



# Nigeria Watch

## Ninth Report on Violence in Nigeria (2019)

## CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	3
ACRONYMS .....	3
FOREWORD .....	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	7

## MAIN FINDINGS IN 2019

1 GENERAL TRENDS (2006 -2019) .....	7
2 MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN 2019.....	8
2.1 CRIME .....	9
2.1.1 Cultism .....	9
2.1.2 Banditry .....	9
2.1.3 Bank Robberies.....	10
2.1.4 Kidnapping .....	10
2.1.5 Farmers/Herdsmen clashes.....	11
2.2 PROTAGONISTS OF VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA.....	11
2.3 POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE .....	12
2.3.1 Boko Haram Insurgency .....	12
2.3.2 Islamic Movement of Nigeria.....	13
2.3.1 Pro-Biafra Agitators.....	13
2.4 ROAD ACCIDENTS.....	14
2.4.1 Road accidents by state.....	14
2.4.2 Road accidents by month.....	15
2.5 ETHNO-COMMUNAL VIOLENCE .....	16
3 THE MOST DANGEROUS STATES .....	17

## LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1: Main trend of violence 2006 – 2019  
Figure 2: Number of fatalities resulting from different causes of violence in 2019  
Figure 3: The main protagonists of violence in 2019, per number of fatalities  
Figure 4: Number of fatalities resulting from road accidents per year from 2006 to 2019  
Figure 5: Road accident fatalities per state in 2019  
Figure 6: Road accident fatalities per month in 2019  
Figure 7: Map of the fatalities caused by communal violence per state in Nigeria, 2019  
Figure 8: Number of fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants per state in Nigeria, 2019

## ACRONYMS

APC	All People’s Congress
DSS	Department of State Services
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FG	Federal Government
FRSC	Federal Road Safety Corps
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IFRA	French Institute for Research in Africa
IMN	Islamic Movement of Nigeria
IPOB	Independent People of Biafra
IRD	Institut de recherche pour le développement, Paris
ISWAP	Islamic State West African Province
LGA	Local Government Area
MASSOB	Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra
NA	Nigerian Army
NAF	Nigerian Air Force
NAFDAC	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NN	Nigerian Navy
NPF	Nigerian Police Force
NSCDC	Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps
NW	Nigeria Watch
PDP	Peoples Democratic Party
PRIO	Peace Research Institute in Oslo
SSS	State Security Service
WHO	World Health Organization

## FOREWORD

This Ninth Annual Report on lethal violence in Nigeria covers the period between 1 January and 31 December 2019. The study has been conducted by Vitus Nwankwo Ukoji with the help of Abiola Victoria Ayodokun and Victor Chinedu Eze at the University of Ibadan.

The Nigeria Watch project is hosted by the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA-Nigeria) at the University of Ibadan's Institute of African Studies.<sup>1</sup> It is supported by the IRD (Institut de recherche pour le développement, Paris), JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) and the British Council's programme Managing Conflict in Nigeria (MCN). The Nigeria Watch project is also a member of an international network of body-count practitioners under the aegis of a London-based NGO, ECW (Every Casualty Worldwide).<sup>2</sup> It aims at following the Standards for Casualty Recording launched at the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) in Geneva in November 2016.<sup>3</sup> Our methodology and sources are online.<sup>4</sup> They have been discussed in various books and occasions, especially during an international conference organized by IFRA at the University of Ibadan in October 2016.<sup>5</sup> The data are updated on a daily basis by a team of Nigerian researchers and they come from a wide variety of local open sources, mainly the press.

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<sup>1</sup> Please visit [www.ifra-nigeria.org](http://www.ifra-nigeria.org) for more information about IFRA.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.everycasualty.org/practice/ipn>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.everycasualty.org/downloads/ec/pdf/StandardsforCasualtyRecording-Version1.0\(2016\).pdf](https://www.everycasualty.org/downloads/ec/pdf/StandardsforCasualtyRecording-Version1.0(2016).pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nigeriawatch.org/index.php?html=4>

<sup>5</sup> Pérouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine, Elizabeth Minor & Samrat Sinha (ed.), *Violence, statistics, and the politics of accounting for the dead*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2016, 140p.; Pérouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine (ed.), *Violence in Nigeria: A qualitative and quantitative analysis*, Ibadan, IFRA-Nigeria, Leiden, African Studies Centre, Waposos Series n°3, 2016, 217p.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ➔ Fatalities from lethal incidents in Nigeria further inched up by 5.6% in 2019 after a 1.4% increase in 2018. There were 11,277 violent deaths in 2019 compared to the 10,665 recorded in 2018.
- ➔ Crime remains the highest cause of violent deaths in Nigeria as 3,425 people perished in banditry, cultism, armed robbery and other forms of crime. Banditry alone claimed 2,067 lives in 7 states in the north.
- ➔ There was an upsurge in kidnap for ransom across the country. Foreigners, humanitarian aid workers, commuters, students and the academia were targeted by gangs. While some victims were released after their ransom was paid, 115 others died in kidnap incidents across 22 states.
- ➔ There was a remarkable improvement in the number of fatalities from herdsmen-farmers clashes. Fatalities dropped from 1,882 in 2018 to 549 in 2019. Yet grazing issues remained a major driver of pastoral conflict in Nigeria.
- ➔ Armed gangs were the main perpetrators of lethal violence across Nigeria in 2019, followed by the Army, especially because its role in the counterinsurgency in the North East. Political organizations and cult groups were the other major stakeholders of fatal incidents in 2019.
- ➔ Road accidents claimed 1,655 lives in 2019. The number went up from the record of 2018 when 1,380 people died in road crashes. Ogun topped other states in road fatalities. Despite the ongoing construction of the Lagos-Ibadan expressway, significant numbers of lethal road accidents still occur on this route.
- ➔ In terms of number of violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, the list of most dangerous states remained the same in 2019. Borno (Boko Haram insurgency), Zamfara (banditry), Taraba (communal clashes between Tiv and Jukun), Kaduna (banditry and issues with Fulani herdsmen) and Ogun (road accidents) emerged as the five most dangerous states to live in.

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria Watch’s methodology can be found online. The database relies on open sources to offer a systematic and credible means of analyzing trends of violence with a Geographic Information System (GIS).<sup>6</sup> It answers four critical questions:

- Where and when is fatal violence taking place?
- Is fatal violence increasing or decreasing?
- What are the main causes of fatal violence?
- What is the security risk?

