II. Armed conflict and peace processes in West Africa

VIRGINIE BAUDAIS AND ANNELIES HICKENDORFF

Six countries experienced armed conflict in West Africa in 2020 (out of a total of 17 states or territories in the subregion, see figure 7.1): Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. However, in this section, the focus is on the high-intensity armed conflicts in the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) and the Lake Chad region (Niger and Nigeria, as well as the Central African states of Cameroon and Chad).\(^1\) Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria were involved in armed conflicts in 2020 that all worsened in terms of conflict-related fatalities (compared with in 2019). In addition, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea experienced election-related violence, but only the latter two were classified as armed conflicts in 2020 (with more than 25 battle-related fatalities).\(^2\)

This section is divided into four core discussions: (a) on the key general developments in the region; (b) on the armed conflicts in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, within the context of developments within the tri-border Liptako-Gourma region; (c) on the internationalization of counterterrorism activities alongside more traditional multinational United Nations peace operations; and (d) the armed conflict in the Lake Chad region and Nigeria.

**Key general developments in the region**

Many states in West Africa face severe governance problems linked to state weakness, extreme poverty, economic fragility and growing insecurity—issues compounded in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. While the exact number of Covid-19 cases and deaths in West Africa in 2020 is uncertain—estimates range between 77 000 and 112 000 fatalities—the border closures and the global slowdown seriously affected socio-economic developments in a region already heavily dependent on foreign aid.\(^3\) On top of this, unequal economic growth and the impact of climate change in a region where more than 80 per cent of the population relies essentially on agriculture and pastoral activities have led to increased food insecurity.\(^4\) Irregular migration, corruption, illicit trafficking and transnational organized crime also flourish, especially where states are challenged by various armed groups.

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\(^1\) Also see the discussion of armed conflict in Cameroon and Chad in section III of this chapter.

\(^2\) For conflict definitions and typologies see chapter 2, section I, in this volume.


The security situation is aggravated by the strength of transnational armed groups and violent extremist groups such as Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, and the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin, JNIM), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Ansarul Islam and Katiba Serma in the Liptako-Gourma region. Extremist groups are interwoven with local self-defence militias and armed groups, and exacerbate local and community tensions.

Other violence in West Africa was predominantly generated around contested elections and the enforcement by national security forces of public health and social measures due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Despite the pandemic, six countries conducted presidential elections (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Niger and Togo), legislative elections took place in Guinea, Liberia and Mali, and Benin, Cape Verde and Niger held local elections. Following contested constitutional changes, incumbent presidents Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire and Alpha Condé of Guinea

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won in the first round of their respective elections in November.\textsuperscript{7} In both countries election-related violence resulted in a sharp increase in protest-related fatalities in 2020. In Côte d’Ivoire the number of such fatalities rose from 16 in 2019 to 51 in 2020, while several thousand refugees from the country’s west and south-west regions fled to Liberia.\textsuperscript{8} In Guinea fatalities increased from 22 in 2019 to 104 in 2020.\textsuperscript{9} In Burkina Faso where the outgoing president, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, was also re-elected in the first ballot, elections were dominated by a threat of jihadist violence that prevented people from voting in at least one fifth of the country.\textsuperscript{10} In Mali post-legislative election contestation and denunciation of insecurity and bad governance ultimately led to a military coup resulting in the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta on 18 August 2020.\textsuperscript{11}

The deteriorating security situation in West Africa was accompanied by a continuous humanitarian crisis: by mid 2020, 31 million people, of whom more than 50 per cent were children, were in need of life-saving assistance. This was an increase of 7 million compared with the beginning of the year.\textsuperscript{12} As a result of this insecurity, in December 2020 the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported an unprecedented high number of forced displacements in the Sahel with 5 million people, including 4.1 million internally displaced persons and 870 000 refugees.\textsuperscript{13}

There were two cross-cutting issues that also contributed to security challenges in West Africa in 2020: (a) the spread of violent extremism and terrorism and (b) the Covid-19 pandemic.

