



NEWS SITUATION TRACKING – NIGERIA

ATTACKS ON POLICE STRUCTURES AND KILLING OF POLICE OPERATIVES IN THE SOUTH-EAST AND SOUTH-SOUTH REGIONS OF NIGERIA

Vol. 13

Location: NIGERIA

Issue: 62 police operatives killed, 23 others injured with 20 police stations burnt down and vandalised by suspected hoodlums from January 9 to April 21 2021¹.

Date: April 21, 2021

COMMUNITY PROFILING

Population: Nigeria has a population of over 206,139,589².

Basic Demography and Geography of Hotspots:

Nigeria shares land borders with the Republic of Benin, Chad, Cameroun, Niger and the Gulf of Guinea of the Atlantic Ocean. The country has 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). There are 774 Local Government Areas (LGA's) divided across six (6) geo-political zones.

Ethnicity: Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups with Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba in the majority.³

Criminal attacks on police stations and security checkpoints in Nigeria:

The operatives of security agencies in the country have witnessed series of attacks by criminal gangs resulting in several fatalities and injuries.

The attacks on police stations and killing of police operatives were heightened during the nationwide demonstration against police officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in October 2020.

CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS

Direct Actors: Suspected cult gangs/hoodlums.

Affected Persons: Police officers.

Interested Actors:

Federal/State Governments, South-East and South-South Governors Forum, Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Nigerian Military, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Department of State Service (DSS), Nigerian Correctional Service (NCS), Presidential Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons, Ohaneze Ndigbo (Pan-Igbo Socio-Political Organisation), Igbo National Council, South East Youth Leaders, Movement

INCIDENT PROFILING

The security challenges in Nigeria have further been compounded by series of attacks by suspected hoodlums on police stations/security checkpoints and police operatives across states in Nigeria, especially the South-East and South-South regions of Nigeria. These attacks continue to wane public confidence and trust in the activities of law enforcement agencies to protect the citizenry, as they have become easy targets by criminal gangs.

Aside the existing trust deficit among the citizenry for the Government, increased conversations on the state of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), especially in its discharge of duties and the welfare of police officers have dominated the polity. Challenges of inadequate police funding, human resource and capacity building as well as inadequate equipment/technological capacity are among the underlying factors that account for lack of professionalism and operational gaps within the police force.

From January 9 to April 21, 2021, 20 police stations across states in Ebonyi, Abia, Imo, Enugu, Anambra (South-East), Akwa-Ibom and Cross River states (South-South) were attacked by suspected hoodlums resulting in 14 police fatalities, 18 injuries, destruction of police buildings and looting of weapons⁵. Out of 20 police stations attacked in the reporting period, states in the South-East region accounted for 18, while 2 police stations were attacked in Akwa-Ibom and Cross River states respectively as recorded in the WANEP's National Early Warning System (NEWS)⁶.

In addition to the above fatalities, several other attacks on police security checkpoints and shoot-outs with suspected hoodlums in the regions led to the death of 48 police officers with 5 other officers sustaining injuries across States in Edo, Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Cross River, Akwa Ibom States (South-South) and Abia, Ebonyi, Imo and Anambra States in the South-East of Nigeria.

The renewed attacks on police stations by suspected hoodlums especially in the South-East region remain a critical human security concern, as it threatens peace and sustainable development in the country. Although security agencies have commenced investigations to ascertain the identity of the attackers and the motive behind the criminality, the attacks have allegedly been linked to suspected cult gangs and members of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its security arm-the Eastern Security Network (ESN)⁷.

The secessionist agenda for the declaration of a Biafra Republic by the leader of the outlawed IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu; his penchant for hate speech using his radio station and social media and the eviction order to non-

¹ www.wanep.org/news

² https://www.statista.com/statistics/1122838/population-of-nigeria/

³ www.wanep.news/org

⁵ www.wanep.news/org

⁶ www.wanep.org/news

⁷ Note: The Eastern Security Network (ESN) is a new armed formation of the proscribed separatist Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) led by Nnamdi Kanu, seeking an independent state for the Igbo ethnic group from Nigeria.

According to the WANEP's National Early Warning System (NEWS), 32 police officers were killed with 43 other officers injured during the #EndSARS protest in October 2020⁴.

