

A man with a beard and a pink headband is holding a large white protest sign high above his head with both arms. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background shows a crowd of people at an outdoor demonstration under a cloudy sky. The sign has the text 'OUR VOICES MOST BE HEARD' in bold, black and red capital letters. Below the text is a black fist icon with a white '24' inside, followed by a line of small right-pointing chevrons and the hashtag '#EndPoliceBrutality' in black.

**OUR VOICES
MOST BE
HEARD**



#EndPoliceBrutality

10 MYTHS ABOUT VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

New series

**NIGERIA
WATCH**

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has a reputation for being one of the most violent countries in Africa and in the world. It is sometimes compared to Mexico and Colombia when it comes to drug cartels, Iraq when it comes to oil conflicts in the Niger Delta, or Afghanistan, Syria, and Mali when it comes to jihadist insurgencies like that of Boko Haram in Borno. Such views are widely shared in Nigeria and abroad. Yet they often rely on personal perceptions and, sometimes, rumours about conspiracies, the power of invisible forces, or the scramble for resources. Hence it is necessary to debunk some of the local and global myths about violence in Nigeria.

Using a database which indexes and codes fatal incidents on a daily basis since 1 June 2006, this brief assesses the situation from a scientific point of view. It compensates for the lack of police statistics and provides answers to policy-makers, academics, journalists, diplomats, development agencies, humanitarian workers, and security operatives. The methodology used to aggregate the data is detailed online at: www.nigeriawatch.org

Some of the myths addressed here include the politicized perception of rising violence, the role of vigilantes, extrajudicial killings by the military, crime cycles, cult clashes, and pipelines explosions.

Dr. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos

Founder of NigeriaWatch

Senior Researcher, Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD), Paris

Nota: In the online system, figures are updated whenever a new source provides a different report, which explains why trends may change slightly according to the current state of data when they are accessed. The algorithm used also rounds up figures a little differently per cause or per incident.

Myth#01

Nigeria was safer during the presidency of Jonathan

No, the number of violent deaths per 100,000 people was higher during the presidency of Jonathan.

There is a widespread belief that Nigeria is becoming increasingly violent. These perceptions are often politicized because they contribute to assessing the security records of elect-presidents.

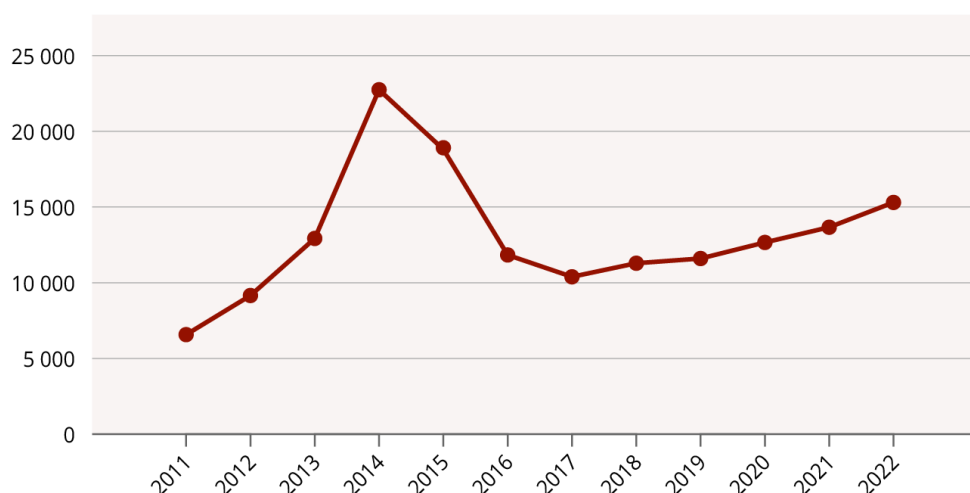
The Data Analysis

The average number of violent deaths per year was lower during the presidency of Goodluck Jonathan (10,381), starting from May 2010, than during the two terms of Muhammadu Buhari (11,267), from May 2015 to May 2023. However, adjusting for population growth, one finds that the average annual number of violent deaths per 100,000 people was higher under Jonathan: 7,2 against 5,9 under Buhari.