\textit{Violent extremism and insecurity}

Hotspots of insecurity in West Africa in 2020 were the Liptako-Gourma region of the Sahel (comprising border regions of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) and the Lake Chad region, which both confronted violence by extremist religious groups, militias and various armed groups. In the Lake Chad region the main insurgent group, Boko Haram, has spread from Nigeria across the lake-bordering regions in Cameroon, Chad and Niger, causing

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{8}‘Ivorians flee to neighboring countries fearing post-electoral violence’, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 3 Nov. 2020; and Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), Dashboard, accessed 3 Mar. 2021.
  \item \textsuperscript{9}ACLED (note 8).
  \item \textsuperscript{10}‘Burkina Faso election takes place amid jihadist threat’, BBC News, 23 Nov. 2020; and ‘Burkina Faso’s Kaboré wins re-election, according to full preliminary results’, France 24, 26 Nov. 2020.
  \item \textsuperscript{12}United Nations, S/2020/1293 (note 6).
  \item \textsuperscript{13}UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), ‘West and Central Africa’, Global Humanitarian Overview 2021 (UN OCHA: Geneva, 1 Dec. 2020).
\end{itemize}
a massive humanitarian crisis and increasing internal and cross-border displacements.\(^{14}\)

In the Liptako-Gourma region, the main violent jihadi groups are: JNIM, which includes al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Ansar Eddine, Al-Mourabitoune, Katiba Macina and Katiba Serma; Ansarul Islam; and ISGS.\(^{15}\) On 9 February 2020 a police station was attacked in Keremou, Benin, at the border with Burkina Faso and Niger; on 11 June 2020 violent extremists believed to be members of JNIM shot around 10 soldiers at a frontier post on Côte d’Ivoire’s border with Burkina Faso—the first attack in Côte d’Ivoire since the attack in Grand-Bassam in March 2016.\(^{16}\) A spillover of the conflict beyond the Sahel to the coastal countries remains a potential risk.\(^{17}\)

In Central Sahel the presence of armed groups has increased existing vulnerabilities associated with structural fragility and political instability. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger rank at the bottom of the UN Development Programme’s 2020 human development index. According to the World Bank the 2019 poverty rates of these states vary between 40 and 43 per cent.\(^{18}\) As a result of this protracted crisis, the number of internally displaced people has risen twentyfold since 2018 from 70,000 to 1.5 million.\(^{19}\) As of 31 December 2020, this number had risen to 1.7 million individuals, of whom 64 per cent were located in Burkina Faso (twice as many as in 2019), while 20 per cent resided in Mali, 12 per cent in Niger and 4 per cent in Mauritania.\(^{20}\) In Tillabéri and Tahoua regions, the number of internally displaced Nigeriens increased by 77 per cent in 2020 to 138,229.\(^{21}\)

**The impact of Covid-19**

Whereas the public health impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was not as devastating in 2020 as initially feared, the restrictions on movement, lockdowns, market closures and barriers to trade had serious political, socio-economic, humanitarian and security impacts.\(^{22}\) The pandemic has deepened the

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\(^{16}\) ‘Ivory Coast soldiers killed in attack at border post near Burkina Faso’, France 24, 11 June 2020.

\(^{17}\) ‘The risk of jihadist contagion in West Africa’ (note 15).


\(^{19}\) UN OCHA (note 13).


pre-existing gender inequalities in West Africa, and women and girls have been disproportionately affected by the consequences of stay-at-home orders and school closures. Increasing domestic and gender-based violence as well as loss of livelihoods have been reported. National security forces in several states used violence to enforce the Covid-19-related restrictions. According to Human Rights Watch the governments in Ghana, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone used the pandemic as an excuse to censor the media or limit free speech.

**Armed conflict in the Liptako-Gourma region**

The 2012 northern Mali crisis has become, over the years, a regionally multidimensional crisis. This subsection focuses on the armed conflicts in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger with a particular focus on the tri-border Liptako-Gourma region, which includes the provinces of: Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre-Nord, Est, Nord and Sahel (Burkina Faso); Gao, Ménaka and Mopti (Mali); and Tillabéri (Niger). The Liptako-Gourma region struggles with several interconnected layers of conflict, including: (a) the presence of jihadist groups; (b) intercommunity and intracommunity tensions, farmer–herder competition and land disputes; and (c) other sources of violence, such as banditry, illicit trafficking and organized crime.

