

The data from this report come from the March 22, 2023, version of GRID—the GTTAC Record of Incidents Database.

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THE COUNTERTERRORISM

Brief

September 11, 2023

The Global Terrorism Trends and Analysis Center (GTTAC) was created by Development Services Group, Inc., and our partner TraCCC of George Mason University to support our work for the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Counterterrorism (No. GS-10F-0166K, 19AQMM18F2561).

The GTTAC Record of Incidents Database (GRID) collects and classifies open-source data on terrorism incidents globally and is used to support the development of the Annex of Statistical Information for the Country Reports on Terrorism. Data used in this report are from the GRID.

Views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the United States government.

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Focus on Nigeria

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The Global Terrorism Trends and Analysis Center, which collects and classifies open-source data on terrorism incidents worldwide, issues this research brief on Nigeria, because of the recent uptick in the nation's terrorism numbers. Perhaps the greatest reasons contributing to insecurity in Nigeria are the country's porous borders, weak institutions, and social and ethnic challenges.

This research brief concentrates on terrorist incidents occurring in Nigeria during 2022 only, except when comparing the numbers of incidents and fatalities with totals from previous years.

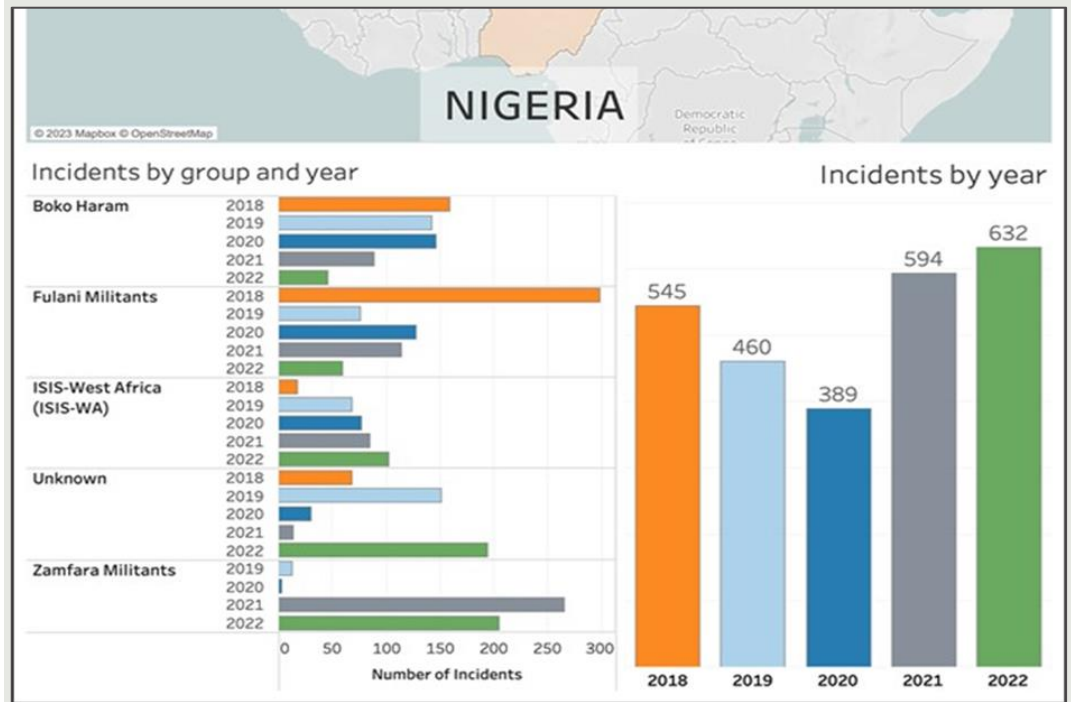
Nigeria experienced 632 terrorist incidents in 2022, resulting in a total of 2,926 fatalities (14% of the total global fatalities

from terrorism for the year). This constitutes a 3% increase in incidents and a 5% increase in fatalities from 2021.

Zamfara militants were the main known perpetrator in Nigeria in 2022. They carried out a total of 205 incidents over the course of the year, 32% of all incidents in the country.

