



Nigeria Watch

First Annual Report

on Public Violence

(2006-2007)

I am pleased to introduce our first Annual Report on public violence in Nigeria. It is based on data collated between 1st June 2006 and 31st May 2007. During this period 1,721 incidents were reported, resulting in 6,556 deaths. Most incidents produce a small number of casualties.

As Nigeria Watch is not a human rights organisation but a research group, the report does not issue recommendations, it only highlights the main findings.

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Executive Summary

-The main causes of death in Nigeria due to public violence are, in order of importance, accidents, crime, economic issues, political clashes, and ethno-religious fighting.

-Crime is heavily concentrated in the South, especially in towns such as Lagos and Port Harcourt. Yet on a national level, crime levels are not as bad as are generally reported.

-The impact of oil, ethnic and religious issues on public violence is often exaggerated, whereas land clashes remain underreported.

-As far as political violence is concerned, the April 2007 General Election was less deadly than the MASSOB uprising in Onitsha in June and July 2006.

-Nigerian security forces contribute substantially to levels of violence. The more they intervene, the bloodier the fighting.

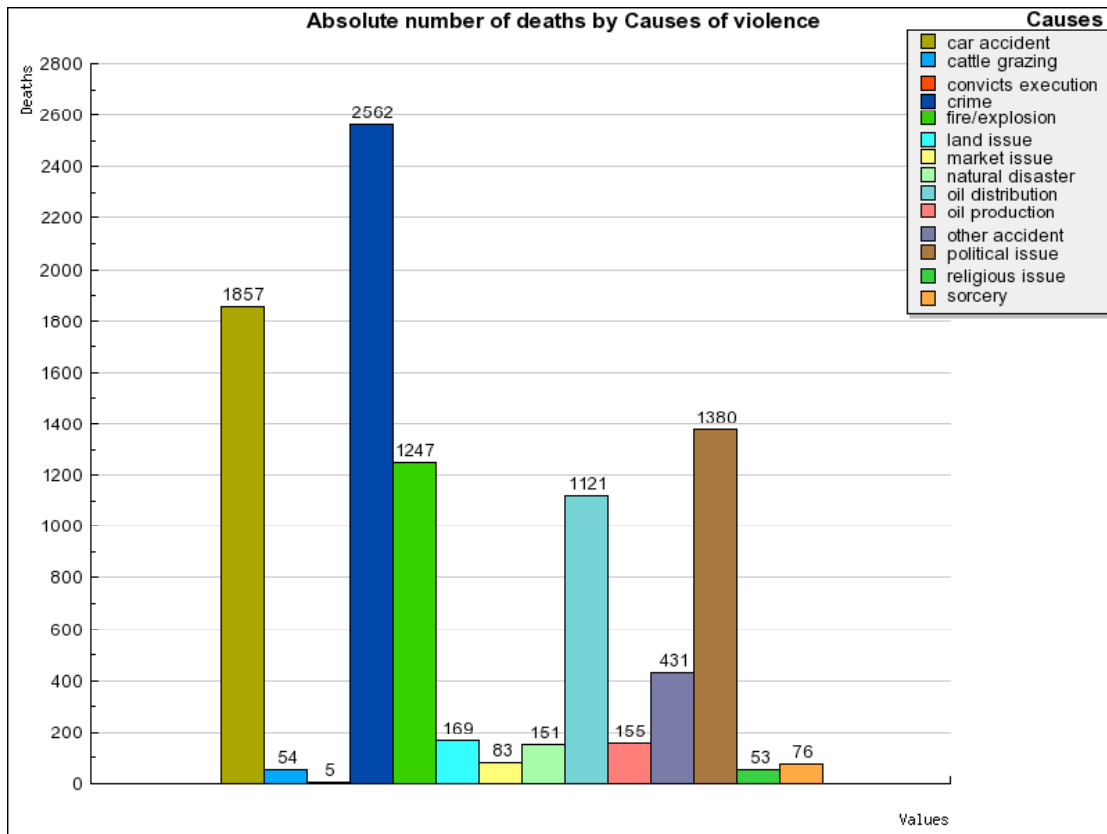
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(2006-2007)

I The main causes of public violence

The main causes of death in Nigeria due to public violence are, in order of importance, accidents, crime, economic issues, political clashes, and ethno-religious fighting.



