



# EARLY WARNING PROJECT

## STATE OF THE WORLD MASS KILLING IN 2022

UNITED STATES  
MEMORIAL  
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MUSEUM**

SIMON-SKJODT CENTER  
FOR THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE

The Early Warning Project uses patterns from past instances of mass killing to forecast when and where new mass killing episodes are most likely to happen in the future. Each year we update [our list](#) of countries experiencing state- and nonstate-led mass killing. The purpose of tracking onsets and terminations is to inform our annual [Statistical Risk Assessment](#). The following report compiles our determinations for new and ongoing mass killings in 2022.

No new mass killing episodes began in 2022, according to the latest review by the Early Warning Project. This good news, however, is tempered by the high number of ongoing mass killings: 20 separate episodes as of the end of 2022 perpetrated by eight states and nine nonstate groups in 14 countries.

Ethiopia—a country that already has two ongoing mass killing episodes—and Mali came close to meeting our criteria for new onsets in 2022. Increasing violence against civilian populations in both countries, discussed below, necessitates greater attention. We also determined that the mass killing perpetrated by Iraqi state security forces has ended.

## How we determine when mass killings begin and end

We consider a mass killing to have occurred when the deliberate actions of armed groups—including but not limited to state security forces, rebel armies, and other militias—result in the deaths of at least 1,000 non-combatant civilians who are targeted as part of a specific group, over a period of one year or less. We determine a mass killing to have ended when fewer than 100 civilians of the targeted group are killed for three consecutive years. Because the purpose of our tracking onsets and terminations is to feed into a model that assesses the risk that any individual country will experience a mass killing, these determinations apply only to situations where perpetrators and targeted civilian groups reside in the same country.

To determine onsets and terminations, we draw on publicly available datasets, reports of international organizations, governments, and NGOs, and media

reports. We also sometimes call on experts to assist in our determinations when the data are inconclusive. When in doubt, we presume that the status quo persists—i.e., no new mass killing has begun, or, in ongoing episodes, the mass killing continues.

Mass killings include, but are not limited to, policies that intentionally kill civilians en masse (e.g., military strategies that intentionally target civilians, mass execution of a specific group) and policies that knowingly result in widespread death (e.g., mass starvation, confiscation of health care supplies, forced relocation). In general, unrelated executions of individuals or the accidental killing of civilians in war (“collateral damage”) will not be considered a mass killing. If an armed group is engaged in multiple campaigns that systematically kill civilians (e.g., in different geographic areas, or targeted against separate civilian groups), those fatalities will be counted toward separate potential onsets.

## Ethiopia

According to the latest Statistical Risk Assessment, Ethiopia ranked fifth highest (out of 162 countries) for the risk of experiencing a new mass killing in 2022 or 2023. Ethiopia already has two ongoing state-led mass killings: one that began in 2015 against perceived state opposition in the Oromia Region, and a second that began in 2020 against Tigrayan civilians.

Reports of increased violence against civilians in Oromia by nonstate actors in 2022 raise acute concerns about the possibility of an onset of a *new* mass killing. Conflict in Oromia, marked by [widespread impunity for human rights abuses](#) by both state and nonstate actors, has been ongoing since the 1970s.

While information is limited, there were several reports of large-scale killings in the Oromia region of Ethiopia in 2022. Most notably, on June 18, 2022, nonstate armed groups reportedly killed over [400 people, primarily ethnic Amhara](#). Just two weeks later, another series of attacks reportedly [killed over 100 civilians](#). Some [sources](#) indicate that more than 1,000 civilians were killed in Oromia in 2022.

## What about violence against civilians in Ukraine?

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a military assault against Ukraine that has included [large-scale attacks against civilians](#). The Museum issued a [statement](#) strongly condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Since then, Russia and Russian officials have been accused, including [by the US government](#) and the [International Criminal Court](#), of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity against Ukrainian civilians. Publicly available information warrants investigation into the potential commission of genocide. The toll the conflict has taken on human life is staggering. According to the UN, almost [9,000 civilians have been killed](#) since the invasion started.

Russia's attacks on Ukrainian civilians appear to meet all but one of the criteria of the Early Warning Project's definition of mass killing. If even a small portion of Ukrainian civilian fatalities were the result of deliberate targeting by Russian forces, it would most likely exceed the threshold of 1,000 deaths. Russian forces' reported crimes against Ukrainian civilians include [summary executions in Bucha and other regions](#), [torture and forced disappearances](#), and widespread [indiscriminate shelling and cluster bombing](#) of civilian areas.

The Early Warning Project's definition of mass killing **excludes** situations in which one country's armed forces attack civilians in another country's territory (i.e., interstate conflicts, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine). The only exceptions to this rule are situations where we can document substantial and close operational coordination between the foreign military and the state government in killing operations. The decision to exclude interstate mass killing does not involve a value judgment about the moral or practical significance of atrocities perpetrated during wars between states, foreign occupations, and other international military operations, only a pragmatic judgment about what we are able to forecast more reliably.

Notwithstanding this limitation, the Simon-Skjoldt Center is committed to identifying risks and providing early warning of mass atrocities that may fall outside the definition of mass killing used for this model and continues to monitor the ongoing risks of mass atrocities against civilians in Ukraine. You can read more about our work on Ukraine [here](#).

However, [restricted access to humanitarian organizations](#), [telecommunication cuts](#), and [fear of retaliation](#) have made reporting on the conflict difficult.

Based on the limited and conflicting information on total fatalities, perpetrators, and targeted groups, we did not conclude that a new mass killing had begun. Some attacks are clearly attributed to the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), while in other cases, reports [remain inconclusive](#) regarding whether the Oromia regional government forces, Amhara militias, or other unidentified armed groups were responsible.

