

Chapter 4

Networks of violence in North and West Africa

This chapter examines how rivalries and alliances affect the long-term evolution of violence in North and West Africa. Building on a dataset of 36 760 violent events, the chapter maps how state and non-state actors are embedded in ever-changing opposition and co-operation networks (relations) from 1997 to 2020. The chapter shows that the number of belligerents has increased dramatically since 1997. Organisations in conflict form a loose network dominated by jihadist organisations in Mali, the Central Sahel and Lake Chad region and by government forces in Libya. This network is becoming increasingly dense and more centralised over time, a worrying trend that suggests that violence is more persistent than ever. The chapter also shows that alliances remain fragile and circumstantial, particularly among rebels and jihadist groups, whose political loyalties remain ambivalent. The decentralised structure of the co-operation network is strikingly similar to the opposition network, suggesting that organisations are frequently shifting allegiances. Co-operation has exhibited a slight upward trend since the mid-2010s, fuelled by regional military alliances in Mali and the Lake Chad region, and the consolidation of authority in Libya.

KEY MESSAGES

- » **Violent organisations have many more enemies and conflictual relations than allies.**
- » **Networks of enemies are becoming denser and more centralised since 2017, suggesting that violence is more widespread and polarised around key organisations than ever.**
- » **Alliances remain fragile everywhere in the region and are dominated by government forces, their allied militias and foreign forces.**
- » **The lack of long-lasting coalitions that could tilt the balance of power is a serious obstacle to the peaceful resolution of conflict in North and West Africa.**

NETWORKED VIOLENCE

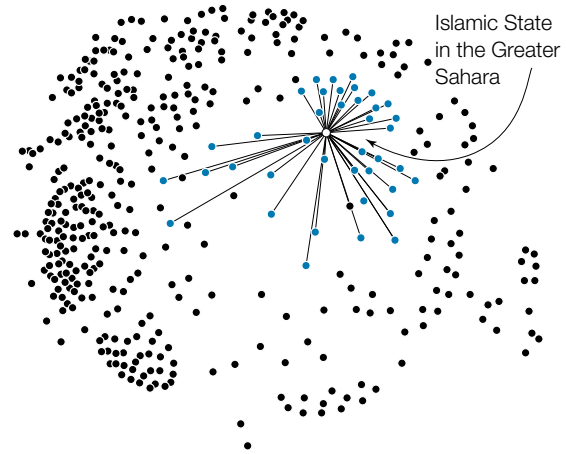
Contemporary conflict in North and West Africa is characterised by a high degree of complexity in which hundreds of rebel groups and extremist organisations are involved in a shifting series of alliances and rivalries with regional governments and with each other. These changing relationships can be represented as a network that provides both opportunities and constraints to violent organisations. To better address this complexity, this chapter models the temporal evolution of both opposition and co-operation

networks using detailed data for North and West Africa beginning from the late 1990s. This relational approach assumes that the evolution of political violence in the region depends as much on the general architecture of the conflict environment as on the position of each organisation in the opposition and alliance networks.

This chapter argues that violent encounters between armed organisations do not occur in isolation. Rather, violent organisations and their members are enmeshed within a complex web of

Figure 4.1

Two levels of network analysis: The conflict environment and an organisation's neighbourhood

Network level – The conflict environment**Node level – The organisation neighbourhood**

Note: Each node represents an organisation involved in politically motivated events from January to June 2020 in North and West Africa. Ties between organisations indicate that they were in conflict with one another at least once over the studied period.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

relations that aggregates to form a larger region-wide community of violence. The left-hand side of [Figure 4.1](#) illustrates such a conflict environment: each node represents an organisation involved in politically motivated events from January to June 2020 in North and West Africa, while ties between organisations indicate that they are in conflict with one another. The overall architecture of this network limits the autonomy of violent organisations and imposes structural constraints on which objectives they may achieve. When an organisation is attacked, for example, its ability to respond militarily is limited by the general patterns of violence in the region. Militias may retaliate more eagerly in a situation where violence is diffuse than when the government is capable of co-ordinating military action against a limited number of rebel or extremist groups.

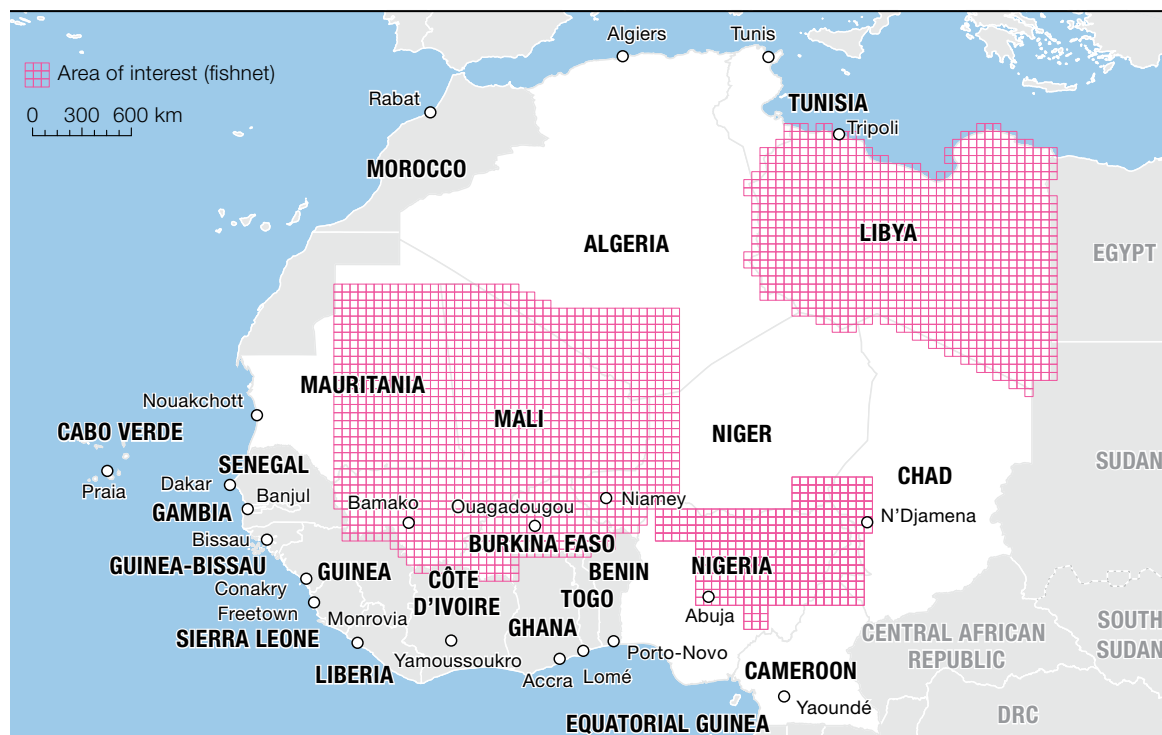
Violence can also spread well beyond an organisation's immediate social ties because members that are not directly involved or harmed will respond collectively in the name of the organisation. That response can be directed toward the original aggressor group or toward others that may be perceived as associated with the aggressor group. This means that investigating individuals is likely to overlook much

of the complexity involved in the patterns of violence of the region. Aggregating violence to the organisation level, as in this report, provides an advantage in terms of assessing patterns of conflict over time.

This chapter also argues that organisations have their own capacity to act independently (agency) and make choices that affect their ability to defeat their enemies and collaborate with their allies. The right-hand side of [Figure 4.1](#) represents the conflict neighbourhood of one of the most violent organisations of North and West Africa, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), which was in conflict with 38 government forces, militias, civilian actors and other armed groups in the first half of 2020. An initial act of violence by an organisation like ISGS can set in motion a sequence of interactions and fuel conflict well beyond its immediate enemies. Of critical importance in understanding how conflict spreads is the structure of the organisation's "neighbourhood", which includes every enemy that a focal organisation is fighting as well as all the ties formed by acts of violence among them. In the language of network science, the conflict neighbourhood is an "egocentric" perspective, providing a glimpse into the

Map 4.1

Areas of interest in Mali and Central Sahel, the Lake Chad region and Libya



Source: Authors.

context within which a focal organisation, or “ego”, is embedded. These neighbourhoods are important because they influence what information organisations receive, how they perceive other organisations and how they react to violent events that are directed at them, their enemies or their allies.

The network approach used in this study makes it possible to simultaneously take into account both the structure and agency of violent organisations and how these two factors have evolved since the late 1990s (see [Chapter 3](#) for a methodological overview). The analysis is first

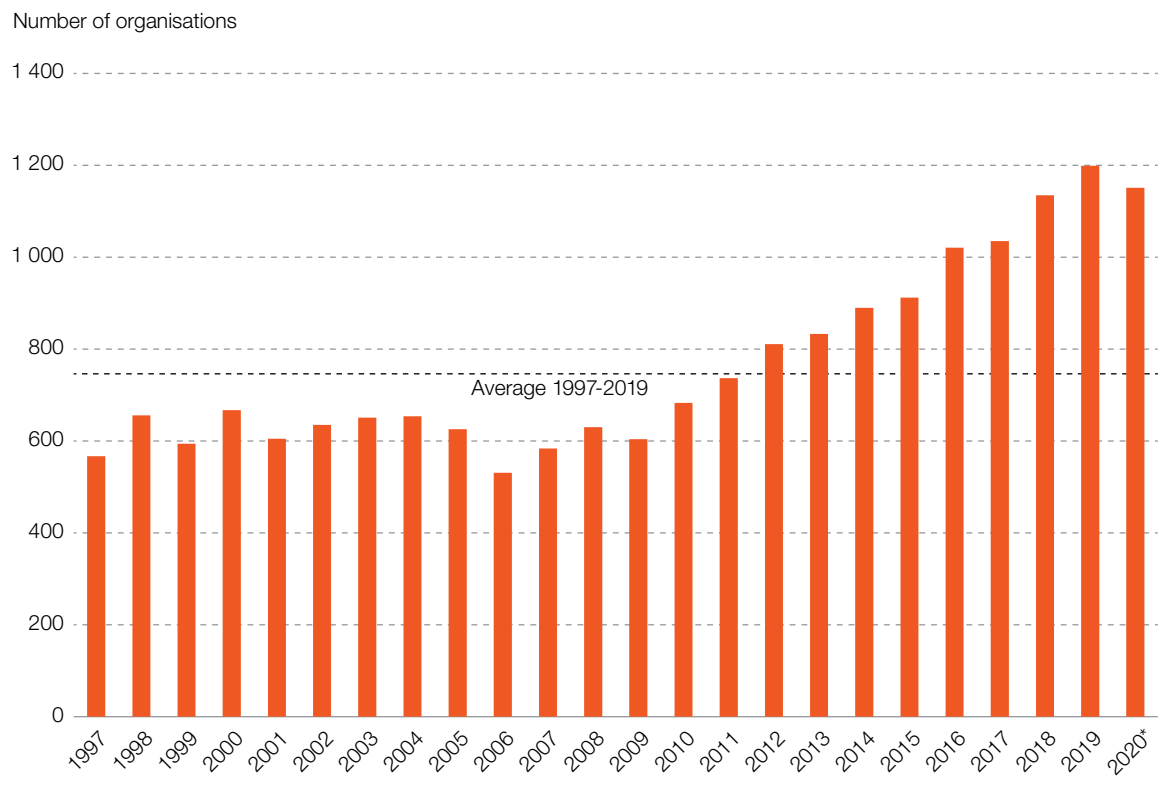
conducted at the regional level, by considering all politically motivated events that took place in 21 North and West African countries from January 1997 to June 2020 ([Map 4.1](#)). The analysis then focuses on three regions that have been particularly affected by violence since the early 2010s: Mali and the Central Sahel, the Lake Chad region (that comprises northern Nigeria and the neighbouring regions of Cameroon, Chad and Niger) and Libya. From 2009 to 2020, North Africa has recorded 11 691 violent events causing 35 772 deaths, while West Africa has recorded 25 069 events and 119 603 deaths.

SHARING A COMMON ENEMY, NOT A COMMON GOAL

One of the distinctive features of the conflicts that are tearing North and West Africa apart is the very large number of actors involved. This multiplication of actors is explained by the lack of a common political goal among many violent organisations, who often share a common enemy without necessarily collaborating with

each other. Violent organisations may even compete against each other despite sharing a common ideological background ([Chapter 2](#)). In the first half of 2020, no less than 562 organisations were involved, as victims or perpetrators, in acts of violence across the region, four times those involved in building alliances. Fuelled by

Figure 4.2
Organisations in conflict in North and West Africa, 1997–2020



* Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

numerous insurgencies, rebellions and coups d'état, the overall number of organisations in conflict has almost doubled from 604 in 2009 to 1 199 in 2019. If the situation continues to deteriorate, 2020 will be by far the most violent year recorded since 1997, with 1 151 organisations recorded through June (Figure 4.2).

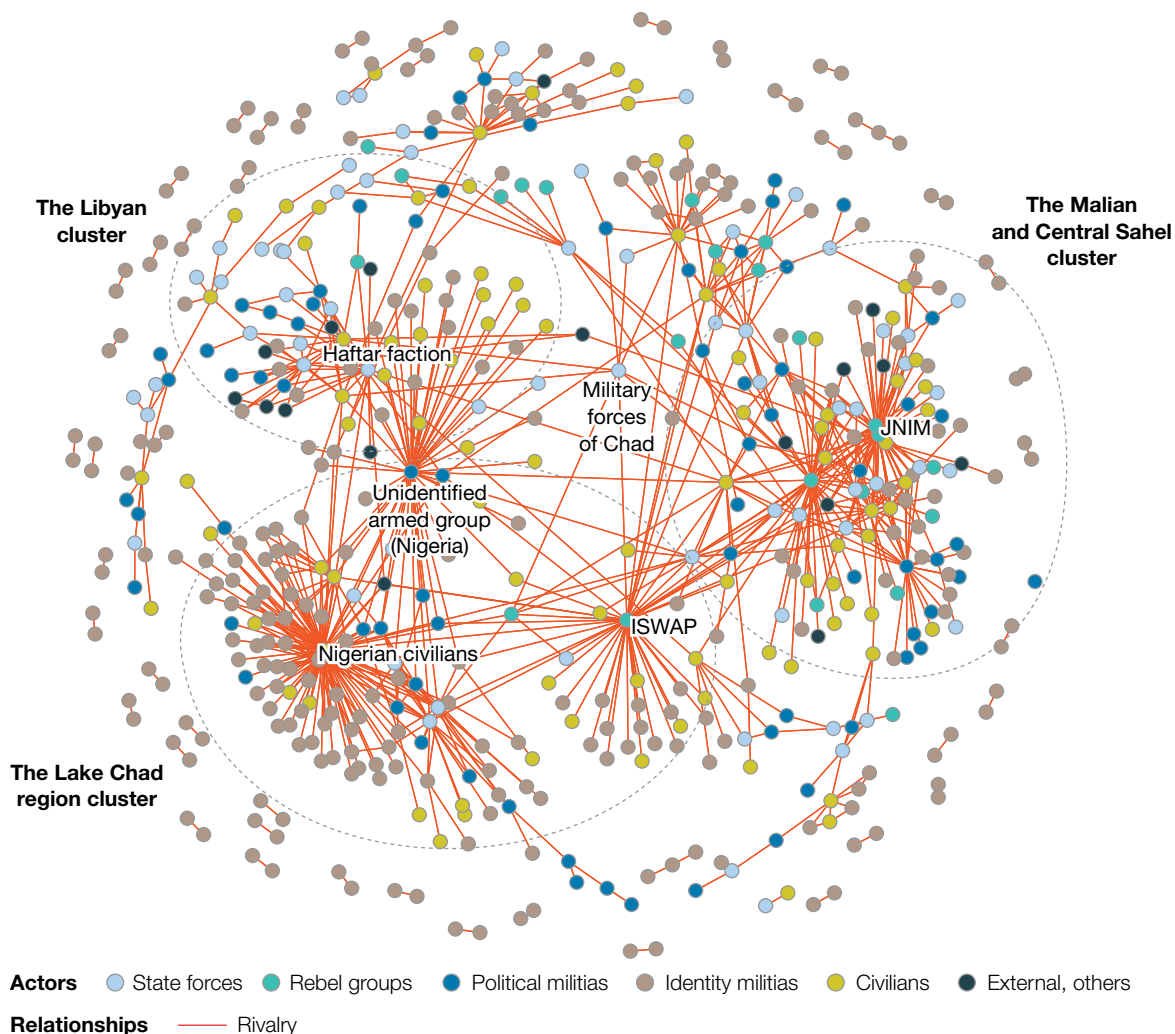
A cosmopolitan network of enemies

To assist in understanding how violent organisations fight each other in North and West Africa, the following section maps the network of their enemies and models their conflictual relationships over time. Mapping how violent organisations fight reveals how diffuse, and yet persistent, political violence is in the region. In 2020, the network that connects the organisations involved in conflictual events in North and West Africa has a decentralised structure explained by the fact that not all of them are necessarily fighting in

the same theatre of operations. For example, the Libyan cluster of actors visible on the left-hand side of Figure 4.3 is indirectly connected to the Nigerian and Malian clusters through a number of jihadist organisations and government forces that are active internationally.

A loose and decentralised structure such as the one that connects organisations in conflict in the region is typical of a “cosmopolitan” network. Actors embedded in a cosmopolitan network have few linkages, tend to form few closely-knit communities, and are far apart from each other. As a result, the density, average number of links and agglomeration co-efficient are low in this kind of structure, while the average number of steps required to link one actor to all others is high (Table 4.1). A distinctive feature of cosmopolitan networks is the presence of key brokers who act as bridges between communities that would otherwise be disconnected from each other. In West Africa, for example, the rice trade network

Figure 4.3
Opposition network in North and West Africa, 2020



Note: Each node represents a violent organisation or its victims. Ties between organisations represent rivalries between January and June 2020. ISWAP stands for Islamic State West Africa Province, and JNIM is Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa-l-Muslimin (Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims).

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020_[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

that connects producers, assemblers, wholesalers and retailers across the region has a clear cosmopolitan structure in which each merchant entertains a limited number of trusted business partners (OECD/SWAC, 2019_[2]).

Cosmopolitan networks differ from “provincial” networks, which tend to be structured around dense communities of actors connected through parentage, business, friendship or alliance relationships. Accordingly, provincial networks have high densities of ties, numerous ties per actor, a tendency to form a large single component and few steps between actors

(Table 4.1). A distinctive feature of provincial networks is to contain numerous actors who have established dense ties to others, or are strategically connected to well-connected actors. For example, the social network of a traditional chief in West Africa has a clear provincial structure: almost everyone in the village is connected to the chief through kinship, clientelist or friendship ties. The social network formed by these ties is based on trust, reciprocity and allegiance.

Provincial and cosmopolitan networks build on two different types of centrality: embeddedness and brokerage. Embeddedness is associated

Table 4.1
Characteristics of provincial and cosmopolitan social networks

Measure	Definition	Provincial networks	Cosmopolitan networks
Density	Percentage of existing ties in the network compared to potential ties	High	Low
Average degree	Number of ties per actor	High	Low
Agglomeration co-efficient	Tendency to form tightly-knit clusters	High	Low
Average length of the shortest path	Number of separations between the actors of the network	Low	High

Source: Adapted from Everton, S. (2012^[9]), *Disrupting Dark Networks*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and OECD/SWAC (2019^[2]), *Women and Trade Networks in West Africa*, West African Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/7d67b61d-en>.