### 1. General Trends of Violence (2006-2019)

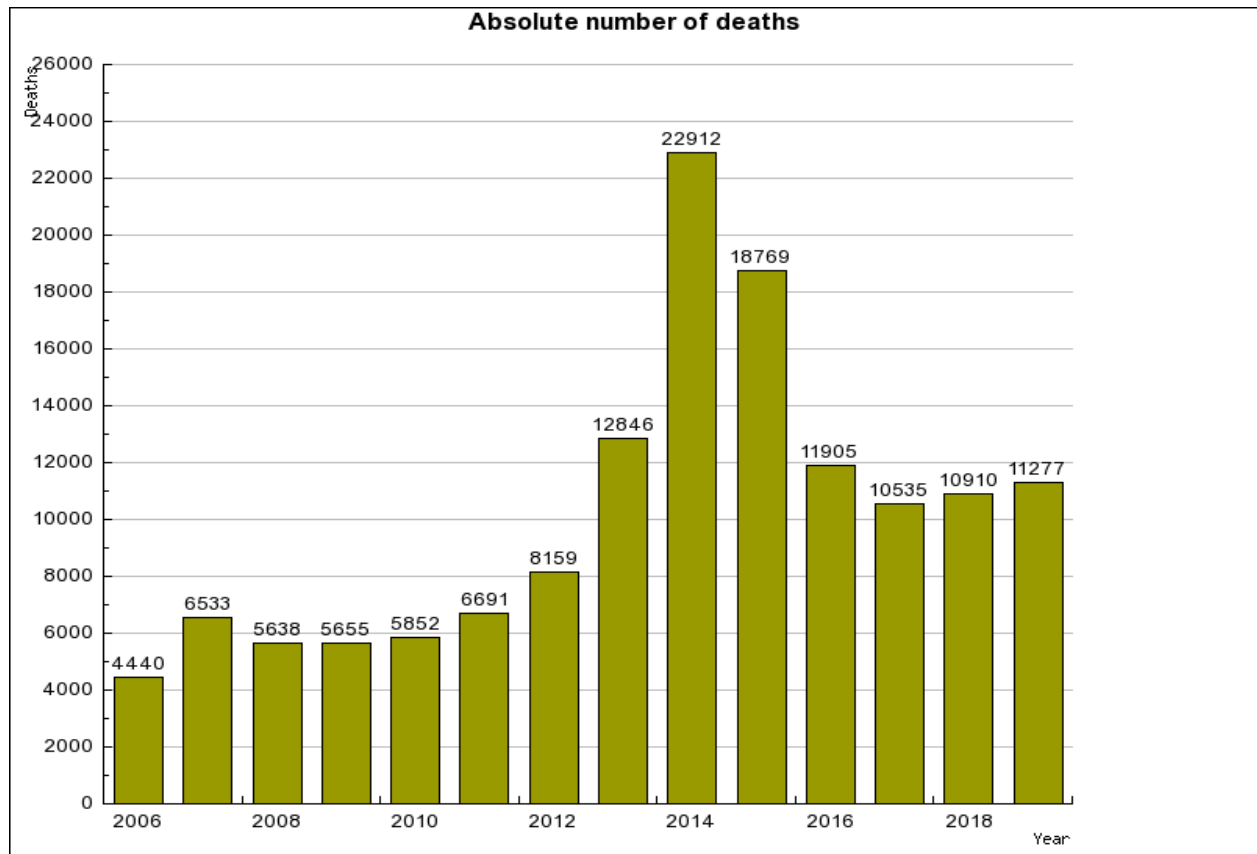


Figure 1: Main trend of violence 2006-2019<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In the online system, figures are updated whenever a new source provides a different report, which explains why trends may change slightly according to the current state of data when they are accessed. The algorithm used also rounds up figures a little differently per cause or per incident.

<sup>7</sup> Data for 2006 only cover the period from June to December.

**Nigeria Watch: Ninth Report on Violence (2019)**

In 2019, Nigeria continued to grapple with violence. Fatalities from lethal incidents increased to 11,277 in 2019 from the 10,910 recorded in 2018, translating to a 3.3% rise. Borno remained the most dangerous state owing to Boko Haram insurgency, followed by the states of Zamfara, Kaduna, Lagos and Katsina. Zamfara, Niger, Sokoto, Katsina and Kaduna states recorded the most fatalities from banditry and kidnapping while Lagos, Rivers and Delta states had significant numbers of cult killings. In the North East, an offshoot of Boko Haram, the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP), intensified attacks on military establishments and on civilians. In December 2019, 7 humanitarian aid workers were killed in two attacks by ISWAP. These executions were blamed on the breakdown of negotiation with the government. Apart from Boko Haram insurgencies, there were violent clashes between security forces and Shia Muslims in and around Abuja. Members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) kept protesting the detention of their leader, Sheikh Ibrahim Yaqoub El Zakzaky, by the Federal government. Also in 2019, Nigeria conducted its general elections, during which an estimated 107 people—voters, organizers, contestants and security operatives—lost their lives.

