

Organized Crime in the Niger Delta: Implications for the 2019 Elections

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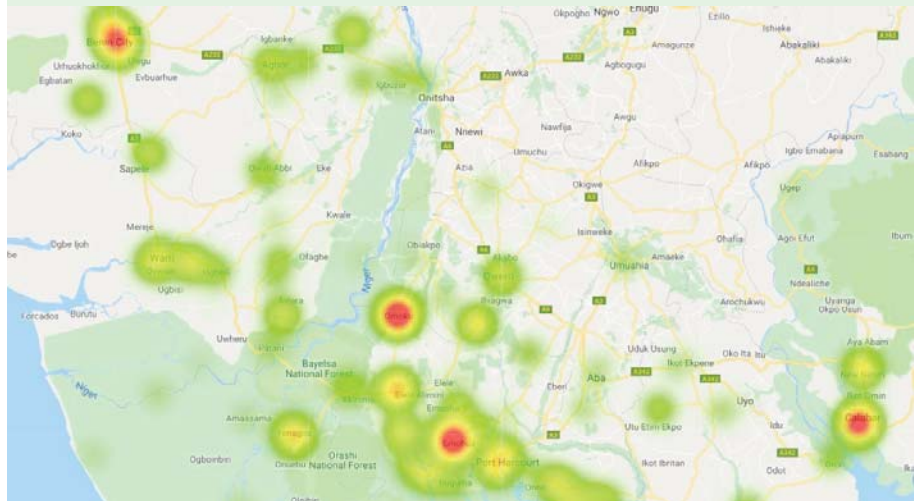
In the Niger Delta region, organized crime manifests most visibly as supremacy clashes between cult groups such as the Icelanders and Greenlanders, or Deywell versus Deybam. Over the past decade, such clashes have killed over 1000 people and have further complicated an already challenging operating environment for businesses.

Despite the uniqueness of the Niger Delta context, organized crime in the region shares traits often found in other parts of the world. For example, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), it most often flourishes in environments characterized by significant internal divisions, depleted infrastructure, high poverty rates, and group or sub-group hostility towards the state. No stranger to cycles of electoral violence, militancy, criminality and communal clashes, many of the Niger Delta states face challenges associated with rule of law and governance that enable an environment of impunity.

Further feeding a cycle of instability, organized crime undermines governments, fuels corruption, and facilitates criminal infiltration of state structures. It also exploits and deepens societal divisions, keeping grievances alive while undermining peace processes. Organized crime also weakens state-society relations by undermining stability, eroding trust and legitimacy, and fostering the creation of parallel or compromised state and local security services. According to the 2017 World Bank Annual Report, and similar findings from a 2016 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report on illicit cash flows, these factors result in disincentives for economic investment and growth.

In the Niger Delta, organized crime is often intertwined with, and feeds off of, other known conflict drivers. These include: communal

Fatalities Heatmap of Lethal Criminality in the Niger Delta



Heatmap shows concentration of conflict fatalities from cult clashes reported from January 2009 - December 2017 in the Niger Delta. Source: All data sources formatted for the P4P Peace Map www.p4p-nigerdelta.org

violence, militancy, and general political violence, especially around elections. Peace and security actors in the Niger Delta have developed effective tools for addressing political violence (civic education, strategic communication, and peace messaging), communal/sectarian violence (community engagement, conflict mediation and arbitration), and militancy (high-level negotiations and development strategies). Organized crime, however mainly manifested as cultism in the Niger Delta, presents a particularly difficult challenge for peace actors, both in terms of addressing cultism itself, as well as complicating efforts to address the other conflict dynamics.

For conflict mitigation to be successful, the approach must treat organized crime as a cross-cutting factor in all interventions, whether they are focused primarily on resolving communal and political tensions, or ethno-nationalist grievances and concerns. Otherwise, cultists will

undermine peacebuilding efforts and ensure that in the long run, they fail.

Looking ahead to the election in 2019, this is especially important, as social cohesion is stressed across a range of fault lines causing the environment to become more conducive to violence entrepreneurs.

This conflict briefing provides a snapshot of the trends and patterns of organized criminality and political violence in the Niger Delta, and examines the security and conflict risk implications of organized criminality on the upcoming 2019 general elections in the region. An understanding of the dynamics of security and conflict risk, and the related impact on peace and stability, allows stakeholders to proactively address emerging conflict risk rather than only reactively responding to incidents. This brief draws on data available on the P4P Peace Map (www.p4p-nigerdelta.org/peace-building-map).