A map of West Africa, specifically showing Mali and Burkina Faso. Numerous small red dots are scattered across the region, indicating conflict locations. Labels for various cities and towns are visible, including Timbuktu, Gao, Djibo, Ouagadougou, and many others. The map also shows the borders of Mali and Burkina Faso.

**Members and financial partners  
of the SWAC/OECD :**

**Austria**  
**Belgium**  
**Canada**  
**CILSS**  
**ECOWAS**  
**E.U.**  
**France**  
**Luxemburg**  
**Netherlands**  
**Norway**  
**Switzerland**  
**UEMOA**  
**USA**

# Geography & networks of West African conflicts

## Lessons from a spatial and relational approach

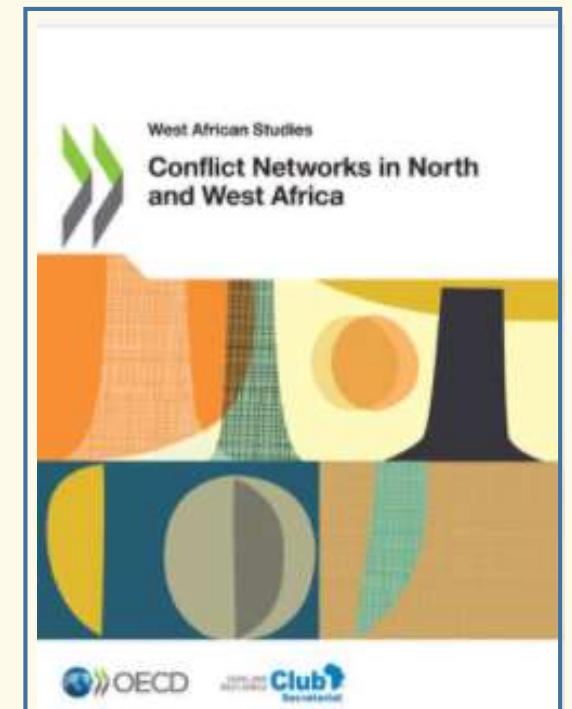
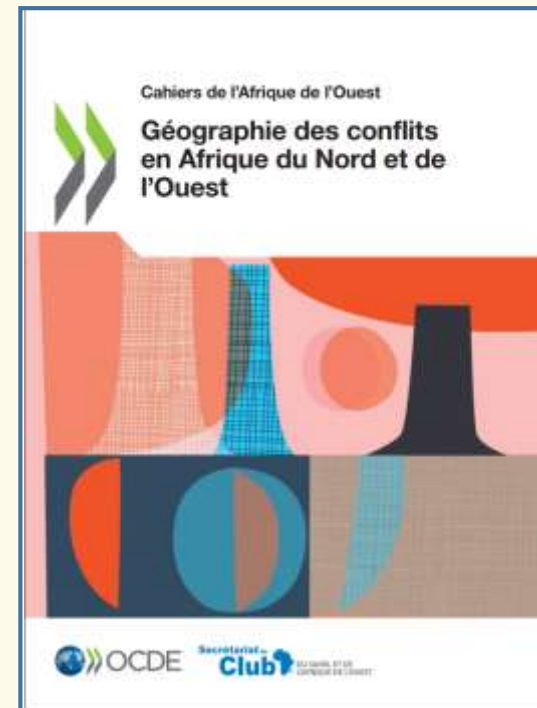
**Laurent Bossard** (SWAC/OECD)  
**Olivier Walther** (University of Florida -  
Sahel Research Group)

Sahel Coalition webinar  
29 March 2021



# Les dernières travaux du CSAO sur la sécurité aident à comprendre:

- Où se produisent les violences politiques et quels sont les relations entre les acteurs impliqués;
- Comment et pourquoi la nature et l'intensité des conflits changent ; et
- Les effets des interventions militaires sur l'intensité, la diffusion des violences et les réseaux des groupes impliqués.



