

SOLACE GLOBAL

WEST AFRICA SECURITY REVIEW NIGERIA THE FAILING STATE

JUNE 2022



Executive Summary

Since our last series of reports focusing on the security landscape in West Africa, instability has worsened, violence has propagated, and regional governance is at risk of collapsing. In the past 18 months alone, the region has seen military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Guinea, with a failed coup attempt in Niger and Guinea-Bissau, and several high-profile bandit and terror attacks, with insecurity proliferating across national borders. At sea meanwhile, whilst 2022 has seen a slight decrease in maritime crime, throughout 2020 and 2021 the Gulf of Guinea accounted for over 95 percent of all kidnappings at sea. The problems facing the region have further continued to be compounded by the ever-present impact of climate change, global food insecurity, and the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

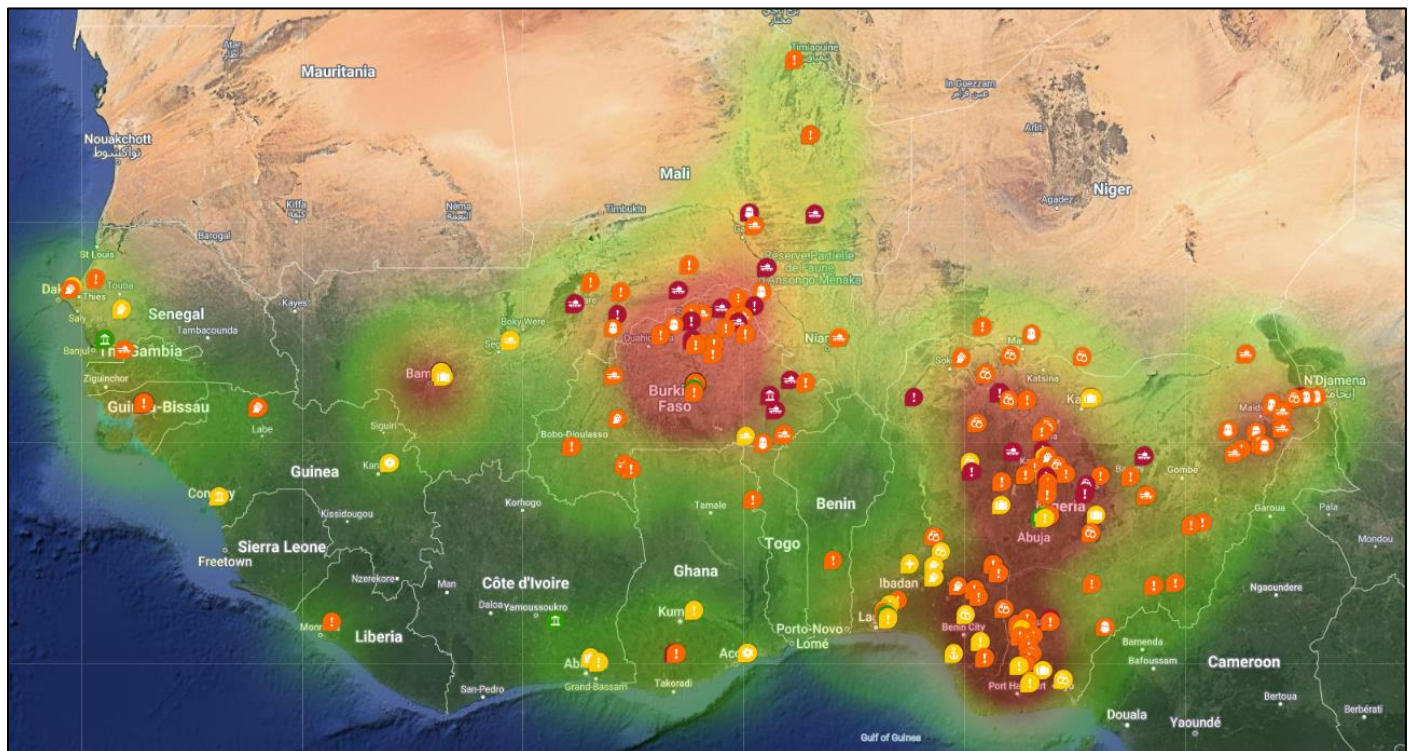


Figure 1: All alerts plotted in West Africa on Solace Secure between January-June 2022

The region matters in a multitude of ways, and these will be explored in depth, but of note it has geographical proximity to Europe, is home to large amounts of the world’s mineral wealth and has an increasingly youthful and educated population. As such, its importance will only grow with time. Whilst all states in the region are suffering, one could argue that the wider fate of the region is tied to that of Nigeria - the regional hegemon - which is in many ways now a failing state. As a result, until such time as this is rectified, the wider region and the states within it, are only likely to continue to encounter worsening governability and security issues.

