



Centre for Democracy & Development
Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

WEST AFRICA

SECURITY TRACKER

FEBRUARY 2025

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WITH SPECIAL THANKS

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data
Project (ACLED)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa) is a nonprofit organisation committed to advancing democracy, security, and development in West Africa through research, advocacy, and strategic analysis. This report is a reflection of that mission, providing independent, data-driven insights into security trends in the region.

The West Africa Security Tracker is made possible through rigorous analysis and the use of high-quality data. We acknowledge the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) for supplying the foundational data that informs this report.

CDD-West Africa upholds the values of quality, independence, and impact in its research. The unwavering support of its leadership ensures that work on West Africa's security landscape remains rigorous, timely, and actionable.



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Executive Summary

The February 2025 West Africa Security Tracker documents a persistently volatile security landscape across the region, with 845 incidents leading to 1,678 fatalities, a 27.8% decrease from January. Despite this decline, the threat posed by insurgencies, communal violence, and criminal networks remains deeply entrenched.

Nigeria emerged as the most impacted country, recording 329 incidents and 554 deaths, driven by armed banditry, insurgent activity, and widespread abductions, particularly in the North West. Mali and Burkina Faso followed closely, both grappling with expanding jihadist violence and weak state control. The report highlights increasing insecurity in Benin, Ghana, and the Ivory Coast, where communal clashes, extremist spillovers, and mob justice reflect emerging threats in states previously considered stable. Particularly in Ghana, the North East and Upper East regions experienced escalating land, chieftaincy, and ethnic disputes.

Patterns of violence reveal that armed clashes were the most lethal, accounting for over half of all deaths. Additionally, coordinated attacks, abductions, and mob violence intensified public fear and demonstrated the growing sophistication of non-state actors. Peaceful protests, however, indicate ongoing civic engagement despite the unrest.

Key actors include state forces, jihadist groups (notably JNIM and Islamic State affiliates), communal militias, and unidentified armed groups. State militaries were responsible for 37% of deaths, raising concerns about civilian harm during counterinsurgency operations. Security operations in countries like Nigeria, Mali, and Niger recorded tactical gains, including militant surrenders, weapons seizures, and the dismantling of insurgent camps. Yet, these efforts remain insufficient in the absence of political will, socioeconomic reforms, and regional cooperation.

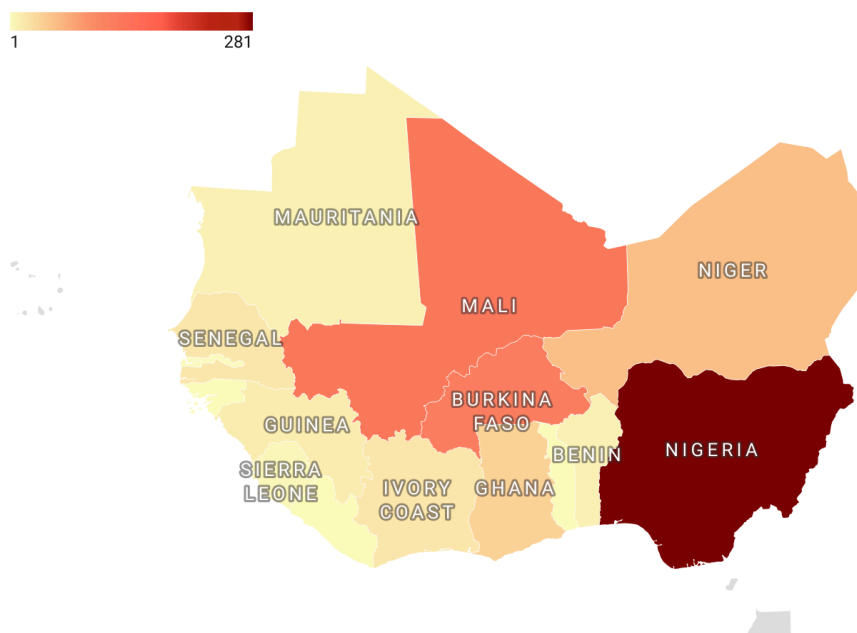
The report concludes that while fatalities decreased in February, the structural drivers of violence, poor governance, economic exclusion, and fragile institutions remain unaddressed. Without a shift toward comprehensive and preventive strategies, the region risks further deterioration.

General Overview

West Africa remains a region where security challenges shape the lives of millions, influencing economies, governance, and daily existence. The February West Africa security tracker revealed a region still enmeshed in violence, insurgencies, and political instability across multiple countries. According to Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), 845 security incidents were recorded during the month, resulting in over 1,678 fatalities. However, this marks a bit of progress from January 2025, as the data shows a 27.8% decrease from the 1,873 fatalities reported in January 2025.¹ Despite the seeming decrease, the pattern of violence and the capabilities of the non-state actors remain the same.

Looking ahead, the question remains: Can West Africa reclaim its security, or will February's grim statistics become the norm? The creeping nature of insecurity suggests that even nations currently experiencing relative peace must take proactive steps to prevent a descent into chaos. As conflicts persist and insurgents adapt, the region stands at a crossroads; one path leads toward strengthened cooperation and resilience, while the other risks deeper entrenchment into cycles of violence.

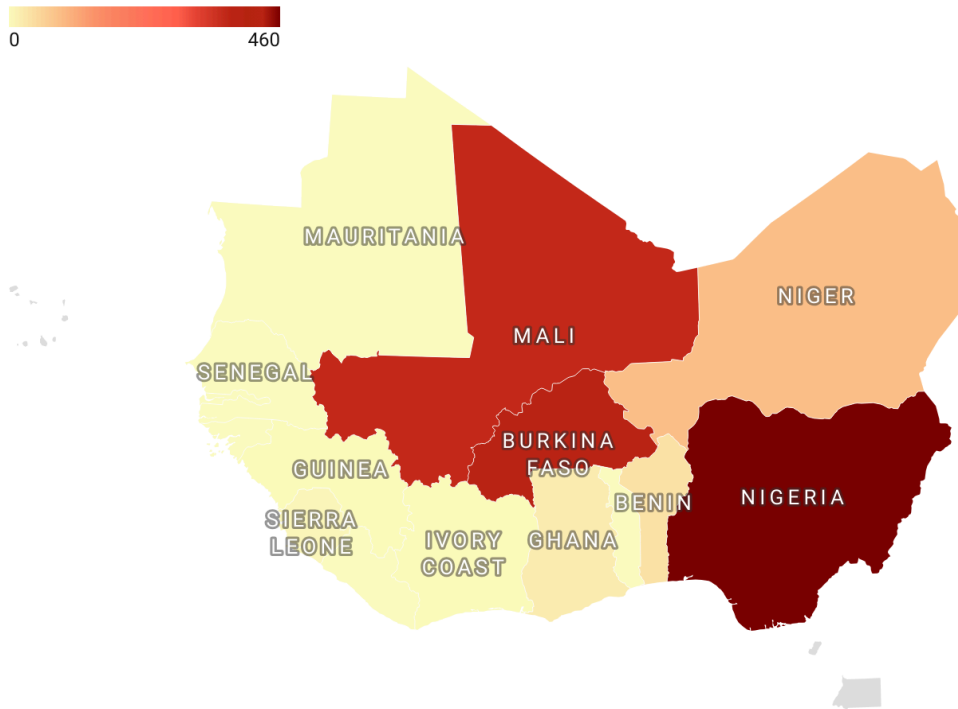
Figure 1: Conflict Incidents Across West Africa – February 2025



