



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

WEST AFRICA

SECURITY TRACKER

MAY 2025

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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.

WITH SPECIAL THANKS

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)



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Executive Summary

West Africa experienced its second-deadliest month of 2025 in May, recording 2,409 conflict-related fatalities across 985 incidents surpassed only by January's toll of 2,475 deaths.¹ Violence intensified in long-standing hotspots and surfaced in previously stable states, underscoring the region's deepening crisis. The conflicts ranged from insurgent attacks and military operations to intercommunal clashes, political protests, and extrajudicial killings. Nigeria accounted for 43.7% and Burkina Faso accounted for 32% deaths, while significant surges were also recorded in Niger, Mali, and Benin. The month's events revealed not just territorial insecurity but a broad collapse of trust in state protection.

Nigeria remained the epicentre, registering 1,054 fatalities from 409 incidents, a 32% increase from April. The escalation stemmed from overlapping threats posed by the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP), also known as *Wilāyat Garb Ifrīqīyā*, Boko Haram, Fulani militias, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the Eastern Security Network (ESN), and state forces. Rural populations in Zamfara, Plateau, Benue, Borno, and Taraba in Nigeria were hit hardest, often caught between insurgent violence, militia retaliation, and deadly military airstrikes. Burkina Faso followed with 772 deaths, driven by JNIM offensives and retaliatory operations by security forces that included the mass killing of civilians in Seno Province. In Mali (238 deaths) and Niger (290 deaths), attacks by jihadist groups and reports of state led abuses signaled eroding public trust and widening operational gaps.

Beyond Nigeria and the Sahel, Benin's 45 deaths across 50 incidents reflected a shift toward frequent, lower casualty violence in its northern corridor. Spillover effects were evident in Ghana, Ivory Coast, Guinea, and Liberia, where rising protests and communal tensions exposed growing fragility. Meanwhile, Senegal, Mauritania, and Cape Verde remained relatively calm but saw increasing civic mobilisation by student groups, labour unions, and feminist movements. Though largely nonviolent, these pressures signalled growing dissatisfaction with state performance and governance delivery.

Overall, violence in May was driven by a complex mix of jihadist insurgents, state militaries, communal militias and unidentified armed groups. Civilians bore the brunt, especially where state responses proved heavy-handed or indiscriminate. While some governments announced reforms, curfews, or regional legal mechanisms, the dominant reliance on force persisted. Without an actor-specific, civilian-focused strategy that addresses governance failures and local grievances, West Africa risks entering a prolonged phase of normalised violence and institutional decay.

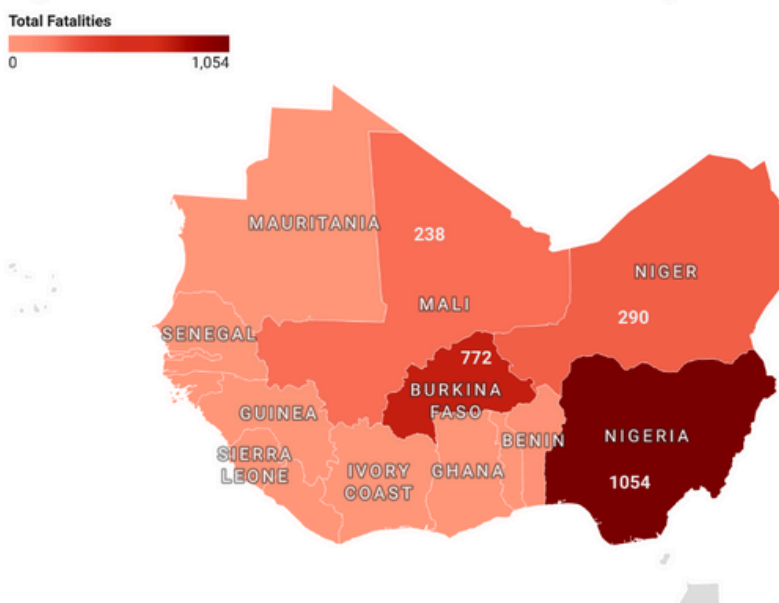
^[1] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/data/>

General Overview

May 2025 marked the deadliest month so far this year in West Africa, with 2,409 fatalities across 985 incidents, underscoring both the entrenched volatility of the Sahel and the gradual destabilisation of previously resilient coastal states. Nigeria and Burkina Faso accounted for nearly three-quarters of all deaths, driven by jihadist offensives, retaliatory militia violence, and deadly state operations. In Niger, Mali, and Benin, militant groups expanded operations against military convoys and economic corridors, revealing strategic intent to deny territorial control and disrupt resource governance. Civilian populations in rural zones, particularly in conflict-affected areas of Dankurmi, Maikonaga, Gwoza, Agatu, Riyom, Munga Lalau, Tangaza, Alkaleri, Gwana, Djibo, and Tillabéri, Tahoua, Diapaga, Boucle du Mouhoun, Karimama, and Dosso, bore the brunt of attacks, displacements, and collateral damage from state airstrikes and joint operations.

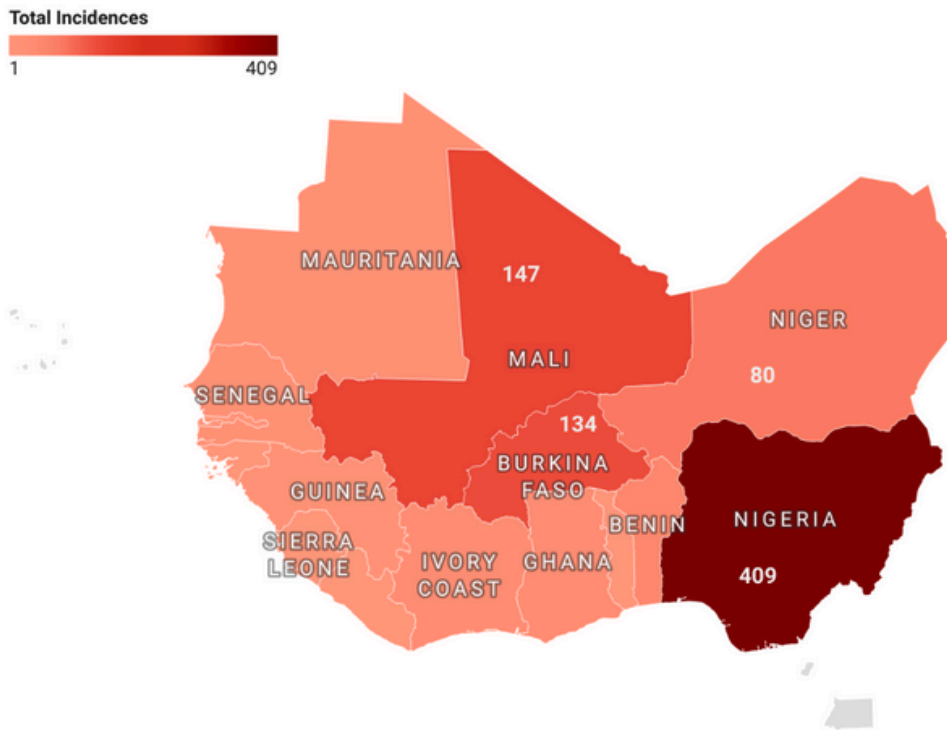
Beyond the Sahelian core, coastal and transitional states, such as Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, and the Ivory Coast, experienced increased political unrest, communal disputes, and resistance to state enforcement, even as fatalities remained relatively low. In Senegal, Mauritania, and Cape Verde, civic pressure mounted through sustained nonviolent protests over service delivery failures and governance deficits. While the forms and intensity of conflict varied, the region as a whole exhibited signs of convergence: blurred boundaries between conventional warfare and political unrest, weakening civilian protection norms, and a widening legitimacy crisis. The geographic and typological diffusion of violence suggests that West Africa's security challenges are no longer isolated but increasingly systemic and mutually reinforcing.