I.1 Accidents

“Accidents” are, by far, the main cause of violent death in Nigeria. Road accidents cause the most fatalities, followed by fires and explosions, other accidents (plane crashes, boating incidents, industrial pollution) and natural disasters. The death toll on the roads is quite horrendous. According to Bola Oyeyemi, Assistant Corps Marshall of the FRSC (Federal Road Safety Commission), there have been 107,000 road deaths

over the past ten years¹. Since its creation nineteen years ago in 1988, the FRSC recorded 142,072 road deaths, an average of 7,477 per year². As for the National Bureau of Statistics, it reported 9,946 road deaths in 2001, 9,240 in 2002, 7,697 in 2003, 8,161 in 2004 and 8,980 in 2005. Given the number of vehicles on the roads, this is one of the highest rates of road death in the world, as one in thirteen road accidents in Nigeria is deadly. According to the SAVAN (Save Accident Victims Association of Nigeria), there are an average of 2.4 deaths for every reported fatality. On a national level, the highest number of road casualties are reported in Lagos, followed by Kaduna, Oyo, Rivers and Ondo. By comparison, there are less deaths from plane crashes. The Nigerian Airport Authorities reported 1,117 deaths in 40 accidents between 1991 and 2006³.

I.2 Crime

The second main cause of public violence is crime. This is heavily concentrated in the South, especially in towns like Lagos and Port Harcourt (see map below). But Nigeria does not live up to its reputation on a national scale. Although records show that 2,570 violent deaths are due to criminal acts, there are less than 2 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. This is much lower than in many developed countries. Even on the African continent, homicide rates tend to vary between 6 and 22 per 100,000 inhabitants according to the World Health Organisation and Interpol respectively in 2000⁴. These rates tend not to rise sharply year on year except in a few particular situations like the oil boom in Nigeria in 1975... or the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, when the authorities decided to consider violent deaths as homicides in their statistics⁵. Of course, it is unlikely that our press report database covers all crimes. The problem is that official figures are even lower and highly unreliable. Unlike other African countries, the Nigerian Police do not even publish annual reports or issue details on crime statistics. Its ad hoc press conferences are full of discrepancies and provide no information on national trends.

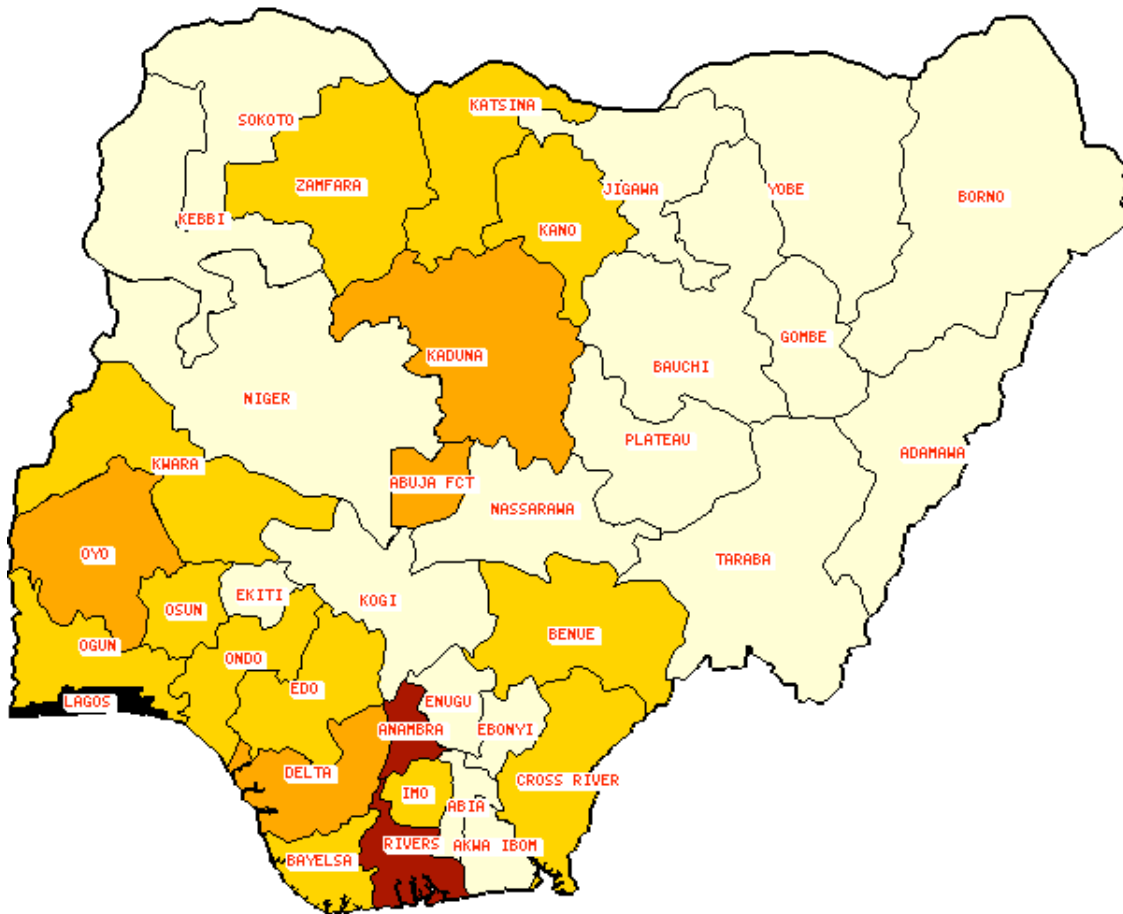
¹ *Daily Trust* 28 Dec. 2006, p.12; *The Nation* 28 Dec. 2006, p.2.

