

## 1.2.3. Banditry and kidnappings

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Banditry is described as a multifaceted crime encompassing acts such as armed robbery, murder, rape, kidnapping,<sup>211</sup> cattle rustling, armed attacks, and raids targeting local communities.<sup>212</sup> Perpetrated by groups defined as 'highly fragmented' and diverse in terms of their capabilities and degree of organisation, violence arising from banditry has increasingly become both more widespread and lethal,<sup>213</sup> spreading from the North-West to other regions and affecting remote villages, towns, and cities.<sup>214</sup>

During the reference period, banditry-related violence was reported in the country's North-West<sup>215</sup> and North-Central zones,<sup>216</sup> as well as in Lagos and other areas of the South-West.<sup>217</sup> Riding on motorbikes (*okadas*), the mobility, weaponry, and unpredictable nature of these groups have reportedly created widespread fear across communities, with anecdotal accounts from residents suggesting that the gunmen 'can reach anywhere ... whenever they want' and 'kidnap at their own discretion.'<sup>218</sup>

During 2024, Nigeria Watch reported an increase in fatalities arising from rural banditry, cattle rustling and related government operations (1 452 deaths, compared to 892 in 2023), with most fatalities recorded in Katsina, Zamfara and Kaduna.<sup>219</sup> In mid-2025, a further 'significant surge' in violence linked to banditry was reported, particularly across Niger, Katsina and Zamfara.<sup>220</sup>

Early 2024 saw a rise in kidnappings for ransom across the country,<sup>221</sup> including hundreds of abductions in various parts of northern Nigeria in February and March 2024.<sup>222</sup> According to a February 2024 study by the Nigeria-based polling agency NOI Polls, the prevalence of kidnapping was highest in the North-Central zone, followed by the South-West, North-West, and South-East.<sup>223</sup> According to the consulting firm Nextier, 2 452 individuals were kidnapped during the year 2024, a 31 % rise over the 1 878 victims of kidnapping recorded in 2023.<sup>224</sup> At the same time, abduction-related fatalities dropped in 2024, according to Nigeria Watch (425 deaths, compared to 536 recorded in 2023).<sup>225</sup> 2025 saw continued large-scale kidnappings<sup>226</sup> and killings of abductees,<sup>227</sup> with kidnappings remaining a 'pervasive threat' across multiple states as of mid-2025.<sup>228</sup> Urban and rural areas, along with national highways, have emerged as vulnerable locations where kidnappings occur.<sup>229</sup> Victims of kidnappings included villagers,<sup>230</sup> travellers, political figures,<sup>231</sup> large numbers of schoolchildren and IDPs,<sup>232</sup> businesspeople, priests, and individuals perceived as being well-off.<sup>233</sup> Several military operations were launched in April 2025 against hideouts of bandits in northwestern Nigeria.<sup>234</sup>

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