

Chapter 4

---

# **The changing geography of conflict in North and West Africa**

---

Chapter 4 examines the changing geography of violent events and fatalities in North and West Africa since the late 1990s. Using disaggregated conflict data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) project, the chapter shows that political violence has reached an all-time high in West Africa and considerably decreased in North Africa after the end of the Second Libyan civil war. In West Africa, the Spatial Conflict Dynamics Indicator (SCDi) confirms that 9% of the studied region is currently affected by violent events, compared with only 1% in 2009. Violence is still predominantly clustered and intense, but the proportion of areas that experience more diffuse forms of violence is increasing, a sign that conflicts are expanding to previously unaffected areas. Several clusters of violence have coalesced in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria, forming large conflict hotspots that transcend national boundaries. The SCDi also identifies two new hotspots of violence that are likely to expand in the coming years, one between Burkina Faso and its southern neighbours, and another in north-western Nigeria. Nowhere else in the world has one multistate region been affected by so many forms of violence, each with its own localised roots, progressively converging.

---

## KEY MESSAGES

- » Each type of conflict has markedly increased in the last decade. In 2021, 9% of the territory of North and West Africa had experienced one form of conflict or another.
- » Nigeria is the epicentre of violence, accounting for 40% of the violent events and more than half of the fatalities in the last year and a half in North and West Africa.
- » Violence is intensifying and simultaneously becoming more dispersed, resulting in significant hotspots of violence, particularly across West Africa and the Sahel.
- » Isolated clusters of violence are coalescing across the Sahel, a situation that is both unique in the world and worrying for the political stability of the region.
- » New clusters of violence have emerged in the border regions neighbouring Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Togo, and in north-western Nigeria.

## VIOLENCE REACHES AN ALL-TIME HIGH IN WEST AFRICA

The intensity of violence increased tremendously in the early 2010s in both North and West Africa after the Arab Spring and the emergence of a series of rebellions and jihadist insurgencies in the Sahel and Sahara. Almost three-quarters (74%) of violent events since 1997 occurred between 2011 and 2021 and 37% between 2019 and 2021 alone. In recent years, however, the situation of the two “shores” of the Sahara has

reversed (Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2). In West Africa, the major clusters of violence that emerged more than a decade ago have expanded geographically, while the civil unrest that followed the Arab Spring in Algeria and Tunisia and the violence associated with the civil wars in Libya has considerably decreased since a cease-fire agreement was concluded in 2020 and a Government of National Unity formed in 2021. While

Figure 4.1  
Violent events by type and sub-region, 1997-2022

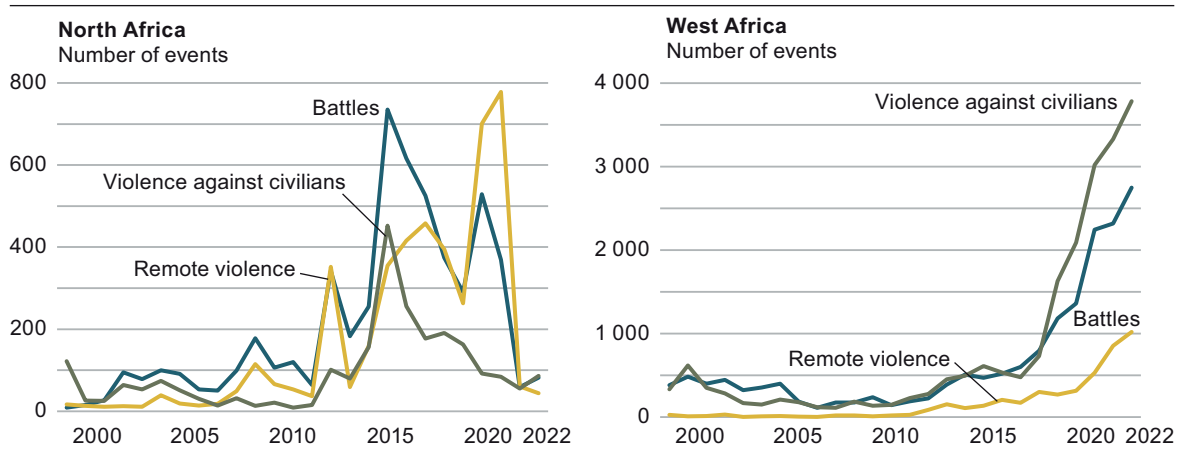
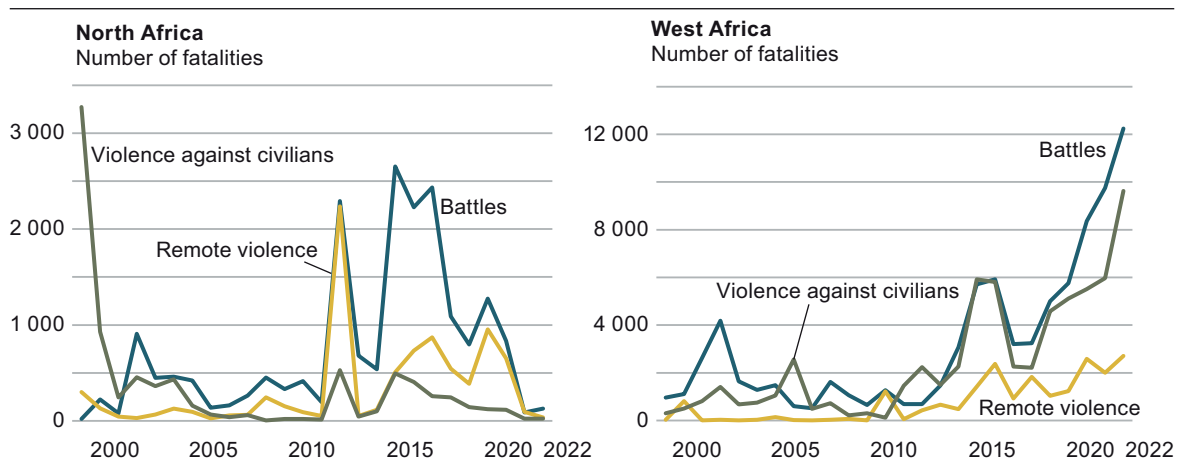


Figure 4.2  
Fatalities by type and sub-region, 1997-2022



the number of violent events and fatalities has reached an all-time low in North Africa, the number of people killed in violent incidents in West Africa has never been higher. More than 42 000 violent events and 168 000 fatalities have been recorded in West Africa since 1997, as against 12 400 events and 37 000 fatalities in North Africa. All forms of violence have steeply increased south of the Sahara, where the number of incidents involving civilians has exceeded the

number of battles since 2018. This contrasts with North Africa, where battles and remote attacks were the predominant form of warfare until the early 2020s.

This contrast can be explained by the type of warfare waged by the belligerents in each region. In North Africa, the waves of violence since the end of the civil war in Algeria in 2002 have been predominantly due to the Libyan wars (2011, 2014-20), which pitted the regular armed

forces against their allied militias for control over the Libyan state. In these conflicts, violence erupted when political factions disagreed over the distribution of resources and receded when they reached agreement. In West Africa, most violent events involve central governments opposed by a multitude of non-state actors, such as rebel groups, religious extremists, ethnic and communal militias, and self-defence groups, whose ideology, motivation and military capabilities vary widely. One of the unfortunate

consequences of these asymmetric conflicts is the death of civilians: nearly 55 000 civilian victims have been recorded in West Africa since the launch of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2009. The fragmentation of the security landscape and the military weakness of both government forces and non-state actors make resolution of these protracted conflicts particularly difficult. Cease-fire and political accords are rarely followed by a durable peace and the demobilisation of fighters.

### THREE MAJOR HOTSPOTS OF VIOLENCE

The geographical distribution of violence in North and West Africa is uneven, reflecting differing dynamics of violence based on a mix of rebellions, jihadist insurgencies, coups d'état, protest movements and military interventions. As indicated in [Table 4.1](#), 93% of the violent events and 94% of the fatalities recorded by ACLED from January 2021 through June 2022 occurred in only five countries: Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, Cameroon and Niger, all located south of the Sahara. Correspondingly, the 14 less affected countries of the region account for only 4% of the violent incidents and only 1% of the people killed in the last year and a half.

The increasing concentration of violence in a few states may appear paradoxical in a region where conflicts have also expanded geographically, spreading from one country to another. It is not. While the diffusion of conflict across borders is undeniably one of the key features of armed conflicts in the region, the hyper-concentration of violence is primarily explained by Nigeria. Nigeria is by far the main focus of violence, in a trend that emerged more than 30 years ago (OECD/SWAC, 2020<sup>[2]</sup>). From 2021-22, 40% of all violent events and more than half (51%) of the fatalities recorded in North and West Africa were in Nigeria alone. Nigeria has suffered a series of overlapping conflicts, including the jihadist insurgency led by Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the Lake Chad region, violence carried out by armed groups in the

Niger River Delta against the federal government and international oil companies, and communal violence in the Middle Belt.

Borno State is by far the most affected region in Nigeria, accounting for 26% of the fatalities recorded in the country from January 2021 through June 2022. This is not surprising, given that Boko Haram and ISWAP are the deadliest extremist organisations on the continent. However, communal violence, cattle rustling and kidnapping are becoming increasingly frequent in north-west Nigeria ([Map 4.1](#)). Often described as "banditry" by the Nigerian government and the media, these forms of violence are less politically motivated than the attacks launched by Boko Haram and ISWAP in the north-eastern portion of the country, but nonetheless extremely deadly for civilian populations. From 2021-22, nearly 4 500 people were killed in the states of Kaduna, Zamfara and Katsina ([Map 4.3](#)), including 2 153 civilians, or 37% of the total for the country. What is even more worrying is that the hotspot of violence in north-western Nigeria is now spatially connected to the Middle Belt, where communal violence between pastoral herders and farmers has been common for several decades. In this region of minority ethnic groups, the states of Plateau, Niger and Benue have been among the worst hit in the past year and a half.

