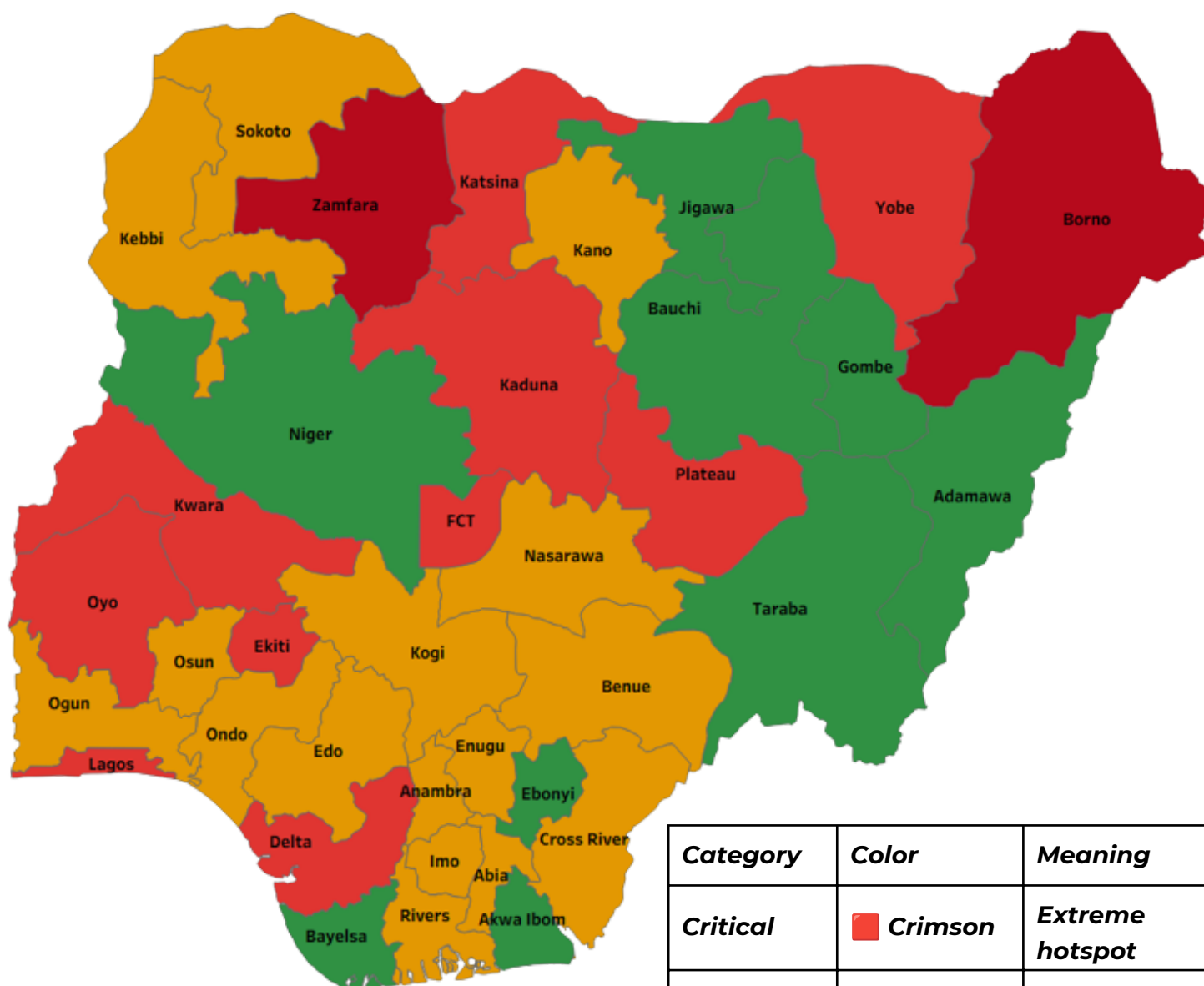




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# MONTHLY THREAT ANALYSIS REPORT MAY 2026



| Category | Color                                                                                                | Meaning                     |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Critical |  <b>Crimson</b> | <b>Extreme hotspot</b>      |
| High     |  <b>Red</b>     | <b>Sustained insecurity</b> |
| Moderate |  <b>Yellow</b>  | <b>Emerging risk</b>        |
| Low      |  <b>Green</b>   | <b>Stable</b>               |

TKC/ESI/MTA/V.09/2026

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## ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

The Kukah Centre (TKC), founded by Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, is a non-profit policy and research institution dedicated to promoting democracy, good governance, and national cohesion in Nigeria. Through evidence-based research, data-driven analysis, and inclusive dialogue, the Centre works to strengthen human-rights protection, accountability, and sustainable peace. Its interventions are designed to generate actionable insights that inform governance reforms, deepen civic participation, and reinforce institutional resilience.

As the Secretariat of the National Peace Committee (NPC), The Kukah Centre provides administrative support to the NPC - a non-governmental, non-partisan body of eminent Nigerians that has been central to Nigeria's democratic stability since its establishment in 2015. The Committee is widely recognized for facilitating the National Peace Accords, through which political parties and candidates commit to issue-based campaigns and respect for electoral outcomes. Beyond the accords, the NPC engages in preventive diplomacy, mediation, and dialogue, consistently helping to de-escalate political tensions and safeguard democratic transitions across electoral cycles.

In alignment with this peacebuilding mandate, The Kukah Centre accepted to host the Election Security Information (ESI) Hub under the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN II) programme. The ESI Hub functions as a central coordination and data-intelligence platform that tracks electoral offences, identifies insecurity flashpoints, and generates verified, real-time analysis to inform decision-making. By integrating systematic data collection, geospatial analysis, and strategic communication tools, the Hub provides actionable insights to key stakeholders, including INEC, security agencies, civil society organizations, media, and development partners. Thereby enhancing early warning, countering disinformation, and advancing the shared goal of peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections in Nigeria.

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

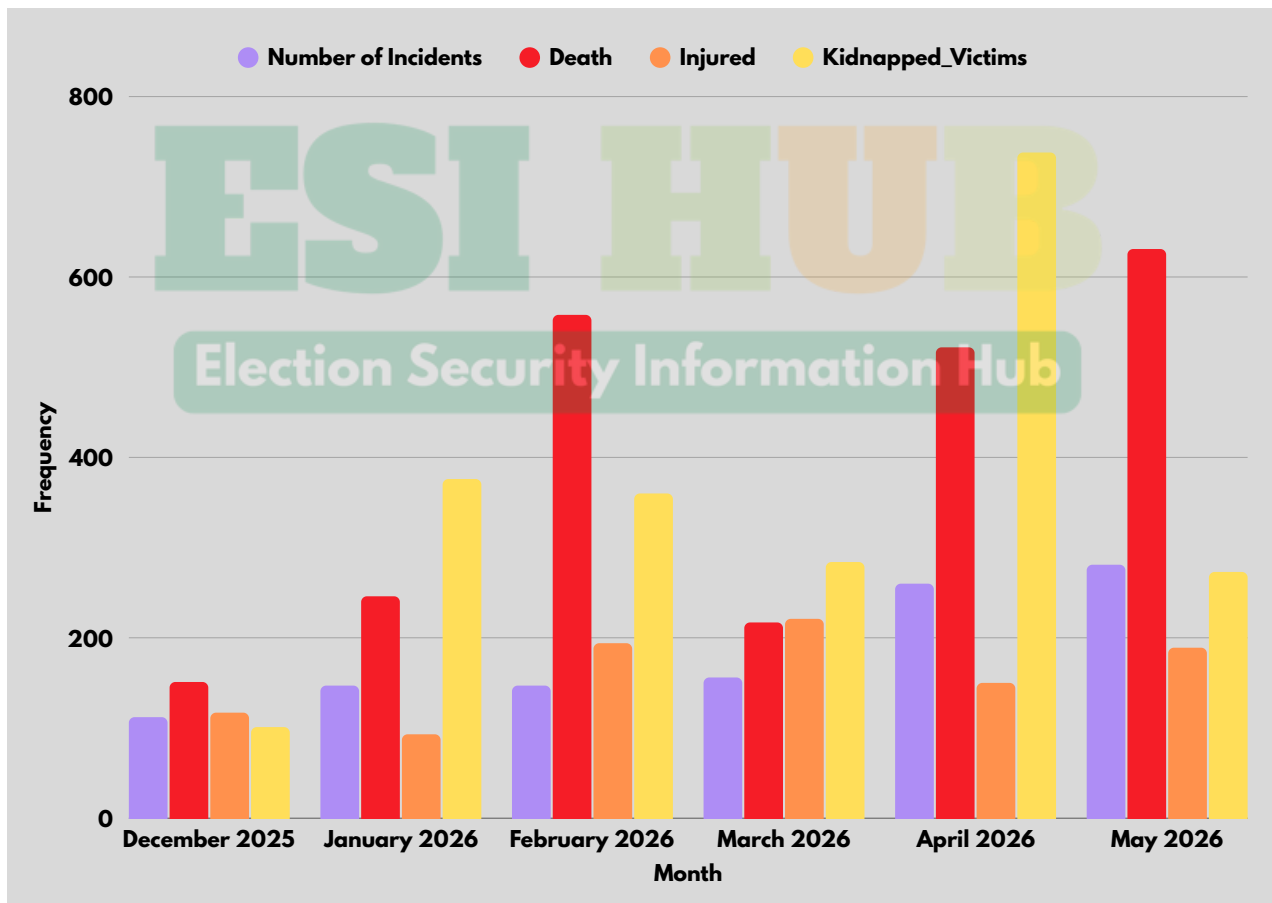
If April was the month Nigeria's insecurity spread, May was the month it turned most lethal. Closing out the first five months of the ESI Hub's 2026 reporting series, May 2026 stands as the deadliest on record. Across 34 states and 167 Local Government Areas, the Hub verified 281 incidents that left 631 people dead, 273 kidnapped, and 189 injured, a toll that climbed past even February's massacre-driven peak of 550 deaths. What set the month apart was not only its scale but its source: for the first time in this series, the electoral calendar ceased to be a mere backdrop to the violence and became one of its principal engines. As INEC's party-primary window ran from 23 April to 30 May, the contest for political power drove much of the bloodshed that was meant to precede it.

### May 2026 Key Metrics

| Metric              | May 2026 | Apr 2026 | Change |
|---------------------|----------|----------|--------|
| Total Incidents     | 281      | 260      | 8%     |
| Total Deaths        | 631      | 522      | 21%    |
| Total Injured       | 189      | 150      | 26%    |
| Total Kidnapped     | 273      | 738      | -63%   |
| States Affected     | 34       | 34       | 0      |
| LGAs Affected       | 167      | 151      | 11%    |
| Electoral Incidents | 87       | 41       | 112%   |

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

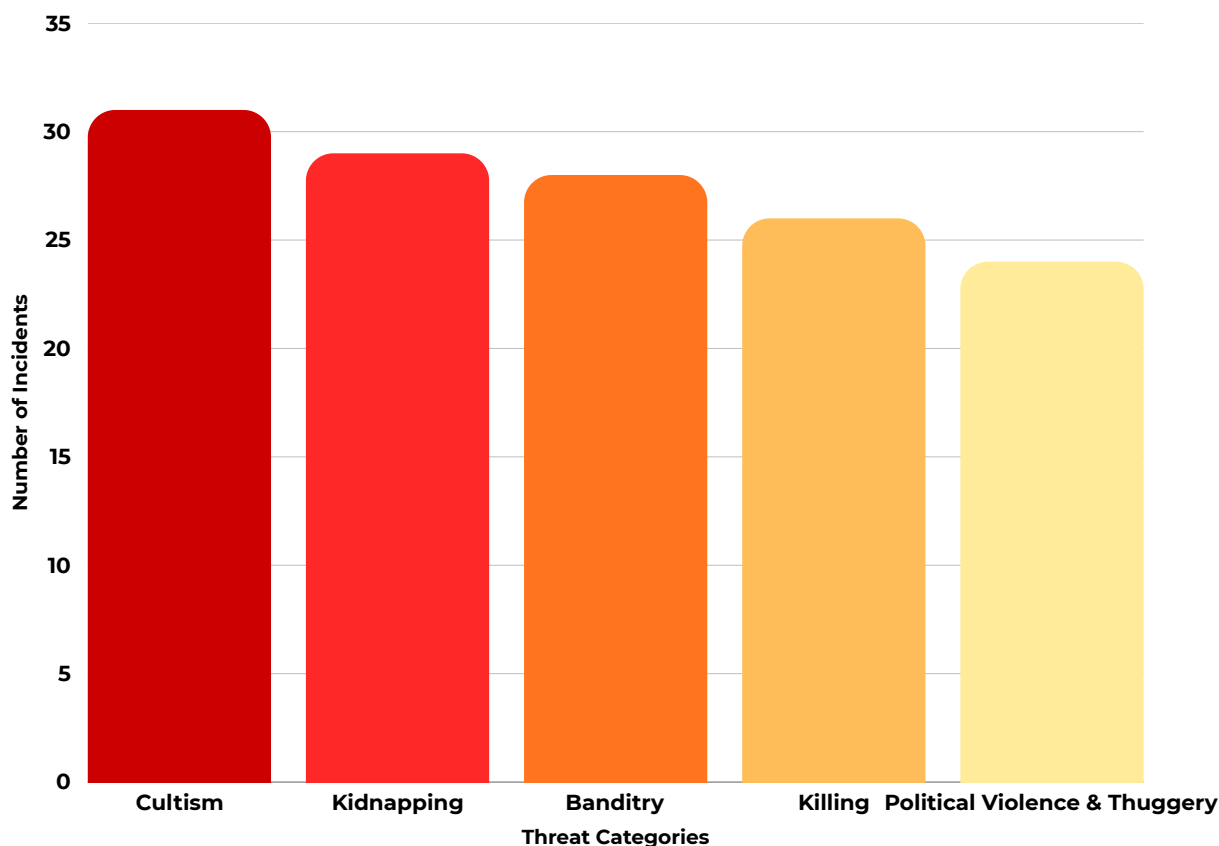
## COMPARATIVE METRICS ACROSS SIX MONTHS



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

The 63% fall in recorded kidnappings is the one figure in Table 1 that invites misreading. April's total of 738 was inflated by two outlier mass abductions - 300 in Borno and over 150 in Zamfara's Zugu raid. Strip those out, and May's 273 sits on the series trend line, not below it. The kidnapping economy has not contracted. It has redistributed southward, and into smaller, more frequent operations.

## TOP 5 THREATS IN MAY 2026



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

The threat landscape itself shifted shape between April and May. Cultism held the fifth spot among the top five threats in April, while May saw Political Violence and Thuggery, a change driven above all by the primary election season then underway. All these are signs that the country's most pressing dangers were realigning around the contest for power.

The deadliest force of the month did not sit at the top of the table at all. Terrorism ranked only sixth by incident volume, but those comparatively few incidents claimed 271 lives, making it the single most lethal threat category, a stark reminder of the enduring and catastrophic reach of insurgent operations across the North East and North West.

### 1.1 THREE KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN MAY

**I. The school abduction crisis crossed the Niger:** On 15 May, fighters of Ansaru - the Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimeena Fii Bilaadis Sudan splinter of Boko Haram - raided three schools in Oriire LGA, Oyo State, taking **46 hostages**: 39 pupils and seven teachers, the youngest, a two-year-old child<sup>[1]</sup>. Two days later, the group circulated a video of the execution of Michael Oyedokun, a mathematics teacher at Community Grammar School, Ahoro-Esinele<sup>[2]</sup>.

<sup>[1]</sup>Tribune Online. (2026, May 15). Gunmen kidnap school principal, students in Ogbomoso community. <https://tribuneonline.com/gunmen-kidnap-school-principal-students-in-ogbomoso-community/>

<sup>[2]</sup>PM News Nigeria. (2026, May 18). Oyo school kidnapping: Teacher Michael Oyedokun brutally beheaded by terrorists. <https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2026/05/18/oyo-school-kidnapping-teacher-michael-oyedokun-brutally-beheaded-by-terrorists/>

Its demands - ₦1 billion, operational vehicles, the release of detained commanders, and the imposition of Sharia law<sup>[3]</sup> - identify this as an ideological operation, not a commercial one. A joint rescue attempt was defeated by improvised explosive devices, and **45 hostages remained in captivity** in the forests fringing the Old Oyo National Park at the time of writing. The arc that opened at Chibok in April 2014 has, for the first time, produced a mass school abduction in the South West.

**II. The political party primaries season converted political competition into organised violence:** The EOTS verified 87 electoral security incidents in May - a 112% increase on April's 41 - spanning 21 states. The APC alone accounted for 58 incidents across 17 states: a supporter was shot dead at the party's primary in Ikotun, Lagos<sup>[4]</sup>; hired thugs and an arms cache were intercepted at a hotel in Moba LGA, Ekiti<sup>[5]</sup>; a Kaduna government aide filmed boasting of writing results in Igabi<sup>[6]</sup>. The Accord Party's primary in Iwo, Osun, left a woman fatally injured<sup>[7]</sup>. On the strength of party primaries violence alone, the South West - historically the least kinetic zone in this series - posted the highest incident count in the country (89).

**III. The opposition realignment hardened around the ADC:** Atiku Abubakar, who left the PDP in July 2025, filed his presidential nomination on 14 May and emerged as the African Democratic Congress (ADC) candidate on 27 May with 1,846,370 votes, defeating Rotimi Amaechi and Mohammed Hayatu-Deen<sup>[8]</sup>. The party's own contest was not spared: Senator Ireti Kingibe was assaulted at the Abuja primary<sup>[9]</sup>, and an INEC official was abducted amid a ballot-box seizure at the ADC primary in Yakurr, Cross River<sup>[10]</sup>. The flag has been settled, the structure beneath it has not.

Beyond the political arena, the month delivered mass-casualty events of strategic weight. Coordinated Boko Haram assaults on two military bases in Buni Yadi and a military training school in Yobe killed 33 soldiers and 17 officers, with troops neutralising 50 militants across the two operations<sup>[11][12]</sup>.

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<sup>[3]</sup>Pulse Nigeria. (2026, June 6). Oyo school kidnapping: Full list of what the terrorists are demanding. <https://www.pulse.ng/story/oyo-school-kidnapping-ansaru-demands-ransom-sharia-law-commanders-release-2026060621581769867>

<sup>[4]</sup>Punch Nigeria Limited. (2026, May 17). Supporter shot dead during Lagos APC primary election. <https://punchng.com/supporter-shot-dead-during-lagos-apc-primary-election/>

<sup>[5]</sup>Vanguard Media Limited. (2026, May 15). Ekiti police arrest suspected political thugs, recover guns. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/05/ekiti-police-arrest-suspected-political-thugs-recover-guns/>

<sup>[6]</sup>ABC News Nigeria. (2026, May 29). Outrage as Kaduna governor's aide boasts of writing election results in Igabi. <https://abcnews.com.ng/outrage-as-kaduna-governors-aide-boasts-of-writing-election-results-in-igabi/>

<sup>[7]</sup>Osun Life. (2026, May 31). Woman reportedly dies from injuries sustained during violent Osun Accord House of Representatives primary. <https://www.osun.life/2026/05/31/woman-reportedly-dies-from-injuries-sustained-during-violent-osun-accord-hor-primary/>

<sup>[8]</sup>Naija News. (2026, May 27). Atiku wins ADC presidential primary election. <https://www.naijanews.com/2026/05/27/atiku-wins-adc-presidential-primary-election/>

<sup>[9]</sup>Leadership Newspapers. (2026, May 24). Senator Kingibe says she, others attacked during ADC primary. <https://leadership.ng/senator-kingibe-says-she-others-attacked-during-adc-primary/>

<sup>[10]</sup>Independent National Observation Network. (2026, May 24). Ballot box snatching and abduction of INEC official during ADC primary election in Yakurr, Cross River State (Ekon) [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1Cp1z4YWMK/>

<sup>[11]</sup>Sahara Reporters. (2026, May 8). Boko Haram terrorists attack two military bases in Yobe, kill dozens of soldiers. <https://saharareporters.com/2026/05/08/breaking-boko-haram-terrorists-attack-two-military-bases-yobe-kill-dozens-soldiers>

<sup>[12]</sup>Premium Times. (2026, May 17). Terrorists attack military training school in Yobe, kill army, police officers — official. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/880323-terrorists-attack-military-training-school-in-yobe-kill-army-police-officers-official.html>

A factional battle between ISWAP and Boko Haram in Sambisa Forest on 2 May left 108 dead - the single deadliest event of the month<sup>[13]</sup>. Amnesty International alleged that a military airstrike on a market in Tumfa, Zurmi LGA, Zamfara, killed approximately 100 civilians (ZA-2026-05-003)<sup>[14]</sup> - an allegation that had not been independently corroborated at publication and is treated throughout this report as a credible claim requiring independent investigation, not a confirmed state action.

## 1.2 GEOGRAPHIC HIGHLIGHTS

**South West:** 89 incidents with 27 deaths, 51 injured, and 69 kidnapped. Forty-nine of the 89 were electoral offences; the Ogbomoso abduction supplied most of the kidnapping count.

