

2.5.5. Edo

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Edo state is comprised of the following 18 LGAs: Akoko-Edo, Egor, Esan Central, Esan North-East, Esan South-East, Esan West, Etsako Central, Etsako East, Etsako West, Igueben, Ikpoba-Okha, Oredo, Orhionmwon, Ovia North-East, Ovia South-West, Owan East, Owan West and Uhunmwonde.1636 The state's capital is Benin city. 1637

The main ethnic groups include Binis, Okpe, Esan, Afemai, Ora, Akoko-Edo, Igbanke, Emai and Ijaw.1638

UNFPA and the US Census Bureau projected the population at 4 777 042 in 2022, based on figures from the 2006 census.1639

a) Conflict dynamics and main actors

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

In July 2025, the Nigerian Observer pointed to 'rampant cultism and targeted kidnappings' as major security challenges, particularly in Benin city, Ekpoma, Auchi and their surrounding areas. 1640 PIND mentioned criminal activities, including homicide, kidnapping for ransom, and communal violence as the main sources of insecurity in early 2025.1641 In the second quarter of 2025, PIND pointed to a decline in the number of reported fatalities, despite an increase in the number of security incidents. Criminal activities, cult-related clashes and communal conflict remained the main security challenges.1642 Criminal violence was also a 'significant' driver of insecurity in 2024, alongside cult/gang-related violence,1643 while in terms of communal conflict, Edo was one of three states recording the lowest number of fatalities in 2024, according to Nigeria Watch.1644

During the reference period, media sources reported on cult gang clashes involving the Black Axe,1645 Eiye, Vikings,1646 and Maphite1647. Edo state, and particularly Benin city, was reportedly 'notorious' for lethal clashes between Black Axe and Viking confraternities.1648 Another group operating in Edo state was the Buccaneer Confraternity.1649 Clashes between rival cult groups were mostly driven by fights for supremacy in terms of territorial control.1650

Communal violence included killings1651 and abductions by suspected herders,1652 mob violence,1653 an attack by suspected Ijaw militias,1654 and attacks by unidentified armed men. 1655

The Nigerian non-profit Policy and Advocacy Centre (PLAC) reported on pre-election violence ahead of the governorship elections in Edo state in September 2024, including shootings and assaults.1656 In the same context, PIND mentioned the targeted abduction of political figures. 1657 Election Day, however, was 'largely peaceful'.1658

b) Security incidents and impact on the population

In the period between 1 January 2024 and 31 August 2025, ACLED recorded 237 security incidents in Edo state, resulting in 212 fatalities. Of these security incidents, 105 were coded as battles, 33 as riots and 99 as violence against civilians.1659

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Figure 19: Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence, riots, and violence against civilians in Edo state, 1 January 2024 – 31 August 2025, based on ACLED data. 1660

Security incidents were recorded by ACLED in all 18 LGAs of Edo state, with the highest number documented in Oredo LGA (71), followed by Etsako West (25), Ikpoba Okha (19), Ovia North-East (18), and Ovia South-West (15). According to ACLED, unidentified armed groups, cult militia and Fulani ethnic militia (coded as either 'Actor 1' or 'Actor 2') were involved in the majority of incidents coded as violence against civilians.1661

PIND recorded the highest number of conflict-related deaths in Oredo LGA in 2024,1662 and in the second quarter of 2025.1663 In the first quarter of 2025, the highest number of conflict-related fatalities was recorded in Esan North-East LGA.1664

Media reported of waves of cult-related violence and crime during the reference period.1665 For example, 150 fatalities were recorded in the period January - May 2024, according to the governor of Edo state,1666 20 suspected members of rival cults were reportedly killed within a month in the period October-November 2024,1667 and in the period March - April 2025, the Nigerian consulting company Nextier recorded 13 incidents of gunmen attacks,1668 while the Nigerian Tribune reported of at least 15 people killed within four days during the same period in Benin city in fights for supremacy between Black Axe and Maphite cults.1669

