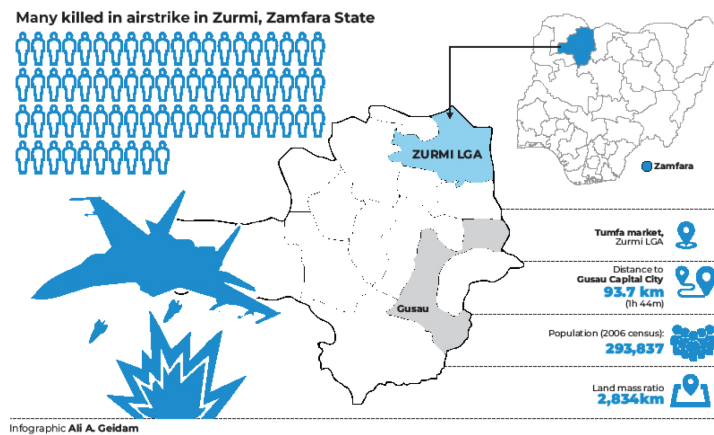


Over 100 Killed In Zamfara Market Airstrike



By Abdullahi Abdulrahaman Chakwa (Gusau) & From Salim Umar Ibrahim (Kano)

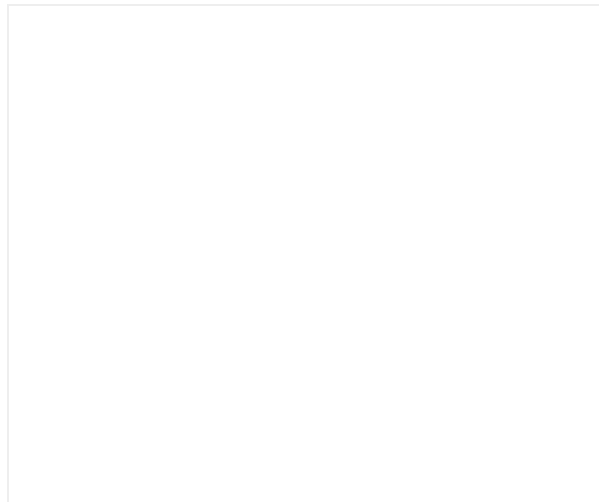
Wed, 13 May 2026 6:00:05 WAT



A military airstrike on Tumfa market in Zurmi Local Government Area of Zamfara State has reportedly killed at least 117 people and injured several others. Residents said the casualties included both bandits and civilians.

The aerial bombardment occurred on Sunday, the same day another Nigerian Air Force operation targeting bandits struck Guradnayi, a settlement near Kusu in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State, where 13 civilians were reportedly killed.

Reports of the Tumfa incident emerged late on Monday due to poor communication networks in the area.



Tumfa and several neighbouring communities in Zurmi LGA are said to be under the control of armed groups, with locals forced to coexist with the bandits who often act as de facto authorities.

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A community leader, Garba Ibrahim Mashema, said the exact number of casualties from the Sunday military airstrike on the market remains difficult to determine.

“The actual death toll is hard to establish at the moment. Everybody — residents and bandits — go to the market. People are at the mercy of the bandits. There is nothing they can do,” he told AFP.

Aliyu Musa, a resident of Zurmi town, about seven kilometres from Tumfa, claimed that many of those killed were traders and food vendors, including young girls selling millet porridge and tofu. He estimated the death toll at 117.

“To be frank, Tumfa market is under the control of bandits. It is their stronghold. Anyone who goes there knows he is entering their territory,” Musa said.

A relative of some of the victims, who requested anonymity for security reasons, said the military fighter jet initially conducted surveillance over the market before returning hours later to launch the bombardment.

He also said several communities in the LGA, including Fakai, Mayasa and Mashema, are effectively under the control of bandits due to the absence of government authority.

“There is no legal authority in villages like Fakai, Mayasa and Mashema. The bandits act as judges and police,” he said.

He alleged that the military may have identified the presence of weapons in the market during the surveillance operation, which possibly informed the airstrike.

“We live together with them and they move around with weapons openly,” he added.

The source further disclosed that bandits recently imposed a levy of N70 million on a community after one of the villagers they allegedly sent to Nasarawa State to procure ammunition was arrested by security operatives.

“They sent him to Nasarawa to collect ammunition hidden inside containers of palm oil, but security agents arrested him. The bandits then forced his relatives to pay N70 million, without caring about the fate of the man they implicated,” he said.

He maintained that most parts of Zurmi Local Government Area remain under the dominance of armed groups.

“You cannot travel five kilometres outside Zurmi town without encountering bandits,” he said.

The resident also accused the bandits of repeatedly destroying farmlands by grazing cattle on crops.

“For years, they only allow us to harvest millet. Whenever we plant guinea corn or beans, they drive their cattle into the farms and destroy them,” he said.

He added that several injured victims were referred to Yariman Bakura Specialist Hospital in Gusau, while others were receiving treatment at Zurmi General Hospital.

Another resident described Tumfa market as a notorious enclave controlled by armed groups.

“Frankly speaking, the market belongs to the bandits. It is located deep inside the forest and there is even a shop known as ‘Bala Shop’ where arms and ammunition are allegedly sold,” he claimed.

He, however, defended the military operation, insisting that the airstrike was not carried out recklessly.

“The fighter jet conducted aerial surveillance over the market and returned about 40 minutes later before carrying out the bombardment,” he said.