Figure 1: Conflict Fatalities Across West Africa- May 2025



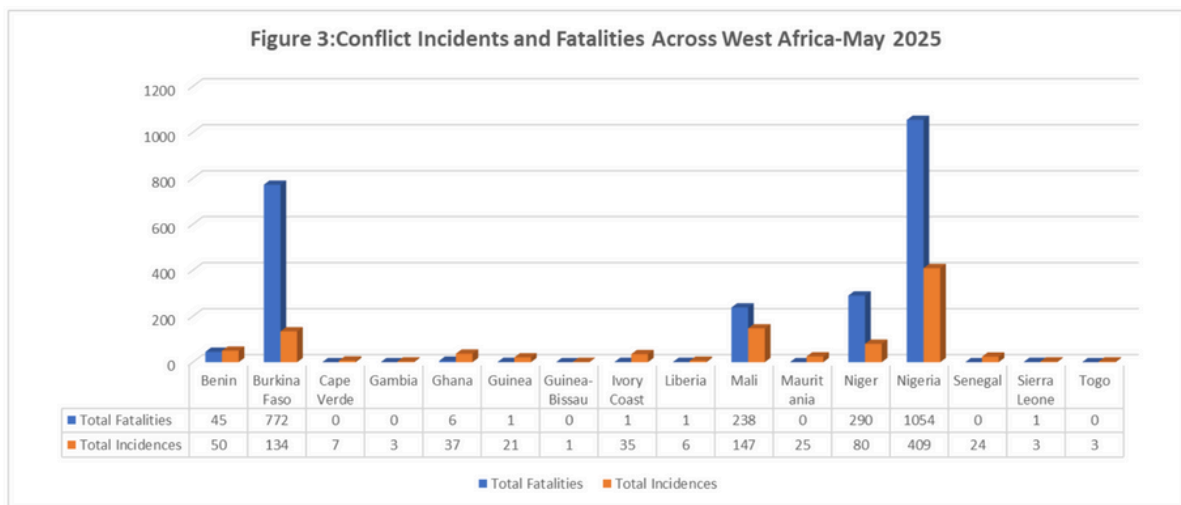
Source: ACLED 2025 · Created with Datawrapper

Figure 2: Conflict Incidences Across West Africa- May 2025



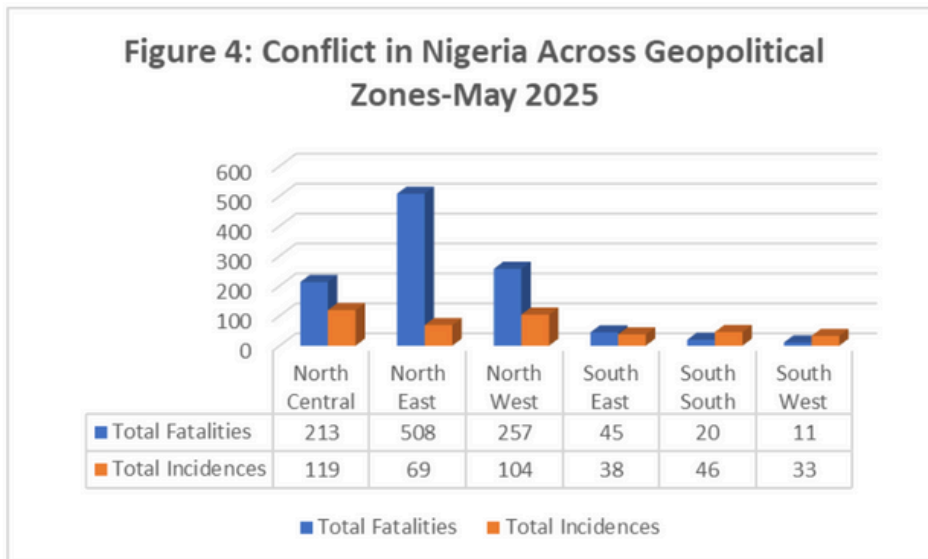
Source: ACLED 2025 • Created with Datawrapper

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



High Impact Countries

Nigeria



Nigeria recorded 1,054 fatalities from 409 incidents in May 2025, a 32% increase in deaths compared to April's 797 fatalities, and a 7.9% rise in incidents.² Out of the 2,409 total fatalities recorded across West Africa in May 2025, Nigeria alone accounted for 43.7% of all deaths, reaffirming its status as the region's most lethal conflict theatre. This escalation was marked by deadlier attacks, more dispersed zones of violence, and an intensified targeting of civilian populations, particularly in rural areas entering their critical planting season. The month opened with an attack on May 1, when ISSP fighters killed at least 13 hunters and abducted others in Hurumi Forest (Tangaza, Sokoto).³ The hunters had ventured into the forest for a seasonal expedition, a livelihood practice now fraught with risk. On the same day, the Nigerian military repelled a Zamfara militia incursion in Maikonaga (Talata Mafara, Zamfara), killing dozens of militia members, including three commanders.⁴ The counteroffensive also led to two civilian deaths, underscoring the cost of civilian proximity to security operations.

The Middle Belt and Northwest witnessed a string of intercommunal and militia-related killings, with Benue, Plateau, Bauchi, and Zamfara emerging as hotspots.⁵ In Benue State alone, 108 fatalities were recorded, driven by attacks from Fulani pastoralist militias across Agatu, Gwer West, and other LGAs.⁶ Plateau State recorded 58 deaths, many linked to targeted shootings and village raids by local militias in Riyom.⁷

^[2] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

^[3] Daily Trust: [Lakurawa mounts massive attack in Sokoto, kills 13 hunters](#)

^[4] The Guardian: [Troops kill five bandit leaders in Zamfara](#)

^[5] Le Monde.fr: [Deadly attacks on villages in central Nigeria](#)

^[6] Church in Need: [Dozens killed in new wave of attacks on communities in Nigeria's Middle Belt](#)

^[7] Zagazola: [Two villagers ambushed, killed in Plateau's Riyom LGA](#)

In Bauchi, intercommunal clashes and militia confrontations led to 106 fatalities, notably in Alkaleri and Gwana. Zamfara State was the deadliest among them, with 121 deaths across 36 incidents, including coordinated attacks on multiple villages and large-scale abductions.⁸ A major clash on May 4 between Bauchi and Alkaleri communal militias resulted in 25 deaths, including 11 civilians.⁹ In Dankurmi district (Maru, Zamfara), seven communities were attacked on May 5, killing 12 people in apparent retaliation for a prior military raid. These attacks suggest a feedback loop of military operations triggering retributive justice cycles among armed groups.

Militant groups like ISWAP and Boko Haram (JAS) remained active in the northeast, with repeated attacks on army bases and civilians. On May 7, Boko Haram attempted to overrun an IDP camp in Malam Fatori (Abadan, Borno), prompting a military clash resulting in 10 fatalities. On May 15, ISWAP killed 50 farmers and fishers in Malam Karanti (Kukawa, Borno), a particularly devastating blow to subsistence agriculture.¹⁰ Airstrikes later that day reportedly killed dozens of ISWAP fighters in Chiralia (Damboa), but the loss of life among unarmed civilians remained disproportionate.¹¹

Meanwhile, IPOB/ESN fighters in the southeast intensified attacks on security convoys and civilians, with 15–30 deaths reported on May 8 along the Okigwe-Owerri Road (Imo State), including the torching of trucks and public property.¹² The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) also launched sophisticated operations against military installations.¹³ On May 16, ISWAP attacked the MNJTF base in Wulgo (Ngala, Borno), killing five soldiers and burning vehicles. On May 23, ISWAP launched simultaneous raids on the Azir Bridge and 25 Task Force Brigade in Damboa, resulting in 46 deaths (including eight civilians).¹⁴ These operations reflect a shift toward multi-pronged assaults and psychological warfare, including the execution of captured civilians.

On May 24, over 50 armed Fulani militia killed 42 civilians in Munga Lalau (Taraba).¹⁵ The violence was reportedly a reprisal after four Fulani youths were killed, showing again how fragile local peace is and how deadly retaliatory logic has become. Also on May 31, a militia killed 20 farmers and abducted over 50 others in Ungwan-Mani (Maru). The military's response led to a deadly fire incident, where five allied Maru Defence Militia members were killed by airstrikes, underscoring coordination failures. By the end of the month, air and land offensives intensified, especially in Gwoza, Niger, and Zamfara, with coordinated attacks killing scores of insurgents.¹⁶ However, civilian collateral damage persisted, with incidents involving mistaken airstrikes and the destruction of noncombatant infrastructure.