**2. Main Causes of Violence in 2019**

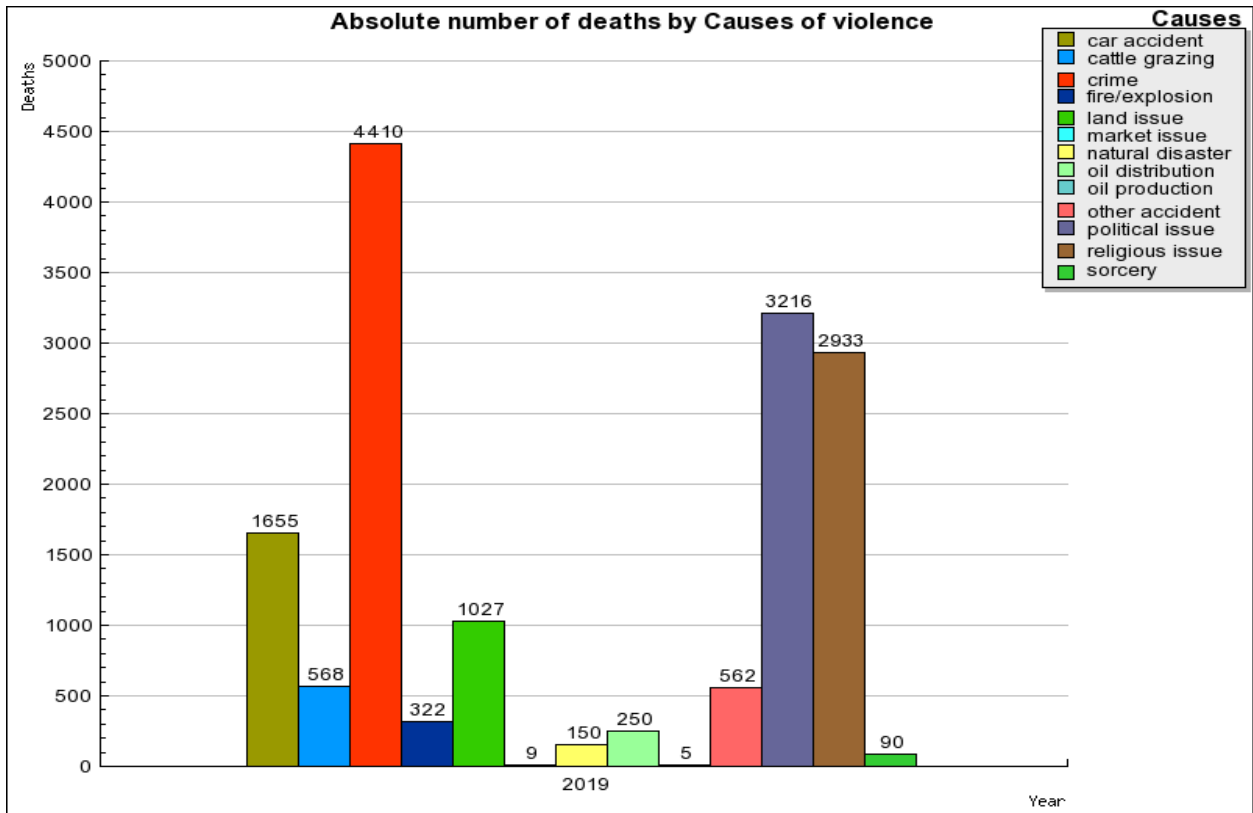


Figure 2: Number of fatalities resulting from different causes of violence in 2019

Crime overtook political and religious issues as the most important cause of lethal violence in Nigeria in 2019, with 3,425 fatalities recorded in 1,191 incidents. Zamfara State was most hit with fatalities from lethal criminal incidents as it recorded 896 victims, followed by Kaduna State with

262 casualties. Both states are in the North West region, which has largely been ravaged by banditry and cattle rustling. Lagos State came third in the ranking with 225 fatalities as it witnessed numerous incidents of cultism, domestic violence, hooliganism and extra-judicial killings. States with the least lethal crime incidents included Yobe, Borno and Gombe states, all in the North East.

### **2.1.1. Crime**

Crime, when isolated from insurgencies and road accidents, remains Nigeria's deadliest phenomenon as it caused 4,410 deaths in 1,313 incidents across all the states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT, Abuja) except Yobe State. Zamfara (1,142 fatalities), Katsina (379), Kaduna (365), Lagos (318) and Rivers (276) were the five states with the highest number of fatalities from criminal activities. While Zamfara, Katsina and Kaduna states were ravaged by banditry, Lagos and Rivers states were infamous for cultism. Sokoto, Niger, Delta, Taraba and Edo completed the list of top 10 states with the most fatalities from crime incidents in 2019. The states accounted for 74% of the overall number of deaths from crime while 26 states and the FCT accounted for the remaining 26%. On the contrary, the media reported an insignificant number of deaths from crime in Borno, Jigawa, Kebbi, Gombe and Kwara states. Apart from Borno where the Boko Haram insurgency is rooted, the other four states lack a defined pattern of reported lethal crime.

#### **2.1.1 *Cultism***

In 2019, cultism was recorded in 21 states in Nigeria, fewer than the 24 states and FCT reported in 2018. However, there were more fatalities in 2019 as 536 people were killed in 168 lethal cult incidents compared to the 446 deaths reported in 153 incidents in 2018. Lagos was most affected as it lost 115 lives, followed by 67 deaths in Delta State and 60 deaths in Rivers State. The emergence of Lagos State with the highest fatality rate is not illogical considering the population of the state and its megacity nature, which exposes it to all forms of crime. Hotspots for cult activities in the state were Ikorodu, Mushin, Agege and Shomolu. The majority of cult clashes in the state involved Aiye and Eiye confraternities. Delta State recorded 67 fatalities from cultism. Ovwian community in Udu LGA was under siege by cultists for over 6 months within which scores of people were killed in rival cult clashes and houses were burnt. In the neighboring Rivers State, 60 fatalities were reported in cult activities despite the Government's proscription of cultism. Ikwere, Obio/Akpor, Emuoha, Khana and Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGAs were hotspots for rival cult groups. Some victims were killed, beheaded and their heads made away with. Most of the clashes were over supremacy and territorial control.



### **2.1.2 *Banditry***

In 2019, bandits killed 2,067 people in 7 states in the North West and North Central. Like previous years, Zamfara State was the worst hit with 1,149 fatalities, followed by Katsina State with 339 fatalities and Kaduna State with 295 fatalities. Other states that came under bandit attacks included Sokoto (218 fatalities), Niger (52), Benue (9) and Plateau (5). Zurmi LGA in Zamfara State recorded 197 fatalities, the most in the state, followed by Gusau LGA with 178 fatalities. In Katsina State, Kankara LGA was the worst hit with 123 fatalities, followed by Batsari LGA with 55 fatalities. Kajuru LGA in Kaduna State witnessed series of bandit attacks that caused the death of 147 people. Birnin Gwari LGA emerged as the second most fatal LGA in the state with 122 fatalities. The LGA is a stronghold for kidnapping activities by different bandit groups. Most victims of banditry were killed during raids on communities or attacked while on transit. Both state and federal governments made efforts to contain banditry in the affected states. Special military operations were launched in the zones to combat banditry and other forms of crime. However, they failed to yield the desired results as killings persisted. Zamfara and Katsina state governments engaged bandits in dialogue. While a significant result was recorded in Zamfara State following the dialogue, it failed to have a significant impact in Katsina.

### **2.1.3 *Bank robberies***

In 2019, some banks in Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos states and FCT were robbed. A total of 18 fatalities were recorded in those incidents, including 6 policemen, some bankers and clients, as well as 1 armed robber. Ondo and Ekiti states recorded 2 deadly bank robberies while Osun, Lagos and FCT recorded one incident each. In Osun State, for instance, some 15 armed robbers killed 4 people, including a policeman and a doctor, during a bank robbery at Ila-Orangun, Ila LGA, on January 24, 2019. In April 8, 2019, a policeman, a school vice-principal and 5 bankers also lost their lives in another bank robbery in Ido Ani, Ose LGA, Ondo State. Again, huge sums of money were stolen. It was a different story for bank robbers on December 28, 2019 when a combined team of security operatives killed one of them and arrested four others in an attempt to break into a First Bank branch in Mpape, FCT, Abuja.

