West African Studies

Borders and Conflicts in North and West Africa

OECD

SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA Club Secretariat

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Olivier J. Walther and Steven M. Radil

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BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

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The Sahel and West Africa Club

The Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) is an independent international platform. Its Secretariat is hosted at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Its mission is to promote regional policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of the people in the Sahel and West Africa. Its objectives are to produce and collect data, draft analyses and facilitate strategic dialogue in order to nurture and promote public policies in line with rapid developments in the region. It also promotes regional co-operation as a tool for sustainable development and stability. Its current areas of work are food dynamics, cities and territories, and security.

SWAC Members and partners include: Austria, Belgium, Canada, CILSS (Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel), the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) Commission, the European Commission, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union) Commission and the United States. SWAC has a memorandum of understanding with the University of Florida Sahel Research Group.

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Foreword

Border violence in North and West Africa is increasing. Within the first six months of 2021, 60% of violent incidents and related casualties occurred within 100 kilometres of a border, half of which involved civilians. This trend, which was already apparent in the Sahel and West Africa (SWAC) report published in 2021, is most visible in West Africa, as the situation in North Africa has since stabilised with the signing of the recent ceasefire (Libya, October 2020). In view of the development of conflicts and transnational terrorist groups, three questions arise: are borderlands more violent than other areas? Has the intensity of violence increased? Are some borderlands more violent than others?

Despite being geographically and politically peripheral, borderlands influence the spatial diffusion of violence and political instability. Border conflicts are not only associated with their peripheral position to the central state, they also reflect broader political problems, such as the perceived marginalisation of certain groups.

The factors that drive state and non-state actors to adopt a transnational strategy are highly dependent on contexts at state and local levels, which explains why some borderlands are much more violent than others. Currently, the two main hotbeds of border violence are in the Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger region and the Lake Chad Basin, where conflicts are more intense and violent events more clustered than elsewhere. There is also a commingling of violence along several of Nigeria's borders, where hotbeds of tension fuelled by different issues are converging geographically. These dynamics are further complicated by the fact that the location of the violence is changing over time.

In addition to mapping and analysing cross-border violence since the late 1990s at regional and local levels (Central and Eastern Sahel), this report also includes the views of colleagues and prominent figures involved at several levels in security and development issues. In my opinion, the following points that they raise seem particularly important:

The decline of security in the Sahel over the past 15 years highlights the fragility of Sahelian states and societies. This deterioration is not limited solely to terrorist and jihadist phenomena, but also reflects the emergence or re-emergence of community conflicts, insurgencies and the multiplication of militias with varying motives.

This lack of lasting security and stability makes it more difficult to develop an environment conducive to value creation, particularly in the agricultural sector, or to develop infrastructure

to increase the commercial opportunities of borderlands, which are essential hubs for territorial structuring and regional integration. In addition to the fact that this situation erodes trust between the border populations and the state, humanitarian organisations are struggling to keep their promises on the ground due to restricted freedom of movement.

Against this backdrop, and in view of the rather pessimistic trends that emerge from the conclusions of this report, I would like to reiterate the three priorities set out by Ambassador Maman Sidikou: protect the dignity of populations, rethink territorial and information continuity, and promote local regional integration.

While the findings of this report do not claim to provide ready-made solutions to the strategies already in place, the options presented stress the importance of having new policy support tools that allow a spatial, relational and temporal understanding of violence and trends. The European Union Special Representative (EUSR), Ms Emanuela Del Re, stresses the importance of a "civilian and political surge" as highlighted in the new European Union pact that aims to accompany the stabilisation of the region by working in close co-operation with its Sahelian partners. The report also shows the need for qualitative and quantitative interpretations through a combination of more conventional and consistent statistics with innovative indicators. These analyses are mechanisms to support decision-making in order to better anticipate future dynamics, to adapt to the region's fragilities and their interactions and volatility, and to imagine more inclusive, contextualised and place-based development and policies. SWAC/OECD hopes that these tools can be used to support sustainable and transformative change in borderlands that are at the heart of Africa's territories of tomorrow.

Dr Ibrahim Assane Mayaki
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Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) and
Honorary President, Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC)

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US Air Force, Department of Defense or the US Government.

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Policy perspectives

The team would like to extend special thanks to Ms. Emanuela Claudia Del Re and Ambassador Maman Sambo Sidikou who kindly agreed to share their thoughts on the priorities and policy challenges for the region.

Emanuela Claudia Del Re was appointed European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for the Sahel on 1 July 2021. Ms Del Re is an Italian national with a long academic career, having conducted extensive research in conflict areas in the Middle East, Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. She has been a member of the Italian Parliament and served as Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation of Italy.

Ambassador Maman Sambo Sidikou held various positions in Niger (Director of Cabinet of the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Ambassador to the United States) before working in the development sector in Africa, America and Asia (World Bank, UNICEF and Save the Children). He co-ordinated peace-keeping operations in Somalia (African Union) and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (United Nations) before being appointed Executive Secretary of the G5 Sahel (2018) and then High Representative of the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) in 2021.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
ANN	Average nearest neighbour
AQIM	Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
CAR	Central African Republic
CC	Conflict concentration
CEMOC	Joint Operational Staff Committee
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
CI	Conflict intensity
CILSS	Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
COS	French Special Operations Command
CSJF	Chad-Sudan Joint Force
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ESRI	Environmental Systems Research Institute
EU	European Union
EUCAP	European Union Capacity Building
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
FACT	Front for Change and Concord in Chad
FAMa	Malian Armed Forces
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FC-G5S	Framework of the G5 Sahel Joint Force
FUC	United Front for Change
GATIA	Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies
G5S	G5 Sahel
GIA	Armed Islamic Group
GIS	Geographic information science
GNA	Government of National Accord
GROADS	Global Roads Open Access Data Set
GSPC	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
IEDs	Improvised explosive devices
IFRI	French Institute of International Relations
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
JEM	Justice and Equality Movement
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa-l-Muslimin (Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims)
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
LNA	Libyan National Army
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
LURD	Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MISAHEL	African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force

MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MONUC	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MSA	Movement for the Salvation of Azawad
MUJAO	Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSM	OpenStreetMap
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PIP	Priority Investment Programme
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SCDi	Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator
SLM	Sudan Liberation Movement
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SRTM	Shuttle Radar Topography Mission
SWAC	Sahel and West Africa Club
UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union
UFDD	Union of Forces for Democracy and Development
UFL	Fusion and Liaison Unit
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy
ULRI	Light reconnaissance and intervention units
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNMIS	United Nations Mission in the Sudan
URF	Union of Resistance Forces

Executive summary

In the first six months of 2021, 60% of the victims of violent incidents in North and West Africa were located within 100 kilometres of a border. Almost half of them were civilians. The growing scale of transnational conflicts and groups against a backdrop of increasingly complex dynamics underscores the need for quantitative and qualitative place-based analyses of how borders help shape patterns of political violence (Chapter 1). The purpose of this report is to contribute to this work.

A spatial and contextualised approach to transnational conflicts

A clear and common definition of borders is a source of stability in both domestic and foreign political relations. When borders are porous, state authority can be uneven, allowing violent groups to develop safe havens or to relocate outside the country. This regionalisation of conflicts has physical, social and strategic costs, which fall on both state forces and their opponents.

In addition to the spatial component, transnational conflicts have a social dynamic and may reflect political problems, such as the perceived or actual marginalisation of certain social groups. These "new types of conflict" that mix local grievances with global discourses and span borders are characterised in North and West Africa by a proliferation of diverse actors — community or ethnic militias, vigilante groups, rebels and religious extremists fighting against and alongside traditional state actors (Chapter 2).

Designing and implementing place-based policies, beyond national or sectoral policies, appears to be one of the most effective ways of combating the political marginalisation of borderlands while promoting their economic centrality within the region.

Not all borders are alike

The governance of border regions combines informal and formal practices with alternative forms of co-operation, exchange and resilience and state regulation. Beyond simply marking a boundary line, borders are therefore more complex spatial and socio-economic concepts that facilitate or prevent cross-border exchanges. State and non-state actors also play a role through complex networks of alliances and frictions that have contributed to shaping the patterns of violence observed since the late 1990s.

Nevertheless, are borderlands in North and West Africa more violent than other areas within a state? How has the intensity of violence in border regions changed? Are some border regions more violent than others?

Tools for mapping border violence and its uneven development

Several approaches have been used to answer these questions including that of the buffer zones ranging from 10 to 200 kilometres extending along either side of borders, and a more innovative approach based on their accessibility to the rest of the country and on a more functional relationship with the border (Chapter 3).

Three types of violence were studied: battles, explosions and remote violence, as well as

violence against civilians from 1997 to mid-2021 at regional level and through case studies (Central and Eastern Sahel).

The patterns of violence in North and West Africa have experienced very contrasting evolutions, mainly due to the nature of the conflicts. For example, in West Africa, the violence is caused by asymmetric struggles between central governments and a multitude of non-state actors, resulting in many civilian casualties

The rapid upsurge in violence and casualties in West Africa since the mid-2010s reflects the intensification and expansion of several interrelated conflicts. Some clusters of violence are merging. In the Central Sahel, the Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger border formed a continuous line of high intensity violence in 2020. The Lake Chad region is also affected from N'Guigmi (Niger) to Mubi (Nigeria) and Maroua (Cameroon). Another unbroken band of insecurity has formed from northern Nigeria to the Niger Delta. The Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) developed by SWAC/OECD and its partners emphasises the fact that these borderlands are more affected by concentrated, very intense violence, which suggesting that it is becoming entrenched (Chapter 4).

Conflicts decrease as distance from borders increases, however, their interactions fluctuate over space and time.

The exploration of the geographical distribution of borderland violence highlights that political violence is more frequent near borders than elsewhere in the region and tends to decrease gradually over distance from borders. More than 4 000 violent events and nearly 19 000 fatalities were observed within 10 kilometres of a border from 1997-2021. During the same period, 9% of all violent events and 11% of all fatalities fell within 10 kilometres of a border. A peak of violent activities can be observed between 100 and 110 kilometres, likely due to the presence of large urban centres located relatively close to borders, such as Maiduguri in northern Nigeria.

The relationship of violent events to borders varies significantly over time as discrete episodes of conflict have waxed and waned within the region. The overall percentage of events near borders declined throughout the mid-2000s as conflict moved from the Gulf of Guinea to the Sahel. The most recent wave of violence within the region has been especially troubling as the percentage of events within 20 kilometres of a border increased every year between 2011 and 2016 to eventually exceed the historical annual average of 23% for 1997-2009. The overall increase of events near borders in recent years can herald either the relocation of a conflict within a state, the expansion of a conflict across state borders, or both.

Using the SCDi, the report shows that border violence is very unevenly distributed across North and West Africa. Violent events and fatalities tend to cluster in specific regions, such as the Lake Chad basin and the Liptako-Gourma, which have become persistent hotspots of violence. In border regions, political violence is more intense and more clustered than in the rest of North and West Africa, suggesting that borderlands experience a more alarming type of conflict than other regions.

The report shows that the drivers of political violence in borderlands are heavily dependent on the social and political contexts of each region. The concentration of violence in borderlands is explained by the local strategies of violent extremist organisations, who use these areas to conduct their attacks and mobilise civilian populations, and by the willingness of some states to conduct extra-territorial campaigns against them (Chapter 5).

Border regions are not always the spatial epicentres of political conflicts

Despite numerous "Sahel strategies" pointing to the need for a regional response, the response of North and West African states to the regionalisation of violence is patchy. Borderlands are not inherently violent. Patterns of border violence are the result of the state's relationship with its borders, but also of the interactions between all warring parties.

Better border security but also better interconnections between borderlands and the rest of the country would both go a long way to reducing border and transnational conflicts. Border towns

are key hubs in the regional movement of goods and people in North and West Africa, and should be the focus of investments.

Over and above the political implications of combating violence in the border regions of North and West Africa, the contributors to the last section of the report underline the increased fragility in the region, particularly in the Sahel, which combines extremist terrorism with local grievances. They recall the need to strengthen the protection of civilians, not only their security but also their dignity, by reinforcing the development of border areas to guarantee the territorial continuity necessary for regional integration (Chapter 6).

Chapter 1

How borders shape conflict in North and West Africa

Chapter 1 examines the increasing importance of North and West African border regions in the development of armed conflicts since the end of the 1990s. Building on a disaggregated analysis of more than 171 000 violent events, the chapter shows that there is a clear empirical relationship between the number of incidents of violence and the distance to borders. Border regions are indeed more violent than other regions in general. The chapter also shows that the relationship of violent events to borders varies significantly over time as discrete episodes of conflict have waxed and waned within the region. Specifically, border violence has shifted from the Gulf of Guinea to the Sahel since the mid-2000s. Finally, the chapter shows that, far from being solely determined by state failure, border violence reflects larger political issues that can threaten a state's very existence.

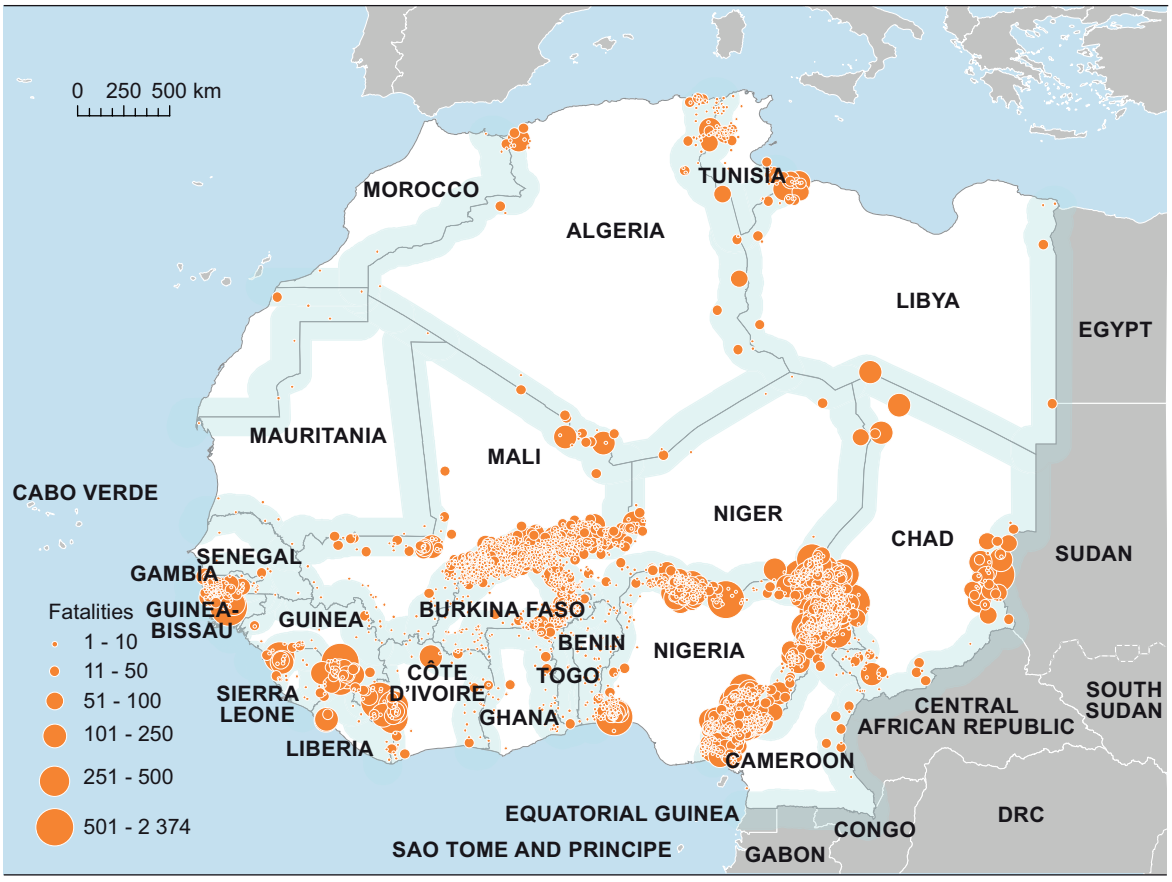
KEY MESSAGES

- **Borderlands are more violent than other regions and the intensity of violence near borders has steadily increased since the early 2010s.**
- **While politically violent events tend to cluster near borders, borderlands do not automatically transform into safe havens for rebels and violent extremist organisations.**
- **Despite being geographically and politically peripheral, borderlands remain central to the political instability that has affected the region in the last two decades.**

Borderlands in North and West Africa have historically been sites where state control is ephemeral at best due to the practical difficulty of controlling movement in the region. In the last two decades, rebel groups and violent extremist organisations have exploited this weakness to carry out an increasing number of attacks that are essentially staged and launched from a neighbouring country (Radil, Irmischer and Walther, 2021[1]). For example, in early October 2017, a large group of fighters aligned with the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) crossed the Nigerien border and attacked a military patrol outside the village of Tongo Tongo, in the Liptako Gourma, before returning to Mali afterwards. In the ensuing firefight, five Nigerien and four American soldiers were killed, and several others wounded. The Tongo Tongo attack is but one example of a larger dynamic where international borders are routinely crossed by non-state armed groups (Map 1.1). In the first six months of 2021, for example, violent events that caused nearly 60% of fatalities took place less than 100 kilometres from a land border and nearly half of these incidents involved civilians. In response to this increase of conflict in border regions, African states and their international allies have launched several military operations in the hope of crushing transnational insurgents. The more recent of these international efforts is the Takuba Task Force led by French forces between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger where ISGS and other violent groups are operating.

Map 1.1

Fatalities located within 100 kilometres of a border, 1997-2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[2]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF TRANSNATIONAL CONFLICTS

The growing importance of transnational conflicts in North and West Africa calls for more spatialised approaches that can map how borders shape political violence. While numerous single-case studies throughout the region have shown the salience of borderlands for violent groups, little is known about the overall relationships between political violence and borderlands region-wide. Using spatial analysis, this report examines the increasing prominence of borders and borderlands for state actors and their adversaries in the region (Box 1.1). More specifically, the report maps the changing location of violent events in relation to borders in 21 North and West African countries since the late 1990s (Map 1.2).

Expanding previous efforts by the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) to document the geography and conflict dynamics of the region (OECD/SWAC, 2021[3]; OECD/SWAC, 2020[4]), the report addresses three crucial questions for the future of counter-insurgency operations against violent non-state actors in North and West Africa: Are borderlands more violent than other spaces? Has the intensity of violence increased in border regions over time? Are some borderlands more violent than others? Without answers to such basic questions, taking on more complex issues related to border violence, such as assessing the divergent impacts to civilian populations, considering potential policy responses to such violence, or untangling the root causes of the conflicts that continue to disrupt the region, remains inaccessible at best.

Map 1.2

Countries covered in this report

Box 1.1

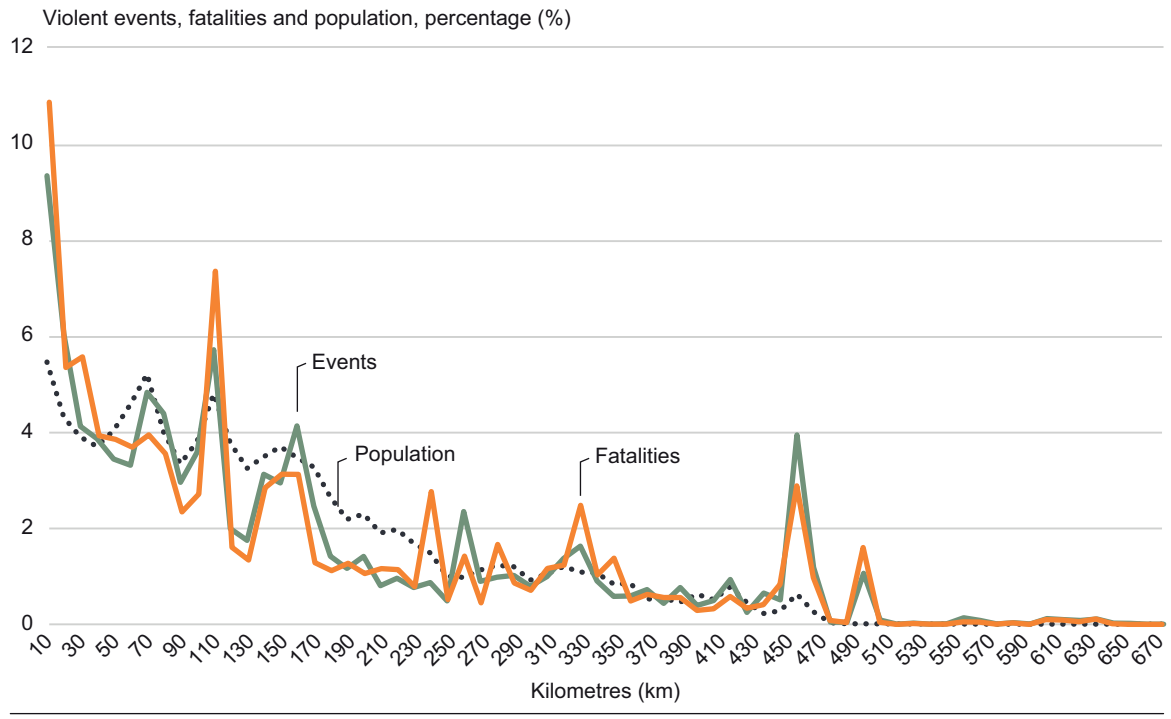
Borders, borderlands and frontiers

Borderlands are an important companion concept to international borders. Most simply, a borderland refers to the geographical regions contiguous to or surrounding an international border. Centrally, interest in borderlands has to do with the effect that the presence of a border has on society and the landscape due to the reality and nature of cross-border activities. From this perspective, borderlands are regions in which the daily routines of those that live there are appreciably different from those further from the border. This difference often involves economic activity but can also involve a cultural component where groups may have been divided by the imposition of a border yet still share a cultural affinity or that display a form of cultural hybridity due to cross-border interactions.

Borderlands are often referred to as frontiers of state as these are the regions in which a state's sovereignty wanes and ultimately ends. However, the use of the term frontier also has another meaning in English, which is an empty space suitable for expansion (i.e., a *terra nullius*). For this reason, the report elects not to use the term frontier to refer to a borderland region as the dual meaning may confuse the issue at hand. Instead, the report uses borderlands or border regions to refer to the spaces near borders that are substantively impacted or transformed by the presence of the boundary line.

Figure 1.1

Violent events, fatalities and population by border distance in North and West Africa, 1997-2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[21]) data and LandScan (Dobson et al., 2000[5]) data. ACLED data available through 30 June 2021. ACLED data is publicly available.

Borderlands are more violent than other spaces

This report examines the presumed link between borders and conflict by analysing whether political violence tends to cluster in borderlands, as recent events in the Liptako Gourma and around Lake Chad seem to suggest, or whether it is rather more spatially dispersed across the region. The wide temporal and spatial perspective adopted in the report facilitates a critical approach to the common assumption that borderlands are inherently more violent than other regions because weak political control at the margins of the state encourages the rise of violent actors facing major military threats in their own country. In contrast to the typical understanding of African borderlands, the report also shows that border regions do not automatically transform into "ungoverned areas" and "safe havens" for rebels and violent extremist organisations.

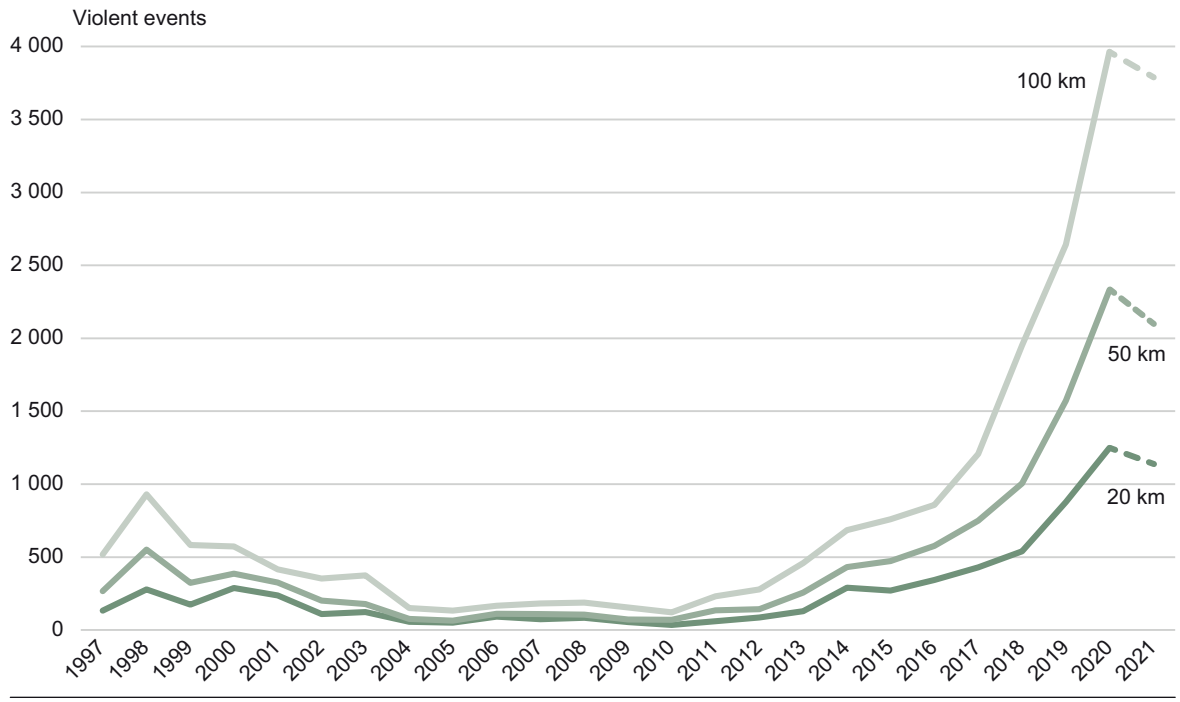
Using data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) for 21 states across 23 years shows that nearly 9% of all violent events occurred within 10 kilometres of a border, 15% of such events occurred within 20 kilometres, and 25% occurred within 50 kilometres (Figure 1.1). This relationship also exhibits a classic distance-decay effect. Generally speaking, the further from the border, the fewer violent events are observed. The relationship is punctuated by some exceptions, however, such as the spike in violence observed between 90-99 kilometres due to the existence of large urban centres such as Maiduguri in Nigeria.

The study also confirms that more violent events and fatalities are observed near borders than what could be assumed from their population. In 2018, an estimated 6% of the region's population lived within 10 kilometres of an international border. Yet, the percentage of violent events within the same distance was more than 1.5 times the percentage of the population (9%). However, once past 30 kilometres, the proportion of population and violent events by distance are quite similar (see Figure 1.1).

The concentration of violence in border regions is not a surprise given the region's history of political instability. The clarity of the relationship,

Figure 1.2

Violent events by border distance in North and West Africa, 1997-2021



Note: 2021 data are projections based on a doubling of the number of events recorded through 30 June.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[21]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

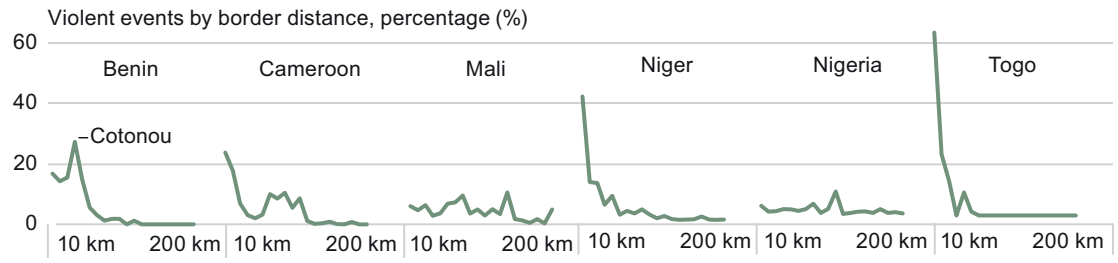
especially at shorter border distances, suggest that borderlands remain a key spatial locus in states' struggles to develop and maintain internal sovereignty. The concentration of violence near borders is a reminder that the circulation of money, people, and arms across the region is central to understanding the ebbs and flows of violence from state to state and over time. Yet, the security practices that states develop and deploy to manage affairs in borderlands, which range from border-crossing checkpoints to physical barriers to security patrols to electronic surveillance, are highly spatially variable even along a single border. This means that borderland spaces are neither fully absent of state influence nor likely to be consistently awash in anti-state violence simply because of their distance from centres of state power.

Borderlands are becoming increasingly violent over time

The report examines the role of border regions in the spatial diffusion of violence across North and West Africa since 1997. It shows that borderlands remain central in the shifting of political instability that has affected the region in the last two decades, despite being geographically and politically peripheral. The report also confirms that the location of violence in North and West Africa is highly dynamic over time. For example, most of the major conflict areas of the 1990s are peaceful today and some of the most violent attacks are observed in states that were considered stable a mere 15 years ago.

With this in mind, the study shows that the importance of borders to violence is not an immutable 'law' of the region's political geography. For example, in eras of interrelated conflicts occurring in multiple states, such as the wars in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone in the late 1990s and early 2000s, borders clearly had a heightened importance for armed groups. The importance of borders for armed groups subsequently declined until 2010 as most of the conflicts of the Gulf of Guinea ended. Since the resumption of major conflicts elsewhere in the region in the early 2010s, borderlands have become

Figure 1.3
Violent events by border distance, selected countries, 1997-2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[2]) data. Data available through 30 June 2021. ACLED data is publicly available.

increasingly violent, while shifting in space away from the Gulf of Guinea. Both the number of violent events located near borders (Figure 1.2) and their proportion (Figure 5.3) are on the rise, an evolution that is principally due to the degradation of the security situation in West Africa.

Some borderlands are more violent than others

Combining quantitative data on the location of violent events with qualitative assessments of the actors involved in these conflicts, the report shows that the political will and military strength of states do shape the development of violent activities in border regions. The report also suggests that border violence is dependent on the ways in which violent non-state actors use borderlands to prepare attacks or mobilise civilian populations. These findings highlight that border conflicts reflect larger political issues, such as the perceived marginalisation of some groups that cannot easily be contained within or ascribed only to the territorial margins of the state. For this reason, such issues can potentially threaten the state's survival.

The various factors that drive state and non-state actors to go transnational are highly dependent on state and local contexts, which helps to explain why some borderlands are much more violent than others. The two main hotspots of border violence are the Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger tri-borderlands and the Lake Chad basin. In these regions, conflicts are more intense and violent events are more clustered than in the rest of the region (Map 1.3).

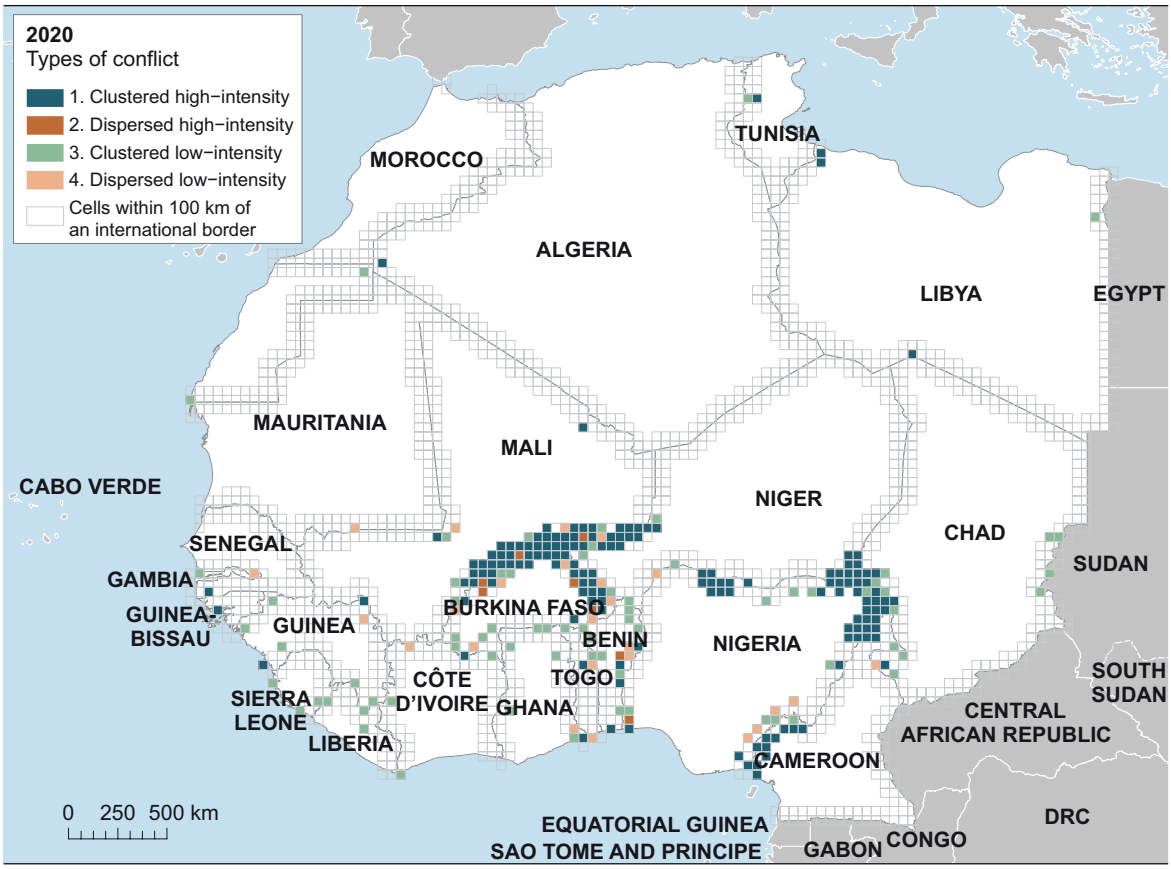
This study demonstrates that the political and geographic processes that lead to the concentration of violence in border regions are first anchored in the efforts of states to realise sovereignty within their own borders. Many of the smaller states in the region show a sharp decline in violence as border distance increases due to their size. Others, such as Benin, exhibit a spike at larger distances from borders that reflects the presence of national capitals and other large urban centres. Among the region's larger states, the relationship between violence and borders is particularly visible in Niger and Cameroon, where insurgencies are focused on border regions. However, the relationship is less clear in Mali and Nigeria because of the multiplication of conflict in several parts of these countries (Figure 1.3).

The significant variations observed across states lead to three important implications. First, the process by which sovereignty ebbs and flows over time is not just a relevant issue for so-called 'big' states. Small states can also struggle to project influence across distance as the presence of public authority can wane in borderland regions, even if the absolute distances involved are much smaller than in other states. In Burkina Faso or Liberia, for example, border communities are those least likely to receive visits and resources from agricultural extension services, or benefit from public investments in health or education (OECD/SWAC, 2019[6]; Witinok-Huber et al., 2021[7]).

Second, because violence may be highly localised in terms of the groups or the grievances involved, conflicts can become entrenched within

Map 1.3

Main hotspots of border violence in West Africa, 2020



Note: The Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) measures the intensity and spatial concentration of violence in 6 540 cells of 50 by 50 kilometres across North and West Africa. Only the cells within 100 kilometres of an international border are represented on the map.

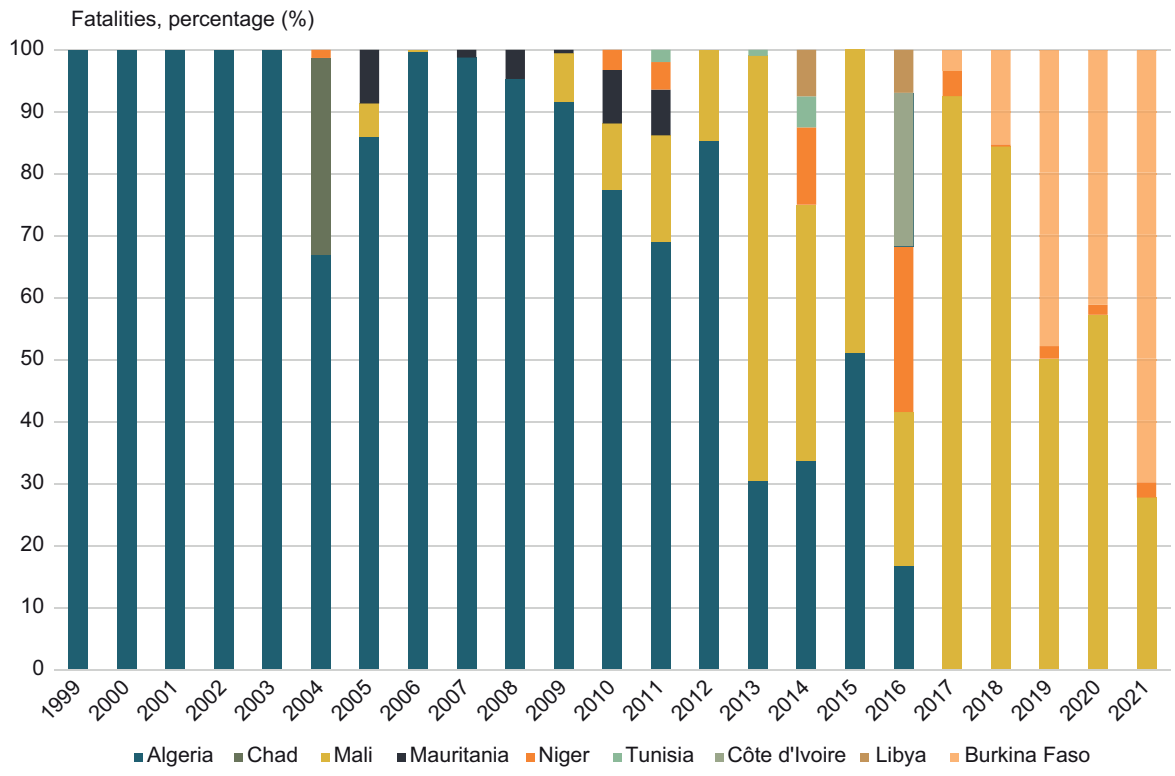
Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[2]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

borderlands. Between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, for example, at least two major insurgencies have developed, each fuelled by different extremist organisations that skilfully exploit local grievances left unaddressed by central governments. By implication, a state that struggles from episodes of violence along one border may be at risk along others even if the parties and issues involved seem unconnected. This means that investigations of these local cases should also be placed within the larger context of the variable capacity of states to project influence throughout their territory.

Third, while the political processes that typically result in expressions of borderland violence emerge in localised settings, there are also international and regional politics to consider. States do attempt to manage sovereignty together, whether through bilateral co-operative arrangements or through larger regional partnerships. For example, the Lake Chad Basin Commission's Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the G5 Sahel's Joint Force both operate as cross-border counter-terrorism security forces in the region. While there is no evidence that these co-operative politics give rise to the spatial patterns of violence presented in this report per se, military forces tasked with combatting armed groups will often find themselves operating in borderlands and thus potentially may contribute to the insecurity that may already be present in such spaces.

The report also shows that non-state actors tend to respond in a timely and opportunistic manner to state offensives against rebellions and violent extremists. The case of Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the Lake Chad and of Al-Qaeda affiliated groups in the Central Sahel suggests

Figure 1.4
Fatalities by country for Al Qaeda-affiliated groups, 1999-2021



Note: The organisations affiliated with Al Qaeda are GSPC, AQIM, and JNIM. JNIM is an affiliate of Al Qaeda, under the formal control of AQIM, and comprises a coalition of forces including Belmokhtar's faction of Al-Mourabitoun as well as several Mali-based jihadist groups and AQIM units.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[2]) data. Data available through 30 June 2021. ACLED data is publicly available.

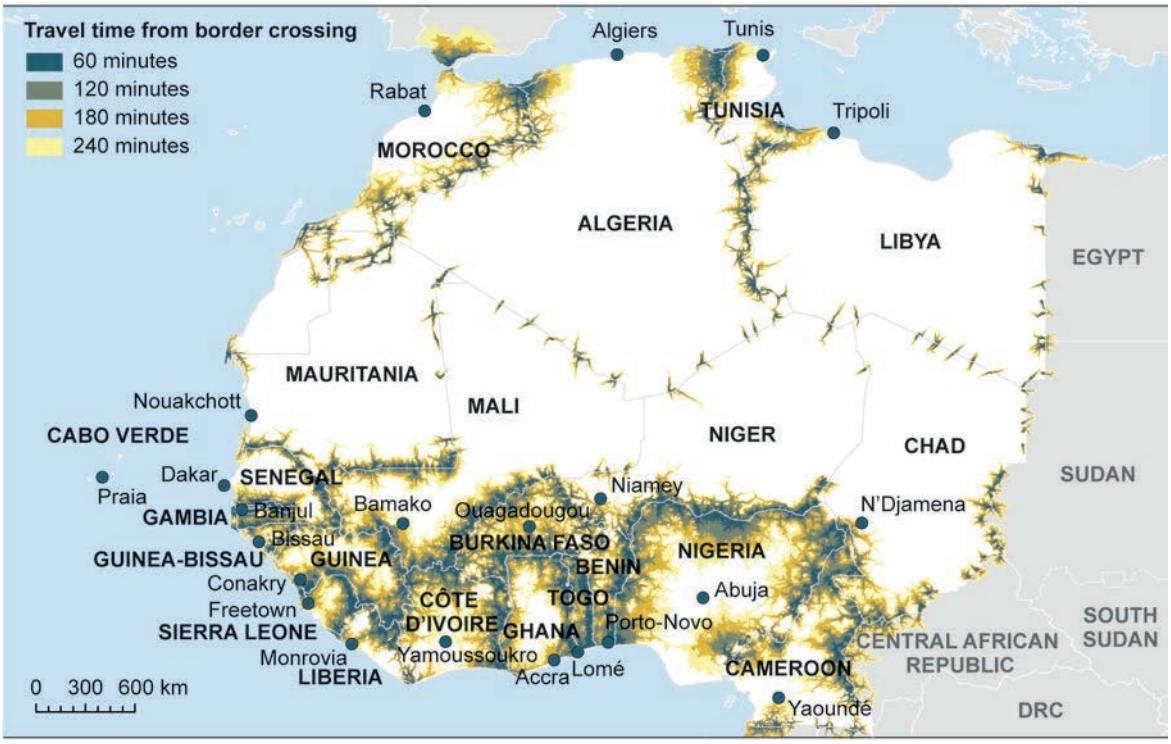
that pressure exerted by one country on one group results in its relocation to a neighbouring country where military capabilities or political will are weaker. Al Qaeda's move from Algeria to the Sahara-Sahel is clearly visible on Figure 1.4, which represents the proportion of fatalities involving the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and the Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims (JNIM) by country from 1999 to 2021. The figure emphasises the growing importance of Mali and Burkina Faso, where most of the fatalities involving Al Qaeda-affiliated organisations are located. By contrast, Algeria represents a negligible proportion of fatalities involving these groups since 2016.