² *New Nigerian* 10 July 2007, p.2, *Vanguard* 10 July 2007, p.4

³ *Le Monde* 8 August 2007, p.13.

⁴ Mack, Andrew *et al.* [2005], *Human Security Report 2005*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, Human Security Centre, p.81.

⁵ Newman, Graeme (ed.) [1999], *Global report on crime and justice*, New York, Oxford University Press, 384p.

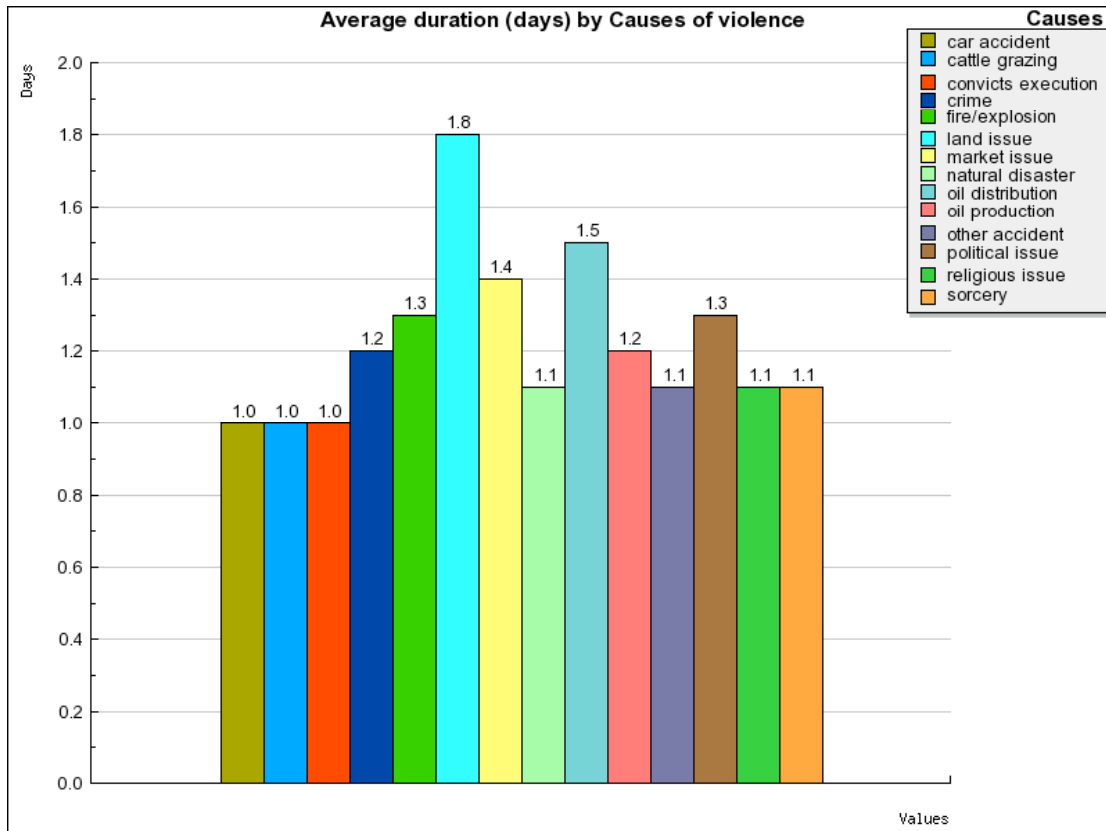


1.3 Oil and land clashes

The third cause of public violence in Nigeria is related to economic issues. Oil is, by far, the most hotly disputed resource, followed by land, market and cattle grazing. But this order should not be taken for granted.

