



Nigeria Watch

Eleventh Report on Violence in Nigeria (2021)

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ACRONYMS

CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
ECW	Every Casualty Worldwide
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
FGC	Federal Government College
GIS	Geographic Information System
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IFRA	French Institute for Research in Africa
IPOB	Independent People of Biafra
IRD	Institut de recherche pour le développement, Paris
ISWAP	Islamic State West African Province
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KASU	Kaduna State University
KKK	Ka Klux Klan
LGA	Local Government Area
MCN	Managing Conflict in Nigeria
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NW	Nigeria Watch

FOREWORD

This Eleventh Annual Report on lethal violence in Nigeria covers the period between 1 January and 31 December 2021. The study was 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.¹ 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).² It aims at following the Standards for Casualty Recording launched at the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) in Geneva in November 2016.³ Our methodology and sources are online.⁴ They have been discussed in various books and occasions, especially during an international conference organized by IFRA at the University of Ibadan in October 2016.⁵ 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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¹ Please visit www.ifra-nigeria.org for more information about IFRA.

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

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

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

⁵ 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, Wapos Series n°3, 2016, 217p.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Violence in Nigeria claimed 13,537 lives in 2021, with Borno State accounting for the highest number of fatalities (1,853), followed by Zamfara (1,516), Kaduna (1,342), Niger (935), and Benue (625). On the other hand, Gombe, Ekiti, Bayelsa, Adamawa, and Cross River states recorded the lowest number of fatalities in 2021.
- Zamfara State was the most dangerous state in 2021. It recorded 28.9 fatalities and homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. By contrast, Gombe, Ekiti, and Kano were the least violent states.
- The number of fatalities resulting from crime in Nigeria surged from 5,446 in 2020 to 7,446 in 2021. The increase was attributed to the rise in rural banditry, mass kidnapping, and cultism in some states.
- Violence involving farmers and suspected herdsmen claimed 703 lives in 2021, against 616 in 2020. Overall, 21 states recorded fatalities resulting from pastoral conflicts. Benue, Plateau, and Ebonyi were most affected. By contrast, very few incidents related to such clashes were reported in Abia, Akwa Ibom, and Rivers.
- Criminal gangs were involved in incidents resulting in 7,117 deaths, the highest number by any other protagonist in 2021. As for security operatives and ethno-political groups, they took part to various incidents resulting in 4,740 and 4,640 fatalities respectively.
- In 2021, road accidents claimed 1,877 lives, against 1,464 in 2020. Ogun recorded the highest number of road accident fatalities, followed by Bauchi and Kwara states.

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).⁶ 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 (2006-2021)

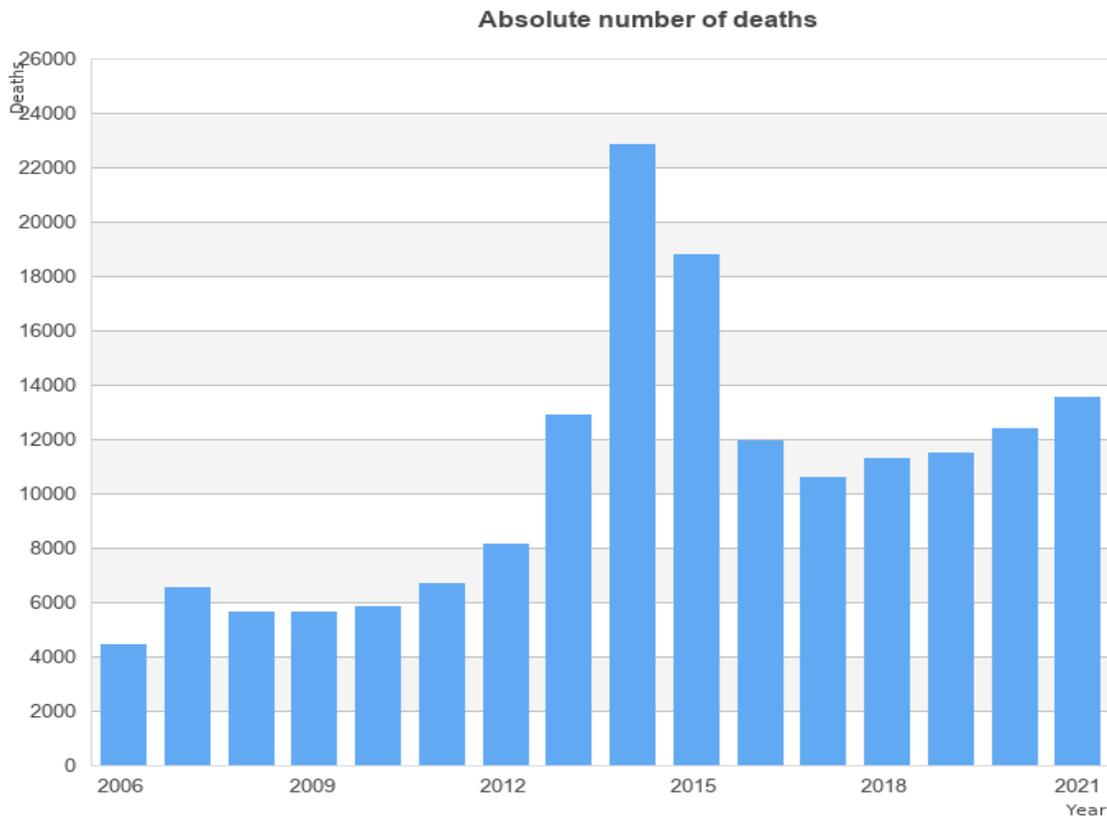


Figure 1: Main trend of violence 2006-2021⁷

⁶ 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.

⁷ Data for 2006 only cover the period from June to December.

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No fewer than 168,757 people died in 34,991 violent incidents in Nigeria between 2006 and 2021. The fatalities maintained an upward trend between 2017 and 2021.

In 2021, violence claimed 13,600 lives in Nigeria (Figure 1). Borno State recorded the highest number of fatalities (1,853), followed by Zamfara (1,516), Kaduna (1,342), Niger (935), and Benue (625). However, the home of Boko Haram witnessed a significant drop in violence, from 3,069 deaths in 2020 to 1,853 in 2021. Meanwhile, the numbers of fatalities surged in Zamfara, Kaduna, and Niger states, where banditry has remained prevalent. By contrast, Gombe, Ekiti, Bayelsa, Adamawa, and Cross River states recorded the least number of violent deaths.

