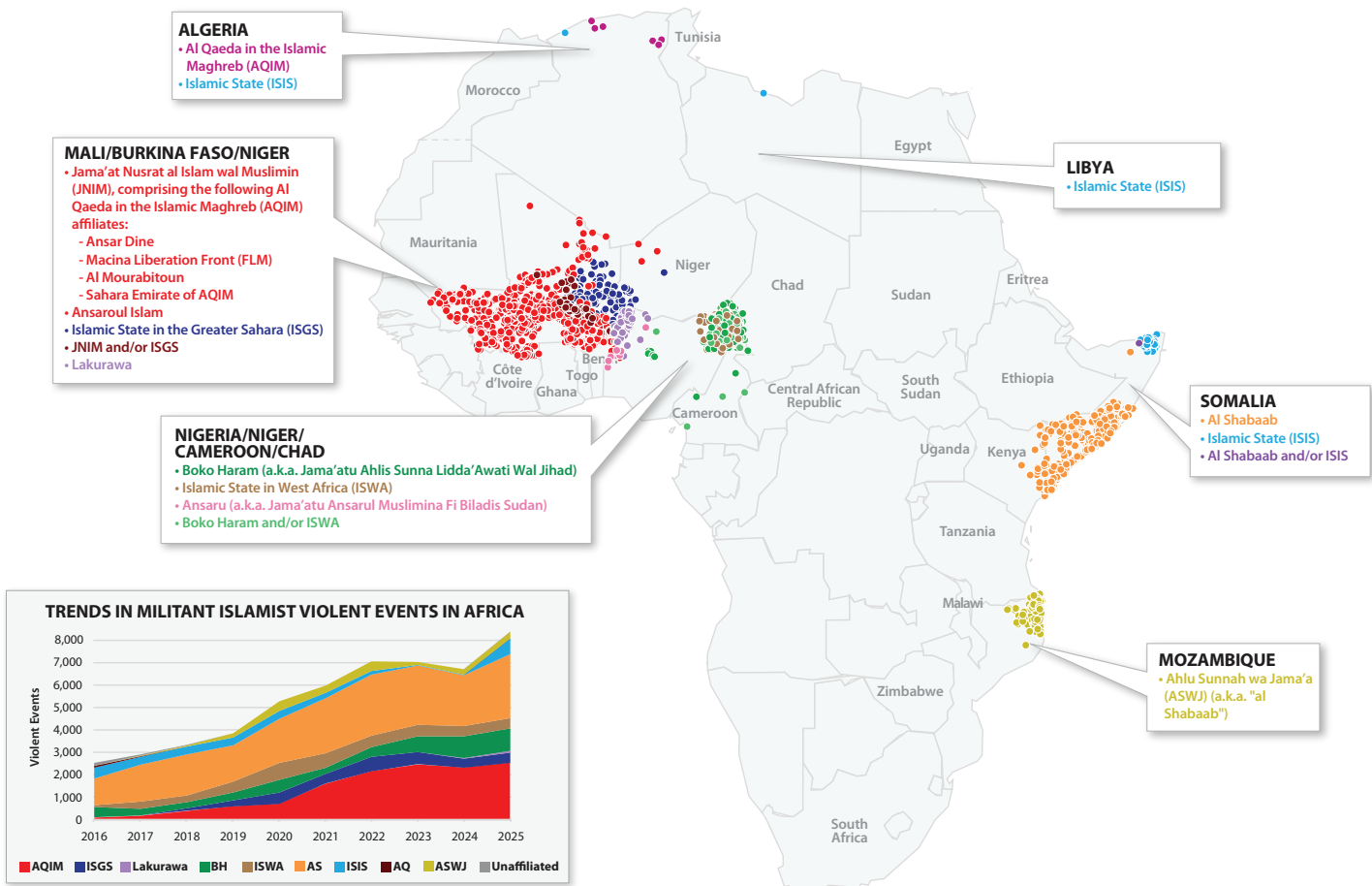


By the Africa Center for Strategic Studies

April 6, 2026

Increasingly capable and organized militant Islamist groups in the Sahel, Somalia, and the Lake Chad Basin continue to expand their reach and lethality.

