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COI QUERY

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Title	Security situation in Imo state
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Topic(s)	1. Security incidents in Imo state, particularly in Owerri 2. Incidents of targeting of Christians by non-state actors, including Boko Haram
Date of completion	12 September 2023
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Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	N/A

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Nigeria

Security situation in Imo state

1. Security incidents in Imo state, particularly in Owerri

According to sources, security and violence incidents have increased during the period covered by this query in the South East region of Nigeria, and particularly in Imo state,¹ which is among the states with the highest number of reported security events in the south of the country.²

The Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) published a compilation of data showing the number of reported incidents and fatalities per state in Nigeria, as documented by ACLED for 2022.³ According to the data, 171 incidents took place in Imo state, with 70 reporting the death of 166 people.⁴ Owerri is included among the affected locations.⁵ According to the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker, a database mapping political violence and 'violent incidents related to political, economic, and social grievances,' based on a weekly survey of Nigerian and international press reports, 218 deaths were reported between January 2022 and 1 July 2023 in Imo state.⁶ According to the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND), a non-profit organization that 'promotes peace and equitable economic growth in the Niger Delta,' based on its own monitoring of reported casualties, Imo state ranked 'very high' in lethal violence in the Niger Delta states during the first (January to March)⁷ and second (April to June) quarters of 2023.⁸ According to the same source, the main drivers of violence included organized crime and 'separatist agitation'.⁹ The same source indicated that, despite a decrease in lethal violence incidents, from 39 in the first quarter to 25 in the second quarter of 2023, there was an increase in conflict-related casualties, from 30 in the first quarter to 69 in the second quarter of 2023.¹⁰

¹ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary: Nigeria – January to June 2023, 30 June 2023, [url](#), p. 10; International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria's 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), p. 5

² PIND, Niger Delta Quarterly Conflict Tracker: 2023 Q2, 22 August 2023, [url](#), pp. 2, 9; FEWS NET, Nigeria: Food Security Outlook [June 2022 to January 2023], 8 July 2022, [url](#), p. 2

³ ACCORD, Nigeria, Year 2022: Update on incidents according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 12 April 2023, [url](#), pp. 4, 7

⁴ ACCORD, Nigeria, Year 2022: Update on incidents according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 12 April 2023, [url](#), p. 4

⁵ ACCORD, Nigeria, Year 2022: Update on incidents according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 12 April 2023, [url](#), p. 7

⁶ CFR, Nigeria Security Tracker, last updated 1 July 2023, [url](#)

⁷ PIND, Niger Delta Quarterly Conflict Tracker: 2023 Q1, 30 May 2023, [url](#), pp. 2, 9

⁸ PIND, Niger Delta Quarterly Conflict Tracker: 2023 Q2, 22 August 2023, [url](#), pp. 2, 9

⁹ PIND, Niger Delta Quarterly Conflict Tracker: 2023 Q1, 30 May 2023, [url](#), p. 9; PIND, Niger Delta Quarterly Conflict Tracker: 2023 Q2, 22 August 2023, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁰ PIND, Niger Delta Quarterly Conflict Tracker: 2023 Q2, 22 August 2023, [url](#), p. 9

Sources indicated that the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) or its armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), and other ‘unknown’ armed or criminal groups, are linked to security and violence incidents in the South East region including Imo state.¹¹ Sources reported that government and police authorities regularly accuse IPOB and ESN members for these incidents, with IPOB and ESN repeatedly denying these allegations.¹² According to the same sources, following the creation of ESN in December 2020, violent incidents and attacks increased, particularly against security forces and state facilities,¹³ with some of the assailants wearing IPOB and separatists’ insignia.¹⁴ It was also reported that criminal and armed groups not directly linked to the independence movement were also active in the South East and have carried out attacks.¹⁵ According to International Crisis Group, Imo state officials, including Governor Hope Uzodimma, accused the political opposition of staging attacks by deploying armed groups and individuals to ‘pretend to be IPOB members’.¹⁶ The same source indicated, however, that criminals ‘impersonating the separatists’ were responsible for some of the attacks.¹⁷

Sources noted that the heavy militarised security response by the Nigerian government was among the reasons for the escalating security situation in South East regions, including Imo state.¹⁸ Amnesty International reported that during military operations against the ESN in the South East, security forces committed human rights violations.¹⁹ For instance, according to media reports, on 17 April 2022, soldiers of the Nigerian army opened fire on civilians at Orlu Local Government Area (LGA), Imo State, resulting in the death of around four people.²⁰

In 2021, a state-sponsored vigilante group, the Ebubeagu, was created in the South East region, and operates mainly in Imo and Ebonyi states.²¹ According to International Crisis Group, Ebubeagu have operated along with security forces against armed groups in the region, but with limited results.²² Sources noted that Ebubeagu members have committed multiple human rights abuses.²³ For instance, in July 2022, a group of men returning from a

¹¹ CSIS, Identity, Insecurity, and Institutions in the 2023 Nigerian Elections, 23 February 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria’s 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 5, 19

¹² Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary: Nigeria – January to June 2023, 30 June 2023, [url](#), p. 10; International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria’s 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 5, 19