“As of last night, 117 people had reportedly died. About 40 injured victims were taken to Shinkafi Hospital, while another 40 were moved to Zurmi Hospital. Two ambulances and a Toyota Hilux loaded with victims arrived from the area,” he added.



Some of the victims receiving treatment at the emergency unit of the Federal Medical Centre, Gusau, Zamfara

‘Airstrike killed many bandits too’

A source in the area said the military airstrike also succeeded in killing an unspecified number of bandits, although he acknowledged that the operation resulted in significant civilian casualties as well.

“But let me tell you the truth, the airstrike killed an unspecified number of bandits that nobody can accurately count, which is a major success. However, innocent citizens also suffered,” he said.

The military denied that civilians were killed in the Zamfara market airstrike. Defence Headquarters spokesman, Major General Michael Onoja, told AFP that the reports of civilian deaths in Zamfara were “not true”.

Zurmi Local Government Area has suffered repeated attacks by armed groups over the years, resulting in the killing of residents and security personnel, as well as mass kidnappings.

Several communities in the area are believed to be under the influence or direct control of bandits.

Concerns over the situation are not new. In April 2019, when military airstrikes targeted suspected bandits’ camps in Dumburum village in Zurmi LGA, traditional rulers alleged that innocent civilians were affected.

Former Zamfara State governor, Abdulaziz Yari, had at the time described Dumburum as a long-standing hideout for criminal groups.

Amnesty Int’l demands probe

Amnesty International has called on the Nigerian government to investigate the military airstrike, which it said killed over 100 civilians at Tumfa market.

In a statement, the organisation said one of the affected villages buried 80 people in one fell swoop.

“The authorities must investigate these deadly strikes, and put an end to reckless attacks on civilians.

“In parts of the north facing conflicts, civilians have borne the brunt of suffering far too often. These horrific deaths must not be overlooked. The devastated survivors and their families deserve truth, justice and reparations.

“Military aircraft bombed the weekly market, at a point it was full of people and without warning. The scene was chaotic.

“There were screams, blood, and bodies all over the ground. Those who survived with injuries were evacuated to general hospitals in Zurmi and Shinkafa, while those severely injured are receiving treatment at Yariman Bakura Specialists Hospital Gusau,” Amnesty International said.

Like Tumfa, like Jilli

The Sunday airstrike on Tumfa market was reminiscent of the April aerial bombardment of Jilli market, located between Gubio and Geidam Local Government Areas of Borno and Yobe states.

Jilli market was reportedly under the control of terrorists and served as a weekly trading hub attracting buyers and sellers from surrounding communities.

Dozens of people — including both insurgents and civilians — were reportedly killed during the operation targeting Boko Haram fighters.

The military confirmed the strike, saying it targeted a location “long identified as a major terrorist movement corridor and convergence point” for ISWAP fighters and collaborators.

It described the area as a “known terrorist enclave and logistics hub” near the abandoned village of Jilli.

Following reports of civilian casualties, the Nigerian Air Force said an investigation had been launched.

Borno State governor, Babagana Umara Zulum, later said the state government had shut down the Jilli market five years earlier because it had become a notorious hub allegedly used by insurgents and their logistics suppliers.

Civilians trapped between bandits, military airstrikes – Security expert

A homeland security expert, Auwal Bala Durumin Iya, has raised concern over the plight of civilians living in bandit-infested communities, saying they are increasingly trapped between armed criminals and military airstrikes.

Speaking in an interview, Durumin Iya said many innocent villagers affected by accidental airstrikes across parts of northern Nigeria have become helpless victims of circumstances beyond their control.

He noted that while bandits continue to impose themselves on rural communities, security operations targeting the criminals sometimes end up hitting innocent residents.

“So it seems that anytime these incidents happen, they affect innocent civilians. These civilians are living within areas occupied by bandits and they do not really have a choice,” he said.

According to him, most villagers remain in the affected areas because farming is their only source of livelihood and they lack the resources to relocate to safer places.

“They have farms there and cannot just leave everything and move into cities to start begging people. The government has not adequately taken care of their living conditions,” he stated.

The security expert explained that many communities are often forced to cooperate with bandits under threats and intimidation.

“Bandits came and met them there. They force people against their wishes and impose sanctions on them. So the civilians have nothing they can do,” he added.

Durumin Iya argued that the responsibility for protecting such communities rests squarely on the government and security agencies.

“It is the work of government to protect lives and property. Civilians do not have rifles or sophisticated weapons to defend themselves against bandits,” he said.

He further criticised what he described as inadequate handling of repeated airstrike incidents affecting civilians in states such as Niger, Kaduna and Borno.

The consultant blamed the situation on poor training and lack of professionalism among some security personnel involved in operations.

“This is due to lack of quality officers and insufficient training. The incidents keep repeating themselves and no serious action is taken against those responsible,” he alleged.

Durumin Iya also faulted the government for deploying heavy security presence during elections while rural communities battling insecurity often remain vulnerable.

“If elections are taking place, government can mobilise all security agencies. But when bandits attack villages, the same level of force is not deployed to protect innocent people,” he said.

He called on authorities to improve intelligence gathering, strengthen military professionalism and ensure accountability in order to reduce civilian casualties during security operations.

According to him, restoring confidence among affected communities requires deliberate efforts to protect innocent residents from both criminal attacks and operational mistakes by security forces.