AFRICA'S ACTIVE MILITANT ISLAMIST GROUPS



Updated: March 2026

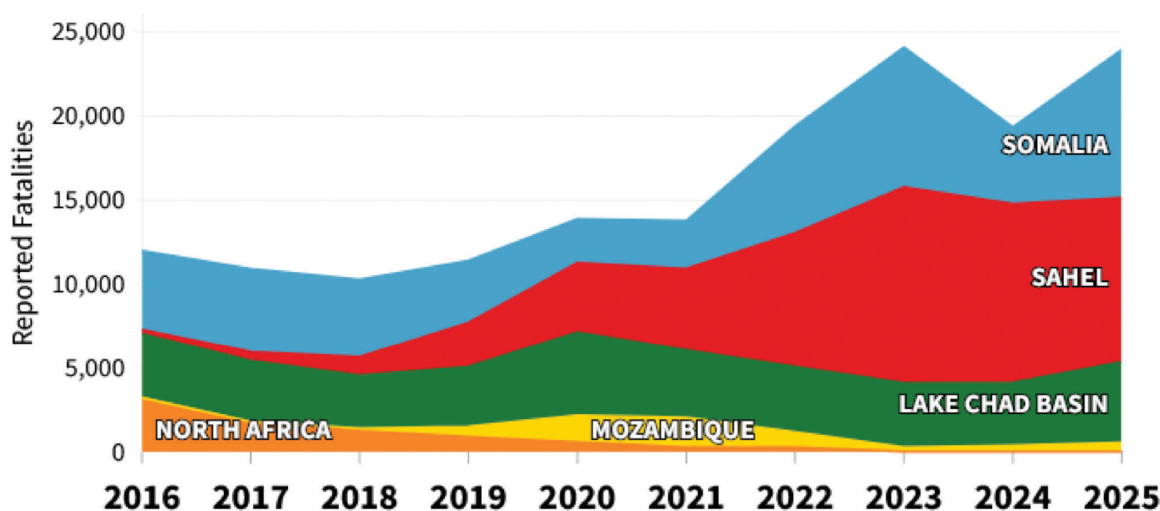
Note: Compiled by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, this graphic shows violent events involving the listed groups over the 12-month period ending December 31, 2025. Data on attacks or fatalities does not attempt to distinguish the perpetrators of the events. Group listings are intended for informational purposes only and should not be considered official designations. Due to the fluid nature of many groups, the listed affiliations may change.

Sources: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data); Centro Para Democracia e Direitos Humanos; Hiraal Institute; HumAngle; International Crisis Group; Institute for Security Studies; MENASTREAM; National Centre for Scientific Research; the Washington Institute; and the United Nations.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Fatalities linked to militant Islamist groups in Africa continue to occur at near record levels. The 23,968 fatalities in 2025, a 24 percent increase from the previous year, reflect increased violence in nearly every theater. The reported 8,375 violent events linked to these groups were the highest ever reported on the continent.

FATALITIES LINKED TO MILITANT ISLAMIST GROUPS IN AFRICA BY THEATER

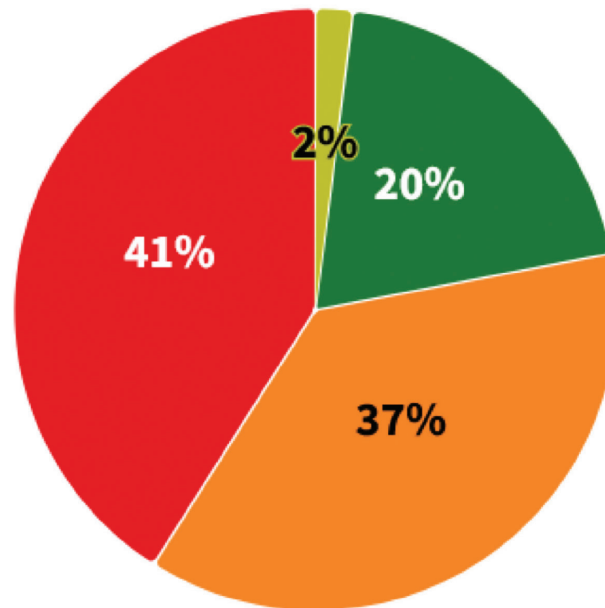


Data source: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data)

- The Sahel continues to experience the greatest number of militant Islamist group-linked fatalities of any region on the continent—a position the Sahel has maintained for the past 5 years. The elevated number of reported fatalities in the Sahel persists despite growing restrictions on reporting from the region that are likely undercounting the severity of this violence.
- Heavy-handed tactics by security forces in the Sahel are continuing to drive jihadist recruitment. Fatalities linked to violence against civilians by the armed forces and allied militias in Mali and Burkina Faso, collectively, have exceeded those attributed to militant Islamist groups since 2023.
- Somalia saw the biggest surge in reported fatalities across all regions—reflecting a heightened level of battles with armed forces across multiple states. The 8,813 deaths linked to al Shabaab and the Islamic State (ISIS) over the past year represent a 93-percent increase from the previous year.
- The Lake Chad Basin also saw a 28-percent increase in fatalities from the previous year, demonstrating the continued threat from Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA), mostly in northeast Nigeria. Meanwhile, there are indications that militant Islamist groups such as Ansaru and Boko Haram have also become more active in northwestern Nigeria, compounding the security threat posed by organized criminal groups (commonly referred to as bandits) in this region.