A SPATIAL APPROACH TO CONFLICT

This report addresses borderland violence with an examination of the geography of violent events in the region from January 1997 to June 2021. The report builds on a database of more than 171 000 violent events that have caused 43 000 fatalities collected from ACLED (ACLED, 2021[2]) (Chapter 3). An original aspect of the report is to combine two different approaches to define borderlands, one that applies a fixed distance from borders and one that calculates their accessibility to the rest of the national territory instead. In this second approach, borderlands are defined as the area that is accessible by road in less than four hours from any border crossing of the region, using local transportation and average speeds determined

Map 1.4

Accessibility in border regions in North and West Africa, 2020



Source: Michiel van Eupen and the authors for this publication.

by topography. This definition based on travel times is well adapted to capture the diversity of borderlands in the region and the ability of state forces and non-state actors to travel across borders (Map 1.4).

The report uses the recent Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) to map the changing geography of borderland conflict in the region (Chapter 4). Specially designed to capture rapid changes in conflict, the SCDi measures both the intensity and spatial concentration of political violence in 6 540 subnational regions or "cells", from Dakar to N'Djamena and from Algiers to Lagos (Walther et al., 2021[8]). The indicator identifies four spatial typologies of violence that can be used to determine whether conflicts are intensifying or decreasing, and in which regions. The report shows that political violence is on the rise in West Africa and that borderlands are more prone to high-intensity and clustered violence, particularly in the tri-national region between Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, and around Lake Chad (Map 1.3). The report then examines the particular role that borders and borderlands play in the diffusion of political violence in North and West Africa (Chapter 5). It first considers the macro space-time trends before taking a disaggregated look at the same patterns across the region.

At the regional level, the report maps violent events and fatalities to determine whether they are more spatially clustered in border regions than elsewhere in North and West Africa. It then examines the temporal evolution of violent events and fatalities over the last two decades to identify several waves of border-related violence. Finally, the report identifies which border regions have become the most violent in recent years and discusses the reasons why conflicts between state and non-state actors tend to affect these regions. The local analysis builds on an examination of several case studies where state forces and violent organisations have conducted numerous operations beyond state boundaries, causing significant numbers of violent events and deaths. These cases are the Mali insurgency and its consequences in the Central Sahel since 2012, the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad region since 2009, and the conflicts around Chad. The last part of

the report discusses the policy implications of addressing violence within border regions in North and West Africa (Chapter 6).

The report focuses on all forms of political violence in the region, including military campaigns, rebellions, terrorism, and communal violence. The originality of the report is to focus on how state forces and non-state actors make use of international borders and borderlands to achieve their political objectives. Such transnational conflicts are defined as armed struggles in which there are cross-border military activities and at least one of the actors involved is a non-state group.

BORDER CONFLICTS AS EXISTENTIAL THREATS TO STATE ELITES

Border regions play a growing and decisive role in the evolution of the security situation in North and West Africa. Conflicts have become more intense and violence is more clustered near borders than in the rest of the region. Borderland violence develops when the ability of the state to project influence is confronted with the ability of violent non-state actors to find refuge or mobilise civilians in peripheral regions. States and their challengers both vie to control borderland regions, which are therefore central to the stability of the state despite often being perceived as marginal. Religious extremist groups, in particular, have been successful at using borderlands to impose an alternative political agenda that builds on a strict interpretation of religious law and attempts to address grievances left unresolved by the state.

Sahelian and Saharan countries have developed different strategies to counter transnational organisations, without managing to establish a new societal model that could simultaneously strengthen national cohesion in a multi-ethnic context and serve as an alternative to religious extremism. The last two decades have shown, on the contrary, that states have continued to rely on two strategies: the delegation of power to political and economic allies in peripheral regions and the clientelist distribution of national resources.

On the one hand, national elites have continued to rely on informal arrangements with politically connected traders at the margins of the state. This approach has resulted in the emergence of a parasitical economy that connects borderlands to the core of the government. These informal networks, which extend from entrepot economies such as Benin, Togo or Gambia to the largest markets of the region, make cross-border co-operation and the harmonisation of economic policies difficult. Some state elites have also invested in numerous ethnic or political militias that often represent minority groups or fight for their own interests, such as the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA) and Dan Na Ambassagou in Mali, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Nigeria or the Koglweogo in Burkina Faso.

On the other hand, states have tried to convince religious extremists to abandon armed struggle. At the end of 2021, after nearly 10 years of civil war, the Malian government, for example, allegedly tried to open talks with Al Qaeda-affiliated leaders, a move vigorously opposed by Mali's ally France. By doing so, political elites were trying to replicate a strategy that has proven successful in the recent history of the region. This strategy has been so successful that, for some rebel movements, the objective of the conflict is not so much to secede from the state than to claim better access to its resources. In Mali, for example, Tuareg rebellions have often been motivated by future political dividends and rebels have artificially inflated their importance in order to provide steady jobs when they were reintegrated in the Malian army (OECD/SWAC, 2021[3]).

The strategy adopted by national governments to rule borderlands by proxy and negotiate with violent extremists is potentially the most perilous for the future of the region for at least two reasons. First, recent years have amply demonstrated the danger of using ethnic or political militias in place of government forces. These militias, which represent one-third of all actors in conflict in 2020, are too often used as an instrument of political disorder by politicians, religious leaders and community strongmen.

Second, there is also no guarantee that religious extremists can be co-opted by political elites in the same way as rebels from previous movements. The new generation of religious extremists that thrive on the inability of states to fully control their own territory is less interested in negotiating a larger share of a government's revenue than it is in destroying its political order.

In contrast to ethno nationalist movements, Jihadist groups argue that modern nation-states are incompatible with religious law and that their borders are irrelevant to the community of believers (Walther, forthcoming[9]). In that sense, they pose an unprecedented existential threat to state elites and their informal arrangements in border regions.

POLITICAL OPTIONS IN BORDER REGIONS

It seems unlikely that a more inclusive societal model will be put in place in the region to foster national cohesion. For the time being, initiatives to mitigate the impact of border conflicts by states and their foreign partners are more likely to take one or more of the following forms: a securitisation of borders through new troops and technologies, a reinforcement of the transport infrastructure that links border regions to the rest of the country, and an investment in health, education and other public services in border cities that are sorely lacking at the margins of the state. Each of these initiatives has a strong spatial component that should ideally consider the specificities of border regions and the varying local contexts in which border communities interact with state representatives (OECD/SWAC, 2017[10]).

Designing and implementing place-based policies, in addition to national or sectoral policies, is one of the most effective ways to address the political marginalisation of borderlands while promoting their economic centrality within the region. Such place-based policies are part of a larger agenda that seeks to enhance regional integration by promoting agglomeration economies at the local level, national cohesion at the national level, and regional trade at the international level (World Bank, 2009[11]). Policy makers involved in the resolution of conflict in African borderlands should build on this conceptual framework to promote urban density in border cities, reduce the impact of distance between capital cities and peripheries, and facilitate international exchanges within North and West Africa and beyond (OECD/SWAC, 2019[12]).

A reinforcement of border security and technologies

Given the current regional focus on military operations, future policy initiatives are likely to focus on strengthening the capacity of governments to defend and monitor their borders. Porous borders have long been recognised as a reality in the region and multiple initiatives have been launched in the last two decades to train African armies against transnational groups and develop multinational forces to operate in borderlands, such as the MNJTF in the Lake Chad basin, or the G5 Sahel and Task Force Takuba in the Central Sahel. Beyond these initiatives, further investments in border monitoring resources and technologies would also be needed to help Sahelian and Saharan countries better secure their borderlands. In other words, the process of regional integration promoted by regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and international donors should be accompanied by a more effective securitisation of borders. However, international efforts to transfer technologies that can monitor the transnational circulation of goods and people have proved rather disappointing thus far. Imported technologies have been instrumentalised by political elites and contested by border communities when they threatened local livelihoods. For example, the highly sophisticated border post of Kantchari, between Burkina Faso and Niger, that implemented fingerprint scanners and computer registration systems with biometric databases, was burned down only two years after its inauguration and its agents reverted to

paper-based control practices (Donko, Doevenspeck and Beisel, 2021[13]).

Better infrastructure to promote national cohesion

While the securitisation of borders will likely remain one of the top priorities of African governments and their international allies, it cannot alone lead to a peaceful resolution of the conflicts in the region. Insurgencies emerge when peripheral communities feel marginalised and the state is unable to maintain national cohesion. Improving transport infrastructure is a necessary step towards restoring the legitimacy of the state. Thus far, border regions remain poorly connected to their respective national territories. For example, more than 60 years after the independence of Chad, Mali, and Niger, there are still no paved roads linking Bardaï, Kidal, Timbuktu or Bilma to the rest of the country (OECD, 2019[6]). Several decades of underinvestment in borderlands have contributed to the breakdown of national cohesion and reinforced centrifugal tendencies that have been exploited by violent extremists. Investments in transportation infrastructure and related policies should aim to reduce the isolation that currently separates border regions from other regional and national centres, so as to minimise the inconvenience associated with their geographical marginalisation.

Better public services in border cities

Better border security and more connectivity for borderlands would be meaningful efforts toward reducing borderland conflicts. Attention is also specifically needed within border cities as these are key nodes in the regional circulation of goods and people in both North and West Africa. Yet, these urban centres usually lack the public services that would help them develop both as centres of innovation and commercial hubs. This in turn can fuel a sense of alienation and grievance among borderlanders that can be exploited by extremists. For instance, a lack of medical, social and educational services in border cities significantly weakens the ability of the state to present itself as a productive force in the lives of borderlanders. Development policies that aim to promote peace and security in the region should invest more in border cities, especially given that urbanisation is accelerating across Africa. Efforts to improve the lives of borderlanders, targeted specifically to where they increasingly live and work, could undercut the appeal of extremist groups as an alternative to the state.

Protect civilians, above all

A final important point to note is that as violence has surged in some border regions, borderland populations have also been the ones that have primarily borne the consequences. No matter the mix of policy initiatives that may be undertaken across the region to aim to reduce borderland violence, protecting the lives and livelihoods of civilians, rather than only killing insurgents, should be the main concern of African states and their allies (OECD/SWAC, 2020[4]). West African women, in particular, are facing unprecedented levels of targeted political violence, with worrying implications for their participation in the agricultural sphere, pastoral livelihoods and political involvement (Kishi, forthcoming[14]). Violence against women is increasing in border regions, where the control of civilian populations has become one of the key issues at stake between governments and non-state armed groups (Walther, 2020[15]). In the absence of a comprehensive database that would report the gender of both victims and perpetrators of political violence, the amplitude of the violence against women in general and in borderlands in particular remains understudied. Without specific attention to the ongoing and deepening insecurity of borderland populations, especially within the Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali tri-border area and around Lake Chad, none of the efforts described above are likely to be achievable. Protecting the lives and well-being of civilians in the immediate term must become a priority of any longer-term security and development strategies in the region.

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Chapter 2

The increasingly transnational nature of conflict in North and West Africa

Chapter 2 shows that transnational conflicts involving non-state actors have become an important feature in Africa since the end of the Cold War. The geographic spread and opportunistic relocation of such conflicts is amplified by the porosity of some borders that facilitate the circulation of fighters, hostages and weapons. Several factors explain why African borders have gradually become synonymous with political disorder. In recent years, state forces have crossed borders to contribute to the restoration of order, destabilise neighbours, exert their right of hot pursuit, or establish joint military initiatives that pool personnel, materiel, and intelligence on violent organisations. Non-state actors have also contributed to the regionalisation of conflict by relocating to other countries when pressured by counter-insurgency initiatives. They use borderlands as a haven to recruit, train their forces, plan their attacks, and exploit state weaknesses and local grievances. The regionalisation of conflict involves physical, social, and strategic costs on both state forces and their opponents.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Conflicts in North and West Africa are increasingly transnational, making borders, borderlands, and border communities ever more important for the stability of the state.**
- **Traditionally, the development of violent organisations in border regions is understood as a result of either state failure or state policy.**
- **In recent years, state-centred approaches to transnational conflicts have been replaced with other approaches that emphasise the autonomy and resilience of non-state actors.**
- **States cross borders to help restore order, destabilise neighbours, or co-ordinate regional offensives. Their enemies relocate to other countries when defeated by state forces, to create safe havens, and to exploit the grievances of border communities.**
- **Going transnational is costly and risky. Even when borders offer jurisdictional protection and opportunities, they nonetheless affect the mobility of armed groups.**

In Africa, the creation of modern boundaries in the early 20th century was a long-lasting process that shaped the trajectory of colonial and postcolonial states. During the colonial period, borders helped elites project their political powers and establish a durable source of revenue. Since much of the colonial revenue depended on import taxes, the sustainability of colonies relied on securing borders, fighting against smuggling, and redirecting regional flows toward the ports and railways built by the French or the British (Howard and Shain, 2005[1]). However, as shown by Nugent (2019[2]), colonial powers struggled to establish a productive social contract with borderlanders that would promote economic development across the region. Instead, they implemented various models of integration according to precolonial history, local resistances, and the colonial policies of each territory. In Senegal, for example, a combination of high rates of personal taxation and few public goods led to the emergence of a coercive social contract only limited by the relative ability of colonial forces to control mobility. Across the border, in Gambia, the British implemented a rather permissive social contract outside of Banjul,

with few expenditures and light taxation. The most productive social contract was found in the urbanised part of the Gold Coast (Ghana), where pressure from local elites ultimately led to the delivery of public goods without personal taxation, and in German Togoland, where high expenditures were combined with a lighter tax burden than in the *Afrique-Occidentale Française*.

Newly independent African states had little incentives (and financial means) to challenge the social contracts established during the colonial period and, as a result, there was considerable continuity between colonial and postcolonial states. As informal trade expanded, state institutions proved increasingly unable to deliver public goods in exchange for taxation, and fashioned rules without implementing them. The emergence of a parasitical economy almost entirely built on smuggling in the second half of the 20th century not only made cross-border co-operation and the harmonisation of economic policies difficult in the region (Bach, 2016[3]). It also encouraged the spatial expansion of political violence and the transnational movement of violent actors (Carmignani and Kler, 2016[4]), illustrating the fundamental duality of African borders, as sources of opportunities and risks for state and non-state actors alike (Brambilla and Jones, 2019[5]).

NOT ALL BORDERS ARE THE SAME

Boundaries and borders are politically constructed lines of division that separate two pieces of land from one another. Such lines are often made quite real and impactful through the actions of those that try to assert control within them. When these lines run between two national states, they are described as international boundaries and are usually clearly defined in terms of location from point to point through treaties and other political processes. This has made international boundaries an important legal topic as these lines serve to delimit the geographic extent within which states can conduct their affairs independently under the concept of sovereignty.

Another defining characteristic of boundaries has been the function they have performed throughout history. For example, well-defined borders have been repeatedly identified as not just a key element of the definition of the modern state, but as a major element in building state institutions and forming a collective sense of national identity. For this reason, borders have been connected to modern state-building projects and to the management of political conflicts between neighbouring states as well. Disputes about the location of boundary lines remains a crucial point of conflict between governments, including in West Africa (Box 2.1) and can be a source of violence in extreme cases.

From this perspective, well-defined international borders have been argued as serving to stabilise both internal and external political relations. Where borders are porous, uncontrolled, or perhaps uncontrollable, the extension of state authority to border regions can be decidedly uneven (Avdan and Gelpi, 2017[6]). Such border conditions have typified much of the post-colonial period in Africa and have been linked to broader critiques of state development (Laremont, 2005[7]). Further, it is important to note that despite providing the common function of delimiting state sovereignty, not all borders are the same all the time. A border crossing in an urban area or along a major transportation route may be tightly controlled while a border located a few kilometres away may be largely ungoverned. Further, borders that are aligned with certain natural features, like rivers or bodies of water, may serve to limit movement even without formal control in a way that other border contexts may not (Dobler, 2016[8]). Lastly, border control is fluid over time and a stretch of border may be managed episodically or inconsistently (Radil, Pinos and Ptak, 2021[9]).

State-centred approaches to borders and conflict

Until recently, much of the literature on borders and conflict was state-centric and considered

Box 2.1

Border disputes between Niger and its neighbours

In 2005, a territorial dispute between Niger and Benin was resolved in a ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The ICJ ruling marked an end to four decades of sporadic conflict between the two states and border communities over access to land and resources to support livestock and crop agriculture. The new boundary between the two countries was delineated along the course of the Niger and Mekrou rivers. The ICJ granted possession of 16 of the 25 disputed islands to Niger including the 40 square kilometres island of Lété, which was the main cause of border tensions. Benin retained sovereignty over a territory of about 1 100 square kilometres in the extreme north of the country.

In the same region, the course of a 650 kilometres stretch of the common border between Burkina Faso and Niger was also a source of dispute between the two states since their independence in 1960. The dispute was ultimately referred to the ICJ in 2010 and the court's judgement in 2013 served to clarify the location of the border. The new border location in turn led to the need for an exchange of territory that had been under the de facto control of each state. Under the settlement, Burkina Faso received 786 square kilometres of territory and 4 towns while Niger received 277 square kilometres and 14 towns.

Source: Kill (2013)[10] and Walther (2015)[11].

transnational actors through the prism of inter-state relations or not at all (Box 2.2). In political science especially, the development of violent organisations in border regions was understood as a result of either state failure or state policy.

- **State failure.** The first approach draws on the concept of a state's "monopoly on violence" which refers to a state as having a right to use violence within its own territory. When a state can no longer exercise its monopoly on violence, it tends to attract violent organisations that are either expelled from other countries or in search of a more secure haven (Innes, 2007[12]; Gray and Latour, 2010[13]). As "weak" or "failed" states, the absence of full state control over its own territory creates "ungoverned areas" or safe havens for transnational criminality and terrorism which contributes towards spreading terrorist attacks to neighbouring countries, as in Afghanistan, Mali, Somalia and Syria. This domino effect is largely attributed to the failure of states to contend with transnational actors. The idea that failed states allow violent organisations to spread in ungoverned areas and create sanctuaries has grown in popularity after the September 11 attacks and remains widely popular in policy circles (Department of State, 2019[14]; UN, 2015[15]).
- **State policy.** The second approach argues that violent organisations defeated in their home country have no other choice but to relocate across borders (D'Amato, 2018[16]). It notes that extremist groups confronted with pressure by opposition forces tend to expand activities beyond the territory of a single state to avoid and recuperate from counterinsurgency operations by state forces operating within its own borders. Evidence for the state power theory consists of cases like the Sahel, Central Africa and the Great Lakes Region, in which rebels, warlords, and extremist groups such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram or the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) have crossed boundaries to find safe havens when confronted with counterinsurgency initiatives.

These approaches suggest that states are either too weak to control their territory or too strong to tolerate terrorist organisations within their boundaries. More recent studies argue that these approaches are complementary. While the failed or weak state approach may partially explain exploitation of safe havens and transnational

Box 2.2
Defining transnational conflicts

Many types of conflict have clear definitions. Interstate wars, for example, are armed struggles between the regular forces of two or more states, while civil wars are armed conflicts between a state's armed and/or security forces and inhabitants or citizens of the same state who seek to take control or secede. Such definitions of conflict often have expression in international law, creating specific policy frameworks to address them. By contrast, what is meant by "transnational conflict" is less settled and a source of active debate among scholars and policymakers alike (Twagiramungu et al., 2019[19]).

In a literal sense, a conflict is considered transnational if it extends beyond the borders of a single state, and any form of conflict not neatly contained by a state's borders could therefore be transnational by nature, including all interstate wars. Relying only on the inherent spatial dimension of conflict can be misleading, however, since most modern conflicts have aspects that span national borders without being "transnational conflicts" per se. For example, modern wars often involve foreign-based material support for a government or an armed non-state group, operational alliances with external actors, or full-fledged foreign military interventions. All of these circumstances would necessarily involve some form of cross-border interaction, as does the classic interstate war example of two states at war with each other. In addition to being cross-border by nature, transnational conflicts include a sociological framing. Transnational violent actors are those groups drawn from the civilian world but that have societal relations spanning borders, such as an ethnic group whose traditional homeland falls within the territory of multiple states. This reflects a distinction often present in both the conflict literature and international law that the cross-border activities of states and those of civil society groups are fundamentally different. The former typically receives the label "international" rather than "transnational", especially when the activity involves another state.

Modern definitions of transnational conflict, violence or terrorism tend to combine these spatial and social components. For example, Crenshaw (2020[20]) argues that transnational terrorism attacks "may be initiated by local actors against foreign targets in conflict regions, or by radicalised local residents or transnational networks against targets outside the combat zone. These features of actor and location distinguish transnational terrorism from terrorism carried out by local parties within civil wars, which is not unusual." For these reasons, this report adopts a dual approach to transnational conflict, considering the issues and activities of non-state groups that spill across national boundaries.

violence, the development of violent extremist groups in border regions ultimately results from a combination of political will and military capabilities (Arsenault and Bacon, 2014[17]). Terrorist groups expand where the government is unwilling and/or unable to counter transnational actors. While there is no doubt that weak states have experienced tendencies to foster rebel, extremist, and other transnational actors, terrorist organisations can also be financially and politically supported by strong states, as in the example of Pakistan, who supported both the Taliban and the Haqqani network (US Government, 2004[18]). In other words, it is not merely the failure or power of states that provokes transnational actors to move transnationally or exploit safe havens. Transnational actors have their own agency and do not react exclusively to pressure from states and militaries.

The state-centred approach to transnational conflicts have emphasized the importance of safe havens for anti-state armed groups and militias. Safe havens are typically considered to be specific geographical areas existing in states such as Afghanistan, Iraq or Yemen that groups can use to minimise external pressure while conducting necessary strategic activities like planning, recruitment, attacks, organising, and raising resources and revenue (Phillips and Kamen, 2014[21]). The literature identifies four

factors influencing the creation of safe havens: low population density, weak political governance, history of corruption and violence, and endemic poverty and low human development indices (Campana and Ducol, 2011[22]).

Safe havens are conceived as critical to extending the longevity of non-state actors facing major military threats (Arsenault and Bacon, 2014[17]) and as a requisite to overcome the disadvantages in personnel, resources, wealth, and power that prohibits non-state actors from engaging in continuous and protracted conflicts with state forces.

Many border regions serve as refuge for violent organisations around the world. Of the 75 foreign terrorist groups designated by the United States Department of State in March 2021, 32 use border areas extensively for their military operations. There are currently three global 'hotspots' of such groups. The largest cluster (13 groups) is found in the shared border regions of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The Lebanon-Syria border, Syria-Iraq borderlands, Southern Lebanon, and Kurdistan are home to another nine such organisations, including the Islamic State, that use borderlands as resources. Lastly, eight foreign terrorist organisations affiliated with Al Qaeda or the Islamic State operate in border regions in the Central Sahel and Lake Chad region.

Border regions used by terrorist groups tend to remain unstable for long periods, with catastrophic consequences for local communities, national cohesion and world stability. In that sense, border violence is not an isolated phenomenon that can easily be contained within the margins of the state. It reflects deeper political issues, such as perceived or effective marginalisation, that cannot be ignored by state elites for too long.

NEW APPROACHES TO BORDERS AND CONFLICT

In recent years, state-centred approaches to transnational conflicts have gradually been challenged by alternative approaches that focus on the autonomy, resilience and shifting allegiances of non-state actors (Salehyan, 2009[24]; Iocchi, 2020[25]). Instead of a limited number of clearly defined actors, modern conflicts are characterised by a proliferation of communal or ethnic militias, self-defence groups, rebels, and religious extremists fighting against and alongside traditional state actors in a seemingly unpredictable manner (Forsberg, 2016[26]; OECD/SWAC, 2021[27]). The Bosnian war of the 1990s is a prototypical example, in which the Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian "sides" of the conflict each wielded their own private militias, many of which were associated with private mercenaries, illicit trade, or other non-state associations (Kaldor, 2012[28]). These "new wars" that combine local grievances with global narratives are often associated with armed conflicts that extend across national boundaries. They have stimulated the development of a "transnational turn" in the conflict literature that gradually discussed the significance and involvement of non-state actors in international affairs, including non-governmental organisations, multinational corporations, terrorist organisations, and civil society groups (Iriye, 2007[29]).

According to this literature, governance in borderlands diverges significantly from statutory rules, and often resembles a hybrid between formal and informal practices (van den Boogaard, Prichard and Jibao, 2021[30]). Far from being "ungoverned", borderlands are now considered as regions where alternative forms of co-operation, exchange, and resistance compete with the more hierarchical mode of regulation of the state (Meagher, 2014[31]). In such regions, local traditional authorities, religious institutions, civil society, ethnic associations, and trade networks are responsible for managing border functions and social relations (Arieli, 2016[32]; Lamarque, 2014[33]). In other words, there is no such thing as a "power vacuum" in which violent organisations could develop without competing with alternative forms of governance (Titeca and de Herdt, 2010[34]). Even in regions where the central state

is weakly present, other forms of power based on customary or civil law can be quite resilient, as in the Sahara today (Strazzari, 2015[35]).

Recent approaches no longer treat borders as exclusively rigid and enforced state-drawn boundary lines controlled by states and authorities. Instead, recent literature considers borders as complex spatial concepts that facilitate or prevent cross-border exchange (Brunet-Jailly, 2012[36]; Rumford, 2012[37]; Frowd, 2018[38]). This shift in approach is particularly well represented in the border studies literature that initially focused on the United States-Mexico border in the 1980s and has, since then, expanded to cover most regions of the world (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2009[39]; Pisani, Reyes and García, 2009[40]; Makkonen and Williams, 2016[41]). One of the key contributions of this interdisciplinary approach has been to highlight the symbolic and identity-forming importance of international boundaries for those who live in borderlands and routinely cross borders (Scott, 2020[42]). In Africa, recent studies have explored how borders were both culturally produced and politically enforced through complex interactions between the state, informal entrepreneurs, violent organisations, and local communities (Nugent, 2008[43]; Zeller, 2009[44]; Walther, 2015[45]; Justin and De Vries, 2017[46]; Moyo and Nshimbi, 2019[47]).

BORDER DISORDERS IN NORTH AND WEST AFRICA

In Africa[1], transnational conflicts involving non-state actors have become an important feature since the end of the Cold War (Williams, 2011[48]; Radil, Irmischer and Walther, 2021[49]). The trend observed in Africa is not unique to the continent. It shares many similarities with other regions of the world, where a strong increase in the number and activities of transnational violent organisations has also been noted (Salehyan, 2009[24]). Terrorist organisations, for example, have become more international and transnational since the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) launched the first hijacking of a plane in 1968, a process that has accelerated since the end of the Soviet-Afghan War in the late 1980s.

In Africa, the geographic spread and opportunistic relocation of such conflicts is amplified by the porosity of some borders that facilitate the circulation of fighters, hostages and weapons. For instance, transnational actors who exploited porous borders were a central feature of the civil wars that tore apart the Gulf of Guinea during the "decade of despair" beginning with the first Liberian civil war in 1989 (Aluede, 2019[50]). These conflicts were followed by an expansion of religious extremism, rebellions, and communal violence in the 2000s that increasingly relied on the opportunistic relocation of violent organisations across borders, particularly in the Lake Chad region and the Central Sahel. In 2012, for example, the offensive conducted by AQIM and the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) against the Malian army was supported by Tuareg fighters who fled Libya with arms, ammunitions, and explosives. Since then, this insurgency has spread to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger.

African borders have gradually become synonymous with political disorder for several reasons that relate to both state and non-state actors (Table 2.1). As discussed in the previous section, the dynamics of violent transnational actors in North and West Africa can hardly be attributed to the sole weakness or failure of states in the region. Rather, both state and non-state actors are involved in complex networks of alliances and conflict that shape the patterns of violence observed since the late 1990s (OECD/SWAC, 2021[27]) and both tend to use borders as a resource that can be mobilised to defeat their enemy. On the one hand, there is little doubt that state forces are more constrained by the existence of international boundaries than rebels and extremist organisations, for whom borders can represent an artificial line in the sand or a political manifestation of state order to be destroyed. On the other hand, borders are a powerful feature

of the world order that states can mobilise when they feel that their sovereignty is threatened by the incursion of non-state actors or other states on their territory.

In recent years, state forces have been known to cross into neighbouring countries to restore order at their margins, by cutting communication lines, destroying insurgent bases, or exerting their right of hot pursuit. In the Lake Chad region, for example, rights of pursuit have been negotiated between Nigeria and its neighbours on a bilateral basis to facilitate co-ordination against Boko Haram and its splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (Albert, 2017[51]). Not all these initiatives are concerted. In 2010, for example, Mauritania conducted a series of raids against AQIM in northern Mali without the support of Malian forces (Harmon, 2014[52]). State forces may also intervene internationally to support an ally in difficulty, as when Guinean troops occupied the town of Yenga in 2011 to help Sierra Leone's army fight the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a Sierra Leonean rebel group founded in Liberia.

State forces may also cross boundaries to destabilise neighbouring regimes. In the Great Lakes region, for example, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) formed in Uganda invaded Rwanda and put an end to the genocide against Tutsis and moderate Hutus in 1994. In the following years, the RPF and its allies invaded Zaire to replace President Mobutu Sésé Séko who provided support to Hutu extremists in Eastern Zaire, setting in motion the First Congo War. In 1998, during the Second Congo War, rebels backed by Rwanda and Uganda invaded the newly renamed Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to eliminate Hutu incursions across the western borders and create a buffer zone that would protect the Tutsis of Kivu (Alusala, 2019[53]).

These initiatives remain rare in West Africa, where most countries tend to avoid large-scale military operations across their borders and, instead, favour the establishment of joint military initiatives against insurgents. Joint military initiatives allow the small and underequipped military forces of many African countries to pool personnel and materiel and share intelligence on violent organisations. Among African troops, the most ambitious joint initiative is without doubt the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) established in the Lake Chad region by Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. Since the mid-2010s, the MNJTF has launched a series of military offensives against Boko Haram and ISWAP on Nigerian soil. Yet, co-ordination has remained poor due to rivalries between Nigeria and its neighbours and Nigeria's military weakness faced with a highly motivated enemy (Thurston, 2018[54])

Non-state actors also contribute to the regionalisation of conflict by relocating to other countries when pressured by counter-insurgency initiatives. According to the well-known principle of communicating vessels, pressure exerted by one country on an armed group usually results in its opportunistic move to another country where military capabilities or political will are weaker. The recent history of AQIM provides the best illustration of this principle in North and West Africa. Until the mid-2000s, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) which changed its name to AQIM in 2007, was principally an Algerian group led by an Algerian emir from its stronghold of Kabylia, east of Algiers. Faced with increasing pressure from security forces in Algeria, the GSPC/AQIM progressively expanded its operations in the Sahara and the Sahel, where it was tolerated for many years by the Malian government and developed a network of alliances with Tuareg and Arab tribes that allowed the group to carry out numerous operations across the region (Walther and Christopoulos, 2015[56]). After the French intervention of 2013, some AQIM members fled to Libya where the chaos that followed the collapse of the regime of Colonel Gaddafi provided a fertile ground for jihadist organisations.

Boko Haram and ISWAP have experienced a similar evolution in recent years. While the group had focused its attacks on northeastern Nigeria until 2014, increasing pressure from government forces led Boko Haram to focus its attacks on neighbouring Chad, Cameroon, and Niger after a series of major offensives conducted under the umbrella of the MNJTF in 2015 (Dowd, 2018[57]). The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Central Africa followed the same

Table 2.1

Why do state and non-state actors go transnational?

State	Non-state
Restore order: Cut communication lines, destroy insurgent bases, right of hot pursuit	Relocate to another region or country after being defeated by government forces
Help or destabilise a neighbour	Use borderlands to recruit, train and plan attacks
Co-ordinate a regional offensive	Exploit state weaknesses and local grievances

Source: Adapted by the authors from Walther and Miles (2018[55]).

trend: historically based in northern Uganda, the group led by Joseph Kony started to extend its attacks to the DRC and the Central African Republic (CAR) in the late-2000s following a series of inconclusive joint military offensives undertaken by neighbouring countries (Schomerus, 2021[58]). Started in the mid-1980s in northern Uganda as a rebellion against the government of President Yoweri Museveni, the LRA's longevity is tightly linked to the group's opportunistic and strategic use of borders and borderlands (Box 2.3).

Non-state actors also use borderlands as a haven to recruit, train their forces, and plan their attacks without interference from their main enemies. The western part of the Gulf of Guinea provides a dramatic example of how wars and borders were intertwined during the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia (Map 2.1). Within this region, several militia and rebel groups operated transnationally to gain access to valuable mineral resources and destabilise neighbouring political regimes. On Christmas Eve 1989, Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) entered Liberia to overthrow the Doe regime in Monrovia. His movement was originally assembled in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. Two years later, his enemies of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO) took refuge in Guinea and Sierra Leone, from which they secured strategic mine fields in Liberia (Ellis, 1998[60]). That same year, RUF rebels affiliated with Taylor's NPFL entered Sierra Leone from Liberia and secured parts of Sierra Leone rich in alluvial diamonds. They failed to conquer Freetown in 1995 and fled to Liberia from where they continued to engage in smuggling, arms trafficking, and violence even after disarmament and peace accords in 2002 (Silberfein and Conteh, 2016[61]). The RUF was also recruited by renegade soldiers in neighbouring Guinea in their planned insurgency, and was involved in illicit transborder movements of mercenaries, child soldiers and weapons. Borders remained crucial to the Second Liberian War (1999-2003), during which rebels from the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) invaded Liberia from Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Their offensive against Monrovia led to the exile of Charles Taylor in 2003.

Finally, non-state actors may move to borderlands to exploit state weaknesses and local grievances. Some interviewed jihadists have mentioned exploiting or capitalising on border porosity or lack of vigilance by claiming, "you come, we go, you go, we come back. We go wherever you aren't and you can't be everywhere" (Aydinli, 2010[62]). In recent years, for example, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) has expanded its operations in the border region of Tillabéri between Niger and Mali (Bøås, Cissé and Mahamane, 2020[63]). Originally based in Mali, ISGS progressively gained social control of the Tillabéri region by exploiting grievances among pastoral communities, for whom the lack of state support and expansion of farming into traditional pastureland created disputes left unaddressed by authorities. Through a combination of violence and intimidation, ISGS provided an alternative mode of governance that the state could not match, due to a lack of institutional strength and sovereign power.

Box 2.3

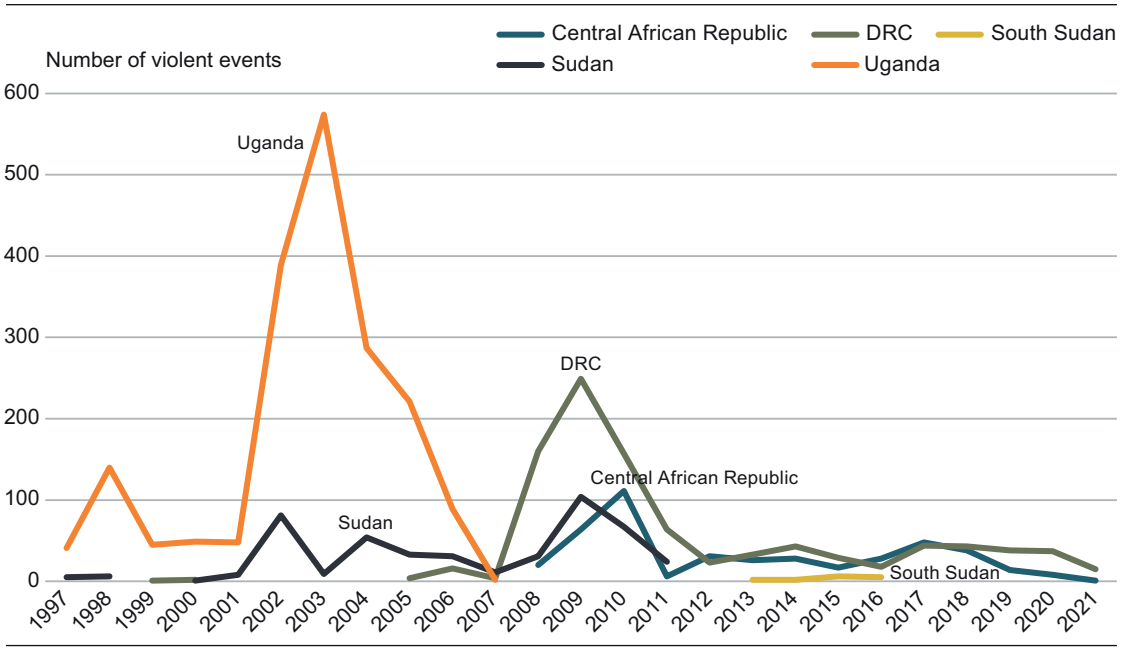
The Lord's Resistance Army: Borderlands as facilitators of longevity

At first glance, the history of violence in the borderlands of Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, the DRC and the CAR appears directly linked to military activity against the LRA. A spike in violence committed in Uganda in the late 1990s and early 2000s was intertwined with Operations North and Ironfist, two Ugandan military campaigns against the LRA. Animosity between the governments of Uganda and Sudan at the time fuelled a cross-border proxy war in which each government supported the rebels against the other respective government. The LRA's need for shelter, particularly during Operation Ironfist, increased with the LRA at times leading a fairly peaceful co-existence with Sudanese civilians. What is today's South Sudan became a more precarious safe haven after the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) rebels offered free passage in the areas it controlled to the Ugandan army, leading to an increase in violent incidents.

LRA violence in Uganda effectively ended with the Juba Peace Talks initiated in 2006. The LRA moved first into Sudan (later South Sudan) and then assembled in the Sudanese borderlands with the DRC. During this time, which follows the aftermath of Sudan's 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, violent incidents were common, with clear attribution to a specific group often challenging due to the sheer numbers of often small armed groups. As the Juba Talks were increasingly being held under military pressure by the Ugandan army, violent incidents against Congolese civilians increased, with a dramatic and devastating rise after the ill-planned 2008 aerial bombardment of the LRA camp (Operation Lightning Thunder) that marked the end of this peace effort. With the LRA now scattered, civilians in CAR, DRC and South Sudan became victims of violence and self-organised into protective militias.

Figure 2.1

Violent events involving the Lord's Resistance Army by country, 1997-2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[59]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

(Continues overleaf)

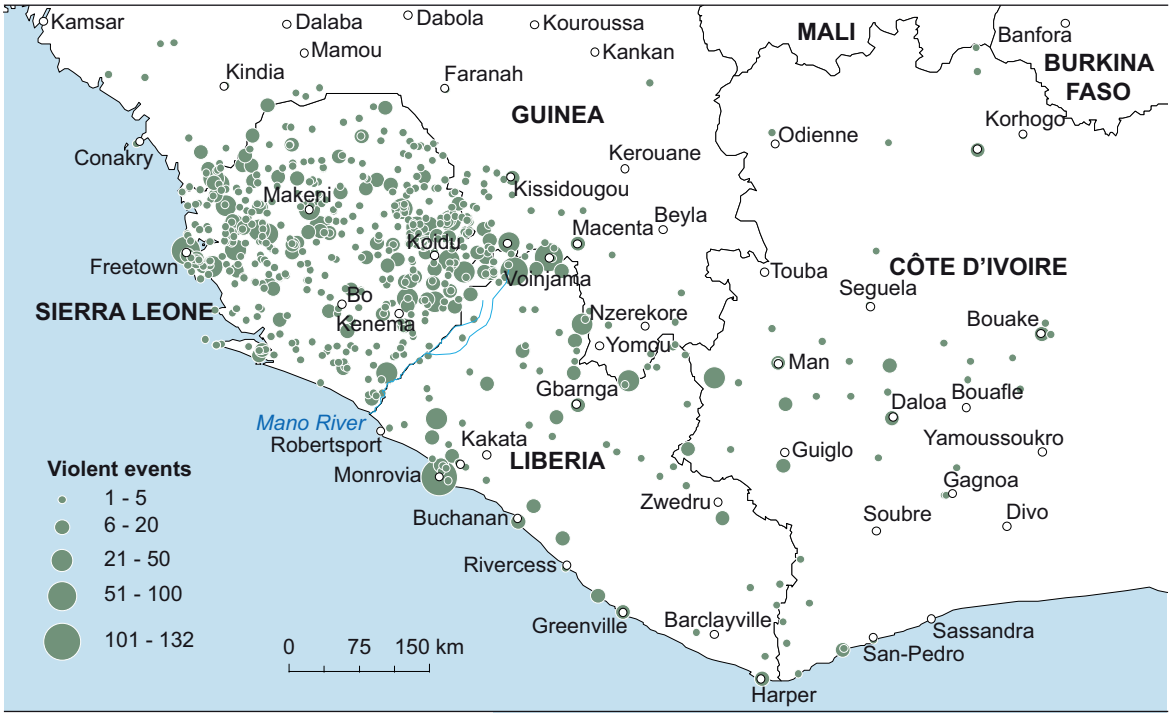
(Box 2.3 continued)

On the surface, the LRA's military strategy of operating as borderland rebels does not appear very durable. The group's violent activity has declined sharply in all countries since the early 2010s, with only 46 violent events recorded in 2020, more than 10 times less than in 2002 (Figure 2.1). Yet, these numbers fail to capture the LRA's strategic and opportunistic use of mobility across borders and in borderlands. Strategically, the LRA used government interests in proxy wars and unclear control mechanisms across borderlands to seek shelter or move their troops and goods. These strategies were often born out of or strengthened by opportunism, with the LRA utilising geopolitical dynamics to their advantage. The LRA crisscrossed the border between South Sudan and the DRC for years to elude the UN peacekeeping mission in the region. If the LRA had been conclusively either in the DRC or Sudan, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC, later MONUSCO) or the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS) would have theoretically been able to pursue them. For the LRA, a major aim over long periods of their rebellion has been to ensure survival against the Ugandan government of Yoweri Museveni. Moving across borders and utilising borderlands has allowed the LRA to succeed continuously in this aim.