ISIS-West Africa Province (ISWAP) was responsible for 102 incidents (16% of the total for the calendar year). Notably, local sources do not always differentiate among Boko Haram and ISWAP. Fulani militants also contributed to the violence in Nigeria, conducting 59 attacks (9% of the overall total).

While there are several known militant groups operating within Nigeria, 31% of all incidents



Focus on Nigeria (continued)

that took place in 2022 were unable to be attributed to a certain group.

Common tactic types used in these attacks included shootings (69%) hostage-taking/kidnapping (32%), and ambushes (7%).

Fifty-six percent of the terrorist incidents carried out in Nigeria targeted the general population.

Other frequently targeted groups included law enforcement (9%), the military (8%), and other perpetrator groups (9%).

The Nigerian states that experienced the highest number of incidents were Kaduna with 118 incidents (19% of the total in the country), Borno with 98 incidents (15%), and Niger with 70 incidents (11%).

In the following pages, we will examine four perpetrator groups: Zamfara militants, ISIS-West Africa Province, Boko Haram, and Fulani militants. We also will look at how resource exploitation and recent droughts in the Lake Chad region have emboldened terrorist groups and weakened the local populations.



GTTAC Defining Terrorism

An incident is deemed a terrorist act if it conforms with Title 22, Section 2656f, of the U.S. Code. It is therefore defined as a violent act carried out by nonstate actors that meets the following inclusion criteria:

- The violent act aims to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal.
- The violent act includes evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to an audience (or audiences) larger than the immediate victims.
- The violent act occurred outside the precepts of international humanitarian law, as far as it targeted non-combatants.

The Global Terrorism Trends and Analysis Center includes only those incidents for which all three criteria were met. In some cases where terrorists initiate an action that targets military forces rather than non-combatants, this would be considered an incident.



Zamfara Militants

Zamfara militias are groups of insurgents who traditionally operate in the northwest region of Nigeria. Their activities predate Nigeria's colonial period, and they are now well entrenched in northern Nigeria.

They have spread across parts of northwestern and north-central Nigeria, including Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger state, Sokoto, and the Federal Capital Territory. Authorities and analysts suggest that Zamfara militias may number as many as 100 loosely connected groups ranging in size from 10 fighters to more than 1,000, totaling more than 30,000 fighters, most of whom are based in Zamfara state.

Fragmentation and counter-offensives by Nigerian security agents forced Zamfara militias to disperse across Nigeria, with some moving across state lines through the forests to evade capture. Rather than defeat the militias, the counteroffensives led them to adapt, and they expanded their numbers and capabilities.

The militias have recruited, and

continue to recruit, members from Chad, Mali, and Niger — mostly Tuaregs with links to Sahelian rebels, who also arm the militias.

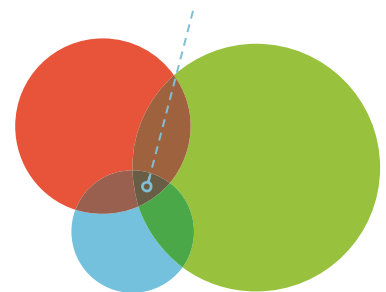
They have trained in modern guerilla strategies and tactics and have developed relationships with Jihadi groups in the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel region, particularly Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa Province. With greater numbers and capabilities, Zamfara militias have intensified their attacks.

The data indicate that, in 2022, Zamfara militants carried out 205 incidents, resulting in 1,041 fatalities. This was a 22% decrease in incidents and fatalities from numbers tallied for 2021. In 2022 the great majority of attacks were in the form of kidnappings or shootings (sometimes both) and largely targeted the general population in Nigeria.

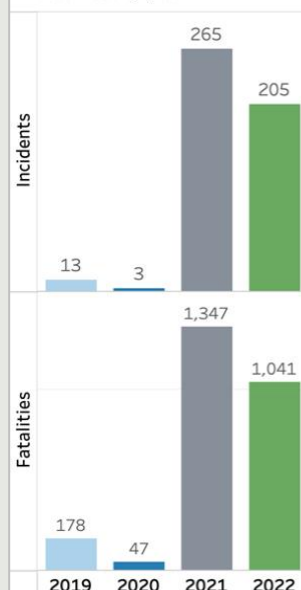
Understanding the Data

GRID records only those incidents that meet its criteria for inclusion. While some incidents of interethnic conflict do meet those criteria, this is not necessarily representative of some of the complex and multifaceted tribal disputes that exist in Nigeria.

