

AN ANALYSIS OF VIOLENCE IN SHIRORO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF NIGER STATE

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ACRONYMS

ANPP - All Nigeria Peoples Party

APC - All Progressive Party

ECWA - Evangelical Church Winning All

IDP - Internally Displaced Persons

LGA - Local Government Area

NAF - Nigerian Air Force

NSCDC - Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps

NWD - Nigeria Watch Database

PDP - People's Democratic Party

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study investigates fatal incidents in Niger State's Shiroro Local Government Area (LGA) from January 2007 to December 2023. While using the data of the NigeriaWatch project, additional insights were gathered through 25 in-depth interviews conducted on site in June 2024. The findings reveal widespread violence, with Allawa and Bassa wards experiencing the highest fatality rates, primarily driven by crime. The research corroborates the NigeriaWatch data and highlights the importance of insurgents attacks. Respondents also noted some underreported incidents, including farmer-herder conflicts and mining accidents.

INTRODUCTION

An abstract painting with vibrant colors including blue, green, red, and yellow, featuring a prominent yellow square in the upper center.

Using data from the NigeriaWatch project, this study investigates cases of lethal violence in Shiroro Local Government Area (LGA) in the North Central geo-political zone. With an area of 5,015 square kilometers and a population of 235,404 people according to the 2006 census, this administrative subdivision of Niger State houses one of Nigeria's major hydroelectric power stations, the Shiroro Dam, along with the Kainji Dam and the new Zungeru Dam. Its headquarters is in Kuta and it has fifteen wards, i.e. Allawa, Bangajiya, Bassa/Kukoki, Egwa/Gwada, Erena, Galkogo, Gurmana, Gussoro, Kato, Kushaka/Kurebe, Kwaki/Chukaba, Manta, Pina, She and Ubandoma (see fig. 1). The Gbayi ethnic group predominates in the area but rural settlements also host Hausa, Fulani, Nupe, Yoruba and Igbo people. Christianity and Islam are the prevailing religions in Shiroro LGA, with a smaller fraction of the population adhering to African traditional religions.

Shiroro LGA is endowed with vast land and substantial mineral deposits such as gold, wolframite, mica, feldspar, beryl and kyanite. Agriculture is the backbone of the local economy, with residents engaged in farming, fishing and hunting. The political dynamics of Shiroro is characterized by pluralism. Village heads known as “Mai-Angwa” represent communities while the LGA Chairman is elected. In 2023, Akilu Isiyaku Kuta of the All Progressive Party (APC) won the chairmanship election against his opponents from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP).

According to the NigeriaWatch database, Shiroro LGA is currently the most violent area in Niger State. As shown in Figure 2, it thus recorded the highest number of fatalities since 2007, while surrounding areas such as Mariga, Rafi, Munya and Chanchaga were also greatly affected. Table 1 in the Annex provides more details about these incidents.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Through fieldwork, this study aims to identify the patterns and causes of violence in Shiroro LGA, complement and validate the NigeriaWatch data, investigate and identify reasons why some lethal incidents are not reported by the media, and analyse the socio-economic and political context that can explain the spillover effect of rural banditry from bordering states like Kaduna and Zamfara.

This research is quantitative and qualitative. It relies both on fieldwork and secondary data from the NigeriaWatch project. Twenty-five respondents provided information through in-depth interviews. They were predominantly farmers, traders and civil servants who had resided in various areas of Shiroro LGA for at least 10 years. Their age ranged from 27 to 70 and they included 15 men and 10 women.