^[8] The Nation Newspaper: [JUST IN: Many feared dead as bandits attack Bauchi communities](#)

^[9] Channels: [Bandits Kill Vigilantes, Civilians In Bauchi](#)

^[10] All Africa: [Nigeria: Borno - How Boko Haram Killed 90 Farmers in 5 Months](#)

^[11] Humangle Media: [ISWAP Overruns Key Borno Sites in Coordinated Assault](#)

^[12] Vanguard: [IPOB knocks Amnesty International for linking group to Okigwe gunmen attack](#)

^[13] The Conversation: [Why Islamic State is expanding its operations in north-eastern Nigeria](#)

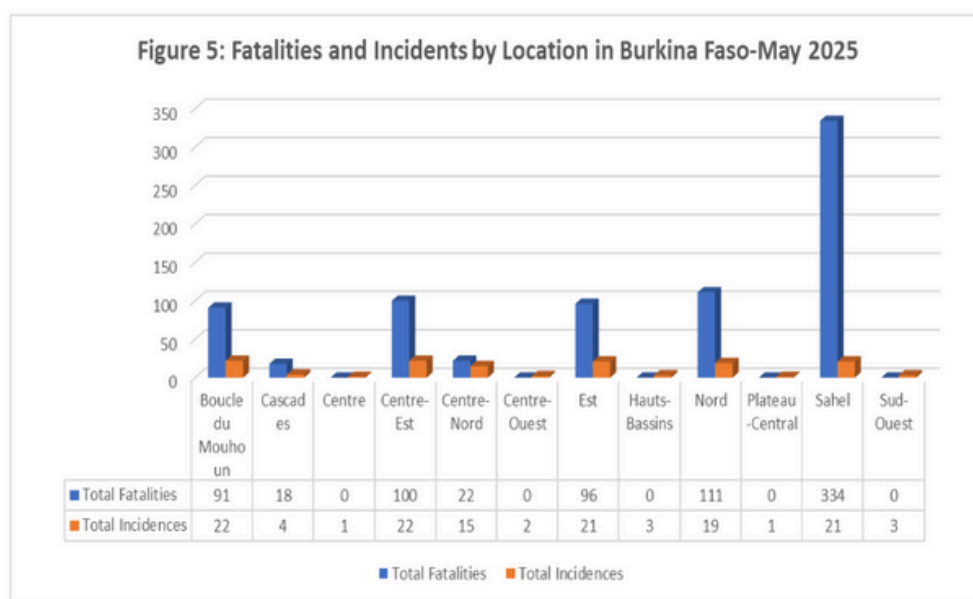
^[14] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

^[15] Aljazeera English: [At least 50 dead as violence erupts in Nigeria's Taraba state](#)

^[16] Anadolu Ajanzi: [Nigerian army kills 60 Boko Haram terrorists after repelling ...](#)

These violent activities further solidified the evolving nature of Nigeria’s conflict, from northeast insurgency to nationwide hybrid violence involving militias, pastoralists, communal vigilantes, and transnational jihadist groups. Rural zones, particularly farming communities, bore the brunt at a time when they should have been engaged in serious farming activities. Despite the rains, many farm fields remain empty, seed reserves are being depleted, and communities are fleeing for safety. Nigeria’s rural insecurity has become an existential threat to its food systems, compounded by climate volatility and inflation. With the intensified military offensives, territorial gains are temporary, and response coordination remains fragile. Tactical victories, such as in Ruwan Godiya (Faskari, Katsina), where 21 militia fighters were killed and large weapons caches recovered, contrast with avoidable errors like airstrikes killing allies in Zamfara. The trendlines from May indicate strategic overstretch, where kinetic responses outpace political or humanitarian support, and violence spreads more rapidly than governance can catch up.

Burkina Faso



In May 2025, Burkina Faso recorded 772 fatalities from 134 violent incidents, representing a 46% increase in deaths compared to April’s 529 fatalities, despite a 25.5% drop in incident count from the previous 180. The country accounted for 32% of all conflict-related fatalities in West Africa during the month, 772 out of 2,409, making it the second deadliest country in the region after Nigeria.¹⁷ This sharp increase not only highlights the intensification of operations by Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) but also raises serious concerns about the effectiveness of the military-led government in the country.

^[17] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

From May 2 to 13, JNIM launched a relentless series of attacks across the Boucle du Mouhoun, Nord, Centre-Est, and Est regions. These operations overran multiple military and Volunteer for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP) positions in areas including Sampopo, Lanfiera, Gombele, Posso, Kouri, and Boussougou.¹⁸ Mass killings, destruction of critical infrastructure, and systematic looting of weapons and supplies marked the offensives. The most lethal of these was the assault on Djibo on 11 May, where over 200 people were reportedly killed, including 102 soldiers and VDP members and 101 civilians. Militants captured two military camps, destroyed government offices, burned markets and health centres, and looted communications and logistics infrastructure.¹⁹ Similar levels of violence were seen in Diapaga, where 52 people were killed, and in Solle, which recorded 60 fatalities, reflecting a growing jihadist focus on disrupting not only rural security but also urban administration and service delivery. A significant shift occurred on 21 May, when Burkinabe troops and VDPs were accused of killing over 100 civilians across the villages of Tonga, Tafakou, and Nobiol in Seno province.²⁰ The attacks reportedly took place after a military convoy escort. While the government denied the incident, independent media and photographic evidence suggest the existence of mass graves.²¹ The presence of such violence on both insurgent and state sides highlights the dangerous erosion of protection norms in the conflict.

Importantly, the violence in May did not emerge in new regions but intensified in the same areas repeatedly targeted in April. The Boucle du Mouhoun region continued to be severely affected, with renewed attacks in Kossi, Sourou, and Banwa provinces. The Nord region remained under pressure, especially in Loroum and Yatenga. In the Centre-Est, Koulpelogo saw multiple incidents involving both jihadist assaults and reprisal killings. The East region remained a battleground, with continued attacks in Gnagna, Tapoa, and Gourma. In the Sahel, particularly Seno province, the locus of violence shifted from jihadist offensives in April to alleged state reprisals in May. Furthermore, the attacks on Djibo and Diapaga represent a troubling tactical evolution, with jihadist groups now targeting administrative towns and not just rural detachments. These locations were already under pressure in April, and the May assaults reflected an intensification rather than a geographic spread.

Despite limited tactical gains by the military, such as the *Tourbillon Vert* three operation in the Dida Forest and the ambush by Rapid Intervention Battalion 6 in Tougouri, the broader security picture remains bleak. JNIM has sustained both its operational momentum and its capacity to shape the narrative through propaganda, publishing images of seized weapons and destroyed facilities.

^[18] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

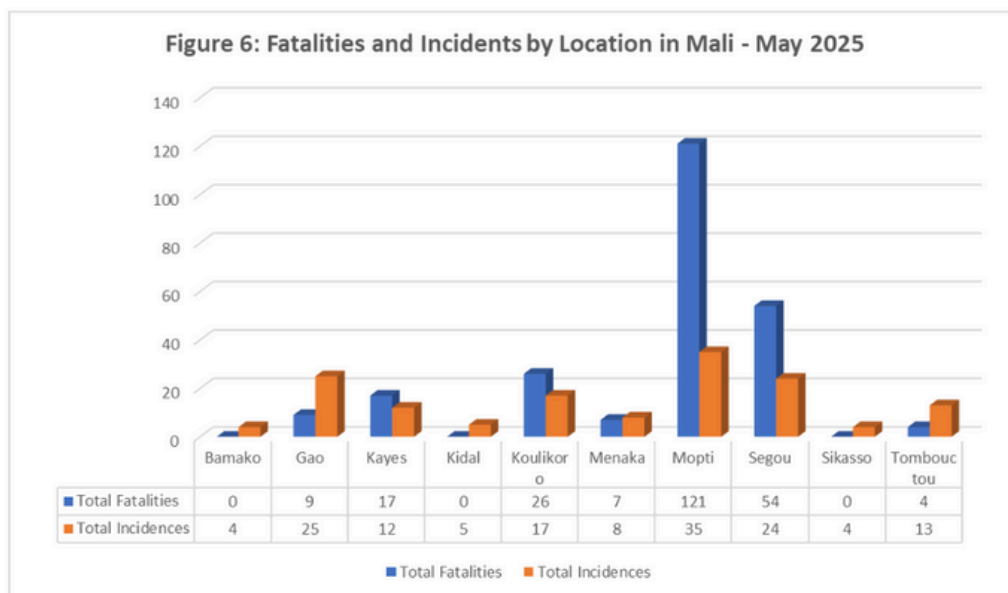
^[19] Al Jazeera: [Al-Qaeda affiliate claims 200 soldiers killed in Burkina Faso attack](#)

^[20] Human Rights Watch: [Burkina Faso: Army Directs Ethnic Massacres](#)

^[21] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

These developments undermine the junta’s central promise of restoring order. With rising fatalities, increasingly strategic attacks, and documented abuses by state actors, the legitimacy of military rule is visibly unravelling. Rather than stabilising the country, the current approach appears to be deepening the conflict, militarising civilian spaces, and accelerating social fragmentation. Burkina Faso now faces not only a security crisis but also a crisis of governance and trust.

