

# **BLACK GOLD AND BLOODSHED: THE GREED VS. GRIEVANCE DYNAMICS OF OIL TERRORISM IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the driving forces behind terrorist attacks on the oil industry in Nigeria, focusing on the complex interplay between greed and grievance motivations in the Niger Delta. Employing a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, this study focuses on challenging the conventional “greed” narrative by analysing whether the existence of “grievances” provides a more substantial explanation for the engagement of local groups in terrorist tactics against the Nigerian oil industry. The major findings of the quantitative descriptive analysis indicate that grievances encompassing political, environmental, and socio-economic injustices experienced by the local communities, significantly outweigh purely economic motivations in prompting terrorist acts. The qualitative analysis, through detailed case studies, explores the specific grievances and motivations of these groups, revealing a complex interplay of historical marginalisation, lack of resource autonomy, and economic deprivation that fuels these violent responses. Overall, this thesis provides a nuanced understanding of the motivations behind oil terrorism, highlighting the predominance of grievance-driven violence over greed-driven actions in the context of the Niger Delta.

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# Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	v
List of Tables.....	vi
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Literature Review.....	4
Research Design.....	8
<b>Chapter 1 – Conceptual Overview .....</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1 Grievances.....	12
1.1.1 Resource Sovereignty Grievances .....	13
1.1.2 Environmental Grievances .....	14
1.1.3 Political Grievances .....	15
1.2 The role of agency in group violence.....	17
<b>Chapter 2 – Context: Political Violence and the Oil Industry in the Niger Delta.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter 3 – Theory Testing: Quantitative Descriptive Analysis .....</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1 Methodology .....	24
3.2 Analysis.....	26
<b>Chapter 4 – Types of Grievances .....</b>	<b>33</b>
4.1 First spike – 2015/2016.....	34
4.2 Second spike – 2020/2021 .....	43
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>48</b>
Reference List .....	52

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Cumulative Analysis of Greed and Grievance Attacks .....	27
Figure 2: Temporal Analysis of Greed and Grievance Attacks.....	27
Figure 3: Geographical Distribution of the Attacks .....	28
Figure 4: Temporal and Geographical Trends in Greed-Driven Attacks .....	29
Figure 5: Temporal and Geographical Trends in Grievance-Driven Attacks.....	30
Figure 6: Geographical Cluster of Grievance Attacks since 2020 .....	31

## List of Tables

Table 1: First Spike Attacks by Group .....	37
Table 2: NDA Attacks by Target Type .....	39
Table 3: Second Spike Attacks by Group .....	43
Table 4: IPOB Attacks by Target Type.....	44

## Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that natural resources can influence the security environment of a region, especially in poorer societies where individuals may exploit these resources for personal economic gain. Numerous studies focusing on the oil and gas sector have concluded that the exploitation of natural resources in impoverished countries significantly contributes to civil wars, particularly through the financial capital that they provide to militant groups (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Ross 2004; Dreher and Kreibbaum 2016; Venables 2016), with some scholars going as far as arguing that the sole discovery of petroleum can lead to civil conflict (Bell and Wolford 2015).

There is a mutual relation between political violence and the presence of a resource curse, which represents the paradox where countries with abundant natural resources often experience worse economic growth and development outcomes than countries with fewer natural resources. Recognising that the two phenomena influence each other, affecting society, security, and the economy – often extending to neighbouring countries or the global stage – it is crucial to understand the motives behind actors' involvement in such activities in order to develop effective countermeasures. One particularly notable case is that of Nigeria, because, despite the country's rich petroleum reserves, the production of oil has been decreasing, with 2022 marking the lowest output in 32 years. This decline is attributed to high rates of oil theft and vandalism which raise production costs, damage infrastructure, and increase the risk to foreign investment (Olujobi, Olarinde & Yebisi 2022). Considering that Nigeria is heavily dependent on its oil industry, with approximately 90 percent of its exports being attributed to oil (The World Bank 2023), the losses associated with oil theft and vandalism exacerbate the risks presented by the high volatility of oil revenues. Of the nearly 11,500 incidents reported since 2010, over 8,000 have been attributed to sabotage and theft (NOSDRA 2023). As the impact of oil theft has started to escalate, petroleum companies have

begun reducing their production to minimize additional losses, with oil refineries currently operating at 30% of their capacity.

In Nigeria, a nation that seems to have been ‘cursed’ with large quantities of petroleum, the plentiful presence of oil, intertwined with profound ethnic grievances caused by the country’s colonial past and decades of political marginalization and corruption, has led to what is known as ‘oil terrorism’ – a term used for attacks on oil infrastructure perpetrated by militant groups seeking to destabilise the federal government (Onuoha 2008). Onuoha’s definition aligns with broader terrorism definitions, describing it as the illegal use or threat of violence to achieve political aims through fear and intimidation tactics (Crenshaw 1981; Hoffman 2006; Rapoport 2022). However, as oil terrorism involves strong-willed militants employing terrorist tactics without being part of a terrorist organisation, this thesis will avoid labelling actors involved in oil terrorism as “terrorists,” in accordance with Schmid’s (2023) distinction between “terrorist acts” and “terrorists.” This distinction is crucial as while oil terrorism shares terrorism’s objective of spreading panic, it is targeted and goal-oriented, resembling the nature of political violence typically seen in civil wars rather than that of organized terrorist activities (Kalyvas 2004).

Furthermore, unlike traditional terrorist organisations that typically engage in sustained campaigns of violence to promote their ideological goals, the groups involved in oil terrorism often operate more like social movements utilising episodic violence to influence political and economic landscapes. While traditional terrorist organisations aim for broad societal disruption and fear to further their agendas, the militants engaging in oil terrorism are often more focused on specific, strategic targets related to the oil sector. Their actions, which include sabotage, theft, and the destruction of infrastructure, serve not just to cause fear but to directly impact the economic viability of their targets. This form of violence is episodic in nature, occurring in bursts that are typically aligned with tactical objectives rather than a



continuous state of conflict. This strategic use of violence bears a closer resemblance to the actions of some social movements that leverage limited, impactful acts of disruption to effect change or draw attention to their causes (della Porta 2008, Case 2021), rather than the indiscriminate violence often associated with more conventional forms of terrorism (Norton 1990, Goodwin 2006, Fortna 2023). Moreover, these groups may use terrorist tactics as a means of political expression or to correct perceived injustices, thus their actions are deeply embedded in the socio-political fabric of their regions (Cronin 2009). The distinction is crucial for understanding the nature of oil terrorism within Nigeria, as it is less about spreading ideological terror across a broad spectrum and more about targeted economic disruption and political messaging. Consequently, this thesis will depict oil terrorism not merely as a form of violence but as a calculated tactic used by politically motivated groups that, while employing methods similar to those of terrorists, are fundamentally different in their objectives and manifestations.

This thesis aims to explore the reasons behind politically motivated militants engaging in oil terrorism. The most intuitive explanation, aligning with the research of Collier et al. (2003), suggests that terrorist groups finance their operations through oil revenues, with greed being a primary motivator for their activities. Despite the greed theory holding significant ground in political violence research, the sole explanation that financial motivations act as a catalyst for the engagement of local groups in terrorist tactics on the Nigerian oil industry may not accurately disclose the roots of the problem. As this thesis will present, a significant part of “oil terrorism” in Nigeria is represented by attacks on oil infrastructure which does not entail any financial gain for the perpetrators. Therefore, my hypothesis proposes that grievances provide a more substantial explanation for the extent of terrorist attacks on extraction sites. By sabotaging the state’s oil industry through terrorist means, militants can more effectively pursue their objectives as they directly weaken the government by cutting off its oil revenues.

This thesis systematically explores the complex phenomenon of oil terrorism in Nigeria through detailed analysis grounded in both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The organisation of the thesis builds upon the initial findings presented in the literature and the research design discussed later in this introduction, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The first chapter offers a conceptual overview for understanding grievances. Following this, the second chapter provides the necessary context for understanding oil terrorism in the Niger Delta. The third chapter presents the first part of the analysis, namely the quantitative descriptive analysis, focusing on testing the greed explanation in relation to the role of grievances in the context of oil terrorism. This analysis aims to refute the greed hypothesis and provides a framework for analysing the type of grievances in the second part of the analysis. The fourth chapter qualitatively explores the “grievances” hypothesis by presenting findings from two case studies of the actors and groups involved in the peaks of terrorist activity within the Niger Delta. Finally, the sixth chapter synthesizes the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses to draw conclusions about the predominant drivers of oil terrorism in Nigeria, discusses the limitations of the study, and proposes areas for future research.

### *Literature Review*

As stated above, this thesis will extend the application of Collier et al.’s (2003) greed versus grievance theory from its traditional realm of civil conflicts to the specific area of oil terrorism within the Niger Delta. This application is seen as fitting despite not examining a specific civil conflict, because the theory addresses extreme political violence occurring in contexts marked by civil tensions among different ethnic and religious groups, ideologies, and economic incentives.

One of the most influential studies on the root causes of political violence, conducted by Collier et al. (2003) for a World Bank Policy Research Report and further developed in an academic article published by Oxford University Press (Collier and Hoeffler 2004), argues that the primary driver of civil wars is the economic self-interest, or greed, of rebel groups, rather than ethnic or political grievances. The theory suggests that factors such as the availability of financial resources from natural resources (like diamonds or oil), external funding, and the feasibility of rebellion are more predictive of civil conflicts than are ethnic or religious divisions. Over time, the greed versus grievance theory has garnered significant academic attention, with scholars finding the theory's quantitative rigor, statistical foundation, and simplified explanation of civil conflicts' causes compelling (Ballentine and Sherman 2003). Even in qualitative studies, researchers have identified greed as the main driver of political violence in resource-rich areas (Naguib 2015), arguing that economic motivations are often cloaked in political grievances to legitimize actions (Mair 2003). However, the theory has faced criticism for its potential oversimplification of complex socio-political realities and for neglecting the importance of identity-based grievances and historical injustices in sparking and sustaining conflicts (Ballentine and Nitzschke 2003; Vinci 2006; Bodea and Elbadawi 2007; Stewart 2008; Keen 2012). For example, Regan and Norton (2005) found limited support, through quantitative analysis, for the argument that diamonds significantly fuel civil unrest, reinforcing the view that resource-motivated political violence is more often driven by grievances.