First and foremost, there are methodological limits. Data extracted from the Nigerian press underreports conflicts in rural areas, especially in the Middle Belt, Borno and the North-West where there are many land conflicts. On the other hand, the oil industry attracts media attention and its activities are closely monitored. Moreover, press reports on social and ethnic conflicts are not always associated with their economic causes. Other researchers return different findings. Academic investigations, for instance, show that in the Middle Belt, most conflicts are actually over land clashes. In Benue State, 27 of the 32 areas of conflict studied between 1980 and 2001 were over landownership as were 4 out of 6 in Plateau State between 1991 and 2000, 8 out of 13

in Kogi State between 1991 and 2000 and 5 out of 13 in Nasarawa State between 1985 and 2001⁶. Not only were these clashes deadly, but they also tended to last longer than other types of conflicts (see the graph below). Furthermore, many people — in particular the so called *mba yevese num* ("those who fled the war")— were forced to escape from violence. According to figures collected in July 2002, there were 110,467 internal refugees registered in camps, as well as 374,952 living in host communities in the States of Nasarawa, Taraba, Plateau and Benue⁷. In contrast, oil conflicts account only for a minority of the number of displaced people in the country: 50,000 out of 1,270,000 in 1997⁸.



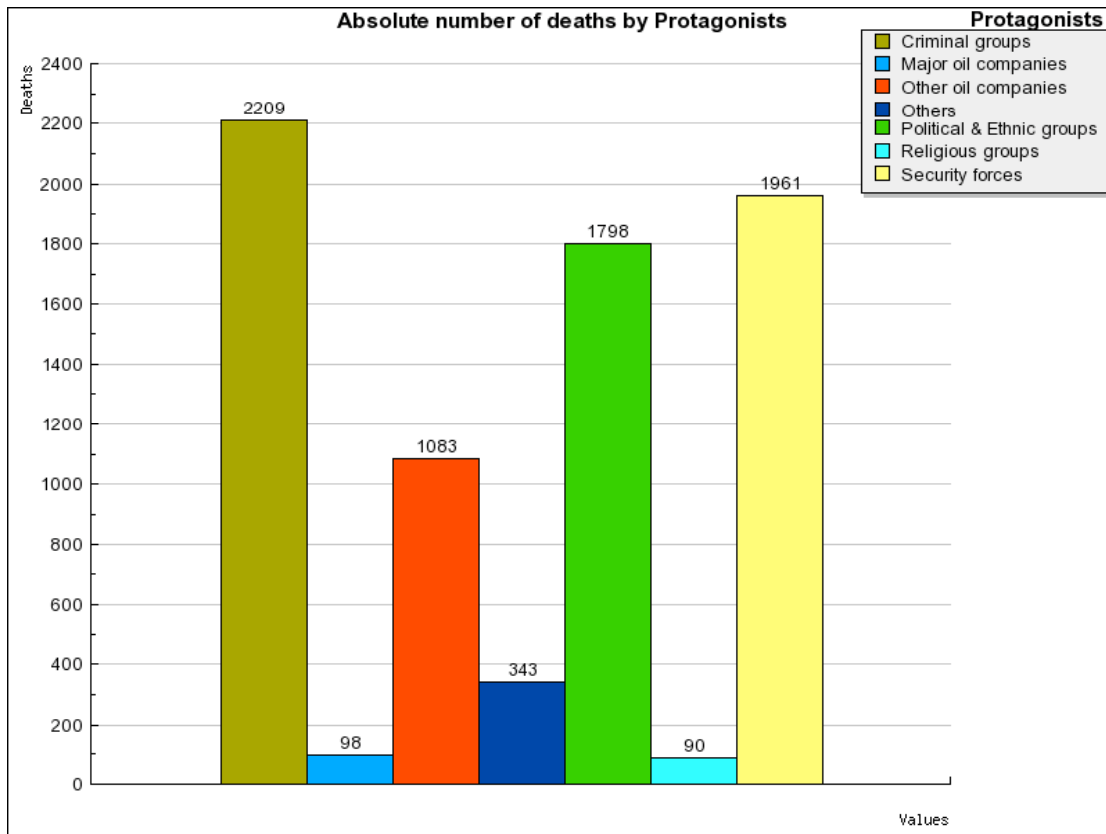
Another reason not to overestimate the role of oil in public violence has to do with the complexity of the industry. Production and distribution activities must be analysed separately as the results for each are very different. On a national level, oil distribution is far more dangerous, as it includes armed attacks on filling stations, tanker accidents and the theft of petrol or inflammable products that are much more lethal than crude oil in the event of an explosion. On the other hand, violence in oil production is

⁶ Jibo, Mvendaga, Simbine, Antonia & Galadima, Habu [2001], *Ethnic Groups and Conflicts : The North Central Zone of Nigeria*, University of Ibadan, Programme on Ethnic and Federal Studies, vol.4, pp.11, 12, 121 & 146.

⁷ Alubo, Ogoh [2006], *Ethnic Conflicts and Citizenship Crises in the Central Region*, University of Ibadan, Programme on Ethnic and Federal Studies, pp.190-1.

