.

SOURCE: GI-TOC interviews and media review

Locally made pistol and ammunition, Jos South, September 2021. © *GI-TOC*

Local arms manufacturing

Locally made weapons have largely catered to the self-defence market. For example, villagers in Plateau, Kaduna, Katsina and Borno acquire locally made firearms to defend themselves against bandits.[71] However, criminal actors and state-created security forces also use locally produced firearms. Across the country, locally manufactured arms have been seized in operations targeting criminal activities, including armed robberies and kidnapping.[72]

It is notable that, according to the Emani perceptions survey and additional stakeholder interviews conducted for this report, many Nigerians do not perceive gun smuggling as a criminal offence, but rather as a community service – no doubt in part due to the growing need for self-defence.[73] This, together with the profitability of the business and fairly low barriers to entry, has made gun manufacturing a business that attracts young people.[74]

Escalating local arms manufacturing in Nigeria has meant far greater access to weapons, as prices are up to four times lower than those of imported models.[75] An entry-level handgun can cost as little as 3 500 naira (€7). By comparison, the country's official monthly minimum wage is 30 000 naira (€64).[76]

State	AK-47		Pistols		Pump action		Single barrel	Dane guns
	Imported	Locally made	Imported	Locally made	Imported	Locally made	Locally made	Locally made
Plateau	N300 000–N450 000 (€600–€900)	N80 000–N200 000 (€160–€400)	N120 000–N270 000 (€240–€540)	N30 000–N80 000 (€60–€160)	N150 000–N250 000 (€300–€500)	N70 000–N150 000 (€140–€300)	N11 000–N30 000 (€22–€60)	N8 000–N20 000 (€16–€40)
Benue		N320 000–N400 000 (€640–€800)	N150 000–N300 000 (€300–€600)	N50 000–N150 000 (€100–€300)	N180 000–N300 000 (€360–€600)	N100 000–N180 000 (€200–€360)	N15 000–N40 000 (€30–€80)	N10 000–N20 000 (€20–€40)
Kaduna	N300 000–N500 000 (€600–€1000)	N80 000–N180 000 (€160–€360)	N150 000–N300 000 (€300–€600)	N30 000–N80 000 (€60–€160)	N150 000–N250 000 (€300–€500)	N70 000–N150 000 (€140–€300)	N10 000–N30 000 (€20–€60)	N8 000–N18 000 (€16–€36)
South East	N350 000–N1.5 million (€755–€3245)	N250 000–N400 000 (€540–€865)	N150 000–N600 000 (€300–€1300)	N10 000–N50 000 (€20–€110)	N250 000–N500 000 (€540–€1000)		N15 000–N45 000 (€30–€80)	

FIGURE 9 Prices of firearms in Northern and South Eastern Nigeria.

NOTE: The prices reflect the contrasting complexity of making the arms. One arms smuggler reported that it takes around a month to make an AK-47, and three days to make a pistol.

SOURCE: For the north, prices are based on two interviews with local gun manufacturers and gunrunners in Jos, Plateau State and Zangon Kataf, in southern Kaduna State, and a journalist in Makurdi, Benue State, August 2021. For the South East, they are based on interviews with five arms smugglers in Abia, Akwa Ibom and Enugu States in September 2021.

Locally made rifles ready to be sold in a facility in Benue State, September 2021. © *GI-TOC*

The profitability of this market has attracted recruits, both as manufacturers and transporters, which has added impetus to the local arms-manufacturing industry. 'When I started [in 2017] there were very few [gunmakers],' said Yusuf (not his real name), an arms smuggler in Plateau State (see the profile below). 'But I know of at least five gunmakers today.' Business appears to be booming: one manufacturer in Jos said he had sold 180 home-made AK-47s for 80 000 naira (€176) each in the past three years.

Yusuf said that he could sell an AK-47 for up to N200 000 (€426), and, when business is good, up to 10 weapons and a thousand rounds of ammunition in a day.[77] A bullet for a 9 mm pistol sells for 400 naira (€0.85); those for an AK-47 are 1 000 naira (€2) each.

The arms manufacturing market has expanded significantly, especially where local demand is high, such as in the towns of Awka, Nkwerre, Udi and Abiriba in the South East.[78] There, the Presidential Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons estimates that 60 per cent of illegal arms in circulation in the South East are home-made.[79]

Profile of an arms smuggler

A gun fabricator handles his product, Southern Kaduna, September 2021. © *GI-TOC*

In March 2017, Yusuf (not his real name), a resident of Plateau State in his thirties, got a phone call from a former school classmate who wanted to buy 'one AK-47 and two pistols' for self-defence. Yusuf told him that he would make enquiries. A few days later, he mentioned the conversation to an acquaintance, who told him about a gun manufacturer in a nearby town and gave him the phone number of this person.

Yusuf met the gun manufacturer at a restaurant. Two weeks later, he made his first delivery – three firearms, wrapped in a coat and concealed in a sack of corn strapped to a motorbike. The buyer paid 120 000 naira (€256) for the two pistols and 130 000 naira (€277) for the AK-47. Yusuf paid the gun manufacturer 70 000 naira (€149) for the pistols and 85 000 naira (€181) for the AK-47: a profit of 95 000 naira (€203). Unemployed at the time, he said, 'The money was the largest amount I had ever seen' and that his 'life changed completely'. In the past two years, Yusuf has made at least 30 deliveries across Plateau, Kaduna and Bauchi states in central Nigeria. He recruited three young men who help when there are several deliveries on order. Yusuf claims his clients are 'responsible adults – all of them male and working with government and private organizations – who want to protect themselves because the government has failed to provide adequate security.'

The manufacturer supplying Yusuf works alone in a one-room makeshift workshop in his home. The factory has a forge, anvil and various tools. Though the house is located in a densely populated part of town, many people do not know what is happening inside.

Gunrunners like Yusuf use various means of transport, depending on the volume of supplies and the terrain. Sometimes they use lorries carrying passengers and farm produce between villages and towns or, for urban deliveries, motorcycles and tricycles.[80]

A gunrunner handles a foreign made pistol, Jos North, August 2021. © *GI-TOC*

The stability brought by certain illicit markets is fragile and vulnerable to disruption.

Illicit markets as stabilizing forces

It is known that illicit economies have generated violence across Nigeria and play a destabilizing role globally. However, it is also important to recognize that certain illicit economies can act as a stabilizing force for communities and provide livelihoods where they are scarce. Given the important role that such illicit economies play in providing a revenue for communities, one should carefully assess the costs and benefits of government crackdowns on such illicit markets.

The stability brought by illicit markets is fragile and vulnerable to disruption when the state intervenes to halt them or when there is violent competition between market players.[81] It is therefore often a volatile or short-lived stability. Grey markets – those that involve the smuggling of legal goods – can engender a longer-term stability.

Two illicit markets have been selected here that illustrate well this relationship between stability and illicit markets in the Nigerian context: the illicit artisanal oil-refining economy in the Niger Delta region, and the cross-border smuggling economy of mostly goods and staple foods on the border with Benin.

Artisanal oil refining

The Niger Delta's artisanal oil-refining economy has a complex and fraught relationship with stability. Oil wealth props up not only Nigeria's GDP, but also elements of its elite patronage networks. Large-scale oil-smuggling operations are reportedly coordinated by major figures in Nigeria.[82] Perhaps in tacit recognition of the likely consequences of shining a light on these shadowy arrangements, greater attention has been paid to lower-level criminal networks engaged in oil theft.

Since their inception in the 1980s, the resource-sharing arrangements of the Niger Delta's lucrative oil reserves were enforced by military might. By the mid-1990s, General Sani Abacha's regime was stifling environmental-rights activism, which was born out of purely non-violent means, by deploying the Joint (Military) Task Force, which militarized oil production and drove a rapid increase in arms uptake in the region. The execution of prominent environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other members of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People by the military government in 1995 worsened the security situation. Violence, criminality and kidnapping began to increase, leading to many years of unrest in the Niger Delta, to the significant detriment of the government's budget, largely dependent on oil revenue. However, since 2009, violence in the Niger Delta has tangibly decreased. Although this is widely attributed to government stipends paid to former militants under an amnesty programme, what is also holding back a resurgence in violence is the alternative livelihoods provided by the smaller-scale artisanal oil economy.

