

**PSJ-UK/iNSDEC QUARTERLY  
INSECURITY REPORT**

**OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2025**

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## **Executive Summary:**

The fourth quarter of 2025 (October–December) presented a complex and evolving security landscape across Nigeria, characterized by a significant tactical shift by non-state actors from high-lethality kinetic warfare to large-scale kidnapping for ransom. While the quarter recorded the lowest fatality figure of the year (423 deaths), it simultaneously witnessed the highest number of abductions (1,205 victims), representing a 58% increase from the previous quarter. This inverse relationship suggests that as security forces intensified kinetic operations, criminal and insurgent networks adapted by pivoting toward human capital exploitation as a primary instrument of coercion and revenue generation.

Geographically, the North Central zone bore the brunt of this abduction crisis, accounting for 648 victims, with Niger State alone recording 431 abductions. The North West remained the epicenter of banditry, recording 480 abductions and 119 fatalities, with Zamfara State accounting for 253 kidnapping victims. The North East showed signs of relative stabilization compared to mid-year volatility, recording 56 deaths and 36 abductions. Southern regions recorded comparatively lower figures, though emerging threats were evident: the South West recorded 9 abductions (concentrated in Oyo State), the South South reported 27 abductions (predominantly in Edo State), and the South East recorded 20 fatalities and 5 abductions.

Analysis of perpetrator dynamics identified bandit groups as the most consistent threat actor, responsible for 92 incidents (45.54%) during the quarter. Armed gunmen accounted for 75 incidents (37.13%), while Fulani militia exhibited significant volatility, surging to 19 incidents in November before declining sharply. Jihadist factions (ISWAP and Boko Haram) recorded minimal activity, confirming their degraded but not eliminated operational capacity. These patterns underscore the adaptability of Nigeria's threat networks and highlight the urgent need for security responses that are equally dynamic, intelligence-led, and regionally tailored.

## **Introduction:**

The October–December 2025 edition of the Nigeria Security Watch Quarterly Bulletin provides a data-driven overview of insecurity incidents recorded across Nigeria during the final quarter of the year. Compiled by Nigeria Security Watch and published under the auspices of Peace and Security Journal UK (PSJ-UK) and the International Network for Strategic and Developmental Evaluation (INSDEC). This quarterly report presents a data-driven overview of violent incidents recorded across the country during the reporting period, highlighting patterns of fatalities, injuries, and abductions as well as the primary actors responsible for these incidents.

During the quarter under review, Nigeria continued to experience diverse and persistent security threats across multiple geopolitical zones. Data compiled from open-source monitoring and field-validated reports indicate that a total of 202 security incidents were recorded nationwide between October and December. These incidents collectively resulted in 423 deaths, 71 persons injured, and 1,205 individuals abducted, reflecting the continued severity of organized criminal violence, insurgency, and communal conflicts affecting communities across the federation.

The distribution of incidents demonstrates significant geographical variation in the intensity and nature of insecurity. The North Central zone recorded the highest impact in terms of casualties and abductions, accounting for 221 deaths, 35 injuries, and 648 abductions, highlighting the sustained activities of armed groups and communal militias in the region. The North West followed with 119 deaths, 29 injuries, and 480 abductions, largely driven by banditry-related attacks and mass kidnappings. In the North East, where insurgent activities remain present, 56 deaths, 3 injuries, and 36 abductions were documented. Comparatively lower levels of violence were recorded in the southern regions, with the South East reporting 20 deaths and 5 abductions, the South South recording 1 death and 27 abductions, and the South West experiencing 6 deaths, 1 injury, and 9 abductions during the period.

Analysis of perpetrators indicates that bandit groups constituted the most active violent actors, responsible for 92 incidents (45.54%) recorded during the quarter. This was followed by armed gunmen, who accounted for 75 incidents (37.13%), while Fulani militia groups were linked to 28 incidents (13.86%). Insurgent groups such as ISWAP and Boko Haram were responsible for a smaller proportion of incidents, accounting for 1.98% and 1.49% respectively. Monthly trends further show fluctuations in incident frequency, with 80 incidents recorded in

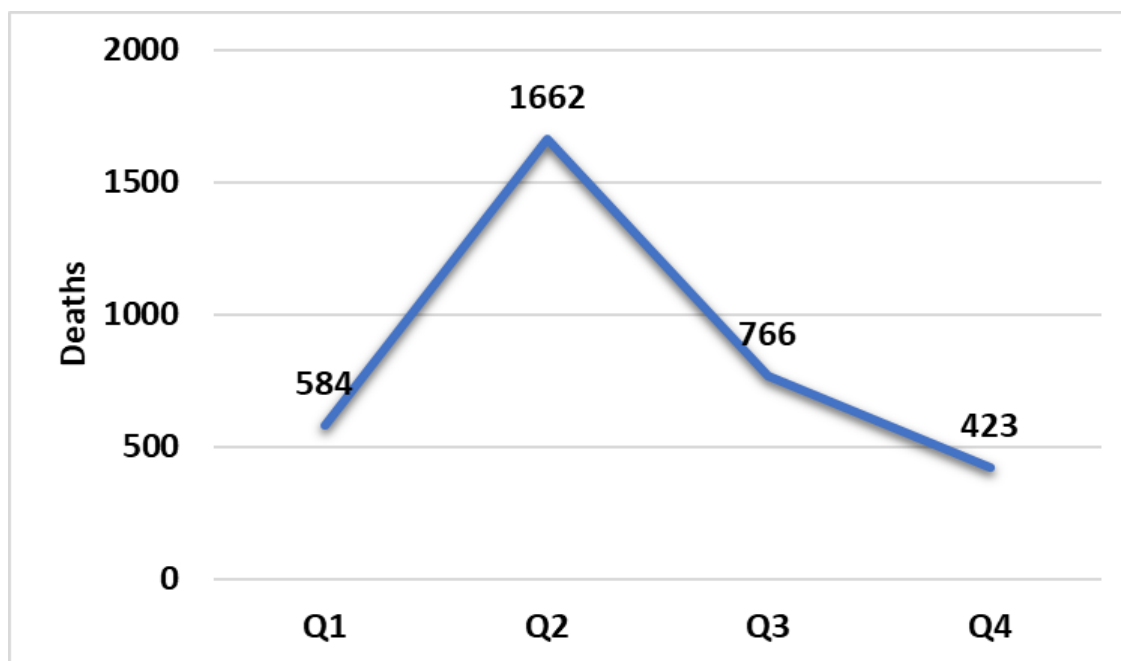
November, 72 in October, and 50 in December, indicating a gradual decline toward the end of the quarter.

This quarterly assessment aims to provide policymakers, security stakeholders, researchers, and development partners with an evidence-based overview of evolving insecurity patterns across Nigeria. By systematically documenting incidents and identifying dominant threat actors and regional trends, the report contributes to improved situational awareness and supports the development of targeted security interventions, conflict prevention strategies, and policy responses to address Nigeria’s complex security landscape.

