

Christian ICHITE

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Land conflicts, population
pressure and lethal violence
in the Niger Delta (Akwa Ibom,
Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta),
2006-2014



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Christian ICHITE*

Land conflicts, population pressure and lethal violence in the Niger Delta (Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta), 2006–2014

Executive Summary

This study relies on the Nigeria Watch database to assess the contributions of land and population pressures to overall lethal violence in the core Niger Delta states of Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta over an eight-year period (2006–2014). Disaggregated data on land issue-related violent deaths was obtained for each Local Government Area (LGA) of the four states under review. Population densities were computed based on the Nigeria 2006 Census and available or ‘real’ surface area.

The study arrived at two main findings. First, casualties associated with land issues in the core Niger Delta states do not account for a significant contribution to overall lethal violence in the region, contrary to popular claims and declarations based on the un-researched impacts of the Land Use Act of 1978. Fatal land conflicts in Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta result significantly from inter-communal clashes, just as inter-communal clashes over political, religious, and ethnic issues also significantly account for deaths. Second, overall crude death rates (mortality) from multiple causes, including land issues, do not strictly conform to a relationship of direct proportionality with the spatial distribution of population densities within the region. Some LGAs with high population densities record

*Christian Ichite is a Research Fellow at the National Defence College, Abuja. Any errors that remain are the sole responsibility of the author. Contact: chrisichite@gmail.com

low death rates, and vice versa. Moreover, inter-communal clashes also significantly account for most of the deaths from multiple causes in the LGAs, irrespective of the patterns of population density.

The findings, by implication, attest to a deteriorating quality of human conditions and habitat in the Niger Delta, despite existing measures aimed at resolving conflicts in the region. They also make necessary a re-assessment of studies on the region. Such studies hitherto have often been based on simplistic applications of the Malthusian theoretical framework to the relationships between environmental degradation, population density, and lethal violence in the region. A re-assessment would involve a renaissance of rigorous research into the causes and drivers of lethal violence in the region—in a disaggregated manner and based on systematic evidence. Such research increasingly requires a hybrid of qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

INTRODUCTION

The following study investigates the extent to which land and population pressures contribute to lethal violence in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. In this region, which is of strategic interest to a myriad of stakeholders, land and population pressures have been indicted as structural causes of conflict by scholars such as Imobighe (1998), Udeh (2008), and the duo of Oluwadare and Oyeboade (2013).¹ Conventional wisdom also links agitations in the region to the negative impacts of the Land Use Act of 1978, which empowered the Federal Government in relation to ownership of land and mineral resources. Though often without presenting systematic evidence, some key leaders of Niger Delta militants have also consistently referred to the loss of land and associated resources—through oil exploitation and environmental degradation—as a major driver of violent confrontations within the region.

Undoubtedly, the Niger Delta is a densely populated region compared with the national average population density of Nigeria, estimated to be about 175 people per sq. km in 2010 by the World Bank.² Aside from Bayelsa, three of the four states under focus in this study—Akwa Ibom, Delta and Rivers—each have population densities above the national average (Table 2). In these four states, some LGAs, with the exception of those in Bayelsa, have a population density 3–5 times greater than the national average (Tables 3 to 6). Against this background, popular inferences therefore suggest that land and population pressures make significant contributions to local conflicts and tensions in the region. However, the Nigeria Watch database (NW database) shows that land and population pressures, disaggregated from other causative factors, actually make insignificant

¹ These studies are often multivariate, yet they do not always disaggregate the different factors of violence.

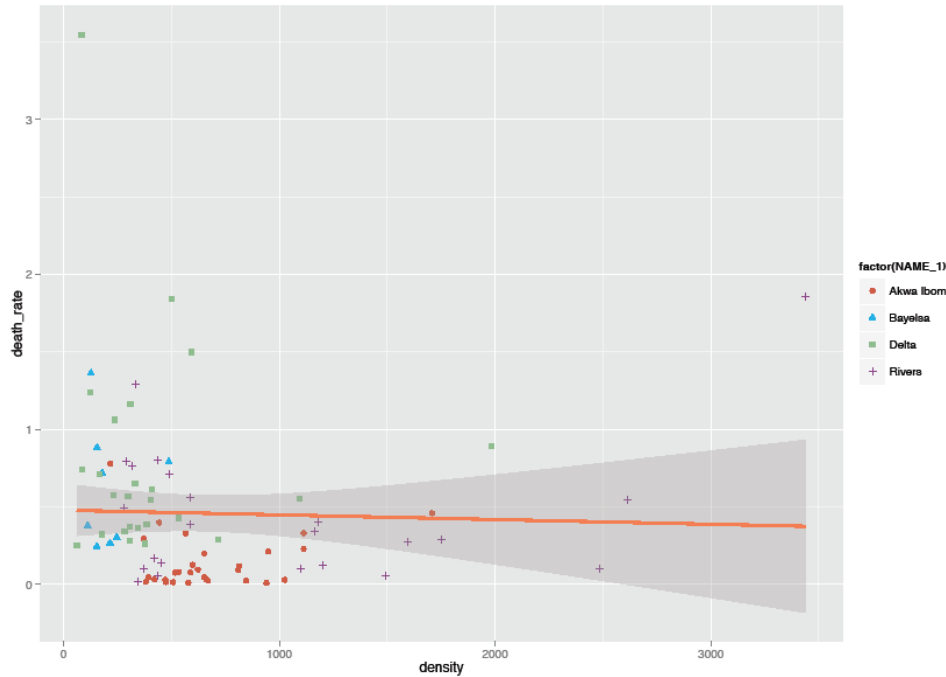
² See Population density (people per sq. km of land area), <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST>

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contributions to the number of fatalities reported in the Niger Delta between 2006 and 2014.