Large-scale bunkering of crude oil and small-scale artisanal refining are activities that have both dramatically increased over the past decade – the latter estimated to have grown three- to fivefold.[83] Today, the illicit oil-refining economy offers a significant livelihood in a context with few alternatives and flourishes with extensive state collusion. An estimated 40 per cent of youths under 25 in the Niger Delta region are unemployed.[84] One young man involved in artisanal crude oil refining explained:

An illegal oil refining site in Rivers State. © *Kelechukwu Iruoma/GI-TOC*

'The government is not doing the youths well, so the youths now decided to help themselves through the oil-bunkering business.'[85]

While oil resources are officially split between the state and large foreign multi-nationals, they are perceived by local communities to be rightfully theirs, conferring upon the illegal (largely artisanal) oil refining industry a significant degree of local legitimacy. This is despite its environmental and health impacts, together with the significant economic losses refining poses to the state.[86]

Participants in the artisanal oil-refining economy operate from camps located in the creeks of the delta or on land closer to crude oil pipelines. Most actors are unemployed youths from the South South region, as well as former militants who have been involved in kidnapping for ransom, sea piracy and blowing up crude oil pipelines.[87]

In 2009, a presidential amnesty programme was introduced to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate armed militants engaging in oil theft, kidnapping oil workers for ransom and killing security operatives.[88] This came after over a decade of attacks, peaking in 2008 when the country lost an estimated 6.27 trillion naira (€36 billion) in potential revenue to militant activities.[89]

Violent deaths linked to oil production and bunkering in the Niger Delta rose sharply between 2006 and 2009 before falling tenfold after the amnesty programme. Ever since, these figures have remained low.[90] Out of 50 participants surveyed across LGAs in the oil-producing states of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers, 72.5 per cent said that violence had decreased or stayed the same in their LGA in the past five years (see Figure 11).

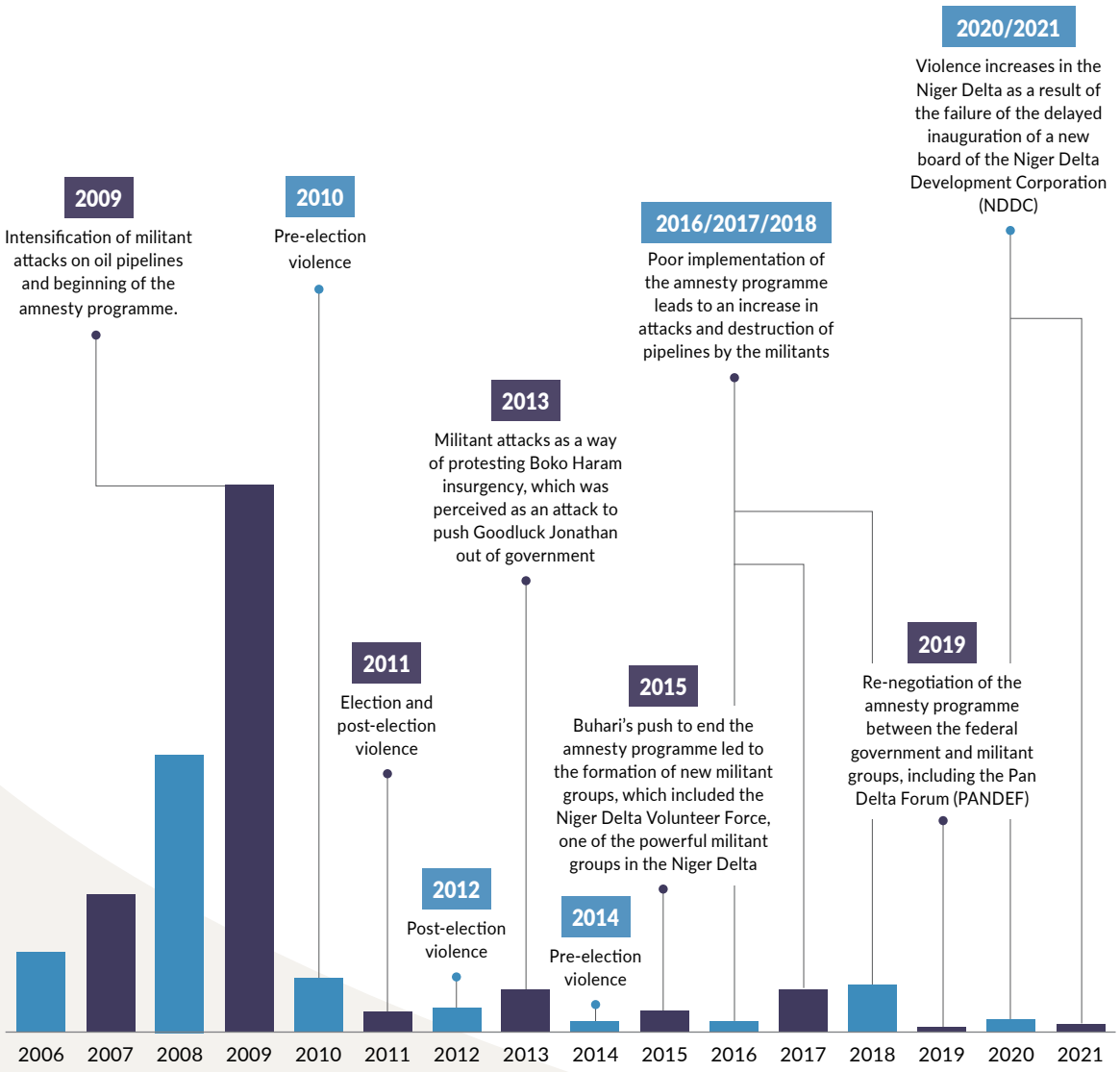


FIGURE 10 Timeline of violent deaths in Nigeria related to oil production.

SOURCE: Nigeria Watch database

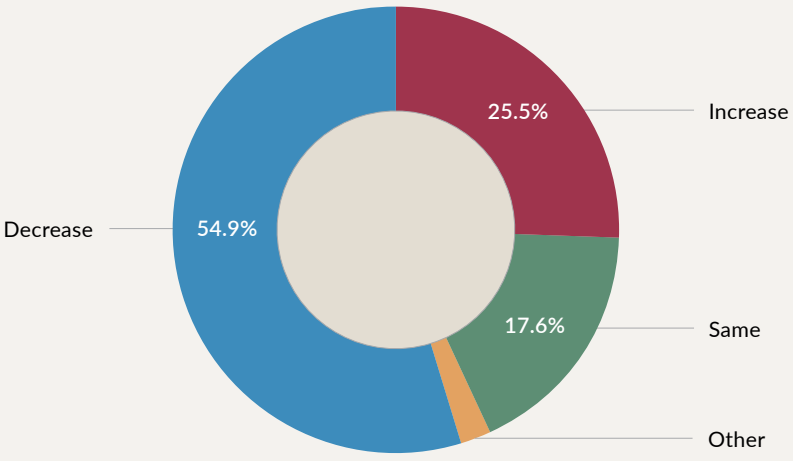


FIGURE 11 Perceived changes in violence in oil-producing states.

NOTE: The survey question was, 'Has violence increased or decreased over the last five years?'

SOURCE: Emani survey of 50 participants in Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta states

Although effective in curbing violence, the costly amnesty programme has been criticized for failing to reintegrate militants or address legitimate grievances of local communities, including lack of opportunities for the youth and environmental restoration, while 'rewarding' former militants with stipends.[91]

Besides, many of the ex-militants are not satisfied with the monthly allowance they receive as part of the programme. Former militants who were interviewed reported late, inconsistent and sometimes reduced payments.[92] While for some ex-militants, dissatisfaction with stipends has been a motive to resume attacks, others have turned to illicit oil refining as an economic coping mechanism.[93] One former militant who handed over 17 firearms, including assault rifles, under the amnesty programme in 2009, said that he could no longer live on the stipends and supplements his income through oil refining.[94]

Interviewees in the Niger Delta repeatedly argued that illicit oil refining has helped quell violence in the region.[95] There have been only 22 recorded deaths related to violence resulting from refining or distributing oil in the past five years.[96] However, state and illicit actors alike now fear that government attempts to completely cripple the illicit economy would result in a resurgence of violence in the region.[97]

An anti-aircraft gun surrendered to the Nigerian authorities, Port Harcourt. *© Pius Utomi Ekpei via Getty Images*

The oil refining ‘camps’ of the delta

Illicit oil refining is reportedly both more lucrative – and safer – than armed militancy. Several former Niger Delta militants told us that the profitability associated with artisanal oil refining had deterred them from returning to armed militancy.[98]

Camp owners reported that, on average, they refined crude oil for five days a week and earned around 1.5 million naira (€3 198) a day, or 7.5 million naira (€15 991) a week.[99] Said one interviewee: ‘There is a lot of money in the business. I used the money I made to buy two plots of land and completed the house I am living in. I sponsored my sisters in the universities, and I have two cars.’[100]

An illegal refinery has between 50 and a hundred camps, depending on the area of the land, a camp employing an average of six people.[101] Each camp has drums for ‘boiling’ the crude oil, supplied by a pipe linking the drums to the tapping points on the oil pipeline. Whenever oil refining is about to begin, youths from the host communities and beyond go to the camps where they are engaged and paid around 5 000 naira (€11) for a day’s work. These casual workers monitor the pipe from the tapping point, refine the crude oil, transfer it to polythene bags after refining and transport the oil to the markets.

