

2.5.2. Bayelsa

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Bayelsa state is comprised of the following 8 LGAs: Brass, Ekeremor, Kolokuma/Opokuma, Nembe, Ogbia, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw, Yenagoa. The capital city is Yenagoa.[1548]

The state's main ethnic group are the Ijaw; other groups include the Urhobo[1549] and Isoko.[1550]

Bayelsa's population was 'exceeding 2.5 million', according to the website of the Bayelsa state government, noting that it was the country's least populous state.[1551] Similarly, UNFPA and the US Census Bureau projected the population at 2 537 375 in 2022, based on figures from the 2006 census.[1552]

a) Conflict dynamics and main actors

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

In early 2025, PIND described cult violence and organised crime as the main drivers of insecurity and violence, including lethal violence, in Bayelsa state. Clashes between rivalling cults occurred particularly in Yenagoa between the Greenlanders and Bobos cult gangs who were fighting for control over a carpark in Igbogene.[1553] Other cult gangs reportedly involved in the conflict were the Icelanders, Vikings and Deebams.[1554] Cult-related violence targeted not only rival cult members; civilians were also killed or injured by suspected cultists.[1555] Sources reported of cult-related killings using firearms,[1556] machetes[1557] or of stoning people.[1558] Cult-related crimes also included robbery and theft.[1559] Insecurity and lethal violence increased in the second quarter of 2025, mainly driven by clashes between rival cult gangs – particularly in Yenagoa and Southern Ijaw LGA – and criminal activities. Nevertheless, based on the recorded fatalities, Bayelsa remained one of the least violent states in the Niger Delta region, according to PIND.[1560]

Suspected sea pirates were involved in the abduction of four women travelling by boat and robbing the other passengers,[1561] as well as in ambushes on private pipeline surveillance workers[1562] and federal security forces.[1563]

Lethal clashes between Opolo and Okutukutu communities in Yenagoa LGA over land ownership and the boundaries of their communal land were reported in February 2024.[1564]

b) Security incidents and impact on the population

In the period between 1 January 2024 and 31 August 2025, ACLED recorded 44 security incidents in Bayelsa state, resulting in 44 fatalities. Of these security incidents, 13 were coded as battles, 1 as explosion/remote violence, 7 as riots, and 23 as incidents of violence against civilians.1565

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Figure 31: Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence, riots, and violence against civilians in Bayelsa state, 1 January 2024 – 31 August 2025, based on ACLED data.1566

Security incidents were recorded by ACLED in 6 LGAs of the state. The by far highest number of incidents was recorded in Yenagoa LGA (29), followed by Southern Ijaw (8), Ogbia (3) and Ekeremor (2). No incidents were recorded in 2 LGAs. According to ACLED, unidentified cult militia, unidentified armed groups and pirates (coded as either 'Actor 1' or 'Actor 2') were involved in the majority of incidents coded as violence against civilians.1567

In early 2025, cult-related violence was a 'major driver' of insecurity in the state.1568 In comparison, in 2024, Bayelsa was among the country's five states with the lowest number of deaths (91) , according to Nigeria Watch.1569 Daily Trust noted that the violence was believed to have increased after the government's decision at the end of 2024 to move all inter-state carparks to Igbogene, Yenagoa LGA, as the gangs were fighting over revenues generated from the new transport terminal. The source estimated that 15 people were killed in seven cult-related incidents in Yenagoa in the period from January to April 2025.1570 The Guardian Nigeria reported in May 2025 of the killing of six people within a week, among them two graduates from Niger Delta University (NDU) who were attacked while heading out for shopping.1571 In some areas of the state, social activities were reportedly 'paralyzed', with people avoiding the streets and shop owners closing early for fear of being attacked.1572

Conflict-related infrastructure damage and road security - No information could be found during the reference period.

Displacement, movement and return - No information could be found during the reference period.

c) State response in maintaining law and order

The Guardian Nigeria noted in May 2025 that in some parts of the capital Yenagoa, the violent conflict between rivalling cult groups continued 'unabated' and that after the killing of 15 people within a month, the police authorities 'appeared helpless' in the ongoing 'cult war'. Residents in Swali community (Yenagoa LGA) reportedly blamed the authorities for failing to take 'proactive actions' against the attackers, and the community's leader claimed that many of those detained by the police would return only a few days later and harass the residents.1573

Similarly, a rights activist stated that police efforts were made difficult by 'all sorts of calls from different angles' that the police would receive when they arrested cultists, 'pleading for their release'. He alleged links between the political class and cultists, noting that the cultists were sometimes 'the same boys' whom politicians would 'use during elections'.1574

In May 2025, the paramount ruler of Swali community was reportedly suspended by the Bayelsa state governor due to the escalation of cult-related killings and crime and over ‘credible intelligence’ that two of the traditional leader’s sons were involved in cult activities.1575

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