Source: ACLED • Created with Datawrapper

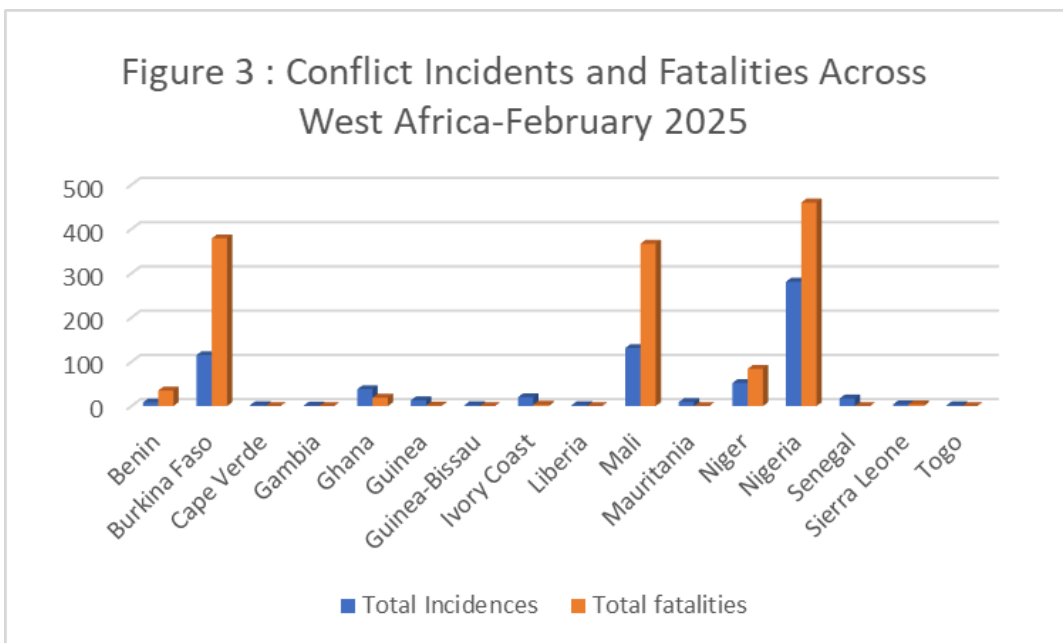
¹ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project: <https://acleddata.com/data/>

Figure 2: Conflict Fatalities Across West Africa – February 2025



Source: ACLED • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 3 : Conflict Incidents and Fatalities Across West Africa-February 2025

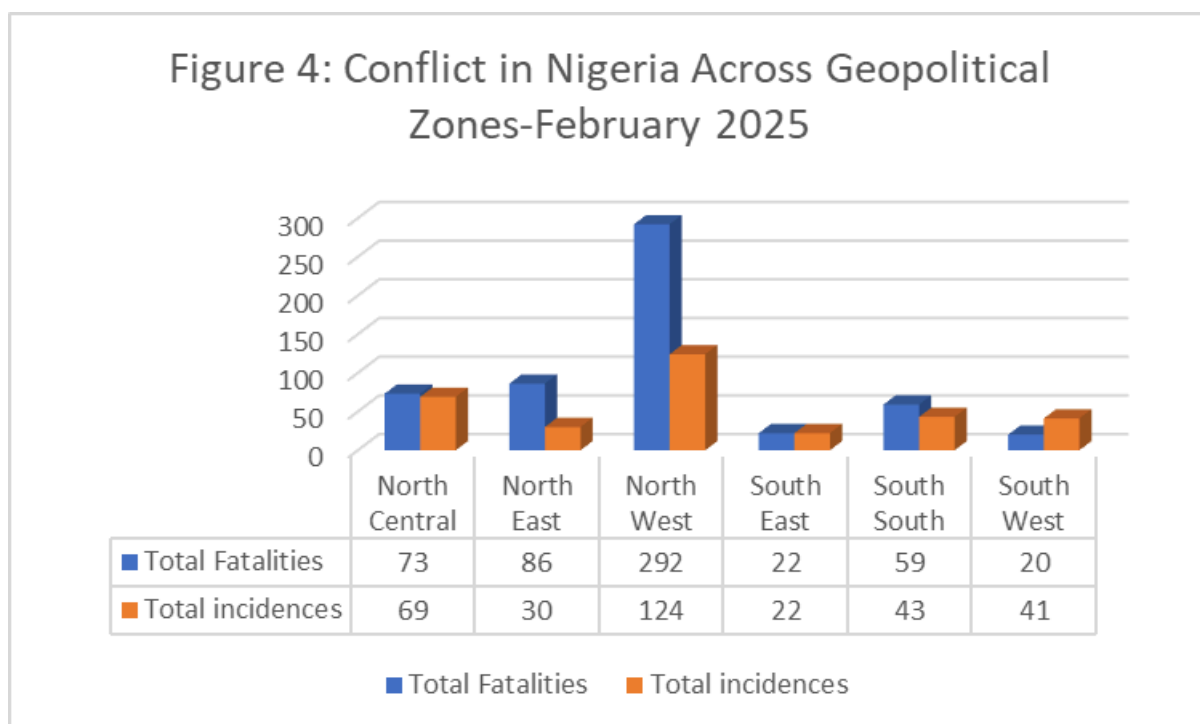


Source: ACLED, February 2025

High Impact Countries

Nigeria

Nigeria was the most impacted by conflict in February 2025, with 329 incidents resulting in 554 fatalities, accounting for 33% of all recorded deaths in the region.² From the far northern regions plagued by Boko Haram insurgents to the central belt regions, where communal violence festers, Nigeria remains a flashpoint of unrest. Attacks on villages, ambushes on security forces, and a surge in kidnappings highlighted the severity of the crisis. Armed banditry continues to be a dominant threat, with well-organized criminal groups moving between states unchecked, orchestrating widespread terror. Within Nigeria, the North West region suffered the most, with 292 fatalities from 124 conflict incidents, with Zamfara State being the hardest hit. Meanwhile, the South East region recorded the fewest incidents in the country during the month, while the South West recorded the lowest fatality rate.