The trade predominantly involves men, but women also engage in artisanal oil refining, both directly and through the ancillary economy, by selling food and goods to the workers at the refining sites.[102] A female camp owner, commonly referred to as 'big woman' in the oil refining business in Bayelsa State said she was in the business in order to send her daughters to university and sustain them after graduation. Women also participate by storing the refined crude in their homes to prevent it from being stolen or seized by government security forces. This carries significant risks: an interviewee showed the burn marks on her body sustained when she had stored fuel and it had ignited a fire in her home.[103]

Boiling drums used to refine crude oil at an illegal oil refining site in Egbema, Rivers State, August 2021.
© Kelechukwu Iruoma/GI-TOC

Given that youth in the region currently rely on this illicit economy to survive, refinery camp owners involved in the artisanal refining economy expressed fear of more sustained crackdowns by the federal government, which has deployed the navy to destroy artisanal refineries. If they manage to thwart this economy, camp owners believe it could heighten instability, unrest and the re-formation of criminal militant groups.[104]

Illicit oil refining is reportedly more lucrative – and safer – than armed militancy.

Arguably more likely, however, is the continuation of a *pax criminalis*, in which certain state actors implicated in the artisanal oil refining business would wish to maintain a détente between actors in the economy (multinationals, communities and state) by routine acts of violence against the illicit refining economy. Elements of the state also appear to demonstrate a degree of tolerance for a degree of ongoing instability in the region.[105]

However, this pact is itself unsteady. The root causes of the 2008 surge in fatal violence in the Niger Delta remain unaddressed. ACLED data demonstrates a clear upward trend in riots, violence against civilians and battles between state and civilian forces, and between non-state groups since 2012, although remaining far below the 2009 levels.[106] This violence, linked to a range of actors and motivations, points to simmering grievances and unaddressed tensions. Although recognizing the role of the artisanal oil-refining economy in maintaining a degree of stability in the region is key, additional steps are required to address the root, historical causes of unrest in the Niger Delta to avoid more flare-ups.

Rice smuggling

The Benin–Nigeria smuggling economy is among the country's most established, with roots going back to 1967 and the trade restrictions imposed due to the Biafran War. Nigeria's high tariffs on some goods arriving at its ports, including rice (at 70 per cent) and cars, have fuelled this cross-border market.[107] It was estimated to generate 7 trillion naira (€14.9 billion) annually in 2017, with 1.45 trillion naira (€3 billion) worth of goods believed to have been smuggled into Nigeria from Benin in 2019.[108] Second-hand cars and rice are imported by sea to Cotonou, Benin, where import tariffs are lower than if they arrived in Lagos, before being smuggled along remote routes across the border and into Nigeria, where they are then sold.[109] Local communities view smuggling as the importation of goods and services, and do not perceive it as a criminal market.[110] The smuggling market has long provided a key livelihood for many communities, both through direct involvement as smugglers and provision of ancillary services, such as storage of goods.[111]

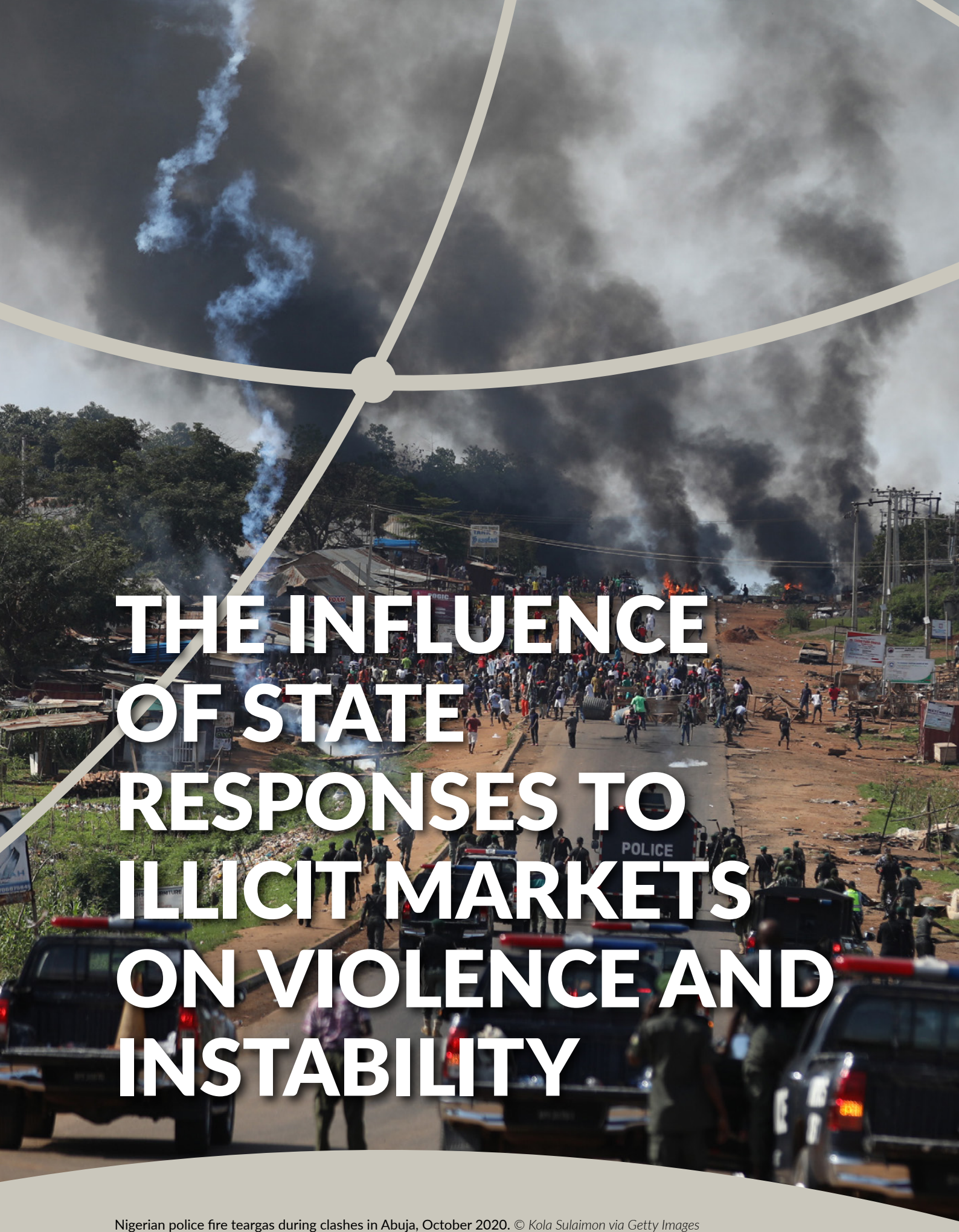
A view of the Benin-Nigerian border city of Krake, one day after Nigeria announced the lifting of the border closure.
© Yanick Folly via Getty Images

How does it add up economically? In the case of rice smugglers operating by motorbike, for each journey, a smuggler makes a profit of around 7 500 naira (€16); a smuggler can make up to 10 journeys a day, accumulating a profit of around 39 865 naira (€85) after expenditure, such as fuel costs.[112] A smuggler's daily income is therefore equivalent to the average *monthly* salary of a police officer.