Source: Mareike Schomerus for this publication.

Map 2.1

Violent events in the western Gulf of Guinea, 1997-2003



Source: Authors, based on ACLED (2021[59]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Costs and benefits of going transnational

The assumption that violent transnational actors frequently move across borders or retreat to cross-border safe havens implies they can do so easily. However, the regionalisation of conflict in North and West Africa clearly involves costs for both state forces and their opponents. Borders are expensive and dangerous to cross for all belligerents, who must assess the advantages and disadvantages of conducting attacks in a distant location. The costs associated with border crossings explain why even the most "transnational" groups tend to operate largely within the limits of one country (Map 2.2).

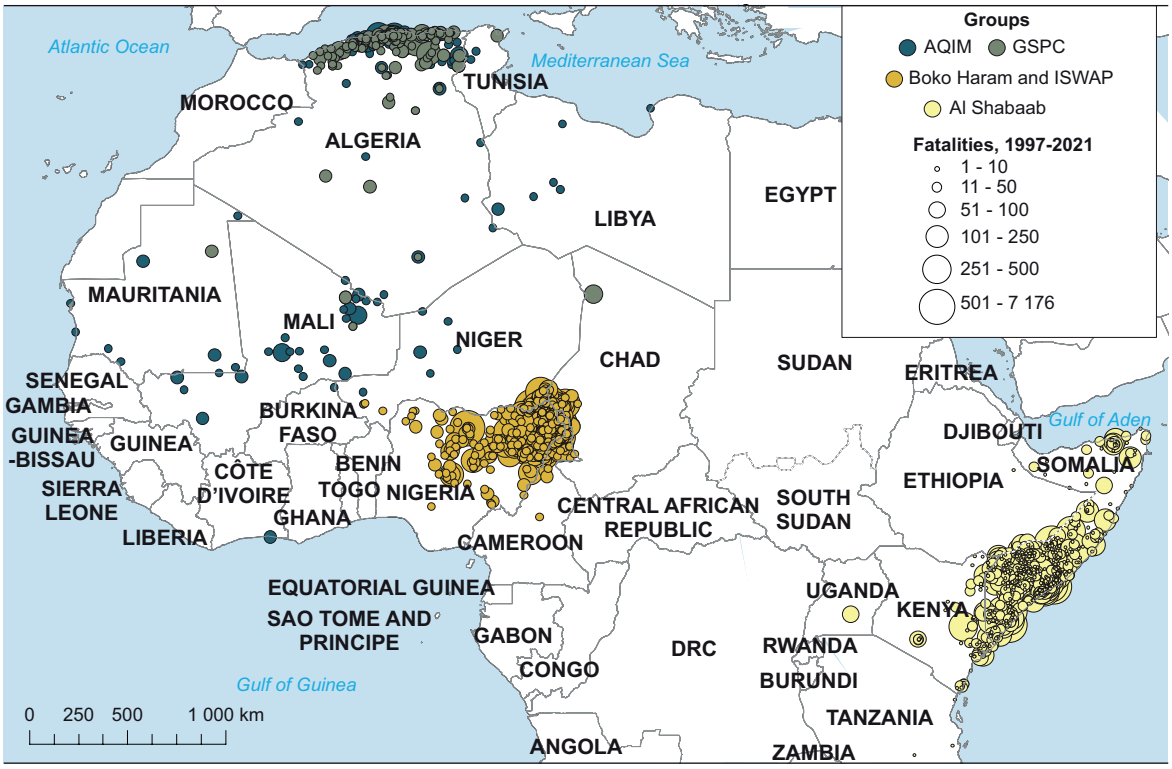
In the last two decades, for example, nearly 95% of the fatalities and violent events related to Al Shabaab between 2006 and 2021 were in Somalia, even if the armed group was capable of conducting spectacular operations in neighbouring Kenya (Table 2.2). Despite being known as one of the most mobile armed groups in North Africa, more than 90% of the fatalities and violent events related to the GSPC were in Algeria between 1999 and 2006, while the proportion of domestic fatalities and events exceeds 75% for AQIM between 2007 and 2017. While violent events committed by Boko Haram and ISWAP in the Lake Chad region have been comparatively "international" since 2009, three-quarters of the fatalities attributed to these groups are located in northern Nigeria rather than in neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

Borders represent an obstacle that armed groups need to overcome when they travel internationally (Box 2.4). A practical cause of the obstacle might be the overhead incurred in crossing a border. People and resources must be transported from one location to another, which takes time and costs money. A distant location imposes transaction costs, such as unfamiliarity with the physical and social terrain, different languages, and an increased risk associated with operating away from "home turf," where it may be less obvious who can or should be bribed. Costs associated with mobility for transnational groups in general and transnational movement specifically can be summarised as either physical, social, or strategic in nature (D'Amato, 2018[16]).

- **Physical costs.** These costs are associated with knowledge of the territory, resources, and physical capabilities. Crossing borders is perhaps easier in some parts of the world than others, but it is never without cost in material terms, risk of being identified by local farmers or herders, or tracked down by government forces or drones. In June 2020, for example, French and American forces learned that AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel was on his way to meet Iyad Ag Ghaly, the leader of the Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims (JNIM), in northern Mali. The French used four helicopters and one drone to track and attack Droukdel's white SUV after it crossed the Algerian border (France 24, 2020[64]). All the Jihadists were killed except their driver. The location where Droukdel was killed is a remote stretch of the Malian border more than 800 miles from Bamako as the crow files.
- **Strategic costs.** Going transnational allows for escape from government forces but it can also trigger new state reactions that are difficult to predict. States are more inclined to co-operate if a violent organisation starts attacking their territory than if it respects their territorial integrity. Expanding geographically can also create more enemies than a group can afford to have. In the early 2010s, for example, the leadership of AQIM was aware of such strategic costs. In a confidential letter found in Timbuktu, Droukdel warned his Saharan commanders that "the great powers with hegemony over the international situation (…) still have many cards to play that enable them to prevent the creation of an Islamic state in Azawad ruled by the jihadis and Islamists". Therefore, Droukdel warned them that "a military intervention will occur, whether directly or indirectly, or that a complete economic, political and military blockade will be imposed along with multiple pressures, which in the end will either force us to retreat to our rear bases or will provoke the people against us" (AP, 2013[65]). He strongly opposed AQIM's decision to go to war against the secular MNLA and encouraged them to build long-lasting alliances in Mali, with both political leaders and local communities.

Map 2.2

Violent events involving select transnational organisations, 1999-2021



Note: The data pertaining to GSPC cover the period 1999-2006, AQIM: 2007-2017, Boko Haram and ISWAP: 2009-2021, Al Shabaab: 2006-2021.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[59]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Table 2.2

Fatalities and violent events involving select transnational organisations by country, 1999-2021

	National		Transnational	
Organisations	**Fatalities (%)**	**Events (%)**	**Fatalities (%)**	**Events (%)**
Al Shabaab (Somalia, 2006-21)	95.2	96.4	4.8	3.6
Boko Haram and/or ISWAP (Nigeria, 2009-21)	79.8	63.4	20.2	36.6
GSPC (Algeria, 1999-2006)	92.8	96.5	7.2	3.5
AQIM (Algeria, 2007-17)	77.6	78.9	22.4	21.1

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[59]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

- **Social costs.** When violent organisations relocate to another region or country, they can lose the support of the civilian population upon which they normally rely for intelligence, mobility, and other resources. Rebuilding social and political relations with local communities is a complicated and long-term process. In Northern Mali, for example, AQIM took years to develop a network of alliances with Tuareg and Arab tribes that allowed the group to carry out numerous operations across the region (Thurston, 2020[67]). This strategy was not without setbacks. When local Jihadist groups started to impose sharia and destroy local shrines, the population reacted negatively and turned its back on extremist groups. Between Mali and Niger, it also took several

Box 2.4

Modelling the cost of borders in North and West Africa

A simple way to model the obstacles associated with borders is to conceive of a border as an additional distance to be covered between two locations by an armed group. For example, in a region where the average speed of pick-up trucks is 50 km/h, the addition of 100 kilometres to account for crossing a border adds a delay of two hours. This simple principle can be used to compare the actual location of violent attacks in a region with their hypothetical location if borders were to cause an additional delay to armed groups. If the actual and hypothetical locations are identical, one can presume that borders are not a significant obstacle to the mobility of armed groups, who are largely free to develop an internationalist agenda. If they are far apart, it means, on the contrary, that armed groups are heavily constrained by national boundaries and may develop a more national or local agenda.

Map 2.3 shows the distortions created on the actual location of violent attacks in North and West Africa committed by violent Islamist organisations from 1997-2015 when borders are modelled as equivalent to an increased distance of 50, 100 and 500 kilometres between countries. The map suggests that the presence of a border has little influence until its potential overhead is at least equivalent to the costs of 100 kilometres of intra-country travel. When the distortion is increased to 100 kilometres, attack locations in different countries begin to separate on the map, indicating that they have become less similar, especially along the Gulf of Guinea, where countries appear as separated clusters. On the other hand, the border between Algeria and Tunisia shows little change, indicating how similar attack locations in these countries are. When the effect of a border is increased to be equivalent to 500 kilometres, locations clearly separate by country, which means that cross-border locations seem less similar, and locations within the same country, by contrast, seem more similar to one another.

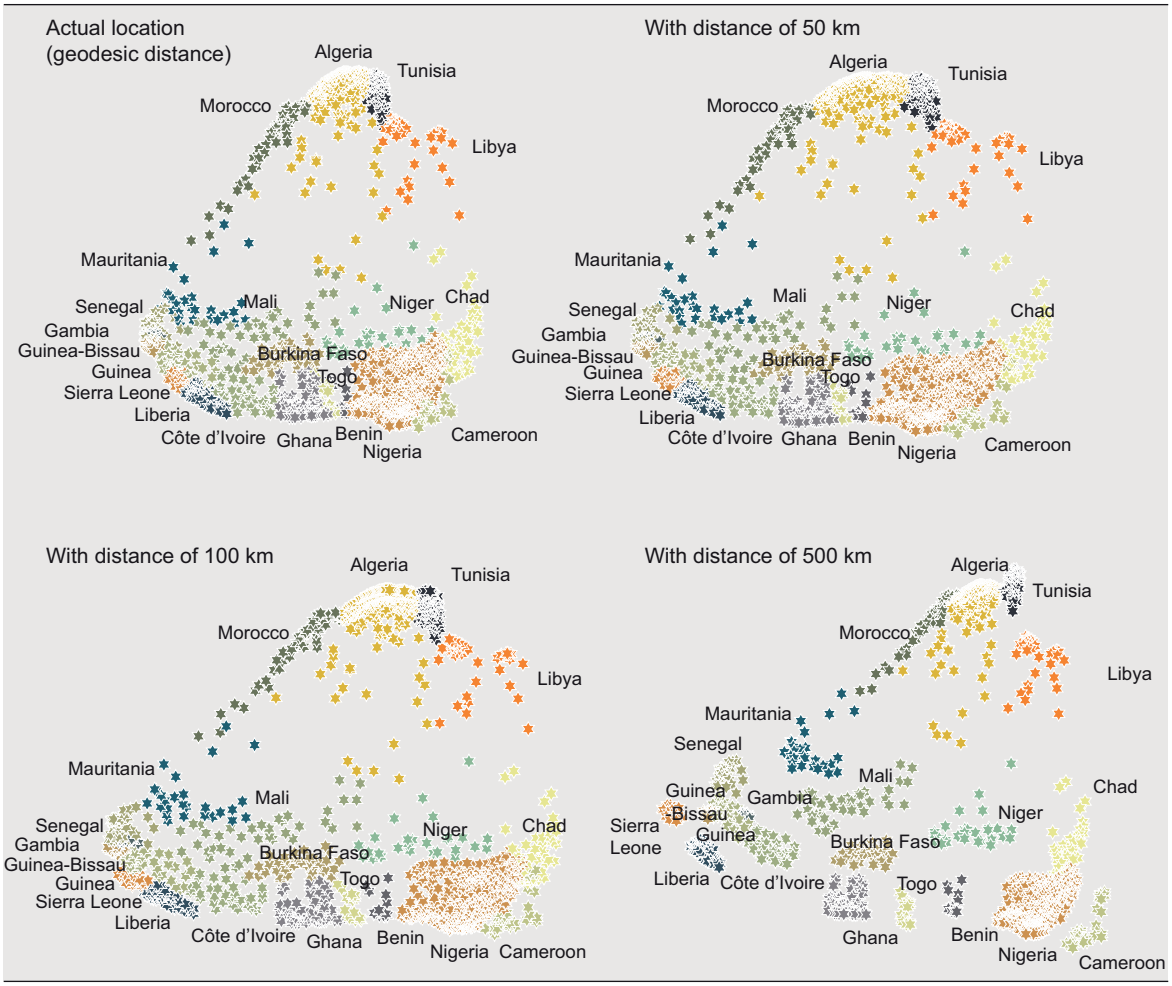
years for ISGS to convince local chiefs to work with the insurgents against the central government. This strategy seems to have paid off, however. When ISGS attacked American and Nigerien troops in Tongo Tongo in 2017, complicity with local chiefs ensured that the military was delayed until the Jihadists arrived in the village.

Thus far, the largest obstacle to the internationalisation of Jihadist organisations has been their inability to create supranational entities that would overcome their localised ethnic and tribal divisions. This represents one of the greatest paradoxes (and limitations) of such organisations. On the one hand, a key objective of Jihadist groups is to build on a supranational community of believers to create new political entities in which the political and the religious would not be separated, as during the Islamic Golden Age which begun in the 8th century (Moghadam and Fishman, 2011[68]). Unlike traditional rebels who are primordially interested in creating a new country or becoming more autonomous, Jihadist groups recognise that tribal, ethnic, and national divisions are an obstacle to their global project. This is why the most internationalist of them, such as Osama Bin Laden, wish to unite Muslims on the basis of their religion rather than on the basis of their local or national allegiances. On the other hand, most Jihadist organisations still rely on tribal and ethnic support for funding, allegiance, and military operations against their common enemies. In the Sahara-Sahel, particularly, very few Jihadist organisations have succeeded in developing a religious and political project that would transcend ethnic and national boundaries, as the examples of Ansar Dine, Katibat Macina and Boko Haram clearly show.

- When Iyad ag Ghali created Ansar Dine in 2012, he tried to unify all Tuareg and Arab populations under the banner of Islam and create an organisation that would compete with other Tuareg rebel groups for the control of northern Mali. The two objectives

Map 2.3

Borders modelled as distance in North and West Africa, 1997-2015



Note: The maps show the actual location of violent attacks and their location modelled as equivalent to distances of 50, 100 and 500 kilometres.

Source: Adapted by the authors from Skillicorn et al. (2021[66])

are contradictory by nature and, as a result, Ansar Dine has failed to recruit massively beyond its tribal base among the Ifoghas in Mali and has proven unable to unite Tuaregs from neighbouring countries.

- Katibat Macina provides another interesting example because its name refers both to a geographical zone within present-day Mali and to an Islamic polity founded by the Fulani jihadist Seku Amadu in the early 19th century. By calling his group "Macina", Amadou Kouffa tried to recreate one of the few political and religious entities that was not based on local or national identity in the precolonial era. His project to create a multi-ethnic jihadist force based on a theocratic utopia has largely failed, however. Most of the recruits who joined Katibat Macina came from Kouffa's Fulani ethnic group. Kouffa's attempt to present Katibat Macina as the defender of the Fulani also encouraged the development of inter-ethnic violence between the Fulani and their Dogon and Bambara neighbours, contributing to a shift in the main epicentre of the Malian conflict from the north of the country to the Inner Niger Delta region and Dogon country.
- When Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau declared the jihad against his enemies in 2010, he announced that areas under his control were now "part of an Islamic State that has nothing to do with Nigeria anymore"

(Pieri and Zenn, 2016[69]). Shekau's declaration of a caliphate was not simply an opportunistic call for attention from the Islamic State, the global jihadist community, or international media. Rather, Shekau was trying to recreate a precolonial political entity founded by Usman Dan Fodio in 1804 and known as the Sokoto Caliphate. A Fulani himself, Dan Fodio toppled the Hausa Muslims states of northern Nigeria and in their place established a caliphate that existed for one hundred years until the British imposed colonial rule over the region. East of Sokoto was another precolonial empire, the Kanem-Borno, which is the traditional homeland of the Kanuri. Boko Haram's expansion is almost fully within the boundaries of the historic Kanem-Borno Empire and most if its leaders and members belong to the Kanuri ethnic group. In contrast, Dan Fodio's Sokoto region has remained largely outside of Boko Haram's control. This represents a main paradox for Boko Haram who seeks legitimacy from the Fulani founder of the Sokoto Caliphate while operating predominantly in the Kanuri areas of the former Kanem-Borno Empire.

A spatial approach to transnational conflicts

While there is no doubt that borders are critical to understanding the diffusion of violence, the dynamics and factors related to diffusion have not been fully clarified. Extremists in Africa have proven particularly resilient against state and military pressure, partially because of transnational strategies, safe havens, and other strategies to evade capture and opposition. The theories relating to international relations propose that interventions must especially target transnational spread, otherwise conflicts may spread and destabilise regions. Therefore, it is critical to understand the factors contributing to conflict contagion.

This report addresses this question by adopting a regional approach that focusses on the combined impact of state and non-state actors on transnational conflicts. First, the report acknowledges that the role of state and non-state actors in provoking and preventing transnational violence requires further scrutiny. Some recent scholarship has challenge state-centred views of transnational conflict, contending that local, social, and non-state actors are critical factors in shaping dynamics around safe havens and border regions. The report expands these efforts, by providing a disaggregated analysis of the violent events involving armed forces and their enemies in borderlands. By doing so, the report contributes to the burgeoning literature on violent actor's transnationalism and adoption of safe havens in response to state power or weakness.

The work also adopts a more spatial perspective on transnational violence in the region. While numerous single-case studies throughout the region have shown the salience of borderlands for violent groups, the literature continues to lack a region-wide analysis that can provide a baseline against which to situate such individual case-studies. Consequently, little is known about the overall relationships between political violence and borderlands region-wide and basic empirical questions remain unaddressed. For example, are regional borderlands in North and West Africa more violent than other state spaces? Has the intensity of violence in border regions changed over time? Are some borderlands more violent than others? These pressing questions are addressed in the remaining chapters of this report.

Note

1 This section builds on Walther and Miles (2018[53]) and OECD/SWAC (2020[24]).

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Chapter 3

Mapping border conflicts in North and West Africa

Chapter 3 develops several tools to examine whether borderlands are more violent than other regions, how the intensity of violence has changed over time in such regions, and which borderlands are the most violent in North and West Africa. The spatial and temporal relationships between political violence and borderlands are studied using two complementary approaches to define borderlands: one based on a series of buffer zones extending along all of the land boundaries of the region, and the other based on the distance travelled by local means of transportation from any border crossing of the region. A Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) developed by the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) is used to identify major clusters of violent activities. This indicator is complemented with a qualitative analysis of violent extremist organisations operating in border regions.

KEY MESSAGES

- **This report develops two definitions of borderlands to determine whether the intensity of violence uniformly decreases with distance to borders throughout North and West Africa.**
- **Borderlands are first defined as the area extending no more than 200 kilometres from an international border.**
- **A novel definition of borderlands is then introduced based on their accessibility to the rest of the country, using local transportation and average speeds determined by topography.**
- **A new geographic indicator of political violence assesses the changing geography of violence, over space and through time.**
- **The Spatial Conflict Dynamics (SCDi) indicator identifies several types of conflict in African borderlands and their life cycle.**

HOW TO ASSESS BORDER-RELATED VIOLENCE

Violent events tend to cluster in space and time as conflicts emerge, spread and disappear. Some regions appear particularly favourable to political violence at a certain period, before becoming peaceful again. Other regions are spared from violence for decades. Understanding how hotspots of violence evolve spatially and temporally is critical to evaluating whether violence is increasing, diffusing to other regions, or receding. This report contributes to mapping this changing geography of violence by focusing on North and West African borderlands, areas where the intensity of violence is currently particularly high.

The report examines whether borderlands are more violent than other regions, how the intensity of violence has changed over time in such regions, and which borderlands are the most violent (Table 3.1). The objective of the first question is to determine whether the number of violent events and fatalities recorded in the region since 1997 decreases with distance and accessibility to land borders. In other words, is political violence more clustered near borders than in the interior of the country? The second question examines whether borderlands have always been more violent than other state spaces. Is the current concentration of violence near

Table 3.1
Questions, approaches and tools to assessing border violence

Questions	Approaches	Tools
(1) Are borderlands more violent than other spaces?	Assess the relative number of violent events and fatalities according to their distance and accessibility to land borders	Distance: 10 km wide buffer zones along land boundaries Accessibility: distance travelled in less than 4 hours from any border crossing
(2) Has the intensity of violence in border regions changed over time?	Assess the changing proportion of violent events and fatalities according to their distance and accessibility to land borders over time	Distance: 10 km wide buffer zones along land boundaries Accessibility: distance travelled in less than 4 hours from any border crossing
(3) Are some borderlands more violent than others?	Contextualise the relationship between borderlands and violence by using local factors that can explain why violence emerges near borders	Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) and qualitative analysis of violent extremist organisations

borders in North and West Africa a historical exception? The last question contextualises the relationship between borderlands and violence by looking at the roots of armed conflicts. Which local factors explain why certain segments of a border are more violent than others?

Several novel tools are developed to address these questions. The spatial and temporal relationships between political violence and borderlands (questions 1, 2) are studied using two complementary approaches to define borderlands: one based on a series of buffer zones extending along all of the land boundaries of the region (distance), and the other based on the distance travelled by local means of transportation from any border crossing of the region (accessibility). The Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) is used to identify major clusters of violent activities (question 3). This indicator is complemented with a qualitative analysis of violent extremist organisations and rebel groups operating in border regions, including Boko Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Chadian rebels.

In a first part, the study examines the spatial and temporal evolution of political violence in the entire region from 2019 to 2021. This analysis is first conducted on 21 countries of the region (Chapter 4, Map 3.1). This regional analysis is followed by a focus on case studies in Central Sahel and Eastern Sahel. As in previous studies (OECD/SWAC, 2020[1]), this study uses the SCDi to map both the intensity and spatial distribution of violence across the region. In a second part, the study focuses on violent activities that have taken place in borderlands from 1997 to 2021 (Chapter 5).

Data

The spatial analysis of violence uses event data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2019[2]) that catalogues politically motivated acts of violence in Africa since the late 1990s (Raleigh et al., 2010[3]). From January 1997 through 30 June 2021, the ACLED dataset provides detailed georeferenced information on 43 182 violent events in the region involving over 6 794 unique organisations and 171 255 fatalities.

The study builds on eight categories of actors based on their goals and structure and, where possible, on their "spatial dimension and relationships to communities" (ACLED, 2019, p. 19[2], see Table 3.2). Actors can either be formal organisations, informal groups of people, or non-combatant categories. Formal organisations include 'state forces', defined as collective actors that exercise de facto state sovereignty over a given territory, such as military and police forces from the region. Another type of formal organisation is 'rebel groups', which are organisations

Map 3.1

Countries and case studies

Table 3.2

Number of actors by category, 1997-2021

Name	Number	Example
State forces	924	Military forces of Niger
Rebels	406	Ansar Dine
Political militias	1 449	Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA)
Identity militias	2 675	Benue Communal Militia (Nigeria)
Rioters and protesters	3	Rioters (Senegal)
Civilians	1 069	Civilians (Cameroon)
External forces	257	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)
Others and unknown	11	Nigeria Petroleum Development Company
Total	**6 794**	

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[4]) data. Data available through 30 June 2021. ACLED data is publicly available.

whose political agenda is to overthrow or secede from a given state. Splinter groups or factions that emerge from a rebel group are recorded as distinct actors.

ACLED distinguishes between two types of militias, those defined by identity and those who pursue political objectives. 'Identity militias' are a heterogeneous group of militants structured around ethnicity, religion, region, community and livelihood. Such militias are often named after the locality or region where they operate, such as the Benue Communal Militia in Nigeria.

Table 3.3

Number of violent events and fatalities by type, 1997-2021

Event type	Sub-event type	Events	Fatalities
Battles		**18 826**	**86 637**
	Armed clash	17 013	77 258
	Government regains territory	971	4,856
	Non-state actor overtakes territory	842	4,523
Explosions/remote violence		**7 007**	**24 234**
	Air/drone strike	2 379	9 119
	Grenade	61	53
	Remote explosive/landmine/IED	2 658	8 425
	Shelling/artillery/missile attack	1 393	1 629
	Suicide bomb	516	5 008
Violence against civilians		**17 349**	**60 384**
	Abduction/forced disappearance	2 734	0
	Attack	14 424	59 464
	Sexual violence	191	920
Grand total		**43 182**	**171 255**

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[4]) data. Data available through 30 June 2021. ACLED data is publicly available.

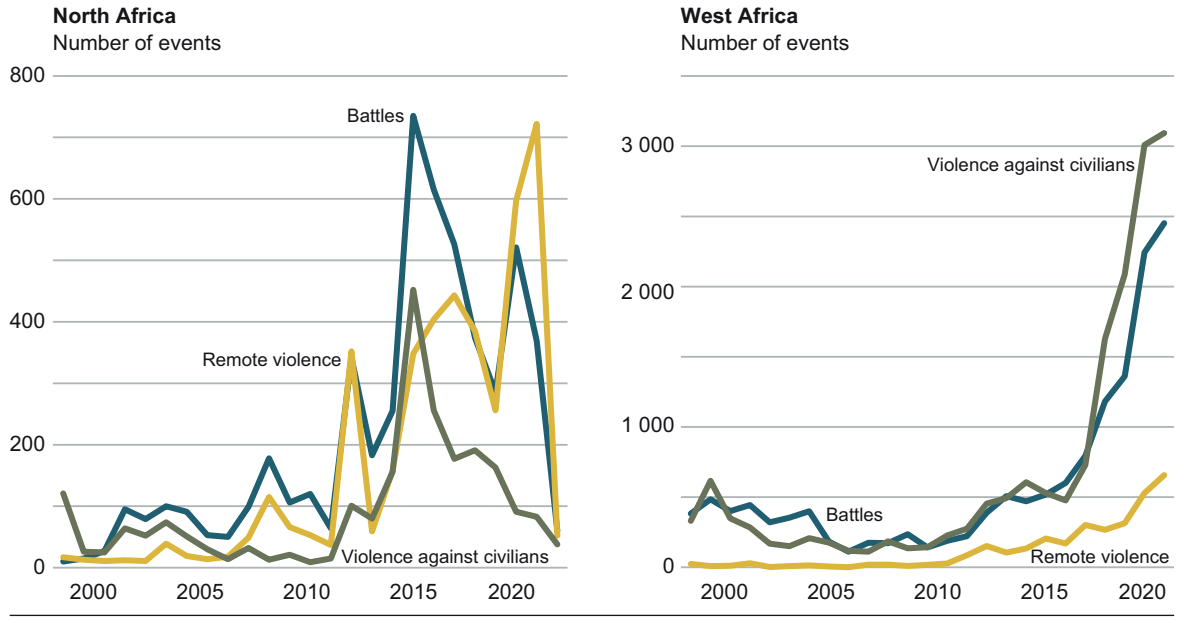
'Political militias' are organisations whose goal is to influence and impact governance, security and policy in a given state through violent means, such as the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA) in Mali. Unlike rebel groups, political militias "are not seeking the removal of a national power, but are typically supported, armed by, or allied with a political elite and act towards a goal defined by these elites or larger political movements" (ACLED, 2019, p. 22[2]).

Several categories of civilian actors are identified by ACLED. 'Rioters' are unarmed individuals or groups engaged in disorganised violence against civilians, government forces or other armed groups during demonstrations, while 'protesters' are unarmed demonstrators who engage in a public event without violence. Finally, 'civilians' refer to the unarmed and unorganised victims of violent events identified by their country of origin. International organisations, foreign military forces, private security firms, and independent mercenaries engaged in violent events are coded as 'external' and 'other forces'. It is important to note that the ACLED database does not indicate the perpetrator and the victim of an attack, with the exception of civilians who are, by definition, unarmed and cannot engage in political violence.

The report focuses on three types of violent events: battles, explosions and remote violence, and violence against civilians (Table 3.3). Non-violent actions such as strategic developments are not taken into account.

- Battles are defined as "violent interactions between two politically organised armed groups at a particular time and location" (ACLED, 2019, p. 7[2]). Battles can occur between any state and non-state actors and involve at least two armed and organised actors. This category is subdivided into three sub-event types, depending on whether non-state actors or government forces overtake territory or whether there is no territorial change. Battles have caused almost 87 000 fatalities in the region since 1997 in a little less than 19 000 events. Almost 90% of these fatalities were caused by armed clashes.
- Explosions and remote violence correspond to "one-sided violent events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the target to respond" (ACLED, 2019, p. 9[2]). These acts

Figure 3.1
Violent events by type and region, 1997-2021



Note: 2021 data are projections based on a doubling of the number of events recorded through 30 June.
Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[4]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

of violence can be carried out using bombs, grenades, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), artillery fire or shelling, missile attacks, heavy machine gun fire, air or drone strikes, or chemical weapons. Explosions and remote violence have killed more than 24 000 people since 1997 in 7 000 incidents.

- Violence against civilians includes "violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants... The perpetrators of such acts include state forces and their affiliates, rebels, militias, and external/other forces" (ACLED, 2019, p. 11[2]). Violence against civilians represents 40% of the events and 35% of the fatalities recorded in North and West Africa since the late 1990s. The vast majority of the 60 000 civilian deaths and more than 17 000 incidents observed in the region were caused by direct attacks against them.

North and West Africa have experienced very low levels of political violence until the early 2010s, followed by a massive increase in violent events and fatalities due to civil wars in Libya and Mali, and armed insurgencies in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Nigeria (Figure 3.1). In recent years, the north of the Sahara has experienced a notable decrease in the number of violent events which contrasts strongly with the degradation of the security situation in West Africa. With more than 135 000 events and 36 000 fatalities recorded so far, the intensity of violence south of the Sahara is three times higher than in North Africa. The number of direct attacks, kidnappings and sexual assaults against civilians now exceeds the number of armed battles between state forces and armed groups in West Africa. In North Africa, the number of events related to explosions, remote violence and battles has reached an historical low after the signature of a permanent ceasefire between the Libyan National Army (LNA) and Government of National Accord (GNA) in October 2020, and the formation of a Government of National Unity in March 2021.

The type of armed conflict adopted by the belligerents explains the contrasting evolution of violence between the two main regions. In North Africa, the vast majority of the incidents and victims were due to a war between regular forces and their militias. Violence emerged when political factions disagreed over the distribution of resources and power, and receded when they

reached an agreement, as after the First and Second Libyan wars. Conflicts in West Africa are of a completely different nature. Instead of mobilising regular forces for conventional military campaigns, armed conflicts south of the Sahara are protracted with asymmetric struggles between central governments and a plethora of non-state actors, including secessionist rebels, religious extremists, communal militias, and self-defence groups. These conflicts tend to kill a larger number of civilians than conventional wars.

MAPPING CHANGING CONFLICT DYNAMICS

The report uses a geographic indicator of political violence that assesses the changing geography of violence, over space and through time (Walther et al., 2021[5]). The SCDi measures two connected but different spatial properties of violence: the intensity of conflict across a region, and the distribution of conflict locations relative to each other. The SCDi has been previously applied to all of North and West Africa (OECD/SWAC, 2021[6]; OECD/SWAC, 2020[1]) using a uniform grid of 50 x 50 kilometres to subdivide the study area. The SCDi is calculated annually for each of these grid cells since 1997. The same approach to defining regions and durations is also utilised in this report.

Measuring the intensity of violence

The first spatial property measured by the SDCi is conflict intensity (CI). The CI metric identifies the total number of events in a given region, such as the 50 x 50-kilometre grid described above, for some duration of time, such as a year. This number of events is then divided by the area of the grid to allow comparisons between regions. The resulting CI metric has a lower bound of 0 if there are no events within a given region during a given year and no upper bound. As the CI metric increases from 0, it reflects an increasing spatial intensity of violence within the footprint of a region (Figure 3.2).

When using a 50 x 50-kilometre grid, most regions have a CI score of 0 in any given year reflecting the absence of violent events. However, there are also many regions that are assigned a CI score greater than 0. In addition to calculating the raw CI score for each region, the SCDi also classifies a region as higher or lower than an expected CI value. The expected CI value for North and West Africa is called the CI 'generational mean' as it is the 20-year average conflict intensity between 1997 and 2016. The CI generational mean is 0.0017 events per square kilometre, or 4 events for a 50 x 50-kilometre region. Therefore, in this report, a region is classified as high intensity if 4 or more events occur in a grid within a given year and as low intensity otherwise.

Measuring the concentration of violence

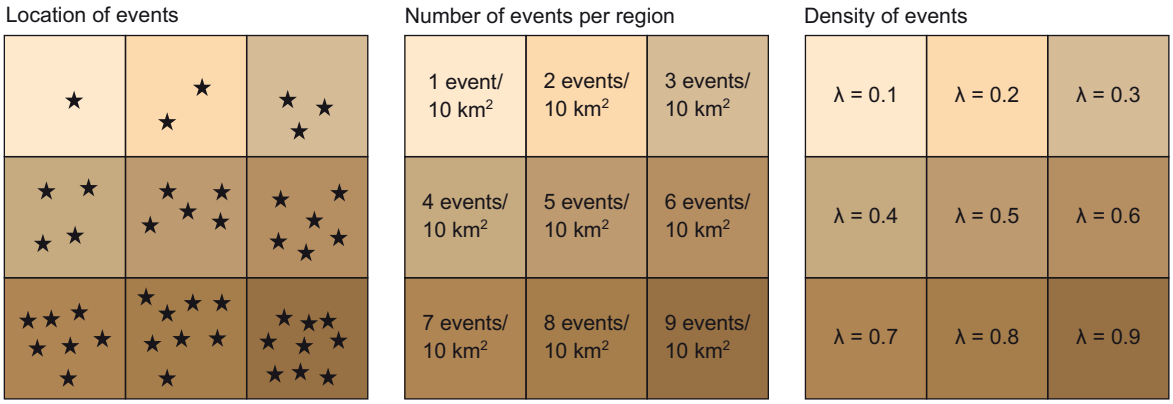
The second property measures the distribution of conflict locations relative to each other within a given region. This is called the conflict concentration (CC) metric. The CC metric calculates observed average distance between events in a given region within a given year divided by the expected average distance if the events were randomly distributed throughout the region. As presented in Figure 3.3, the patterning of events relative to each other is a different concern from conflict intensity and two regions can have a small conflict intensity while resulting in very different locational patterns.

Like CI, the CC metric has a lower bound of 0 with no conceptual upper bound. A CC score of 0 would represent a series of events at the exact same location, an example of extreme geographic clustering of events. A CC score of 1 would represent a random pattern of event, or no detectible locational pattern. A CC score of more than 1 would represent dispersion of events from each other, further apart than would be expected by chance. As shown in Figure 3.4, CC scores lower than 1 in a region are classified as clustered and scores higher than 1 are classified as dispersed.

An average nearest neighbour (ANN) ratio is calculated to determine whether the patterns of violent events exhibit clustering or dispersion. The ANN ratio is calculated as the observed

Figure 3.2

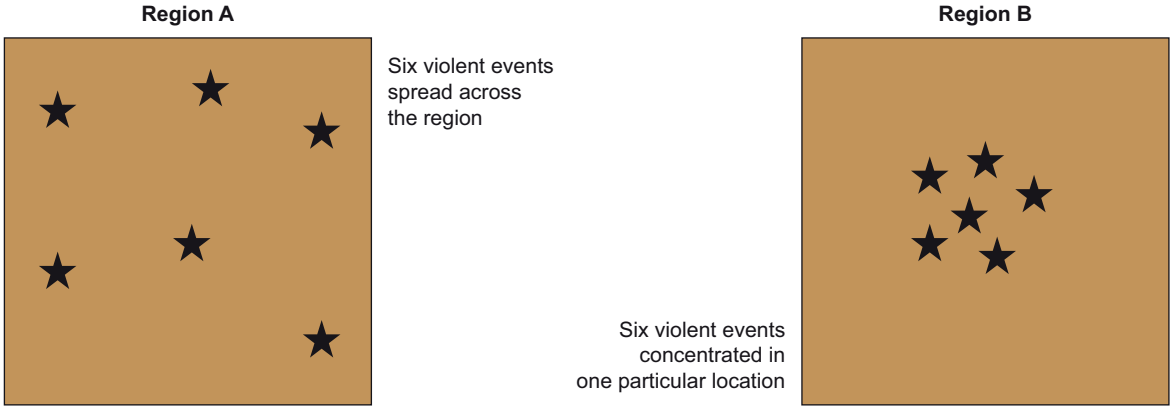
Density of violent events



Source: OECD/SWAC (2020[1]).

Figure 3.3

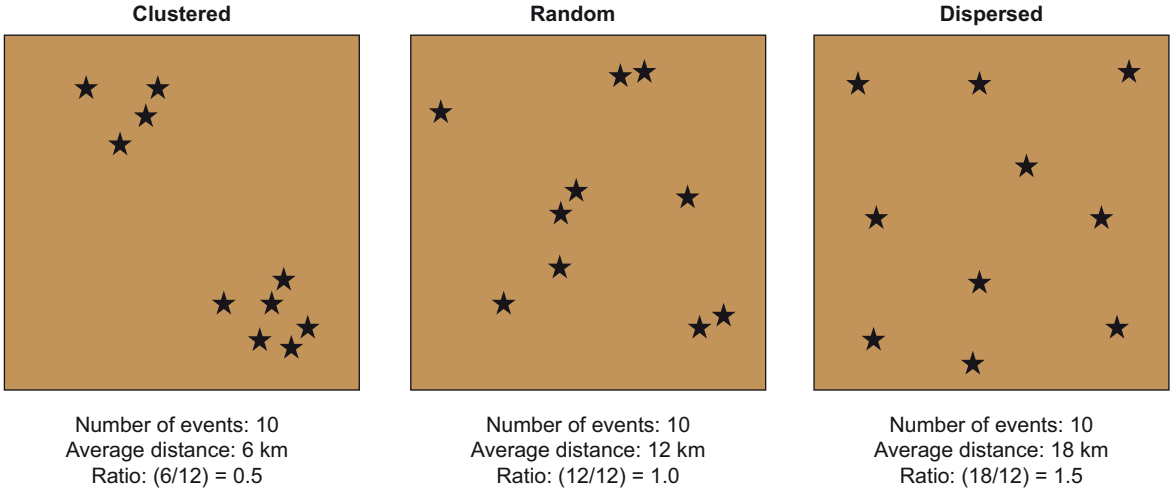
Identical density but different distributions of violent events



Source: OECD/SWAC (2020[1]).

Figure 3.4

Distribution of events as measured by the average nearest neighbour (ANN) ratio



Source: OECD/SWAC (2020[1]).

Table 3.4
The four spatial types of conflict

	High intensity	Low intensity
Clustered	Type 1. More events than mean and closer together than expected	Type 3. Fewer events than mean and closer together than expected
Dispersed	Type 2. More events than mean and further apart than expected	Type 4. Fewer events than mean and further apart than expected

Source: OECD/SWAC (2021[6]).

average distance among violent events in a given region divided by the expected average distance that would have been obtained if the events were distributed randomly (ESRI, 2019[7]). ANN ratios smaller than one indicate clustering while ratios greater than one indicate dispersion. For example, the distribution of events represented on the left-hand side of Figure 3.4 is clustered compared with a random distribution of the same number of events, as shown by its ratio of 0.5, while the distribution on the right-hand side is dispersed, with a ratio of 1.5.

Types and conflict life cycle

The SCDi combines the CI and CC scores of political violence to identify four different spatial types of conflict according to whether violent events are dispersed or clustered, and of high or low intensity (Table 3.4).

- The first type characterises regions that have an above average intensity and a clustered distribution of violent events, suggesting that violence is intensifying locally.
- The second type characterises conflicts with a higher-than-average intensity and a dispersed distribution of events, indicating that the violence is accelerating.
- The third type applies to regions where there are fewer violent activities and most of them take place near each other, possibly indicating a decreasing range of violent groups.
- The fourth type, in which a lower-than-average intensity and a dispersed distribution of events are combined, suggests that a conflict is lingering. This situation may indicate that opponents are highly mobile or are unlikely to face protracted opposition in a given locality.

These four types are indicative of potentially different stages in the overall lifecycle of a conflict (Walther et al., 2021[5]). For example, when violence first emerges in a region, it is usually Type 2 clustered/low-intensity (the majority of cases) or Type 1 clustered/high-intensity (one-third of cases). This indicates that violence is most likely to be concentrated spatially when it first emerges. However, once a conflict is established, it commonly persists over time in its clustered/high-intensity form (Type 2, over 70% of the cases). As conflicts start to end, they tend to move from Type 1 to Type 2 before stopping altogether.

Although violence has been observed to both initiate and end from all of the SCDi typologies, the dispersed categories (Type 3 and 4) are most common either at the beginning or ending of a sequence of violence in a sub-region. Further, dispersed conflicts are quite unlikely to persist over time when compared to clustered conflicts and tend to change quickly to no conflict once they have emerged. This suggests that regions displaying these spatial typologies are either quite near the early stages of a conflict episode or the end. Finally, conflicts most commonly end by transitioning from Type 2 clustered/low-intensity to no conflict in the following year (nearly 60% of observed cases). Violence is often concentrated even just before it ends.

Taken together, the four spatial categories reveal insights about the dynamics of the lifecycle of a typical conflict in North and West Africa. These are the general trends however and not all sub-regions, places, or localities will always exhibit the same lifecycles between the SCDi categories. Nonetheless, there is a predominate pathway reflected in event data across the region since the late 1990s (Walther et al., 2021[5]). Emerging conflicts tend to result in clustering of

either type, dispersed conflicts tend to quickly change, clustered/high intensity are more persistent, and violence most commonly ends from the clustered/low-intensity forms. The typology of the SCDi is first applied to the entire region (Chapter 4) to characterise the recent evolution of violence, before being specifically applied to border regions (Chapter 5).

