

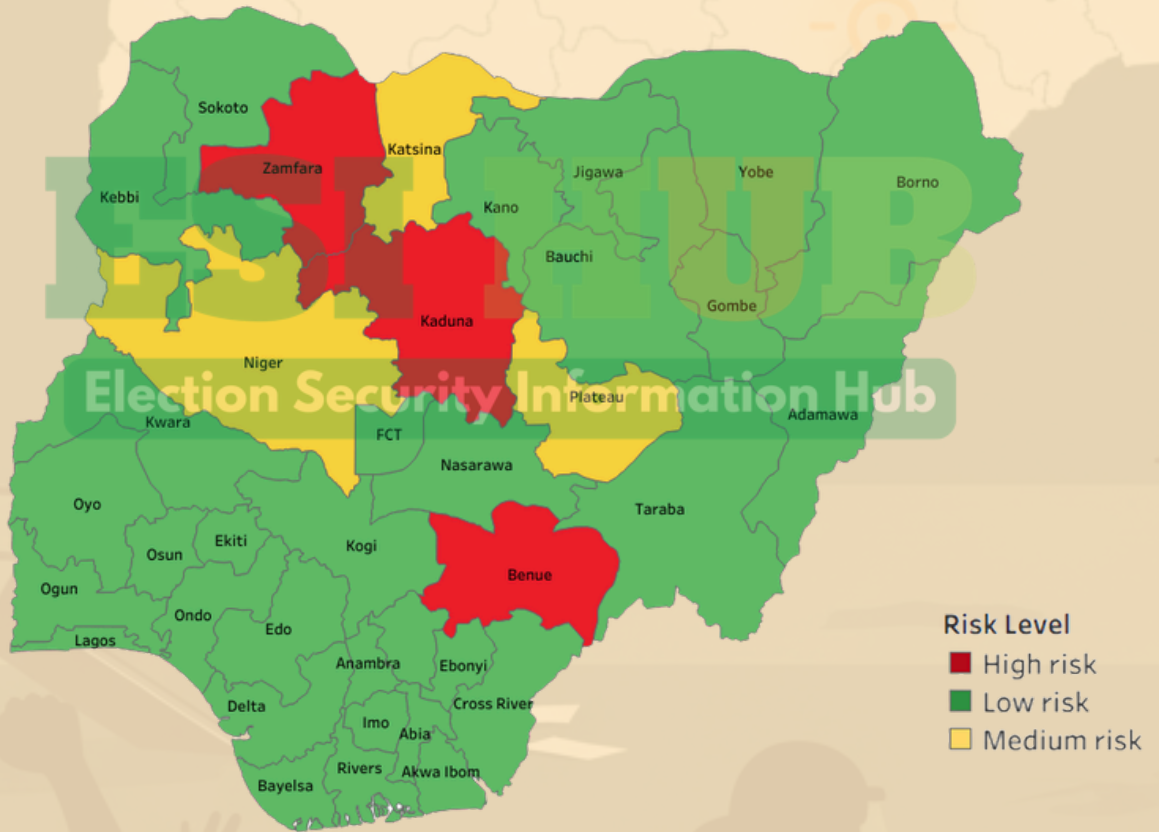


Funded by the European Union



MONTHLY THREAT ASSESSMENT REPORT – JANUARY 2026

National Risk Map (January 2026)



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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

The Kukah Centre (TKC), founded by Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah, is a non-profit policy and research institution dedicated to promoting democracy, good governance, and national cohesion in Nigeria. Through evidence-based research, data-driven analysis, and inclusive dialogue, the Centre works to strengthen human-rights protection, accountability, and sustainable peace. Its interventions are designed to generate actionable insights that inform governance reforms, deepen civic participation, and reinforce institutional resilience.

As the Secretariat of the National Peace Committee (NPC), The Kukah Centre provides administrative support to the NPC — a non-governmental, non-partisan body of eminent Nigerians that has been central to Nigeria’s democratic stability since its establishment in 2015. The Committee is widely recognized for facilitating the National Peace Accords, through which political parties and candidates commit to issue-based campaigns and respect for electoral outcomes. Beyond the accords, the NPC engages in preventive diplomacy, mediation, and dialogue, consistently helping to de-escalate political tensions and safeguard democratic transitions across electoral cycles.

In alignment with this peacebuilding mandate, The Kukah Centre accepted to host the Election Security Information (ESI) Hub under the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN II) programme. The ESI Hub functions as a central coordination and data-intelligence platform that tracks electoral offences, identifies insecurity flashpoints, and generates verified, real-time analysis to inform decision-making. By integrating systematic data collection, geospatial analysis, and strategic communication tools, the Hub provides actionable insights to key stakeholders, including INEC, security agencies, civil society organizations, media, and development partners. Thereby enhancing early warning, countering disinformation, and advancing the shared goal of peaceful, credible, and inclusive elections in Nigeria.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

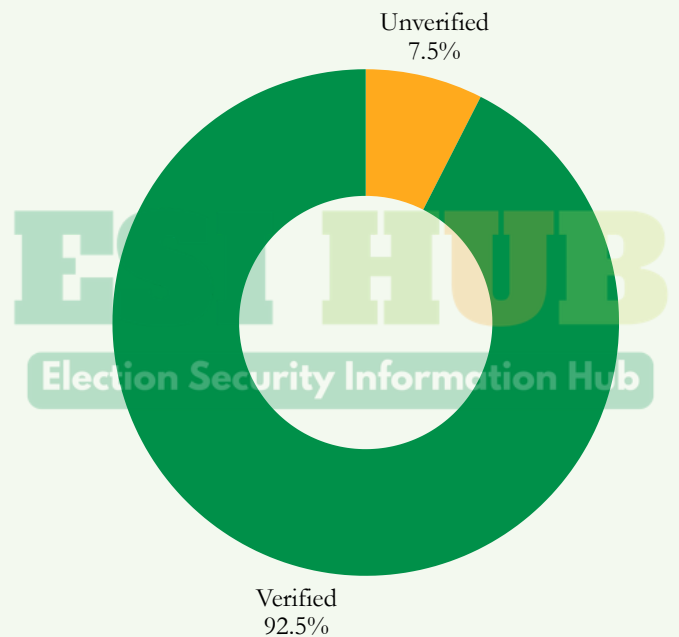
January 2026 marked a volatile and deeply concerning start to the year for Nigeria's national security and electoral environment. The threat landscape was characterised by a sharp and dangerous polarisation: while the North-Central zone recorded the highest number of fatalities, the North-West became the epicentre of mass abductions, accounting for 83% of all kidnapping victims nationwide. A total of 159 security incidents were recorded, resulting in 246 deaths, 376 kidnapped victims, and 93 injuries across 34 states and 110 Local Government Areas. Kidnapping emerged as the most pervasive threat, with 37 incidents affecting 340 victims, while banditry accounted for 30 incidents and 64 fatalities. Gunmen attacks, though fewer in number (12 incidents), proved disproportionately lethal, claiming 59 lives. These figures reflect not only a deterioration in public safety but a strategic evolution in the tactics of armed groups, shifting from sporadic violence to coordinated, high-impact operations. This evolving threat environment directly imperils the integrity of the 2027 electoral cycle, threatening voter participation, campaign mobility, and the logistical capacity of electoral authorities.

This January 2026 report provides a standardised assessment of Nigeria's national security and electoral risk environment, aligned with INEC, UNOCHA, ACLED, and OECD-DAC best practices. It is designed to strengthen early warning, support evidence-based planning, and guide proactive interventions ahead of electoral processes. The analysis serves as a critical tool for the EU-SDGN II programme and supports the mandate of the National Peace Committee (NPC).

Key Findings at a Glance

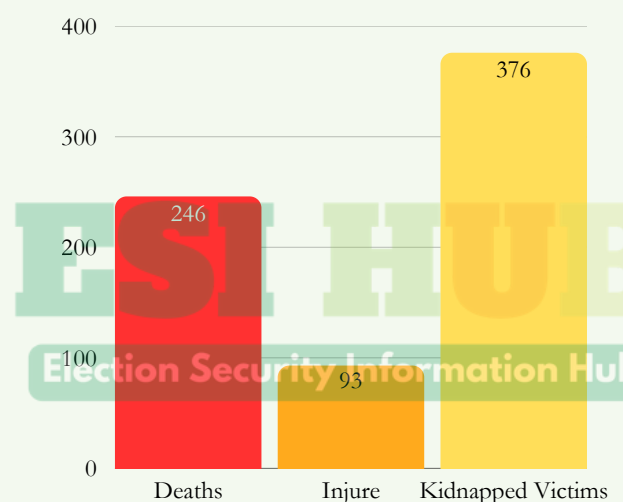
Verification Summary - January 2026

Most reported incidents were verified, indicating strong data validation processes during the reporting period.



Human Impact Metrics

January 2026



January 2026 witnessed a volatile security environment, characterised by a sharp polarization in threat dynamics: while the North Central zone recorded the highest number of deaths, the Northwest became the epicentre of mass abductions.

159 Total Number of Incidents Recorded

147 Total Verified Incidents

12 Total Unverified Incidents

Casualties
246 Deaths, 93 injuries, and 376 victims kidnapped nationwide

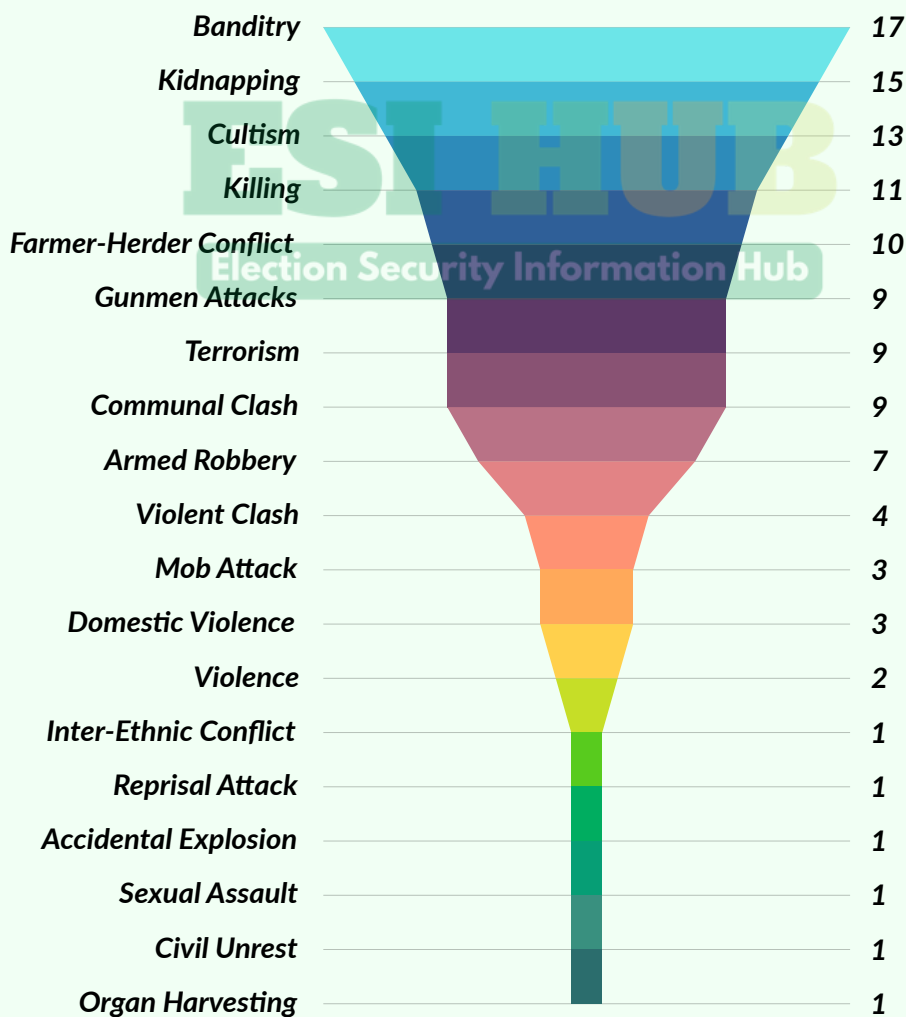
34 States Number of states affected

110 LGAs Number of LGAs affected

Top Threats

Kidnapping emerged as the most pervasive threat during this period, with 37 recorded incidents affecting a total of 340 victims. These cases were largely fuelled by mass abduction events concentrated in the Northwest, highlighting the region’s vulnerability to organized criminal activity. Banditry also posed a significant challenge, accounting for 30 separate incidents and resulting in 64 fatalities. The bulk of these attacks was concentrated in the Northwest and North Central zones, underscoring persistent security gaps in these areas. Meanwhile, gunmen attacks, though fewer in number, proved devastatingly lethal. Only 12 incidents were recorded, yet they resulted in 59 deaths, signalling the extreme risk and high fatality rate associated with these targeted assaults.

Distribution of Incidents Across Threat Categories December 2025



Geographic Highlights

Threats remained geographically concentrated but with spillover effects

Geopolitical Zone	Description
North-West (Most Affected Zone)	<p>Accounts for 83% of all kidnapping victims (313 out of 376). The region faces a dual crisis of banditry (16 incidents) and kidnapping (15 incidents).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epicenter of kidnapping and banditry • Major hotspots: Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina • High risk to voter registration, political movement, and electoral logistics
North-Central (Most Lethal Zone)	<p>Recorded the highest death toll (120 deaths), driven by banditry and communal clashes in states like Benue and Niger.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest deaths (120) across the country • Severe farmer-herder and communal conflicts <p>Major hotspots: Benue, Plateau, Niger</p>
South-West	<p>Characterized by a dual threat environment: urban cultism and political thuggery in major cities like Lagos, coupled with kidnapping and bandit incursions in the forest reserves of states like Ondo and Ekiti. This hybrid risk profile threatens both campaign activities and electoral logistics.</p>
South-South	<p>Characterized by lower intensity but persistent threats of Cultism and targeted Kidnapping, posing risks to urban political activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultism and politically-linked gang violence • Rivers and Delta are key risk states
North-East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent but reduced insurgency-related incidents • Sporadic attacks in Borno and Adamawa
South-East (Simmering Tensions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characterized by the deep entanglement of criminal cults with political competition. Violence is often a proxy for political rivalry, posing a direct risk to polling unit security, election officials, and the integrity of the vote in key urban and riverine areas.

Top 5 Immediate Implications

01

Voter Apathy in the Northwest:

The sheer scale of kidnapping (209 victims in Week 4 alone) creates a climate of fear that may paralyse voter registration and campaigning in rural Zamfara and Kaduna.

02

Lethality in the North Central:

High fatality rates in Benue and Plateau suggest that communal tensions are escalating, which could be weaponised during electioneering.

03

Logistical Disruptions:

The concentration of banditry on key highways in the Northwest and North Central poses severe risks to the deployment of electoral materials.

04

Targeted Political Violence:

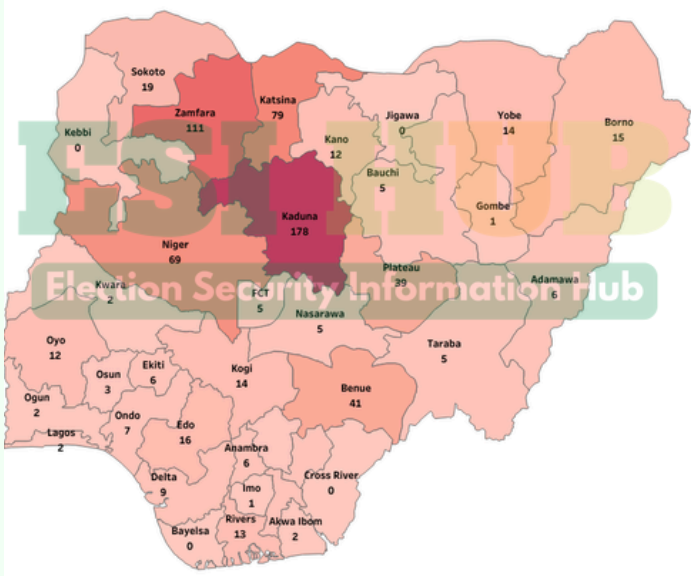
Verified incidents of Assassination (3) and Political Thuggery (2) indicate that political actors are already resorting to lethal violence to settle scores.

05

Displacement:

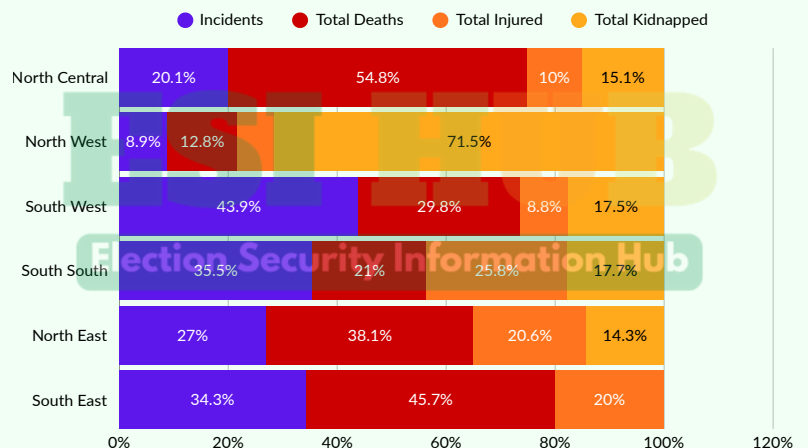
While new IDP numbers for the month appear low in initial reports, the intensity of violence in the North Central is likely generating unreported localised displacement, complicating voting arrangements.

Total Casualties Across Nigeria (January 2026)



Region Summary - January 2026

Certain regions show concentrated threat patterns, pointing to region-specific drivers of insecurity.



RECOMMENDATIONS PREVIEW

For the National Peace Committee (NPC):

Convene emergency state-level peace dialogues in high-risk states (Rivers, Kano, Plateau, Benue, Kaduna, Zamfara); facilitate intra-party dispute resolution mechanisms for parties experiencing leadership crises (PDP, LP, NNPP); task ISPA networks with real-time monitoring of political party dynamics; and publicly reaffirm that the Peace Accord encompasses commitments to internal party democracy.

For Civil Society Organisations (including EU-SDGN partners):

Expand monitoring to include intra-party conflicts, primary violence, and defection patterns; strengthen observation of party primaries; enhance disinformation monitoring and factchecking; amplify rural displacement issues through media partnerships; conduct community-level peace messaging; and track judicial responses to electoral offences.

For Media Organisations:

Prioritise conflict-sensitive reporting; amplify verified information on electoral processes; and provide platforms for peace messaging from the NPC, traditional rulers, and religious leaders.

For Security Agencies:

Launch intelligence-driven interdiction operations in the Kaduna-Zamfara-Katsina bandit corridors; deploy rapid-response forces to communal flashpoints in Benue and Plateau; and secure critical INEC logistics routes in high-risk states.

For INEC:

Reroute logistics away from forecasted high-risk highways and LGAs; provide enhanced risk allowances and security briefings for ad-hoc staff deployed to volatile areas.

For Political Actors & Parties:

Publicly sanction candidates whose supporters engage in violence or incite hatred; commit to issue-based campaigning; and reject inflammatory ethno-religious rhetoric.

For Traditional & Religious Institutions:

Convene trust-building dialogues in communal flashpoints (Plateau, Benue, Southern Kaduna); and advocate for peaceful elections through sermons and council meetings.

For Development/International Partners:

Provide flexible funding for NPC state-level dialogues and CSO mediation initiatives; bolster judicial capacity for election petition tribunals; and maintain diplomatic engagement, reinforcing peaceful political conduct.

