



# Nigeria Watch

## Tenth Report on Violence in Nigeria (2020)

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**ACRONYMS**

CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
COVID-19	Coronavirus
DSS	Department of State Services
ECW	Every Casualty Worldwide
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
GIS	Geographic Information System
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
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
IRT	Intelligence Response Team
ISWAP	Islamic State West African Province
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LGA	Local Government Area
MACBAN	Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria
MASSOB	Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra
MCN	Managing Conflict in Nigeria
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPF	Nigerian Police Force
NSCDC	Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps
NW	Nigeria Watch
PRIO	Peace Research Institute in Oslo
SARS	Special Anti-Robbery Squad
STS	Special Tactical Squad
SUV	Sports Utility Vehicle
ONELGA	Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area

## **FOREWORD**

This Tenth Annual Report on lethal violence in Nigeria covers the period between 1 January and 31 December 2020. 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 European Union funded Managing Conflict in Nigeria (MCN) Programme, which is implemented by the British Council. 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 daily 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**

- Nigeria lost 12,318 people in 2,677 lethal incidents in 2020, with Borno on top of the list, followed by Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, and Niger, all northern states affected by banditry and the Boko Haram insurgency.
- Crime was a major cause of violent death in 2020. It claimed the lives of 5,446 people in 1,426 incidents, against 3,425 in 1,191 incidents in 2019. Katsina, Kaduna, and Zamfara states, all in the Northwest, recorded the highest number of fatalities from crime in Nigeria; Kebbi, Gombe, and Jigawa, the lowest.
- Clashes between suspected herdsmen and farming communities were reported across 22 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Such incidents resulted in the death of 616 people in 2020, mainly in Kaduna, Plateau, and Benue states.
- Road accidents claimed 1,464 lives across 33 states and the FCT in 2020. Ogun State recorded the highest number of fatalities, followed by Anambra and Delta states.
- Borno remains the most dangerous state in Nigeria with 46.3 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Zamfara (16.4), Kaduna (14.7), and Katsina (12.5). Gombe and Kebbi states had the lowest rates of violent deaths (0.2). The FCT, Akwa Ibom, Ekiti, Kano, Enugu, Oyo, Imo, and Bauchi states were relatively peaceful with less than 2 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants.

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria Watch’s methodology is 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 (2006-2020)

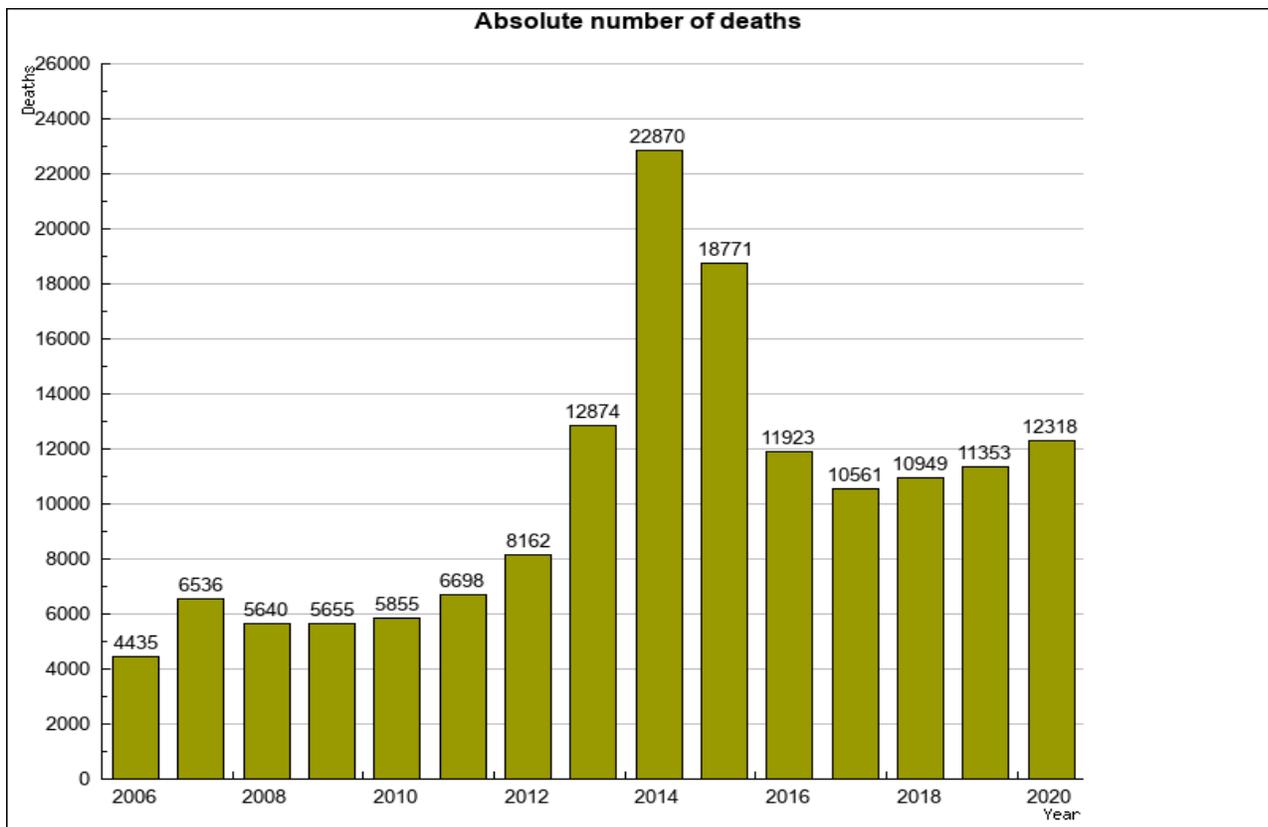


Figure 1: Main trend of violence 2006-2020<sup>7</sup>

<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: Tenth Report on Violence (2020)

Violence in Nigeria killed no fewer than 154,602 people between 2006 and 2020. After a peak in 2014, the trend went downward, then upward again, especially because of the Boko Haram insurgency, banditry and, in 2020, extra-judicial killings during the COVID-19 lockdown, and protests against police brutality.

At the state level, Borno recorded the highest number of fatalities (3,069), followed by Kaduna (1,346), Katsina (1,099), Zamfara (831), and Niger (547). On the other hand, Gombe, Kebbi, Ekiti, Akwa Ibom, and Nasarawa states were relatively peaceful as each of them recorded less than 100 fatalities in 2020.

Following incessant attacks by bandits and various Boko Haram factions, as well as counter-terrorism and anti-crime operations by security agencies, the North recorded the majority of fatalities. However, the South was also home to deadly cult groups and it concentrated the majority of the fatal communal incidents reported in 2020.