At the regional level, the North reported more violent deaths than the South, mainly because of “terrorism”, banditry, and counter operations by security operatives. Down in the South, violence had more to do with land conflicts, chieftaincy issues, factional road union disputes, and cultism.

2. Main Causes of Violence in 2021

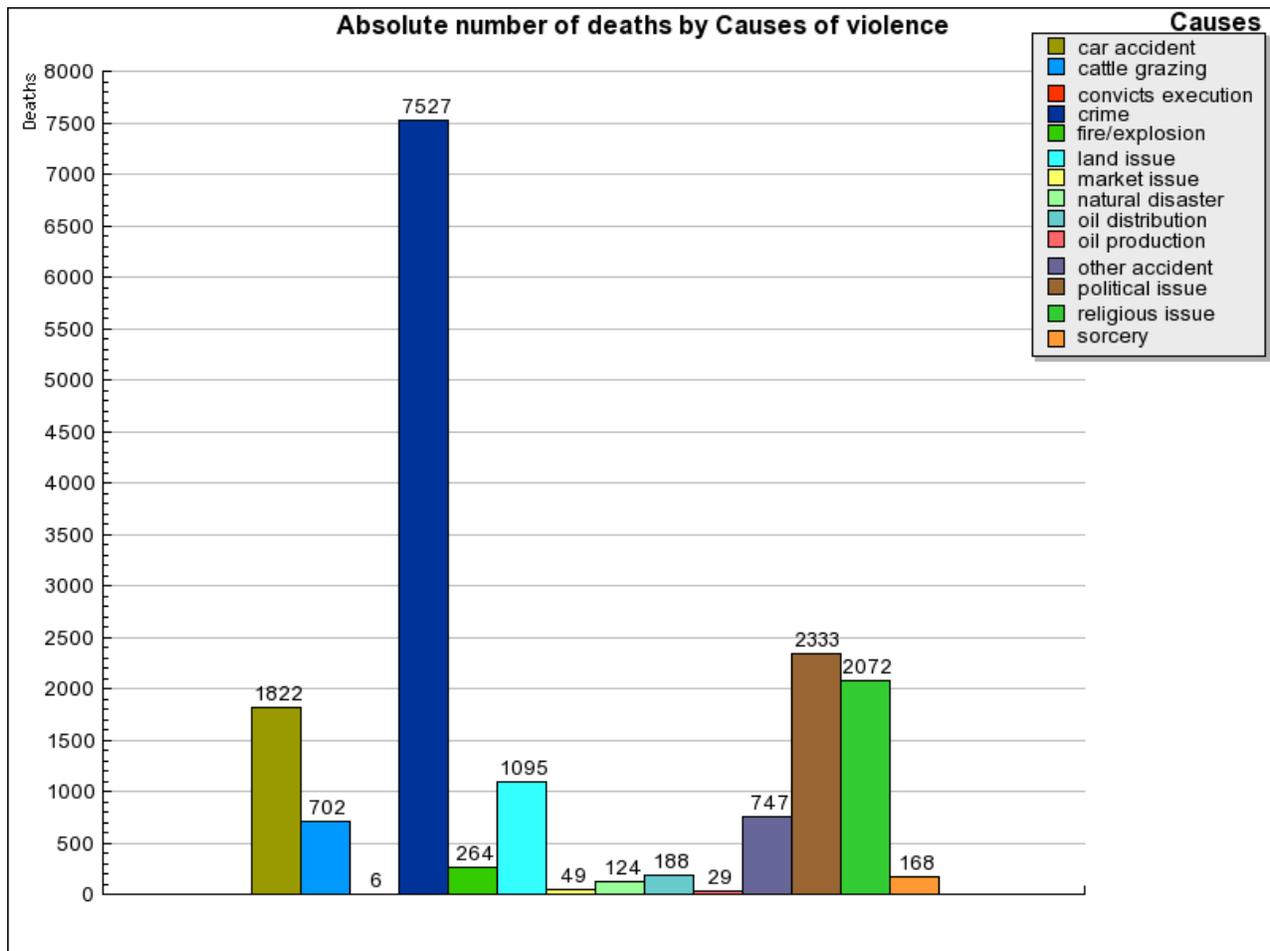


Figure 2: Number of fatalities resulting from different causes of violence in 2021

Crime, political clashes, and road accidents were major causes of violent deaths in Nigeria in 2021, collectively claiming 11,692 lives from the overall 13,600 fatalities.

2.1. Crime

The number of fatalities attributed to violent crime in Nigeria surged to 7,527 in 2021 (Figure 2), against 5,446 in 2020. Because of rural banditry, the Northwest significantly contributed to this situation, with Zamfara recording the highest number of fatalities (1,477), followed by Kaduna (1,222), Niger (767), Katsina (362) and Sokoto (313) states. Yobe, Gombe, and Jigawa states were much less affected.

2.1.1 Cultism

In 2021, more people in Nigeria lost their lives in killings attributed to “cult societies”. The number of fatalities thus jumped from 164 in 2020 to 427 in 2021, while the frequency of attacks increased to 178, compared to 164 a year before. The number of affected states also increased from 19 to 21 during this period. Again, Lagos and Delta recorded the highest number of fatalities related to cultism, with 75 and 62 deaths respectively, while Abia, Niger, and Imo were the least affected states.

Like previous years, cultism opposed rival groups fighting for supremacy and territorial control. The main gangs included the Aiye, Eiye, Icelanders, Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and Degbam confraternities. While the Aiye and the Eiye dominated cult activities in Lagos, Ogun, Ondo and some parts of Delta State, the Icelanders, Degbam, De-Well, and KKK were predominant in the South-South. Some of the victims were killed inside or around universities. But many of them also died in the streets during clashes with rivals or raids by security operatives.

As the proscription of such groups did not deter cultism, government adopted other strategies to curb the menace. In Delta State, the authorities imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew on some communities in Ukwuani LGA following the killing of 3 rival cult members on September 28, 2021. In Ekiti State, a Chief Magistrate Court remanded 4 suspected cultists in a custodial center on September 20, 2021 over their membership of the Eiye cult group, an offense that is punishable under Section 2 of the Secret Cult Abolition and Prohibition Law, 2017. In Borno State, the High Court in Maiduguri sentenced 19 students to 6 years imprisonment on October 20, 2021 for unlawful membership of the Neo-Black Movement, a.k.a. Black Axe.