2. INTRODUCTION

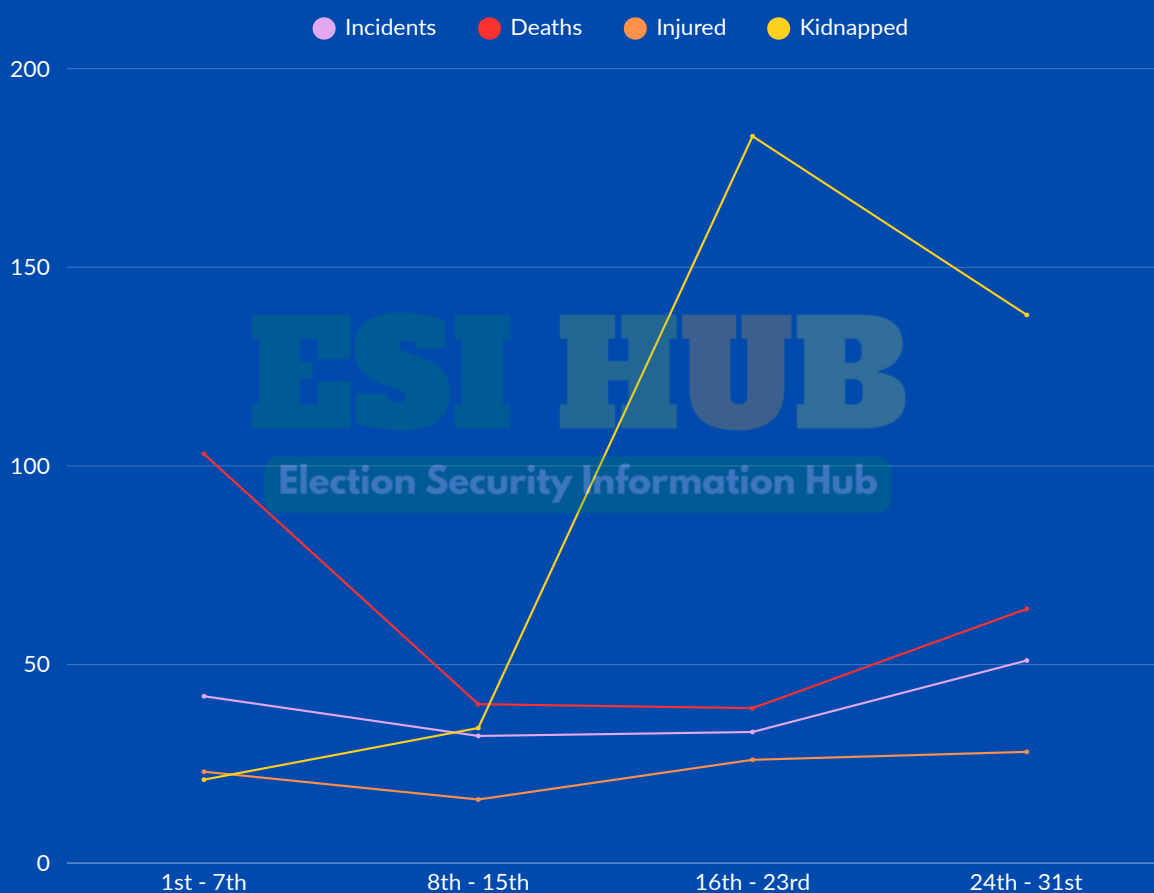
2.1. PURPOSE & MANDATE

This report is produced under the mandate of the ESI Hub, a programme supported by The Kukah Centre and aligned with the objectives of the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN II) project and the National Peace Committee (NPC). Its core purpose is to systematically monitor, analyse, and report on the nexus between pervasive insecurity and electoral integrity in Nigeria. For January 2026, the aim is to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based assessment of the evolving threat landscape, quantify and qualify its impact on the pre-election environment, and offer actionable intelligence to key stakeholders. This analysis directly supports the mission of fostering a secure, credible, and peaceful electoral process by enabling data-driven early warning and response.

During this period, kidnapping emerged as the most pervasive threat, with 37 recorded incidents affecting 340 victims. These cases were largely driven by mass abductions concentrated in the Northwest, highlighting the region's heightened vulnerability to organised criminal activity. Banditry also posed a significant challenge, accounting for 30 incidents and 64 fatalities, with the bulk of these attacks concentrated in the Northwest and North Central zones. Meanwhile, gunmen attacks, though fewer in number, proved devastatingly lethal, 12 incidents resulted in 59 deaths, underscoring the extreme risk and high fatality rate associated with targeted assaults.

Weekly Trends - January 2026

Incident levels fluctuated week-to-week, with identifiable spikes that may align with external triggers.



The temporal security trends for January 2026 show a transition from lethal strikes to mass-scale abductions

Week 1 (1st – 7th) | Peak Operational Intensity:

The month opened with the most violent period of the year. While incidents were moderate (42), they were disproportionately deadly, resulting in 103 deaths (42% of the month's total). This indicates high-intensity, "punitive" raids designed for maximum casualty impact.

Week 2 (8th – 15th) | Decline in Violent Operations:

Activity reached its lowest point this week across all metrics. Incidents dropped to 32, and deaths fell significantly to 40, suggesting a brief period of regrouping by armed groups or a temporary stabilisation in flashpoint areas.

Week 3 (16th – 23rd) | The Kidnapping Pivot:

This week marked a strategic shift from killing incidents to kidnapping cases. While incident counts were 33, the number of kidnap victims exploded from 34 to 183. This represents the primary tactical "shock" of the month.

Week 4 (24th – 31st) | Peak Activity & Saturation:

The month concluded at its highest level of volatility. Recorded incidents peaked at 51, accompanied by a resurgence in high numbers of death counts (64 deaths) and continued mass abductions (138 victims). This indicates a saturated security environment where multiple threat actors were active across various fronts simultaneously.

Collectively, these trends paint a concerning picture of the security environment ahead of upcoming elections, emphasising the need for proactive monitoring, targeted interventions, and coordinated response strategies to safeguard both citizens and the electoral process.

2.2. CONTEXT & REPORTING RATIONALE

The month of January 2026 marked a critical start to the year, with security incidents revealing a dangerous trend: mass abductions and high-casualty attacks have become alarmingly commonplace. The data indicate a distinct shift from sporadic, opportunistic violence toward organized, high-impact criminal and militant operations, particularly across the Northern zones. This evolution in the threat landscape presents a profound risk as political campaigns intensify, creating a window in which violence can be strategically instrumentalized for intimidation, territorial control, or political leverage.

This analysis is critical now because these converging dynamics, sophisticated organized crime, intense political competition, pervasive economic stress, and entrenched local conflicts, are generating new and potent flashpoints. A timely, evidence-based understanding is essential to prevent the weaponization of violence for political ends, safeguard electoral integrity, and enable proactive rather than reactive security and policy responses. The core rationale for this report is to translate and interpret complex, raw incident data into actionable strategic foresight, providing stakeholders with the clarity needed to navigate this perilous period.

2.3. AIM OF THE REPORT

This assessment report analyses both election-related incidents and broader insecurity trends with potential electoral implications. It situates these dynamics within Nigeria's wider governance and democratic landscape, examining how armed violence, disinformation, and institutional weaknesses intersect to threaten political stability. The assessment aims to:

01

Strengthen understanding of security dynamics influencing democratic and electoral integrity across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones.

02

Support early-warning, coordinated response, and accountability mechanisms among security, governance, and peace institutions.

03

Provide a verified, gender-responsive data foundation for continuous monitoring, comparative analysis, and strategic planning across electoral cycles.

2.4. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK & KEY QUESTIONS

This report is structured around seven core analytical questions that guide the evidence collection, analysis, and recommendations. These questions ensure a systematic examination of the nexus between national security and electoral integrity, moving from situational assessment through to forward-looking risk mitigation.

The core questions addressed are:

1. What is the current state of national security in Nigeria, and how has it evolved?
2. How is insecurity impacting electoral processes and preparations?
3. What electoral offences are being committed, and by whom?
4. What are the underlying drivers of insecurity and electoral violence?
5. Which areas and stakeholders are most at risk?
6. What can be done to mitigate risks and strengthen electoral integrity?
7. What are the plausible future scenarios for the electoral process?

The answers to these questions form the logical progression of the report, from data and diagnosis to foresight and actionable response.

2.5. REPORT STRUCTURE

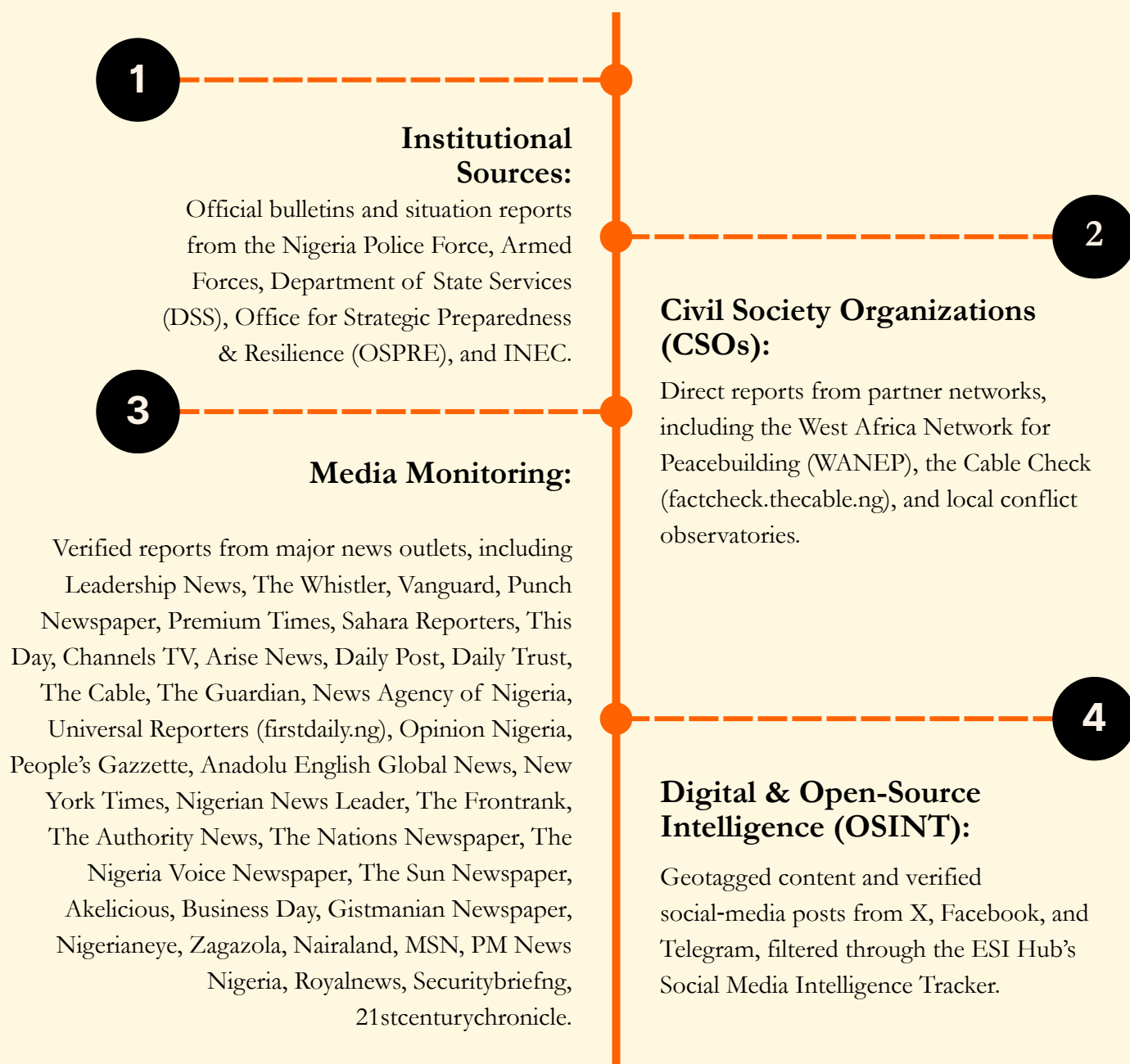
Following this introduction and the analytical framework outlined in Section 2.4, the report is structured to move from methodology to findings, analysis, and actionable guidance. Section 3 details the rigorous multi-source methodology and data verification protocols employed. Section 4 provides a quantitative and qualitative overview of the national security landscape. Section 5 offers a geopolitical zone-by-zone analysis, contextualizing national trends. Section 6 tracks and analyses electoral offences specifically. Section 7 delves into the structural and immediate drivers of conflict and emerging dynamics. Section 8 presents a forward-looking risk assessment and scenario planning matrix. Section 9 provides targeted, stakeholder-specific recommendations. Section 10 provides the conclusion to the report.

3. METHODOLOGY & DATA SOURCES

The assessment applies a six-step hybrid methodology adapted from the ESI Hub Operational Framework and aligned with international standards (UNOCHA Verification Scale, ACLED protocols, EU-SDGN II early-warning benchmarks).

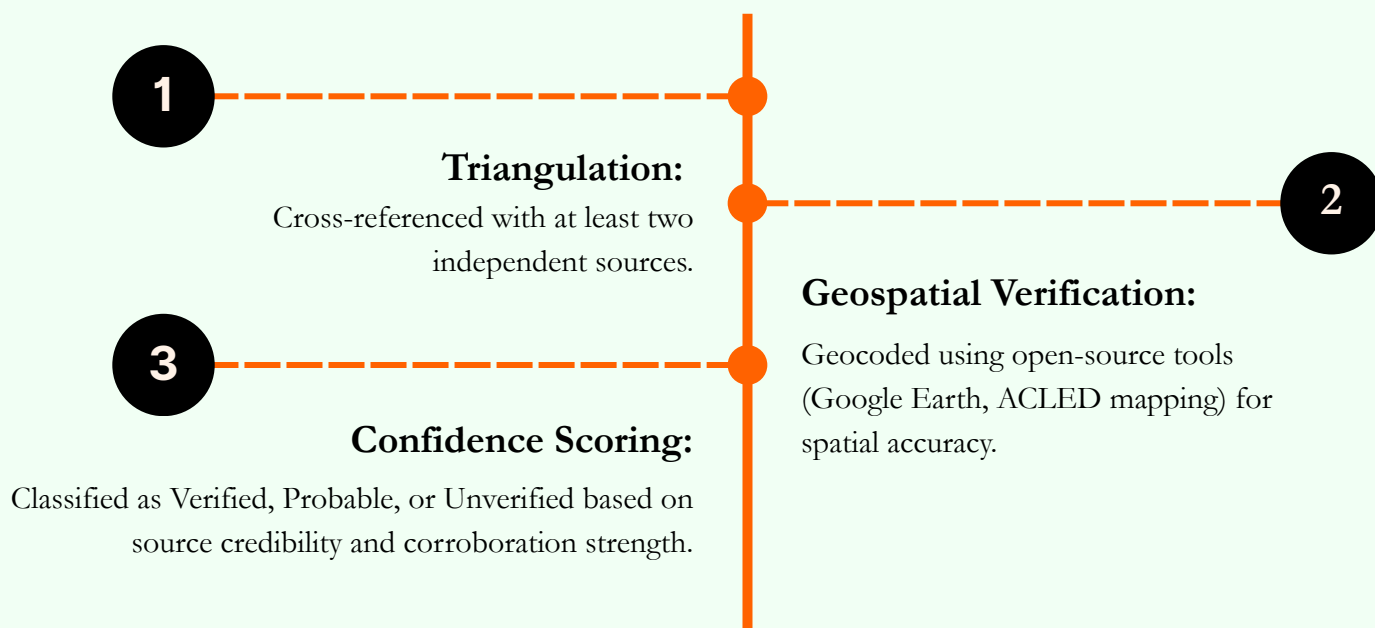
Step 1 – Multi-Source Ingestion

Incidents were collated from a network of more than 50 open-source and institutional feeds, including:



Step 2 – Data Verification and Validation

Each incident underwent a three-stage protocol:



Step 3 – UNOCHA Verification Scale Mapping

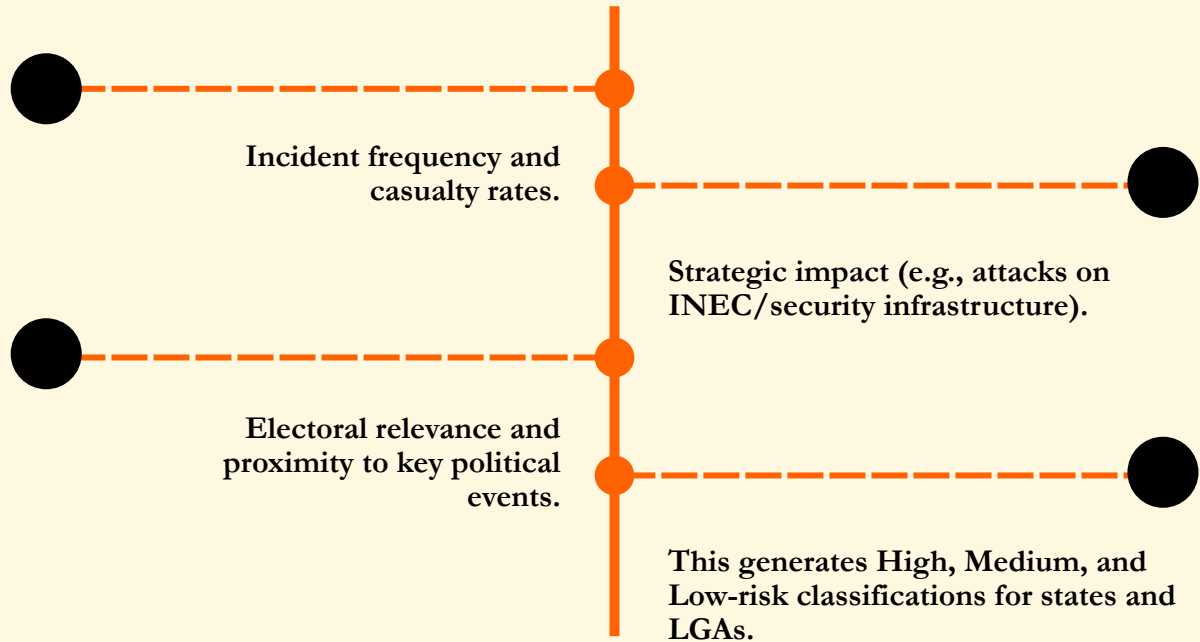
Every incident was assigned a confidence score using the UNOCHA Verification Scale. Only incidents Level 4 (Highly Probable) or above are included in trend analysis and the core dataset.

Step 4 – ACLED-Style Coding & Categorization

Verified incidents were tagged using a taxonomy adapted from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) for global comparability. This includes Event Type, Actors, and Geographic Precision (state, LGA, town).