Figure 1:
Map of Shiroro Local Government Area showing the wards



Figure 2:
Violent deaths in Niger State's LGAs, 2007-2023



LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

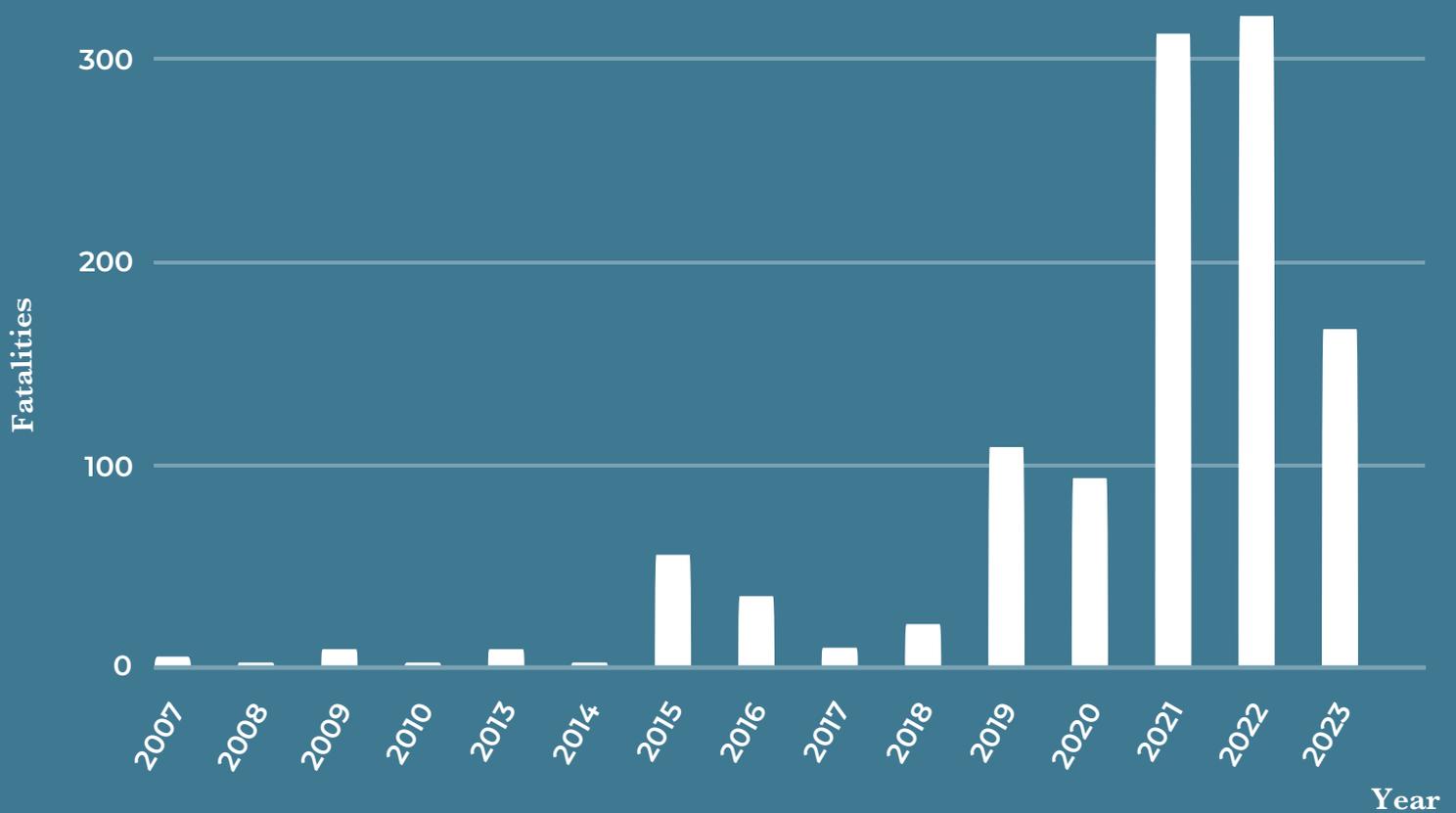
One of the study's limitations is that most respondents were unable to identify the exact month and day when specific incidents took place in their areas. It was however easier to identify the year.

Furthermore, the researcher could not access official documents pertaining to fatalities in the LGA because the local law enforcement agencies and hospitals refused to provide such information. Some security officers responded on an individual basis rather than in accordance with their official status.

Navigating through the communities was also challenging due to the absence of well-maintained access roads and the remote location of many villages. Additionally, the researcher was unable to visit some villages due to ongoing security concerns stemming from persistent bandit attacks.