A car smuggler who lives near the Benin border noted: '[The sale of a single second-hand car] can put food on the table for 50 people, because the money circulates, but since the border was closed, nothing has been happening.'[113] Previously, he said, smugglers made money, built houses and bought cars, but that went into decline following the border closures. 'I make 50 000 naira [€107] for smuggling one car, and in a week, I smuggle up to three cars. But business has been down. There is nothing here any more.'[114]

Until August 2019, the cross-border smuggling economy had been mostly peaceful, with very few violent clashes between security forces and smugglers reported.[115] However, the 2019 government ban changed this – as explored below. The partial reopening of the border in January 2021 facilitated pedestrian traffic, but the bulk of the smuggling trade has not resumed.[116]

How the state responds to illicit markets, such as the generally non-violent artisanal oil industry and rice smuggling market explored above, and what measures it deploys, will be key to how stability is maintained or disrupted.



THE INFLUENCE OF STATE RESPONSES TO ILLICIT MARKETS ON VIOLENCE AND INSTABILITY

Nigerian police fire teargas during clashes in Abuja, October 2020. © *Kola Sulaimon via Getty Images*

Despite the challenges faced in responding to illicit markets highlighted in this report, it is important to recognize that the Nigerian state has made significant efforts in combating organized crime and disrupting illicit flows. Nigeria has both unilaterally and in collaboration with other countries and international agencies spearheaded a range of measures against transnational crime.[117]

The country's responses to organized crime encompass legislation, policy, enforcement and military operations. In the last decade alone, Nigeria's National Assembly enacted several acts to create legal frameworks for responding to transnational organized crime and violent extremism, and established the National Customs Service and the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency, among others.[118]

In tandem with these legal frameworks, Nigeria has implemented several anti-crime policies followed by firm enforcement strategies. The most visible counter-crime measures by the Nigerian government are military operations. As of November 2021, military operations were being conducted in all the 36 states of the federation.[119] Nigeria's military organs have deployed extreme force in dealing with insurgent groups like Boko Haram, separatist groups like IPOB and criminal syndicates involved in oil bunkering, piracy, armed robbery and cattle rustling.[120]

The use of force has helped to restore order and stability in some communities. However, in other contexts such measures – often where local communities depend on illicit economies for their livelihood – have been counterproductive. The two-faced character of the impact of illicit markets on communities – feeding into stability in some settings and instability in others – calls for a more discriminate and context-sensitive deployment of force.

Prohibition creates opportunities for insurgent control of economic activities

Prohibition is a policy approach that underpins the creation of all criminal markets, and their inevitable governance impacts.[121] Yet market suppression continues to be a tool deployed by governments, including Nigeria's, to quash revenue flows to armed groups. While nuanced approaches may yield some success in suppressing demand

The Baga fish market in Maiduguri. © *Stefan Heynis via Getty Images*

or complicating the entry of illicit commodities into licit supply chains, broad-based prohibition has repeatedly had predominantly negative effects.[122]

As highlighted above, in 2016, the Nigerian government closed cattle markets in the North East in an attempt to stop Boko Haram from drawing revenue from cattle rustling. Similarly, in 2017, recognizing that insurgent groups were both taxing and directly involved in the fish trade, the Nigerian government criminalized selling or transporting fish in Borno State.[123] Since criminalizing the fish trade, both Nigeria and Niger have carried out military operations, including air strikes, against actors suspected of being involved in the trade.[124] This has pitted locals, for whom fishing has been a key livelihood, against the government and increased the legitimacy of insurgents who permit the fish trade in the villages they control.[125]

The 12 years of conflict and five million displaced people around Lake Chad reduced the number of fishermen and repopulated the lake with fish, and fishing became an increasingly profitable business.[126] Government interdiction measures have driven an almost threefold increase in fish prices at the market in Maiduguri since 2019 (see Figure 12).[127] This profits the insurgents and aggravates already high levels of food insecurity in the region: approximately 6.5 million people were food insecure in the Lake Chad region in August 2021.[128]

Carton size	Price in 2019	Price in 2021
Maggi carton	N5 000 (€10)	N15 000 (€31)
Aspen carton	N5 000–N10 000 (€10–€21)	N25 000–N30 000 (€52–€62)
Rothmans carton	–	N35 000–N40 000 (€73–€83)
Chororo carton	–	N45 000–N50 000 (€94–€104)
Danbugu carton	N20 000–N25 000 (€42–€52)	N55 000–N65 000 (€114–€135)
Mandula carton	–	N70 000–N80 000 (€146–€167)

FIGURE 12 Price of fish in Maiduguri, August 2021.

NOTE: Fish are packaged and sold in disused cartons, from small to large.

SOURCE: Interviews with a fish trader and a former insurgent in Maiduguri, August 2021

A former Boko Haram insurgent described how the group was involved in the trade: 'Because of too many fish in the Lake Chad, there were trusted people who were screened and registered to do fishing alongside our members, but they must obey all our rules and pay taxes. These people would contact the dealers on our behalf and then every negotiation was directly between the dealers and our leaders.'[129] These 'dealers' or traders buy fish from the insurgents, selling it for almost twice the price at key markets.[130]

In this context, the state policy of criminalizing the fish market effectively handed control of this economy to insurgent groups as its regulators. Criminalization of a practice perceived as licit by communities exacerbated grievances, and facilitated insurgent integration.

Violence weaponizes non-violent illicit actors

A case of another approach with a sometimes counterproductive impact in Nigeria, as elsewhere in the region, is that deployment of violence against illicit markets has fuelled further violence. [131] In some cases, pre-existing violence flared in opposition to state clampdown. In others, state crackdowns effectively engendered violence that had not previously been present. The latter typically occurs where violence is used to target activities that are illegal but broadly perceived to be licit by marginalized local communities and that provide key sources of livelihoods.

For example, the Nigerian government has long sought to stifle cross-border smuggling economies, which are perceived to hamper the country's manufacturing capacity, given its over-reliance on imported goods and staple foods. As part of this, the state sought to crack down on the smuggling economy on the Nigeria–Benin border by using deadly violence to enforce the abrupt closure of the border in August 2019 to prevent the smuggling of rice and other items. As explored above, these smuggling activities had long provided a livelihood for a significant proportion of borderland communities.

The ban has had different impacts on the two principal forms of smuggling.[132] The smuggling of goods and staple foods, such as rice and second-hand clothes, in large trucks through official border posts and using paved roads has declined since the border closure. Ongoing activity continues largely without violence, relying on the complicity of corrupt border officials to ensure a smooth passage.[133]

However, smuggling by motorbike to navigate rural terrain and avoid checkpoints, which constitutes a larger proportion of smuggling activity than prior to the ban, has become more violent. Since the ban, the Nigerian Customs Service has enforced a prohibition on cross-border movement, often shooting at smugglers.[134] As a result, smugglers have armed themselves as defence against border forces, fuelling violence and

A man transports oil smuggled from Nigeria near Porto Novo, Benin. *© Erick Christian Ahonou via Getty Images*

borderland community casualties.[135] On 26 December 2020, for instance, armed smugglers transporting bags of rice on motorcycles clashed with customs officers in Ilaro, in the Yewa North LGA of Ogun State. Ten died during the clash, including community members apparently not involved in smuggling.[136] More recently, on 11 September 2021, a customs officer was reportedly killed by rice smugglers in the Yewa South LGA.[137]

Ogun State, which shares a 200-kilometre land border with Benin, has been most affected by the violence. 'The crisis causes bloodshed,' said a local community youth leader.[138] One local reported: 'Even at night, you will see [customs officers] carrying corpses of rice smugglers they killed to either bury them or deposit them in the mortuary.'[139] Violent clashes have been reported in towns in Ogun State, including Ipokia, Ilaro, Ilara, Idi-Iroko, Oja-Odan, Ayetoro, Sango, Ota, Owode and Ketu.[140]

It is over-simplistic to suggest the impact of the enforced border closures has been purely negative, however. The measures have reportedly been successful in reducing the smuggling economy,[141] and some former smugglers have found employment in the licit economy.[142] Similarly, import duties were reported to increase significantly in the wake of the closures.[143]

However, violent clashes have escalated and community leaders expressed concerns that former smugglers will engage in more violent forms of crime, such as armed robbery.[144]

The state's enforcement actions clashed with local perceptions of legitimacy, fuelling rather than diminishing instability in the area. Research on fragility and state-building emphasizes the importance of strengthening the relationship between the population and the state, and crackdowns on activities perceived to be 'licit' by communities severely undermine this relationship.[145]

The closure of borders has not been matched with significant initiatives to provide alternative legal livelihood options. Economic opportunities that target not only smugglers, but also the communities that have benefited from the wider smuggling economy are needed to break border communities' cycles of dependence on the illicit economy, rather than simply leveraging violence to crack down on the practice. Furthermore, since Nigeria has some of the most restrictive import regimes in the world, a restructuring of the economic policies that create incentives for smuggling would be a more sustainable solution to border-smuggling economies.[146]

State crackdowns have engendered violence that had not previously been present.