### **Crises Report:**

#### **Month-by-Month Analysis (Deaths)**

An analysis of the quarterly fatality figures recorded by the Nigeria Security Watch monitoring framework reveals significant fluctuations in the scale of violence across the year. The data indicate varying intensities of insecurity, with notable spikes and subsequent declines in the number of reported deaths across the four quarters.



**Figure 1: Comparison between Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 Death Figures (iNSDEC, 2025)**

In Quarter 1 (Q1), a total of 584 deaths were documented nationwide. This period reflected a moderate level of violent incidents across several regions, particularly in areas affected by

banditry, communal conflicts, and insurgent activities. While insecurity remained widespread, the overall fatality level during this quarter was comparatively lower than what was later observed in the middle of the year.

The situation escalated significantly in Quarter 2 (Q2), which recorded the highest number of fatalities (1,662 deaths) during the year. This sharp increase represents a substantial surge in violent attacks, suggesting intensified armed group activities, large-scale attacks on communities, and heightened clashes involving non-state armed actors and local militias across multiple geopolitical zones. The Q2 figures account for the peak of insecurity-related fatalities within the reporting year. Following this spike, Quarter 3 (Q3) recorded a considerable decline in fatalities, with 766 deaths reported. Although the number remained relatively high, it represented a significant reduction compared with the extreme levels observed in Q2. The decrease may reflect intensified security operations, seasonal variations in conflict dynamics, or temporary disruptions in the operational capacity of armed groups.

In Quarter 4 (Q4), the downward trend continued, with 423 deaths recorded. This represents the lowest quarterly fatality figure of the year, indicating a further reduction in the scale of lethal violence during the final quarter. A closer examination of the fourth quarter reveals relatively consistent fatality levels across the three months of the reporting period. In total, 423 deaths were documented between October and December 2025. October recorded the highest number of fatalities in the quarter, with 147 deaths, accounting for approximately 34.7% of Q4 fatalities. The relatively higher figure in October suggests that the quarter began with continued violent incidents across several regions before gradually stabilizing in the following months.

In November, fatalities declined slightly to 142 deaths, representing 33.6% of the quarterly total. This modest reduction indicates a marginal improvement in the security situation compared to the previous month, although the difference between October and November remained relatively small. December recorded 134 deaths, the lowest monthly figure within the quarter, accounting for 31.7% of Q4 fatalities. The decrease of 13 deaths compared to October and 8 deaths compared to November suggests a gradual downward trend in fatal incidents toward the end of the year. Overall, the quarterly comparison highlights Q2 as the most lethal period of the year, accounting for a disproportionately high number of fatalities, while Q4 recorded the lowest death toll. The pattern demonstrates the dynamic and fluctuating nature of Nigeria's security landscape, emphasizing the importance of sustained monitoring and targeted security interventions to prevent future surges in violence.

**Table 1: Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 Comparison of Records of Deaths across Major States**

<b>States</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>
<b>Benue</b>	61	579	36	23
<b>Plateau</b>	131	243	162	50
<b>Sokoto</b>	7	164	30	24
<b>Zamfara</b>	44	114	122	41
<b>Borno</b>	42	107	77	23

**Source: iNSDEC, 2025**

The fiscal year across Nigeria’s high-conflict zones was defined by a massive surge in fatalities during Q2, particularly in Benue State, which saw an unprecedented 849% increase (61 to 579 deaths) due to intensified militia activity. Plateau State followed a similar trajectory, peaking at 243 deaths in the same period, while Zamfara exhibited the most sustained volatility by maintaining high fatality counts through Q3 (122). Collectively, these figures highlight the Middle Belt and North West as the primary theaters of lethal violence, significantly outpacing the North East's casualty rates in the first half of the year.

By the final quarter (Q4), a notable de-escalation in kinetic fatalities occurred across all major states, with Benue and Borno both dropping to yearly lows of 23 deaths. While this reduction in loss of life is a positive indicator for regional stability, the broader data suggests a tactical pivot by non-state actors. The transition from high-fatality encounters to high-volume abductions totaling 1,205 victims in Q4 indicates that while the lethality of attacks decreased, the economic incentive for kidnapping remains the dominant security challenge for the federation.

### Month-by-Month Analysis (Abductions)

The fourth quarter of 2025 recorded the highest number of abductions of any quarter in the year; with a staggering 1,205 victims reported between October and December. This figure represents a 58% increase from the previous quarter (Q3: 762) and more than double the number recorded in Q1 (563). The escalation underscores a disturbing tactical shift by perpetrators toward kidnapping as a primary instrument of coercion, revenue generation, and territorial destabilisation.

While fatalities remained a concern, the abduction epidemic emerged as the dominant feature of Nigeria's security landscape in Q4, with profound implications for civilian safety, economic activity, and psychological wellbeing across affected communities. The fourth quarter of 2025 witnessed a marked escalation in abduction incidents across Nigeria, with each month presenting distinct patterns of criminal activity. October recorded the highest monthly figure of the quarter, driven primarily by a catastrophic 431 abductions in Niger State alone, as the North Central zone recorded 663 victims in total largely attributed to bandit operations along the Kaduna-Niger axis and mass kidnappings in Kogi (110) and Kwara (88). November maintained this elevated trajectory, though the epicentre shifted to the North West, where Zamfara State recorded 121 abductions and Sokoto 59, with bandits responsible for 35 incidents, followed by gunmen (21) and Fulani militia (19). December saw a slight moderation in figures but confirmed the persistence of the threat through the festive season, with bandits accounting for 29 incidents and gunmen for 17, demonstrating that criminal networks operated without respite during the holiday period. Throughout the quarter, a clear geographic pattern emerged: October was dominated by the North Central crisis, November by North West operations, and December by sustained but slightly reduced activity across both regions, reflecting the mobility and adaptability of perpetrator networks.

**Table 1: Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 Comparison of Records of Abductions across Major States**

States	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>Benue</b>	6	48	8	12
<b>Imo</b>	2	28	3	4

<b>Katsina</b>	60	47	217	23
<b>Zamfara</b>	112	319	261	253
<b>Borno</b>	-	10	2	30
<b>Kogi</b>	11	24	31	82
<b>Kwara</b>	-	19	38	98
<b>Kaduna</b>	170	13	22	72
<b>Enugu</b>	30	10	-	-
<b>Abuja</b>	18	14	-	14

Zamfara State remained the epicentre of kidnapping operations throughout the year, recording a cumulative total of 945 abductions, with consistently high figures across all four quarters (peaking at 319 in Q2). Katsina State experienced the most dramatic volatility, surging to 217 abductions in Q3 before plummeting to 23 in Q4, suggesting either concentrated operational campaigns or tactical redeployments. The most concerning trajectory emerged in the North Central zone, where Kwara State recorded progressive quarterly increases from zero in Q1 to 98 in Q4 a 416% rise from Q2. Similarly, Kogi State rose steadily from 11 in Q1 to 82 in Q4, representing a 645% increase over the year. These patterns signal the geographic expansion of kidnapping networks into previously less-affected areas.

