

# The Spread of Organized Crime in Nigeria: A Comprehensive Study of Motives and Implications

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## Abstract

Crime gangs and terrorist groups remain among the most severe security threats facing the Nigerian state, so it has been experiencing a surge in violent incidents linked to these organized criminal gangs. Among the most significant terrorist active group in Nigeria are Islamic State in West Africa and Boko-Haram and its divisions, so violent incidents associated with these groups, such as suicide bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on military and civilian targets, have doubled (2000-2020). Accordingly, Nigeria is grappling with the spread of organized crime within its territories, exacerbated by several critical factors, so at the local level, organized crime is the product of variables, most notably tribal life, widespread poverty and unemployment, the absence of political, economic, and developmental vision in the country, and the conflict over resources, land, and water. Additionally, elements of organized crime benefit from technological advancements and numerous other factors that have led to the spread and entrenchment of organized crime in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Organized Crime, Terrorism in Nigeria, Security Threats.

## 1. Introduction

Crime gangs and terrorist groups remain among the most severe security threats facing the Nigerian state, so it has been experiencing a surge in violent incidents linked to these organized criminal gangs. Among the most significant terrorist active group in Nigeria are Islamic State in West Africa and Boko-Haram and its divisions, so violent incidents associated with these groups, such as suicide bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on military and civilian targets, have doubled (2000-2020). Accordingly, Nigeria is grappling with the spread of organized crime within its territories, exacerbated by several critical factors, so at the local level, organized crime is the product of variables, most notably tribal life, widespread poverty and unemployment, the absence of political, economic, and developmental vision in the country, and the conflict over resources, land, and water. Additionally, elements of organized crime benefit from technological advancements and numerous other factors that have led to the spread and entrenchment of organized crime in Nigeria.

Research Problem: This research raises several vital questions, including:

- What are the motives behind the spread of organized crime in Nigeria?

- What movements are causing organized crime in Nigeria?
- How do elements of organized crime benefit from technological advancements?
- What are the consequences of the organized crime dissemination in Nigeria?
- What are the consequences of the organized crime dissemination in Nigeria on neighboring countries?

Research Hypothesis: The research hypothesis based on the idea that "there are several internal and external reasons behind the spread of organized crime in Nigeria, which lead to serious repercussions for Nigeria in particular and regional countries in general."

First: Factors Contributing to Organized Crime in Nigeria:

Organized crime in Nigeria is the product of numerous variables, shaped by social, political, and economic factors, alongside the advantage criminal elements gain from the advanced technology. The tribal life, which prioritizes tribal loyalty over national loyalty, is the significant factor, especially some tribes in Nigeria, such as the Hausa, have transnational extensions, which has a direct impact on the national unity and weakening, leading to the state resulted in a post-colonial state unable to foster a sense of national belonging and allegiance, failing to adopt security policies capable of combating organized crime (1).

Poverty phenomena is another significant factor caused by many factors such as drought due to low rainfall, desertification exacerbated by deforestation (2), locust invasions, and weak economic performance due to reliance on outdated agricultural production methods and the focus on export crops over consumable crops. In addition to these factors, Nigeria is experiencing an intensive activity of the organized crime groups, a consequence of their proliferation led to numerous conflicts among them, subsequently migration of large numbers to the neighboring countries and thousands of deaths.

Nigeria also experiences many internal conflicts stemming from ethnic contradictions, which become more dangerous when driven by religious reasons, such as the conflict between Muslims and Christians in northwest Nigeria. These conflicts hinder economic reforms and impede development efforts, preventing the delivery of external food and financial aid, further undermine the state (3).

The nature of conflicts in Nigeria is interconnected and complex; any conflict often sparks adjacent disputes, reflecting on the state's strength and cohesion that weakens its ability to impose security control over its territories, facilitating organized crime and accessible communication between transnational criminal organizations. This scenario primarily results from state failure, significantly contributed by the ethnic system governing many countries in the region and colonial control that fostered chaos and division among factions. Consequently, these conditions ease the emergence of criminal organizations exploiting these situations: state absence or weakness, individual despair due to distress and marginalization, and poor economic conditions pushing many to join organized crime gangs (4).

