

2.3.7. Zamfara

2.3.7. Zamfara

Zamfara state is comprised of the following 14 LGAs: Anka, Bakura, Birin Magaji (or Birnin Magaji/Kiyaw), Bukkuyum, Bungudu, Chafe, Gummi, Gusau, Kaura Namoda, Maradun, Maru, Shinkafi, Talata Mafara, Zurmi. The capital city is Gusau.1190

The two main ethnic groups are the Hausa and the Fulani. Other ethnic groups in Zamfara State include the Gwari, Kamuku, Kambari, Dukawa, Bussawa, Zabarma, Igbo, Yoruba, Kanuri, Nupe, and the Tiv. While Islam is the predominant religion in the state, there are also Christians and followers of indigenous religions.1191

UNFPA and the US Census Bureau projected the population at 5 833 500 in 2022, based on figures from the 2006 census.1192

a) Conflict dynamics and main actors

For a general overview on actors in Nigeria, please see section 1.1 Main Actors.

In June 2025, IOM reported a multi-dimensional crisis in Nigeria's North-West, with long-standing tensions between ethnic and religious groups leading to attacks and banditry.1193 As of July 2024, one third of the North-West's 20 000 to 30 000 armed bandits were reported to be in Zamfara state.1194 Between 2019 and October 2024, Zamfara was among the five states most affected by inter-group clashes between bandit groups.1195 Amnesty International reported that between May 2023 and May 2025, over 273 people were killed by bandits in the state. 725 villages across 13 LGAs were controlled by bandit/criminal groups,1196 who have reportedly established bases in remote parts of various north-western states, including Zamfara.1197 Armed groups reportedly pressured individuals into paying taxes by threatening to kill,1198 abduct, forcibly evict or hurt them,1199 with some civilians killed for refusing to pay.1200

During the reference period, abductions of civilians,1201 including mass abductions1202 and abductions leading to civilian deaths were reported in Zamfara state.1203

In early 2024, the vigilante force Zamfara state community protection guards,1204 also known as Askarawa, was formed.1205 Previously banned due to violence concerns, the new vigilante force has undergone training to prevent such issues.1206 Some government airstrikes against bandits resulted in civilian deaths.1207 Revenge attacks by bandits and armed groups were also reported.1208

The jihadist group Lakurawa was active[1209] and present in Zamfara state,[1210] specifically in Gummi-Gusau.[1211]

Sources also reported IED explosions in Zamfara state during the reference period.[1212]

b) Security incidents and impact on the population

For the period between 1 January 2024 and 31 August 2025, ACLED recorded 760 security incidents (defined as battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, and riots) in Zamfara state, which resulted in 2 806 fatalities. Of these incidents, 439 were coded as incidents of violence against civilians, 277 were coded as battles, 31 as explosions/remote violence, and 13 as riots.[1213]

Imported image pandoc_image_23.png

Figure 11: Evolution of security events coded as battles, explosions/remote violence, riots, and violence against civilians in Zamfara state, 1 January 2024 – 31 August 2025, based on ACLED data.[1214]

Security incidents were recorded by ACLED in all 14 LGAs of the state, with the highest number documented in Tsafe (145), followed by Gusau (91), Maru (82), Zurmi (68) and Kaura Namoda (66). According to ACLED, Zamfara communal militia (coded as either ‘Actor 1’ or ‘Actor 2’) were involved in the majority of incidents coded as violence against civilians.[1215]

Zamfara state was the most dangerous state in Nigeria in 2024, according to Nigeria Watch, with 19.52 fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants, primarily due to banditry.[1216] Nigeria Watch also noted an increase in fatalities resulting from rural banditry, cattle rustling and government counter-operations across the country in 2024, with Zamfara state accounting for 394 of the about 1 452 deaths, including of civilians, recorded in nine states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).[1217] ACLED ranked Zamfara as the second state with the highest number of security incidents (defined as battles, explosions/remote violence, violence against civilians, and riots) during the reference period, after Borno state ranking first.[1218]