The study arrived at this finding by utilizing data on lethal violence across Nigeria, as monitored by NW database from select national print media sources over an eight-year period, from June 2006 to May 2014. The research also conducted content analysis on available literature on the environment and conflicts in the region, as well as on narratives on shrinking natural resources, land issues, and population pressure, for reported cases of lethal violence in this region. The study noted the fact that land is a crucial resource for both individual and collective survival in the region, and indeed in Africa at large; and that possibly some land conflicts in the region were not reported by any of the newspapers monitored by the NW database, as usually happens with other issues and in other parts of country, owing largely to the fact that media attention to issues is conditioned by many factors. This limitation was significantly minimized by the triangulated data of NW database, which relies on ten different print media sources and human rights reports. Results are presented in descriptive statistics, with a regression analysis in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Regression analysis for lethal violence and population density in the Niger Delta, 2006–2014



Source: Computation by Hugo Lefebvre from the NW database

Interestingly enough, trends in fatalities in the core Niger Delta states of Delta and Rivers display striking similarity to other hotspots of violence in Nigeria, such as Borno, Lagos, and Plateau. At the regional level, the South-South also compares favourably with the North-East, the North-Central and the South-West geopolitical zones when analyzing the causes, patterns, types of stakeholders, and relationship between protagonists of lethal violence. The NW database shows, for instance, that political and ethnic groups, religious groups, criminal groups, and security forces occupy the first four ranks for both fatal land conflicts and lethal violence occasioned by combined causes. Within the South-South geopolitical zone, however, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers states have to be understood within their peculiar political, economic, and social contexts before and after

the amnesty programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2009.

The paper is divided into four main sections. The first clarifies key concepts employed in the study. The second section is an overview of the Niger Delta context. The third deals with land pressure in the region. The fourth and last section analyses population pressure in the Niger Delta. The third and fourth sections also compare lethal violence in the South-South and across different zones in Nigeria. The conclusion emphasizes the need for a more systematic approach to studying the causes and drivers of conflicts in the Niger Delta.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

This section clarifies the main concepts employed in the study, such as ‘land pressure’, ‘land conflict’, ‘population pressure’ and ‘lethal violence’.

Land pressure and land conflict

Land is taken in this study to mean an important economic asset and a source of livelihoods, and it is also closely linked to the identity, history, and culture of communities. Land, understood from this perspective, explains why communities therefore can readily mobilize around land-related issues, making it a central object of conflict. However, land and natural resource are almost never the sole cause of confrontation. Scholars such as Urmilla Bob (2010) observed that land conflicts, for instance, commonly become violent when linked to wider processes of political exclusion, social discrimination, economic marginalization, and a perception that peaceful action is no longer a viable strategy for change.

Bob explained that access to and availability of land resources are critical to ensuring real and long-

lasting improvement in social, economic, and political well-being, especially in vulnerable societies that are prone to instability and conflicts. This is partly because land is critical to food production in rural households. The author further noted that complex and interrelated factors such as poverty, inequality, and land reformation processes lead to conflicts, while contestations over land resources are most noticeable among the poor. Moreover, social dimensions such as class, gender, religion, and ethnicity affect access to and ownership of land. Together with population pressure, agricultural commercialization and urbanization also contribute to land conflicts.

In this regard, scholars have lamented the inability of current land tenure systems to resolve such conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, where access to land is mainly egalitarian in character and ranges from freehold/private titles, communal/traditional systems, and public land, down to squatting (see for instance Van Donge 1999). In Nigeria, the Federal Government promulgated the Land Use Act of 1978 to unify and simplify land tenure. But some controversies over its interpretation continue among writers and judges as Section 1 of the Act vests the control and management of all lands to the governors of each state of the Nigerian Federation.

Population pressure

Demography essentially refers to the study of human populations—their size, composition, and spatial distribution over time. Thomson (2007) identified births, deaths, and migrations as the ‘big three’ of demography, which jointly produce population stability or change. Population changes affect almost all areas of human activity, including economic, social, cultural, and political realities.

Population pressure, on the other hand, has been described by several authors as an elusive concept, which nevertheless exists and must therefore be reckoned with. Popularly, population pressure is understood as a problem

related to the environment and the size, growth, density, and distribution of human populations.³ For the purposes of this paper, population pressure is used to denote the effect of changes in size, growth, density, and distribution of a given human population in a given area, changes which result in deteriorating physical and human conditions, including the economic, social, cultural, and political situation. In this study, population pressure was assessed in relation to population density and lethal violence associated with land issue conflicts in the Niger Delta region.

