Climate change and security in Nigeria: The politicians' perspective

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***Abstract*—This article interrogates how Nigerian politicians perceive the security implications of climate change and what they prioritise as policy responses. Drawing on mixed methods and a purpose-built survey of 56 elected and appointed officials across federal, state and local government, we analyse perceived risks, drivers of violence, institutional barriers, and preferred solutions. Three in four respondents affirm that climate change exacerbates insecurity, with farmer–herder conflict, banditry/kidnapping, and insurgency ranked as the leading climate-linked threats. Majorities report locally observed floods (79%), droughts (46%), heatwaves (55%), and climate-related migration (54%). While 71% support increased climate–security budgets, politicians cite funding shortfalls, data gaps, politicisation, and coordination failures as principal constraints. Likert-scale measures show moderate trust in scientific data (mean 3.57/5) and modest integration of climate risks into security plans (3.34/5). We triangulate survey evidence with recent literature on floods, food insecurity, coastal erosion, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, and farmer–herder violence. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations on mainstreaming climate risk into security sector planning, devolving early warning, de-politicising relief, and financing local adaptation that reduces conflict incentives.**

***Index Terms*—climate security, Nigeria, farmer–herder conflict, floods, policy integration**

I. Introduction

Climate hazards are intensifying in Nigeria and interact with pre-existing fragilities to produce complex security risks. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and extreme flood events compound livelihood stress, displacement, and competition over land and water. These pressures intersect with weak local governance, criminality, and ongoing insurgencies to reshape Nigeria's security landscape. Contemporary analyses—including global assessments of climate impacts on Africa and regional work on West Africa's climate–security nexus—underscore these compound risks and the imperative for locally grounded responses (e.g., IPCC; regional policy briefs).

Politicians—legislators, executives, party officials, and security-committee members—are central to diagnosing these risks and allocating resources. Yet, their perspectives remain under-documented relative to security practitioners or affected communities. This study fills that gap by systematically capturing and analysing Nigerian politicians' views on pathways linking climate change to violence, institutional bottlenecks, and viable solutions. We also situate those perspectives within the evolving national policy environment—including the Climate Change Act (2021), the work of the National Council on Climate

Change (NCCC), the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) update, seasonal climate prediction (SCP) by NiMet, and early-warning initiatives.

Our central questions are: (1) How do politicians in Nigeria understand the relationship between climate change and security? (2) Which threats and hazards do they prioritise? (3) Which barriers impede an effective response? and (4) What policy actions do they support?

II. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual framework

A usable conceptual framework for climate–security analysis in Nigeria requires at least three interacting layers: (A) climate hazard exposure and physical impacts; (B) socio-economic vulnerability and livelihood sensitivity; and (C) institutional capacity and political economy that shape responses (adaptation, mitigation and security measures). The framework treats conflict as an outcome produced by interactions between these layers rather than by climate alone.

1. **Hazard exposure and biophysical impacts.** This includes acute shocks (floods, storms, extreme rainfall) and slow-onset processes (drought, desertification, coastal erosion, temperature rise). The IPCC (2022) documents Africa's rising exposure to both categories; Nigeria's 2022 flood crisis exemplifies a high-impact shock with broad socio-economic consequences (World Bank PDNA, 2023).
2. **Livelihood sensitivity and socio-economic fragility.** Nigeria's economy and livelihoods remain heavily dependent on rainfed agriculture and pastoralism, both sensitive to seasonal variability and shocks (FAO; WFP; Okafor, 2024). Crop and grazing losses increase competition over resources and push migration and mobility as adaptive strategies — which can create flashpoints where custodial arrangements, land tenure, or local conflict mechanisms are weak.
3. **Institutions, governance and political economy.** Local and national institutions determine whether climate stress is transformed into violent conflict. Effective early warning systems, social protection, dispute resolution mechanisms, and accountable security institutions can prevent escalation (UNDP, 2023; NCCC reports). Conversely, politicisation of resource allocation, impunity, and weak coordination drive maladaptive responses (SIPRI/FES, 2023).