Moreover, the qualitative and quantitative development in illicit arms flows across borders significantly drives organized crime in Nigeria due to the multiple conflict hotspots and intensified activities of terrorist organizations in various parts of the country (5).

Nigeria's inability to cope with maritime border security threats, particularly what are coming from the Guinea's Gulf. The Gulf witnesses escalating in the attacks on shipping vessels, focusing on oil tankers from the Nigerian harbors, (6) given Nigeria's status as a leading OPEC member and Africa's primary oil producer and exporter. This significant weakness in securing maritime borders has magnified the role of external parties, affecting Nigeria's security and stability. This situation weakens the state's resilience against external penetrations, as the ongoing inability to secure its borders adequately heightens external attempts to exploit this fragility through organized crime and transnational threats (7).

A program named The Nigerian Security Tracker (NST) which is a project under control of the Council on Foreign Relations Africa program has observed that the country's political, economic, or social grievances drive numerous violent incidents. The NST has recorded many organized crimes motivated by these grievances. Organized crime groups resort to violence and criminal activities due to widespread poverty, oppression, and the absence of justice in wealth distribution, alongside ethnic and religious conflicts. For instance, at the north of Nigeria, Boko Haram is active due to the violence which spread among farmers, ethnic groups, and herders driven by sectarian motives.

Additionally, the Niger Delta militants continuously threaten to wage war against the state due to indiscriminate killings of civilians by security forces, with many reports confirming habitual extrajudicial killings by the police (8).

according to (Michelle Gavin, 2022). "The following figures illustrate the prominent incidents of violence led by political, economic, or social grievances in Nigeria during the period (2011 – 2020), as follows:"

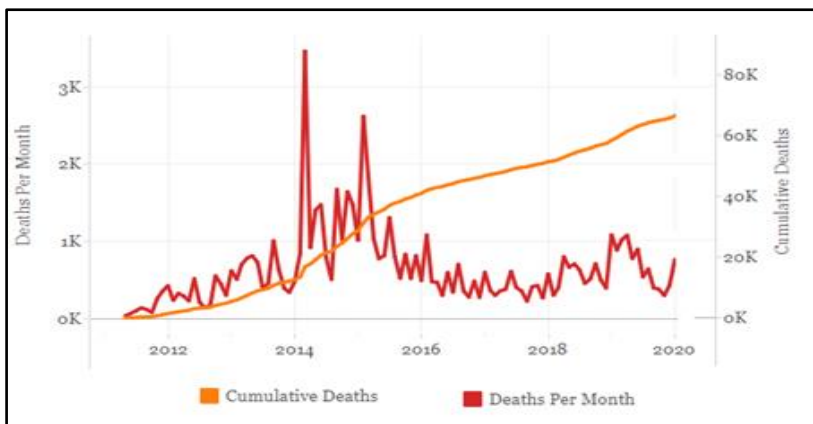


Figure 1 Extrajudicial killings during the period from 2011 to 2020

The observer of the previous figure notices the cumulative increase in the victims of extrajudicial killings during the period from 2011 to 2020. The number of victims peaked in 2014, and the monthly rate of victims of extrajudicial killings reached its highest in 2020.

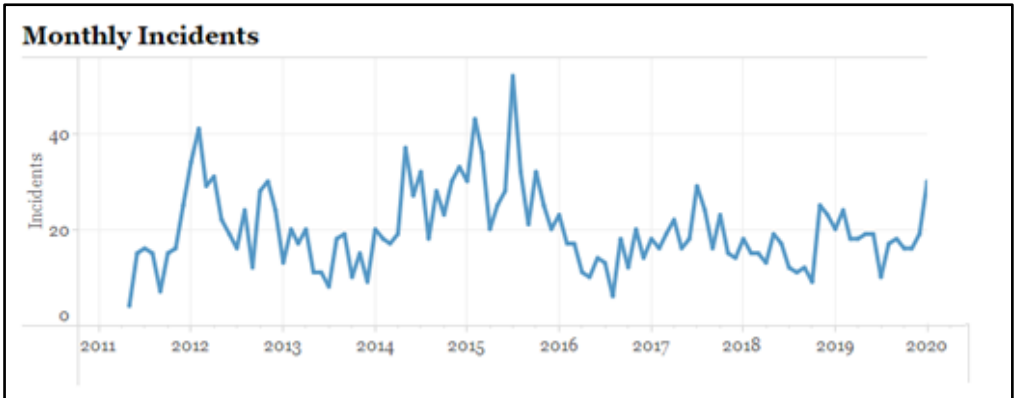


Figure 2 Tracking Boko Haram operations during the period from 2011 to 2020 (ibid).