Other scholars have adopted a more nuanced stance in critiquing Collier and Hoeffler's theory, arguing that it does not fully capture the complex interaction between greed and grievance, where economic motives may be entangled with deep-rooted grievances (Berdal 2005; Murshed and Tadjoeeddin 2008; Zartman 2011). These interpretations highlight the multifaceted relationship between economic motives and grievances. For example, Murshed

and Tadjoeeddin (2008) note that a significant trigger for violence in the Niger Delta was the local populations' perception of not receiving a fair share of natural resource rents, leading to strong grievances with ethnic and regional dimensions. Another viewpoint suggests that while grievances may initiate political violence, greed often sustains it. Reno (2003) believes that the exploitation of natural resources has played a prominent part in conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone by sustaining warring groups, although he agrees that “hegemonic struggles” are at the root of the conflicts (p. 47). Similarly, Tonwe, Ojo, and Aghedo (2011) argue that in Nigeria, political violence originated from a transformation of environmental activism into violence due to grievances, but they note that in recent years, greed has overtaken grievances as the primary driver of political violence, with the pursuit of environmental justice serving as a facade for economic motives. Integrating those two perspectives, Zartman (2011) contends that while greed plays a role in conflict, its influence is primarily at the end, when the conflict evolves into a self-serving stalemate, or at the very beginning, as the root of grievances which ultimately drive the conflicts.

The debate on what motivates oil-related political violence in Nigeria is still ongoing, with scholars being divided on the topic due to its complex and evolving character. The country's history with violence entered a new phase in the 1960s, a period marked by political instability following the revolution. This was when oil production emerged as a significant sector in Nigeria's economy, leading to increased militancy and rebellion in the Niger Delta, the epicentre of the country's oil industry. However, recent years have seen a transformation in oil-related violence, with a growing focus on terrorist and extremist groups rather than minor criminal activities. According to Ross, an expert in oil-induced violence, the driver of this shift is the changing role of oil in conflicts. Previously, Nigeria's oil wealth incentivised local minorities to support independence movements. In contrast, the latest surge in violence,

predominantly associated with terrorism, sees oil wealth financing anti-government militias through oil theft and extortion (Ross 2012, 170-171).

In his extensive study encompassing 130 non-OECD countries, including Nigeria, Piazza (2016) identifies a significant direct correlation between a country's onshore oil production and the prevalence of terrorist attacks. Piazza's analysis indicates that oil exploitation indirectly contributes to terrorism by way of human rights abuses in oil-producing nations. He notes that the act of extracting oil is often associated with intensified violations of physical integrity rights, leading to widespread grievances among the affected populations, grievances which play a crucial role in fostering support and momentum for terrorist activities. Aligning with Ross' (2012) observations, Piazza points out that in regions abundant in oil, governments frequently resort to repressive measures against local communities. These actions, aimed at suppression and relocation, facilitate the extraction of oil resources at the expense of the well-being of the Niger Delta population, which fuels the cycle of violence. In a comprehensive study of Nigeria's oil economy, Ikelegbe (2006) outlines the historical response of local communities to oil extraction. He explains how the Niger Delta communities shifted their struggle from a focus on group rights and self-determination to a movement against state reforms and eventually to a comprehensive action plan against both the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian state, exemplifying the dynamics of this cycle of violence which encompasses all activities referred to in this thesis as "oil terrorism." According to Ikelegbe, the economy of oil theft, emerging from deeper underlying conflicts, has been adopted and tolerated by the local population as a means of struggle. Therefore, he suggests that a significant portion of the Niger Delta population is either involved in oil vandalism and theft or supports these activities as a means to express their grievances.

A contending explanation of the motivation of actors engaging in terrorist tactics on the oil industry in Nigeria is presented by Ross (2012). In his book on the oil curse, the scholar

acknowledges the varied objectives of militant groups in the Niger Delta, which range from political goals such as secession to predominantly economic-based criminal activities. Nevertheless, he argues that the core of terrorist acts in the region is fundamentally centred on financial gain, achieved through means such as oil theft or extortion aimed at the delta's petroleum infrastructure. From his viewpoint, the specific allocation of the funds – whether for political pursuits or personal gain – is secondary to their primary goal of monetary acquisition. Thus, while recognizing the role of political and ideological motives behind the terrorists' actions on oil-related attacks, Ross predominantly attributes these acts of oil theft and sabotage in the region to a basic “greed” explanation, which posits that actors are motivated to resort to terrorist tactics by economic self-interest.

As seen above, the literature on the causes of actors engaging in terrorist acts on the oil industry in the Niger Delta is split between those who attribute the main motivation to perceived injustices – or “grievances” – and those who believe financial gain – or “greed” – is the primary motivator. This thesis employs the “greed versus grievance” framework, first introduced by Collier et al. in 2003 and widely used since to explain civil conflict and political violence, to address the significant research question that continues to elicit varied responses in the literature: what motivates militants to commit terrorist acts against the oil industry in the Niger Delta? To explore this question, the thesis seeks to challenge the prevailing notion of greed and to analyse the alternative explanation of grievances as potential motivators for these acts.

### *Research Design*

To explore the multifaceted nature of oil terrorism in Nigeria, this study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.

Given the limited data available on the exact quantities of oil stolen by terrorist organisations and the specific perpetrators of sabotage acts at oil sites, this thesis will examine the nature of oil-driven terrorist attacks to discern their motivations – be it greed or grievance. In order to do that, a quantitative descriptive analysis will be firstly conducted with the purpose to disprove Collier et al.'s (2003) theory that financial incentives – or greed – is the main motivator behind terrorist attacks on the oil industry in the Niger Delta. The quantitative descriptive analysis will see the categorisation of oil-motivated terrorism into two types of attacks: those driven by the terrorists' need for funding (oil theft and hostage takings) and those serving ideological and motivational incentives (bombings, explosions, and direct attacks on utilities). Data for this analysis will be sourced from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), which classifies attacks by type, enabling an exploration of the relationship between attack types and the objectives of terrorists in targeting the petroleum industry in Nigeria.

The first step of this thesis' research design, the quantitative analysis, is particularly suited for casting some doubt over the explanatory character of the greed theory, given that the nature of terrorist attacks often indicates their primary objective, whether for financial or ideological reasons. In support of the greed theory, armed assaults and hostage-takings typically aim to secure ransoms. However, these attacks may also serve other purposes, such as creating an insecure environment to deter foreign investment and undermine the government's international legitimacy, thereby destabilizing the oil market—a suggestion of an underlying grievance component. Conversely, bombings, explosions, and direct attacks on utilities generally do not yield significant revenue, as perpetrators cannot profit from the oil burned or the infrastructure destroyed. Such attacks align more closely with the grievance theory, indicative of motivations tied to ideological political violence and efforts to weaken the government. The specific methodologies from both research strands will be thoroughly

explored in subsequent chapters, dedicated to quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques, respectively. Each chapter will investigate the distinct approaches and tools associated with these methodologies, demonstrating their application to the research objectives of this thesis.

This classification aligns with the views of scholars in the field. For example, Ikelegbe (2005) points out that local populations mostly resort to abductions and kidnappings for ransom to acquire compelled cash benefits from multinational companies, highlighting the greed aspect of these acts. Similarly, Umar et al. (2021) explain that vandals are driven solely by grievances, targeting oil infrastructure as a means to directly afflict the government and multinational oil corporations. Unlike oil theft and bunkering, vandalism typically involves violent assaults, employing weapons and explosives to rupture the pipelines (Umar et al., 2021). Moreover, Blair, Christensen, and Gibilisco (2023) contend that pipeline sabotage serves as an effective strategy for armed factions to compel governments to address their grievances.

The study anticipates that a quantitative descriptive analysis will reveal patterns supporting the grievance hypothesis while challenging the greed hypothesis. Therefore, this paper will present a scenario that favours the greed argument, positing oil theft and hostage takings as acts motivated purely by greed, even though a more detailed case-by-case analysis might uncover a significant grievance component in some instances. For example, oil theft might be used for financing terrorist activity, as observed in Iraq and Colombia (FATF 2015). Similarly, while hostage takings primarily aim for ransom, they can also serve to spread terror. Tichý (2019) argues that for ISIS, the main motivation for taking hostages working within the oil industry is to undermine the credibility of the state, as this act demonstrates that the local government is incapable of ensuring internal security. Given the data's limitations in distinctly categorising oil bunkering and hostage takings on a case-by-case scenario as motivated by greed or grievance, this study will classify all incidents under these categories



as motivated by greed. This approach presents a 'best-case scenario' for the greed argument. Thus, if the quantitative analysis refutes the greed theory and indicates that grievance-based attacks are more prevalent within the oil industry in the Niger Delta, it will significantly strengthen the argument that grievances are the primary motivation for actors engaging in terrorist tactics.

The results of the quantitative analysis will form the basis for the second part of this thesis' research design, specifically the qualitative analysis. This analysis will be conducted to further understand the motivations behind these terrorist activities. Through case study analysis, this thesis will explore patterns identified in the quantitative analysis, delving deeper into the reasons behind episodic increases in the number of attacks during specific time frames and further analysing the goals of the actors responsible for those attacks. Case study analysis will enable detailed exploration of the actors and responsible organizations using various secondary data sources. The aim of the qualitative study is to explain why the patterns identified in the quantitative study occurred and to provide further insight into the type of grievances experienced by the local population of the Niger Delta, which lead these actors to employ terrorist tactics against the oil industry.

## Chapter 1 – Conceptual Overview

In order to understand the dynamics of the Niger Delta, this chapter will lay out the concepts used by scholars to understand why groups resort to political violence, and, more specifically, terrorist tactics. This chapter is going to delve into two main concepts, those of grievances and agency, that help explaining how collective action can lead to violent outcomes. On the one hand, dissecting the types of grievances that fuel these movements reveals how perceived injustices and inequality motivate groups to adopt aggressive strategies. On the other hand, examining the concept of agency helps to illustrate how individual and collective choices, informed by these grievances, lead to strategic decisions about engaging in violent acts. This dual focus highlights the interaction between personal motivations and group dynamics, emphasizing the calculated nature of movements that choose violence as a tool for achieving their objectives.

### *1.1 Grievances*

The concept of “grievances” encompasses a large field of issues that create deep feelings of perceived injustice and dissatisfaction among certain groups. According to social movement theory, the presence of grievances represents the primary motivation for individuals engaging into collective action (Snow 2022). Ted Gurr, one of the most influential scholars in conflict studies, argues that political violence is rooted in the concept of grievance through his theory of relative deprivation, which sees perceived discrepancies between expected and actual access to resources and rights as the driving force for mobilising individuals towards action (Gurr 1970). Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward argue that the eruption of social movements – both peaceful and violent – is often facilitated by the breakdown of

institutionalised mechanisms for addressing grievances, leading individuals to seek alternative means of claim-making (Piven and Cloward 1977)

In the Niger Delta, a region in which the local communities have endured severe environmental degradation, health hazards, and economic dispossession due to extensive oil extraction activities by both multinational corporations and the government, grievances represent a core element of the security environment. The immense role of grievances within the local population has led to organised groups becoming more and more extremist, in the hope that political violence will push the government into making amends and redress their perceived injustices. Nevertheless, the literature on political violence in the Niger Delta has been using the concept of grievance widely, encompassing a broad set of issues. Despite those issues often being inter-dependent, it is essential to differentiate between the types of grievances that have the power to mobilise actors into resorting to terrorist tactics as a mean to inflict political change.