MILITANT ISLAMIST-LINKED FATALITIES BY THEATER

■ SAHEL ■ MOZAMBIQUE ■ LAKE CHAD BASIN ■ SOMALIA



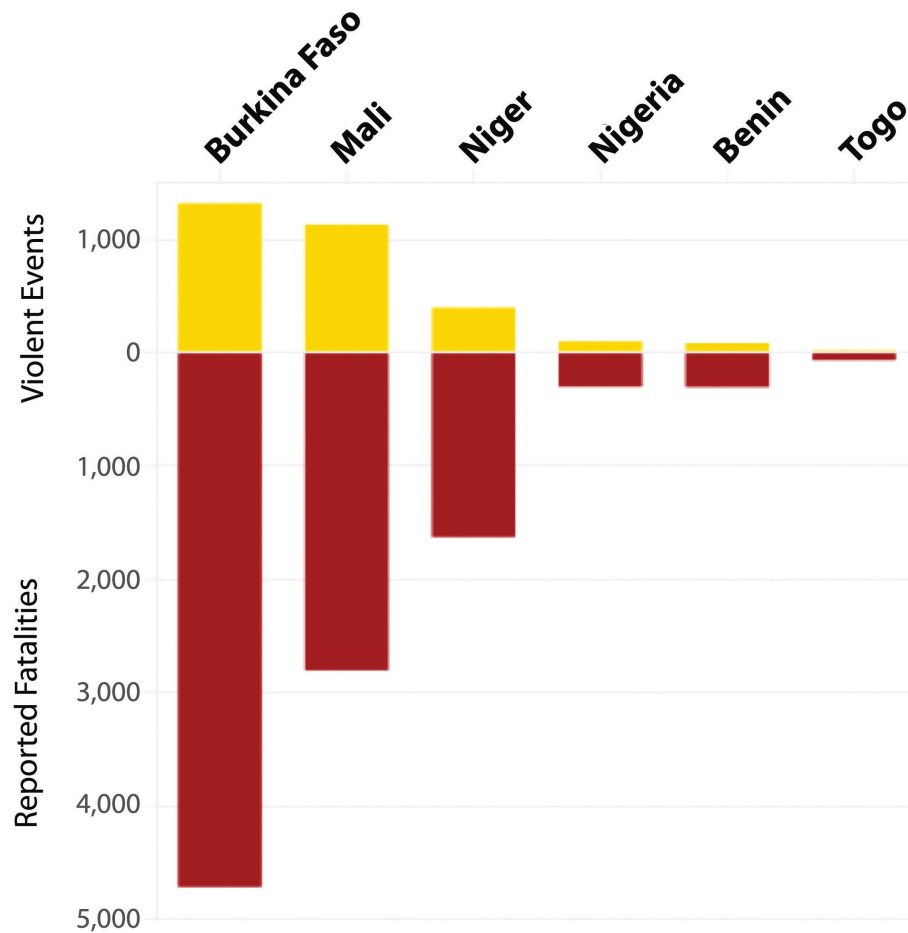
Data source: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data) (2025)

- Collectively—the Sahel, Somalia, and Lake Chad Basin—account for 98 percent of all militant Islamist group-linked fatalities in Africa.

SAHEL

- Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger continue to face intense pressure from militant Islamist groups, which have pushed southward and into more populated areas in each of these countries. The nearly 9,826 reported fatalities in this region account for 41 percent of all deaths linked to militant Islamist groups in Africa.
- The geographic expanse of the militant Islamist threat in this region—traversing more than 1,200 km from east to west—is also greater than any other theater.
- This violence has been largely driven by the Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) coalition, which has been linked to 78 percent of the fatalities in the region (and 2,502 out of the 3,039 reported events) over the past year. In Mali, for example, the JNIM coalition has executed a wave of attacks on military bases from Timbuktu in the north to Bamako in the south and Keyes in the west (including near the borders with Senegal and Mauritania). Since September 2025, the coalition has targeted the importation of fuel into the country along key economic corridors from Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, causing price spikes and major economic disruptions.

