2. Actors of persecution or serious harm

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: March 2026

For general guidance on the country guidance approach to actors of persecution or serious harm, see 'EUAA, Actors of persecution or serious harm' in *Country Guidance: explained*, February 2026'.

In Nigeria, a wide range of different groups and individuals can be considered as actors of persecution or serious harm. Applicants might be at risk of persecution or serious harm by more than one actor. The following sections highlight the main actors of persecution and serious harm as well as their areas of control/activity, in a non-exhaustive manner.

2.1. The Nigerian state forces and state-affiliated actors

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI report: Security 2025, 1.1.1., 1.1.2., 1.2.1.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

The Nigerian state forces include the **Nigerian Police Force (NPF)**, the **Nigerian Armed Forces (NAF)** and the **Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC)**, deployed in all 36 states and Abuja FCT. Sources estimated the strength of NPF at 371 800 officers, serving a total population estimated in 2024 at 236 747 130, indicating a shortage in manpower. The NAF have been mostly engaged in counterinsurgency operations in the North-East with the help of the Multinational Joint

Task Force (MNJTF) and combating criminal gangs/banditry in the North-West, farmer-herder violence, criminal activities targeting the oil industry in Niger Delta and separatist agitation in the South-East. NSCDC activities have been mostly about the protection of critical national assets and infrastructure. Nigerian state forces have been accused of misconduct, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, airstrikes, ambushes, extortion, excessive use of force, and sexual violence. Moreover, disputes between the NSCDC and the police over their respective roles, as well as violent altercations between their members have been reported.

Due to the shortage in manpower, as well as corruption and insufficient resources, Nigerian state forces are assisted by various **vigilante groups** in the fight against insecurity all over the country, including in relation to banditry and kidnappings. Some groups have defined structures and operational procedures, especially those sponsored by state administrations, while others operated under no specific guidelines or organisation. The most powerful vigilante groups are the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) in Benue state, which was estimated to have around 13 000 members in 2023, the Borno State Hunters Association (BoSHA), the Kesh Kesh and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the Northeastern part of the country. Amotekun and Ebube Abu are also present in the South-West and South-East parts of the country. Vigilante groups are accused of human rights violations such as torture and extra-judicial killings.

☐ 2.2. Non-State actors

The term Boko Haram serves as an umbrella label covering multiple internal factions within this armed group. Some COI sources do not distinguish between the two main factions of Boko Haram, JAS and ISWAP, which may affect the specificity of information related to their activities, structures, and areas of control.

Furthermore, reporting on cult groups, herders and farmers, bandits, and in some cases vigilantes, separatists, or Islamist armed groups often relies on broad labels like criminals, gunmen, bandits, or terrorists. These terms can blur distinctions between different groups, especially where their activities overlap, making precise identification difficult.

☐ 2.2.1. Boko Haram and other Islamist armed groups

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI products: Security 2025, 1.1.3., 1.2.1., 2.1.4., 2.1.6.; COI Update 2026, 1.1., 2.1.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

Since 2016, there have been two main distinct factions of Boko Haram – the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS) – with considerable differences in their modus operandi and territorial control.

Sources estimated that **ISWAP** has between 4 000 and 12 000 fighters within its ranks, operating in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states. As its organisation, the group has split its territories in northeastern Nigeria into three provinces/ *wilaya* (Buhaira, Faruq and Krenowa). ISWAP mainly targets the military forces and Christian communities and seeks to improve its relations with Muslim communities on whom it has imposed levies to maintain its standing armed fighting force. Deadly assaults against Shiites have also been reported. **JAS** is much less structured than ISWAP and estimated numbers are difficult to determine. As of mid-2024, the group controlled several areas in Nigeria, including its main territory on the Lake Chad islands in Borno and Yobe states, Gwoza Hills near the Nigeria-Cameroon border in Borno state and the hills near the Shiroro Reservoir in Kaduna State. While JAS primarily targets civilians, including Muslims, through plunders and abductions for ransom, the group has been also reported to regularly attack military posts to replenish its own arsenal. The group has also started to 'tax' residents in the Lake Chad enclave.