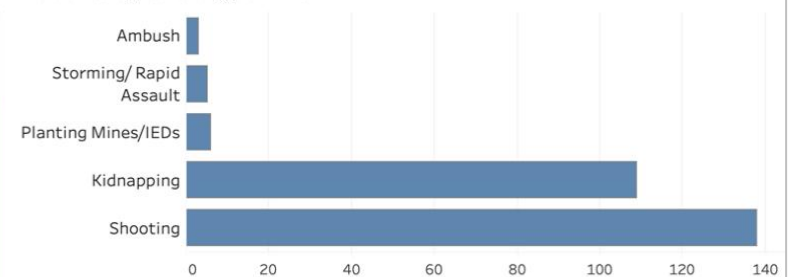
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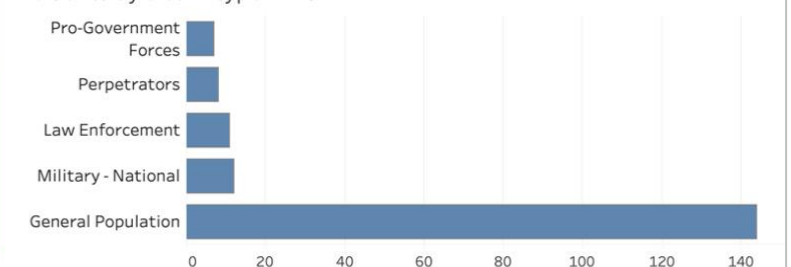
Incidents by year



Incidents by tactic type in 2022



Incidents by victim type in 2022





ISIS-West Africa Province

Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) was the 10th-most-active perpetrator in the world during 2022.

That year the group was involved in 112 incidents, with 575 fatalities and 193 persons wounded. This constituted a 10% increase in incidents from 2021. However, while attacks increased, lethality fell — with a 43% decrease in persons killed.

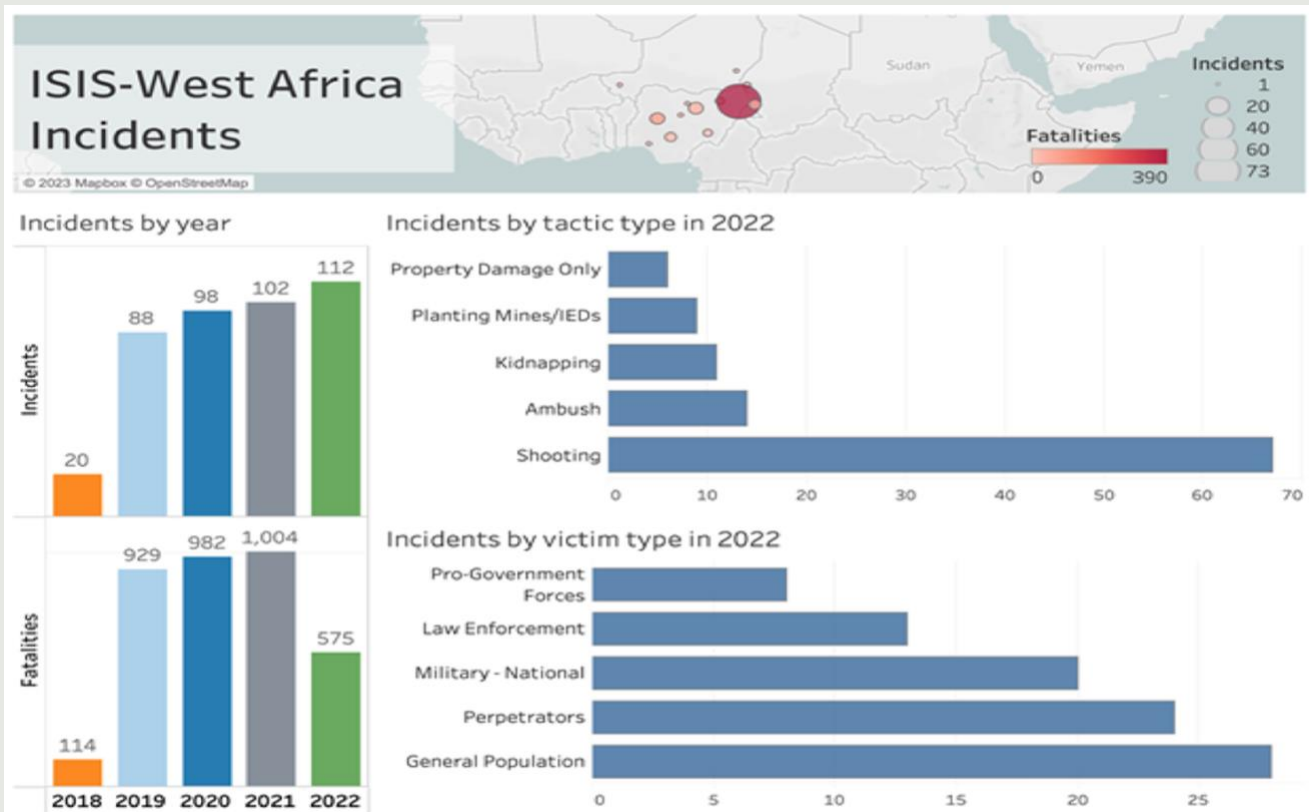
Common tactics ISWAP employed in its 2022 incidents included shootings (60%), ambushes (13%), and kidnappings (10%).