### 2. Main Causes of Violence in 2020

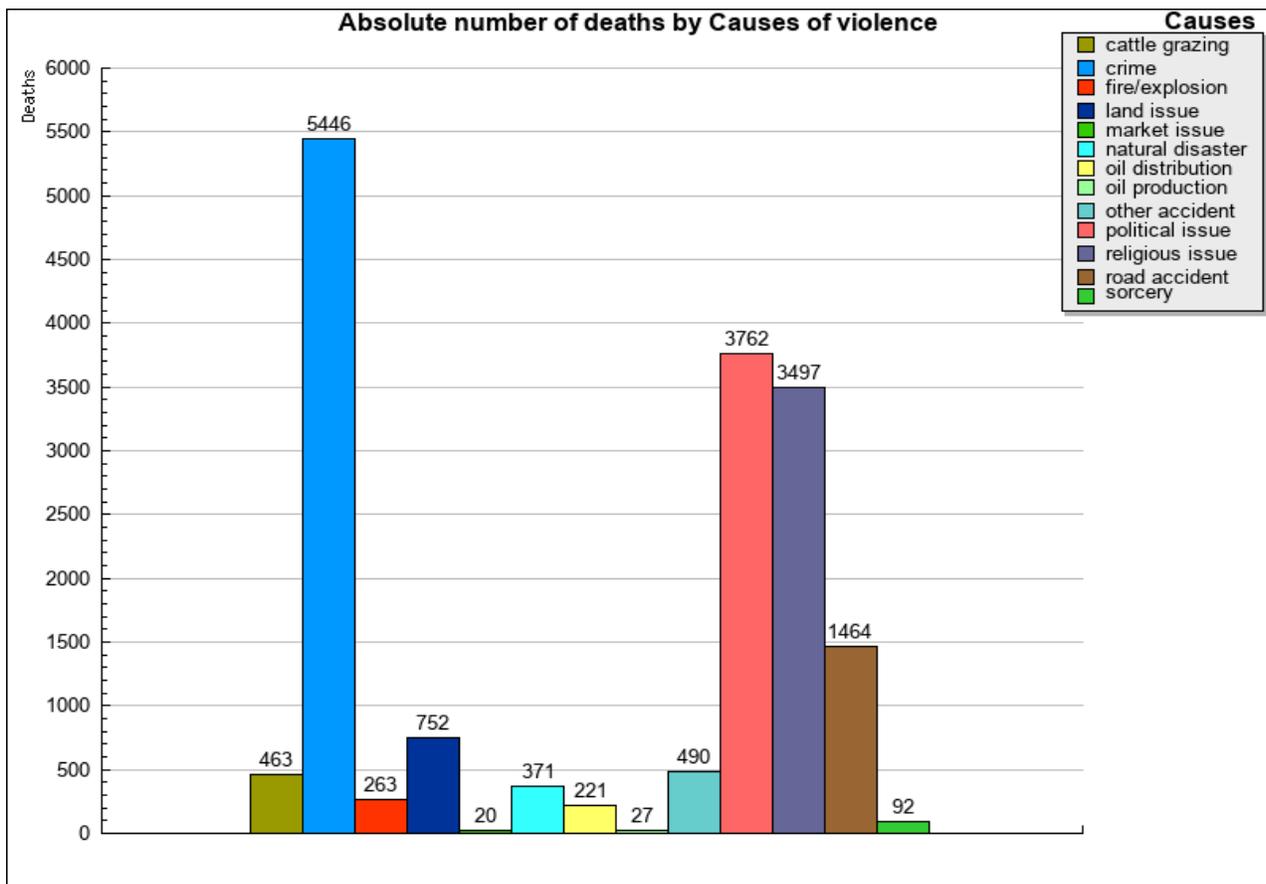


Figure 2: Number of fatalities resulting from different causes of violence in 2020

Crime remained the major cause of violent deaths in Nigeria in 2020, followed by political clashes and road accidents.

## **2.1. Crime**

Crime claimed 5,446 lives in 2020, against 3,425 in 2019. Katsina was the most impacted state (957 victims), followed by Kaduna (793), and Zamfara (720), mainly because of banditry and kidnapping.

### **2.1.1 *Cultism***

Violence related to so-called “cult societies” was less deadly when it comes to the number of fatalities and affected states, together with the frequency of clashes. In 2020, 427 people were killed in 164 of such incidents across 19 states, as against 536 in 168 incidents across 21 states in 2019. Delta and Lagos were the most impacted states (69 deaths each), followed by Ogun, Rivers, Edo, and Bayelsa.

Clashes between cult groups in 2020 were mostly characterized by rivalry for supremacy and space. Yet attacks and counterattacks also affected neighboring communities where innocent residents were killed or injured. On 30 November, for instance, Epe, Ejinrin, Adefisan, and Onirugba areas of Ijebu Ode LGA of Ogun State came under attacks by the Aiye and Eiye confraternities. The incidents claimed over 20 lives, with many others injured. Clashes between these cult groups were also prevalent in Ikorodu, Mushin, Agege, and Kosofe areas of the neighboring Lagos State, as well as Upper Sakponba, Ogida, and New Benin in Edo State.

Several arrests were made by the Nigerian Police during initiation ceremonies or raids on the gangs’ hideouts. In February 2020, for instance, 12 cultists were captured in Idiaraba area of Lagos State. In April 2020, again, 69 others were arrested after clashes between the Black Axe and Eiye confraternities in different parts of Benin City in Edo State.

### **2.1.2 *Rural Banditry***

In 2020, rural banditry claimed 3,007 lives across 14 states in Nigeria, mainly in the North-West zone (86%). Katsina alone recorded 966 fatalities, followed by Zamfara (725), Kaduna (703), and Sokoto (189) states. Kano remained peaceful despite its proximity to Kaduna. Also, the North-Central zone was a bit preserved from rural banditry and cattle rustling, except for Niger State (329 victims).

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

No fewer than 21 people were killed following bank robberies in Ondo, Kogi, and Oyo states. On February 6, 2020, 2 policemen and 2 bank customers were killed during an attack on 2 banks in Ile-Oluji-Okeigbo LGA, Ondo State. Also in Ondo State, on November 26, a 9-men-gang raided 2 banks

at Ode-Irele, Irele LGA, killing several persons. In Kogi State, 8 policemen and a civilian were shot dead by armed robbers who launched an attack on a branch of First Bank and a police station on June 4. A team of crack detectives from the Intelligence Response Team (IRT), the Special Tactical Squad (STS), and Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) were deployed to apprehend the attackers but it is unclear if any arrest was made. In Oyo State, a 6-men-gang of armed robbers stormed a new bank in Okeho, Kajola LGA on July 29. An anti-riot policeman and 3 robbers were killed in the incident, while 5 other robbers were subsequently arrested.