Mali



In May 2025, Mali recorded 238 fatalities across 147 incidents, representing a 21.7% increase in deaths compared to April’s 195 fatalities, despite a slight drop in the number of incidents. The country accounted for 9.9 per cent of all conflict-related fatalities in West Africa for the month.²² This uptick reflects continued operational momentum by Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), increasing allegations of state-perpetrated abuses, and persistent targeting of both civilians and security forces. The violence remained concentrated in Mopti, Ségou, Koulikoro, and Kayes, reinforcing the trend of central and southern Mali becoming the most volatile zones of engagement.

Between 1 and 3 May, JNIM militants launched simultaneous attacks on Dan Na Ambassagou militias in Koulebala (Djenne, Mopti) and Bomboukore (Mopti), killing nine militia members and three civilians. In Bomboukore, an improvised explosive device planted on a motorcycle exploded after the militants fled, killing six civilians and wounding three others.²³

^[22] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

^[23] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

On 3 May, militants struck Mourdiah (Nara, Koulikoro), killing six residents, looting homes, and setting fire to livestock sheds. From May 7 to 13, the group expanded its attacks to include garrison towns and transit routes. On 7 May, JNIM claimed responsibility for an assault on a Malian army post in Douentza (Mopti), killing five soldiers and publishing photographs of captured weapons.²⁴ On 8 May, in Nienou (San, Segou), they killed 14 members of a Dozo militia and stole livestock. A major atrocity occurred on 12 May in Diafarabe (Tenenkou, Mopti), where Malian troops and allied militia reportedly arrested and executed 27 Fulani civilians at a livestock market.²⁵ Though the military initially denied involvement, Human Rights Watch confirmed the discovery of 22 bodies in mass graves, most with their throats slit. This triggered strong condemnation from JNIM, which promised reprisal attacks.

By 17 May, the insurgency escalated to Sandaré (Nioro, Kayes), JNIM claimed to have captured a Malian army camp, killing seven soldiers and seizing military vehicles and heavy weapons, including RPGs and mortars. On 20 May, the militants launched coordinated raids on Diabaly (Niono, Segou), clashing with government forces and claiming the seizure of three army positions and several weapons. Although local media reported the attack was repelled, at least seven deaths were recorded. The most lethal attack occurred on 23 May in Dioura (Tenenkou, Mopti), where at least 40 soldiers, including senior officers, were killed in a dawn assault on a military base. JNIM released photographs of the captured base, weapons, and destroyed equipment. By 26 May, JNIM had again targeted Dozo militias in Noina (Djenne, Mopti), killing 10 fighters and seizing livestock. That same day, the Malian Air Force mistakenly killed five children in Danguere Tomana, reportedly during a drone strike on suspected militant targets. On 30 May, JNIM claimed another attack on a Malian army camp in Sirakorola (Koulikoro), reportedly killing four soldiers and seizing weapons and vehicles. Although the army said it repelled the attack, photos from the group confirmed the seizure of arms and tactical gear.²⁶

The May 2025 conflict trajectory in Mali illustrates three converging patterns. First, JNIM sustained its ability to carry out high-impact raids and control key road networks, while capturing significant military hardware, demonstrating tactical confidence and regional reach. Second, the Malian government and affiliated militias continued to face allegations of unlawful killings, particularly targeting Fulani civilians, which risks deepening ethnic divisions and undermining trust in the state's counterinsurgency efforts. Third, civilians increasingly became casualties not just of jihadist violence but also of state operations, such as the drone strike in Danguere Tomana and the killings in Diafarabe. These dynamics signal a widening legitimacy crisis for the military-led transitional government, with state-perpetrated violence now contributing to the insurgency's justification narrative.

^[24] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

^[25] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

^[26] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

Benin Republic

Benin recorded 45 fatalities across 50 incidents in May 2025, representing a 56% drop in fatalities from the 103 deaths in April, despite a 35% increase in incident count (from 37 to 50).²⁷ This divergence between incident volume and fatality count suggests a strategic shift from high-casualty coordinated attacks to dispersed and targeted operations, particularly against civilians and fuel transporters. The continued concentration of events in Alibori and Atacora confirms the persistent vulnerability of Benin's northern belt and signals the evolving tactics of both insurgents and security forces.

On 1 May, National Guard personnel launched an operation against illegal fuel smuggling networks around the Mekoru river in Karimama (Alibori), reportedly used to supply terrorist armed groups. Multiple people were killed and injured; fatalities coded as 3.²⁸ Two days later, on 3 May, a similar encounter in Founougo (Banikoara, Alibori) led to the deaths of two individuals accused of fuel transport. These incidents highlight state efforts to disrupt insurgent logistics and funding chains. On 7 May, the National Guard ambushed and killed suspected JNIM militants near Gouande (Materi, Atacora); fatalities coded as 3.²⁹ On 11 May, suspected JNIM militants executed a Fulani community leader in Tandafa (Toucountouna, Atacora), accusing him of collaborating with the security forces.

A wave of isolated killings followed: on 13 May, a cattle trader was shot in Dougou (Gogounou, Alibori); on 15 May and 18 May, the National Guard launched offensives along the Mekoru river, killing smugglers and militants (fatalities coded as three each). On 19 and 20 May, JNIM militants killed two civilians in Mamassi Peuhl (Karimama) and Kopienga (Materi), while an IED planted by militants killed another farmer in Gouande. The night of 20 May marked a surge in targeted violence: an armed group killed one civilian in Sirarou (N-Dali, Borgou), and National Guard forces killed three suspected JNIM members in Birni Lafia (Karimama). A string of fatal attacks continued: on 22 May, a man was found mutilated in Natitingou (Atacora); on 23 May, four people were killed by National Guard forces in Karimama, all accused of aiding terrorists.³⁰

State-led operations intensified: 1 man was shot in Soroko (24 May), 2 in Founougo (26 May), and 10 suspected militants were killed in Karimama on 29 May. On 26 May, JNIM militants also killed a civilian in Sakaouan (Malanville, Alibori). On the final day of the month, 30 May, National Guard units killed three fuel smugglers near Founougo. May's pattern reflects a fragmentation of violence into more routine, lower-casualty operations.

^[27] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

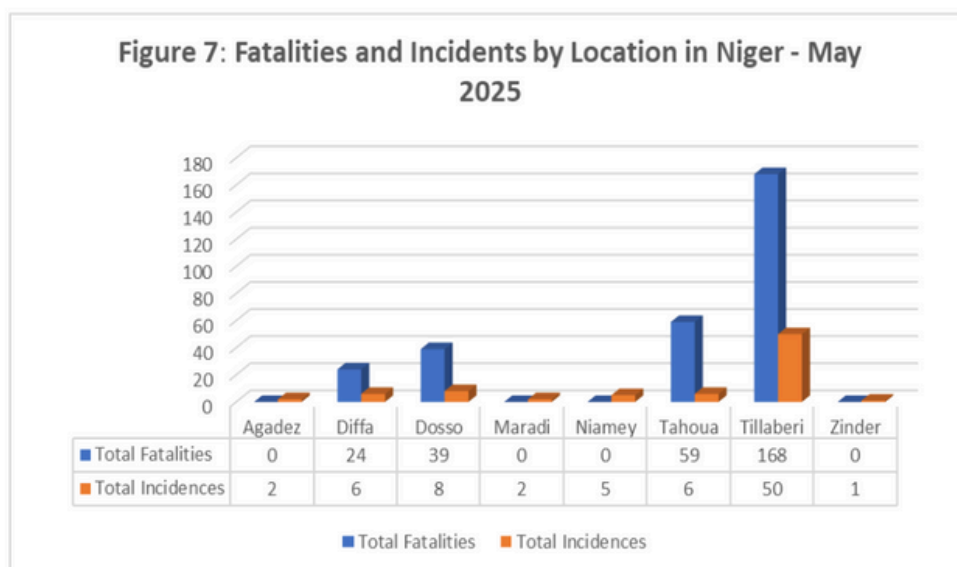
^[28] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

^[29] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

^[30] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

Nonetheless, the high incident rate and repeated targeting of alleged fuel collaborators indicate both a hardening state response and sustained insurgent efforts to reassert influence through intimidation and selective killings. If left unchecked, this cycle risks normalising extra-judicial killings and deepening local mistrust in both state and non-state actors.