Lethal violence

Lethal violence, for the purposes of this study, is defined simply as cases of hostility, aggression, fighting, violent behaviour, brutality, cruelty, bloodshed, or sadism that result in the death of human beings. These include murder, homicide, fratricide, infanticide, assault, and manslaughter. Killing is treated seriously in all societies, which renders it more amenable to examination and measurement; and it is therefore an important index of insecurity administratively, since it tends to be recorded more systematically than other crimes. However, undercounting is inherent in incident reporting of conflict deaths, and national and international data collection systems are often inadequate.⁴

This study utilized disaggregated data on lethal violence related to land issues and population pressure in the four states under review: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta,

³ See “What is the meaning of Population Pressure”, <https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090711193059AAWCdIO>

⁴See for instance the reports of Global Burden of Armed Violence, a comprehensive database on lethal violence covering the years 2004–2009. <http://www.genevadeclaration.org/measurability/global-burden-of-armed-violence/global-burden-of-armed-violence-2011.html><http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/GBAV2/GBAV2011-Ex-summary-ENG.pdf>

and Rivers. The NW database computes fatalities in 12 different categories of causes, including car accidents, cattle grazing disputes, convict executions, crimes, land issues, political issues, and sorcery. Fatal land conflicts in the Niger Delta are compared against levels and trends of such violence in other selected states and geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

THE NIGER DELTA CONTEXT

Nigeria is the most populous African country. It covers a total area of 923,768 sq. km and shares boundaries with Cameroon in the east, the Republic of Niger in the north, Chad in the north-east, and Benin in the west. In the south, Nigeria makes contact with the Atlantic Ocean through its 853 km-long coastline (UNEP 2011: 20). Water covers 13,000 sq. km of the country. Current environmental issues include loss of arable land, soil degradation, rapid urbanization, deforestation, desertification, and, in Nigeria's Niger Delta, oil pollution of water, air, and soil.

The Niger Delta is located in the southernmost part of Nigeria. Its land topography rises from a coastal belt of swamps and stretches northwards into a rainforest which gradually merges with woodland and savannah grasslands in central Nigeria. The swamps, forest, and woodland areas have been estimated to occupy approximately 12% of the land surface of the area. It is also estimated that 2,370 sq. km of the Niger Delta is made up of rivers, creeks, and estuaries, while swamps cover about 8,600 sq. km (Ayodele 2010: 2).

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) recognizes nine oil-producing states in the whole region. Thus the Niger Delta has officially nine of the 36 states and 185 of the 774 LGAs in Nigeria. Its population is estimated at 32 million, which is about 22% of the total Nigerian population. The region is rich in crude oil and natural gas reserves. Oil exploration, production, and

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distribution activities have left over 5,200 wells drilled and about 275 flow stations in the area, with thousands of kilometres of pipelines that criss-cross the region (UNEP 2011: 20).

Despite its strategic and economic importance, however, Osha (1996) observed that the Niger Delta has been largely neglected by the government. Attempts at managing the problem have been dominated by confrontation, typified by repeated militarization and the establishment of institutions such as the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB), Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the Amnesty Programme, and the Niger Delta Ministry. In these ‘mega projects’, payoffs are easily hidden and bribes are facilitated (Stiglitz 2005; Karl 2005), to the detriment of the people, their communities, and the environment on which they have always depended for their livelihood.

Dissatisfaction has largely accounted for the emergence of non-state rebel groups and armed conflicts within the region. In 1966, Isaac Adaka Boro led an insurgency, with the intention of seceding Ijaw-land from Nigeria. The attempt was foiled by the government, but years later Ken Saro-Wiwa, an Ogoni activist, internationalized the struggle of the Niger Delta people against the government and attracted global attention to the region with his Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). However, he was imprisoned and executed in November 1995 for treason. Since his death, several pressure groups have emerged in the Niger Delta, and most of these new groups have become violently militant against the government. These include the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Peoples’ Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Egbesu Boys, and the Coalition for Militant Action in Niger/Delta (COMA).

Lethal violence in the Niger Delta has since become a recurrent problem. Communities fight other communities over the control of remunerations and kick-backs from crude oil extracted from their land. Instances of these conflicts include the Ogbogoro War in 1998 and the Nembe War in 2000. Communities also confront oil companies over compensation for extraction and environmental degradation, as with Umuechem against Shell in 1990 or the Ijaw against Chevron in 2000. In other instances, the Federal Government, communities, and armed groups all get embroiled in conflicts which entail huge losses in oil revenue owing to production shutdown, sabotage, pipeline vandalism, crude oil theft, or the kidnapping of oil workers.

As a result, the Administration of President Umaru Musa Yar'adua inaugurated in August 2009 an Amnesty Programme to contain the debilitating effect of the conflict on the Nigerian economy. Under this programme, all members of armed groups who renounced their militant activities, relinquished their weapons, and signed an undertaking not to fall back into such activities, were unconditionally pardoned by the Nigerian state and were to be subsequently trained and empowered. However, in 2014 the region was still experiencing cases of kidnapping, maritime piracy, oil bunkering, and vandalism of oil installations, although these cases have been occurring at a comparatively reduced rate.

LAND PRESSURE AND LETHAL VIOLENCE IN THE NIGER DELTA

What role did land conflicts play in the Niger Delta crisis? The linkage between land pressure and lethal violence is quite complex. To assess it, this study evaluated and compared population densities, land conflicts, and the number of fatalities as they were reported by the media and archived by NW database during an eight-year period, from 2006 to 2014. The data

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for Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers were compared with similar NW data for selected states with significant levels of lethal violence in Nigeria, including Borno, Plateau, Lagos, Kaduna, Kano, Benue, and Ogun (Table 1).

As already noted, land issues, population pressure, and access to natural resources are never the sole reasons for fatal conflicts. Rather, they become causes of violence when associated with other factors such as exclusion, discrimination, marginalization, and wrong perceptions. In the Niger Delta, these factors prominently include politics, socio-economic factors, and policies such as the Amnesty Programme of the Federal Government, the Land Use Act, crude oil exploration and extraction activities, inter and intra-communal rivalries, and environmental stress within the region (Ichite 2012).

