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NEWS SITUATION TRACKING - NIGERIA

ESCALATING ARMED HERDER ATTACKS IN BENUE STATE, NORTH-CENTRAL REGION OF NIGERIA

Vol. 2

Location : BENUE STATE, NIGERIA.

Issue: 174 people killed, over 38 people injured, 19 people abducted from February 5 to May 7, 2025.

Date: May 9, 2025

COMMUNITY PROFILING

CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS

INCIDENT PROFILING

Population: Benue State currently has a population of 6,618,526.²

Basic Demography and Geography of Hotspots:

Benue State, located in North-Central Nigeria, is bordered by Nasarawa to the north, Taraba to the east, and Cross River to the south, with Enugu and Kogi to the west. Known as the "Food Basket of the Nation," its fertile plains and the River Benue support robust agriculture. The state has an estimated population of 6.62 million people and comprises 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs). The Tiv, Idoma, and Iggede are the dominant ethnic groups. Makurdi, the state capital, lies on the southern bank of the Benue River. Benue's geography strengthens its role in food production and regional connectivity.

Ethnicity: Benue State is predominantly inhabited by the Tiv, Idoma, and Iggede ethnic groups, each with distinct languages and cultural heritage.

Direct Actors:

Armed Fulani militias, indigenous/local collaborators.

Affected Persons:

Community residents including farmers, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), youths, children, and the elderly, security operatives.

Interested Actors:

Benue State Government, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), Socio-Cultural Organizations including Mdzough U Tiv, Idoma National Forum, and Ominy'Iggede, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and

Between February and May 2025, Benue State witnessed a devastating series of violent attacks perpetrated by suspected armed herders. These attacks, concentrated in Local Government Areas (LGAs) such as Otukpo, Kwande, Ukum, Katsina-Ala, Gwer West, Logo, Opokwu, Gwer East, Makurdi, and Agatu, resulted in a total of 174 deaths, thirty-eight (38) injuries, and nineteen (19) abductions. Most casualties were male (125), while females accounted for forty-nine (49) underscoring the direct targeting of men in roles such as farmers, hunters, and security agents. The pattern of attacks included killings, abductions, arson, and widespread destruction of property and farmlands.

The violence began on February 5, 2025, when suspected armed herders clashed with local hunters in Okpomaju Village, Otukpo LGA, killing three and injuring one.³ Two days later, the same community witnessed a retaliatory attack that left five hunters dead.⁴ In Kwande LGA, sixteen people were killed along Kashimbial Road on February 15,⁵ followed by another three deaths in Boaguwa Community on February 17.⁶ On March 1, six residents were killed in twin attacks in Ukum LGA.⁷ On March 8, eleven people were also killed, seven injured, and multiple homes razed in Katsina-Ala LGA by the same category of assailants.⁸ In Gwer West LGA, three operatives of the Benue State Civil Protection Guards were killed on March 10 in an attack by suspected armed herders, sparking violent demonstrations during which a council secretariat, traditional palace, and homes were set ablaze.⁹ Meanwhile, on March 19 in Tombo Ward, Buruku LGA, a shootout between police and a militia group linked to armed herders resulted in thirteen deaths, including a police officer.¹⁰ That same day, nine people—among them two Nigerian Army personnel—were killed in Jato-Aka, Kwande LGA.¹¹ On April 28, a resident was reportedly killed by the suspected armed herders at Ojoga Community in Icahama Area, Opokwu LGA. Furthermore, at Olena Community in Otukpo LGA, one person was killed and one other abducted in an attack by the suspects on March 30.¹²

¹ <https://atiterkula.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/wpid-benue.png>

² <https://naijadetails.com/benue-state-population/>

³ https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/02/benue-local-hunters-armed-herdsmen-clash-claims-3-lives-in-otukpo-2/#google_vignette

⁴ <https://punchng.com/armed-herders-kill-five-benue-hunters-in-fresh-attack/>

⁵ <https://punchng.com/suspected-herders-kill-19-in-fresh-benue-attack/>

⁶ <https://punchng.com/suspected-herders-kill-19-in-fresh-benue-attack/>

⁷ <https://punchng.com/gunmen-kill-six-in-benue-community-raid-others-missing/>

⁸ <https://punchng.com/15-killed-in-herders-renewed-attack-in-benue/>

⁹ <https://dailypost.ng/2025/03/13/benue-police-arrest-two-over-ig-chaos/>

¹⁰ <https://punchng.com/police-confirm-death-of-inspector-12-gunmen-in-fierce-battle/>

¹¹ <https://saharareporters.com/2025/03/20/breaking-residents-flee-benue-community-fresh-herdsmen-attack-leaves-two-soldiers-seven>

¹² <https://dailypost.ng/2025/04/01/residents-flee-as-herdsmen-launch-fresh-attack-on-benue-community/>

advocacy groups, Federal Government of Nigeria, Nigerian Army (NA), Nigeria Police Force, National Security Corps (NSCDC), Department of State Services (DSS), Nigerian Air Force (NAF), Benue State Livestock Guards (BLSG), Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Benue State Peace Commission