2.1.2 Banditry

The number of fatalities resulting from rural banditry increased from 3,007 in 2020 to 4,407 in 2021, while the number of affected states rose from 14 to 22 during this period. The Northwest remained a hotspot (Figure 3), with Zamfara State recording the highest number of deaths (1,407), followed by Kaduna (1,205) and Niger (646). Kebbi State, which used to be relatively peaceful, was also affected in Sakaba LGA when Nigerian troops of ‘Operation Hadarin Daji’ went to rescue students of the Federal Government College (FGC) abducted by bandits in Birnin Yawuri.

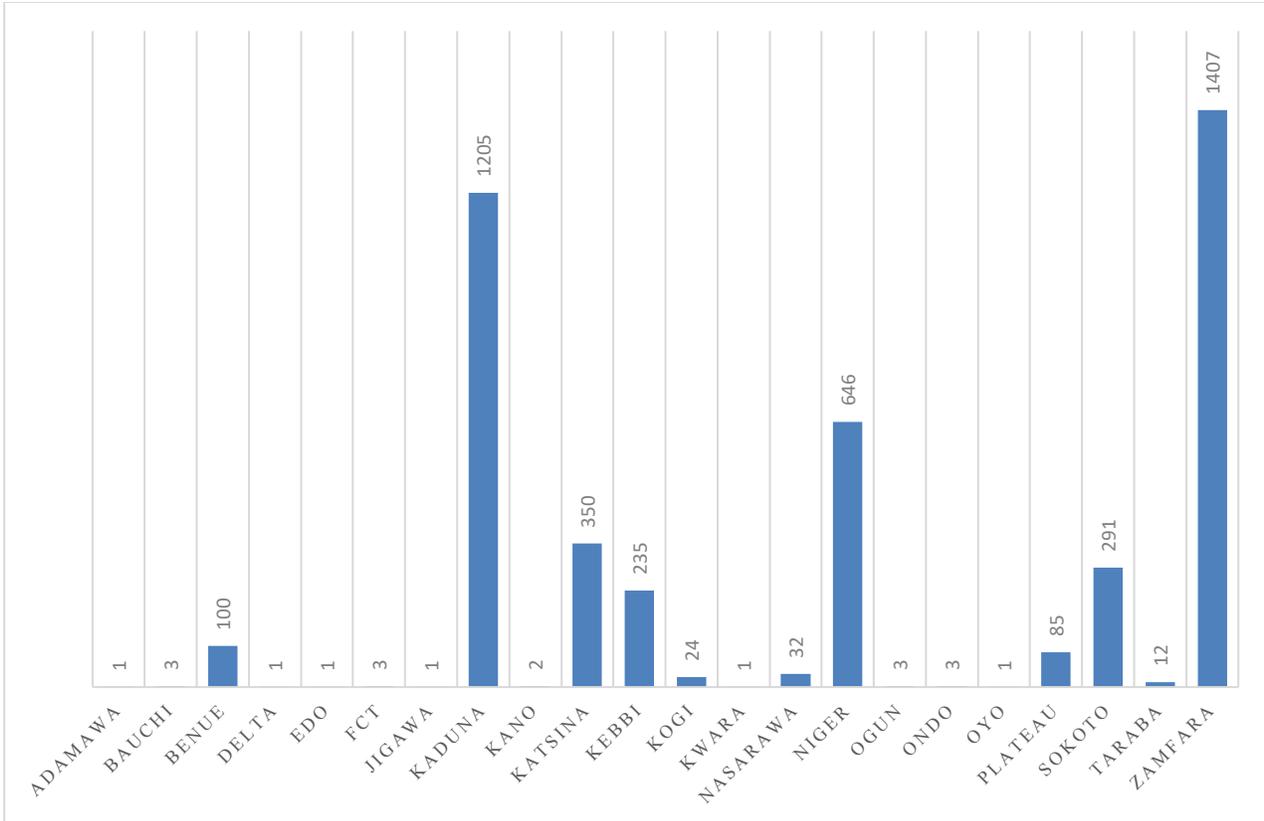


Figure 3: Number of fatalities resulting from banditry in 2021

Kaduna State recorded the second highest number of fatalities resulting from banditry in 2021, especially in Birni Gwari, Giwa, Chikun and Kaura LGAs. On September 26, 2021, for instance, not less than 36 people were killed in Madamai and Abun, two communities of Kaura LGA. Similarly, the people of Kauran Fawa, Marke and Riheya in Giwa LGA were attacked on December 19, 2021 by bandits who killed 39 residents, razed houses and looted farms. Meanwhile, the Kaduna–Abuja highway was a death trap to motorists and commuters who were occasionally ambushed and kidnapped. Special military operations launched by the Nigerian Army to curb banditry also contributed to the high number of fatalities.

2.1.3 Kidnapping

Kidnapping claimed 575 lives across 29 states and the FCT in 2021, against 336 in 2020. Kidnappers were mainly bandits, Boko Haram/ISWAP terrorists, and suspected Fulani herdsmen. Yet sea pirates and other criminal gangs were also involved in isolated incidents. Victims included students and teachers in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions of education, as well as bandits who were killed during rescue operations. While some hostages died on the scene of abductions, others passed away in captivity. Schools and colleges in Niger, Zamfara, Kebbi, Kaduna, and Katsina states were raided. Some of the affected institutions included: the Government Science College, Kagara, Rafi LGA, Niger State; Federal Government College, Birnin Yawuri, Kebbi State; College of Agriculture

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and Animal Science, Bakura, Zamfara State; Greenfield University, Kaduna State University (KASU), Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic Zaria, and the Federal College of Forestry Mechanization in Afaka, Kaduna State.

About 24 foreign nationals were also kidnapped. Many of them were expatriates in construction and mining companies, or crew members. Eight Chinese nationals were abducted in Edo, Niger, Benue, Ogun, Osun, and Taraba states. Though most of them were released after allegedly paying ransom, one died in an ambush in Ukum LGA of Benue State on April 7, 2021. Two policemen escorting him were killed, bringing the total of security operatives who died during the kidnapping of foreigners to 4 policemen (in Abia, Ogun, Benue, and Osun states), 3 soldiers (in Niger State), and a local guard (in Osun State). Another foreigner, an Azerbaijan sailor in a Liberian-flagged Turkish cargo ship, Mozart, was killed by suspected sea pirates on January 23, 2021.

2.1.4 Farmers/Herdsman clashes

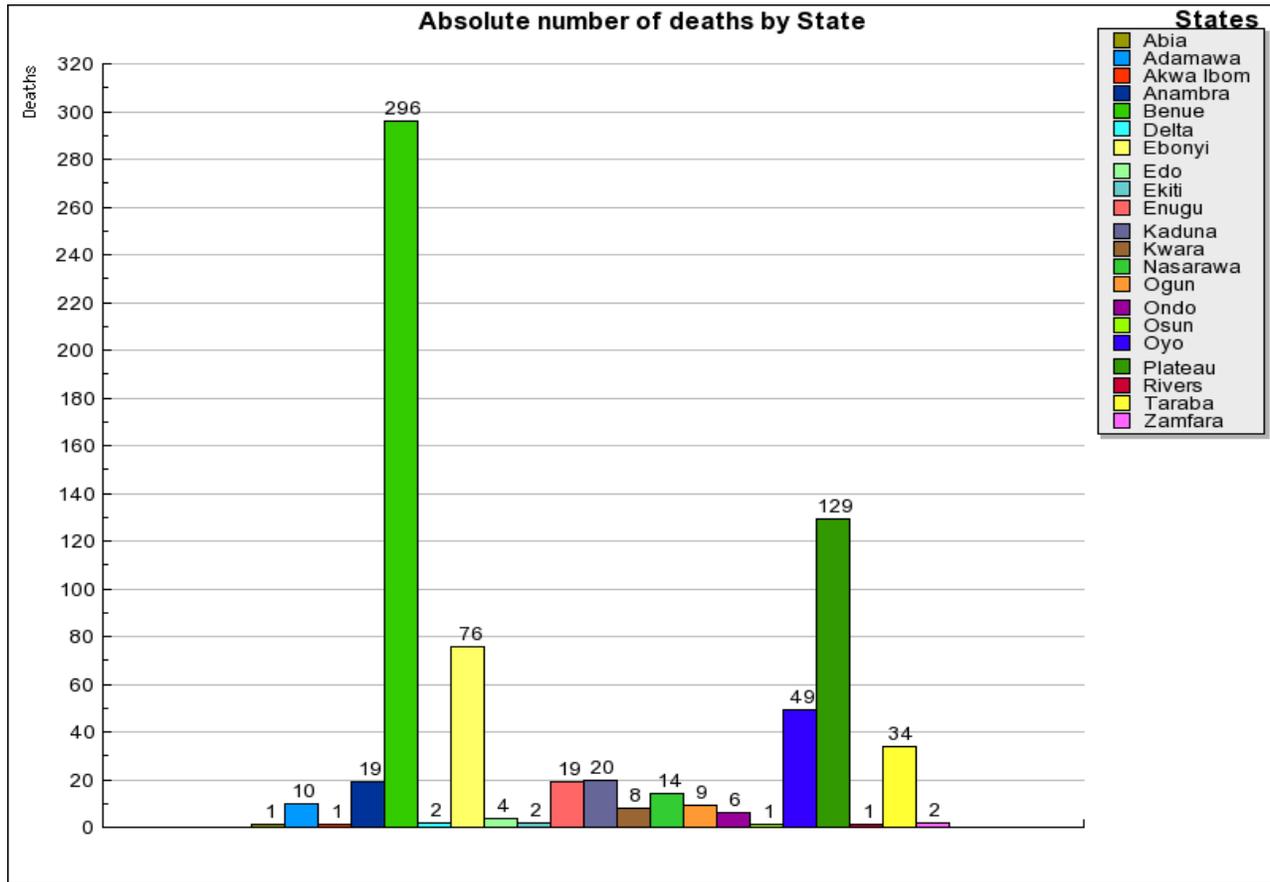


Figure 4: Number of fatalities resulting from pastoral conflicts in 2021

Violence involving farmers and herdsman claimed 703 lives in 2021, against 616 in 2020. The victims were either killed while the cattle grazed, or in reprisal attacks on farming communities and Fulani settlements across 21 states. Benue, Plateau, and Ebonyi recorded the highest number of fatalities; Abia, Akwa Ibom and Rivers, the least (See Figure 4).

Benue State has always been on the frontline in this regard, especially in Katsina-Ala, Agatu, Logo, Guma, and Gwer West LGAs. Between May 22 and May 29, 2021, for instance, about 136 residents of Katsina-Ala were killed by suspected Fulani herdsmen. Many more were injured; others were either declared missing or displaced. Meanwhile, Plateau and Ebonyi continued to suffer the spillover effects of the Benue laws which criminalized open grazing and pushed herdsmen toward neighboring states. Clashes between Irigwe youths and Fulani communities thus claimed many lives in Plateau State. Also, three-quarters of the fatalities resulting from pastoral conflicts nationwide occurred during April, May or June when grasses flourish and attract more herdsmen (Figure 5). Grazing of farmlands and rustling or poisoning of cattle were the main triggers of clashes between farmers and herdsmen during this period. By contrast, the harvest season was much less violent.

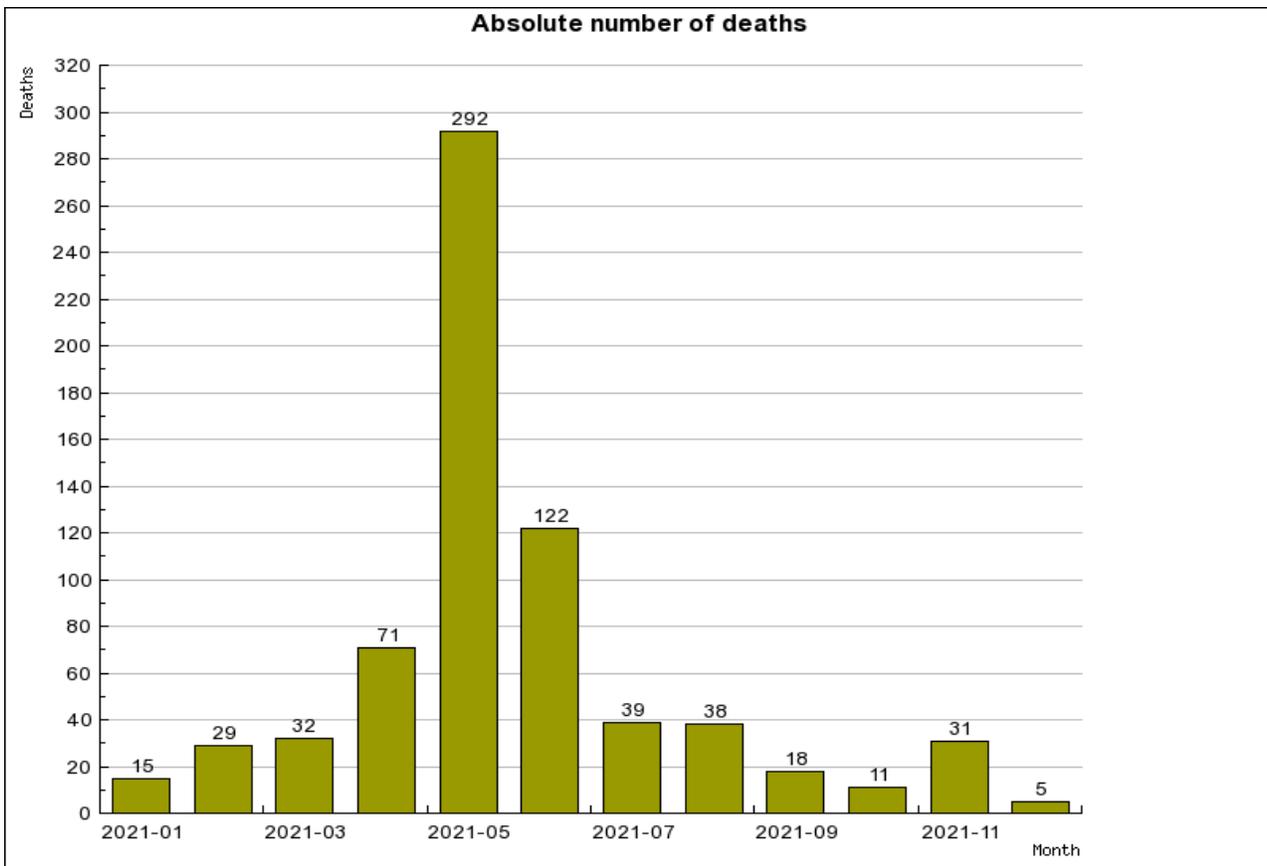


Figure 5: Number of fatalities resulting from pastoral conflicts by months in 2021

2.2 Major protagonists to lethal violence in Nigeria

In Nigeria, criminal gangs were the major protagonists to lethal violence in 2021, a position occupied by security operatives in 2020. They were involved in incidents resulting into 7,117 fatalities, against 4,740 for security operatives and 4,640 for political and ethnic groups (Figure 6).

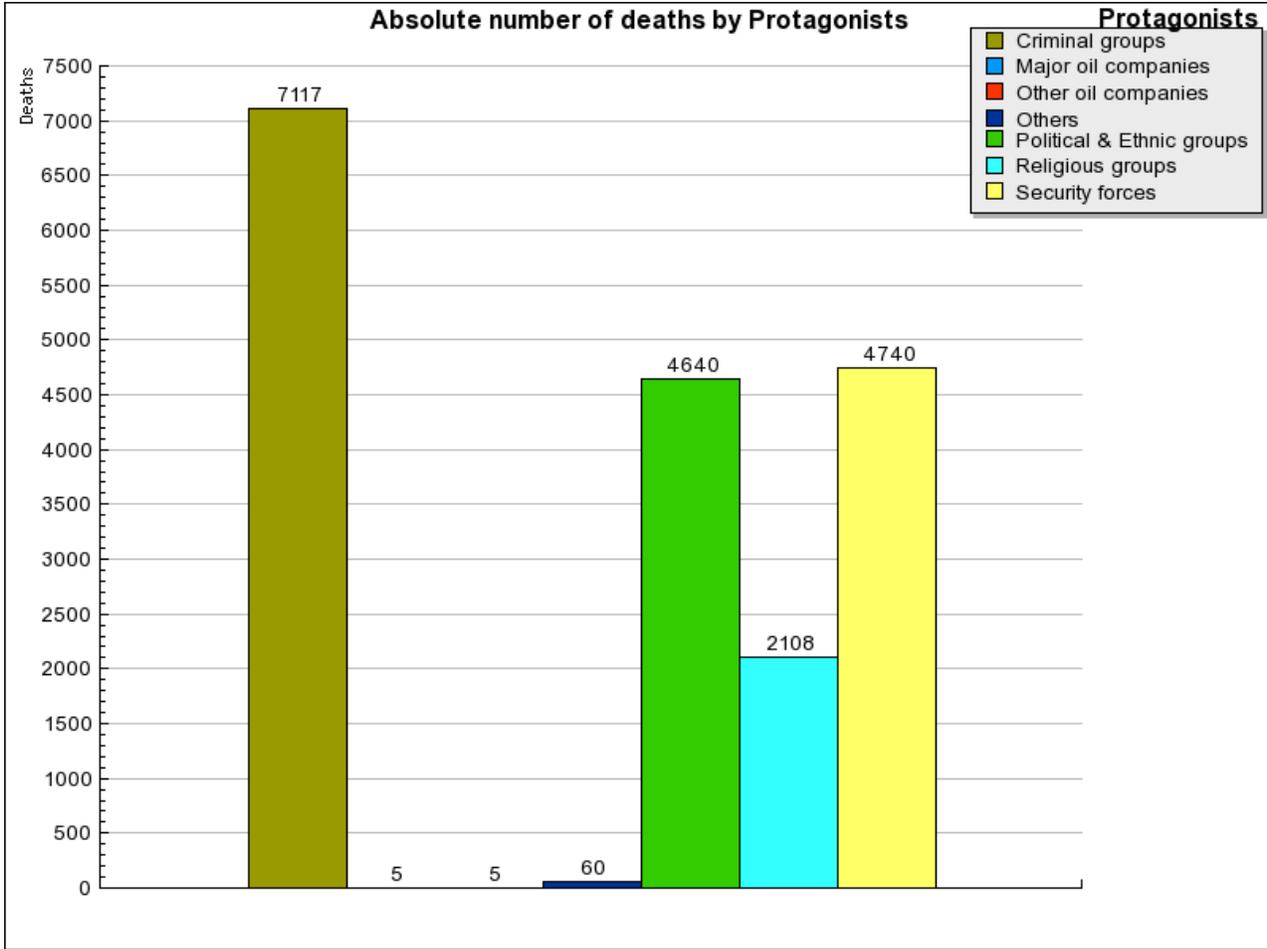


Figure 6: Main protagonists of violence per number of fatalities in 2021

2.3 Political and religious violence

2.3.1 Boko Haram Insurgency

In 2021, Nigeria recorded fewer fatalities related to the Boko Haram crisis, with 2,116 people killed across 7 states, against 3,295 in 2020. Yet Borno State remained the hotbed of terror activities: 22 LGAs were affected and it recorded the highest number of fatalities resulting from the conflict (1,868), followed by Yobe (143), Adamawa (29), Kaduna (30), Nasarawa (7), Sokoto (26), and Niger states (13). Victims included insurgents, civilians, security operatives, and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). Also, about 96 jihadists died during clashes between different factions of Boko Haram, i.e. ISWAP and the Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad (JAS). Following the reported death of JAS leader, Abubakar Shekau, on May 19, 2021, ISWAP consolidated its presence in the Lake Chad region. It killed dissident commanders and took over their territories. On August 24, 2021, for instance, about 27 insurgents were reportedly killed in a deadly clash between ISWAP and Boko Haram over an attempt by the latter to surrender. The attack was coordinated by a self-proclaimed ISWAP government of Tumbumma commanding Marte, Abadam, Kukawa, and Magumeri.

