

2.1.1. Benue

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Benue state is comprised of the following 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs): Ado, Agatu, Apa, Buruku, Gboko, Guma, Gwer East, Gwer West, Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo, Makurdi, Obi, Ogbadibo, Ohimini, Oju, Okpokwu, Otukpo, Tarka, Ukum, Ushongo and Vandeikya. The state's capital is Makurdi. 281

The main ethnic groups are Tiv, Idoma, Igede, Etulo, Abakpa, Jukun, Hausa, Akweya and Nyifon. 282

UNFPA and the US Census Bureau projected the population at 6 141 284 in 2022, based on figures from the 2006 census.283

a) Conflict dynamics and main actors

For a general overview on actors in Nigeria, please see section 1.1 Main Actors.

Benue was frequently affected by intercommunal clashes, primarily fuelled by disputes between nomadic herders and predominantly settled farming communities regarding access to and control of natural resources, including land and water.284 Attacks primarily affected farmers. 285 In a May 2025 report, Amnesty International mentioned that all 23 LGAs of Benue state had experienced attacks by gunmen and bandits, with Ukum, Logo, Katsina-Ala, Gwer West, Gwer East, Apa and Agatu LGAs facing attacks more frequently.286 In March 2025, SBM Intelligence mentioned protests against attacks by alleged Fulani herdsmen. Benue state remained the 'epicentre' of protests. According to SBM 'reports suggest some peaceful Fulani communities face increasing hostility, regardless of their involvement in violence.'287

Regular killings by (alleged) herders were reported over the reference period in 2024 (for example in March,288 July,289 October,290 and December291) and 2025 (for example in February,292 April,293 May,294 June295 and July296). Besides attacks by Fulani militias297 and unspecified armed men,298 other types of violence included clashes between rival militias 299 and abductions.300 According to a report by Nextier, 97 kidnap victims were recorded in 2024. 301

Clashes between cult groups were also reported.302 According to a July 2025 SBM Intelligence report, Benue state recorded 81 gang-related deaths, with gang activities 'often intersecting with farmer-herder clashes.'303 The gang environment of the state was marked by longstanding rivalries among groups like the Eiye, Vikings, and Buccaneers, as well as the presence of

localised factions such as the Red Axe and Chain. The Red Axe, an offshoot of the Supreme Eiye confraternity, operated exclusively within Benue.304

b) Security incidents and impact on the population

In the period between 1 January 2024 and 31 August 2025, ACLED recorded 406 security incidents in Benue state, which resulted in 1 338 fatalities. Of these security incidents, 106 were coded as battles, 18 as riots and 271 as incidents of violence against civilians.305

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Figure 5: Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence, riots, and violence against civilians in Benue state, 1 January 2024 – 31 August 2025, based on ACLED data.306

Security incidents were recorded by ACLED in 22 LGAs of the state, with the highest numbers documented in Makurdi (62 incidents), Agatu (48 incidents), Otukpo (41 incidents), Ukum (39 incidents) and Qwer West LGAs (37). No incidents were recorded in one LGA (Obi). According to ACLED, Fulani ethnic militia and unidentified armed groups (coded as either ‘Actor1’ or ‘Actor2’) were involved in the majority of incidents coded as violence against civilians.307

According to Nigeria Watch’s annual report covering 2024, the highest number of deaths from violence involving farmers and herders countrywide was recorded in Benue State (376), with Agatu (99), Kwande (76), Logo (60), Gwer West (46) and Apa (32) LGAs being the most affected. 308

According to Nigeria Watch, regarding fatalities, Benue was the second most affected state by ethno-communal violence in 2024,309 with deadly incidents reported in Ado LGA in December 2024310 and April 2025.311

In February 2025, eight people were killed in alleged clashes between the Black Axe and Vikings cult groups in Benue’s capital Makurdi.312 In April 2025, an attack by alleged members of the Effium community against members of the Ezza community resulted in the killing of two persons and the disappearance of several others.313 In April 2025, suspected herders killed 11 persons in Afia community in Ukum LGA,314 and in May 2025 suspected herders killed 42 people in four communities in Gwer West LGA.315 In June 2025, up to over 200 people were killed in attacks by gunmen in Yelewata, in Guma LGA.316

Conflict-related infrastructure damage - In May 2025, Amnesty International reported that gunmen not only killed individuals but also destroyed boreholes, clinics, and schools following attacks. Amnesty International documented that, during attacks on communities in Ukum and Logo LGAs, grain reserves and religious sites were destroyed.317 Reportedly armed groups occupied farmland and obstructed agricultural activities.318

Road security - Kidnappings were reported along various roads in the reference period.319

Displacement, movement and return - As of February 2025, IOM estimated the number of IDPs in Benue state at 457 666320 compared to 401 403 as of November 2024.321 IOM lists communal clashes (45 %), farmer-herder clash (36 %) and insurgency (18 %) as the main

reasons for displacement in the state.322 IDMC recorded 43 000 displacements triggered by communal conflicts in Benue in 2024.323 According to a July 2025 article by Amnesty International, attacks by gunmen had displaced at least 500 000 people.324

No information could be found on returns in Benue state during the reference period.

c) State response in maintaining law and order

Media reported on Operation Whirl Stroke (OPWS), launched in May 2018,325 with activities in Benue state, including the rescue of kidnapped victims,326 operations against bandit hideouts 327 and the arrest of suspects.328 In June 2025, new combat and mobility equipment was deployed to troops of OPWS329 following the killing of civilians in Yelewata on 14 June 2025 (see above), with sources alleging state failure regarding the protection of citizens.330 Also, the Nigeria Police Force, military, and intelligence services were criticised for their continued inability 'to safeguard vulnerable communities and deter armed non-state actors' following the attacks.331 An April 2025 article by France 24 on killings in Benue state noted that critics alleged 'a failure by authorities and police to govern the countryside.'332 Reportedly, despite various efforts, state-level initiatives such as the anti-open grazing law, community dialogues and compensation programmes had not proven effective, while military operations often triggered reprisals by bandits and armed groups.333

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