Between July 2023 and June 2024, the state experienced 132 of the country's 1 130 abduction incidents and accounted for 1 639 of the 7 568 victims, including 146 civilian fatalities, making it the Nigerian state most affected by abductions in that period.[1219] In 2024, Zamfara was the state with the second-highest number of abduction victims (421)[1220] and abductions in the state reportedly increased by 156 % compared to the foregoing 4-year average.[1221] Amnesty International reported that over 467 individuals were abducted in Zamfara between May 2023 and May 2025.[1222]

In May 2024, armed men attacked Bilbis in Tsafe LGA and three villages in Birin Magaji LGA, resulting in 20 deaths and seven injuries. Over 100 people were abducted for ransom.[1223] In December 2024, unidentified men raided Kakin Dawa village in the Maradun LGA, abducting over 50 women and children.[1224] In May 2025, an armed group killed four women and abducted 20 residents in the Kaura Namoda LGA.[1225] In April 2024,[1226] as well as in January [1227] and June 2025, government attacks from the air targeting bandits were reported to have accidentally killed civilians.[1228]

Conflict-related infrastructure damage - An October 2024 Africa Center for Strategic Studies report noted that attacks by criminal groups have resulted in looting of medical supplies and the razing or occupying of medical facilities in some north-western states, including Zamfara. Some facilities reportedly shut down as a result of insecurity. The source noted that healthcare access in Zurmi, Maru, Bungudu, Tsafe, Birnin Magaji, Gusau East, and Shinkafi LGAs had disappeared for almost two years as a result, forcing people to receive healthcare in other places inside or outside the country. Activities of bandits and a related worsening of the security situation also forced the mentioned LGAs to shut schools for over two years, with 168 schools remaining shut in Zamfara state as of October 2024. Also, large areas of 'farmlands have become inaccessible or deserted due to displacements, producing very little output. Where people can farm, a substantial portion of their harvests go to the criminal groups'.1229

Road security - Criminal groups in Zamfara state were reportedly engaging in grand larceny along major highways,1230 with bandits planting landmines on roads to block government forces' accessing during attacks.1231 In May 2025, Amnesty International reported that bandit groups were preventing farmers in the Dangulbi district of the Maru LGA from accessing the nearest markets to sell their harvest.1232 Blocked by bandits, residents in Anka LGA's Bagega and Kawaye districts were cut off from the outside world for weeks in late April and early May 2025.1233

Displacement, movement and return - According to IOM, the conflict in the north-western states of Nigeria has worsened, leading to widespread displacement throughout the region.1234 According to the October 2024 Africa Center for Strategic Studies report, criminal groups' establishment of bases in remote parts of Zamfara and other north-western states has led to civilian displacement.1235 As of February 2025, IOM estimated the number of IDPs in Zamfara state at 216 885 compared to 191 055 as of November 2024.1236 UNHCR, as of August 2025, estimated the number of IDPs in Zamfara state at 216 968.1237 IOM lists armed banditry/kidnapping (79 %), insurgency (12 %) and communal clashes (9 %) as the main reasons for displacement in the state.1238 The IMDC reported 295 000 cases of internal displacements resulting from conflict and violence in Nigeria in 2024, of which almost 123 000 occurred in three north-western states, including Zamfara.1239 The Africa Center for Strategic Studies in October 2024 attributed 100 % of displacements in Zamfara state to criminal group activity.1240 In an attack by armed bandits on 24 June 2025 on six locations in Bukkuyum and Gummi LGAs in Zamfara state, 6 245 individuals, including a high number of children, were displaced.1241 According to a May 2025 Nigerian Tribune article, there were no camps for the IDPs in Zamfara state.1242

No information could be found on returns in Zamfara state during the reference period.

c) State response in maintaining law and order

Offensives against bandits were carried out by vigilantes1243 and the government during the reference period,1244 including government airstrikes.1245 Regarding Lakurawa activity, the government also reportedly carried out raids on communities and counter-operations in 2024.1246 Sources also reported security operation during the reference period, which resulted in abduction victims being released.1247 Non-military government efforts in late August 2025 reportedly led to the release of over 142 abduction victims.1248