Table 4.2
Composition and density of opposition networks by region, 2020

	Number of nodes	Number of ties	Density, %
North and West Africa	562	828	0.5
Mali and Central Sahel	137	237	2.5
Lake Chad	126	183	2.3
Libya	50	71	5.8

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

with trust between friends, parents, commercial partners or political allies; it reduces risks associated with social, economic and political activities. Highly embedded actors occupy very central positions, surrounded by other actors with which they frequently interact to exchange information, raise resources, transmit instructions or establish alliances. Military forces that have established alliances with ethnic or community militias find themselves in such a position: as the dominant node of the alliance, they receive detailed intelligence about the enemy from each of their allies without necessarily having to share it with the entire network. Brokerage, by contrast, offers access to resources or information that are not available in the immediate neighbourhood of actors. Brokers manage to build bridges between their communities and the rest of the network in three ways. They can transfer resources between two disconnected parties, facilitate the connection of two actors to mutual benefit, or co-ordinate the activities of others without creating direct connections between them, reinforcing their dependence

on the broker (Spiro, Acton and Butts, 2013^[4]; OECD/SWAC, 2017^[5]). Brokers are often used in conflict situations. In the Sahel, for example, the regime of Blaise Compaoré in Burkina Faso has long played the role of broker between jihadist organisations and Western governments willing to negotiate ransom payments (Thurston, 2020^[6]).

The analysis of the regional opposition network confirms that violent organisations tend to favour brokerage over embeddedness, which is understandable as having many enemies is hardly an advantage (Table 4.2). The opposition network consists of 562 organisations linked by 828 negative ties, which means that only 0.5% of the ties that could potentially exist in the region are actually present in the network. The density of the regional network is much smaller than the one observed in Mali and the Central Sahel (2.5%), in the Lake Chad region (2.3%) and in Libya (5.8%). This is hardly surprising since the density of a network usually decreases with its size, due to the impossibility of maintaining a large number of conflicting relationships simultaneously (Valente, 2010^[7]). The nature of

Table 4.3
Are the opposition networks rather provincial or cosmopolitan?

Measure	North and West Africa	Lake Chad	Mali and Central Sahel	Libya
Density, %	0.5	2.3	2.5	5.8
Average number of enemies	3.0	2.9	3.4	2.8
Clustering coefficient	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.6
Average path length	4.2	3.0	2.8	2.4
Type of network	Cosmopolitan	Neither cosmopolitan nor provincial	Rather cosmopolitan	Rather cosmopolitan

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020_[9]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

opposition networks also encourages low densities, as violent organisations tend to have as few enemies as possible.

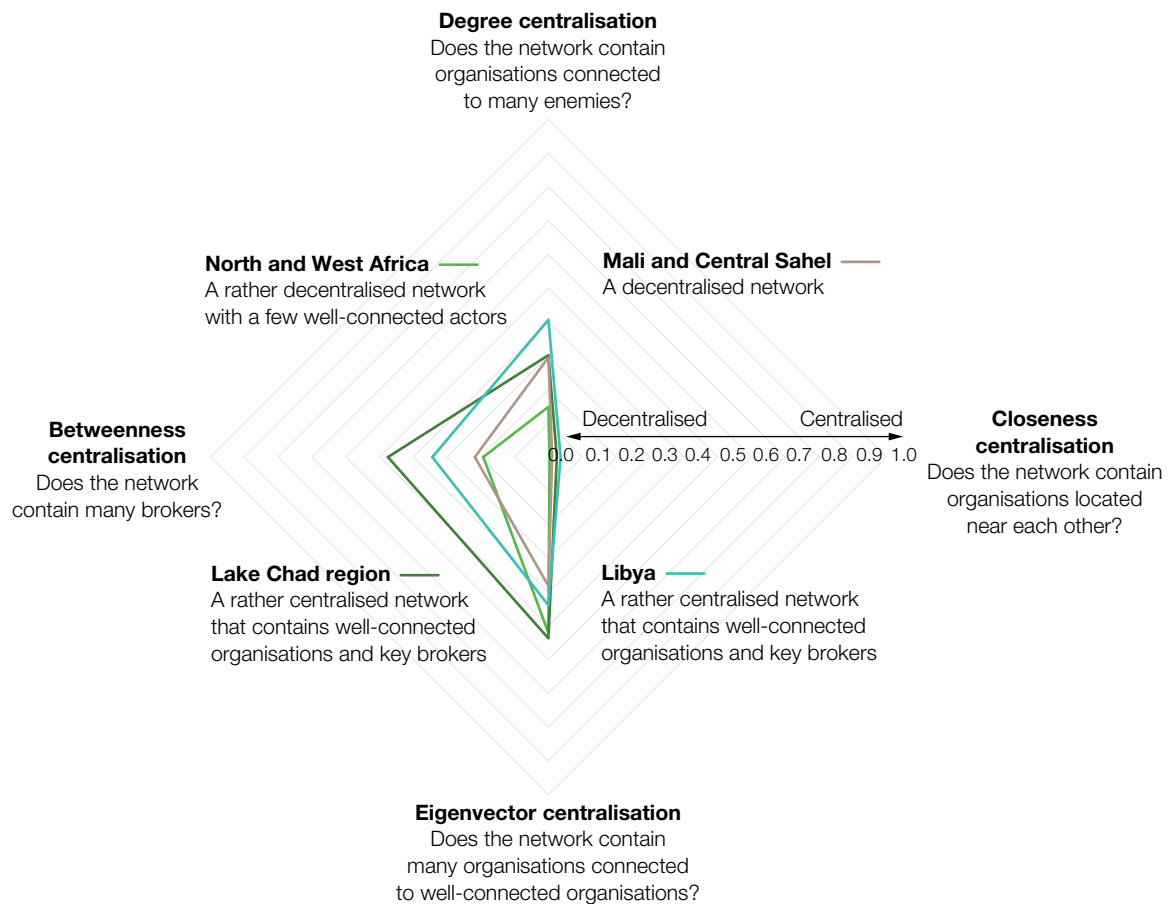
Further analysis of the overall structure of the network confirms that the organisations in conflict in the Lake Chad region have adopted a far less cosmopolitan structure than in the rest of the region and regionally (Table 4.3). In 2020, each organisation has, on average, 3.0 enemies in North and West Africa, Lake Chad and Libya, and 3.5 enemies in Mali and the Central Sahel. Conflict networks have a rather compact structure, as evidenced by the rather low clustering coefficient that indicates whether organisations tend to form small, closed communities characterised by a high density of ties. The only exception is the Lake Chad region, where a relatively high clustering coefficient suggests the existence of a more cohesive network. The average number of steps required to link organisations in conflict does not exceed three in all of the regional conflicts, suggesting that most enemies can be reached easily. Violent organisations are further apart in the regional network, with 4.2 steps on average between them.

These results do not imply that the regional network lacks cohesion. Far from being fragmented into multiple groups, the regional network of conflict is remarkably compact, considering the significant distance that separates some of the organisations involved across North and West Africa. Three-quarters of all actors (74%) can be found in the main component of the network, which brings

together many of the organisations involved in the Libyan, Malian and Nigerian conflicts. This remarkable compactness is explained by the existence of major brokers, i.e. organisations that are targeted by several types of enemies. Civilian groups occupy this unfortunate position in many countries: both government forces and jihadist organisations tend to attack them more than they attack each other. In other words, civilian groups are the glue that holds enemies together, with disastrous consequences for both themselves and the political stability of the region.

Another way to characterise how violent organisations are fighting each other is by looking at the centralisation of their network, which indicates whether they are rather centralised around a few key nodes, or rather decentralised. The analysis shows that the regional and local opposition networks have few actors with exceptionally high centrality, as shown by the measures presented in Figure 4.4, which determines the degree of inequality in the network. These figures vary between “0” if no actor is more central than another and “1” if a single actor’s centrality is greater than every other actor, such as when an individual occupies the centre of a star network in which everyone is connected to a central node. If opposition networks were centralised, most of their centralisation measures would be above 0.5, and the space between the four edges of the radar chart would be nearly full. It is clearly not the case. Generally speaking, the network is the least centralised in Mali and the Central Sahel, and the most centralised in the Lake Chad region.

Figure 4.4
Are the opposition networks rather centralised or decentralised?



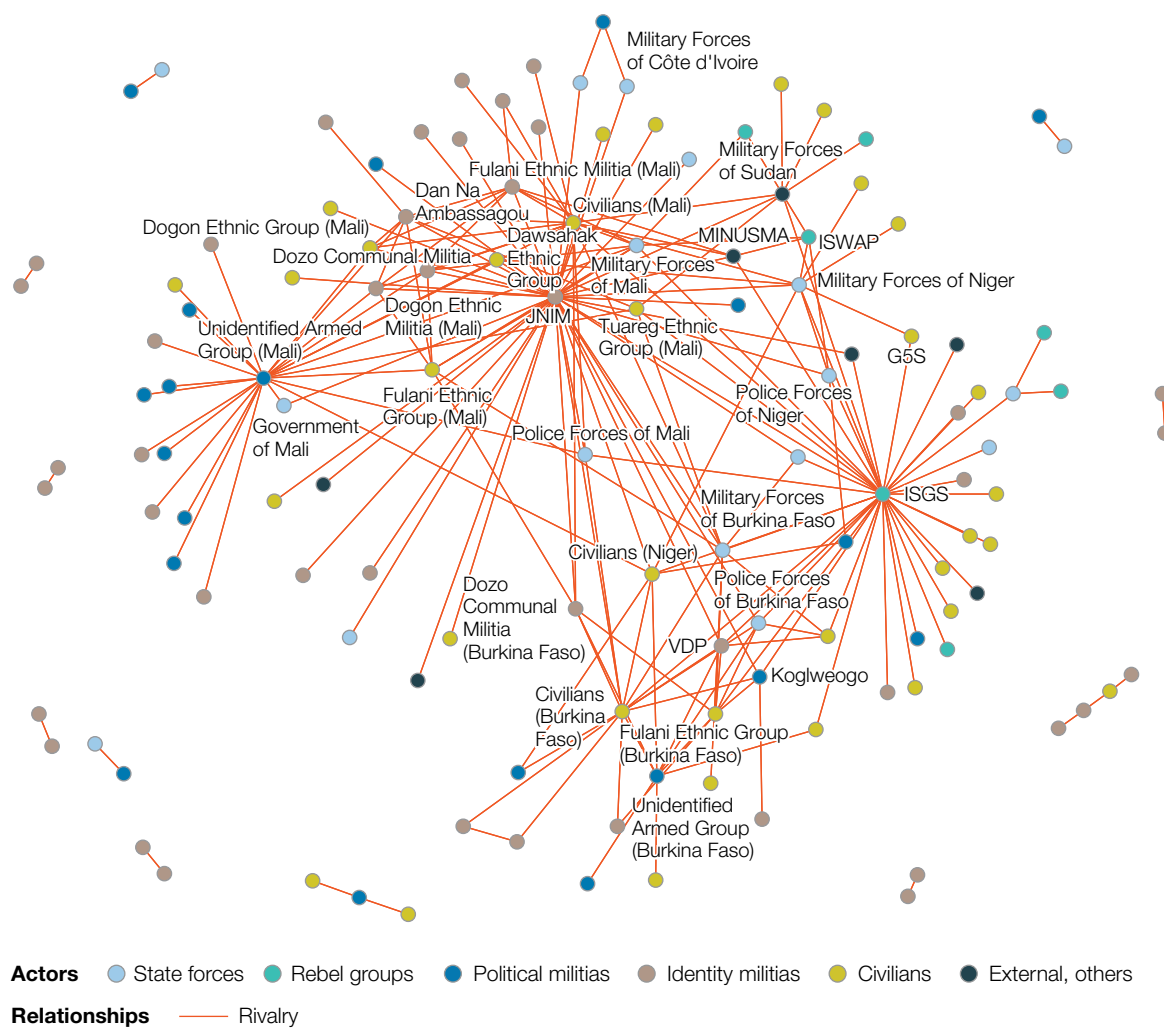
Note: Data available through 30 June 2020.
Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

Degree centralisation is below 0.3 for all opposition networks, indicating that the number of conflictual relationships does not vary substantially among the organisations in conflict. Low closeness centralisation scores are observed everywhere, which suggests that no single actor is particularly close to the centre of the network. Eigenvector centrality is relatively high (>0.5) in the region and in Lake Chad, which suggests that some organisations may fight a disproportionately large number of enemies who themselves have numerous enemies. Finally, low betweenness centralisation (<0.5) is recorded in all regions, indicating that no one broker is particularly central.

Who is fighting whom in Mali and the Central Sahel?

The Malian conflict started in January 2012, after a provisional alliance between the Tuareg rebels of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and Al Qaeda-affiliated groups launched a military offensive against the Malian army. The insurgents took over all major cities of northern Mali in a matter of weeks, including Tessalit and Kidal, where the offensive started, as well as Menaka, Timbuktu and Gao. Soon enough, the jihadist groups, Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Ansar Dine, exploited Tuareg grievances and started to fight against their former allies. In January 2013, a

Figure 4.5
Opposition network in Mali and the Central Sahel, 2020



Note: Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020_[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

military offensive by the jihadists towards Mopti in Central Mali convinced the interim Malian government to request the intervention of the French army, which launched Operation Serval. The French army rapidly retook northern Mali after an operation on a scale not witnessed since the Algerian war and paved the way for the deployment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali).

Though the French intervention achieved its immediate military goals, a political solution to the conflict in Mali failed to materialise (OECD/

SWAC, 2020_[8]). In February 2014, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Mauritania launched the G5 Sahel with a view to co-ordinating their efforts against jihadist organisations. Six months later, France replaced Operation Serval with Operation Barkhane, a regional effort to combat transnational terrorist and trafficking activities in the Sahara-Sahel region. Eight years after Serval, the insecurity fostered by rivalries between government forces, former rebels, religious extremists, militias and international forces remains higher than ever. Initially limited to northern Mali, violence has spread to central and eastern Mali, and to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger. In

Box 4.1**Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims (JNIM)**

The Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims, or Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa-l-Muslimin (JNIM), is a Salafi-Jihadist organisation under Al Qaida's banner. It was formed in March 2017 after a merger between Ansar Dine, including the unit called Katibat Macina, and the southern branches of AQIM, including the strike force al-Mourabitoun, which had rejoined AQIM in 2015 after a period of tension. The emir of JNIM is Iyad ag Ghali, the former leader of Ansar Dine. Other prominent figures in the organisation have included AQIM's Djamel Okacha (aka Yahya Abu al-Hammam, 1978–2019) and Katibat Macina's leader Amadou Kouffa (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2018^[9]). The second in command to ag Ghali, Ali Maychou, was killed in October 2019.

JNIM is active in northern and central Mali as well as in Niger and Burkina Faso. JNIM, and especially Kouffa, have close ties to the Burkinabè jihadist group, Ansaroul Islam (Box 4.3). JNIM units under Kouffa may also be establishing a presence along the Burkina Faso-Côte d'Ivoire border. JNIM's targets include French counter-terrorism forces in the Sahel, UN peacekeepers, Sahelian military forces, local militias and other jihadist organisations. JNIM and its components have perpetrated some of the deadliest attacks of the entire ongoing Sahelian conflict, including a

June 2018 attack that forced the regional G5 Sahel Joint Force to relocate its headquarters from central Mali to the capital Bamako.

JNIM may have complex and opaque ties to more mainstream political actors in the Sahel, and especially in northern Mali. There are recurring accusations that JNIM and particularly ag Ghali, have an ongoing relationship with the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), an ex-rebel bloc that is politically dominant in Mali's Kidal Region; several senior leaders of the CMA were leaders of Ansar Dine during 2012–13. The United Nations Security Council has sanctioned individual CMA leaders over charges of abetting and co-ordinating with JNIM (United Nations Security Council, 2018^[10]). In 2020, the prominent CMA leader Ahmada ag Bibi, also a former Ansar Dine leader, was a central negotiator of a prisoner exchange between JNIM and the Malian government. Overall, ag Ghali's long-term intentions are unclear – JNIM has agreed in principle to begin wider negotiations with the Malian government, but JNIM's insistence on the withdrawal of French combat forces may make such talks effectively a non-starter.

Source: Original text provided by Alexander Thurston and Susanna Goewey.

spite of punctual anti-terrorist successes, such as the killing of Abdelmalek Droukdel, the emir of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), by French forces in June 2020, Mali remains the epicentre of a regional cluster of violence dominated by violent organisations affiliated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

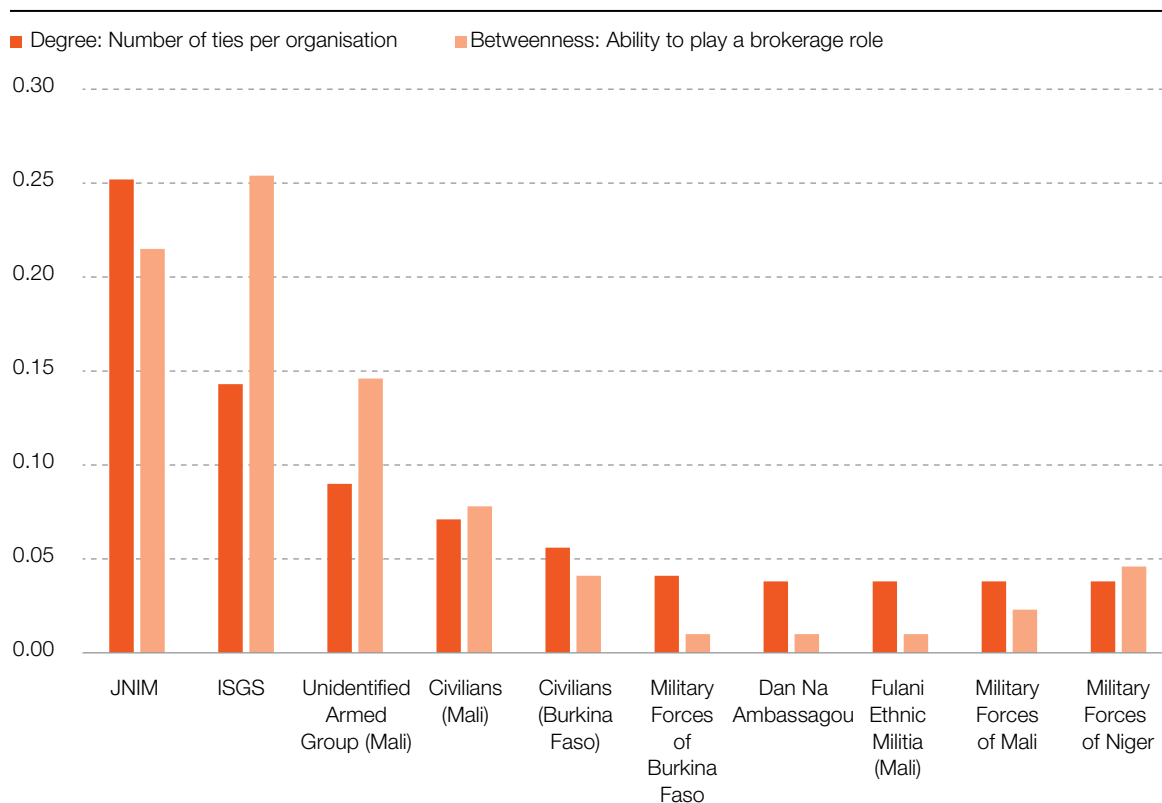
The decentralised structure of this opposition network is clearly visible in Figure 4.5, which represents organisations in conflict in the first half of 2020 in Mali and the Central Sahel. None of the 137 individual organisations represented according to their type is particularly central. Nearly 80% of the organisations are connected with each other within the main component of the network. The relatively small number of organisations disconnected from the conflict

network is a sure sign that Mali and the Central Sahel form a theatre of operations that transcend national boundaries.