⁸ Hampton, Janie (ed.) [1998], *Internally Displaced People : A Global Survey*, London, Norwegian Refugee Council/Global IDP Survey, p.51. For updated figures, see <http://www.internal-displacement.org/>

limited to extraction areas only, mainly in the Niger delta. Apart from a few industrial accidents and acts of piracy, this has more to do with political or criminal attacks to gain control of the resource. An assessment of the protagonists involved in violence confirms this. “Major oil companies”, which are concentrated in oil producing states, are much less affected than “other oil companies”, i.e. the NNPC (Nigerian National Petroleum Company) and independent oil companies which are both involved in production and distribution on a national level.



Some major oil companies are of course more exposed to violence than others – in particular Shell and Chevron. This is not only because they are the main producers or because their assets are onshore and more vulnerable to attacks⁹. According to specialists, this is also because of the way they operate¹⁰. Since the execution of Ogoni writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa in November 1995, Shell’s case is quite well known¹¹. Other companies would need further investigation. Formerly known as the Gulf Oil Company, Chevron, for instance, started its operations in December 1961 and is credited with the discovery of the first successful offshore field in Nigeria, at Okan, in December 1963. It built its export terminal in Escravos and commissioned its first

⁹ Pérouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine [2003], “Pétrole et sécurité privée au Nigeria : un complexe multiforme à l’épreuve du “syndrome de Monaco””, *Cultures et conflits* n°52, pp.117-38.

¹⁰ Omeje, Kenneth [2006], *High stakes and stakeholders : oil conflict and security in Nigeria*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 199p.

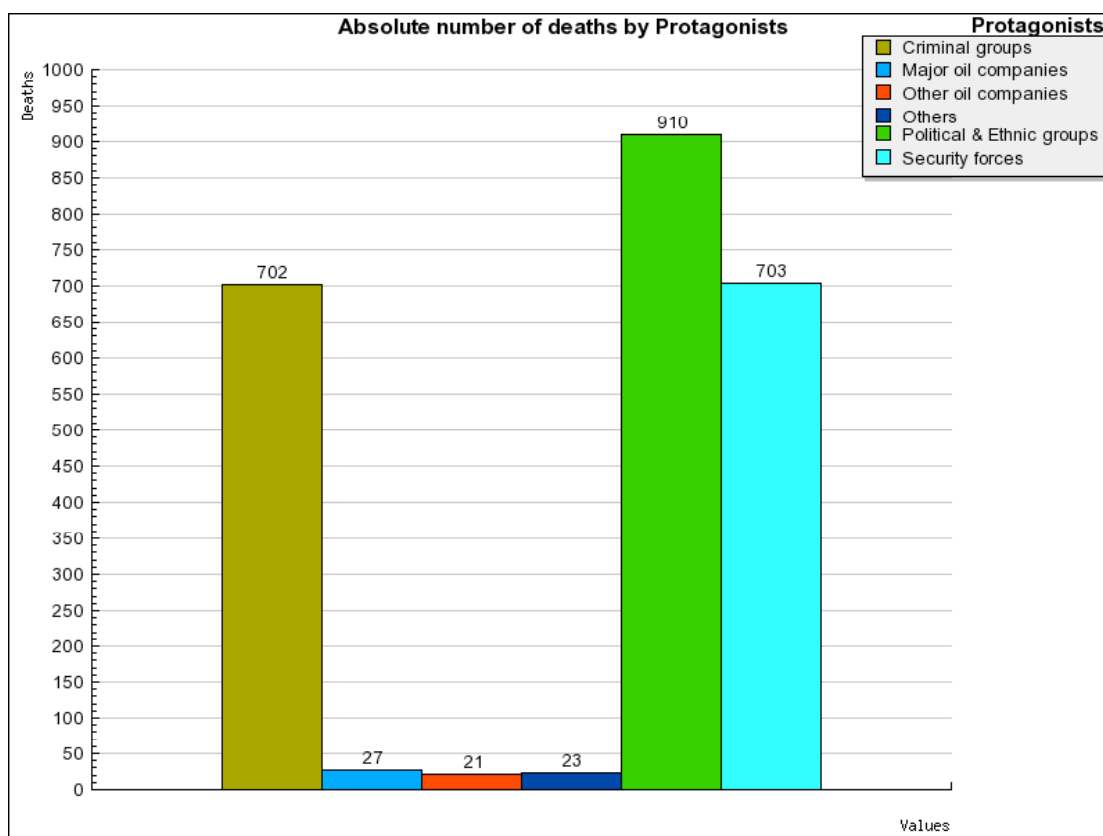
¹¹ Omoweh, Daniel [2007], *Shell Petroleum Development Company, The State, And Underdevelopment Of The Nigeria's Niger Delta : A Study in Environmental Degradation*, Trenton (NJ), Africa World Press, 300p.

onshore field, Abiteye, in October 1972. But the company appeared to be quite insensitive to ecological and social issues. In 1975, it conducted no proper impact assessment before drilling a canal through Opuekeba creek to provide a more convenient access route from the ocean to its oil flow station. From then on, the two communities of Tsekelewu and Opuoma have been affected by oil spills and the saline water that has come from the sea and spoiled mangrove forests. Moreover, compared to other companies, Chevron has abandoned more drilling sites which are known to be a menace to the environment.