### **1.1.1 Resource Sovereignty Grievances**

According to Obi (2009), numerous minorities in the Niger Delta associate the control of oil resources by external entities with 'internal colonialism' and demand the right to manage their own resources. This sentiment is widespread among communities throughout Africa who feel they lack control over their land and people, perceiving a violation of their sovereignty as outlined in the UN General Assembly Resolution 1803 (XVII) of 1962, titled "Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources." This resolution has increasingly been interpreted to affirm not only the rights of states but also the rights of peoples within those states, including indigenous communities, to manage their resources in accordance with their own development objectives. Despite this, many communities see the promises of the resolution as

unmet, with multinational corporations and national governments exploiting local resources without sufficient benefits to or consent from the local populations (Hobe 2015). This perceived injustice is fuelled by the stark contrast between the wealth extracted from their lands and the lack of development and prosperity in these communities.

The absence of resource sovereignty can be a significant factor in driving communities towards organised movements that use violence to assert their rights and grievances. Nevertheless, violent struggles for resource sovereignty are often conceptualised in the literature as having a strong identity component. Aspinall (2007) observed that in Indonesia, natural resource-related violence occurred only as part of broader identity construction processes, framing resource control as part of an ethnic struggle. Similarly, Horowitz (2009) interpreted resource-related violence as concealing a crisis of political legitimacy between two contrasting lifestyles, rooted in a longstanding opposition to colonial power. In the Niger Delta, crude oil theft can be seen as a way to finance organised armed violence against the government and multinational oil companies, reflecting a reaction to these entities' control over productive assets and the labour of the local population (Ufuoma 2014). Moreover, resorting to violence – and particularly terrorism – is not merely a symbolic or militarised action aimed at forcibly gaining control of natural resources, but it also provides local groups an opportunity to inflict significant damage on the host government (Lee 2018). By doing so, they compel the government to address the citizens' grievances due to the severe economic impact of their actions, effectively advancing the groups' goals (Aborisade 2010).

### **1.1.2 Environmental Grievances**

Over the last decades, environmental grievances have started playing a much more important role in resource conflicts. In her study of the political ecology of conflicts, Jewitt (2008)

highlights how grievances related to land alienation, restrictive forest policies, and employment issues in regions like Jharkhand, India, have led to the mobilisation of violent protest movements. Similarly, the Global Environmental Justice Atlas documents numerous cases where socio-environmental conflicts lead to violence, driven by the community's need to protect their livelihoods and environment against exploitative practices (Temper, et al. 2018).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that environmental grievances are, in their nature, peaceful. In order for them to turn violent, they must be complemented by socio-political grievances such as government repression or a sense of marginalisation (Ajil 2022). In Honduras, violent repression in response to environmental grievances greatly escalated violence (Middeldorp and Le Billon 2019). In the Niger Delta, Imobighe (2004) notes that the government's bureaucratic sidelining of the local communities, manifesting primarily through a lack of local representation, leads residents to primarily focus their grievances on destroying the oil infrastructure of Multinational Companies in an attempt to heal their environment by themselves. Similarly, Omeje (2005) argues that while these grievances are built on environmental problems, the core issues on which the militants act upon are deep-seated feelings of neglect and injustice from the government. According to him, the motivation for violence in the region is rooted in political grievances, exacerbated by the government's military responses to the security issues posed by oil militants.

### **1.1.3 Political Grievances**

Political grievances arise from dissatisfaction with governance and the political system. In many unstable societies, the support for violence against the state grows with perceived political grievances, especially when groups feel politically marginalised and ineffective

within existing political structures (Dyrstad and Hillesund 2020). A study conducted by Lacina (2014) shows that government policies, particularly those that marginalise certain groups or fail to address their political demands, can significantly increase the likelihood of violent movements. Her research on India's federal reorganisation reveals that politically disadvantaged groups were more likely to resort to violence, whereas those with political representation were more likely to be peacefully accommodated. In his comprehensive book on ethnic mobilisation, Vogt (2019) finds that grievances are more likely to translate into violent forms of conflict in societies that were segmented into ethnic groups with distinct socioeconomic and cultural institutions as a result of their colonial past.

In conceptualising the grievances in the Niger Delta as political, scholars have highlighted how political exclusion and marginalisation fuel dissatisfaction, as local communities often feel overlooked in political decision-making processes. Ojakorotu (2006) argues that Nigeria's federalism, characterised by fiscal centralisation that favours the Federal Government and the country's ethnic majority, is at the core of these grievances, as this system prevents communities from accessing the wealth derived from the exploitation of their own resources. Additionally, he explains how these political grievances translate into ethnic tensions, as ethnicity is used to mobilise groups against what they perceive as injustice. This exclusion fosters a sense of disenfranchisement and fuels movements that challenge governmental and corporate policies in the region (Frynas 2003).

In a comprehensive study on the types of grievances experienced by communities in the Niger Delta, Koos (2014) finds that individual-level grievances – such as poverty, poor access to public services, and the health impacts of gas flaring – are more widespread and are associated with increased support for violence against the Nigerian state. In contrast to group-level grievances, Koos finds no evidence that such grievances influence support for criminal behaviour on a personal level. However, individual-level grievances, which include socio-

economic aspects, can be more swiftly addressed through political actions targeting these communities, diverging from issues related to resource control and environmental hardships (Koos 2014).

### *1.2 The role of agency in group violence*

In order to understand why groups resort to violent tactics, one must go beyond grievances and look into dynamic interplay between individual actions and collective outcomes. The decision of organised groups to engage in terrorist tactics is dictated by collective agency, which is shaped and constrained by the structures within which they operate (de la Roche 1996). This goes both ways, as the structure and strategies of the group also influence how collective identities are forged and the means through which they pursue their goals (Swanson 1992). Individually, actors choose to join these groups and participate in collective violence primarily because of common goals, which they perceive to be achievable only through extreme violent means, such as terrorism (Crenshaw 2000). Nevertheless, the psychological need of belonging is also an important element, as actors resort to violence and terrorism as a result of the group's identity and strategies which foster a sense of belonging (Schwartz, Dunkel and Waterman 2009, Littman and Paluck 2015).

As a result, framing is an essential concept for understanding these groups, and agency plays a crucial role in the evolution and dissemination of these collective identities. Framing processes involve constructing meaning around specific grievances and goals, a strategic action that group leaders take to aid them in recruiting participants, garnering public sympathy, and effectively challenging opponents. These individuals not only generate and manipulate these frames to align with the movement's objectives but also adapt them in

response to external pressures and opportunities, thus having a significant impact on the movement's trajectory and success in achieving its goals (Benford and Snow 2000).

There are several theories that aim to explain why groups resort to violence, while keeping agency as a core element of their conceptualisation. For instance, strategic decision-making theory explains why groups resort to violence by focusing on how they assess risks and benefits to optimise outcomes aligned with their goals. Groups weigh immediate impacts, such as gaining attention or instilling fear, against potential long-term drawbacks, like retaliation or losing public support. They adapt their strategies in response to changing circumstances and employ tactics aimed at maximising their influence and achieving specific objectives (Smith 1999). By adopting the view that individuals are rational actors with agency, Gould (1999) argues that groups resort to violence after their strategies fail to convince their "adversary" to de-escalate. This happens, according to him, due to the sense of solidarity being called into question, prompting members to resort to violent means in order to prove that they can overcome their collective-action problem and achieve their goals.

Another theory which is essential for understanding the success of groups in the Niger Delta in their continuation of employing terrorist tactics on the oil industry is resource mobilisation theory (RMT). Even if actors were solely motivated by grievances, RMT explains the capacity of these groups to sustain and organise their violent activities for long periods of time. As the theory sees groups acting and planning their activities based on the resources available to them, the presence of resources – both natural resources as well as money, people, and expertise – makes groups more capable of mobilising individuals towards achieving shared, sometimes aggressive, goals (McCarthy and Zald 1977).



Conceptualising greed and grievances in the context of the Niger Delta it is evident that there is recognition of the dual significance of both theories in perpetuating conflicts. Both elements are acknowledged as catalysts enabling militants to initiate and sustain their activities. However, as previously indicated, a divide persists in the literature regarding terrorist tactics being deployed on the oil industry: some scholars emphasize the role of greed, while others prioritise grievances as the primary motivator. This lack of a unified approach hampers policymakers' understanding of the complex interplay between economic interests and deep-seated social and ethnic grievances that fuel such forms of terrorism. Consequently, this limitation undermines the effectiveness of long-term strategies aimed at addressing these issues. Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to the debate by testing the greed theory through a quantitative study and further explore the type of grievances which are most predominant in motivating terrorist activity related to the oil industry in the Niger Delta.

## **Chapter 2 – Context: Political Violence and the Oil Industry in the Niger Delta**

Politically motivated actors using terrorist tactics have played a significant role in oil sabotage in Nigeria, contributing to the industry's decline. Nigeria provides a compelling case for studying oil terrorism due to the strong link between its conflict-ridden, insecure environment, and criminal activities in the oil sector. While oil bunkering as a means to fund violence and terrorism is not unique to Nigeria, with countries like Mexico and Iraq also facing significant challenges due to oil theft and sabotage, Nigeria's situation is unique. In Mexico, oil theft primarily emerged from the exploitation of oil production by drug cartels, such as the Zetas, driven by profit motives (Correa-Cabrera 2017). Conversely, in Nigeria, oil theft evolved as a 'last-resort' measure among locals and extremist groups amid poverty and corruption, differing from Iraq's scenario where oil theft followed major external disruption, notably the US invasion in 2003, which significantly altered the country's security landscape and pace of oil production. Thus, Nigeria's case offers unique insights into the dynamics of oil theft under different socio-political and economic conditions.

Crude oil was first discovered in Nigeria in 1956, shortly before the country gained independence from Great Britain. Since the discovery of oil, foreign companies such as Shell, Chevron, and ExxonMobil have dominated oil extraction activities, leading to severe environmental degradation including oil spills, deforestation, and water pollution. Against this backdrop of oil exploitation, the early years of independence were marked by political tensions and ethnic rivalries, culminating in the 1967 Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War. This conflict emerged when the Eastern Region, dominated by the Igbo ethnic group, attempted to secede and form the Republic of Biafra, resulting in a brutal war that caused significant loss of life and widespread suffering (Heerten and Moses 2014). After the

war ended in 1971, control of oil revenue shifted to the federal military government, which decided to nationalise the oil industry to assert greater control over resources, establishing the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation. In an effort to suppress the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta and prevent separatist movements, the government transferred land ownership from local communities to federal and state governments and increased local oil production, further exacerbating the environmental degradation in the delicate Niger Delta. Consequently, Nigeria, and particularly the regions of the Niger Delta, continued to experience violent clashes related to ethnic, religious, and resource control issues. In this context of ongoing violence, numerous militia groups formed, leveraging Nigeria's abundant oil resources to organise themselves and pursue their objectives.