The Zamfara State parallel House of Assembly criticised state's governor Dauda Lawal in May 2025 for failing to fulfil electoral campaign promises to end armed banditry and allow insecurity to grow and leaving IDPs with nowhere to go.1249 The same month, communities in Bagega and Kawaye districts of Anka LGA, expressing desperation due to ineffective government intervention, initiated direct negotiations with bandits.1250 On a similar note, the Africa Center for Strategic Studie reported in October 2024 that some villages in Zamfara 'having lost confidence in the government's ability to come to their aid', were paying criminal groups protection money, noting that those who cannot pay are subjected to attacks.1251 In contrast to this, some sources cited Zamfara state governor Dauda Lawal as saying security has improved. 1252 In early September 2025, he reportedly stated that his main problem in tackling banditry in Zamfara state was that he did not have direct control over the security agencies, which received their orders from the federal government. A Daily Trust article cited unspecified sources as saying that poor road conditions were helping the bandits and seriously hindering the security forces' ability to access affected areas promptly.1253

In January 2025, at least 16 civilians were killed in Zamfara state in a military air strike, apparently after being mistaken for criminal gangs; the Nigerian Air Force indicated that it '"views with grave concern reports of the loss of civilian lives in the course of the operation" and that a '"comprehensive investigation"' would be carried out and it would be '"communicated to inform and reassure the public"'.1254 Human Rights Watch indicated that investigations into airstrikes by the Nigerian military have yet to produce results and that the military continue facing accusations of further erroneous strikes.1255

- 1190

  Nigeria, Federal Government of Nigeria, States, Zamfara, n.d., url; Nigeria, NIPC, Nigerian States – Zamfara State, n.d., url

- 1191

  Nigeria, Zamfara State Government, Brief history of the state, n.d., url

- 1192

  UNFPA and US Census Bureau, Nigeria – Subnational Population Statistics, 2022, modified 11 September, url

- 1193

  IOM, Flash report 220 – Population displacement: North-west Nigeria – Zamfara state - Conflict/Violence, 5 June 2025, url

- 1194

  ACLED and GI-TOC, Non-State Armed Groups and Illicit Economies in West Africa: Armed Bandits in Nigeria, July 2024, url, pp. 16, 18

- 1195

SBM Intelligence, Chart of the week: Bandit rivalry in Northern Nigeria, 3 October 2024, url

- 1196

  Amnesty International, Nigeria: Mounting death toll and looming humanitarian crisis amid unchecked attacks by armed groups, 29 May 2025, url

- 1197

  Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Violent Criminal Gangs Displace and Disrupt North West Nigeria, 21 October 2024, url, p. 4

- 1198

  Amnesty International, Nigeria: Mounting death toll and looming humanitarian crisis amid unchecked attacks by armed groups, 29 May 2025, url

- 1199

  Daily Trust, Zamfara residents pay millions for safety, 22 April 2025, url

- 1200

  Nigeria Watch, Fourteenth report on violence in Nigeria 2024, 2025, url, p. 9

- 1201

  Amnesty International, Nigeria: Mounting death toll and looming humanitarian crisis amid unchecked attacks by armed groups, 29 May 2025, url

- 1202

  SBM Intelligence defines mass abductions as abductions, where a minimum of five people is abducted per incident. SBM Intelligence, Grim Reaping: Economics of Nigeria’s Kidnap Industry–A 2024 Update, 29 August 2024, url

- 1203

  International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Nigeria: January 2024 – August 2025, n.d., url; Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes (KW51/2024), 16 December 2024, url, p. 6; SBM Intelligence, Grim Reaping: Economics of Nigeria’s Kidnap Industry–A 2024 Update, 29 August 2024, url

- 1204

  Punch, Zamfara gov unveils 2,645-member protection guard to tackle insecurity, 31 January 2024, url; AFP, Nigerian state turns to vigilantes in fight against bandits, 1 February 2024