The second major hotspot of violence is the Central Sahel, which is contending with a Tuareg rebellion and coups d'état in Mali and Burkina Faso. The ongoing communal strife in

Table 4.1  
Violent events and fatalities by country, 2021-22

	Violent events		Fatalities		Population		Events (%) vs. population (%)	Fatalities (%) vs. population (%)
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Ratio	Ratio
Nigeria	4 169	39.5	15 513	51.2	213 401 323	38.0	1.0	1.3
Burkina Faso	2 229	21.1	4 575	15.1	22 100 683	3.9	5.4	3.8
Mali	1 649	15.6	4 569	15.1	21 904 983	3.9	4.0	3.9
Cameroon	1 228	11.6	1 821	6.0	27 198 628	4.8	2.4	1.2
Niger	515	4.9	2 008	6.6	25 252 722	4.5	1.1	1.5
Libya	171	1.6	185	0.6	6 735 277	1.2	1.4	0.5
Chad	164	1.6	1 227	4.0	17 179 740	3.1	0.5	1.3
Others	436	4.1	400	1.3	227 959 720	40.6	0.1	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>10 561</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>30 298</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>561 733 076</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>

Notes: Data is available through 30 June 2022. Countries with a ratio between violence and population higher than 1 are highlighted in grey. In these countries, violence is higher than the share of the regional population would suggest.

Source: Authors, based on ACLED (2022<sub>[1]</sub>) data and updated United Nations (2019) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

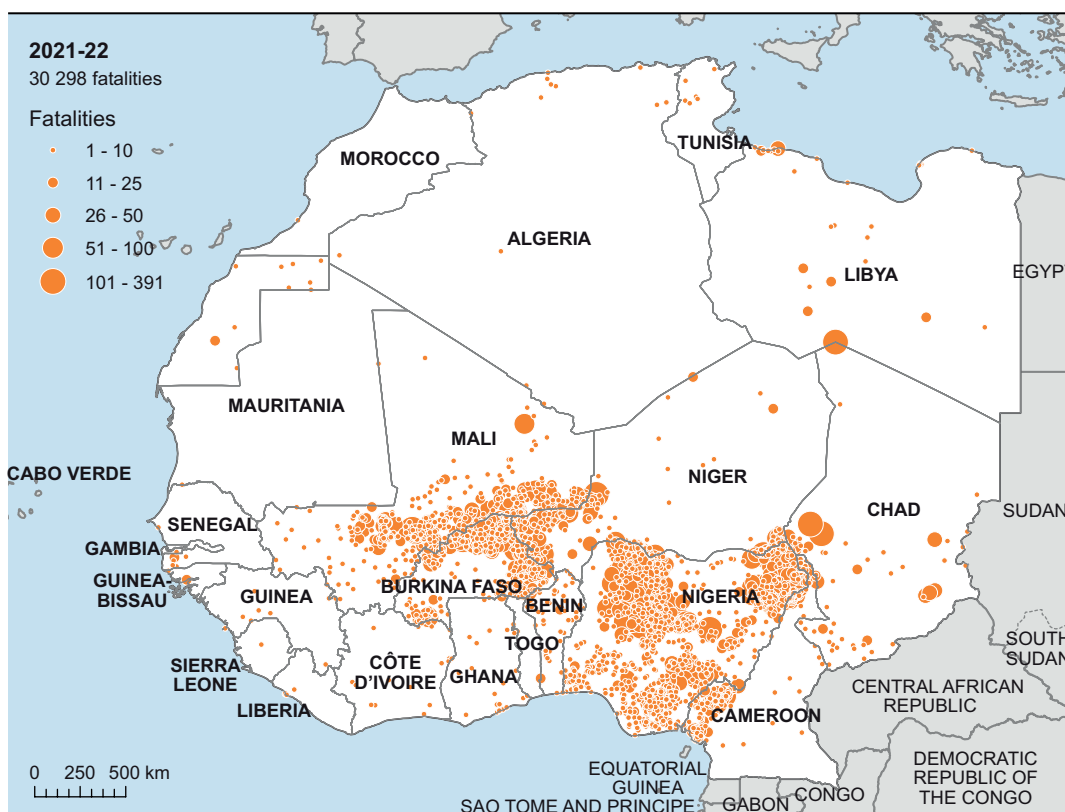
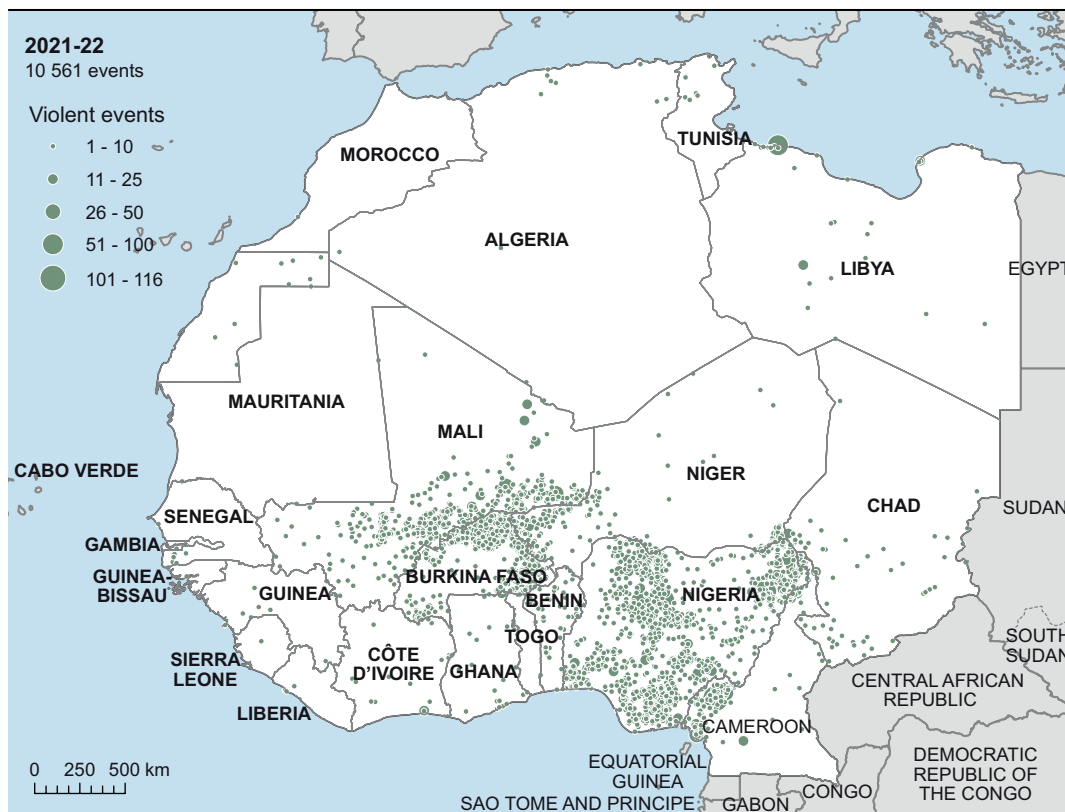
Burkina Faso and Niger has been exacerbated by Islamist extremist groups. The southern expansion of the Malian insurgency has made Burkina Faso the second most affected country in the region after Nigeria, with more than 2 200 incidents and 4 500 victims recorded between January 2021 and June 2022. Violence has engulfed much of the border regions of the country (Table 4.2). Half of the people killed in Burkina Faso were in the Sahel region neighbouring Niger and Mali, almost 16% in the East region bordering Niger and the trinational W National Park reserve, and 12% in the Centre-Nord region (Map 4.2). Ouagadougou, the capital, has so far been largely untouched by violent events, although it is relatively close to some of the areas of the country that have been most severely affected. Only 100 kilometres separate the Burkinabè capital from Kaya in the north-east, where thousands of internally displaced persons have sought refuge, for example.

Similar numbers of people were killed in Burkina Faso (4 575) and Mali (4 569) between 2021-22, although there were roughly 35% more events in Burkina Faso (Table 4.1). This may

suggest that the Burkinabè insurgents' military capabilities are not as well developed as they are in Mali and that the magnitude of the Burkinabè insurgency has not yet reached its peak. In Mali, the number of events (1 649) and fatalities (4 569) has increased since 2020-21. Mopti remains by far the most violent region of the country in terms of fatalities, followed by Gao, Menaka and Segou, while the north of the country is no longer a major epicentre of conflict. The capital city, Bamako, has largely been spared from violence (Table 4.3). In mid-2022, Bamako appeared to be under greater jihadist threat than ever before. Amid the growing pace of jihadist attacks in southern Mali, an assault on 22 July by the Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims (JNIM) on the country's main military base at the town of Kati, approximately 18 kilometres northwest of Bamako, added to concerns that the capital itself was vulnerable. Shortly after the Kati attack, JNIM directly threatened more operations in Bamako (Diallo, 2022<sub>[3]</sub>). Although the fall of Bamako appears unlikely in the short term, a more sustained and intensive jihadist effort to attack the city could disrupt its status as an enclave.

Map 4.1

Violent events and fatalities in North and West Africa, 2021-22



Note: Data is available through 30 June 2022.