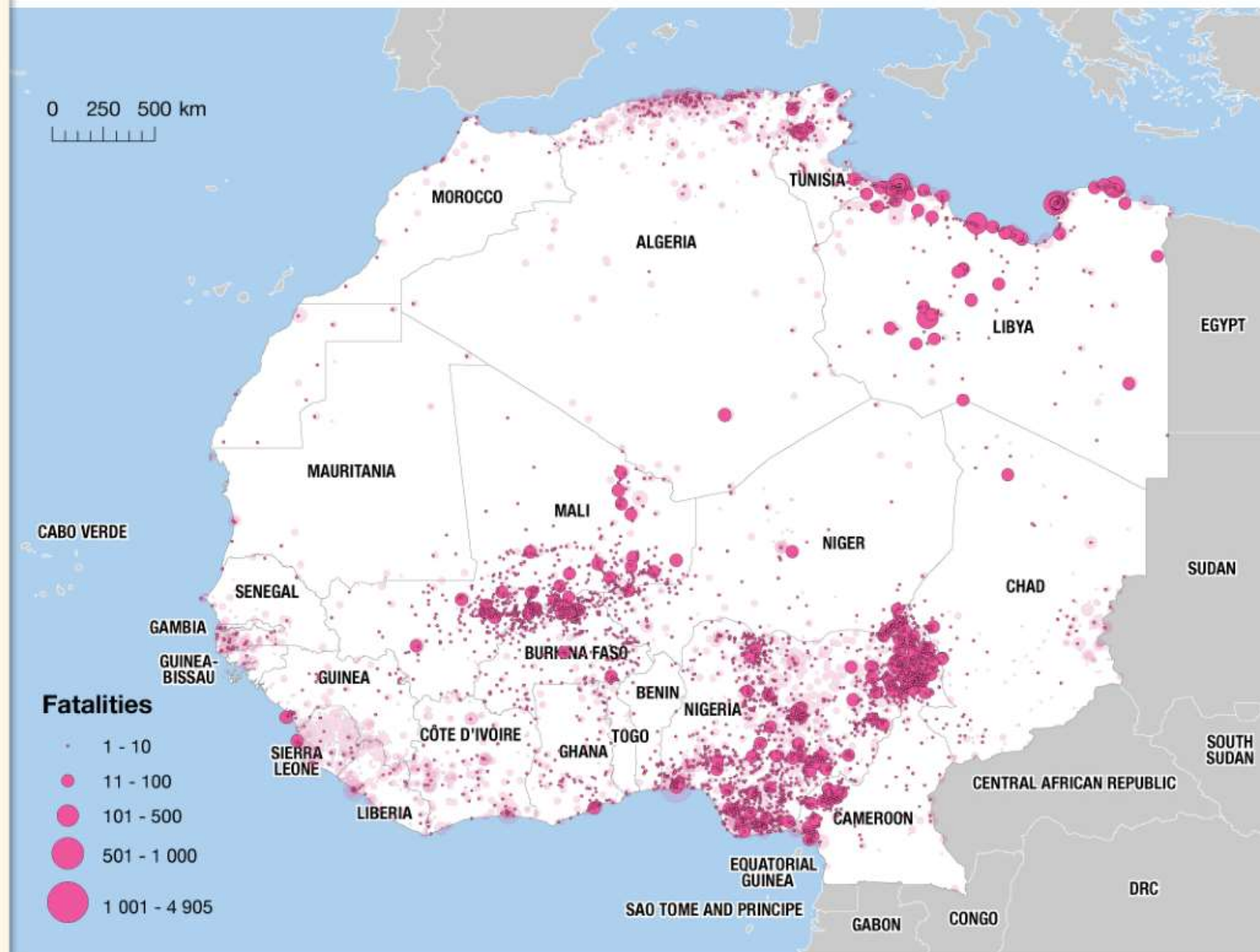
1997 – 2019:  
32 737 events  
143 840 killed