- 1205

Channels Television, Bandits Kill Eight Zamfara Community Guards, 8 October 2024, url; Punch, Zamfara gov unveils 2,645-member protection guard to tackle insecurity, 31 January 2024, url;

- 1206

  AFP, Nigerian state turns to vigilantes in fight against bandits, 1 February 2024

- 1207

  Al Jazeera, Military air strike kills at least 20 people in northwest Nigeria, 2 June 2025, url; Nigerian Tribune, Group slams NAF over alleged killing of civilians in Zamfara, 12 January 2025, url; HRW, Nigerian Military Accused of Another Deadly Airstrike, 9 October 2024, url; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Nigeria: January 2024 – August 2025, n.d., url

- 1208

  Nation (The), Bandits kill 10 security guards, three missing in Zamfara, 24 March 2025, url; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Nigeria: January 2024 – August 2025, n.d., url

- 1209

  Dayton C., Islamic State, Not “Lakurawa” [Map], Modern Diplomacy, 28 June 2025, url

- 1210

  Nigeria Watch, Fourteenth report on violence in Nigeria 2024, 2025, url, p. 6

- 1211

  SBM Intelligence, Lakurawa, the not-so-new sheriffs in town, 14 November 2024, url

- 1212

  SBM Intelligence, Bombings in Nigeria: A shifting threat, 26 June 2025, url; Nigerian Tribune, Again, explosion rocks Zamfara community, 7 December 2024, url; BBC News, Military react to bandits new strategy of planting landmines for road for Zamfara, 6 December 2024, url

- 1213

  EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Africa, data covering 1 January 2024 to 31 August 2025, as of 10 September 2025, url

- 1214

  EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Africa, data covering 1 January 2024 to 31 August 2025, as of 10 September 2025, url

- 1215

EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Africa, data covering 1 January 2024 to 31 August 2025, as of 10 September 2025, url

- 1216

  Nigeria Watch, Fourteenth report on violence in Nigeria 2024, 2025, url, p. 16

- 1217

  Nigeria Watch, Fourteenth report on violence in Nigeria 2024, 2025, url, p. 9

- 1218

  EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Africa, data covering 1 January 2024 to 31 August 2025, as of 10 September 2025, url

- 1219

  SBM Intelligence, Grim Reaping: Economics of Nigeria’s Kidnap Industry–A 2024 Update, 29 August 2024, url

- 1220

  Nextier, Mutations of Terror and Conflicts. 2025 Security and Conflict Outlook in Nigeria, February 2025, url, p. 31

- 1221

  ORFA, The Illusion of Progress: Mapping Nigeria’s Deteriorating Security Landscape, 29 May 2025, url

- 1222

  Amnesty International, Nigeria: Mounting death toll and looming humanitarian crisis amid unchecked attacks by armed groups, 29 May 2025, url

- 1223

  Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes (KW20/2024), 13 May 2024, url, p. 4

- 1224

  Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes (KW51/2024), 16 December 2024, url, p. 6

- 1225

  International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Nigeria: January 2024 – August 2025, n.d., url

- 1226

  HRW, Nigerian Military Accused of Another Deadly Airstrike, 9 October 2024, url

- 1227

International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Nigeria: January 2024 – August 2025, n.d., url; Nigerian Tribune, Group slams NAF over alleged killing of civilians in Zamfara, 12 January 2025, url

- 1228

  Impact International, Zamfara Airstrike Tragedy: Understanding Civilian Casualties and Security Challenges in Nigeria, 3 June 2025, url; Al Jazeera, Military air strike kills at least 20 people in northwest Nigeria, 2 June 2025, url

- 1229

  Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Violent Criminal Gangs Displace and Disrupt North West Nigeria, 21 October 2024, url, pp. 5-6

- 1230

  IOM, Flash report 220 – Population displacement: North-west Nigeria – Zamfara state - Conflict/Violence, 5 June 2025, url

