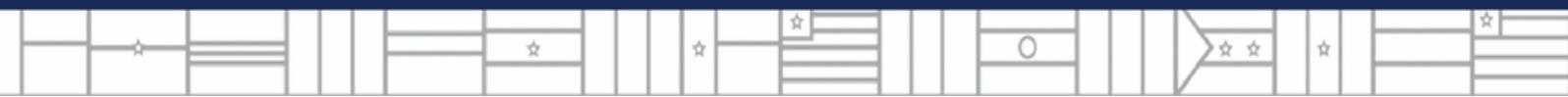# ANALYSIS OF SECURITY DYNAMICS IN WEST AFRICA FROM OCTOBER 2022 TO JUNE 2023

Nichole Grossman
Dengiyefa Angalapu

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ABOUT CDD

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) was established in the United Kingdom in 1997 as an independent, not-for-profit, research training, advocacy and capacity building organisation. The purpose was to mobilise global opinion and resources for democratic development and provide an independent space to reflect critically on the challenges posed to the democratisation and development processes in West Africa.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nichole Grossman is a visiting scholar at the Centre for Democracy and Development. She is a Ph.D. Candidate in International Relations from American University in Washington, DC. During her time in Nigeria, Nichole is conducting field research for her dissertation titled "Seeking Chronic Healthcare in Forced Migration Camp Settings: The Case of Nigeria's Internally Displaced Persons."

Nichole's research focuses on the intersection between forced migration and health. Centered around the reality of limited access to healthcare within conflict zones and displacement camps, her research examines how communities navigate available services, how these communities cope when needed services are limited or non-existent, and the informal institutions that are created in the absence of formal healthcare. Her research uses a mixed-methods approach. Prior to arriving in Nigeria, Nichole has lived and traveled across many countries and has conducted additional fieldwork in Ethiopia.

Dengiyefa Angalapu

Dengiyefa Angalapu is a Research Analyst with the Centre for Democracy and Development. He is a Political Scientist interested in research and teaching on development challenges in the global south, specifically focusing on issues around climate change and conflict, crude oil-related violence, political violence, terrorism, democracy, environmental politics and sustainability. Dengiyefa Angalapu has vast experience working as a researcher on violence in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region. He is a member of the International Political Science Association (IPSA), The American Political Science Association (APSA), The Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA) and the Nigerian Political Science Association South South Zone (NPSA-SS).

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Introduction

The West Africa region has been impacted by violent conflict, often characterized by insurgencies, terrorism, intercommunal clashes, and criminal activities. Several factors contribute to the violent conflict in the Greater Sahel, including socio-economic challenges, political instability, weak governance, and competition over resources. The region faces numerous development challenges, such as poverty, high unemployment rates, limited access to education and healthcare, and food insecurity. These conditions, coupled with a lack of strong institutions and poor governance, create an environment conducive to conflict and exploitation by various armed groups. Jihadist and extremist groups have gained prominence in the Greater Sahel, aiming to establish Islamic states, implementing strict interpretations of Sharia law, and challenging state authority. Some of the prominent armed groups operating in the region include Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), affiliated with al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). These groups have conducted attacks on military and civilian targets, committed human rights abuses, and engaged in smuggling, kidnapping for ransom, and other criminal activities.[1] The violent conflicts in West Africa have had devastating consequences for the affected populations. This situation led to mass displacement, loss of lives, human rights violations, and hindered socio-economic development. The conflicts have also exacerbated existing intercommunal tensions, leading to cycles of revenge and further instability.

With sustained conflict across many West African countries, the months of April, May, and June 2023 continued to see excessive violence and fatalities. While the number of overall fatalities has continued to increase slightly across the region over the last nine months, other metrics have remained relatively flat or have seen a decrease in activity. In this report we seek to provide a short overview of the state of political fatalities across West Africa before providing a deeper dive into some of the political activities that are not usually associated with fatalities but still assist in instilling fear in civilians across the region. These activities include looting and the destruction of property, mob violence, and abductions. This report relies on data collected and maintained by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project

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[1]Grossman N & Angalapu D (2023), "Turbulent Region: An Analysis of Trends and Actors of Conflict in West Africa," Centre for Democracy and Development. June 9, 2023, https://www.cddwestafrica.org/reports/turbulent-region-an-analysis-of-trends-and-actors-of-conflict-in-west-africa/.