ANALYSIS

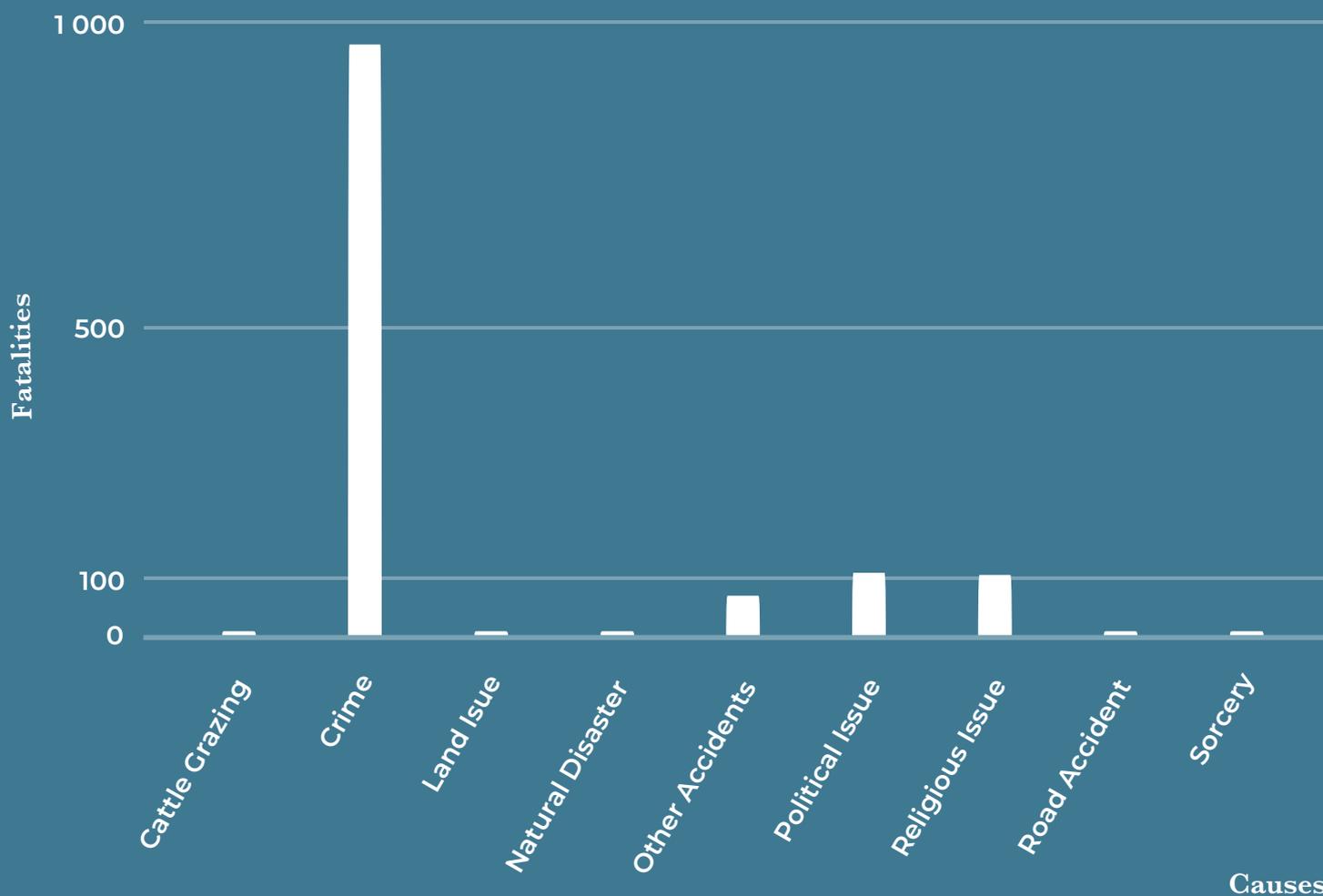
Figure 3: Number of violent deaths in Shiroro LGA from January 2007 to December 2023



Source: Nigeria Watch Database

As shown in Figure 3, the number of fatalities resulting from violent incidents stood at 1,194 between 2007 and 2023. Peaks were observed in 2021, 2022 and 2023 according to the NigeriaWatch database. In September 2021 at Maganda village near Allawa, for instance, a combined team of the army and mobile police force neutralized 40 bandits who were fleeing military operations in neighboring Zamfara State; a soldier was killed in the operation. Also in August 2021, about 20 bandits were killed by local hunters who recovered stolen livestock. In November 2022, again, there was as a gun battle at Chibani between cattle rustlers and security forces. It was reported that two vigilantes had been killed by the bandits during an earlier ambush. Three days after the incident, the bandits trailed the son of the village head whom they believed betrayed them and took him to their camp where they shot him dead.