**North East:** 21 incidents but 260 deaths - 12.4 per incident, the highest lethality in the country. Yobe's twin base attacks and the Sambisa factional battle dominated the file.

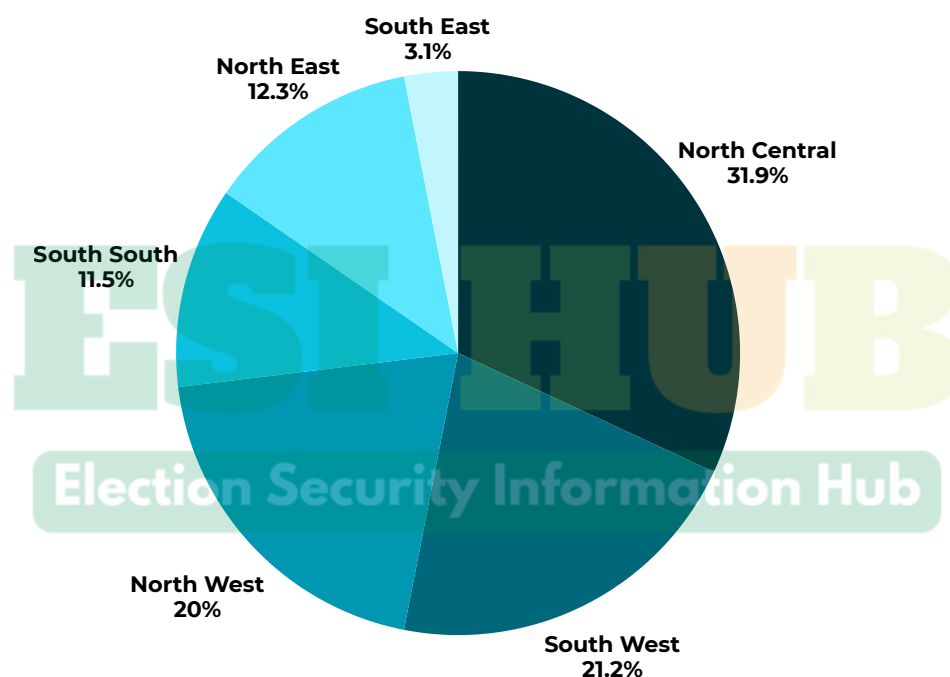
**North West:** 42 incidents, 218 deaths, 87 kidnapped. Zamfara accounted for 130 deaths, a figure shadowed by the unverified airstrike allegation; Katsina recorded 12 incidents across eight LGAs.

**North Central:** 56 incidents, 78 deaths, 52 kidnapped. Kwara's 25 abductions - 15 from a church, 10 from an Emir's palace - opened a new corridor of concern.

**South South:** 37 incidents, 14 deaths. Delta led with 17 incidents across 11 LGAs; Cross River produced the series' first ballot-box seizure at a party primary.

**South East:** 36 incidents and 34 deaths - the zone's highest monthly count of 2026, led by Imo's gunmen attacks and a cluster of state-linked custody deaths.

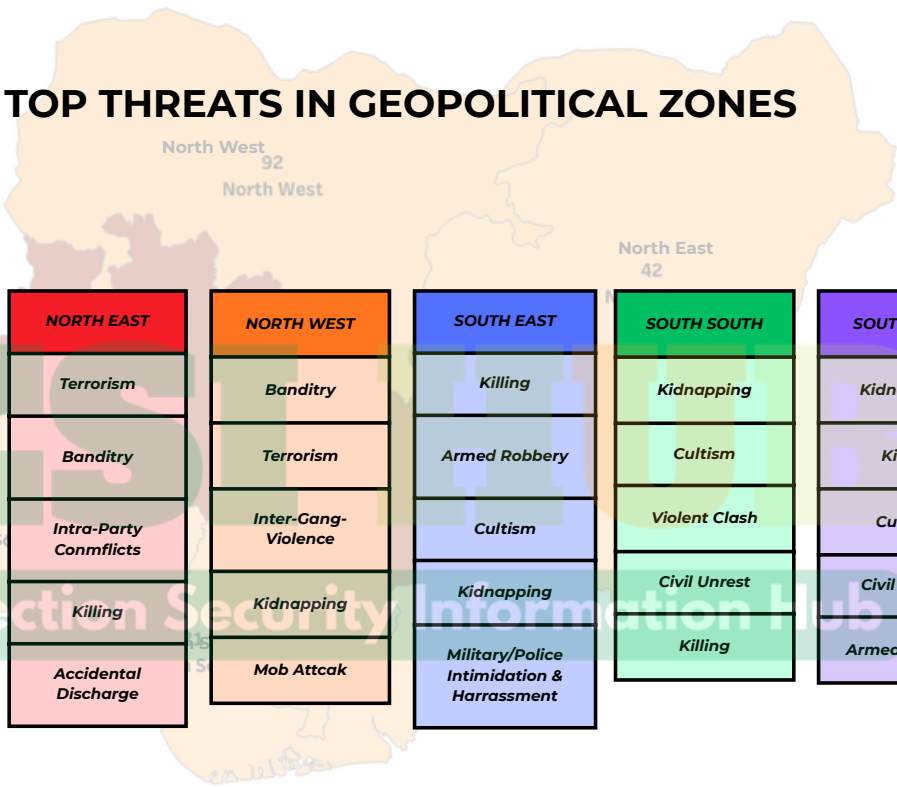
## DISTRIBUTION OF INCIDENTS ACROSS GEOPOLITICAL ZONES



<sup>[13]</sup>Daily Post Nigeria. (2026, May 2). Boko Haram, ISWAP battle for supremacy in Sambisa Forest as clashes intensify. <https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/02/boko-haram-iswap-battle-for-supremacy-in-sambisa-forest-as-clashes-intensify/>

<sup>[14]</sup>The Guardian Nigeria. (2026, May 12). 100 killed in Nigerian airstrike on Zamfara market, Amnesty alleges. <https://guardian.ng/news/100-killed-in-nigerian-airstrike-on-zamfara-market-amnesty-alleges/>

## TOP THREATS IN GEOPOLITICAL ZONES



| NORTH CENTRAL | NORTH EAST            | NORTH WEST          | SOUTH EAST                                | SOUTH SOUTH   | SOUTH WEST    |
|---------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Banditry      | Terrorism             | Banditry            | Killing                                   | Kidnapping    | Kidnapping    |
| Terrorism     | Banditry              | Terrorism           | Armed Robbery                             | Cultism       | Killing       |
| Killing       | Intra-Party Conflicts | Inter-Gang-Violence | Cultism                                   | Violent Clash | Cultism       |
| Gunmen Attack | Killing               | Kidnapping          | Kidnapping                                | Civil Unrest  | Civil Unrest  |
| Kidnapping    | Accidental Discharge  | Mob Attack          | Military/Police Intimidation & Harassment | Killing       | Armed robbery |

## TOP IMPLICATIONS FOR THE 2027 ELECTORAL CYCLE

### Party Primary impunity → general-election rehearsal:

Eighty-seven offences, one cluster of arrests, zero prosecutions. Every actor weighing violence in 2027 has now watched it succeed at no cost in 2026.

### Southward abduction migration → nationwide school exposure:

Tactics refined in the North East - counter-rescue IEDs, execution videos - have been demonstrated south of the Niger. No state can plan election security on the assumption of regional immunity.

### Realignment churn → fresh flashpoints:

Defection waves into the ADC, NDC, SDP, and Accord transfer grievance networks between parties faster than internal dispute-resolution structures can absorb.

### State-actor allegations → legitimacy erosion:

The Zamfara airstrike allegation and a cluster of custody deaths corrode the public trust on which credible election security depends.

## RECOMMENDATIONS PREVIEW

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### **NPC:**

Fast-track Peace Accord signings in Ekiti and Osun ahead of the June and August governorship polls; convene a post-primary accountability summit of party leaderships.

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### **INEC:**

Treat the Ekiti poll as the 2027 proof of concept; publish the LGA accessibility audit for the North East and North West before October.

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### **Security Agencies:**

Establish a permanent forest-corridor command for the Oyo–Kwara–Kogi axis; commission an independent investigation into the Zurmi airstrike allegation.

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### **CSOs:**

Publish a public tracker of all 87 May electoral incidents and monitor the Moba arrests through to prosecution or collapse.

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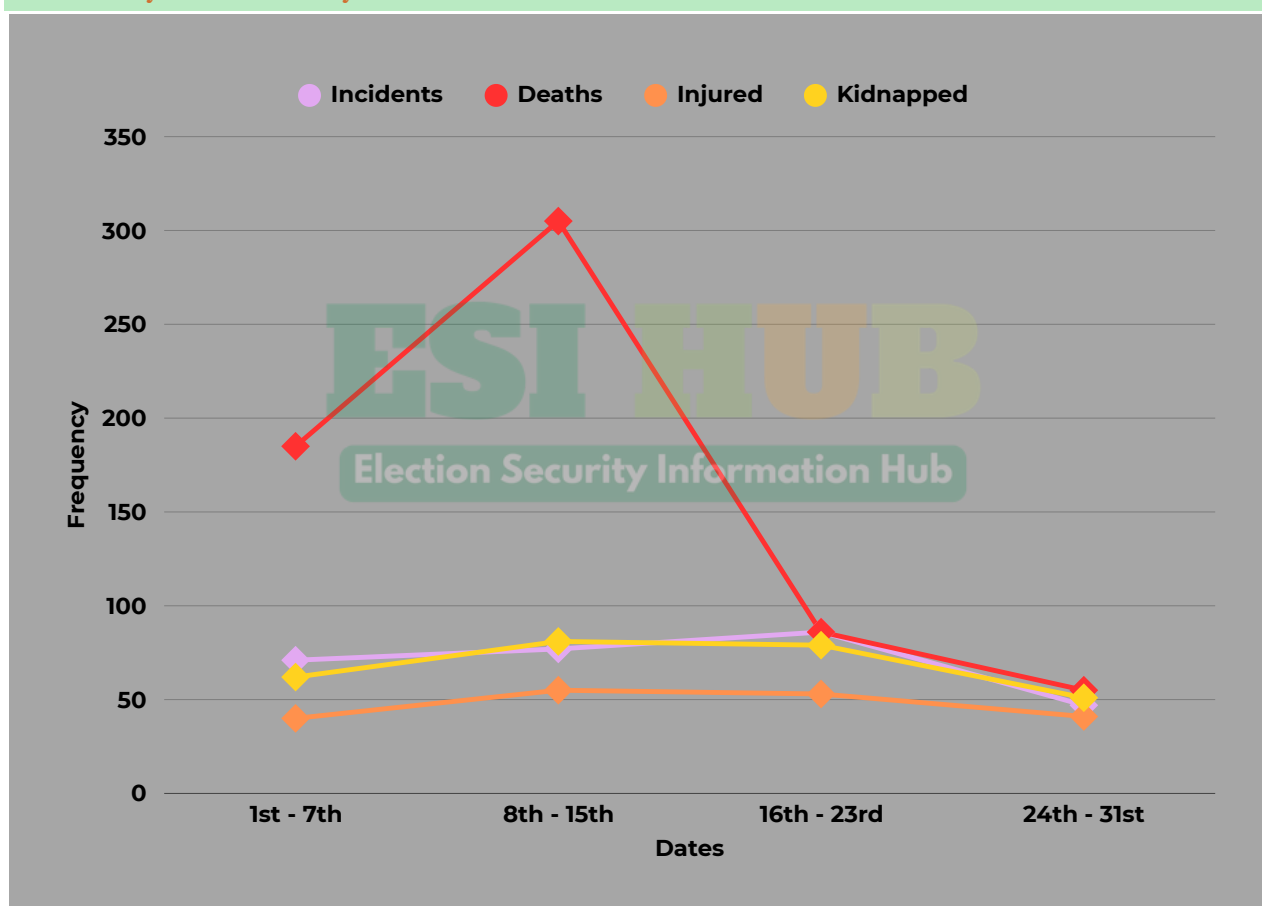
Five months of systematic tracking now stand on the record: 1,106 incidents, 2,166 deaths, 2,031 kidnapped, 316 verified electoral offences, and zero prosecutions. January diagnosed the kidnapping economy, February counted its dead, March warned that violence was normalising, April measured its acceleration and May supplied the synthesis: an electoral cycle being contested by force, roughly eight months before the January 2027 general election.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1. WHY THIS MONTH MATTERS

In May 2026, the ESI Hub recorded 281 incidents and 631 deaths, against April's 260 incidents and 522 deaths. The 8% rise in incident volume understates the change; the 21% rise in deaths and the 112% surge in electoral offences define it. Two forces converged to form the nexus for this month's incidents. The first is the party primary calendar: INEC's window compressed the country's most consequential intra-party contests into five weeks, and the violence trailed the schedule with near-mechanical fidelity. The single busiest day of the month, 17 May, with 27 recorded incidents, fell at the height of the APC's House of Representatives primaries. The second is territorial: the Ansaru operation in Oriire confirmed that the mass-abduction model incubated in the North West and North East now has a southern franchise.

### 2.2. Weekly Trends – May 2026



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

#### Week 1 (1 to 7 May):

The month opened with its single deadliest event. On 2 May, ISWAP and Boko Haram factions fought a pitched battle for control of Sambisa Forest, Borno, leaving 108 fighters dead - an intra-insurgent contest for territory and resources rather than an attack on civilians, but a measure of the firepower in the Lake Chad Basin<sup>[15]</sup>.

<sup>[15]</sup> Africa Defence Force (2026 May 19). Boko Haram and ISWAP Fight For Control of Sambisa Forest <https://adf-magazine.com/2026/05/boko-haram-and-iswap-fight-for-control-of-sambisa-forest/>

In Sokoto's Sabon Birni LGA, bandits killed a father and his eight-year-old daughter and abducted other members of the household<sup>[16]</sup>. Katsina recorded the abduction of women and girls in Bakori<sup>[17]</sup> and an attack on travellers along the Katsina–Kaduna corridor near Funtua, with 11 taken<sup>[18]</sup>. In Zamfara, an IED detonation in Anka LGA killed six people and injured six more<sup>[19]</sup>. Plateau lost five residents to gunmen in the Fan District of Barkin Ladi<sup>[20]</sup>, and bandits killed three police officers in Kwara<sup>[21]</sup>. Before the primaries had produced a single ballot, the month's trajectory was set.

### Week 2 (8 to 14 May):

Week 2 belonged to the North East. Boko Haram mounted coordinated assaults on two military bases in Buni Yadi, Yobe, killing 33 soldiers; in the counter-operation, troops neutralised 50 terrorists at the cost of two more soldiers<sup>[22]</sup>. In Borno's Askira/Uba LGA - within operational reach of the original Chibok corridor - 50 students were abducted<sup>[23]</sup>. Zamfara suffered a convoy ambush in Maru that killed 10 and produced further abductions<sup>[24]</sup>, and reprisal raids across Katsina's Matazu communities killed 12<sup>[25]</sup>. The party primary season opened in parallel: field observers logged the first verified vote-buying operations of the cycle in Ikole<sup>[26]</sup> and Ekiti West<sup>[27]</sup>, and a party gathering in Lafia, Nasarawa, was violently disrupted (EOTS-NS-2026-05-003)<sup>[28]</sup>.

### Week 3 (15 to 21 May):

The pivotal week of the month and arguably of the year so far. On 15 May, the day of the APC's House of Representatives primaries, Ansaru fighters raided three schools in Oriire LGA, Oyo State, abducting 46 pupils and 7 teachers<sup>[29]</sup>. Over 16–17 May, as primaries ran nationwide, a supporter was shot dead at the APC exercise in Ikotun, Lagos<sup>[30]</sup>; police in Moba LGA, Ekiti, arrested armed thugs at a hotel and recovered firearms and ammunition<sup>[31]</sup>; primaries were disrupted in Mushin<sup>[32]</sup>,

<sup>[16]</sup>Daily Trust. (2026, April 30). Bandits kill father, 8-year-old daughter, abduct family members. <https://dailytrust.com/bandits-kill-father-8-year-old-daughter-abduct-family-members-2/>

<sup>[17]</sup>The Guardian Nigeria. (2026, May 9). Bandits abduct girls, women in Katsina. <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/metro/bandits-abduct-girls-women-in-katsina/>

<sup>[18]</sup>Zagazola Makama. (2026, May 22). Troops rescue two victims, launch manhunt after bandits attack on Katsina–Kaduna border. <https://zagazola.org/index.php/breaking-news/troops-rescue-two-victims-launch-manhunt-after-bandits-attack-on-katsina-kaduna-border>

<sup>[19]</sup>Leadership Newspapers. (2026, May 7). Tension as IED explosion kills 6 in Zamfara. <https://leadership.ng/tension-as-ied-explosion-kills-6-in-zamfara/>

<sup>[20]</sup>Leadership Newspapers. (2026, May 12). Gunmen kill 5 persons in fresh attack in Plateau village. <https://leadership.ng/gunmen-kill-5-persons-in-fresh-attack-in-plateau-village/>

<sup>[21]</sup>Punch Nigeria Limited. (2026, May 3). Bandits kill three Kwara cops as police track suspects. <https://punchng.com/bandits-kill-three-kwara-cops-as-police-track-suspects/>

<sup>[22]</sup>Vanguard Media Limited. (2026, May 10). Troops neutralise 50 terrorists, lose 2 soldiers in Yobe attack. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/05/troops-neutralise-50-terrorists-losses-2-soldiers-in-yobe-attack/>

<sup>[23]</sup>Reuters. (2026, May 15). Suspected militants abduct students in Nigeria's Borno State, residents say. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/suspected-militants-abduct-students-nigerias-borno-state-residents-say-2026-05-15>

<sup>[24]</sup>Naija News. (2026, May 11). Ten killed, others kidnapped as terrorists ambush Zamfara convoy. <https://www.naijanews.com/2026/05/11/terrorists-ambush-zamfara-convoy/>

<sup>[25]</sup>Daily Post Nigeria. (2026, May 11). Bandit attacks kill 12 in Katsina communities. <https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/11/bandit-attacks-kill-12-in-katsina-communities/>

<sup>[26]</sup>Field Observer Report. (2026, May 6). Vote buying/voter inducement at PVC registration centre, Ikole LGA, Ekiti State (EOTS-EK-2026-05-03).

<sup>[27]</sup>Field Observer Report. (2026, May 7). Vote buying/voter inducement via voter card information collection in Ekiti West LGA (Aramoko, Erio, Erinjiyan), Ekiti State.

<sup>[28]</sup>Field Observer Report. (2026, May 5). Political violence and thuggery during rival political gatherings in Lafia, Nasarawa State (EOTS-NS-2026-05-003) [Field incident record]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=CLash%20wada>

<sup>[29]</sup>The Nation. (2026, May 15). Principal, students abducted in Ogbomoso as govt shuts affected schools. The Nation Newspaper. [The Nation article](#)

<sup>[30]</sup>Punch Newspaper (2026, May 18). Supporter shot dead during Lagos APC primary election. [https://punchng.com/supporter-shot-dead-during-lagos-apc-primary-election/#google\\_vignette](https://punchng.com/supporter-shot-dead-during-lagos-apc-primary-election/#google_vignette)

<sup>[31]</sup>Vanguard Media Limited. (2026, May 15). Ekiti police arrest suspected political thugs, recover guns. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/05/ekiti-police-arrest-suspected-political-thugs-recover-guns/>

<sup>[32]</sup>Field Observer Report. (2026, May 17). Violence breaks out during APC House of Representatives primary in Mushin, Lagos [Facebook reel]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/reel/856176380866629>

Somolu<sup>[33]</sup>, Kosofe<sup>[34]</sup>, and Alimosho in Lagos. A Lagos State commissioner was attacked with machetes at a reconciliation meeting<sup>[35]</sup>; and the Ikole/Oye Federal Constituency primary in Ekiti was halted three times by armed disruption<sup>[36][37]</sup>. In Plateau's Mangu LGA, a soldier shot a community member at a party primary venue, leaving one dead and five injured<sup>[38]</sup>. On 17 May - the month's single busiest day, with 27 recorded incidents - Ansaru circulated video of the execution of Michael Oyedokun<sup>[39]</sup>. The primaries and the hostage crisis are no longer separate stories, both are competing for the same security apparatus.

#### Week 4 (22 to 31 May):

The final week layered political consolidation over continuing violence. On 24 May, gunmen killed three worshippers and abducted 15 from a church service in Kwara's Ekiti LGA<sup>[40]</sup> - the southern abduction corridor's second mass operation in ten days. The ADC's presidential primary on 27 May produced both an outcome and an incident file: Atiku Abubakar was declared the candidate with 1,846,370 votes, while Senator Ireti Kingibe was assaulted at the Abuja exercise and ballot boxes were snatched<sup>[41]</sup> - and an INEC official abducted - at the Yakurr primary in Cross River<sup>[42]</sup>. On 29 May, a woman injured at the Accord Party primary in Iwo, Osun, died; around 30 others were injured<sup>[43]</sup>. INEC's primary window closed on 30 May.