(ACLED). While not all events in the dataset will be viewed by everyone as being inherently political, we maintain the source data and the associated coding accepting that, for our purposes, the fatalities and events mentioned in this report relate in some way to political activity, even if not primarily so. This report seeks to highlight regional trends. Some country dynamics will be discussed; however, these dynamics will be utilized to provide additional context to the regional trends being presented. For a more in-depth discussion of country-specific dynamics, please refer to our most recent report titled "Turbulent Region: An Analysis of Trends and Actors of Conflict in West Africa."[2]

Fatality Trends Across the Region:

Over the last nine months, from October 2022 through June 2023, the number of political violence-related fatalities across West Africa has continued to increase slightly (see graph 1). However, the months of April, May and June 2023 saw a slight decrease in overall fatalities. This fact can be attributed to the decrease in fatalities from attacks in all countries except Nigeria (see graph 2), and a decrease in fatalities related to armed clashes in all countries except Burkina Faso (see graph 3).[3] This is promising as fatalities related to attack and armed clashes are the two types of political violence that account for most of the political fatalities in the region.

This outcome could be due to several factors in the nations with the highest rates of political violence-related fatalities. In Nigeria, the presidential inauguration, and the decisions the new administration has made may be affecting the ability and/or desire for armed non-state actors to execute attacks and engage in violence. One such policy was the decision by the Tinubu administration to announce the end of the fuel subsidy on May 29. This has resulted in a three-fold increase in fuel prices[4] and inflation hitting its highest rate in 17 years.[5] This has greatly affected the ability to move around the country which may be one reason for a lowered fatality rate. Additionally, as the military awaited their new commander-in-chief, military attacks and armed clashes were significantly reduced during the lead-up to the inauguration and did not become particularly robust during President Tinubu's first month in office.

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[2]Ibid
[3]All graphs have a linear trendline labeled as 'Linear.' The trend line applies only to the data indicated. In this graph, the trend line is for Overall Fatalities.
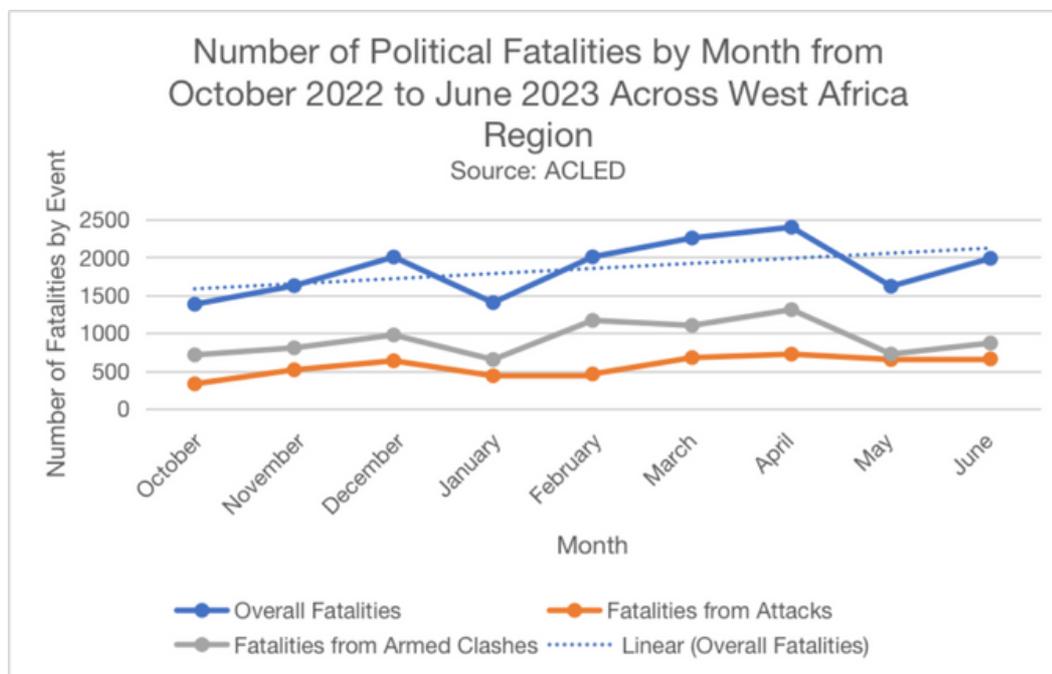[4]"Why Fuel Prices Increased to N617 per Litre - NNPCL," accessed July 22, 2023, https://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/610502-why-fuel-prices-increased-to-n617-per-litre-nnpcl.html.
[5]Amaka Anagor, "SMEs, Startups Facing Challenges as Nigeria's Inflation Soars – Jiji Nigeria," Businessday NG, July 21, 2023, https://businessday.ng/companies/article/smes-startups-facing-challenges-as-nigerias-inflation-soars-jiji-nigeria/.