Table 1: Land conflicts and fatalities per state and geopolitical zone of Nigeria (2006–2014)

S/N	States in geopolitical zones	No. of fatalities related to land conflicts	Total No. of fatalities (all causes of violence included)	Fatalities related to land conflicts as % of total No. of fatalities	Population (2006 Census)
	SOUTH-EAST	274	4,993	5.49%	16,395,555
1	Anambra	44	2,225	1.98%	4,177,828
2	Enugu	36	740	4.87%	3,267,837
4	Ebonyi	145	499	29.06%	2,176,947
4	Imo	42	886	4.74%	3,927,563
5	Abia	7	643	1.09%	2,845,380
	SOUTH-SOUTH	628	11,332	5.54%	21,044,081

6	Edo	47	2,115	2.22%	3,233,366
7	Bayelsa	17	1,183	1.44%	1,704,515
8	Rivers	67	3,012	2.22%	5,198,716
9	Delta	73	3,436	2.13%	4,112,445
10	Akwa- Ibom	102	599	17.03%	3,902,051
11	Cross- River	322	987	32.62%	2,892,988
	SOUTH- WEST	145	11,782	1.23%	27,722,432
12	Lagos	64	6,273	1.02%	9,113,605
13	Ogun	46	1,912	2.41%	3,751,140
14	Oyo	5	1,675	0.30%	5,580,894
15	Osun	7	695	1.01%	3,416,959
16	Ondo	22	919	2.39%	3,460,877
17	Ekiti	1	308	0.33%	2,398,957
	NORTH- CENTRAL	1,724	13,134	13.13%	20,369,956
18	Kwara	15	777	1.93%	2,365,353
19	Kogi	11	1,382	0.80%	3,314,043
20	Plateau	837	4,024	20.80%	3,206,531
21	Nassarawa	223	1,503	14.84%	1,869,377
22	Benue	613	2,511	24.41%	4,253,641
23	Niger	23	942	2.44%	3,954,772
	F.C.T	2	1,995	0.10%	1,406,239
	NORTH- EAST	412	16,927	2.43%	18,984,299
24	Taraba	299	1,252	23.88%	2,294,800
25	Adamawa	33	1,205	2.74%	3,178,950
26	Borno	76	10,759	0.71%	4,171,104

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27	Yobe	0	1,815	0	2,321,339
28	Bauchi	4	1,534	0.26%	4,653,066
29	Gombe	0	362	0	2,365,040
	NORTH- WEST	34	7,801	0.44%	35,915,467
30	Sokoto	0	426	0	3,702,676
31	Zamfara	9	1330	0.68%	3,278,873
32	Kebbi	0	456	0	3,256,541
33	Kaduna	11	2,771	0.40%	6,113,503
34	Katsina	7	863	0.81%	5,801,584
35	Kano	1	1521	0.07%	9,401,288
36	Jigawa	6	434	1.38%	4,361,002

Source: Compiled by author, based on NW database and Nigeria 2006 Census

Land issue-related lethal violence across the geopolitical zones of Nigeria

According to the NW database, the spatial distribution of deaths related to land conflicts do not obey a pattern similar to those for the geopolitical zones or the regional levels of lethal violence generally (Table 1). For instance, the geopolitical zones with over 10,000 fatalities included the North-East, the North-Central, the South-West and the South-South, while the North-West and South-East recorded less than 8,000 deaths during the same period. However, only 2.43% of the 16,927 violent deaths reported in the North-East within the period were related to land issues, as against 13.13% of the 13,134 recorded in the North-Central zone. As for the North-West, South-West, South-South and South-East, land conflicts accounted for 0.44%, 1.23%, 5.54%, and 5.49% of fatalities, respectively.

The same pattern of non-proportionality holds for some states within each of the six geopolitical zones (Table 1). Borno, for example, is the most violent state in the North-East. Yet land conflict deaths accounted for a paltry 0.71% of the 10,759 fatalities recorded in Borno, as against 23.88% of the 1,252 fatalities in Taraba. Likewise, in the North-Central geopolitical zone, land conflict deaths accounted for 20.8% of the 4,024 fatalities in Plateau and 24.41% of the 2,511 deaths in Benue, irrespective of the fact that lethal violence in absolute numbers is higher in Plateau than in Benue. These figures suggest that although land is a factor in violence, there are other and perhaps more important causes of clashes in the region. The most violent states within their respective geopolitical zones, Kaduna in the North-West and Anambra in the South-East, also recorded insignificant contributions from land issue-related conflicts to the overall fatalities in their respective zones: 0.40% of 2,771 and 1.98% of 2,225, respectively. Finally, the South-South recorded percentages ranging from less than 2% in Rivers and Delta to 17.03% of 599 violent deaths in Akwa Ibom.

Land issue-related lethal violence in the Niger Delta region

In the preceding section, levels of lethal violence in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers have been compared with those in other states and geopolitical zones. The focus will now be on specific local contexts within the four states under review. A summary of the number of LGAs affected by fatal land conflicts in the four Niger Delta states is given in Table 2.