The Findings

The number of the victims of crime increased during Buhari's two terms, from 35% to 39% of total fatalities. Conversely, deaths related to religious issues decreased from 39% to 26%. The main increase in the causes of lethal violence between the two presidencies was related to land disputes (3% to 7%).

Violent deaths per year (2011-2022)



Myth#02

Presidential elections are getting more violent

No, cases of election-related violence did not increase in number.

Nigeria's presidential elections are always a moment of uncertainty. As a result, many voters decide not to leave their homes during election days, for fear of violence.

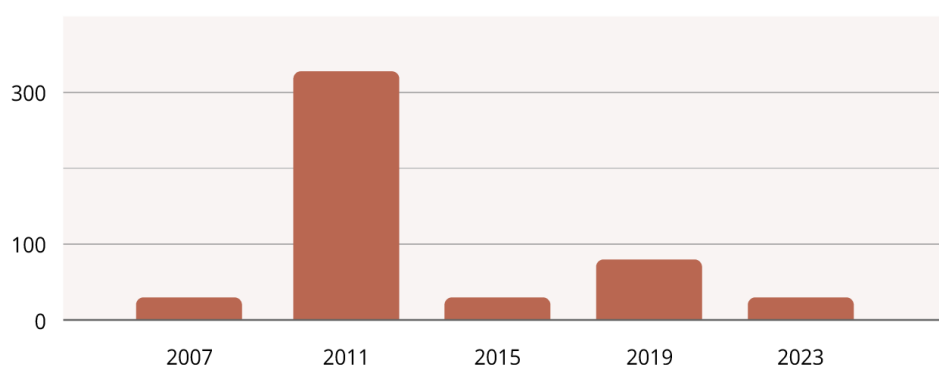
The Data Analysis

Statistics show that presidential election days are not always more violent than any other day, especially since 2011.

The Findings

Political violence can occur before or after elections. There are no cycles and it is difficult to predict whether or not there will be clashes during the vote. Furthermore, political violence is often manipulated and can be tool of the elites more than a means of protest for the people.

Fatalities related to political conflicts three days before, during and after presidential elections (2007-2023)



Myth#03

The military kill less than the police

No, more people were killed by the military.

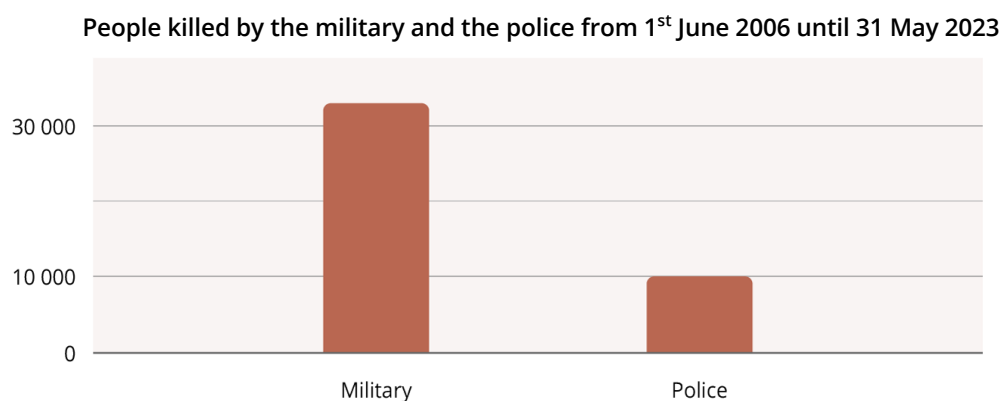
Both the police and the military kill a lot of people in Nigeria. Their actions are sometimes legitimate. But there are also numerous records of extrajudicial killings. On a daily basis, the police is more often in contact with civilians, especially during patrols and check-points on the road. Normally, the Nigerian Army only intervenes in specific operations. As a result, some people assume that the military kill less people than the police.

The Data Analysis

NigeriaWatch keeps records on fatal incidents where the police and the military kill at least one person accidentally or intentionally. Yet the data have to be sorted out to distinguish the victims of police or military violence as they are reported by the Nigerian media. These records do not include the legal executions of convicts.

The Findings

In 17 years, a total of 33,104 people were reportedly killed by the military across Nigeria, against 10,072 by the police. During this period, Borno had the highest number of people killed by the military, with 20,625 deaths, followed by Kaduna (2,133) and Zamfara (2,112) states. Such a situation is clearly linked to operations and bombardments against bandits and terrorist groups like Boko Haram. For police killings, the highest figure was recorded in Anambra State, with 1,124 victims, followed by Lagos (1,098) and Delta (672) states, because of the repression of IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra) and MASSOB (Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra) militants.



Myth#04

Security operatives kill more than pro-Biafra militants in the Southeast

No, separatist groups killed more people.

In 2012, Nnamdi Kanu created a separatist movement, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), that gave birth to a militia in 2021, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). Since then, clashes with government forces have been rampant in the Southeast. As a result, many people believe that security operatives have killed more

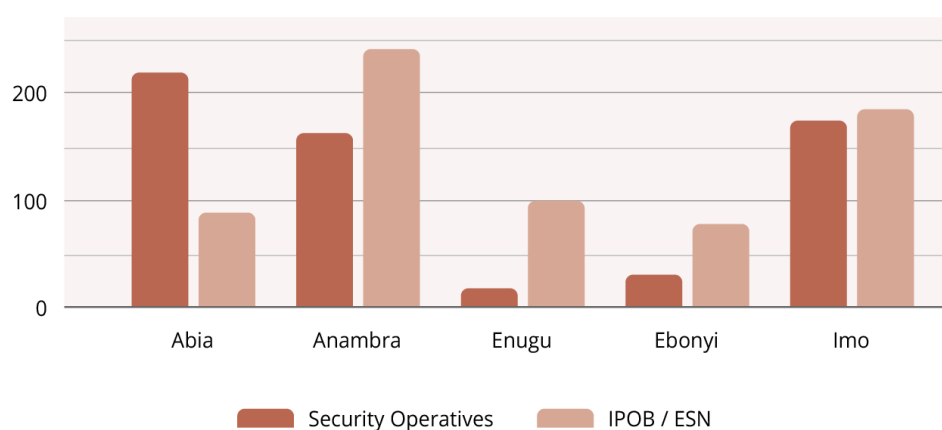
The Data Analysis

In 10 years between 2012 and 2022, 696 people were killed by IPOB/ESN, especially in border areas such as Ihiala, Nnewi South, Orumba North, Aguata, Orlu and Orsu between Anambra and Imo states. Abia was the only state where government forces killed more, maybe because Umuahia is the hometown of Nnamdi Kanu. During this period, the Army, the Police, the Department of Security Services, and the Ebubeagu vigilantes have been reported to be responsible for 605 deaths.

The Findings

The situation is quite different from the Boko Haram crisis in the Northeast, where government forces killed more people than insurgents. Several factors can explain this. First, pro-Biafra agitation is less severe than the large scale insurgency in the rural Northeast. Moreover, human rights abuses are more easily reported in urban places like Onitsha, Ihiala, Aba, Owerri, Orlu and Orsu, where clashes are prevalent. Also, IPOB is linked to the Ibo diaspora overseas. As a result, it is more efficient than Boko Haram to inform the public against government's killings, a position that possibly deters the military from perpetrating massacres.

Killings by security operatives and IPOB/ESN by state (2012-2022)



Myth#05

Attacks by cult groups are on the rise

No, the level of cult related killings has declined since 2019.