The organisations with the most enemies are the Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims (JNIM), a coalition of jihadist groups affiliated with Al Qaeda, formed in 2017 (Box 4.1), and ISGS, founded in 2015. JNIM and ISGS are also among the largest brokers of violence in the region, as evidenced by their very high betweenness centrality scores, which means that these organisations often lie between two actors that do not fight each other, for example, government forces and their allied militias (Figure 4.6). In purely structural terms, being surrounded by numerous enemies or bridging different clusters of enemies in an opposition network is a liability for any organisation. In a

Figure 4.6

Centrality for top-scoring organisations in Mali and the Central Sahel, 2020



Note: Degree centrality represents the number of ties an organisation has. Betweenness centrality refers to the ability of an organisation to bridge several parts of the network (brokers). These measures are standardised so that networks of different size can be compared, by dividing the number of actual ties by the maximum number of possible ties. Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020_[9]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

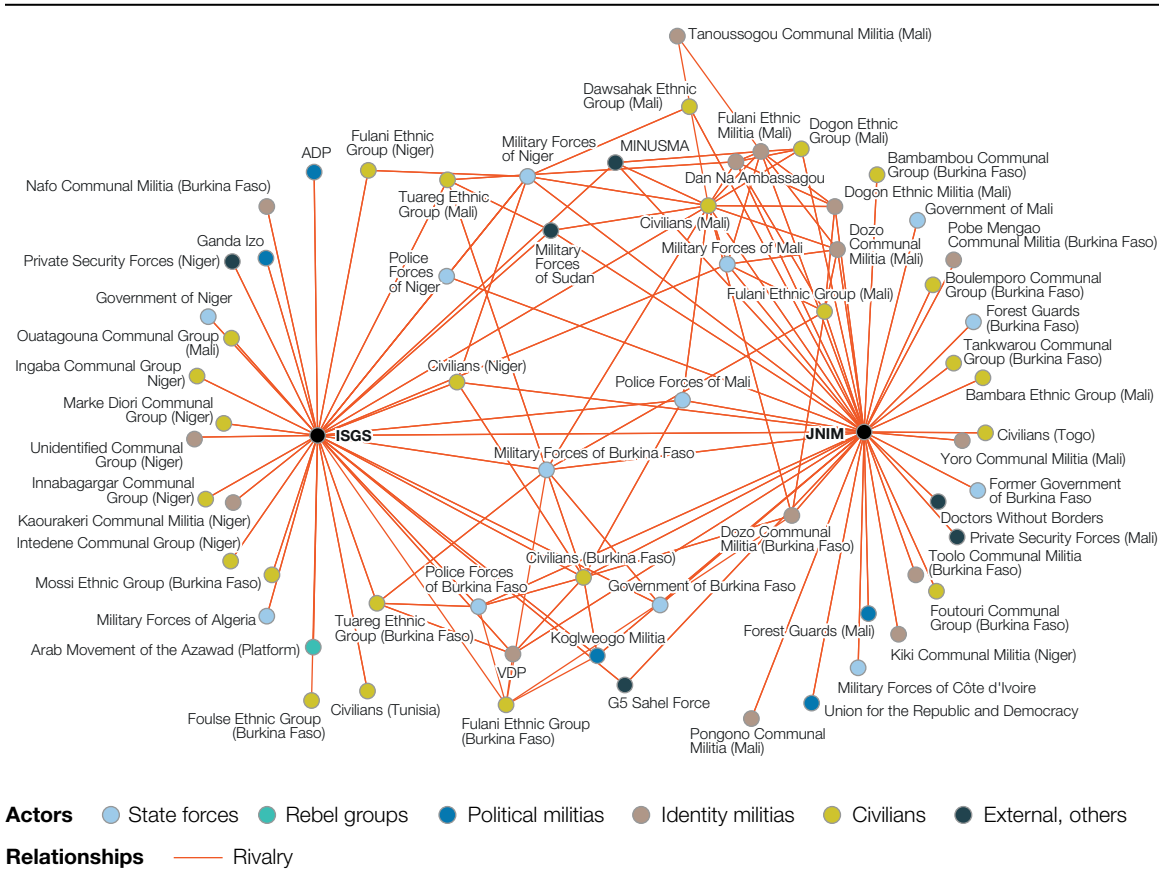
conflict network where ties between actors represent rivalries, brokers are likely to be targeted by various sides and find themselves in a precarious situation. Contrary to positive-tie networks, such as those who connect traders or political allies together, negative-tie networks are detrimental to organisations that have a large number of connections, for the simple reason that each new connection brings more violence.

In 2020, JNIM was in conflict, at some point or another, with 44 unique organisations, the largest number recorded in the region, while ISGS counted 37 enemies. The most striking feature of these organisations is their ability to fight a wide range of enemies: in addition to clashes with police and military forces from six countries, JNIM and ISGS are fighting with ethnic militias such as the Dogon-based group Dan Na Ambassagou, communal militias formed in response to political insecurity, rebel groups,

the G5 Sahel, the UN stabilisation mission, private security forces, non-governmental organisations such as Doctors Without Borders (MSF) and numerous civilian groups. The structural representation of these conflicts highlights how government forces are fighting both JNIM and ISGS simultaneously and how civilians are caught in between (Figure 4.7).

Until the end of the 2010s, ISGS conducted numerous attacks with Al Qaeda-affiliated groups against their common enemies (Le Roux, 2019_[11]), due to close interpersonal ties between senior commanders. In recent years, however, ISGS and JNIM have increasingly clashed over ideological and strategic issues (Nsaibia and Weiss, 2020_[12]). From January to June 2020, ISGS fought JNIM 28 times, resulting in 303 fatalities. The geography of these attacks shows that both organisations worked together to expand their activities in central Mali, northern Côte

Figure 4.7
JNIM and ISGS opposition network in the Central Sahel, 2020



Note: Data available through 30 June 2020. ADP stands for Alliance for the Defense of the Homeland and VDP stands for Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020_[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

d'Ivoire, and in the Séno plain and Gourma region between Mali and Burkina Faso. ISGS is currently competing with JNIM in three specific regions: the lower Inner Delta in Mali, the Sahel Region of Burkina Faso, and along the eastern border of Burkina Faso (Map 4.2).

Who is fighting whom in the Lake Chad region?

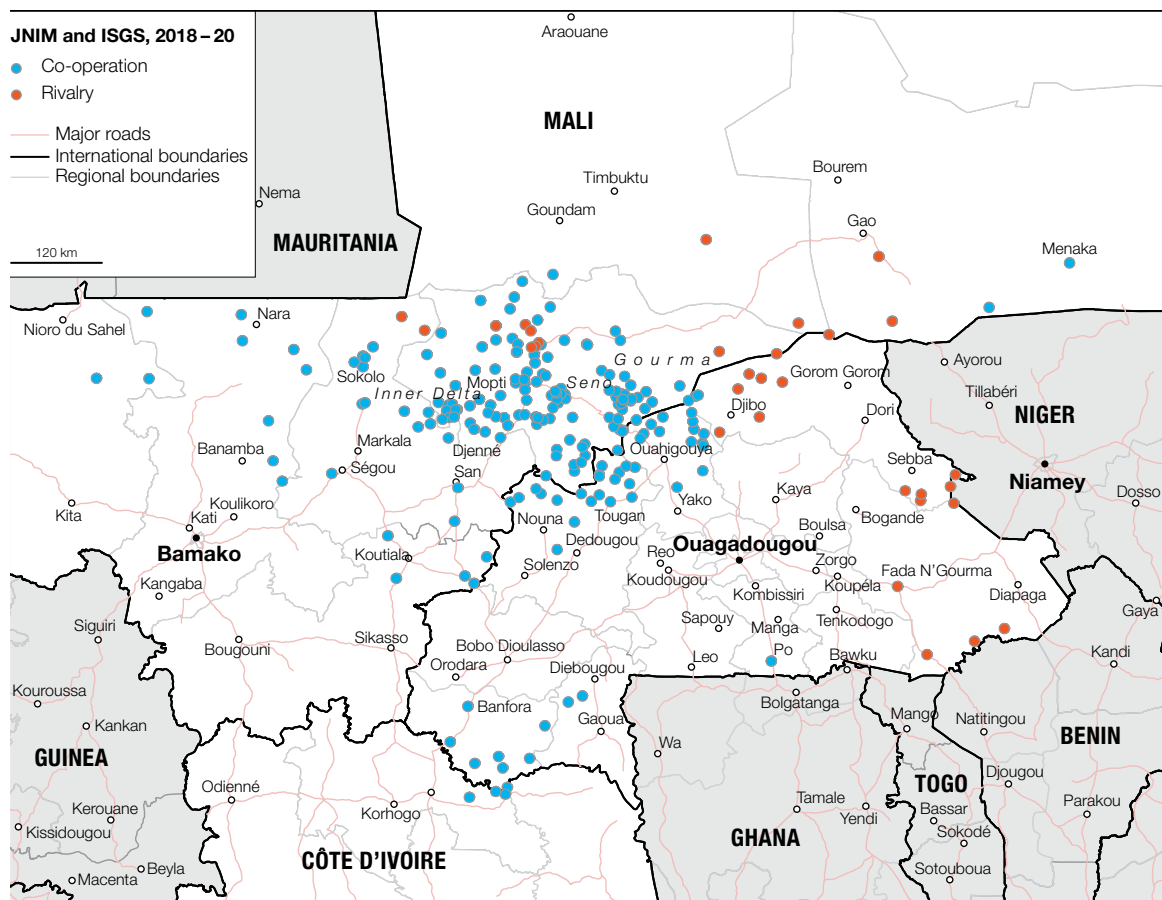
The impoverished Lake Chad region is the centre of a major insurgency launched by the jihadist organisation commonly known as Boko Haram against the Nigerian government in 2009. Boko Haram, which means “Western-style education is forbidden [by Islam]”, was a slogan used by the group’s early leader, Muhammad Yusuf (1970–2009), but it was never the group’s official name. Since the 2010s, the group has gone by

“Jama’at Ahl al-Sunna li-l-Da’wa wa-l-Jihad” or “The Society of Muhammad’s True Followers [who are] for Preaching and Holy War”.

The origins of the group are debated (Thurston, 2018_[13]). The dominant perspective is that it coalesced in the early 2000s as a hard-line, but mostly non-violent, preaching movement centred around Yusuf in the north-eastern Nigerian city of Maiduguri. Another perspective asserts that it grew in the 1990s out of a cell directly encouraged by Al Qaeda and/or Algerian militants and jihadists. In either case, the first violent uprising involving parts of Boko Haram occurred in 2003 in Yobe State, Nigeria. A much larger uprising occurred in summer 2009 in Maiduguri (Nigeria). Yusuf was killed by police afterwards and was succeeded by his close companion, Abubakar Shekau.

Map 4.2

Rivalry and co-operation between JNIM and ISGS in the Central Sahel, 2018–20



Note: The map shows the events for which JNIM and ISGS were opposed or allies, not the attacks conducted by each organisation separately. Data available through 30 June 2020.

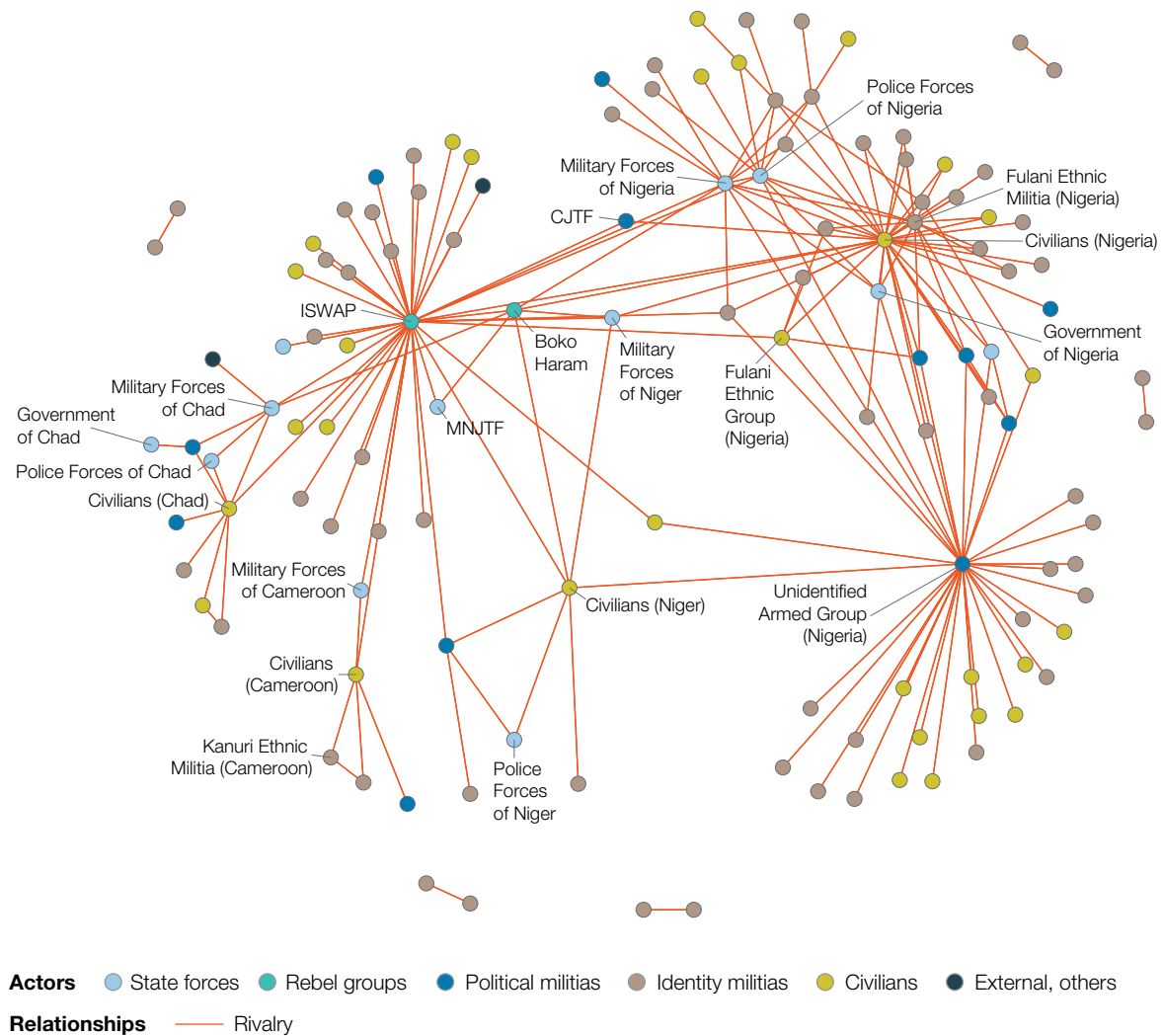
Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

During Yusuf's time, Boko Haram had individual-level connections to AQIM, who offered broader funding and training after the 2009 uprising. However, AQIM's efforts to control Shekau failed. A group of AQIM-backed Boko Haram dissidents broke away in 2011–12 and formed Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan (the Group of Muslims' Defenders in the Land of the Blacks, commonly known as Ansaru). Ansaru faced assassinations from Shekau's side as well as manhunts from the Nigerian security services and failed to thrive beyond sporadic operations. In 2015, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and became its "West Africa Province." In 2016, the majority of fighters broke away, taking the Islamic State's endorsement with them. Analysts now refer to the smaller faction as Boko Haram or Jama'at

Ahl al-Sunna li-l-Da'wa wa-l-Jihad led by Shekau, while referring to the larger, breakaway group as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) under the leadership of Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi (Zenn, 2020^[14]).

Since 2009, the group has conducted waves of terrorism, primarily within north-eastern Nigeria. The magnitude of the Boko Haram insurgency is often underestimated: more than six times more people have been killed around Lake Chad since the early 2010s than during the entire Malian civil war that started in 2012 (OECD/SWAC, 2020^[8]). Considered together, the two factions of Boko Haram are by far the deadliest insurgent groups in the region. No fewer than 4 895 violent events involving Boko Haram or ISWAP have been recorded by ACLED since 2009, which represents almost 20% of all

Figure 4.8
Opposition network in the Lake Chad region, 2020



Note: Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

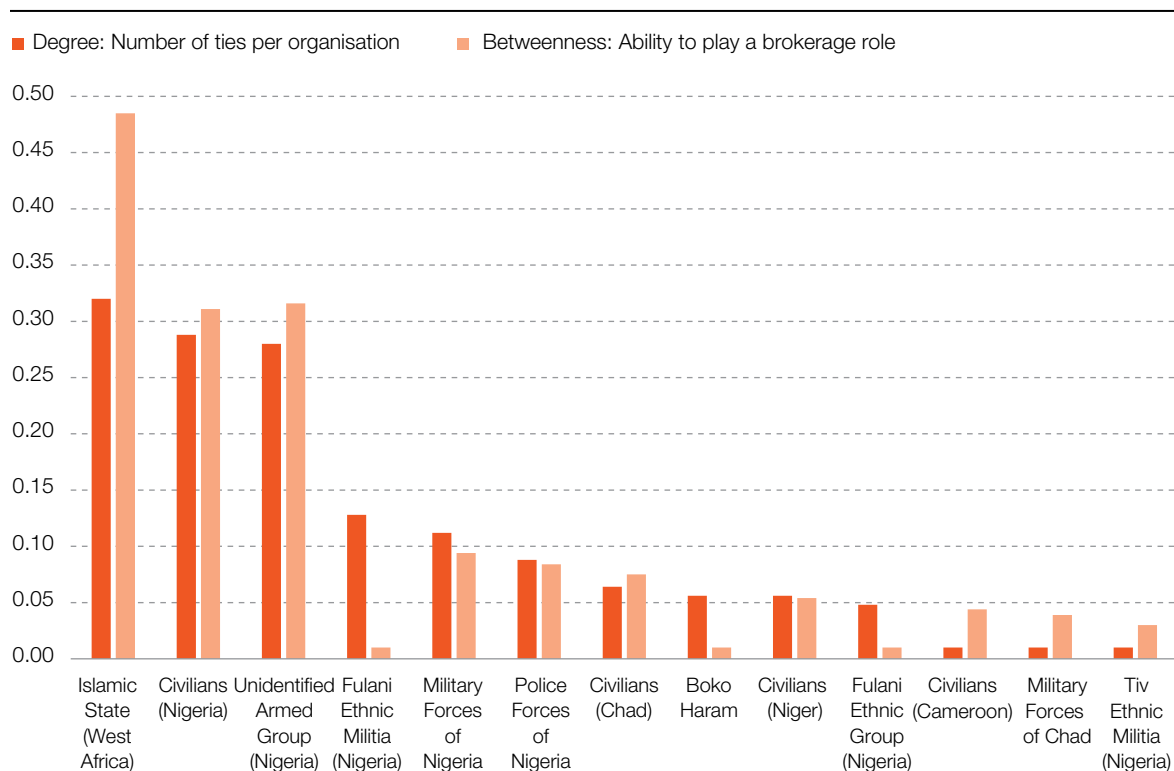
events recorded in West Africa. Initially focused on cities, Boko Haram spread to rural areas, under pressure from government forces and vigilante groups such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). In 2014–15, under the leadership of Shekau, Boko Haram seized territory in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states, where they attacked markets (Van Den Hoek, 2017^[15]), levied taxes on agricultural, pastoral and fishery resources and displaced hundreds of thousands of refugees.

In response, the Government of Nigeria launched several large-scale military offensives and reactivated the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), a joint effort to secure

the borders of the region. Boko Haram and its offshoots then resumed a campaign of violence in north-eastern Nigeria, south-eastern Niger, south-western Chad, and northern Cameroon. While the MNJTF’s operations made it possible to reduce the intensity of the insurgency, violence within the Lake Chad region remains quite high, and the insurgency, entrenched in a few strongholds, is far from defeated. The study of mobility patterns suggests that the two main factions of Boko Haram are composed of highly mobile cells capable of travelling over long distances repeatedly. These 50–60 cells can relocate to remote places that are difficult for government troops

Figure 4.9

Centrality for top-scoring organisations in the Lake Chad region, 2020



Note: Degree centrality represents the number of ties an organisation has. Betweenness centrality refers to the ability of an organisation to bridge several parts of the network (brokers). These measures are standardised so that networks of different sizes can be compared, by dividing the number of actual ties by the maximum number of possible ties. Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020_[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

to access, such as islands of Lake Chad and the Mandara Mountains on the Cameroonian border (Prieto Curiel, Walther and O’Clery, 2020_[16]).