In this figure, we notice the significant variation in the rates of operations carried out by Boko Haram during the period from 2011 to 2020, peaking in mid-2015, after being at its lowest levels in 2011.

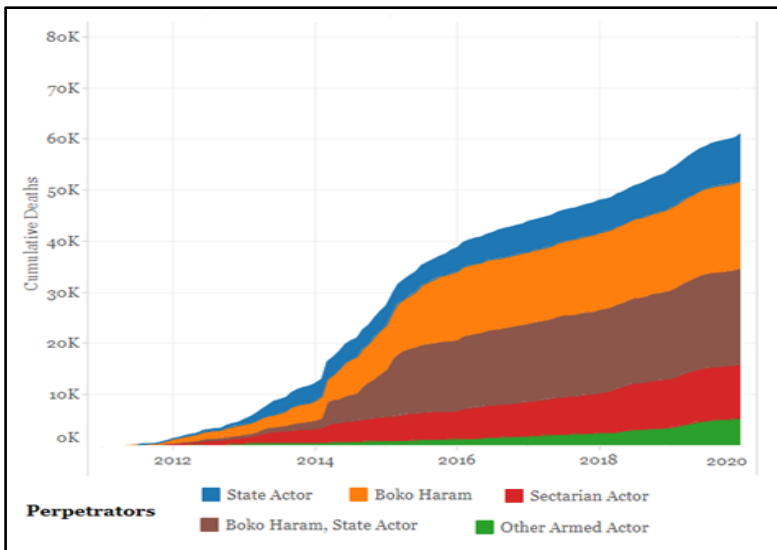


Figure 3 Total number of casualties by actor during the period from 2011 to 2020 (ibid)

The mentioned above figure tracks the total casualties of violence as well as killings in Nigeria by the active entity during the period (2011 – 2020). Government entities topped the hierarchy as the primary perpetrators of killings in Nigeria, followed by Boko Haram, the killing and violence through sectarian, and the violence by other armed groups. Thus, the highest number of casualties caused by government entities were most of them were likely members of terrorist groups.

One of the most significant factors of organized crime in Nigeria is the conflict over land and water resources, particularly in northern Nigeria (9), where farmer-herder conflicts have reached critical levels in recent years due to climate and environmental changes and increasing demographic pressures. Over the past few decades, Northern Nigeria has experienced a significant shortage in the rainy seasons that led to reduced water sources and rising desert-like conditions, reducing arable and grazing lands. Meanwhile, rapid population growth in the region has increased the demand for available land (10).

Under conflicts over water sources and available land, young men in many Hausa communities have mobilized to defend their villages against organized criminal attacks. Armed with guns, machetes, homemade clubs, and other primitive weapons, they have imposed severe penalties on actual or suspected thieves and raiders, so they lack a security source.

In particular, the guards aimed at many people of Fulani due to their ethnic association with Fulani cattle herders in the forests with collusion of criminal activity.

The Punishments are unlawful arrests, random livestock confiscation, torture, and non-judicial killings, sometimes reaching to torturing the suspects to death in markets and other public places and burning the settlements that compelled them to run away into the forests. (11).

Relations deteriorated, and conflicts sparked among Fulani herders and Hausa farmers because of the practice and atrocities of the guards that forced the Fulani to form an armed group (Militias) named Yan Bindiga to protect themselves, their cattle, as well as to revenge the practice and atrocities of the guards. These militias exaggerated in defending their members that they decided to kill at least 50 for every single member of their tribe. They collect funds to buy weapons through community contributions and various alleged activities like kidnappings for ransom. As the violence escalated, they growingly gained effective and advanced weapons primarily smuggled by the desert and coast through an international route. (12).