In 2020 violence in Liptako-Gourma escalated further with over 5000 conflict-related fatalities, most of which occurred in the region's Burkina Faso and Mali provinces (see table 7.3). Violence is directed against civilian populations, local authorities, civil servants and national security forces. Armed groups are kidnapping or killing traditional, religious and community leaders suspected of collaborating with the state. This strategy aims to discourage local populations from cooperating with the state and force them to collaborate with the armed groups, which destroys traditional community ties. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack noted over 85 attacks on schools in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger between January and July 2020, despite Covid-19-related school closures between late March and May. As of April 2020 more than 135 health centres and

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2500 schools were closed in Burkina Faso, depriving 338 000 students of access to education and millions of people of access to essential healthcare.\(^\text{28}\)

**Burkina Faso**

Since 2015, the situation in Burkina Faso has deteriorated and the country is under constant pressure from armed groups. The weak state presence has left communities with limited protection and allowed for the proliferation of armed groups and militias, including the Koglweogo groups.\(^\text{29}\) To support the fight against terrorism, the government chose to arm civilians and create the civilian defence volunteers’ forces (Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie) in January 2020.\(^\text{30}\) Arbitrary arrests and executions by national armed forces have led to distrust between the central government and large parts of the population. Human Rights Watch reported that Burkina Faso’s state security forces were involved in mass extrajudicial executions.\(^\text{31}\)

**Mali**

While the military situation in the north of the country stabilized in 2020, the situation in the centre continued to deteriorate as armed and radicalized groups fuelled old and local intercommunity tensions. The implementation of the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali did not make any major advances in 2020 due to the sociopolitical crisis, the coup d’état and the Covid-19 pandemic.\(^\text{32}\)

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31 ‘Burkina Faso: Residents’ accounts point to mass executions’, Human Rights Watch, 8 July 2020.

In addition to the persistent insecurity, corruption and bad governance fuelled discontent with the government. After weeks of popular mobilization led by the coalition called 5 June Movement–Rally of Patriotic Forces, a military coup removed President Keïta from power on 18 August 2020. Implementation of the 2015 Bamako Agreement remained the goal of the new transitional authorities and international mediators, and the new Malian authorities expressed their willingness to talk to all groups including those that have not signed the agreement.

To address the situation and support the stabilization of the country, several multinational peace operations and other multilateral operations are operating in the country and in the Liptako-Gourma region (as discussed below). Notwithstanding, the situation worsened in 2020 (see table 7.4).

### Niger

The rise in fatalities on a national level from 719 in 2019 to 1114 in 2020 can be explained by the increasing violence in the Liptako-Gourma region, which was responsible for 61 per cent of the total national fatalities (see table 7.3). In Tillabéri, the high number of refugees and displaced people forced authorities to manage the local economy and to avoid the disruption of local dynamics and tensions around natural resources. The crisis also led to a deterioration of the relationship among communities and weakened traditional authorities, which are targeted by armed groups. Although the number of violent events in Diffa increased from 150 in 2019 to 167 in 2020, Niger suffered fewer fatalities involving Boko Haram in 2020 than in 2019 (see table 7.6). Incidents involving Boko Haram in 2020 included an assault

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**Table 7.4.** Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Mali, 2013–20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Battles</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>831</td>
<td>1,657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explosions/remote violence</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protests, riots and strategic developments</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against civilians</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>883</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>1,747</td>
<td>1,875</td>
<td>2,849</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ‘ACLED definitions of political violence and protest’, 11 Apr. 2019.


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Table 7.5. Active external national and multilateral peace and counterterrorism operations in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Launched or established</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contributing countries/organizations</th>
<th>Force level (No. of personnel deployed)</th>
<th>Country of deployment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>European Union (EU) Capacity Building Mission Sahel Niger</td>
<td>EU member states</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>Niger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali</td>
<td>United Nations (mainly African countries, Bangladesh, China, Egypt and Germany)</td>
<td>15 050</td>
<td>Mali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>EU Training Mission in Mali</td>
<td>EU member states</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>Mali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Multinational Joint Task Force</td>
<td>Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria</td>
<td>10 620</td>
<td>Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Operation Barkhane</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>5 100</td>
<td>Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>EU Capacity Building Mission Sahel Mali</td>
<td>EU member states</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>Mali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel</td>
<td>Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger</td>
<td>5 000</td>
<td>Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Task Force Takuba</td>
<td>France, special forces from European states (Estonia, France)</td>
<td>[. ]&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Liptako-Gourma region</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Initiated as a solely Nigerian force in 1994; expanded to include Chad and Niger in 1998.

<sup>b</sup> Succeeded Operation Serval, which was launched in January 2013 and ended in July 2014.