Collusion erodes state legitimacy and enables illicit activities

The systemic involvement of elements of Nigerian state security forces in certain illicit economies has undermined the legitimacy of the state in its regulatory function, while enabling illicit markets to operate without disruption or instability.

As outlined above, the illicit artisanal oil-refining economy in the Niger Delta enjoys a degree of stability, and the role of security forces in exploiting and protecting it (in parallel to intermittent violent crackdowns) has been one enabling factor in its stability.[147]

Since 2010, the Joint Task Force, comprising the Nigerian navy, army, air force and police, deployed to combat oil theft and illegal oil refining in the Niger Delta has been intensifying operations. The navy has reportedly destroyed ever more illegal refineries in the Niger Delta since 2015, rising from 140 in 2015, to 418 in 2019.[148] However, rather than genuine attempts to close the refineries, site owners see these crackdowns as attempts to pressuring them into paying bribes. [149]

Indeed, despite the repeatedly publicized crackdowns, illicit oil refining continues, mostly due to security force corruption and involvement in the practice.[150] Elements of the task force have benefited from oil theft in three main ways. First, security forces meant to protect pipelines or destroy refining sites have received bribes from illicit actors to prevent them from destroying sites.[151] These bribes are typically between 2 million (€4 264) and 6 million naira (€12 793).[152]

Secondly, security forces manning checkpoints on routes to the refineries have taxed vehicles transporting artisanal fuel to the selling points instead of seizing their cargo.[153] Some security operatives have also acted as escorts to avoid consignments being stopped by other security operatives.[154] They are reportedly paid between 20 000 and 50 000 naira (€43–€107) for these services.[155]

Security forces have also run refining sites, ensuring their sites are not targeted during security operations.[156] Some workers have even reportedly received weapons from security forces to protect themselves and the camps from being destroyed.[157] An interviewee who runs an illegal refinery in Rivers State said, 'Some days when we are not refining, security operatives question us. They always want us to be refining, so they can be getting money.'[158]

Deployment to the region is very lucrative, with some officers reportedly paying bribes to be posted in communities where oil bunkering happens.[159] A police officer involved in illicit oil refining in Akwa Ibom emphasized this: 'Some security men are surviving through this local illegal refinery.'[160] Some top-ranking officers in the military are also said to be involved, making considerably more through the illicit economy than their salaries.[161]

THE RISE OF NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS AS SECURITY PROVIDERS

The Amotekun corps in Ogun State. © *Prince Dr. Dapo Abiodun via Twitter*

In certain regions of Nigeria, limited resources and the vastness of the territory mean the state does not manage to maintain a presence sufficient to operate as a security provider. And even where state security apparatuses are present, their behaviour can undermine their legitimacy.[162]

Poor salaries drive police officers to turn to alternative, often illicit, revenue streams. Monthly salaries within the police force start at around 47 000 naira (€100) for a constable.[163]

Many police officers use their positions of authority to demand bribes from citizens at checkpoints, effectively running organized extortion rackets, with proceeds trickling up the chain of command, making it an organized and systemic practice.[164] The need for alternative income streams also drives some elements in the police service to rent or sell weapons and ammunition to armed bandits.[165]

Police officers also earn additional revenue as private security guards for Nigeria's elites and government officials,[166] effectively depleting Nigeria's already low police-to-population ratio (which, in 2018, was one police officer for every 740 citizens, well under the UN recommended ratio of 1:450).[167]

Growing instability and lack of confidence in the state's security forces have led to the emergence of non-state actors who fill the gap and provide security for communities most affected by violence, presenting themselves as 'anti-violence and anti-crime' armed groups.[168]

Despite its own involvement in criminal economies and its association with global jihad, the Boko Haram insurgency initially emerged as a movement that was fighting corruption, crime and weak state governance, thereby gaining enormous local legitimacy. Since then, many armed groups have emerged across the country targeting crime as their main agenda. For example, the Yan Gora, also known as the Civilian Joint Task Force, emerged in response to the insecurity brought by Boko Haram and worked alongside state security forces to help patrol urban areas and identify Boko Haram members – leading to abuses in many cases.[169]

Although communities have tended to embrace this trend of anti-crime armed groups, their proliferation poses several risks to Nigeria. First, they risk perpetrating human rights violations and abuses of power, including along ethnic lines. As with much of the government's security forces, there is a profound lack of

accountability within vigilante groups. Both the predominantly Yoruba Amotekun (discussed below) and the predominantly Igbo ESN armed groups have positioned themselves against the Fulani, a largely Muslim and pastoralist ethnic group perceived to be supported by northern politicians in Nigeria and behind much of the insecurity in the south.[170] This risks accentuating the north–south political split in the country.[171]

Secondly, these groups risk being instrumentalized for political gains. Politicians may pay them to perpetrate violence during elections, multiplying the number of armed politicized actors operating in the election arena. They may also become a rallying point for regional separatist agendas, as they gain popular legitimacy through effective policing and exercising state-like functions.

Anti-crime armed groups also risk competing with police and military forces, which may deepen federal agency mistrust, and create rivalry between security providers, which can hamper anti-crime efforts.

Finally, in the case of state-created security groups, weak state budgets may reduce their funding, forcing reliance on alternative revenue streams. The reaction of federal security forces to their low and unpaid salaries suggests that this can translate into their leveraging territorial control to obtain funding from illicit markets and protection rackets. In addition, their weapons may be used to gain a hold on illicit economies, divorcing their revenue streams from the state and enabling these groups to emerge as independent political players, further fragmenting Nigeria's political landscape.

A new trend: State-created security networks

Non-state armed groups with anti-crime and corruption agendas fall broadly into three categories: local anti-crime self-defence groups that emerge from communities and can cooperate with government security forces, such as the Civilian Joint Task Force in north-eastern Nigeria; anti-crime and anti-government groups that hold a separatist or political agenda, such as IPOB and Boko Haram; and state-initiated anti-crime groups.

While the first two categories have been a feature for some time in Nigeria, the third is a more recent phenomenon, emerging only in the past two years. State-initiated anti-crime groups present a significant risk to the federal government's legitimacy across the country. State governors have no control over federal security forces in their state: a situation maintained by the federal government due to secessionist fears.[172] As a result, increasing levels of violence and crime have repeatedly impelled state governors to proactively hand over the security mandate to local communities.[173]

More recently, however, regionally and ethnically aligned governors in the South West have created their own security provider. In January 2020, state governments created the Western Nigeria Security Network, known as Operation Amotekun (from the word meaning 'leopard' in Yoruba).[174] This appeared to inspire other regions of Nigeria to race to organize their own security outfits, and the South Eastern state governors launched the Ebube Agu Security apparatus in April 2021.[175] This was partly in response to the creation of ESN, the newly launched armed wing of the secessionist group IPOB (see below).[176]

Meanwhile, in the south, the Delta State governor and senator launched Operation Delta Hawk, a new security corps to respond to growing 'herdsmen-related clashes' in the state.[177] The Middle Belt Forum in central Nigeria also announced plans to create its own security outfit in March 2021.[178] In the north, the Coalition of Northern Groups is attempting to convince the Northern Governors Forum to back the creation of a security group called Operation Shege Ka Fasa, modelled on Amotekun. [179]

This proliferation of state government security operations such as these risks politicizing security provision and exacerbating tensions in the lead-up to the 2023 general and gubernatorial elections. The South East – and particularly the Igbo community, which has never had an elected president in power in Abuja – is particularly vulnerable to armed-group politicization and pre-electoral violence. This is especially true given the growth of separatism in the region, led by IPOB and weaponized by its armed wing, ESN, and that the country's rotating presidency dictates a southern powerholder.

Importantly, state governments have no constitutional power to arm security networks. In doing so with these security groups, they are in flagrant breach of the separation of powers between federal and regional governments, posing a threat to the federal government's monopoly over violence.[180]

Operation Amotekun: Risks crystallize

Created in January 2020 by south-western state governments in response to escalating insecurity, Amotekun today maintains a presence in all states in the South West region, except for Lagos. The operation comprises former vigilantes, local hunters, community youths, farmers and menial workers.