#### **2.1.4 Kidnapping**

No fewer than 336 people died in kidnap incidents across Nigeria in 2020. The involvement of Boko Haram insurgents, bandits, suspected Fulani herdsmen, and pirates in mass kidnapping made it difficult for communities and security operatives to travel. Victims included students, commuters, politicians, residents, foreigners, among others. Many of them were released after paying ransom while others were killed for different reasons. In Katsina State, over 344 students of Government Science Secondary School in Kankara were abducted by gunmen on 12 December and released a week later. The incident was blamed on gangs operating in the area despite a Boko Haram statement claiming the attack in an unverified audio recording. Mass abductions were also reported in Niger, Kaduna, Zamfara, Nasarawa, and Sokoto states. As for isolated kidnappings, they sometimes targeted expatriates. For instance, a 27-year-old American citizen was rescued on October 31, in Sokoto State by American soldiers after he was kidnapped in Niger Republic and held hostage in Nigeria. In Delta State, 3 Lebanese, 4 Indians, 2 Egyptians, and 1 Cameroonian were then abducted on 25 November from their vessel along the Pennington River; later on, they were rescued by a joint team of security operatives in neighboring Bayelsa State.

#### **2.1.5 Farmers/Herdsmen clashes**

The number of victims that died from clashes between herdsmen and farmers increased from 549 in 2019 to 616 in 2020. No fewer than 23 states were affected, with Kaduna recording the highest number of fatalities (203), followed by Plateau (106) and Benue (96). Southern Kaduna remained the hotbed of such clashes. Kajuru and Zango-Kataf LGAs accounted for more than half of the fatalities in the state, with clashes also reported in Chikun, Jemaa, Kaura, and Kuru LGAs. While clashes in other states often occurred during the grazing season, many of the victims in Kaduna State died in attacks and counter-attacks involving local farmers and Fulani cattle breeders. Delta, Katsina, Kogi, Edo, Nasarawa, and Bauchi states also recorded a significant number of fatalities from pastoral incidents. In Ughelli North LGA, Delta State, for instance, no fewer than 14 people were killed in February 2020 by suspected Fulani herdsmen in Avwon, Agadama, and Ohoror communities of Uwheru Kingdom.

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

## Nigeria Watch: Tenth Report on Violence (2020)

In 2020, security operatives in Nigeria were involved in incidents that resulted into the death of 5,307 people, especially during the fight against banditry, Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the North. In the South, the clampdown on protesters was also a cause for alarm. On August 23, about 21 members of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and 2 operatives of the Department of State Security (DSS) lost their lives during clashes in Enugu State. On October 20, no fewer than 15 protesters against police brutality were killed at Lekki Toll Gate, Ibeju/Lekki LGA, Lagos, by uniformed men whose identities are yet to be confirmed. The incident triggered violent protests across the country, with more lives lost, businesses and properties destroyed.

Armed gangs made up of kidnappers, rural bandits, cultists, thugs, sea pirates, and / or herdsmen were involved in the death of 4,808 people in 2020. Many of the victims were killed by the criminals. But bandits were also killed by rival gangs or security operatives. As for political and ethnic groups, or organizations, they were the third main protagonist to incidents that caused the death of 3,998 people in 2020.

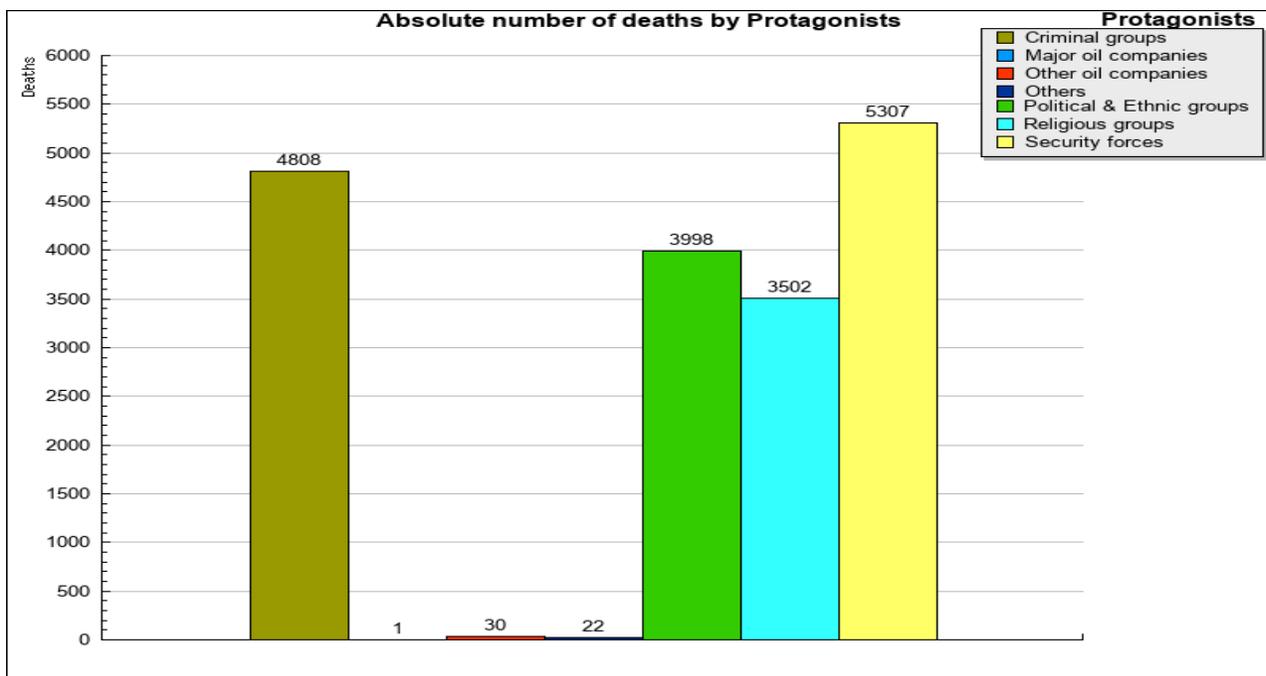


Figure 3: Main protagonists of violence (per number of fatalities in 2020)

### 2.3 Political and religious violence

#### 2.3.1 Boko Haram Insurgency

Nigeria continued to grapple with the Boko Haram crisis in 2020. Fatalities resulting from incidents involving the insurgents, security operatives, hunters, and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) caused the death of 3,295 people, against 2,866 in 2019. Like in previous years, Borno was the most

## **Nigeria Watch: Tenth Report on Violence (2020)**

affected state, with 3,076 deaths reported in 172 incidents, followed by Yobe (150 fatalities in 10 incidents) and Adamawa (65 victims in 8 incidents). In Borno State, only Bayo, Biu, Guzumala, Kala/Balge, and Kwaya Kusar LGAs were spared by the fighting.