Kaduna State exhibited a bimodal pattern, with 170 abductions in Q1, a sharp decline in Q2 and Q3, before rebounding to 72 in Q4, reflecting the cyclical nature of operations along the Kaduna-Abuja corridor. Borno State recorded minimal activity for most of the year but saw an uptick to 30 in Q4, warranting monitoring for potential tactical shifts by insurgent groups.

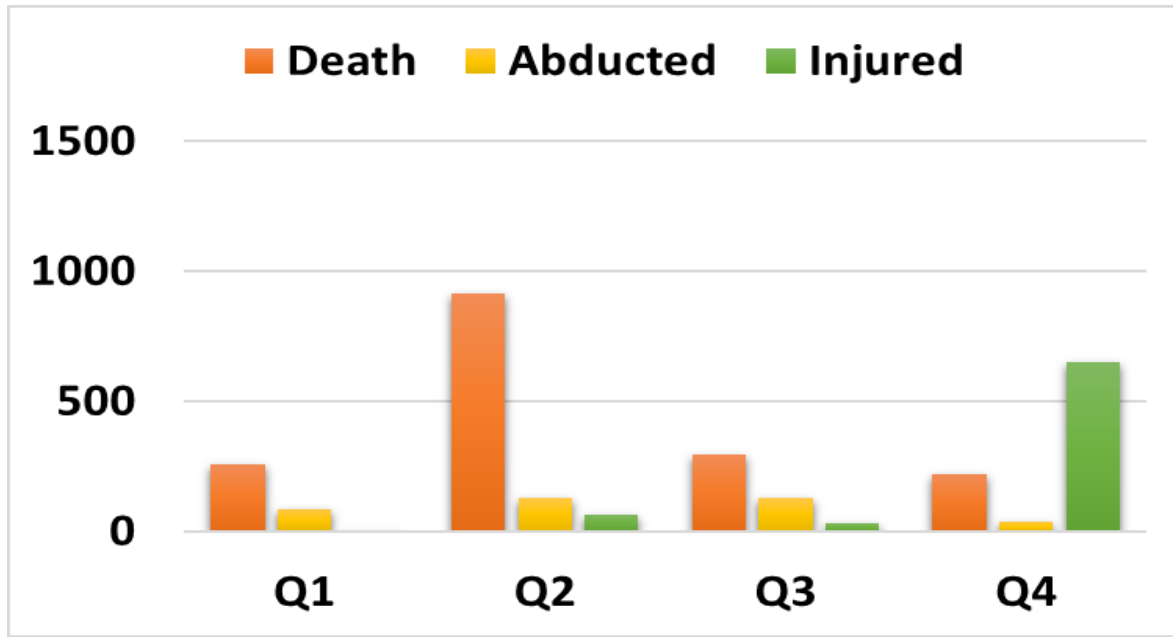
In the South East, activity was sporadic, with Imo State peaking at 28 in Q2 and Enugu State recording 30 in Q1 before declining to zero. Abuja (FCT) returned to double-digit figures in Q4 with 14 abductions, underscoring the proximity of kidnapping networks to the capital. The North West (Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna) accounted for the highest cumulative figures, the sustained quarterly increases in North Central states (Kwara and Kogi) signal a dangerous geographic diffusion of the kidnapping crisis. By Q4, the burden of abductions had shifted significantly toward the North Central, confirming the mobility and adaptability of perpetrator networks across state boundaries.

## **Geopolitical Zone Analysis**

### **The North Central region**

The North Central geopolitical zone witnessed a profound tactical evolution in 2025, shifting from high-lethality kinetic warfare to a systemic "kidnap-for-ransom" crisis. The year began with intense violence, peaking in Q2 with 911 recorded deaths the deadliest period of the year. By Q3, kinetic intensity began to subside, acting as a transitional phase toward the new operational model observed in the final quarter.

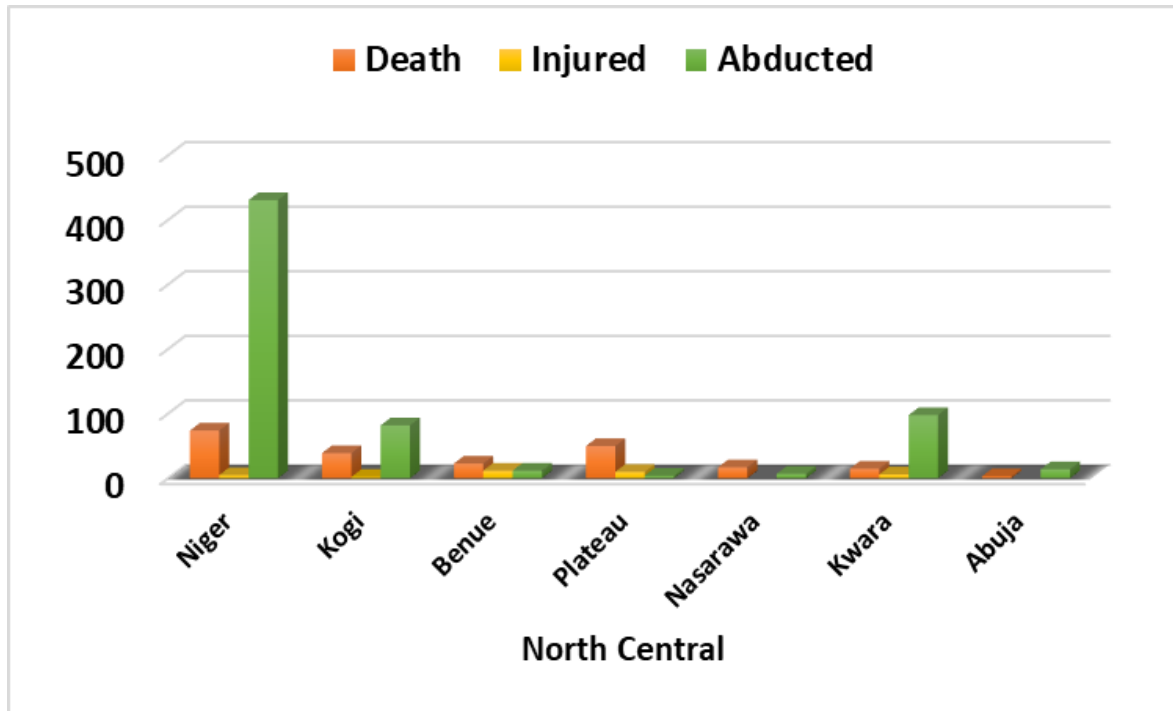
The Q4 data reveals the most significant shift: while direct fatalities reached their annual low of 221, abductions surged by an unprecedented 414% (totaling 648 victims). This transition indicates that non-state actors have moved away from mass-casualty territorial raids in favor of high-volume kidnapping to maximize financial leverage. Consequently, the reduction in deaths in the North Central zone should be viewed as a tactical pivot to criminal economics rather than an improvement in regional security.