In 2020, the state governments and houses of assembly in all six states in the South West passed bills to create the security outfit and legalize its operations. This effectively elevated Amotekun's status from a vigilante group, which, by definition, operates outside the law, to a security outfit or militia, although it remains unconstitutional in the eyes of the federal government.

Amotekun checkpoint and Ondo State headquarters, November 2021. © *Alexandre Bish*

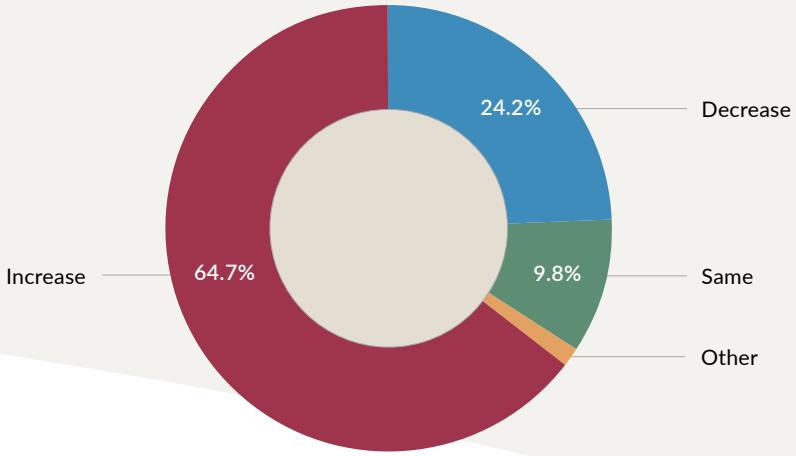


FIGURE 13 Perception of change in violence over the past five years in the South West states.

SOURCE: Emani survey

Amotekun has positioned itself as more capable than the federal police force for several reasons.[181] It now has significant capacity in rural areas across five of the six South West states (the exception being Lagos State), with newer equipment than most police officers.[182] The state governors provided Amotekun with new pickup vehicles, motorcycles and communication technology.[183] While initial membership ranged from 100 to 300 people per state, in less than two years it has rapidly grown to at least 1 000 members per state, deployed in every local government area (except in Lagos State).[184]

The group recruits only locals from within each of the five states, which they say has helped with terrain knowledge and intelligence gathering. In contrast, police officers come from across the country and often have linguistic and cultural barriers when policing local communities. This cultural distance has affected police work, with low incentives to reach the more rural communities where insecurity has grown, and allowing some police officers to act with more impunity, given the lack of reputational blowback in communities they are disconnected from. Instead, they have focused mainly on the safer and more lucrative urban areas and checkpoints on key routes linking cities. Over time, these factors have contributed to reducing the police's legitimacy in the South West – much like in the rest of the country – and allowed Amotekun's to grow.

According to an Amotekun commander in Ondo State, 'The [state] government funds us because we are grassroots. Right now, we are virtually taking over the grassroots security of Ondo State. We are supposed to complement the efforts of the police, but we are taking over security fully.'[185]

Concentrated in the Yoruba South West, the group's ethnic character is undeniable, causing many to fear it could revive and fuel separatist tendencies and commit abuses.[186]

While hailed as a success by elements of state governments in South West Nigeria, according to local media reports, Amotekun has also reportedly fuelled violence in the region by allegedly engaging in the torture and extrajudicial killings of civilians, shooting federal police officers and conducting rackets with locals, and engaging in other low-level crime.[187]

Over a dozen reported cases of alleged extrajudicial killings, beatings and torture have led Ibadan residents to report growing apprehension in the city over the growing violence perpetrated by Amotekun.[188]

As of November 2021, around 50 Amotekun members had been arrested and detained by police in Oyo State and many more had reportedly been dismissed.[189] Many other violent incidents have reportedly remained without investigation or punishment.[190]

Amotekun Commander, Ondo State, November 2021. © *Alexandre Bish*

Mechanisms to detect members who abuse their powers seem to be in place in some states, including a hotline to report abusive Amotekun members in Ondo State, for instance. Interviewed Amotekun members also suggest there are strong internal systems of punishment for those who abuse power:

> Extortion is not possible in Amotekun. It is not worth it. If you extort in Amotekun, the spiritual consequences are high. The training and the process of recruitment forbids it because the punishment is extremely high. The punishment is traditional. We have punished many corps members for anything that has to do with breaching the oath of allegiance to the corps.[191]

Interviews suggest that members, who are solely recruited from the Yoruba ethnic group, undertake a spiritual or voodoo oath upon joining the corps.[192] Furthermore, while a school certificate is needed to join the corps, the ability to engage in what was described as 'spiritual warfare' was highly valued.[193]

Members of the group receive very little training and are deployed for patrols after only three to eight weeks of training, which is far less than the mandatory six to 18 months in federal security agencies.[194] Members are typically trained in patrol duties, intelligence gathering, first aid, communication skills and interagency cooperation.[195] A lawyer also gives new recruits a lecture on human rights.[196] Members who go on patrol are usually either given a pump-action rifle or a craft weapon, or, in some cases, asked to use their own. Federal law prohibits them from carrying assault rifles, although this has happened.[197]

Another factor that may fuel abuses of power could be the reportedly low salaries and late payments characteristic of most state-funded agencies. Members are mostly paid the minimum wage, although it can be slightly more depending on the state 30 000–45 000 naira (€65–€97). In addition, mismanagement of funds could, and has already started to, affect salary provision. In August 2021, an Amotekun

Amotekun corps in Akure, Ondo State, November 2021. © *Alexandre Bish*

commander in Osun State resigned from the group, reportedly over mismanagement of funds.[198] For now, most of the group's funding stems from the state government and donations, although there are plans to create a 'security trust fund', through which citizens could effectively crowdfund their own security provision.

Despite the mismanagement of funds and various incidents of violence or abuse, the image of the fledgling group remains overwhelmingly positive among most locals interviewed in the region. This may be because much their abuse of power appears to have predominantly targeted the Fulani, the ethnic group to which President Buhari belongs, as do most of the herdsmen perceived to clash with farming communities over land-grazing rights. The ethnic profiling of northern Fulani in the south has already reportedly been normalized. Amotekun's anti-Fulani stance is concerning, especially in the context of alleged extrajudicial killings and the upcoming presidential elections, which is likely to trigger communal violence.[199]

Although Amotekun enjoys popularity for now in Yoruba communities, their politicization during the run-up to the elections is likely to affect the legitimacy of the group. The group may be used to legitimize some politicians by supporting an increasingly popular ethnic separatist stance or to deter others from running.

Because the majority (though not all) of state governors who founded the group stem from the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), Amotekun is associated with APC, giving rise to fears that should an opposition candidate win, the new governor might effect significant changes in the Amotekun chain of command, which could dampen morale among members. If members were to resign, or join or create a new group, this would contribute to the mushrooming numbers of armed actors and the various risks inherent in this.

Alternatively, a new governor could simply stop the group's funding. One senior Amotekun member was not worried about this eventuality: 'The people will revolt if the next government threatens to terminate Amotekun.'[200]