### 2.3. AIM OF THE REPORT

This assessment report analyses both election-related incidents and broader insecurity trends with potential electoral implications. It situates these dynamics within Nigeria's wider governance and democratic landscape, examining how armed violence, disinformation, and institutional weaknesses intersect to threaten political stability. The assessment aims to:

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<sup>[33]</sup>News Diary Online. (2026, May 16). Suspected hoodlums attack APC apex leaders at Somolu polling units. <https://newsdiaryonline.com/suspected-hoodlums-attack-apc-apex-leaders-at-somolu-polling-units/>

<sup>[34]</sup>Field Observer Report. (2026, May 17). Lagos APC State House of Assembly primaries turn violent in Kosofe as hoodlums chase voters from venue [Facebook video]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=1646273919912654>

<sup>[35]</sup>Field Observer Report. (2026, May 17). Violence during APC reconciliation meeting in Lagos West leads to attack on commissioner [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/TheTimelessUpdate/posts/apc-primaries-sanwo-olus-commissioner-macheted-hospitalisedviolence-erupted-at-t/829993966850546/>

<sup>[36]</sup>Field Observer Report. (2026, May 16). Political violence and thuggery causing disruption at Ward 10, Oke Ayedun, Ikole LGA, Ekiti State (EOTS-EK-2026-05-046) [Field data record].

<sup>[37]</sup>Field Observer Report. (2026, May 16). Political violence and thuggery disrupting APC House of Representatives primary at ward collation centre, Ikole LGA, Ekiti State (EOTS-EK-2026-05-047) [Field data record].

<sup>[38]</sup>Daily Post Nigeria. (2026, May 18). One killed, five injured as APC House of Representatives primary turns violent in Plateau. <https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/18/one-killed-five-injured-as-apc-house-of-reps-primary-turns-violent-in-plateau/>

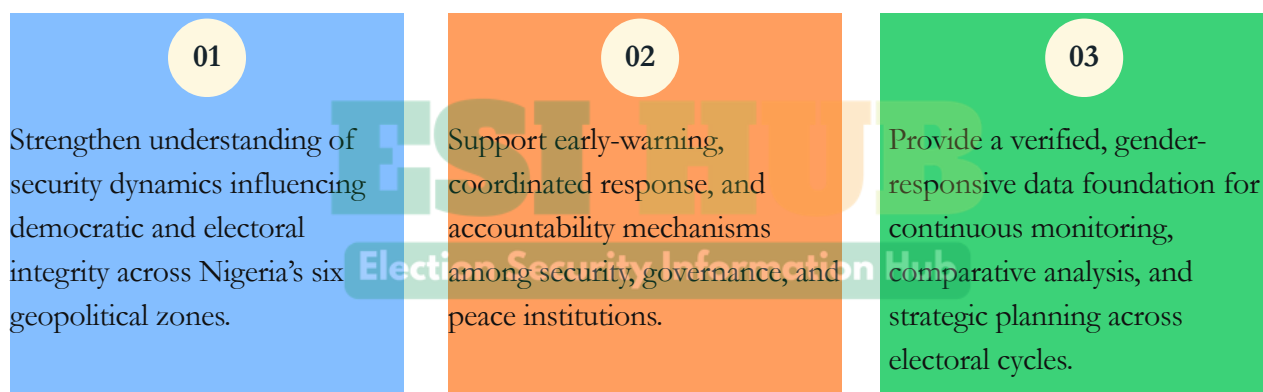
<sup>[39]</sup>Leadership Newspaper (2026 May 8). Murder Video Of Oyo Teacher Oyedokun Is Traumatizing – Family. <https://leadership.ng/murder-video-of-oyo-teacher-oyedokun-is-traumatizing-family/>

<sup>[40]</sup>Punch Nigeria Limited. (2026, May 24). Gunmen kill three worshippers, abduct 15 in Kwara. <https://punchng.com/gunmen-kill-three-worshippers-abduct-15-in-kwara/>

<sup>[41]</sup>Premium Times Nigeria. (2026, May 24). How I and others were physically attacked at ADC secretariat – Senator. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/882263-how-i-others-were-physically-attacked-at-adc-secretariat-senator.html>

<sup>[42]</sup>Guardian Nigeria. (2026, May 24). Gunmen disrupt ADC primary in Cross River, abduct INEC official. <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/metro/gunmen-disrupt-adc-primary-in-cross-river-abduct-inec-official>

<sup>[43]</sup>Punch Nigeria Limited. (2026, June 1). APC demands probe as woman dies during Osun Accord Party primary. <https://punchng.com/apc-demands-probe-as-woman-dies-during-osun-accord-party-primary/>



## 2.4. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK & KEY QUESTIONS

This report is structured around seven core analytical questions that guide the evidence collection, analysis, and recommendations. These questions ensure a systematic examination of the nexus between national security and electoral integrity, moving from situational assessment through to forward-looking risk mitigation. The core questions addressed are:

The core questions addressed are:

1. What is the current state of national security in Nigeria, and how has it evolved?
2. How is insecurity impacting electoral processes and preparations?
3. What electoral offences are being committed, and by whom?
4. What are the underlying drivers of insecurity and electoral violence?
5. Which areas and stakeholders are most at risk?
6. What can be done to mitigate risks and strengthen electoral integrity?
7. What are the plausible future scenarios for the electoral process?

The answers to these questions form the logical progression of the report, from data and diagnosis to foresight and actionable response.

## 2.5. REPORT STRUCTURE

Following this introduction and the analytical framework outlined in Section 2.4, the report is structured to move from methodology to findings, analysis, and actionable guidance. **Section 3** details the rigorous multi-source methodology and data verification protocols employed. **Section 4** provides a quantitative and qualitative overview of the national security landscape. **Section 5** offers a geopolitical zone-by-zone analysis, contextualising national trends. **Section 6** delves into the structural and immediate drivers of conflict and emerging dynamics. **Section 7** presents a forward-looking risk assessment and scenario planning matrix. **Section 8** provides targeted, stakeholder-specific recommendations. Section 9 provides the conclusion to the report.

### 3. METHODOLOGY & DATA SOURCES

This report is generated through the Election Security Information (ESI) Hub's structured hybrid methodology, integrating multi-source data ingestion, international-standard verification, and blended quantitative-qualitative analysis. The framework - comprising the Election Security Trends Analysis, the Electoral Offences Tracking System (EOTS), and the ESI Studio - produces verified data to support early warning, institutional accountability, and evidence-based peacebuilding. By combining quantitative incident tracking with insights from the National Peace Committee's Independent State Peace Architectures (ISPAs), civil-society partners, and media observers, the report contributes to a unified national framework for election-security analysis.

#### 3.1 Hybrid Methodology

The assessment applies a multi-step hybrid methodology adapted from the ESI Hub Operational Framework and aligned with international standards (UNOCHA Verification Scale, ACLED protocols, EU-SDGN II early-warning benchmarks).

##### Step 1 – Multi-Source Ingestion

Incidents are collated from a network of more than 45 open-source and institutional feeds, together with primary field observations from the Hub's dedicated monitoring network. Field observers remained deployed across Ekiti's LGAs throughout May, filing structured incident reports within 24 hours of verification. Each field report records geocoordinates (LGA, ward, settlement), temporal data, victim and perpetrator profiles disaggregated by gender and age where identifiable, weapon types, and a verification trail of at least two corroborating sources.

##### Step 2 - Verification & Validation

Each incident undergoes triangulation against at least two independent sources, geospatial verification using open-source mapping tools, and confidence scoring as Verified, Probable, or Unverified.

##### Step 3 - UNOCHA Scale Mapping

Every incident is assigned a confidence score on the UNOCHA Verification Scale. Only incidents scoring Level 4 (Highly Probable) or above enter the trend analysis and core dataset.

##### Step 4 - ACLED-Style Coding

Verified incidents are tagged using a taxonomy adapted from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, capturing event type, actors, and geographic precision.

##### Step 5 - Flashpoint Severity Index (FSI)

A proprietary index weights incident frequency, casualty intensity, strategic impact (for example, attacks on INEC or security infrastructure), and electoral relevance to generate standardised severity scores and the **CRIMSON** / **RED** / **YELLOW** / **GREEN** risk tiers used in Section 7.

##### Step 6 - Qualitative Synthesis

Analysts conduct narrative vetting, correlating incident data with broader socio-political dynamics and integrating field-monitor and ISPA insights to explain the drivers behind the numbers.

### **3.2. DATA SYSTEMS**

The combined dataset draws on two institutional streams: the Electoral Offences Tracking System (EOTS), which covers national electoral offences, and the Electoral-Related Violence (ERV) data, which documents broader insecurity. Duplicate entries and reports below UNOCHA Level 4 are excluded before analysis.

### **3.3. ANALYTICAL CLUSTERS**

All incidents are classified under four ESI Hub analytical clusters: (1) Electoral Security - the core layer, drawn primarily from EOTS; (2) Armed Violence & Organised Crime - the context layer; (3) Human Rights & Rule of Law - the accountability layer; and (4) Gender & Inclusion - the vulnerability layer.

### **3.4. SCOPE, LIMITATIONS & ETHICAL PROTOCOLS**

This assessment covers 1–31 May 2026 across 34 states and the FCT. Under-reporting remains a standing limitation – particularly in the North Central and North East. Verification lag is inherent to the multi-step protocol. GBV incidents follow GBV Guidelines for responsible, victim-centred reporting. ‘Low Risk’ FSI does not mean ‘no risk.’

## 4. NATIONAL SECURITY OVERVIEW

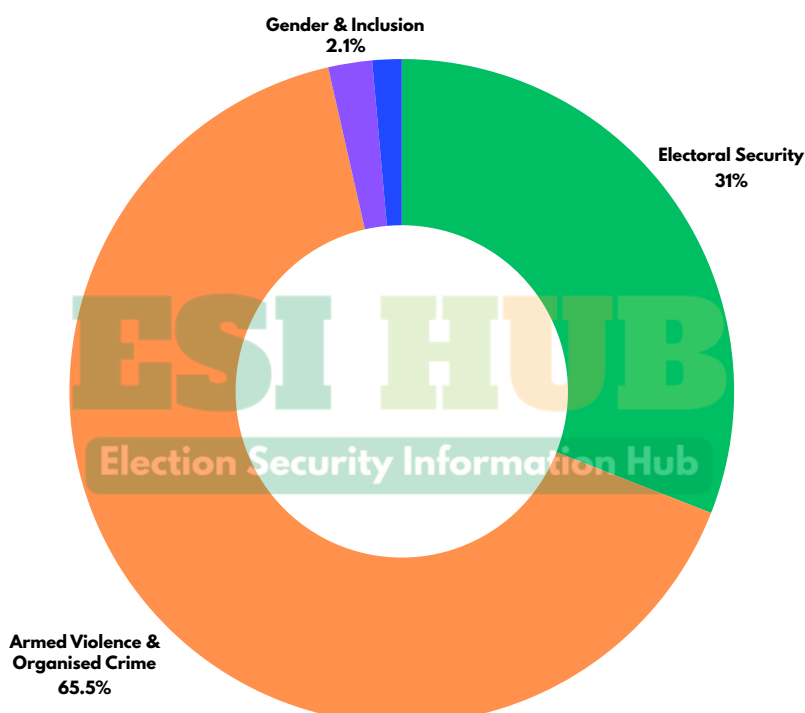
### 4.1 QUANTITATIVE SNAPSHOT

May 2026 presents a national security environment that has moved beyond chronic and acute into something more structural. The 281 incidents recorded across 167 LGAs and 34 states are more widely distributed than April's 151 LGAs - an 11% expansion of the affected map in a single month. But the more telling movement is vertical, not horizontal. Deaths rose 21%, from 522 to 631; injuries rose 26%, from 150 to 189; and the share of those deaths borne by civilians widened sharply. This is not violence spreading thin. It is violence reaching further and killing harder at the same time.

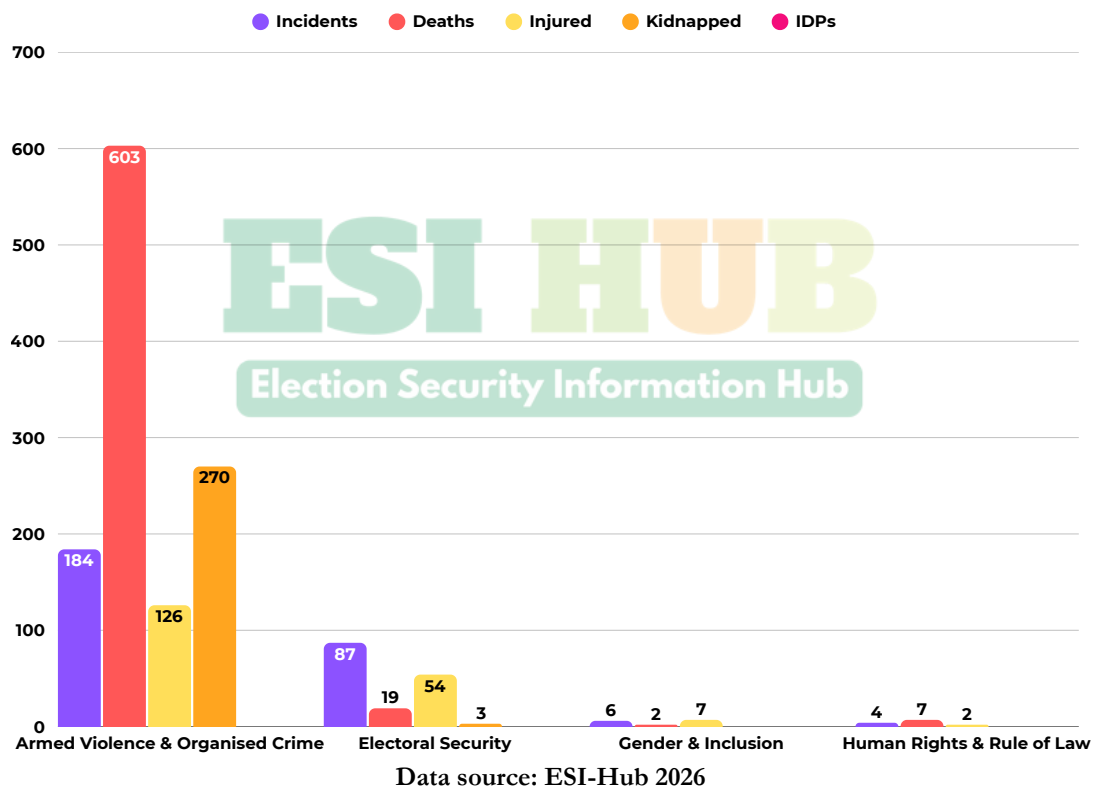
The casualty composition carries its own warning. Civilian deaths rose 29% - from 433 to 557 - while deaths among government and security actors (GSA) fell 15%, from 86 to 73. Classifications were recorded for 630 of the 631 deaths, with one death unclassified at publication. The divergence is the signal: armed groups are killing more civilians while losing fewer of their own to the state. That is the statistical fingerprint of a deliberate shift toward soft, high-impact targets and away from direct confrontation with security forces - the same logic that produced a 108-fatality intra-insurgent battle in Sambisa while civilian massacres continued uninterrupted elsewhere.

The national totals also conceal a severe geographic concentration. Borno (147 deaths), Zamfara (130), and Yobe (106) together account for 383 deaths - 60.7% of the national total - from a combined fraction of the month's incidents. The remaining 248 deaths are spread across 31 affected states, an average of roughly eight per state. A national figure of 631 is therefore best read as two distinct emergencies: a North-East/North-West mass-casualty crisis driven by terrorism and banditry, and a lower-lethality but far more geographically diffuse pattern of electoral, communal, and criminal violence across the rest of the country.

### DISTRIBUTION OF INCIDENTS ACROSS CLUSTERS



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026



## 4.2 THREAT CATEGORY ANALYSIS

The composition of the top five threats is itself a finding. Political Violence & Thuggery entered the table for the first time in this series, displacing the position cultism held in April and confirming that primary-season conduct, was not a sideshow to the month's violence but one of its leading categories. Cultism led to an incident volume (31) but, as ever, with a near one-to-one death ratio that reflects targeted score-settling rather than mass casualty. Kidnapping topped the abduction count (156 of the month's 273) while killing only 14 - the kidnapper wants the captive alive.

The decisive number, however, sits just outside the table. Terrorism ranked only sixth on incident volume (16) yet produced 271 deaths -16.9 per incident, against a national average of 2.25 and a cluster-two average of 3.28. One category, a fraction of the events, nearly half the dead. The lethality gap between terrorism and everything else is the clearest measure of why incident counts and death tolls tell different stories, and why the North East's 21 incidents outweigh, in human cost, the South West's 89.

## TOP 5 THREATS IN MAY 2026

| Rank | Threat Category               | Incidents | Deaths | Kidnapped | States |
|------|-------------------------------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|
| 1st  | Cultism                       | 31        | 31     | 0         | 11     |
| 2nd  | Kidnapping                    | 29        | 14     | 156       | 14     |
| 3rd  | Banditry                      | 28        | 74     | 87        | 8      |
| 4th  | Killing                       | 26        | 140    | 0         | 14     |
| 5th  | Political Violence & Thuggery | 24        | 11     | 0         | 11     |

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

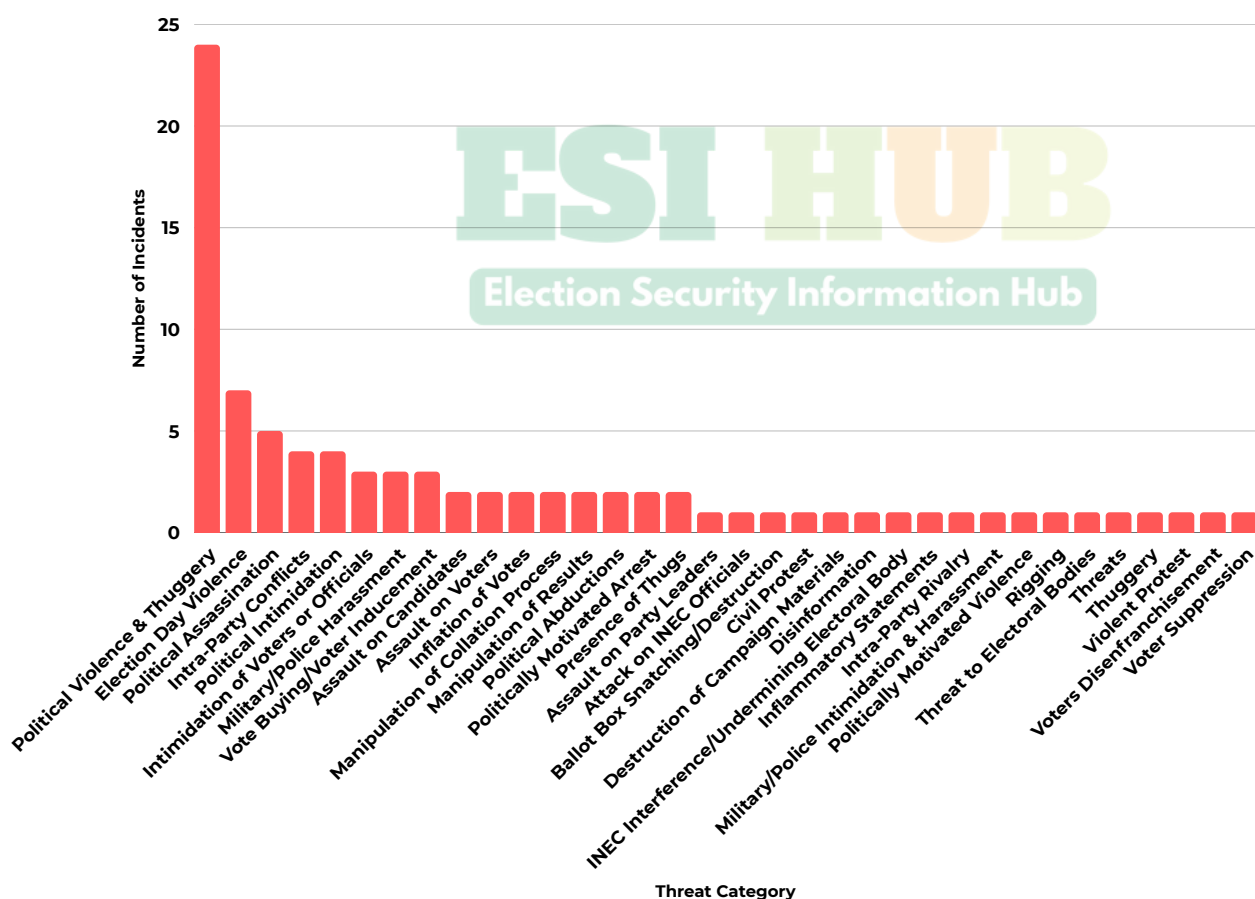
## CLUSTER 1: ELECTORAL SECURITY

| ELECTORAL SECURITY |                 |               |              |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|
| Total Incidents    | Deaths          | Kidnapped     | Injured      |
| 87                 | 19              | 3             | 54           |
| IDPs               | States Affected | LGAs Affected | Verification |
| 0                  | 21              | 49            | 100%         |

The 112% month-on-month rise in electoral incidents is the headline finding of the cluster and of the report. It is a direct product of INEC's compressed primary window, and its internal distribution is concentrated rather than diffuse: the APC alone generated 58 of the 87 incidents, across 17 states - more than every other party combined. That concentration reflects the structural reality of an incumbent party in which the value of a nomination, and therefore the incentive to seize it by force, is highest.