Graph 1

Number of Political Fatalities by Month from October 2022 to June 2023 Across West Africa Region
Source: ACLED

(Line graph showing "Number of Fatalities by Event" (y-axis, 0 to 2500) by Month (x-axis, October through June). Series: Overall Fatalities, Fatalities from Attacks, Fatalities from Armed Clashes, and Linear (Overall Fatalities) trend line.)

Legend:
- Overall Fatalities
- Fatalities from Attacks
- Fatalities from Armed Clashes
- Linear (Overall Fatalities)

Burkina Faso experienced a steady rate of armed clashes between the military and armed non-state groups, but a decline in fatalities due to attacks. This could indicate that the military initiatives employed by the current president, in concert with the Malian military on their shared border, have been successful in reducing the number and severity of attacks from armed non-state actor groups on civilians. The G5 Sahel member states--Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger --have long worked together to fight jihadists across the Sahel, although Mali's commitment has wavered since the return to military rule instead focusing on bi-lateral partnerships.[6]

Mali has, similarly, seen steady rates of fatalities from attacks and a decline in fatalities from armed clashes from April through June 2023. Despite seeming success during the last few months in limiting the fatalities caused by armed insurgent groups, the number of fatalities has increased significantly over the past ten years leading the Malian government to request the evacuation of the UN peacekeeping mission, which was unanimously approved by the UN Security Council.[7] Beyond the dissatisfaction by the Malian authorities that MINUSMA was not playing an active fighting role but rather interested in freedoms, the mission itself was also at the end of its mandate and required a
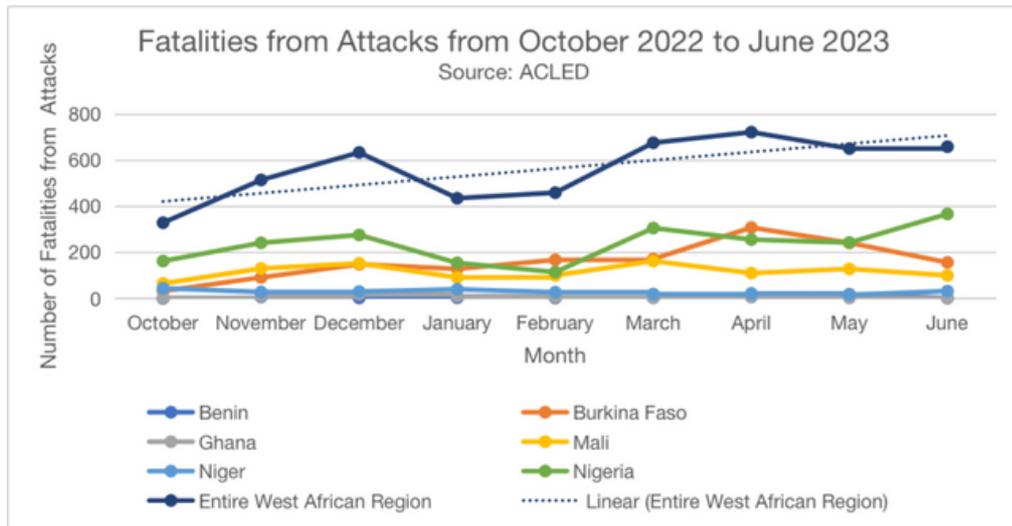
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[6]"Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel," Report of the Secretary General (United Nations Security Council, May 9, 2023), 5.
[7]"Mali and the UN: Why Peacekeepers Are Being Told to Leave," BBC News, February 17, 2022, sec. Africa, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60419799; "UN Security Council Ends Mali Peacekeeping Mission | Africanews," accessed July 22, 2023, https://www.africanews.com/2023/06/30/un-security-council-ends-mali-peacekeeping-mission/.
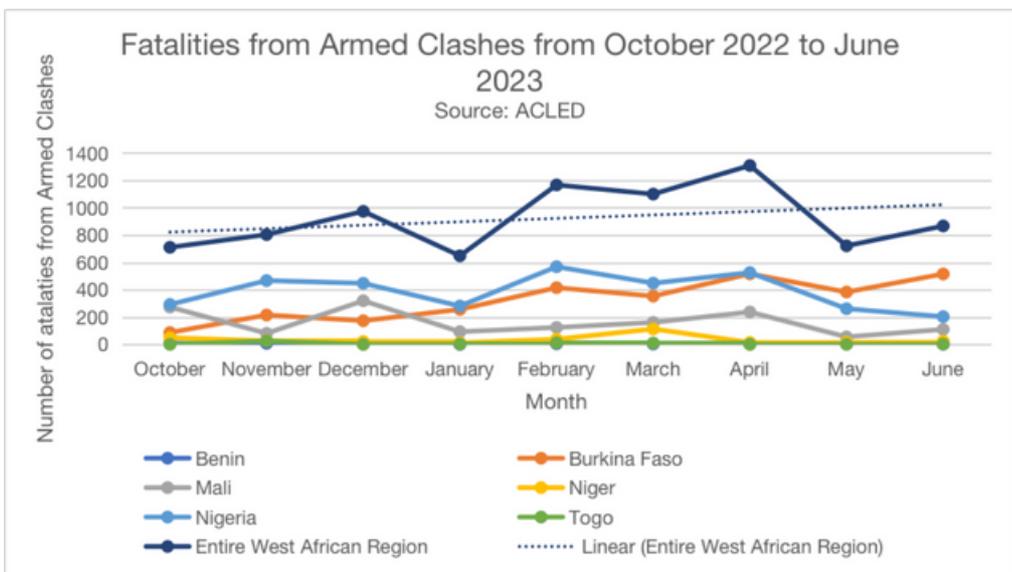
decision to remove the UN Peacekeeping mission results in more successful campaigns against militant groups and less civilian casualties.

