

# SECOND REPORT ON VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA 2007-2008



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**Dr. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos**

*Senior Researcher, Institut de recherche*

*pour le développement (IRD)*

# FOREWORD

I am pleased to introduce our second Annual Report on public violence in Nigeria. It is based on data collated between 1st June 2006 and 31st May 2008. From 1st June 2007 until 31st May 2008, 1,674 incidents were reported, resulting in 6,259 deaths, as against 1,753 and 6,773 during the same period a year before.<sup>1</sup> 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.

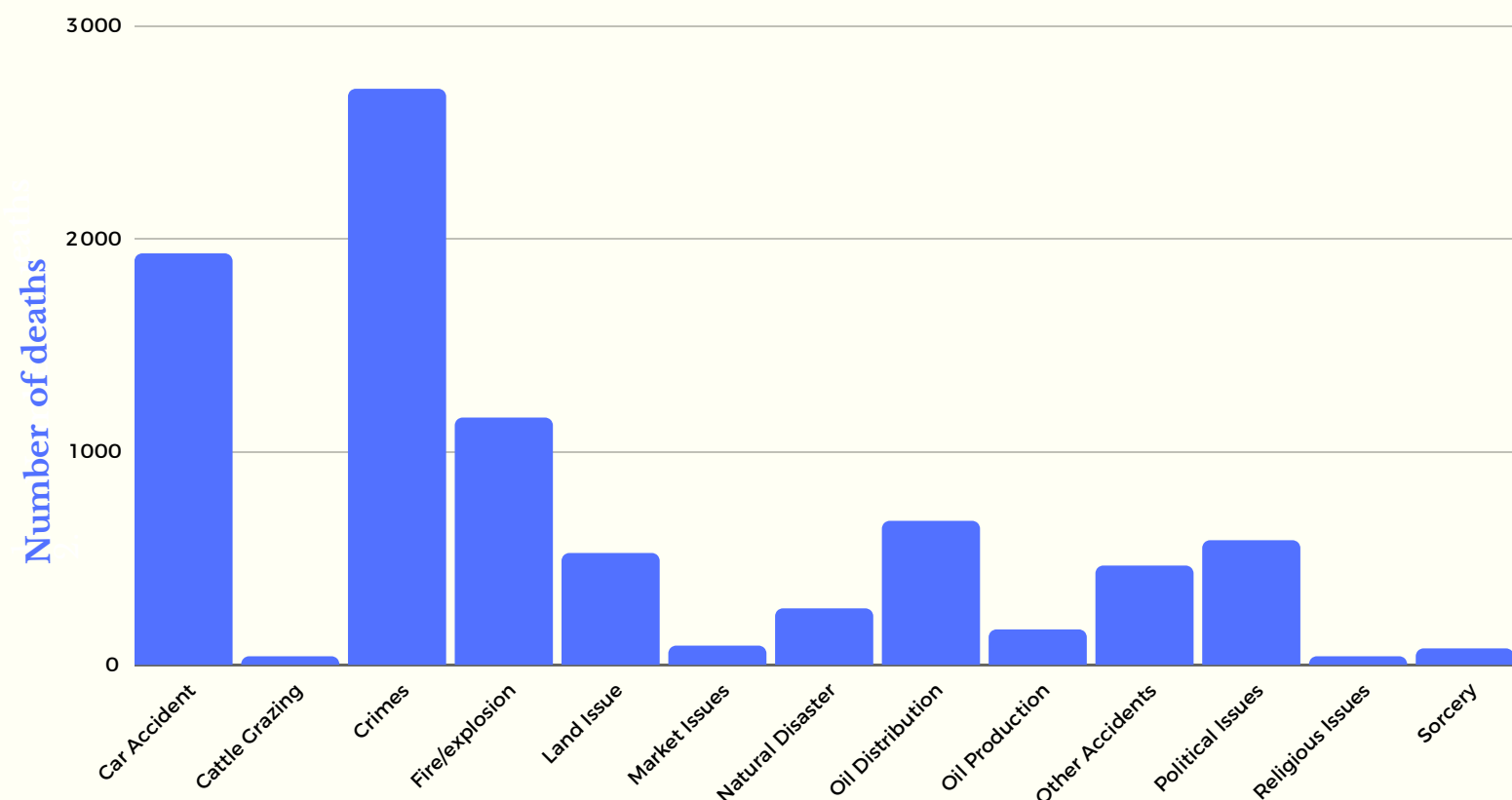


# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- As in 2006-2007, the main causes of death due to public violence are, in order of importance, accidents, crime, economic issues, political clashes, and ethno-religious fighting.
- Nigerian security forces still contribute substantially to violence. The more they intervene, the bloodier the fighting.
- Yet violence is decreasing, a trend that obviously impacts on the number of killings by the security forces. Our findings challenge the common assumption according to which criminal and political violence is on the rise.