Source: Authors, based on ACLED (2022<sup>[1]</sup>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Table 4.2

Violent events and fatalities by region in Burkina Faso, 2021-22

Regions	Violent events		Fatalities	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Sahel	785	35.2	2 316	50.6
Est	524	23.5	713	15.6
Centre-Nord	294	13.2	555	12.1
Nord	257	11.5	387	8.5
Boucle du Mouhoun	154	6.9	238	5.2
Cascades	94	4.2	121	2.6
Centre-Est	52	2.3	80	1.7
Sud-Ouest	36	1.6	144	3.1
Hauts-Bassins	19	0.9	8	0.2
Centre (Ouagadougou)	6	0.3	5	0.1
Centre-Sud	6	0.3	5	0.1
Centre-Ouest	2	0.1	3	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 229</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4 575</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: Data is available through 30 June 2022.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sub>[1]</sub>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Map 4.2

Fatalities in Burkina Faso and neighbouring countries, 2021

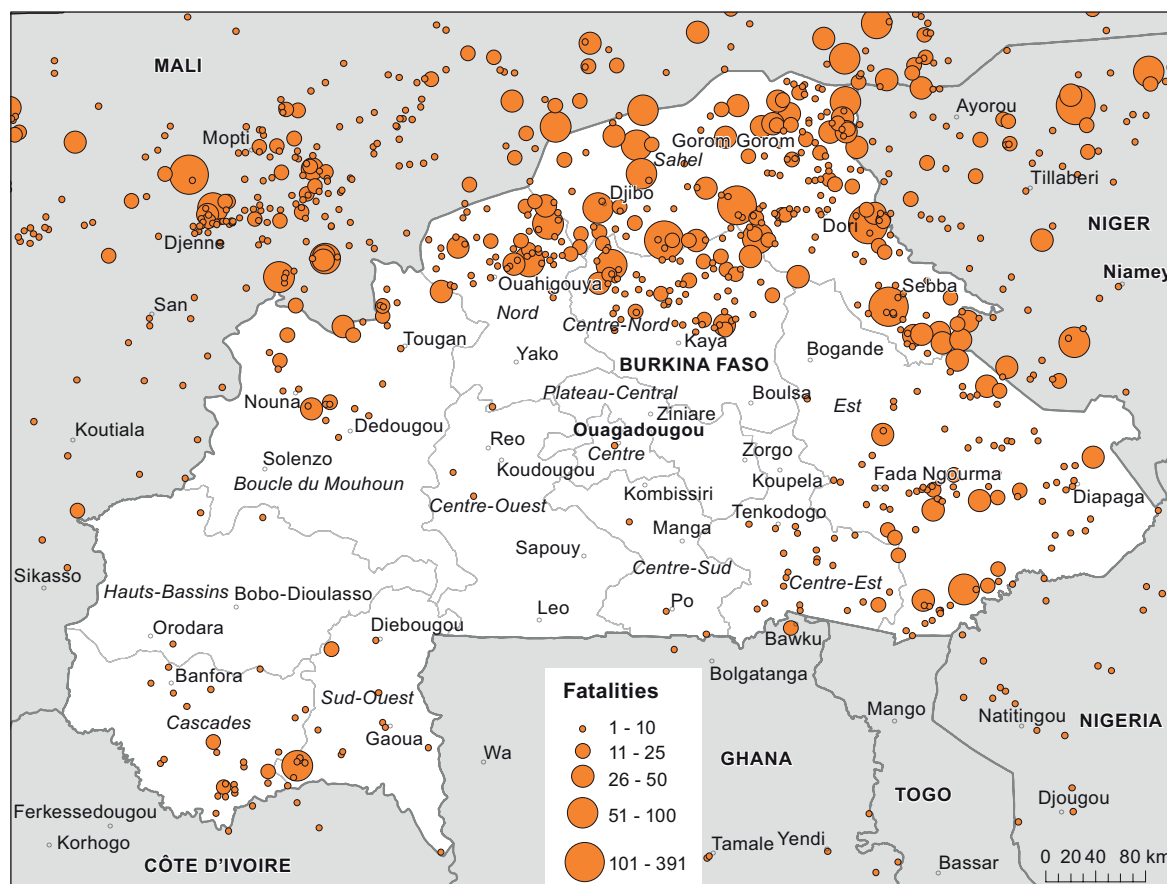
Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sub>[1]</sub>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Table 4.3  
Violent events and fatalities by region in Mali, 2021-22

Regions	Violent events		Fatalities	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Mopti	694	42.1	2 101	46.0
Gao	268	16.3	906	19.8
Segou	219	13.3	485	10.6
Tombouctou	136	8.2	126	2.8
Menaka	118	7.2	593	13.0
Kidal	64	3.9	69	1.5
Sikasso	57	3.5	64	1.4
Koulikoro	56	3.4	196	4.3
Kayes	31	1.9	28	0.6
Bamako	6	0.4	1	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 649</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4 569</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: Data is available through 30 June 2022.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sub>[1]</sub>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

#### Box 4.1

##### Political violence in Bamako, Mali

Bamako has been relatively peaceful, despite the wider collapse of Mali and the spread of mass insecurity in northern and central regions. The capital city registered just 158 fatalities in the period 1997-2021. Two minor peaks of violence occurred in Bamako in the period: one in 2012 (44 fatalities), a year of substantial upheaval in Mali, and a second peak in November 2015, after the assault on the luxury Radisson Blu Hotel, claimed by two factions of Al Qaeda (Lebovich, 2016<sub>[4]</sub>). Although the Radisson attack did not provoke a wave of terrorism in the capital, it was a milestone on the road to the formation of the powerful Al Qaeda-sponsored Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims (JNIM) in March 2017. In 2020, a summer of mass anti-government protests were held in the capital, followed by a coup in August that brought a third small surge in violence (25 fatalities).

As crisis spread across northern Mali in 2012 and then into central Mali starting in 2015, Bamako functioned as a relatively safe enclave for both the Malian elite and foreign soldiers and civilians, with security deployments and NGOs multiplying, often with a Bamako-centric character. The most prominent

foreign security deployments extended far beyond the city, for example the string of northern military bases operated by France's Operation Barkhane (2014-22) and the many sites in the country used by the United Nations' Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) since 2013. Yet insecurity elsewhere meant that some operations ended up headquartered in Bamako whether they liked it or not – notably the G5 Sahel Joint Force, whose initial headquarters at Sévaré was attacked by jihadists in 2018, prompting a relocation to Bamako, where the mission was greeted with mass protests.

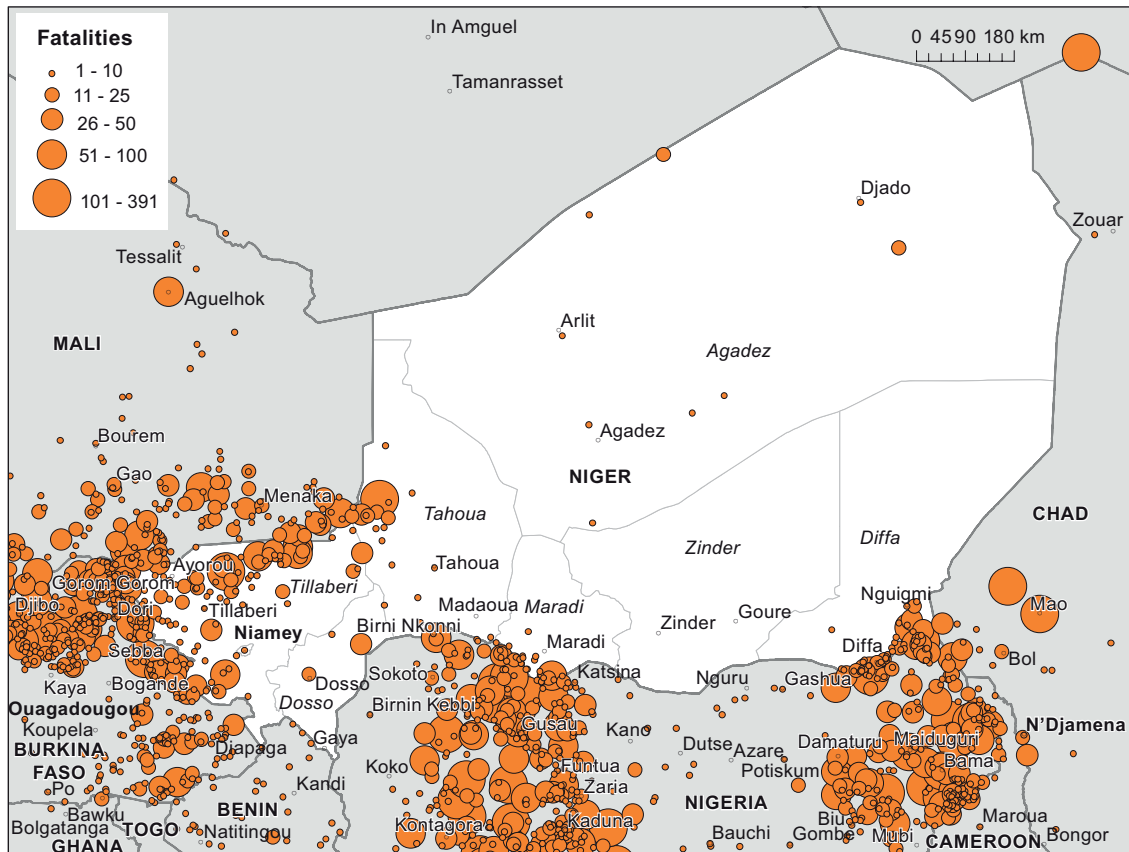
Bamako was also a hub for the displaced and political-military elite, which had thrived within or emerged out of the conflict, as major figures from northern and central Mali began (or continued) to divide their time between their home areas and the capital. Meetings of the monitoring committee for the Algiers Accord, a 2015 peace deal aimed at resolving the causes of discontent in the north, became one venue among many for key actors in the conflict to spend considerable time in Bamako.

Source: Alexander Thurston for this publication.