Nevertheless, in order to understand the context of violence in Nigeria, it is crucial to examine the specific characteristics of the oil industry. This sector has not spurred growth in other parts of the economy due to its "enclave" nature, which instead siphons capital from other industries. The oil industry is geographically isolated from the rest of the country's economic activities and relies heavily on specialised equipment produced abroad, utilising relatively little human capital compared to sectors like manufacturing (Ross 2012). Additionally, the focus on petroleum has diverted capital from other areas, particularly agriculture, which was once a cornerstone of Nigeria's economy. Before the oil boom, crops like cocoa, rubber, and palm oil drove Nigeria's development, accounting for 65% of its GDP. Following the discovery of crude oil, the agricultural sector was increasingly overlooked, with its GDP contribution falling to 26%. Consequently, the oil industry's growth not only restricts the development of other sectors but also results in the underutilisation of various resources, leading to economic underdevelopment and lack of diversification (Oludimu and Alola 2022).

A significant portion of Nigeria's population faces poverty, especially acute among rural communities. This issue is particularly severe in the Niger Delta, where the oil industry has drastically altered the economic landscape. Local agricultural and fishing industries, which traditionally supported rural livelihoods, have been severely disrupted by intensive oil exploration and production activities. Often, these traditional industries are supplanted by oil-related operations that demand advanced technological skills and equipment, resulting in job displacement (Elum, Mopipi and Henri-Ukoha 2016). Because the oil sector is capital-intensive, it employs fewer people compared to the agricultural sector it displaces, thus exacerbating unemployment and underemployment in the area.

The youth in particular face daunting employment challenges. Despite high levels of education and motivation, young people in the Niger Delta find limited job opportunities within the oil industry, which often prefers to hire expatriate workers for specialised roles. This situation contributes to a soaring unemployment rate among the youth, estimated to exceed 50% in some areas of the Niger Delta (Ojutalayo, et al. 2023). The lack of adequate employment opportunities, coupled with extensive poverty and social inequality, has led many to engage in oil theft as a means of economic survival (Wilson 2014).

Due to the insecure environment in the Niger Delta, several multinational companies have had to shut down their operations during periods of high crime. Given the Nigerian economy's heavy reliance on oil, its economic growth faces additional hurdles when oil production is disrupted (Odalonu 2015). Sudden halts in oil extraction have led to severe economic losses and increased unemployment rates, exacerbating the resource curse. However, in an economy already highly dependent on the petroleum industry, the environmental and socio-economic benefits of reduced or halted oil production are not immediately apparent. Even if Nigeria's oil production is curtailed for several months, the government still contends with the cumulative side effects of decades-long operations

without protective mechanisms. Consequently, despite reduced crude oil exploitation, political violence in the region continues to erode the state's revenue base, further intensifying the crisis in the short term (Wilson 2014).

## Chapter 3 – Theory Testing: Quantitative Descriptive Analysis

Scholars primarily supporting the greed theory have offered various explanations for the conflict in the Niger Delta. Although the framework by Collier and Hoeffler is not explicitly mentioned in the literature concerning the motivations behind actors adopting terrorist tactics in the Niger Delta, numerous scholars have identified economic incentives as the fundamental cause of violence, while also acknowledging ethnic, religious, and political disparities. This chapter aims to refute the greed theory by running a quantitative descriptive analysis that will look into the type of terrorist attacks that took place in the Niger Delta and that are related to the oil industry.

### *3.1 Methodology*

It is important to note that the GTD exhibits many inconsistencies in terms of its categorisation of the attacks. Consequently, each of the 879 attacks recorded in the Niger Delta from 1992 to July 2021 has been subjected to a qualitative analysis in accordance with the classification methodology outlined above. Hou, Gaibullov, and Sandler (2020) have observed similar issues with the GTD and other studies based on the database, suggesting that a qualitative review of the classifications is necessary, particularly considering that the GTD's definition of a terrorist attack may differ from the one adopted in this paper. For instance, under the category of "bombings," which the methodology classifies as grievance-motivated, the GTD includes an attack cited by Vanguard in 2012 where the motives were either robbery or revenge (Vanguard 2012). Such attacks, with discriminate and personal motives and no political aim, do not align with the GTD's or this thesis' definition of terrorist attacks or oil terrorism specifically.

Consequently, this analysis will exclude attacks unrelated to the oil industry, even if they occurred in the oil-producing states of the Niger Delta. This includes attacks motivated by religion, targeting religious figures, educational institutions and personnel, as well as farmers and herdsman, including those conducted by Fulani extremists. Similarly, solely ethnically motivated attacks on tribes and traditional rulers, and economically motivated attacks that do not target the oil industry, such as those against tourists, will be omitted. The focus will thus remain on attacks targeting the oil industry, its infrastructure and workers, government buildings and personnel, and the press, police, and military.

As mentioned earlier, the category of greed attacks will naturally encompass all "hijacking" incidents, as these represent cases of oil theft motivated solely by the economic gain from capturing oil resources. This category will also include all instances identified as "hostage taking," which covers both barricade situations and kidnappings, to support a best-case scenario for the greed theory. Additionally, both armed and unarmed assaults are qualitatively assessed since some incidents involve oil theft while others are clearly motivated by grievances. The remainder of the grievance attacks will include assassinations – a common terrorist tactic aimed at achieving specific political outcomes and generating significant psychological impacts beyond the immediate physical harm (McCormick 2003). This category also encompasses bombings, explosions, and attacks on facilities or infrastructure, which represent clear acts of destruction against oil infrastructure without any potential for financial gain. Lastly, there are ten attacks classified under "unknown" type. These have been qualitatively assessed by analysing the news sources reporting on the incidents. After thorough analysis, all these attacks have been determined to be grievance-motivated, targeting either oil facilities, police, or individuals involved in promoting foreign investments in the oil industry – issues commonly linked to the socio-economic and environmental damages in the area (Ite, et al. 2013).

Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the economic incentives discussed in this chapter may also encompass a significant grievance component. The funds obtained through oil theft and extortion could be channelled into financing militant groups and terrorist activities. Many terrorist organisations have shown interest in controlling oil resources. A prime example of that is Boko Haram, the most active terrorist organisation in Nigeria, which has been claiming the newly found gas and oil in Lake Chad, Northern Nigeria (Omenma 2020). Consequently, terrorist attacks on oil facilities, while economically motivated, could enable broader and more devastating objectives of terrorist organizations, thus categorizing these attacks more as acts of grievance than greed. Additionally, kidnappings should be interpreted not merely in terms of ransom demands but also as a method for expressing grievances and instilling fear and anxiety within the oil industry. Nevertheless, as the main purpose of this chapter is to refute the greed theory in order to prove the salience of grievances, these attacks will be considered as motivated by greed to present a best-case-scenario for theory testing.

### 3.2 Analysis

The disparity in the number of greed and grievance-motivated attacks is substantial. After refining the data based on the previously mentioned criteria, 188 cases were identified as motivated by economic incentives, either directly or indirectly linked to the presence of oil in the region. In contrast, the number of grievance-motivated attacks is significantly higher, totalling 446. Although the discrepancy in attack numbers is notable, *Figure 1* illustrates that until the mid-2010s, the growth rates for both types of attacks were similar, with a slight surge in 2009. However, starting in 2016, the number of grievance-motivated attacks saw a significant increase, maintaining a rapid growth rate throughout the analysed timeline. On the other hand, the growth rate of greed-motivated attack stagnated.



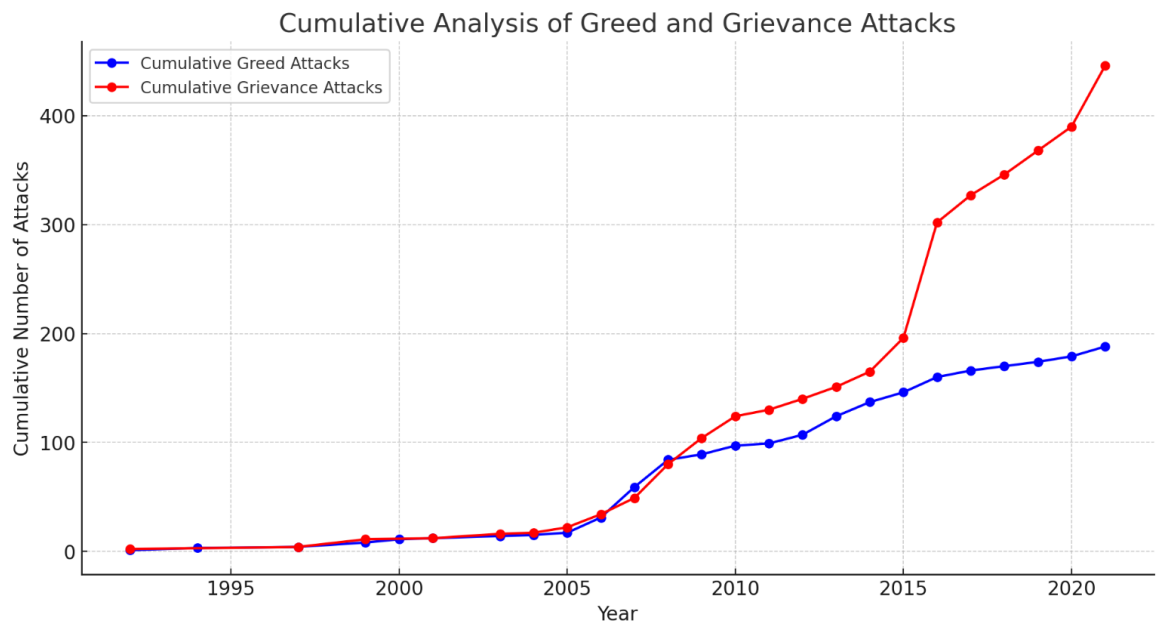


Figure 1: Cumulative Analysis of Greed and Grievance Attack<sup>1</sup>

Figure 2 clearly illustrates that between 2015 and 2016, the number of grievance attacks more than tripled, before reverting to the trend observed prior to 2015, and then rising again after 2020. Unfortunately, the data from the GTD only extends up until July 2021, so it is unclear whether the increase is consistent or sporadic. The spike in 2015-2016, similarly to the one in 2020, can be explained by a multitude of reasons, which will be discussed in the following section.