**Figure 2: Atrocities in North Central Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 (iNSDEC, 2025).**

This North Central security reveals a bifurcated threat landscape, where the region is suffering from both lethal communal violence and a systemic abduction crisis. Niger State is the clear epicenter of the abduction industry, accounting for approximately 66% of all regional kidnappings (431 victims). While states like Plateau and Benue remain focused points for kinetic, high-fatality violence, the data shows an alarming southward expansion of kidnapping networks into Kwara and Kogi.

Ultimately, the regional security profile is evolving; non-state actors are increasingly favoring high-volume "kidnap-for-ransom" operations in the northern reaches of the zone, while southern agrarian states continue to grapple with territorial and communal conflicts. This divergence underscores the need for a dual-track security response that prioritizes specialized counter-kidnapping operations in transit-heavy corridors alongside targeted stabilization efforts for vulnerable agrarian communities.



**Figure 3: Atrocities North Central States (iNSDEC, 2025)**

Plateau State recorded consistently high fatalities, rising from 138 deaths in Q1 to a peak of 243 in Q2, before declining to 162 in Q3 and 50 in Q4. Abductions remained relatively low across the quarters, indicating that violence in the state was largely characterized by deadly attacks. In contrast, Kwara State recorded fewer deaths but a notable rise in kidnapping incidents. While fatalities increased from 1 in Q1 to 51 in Q3 before declining to 15 in Q4, abductions rose sharply from 0 in Q1 to 98 in Q4, marking a significant escalation toward the end of the year.

Q1			
	Death	Abducted	Injured
Plateau	138	3	0
Kwara	1	0	0
Q2			
Plateau	243	6	32
Kwara	23	19	16
Q3			
Plateau	162	8	9
Kwara	51	38	8
Q4			
Plateau	50	4	10

Kwara	15	98	6
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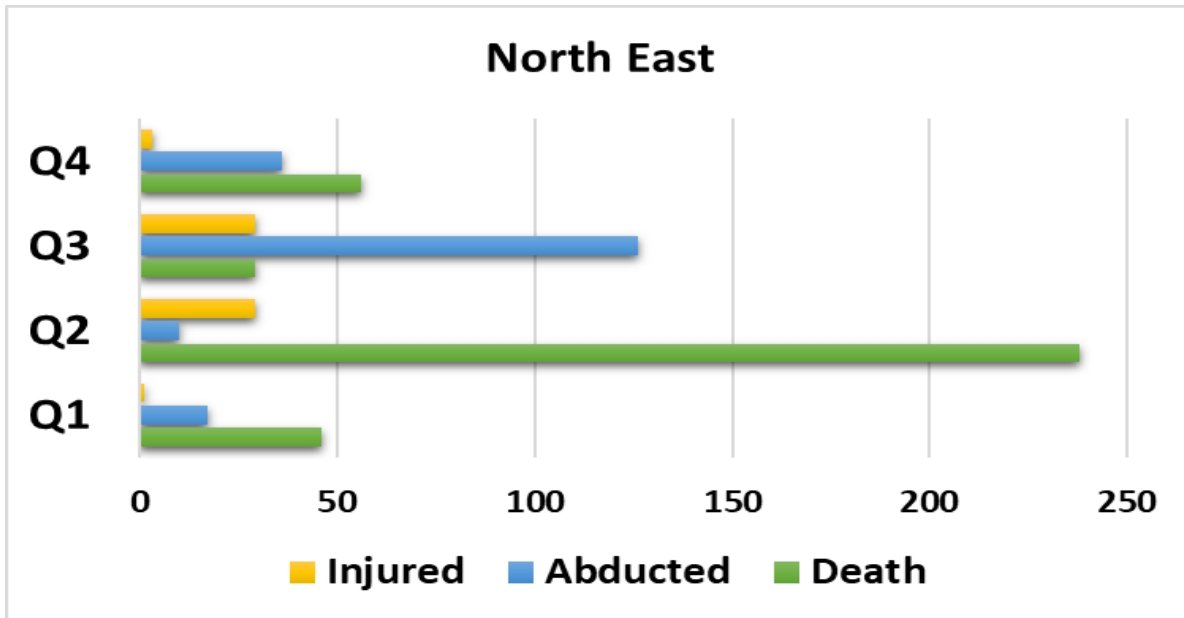
**Source: iNSDEC, 2025**

Apart from Plateau and Kwara States, several other North Central states recorded varying levels of violent incidents during the reporting period. Niger State experienced the most severe impact in terms of abductions, recording 431 persons abducted, alongside 74 deaths and 5 injuries, making it one of the most affected states in the region. Kogi State also recorded notable incidents, with 39 deaths, 2 injuries, and 82 abductions, reflecting the continued presence of violent attacks and kidnapping activities. Meanwhile, Benue State recorded 23 deaths, 12 injuries, and 12 abductions, while Nasarawa State reported 17 deaths and 7 abductions with no injuries documented. In the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), relatively lower levels of violence were recorded, with 3 deaths and 14 abductions. Overall, the figures highlight Niger and Kogi States as the most affected by kidnapping incidents, while other states experienced moderate levels of violence, underscoring the persistent security challenges across the North Central region.

**North East:**

The 2025 security trajectory for the North East Geopolitical Zone was defined by a volatile shift between high-lethality kinetic attacks and mass abduction events. The year reached a catastrophic "lethal peak" in Q2, where fatalities surged by over 417% (from 46 to 238 deaths), indicating a period of intense direct confrontation or insurgent raids. However, this was followed by a dramatic tactical pivot in Q3, which saw the lowest death toll of the year (29) but the highest number of abductions (126 victims), suggesting that non-state actors shifted their focus toward human capital for ransom or forced recruitment.