In an effort to address the long-standing conflict and grievances, the Ethiopian government and the OLA agreed to meet for [peace talks](#) in April 2023. Unfortunately, this first round of talks concluded

[without an agreement](#), but both groups have agreed to keep talking.

In addition to monitoring the situation in Oromia, the Early Warning Project also continues to closely monitor the ongoing episode of mass killing in Tigray and the progress and implementation of the November 2022 [Cessation of Hostilities Agreement](#).

### Mali

Mali ranks 24th highest (out of 162 countries) for the risk of experiencing a new mass killing in 2022 or 2023, according to the latest Statistical Risk Assessment.

According to data from [ACLED](#), total fatalities associated with violence against civilians increased from 428 in 2021 to 2,155 in Mali in 2022. Despite

this substantial increase in violence, our review of publicly available information suggests that no one perpetrator group appears to have intentionally killed more than 1,000 civilians in this past year. While we did not conclude that a new mass killing had begun, Malian government forces and specific nonstate armed groups each separately killed hundreds of civilians in 2022, and in some cases came close to meeting our criteria. Most violence was attributed to Malian military forces and two competing nonstate armed groups, the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). All groups have targeted civilians. In March 2022, Malian military forces alongside the Wagner Group, a Russian private military contractor [accused](#) of committing atrocities and human rights violations in the region, [killed 500 people](#), primarily from the Peuhl or Fulani ethnic group, in the town of Moura. This was the single deadliest incident reported in the country's 10-year conflict. And in June 2022, JNIM [killed 132 civilians](#) in central Mali, targeting perceived supporters of the Malian government. In northern Mali, primarily in the Gao and Menaka regions, a surge of ISGS-led violence between March and August of 2022 [killed hundreds of people](#), largely targeting Dawsahak, a Tuareg ethnic group.

The Early Warning Project released a [detailed report](#) in 2018 assessing atrocity risks in Mali. We will continue to review information and reports from conflicts across Mali by state and nonstate armed groups.

### Ended State-Led Mass Killing: Iraq

This year we determined that the state-led mass killing in Iraq perpetrated against Sunni civilians has ended. According to our definition, mass killings end when fewer than 100 civilians of the targeted group are killed for at least three consecutive years. We trace the end of this mass killing episode to 2018, following the Iraqi government's [defeat](#) of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militants at the end of 2017.

Since 2013, state security forces and associated militias have killed Sunni civilians suspected of supporting ISIS, primarily in western Iraq. As

violence escalated dramatically from 2014–17, Iraqi security forces and allied militias carried out a number of attacks against civilians, including revenge killings in territory previously held by ISIS. While the conflict and most major military operations against ISIS ended in 2017, [low-level armed conflict](#) has continued and Sunni civilians and other minority groups remain at risk. Nevertheless, violence perpetrated by Iraqi state forces has declined dramatically since 2018, leading us to judge that this particular episode has ended. We will continue to monitor the situation closely.

### Ongoing State-Led Mass Killings

The following countries were experiencing ongoing episodes of state-led mass killing as of the end of 2022. More details on all ongoing mass killings can be found on [our website](#). As noted in the definition, mass killings are considered ongoing until we record three consecutive years in which fewer than 100 civilians were killed as part of the episode. The names of the targeted communities and year of onset are in parentheses:

- Burma/Myanmar (civilians suspected of opposing Tatmadaw rule, 2021; Rohingya, 2016; ethnic minority groups: ethnic minority groups—including the Karen, Kachin, Ta'ang, Mon, Lisu, and Shan—in the country's east, 1948)
- Ethiopia (Tigrayans, 2020; Oromo, 2015)
- Nigeria (suspected supporters of Boko Haram, 2009)
- North Korea (suspected political opponents, 1948)
- Philippines (civilians accused of using or selling drugs, 2016)
- South Sudan (suspected rebel supporters/co-ethnics, 2013)
- Sudan (ethnic groups—including the Fur, Zaghawa, Masaleit, and other non-Arab peoples—in Darfur, 2003).\*
- Syria (civilians suspected of opposing al-Assad's rule, 2011)

\* As a reminder, this report assesses mass killings that took place through the end of 2022. For this reason, the ongoing episode of mass killing in Sudan

only reflects conditions as of the end of 2022, and so does not include the most recent violence that started in April 2023.

### Ongoing Nonstate-Led Mass Killings

The Early Warning Project identified nine ongoing episodes of nonstate-led mass killing as of the end of 2022. The affected countries, with the perpetrator group and date of onset in parentheses, are the following:

- Central African Republic (various armed groups, including anti-Balaka, 2013)
- Democratic Republic of the Congo (various militias in the northeast, 1998)
- India (Naxalite-Maoist rebels, 2004)
- Iraq (Islamic State and associated militias, 2003)
- Nigeria (Boko Haram, 2010)
- Pakistan (Taliban Movement of Pakistan and associated militias, 2001)
- Somalia (Al Shabaab and associated militias, 2007)
- South Sudan (Machar supporters, including SPLM in Opposition, Nuer ethnic militias, and others, 2013)
- Syria (Islamic State and associated militias, 2012)

### Author

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### **The Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide**

of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum works to prevent genocide and related crimes against humanity. The Simon-Skjodt Center is dedicated to stimulating timely global action to prevent genocide and to catalyze an international response when it occurs. Our goal is to make the prevention of genocide a core foreign policy priority for leaders around the world through a multi-pronged program of research, education, and public outreach. We work to equip decision makers, starting with officials in the United States but also extending to other governments, with the knowledge, tools, and institutional support required to prevent—or, if necessary, halt—genocide and related crimes against humanity.



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