April marked a peak in violence. On April 3, two individuals were killed and fourteen (14) abducted by suspected armed herders in Otukpo LGA.^{13 14} A day later, a security guard was murdered at Otobi Dam, also by suspected herders.¹⁵ April 9 saw three deaths and arson in Mbasombo, Gwer East LGA¹⁶, while April 13 brought more fatalities and looting in Kwande LGA.¹⁷ On April 15, suspected armed herders killed eleven people, injured five, and burned fifty houses in Otobi Community, Otukpo LGA.¹⁸ The deadliest attacks occurred on April 17, when fifty-six people, including women and children, were killed and twenty-five others wounded in raids on Ukum¹⁹ and Logo LGAs²⁰.

As the attacks continued, security operatives launched a series of countermeasures and operations. On January 10, 2024, police operatives arrested an illicit firearm manufacturer in Daudu, Guma LGA, and recovered six homemade guns. On February 4, 2025, the Benue State Civil Protection Guard (BSCPG) apprehended four suspected armed militiamen at Aliade, Gwer East LGA, who were found with two firearms and ammunition. They claimed to be private security personnel. On April 6, three suspected kidnappers affiliated with armed herders were arrested in Otukpo LGA. The crackdown on small arms and light weapons (SALW) continued with notable success. On January 11, two gunrunners were arrested in Mbaafa, Kwande LGA, with ten firearms. A major raid on April 16 in Shangev Tiev, Konshisha LGA, uncovered an illegal arms factory linked to armed militias, with police recovering an AK-47, ammunition, and welding equipment. These developments reflect efforts to stifle the logistics networks supporting armed criminal groups.

The Nigerian Army was also active. On May 6, troops intercepted livestock reportedly rustled by suspected armed herders along the Naka-Adoka Road, as part of a larger security sweep aimed at weakening herder militias' operational capacity. On April 22, the conflict spilled into neighbouring Taraba State, where an armed gang—also suspected of ties to herder groups—killed a Fulani herder and rustled 40 cows in Kogon Dutse, Karim Lamido LGA. Community responses intensified as well. On April 1, thousands of Benue residents staged a peaceful demonstration, demanding decisive government action to close security gaps and restore peace to affected communities. The protest highlighted widespread public frustration over perceived state inaction.²¹

The final weeks of April and early May continued to see bloodshed. On May 5, suspected armed herders killed four individuals, including a woman, in Logo LGA. That same day in Makurdi LGA, a police officer and another man were killed, with a 12-year-old suspect arrested in connection to the attack. On May 7, the traditional ruler of Odugbeho, Agatu LGA, was assassinated on his farm, further underscoring the systematic targeting of community leaders by armed herders.^{22 23 24}

These incidents reflect the escalating security crisis in Benue State. Despite proactive responses—arrests, weapons seizures, and military deployments—the intensity, coordination, and scale of the violence suggest that suspected armed herders continue to pose a major threat to peace and stability in the state. Nonetheless, the documented

¹³ <https://dailypost.ng/2025/04/02/benue-outrage-as-herdsman-murders-man-hours-after-child-died-at-birth/>

¹⁴ <https://saharareporters.com/2025/04/04/gunmen-attack-benue-links-bus-kill-driver-passenger-abduct-13-other-travellers>

¹⁵ <https://dailypost.ng/2025/04/05/suspected-herdsmen-attack-benue-again-kill-guard/>

¹⁶ <https://punchng.com/suspected-herders-kill-three-in-benue-2/>

¹⁷ <https://dailypost.ng/2025/04/13/benue-insecurity-trader-housewife-okada-rider-killed-by-suspected-herdsmen/>

¹⁸ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/04/benue-13-killed-50-houses-burnt-in-otobi-akpa-attack/>

¹⁹ <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/metro/easter-attacks-in-benue-alia-confirm-56-bodies-recovered/>

²⁰ <https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/metro/easter-attacks-in-benue-alia-confirm-56-bodies-recovered/>

²¹ <https://saharareporters.com/2025/04/01/breaking-protest-erupts-benue-state-over-constant-herdsmen-killings-residents-chant-we>

²² <https://punchng.com/gunmen-intercept-commercial-bus-kill-two-kidnap-four-in-benue/>

²³ <https://x.com/ZagazOlaMakama/status/1920112050077942018>

²⁴ <https://x.com/ZagazOlaMakama/status/1920107801428324538>

arrests and crackdowns are early signs of a gradually evolving response by both state actors and affected communities.