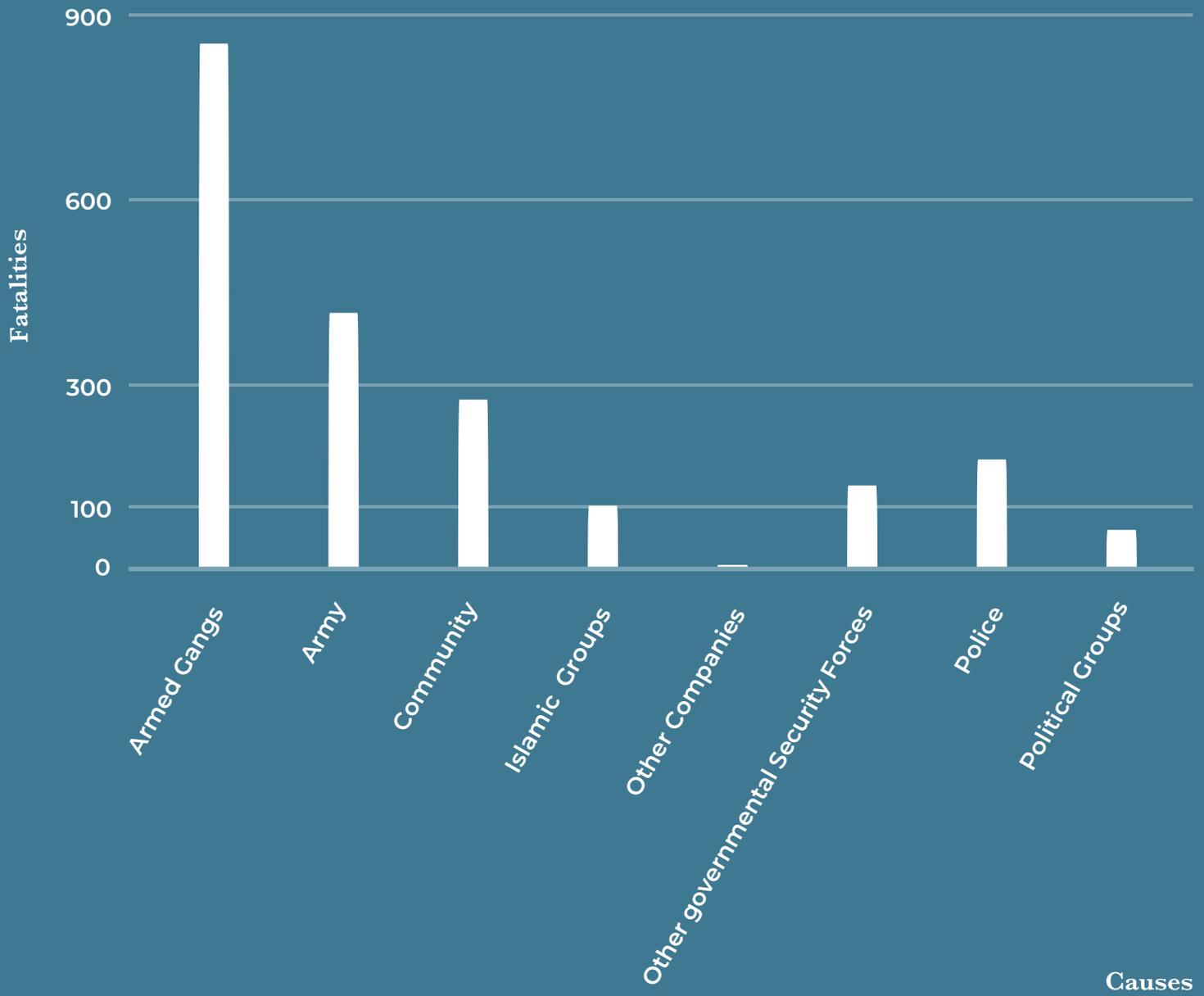
Figure 4: Main causes of fatalities in Shiroro LGA from January 2007 to December 2023