Source: ACLED, February 2025

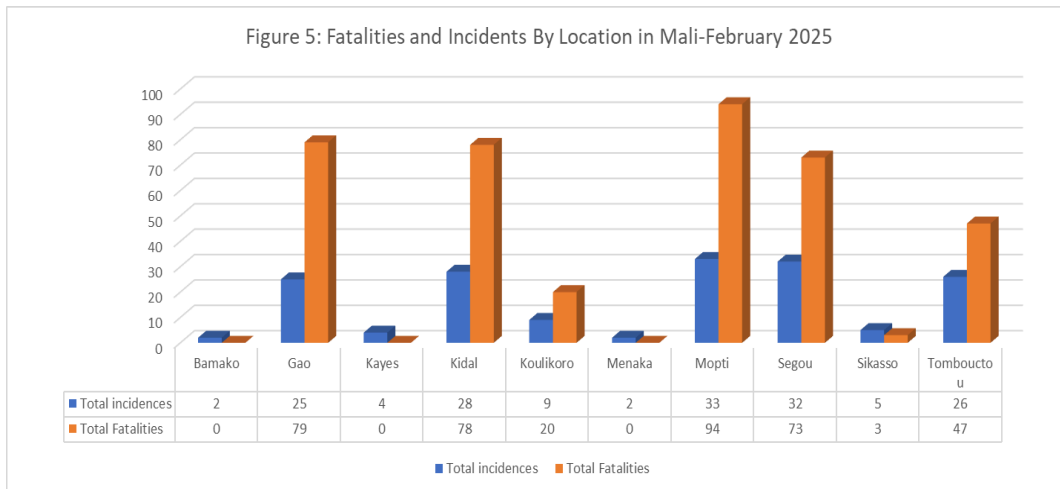
Mali

Mali followed Nigeria with 166 incidents leading to 394 deaths, accounting for 23.48% of the fatalities in West Africa.³ The familiar chaos of jihadist insurgencies, ethnic conflicts, and fragile state control continued to define its security narrative. The central and northern regions of the country remain battlefields where government forces, militant groups, and international peacekeeping missions clash in an unending struggle. The Malian government

² Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project: <https://acleddata.com/data/>

³ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project: <https://acleddata.com/data/>

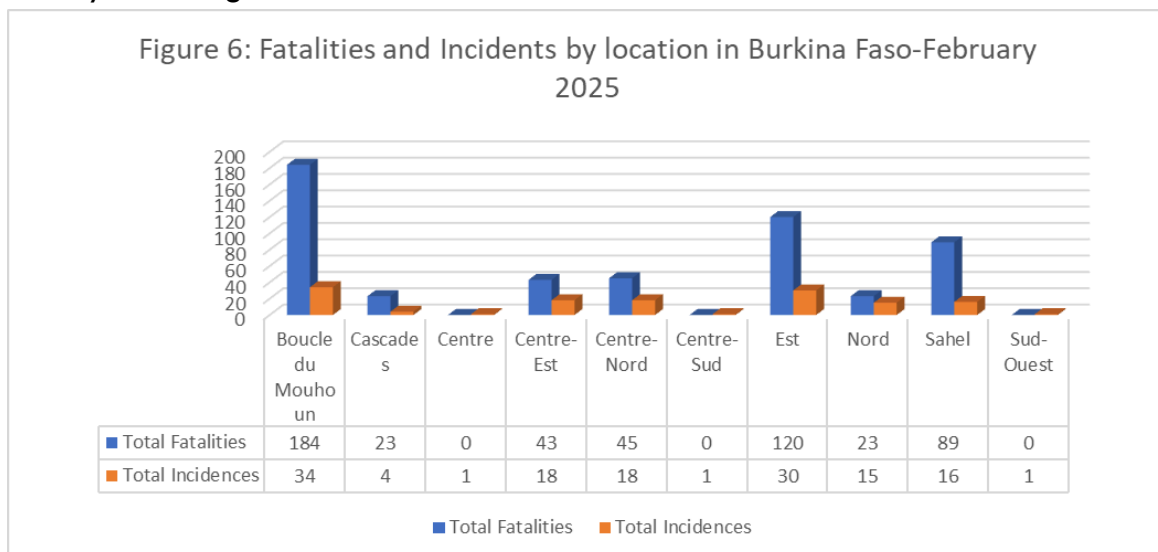
has fought back, but with limited success, as terrorist factions expand their operations, drawing new territories into the web of violence.



Source: ACLED, February 2025

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso ranked third in the high-impact countries with a record of 138 incidents that claimed 527 lives, contributing 31.4% to the total death count in West Africa for February 2025⁴. In recent years, the country has transitioned from being a relatively peaceful state to one where terror groups operate with impunity. From the borders of Mali and Niger to the central regions, militants continue to execute coordinated attacks on civilians, military personnel, and infrastructure.⁵ The growing inability of the Burkinabé government to contain these attacks raises questions about the long-term security of the region.



Source: ACLED, February 2025

⁴ ACLED: <https://shorturl.at/DNy53>

⁵ ReliefWeb: <https://shorturl.at/ZvAyA>

Benin Republic

Benin Republic recorded 27 incidents resulting in 71 fatalities, accounting for 4.1% of all deaths in the region for February.⁶ The violence ranged from communal clashes to jihadist attacks and security force operations. On 23 February, a confrontation in Basso (Kalale, Borgou) escalated after a dispute over theft led to the death of one individual. The violence that followed resulted in six more deaths, several injuries, and the burning of huts before security forces intervened. On 15 February, JNIM militants attacked a military position near the border with Niger, triggering a battle in which 23 people, including six soldiers and 17 attackers, were killed.⁷ JNIM later claimed responsibility, releasing images of seized weapons, including mortars and Kalashnikov rifles. Further insecurity was evident on 7 February when Beninese forces killed four civilians in Darkikou (Banikoara, Alibori), accusing them of collaborating with militant groups. The night before, suspected JNIM militants executed two elderly men in Tanongou (Tanguieta, Atacora), allegedly for criticizing those who listened to jihadist preaching in their village.

While the Benin Republic has not traditionally been a hotspot for extremist violence, recent trends suggest an increasing spillover from neighboring Sahelian conflicts. The larger picture remains grim. The porous borders of West Africa exacerbate the problem. Criminal networks, insurgents, and arms traffickers move freely between countries, making it difficult for any single nation to tackle security threats in isolation.

⁶ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project: <https://acleddata.com/data/>

⁷ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project: <https://acleddata.com/data/>

Spillover and Emerging Conflict Zones

Ghana

Ghana, often hailed as a stable West African democracy, saw 26 incidents with 43 deaths, accounting for just 2.56% of regional fatalities. Yet, even these figures raise concerns. What once seemed like distant conflicts in the Sahel are now knocking at the doors of coastal states. The North East Region, particularly Bunkpurugu and Mamprusi West, emerged as the most affected areas, aligning with reported chieftaincy conflicts and land disputes. These areas, located near Ghana's border with Burkina Faso and Togo, highlight the potential influence of cross-border tensions on local conflicts. The data suggests that Ghana's security challenges were largely driven by localized disputes escalating into deadly confrontations alongside a rising trend in mob justice.

