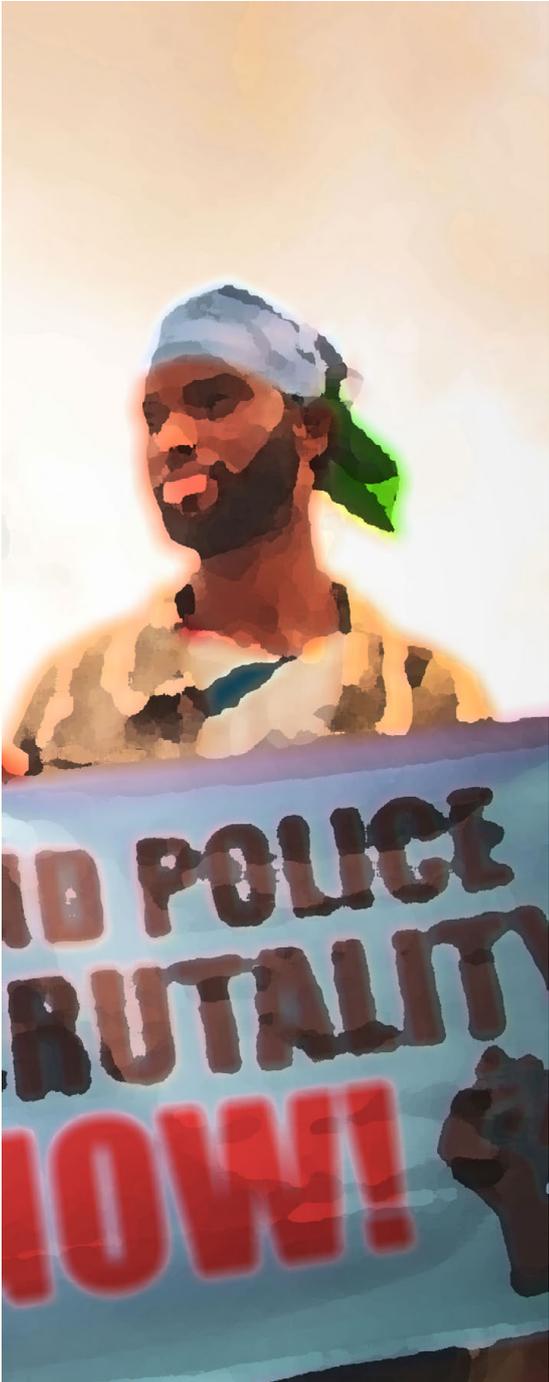




THIRTEENTH REPORT ON VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA 2023

NIGERIA
WATCH

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ACRONYMS

CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
DPO	Divisional Police Officer
ECC	Every Casualty Counts
ESN	Eastern Security Network
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
GIS	Geographic Information System
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRA	French Institute for Research in Africa
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IPOB	Independent People of Biafra
IRD	Institut de recherche pour le développement, Paris
ISWAP	Islamic State West African Province
JAS	Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad
LGA	Local Government Area
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSCDC	Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps
NAF	Nigerian Air Force
NW	Nigeria Watch
MNJTF	Multi-national Joint Task Force
OPHK	Operation Hadin Kai
PMS	Premium Motor Spirit
RUSPAC	Rundele Security and Peace Advisory Council

Dr. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos
*Senior Researcher, Institut de recherche
pour le développement (IRD)*

FOREWORD

This thirteenth Annual Report on lethal violence in Nigeria covers the period between 1 January and 31 December 2023. The study was conducted by Vitus Nwankwo Ukoji with the help of Abiola Victoria Ayodokun, Dr. Victor Chinedu Eze and Egbochice Precious of Nigeria Watch.

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) and is a member of an international network of body-count practitioners under the aegis of a London-based NGO, ECC (Every Casualty Counts).²

The Nigeria Watch project aims to follow the ECC's Standards for Casualty Recording as well as the United Nations Guidance on Casualty Recording.³ But it only records alleged perpetrators as reported by the media. Moreover, it does not have the capacity to identify the status of the victims (civilian or combatant). 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.

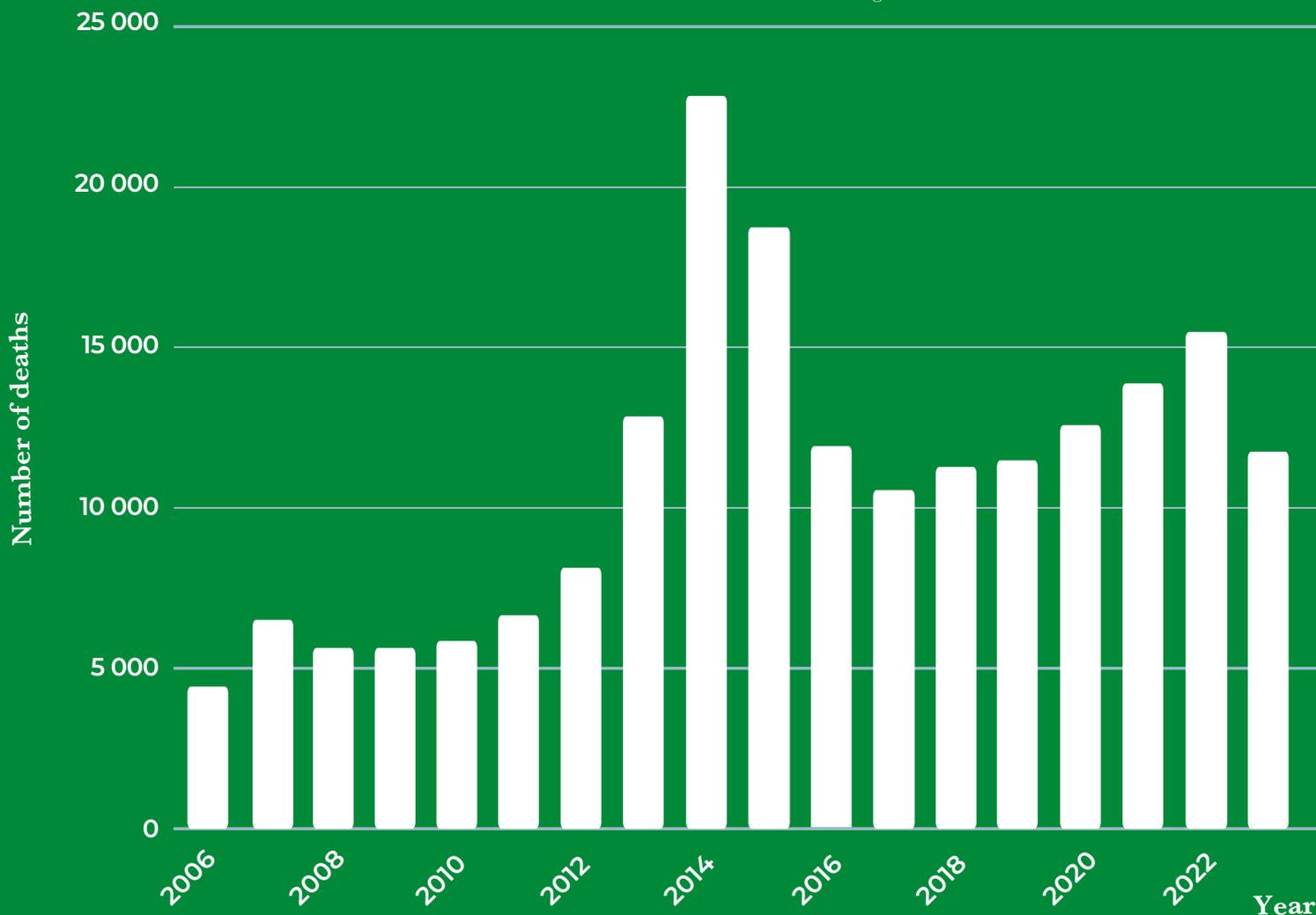
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