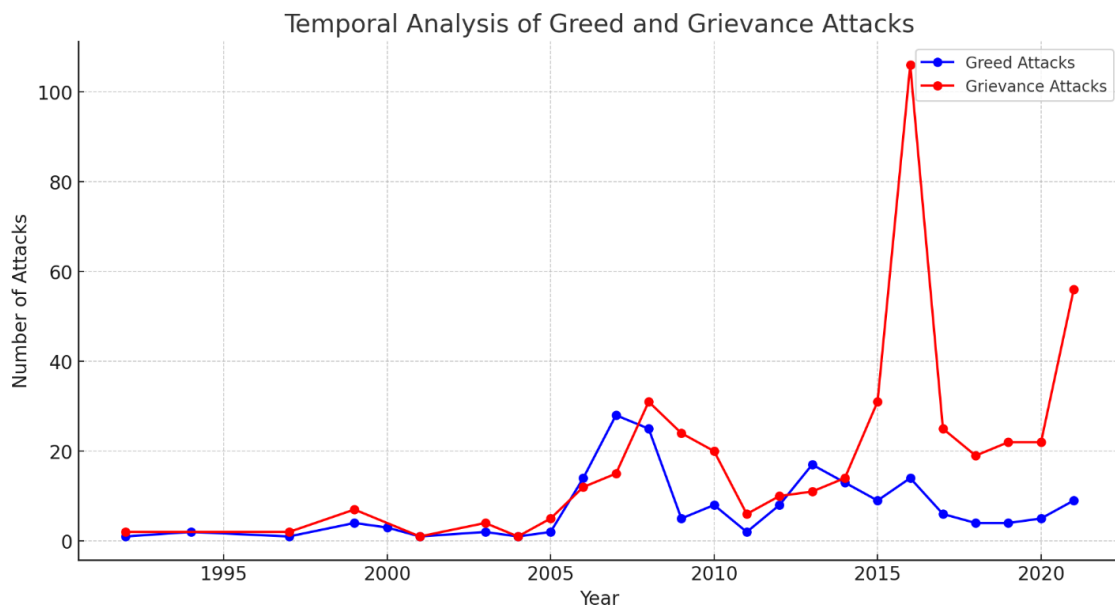
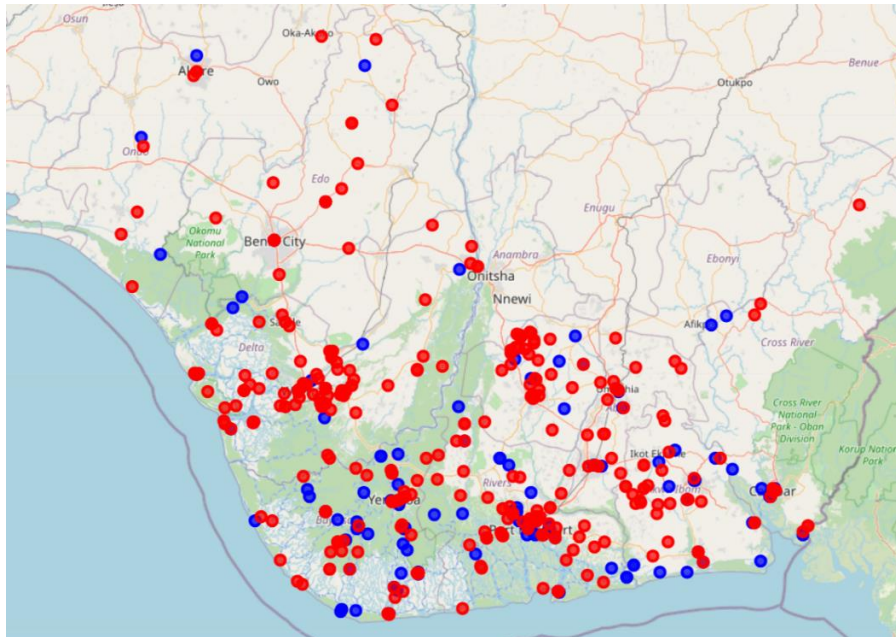


Figure 2: Temporal Analysis of Greed and Grievance Attacks<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The illustrations of Figures 1 and 2 were created using ChatGPT based on the working database of the thesis.

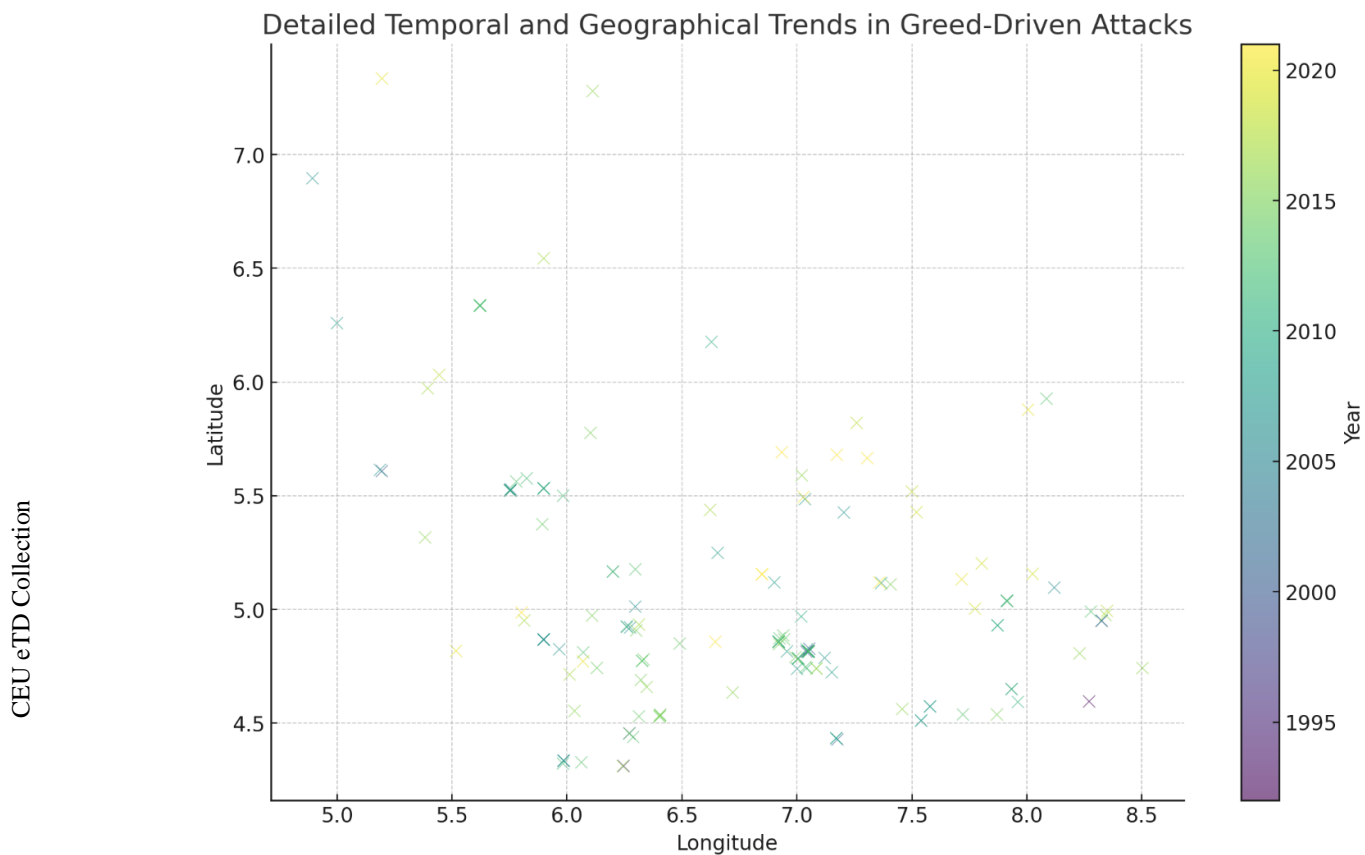
In analysing the geographical distribution of the attacks, no clear pattern emerges (*Figure 3*). However, there is some clustering of greed-driven attacks along river paths and near coastal areas, likely due to logistical reasons, as activities such as hijacking and oil siphoning typically occur near drilling sites. Additionally, many kidnappings occur near locations where oil workers and key political figures in the Nigerian oil industry operate, which are also proximal to oil sites. In contrast, the distribution of grievance-driven attacks across the Niger Delta is more dispersed, suggesting that these attacks target not only economically strategic locations but also areas of significant local discontent, potentially due to environmental damage, lack of economic benefits, or political grievances. The absence of a distinct pattern may indicate that both types of attacks are influenced by a mix of factors including economic opportunities, geographic accessibility, political instability, and local community sentiments. The widespread presence of attacks throughout various parts of the Delta underscores the pervasive issues affecting multiple communities, each influenced by potentially different triggers and targets.



*Figure 3: Geographical Distribution of the Attacks<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> The code for geographically mapping the attacks was created using Python and can be provided upon request.

Nevertheless, when looking at both the geographical and temporal distribution of the attacks it becomes apparent that the centres of activity have slightly shifted over the years for both greed and grievance-driven attacks. As depicted in Figures 4 and 5, each point representing an attack provides a clear insight into the variability and geographical spread over time. *Figure 4*, which illustrates greed-driven attacks, shows that over time these attacks may expand to new regions or intensify in existing hotspots, reflecting changes in operational tactics or shifts in focus areas. The grievance-driven attacks, as shown in *Figure 5*, are more widely distributed. This broader distribution suggests that they are driven by more extensive issues affecting larger areas, such as environmental concerns or community grievances, which will be more extensively discussed in the following section. Additionally, this pattern could also demonstrate how these issues evolve or spread geographically over time.



*Figure 4: Temporal and Geographical Trends in Greed-Driven Attacks<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> The illustrations of Figures 4 and 5 were created using ChatGPT based on the working database of the thesis.

