REPORT ON VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA 2006-2011

NIGERIA WATCH

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FOREWORD

I am pleased to introduce our third report on violence in Nigeria. It is based on data collated between 1st June 2006 and 31st May 2011, a period during which we reported 7,645 incidents, resulting in 30,373 deaths. Most incidents produce a small number of casualties and last only one day. 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 due to violence in 2006-2011 are, in order of prevalence, accidents, crime, economic issues, political clashes, and ethno-religious fighting..

- We observe a general decrease in violence.

- Political fighting is the only cyclical violence we could identify, and this was during the elections of April 2007 and April 2011

- Oil distribution is much more dangerous than oil production.

- The Nigerian security forces are responsible for many killings on a daily basis.

- Few foreigners are killed in Nigeria.
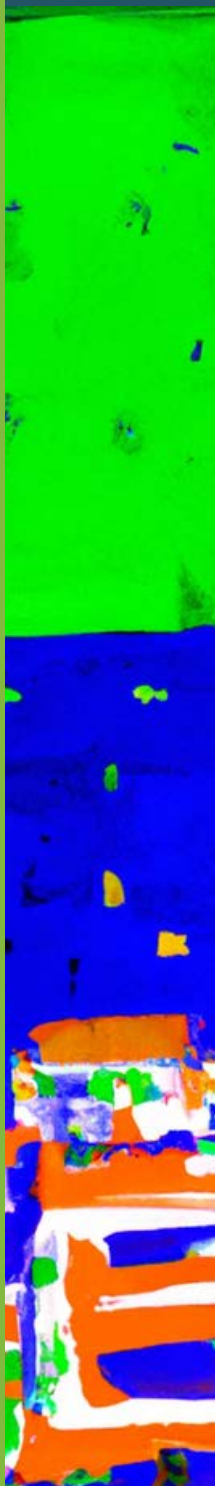
1. THE METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES 1/5

"Statistics about crime are unreliable in Nigeria, but the sense of the expatriate community [is] that levels dramatically increased, starting in 2005"[1]. John Campbell, former U.S. ambassador to Nigeria from 2004 to 2007.

To measure the intensity of violence is quite complex. Its quantification comes up against three main difficulties. First, researchers have to define categories that do not always properly reflect the complexity of a society. Secondly, they have to agree on indicators that cannot be comprehensive. And eventually, they have to rely on sources that are often contested.

I.1. Unrealizable categories: civilians and combatants; public and private violence; criminal politicians and politicized criminals

In a country like Nigeria, several distinctions can be made to quantify and qualify violence. However, none of these categories meet all the requirements of a general understanding of the problem. To start with, one could try to distinguish between combatants and civilians in accordance with the international humanitarian law in armed conflicts. If we follow the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols, we should then separate those who bear arms from those who do not take part in the hostilities. The problem is that we often don't have enough information to determine whether individuals fit such criteria. Moreover, many deaths that we record dot not result from conflicts, especially when it comes to accidents or one-sided violence. We should not overestimate the role of weapons in this regard. As the Cleen Foundation's National Crime Victimization Survey demonstrates, firearms were used in only 32% of the incidents reported by 10,036 Nigerians in October-December 2005[2].

A second distinction has to do with political and/or criminal violence. Here again the lines are blurred. Freedom fighters and guerrillas are often disqualified by governments as terrorists or bandits, and politicians are frequently accused of criminal wrong-doing. Nigeria is no exception in this regard, but the confusion is highlighted by widespread corruption and common vocabulary that refers to officials as "godfathers" and members of a "mafia" (from Kaduna, Abeokuta, Langtang, or other cities). In practice, NigeriaWatch cannot and does not want to investigate violent incidents in order to qualify them as criminal or political. Hence many hostilities are recorded as both, depending on various points of view. The hypothesis is that the bias remains basically the same, so that we can still follow up trends.

1. METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES 2/5

A third distinction relates to public and private violence. As NigeriaWatch focuses on deaths only, it did not plan to analyse all actions intended to cause destruction, pain, or suffering. But it aimed at dealing with so-called "public violence", i.e. violence that pertained to the affairs of all people, not just those of an individual person or a specific group. The problem was that this category was defined in opposition to the private domain, so it could not really be used except if we confined it to "mass violence" between collective groups or organisations. Take for instance a motor accident. Cars often belong to private persons. But if they are not properly maintained, a tyre can explode, provoke an accident and kill a pedestrian or another driver on a public road. Another example is a burglar who breaks into a private house and who shoots at the police while he escapes, killing a member of the public force. To consider these two cases as private or public, should we give priority to the place, the perpetrator or the victim? According to a spatial analysis, the car accident would be public, unlike the burglary. Yet in both events, the perpetrators are private persons. Regarding the burglary, however, the victim is a public agent.

Of course, there is no good reason to dismiss perpetrators or victims to analyse only violence according to the place where it happens. In developing countries, the difficulty also pertains to the conflicts of interests of a corrupt ruling class that often straddles and deliberately confuses public and private money. There is no need here to elaborate further on the notion of state, public service and the res publica in Africa. Suffice it to say that NigeriaWatch had to give up trying to differentiate public and private violence. To remain coherent, however, we kept the same categories of causes, protagonists and types of conflict[3] .