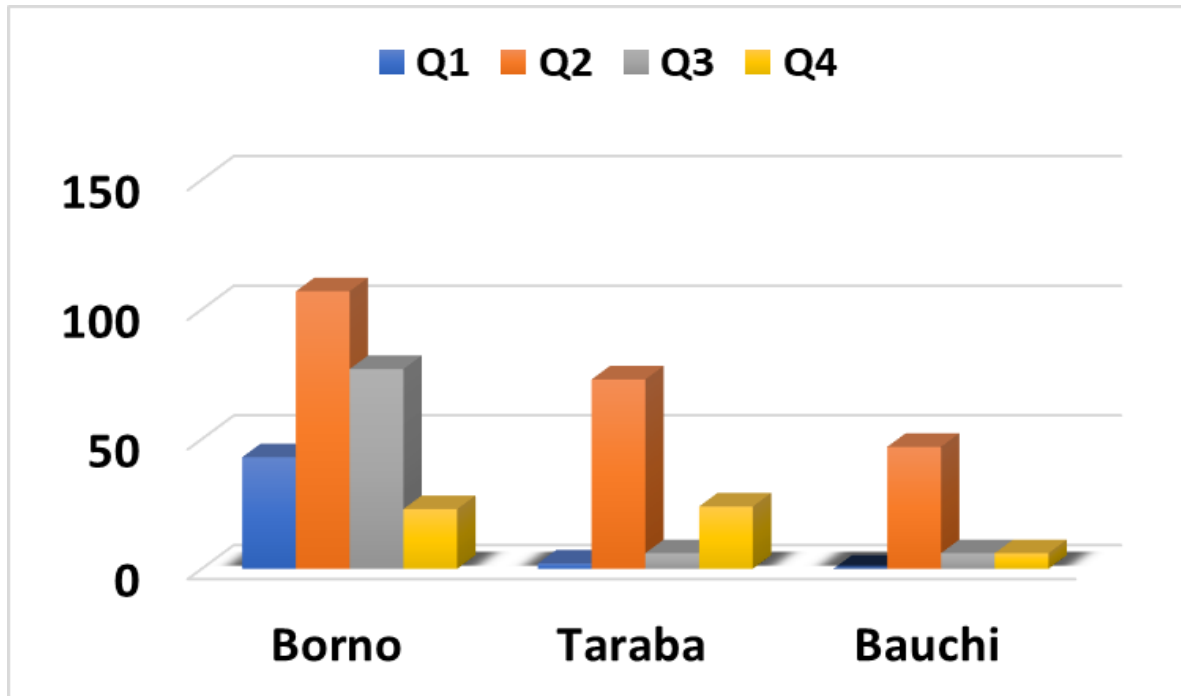
By the final quarter (Q4), the region showed signs of relative stabilization compared to the mid-year volatility. While fatalities saw a moderate resurgence to 56, abductions dropped significantly to 36, and injuries reached an annual low of 3. This data underscores an asymmetric conflict environment where the threat profile can rapidly oscillate between mass-casualty encounters and large-scale kidnapping, necessitating a defense strategy that is equally adept at counter-insurgency and rapid-response anti-abduction operations.



**Figure 4: Atrocities in North East Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 (iNSDEC, 2025).**

The 2025 security landscape in the North East specifically across Borno, Taraba, and Bauchi was defined by a synchronized surge in lethal violence during the second quarter (Q2) and distinct patterns of subsequent stabilization. Borno remains the primary conflict theater with 250 total annual deaths, peaking at 107 in Q2, followed by a consistent decline toward a year-end low of 23 deaths in Q4.

While Borno’s trend indicates a successful suppression of kinetic activity by year-end, Taraba State exhibited higher volatility; after a sharp spike of 73 deaths in Q2, it experienced a notable resurgence in Q4, signaling localized security failures. Bauchi mirrored the regional Q2 escalation but stabilized into a low-level threat for the remainder of the year. Collectively, these figures suggest that while the insurgency’s lethality is waning in its historical epicenter (Borno), shifting militant activity in secondary states like Taraba requires a more localized, mobile security response.



**Figure 5: Comparison of Deaths Recorded in Major States in North East Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 (iNSDEC, 2025).**

The third quarter (Q3) of 2025 in the North East marked a pivotal tactical transition: while direct lethal violence reached its lowest point of the year (29 deaths), the region faced its most severe abduction crisis, peaking at 126 documented victims. This inverse relationship indicates that non-state actors moved away from high-intensity kinetic raids common in the previous quarter toward "criminal economics," prioritizing kidnapping for ransom over territorial combat.

This operational shift highlights a dangerous evolution in the conflict: the decline in death tolls does not signify improved regional security. Instead, it reflects a strategic pivot by insurgent and criminal networks toward human capital exploitation to maximize financial gain and maintain strategic pressure in agrarian corridors. The concentration of these abduction raids across Borno, Taraba, and Bauchi suggests that these groups have successfully established mobile networks capable of bypassing localized stabilization efforts.

## North West:

The North West region in 2025 functioned as the federation's primary theater for large-scale "kidnap-for-ransom" operations, maintaining a consistently high volume of criminal activity throughout the year. While lethal violence peaked in Q2 (399 deaths), the abduction crisis remained the dominant security threat, hitting an annual high of 552 victims in Q3. This demonstrates a clear strategic shift: as kinetic military pressure increased in mid-year, criminal networks pivoted away from direct lethal engagement toward high-volume kidnapping to sustain their economic operations.

By the final quarter (Q4), all metrics showed a necessary de-escalation, with fatalities dropping to 119 and abductions stabilizing at 480. However, the total annual victim count—comprising 1,918 abductions and over 1,000 fatalities confirms that the region remains trapped in a "plateau of insecurity." The data suggests that kinetic interventions have successfully reduced the immediate lethality of attacks, but have failed to disrupt the underlying logistical and financial networks that underpin the region's rampant banditry.

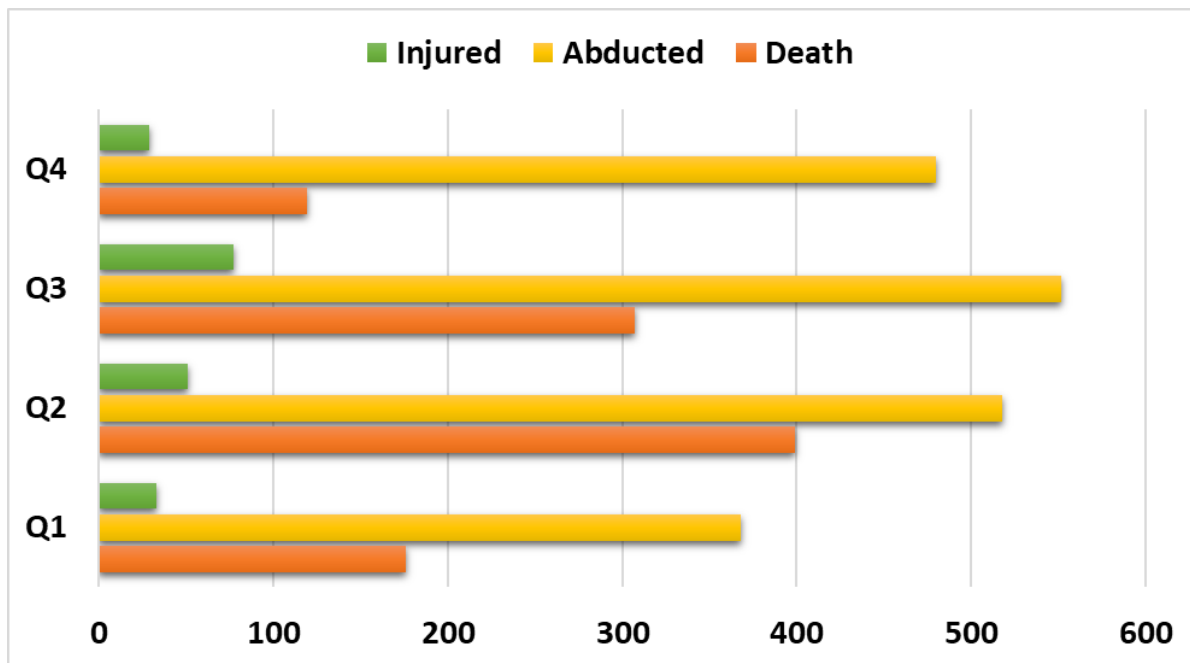
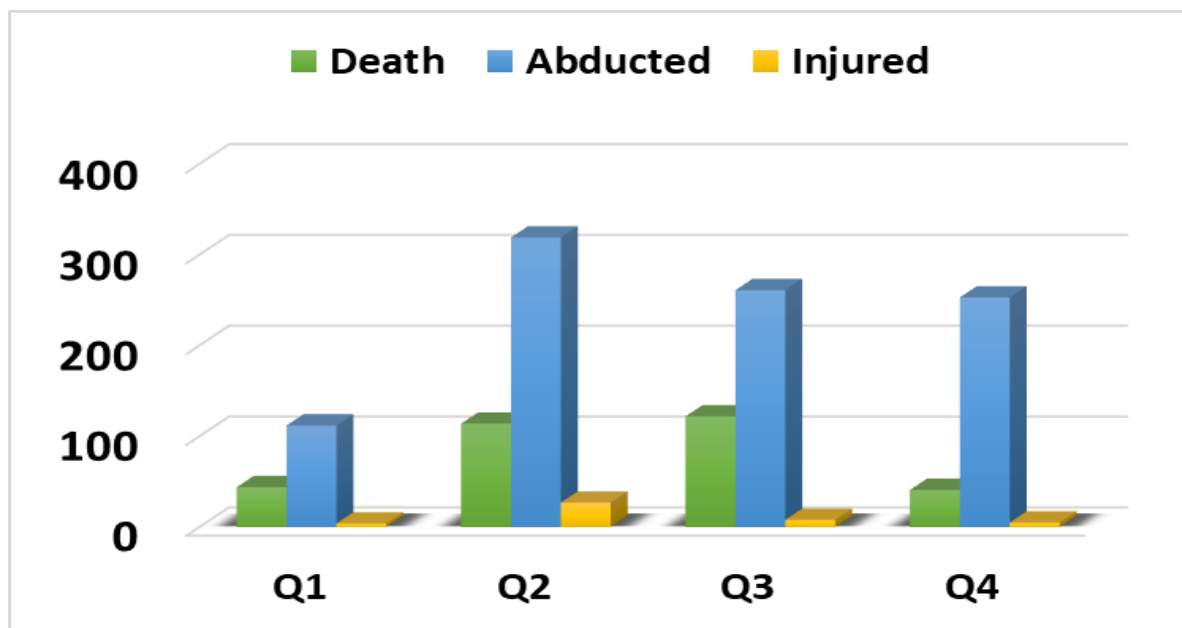