RISK ANALYSIS

- Persistent armed attacks by suspected herders continue to cause significant casualties including the death of 174 people, injury to 38 others and the abduction of 19 others, affecting both civilians and security personnel during the reporting period. This ongoing violence undermines public safety and fuels instability across the state. Evidence of firearms seizures and the discovery of illegal arms manufacturing facilities suggest an alarming militarization of herder militias and affiliated groups, signalling their increasing operational capacity. Additionally, the targeted killings of traditional rulers and security personnel point to a strategic attempt to weaken local governance structures and cripple enforcement mechanisms. Remote and rural areas in Benue remain under-policed, allowing these actors to operate with impunity and perpetuate violence. Furthermore, the frequent confrontations between herders and local defence actors, such as hunters and vigilantes, risk escalating into prolonged cycles of retaliatory violence, further complicating the security landscape.
- The violence has triggered widespread displacement, with many families forced to flee their homes under threat of attack or arson. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that 130,350 people were displaced from July 2024 to February 2025 within the State²⁵ with hundred more trickling into IDP camps up until May 2025. This displacement causes long-term psychological trauma and disrupts education, livelihoods, and community cohesion. The abduction of women and girls during attacks raises concerns over gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, and human trafficking, making women and children especially vulnerable. In many affected communities, poor road infrastructure and insecurity hinder the timely provision of emergency medical care, exacerbating the impact of injuries sustained during these violent incidents.
- The ongoing attacks, which often target farming communities, threaten Benue State's reputation as the "Food Basket of the Nation." The disruption of agricultural activities not only impacts local food security but also has national implications. The destruction of homes, schools, farms, and public infrastructure significantly reduces community resilience and impedes economic recovery efforts. As the violence persists, communities face increased poverty levels and are becoming increasingly reliant on overstretched humanitarian agencies for survival and basic services.
- Public confidence in the government and security institutions is waning due to perceived delays in intervention and ineffective protection mechanisms. This erosion of trust has prompted some communities to take security into their own hands, forming armed vigilante groups that could spiral into new threats and further destabilize the region. The proximity of many attacks to state borders, especially with Taraba and Ebonyi, raises the risk of cross-border hostilities and inter-ethnic reprisals, which could escalate into broader regional conflict if not contained.
- Insecurity across affected LGAs continues to limit access for humanitarian workers, journalists, and emergency responders, thereby delaying lifesaving aid and limiting accurate reporting. Human rights monitors and field-based staff also face personal safety risks, particularly in volatile zones where combatants may target or harass them. Additionally, in tense operational environments, there is a high risk of misidentification, where responders may be mistaken for armed actors or sympathizers, especially during crackdowns or raids by security forces.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Benue State Police Command and the Nigerian Army should continue to intensify coordinated security patrols and establish permanent Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) in conflict-prone LGAs such as Ukum, Gwer West, Logo, and Otukpo. This should be complemented by the expansion of intelligence-gathering operations through the deployment of trained local informants and the activation of community-led early warning systems. To further enhance the responsiveness of security forces, the deployment of rapid response teams and aerial surveillance capabilities from the Nigerian Air Force is essential. Additionally, the National Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) should deepen its collaboration with local vigilante groups and Civil Protection Guards to monitor rural areas, ensuring their efforts align with legal frameworks and prevent the misuse of firearms. As part of broader efforts to disrupt the cycle of armed violence, the Benue State Police Command and the Nigerian Customs Service should also intensify operations to identify and dismantle illegal firearms manufacturing sites and smuggling routes, particularly along state and international borders. These enforcement measures should be paired with community engagement strategies, including a well-publicized, incentivized arms surrender program that offers a peaceful avenue for individuals and communities to turn in illegal weapons in exchange for rehabilitation or livelihood support.

²⁵ https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11461/files/reports/Nigeria%20-%20IDP%20ATLAS%20-%20NNWC%20R16%20February%202025_.pdf?iframe=true

- The Benue State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) should lead the establishment of mobile relief centres to provide immediate access to food, shelter, healthcare, and psychosocial services for displaced populations, especially in areas repeatedly targeted by attacks. These agencies should also develop a Displacement and Victim Registry to facilitate coordinated, needs-based humanitarian support. International humanitarian actors and UN agencies such as UNHCR, IOM, and UNICEF are encouraged to deploy trauma-informed mobile response units, particularly focused on supporting women, children, and the elderly. These agencies should also ensure the provision of safe spaces, distribute dignity kits to female survivors, and create referral pathways for legal aid and mental health services.
- To address herder-farmer tensions in Benue State, the Benue State Peace Commission and local authorities should establish ongoing inter-community dialogue platforms, supported by the deployment of Peace Ambassadors for early mediation in conflict-prone LGAs. Traditional and religious leaders should promote peace through cultural and faith-based forums, while civil society organizations train youth and informal security actors in nonviolent conflict resolution and document human rights violations. Concurrently, the state government, with National Assembly representatives, should review and strengthen enforcement of the Anti-Open Grazing Law, integrating practical livestock management and supported by rural development and community policing under the State Security Trust Fund. The Ministry of Justice and law enforcement should ensure timely and transparent prosecution of offenders to reinforce accountability and restore public trust.