Additionally, 82 police stations and outposts were vandalized and burnt down with arms/ammunition looted in the incidents. Affected States during the #EndSARS demonstrations with police fatalities include, Edo (South-South); Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi States (South-East) and Oyo, Lagos and Ogun States (South-West).

for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), International organisations and the Media.

indigenes in the South-East region have led relevant authorities and security experts into accusing the IPOB/ESN for the attacks on police stations and murder of police operatives⁸. However, the IPOB has denied involvement in the attacks⁹.

Moreover, the surge in the rate of sophisticated crimes facilitated by the proliferation of illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in the possession of criminals has further increased the vulnerability of the populace and security agencies to violent attacks and threatens social cohesion. As of April 7, 2021, the Former Head of State and Chairman of the National Peace Committee (NPC), General Abdulsalami Abubakar (rtd) estimated the number of weapons in public circulation at six million in the country¹⁰. This is further corroborated by the report of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) which revealed that out of the 500 million illegal weapons circulating in West Africa, 350 million representing 70% are in the hands of unauthorized users in Nigeria¹¹.

To reduce the risk of attacks and casualties, States in the South-East region have enforced several security measures. This includes, the option of police officers wearing mufti in public except when at police stations¹², while curfew have been imposed by the Abia State Government on four volatile towns of Aba, Umuahia, Ohafia and Arochuku¹³. Also, security agencies have been deployed to the affected states to forestall attacks and apprehend perpetrators of the crime. Other security measures include the launch of a security outfit-'Ebube Agu' by State Governors in the South-East to complement the interventions of security agencies in the fight against crime¹⁴.

Reports of attacks on police stations as recorded by WANEP NEWS in April 2021 include¹⁵:

- On April 5, 2021, suspected hoodlums reportedly carried out coordinated attacks on the Nigeria Police Divisional headquarters and the Nigerian Correctional Services (NCS) in Owerri Municipal of Imo State¹⁶. A total of 1,844 inmates were freed from the NCS and the police headquarters with over 100 vehicles destroyed at the premises of the police headquarters¹⁷. One prison inmate was reported dead with one police officer injured in the incident.
- On April 6, 2021, the Divisional Police headquarter was reportedly burnt down in an attack carried out by suspected hoodlums at Ehime Mbano LGA of Imo State¹⁸.
- On April 6, 2021, 2 police officers were reportedly injured with one police officer missing in an attack carried out by suspected hoodlums on Mbiere Divisional Police headquarters in Mbatoili LGA of Imo State¹⁹.
- On April 6, 2021, one police officer was reportedly injured in an attack carried out by suspected hoodlums at Ugboodo police station in Ebonyi LGA of Ebonyi State²⁰.
- On April 10, 2021, suspected hoodlums reportedly attacked Ekori police station in Yakurr LGA of Cross River State. The attackers reportedly snatched an Ak-47 rifle belonging to one police officer in incident²¹.
- On April 19, 2021, suspected hoodlums reportedly attacked the Zonal Police headquarters (Zone 13) in Ukpo area at Dunukofia LGA of Anambra State. 2 police officers were allegedly killed with 2 officers injured in the incident. Sections of the building and vehicles were set ablaze as the attackers threw petrol bombs and Improvised explosive devices²². Preliminary investigations have revealed that the police operatives repelled the attack resulting in the death of 3 suspected hoodlums with one General Purpose Machine Guns, ammunition, one locally-made smoke pistol and an axe recovered in the incident.
- On April 19, 2021, suspected hoodlums reportedly attacked Uzuakoli Divisional Police station at Bende LGA of Abia State²³. The attackers reportedly destroyed the building and vehicles at the premises of the police station with some detainees reportedly released during the attack.²⁴
- On April 21, 2021, suspected hoodlums reportedly burnt down the Divisional Police Station in Adani, Uzo-Uwani LGA of Enugu State. Three police officers were allegedly killed with several others injured in the incident²⁵.