1.2. Measuring the risk: attacks or deaths?

Another fundamental issue is to agree on indicators to measure violence. It is important because the perception and the reality of a risk or a threat can be very different. When it comes to murders, for instance, Mushin and Epe were seen as the most insecure places in Lagos according to a survey conducted in 2009[4]. But data from NigeriaWatch show that places like Apapa and Badagry had much more violent crime, a trend which was even more pronounced if one looked at the relative number of homicides per inhabitant. There are also discrepancies with the actual experiences of victims of crime, which were greatest in Rivers State, followed by Oyo, Abia, Benue, Abuja, Adamawa, Borno, Bauchi, Delta, Imo and Bayelsa according to interviews conducted by the Center for Law Enforcement and Education in Nigeria (CLEEN) among 11,161 people in 2006[5]. This same year, however, data from Nigeriawatch revealed a different pattern. If we look at the relative number of deaths due to crime, Lagos scored first in the "hit parade", followed by Abuja, Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Abia, Edo, Benue, Anambra, Imo and Enugu.

Hence it is crucial to produce a robust indicator to objectify the reality of violence. There are two schools of thought in this regard. One relies on the body count; the other, on the number of attacks. Regarding Nigeria, the latter is dominant. The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) in Abuja, the Small Arms Survey in Geneva and private firms like Risk Solutions in Bergen, for instance, all record violent incidents according to media reports and other sources[6]. The problem is that their methodologies use large definitions of violence that do not rely on a unit of measure to track conflicts[7] . 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 calculate absolute numbers but not rates, i.e. the actual risk. 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, since they themselves depended on the Nigerian press.

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METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

To identify patterns and trends, one should actually be able to compare facts that are comparable. The question is to know whether it is appropriate to consider a massacre on par with an inflamed ethnic speech on the radio, both recorded by IDASA as a single violent event. As such, the number of attacks or incidents does not say much. To measure rape or hostage taking, for instance, the number of victims is certainly more relevant. The use of newspapers dataset is also important in this regard. Indeed, journalists are often more likely to report on conflicts which result in deaths, making fatality totals "a useful proxy to compare violence between regions[8]" . Thus NigeriaWatch focuses on the body count to study general violence and accidents, a bit like the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) when it records battle deaths to track major armed conflicts. Our findings, however, sometimes concur with the results of other methodologies which rely on the number of incidents. The Small Arms Survey, for example, claimed that violence in Nigeria 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[9] . Meanwhile, NigeriaWatch found the same trend by taking into account the number of deaths due to crime and political conflicts. Likewise, we confirm that it is highly probable that 11,000 Nigerians lost their lives in political, ethnic and religious clashes between the end of 1999 and 2006[10] . This is an average of 1,571 deaths per year, as against 1,655 in our database in 2006- 2011.

1.3. The quality of the sources

Of course, one should not underestimate the analytical limits of a focus on the body count. Certainly, the collation of homicides and accidental fatalities does not cover all the aspects of violence.Yet it remains a reliable indicator in developing or war-torn countries where there are no decent crime statistics.

Nigeria is typical in this regard. Between 1990 and 2003, its police failed to produce any annual report[11] . Influenced by the secretive military juntas in power until 1999, other public agencies like the NOA (National Orientation Agency) and the SSS (State Security Services) do not publish their records either. Even today in a parliamentary regime, the police does not keep adequate records and manipulate data to produce artificially low numbers. Ad hoc press conferences on crime provide no information on national trends. They seldom give relevant figures and reveal many discrepancies. Successive Inspectors-Generals of Police, for instance, made contradictory statements on the number of alleged armed robbers killed by their men: inflating them to boast their "success" when speaking to the local press, or deflating them when reporting to the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions[12] .

Another problem with the reliability of official crime statistics in Nigeria is that the security forces are not equally distributed across the national territory. They are usually concentrated on urban centres of power, to the detriment of rural areas. Hence there were 2,545 policemen for 1 million inhabitants in Lagos according to official figures in 2006, and up to 9,460 in the capital city Abuja, as against 2,189 in Delta State, 1,864 in Bayelsa and 1,745 in Rivers for instance. Known to be very corrupt and brutal, the security forces are not trusted by the population either. According to national surveys conducted by the Cleen Foundation amongst some 10,000 Nigerians, only a minority of victims reported crimes to the police, 30% in 2005, 11% in 2006[13] . As a result, official statistics are under-evaluated. By its own account, the police recorded "only" 1,956 murders and 17 manslaughters in 2008, including 133 victims of armed robbers[14] . This very year, NigeriaWatch recorded 2,626 deaths due to crime, excluding accidents or political violence; the annual average was 2,730 in 2006-2011.

1. METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES 4/5

Crime victimization surveys confirm the discrepancies of the Nigerian police. On the African continent, homicide rates usually vary between 6 and 22 per 100,000 inhabitants according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Interpol respectively in 2000[15] . In Nigeria, they rose sharply during the oil boom in the mid-1970s[16] . But if we are to believe the police, the country now records less than 2 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. This is comparable to Switzerland and does not correspond at all to strong feelings of insecurity in the population. According to the Cleen Foundation's 2005 and 2006 country-wide crime victimization surveys, each covering 10,000 Nigerians, almost 2% of the persons interviewed reported that a member of their household was killed in the past twelve months[17] . Since we have no information about duplicates, the household size and the age of respondents, it is not really possible to extrapolate. Applied to the whole population, this percentage does not make sense and probably refers to mortality in general, in the range of almost three millions deaths per year. Restricted to the 20-59 age group, which was roughly 39% of 140 million inhabitants, the Cleen Foundation's survey meant that 1,1 million people reported the killing of a member of their household. If we extend arbitrarily to ten years the recall period of the respondents, one could then conclude that 21,840 persons were killed per annum, with an average household size of five[18] . This is a homicide rate of 15,6 per 100,000 inhabitants: eight times the official statistics.