Map 4.3

Fatalities in Niger and neighbouring countries, 2021



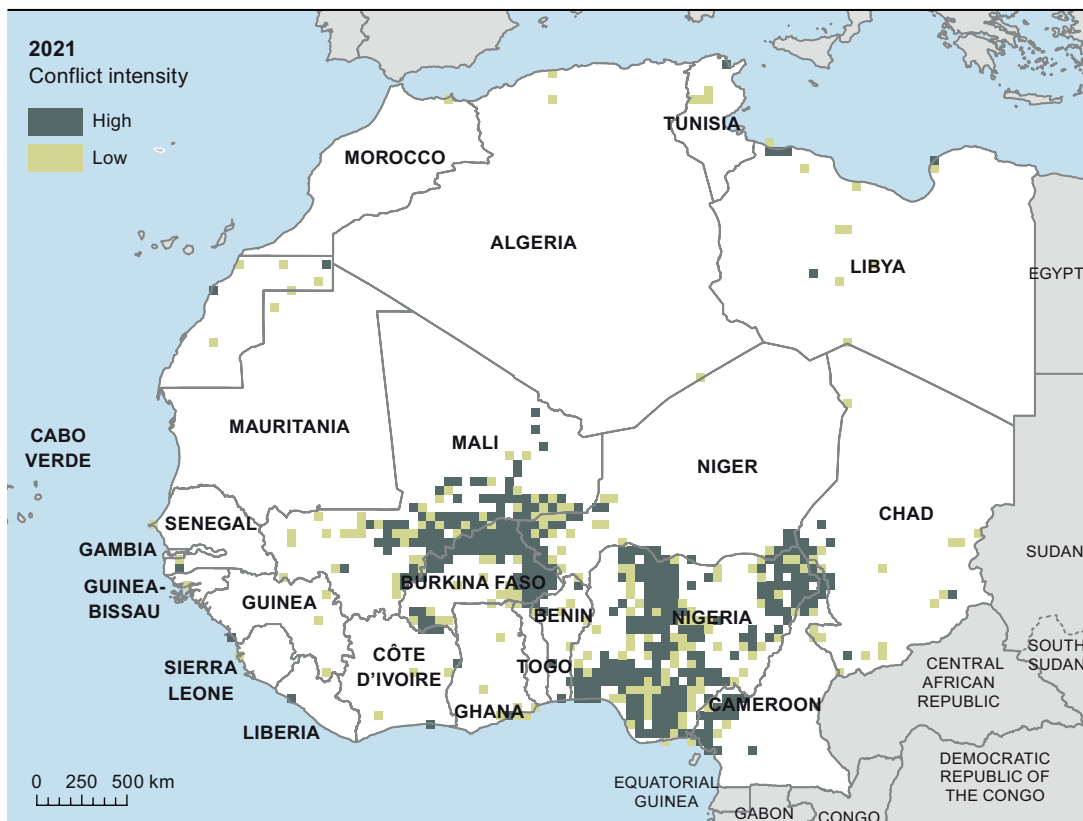
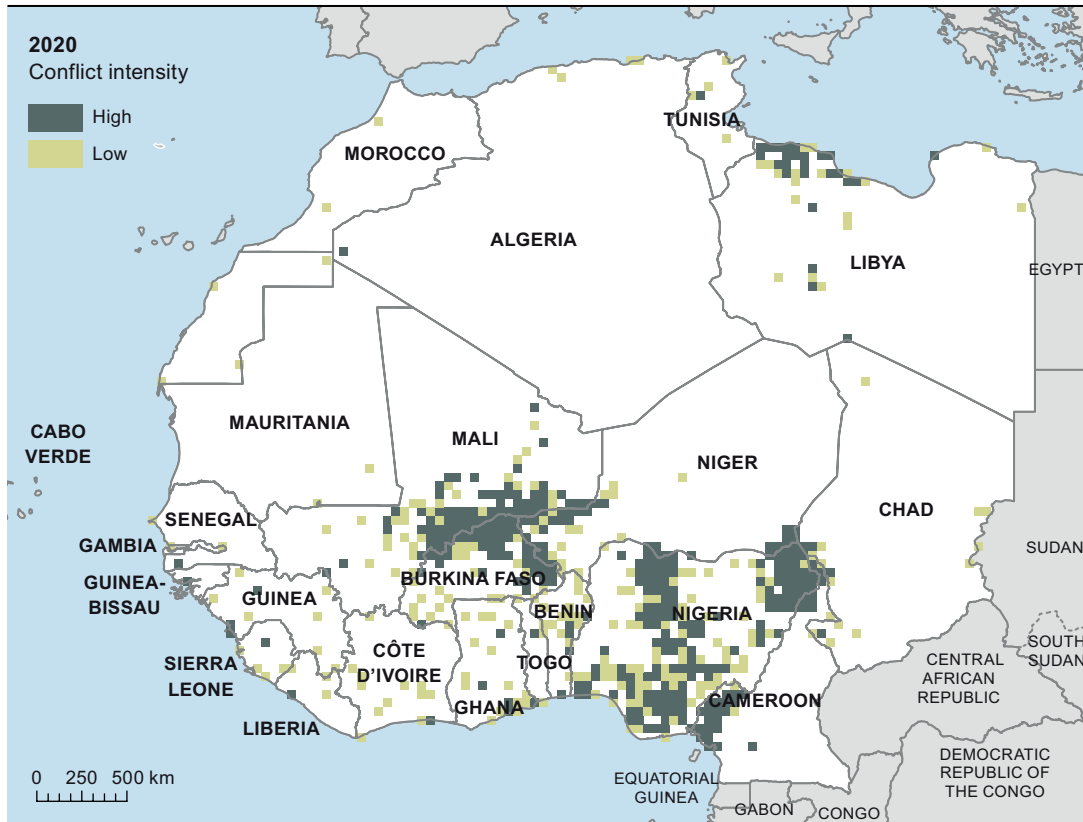
Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sup>[1]</sup>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

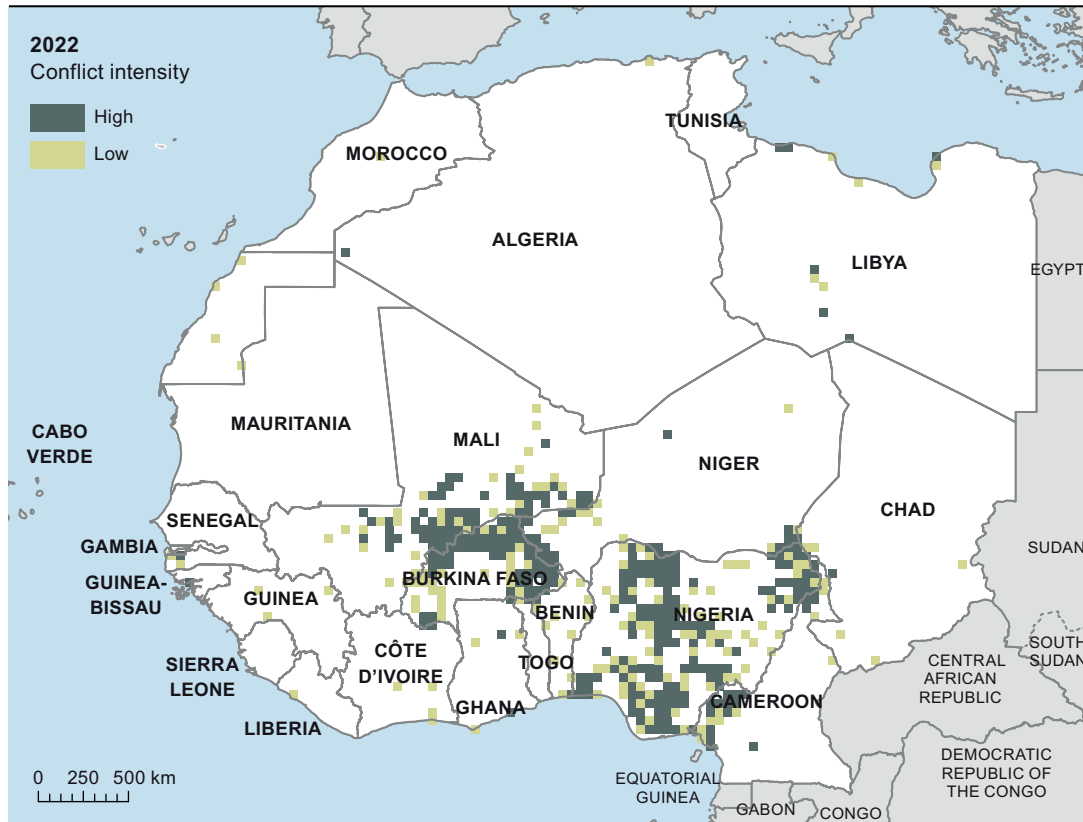
Violence in Cameroon is slightly less than in the early 2020s, thanks more to spatial shifts in the Boko Haram insurgency around Lake Chad than to a reduction in the conflict between the government and English-speaking communities in the west of the country. In Niger, violence has remained constant, with the bulk of violent events (45%) and fatalities (63%) now located in the Tillabéri region in the southwest, bordering both Burkina Faso and Mali. The Diffa region where Boko Haram and ISWAP are active is the second focus of conflict in the country, accounting for 32% of the events and 19% of the fatalities (Map 4.3). Niamey, Niger's capital, has largely been spared from political violence over the observed period. In Chad, the main sources of political instability remain the Lake region near N'Djamena and the Tibesti in the far north, where more than 300 died in clashes between miners.

All these countries have experienced more violence than the norm, as indicated by a ratio of violent events and/or fatalities per inhabitant higher than 1 (Table 4.1). For example, 51% of the victims of political violence were in Nigeria, whose population accounts for 38% of that of the area studied. This results in a ratio of 1.3, a testament to the brutality of the many subnational and transnational conflicts that continue to plague the most populous country in Africa. Based on this metric, the most affected countries are Mali and Burkina Faso, whose ratio of victims per inhabitant is close to 4, suggesting that the insurgency affects most regions of the country. Libya is the hardest-hit country in North Africa, with 171 violent events and 185 fatalities, a fraction of the violence that erupted during the First and Second Libyan civil wars.