RISK ANALYSIS

⁸ <https://www.pressreader.com/nigeria/sunday-trust/20210411/282200833736551>

⁹ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/04/attack-on-zone-13-anambra-ipob-denies-involvement/>

¹⁰ <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/04/08/abdulsalami-raises-the-alarm-says-6m-weapons-circulating-in-nigeria/>

¹¹ <https://guardian.ng/news/again-twin-attacks-rock-police-divisions-in-abia-anambra/>

¹² <https://dailypost.ng/2021/04/01/anambra-how-police-used-mobile-phone-to-track-one-of-soldos-attackers/>, <https://guardian.ng/news/again-twin-attacks-rock-police-divisions-in-abia-anambra/>

¹³ <https://guardian.ng/news/again-twin-attacks-rock-police-divisions-in-abia-anambra/>

¹⁴ <https://punchng.com/bandits-responsible-for-south-east-attacks-not-ipob-umahi/>

¹⁵ www.wanep.org/news

¹⁶ <https://www.thecable.ng/just-in-inmates-freed-as-gunmen-attack-imo-prison-police-headquarters>

¹⁷ <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/04/07/audacious-assault-on-imo-police-hq-forces-buhari-to-remove-igp-adamu/>

¹⁸ <https://dailytrust.com/breaking-gunmen-attack-imo-police-station-kidnap-officer>

¹⁹ <https://dailytrust.com/breaking-gunmen-attack-imo-police-station-kidnap-officer>

²⁰ <https://punchng.com/one-killed-as-police-foil-fresh-attack-on-ebonyi-station/>

²¹ https://punchng.com/gunmen-attack-police-station-in-cross-river/?utm_source=auto-read-also&utm_medium=web

²² <https://punchng.com/two-cops-seven-others-killed-as-gunmen-attack-anambra-abia-police-stations/>

²³ <https://dailytrust.com/breaking-hoodlums-on-rampage-in-anambra-attack-police-station>

²⁴ <https://dailytrust.com/abia-unknown-gunmen-strike-again-kill-two-police-officers-set-vehicles-on-fire>

²⁵ <https://punchng.com/breaking-gunmen-attack-police-station-in-enugu-three-cops-feared-killed/>

Situation Tracking is a periodic analytical report designed by WANEP through its National Early Warning System (NEWS) to monitor the changing trends of specific conflict threats as civil society support to peace and security in Nigeria

- The continued attacks on police stations exposes the inadequacies in the capacity of security operatives to provide security to the vulnerable populations in communities. Moreover, the antecedents of these criminal attacks on police infrastructure and killing of officers across the nation during the #EndSARS demonstration in October 2020 have created an avenue for youth radicalism, further emboldening hoodlums to perpetuate crime as well as confront security operatives.
- Besides, the attacks have been linked to general insecurity tied to poverty, inadequate public service delivery, unemployment, and frustration emanating from intimidation, injustice and extrajudicial killing by police operatives. The widespread unemployment in the country further serves as a push factor for young people to engage in criminality and other vices to sustain their livelihoods. As of December 2020, an estimated 23.18 million people accounting for 33.3% were unemployed in the country²⁶.
- In addition, perceived marginalization of the South East region in the political leadership of Nigeria has been cited by interest groups as the underlying causes of attacks. Notwithstanding this, the attacks have the potential of weakening public confidence in the capacity of security agencies to protect lives and properties. This further creates a security gap, as citizens may likely rely on self-help groups to provide local security for communities.
- The release of inmates by suspected hoodlums from the custody of the State Police Commands and the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCS) coupled with stolen arms and ammunition from the police have also raised national concerns about the capacity of the Police to provide security.
- The attacks have again placed the secessionist agenda of the IPOB in public discourse considering the allegations that they (IPOB) are the perpetrators of the crimes and seeking to destabilize the region with the goal of achieving their demand for a separate Biafra nation.
- Evidently, there is heightened fear among the citizenry, with potential to disrupt social and economic activities in the affected States. The expected security offensive to prevent attacks and suppress the capacity of hoodlums would further aggravate fear in the region and beyond.
- The proliferation and accessibility of illicit Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in Nigeria strengthens the position of hoodlums to constantly perpetuate crimes. The consequences of this could manifest in the risk of violence in other regions in the country.

RECOMMENDATION:

- The Federal and State Governments in partnership with security agencies, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), traditional/religious institutions and women groups should create platforms to rebuilding public confidence and trust through consultations and inclusive participation of youths in the decision-making processes in the country. Also, continuous interface between communities and security agencies is critical to effective service delivery in terms of security to mitigate issues of human security threats in the country;
- The increasing spate of attacks further reveals a gap in the task of intelligence gathering and tactical training of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). Thus, the Federal and State Governments should continue to strengthen the capacity of security agencies and increase security presence in vulnerable communities. This should be bolstered with increased citizens engagement in communities.

²⁶ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-15/nigeria-unemployment-rate-rises-to-second-highest-on-global-list>