The verified file ranges from a fatal shooting in Lagos<sup>[44]</sup> and a machete attack on a Lagos State commissioner<sup>[45]</sup> to alleged vote inflation in Ebonyi<sup>[46]</sup> and Ondo<sup>[47]</sup>, a Kaduna aide's recorded boast of writing results in Igabi<sup>[48]</sup>, and the abduction of an INEC official during the ADC primary in Cross River<sup>[49]</sup>.

## DISTRIBUTION OF INCIDENTS ACROSS THREAT CATEGORIES



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

<sup>[44]</sup> Punch Nigeria Limited. (2026, May 17). Supporter shot dead during Lagos APC primary election. <https://punchng.com/supporter-shot-dead-during-lagos-apc-primary-election/>

<sup>[45]</sup> Observation Network. (2026, May 17). Violence during reconciliation meeting in Lagos West leads to attack on Lagos State Commissioner for Wealth Creation and Employment [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/TheTimelessUpdate/posts/apc-primaries-sanwo-olus-commissioner-macheted-hospitalisedviolence-erupted-at-t/829993966850546/>

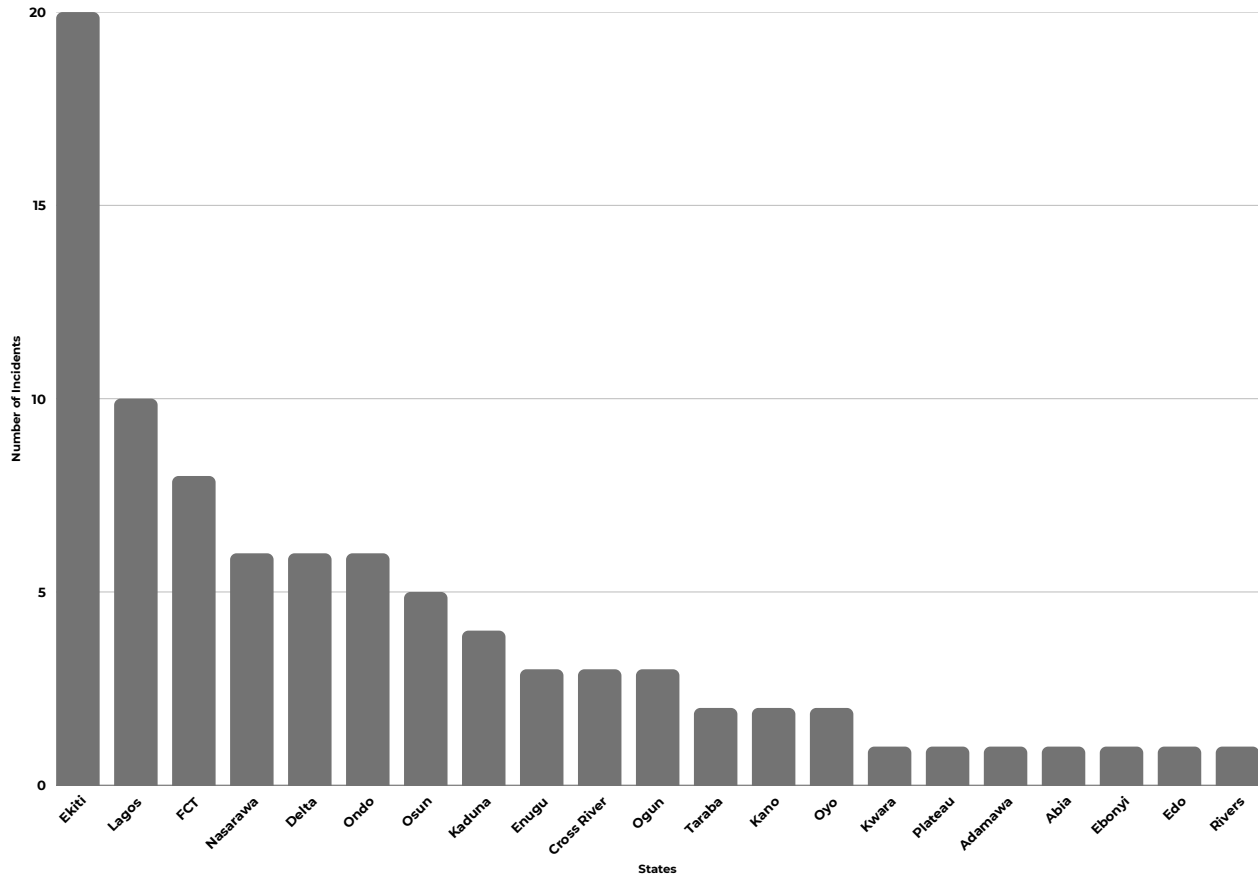
<sup>[46]</sup> Observation Network. (2026, May 17). APC primary election in Ebonyi showing alleged vote inflation and irregularities [Facebook reel]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1656355348749122>

<sup>[47]</sup> Observation Network. (2026, May 17). Alleged vote inflation during APC House of Representatives primary election in Igbotako, Ondo State [Facebook reel]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1502480354935287>

<sup>[48]</sup> ABC News Nigeria. (2026, May 29). Outrage as Kaduna governor's aide boasts of writing election results in Igabi. <https://abcnews.com.ng/outrage-as-kaduna-governors-aide-boasts-of-writing-election-results-in-igabi/>

<sup>[49]</sup> Observation Network. (2026, May 24). Abduction of INEC official during disruption of ADC primary election in Yakurr, Cross River State (Ekor) [Facebook post]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1Cp1z4YWMK/>

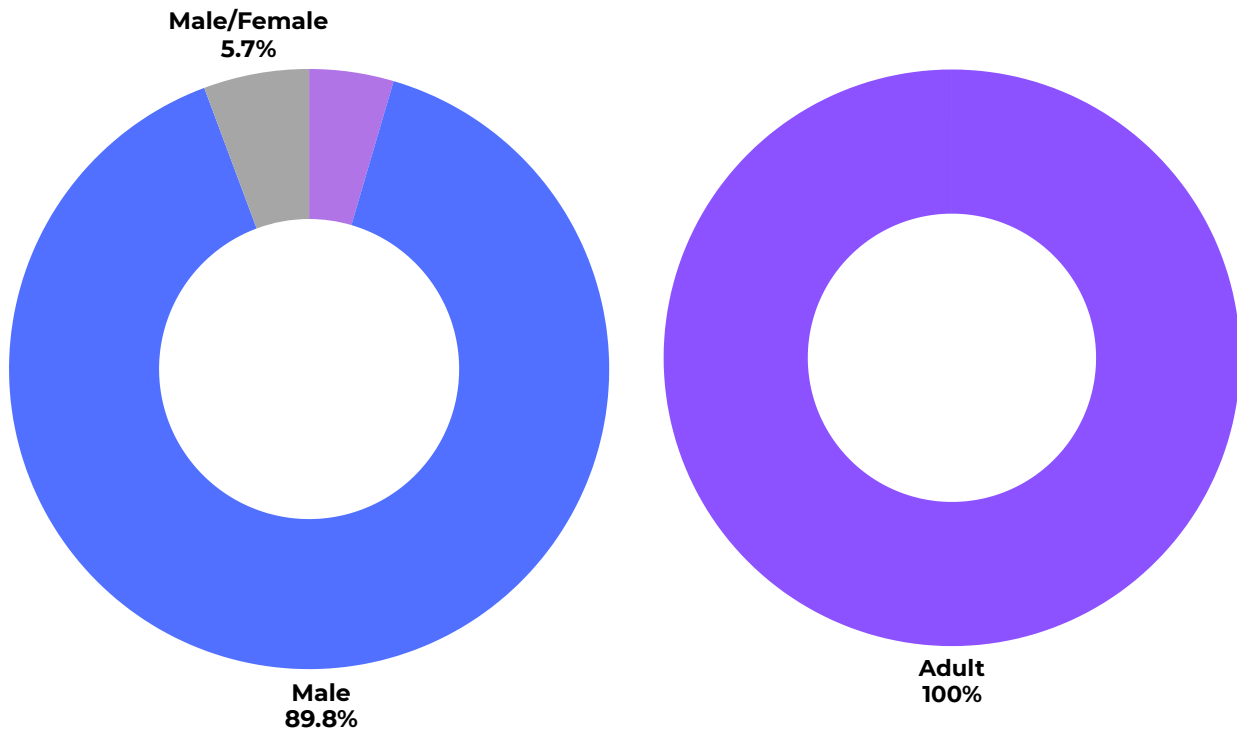
## DISTRIBUTION OF INCIDENTS ACROSS STATES



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

The Ekiti field-observer record remains the most granular electoral intelligence in the dataset. Ekiti logged **23 incidents across 10 LGAs** - the third-highest state count after Lagos (25) and Delta (17) - and across 12 distinct threat types. The verified patterns are instructive: thugs allegedly hired by a serving House of Representatives member to disrupt the Moba primary<sup>[50]</sup>; vote-buying at ₦2,000 per voter in Ikole<sup>[51]</sup> and Ekiti West<sup>[52]</sup>; three successive disruptions of the Ikole/Oye primary, initiated by an APC chieftain and escalated by an armed group invading the venue<sup>[53][54]</sup>; disinformation circulated about the Ikole result before collation closed<sup>[55]</sup>; the abduction of the LG vice chairman in Ilejemeje<sup>[56]</sup>; and an attack on a rally in Ilupeju-Ekiti<sup>[57]</sup>. Together they document party primaries in which inducement preceded the vote and intimidation replaced the count. rally in Ilupeju-Ekiti involving armed thugs (EK-2026-05-001) [Field data record].

## VICTIM DISAGGREGATION BY GENDER



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

<sup>[50]</sup> Vanguard Media Limited. (2026, May 15). Ekiti police arrest suspected political thugs, recover guns. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/05/ekiti-police-arrest-suspected-political-thugs-recover-guns/>

<sup>[51]</sup> Field Observer Report. (2026, May 6). Vote buying and voter inducement through PVC/NIN registration reward scheme in Ikole LGA, Ekiti State

<sup>[52]</sup> Field Observer Report (2026, May 7). Vote buying and voter inducement through voter card data collection in Ekiti West LGA, Ekiti State

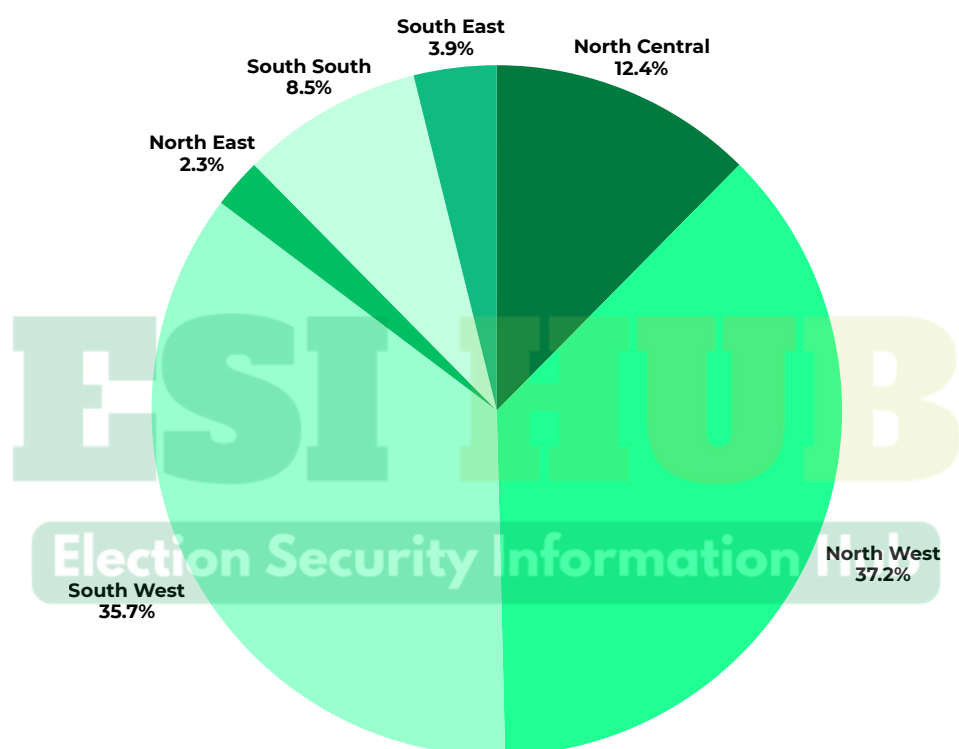
<sup>[53]</sup> Field Observer Report. (2026, May 17). Election day violence and disruption during APC House of Representatives primary, Ward 11, Ipao Ekiti, Ikole LGA (EOTS-EK-2026-05-048) [Field data record].

<sup>[54]</sup> Field Observer Report (2026, May 17). Election disruption and armed invasion during APC House of Representatives primary in Ipao, Ikole LGA, Ekiti State (EOTS-EK-2026-05-049) [Field data record].

<sup>[55]</sup> Field Observer Report. (2026, May 16). Disinformation during APC primary election in Ikole South Ward 5, Ikole LGA, Ekiti State (EOTS-EK-2026-05-042) [Field data record].

<sup>[56]</sup> The Sun Nigeria. (2026, May 21). Gunmen kidnap Ekiti LG vice chairman. <https://thesun.ng/gunmen-kidnap-ekiti-lg-vice-chairman/>

<sup>[57]</sup> Field Observer Report. (2026, May 1). Violence at APC primary



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

The impunity rate for electoral offences in May remained, as in every prior month of this series, effectively total. The sole documented enforcement action was the arrest of the armed thugs in Moba LGA, Ekiti<sup>[58]</sup>. No perpetrator of the shootings, assaults, or ballot-related violence in Lagos, Ondo, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Cross River, or Delta had been charged at publication. This might be interpreted as electoral violence in Nigeria carries no professional, legal, or political cost.

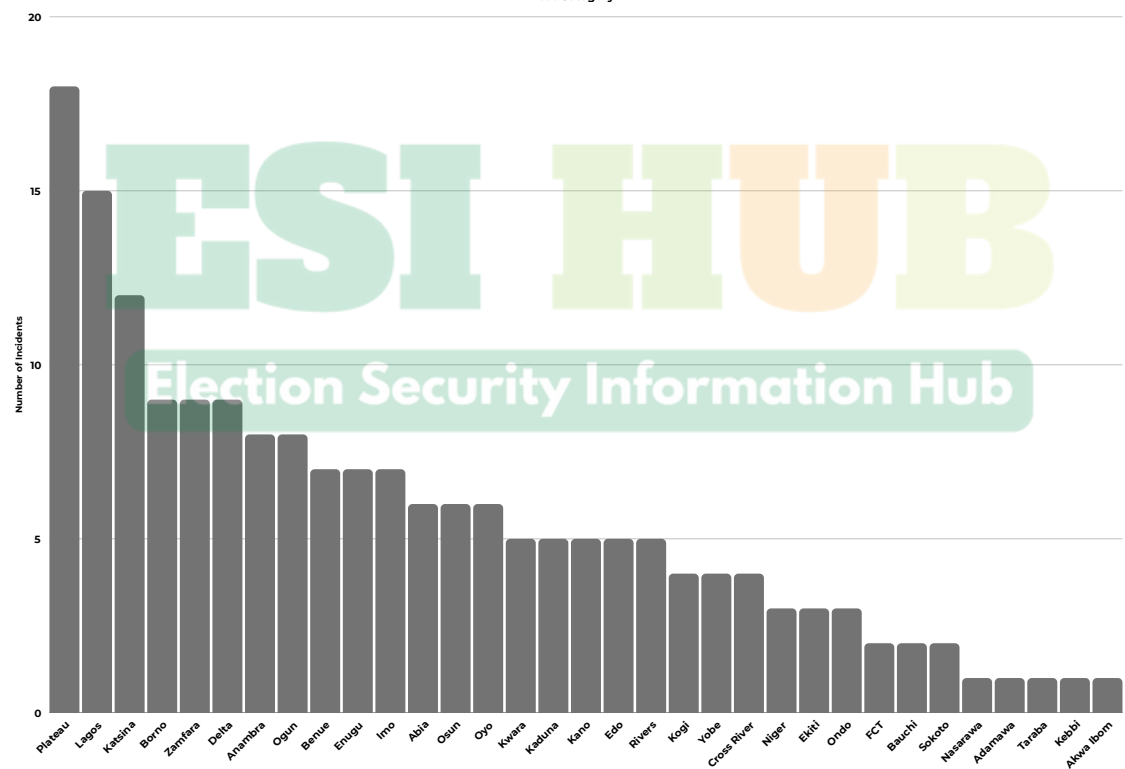
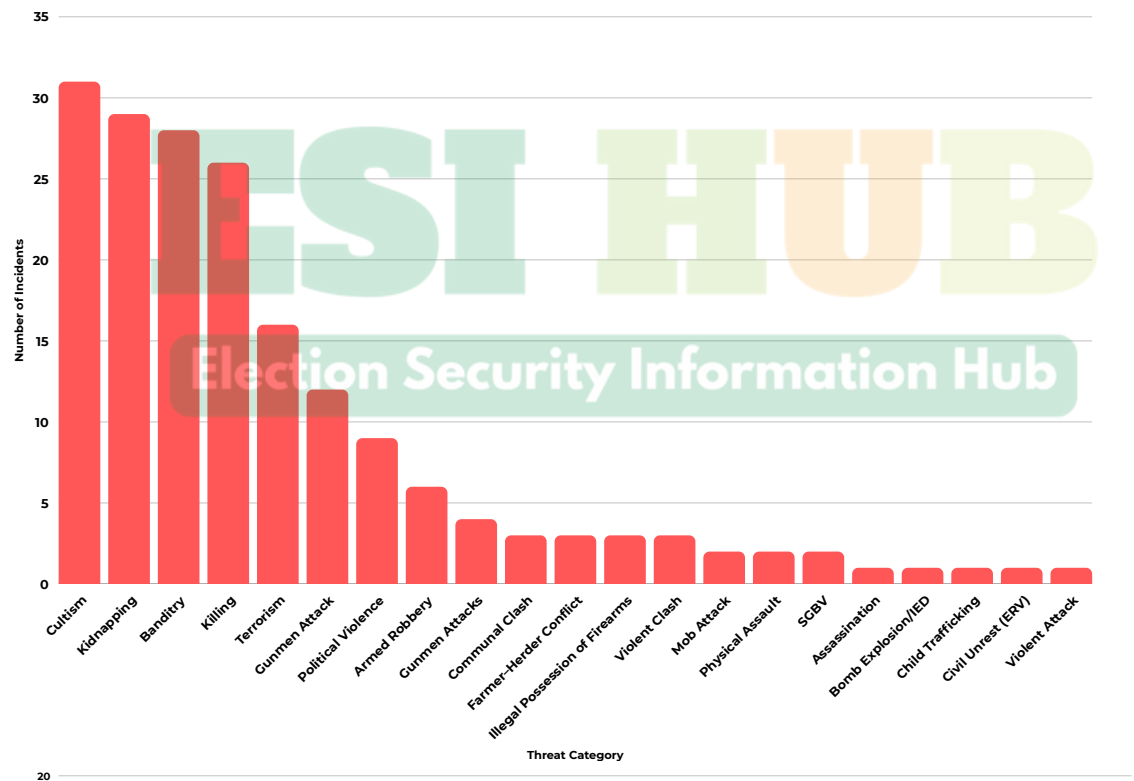
## Cluster 2: Armed Violence & Organised Crime

| ARMED VIOLENCE & ORGANISED CRIME |                 |               |              |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|
| Total Incidents                  | Deaths          | Kidnapped     | Injured      |
| 184                              | 603             | 270           | 126          |
| IDPs                             | States Affected | LGAs Affected | Verification |
| Unspecified                      | 33              | 134           | 100%         |

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

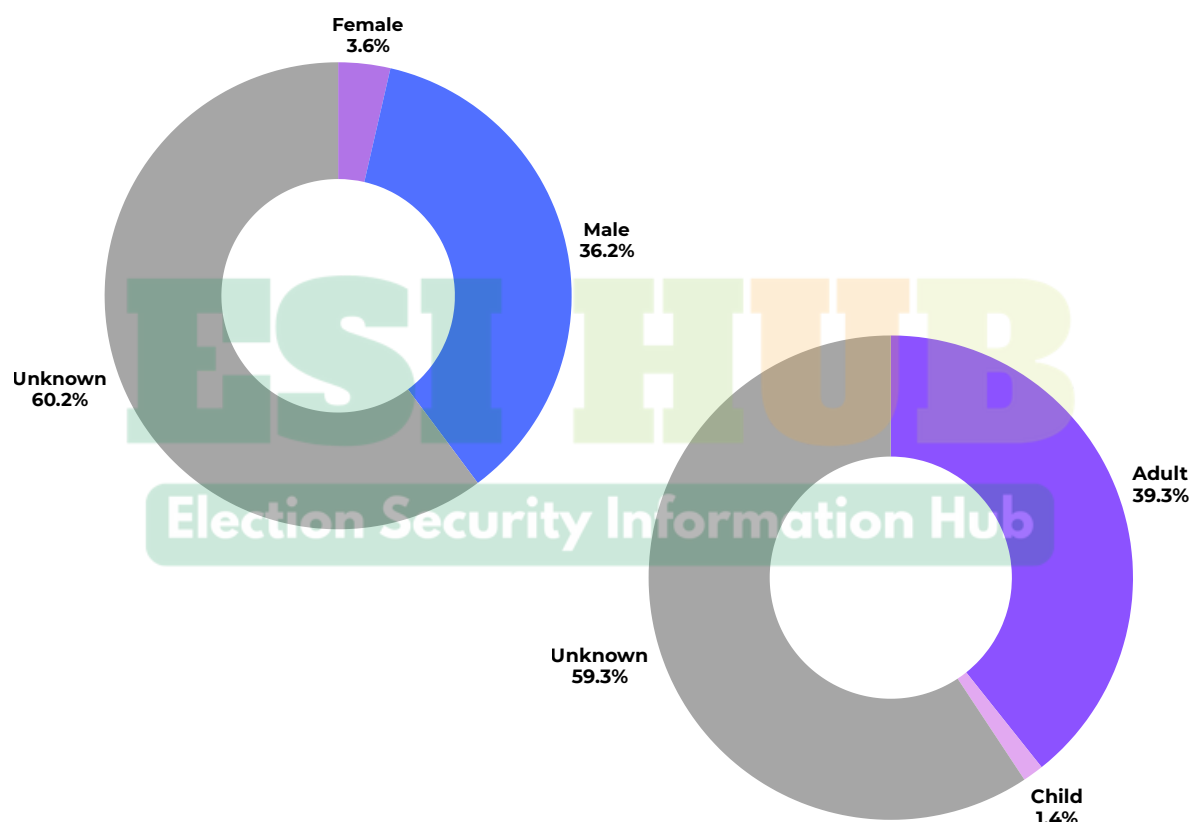
<sup>[58]</sup> Field Observer Report

This cluster carries the overwhelming majority of the month's lethality, and within it, terrorism is the dominant killer: 271 of the 603 deaths - 45% - from just 16 incidents, at 16.9 deaths per event against a cluster average of 3.28. The Yobe operations alone accounted for 102 deaths across two assaults, demonstrating that fortified military installations in the North East are neither impenetrable nor a deterrent. The Sambisa factional battle of 2 May, the deadliest single event of the month at 108 dead, was an internal contest between ISWAP and Boko Haram splinters - and its resolution carries its own danger: whichever faction consolidates, emerges as a more coherent, and therefore more capable, adversary.