Figure 5: Atrocities Recorded in North West Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 (iNSDEC, 2025).

An analysis of security incidents in the North West geopolitical zone indicates persistent and high levels of violence throughout 2025, reflected in significant numbers of fatalities, abductions, and injuries across the four quarters. The region continues to face serious security challenges largely associated with banditry, armed attacks on rural communities, and kidnapping activities. In Quarter 1 (Q1), the region recorded 176 deaths, 368 abductions, and 33 injuries, indicating a considerable level of violence and widespread kidnapping incidents across several states in the zone. These figures demonstrate the early presence of organized armed groups operating within the region.

The level of violence escalated significantly in Quarter 2 (Q2), which recorded 399 deaths, 518 abductions, and 51 injuries. This quarter represents the peak period of fatalities, suggesting intensified attacks on communities and increased activities by armed bandit groups. In Quarter 3 (Q3), fatalities declined slightly to 307 deaths, while abductions increased to 552 cases, the highest recorded in the year. Injuries also rose to 77, indicating continued violent confrontations and attacks during the period.



**Figure 6: Atrocities Recorded in Zamfara Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 (iNSDEC, 2025).**

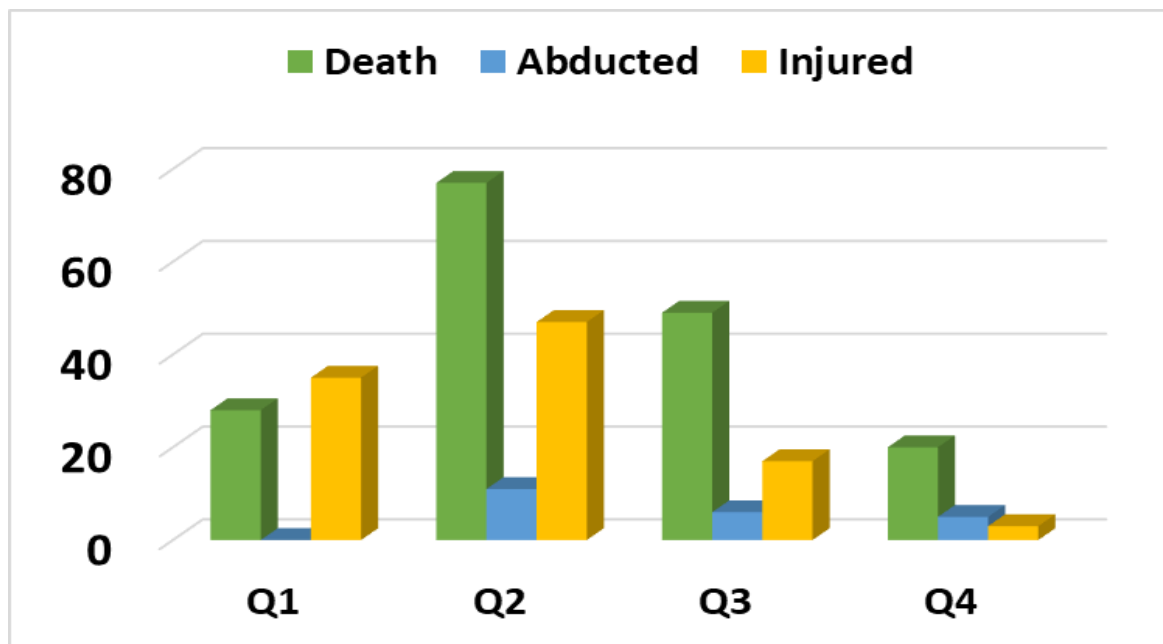
By Quarter 4 (Q4), the number of fatalities decreased further to 119 deaths, while 480 abductions and 29 injuries were recorded. Although the decline in deaths suggests a relative

reduction in lethal attacks, the sustained high level of abductions indicates that kidnapping remained a major security concern in the region.

Overall, the quarterly trend shows that Q2 recorded the highest fatalities, while Q3 experienced the most significant level of abductions and injuries. Despite some reduction in fatalities in Q4, the consistently high number of kidnapping incidents across the quarters highlights the persistent insecurity and operational presence of armed groups in the North West geopolitical zone.

**South East:**

The South East geopolitical zone experienced relatively lower levels of large-scale violence compared to other regions of Nigeria during 2025. However, the zone continued to witness periodic security incidents linked to armed attacks, criminal activities, and localized violence affecting communities across several states. These incidents resulted in fatalities, injuries, and occasional abductions throughout the year, although the intensity of violence fluctuated across the four quarters.