# 1.MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE (2007-2008)



Like in 2006-2007, the main causes of death due to public violence in 2007-2008 are, in order of importance, accidents, crime, economic issues, political clashes, and ethno-religious fighting. Our findings are different from other studies that are based on a shorter period of time and do not include accidents. According to the Small Arms Survey in Geneva, the most common violence in Nigeria from December 2006 to March 2007 was crime, followed by politico-electoral clashes, and oil-related conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 Accidents

“Accidents”, i.e. road accidents, plane crashes, boating incidents, fires, explosions, industrial pollution and natural disasters, are still the main cause of violent death in Nigeria. Car accidents cause the most fatalities, followed by fires and explosions, other accidents and natural disasters. On a national level, the highest number of road casualties are reported in Lagos, the most populated city in the country. But Abuja is more dangerous when compared to the number of inhabitants. In other words, the probability of having a car accident is much higher in the Federal Capital Territory. Abuja is twice more dangerous than Lagos in this regard.

## 1.2 Crime

The second main cause of public violence is crime. This is heavily concentrated in the South, especially in highly populated areas like Lagos and Port Harcourt. Yet the Central States are not immune from armed robbery and banditry. Benue and Taraba are not as populated as Lagos but record important crime rates (see map below)

ABSOLUTE NUMBER OF DEATHS PER PROTAGONISTS



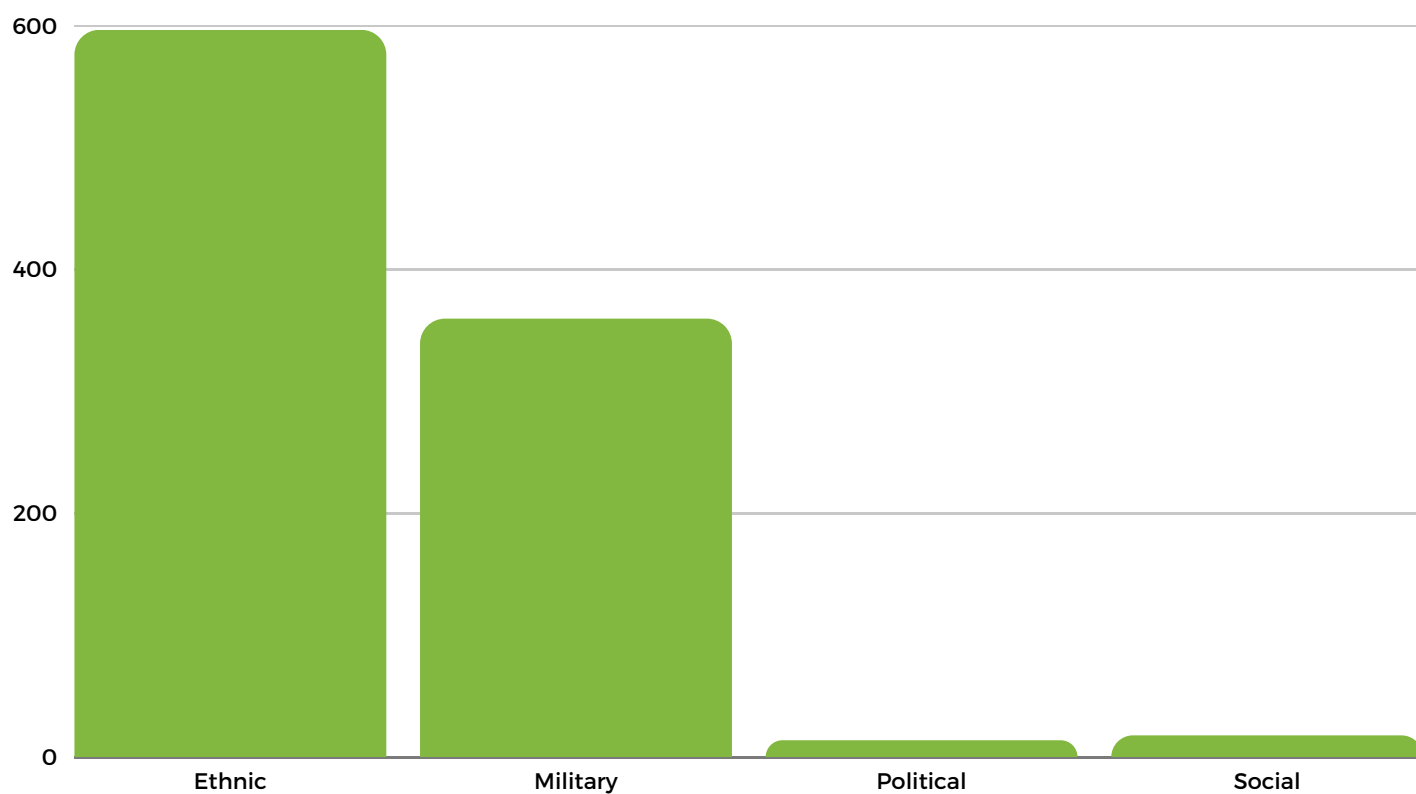
### 1.3 Oil and land clashes

The third cause of public violence in Nigeria is related to economic issues. Oil is, by far, the most disputed resource, followed by land, market and cattle grazing (see our report for the year 2006-2007). This pattern is confirmed by the breakdown of violence according to the types of protagonists involved.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.4 Political violence