### **2.1.4 *Kidnapping***

Kidnap for ransom remains lucrative in Nigeria. Many kidnap incidents in 2019 were fatal as victims were either killed for not raising demanded ransom or died while in custody from injuries or harsh environment. Some kidnapers and police escorts also lost their lives in incidents that impacted 22 states in Nigeria, especially in Benue, Rivers and Kaduna. In September 2019, no less than 30 decomposing bodies of kidnapped victims were found buried in mass graves in Gbatse, Ushongo LGA, Benue State. The scenario was different in Rivers State, as majority of the victims were kidnappers who lost their lives during rescue operations and clamp down by security

operatives. On March 28, 2019, 5 kidnapers who had abducted 13 bus passengers were trailed to their hideout and shot dead by the police at a forest in Ikwere LGA. Similarly, 3 kidnapers lost their lives in an exchange of fire with the police on October 20, 2019.

In Kaduna State, finally, there was a drop in the number of fatalities reported in deadly kidnappings in 2019, as 16 people were killed in 11 incidents, unlike in 2018 when 23 people were killed in 11 incidents. Internal strifes also claimed the lives of gangs' members. On March 27, for instance, violence broke out among kidnapers and 9 of them were killed. On 19 August, a kidnapper was then murdered by his accomplices for fleeing with a ₦5 million ransom that the gang had extorted from a victim's family.

### **2.1.5 *Farmers/Herdsman clashes***

The government's efforts to curb pastoral conflict in Nigeria yielded positive results as the number of fatalities from clashes between farmers and Fulani herdsmen fell from 1,882 in 2018 to 549 in 2019. Kaduna State replaced Benue as the state with the most fatalities from pastoral clashes. Communities in Kajuru and Jemaa LGAs, both in Southern Kaduna, repeatedly came under attacks by Fulani herdsmen. On 3 and 4 March, for instance, Inkimi, Iri, Dogonnoma in Ungwar Gambo, Ungwan Barde and Gamu villages were raided by Fulani herdsmen in large numbers. Over 160 people were killed in the attacks. Residents were injured and houses were burnt down. Led by Governor Mallam Nasir el-Rufai, the State government in 2016 reportedly paid aggrieved Fulani herdsmen to stop the killings of Southern Kaduna natives and the destruction of their communities. However, the payment did little to stop the raids and killings in the zone.

Unlike Kaduna State government, which opted to pay off attackers, Benue State implemented an anti-grazing bill that criminalized open grazing in the state. Thereafter, fatalities from pastoral clashes in the state reduced from 532 in 2018 to 74 in 2019. The most fatal clash in the state occurred on February 20, 2019 when 16 persons, including hunters and farmers, were reportedly shot dead by Fulani herdsmen at Ebete community, Agatu LGA.

Aside Kaduna and Benue states, 15 others states recorded fatalities from alleged herdsmen attacks and clashes with farmers. The number equals the 2018 statistics that also reported attacks in 18 states. Kogi State recorded 47 fatalities; Adamawa, 44; Taraba, 40; Plateau, 37; and Nasarawa, 23.

## **2.2 Major protagonists of lethal violence in Nigeria**

Different stakeholders were responsible for the death of 11,277 people in Nigeria in 2019. The majority of the victims were killed in crime-related incidents and figure 3 shows that 3,680 fatalities were attributed to incidents involving armed gangs. The army was also involved in incidents that caused the death of 2,978 people, the majority of whom were alleged Boko Haram insurgents in the North East and bandits in the North West. Islamic groups, mostly Boko Haram and its offshoot, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), were involved in incidents

that led to the deaths of 2,838 people. Lastly, political organizations and cult groups were involved in incidents that killed 1,905 and 546 people respectively.

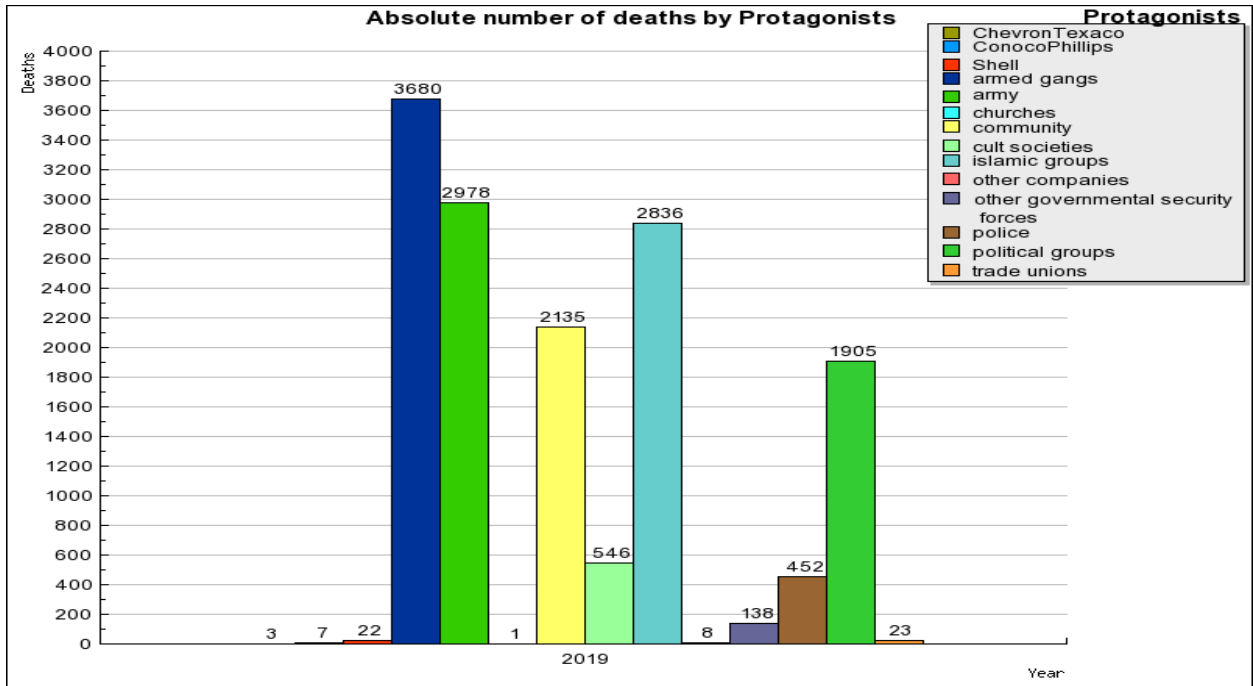


Figure 3: Main protagonists of violence (per number of fatalities in 2019)