On 28 February, armed men set fire to properties and killed three residents in Nanik near Bunkpurugu (Bunkpurugu Yonyo, North East) following renewed tensions between the Nanik and Bimbagu communities. This incident underscores the persistent land and communal disputes affecting the region, which shares proximity with Burkina Faso, potentially influencing migration patterns and security dynamics. The influence of mob justice also remained evident. On 25 February, a man was lynched by a crowd in Kasoa (Gomoa East, Central) after he was caught stealing clothes and toilet rolls. The incident reflects ongoing concerns about extrajudicial actions and the public's response to crime.

Ethnic tensions escalated on 20 February⁸ when Dagomba hunters and Konkomba community members clashed in Kumtumbiliyili, Zabzugu (Zabzugu, Northern). The violence erupted after the hunters set fire to the land, destroying a farmer's yam barn. The confrontation resulted in two deaths and multiple injuries, highlighting ongoing disputes over land use and resource control. Zabzugu's location near the Togo border raises concerns about cross-border resource competition and potential spillover of conflicts from neighboring communities.

Political unrest also surfaced, with an attack on the North East Regional Minister's convoy on 16 February in Walewale (Mamprusi West, North East).⁹ Protesters attempted to hold the minister hostage at the Chief's Palace and vandalized his vehicle in response to the imposition of a regional curfew. Security forces intervened, firing live rounds that killed one protester. This incident highlights tensions between local populations and government authorities over security measures in a region that plays a key role in border security and trade.

In a concerning trend, targeted attacks on transportation were reported. On 14 February, unidentified armed men set fire to a bus near Kukua (Mamprusi West, North East), killing four passengers who refused to leave the vehicle. Similarly, on 11 February, another attack

⁸ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project: <https://acleddata.com/data/>

⁹ CediRates: <https://cedirates.com/news/angry-youth-in-walewale-destroy-regional-ministers-vehicle-over-curfew-imposition/>

occurred in Wulugu (Mamprusi West, North East), where gunmen set fire to a bus and shot three fleeing passengers in what appeared to be a reprisal linked to the ongoing Bawku chieftaincy conflict. These attacks highlight growing insecurity along major transport routes connecting Ghana to Burkina Faso.

Further south, on 10 February, unidentified armed men ambushed a military-escorted bus at Bazua (Binduri, Upper East).¹⁰ The attack resulted in one fatality, as a civilian was run over by a military vehicle amid rising insecurity in the Upper East, largely influenced by the chieftaincy crisis in Bawku. Given Binduri's location near the Burkina Faso border, security forces may need to strengthen border surveillance to prevent further escalation. On 9 February, suspected communal militia members dressed in military uniforms stormed a residence in Tensungu, a suburb of Bawku (Bawku, Upper East), killing a woman and her two children.¹¹ This incident further exacerbated tensions linked to the region's long-standing traditional leadership disputes, with cross-border dynamics potentially playing a role in the flow of arms and militant activity.

Another deadly attack occurred on 5 February in Bunkpurugu (Bunkpurugu Yonyo, North East), where an unidentified armed group killed one resident and destroyed properties amid a suspected land dispute.¹² Bunkpurugu's proximity to Togo suggests the possibility of external actors or influences exacerbating local conflicts. These incidents in Ghana highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of insecurity in the country, with communal violence, ethnic clashes, political unrest, and targeted attacks on transportation emerging as key concerns. Many of the affected regions are located near Ghana's borders with Burkina Faso and Togo, raising concerns about cross-border influences, migration flows, and the spread of instability. The government faces increasing pressure to enhance security responses, particularly in border regions, to prevent further escalation and ensure long-term stability.

Ivory Coast

In February 2025, Côte d'Ivoire recorded 20 incidents, leading to 3 fatalities. Among these, 12 were classified as violent demonstrations, while five were peaceful protests. The data highlights key security concerns, particularly mob justice, targeted attacks, and the risks associated with illegal mining operations.

One of the most notable incidents occurred on 16 February 2025, when an unidentified armed group ambushed two police officers in Niakaramandougou (Hambol, Vallée du Bandama). The officers had been returning from a patrol in an illegal mining area when they were attacked.¹³ One officer was killed, while the other escaped. This attack underscores the

¹⁰ CITI NewsRoom: <https://shorturl.at/6JmSE>

¹¹ Modern Ghana: <https://shorturl.at/fKUYk>

¹² CITI NewsRoom: <https://shorturl.at/BhHm1>

¹³ International Crisis Group: <https://bit.ly/4jornQx>

persistent security threats linked to illegal mining, where armed groups and criminal networks operate in defiance of state authority. Such incidents reflect the broader challenge of securing resource-rich areas that are often contested by both state and non-state actors.

In Ivory Coast, mob justice remained a serious concern in February, with two recorded lynchings. On 6 February 2025, in Okouguie, near Agboville (Agnéby-Tiassa, Lagunes), a disabled man was lynched by a mob that accused him of witchcraft. Police later arrested two individuals in connection with the attack. This incident highlights how traditional beliefs, combined with weak law enforcement, continue to fuel extrajudicial killings in certain communities. Similarly, on 5 February 2025, a man was beaten to death in Elibou (Agnéby-Tiassa, Lagunes) after being accused of stealing a motorcycle. These cases suggest ongoing public distrust in formal legal institutions, leading some communities to resort to violent, informal justice mechanisms.

The 12 recorded violent demonstrations in Ivory Coast suggest a high level of social and political unrest. While the exact causes varied, these protests likely stemmed from economic grievances, governance-related dissatisfaction, and localized disputes. In contrast, five peaceful protests indicate that while tensions exist, not all demonstrations escalate into violence. The security landscape in February points to three key challenges: illegal mining-related violence, mob justice, and protest-driven instability. The ambush of police officers in an illegal mining zone signals the growing assertiveness of armed actors in resource-rich areas. The persistence of mob justice underscores gaps in law enforcement effectiveness and public trust in formal institutions. Also, the prevalence of violent demonstrations suggests a fragile social environment where political and economic grievances continue to drive unrest. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive security strategy, judicial reforms to curb mob violence, and proactive engagement with communities to prevent protest escalation.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone ranks third, with an equal number of incidents and fatalities, recording four incidents and four fatalities¹⁴ in February 2025. The most significant incident occurred on 10 February 2025, when a group of ethnic Limba youths attacked ethnic Mandingo residents in the New Jombohun Site Community, Kailahun, located in the Luawa District of Eastern Province. This violent assault resulted in the deaths of four civilians and left 40 others seriously injured.

During the attack, the assailants looted cattle and set fire to approximately 20 houses,¹⁵ causing widespread property destruction. This incident reflects deep-rooted ethnic tensions and competition over resources, which have historically fueled localized violence in Sierra Leone. The scale of the destruction points to a coordinated assault, raising concerns about the potential for further escalation of ethnic-based hostilities if not addressed through effective conflict resolution mechanisms. This episode underscores the ongoing risk of intercommunal

¹⁴ Sierraloaded:<https://sierraloaded.sl/local/ethnic-communities-clash-biriwa-chiefdom/>

¹⁵ Sierraloaded:<https://sierraloaded.sl/local/ethnic-communities-clash-biriwa-chiefdom/>

violence, particularly in areas where ethnic divisions and resource disputes intersect. Addressing these tensions calls for proactive conflict mitigation strategies, including community dialogue, an enhanced law enforcement presence, and targeted interventions to resolve resource-related grievances.

