

2.5.6. Rivers

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Rivers state is comprised of the following 23 LGAs: Port Harcourt, Obio-Akpor, Okrika, Ogu–Bolo, Eleme, Tai, Gokana, Khana, Oyigbo, Opobo–Nkoro, Andoni, Bonny, Degema, Asari-Toru, Akuku-Toru, Abua–Odual, Ahoada West, Ahoada East, Ogba–Egbema–Ndoni, Emohua, Ikwerre, Etche, Omuma. The capital city is Port Harcourt.1692

The main ethnic groups include Ikwerre, Ibani, Opobo, Eleme, Okrika, and Kalabari, Etche, Ogba, Ogoni, Engenni and others.1693

UNFPA and the US Census Bureau projected the population at 7 476 805 in 2022, based on figures from the 2006 census.1694

a) Conflict dynamics and main actors

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

In the first six months of 2025, PIND identified criminal activities and clashes between rival cult gangs as major security challenges in Rivers state, with the highest number of conflict-related fatalities being recorded in Emohua LGA in the period from January to March 2025,1695 and in Port Harcourt LGA in the period from April to June 2025.1696 Similarly, in 2024, clashes between rival cult gangs, security forces and local vigilantes, kidnapping for ransom – especially in Port Harcourt, Ikwerre, Degema, Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni, and Ahoada West LGAs –, as well as vigilante and mob violence triggered by criminal activity and clashes between local vigilantes, cult gangs and ‘hoodlums’ constituted primary drivers of insecurity.1697 Cult-related violence was predominantly caused by fights for supremacy over territory, levies collection and other criminal activities.1698 In its report analysing the main drivers of crime and violence in the Niger Delta and covering the period from 2019 to 2024, the Nigerian Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) rated ‘cultism’ as overall ‘very high’ in Rivers state.1699 Cult groups operating in Rivers state reportedly included the Deebam1700 (also spelled Deygbam1701), Icelanders,1702 Vikings, 1703 the Klu-Klux-Klan,1704 the Black Axe confraternity,1705 and the Greenlanders,1706 who predominantly operated around Owube Kingdom in Ahoada West LGA.1707 Clashes between these groups were reported during the reference period, including between Deebam and Icelanders,1708 Vikings and Icelanders,1709 the Klu-Klux-Klan and Vikings,1710 and between Vikings and the Black Axe confraternity.1711

Sources also reported of pirate attacks on boats travelling along sea routes and the abduction of passengers;1712 pipeline vandalism,1713 and oil theft,1714 also involving children.1715

Following an outbreak of violence and attacks on oil infrastructure, the Nigerian president declared a state of emergency in Rivers state in March 2025, and suspended the state's leadership and parliament for six months.1716 The move, which was criticised as 'unconstitutional',1717 constituted the culmination of an ongoing political crisis between state governor Fubara and his predecessor,1718 and according to one source, triggered 'ethnic sentiments' among the Ijaw, who perceive attempts to unseat the governor as directed against the political representation of their ethnic group.1719

b) Security incidents and impact on the population

In the Period 1 January 2024 - 31 August 2025, ACLED recorded 141 security incidents in Rivers state, resulting in 111 fatalities. Of these security incidents, 42 were coded as battles, 28 as explosion/remote violence, 14 as riots, and 57 as violence against civilians.1720

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Figure 20: Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence, riots, and violence against civilians in Rivers state, 1 January 2024 – 31 August 2025, based on ACLED data.1721

Security incidents were recorded by ACLED in 19 LGAs of the state, with the highest number documented in the capital Port Harcourt (36 incidents), followed by Degema LGA (25), Obio (12), Emohua and Ikwerre LGAs (11 incidents each). No incidents were recorded in 4 LGAs. According to ACLED, unidentified armed groups and cult militias, the Icelander cult group, and pirates (coded as either 'Actor 1' or 'Actor 2') were involved in the majority of incidents coded as violence against civilians.1722

PIND noted that, overall, Rivers was one of three states in the Niger Delta region with the highest level of lethal violence in 2024.1723 It recorded the fourth highest level within the region in the first quarter of 2025, with a slight increase compared to the last quarter of 2024, 1724 and the third highest level in the second quarter of 2025.1725 According to Nigeria Watch, Rivers was among the three most affected states in terms of cult-related fatalities and the fifth most affected state in terms of fatalities related to kidnappings in 2024.1726

For example, at least 19 people were feared to have been killed in a battle for supremacy between Deebam and Icelanders cult groups in Obelle community in Emohua LGA in February 2025. According to the police quoted by Punch, 10 fatalities were confirmed, and the fight was over control of levies from an oil company in the region.1727 Moreover, since the beginning of 2025, the Nigerian Foundation for Investigative Journalism (FIJ) reported of three incidents of sea pirates abducting at least 28 passengers from boats travelling on waterways in Rivers state. 1728

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

In the context of attacks by sea pirates on passenger boats, the FIJ reported that several abducted passengers could be rescued by security forces. Nevertheless, the ‘maritime police lacked funding and equipment’ to secure the state’s waterways, according to the chairman of the Maritime Workers Union quoted by the FIJ.1729

In January 2024, the Nigerian navy reportedly launched Operation Delta Sanity to fight oil theft in the Niger Delta Region and extended it in April and July 2024.1730 A second phase of the operation was launched on 30 December 2024.1731 In December 2024, the state government declared that it had donated six gunboats to the Nigerian navy to improve waterway patrols and response times.1732 Operations against oil theft,1733 vandalism,1734 and illegal refineries continued to be reported in 2025.1735

Vanguard reported on a case of oil theft executed with the complicity of two officers of the NSCDC.1736 Four soldiers and an NSCDC member were arrested in May 2024 on suspected involvement in armed robbery, the hijacking of food trucks and diversion of these goods.1737 On the other hand, sources reported of lethal attacks on security personnel1738 and suspected police informants.1739 One official stated that the police was ‘doing their best’, but that it was ‘not enough’. Cult members had sophisticated arms, while a local security outfit had only hunting guns.1740

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