In any case, neither police figures nor victimization surveys are satisfactory. Yet few Nigerian journalists and researchers attempt to challenge official crime statistics, unlike South Africa[19] . Academics who try to address the issue often rely on "guestimates". Robert Rotberg, for instance, argued that since 1999, "crime against persons, including murder, rape and robbery, has grown in scale and viciousness"[20].However, his assertion was only based on a survey conducted in Lagos in 2005. It was not scientifically valid and could not be generalised at the national level[21] . So the question remains to know whether we should dismiss all attempts to quantify violence, or strive to circumvent data problems with other methods and sources. Fortunately, the press is quite strong in Nigeria, and it is probably one of the most developed on the African continent. Hence it seems possible to use its reports cautiously to compensate for the lack of police data. When they studied Kenya, Philippe Bocquier and Hervé Maupeu thus wrote that: "Using press reports to analyse homicides might look unorthodox to social scientists, but we believe that, in the absence of more exhaustive and reliable sources, newspapers can be used for evaluating collective violence, provided that a critical analysis of press practices and opinions is conducted"[22].

Undoubtedly, journalists can be biased. First, they tend to label violence as being political, criminal or ethnic according to their own views. In the same vein, they often focus on dramatic incidents in order to sell their articles. For instance, they will report more on collective bus accidents that involve many passengers, rather than single road fatalities with only one death[23] . Numbers are not the only criteria. In Nigeria, journalists like to concentrate on spectacular crimes, especially ritual killings, but they seldom report fatal snake bites. Moreover, there is a strong geographic bias. Indeed, the Nigerian press is concentrated in Southern cities and Abuja, so it under-reports violence in rural areas and the Muslim North. As a result, we must take into account all these distortions. Thus our scientific hypothesis is that even if the figures of NigeriaWatch are not exhaustive, they constitute a reliable sample because they are wrong the same way from one year to another and one region to another! In other words, our data is robust enough to generate trends and produce a GIS (Geographic Information System).

1. METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES 5/5

I.4. The quality of the results

Now, one might wonder about the reliability of the statistical trends extracted from press reports that are not exhaustive. A first indication is that NigeriaWatch does not differ so much from a study conducted in Kenya with data collected from only one local daily newspaper. In Nigeria, we found an average of 506 deaths per month from June 2006 until May 2011, as against 93 in Kenya from January 1990 until September 2003[24] . This is coherent, for the ratio of the Kenyan figures to the Nigerian ones, including accidents, is 0,18, compared to 0,26 for the population[25] . Moreover, the Nigerian press might not be as biased as initially thought. Competition between papers and the initiatives of local correspondents minimise the risk of under-reporting. They also balance the economic imperatives that create thresholds at which conflicts become news: almost half of the lethal occurrences collated by NigeriaWatch record only one death. Last but not least, the corruption of some journalists does not mean that the whole press is censored. In the South, for instance, the governor of Rivers State since 2007, Rotimi Amaechi, is said to have bribed journalists to dissuade them to report crimes and tarnish his image in restoring security in the region. However, no proper investigation could confirm this allegation.

Other studies have shown that press reports do cover a significant part of violent incidents. In Indonesia, for example, Patrick Barron and Joanne Sharpe used local newspapers to uncover regional conflicts that were usually ignored because the authorities and the international community focused on places like the Malukus, Central Sulawesi, Papua and Aceh. In 2001-2003 in East Java and Nusa Tenggara Timur, the two provinces of their study, they found two and a half times as many deaths as did a governmental survey, and over six times as many deaths as another newspaper dataset which relied only on the remote national press[26] . War-torn countries might be different because of access problems. But generally speaking, journalists do not seem to try to stay away when the fighting becomes more dangerous, even if they are sometimes banned from conflict zones[27] .

According to retrospective household surveys conducted in peacetime by the World Health Organisation (WHO), war deaths are three times higher than the media estimates used by Uppsala University and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). In other words, press reports capture on average one third of the number of deaths estimated from population based surveys[28] .

Of course, media coverage also depends on the types of violence, in addition to the social background and the political context. In Kenya, researchers estimate that the press reports less than 10% of the homicides extrapolated from surveys conducted by the WHO[29] . This is roughly the ratio found in Nigeria when comparing our data and figures extrapolated from crime victimization surveys (2,730 persons killed per annum as against 21,840: see above)[30] . Yet it wouldn't be advisable to extrapolate and multiply by ten to estimate the total number of violent deaths, which would then reach 60,000 per year. For instance, the ratio between our data and official figures varies from one to three or five when it comes to statistics on road accidents, which are often considered to be the most reliable. Thus, motor accidents killed 9,360 persons in 2007, 9,572 in 2008, and 5,678 in 2009 according to the Police, as against 1,802, 1,876, and 1,729 respectively according to NigeriaWatch[31] .

Hence our quantification of violence cannot be exhaustive. Neither does it pretend to cover evenly the territory of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Yet it provides reliable indications to answer the four fundamental questions that we raise:

-Is violence rising or decreasing?
-What are the main causes of violence (criminal, accidental, ethnic, religious, etc.)?
-What is the probability of being killed?
-Where does violence happen?