- Nigeria lost 11,794 individuals to violence in 2023. The figure marked a reduction from the 15,493 deaths recorded in 2022. Rural banditry and kidnapping remained prevalent in many states.
- In 2023, Borno State recorded the highest number of fatalities (2,123), followed by Benue (872), Niger (731), Plateau (708), Kaduna (672) and Zamfara (573) while Ekiti, Jigawa (36), Bayelsa (51), Gombe (55) and Adamawa (85) reported the lowest numbers. Borno was also the most dangerous state in 2023, registering 29.03 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants, primarily due to the Boko Haram conflict.
- Criminal incidents claimed 5,356 lives in 2023, especially Niger, Kaduna, Zamfara, Benue and Plateau. The North Central and North West geopolitical zones reported the highest number of deaths.
- The toll resulting from clashes involving farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria surged to 860 in 2023, marking an increase from the 579 recorded in the previous year. Benue, Plateau and Taraba states were the most affected.
- The 2023 general election was relatively peaceful compared to others, especially in 2011. But it claimed about 234 lives during the different phases of the process: 67 before the election, 153 during voting activities and result collation, and 14 during the contestation and celebration of declared results.
- Various Boko Haram factions, including ISWAP, lost about 497 combatants and members because of internal fighting in 2023. Most clashes occurred in Marte, Kukawa, Bama, Nganzai, Konduga and Guzamala LGAs of Borno State.
- Reported road accident fatalities decreased from 1,860 in 2022 to 1,565 in 2023. The majority of these fatal crashes were attributed to traffic violations, speeding, poor vehicle maintenance and explosions related to the distribution of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS).

INTRODUCTION

Figure 1: Main trend of violence 2006-2023⁷



- Nigeria Watch 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?
 - What are the main causes of fatal violence?
 - Is fatal violence increasing or decreasing?
 - What is the security risk?

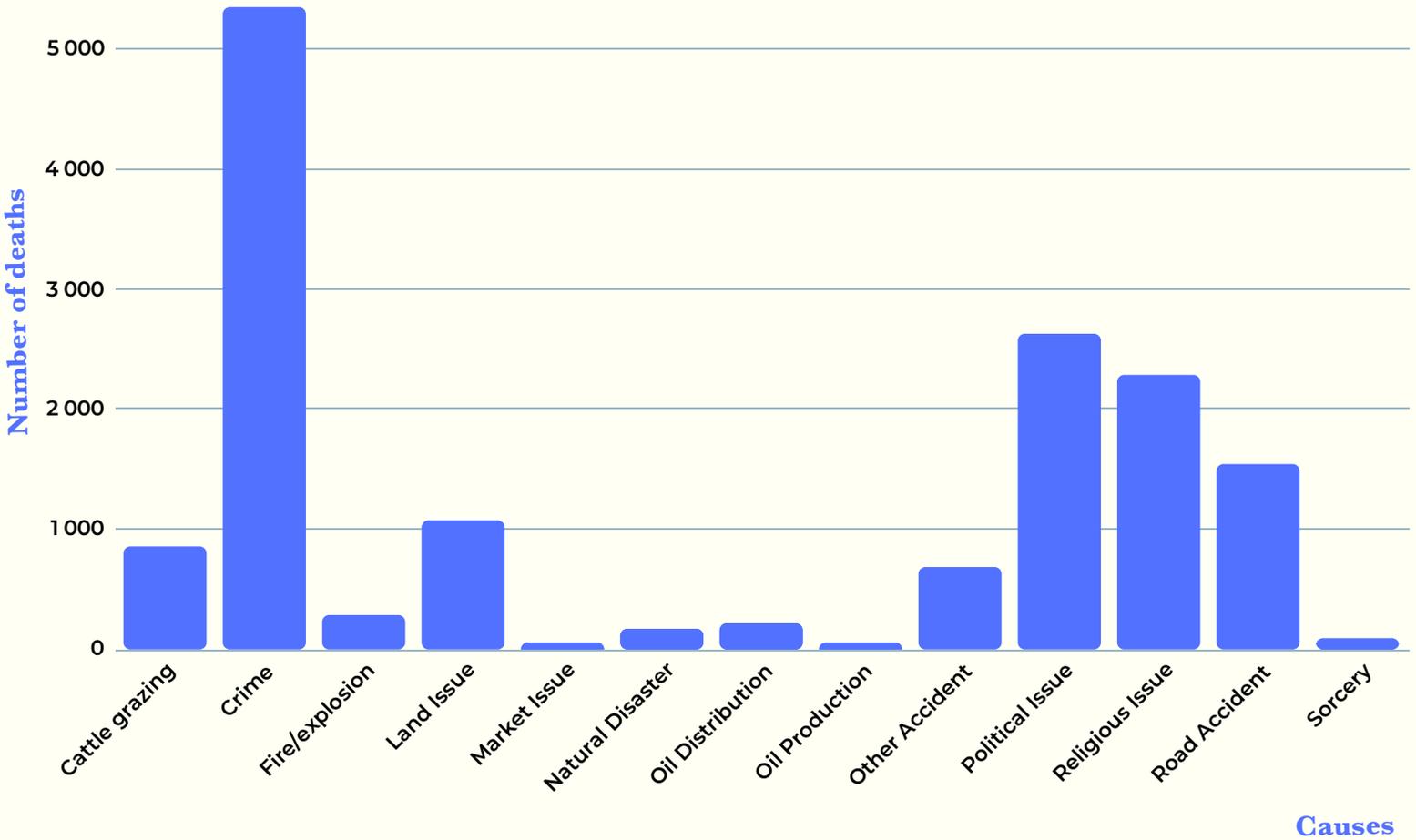
1. GENERAL TRENDS OF VIOLENCE (2006-2023)

Between 2006 and 2023, about 196,737 people lost their lives in 40,725 lethal incidents across the 36 Nigerian states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The number of fatalities dropped to 11,794 in 2023 from 15,493 in 2022, as shown in Figure 1. Borno State recorded the highest number of fatalities (2,123), followed by Benue (872), Niger (731), Plateau (708), Kaduna (672) and Zamfara (573). The most affected states were grappling with issues related to insurgency and banditry. Ekiti State recorded the least number of deaths (28), followed by Jigawa (36), Bayelsa (51), Gombe (55) and Adamawa (85). Over the years, Ekiti and Gombe states consistently registered a fewer number of violent deaths in Nigeria.