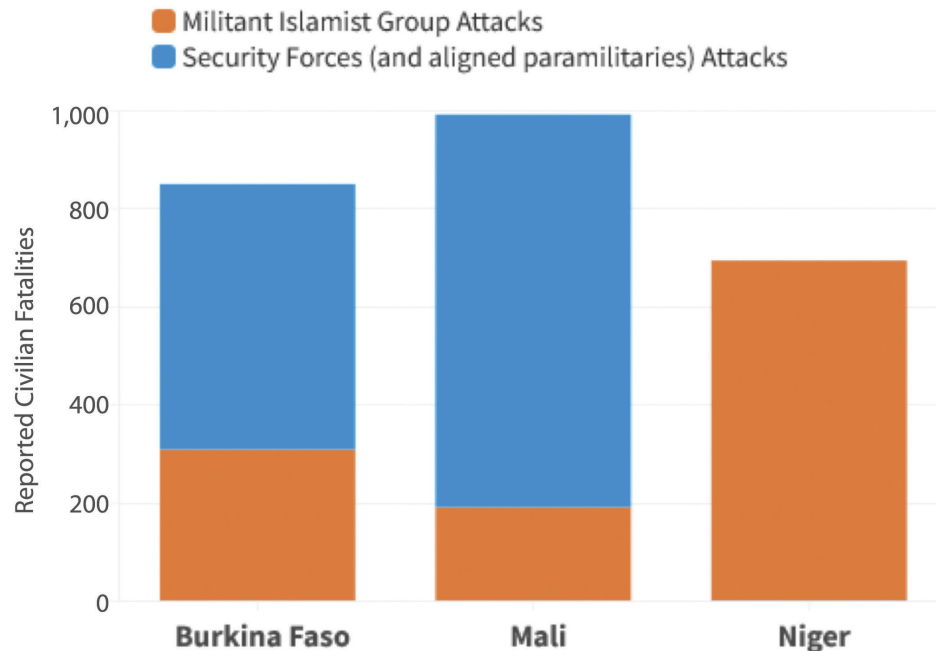
MILITANT ISLAMIST ACTIVITY AND FATALITIES IN THE SAHEL



Data source: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data) (2025)

- Burkina Faso continues to experience the highest levels of violence in the Sahel, accounting for 50 percent of all militant Islamist-linked fatalities in the region. Mali represents over 29 percent of these fatalities, while Niger 17 percent. The percentage for Niger represents a sharp increase from the 7 percent recorded in 2023, when there was a military coup against the democratically elected government of President Mohamed Bazoum.
- JNIM affiliates enjoy substantial freedom of movement in Burkina Faso. These groups have also increased their direct and large-scale attacks on urban centers. In May 2025, JNIM claimed to have killed 200 Burkina Faso soldiers in Djibo, the capital of Soum Province, and another 60 in Sollé of Loroum Province.
- Millions of Burkinabe have been displaced, but current and accurate numbers are unknown. The junta in Burkina Faso has been accused of preventing some communities from fleeing in order to present the areas as stable.

VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS IN THE SAHEL



Data source: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data) (2025)

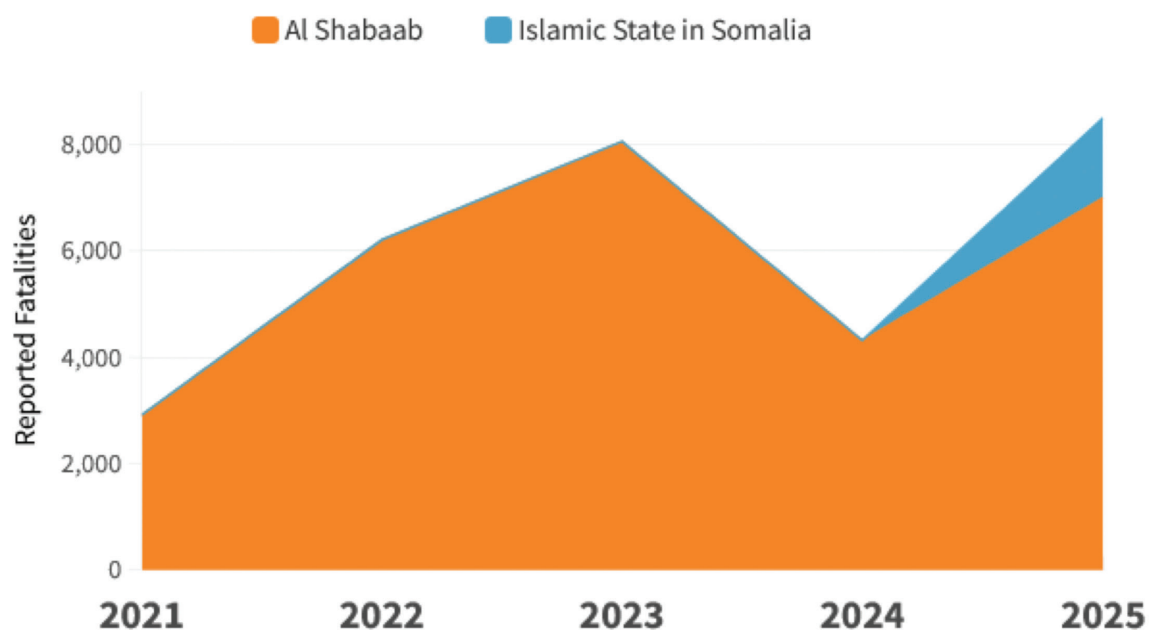
- JNIM has used the repression and violence against civilians by the military juntas in Burkina Faso and Mali—as well as atrocities against civilians by junta-aligned Russian paramilitary groups—to drive recruitment.
- The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) was linked to 19 percent of the reported fatalities in the Sahel. Based largely in western Niger and eastern Mali, ISGS has distinguished itself by the level of violence against civilians. In Niger, for example, ISGS was reportedly responsible for roughly 94 percent of the civilian fatalities (approximately 650), a 144-percent increase from the previous year.
- ISGS appears to be consolidating a sanctuary north of Niamey, positioning itself for deeper incursions into Niger. As a result, Niger saw a 51-percent increase in violent activity linked to militant Islamist groups over the past year.
- The past year has also seen growing competition between JNIM and ISGS, with multiple clashes between the two militant groups in western Burkina Faso and northern Mali, around Gao and Timbuktu.
- The southward expansion of the Sahelian militant Islamist groups continues to put great pressure on the coastal West African countries.
- This has been most acute in Benin, where the 305 militant Islamist-linked fatalities were the deadliest on record, and a 76-percent increase from the prior year. Underscoring its intentions, the JNIM leadership appointed an emir for Benin.