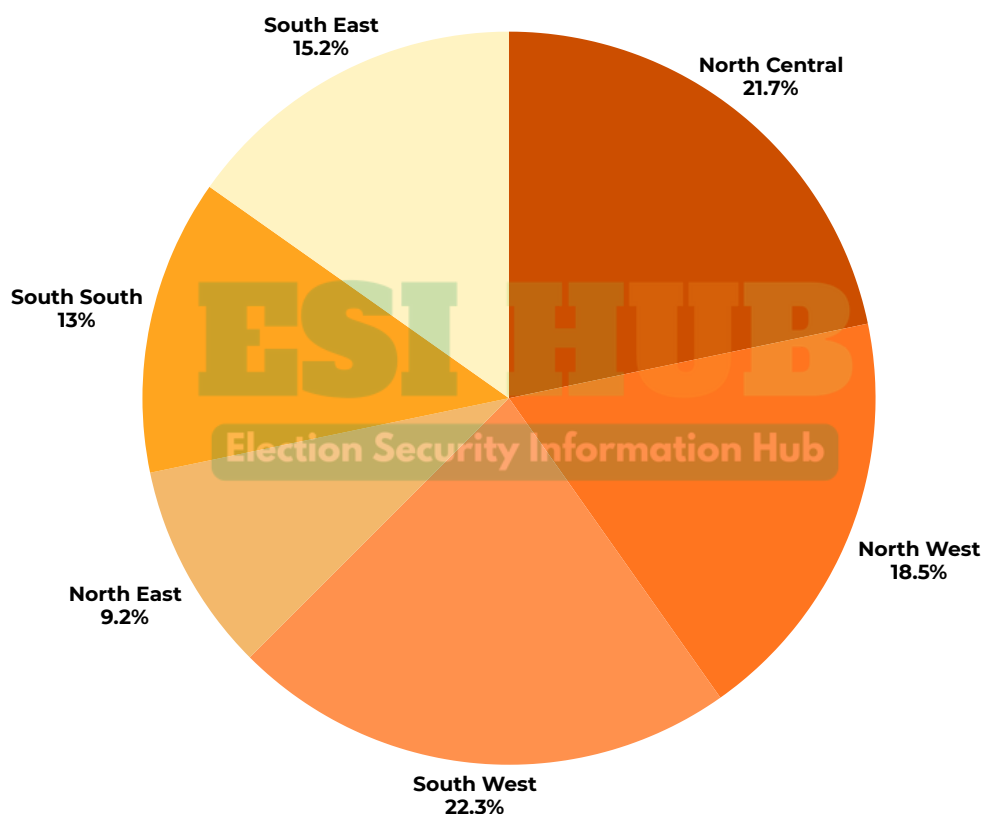
Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Banditry produced 74 deaths and 87 kidnappings across 28 incidents, concentrated in the North West and the Katsina corridor. The most consequential single allegation of the month, however, concerns the use of state force, not non-state violence. Amnesty International's claim that a military airstrike on a market in Tumfa, Zurmi LGA, killed approximately 100 civilians<sup>[59]</sup> would, if substantiated, constitute the gravest misuse of force by Nigerian security forces in this series. The military's response - neither confirmation nor denial - is itself an accountability problem. The ESI Hub records the incident strictly as an allegation requiring independent investigation by the National Human Rights Commission and the military's own oversight mechanisms, and does not treat its casualty figure as an established part of the national toll. The 2015 Zaria episode, in which a mass-casualty event involving the Army drew sustained domestic and international scrutiny<sup>[60]</sup>, is the relevant precedent: such allegations do not dissipate on official silence.



<sup>[59]</sup> Amnesty International Nigeria. (2026, May 12). Nigeria: Military airstrike on Zamfara market kills over 100 civilians. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/05/nigeria-military-airstrike-on-zamfara-market-kills-over-100-civilians/>

<sup>[60]</sup> Amnesty International. (2016, April 22). Nigeria: Unearthing the truth: Unlawful killings and mass cover-up in Zaria. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AFR01/3883/2016/en/>



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Two further incidents illuminate the kidnapping economy's internal logic. The abduction and killing of a former lawmaker in Kaduna after a reported ₦50 million ransom had been collected (KD-2026-05-001)<sup>[61]</sup> exposes the central fiction of ransom payment: it purchases nothing enforceable. Captors set the terms, take the money, and retain every option. In a market with no mechanism to bind either party to an agreement, payment is not a transaction. It is a wager - and the house keeps the stake regardless of the outcome.

### Cluster 3: Human Rights & Rule of Law (4 incidents, 7 deaths, 2 injured)

Four incidents, seven deaths, and a weight of implication far beyond the count. The cluster's centre of gravity this month is Anambra, where **two separate state-linked killings occurred within a single state in a single month**. Operatives of the state's Special Anti-Touting Squad (SASA) allegedly killed Chinyeaka Ike, a 26-year-old man, triggering a community protest<sup>[62]</sup>; days later, police were accused of beating an octogenarian to death in Nkpor<sup>[63]</sup>. In Imo, a student of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, died following an alleged assault by a Man O' War officer<sup>[64]</sup>; in Kebbi, two Customs officers were killed under contested circumstances in Bagudo<sup>[65]</sup>.

<sup>[61]</sup>The Guardian Nigeria. (2026, May 11). Kidnappers return body of ex-lawmaker after collecting ₦50m ransom. <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/metro/kidnappers-return-body-of-ex-lawmaker-after-collecting-n50m-ransom/>

<sup>[62]</sup>Daily Post Nigeria. (2026, May 1). Anambra community protests killing of man by state vigilante operatives. <https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/01/anambra-community-protests-killing-of-man-by-state-vigilante-operatives/>

<sup>[63]</sup>Punch Nigeria Limited. (2026, May 9). Police launch probe as octogenarian beaten to death in Anambra. <https://punchng.com/police-launch-probe-as-octogenarian-beaten-to-death-in-anambra/>

<sup>[64]</sup>Punch Nigeria Limited. (2026, May 31). Police arrest three for torturing Imo varsity student to death. <https://punchng.com/police-arrest-three-for-torturing-imo-varsity-student-to-death/>

<sup>[65]</sup>Punch Nigeria Limited. (2026, May 13). Two Customs officers feared killed in Kebbi attack. <https://punchng.com/two-customs-officers-feared-killed-in-kebbi/>

The Anambra pairing demands the same scrutiny applied to the Delta and Benue cases in April. Two extra-judicial deaths in one state in one month is not a coincidence; it is a pattern indicative of institutional conduct rather than individual aberration. Each of these deaths shares a structural origin with the impunity that runs through the electoral cluster: where formal accountability is understood to be optional, lethal state and para-state conduct becomes routine. The cluster is small by count and central by meaning.

#### Cluster 4: Gender & Inclusion

| GENDER & INCLUSION |                 |               |              |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|
| Total Incidents    | Deaths          | Kidnapped     | Injured      |
| 6                  | 0               | 1             | 4            |
| IDPs               | States Affected | LGAs Affected | Verification |
| Unspecified        | 5               | 6             | 100%         |

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

The cluster recorded six incidents - and the documentary bias of the series surfaced. Five of the six originated in the South: domestic violence in Delta<sup>[66]</sup> (including a fatal assault on a child<sup>[67]</sup>), a defilement arrest in Oyo<sup>[68]</sup>, a child-trafficking rescue in Delta<sup>[69]</sup>, and a sexual-assault case in Ondo (OD-2026-05-002).

The month's three mass abductions - 46 from Oriire, 15 from the Kwara church, 50 from Askira/Uba - combined 111 people into captivity, and not one of those victims is recorded in this cluster. They sit under kidnapping, terrorism, and banditry, their gendered exposure is invisible to the gender dataset. The classification gap has a direct policy cost: what is coded as banditry is funded and addressed as banditry, while the sexual violence that is statistically near-certain in protracted captivity goes unbudgeted and unaddressed. What the system does not count, the system does not protect.

<sup>[66]</sup>Linda Ikeji's Blog. (2026, May 2). Elderly man captured on camera beating wife over his side chick in Delta community (video). <https://www.lindaikojisblog.com/2026/5/elderly-man-captured-on-camera-beating-wife-over-his-side-chick-in-delta-community-video.htm>

<sup>[67]</sup>Leadership Newspapers. (2026, May). Delta man allegedly kills child after complaining he ate too much. <https://leadership.ng/delta-man-allegedly-kills-child-after-complaining-he-ate-too-much/>

<sup>[68]</sup>Leadership Newspapers. (2026, May 3). Oyo police arrest 35-year-old suspect over alleged defilement. <https://leadership.ng/oyo-police-arrest-35-year-old-suspect-over-alleged-defilement/>

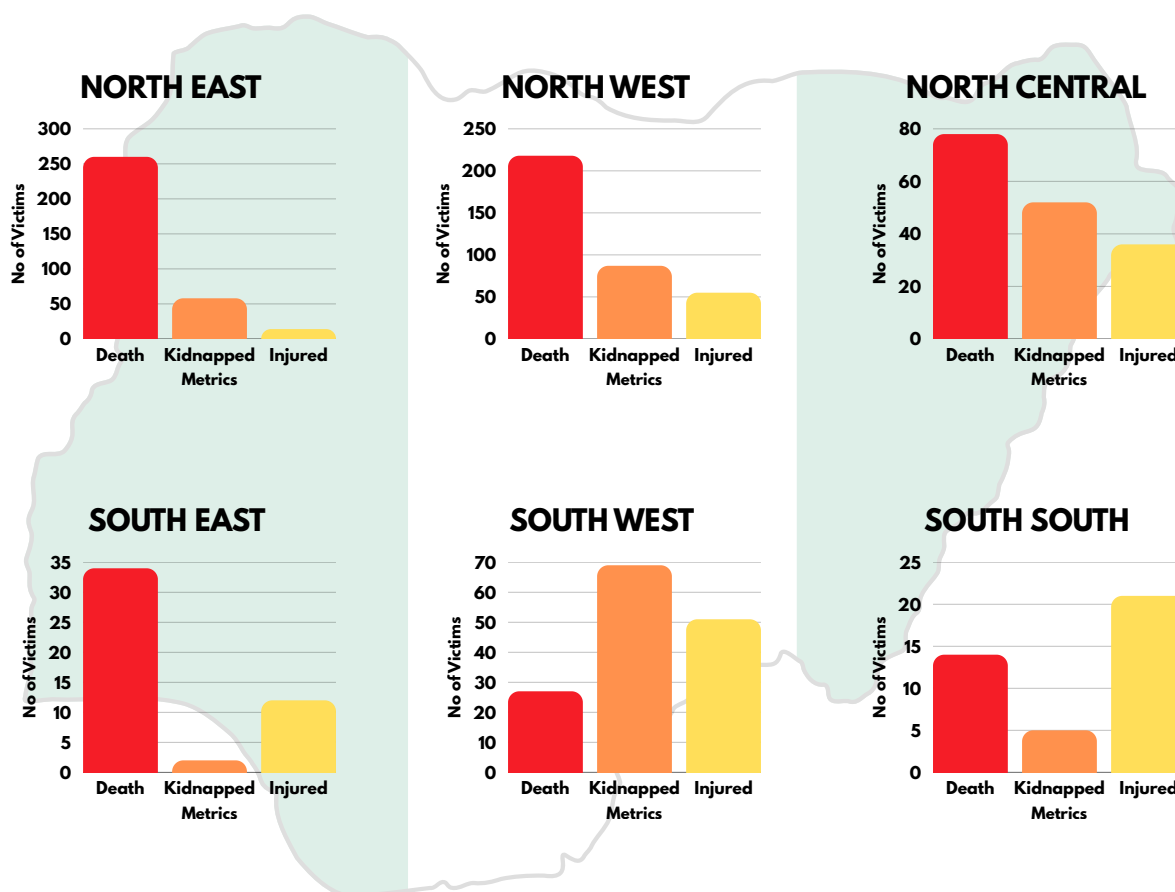
<sup>[69]</sup>Linda Ikeji's Blog. (2026, May). Police rescue abducted two-year-old child concealed inside sack, arrest suspect in Delta. <https://www.lindaikojisblog.com/2026/5/police-rescue-abducted-two-year-old-child-concealed-inside-sack-arrest-suspect-in-delta.html>

## 5. GEOPOLITICAL ZONE ANALYSIS

For the first time, the South West recorded the highest number of security incidents (89), while the North East, despite reporting the fewest incidents (21), accounted for the highest number of deaths (260). This apparent reversal is explained by the concentration of election-related violence in the South West. Of the 89 incidents recorded in the zone, 49 were electoral offences linked to the primary election period. Excluding these incidents reduces the South West's total to about 40, close to its typical monthly level.

In contrast, the North East's lower incident count masks the severity of violence in the region. Although fewer incidents occurred, they were significantly more lethal, resulting in far more fatalities than in any other zone. The underlying security crises in northern Nigeria therefore remained largely unchanged, while the temporary surge in election-related violence elevated the South West's incident count. Together, these figures show that the South West experienced the greatest volume of security events, whereas the North East endured the deadliest violence.

### Distribution of Casualties Across Geopolitical Zones



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

## 5.1 NORTH EAST (21 INCIDENTS, 260 DEATHS, 14 INJURED, 58 KIDNAPPED, 5 STATES)

**Dominant Threats:** Terrorism

**Key States:** Borno (9 incidents, 147 deaths, 50 kidnapped), Yobe (5 incidents, 106 deaths).

The North East recorded the highest per-event lethality in the country and a figure that, on its own, refutes any reading of the zone's low incident count as improvement. Yobe bore the brunt: coordinated assaults on two military bases in Buni Yadi killed 33 soldiers, and a separate strike on a military training school killed 17 officers<sup>[70]</sup>, even as troops neutralised 50 attackers across the operations. The simultaneity and target selection - multiple high-value military objectives struck in a coordinated sequence - mark a tactical sophistication that distinguishes North-East terrorism from the opportunistic banditry of the North West.

Borno's file reopened the oldest wound in this crisis. The abduction of 50 students from Askira/Uba<sup>[71]</sup>. The Sambisa factional battle<sup>[72]</sup> confirms that the insurgency is fragmented rather than defeated - and fragmentation, as noted, tends to produce more unpredictable violence as factions compete to demonstrate capacity.

**Electoral implications:** The entire zone is a high-risk environment for any electoral activity. No meaningful registration, campaign, or polling can occur in rural Borno or large parts of Yobe without dedicated security guarantees that do not currently exist. INEC should formally assess and publish which North-East LGAs are operationally accessible before the 2027 campaign season opens.

## 5.2 NORTH WEST (42 INCIDENTS, 218 DEATHS, 55 INJURED, 87 KIDNAPPED, 6 STATES)

**Dominant Threats:** Banditry and Terrorism

**Key States:** Zamfara (9 incidents, 130 deaths), Katsina (12 incidents, 53 deaths, 35 kidnapped), Kaduna (9 incidents, 13 deaths).

The North West in May sat at opposite ends of the accountability spectrum within a single zone. At one end is the Zamfara airstrike allegation, according to Amnesty International's claim that the Nigerian Air Force killed approximately 100 civilians in a market in Tumfa, Zurmi LGA. If verified, it would be the largest state-attributed mass-casualty event in this series - and Zamfara's headline figure of 130 deaths must be read in the knowledge that the allegation's casualties are neither confirmed nor incorporated into the Hub's verified national toll. The military's silence does not settle the question; it sharpens it.

At the other end is the relentless, under-scrutinised banditry of Katsina: 12 incidents, 53 deaths, and 35 abductions across eight LGAs. A market attack in the Matazu-Bakori area killed a dozen people, among them a pregnant woman; reprisal raids killed others across the same communities<sup>[73][74]</sup>.

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<sup>[70]</sup> Premium Times. (2026, May 17). Terrorists attack military training school in Yobe, kill army and police officers – Official. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/880323-terrorists-attack-military-training-school-in-yobe-kill-army-police-officers-official.html>

<sup>[71]</sup> BBC News. (2026, May 15). Suspected militants abduct students in Nigeria's Borno state. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c202vrxlwqgo>

<sup>[72]</sup> Leadership Newspapers. (2026, May). Boko Haram kills 6 in fresh Chibok attack. <https://leadership.ng/boko-haram-kills-6-in-fresh-chibok-attack/>

<sup>[73]</sup> The Sun Nigeria. (2026, May). Bandits kill 11 in reprisal attack on Katsina communities. <https://thesun.ng/bandits-kill-11-in-reprisal-attack-on-katsina-communities/>

<sup>[74]</sup> Daily Trust. (2026, May). 16 feared dead as bandits attack Katsina village. <https://dailytrust.com/16-feared-dead-as-bandits-attack-katsina-village/>

The abduction of a 300-level university student in Charanchi and of a former military spokesperson and his wife in Matazu<sup>[75]</sup> makes the point that status confers no protection in Katsina - the home state of a former president, now in its seventh year of banditry across three military operations and a federal ban on ransom payments. Seven years on, the dominant fact is continuity, not containment.

**Electoral implications:** The North West is most likely to see the most severe voter-access suppression of any zone in 2027. Rural LGAs across Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna are under conditions in which free and fair voting is not currently possible. The constitutional question raised in earlier editions of whether a result can be valid where entire LGA is inaccessible, grows more pressing with each cycle.

### 5.3 NORTH CENTRAL (56 INCIDENTS, 78 DEATHS, 36 INJURED, 52 KIDNAPPED, 7 STATES)

**Dominant Threats:** Banditry, Killing, Kidnapping

**Key States:** Plateau (19 incidents, 41 deaths), Nasarawa (7 incidents), Benue (7 incidents, 24 deaths), Kwara (6 incidents, 8 deaths, 25 kidnapped).

Plateau sustained its place in the RED tier (FSI 0.525) under compound pressure: the abduction of a Fulani community leader for a ₦2 million ransom<sup>[76]</sup>, a peace meeting that turned deadly with one killed and five injured<sup>[77]</sup>, and the party primary-related killing in Mangu where a soldier shot community members, leaving one dead and five injured<sup>[78]</sup>. The diversity of the threat - banditry, communal killing, electoral violence, and abduction in the same month - means no single response architecture can address Plateau's full risk profile; it is the zone's most complex security environment.

Kwara opened a corridor that warrants close watch. The 24 May church attack in Kwara's Ekiti LGA - three worshippers killed, 15 abducted<sup>[79]</sup> - and the abduction of ten people from the Emir's palace in Yashikira<sup>[80]</sup> drove the state to 25 kidnappings, a sharp month-on-month rise. These incidents trace the same forest boundary that connects Oyo and Kogi to the Ogbomoso operation; Kwara is not a separate problem from Oriire but the northern shoulder of the same corridor. The FCT recorded ten incidents - among them the assault on Senator Kingibe at the ADC primary<sup>[81]</sup> and a protest by Itsekiri delegates at INEC headquarters over ward delineation<sup>[82]</sup> - a reminder that the capital concentrates national political grievance into a single, dense flashpoint.