Guinea Conakry

In February 2025, Guinea Conakry recorded 13 incidents, one of which resulted in a fatality. On 25 February, a chilling event unfolded in the Koloma Soloprime neighborhood of Conakry (Matoto, Conakry) when a group of youths beat and lynched a man accused of attempted robbery. The man had been stopped by a property owner before encountering the group of youths, who decided to take matters into their own hands. This tragic incident highlights the dangers of mob justice and the volatile dynamics within communities where tensions and distrust can quickly escalate into violence. The brutal act reflects a deep-seated challenge in addressing crime and punishment outside formal legal channels, raising concerns about the potential for more such occurrences if underlying issues are not addressed.

Relatively Peaceful

Senegal

Senegal recorded 17 incidents but no fatalities. Senegal remains one of West Africa's most stable democracies.¹⁶ The country benefits from a strong tradition of democratic governance, regular peaceful transitions of power, and a resilient economy driven by agriculture, mining, and a growing service sector. Its well-trained military and security apparatus have been instrumental in maintaining internal order. However, challenges persist, particularly with the long-standing Casamance separatist movement in the southern region. While the conflict has significantly de-escalated in recent years, unresolved grievances still pose a risk of flare-ups under certain political conditions. Additionally, as a key regional player, Senegal remains vulnerable to instability in neighboring Mali and Guinea.

Mauritania

Mauritania recorded nine incidents in February but no fatalities. The country's relative stability is largely attributed to its strict border control measures and a strong military presence, which have effectively prevented jihadist infiltration from the Sahel. However, Mauritania's governance remains more authoritarian than fully democratic, and underlying ethnic tensions between the Arab-Berber elite and the Haratine (Black Mauritanian) communities continue to pose a risk. Additionally, given its geographical proximity to volatile regions, Mauritania remains susceptible to cross-border terrorism and militant activity.

Liberia

Liberia, with just five (5) recorded incidents and no fatalities, has made significant progress in maintaining peace since the end of its civil wars in 2003. Strengthened democratic institutions and peaceful elections have contributed to its stability, supported by international efforts from the UN and ECOWAS. Unlike many West African nations, Liberia does not face major threats from insurgencies or terrorism. However, economic vulnerabilities remain a concern. High unemployment rates and reliance on commodity exports create conditions for potential unrest, while instability in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea poses a risk of conflict spillover.

Cape Verde

Cape Verde also recorded only two (2) incidents with no fatalities, reinforcing its status as one of West Africa's most peaceful nations. As an island nation, it is naturally insulated from the land-based conflicts affecting the mainland. The country's strong democratic governance and high human rights standards further contribute to its stability. However, its strategic Atlantic location has made it a transit hub for drug trafficking, posing long-term security

¹⁶ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project: <https://acleddata.com/data/>

concerns. Additionally, its heavy dependence on tourism leaves the economy vulnerable to external shocks, such as global economic downturns and climate change.

With two recorded incidents and no fatalities, Guinea-Bissau remains relatively peaceful compared to conflict-ridden states in the region. Traditional governance structures, including local community leaders, play a significant role in conflict resolution. However, the country has a history of political crises and military coups, which continue to pose risks. Additionally, Guinea-Bissau is a known transit point for drug trafficking networks connecting South America and Europe, raising concerns about organized crime and corruption that could destabilize the nation in the future.

Togo

Togo, with just two (2) incidents and no fatalities, remains one of the region's quieter nations in terms of conflict. Its relatively strong state control has contributed to its security, but underlying political tensions and governance concerns persist. While Togo has largely avoided large-scale violence, past protests and government crackdowns suggest that political instability remains a potential flashpoint.

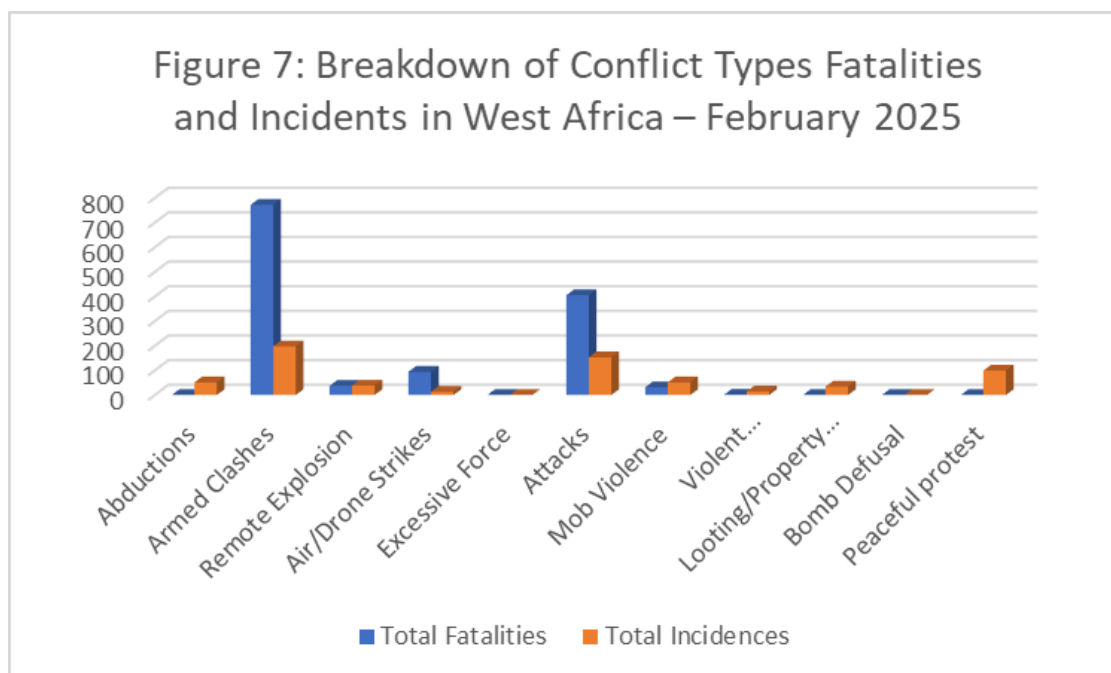
The Gambia

The Gambia recorded only one incident, a protest, with no casualties. Since the fall of Yahya Jammeh's authoritarian regime in 2017, the country has undergone significant democratic reforms. Its small geographic size makes security management more effective, while ECOWAS peacekeeping support has played a critical role in ensuring stability. Unlike some of its neighbours, The Gambia has largely avoided insurgencies and terrorist threats. However, political fragility remains a concern, with lingering tensions from the Jammeh era still influencing governance. Additionally, its economy's heavy reliance on tourism makes it vulnerable to external shocks and regional instability.