- In Togo, fighters linked to the JNIM coalition killed at least 54 civilians and 8 soldiers over the past year. Wedged between the Burkina Faso and Benin borders, Kpendjal Prefecture is the Togolese region worst-hit by jihadist attacks.
- For the first time, JNIM has claimed attacks in Nigeria that have killed soldiers. These attacks have occurred in a forested region bordering Benin and the Nigerian States of Kwara and Niger, where JNIM's ally, Ansaru, also conducted multiple attacks in 2025.
- Numerous reports suggest that ISGS has also expanded into northwest Nigeria from Niger via groups identified as Lakurawa. The alignments these jihadists have are unclear: there is evidence of Lakurawa cells cooperating with JNIM, ISGS, and Boko Haram. The activity attributed to Lakurawa accounts for 3 percent of fatalities (299 deaths) in this theater.

SOMALIA

- Somalia saw a surge in violence linked to militant Islamist groups over the past year, resulting in a 93-percent increase in fatalities (from 4,561 to 8,813)—a record high. The spike represents the largest annual shift recorded in any region on the continent and follows a marked lull in fatalities during the previous year.
- This rise in violence was largely attributed to a doubling in fatalities linked to battles (6,051) and remote violence (2,676). The latter accounts for more than half of the remote violence-linked deaths in Africa over the past year, highlighting the growing use of drones and air strikes in this theater.

FATALITIES INVOLVING MILITANT ISLAMIST GROUPS IN THE SOMALI THEATER



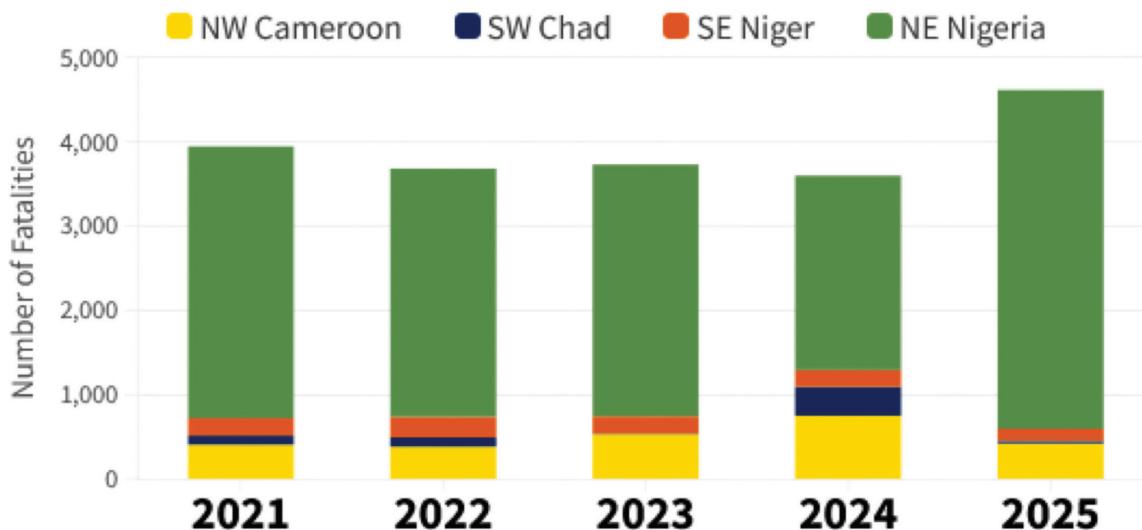
Data source: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data)