**Figure 7: Atrocities Recorded in South East Nigeria Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 (iNSDEC, 2025).**

In Quarter 1 (Q1), the region recorded 28 deaths, no abductions, and 35 injuries, indicating that violent incidents during this period were largely characterized by attacks that resulted in casualties rather than kidnappings. The situation escalated in Quarter 2 (Q2), which recorded the highest fatalities (77 deaths) and 47 injuries, alongside 11 abductions, marking the most intense period of violence in the zone during the year. In Quarter 3 (Q3), fatalities declined to 49 deaths, while 6 abductions and 17 injuries were recorded. This reduction suggests a relative improvement in the security situation compared to the second quarter, although incidents of violence and kidnapping persisted.

By Quarter 4 (Q4), the region recorded 20 deaths, 5 abductions, and 3 injuries, representing the lowest level of violence recorded during the year. Fourth quarter indicate that Anambra State accounted for the majority of fatalities, recording 16 deaths, along with 3 abductions and 1 injury, while the remaining states Enugu, Imo, Ebonyi, and Abia recorded comparatively minimal incidents during the same period.

Overall, the trend across the four quarters shows that Quarter 2 recorded the peak of violence in the South East, while the level of incidents gradually declined toward the end of the year. Despite the relatively lower figures compared to other geopolitical zones, the persistence of violent incidents underscores the continued need for proactive security measures to maintain stability within the region.

### **South South:**

The 2025 security trajectory for the South South geopolitical zone reveals a definitive shift away from traditional, large-scale militancy toward organized criminal economics. While the region has seen a relative stabilization in terms of lethal confrontations, it now faces a persistent and high-frequency threat from sophisticated kidnapping-for-ransom syndicates. This criminal evolution is most pronounced in Edo State, which recorded 21 abductions, and Rivers State, which reported 6, highlighting how non-state actors are increasingly exploiting major industrial nodes and transit corridors to maximize financial gain through human capital exploitation.

Unlike the kinetic volatility observed in northern Nigeria, the South South is currently defined as a "low-fatality, high-abduction" theater. The data indicates that criminal actors have transitioned from aggressive territorial expansion to a consolidated "extortion economy," where surgical, targeted kidnappings have replaced broad, lethal raids. This strategic pivot

presents a unique challenge for regional security: because these threats are primarily criminal rather than insurgent, traditional military kinetic operations are increasingly ineffective.

Moving forward, the security posture in the South South requires a fundamental shift in doctrine. The persistence of these abduction networks suggests that without a transition toward intelligence-led urban policing and enhanced highway surveillance, these criminal syndicates will continue to entrench themselves in the region's economic hubs.

### **South West**

The security landscape of Nigeria's South West in the final quarter of 2025 was defined by a shift from relative stability toward localized, high-frequency criminal activity. While the region remained less affected by the large-scale insurgencies seen in the North, it grappled with persistent threats including armed robbery, cult clashes, and a growing trend of kidnapping-for-ransom. The diversification of these threats, particularly the spread of abductions across formerly peaceful agrarian communities and transit routes, has forced regional governors to prioritize new, integrated security architectures, including renewed calls for state-level policing and digital intelligence-sharing networks to track criminal mobility across state lines.

In the fourth quarter specifically, data indicates that insecurity was characterized by a distinct "spread effect." While Lagos State recorded the highest number of fatalities (5 deaths), reflecting the acute and often violent nature of urban crime and factional confrontations in the nation's commercial capital, the broader region saw the emergence of kidnapping as a dominant threat. Oyo State emerged as a critical hotspot, recording 6 abductions the highest in the zone as criminal networks leveraged its expansive geography to conduct operations. Smaller but significant abduction incidents were also noted in Osun, Ondo, and Ogun states, suggesting that these networks are successfully moving between states to evade local security interventions.

Overall, the South West is transitioning from a region of relative insulation to one struggling with "urbanized insecurity." The persistence of these abduction networks, combined with concerns over illegal mining and unchecked cross-state migration, has pushed the region's leadership to adopt a collective security purse and a coordinated digital intelligence platform. These efforts underscore a growing realization that the security challenges ranging from transit-route kidnappings to intercommunal skirmishes can no longer be managed in isolation by

individual states, but require the kind of unified, intelligence-led response currently being advocated by the Southwest Governors' Forum.

### **Flashpoints to Watch out for in Q1 (2026)**

Several regions across Nigeria remain vulnerable to renewed violence as the country enters the first quarter (Q1) of 2026. Patterns observed during the previous year show that insecurity often persists or intensifies due to the continued activities of armed groups, unresolved communal tensions, and expanding criminal networks. Based on the recorded incidents of deaths, abductions, and injuries, several geopolitical zones particularly in the northern part of the country are likely to remain critical flashpoints requiring close monitoring in early 2026. The North Central region remains one of the most volatile zones in the country. Data from 2025 revealed extremely high levels of violence, especially in states such as Benue and Plateau, which recorded significant fatalities due to communal clashes and militia attacks. Although fatalities declined toward the end of the year, the region witnessed a sharp increase in kidnapping incidents. Niger State, which recorded one of the highest numbers of abductions in the region, alongside rising incidents in Kogi and Kwara States, suggests the expansion of kidnapping networks across rural communities and major transportation corridors. These trends indicate that the North Central zone may remain a major security concern in Q1 2026.

Similarly, the North West geopolitical zone continues to represent one of the most significant security flashpoints in Nigeria. Throughout 2025, the region recorded consistently high levels of abductions and fatalities linked to armed banditry and organized criminal activities. Zamfara State remained the most affected, with extremely high abduction figures recorded across multiple quarters, while Katsina and Kaduna States also experienced notable kidnapping incidents. The persistence of these trends suggests that bandit groups remain operationally active and capable of launching attacks on rural communities and travelers, making the North West a critical area of concern in early 2026. In the North East, insecurity continues to be influenced largely by insurgent activities. Although the intensity of violence fluctuated throughout 2025, the region experienced a notable surge in fatalities in the second quarter and an increase in abductions in the third quarter. Borno State consistently recorded the highest number of deaths within the region, while Taraba State also experienced periodic spikes in violence. These patterns suggest that insurgent groups remain active and may attempt renewed attacks or tactical regrouping in early 2026, particularly in vulnerable and remote communities.

Beyond the northern zones, emerging kidnapping corridors along parts of the North Central–South West axis are also a growing concern. The steady rise in abductions in states such as Kwara and Kogi, particularly toward the end of 2025, suggests that criminal networks may be expanding their operational areas toward central transportation routes. This development poses potential risks for travelers, commercial transport, and rural communities located along major highways. Although the southern regions including the South East, South South, and South West recorded comparatively lower levels of large-scale violence, isolated incidents of attacks and kidnappings were still reported. In the South East, violent incidents peaked earlier in the year but declined significantly toward the fourth quarter. In the South South, kidnapping incidents were recorded in states such as Edo and Rivers, while in the South West, isolated cases of fatalities and abductions were reported in states including Lagos and Oyo. While these regions remain relatively stable compared to northern zones, the persistence of sporadic criminal activities suggests that security agencies must continue to maintain vigilance.