The peaceful countries in West Africa exhibit several key traits that contribute to their stability: strong governance structures, effective security measures, and diversified economies that reduce conflict triggers. However, they are not entirely free from risks. Political fragility, economic vulnerabilities, and transnational crime networks pose ongoing threats that could disrupt peace in the future. Understanding these dynamics is essential for sustaining stability and ensuring that these nations continue to serve as models of peace in the region.

Patterns of Violence in West Africa

These incidents were not uniform but ranged from full-scale armed clashes and remote explosions to abductions, targeted attacks, and violent demonstrations. The distribution of violence was far from equal, with some nations experiencing heightened unrest while others remained relatively calm.



Source: ACLED, February 2025

Armed clashes were the most prevalent form of violence, accounting for 28% of all recorded incidents and being responsible for a staggering 57% of all fatalities. These direct confrontations were concentrated in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Nigeria, three nations where insurgencies and militant activity continue to drive instability. In Burkina Faso, 64 clashes resulted in 258 deaths, while in Mali, 36 clashes left 191 people dead. Nigeria, the most volatile nation in the region, witnessed 79 clashes, which led to 248 fatalities. These figures highlight the relentless nature of fighting between government forces and insurgent groups, particularly in the Sahel, where control over territory remains fiercely contested.

Beyond open combat, explosive attacks and drone strikes were a persistent threat in the region, with 38 remote explosions and 13 air/drone strikes recorded in February. These methods of warfare, while fewer in number, were disproportionately deadly. Remote explosions alone accounted for 37 fatalities, while drone and airstrikes resulted in 94 deaths, demonstrating their effectiveness in asymmetric warfare. Mali was the epicenter of explosive violence, recording 23 incidents, followed by Burkina Faso and Niger, where roadside bombs and targeted drone strikes continued to be a major security concern.

Coordinated attacks, in which armed groups launched deliberate assaults on villages, security posts, and urban centers, were another dominant feature of February's violence.

These attacks accounted for 22% of all incidents and led to 30% of total deaths. Nigeria bore the brunt, with 86 attacks, followed by Mali (36) and Burkina Faso (12). These targeted operations suggest that militant groups remain well-organized, capable of striking key targets, and determined to assert their influence across different regions.

While large-scale battles and attacks dominated the conflict landscape, mob violence and civil unrest were also a growing concern, accounting for 9% of all incidents. In countries like Nigeria and Ghana, public frustration manifested in 65 separate incidents of violent demonstrations and communal clashes. Nigeria recorded 16 cases of mob violence and 3 violent demonstrations, while Ghana saw 12 cases of mob violence and 4 protests escalating into riots. These events, while less deadly than armed clashes, signal deeper societal tensions fueled by economic hardship, governance issues, and long-standing ethnic disputes. Fatalities from mob violence and demonstrations were lower than in other categories, accounting for just 2% of the total death toll, but their potential to spiral into larger security crises remains a pressing issue.

Abductions, a long-standing tactic used by criminal gangs and insurgents, remained a significant security concern. Nigeria was the most affected, with 48 kidnappings, reinforcing its status as a hotspot for ransom-driven crime. The human impact of these abductions extends beyond statistics, leaving families devastated and communities paralysed with fear. While abduction-related fatalities are difficult to quantify precisely, their psychological and socio-economic effects are undeniable.

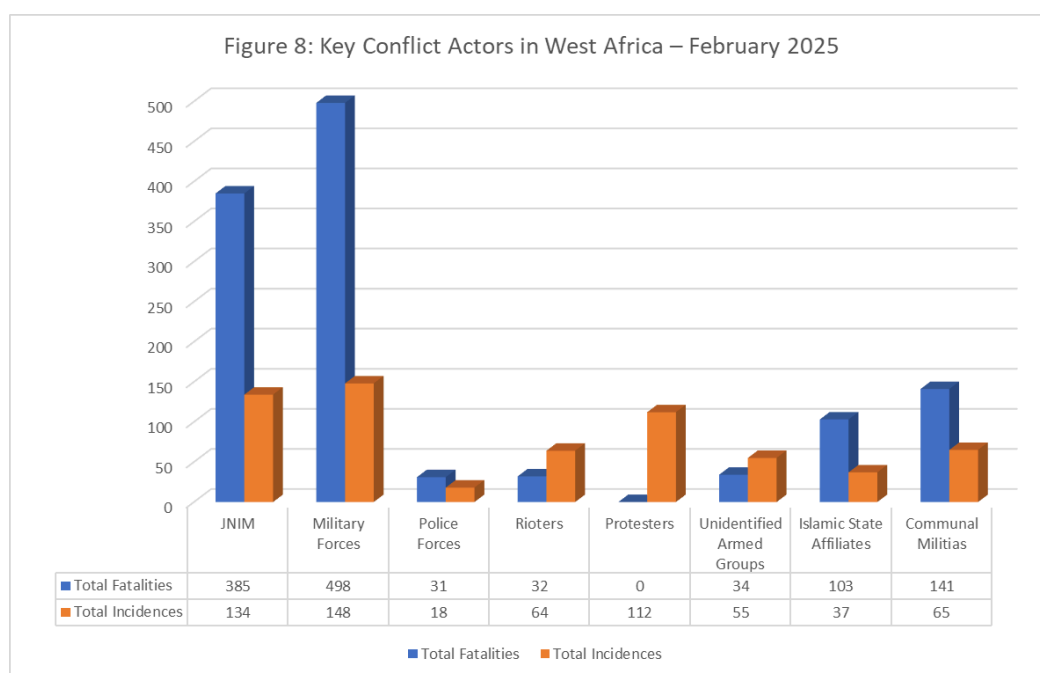
Looting and property destruction were also recorded, albeit on a smaller scale, contributing to instability in areas already suffering from conflict. 34 incidents of looting were reported, primarily in Niger, Mali, and Benin, where markets, homes, and public infrastructure were targeted. Though these incidents did not result in direct fatalities, they exacerbated economic distress and displacement, further deepening the crisis in affected regions.

Despite the violence, peaceful protests emerged as a counter-narrative to the chaos, with 99 recorded demonstrations, showing that civil engagement remains a key feature of West African political landscapes. Nigeria, despite being the hardest-hit nation in terms of violence, led in peaceful mobilization, recording 32 non-violent protests, followed by Ghana, Senegal, and Mauritania. These protests reflected demands for improved governance, economic relief, and social justice, proving that, even in the face of conflict, many West Africans continue to seek change through nonviolent means.

The security situation in West Africa remains precarious. February's data reveals that while large-scale insurgencies remain the primary driver of violence, civil unrest and organized crime are growing threats that cannot be ignored. The dominance of armed clashes and organized attacks highlights the entrenched nature of militant operations, particularly in the Sahel. Meanwhile, the rise in mob violence and protests signals a deeper, structural challenge, one that military responses alone may not be able to address.