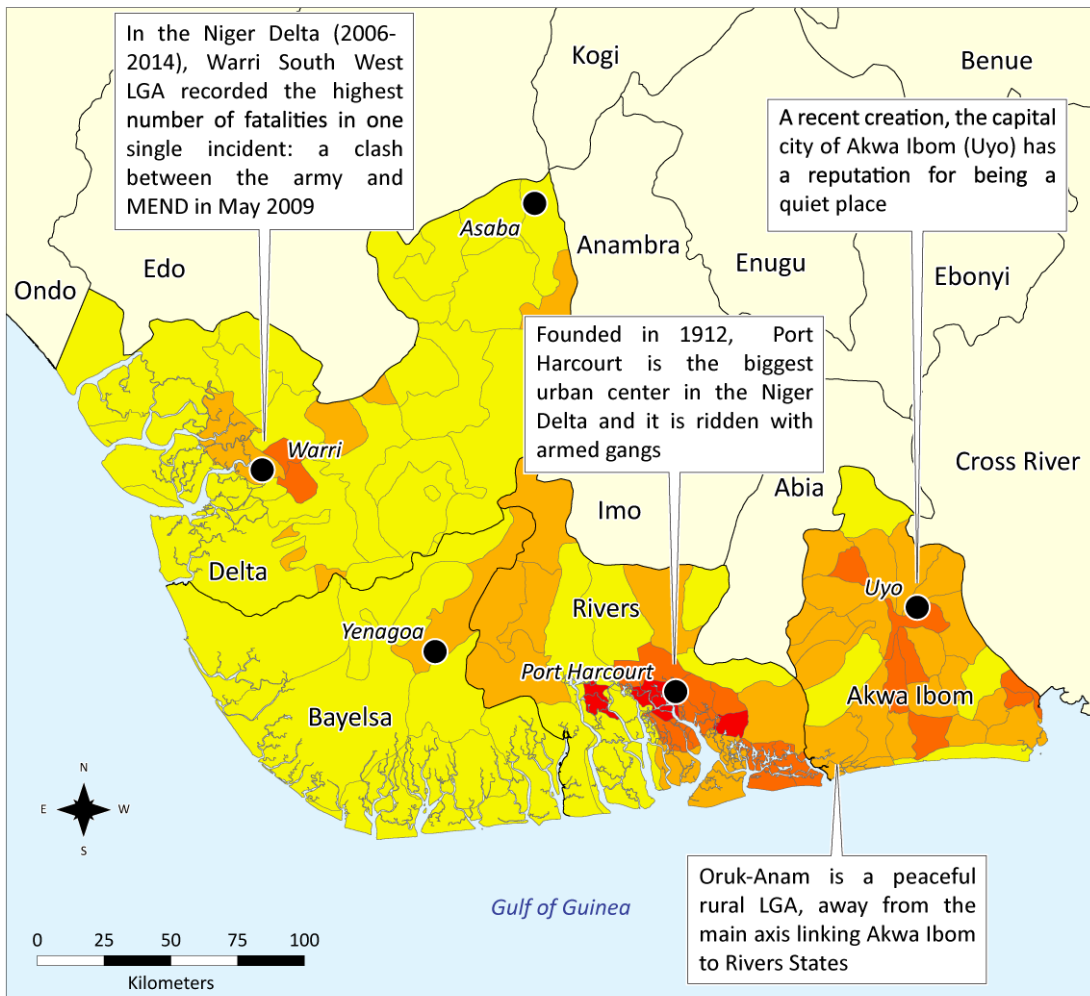
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Table 2: Average population densities and percentage distribution of LGAs affected by fatal land conflicts in the core Niger Delta states (2006–2014)

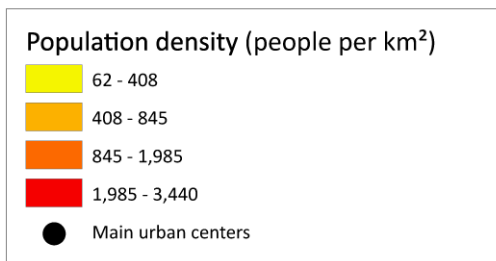
S/N	State	Total No. of LGAs	Surface area (sq. km)	Population (2006 Census)	Total No. of LGAs with land issue-related lethal violence	Percentage of LGAs affected by land issue-related lethal violence	Population density based on total surface area and 2006 census
1.	Delta	25	17,698	6,710,214	9	36.0%	379
2.	Bayelsa	8	21,110	1,998,349	3	33.33%	95
3.	Rivers State	23	11,077	6,689,087	6	26.09%	604
4.	Akwa Ibom	31	7,081	4,805,451	9	29.03%	679