¹³ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary: Nigeria – January to June 2023, 30 June 2023, [url](#), p. 10; International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria’s 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁴ International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria’s 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁵ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary: Nigeria – January to June 2023, 30 June 2023, [url](#), p. 10; International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria’s 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁶ International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria’s 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), p. 19

¹⁷ International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria’s 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁸ CSIS, Identity, Insecurity, and Institutions in the 2023 Nigerian Elections, 23 February 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria’s 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁹ AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/23 – Nigeria, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

²⁰ Guardian (The), Soldiers allegedly open fire on civilians in Imo, 19 April 2022, [url](#); HumAngle, #OrlulsBleeding: Nigerian Soldiers Allegedly Open Fire On Civilians In Southeast, 18 April 2022, [url](#)

²¹ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 38

²² International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria’s 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), p. 19

²³ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 38; AI, Nigeria: Extrajudicial executions under the guise of tackling insecurity in the South East must stop, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

wedding were shot and killed allegedly by members of the Ebubeagu in Imo state,²⁴ with casualties ranging from 7 to 14 people.²⁵ According to USDOS, Governor Uzodinma denied Ebubeagu's participation, and during 2022 there were no reports on the investigation and prosecution in relation to the incident.²⁶

Security incidents, as reported by sources, include:

- On 3 January 2022, gunmen attacked the palace of traditional ruler E. C. Okeke in Ezioha Amaifeke, Orlu Local Government Area, Imo State. One person was reportedly killed and many others injured.²⁷
- On 5 January 2022, residents of Imo state accused security forces of killing 25 civilians during an operation and clashes with IPOB's armed wing.²⁸
- On 20 February 2022, gunmen attacked the Isu Police Division in Imo State, killing two police officers. The police blamed the attack on members of the IPOB and the ESN.²⁹
- On 19 March 2022, unidentified armed men carried out an attack at a police station in Owerri West Local Government Area, Imo State. The attack resulted in the death of two police officers, although the police claimed that there were no casualties.³⁰
- On 19 March 2022, gunmen attacked the house of Igbo leader George Obiozor, in the Oru East Local Government Area, Imo State, by throwing explosive devices. No fatalities were reported.³¹
- On 29 April 2022, two members of the Nigerian army were murdered by gunmen in Imo State. The Nigerian army accused members of the IPOB and ESN for the incident.³²
- On 1 August 2022, gunmen attacked the Orogwe community in Owerri West Local Government Area, Imo State, killing seven security guards.³³
- On 5 August 2022, gunmen attacked a police station in Agwa, Oguta Local Government Area, Imo State, using Improvised Explosives Devices (IEDs), which resulted in the killing of 4 police officers.³⁴
- On 3 November 2022, security forces raided the Amangwu town in the Ohafia area, Imo state, allegedly in search of separatists. Local residents reported that soldiers killed about 10 people.³⁵

²⁴ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 38; AI, Nigeria: Extrajudicial executions under the guise of tackling insecurity in the South East must stop, 19 July 2022, [url](#)

²⁵ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 38

²⁶ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 38 – 39

²⁷ Daily Trust, One shot dead as police foil attempt to burn down Imo palace, 3 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁸ International Crisis Group, Tracking Conflict Worldwide: Nigeria [January 2022 – August 2023], n.d., [url](#)

²⁹ Premium Times, Gunmen kill 2 officers, attack Imo police station, 23 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁰ Daily Post, Tension in Imo community as gunmen attack police station, kill two police officers, 19 March 2022, [url](#)

³¹ Punch, Gunmen raze Ohanaeze President's country home in Imo, 19 March 2022, [url](#)

³² Sahara Reporters, IPOB Responsible For Killing, Beheading Of Military Couple In Imo – Nigerian Army, 3 May 2022, [url](#)

³³ Premium Times, Gunmen kill seven security guards in Imo, 3 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁴ Vanguard, Gunmen bomb police station, kill 4 cops in Imo, 6 August 2022, [url](#)

³⁵ International Crisis Group, Tracking Conflict Worldwide: Nigeria [January 2022 – August 2023], n.d., [url](#)

- On 14 November 2022, unidentified men attacked traditional ruler Eze Ignitius Asor and two of his associates in the city of Oguta, Imo state, as well as the office of a local civil defence militia, killing at least one person.³⁶
- Vanguard reported that on 11 January 2023, Nigerian security forces killed five IPOB militants in Mbaitoli, Imo state.³⁷
- On 18 January 2023, the police reported that during a gun fight in Agwa, Oguta Local Government Area, Imo state, police forces killed three suspected IPOB members who were allegedly heading to attack the local police station. One police officer was reportedly injured.³⁸
- On 27 March 2023, gunmen killed three personnel of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in Obiangwu Community, Ngor Okpala Local Government Area, Imo state.³⁹
- In April 2023, a woman, her daughter and her baby were killed by stray bullets allegedly fired by NSCDC officers in Owerri.⁴⁰
- On 6 and 21 April 2023, gunmen allegedly linked to IPOB killed at least six policemen in Aboh Mbaise and Ngor Okpala areas, respectively, in Imo state. IPOB denied responsibility.⁴¹
- On 17 July 2023, Leadership News reported that unidentified gunmen killed two traditional rulers from Aboh and Ezinihitte Mbaise local government areas of Imo State in separate attacks.⁴²
- On 8 and 9 July 2023, gunmen, enforcing a stay-at-home order in the South East zone, raided a popular area in Akwakuma, Owerri North, Imo state. During the incident two civilians were reportedly killed.⁴³