Map 4.4

Intensity of conflict in North and West Africa, 2020-22





Note: Data is available through 30 June 2022.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sub>[1]</sub>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

## VIOLENCE INTENSIFIES AND SPREADS

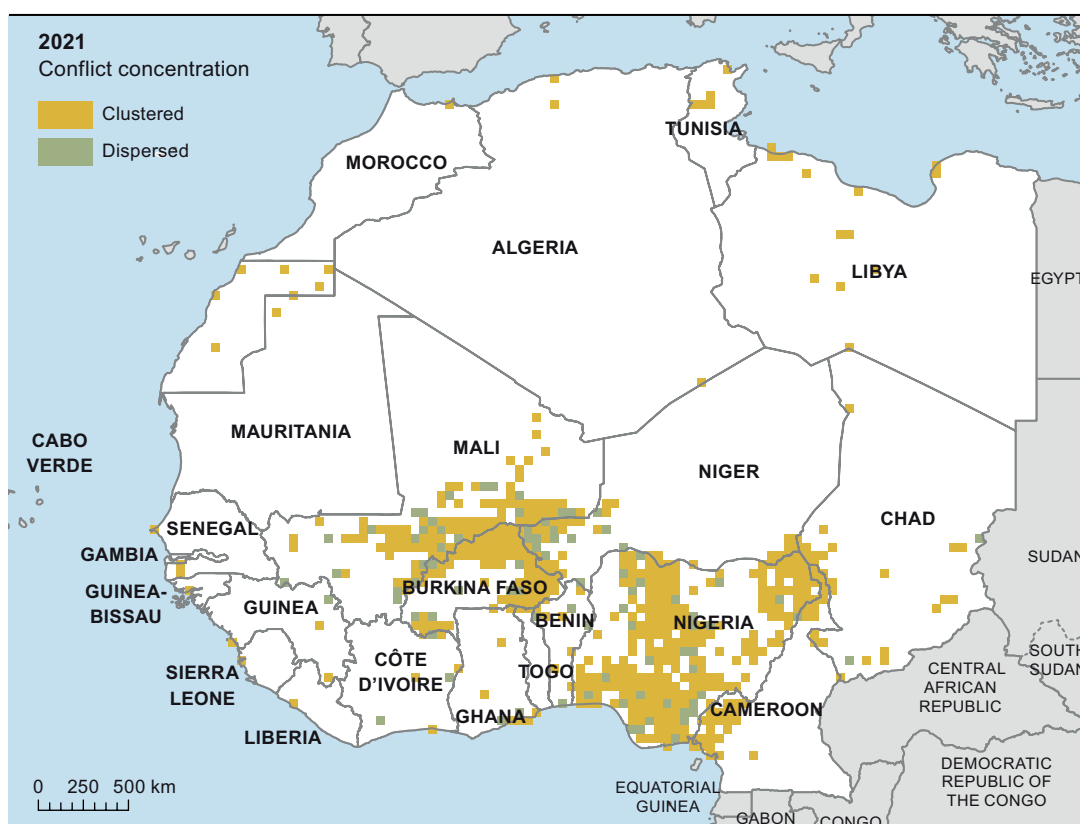
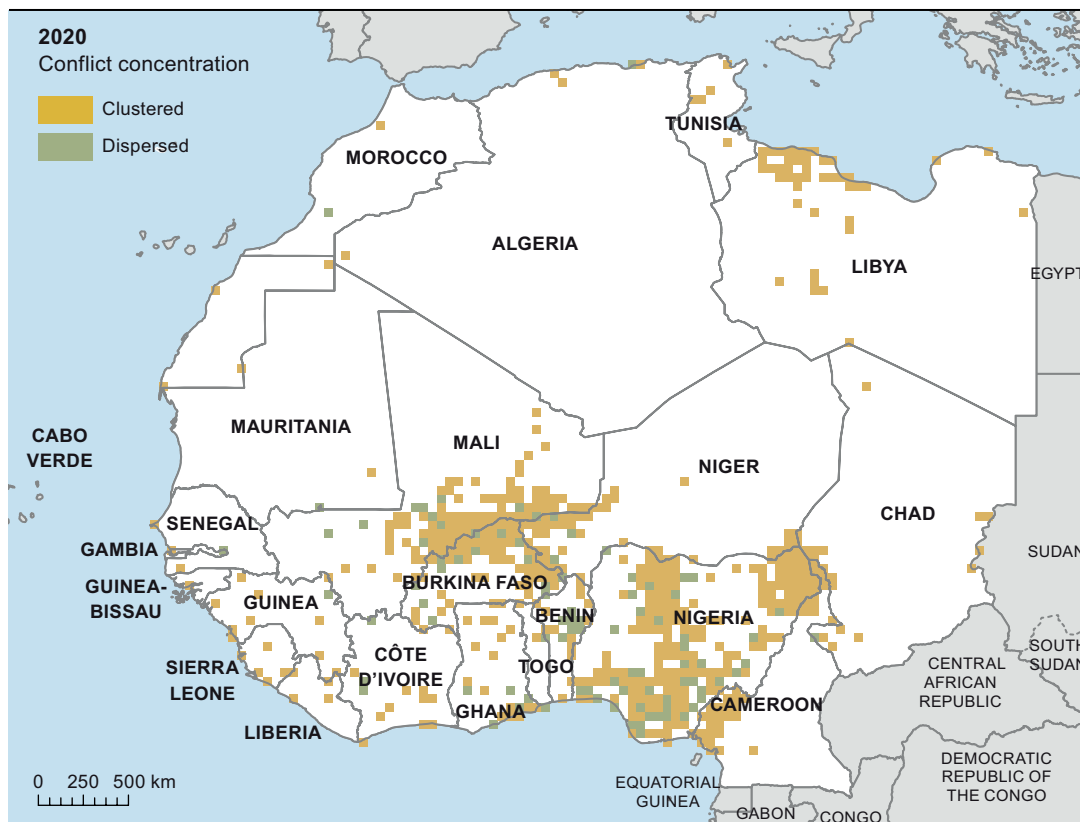
The rapidly changing geography of armed conflict in North and West Africa can be measured using the SCDi developed to monitor the evolution of violence in the region since the late 1990s (Walther et al., 2021). The SCDi measures both the intensity and spatial concentration of violence in each of the 6 540 “cells” of 50 km by 50 km that stretch from Dakar to N’Djamena and from Lagos to Algiers (Chapter 3). *Conflict intensity* calculates the number of violent events per cell, while *conflict concentration* compares the average distance between violent events in the region with the average distance that would be obtained if they were randomly distributed. Cells can experience either a low or a high intensity of conflict, as well as a clustered or dispersed spatial distribution of violent events.

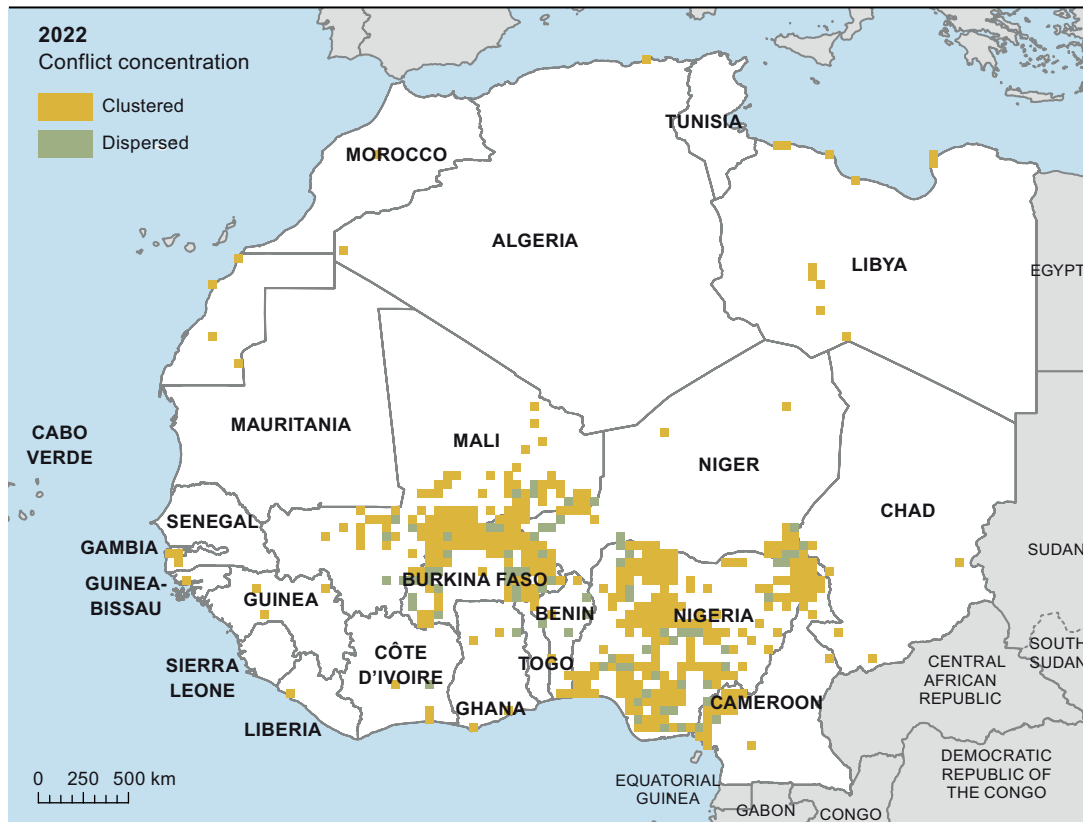
Since 2019, conflicts have become increasingly intense in North and West Africa. The SCDi

shows that numerous countries have experienced a rise in the number of high-intensity cells. This is particularly evident in the Central Sahel, where many regions that had experienced low-intensity violence have become high-intensity conflicts, such as in the Niger Inner Delta in Mali, in the north of Burkina Faso, and in the Tillabéri region of western Niger (Map 4.4). The indicator also confirms that previously isolated clusters of high-intensity violence have coalesced, a disturbing trend highlighted in previous studies (OECD/SWAC, 2021<sub>[5]</sub>). Nigeria is the emblematic example: a vast area of instability now connects the Delta to the Middle Belt and the north-west of the country. For 2021 and 2022 combined, 60% of the Nigerian territory (295 cells out of 494) were affected by one form of conflict or another. The expansion of the Malian conflict to Burkina Faso and western Niger has also led several insurgencies to coalesce in vast, uninterrupted areas

Map 4.5

Concentration of conflict in North and West Africa, 2020-22





Note: Data is available through 30 June 2022.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sub>ii</sub>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

of Burkina Faso and western Niger. This cluster of violence has also spread southward, moving towards northern Benin, Togo, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.