2.MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE
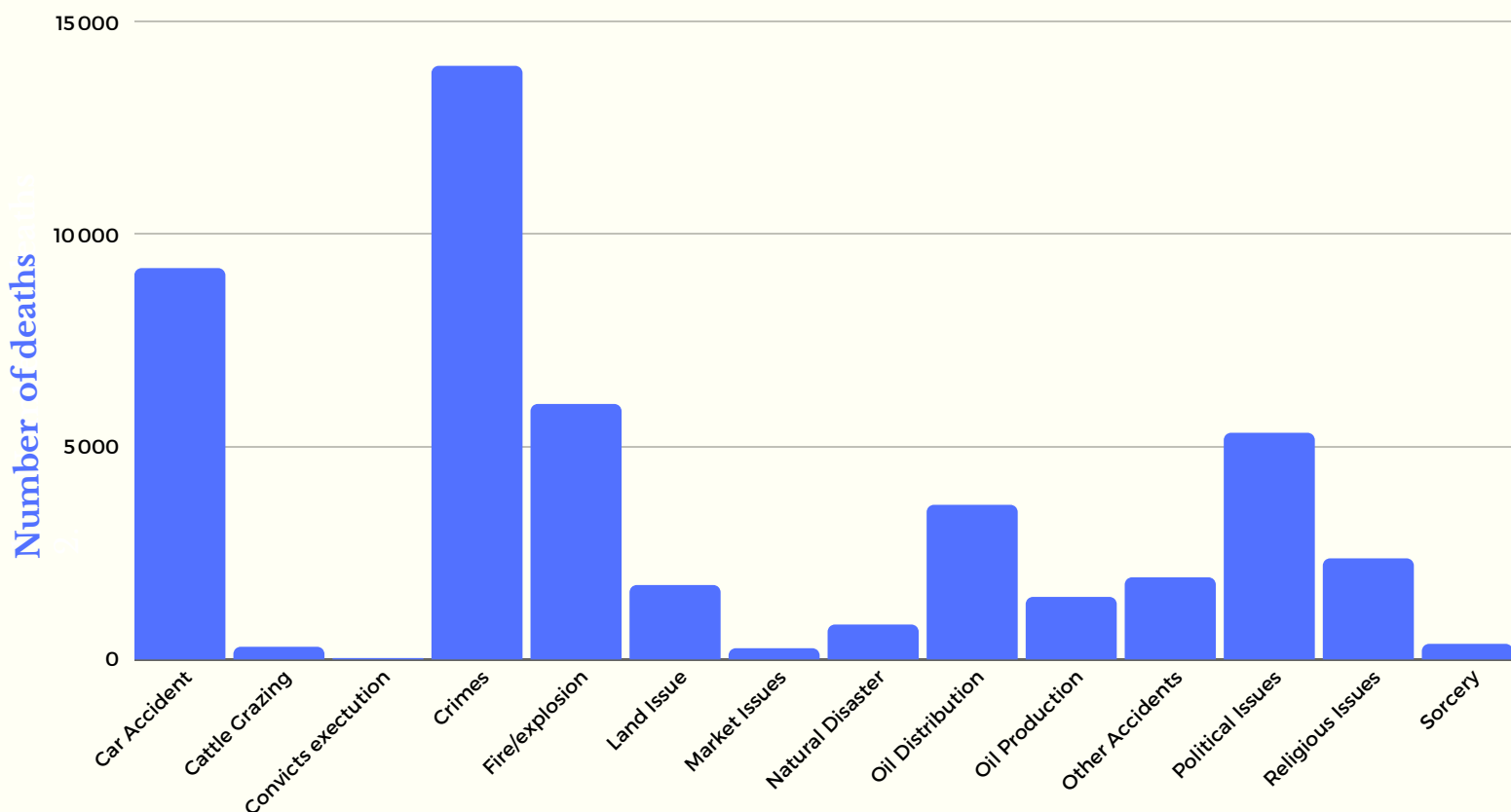
The main causes of death due to violence in 2006-2011 are, in order of importance, accidents, crime, economic issues, political clashes, and ethno-religious fighting.

2.1 Accident

"Accidents" are the main cause of violent death in Nigeria. Cars are responsible for most fatalities, followed by fires and explosions, other accidents (plane crashes, boat mishaps, animals attacks, electrocutions, drowning, suffocation, building collapses) and natural disasters. Official sources confirm our findings. The Nigerian Airport Authorities, for instance, reported 1,117 deaths in 40 plane crashes between 1991 and 2006[32] . In the same vein, the Federal Fire Service recorded a total of 392 lives lost due to fire outbreaks in 2004-2008, mainly in private homes, rather than industrial areas. By comparison, cars were much more deadly. The Police and the National Bureau of Statistics recorded 9,946 road deaths in 2001, 9,240 in 2002, 7,697 in 2003, 8,161 in 2004, 8,980 in 2005, 9,131 in 2006, 9,360 in 2007, 9,572 in 2008 and 5,678 in 2009[33] . On a national level, the highest number of road fatalities collated by NigeriaWatch was in Lagos, the most populated city in the country. But Abuja was 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. This might be because people drive faster. Abuja has larger avenues and less traffic jam than Lagos. Moreover, the Capital Territory ranks second or third regarding the registration of new vehicles and the issue of drivers' licences in the federation.

Nigeria is not so different from other developing countries in this regard. In Kenya, for instance, road accidents are also the most frequent cause of violent death[34] . Nigeria records a higher number of casualties because it is the most populated country in Africa. According to the FRSC (Federal Road Safety Commission), 292,703 persons were killed in road accidents between 1960 and 2006! Since it was established in 1988, this institution recorded a total of 142,072 fatalities in 2006, or an average of 7,477 per year[35] . As there are an increasing number of vehicles on the roads, it is very possible that the problem could get worse. At a press conference, an Assistant Corps Marshall of the FRSC reported 107,000 road deaths between 1997 and 2006, or an average of 10,700 per year[36] .

All in all, Nigeria might have one of the highest rates of fatal road traffic accidents in the world. Indeed, the number of cars and trucks is much lower than in developed countries. Nigeria has approximately one motor vehicle per 1,000 people and, out of 140 million inhabitants in 2006, only 3.2 had a driving license. In other words, the simple fact of being in a car is extremely risky. According to the SAVAN (Save Accident Victims Association of Nigeria), one in thirteen road accidents is deadly and there are an average of 2.4 deaths for every reported fatality.