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<sup>[75]</sup>Daily Post Nigeria. (2026, May 30). Ex-military spokesperson, wife abducted in Katsina. <https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/30/ex-military-spokesperson-wife-abducted-in-katsina/>

<sup>[76]</sup>Daily Post Nigeria. (2026, May 4). Gunmen abduct Fulani community leader in Plateau, demand ₦2m ransom. <https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/04/gunmen-abduct-fulani-community-leader-in-plateau-demand-n2m-ransom/>

<sup>[77]</sup>Daily Post Nigeria. (2026, May 8). Peace meeting turns deadly in Plateau as one person killed, five injured. <https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/08/peace-meeting-turns-deadly-in-plateau-as-one-person-killed-five-injured>

<sup>[78]</sup>Daily Post Nigeria. (2026, May 18). One killed, five injured as APC House of Reps primary turns violent in Plateau. <https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/18/one-killed-five-injured-as-apc-house-of-reps-primary-turns-violent-in-plateau/>

<sup>[79]</sup>Daily Trust. (2026, May). Murder of prominent cleric triggers crisis in Kwara community. <https://dailytrust.com/murder-of-prominent-cleric-triggers-crisis-in-kwara-community/>

<sup>[80]</sup>The Guardian Nigeria. (2026, May). Gunmen kidnap 10 at Emir's palace in Kwara. <https://guardian.ng/breakingnews/gunmen-kidnap-10-at-emirs-palace-in-kwara/>

<sup>[81]</sup>Leadership Newspapers. (2026, May 24). Senator Kingibe says she, others attacked during ADC primary. <https://leadership.ng/senator-kingibe-says-she-others-attacked-during-adc-primary/>

<sup>[82]</sup>Naija News. (2026, May 25). Thugs attack Itsekiri youths at INEC headquarters. <https://www.naijanews.com/2026/05/25/thugs-attack-itsekiri-youths-inec-headquarters>

## 5.4 SOUTH WEST (89 INCIDENTS, 27 DEATHS, 51 INJURED, 69 KIDNAPPED, 6 STATES)

**Dominant Threats:** Political Violence & Thuggery (primary-driven), Cultism, Kidnapping

**Key States:** Key states: Lagos (25 incidents), Ekiti (23), Osun (11), Ogun (11), Ondo (10), Oyo (9).

The South West's arrival at the top of the incident table is the month's signature structural event, and its cause is unambiguous: 49 of its 89 incidents were electoral offences generated by the party primary season. But the figure is not a story about volume alone. The concentration of so much violence in so short a window, across so many wards simultaneously, reveals party primaries' violence for what it is - not spontaneous disorder but an organised system. It requires logistics (hired thugs, weapons, vehicles, as the Moba arms cache<sup>[83]</sup> made plain); it requires coordination (simultaneous disruptions across Mushin<sup>[84]</sup>, Somolu, Kosofe<sup>[85]</sup>, Alimosho<sup>[86]</sup>, Ikole, and Mangu<sup>[87]</sup> in the same 48 hours); and it depends on impunity (no arrests in almost every case). Logistics, coordination, and impunity are the three components of organised electoral violence wherever it has taken root, and the South West displayed all three in May.

**Electoral implications:** Lagos's entry into the high-risk tier is the consequential development. As the country's largest voter base, its economic centre, and the operational heart of the ruling party, Lagos cannot absorb party primary's-grade political violence without national consequence. The violence will not end with the primary window; it will recalibrate around the senatorial and gubernatorial contests to come. A zone long treated as the calm flank of Nigeria's security map can no longer be planned for as such.

### EKITI

Ekiti was the most closely observed state in the country in May, and the field record it produced is the clearest window in the dataset onto how a primary is captured. The state logged **23 incidents across 10 LGAs and 12 threat types**, of which 18 were electoral or directly election-adjacent. The defining incident was the **Moba LGA hotel operation**<sup>[88]</sup>: police arrested seven armed thugs who admitted being hired by Hon. Davidson Akinlayo, a serving House of Representatives member, to disrupt the APC primaries; four more suspects were detained in an unregistered vehicle, and officers recovered two pump-action guns, a Beretta pistol, and 13 rounds of live ammunition. Governor Oyeibanji subsequently suspended an aide linked to the case. This is the rarest object in the entire May file - an electoral-violence incident with arrests, a named alleged sponsor, and recovered evidence. Whether it proceeds to prosecution is the single most important accountability test of the 2027 cycle to date.

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<sup>[83]</sup> Premium Times Nigeria. (2026, May 24). Police recover cache of arms in Ekiti ahead of APC primary election. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/882198-police-recover-cache-of-arms-in-ekiti-ahead-of-apc-primary-election.html>

<sup>[84]</sup> Premium Times Nigeria. (2026, May 17). Violence, irregularities characterise APC Reps primaries in Lagos. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/880170-violence-irregularities-characterise-apc-reps-primaries-in-lagos.html>

<sup>[85]</sup> Guardian Nigeria. (2026, May 21). Crises mar APC Assembly primary in Kosofe. <https://guardian.ng/news/crises-mar-apc-assembly-primary-in-kosofe/>

<sup>[86]</sup> Punch Nigeria Limited. (2026, May 16). Police arrest 10 over violence at Lagos APC primaries. <https://punchng.com/police-arrest-10-over-violence-at-lagos-apc-primaries/>

<sup>[87]</sup> Nigeria Info FM. (2026, May 18). Violence disrupts APC primaries in Lagos, Plateau; one killed, 10 arrested. <https://www.nigeriainfo.fm/lagos/news/homepagelagos/violence-disrupts-apc-primaries-in-lagos-plateau-one-killed-10-arrested/>

<sup>[88]</sup> Vanguard Media Limited. (2026, May 15). Ekiti police arrest suspected political thugs, recover guns. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/05/ekiti-police-arrest-suspected-political-thugs-recover-guns/>

Alongside it, the Ikole/Oye Federal Constituency primary was disrupted three times<sup>[89]</sup> - by an APC chieftain's altercation, then by an armed group invading the venue - leaving three injured and the result uncollated, while disinformation about the outcome circulated before collation closed. Vote-buying at ₦2,000 a head ran in Ikole and Ekiti West before voting began. Read against Ekiti's documented history - the 2014 'Ekiti-gate' recordings, the contested 2018 and 2022 governorship polls - the May primary is not a departure but a continuation of state-coordinated manipulation whose central lesson, that such methods carry no legal consequence, has plainly not been unlearned.

## OSUN

Osun broke from its quieter April register, recording 11 incidents across five LGAs whose political significance outruns their count. With a closely contested governorship cycle approaching - Governor Ademola Adeleke's PDP took the seat from the APC in 2022, affirmed by the Supreme Court in 2023 - the APC retains deep ward-level organisation and financial reach. May saw competition between the APC and the Accord Party escalate from property to lethality: a billboard-destruction clash<sup>[90]</sup>, the Governor's public accusation against the NURTW leadership<sup>[91]</sup>, and decisively, the killing of the son of an Accord Party women's leader<sup>[92]</sup>. Accord is not Osun's principal opposition, which makes the lethal targeting of its members a signal aimed at all opposition: the cost of contesting the preferred outcome is being set, and it is being set high. Osun's FSI of 0.276 reflects exactly this compounded, pre-electoral pressure.

## 5.5 SOUTH SOUTH (37 INCIDENTS, 14 DEATHS, 21 INJURED, 5 KIDNAPPED, 5 STATES)

**Dominant Threats:** Cultism, Political Violence.

**Key States:** Delta (17 incidents), Cross River (7), Edo (6).

The South South in May was where the party primary season's politics collided with the zone's standing repertoire of cultism and targeted political attack. In Rivers, masked gunmen assassinated a politician in a hotel attack in Eleme, coded in the EOTS as a political assassination<sup>[93]</sup>. Cross River produced the **first ballot-box seizure at a party primary**, at the ADC exercise in Yakurr LGA, an INEC official was abducted, and ballot boxes were taken<sup>[94]</sup>. This is a direct assault on the machinery of the vote itself, and a marker of how exposed INEC personnel have become. Delta led the zone with 17 incidents across 11 LGAs and 10 threat types, including APC primary violence in Isoko North and Aniocha North<sup>[95]</sup>. The zone's defining risk is the fusion of party rivalry with pre-existing armed networks, which lends ordinary primary disputes an unusual capacity for lethal escalation.

<sup>[89]</sup> Field Observer Report. (2026, May 16). Political violence and thuggery disrupted APC primary election at Ward 10, Oke Ayedun (Ikole LGA), Ekiti State.

<sup>[90]</sup> Punch Nigeria Limited. (2026, May 8). Osun APC, Accord clash over billboard destruction. <https://punchng.com/osun-apc-accord-clash-over-billboard-destruction/>

<sup>[91]</sup> Vanguard Media Limited. (2026, May 11). Osun 2026: NURTW boss extricates self from political violence. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/05/osun-2026-nurtw-boss-extricates-self-from-political-violence/>

<sup>[92]</sup> Punch Nigeria Limited. (2026, May 9). Gunmen kill Osun Accord Party women leader's son. <https://punchng.com/gunmen-kill-osun-accord-party-women-leaders-son/>

<sup>[93]</sup> The Guardian Nigeria. (2026, May). Masked gunmen kill Rivers politician in hotel attack. <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/metro/masked-gunmen-kill-rivers-politician-in-hotel-attack/>

<sup>[94]</sup> *ibid*

<sup>[95]</sup> Leadership Newspapers. (2026, May 26). Violence Erupts At APC Senatorial Primary Venues In Delta North, South. Leadership. Retrieved from <https://leadership.ng/violence-erupts-at-apc-senatorial-primary-venues-in-delta-north-south/>

## 5.6 SOUTH EAST (36 INCIDENTS, 34 DEATHS, 12 INJURED, 2 KIDNAPPED, 5 STATES)

**Dominant Threats:** Cultism, Killing, Gunmen Attacks

**Key States:** Anambra (10 incidents), Enugu (10), Imo (8 incidents, 14 deaths).

The South East posted its highest monthly incident count of 2026, dispelling any reading of the zone's habitual low numbers as security rather than under-monitoring. Imo carried the zone's lethality: a gunman's attack in Ohaji/Egbema killed eight and injured two<sup>[96]</sup>, continuing a pattern of assaults on security forces and communities alike, while the rape and killing of a nursing student in Owerri West<sup>[97]</sup> and the death of the FUTO student registered the zone's human-rights exposure. The political file showed the same primary-season fractures seen elsewhere: NDC primaries in Abia and Enugu collapsed into violence or dissolution, and armed enforcement of Biafra Day in Anambra<sup>[98]</sup> drew a security response, a reminder that non-state coercion, more than open incident volume, remains the zone's defining electoral risk.

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<sup>[96]</sup> Vanguard News. (2026, May 31). Gunmen kill eight, burn houses in Imo community. Vanguard. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/05/gunmen-kill-eight-burn-houses-in-imo-community/>

<sup>[97]</sup> Vanguard News. (2026, May 22). Hoodlums kill Imo nursing student, 1 arrested. Vanguard. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/05/hoodlums-kill-imo-nursing-student-1-arrested/>

<sup>[98]</sup> National Politics & New Update. (2026 May 4). Facebook group post [Status update]. Facebook. [https://web.facebook.com/groups/924169070940034/posts/2724487155177642/?\\_rdc=1&\\_rdr](https://web.facebook.com/groups/924169070940034/posts/2724487155177642/?_rdc=1&_rdr)

## 6. KEY DRIVER ANALYSIS & EMERGING DYNAMICS

### 6.1 THE SECURITY LANDSCAPE: A STRUCTURAL DIAGNOSIS

Nigeria entered May 2026 carrying the heaviest aggregate security burden of any state in West Africa<sup>[99]</sup>, and the trend lines were pointing the wrong way. Independent conflict monitoring recorded a sharp escalation through 2025: Nextier's database logged more than 1,270 violent incidents and over 4,650 casualties for the year, with banditry alone accounting for roughly 600 incidents and 2,700 casualties - a steep rise on 2024.<sup>[100]</sup> The Global Terrorism Index, as relayed by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, recorded a 46% increase in Nigerian terrorism fatalities in 2025.<sup>[101]</sup> The opening weeks of 2026 sustained the trajectory: one widely cited tally counted more than 1,250 violence-related deaths between 1 January and 10 February alone, and by mid-June the year had already seen an unprecedented run of senior military fatalities, with multiple serving commanders and a retired general killed by terrorists and bandits.<sup>[102][103]</sup> This is the baseline against which May's events must be read - not an anomaly, but an acceleration of an established and worsening pattern.

The threat ecology comprises five overlapping theatres. In the **North East**, the Boko Haram successor JAS and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) continue a coordinated insurgency against military and civilian targets in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, marked in 2026 by a renewed capacity to overrun fortified positions. In the **North West**, banditry has matured from cattle-rustling into a kidnapping-and-extortion industry<sup>[104]</sup>; by some estimates tens of thousands of armed men operate across Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, and Kebbi, and SBM Intelligence recorded nearly 3,000 abductions in the zone in a single twelve-month window, more than 60% of the national total.<sup>[105][106]</sup> The **North Central / Middle Belt** carries the country's longest-running communal conflict - farmer-herder violence driven by competition over land and water, which the UNODC links to the displacement of some 1.5 million people.<sup>[107]</sup> The **South East** sees continued separatist-linked violence associated with elements of the pro-Biafra movement and its armed offshoots, including enforcement of sit-at-home orders. And across all zones runs the connective tissue of political and criminal violence - cultism, communal reprisal, and the thuggery that intensifies around every electoral cycle.

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<sup>[99]</sup> The Guardian. (2026, March 19). Jihadist violence in Nigeria and DRC rose sharply last year even as global deaths from terror fell. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/mar/19/jihadist-violence-nigeria-drc-terrorism-index>

<sup>[100]</sup> Nextier (PCVE-KIRH)

<sup>[101]</sup> Global Terrorism Index figures as reported by UNODC (2026) — a 46% rise in Nigerian terrorism fatalities in 2025, to roughly 750. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/latest-news/2026-strengthening-nigerias-fight-against-terrorism.html>

<sup>[102]</sup> Africa Defense Forum. (2026, February 20). Nigeria Faces Growing Terror Threat. <https://adf-magazine.com/2026/02/nigeria-faces-growing-terror-threat/>

<sup>[103]</sup> Daily Post Nigeria. (2026, June 15). Anger as Nigeria loses 7 military commanders to terrorism, banditry. <https://dailypost.ng/2026/06/15/anger-as-nigeria-loses-7-military-commanders-to-terrorism-banditry/>

<sup>[104]</sup> Schouten, P., & Barnett, J. (2025). Divided, they rule? The emerging banditry landscape in northwest Nigeria. Danish Institute for International Studies. <https://research.diiis.dk/en/publications/divided-they-rule-the-emerging-banditry-landscape-in-northwest-ni/>

<sup>[105]</sup> Africa Defense Forum. (2026, January 20). Nigeria's Triple Threat. <https://adf-magazine.com/2026/01/nigerias-triple-threat/>

<sup>[106]</sup> SBM Intelligence, cited in Human Rights Watch, World Report 2026: Nigeria — 2,938 abductions recorded in the North West, July 2024–June 2025. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/nigeria>

<sup>[107]</sup> UN Office on Drugs and Crime. (2026, April). Strengthening Nigeria's Fight Against Terrorism. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/latest-news/2026-strengthening-nigerias-fight-against-terrorism.html>

What makes the 2026 landscape distinct from earlier years is not the existence of these theatres but their convergence and mobility. Analysts at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies recorded, for the first time, attacks inside Nigeria claimed by the Sahelian JNIM coalition that killed soldiers - in the forested belt bordering Benin and the Nigerian states of Kwara and Niger, the same belt in which JNIM's ally Ansaru operates. The Combating Terrorism Center's detailed study of jihadi diffusion traced the movement of a Boko Haram-linked group under the commander Mahmuda across a near-contiguous chain of forest reserves spanning Niger, Kwara, and Oyo, abutting the Benin border and reaching toward Old Oyo National Park. These are not isolated findings; they are the analytical foundation for understanding why violence that was once containable by region is now a national transmission problem.

## 6.2 THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE: A STRUCTURAL DIAGNOSIS

Nigeria's politics in May 2026 was defined by two simultaneous processes: the consolidation of the 2027 contest into recognisable blocs, and the violence that the contest's internal mechanics generated. The opposition realignment that had been forming since mid-2025 reached a turning point. The African Democratic Congress (ADC) had been adopted in July 2025 as a coalition vehicle for a remarkably broad set of figures - Atiku Abubakar, Peter Obi, Nasir El-Rufai, David Mark, Rauf Aregbesola, Rotimi Amaechi, and others - united by the single objective of unseating President Bola Tinubu.<sup>[108][109]</sup> By early May 2026, that coalition had fractured: amid disputes over the presidential ticket and allegations of a 'dollarised' primary, Peter Obi and Rabiul Kwankwaso exited the ADC for the emergent National Democratic Congress (NDC), splitting the opposition into competing platforms.<sup>[110][111][112]</sup>

Against this fragmented opposition stands an incumbent APC with the advantages of federal patronage, incumbency, and organisational depth - and, in May, the heaviest internal-violence footprint of any party. The compression of the primary season into INEC's narrow window turned intra-party contests into open conflict. Commentators across the Nigerian press characterised the May primaries as a systemic failure of internal party democracy: candidate imposition, delegate-list manipulation, vote-buying, and thuggery were widely documented, and the controversies have begun moving toward the courts in a wave of pre-election litigations.<sup>[113][114][115]</sup> The Electoral Act 2026 mandates direct primaries or consensus, but enforcement of its provisions - particularly against inducement and intimidation - remained, as in prior cycles, largely theoretical.

<sup>[108]</sup>The Africa Report. (2025, November 4). Nigeria 2027: Atiku, Obi's new alliance faces six hurdles to unseat Tinubu. <https://www.theafricareport.com/387422/>

<sup>[109]</sup>Within Nigeria. (2026, June 4). Why Atiku Abubakar Left PDP for ADC in Nigeria's Opposition Realignment 2026. <https://www.withinnigeria.com/2026/06/04/why-atiku-abubakar-left-pdp-for-adc-in-nigerias-opposition-realignment-2026/>

<sup>[110]</sup>Daily Post Nigeria. (2026, May 4). 2027: Coalition collapses as ADC presidential ticket splits opposition leaders. <https://dailypost.ng/2026/05/04/2027-coalition-collapses-as-adc-presidential-ticket-splits-opposition-leaders/>

<sup>[111]</sup>Within Nigeria. (2026, May 6). 2027 Election Update: What Obi and Kwankwaso joining NDC means for APC, ADC and PDP. <https://www.withinnigeria.com/2026/05/06/2027-election-update-what-obi-and-kwankwaso-joining-ndc-means-for-apc-adc-and-pdp/>

<sup>[112]</sup>AllAfrica. (2026, May 5). Inside Nigeria's Opposition Realignment — How ADC's Breakdown, NDC's Rise, Elite Rivalries Could Shape 2027. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202605050140.html>

<sup>[113]</sup>ThisDay. (2026, May 20). APC Primaries: Dangerous Erosion of Democratic Values. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/2026/05/20/apc-primaries-dangerous-erosion-of-democratic-values/>

<sup>[114]</sup>AllAfrica / analysis. (2026, June 2). Nigeria: Flawed Primaries Portend Danger for 2027 Elections. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202606020248.html>

<sup>[115]</sup>P.M. News. (2026, May 13). Editorial: How Nigeria can end Violence and Bloodshed during Party Primaries. <https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2026/05/13/editorial-how-nigeria-can-end-violence-and-bloodshed-during-party-primaries/>

The institutional backdrop matters as much as the party dynamics. The Independent National Electoral Commission, under its chairman Professor Joash Amupitan, faces a credibility test that begins not in 2027 but now, in how it responds to documented primary-season abuses and to direct attacks on its own personnel and materials. The National Security Adviser's office and the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security have publicly committed to confronting thuggery and vote-buying ahead of the off-cycle Ekiti and Osun governorship polls and the 2027 general election.<sup>[116]</sup> Whether those commitments translate into prosecutions - the single variable that has been absent from every prior cycle - is the open question on which the credibility of the entire 2027 process rests.<sup>[117]</sup>

### 6.3. TIER ONE - STRUCTURAL (ROOT) DRIVERS

Structural drivers are the deep conditions that make violence cheap to start, profitable to sustain, and slow to reverse. They do not, by themselves, cause any particular attack; they constitute the environment in which attacks become rational choices for those who carry them out. Six are decisive in the Nigerian case.