MAPPING VIOLENCE WITHIN BORDER REGIONS

A borderland region is one in which the influence of a border on daily life and the identities of the people that live near it is detectable. This report uses two different approaches to define borderlands and maps their relationships to political violence: one based on fixed distances from borders and one based on accessibility to border crossings. Both approaches provide a more comprehensive understanding of how borders can influence conflict dynamics than definitions based on existing administrative units, whose size can vary greatly across countries (Figure 3.5).

The first approach conceptualises borderlands as extending no more than 200 kilometres from an international border. Using a cut-off distance allows to empirically assess whether the intensity of violence uniformly decreases with distance to borders through North and West Africa. To allow for meaningful comparisons between large and small states, the study creates a series of 10 km wide buffer zones along all the land borders in the region. Not all states have zones that extend to 200 kilometres, while others, such as Algeria, require that the buffer zones be extended out to 690 kilometres from a border. Violent events are then overlaid on the buffer zones and are assigned to the buffer zone that the fall within.

The second approach acknowledges that there is no consistent distance or threshold where border effects vanish or where the border does not matter. Instead, borderland regions are highly variable constructs. For example, a border city might be consistently impacted by the presence of the border because of cross-border trade and mobility while an adjacent rural area might experience few or no interactions. Further, given that the land areas of the states in the region are of quite different sizes (Algeria is more than 200 times the size of Gambia, for example), borderland regions should be expected to fluctuate from state to state and from border to border. Establishing such a criterion is challenging for such a vast region because border processes are fluid and not always tied to the locations of borders or borderlands themselves (Ptak et al., 2020[8]).

In order to address this issue, the report introduces a novel definition of borderlands based on their accessibility to the rest of the country. Borderlands are formally defined as the area that is accessible by road in less than four hours from any border crossing of the region, using local transportation and average speeds determined by topography. This relational definition helps understand whether violence tends to decrease with accessibility to borders, rather than just with distance. It is theoretically better adapted to capture the diversity of borderlands in the region and the ability of belligerents to travel across borders than a fixed buffer zone.

Travel times from border crossings are estimated using a similar methodology to that used to determine accessibility to urban centres in Europe (van Eupen et al., 2012[9]; Gløersen, 2012[10]), in West Africa (OECD/SWAC, 2017[11]; OECD/SWAC, 2020[1]; OECD, 2019[12]), East Africa (Macharia, Mumo and Okiro, 2021[13]), and at world level (Nelson et al., 2019[14]; Weiss et al., 2018[15]). The logic behind the accessibility model used to define borderlands is similar to the one presented in Box 3.1 to delineate trade hubs' areas of influence in Niger. In both cases, the road infrastructure and urban network used by local populations is modelled to identify new regions that are potentially more influenced by border dynamics than the rest of the country.

The first step to measure travel times is to quantify at which speed people travel across the region by local means of transportation. For this, North and West African countries are divided into cells of the same size and all datasets are converted to raster datasets with

Figure 3.5

Borderlands defined according to buffer zones, travel times and administrative units

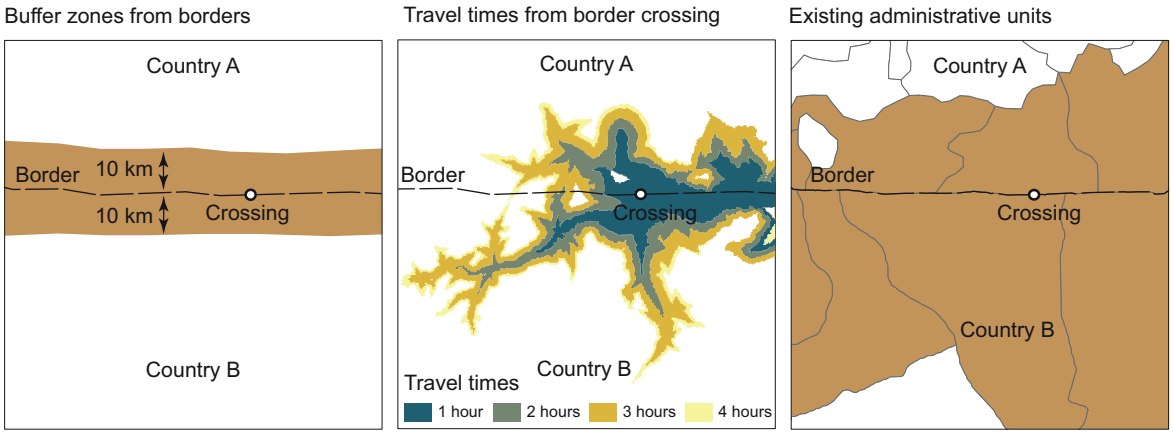
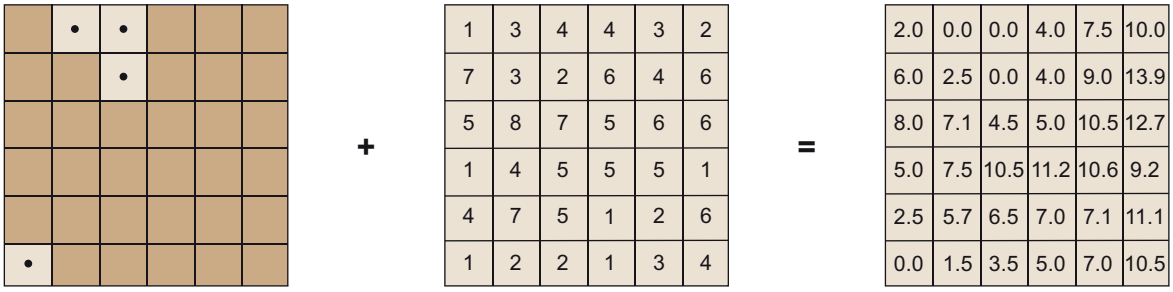


Figure 3.6

Calculation of travel time from each border crossing based on a friction surface grid



Source: Adapted from OECD (2019[12]) by the authors.

Box 3.1

An algorithm to delineate borderlands according to trade

In the Sahel, borderlands are at the core of political and fiscal competition between states and armed groups. The spatial representation of borderlands is a condition for political dialogue and technical co-operation among security actors. Border agencies, the military and experts use either administrative units or buffer zones extending from the border to represent borderlands. However, neither the smugglers nor the armed groups are limited by administrative lines or fixed distance from borders. Moreover, some cities may be economically connected to borderlands but located very far from them, such as Agadez in Niger. This makes fixed buffer zones largely irrelevant to defining borderlands.

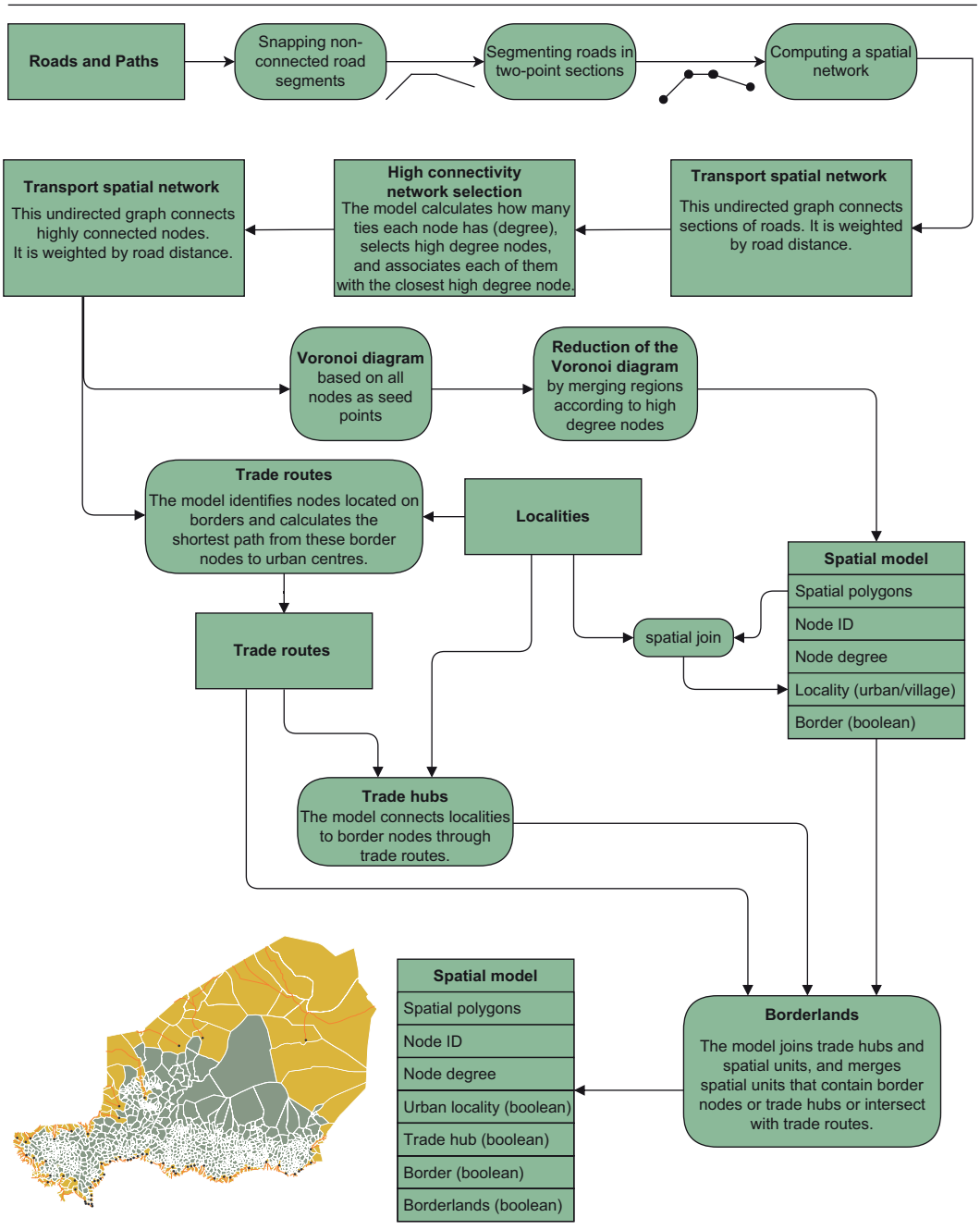
One of the ways to address these issues is to develop a spatial model that defines borderlands according to the road network and local markets used by traders and insurgents to move from one region or country to another. The model uses the sf and tidygraph packages in R to encode spatial vector data (Pebesma, 2018[18]; Pedersen, 2020[19]). The first step of the model is to transform the existing road network into a graph where the nodes represent the extremities of road segments and the weighted ties represent the road distances between nodes (Figure 3.7).

(Continues overleaf)

(Box 3.1 continued)

Figure 3.7

Flowchart of the spatial model algorithm



Source: Thomas Cantens for this publication.

The model then divides the territory into smaller regions organised around the nodes of the network to produce a Voronoi diagram. Each spatial units therefore captures a segment of road and its surrounding space. The model then calculates the number of ties each node is connected to (degree), selects the most highly "connected" nodes and associates each node to the closest high connectivity node. This allows to aggregate each precedent spatial unit of the Voronoi diagram to that of the closest high connectivity node. At this stage, the spatial model is composed of units shaped by highly connected places like cities, big villages, crossroads and the spatial influence of roads and tracks segments.

(Continues overleaf)

(Box 3.1 continued)

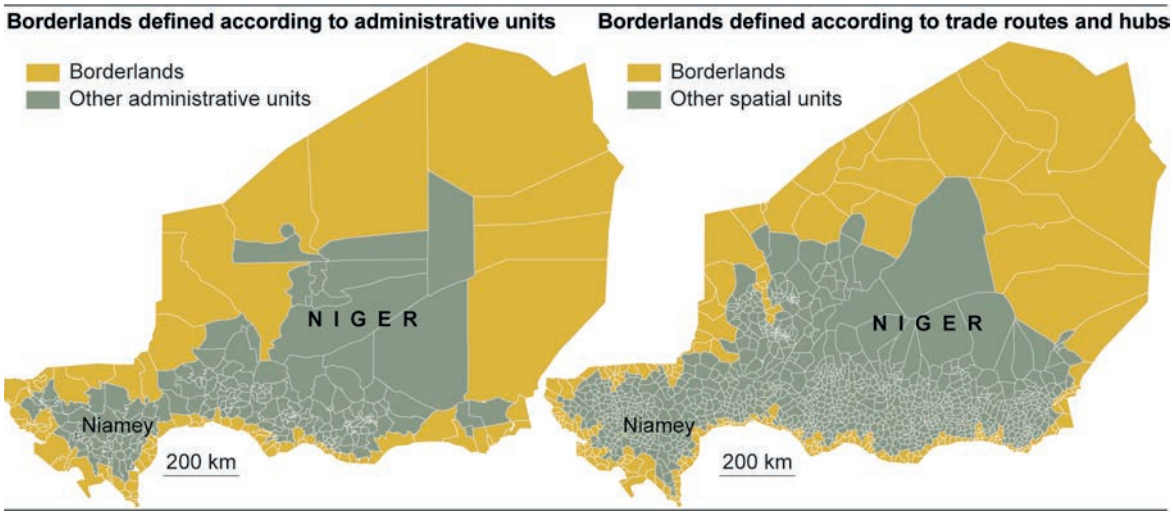
The final step is to delineate borderlands. All border crossings are identified and associated with the closest locality. Localities that are connected to the border are identified as trade hubs. Routes that join the trade hubs and the border crossings are defined as trade roads. By reversing the direction of spatial analysis, the trade hubs' areas of influence are computed as the spatial union of the Voronoi units crossed by a trade road or containing a trade hub. Borderlands are then the union of the trade hubs' areas of influence and the spatial units touching the border.

The use of trade routes and hubs to define borderlands provides a much more realistic view of African borderlands than existing administrative units (Map 3.2). In Niger, for example, where traders and insurgents have used borderlands intensively to conduct their operations, administrative borderlands represent 58% of the national territory (74 units out of 266). However, large portions of some of these regions are poorly connected to borders. When defined according to trade routes and hubs, borderlands only represent 49% of the country (249 units out of 1 259) and more precisely reflect the geographical extent of border dynamics.

Source: Thomas Cantens for this publication.

Map 3.2

Administrative model (left) and spatial model (right) for Niger



Source: Thomas Cantens for this publication. Data is from United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

a spatial resolution of ~1 km (30'' arc seconds). Using this grid, the model then builds a 'friction' surface, in which the value of each cell is the time needed to travel across it depending on local factors, such the existence of roads, land cover, topography, and rivers (Figure 3.6). When following a road, the model follows a least-cost path algorithm and integrates the higher speed of flows along this axis. When travelling off-road, the model uses vegetation density to simulate the slowest speeds. Watercourses and steep slopes are considered potential obstacles that slow travel speed. The model does not impose a penalty when crossing borders, since the source points used to calculate travel times are located precisely on the border line.

The model uses road data from Open Street Map (OSM) and the Global Roads Open Access Data Set (GROADS), both from 2019. OSM provides mean travel speeds associated with four types of roads with average speeds ranging from 60 km/h for asphalted highways to 10 km/h for all unpaved roads not classified as secondary roads. Because the GROADS dataset does not provide

average speeds for West Africa, an average speed of 30 km/h is used as the reference speed for roads that are only included in this dataset. Off-road speeds and on dirt roads not covered by OSM and GROADS are estimated using land cover data from the European Space Agency (2010). Building on earlier studies in the region (OECD/SWAC, 2017[11]; Walther et al., 2020[16]) average speeds are estimated for 32 land cover classes of the region. To take into account the topography of the region, the model uses data produced by NASA's Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM) digital elevation model and interprets steep slopes and rivers as potential obstacles that reduce speed. A speed multiplication factor of 0.5 is applied to slopes from 15 to 45 degrees and a factor of 0 to slopes higher than 45 degrees. Using OSM and GROADS road data, the model applies a speed multiplication factor of 0.5 to correct for waiting time at ferries and lower speeds at bridges.

A total of 1 480 border crossings were identified where one of the road segments cut an international boundary. The vast majority of these border crossings are located in the densely populated regions of North and West Africa rather than in the Sahara, where population and roads are rare. The unequal distribution of population and roads explains that borderlands cover a much larger extent in the northern and southern parts of the region. However, most movements in the Sahara occur off-road and are not necessarily captured by the accessibility model. This distortion was corrected by adding a series of buffer zones on every segment of border where the absence of permanent roads does not allow to calculate travel times.

The model then uses 2019 population data from the Land Scan Global Population Project (Dobson et al., 2000[17]) to calculate the population basin of each border crossing. This dataset is a global population database compiled on a 30" x 30" latitude/longitude grid. Each grid estimates population counts from sub-national census data in combination with a series of other factors, including land cover, slope, road proximity, and high-resolution imagery. Four travel times ranging from one to four hours were calculated. Travel times of less than one hour correspond to short movements starting from a border crossing. It is estimated that crossing a border to get to another border city takes approximately two hours. Reaching a regional centre located within a given country generally requires three hours of travel. Four hours is the threshold at which day-to-day travel in border areas is no longer significant.

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Chapter 4

The changing geography of conflict in North and West Africa

Chapter 4 studies the spatial distribution of violent events and fatalities in North and West Africa since the mid-2010s. The chapter shows that political violence has experienced a contrasted evolution in the region. While violence has reached historical lows north of the Sahara following the formation of a Government of National Unity in Libya in 2020, West Africa is engulfed in an unprecedented wave of violence since 2016. Nearly one-half of all violent events and one-third of the fatalities observed in West Africa since 1997 occurred in the last three years. Using the Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi), the chapter confirms that political violence is both more intense in terms of victims and more diffuse geographically than ever.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Political violence has receded in North Africa while reaching unprecedented levels in West Africa. Nearly one-half of the violent events and one-third of the fatalities recorded in West Africa since 1997 took place in the last three years.**
- **South of the Sahara, political violence has both intensified and expanded geographically, as revealed by the Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi).**
- **The vast majority of conflicts exhibit a clustered distribution of violent events. However, the overall number of regions with dispersed violent locations is increasing, suggesting that violence is spreading.**
- **More than half of the Nigerian territory was affected by one type of conflict or another in 2020. Apart from Nigeria's troubles, the epicentre of borderland violence in West Africa is along the Malian-Burkina Faso-Niger region.**

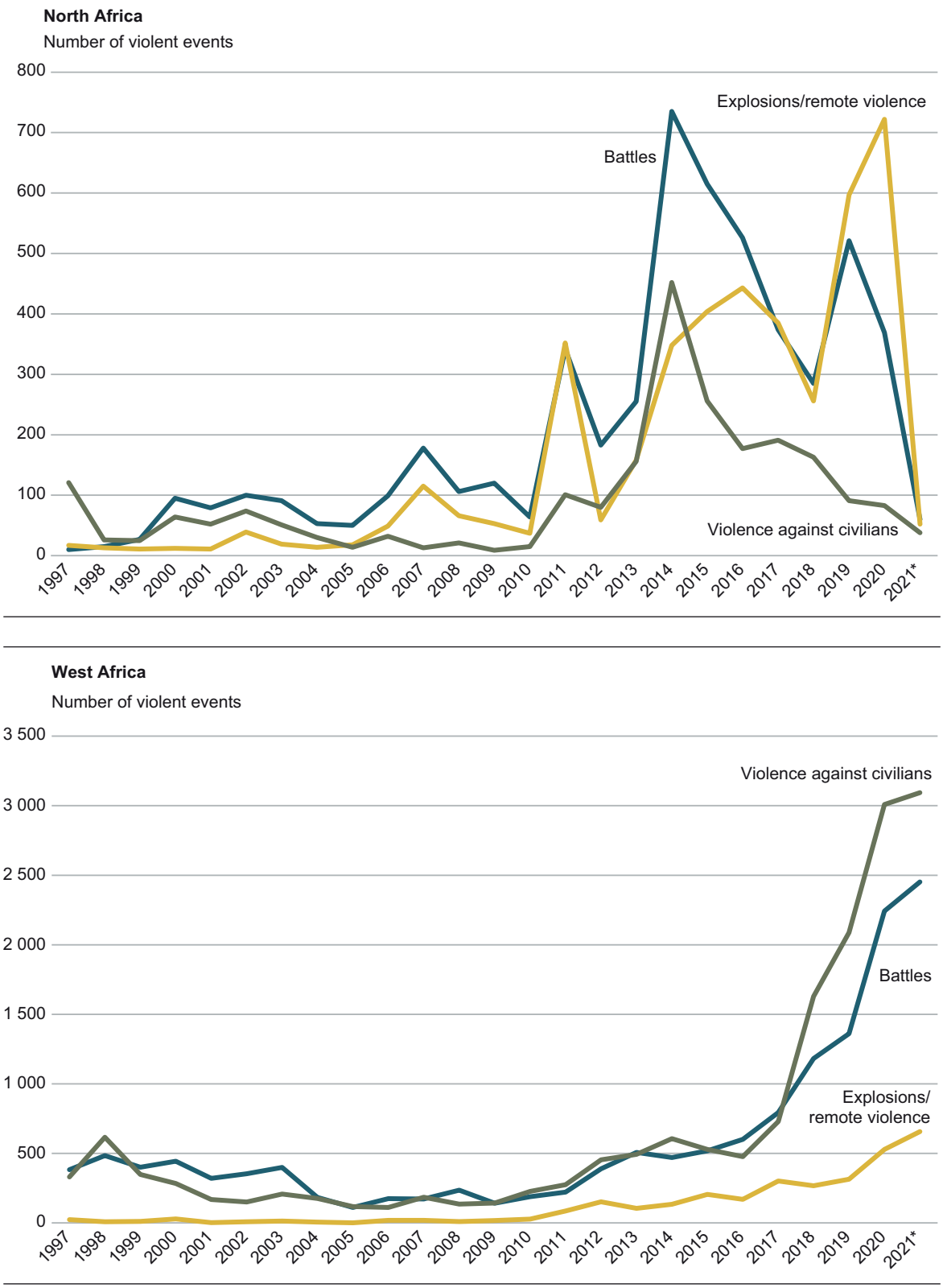
VIOLENCE EVOLVES DIFFERENTLY IN NORTH AND WEST AFRICA

Political violence in North and West Africa has experienced a contrasted evolution since the end of the 2010s. A strong decrease in political violence is observed north of the Sahara following the signature of a permanent ceasefire between the Libyan National Army (LNA) and the Government of National Accord (GNA) in October 2020 and the formation of a Government of National Unity in March 2021 in Libya. If the current trend continues, only around 150 violent events will take place in North Africa by the end of 2021 compared to more than 1 200 in 2019, which was the largest number ever recorded since detailed data was provided by ACLED in 1997 (Figure 4.1). The number of fatalities should also reach an all-time low in 2021, with around 200 deaths per year, against 5 000 during the First Libyan Civil War in 2011, and 3 700 during the Second Libyan Civil War in 2014 (Figure 4.2). All types of violence have decreased sharply north of the Sahara since 2020, including explosions and remote violence that had reached record highs with the failed offensive of Marshal Khalifa Haftar against Tripoli in the last phase of the Libyan conflict.

South of the Sahara, the security situation has worsened since the mid-2010s. The last three years have been the worst ever observed in the

Figure 4.1

Violent events by type in North and West Africa, 1997-2021

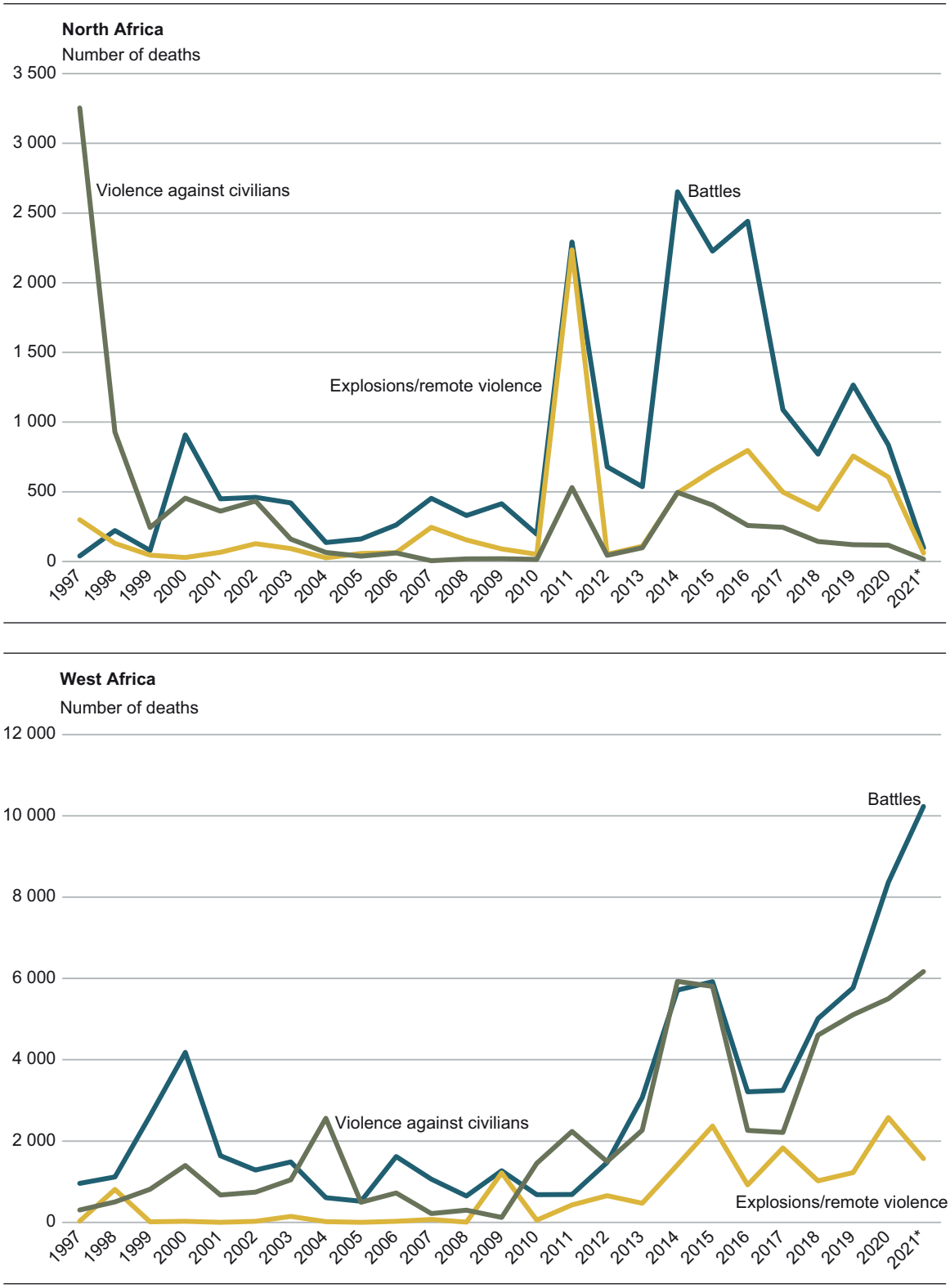


Note: 2021 data are projections based on a doubling of the number of events recorded through 30 June.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Figure 4.2

Fatalities due to violent events by type in North and West Africa, 1997-2021



Note: 2021 data are projections based on a doubling of the number of events recorded through 30 June.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[11]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Table 4.1
Violent events and fatalities by country, 2020-21

	Violent events		Fatalities		Population		Events (%) vs Population (%)	Fatalities (%) vs Population (%)
	Number	%	Number	%	Number (x 1000)	%	Ratio	Ratio
Nigeria	3 406	33.6	12 506	46.2	211 401	38.0	0.9	1.2
Cameroon	1 685	16.6	2 428	9.0	27 224	4.9	3.4	1.8
Mali	1 469	14.5	3 774	13.9	20 856	3.7	3.9	3.7
Libya	1 140	11.3	1 543	5.7	6 959	1.2	9.0	4.6
Burkina Faso	1 114	11.0	3 219	11.9	21 497	3.9	2.8	3.1
Niger	572	5.6	1 835	6.8	25 131	4.5	1.3	1.5
Chad	160	1.6	1 361	5.0	16 915	3.0	0.5	1.7
Benin	100	1.0	90	0.3	12 451	2.2	0.4	0.1
Others	485	4.8	314	1.2	214 454	38.5	0.1	0.0
Total	**10 131**	**100.0**	**27 070**	**100.0**	**556 887**	**100.0**	**1.0**	**1.0**

Note: Data available through 30 June 2021. Countries with a ratio between violence and population higher than 1 are highlighted.
Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data and United Nations (2019[3]). ACLED data is publicly available.

region, with more than 15 000 violent events and 46 000 fatalities. To put this in perspective, the number of violent events observed since 2019 corresponds to nearly one-half of all political violence recorded by ACLED in West Africa since 1997. One-third of the fatalities of the region were recorded in the last three years alone. All types of violent events have experienced a strong increase. There were more than 2 200 battles and 3 000 incidents against civilians in 2020, an unprecedented level of violence that signals an historic degradation of the security situation in the region. Since 2017, the number of violent events involving civilians has surpassed the number of battles in West Africa and the gap between the two types of violent events is increasing. Explosions and remote violence, which had been relatively uncommon in West Africa until the mid-2010s, killed more than 2 500 people in 500 incidents in 2020.

VIOLENCE IS CONCENTRATED IN A FEW COUNTRIES

Political violence is very unevenly distributed across North and West Africa (Table 4.1). From January 2020 to June 2021, 87% of violent events and fatalities were concentrated in only five countries: Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali, Libya, and Burkina Faso. Nigeria remains by far the main epicentre of political violence, with more than 12 000 people killed in 3 400 incidents, a trend that emerged already in the 1990s (OECD/SWAC, 2020[2]). One-third of all violent events and nearly one-half of all fatalities are recorded in this country, where three major insurgencies are currently ongoing (Lake Chad, Middle Belt and Niger Delta).

Cameroon is the second most affected country in terms of violent events (17%), due to the insurgency waged by Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) around Lake Chad, and the more recent conflict between the government and English-speaking communities along the western borders. The Malian conflict and its ramifications in Burkina Faso and Niger explains why these three countries are among

Table 4.2
Violent events and fatalities by region in Mali, 2020-21

	Violent events		Fatalities	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Mopti	718	48.9	2025	53.7
Gao	288	19.6	814	21.6
Tombouctou	135	9.2	297	7.9
Segou	125	8.5	332	8.8
Menaka	70	4.8	150	4.0
Kidal	48	3.3	69	1.8
Sikasso	41	2.8	30	0.8
Kayes	22	1.5	20	0.5
Koulikoro	15	1.0	29	0.8
Bamako	7	0.5	8	0.2
Total	**1 469**	**100.0**	**3 774**	**100.0**

Note: Data available through 30 June 2021.
Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

the most affected by political violence in recent years. Fewer than 100 violent events or fatalities were observed in 14 countries of the region, including much of North Africa, the Gulf of Guinea, and Mauritania, where political violence has almost disappeared.

The seven countries mentioned above experience more violence than what would be assumed by the size of their population in 2021. As Table 4.1 shows, the ratio between the percentage of events or fatalities in each country and the percentage of their population is usually higher than 1. Violence per inhabitant is relatively close to the regional average in Nigeria, despite being the main epicentre of conflict of West Africa, while violence per inhabitant is nine times higher in sparsely populated Libya than in the region.

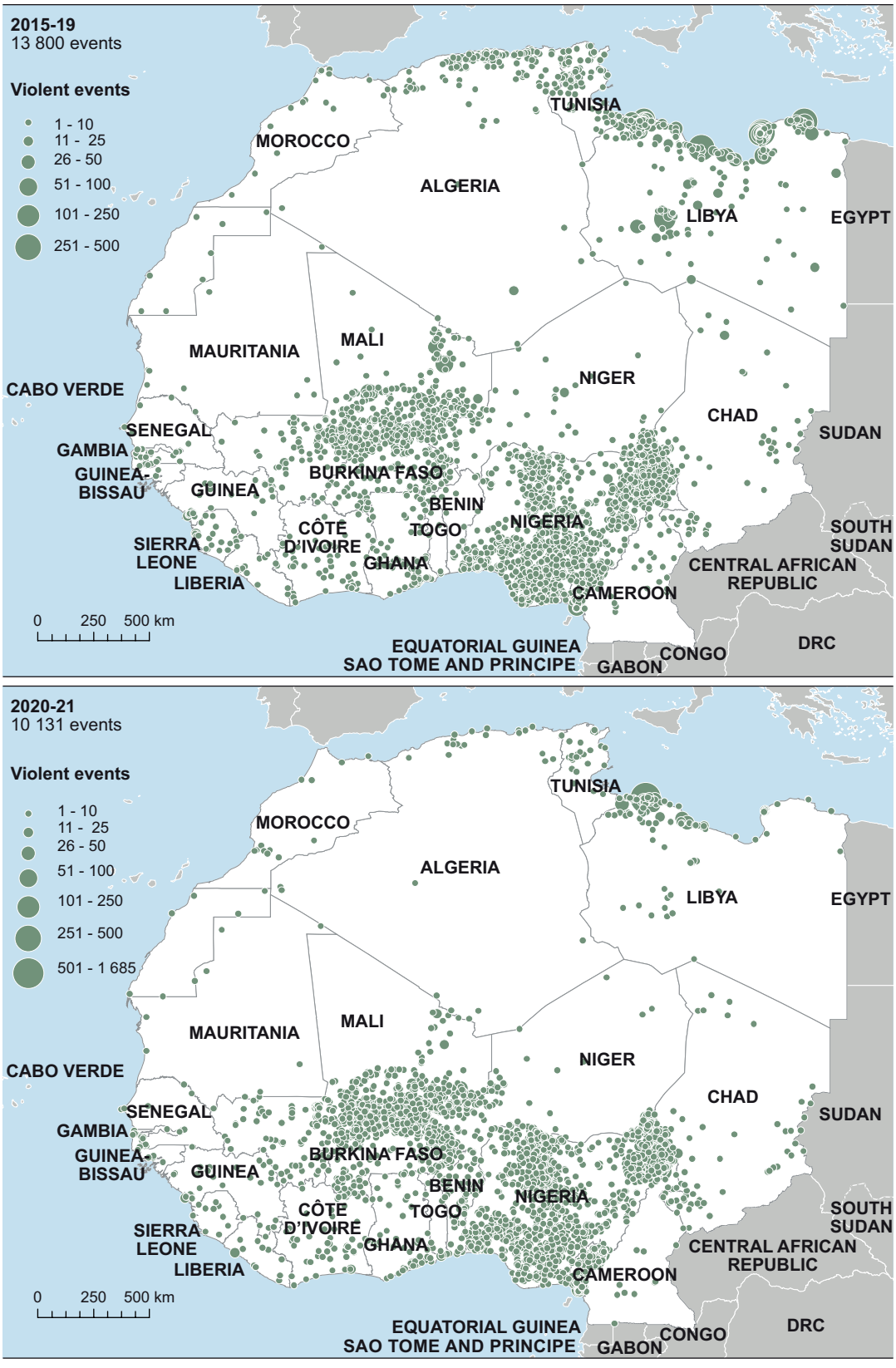
The major clusters of political violence that emerged in West Africa in the 2000s have expanded geographically and in intensity since 2015 (Map 4.1). In the Central Sahel, the diffusion of the Malian conflict across the Burkinabe and Nigerien borders is the most worrying. The most violent region of Mali is by far Mopti, where one-half of the violent events and fatalities are observed, followed by the region of Gao with around 20% of events and fatalities (see Map 4.8). The Kidal region, where the Malian conflict started in 2012, is no longer a major epicentre of violence in the region: fewer than 50 violent events were located in this region from 2020-21, which represents 3% of the national total (Table 4.2). These figures illustrate the shift of the Malian conflict from the Sahara to the Sahel and its southern peripheries.

In Nigeria, recent years have seen an increase in the number of daily attacks conducted by Boko Haram and ISWAP following the Nigerian government's decision to withdraw from the countryside and concentrate its forces (and civilians) in garrison towns. Communal violence, cattle rustling, kidnapping, and banditry are also more frequent in Zamfara, Sokoto, and Katsina States near the Nigerien border. Despite being violently repressed by security forces, this form of violence is progressing due to the proliferation of light weapons in northern Nigeria (Map 4.2).

Across the region, Tripoli is the city where the largest number of violent events (541) and fatalities (521) were recorded from 2020 through mid-2021, due to the Western Libya

Map 4.1

Violent events in North and West Africa, 2015-21



Note: Data available through 30 June 2021.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Map 4.2

The Northeast, Middle Belt and Delta of Nigeria

Note: Major conflict areas are indicated with polka dots.

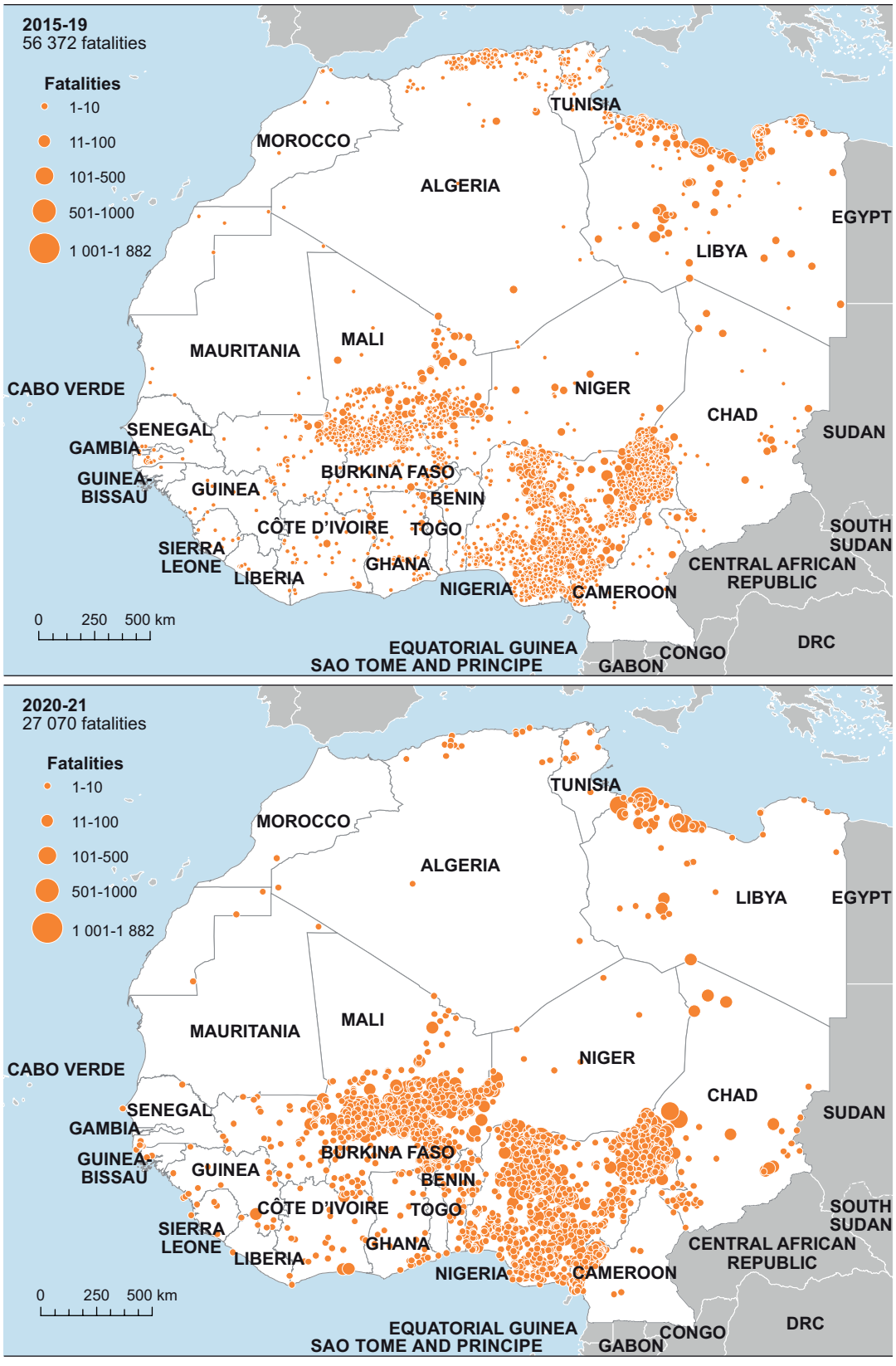
Source: OECD/SWAC (2020[21]).

Campaign initiated by the LNA in April 2019. In West Africa, cities located between Nigeria and Cameroon (Bamenda, Mora, Maiduguri, Kolofata) are among the most affected by violent events, while small and large cities affected by the Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgency in northern Nigeria (Zurmi, Mongano) and Chad (Mao) have experienced the largest number of fatalities (Map 4.3).

Outside of these major conflict areas, eastern and northern Chad have emerged as yet another source of instability in the Sahara (Box 4.1). In eastern Chad, communal violence is on the rise in the regions of Ouaddaï, Sila and Wadi Fira that border Darfur in neighbouring Sudan. These conflicts are marked by long-standing tensions between herders and farmers and increasingly along ethnic lines between Arab and non-Arab populations and have killed 37 people from 2020 through mid-2021. Separately in the remote northern Chadian region of Tibesti neighbouring Libya, clashes between gold miners and local militias, and battles between government forces and rebels from the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), have killed 128 people from 2020 to mid-2021.

Map 4.3

Fatalities due to violent events in North and West Africa, 2015-21



Note: Data available through 30 June 2021

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Box 4.1
Chad's border-related conflicts

Since it entered independence from France in 1960 under the rule of François Tombalbaye (in power 1960-1975), Chad has been at the centre of numerous border conflicts in both the north and south of the country. After the Libyan coup d'état of September 1969, Gaddafi claimed the Aouzou Strip, a territory stretching across the Libya-Chad border. Libyan soldiers made periodic incursions into Chadian territory between 1973 and 1987, and sponsored various rebels against the Chadian state, while French-backed Chadian governments and anti-Libyan rebel factions combated Gaddafi's forces. One notable episode from the war was the 1987 defeat and capture of Gaddafi's then-subordinate Khalifa Haftar, who emerged after 2011 as a pivotal actor in Libya, with influence extending into Chad. After efforts at peace-making between Chad and Libya starting in 1988, the International Court of Justice eventually ruled in 1994 that the Aouzou Strip should remain part of Chad.