2.2 CRIME

Figure 2: Crime rates in Nigeria (homicides per 100,000 inhabitants)
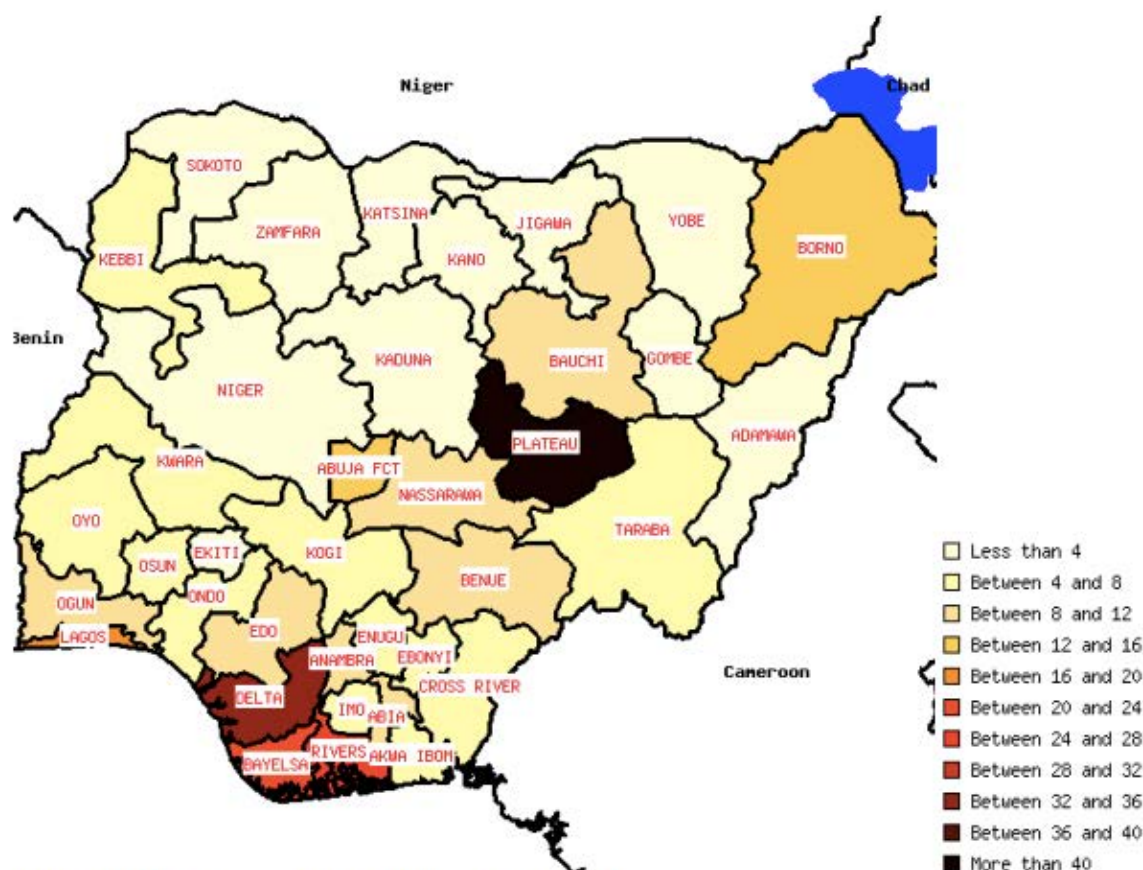
Nota: Data collated between 1st June 2006 and 31st May 2011.

The second main cause of violence is crime. This is heavily concentrated in the South, especially in highly populated areas like Lagos and Port Harcourt. Yet the Middle Belt is not immune from armed robbery and banditry, especially in Plateau State, which records higher crime rates (see map below). In contrast, many regions appear to be relatively safe.

2.3 OIL AND LAND CLASHES

The third cause of violence in Nigeria is related to economic issues. Oil is, by far, the most disputed resource, followed by land, market-control and cattle. But this order should not be taken for granted when it comes to victims. Figures are often unreliable. In a famous report for Shell, for instance, experts asserted that violence associated with theft of oil in the Niger Delta accounted for at least 1,000 deaths a year. Their figures supposedly relied on systematic reviews of local press and the SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute[37]) . But the latter, which uses only the international press, does not give access to the core data that provides number of casualties. As for the experts who worked for Shell, they never published any database whatsoever. Likewise, the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, which submitted its draft report to the government in November 2008, claimed that attacks on oil installations killed about 1,000 persons. But it did not specify if it was in 2007 or in 2008[38] . Its figure was then quoted by various press agencies and organisations like the International Crisis Group, according to which 1,000 persons were killed in the first nine months of 2008[39] . During this period, NigeriaWatch found that oil-related violence caused a total of 373 deaths in Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers States.

By all standards, 2008 was definitely not the Niger Delta's "most dangerous year on record", as alleged by the UN. While the Ogoni crisis of 1994-1994 was probably more severe, the region was already placed in 2002 in the 'high intensity conflict' category, with over 1,000 fatalities a year, "alongside more known cases such as Chechnya and Colombia"[40] .
Several factors contribute to overestimate the role of oil in violence. First and foremost, data extracted from the Nigerian press usually tends to underreport rural areas, especially the Middle Belt, Borno and the North-West where there are many land conflicts. In contrast, the oil industry attracts media attention and its activities are closely monitored in the Niger Delta. Moreover, press reports on social and ethnic conflicts are not always associated with their economic causes. After all, the fighting for the control of oil is also a land issue.