The victims in 28% of ISWAP incidents were the general population. Other frequent victims included other perpetrator groups (21% of incidents) and the national military (18%).

ISWAP, of course, doesn't act in Nigeria alone. However, in 2022, the 102 incidents perpetrated by this group in Nigeria constituted 91% all terrorist incidents it carried out that year. The states that experienced the highest number of incidents were Borno, with 73 incidents, and Niger state, with 8 incidents (7%).

An ISIS affiliate made up of Lake Chad militants, ISWAP receives substantial support from its parent group in the form of operational knowledge and financial assistance.¹

Troublingly, ISIS has forged an association with another extremist group, Boko Haram, posing an even greater tandem threat to Nigeria.² This intergroup cooperation has aided ISIS's international status, while Boko Haram has gained operational and financial intelligence.² Both groups, however, also have been regularly in conflict with each another since at least 2021.



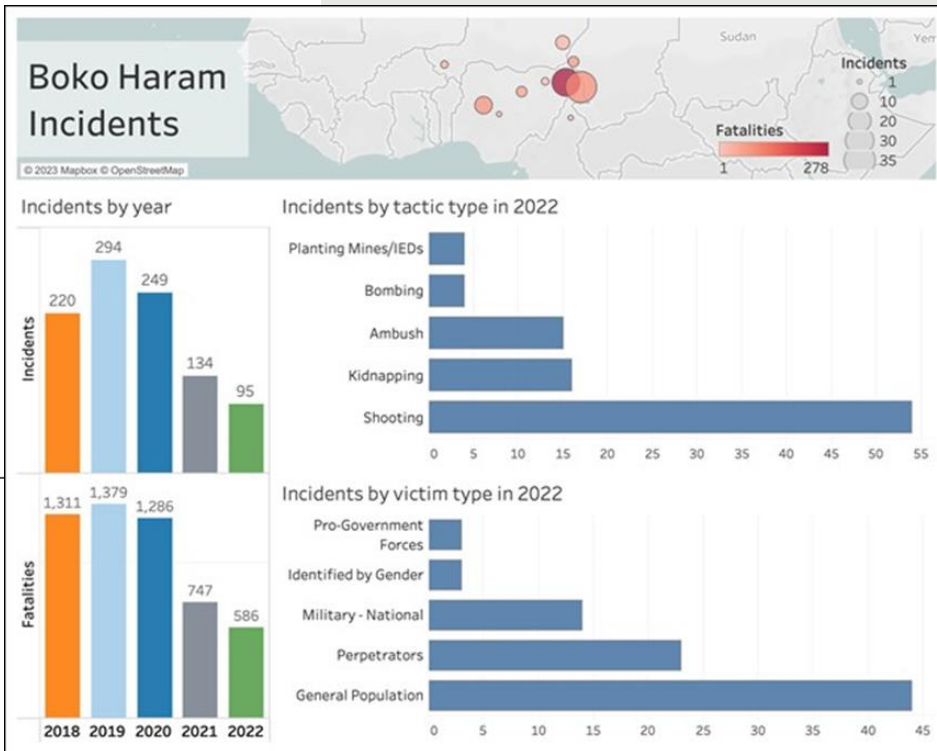


Focus on Nigeria (continued)

Boko Haram

Boko Haram, an Islamist group, was involved in 95 incidents during 2022, resulting in 586 fatalities and another 215 persons wounded. This constituted a 17% decrease in incidents and a 12% decrease in fatalities in 2022, compared with 2021.

Forty-six of those incidents in 2022 were concentrated in Nigeria. Another 36 occurred in the adjacent country of Cameroon.



Common tactics Boko Haram employed in their attacks included shootings (57%), kidnappings (17%), and ambushes (16%).

In 2022 the victims in 46% of Boko Haram-involved incidents were members of the general population. Other prominent victims of Boko Haram violence included other perpetrator groups (24%), the military (15% of incidents), and law enforcement (6% of incidents).

The regions that experienced the most Boko Haram incidents were Extreme-Nord (Cameroon) with 35 incidents (37%), Borno with 28 incidents (30%), and Niger state with 11 incidents (12%).

