

2.4.5. Imo

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Imo state is comprised of the following 27 LGAs: Ahiazu Mbaise,1437 Aboh Mbaise, Ehime Mbano, Ezinihitte, Ideato North, Ideato South, Ihitte/Uboma, Ikeduru, Isiala Mbano, Isu, Mbaitoli, Ngor Okpala, Njaba, Nkwerre, Nwangele, Obowo, Oguta, Ohaji/Egbema, Okigwe, Onuimo, Orlu, Orsu, Oru East, Oru West, Owerri Municipal, Owerri North and Owerri West. The capital city is Owerri.1438

Igbo people constitute 98 % of the population.1439

UNFPA and the US Census Bureau projected the population of Imo in 2022 at 5 459 337, based on figures from the 2006 census.1440

a) Conflict dynamics and main actors

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

The situation in Imo has been marked by rising insecurity, which also affected the city of Owerri. 1441 According to PIND, Imo ranked among the three Niger Delta states witnessing the highest numbers of conflict-related deaths in 2024, with Ohaji/Egbema being one of the three most affected LGAs in the region.1442 Conflict-related fatalities in the state dropped from 22 in the fourth quarter of 2024 to 13 in the first quarter of 2025 (PIND)1443 but then saw a marked increase to 41 in the following quarter.1444 Main sources of insecurity were criminal activities (including targeted killings and kidnappings for ransom), violence linked to separatist militias, 1445 and communal clashes.1446

In 2024, Imo was reportedly one of the Niger Delta states experiencing the highest numbers of fatalities attributed to separatist militias,1447 including IPOB/ESN.1448 Meanwhile, referring to the South-East in general, a Nigerian senior security advisor interviewed by EUAA in July 2025 stated that IPOB was now generally viewed as ‘less combative’ than in previous years and appeared not to have been implicated in the majority of recent attacks against federal security personnel. According to this source, these attacks seemed to have been carried out either by criminal groups ‘masquerading’ as Biafran agitators or by elements linked to Simon Ekpa’s BRGIE.1449 For more information on the BRGIE, see section 1.1.3 Non-state armed actors.

b) Security incidents and impact on the population

In the period from 1 January 2024 to 31 August 2025, ACLED recorded 154 security incidents in Imo state that resulted in a total of 275 fatalities. Of these incidents, 76 were coded as battles, 3

as explosion/remote violence, 5 as riots, and 70 as violence against civilians.1450

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Figure 16: Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence, riots, and violence against civilians in Imo state, 1 January 2024 – 31 August 2025, based on ACLED data. 1451

Security incidents were recorded by ACLED in 20 LGAs of the state, with the highest number documented in Okigwe LGA (27 incidents), followed by Owerri West (23), Orsu (15), Mbaitoli (14) and Owerri Municipal (13) LGAs. No incidents were recorded in seven LGAs. According to ACLED, unidentified armed groups, IPOB, and Fulani ethnic militias (coded as either 'Actor1' or 'Actor2') were involved in the majority of incidents coded as violence against civilians.1452

Over the year 2024, PIND attributed more than 100 deaths in Imo to violence linked to separatist militias,1453 while Nigeria Watch recorded 174 such deaths, the highest figure among all states, with Orsu and Ehime Mbano Oyo among the LGAs most severely affected in the zone. Many of those killed were members of IPOB and ESN who died in special operations led by security forces.1454 Incidents attributed to separatist militias included multiple deadly clashes with security forces1455 and alleged lethal attacks on civilians in Okigwe (June 2024), 1456 Owerri North (July 2024)1457 and Onuimo LGAs (August 2024).1458 Amongst others, gunmen suspected to be IPOB members killed six people in Okigwe LGA (June 2024)1459 and eight community leaders in Onuimo LGA (August 2024).1460 Meanwhile, unidentified gunmen killed more than 18 local residents in a string of attacks across multiple communities in Orsu LGA in January 2025.1461 At least 18 more local residents were killed in attacks attributed to armed herders in Okpala, Owerri West, Mbaitoli, Oguta (between April and June 2025)1462 and Ideato North LGAs (July 2025).1463

Imo was one of the Niger Delta states witnessing the highest numbers of fatalities (more than 50) linked to criminal violence in 2024, mainly as a result of gun attacks and clashes between militia groups, vigilantes and security forces.1464 Unidentified gunmen were involved in deadly clashes with security forces,1465 freed inmates in an attack on a correctional facility,1466 and killed dozens of civilians in Ohaji/Egbema (March 2024),1467 Mbaitoli (April 2024),1468 Onuimo (August 2024),1469 Ideato North (December 20241470 and July 20251471), Orsu LGAs (January 2025)1472 and on the Okigwe-Owerri road (May 2025).1473 Unknown gunmen also carried out kidnappings in Owerri West (September 2024),1474 Isiala Mbano (November 2024)1475 and Okigwe LGAs (January 2025)1476 and Owerri city (December 20241477 and February 20251478).

Imo was also one of the Niger Delta states most affected by fatalities related to vigilante and mob violence in 2024, resulting in killings of civilians in Owerri North (April 2024) and Owerri West LGAs (September 2024).1479 Deadly inter-cult fighting was reported in Owerri city (March 2024)1480 and Ohaji/Egbema LGA (September 2024).1481 Moreover, civil society organisations reported of 'escalating attacks' by suspected armed bandits and herdsmen on local communities.1482 Attacks by armed herdsmen resulted in several deaths.1483 At least five residents of Oguta LGA were killed by suspected armed herdsmen June 2025,1484 while at least eight people died in an inter-cult clash involving two communities in Ohaji/Egbema in September

2024.1485

Conflict-related infrastructure damage - An armed attack on travellers along the Okigwe-Owerri Road on 8 May 2025, resulted in the killing of at least 30 people1486 and the burning of more than 20 commuter vehicles and lorries,1487 while the Okigwe area was also affected by farmland destruction.1488

Road security - Besides the aforementioned attack on travellers along the Okigwe-Owerri Road on 8 May 2025,1489 two further ambushes the same month reportedly led to the killing of at least two drivers and the kidnapping of multiple travellers/bus passengers. The following month, separatist militias reportedly killed two lorry drivers at Ogi Junction in Okigwe LGA.1490

Displacement, movement and return - No information could be found on conflict-induced displacement or returns in Imo state during the reference period.

c) State response in maintaining law and order

Amnesty International noted that activities of gunmen had turned some communities in the South-East, including parts of Oguta LGA, into 'ungoverned spaces'.1491 Civil society organisations observed that the security forces demonstrated 'alarming inertia' in responding to attacks by herdsmen on communities across the region. Amongst others, the Okigwe area saw no evidence of significant arrests or prosecutions in response to attacks and destructions.1492

In Oguta and Orsu LGAs, IPOB exercised 'fragmented shadow governance' with the ESN operating checkpoints and enforcing lockdowns, while police were near-absent and courts remained closed.1493 On 30 May 2025, Owerri's residents remained indoors in compliance with a sit-at-home directive issued by IPOB for that day, despite the police calling on residents to ignore the directive.1494 ESN launched a campaign against the Fulanis in the forests of the South-East, reportedly dislodging over 70 Fulani herders and criminal settlements in forests across the South-East zone in 2024. Meanwhile, security agencies sustained operations to destroy IPOB/ESN,1495 killing and arresting multiple commanders and members across Imo. 1496

In July 2025, the Imo State Police Command announced that over the previous six months, it had arrested 2 785 individuals suspected of crimes such as murder, terrorism, armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism and trafficking in children and claimed having rescued 100 victims of kidnapping and child trafficking.1497

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