The centrality of Boko Haram and ISWAP is clearly visible in the opposition network presented in Figure 4.8. One should note, however, that conflict in the Lake Chad region is far from being limited to Boko Haram and its enemies. Communal violence is widespread in the region, as evidenced by the dense cluster of enemies structured around Fulani and communal self-defence groups, identified as “identity militias” in the ACLED dataset. Less documented than the Boko Haram insurgency, these conflicts over agricultural and pastoral resources, land rights, access to markets and political disagreements, are nonetheless extremely deadly. While the origins and political motivations of the Boko Haram insurgency and communal violence are clearly different, both contribute to increasing the intensity of the conflict environment by spurring violence

between other actors in the network. Since Boko Haram started its campaign of violence in the late 2000s, the region has experienced an increase in conflicts between armed actors that did not fight Boko Haram or ISWAP (Dorff, Gallop and Minhas, 2020_[17]). This suggests that the entrance of a major opponent to the state, such as Boko Haram, can indirectly lead to increasing the likelihood of a battle between any of the belligerents of the north-eastern Nigeria conflict.

ISWAP is the organisation with the highest degree centrality in the region. Together, Boko Haram and ISWAP are opposed to 44 enemies in the region, far more than any other violent organisation in northern Nigeria and the surrounding countries, and the same number as JNIM in Mali (Figure 4.9).

Civilians are the second-most central actors in the network, an unfortunate position that results in their being targeted both by government forces, Boko Haram and ISWAP. While

the number of civilian fatalities has strongly decreased since its peak in the mid-2010s, more than 16 000 civilians have been killed in clashes with Boko Haram and ISWAP since the beginning of the insurgency.

As in Mali and the Central Sahel, unidentified armed groups are responsible for a significant number of attacks in the Lake Chad region. Their degree and betweenness centrality are next only to ISWAP and Nigerian forces. These groups remain unidentified either because the attackers left the scene without being recognised, did not claim their attack, killed all witnesses or were killed themselves. Could these unidentified groups be either Boko Haram or ISWAP? The patterns of aggression recorded in 2020 suggest otherwise: unidentified armed groups share only 14 out of 69 enemies in common with either Boko Haram or ISWAP. This means that events attributed to unidentified armed groups are committed by numerous other organisations operating in northern Nigeria as well. Some of these incidents are more criminal than political by nature, as when unidentified armed men attack traders or steal cattle. However, an alarming number of these incidents concern local politicians abducted or killed by unidentified gunmen in local government areas (LGAs) in Nigeria.

Who is fighting whom in Libya?

The first Libyan civil war started in February 2011 after security forces responded with violence to protests against the oppressive regime of Muammar Gaddafi. In response to these events, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorised a military intervention to prevent attacks on civilians in Libya. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) launched Operation Unified Protector on 23 March to cut off the flow of weapons to Libya by sea and soon began a bombing campaign to destroy government forces and enforce the UN-mandated no-fly zone. Gaddafi was killed on 20 October, and Operation Unified Protector ended 11 days later. The NATO intervention did not put an end to the conflict. Fighting between different factions of the rebellion started shortly after the National Transition Council (NTC) declared Libya “liberated” in October 2011. In May 2014, rivalries between the

House of Representatives (HoR) government and the General National Congress (GNC) government led to the Second Libyan Civil War, a conflict that continues to devastate Libya to this day.

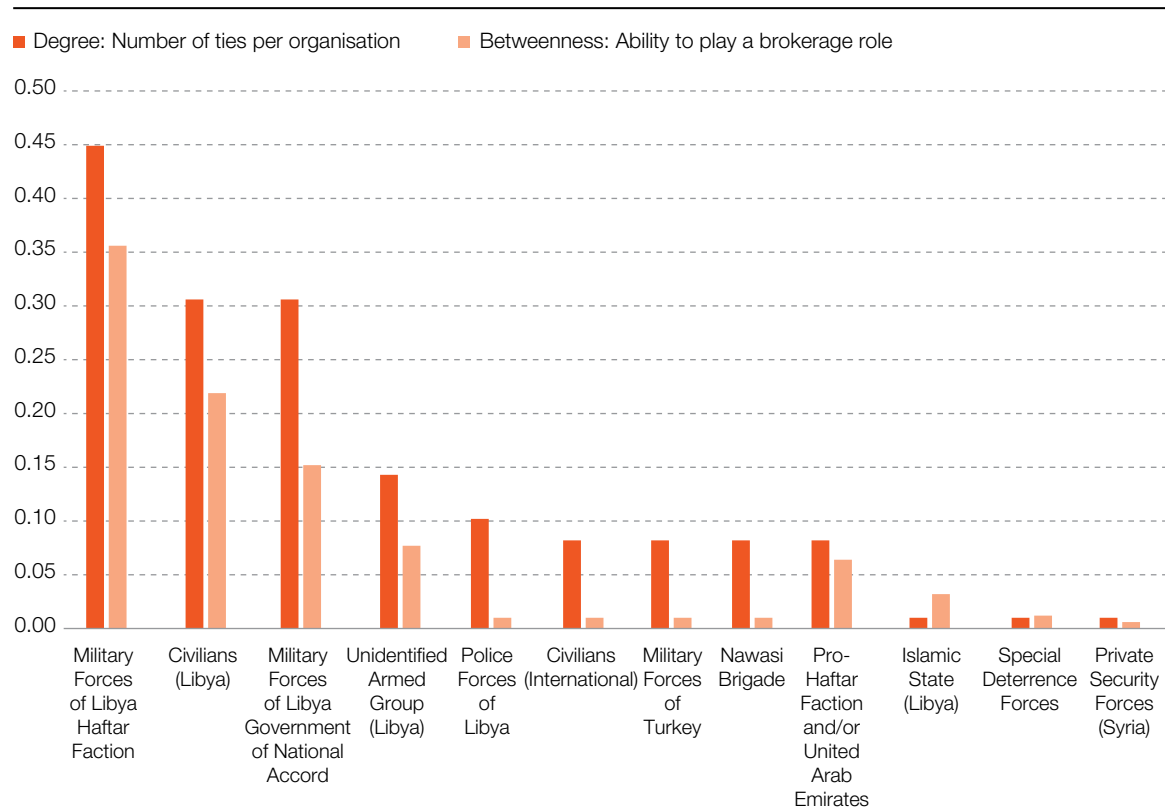
Since Gaddafi’s death in late 2011, the Libyan conflict has clearly been a civil war amid state collapse rather than an insurgency against a state, as in Mali, Burkina Faso or in northern Nigeria. The war has also been marked by a clear political and military divide between eastern and western Libya. On one side has been the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) put in place in 2015 as part of the UN-brokered Libyan Political Agreement. On the other side has been the eastern Libyan National Army (LNA) in Benghazi (also known as the Libyan Arab Armed Forces) that is affiliated with the HoR in Tobruk. The LNA is led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and has been accused of perpetrating many human rights abuses. There are countless other militias and tribes involved in this conflict fighting for both sides, as well as small pockets of terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS) and Al Qaeda that have complicated the civil war.

Militarily, the Libyan conflict is dominated by the GNA and the LNA, who have a much higher degree and betweenness centrality than any other organisation in the country (Figure 4.10). Other prominent organisations include the Islamic State, and the Nawasi Brigade and Special Deterrence Forces, two militias that functioned as a police and a fighting force in Tripoli against LNA. Because both LNA and GNA were initially part of a unified force, the former is coded “Military Forces of Libya – Haftar Faction” and the latter “Military Forces of Libya – Government of National Accord” by ACLED. The Libyan conflict is also characterised by a strong military involvement of private security forces and foreign military forces, whose impact on the conflict is discussed below and in Chapter 5.

These specificities are well reflected in the structure of the opposition network in 2020 (Figure 4.11). In addition to fighting each other, the GNA and the LNA are in conflict with numerous militias, private security forces and civilians. Because GNA and LNA forces form the main nodes of the network, both are in conflict with organisations that have fewer enemies than themselves,

Figure 4.10

Centrality for top-scoring organisations in conflict in Libya, 2020



Note: Degree centrality represents the number of ties an organisation has. Betweenness centrality refers to the ability of an organisation to bridge several parts of the network (brokers). These measures are standardised so that networks of different sizes can be compared, by dividing the number of actual ties by the maximum number of possible ties. Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020_[9]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

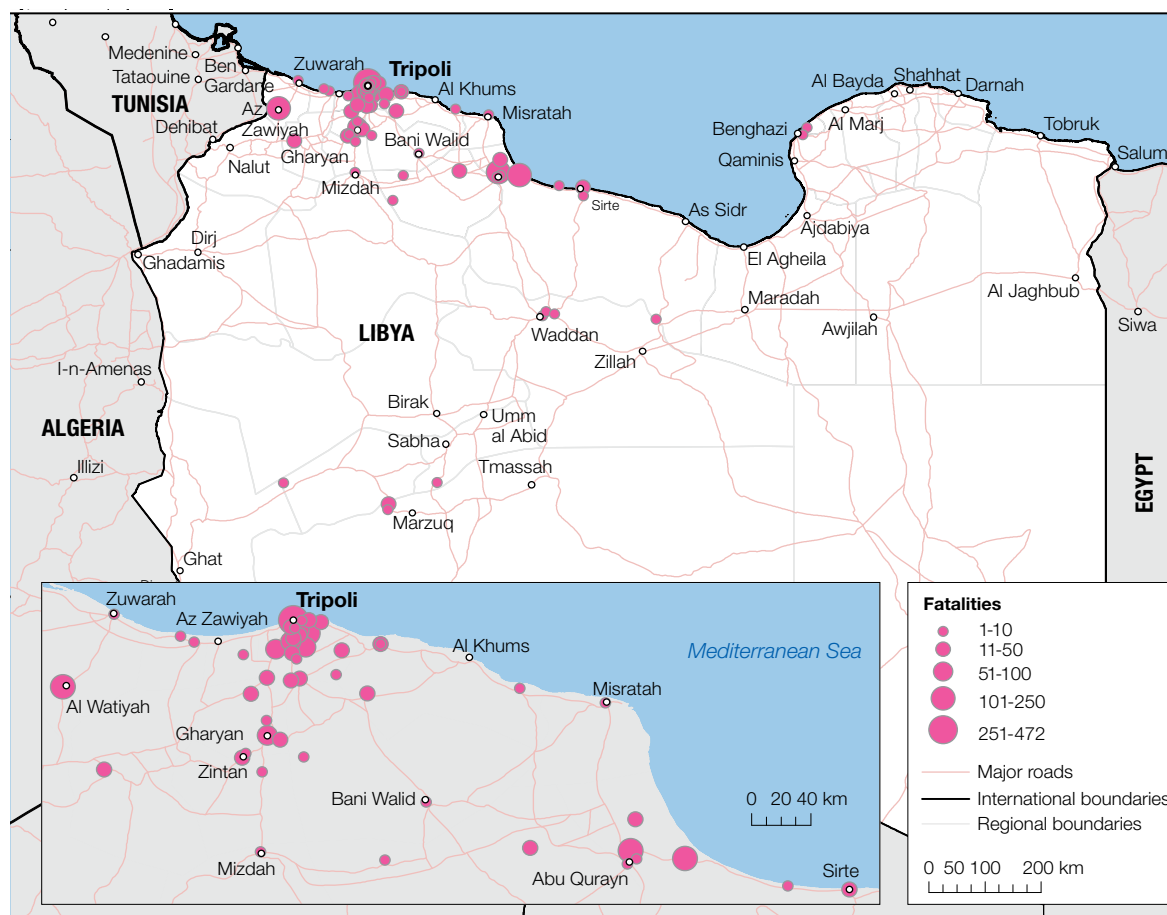
leading to a more centralised and less fragmented network than in Mali or Lake Chad.

In April 2019, after years of back and forth fighting between GNA and LNA forces, as well as multiple peace attempts by international actors, Haftar's forces launched an assault on Tripoli (Lacher, 2019_[18]). A few foreign governments were openly supportive of this initiative, namely the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Russian Federation (hereafter, Russia) and Egypt, who sent everything from troops to drones, while states like Saudi Arabia and France provided funding, weapons and intelligence. One of the prime justifications these states gave for their involvement was in response to Haftar's proclaimed anti-political Islamist sentiment, a significant issue for states like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt who strongly oppose the political Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood in their territory and abroad.

The conflict also has been characterised by the steady provision of arms from abroad. This flow of arms has been in violation of a UNSC arms embargo that has been in place against Libya since 2011, and a pervasive issue that the UN has struggled to address. On 29 July 2019, the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Ghassan Salamé, presented a plan to seek peace in Libya to the Security Council, proposing: 1) a truce during Eid al-Adha, an important Islamic holiday; 2) a high-level international conference of all countries concerned to work towards a ceasefire, and implement the arms embargo; and 3) a meeting of Libyan leaders to agree on a Libyan-led way forward. The Eid al-Adha truce was soon agreed upon, and planning began for Salamé's second initiative. During this time, between September and November of 2019, 200 mercenaries from

Map 4.3

Clashes between LNA and GNA, 2018–20



Note: Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[19]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

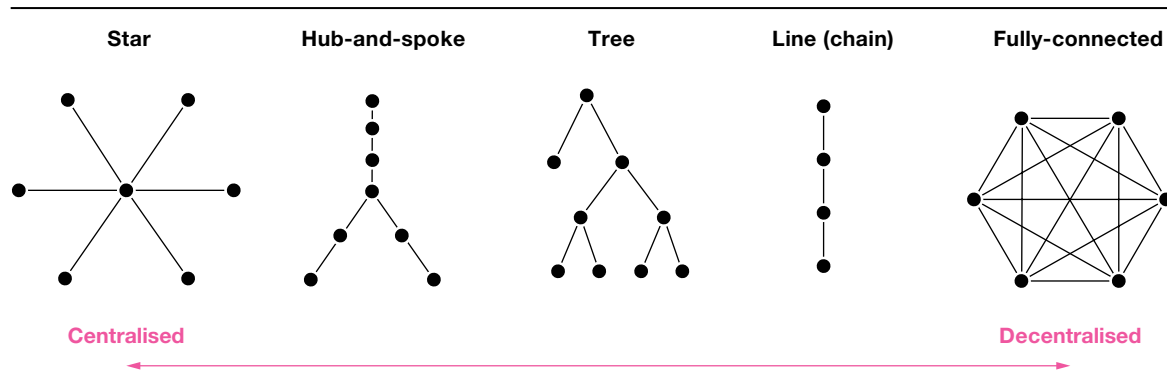
on 3 February, and the progress made there led to a second JMC meeting in late February 2020, where officials worked on a ceasefire agreement that would let some civilians return to their homes. However, an increase in violence in March stalled the talks while arms shipments continued to both sides and GNA forces pushed the LNA out of Tripoli.

In May 2020, the GNA pushed Haftar's forces back to Sirte, a city seen as the gateway to the eastern, oil-rich region. On 6 June, in a meeting with Field Marshal Haftar and HoR President Aguila Saleh Issa, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi called for a ceasefire to start on 8 June, for all foreign troop and mercenaries to leave the country, and for all militaries and militias to hand over their weapons to the LNA, among other points. This Cairo Declaration was

largely ignored by the GNA, which regarded it as a one-sided proposal and said they would continue on to Sirte (Melcangi and Dentice, 2020^[20]).

Later that same month, President el-Sisi declared that the presence of GNA forces in Sirte was "a red line" for Egypt and that direct intervention would be justified as self-defence if the GNA continued. Three days later, Russia called for ceasefire negotiations, followed by similar calls from France, Germany, the United States, Italy and the Arab League. However, even if a ceasefire were to be called now, the violence since spring 2020, supported by many international actors pursuing their own interests, has already cost thousands of lives, internally displaced over 425 000 Libyans and put some 650 000 other African refugees in Libya in danger (Baldwin-Edwards and Lutterbeck, 2019^[21]).

Figure 4.12
Centralisation in networks



Source: Adapted from OECD/SWAC (2019^[23]), *Women and Trade Networks in West Africa*, West African Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/7d67b61d-en>.

The changing structure of opposition

How has the overall structure of the opposition network changed over time? The evolution from 2009 to 2020 shows that there is an overall trend toward increased conflict in North and West Africa. It also confirms that opposition networks are increasingly centralised on a few key actors. Each of the subnational conflict theatre networks self-evidently displays higher levels of conflict than does the overall region. However, there is also a significant amount of volatility in the structure of Libya's opposition networks, while Lake Chad has been more consistent over time. By contrast, Mali and the Central Sahel's opposition networks have rapidly changed since 2017, after several years of relative stability.

These results build on two key network-level metrics, density and centralisation, calculated both in the entire region and in each of the three subnational conflict theatres (Mali and Central Sahel, Lake Chad, Libya). The concepts of density and centralisation refer to differing aspects of the overall "compactness" of a network. Density describes the general level of cohesion within a network. It measures the overall proportion of relations present within a network to the maximum number of relations possible. The metric's score ranges from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 1. Centralisation describes the extent to which this cohesion is organised around particular organisations and ranges from 0 (highly decentralised) to 1 (highly centralised).

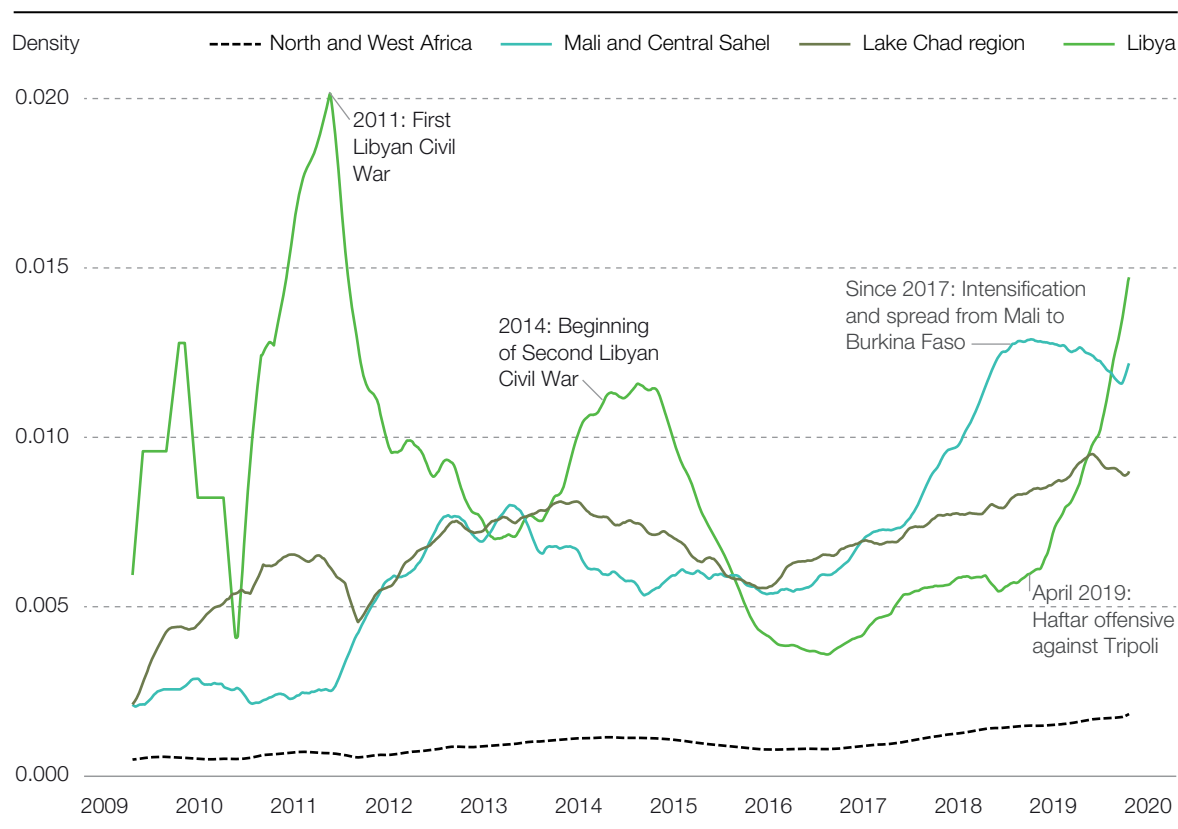
Density and centralisation, therefore, are important complementary measures of a network's overall structure. As previously discussed, there are several different ways to conceptualise centrality in a network. This analysis uses group degree centralisation, which emphasises the structural difference between a highly centralised (star-like) network, where one organisation is linked to all others, and a highly decentralised (fully-connected) network, where all organisations are linked to each other (Figure 4.12).