The Yan Bindiga have purchased weaponry from other militias in north east such as Islamic State in West Africa and Boko-Haram or from corrupted state security officers, weapon suppliers in the south and domestic arms dealers, due to the state's authorities' neglect in addressing the crisis, the situation in the region worsened, organized crime rates increased, and all of these reasons led to the spread of organized crime in Nigeria (13).

## Second: Exploiting the advanced Technology by Organized Crime Elements

Amidst significant progress in weaponry technologies, organized crime groups benefit from these developments, upgrading their weapons to bolster their combat capabilities. The region has been a witness to a rapid escalation in the arming levels of these groups. According to the report

on measuring illicit arms flows in Niger, the Nigerian government seized approximately 2,000 weapons during the period (2011 – 2014).

It included nine missiles, 66 mines, RPG shells, and machine guns of various calibers, which crossed the northern border from Libya to be redistributed among terrorist groups in both Mali and Nigeria. The use of specialized weapons acquired through smuggling routes was also documented, including 60 mm Belgian-made mortars, 81 mm French mortars, and Russian-made Strela-2 portable missiles. Furthermore, documentation of the use of newly manufactured Sudanese-made light weapons by terrorist organizations during the period (2011 – 2014) (15).

With the spread of these advanced weapons in the hands of extremist groups in the Sahel region, the Nigerian authorities announced at the end of 2018 that Boko Haram was using drones for reconnaissance missions on Nigerian counter-terrorism forces. This development was confirmed in 2019 by the revelation of additional progress made by the organization in the type of drones used and their operational patterns.

The group began using them in attacking missions by directing strikes against counter-terrorism forces, not just for surveillance and reconnaissance (16).

In the continuing instability in the region, the possibility of increased flows of heavy, medium, and light weapons to terrorist organizations in Nigeria remains high. Numerous terrorist operations and incidents of violence and organized crime have demonstrated this qualitative development in the level of arming organized groups in Nigeria, especially those operations that carried an offensive character against the army and police forces involved in counter-terrorism operations.

### Third: The impact of the Spread of Organized Crime on Nigeria

The spread of organized crime in Nigeria is horrible, as organized crime has become one of the security and stabilization threats on various political, economic, and social levels, with no development or stability in the presence of widespread organized crime. The repercussions of organized crime in Nigeria are not limited to the country alone but extend to neighboring countries, particularly Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, which suffer from the spread of violence and organized crime originating in Nigeria. This section will discuss the spread of organized crime and its repercussions on Nigeria and its neighboring countries through the following themes:

#### 1- The impact of the Spread of Organized Crime on Nigeria

On the humanitarian and social level, organized crime threatens human security. It erodes human security by spreading fear and violence because organized crime syndicates use threats, violence, and even murder to terrorize the people. The widespread insecurity and the proliferation of arms trade threaten its stability on multiple levels.

Organized crime undermines the safety and stability of Nigerian citizens (17), with violence in northwest Nigeria claiming thousands of lives between (2000 and 2020) organized crime has also led to the displacement of several hundred thousand people.

According to the comprehensive evaluation conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in conjunction with the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons, which references estimations provided by local governmental authorities in 2018, "a total of 210,354 individuals experienced displacement from 171 municipalities and settlements within the northwestern region. Among these displaced persons, 144,996 were located in Zamfara State, 35,941 in Sokoto, and 29,417 in Katsina. Furthermore, approximately 60,000 displaced individuals sought refuge across the international boundary into the Republic of Niger, where escalating insecurity in the border regions precipitated the internal displacement of 19,000 Nigerian citizens."

On February 22nd, 2020, the Niger State Government reported that pervasive violence in the region had led to the displacement of 10,000 people from local communities in ten out of 25 local government areas (19).

As stated by the National Emergency Management Agency (March 2020), a total of 105,463 individuals have been displaced in Sokoto State. "The proliferation of organized crime within Nigeria has also culminated in the abduction or murder of thousands of men and boys, as well as the theft of their livestock or property, consequently leaving numerous widows devoid of financial support," as reported by the Zamfara State Government (April 2019).