- 1231

  BBC News, Military react to bandits new strategy of planting landmines for road for Zamfara, 6 December 2024, url

- 1232

  Amnesty International, Nigeria: Mounting death toll and looming humanitarian crisis amid unchecked attacks by armed groups, 29 May 2025, url

- 1233

  GGA, Zamfara’s fragile peace: Communities negotiate with bandits amid government inaction, 15 May 2025, url

- 1234

  IOM, Flash report 220 – Population displacement: North-west Nigeria – Zamfara state - Conflict/Violence, 5 June 2025, url

- 1235

  Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Violent Criminal Gangs Displace and Disrupt North West Nigeria, 21 October 2024, url, p. 4

- 1236

  IOM, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West — Round 16 IDP Atlas (February 2025), 18 March 2025, url, p. 6

- 1237

UNHCR, Nigeria – Forcibly Displaced Populations, 13 August 2025, url

- 1238

  IOM, Nigeria — North-Central and North-West — Round 16 IDP Atlas (February 2025), 18 March 2025, url , p. 10

- 1239

  IDMC, GRID 2025, Global Report on Internal Displacement, 2025, url, p. 31

- 1240

  Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Violent Criminal Gangs Displace and Disrupt North West Nigeria, 21 October 2024, url, p. 6

- 1241

  IOM, Flash report 231 – Population displacement: North-west Nigera – Zamfara State - Conflict/Violence, 30 June 2025, url

- 1242

  Nigerian Tribune, Insecurity: Zamfara parallel Assembly urges Gov Lawal to establish IDP camps, 13 May 2025, url

- 1243

  Nigerian Tribune, Jubilation as Shinkafi Volunteer Forces kill bandit commander, Danbokolo in Zamfara, 30 June 2025, url

- 1244

  International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Nigeria: January 2024 – August 2025, n.d., url; Nigerian Tribune, Zamfara: Troops kill two bandits, recover weapons, 12 December 2024, url

- 1245

  BBC News, Scores of bandits killed in air and ground raids, Nigerian military says, 12 August 2025, url; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Nigeria: January 2024 – August 2025, n.d., url; SARI Global, Weekly Update: Nigeria (July 4 - 10, 2025), 11 July 2025, url, p. 1; USCIRF, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2025 Annual Report; USCIRF–Recommended for Countries of particular Concern (CPC): Nigeria, March 2025, url, p. 29

- 1246

  Nigeria Watch, Fourteenth report on violence in Nigeria 2024, 2025, url, p. 12

- 1247

Nigeria, Federal Government of Nigeria, The National Counter Terrorism Centre, NSA presents 128 rescued kidnap victims to Zamfara govt, 28 August 2025, url; Daily Post, Troops free kidnaped victims in Zamfara, 2 September 2025, url

- 1248

  Daily Post, Bandits leader releases 142 victims to govt in Zamfara amid peace talk, 28 August 2025, url

- 1249

  Nigerian Tribune, Insecurity: Zamfara parallel Assembly urges Gov Lawal to establish IDP camps, 13 May 2025, url

- 1250

  GGA, Zamfara's fragile peace: Communities negotiate with bandits amid government inaction, 15 May 2025, url

- 1251

  Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Violent Criminal Gangs Displace and Disrupt North West Nigeria, 21 October 2024, url, p. 4

- 1252

  Channels TV, Why Security Has Improved In Zamfara – Gov Lawal, 14 May 2025, url; Nigeria, Zamfara State Government, Zamfara security has improved, says Gov. Lawal during historic peace walk, 30 May 2025, url

- 1253

  Daily Trust, I can end banditry in 2 months – Zamfara gov, 4 September 2025, url

- 1254

  BBC, Nigeria military kills 16 civilians in air strike 'mistake', 13 January 2025, url; HRW, Another Erroneous Airstrike Claims Lives in Nigeria, 13 January 2025, url

- 1255

  HRW, Nigerian Military Accused of Another Deadly Airstrike, 9 October 2024, url

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu