# deadly violence surges in northern nigeria amid enduring ethnic and religious tensions



Northern Nigeria has experienced a deadly surge of violence in recent months, with over 150 people killed and thousands displaced during April alone. The attacks have principally affected the north-central states of Benue and Plateau, marking the most lethal period since December 2023. Local authorities attribute the violence largely to conflicts involving animal herders, with additional assaults by a Boko Haram splinter group targeting Christian civilians and security personnel in the north-east.

This resurgence of violence has intensified criticism of President Bola Tinubu, who was elected in 2023 on promises to address Nigeria’s ongoing security challenges. Now two years into his administration, tangible improvements remain elusive, particularly in rural communities that continue to bear the brunt of the instability. Nnamdi Obasi, senior Nigeria adviser at the International Crisis Group, acknowledged that while the president has taken positive steps such as increasing defence spending and appointing reputable security officials, “that has not translated to better results on the ground.”

Following a recent meeting with security chiefs, Tinubu’s office issued a statement declaring that the president had “directed an immediate and comprehensive overhaul of national security strategies.” Despite these efforts, the violence is deeply entrenched in local disputes over resources. The clashes largely stem from longstanding conflicts between nomadic cattle herders, predominantly Muslim, and settled farming communities, who are mainly Christian. Desertification and climate change have exacerbated this competition by forcing herders southward into the agriculturally rich middle belt of Nigeria.

The religious dimension of the violence has drawn attention beyond Nigeria’s borders, particularly among some US conservative figures. Republican Congressman Chris Smith, chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, has introduced a resolution urging the Trump administration to redesignate Nigeria as a “country of particular concern” (CPC) for religious freedom violations, a status previously assigned by Donald Trump late in his first term but revoked under Joe Biden in 2021. The Hudson Institute, a conservative Washington think-tank, has voiced support for this move. Nina Shea, senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, said at a congressional hearing in March that “placing Nigeria on the US’s short list of the world’s most egregious religious freedom violators is warranted.”

Despite these calls, Nigerian officials reject claims that Christians are being specifically targeted. The ministry of foreign affairs has denied allegations of religious targeting amid the violence, emphasising the complex nature of the conflicts. Confidence MacHarry, senior security analyst at Lagos-based SBM Intelligence, explained that “conflicts in Nigeria don’t always begin with religious motives... but once it turns into disagreement between ethnic groups, it very quickly involves religion. It becomes easy to lose sight of the bigger picture,” referring to the underlying resource competition. SBM has also highlighted that an influx of weapons has intensified the scale of the attacks.

The security challenges Nigeria faces are further compounded by structural issues within its security apparatus. Obasi of the International Crisis Group pointed out problems such as understaffing within the police and military, shortages of equipment, and slow implementation of reforms aimed at promoting ranching as an alternative to nomadic grazing. He warned of “continuous inertia” within the country’s governance that is giving rise to “explosive situations.”

Domestically, President Tinubu has faced criticism not only for the security lapse but also for his absence during a critical period. The president was abroad in Paris and London for three weeks as much of the recent violence occurred. Opposition figures, such as Atiku Abubakar, who was Tinubu’s main rival in the 2023 election and may contest again in 2027, condemned the president for “governing Nigeria in absentia as if from a holiday perch.”

The situation in northern Nigeria remains volatile, with the violence reflecting deep-rooted socio-economic and environmental issues intertwined with ethnic and religious tensions. The government’s efforts to restore peace continue amid broad scrutiny both at home and internationally.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/nigeria> - Describes ongoing violence in Nigeria's Northwest and Northcentral regions by armed groups, corroborating claims about herder-related conflicts and displacement.
* <https://acleddata.com/2024/04/16/a-decade-after-chibok-assessing-nigerias-regional-response-to-boko-haram/> - Provides context on Nigeria's security challenges, including declining violence trends, though recent data cited in the article suggests a resurgence in 2024.
* <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483> - Tracks violence across Nigeria, supporting the article's claims about regional instability and the complexity of conflict drivers (political, economic, religious).
* <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/nigeria> - Documents bandit-related killings and kidnappings in the Northwest, aligning with the article's description of non-state actor violence.
* <https://nigeria.fes.de/e/nigeria-violent-conflict-monthly-bulletin-may-2024-edition.html> - May 2024 bulletin details specific incident counts (94 across 25 states) and gendered impacts, corroborating the article's casualty figures and displacement claims.
* <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/nigeria> - Reiterates bandit violence patterns mentioned in the article, particularly in the Northwest, though the article focuses on north-central regions.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/3c3e579a-5538-486e-bab3-9023c85934e4> - Please view link - unable to able to access data