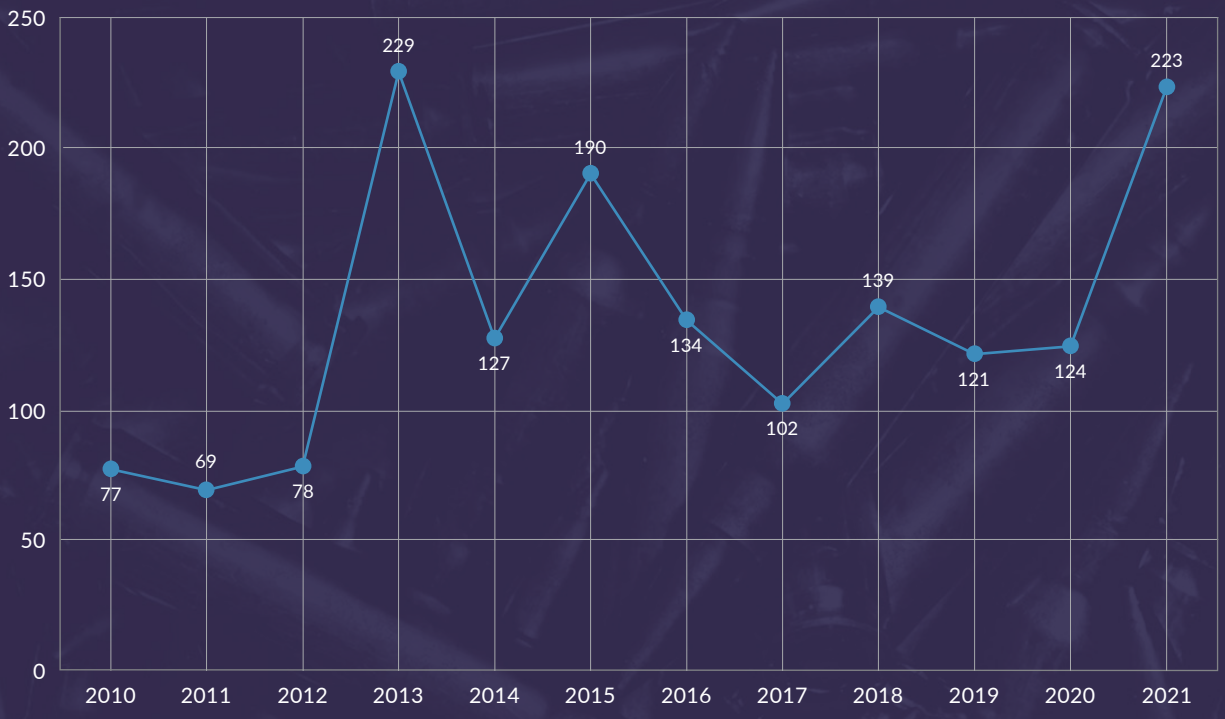
Anti-crime stance behind rise of non-state-backed militias

Non-state-backed armed groups have also adopted an anti-crime stance to gain legitimacy over populations, further highlighting the prevalence of crime in communities. This has been the case of ESN, the armed wing of IPOB. Created in 2017, the secessionist Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) group is fighting to resurrect the ill-fated Biafran state in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. The group has been blamed for violent attacks and killings sweeping across the region.[201] A federal high court proscribed IPOB as a terrorist organization in 2017.[202]

IPOB started out as a peaceful movement campaigning for secession of the Igbo-speaking South East region from Nigeria, citing marginalization. It took to violence following the creation of its military wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), in December 2020, by its now-detained leader Nnamdi Kanu.[203] ESN, which claimed 4 000 members in June 2021, said it was formed to root out 'every criminal activity and terrorist attack' from the South East.[204] Ex-military officers provided training to the force.[205]

Movement for the Indigenous People of Biafra take part in a demonstration calling for independence from Nigeria, June 2021, Rome. © *Stefano Montesi via Getty Images*

ANAMBRA STATE



IMO STATE

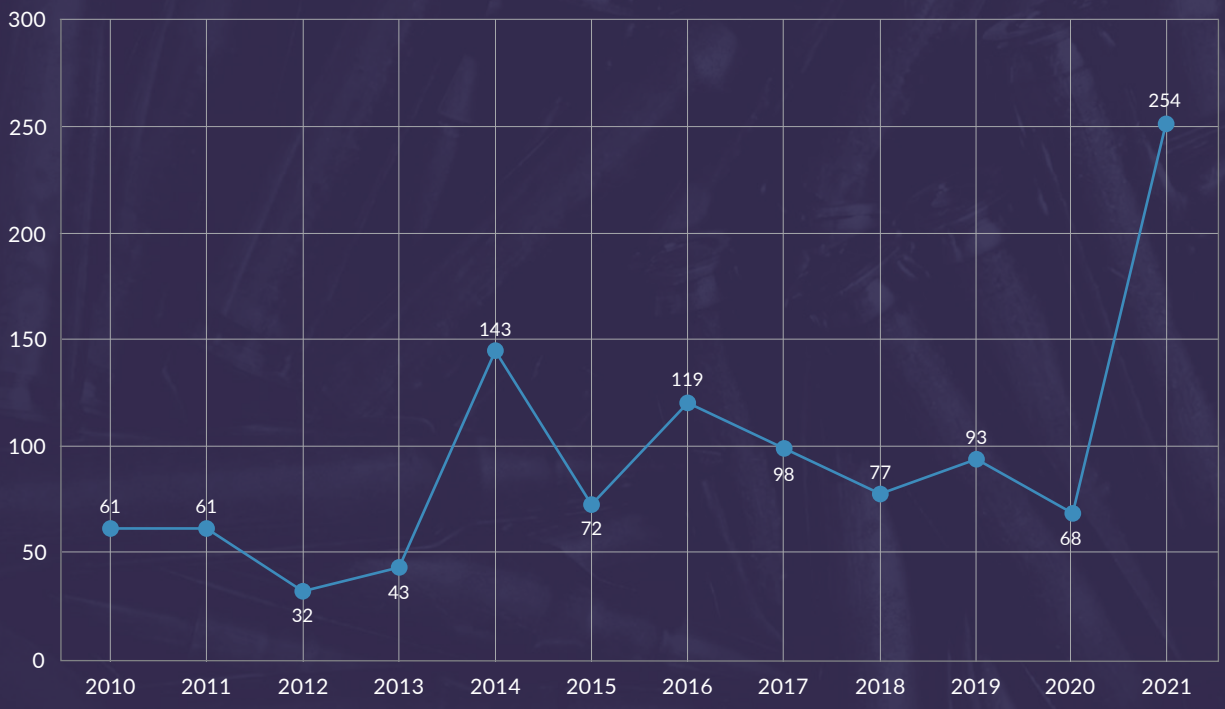


FIGURE 14 Violence and crime-related deaths in Anambra and Imo states by year, 2010–2021.

SOURCE: Nigeria Watch Database

The group's activities have cast a dark shadow of insecurity over the entire South East region. After the launch of ESN, the number of killings linked to separatist violence shot up to 222 within the first three months (January to March 2021), a staggering 344 per cent increase from the 50 deaths recorded in the three months preceding the armed group's launch (September to November 2020).

ESN has vowed to rid the zone of criminal herdsmen because the government has failed to reduce farmer–herdsmen violence. To achieve this, the group has allegedly attacked Fulani settlements and killed civilians indiscriminately.[206] According to media reports, between December 2020 and August 2021, at least 127 police and security officers were allegedly killed, with 20 police stations and election commission offices attacked in raids that ESN is suspected to have led.[207] Attacks intensified across 2021: the Nigerian government claims that ESN killed 60 people between January and April 2021.[208]

Similarly, fear of IPOB is hindering law enforcement officers from carrying out their duties in parts of the South East. A peace advocate with the Citizens Rights and Mediation Centre NGO in Enugu, stated: 'Police are even scared of coming to arrest criminals in some parts of the zone. They are just afraid of sudden collision with members of IPOB who are always interested in every case in the communities and act as de facto government.'[209] The government responded to the violence by deploying more troops to the region.[210] The measure led to the arrest and killing of many ESN members, but the group has continued its attacks. In their hunt for ESN members, soldiers have been accused of committing violence against civilians.[211]

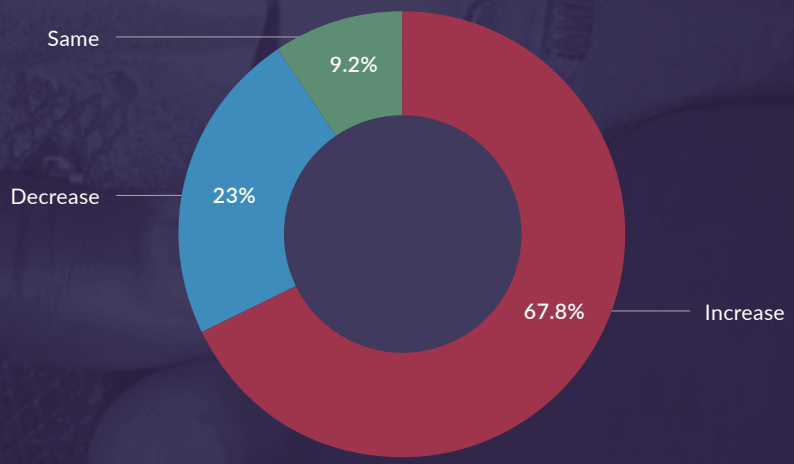


FIGURE 15 Perception of change in violence over the past five years in south-eastern states.