In recent years, Chad has experienced cross-border attacks related to the Darfur crisis in Sudan, a major jihadist insurgency around Lake Chad, and renewed rebel incursions from Libya and the Central African Republic (CAR). These conflicts have contributed to the militarisation of the state in Chad (Eizenga, 2018[4]), a dynamic visible in Idriss Déby's self-styling as "Field Marshal" before his death, in the swiftness of the family takeover following his demise, and in the role that Déby and his successors have sought to play as regional security actors in the Sahel. The fragility of the Chadian state has incentivised authorities there to offer up Chadian military contributions to Sahelian ventures, including France's Operation Serval in Mali, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) around Lake Chad, and the G5 Sahel Joint Force in the tri-border zone of the central Sahel. In this way, Chad's own cross-border military deployments are key techniques for maintaining international and peer support for continued Déby family rule at home.

Source: Alexander Thurston for this publication.

INTENSIFICATION AND EXPANSION OF VIOLENCE

The rapid increase in the number of violent events and fatalities recorded in West Africa since the mid-2010s reflects the intensification and expansion of several interconnected conflicts. These changes can be measured using the SCDi developed to assess the changing geography of conflict in the region (OECD/SWAC, 2020[2]; Walther et al., 2021[5]). As discussed in Chapter 3, the SCDi measures both the intensity and the spatial concentration of political violence for each of the 6 540 "cells" or regions of 50 by 50 kilometres that compose North and West Africa. The SCDi measures two interrelated spatial forms of violence by cell: conflict intensity and conflict concentration. Conflict intensity corresponds to the number of violent events in a given region divided by its area. Conflict concentration compares the average distance between violent events in a given region with the average distance if events were randomly distributed. This determines whether violent events in a cell are rather clustered or dispersed. The cells can experience a high or low intensity of conflict, as well as a clustered or dispersed distribution of violent events.

CONFLICTS ARE INTENSIFYING, ESPECIALLY IN WEST AFRICA

Since 2019, conflicts have tended to intensify in West Africa, where an increasing number of regions are now experiencing high levels of violence. Violence has become more intense in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. In these countries, regions where conflict intensity was low until the late 2010s tend to exhibit a higher level of violence in 2019 and 2020 (Map 4.4). Moreover, isolated clusters of high-intensity violence have started to coalesce. In the Central Sahel, the Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger border formed a continuous cluster of high-intensity violence in 2020, while several parts of the region were still unaffected by or relatively preserved from conflict in 2018. Each major conflict in Nigeria has followed the same evolution. The Lake Chad region is now a compact cluster of high-intensity violence from N'Guigmi in Niger to Mubi in Nigeria and Maroua in Cameroon. Another uninterrupted cluster of violence has emerged from the north of Nigeria to the Niger delta, across the entire country. In North Africa, regions that experience high-intensity violence are far less numerous in 2019 and 2020 than in previous years and almost exclusively centred on Tripoli and other coastal cities.

VIOLENCE IS BECOMING MORE DISPERSED

In 2019 and 2020, the vast majority of regions that experience conflict (>80%) exhibited a clustered distribution of violent events, which means that conflict is largely localised and violent events are likely to occur near each other. Regions that tend to experience a high intensity of violence, as discussed in the previous section, also tend to exhibit clustered violence. Accordingly, concentrated conflicts were particularly numerous between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, in Nigeria, and in north-western Libya until 2020 (Map 4.5).

However, the overall number of regions with clustered violent locations has decreased noticeably from its peak of 2011, where it represented 95% of all events, to 82% in 2021 (Figure 4.3). The corresponding increase in dispersed violence may be a sign that conflicts are weakening, or, on the contrary, that they are spreading to previously unaffected regions. In both cases, a dispersed pattern identifies regions where a transition is underway. In West Africa, dispersed events appear at the margins of large conflict areas, such as in southern Mali, but also in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and south-western Nigeria. This suggests that dispersed violence is spreading to new regions. In Libya, the violence that remains is heavily clustered in urban areas and recent dispersed events can be interpreted as a remnant of the Second Civil War.

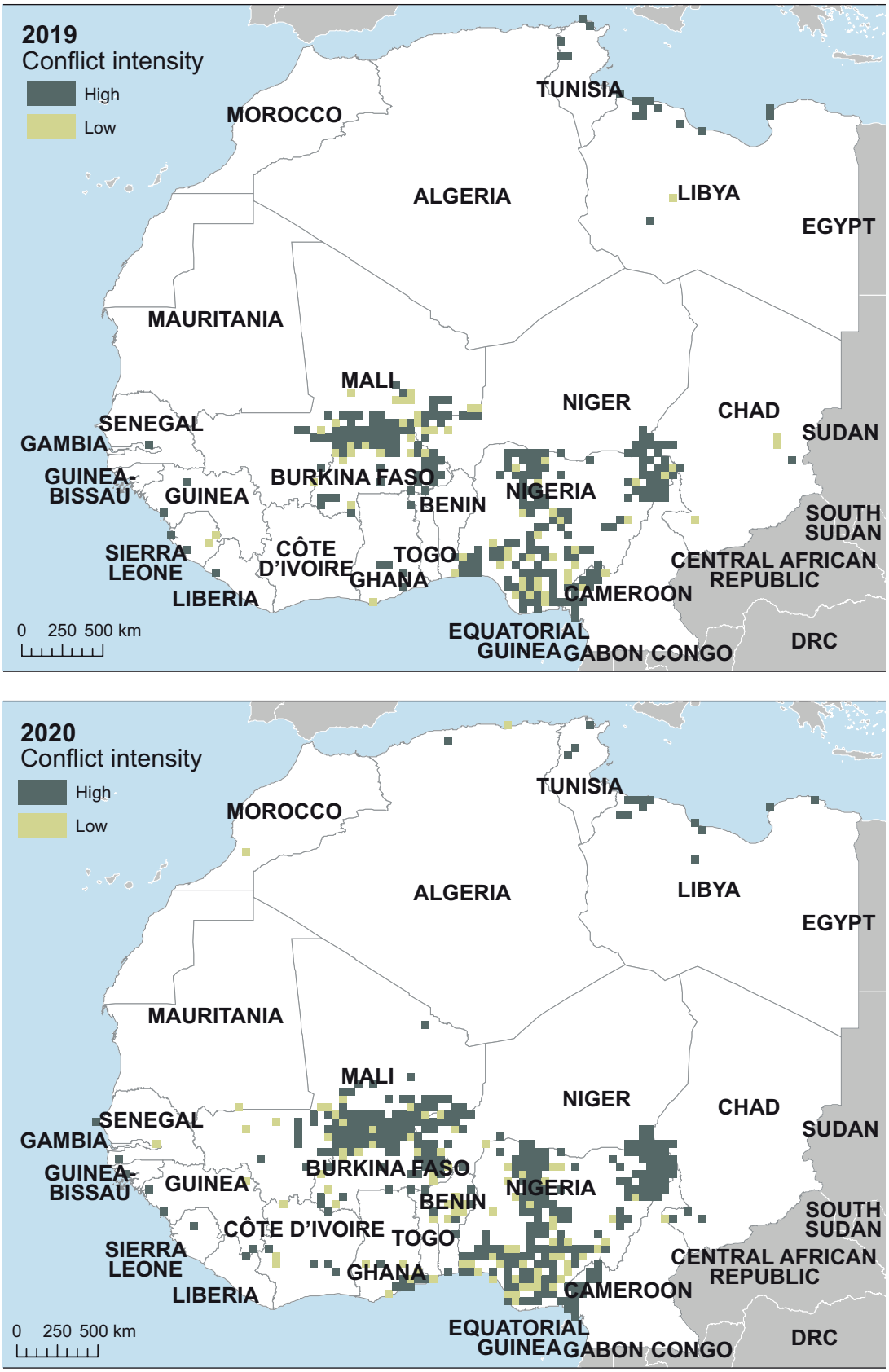
THE CHANGING GEOGRAPHY OF VIOLENCE

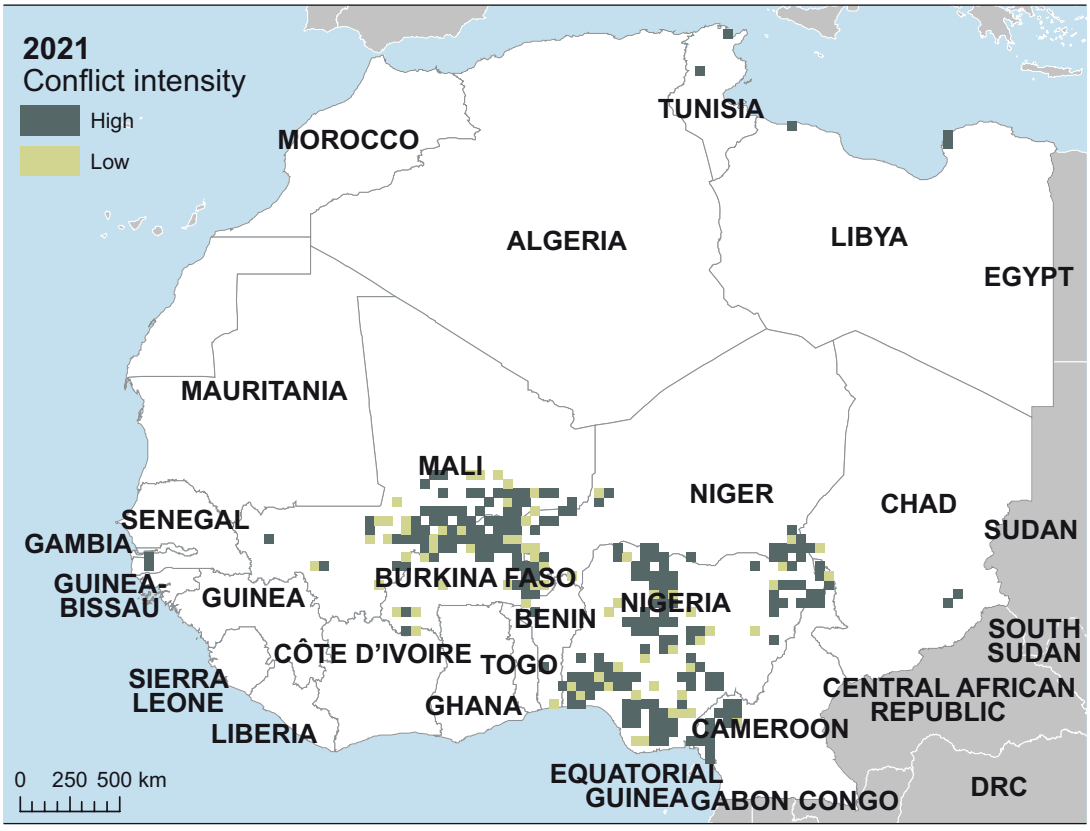
The analysis of the intensity and concentration of violence can help understand the changing geography of violence in the region. Developed with this purpose in mind, the SCDi identifies four types of conflicts, depending on whether violence is intensifying locally, accelerating, in transition, or lingering.

- Regions where violence is both intense and clustered are the most worrying. In recent years, these regions have occupied a growing portion of the Central Sahel and of Nigeria (Type 1 indicated on Map 4.6 and Map 4.7). Nigeria is by far the country that counts the largest number of conflict regions (495). More than one-half of the Nigerian territory (52%) is affected by one type of conflict or another in 2020.
- Regions where violence is intense but dispersed are far less frequent in North and West Africa (Type 2). They are usually located immediately next to a major source of violence, as in some remote parts of the

Map 4.4

Intensity of conflict in North and West Africa, 2019-21





Note: Data available through 30 June 2021.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Mali-Burkina Faso border (Map 4.8), or in the Niger River Delta in Nigeria (Map 4.9). In these regions, conflicts are accelerating.

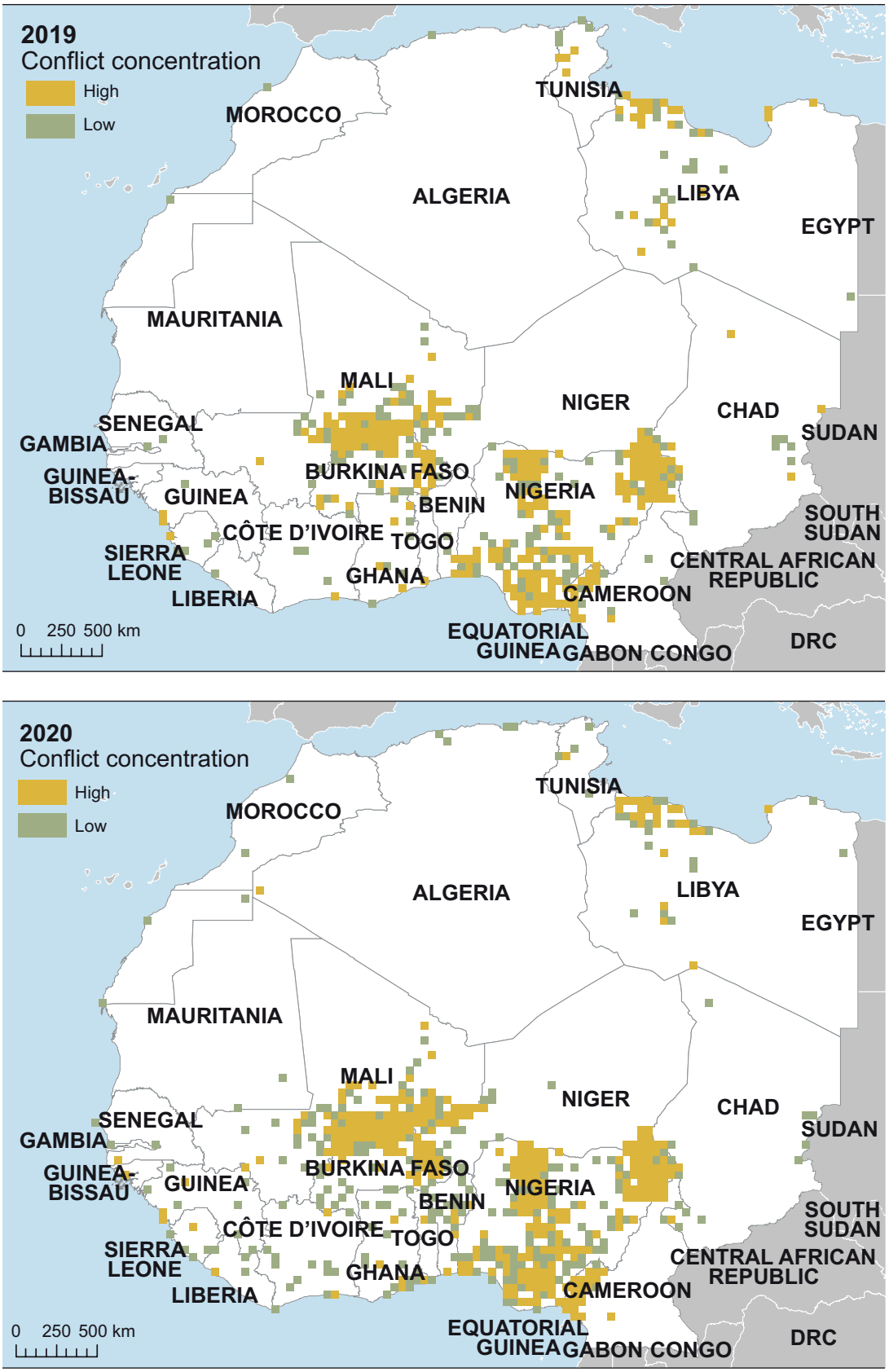
- Regions where violence is both clustered and of low intensity, are in transition (Type 3). They are relatively well represented at the margins of major hotspots of violence, as in Mali and Nigeria, but also in more remote regions where violence has remained diffuse so far, as in northern Ghana or around Tripoli (Map 4.10). Conflicts may start or end in these regions.
- Regions where violence is both dispersed and of low intensity are quite unusual (Type 4). They are often isolated from major conflict areas.

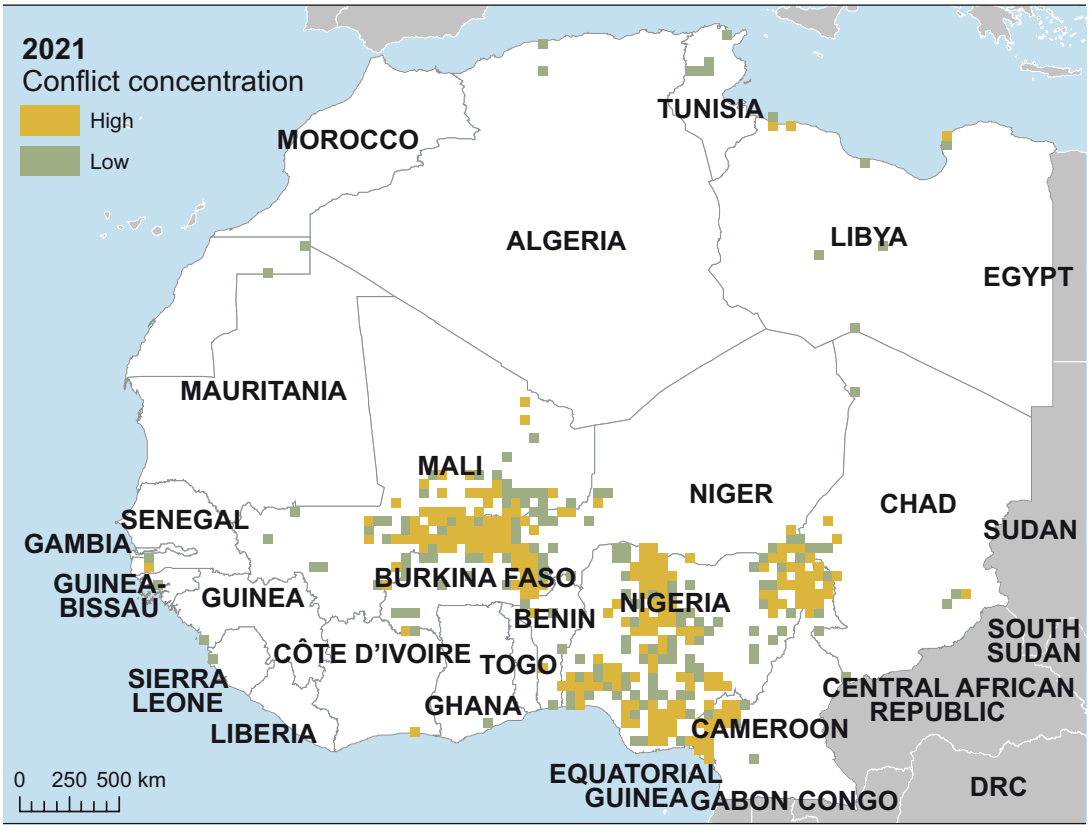
The SCDi confirms that the last 10 years are marked by an increase in all types of conflicts in North and West Africa. In 2020, 606 cells were affected by conflict, against 300 in 2016 and less than 100 in 2011. In other words, the number of regions affected by conflict has been multiplied by six in the last decade. Clustered and intense conflict (Type 1) have been the most represented in the region since the late 1990s. The occurrence has increased faster than any other type of conflict since the mid-2010s: 329 regions are affected by this type of violence in 2020 against 65 when the French intervened militarily in Mali in 2013 (Figure 4.4).

Clustered and intense conflicts represent more than half (54%) of the cells of the region in 2020, against 28% in 2005 (Figure 4.5). Regions in which conflicts are either beginning or ending (Type 3) have experienced spectacular growth and are now the second most represented in the region, with 185 cells in 2020. In spite of their growth, their share has declined since the mid-2000s where they represented one-half of the regions. For example, between 2005 and 2012, Type 3 Clustered low-intensity violence was the most observed SCDi category (52%). Regions where conflicts are lingering (Type 4) or accelerating (Type 2) were uncommon until ten years ago. Today, these two types of conflicts represent nearly 15% of the cells of the region.

Map 4.5

Concentration of conflict in North and West Africa, 2019-21



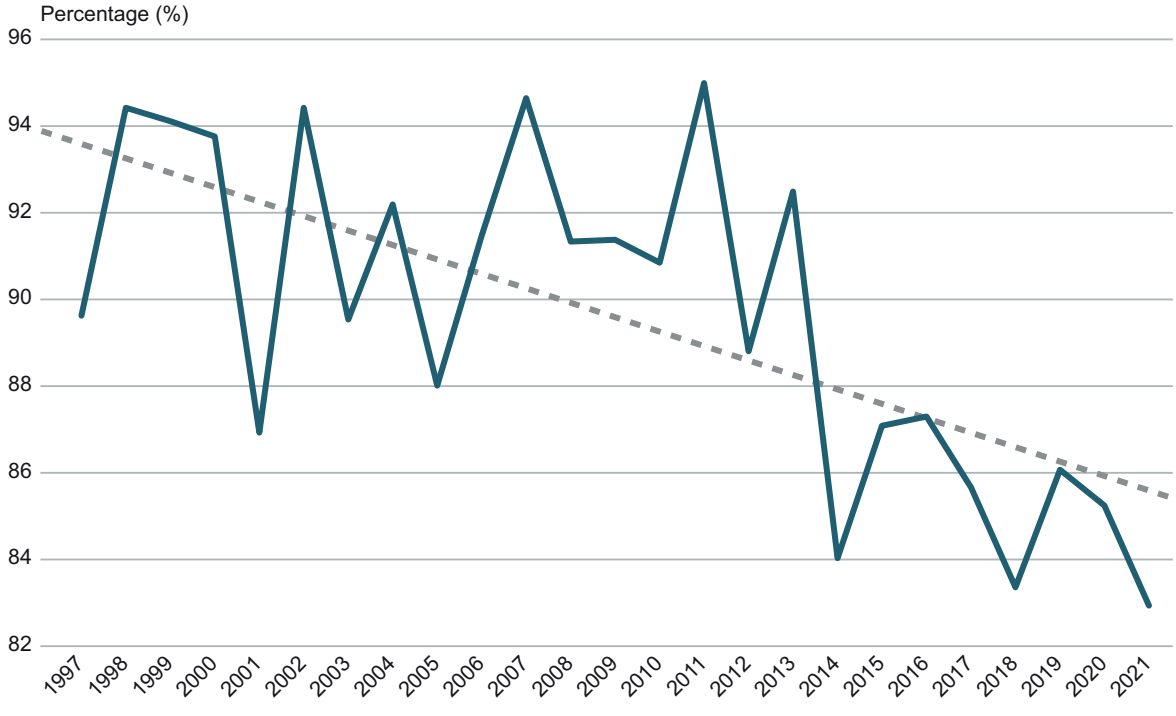


Note: Data available through 30 June 2021.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Figure 4.3

Proportion of conflict regions classified as clustered, 1997-2021

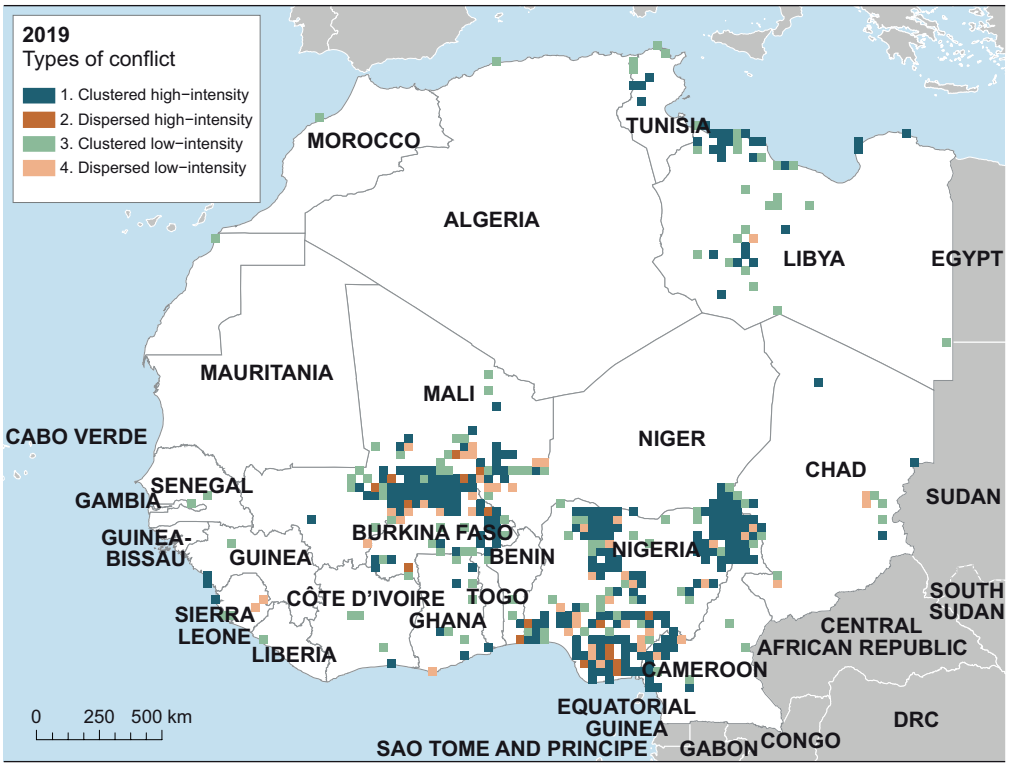


Note: Data available through 30 June 2021.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Map 4.6

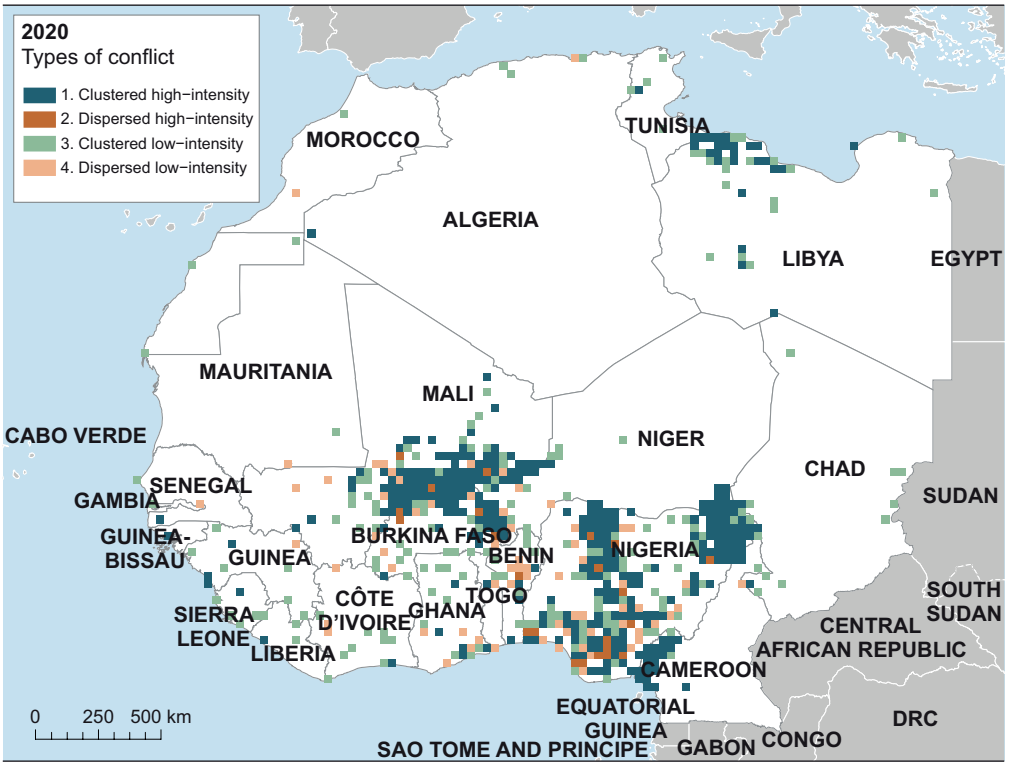
Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) in North and West Africa, 2019



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Map 4.7

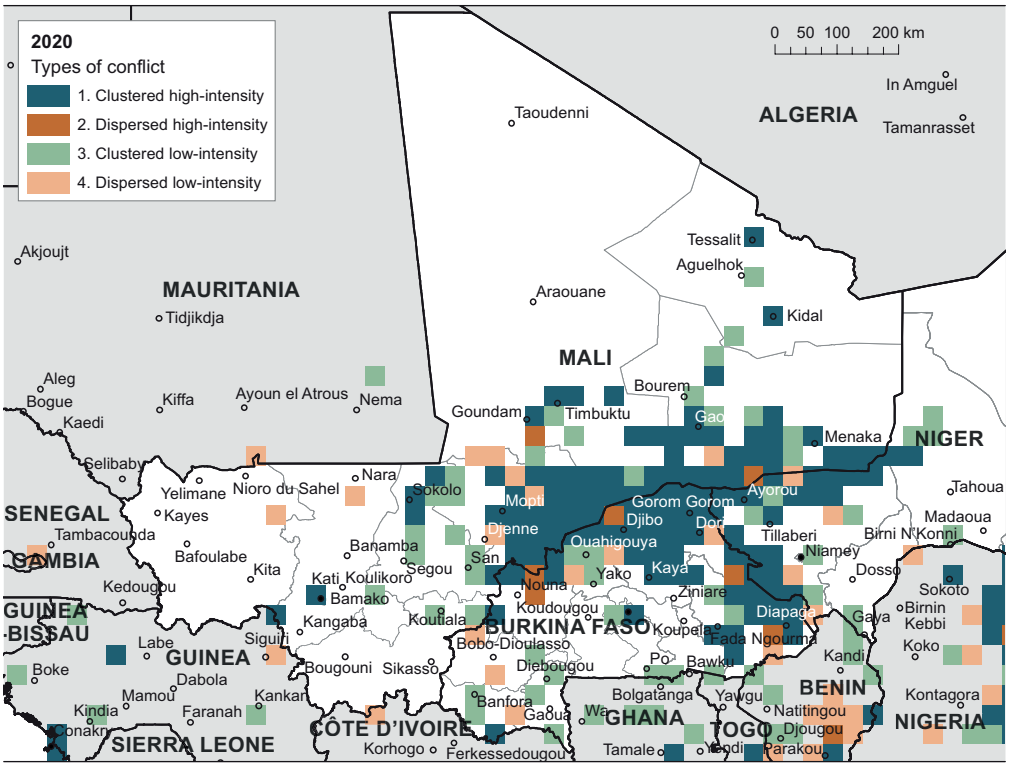
Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) in North and West Africa, 2020



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Map 4.8

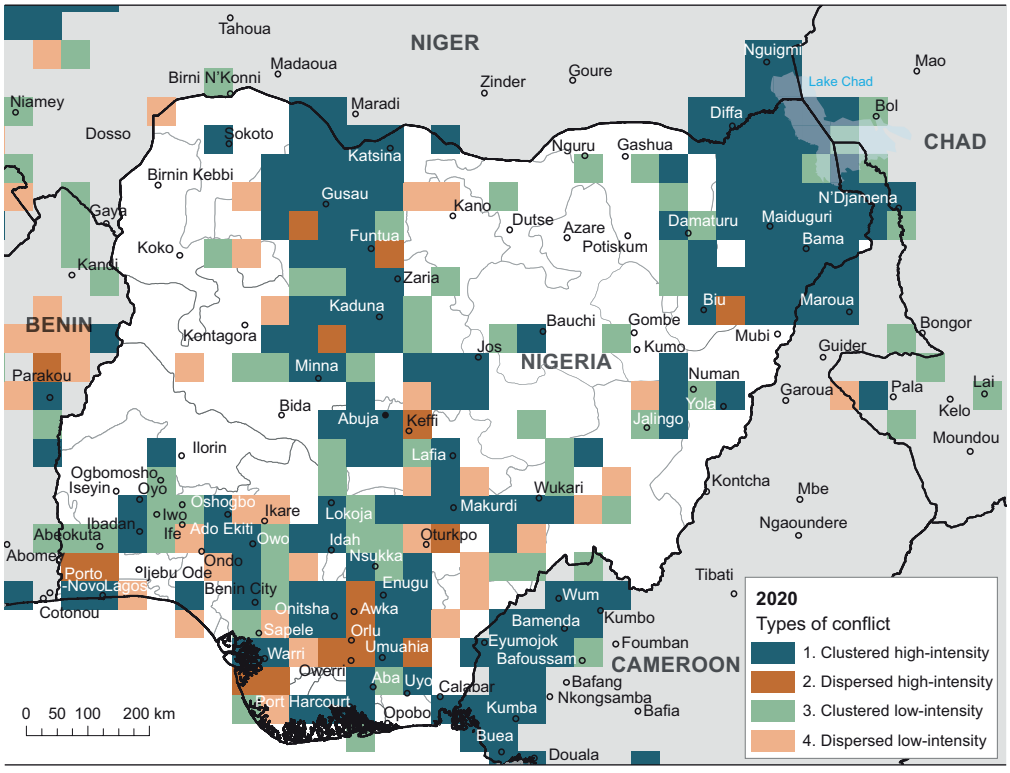
Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) in Mali and Central Sahel, 2020



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Map 4.9

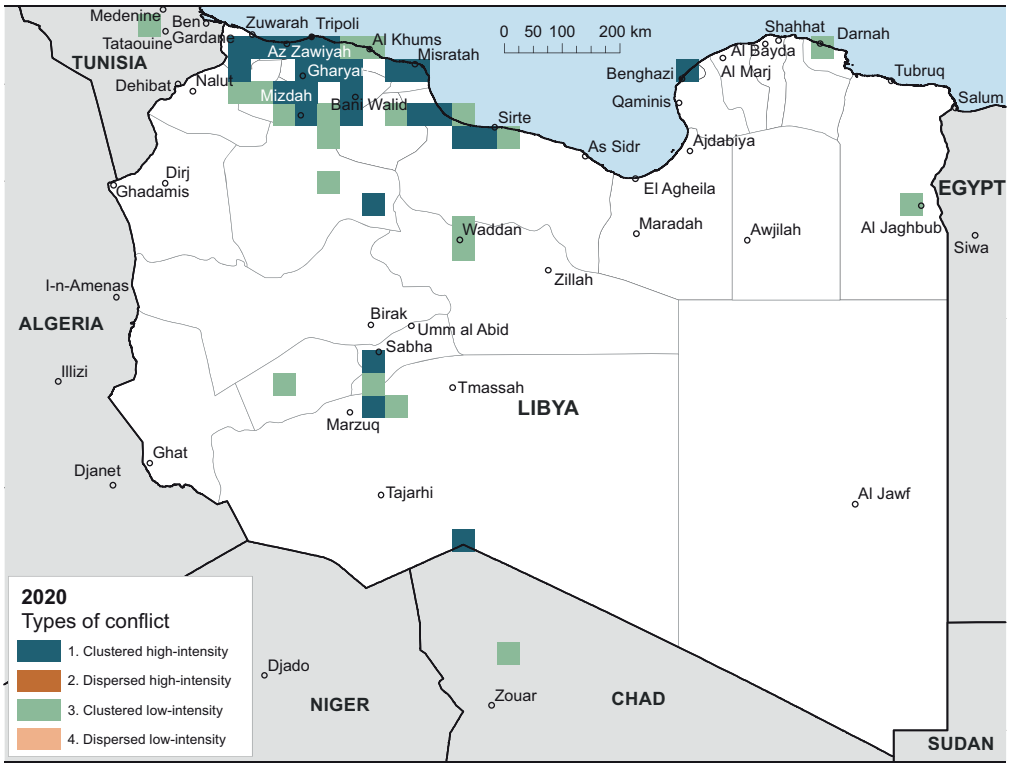
Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region, 2020



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Map 4.10

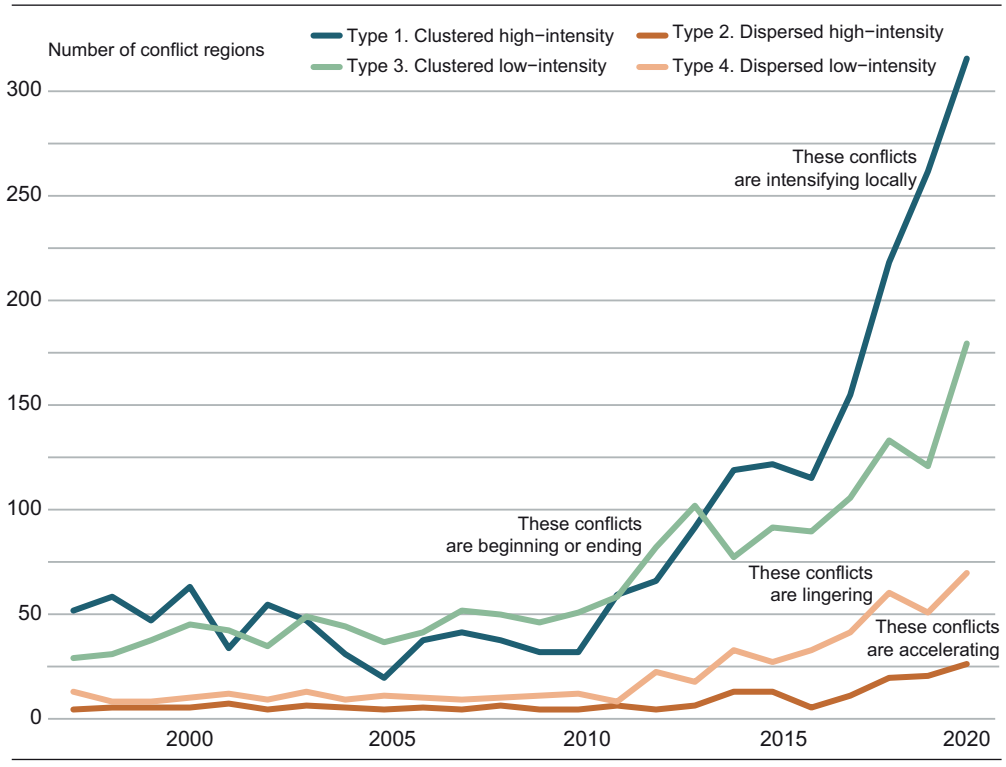
Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) in Libya, 2020



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Figure 4.4

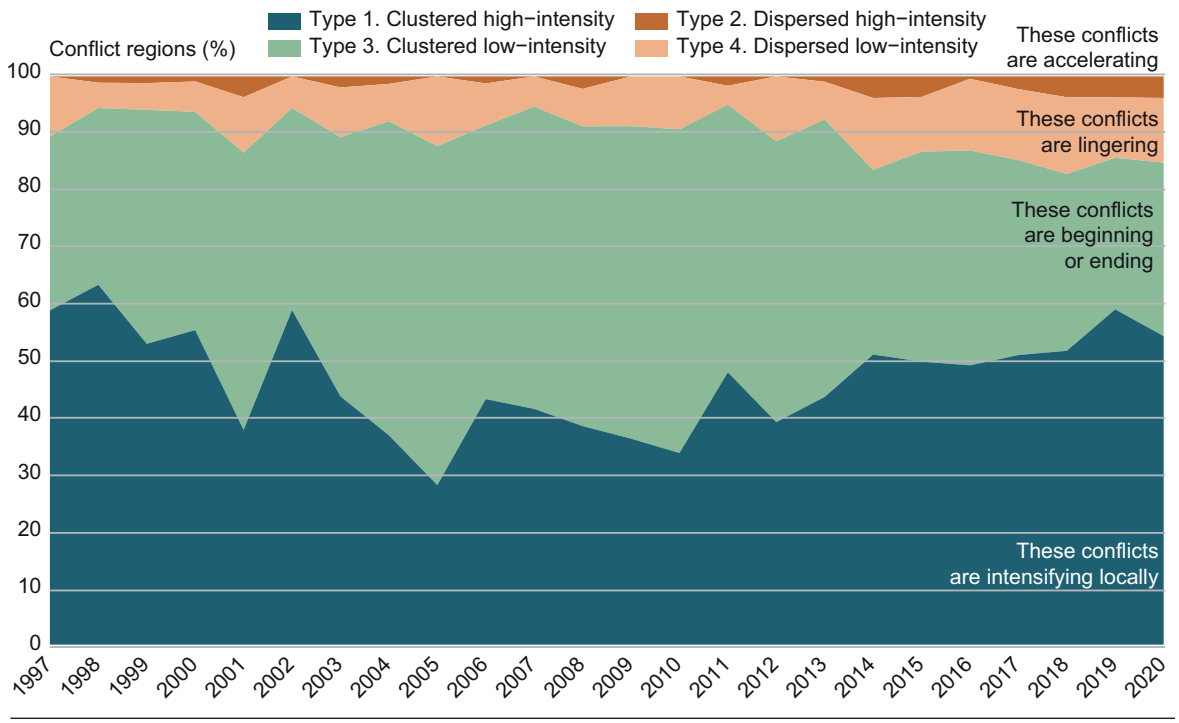
Number of conflicts by type, 1997-2020



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Figure 4.5

Proportion of conflict regions in North and West Africa by type, 1997-2021



Note: Data available through 30 June 2021.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

The evolution of the SCDi suggests that conflicts have not just become more violent in the region. Their nature has also changed. While violence is still clustered in a vast majority of conflict regions, patterns that are more diffuse have emerged that contribute to make the geography of violence even more volatile than ever. This recent change in the nature of conflict evolution is particularly visible in border regions, where violence is both intensifying and expanding (Chapter 5).