Boko Haram is expanding beyond the Lake Chad region into North-Central Nigeria, reportedly collaborating with bandits and with the emerging Lakurawa group. **Lakurawa** has been described as a violent jihadist group, suspected to have links with the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP), and operating in Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara states. Its members have attacked villages in both Nigeria and Niger and are accused of levying 'taxes' in the territory they hold. In December 2024, the group was designated as a terrorist organisation by Nigerian authorities.

In addition, other Islamist armed groups such as Ansaru and Mahmuda exist in the northern part of Nigeria. **Ansaru** is an al-Qaeda-affiliated group and **Mahmuda** is a newly emerged group believed to be a Boko Haram splinter faction. Both groups are based around the Kainji National Park between Niger and Kwara states. Ansaru has been linked to several high-profile attacks and kidnappings in Kaduna state and across Nigeria. Mahmuda was primarily engaged in village attacks, kidnappings for ransom, forced labour and illegal taxation of herders and farmers. In August 2025, the leader and deputy leader of Ansaru were arrested and a trial was set to start in January 2026 with charges related to terrorism and other crimes. Deputy leader of Ansaru is also associated with Mahmuda. Furthermore, a Boko Haram faction, known as **Wulowulo**, has established a presence in Kwara state. Meanwhile, Sahel-based al-Qaeda–affiliated Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) also claimed its first attack in Kwara state in late October 2025.

For more information on the methods and tactics of these groups, see 4.3.3(a) Security situation in Nigeria: recent events.

☐ 2.2.2. Herders and farmers and communal militias

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI report: Security 2025, 1.1.3., 1.2.2., 1.2.7., 2.1.5., 2.1.7., 2.2.4., 2.4.3.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

Farmer-herder violence has been long-standing in Nigeria. These tensions appear to be fuelled by competition over ever-dwindling resources and the impacts of climate change. Since herders are predominantly Muslim and farming communities largely Christian, tensions between the two may take a religious dimension which also overlaps with ethnic differences (e.g. between Fulani and Hausa). Farmer–herder violence, which has further been described as organised criminality led by armed groups or as terrorism, intensified in early 2025.

The highest levels of violence related to herders and farmers conflict are reported in the North-Central and North-West regions. In the second quarter of 2025, mass casualty attacks were reported in Benue and Plateau states. Violence between herders and farmers was sometimes inflicted by unidentified perpetrators. In some instances, herders and farmers have organised themselves into militias. Both groups have engaged in coordinated and mass-

casualty attacks against each other's communities. These confrontations have also involved the killing of livestock, cattle rustling, destruction of property and farm produce.

Inter- and intra-communal clashes have also been reported in several parts of Nigeria, mainly in the North-Central and North-West, with some incidents also reported in the southern states. Community groups, often organised along ethnic or tribal lines, have at times formed communal militias. These clashes, typically fuelled by competition over land and natural resources, have led to civilian fatalities and property destruction.

Within this context, organised criminal activity and clashes between bandits and vigilante groups have been also reported.

☐ 2.2.3. Pro-Biafra separatist groups

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI products: Security 2025, 1.1.3., 2.4.1., 2.4.4., 2.4.5.; Country Focus 2025, 2.9.1.; COI Update 2026, 1.1.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

The Indigenous People of Biafra (**IPOB**), a splinter faction from the Movement for Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), is a secessionist group fighting for the restoration of the Republic of Biafra and designated as a terrorist organisation, banned by the Nigerian government in 2017. Since the 2021 arrest of its leader, Nnamdi Kanu, armed violence linked to the group has declined. Nevertheless, IPOB has been enforcing a sit-at-home order across the South-East using looting, arson, and targeted killings towards those disrespectful of the order. Kanu was sentenced to life imprisonment in November 2025.