#### 6.3.1 UNGOVERNED SPACE AND THE FOREST-CORRIDOR GEOGRAPHY

The most important physical fact about Nigerian insecurity is the existence of vast, lightly governed territory - forest reserves, national parks, and border belts where the state collects no taxes, delivers no services, and maintains no continuous security presence. Research consistently identifies these ungoverned spaces as the structural enabler of both jihadist recruitment and arms proliferation, particularly across the North West.<sup>[118]</sup> What May 2026 made unmistakable is that these spaces are not isolated pockets but a connected network. The Combating Terrorism Center's mapping shows a near-contiguous chain of forest reserves running through Niger, Kwara, and Oyo to the edge of Old Oyo National Park and the Benin border - terrain across which the Mahmuda group moved with mobility the state could not match. The Africa Center independently documented Ansaru's operational shift from Kaduna toward Kwara and Niger, narrowing the distance to the international frontier.

This geography explains why suppression in one area produces displacement rather than defeat. A forest corridor is not a front line; it is a circulatory system. Captives can be rotated between woodland camps in Kaduna, Niger, and Kogi to evade patrols, and fighters dislodged from one reserve resurface in the next.<sup>[119]</sup> The strategic implication is that no state-by-state response can succeed against a threat organised around inter-state terrain. The corridor connecting the North to the South West and, via the Niger River belt in Kogi, to the South East, is now the single most important geographic driver of violence diffusion in the country.<sup>[120]</sup>

<sup>[116]</sup>Leadership Newspapers. (2026, February 7). Federal Govt Set To Crush Political Thuggery, Vote Buying — Ribadu. <https://leadership.ng/federal-govt-set-to-crush-political-thuggery-vote-buying-ribadu/>

<sup>[117]</sup>Naija News. (2026, May 10). 2027: 'No Political Office Worth Blood Of Innocent Nigerians' — Analyst Warns. <https://www.naijanews.com/2026/05/10/2027-political-office-blood-of-nigerians/>

<sup>[118]</sup>Quantum Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities. (2026). Ungoverned Spaces as Structural Drivers of Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferation in Nigeria. <https://www.qjssh.com/index.php/qjssh/article/view/1139>

<sup>[119]</sup>Truth Nigeria. (2026, March 9). Ansaru-Linked Terrorists Kidnap Christians, Civilians Across Kogi-Kwara Forest Corridor. <https://truthnigeria.com/2026/03/ansaru-linked-terrorists-kidnap-christians-civilians-across-kogi-kwara-forest-corridor/>

<sup>[120]</sup>Prima News. (2026, June). Terrorists Dislodged From North Migrate to Southern Nigeria. <https://primanews.org/terrorists-dislodged-from-north-migrate-to-southern-nigeria/>

### 6.3.2 THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF POVERTY, YOUTH, AND DEMOGRAPHIC PRESSURE

Nigeria's violence is sustained by an effectively limitless supply of recruitable young men for whom armed activity is a rational economic choice in the absence of alternatives. Analysts across the political spectrum converge on this point: the youths deployed as political thugs and as foot-soldiers for armed groups are, in large part, products of joblessness, poverty, and manipulation by those with resources to spend<sup>[121]</sup>. The same labour pool serves the bandit gang, the cult, the insurgent cell, and the political godfather - which is why the categories blur. A young man's path from unemployment into a kidnapping gang and from there into election-day thuggery is short, and the wage differentials are real.

This is a demographic driver as much as an economic one. A very large and rapidly growing youth population, concentrated in regions with the weakest formal economies and the thinnest state presence<sup>[122]</sup>, produces a structural mismatch between the number of young people entering the labour market and the opportunities available to them. Where that mismatch coincides with ungoverned space and cheap weapons, the result is a durable recruitment pipeline that no single counter-operation can drain. It is the reason every credible analysis of Nigerian insecurity - including the federal government's own framing - pairs kinetic measures with calls for youth empowerment, vocational training, and rehabilitation. The pipeline is the supply side of the entire conflict system.

### 6.3.3 FOOD INSECURITY AND THE CLIMATE-CONFLICT NEXUS

Food insecurity is both a consequence of violence and a driver of it, and in 2026 the relationship tightened into a self-reinforcing loop. The Cadre Harmonisé analysis projected that some 34.7 million Nigerians would face acute food insecurity by the June–August 2026 lean season, and the FAO identified Nigeria as facing one of the largest single-country increases in food insecurity in the world, with roughly 4.1 million additional people projected to fall into acute hunger.<sup>[123][124]</sup> FEWS NET was explicit about the lead cause: conflict is the primary driver of acute food insecurity across northern Nigeria, with attacks and abductions in early 2026 exceeding both seasonal norms and the five-year average.<sup>[125]</sup>

The mechanism is straightforward and vicious. Insecurity drives farmers off their land, suppresses planting and harvest, and cuts the movement of goods to market; the resulting scarcity and price inflation deepen the rural poverty that feeds recruitment; and hungrier, poorer, more desperate populations are both easier to mobilise and less able to resist predation.

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<sup>[121]</sup> Premium Times. (2025, September 5). 80m Nigerian youth unemployed - Report (citing the State of the Nigerian Youth Report 2025 and NBS data: 40.1% of Nigerians, about 82.9 million people, live in poverty). Premium Times. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/818817-80m-nigerian-youth-unemployed-report.html>

<sup>[122]</sup> Abdullahi, Y. A. (2023). Youth bulge, rural banditry and ungoverned spaces in Nigeria. *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy*, 13(2). <https://unjpe.com/index.php/UNJPE/article/view/238>

<sup>[123]</sup> Cadre Harmonisé / Nigeria Food Security Sector, reported in *The Guardian Nigeria*. (2025, November). 34.7 million Nigerians projected to face food insecurity by June 2026. <https://guardian.ng/news/34-7-million-nigerians-projected-to-face-food-insecurity-by-june-2026/>

<sup>[124]</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization, cited in *Daily Post Nigeria*. (2026, April 24). Nigeria to record largest surge in food insecurity globally in 2026. <https://dailypost.ng/2026/04/24/nigeria-to-record-largest-surge-in-food-insecurity-globally-in-2026/>

<sup>[125]</sup> FEWS NET. (2026, April 30). Conflict and rising input costs driving Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in northern Nigeria. <https://fews.net/west-africa/nigeria/food-security-outlook-update/april-2026>

Climate shocks - floods, long dry spells, shifting transhumance routes - compound the pressure and sharpen the farmer-herder competition at the heart of Middle Belt violence.<sup>[126]</sup> The southward spread of banditry now threatens this loop's extension into the South West, one of Nigeria's most strategic agricultural zones; fear among farming communities across Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, Ekiti, and Kwara has already begun to unsettle production in a region long assumed immune.<sup>[127]</sup> A food-system shock in the South West would convert a regional security problem into a national economic one.

#### 6.3.4 SMALL-ARMS PROLIFERATION AND THE SAHEL SPILLOVER

Violence at this scale requires weapons at this scale, and Nigeria's armed groups are not short of them. The structural driver is the country's exposure to the collapse of the Sahel. With the region now accounting for more than half of all global terrorism deaths, and with military juntas in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso presiding over expanding ungoverned territory, the arms pipeline running south into Nigeria has widened.<sup>[128]</sup> Weapons from Libyan-era stockpiles and active Sahelian conflict zones move across porous borders into the hands of bandits, insurgents, and communal militias, blurring the line between organised crime and terrorism by equipping both from the same supply.<sup>[129]</sup>

The proliferation is also a governance failure, not merely a regional misfortune. Analysts attribute the open arms gate to specific choices not made - under-investment in border infrastructure, failure to prosecute complicit officials, and the absence of governance in the spaces where weapons accumulate. Archaic firearms legislation and unregulated artisanal mining sites, which both fund and arm groups, compound the problem<sup>[130]</sup>. The result is a market in which the marginal cost of arming a new cell is low and falling - a structural condition that directly raises the lethality recorded in every monthly dataset. The first attacks inside Nigeria claimed by the Sahelian JNIM coalition, in the Kwara–Niger forest belt, are the clearest signal that the Sahel's conflict and the arms that drive it are no longer external to Nigeria's security calculus.

#### 6.3.5 IMPUNITY AND THE ACCOUNTABILITY DEFICIT

If ungoverned space is the physical enabler of violence, impunity is its institutional enabler. The structural fact running through every category of Nigerian conflict is that perpetrators are rarely held to account<sup>[131]</sup> - not the kidnapper, not the political thug, not the official who manipulates a result, and frequently not the state actor who abuses force. In the electoral sphere this is near-total: across multiple cycles, vote-buying and primary violence have continued with what observers describe as effective impunity, exploiting institutional weakness and the non-enforcement of the Electoral Act's penalties.<sup>[132]</sup>

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<sup>[126]</sup>Cadre Harmonisé / Nigeria Food Security Sector, reported in *The Guardian Nigeria*. (2025, November)

<sup>[127]</sup>ThisDay. (2026, May 31). Banditry, Empty Farms and Looming Food Shock. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/2026/05/31/banditry-empty-farms-and-looming-food-shock/>

<sup>[128]</sup>TheCable. (2026, February 18). Terrorism spillover from the Sahel: What Nigeria must prepare for. <https://www.thecable.ng/terrorism-spillover-from-the-sahel-what-nigeria-must-prepare-for/>

<sup>[129]</sup>Pan African Visions. (2026, April 6). The Open Gate: Why Nigeria Can't Stop the Surge of Small Arms from the Sahel. <https://panafricanvisions.com/2026/04/the-open-gate-why-nigeria-cant-stop-the-surge-of-small-arms-from-the-sahel/>

<sup>[130]</sup>Awotayo, O. O., Yusuf, N. O., Arikewuyo, W. K., & Fasipe, O. I. (2024). Armed to the hilt: Nigeria's battle with illicit gun and local production in a state of fragility. *Košická bezpečnostná revue*, 14(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/article/bfea773f67a74271b3082dc4add3e344>

<sup>[131]</sup>Human Rights Watch. (2026). World Report 2026: Nigeria. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/nigeria>

<sup>[132]</sup>Empirical analysis of electoral violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *Criminal Law Journal*. <https://www.criminallawjournal.org/article/57/3-1-16-857.pdf>

Nigerian commentators have repeatedly tied the persistence of political thuggery to the absence of swift prosecution, arguing that delay itself teaches offenders they can escape justice.<sup>[133]</sup>

The same logic operates in the kidnapping economy. Ransom payment criminalisation under the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022 has produced no meaningful prosecution record<sup>[134]</sup>, and the absence of consequence - for the abductor who kills despite payment, for the financial networks that move ransom flows - leaves the business model intact. Impunity is what converts an isolated tactic into a sustainable industry: where the expected cost of violence approaches zero, the only remaining variable is the expected benefit, and for both the armed group and the desperate politician that benefit is high. Until at least one high-profile perpetrator faces genuine consequence, the incentive structure that produces the monthly numbers will not change. This is the cheapest driver to address and the most consistently neglected.

### 6.3.6 STATE CAPACITY AND SECURITY-SECTOR OVERSTRETCH

Nigeria's security forces are simultaneously large and overstretched. The military, among Africa's largest at roughly 230,000 personnel<sup>[135]</sup>, is committed across four major theatres at once - insurgency in the North East, banditry in the North West, communal conflict in the Middle Belt, and separatist tension in the South East - while the police operate at a ratio of roughly one officer to 600 citizens, far below international norms.<sup>[136]</sup> The structural consequence is that the state cannot hold ground; it can surge to a crisis, but every surge thins coverage elsewhere, which is precisely the displacement dynamic that armed groups exploit. The diversion of personnel to election protection during the primary season is the same vulnerability expressed in the political domain.

The government has acknowledged the capacity gap directly. In November 2025 President Tinubu declared a nationwide security emergency, ordering the recruitment of 20,000 police officers toward a 50,000 target, authorising the use of NYSC camps as training depots, withdrawing officers from VIP duties for redeployment, and directing the deployment of trained forest guards to contest the woodland corridors.<sup>[137][138]</sup> By the 2026 Democracy Day address, the administration was pointing to a record security budget of ₦5.41 trillion and continued recruitment.<sup>[139]</sup>

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<sup>[133]</sup>Blueprint Newspapers. (2026, April 27). Nuggets and 2027 elections. <https://blueprint.ng/nuggets-and-2027-elections/>

<sup>[134]</sup>Yusuf, A. (2026). From battlefield to courtroom: Evidentiary challenges in the prosecution of terrorism and insurgency cases in Nigeria. SSRN. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=6367799](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=6367799)

<sup>[135]</sup>Global Firepower. (2026). 2026 Nigeria military strength. [https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country\\_id=nigeria](https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=nigeria)

<sup>[136]</sup>Vanguard. (2026, May). Insecurity: 1,095 Days After — Tinubu's Long War. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2026/05/insecurity-1095-days-after-tinubus-long-war/>

<sup>[137]</sup>The State House, Abuja. (2025, November 26). President Tinubu Declares a Security Emergency, Orders Army, Police to Recruit More Personnel. <https://statehouse.gov.ng/president-tinubu-declares-a-security-emergency-orders-army-police-to-recruit-more-personnel/>

<sup>[138]</sup>Punch Nigeria. (2025, November 27). Abduction crisis: Tinubu declares emergency as NASS rejects bandit negotiations. <https://punchng.com/abduction-crisis-tinubu-declares-emergency-as-nass-rejects-bandit-negotiations/>

<sup>[139]</sup>Pulse Nigeria. (2026, June 12). Democracy Day 2026: Tinubu defends reforms, vows tougher action against terrorists. <https://www.pulse.ng/story/democracy-day-2026-tinubu-defends-reforms-2026061210355023712>

<sup>[136]</sup>Guardian Nigeria. (2026, June 11). Reps pass State Police bill. <https://guardian.ng/breakingnews/rep-pass-state-police-bill/>

<sup>[137]</sup>The State House, Abuja. (2025, November 26). President Tinubu Declares a Security Emergency, Orders Army, Police to Recruit More Personnel. <https://statehouse.gov.ng/president-tinubu-declares-a-security-emergency-orders-army-police-to-recruit-more-personnel/>

<sup>[138]</sup>Punch Nigeria. (2025, November 27). Abduction crisis: Tinubu declares emergency as NASS rejects bandit negotiations. <https://punchng.com/abduction-crisis-tinubu-declares-emergency-as-nass-rejects-bandit-negotiations/>

<sup>[139]</sup>Pulse Nigeria. (2026, June 12). Democracy Day 2026: Tinubu defends reforms, vows tougher action against terrorists. <https://www.pulse.ng/story/democracy-day-2026-tinubu-defends-reforms-2026061210355023712>

These are real measures, but they operate on a long lead time and against a threat that adapts faster than institutions can scale. The same period saw the National Assembly revive the long-stalled debate over state policing and openly criticise the federal practice of negotiating with - and reportedly paying - armed groups for hostage releases<sup>[140]</sup>, exposing the strategic incoherence at the centre of the state's response. Capacity, in short, is being added at the margin while the structural deficit persists.

## 6.4 TIER TWO - PROXIMATE (IMMEDIATE) DRIVERS

Proximate drivers are the period-specific forces that converted Nigeria's latent structural risk into the active violence recorded in May 2026. Where the structural tier explains why violence is possible, the proximate tier explains why it took the shape and scale it did this month.

### 6.4.1 THE COMPRESSED PRIMARY CALENDAR

The single most powerful proximate driver of May's violence was the electoral calendar itself. INEC's compression of the 2027 party primaries into a narrow window concentrated the country's most consequential intra-party contests into a matter of weeks, and the violence tracked the schedule with near-mechanical precision. The mechanism is threefold. First, the calendar supplied fixed dates and fixed venues<sup>[141]</sup> - known gatherings of rivals that hired muscle could be deployed against. Second, the stakes of an incumbent-party nomination, in a system where the ticket often equals the office, made the marginal value of seizing a primary by force extremely high. Third, the season diverted security personnel to political protection precisely when rural corridors needed them most, opening the windows that armed groups exploited.<sup>[142]</sup>

The Nigerian commentariat read the May primaries as a systemic indictment of internal party democracy rather than a series of local accidents - documenting candidate imposition, delegate manipulation, vote-buying, intimidation, and thuggery across parties<sup>[143]</sup>, with the consequences now flowing into pre-election litigation. The structural reading matters: primary violence is not spontaneous disorder but an organised system requiring logistics (hired thugs, weapons, vehicles), coordination (simultaneous disruption across multiple wards), and the impunity that guarantees no consequence<sup>[144]</sup>. The compression of the calendar was the trigger that set that pre-existing system in motion at scale, and the off-cycle Ekiti and Osun governorship polls now approaching will test whether it can be contained before 2027.

### 6.4.2 THE SOUTHWARD MIGRATION OF ARMED-GROUP INFRASTRUCTURE

The second proximate driver is territorial: the active transfer of armed-group infrastructure out of the North and into the South. This is not a hypothetical projection but a documented movement. The Africa Center recorded a doubling of fatalities linked to militant Islamist groups in Niger and Kwara states over the preceding year, and the first JNIM-claimed attacks inside Nigeria, both concentrated in the forest belt approaching the Benin border.

<sup>[140]</sup> Guardian Nigeria. (2026, June 11). Reps pass State Police bill. <https://guardian.ng/breakingnews/reps-pass-state-police-bill/>

<sup>[141]</sup> Independent National Electoral Commission. (2025). Timetable and schedule of activities for the 2027 general elections. <https://www.inecnigeria.org/>

<sup>[142]</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum. (2026). Nigeria: Security situation – State armed actors. <https://www.euaa.europa.eu/nigeria-security-situation/111-state-armed-actors>

<sup>[143]</sup> Punch Nigeria Limited. (2026, May 22). APC primaries: More aspirants protest alleged imposition, irregularities. <https://punchng.com/apc-primaries-more-aspirants-protest-alleged-imposition-irregularities/>

<sup>[144]</sup> Premium Times Nigeria. (2026, May 17). Violence, irregularities characterise APC Reps primaries in Lagos. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/880170-violence-irregularities-characterise-apc-reps-primaries-in-lagos.html>

The Combating Terrorism Center traced the Mahmuda group's operations across the Niger–Kwara–Oyo forest chain, including a reported attempt to push southward into northern Oyo and the possibility of establishing a corridor near Old Oyo National Park. Nigerian security sources, speaking after May's events, described Ansaru and allied factions operating in Niger, Kwara, and parts of the South West, and mapped the Niger River corridor through Kogi as the route by which fighters move toward the South East.

What distinguishes the 2026 migration from earlier spillovers is the transfer of technique, not merely personnel. The use of counter-rescue improvised explosive devices, ideological abduction demands, and execution-video propaganda - methods matured in the North East - appearing in operations south of the Niger, indicates that tactical knowledge is moving along the same corridors as the fighters. Groups that preceded their attacks by distributing pamphlets demanding adoption of their version of Sharia, as reported in the Kwara/Borgu belt, signal an ideological project, not opportunistic banditry.<sup>[145]</sup> This driver is the proximate expression of the structural forest-corridor geography: the terrain made migration possible, and northern military pressure made it attractive, so the infrastructure moved.

#### 6.4.3 THE KIDNAPPING ECONOMY AS A SELF-FINANCING SYSTEM

Kidnapping for ransom is no longer a tactic in Nigeria; it is an industry with its own economics, and in 2026 it functioned as a proximate driver by financing the very capacity that produces further violence. The scale is industrial: SBM Intelligence recorded nearly 3,000 abductions in the North West alone over a twelve-month window, with Zamfara accounting for the largest share. The business model is self-sustaining - ransom funds weapons, weapons enable abduction, abduction generates ransom - and no legislative prohibition has interrupted the cycle.<sup>[146]</sup>

Two features make the kidnapping economy a particularly corrosive driver. First, it has demonstrated that payment guarantees nothing: captives are killed despite ransom collection, because no mechanism binds the captor once the money moves, and the state's own practice of back-channel negotiation and reported payment -criticised openly in the National Assembly during the November 2025 emergency - both legitimises and capitalises the market.<sup>[147]</sup> Second, the model is migrating with the groups that run it, carrying the abduction enterprise into the southern forest corridors where it converges with school and church attacks. The kidnapping economy is thus simultaneously a source of violence, a source of finance for other violence, and a vector for the southward diffusion of armed-group presence<sup>[148]</sup> -a rare driver that operates across all three tiers of this analysis at once.

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<sup>[145]</sup> 2026 Kwara State attacks (Woro). Open-source compilation; Amnesty International reporting cited therein. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026\\_Kwara\\_State\\_attacks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026_Kwara_State_attacks)

<sup>[146]</sup> SBM Intelligence. (2025, August 27). The economics of Nigeria's kidnap industry: Locust business. <https://www.sbmintel.com/2025/08/the-economics-of-nigerias-kidnap-industry-locust-business/>

<sup>[147]</sup> Reuters. (2025, November 21). What's behind Nigeria's latest school abductions, church attack? [https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/whats-behind-nigerias-latest-school-abductions-church-attack-2025-11-21/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/whats-behind-nigerias-latest-school-abductions-church-attack-2025-11-21/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>[148]</sup> European Parliament. (2025). Motion for a resolution on mass kidnapping of children in Nigeria, including those from St Mary's Catholic School in Papiri. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-10-2025-0593\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-10-2025-0593_EN.html)

#### 6.4.4 OPPOSITION REALIGNMENT CHURN

The fourth proximate driver sits squarely in the political landscape: the violence generated by the rapid migration of politicians and their networks between parties. The 2026 realignment was not an orderly sorting but a churn -Atiku from the PDP into the ADC, Kwankwaso from the NNPP into the ADC and then, with Obi, out again into the NDC, each movement carrying grievance networks, enforcement arms, and local rivalries between platforms faster than any party's internal dispute-resolution machinery could absorb them<sup>[149]</sup>. Smaller parties absorbing defectors from larger ones inherit not only their numbers but their disputes, and the friction surfaces as incidents -at primaries, conventions, and ward-level contests.