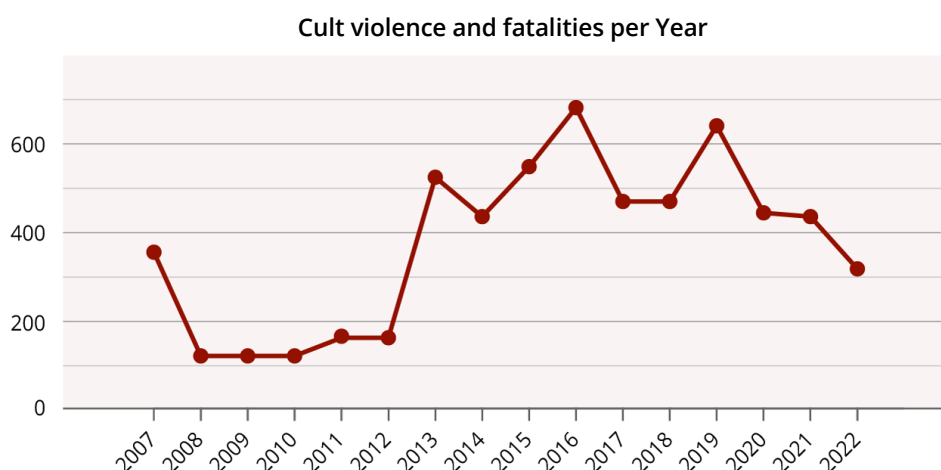
In Nigeria, many cult societies are engaged in criminal activities, political conflicts, land tussles, ritual killings and struggles for supremacy. Most of them emerged from university campuses, like the Pyrates, the Seadogs, the Buccaneers, the Black Axe, the Klansmen, the Deebam, the Deewell, the Vikings, and the Eiye Supreme Confraternity. Yet some authors also consider as “cultist” religious sects which are neither Islamic nor Christian, as with Ombatse. In this context, cultist violence seems to be rampant, and even rising.

The Data Analysis

Across Nigeria, a total of 6,013 fatalities related to cultist violence were reported in 1,913 incidents from 2007 to 2022. Compared to the period 2008-2012, the level of killings first rose in 2013, with two peaks in 2016 and 2019, especially in Rivers State. Since then, however, it has declined.

The Findings

While cult violence is a menace to the Nigerian society in general, some states of the federation are more affected than others. The activities of such groups usually happen around the campuses of tertiary institutions. But incidents were also reported in secondary schools, especially in Lagos. Cult violence can thus rise in some states while declining at the national level.



Myth#06

There was less crime during Covid-19 lockdown

No, the lockdown period recorded a higher number of deaths per criminal incident.

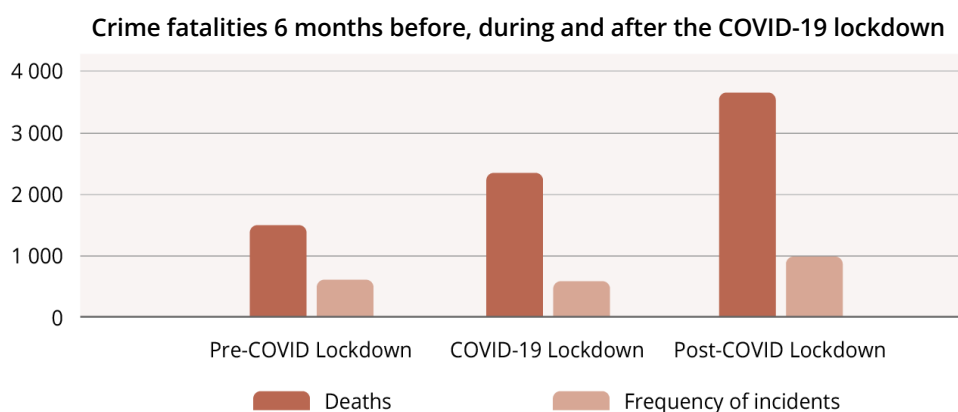
The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic officially touched Nigeria on February 27, 2020 when an Italian national tested positive in Lagos. With an increase in the number of daily confirmed cases, the Nigerian government declared a total lockdown on 30th March 2020 as a containment measure. Schools, businesses, and places of worship were shut down and vehicular movements restricted. While security operatives strictly enforced the lockdown, many Nigerians assumed that crime incidents would reduce.