The Middle Belt and the Muslim North are not so different in this regard. Even if they do not produce oil, people in these regions do fight to control whatever available economic resources there are. According to the University of Ibadan, for instance, 27 of the 32 areas of conflict studied in Benue State between 1980 and 2001 were actually 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 2001[41] . Not only were these clashes deadly, but they also tended to last longer than other types of violence (see the graph below). Furthermore, many people were forced to escape from violence, hence their nickname mba yevese num ("those who fled the war"). According to figures collected in 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 Benue[42] . Oil conflicts in the Niger Delta accounted for a minority of the total number of displaced people in the country: 50,000 out of 1,270,000 in 1997[43]. Another reason not to overemphasize the role of oil in violence has to do with the complexity of the industry. Production and distribution activities must be analysed separately. 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. In contrast, violence in oil production is 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, especially the main producers Shell and Chevron. According to Kenneth Omeje, this is mainly because of the way they operate and fail to perform their corporate social responsibility[44] . But this is also because Shell and Chevron's assets are onshore and more vulnerable to attacks[45] . According to NigeriaWatch, for instance, ExxonMobil seems to be quite immune to violence (see the graph below). Indeed, its assets are restricted to four LGAs (Local Government Areas) in Akwa Ibom only. Consequently, it is easier to provide substantial development infrastructures for the host communities. Furthermore, the geographic location of wells in deep offshore waters helps to secure the industry. Even if local employees sometimes collude with youths to seize airstrips and impede operations inland, ExxonMobil'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.

2.4 POLITICAL VIOLENCE 1/2

Political issues are the fourth cause of violence in Nigeria. Yet their impact is much greater if we study collective violence only, leaving aside accidents and crime. A deeper analysis shows that political fighting is the leading cause of violence, ahead of social, ethnic and military clashes. Taking a closer look at the protagonists, we realise that the security forces are one of the main stakeholders in this regard, after political and ethnic groups, and before criminal groups (see part 2 of this report). In many cases, it is of course difficult to differentiate the various actors. Sometimes, armed gangs are recorded as both political and criminal. 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. Amongst political groups, Nigerians often mention "godfathers" and their cliques to be responsible for violence, both from the leading party, the PDP (People's Democratic Party), and from the opposition, such as the AC (Action Congress), the ANPP (All Nigeria People's Party) or the DPP (Democratic People's Party).

Yet there are different theories in this regard. According to Paul Collier and Pedro Vicente, for instance, "no violence is likely to arise… in situations where the challenger is strong"[46] . To support their assertion, the authors used surveys based on a panel of 1,149 respondents and conducted by an international NGO, ActionAid, in Oyo, Lagos, Kaduna, Plateau, Delta and Rivers States just before the 2007 elections. They found that weaker opposition parties were prone to use violence because they needed to resort to intimidation to compensate for their lack of base support. On the contrary, the PDP was more likely to resort to vote-buying and fraud in locations where it was the incumbent. To prevent political violence, this conclusion is obviously quite disturbing from a democratic point of view, as it could be understood as an invitation to support authoritarian state-parties with no opposition. But the problem is mainly methodological, notwithstanding its moral implications. First, the panel of states chosen by ActionAid is not representative: four are in the Christian-dominated South, one in the Middle Belt and only one in the Muslim North.

Incidentally, one can wonder if NGOs are the best channel to conduct such surveys if they want to prove their efficiency and find a decrease of electoral violence precisely in the areas where their programmes oppose voter intimidation. In this case, the results of the survey also risked introducing a bias by convincing voters to vote for the PDP and not for the AC, which was portrayed in the media as the weakest and most instable party. Another problem is that respondents find it difficult to identify groups that perpetrate violence. Thugs hired by the PDP, for instance, do not always appear to be working for it. Moreover, gangs like "cult societies", which organise political assassinations of PDP opponents, especially in Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers States, do not even appear in the list of Paul Collier and Pedro Vicente. The findings are quite different if we look at surveys conducted by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems amongst 2,400 adults in the Federal Capital Territory and each of Nigeria's 36 States before and after the 2007 presidential voting. First, a majority of respondents (56%) describes the elections as peaceful. Of those who personally saw or heard of any election-related violence in their area, nearly one in three (29%) attributed it to PDP supporters. Other political parties, such as the AC (7%), the ANPP (4%), and the DPP (2%), were less concerned. And 14% of the respondents were unable to provide specific details on the organisation behind the violence. They just thought that the instigators were general party supporters[47] . The database of NigeriaWatch confirms that the PDP and its followers were the main group involved in political and electoral violence in 2007, as they were to be found in 73% of the total number of lethal incidents recorded. Of course, it does not mean that they always were the aggressor. As the leading party in power, the PDP was probably more targeted and it was involved in 53% of lethal incidents opposing political parties. In addition, no party could be identified in 27% of the cases, and 5% of political violence involved no more than one party.

2.4 POLITICAL VIOLENCE 2/2

But violence opposing other parties only occurred in 1% of the total number of cases and deaths. A striking feature of the PDP was the brutality of competing factions within the organisation, through political assassinations or violent demonstrations. This accounted for 14% of incidents opposing political parties and 11% of deaths resulting from these occurrences. In Ogun State alone, for instance, we recorded six deadly clashes between various PDP factions in 2007-2009, as against two between the PDP and the ANPP, one between the PDP and the AC and two cases where the fighting groups could not be identified (a political assassination by unknown gunmen in 2009, and protests over the results of the general elections in 2007).