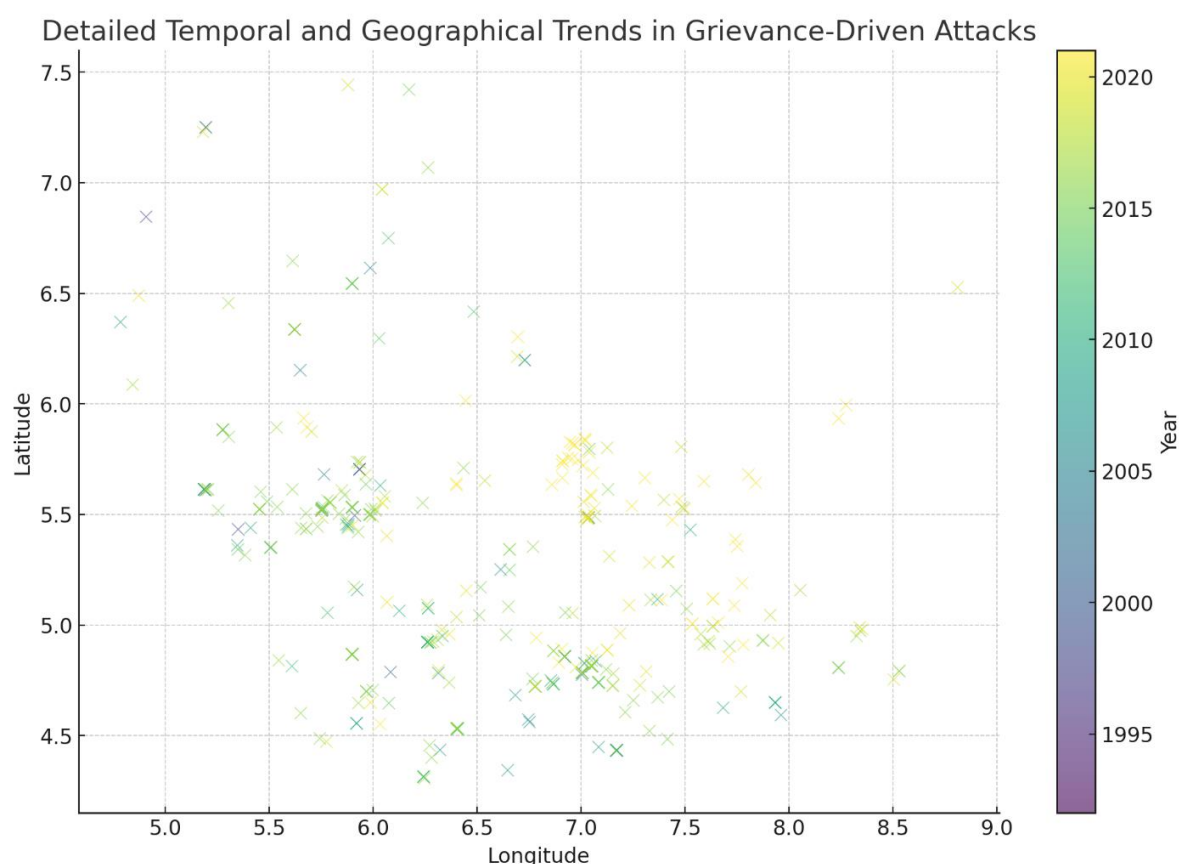
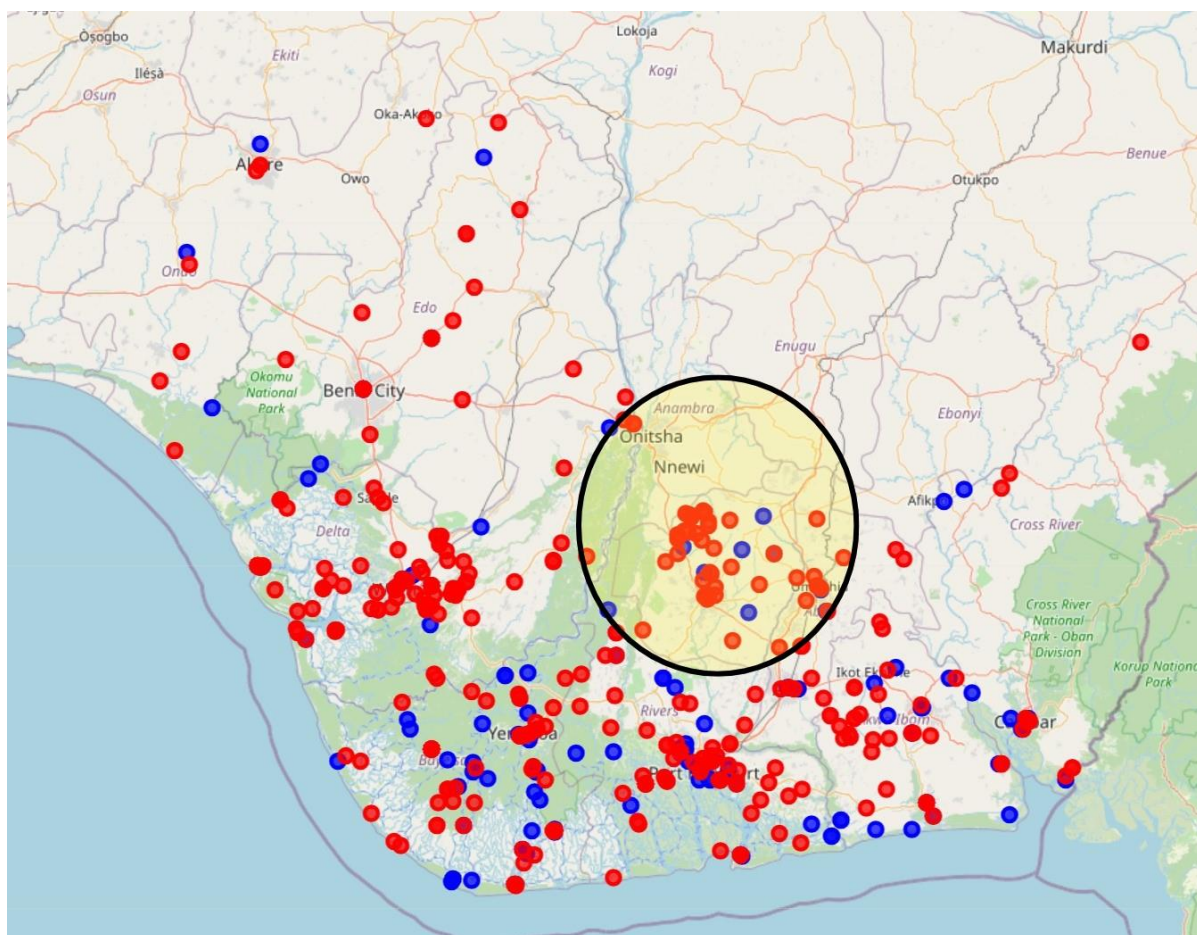


Figure 5: Temporal and Geographical Trends in Grievance-Driven Attacks<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that grievance-driven attacks show a clear clustering around Imo State in 2020, coinciding with a resurgence in such attacks. As highlighted in Figure 6, which displays the same map as Figure 3, this cluster of attacks is particularly visible, with most occurring in the highlighted region since 2020. This recent increase in grievance-driven attacks in the Imo region could provide insightful implications regarding the current state of grievances in the Niger Delta. This geographical cluster, together with the increase in the number attacks starting in 2020, need to be extensively analysed qualitatively, which presents the basis of the following section.



*Figure 6: Geographical Cluster of Grievance Attacks since 2020*

This thesis' descriptive quantitative analysis strongly challenges the greed theory of conflict in the Niger Delta, disproving its central assumptions. Even under the conditions most favourable to the greed theory, where all incidents of kidnappings and oil theft – activities that could, upon closer qualitative scrutiny, reveal significant grievance motivations – were classified as greed-driven, the data still indicate a substantial disparity. Attacks motivated by grievances outnumber those driven by greed nearly three-to-one. This pronounced difference, evident even in a dataset optimised to potentially exaggerate greed-motivated conflicts, underscores the inadequacy of the greed theory in fully explaining the dynamics of violence in the region. The findings highlight the critical need to consider deeper socio-economic and political grievances as primary drivers of conflict, rather than merely economic incentives. Building on these findings, the subsequent section will delve into examining the specific

grievances that have fuelled the attacks, aiming to understand the broader socio-economic and political contexts that the quantitative data has outlined.

## Chapter 4 – Types of Grievances

Quantitative analysis has shown that grievances play a crucial role in motivating actors to engage in oil terrorism. However, this analysis falls short of addressing an important question: What specific types of grievances are these actors experiencing? As previously mentioned, while all grievances share a socio-political dimension, they stem from diverse resentments. Economic grievances necessitate very different policy responses compared to environmental grievances. Therefore, identifying the primary source of these resentments is vital for developing a comprehensive strategy to enhance regional security. This is not to say that economic grievances cannot coexist with those driven by environmental concerns or corruption. In fact, these grievances often consolidate and reinforce one another, being intricately linked. Nevertheless, it is imperative to investigate the precise dynamics to understand the catalyst that pushes actors to the brink, compelling them to adopt an extreme form of violence and resort to terrorist tactics. Considering that the quantitative analysis has revealed a relatively stable trend in grievance-driven attacks apart from the notable spikes in 2015 and 2022, this section will investigate the factors that precipitated these increases. By examining the surge in attacks, this thesis aims to identify the most pressing grievances and understand which specific issues mobilise both groups and individual actors to resort to violence using terrorist tactics. By precisely looking at the spikes of attacks, this exploration will shed light on the underlying causes of these escalations and provide insight into the dynamics of conflict in the region.

To achieve this, the section will utilise case study analyses focusing on the groups and actors involved in the surges of attacks during the aforementioned periods. It will examine the primary objectives of these actors and analyse the factors that led to their decision to employ terrorist tactics, further investigating the role of violence in the groups' strategies. For the first spike, the analysis will also explore the factors that contributed to the de-escalation of the



situation. For the second spike, as the quantitative data is only available until July 2021, this paper will analyse secondary sources to acquire a better understanding of the current situation and determine if the pattern of de-escalation is repeating.

#### *4.1 First spike – 2015/2016*

The constant presence of violence in the Niger Delta is based on the militarisation of the region, which came as a response to the failure of peaceful protests to influence the partnership between the state and oil companies in their approach to managing the Niger Delta. As a result, various groups have turned to violence either as a survival strategy or to challenge and possibly take over the oil resources, which are seen as being exploited by the state-oil collaboration. Among the residents of the Niger Delta, there is a common perception that the Nigerian state and oil firms are arrogant, leading to a widespread belief that these entities only respond to violence (Obi 2009). While the constant increase – and occasional fluctuations – in the display of violence is normal when it comes to conflict regions, the spike of attacks recorded in 2015/2016 necessitate further attention.

To understand the grievances that led to the upsurge of terrorist attacks in the Niger Delta in 2015, one needs to examine the situation in the region in the years preceding. Following the global oil price drop in 2014, which led to an economic downturn in Nigeria, particularly in oil-producing areas such as the Niger Delta, government spending generally decreased. This included delayed payments to amnesty programs and a reduction in development initiatives targeting the Niger Delta (Omoshola, Ismail and Zakuan 2021). Furthermore, around this time it became evident that the other significant development program in the region, the General Memoranda of Understanding (GMoU), was failing short of its ambitious goals, particularly that of engaging the communities most prone to rebel. This initiative,



predominantly managed by multinational oil companies through their corporate social responsibility, claimed to incorporate accountability processes, regular communication with communities, greater ownership, conflict prevention efforts, and sustainable development initiatives. However, a study by Uduji, Okolo-Obasi, and Asongu (2021) found that while GMoU interventions increased community ownership and trust, they did not significantly improve the economic conditions of the region's youth, including ex-militants, as the initiative failed to promote substantial entrepreneurship or job creation. Considering that youth-employment projects represented one of GMoU's main tools of fostering conflict reduction, the environment in the Niger Delta prior to 2015 was characterised by poor economic and security conditions.