According to a report published by PM News Nigeria in April 2019, "Women and girls have been the subject of multiple assaults, frequently characterized by gender-based violence, encompassing abduction, sexual assault, sexual exploitation during incursions, or coerced matrimony, particularly perpetrated by members of allied armed factions collaborating with herders, whose violent actions, exacerbated by social retaliation, were directed against agrarian communities. This violence has resulted in profound ramifications for children; in Zamfara State, the government documented that over 16,000 children became orphans as a consequence of organized criminal activities."

The social services and public utilities provided by federal and local governments have been impacted negatively by the spread of organized crime in the region. As the government resorted to transferring its money that would abide for social services to respond to security challenges, even though the government has built hospitals and schools in some areas, many remain unused or inadequately utilized due to the displacement of its residents or fear of attacks.

A report published by the Zamfara State Government in April 2019 stated that thousands of classrooms were built between 2012 and 2019 and not used due to insecurity, disrupting education in many areas and excessive the already high number of out-of-school children and street beggars in several towns and cities (23).

Economically, organized crime significantly impacts the Nigerian economy. Organized crime syndicates threaten the movement of people and money, particularly given the various forms of economic crime and the diversity of methods used (24). The negative impact on the investment is notable, with the tourism sector often being the most affected. Most criminal operations aim to spread terror and fear within communities, prompting governments to allocate more resources to security and defense rather than developmental purposes.

At the economic level, organized crime syndicates control sectors or the entire economy due to their considerable financial resources and their influence over private sector officials, manipulating them to commit or overlook crimes through bribery or extortion. These syndicates engage in tax evasion and promote illicit transactions, including money laundering, to hide the sources of their illegal funds, leading to economic losses for individuals, companies, and the overall economy.

It hides the criminal nature of the activity and allows perpetrators to enjoy the proceeds of their crimes, thus encouraging continued crime and increased corruption (25). The violence severely destabilized the economy in various parts of the north-west of Nigeria. In particular, the agriculture sector has been affected, which provides a livelihood for about 80% of the population. Farmers in the damaged areas have abandoned their lands because of the attacks or kidnappings due to the spread of the organized crime phenomena.

As reported by (Daily Trust, October 2019), it was indicated that "In Sokoto State, the State Emergency Management Agency revealed that as of October 2019, nearly 21,316 hectares of arable land within five local government areas were left uncultivated, resulting in 80,000 apprehensive farmers refraining from agricultural activities."

(PM News, April 2019) articulated that "In Zamfara State, over 13,000 hectares of agricultural land have been rendered either devastated or unreachable as a consequence of assaults perpetrated by armed factions associated with pastoralists and illicit organizations."

(Shinkafi, 2020), stated that "during 2011 and 2019, vast numbers of livestock were lost, with approximately 141,360 cattle and 215,241 sheep stolen in Zamfara State alone".

According to the International Crisis Group (April 2020), "The prevailing insecurity and proliferation of organized criminal activities within the region have resulted in the destitution of both agriculturalists and pastoralists, thereby precipitating food scarcity in certain localities and intensifying malnutrition, particularly among the pediatric population. In April 2020, Governor Abubakar Sani Bello of Niger State cautioned that the region was on the brink of famine."

In the area of northwest Nigeria, with scaling according to agriculture, thousands of stores and other companies have also been broken off, which is destroyed or closed as a result of head-on attacks and kidnapping of shop owners that fuel growing fears of insecurity.

(PM News, April 2019) stated that "Zamfara State reported destroying over 10,000 houses, shops, and granaries". Due to the dangers of road travel, local merchants fear transporting agricultural products to the shops. Shareholder trust has also decimated.

In May, 2019 the Niger State Government hosted the national trade fair, registering significant low turnout, as Mr. Abdulqader Hassan, head of the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture, outlined the fears of the prospective participants of highwayman attacks and kidnappings



In Zamfara, the available income of wealthy families has gradually decreased, and the average number of people who were able to perform the pilgrimage (Haj) to Mecca and Medina has dropped from around 4500 to 1500 in the previous years to 2019.