Source: Author's computation from 2006 population census and NW database

The Core Niger Delta States: Population Density per Local Government

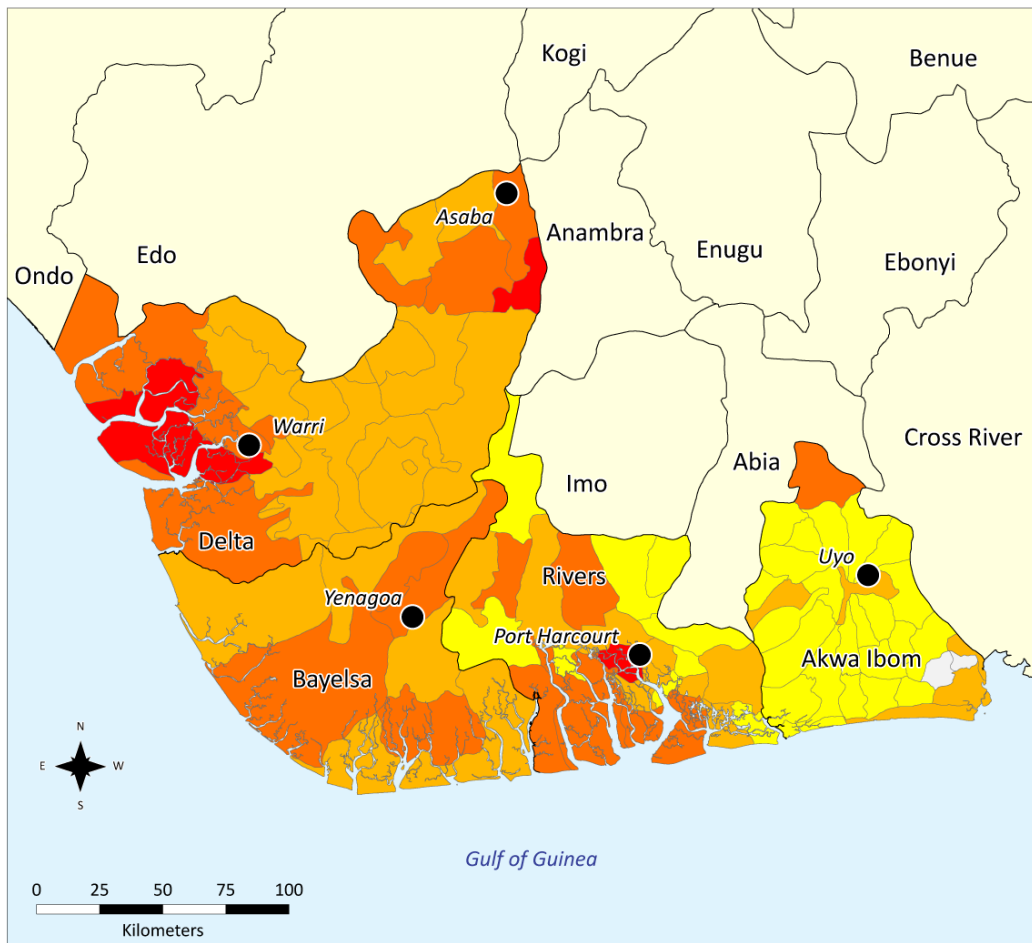


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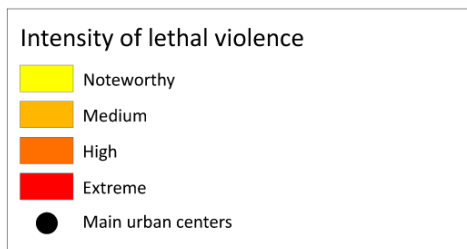


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The Core Niger Delta States: Violence per Local Government as measured
 by the number of fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants (2006-2014)



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Land issue-related lethal violence in LGAs in Akwa Ibom State

According to the 2006 national population census, Akwa Ibom State contains 3,902,051 inhabitants, occupies an area of 7,081 sq. km, and consists of 31 LGAs. Within the period under study, the NW database shows that nine LGAs were affected by fatal land conflicts, and prominent among them were Ini and Eastern Obolo. With a population density of 210 people per square kilometre, Ini LGA is mostly land and has recorded a total of 80 fatalities resulting from all kinds of violence. With a population density of 624 people per square kilometre, Eastern Obolo LGA is mostly riverine and has recorded a total of 20 fatalities (Table 4). Communities dominate as the main protagonists in land-related violence in both LGAs. The other LGAs affected by fatal land conflicts are Ibeno, Ikot Abasi, Mbo, Obot Akara, Oron, Uruan, and Uyo.

Table 3: Population density and lethal violence in LGAs of Akwa Ibom, 2006–2014

S/N	LGA	No. of inhabitants (2006 Census)	Surface area (sq. km)	Population density	No. of fatalities (all causes of violence, 2006–2014)
79	Abak	139,069	176.651	787.25	19
80	Eastern Obolo	59,970	95.9552	624.98	20
81	Eket	172,856	188.199	918.47	42
82	Esit Eket	63,358	138.914	456.1	1
83	Essien Udim	193,257	297.636	649.31	7
84	Etim Ekpo	105,922	192.655	549.8	37
85	Etinan	168,924	170.676	989.74	9
86	Ibeno	74,840	209.922	356.51	26

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87	Ibesikpo Asutan	137,127	174.899	784.04	18
88	Ibiono Ibom	188,605	314.743	599.24	19
89	Ika	72,772	130.292	558.53	3
90	Ikono	131,673	268.486	490.43	2
91	Ikot Abasi	132,608	332.58	398.73	34
92	Ikot Ekpene	141,408	132.926	1063.81	34
93	Ini	99,084	470.979	210.38	80
94	Itu	127,856	254.639	502.11	10
95	Mbo	102,173	242.242	421.78	43
96	Mkpat Enin	177,293	345.063	513.8	20
97	Nsit Atai	73,395	131.09	559.88	6
98	Nsit Ibom	108,095	119.396	905.35	1
99	Nsit Ubium	127,083	203.258	625.23	6
100	Obot Akara	147,286	231.574	636.02	5
101	Okobo	102,753	273.894	375.16	5
102	Onna	123,193	150.866	816.57	3
103	Oron	87,209	81.2588	1073.23	33
104	Oruk Anam	171,839	468.178	357.04	3
105	Udung Uko	53,060	53.4675	992.38	0
106	Ukanafu n	125,473	278.314	450.83	4
107	Uruan	117,169	290.126	403.86	5
108	Urue- Offong/ Oruko	70,740	127.033	556.86	0
870	Uyo	305,961	187.474	1632.02	150

Source: Author's computation of population density and lethal violence in LGAs from NW database

Land issue-related lethal violence in LGAs in Bayelsa State

Bayelsa State is mostly riverine, with a total surface area of 21,110 sq. km and a population of 1,998,349 in 2006.⁵ It is made up of eight LGAs, of which three are affected by fatal land conflicts, especially in Yenagoa, followed by Brass and Southern Ijaw (Table 4). With a total of 17 fatalities, the major protagonists of these incidents are communities.