On the other hand, ExxonMobil, which according to our database recorded no deaths in 2005-2006, is a different case altogether. First, it leads the Nigerian oil industry in terms of gas utilization: it flares only 30% of its produced gas, as opposed to an average of 70% by other companies, and its offshore operations limit the impact of spillages and ecological hazards on local communities. Moreover, its assets are not as scattered as Shell's or Chevron's. They are restricted to four LGAs (Local Government Areas) in Akwa Ibom, which has a population of about 300,000 people and a much more manageable density. Consequently, it is easier to provide substantial development infrastructures for the host communities. The company was also more attentive, in terms of employing locals. About 45% of the senior staff and 60% of the junior staff are native to Akwa Ibom, as opposed to 20% in the early 1990s. Furthermore, the geographic location of wells in deep offshore waters helps to secure their assets. Even if local employees sometimes collude with youths to seize airstrips and impede operations inland, Mobil's terminals on the coast are heavily guarded and equipped with lodging facilities so that offshore production can carry on for several days even when the gates and access roads are blocked.

1.4 Political and electoral violence

Politics is the fourth cause of public violence in Nigeria. Yet the incidence of political violence is much greater if we study collective violence only, leaving aside accidents and crime. A sharper analysis shows that political fighting is the leading cause of public violence, ahead of social, ethnic and military clashes. If we take a closer look at the protagonists in political violence, we see that the security forces are one the main leading offenders (see below). In many cases, it is of course difficult to differentiate between political and criminal belligerents: sometimes, armed gangs are recorded as both. But if we consider that it is possible to distinguish the two, political groups and security forces appear to cause more politically-motivated violent deaths than criminal organisations.



1.5 Religious and ethnic fighting

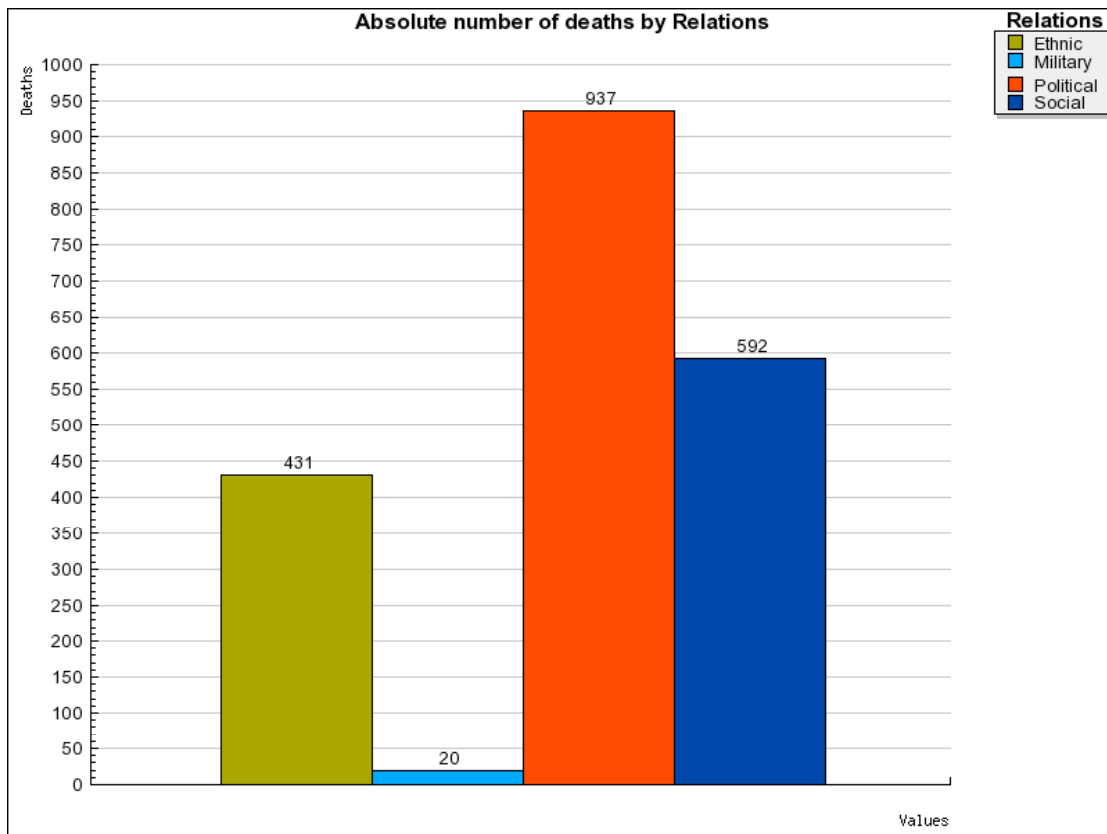
Surprisingly, the last and smallest cause of public violence in Nigeria is religion. This year, there were very few clashes in the North between Muslims and Christians. Most “religious” violence was related to sorcery, notably in the South, where it included ritual killings, body mutilations, human trafficking, witch hunts, and jungle justice. A total of 6,000 victims of ritual murders have already been recorded between 1992 and 1996¹². And there is no reason to think that the situation has improved. An assessment of the protagonists involved in violence shows the importance of cult societies which, from now on, operate outside university campuses, are linked to street gangs and are implicated in many criminal activities. According to our data, in 2006-2007, they were responsible for 335 deaths, as opposed to 39 by churches and 51 by Islamic groups.