Attack on convoys was a major strategy deployed by both insurgents and soldiers. On different occasions, military and civilian convoys were ambushed by insurgents. Many were killed in the incidents while others were kidnapped or injured. On March 23, about 70 soldiers were allegedly killed in a Boko Haram ambush on their convoy at Gorgi community in Damboa LGA, Borno State. On April 11, an unspecified number of motorists in a convoy of security escort died after they ran over IEDs allegedly planted by Boko Haram on the Marte-Dikwa highway in Borno State. It was unclear if soldiers were among the victims. On May 17, over 20 insurgents were killed in Baga in Kukawa LGA, Borno State, when the troops attacked their convoy.

Boko Haram and ISWAP executed some of their victims in 2020, especially when ransoms could not be paid. On January 1, the Chairman of the Michika chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was abducted by Boko Haram and beheaded 28 days later. On January 14, a 22-year-old Christian student of the University of Maiduguri was executed by an 8-year-old ISWAP fighter after he was kidnapped on his way back from school. On July 22, 5 abducted humanitarian workers were also executed in Sambisa by ISWAP. The insurgents made contact with the families of the victims and demanded \$500,000 as ransom. They might have been killed after their families could not meet the demand. On December 29, 5 Christian captives were executed in a 49-second video by ISWAP. They were abducted from Garkida in Adamawa State.

### **2.3.2 *Ansaru terrorists***

The al Qaeda-linked Jamaat al Ansar al Muslimeen fi Bilad al Sudan, better known as Ansaru, announced its return to Nigeria on 27 October 2019 and claimed responsibility for the attack on the convoy of the Emir of Potiskum in Kaduna State on 17 January 2020. At least 6 soldiers died in the encounter at Fandatio village along the Kaduna-Zaira highway, though Ansaru claimed it killed 22 soldiers. In response, the special operatives of Operation Puff Adder of the Nigeria Police, backed by the Special Forces of the Police Airwing, allegedly killed 250 Ansaru members in Kuduru forest, Birni-Gwari LGA, of Kaduna State on February 5. The group lost more fighters on August 13, when the Nigerian Air Force embarked on a clearance operation in Birnin Gwari.

### **2.3.3 *Islamic Movement of Nigeria***

The continued detention of the leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, by the government since 2015 pushed his followers into the streets on different occasions. Despite being proscribed by the government, the group protested in Kaduna State, the hometown of the detained leader, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). About 11 deaths were reported in these clashes. On January 21, 2020, a passerby was shot dead when policemen fired

gunshots and canisters to disperse protesting Shiite members in Wuse, Abuja. In Kaduna State, clashes between policemen and Shiites in Igabi and Zaria LGAs claimed 5 lives. One of the incidents occurred during the Ashura procession.

#### **2.3.4 *Pro-Biafra Agitators***

Violent clashes between the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and security operatives claimed 44 lives in 2020. The group was proscribed by the government in 2017 following clashes with security operatives and disruption of socio-economic activities in the Southeast and the South-South. Yet 21 IPOB members and 2 DSS operatives were killed during a clash in Emene, Enugu State, on August 23, 2020. The operatives tried to disperse them but met stiff resistance from the pro-Biafra agitators.

In Rivers State, Oyigbo was grounded for weeks following clashes between IPOB members and the Hausa community on one hand and IPOB members and soldiers on the other hand. The agitators took advantage of the violent protest against police brutality to unleash terror on the Hausa community and police stations. Over 7 soldiers and policemen were allegedly killed in one of the incidents on October 20, 2020. Police stations and cars were burnt down while many officers were injured and a few declared missing. Soldiers were drafted into the community to contain the crisis. The occupation lasted for weeks, with allegations of harassment, intimidation, arrest, and extra-judicial killing of citizens.

#### **2.3.5 *COVID-19 Lockdown***

The first confirmed Coronavirus case in Nigeria was announced on 27 February 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive. The FCT, Lagos, and Ogun states were locked down by the Federal Government in a bid to contain the spread of the virus. Other states were locked down by their governors, and security operatives were mandated to enforce the restrictions of movements. Violations of the lockdown order and search for palliatives culminated in the death of 94 Nigerians across 19 states (see figure 4). Some of the victims died during clashes with security operatives while others died in a stampede during the looting of warehouses.

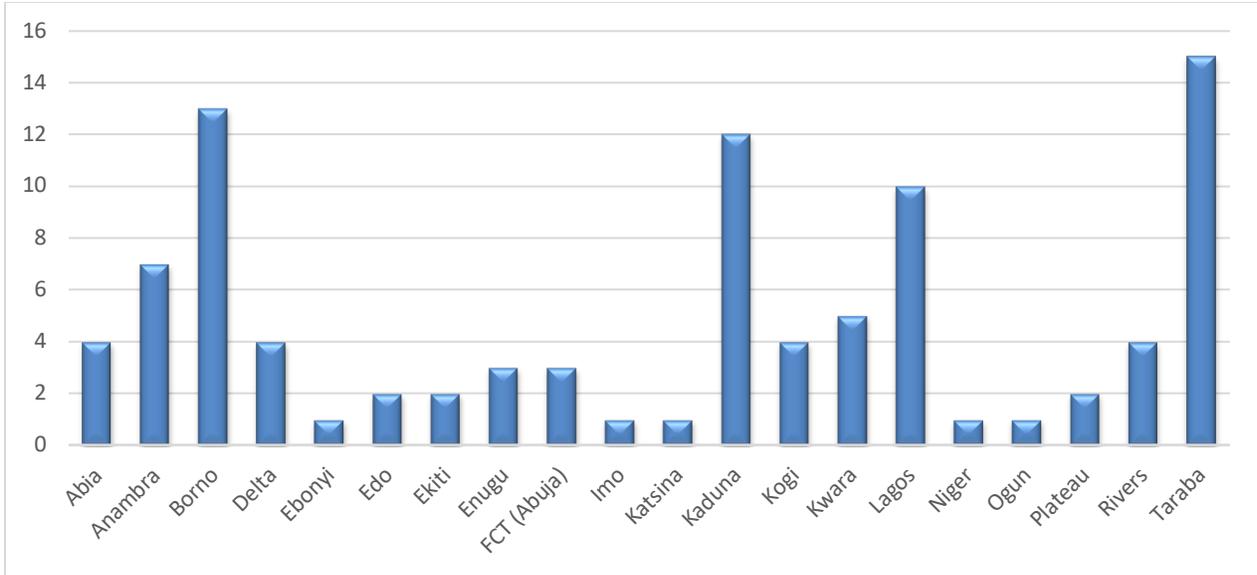


Figure 4: COVID-19 Lockdown fatalities (per number of fatalities in 2020)

### 2.3.5 EndSARS Protest

On Thursday 8 October 2020, nationwide protests against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) broke out after weeks of outrage and anger over police brutality, harassment, and extortion in Nigeria. The immediate trigger was a video that showed a SARS officer shooting a young motorist in Ughelli, Delta State, pushing his body out of the car and driving off with his Lexus SUV. The protests were led predominantly by young Nigerians including activists and celebrities and claimed about 225 lives across 21 states and the FCT, with 104 of the victims killed on 20 October (see figure 5).