This upcoming four-report series will examine the region’s problems thematically, with this first report setting out the case for why the region is important and should be treated as such. It will then move to outline how Nigeria, the region’s largest state, can be considered to be in a state of failure, and how this is contributing to setting the conditions for the wider regional failure. Subsequent reports in the series will explore themes such as the region’s weak states and economies, the rise of crime and conflict, and environmental degradation and the future of the region.

Why does West Africa matter?

The West African region is defined by the United Nations as 16 countries, including but not limited to, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Burkina Faso and Guinea. Geographically the region is bounded to the north by the Sahara Desert, and to its south and west by the Atlantic Ocean/Gulf of Guinea. The region's eastern border is harder to define, but it is broadly accepted that it correlates to the longitude which Lake Chad sits upon. It sits roughly equidistant from both Europe and South America, whilst a long history of the movement of people – initially through the mechanism of slavery, and later through imperial boundaries and citizenship – to both these regions means that there are large diaspora populations of West Africans in nations such as France, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and the United States. These in turn provide strong transnational links between West Africa and these countries.



Figure 2: Countries of West Africa

In terms of population, the region is believed to be home to over 421 million people, according to UN estimates from May 2022. This equates to around 5.16 percent of the world's population. Despite this small population size when compared to other global regions, West Africa is believed to be the fastest-growing region on earth. It is predicted that by 2059 it will be home to over one billion people, or around ten percent of the world's population. On top of this, at the time of writing, nearly half of all those in West Africa are aged fifteen or younger, making it home to one of the world's most youthful demographics. As a result of this burgeoning population, the region is also home to some of Africa's most populous cities and some of the world's fastest-growing cities. These include Abuja and Lagos, both in Nigeria, Abidjan, in Cote d'Ivoire, Niamey in Niger, and Accra in Ghana. Lagos is already Africa's second-largest metropolis with a population of 15.3 million according to the UN, whilst Lagos City authorities claim there are more than 20 million residents. This latter claim would make it Africa's largest city. It is also predicted to become the world's largest city by population in the coming decades.

Economically speaking, the West African regional economy was worth more than USD 659 billion in 2020, whilst the three West African states of Nigeria, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire accounted for over one quarter of the entire African continent's GDP, with Nigeria alone accounting for over 18 percent of African GDP. The region is one of the richest in the world in terms of natural resources, including oil, gold and uranium. The region accounts for around 6.5 percent of all global oil production, over 12 percent of total gold production, and 25 percent of the world's bauxite. There is also great potential for renewable energy in the region, in particular, solar power. Africa receives more sunshine than any other continent on earth. It is estimated that West Africa has a solar energy potential averaging 4-6.5kW/m². If this was to be fully exploited, it has the potential to turn the region into an energy-exporting power. As a result of these factors, strategically the region is set to only become more economically important over time.

Regional Stats

43 Offshore oil and gas rigs

≈ **8** Million ounces of gold produced

4th biggest Uranium reserves

7% of regional GDP is from mining

Politically, the region was seen as leading Africa's transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Across West Africa, several countries emerged from a military or dictatorial rule, and political parties and open debate began to flourish. Across the region, countries also witnessed a of stable transfers of power and leaderships – by African standards – thus giving hope that democratic norms were slowly becoming embedded in the region. Despite this auspicious start, democracy has retreated across the region, however, at time of writing, Ghana, remains one of Africa's most functional democracies, whilst Nigeria theoretically is the world's third largest democracy after India and the USA respectively.

As a result of the confluence of these factors, what happens in West Africa reverberates across the world. The future importance of the region, both economically and demographically, means that the international community should be invested in stabilising the rapidly deteriorating regional security environment. This is of critical importance, since if these issues are left unresolved then they may cascade out of the region in unexpected ways, such as higher levels of informal migration to European Countries, or the exporting of insecurity across Africa.

Nigeria: A Failing State?

Nigeria is Africa’s most populous nation with over 200 million residents. It is the continent’s largest economy, worth over USD 514 billion, it pumps around 2 million barrels of oil per day, and it has one of the continent’s largest and most well-equipped armed forces. In sum, Nigeria is an African regional power and has been nicknamed the “Giant of Africa”. In the late 1990s, Nigeria helped to lead the African transition to democracy. Indeed, its status as regional hegemon since its transition to democracy has allowed Nigeria to play a key role in the promotion of democracy and security across its near abroad. These activities were funded by the wealth created by the Nigerian economy and its oil wealth, whilst the Nigerian army provided much of the equipment and manpower needed to consolidate regional security. As recently as 2007, Nigeria and its politicians were at the forefront of a movement to make coups in the region unacceptable and to promote stable, secure democratic states.