Each of these key metrics is observed daily for opposition and alliance relations across the entire duration of the study to consider how these networks have evolved over time. The daily density and centralisation metrics are analysed as a formal time series, which is composed of the following elements: an overall trend, a seasonal component and random fluctuation. To simplify the presentation of such a complex and dynamic temporal network time series, only the overall trend element for each metric is presented here. The following discussion considers these trends for the opposition network; the alliance network is discussed later in the chapter.

An increasingly dense and centralised network of opposition

The density of the overall opposition network in the region has been consistently low over time (Figure 4.13). Despite the overall low density, there is a gradual and noticeable increase in density

Figure 4.13
Opposition network density, 2009–20



Note: The graphs begin in July 2009 rather than January 2009 because there is never a trend to observe on the first time point and because the data are smoothed using a 90-day moving-average window.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

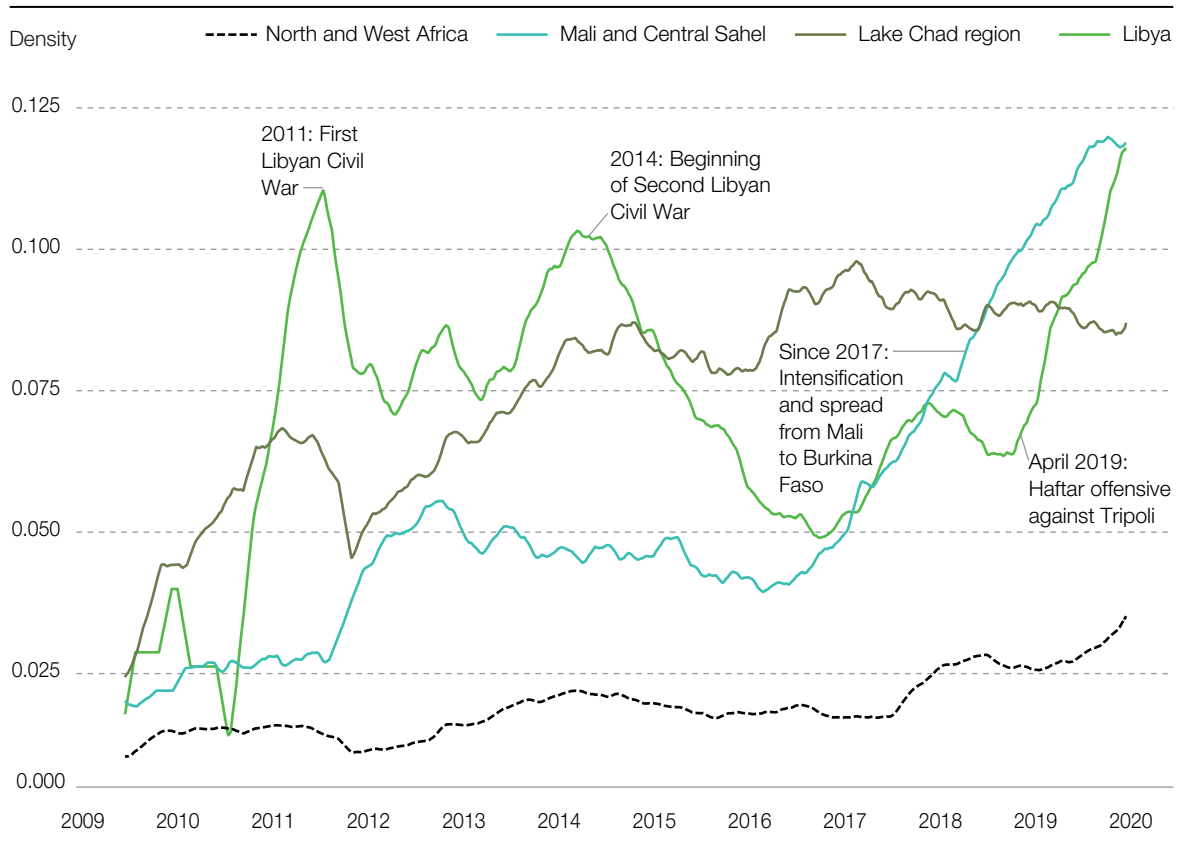
scores since 2009, largely a result of the impact of the three conflict theatres: Libya, Mali and the Central Sahel, and the Lake Chad region. The increase in density is an alarming sign for the region, as it means that there are more conflictual relationships between organisations since the late 2000s. It is also alarming because density is increasing even as the number of organisations is also increasing, which typically is expected to reduce network density. While each of the three theatres has consistently higher densities than the regional network, there is significant volatility present.

The overall trend is towards increased density, but there are episodes where the density drops dramatically, only to return to higher levels later. This is most noticeable in Libya, which had the highest density between 2009 and 2016, the lowest density between 2017 and 2019, and the highest again in the first half

of 2020, marked by the failed offensive against Tripoli by Haftar forces. The Central Sahel and Lake Chad theatres had been more consistent over time while also exhibiting the graduate upward climb that characterises the region at large. The case density trends largely correspond with major escalations and de-escalations within each theatre. For example, the intensification and spread of the Sahelian conflict from Mali to Burkina Faso since 2017 resulted in a significant and corresponding density increase as well.

In contrast with low density measures, the opposition networks have been relatively more highly centralised over time (Figure 4.14). This means that the overall regional relations have exhibited a star-like structure that involves many conflicts with a few key organisations (Figure 4.12) over time. This points to the importance of states as key combatants in these conflicts as state forces will typically attract and prosecute

Figure 4.14
Opposition network centralisation, 2009–20



Note: The graphs begin in July 2009 rather than January 2009 because there is never a trend to observe on the first time point and because the data are smoothed using a 90-day moving-average window.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

violence against competing non-state organisations within their territory. It also points to the importance of a few non-state violent groups, like JNIM, ISGS, Boko Haram and ISWAP, in pressing the conflicts in the individual theatres. Like states, these types of organisations will also be involved in many more oppositional ties than the average group in the network.

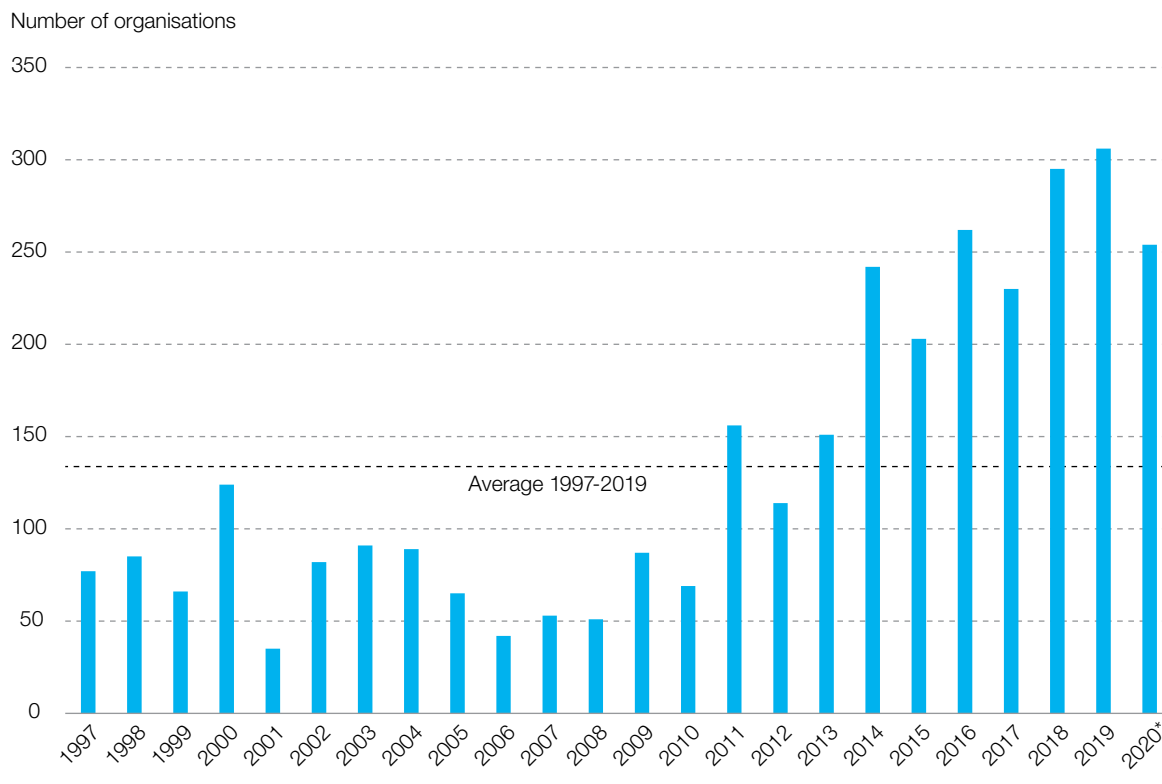
While the overall trend has been toward more centralised opposition networks, Libya has been more volatile than has the Central Sahel and Lake Chad conflict theatres, with significant oscillations between higher and lower centralisation. These episodes reflect the tendency of the Libyan network to decentralise during ceasefires and peace talks and to recentralise around the two main opponents, the GNA and the LNA, when those processes have failed. By contrast, Lake Chad has been far more consistently centralised over time, with few clear periods

of decentralisation since 2012. The conflict has experienced a gradual intensification and a multiplication of the number of actors targeted by both government forces and jihadist militants, with no periods of ceasefire or negotiations. Different still is the Mali and Central Sahel opposition network, which has become more rapidly centralised since 2017, after several jihadist organisations merged into JNIM and expanded within Mali and into neighbouring Burkina Faso.

These dynamics speak not only to the fluidity of the conflicts but also to a persistent centralised architecture found in these opposition networks. Given that each theatre is composed of a series of non-state organisations seeking to challenge or replace state forces (Central Sahel and Lake Chad) or to fill the void in a collapsed state (Libya), it is likely that the opposition networks will remain centralised even as the networks themselves continue to expand in terms of participants.

Figure 4.15

Co-operative organisations in North and West Africa, 1997–2020



Note: *Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

ALLIANCES WITHOUT COALITIONS

Fewer alliances than conflicts

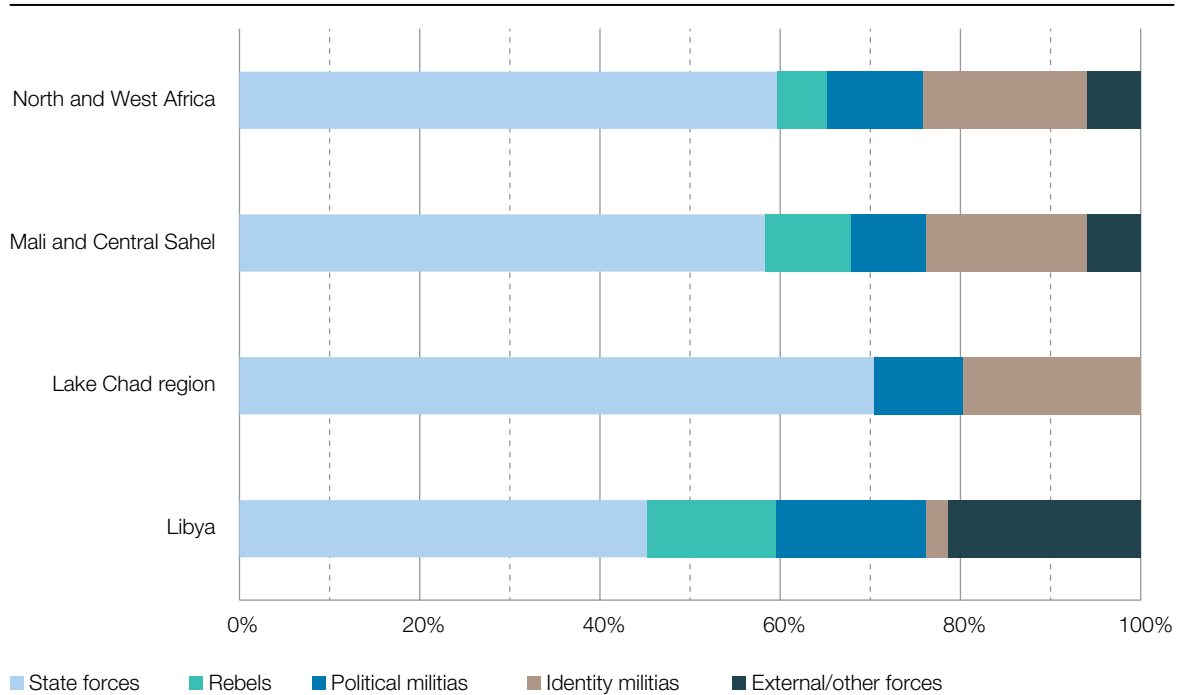
North and West Africa have experienced a rise in the number of alliances since the early 2010s. Only 87 organisations involved in co-operation were recorded in 2009, against 306 ten years later (Figure 4.15). This evolution first reflects the overall increase in the number of violent actors in the region. While there were fewer than 200 organisations at the beginning of the 2000s, there were 704 in 2019. The region still counts far fewer alliances than conflicts. In 2019, only 127 organisations were involved in co-operative events, against 562 for conflictual events. Similarly, co-operative events in which two or more organisations have established a partnership against a common enemy represent less than 20% of all the events recorded from 1997 to 2020.

The increase in the number of alliances can also be linked to new military partnerships among state forces. State forces are the most likely type of actor to build co-operative relationships with other organisations (Figure 4.16). In 2020, state forces represented 60% of the co-operative organisations in the region, a proportion that is roughly similar to the one found in Mali and the Central Sahel. In the Lake Chad region, where there are no alliances involving rebel groups, state forces represent 70% of the co-operative organisations. External and other forces are particularly represented in Libya where the LNA is supported by Egypt, France, the UAE and Russian mercenaries, while the GNA receives military aid from Turkey, Italy and Qatar.

Alliances among rebels or jihadist organisations remain fragile and opportunistic. In Mali, for example, the awkward alliance between

Figure 4.16

Co-operative organisations by actor and region, 2020



Note: Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020_[19]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

the secular rebels of the MNLA and the Jihadists of Ansar Dine against the Malian army in 2012 was short-lived. Alliances are also built on circumstances rather than common objectives or ideology. The Libya Dawn alliance launched by Tripoli's Islamists and Misratan militias, and the Dignity alliance built around Haftar's faction of the LNA proved unable to prevent the growing fragmentation of the political landscape in 2014 (Lacher, 2020_[22]). In the Lake Chad region, Boko Haram and ISWAP have few if any allies, which also contributes to explaining the prominence of alliances built around state actors.

State actors are also those who have established the fastest-growing number of alliances: there were less than 40 co-operative state forces in 2007 against nearly 150 ten years later (Figure 4.17). The need for more alliances can be read as a response to the multiplication and spread of conflict in the region. These alliances have taken many shapes: reactivation of joint forces such as the MNTJF around Lake Chad, co-operation with foreign troops in Mali, increased use of ethnic militias such

as Dan Na Ambassagou or the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA) in Mali, self-defence groups such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in northern Nigeria or the Koglweogo in Burkina Faso. The strong increase in the number of alliances among states is reflected, with a short delay, in the rise of political and identity militias since the early 2010s. While militias have sometimes proved effective in combating rebels or religious militants where state power is deficient, these organisations are increasingly used to serve political or private interests. In a conflict environment where violence is widespread, they continue to commit serious human rights abuses, further contributing to the intensification of violence across the region, particularly against civilians.

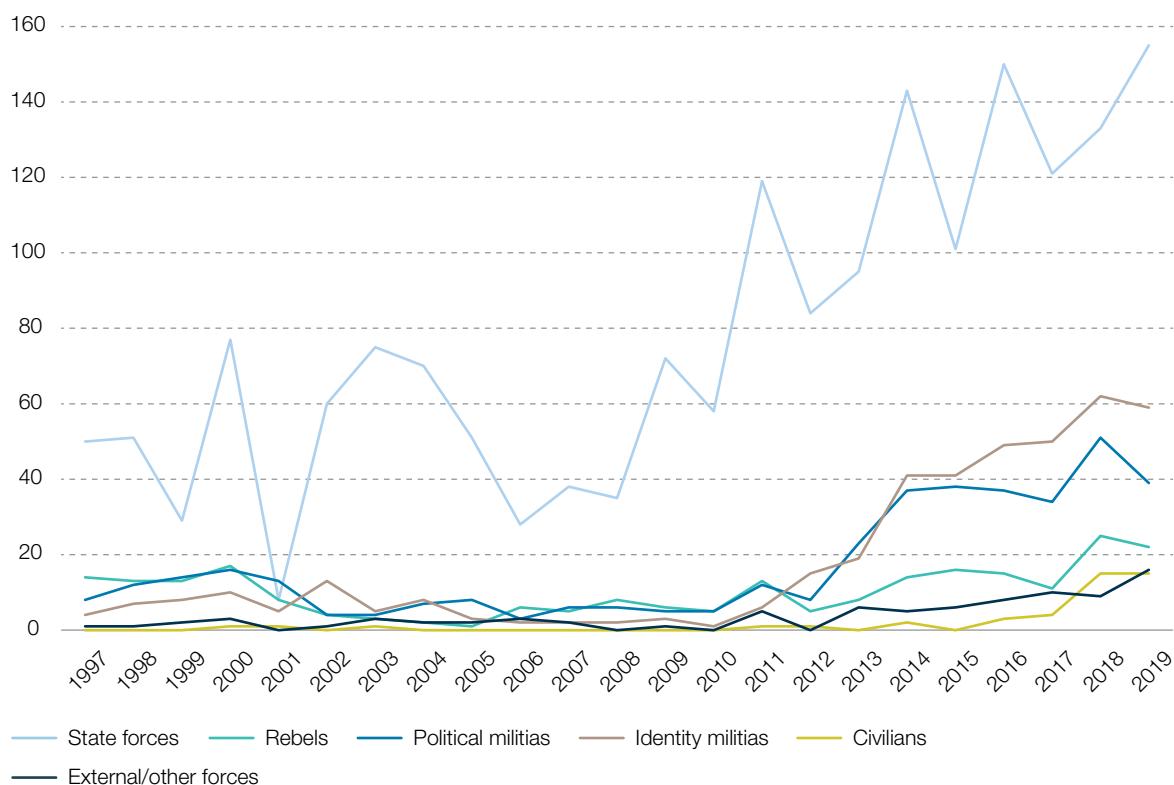
A sparse and decentralised network of allies

Violent organisations collaborate far less than they fight across the region. In 2020, the network that connects the organisations

Figure 4.17

Co-operative actors by type in North and West Africa, 1997–2019

Number of co-operative actors



Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020_[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

Table 4.4

Composition and density of co-operation networks by region, 2020

	Number of nodes	Number of ties	Density, %
North and West Africa	129	147	1.8
Lake Chad	28	34	9.0
Mali and Central Sahel	44	55	5.8
Libya	24	28	10.1

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020_[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

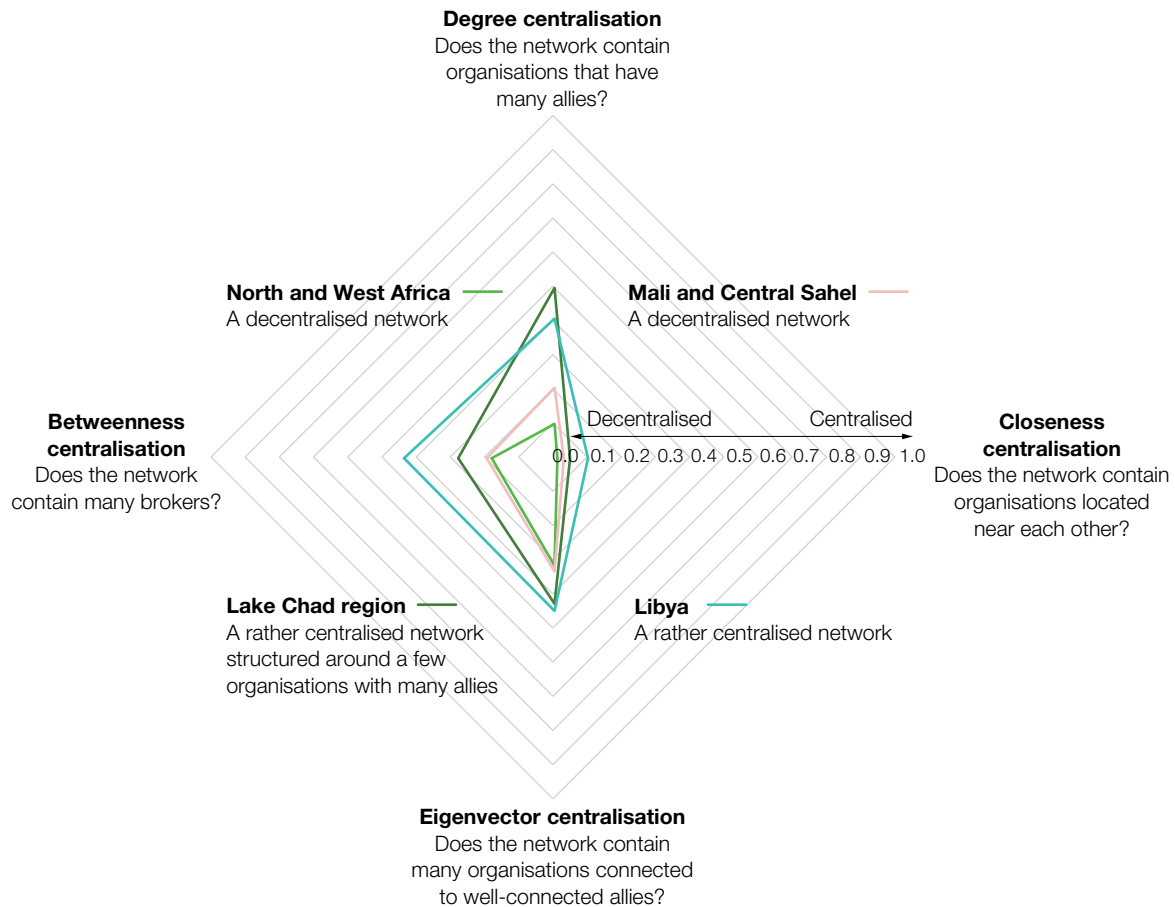
involved in co-operative events in North and West Africa counted only 129 nodes, against 562 in the opposition network. Similar disparities are observed in each of the three theatres of operations: only 55 alliances were recorded in Mali and the Central Sahel, 34 around Lake Chad, and 28 in Libya in 2020 (Table 4.4).