<sup>c</sup> No estimate for 2020.


in Toumour on the Diffa border, which killed 28 people and injured hundreds more on 13 December, the day of local and regional elections.<sup>34</sup>

Multinational peace and counterterrorism operations

To address insecurities in West Africa, several multinational peace and counterterrorism operations have been deployed, mainly in the Sahel region (see table 7.5). The largest of these is the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, which focuses on peacekeeping and stabilization. However, it continued to face enormous difficulties in implementing its protection of civilians mandate in 2020. The United States, the European Union (EU) and several European states are centrally involved in the fight against transnational jihadist and criminal networks in the region, albeit rarely directly: most Western forces train and build capacity in local forces, including the two ad hoc counterterrorism task forces: the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad region and the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) Joint Force. Since March 2020 the EU Training Mission in Mali has been mandated to improve the operational capacity of the Malian army and also to assist the national armed forces of the other G5 Sahel countries. On the civilian side, the EU Capacity Building Mission Sahel Mali and the EU Capacity Building Mission Sahel Niger support the internal security forces (see table 7.5).

At the 13 January 2020 Pau Summit in France, France and the G5 Sahel countries launched the Coalition for the Sahel, a broader coordinating framework. The coalition is based on four pillars: the fight against terrorism, capacity building for Sahelian forces, restoration of state authority and development assistance. The counterterrorism pillar comprises special forces from European states—Task Force Takuba officially launched on 27 March 2020. The European task force is placed under Operation Barkhane’s command, and advises, assists and accompanies Malian Armed Forces. An initial operational capability for Task Force Takuba, consisting of French and Estonian units, was in place by the end of 2020, and a 150-troop contingent from Sweden was due to be deployed in early 2021. Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal have also

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39 The European signatories of the political statement are Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Niger, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom.
pledged future contributions. France also increased its military personnel under Operation Barkhane from 4500 to 5100 in 2020.

The effectiveness of these peace and counterterrorism operations has been mixed, whether at the military level or in the restoration of state authority, while more needs to be done to differentiate between civilians and combatants in the areas where they operate. From February until April 2020 national and foreign forces intensified their counterterrorism operations in the Liptako-Gourma region, which is reflected in a concurrent peak in battle deaths and in violence against civilians. The involvement of the defence and security forces and international forces in human rights violations committed during military operations in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger increased in 2020 compared to in 2019. Since late 2019 the crackdown on terrorism by the security forces of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger has resulted in more than 600 extrajudicial killings of civilians during counterterrorism operations.

**Armed conflict in the Lake Chad region**

Armed conflict, forced displacement and grave human rights violations, including killings, sexual violence, abduction and recruitment of child soldiers, remained widespread in the Lake Chad region, which includes

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**Table 7.6. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in the Lake Chad region, 2017–20**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province (state)</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Far North (Cameroon)</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>592 (37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lac (Chad)</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>441 (60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffa (Niger)</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>338 (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adamawa, Borno and Yobe (Nigeria)</td>
<td>3,022</td>
<td>2,591</td>
<td>2,221</td>
<td>3,465 (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,969</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,346</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,340</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,836 (43)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percentages are of total national conflict-related fatalities.*


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41 See chapter 2, section II, in this volume.
the provinces of Far North (in Cameroon); Lac (in Chad); Diffa (in Niger); and Adamawa, Borno and Yobe (in Nigeria). Boko Haram, which started its violent uprising in 2009, and the growing influence of the Islamic State West Africa Province (a Boko Haram splinter group) with deepening roots in civilian populations, contributed to a continued humanitarian crisis and increased internal and cross-border displacement of people.47

The security situation in the Lake Chad region worsened in 2020, with a sharp increase in conflict-related fatalities of 44 per cent. There were 3340 fatalities in 2019 versus 4836 in 2020 (see table 7.6).48 The high number can partly be explained by the battles between Boko Haram and Chad's military. Chadian troops claimed to have killed 1000 Boko Haram members around Lake Chad in response to the ambush that killed almost 100 of their soldiers in Boma, Chad, on 23 March 2020.49

As of 23 November 2020, 2.7 million people in the region were internally displaced and another 257 000 were refugees in neighbouring countries. An estimated 12.5 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance, of whom 10.6 million were in north-eastern Nigeria where an estimated 4.3 million people faced emergency levels of food insecurity. With increasing attacks on education, 1117 schools in the Lake Chad region remained closed during 2020, of which 934 were in Nigeria.50

Chad has been one of the most important regional actors in the fight against jihadist groups in the Sahel. Its troop withdrawals from Borno in Nigeria in January 2020 heightened the risk of attacks in Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria.51 On 23 March 2020 an estimated force of 400 Boko Haram fighters killed around 100 Chadian soldiers in an unprecedented large attack on a garrison on Bohoma Peninsula, confirming the threat of violent extremism in the country and the region.52 In response, Chadian troops—mainly outside of the auspices of the MNJTF—claimed to have killed 1000 Boko Haram members during operation Wrath of Boma.53 This unprecedented attack in Bohoma confirmed the growing threat of violent extremism in the country and the region.