## 2.3 Political and religious violence

### 2.3.1 Boko Haram Insurgency

The intensity of the Boko Haram insurgency in terms of fatalities and the frequency of attacks increased in 2019. While 2,866 fatalities were reported in 2019, compared to 2,134 in 2018, the number of lethal incidents rose to 180 in 2019, from 170 in 2018. Borno, again, accounted for the majority (89%) of overall fatalities, followed by Yobe (7%) and Adamawa states (4%). In Borno, the number of LGAs that recorded fatalities from Boko Haram attacks and counter attacks also increased from 20 to 24, sparing only Bayo, Hawul and Kwaya Kusar. Gwoza LGA recorded the highest numbers of incidents and fatalities in the state.

Victims of the conflict were civilians, security operatives and fighters from different factions of Boko Haram. While about 564 civilians including humanitarian aid workers were lost in raids on communities, suicide operations, attacks on commuters and ambush on convoys, 281 security operatives were killed in attacks on military formations, ambushes on convoys and landmines and 2,021 alleged Boko Haram fighters were killed in clearance operations, aerial bombardments and foiled attacks on military establishments. The most fatal incident occurred on January 9, 2019, when 80 combatants of the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) were killed in Baga, Kukawa LGA, by the Special Forces Command of Operation Lafiya Dole. The incident came 4

days after the group lost about 50 of its fighters in an aerial bombardment in Damasak, Mobbar LGA, Borno State on January 5, 2019.

Infrastructures were not spared by Boko Haram insurgents. On December 29, 2019, a church, primary school and primary health care centre were destroyed during an attack on Mandara Girau, Biu LGA, Borno State. A missionary hospital in Molai, Maiduguri LGA, had earlier been targeted by Boko Haram suicide bombers on February 5, 2019. Though scores of people were wounded, 3 of the attackers were killed by their Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).

The beheadings of ISWAP kidnap victims were captured in horrifying videos. Some of the victims were humanitarian aid workers. In September 25, 2019, ISWAP beheaded an employee of the French NGO Action Against Hunger (AAH) who had been abducted while travelling to deliver relief to IDP returnees at Damasak town in July 2019. His colleagues suffered the same fate on December 14 when 4 of them were beheaded in a video after a breakdown in talks with the government. Similarly, 11 Christians were beheaded by ISWAP on 26 December in retaliation for the killing of the leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

### ***2.3.2 Islamic Movement of Nigeria***

The leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, has been detained by the Department of State Services (DSS) since 2015 when his members, popularly called Shiites, engaged soldiers in a violent clash during a procession in Kaduna State. In 2019, Shiites sustained their protest against the unlawful detention of their leader. They also continued with their annual Ashura parade which commemorates the day when Prophet Mohammed's grandson, Imam Hussein, died in a battle. The protests and the processions often ended in violence, with 30 people killed in 2019, mainly in FCT (Abuja), followed by Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Gombe, and Bauchi states. In the Central District of Abuja in July 2019, for instance, a Deputy Commissioner of Police, a reporter with Channels Television and 8 other people were killed during a clash between the police and Shiites over the detention of their leader. On September 10, 2019, clashes in Katsina, Sokoto, Gombe, Bauchi and Kaduna states claimed 12 lives, mostly Shiite protesters. The incidents occurred when members of the sect were performing their annual Ashura processions.

### ***2.3.3 Pro-Biafra agitators***

Pro-Biafra agitations in the South East and some parts of the South-South subsided despite the proscription of separatist groups by the Federal Government. In 2019, there were pockets of fatal incidents involving security operatives which claimed 21 lives in Imo, Anambra, Delta and Abia, the home state of the leader of the Independent Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), Nnamdi Kanu. On 6 February, for instance, 3 IPOB members were shot dead when soldiers attempted to remove posters of Nnamdi Kanu at Asa Nnentu Auto Spare Parts Market in Ukwa West LGA, Abia.

Anambra State also recorded 12 fatalities from clashes between pro-Biafra groups and security operatives. In May 22, 2019, 2 members of the Chief Uwazurike-led Biafra Independence Movement (BIM) were shot dead at Upper Iweka by security agents during an attempt to hoist their flag in the wake of their 19th anniversary celebration. A few days later, 5 persons were killed at Nnewi when IPOB members attacked people who breached a sit-at-home order declared by the group. Delta and Imo states, finally, recorded 1 and 3 fatalities respectively.