The Data Analysis

The graph Below shows the frequency of lethal criminal incidents and their fatalities at (roughly) 6 months intervals for pre-COVID era (29 September 2019 – 29 February 2020), the lockdown period (30 March 2020 – 6 September 2020) and the post-lockdown era (7 September 2020 - 7 March 2021). The pre-COVID lockdown period recorded 1,490 fatalities and an average of 2.43 deaths from 611 incidents, against 2,343 and 4.03 in 582 incidents during the lockdown, and 3,641 and 3.69 in 986 incidents during the post-COVID era.

The Findings

The lockdown period recorded the highest number of deaths per criminal incident, yet with a lower number of lethal cases when compared with the pre-COVID-19 and post-lockdown eras. It is also worth noting that security operatives killed people who violated lockdown regulations, while others died because of intimate partner violence. After the lockdown, many people then lost their life during the scramble for COVID-19 palliatives. Some of the victims died from stampedes or were shot dead by government forces who were safeguarding the warehouses.



Myth#07

There was less crime during cash crunch

No, crime-related incidents were slightly more deadly.

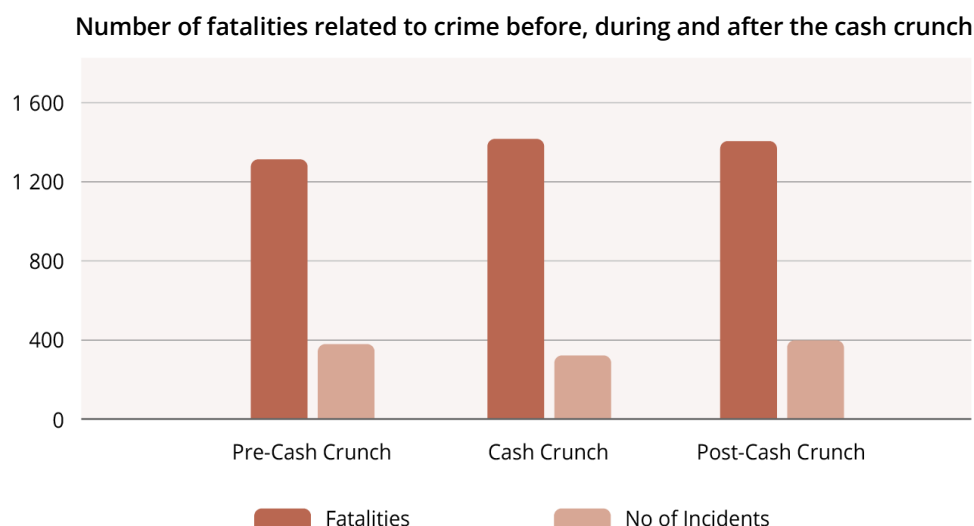
Before the 2023 elections, Nigerians were faced with a severe cash crunch, one of the worst ever recorded since the Biafran War. The crisis was caused by a sudden change of the N200, N500 and N1000 banknotes. The lack of cash affected mobility and led many people to assume that there would be less crime in the country.

The Data Analysis

The data covers three periods of three months before (October – December, 2022), during (January – March, 2023) and after (April – June, 2023) the cash crunch. It reveals that there were less crime-related incidents during the crisis, but that they were more deadly, with 1,423 fatalities reported against 1,319 before and 1,408 after.

The Findings

Lack of cash limits the mobility of citizens. But it does not weaken the capacity of bandits to attack people. Overall, the lack of cash does not seem to have a strong effect on violent crime, at least during a period of three months.



Myth#08

Land conflicts claim more lives in the South than in the North

No, the overall number of fatalities is higher in the North.