Niger Republic



Niger republic recorded 290 deaths across 80 incidents, more than triple the 93 fatalities recorded in April, accounting for approximately 16.3% of all conflict-related deaths in West Africa for the month.³¹ This marks the highest monthly fatality toll for Niger in 2025 so far, signalling a sharp deterioration in the country's internal security environment. The Tillabéri, Tahoua, Dosso, and Diffa regions remained epicentres of violence, with insurgent groups leveraging mobility, terrain, and intelligence gaps to inflict substantial losses on military and civilian targets alike.

The month began with dual ISSP assaults on May 4 in Danga Zaouni (Tillabéri), six members of a pro-government militia were killed. On the same day, an ISSP-coordinated ambush on a joint patrol in Dan Kassari (Dosso) resulted in at least 22 fatalities, including 12 Nigerien soldiers and 10 militants. Alternative sources, however, placed the soldier death toll as high as 30, underscoring the challenge of accurate casualty reporting in complex attacks.³²

^[31] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

^[32] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

On May 8, 7 women and girls were killed by an IED in Yerwa Gana (Diffa), revealing continued militant presence in the Lake Chad Basin and the indiscriminate nature of explosive threats to civilians. The use of roadside explosives persisted throughout the month. On May 9, an IED killed eight workers on a convoy near Tiawa (Tillabéri), likely targeting infrastructure tied to the Samira gold mine. Rural communities bore the brunt of unrelenting violence in mid-May. On May 11 and 13, ISSP militants attacked villages in the Tera and Tillabéri areas, killing over 30 civilians across locations such as Karta, Marize, Fambita, and Anzourou. In Anzourou alone, 12 residents were killed in a single raid, reinforcing the vulnerability of farming communities in the volatile tri-border zone.

Militant momentum peaked from May 23 to 26. On May 23, ISWAP launched an incursion into Diffa city, reportedly killing eight security personnel and wounding several civilians. The same day, JNIM detonated an IED near Talambou (Dosso), killing six soldiers.³³ Two days later, another IED attack in the same area killed five more. Meanwhile, on May 25, the single deadliest incident of the month occurred when ISSP militants attacked Eknewane (Tahoua). At least 58 soldiers were killed, including a senior commander, and multiple drone surveillance systems were reportedly overwhelmed; this event alone accounted for 20% of Niger's total fatalities in May.

On May 26, JNIM ambushed a Nigerien army flotilla near Korogoungou (Tillabéri). Reports indicate up to 45 soldiers were killed, and weapons, including mortars, PK machine guns, and AK-47s, were seized. The death of Captain Abdoul Aziz Moumouni Boureima following injuries sustained in the clash further underscored the strategic and psychological weight of this engagement. The sustained frequency and intensity of these incidents show a militant focus on disrupting Niger's pipeline corridors, military logistics, and rural governance nodes. Attacks on May 18 in Karta, Komdi, and Korogoussou, as well as raids on May 15 in Mossi Paga (Torodi), confirmed that both ISSP and JNIM are expanding their spheres of influence from hard-to-govern rural terrain to critical national infrastructure.

The May data reflects not just the scale of operational losses but the erosion of deterrence across multiple fronts. Despite the military's use of drones, coordinated special forces responses, and the presence of foreign-backed counterterrorism initiatives, the insurgents retained the ability to mount sophisticated, multi-pronged attacks across four key regions. With over 290 deaths, this escalation repositions Niger as a high-intensity conflict zone and raises urgent questions about the viability of military-led containment strategies.

^[33] Zagazola: [Niger: Six Army Substitutes Killed in EIGS-Claimed ...](#)

Spillover and Emerging Conflict Zones

Ghana

Ghana recorded 37 incidents and six fatalities in May 2025, a notable drop in both metrics from April's 47 incidents and 23 deaths. While not classified as a high-intensity conflict state, the latest data continues to reinforce Ghana's status as a spillover-prone and increasingly volatile zone, where local political rivalries, communal disputes, and public frustrations with state institutions are producing frequent and fragmented episodes of unrest. Although the fatality rate remained low, the geographic spread and institutional targets of these incidents suggest deepening public distrust and eroding conflict management structures.

One of the month's most pronounced features was the escalation of political contestation into physical disruption, particularly around the confirmation of Municipal Chief Executives (MCEs). Across regions, including Greater Accra, Eastern, Western North, and Central, clashes between party factions, walkouts by MPs, and vandalism of voting facilities reflected rising tensions within and between political camps. These actions disrupted local governance processes and often drew in security forces. This form of violence was not random, but tied to elite competition and public resistance to perceived imposition, especially in areas where candidates were seen as externally imposed or politically disconnected from local constituencies.

Another dominant thread in May was the rejection of state enforcement efforts, both symbolic and operational. Decongestion exercises in Kasoa and Accra triggered violent clashes between traders and municipal officers, while the police faced confrontations in areas such as Samreboi and Kumasi. This trend aligns with broader signals of waning legitimacy and reflects how routine governance actions now frequently meet organised resistance. Even student and youth actions, such as riots over school phone seizures or vigilante crackdowns on criminal hideouts, underscore the extent to which non-state actors are asserting parallel authority or enforcing order on their terms. Meanwhile, weapons seizures in Ashanti raise concerns about the potential for future escalations.

Though the month recorded fewer deaths, communal and ethnically tinged violence persisted, especially in northern and eastern zones. The killing of the Bongo NHIA director in Upper East and recurring arson in deserted villages like Gunyioko are stark reminders of the enduring Bawku chieftaincy crisis and the fragmentation it has caused.³⁴

³⁴ Ghanaweb: [Bongo District NHIA Director killed, body burnt by assailants](#)

In Nkawkaw, the killing of three Fulani men hinted at intra-ethnic tensions, while inter-group clashes in Adoagyiri reignited after the death of a second victim. These incidents reveal that underlying identity and land disputes remain active flashpoints, despite relative national calm. Taken together, May's developments point to a growing normalisation of violence as a mechanism for political negotiation, justice-seeking, and dispute resolution, underscoring Ghana's increasingly fragile civic order ahead of the next electoral cycle.

Ivory Coast

In May 2025, Ivory Coast reported 35 incidents and one fatality, representing a significant increase from the 19 incidents recorded in April. While the number of deaths remained low, the surge in demonstrations and political agitation reflects the country's shift from a relatively peaceful context to a spillover-prone and increasingly volatile environment. Much of this unrest stems from mounting frustrations with electoral processes, governance structures, and perceived elite exclusion, particularly in the lead-up to the October 2025 presidential election.

The protests were driven mainly by supporters of the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI-RDA) following the removal of Tidjane Thiam from the electoral roll.³⁵ On 8 May, thousands gathered at the PDCI headquarters in Cocody, Abidjan, after authorities relocated their initial protest venue due to security concerns. Similar protests occurred on 28 May across towns such as Mankono, Gagnoa, and Abengourou, where coordinated marches were held to demand Thiam's reinstatement. These sustained actions illustrate a deepening crisis of confidence in state institutions, especially the judiciary and the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI).