Source: Nigeria Watch Database

Crime is thus the main security challenge in Shiroro, as shown in Figure 4. Bandits currently storm villages on motorcycles with weapons. This was for instance the case in April 2022 at Tafila near Gwada, an IDPs' camp, where about four people were killed while many others were kidnapped. Operations by security and defense forces also contribute to the killings, as shown in Figure 5. Aerial bombardments, in particular, are quite deadly. In December 2023, for instance, the Nigerian Air force struck a bandit hide out in Kusu area and killed about 40 people, including a kingpin known as "Yellow Jambros". From June 2019, there were also reports indicating an increasing insurgent presence in Shiroro and Munya LGA, with supporting evidence from two videos filmed by jihadists in Niger State (Barnett 2021). In April 2021, both bandits and Boko Haram members thus arrived at villages on motorbikes, dressed in military and mobile police attire, and armed with a mix of AK-47s, RPGs, and machine guns. The militants then raised their flag to assert territorial claims in the name Islam.

Figure 5: Main protagonists of deadly incidents in Shiroro LGA, 2007-2023



Source: Nigeria Watch Database

1. COMMUNITY PERCEPTION ON THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN SHIRORO LGA

The research revealed an unanimous perception that over the years, banditry has been a major menace in Shiroro LGA. Many families had to leave their original settlement and some respondents disclosed that they have been displaced for periods extending to 5 years and more. While fleeing, some were kidnapped, taken hostage or attacked by reptiles. Others gave birth on transit. Many of them lost their farmlands, livestock, food barns, businesses and properties. They were confronted with the choice of resettling in IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps or villages that were more secure. The displacements led to severe challenges, including food security, inadequate healthcare, and limited means of livelihood.

For example, one respondent recounted that he had to leave Allawa when his village was attacked by bandits who killed over 30 people in 2015-2016. The government is yet to provide any significant assistance. According to the victims, the bandits issued a stern warning and forbade them from returning to their homes. Other respondents said that they felt unsafe in their current IDPs' camp. To survive, they had to engage in mining activities, beg for alms in nearby communities, or give out their children for menial jobs. They also had to use traditional herbal medicine because they could not afford to visit clinics when they fell sick.

According to many respondents, rising levels of violence in Shiroro can be explained by the movements of bandits across different states in Nigeria, especially from Kaduna, Zamfara and Kebbi. The data of the NigeriaWatch project confirm that the surrounding LGAs of Mariga, Rafi and Munya are also affected by a lot of crime. One respondent added that Shiroro attracts bandits because of its fertile land and mineral resources. Allawa and Bassa, the most affected wards, are thus believed to have large portions of gold which are yet to be explored by the government or the private sector. Sometimes, the bandits allow local farmers to cultivate their lands but chase them away when the crops are due for harvest. They also seize their lands and properties if they refuse to pay them taxes. The remoteness of most communities in a rural LGA, finally, explains why they come under attack, as bandits can easily hide in the bush. A security personnel added that crime persists because of the lack of cooperation from villagers under threat.

2. REASONS FOR UNREPORTED CASES OF VIOLENT DEATHS IN SHIRORO LGA

Respondents believe that some lethal incidents, like conflicts between farmers and herders, or accidents at mining sites, are frequently underreported. For instance, an attack on Kadna villagers claimed two lives on June 13th, 2024. Yet it was not reported in the press. This was also the case of a tragedy at the mining site in Galkogo, where some 50 people allegedly died on June 3rd, 2024.

Limited media coverage was attributed to the challenges of a remote rural LGA. Furthermore, some residents believed that politicians were behind some attacks and used their influence to muzzle the media.