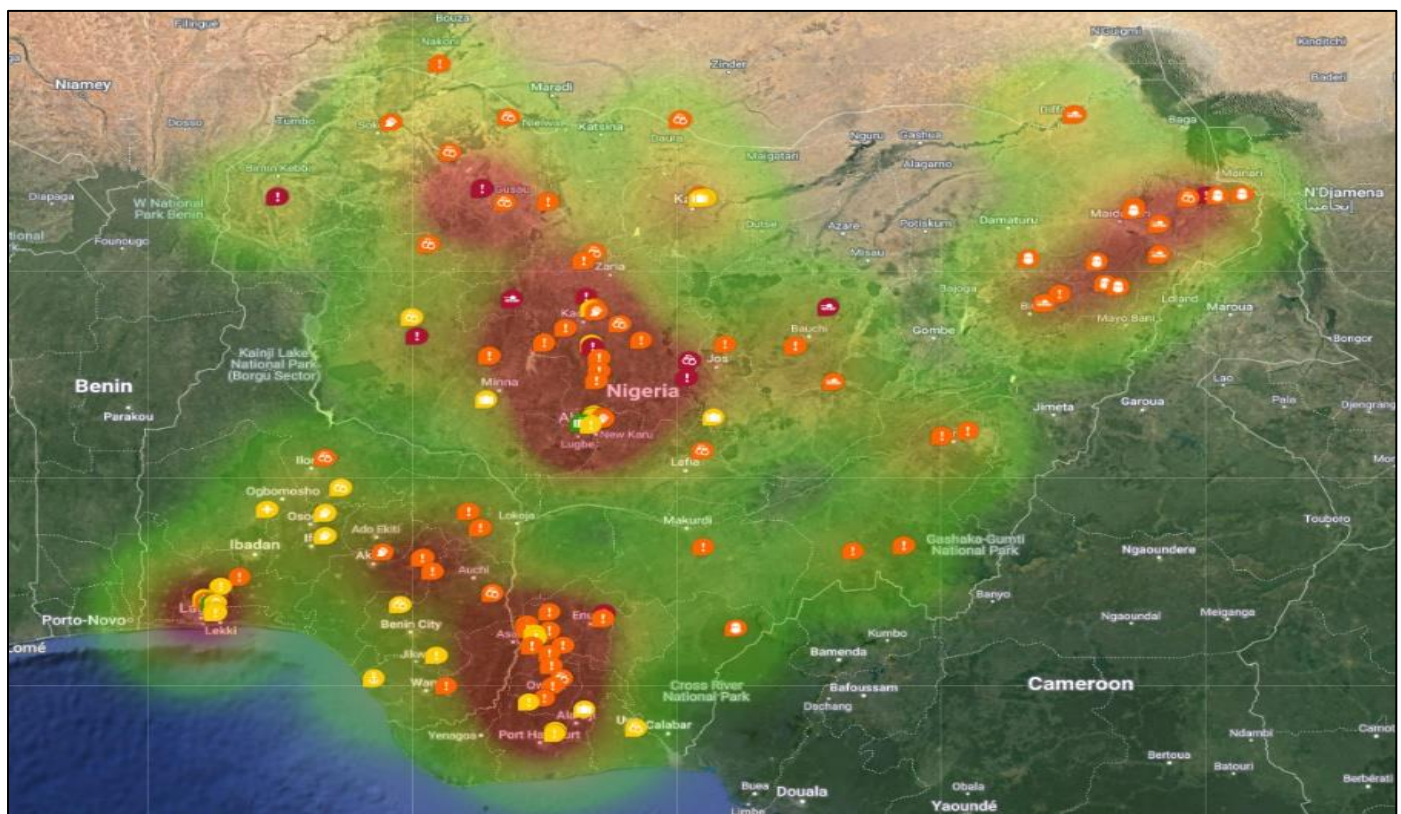


Figure 3: Data from Solace secure showing alerts plotted in Nigeria between January and June 2022. In total, 129 alerts were plotted.

Since then, though, it can be argued that a confluence of security, political, and economic problems have left Nigeria in a state of failure, and that as long as it is unable to solve its own problems it will no longer be able to play the stabilising role it once did in the region – with regards to political stability and security. As a result of the security vacuum which has been exposed by a failing Nigeria, violence and instability has proliferated across the region, and some of this can be directly attributed to internal Nigerian failures. The largest issue which faces Nigeria is the simple fact that it is no longer able to keep its citizens safe and secure – the state has lost the monopoly on violence it needs in order to achieve this. Such is the scale of the insecurity, that it is believed that between January and April 2022, over 2,900 had been left dead, and more than 1400 had been kidnapped, whilst the worst week saw at least 215 killed.