Graph 2

Fatalities from Attacks from October 2022 to June 2023
Source: ACLED

Graph 3

Fatalities from Armed Clashes from October 2022 to June 2023
Source: ACLED

Looting and Property Damage

Incidences described as 'looting and property damage' in the ACLED database focus mostly on the times where this has occurred outside of common peaceful political protests which turn violent.[8] While the number of looting and/or property damage incidences has continued to decline significantly over the last nine months, there are still a number of incidences to report. Burkina Faso and Mali reported the most incidences of looting and property damage during this time period. According to the ACLED data, they were almost entirely executed by the militant groups known as IS Sahel, JNIM, and Dan Na Ambassagou. These groups entered villages or stopped vehicles on the road to steal items necessary for their continued survival and destroyed homes, cars, and livestock in the process. It is unsurprising that the four nations with the most incidences of looting and property damage, as defined by ACLED, are the nations most engaged in battling militants. Therefore, the decline in these incidences over time is a testament to the work of the country's respective militaries and the work they are doing to combat jihadists. The decline over time in incidences such as these is promising.

Graph 4:

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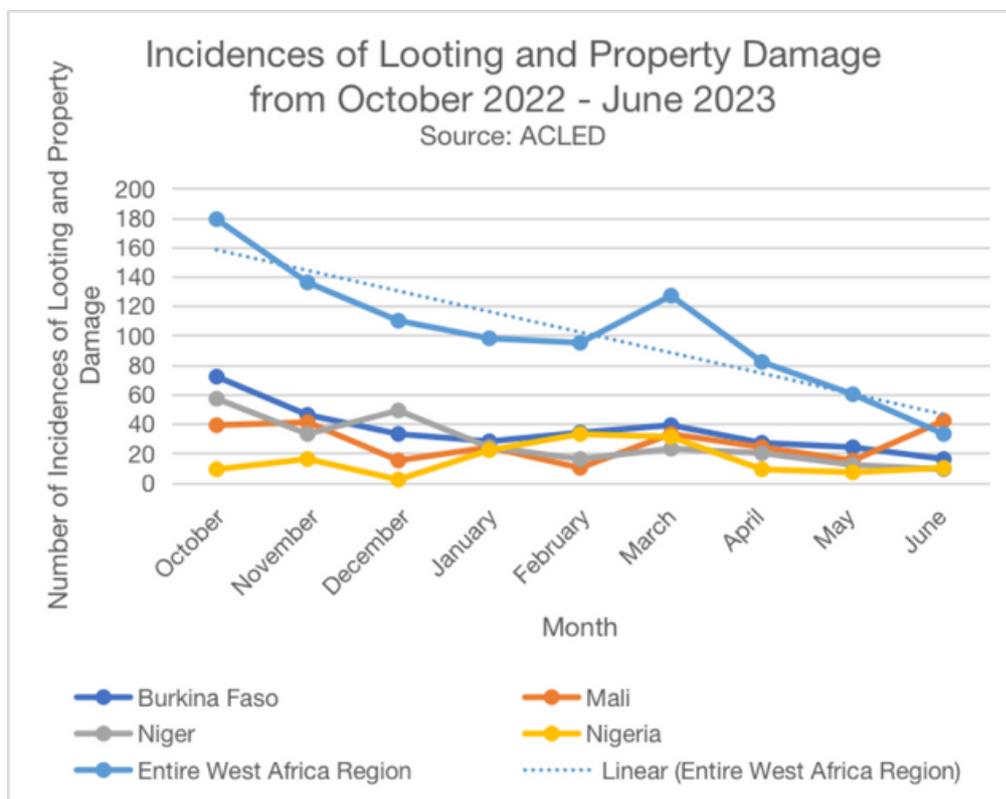
[8]Incidences of protest which turn violent are coded as 'mob violence' and are discussed in the next section.

Mob Violence

Unlike incidences deemed to be looting and property damage, mob violence focuses on the times violence has occurred only within a large group setting. The West African region has been home to a seemingly increased number fo protests. In Senegal, fears that President Sall would circumvent the consittution and run for a third term were bolstered by the jailing of his political rival, Ousmane Sanko, with a two year sentence for the crime of courrpting the youth, a misdemeanor charge for encouraging the debauchery of a person under the age of 21.. Sonko supporters and those who feared democratic backsliding took to the streets in droves leading to significant destruction of property and 16 deaths.