The North accounted for about 75% of the fatalities reported in Nigeria in 2023. These deaths were primarily attributed to insurgency, rural banditry, land conflict and counter operations by government security forces. In the South, the prevalence of lethal violence was associated with pro-Biafra agitation, crime, and ethno-communal conflicts.

2.MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN 2023

Figure 2: Number of fatalities resulting from different causes of violence in 2023



Confirming the general pattern of preceding years, fatalities in Nigeria in 2023 were predominantly associated with crime, political issues, and road accidents. Market issues, oil production and sorcery caused the least number of fatalities.

2.1. Crime

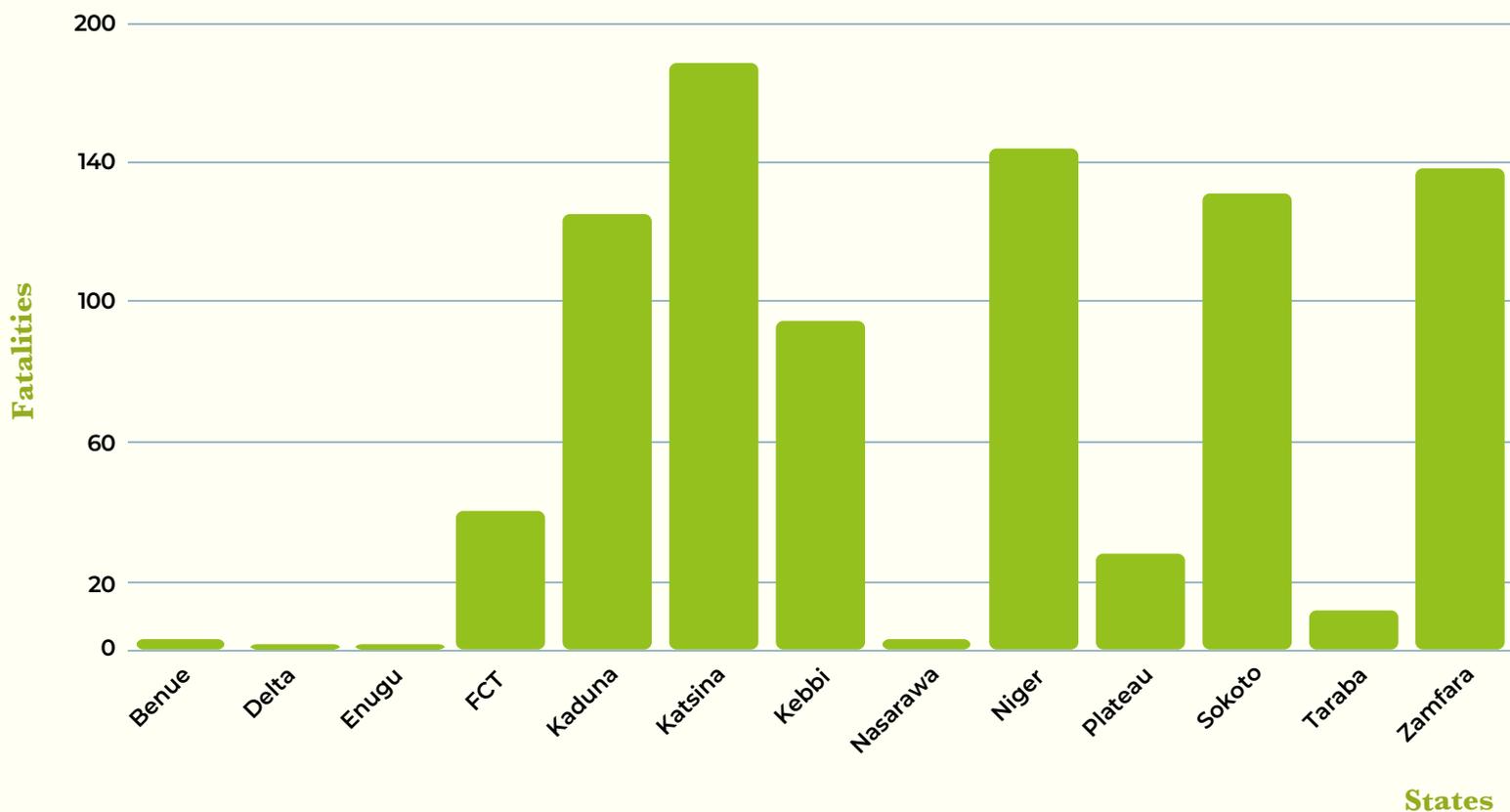
Crime claimed 5,356 lives, as shown in Figure 2. The number marked a decline from the 7,031 fatalities reported in 2022. The North Central and North West regions were the most affected, with Niger State reporting the highest number of fatalities at 579, followed by Kaduna (539), Zamfara (531), Benue (482), and Plateau (384). Conversely, Bayelsa, Ekiti, Osun, Ebonyi and Cross River states were least affected by violent crimes.

2.1.1 Cultism

In 2023, cultism in Nigeria resulted in 371 deaths, marking an increase from the 301 recorded in 2022. Yet less states were affected, from 20 in 2022 to 18 in 2023. Rivers, Lagos, and Ogun consistently reported the highest number of deaths in clashes between rival cult groups. In Rivers, the usual strongholds of cult societies were to be found in Emuoha, Port Harcourt, and Ahoada, and they involved the so-called Icelanders, Greenlanders, and Degbam confraternities. Their victims were not only rival members, but also security operatives and local vigilantes. For instance, the murder of Divisional Police Officer (DPO) Bako Angbashim of Ahoada Division on September 8, 2023, triggered an extensive manhunt for suspected cultists by security operatives, including the Runde Security and Peace Advisory Council (RUSPAC). In Lagos and Ogun states, clashes primarily involved the two dominant cult groups, the Aiye and Eiyé confraternities. Incidents were reported in Ajeromi-Ifelodun, Mushin, Ojo, Oshodi-Isolo, and Shomolu LGAs of Lagos State, as well as Obafemi-Owode, Shagamu, Ijebu-Ode, and Abeokuta North and South LGAs in Ogun State.