CONCLUSION

Shiroro LGA has consistently experienced criminal incidents that caused many fatalities. Armed gangs were linked to many of the attacks, while efforts by the military and community vigilantes to combat banditry resulted in more deaths and positioned them as the second and third most involved protagonists in lethal violence in the LGA. The dynamics of violence in Shiroro LGA are thus complex, as multiple actors contribute to the region's volatile security landscape.

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- Interview with Respondent 3, Female, 45 years, Community Member, Zumba, 17th June, 2024
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- Interview with Respondent 5, Male, 50 years, Community Leader, Kadna, 18th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 6, Male, 25 years, Community Member, Kadna, 18th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 7, Male, 30 years, Community Member, Kadna, 18th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 8, Male, 36 years, Community Member, Kadna, 18th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 9, Male, 27 years, Community Member, Kadna, 18th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 10, Male, 31 years, Community Member, Kadna, 18th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 11, Male, 39 years, Community Member, Kadna, 18th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 12, Male, 29 years, Community Member, Kadna, 18th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 13, Male, 32 years, Community Member, Kadna, 18th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 14, Male, 47 years, Community Member, Kadna, 18th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 15, Female, 30 years, Community Member, Asha, 19th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 16, Female, 36 years, Community Member, Asha, 19th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 17, Male, 70 years, Community Member, Asha, 19th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 18, Male, 67 years, Community Member, Asha, 19th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 19, Female, 49 years, Community Member, Asha, 19th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 20, Female, 48 years, Security Woman, Zumba, 20th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 21, Male, 59 years, Civil Servant, Galadimma, 20th June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 22, Male, 53 years, Clergy Man, Zumba, 21st June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 23, Male, 36 years, Security Man, Zumba, 22nd June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 24, Female, 36 years, Community Member, Asha, 23rd June, 2024
- Interview with Respondent 25, Female, 46 years, Trader, Zumba, 24th June, 2024

Table 1: List of lethal incidents in Shiroro LGA, Niger State (2007-2023)

S/N	Date	Location	Cause	Description	No of Fatalities
1	April 2007	Gusoro	Political Issue, Crime	Supporters of PDP and ANPP clashed	2
2	April 2010	Baji Manta Village	Crime	A 37-year-old palm wine tapper, Iliya Woya, kills Abubakar Hussani for stealing his palm wine	1
3	June 2013	Kushaka Village	Crime, Land Issue	More than 100 Fulani men attacked settlements leaving 9 residents dead and many others injured in Kushaka village	9
4	May 2014	Lashi Village, Shiroro	Crime, Sorcery	4 ritual killers took a teenager to a village and beheaded him	1
5	September 2015	Allawa Village	Crime	50 persons, including a policeman, a district head of Allawa village and his brother, were killed by some Fulani herdsmen during a midnight raid. The assailants invaded the village brandishing weapons and sophisticated guns which they shot at villagers	40
6	April 2016	Gwada community	Other accident	A baby, a 2 years old girl and 4 others lost their lives when they were electrocuted. Some of the victims were identified as M ^{rs} Kande Salihu, Adama Tanko and an officer of the Federal Road Safety corps, Idris Bala	6
7	November 2016	Kukoki community	Crime	6 persons were killed in an attack by about 50 armed cattle rustlers. It was reported that the criminals killed four Fulani natives and two Gbaya indigenes. Several women and children were injured, while the rustlers stole about 700 cows	9
8	June 2017	Allawa	Crime	2 policemen and a vigilante were killed in a clash with two Fulani men who were picked up for undisclosed offence	2
9	July 2017	Shiroro	Armed Gang, Police	2 policemen on duty were shot dead by kidnappers	2
10	September 2017	Yakpa Village	Crime	Gunmen attacked a Fulani community and killed 3 children	3
11	January 2018	Allawa	Crime	Gunmen led by one Lawal Kwali killed 19 villagers and two policemen. They also burnt down the police station.	21
12	February 2019	Badna, Malfa, and Tunga	Crime	9 people, mostly women and girls, were killed by armed men. Some of them were raped during the attack	9