Step 5 – Quantitative Weighting: Flashpoint Severity Index (FSI)

A proprietary Flashpoint Severity Index (FSI) was applied to compute severity scores and standardize impact across states. The FSI algorithm weights:



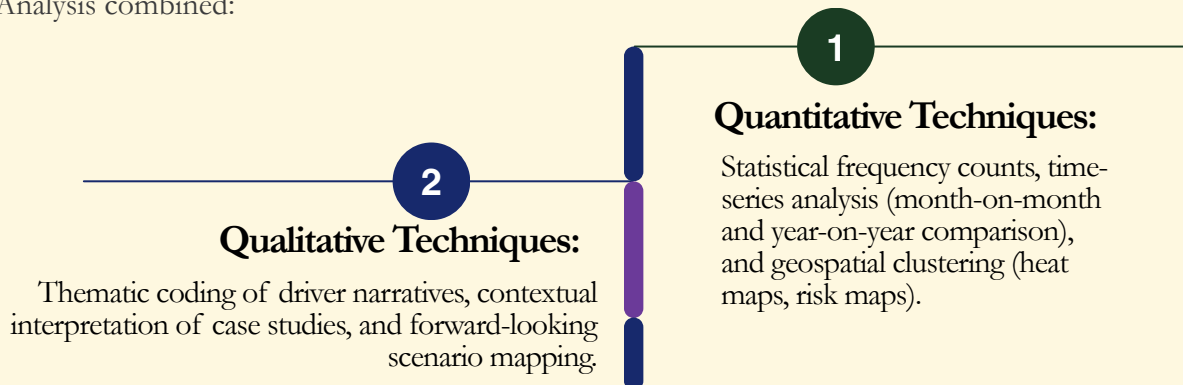
Step 6 – Qualitative Context Review & Synthesis

Analysts conducted narrative vetting, correlating incident data with broader socio-political dynamics (e.g., displacement patterns, political rhetoric). This step integrates field-monitor and ISPA insights to explain the “why” behind the numbers and identify emerging patterns.

3.2 DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

Following verification, data were cleaned, standardized, and consolidated using the ESI Hub’s relational database schema. Duplicate entries and unverifiable reports (Level 0-2) were excluded.

Analysis combined:

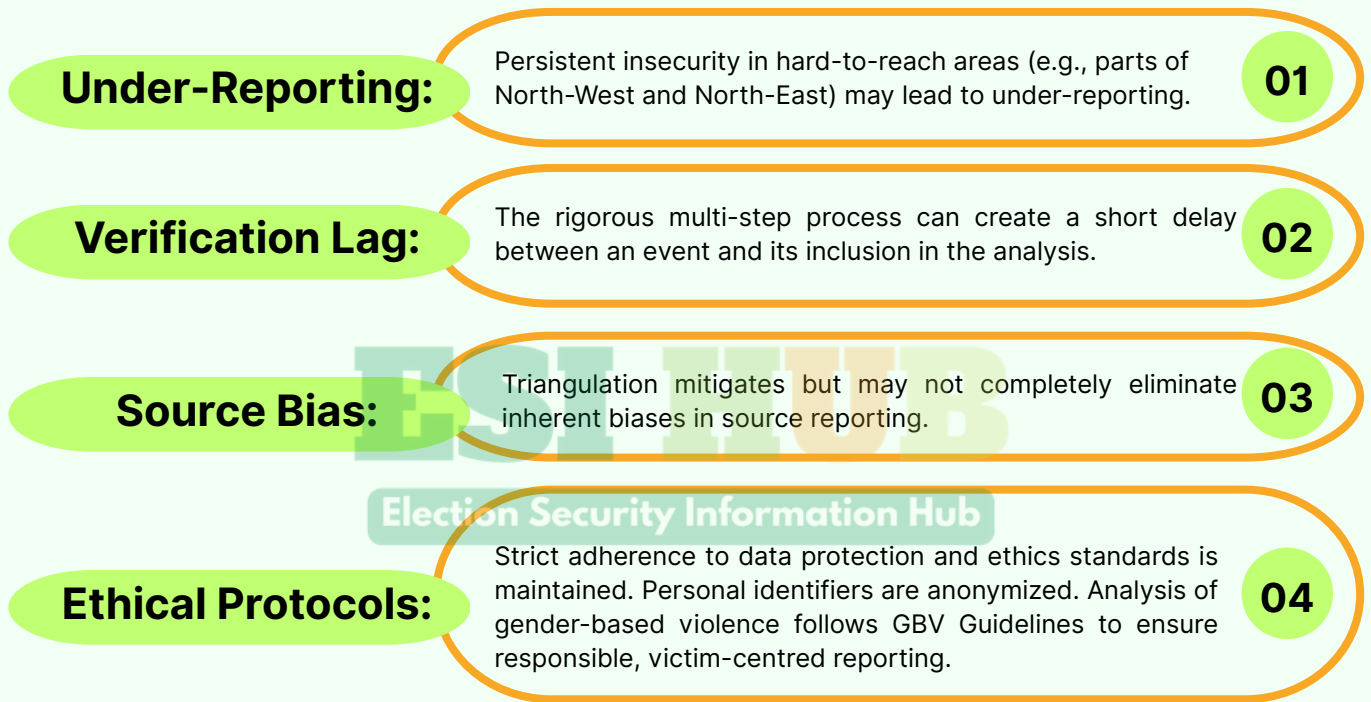


Findings were visualized through charts and infographics to aid trend interpretation and stakeholder communication.

3.3 TIME FRAME AND SCOPE

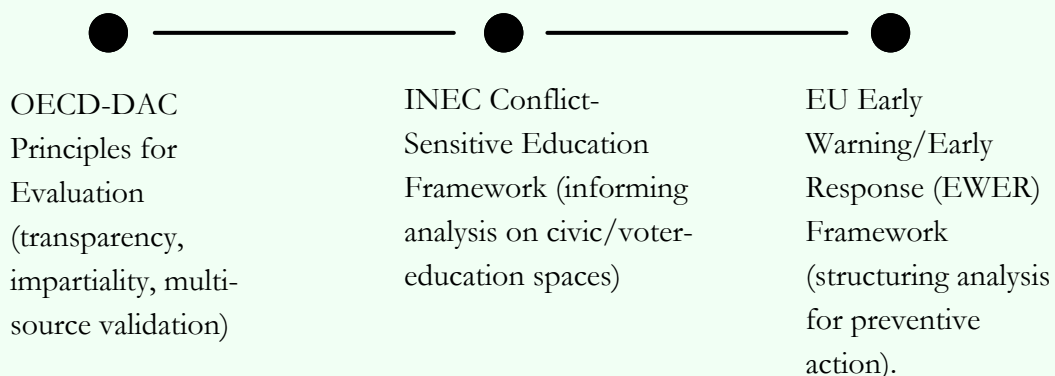
This assessment covers the period 1–31 January 2026. It captures all incidents of insecurity recorded within that period across Nigeria's 36 states + FCT. Incidents were recorded in 34 states during this reporting window. Only incidents falling within this period were analysed for this report.

3.4 LIMITATIONS & ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS



3.5 ALIGNMENT WITH INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

The methodology is explicitly designed to align with:

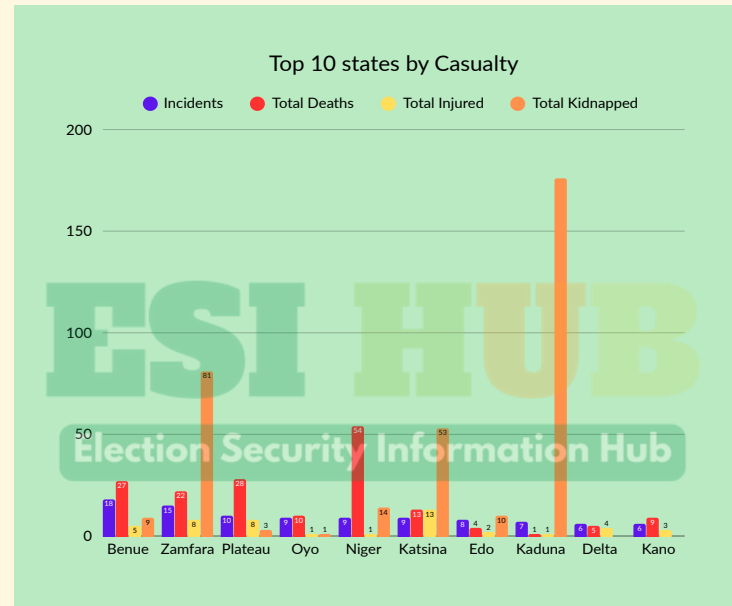
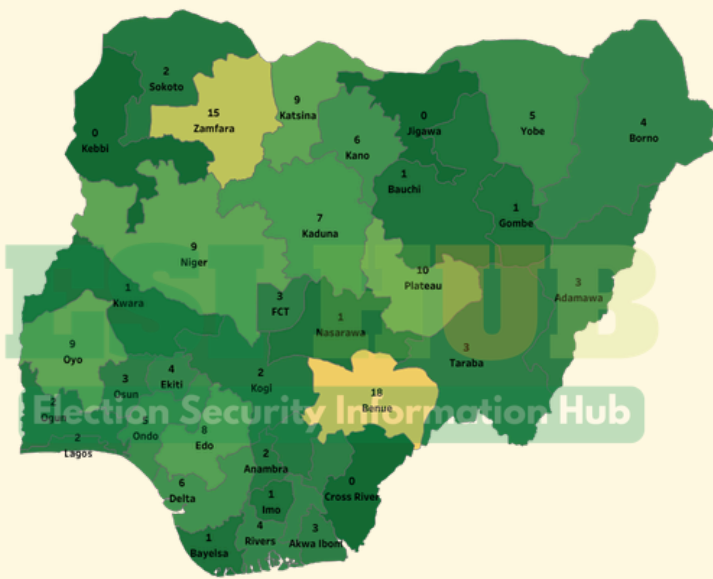


4. NATIONAL SECURITY OVERVIEW

4.1 QUANTITATIVE SNAPSHOT

November 2025 presented a nuanced national security landscape where a marginal decrease in certain high-intensity conflicts was offset by a sharp rise in criminality and politically-adjacent violence, creating a pervasive climate of instability with direct implications for electoral activities.

Total Incidents Across Nigeria (January 2026)



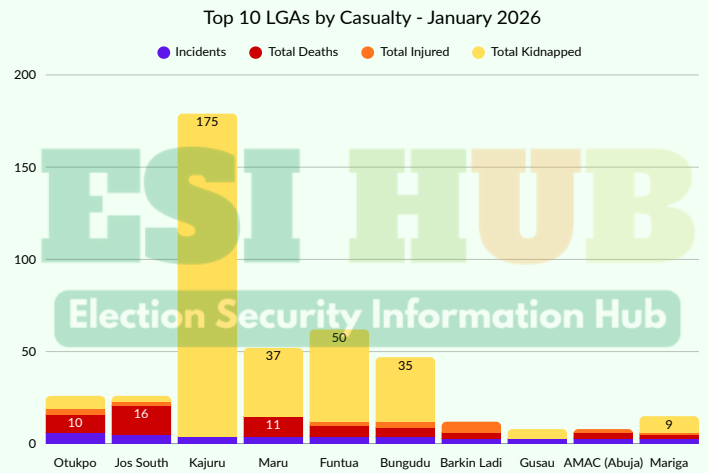
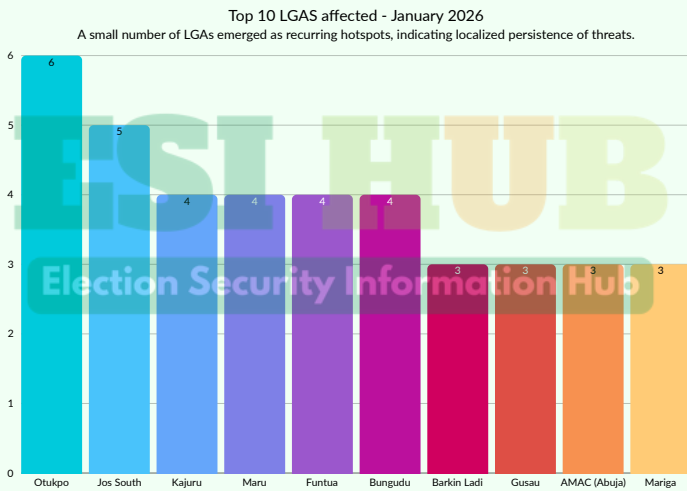
Quantitative Snapshot

January 2026 recorded 159 total incidents, of which 147 were verified. The human impact was severe, with 246 fatalities and 376 kidnappings.

Most Affected States (Incidents): Benue (18), Zamfara (15), Plateau (10), Niger (9), Katsina (9).

Most Affected States (Deaths): Niger (54), Borgu LGA alone accounted for 43 deaths; Benue (27), Plateau (28).

Most Affected States (Kidnapping): Kaduna (176 victims), Zamfara (81), Katsina (53).



Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

4.2 THREAT CATEGORY ANALYSIS

Table 1: Analytical Clusters for January 2026

Threat Theme	Threat Categories Included	Analytical Rationale
Organised Violence & Insurgency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Banditry Terrorism Gunmen Attacks Arson 	These threats involve organised armed groups (OAGs) operating with coordination, often challenging state authority or controlling territory.
Crimes Against the Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kidnapping Human Trafficking Human Part Trafficking Assassination Killing Extra-Judicial Killings 	These crimes target specific individuals for profit, elimination, or ritual purposes. Kidnapping is the dominant driver here.
Communal & Resource Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communal Clash Farmer - Herder Conflict Cattle Rustling 	Incidents driven by competition for land, water, or resources often occur along ethnic or occupational lines.

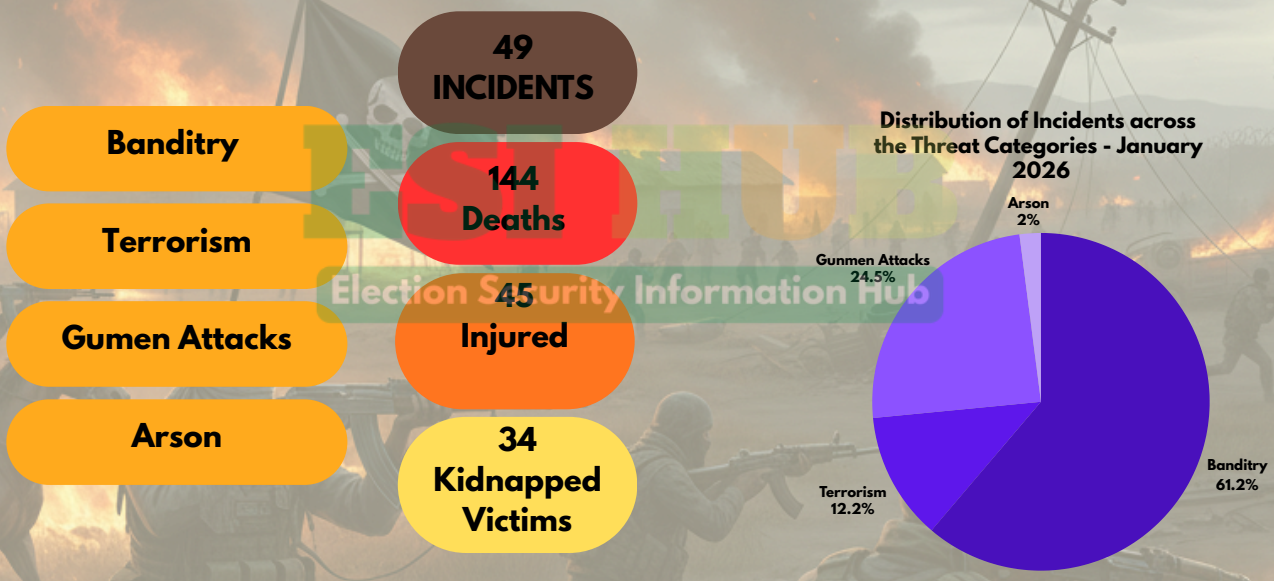
Social Order & Civil Unrest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Unrest • Violent Protest • Mob Attack • Cultism • Thuggery • Inter-Gang Violence 	Represents breakdowns in public order, usually in urban centres, driven by social grievances or group rivalries (e.g., Cultism).
Criminal Opportunism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armed Robbery • Robbery • Violence (General) 	Economically motivated crimes of opportunity rather than systemic insurgency or inter-group conflict.
Gender & Domestic Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual Assault • Domestic Violence • GBV (Gender-Based Violence) 	Interpersonal crimes that disproportionately affect vulnerable demographics and require distinct social/legal interventions.

The following analysis categorises the 159 recorded security incidents from January 2026 into six analytical clusters. This structured overview evaluates the implications of these threats on national security and the upcoming electoral cycle.

1. ORGANISED VIOLENCE & INSURGENCY

ORGANIZED VIOLENCE AND INSURGENCY

JANUARY 2026



Threats: Banditry, Terrorism, Gunmen Attacks, Arson

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Narrative Overview: This cluster represents the most lethal threat to state authority, characterised by coordinated attacks on soft targets and security infrastructure. January saw a significant persistence of banditry, particularly in the Northwest. For instance, bandits launched a lethal attack in Malumfashi LGA, Katsina State, killing 2 civilians and injuring 6 others in a single operation^[1]. In a brazen challenge to state authority, bandits also attacked a police station in Owo LGA, Ondo State on January 1st, causing widespread panic, though no casualties were officially confirmed^[2]. Further demonstrating their reach, bandits invaded Shanono LGA, Kano State, killing one civilian despite intensified security patrols^[3].

i. Security & Electoral Implications:

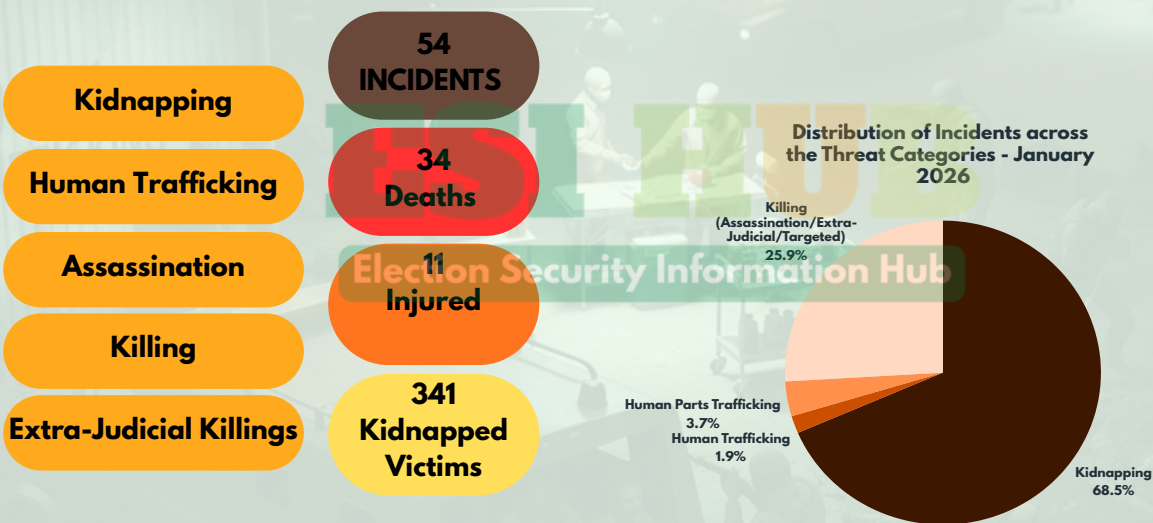
- a. Security: The ability of OAGs to attack hardened targets like police stations indicates a high level of operational confidence. The proliferation of these groups stretches the military, forcing a retreat into "super camps" and leaving rural areas vulnerable.
- b. Electoral: Displacement caused by these attacks creates a disenfranchised demographic. In LGAs like Malumfashi and Tsafe, the risk to INEC officials is critical; ad-hoc staff may refuse deployment, necessitating the creation of "super clusters" for voting, which often suppresses turnout.

ii. Geographical Implications:

- a. Epicentre: North West (Katsina, Zamfara, Kano).
- b. Emerging Front: South West (Ondo), indicating a southern drift of organised bandit groups.