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Chapter 5

Why borderlands have become more violent in North and West Africa

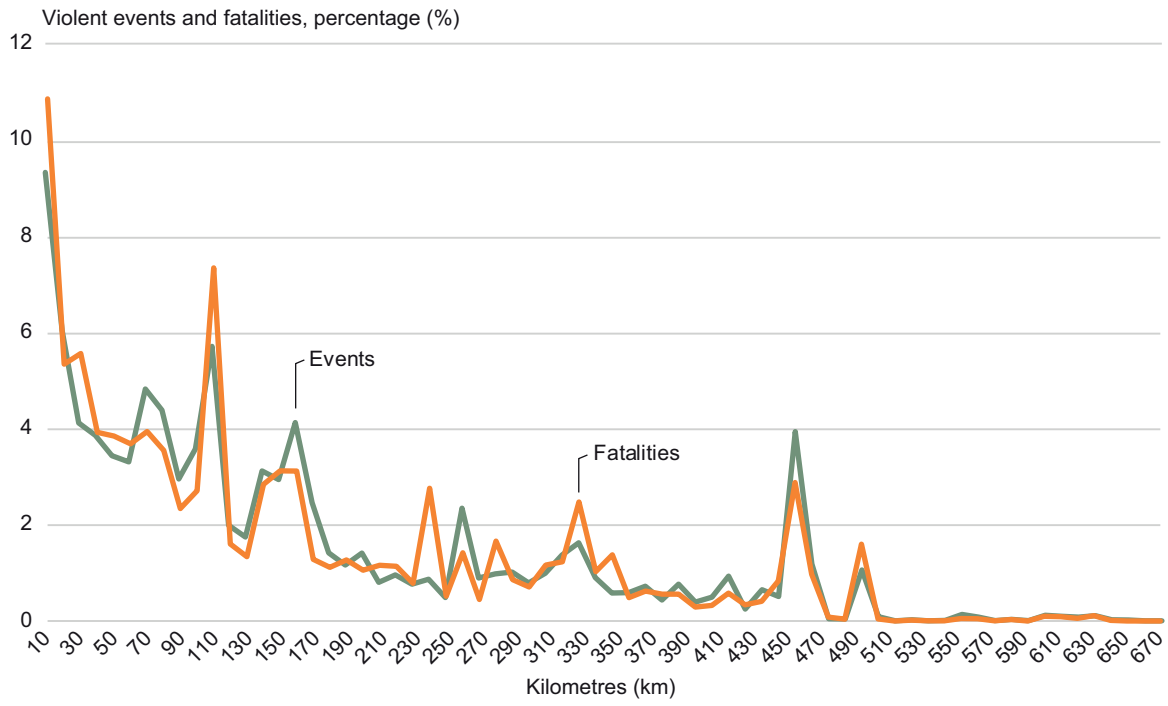
Chapter 5 uses a disaggregated database of violent events to show that political violence is more frequent near borders than elsewhere in North and West Africa. Both violent events and fatalities tend to decrease gradually over distance from borders at the regional level. The effect is most pronounced at short distances and roughly 10% of events and fatalities occur within 10 kilometres of a border. The relationship between violence and distance does not vary by the several types of violent events, such as battles or violence against civilians. It does, however, vary significantly over time as discrete episodes of conflict have waxed and waned within the region. Notably, border violence has strongly increased in the last decade: 23% of all violent events are located within 20 kilometres in 2021, against less than 10% in 2011. The chapter shows that the drivers of political violence in borderlands are heavily dependent on the social and political context of each region. The concentration of violence in borderlands is explained by the local strategies of violent extremist organisations, who use these areas to conduct their attacks and mobilise the civilian population, and by the willingness of some states to conduct extra-territorial campaigns against them.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Borderlands are more violent than other regions and political violence tends to decrease with distance from borders in North and West Africa.**
- **Border violence has strongly increased since the early 2010s. Nearly one-fourth of all violent events occurred within 20 kilometres of a border in 2021, twice as much as in 2011.**
- **Local factors explain why some borderlands such as the Lake Chad region or the Liptako Gourma become hotspots of violence while others do not.**
- **Border violence is not solely determined either by state failure or policy or by the strategies of violent extremist organisations. Instead, the interplay of both factors results in border violence.**

North and West Africa countries have experienced unprecedented levels of political insecurity in the last decade. A significant proportion of the events and fatalities associated with the rise of violence in the region are located near international boundaries. This chapter explores to what extent borderlands are more violent than other regions, whether the intensity of violence in borderlands has increased over time, and which factors explain why some borderlands have transformed into hotspots of violence. The chapter confirms that violence tends to decrease with distance from borders and is more intense in borderlands in general. The analysis also shows that not all borderlands are becoming more violent. Violence clearly varies across states and regions, which stresses the need to understand the local determinants of conflicts.

Figure 5.1
Violent events and fatalities by border distance, 1997-2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[11]) data. Data available through 30 June 2021. ACLED data is publicly available.

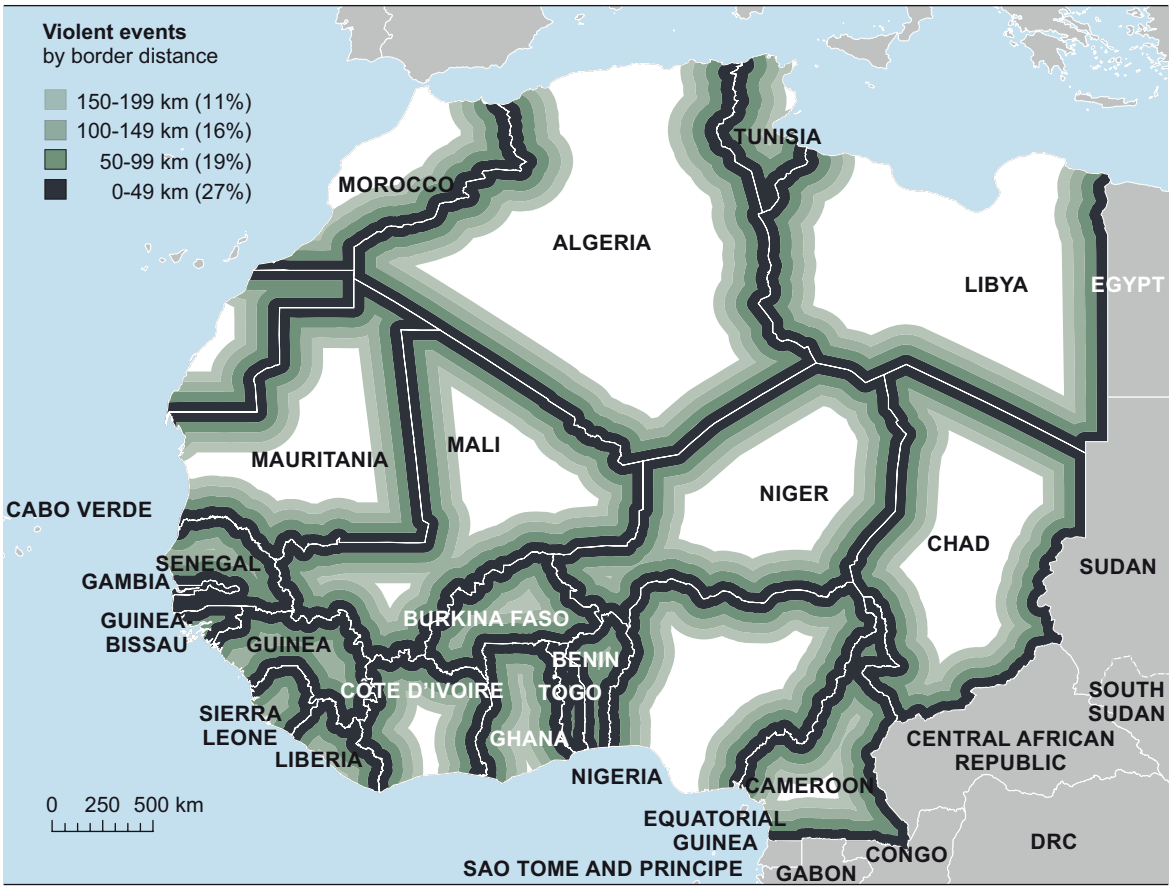
VIOLENCE DECREASES WITH DISTANCE FROM BORDERS

There is a clear empirical relationship between incidents of violence and borders in North and West Africa[1]. Political violence is more frequent near borders than elsewhere in the region and tends to decrease gradually over distance from borders. This suggests that borderlands typically are less controlled political spaces and that armed groups have fewer impediments to movement or other activities within them. More than 4 000 violent events and nearly 19 000 fatalities were observed within 10 kilometres of a border from 1997-2021, the highest incidences in the region. During the same period, 9% of all violent events and 11% of all fatalities fell within the 0-9 kilometre buffer. The next highest percentage of event in any zone occurred in the 10-19 kilometre buffer (8.0%, see Figure 5.1). A peak of violent activities can be observed between 100 and 110 kilometres, with 6% of the events and 7% of the fatalities, likely due to the presence of large urban centres located relatively close to borders, such as Maiduguri in northern Nigeria.

Taken together, 27% of all violent events occurred less than 50 kilometres from a border, 46% occurred within 100 kilometres, and 72% were within 200 kilometres (Map 5.1). This relationship is similar for the number of people killed in these events, suggesting that the lethality of events is not dependent on their distance to borders. The relationship between violence and distance also remains largely invariant when several types of violent events are considered. The proportion of battles, violent attacks against civilians and acts of remote violence reaches its maximum within 10 kilometres of a border and then decreases regularly with distance for all types (Figure 5.2).

Map 5.1

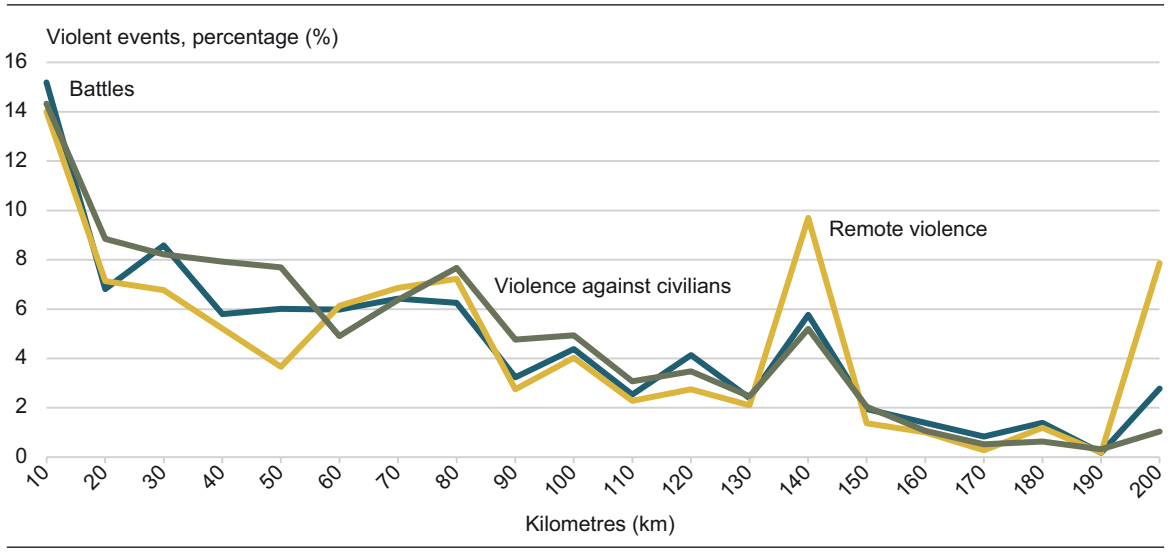
Violent events by border distance, 1997-2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. Data available through 30 June 2021. ACLED data is publicly available.

Figure 5.2

Violent events by border distance and by type, 1997-2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. Data available through 30 June 2021. ACLED data is publicly available.

Figure 5.3

Violent events within 20 kilometres of borders, 1997-2021

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. Data available through 30 June 2021. ACLED data is publicly available.

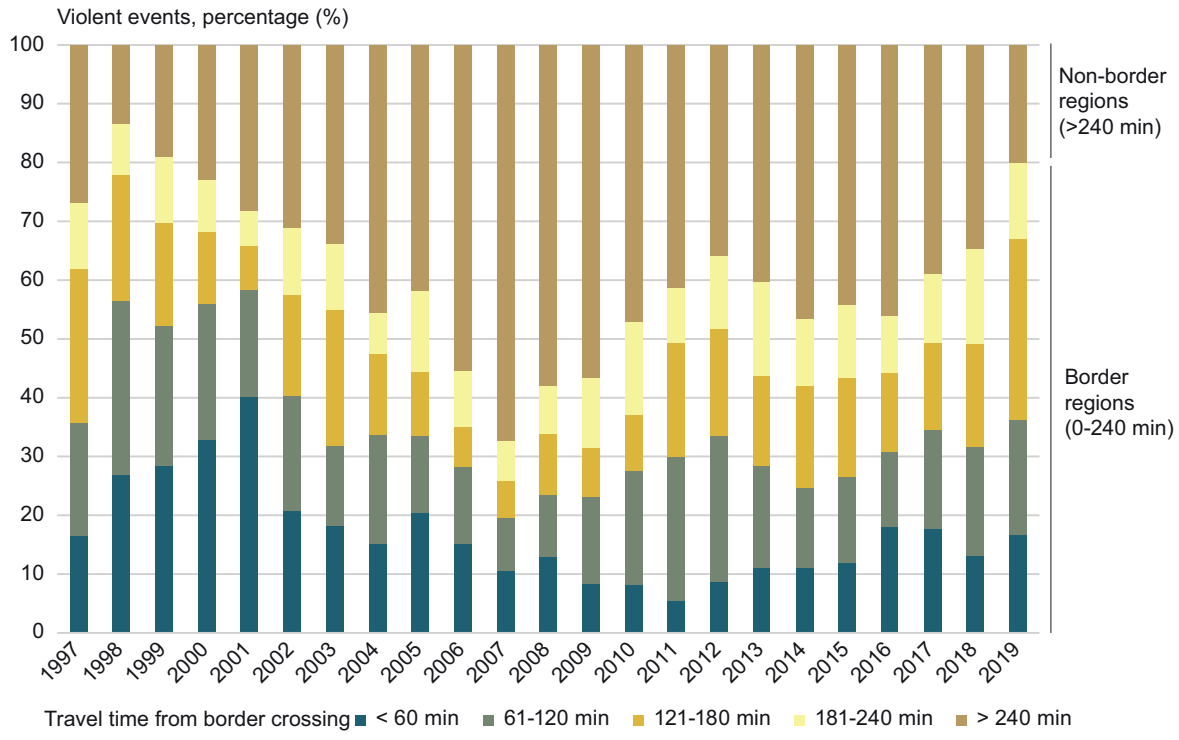
BORDERS REGIONS ARE INCREASINGLY VIOLENT

The relationship of violent events to borders varies significantly over time as discrete episodes of conflict have waxed and waned within the region (Figure 5.3). For example, the conflicts in the Gulf of Guinea in the late 1990s and early 2000s yielded high percentages of events near borders. During that period, 22% of violent events in Sierra Leone were recorded within 20 kilometres of borders; this rose to 40% in Liberia and 48% in Guinea. The concentration of violent events near borders during this period is explained by the relatively small size of the countries in conflict and by the tendency for armed groups to use border regions as sanctuaries, such as the establishment of the Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front (RUF) along the Liberian border in the early 1990s.

The overall percentage of events near borders declined throughout the mid-2000s as conflict changed location, declining in the small states of the Gulf of Guinea and emerging in larger ones like Algeria, Chad and Nigeria. The most recent wave of violence within the region since 2010 is the most alarming since it involves many larger states (Libya, Mali and Nigeria, primarily) while still resulting in an increase in the percentage of events near borders since 2015. This suggests that the number of conflicts or the amount of violence is not just proportional to the size of a country or to the length of its borders.

The overall increase of events near borders in recent years is a troubling trend as it can herald either the relocation of a conflict within a state, the expansion of a conflict across state borders, or both. From this perspective, the period since 2010 has been especially troubling as the percentage of events within 20 kilometres increased every year between 2011 and 2016 to eventually exceed the historical annual average of 23% for 1997-2009 (Figure 5.3). After a brief decline between 2017 and 2018, the percentage of events within 20 kilometres of a border has been on the rise again, reaching 22% through June 2021.

Figure 5.4
Violent events according to travel times, 1997-2019



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

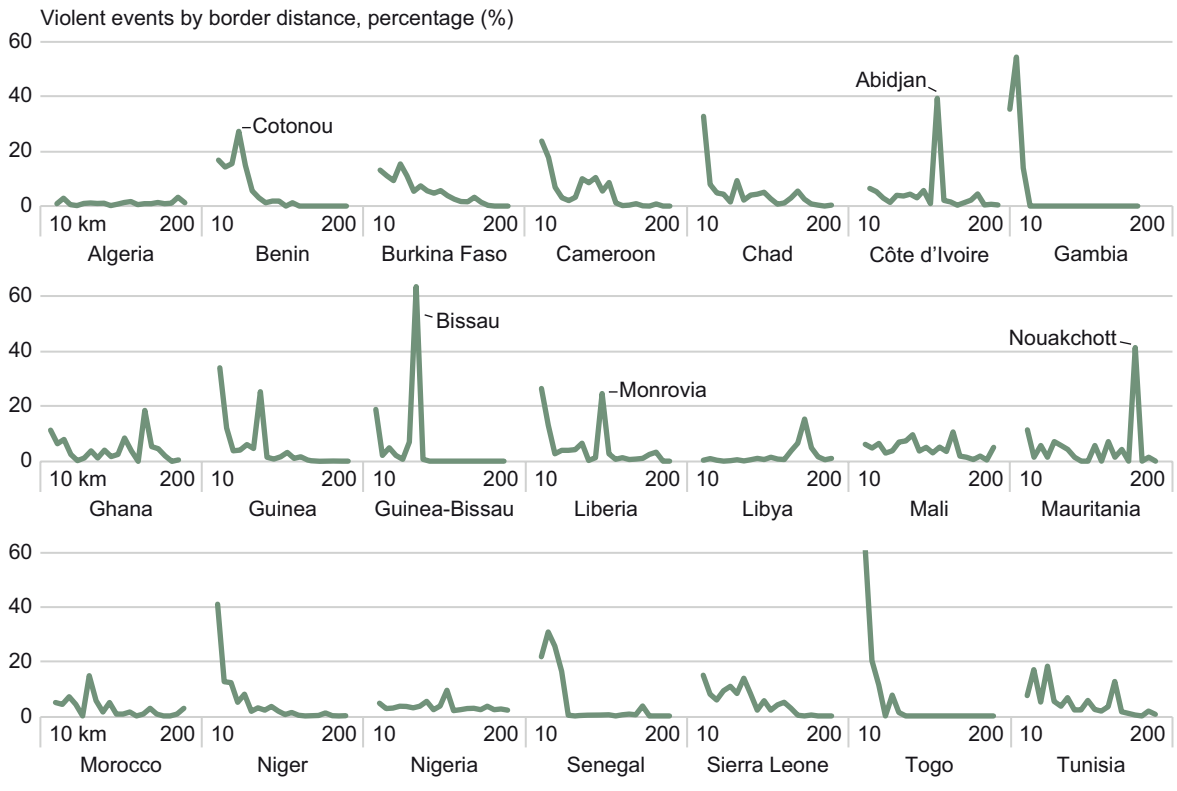
Within the region, the relationship between borders and violent events is not fully consistent over time. While the average annual percentage of events that occurred within 20 kilometres of a border is over 22%, recent years have been as low as 7% (2011) and as high as 26% (2016). This temporal variability is connected to the shifting geography of conflict during these years.

The use of travel times to delineate border regions instead of buffer zones leads to similar conclusions (Figure 5.4). The accessibility model used to determine how far people can travel across the region from any border crossing suggests that the proportion of violent events located near borders was particularly high in the late 1990s, when the civil wars of the Gulf of Guinea made extensive use of border regions. More than half of the violent events observed in the region until 2001 were located within two hours of a border crossing and more than 70% within four hours, which is considered the threshold to define border regions. The proportion of border related events (i.e. within 0-240 min) has experienced a continuous decrease until 2007, where they represented only a third of the total. This all-time low was followed by a second wave of border violence that continues today. In 2019, for example, less than 20% of violent events were located more than four hours away from a border crossing, in regions that are unlikely to be affected by border violence.

The temporal variability of border violence suggests that, as conflict surges in one part of the region, so too does the utility of borderlands to the belligerents. This speaks to the need to consider not just the temporal variability of this regional pattern but its spatial variability as well.

Figure 5.5

Violent events by border distance and by country, 1997-2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[11]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

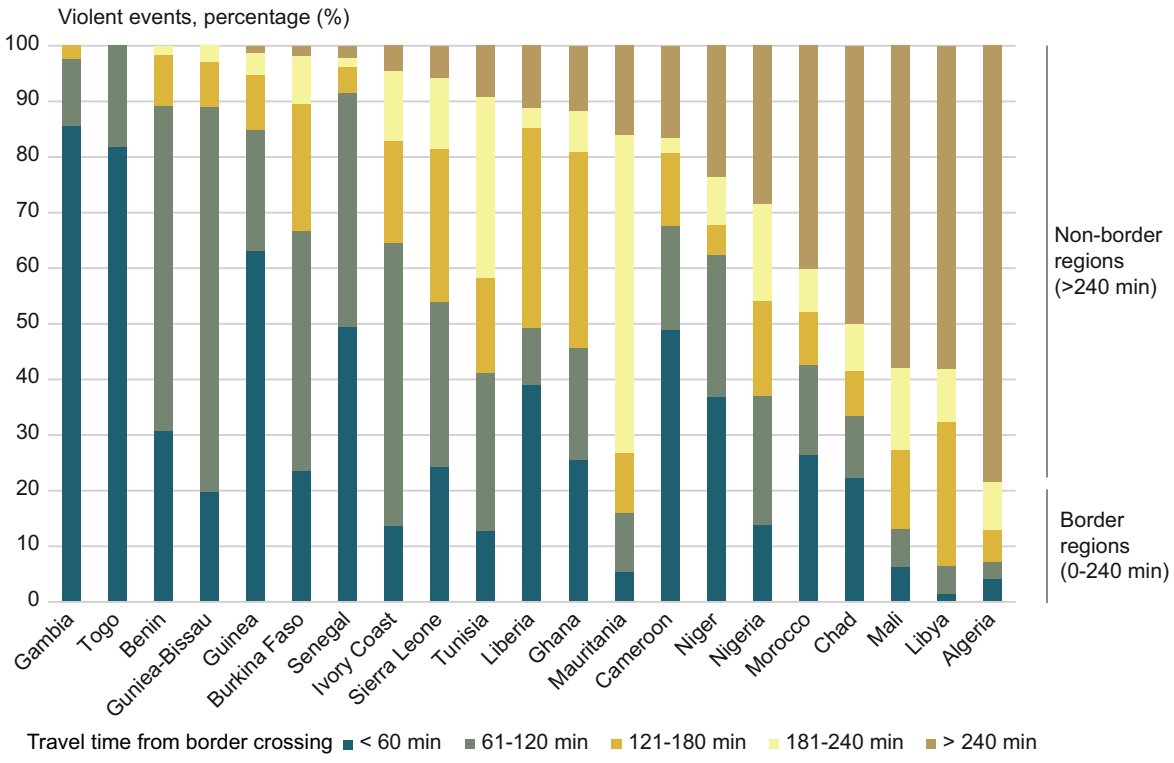
BORDER VIOLENCE VARIES ACROSS NORTH AND WEST AFRICAN STATES

Unsurprisingly, there are significant differences in the relationship between violence and borders across North and West African states (Figure 5.5). Many of the smaller states show a sharp decline in violence as border distance increases. For example, 60% of all violent events recorded in Togo from 1997-2021 occurred within 10 kilometres from a border, which is understandable given that no location in the country is more than 75 kilometres from the nearest border. Other states, both small and large, exhibit this same general relationship but also present significant spikes at large distances from borders, such as the nearly 64% of events found in the 70 kilometre zone in Guinea-Bissau and the 41% of events in the 170 kilometre zone in Mauritania. Such spikes generally reflect the underlying population distribution throughout each state and specifically reflect the presence of national capital cities or other major urban population centres in a buffer zone, including Monrovia in Liberia (25% of events, 100 kilometres) and Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire (39%, 100 kilometres). This also points to the salience of capital cities and urban centres in political struggles in the region as many movements are seeking to replace or overthrow the state and/or combatting state forces where they are already concentrated.

Taken together, these outcomes support the overall insight that violence tends to decrease with distance from borders while also pointing toward the salience of population distribution as a possible corollary to this truism. In Niger, for example, 41% of all violent events were within 10 kilometres of a border and 53% were within just 20 kilometres. Burkina Faso's pattern is less

Figure 5.6

Violent events according to travel times and country, 1997-2019



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

stark but still notable as over 23% of violent events were within 20 kilometres of a border. Simply disaggregating the region into states may not be enough to understand the ways in which borderlands function across and within countries, though. For example, within Niger, the western border region has been far more violent than the borderlands shared with Algeria and Libya. This violence is due to groups based in Mali that conduct cross-border attacks against Nigerien and international armed forces operating there, including France and the United States, and to local ISGS fighters clashing with Zarma and Tuareg communities and self-defence forces. In fact, the Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger tri-border is now at the heart of one of the region's conflict hotspots in the same way that Liberian borderlands were central to an earlier episode of conflict. In short, while the relationship between borders and violence is detectable within the region, it is highly fluid and mobile over both time and space.

Interestingly, some countries that have experienced the highest levels of violence since 2010 are those that are least likely to reflect this relationship. Figure 5.5 shows how the borders to violence relationship within Libya and Mali is largely invariant by distance, for example. This is undoubtedly due to the population geography of each country, which is not concentrated near its borders in either state. In Nigeria, the absence of a clear relationship between borders and distance to violence is due to the different subnational conflicts around Lake Chad, in the Middle Belt, and in the Delta that have encompassed half of the country for the last decade. In Libya, much of the civil war took place along the Mediterranean coast, where the vast majority of cities and people are located, and not in border regions.

These conclusions based on a series of buffer zones are similar to the results of the accessibility model developed to measure travel times from border crossings (Figure 5.6). This suggests that both approaches can be used to study the temporal evolution of border violence and its variations across countries. The proportion of

events located within four hours of a border crossing is naturally extremely high in The Gambia, Togo, Benin, Guinea-Bissau (>95%), due to the size and shape of those countries, and in countries that experience insurgencies in border regions such as Cameroon and Niger (84 and 76% respectively). Cameroon appears particularly affected by border violence with nearly half of the events (49%) located within one hour of a border crossing. Nigeria is more affected by border violence when border regions are based on real accessibility than when fixed buffer zones are used: 72% of violent events occurred within four hours of travel from a border, including 14% within one hour. The density of the road network in Nigeria explain that more distance can be travelled per hour in this country than in the rest of the region, which, in turn, tends to increase the geographical extend of border regions in Nigeria.

BORDER VIOLENCE IS HIGHLY CLUSTERED

Two main epicentres of borderland violence

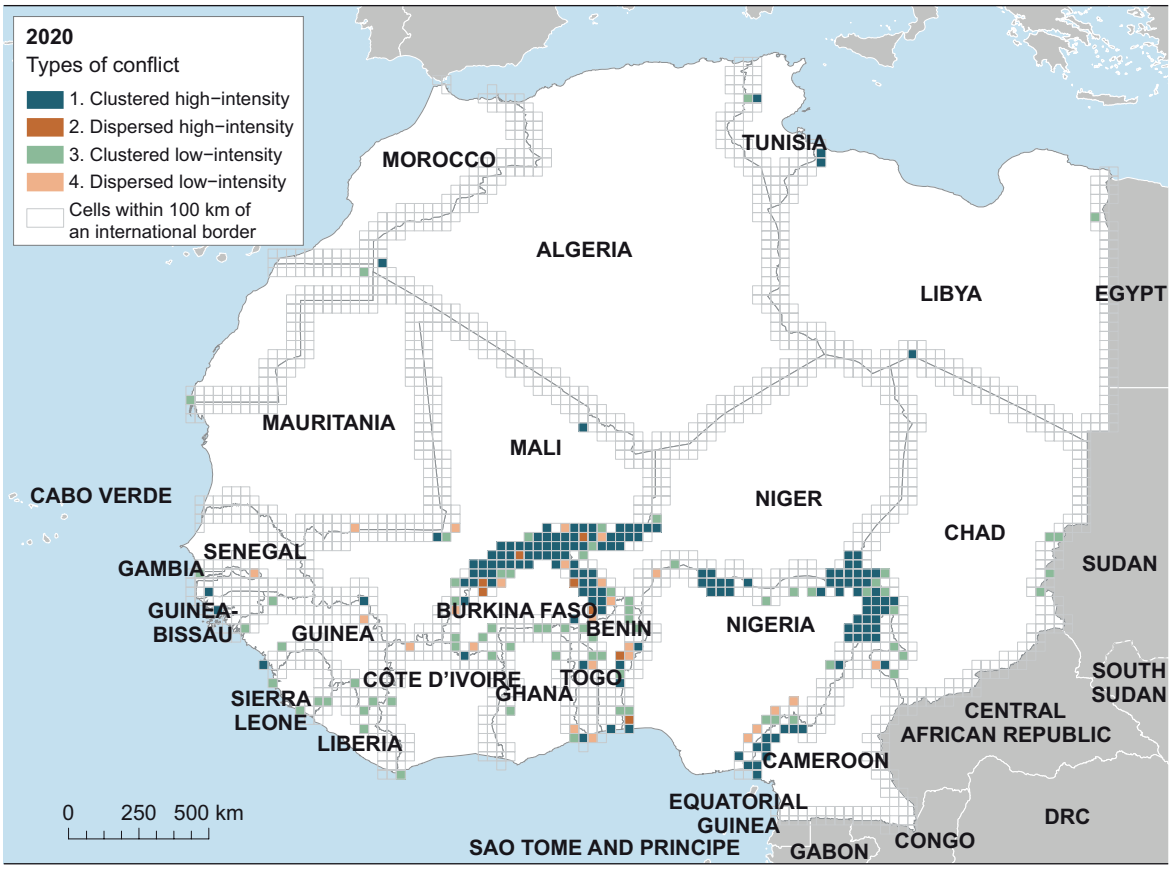
Border violence is very unevenly distributed across North and West Africa. Violent events and fatalities tend to cluster in specific regions that can become persistent hotspots of violence. These hotspots of violence can be revealed by the Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) specifically developed to measure the evolution of conflict over space and time (Chapter 3). After dividing the region into 6 540 identical "cells" of 50 by 50 kilometre, the SCDi identifies four types of conflict depending on the intensity and spatial distribution of violence in each cell. Conflicts can be intensifying locally if violence is intense and clustered (type 1), accelerating if violence is intense and dispersed (type 2), beginning or ending if violence is of low intensity and clustered (type 3), or lingering if the intensity and concentration of violence are low (type 4). The application of the SCDi to the region suggests that the four categories of conflict do not appear in the same proportion within borderlands as they do elsewhere: violence is more intense and more clustered in these regions than in the rest of North and West Africa.

Results shows that 30% of the cells of the region are within 100 kilometres of an international boundary and can be categorised as borderland cells. In 2020, 13% of these borderland cells were in conflict. Map 5.2, which shows the SCDi categories for borderland cells that experienced violence, highlights the recent decrease in violence in North Africa and the deepening violence in West Africa. Indeed, north of the Sahara, only eight borderland cells received a SCDi classification in 2020. The remaining 245 borderland cells with SCDi classifications were in West Africa. The map also highlights how crises in neighbouring states can become comingled in borderlands. For example, all of Nigeria's various sub-national conflicts are expressed in its borderlands, particularly around Lake Chad. The lingering Anglophone insurgency in Cameroon is also affecting the already violent southern Nigerian-Cameroonian border. In this case, two largely disconnected political issues are combining to jointly destabilise the borderlands on either side of the border.

Apart from Nigeria's troubles, the epicentre of borderland violence in West Africa is along the Malian-Burkina Faso-Niger tri-border region. Along Mali's eastern boundary, the cluster extends from the Malian border towns of Bénéna in the west to Andéramboukane in the east, a distance of more than 800 kilometres. The cluster also subsumes all the borderlands along the entire Burkina Faso-Niger boundary, a distance of just over 400 kilometres. Taken together, these borderland cells represent a conflict belt approximately 1 200 kilometres long and 200 kilometres wide. This represents a disturbing geographical thickening of violence in the region and speaks to how entrenched violence has become in these borderlands.

Map 5.2

Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) in border regions, 2020



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Borderlands are more prone to high-intensity violence

A comparison of the types of conflict by region offers some insight into the specificities of border areas. Table 5.1 shows that borderlands are more prone to clustered high-intensity forms of violence than are other regions (Type 1). Between 1997 and 2021, 53% of Type 1 conflicts were observed in border regions, compared with 49% elsewhere. In 2020 alone, this propensity for clustered high-intensity violence was more pronounced as these types of conflicts were observed 59% of the time. The number of regions characterised by a high intensity of dispersed events (Type 2) also increased in 2020.

Taken together, this analysis identifies that, both historically and recently, the proportional mix of SCDi types is notably different in border regions than within non-borderlands. That is to say that when violence occurs in borderlands, it is expressed differently than it is elsewhere and this difference is clearly observable in 2020 (Figure 5.7).

The increased frequency of high-intensity violence in general and clustered high-intensity specifically, is worrisome when considering the SCDi's insights about the life cycle of violence. For example, Type 1 cells tend to represent a conflict in the middle of its life cycle, instead of its beginning or ending (Walther et al., 2021[2]). The fact that borderlands have more of these types of cells than would be expected points to the potential for violence to endure in these regions for some time to come.

Table 5.1

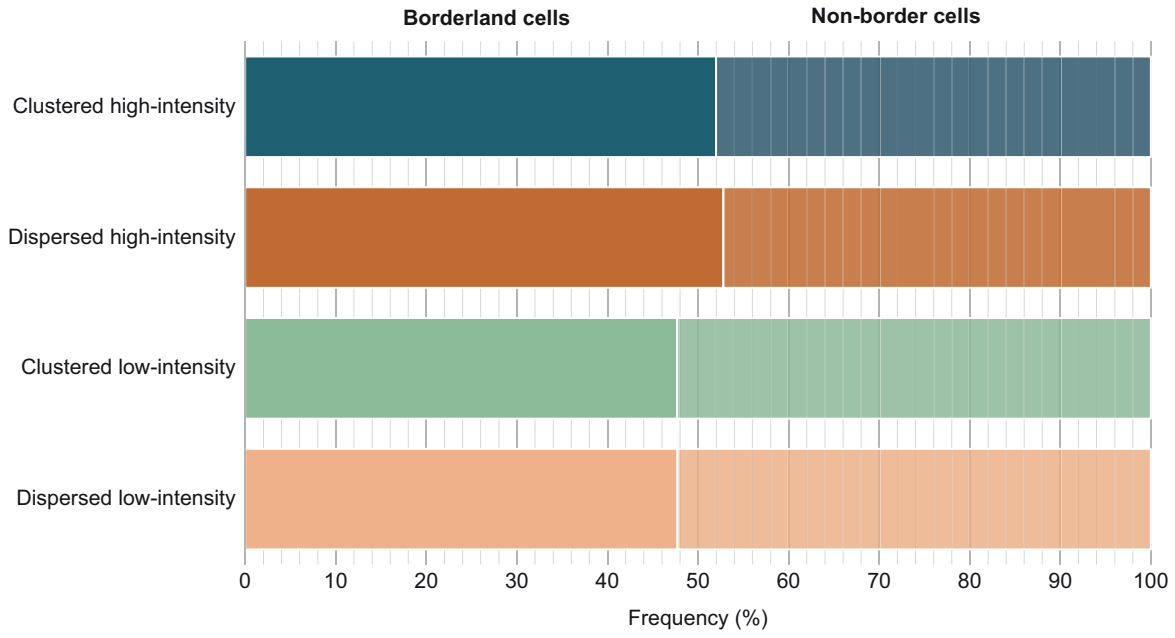
Proportion of conflicts in borderland and non-borderland cells, 2020 and 1997-2021

	2020		1997-2021	
	Borderlands	**Other**	**Borderlands**	**Other**
Type 1. Clustered high-intensity	58.5%	51.3%	52.8%	48.8%
Type 2. Dispersed high-intensity	4.2%	3.2%	2.7%	2.4%
Type 3. Clustered low-intensity	27.4%	33.0%	34.8%	38.2%
Type 4. Dispersed low-intensity	9.9%	12.5%	9.7%	10.6%
Total	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. Data available through 30 June 2021. ACLED data is publicly available.

Figure 5.7

Conflict type in border regions and other regions, 2020



Source: Authors based on ACLED data (2021[1]). ACLED data is publicly available.

BORDERLANDS, STATES AND VIOLENT EXTREMIST ORGANISATIONS

The concentration of violent events and fatalities in a border region is partially explained by a state's capacities and practices towards its borders, which can create historical and geographic contexts under which borderlands can become central to political violence. In border regions where state power is elusive, for example, secessionist movements challenging the authority of the central government can emerge more easily than elsewhere in the country. While borders are crucial to the project of establishing and maintaining political power in general, this study shows that not all borders are always "sites of struggle". Violence is usually concentrated along certain segments of borders, and at certain points in time, as in the Central Sahel today.

Drawing on these arguments meaningfully puts the focus of explanation on what borders are, what purposes they serve politically, and why one border region might yield more violence than others. This section shows that the drivers of political violence in borderlands are heavily

dependent on the social and political context of each region. In addition to a state's ability to counter external threats, the concentration of violent events along certain segments of borders is explained by the local strategies of non-state actors, who use borderlands to conduct their attacks and mobilise the civilian population. The section focuses on several violent extremist organisations and rebel groups that have successfully exploited border regions to expand their activities, and examines the social and political factors that make these regions a worrying source of political disorder[2].

Regional expansion of jihadist armed groups

The regional expansion of jihadist groups in North and West Africa started in the 1990s, amid the Algerian civil war (1991-2002). Algerian jihadists began to cross and exploit borders in various ways. The most prominent Algerian jihadist group of the early to mid-1990s, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), received delegations from Libya, incorporated some Tunisians, and had a network of rhetorical and material supporters in Europe (Zelin, 2020[3]). Yet the GIA's brutality, including its murders of some Libyan fighters, prompted backlash from other jihadists around the world, contributing to the movement's relative isolation by the mid-1990s.

The southward expansion of Algerian jihadists was primarily conducted by the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), a GIA offshoot more deeply involved in cross-border activity. In the 2000s, GSPC field commanders became central actors in a Saharan kidnapping economy that targeted Westerners in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Tunisia. These field commanders included Mokhtar Belmokhtar as well as figures such as Amari Saifi or "El Para," Abd al-Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2013), and Yahya Abu al-Hammam (d. 2019). Saifi was captured in 2004 after the GSPC's first major kidnapping of Westerners, but the others remained major operators in the Sahara and engaged in kidnappings, raids, smuggling activities, and local politics. These forays into the Sahara were built on longstanding patterns of cross-border trade and smuggling (Scheele, 2012[4]).

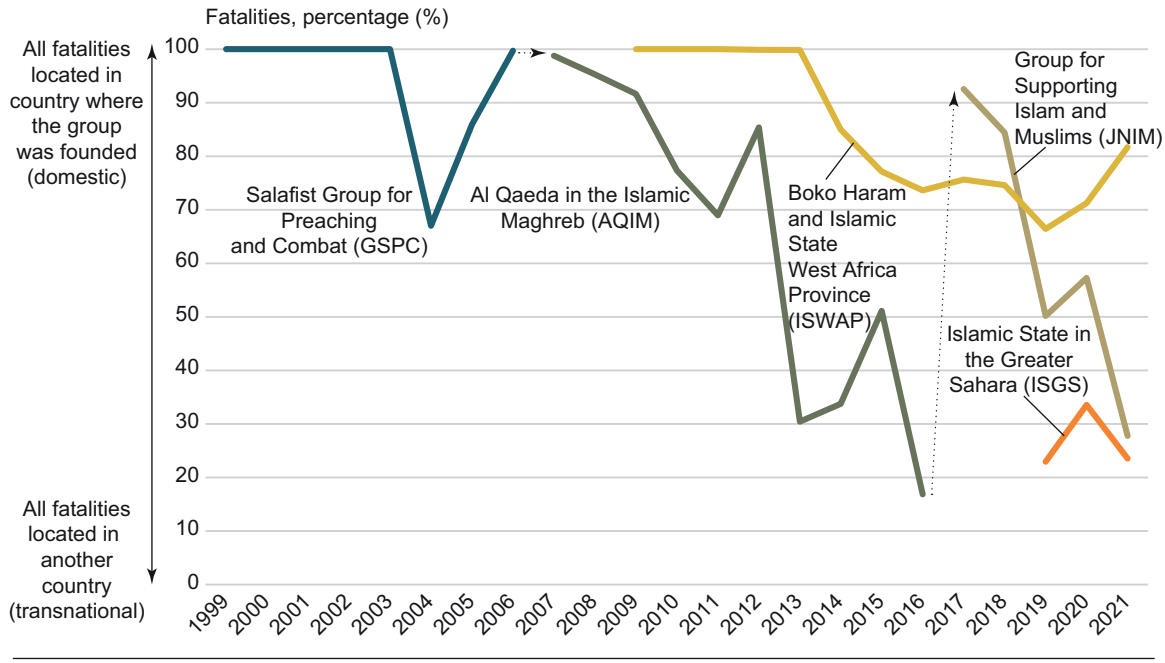
By the time GSPC rebranded as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2007, the organisation was well on its way to being a trans-Saharan force. Indeed, its centre of gravity was beginning to shift to Mali rather than its native Algeria. Belmokhtar, Abu Zayd, and others were key players in the jihadist takeover of Mali in 2012-13. That episode thrust AQIM and its offshoot the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) into the political spotlight in Mali. It also featured jihadists' own exploratory efforts at border-drawing, as they carved out a short-lived "Islamic Emirate of Azawad."

Al Qaeda's move from Algeria to the Sahara-Sahel is clearly visible on Figure 5.8, which represents the proportion of fatalities involving the GSPC, AQIM, and the Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims (JNIM) according to whether they occurred in the country where the group was founded or in another country from 1999-2021. For the sake of simplicity, attacks conducted by GSPC and AQIM in Algeria, and by JNIM and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) in Mali, are considered "domestic", even though ISGS might be considered equally at home in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The figure confirms that the proportion of domestic fatalities declined as GSPC became AQIM and extended its operations in the Sahel, from nearly 100% in 2006 to less than 20% in the mid-2010s. In 2017, the formation of JNIM was marked by an increase in domestic attacks – this time in Mali – followed by another regionalisation as JNIM extended its operations into Burkina Faso. The proportion of fatalities involving JNIM outside of Mali exceeds 70% in 2021.