48 ACLED (note 44).
51 Ahmen, K., ‘Fears for civilians in Chad after army suffers devastating Boko Haram attack’, The Guardian, 1 Apr. 2020. Also see the discussion on Chad in section III of this chapter.
52 ‘Boko Haram militants kill nearly 100 Chadian soldiers in attack’, Reuters (note 49).
53 ‘Chad’s army says 52 soldiers, 1,000 Boko Haram fighters killed in operation’, Reuters (note 49); and ‘Behind the jihadist attack in Chad’, Commentary, International Crisis Group, 6 Apr. 2020.
With 71 per cent of the total conflict-related fatalities in the Lake Chad region, Borno in Nigeria (the birthplace of Boko Haram) continued to be the epicentre of the conflict in 2020 (see table 7.6). In the most violent direct attack on civilians in 2020, at least 110 people were killed near the Borno capital Maiduguri on 28 November 2020. Boko Haram’s area of operation also expanded into the north-west region of Nigeria in 2020, where it forged alliances with increasingly overlapping and intertwining bandits and criminal gangs. Banditry, including armed robbery, cattle rustling, murder, kidnapping and sexual violence, surged in 2020: after a lull at the end of 2019, more than 1600 fatalities were recorded in the north-west region between January and June 2020. In mid December 2020 Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of hundreds of students in the state of Katsina, far from its original bases. Some of the kidnapped boys were reportedly released on 17 December 2020.

Aside from the intensifying Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east and the surge in banditry in the north-west, Nigeria experienced additional security challenges in 2020. Against the backdrop of an economic recession due to Covid-19 coupled with a collapse in oil prices, the country faced protests against police brutality, increasing violence between farmers

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Table 7.7. Estimated conflict-related fatalities in Nigeria, 2013–20

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<thead>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Battles</td>
<td>2,326</td>
<td>4,031</td>
<td>3,329</td>
<td>2,191</td>
<td>1,779</td>
<td>2,470</td>
<td>2,475</td>
<td>3,336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explosions/remote violence</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>1,311</td>
<td>1,938</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>1,424</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>1,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protests, riots and strategic</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against civilians</td>
<td>2,039</td>
<td>5,794</td>
<td>5,285</td>
<td>1,886</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>2,853</td>
<td>2,075</td>
<td>2,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,686</strong></td>
<td><strong>11,388</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,918</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,896</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,947</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,243</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,431</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,760</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** For definitions of event types, see Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ‘ACLED definitions of political violence and protest’, 11 Apr. 2019.


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58 ‘Nigeria’s Katsina school abduction: Boko Haram says it took the students’, BBC News, 15 Dec. 2020; Akinwotu (note 57); and Campbell (note 57).
and herders in the Middle Belt and the north-west, and the long-running militancy in the Niger Delta.\footnote{59}

In 2020 Nigeria’s conflict-related fatalities were at the highest level since the peak in 2014–15, when the Nigerian armed forces recaptured territory from Boko Haram (see table 7.7).\footnote{60} This can partly be explained by the rise in fatalities in the Lake Chad region and banditry in the north-west. Violence by national security forces also contributed to the rise in fatalities: the Nigerian National Human Rights Commission, for instance, reported by mid April that violent enforcing of the lockdown caused almost twice as many fatalities as the officially reported Covid-19 deaths at that time.\footnote{61} Nigeria’s military spending increased by 29 per cent to reach $2.6 billion in 2020.\footnote{62}


\footnote{60} ‘Most territory regained from Boko Haram, Nigeria says’, Voice of America, 17 Mar. 2015.

\footnote{61} ‘Report on human rights violations following the implementation of Covid-19 regulations 2020 and directives issued by federal and state governments from 31st March to 13th April 2020’, National Human Rights Commission, 8 July 2020.

\footnote{62} On Nigeria’s military spending see chapter 8, section II, in this volume.