2. CRIMES AGAINST THE PERSON

CRIMES AGAINST A PERSON
JANUARY 2026



Threats: Kidnapping, Assassination, Killing, Human Trafficking
Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Narrative Overview: Kidnapping remains the primary "business model" of violent actors, targeting individuals for economic gain or ritual purposes. The data highlights the vulnerability of traditional institutions; notably, gunmen abducted a village head in Ifelodun LGA, Kwara State, injuring his wife in the process^[4]. In the South South, the threat is equally pervasive but often targets families; in Etsako East, Edo State, gunmen killed a father and abducted his twin children, who were later rescued.^[5]

i. Security & Electoral Implications:

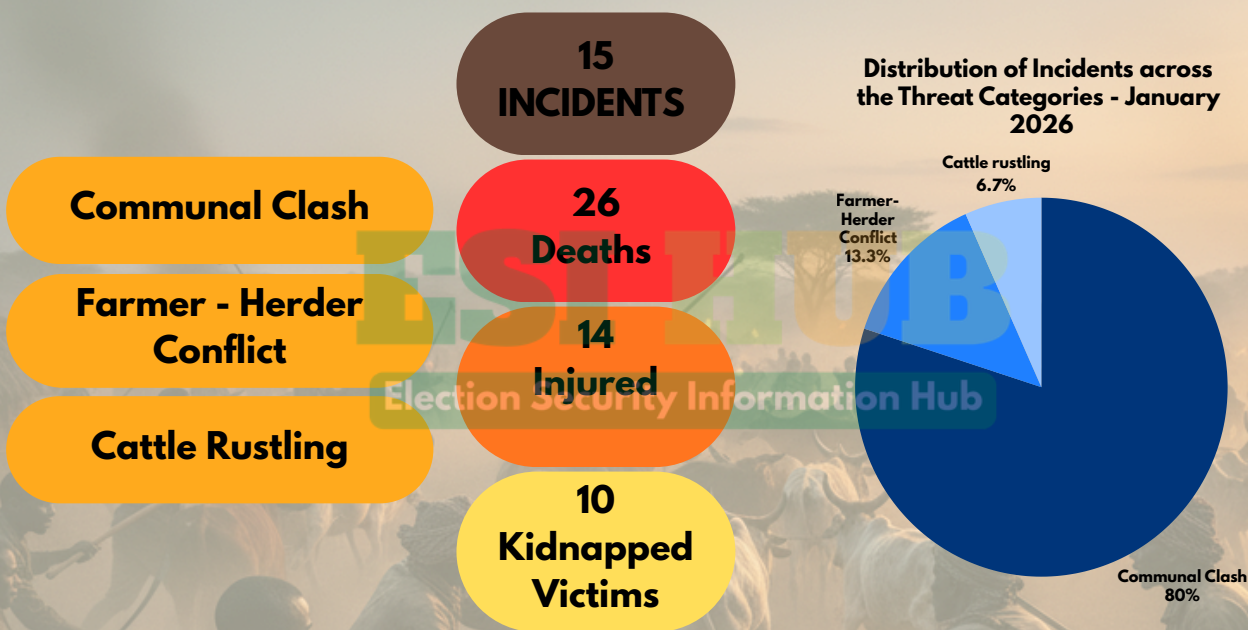
- a. Security: The commodification of humans creates a "kidnap economy" that funds wider insurgency (Cluster 1). The involvement of high-profile victims (traditional rulers) degrades public trust in the state's protective capacity.
- b. Electoral: Targeted assassinations and kidnappings are likely to rise as a tool for political intimidation. Candidates in rural LGAs are soft targets, and the fear of abduction will severely limit campaign mobility, reducing voter education and engagement.

ii. Geographical Implications:

- a. High Risk: North Central (Kwara) and South South (Edo).
- b. Corridors: Highways connecting these regions are high-risk zones for intercept-style abductions.

3. COMMUNAL & RESOURCE CONFLICT

COMMUNAL & RESOURCE CONFLICT
JANUARY 2026



Threats: Communal Clash, Farmer-Herder Conflict, Cattle Rustling.
Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Narrative Overview: Driven by competition for diminishing resources, this cluster recorded high lethality. In Jos South, Plateau State, a reprisal attack resulted in the death of 7 farmers, confirmed by the Berom Youths Moulder-Association, signalling a deepening cycle of vengeance^[6]. Concurrently, economic sabotage related to livestock continues; suspected rustlers raided Tsanyawa LGA, Kano State, carting away an unspecified number of cattle before security forces could intervene.^[7]

i. Security & Electoral Implications:

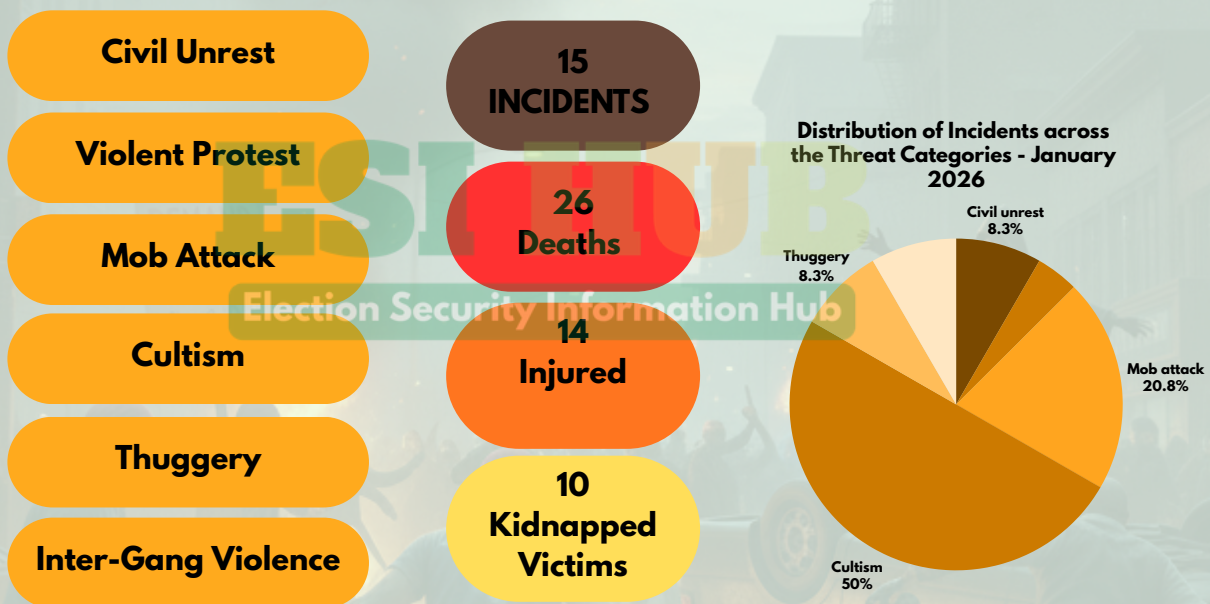
- a. Security: These conflicts are often viewed through ethnic or religious lenses, making them volatile. The proliferation of local militias (vigilantes) to protect communities often leads to extra-judicial killings and an arms race.
- b. Electoral: This is the most politically manipulatable cluster. Politicians often weaponize ethnic grievances to consolidate votes. Violence in the Middle Belt (Plateau/Benue) risks partitioning constituencies along ethnic lines, making "safe" polling almost impossible in mixed communities.

ii. Geographical Implications:

- a. Flashpoint: North Central (Plateau) remains the volatile fault line.
- b. Economic Impact: Northwest (Kano) faces economic destabilisation due to rustling.

4. Social Order & Civil Unrest

SOCIAL ORDER & CIVIL UNREST
JANUARY 2026



Threats: Cultism, Civil Unrest, Mob Attack, Thuggery.
Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Narrative Overview: Urban centres are experiencing a breakdown in order amid group rivalries. In Ikorodu, Lagos State, a violent clash occurred between the Eiyee and Aye cult groups, resulting in 2 fatalities^[8]. Similarly, cult violence in Owerri West, Imo State, led to the shooting of a man on the old Nekede road.^[9] Civil unrest also stems from social grievances; in Ede North, Osun State, a mob protest erupted following the death of a teenager in a hotel swimming pool.^[10]

i. Security & Electoral Implications:

- a. Security: Cult groups are frequently recruited as political thugs. The transition from "cultist" to "political enforcer" is seamless during election cycles.
- b. Electoral: High risk of ballot box snatching and voter intimidation in urban wards. Areas like Ikorodu (Lagos) and Owerri (Imo) require heavy police presence to prevent localised disenfranchisement.

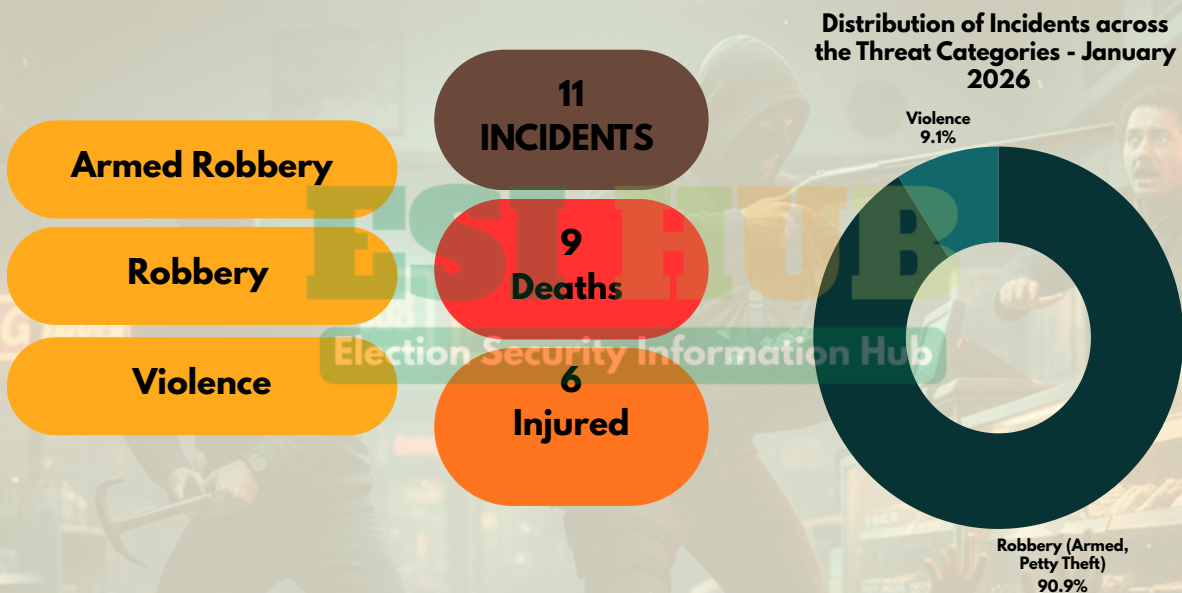
ii. Geographical Implications:

- a. Urban Centres: South West (Lagos, Osun) and South East (Imo).
- b. LGA Focus: Ede North, Ikorodu, Owerri West.

5. Criminal Opportunism

CRIMINAL OPPORTUNISM

JANUARY 2026



Threats: Cultism, Civil Unrest, Mob Attack, Thuggery.

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Narrative Overview: While often overshadowed by insurgency, opportunistic crime contributes significantly to the general climate of insecurity. These incidents are largely economically motivated and occur randomly, exploiting gaps in police coverage.

i. Security & Electoral Implications:

- a. Security: Stretches police resources, distracting them from counter-terrorism or election duties.
- b. Electoral: The transport of sensitive electoral materials (such as BVAS machines) is vulnerable to armed robbery attacks, not for political reasons, but for the economic value of the assets.

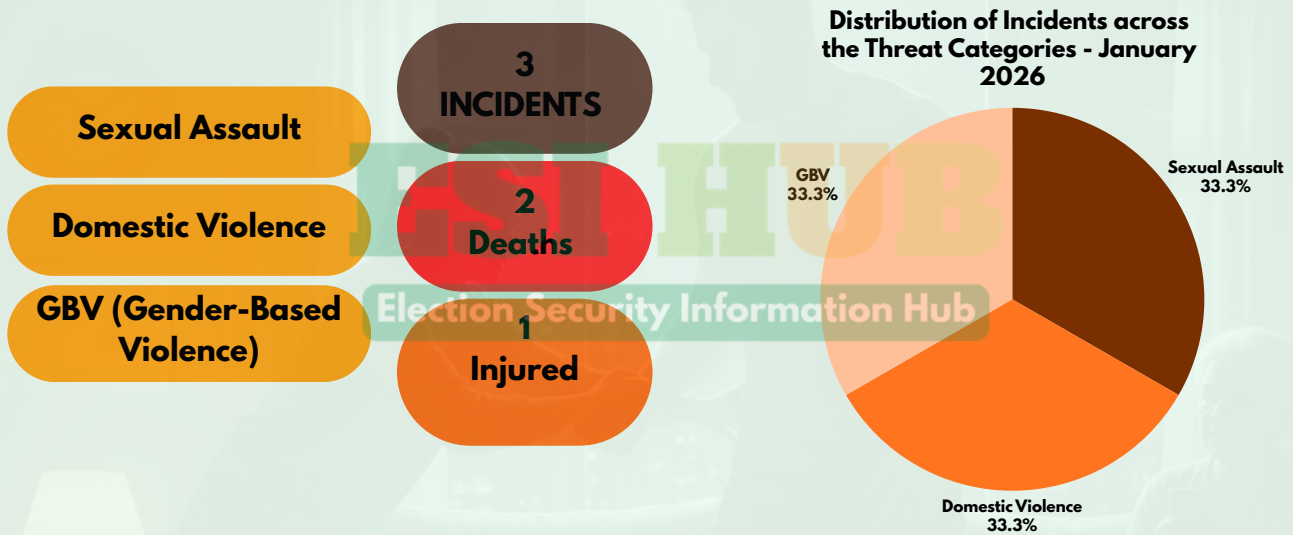
ii. Geographical Implications:

- a. Nationwide: Prevalent in all urban and semi-urban LGAs.

6. Gender & Domestic Violence

GENDER & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

JANUARY 2026



Threats: Cultism, Civil Unrest, Mob Attack, Thuggery.

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Narrative Overview: This cluster remains underreported in the security dataset but represents a critical human rights failure. Incidents often spike in IDP camps and conflict zones where women and girls are vulnerable to combatants and opportunists.

i. Security & Electoral Implications:

- a. Security: Sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war in the insurgency contexts (Cluster 1) to humiliate communities.
- b. Electoral: A high prevalence of GBV deters women from participating in the electoral process, both as voters and candidates. Security deployments for elections must include gender-sensitive protocols.

ii. Geographical Implications:

- a. Vulnerability: High in conflict-affected states (Borno, Zamfara, Benue) and IDP concentrations.

5. GEOPOLITICAL ZONE ANALYSIS

In January 2026, the national threat landscape was a patchwork of many regional crises, each with its own prominent actors, historical roots, and electoral ramifications. A zone-by-zone account shows how regional disputes jointly influence the political and security future of the country.

Spread of Different threats across geopolitical zones

Threat Category	North Central	North East	North West	South East	South South	South West
Armed Robbery	2	1	1	2	3	0
Arson	0	0	1	0	0	0
Assassination	0	0	0	0	2	1
Banditry	11	0	16	0	0	3
Cattle Rustling*	2	0	1	0	0	1
Civil Unrest	0	0	0	0	1	1
Communal Clash	5	4	0	3	0	0
Cultism	4	0	0	1	4	3
Domestic Violence	0	0	0	0	0	1
Inter-Gang Violence	0	0	2	0	0	0
Kidnapping	8	4	15	1	5	4
Killing	1	2	0	1	3	2
Mob Attack	1	1	0	0	0	3
Robbery	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sexual Assault	0	0	0	0	0	1
Terrorism	0	3	1	1	1	0
Thuggery	0	0	1	0	1	0
Violence	0	0	0	0	0	1
Violent Protest	0	0	0	0	1	0

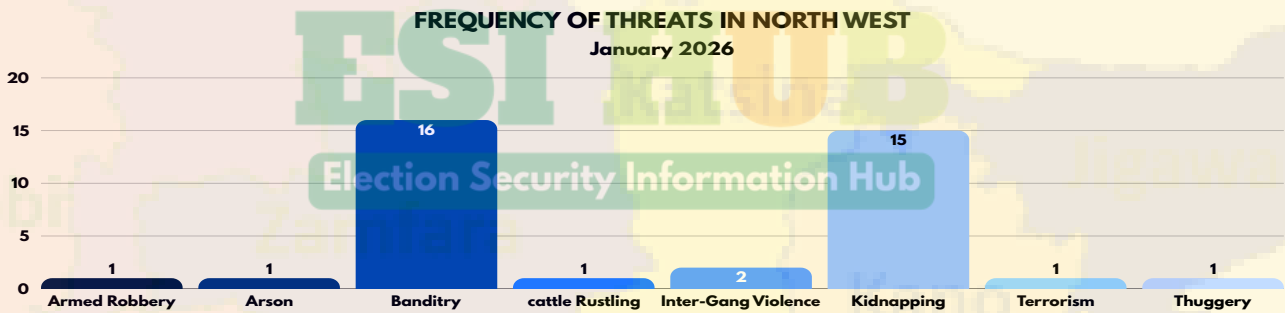
Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

In January 2026, the security environment shows a clear division: the Northern zones are besieged by Cluster 1 (Organised Violence) and Cluster 2 (Crimes Against the Person), resulting in mass casualties and abductions. Conversely, the Southern zones are grappling with Cluster 4 (Social Order) and Cluster 5 (Criminal Opportunism), characterised by urban violence and targeted criminality.

North-West Zone: The Abduction Epicentre

NORTH WEST

January 2026



North West Summary



Dominant Threats: Banditry (Cluster 1), Kidnapping (Cluster 2). Key Metrics: 39 Verified Incidents | 56 Deaths | 313 Kidnapped (83% of National Total)

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

The North West has devolved into an industrial hub for the kidnap-for-ransom economy. In January, the region recorded a staggering 313 abduction victims, driven by the unchecked operations of bandit warlords in the uncontrolled forests bordering Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina. Unlike the ideological insurgency of the North East, the violence here is transactional and indiscriminate.

A defining incident occurred in Tsafe LGA, Zamfara State, where bandits besieged a community, resulting in mass abductions and fatalities.^[1] Similarly, Kajuru LGA in Kaduna State remains a "killing field," accounting for a significant portion of the state's 176 kidnapped victims. The sheer volume of victims in single incidents—often exceeding 50 people—suggests a consolidation of bandit groups capable of overwhelming local vigilantes and stationed security detachments

Security & Electoral Implications:

Disenfranchisement by Displacement: The high kidnapping rate in rural LGAs like Maru (Zamfara) and Funtua (Katsina) has likely emptied frequent polling unit locations. Residents currently in captivity or hiding in the bush cannot be captured during voter registration exercises.

Logistical paralysis: INEC ad-hoc staff and materials cannot be safely deployed to "red zones" without heavy military escort, which is currently unavailable due to overstretch. This risks a total cancellation of elections in specific wards, leading to constitutional challenges regarding the conclusiveness of results.