**2.4 Road accidents**

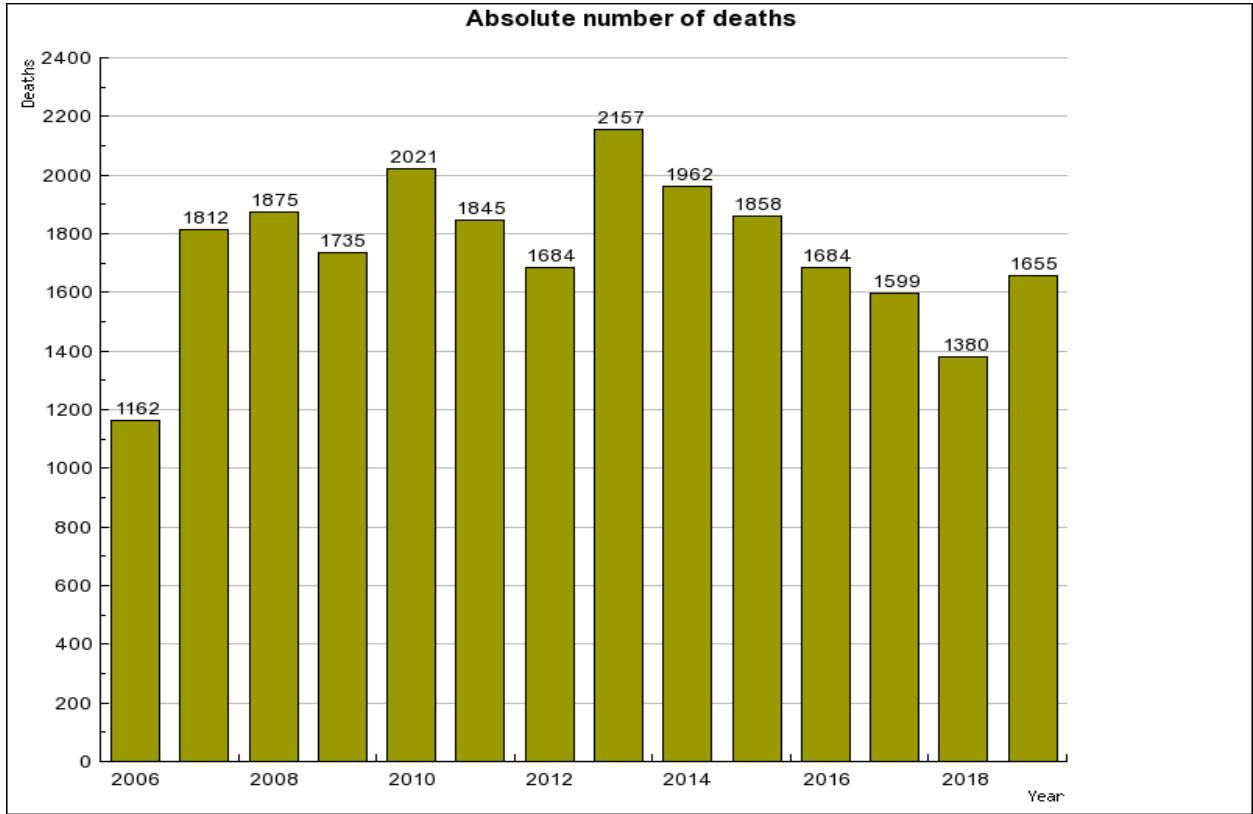


Figure 4: Road accident fatalities, 2006-2019

Apart from crime and the Boko Haram insurgency, road accidents remained a major cause of violent deaths in Nigeria. A total of 24,428 fatalities were recorded in road crashes across Nigeria between 2006 and 2019 (Figure 4). However, there was a consistent drop since 2013, when it peaked at 2,157 fatalities compared to 1,962 in 2014, 1,858 in 2015, 1,684 in 2016, 1,599 in 2017 and 1,380 in 2018. Yet the trend reversed when road fatalities went up to 1,655 in 2019.

**2.4.1 Road accidents by state**

Ogun State recorded the highest number of road accident fatalities in 2019, a repeat of the 2018 pattern (Figure 5). Between January and March 2019, 102 people were killed in different road crashes in the state. Road crashes along the ever-busy Lagos-Ibadan expressway still remain high despite, or because of the ongoing road construction. Many of the crashes occurred at diversions or

bad portions of the road. Other states with high road accident fatalities included Gombe (177 deaths), Bauchi (143) and Niger (126).

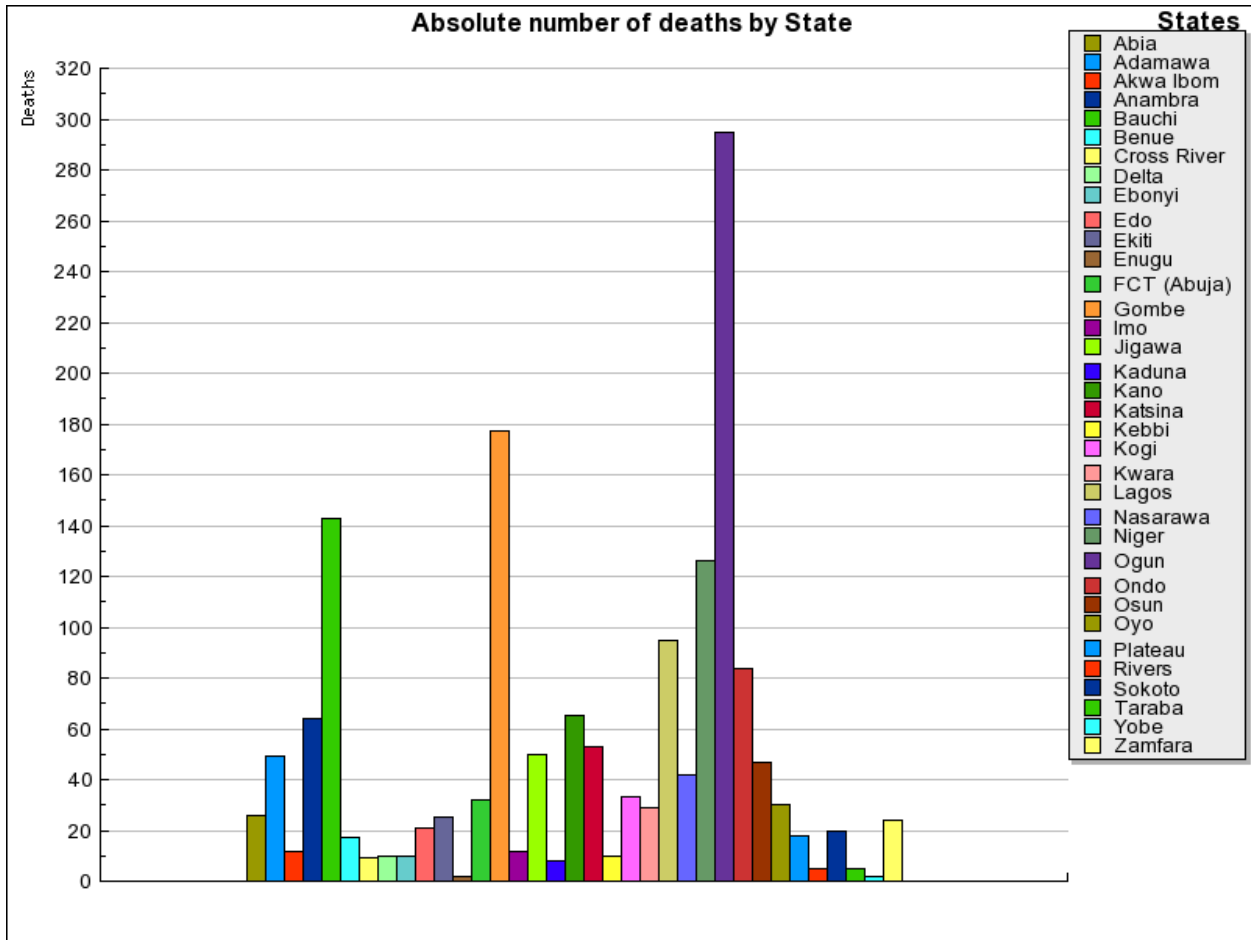


Figure 5: Fatalities resulting from road accidents by state in 2019

### 2.4.2 Road accidents by month

Result from Figure 6 show that November recorded the highest number of road fatalities, followed by June and January. March, July and May recorded the lowest number of road fatalities. The result did not establish a definite pattern of lethal road crashes unlike a common assumption that more deaths are recorded during festive periods.