The structural backdrop sharpens the driver. The opposition's fragmentation reproduces the 2023 dynamic in which a divided field allowed the incumbent to prevail<sup>[150]</sup>, raising the stakes of every internal contest as factions fight over diminishing platforms. The collapse of the ADC's unity ticket -amid allegations of a dollarized primary that drove Obi and Kwankwaso to the NDC -illustrates how elite rivalry at the top translates into mobilisation and counter-mobilisation at the base. With governorship cycles in Anambra, Ekiti, and Osun concentrating high-stakes contests into narrow windows through the second half of 2026, the realignment churn is positioned to generate recurring flashpoints well before the general election.

#### 6.5. TIER THREE -ACCELERANTS & THREAT MULTIPLIERS

Accelerants do not originate violence; they amplify its scale, speed its spread, and entrench its persistence. Three are decisive in the current period.

##### 6.5.1 THE CRIME-TERROR-POLITICS CONVERGENCE

The most consequential accelerant is the erosion of the boundaries between categories of armed actors. Nigeria's threat landscape is hybridising: bandit gangs adopt jihadist branding and ideological demands<sup>[151]</sup>; insurgent factions run profit-driven kidnapping enterprises<sup>[152]</sup>; and political actors rent the capacity of both for electoral ends. The Africa Center and CTC analyses document the operational and kinship ties linking Sahelian jihadist coalitions, north-western bandit gangs, and groups such as Lakurawa and the Mahmuda faction -networks in which a fighter, a financier, and a smuggler may serve crime and terror interchangeably. The same convergence operates downward into politics, where the youth labour pool that staffs the kidnapping gang also staffs the election-day thug squad.

This convergence is an accelerant because it multiplies the pathways by which violence spreads and the sources from which it draws. A purely ideological insurgency can be countered on ideological and military terms; a purely criminal enterprise can be addressed through law enforcement, but a hybrid that is simultaneously ideological, commercial, and politically useful resists any single instrument. It also defeats the analytical compartmentalisation on which Nigeria's institutional response is built -separate commands for insurgency, banditry, and electoral security -by operating across all three at once.

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<sup>[149]</sup> Reuters. (2026, May 5). Nigeria opposition alliance falters as two leading figures quit, clouding 2027 unity push. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/nigeria-opposition-alliance-falters-two-leading-figures-quit-clouding-2027-unity-2026-05-05/>

<sup>[150]</sup> *ibid*

<sup>[151]</sup> Barnett, J., Rufa'i, M. A., & Abdulaziz, A. (2022). Northwestern Nigeria: A jihadization of banditry, or a "banditization" of jihad? CTC Sentinel, 15(1). <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/northwestern-nigeria-a-jihadization-of-banditry-or-a-banditization-of-jihad/>

<sup>[152]</sup> Oyewole, S., & Omotola, J. S. (2024). The Political Economy of Kidnapping and Insecurity in Nigeria. . One Means, Multiple Ends: A Strategic Framework of Understanding Kidnapping in Nigeria. Springer. [https://ideas.repec.org/h/spr/aacchp/978-3-031-47168-1\\_2.html](https://ideas.repec.org/h/spr/aacchp/978-3-031-47168-1_2.html)

### 6.5.2 PROPAGANDA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

The third accelerant is the conduct of state actors themselves. Where security operations cause civilian harm, or where state and para-state forces kill with impunity, the effect is to deepen the grievance and erode the legitimacy on which any durable security settlement depends. Human Rights Watch has documented Nigerian security forces' implication in abuses, including airstrikes that have killed civilians. The most serious allegation of the current period -the reported military airstrike on a market in Zurmi LGA, Zamfara, which Amnesty International alleged killed approximately 100 civilians - remains uncorroborated and is treated here strictly as a claim requiring independent investigation; but the very fact of such allegations, and the institutional silence that often follows them, is itself a driver of distrust.

State conduct accelerates conflict through two channels. The first is grievance: communities that experience the state as a source of harm rather than protection are less likely to cooperate with security forces and more susceptible to the narratives of armed groups that position themselves as alternative authorities. The second is legitimacy erosion in the electoral domain, where custody deaths, partial security deployment, and the perception of force used for political ends corrode the public trust on which a credible 2027 vote depends. The state is not only the principal counter-violence actor; through its own conduct it is, at the margin, also a contributor to the conditions it seeks to suppress. Recognising this is not an indictment of the security services but a precondition for an effective strategy -one that treats accountability and legitimacy as security assets rather than obstacles to them.

### 6.6. DRIVER INTERACTION: THE CONFLICT AS A SYSTEM

The drivers analysed above do not operate in isolation; their danger lies in how they reinforce one another. Reading them as a system, rather than a checklist, is the central analytical move of this report -and it is what distinguishes a driver analysis from an incident report. Four interaction loops are decisive.

#### **The displacement loop:**

State security pressure in the North (a structural-capacity factor) pushes armed groups along the forest corridors (a structural-geography factor) into the South (the migration driver), where finite security resources are simultaneously diverted by the primary calendar (the electoral driver). Suppression in one node does not reduce total violence; it relocates it. This is why the North East's falling incident count and the South West's rising one are two faces of one process, not independent trends.

#### **The financing loop:**

The kidnapping economy (proximate driver) capitalises the arms purchases (structural driver) that raise lethality, while ransom payment -including by the state -sustains the market; the resulting insecurity drives the food crisis (structural driver), which deepens the poverty (structural driver) that supplies recruits (structural driver) to the kidnapping gangs. Money, weapons, hunger, and manpower circulate in a closed loop that no single intervention can break.

#### **The impunity loop:**

The absence of prosecution (structural driver) lowers the expected cost of violence to near zero across every category -kidnapping, thuggery, result manipulation, and abusive state conduct alike - which raises the rational appeal of each, which increases their frequency, which further overwhelms an already overstretched justice and security apparatus (structural driver), which further reduces the probability of prosecution. Impunity is both a cause and a consequence of itself.

### The legitimacy loop:

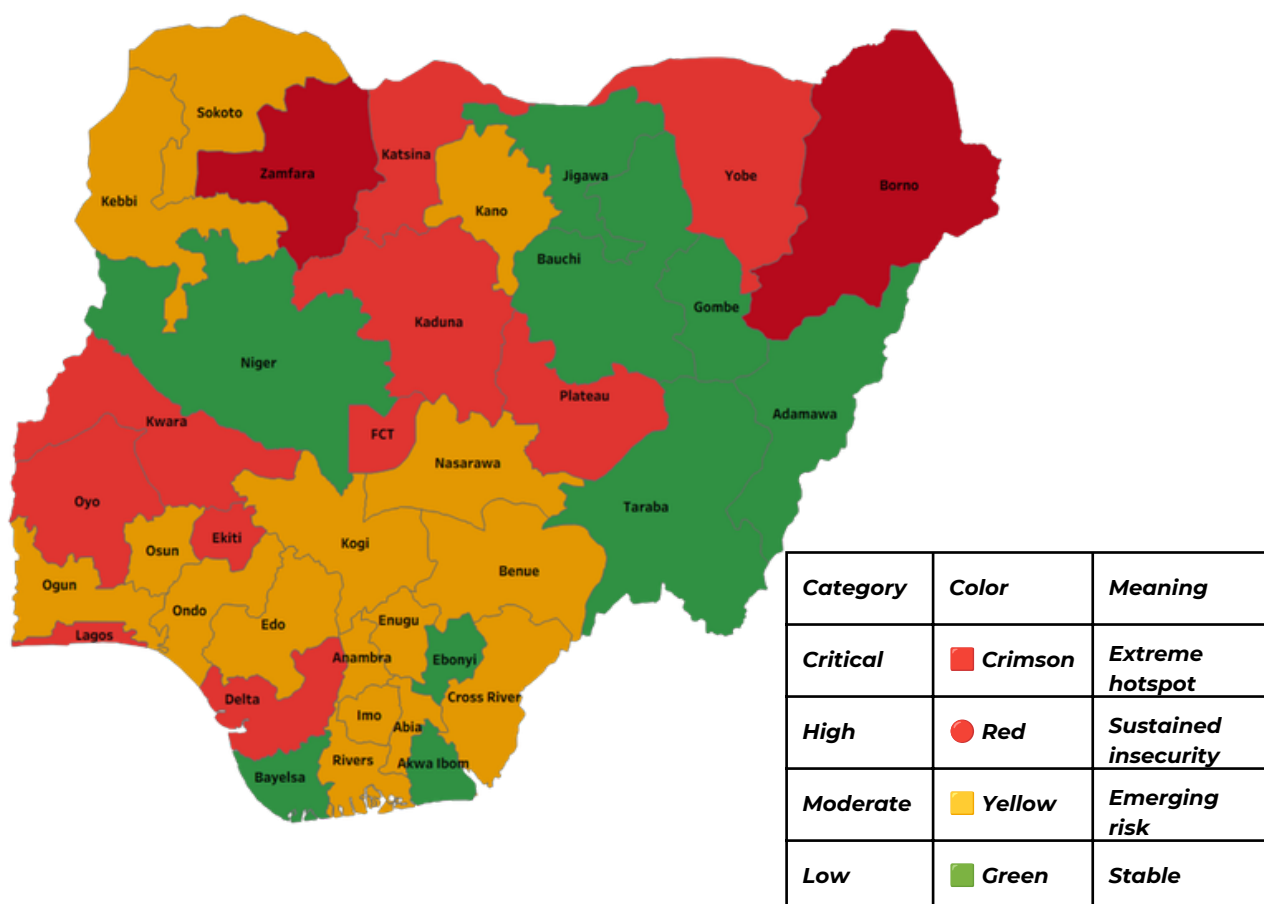
The convergence of crime, terror, and politics (accelerant), plus state conduct that causes civilian harm (accelerant), plus electoral manipulation (proximate driver), erodes public trust in the state, which weakens cooperation with security forces and strengthens the appeal of armed groups offering an alternative order, which expands ungoverned space (structural driver) and deepens the original convergence. Legitimacy lost is security lost.

The matrix below summarises the principal drivers, their tier, the May 2026 evidence that activated or expressed them, and the loop through which each propagates.

| Driver                        | Tier       | May 2026 Expression / Evidence                      | Propagation Loop         |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Forest-corridor geography     | Structural | Niger–Kwara–Oyo reserve chain; Old Oyo NP corridor  | Displacement             |
| Poverty / youth pipeline      | Structural | Recruitable labour for thugs and armed groups       | Financing; Impunity      |
| Food insecurity / climate     | Structural | ~34.7m projected acute; SW farming fear             | Financing                |
| Arms proliferation / Sahel    | Structural | JNIM's first soldier-killing attacks in NW belt     | Financing; Displacement  |
| Impunity / accountability gap | Structural | Near-total non-prosecution of electoral offences    | Impunity; Legitimacy     |
| State overstretch             | Structural | 4 theatres; police 1:600; Nov 2025 emergency        | Displacement; Impunity   |
| Primary calendar              | Proximate  | Concentrated primary-season violence; litigation    | Displacement; Legitimacy |
| Southward migration           | Proximate  | Ansaru/Mahmuda/JNIM movement toward Benin border    | Displacement             |
| Kidnapping economy            | Proximate  | ~3,000 NW abductions/yr; payment guarantees nothing | Financing                |
| Realignment churn             | Proximate  | ADC fracture; Obi/Kwankwaso to NDC                  | Legitimacy               |
| Crime–terror–politics fusion  | Accelerant | Hybrid actors; shared youth labour pool             | All four                 |
| Propaganda / disinformation   | Accelerant | Execution video reaches new theatre; result rumours | Legitimacy               |
| State conduct                 | Accelerant | Zurmi airstrike allegation; custody deaths          | Legitimacy               |

## 7. RISK ASSESSMENT & SCENARIO PLANNING

As noted in Section 6.6 above, these drivers reinforce one another rather than operating in isolation. Four interaction loops are decisive.



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

**Borno and Zamfara** sit alone in CRIMSON, the highest tier, combining low incident counts with the most severe casualty intensity in the index (see the State Risk Index table above); Zamfara's position is further shadowed by the unverified airstrike allegation. The RED tier carries the expected North-Central and North-East entries alongside five southern states elevated almost entirely by primary-season political violence: **Lagos, Ekiti, Oyo, Osun, and Delta**. Lagos's presence in RED, driven by political violence and cultism rather than terrorism or banditry, is the tier's strategic warning: the country's largest voter base, economic centre, and ruling-party stronghold has entered the high-risk tier roughly eight months before a general election. GREEN and unscored states denote relative, not absolute, safety; states that transitioned rapidly upward in earlier quarters, Plateau among them, did so from low-visibility baselines.

### FORWARD-LOOK SCENARIOS

This section sets out a short forward look for the three months following the reporting period (June–August 2026), read against the figures below.

| Metric             | May 2026 (verified) | Cumulative, Jan–May 2026 |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Incidents          | 281                 | 1,106                    |
| Deaths             | 631                 | 2,166                    |
| Kidnappings        | 273                 | 2,031                    |
| Electoral offences | 87                  | 316 (no prosecutions)    |

Three scenarios are presented below. The probabilities are indicative and reflect conditions at publication; the period's actual direction will turn largely on three pivots: the outcome of the Ogbomoso hostage crisis, the conduct of the Ekiti and Osun off-cycle governorship cycles, and whether any May offence, electoral or criminal, produces a prosecution.

#### **Scenario A - Managed Drift (most likely, ~50%)**

Primary-season violence subsides as INEC's window closes, but the conditions that produced it remain intact. The North East and North West continue chronic terrorism and banditry at May levels; the Oyo–Kwara–Kogi corridor stays active. The Ogbomoso hostages are released through quiet negotiation at an undisclosed cost, with no structural change to corridor security. Electoral incidents fall sharply in June, then climb again through July–August as governorship contests open. Monthly figures settle into the 200–240 incident and 450–600 death range. This will amount to continuity, not relief: the system may keep producing violence at a high baseline because nothing in its incentives may have changed.

#### **Scenario B - Escalation (plausible downside, ~35%)**

The Ogbomoso crisis ends badly - further hostage killings - emboldening Ansaru and confirming the South West as a viable theatre, with copycat or affiliated attacks on schools or worship sites in Oyo, Kwara, or Kogi. Aggrieved primary losers contest results by force rather than through the courts, and the Ekiti or Osun pre-poll period turns lethal. Casualty tempo in the North holds or rises. Monthly figures pushed into the 300–400 incident and 700–950 death range, and the security forces are stretched across hostage response, election protection, and the northern theatres simultaneously.

#### **Scenario C - Partial Stabilisation (low-probability upside, ~15%)**

Several favourable developments coincide: the Ogbomoso hostages are freed without further killing, blunting Ansaru's propaganda gain; the Moba LGA arms-cache case in Ekiti proceeds to formal charges, establishing the cycle's first primary-violence prosecution; a sustained operation disrupts at least one northern corridor; and the National Peace Committee secures binding pre-poll conduct commitments for Ekiti and Osun. Monthly figures ease below the May baseline. The low weighting reflects that, at publication, none of these had begun.

| Scenario                  | Likelihood | Headline outcome                                                                           |
|---------------------------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A - Managed Drift         | ~50%       | Violence persists at a high baseline; primaries quiet, then governorship contests reignite |
| B - Escalation            | ~35%       | Southern abduction theatre hardens; post-primary and pre-poll violence rises               |
| C - Partial Stabilisation | ~15%       | Hostage release, a first prosecution, and pre-poll accords ease the trend                  |

#### Indicators to Watch (June–August 2026)

1. **Ogbomoso resolution:** release, prolonged captivity, or further killings will signal which scenario is unfolding.
2. **Ekiti and Osun pre-poll period:** early thuggery, arms recovery, or attacks on officials would point to Scenario B.
3. **The Moba case:** movement from arrest to formal charges would be the single clearest marker of Scenario C.
4. **Oyo–Kwara–Kogi corridor:** any new school, church, or highway attack confirms the southward theatre is consolidating.
5. **Opposition realignment:** fresh defection-driven clashes as parties position for 2027 governorship and national tickets.
6. **Northern casualty tempo:** sustained mass-casualty events in Borno, Yobe, or Zamfara would keep the death toll elevated regardless of the southern picture.

#### Bottom line:

The most likely path is continuity at a high and costly baseline rather than either collapse or recovery. The balance between drift and escalation will be set in the next quarter, and the cheapest lever available - a single credible prosecution - remains the variable most within domestic control and most capable of shifting the trajectory toward the upside.

## 8. STAKEHOLDER-SPECIFIC MEASURES

Translating the drivers, zone findings, and forward-look scenarios above into action, the table below sets out concrete, near-term proactive measures for each of the ESI Hub's principal stakeholder groups, building on and extending the recommendations previewed in Section 1.

| Stakeholder                                                               | Proactive Measures                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>National Peace Committee (NPC)</b>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor compliance with the signed Peace Accord in Ekiti state</li> <li>• Fast-track Peace Accord signing of the Osun off-cycle polls, securing written commitments from contesting parties on issue-based campaigning and acceptance of results.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>INEC</b>                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish the LGA-level accessibility audit for the North East and North West before the 2027 campaign season opens.</li> <li>• Treat the Ekiti governorship poll as a 2027 proof-of-concept, embedding lessons from May's logistics, vote-buying, and disruption patterns.</li> <li>• Strengthen protection protocols for INEC personnel and materials, and enforce the Electoral Act 2026's direct-primary provisions with mandatory party-level compliance reporting.</li> </ul>                                                                                      |
| <b>Security Agencies (Military, Police, NSA / Inter-Agency Committee)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a standing forest-corridor command for the Oyo–Kwara–Kogi axis to interdict the southward migration of armed-group infrastructure.</li> <li>• Commission an independent investigation into the Zurmi/Tumfa airstrike allegation through the National Human Rights Commission and military oversight mechanisms.</li> <li>• Pre-position dedicated election-security details for the Ekiti and Osun polls without further thinning counter-insurgency and counter-banditry coverage in the North, and advance the Moba LGA case to formal charges.</li> </ul> |

|                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Civil Society Organisations &amp; Field Observers</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain and publish a public tracker of all verified electoral incidents through to prosecution, dismissal, or case closure.</li> <li>• Expand structured field-observer coverage beyond Ekiti to other off-cycle and high-risk states ahead of the Osun and subsequent governorship contests.</li> <li>• Apply GBV-sensitive, victim-centred reporting protocols to close the classification gap that leaves abducted women and girls invisible to the gender dataset.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Media</b>                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt conflict-sensitive reporting standards for mass-abduction and execution-video incidents that inform the public without amplifying propaganda value.</li> <li>• Fact-check and flag pre-collation result disinformation in real time, drawing on EOTS and field-observer verification.</li> <li>• Sustain coverage of unresolved cases (the Ogbomoso hostages, the Zurmi allegation, the Moba prosecution) beyond the initial news cycle.</li> </ul>                           |
| <b>Development Partners</b>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support youth-empowerment, vocational, and livelihood programming in the North West and North East to address the structural recruitment pipeline.</li> <li>• Back independent investigative and oversight capacity, including the National Human Rights Commission, to follow up on state-conduct allegations such as the Zurmi airstrike.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                              |

## 9. CONCLUSION

May 2026 closes the first five months of this reporting series as the deadliest month on record, and the reason is structural rather than incidental. INEC's compressed primary calendar did not merely coincide with a violent month; for the first time in this series, it became one of the principal engines of the violence itself, while the machinery built around the North's insurgency and banditry continued, largely undisturbed, in parallel.

Three findings carry forward into the next quarter. First, the southward migration of armed-group tactics and infrastructure – confirmed by the Oriire school abductions and the Kwara church attack – means no zone, including the historically calm South West, can be planned for as immune. Second, the convergence of crime, terrorism, and electoral politics has produced a hybrid threat that resists the single-instrument responses on which Nigeria's institutional architecture is built. Third, impunity remains the connective tissue running through every category tracked in this report: of 316 verified electoral offences across five months, none has yet produced a prosecution, and the incentive structure that produces each month's numbers therefore remains intact.

Against this backdrop, the report's central, recurring finding bears repeating: the cheapest and most consequential lever available to break the cycle is not new legislation or additional capacity, but a single credible prosecution. The Moba LGA case in Ekiti – an arrest, a named alleged sponsor, and recovered evidence – is, as of publication, the only file in the national dataset capable of supplying it. The period ahead (June–August 2026) will most likely register as continuity at a high and costly baseline (Scenario A), with escalation (Scenario B) the principal downside risk should the Ogbomoso hostage crisis end badly or the Ekiti and Osun pre-poll periods turn violent. The proactive measures set out in Section 10 are designed to shift that balance, however modestly, toward the low-probability but achievable upside of Scenario C. Five months of data have established the diagnosis. The cycles remaining before January 2027 will determine whether anything is done about it.