Most of the cells in conflict exhibit a clustered distribution of violent events, meaning that violence tends to occur in a few localised places within each cell (Map 4.5), for example around a particular city or along a major highway. Violence is particularly clustered in the central part of Mali and the Burkinabè peripheries in Central Sahel, in north-west Nigeria and around

Lake Chad, while it has almost completely disappeared in North Africa. Even if violence remains predominantly clustered south of the Sahara, the proportion of regions with clustered violent locations has continued to decrease since its peak in 2011, when it represented 95% of all events (Figure 4.3). In the first half of 2022, 83% of all cells exhibited a clustered pattern of violence. The fact that dispersed violence can be found in the immediate vicinity of high-intensity and highly clustered regions suggests a geographical expansion of conflict.

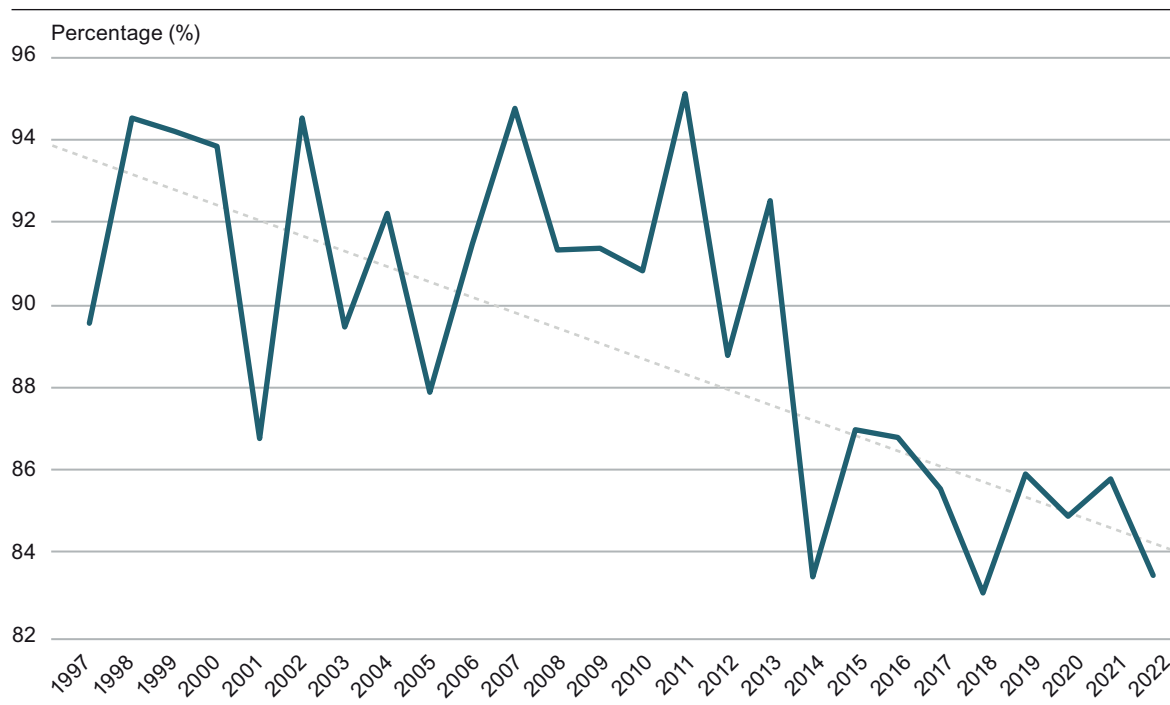
## A UNIQUE GEOGRAPHY OF VIOLENCE

By combining conflict intensity and concentration, the SCDi produces a typology of conflicts that can be used to map and understand shifts in the patterns of violence in a cell, in a country, or at the regional level. Four types of conflicts can be identified, depending on whether violence is intensifying locally, accelerating, in transition, or lingering.

- Situations causing the most concern are regions where violence is both intense and clustered (Type 1). This combination of factors is likely to produce the largest number of victims, particularly among civilian populations. These regions now cover much of Central Mali and the Burkinabè borders in the Central Sahel, the region

Figure 4.3

Proportion of conflict zones in North and West Africa classified as clustered, 1997-2022



Note: Data is available through 30 June 2022.

Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sup>[9]</sup>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

around Lake Chad and a significant part of the Nigerian territory (Map 4.6, Map 4.7). Burkina Faso is surrounded by a continuous area of intense and clustered violence, from the border region of Bwaku in northern Togo to the Houet province north of Bobo-Dioulasso, over 1 500 kilometres. Since 2020, clustered and high-intensity violence has slightly receded from the Menaka region in eastern Mali and almost completely disappeared from Libya (Map 4.8 and Map 4.9). It has considerably increased in southern and north-western Nigeria and remained stable along the Nigerian-Cameroon border. A new isolated hotspot of violence has emerged between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire in 2021.

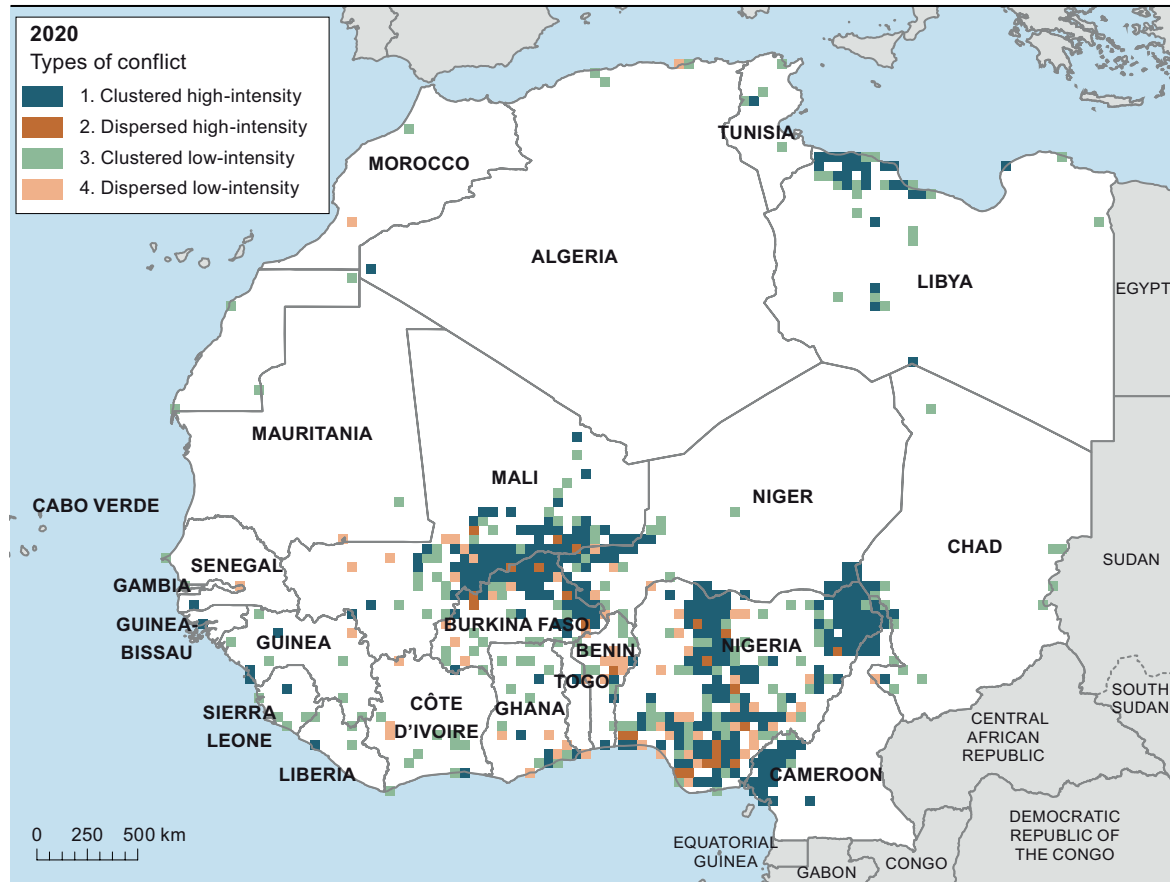
- Areas where violence is both dispersed and intense are usually located at the periphery of major clusters of conflict (Type 2). Violence is most likely to accelerate in these regions, which should thus be monitored closely. In 2021, dispersed and intense violence

was concentrated in the Tillabéri region of western Niger, along the western and southern borders of Burkina Faso, around the Niger Delta in Nigeria, and west of Kano, in a new cluster of violence that has developed in northern Nigeria. With its numerous parks and low population densities, the border region between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire presents conditions that encourage the proliferation of such violence (Map 4.8).

- Clustered and low-intensity violence affects areas in transition (Type 3), where violence can either intensify or dissipate. In these regions, episodes of violence are short-lived, as in much of the West African countries that are not currently affected by a civil war or an insurgency, or at the margins of larger hotspots of violence, as in Mali and Nigeria (Map 4.9).
- Areas where violence is both dispersed and of low intensity (Type 4) are usually located far from major conflict areas, as in northern Benin or on the periphery of the Liptako-Gourma in Niger.