- Alternating battles between Somali security forces and al Shabaab accounted for 2,650 reported violent events and 7,052 fatalities. An al Shabaab offensive led to major gains for the militant group in central and southern regions of Somalia, bringing it within 50 km of Mogadishu. A counter offensive by the Somali National Army, federal member states, and aligned militias—in coordination with AUSSOM forces—recaptured several towns in the Lower Shabelle region described as al Shabaab “strongholds and safe havens.” Danab forces subsequently captured towns just 30 km from Jilib, al Shabaab’s de facto capital.
- Links between al Shabaab and the Houthis in Yemen have continued to deepen with increased levels of training and purchases of advanced weapons. Al Shabaab reportedly allocates about a quarter of its operational funds to acquiring arms from the Houthis and AQAP in Yemen.
- A year-long offensive led by Puntland Security Forces with the support of U.S. and UAE airstrikes in the north of Somalia accounted for 1,675 reported fatalities linked to ISIS’s affiliate in Somalia. Once numbering more than 1,000 fighters and earning an estimated \$4 million annually, ISIS lost most of its Somalia-based fighters as a result of these battles. ISIS’s Somalia affiliate had been a key coordination, management, and financial hub for ISIS globally.

LAKE CHAD BASIN

- The Lake Chad Basin saw a 28-percent increase in fatalities (from 3,734 to 4,779) linked to militant Islamist activity over the past year, making it the deadliest year for this theater since 2015, when Boko Haram was at its height and the Lake Chad Basin experienced over 11,700 deaths. This jump in fatalities also reverses a 5-year trend of incremental reductions in lethal violence in this region.

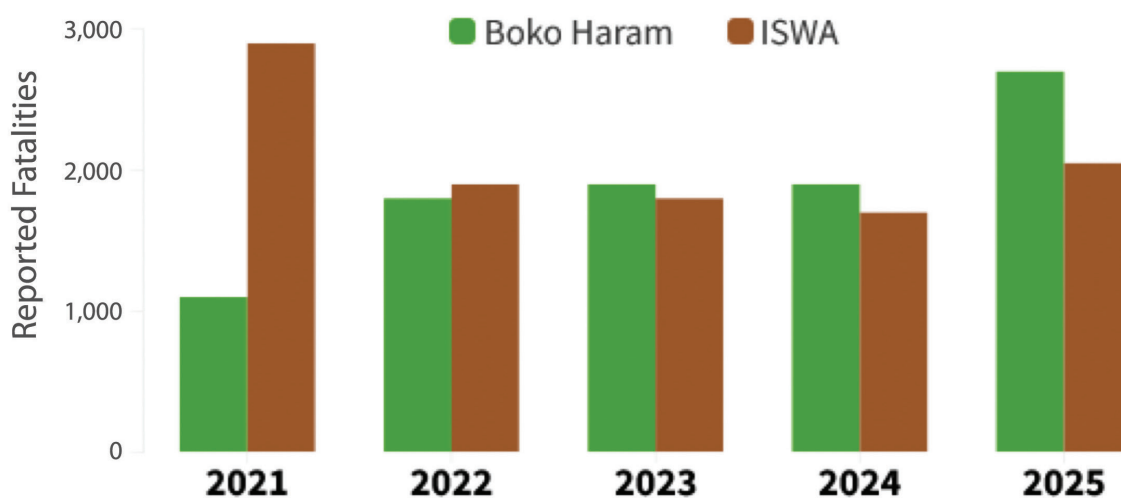
RELATIVE LEVELS OF MILITANT ISLAMIST-LINKED FATALITIES IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN



Data source: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data)

- There was a 62-percent increase in battle-related fatalities (from 1,959 to 3,168), demonstrating that much of the increased violence in this theater was due to clashes between security forces and the militant groups.
- 87 percent of the deaths linked to militant Islamist groups in the Lake Chad Basin over the past year were in Nigeria. By comparison, fatalities in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger all declined. The drop in Cameroon (which resulted in 425 deaths and 8 percent of the regional total) is noteworthy in that northern Cameroon had seen growing levels of militant violence since 2022.
- Boko Haram was linked to 56 percent of the fatalities in the Lake Chad Basin, the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) to 43 percent.
- While cooperative at times, these groups have regularly clashed around Lake Chad in the past year. Boko Haram, supported by mercenaries from Chad and Libya, evicted ISWA from the Lake Chad islands, though ISWA still retains a significant presence in Nigeria's Borno State.
- ISWA remains a formidable threat and is estimated to have overrun at least 16 Nigerian military bases in the past year. ISWA's use of IEDs and advanced reconnaissance drones has elevated the threat posed to the Nigerian military.
- The past year was also noteworthy for the rising violence of militant Islamist groups in northwestern Nigeria. Most notable has been the re-emergence of Ansaru, which separated from Boko Haram in 2012 and has since been allied with AQIM and the JNIM coalition. Ansaru's area of operations has shifted from Kaduna State in 2020 to Kwara and Niger States over the past year, bringing its activities closer to the Benin border.