Attacks on farmers by unknown gunmen or suspected herders included, for example, the killing of a man on his farm in Ubune-Ivbiaro community/Owan East LGA in March 2024,1670 and the killing of two men on their farms in Okpekpe community/Etsako East LGA in February 2025.1671 At least 22 people were reportedly killed in an attack by suspected Ijaw militias on seven farming communities in February 2025, while the state police confirmed seven killed and six injured. The attack reportedly occurred in retaliation for the previous killing of a suspected cocoa thief by vigilantes hired by the farmers.1672 In March 2025, seven travellers on their way from Rivers to Kano state for Islamic religious festivities were killed in a mob attack in Uromi.1673 The travellers, Hausa hunters, had been stopped by local vigilantes who found several arms when searching their car and subsequently suspected them of being kidnappers and herders, triggering the attack.1674

Conflict-related infrastructure damage - Media sources reported on conflict-related infrastructure damage in the context of communal violence such as the burning of houses, destruction of property, and crops.1675 In March 2025 and based on a previously adopted law, authorities began with the demolition of houses presumably linked to kidnapping activities.1676

Road security - The Nigerian Observer reported on several attacks on travellers along the Ivbiaro-Auchi route in Owan East LGA in May 2025, and quoted a village chief as saying that given the insecurity many locals were afraid to go to their farms.1677 PIND mentioned targeted abductions of travellers ahead of the elections for state governor in September 2024.1678

Displacement, movement and return - Residents were reportedly fleeing 'en masse' following violent clashes with suspected Ijaw militias that affected seven farming communities in Ovia South-West LGA in February 2025.1679 No further information on conflict-induced displacement and no information on returns in Edo state during the reference period could be found.

c) State response in maintaining law and order

Security experts and opposition members reportedly criticised the state government for its 'lack of coordination' in the context of a resurgence of cult-related violence and criminal activity, following contradicting information on the status of the Edo State Security Network (ESSN).1680 The ESSN and other state-owned or private security networks had been suspended from participating in securing voters and election materials by the Inspector General of Police (IGP) ahead of the September 2024 gubernatorial elections.1681 The suspension was lifted by October/November 2024.1682 Two civil society organisations reportedly attributed the rise in crime to the ban of the ESSN,1683 with a member of one organisation noting that there was an 'insufficient' number of police officers in relation to the state's population.1684

In January 2025, the Secret Cult and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Law was signed into law by the state governor. The new law foresees a 21-year prison term for 'financial and material sponsors of secret cults' and states that '[a]ny person found to be a cultist under Section 4, who assaults, injures, maims, or kills any person(s) or destroys any property in furtherance of the activities of any secret cult, is guilty of an offence and is liable to 21 years of imprisonment without an option of fine'. In case of a fatality, the law provided for the death penalty for the perpetrator(s) and the confiscation and demolition of their properties and place of residence by the state. Persons harbouring cult members face a 10-year prison term and the confiscation and demolition of their properties.1685

PLAC pointed to an 'alarming rise' in attacks targeting police officers and military forces in the South-South zone in 2024,1686 such as the killing of two police officers in Edo state in March 2024.1687 A police station was set on fire in Etsako East LGA in October 2024 by youths who accused police of collaborating with suspected criminals.1688 Similarly, communities in Etsako West LGA alleged in a protest letter to the IGP in April 2025, in the context of ongoing killings, kidnappings and rape, that police officers collaborated with suspected herders whom they accused of being responsible for the attacks.1689 Punch described the mob killing of suspected herders in Uromi in March 2025 (see above) as 'the symptom of a broken security and justice system' in Nigeria.1690 Following a second attack on a Catholic seminary in Etsako East LGA in July 2025, where a police officer was killed and three seminarians kidnapped, the Human Rights

Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) pointed to the state's security forces' 'lack of capacity to protect the lives and property of the citizens'.1691

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