[9] President Sall's annoucement that he would not seek a third term, on July 4, was welcomed and praised by Senegalese and world leaders alike. It is hopeful that riots will subside as Senegal moves toward its 2024 elections. During the last three months of complete available data, almost all of the 16 incidences of mob violence reported were attributed to clashes with police and/or were politically motivated. Despite these widely watched protests, the number of mob violence incidences in Senegal were not enough to register as one of the countries in West Africa with the most incidences from April – June 2023 (see graph 5).

While some mob violence is due to peaceful protesets turning violent, some is made up of a mob of people engaged in vigilantsm, seeking to right a perceived wrong done to themselves or their community. This has resulted in deaths across the region and accounts for almost all of the 38 mob violence incidences in Ghana from April through June. In Ghana, these incidences often involve a mob attacking an individual accused of a crime (such as kidpnapping a child or theft), or a mob attacking a group of people when a communal wrong, such as land theft, is perceived. Similar incidents make up the majority of mob violence incidences in Benin and Guinea with land disptues being the most common cause.

During the months of May and June, 2023, Sierra Leone witnessed an increase in incidences of mob violence with thirteen total incidences reported. All of these incidences were politically motived attacks on politicians,

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[9]"Senegal's Macky Sall Rules out Third Term after Deadly Protests | Politics News | Al Jazeera," accessed July 22, 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/4/senegals-macky-sall-rules-out-third-term-after-violent-unrest.

political party headquarters, or people siding with specific political parties. This is unsurprising given that the rise in these incidences coincided with the leadup to the June 24, 2023 presidential elections. Unlike Senegal, these did not start as peaceful protests which turned deadly. Instead, mobs formed with the express purpose of seeking some form of political retribution. In this way, the incidences experienced in Sierra Leone mirror the process of mob violence in Ghana, Benin, and Guinea. With the elections now concluded, one would expect to see incidences of mob violence diminish in the coming months.