This layered framework helps interpret the empirical literature that follows: hazards trigger livelihood disruptions, household and communal coping strategies are mobilised, and the resulting tensions are either managed or escalate depending on institutional capacity and political incentives.

2.2. Empirical review

This section summarises empirical evidence across five strands: (A) floods and extreme events; (B) farmer–herder conflicts and pastoral mobility; (C) food security, markets and price shocks; (D) coastal and maritime security (including oil theft/piracy); and (E) migration, displacement and urban pressures.

A. Floods and extreme hydrometeorological events

The 2022 Nigeria floods were among the most severe recent climate disasters, with extensive agricultural losses, infrastructure damage, and internal displacement; multi-agency assessments (World Bank PDNA, UNDP/UNDRO reports) document these impacts and the knock-on security risks that follow (looting, displacement-related tensions) (World Bank, 2023; UNDP Nigeria Flood Assessment, 2023). Empirical work shows that floods not only create immediate humanitarian crises but also erode livelihoods and push people into precarious income strategies that can heighten communal tensions (Lagos floods case study; UNU-EHS analyses).

B. Farmer–herder conflict and pastoral mobility

A large and growing body of empirical research connects pastoral mobility changes to rising tensions in Nigeria's Middle Belt and parts of the North West and North Central. Studies published 2021–2025 document trajectories where reduced pasture availability, delayed rainy seasons and shrinking water points push pastoralists southward or into farming areas, triggering clashes with sedentary farmers (Efobi, 2025; Nwankwo et al., 2024). ACLED data corroborate spatial-temporal increases in violence in areas identified as climate hotspots (ACLED country notes; Ogunkunle media-framing analyses). Recent massacre events and high-casualty attacks in 2024–2025 have sharpened policy attention.

C. Food security, markets and price shocks

Climate events contribute to reduced harvests and market disruptions. WFP and FAO reporting from 2022–2024 links climatic shocks to rising food insecurity, complementing national reporting that indicates spikes in the number of acutely food-insecure Nigerians (WFP, FAO, Presidential statements; Reuters coverage). Empirical analyses show that food price spikes are a pathway linking climate events to social unrest and can create recruitment pools for criminal gangs where safety nets are inadequate (WFP 2023; World Bank PDNA 2023).

D. Coastal erosion, petroleum-related insecurity and maritime crime

The Niger Delta faces both chronic coastal erosion and episodic oil theft/piracy. While large naval and inter-agency efforts have reduced some piracy incidents by 2023–2024, risks remain because coastal communities experience livelihood loss and youth unemployment, creating conditions ripe for criminality

(IMB/ICC reports; ISS/European Union analyses; Deep Blue Project assessments). Coastal erosion also removes arable land and fisheries access, worsening local grievances (Oloyede et al., 2022; regional maritime security briefs).

E. Migration, displacement and urban pressures

Climate-driven displacement — both seasonal and permanent — is documented in Nigerian contexts. Internal reports and academic studies indicate that displaced farmers who move into urban peripheries or new rural frontiers can strain services and create competition for land and jobs, sometimes escalating into communal violence (ESP journals, UN/UNDRO assessments). The literature stresses that mobility is an adaptive strategy for many households, but its security implications depend heavily on reception politics and governance capacities in destination zones.

2.3. Theoretical framework

The literature draws on and integrates multiple theoretical traditions to explain climate-linked insecurity in Nigeria:

1. **Threat multiplier / risk amplifier theory.** The IPCC and subsequent security literature treat climate as a force that amplifies existing social, economic and political stresses rather than being a primary cause of conflict (IPCC, 2022; SIPRI, 2023). This framing emphasises multi-causality and the need to investigate proximal political drivers alongside biophysical stressors.
2. **Environmental scarcity and livelihood competition (Homer-Dixon; Turner).** These approaches posit that scarcity of essential resources (water, arable land) increases competition, migratory pressure and potential for mobilisation, particularly when institutions for sharing and dispute resolution are weak (classic scarcity theory updated in regional studies). Recent Nigerian case studies show how seasonal pasture scarcity has altered mobility patterns and increased contestation between pastoralists and sedentary farmers (Efobi, 2025; Nwankwo et al., 2024).
3. **Political ecology and grievance theory.** This lens underscores how unequal power relations, governance failures and perceptions of marginalisation fuel grievances that can be mobilised into violence. Scholars emphasise that identity politics (ethnic, religious) mediate the translation of resource competition into large-scale communal conflict (Ogunkunle, 2023; International Crisis Group, 2023).
4. **Complex adaptive systems and resilience thinking.** This perspective sees social-ecological systems as dynamic; resilience is the ability to absorb shocks and reorganise without shifting to a

less desirable state. Policy follows from enhancing adaptive capacity — through diversification, social protection and anticipatory action (GCA, UNDP mapping).