Security incidents related to the 2023 elections

Sources reported that prior to the presidential elections in February 2023, security incidents and attacks of electoral and politically motivated violence increased in the South East, particularly in Imo state.⁴⁴ Security incidents in Imo state included attacks against Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) facilities and the targeting of politicians.⁴⁵ The Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) noted in a 2023 article on elections in Nigeria that, according to estimations, 20 percent of all attacks against INEC facilities took place in Imo

³⁶ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary; Nigeria – July to December 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 11

³⁷ Vanguard, Bloody January: Nigeria loses 508 citizens to violence, accidents, others in 19 days, 21 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁸ Vanguard, Police kill 3 hoodlums, one officer injured in Imo, 19 January 2023, [url](#)

³⁹ Sahara Reporters, Gunmen Kill Three Nigerian Corps, NSCDC Officers In Fresh Attacks In Imo State, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰ PIND, Niger Delta Quarterly Conflict Tracker: 2023 Q2, 22 August 2023, [url](#), p. 9

⁴¹ International Crisis Group, Tracking Conflict Worldwide: Nigeria [January 2022 – August 2023], n.d., [url](#)

⁴² Leadership News, JUST-IN: Gunmen Murder 2 Monarchs In Imo, 17 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴³ Guardian (The), Soldiers patrol Owerri as residents comply with sit-at-home, 11 July 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴ CSIS, Identity, Insecurity, and Institutions in the 2023 Nigerian Elections, 23 February 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria's 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 18 – 19

⁴⁵ International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria's 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 18 – 19; Counter Extremism Project, Nigeria: Extremism and Terrorism, n.d., [url](#)

state.⁴⁶ According to International Crisis Group, these attacks were carried out by IPOB separatists, or by armed groups passing by IPOB.⁴⁷

The following are among the security incidents reported by sources on the 2023 elections:

- On 2 December 2022, gunmen attacked the INEC office in Orlu Local Government Area, Imo state, throwing IEDs and shooting at the office. Imo police accused members of the IPOB for the attack and indicated that no casualties were reported.⁴⁸
- On 4 December 2022, unidentified armed persons attacked the INEC office in Oru West Local Government Area, Imo State. No fatalities were reported.⁴⁹
- On 12 December 2022, gunmen bombed the INEC office in Owerri, Imo state. According to a police statement, the attack resulted in the death of a police officer and the injury of another, and that three of the attackers were 'neutralized' and two arrested.⁵⁰
- On 16 December 2022, gunmen killed the Labour Party candidate for Onuimo Local Government Area in the Imo State House of Assembly, Christopher Elehu, setting his house and property on fire.⁵¹
- On 3 January 2023, gunmen bombed a convoy that was carrying the former state governor. The attack took place in Ehime Mbano Local Government Area, Imo state. Four police officers were killed.⁵²
- On 22 January 2023, an armed group abducted and later beheaded Christopher Ohizu, the local government administrator of Ideato North Local Government Area of Imo State. In a video circulated in social media, the armed group identified as Biafra agitators, but claimed not to belong to the ESN nor the IPOB.⁵³

2. Incidents of targeting of Christians by non-state actors, including Boko Haram

Information on incidents of targeting of Christians by non-state actors, including Boko Haram, in Imo state was scarce among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

A report by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) indicated that, according to police statements, four Catholic nuns were kidnapped in Imo State in August 2022 and released safe three days later. During another incident, a Catholic priest and a

⁴⁶ CSIS, Identity, Insecurity, and Institutions in the 2023 Nigerian Elections, 23 February 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷ International Crisis Group, Mitigating Risks of Violence in Nigeria's 2023 Elections, 10 February 2023, [url](#), pp. 18 – 19

⁴⁸ Guardian (The), Police repel attack on INEC office in Imo, 3 December 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁹ Premium Times, Another INEC office attacked – seventh in four months, 5 December 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁰ Reuters, Gunmen attack electoral office in southeast Nigeria, kill policeman, 12 December 2022, [url](#)

⁵¹ Punch, Suspected assassins murder Imo Assembly LP candidate, 16 December 2022, [url](#)

⁵² Sahara Reporters, Gunmen Attack Former Imo State Governor, Ohakim's Convoy, Kill Four Policemen, 3 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵³ Premium Times, Gunmen behead council chairman in Imo, 23 January 2023, [url](#)



seminarian were kidnapped by unidentified persons on the Okigwe-Umunneochi road between Imo and Abia states, with both being released following a ransom payment.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes Summary; Nigeria – July to December 2022, 1 January 2023, [url](#), p. 5

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Amnesty International (AI); ECOLnet; European Union – EUAA COI Portal; Freedom House; International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH); Norway – Landinfo; United Nations – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); VOA Africa;