Overall, the insecurity trends observed in 2025 suggest that banditry, communal violence, insurgency, and kidnapping will likely remain the dominant security threats in Q1 2026. The most critical flashpoints are expected to remain within the North West, North Central, and parts of the North East, where armed groups continue to operate with considerable capacity. Addressing these challenges will require sustained security operations, improved intelligence gathering, and stronger coordination between security agencies and local communities to prevent further escalation of violence in the coming year.

<b>Region</b>	<b>Flash Point Sales</b>
North-Central	Plateau, Kwara, Niger, Kogi
North-West	Zamfara, Sokoto, Kaduna
North-East	Borno
South-East	Imo, Anambra,
South-South	Edo, Rivers
South-West	Oyo, Lagos

#### **Table 4: Flashpoint States**

Q4 reinforces that insecurity is a nationwide challenge, not a northern-only crisis. The South now exhibits region-specific drivers' separatist agitation in the South-East, cultism and organized crime in the South-South, and expanding kidnapping networks in the South-West highlighting the need for tailored, regionally informed security interventions across the entire country.

#### **Perpetrators of Atrocities**

In the fourth quarter, an analysis of perpetrator data reveals a complex and shifting landscape of violence across Nigeria, with Bandits emerging as the most consistent and resilient threat actor. Bandits maintained a high operational tempo throughout the period, recording 28 incidents in October, peaking at 35 in November, and remaining elevated at 29 in December. This consistency underscores their deeply entrenched logistical networks in the forests of the North West and North Central regions, and highlights the limitations of current kinetic operations in curbing their capacity for mass abductions and community raids regardless of season or security sweeps.

Fulani Militia and unidentified Gunmen exhibited significant volatility in their patterns of violence during the quarter. Fulani Militia activity surged dramatically in November with 19 recorded incidents, likely tied to seasonal grazing conflicts or reprisal attacks in the Middle Belt, before plummeting to just two in December. Similarly, Gunmen were the most active perpetrators in October with 37 incidents, gradually declining through November and December to 17, suggesting either a degradation of operational capacity or the impact of security cordons in regions like the South East. These patterns indicate that while these actors can rapidly escalate violence, they are also susceptible to interdiction or seasonal factors that lead to sudden quiescence.

The jihadist factions in the North East, ISWAP and Boko-Haram, recorded minimal activity throughout Q4, confirming their continued but degraded capacity to inflict mass atrocities. ISWAP concentrated its operations in November with four incidents followed by silence in October and December, reflecting a hit-and-run operational style focused on strikes against military targets. Boko-Haram recorded only three incidents total, with a slight uptick in December suggesting an attempt to disrupt end-of-year operations. While their low frequency indicates logistical constraints and the effectiveness of sustained military pressure, the potential

for resurgence remains and requires continued intelligence-led operations to prevent regrouping.

### **Policy Implementation:**

Addressing the persistent insecurity highlighted in this Fourth Quarter (October–December 2025) Nigeria Security Watch Report requires a coordinated and multi-sectoral policy approach involving federal, state, and local stakeholders. First, there is a need to strengthen intelligence gathering and inter-agency coordination among security institutions. Many of the recorded incidents particularly abductions and bandit attacks occur in rural communities and along transport corridors where early warning systems remain weak. Establishing integrated intelligence platforms and improving information sharing between the military, police, civil defence, and local vigilante networks would significantly enhance rapid response capabilities.

Second, the government should prioritize community-based security frameworks in areas most affected by banditry, insurgency, and militia activities. Community policing structures, supported by local authorities and traditional institutions, can help identify emerging threats early and reduce the operational space available to armed groups. Such frameworks must be complemented with proper training, accountability mechanisms, and oversight to ensure adherence to national security regulations.

Third, there is a need to address the socioeconomic drivers of insecurity, particularly youth unemployment, poverty, and limited access to education in vulnerable communities. Many areas experiencing persistent attacks are characterized by weak economic opportunities and limited government presence. Expanding livelihood programmes, agricultural support initiatives, and vocational training schemes in these communities can help reduce the recruitment base for criminal and insurgent groups. Additionally, the government should strengthen security presence in high-risk flashpoints, especially in the North West and North Central regions where banditry and communal conflicts continue to escalate. This includes improving mobility for security forces, deploying surveillance technologies, and enhancing border monitoring to limit the movement of armed groups and illicit weapons across porous frontiers.

Finally, greater investment is needed in victim support and post-conflict recovery programmes. Communities affected by attacks often suffer long-term economic and psychological impacts. Establishing structured support systems including trauma care, rehabilitation programmes, and reconstruction assistance will help restore stability and build community resilience.

## Recommendations

Based on the patterns observed during the fourth quarter of 2025, the following measures are recommended to strengthen Nigeria's national security response:

1. **Strengthen intelligence coordination:** Establish a centralized intelligence-sharing framework that connects federal security agencies, state security units, and community networks for faster response to emerging threats.
2. **Enhance surveillance in high-risk areas:** Deploy drones, surveillance technologies, and improved communication systems to monitor rural communities and key transport routes frequently targeted by kidnappers and bandits.
3. **Expand community policing initiatives:** Encourage collaboration between security agencies, local vigilante groups, and community leaders to strengthen grassroots security structures.
4. **Improve security presence along major highways:** Many abductions occur along transportation corridors; therefore, regular patrols and security checkpoints should be strengthened along high-risk routes.
5. **Address socioeconomic vulnerabilities:** Government and development partners should expand employment programmes, youth empowerment initiatives, and rural development projects in vulnerable regions.
6. **Strengthen counter-insurgency operations in the North East:** Sustained military pressure and intelligence operations are necessary to prevent insurgent groups from regrouping and expanding their operational capacity.
7. **Improve data collection and monitoring systems:** Continuous documentation and analysis of security incidents will support evidence-based policymaking and enable security institutions to respond proactively to emerging threats.

## **Conclusion**

The findings presented in the October–December 2025 Nigeria Security Watch Quarterly Report highlight the continued complexity of Nigeria’s security landscape. While the nature and intensity of violence varied across geopolitical zones, the data clearly demonstrate that banditry, kidnapping, communal violence, and insurgent activities remain the dominant drivers of insecurity across the country. The fourth quarter recorded significant levels of violence, with hundreds of fatalities and over a thousand abductions nationwide. Northern regions particularly the North West and North Central continued to experience the highest levels of violent attacks, largely driven by bandit groups, militia clashes, and organized criminal networks. At the same time, insurgent activities persisted in parts of the North East, while isolated incidents of violence and kidnapping were also recorded in some southern states.

These patterns suggest that insecurity in Nigeria is increasingly multi-dimensional, involving a combination of insurgency, organized crime, communal conflicts, and opportunistic violence. Addressing these challenges will require sustained political commitment, improved coordination among security institutions, and long-term investments in social and economic development. Going forward, a comprehensive approach that combines security operations, community engagement, intelligence-driven policing, and socioeconomic interventions will be essential to reducing violence and restoring stability in affected communities. If effectively implemented, such strategies can significantly mitigate emerging threats and strengthen Nigeria’s overall security outlook in the coming year.