Alongside political unrest, other civic protests underscored longstanding grievances over governance and state service delivery. In Guitry, residents protested against repeated power outages, while in Thomasset, a faction of the community demanded the resignation of the traditional ruler due to land mismanagement. In N'Gbasso, tensions over an illegal gold mining arrest escalated into a clash between residents and forest officials, resulting in the only fatality recorded in May. These incidents reveal that localised governance failures, if unresolved, can quickly fuel unrest and expose underlying fragilities in state-society relations.

Though largely non-lethal, May's developments in Ivory Coast reflect a growing political and social unease. The proliferation of peaceful yet persistent protests, combined with localised confrontations, signals an increasingly fragile security landscape shaped by both elite contestation and community-level discontent.

^[35] APANews: [Ivory Coast: Thiam resigns as PDCI-RDA President, alleges political persecution](#)

As the October elections approach, the government's ability to de-escalate tensions through transparent electoral reforms, conflict-sensitive policing, and inclusive dialogue will be critical in preventing the current protest-driven mobilisation from tipping into more widespread instability.

Guinea

In May 2025, Guinea recorded 21 incidents and one fatality, reflecting a similar fatality rate but a decline in total incidents compared to April. Though relatively low in terms of casualties, the nature and spread of unrest suggest that underlying tensions are deepening, with demonstrations increasingly targeting political exclusion, poor governance, land disputes, and state failure in public service delivery. The continued frequency of protests and the fragmentation of grievances ranging from electricity cuts to labour rights indicate that Guinea remains vulnerable to political volatility and localised violence, even if headline fatalities remain minimal.

Political tensions continued to be a core driver of public unrest. Throughout May, various political groups and civil society actors sustained momentum in anti-government mobilisation. On 24 May, opposition figures from parties such as Model and UFDG staged a sit-in in Conakry, demanding the release of jailed opposition leader Aliou Bah.³⁶ Earlier in the month, on 15 May, the authorities forcibly shut down an RPG event in Gbessia and arrested its permanent secretary, fuelling perceptions of repression and undermining confidence in the transitional process led by General Mamadi Doumbouya. These events reflect a shrinking civic space and growing disillusionment with the military-led interim government.

Meanwhile, localised grievances continue to manifest in explosive, often unpredictable ways. In Nzérékoré, a long-running land dispute escalated dangerously on 27 May, when youth groups attacked demonstrators in Gouecké, injuring several and burning shops. That same day, in Koma Yeneta (Lola), a pastoralist was killed in a retaliatory attack linked to herder–farmer tensions.³⁷ These incidents point to the fragile state of local governance and traditional land management systems, where weak dispute resolution mechanisms and simmering frustrations can easily spiral into violence.³⁸

Despite the low casualty count, the diversity and consistency of protest activity in May underscore the widening gap between citizens and state authorities. Demonstrations over basic services, such as energy, roads, or food security, continue to emerge alongside politically charged protests and targeted unrest. The intersection of political exclusion, economic precarity, and unresolved communal grievances means that Guinea's transition remains vulnerable to being undermined

^[36] West Africa Democracy Radio: [Guinea opposition leader gets two-year sentence upheld](#)

^[37] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

^[38] Reuters: [Guinea's suppression of protests stokes anger as junta loses shine](#)

by both top-down authoritarian impulses and bottom-up instability. Preventive engagement, inclusive dialogue, and transparent governance are urgently needed to break this cycle before the situation escalates further.

Liberia

In May 2025, Liberia recorded six incidents and one fatality, marking a slight uptick in incidents compared to April, which had no reported deaths. Though still relatively low compared to regional hotspots, the qualitative shift, like violence, including fatal cross-border activity and armed traditionalist aggression, signals Liberia's drift from a relatively peaceful state to one facing emerging volatility. The lone fatality recorded in May, involving the killing of a Burkinabe civilian near Blewali (Nimba), also highlights the country's porous borders and vulnerability to spillover dynamics from neighbouring conflicts.

Several of May's incidents were linked to governance grievances and unresolved tensions related to traditional authority. On 13 May, a violent confrontation erupted in Gbarma Town (Gbarpolu) when armed traditionalists attacked and detained government officials attempting to enforce a suspension on bush schools. The standoff involved over 500 armed youths and led to a high-profile retreat by a ministerial delegation. This event reflects not only the enduring influence of traditional structures but also the challenges state institutions face in asserting authority in rural areas, especially when reforms are perceived as encroachments on cultural norms.

Elsewhere, non-violent political and civic demonstrations highlighted simmering frustrations over exclusion, misgovernance, and inadequate public service delivery. On 27 May, students shut down Lutheran University in Bong in protest against academic mismanagement and substandard conditions.³⁹ Earlier, on 12 May, Unity Party supporters in Fuamah (Bong) peacefully demonstrated over being sidelined in local political appointments. These actions, though not violent, signal a growing politicisation of marginalisation grievances, a dynamic that, if ignored, could escalate into more destabilising activity ahead of electoral cycles.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone recorded three incidents and one fatality in May 2025, compared to 1 non-lethal incident in April, reflecting a modest but notable shift in its conflict dynamics. While still considered low intensity, the nature of May's incidents suggests a widening of conflict triggers, from localised disputes to geopolitical tensions, warranting close monitoring. The country's transition out of the "Relatively Peaceful" category underscores the growing complexity of its internal and border-related

³⁹ The Liberian Investigator: [Students protest at Lutheran University of Liberia over...](#)

grievances. The month's only fatality occurred on 10 May, when a civilian was stabbed to death in Waterloo (Western Area Rural), in what appeared to be a targeted killing linked to a protracted land dispute. The suspected use of hired attackers in the incident points to an alarming trend of dispute resolution through extrajudicial means. Land-related violence, especially in peri-urban zones like Waterloo, highlights deeper challenges around land tenure, urban expansion, and the ineffectiveness of institutional dispute mechanisms.

Meanwhile, the deployment of Sierra Leonean troops to Yenga (Kailahun District) on 5 May marked a significant development in the long-running border dispute with Guinea. While no direct clashes were recorded, the mobilisation reflects growing assertiveness by Freetown in defending territorial claims, and the potential for regional spillover cannot be discounted. The symbolic and strategic importance of Yenga, coupled with unresolved demarcation tensions, could escalate further if not addressed through diplomatic channels. Additionally, communal tensions surfaced in Freetown on 2 May, where youth associated with the traditional Ojeh Society rioted over leadership disputes, smashing bottles and clashing with police. While largely contained, the incident highlights how youth mobilisation within traditional structures can evolve into public disorder, particularly in contexts where internal grievances remain unaddressed.

Relatively Peaceful

Mauritania

Mauritania remained within the Relatively Peaceful Countries category in May 2025, recording over 25 protest incidents and zero fatalities, maintaining its non-violent profile. This marks a notable decline from April 2025, when the country recorded 53 incidents, mostly protests, without fatalities. Despite the drop in numbers, May protests were more thematically focused, with sustained pressure on government institutions, particularly around service delivery, labour rights, and youth inclusion.

The majority of protests in May were concentrated in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, with actors ranging from students and nurses to retired soldiers, dismissed port workers, and anti-slavery activists. Student-led protests on 7–8 May, triggered by university sanctions, saw arrests and accusations of police violence, raising red flags about the shrinking space for dissent. Meanwhile, electricity and water shortages, particularly in Atar and Awaynat Izbil, drove repeated local mobilisations, signalling growing discontent with infrastructure inequality and neglect in interior regions.

Labour Day, i.e., 1 May, served as a flashpoint for multiple coordinated marches in Nouakchott, Kaedi, El Ayoun, and Nouadhibou, as major unions called for wage increases, improved working conditions, and even rejected the EU-Mauritania migration agreement. The diversity of demands, ranging from local governance reforms to regional geopolitics, points to broader legitimacy concerns and a citizenry more willing to confront state authority.

While no incidents of political violence or fatalities were recorded for the second month running, the volume and persistence of protests, particularly from traditionally quiet constituencies like military retirees, dockworkers, and doctors, suggest mounting governance stress. Compared to April's broader spread of unrest, May reflected more organised, issue-specific mobilisations. The state's heavy-handed response in some cases, including arrests of student leaders, signals potential tensions between protest management and civic freedoms that may escalate if left unaddressed.