1997 – 2002:  
5 138 events  
25 845 killed

2003 – 2008:  
3 282 events  
14 637 killed

2009 – 2014:  
8 140 events  
41 623 killed

2015 – 2019:  
16 177 events  
61 735 killed

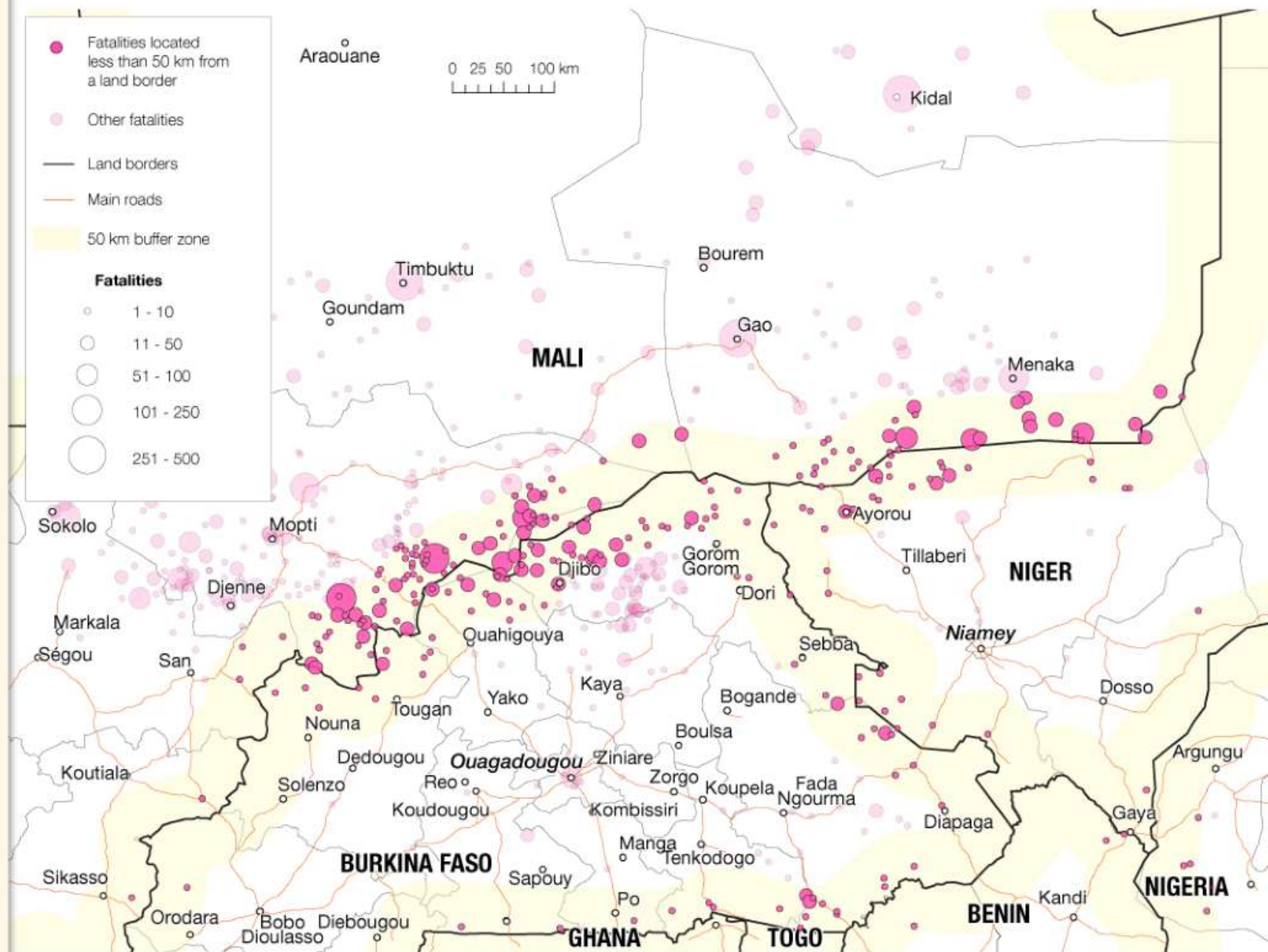




## Border region dynamics are important

Ex: Liptako-Gourma