2.MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN 2023

Figure 3: Number of fatalities by states resulting from rural banditry in 2023



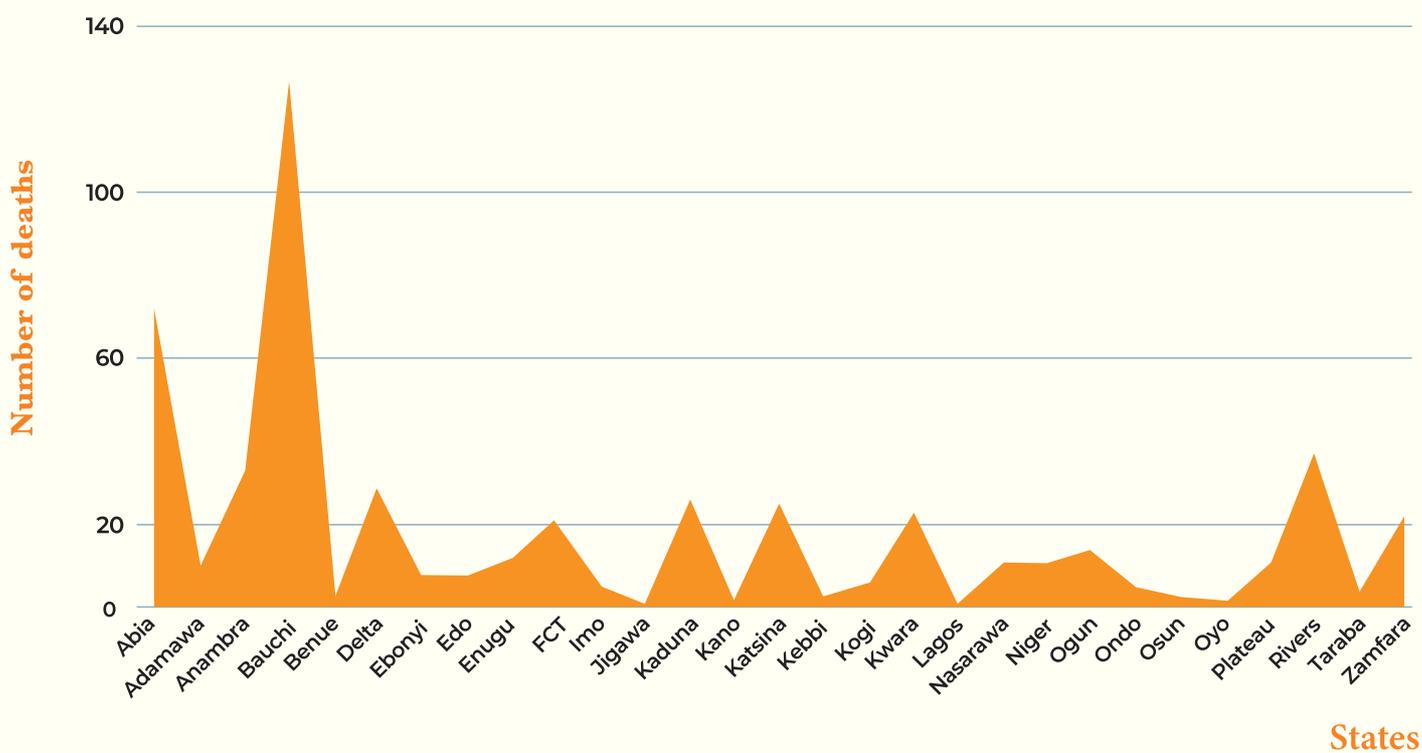
2.1.2 Rural Banditry

In 2023, fatalities resulting from rural banditry and government counter-operations decreased to 892 from the 5,725 deaths recorded in 2022. The number of states affected also saw a decline, dropping to 12 from 19 in the previous year (See Figure 3). Yet the North West and North Central zones still accounted for 98% of the overall fatalities. Katsina State had the highest number of reported deaths (169), followed by Niger (144), Zamfara (139), Sokoto (131), and Kaduna (126). While a considerable number of the victims were civilians, many were bandits who were eliminated during military offensives. Cattle rustling also remained prevalent. Some of the stolen livestock were transported to new locations to be sold or slaughtered for local consumption. Sometimes, the movements were intercepted by security operatives and hunters, leading to more fatalities. For example, on August 13, 2023, about 50 bandits, together with 13 military personnel and vigilantes, lost their lives in an ambush by soldiers while the cattle rustlers attempted to cross a river in Kundu village, Wushishi LGA of Niger State, with a large number of livestock.

Surrounded by Niger and Kaduna states, where rural banditry prevails, some localities in the FCT also emerged as destinations for some gangs in 2023. Communities in Kuje and Bwari LGAs experienced multiple attacks. Residents were robbed, kidnapped, injured or killed. Attacks by bandits and counter-operations by security forces in Kwaku, Kabi Forest, Kuduru and Garam communities in both LGAs resulted in 41 deaths between November and December.