At the political level, organized crime significantly contributes to political instability by eroding trust in democracy and governments fail to control crimes that spread corruption in government agencies through blackmail and bribing its political decision-makers and penetrating the political parties to attain power to secure its interests, ultimately distorting the democratic process and leading to the collapse of political systems. Criminal organizations also threaten state sovereignty.

The main characteristic of any government sovereignty is recognized by controlling its borders and preventing transnational organized crime, which the criminal organization goes beyond. It exceeded the borders by its crimes, and the government standstill to control its border and prevent the crimes, so it was considered a challenge to the government and its sovereignty.

The transnational criminal organizations undermine and disrupt civil society, adding instability to local political affairs and challenging the normal functioning of government and the rule of law. In some cases, organized crime may even dominate the government, seizing power and influence. Organized crime also affects national security. Its indirect effects on security in various parts of Nigeria are significant. Hence, cattle ranchers migrate towards the south as a result of the violence in the three most damaged provinces, which are Zamfara, Sokoto, and Katsina, draining the resources in the central and southern regions of the country while for decad the Fulani migrate towards the far south. This slight increase exacerbates tensions in the southeast, southwest, and Niger Delta that have reported rising friction between herders and farmers, which frequently escalate to fatal violence.

Due to the security operations in the northwest, some criminal gangs have fled toward the central and southern regions, which cause security problems.

#### 1- the Impact of the Spread of Organized Crime on Neighboring Countries

The impact of organized crime in Nigeria is not limited to the country alone but extends to the bordering countries like Cameroon and Chad. The organized crime gangs and terrorist groups entrenched in northwest Nigeria;

This area has changed into a land bridge that connects fighters in the northeast near Lake Chad with other fighters in the west of Niger. In Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, it has affirmed the activity of Islamic State fighters is the same as those who activated in West Africa. Hence, fighters in the Lake of Chad have allied under one banner with the ones in the region of Sahel where it at least symbolically connected with rebel movements in entire areas of west Africa.

The fighters of the two mentioned regions might pursue to strengthening their mutual activities as well.

Since 2018 Islamic State fighters sought to find a way through the north of Mali across Dogondoutchi in Niger towards the northwest of Nigeria and the north of Benin in the west.

Terrorist groups and organized crime gangs have exploited the harsh and seasonally changing geography of West Africa to move across borders into Cameroon to launch incursions and suicide attacks in the northernmost where there is an existence of a limited Cameroonian army.

In 2019, northern Cameroon experienced the most significant increase in violence, mainly on civilians, in the Lake Chad Basin by Boko Haram. The casualties of violent attacks caused by terrorism and organized crime groups in Nigeria jumped by 52% in 2019. The violence increases in the northernmost happened together with increased combats between Islamist extremist groups and Nigerian forces at the border of Nigeria. The growing pressure in Nigeria will probably force those fighters to move into Cameroon, with Boko Haram moving through the Mandara Mountains around Mora to the north and the Islamic State fighters in West Africa moved to near Fotokol near the Chadian border underscores regional dimensions of this security threat.

We can track the locations of armed conflict and violence incidents originating from Nigeria that threaten neighboring countries during the period from 2009 to 2020 through the following figure:

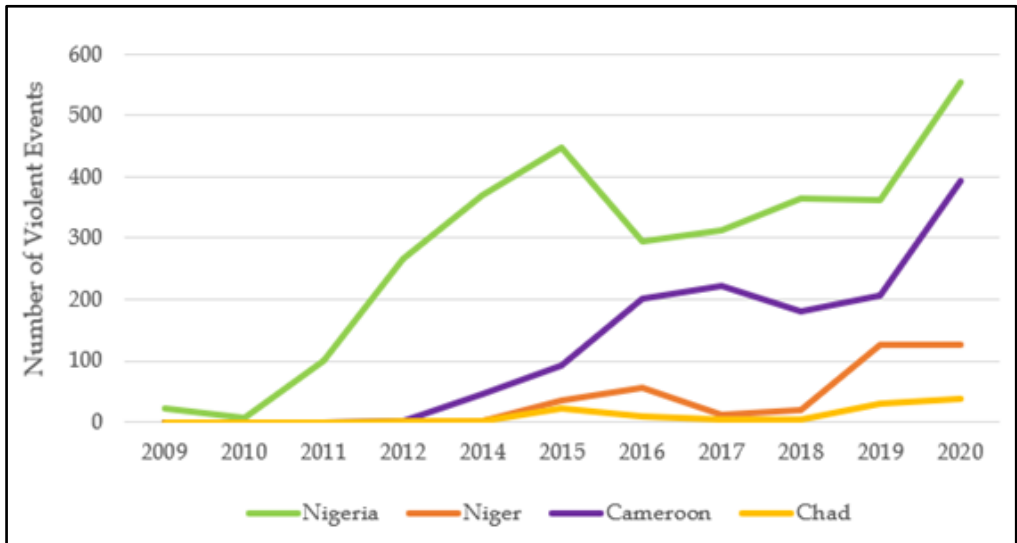


Figure 4 Incidents of violence originating from Nigeria that threaten neighboring countries during the period from 2009 to 2020

This figure tracks incidents of violence originating from Nigeria that threaten neighboring countries, particularly Niger, Cameroon, and Chad, during the period (2009 – 2020). The figure shows that Cameroon is the most affected by violent events coming from Nigeria, followed by Niger and then Chad. The African Center for Strategic Studies indicated that about 59% of reported acts of violence in Cameroon were attacks targeted at civilians.

In 2019, approximately 234 attacks targeted civilians, while around 100 was the number of attacks in Nigeria was less than attacks in Cameroon despite originating from Nigeria. The number of attacks in Niger was 92, and in Chad, it was 12. It consisted of attacks related to Boko Haram, kidnappings for conscription and ransom, and robbing of villages and IDP settlements.

In the year 2020, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) articulated profound indignation concerning a terrorist assault on a site accommodating internally displaced individuals in Cameroon, resulting in the fatalities of no fewer than 18 individuals. The UNHCR unequivocally denounced this egregious and unwarranted act of violence directed at a location housing approximately 800 locally displaced persons in proximity to Nguetchewe, a settlement situated in the northernmost region of Cameroon.

The assault compelled approximately 1,500 individuals to evacuate the camp, encompassing alarmed members of the local community in the town of Mozogo in their quest for safety. This aforementioned assault ensued subsequent to a significant escalation of violence in the northernmost region of Cameroon, characterized by acts of robbery and abductions perpetrated by Boko Haram and other militant factions in the vicinity. It served as a disheartening reminder of the grave and savage nature of violence in the Lake Chad region, leading to the forced displacement of over three million individuals.

In northeastern Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, approximately 2.7 million people were displaced, while 292,682 Nigerian refugees have escaped to the neighboring countries.

From January 2020 to the end of the year, in Cameroon alone, there were 87 attacks on its northern border with Nigeria carried out by Boko Haram 22 attacks took place in the northern area of Mozogo alone.

These aggressive assaults resulted in the fatalities of over 30,000 individuals and caused the displacement of more than three million people across Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad.

Amid increasing criminal attacks on civilians in this region, many international reports warn of the growing risks posed by criminal gangs to Nigeria and its neighbors, especially after the transition of violent and organized crime from within Nigeria to neighboring countries. With support from international partners, these reports have urged federal and central governments in Nigeria to take necessary procedures for ending this violence in the northwest and analyzed the armed violence in the region to outline its impact on the humanitarian, social, economic, and security levels.

They also assessed the responses of the Nigerian federal and central governments, highlighting emerging security risks and identifying a range of strategies for ending this violence, avoiding new rebellion, and achieving lasting peace.

## **2. Conclusion:**

In summary, we must emphasize the seriousness of organized crime across various countries worldwide, especially in Africa.

Particularly in Nigeria, due to its severe repercussions on local, regional, and even international levels. Thus, the world must unite to assist African countries, especially Nigeria, to eliminate organized crime.

Moreover, the United Nations, regional bodies, and national authorities should collaborate on organized crime proliferation and terrorist gangs and ban any activities by these groups and those who support them.

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