The north of the country is currently seeing the continued expansion of Islamist extremist groups and daily jihadist attacks. Boko Haram has in recent years been replaced by Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Jamā'at Ahl al-Sunnah li-I-Da'awah wa al-Jihād (JAS), although the use of Boko Haram remains common amongst local media and security forces which often creates confusion as to which group was behind an attack. Attacks in the north are characterised by attacks on non-Muslim places of worship, massacres, and the targeting of manifestations of the Nigerian state such as police stations, checkpoints, government offices and often schools. Since the emergence of the insurgency in the north of the country in 2010 it is believed to have led to the deaths of 40,000 people. Reasons for the inability of the Nigerian forces to defeat this insurgency include a lack of regional cooperation, and the inherent difficulties in effectively countering insurgencies by focusing on defeating them militarily and ignoring the root causes of the issue. Despite this, an operation launched in late 2021 named Operation Sanity has had some successes in the Sambisa Forest region of northeast Nigeria which is a known hideout for insurgent groups. Other deep-seated reasons for how one of Africa's largest and most well-equipped forces failed include the role that corruption and local pro-jihadist sympathies have played over the ensuing decade.

In the south of the country the insurgency in the Niger Delta has returned. Alongside this, to a limited extent the Biafran conflict has also resurfaced, under the auspices of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) who in 2021 declared that the second Nigeria - Biafra war had begun. In the Niger Delta region, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta has been involved in a campaign of bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, and infrastructure destruction – much of which has often targeted the city of Port Harcourt. Meanwhile, the deterioration in security in the south comes amid a surge in support for IPOB, particularly from much of the region's younger generation born after the Nigerian civil war. The Federal government has responded to IPOB with an increasing campaign of militarisation, security crackdowns and the mass arrests of supporters of IPOB. Amnesty International documented at least 115 people killed by security forces between March and June 2021. As a result, much as in the north, government facilities such as police stations, electoral commission officers, courts and checkpoints are increasingly targeted. With each targeting, the Federal government only becomes more repressive – further alienating those in the region and perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Central and eastern Nigeria meanwhile are both seeing increasing inter-communal violence between farmers and herdsmen who are brought into conflict due to climate change. Increased drought frequency and severity is forcing nomadic pastoral herdsmen to compete for water and land with traditional farmers. Alongside this, changes in weather conditions can also open new opportunities for cultivation and incite agricultural encroachment onto pastoral land. Both of these processes are being further inflamed by climate change. In 2018, Nigeria saw over 2,000 deaths because of conflict between these two factions. This particular year is also noted to be the year that this intercommunal violence became more deadly than the ongoing insurgency in the north of the country. The intercommunal conflict between the farmers and herdsmen also has an interreligious nature to it. This is because the herdsmen are mainly Fulani Muslims, whilst the farmers are traditionally Christian. The violence originally was seasonal – with clashes and deaths rising and falling with the beginning and the end of the dry season. However, as the climate has become more unstable and as more people in Nigeria have armed themselves, there is now little if any correlation to the seasons for this intercommunal violence.

Whilst all the above elements of insecurity are regional, the security situation is generally so dire that much of the country is seen as prime operational territory for groups simply known as “unknown gunmen” or “bandits”. These groups frequently engage in roadside actions such as car jackings, kidnap for ransom, and twice now they have successfully held up intercity trains.

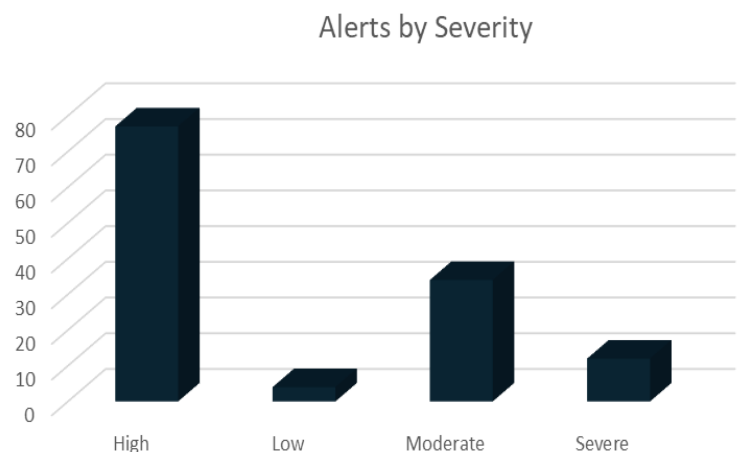


Figure 4: Graph showing the severity of Nigerian alerts in Solace Secure between 1 Jan 2022 and 12 June 2022

As a result, travel across much of the country via land is extremely unsafe. These groups have also targeted universities and schools – kidnapping children and leaving dozens dead whilst disrupting education for thousands. These bandits have been able to exploit existing insecurities in Nigeria to acquire arms and become criminal enterprises which profit from cattle rustling, looting, extortion and kidnap for ransom. It is believed that at least 12,000 people have died since 2011 as a result of bandit attacks in Nigeria according to analysis from the Abuja based Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD).

The bandit gangs and widespread criminality have been able to proliferate and expand as Nigerian security forces, already unable to cope with the nation's other conflicts, are plagued by low morale, poor training, insufficient equipment, and prevalent corruption. In a sign of how ill-equipped the Nigerian state is, Katsina - the Nigerian state worst hit in recent months by bandits - has less than 3,000 policemen to police 5.8 million residents. This equates to 52 police officers for every 100,000 residents – which is over five times lower than the UN recommended levels of around 300 police officers per 100,000.

Meanwhile, the bandit groups and gangs have increasingly become emboldened by what appears to be the lack of official push-back against them. As a result of this, in June 2022, bandits attacked the Genuine Estate in the Gwarinpa area of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Whilst bandits had long operated on the main roads out of Abuja, such as the Abuja – Kaduna Road, and have in recent months twice held up intercity trains from Abuja, this attack marks the first time that bandits have been recorded as attacking within the FCT itself. Not only does this attack show how emboldened such gangs have become, but it also underscores how ineffective the Nigerian state is in effectively combatting these groups; it is now seemingly unable to stop bandit attacks within its own capital city. A further sign of how ineffectual Nigerian security forces are against the banditry threat is the fact that in Kaduna state, reports emerged that one single bandit attack in June 2022 saw the bandits conduct a ground assault consisting of 150 motorcycles each with three bandits on. There are also conflicting reports as to whether this attack also saw bandits utilising an attack helicopter. Whilst many governments would struggle to deal with an assault this size, the root failing is allowing the bandits to achieve such a scale of force projection.

The pervasive threat of banditry, and the seeming inability of the Nigerian state to respond to it, has led many Nigerians to form vigilante anti-banditry gangs. In Hausa-speaking parts of the country, these are also known as Yansakai – which loosely translates as “Volunteer Force”. Some of these vigilante groups are partially funded by regional and state governments in Nigeria, whilst others are self-financing through members of the public. Whilst in the short term the creation of such groups may help to reduce banditry, it only further creates a cycle of conflict in the country. Further to this, the longer-term presence of these groups only further destabilises Nigerian security, since even more people outside of the formal security forces of Nigeria will have weapons and will most likely have been provided some form of training in how to use them. Many of those involved in the vigilante movement are also young men. In the words of the CDD, the proliferation of vigilante groups, which predominately involve arming young men, is likely to create a “Frankenstein’s Monster” if such groups are not properly policed, monitored, and ultimately disarmed as and when the Nigerian security forces are able to regain control of the country’s security.

As the country’s military tries to address Nigeria’s growing insecurity, it is less able to commit troops more widely across the region to prevent insecurity emerging in other countries. Alongside this, the growth of insecurity in Nigeria means that the country has transitioned from one largely governed with a few insecure ungoverned spaces, to one where much of the nation is insecure and ungoverned with few islands of governance. Within these large tracts of ungoverned and insecure land, gangs of jihadists, bandits, and criminals can organise and operate with almost unimpeded freedom of movement. They are also able to effectively move across the regions porous borders from their Nigerian bases and further spread insecurity across the region. One can argue that Nigeria has become the ground zero for insecurity in the region as a result of its geographical positioning. In a sign of how poorly policed and how porous the Nigerian borders can be, there are around 1,500 known illegal routes across the country’s borders, whilst it is also known that the Nigerian border force is not able to fully occupy the country’s official border points – let alone police the nation’s 4000 kilometres of land border.

The insecurity in Nigeria, however, did not emerge out of a vacuum. It is closely related to the underperformance of the Nigerian economy in recent years, and to the country’s political and corruption issues. Since 2015, the Nigerian economy has failed to grow quicker than the Nigerian population, meaning per capita GDP has fallen every year, and the country has witnessed two recessions, as seen illustrated in Figure 5.

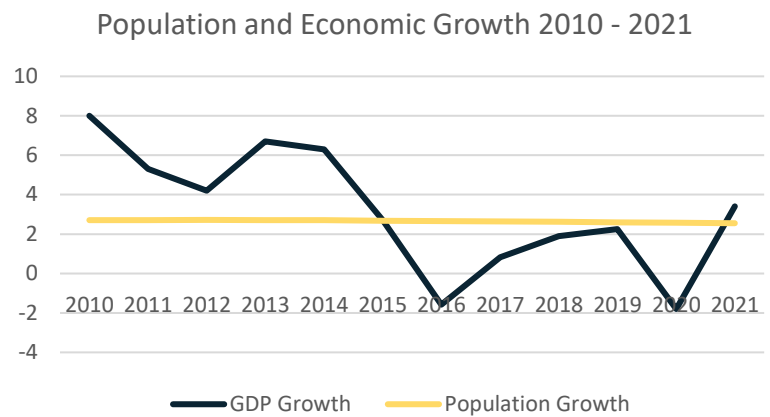


Figure 5: Nigerian Population and Economic Growth

As of 2022, the nation has a youth unemployment rate officially of over 33 percent – one of the world’s worst. Amongst those classed as young, meaning under 35, the unemployed and underemployed figure rises to over 50 percent. Those who are underemployed are often found working jobs they are overqualified for or working fewer hours than they would wish to do. As a result of this economic underperformance, the Brookings Institution has calculated that six Nigerians fall into extreme poverty every minute. The definition of extreme poverty is living on less than USD 1.90 a day. From this, it is calculated that around forty percent of the country’s population lives beneath the poverty line.