2.MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN 2023

Figure 4: Number of fatalities by states resulting from kidnapping in 2023



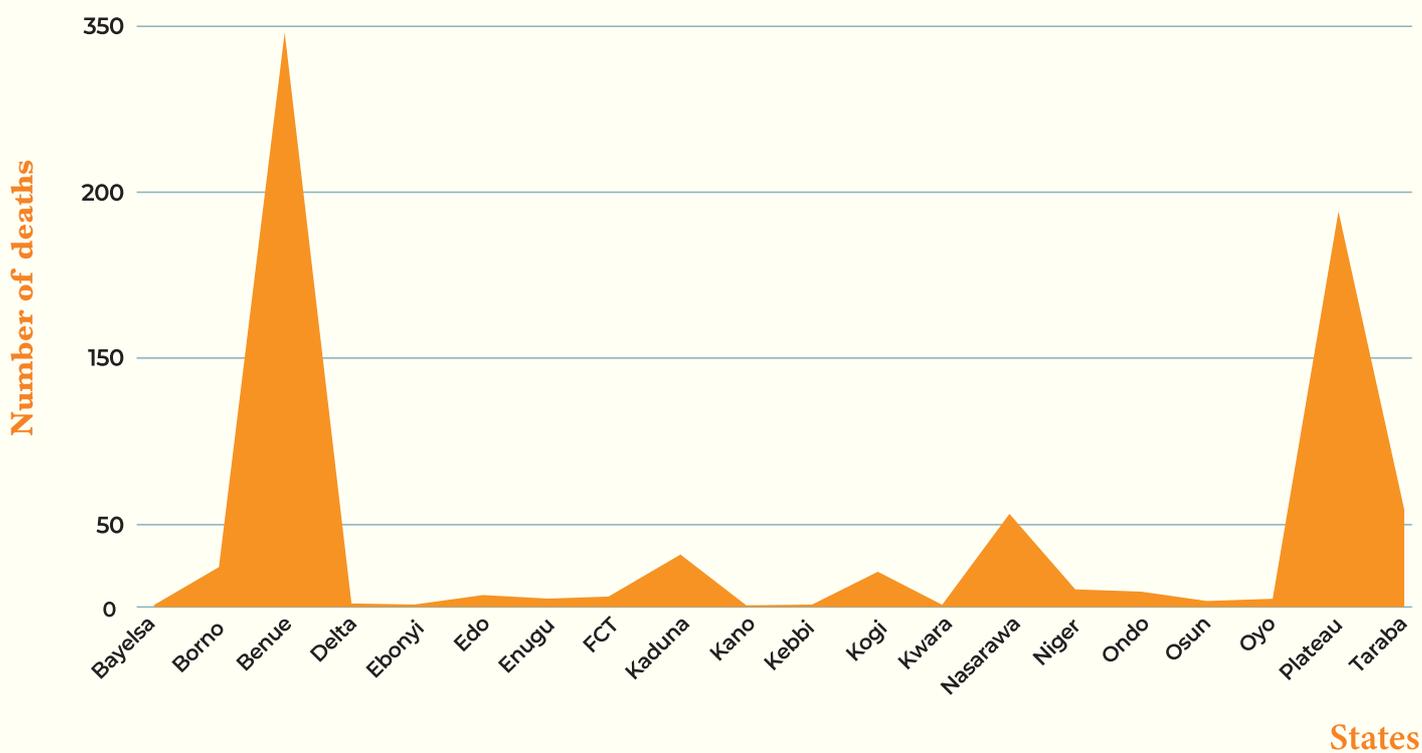
2.1.3 Kidnapping

Kidnapping remained prevalent in 2023, leading to 536 fatalities across 28 states and the FCT. The figure was a notable reduction from the 1,145 reported in 2022. Bauchi recorded the highest number of deaths (127), followed by Abia (73), Rivers (37), Anambra (33), and Delta (29), as shown in Figure 4. The fatalities resulted from isolated kidnap incidents, mass abductions, and counter operations. Victims spanned from politicians to businessmen and women, traditional rulers, commuters, students and kidnappers killed by security operatives. In Abia State, about 70 decomposed and headless bodies of suspected kidnap victims were discovered around the Lokpanta Regional Cattle Market bush in Umuneochi LGA.

The main protagonists in lethal kidnap incidents were suspected Fulani herdsmen, cultists, insurgents, pro-Biafra agitators, and bandits. On October 7, 2023, police operatives killed about 67 kidnappers and rescued 29 victims in Tafawa Balewa, Bauchi State. Similar operations were carried out in other states, in collaboration with vigilantes and hunters. In the Kuje and Bwari areas of the FCT, where kidnapping became rampant, a joint security team of the army, the police, vigilantes, and secret services eliminated 6 kidnappers in their hideout in Tukuba Forest of the Bwari Area Council.

2.MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN 2023

Figure 5: Number of fatalities by states resulting from pastoral violence in 2023



2.1.4 Farmers/Herdsmen Clashes

In 2023, the toll resulting from clashes involving farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria surged to 860, an increase from the 579 recorded in the previous year. Benue State reported the highest number of deaths, followed by Plateau and Taraba states, while Kano, Ebonyi, Kwara, and Bayelsa recorded the lowest (See Figure 5). As in previous years, the killings occurred in grazing fields and during raids on farms or Fulani communities.

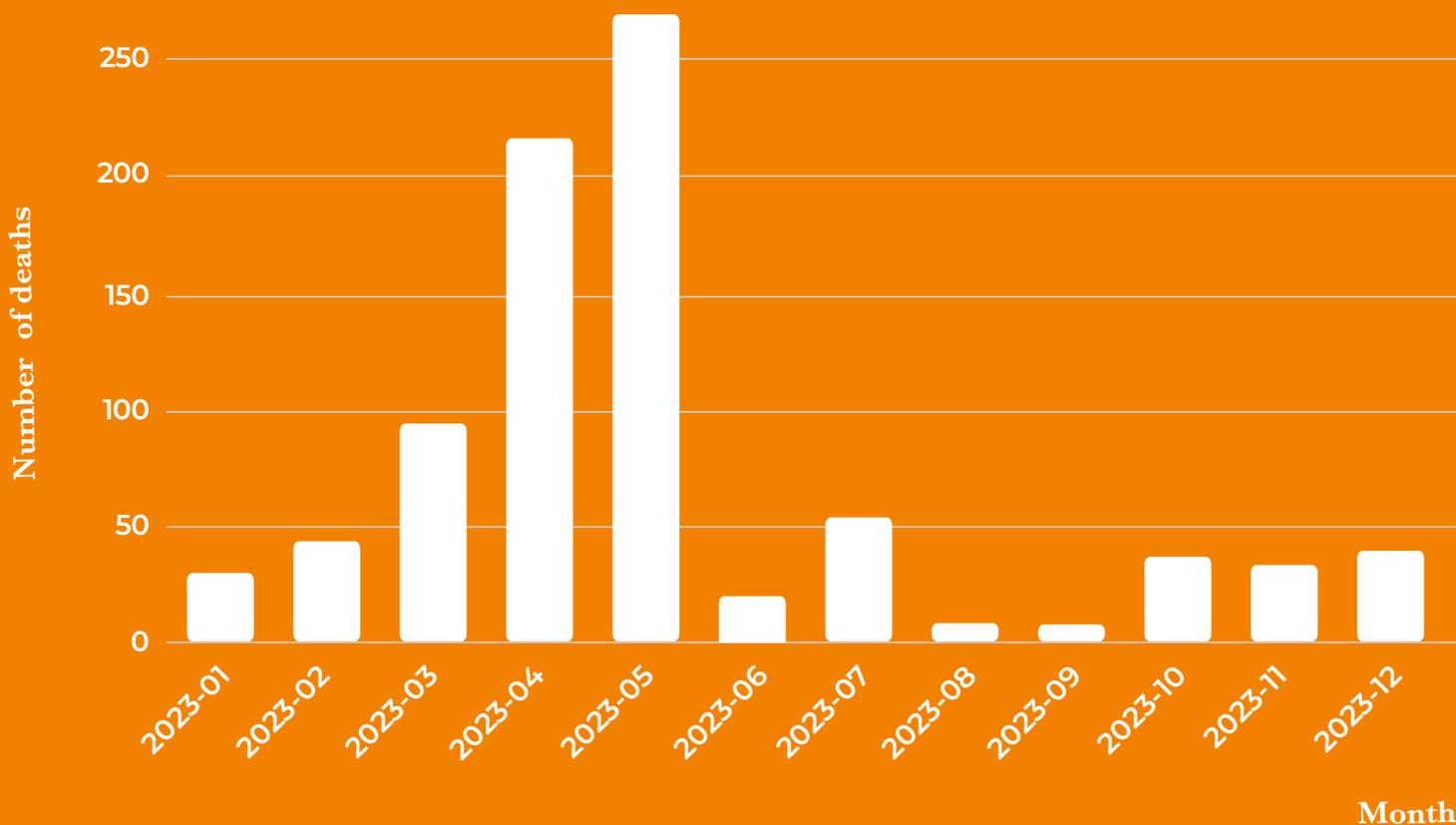
Benue was the most affected state, especially in Agatu, Apa, Guma, Gwer West, Kwande, Logo, Makurdi, Obi, and Otukpo LGAs. Guma LGA alone contributed 34% to the overall fatalities in the state. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps were not spared.

On April 7, 2023, suspected Fulani herdsmen invaded the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) Primary School in Nyiev Ward of Guma LGA, killing about 39 IDPs and injuring 40 others.

Plateau State recorded the second-highest number of fatalities from clashes involving farmers and herdsmen in 2023, especially in Mangu LGA. On May 16, for example, attacks on Fungzai and Kubat villages resulted in 122 deaths. The incident occurred a month after 35 people were killed in Mai Tumbi, still in Mangu LGA.

2.MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN 2023

Figure 6: Number of fatalities resulting from pastoral conflict by months in 2023



The months of May, April, and March recorded the highest number of fatalities from clashes involving farmers and herdsmen (See Figure 6). These months coincide with the onset of the early raining and planting season when crops become appealing to herdsmen and their livestock.