Senegal

Senegal recorded 14 incidents and two fatalities in April, placing it under the category of Spillover and Emerging Conflict Zones. In May, incident figures surged to 24, though no fatalities were reported. Labour Day on 1 May marked a rare moment of unity among major union coalitions, with coordinated demonstrations across Dakar, Kolda, Matam, and Kaolack.⁴⁰

^[40] Reuters Connect: [May Day protest in Dakar](#)

Protesters raised demands around job security, wage increases, housing, and unmet government commitments under a previously signed social pact. Throughout the month, student protests flared in Bambey, Dakar, and Ziguinchor, driven by grievances over inadequate facilities, rent, and perceived administrative high-handedness. On 20 May, soldiers were attacked near Karounor in a suspected MFDC-linked incident, highlighting the persistent low-level conflict in Casamance. The following day, a communal land dispute in Mlomp resulted in one person being injured. From 28 to 29 May, motorcycle taxi drivers clashed with gendarmes in Karang, exposing tensions between informal workers and security forces, particularly over allegations of abuse and arbitrary detention. On 31 May, hundreds of women held a symbolic sit-in in Dakar to denounce impunity surrounding feminicides and to demand institutional reforms, legal protections, and victim support services, signalling the momentum of feminist mobilisation around gender-based violence.

May's protest activity spanned a broad spectrum of discontent from student strikes and labour actions to health worker demonstrations and rural grievances over water and land. This diversification of protest themes reflected widening gaps in governance, service delivery, and social equity. While no fatalities were recorded, several protests were met with aggressive state responses, including tear gas, arrests, and raids, notably in Mbeuth and Bignona. Compared to April's fewer but deadlier events, May's incidents were more numerous, organised, and issue-specific, indicating an increasingly mobilised civic landscape amid enduring political uncertainty. Senegal remains categorised under Spillover and Emerging Conflict Zones, not for extreme violence, but for escalating protest volatility, state-society tensions, and the fragile peace process in the south.

Cape Verde

In May 2025, Cape Verde recorded seven protest incidents across several islands, up from five in April, with no reported fatalities.⁴¹ While the country remains relatively peaceful, the data points to mounting frustration within key institutional sectors. The bulk of the protests stemmed from judicial staff, particularly magistrates of the Public Prosecutor's Office, who staged coordinated demonstrations across Mindelo, Praia, Porto Novo, and Ponta do Sol. Their grievance centred on long-standing delays in approving their class statute, which had been pending since 2021. This repeated mobilisation signals institutional stagnation and growing impatience among civil servants tasked with upholding the justice system.

Other protests highlighted poor infrastructure and labour conditions: pilots from Cape Verde Airlines demanded better working conditions, and local drivers and residents decried salary stagnation and municipal neglect, respectively. While none of these actions turned violent, they reflect an undercurrent of governance fatigue

^[41] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

and eroding public trust in administrative responsiveness. The geographic dispersion of protests and their sectoral diversity suggest that while political stability remains intact, the foundations of institutional cohesion and public service delivery are under quiet strain.

Gambia

Although The Gambia recorded only three protest incidents in May 2025 and no fatalities, the events reflect mounting tensions over governance, accountability, and public space.⁴² Two of the incidents stemmed from youth-led mobilisation by the Gambians Against Looted Assets (GALA), who protested in Banjul over the handling of former President Yahya Jammeh's seized assets and the arrest of fellow activists. The demonstrations, though peaceful in intent, resulted in 27 arrests, including those of journalists, signalling a continued government sensitivity to accountability-related dissent.

Separately, a protest by street vendors in Serrekunda over a planned relocation escalated into a confrontation. Police deployed tear gas, destroyed stalls, and arrested several vendors after tensions flared between protesters. While the scale of unrest remains low, these incidents suggest growing frustration among marginalised groups and youth networks. State responses ranging from arrests to forceful dispersal point to an increasingly securitised posture toward civil disobedience, even on socio-economic issues.

Togo

In May 2025, Togo recorded three incidents matching April's count with no reported fatalities.⁴³ However, the month revealed heightened political tensions and continued security threats. On 3 May, during a plenary session, the National Assembly, led by the ruling Union for the Republic (UNIR), appointed President Faure Gnassingbé to a newly created role, President of the Council of Ministers, a position with no fixed term. This constitutional change, passed in April 2024, effectively restructures executive power. Gnassingbé was sworn in the same day before the Constitutional Court, while Jean-Lucien Savi de Tové was elected president by the Assembly under the new constitutional arrangement.

This political development sparked protests. On 4 May, hundreds of opposition supporters, including members of the National Alliance for Change (ANC) and the Democratic Forces for the Republic (FDR), gathered in Lomé to denounce what they described as a "monarchical shift."

^[42] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

^[43] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

Protesters accused the government of consolidating power undemocratically and called for the reinstatement of term limits and checks on executive authority. In the north, on 7 May, suspected militants from Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) clashed with Togolese security forces in Ponio canton (Kpendjal, Savanes region). The militants were reportedly attempting to steal cattle but were repelled by the military. Though no casualties were confirmed, the incident reflects the persistent threat of extremist infiltration and rural insecurity along the northern border.

Although no fatalities occurred in May, these developments indicate a tense national climate. Political restructuring under the guise of constitutional reform is fueling opposition mobilisation, while jihadist pressures in the north continue to test the capacity of the state. Togo remains vulnerable to both authoritarian drift and regional spillover from the Sahel conflict.

Patterns of Violence in West Africa

Violence across West Africa in May 2025 remained deeply entrenched, with a total of 985 incidents and 2,409 fatalities recorded across 16 countries. The data reveals a regional landscape marked by persistent insecurity in the Sahel and expanding civic unrest in coastal states. While the epicentres of lethal violence remain concentrated in Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the frequency of incidents in countries like Benin, Ghana, Guinea, and Senegal suggests that instability is no longer confined to conflict zones but is increasingly linked to governance gaps, economic pressure, and declining public trust in institutions.

Nigeria accounted for the highest number of fatalities (1,054) and incidents (409), comprising 43.7% of regional deaths. A combination of insurgent activity, communal clashes, banditry, and state-led operations drove the violence. Armed clashes and airstrikes were particularly concentrated in Zamfara, Borno, and Plateau states. At the same time, mob violence and extrajudicial killings emerged in southern and central regions, underscoring the pervasive breakdown of law enforcement. Burkina Faso, with 772 fatalities and 134 incidents, experienced the deadliest attacks per capita, with Islamist groups consolidating control over rural territory and security forces responding with force, often resulting in civilian casualties.

Further north, Mali and Niger recorded 238 and 290 fatalities respectively. In Mali, the violence was defined by drone strikes and operations involving foreign mercenary groups, particularly in the central and northern regions. In Niger, fewer incidents (80) led to a disproportionately high death toll due to suicide bombings and mass executions, including attacks on civilian spaces such as mosques. Both states recorded no instances of negotiations or peace efforts, indicating a continued reliance on military operations and a worsening absence of dialogue.

While the Sahel remains the most violent subregion, several coastal and less conflict-prone countries are showing signs of stress. Benin recorded 45 fatalities across 50 incidents, primarily in its northern corridor, reflecting the spillover from Burkina Faso's instability. Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Guinea experienced clusters of incidents linked to communal disputes, land rights, and protest activity. Although the fatality figures were low, 6 in Ghana, 1 in each of Ivory Coast and Guinea, the frequency and distribution of events suggest rising fragility in countries once considered relatively stable. These trends underscore the need to treat governance and social discontent as critical risk factors alongside armed conflict.

Finally, low-fatality or relatively peaceful countries such as Senegal, Cape Verde, Mauritania, Togo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau saw minimal lethal violence.

Still, they collectively accounted for over 60 non-fatal incidents, primarily protests, mob action, and isolated communal disputes. Notably, Senegal recorded 24 incidents with no deaths, reflecting sustained protest mobilisation across student, feminist, and labour groups. However, the complete absence of peace agreements or negotiations across all 16 countries reflects a troubling regional pattern: even as violence becomes more varied and widespread, avenues for resolution remain scarce. The emerging reality is one of a region where conflict persists not only through arms but also through silence, impunity, and institutional failure.