Lagos State recorded the highest number of fatalities during the EndSARS protest, with over about 76 people including protesters and security operatives killed in Ajeromi-Ifelodun, Alimosho, Apapa, Eti-Osa, Ibeju/Lekki, Ifako-Ijaye, Ikeja, Ikorodu, Kosofe, Lagos Mainland, Mushin, Ojo, Oshodi-Isolo, Shomolu, and Surulere LGAs. Following violent attacks by agitators against protesters and police, the governor of Lagos state, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, declared a state-wide 24-hour curfew on 20 October. Protesters defied the curfew and camped at the Lekki toll where over 15 of them were killed while holding hands together and singing the Nigerian National Anthem. The identity of the shooters has been shrouded in controversy. The incident triggered killings and destruction of government and individual properties throughout the federation.

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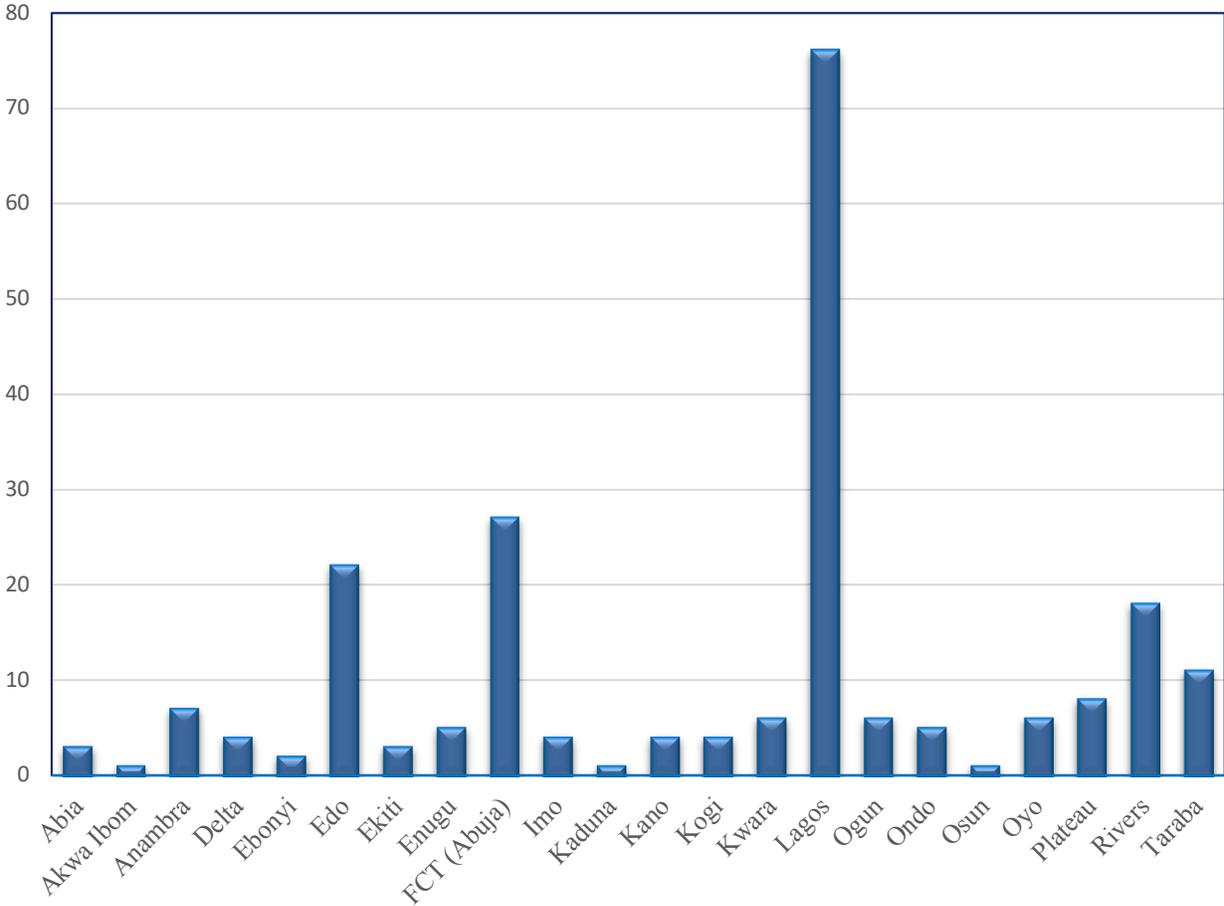


Figure 5: Fatalities from EndSARS protest (per number of fatalities by state in 2020)

### 2.4 Road accidents

Road accidents claimed 25,893 lives in Nigeria between 2006-2020, with a peak in 2013 (see figure 6).

In 2020, road accidents killed 1,464 people across the FCT and 33 of 36 states of the federation. Many of the crashes were blamed on human errors and mechanical faults. On September 18, for instance, 31 people died after an Enugu-bound Mercedes Benz 608 bus conveying people returning from a burial ceremony plunged into a river after it attempted to overtake a trailer along the Akaeze-Ishiagu axis of Afikpo-Okigwe highway. Five days later, at least 30 people were confirmed dead and many others injured following a petrol tanker crash and explosion that gutted 5 other vehicles, 2 motorbikes, and 3 tricycles in Lokoja, Kogi State. The accident was blamed on brake failure.