Map 4.6

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



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sub>[1]</sub>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

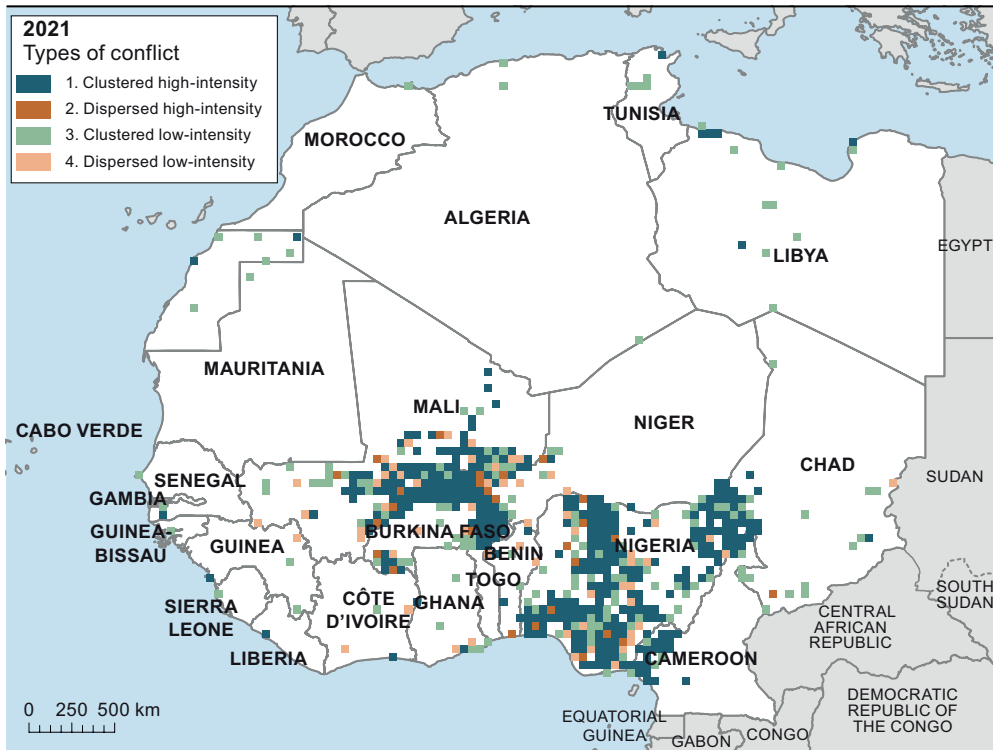
The SCDi confirms persistent, steady growth in all types of conflicts over the last decade (Figure 4.4). In 2021, 9% of North and West Africa had experienced one form of conflict or another (597 cells out of 6 540), a considerable proportion if one considers that conflict areas represented only 1% of the region when the Boko Haram insurgency began in 2009 (80 cells) and 3% when the Malian civil war started in 2012 (167 cells). This nearly tenfold increase is a testament to the degradation of the security situation since the late 2000s. Clustered and intense conflict (Type 1) is by far the most common type of violence (60%) and has exhibited the most spectacular growth. Until 2010, fewer than 50 such cells were observed, but by 2021, more than 355 had emerged. These cells cover 5% of North and West Africa and represent 60% of all conflict areas in

2021, up from 54% in 2020. Relatively few regions exhibit dispersed and high-intensity violence in 2021 (Type 2, 27 cells) but their number has increased rapidly since the mid-2010s, when they were almost unheard of. The number of areas where violence is both clustered and of low intensity (Type 3, 156 cells) is three times higher than in 2011 (57 cells). Regions with dispersed and low-intensity conflicts (Type 4) have followed a similar evolution: while before 2010, they were almost non-existent in North and West Africa, they represent nearly 10% of the conflict areas in 2021 (59 cells) (Figure 4.5).

The combined analysis of conflict *intensity* and conflict *concentration* show that violence is both intensifying and becoming more dispersed, resulting in large hotspots of violence across West Africa and the Sahel. This spatial coalescence

Map 4.7

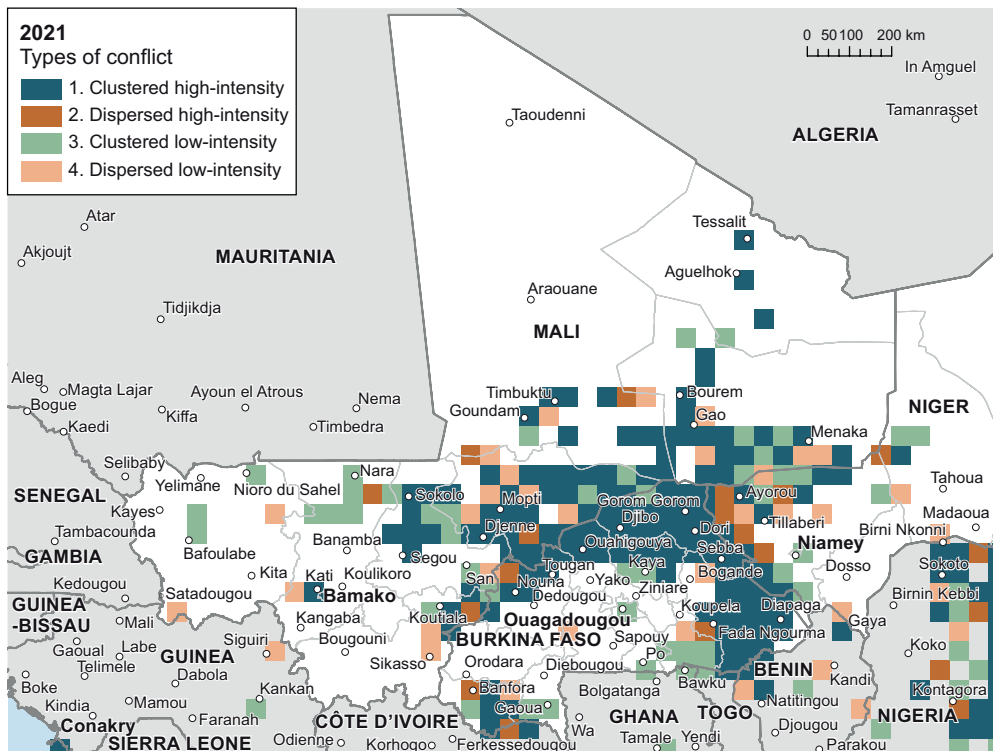
Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) in North and West Africa, 2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sub>11</sub>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Map 4.8

Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) in Mali and Central Sahel, 2021

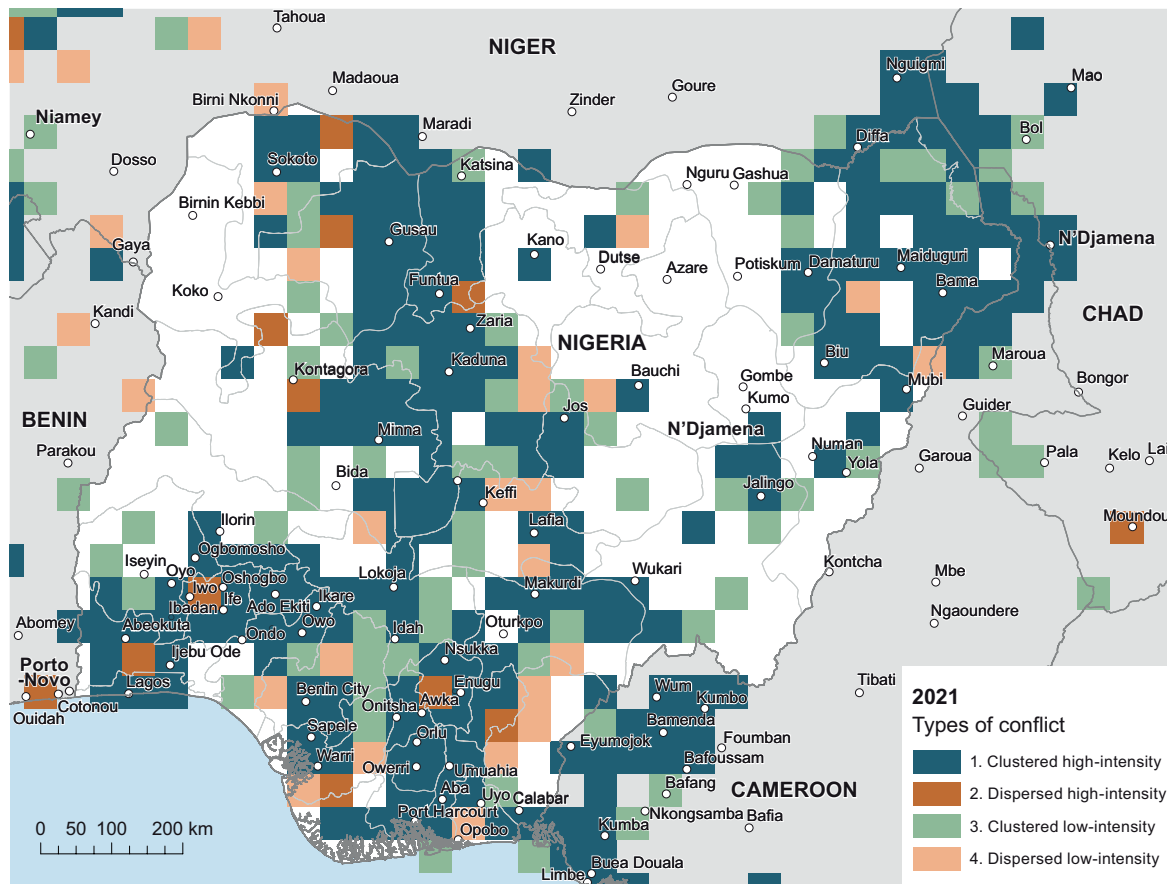


Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sub>11</sub>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.



