

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,211 cattle rustling, armed attacks, and raids targeting local communities.212 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,213 spreading from the North-West to other regions and affecting remote villages, towns, and cities.214

During the reference period, banditry-related violence was reported in the country’s North-West 215 and North-Central zones,216 as well as in Lagos and other areas of the South-West.217 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.’218

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.219 In mid-2025, a further ‘significant surge’ in violence linked to banditry was reported, particularly across Niger, Katsina and Zamfara.220

Early 2024 saw a rise in kidnappings for ransom across the country,221 including hundreds abductions in various parts of northern Nigeria in February and March 2024.222 According to a February 2024 study by the Nigeria-based polling agency NOIPolls, the prevalence of kidnapping was highest in the North-Central zone, followed by the South-West, North-West, and South-East. 223 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 2023.224 At the same time, abduction-related fatalities dropped in 2024, according to Nigeria Watch (425 deaths, compared to 536 recorded in 2023).225 2025 saw continued large-scale kidnappings226 and killings of abductees,227 with kidnappings remaining a ‘pervasive threat’ across multiple states as of mid-2025.228 Urban and rural areas, along with national highways, have emerged as vulnerable locations where kidnappings occur.229 Victims of kidnappings included villagers,230 travellers, political figures,231 large numbers of schoolchildren and IDPs,232 businesspeople, priests, and individuals perceived as being well-off.233 Several military operations were launched in April 2025 against hideouts of bandits in northwestern Nigeria.234

- 211

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