5. **Hybrid security governance.** More recent literature on West Africa highlights hybridity — where formal state actors, traditional institutions, private security, and non-state armed groups all influence security outcomes. This is particularly relevant to Nigeria's Northern regions, where non-state actors often fill governance gaps (ACLED, 2023; SIPRI, 2023).

Together, these theoretical traditions justify a mixed-method empirical strategy (quantitative trend analysis, local case studies, and qualitative interviews) and guide policy prescriptions focused on both technical (early warning, adaptation infrastructure) and governance (depoliticization, local dispute resolution) solutions.

2.4. Gaps in the literature

Scholars and practitioners identify persistent gaps:

- **Causal identification at micro-scales.** While macro models show correlations, more panel data and sub-ward level studies are needed to robustly identify mechanisms leading from climate shocks to violence (ACLED-based critiques).
- **Evaluations of interventions.** Evidence on which adaptation interventions demonstrably reduce conflict risk (not just vulnerability) is limited; randomized and quasi-experimental evaluations are relatively rare.
- **Gendered pathways.** More disaggregated work on how climate-security dynamics affect women, girls and marginalised groups is required, including gendered adaptation strategies and protection needs.
- **Urban climate insecurity.** With growing urbanisation, studies that link peri-urban climate impacts to crime and social disorder are sparse compared to rural farmer–herder literature.

Addressing these gaps would improve policy targeting and allow politicians and implementers to focus scarce resources on interventions with proven conflict-prevention effects.

III. Methodology

3.1 Research design and sampling

We employed a cross-sectional survey of 56 politicians (federal, state, and local tiers) combined with brief key-informant notes. Respondents were purposively sampled to cover Nigeria's six geopolitical zones and a spread of parties and offices. The sample composition is summarised in Table 1. The survey instrument

included demographic fields, observed hazards, perceptions of climate–security linkages, threat prioritisation, barriers, and Likert-scale items on trust in evidence, integration into security plans, and perceived impacts on food prices.

3.2 Data collection

Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered in person and via secure forms. Items captured:

1. Demographics: office level, zone, party, gender, age, role, and years in office.
2. Hazard observation: floods, droughts, heatwaves, coastal erosion.
3. Perceptions: whether climate exacerbates insecurity; top climate-linked threats; conflict seasonality; climate-related migration.
4. Policy preferences: preferred priority policy; support for budget increases; perceived primary barrier.
5. Scales (1–5): trust in scientific data; degree of integration of climate risks into security plans; perceived impact of climate change on food prices.

3.3. The dataset

Table 1 profiles respondents; Tables 2–4 summarise key indicators and Likert scales. Figures referenced in text (Figures 1–3) present pie charts of (i) budget-support, (ii) perceived top threats, and (iii) primary barriers. (See downloadable figures listed after the article.)

Table 1. Sample characteristics (n = 56)

Attribute	Categories	Count
Office level	State (21); Local (18); Federal (17)	56
Zone	North West (14); South East (11); North Central (10); North East (9); South West (7); South South (5)	56
Party	APC (25); PDP (15); LP (10); NNPP (4); Others (2)	56
Gender	Male (46); Female (10)	56
Age group	50–59 (20); 40–49 (17); 60+ (13); 30–39 (6)	56
Role	Legislator (27); Executive (14); Security Committee (10); Party Official (5)	56

Attribute	Categories	Count
Years in office (mean)	6.7 years	—

Table 2. Key indicators

Indicator	Result
Climate exacerbates security	75.0% “Yes”
Supports budget increase	71.4% “Yes”
Observed floods	78.6%
Observed droughts	46.4%
Observed heatwaves	55.4%
Observed coastal erosion	21.4%
Observed climate-related migration	53.6%