Yet religious and ethnic fighting is not as widespread as one may think. As defined in our methodology on the relationship between identified protagonists, an analysis centred on the causes of collective violence show that communal conflicts ranked only third, at least during the year 2006-2007. More casualties were caused by “social” fighting, the second major cause. This does not include communities but mainly trade unions, and transport in particular, as they are often linked to political or criminal

¹² Harnischfeger, Johannes [2004], « Sharia and Control Over Territory : Conflicts Between "Settlers" and "Indigenes" in Nigeria », *African Affairs* vol.103, n°412, p.47.

groups. The NARTO (National Association of Road Transport Owners) and MASSOB (Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra) case in Onitsha is quite symbolic.

In other words, the number of violent deaths due to ethnic fighting is most probably lower than the usual rough figures reported by the media. For instance, over 100,000 people are reported to have been killed in more than fifty ethnic and religious conflicts between 1999 and 2002¹³. With an average of 25,000 deaths per year, this is almost sixty times our findings and more than ten times the figures given by Reuters and the International Crisis Group, which recorded 14,000 deaths due to inter-communal clashes between 1999 and 2005¹⁴. There is no detailed data to officially confirm such compilations. Likewise, a committee headed by Thomas Kangna'an to conduct a census of internally displaced people in Plateau State estimated that 53,000 lives had been lost due to various ethnic and religious conflicts in the Middle Belt between September 2001 and May 2004. This data was contested by the government because it came from unverified claims filed by affected local groups.



¹³ *This Day* 27 August 2002, p.5.

¹⁴ ICG [2006], *Nigeria : Want in the midst of plenty*, Brussels, International Crisis Group, p.14.

II The main findings

Spatial and time criteria are an alternative way of interpreting public violence in Nigeria.

II.1 The most dangerous place

The most deadly places in 2006-2007 were, by far, Agege in Lagos because of an oil pipeline explosion, and Onitsha in Anambra, because of political violence. At national level, Lagos was the most dangerous, followed by Anambra and Rivers. Crime victimization surveys produce similar findings and confirm the concentration of violence in the South, as opposed to the North. According to interviews conducted by the Center for Law Enforcement and Education in Nigeria (CLEEN) among 10,035 people in 2005, the feeling of insecurity was greatest in Rivers State, followed by Bayelsa, Benue, Taraba and Plateau¹⁵. The highest number of armed robberies were reported, in order of importance, in Abia, Rivers, Ebonyi and Kogi State; with the lowest levels in Katsina, Gombe and Niger in the North.