Furthermore, the time the grievance-driven attacks increased coincided with significant changes in national government, marked by the election of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015. The new administration introduced policy shifts that impacted the Niger Delta. More specifically, although President Buhari extended the Presidential Amnesty Program initiated in 2009 and was set to expire in December 2015, funding for the program was cut by 70% (Stevenson 2016). Although opinions on the success of the amnesty program are divided, it is evident that by offering economic incentives for militants to disarm, the program decreased greed-motivated attacks, diminishing the criminal component from the bigger challenge of reducing political violence. Nevertheless, the amnesty program did not have any positive impact on grievance-based violence. In fact, the various challenges and criticisms that the program has faced over the years deepened the structural issue on which grievances were built in the Niger Delta, potentially playing a significant role in explaining the increase in grievance-motivated attacks in 2015. For instance, Hallmark (2017), raising doubts about the efficiency of the amnesty program, asserts that merely providing financial incentives and amnesty might not be enough to deter militants from continuing their attacks. Although he

acknowledges the importance of environmental grievances, Hallmark argues that a truly effective and lasting resolution to the conflict would entail distributing a portion of oil production revenue to the communities in the Niger Delta, recognizing that the short-term solutions offered by the amnesty deal were unsustainable. Eke (2015) argues that while the financial benefits provided through the amnesty program may have temporarily restored peace in the region shortly after the program was implemented, they also had unintended consequences. As the government diverted resources away from genuine development efforts, the amnesty essentially became a 'money for weapons' strategy. This approach not only incentivised criminal elements to confront the government aggressively to gain from the financial rewards but also deepened existing grievances and created new challenges (Eke 2015). Such practices may have further deepened exacerbated frustrations, leading to a resurgence in grievance-based attacks.

Apart from the extending the contended amnesty programme, President Buhari ordered an increased military presence in the Niger Delta and launched several developmental initiatives, including vocational training aimed at youth. Despite these efforts to mitigate conflict, the core grievances of the Niger Delta communities remained largely unaddressed. This was due in part to the ineffective implementation of reforms and also because of the administration's focus on security rather than addressing the root causes of discontent, such as environmental degradation and economic disparity (Duyile 2023). Moreover, Nigeria's economic challenges during Buhari's tenure, including high inflation rates, rising debt, and a struggling economy heavily reliant on oil revenues – which were severely affected by the drop in oil prices – further exacerbated the struggles of communities in the Niger Delta. In this context, the new administration's economic policies, despite attempts at economic diversification and fiscal adjustments, were perceived as too narrow and insufficiently comprehensive to address the entrenched issues in the Niger Delta (Oxford Analytica 2019). These measures, failing to

directly meet the needs and concerns of the local communities, likely fuelled the narrative of the government's exploitation of the region without sharing the benefits of oil extraction, thereby causing dissatisfaction among the local population and former militants.

A detailed examination of the attacks occurring in the first spike, between 2015 and 2017, reveals noticeable outliers. Out of the 162 attacks recorded during the first strike, in 79 of them responsibility was claimed by groups such as the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), the Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate (NDGJM), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Urhobo Gbagbako. While it is not uncommon for terrorist attacks to remain unclaimed, especially since research shows that established groups use 'non-verbal signatures' to claim responsibility as that lowers the risk for detection (Hansen 2023), the significant number of claimed attacks provides insights into the motivations behind employing terrorist tactics on the oil industry in the Niger Delta. The outliers become even more evident when looking at the distribution of attacks per year, as displayed in ***Error! Reference source not found.*** The resurgence of violence in 2016 from NDA, NDGJM, and, to a certain extent, MEND, reveals a fragmented landscape of militancy marked by episodic violence triggered by events that deepened the militants' grievances. Since these groups nearly ceased their violent activities in 2017, they provide a compelling case to study in order to understand the role of grievances in terrorist attacks on the oil industry in the Niger Delta.

*Table 1: First Spike Attacks by Group*

Group Name	2015	2016	2017
Unknown	28	35	20
Urhobo Gbagbako	2	0	0
Tribesmen	1	0	0
Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)	0	4	0

Niger Delta Avengers (NDA)	0	49	1
Ijaw extremists	0	2	0
Red Egbesu Water Lions	0	1	0
Niger Delta extremists	0	1	2
Red Scorpion	0	1	0
People's Democratic Party (PDP)	0	1	0
Niger Delta Justice Defense Group (NDJDG)	0	1	0
Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate (NDGJM)	0	11	0
Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)	0	0	2

When looking at the targets of attacks in 2016, those claimed by militant groups predominantly targeted oil and gas infrastructure, primarily employing explosive devices to attack pipelines, oil platforms, wells, and manifolds. While this modus operandi is not new in the Niger Delta, as groups have been engaging in terrorist practices such as bombings since the late 1990s to highlight their political objectives and dissatisfaction with the state and oil companies' policies (Ibaba 2011), the frequency of attacks indicates an isolated occurrence taking place in 2016. The NDA, which carried out most of the claimed attacks that year, emerged early in the year following the decline in activity of older, established groups such as the Nigeria Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) and MEND (Niworu 2017). NDA emerged as a group of abroad educated and well-travelled individuals, who aimed to make the Niger Delta struggle known on an international scale. Having an ethnically diverse leadership, NDA's agenda represented a compilation of the grievances experienced by the people of the Niger Delta, demanding a larger share of oil revenues, better education opportunities, cleanup of oil polluted areas, higher responsibility

from foreign investors, and stronger anti-corruption laws. All these demands were outlined in an ultimatum to the government prior to the commencement of their bombing campaign on oil installations, as detailed in *Table 2* (Babatunde, Norafidah and Tapiwa 2016).

*Table 2: NDA Attacks by Target Type*

<b>NDA Target Type</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Gas/Oil/Electric	0	1	0
Gas	0	4	0
Oil	0	44	1

Despite claiming that the attacks were conducted to draw attention to the general grievances experienced by the communities in the Niger Delta, the nature of the attacks reveals that some of the claimed demands were not central to the NDA's agenda. Despite the fact that several studies have determined that the region's violence is rooted in long-standing environmental harm, driven by the extractive nature of the oil industry and perpetuated by significant government corruption (Frynas 2001, Ebiede 2011, Eke 2015, Stakeholder Democracy Network 2020), the severe environmental consequences of the attacks conducted by NDA suggest that oil pollution was not the main concern of the group. The extensive environmental damage in the Niger Delta severely impacts the local communities' agriculture and fisheries, which represents the primary sources of livelihood for the working class (Tom-Ekine and Larinde 2010, Jemimah and Ike 2015, Elum, Mopipi and Henri-Ukoha 2016). The massive destruction of farmlands, as well as wild and marine environments, has led to what Odoemene (2011) describes as "environment-related poverty." However, the NDA's bombings of oil installations only worsened the immediate environmental conditions in the region, as the attacks caused severe oil spills (Babatunde, Norafidah and Tapiwa 2016).

The NDA's attacks thus support the findings of Mähler's (2010) report, which posits that environmental concerns are often used as a convenient diversion to mask the broader issues facing local communities. Mähler contends that while environmental degradation in the Niger Delta has been a significant issue, with its origins tracing back to the 1970s and 1980s, there has not been a marked deterioration in environmental conditions since the 1990s that would sufficiently account for the corresponding escalation in violence. Even though the environmental and economic damage caused by the oil industry in the Niger Delta is frequently cited as a catalyst for violent responses, it is not the primary factor driving the decision to resort to violence. It is important to recognise that while environmental concerns exist among the Niger Delta communities, the local population is willing to accept the environmental repercussions of oil exploitation if it is accompanied by resource autonomy. Therefore, the core grievances stem from the perceived injustices of enduring the negative effects of oil exploitation without reaping any benefits. This highlights the foundational nature of resource sovereignty grievances in motivating violent activity.

The NDA *modus operandi* further reveals the overall arching target. Consequent to their higher goals of investment in the local communities and equitable sharing of resources (Bamidele 2017, 544), the NDA's tactics are directed towards harming Multinational Oil Companies and the government, not civilians. Ever since their establishment, the group has stated they will not harm people, either military or civilians. They have also publicly instructed other groups to stay away from targeting soldiers and oil workers, citing that these tactics would "offend God in their mission to liberate the people of the region" (Okpare 2016). Attacking oil infrastructure is thus not only a symbolic act but also a strategic one, aimed at highlighting their plight, disrupting the economic interests of perceived oppressors, and asserting demands for autonomy, resource control, and social justice. This frames oil terrorism as a response to deeper structural problems, necessitating solutions that go beyond

mere economic compensation and address both the economic and socio-political grievances of the affected communities.

Nevertheless, going back to the context in which these attacks resurged, the motivations behind the attacks must be understood by also looking at the momentum NDA chose to act. One field study conducted by Chikwem and Duru (2018) suggests that the resurgence in attacks by the NDA in 2016 can largely be attributed to several political and socio-ethnic grievances, mainly related to President Buhari's administration. After conducting surveys among local population, they found that the perception of a selective anti-corruption campaign by the government, which appeared to disproportionately target prominent figures from the Niger Delta, seen as both humiliating and harassing, was central to the NDA's agenda. Additionally, the scholars found that there was a significant crackdown on federal structures within the Niger Delta itself, particularly concerning the cancellation of a project to establish the Maritime University in Okerenkoko, located in the Warri South West Local Government Area of Delta State, which had previously been approved by the former administration. This decision, found to be indicative of the Buhari administration's lack of a comprehensive plan or agenda to address the needs and aspirations of the Niger Delta community, was cited by the respondents as an example of perceived neglect towards the people of the Niger Delta. Moreover, the study also highlighted the decision to uniquely pursue former President Goodluck Jonathan, among other leaders, for prosecution, as being viewed by the local communities as particularly provocative given his ties to the Niger Delta (Chikwem and Duru 2018). Nevertheless, the explicit political objectives of the NDA should not be taken out of the context of the oil revenue distribution issue in the Niger Delta. The change in administration from President Goodluck Jonathan, who has coming from the Niger Delta to President Muhammad Buhari, a Northerner, resulted in the immediate loss of privileges implemented during President Jonathan's administration, such as oil patronage

networks and key portfolios for the Niger Delta communities. The swift actions of President Buhari to reverse many of his predecessor's development policies targeting the Niger Delta fuelled fears and uncertainties, triggering a violent response based on long-standing grievances. The immediate violent reaction of the NDA to the new presidency underscores the impact of political change on their decision to act on their grievances, serving as a catalyst for employing terrorist tactics. Therefore, despite the primary motivation for the attacks being the pursuit of resource autonomy, the political environment should also be recognised as a catalyst for violence.

The sudden stop in attacks at the end of 2016 can be explained by the negotiations the Nigeran government agreed to, opening the door for concessions that prompted NDA to announce a conditional ceasefire (Kazeem 2016). The decision to open talks with the NDA was taken after the oil companies in the region were forced to evacuate and shut down their operations. In this sense, the NDA succeeded to severely damage Nigeria's economy and force them into a dialogue to address the grievances of the region. Nevertheless, just a year after announcing the ceasefire, the NDA called it off in late 2017, announcing a "brutal and bloody" campaign as a result of President Buhari's alleged unwillingness to address any of the group's demands (Akwagyiram 2017).

By examining the characteristics of the first spike of violence, this section has revealed that while the primary grievances motivating the NDA to employ terrorist tactics were related to resource sovereignty, political grievances served as a trigger for organised action, acting as a unifying element for the group. Although the group has cited numerous grievances as drivers of their violence, the analysis shows that most of these grievances are ultimately rooted in the main driver – resource autonomy. The risk of losing the few resource-related benefits enjoyed by the communities with the change in administration also led to political grievances that



triggered such an extensive violent response. However, all of these actions were fundamentally based on grievances over resource sovereignty.