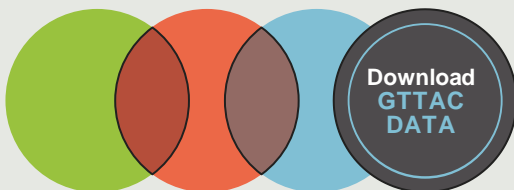
Boko Haram is still conducting violent operations in Nigeria despite claims that the government had decimated the group.³

Opposed to Western influence and to secular governments, Boko Haram sees individuals who are not in line with their ideological beliefs as enemies.²

Because of complexities in the group's structure, it is difficult to determine membership. Therefore, it is also challenging for the Nigerian government to measure Boko Haram's potential threat.³

The impact of Boko Haram's violence on Nigeria has been immense, creating one of the largest camps of displaced individuals in the world.⁴ The group also is responsible for other horrific acts of violence, such as sexual crimes against women, including sexual enslavement.

Terrorism Datasets 2018–23 Available for Download





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Focus on Nigeria (continued)

Fulani Militants

The Fulani, a nomadic, pastoral group found largely in Nigeria, are a vital part of the Nigerian economy owing to their significant contribution toward the food supply in the form of animal products.^{5, 6}

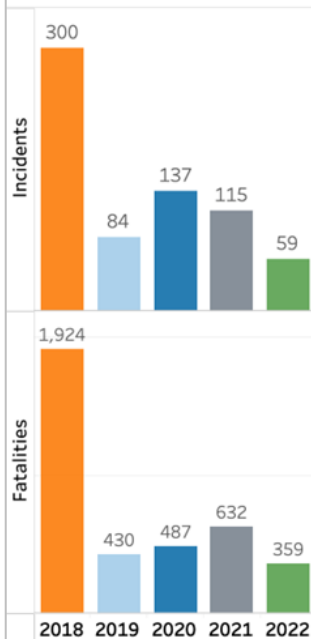
The livestock they raise accounts for more than 90% of the total livestock in Nigeria, making the Fulani the best-known pastoralists in the country.⁵ The Fulani practice traditional migratory grazing styles, whereby they and their livestock move based on seasonal climate changes such as prevalence of rainfall in an area.⁷ However, their large herd sizes have forced them to expand their pastures, resulting in struggles between these pastoralists and cultivating farmers over land and water access.⁵ Additional factors fueling these clashes include crop destruction by cattle and damage to stock routes or water points.⁷ These migratory herdsmen now sometimes bring violence where they go. Militants kill those who get in their way, with some instances of their destroying entire villages to take stake on the land.⁷