Graph 5:

Incidences of Mob Violence From October 2022 - June 2023
Source: ACLED
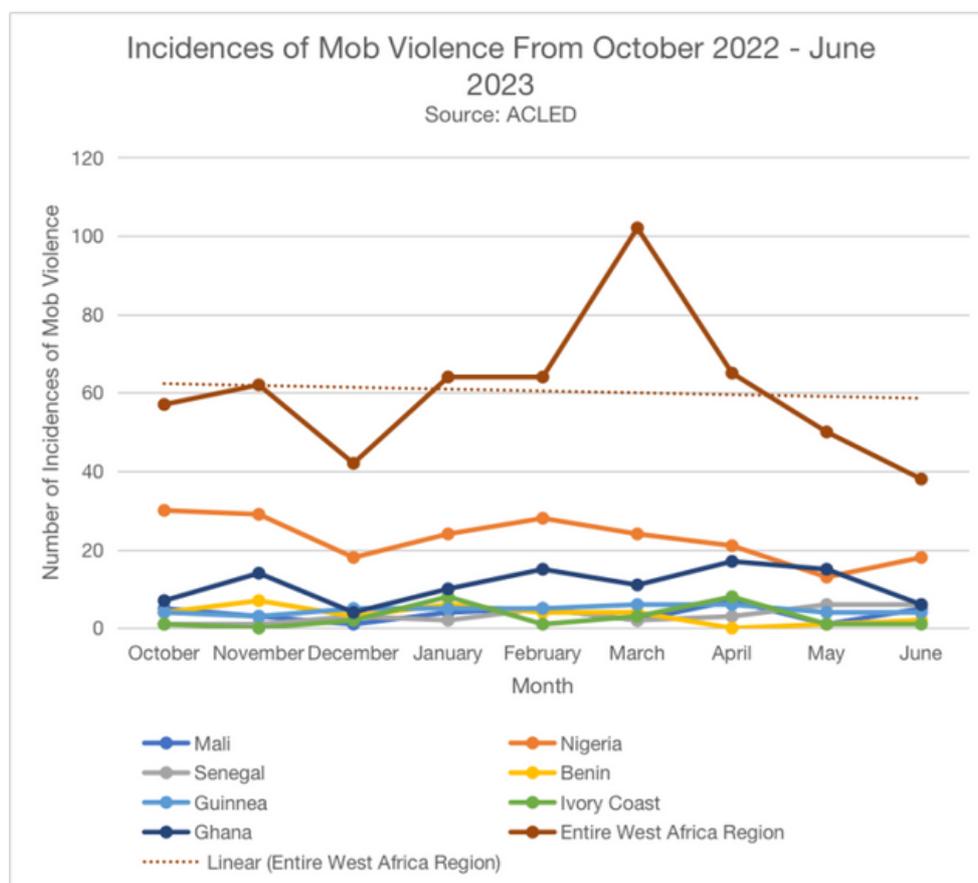
Abductions

Abductions are a common tactic used by militant groups across West Africa. However, the ways in which abductions occur differ depending on the

country and the militant group. Over the nine months between October 2022 and June 2023, the overall minimum number of people abducted in West Africa has slowly declined from 372 in October 2022 to 314 in June 2023. Notably, in January and March, Nigeria experienced a huge drop off in the number of people abducted, likely due to the general and state-level elections in January and March, respectively, the limits on access to cash, and fuel scarcity making it difficult and undesirable to kidnap large numbers of people. However, the number of people abducted immediately bounced back to higher numbers once these elections were completed.

ACLED data tracks the incidences where abductions occur and provides notes as to what occurred. These notes often include the number of people abducted and whether a ransom was known to have been requested and/or if the abductee had been released. These are based on news reports of the incidents. Unfortunately, many of these incidents have an unknown number of abductees. Therefore, Graph 6 shows the minimum number of people that were abducted in the countries where abductions are most common using the available numbers provided within the ACLED dataset. Incidences where an unknown number of people were abducted were not included in this number. For incidences where a range of numbers were provided (i.e., 4-6 people were abducted), the minimum number was included in the count. Additionally, information about the abductees and abductors is often provided including the gender of those abducted and any additional theft or damage which may have occurred during the process of the abduction. This information provides interesting insight into how different militant groups in different countries behave regarding abductions.

The nations with the most abductions were Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Benin. Nigeria has a higher minimum number of abductees each month, outpacing the other nations significantly. In Nigeria, there are two main types of abductions. The first are abductions carried out by terror organizations such as ISWAP and Boko Haram. These abductions appear to target women and children to be forcefully brought into their organizations. Ransoms are not demanded when these abductions occur, and the families of the abductees rarely hear from their loved ones or the abductors while the abductee is being held captive. Most often, abductees are only freed during military operations.