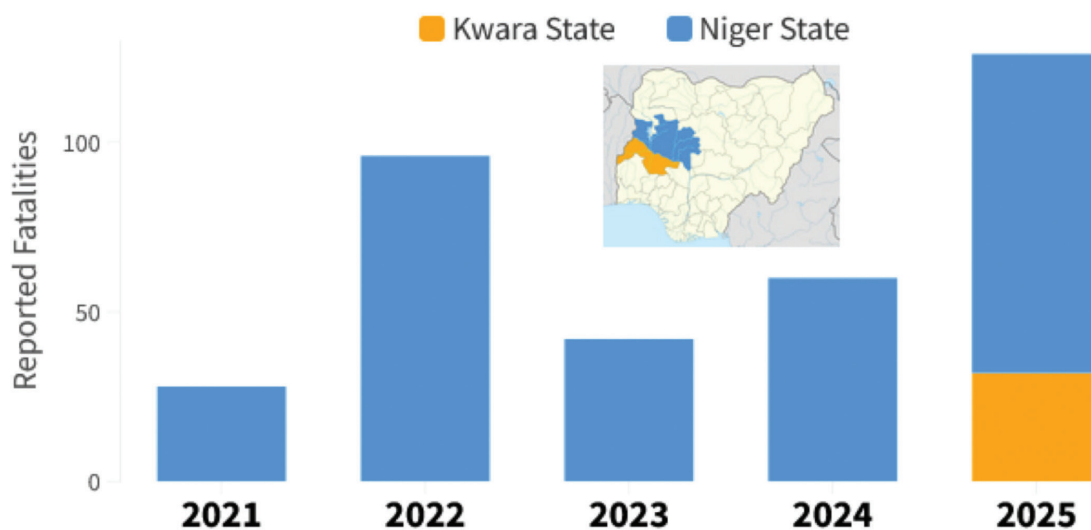
FATALITIES LINKED TO BOKO HARAM AND ISWA



Data source: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data)

- Boko Haram's Sadiku faction has also been active in northwestern Nigeria, particularly in Niger State, close to Kwara State. Niger and Kwara States, consequently, saw a doubling in fatalities (from 60 to 126) linked to militant Islamist groups over the past year. Groups affiliated with Lakurawa, which are currently operating mostly in Kebbi and Sokoto States, have also been cooperating with the Sadiku faction since 2023.
- Organized criminal gangs, commonly known as bandits, continue to cause the most armed violence in northwestern Nigeria. The kidnapping of 253 children from a Catholic school in Niger State was the work of bandits. Bandits also ambushed three military bases in Niger and Kaduna States. These illustrations show how bandits are mimicking jihadist activity in the region, while jihadists are adopting tactics from bandit groups (including cattle rustling, extortion, and looting).

TRENDS IN MILITANT ISLAMIST ACTIVITY IN NORTH WEST NIGERIA



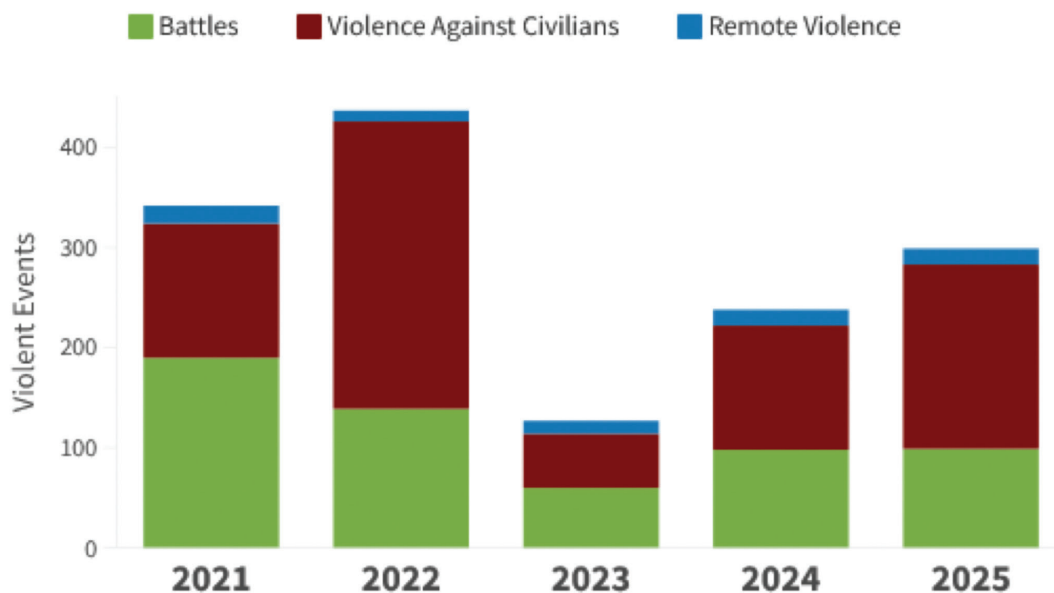
Data source: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data)

- In addition to the increased pace of battles with militant groups, security forces in the Lake Chad Basin have made some notable arrests of jihadist leaders in the past year. In Chad, the military apprehended the youngest son of Mohamed Yusef, founder of Boko Haram. He was with six others attempting to create a new cell on the Chadian side of the Lake Chad region. Meanwhile, Ansaru's leadership, including the head of its Mahmuda faction, was arrested during a series of operations by Nigeria's security and intelligence services.