This type of violent conflict toward crop farmers is what defines Fulani militancy.⁶

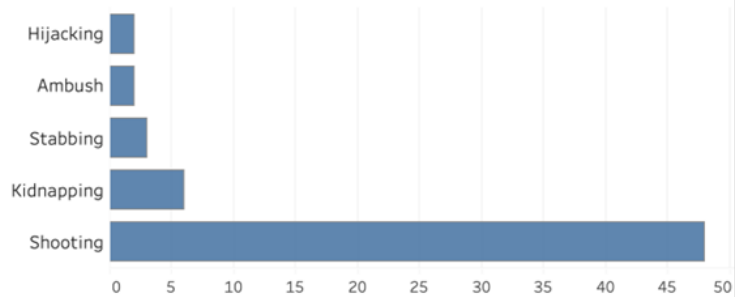
The Nigerian government has attempted to improve the situation, most notably by demarcating grazing routs in 2009. However, human, animal, and crop losses have continued.⁵

The Fulani militants' violent activities in Nigeria began with attacks against the agrarian population in Middle-Belt/North-Central area of the country.³ These attacks often consist of direct attacks on farming communities, including killings and kidnappings.⁴ Previously, the militants had much-lower capabilities, operating with bows and arrows or knives.⁴ Despite what appears to be a decline in attack numbers in 2022, the group has advanced, and is now armed with AK-47s.⁴ Their militancy has resulted in substantial hardships on affected populations, including hunger, malnutrition, disease, poverty, and displacement.⁶

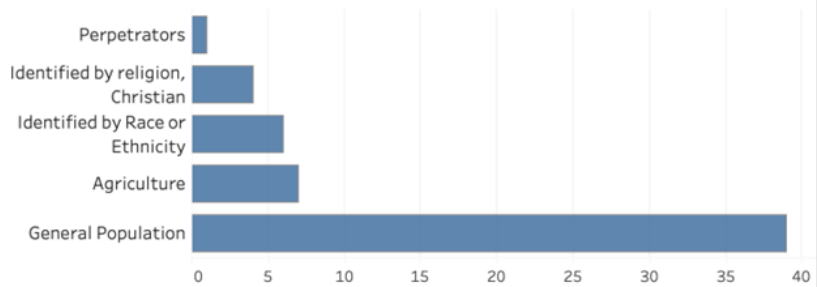
Incidents by year



Incidents by tactic type in 2022



Incidents by victim type in 2022





Focus on Nigeria (continued)

Resource Exploitation in the Lake Chad Region

Recent climate changes in the Lake Chad Basin, and in Africa in general, have resulted in a multitude of issues that have contributed toward conflict in the region.⁸ Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger all share parts of their borders with Lake Chad, the fourth-largest lake in Africa.⁸ However, droughts have caused the lake to shrink over time, resulting in a significant strain on populations in the area.⁹ The vanishing of Lake Chad is so severe, it has been a significant factor contributing to one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.¹⁰



The conditions in the Lake Chad region are exacerbated by the actions of militants, who target cattle herders and fishermen to steal their fish and livestock.¹¹ These types of banditry skills are brought into extremist groups by recruited members, who can engage in practices such as cattle rustling to help fund the group's activities. Though in the past Lake Chad's islands and shoreline were fertile areas that provided for Indigenous communities, the actions on the lake by Boko Haram and other militant groups — predominantly ISIS-West Africa Province — have resulted in abandonment of the area.

Conflict between fishermen and herders over the resources the lake area provides have always existed; however, before the involvement of the militants in the area, the conflicts were resolved much more amicably. In addition to their taking over villages and areas of Lake Chad, groups like Boko Haram are levying taxes against farmers, creating even more economic strain.¹¹

The exploitation of the lake by extremists, paired with climate factors shrinking the lake, has resulted in extremists' profiting off products such as fish, while Indigenous communities are displaced and starved. The governments of Lake Chad-bordering countries have assembled task forces to target the terrorists who are controlling the lake, and humanitarian efforts are attempting to ameliorate these issues. Even so, the situation remains dire.



Endnotes

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