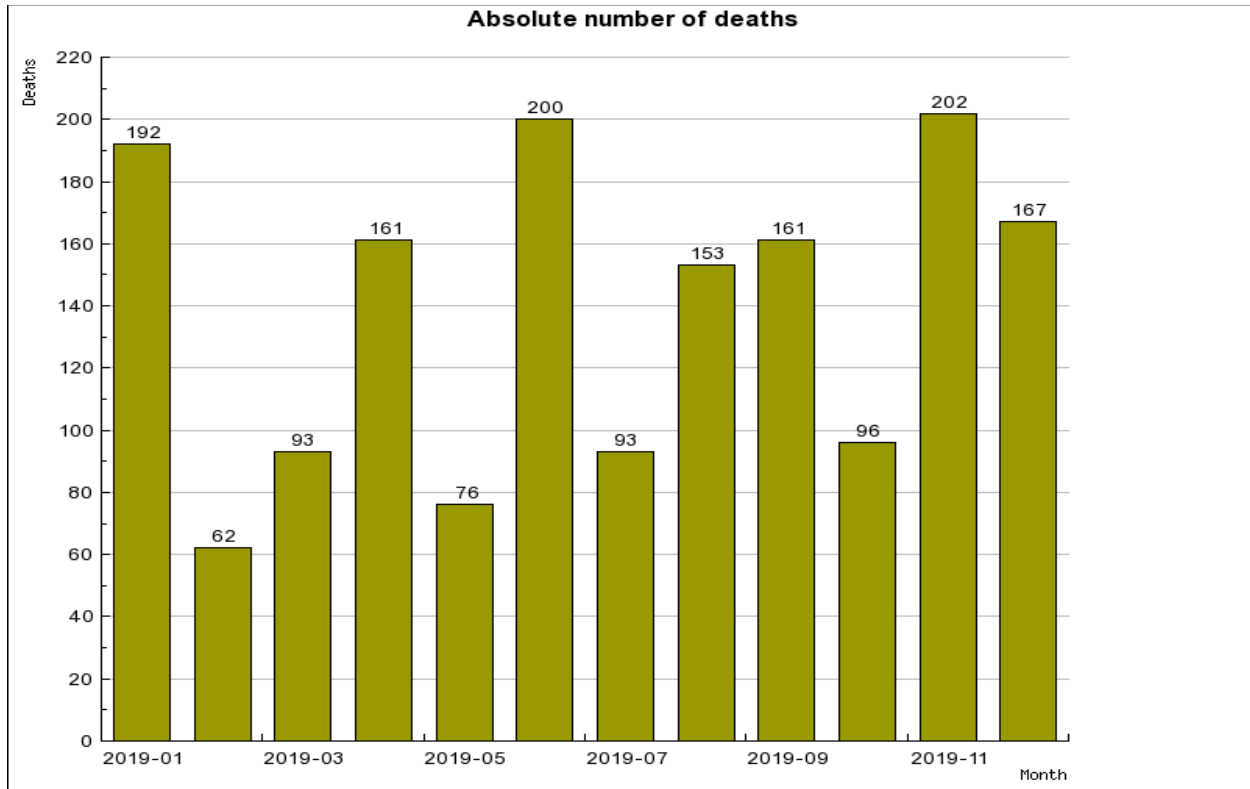


Figure 6: Fatalities resulting from road accidents by month in 2019

### 3. Ethno-communal violence

Communal conflict remains a major form of violence in Nigeria (Figure 7). In 2019, 1,012 fatalities were recorded during intra- and intercommunal clashes over land located in boundary areas, grazing spaces, chieftaincy and market issues and sharing formula for royalties paid by oil companies. The context of communal clashes in states varied. In Kaduna, Zamfara, Jigawa and Plateau states, grazing space was a major cause of clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farming communities. In Taraba and Benue states, Tiv and Jukun ethnic nationalities clashed over land ownership. In Ebonyi, Edo, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Cross River and Benue states, the clashes were driven by claims over land in border areas. Notable among the perennial intra-state communal clashes in 2019 were the land disputes between Obubra/Abanwan communities in Cross River State and Izzi/Ikwo communities in Ebonyi State; Ikot Offiong in Cross River and Oku-Iboku in Akwa Ibom; Agila in Benue State and Ngwo in Ebonyi State.