Political issues are the fourth cause of public violence in Nigeria. Yet their impact 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. Taking a closer look at the protagonists in political violence, we realise that the security forces are one of 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 between the two, political groups and security forces appear to cause more politically-related violent deaths than criminal organisations.

## ABSOLUTE NUMBER OF DEATHS BY RELATIONS



### 1.5 Religious and ethnic fighting

As in 2006-2007, religious and ethnic fighting in 2007-2008 produce less public violence than political issues.

Yet ethnic and social conflicts are on the rise if we study the different types of relationship between the protagonists (see our methodology online at: <http://www.nigeriawatch.org//index.php?html=4>)

## 2. THE MAIN FINDINGS

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

### 2.1 The most dangerous place

The most deadly place during the study period has been Port Harcourt in absolute numbers, because of political violence and gang fighting in August 2008. This confirms other studies according to which violence was concentrated in Lagos and Rivers States from December 2006 to March 2007.<sup>4</sup> Some authors consider the Niger Delta to be the worst: it records a thousand people killed every year and should fall into the category of “high-intensity conflict”, alongside such better-known hot spots as Chechnya and Colombia.<sup>5</sup> In the three states of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers, NigeriaWatch’s database gives a death toll of 1,158 in 2006, 1,451 in 2007 and 915 from January to November 2008, including accidents and all types of violence. The figures are much lower if we only take political conflicts into account, with some 400 deaths in 2006, 354 in 2007 and 206 from January to November 2008. In terms of risk, i.e. rates, we find that Bayelsa was the most dangerous State from June 2007 until May 2008, followed by Rivers, Abuja FCT and Lagos. Compared to the number of inhabitants, Takum in Taraba State has also been the most violent Local Government Area because of a land conflict between Tiv and Kuteb near the border of Benue from June to August 2008.

### 2.2 The most violent incidents

The most violent incidents during the study period were the land conflict in Taraba in June-August 2008 (200 deaths) and pipeline explosions in Lagos (100 deaths in May 2008 and 58 in December 2007). This is less than the MASSOB uprising in Onitsha or the political clashes preceding the General Election the year before. Onitsha recorded 589 deaths in June-July 2006. And according to European Union observers, a total of 300 Nigerians were killed in violence linked to the 2007 elections, 200 of them during the two weeks surrounding the voting on 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of April.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.3 The worst month

As in 2006-2007, June and December were the worst months during the study period. Yet is too soon to generalize and to identify cycles, for our time-series are too “short” and can not be analysed in a prospective way.






## 2.4 The most important findings

We confirm that the Nigerian security forces are responsible for many killings on a daily basis, not to speak of torture and extra-judicial executions. In the space of one year during the study period, they intervened in 443 incidents which resulted in 1,540 deaths.<sup>7</sup> Of these, they were responsible for causing casualties in a majority of cases (240) which corresponds to 55% of the total number of deaths reported (846 out of 1,540). This is consistent with previous findings. By its own account, the Nigeria police killed 348 armed robbery suspects in the last four months of 2000.<sup>8</sup> If we extrapolate, this is roughly a thousand per year, excluding other categories of victims. In just three months, Inspector General of Police Mike Okiro even announced that 785 suspected “armed robbers” were shot and killed in gunfire exchanges with the force between June and September 2007. This year, a consultant of NOPRIN (Network on Police Reform in Nigeria), Mr. Chidi Odinkalu, also pegged the average number of an annual police killings in the country at 2,865, suggesting an unusually “high incidence of insanity and psychiatric ailments among officers”.<sup>9</sup> In November 2007, Human Rights Watch eventually claimed that the Nigerian police may have killed more than 10,000 people since 2000.