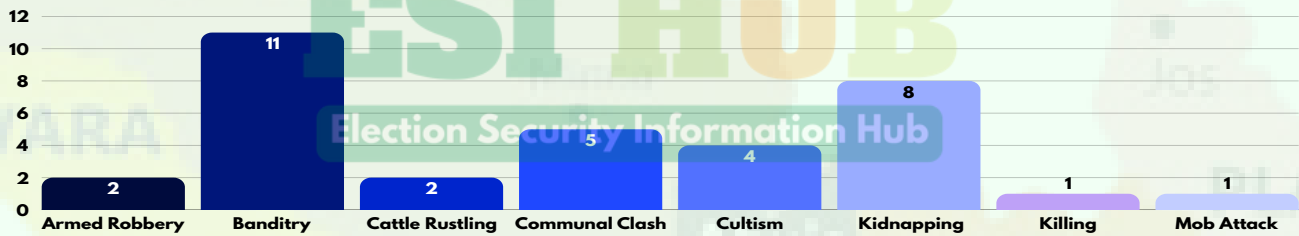
North-Central Zone: The Deadly Trap

NORTH CENTRAL

January 2026

FREQUENCY OF THREATS IN NORTH CENTRAL

January 2026



North Central Summary



Dominant Threats: Banditry (Cluster 1), Communal Conflict (Cluster 3). Key Metrics: 44 Verified Incidents | 120 Deaths (Highest Nationally) | 33 Kidnapped

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

While the North West suffers from abduction, the North Central suffers from extermination. This zone recorded the highest lethality ratio in the country, driven by a deadly convergence of Cluster 1 (Banditry) migrating from the North West and Cluster 3 (Communal Conflict) over land resources.

Niger State recorded 54 deaths, the highest of any state, with Borgu LGA witnessing a catastrophic singular event resulting in 43 fatalities.^[12] This indicates a shift in bandit tactics towards punitive raids rather than just kidnapping. Simultaneously, the Middle Belt fault lines in Plateau State remain active; a reprisal attack in Jos South claimed 7 lives, perpetuated by the cycle of "silent killings" between farming and herding communities.^[13]

Security & Electoral Implications:

The "Buffer Belt" Collapse: The insecurity in Niger and Kogi creates a perilous corridor for travellers moving between the North and the FCT/South, threatening the movement of election observers and sensitive materials.

Weaponisation of Identity: In Benue (Otukpo, Guma) and Plateau, the high death toll is likely to be politicised. Candidates may use these massacres to mobilise ethnic voting blocs, increasing the risk of Cluster 4 (Civil Unrest) and violent protests at collation centres.

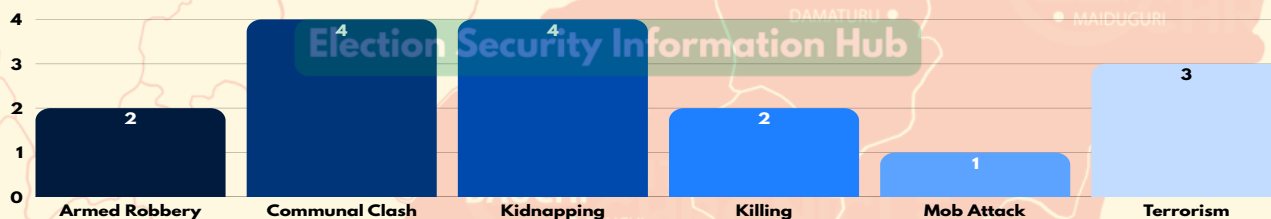
North-East Zone: Fragile Stabilisation

NORTH EAST

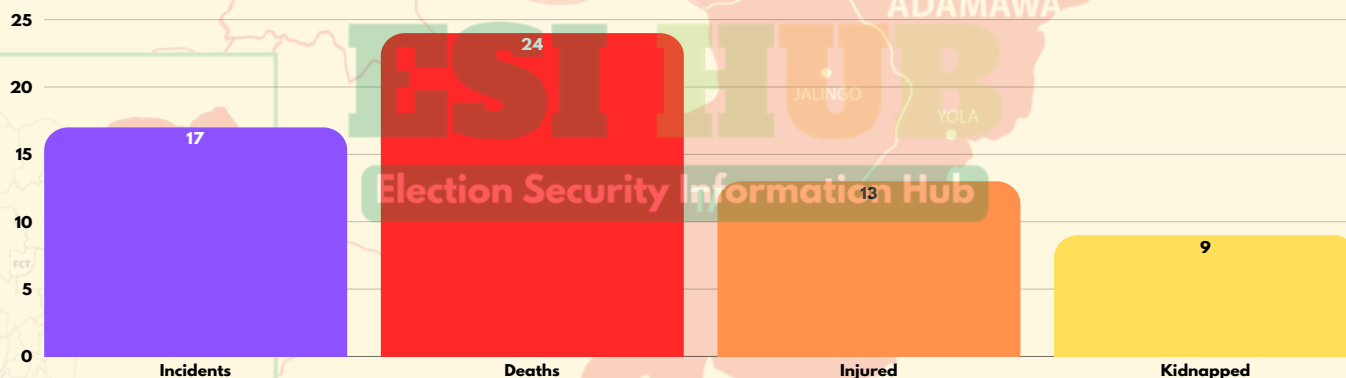
January 2026

FREQUENCY OF THREATS IN NORTH EAST

January 2026



North East Summary



Dominant Threats: Terrorism (Cluster 1), Communal Clash (Cluster 3). Key Metrics: 17 Verified Incidents | 24 Deaths | 9 Kidnapped.
Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

The North East is in a phase of "fragile stabilisation." While Cluster 1 (Terrorism) incidents are lower than historical peaks, ISWAP and Boko Haram splinter groups retain the capacity for asymmetric attacks. The violence is concentrated in Borno State, particularly targeting humanitarian and state infrastructure. However, a secondary trend of Cluster 3 (Communal Clash) is emerging in Taraba State, where ethnic militias clash over chieftaincy and land issues, often overshadowed by the insurgency narrative.

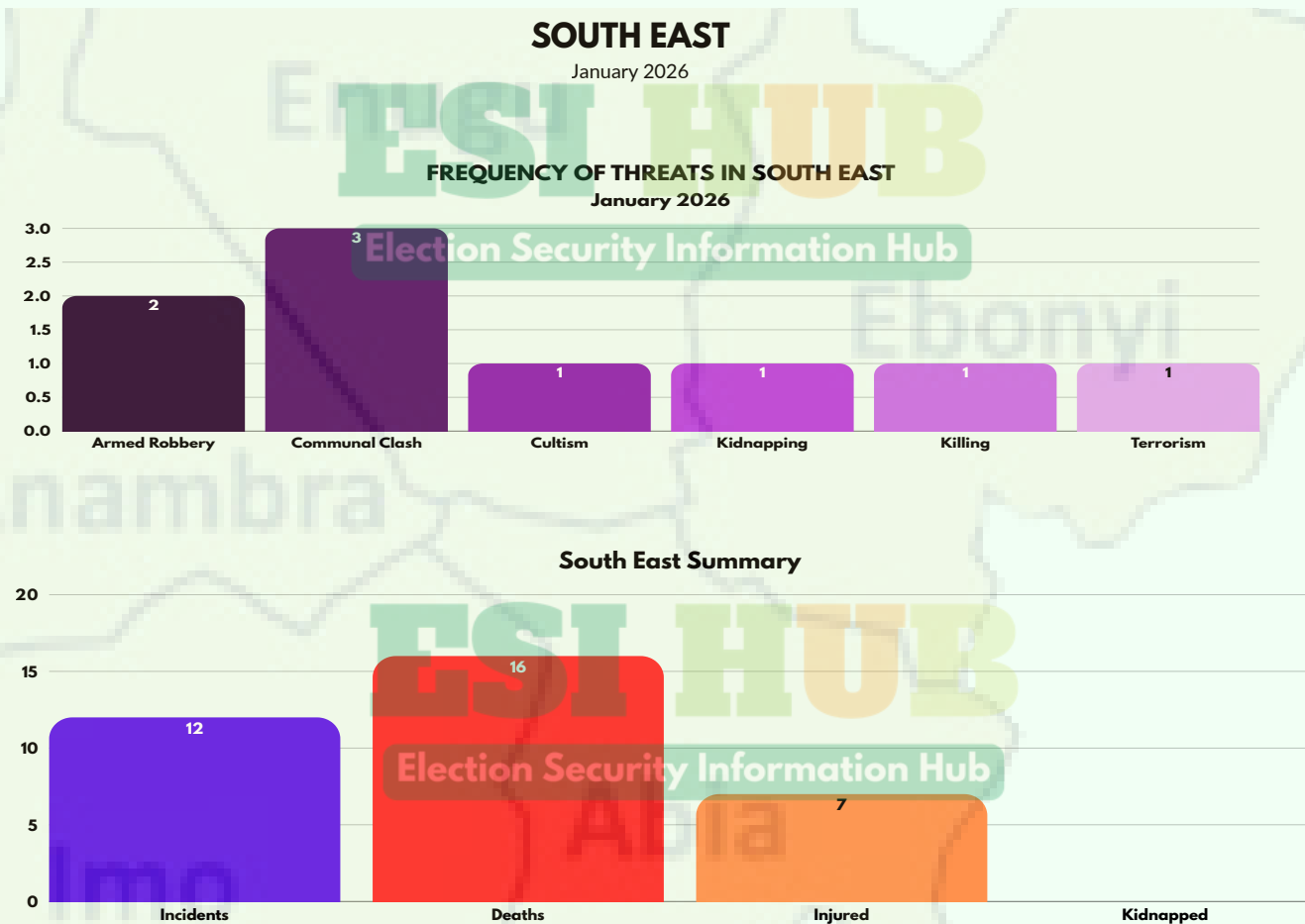
A notable incident involved an attack on a humanitarian facility in Dikwa, Borno, disrupting essential services.^[14] This highlights that while territorial control by insurgents has diminished, their ability to disrupt governance remains intact.

Security & Electoral Implications:

Garrison Voting: Voting in Borno will likely remain restricted to "super camps" and IDP centres in garrison towns (Maiduguri, Monguno). This persistent restriction limits the franchise of those attempting to return to resettled communities.

Military Overstretch: Security in this zone is almost entirely dependent on the military. Any redeployment of troops to cover election duties in other zones could create security vacuums that insurgents will exploit.

South-East Zone: Strategic Instability



Dominant Threats: Gunmen Attacks (Cluster 1), Communal Clash (Cluster 3). Key Metrics: 12 Verified Incidents | 16 Deaths | 0 Kidnapped (Reported)

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

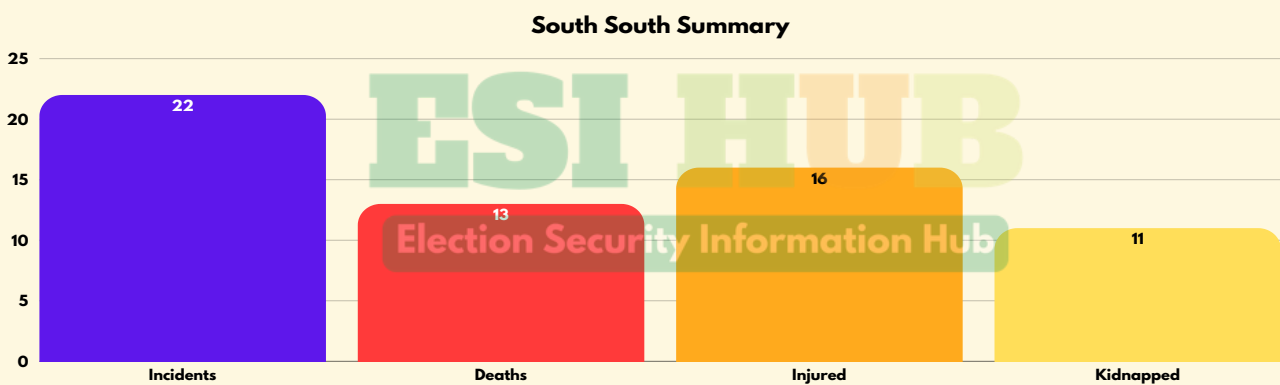
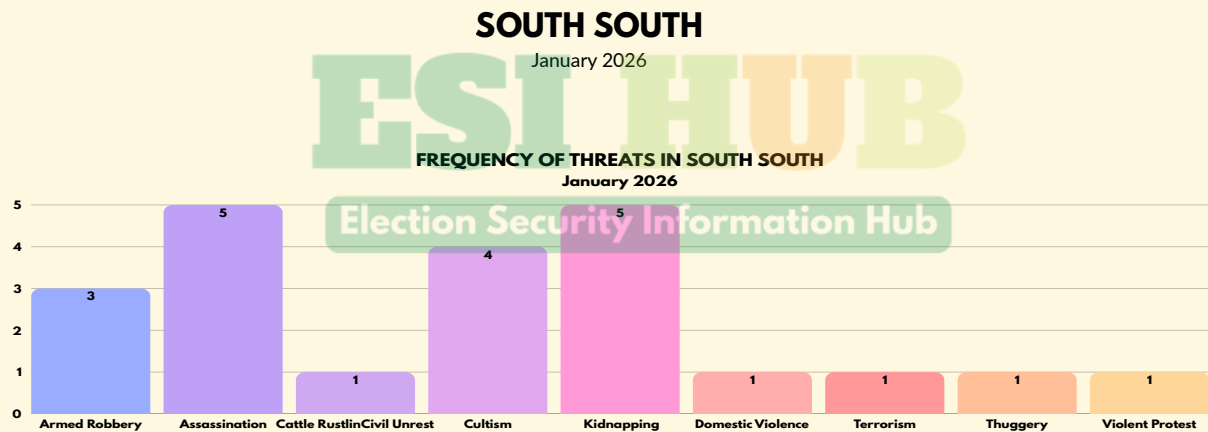
The relatively low incident count in the South East belies a high-tension environment driven by Cluster 1 (Gunmen Attacks). These attacks are strategic, targeting security personnel and government symbols rather than the general populace. Incidents in Imo and Anambra involving "Unknown Gunmen" enforcing sit-at-home orders or attacking police checkpoints create a climate of fear^[15]. Additionally, Cluster 3 (Communal Clashes) in Ebonyi State over land boundaries adds a layer of localised volatility.

Security & Electoral Implications:

Voter Apathy via Intimidation: The primary electoral threat is not mass casualties but mass boycott. Armed groups need not attack polling units; they only need to threaten violence to ensure a historically low turnout (often <20%).

Targeting of INEC Assets: The strategic nature of violence here suggests a high risk of arson attacks on INEC Local Government offices and BVAS storage facilities closer to the election.

South-South Zone: The Cult-Politics Nexus



Dominant Threats: Cultism (Cluster 4), Kidnapping (Cluster 2). Key Metrics: 22 Verified Incidents | 13 Deaths | 11 Kidnappings
Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

In the South South, security threats are inextricably linked to the political economy. Cluster 4 (Cultism) is the dominant driver, with groups in Rivers and Delta acting as hybrid criminal-political enterprises. January saw a rise in "supremacy battles" between rival cult groups, which often serve as proxy wars for political factions vying for territory.

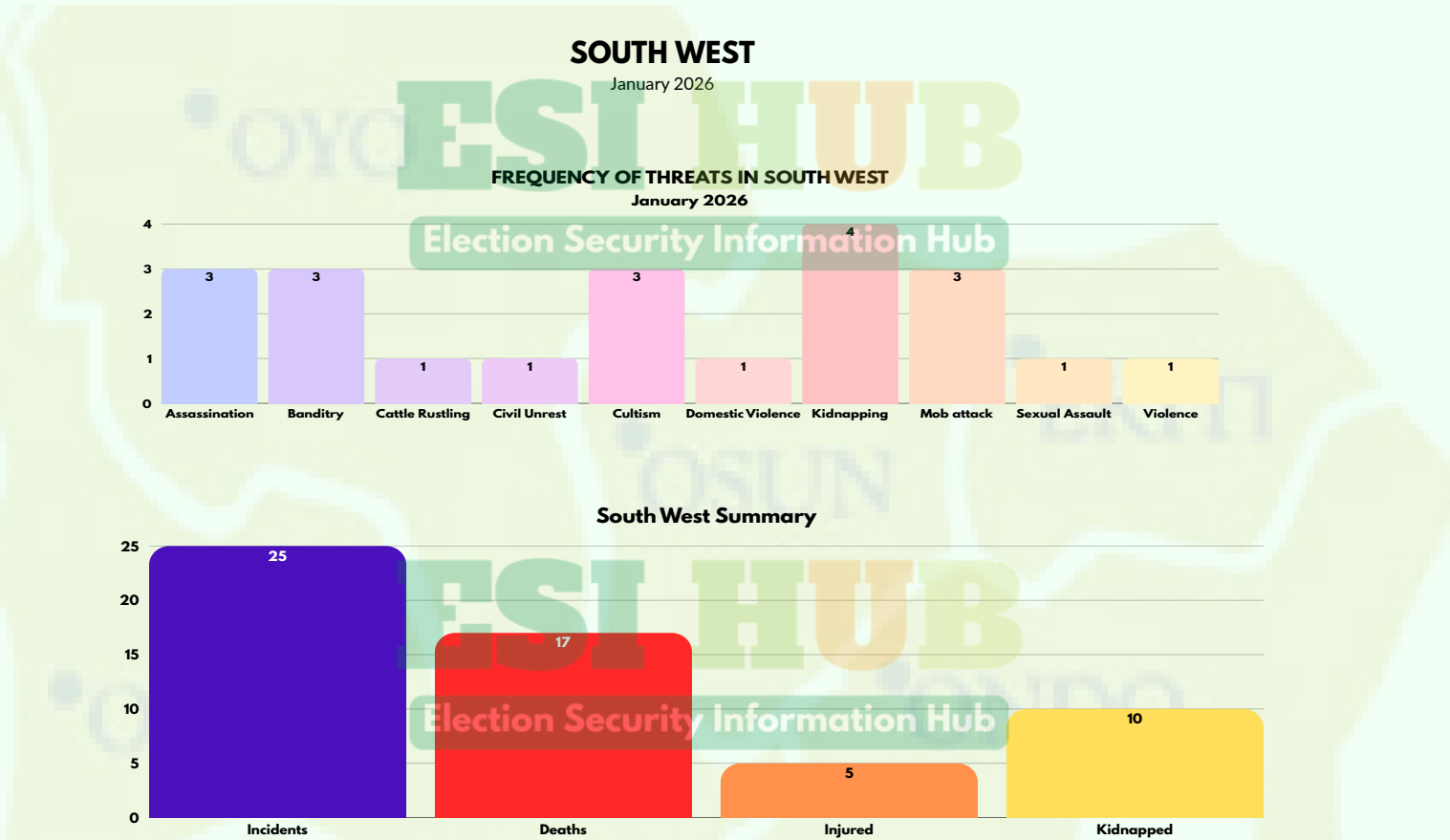
The kidnapping of civilians in Edo State (Etsako East) highlights the dual threat of cultism in urban areas and Cluster 2 (Kidnapping) in rural/riverine corridors^[16].

Security & Electoral Implications:

Polling Unit Disruption: The primary risk is the use of cultists to snatch ballot boxes or disrupt voting in opponent strongholds. This violence is typically localized to specific wards in Port Harcourt and Warri but has high disruptive potential.

Riverine Logistics: The terrain makes the movement of materials vulnerable to piracy and hijacking by armed groups in the creeks.

South-West Zone: Urban-Rural Hybrid Threats



Dominant Threats: Kidnapping (Cluster 2), Cultism (Cluster 4). Key Metrics: 25 Verified Incidents | 17 Deaths | 10 Kidnapped.
Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

The South West faces a "hybrid" threat landscape. Cluster 4 (Cultism) and Cluster 5 (Criminal Opportunism) are prevalent in the urban centres of Lagos and Osun, exemplified by the violent clash between Eiyeye and Aye cult groups in Ikorodu^[17]. Conversely, the rural fringes of Ondo, Oyo, and Ekiti are suffering from Cluster 2 (Kidnapping), driven by armed groups infiltrating forest reserves. The attack on a police station in Owo, Ondo State,^[18] serves as a warning that OAGs are testing the resolve of state security in what is traditionally considered the safest zone.