Key Actors Driving West Africa’s Security Crisis (Conflict Types)

The actors involved in West Africa’s security crisis are as diverse as the conflicts themselves. February had 845 security incidents resulting in over 1,678 fatalities, which were driven by a complex interplay of state forces, extremist groups, communal militias, and civilian movements. Understanding who is behind these conflicts is crucial to analyzing trends, predicting future threats, and crafting effective responses. Whether through military operations, insurgent attacks, communal clashes, or civilian uprisings, the month’s violence was shaped by a broad spectrum of actors, each with different motivations and methods.



Source: ACLED, February 2025

State military forces were responsible for the highest share of fatalities, accounting for 37% of all deaths, with 498 recorded fatalities across 148 engagements. Military operations in Mali, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso were particularly intense. Mali witnessed 65 security-related incidents resulting in 174 fatalities, underscoring the persistent conflict between government forces and jihadist elements. Nigeria’s military was engaged in 48 incidents, leading to 182 deaths, making it the deadliest national force in the region. Burkina Faso saw 15 military-led incidents, which resulted in 90 fatalities. These figures highlight the growing militarization of conflict zones but also raise concerns about the effectiveness of these operations in curbing insurgencies.

Extremist groups continued to be a dominant force in February’s violence, with Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State-affiliated groups responsible for a significant portion of attacks and deaths. JNIM, the most active militant faction, accounted for 19% of all incidents and was linked to 385 fatalities, or 28% of total deaths. Burkina Faso

was the worst hit by JNIM, with 76 attacks leading to 254 deaths, followed by Mali, where 47 JNIM-related incidents resulted in 105 fatalities. These numbers reflect the group's entrenched influence in the Sahel, where it continues to challenge state authority and expand its reach. Islamic State-affiliated groups, while less active than JNIM, were responsible for 5% of total incidents but accounted for 8% of all fatalities. Their impact was most notable in Niger, where 21 recorded attacks led to 33 deaths, and Nigeria, where 7 attacks resulted in 11 fatalities. These groups have focused on targeting military and government installations, highlighting their strategic approach to destabilizing states through high-impact attacks.

Communal militias played a significant role in local conflicts, accounting for 9% of all incidents and 10% of total fatalities. These groups were particularly active in Nigeria, where 64 militia-related incidents resulted in 138 deaths, primarily from ethnic clashes and farmer-herder conflicts. The scale of communal violence in Nigeria underscores the growing threat of localized conflicts outside traditional insurgent battlefields. Ghana also saw smaller-scale militia activity, with one recorded incident leading to three deaths. The persistence of these clashes suggests that, while national governments focus on counterterrorism, intercommunal violence remains an unresolved challenge.

Unidentified armed groups were behind 8% of all recorded incidents, contributing to 3% of total deaths. The presence of 55 incidents with no clear attribution reflects the fluid nature of conflicts in West Africa, where shifting alliances and splinter factions operate beyond easy identification. These groups often carry out raids and ambushes, exploiting weak state control in border regions to evade detection and retaliation.

Civilian unrest also played a key role in February's conflict landscape, with rioters and violent protesters accounting for 9% of all incidents. Ghana recorded the highest number of riot-related incidents, with 17 cases, while Nigeria followed with 19, leading to 16 fatalities. Though less deadly than organized militant attacks, these protests indicate rising discontent over governance, economic instability, and security failures. The frequent escalation of demonstrations into violence suggests a lack of effective crowd control and growing frustration with state authorities.

The February data confirms that West Africa's conflicts are not only being fought by well-known extremist groups but also by a variety of actors, including state forces, armed civilians, and unidentified militias. The dominance of JNIM and Islamic State factions in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger highlights the ongoing challenges in the Sahel, while communal violence and urban unrest in Nigeria and Ghana suggest that instability is spreading beyond traditional conflict zones.

The key challenge facing West African governments is balancing counterterrorism efforts with addressing local conflicts. While military interventions remain necessary to weaken insurgent networks, long-term peace will require conflict resolution mechanisms that address communal disputes and economic disparities. Without a more comprehensive security strategy, February's trends may continue, pushing West Africa toward deeper fragmentation and prolonged instability.

Strategic Developments

In Nigeria, February 2025 saw a notable increase in security operations as the government intensified efforts to counter insurgency and mitigate threats from armed groups. The Nigerian military launched several key initiatives, including the demolition of a Zamfara militia camp in Garin Fakai (Shinkafi, Zamfara), where troops rescued women and children while seizing AK-47 rifles, RPG bombs, and large quantities of ammunition. Additionally, security forces intercepted two gunrunners from the Plateau Militia along the Jos-Barkin Ladi highway in Kassa (Barkin Ladi, Plateau), seizing a significant cache of weapons intended for armed groups.¹⁷

A major counterinsurgency milestone was the surrender of five Katsina militia kingpins and hundreds of their fighters in Batsari (Katsina). As part of a government-led peace initiative, they handed over their weapons and released hostages, signaling a strategic effort to reduce militia influence through negotiated disarmament. Meanwhile, the voluntary return of 1,542 refugees to Banki (Bama, Borno) from Chad indicated improved localized security conditions, facilitating the reintegration of displaced persons into their communities.

Further counterterrorism actions included the dismantling of an illegal militia camp in Niger State and an operation to defuse IEDs along the Bassa-Erena road near Kasmani village (Shiroro, Niger). While one device was successfully deactivated, the road was secured to prevent further attacks. These security-led initiatives highlight the state's commitment to disrupting insurgent networks, reclaiming contested areas, and restoring stability in affected regions. The ongoing challenge remains in ensuring that these efforts lead to long-term peace rather than temporary disruptions of militant activities.

In Mali, February 2025 saw intensified security operations and counterinsurgency efforts aimed at curbing insurgent activities and reclaiming contested areas. The Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) and Wagner forces conducted multiple operations targeting militant strongholds, including the seizure of weapons and dismantling of insurgent networks. On 27 February, two JNIM militants were killed while attempting to plant an IED in Dogofryba (Niono, Segou), preventing a potential attack on security forces. Additionally, FAMa reported seizing AK rifles, IED controls, and communication equipment, demonstrating ongoing efforts to neutralize the threat posed by explosive devices.¹⁸

Military forces also focused on disrupting militant logistics and supply routes. Throughout the month, FAMa and Wagner forces launched operations in Gao and Kidal, setting fire to grazing lands and targeting insurgent hideouts. These actions were part of broader efforts to deny militants access to essential resources and dismantle their operational capabilities. Meanwhile, the Malian military continued intelligence-driven strikes, targeting key militant hubs and deterring further expansion of armed groups.