SOURCE: Emani survey

CONCLUSION

A scene from Lagos. Nigeria's violence and challenges caused by instability would appear to be intensifying.
© Olukayode Jaiyeola via Getty Images

Nigeria's deep-seated challenges to stability appear to be intensifying and violence escalating. In some areas, conflicts appear to have reached a tipping point, with power shifting from the state to non-state armed groups.[212]

Illicit markets are playing a pivotal – although by no means unilateral – role in sustaining conflict actors and shaping instability across Nigeria. However, suggesting that Nigeria is on a linear path towards implosion – feeding into the current debate over whether Nigeria now fulfils the characteristics of a 'failed state' – is over-simplistic.[213] It ignores the complex resilience of the state and its people. Similarly, painting illicit markets solely as drivers of instability ignores their broader utility role in perpetuating a degree of stability in some contexts.

The role of illicit markets is two-faced. Recognizing this should shape state interventions to ensure that state resources are prioritized to illicit markets that most contribute to the destabilization of the country and perpetrate widespread harm to communities. Similarly, interventions should avoid crackdowns on pacific, illicit and grey economies that fulfil a stabilizing function, and pursue development agendas to achieve reform. Adopting effective approaches to respond to the country's lucrative and powerful illicit economies could prove a decisive factor in shaping Nigeria's future.

And Nigeria's future state matters. National instability is already spilling over borders and rippling out across the subregion. Already governments in Cameroon, Chad and Niger have redirected significant proportions of their state budgets to address security challenges linked to conflict actors in Nigeria.[214] This cross-border ripple effect is in line with recent research that points to increasing incidence of violent events near borders in West Africa. This is a concerning trend, given that it may point to the relocation or geographic expansion of conflicts and its impacts in creating cross-border tremors of instability.[215]

Differentiated and targeted deployment of violence in response to illicit markets and their destabilizing impacts is therefore required to curtail, rather than fuel, escalating instability. The Nigerian state may also need to compromise with regard to other illicit markets that currently do not pose intrinsic threats to stability or the authority of the state.

Policy recommendations

In order to reduce violence, and to prevent interventions targeted at stemming illicit markets from increasing violence, the following policy actions are recommended, based on the findings of this report.

Tailor responses to illicit markets to the market typology and its role in shaping instability and violence

Avoid leveraging violence indiscriminately in response to illicit markets, and make 'do no harm' prerogatives the centrepiece of counter-crime responses. In some contexts, longer-term, non-securitized responses are required to avoid weaponizing previously peaceful illicit markets and creating surges in instability. Law enforcement responses should prioritize markets that multiply community harms and exacerbate tensions, thus creating spaces for insurgent groups to gain legitimacy. States may need to assess different forms of harm – such as economic versus physical – and compromise in shaping responses.

A set of indicators that states should use to analyze illicit market impacts and craft appropriate responses include:

1. Revenue sharing arrangements. Are profits from the illicit market shared among a narrow group or do they disperse widely across the community? In analyzing this, also consider revenues that are ancillary to direct engagement in the market (e.g. provision of storage capacities, providing food or services to illicit actors). Wider dispersion of profits is likely to translate into greater legitimacy, greater destabilization in the face of crackdowns, and may point towards the need for a development-centric response.
2. Community concepts of legitimacy. Linking to the indicator above: where a market is broadly perceived to be legitimate, crackdowns are likely to engender backlash and may drive recruitment into insurgent groups. Creating space for conflict actors to regulate legitimate but 'illicit' markets is not only damaging because it provides conflict actors with revenue flows, but because it enhances their legitimacy, at the expense of the state's.
3. Transit or production? Is the illicit market premised on the transit of a certain commodity through a region that has no local market itself, with the profits realized elsewhere? Does the commodity have a local consumption market, or is it produced or cultivated in the region? Transit commodities with no local market will typically benefit a narrower group of stakeholders and, particularly where the commodities are high value, engender structured protection economies. Transit markets will typically be displaced in response to crackdowns unless issues of supply and demand are tackled; however, they are less likely to cause backlash from local populations if dispersed.
4. Relationship with inter-community tensions. Does the illicit market typically pit different ethnicities against each other, fuelling existing rifts? Cattle rustling and, increasingly, the religiously affiliated arms-manufacturing market both fall into this bracket. These characteristics are of significant concern, point to the role of the market in fuelling short- and long-term conflicts and demand prompt response.

'Do no harm': place an assessment of harm at the centre of illicit market responses and accept compromise

The harms of illicit markets are manifold and exist across a range of typologies (e.g. economic, health, physical violence, governance) and differing victims (e.g. the nation-state, communities, government entities). The typology, victim and scale of the harms perpetrated by any specific market should be assessed before crafting a response. As should the likely harms, across this spectrum, of state responses. Interventions should only be activated where the harms of intervening are lower than those of tolerating the status quo. Further, the type of harms perpetrated by the market should shape the nature, timing and prioritization of responses.

Couple law enforcement approaches with dialogue and non-securitized approaches to tackling violence in Nigeria

The perception of violence and the illicit varies between local and government actors and across regions. Most violence described in this report has resulted from poverty, weak governance and unaddressed grievances. These need to be considered to put an end to violence. Engaging with violent actors to understand and ultimately address their grievances is key to combating cyclical violence.

Empower civil society to monitor and report on violence

Civil society organizations and investigative journalists are key stakeholders to help shed light on violence and illicit economies, which is key to tackling them. The role of these actors has been overlooked, in particular by the Nigerian state. However, they can become a remedy to catalyze grassroots-level efforts and empower communities in areas where state presence is weak.

Enhance the capacity and training of security forces

More training and capacity are needed to tackle endemic violence in the country. The Nigerian police force is understaffed. The Nigerian military is often brought in to tackle policing challenges. Neither body has enough human rights training to ensure there are no abuses perpetrated against civilians.

Devolve more power to state security outfits

Reconsider Nigeria's constitution and legal framework, and address the concentration of security responsibilities in the hands of the federal government at the expense of state units. Amendments are needed to grant states greater policing power over their own territory and to bring the recent trend of state-created security forces into the legal and regulated space. The federal government should spearhead this initiative, alongside parallel drives to improve regulation of regional security bodies to mitigate the risk of abuses.

NOTES

1 John Campbell and Matthew T, Page, *Nigeria, What Everyone Needs To Know*, Oxford University Press, 2018; Stephen Ellis, *This Present Darkness: A History of Nigerian Organized Crime*, London: Hurst and Company, 2016.

2 Oge Onubogu, It's time to end 'business as usual' with Nigeria, https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/11/its-time-end-business-usual-nigeria. Bilkisu Labaran, Nigeria at 50: What does Naija mean? BBC Focus on Africa, 1 October 2010. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-11447252#:~:text=Naija%20simply%20means%20%22The%20New,adults%20as%20an%20exclamation%20word.

3 Richard Snyder and Angelica Duran-Martinez, Does illegality breed violence? Drug trafficking and state-sponsored protection rackets, 2009, *Crime Law and Social Change*, 52, 3, 253–273; Angelica Duran-Martinez, To kill and tell? State power, criminal competition, and drug violence, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2015, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022002715587047.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Nigeria has 36 states, which are semi-autonomous political units sharing powers with the federal government.

7 More on the Nigeria Watch Database and its methodology can be found here: http://www.nigeriawatch.org/index.php?html=4.

8 The majority (708) of responses arrived on the day of launch. Community managers followed up with approximately 250 lower-quality responses in the week that followed. There are two main general limitations to this survey data. First, the survey results are indicative, not generalizable. Respondents were not randomly selected, so the sample is not statistically representative. Results cannot be generalized to 'Nigerian views on crime'. Mitigation: the survey is geographically representative – at least one person from and living in each local governance area responded – and demographically diverse. Second, responses were written, not spoken. Respondents entered responses in written format, usually via their smartphone handsets. Unlike traditional conversational surveying, there was no enumerator to explain and rephrase questions that might have been misunderstood. Mitigation: the community element – specifically, a trained coordinator present in each state capital – was on hand to explain the survey and answer questions. The lack of an enumerator may also reduce the risk of enumerator bias.
There are two main question-specific limitations for this data. First, open-ended responses. Some responses to open-ended questions are difficult to understand. Emani's DataStream cleans open-ended responses by correcting punctuation and upper/lower case and eliminating nonsensical answers. In the future, DataStream's use of natural language processing will make responses more intelligible and automatically codify answers. Second, the multiple-selection question, 'Which of the following activities do you think are crimes? Select as many as applicable', was followed by 17 options, requiring respondents to proactively select those they thought were crimes, while assuming that non-checked boxes meant 'No, I do not consider this a crime'. Non-checked boxes may also have meant that respondents did not understand the option.

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