Security & Electoral Implications:

Security & Electoral Implications: Urban Voter Suppression: In Lagos, political thuggery (often disguised as "agbero" or cult activity) is frequently used to intimidate voters in ethnically diverse areas.

Highway Insecurity: The Lagos-Ibadan and Akure-Abuja expressways are critical arteries for election logistics. Kidnapping spikes on these routes could delay the arrival of sensitive materials from the CBN to state capitals.

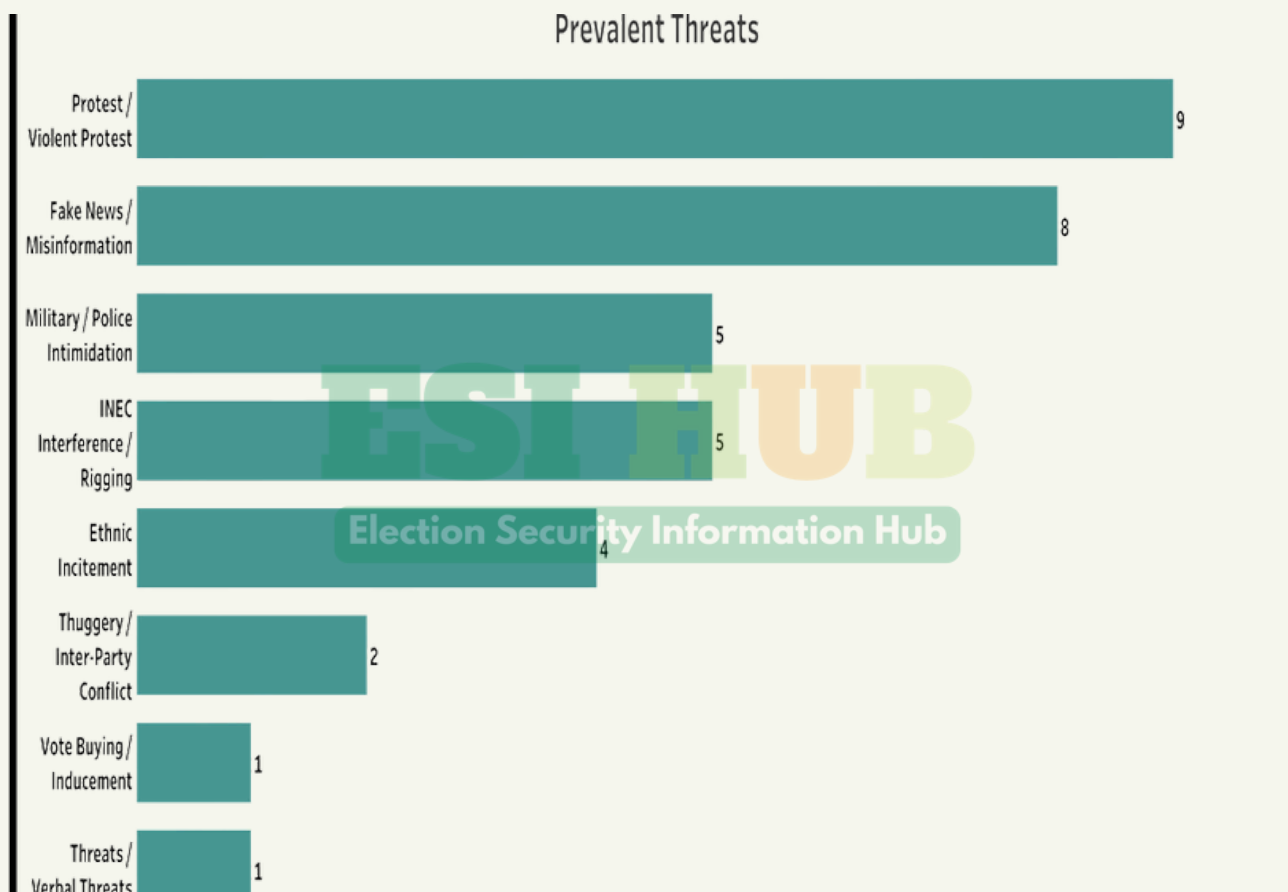
6. ELECTORAL OFFENCES TRACKING (EOTS)

6.1 LEGAL & NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

The tracking and analysis of electoral offences in this report are grounded in Nigeria's domestic legal statutes and the voluntary commitments made by political actors. The primary legal framework is the Electoral Act 2022, which explicitly defines offences and prescribes penalties for actions ranging from vote-buying and undue influence to violence at polling units and the destruction of electoral materials. Concurrently, the National Peace Committee (NPC) Peace Accords, signed by presidential and later gubernatorial candidates, establish a normative framework committing signatories to issue-based campaigning, non-violence, and the respect of electoral outcomes. This EOTS section measures the breach of both the hard law of the state and the soft law of political commitment, providing a dual-lens analysis of the integrity of the pre-election environment.

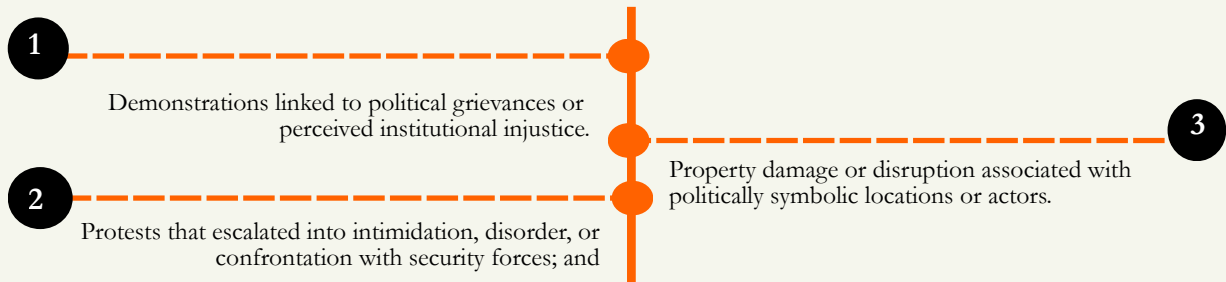
6.2 OFFENCE CATEGORIES & JANUARY 2026 TRENDS

In January 2026, the Electoral Offences Tracking System (EOTS) recorded and verified 33 electoral-related incidents across six geopolitical zones, marking a clear resumption of politically relevant activity following the end-of-year break. While the reporting period did not witness widespread, coordinated physical violence, the pattern of offences points to an early-stage contestation environment dominated by narrative warfare, political signalling, and behavioural norm violations, rather than mass confrontation. The offences recorded during the period fall into the following dominant categories, listed in order of prevalence:



Protests and Violent Protests (9 incidents)

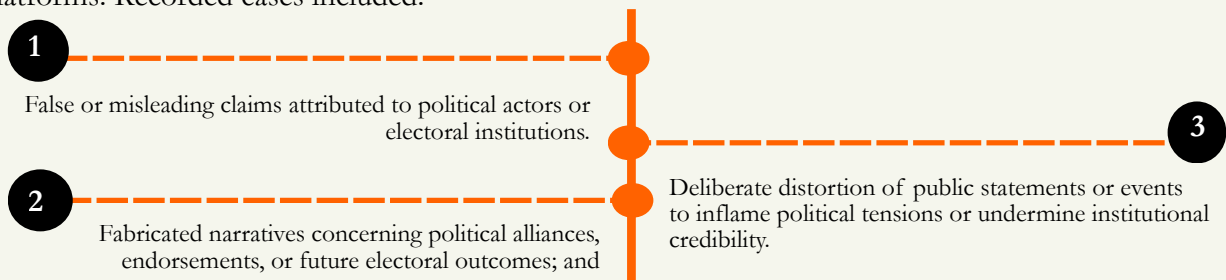
The most numerically significant category in January involved protests and violent protests, accounting for 9 verified incidents. These events were diverse in form and motivation but shared a common characteristic of political framing or electoral relevance. Recorded incidents included:



While most of these incidents resulted in limited or no casualties, their frequency highlights the continued fragility of political engagement channels and the ease with which protest actions can cross from lawful expression into offence territory, particularly in urban and politically sensitive locations.

Disinformation & Misinformation (8 incidents)

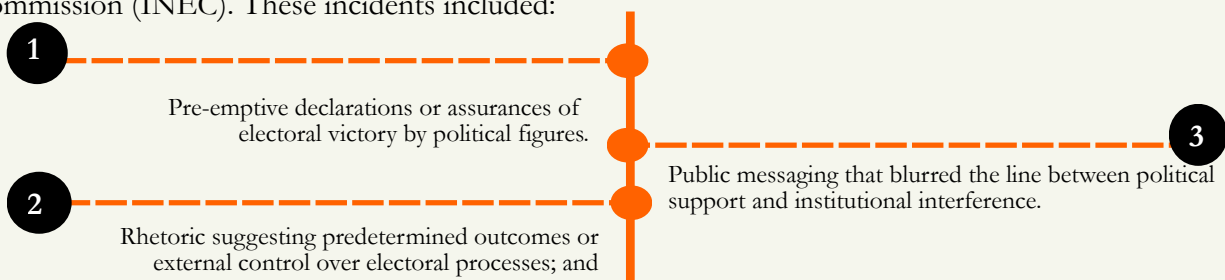
Disinformation and misinformation constituted the most frequently recorded offence category in January 2026, accounting for nearly one-quarter of all verified incidents. These incidents were predominantly media-driven and digitally amplified, involving both traditional and social media platforms. Recorded cases included:



The persistence of this category underscores the increasing reliance on information manipulation as a low-cost, high-impact electoral tactic, particularly effective in shaping public perception well ahead of formal campaign milestones. Its prominence at this early stage suggests a strategic effort to precondition voter attitudes and erode trust before more visible campaign activity begins.

Institutional Undermining and Electoral Manipulation Narratives (5 incidents)

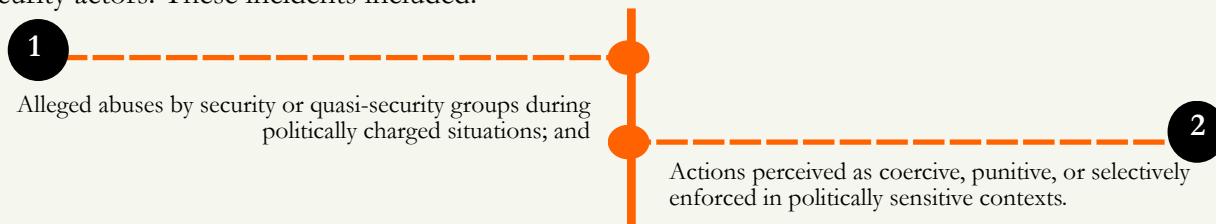
A significant subset of incidents (5 cases) involved statements or actions undermining the authority, neutrality, or independence of electoral institutions, particularly the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). These incidents included:



Although fewer in number, these incidents carry disproportionate risk, as they weaken public confidence in electoral administration and normalise the perception of elections as outcomes of power rather than process.

Security-Related Intimidation and Harassment (5 incidents)

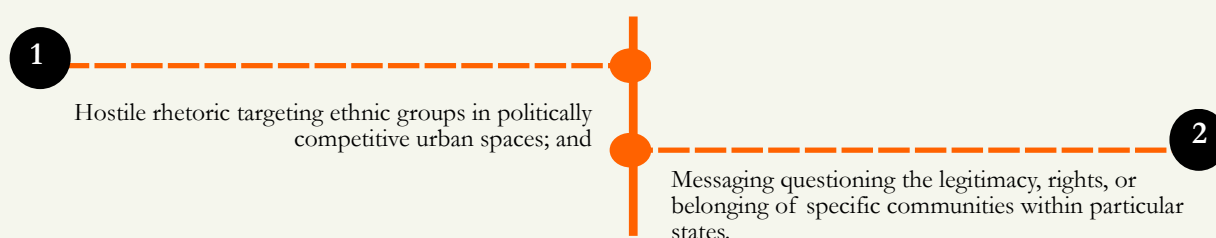
January also recorded 5 incidents involving intimidation or harassment linked to formal or informal security actors. These incidents included:



Such incidents are analytically significant because they combine coercive capacity with political context, increasing the risk of escalation and public distrust, even when not directly linked to polling activities.

Ethnic Incitement and Identity-Based Hostility (4 incidents)

Finally, 4 verified incidents involved ethnic or identity-based incitement, largely manifesting through online platforms but with offline resonance. These incidents included:



While numerically limited, these incidents represent a high-risk category, as identity-based mobilisation has historically catalysed broader electoral violence when left unchecked.

Other High-Risk Isolated Offences (2 incidents)

Beyond the dominant trends, January 2026 recorded two isolated but high-risk offences that warrant specific attention. One incident involved vote buying and voter inducement, signalling the early testing of inducement tactics despite their limited scale during the reporting period. Another incident constituted an explicit verbal threat directed at an electoral institution, representing a direct challenge to lawful electoral authority and grievance-resolution mechanisms. Although numerically limited, both offences carry significant escalation potential and are treated within EOTS as priority indicators for early preventive intervention.

6.3 Key Case Analysis

Given the number of incidents recorded in January 2026, this section adopts a focused case-study approach, analysing incidents that carry high institutional, normative, or escalation risk. Rather than treating January as a low-risk period, the cases below are assessed as early warning signals of behaviours and practices that may intensify as electoral activity progresses.

Table 2: Verified Incident (Reference: EOTS #0174): Illegal Voter Registration Using INEC Equipment in Abia State^{[19] [20]}

<p>Event:</p>	<p>An individual was arrested in Isiala Ngwa North LGA, Abia State, for conducting illegal voter registration for politicians using an INEC voter registration device. Video evidence confirmed the unauthorised capture of voter data outside INEC’s official registration framework.</p>
<p>Perpetrators & Targets:</p>	<p>The perpetrator acted on behalf of unidentified political interests. The target was the integrity of the voter register and public confidence in the credibility of the electoral process.</p>
<p>Impact:</p>	<p>This incident constitutes a direct material interference with electoral infrastructure, posing a systemic threat if replicated. Unlike rhetorical or protest-related offences, it undermines the administrative foundation of credible elections and signals early-stage manipulation of electoral processes.</p>
<p>Enforcement Gaps:</p>	<p>While the arrest reflects reactive enforcement, the incident exposes weaknesses in INEC equipment control, access oversight, and internal safeguards, with no publicly disclosed preventive measures following the incident.</p>

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Table 3: Verified Incident (Reference: EOTS #0162): Voter Inducement in Lagos State^[21]

Event:	A widely circulated video showed a political figure distributing ₦5,000 cash payments to party supporters in Lagos State. Although framed as mobilisation, the act constituted voter inducement.
Perpetrators & Targets:	Party affiliates were the perpetrators. Economically vulnerable supporters were the targets.
Impact:	Although isolated, the incident signals early testing of inducement strategies ahead of formal campaign periods. Vote inducement undermines issue-based political competition and entrenches transactional politics at an early stage of the electoral cycle.
Enforcement Gaps:	No investigation or sanction was publicly reported despite clear video evidence, reinforcing perceptions of elite impunity and weak deterrence in the pre-election phase.

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Table 4: Verified Incident (Reference: EOTS #0151): Disinformation on Political Endorsements in Rivers State^[22]

Event:	False claims circulated alleging a political coalition backing a future presidential re-election bid. These claims were subsequently publicly debunked by relevant political bodies.
Perpetrators & Targets:	Political actors and media intermediaries were implicated. The target was public perception of political legitimacy.
Impact:	The incident exemplifies narrative manipulation designed to shape political expectations and influence alignment decisions. Such conduct contributes to information disorder and erodes trust in political communication.
Enforcement Gaps:	Institutional responses were limited to public rebuttals, with no reported accountability for the originators or amplifiers of the false claims.

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Table 5: Verified Incident (Reference: EOTS #0167): Dissemination of False Election Timetable Information^{[23] [24]}

Event:	Misleading information circulated online regarding a purported 2027 election timetable, prompting INEC to issue a public clarification and debunk the claims.
Perpetrators & Targets:	Media outlets and online influencers amplified the misinformation. The target was public trust in electoral administration.
Impact:	Although isolated, the incident signals early testing of inducement strategies ahead of formal campaign periods. Vote inducement undermines issue-based political competition and entrenches transactional politics at an early stage of the electoral cycle.
Enforcement Gaps:	No sanctions were reported against those responsible for originating or amplifying the false information.

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Table 6: Verified Incident (Reference: EOTS #0172): Violent Protest and Security Force Confrontation in Onitsha, Anambra State^[25]

Event:	Security operatives fired shots while dispersing traders attempting to access the Onitsha Main Market following enforcement actions linked to political directives. The incident was captured on video and widely circulated.
Perpetrators & Targets:	Security forces were the primary actors. Traders and civilians were the targets of the enforcement action.
Impact:	This incident reflects the militarisation of civic and economic spaces in politically sensitive contexts, heightening fear and undermining peaceful political participation ahead of elections.
Enforcement Gaps:	No public accountability measures were reported concerning the conduct of the security personnel involved.

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

Table 7: Verified Incident (Reference: EOTS #0166): Ethnic Incitement in Oyo State^[26]

Event:	A video circulated showing an individual issuing ethnically hostile and provocative statements in a politically charged context.
Perpetrators & Targets:	Private individuals were the perpetrators. Ethnic communities were the targets.
Impact:	Although isolated, the incident carries a high escalation risk, as identity-based rhetoric has historically acted as a catalyst for broader electoral violence when left unaddressed.
Enforcement Gaps:	No corrective or punitive action was publicly reported, raising concerns about tolerance for identity-based provocation.

Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

6.4. Monitoring Intra-Party Dynamics: An Early Warning Indicator

Threats to electoral integrity are not solely external. A significant portion of political instability in January 2026 originated within political parties themselves. While the EOTS framework monitors breaches of the Electoral Act 2022 and NPC Peace Accords, a parallel focus on intra-party regulatory violations offers a critical early warning lens. Internal disputes—over leadership legitimacy, candidate selection, and party constitutions—often precede and predict broader electoral violence, voter disenfranchisement, and institutional delegitimization.

6.4.1. January 2026 Intra-Party Conflict Trends

During the reporting period, the ESI Hub tracked multiple high-intensity intra-party conflicts across Nigeria's four major political parties, summarised below.

People's Democratic Party (PDP)

The PDP experienced severe leadership fragmentation at the national level, with two factions claiming control of the National Working Committee: one led by Kabiru Turaki, the other aligned with Nyesom Wike. The Federal High Court in Abuja fixed January 23 for hearings on multiple applications, including requests for judicial recusal over alleged bias.^[27] In Ekiti State, a Federal High Court nullified the PDP's governorship candidate on January 13, ordering a fresh primary due to "gross abuse of process" and violations of the party's own electoral guidelines.^[28]

Labour Party (LP)

The Labour Party's lingering leadership crisis intensified significantly. A Federal High Court judgment recognized the Nenadi Usman-led caretaker committee. At the same time, the Julius Abure-led faction vowed to appeal, arguing that the court had violated the Supreme Court's principle that leadership matters are "internal affairs."^[29] By late January, INEC had reportedly uploaded Nenadi Usman's leadership to its records.^[30] The crisis contributed to Peter Obi's departure from the party, described as a "symbolic and practical turning point."^[31]

New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP)

Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf formally resigned from the NNPP on January 25, citing "persistent internal challenges arising from leadership disagreements and ongoing legal processes."^[32] His resignation was accompanied by 21 state assembly members, 8 federal lawmakers, and 44 local government chairmen. Two factions existed—Kwankwaso-led and Agbo Major-led—with competing court rulings exacerbating fragmentation.^[33]

All Progressives Congress (APC)

While more stable nationally, significant internal tension existed in Rivers State. APC support groups urged President Tinubu to intervene in the crisis between Governor Siminalayi Fubara and Minister Nyesom Wike, warning the situation "poses a serious threat to party unity and democratic stability."^[34] Impeachment moves against Fubara on January 8 reflected deep factional divisions.