Economic weakness in Nigeria, however, did not appear suddenly in 2015 and can be seen as part of the country’s ‘resource curse’. In 2021, the country’s World Bank Representative announced that Nigerian per capita income has remained stagnant for the last 40 years. Nigeria’s much vaunted oil wealth is likely to play a large role in the nation’s economic underperformance due to the resource curse, whereby a country’s resource wealth, in this case, oil, comes to dominate the economy and wealth creation, often at the expense of other areas of the economy. As a result, the discovery of oil and the wealth it generates effectively halted Nigeria’s industrialisation and its future economic development, whilst the sector began to eat large amounts of the Nigerian capital, relative to its size. This now means that much of the means of production in the country are closely tied up in oil. As a result of this, oil, which accounts for ten percent of the Nigerian economy, accounts for 94 percent of revenue earning exports, and more than half of all government revenues. Since 1960, Nigeria has reaped an estimated USD 600 billion in oil revenue – as a result of the emergence of oil as a key part of the Nigerian economy and the windfall it has provided, a rentier state has emerged.

A rentier state is defined as one in which the state comes to earn most or all of its total revenue from the rents paid by foreign individuals, companies or governments involved in resource extraction – whilst the boom in this sector leads to a shrinking of non-resource sectors. Meanwhile, the influx of foreign currency leads to rising inflation and imports increasing in both quantity and cost. Finally, to try and counter the increased cost of living and the slow erosion of the non-oil sectors of the economy, the government spends more on welfare and subsidy programmes and often on political vanity projects. The high prices of oil for many years generally hid the large disparities that oil wealth had generated in the country, whilst the revenue it created for the government was theoretically used to provide public services or was used for large-scale subsidy programmes. However, the sustained collapse of oil prices between 2014 and 2016 meant that the Nigerian economy began to oscillate, hence the two recessions, whilst seemingly almost all government revenue dried up. In effect, since 2015 Nigeria’s economic mirage vanished, and the rentier state which had been built upon oil wealth became increasingly apparent. As the state’s economic subsidies began to run out, people who relied on them began to turn to other ways to make money.

Somewhat counterintuitively, the recent rise in global oil prices as a result of ongoing sanctions against Russia and several other oil-producing nations is not predicted to help the Nigerian economy for several reasons. For instance, the country is unable to swiftly restart production after it was cut by nearly one million barrels a day in 2021 in compliance with OPEC. Alongside this, for several years the country has lacked investment in the important “upstream” sector of oil which further constrains its ability to reap the benefits of

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high oil prices. Finally, as a result of this lack of upstream investment, the country imports over 95 percent of all refined oil products - including petrol and diesel. As a result, higher oil prices mean higher prices for refined products. This either means higher prices for Nigerian citizens, often a cause of protest, or higher rates of fuel subsidy. As of July 2022, the country is expected to spend over 4 trillion Naira (USD 9.5 billion) on fuel subsidies in 2022, whilst between January and May the month-by-month cost of the fuel subsidy has risen by over 55 percent.

The lack of long-term economic dynamism in the Nigerian economy, combined with the fall in oil prices, and a population growing quicker than the economy can absorb it have helped to create some of the conditions for the insecurity the country is battling. The chronic under-performance of the nation's economy means that Nigeria will continue to struggle to create the kind of prosperity that would help to achieve social peace and provide Nigeria's youth with better alternatives to joining militant groups or criminal gangs. The emergence of insecurity in time only begins to further hinder the country's economy as it is impossible to have a growing and dynamic economy when the basic foundations needed, such as security and stability, are not in place. This interplay between insecurity and poor economic performance very likely indicates that without significant external support, Nigeria will continue its spiral towards state failure in the medium to longer-term.

Alongside the insecure nature of much of the country and its stagnant economy, Nigeria has long struggled with corruption and the use of patronage networks. Both have long been intrinsic elements of Nigerian society and affect virtually all spheres of the West African country. The incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari was elected on a pledge to battle corruption; however, corruption has continued to flourish, and Nigeria has continued to slide down the rankings of Transparency International's corruption index. The country is ranked at 154 out of 180. In 2015, when Buhari was sworn in as President with a declaration to "wage a war against corruption" Nigeria was ranked at 136. The high and persistent levels of chronic corruption across the country have led corruption to become culturally acceptable and increasingly normalised. This is because it is often seen as the only way to get things done, whilst more widely members of the family, tribe or ethnic group benefit from an individual's gains through corruption and nepotism. Yet this acceptance of widespread corruption means that it continues to erode Nigerian democracy and the economy. A study commissioned by PwC showed that if corruption continues unchallenged, then by 2030 it could cost up to 37 percent of Nigeria's GDP annually. For a monetary value of the cost of corruption in Nigeria, it is believed that since the country's independence, the Nigerian treasury has lost over USD 400 billion through corruption.