2.2 Major protagonists to lethal violence in Nigeria

In 2023, criminal gangs and government security forces continued to play central roles in violent incidents in Nigeria, a position they had also held before. Criminal groups were implicated in incidents that led to 5,151 fatalities, surpassing security operatives (3,789) and political and ethnic groups (3,064), as shown in Figure 7.

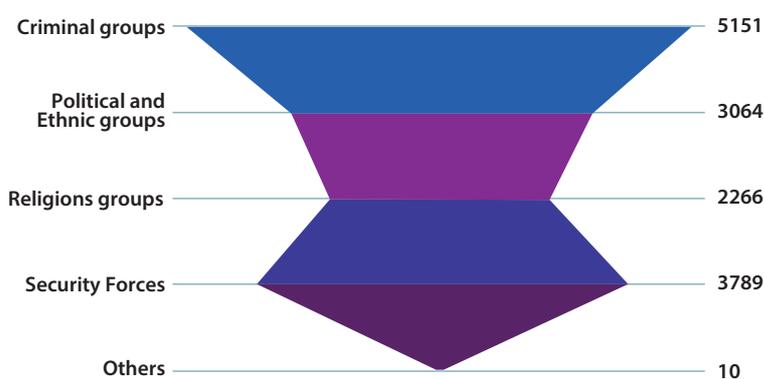
2.3 Political and religious violence

2.3.1 2023 General Election

In 2023, the political competition for the general election in Nigeria resulted in 234 deaths. During party primaries and campaigns before the vote, between 1st January and 24 February 2023, 67 deaths were recorded in Anambra, Bauchi, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Jigawa, Kano, Lagos, Osun, Oyo, and Sokoto states. On the election days, 153 deaths were reported in Akwa Ibom, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Borno, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Gombe, Imo, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Lagos, Nasarawa, Niger, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Rivers, and Taraba states.

2.MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN 2023

Figure 7: Main protagonists of violence per number of fatalities in 2023



These incidents occurred during the distribution of voting materials, the voting process, and the collation of results between the Presidential (25-28 February) and Governorship (18-22 March) elections. Borno State recorded the highest number of deaths during the vote, when an ISWAP attack on a polling unit in Ajari Ward, Mafa LGA, was repelled on March 18, 2023. In the post-election phase from 23 March to 9 May, which included supplementary elections in 15 states on 15 April, 14 deaths were reported during the celebration and contestation of the results.

2.3.2 Boko Haram/Islamic State West Africa Province Insurgency

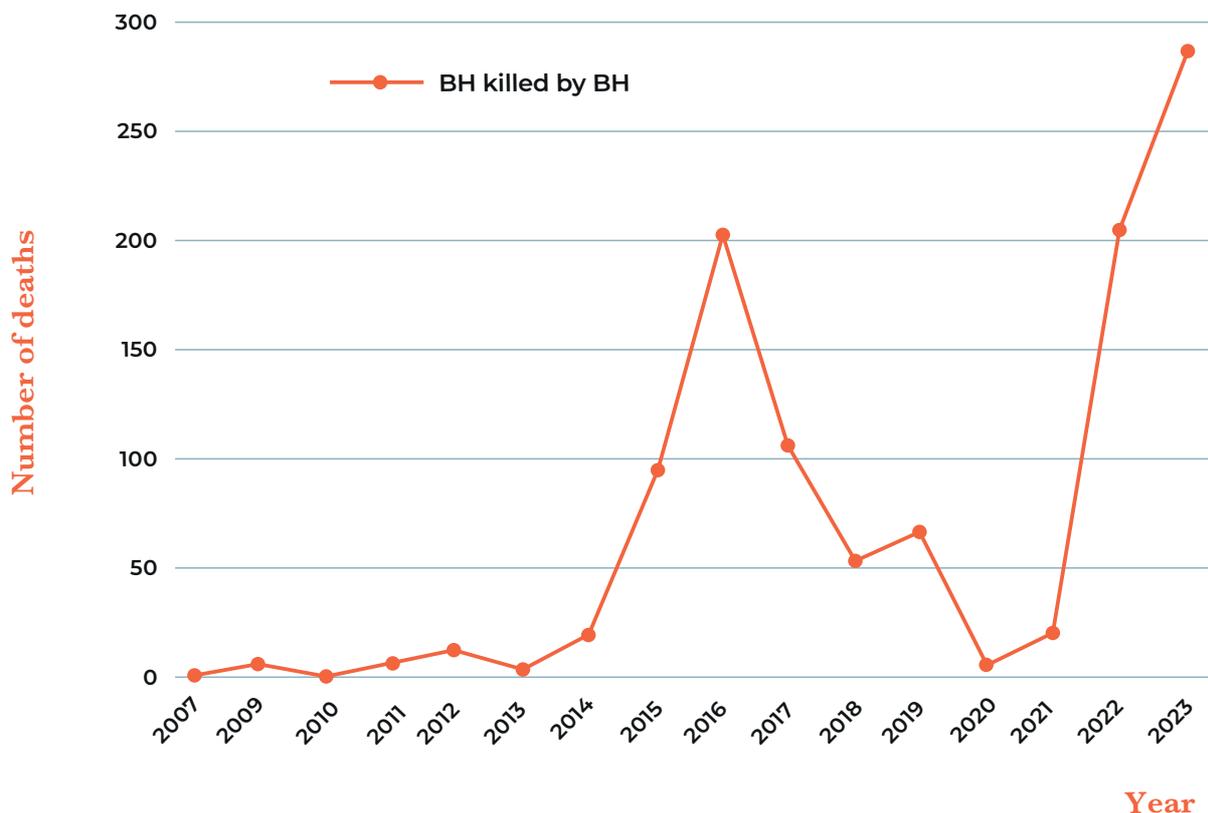
In 2023, attacks by Boko Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Ansaru, and counter operations by government security forces resulted in 2,212 deaths across communities in Adamawa, Borno, Kaduna and Yobe states. The number marked a decrease from the 3,110 fatalities recorded in 2022. Borno State reported the highest number of deaths (1,932), followed by Yobe (213), Kaduna (62) and Adamawa (5). Within Borno State, 22 Local Government Areas (LGAs) were affected, with Gwoza (395) and Bama (241) reporting the highest number of deaths. Communities on the fringes of the Sambisa Forest and the Mandara Mountains suffered most. Victims ranged from fishermen to farmers, wood vendors, herdsmen, commuters, security operatives and insurgents.

A large number of the alleged Boko Haram and ISWAP members were killed in foiled attacks and clearance operations by personnel of the Nigerian Air Force (NAF), Multi-national Joint Task Force (MJTF), Operation Hadin Kai (OPHK) and Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTf). Arrests were also made while abducted victims were rescued. During these operations, government forces lost some of their men in land mines and ambushes.