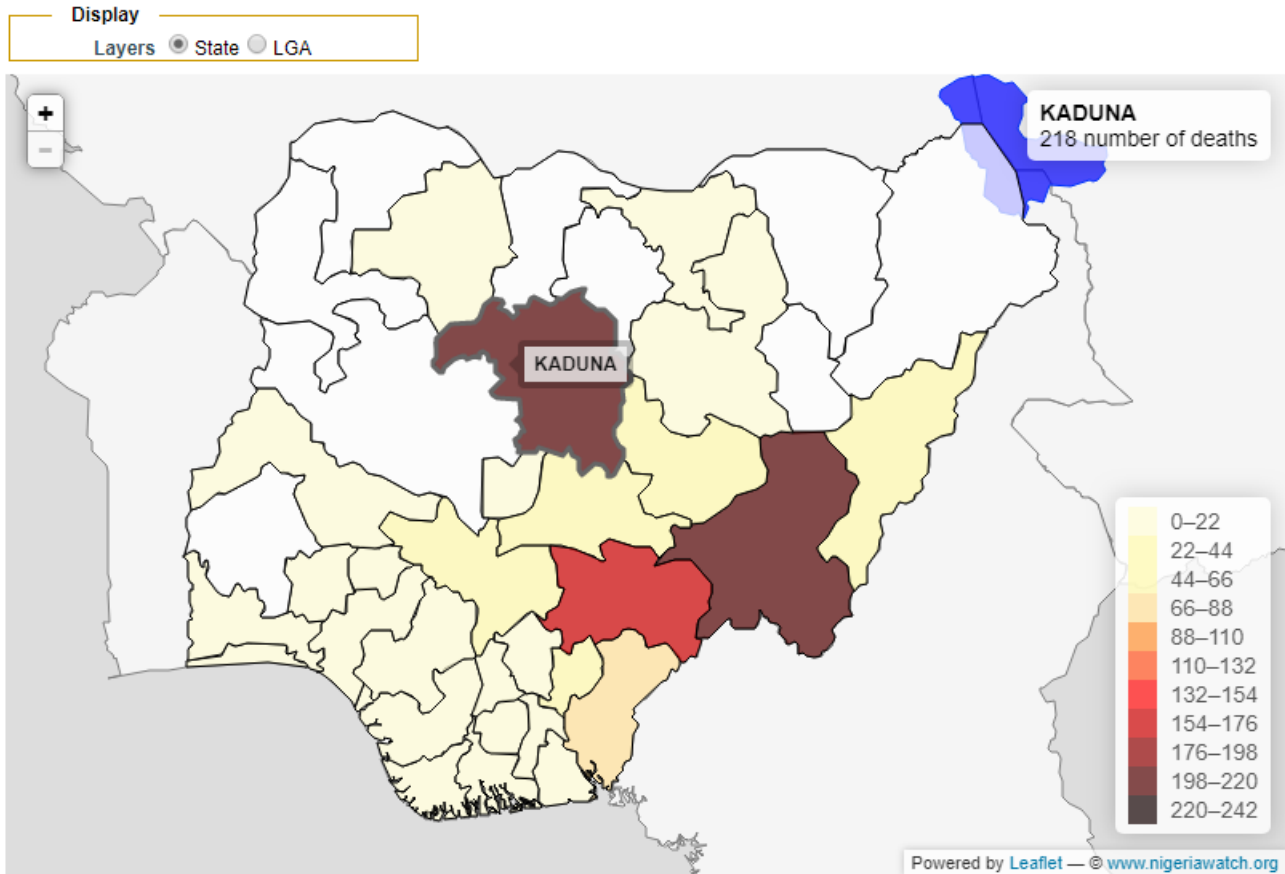


Figure 7: Map of the fatalities caused by communal violence per state in Nigeria, 2019

#### 4. The most dangerous states

The relative number of violent deaths in Nigeria averaged at 4.6 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2019. Because of the Boko Haram insurgency, Borno maintained its lead as the most dangerous state, with 33.9 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Zamfara with 21.7, Taraba with 9.1, Kaduna with 6.3 and Ogun with 6.0. Zamfara grappled with banditry; Taraba, with clashes between Tiv and Jukun; while Southern Kaduna suffered from banditry and cattle rustling altogether.



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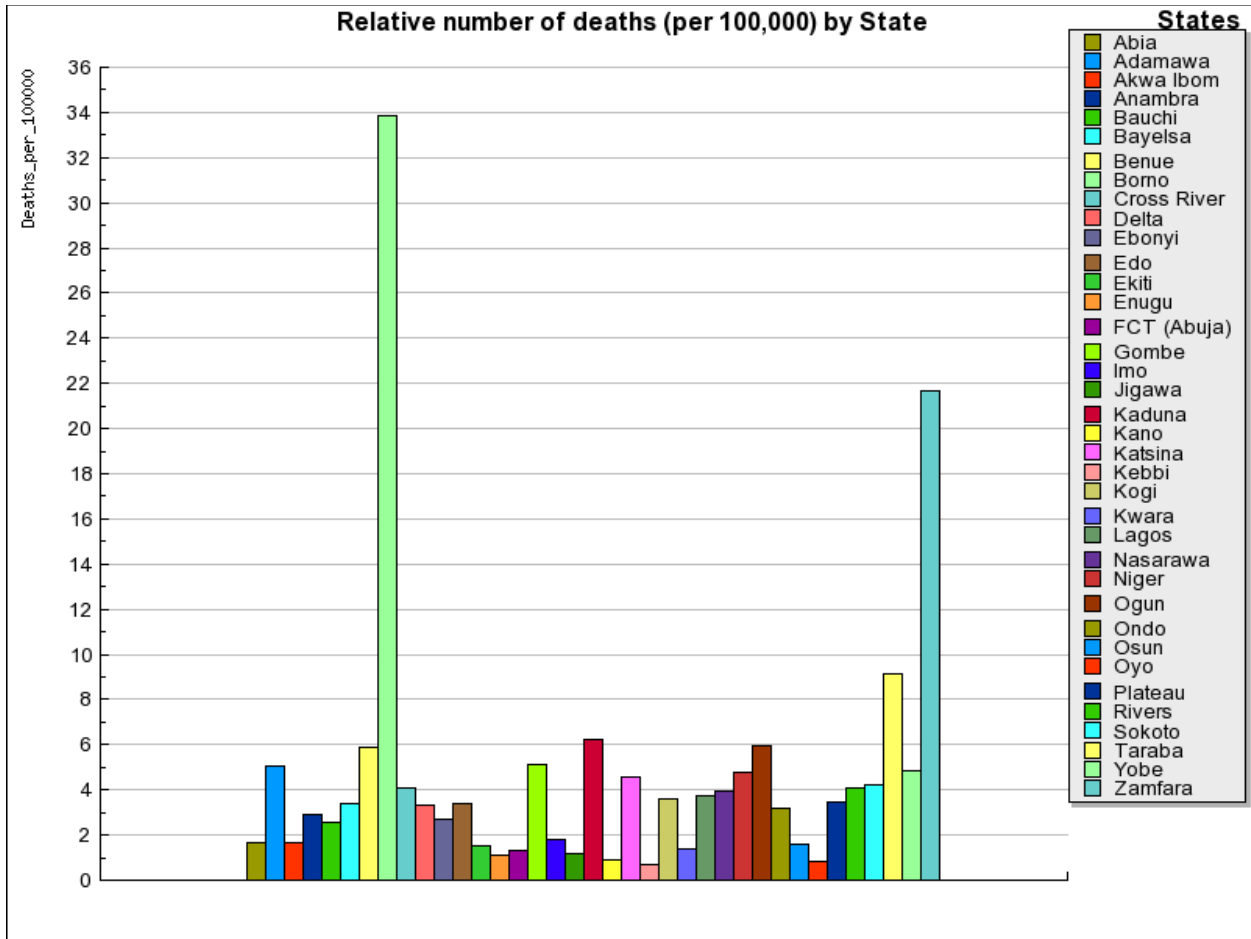


Figure 8: Number of fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants per state in Nigeria, 2019