

try. In February more than 100 people were killed and thousands displaced in a wave of interconnected religious riots that began in the northeastern city of Maiduguri and spread to Bauchi and Anambra states. The underlying causes of Nigeria's chronic intercommunal strife—including ethnic and religious divisions and competition for scarce economic opportunities—often overlap with and exacerbate one another.

In some cases, unscrupulous political leaders have manipulated intercommunal tensions or have actively sponsored violence to advance their political positions. In August 2006, for example, clashes by rival political gangs in the Rivers state town of Bodo left more than 15 people dead and terrorized the community. The state's commissioner for finance and a leading member of the state legislature were briefly arrested in connection with that incident. There is widespread concern that the run-up to nationwide polls slated for April 2007 will be marred by similar incidents, which were a defining feature of elections held in 2003 and 2004.

Abuses by Security Forces

Nigeria's police and other security forces continued to be implicated in widespread acts of torture, ill-treatment, extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrest, and property destruction. For example, in August 2006 the bodies of 12 criminal suspects who had been in police custody were found dumped beside a road in the town of Umuahia in Abia state. Later that month, Nigerian army personnel burned to the ground a poor community on the outskirts of Port Harcourt in reprisal for the murder of an army sergeant earlier that day.

Impunity from prosecution remains the biggest single obstacle to ending abuses such as these. President Olusegun Obasanjo's public acknowledgement in August 2005 that Nigerian police officers have committed murder and torture did not translate during 2006 into any significant effort to hold members of the security forces accountable for past or ongoing crimes, in which their involvement is alleged.