The second form of abduction that is common in Nigeria is abductions for ransom executed by bandit groups. These groups target whomever is easily accessible, often storming villages with guns and abducting large groups of people. In these scenarios, ransom is usually requested within a short time and captives are released upon receipt of the ransom. A third type of abduction occurred during the election season – political abductions targeting politicians and/or their family members. These are not as common but did occur, predominantly in the South-South and Southeast regions during the months surrounding the elections. It is also worth noting that abductors in Nigeria often destroy property and livestock. This is true no matter the affiliation and motivations of those doing the abducting. Their goal is seemingly not to replenish their resources, but to focus on the people and the money which can be gained during this exercise.
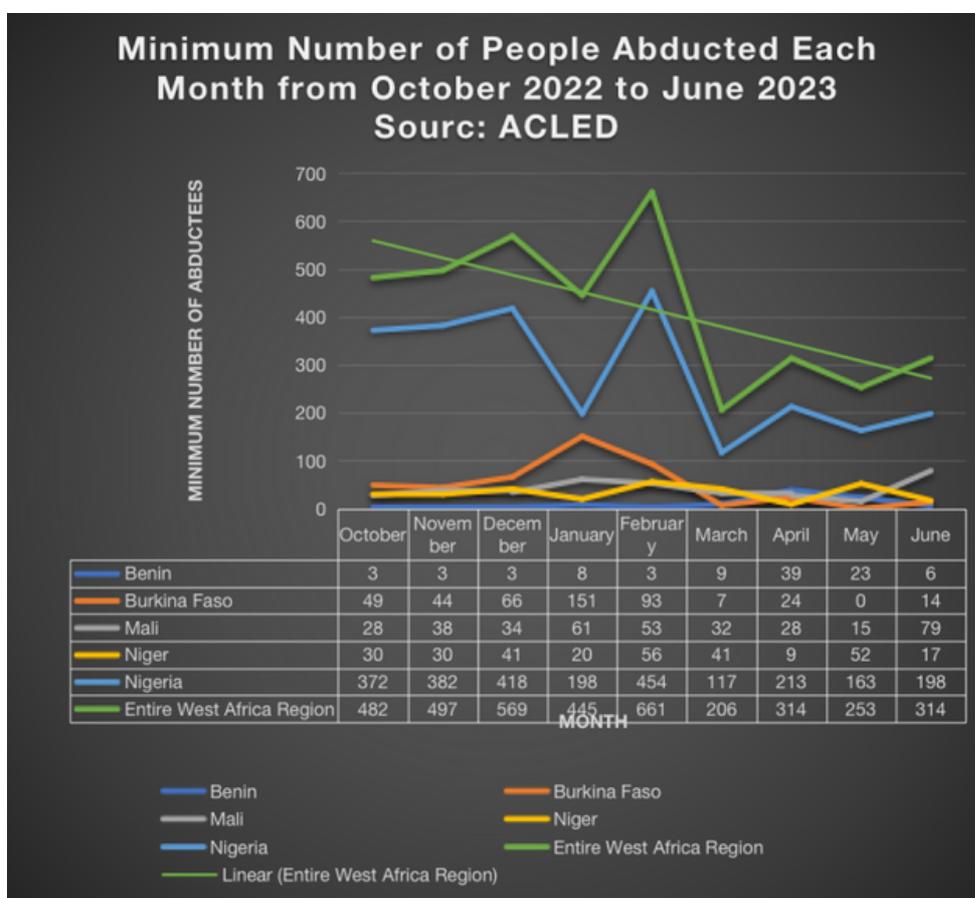
Contrary to the how abductors in Nigeria behave, abductors in Mali keep the livestock, cars, and any other material resources they can take when abducting people. Almost all abductions in Mali are done by JNIM. Given the information provided within the data, it appears that the JNIM terrorist organization use abductions as a tactic to fill their coffers and address their material needs whereas Boko Haram and ISWAP in Nigeria use abductions to fill their ranks and join their organization. JNIM abductions are usually targeted and only take one or two people at a time. Abductees may be targeted for their property or goods, their political affiliations, their standing in the community, or the services they may be able to provide the militants. Many are released quickly after the needs of the group have been met. Noticeably, JNIM has, on several occasions, kidnapped healthcare workers both at clinics and hospitals or during their commute. Given the way JNIM appears to be operating, it would be safe to intuit that these abductions are tactical and meant to provide medical care to wounded or sick JNIM members.