With the power play between ISWAP and other factions of Boko Haram, some combatants fled away and Niger State emerged as a new frontier of terrorism. On April 3, 2021, it was reported that Boko Haram occupied no fewer than 50 communities in Shiroro, Munya, and 3 other LGAs⁸. With no immediate action taken, communities in the state have come under alleged Boko Haram/ISWAP attacks and thousands of residents were displaced from their ancestral homes.

2.3.2 Pro-Biafra Agitators

Conflicts related to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its security wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), caused about 306 deaths across 7 states in Southeast and South-South Nigeria. Imo State recorded the highest number of fatalities (151), followed by Anambra (83), Abia (48), Ebonyi (15), and Enugu (9). Attempts to repel IPOB/ESN attacks were also lethal. On June 06, 2022, for instance, about 15 ESN members were killed during raids by security operatives on their camp in Atta, Izombe, Ideato North LGA, Imo State. Yet a relative peace was restored in the Southeast towards the end of 2021.

2.4 Road accidents

Nigeria has lost 27,594 people in road accidents since 2006. In 2021, road accidents claimed 1,877 lives, against 1,464 in 2020. The majority of the crashes were blamed on speed violations and dangerous driving. Oil distribution also contributed to the problem. In Enagi, Edati LGA, Niger State, for instance, scores of people were burnt to death and shops razed to the ground when two tankers collided and exploded on October 10, 2021.

2.4.1 Road accidents by states

About 1,822 people died in road accidents in Nigeria in 2021. As shown in Figure 7, Ogun, again, recorded the highest number of fatalities (213), like in 2020, followed by Bauchi (172) and Kwara (107). The state indeed remains a major link to the North via the Lagos-Ibadan-Ilorin expressway and to the South via the Lagos-Shagamu-Benin expressway. Both routes witness a lot of traffic, including the distribution of refined and volatile petroleum products by tankers that are not properly maintained. Nationwide, the majority of these crashes were attributed to human factors such as speed violation and wrongful overtaking.

⁸ Governor Sani Bello of Niger State on the occupation of five council areas by Boko Haram
<https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2021/04/26/gov-sani-bellos-bombshell-boko-haram-rules-5-lgas-in-niger-state/?amp=1>

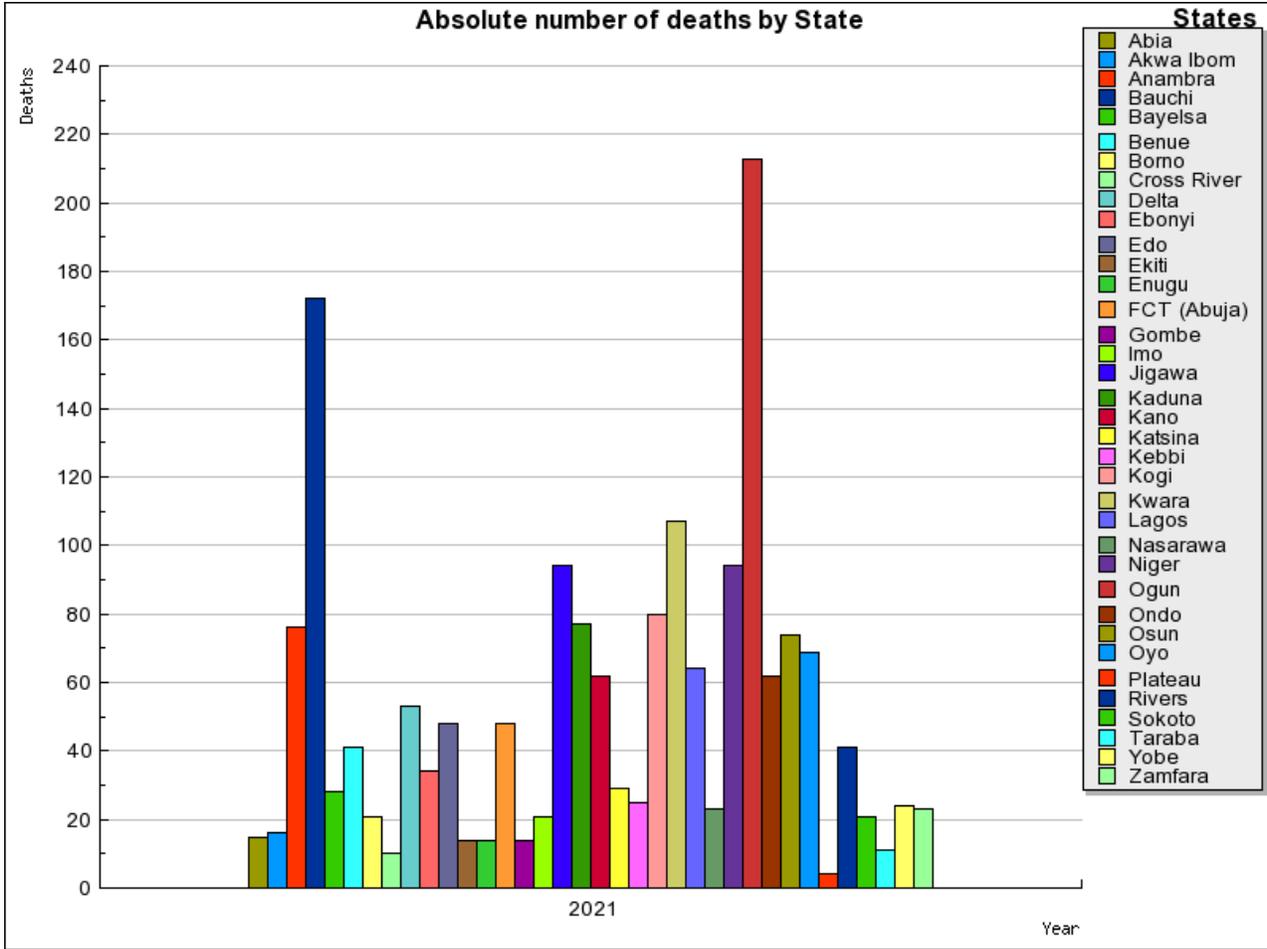


Figure 7: Fatalities resulting from road accidents by state in 2021

2.4.2 Road accidents by months

A monthly analysis shows that the highest number of fatalities related to road accidents in 2021 occurred in January and December, when the traffic increases during Christmas and New Year (Figure 8). June and July also recorded a peak because of heavy rainfall that causes poor visibility and reduces traction, causing drivers to lose control of their vehicles.