This transnational expansion contrasts with the recent evolution of Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), who have remained primarily focused on northern Nigeria, despite an increase in international attacks in the mid-2010s. In 2019, the decision of the Nigerian military to concentrate its forces in fortified camps has led to an increase in the proportion of attacks conducted in Nigeria, which is considered the "home country" of both Boko Haram and ISWAP in this figure. More than 80% of the fatalities involving Boko Haram and ISWAP are located in Nigeria in 2021.

Figure 5.8

Fatalities by group and by home country, 1999-2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. Data available through 30 June 2021. ACLED data is publicly available.

Lack of co-ordinated responses to transnational jihadists

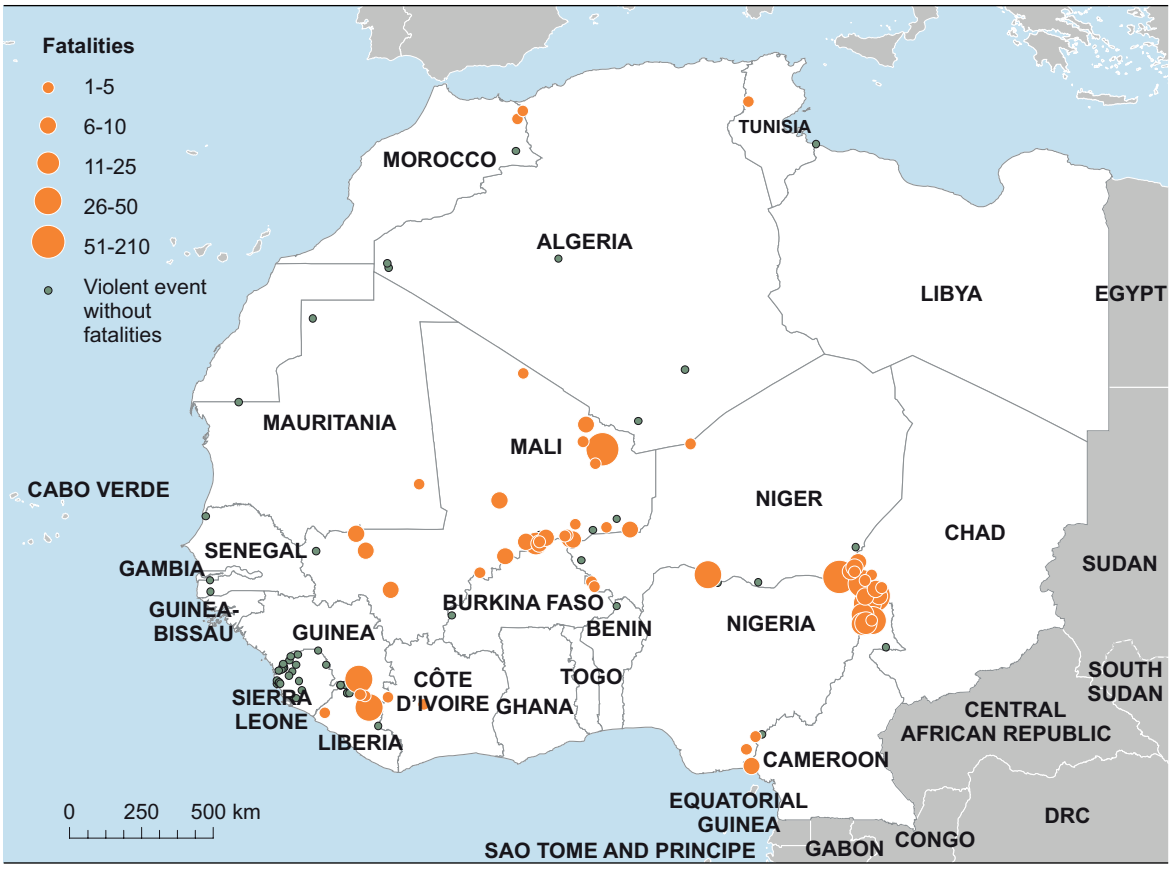
Despite numerous "Sahel strategies" that emphasised the need for a regional response, North and West African states responded to this regionalisation of violence in dispersed order (Walther and Retaillé, 2021[5]). At the regional level, violent events during which military and police forces intervened in another country represent less than 2% of all events in which government forces are involved from 1997-2021 (253 out of 14 049). While all countries have intervened at least once in another country, except for Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Togo, the fatalities resulting from these events are clustered in a handful of countries: Guinea, Mali, and Nigeria (Map 5.3). In the 1990s, much of the foreign military interventions targeted Sierra Leone (1990-99), Liberia (1997-99) and Guinea-Bissau (1999) under the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). In recent years, the vast majority of the victims of foreign military interventions are related to Operation Serval and Barkhane in the Central Sahel since 2014 and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) established by Nigeria and its neighbours around Lake Chad since 2015 (OECD/SWAC, 2020[6]). Map 5.3 confirms that most fatalities involving state forces in another country are located in border regions, for example between Liberia and Guinea, Nigeria and Cameroon, or Mali and Burkina Faso. In some instances, a country will seem to deliberately pull away from a strategy of cross-border interventions. Mauritania, for example, conducted raids on Malian territory in 2010 and 2011, then stopped and instead militarised the border zone in a more defensive way.

Violent extremist organisations exploited the lack of co-ordination by expanding or relocating to countries where the political will and military means to counter them was the weakest (Walther and Miles, 2018[7]). In some countries, jihadist organisations benefited from the loosening of border controls, while in other settings their ambitions were curtailed by a militarisation of borders.

North of the Sahara, AQIM benefited from the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya in 2011 following the Arab Spring. Some AQIM commanders such as Belmokhtar, who may have

Map 5.3

Fatalities resulting from an event involving state forces in another country, 1997-2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. Data available through 30 June 2021. ACLED data is publicly available.

been killed in a French airstrike in Libya in 2016, crossed multiple times into Libya, seeking allies, training opportunities, and profits. AQIM's presence in Libya, however, did not take on the formalised, territorial character that the Islamic State's affiliates pursued there, especially during the peak of Islamic State activity in Libya from 2014 to 2016. Indeed, determining who really counted as AQIM could be difficult amid the fluidity of Libyan militias' and conflict entrepreneurs' alliances and mutual recriminations (Topol, 2014[8]; Thurston, 2017[9]). Nonetheless, AQIM's presence remained limited outside of Libya apart from a small AQIM-sponsored terrorist unit in Tunisia, Katibat Uqba bin Nafi, named for an early Arab Muslim conqueror (Zelin, 2020[3]). In Morocco, intensive surveillance, as well as complex policies of religious regulation, appear to have limited the ability of militants to conduct attacks on Moroccan soil, despite a few attacks conducted there by Salafi-jihadists between 2003 and 2011 (Wainscott, 2017[10]), and a relatively large number of Moroccans who travelled to Syria to fight (Sterman and Rosenblatt, 2018[11]).

South of the Sahara, Mauritania initially seemed an attractive target for the GSPC/AQIM. The country was the site of the group's first major raid outside Algeria, as well as the site of key bombings in 2008, well before major attacks in Mali or Niger began. Yet the amateurish, AQIM-backed local Mauritanian cells faltered amid arrests of their leaders and fighters, and AQIM field commanders began to look for rising opportunities in Mali. Meanwhile, Mauritanian authorities pursued a carrot-and-stick approach, releasing some suspected jihadists under surveillance while detaining the uncompromising hardliners (Thurston, 2020[12]). As part of this strategy, Mauritania heavily militarised its border with Mali and has been relatively free of cross-border jihadist attacks for almost a decade.

Further east, the Mali-Algeria border has remained more open to AQIM, even after the French-led intervention against jihadists in northern Mali in 2013. Since that time, the French and others have prioritised tracking and killing AQIM leaders, and have had some major successes, including killing Abu Zayd in 2013, Abu al-Hammam in 2019, and AQIM's overall emir, Abdelmalek Droukdel, in 2020. Droukdel was found in part because he dared to travel from Algeria to northern Mali, where he was traced and ambushed by the French. Yet the Mali-Algeria border remains a resource for AQIM and its subsidiary the JNIM, founded in 2017. JNIM's leader and a long-time partner of AQIM, the Malian national Iyad Ag Ghaly, may spend significant time in southern Algeria, even as some of his lieutenants have been killed in French raids in far northern Mali. Other Saharan jihadists have taken advantage of the border by crossing it to surrender to Algerian authorities (RFI, 2018[13]).

Another key border for JNIM is the Mali-Burkina Faso border. JNIM is a coalition, and much of its expansion has been driven by one of its coalition members, Katibat Macina. Katibat Macina, led by the preacher-turned-jihadist Amadou Kouffa, operates in central Mali and along the Burkina Faso border. An associate of Kouffa's, the Burkinabè national Ibrahim Dicko, founded a group called Ansaroul Islam (Defenders of Islam) that launched a serious insurgency in northern Burkina Faso in 2016. Although Dicko was killed in 2017, the group lived on, and its partial absorption into JNIM helped the latter become a significant player in the Burkinabè insurgency. The causes of this violence are multiple: localised social tensions in northern Burkina Faso, the heavy-handed security crackdown against the initial violence, the spread of ethnic tensions and civilian vigilantism amid jihadist attacks, and the competition between jihadists and other armed actors to control artisanal gold mining (ICG, 2017[14]). Yet cross-border movement is one element, and various commonalities link central Mali and northern Burkina Faso, including the cross-border presence of the Fulani ethnic group.

The rise of Katibat Macina, Ansaroul Islam, and JNIM have placed the Fulani in a complex position. On the one hand, jihadists have recruited heavily amid their ranks and proclaimed themselves defenders of the Fulani (both Kouffa and Dicko are or were Fulani). On the other hand, other actors' perceptions of the Fulani as jihadists or crypto-jihadists has led to collective punishment, by state and non-state actors, against Fulani non-combatants (Pflaum, 2021[15]). Real differences between the conflicts in Mali and Burkina Faso persist, and there is significant variation in conflict dynamics from one locality to another even within the same administrative district (Walther et al., 2021[2]). However, there is no question that the ability to win allies and recruits in Burkina Faso has bolstered JNIM's power as not just a Malian but also a Sahelian entity.

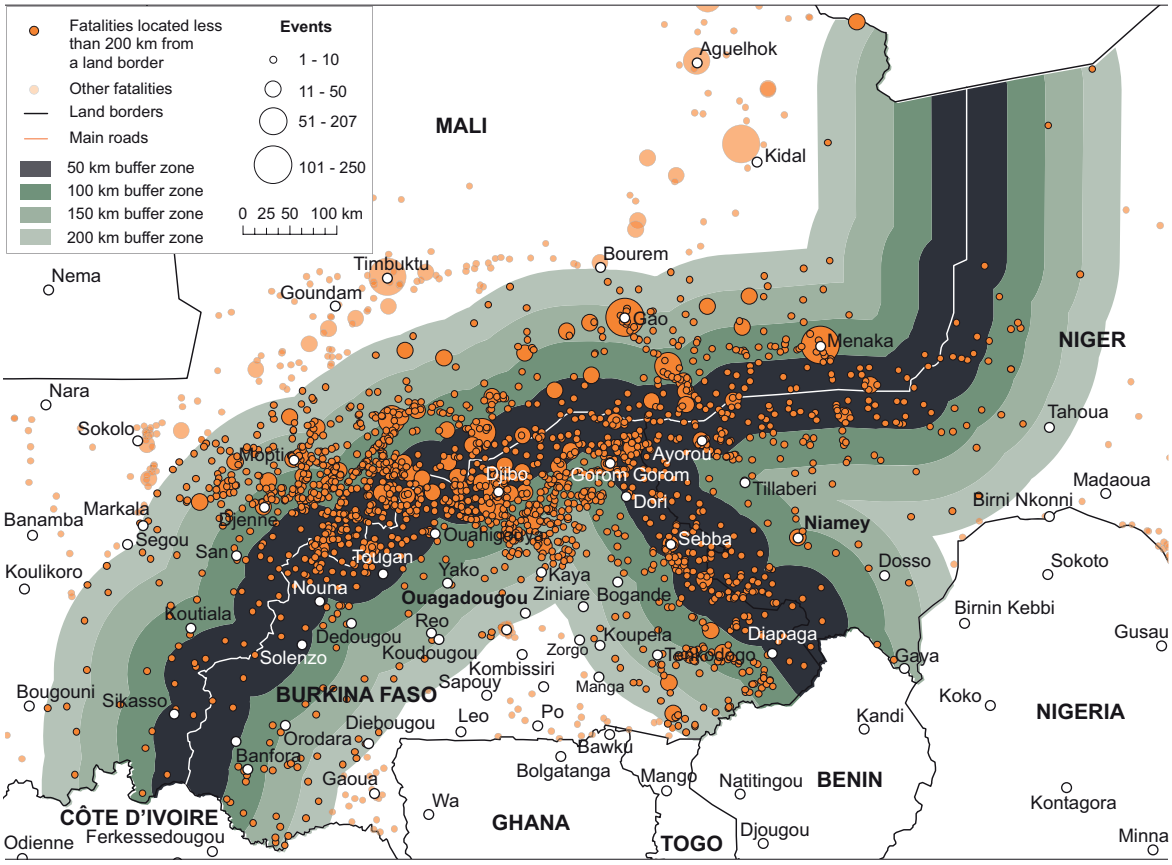
JNIM's expansion has also raised the possibility that the group will cross other borders, namely the Mali-Senegal border and the borders between southern Mali, southwestern Burkina Faso, and northern Côte d'Ivoire. JNIM units are reportedly present throughout this area, and sporadic attacks on the state security forces in Côte d'Ivoire in 2020 and 2021 have been attributed to JNIM. Côte d'Ivoire is familiar with AQIM and its offshoots — AQIM perpetrated a major terrorist attack at an Ivoirian resort in 2016 — but a sustained JNIM presence in northern Côte d'Ivoire would be a watershed development for the country. Joint Ivoirian-Burkinabè efforts to secure the border initially constrained jihadists' freedom of movement and operations there (Nsaibia, 2020[16]), although crackdowns can also trigger reprisals from JNIM. The coastal West African states have, on paper, mechanisms such as the Accra Initiative, a co-operation, training, and intelligence-sharing agreement covering Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo. Yet JNIM's expansion will test the efficacy of such frameworks.

Transnational jihadism in the Central Sahel

In 2015, ISGS formed as a breakaway faction of Al-Mourabitoun (The Sentinels), itself at that time an estranged faction of AQIM. ISGS' top leaders have been Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi (killed in 2021) and Abd al-Hakim al-Sahrawi

Map 5.4

Fatalities between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, 1997-2021



Note: Data available through 30 June 2021.

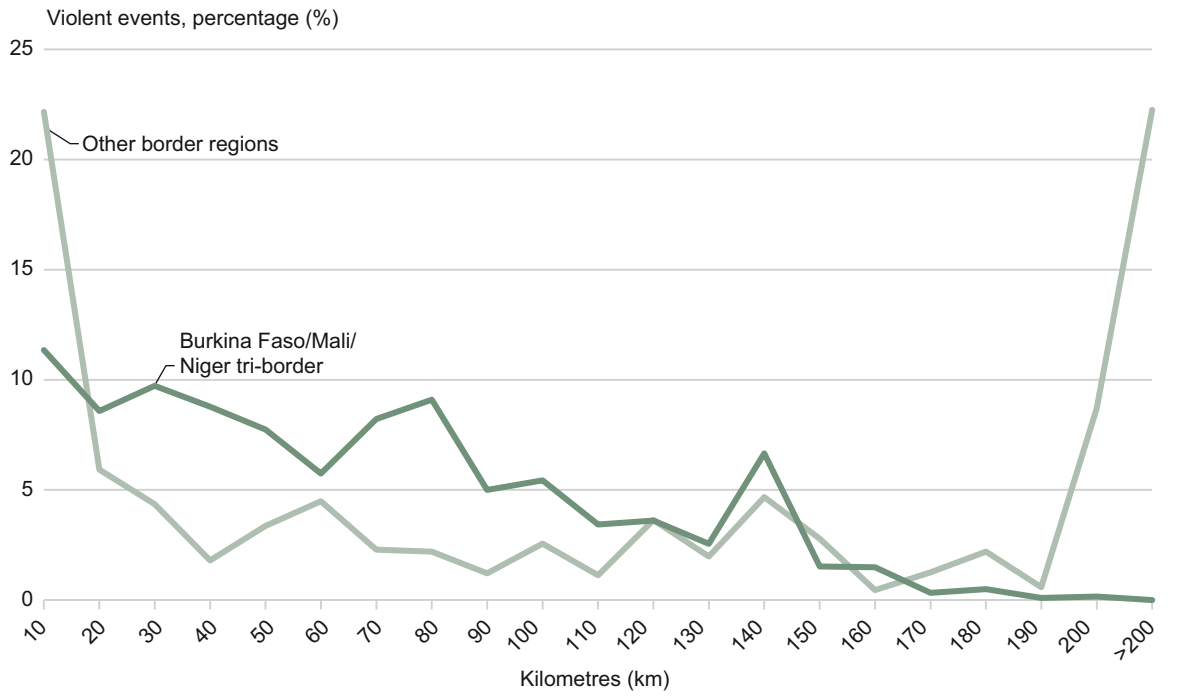
Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

(possibly killed in 2020). In recent years, ISGS has based itself in the tri-border region of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger (Le Roux, 2019[17]; OECD/SWAC, 2020[6]). Administratively, ISGS falls under ISWAP, but it appears to be mostly operationally distinct from the Boko Haram offshoot commonly referred to as ISWAP, which operates around the Lake Chad Basin. ISGS operates largely as an extortionist force in a border region, akin to bandits. It simultaneously offers protection to some mobile and/or border communities and perpetrates periodic terrorist attacks on Westerners and other high-profile targets. Today, the borderlands between Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger are one of the most violent regions of North and West Africa (Map 5.4). For instance, since the emergence of ISGS in 2015, nearly half of all the violent events in this region (48%) have occurred within 50 kilometres of the tri-borders.

The presence of ISGS along the tri-border serves to differentiate these borderlands from others in all three of these states. Figure 5.9 compares the percentage of violent events that are within 200 kilometres of the tri-border region with borderlands elsewhere in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. In both categories, violence is highest near a border but there are also important differences. Interestingly, the non-tri-border borderlands display a steep distance decay effect within 20 kilometres of a border and are largely invariant to distance beyond that. The distance effect in the tri-border region is much more gradual with violence occurring between 5 and 10% of all events through 80 kilometres from the border, four times further out than found in the other borderlands. This points to at least two possible typologies of border-distance violence relationships: events that cleave closely

Figure 5.9

Violent events by distance in the Liptako Gourma and other border regions, 1997-2021



Note: Data available through 30 June 2021.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[11]). ACLED data is publicly available.

to borders and those that permeate borderlands much further away from the border.

The tri-border zone itself has some features that make it particularly amenable to tenacious insurgencies. Many parts of the zone are far from their respective national capitals; the Malian town of Ménaka, for example, is approximately 1 500 kilometres from Bamako, while the eastern Burkinabè flashpoint of Tanwalbougou is approximately 270 kilometres from Ouagadougou. The distances in western Niger are smaller, but can still be significant: it is 200 kilometres from Niamey to the conflict hotspot of Ayorou, for example. In this region as in the rest of West Africa, poor road quality compounds the effects of physical distance (Walther et al., 2020[18]).

ISGS also benefited from pre-existing networks in the region. Prior to the internal split within Al-Mourabitoun, that faction and its leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar had long experience conducting attacks, recruitment, and operations in the Gao Region of Mali and across the border into Niger. Even before the formation of Al-Mourabitoun, Belmokhtar and Abu Walid al-Sahrawi were close to another AQIM splinter group, the MUJAO, which was the dominant jihadist faction in Gao during the 2012-13 jihadist takeover of northern Mali. MUJAO later fused with Belmokhtar's unit to form Al-Mourabitoun. Al-Sahrawi thus inherited fighters with deep experience in a border region of Mali and with experience conducting attacks in Niger and to a lesser extent in Burkina Faso. At the time that al-Sahrawi pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015, his unit had recently kidnapped a Romanian national at a mining site in Burkina Faso. ISGS found itself first compromising and later clashing with JNIM, who has particular strength in northern Mali, central Mali, and northern Burkina Faso. Accommodation between JNIM and ISGS led to a very loose division of territory that saw ISGS operate mostly to the east of JNIM zones. Even after accommodation between JNIM and ISGS broke down in 2019, ISGS peeled off some JNIM defectors but did not ultimately wrest many territories from JNIM (Nsaibia and Weiss, 2020[19]).

Deep historical patterns of trade, exchange, and pastoralism connect the border zones of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. ISGS thus operates in an area where many of its own recruits, as well as many of its armed civilian enemies as well as surrounding non-combatants, are deeply plugged into cross-border networks and are accustomed to moving across borders. ISGS' activities, however, have also disrupted older patterns of commerce and have displaced people across borders, for example from Mali into Niger. In Burkina Faso's Est Region, ISGS found opportunities for political sway and support by controlling artisanal gold mining sites and reopening hunting grounds where the Burkinabè state had restricted residents' access; these actions reflect broader patterns of Sahelian jihadists targeting gold mines (Lewis and McNeill, 2019[20]).

The tri-border zone is also home to many ethnic groups that are minorities within their respective countries. The Fulani number in the tens of millions, for example, but their numbers are spread out across West and Central Africa, meaning that they account for only 13% of the population of Mali and less than 10% of the population of Burkina Faso and Niger. The Tuareg, similarly, comprise only 11% of Niger's population and less than 2% of the populations of both Mali and Burkina Faso (CIA, 2021[21]). This dynamic does not automatically mean that governments are hostile to ethnic minorities, but ethnic and linguistic differences can complicate counterinsurgency by erecting communication and cultural barriers between soldiers and civilians, and by reinforcing the tendencies toward ethnic profiling and collective punishment that have marked counterinsurgency efforts throughout the Central Sahel.

Violent extremist organisations such as ISGS tapped into inter-ethnic tensions within the region that themselves reflect competition over land, herding rights, and mobility, including across borders. The most often-cited example relevant to ISGS is the ways in which conflicts between Nigerien Fulani and Malian Tuareg, dating to the 1970s, led some Fulani to seek protection by ISGS (Zandonini, 2019[22]). In Niger's Tillabéri Region, ISGS recruited among Fulani herders and villagers, offering them protection and enrichment (Bøås, Cissé and Mahamane, 2020[23]). Over time, ISGS' extortion and predation has elevated inter-communal tensions, which reinforces some recruits' ties to ISGS but also hardens some ethnic groups' opposition and resistance to the group, particularly among the Zarma. As the jihadist insurgency spread throughout different parts of the tri-border zone, moreover, the salience of ethnicity increased in many localities, with the Fulani as a whole increasingly stereotyped by state security forces, other ethnic groups and non-state armed groups as terrorists. The ethnicisation of conflict in Tillabéri parallels dynamics that were visible earlier with and around JNIM in central Mali and northern Burkina Faso.

Finally, counterterrorism operations and the mobilisation of ethnically tinged militias helped to push ISGS around within the tri-border zone. Between its formation in 2015 and 2020, ISGS steadily became a greater priority for France, the primary Western security actor in the Sahel. One key turning point was the 2017 ISGS ambush against an American-Nigerien patrol in Tongo Tongo near Tillabéri. In 2018, France's Operation Barkhane partnered with two northern Malian militias, the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA) and the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) to fight ISGS, especially in the Gao and Ménaka regions of Mali (Nsaibia, 2018[24]). That operation had the unintended consequence of pushing ISGS more into eastern Burkina Faso, which in turn led to the outbreak of a serious insurgency there. By the January 2020 G5 Sahel security summit in the French town of Pau, ISGS was enemy number one for France and the Sahelian states. Yet ISGS's ability to move within the tri-border zone has made it very difficult to eliminate, even as French strikes have removed many of the group's leaders.

As the wider Sahel conflict expands, ISGS could spread across other borders as well, namely the Niger-Nigeria border and the Burkina Faso-Benin border. One of ISGS' most infamous attacks, targeting a group of vacationing French and Nigerien aid workers, occurred in the Kouré giraffe preserve to the southeast of Niamey, not far from the border with Nigeria. There are concerns about an ISGS presence, as

well as wider patterns of banditry and Fulani armed communal mobilisation, in southwestern Nigerien border areas such as Dosso and Maradi (ICG, 2021[25]). Given the presence of substantial banditry and organised crime across the border in north-western Nigeria, further ISGS expansion into south-western Niger would have regional ramifications. The presence of ISGS in south-western Niger and eastern Burkina Faso (along with the JNIM presence in the latter as well) also poses a serious threat to northern Benin, where one major kidnapping already occurred in 2019 and where there is a reported presence of several jihadist cells as of 2021 (de Bruijne, 2021[26]).

Transnational jihadism around Lake Chad

The Lake Chad region has become a major epicentre of border violence in the region since the launch of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2009. Boko Haram is a jihadist organisation whose exonym translates as "Western education/culture is forbidden under Islamic law". Formally known as Jama'at Ahl al-Sunna li-l-Da'wa wa-l-Jihad (the Group of Prophet Followers Who Preach and Fight), the organisation was formed in the early 2000s in Nigeria, with the north-eastern city of Maiduguri in Borno State as its base. Maiduguri's relative geographical location, as well as the evolution of the conflict involving Boko Haram and its offshoots, contributed to the regionalisation of militant violence and recruitment from an early point.

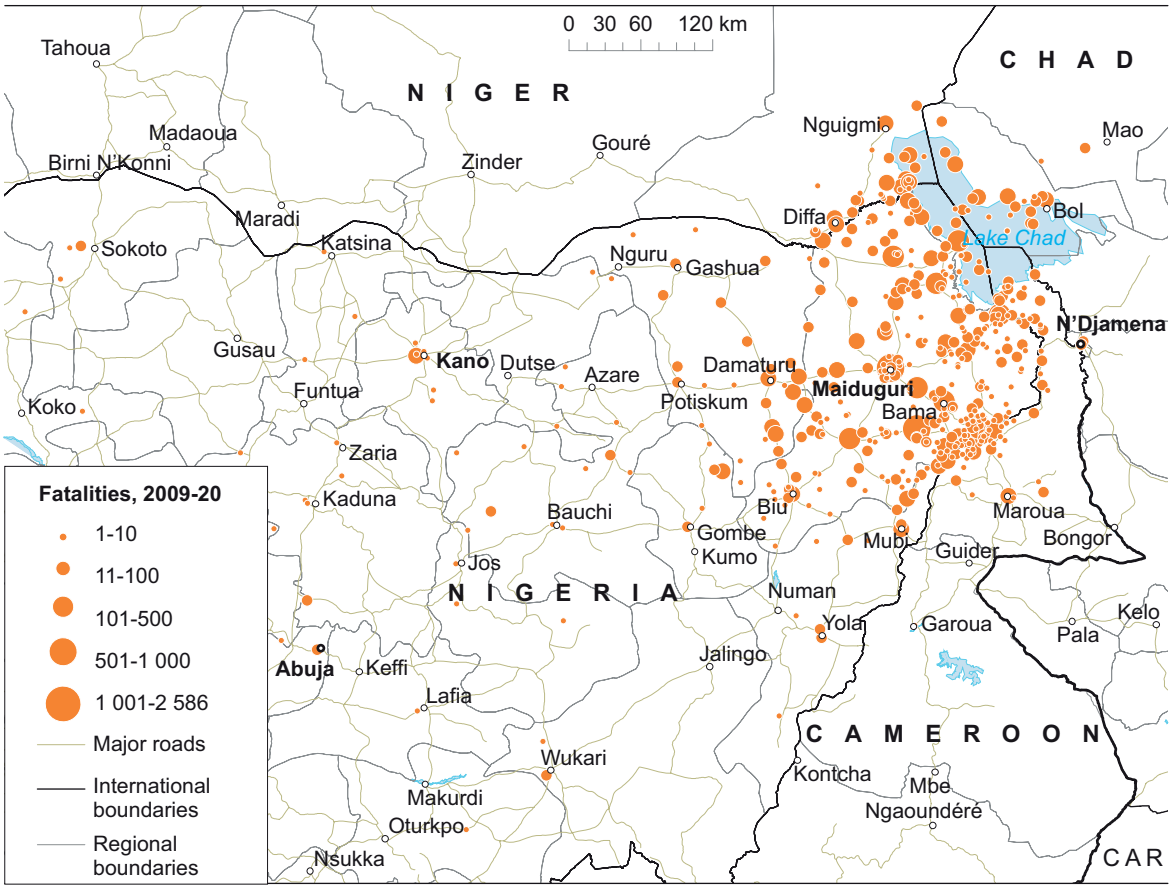
Borno State, as well as neighbouring Yobe and Adamawa states, have long-standing political, economic, cultural, religious, and linguistic ties to nearby areas in the Lake Chad Basin (Hiribarren, 2017[27]). In precolonial times, major polities such as Kanem-Bornu and the Sokoto Caliphate (including its Adamawa Emirate) crossed what are now international borders between Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. Colonial and postcolonial boundary-making has not erased the deep ties connecting ethnic groups such as the Kanuri and the Fulani in the region. While the Kanuri are the dominant ethnic group in Borno and Yobe, and numerous in Niger's Diffa region, the Fulani are a major ethnic group in Adamawa, in northern Cameroon, and across much of northern Nigeria and the wider Sahel. Boundary-making has also not cut off deep the trade ties connecting Maiduguri to many other markets in the Lake Chad Basin and beyond.

Boko Haram's initial recruitment base likely drew heavily on in-migrants to the city, and the founders themselves had itinerant biographies (Thurston, 2018[28]). Mobility, including in-country migration but also migration from around the Lake Chad Basin, was thus a core feature of the group from the beginning. The group's two most important leaders, Muhammad Yusuf (1970-2009) and Abubakar Shekau (d. 2021), were both from Yobe; another pivotal figure, Mamman Nur (d. 2018), was likely Cameroonian. While Nigerian Kanuri from Borno and Yobe have dominated the group's leadership, Boko Haram has remained open to other nationalities from the region, such as the field commander Mustapha Chadi of Chad (ISWAP, 2018[29]; U.S. Treasury Department, 2015[30]). Boko Haram also attracted recruits from Niger's Diffa region and other nearby zones prior to 2009, when the organisation launched what became a long-running insurgency against the Nigerian state.

After the 2009 uprising, Boko Haram sought more intensive ties with AQIM and with the Al Qaeda core, although the relationship proved rocky when Shekau bucked external efforts at control over his strategy and operations. Boko Haram's ties with AQIM involved training, finances, and correspondence, especially between late 2009 and 2011 (Al-Bulaydi, 2017[31]). The presence of Boko Haram fighters was also rumoured during the 2012-13 jihadist occupation of northern Mali, in which AQIM was a key player (Raghavan, 2013[32]). By 2013, Boko Haram's external jihadist relationships appeared to be slackening, but its mass violence was expanding. This intensification of the conflict came largely in response to heavy-handed Nigerian military operations as well as the rise of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), a government-backed vigilante force. The CJTF, whose members often had local contacts and intelligence that the Nigerian Army lacked, helped to dramatically curtail Boko Haram's presence within Maiduguri, but their activities produced a

Map 5.5

Fatalities involving Boko Haram, ISWAP and government forces, 2009-20



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2021[1]) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

concomitant escalation of the war outside the state capital (Higazi, 2015[33]). During this period, Boko Haram began to attack northern Cameroon as well, transitioning from a previously more passive presence that included recruitment, preaching, and rear-basing dating to 2011 or earlier.

Back in Nigeria, meanwhile, Boko Haram began to capture and overtly hold territory in summer 2014, carving out a "state" that included parts of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. Boko Haram's territorial venture alarmed Nigeria's neighbours, and Chad and Niger were drawn into greater conflict with Boko Haram in early 2015. A joint Chadian-Nigerien invasion chased Boko Haram out of various towns in north-eastern Nigeria and elicited numerous reprisals, including attacks in Diffa (Niger) and N'Djamena (Chad). Boko Haram units appeared to cross borders with relative ease and developed a substantial presence on the islands of Lake Chad and in other remote zones (Map 5.5). Border towns became recurring flashpoints, such as Gamboru and Ngala on the Nigeria-Cameroon border. In one analysis of data on attacks and clashes, the majority of Boko Haram activity was concerned in Borno and Yobe States, but some units appeared highly active along the Nigeria-Cameroon and Nigeria-Niger borders as well (Prieto Curiel, Walther and O'Clery, 2020[34]).

At the same time, borders somewhat constrained the Lake Chad states' responses to Boko Haram. Following the Chadian-Nigerien intervention of 2015, efforts to produce an integrated regional response proceeded through the reinvigoration of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) created in 1964 and the MNJTF, created in 1994. The MNJTF conducts some patrols and has its headquarters in N'Djamena, although it has mostly been

commanded by Nigerian officers. Yet for the most part, the states and militaries of the region continued to act in a parallel rather than fully integrated fashion. For example, Chad's Operation Boma (or Bohoma) Anger in 2020 received some Nigerian air support but was primarily carried out by the Chadian military (Eizenga, 2020[35]).

In addition to Abubakar Shekau's organisation, Boko Haram's key offshoots are the Defenders of Muslims in the Lands of the Blacks (Ansar al-Muslimin or Ansaru), and ISWAP. Ansar al-Muslimin officially launched in 2012 and has been overwhelmingly Nigeria-centric, although it has targeted Westerners and had close links to AQIM. The group had difficulty gaining traction, and some of its early actions led to the arrests of key leaders. ISWAP has been more consequential. During the period from March 2015 to summer 2016, Shekau's Boko Haram itself bore the name ISWAP after Shekau's own pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State. In August 2016, however, Islamic State media officially announced that a rival, Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi (one of Muhammad Yusuf's sons) had become the official governor of ISWAP. Shekau, despite continuing to affirm loyalty to the Islamic State, was sidelined and left with a minority of the group's fighters. Al-Barnawi's ISWAP eventually killed him in 2021.

ISWAP, like Shekau's faction, has had a regional presence around Lake Chad, although the heart of its operations remains Nigeria's Borno State. ISWAP has received fluctuating support from the central Islamic State and may have interacted with the Islamic State's branches in Libya (Foucher, 2020[36]). At the same time, ISWAP has continued to have heavily Nigerian leadership, especially after Mamman Nur (who had helped engineer the break between al-Barnawi and Shekau) was likely killed in an internal ISWAP dispute in 2018. ISWAP continues to conduct attacks in Nigeria's neighbours, including the Diffa region of Niger, but has not conclusively expanded beyond the core territories around Lake Chad where Boko Haram has operated since the beginnings of the insurgency.

The Boko Haram crisis also crosses borders through its humanitarian impacts. As of June 2021, internally displaced persons (IDPs) outnumbered refugees in all of the Lake Chad Basin countries except Niger (127 000 refugees and 105 000 IDPs). The epicentre of displacement, both internally and into neighbouring countries, has been north-eastern Nigeria, where there were 2.2 million IDPs as of June 2021 (UNHCR, 2021[37]).

Transnational conflicts in and around Chad

Since Chad became independent from France in 1960, the country has experienced instability on virtually all of its borders (see Box 4.1). In the East, Chad has been affected by the Darfur conflict involving the Sudanese government, the government-backed Janjaweed militias, and several rebel groups (Map 5.6). The conflict in Darfur is often dated to 2003, when rebel groups such as the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) began sustained attacks, but the conflict has a longer prehistory dating to at least the 1980s, involving tensions over land, water, ethnicity, and politics. Ethnic groups involved in the conflict include Arabs, Fur, and Zaghawa, — all communities that straddle the Sudan-Chad border (Flint and De Waal, 2008[38]). The Zaghawa are the group from which former President Idriss Déby (d. 2021) and many members of his inner circle hail.

Although Darfur was a key base for Déby during his own rebellion in 1989-90, the war there after 2003 exacerbated various problems for Chad, including cross-border attacks by the Janjaweed, inter-ethnic tensions in the eastern region, and the Sudanese and Chadian governments' support for rebels seeking to topple the other. Déby was accused of backing the Zaghawa-led JEM, while Sudan's al-Bashir was accused of supporting the United Front for Change (FUC), the Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD), and others. Déby faced dramatic rebellions in 2006 and 2008; both times, Darfur-based Chadian rebel groups reached N'Djamena and threatened the survival of the regime. In 2010, Déby and al-Bashir exchanged visits and pledged to stop supporting each other's enemies, which helped shore up Déby's power (Debos, 2016[39]). Violence

Map 5.6

Chad and its surrounding countries

Source: Olivier Walther for this publication.

continued in Darfur even after the Chad-Sudan rapprochement, however, with ongoing effects on displacement, farmer-herder violence, and inter-ethnic tensions in eastern Chad. Meanwhile, al-Bashir fell due to popular protests in 2019. The subsequent rise to power of former Janjaweed commander Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo or Hemedti has raised questions about whether Sudan's new rulers might seek to undermine Déby and his successors (ICG, 2019[40]).

During the 2010s, however, the main base for Chadian rebels became not Darfur but Libya. Déby opposed the 2011 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led intervention against Gaddafi and for the rest of his life blamed that decision for causing chaos in the Sahel. Given the trans-border presence of key ethnic groups such as the Tubu, who have historically supplied some of the leadership of Chadian rebel groups and have been major trans-Saharan traders (Brachet and Scheele, 2019[41]), Libya became a natural destination for northern Chadian dissidents. Haftar, who returned to Libya in 2011 and carved out a de facto polity for his forces in eastern Libya, gave intermittent support to some Chadian mercenaries and rebels (Tossell, 2020[42]). Major rebel incursions occurred in 2019 by the Union of Resistance Forces (URF) and in 2021 by the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), necessitating French airstrikes against rebels in 2019 and evoking Chadian military deployments both times. Rebels' survival, planning, and equipping has been aided by their access to Libya as a rear base (Walsh, 2021[43]). In 2018, Chad signed a border control agreement with Niger, Sudan, and Libya's Government of National Accord; in summer 2021, Mahamat Déby visited Sudan to, among other goals, attempt to revive that framework.

On its southern border, Chad has been accused of backing the Seleka, a rebel coalition from northern Central African Republic that formed in 2012 and overthrew the government of then-President François Bozizé in 2013. The Seleka formally disbanded in 2013 but "ex-Seleka" factions remain key actors in the Central African Republic's ongoing crisis. Central African Republic rebels and soldiers sometimes cross into Chad, and in 2021, there was a major diplomatic row following Central African Republic soldiers' attack on a Chadian border post.

BORDERLANDS ARE NOT ALWAYS THE SPATIAL EPICENTRES OF POLITICAL CONFLICT

The regional relationship between borders and violence is quite clear: borderlands experience high levels of violence and violence tends to decrease as distance from international borders increases. This is true in the region in aggregate despite the fact that the relationship is also highly variable spatially, both among countries and within them. For example, violence is more frequent near borders in some of the states that are currently exhibiting high levels of conflict, such as Burkina Faso and Niger. However, for other countries also currently mired in conflict, such as Mali, Nigeria, and Libya the effect is less pronounced. This points toward the idea that borderlands are not always the spatial epicentres of political conflicts. Indeed, in some circumstances, such as when conflict takes on an urban dimension or is focused upon the control of capitals, violence is observed at much higher rates further from the border than might be suggested by the relationship observed at the regional level.

The study suggests that these border violence patterns can be explained in part by the choices of violent extremist organisations to use borderlands to avoid state forces and to seek recruits from restive or marginalised border populations (see Chapter 2). The relocation of AQIM from Algeria to the Sahel, the opportunistic move of Boko Haram from Borno State to neighbouring states, or the more recent shift from Mali to Burkina Faso of ISGS confirm that transnational armed groups relocate to areas where the government is unwilling and/or unable to counter them (Arsenault and Bacon, 2015[44]). Violent extremist organisations also use borderlands to recruit,

train and expand their operations internationally where they can benefit from social networks established in previous waves of the conflict (Walther, Radil and Russell, 2021[45]).

In the Liptako Gourma, for example, ISGS has exploited existing networks and local grievances left unaddressed by the government to present themselves as the defenders of marginalised communities, including pastoral groups. Their expansion was greatly facilitated by the relative absence of state services, confirming the general argument that porous borders contribute to jihadists' survival and success. In many respects, AQIM and ISGS appear as the most transnational of the various armed extremist groups of the region and the most willing to challenge the informal arrangements established since colonial times between national elites and border populations.

Around Lake Chad, Boko Haram and ISWAP have also shown great ability to cross borders, seek shelter, tap new recruits, and find alternative supply lines that appear linked to the groups' remarkable tenacity. This was particularly evident in the aftermath of the 2009 Boko Haram uprising, during the movement's adaptation to the CJTF's rise in 2013, and after the 2015 Chadian-Nigerien campaign. In other ways, however, Boko Haram and ISWAP have remained deeply parochial movements. Their expansion into border areas of Niger and Cameroon has not been followed by systematic expansion into other parts of those countries, much less into nearby countries such as the Central African Republic. Boko Haram and ISWAP are most comfortable in border zones, rather than in the interior of countries, including Nigeria. Despite some of Boko Haram's most famous attacks occurring outside of the greater Lake Chad Basin, such as two major bombings in Nigeria's capital in 2011, the insurgency has always gravitated back to its borderland birthplace.

Given that a presence in borderlands can offer violent extremist groups easy access to either side of a border, states often find themselves in the difficult position of choosing how to counter them. Some governments in the region have shown a willingness to engage in cross-border extra-territorial attacks against extremist groups in neighbouring states. In some cases, government forces operate in formal regional partnerships, such as the ECOMOG, CJTF, MNJTF, or the G5 Sahel, while in others, governments pursue these efforts unilaterally. In both circumstances, such extra-territorial events initiated by governments should be expected to cleave closely to borders for a variety of reasons, such as concerns about straining international norms about state sovereignty or disrupting relationships with neighbouring states. This would limit the impact of such efforts to borderlands and undoubtedly contributes to the higher rates of violence along some borderlands, such as between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, and in the Lake Chad region.