The paucity of alliances reflects the difficulty of building long-lasting coalitions between organisations that often have divergent political

agendas. It does not mean, however, that the density of the co-operation network is low. Despite the small number of organisations involved, co-operation networks are denser than their opposition counterparts, suggesting that the few violent organisations that collaborate have more allies than enemies on average. The density of ties is lowest at the regional level (less than 2%), due to the considerable distance between the actors, and highest in Libya and

Figure 4.18

Are the co-operation networks rather centralised or decentralised?



Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[9]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

Lake Chad, where roughly 10% of possible ties are actually present in the network.

The most striking feature of the co-operation networks is not that their density is several times higher than the opposition networks. After all, this is quite understandable, as belligerents tend to have as many allies as possible, and as few enemies as possible. What makes the co-operation networks particularly unique is that their overall architecture is almost similar to the opposition networks. Despite representing two very different kinds of relations, both types of networks tend to have a cosmopolitan structure characterised by an abundance of loosely connected brokers. This structure differs from a provincial structure in which organisations are clustered around a few central players. In contrast, both types of networks are rather

sparse and decentralised. This is particularly the case for the North and West African network, which has a low density, average number of ties (degree), and clustering coefficient, and in which organisations are separated by a rather large average number of steps (Table 4.5). The structure of the Malian and Libyan networks also largely conforms to this model. The Lake Chad region is the only case for which the structure of the actors presents features associated with both provincial and cosmopolitan networks.

Co-operation networks appear to contain few organisations that are particularly well connected, as suggested by the low levels of centralisation presented in Figure 4.18. Each centralisation measure ranges from 0 if the network is completely decentralised, to 1 if the network is perfectly centralised around a single actor. The North

Table 4.5

Are the co-operation networks rather provincial or cosmopolitan?

Measure	North and West Africa	Lake Chad	Mali and Central Sahel	Libya
Density, %	1.8	9.0	5.8	10.1
Average number of allies	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.3
Clustering coefficient	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.6
Average path length	4.3	1.9	2.7	2.5
Type of network	Cosmopolitan	Neither cosmopolitan nor provincial	Rather cosmopolitan	Rather cosmopolitan

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[19]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

and West Africa network is clearly a decentralised structure in which very few actors are either well-connected (degree) or capable of playing the role of brokers (betweenness). A similar structure can be found in Mali and the Central Sahel: none of the four centralisation measures considered here exceeds 0.3, a sure sign that most organisations tend to form loosely connected clusters. Co-operation networks in the other theatres of operations appear more centralised. Both the Lake Chad region and Libya network contain organisations that have established many alliances and/or are tied to well-connected allies, as evidenced by relatively high degree and eigenvector scores. The Libyan network also contains a significant number of important brokers that build alliances between local militias.

The decentralised structure of the regional co-operation network is particularly visible when each organisation is mapped as a node connected to its allies (Figure 4.19). To emphasise the role of key players, the size of the node is proportional to its brokerage centrality, i.e. the number of times that a node is located between two other allied nodes. Organisations that play the role of brokers appear bigger than the others. Three major clusters emerge from the region, each one structured around a major military organisation: the military forces of Field Marshal Haftar in Libya, the military forces of Nigeria around Lake Chad and the military forces of Niger in the Central Sahel. Governmental actors clearly dominate each theatre of operations and are densely connected to civilian organisations, political militias and identity militias. In contrast, violent

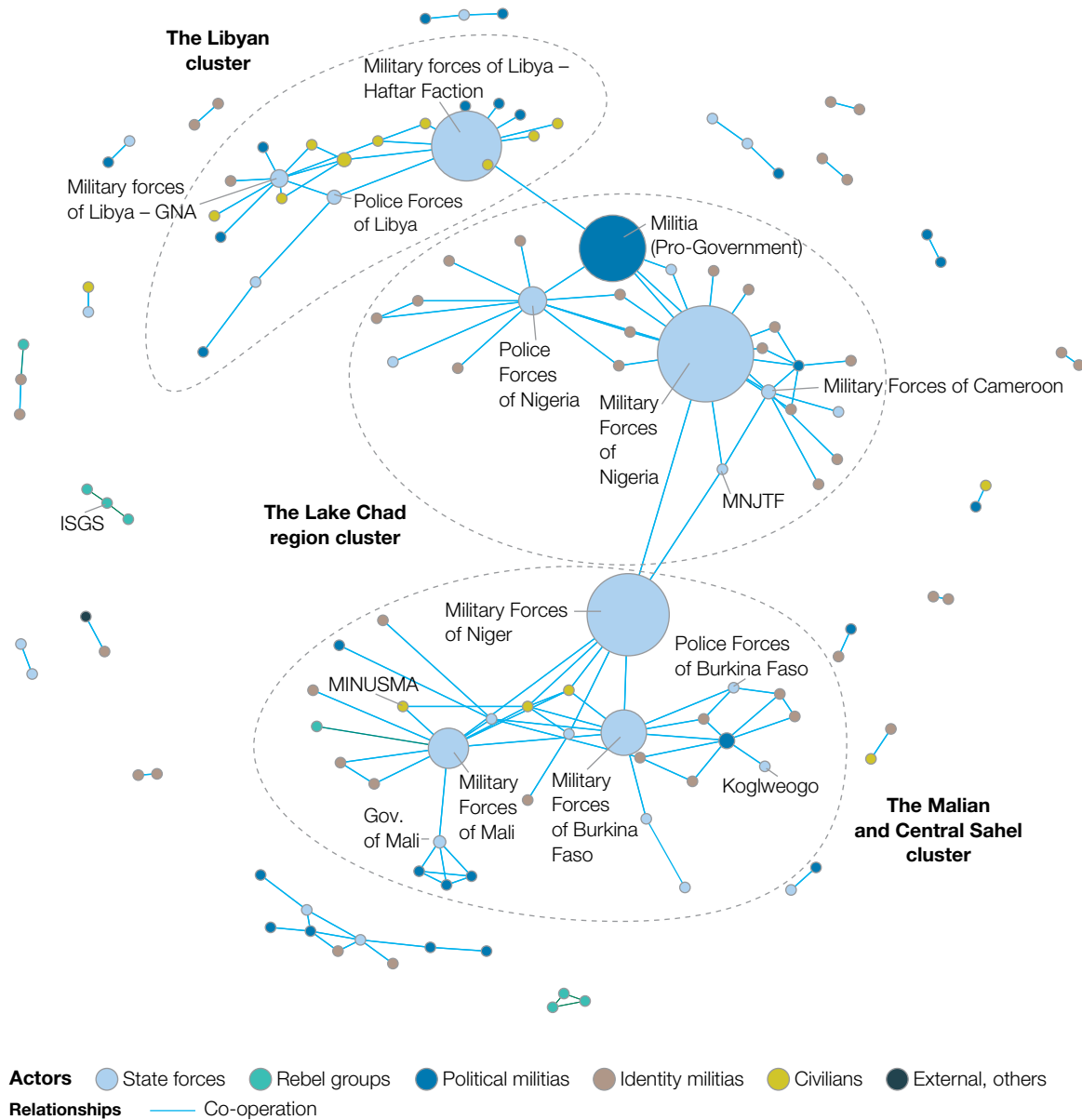
extremist organisations such as ISGS occupy the periphery of the regional network due to their limited ability to build large-scale alliances.

Who is allied with whom in Mali and the Central Sahel?

In Mali and the Central Sahel, the main component of the network is structured around the military forces of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and secondarily, around the police forces of each country (Figure 4.20). Malian forces are allied with numerous communal and ethnic militias, such as Dan Na Ambassagou, a group founded in 2016 to defend Dogon communities from attacks from jihadist and Fulani-dominated groups. In March 2019, Dan Na Ambassagou massacred 160 Fulani near Bankass, more than 1 000 km from Bamako. Condemned by the international community, this incident led the Malian president to fire two generals and dissolve the group suspected of originating the attack. Amid growing pressure on insecurity in the country, this event also contributed to the resignation of the Malian government on 18 April. While Dan Na Ambassagou was formally disbanded in 2019, 48 events attributed to the group resulting in 300 deaths are recorded by the ACLED database in the first six months of 2020. The deadliest of them took place on 18 March 2020, when militants described either as JNIM fighters or Fulani self-defence militiamen clashed with Dan Na Ambassagou in the northern part of the Bandiagara Plateau, resulting in 109 deaths.

These events have contributed to intensifying conflict in the Dogon Country and Séno-Gondo

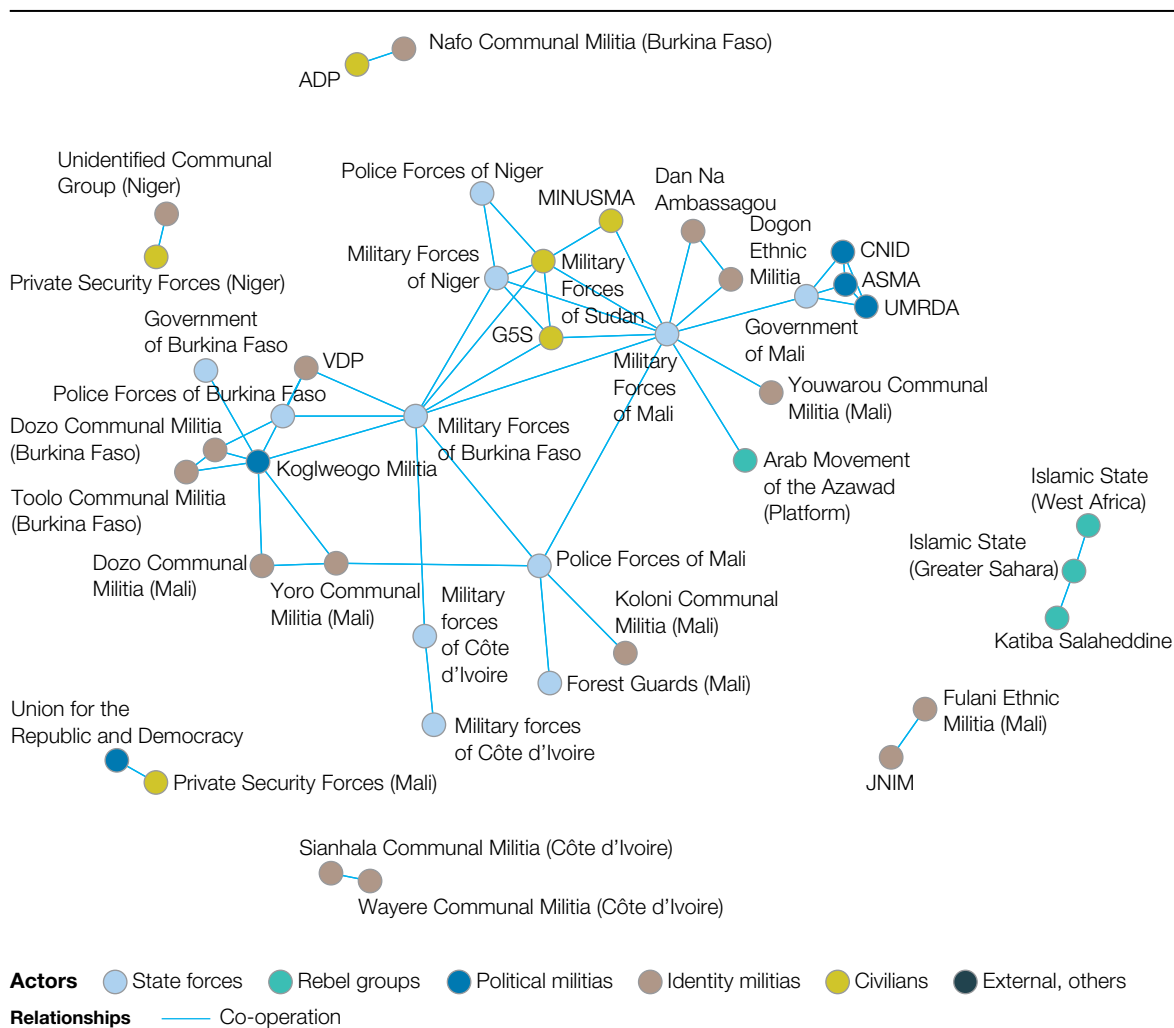
Figure 4.19
Co-operation network in North and West Africa, 2020



Note: The size of the node is proportional to its importance as brokers (betweenness centrality). Data available through 30 June 2020. ADP stands for Alliance for the Defense of the Homeland; VDP stands for Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland; CNID stands for National Congress for Democratic Initiative; ASMA stands for Alliance for Solidarity in Mali; and UMRDA stands for Malian Union for the African Democratic Rally.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020_[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

Figure 4.20
Co-operation network in Mali and the Central Sahel, 2020



Note: Data available through 30 June 2020. ADP stands for Alliance for the Defense of the Homeland; VDP stands for Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland; CNID stands for National Congress for Democratic Initiative; ASMA stands for Alliance for Solidarity in Mali; and UMRDA stands for Malian Union for the African Democratic Rally.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

plain that extends towards Burkina Faso. While the development of religious extremism in central Mali fuels the attacks, the rivalries between local communities have deeper roots that are prone to resurface when left unaddressed by the authorities. In the Séno-Gondo plain, the expansion of the Fulani in the 19th century led Dogon farmers to withdraw from their villages on the plain and adopt defensive settlements in the Bandiagara Cliff. In the 20th century, the descendants of these farmers moved eastwards to fill the void left by the Fulani and have given rise to an agricultural front that they regard as their original lands (Box 4.2).

State forces occupy the centre of the co-operation network in Mali and the Central Sahel. Military and police forces indubitably have more allies than any other type of organisations: six of them can be found among the ten organisations that have the highest number of allies (degree centrality). State forces of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso also play an important brokerage role between communal militias and self-defence groups that, by definition, have a narrow and local focus, and larger military coalitions such as the G5 Sahel that pursue a more regional mandate. One of the most central self-defence

Box 4.2**Rivalries between Dogon and Fulani in Central Mali**

The Dogon arrived in the Bandiagara area in the 15th century and dispersed into relatively autonomous communities that colonised not only the Bandiagara Cliff and Plateau but also the vast plain of Séno-Gondo, a sandy area east of the cliff. In 1818, the Fulani conqueror Seku Amadu founded the Empire of Macina, which gradually extended from Segou in the south to Timbuktu in the north. The Fulani used their cavalry to raid the Dogon plateau and the plain of Séno-Gondo, destroying the crops of the farmers and enslaving the local populations. In response, the Dogon built spectacular fortress villages in the Bandiagara Cliff and Hombori Mountains. Those who remained in the plain of Séno-Gondo became the serfs of the Fulani.

The Dogon could hardly count on their military strength to defeat the Fulani. Instead, they allied themselves with El Hadj Umar Tall, a Toucouleur conqueror from Futa Toro who conquered the capital of Macina in 1862. El Hadj Umar Tall's nephew, Tidjiani Tall, settled in Bandiagara where he ensured the fidelity of the Dogon. The French arrived in the region in 1893 and supported the Toucouleur in their fight against the Fulani of Macina. The fall of the Macina Empire allowed the Dogon to resume their expansion in the plain of Séno-Gondo at the expense of the Fulani. The colonial administration feared that the local political chiefs would lose control over the population and would no longer be able to collect tax. France, however, never had the means to counter

the Dogon migration. During this second colonisation of the Séno-Gondo plain, the Dogon reclaimed the lands their clans possessed before the Fulani conquest of the 19th century. Numerous families settled in the New Country east of the Bandiagara Cliff. Each of the old Dogon villages developed a colonisation corridor roughly perpendicular to the cliff (Gallais, 1975_[23]).

The independence of Mali in 1960 did not challenge the colonisation of the Séno-Gondo plain by the Dogon. The plain transformed into an agricultural front where competition for land and water between farmers and herders was increasingly fierce. The Fulani progressively lost most of their cattle and turned to agriculture or small livestock. Politically, the Fulani could also not match the political support that the Dogon found within the Malian state. In recent decades, the Dogon migration from the cliff towards the Séno-Gondo plain has intensified due to demographic growth. New crops have replaced the pastures of the Fulani, whose way of life is now threatened by a lack of investment in the pastoral sector and recurring droughts. The presence of the Malian state in the region has also diminished as insecurity in the centre of the country increases. This explosive context encourages ethnic militias to capitalise on the fear of religious extremism to promote their local objectives.

Source: Original text provided by Olivier Walther.

groups in the co-operation network is the Koglweogo ("Guardians of the bush" in Mooré), as the vigilante that proliferated after the fall of Blaise Compaoré in rural Burkina Faso are known (Hagberg, 2018_[24]). While initially supported by the Burkinabe government as a local response to attacks by JNIM and Ansaroul Islam (Box 4.3) in the north and east of the country, Koglweogo are criticised for undermining the state monopoly of legitimate violence and contributing to human rights violations (Leclercq and Matagne, 2020_[25]).

Who is allied with whom in the Lake Chad region?

The co-operation network in the Lake Chad region is structured around the military forces of Nigeria (Figure 4.22), the organisation with the highest number of allies and the largest ability to bridge disconnected actors. In 2020, the Nigerian military forces were allied with 15 other organisations, including 4 foreign military forces and 7 communal militias. The indisputable predominance of the Nigerian military in the network of local alliances contrasts with the quasi absence

Box 4.3**Ansaroul Islam**

Ansaroul Islam (Defenders of Islam) is a jihadist group in Burkina Faso. The group emerged in the Soum Province of northern Burkina Faso in 2016 and launched its first official attack on the Nassoumbou military base in December of that year. The group was founded by Ibrahim or Boureima Dicko, a preacher with ties to the Malian jihadists Amadou Kouffa and Iyad ag Ghali, who were key figures in creating the jihadist coalition JNIM in March 2017 (International Crisis Group, 2017_[26]).