Benin had not been known for adductions having a minimum number of abductees less than 10 from the months of October 2022 through March 2023. However, in April, the minimum number of abductees spiked jumping to 39 and lowering slightly to 23 in May before dropping back down below 10. After further exploration, it appears that most of the abductions occurred within a 30-minute drive from the Nigerian or Burkinabe borders. This

suggests that these kidnappings do not indicate the start of home-grown terrorism, but instead may be a spillover effect from the events happening in neighboring countries. The rise in abductions in Benin correlates to a decrease in abductions in Nigeria and Burkina Faso. It is likely that terrorists crossed the border from either country to avoid actions being taken by the military forces of their 'home' countries.

Graph 5:

Minimum Number of People Abducted Each Month from October 2022 to June 2023
Sourc: ACLED

	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June
Benin	3	3	3	8	3	9	39	23	6
Burkina Faso	49	44	66	151	93	7	24	0	14
Mali	28	38	34	61	53	32	28	15	79
Niger	30	30	41	20	56	41	9	52	17
Nigeria	372	382	418	198	454	117	213	163	198
Entire West Africa Region	482	497	569	445	661	206	314	253	314

Conclusion

The West African region has some reason to remain positive. Overall, fatalities related to political violence have decreased over the past nine months. Activities often not associated with fatalities which are still known to cause terror within the community such as mob violence, looting and destruction of property, and abductions have also decreased during this time.

Understanding the ways in which these tactics are utilized by various groups within each country provides a roadmap for working to dismantle these activities altogether.

The biggest challenge in the fight against insurgency remains the lack of effective collaboration between border countries. Every time there is a more vigorous effort in one country, insurgents find a safe haven in border countries where there is a bit of laxity in security efforts. Countries in West Africa need to adopt a multi-national approach to effectively combat the movement of terrorists, drugs and small arms and light weapons across borders. This could be achieved through enhanced joint military operations, intelligence sharing and with traditional authorities of border communities working together closely across the region. Also, the successes by the military are often short-lived because there is often a lack of a strategy to keep reclaimed territories safe. In many instances, once a territory has been reclaimed, there is a rush to clear the area before moving onto the next mission. This leaves the reclaimed territories vulnerable to reprisal attacks, deepening community distrust in the security agencies and shifting allegiances toward terrorist groups. Leaving a small cadre of soldiers in each reclaimed territory would ensure the protection of these local communities. However, countries across West Africa remain dangerously under-manned due to the growing insurgent networks and the increased need for security personnel.

Counter-terrorism efforts will record remarkable success if countries can halt the movement of non-state armed groups between locations. To this end, it has become expedient to track fuel supply chains within and between border countries. In the future, large purchases of fuel not being used for cars, or any known legitimate business should be closely monitored. Fuel supply monitoring should be paired with the monitoring of the sales and registration of motorbikes across West Africa. Following the current marking system for civilian guns, motorbike parts should also be marked for identification beyond just the basic paperwork and factory markings currently in use.

The region's governments need to strengthen their non-kinetic security components and adopt a 'whole of society' approach such as appropriating the powers of traditional institutions for conflict mitigation, management and resolution.

This can be achieved through the development of community resilience strategies such as training of community leaders on early warning signals, intelligence gathering, and effective means for seeking support during and after attacks by insurgents. To be successful, there is a need to work with local community structures to develop strategic communications in local languages aimed at de-radicalizing violent groups and to encourage communities to cooperate with the formal authorities to combat banditry in the region. This will require deeper and more systematic engagements with traditional and religious leaders that understand the intricacies of the security dynamics where they live.

Ultimately, behaviours that are rewarded would be repeated and those which are punished would fade into oblivion. All segments of the society must work together to ensure that negative behaviours are punished, and good behaviours are rewarded. The criminal justice system must be strengthened at all levels with priority placed on the investigative and prosecutorial capacities of the judiciary and the police. Crimes within communities that serve as a rallying point for the mobilization of groups into violence should be swiftly prosecuted and perpetrators punished in accordance with the law. Impunity perpetuates violence.

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