No sector of Nigeria is immune from the damage that corruption has wrought. As established, economically it erases billions from the Nigerian economy and prevents it from harnessing its fullest potential. Much of this money flows out of the country to offshore tax havens, and into foreign property. It is estimated that Nigeria "leaks" around USD 10 billion a year in illicit financial flows according to the Nigerian Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). The Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) meanwhile in 2020 claimed that the figures may be as high as USD 15 billion to USD 18 billion annually. Ultimately this is money which could be used for job creation, infrastructure development, social services, and other true functions of government.

Meanwhile corruption and nepotism in the political and security sectors are believed to play roles in compounding Nigeria's mounting insecurity, whilst corruption in the judiciary and anti-corruption agencies renders them unaccountable. Across politics, the government, and the judiciary, corruption and nepotism have the added problem of keeping a political class increasingly divorced from ordinary life in positions of power across the country. This in turn further allows them to be seen as less democratic and accountable. The actions of such elites meanwhile are often seen as a model for other regional kleptocrats to follow. This is in stark opposition to early 2000s where Nigeria was seen to provide a model for good democratic governance for the region.

Maritime Security

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea may be Nigeria's one bright spot as of July 2022. It was feared through 2022 and 2021 that the insecurity plaguing Nigeria on land had become endemic to the waters of the Gulf of Guinea. The gulf accounts for one quarter of all of Africa's maritime traffic and is home to 20 commercial seaports – including some of Africa's most important, such as Lagos and Abidjan. Despite this importance,–

insecurity at sea had grown in tandem with that on land. In 2020, out of the 135 maritime kidnappings worldwide, 130 took place in the Gulf of Guinea, the highest number ever registered in the region. However, the first quarter of 2022 has only seen five incidents in the gulf being reported.

The high attack rates reported across 2020 and 2021 led London insurers to warn that the waters of the gulf were rapidly becoming uninsurable, whilst shipping agents warned they would cease serving the region unless something was done to foster security. As a result, the US, UK and EU have all deployed naval vessels to the region to combat organised criminal groups targeting commercial transport ships. For example, the Danish navy sent a frigate to the area in November 2021, whilst France, Spain and Portugal regularly patrol West African waters. The United States has begun to host counter-piracy operations in the area. At the same time, Nigeria implemented a new maritime security strategy called the Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure project, popularly known as Deep Blue. This saw the Nigerian Navy commission coastal patrol vehicles, interceptor boats and reconnaissance aircraft into service, all for dedicated piracy usage. Further to this the Nigerian federal government has passed a new anti-piracy law which came into effect in May 2022. This has increased the penalties for those who stand accused of piracy-related activities.

Despite improved policies from Nigeria, and the anti-piracy patrols mounted by international navies, better policing at sea will not address the socio-economic challenges on land that help drive piracy. It can also be stated that whilst the Nigerian Deep Blue project is likely to have had some impact in contributing to the decline of piracy in the region in 2022, the largest impact comes from the anti-piracy patrols launched by international navies, which all have assets in the region that they wish to safeguard. In what could be seen