Dicko, often referred to by the title “Malam” (meaning teacher, from the Arabic mu’allim), had a preaching career in Soum dating back to the 2000s. He founded an initially non-violent religious network called al-Irshad (meaning guidance) and had ties to the local religious establishment, including a marriage to a daughter of the Emir of Djibo, capital of the Soum Province. By the early 2010s, Dicko began working to channel the frustrations of some Soum residents and particularly marginalised members of his own Fulani ethnic group. Due to local socio-economic tensions and the impact of the escalating crisis in neighbouring Mali, where Dicko

appears to have received some training prior to 2016, his message became very militant around 2015–16. The Emir disowned him and al-Irshad split, with Dicko’s followers then targeting the non-violent wing of al-Irshad. Dicko appears to have died, either of wounds or of an illness, in northern Burkina Faso in early 2017. He was succeeded by his brother Ja’far, about whom relatively little is known (Abba, 2017_[27]).

Ansaroul Islam’s precise relationships with JNIM, and with JNIM’s rival, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, have seemed fluid and opaque. Ansaroul Islam has played a key role in the escalating crisis in northern Burkina Faso. In a way loosely similar to dynamics in central Mali, jihadist violence contributed to state security forces’ collective profiling of the Fulani as a whole, as well as to inter-ethnic conflict between the Fulani and other ethnic groups (Le Roux, 2019_[28]). As of late 2020, the situation in eastern and northern Burkina Faso is dire, with over 1 million displaced and with Djibo under a de facto jihadist blockade.

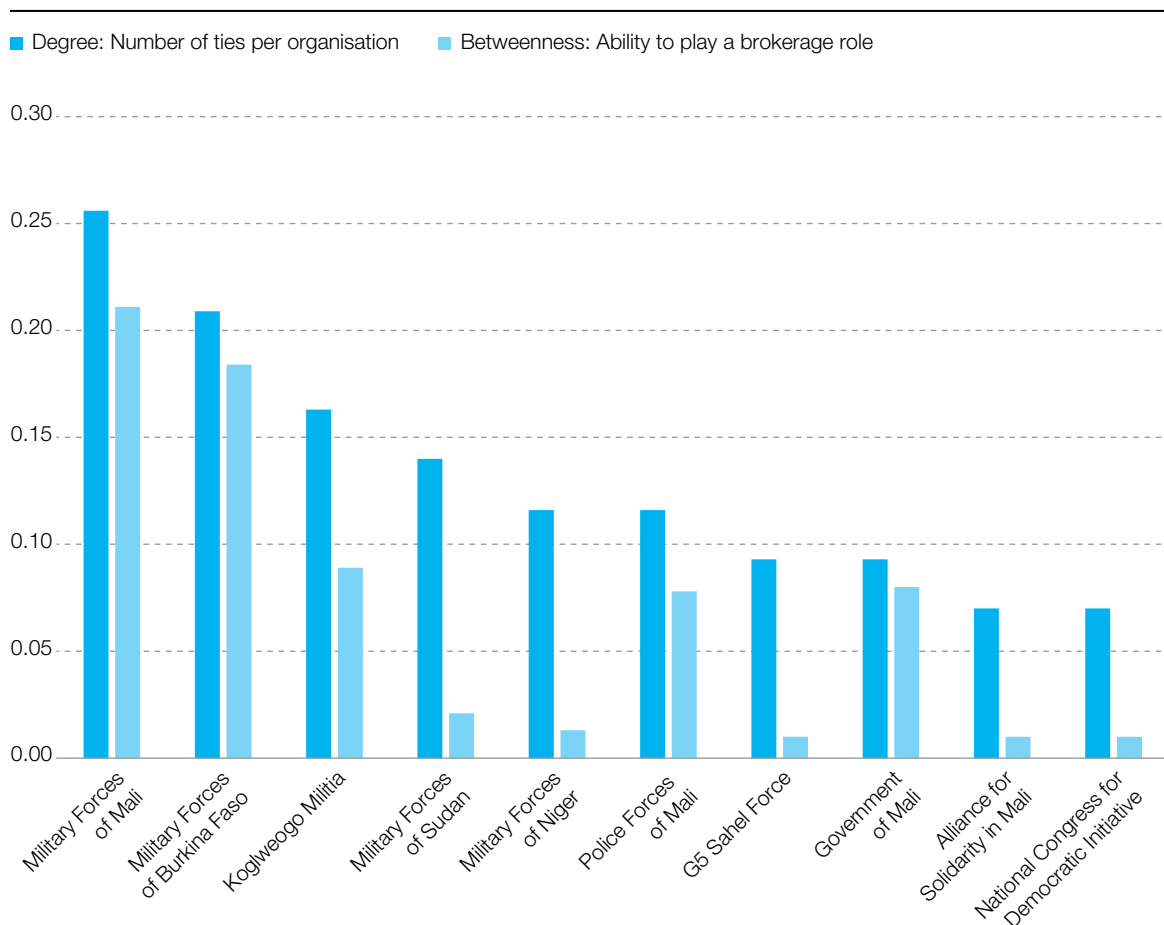
Source: Original text provided by Alexander Thurston.

of jihadist organisations. Neither Boko Haram nor ISWAP is known for working particularly closely with allies. The speculations that Boko Haram and its offshoots have clandestine backers among local or national elites must be regarded as baseless conspiracy theories. Since 2009, only 17 co-operative events have been recorded between a Boko Haram faction and another organisation of the region, including a kidnapping with Ansaru in 2013; sporadic attacks with unidentified armed groups and Fulani militias; and formal claims on behalf of ISGS. With the exception of the kidnapping, none of these events denotes actual co-operation, and they represent only 0.3% of the events in which one of the factions of Boko Haram was involved in the last 11 years.

The Nigerian military is primarily responsible for fighting Boko Haram and ISWAP within the country, while rights of pursuit have been

negotiated on a bilateral basis with Cameroon, Chad and Niger (Albert, 2017_[29]). As a result, the centrality of the military of Nigeria in the network of allies is unrivalled (Figure 4.23). The Nigerian military is the organisation that has the largest number of allies (degree), and that plays the largest role of broker in the region (betweenness). Nigerian troops form the core of the MNJTF, a military formation initiated by Nigeria in 1994 with a mandate to address cross-border security issues in the Lake Chad region under a joint command structure. Reactivated in 2012 by the African Union to confront the Boko Haram insurgency, the multinational force now includes Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria (Institute for Security Studies, 2016_[30]). Nigeria and its neighbours have conducted numerous major operations against Boko Haram and ISWAP since 2015 (OECD/SWAC, 2020_[31]). Half of the fatalities and nearly three-quarters of the events related

Figure 4.21
Centrality for top-scoring organisations in Mali and the Central Sahel, 2020



Note: Degree centrality represents the number of ties an organisation has. Betweenness centrality refers to the ability of an organisation to bridge several parts of the network. These measures are standardised so that networks of different sizes can be compared, by dividing the number of actual ties by the maximum number of possible ties. Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[11]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

to these multinational operations have occurred in Borno State, which suggests that Nigeria conceives of MNJTF as a military instrument to secure its north-eastern borders.

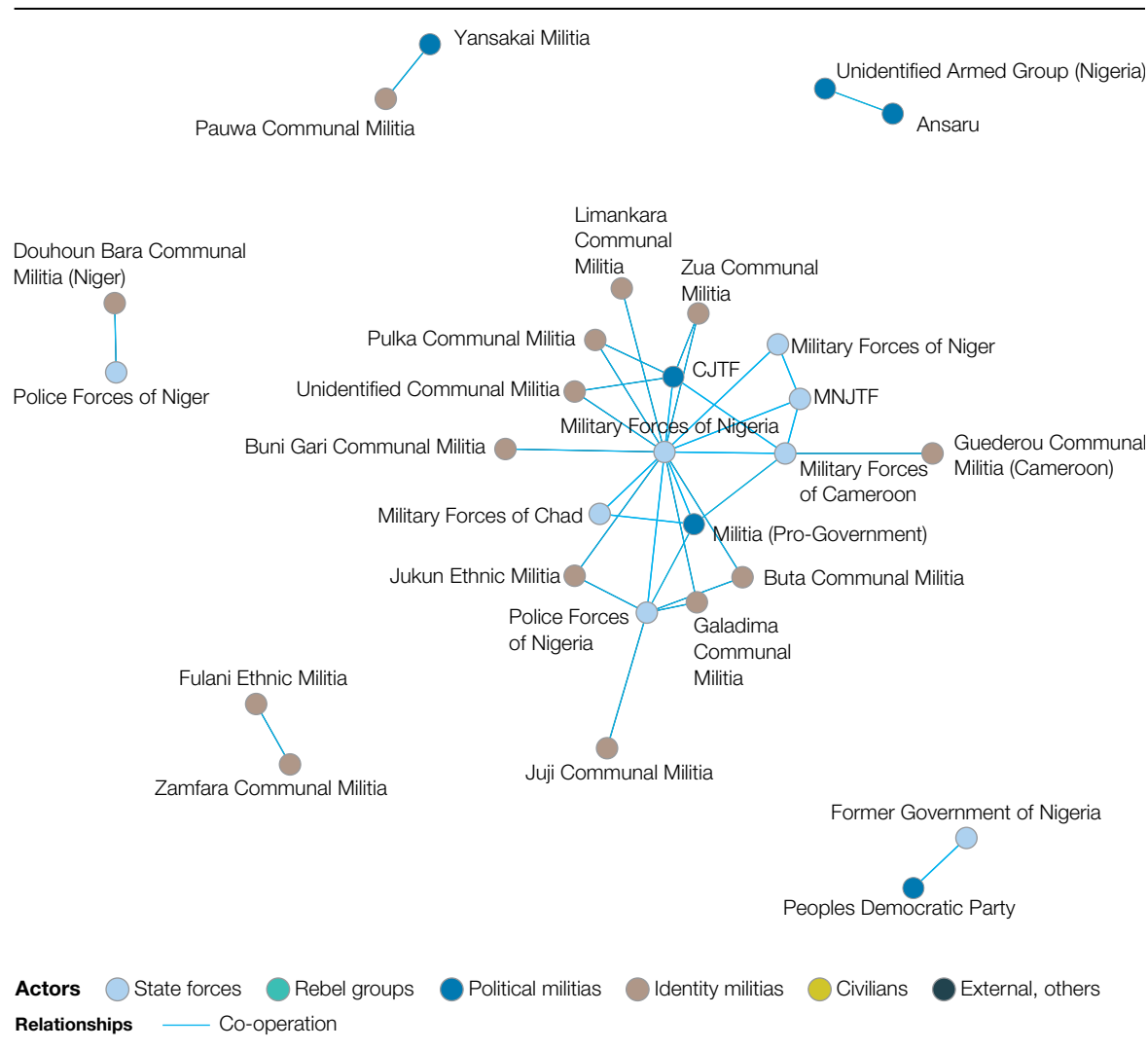
Who is allied with whom in Libya?

In 2020, the Libyan co-operation network is dominated by two well-connected organisations, the GNA and the LNA of Field Marshal Haftar, each surrounded by numerous allies who do not necessarily work together (Figure 4.24). For example, Russian private security forces may support the LNA without having to conduct joint operations with other militias affiliated with Haftar forces. This particularity offers structural opportunities to the dominant actors of the alliance network, who

can theoretically co-ordinate military actions in relative independence, without having to fear that their allies will join forces against them.

Consequently, the overall centrality of GNA and LNA is noticeably superior to any other organisation in 2020 (Figure 4.25). The reality on the ground is more elusive, and both the GNA and LNA have struggled to maintain alliances built on versatile and opportunistic allies. For example, the alliance built by Haftar with the Kaniyat militia from Tarhuna, the Tareq ben Ziyad Brigade, and other loyalist or marginalised communities from the west and south of the country relied on the assumption that Tripoli would be quickly taken in 2019. As Lacher (2020^[22]) demonstrates, centralising command

Figure 4.22
Co-operation network in the Lake Chad region, 2020



Note: Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020_[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

over irregular forces has proved impossible in Libya since the fall of Gaddafi. As a result of continuously changing alliances, politicians and military commanders have been unable to exploit the advantages of joint forces for long periods.

The changing structure of alliances

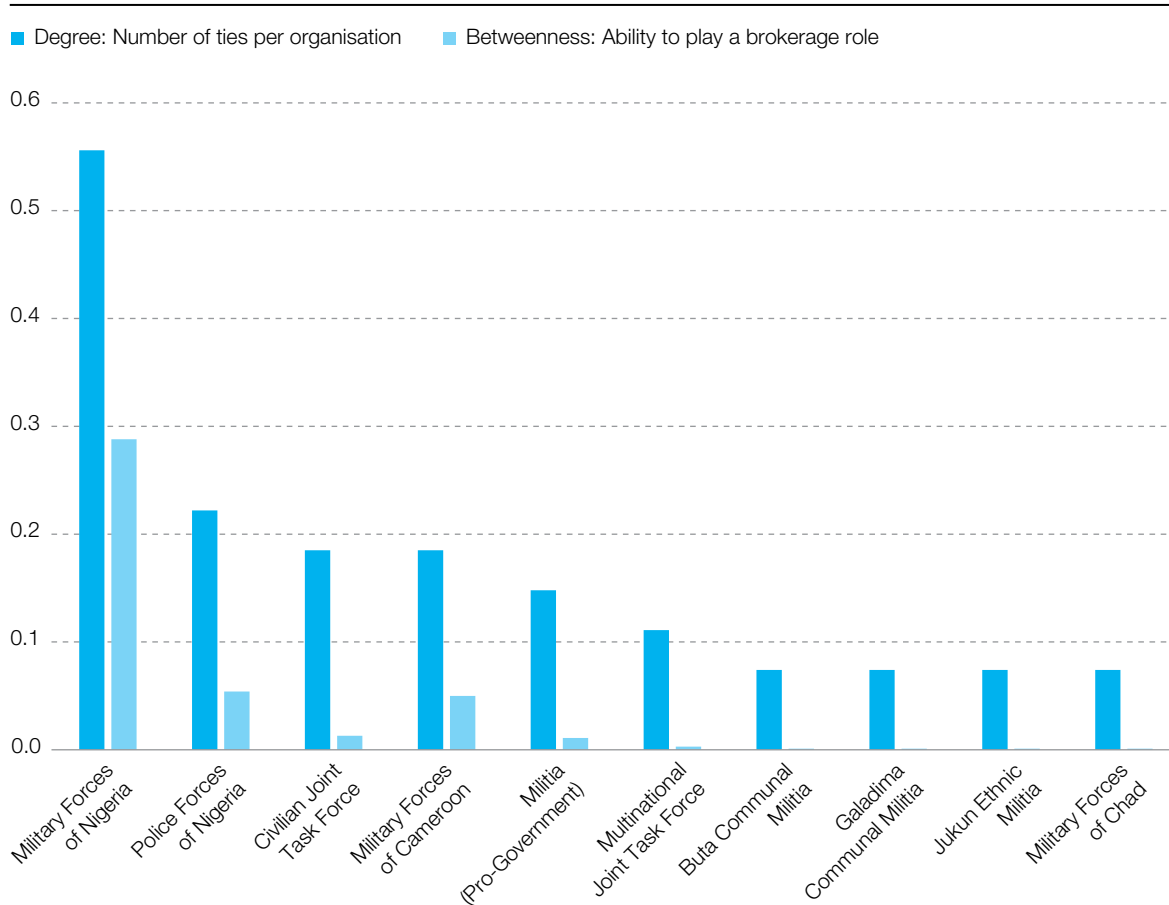
The evolution of co-operation between organisations shows that there is a slight overall trend toward increased co-operation since 2009, but that alliances remain the exception rather than the norm. However, each of the conflict theatres

displays more evidence of co-operation than within the overall region. Further, alliances are highly volatile over time, particularly in Libya and Mali. Both demonstrate periods with low levels of co-operation punctuated by intervals with a great deal more co-operation.

The study presents the evolution of co-operation between organisations from 2009 to 2020 with regard to the entire region and each of the three subnational conflict theatres by considering network density and degree centralisation. Both were observed daily for alliance relations from 1997–2020. Density measures the

Figure 4.23

Centrality for top-scoring organisations in the Lake Chad region, 2020



Note: Degree centrality represents the number of ties an organisation has. Betweenness centrality refers to the ability of an organisation to bridge several parts of the network. These measures are standardised so that networks of different sizes can be compared, by dividing the number of actual ties by the maximum number of possible ties. Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

overall proportion of relations present within a network to the maximum number of relations possible, and the metric’s score ranges from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 1. Centralisation ranges from 0 (highly decentralised) to 1 (highly centralised). The daily density and centralisation metrics were analysed as a formal time series that is composed of the following elements: an overall trend, a seasonal component and random fluctuation. To simplify the presentation of such a complex and dynamic temporal network time series, the following discussion presents just the overall trend element for each metric.

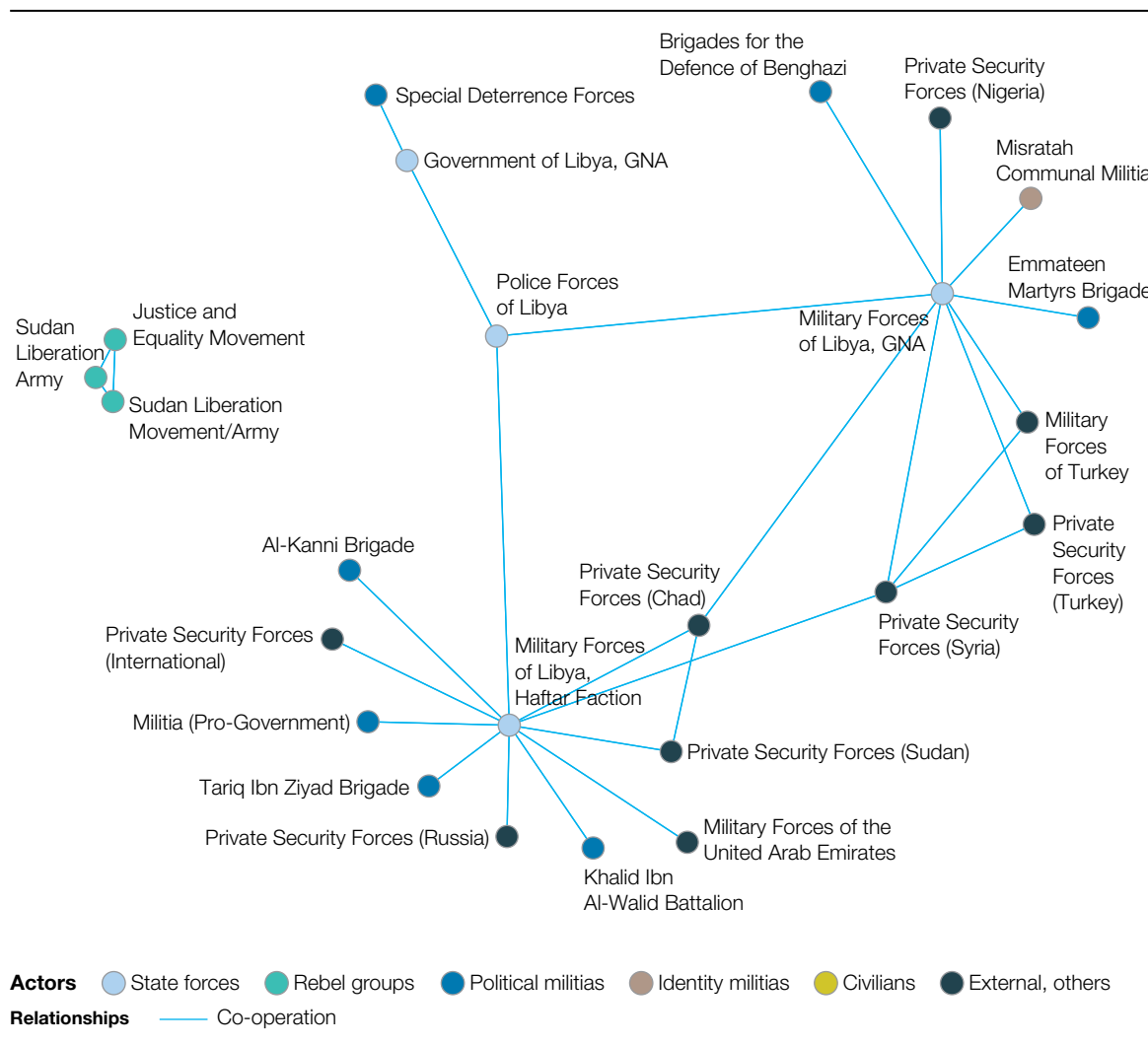
A slight increase in co-operation

Co-operation within the entire region has exhibited a slight upward trend since 2014. This

increase in co-operation is clearly visible in [Figure 4.26](#), which presents the overall density trend of the alliance network by day. Even so, the baseline for such co-operation in the region has been, and remains, quite low. Consequently, when organisations do choose to act within the region, they have largely done so on their own. This is particularly true of non-state actors, as states can be more inclined to co-operation, either with each other or with groups that serve as proxies.