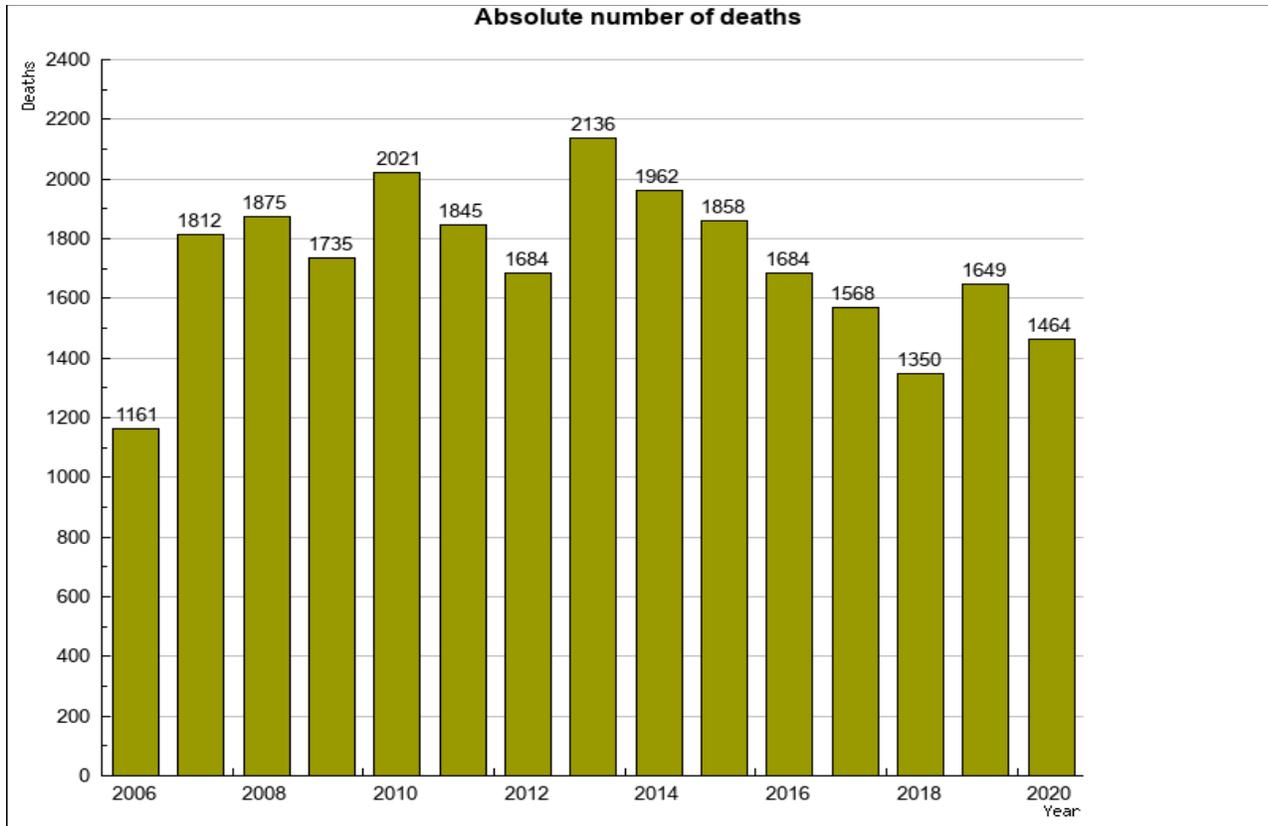


Figure 6: Road accident fatalities, 2006-2020

### 2.4.1 Road accidents by states

Fatal road accidents occurred in 33 states and the FCT in 2020, leaving Akwa Ibom, Kebbi, and Taraba states with no reported deaths (see figure 7). Ogun State maintained the topmost spot with 166 deaths in 63 crashes, followed by Anambra State with 95 deaths in 48 crashes and Delta State with 90 fatalities in 31 crashes. Majority of the fatalities in Ogun state occurred along the ever-busy Lagos-Abeokuta expressway in Ado-Odo Ota LGA and the Lagos-Ibadan expressway in Obafemi-Owode LGA. As for Anambra and Delta states, they are major transit points to travelers going to the Southeast, South-South, and Southwest. On July 23, for instance, a multiple auto crash that involved a petrol tanker and 9 other vehicles claimed 20 lives around the popular Koko junction in Delta State. 15 more lives were claimed in another crash that involved a luxurious bus and a Toyota Sienna car along the Asaba/Benin expressway on December 29.

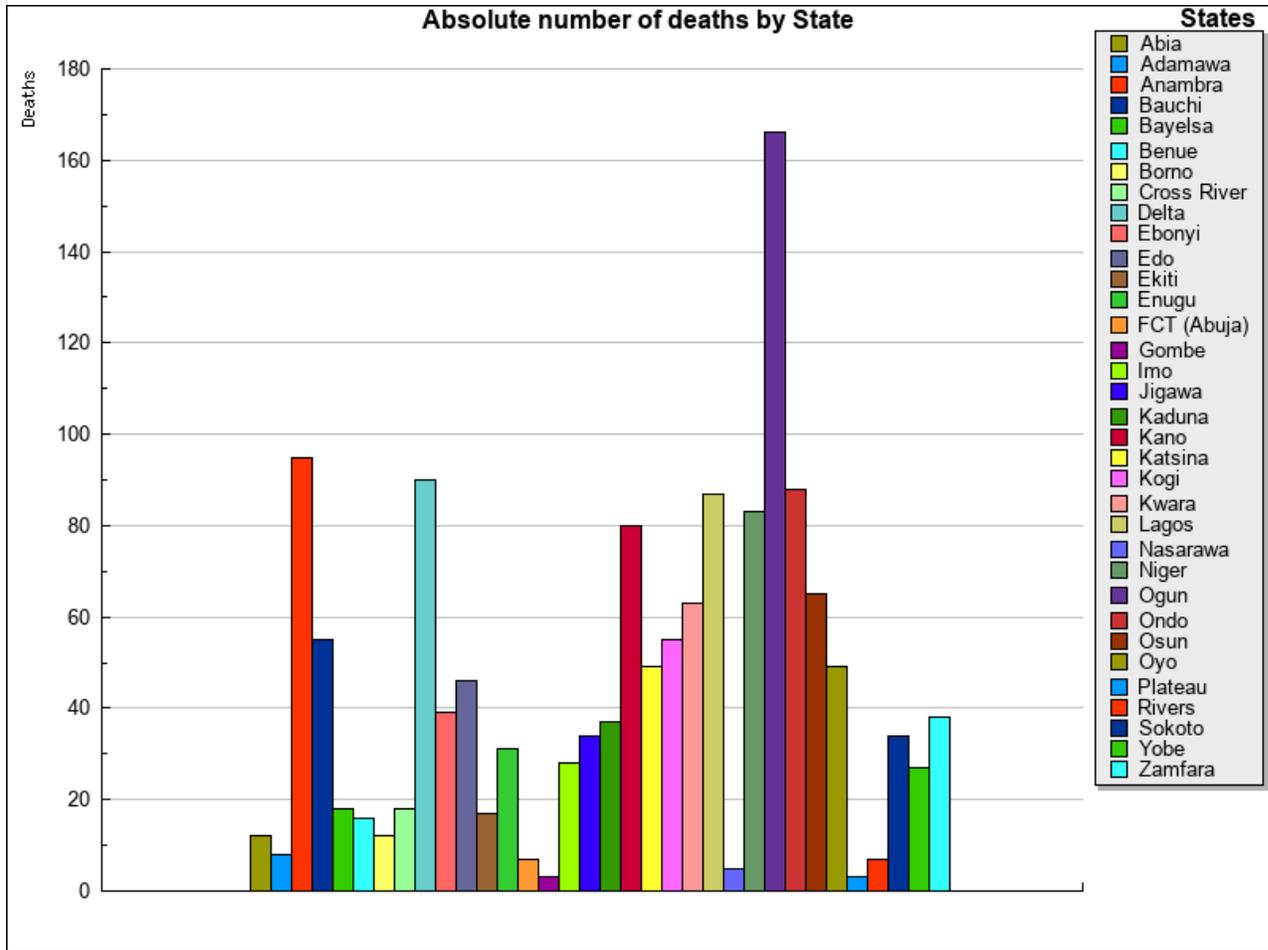


Figure 7: Fatalities resulting from road accidents by state in 2020

### 2.4.2 Road accidents by months

Figure 8 shows that October 2020 recorded the highest number of road fatalities, followed by September and January. This finding negates the popular assumption that more people die in road crashes during festive seasons. The Christmas (December) and Easter (April) periods ranked 4th and 11<sup>th</sup>, while July, the month for the Muslim Id el Kabir, ranked 8th.