Given that these patterns are the result of the interaction of states and their challengers in the region, it is meaningful to recognise that borderlands are not inherently violent spaces or that borderlanders are somehow destined to be either continually victims or sources of violence. For example, this analysis shows that only at very short distances (20 kilometres or less from a border) do violent events occur at a much higher rate than would be expected. Beyond 20 kilometres, borderlands in aggregate appear similar to non-borderlands and many borderlands exhibit no violence to speak of at all. Further, this analysis shows that the overall regional relationship is also highly variable over time and exhibits an episodic nature as violence ebbs and flows over time.

Taken together, this analysis highlights that nothing about border violence is inevitable and that the current conditions, as dire as they are in many borderlands, can be improved. Governments, international and non-governmental organisations, and civil society groups all have roles to play in deescalating violence and countering the appeal of extremist groups to borderlanders.

Notes

1 This section builds on Radil et al. (2021[46]).

2 This section builds on an original draft by Alexander Thurston.

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Chapter 6

Reducing violence in African borderlands: Policy perspectives

This chapter includes the views of experts and prominent figures involved at several levels in security and development issues within the region, on the transnational nature of violence in North and West Africa and its impact on policies. The deterioration in security is not limited solely to terrorist and jihadist phenomenon, but also reflects the emergence or re-emergence of community conflicts, insurgencies and the multiplication of militias with varying motives. This poses new challenges for states and partners. To cope with this worrying situation, the contributors to this chapter emphasise the need to reduce social and economic disparities between territories, helping to restore the legitimacy of the state and public authorities. Territorial continuity can be achieved through greater social cohesion between populations and states, by ensuring the informational continuity between border areas and the capitals, and through the continuity of socio-economic activity. Communities, local and national authorities, regional institutions, and development partners should redouble their co-ordination efforts to improve security notably in the Sahelian borderlands and to enable a sustainable pathway to transformative development in agriculture.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Growing insecurity in the Sahel over the past 15 years resulting from the actions of terrorist groups, further highlights the internal and social fragilities of states and societies.**
- **The importance of a "civilian and political surge" that focuses on long-term sustainable social, environmental and economic development is indispensable.**
- **It is crucial to protect the dignity of populations, rethink territorial and information continuity, and promote local regional integration.**
- **The transformation capacity of agriculture in borderlands will not catalyse into wealth creation without adequate and contextualised strategies to counter political violence.**

EMANUELA CLAUDIA DEL RE

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As stated in the European Union's (EU) Integrated Strategy in the Sahel, the nature and forms of violence present a border dimension. How do the recent European strategy and mechanisms integrate this border and or multiscalar (local, national, regional) dimension?

In the Sahel, the EU focuses its actions on the fight against terrorism and armed groups, cross-border trafficking and organised crime. All this is in accordance with the 2020 Council conclusions on EU external action on preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism. One important element that the EU enhances strongly is the commitment shown by several Member States in supporting EU successful missions devoted to training the military (European Union Training Mission, EUTM) and to capacity-building for police forces (European Union Capacity Building, EUCAP). Also very important is the adherence by several EU Member States to the Takuba Task Force aimed at supporting the Malian armed forces in combat.

The scope of the EU's efforts in the region is to promote good governance, which is a key aspect of the new EU Integrated Strategy in the Sahel (April 2021) that is based on the strong awareness that lack of access to quality basic services — amongst other causes — is at the heart of a failing social contract, which favours terrorism and violence. Strengthening the resilience of local populations, with an emphasis on the mitigation of vulnerabilities through the reduction of social imbalances, particularly in favour of young people and women, encourages greater social cohesion which is a powerful tool to counter violence. It is important to reduce disparities between territories in terms of social and economic development, helping to restore the legitimacy of states and public authorities.

The EU stresses the importance of a "civilian and political surge" and proposes a new political and governance pact with a focus on short-term stabilisation and long-term sustainable social, environmental and economic development perspectives that go beyond military efforts. What is the aim and functioning of this new pact?

The new pact that the EU has proposed aims at accompanying the stabilisation of the region by working in close co-operation with its Sahelian partners. The EU Integrated Strategy crystallises the new European long-term vision through a stronger focus on governance. In this vision, the EU highly values the fundamental contribution of civil society: the Integrated Strategy mentions the need to be attentive to inputs from civil society and local authorities. The Strategy also emphasises the importance of consolidating credible judicial systems and fighting against impunity within armed forces to build greater trust between armed forces and populations. Trust building and a healthy relationship between civil and military constituencies is indeed paramount to achieving greater stability.

The EU is fully committed to work with its partners in the Sahel for sustainable political solutions because these are necessary to address the political and security crises in the region. The EU Strategy mentions clearly that mutual accountability based on close and continuous political dialogue within a climate of trust, is crucial for reaching progress in jointly-agreed priority areas. An important element taken into account is that Sahelian states hold the brunt of the responsibility for stabilising their territories. This concept of responsibility should be understood, in my view, as the recognition of the guarantee of African ownership: that is African solutions to African problems. We, the EU, will accompany our partners in finding the best solutions to their pressing challenges.

In your view, what are the more pressing challenges in the short and medium term for the region and its partners?

The challenges in the Sahel are complex and multi-faceted. Colonial legacy, poor governance, persistent economic instability, extreme poverty, climate change, drought and desertification; population growth without education, youth unemployment, political and social fragility, mounting terrorist threats, armed groups, a growing number of refugees and IDPs, and recently a global pandemic that is causing and exacerbating ongoing issues such as food security, constitute what might sadly be described as a perfect storm in which insecurity and poverty create a vicious circle of instability.

Education is one of the most alarming challenges. According to studies, only one young person in two is literate in the region (compared to an average of over three in four across Africa) and only one student in three completes secondary school. Access to education — and more broadly to basic services — is of paramount importance in the region, especially in the context of strong demographic growth (+3% per year), aggravated by the fact that the increase in school enrolment rates has been accompanied by a decline in the quality of education. Considering that the Sahel's youth constitutes a formidable human capital that deserves to be able to realise its dreams, contributing to the development and stabilisation of its communities, I think that beside the need to invest in security measures we must in parallel invest largely in education. Although

the conditions in the region are extremely challenging, there is much potential for growth. The Sahel is one of the most dynamic regions in Africa, but the structural transformation of its economies is slow.

Greater co-ordination between all partners and stakeholders is needed to place the Sahel at the core of our policies. The realisation of the nexus between security and development is the key to building the future for and with Sahelians.

AMBASSADOR MAMAN SAMBO SIDIKOU

High Representative of the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL)

Operating "citizen protection" in the Sahel

What do you consider to be the priorities for the future of the people of the Sahel?

Since the 1960s, we have been casting a concerned eye over the Sahel, with questions that elicit certain — almost "automatic" — responses. By "we" I mean a broad community of thinkers, doers and "enthusiasts", who often like to connect ideas to actions and who care about the impact (regardless of the methods devised to (try to) identify and determine said impact...).

Over the past fifty years, at different levels and on several continents, I have been involved in several institutional schemes with objectives that combined security and prosperity. In my opinion, the development of the Sahel-Saharan strip should be looked at against an international backdrop — that of the majority of the analytical tools and operational references to which we are exposed. There are, for me, three particularly salient priorities: protecting dignity, rethinking territorial and information continuity, and promoting local regional integration.

What do you mean by "protecting dignity"?

A crisis is a test from which we must emerge stronger. At the end of the Second World War, the socio-economic slump was accompanied by an unprecedented humanitarian initiative. The NGO CARE or "Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe" distributed several million food rations. In Germany, which received these donations until 1960, people of my generation associate the name of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) with an initiative in which the victor helped the vanquished without depriving them of their dignity. It is true that some of the donations came from Americans wishing to help their families living on the "Old Continent".

This is, to my knowledge, an unprecedented moment of mass philanthropy combining government action, diaspora contributions and active solidarity from the general public. It is perhaps an example to ponder, for those of us who "produce" or "welcome" migrants in a world where borders are both more subtle and less penetrable...

This aside gives me the opportunity to underline a central fact, at a time when some actors in the humanitarian world are concerned about access to certain conflict zones while respecting the principles of independence and impartiality. Without commenting on the merits of using military escorts to accompany certain "humanitarian" convoys, I wonder about the importance of using "local content" in the Sahel.

I think that the best way to preserve each other's dignity, while initiating a virtuous circle, is to create a movement based on an exchange of (good) services. This includes the social engineering of our interventions (as recommended by Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2021[1]), the logistics chain, and the "goods" distributed (ideally, cereals produced in the region rather than imported from distant continents with the associated carbon footprint).

For too long, sometimes with the best of intentions, we have been designing schemes where most of the added value is only of marginal benefit to the areas we define as being "priority". Underemployment, unemployment ... or sometimes ad hoc contracts with menial tasks entrusted to graduates — this is sometimes the effect of "project approaches" and of policies

drafted in ignorance of the context of our "activities".

In the Sahel, we need to support the upscaling of a private sector that meets the objectives of what successful societies call the "social economy". Creating jobs and producing "social public goods" while making the most of the expectations and tools of a society.

The challenges are operational and "transactional". Proceeding in this manner is often more efficient and discreet. It allows certain local values to be respected, values that safeguard the discretion of the donation.

Most importantly, working in this way makes it possible to identify the real issues at stake and consolidate the links in a chain of value creation starting, in particular, with trust between stakeholders whose destinies are inseparable, thus strengthening each other's dignity.

How do you go about rethinking territorial and information continuity?

The economy of the Sahel-Saharan zone cannot be properly understood unless it is placed in the context of international flows, notably via the Maghreb, the Mashriq, the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, etc. The activity of rearing livestock highlights the importance of creating shared value(s) not only in the immediate area but also thousands of kilometres further afield.

I was involved in the production of "HOTTUNGO: when pastoralists meet farmers in the Sahel", a documentary recently nominated at an international film festival in Australia. The filmmakers' objective was to highlight a Nigerien civil society initiative (by the NGO Kawtal Waafakey) and the quality of the co-operation between producers (breeders' and farmers' associations) and administrations.

It was also about promoting diplomacy between the Sahel-Saharan strip and the more southerly regions so that a mutually beneficial management of transhumance could benefit the greatest number of economic actors - in accordance with certain objectives of organisations of which our States are members (ECOWAS, AU, etc.). This project was also motivated by a desire to innovate "Sahelian-style" in terms of both achievements and communication.

The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) has taken the bold step of investing in a pilot cross-border co-operation initiative between municipalities in the Sahel (Burkina Faso), Timbuktu (Mali) and Tillabéri (Niger) regions, which are home to 5.5 million inhabitants and 30% of all the livestock in the three countries. The operational challenge is clear, as strengthening the value chain of the pastoral economy requires the creation of infrastructures that benefit the actors in the sectors concerned (pastoral facilities, water points, passageways, cattle trails and sheds, slaughterhouses).

I believe it is essential that we do more to support a sector with great potential for regional integration in that it "links" producers in the Sahel and consumers in the major cities of the Gulf of Guinea. It is therefore a question of responding to the urgent needs of our fellow citizens without losing sight of the fact that "free trade" is a priority for established economic (UEMOA) and political (ECOWAS, AU) institutions.

Continuity is therefore the continuity of a socio-economic activity within — a given territorial area. What can be done to allow some breeders to maintain their know-how and "vocations" while adapting to the needs of the contemporary market? Continuity is also the continuity of flows on communication routes that have become the targets of insurgents, when mines are laid that maim civilians and soldiers. How can air bridges be developed? How can we make better use of inland navigation? Lastly, continuity is also the continuity of local social cohesion between citizens and their elected officials. How can a vote be organised when the inhabitants of a community have almost all become denizens elsewhere, scattered across several areas because of growing insecurity?

What assistance can social media and radio offer us in helping to organise remote municipal council meetings and prepare the way out of the crisis by making the most of communication tools that have become indispensable? These are some of the questions that come to mind when I meet the main social and economic players of the Sahel countries where my mission takes me.

How to leverage local regional integration and support the region's transformations?

In September 2018, Yacouba Sawadogo, a tenacious and resourceful farmer from Burkina Faso, was awarded the so-called "Alternative Nobel Prize". He had been working for four decades to change the course of history in his region. In the Sahel, we have to take into consideration extraordinary climatic events that can disrupt fauna, flora and human communities in a matter of months. A large part of our economy relies on rain, and Mr Sawadogo's leadership has consisted of introducing (in Burkina Faso and Niger) *zai*, small artificial basins that are part of ancestral practices. Much remains to be done, and we need to bolster the empiricism of our producers by giving them the attention and resources (human, financial and political) they deserve.

We tried centralisation after independence, and then opted for decentralisation, which too often lacked financial funds and a vision of how to make prosperity accessible to the masses. Our societies are now mature enough to know that our way ahead must combine private sector momentum with good government. Using *zai* does not mean that all the solutions to our challenges lie in our past. Significant efforts must be made to promote research. The key must be to strengthen our capacity to transform the results of our investigations into interventions that have a rapid, tangible impact and that foster a "virtuous circle".

In many countries in the Sahel-Saharan strip, the uneven and unco-ordinated management of natural resources (water, land and forests) is weakening the social fabric, undermining local governance and eroding the creation of shared value. It is, above all, a social and economic challenge.

The current challenge is to identify better "social engineering" to match our values (mutual respect, sharing) with our tools, through an appeal to the civic-mindedness of our citizens and simple, efficient and predictable administrative management. What is at stake is the (quality of) life of our "fellow citizens" and our collective capacity to create stability and prosperity through "local regional integration" based on the production and first-stage processing of our agricultural resources (including cotton, for example).

I know that the African Union "is calling on the governments of the region to make a concerted effort to improve the governance of natural resources" and I am convinced that any sustainable outcome will require working with our private sector. For a tangible improvement in the (quality of) life of Sahelians to occur, we must enable as many people as possible to contribute to a circular economy that guarantees sustainable and shared prosperity.

In conclusion, we need to combine the protection of citizens and the creation of shared value.

The gold rush trends we are seeing in several Sahelian countries are partly the result of underemployment and the size of the economy that continues to be referred to as "informal" even when it turns out to be larger than the "formal" economy... Thousands of young women and men are setting off along our roads and through the bush. Driven by dreams of quick success and ready to make remarkable efforts, they are demonstrating courage in their efforts to triumph over adversity.

Above and beyond the anathemas surrounding artisanal gold mining, and conscious of how important the hard currency offered by some multinationals is in balancing the budgets of some of our states, I am hearing more and more voices calling for a more balanced approach.

Mining deposits pay no attention to borders, nor do some players in the mining industry. The strong socio-economic demand of the citizens of the Sahel is an unavoidable factor. The time seems to have come to combine sound management of natural resources with a better distribution of the profits created by rising gold prices. The challenge is immediate: to give more Sahelians the opportunity to live with dignity from the fruits of their labour in their region. This way of combining "the protection of citizens" and "the creation of shared value" seems to me to be worthy of reflection — and action...!

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Barkhane and security in the Sahel

The breakdown of security in the Sahel over the past 15 years has highlighted some of the vulnerabilities of Sahelian states and societies. This situation is not just the consequence of jihadist attacks on fragile states, but is also due to the emergence of other problems such as community conflicts, insurgencies, and the proliferation of militias. The trends are very negative, particularly in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. These local conflict dynamics are compounded by the absence or "downgraded presence" of the state in some areas, and limited capacities in terms of controlling borders and border areas. Sahelian countries and their main partners are trying to address these weaknesses and the flow of arms, fighters, drugs and migrants across their borders. The Sahelians have realised that a patchwork of national policies is not enough to address and solve these issues. Moreover, co-operation between states on these transnational issues was initially not easy, set as it was against a backdrop of mistrust and hostility between the two sides of the Sahara.

Multiple security initiatives with a specific border focus

Over the past few decades, security initiatives with varying degrees of effectiveness have gradually been put in place in the Sahara-Sahel region. This region straddles three regional economic communities: the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Initially driven by Libya, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), which unites 29 countries bordering the Sahara around economic co-operation and development objectives, has also developed security initiatives, initially to deal with Sudan-Chad issues and then through its Security and Development Strategy for the Sahel-Saharan Zone.

In 2010, on Algeria's initiative, the Joint Operational Staff Committee (CEMOC - *Comité d'État-Major Opérationnel Conjoint*) proposed the co-ordinated management of Algerian border areas in collaboration with its southern neighbours. A joint headquarters was set up in Tamanrasset and a right of pursuit across national borders was put in place. The creation of CEMOC was combined with a parallel intelligence exchange initiative called the Fusion and Liaison Unit (UFL), albeit without much success. Algeria wanted to politically assert its central position in the fight against terrorism in the Sahara-Sahel in relation to other players (Morocco, Libya and France). The CEMOC provided for a right of pursuit across borders, although the Algerian constitution (Article 26) banned the People's National Army from intervening outside its borders (Porter, 2015[2]).[1] This contradiction left CEMOC paralysed and led the Sahelians to look for other solutions:

- In January 2010, Chad and Sudan, which had been in conflict with each other through proxy wars for a decade, signed a border security protocol and decided to create the Chad-Sudan Joint Force (CSJF), consisting of 3 000 soldiers, dedicated to securing their shared border. The 1 500 soldiers from each country had a right of pursuit of up to 100 kilometres into the neighbouring country, and command of the force alternated between senior officers from the two countries.
- Further west, the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was founded on 21 March 1994 by the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) to fight crime in the area. It remained relatively quiet for almost two decades, but aced with the problem of terrorism in the area (Boko Haram), the LCBC countries decided to mobilise the MNJTF as a counter-terrorism apparatus.
- Announced in 2014 by Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, the G5 Sahel (G5S) was created for the same purpose of sharing border control. The G5 Sahel is

a development and security organisation focussing on border areas (Antil, 2018[3]) that aims to establish a portfolio of development actions through its management scheme, the Priority Investment Programme (PIP) (Desgrais, 2019[4]). It is also behind security initiatives such as the G5S Defence College, based in Nouakchott, and the secure exchange platform.

Operation Barkhane

Operation Barkhane was created against a backdrop of growing co-operation. The operation was rolled out across the same geographical area as the G5 Sahel and followed on from two previous French operations. The first, Epervier, was set up in February 1986 to help Chad repel attempts by the Libyan army to seize control of the Aouzou Strip, before serving as a back-up for the Chadian army and part of the defence force protecting the Chadian capital. This explains why Barkhane's HQ was located in N'Djamena, while the bulk of the effort and military presence was in northern Mali and Liptako-Gourma. The second operation was Serval, launched in January 2013 at the request of the Malian transitional authorities and interim president Dioncounda Traoré. Serval perfectly fulfilled its three assigned objectives, namely stop the advance of Al Qaida-affiliated jihadist groups in central Mali, liberate the main settlements in the North, and annihilate the logistical capacities of the armed groups as much as possible.

Operation Barkhane was launched on 1 August 2014, a few months after the announcement of the creation of G5 Sahel, over a larger area than that covered by the operations it succeeded. It was assigned counter-terrorism objectives, without any clearly defined criteria for what constituted mission success. Its main assigned objective was to put in place a "glass ceiling[2]" to ensure that jihadist groups were no longer able, as was the case in 2012, to conquer vast areas of territory and control towns and transport routes. Barkhane's missions were subsequently based on accomplishing this central objective and involved providing combat support for local armies (on the ground and in the air), neutralising jihadists by bombing columns of vehicles, and eliminating 'high value targets' so as to disorganise the groups. These missions were shared with another French force, Task Force Sabre, on the ground since 2009 and based in Ouagadougou, which reported to Special Operations Command (COS).

Barkhane's other essential objective was to support the armed forces of the G5S countries in terms of training, planning joint operations, and helping them coordinate with each other during joint border operations, particularly within the framework of the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S). Indeed, the creation of the FC-G5S in 2017, recognition of which in UN Security Council Resolution 2359 (2017) received diplomatic support from the French government, gave the G5 an armed wing. However, the Security Council refused to grant this force status, which would have given access to UN funding. FC-G5S's approach was directly inspired by the experience of the CSJF. It was not a question of creating a G5 army but of designating units within the five armies that would be dedicated to jointly securing three sectors. The Eastern sector covering the Chad-Niger border area, the Western sector covering part of the Mali-Mauritania border area, and the Central sector in the tri-border area between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The force's HQ, initially in Sévaré, pulled back to Bamako after an attack by a jihadist group in June 2018.

The Barkhane force initially comprised 3 000 men, before quickly increasing to 4 500 and then to 5 100 after the Pau Summit in January 2020. The bulk of the operation's activity took place in the north of Mali and then gradually shifted to the Hombori region and the tri-border area. The French authorities repeatedly referred to FC-G5S as the entity that would eventually replace Barkhane. If the Eastern and Western sectors were ultimately relatively well secured by the Sahelian armies, the problems in the Central sector worsened. The Malian army's failure to rebuild itself, the Burkinabe army's lack of combat experience, and the Nigerien army's setbacks in the west of its territory all contributed to security deteriorating. Despite the efforts of Barkhane and the Joint Force, the areas affected

by insecurity gradually expanded (OECD/SWAC, 2020[5]). Doubts, along with forms of anti-French conspiracy theories, gained traction in Sahelian public opinion, including among the ruling classes, notably through social networks via which particularly aggressive messages were circulated.

Having acknowledged France's declining image in the region, at the end of 2019 French President Emmanuel Macron decided to invite his opposite numbers in the region to Pau to ask them if they still wanted France as a security partner. Although this initiative was in substance necessary, it was diplomatically tactless as it looked like the Sahelian heads of state were being summoned to a French town that also happened to be the military base for a unit that had just suffered heavy losses in northern Mali. These image problems started to influence French public opinion and voices could be heard, both in the opposition and in the parliamentary majority, calling into question the fairly broad consensus around Barkhane since 2014. There were several recurrent criticisms, including the inability to translate tactical successes into political successes, France's excessive political exposure in the Sahel, and the unresolved governance problems of the Sahelian countries. These issues restricted France and other partners to intervening solely on the symptoms of conflicts without ever being able to act on the causes, i.e. the operations served to reassure regimes that were in fact at the heart of the issues being addressed.

Task Force Takuba

Barkhane achieved many successes on the ground, such as the neutralisation or arrest in 2021 of the main leaders of the Islamic State in the Great Sahara (ISGS). These achievements nevertheless concealed the fact that the overall situation was deteriorating. In Mali, the implementation of the measures provided for by the Algiers Agreements (2015) were delayed to the point that some of them became hypothetical. In January 2020, President Macron stated that it was unrealistic to want to improve the situation if the territories liberated from the jihadist presence were not then reintegrated by the states. France and the international community called for a "civil surge" in areas abandoned or disinvested by states.

A few weeks after the Pau meeting, in March 2020, Task Force Takuba was created within Barkhane, comprising members of the special forces. The force had a European dimension since 10 countries joined France in this initiative to support, advise and accompany the Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) in combat, mainly in the Gao and Ménaka area. Three phases were announced, with deployment to the area from July 2020 to the beginning of 2021, combat support for Malian units during 2021, and in 2022, support for highly autonomous Malian units from Takuba, the newly formed light reconnaissance and intervention units (ULRI). This third phase may be renewed going forward.

In November 2021, France, Sweden, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Italy and Romania had already sent soldiers, while Hungary and Denmark are preparing to do so in early 2022. A Swedish colonel has taken command of the Task Force, which consists of a command post in Niamey, two sub-units located in Gao (Franco-Estonian) and Ménaka (Franco-Czech), and a Swedish rapid reaction force based in Malian Liptako. There are currently 700 soldiers in the force, which will reach 2 000 at full strength (France Info, 2021[6]; French government, 2021[7]).

Through its presence, Takuba aims to help Mali better secure its borders, especially in the Gao-Ménaka area where the Malian army has been absent for several years, by trying to concentrate the military efforts of allies against the IS-GS, without overlooking the fight against the Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims (JNIM). At the same time, Barkhane is beginning to withdraw from its bases in northern Mali (Tessalit, Kidal and Timbuktu), which have been re-occupied by the FAMa and MINUSMA. Eventually, an international anti-terrorist coalition will gradually take over in the Sahel. FC-G5S, Takuba and Sabre will certainly be a part of it, and in this manner France expects to be present in the Sahel in a "different manner" and to be less politically exposed.

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Farmers' vulnerabilities and challenges in the context of insecurity in the Sahelian borderlands

Agriculture remains the mainstay of Africa's economy, with enormous opportunities for job creation, food security, poverty alleviation and inclusive economic growth. Most inhabitants of Africa's borderlands are engaged in farming activities, either as their primary source of livelihoods or at subsistence level. Through this, they can earn a living, feed their families and take care of migrants and refugees who have been displaced by the impacts of climate change, conflict and war. However, the transformation capacity of agriculture in borderlands will not catalyse into wealth creation without adequate security.

Prolonged insurgencies by non-state armed groups shape the context of insecurity in borderlands. Terrorist groups duel with states over control of national territories whilst taking advantage of the large expanse of borderlands to engage in transnational organised criminal activities, mobilisation of combatants, and looting and destruction of state infrastructure. Incidents of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), open combat between security forces and insurgents, social unrest, rural banditry and imposition of unofficial taxes and levies have undermined farming activities. Perceptions in some quarters that borderland stakeholders aid and abet smugglers and terrorists add to the tension between security forces and stakeholders in these communities. In addition, perception that their communities receive less security cover compared with official border crossing towns also complicates relationships between security forces and local communities. Farming in the marginal spaces of the Sahel is therefore further complicated, making it an increasingly endangered vocation.

Insecurity prevents borderland farmers from accessing arable land. Land that should be a profitable asset can no longer support economically viable production. Incidents of forced displacement of farmers from their land due to armed conflict and the presence of IEDs is commonplace, so are cases of killings, abductions, and physical attacks. Farmers cultivating arable lands are mainly targeted by insurgents who seek new frontiers to collect levies to fund their activities, mainly in the Lake Chad Basin. It is often impractical for security forces to secure most of these areas. Conflict over land exacerbates existing tensions and often results in violence and criminal activities. Whilst the conflicts persist, the land remains a nominal asset. Due to communal conflict over land, there are cases of farmers being forced to sell off their produce cheaply or abandon their farms, in the latter cases, leaving behind their products to waste off. In other situations, farmers become victims of robbery when their crops are close to harvesting.

Borderland farmers often find it challenging to mobilise adequate capital to grow their crops and improve their vocation to a business model because of the high-security risks involved in investing in such areas. The growing crowdfunding trend seen in the agro-allied sector, which has unlocked latent capital from the middle class, may not benefit border farmers due to the absence of insurance cover for investors and farmers from armed conflict. Thus, it becomes difficult to attract the much-needed capital. Even alternative credit scoring systems may not be enough to convince private sector investors to put their money in border communities that encounter insecurity because of the high risk of failure. In the absence of public and private sector funding, the growth potentials of most farming activities at these marginal spaces remain stunted.

Insecurity presents an inter-generational threat to food security (Maps 6.1-6.3), as it serves as a disincentive for young persons to engage in farming. With the risks and low yields associated with subsistence farming, young persons are often tempted to migrate from the periphery

to the centre of a country to seek other livelihood opportunities. Many are unsuccessful due to the limited opportunities made available to young people by formal institutions. Some engage in illicit activities such as irregular migration outside their native countries without any skills to sell, engaging in violent extremism, drugs, human trafficking, and banditry. Young people engaged in such activities contribute to the worsening security situation in border regions and it is difficult to reform and re-engage them in productive agriculture activities because of the limited wealth generation of subsistence farming. The cyclical impact of violence, therefore, can create generational food scarcity with dire consequences for resilience building. A significant concern is what happens to food production in borderlands when the current farmers pass on.

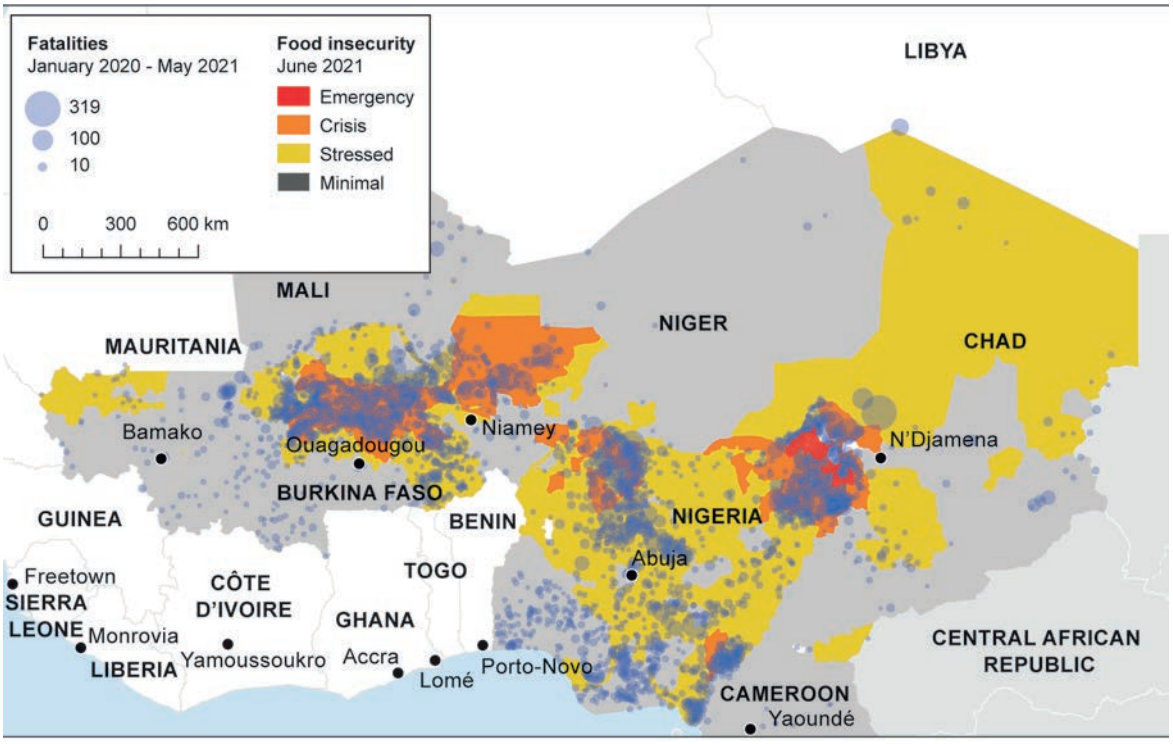
In the absence of security, there is a lack of an environment conducive to creating value from agriculture and developing a chain of products that can create jobs, improve infrastructure, serve industry clients, and expand market opportunities. Private sector investors, who can provide infrastructure such as solar powered machines, internet access, and telecommunications, may hesitate to invest due to the high cost of security and risks of destruction of their facilities. In this situation, where enabling infrastructure is missing, perishable goods can spoil quickly, affecting profitability as farmers are forced to sell their products as commodities and not as refined or processed products. Facilitating institutions such as chambers of commerce and industry and the organised private sector often do not link up with borderland farmers to promote advocacy and visibility, partly due to the difficulties of organising such outreach in highly volatile security contexts. The opportunity to bring more players, knowledge and capital into the equation is therefore lost. In addition, enabling capacities such as logistics and marketing become impossible to deploy due to perceived and actual threats to the providers of these services. This hinders the opportunity to build critical infrastructure, such as roads and silos and freezing facilities, to preserve goods, which are critical to connecting the farmers to off-taker markets. In an overtly securitised environment, it also becomes impracticable to fully leverage the opportunities provided by business innovation.

Insecurity has an even more disproportionate impact on women farmers, who are often unacknowledged for their agility and resilience, despite institutional, cultural, social and economic disadvantages. For instance, cultural practices make it difficult for women to own, keep and maximise the use of land. Even so, land-owning women farmers may attract criminal groups who would likely prey on their produce. Many women farmers have been forced to become the sole providers for their households due to the death of their spouses as a result of insecurity. Yet, they struggle with basic security to earn a livelihood. Armed attacks also expose them to additional risks, thus making it difficult to engage in farming safely. They are often subjected to assault and rape in their farmlands, and cultural stereotypes make it difficult for the victims to acknowledge such atrocious crimes openly. Though perceived to be more entrepreneurial than men, security risks make it difficult for borderland women to maximise their capacity to create value from farm products.

Security challenges deprive borderland communities from building relationships with providers of technical advice and tools for high-yielding crops and technology. The presence of development partners is often tenuous, and most activities are implemented through third parties due to insecurity. This situation affects the quality of monitoring and evaluation and the sustainability of implemented interventions. The capacity of agricultural extension services is also limited. Agriculture extension can no longer establish direct contact with farmers, hampering work to improve crop productivity and efficiency. With all its difficulties and disadvantages, remote support does not usually have the expected transformative effect. Development partners may hesitate to commit significant funds and human resources if they are unsure of the security of the facilities being provided. Over the past decade, this situation has eroded trust between these marginal communities and aid agencies who promised much but could not fully deliver on the ground.

Map 6.1

Fatalities and food insecurity in West Africa, 2020-21

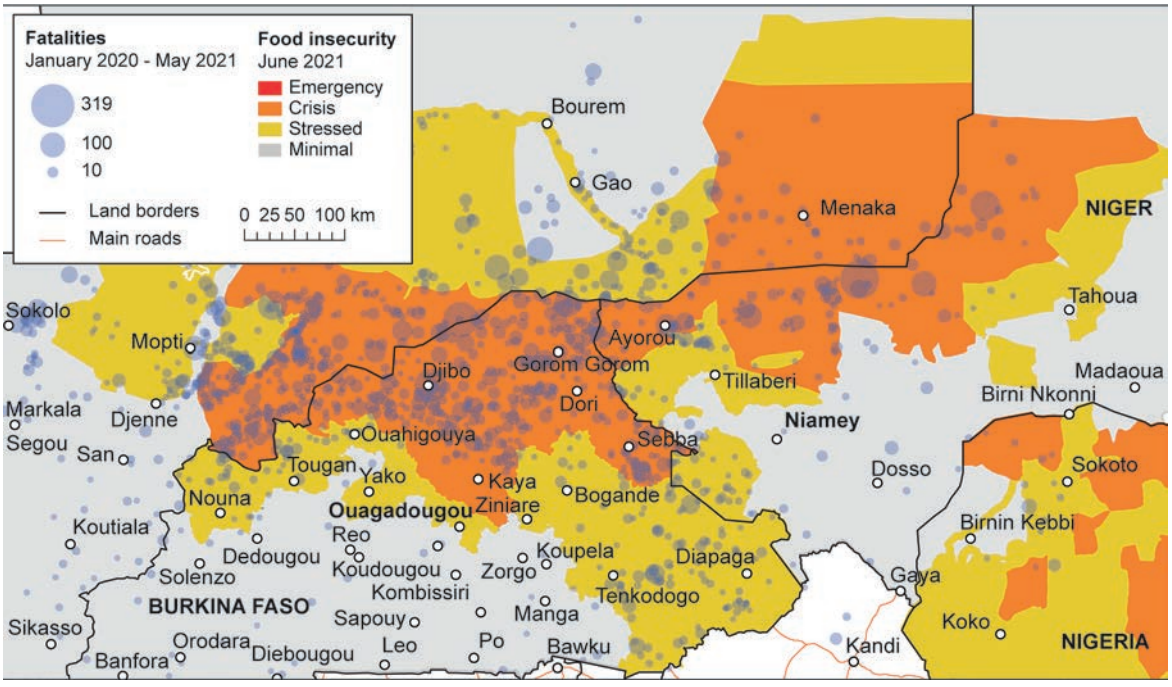


Cartography: José Luengo-Cabrera and Olivier Walther.

Source: ACLED (2021[68]) and FEWS NET (2021[69]). ACLED data is publicly available.

Map 6.2

Fatalities and food insecurity in the Liptako-Gourma, 2020-21

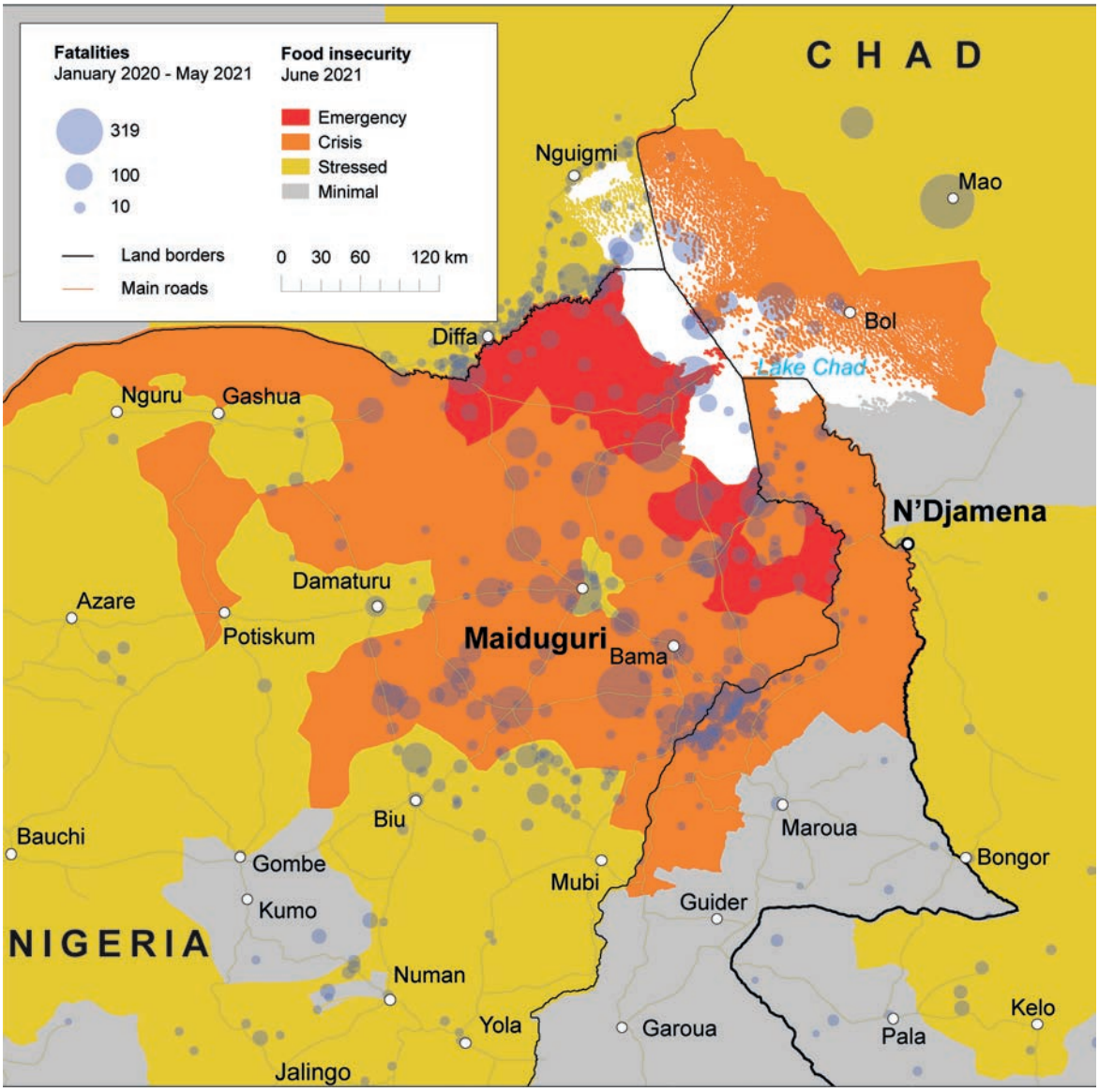


Cartography: José Luengo-Cabrera and Olivier Walther.

Source: ACLED (2021[68]) and FEWS NET (2021[69]). ACLED data is publicly available.

Map 6.3

Fatalities and food insecurity in the Lake Chad region, 2020-21



Cartography: José Luengo-Cabrera and Olivier Walther.

Source: ACLED (2021[8]) and FEWS NET (2021[9]). ACLED data is publicly available.

In conclusion, insecurity represents a real threat to realising Goal 1 of the 2030 Agenda for Development and ending poverty for subsistence farmers in Africa's Sahel borderlands. Insecurity heightens risks, increases transaction costs, decreases the quantum of capital available for farming, stunts value chain development, undermines trust and social capital, and puts at risk the prospects of agriculture as a catalyst for sustainable development. It puts the farmer in a difficult situation and increases their dependency on development aid.

Modest progress has been recorded by security forces in reclaiming land from insurgents across the region in recent years. However, this is not enough. As UNDP has done in the last few years, liberated areas in borderland regions must be supported by robust stabilisation programmes. Rebuilding damaged infrastructure, local governance, social cohesion, community security, access to justice, and the rule of law remains critical. Interventions need to refocus and strengthen their borderlands efforts. Stabilisation must have a clear pathway from

aid dependency to sustainable development. For this to happen, safe and secure conditions must be implemented for borderland farmers to return to their lands and turn this latent resource into a driver of prosperity. Specific actions are therefore required to secure borderland spaces, de-risk farmers, improve shared infrastructure, incentivise young farmers to use their natural resources, and improve protection for women engaged in farming. In the light of the foregoing, communities, local authorities, national governments, regional institutions, and development partners should redouble their co-ordination to improve security in the Sahelian borderlands and to enable a sustainable pathway to development through farming.

Notes

1 This has now been made possible by recent amendments to the constitution (Article 91) in December 2020.

2 Not the official term.

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West African Studies

Borders and Conflicts in North and West Africa

This publication examines the role of border regions in shaping patterns of violence since the end of the 1990s in North and West Africa. Using the innovative OECD Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi), the report looks at the growing relationship between political violence and borderlands at the regional level, by analysing more than 170 000 violent events between January 1997 and June 2021 and through the exploration of case studies in the Central and Eastern Sahel. Violence in border regions is both more intense in terms of the number of victims and more diffuse geographically than ever before. This report combines quantitative data on the location of violent events and victims, their mapping over time and space, and an analysis of the actors in conflict to answer three crucial questions i) Are borderlands more violent than other spaces? ii) Has the intensity of violence in border regions increased over time? iii) Are some borderlands more violent than others? The growing importance and complexity of transnational conflicts and transnational violent groups in North and West Africa calls for a more place-based analysis in order to create better tailored and more flexible policy options.

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