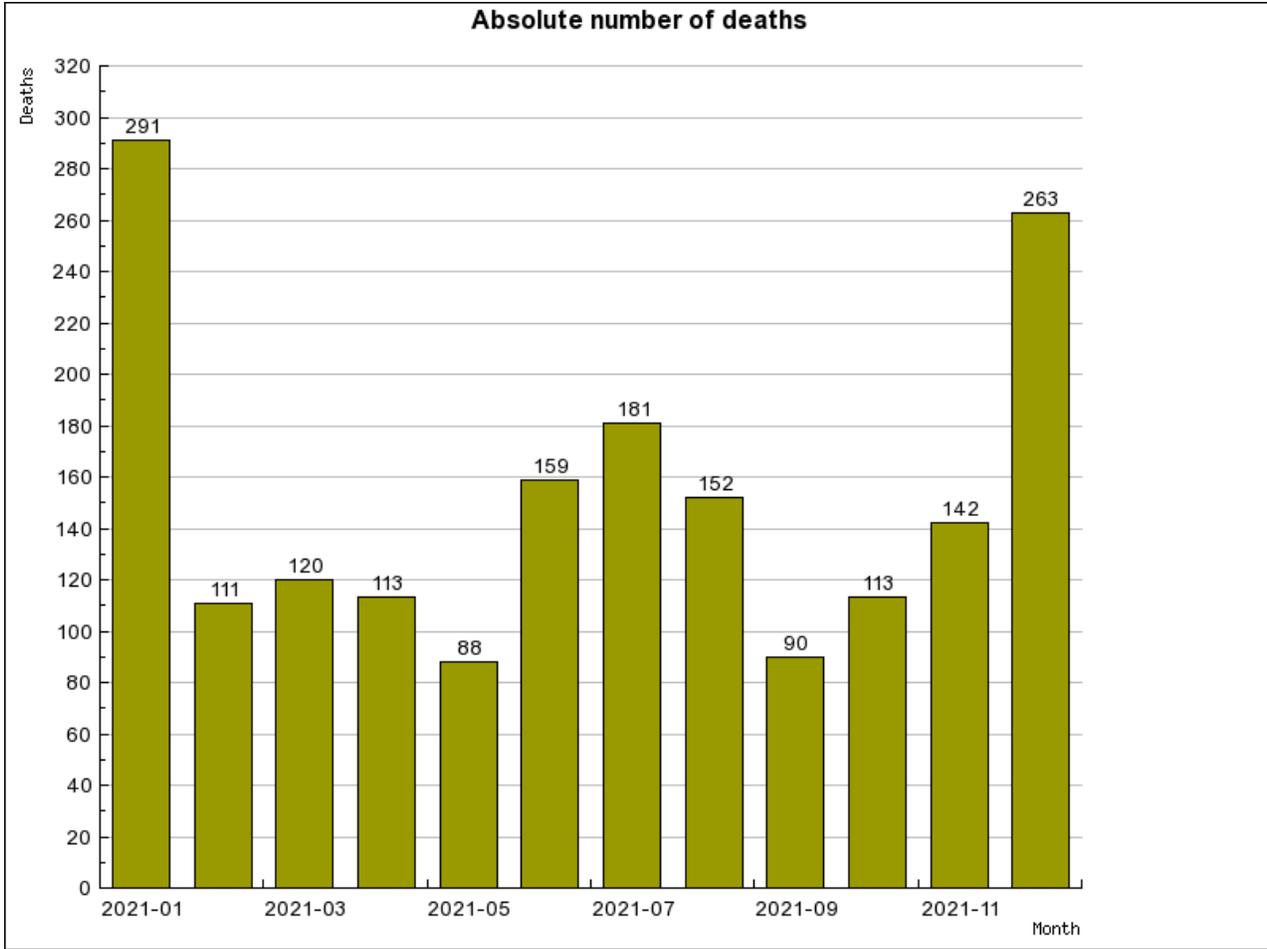


Figure 8: Fatalities resulting from road accidents by month in 2021

3. Ethno-communal violence

Ethno-communal violence in Nigeria claimed 794 lives in 29 states in 2021, against 579 in 2020 (Figure 9). Benue recorded the highest number of fatalities (175) resulting from such clashes in 2021, followed by Ebonyi (114) and Taraba (88). This is because the state is affected by incessant conflicts between farming communities and Fulani herdsmen, or between indigenous people like the Bonta and the Igede of Ukpute in Konshisha LGA. Benue’s neighboring states of Ebonyi and Taraba also recorded many fatalities from communal violence. Nationwide, the causes of these clashes included land disputes, chieftaincy issues, local politics, and compensations paid by international oil companies.