Key Actors Driving Security Crises in West Africa

The security crisis in West Africa in May 2025 was shaped by a diverse set of actors operating across multiple conflict theatres. These included state military forces, jihadist insurgent groups, community militias, unidentified armed groups, and law enforcement agencies. While the nature of violence varied by context, the actions of these actors collectively destabilised the region and blurred the lines between protection and perpetration. State military forces were among the deadliest actors in the area. In countries such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, military operations contributed significantly to the month's fatality figures. In Nigeria, the military was reportedly responsible for more than 300 fatalities, particularly in the Northeast and Northwest, during counterinsurgency operations and joint raids targeting armed groups and criminal networks.⁴⁴ Burkina Faso's military accounted for 169 deaths, mostly in contested areas of the East and Centre North, where anti-jihadist campaigns have intensified. Mali (35 deaths) and Niger (28 deaths) also saw sustained military engagement. While these operations aim to contain insurgency, recurring reports of civilian harm, especially to farmers, forced displacements, and excessive use of force highlight the controversial role of state security actors in the region's violence landscape.

Jihadist insurgent groups remained central actors in West Africa's ongoing insecurity. The most active were Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State affiliates including ISWAP in Nigeria and ISGS in Niger and Burkina Faso. JNIM was the most lethal among them, responsible for more than 350 deaths across Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Its growing territorial influence, particularly in the Boucle du Mouhoun, East, and parts of northern Mali, reflects a deepening entrenchment. ISWAP was responsible for approximately 28 fatalities in northeastern Nigeria, while ISGS accounted for around 90 deaths, mainly in Tillabéri and Tahoua regions of Niger.⁴⁵ These jihadist factions continue to exploit porous borders, weak state presence, and communal grievances to expand their operational footprint.

Community militias, often ethnic based, also contributed to high levels of violence, especially in Nigeria. More than 400 fatalities were linked to militia activity, including killings by Fulani militias, ethnic armed groups in the North Central and Middle Belt. These groups are often mobilised in response to land disputes, cattle grazing conflicts, and perceived state inaction. In some areas, they function as parallel security providers or engage in retaliatory attacks. In Ghana, militias were implicated in at least 16 deaths, particularly in the north, where cross-border dynamics with Burkina Faso exacerbate local tensions.

^[44] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/2025/05/09/africa-overview-may-2025/>

^[45] ACLED 2025: <https://acleddata.com/data/>

Unidentified armed groups continued to pose a persistent and opaque threat. In May 2025, at least 140 fatalities were attributed to actors whose identity could not be confirmed. These killings were widespread in Nigeria, particularly in Zamfara, Plateau, and Niger states, and were also recorded in Ghana and Mali. The presence of unidentified assailants reflects the growing fragmentation of violence and the limitations of state intelligence and attribution systems. It also allows armed actors to evade accountability while sustaining high levels of fear and disruption.

Law enforcement agencies, particularly the police, were linked to several civilian deaths during crowd control, raids, and checkpoint altercations. In Nigeria, police operations reportedly resulted in over a dozen deaths, especially in urban centres such as Lagos and Abuja. Additional incidents were recorded in Guinea and Liberia, mainly in the context of protests and enforcement actions. These events reflect long-standing concerns about police brutality, inadequate training, and a lack of accountability in the use of force. The actors driving West Africa's security crisis in May 2025 operated across a spectrum of legitimacy and responsibility. From state militaries conducting controversial operations to insurgent groups establishing authority in ungoverned spaces, and from vigilantes filling gaps in formal security to anonymous attackers avoiding detection, the region's violence is shaped by multiple forces. Without an actor-specific and rights-centred strategy, the efforts to address insecurity risk reinforcing the very structures that sustain it.

Strategic Developments

In Nigeria, there was a significant response to cult-related unrest when the chairman of Oshimili North Local Government Area declared a seven-day curfew in Akwukwu-Igbo on 29 May. This move reflects the growing securitisation of communal and criminal violence, particularly in peri-urban areas not previously viewed as hotspots. Meanwhile, in Burkina Faso, authorities introduced adaptive security measures to counter insurgent threats during the rainy season. Specifically, officials in Kalsaka (Yatenga) banned the cultivation of tall crops, such as millet, maize, and sorghum, near military and volunteer positions to improve visibility and facilitate defensive operations. This measure underscores a shift toward integrated civilian-military coordination.

Similarly, Mali experienced notable strategic developments with a regional dimension. On 31 May, the Ministers of Justice from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger announced the creation of a Sahelian Criminal and Human Rights Court, a high-security regional prison, and new frameworks to harmonise their legal systems. These initiatives, unveiled in Bamako, mark an effort to consolidate regional legal authority outside ECOWAS structures. At the same time, non-military developments occurred at the local level. JNIM reportedly reached agreements with residents in Noina, Keke, and Kobassa (Djenne, Mopti), while also imposing embargoes in Diafarabe and Nouhoun-Peuhi. A suspected ISSP militant surrendered to the GATIA militia in Tassiga (Ansongo, Gao) on 27 May. The seizure of vehicles by ISSP at a gold mine in Intahaka (Gao) and the razing of a Nigerian military camp in Kuchi (Muya, Niger) further highlighted the continuing militarisation and economic stakes of the conflict.

In the Benin Republic, a series of low-intensity but strategically significant developments took place. On 30 May, suspected JNIM militants spent time in Tantega (Materi, Atacora) without resorting to violence, a likely demonstration of control. A day earlier, on 29 May, militants warned the chief of Tankonga (Kouande, Atacora) against collaborating with security forces. Similar threats were issued to residents of Tasso (Nikki, Borgou) on 28 May. These security pressures triggered the displacement of families from Tanongou (Tanguieta, Atacora) on 27 May, while continued looting, such as cattle theft in Tchafarga, marked persistent militant influence.

In the neighbouring Niger Republic, no institutional reforms were announced during the month. Nonetheless, the destruction of a Nigerian military camp in Kuchi (Muya) by Boko Haram exposed operational weaknesses and underscored border security challenges. Broader patterns of property destruction and displacement continued, pointing to the need for enhanced coordination across borders.

By contrast, Ghana witnessed no major structural shifts in its national security architecture during the month. State responses to escalating violence in the Upper East and Ashanti regions remained largely ad hoc, relying on community engagement and intermittent patrols rather than formal curfews or legislative action. In Senegal, authorities reported no strategic-level reforms or new security frameworks in May 2025.

Likewise, Guinea did not introduce new strategic security policies. However, persistent local tensions and grievances continued to manifest in sporadic protests and community-led actions. Turning to Mauritania, the country became a site of regional political signalling when, on 31 May, the Azawad Liberation Front (FLA) stated that it condemned Turkey's support for Sahelian juntas in Tin Zaouaten (Kidal). The FLA accused Turkey of providing drones and weapons used in repressive campaigns against civilians, highlighting external actors' roles in shaping the region's conflict dynamics. On the contrary, there were no new strategic security developments in Ivory Coast, Cape Verde, Liberia, Togo, Guinea-Bissau, and Sierra Leone in May 2025. Their relative calm may reflect a reliance on existing security mechanisms, though underlying tensions in several of these countries could prompt future action.

Strategic developments in May 2025 across West Africa reflected both state-led reforms and non-state adaptation. While AES members prioritised judicial integration and territorial control, other states grappled with hybrid threats through community-level action. The evolving mix of military, legal, and political responses suggests a fragmented yet reactive security landscape shaped by both internal vulnerabilities and transnational pressures.

Conclusion

The security trajectory of West Africa in May 2025 reflects an entrenched and expanding crisis marked by operational sophistication from insurgent groups, rising lethality in state responses, and the erosion of civilian protection norms. While Nigeria and Burkina Faso continue to anchor the region's instability, Niger, Mali, and Benin illustrate the broadening scope and coordination of violent actors across borders. Simultaneously, growing protest activity and governance strain in coastal states signal that the region's fragility is not confined to traditional conflict zones.

The persistence of high-fatality events alongside institutional fragmentation points to the exhaustion of purely kinetic strategies. Without integrated responses that prioritise political legitimacy, civilian security, and transnational coordination, the region risks normalising violence as a tool of both governance and resistance. West Africa's current conflict environment demands not only tactical containment but a strategic recalibration grounded in justice, inclusion, and resilience.

About CDD-West Africa

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa) was established in 1997 as an independent, not-for-profit research, training, advocacy, and capacity-building organisation. Its mission is to drive democracy, security, and development in West Africa by bridging policymakers, civil society, and academia through research and strategic analysis.

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