In 2023, various Boko Haram factions, including ISWAP, lost about 497 combatants and family members during clashes in Marte, Kukawa, Bama, Nganzai, Konduga and Guzamala LGAs of Borno State. The rise of internal fighting within the jihadi group has been quite impressive, as shown in Figure 8. In 2023, up to 40% of the victims of the conflict were Boko Haram members killed by rival factions. For example, on February 26, 2023, ISWAP killed about 200 of them in a deadly clash around Gudumbali community in Guzumala LGA of Borno State.

2.MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN 2023

Figure 8: Number of “Boko Haram” members (including ISWAP) killed by rival factions, 2007-2023



Nota: The figures were collated by Pablo Menguy and include suicide bombers in 2013-2020. Graph by Eric Opigez.

2.3.3 Pro-Biafra Agitators

In 2023, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its militia wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), were at the forefront of the agitation in Nigeria’s Southeast geopolitical zone. Their activities and counter-operations by government forces resulted in 245 deaths across the five states that make up the region, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. Some fatalities were also reported in Delta State. Imo State recorded the highest number of deaths (108), followed by Anambra (53), Ebonyi (29), Abia (27), Enugu (23), and Delta (4). As in the preceding years, victims of the agitation included security operatives, politicians, traditional rulers and businessmen. Some of them were abducted and killed or released after ransom was paid

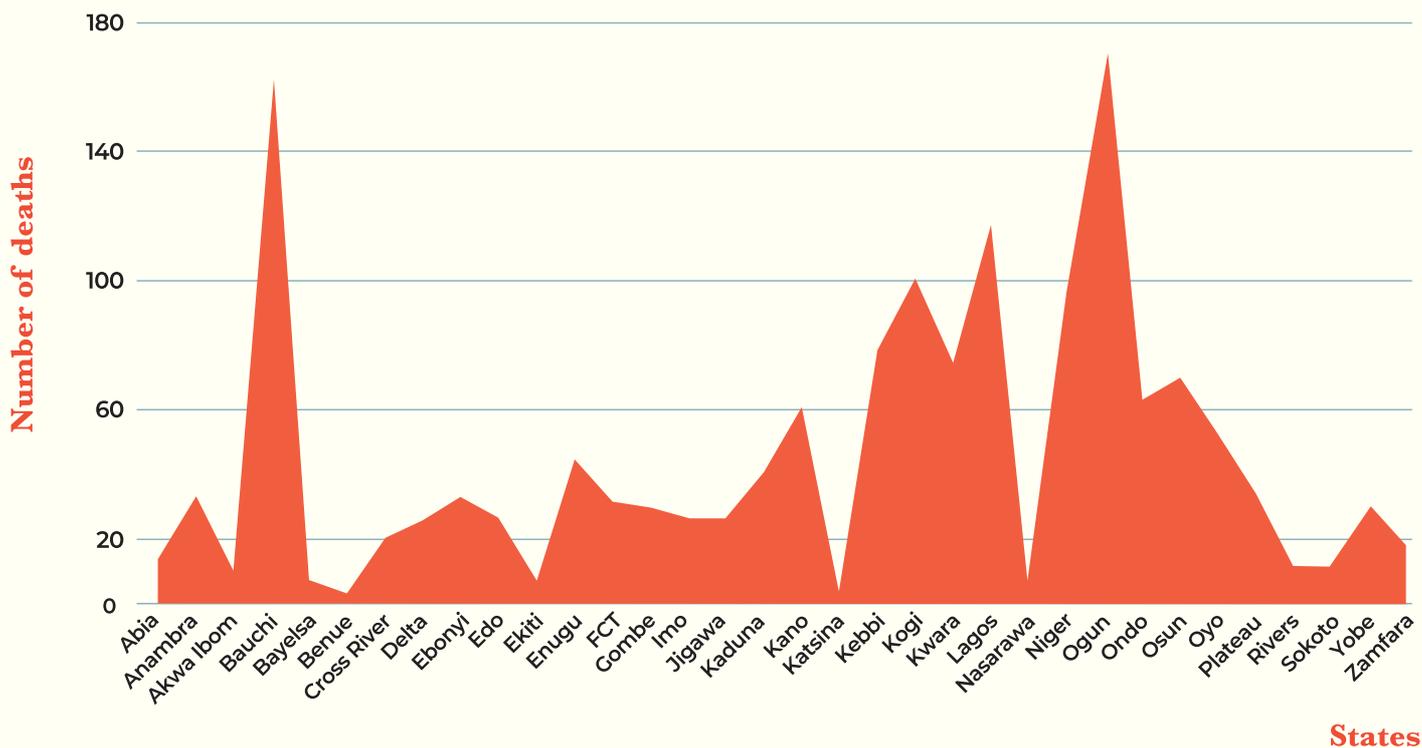
In 2023, the focus of agitation shifted back to Imo State from Anambra, where the group faced an increased military crackdown. In Imo State, Aboh-Mbaise, Abiazu, Ehime-Mbano, Ideato, Isu, Mbatoli, Ngor-Okpala, Oguta, Okigwe, Orlu, Orsu, and Oru LGAs became new frontiers. However, socio-economic activities picked up after security in the region improved.

2.4 Road accidents

Since 2006, Nigeria has lost 31,091 lives in road accidents. In 2023, road accidents claimed 1,565 lives, lower than the 1,860 reported in 2022. The majority of these fatal crashes were attributed to traffic violations and lack of vehicle maintenance. The daily distribution of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) and the transportation of agricultural goods were also major contributing factors. Indeed, the high volatility of refined PMS make petrol tankers very dangerous. The situation was compounded by the deplorable condition of Nigerian roads.