S/N	Date	Location	Cause	Description	No of Fatalities
13	June 2019	Ajatayi, Gwassa and Barden Dawak	Crime	Dozens of persons were killed by gunmen who invaded some communities	64
14	September 2019	Shiroro	Political Issues	2 persons were killed by stray bullets fired by policemen during the All Progressive Congress (APC) primary ahead of the November local government election	2
15	December 2019	Koki	Crime	11 people were killed in an attack by bandits. The victims were preparing to go to church when they were raided. Over 20 people sustained injuries	10
16	January 2020	Kudodo, Galapai, Dnalgwa Villages	Armed Gangs	Armed bandits numbering about 50 invaded 5 communities and killed 11 people. The bandits also kidnapped 4 women and rustled over 300 livestock	8
17	March 2020	Galkogo and Zumba Villages	Crime	20 people including a Mobile Police Officer were killed when bandits numbering over 50 came on motorcycles and raided 2 communities. Scores of residents including 3 military were wounded. Many others were abducted. A subsequent report stated that 17 policemen, 12 soldiers and 3 civilians were ambushed and killed while on a rescue mission	27
18	July 2020	Gurmana River	Other Accident	5 persons including 2 children were drowned when their canoe capsized following the news of bandits coming to invade their village	5
19	December 2020	Chukuba	Crime	Jeremiah Ibrahim, a Pastor with Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), was killed by gunmen when he went to visit his farm	1
20	December 2020	Kusasu	Crime	7 people lost their lives and several houses were set ablaze when some hoodlums attacked their village	7
21	January 2021	Tufa	Crime	A Catholic priest, Father John Gbakan Yaji, was kidnapped and murdered by gunmen. His corpse was found a day after his abduction on his way from a religious meeting	1
22	February 2021	Kurebe, Sabon Gida, Sararai and Bafin Kanya	Crime	21 people were killed by over 100 bandits when villagers refused to pay them "taxes"	22
23	August 2021	Iburo	Crime	15 bandits were killed by the Joint Security Task Force. The incident occurred 2 weeks after 10 bandits were killed in the same LGA	15
24	September 2021	Allawa community	Crime	A combined team of military and mobile police forces neutralized 42 bandits in an ambush. The victims were fleeing military operations in Zamfara State. A soldier was killed in the operation	43

S/N	Date	Location	Cause	Description	No of Fatalities
25	December 2021	Zhigiri Village	Other Accident	7 people lost their lives in a boat mishap while going for a naming ceremony. The victims included a man, Muazu Babangida, his two wives, his son and relatives	7
26	January 2022	Forest in Galadima-Kogo, Kusasu, Allawa and Erena	Crime	Cattle rustlers were decimated by security operatives and hunters during a clearance operation	28
27	February 2022	Galadima Kogo	Crime	4 officers of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and 6 civilians were killed by gunmen. The officers died when their vehicle ran into an improvised explosive device	11
28	April 2022	Tafila Village, near Gwada, Internally Displaced Persons, (IDP) camp	Crime	4 persons were killed and many kidnapped when bandits stormed their village on motorcycles with firearms	4
29	July 2022	Zumba Village	Other Accident	50 people drowned in a boat that capsized on a market day	30
30	September 2022	Gaude	Crime	The Nigerian Air Force (NAF) killed some 10 bandits during clearance operation	10
31	January 2023	Shiroro	Crime	Military airstrikes killed more than 40 people during air raids against bandits	40
32	April 2023	Kusasu community	Cattle Grazing, Land Issue	8 persons were killed and several others were injured during a clash between two rival armed groups led by Dogo Jede and Ali Kachala	8
33	August 2023	Maganda Junction on the Allawa-Pandogari Road	Crime, Accident	A man identified as Yahaya Masinja was shot dead by some bandits	1
34	August 2023	Chukuba	Crime	A NAF helicopter that was on a casualty evacuation mission crashed. The pilot and 8 soldiers were believed to have died in the accident. It was not confirmed if the helicopter was shot down by bandits	9
35	November 2023	Zongoru community of Bassa Ward to Gijiwa	Other Accident	10 traders lost their lives when a boat capsized in a river	10