The slight overall trend toward increased co-operation is largely driven by the higher level of alliances present in each of the three conflict theatres. Libya, Mali and the Central Sahel, and the Lake Chad region have each exhibited persistently higher levels of co-operation than has North

Figure 4.24
Co-operation network in Libya, 2020



Note: Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[9]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

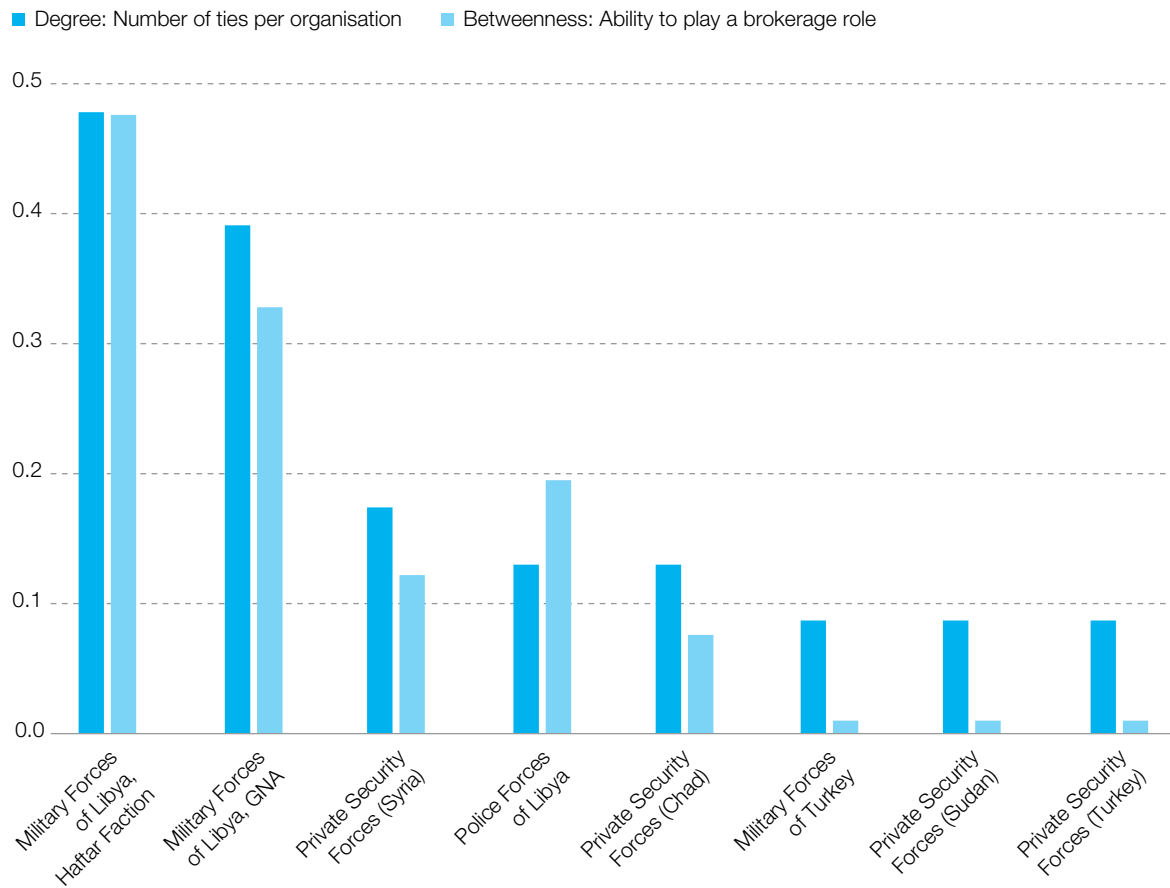
and West Africa at large since 2010. Further, co-operation has been increasing again in Libya and Mali since 2017. Interestingly, both Libya and Mali have also exhibited episodic volatility in alliances, which speaks to the fact that most examples of co-operation are those of short-term convenience and are unlikely to lead to durable partnerships over time. It also points to the potential for such ephemeral relationships to be disrupted through the actions of other groups, regional governments or international actors (Chapter 5).

The periodic rise and fall of alliances in Libya and Mali may be thought of as representing waves of co-operation. For example, co-operation

first peaked in Libya between late 2010 and 2012 as groups opposed to the Gaddafi regime worked together during the initial phase of civil war and the NATO intervention. As the second phase of civil war emerged in mid-2014, so too did another wave of heightened co-operative relations, as like-minded organisations again made common cause against common foes. Beginning in 2017, co-operation between organisations began to climb yet again and, as of mid-2020, co-operation in Libya had surpassed its previous peak in 2011. This recent evolution is explained by the military offensive launched by Field Marshal Haftar in April 2019 against the GNA in Tripoli,

Figure 4.25

Centrality for top-scoring organisations in Libya, 2020



Note: Degree centrality represents the number of ties an organisation has. Betweenness centrality refers to the ability of an organisation to bridge several parts of the network. These measures are standardised so that networks of different sizes can be compared, by dividing the number of actual ties by the maximum number of possible ties. Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

which contributed to uniting militias in defence of the capital. A similar, though less prominent, trend can be observed in Mali between 2014 and 2016. Like Libya, co-operation in Mali has also ticked up beginning in 2018, a period marked by increasing co-ordination between jihadist organisations, as the example of JNIM, the organisation led by Iyad ag Ghali, shows (Box 4.4).

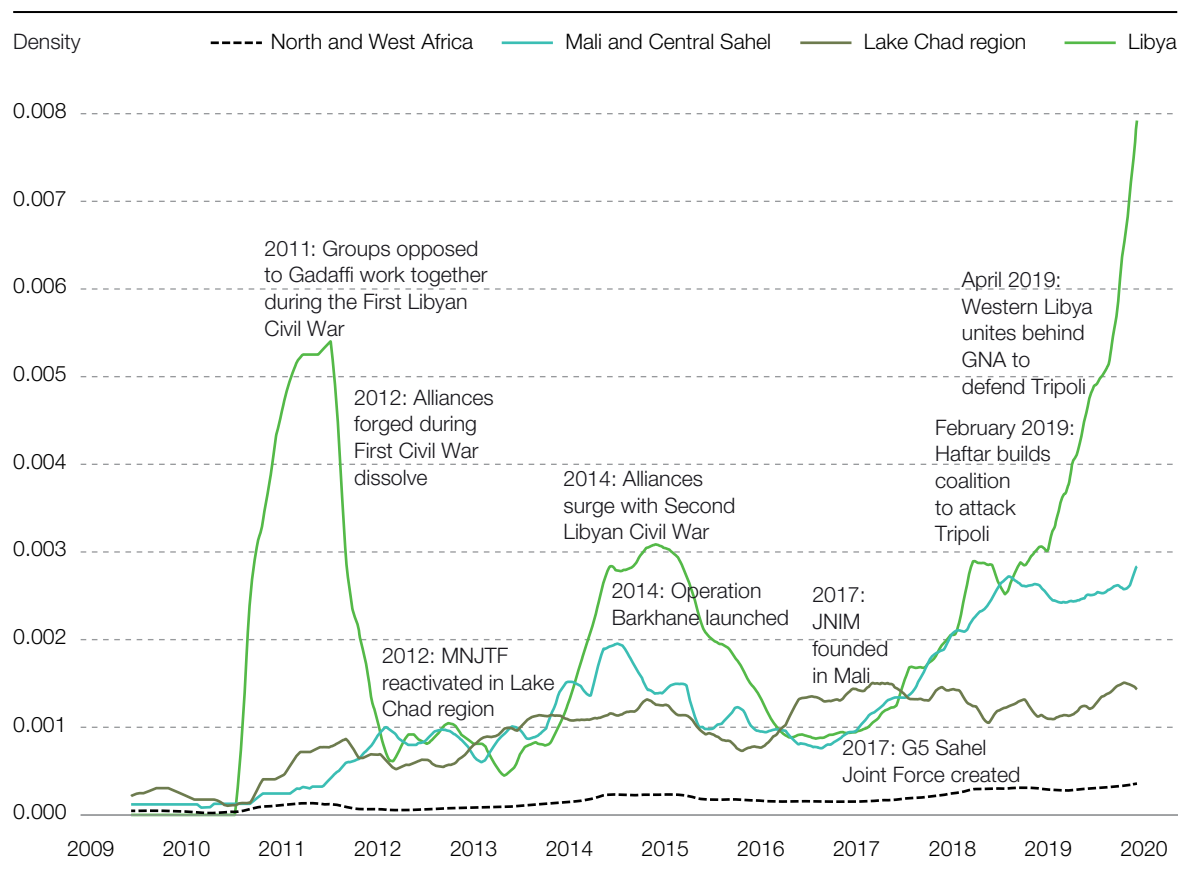
By contrast, the Lake Chad theatre has been less volatile than the others. Co-operation there has been consistently above the region-wide baseline since Boko Haram's insurgency began in mid-2009, but without the sharp increases and decreases that have characterised the other conflicts. Boko Haram and ISWAP may be resilient, but they have been largely unable to build political alliances.

The low overall density of the alliance network suggests that most organisations tend to act alone in North and West Africa. This points toward a highly decentralised network structure where alliances are less likely to be centred on a few important organisations. However, there are periods of time when co-operation has relatively intensified within each of the conflict theatres. During those episodes, the network structure shifts, becoming less fragmented and more focused around a few important groups. For this reason, as alliance density increases (Figure 4.26), so too does alliance centralisation (Figure 4.27).

For alliances, this means that the overall regional network has trended slightly toward a star-like structure over time with a few central actors having many more co-operative ties to

Figure 4.26

Alliance network density, 2009–20



Note: The graph begins in July 2009 rather than January 2009 because there is never a trend to observe on the first time point and because the data are smoothed using a 90-day moving-average window.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020¹⁰), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

other organisations. However, this is again mostly attributable to the dynamics in each of the three theatres, notably Libya. Libya exhibits the highest levels of centralisation during episodes where there is a clear bipolarity in the conflict. Between 2011 and 2012, this meant the groups organised around the defence of the Gaddafi regime and its opponents, primarily the NATO-supported NTC. Since 2014, this has meant alignment around the

main actors competing for control over the state, the LNA, the Libya Dawn coalition and the various branches of the Islamic State. Accordingly, Libya exhibits the most centralised alliance networks over time and the most volatility between more and less centralisation. Notably, however, all three theatres have been trending toward increased centralisation since 2016.

CONFLICTS THAT CANNOT END?

This chapter has examined the overall structure of opposition and co-operation networks in North and West Africa and in three regions that have been particularly affected by political instability since the late 2000s. Using a network approach, the study has highlighted surprising similarities

between co-operation and opposition networks: both are rather decentralised and organised around a few key organisations. This structure, which we called “cosmopolitan” to emphasise the absence of closely-knit communities, suggests that violent organisations tend to reproduce

Box 4.4**Iyad ag Ghali**

Iyad ag Ghali (born in 1958) is a Malian jihadist leader and politician. He is ethnically Tuareg, belonging to the Kel Adagh confederation of the Kidal Region of Mali, where the Kel Adagh are politically dominant. His father died during the 1963–64 rebellion in Kidal, fought by some Kel Adagh against the Malian state. Ag Ghali is the most famous member of the *ishoumar* (from the French *chômeur*, or unemployed), a generation of Tuareg who emigrated from Mali and Niger to Libya and other destinations in the 1970s and 1980s. Ag Ghali spent considerable time in Libya and fought on behalf of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

From 1990–2006, ag Ghali was the foremost rebel leader in northern Mali. In 1990, he launched a rebellion against the Malian state. He concluded peace agreements with Mali in 1991 and 1992, but the rebellion fractured along ethnic, clan and ideological lines (Lecocq, 2010_[31]). In 2006, ag Ghali led another short rebellion. Once again, his authority was challenged: one of his sub-commanders kept fighting even after ag Ghali made peace. In 2011, ag Ghali was passed over for leadership of the MNLA, which launched an uprising in 2012. Throughout this period, ag Ghali had other roles as well, including a period around 2010 as a Malian diplomat in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

During the 2000s, ag Ghali developed financial, familial and political ties with what became AQIM. In late 2011, he formed his own jihadist group, Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Faith), which fought in the rebellion alongside the MNLA in early 2012, then forcefully supplanted the MNLA, ruling northern Mali in collaboration with AQIM and its offshoots. In January 2013, ag Ghali helped lead an offensive into central Mali, prompting a French-led military intervention that chased jihadists out of northern Malian cities.

In 2017, ag Ghali became the formal leader of a jihadist coalition called JNIM. JNIM is formally subordinate to AQIM's central leadership, which is in turn formally subordinate to the central command of Al Qaeda. JNIM has become the most important jihadist force in Mali and the Sahel, targeting foreign and Sahelian militaries but also both wooing and intimidating local communities and politicians. Ag Ghali has been the foremost face of the group, including in halting negotiations with the Malian state, which are still unfolding at the time of writing (Thurston, 2020_[6]).

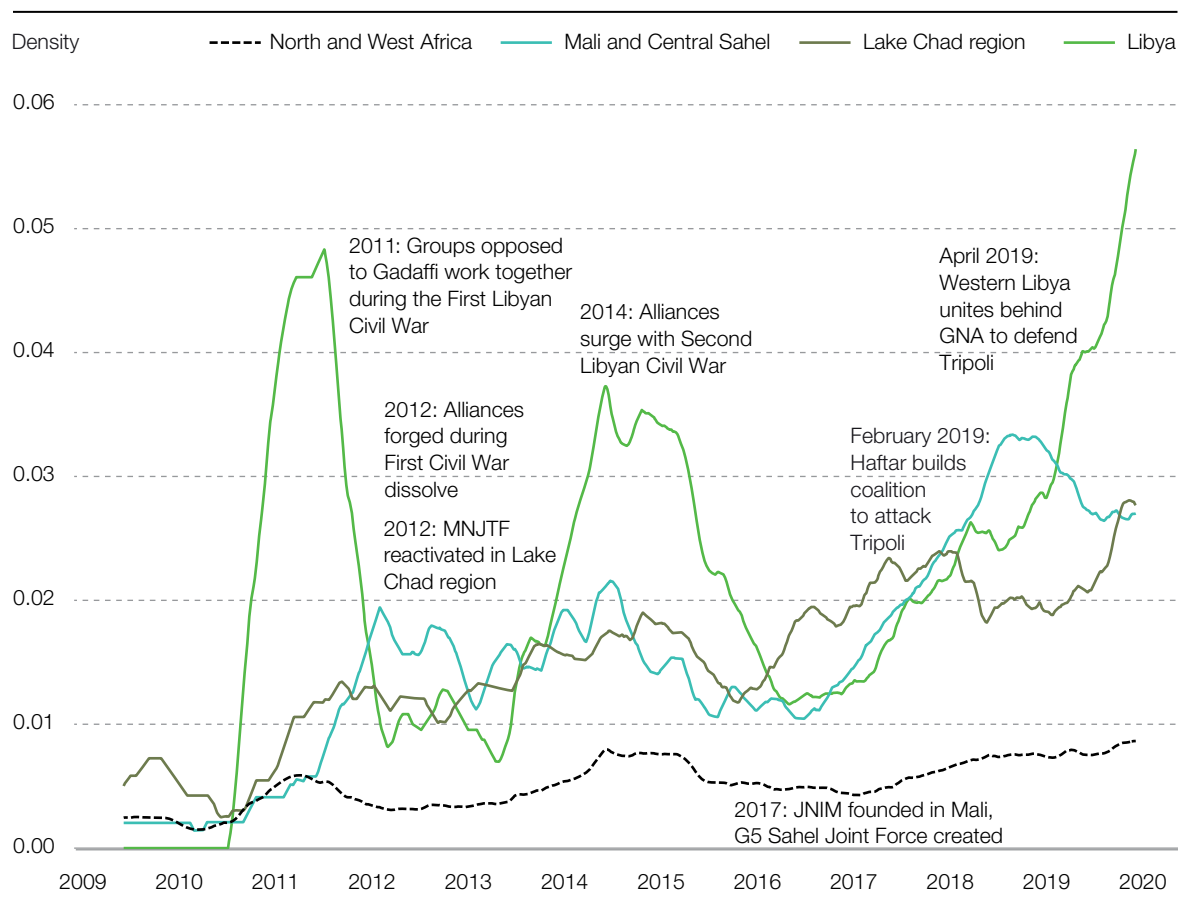
Source: Original text provided by Alexander Thurston.

the same patterns irrespective of the nature of the ties that link them. This is a puzzling observation. Because building alliances or fighting an enemy are conceptually very different, one would have expected the structure of opposition and co-operation networks to be quite different from each other. The fact that they are not suggests that opposition and co-operation should be conceptualised as two possible, rather than exclusive, options to the belligerents. These results point to the fundamental flexible and opportunistic nature of relationships that bind violent organisations in the region. Rather than formal agreement or existential oppositions, rivalries and alliances should be conceived as two alternatives that can be mobilised as circumstances change.

The chapter also shows that both opposition and co-operation networks tend to be denser and more centralised over time. This evolution is alarming. It means that violent organisations tend to have an increasing number of enemies, a sure sign that conflicts are intensifying in the region and that each theatre of operation becomes increasingly focused on a limited number of key belligerents. This polarisation of the conflict environment has devastating consequences for civilian populations, who, as clearly showed in this chapter, are often targeted both by violent extremist organisations and government forces. The increasing density and centralisation observed in the network of allies among military forces should be regarded as a consequence of

Figure 4.27

Alliance network centralisation, 2009–20



Note: The graph begins in July 2009 rather than January 2009 because there is never a trend to observe on the first time point and because the data are smoothed using a 90-day moving-average window.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020^[1]), *The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>.

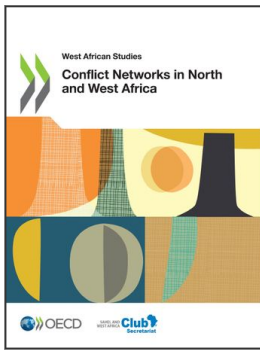
the increase in conflict in the region. As the security conditions continue to deteriorate, government forces multiply their collaborations, in search of a more adapted security framework.

That these trends are present in combination with the ever-growing number of belligerents since 2009 is particularly distressing. The increasing number of belligerents, increasing density of conflictual relationships, and polarisation among powerful organisations capable of conducting extensive military operations make a peaceful resolution of the North and West African conflicts more elusive

than ever. These conditions are present in varying degrees in all three of the primary conflict regions as well. More than a decade after the outbreak of the Boko Haram insurgency in northern Nigeria, political violence has evolved and coalesced into multiple conflictual subnational theatres that have resisted all efforts of resolution to date. Given the trends identified in this report, it is difficult to see an end to this process in the short term. It is reasonable to expect that the conflict networks will continue to enlarge, intensify, and centralise.

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