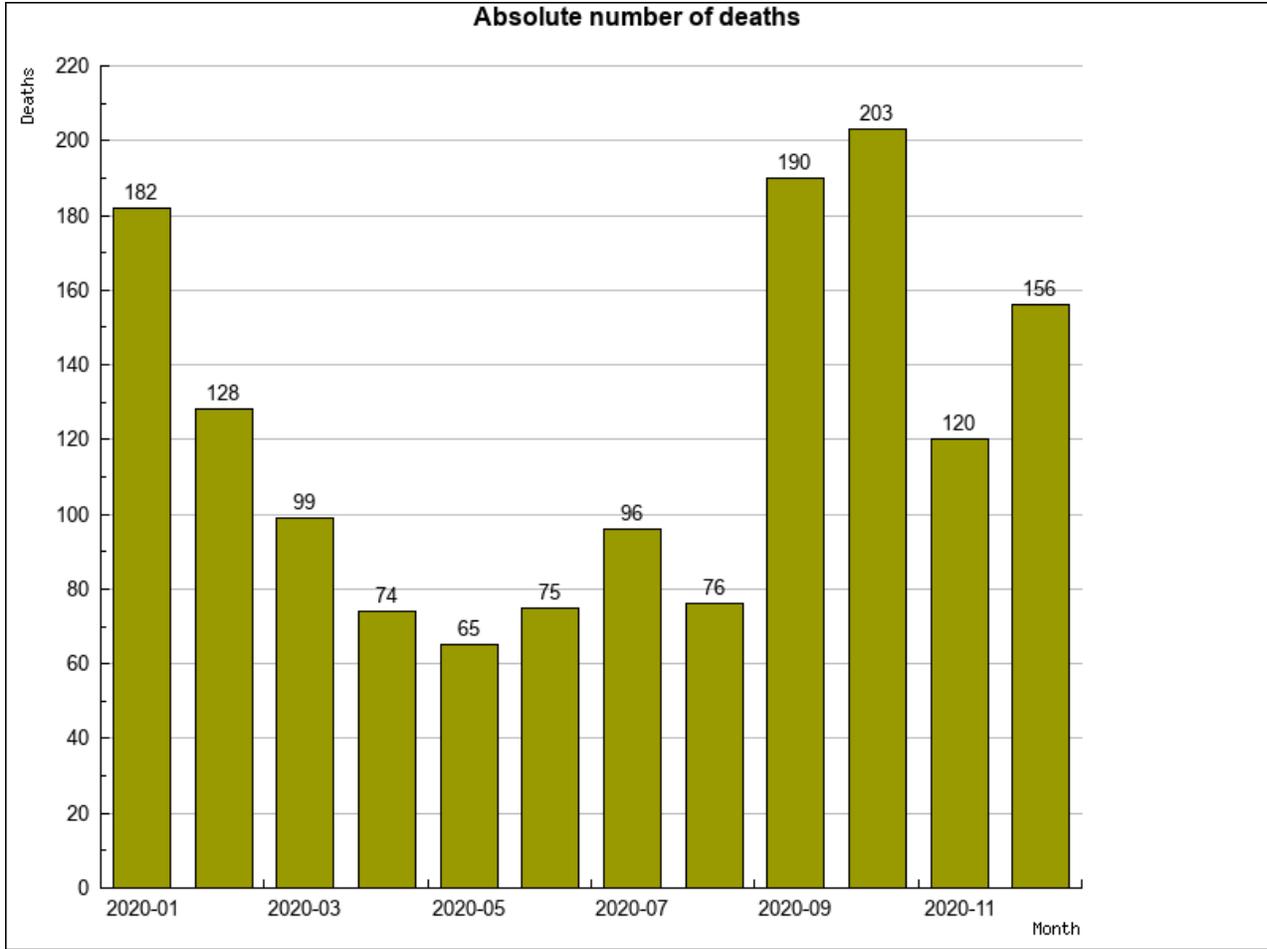


Figure 8: Fatalities resulting from road accidents by month in 2020

### 3. Ethno-communal violence

Nigeria witnessed a significant drop in the number of deaths from communal clashes, with 700 fatalities reported in 2020, against 1,012 in 2019. Access to land and grazing space remained key issues. Kaduna State (See figure 9) recorded the highest number of fatalities from such conflicts (170), followed by Benue (106), Adamawa (81), Taraba (59), Plateau (44), and Benue (34). In this regard, the media focus on Fulani herdsmen should not overshadow long-standing land disputes between other ethnic groups. On June 7, 2020, for instance, a village head, an Islamic cleric, and 12 others were killed by rival Jukun and Tiv militias in Maigoge, Maihula, Bagoni, Akate, and Wurbo communities in Bali, Donga, and Wukari LGAs of Taraba State. In Adamawa State, clashes between the Lunguda and Waja and between the Chabo and Hausa communities then claimed 81 lives in May and July. Abia, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Plateau, Nasarawa, Niger, and Oyo states also recorded communal incidents that were triggered by claims over land ownership, destruction of farmlands, and indulgence in criminal activities.