Map 4.9

Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region, 2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sub>[1]</sub>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

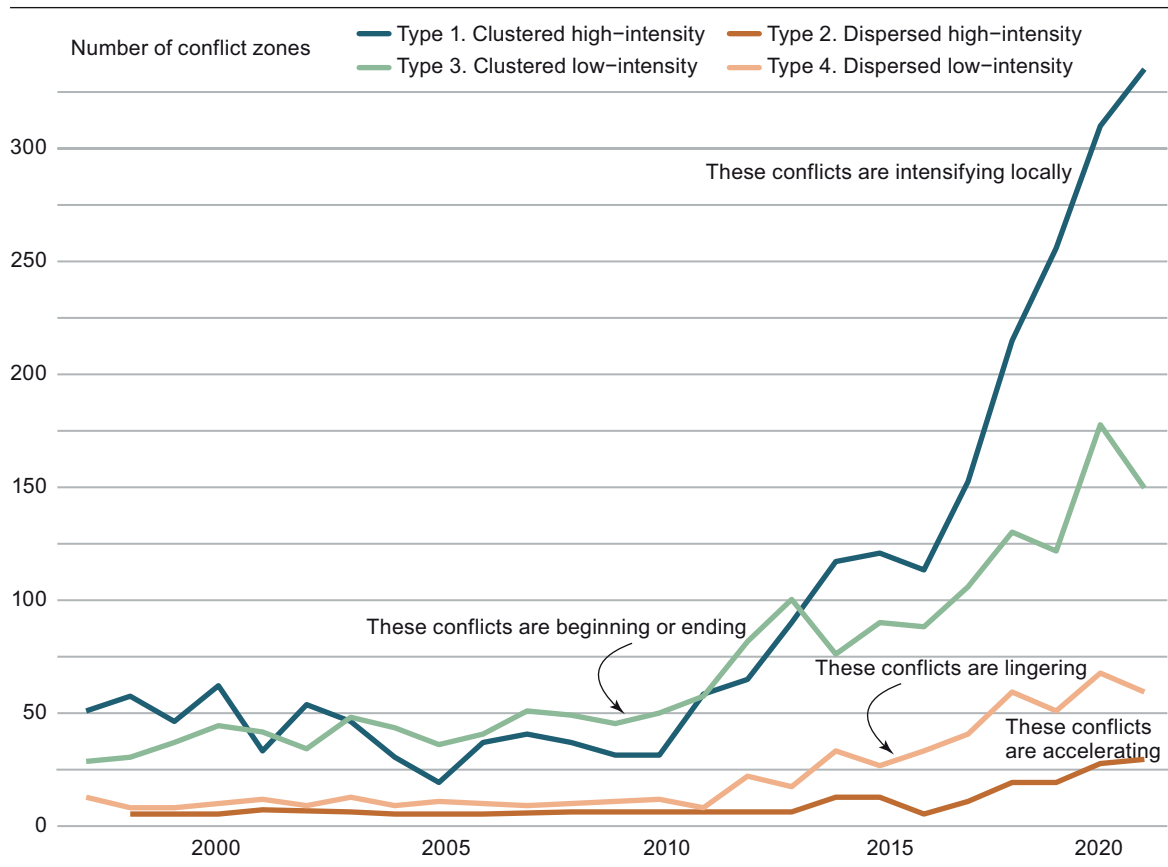
of various conflicts is unique. Nowhere else in the world has one macro region been affected by so many different forms of violence, each with its own localised roots, and progressively converging. Perhaps the most comparable instance was the violence that spread through Central and Southern Africa in the Congo Wars of the 1990s and 2000s. However, the current violence in the Sahel is fundamentally different, for two important reasons.

First, the violence in West Africa does not originate in the dynamics of state alliances and rivalries. It is mainly driven by localised, non-state violent actors, while the Congo Wars were largely driven by the involvement of regional governments pursuing their interests beyond their own borders and partnering with local non-state actors. The West African actors

are quite diverse in motivations and objectives and frequently shift alliances with other groups involved (OECD/SWAC, 2021<sub>[5]</sub>). Each of the spatial conflict hotspots is a highly complex mix of issues, fault lines and dynamics that resist efforts at resolution, whether initiated in the region or from afar. This is reflected in the failure of international attempts to build a durable framework that could lead to a peace, or at least security, in the region (OECD/SWAC, 2020<sub>[2]</sub>).

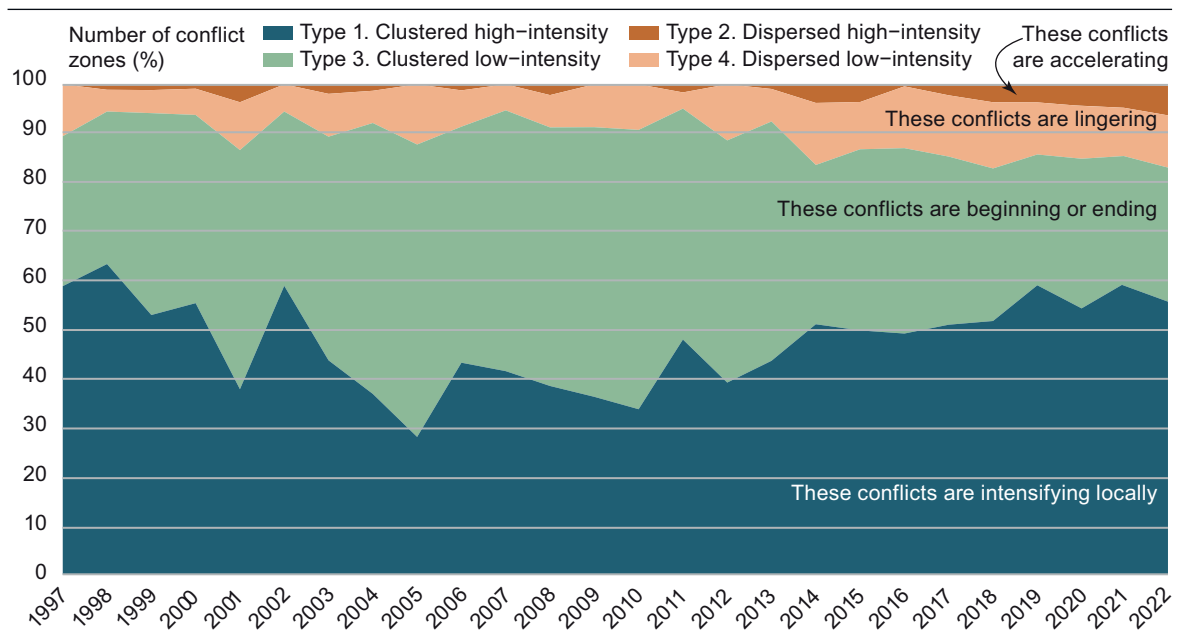
Secondly, transborder violent extremist organisations have emerged that have proved to be adept at leveraging local tensions for their own gain, while using borderlands as bases and recruitment zones (OECD/SWAC, 2022<sub>[6]</sub>). Rather than trying to seize control of a state or to effect change for their cause through pressure on state elites, these jihadist groups often aspire

Figure 4.4  
Number of conflict zones in North and West Africa by type, 1997-2021



Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sub>[1]</sub>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

Figure 4.5  
Proportion of conflict zones in North and West Africa by type, 1997-2022



Note: Data is available through 30 June 2022.

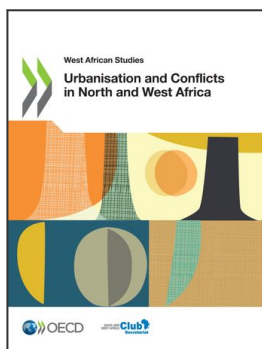
Source: Authors based on ACLED (2022<sub>[1]</sub>) data. ACLED data is publicly available.

to remake the political map in the region. They are largely indifferent to conventional territorial norms, crossing borders with regularity and systematically seeking to operate in multiple states at the same time. By implication, any effort to stop such groups in one state may appear to succeed initially, because the groups simply

withdraw into a neighbouring state, only to re-emerge when conditions are more favourable. It also means that violence can easily continue to spread, forming large transborder hotspots. Ultimately, this means that any political solution must be regional by design rather than focused on a given state.

## References

- ACLED (2022), *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (database)*, <https://acleddata.com>. [1]
- Chivvis, C. (2015), *The French War on Al Qa'ida in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. [7]
- Diallo, F. (2022), "Mali: le GSIM annonce des 'opérations' contre Bamako", *Jeune Afrique*, 28 July, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com>. [3]
- Lebovich, A. (2016), "The hotel attacks and militant realignment in the Sahara-Sahel region", *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel*, West Point, New York, pp. 22-28. [4]
- OECD/SWAC (2022), *Borders and Conflicts in North and West Africa*, West African Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/6da6d21e-en>. [6]
- OECD/SWAC (2021), *Conflict Networks in North and West Africa*, West African Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/896e3eca-en>. [5]
- OECD/SWAC (2020), *The Geography of Conflict in North and West Africa*, West African Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/02181039-en>. [2]
- Sangaré, B. and S. Cold-Ravnkilde (2020), "Internally displaced people in Mali's capital city", Danish Institute for International Studies Policy Brief, 8 December. [8]
- United Nations (2021), *World Population Prospects 2019*, United Nations, Department of Social and Economic Affairs, Population Division, New York. [10]
- Walther, O. et al. (2021), "Introducing the Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator of political violence", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2021.1957846>. [9]



**From:**  
**Urbanisation and Conflicts in North and West Africa**

**Access the complete publication at:**

<https://doi.org/10.1787/3fc68183-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD/Sahel and West Africa Club (2023), "The changing geography of conflict in North and West Africa", in *Urbanisation and Conflicts in North and West Africa*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/44dee592-en>

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area. Extracts from publications may be subject to additional disclaimers, which are set out in the complete version of the publication, available at the link provided.

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.