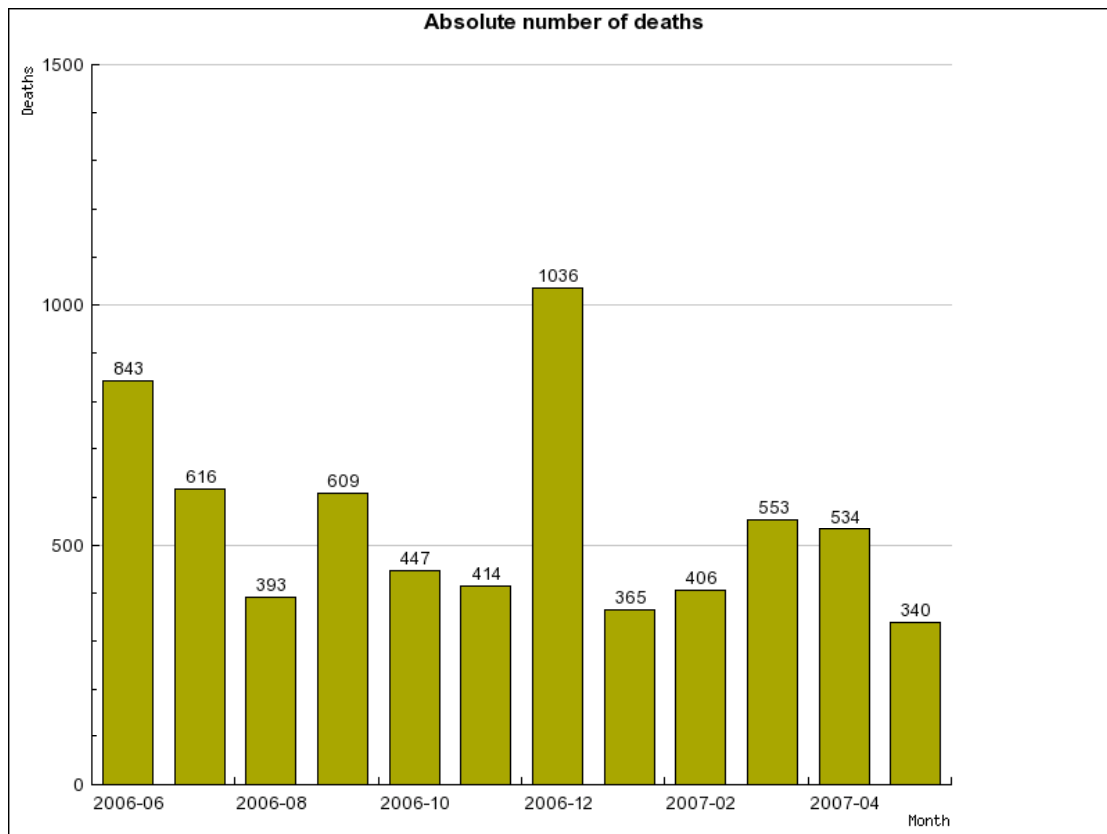
II.2 The most violent incident

Interestingly enough, the MASSOB uprising in Onitsha in June and July 2006 caused more fatalities than the April 2007 General Election. This is the most violent incident reported during the study period, followed by the oil pipeline explosion in Agege. In contrast, “only” 99 deaths were reported during the April 2007 General Election. In a country with a population of 140 million, this is less than during the elections in the Philippines in May 2007 (100 deaths for a population of 80 million) or Guatemala in September 2007 (more than 50 for a population of 13 million).

II.3 The worst month

December was the worst month after June 2006 (MASSOB uprising in Onitsha). Yet this does not confirm the usual say according to which crime is on the increase over Christmas. More deaths were recorded in December because of the oil pipeline explosion in Agege, not because of armed robbery.

¹⁵ *This Day* 13/6/2006, p.2.



II.4 The most important findings

As far as the major trends are concerned, it is too soon to generalize, for our time-series are too “short”. A temporary conclusion is that the main causes of deaths due to public violence in Nigeria are related to accidents, not crime, economic issues, political clashes, or ethno-religious fighting. Due to the dearth of police data, it is not yet possible to analyse cycles and trends in a prospective way. Despite high levels of violence, crime seems to be less lethal than in other countries like South Africa. But this has to be confirmed in the long term. Security forces claim, although there is no clear evidence to prove it, that armed robbers are increasingly violent and well equipped. According to the police in Rivers State, for instance, the force lost 99 men in 2006¹⁶. But discrepancies and the lack of published national crime statistics do not make it possible to substantiate this finding. As a matter of fact the security forces and police in particular, are also responsible for many killings on a daily basis.

This is a cause for alarm. In the space of one year, the Nigerian security forces intervened in 517 incidents which resulted in 1,961 deaths. Of these, they were responsible for causing death in a majority of cases (295) which corresponds to 68% of the total number of deaths reported (1,330 out of 1,961). In other words, the more the police intervenes, the bloodier the fighting. Security forces are not only trigger happy, they appear to contribute substantially to the violence. Our finding is consistent with

¹⁶ *Daily Trust* 27 Feb. 2007, p.6.

other sources, as the police claims to have killed 3,100 suspected « armed robbers » in 2003¹⁷. Yet, security forces still enjoy high levels of impunity. According to a non governmental organization of lawyers, the police was responsible for 153 out of 231 (66%) extra judicial executions in 2005, but only three cases were referred to the judiciary¹⁸.

¹⁷ Maldar, Sonya [2005], “Rest in Pieces”. Police Torture and Deaths in Custody in Nigeria, New York, Human Rights Watch, p.16.

¹⁸ LEDAP [2006], *Impunity in Nigeria: Report of Extra judicial executions in Nigeria*, Lagos, The Legal Defence and Assistance Project, 78p.