The timeline is also relevant in this regard. Many analysts focus on general elections only. Thus observers of the European Union recorded 200 Nigerians killed during the two weeks surrounding the polls on 14th and 21st of April 2007[48] . For a population of 140 million, 99 deaths were counted during voting days. Yet this was less than in the Philippines in May 2007 (100 deaths for 80 million inhabitants) or Guatemala in September 2007 (more than 50 for 13 million). Moreover, the graph below shows how important other political crises can be. Indeed, the MASSOB uprising in Anambra in June 2006 and the military attack in Delta State in May 2009 were the most severe political clashes recorded as single events happening in the same place. Local elections can be very violent too, like in Plateau State in November 2008.

In addition, one needs to follow-up the consequences of electoral competition for longer periods after voting days, since the fighting often resumed when tribunals nullified the election of many governors. In Rivers State, for instance, the gang crisis of Port-Harcourt in August 2007 was clearly linked to the antagonism of the two PDP contenders, Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi and Celestine Omehia, who was eventually deposed by the Supreme Court in the following September.

Hence there were important differences between the general elections of April 2007 and April 2011. Human Rights Watch claims that the latter left 165 people dead from November 2010 up to April 2011, and more than 800 just after, as against 300 before, during and after the vote in April 2007[49] . But the graph below shows that the relative number of political deaths per capita decreased between the two polls. In April 2007, the upsurge of political assassinations started earlier and carried on even after the PDP primaries of December 2006 "settled" the winner and reduced the level of competition within the ruling party. Yet protests over presidential results were not very violent… since everybody knew about them in advance! On the contrary, the political game was much more open five years later.

In 2011, the PDP primaries were delayed until January and the electoral process was quite smooth until the vote in April. If only it was possible to test this hypothesis, one could thus agree with Paul Collier and argue that violence erupted thereafter precisely because there were greater expectations to defeat the PDP. However, other analysts suggest that the following fighting did not result so much from support of the opposition, but instead as a result of the zoning system. In other words, it had more to do with the frustration of the Muslim North against the Christian South after the election of a president hailing from the Niger Delta.

2.5 RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC FIGHTINGS

Religious and ethnic fighting cause less casualties than political issues, even if inter-communal conflicts are on the rise because of the continuing crisis in Plateau State. The Middle Belt might not be so specific in this regard. According to Human Rights Watch, for instance, more than 15,700 people have been killed in inter-communal, political and sectarian violence between 1999 and 2011, especially in Plateau State, with a total of 3,800 deaths since 2001, at least 1,000 of them in 2010 alone[50] . However, it should be remembered that the media like to focus on the fighting between Christians and Muslims in Jos, so it is very likely that intra-ethnic and intra-religious conflicts are much less reported in other regions. Hence the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom claims that "12,000 Nigerians have been killed in sectarian and communal attacks and reprisals between Muslims and Christians" from 1999 up to 2009[51] . That's an average of 1,090 deaths per year, as against 410 for the events that were recorded by NigeriaWatch and which opposed church followers against Islamic groups in the period 2006-2011.

In the context of the global war on terrorism since 2001, religious conflicts are a very sensitive issue, especially when Muslim and Christian communities are involved. In Nigeria, casualty figures thus became part of a political game to alert the international community. From a scientific point of view, the problem is that reports on religious violence do not rely on any database and cannot be cross-checked. The Federal Government, for instance, contested unverified claims filed by local groups and relayed by the Chairman of the Plateau State Committee on the Census of Displaced Persons, Thomas Kangnaan, who alleged that 53,787 lives had been lost due to various ethnic and religious conflicts in the Middle Belt between the crisis of September 2001 and the proclamation of emergency rule in May 2004[52] .

Indeed, this survey seems to have included the whole mortality: according to the National Population Commission, the total of all registered deaths in Plateau State amounted to 74,206 during this period, or an average of 24,735 per year. Such figures also dismiss the claims of a special assistant to the Benue state governor, Shima Ayata, who pretended that over 500,000 people died during inter-communal clashes in Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba in 2001[53] . For the whole country, other estimations ranged from 10,000[54] to over 100,000[55] people killed in some fifty ethnic and religious conflicts between 1999 and 2002. With an average of 25,000 deaths per year, this latest figure was ten times higher than the one given by Reuters and the International Crisis Group, which recorded 14,000 deaths due to inter-communal clashes between 1999 and 2005[56] .

In any case, these variations depend a lot on the classification of violence. Some clashes can be recorded as economically-driven because they focus on land disputes, like in Jos. Others are seen as religious or ethnic for all sorts of reasons. According to Shehu Sani, for instance, 104 out of 178 cases of clashes that took place in Northern Nigeria from 1980 to 2004 were related to religion[57] . But his coding does not exclude other factors of violence. According to the methodology of NigeriaWatch, conflicts are related to religion when some of its protagonists are religious organisations, mainly churches or Islamic groups. They are religious when stakeholders advocate a religious agenda. Strictly speaking, this is not the case in Jos, where the fighting between Muslim and Christian communities is mainly caused by economic, social and ethnic antagonisms.

3. THE MAIN FINDINGS

At this juncture, it is relevant to highlight the main findings of NigeriaWatch.

3.1 The most dangerous places, incidents and months

With the exception of Plateau State, violence of all types was concentrated in the South during the study period. On a much shorter span of time (December 2006 to March 2007), other studies also found that armed violence was more intense in Lagos and Rivers States[58] . According to some authors, the Niger Delta was the worst place: it recorded 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[59] . Yet in the three states of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers, NigeriaWatch's database recorded 1,451 deaths in 2007, 1,156 in 2008, 1,107 in 2009 and 843 in 2010, including accidents and all types of violence. The figures were much lower if we only took political conflicts into account, with 354 deaths in 2007, 267 in 2008, 673 in 2009 and 209 in 2010. In terms of risk, i.e. rates, we found that Plateau was the most dangerous State (because of ethnic conflicts), followed by Abuja FCT (because of car accidents), and then by Delta and Bayelsa. Compared to the number of inhabitants, Jos South and East, Onitsha South and North, Warri South-West and Bakassi (officially in Cameroon since then) were the most violent Local Government Areas.