Table 3. Perceived top threat (counts)

Threat	Count
Farmer–herder conflict	14
Insurgency	12
Communal clashes	10
Banditry/kidnapping	10
Urban crime	8
Oil theft/piracy	2

Table 4. Likert-scale summaries (1–5)

Construct	Mean	SD	Median
Trust in scientific data	3.57	0.95	4.0
Integration in security plans	3.34	0.79	3.0
Impact on food prices	3.93	0.81	4.0

Table 5. Top threat by zone (row-normalised proportions)

Zone	Banditry/kidnapping	Communal clashes	Farmer–herder	Insurgency	Oil theft/piracy	Urban crime
North Central	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.00	0.20
North East	0.11	0.33	0.22	0.11	0.11	0.11
North West	0.14	0.00	0.43	0.21	0.07	0.14
South East	0.45	0.27	0.00	0.27	0.00	0.00
South South	0.00	0.20	0.40	0.20	0.00	0.20
South West	0.00	0.14	0.29	0.29	0.00	0.29

IV. Results and analysis

4.1 Politicians' threat perceptions

Three clusters dominate perceived climate-linked security risks: (i) farmer–herder conflict (25% of respondents), (ii) insurgency (21%), and (iii) a combined basket of communal clashes and banditry/kidnapping (each 18%). Oil theft/piracy registers at 4%—low in the aggregate, but comparatively salient in the South South. Zone-specific patterns align with known conflict geographies: the North West is strongly associated with farmer–herder conflict (0.43 row share), the South East leans toward banditry/kidnapping (0.45) and insurgency (0.27), and the South West shows a balanced concern across farmer–herder conflict, insurgency and urban crime (all at or above 0.29). These distributions suggest political attention is grounded in local risk ecologies rather than a single national narrative.

4.2 Hazard exposure and displacement

Localised observation of floods is pervasive (79%), consistent with multi-agency documentation of extreme flooding in 2022 and recurrent high-water events that damaged infrastructure, disrupted agriculture, and displaced populations. Drought (46%) and heatwaves (55%) are also widely reported, with coastal erosion (21%) concentrated in littoral states. More than half (54%) say they have observed climate-related

migration. This triangulates with evidence that flood and drought shocks can trigger temporary relocation, deepen food insecurity, and heighten land-use competition.

4.3 Budget preferences and policy options

A clear majority (71%) supports increasing climate–security budgets. When asked to prioritise policy instruments, respondents most frequently nominate adaptation projects, early-warning systems, and agricultural support, with secondary support for IDP assistance, security force training, and border management. The emphasis on locally relevant adaptation and anticipatory systems reflects political sensitivity to short-run livelihood losses and a desire for preventive capabilities.

4.4 Institutional barriers

Politicians overwhelmingly identify funding constraints (46%) as the principal barrier, followed by politicisation (16%), data gaps (16%), coordination failures (14%), and capacity limitations (7%). These are interdependent: when data on hazards, exposure, and conflict pathways are patchy, it becomes easier for response to be politicised, and coordination suffers. Critically, confidence in data is not uniformly low—mean trust in scientific evidence is a moderate 3.57/5—but translating evidence into integrated security planning is only middling (3.34/5), indicating an implementation gap between awareness and institutional practice.

4.5 Seasonality and prices

Respondents are split on conflict seasonality: 36% report peaks in the rainy season, 34% in the dry season, and 30% perceive no clear seasonality. That heterogeneity mirrors Nigeria's agro-climatic diversity. The perceived impact of climate on food prices scores high (mean 3.93/5), which aligns with widely reported post-shock price spikes following floods and dry spells.

V. Discussion

5.1 Alignment with national policy and regional evidence

The survey's high salience for floods and farmer–herder conflict dovetails with national priorities and recent analytic work on climate–security linkages in West Africa. Nigeria's Climate Change Act established governance architecture (including carbon budgets and the NCCC) intended to mainstream climate across sectors. Seasonal Climate Predictions (SCP) by NiMet, and newly institutionalised early-warning mechanisms, create opportunities to embed anticipatory action in security sector protocols. Regional

assessments likewise urge connecting climate-related security risks to local priorities and devolved implementation.