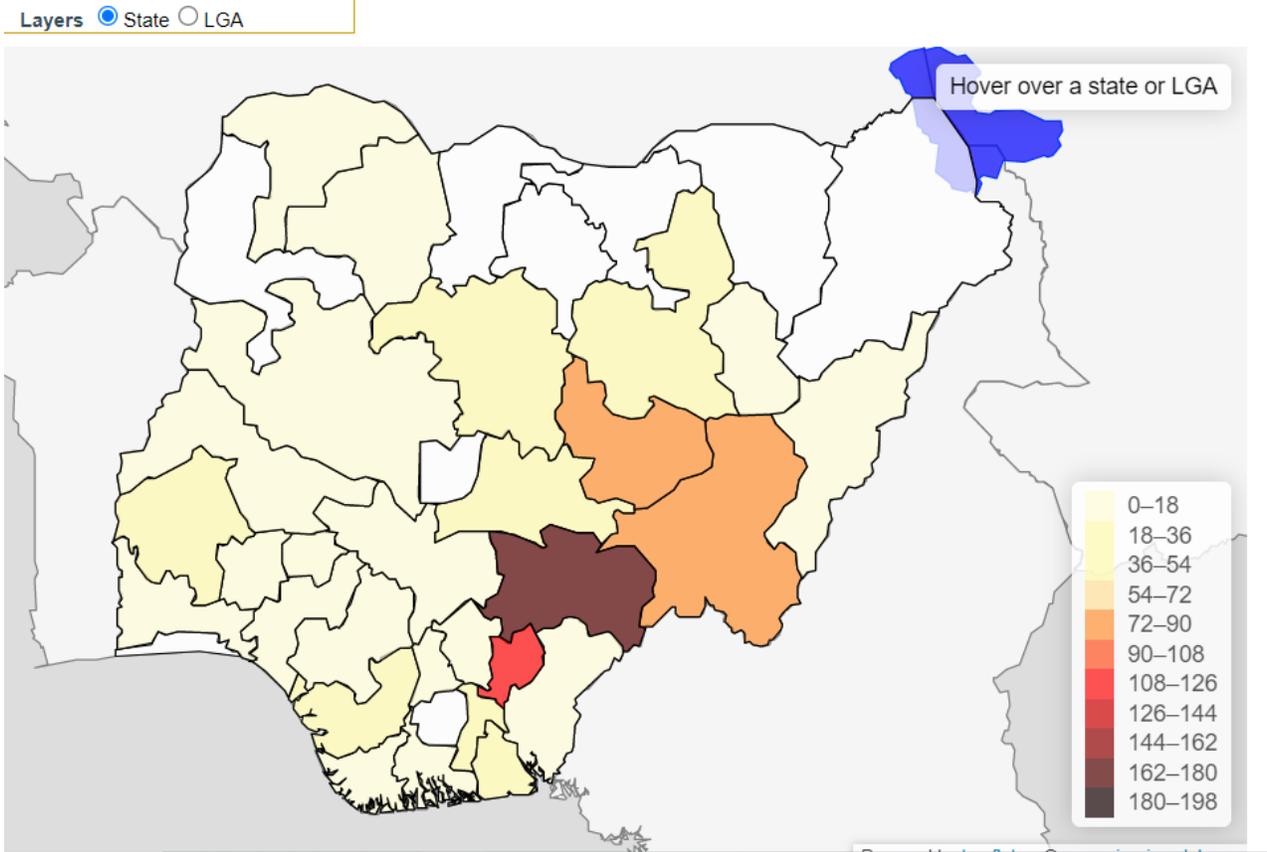


Figure 9: Map of the fatalities caused by communal violence per state in Nigeria, 2021

4. The most dangerous states

Due to increased banditry and counter-measures by government security forces, finally, Zamfara was the most dangerous state in Nigeria in 2021. It recorded 28.9 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Borno (27), Niger (14), Kaduna (14), and Benue (9.5). By contrast, Gombe, Ekiti, and Kano were the least violent states (Figure 10).

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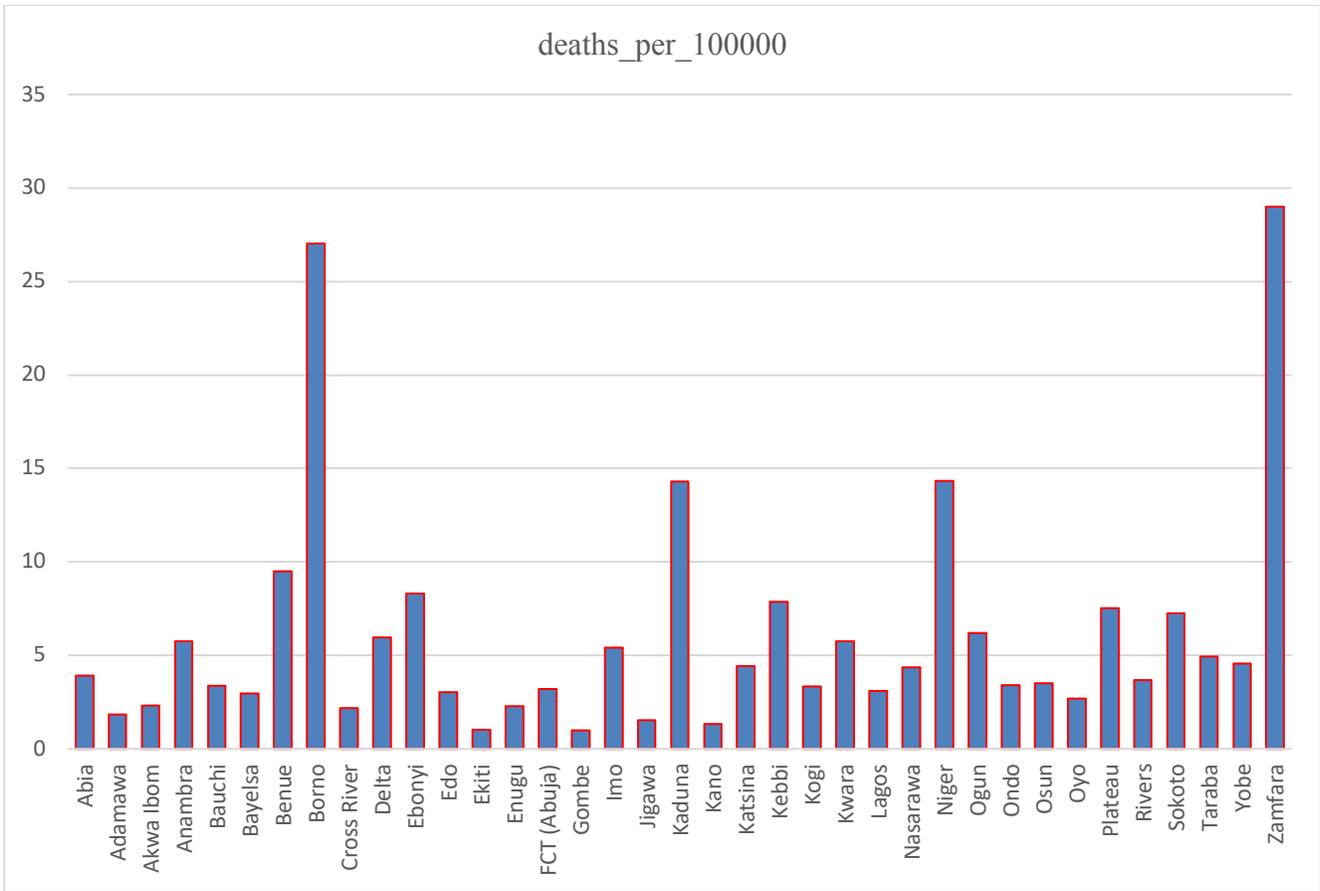


Figure 10: Number of fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants per state in Nigeria, 2021.