NORTHERN MOZAMBIQUE

- The Northern Mozambique theater saw a 51-percent jump in fatalities (from 352 to 531) over the past year.
- This was marked by a more than doubling in the number of civilian fatalities (from 111 to 260). Civilians account for roughly half of all fatalities in this region—a higher percentage than any other theater on the continent.
- This sharp increase follows significant reductions in violence during the deployment of SADC forces from 2021 to 2024. Currently, Mozambican security forces are only supported by a contingent of Rwandan troops.

MILITANT ISLAMIST VIOLENCE IN MOZAMBIQUE BY TYPE



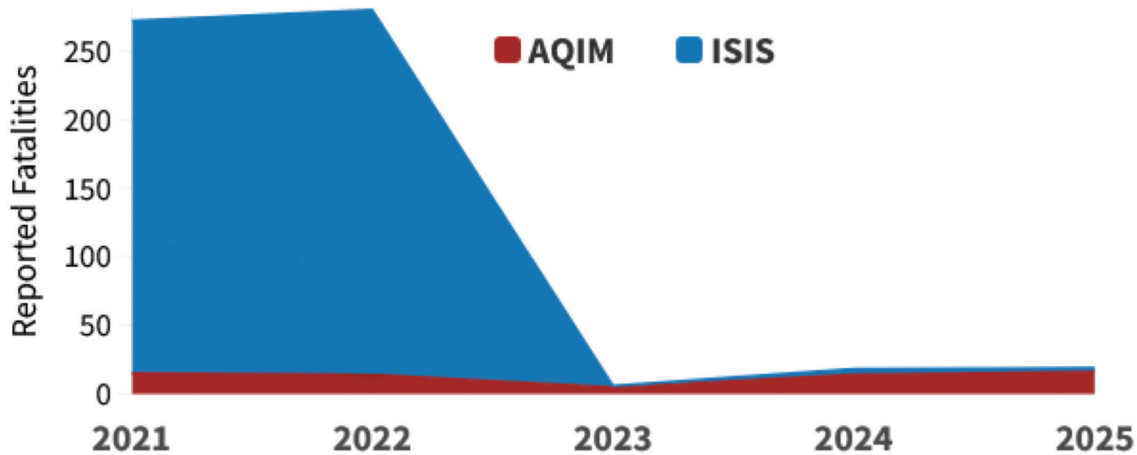
Data source: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data)

- Ahl al Sunnah wal Jama'a (ASWJ) has been threatening communities in northern Mozambique since 2017. While thought to consist of no more than 350 fighters across scattered small cells in rural areas of the country, they have been resilient. ASWJ is regularly linked to raids, roadblocks, kidnapping for ransom, and hit-and-run attacks on security forces and civilians.
- Illustrative of ASWJ's resilience and resurgence was a September 2025 attack on Mocímboa da Praia, the capital of Cabo Delgado Province. This was the first attack on the capital since ASWJ was driven out in 2021. ASWJ has previously targeted Palma in Cabo Delgado, where TotalEnergies has an LNG project.

NORTH AFRICA

- North Africa remains relatively quiet compared to the other theaters. Nonetheless, there was an uptick in fatalities (from 5 to 19) over the past year, reflecting the ongoing threat militant Islamist groups pose to this region.
- Virtually all the jihadist-linked fatalities (17 out of 19) reported in North Africa occurred in Algeria, where security forces confronted and killed militants.

FATALITIES LINKED TO MILITANT ISLAMIST GROUPS IN NORTH AFRICA



Data source: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data)

- The absence of any militant Islamist activity in Egypt since 2023 reflects heightened security measures and government-led development initiatives in northern Sinai. Though there may still be some members or sympathizers of the Islamic State in the Sinai, they remain unable to recruit and mobilize violence.
- In Libya, four Islamic State cells were dismantled by the intelligence services. These cells' activities were oriented with a regional focus:
 - Facilitating the movement of fighters from Europe through Libya to the Sahel and Somalia
 - Producing and disseminating propaganda on social media
 - Laundering funds in support of a planned operation in Sudan
 - Establishing sleeper cells in Libya
 - Generating revenue through migrant smuggling
- The variety of activities pursued by these militant Islamist groups in the Maghreb underscores the ongoing threat to security, requiring continued vigilance. In 2015, North Africa experienced over 4,000 fatalities linked to violent extremist groups.