Table 4: Population Density and Lethal Violence in LGAs of Bayelsa State, 2006-2014

S/N	LGA	No. of inhabitants (2006 Census)	Surface (sq. km)	Population density	No. of fatalities (all causes of violence, 2006 - 2014)
150	Brass	184127	1,707.00	107.87	80
151	Ekeremor	269588	1,800.34	149.74	73
152	Kolokuma /Opokuma	79266	442.839	179	60
153	Nembe	130966	866.469	151.15	128
154	Ogbia	179606	751.035	239.15	58
155	Sagbama	186869	891.941	209.51	54
156	Southern Ijaw	321808	2,576.58	124.9	465
157	Yenagoa	352285	745.261	472.7	298

Source: Author's computation of population density and lethal violence in LGAs from NW database

⁵ See <http://www.facts.ng/nigerian-states/bayelsa/>
IFRA-Nigeria epapers series, 2015, n°48

Land issue-related lethal violence in LGAs in Delta State

Delta state has a surface area of 17,698 sq. km and a population of 4,112,445. It is composed of 25 LGAs, of which 9 are affected by lethal violence related to land issues. With a surface area of approximately 498 sq. km and a population density of 238 people per square kilometre, Oshimili North recorded a total of 165 fatalities resulting from all kinds of violence between 2006 and 2014, while Uvwie, with a population density of 1,895 people per square kilometre, recorded 190 deaths during the same period (Table 5). The other LGAs affected by fatal land conflicts were the following: Aniocha South, Ika South, Ndokwa East, Ndokwa West, and Oshimili South. The main protagonists of these incidents are the communities, armed gangs, the police and, to a lesser extent, political groups and the army.

Table 5: Population density and lethal violence in LGAs of Delta State, 2006–2014

S/N	LGA	No. of inhabitants (2006 Census)	Surface area (sq. km)	Population density	No. of fatalities (all causes of violence, 2006–2014)
229	Aniocha North	104,062	466.349	233.14	103
230	Aniocha South	142,045	865.65	164.09	158
237	Bomadi	86,016	124.787	689.3	26
238	Burutu	207,977	1,739.06	119.59	270
241	Ethiophe West	200,942	544.756	368.87	99
242	Ethiophe East	202,712	387.586	523.01	102
232	Ika North	182,819	504.48	362.39	80
231	Ika	167,060	541.78	308.35	218

	South		5		
236	Isoko North	143,559	484.09 5	296.55	62
235	Isoko south	235,147	679.27 8	346.17	91
234	Ndokwa East	103,224	1,710.3 6	60.35	34
233	Ndokwa West	150,024	860.41 9	174.36	57
244	Okpe	128,398	436.93 9	293.86	41
251	Oshimili North	118,540	497.8	238.13	165
228	Oshimili South	150,032	306.81 8	488.99	291
252	Patani	67,391	210.47 6	320.18	49
243	Sapele	174,273	433.98 9	401.56	110
248	Udu	142,480	135.25	1053.46	85
240	Ughelli North	320,687	820.40 9	390.89	229
239	Ughelli South	212,638	779.58 7	272.76	93
250	Ukwuani	119,034	415.55 2	286.45	76
247	Uvwie	188,728	99.573 5	1895.36	190
245	Warri North	136,149	1,638.1 2	83.11	238
249	Warri south west	311,970	1,448.8 4	215.32	923
246	Warri South	116,538	526.32 6	221.42	850

Source: Author's computation of population density and lethal violence in LGAs from NW database

Land issue-related lethal violence in LGAs in Rivers State

Rivers State has a population of 5,198,716 and a surface area of 11,077 sq. km. With a total of 67 fatalities related to land conflicts during the period under review, it has six LGAs out of 23 which are most affected: Gokana (36 deaths) and Khana (6), followed by Port Harcourt, Obio-Akpor, Ogo/Bolo, and Eleme (see also Table 6). The main protagonists of these incidents are the communities, cult societies, armed gangs and, to a lesser extent, oil companies and political groups. Media narratives associated with such fatalities also underscore inter-communal clashes and ethnic issues.⁶

Table 6: Population density and lethal violence in LGAs of Rivers State, 2006–2014

S/N	LGA	No. of inhabitants (2006 Census)	Surface area (sq. km)	Population density	No. of fatalities (all causes of violence, 2006 - 2014)
719	Abua/Odual	282,410	671.581	420.52	33
720	Ahoada East	166,324	352.877	471.34	224
721	Ahoada West	249,232	439.423	567.18	244
722	Akuku Toru	161,103	484.623	332.43	210
723	Andoni	217,924	187.826	1160.24	85
724	Asari-Toru	219,787	91.5151	2401.65	23
725	Bonny	214,983	513.056	419.02	198

⁶ See Bernard Tolani Dada, “Land Dispute Claims 6 in Oron”, *The Leadership*, 27 December 2010 (source: NW database). Also see Emma Una, “50 killed in Communal Clash”, *PM News*, Vol 17, No. 206, 27 October 2011 (source: NW database).