The Eastern Security Network (**ESN**) is IPOB's paramilitary wing, whose strength is unknown, and it was created in December 2020 to allegedly protect the Igbos from attacks by armed men, including Fulani herders. Over 2024, ESN launched a campaign that dislodged Fulanis and criminal settlements in the forests of the South-East. During the same period, ESN also fought against security forces and regularly targeted police and military installations.

Since 2023, violent activities in the South-East, including attacks targeting security forces, were conducted by armed men linked to Simon Ekpa, a Finland-based agitator and founder of the Biafra Republic Government in Exile (**BRGIE**) and the Biafran Liberation Army (**BLA**), both created in 2025. The BRGIE is now

considered more violent than IPOB. It has begun recruiting fighters, including among ESN members, and seems to be linked to the rising violence in the South-East region. The BLA has carried out violent attacks in the South-East, including kidnappings, killings, sexual violence, and trafficking in human beings. In September 2025, Ekpa was sentenced in Finland to six years for terrorism-related offences.

☐ 2.2.4. Criminal groups

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI reports: Security 2025, 1.1.3., 1.2.3.; Country Focus 2025, 2.2.3.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

Bandit groups, also known as organised criminals, unknown gunmen or terrorists, are mobile, economically motivated, and characterised by fragmentation and varying levels of capability and organisation. Reported forms of violence include armed robberies, killings, sexual violence, kidnappings, cattle rustling, armed attacks and raids on motorbikes targeting local communities. The intensity of their attacks has been steadily increasing and banditry-related violence intensified across Nigeria's North-West and North-Central zones as well as parts of the South-West, including Lagos.

Furthermore, in southern Nigeria, several violent armed groups originated as university confraternities or **cult groups**. These include Black Axe (Aiye) also perceived as the Neo-Black Movement of Africa (NBM), which runs cells in numerous countries; the Supreme Eiye Confraternity, operating mainly in Lagos; the Supreme Vikings Confraternity, strongly established in Edo and Delta states; the Buccaneers (Alora Sea Lords); the Maphite gang, dominant in Edo State; Deygbam, Deywel, Icelanders and Greenlanders, which are primarily operating in Rivers, Edo, Delta, and Bayelsa states. Among them, rivalries over the control of territories were reported. While these groups are well-known, the most recorded incidents of lethal violence were linked to unidentified gangs. Black Axe is particularly famous for its violence and brutality as it uses kidnappings, extortion, smuggling and drug dealing in big cities such as Benin City, Lagos and Port Harcourt.

Organised criminal groups as well as Nigerian confraternities, such as Black Axe, Supreme Viking Confraternity, Arobaga Vikings, the Maphite, and the ACHAD Life Mission International (operating in Kaduna and Plateau states) are also involved in trafficking in human beings and other criminal activities with their networks collaborating with European mafias and other organised criminal groups.

☐ 2.2.5. Other non-state actors

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI report: Country Focus 2025, 2.2.3., 2.2.8., 2.3.3., 2.5., 2.16., 2.17.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

Family members, friends and community members have also been actors of persecution or serious harm against individuals with disabilities, including mental health issues, individuals accused of witchcraft, and persons with diverse SOGIESC. They have also been perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence, female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) and forced marriage, especially child marriage, using coercion in the form of physical violence, threats, verbal harassment and financial oppression. In the case of FGM/C, older community members, midwives, and medical professionals typically carry out the procedure.

In the context of trafficking in human beings, although it is driven by criminal networks, multiple actors play critical roles throughout the recruitment and exploitation process. These include traditional religious figures (such as juju priests), who use oath rituals to control victims; community leaders and family members, who may facilitate the process through deception or threats; corrupt officials and other intermediaries, whose collaboration provides the logistical support required at various stages of the trafficking cycle.



For further information on human rights violations committed by different State and non-State actors and their relevance as potential exclusion grounds, see 7. Exclusion.

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