Yet there is hope, for we observe a decrease in general violence, a trend that obviously impacts on the number of killings by the security forces. Our findings contradict the common assumption according to which criminal and political violence is on the rise. As a matter of fact, we should differentiate between the reality of crime and its perception, which is often pessimistic. Moreover, methodological problems explain distortions. There are no decent crime statistics in the country, and no public debate on the issue, unlike South Africa.<sup>10</sup> The Nigeria Police failed to produce annual reports between 1990 and 2005.<sup>11</sup> As a result, journalists and researchers usually rely on “guestimates”. Robert Rotberg, for instance, argues that since 1999, “crime against persons, including murder, rape and robbery, has grown in scale and viciousness”.<sup>12</sup> But his assertion is only based on a survey conducted in Lagos in 2005. It is not scientifically valid and cannot be generalised at the national level.<sup>13</sup>



Other methodologies used by IDASA (Institute for Democracy in South Africa) in Abuja, the Small Arms Survey in Geneva or private firms like Risk Solutions in Bergen record violent incidents according to media reports and other sources.<sup>14</sup> Yet it seems difficult to compare killings with hostage taking or an inflamed ethnic speech on the radio. The problem is that the large definition of violence given in these methodologies does not make it possible to track conflicts according to a unit of measure.<sup>15</sup> While Bergen Risk Solutions focus only on the Niger Delta and attacks on the international staff of the petroleum and marine industries, both IDASA and the Small Arms Survey record all types of armed occurrences, whether they cause deaths or not. As a result, they mix major lethal incidents and minor events with no casualties. Moreover, they give only absolute numbers and do not calculate rates, i.e. the exposition to risks. The Small Arms Survey even limited its categories of security incidents to crime, political conflicts and oil-related violence. Unlike IDASA, which also uses radio information, its conclusions relied on three national newspapers only (Vanguard, Punch, and Daily Sun); international news reports in the Lexis-Nexis database did not really complete the picture, for they themselves rely on the Nigerian press.

To be able to compare facts, identify patterns, generate trends, and produce a robust indicator, NigeriaWatch focuses on the body count, a methodology which is also used by SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) to track major armed conflicts according to battle deaths. Yet our findings sometimes concur with others. The Small Arms Survey, for instance, claimed that violence in the country increased in the lead-up to the April 2007 elections, with 28 incidents in December, 36 in January, 44 in February and 57 in March.<sup>16</sup> NigeriaWatch also found the same trend if we only take crime and political conflicts into account. Likewise, we confirm that it is highly probable that 11,000 Nigerians lost their lives in political, ethnic and religious clashes between 1999 and 2006.<sup>17</sup> This is an average of 1,375 deaths per year, as against 1,203 in our database in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.

# REFERENCES

- 1 Due to a continuous updating of our data, there are slight variations as compared to our first report, when we reported 1,721 incidents and 6,556 deaths between 1st June 2006 and 31st May 2007.
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- 3 Figures are rounded off according to the average of the total number of incidents reported by various sources.
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- 9 By comparison, there were 2,987 cases of extra-judicial killings in 2004 according to the Legal Defence Assistance Project in Lagos. None was prosecuted. Cf. Odinkalu, Chidi [2008], *Criminal Force? Torture, Abuse, and Extrajudicial Killings by Police in Nigeria*, Lagos, NOPRIN (Network on Police Reform in Nigeria), pp.50-1.
- 10 Comaroff, Jean & John [2006], *An Excursion Into The Criminal : Anthropology of the Brave Neo South Africa*, Basel, Lit Verlag, 48p.
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- 12 Rotberg, Robert [2007], « Nigeria : Elections and Continuing Challenges », in Lyman, Princeton & Dorff, Patricia (eds.), *Beyond Humanitarianism: What You Need to Know about Africa and Why it Matters*, New York, Brookings, p.33.
- 13 Other results suggest a very different pattern. According to a survey conducted by the British Council, also in 2005, 89% of Lagosians felt safe or very safe in their communities, as against a national average of 65%. Cf. Hills, Alice [2008], « The dialectic of police reform in Nigeria », *Journal of Modern African Studies* vol.46, n°3, p.230.
- 14 Hazen, Jennifer & Horner, Jonas [2008], *Small Arms, Armed Violence, and Insecurity in Nigeria: The Niger Delta in Perspective*, Geneva, Graduate Institute of International Studies, pp.52-6. See also: <http://www.bergenrisksolutions.com/> and <http://www.idasanigeria.org/>
- 15 The Small Arms Survey, for instance, defines armed violence as "the intentional use (threatened or otherwise) against oneself, another person, or against a group or community of any material thing that is designed, used or usable as an instrument for inflicting bodily harm that either results in or has likelihood to result in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation". See: [http://www.utoronto.ca/ois/armed\\_violence/code.htm](http://www.utoronto.ca/ois/armed_violence/code.htm)
- 16 Hazen, Jennifer & Horner, Jonas [2008], *Small Arms, Armed Violence, and Insecurity in Nigeria: The Niger Delta in Perspective*, Geneva, Graduate Institute of International Studies, p.52.
- 17 Albin-Lackey, Chris [2007], *Criminal Politics. Violence, 'Godfathers' and Corruption in Nigeria*, New York, Human Rights Watch, 121p.