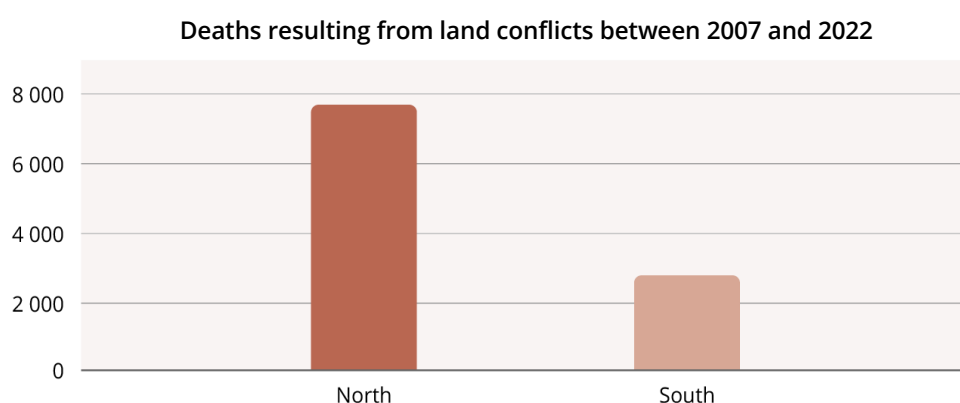
Disputes over access to and use of land trigger many deadly conflicts in rural and urban communities across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Yet it is commonly believed that land issues are more prevalent in the South, especially in Lagos, where property prices are highest, and in the Niger Delta, where oil is produced.

The Data Analysis

Between 2007 and 2022, 2,855 deaths related to land conflicts were reported in Southern Nigeria, against 7,884 in the North. The North Central geopolitical zone was the most affected, with 4,863 fatalities, followed by the Northeast (1,991) and the Northwest (1,030). In the South, the South-South recorded the highest number of deaths resulting from land disputes (1,481), followed by the Southeast (965) and the Southwest (409).

The Findings

From 2007 to 2022, land disputes killed 10,472 people all over Nigeria. In the North, Taraba (1,276 fatalities), Benue (2,000) and Plateau (1,576) states recorded the highest number of deaths, especially because of farmers-herdsmen conflicts and ethnic issues between the Tiv and the Jukun. In the three geopolitical zones of the South, Cross River state came first in the Niger Delta, with 701 victims, followed by Ebonyi in the Southeast (467) and Lagos (116) in the Southwest.



Myth#09

There are more kidnap-related deaths in the South than in the North

No, the overall number of fatalities is higher in the North.

Kidnapping for ransom is a major concern for Nigerians and foreigners. From cities to rural communities, it does not affect the rich only. Yet it is commonly believed that kidnappings kill more people in the South than in the North, where the levels of poverty are higher. Also, it is often claimed that the kidnapping industry originated from the South.

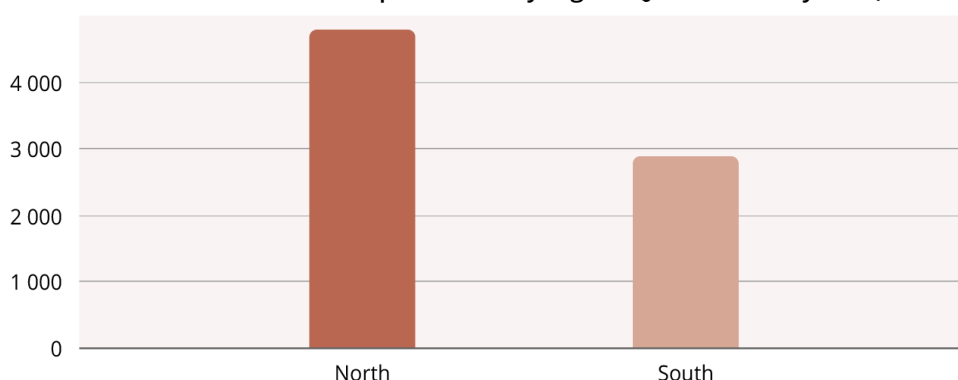
The Data Analysis

The graph shows the regional distribution of fatalities resulting from kidnapping. In 17 years, 4,794 people died in the North, including 17 expatriates. During the same period, 2,881 were killed in the South, including 13 expatriates.