6.4.2. Analytical Observations

Table 8: Cross-cutting themes emerge from January's intra-party conflicts

Observation	Description	Electoral Risk
Judicialization of Disputes	Parties increasingly rely on courts rather than internal grievance mechanisms (PDP, LP, NNPP)	Prolonged uncertainty delays candidate emergence; it overwhelms election tribunals
Candidate Selection as Flashpoint	Ekiti PDP primary nullification demonstrates vulnerability of nomination processes.	Litigation surge; voter confusion; intra-party sabotage
Leadership Crises Driving Defection	LP loses Peter Obi; NNPP loses Governor Yusuf and 73 other officials	Destabilises party structures; triggers violent realignments
Cross-Party Recruitment as Conflict Driver	Kwankwaso alleges NNPP appointees were coerced to defect to APC in Kano ^[35]	Retaliatory violence between party supporters

Intra-party conflicts documented in January 2026 underscore a fundamental truth: elections are not won or lost solely on Election Day. Candidate selection, leadership legitimacy, and internal governance shape political competition long before voters go to the polls. Expanding EOTS to capture these dynamics provides stakeholders with a more comprehensive early warning system, enabling interventions that address the root causes of electoral instability.

7. KEY DRIVER ANALYSIS & EMERGING DYNAMICS

Nigeria faces a complex and geographically diverse security crisis. From the insurgency in the Northeast to rampant banditry in the Northwest, violent communal clashes in the Northcentral, and rising criminality in the South, these threats undermine economic growth and pose an existential risk to the nation. This section analysed a detailed dataset of security incidents documented in January 2026 to dissect this landscape. The analysis moves beyond description to examine the structural drivers that create fertile ground for instability, the proximate triggers that ignite violence, and the cross-cutting themes defining the contemporary risk environment, with a specific focus on implications for the 2027 electoral cycle.

7.1 Structural Drivers: The Deep-Rooted Foundations of Instability

7.1.1 Governance and Security Deficits

A core structural driver of insecurity is a profound crisis in state capacity and legitimacy. In many conflict zones, the state is physically absent or demonstrably ineffective, ceding authority to non-state armed groups. This governance deficit creates a permissive environment where violence flourishes, and institutions fail.

1. The Spending-Effectiveness Paradox

This failure is starkly illustrated by a troubling disconnect between massive financial investment in security and deteriorating public safety. Nigeria's security and defence budget has seen an alarming upward trajectory, reaching a peak of N6.85 trillion in 2025, which included significant allocations for modernizing the Nigeria Police Force. Despite this record spending, the January 2026 incident data shows widespread security failures. In over 15 documented cases (from attacks in Owo, Ondo, to the mass abduction in Kaduna), the official government response is explicitly noted as “At the time of this report, no Police response.”

2. Critical Anomalies in Accountability and Resource Allocation

This paradox also points to critical anomalies in accountability and mission effectiveness. For instance, the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) reported a capital budget utilisation rate of 314.59% in 2025. This extreme over-execution, occurring alongside escalating violence, indicates that increased financial investment has not yet translated into proportional improvements in civilian security. Where citizens do not see tangible improvements in security and development despite significant public expenditure, trust in state institutions diminishes.

3. The Culture of Impunity and Its Consequences

A widespread lack of accountability for human rights abuses by both state and non-state actors fosters a culture of impunity, where violence is seen as a cost-free tool for resolving disputes or seizing power. This governance deficit has a direct and corrosive impact on democratic processes. It directly enables electoral offenses, as citizens have little faith that institutions like the police or the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) will act fairly or punish violators. When the state cannot guarantee basic security or justice, the social contract is broken, making communities more likely to resort to self-help or accept the authority of alternative power structures.

7.1.2 Economic Exclusion and Livelihood Pressures

The economic crisis in Nigeria is more than a context for crime; it is the primary driver that turns instability into a rational livelihood strategy.

1. The Macroeconomic Crisis: Widespread Deprivation as a Driver of Crime

Official projections and reports from January 2026 describe a severe economic breakdown. PricewaterhouseCoopers projects that roughly 62% of the population (about 141 million Nigerians) will live in poverty in 2026, while the World Food Programme warns that 35 million Nigerians risk severe hunger^[36] ^[37]. This deprivation is fuelled by hyper-inflation that erodes purchasing power and, critically, by staggering rates of youth unemployment and underemployment, creating a "vast pool of disaffected, idle young people."^[38] ^[39] Also, soaring prices and stagnant wages are testing Nigerians, creating fertile ground for instability. For those with no opportunities, crime becomes an employment option.

2. From Scarcity to Crime: The Illicit "Kidnapping Economy."

In this context, criminality has evolved into a sophisticated and profitable parallel economy. According to PWC, kidnapping is not as sporadic banditry but as a deeply entrenched business model, describing it as a "national emergency that threatens our very prospects to become a stable and economically powerful nation."^[40] Data indicates the scale: Nigerians reportedly paid an estimated ₦2.23 trillion in ransom within a single year. PwC also noted that worsening economic conditions are a statistically significant predictor of the perceived severity of kidnapping. Banditry, therefore, functions as a revenue model, and electoral offenses (votes traded for sustenance) are fuelled by the same economic desperation.

3. Intensifying Competition: Climate, Land, and Communal Conflict

The struggle for economic survival is most direct in violent competition over dwindling natural resources, a driver of persistent farmer-pastoralist clashes.^[41] According to Eke et al. (2025), they opined that while resource competition for land and water is central, ethnic identity often acts as an accelerant.^[42] This conflict has killed tens of thousands over two decades and continues to escalate, as recorded in January. The competition is intensifying due to climate change, as erratic rainfall and desertification in the north push herders southward into farmland, and due to the collapse of traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms. The attacks have a devastating impact on food security, forcing farmers in states like Plateau and Benue to abandon their fields and threatening national food supplies.^[43]

4. Exploitation by Elites and the Pre-Election Context

This widespread hardship is exacerbated by a growing disconnect between suffering citizens and political leaders who remain insulated from the crisis. Observers criticize unchecked government extravagance and note that "poverty has become a political tool," with deprivation weaponized during election seasons through vote-buying and manipulation when citizens are pushed to survival's edge. The pre-election period thus becomes a time when politicians can exploit this profound economic vulnerability for political gain through inducement schemes.

7.1.3 Communal Polarization and Identity Politics: The Weaponization of Identity

While economic competition over resources provides the fuel for conflict, ethnic and religious identity often supplies the spark, transforming localized disputes into intractable cycles of communal violence. In Nigeria, conflicts are not only about land or cattle; they are also "deeply rooted in ethnic affiliations and perceptions," with identity becoming a primary lens through which grievances are perceived and violence is justified.

1. The Framing of Conflict: From Resource Dispute to Identity War

This dynamic is most visible in the enduring farmer-herder conflict. What begins as competition over grazing land and water resources is frequently framed and experienced as a clash of identities: predominantly Muslim Fulani pastoralists versus often Christian farming communities. This superimposition of religious and ethnic dimensions onto an economic dispute exponentially exacerbates hostilities, making reconciliation far more difficult as each act of violence is interpreted as an attack on a collective identity rather than an individual or criminal act.

2. Documented Cycles of Retaliatory Violence

The January 2026 incident data provide stark evidence of this weaponization. In Plateau State, a clear retaliatory cycle is documented:

1. Initial Attack: "Fulani youths shot by suspected Berom militia."^[44] frames the violence along ethnic (Berom vs. Fulani) lines.

2. Retaliatory Strike: This is followed by "Bandits kill 3 in reprisal"^[45] where the perpetrators are identified by the community affiliation of the initial victims (Fulani). These are not random criminal acts but targeted reprisals mapped directly onto ethnic fault lines, demonstrating how a specific incident can rapidly escalate into a broader communal conflict.

3. Electoral Implications: Politicization of Grievance

This entrenched polarization presents a grave risk to electoral integrity. Historical grievances and identity-based distrust are easily manipulated by political actors. During campaigns, politicians may employ divisive rhetoric, framing elections as an existential struggle between groups, or use identity-based patronage to mobilize blocs of voters. This politicization of identity can transform the electoral process from a civic exercise into a high-stakes competition for group survival, increasing the likelihood of violence, voter intimidation, and a rejection of electoral outcomes by communities that feel politically marginalized.

7.2 Immediate Triggers

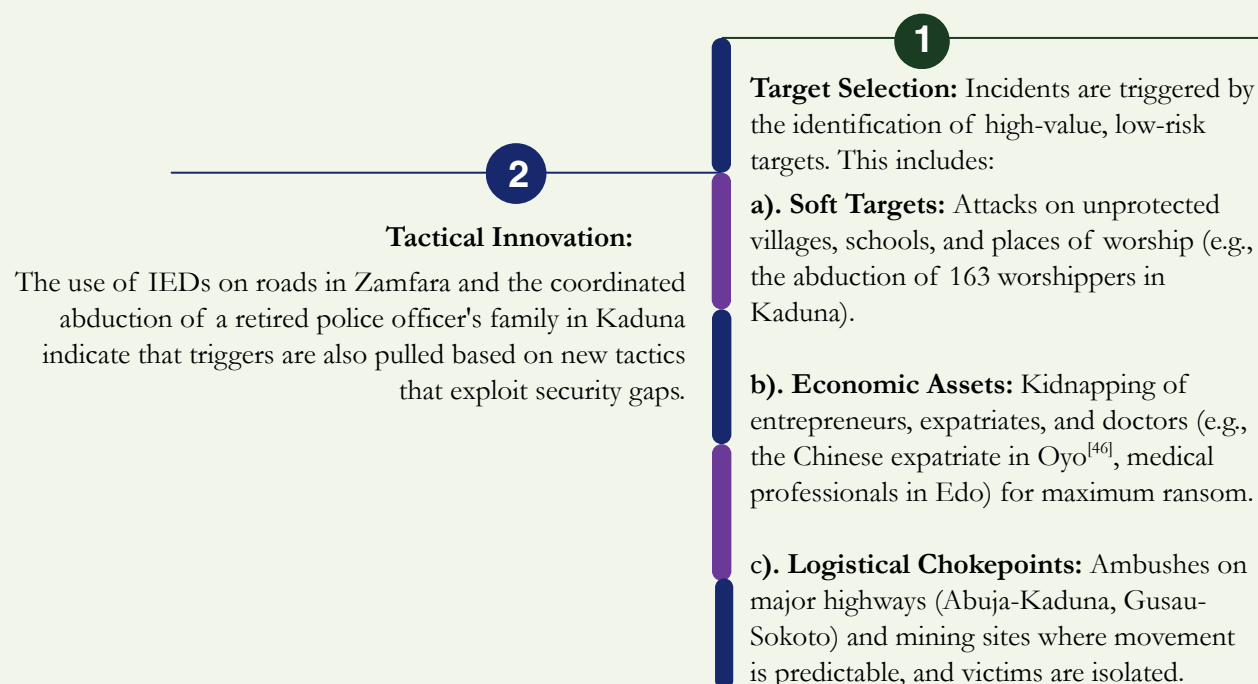
The structural drivers of governance failure, economic desperation, and identity polarization create a chronically volatile environment in Nigeria. Within this flashpoint, specific proximate events act as immediate triggers, converting underlying tension into open violence. These triggers are not random but are strategically exploited or emerge inevitably from the structural conditions.

7.2.1 Retaliatory Cycles and Tit-for-Tat Violence

The most potent and predictable trigger is the act of retaliation, which transforms isolated incidents into self-perpetuating conflict cycles. This dynamic is a direct consequence of the culture of impunity and absent state justice mechanisms outlined in Section 7.1.1. An attack by one group (e.g., "Fulani youths shot by suspected Berom militia") is perceived not as a crime by individuals, but as an assault on the entire community. In the absence of a trusted state authority to deliver justice, the affected community feels compelled to enact retribution ("Bandits kill 3 in reprisal"). This creates a closed loop of vengeance where each retaliatory strike justifies the next, making conflicts exponentially harder to resolve. The January 2026 data from Plateau State is a textbook example of this trigger in action, demonstrating how a single incident can escalate communal strife

7.2.2 Criminal Opportunism and Economic Targeting

For criminal networks operating the "kidnapping economy" (Section 7.1.2), triggers are often opportunistic, based on vulnerable targets and tactical advantage.



7.2.3 Power Dynamics and Electoral Instrumentalization

As the 2027 electoral cycle approaches, political competition itself becomes a major trigger for violence. This exploitative dynamic is fuelled by the economic vulnerability and identity polarization previously analysed.

2

Resource-Based Triggers: The release of campaign funds and political patronage can itself trigger violence, as armed groups clash over access to these financial resources.

1

Pre-Election Positioning: Violence can be triggered to:

- a). Eliminate or Intimidate Rival Factions:** The kidnapping of a Tinubu/Shettima campaign leader in Zamfara and an APC chieftain in Ondo serve as early warning signals of politically-motivated targeting.
- b). Demonstrate Control:** Cult and gang clashes in Delta, Lagos, and Benue may be triggered to assert territorial dominance ahead of elections, ensuring these groups are positioned as enforcers for political patrons.
- c). Disrupt Opponent Strongholds:** Attacks in politically sensitive regions can be triggered to destabilize an opponent's base of support.

7.2.4 Ecological Shocks and Resource Pressure Points

Immediate environmental changes act as acute triggers, particularly for farmer-herder conflict, by intensifying the resource competition described in Section 7.1.2.

2

Specific Events: A particularly severe dry spell, the blockage of a traditional cattle route, or the destruction of a crop by livestock can serve as the immediate spark for a violent clash, layering onto deeper historical grievances.

1

Seasonal Migration: The onset of the dry season is a predictable annual trigger, as herders move their cattle southward in search of water and grazing land, inevitably bringing them into contact with farming communities.

7.3 Cross-Cutting Themes

Gender & Vulnerability:

In January 2026, the violence was not gender neutral. Women and children were disproportionately targeted, a pattern that reflects strategic calculations by armed groups. This is evident in mass abductions, where women and children overwhelmingly become the victims, such as the 163 worshippers kidnapped in Kaduna, the pregnant woman taken in Ekiti, or the twins abducted in Edo. Perceived as "softer" targets, they are less likely to resist violently and can be used to exert maximum pressure for ransom payments.

Attacks also specifically target women to achieve strategic objectives. For example, the murder of a woman and six children in Kano and the case in Ondo, where a man was arrested for impregnating a minor, serve to terrorize communities and shatter social cohesion. Such acts are intended to demonstrate the complete powerlessness of both the victims and their male protectors, thereby reinforcing the control of armed groups.

7.4 The Electoralization of Insecurity

The security crisis is becoming intrinsically linked to the political cycle, with violence increasingly instrumentalized for electoral gain. This is evidenced by the early kidnapping of political figures and the mobilization of cult groups, which represent a testing and deployment of forces for the upcoming campaign and election period. As shown in the table below, the January 2026 data reveal clear, actionable linkages between ongoing security dynamics and specific threats to the 2027 electoral process.

Table 9: Linkages Between Observed Security Dynamics and Projected Electoral Risk

Security Dynamic (Evidence from Jan 2026 Data)	Specific Incident Example(s)	Projected Electoral Impact & Mechanism
1. Kidnapping & Targeting of Political Figures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Zamfara: "Gunmen Kidnap Tinubu/Shettima Campaign Leader." 2. Ondo: "Gunmen abduct Ondo APC Chieftain." 	<p>Intimidation & Campaign Suppression: Creates a climate of fear, deterring candidates from campaigning in volatile regions. Signals that political affiliation itself makes one a target, which can suppress political mobilization and competition.</p>
2. Cult/Gang Violence & Urban Clashes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delta: "Clash Between Rival Cults in Aladja." 2. Lagos: "Clash between Eiyè (ACN) and Aye (NBM) in Agbede." 3. Benue: Multiple cult clashes across Gboko, Makurdi, and Otukpo. 	<p>Mobilization of Political Thuggery: These groups are the likely foot soldiers for election-day violence. Clashes represent turf wars and readiness tests. They may be hired for ballot-box snatching, voter intimidation, and attacking opponents' agents.</p>
3. Direct Attacks on Security Personnel & Infrastructure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ondo: "Bandits attack police station." 2. Enugu: "Gunmen attack police checkpoint... two officers killed." 3. Kogi: "Gunmen attack 	<p>Degradation of State Security Capacity: Weakens the state's ability to secure polling units, protect INEC officials, and escort election materials. Emboldens non-state actors by demonstrating the vulnerability of formal security forces.</p>

<p>4. Highway Attacks & Road Blockades</p>	<p>1. Kogi: "Gunmen kill five, abduct passengers in attack on Abuja–Ilesha bus." 2. Zamfara/Kaduna: Multiple incidents on Gusau-Sokoto and Abuja-Kaduna highways.</p>	<p>Retaliatory violence between party supporters</p>
<p>5. Communal Violence & Identity-Based Retaliation</p>	<p>1. Plateau: Retaliatory cycle of "Fulani youths shot..." followed by "Bandits kill 3 in reprisal." 2. Ebonyi: "Four beheaded in renewed boundary clash."</p>	<p>Politicization of Grievance: Provides a ready-made fault line for politicians to exploit using divisive rhetoric. Elections may be framed as a zero-sum ethnic/communal struggle, increasing the stakes and likelihood of violence around polling.</p>
<p>6. Attacks on Informal Security Actors (Vigilantes)</p>	<p>1. Niger: "Vigilante killed... as bandits attack Wamba village." 2. Borno: "CJTF member killed in suspected Boko Haram ambush." 3. Oyo: "Bandits kill five Oyo forest guards."</p>	<p>Destabilization of Local Order: Removes the last layer of localized protection in many communities. Creates a security vacuum that armed groups can fill, allowing them to control territory and influence voter access and freedom of choice.</p>

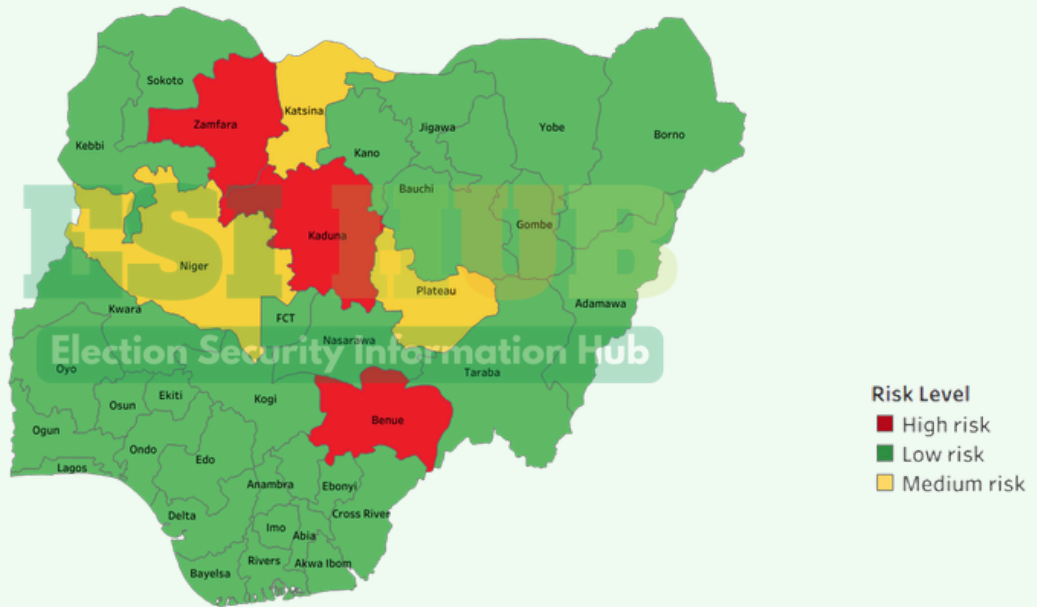
Data source: ESI-Hub 2026

The table demonstrates that the electoral threat is not monolithic but stems from the convergence of criminal entrepreneurship, organized group violence, and deep societal fractures. The targeting of both police and informal vigilantes is particularly strategic, aiming to degrade all layers of security that could safeguard the electoral process. Consequently, mitigating these risks cannot rely on standard security operations alone; it requires an electoral-specific security strategy designed to pre-empt these identified pathways of interference, ensuring the integrity of both the campaign period and election day itself.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT & SCENARIO PLANNING

This section synthesises verified data and driver analysis to project future risks. It employs a Flashpoint Severity Index (FSI) to map current vulnerabilities and outlines plausible scenarios for the next 1-3 months. The analysis also forecasts short-term incident trends to support immediate logistical planning.