However, one should remember that this ranking does not portray mortality in general. According to household surveys and the National Bureau of Statistics in 2001-2005, the crude death rate was the highest in Kano, followed by states like Katsina, Benue, Adamawa, and Imo. During the study period, the most violent incidents collated by NigeriaWatch were pipeline explosions in Lagos (628 deaths in December 2006, 100 in May 2008 and 58 in December 2007), a military attack on Camp 5 in Delta State (593 deaths in May 2009), the MASSOB uprising in Onitsha (589 deaths in June-July 2006), inter-communal riots in Plateau (557 deaths in January 2010, 540 in November 2008 and 520 in March 2010), clashes with the Islamist sect Boko Haram in Borno and Bauchi (490 and 275 deaths, respectively, in July 2009), protest over presidential results in Kaduna (331 deaths in April 2011), and a conflict over landownership in Taraba (200 deaths in June-August 2008). During the study period, no cycles could be identified, except for political violence during the elections of April 2007 and April 2011.
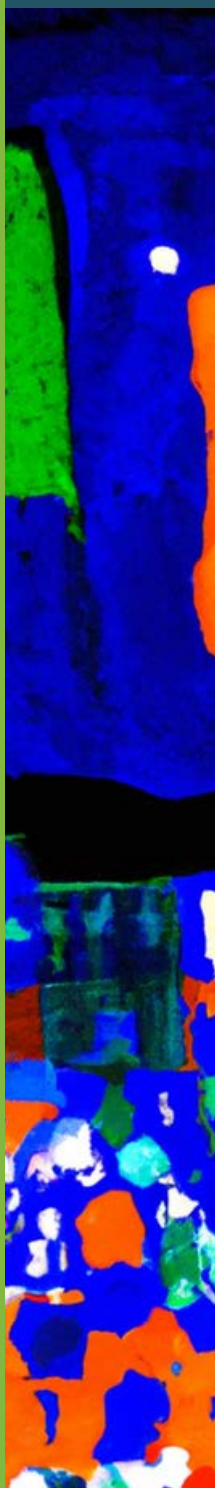
3.2 THE MOST IMPORTANT FINDINGS

We observe a decrease in general violence. Nigeria is less dangerous than usually thought. For instance, few non-African foreigners are killed (58 in 5 years). Our findings contradict the common assumption according to which criminal and political violence is on the rise. On a national level, 48.7% of the Nigerians interviewed in 2006 thought that crime increased[60] . But it all depends on the point of view, periods of time and places of residence. In Lagos in 2009, 79.5% felt it decreased, probably because of the good reputation of the governor[61] . According to specific surveys, a large majority (between 81% and 95%) of rural communities like Onelga (Rivers State) and Eastern Obolo (Akwa Ibom State) also thought that violence actually decreased[62] . We also observe that the Nigerian security forces are responsible for many killings on a daily basis, not to speak of torture and extra-judicial executions.

This is no surprise. In Kenya, for instance, security forces are the first cause of collective homicides in Nairobi, before banditry, community clashes and mob justice; during the period 1990-2003, they were responsible for 71% of the overall increase of collective homicides in the city[63] . In Nigeria, the police are no better. According to its own statistics, it killed 595 armed robbers in 2000, 376 in 2001, 317 in 2002, 545 in 2003, 569 in 2004, 252 in 2005, 329 in 2006, 785 in 2007, 857 in 2008 and 316 in 2009[64] . Meanwhile, it lost 182 men on the 'battlefield' in 2000, 133 in 2001, 120 in 2002, 144 in 2003, 111 in 2004, 129 in 2005, 111 in 2006, 110 in 2008 and 58 in 2009.

In other words, the police, which had supposedly 345,023 members in 2009 (as against 312,223 in 2008), kills much more often than its forces are killed. It has a take-no-prisoners-policy and usually executes armed robbers, whose injuries are simply not recorded. It also enjoys impunity. According to a non-governmental organization of lawyers, the police were responsible for 153 out of 231 extra judicial executions in 2005 (66%), but only three cases were referred to the judiciary[65] . NigeriaWatch thus confirms the conclusions of human rights defenders: the security forces are trigger happy, and unable to maintain order properly and peacefully.

On the contrary, the more they intervene, the bloodier the fighting. In a majority of violent cases where they got involved, they were responsible for causing death. To substantiate this, previous NigeriaWatch reports demonstrate that the police have killed in 295 incidents out of 517 in 2006-2007, and 240 out of 443 in 2007-2008[66] . The pattern is too systematic to let us think that these were unfortunate mistakes. It has more to do with a general culture of violence and impunity within the security forces. This is evidenced by the tendency of Nigerian police to boast about and even inflate the number of bandits it suppressed. By its own account, it said it killed 348 armed robbery suspects in the last four months of 2000[67] . If we extrapolate, this is roughly a thousand per year[68], excluding other categories of victims. Human Rights Watch also reckoned that the Nigerian police may have killed more than 10,000 people between 2000 and the end of 2007, which is an average of 1,300 per year . But in 2003 alone, the police claimed the suppression of 3,100 suspected armed robbers[69] .

In just three months, again, Inspector General of Police Mike Okiro 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), Chidi Odinkalu, 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"[70] .

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