2.MAIN CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN 2023

Figure 9: Fatalities resulting from road accidents by states in 2023



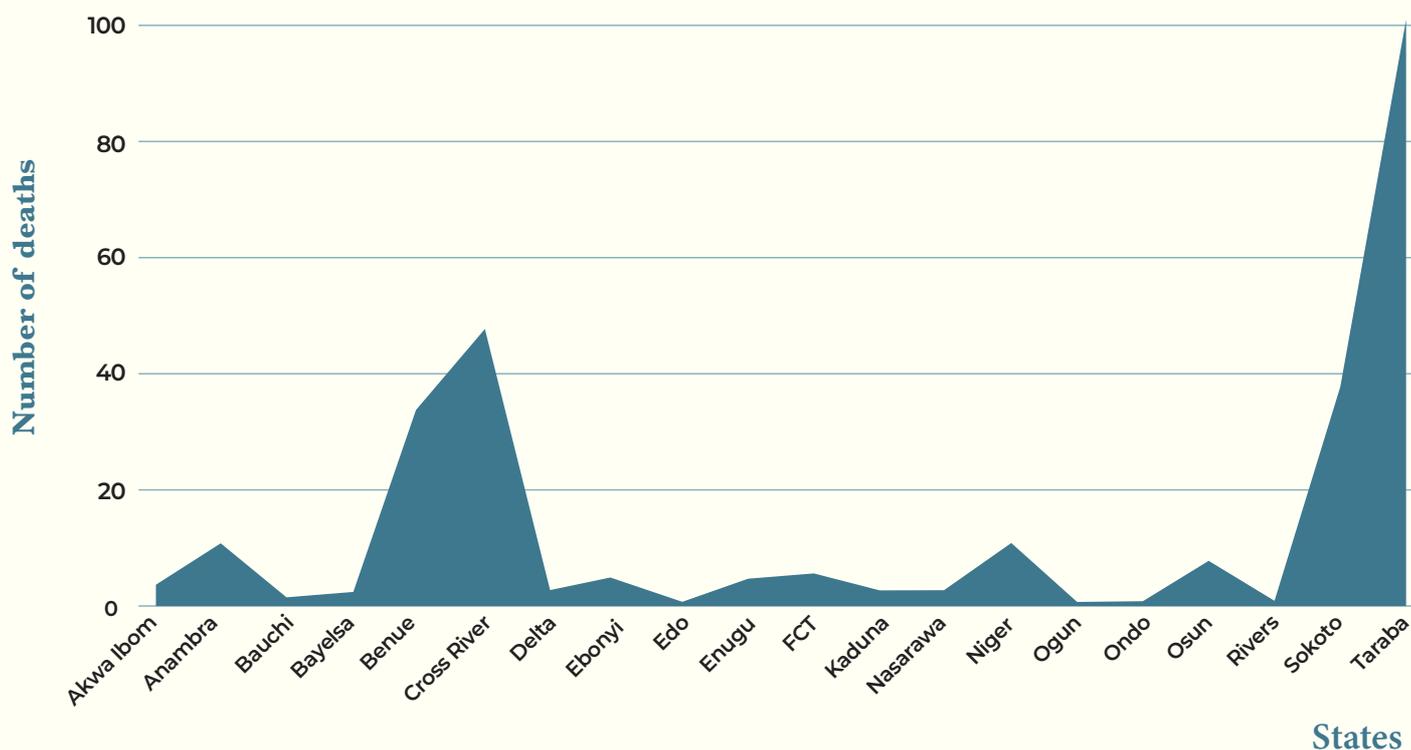
2.4.1 Road accidents by states

For the past seven years, Ogun State recorded the highest number of road accident fatalities in Nigeria. In 2023, it reported 171 fatalities, surpassing Bauchi (163), Lagos (118) and Kogi (101), as shown in Figure 9. Conversely, Benue experienced the lowest number, followed by Katsina, Bayelsa, Ekiti and Nasarawa states. Along the major expressways, the majority of these accidents were attributed to overspeeding, wrongful overtaking, and tankers explosions during the distribution of PMS.

The rehabilitation of the Lagos-Ibadan expressway presented new challenges in this regard. Indeed, the smoother road facilitated overspeeding. Additionally, the transportation of agricultural goods from the north to Ogun and Lagos states involved overloading, as bags of tomatoes, onions, or pepper are added to already laden petrol tankers. Cargo trucks conveying agricultural goods also carry excess passengers, contributing to the increased possibility of road crashes.

2.5 ETHNO-COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Figure 10: Fatalities caused by communal violence by states in 2023

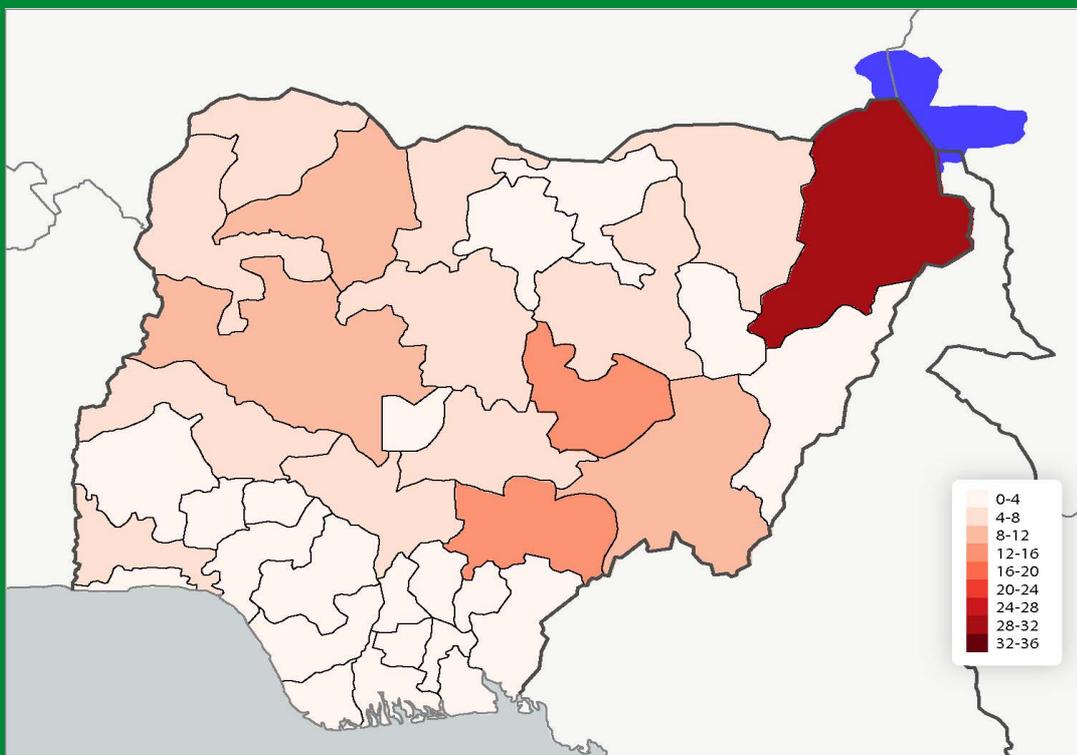


Ethno-communal violence in Nigeria claimed 289 lives across 19 states and the FCT in 2023, marking a decrease from the previous year's toll of 415. Taraba State recorded the highest number of fatalities, followed closely by Cross River, Sokoto and Benue (see Figure 10) while Ondo, Ogun, Rivers and Edo states reported the lowest. The deaths in Taraba State were mostly attributed to the chieftaincy conflict between the Karinjo and Murukun chiefdoms, a tussle that killed no fewer than 53 people. Tiv settlers were also involved in communal unrest in Cross River State, where a boundary dispute with the Yache-Ijiegwu indigenes in Yala LGA resulted in 30 deaths and several injuries on September 11 and October 20, 2023.

3. THE MOST DANGEROUS STATES



Figure 11: Map of fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants by states in 2023



In 2023, Borno State ranked as the most dangerous state in Nigeria, registering 29.03 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants, primarily due to the Boko Haram conflict (see Figure 11). Following closely were Plateau (14.29) and Benue (12.68) states. In stark contrast, Ekiti emerged as the most peaceful state, reporting only 0.73 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants. Other states with low fatality rates included Kano (1.12), Akwa Ibom (1.25), Akwa Ibom (1.25), and Oyo (1.3).

REFERENCES

- 1 Please visit www.ifra-nigeria.org for more information about IFRA.
- 2 <https://www.everycasualty.org/practice/ipn>
- 3 OHCHR [2019], *Guidance on Casualty Recording*, Geneva, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 38p. See also: [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.
- 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 incident.
- 7 Data for 2006 only cover the period from June to December.