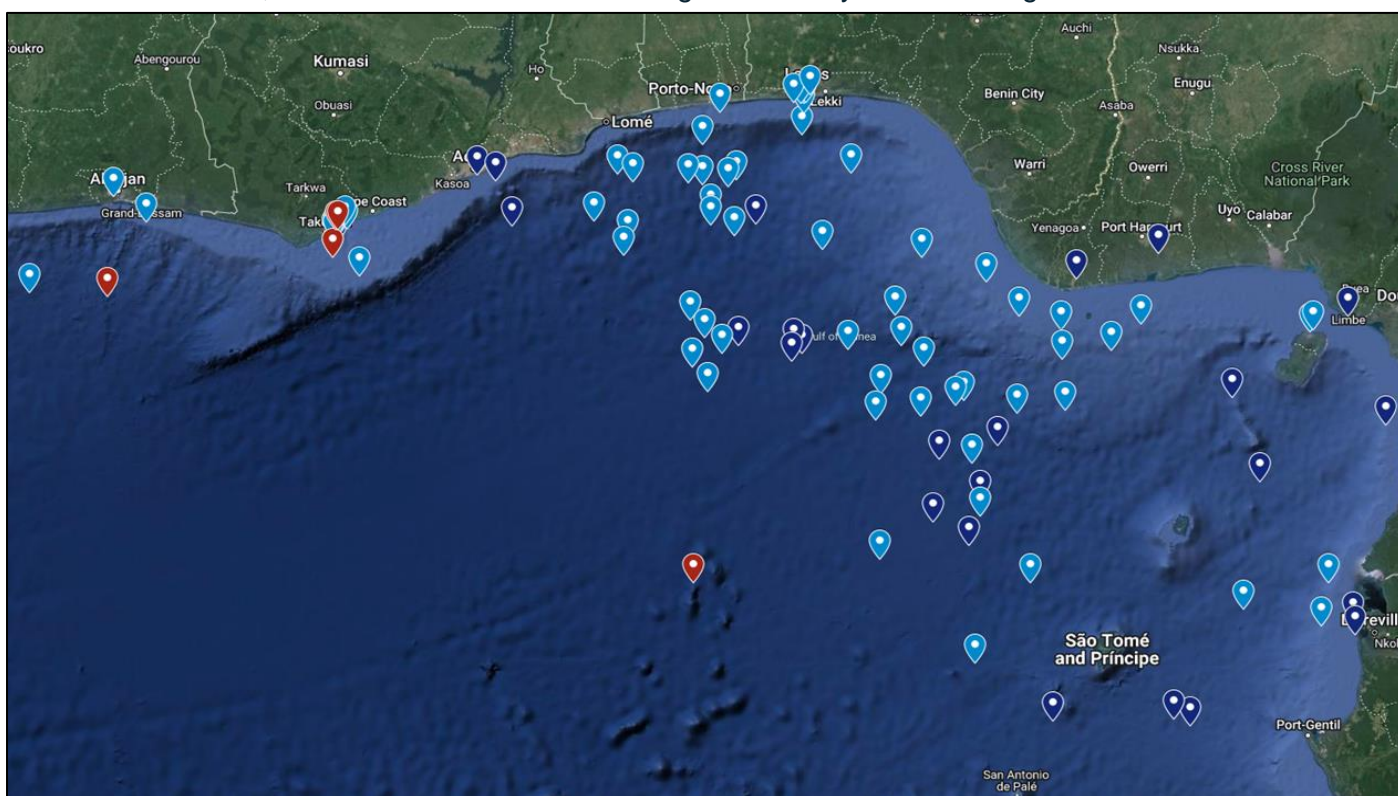


Figure 6: Approximate location of all reported Pirate attacks in the Gulf between 2020 and June 2022. Light blue 2020, Dark Blue 2021 and Red 2022. Note that attacks which appear to take place on land are located on rivers and estuaries.

as a potentially damning indictment of the international arena’s assessment of Nigerian governance, these international patrols appear to have not involved the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency due to long-held suspicions that corrupt elements of Nigerian maritime security and safety cooperate with some of those who perpetuate Nigerian maritime crime. Finally, the issue of Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is a regional problem and until the littoral countries of the Gulf are able to find the political will and capacity to work collaboratively on solving the issue, those involved in Gulf piracy will just migrate across state boundaries or territorial waters when needed. Historically, such regional collaboration would have been led

by Nigeria, however, as illustrated earlier in this report, due to its internal problems the country is unable to take this lead.

Conclusion

This first report in our series has demonstrated why the region of West Africa is of importance, and as such why it is therefore important that region's states are politically stable and secure.

Alongside this, the report has demonstrated that Nigeria, whilst not a collapsed state, is certainly a state which is increasingly succumbing to failure. The government now is unable to keep its citizens safe and secure and lacks a monopoly on violence within its borders – but is just about able to keep itself in power. For a country nominally still at peace, and within its longest stretch of civilian democracy since independence, the scale of the violence and levels of insecurity in the country should be of paramount concern to both the Nigerian government and the international community. It remains realistically possible that one complex and well-timed terror attack could significantly undermine the ability of the state to support itself, and any lingering faith that Nigerians have in the state to provide any security. In turn, this could see Nigeria become a truly failed state.

In the short to medium term, instability is likely to remain centred on pre-existing violence hotspots of Borno State in the northeast, the Abuja/Kaduna region of central Nigeria, the coastal Rivers and Imo States, and to a lesser extent in Lagos. In the longer term, without robust and effective governance, a unified regional counterinsurgency initiative, and economic diversification, there exists significant potential for violence to migrate beyond these hotspots. Insurgent and criminal organisations will likely be able to exploit an emerging security vacuum along much of the Niger border region to project instability deeper into central Nigeria. Corrupt and ineffective police forces will be unable to guarantee security in the larger population centres, placing considerable strain on both the government of Nigeria and the international community to react.

As a result of Nigeria's hegemonic status in the region, the ostensible failure of Nigeria has allowed for disorder and militancy to metastasize across the region. This is because it has been unable to act as a regional leader or halt the insecurity in the region, which stems in part from its own inability to respond to domestic security issues. The risk of a catastrophic failure of Nigeria will remain until the Nigerian state is able to reclaim the monopoly on violence within its territory and is able to begin the task of creating economic opportunities for its growing population, which in time would lead to greater stability and in the long term could see the country once more become a positive contributor to governance and security in the region. As long as Nigeria remains on the trajectory to state failure, West Africa as a region will remain mired in insecurity and instability.

The next report in the series will examine how the region's failing economies and decaying body politics contribute to the region's insecurity and instability.

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