726	Degema	249,467	817.82 6	305.04	210
728	Eleme	190,194	123.91 2	1534.91	57
727	Emuoha	201,057	744.35 4	270.11	137
729	Etche	249,939	566.59 9	441.12	38
730	Gokana	233,813	90.464 8	2584.57	136
731	Ikwerre	188,930	670.69	281.7	174
732	Khana	292,924	517.99 9	565.49	136
733	Obio/A kpor	462,350	274.38 4	1685.05	146
734	Ogba/E gbema/ Ndoni	283,294	697.63 8	406.08	65
735	Ogo/Bo lo	75,282	51.728 7	1455.32	6
736	Okrika	222,285	194.71 2	1141.61	92
737	Omum ma	100,388	300.87 2	333.66	2
738	Opobo/ Nkoro	152,833	142.24 8	1074.41	16
739	Oyigbo	125,331	340.85 8	367.69	13
740	Port- Harcour t	538,558	162.62 3	3311.7	1080
741	Tai	120,308	101.26 4	1188.06	15

Source: Author's computation of population density and lethal violence in LGAs from NW database

Findings from this section indicate that fatal land conflicts in the Niger Delta, disaggregated from the overall common causes of violence in the region, are mainly centred on inter-communal clashes. Therefore, although land pressure in the region exists, it makes an insignificant contribution to overall lethal violence. This implies that land pressure-related deaths remotely caused by inter-communal clashes would significantly affect the

patterns and trends of population pressure in the region, if such fatalities were measured as an indicator of population pressure. The next section deals more extensively with violent deaths in the region as an indicator of population pressure.

POPULATION PRESSURE AND LETHAL VIOLENCE IN THE NIGER DELTA

This section takes a comprehensive look at patterns and trends of crude death counts in the study area in relation to population pressure as represented by population density. The section places particular emphasis on Akwa Ibom, which is treated separately owing to the notable significance of land-related lethal violence in the state—well above that of the other three states studied in the region.

Akwa Ibom's average population density, based on total land mass, is 679 people per square kilometre and is the highest for the four states (Table 2). It is approximately three to four times greater than the average national population density of Nigeria, put at 175 people per square kilometre (World Bank 2010). LGAs within Akwa Ibom follow a similar pattern. Aside from Ini LGA (210) and Oruk Anam (357), all have population densities of between three and five times greater than the national average (Table 3).

However, lethal violence measured over the eight-year period in the various LGAs in the state does not exhibit any relationship of direct proportionality with the size of population density. For instance, the most densely populated LGAs of Uyo (1,632 people per square kilometre), Oron (1,073), and Ikot Ekpene (1,064) recorded 150, 33, and 34 deaths, respectively, while Ini LGA, with a moderate population density of 210 people

per square kilometre, recorded 80 deaths for the period under investigation, above the number of fatalities

reported in Oron and Ikot Ekpene with their much higher population densities. This tends to suggest that lethal violence does not necessarily or strictly follow the patterns of distribution of population densities in LGAs of the state.

As for Rivers, Delta, and Bayelsa, they have average population densities of 604, 379, and 95 people per square kilometre, based on total landmass estimates not available surface area (Table 2). This is much lower than that of Akwa Ibom State. Media narratives on fatal incidents in Rivers, Delta, and Bayelsa are also mainly centred on inter-communal clashes, not land issues. Moreover, as in Akwa Ibom State, fatality rates in different LGAs across these three states over the eight-year period do not follow a regular pattern of correlation or direct proportional relationship with population density based on available surface area. As such, some densely populated LGAs recorded low levels of lethal violence, while others that are less densely populated displayed high death counts (Tables 4 to 6). It is also significant that communities are the major protagonists of violence.

Finally, inter-communal clashes over land or other political, religious, and ethnic issues remain significant, as they represent the proximate cause of fatal incidents in most cases across the region. There is no systematic evidence for a direct correlative relationship between population density size and number of fatalities recorded per LGA. This implies that population pressure is not a key factor conditioning lethal violence trends in the Niger Delta.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the contributions of population density and land conflicts to overall lethal violence in the Niger Delta. Taking the form of desktop research, it utilized data mainly from the NW database, which relies on reputable media sources. The study arrived at two key findings. First, the main protagonists of fatal land conflicts in the Niger Delta are communities through inter-communal clashes. Though insignificant in their contribution to the overall number of fatalities in the region, land issues are a testimony to population pressure. Second, excess mortality resulting from all types of violence is not in direct proportional relationship to population density or population pressure per LGA, calculated on the basis of available or 'real' surface area.

These findings present two major implications. Firstly, contrary to popular utterances by some militants and pseudo-academic declarations in the literature and the media, conflicts resulting from land issues do not make significant contributions to the overall number of fatalities in the region. Secondly, other factors must link lethal violence to population density and land scarcity, which is contrary to the common perception and understanding. Therefore, there is a need for disaggregated study of the causes and factors driving violent conflicts in the region, beyond a simplistic application of theoretical frameworks such as the Malthusian theory. This will increasingly require the hybridization of methodologies, both from the empirical sciences and the arts and social sciences, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATION

COMA	Coalition for Militant Action in Niger/Delta
FGN	Federal Government of Nigeria
FRN	Federal Republic of Nigeria
GBAV	Global Burden of Armed Violence
NWD	Nigeria Watch Database
ND	Niger Delta

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LGAs	Local Government Areas
NEST	Nigerian Environmental Study/Action Team
NDDC	Niger Delta Development Commission
OMPADEC	Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission
NDDB	Niger Delta Development Board
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People
NDPVF	Niger Delta Peoples' Volunteer Force