#### 4.2 Second spike – 2020/2021

On the context of deep discontent from the previous ceasefire negotiations, it was a matter of time until violence was to reappear in the Niger Delta. As discussed in the previous sections, attacks started raising again in 2020, with 78 attacks being registered from the beginning of the year until July 2021, when the last attacks were recorded in the GTD. A closer examination of the data (*Error! Reference source not found.*) reveals that most attacks conducted since 2020 have been perpetrated by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a separatist militant group with Neo-Marxist grievances related to the control of oil resources of the Niger Delta. Despite IPOB's primary agenda focusing on secession and self-determination for the Igbo people and the creation of a sovereign state of Biafra, controlling resources remains one of their main, tangible goals. This is rooted in historical contexts, as oil autonomy was central to the Biafran War that began in 1967. Since Biafra claimed the oil fields in the Niger Delta, IPOB's focus continues to be on controlling this natural resource, which they view as historically belonging to the state of Biafra (Obi 2009).

Table 3: Second Spike Attacks by Group

Group Name	No. of Attacks
Unknown	33
Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)	43
Niger Delta extremists	1
Fulani extremists	1

It is to be noted that the NDA and IPOB are allied groups, sharing mutual goals. The two groups differ in their main, overarching goals, as IPOB primarily focuses on the secession of the southeastern regions to form an independent Biafra, while NDA concentrates on issues already discussed specific to the larger region to the Niger Delta. Nevertheless, in practice they are primarily motivated by a common tangible goal – a greater share of control over their natural resources. Back in 2016, IPOB was the only pro-Biafra group publicly supporting the attacks conducted by the NDA, calling them their “kith and kin” for fighting for the freedom of the people of Biafra (Chiedozie 2016). Therefore, the resurgence of violence perpetrated by IPOB can be seen as an extension of the NDA's actions, aligning with Gould's (1999) theory that groups intensify their violent actions following failures. This becomes particularly clear when considering the NDA's 2017 declaration that the new wave of violence would be far more severe, targeting military and police personnel and infrastructure instead of just oil pipelines. Table 4, which shows the attacks conducted by IPOB categorised according to major target types, reveals this trend, as almost 90% of the group's attacks were aimed at police, government, and military targets. Their targets are not uncommon for a separatist group, as they usually focus on political agitation rather than economic sabotage (Beary 2011, Webb 2015). Nevertheless, this modus operandi is unusual for the region, considering the importance of oil for the militant groups who most often resort to terrorist tactics as a means of economic disruption. However, it is crucial to emphasize that the oil industry remains central to IPOB's goals, reflecting the broader issue of unfair oil revenue distribution.

*Table 4: IPOB Attacks by Target Type*

Target Type	IPOB Attacks
Police/Military	38

Government/Political	5
Oil Industry	0

The modus operandi of IPOB nonetheless reveals that their grievances are shifting. In the past, IPOB primarily adopted nonviolent resistance strategies such as sit-at-home protests (Igwebuike and Akoh 2023). However, the persistent and excessive violent response from the Nigerian government against IPOB has triggered a cycle of violence and further radicalisation (Chukwudi, et al. 2019). Udo (2022) suggests that IPOB's violent actions against police and government entities are portrayed as a response to the Nigerian government's failure to govern effectively and ensure security, particularly in the southeastern states. These attacks are perceived as reactions to the state's inability to protect life and property and to provide economic opportunities, contributing to the region's instability (Udo 2022). Furthermore, since the group's leader, Nnamdi Kanu, was arrested in 2021 on charges of terrorism, IPOB increased their violent and extremist activity, in the hope that this will pressure the government to release him. In August 2021, the group introduced a sit-at-home order every Monday across the South-east states that imply that people who are observed to leave their homes for any reason are attacked by gunmen (Ugwu 2023).

The long-standing grievances of decades of marginalisation have a very strong ethnic component for IPOB, as the group's call for self-determination is not only centred on the unfair revenue allocation, but it encompasses a wider range of injustices experienced by the Igbo people since the end of the Nigerian civil war (Obi-Ani 2022). As the Igbo people represent a significant part of the Niger Delta population, the grievances are often common, especially since IPOB enjoys significant support among the Igbo population in Rivers state, especially in the state's capital city, Port Harcourt. Nevertheless, while regional autonomy is

one of the core sources of grievances among delta communities, most of them are opposing the idea of joining a newly separate state of Biafra (Obasi 2015).

While the second spike in terrorist attacks in the Niger Delta is not caused by oil bunkering or bombings, its roots are in the same grievances that have made the oil-rich Niger Delta a hub of violence. Similarly, IPOB's recourse to violence is fuelled by a deep-seated sense of injustice, mirroring the motivations of groups such as the NDA and other militants. This stems largely from the exploitation of the Igbo people by northern interests, which is perceived as part of a broader pattern of exploitation by the Nigerian federation. The federal structure of Nigeria has been long criticised for utilising the resources of the southern regions, particularly the Niger Delta, without ensuring equitable returns or addressing local needs and environmental damages, which create deep ethnic resentments (Ikporukpo 2004, Omotola 2009). These structural problems, including political marginalisation, economic deprivation, and environmental degradation, contribute to the cycle of violence in the region. Both the Biafran movements and the militant groups in the Niger Delta share common ground in their opposition to multinational oil companies and the federal government, which they accuse of extracting wealth at the expense of local welfare. This shared struggle highlights a broader conflict between indigenous rights to resource control and national governance, underscoring the complex interplay of historical grievances and contemporary political dynamics that fuel ongoing unrest in the Niger Delta. Furthermore, the fact that the two spikes in terrorist attacks were carried out by different groups with similar, though not identical, core agendas proves that as long as the Nigerian government does not take solid measures to address the structural discrepancies in its federal structure and provide greater autonomy to oil-producing regions, violence will persist – even despite the militarisation of the region.

In conclusion, the second spike in violence can be attributed to separatist motivations deeply rooted in an ethnic struggle, which forms the foundation of political grievances. This struggle extends beyond mere self-determination to encompass the broader historical exploitation and political marginalisation of ethnic minorities, particularly the Igbo people. Political grievances, arising from the repression of these ethnic groups, are closely intertwined with a fervent desire for control over local resources perceived as unfairly exploited by external powers. These interlinked grievances have resulted in an extremist interpretation of both political and resource control issues by IPOB, leading to an escalation in violent resistance.

## Conclusion

This thesis has analysed the intricate relationship between greed and grievance as driving forces of oil terrorism in Nigeria. Through a comprehensive examination that integrated both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this thesis has explored the motivations and tactics of actors engaged in “oil terrorism” within the Niger Delta. The evidence presented robustly challenges the conventional greed theory, which suggests that economic incentives are the primary drivers of terrorist attacks being deployed on oil infrastructure. Instead, the thesis’ findings underscore the significant role of grievances rooted in political, environmental, and socio-economic injustices.

The quantitative analysis revealed a predominance of grievance-driven attacks over those motivated by greed. This suggests that while economic motivations are not insignificant, they are overshadowed by profound grievances among the local communities of the Niger Delta. These grievances stem from a history of political marginalisation and economic exploitation, compounded by environmental degradation caused by foreign multinational oil companies. These conditions have not only created a fertile environment for conflict but have also driven the local communities to express their discontent through violent, terrorist tactics. By using the qualitative methodology of case study analysis, this study delved into specific instances of increased violence, particularly analysing spikes in terrorist activities in 2015/2016 and 2020/2021. These periods of intensified conflict were closely associated with significant political and socio-economic changes, which exacerbated the existing grievances among the Niger Delta communities. The analysis of these spikes provided insights into the immediate triggers of escalated violence and highlighted the reactive nature of these communities to perceived injustices.

Furthermore, the case studies illustrated that the groups involved in terrorist tactics on the oil industry, such as the Niger Delta Avengers and the Indigenous People of Biafra, often articulate their actions as a response to the failure of peaceful protests and negotiations with the government and oil companies. This indicates that the roots of oil terrorism are not to be found within a manifestation of criminal intent, as the government of Nigeria sees it, but a politically and ideologically driven effort to escape marginalisation and take control over their own land. The grievances driving the two analysed spikes of terrorist acts in the Niger Delta highlight distinct yet interconnected motivations. The first spike, primarily driven by the NDA, centred on resource sovereignty. Political changes that threatened local benefits spurred these grievances into action, melding resource-based concerns with political triggers to catalyse violent responses focused on reclaiming control over natural resources. In contrast, the second spike, led by IPOB, was underpinned by separatist ambitions rooted in ethnic struggles, where political repression of ethnic minorities and the desire for resource autonomy intertwined. Here, historical exploitation and marginalisation of the Igbo people, combined with a fight against external exploitation of resources, fuelled a broader, more radical movement towards self-determination.

The implications of these findings are profound for both policy-making and academic discourse. For policymakers, the challenge lies in addressing the root causes of grievances, rather than merely focusing on the symptoms of economic incentives through amnesty deals and securitisation. Effective intervention strategies should therefore aim at comprehensive socio-political and economic reforms. These include ensuring fair distribution of oil revenues, enhancing political inclusion, and improving the livelihoods of the affected communities. Academically, this thesis contributes to the broader discourse on the interplay between economic and socio-political factors in fuelling political violence – and particularly terrorism. By applying the greed versus grievance framework to the context of terrorist tactics

deployed on the oil industry in Nigeria, it enriches the understanding of how different motivations can coexist and interact in complex conflict scenarios.

Nevertheless, having highlighted the answer on the main motivations for actors employing terrorist tactics on the oil industry, there are many nuances that this thesis has not explored. As Obi (2009) rightfully observes, even though the conflict in the Niger Delta might initially seem to be a straightforward clash between ethnic minorities and the ethnic majority-controlled federal government, the reality is much more nuanced. The violent disputes of the Niger Delta are rooted in deep-seated grievances arising from injustice, inequality, and severe exploitation by an alliance between the state and transnational oil companies. This thesis has limitations in fully addressing the range of responses to these grievances, particularly the numerous movements within the Niger Delta that resort to non-violent methods of protest and advocacy. While the focus here has been predominantly on violent outbreaks in the form of terrorist attacks and their motivations, it is crucial to acknowledge that many groups and communities choose more peaceful avenues to express their discontent and seek change. These non-violent movements play a critical role in the social and political landscape and offer a different perspective on how grievances are managed and negotiated within the region.

Further research should delve into the strategies and impacts of these non-violent movements, examining how they influence policy and public perception, and their effectiveness in achieving the goals of resource sovereignty and ethnic equality. Additionally, a comparative study of regions with similar conflicts could provide valuable insights into the various factors that lead some movements to choose violence while others adhere to peaceful protest. Such studies could help illuminate the conditions under which non-violent strategies are most effective and explore the international dimensions of ethnic and resource-based conflicts. This would not only broaden the understanding of the Niger Delta's complex socio-political



environment but also contribute to the global discourse on managing and resolving conflicts rooted in ethnic tensions and economic disparities.

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