¹⁷ DailyPost: <https://dailypost.ng/2025/02/10/military-troops-destroy-turjis-stronghold-in-zamfara-community/>

¹⁸ ABCNews: <https://abcnews.com.ng/jnim-strikes-again-deadly-ambush-in-malis-segou-region/>

Civilian security remained a priority, with security forces responding to displacement crises caused by insurgent threats. On 19 February, residents of Dianke (Niafunke, Tombouctou) fled following JNIM threats, prompting increased patrols in the area. In Timbuktu, FAMA announced the surrender of five FLA fighters who handed over weapons and ammunition, though this claim was disputed by FLA leadership. These developments highlight the ongoing struggle for control and influence between state forces and armed groups, as well as efforts to integrate former combatants where possible.

The February 2025 security developments in Mali reflect a continued commitment to counterinsurgency measures. While military operations have disrupted some insurgent activities, the persistence of militant threats and displacement crises underscores the complexity of achieving long-term stability in the region.

In Burkina Faso, February 2025 saw sustained security operations aimed at countering insurgent activities and safeguarding civilian populations. On 23 February, Burkinabe soldiers and volunteer fighters (VDP) successfully recaptured 80 stolen oxen from suspected JNIM militants in Pissila (Sanmatenga), marking an effort to combat economic disruptions caused by militant groups.¹⁹ This operation, which occurred without direct clashes, highlights the increasing efficiency of local defense forces in reclaiming stolen assets and limiting militant influence in rural areas.

Security forces also responded to insurgent taxation and extortion efforts. On 10 February, militants imposed illegal Zakat taxes on residents of Natiaboani (Fada Ngourma, Gourma), demanding payments ranging from 50,000 to 75,000 CFA. In response, Burkinabe forces increased patrols in the area to deter further economic coercion by armed groups. Meanwhile, in Gorom-Gorom (Oudalan), on 4 February, an armed group seized a transport bus, prompting heightened security measures along key transit routes to prevent further militant control over transportation networks.

Population displacement remained a concern, particularly in areas affected by insurgent activity. On 4 February, a large number of residents fled Djakarga (Soudougou, Koulpelogo) following an attack on the nearby village of Waldjoaga. This movement underscores the ongoing challenge of protecting vulnerable communities against militant violence. The Burkinabe military has since reinforced its presence in affected regions to provide greater protection and deter further displacements.

The security situation in Burkina Faso remains fragile, with ongoing efforts to counter militant taxation, reclaim stolen property, and enhance transit security. While security operations have seen some successes, the continuous threats posed by armed groups necessitate sustained military vigilance and improved coordination with local defense forces to ensure long-term stability.

¹⁹ NRC Factsheet: https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/fact-sheets/2025/factsheet_burkinafaso_feb2025.pdf

In Niger Republic, February 2025 saw a series of security operations aimed at dismantling militant networks, countering illegal activities, and improving national security. On 26 February, military forces conducted a large-scale operation in Agadez (Tchirozerine, Agadez), arresting 600 individuals to verify their identities and seizing several vehicles, bladed weapons, and recreational goods. This action was part of an increased effort to identify and disrupt militant infiltration within urban and semi-urban areas.

Military forces also focused on reclaiming stolen resources and preventing insurgent financing through cattle rustling. On 23 February, troops successfully recovered stolen cattle near Makal (Birni N’Konni, Tahoua) after locating the armed group responsible in a nearby cave. A similar operation on 20 February in Guero Banguia (Tera, Tillaberi) led to the recovery of looted livestock and the reinforcement of security in the area to prevent further incidents.

Defensive countermeasures were also prioritized, particularly against improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Military engineers successfully defused two IEDs near Kamrey I (Dogondoutchi, Dosso) on 21 February, preventing potential attacks along strategic infrastructure, including an oil pipeline. A similar operation between 6 and 8 February in Dyongore (Say, Tillaberi) saw the removal of additional IEDs planted by suspected JNIM militants, ensuring safer passage for security forces and civilians in the region.

Surrender and disarmament efforts also played a crucial role in counterinsurgency strategies. On 23 February, four ISWAP members surrendered to military forces in Toumour (Bosso, Diffa), and on 11 February, another four ISSP fighters laid down their arms in Ayorou (Tillaberi), alongside a woman, weapons, and military equipment. These developments were attributed to increasing military pressure on insurgent supply routes and command structures.

To further curb insecurity, the Nigerien government introduced strict security measures, including a motorcycle ban in five localities within Tahoua from 15 February to 15 May 2025, aimed at limiting the mobility of armed groups frequently using motorcycles for attacks. Additionally, the government reinforced regulations on NGOs operating in the country by establishing a technical monitoring committee to ensure alignment with national security priorities. Additionally, on 4 February, the government suspended the operations of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), withdrawing its authorization and ordering the closure of its offices without providing an official reason.²⁰ These operations and policy measures reflect Niger’s ongoing counterinsurgency efforts, with a focus on dismantling militant networks, protecting strategic resources, and reducing insurgent mobility. While security forces have made notable gains, the persistence of armed group activities underscores the need for sustained pressure and coordinated military actions.

²⁰ DW Global Media Forum:
<https://www.dw.com/en/niger-red-cross-ban-comes-amid-dire-humanitarian-situation/a-71533586>

In Benin Republic, security operations in February 2025 were centered on countering insurgent threats and protecting public infrastructure. The most notable incident occurred on 9 February, when suspected JNIM militants set fire to a public elementary school in Kara (Karimama, Alibori), destroying furniture and school materials. This attack underscores the vulnerability of educational institutions to militant activities and highlights the growing security concerns in the northern regions bordering Niger and Burkina Faso.

While no immediate security response was reported, authorities have been monitoring militant activity in the region to prevent further destruction. The attack in Karimama aligns with a broader trend of insurgents targeting schools to disrupt education and spread fear among local communities. Given its proximity to active conflict zones, the Benin Republic remains at risk of further militant incursions. Security forces are expected to reinforce surveillance and response measures in vulnerable areas to counter the growing threat posed by extremist groups. These developments indicate an increasing need for enhanced security strategies to protect educational and public institutions from insurgent influence. The government's response to such incidents will be critical in determining the long-term stability of the affected regions.

Governments across West Africa continue to deploy counterinsurgency measures, from military operations to intelligence-driven interventions, but the persistence of violence suggests that more comprehensive solutions are needed. Regional cooperation, socioeconomic development, and stronger governance structures will be crucial in the fight for long-term stability.

Conclusion

The report underscores the persistent security challenges facing the region, with Nigeria, Mali, and Burkina Faso experiencing the highest levels of violence. Despite a decrease in total fatalities compared to January, the capabilities of non-state actors remain unchanged, demonstrating the entrenched nature of insecurity. The Sahel continues to be the epicenter of insurgencies, with jihadist groups, armed bandits, and criminal networks exploiting porous borders and weak state capacities. While regional governments and international partners have intensified counterterrorism efforts, the underlying drivers of violence - economic hardship, political instability, and weak governance remain largely unaddressed. Without a comprehensive approach that integrates military, political, and socio-economic strategies, West Africa risks further instability. The coming months will be critical in determining whether current interventions can shift the tide or if the region will continue its struggle against deepening insecurity.

About CDD-West Africa

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