The Findings

A total of 7,675 people were reportedly killed in kidnap incidents across Nigeria between June 2006 and May 2023. Among the victims were 30 expatriates. The North recorded more fatalities than the South due to rural banditry and the insurgencies of armed groups such as Ansaru, Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa (ISWAP). With 947 and 923 victims respectively, Kaduna and Borno States recorded the highest number of deaths from kidnap incidents in the North. The victims were either released upon the payment of ransoms, married off to criminals or outrightly killed. However, many of them were rescued by security operatives or escaped from their abductors. In the South, Delta and Rivers states recorded the highest number of deaths from kidnap incidents, with 847 and 449 victims respectively. These oil-rich regions have indeed a long history of militancy and piracy.

Deaths from kidnap incidents by regions (June 2006-May 2023)



Myth#10

Pipelines are more dangerous than petrol tankers

No, more fatalities result from fuel trucks involved in road accidents.

Explosions are a major concern for the oil industry, especially when people try to scoop volatile refined products from vandalized pipelines. Yet the high number of deaths reported in such incidents should not obscure the dangerousness of fuel trucks involved in road accidents on a daily basis.

The Data Analysis

Fuel trucks accidents caused more deaths (2,790) than pipeline explosions (1,874) between 1st June 2006 and 31 May 2023. But they had a lower average number of fatalities per incident (8.6 compared to 15.4). During this period, the deadliest accident involving a petrol tanker (181 fatalities) occurred in Okogbe, Ahoada East LGA, Rivers State, in 2012, while the deadliest pipeline explosion (610 deaths) was recorded when people scooped oil from a vandalized pipeline in Abule-Egba, Agege LGA, Lagos State, in 2006.

The Findings

The high volatility of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) and its daily distribution all over the country explain why the downstream sector is more exposed to risk. Fuel trucks are thus more dangerous than pipeline explosions of crude oil, which is much less flammable. This is quite clear if one considers the number of deaths, the frequency of occurrence and the number of states affected by fatal incidents related to oil production or distribution.

Number of fatalities caused by fuel trucks' accidents or pipeline explosions
(June 2006-May 2023)

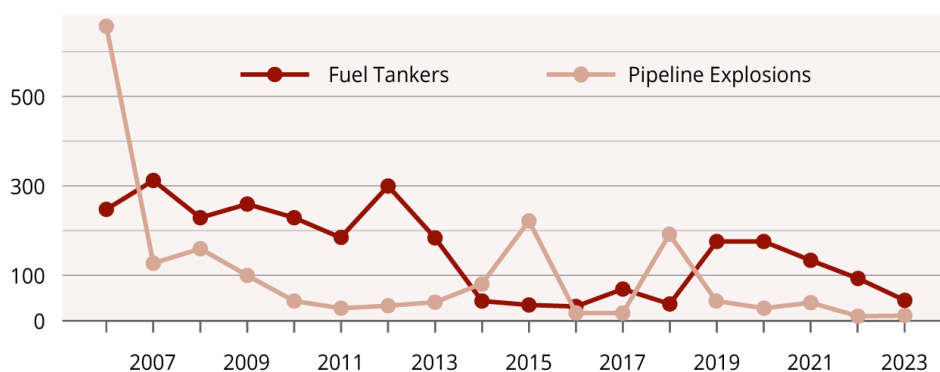


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Scientific supervision and edition:

Dr. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos

Contributors:

Vitus Nwankwo Ukoji, Dr. Victor Chinedu Eze, Abiola Victoria Oladunjoye and Enzo Fasquelle with the help of Precious Egbochice at the University of Ibadan

Layout and graphs:

Eric Opigez

Cover photograph:

Tope A. Asokere