National Risk Map (January 2026)



8.1 Flashpoint Severity Index (FSI) – January Assessment

The FSI classifies states and select LGAs into High, Medium, and Low-risk categories. The algorithm weights incident frequency (30%), casualty rates (40%), strategic impact (e.g., attacks on INEC/police) (20%), and electoral activity levels (10%).

8.1 Flashpoint Severity Index (FSI) – January Assessment

The FSI classifies states and select LGAs into High, Medium, and Low-risk categories. The algorithm weights incident frequency (30%), casualty rates (40%), strategic impact (e.g., attacks on INEC/police) (20%), and electoral activity levels (10%).

HIGH-RISK STATES (CLUSTER 2)

1) Kaduna State (FSI Score: 0.7556)

a). Justification: Represents the highest national security threat. The state recorded 178 casualties in just 7 incidents.

b). Indicators: Industrial-scale kidnapping in Kajuru and Chikun LGAs; strategic bandit control of the Abuja-Kaduna transport corridor; high potential for mass disenfranchisement in rural wards.

2) Zamfara State (FSI Score: 0.7075)

a). Justification: The operational epicenter of banditry. Recorded 15 verified incidents with a focus on mass abduction (81 victims).

b) Indicators: Total collapse of security in Maru and Tsafe LGAs; bandits dictating terms to rural communities; paralysis of voter registration exercises.

MODERATE-RISK STATES (CLUSTER 1)

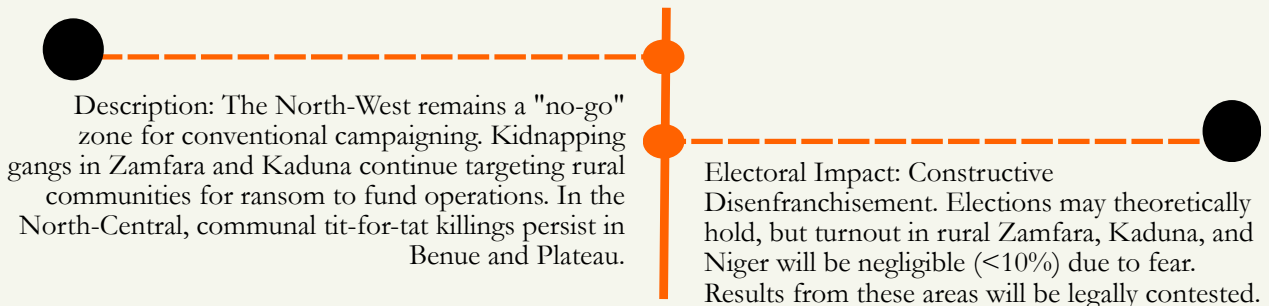
- 1) **Benue, Niger, Plateau, Katsina**
- a). **Justification:** These states exhibit high lethality but slightly lower frequency or kidnapping rates than the High-Risk cluster.
- b). **Indicators:**
 - i). **Niger:** Highest death toll (54 deaths), primarily in Borgu LGA.
 - ii) **Benue:** High incident frequency (18 incidents) driven by localized militia clashes in Otukpo and Guma.
 - iii) **Plateau:** Recurring ethno-religious violence in Jos South and Barkin Ladi.

LOW-RISK STATES (CLUSTER 0)

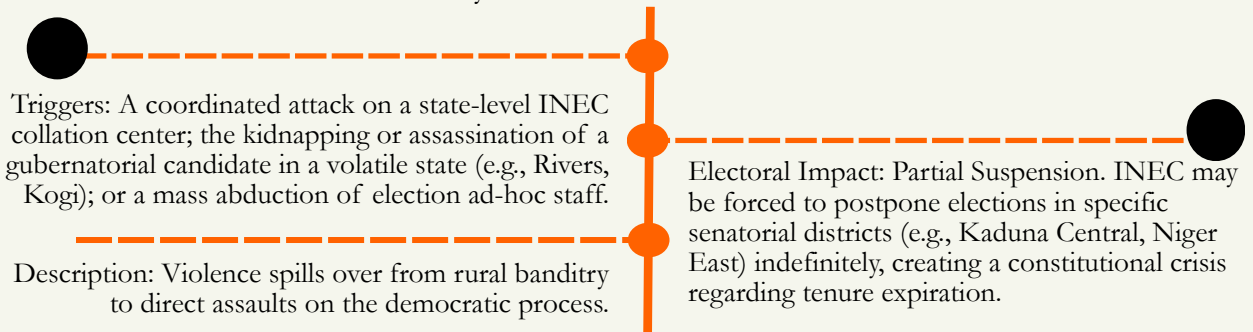
- 1) **Abia, Adamawa, Kano, Lagos, Rivers, FCT, etc.**
- a). **Justification:** Incidents are largely isolated, urban-centric, or lower in casualty intensity.
- b). **Caveat:** "Low Risk" does not mean "No Risk." Rivers and Kano show high indicators for political thuggery and assassination, which could trigger rapid escalation during campaign peaks.

8.2 Forward-Looking Scenarios (Next 1-3 Months)

Baseline Scenario (Current Trends Continue): 60% Probability



Deterioration Scenario: 30% Probability



Improvement Scenario: 10% Probability

i

Triggers: A major military decapitation strike against bandit leadership in Zamfara; a successful, high-visibility peace accord signing in Plateau, enforced by community policing.

ii

Description: Security forces regain the initiative in key corridors.

Electoral Impact: Restored Confidence. Main supply routes become safe for logistics; displaced voters feel secure enough to return to "super cluster" voting centres.

Electoral Implications

1

Voter Turnout Projections: Based on current FSI mapping, severely depressed turnout (below 15%) is projected for many LGAs in High-Risk states like Zamfara and rural Kaduna. Moderate turnout (20-35%) is expected in Moderate-Risk states like Benue and Plateau, heavily dependent on localized security on election day. This creates a fundamental inequality in democratic participation.

2

Logistics & INEC Operational Risks: The greatest logistical threats are:

a). Insecure Highways & Kidnapping

Corridors: Threatening the movement of personnel and materials to/from LGAs in the North-West and North-Central.

b). Targeted Attacks on INEC Facilities:

Storage facilities (RACs/Super RACs) in forecast hotspots like Otukpo (Benue) are highly vulnerable.

c). Mass Withdrawal of Ad-hoc Staff: Fear of violence, especially in high-forecast areas, may lead to a critical dropout rate of NYSC members and poll officials.

3

Candidate & Observer Safety: The risk of assassination, kidnapping, and violent assault on candidates, party agents, and observers is High in states with high political-thuggery indicators like Rivers and Kano, and Extreme for campaigns in rural areas of High-Risk states. This will likely suppress campaign activities and independent observation.

4

Legitimacy & Acceptance Risks: The convergence of predicted violence, mass disenfranchisement, and logistical failures creates a profound legitimacy deficit. Losers in volatile states will almost certainly reject results, alleging violence and malpractice. The capacity of election tribunals and the NPC to manage this volume of dispute will be critically tested, with high potential for post-election violence.

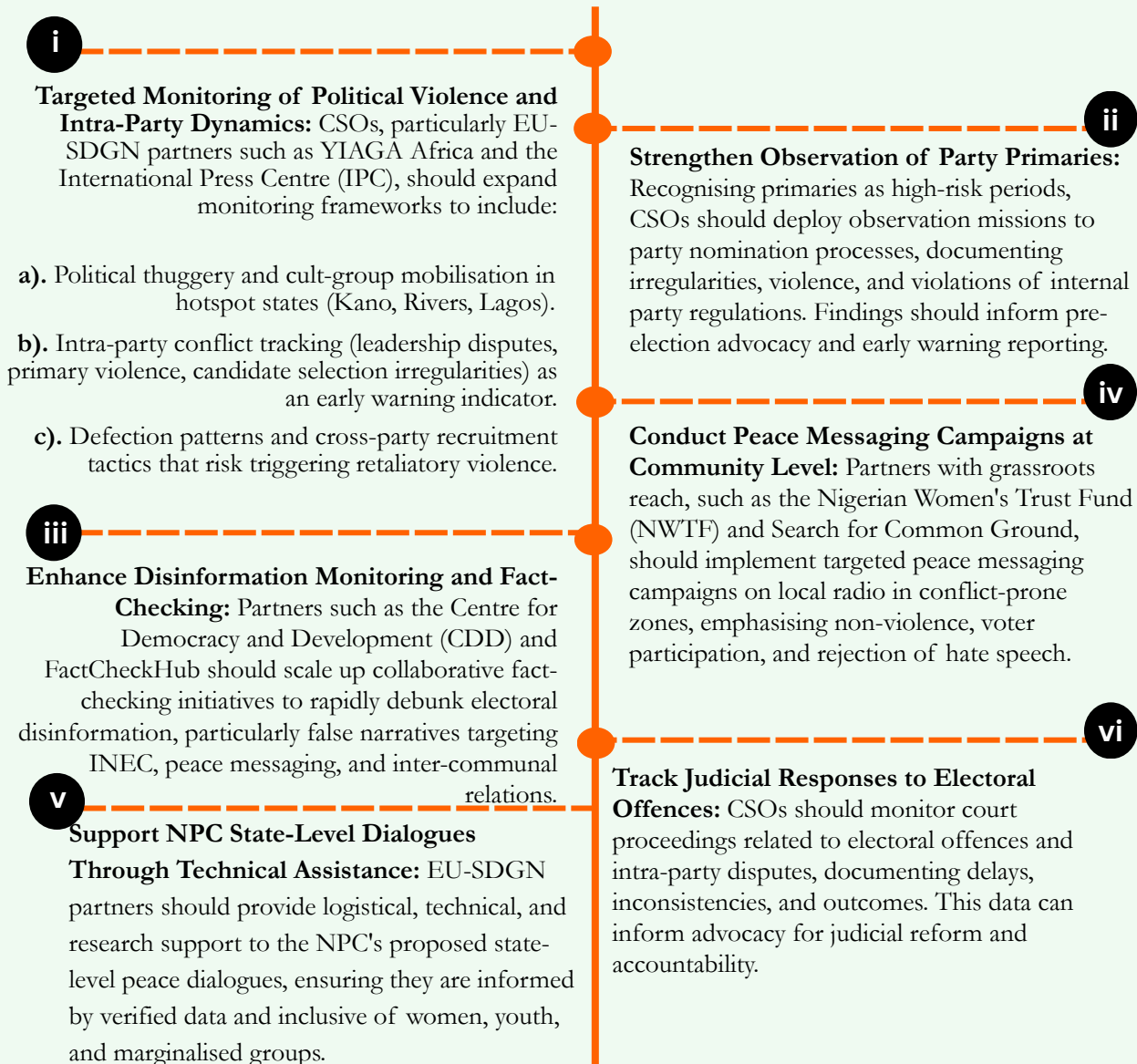
9. STAKEHOLDER-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the January 2026 analysis and forward-looking risk projections, the following targeted recommendations are proposed to mitigate identified risks, strengthen electoral integrity, and de-escalate violence in the critical pre-election period.

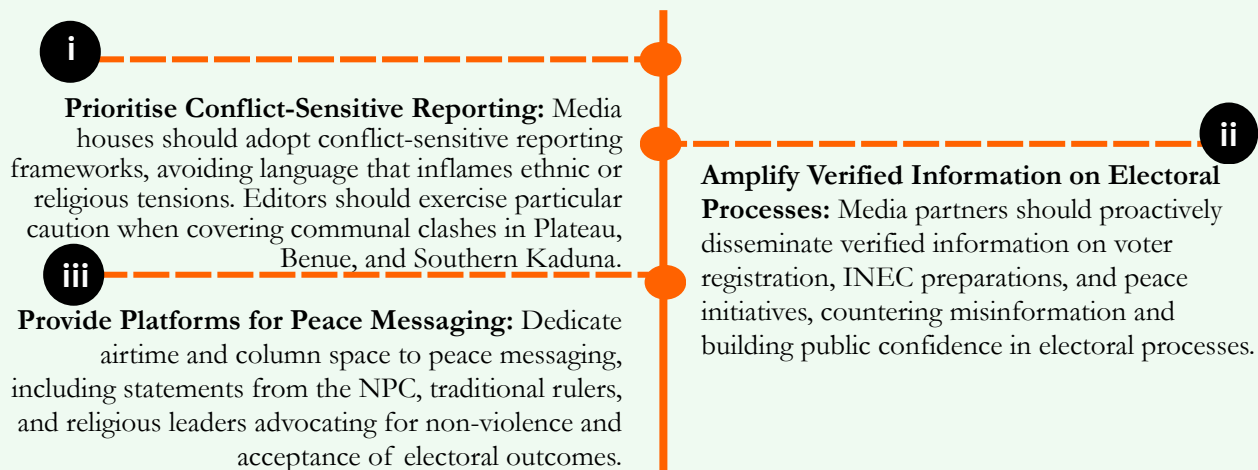
9.1 For the National Peace Committee (NPC):



9.2. Civil Society Organisations (Including EU-SDGN Partners):



9.3. Media Organisations:



9.4 Security Agencies (NPF, Military, DSS, NSCDC)

i

Operation "Forest Sanity": Immediately launch sustained, intelligence-driven interdiction operations in the Kaduna-Zamfara-Katsina bandit corridors to dismantle kidnapping camps and disrupt ransom logistics before the peak campaign season.

iii

Highway Security & Logistics Corridors: Establish joint-security task forces to secure critical INEC logistics routes, especially those identified as high-risk in Niger and Katsina states, through coordinated patrols and aerial surveillance.

ii

Flashpoint Patrols: Deploy rapid-response mobile strike forces to high-lethality areas identified in the FSI, particularly Benue (Otukpo, Guma) and Plateau (Jos South, Barkin Ladi), to deter communal retaliatory attacks and protect vulnerable communities.

9.5 INEC

i

Risk-Based Logistics Planning: Reroute the transportation and storage of sensitive materials away from forecasted high-risk highways and LGAs (e.g., areas in Niger, Katsina, and Otukpo LGA in Benue).

ii

Staff Safety & Incentives: Provide enhanced risk allowances, insurance, and pre-deployment security briefings for all ad-hoc staff assigned to High and Moderate-Risk states to prevent last-minute withdrawals.

9.6 Political Parties & Candidates:

i

Enforce Internal Party Sanctions: Party leadership must publicly and decisively sanction candidates or officials whose supporters engage in violence, incite hatred, or violate intra-party governance rules (as documented in Section 6.4). This includes withdrawing party support from proven violators, thereby demonstrating that the signed peace accords carry concrete consequences.

iii

Reject Defection-Induced Violence: Party leaders should publicly condemn aggressive cross-party recruitment tactics that involve coercion or intimidation, recognising such practices as potential triggers for retaliatory violence in volatile states like Kano and Rivers.

ii

Commit to Issue-Based Campaigning: All parties should issue public directives to their spokespersons and supporters to avoid inflammatory ethno-religious rhetoric that triggers communal violence, as observed in Plateau and Oyo States during January 2026. Campaign messaging should focus on policy and governance, not identity-based mobilisation.

9.7 Traditional & Religious Institutions

i

Local Mediation in Communal Flashpoints:

Leverage moral authority and local knowledge to convene and mediate trust-building dialogues between conflicting communities in Plateau, Benue, and Southern Kaduna.

ii

Preach Electoral Peace: Use sermons and traditional council meetings to publicly advocate for peaceful elections, respect for the sanctity of life, and the acceptance of legally determined outcomes.

9.8 Development/International Partners

i

Support for Dialogue & Mediation: Provide flexible funding and technical support for the NPC's state-level peace dialogues and for CSO-led conflict mediation initiatives at the community level.

iii

Diplomatic Engagement: Maintain consistent diplomatic pressure on political leaders to adhere to constitutional processes and condemn violence, while publicly supporting institutions working towards credible and peaceful elections.

ii

Bolster Judicial Capacity: Offer technical assistance to strengthen the capacity and security of the election petition tribunals to ensure they can manage the anticipated high volume of cases efficiently and impartially.

10. CONCLUSION

The security and electoral landscape of Nigeria in January 2026 reveals a nation at a critical juncture. The data and analysis presented in this report underscore a volatile and increasingly complex threat environment, characterized by a sharp polarization of violence: mass abductions in the Northwest and high-lethality attacks in the North-Central. These are not isolated crises, but interconnected phenomena fuelled by deep-seated structural drivers—governance and security deficits, profound economic exclusion, and the weaponization of communal identity.

The convergence of these insecurity dynamics with the approaching electoral cycle creates a perfect storm of risk. Kidnapping has evolved into a lucrative parallel economy, banditry challenges state authority in key geographic corridors, and communal conflicts remain ripe for political manipulation. Simultaneously, the tracking of electoral offences indicates an early and troubling shift toward information warfare, institutional undermining, and the testing of inducement and intimidation tactics.

The forward-looking assessment is sobering. Without urgent, coordinated, and targeted intervention, the Baseline Scenario of widespread voter suppression and legitimacy deficits appears most probable. High-risk states like Kaduna and Zamfara face the prospect of effective disenfranchisement, while politically volatile states like Rivers and Kano simmer with the early warning signals of election-related violence. However, this analysis is not a prediction of inevitable failure. It is a call to actionable foresight. The detailed zonal analysis, driver assessment, and risk scenarios provide a clear map of the vulnerabilities. The stakeholder-specific recommendations offer a tangible pathway for mitigation.

The mandate of the National Peace Committee's ESI Hub, with support from the European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN II) programme, is to convert data into dialogue and analysis into action. The findings of this report must now catalyse a proactive, multi-stakeholder response. Security operations must be intelligence-driven and focused on protecting electoral logistics and personnel. Political actors must be held accountable to the peace accords they have signed. Civil society and the media must amplify the voices of vulnerable communities and combat disinformation. International partners must bolster institutional capacity and support credible conflict resolution mechanisms.

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