5.2 Farmer–herder conflict as a climate-sensitive system

Politicians' emphasis on farmer–herder conflict is not misplaced. Climate variability can shift pasture and water availability, encourage transhumance into crop lands, and inflame local disputes—especially where land tenure is weak and justice systems are slow. However, climate is a threat multiplier, not a monocausal explanation: criminal bandit networks, small arms proliferation, and political mobilisation also matter. Effective strategy must therefore pair climate adaptation in rural economies (water points, fodder systems, dry-season farming support) with conflict resolution, policing reform, and livelihood diversification.

5.3 Floods, food security and displacement

Pervasive flood observation among respondents mirrors the reality that large-scale floods have become more frequent and damaging, with cascading effects on transport, health, schooling, and agricultural output. Politicians' elevated concern about food prices is consistent with this exposure. Localised adaptation—embankments, drainage rehabilitation, floodplain zoning, and resilient seed varieties—has clear co-benefits for stability by reducing displacement and opportunistic criminality that often follows disaster.

5.4 Coastal erosion and maritime security

While fewer respondents prioritised oil theft/piracy or coastal erosion, these risks remain strategically important. Coastal erosion threatens livelihoods in the Niger Delta and deepens grievances in already fragile oil-producing communities. Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea has declined from 2020 peaks but remains volatile; gains can reverse without sustained governance and economic alternatives for littoral youth. Politicians outside the coast may discount these risks, but federal coordination and investment are still required.

5.5 The politics of evidence

Moderate trust in science coexists with frustration about data availability and coordination. This suggests an appetite for decision-grade, locally disaggregated risk information, translated into the language of budget lines and operational orders. Politicians are more likely to fund early warning and adaptation when outputs are tangible (e.g., flood maps for specific wards; agro-advisories timed to planting windows; quantified benefit–cost ratios). Strengthening subnational data platforms and codifying minimum data standards in sector plans can reduce politicisation and accelerate uptake.

VI. Conclusion

Nigerian politicians increasingly accept that climate change is reshaping the security landscape. In our multi-zone sample, floods, farmer–herder conflict, insurgency and banditry dominate the climate–security agenda. Most respondents support budget increases and prioritise practical, local solutions—adaptation projects, early warning, and agricultural support. Yet chronic barriers—funding gaps, data deficits, politicisation and coordination problems—impede translation into practice. The path forward is to operationalise climate risk management inside security, agriculture, water, urban, and disaster institutions through clear mandates, devolved financing, and accountability for results.

VII. Recommendations

1. **Mainstream climate risk into security doctrine and plans.** Update security sector SOPs to include climate triggers for patrol posture, protection of critical infrastructure, and crisis standards for flood/drought displacement.
2. **Institutionalise anticipatory action.** Tie NiMet's SCP and hydrological forecasts to pre-agreed local actions (e.g., prepositioning relief, temporary market support, risk-based school calendars) with budget codes and thresholds.
3. **Devolve data and decision-support.** Fund state and LG-level risk observatories that produce ward-scale flood/drought maps, conflict early warnings, and seasonal agro-advisories; publish dashboards to reduce politicisation.
4. **Target rural adaptation where conflict risk is highest.** Expand water points, small irrigation, fodder banks, and climate-smart agriculture in Middle Belt and North West hotspots; pair with mediation and land-use pacts.
5. **Protect food systems.** Invest in storage, feeder roads, and market information systems to dampen climate shock pass-through to prices; build shock-responsive safety nets.
6. **Manage coastal risk.** Advance integrated coastal zone management in the Niger Delta—mangrove restoration, setback enforcement, and nature-based buffers; keep funding for maritime domain awareness and community youth schemes.
7. **Finance and accountability.** Create a climate–security budget tag across MDAs, set annual targets for local spending shares, and require independent audits and after-action reviews following hazard seasons.
8. **Professional development.** Introduce climate-security modules in civil service colleges, police and military academies; incentivise uptake via promotion points.

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