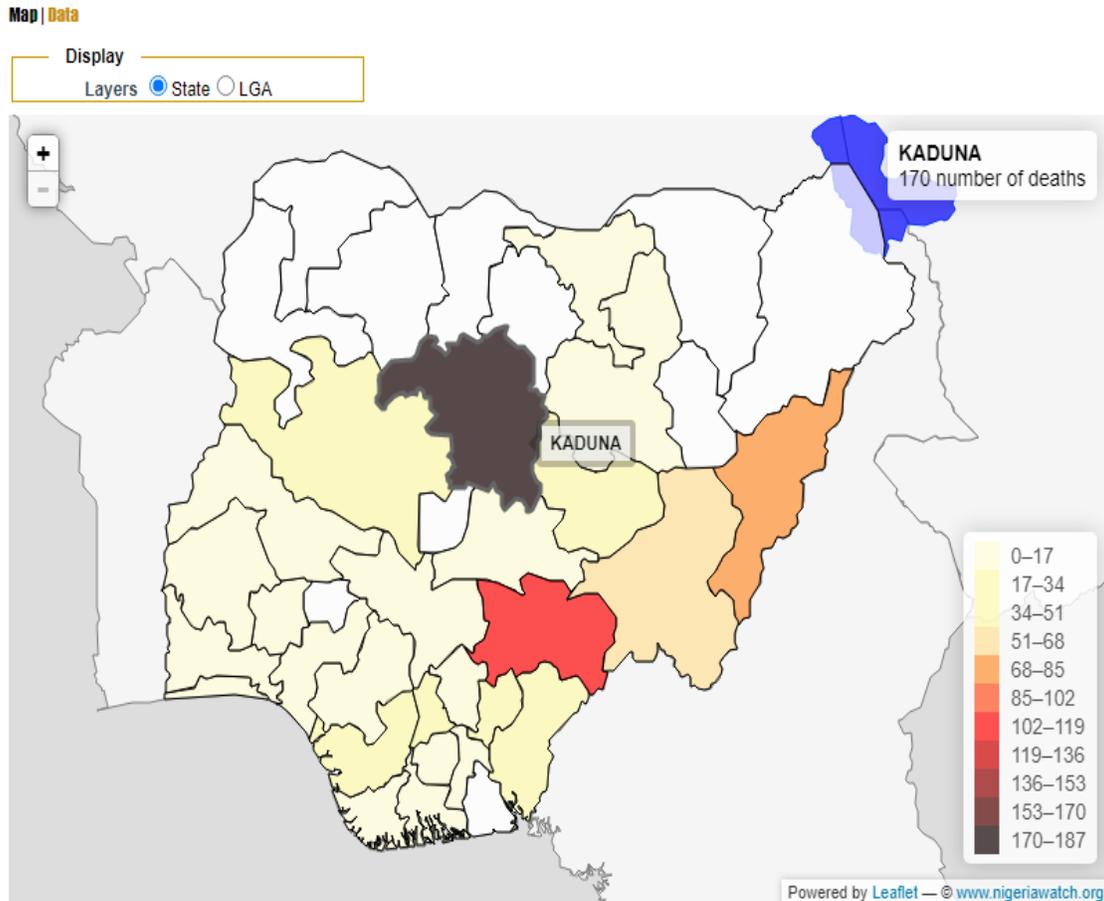


Figure 9: Map of the fatalities caused by communal violence per state in Nigeria, 2020

#### 4. The most dangerous states

Borno was still the most dangerous state in Nigeria in 2020 (see figure 10). Its number of violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants even increased from 39.9 in 2019 to 46.3. As for Zamfara, it remained the second most dangerous state with 16.4 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Kaduna (14.7) and Katsina (12.5). On the other hand, Gombe and Kebbi were the most peaceful states in 2020, as they recorded 0.2 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants. Also, Akwa Ibom, Ekiti, Kano, Enugu, Oyo, Imo, Bauchi states, and the FCT were relatively peaceful, with less than 2 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants.

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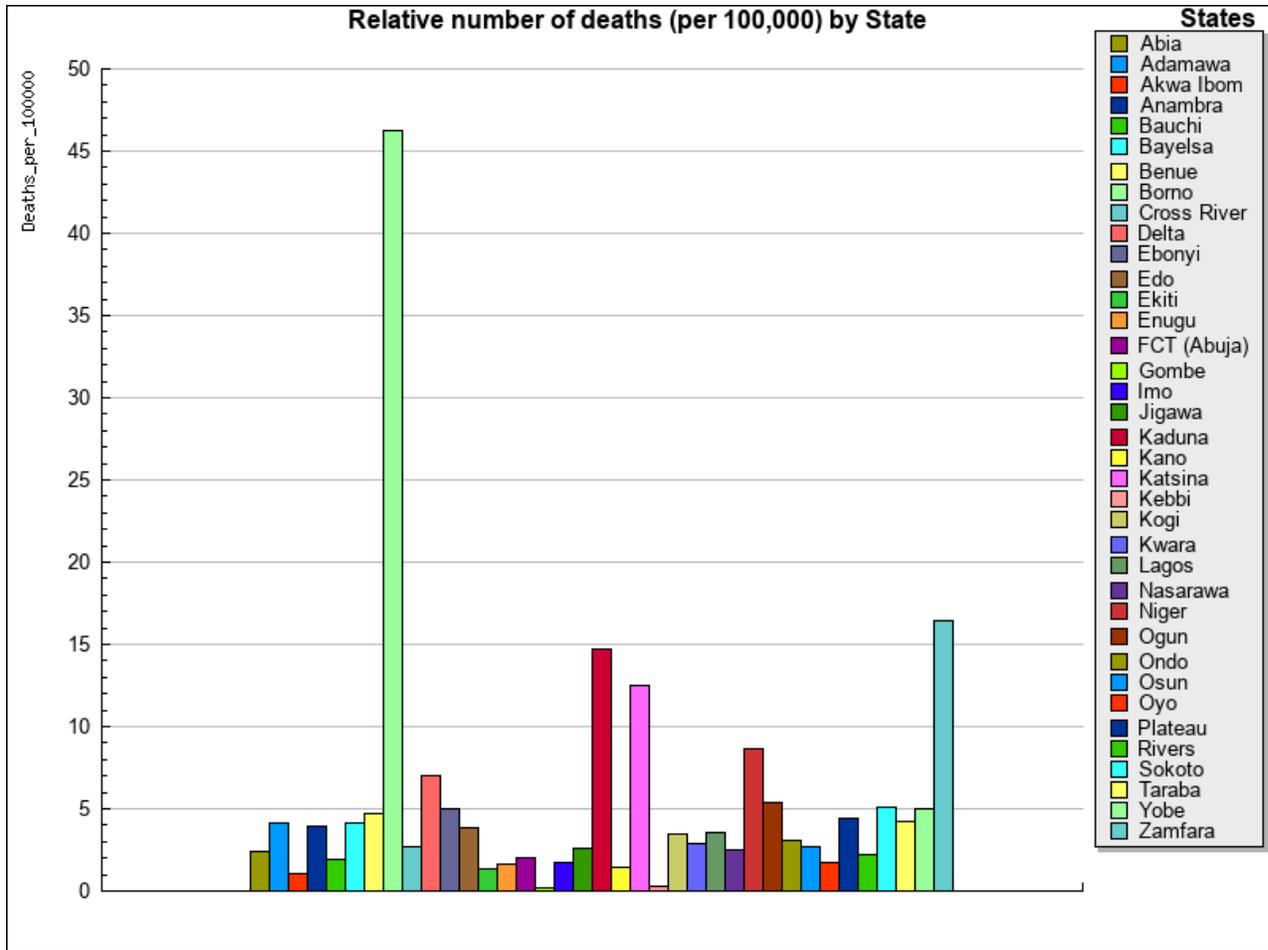


Figure 10: Number of fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants per state in Nigeria, 2020.