Events within 50 km of  
international boundaries



## North Africa

4 922 battles

3 491 remote attacks

2 192 attacks on  
civilians

32 737 violent events

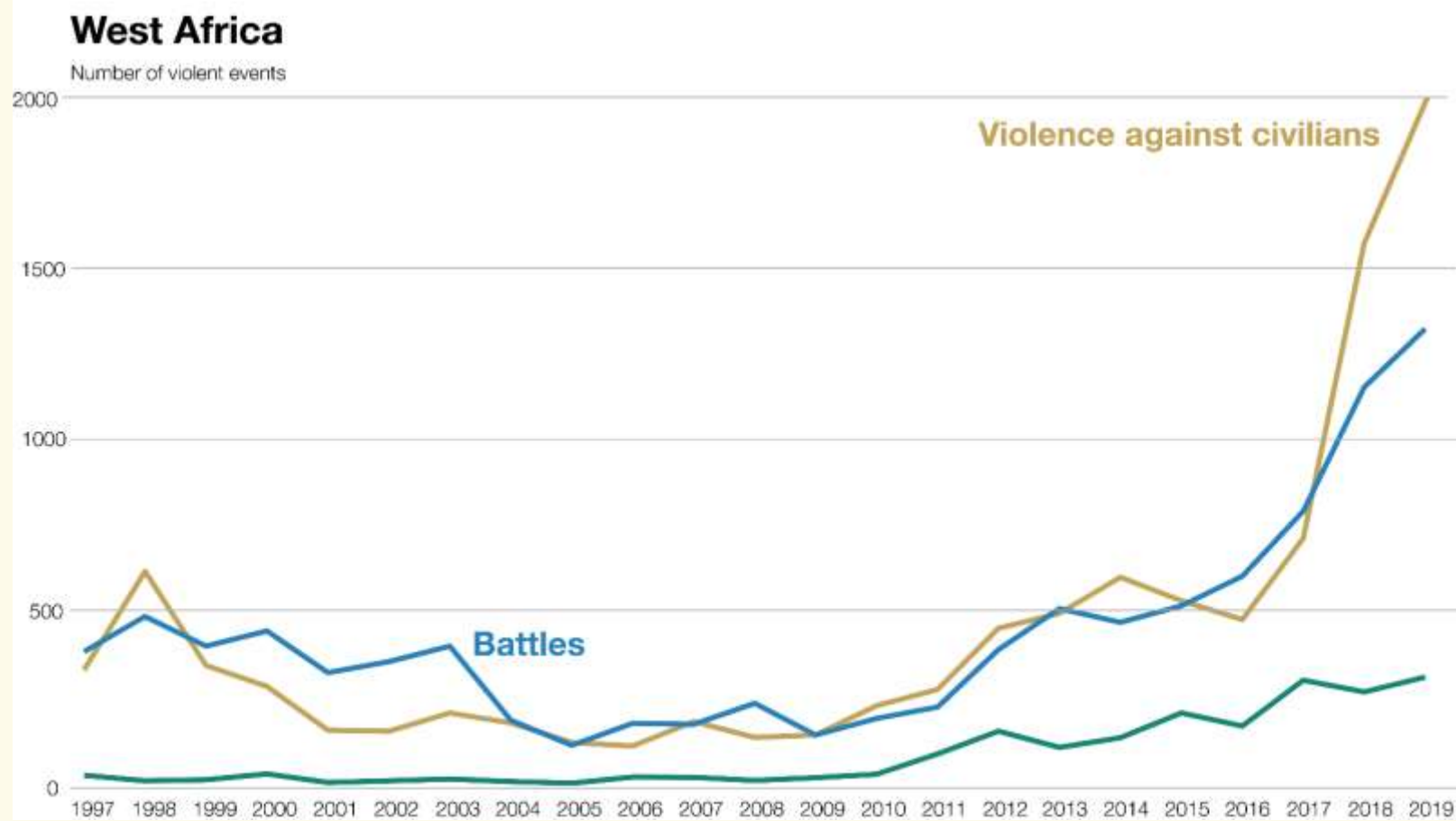
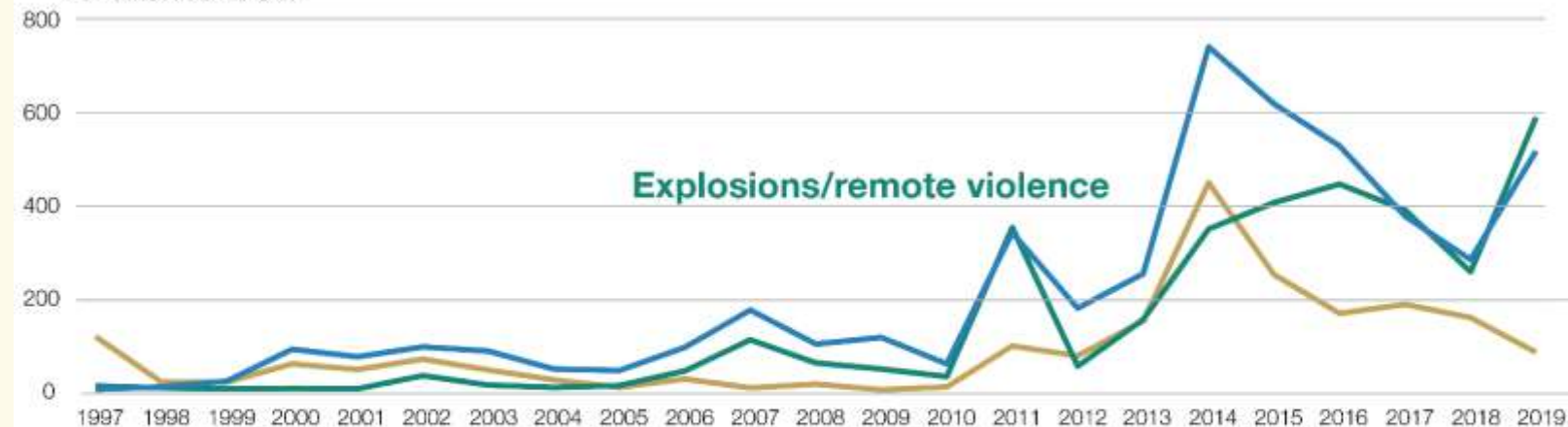
143 840 killed

## West Africa

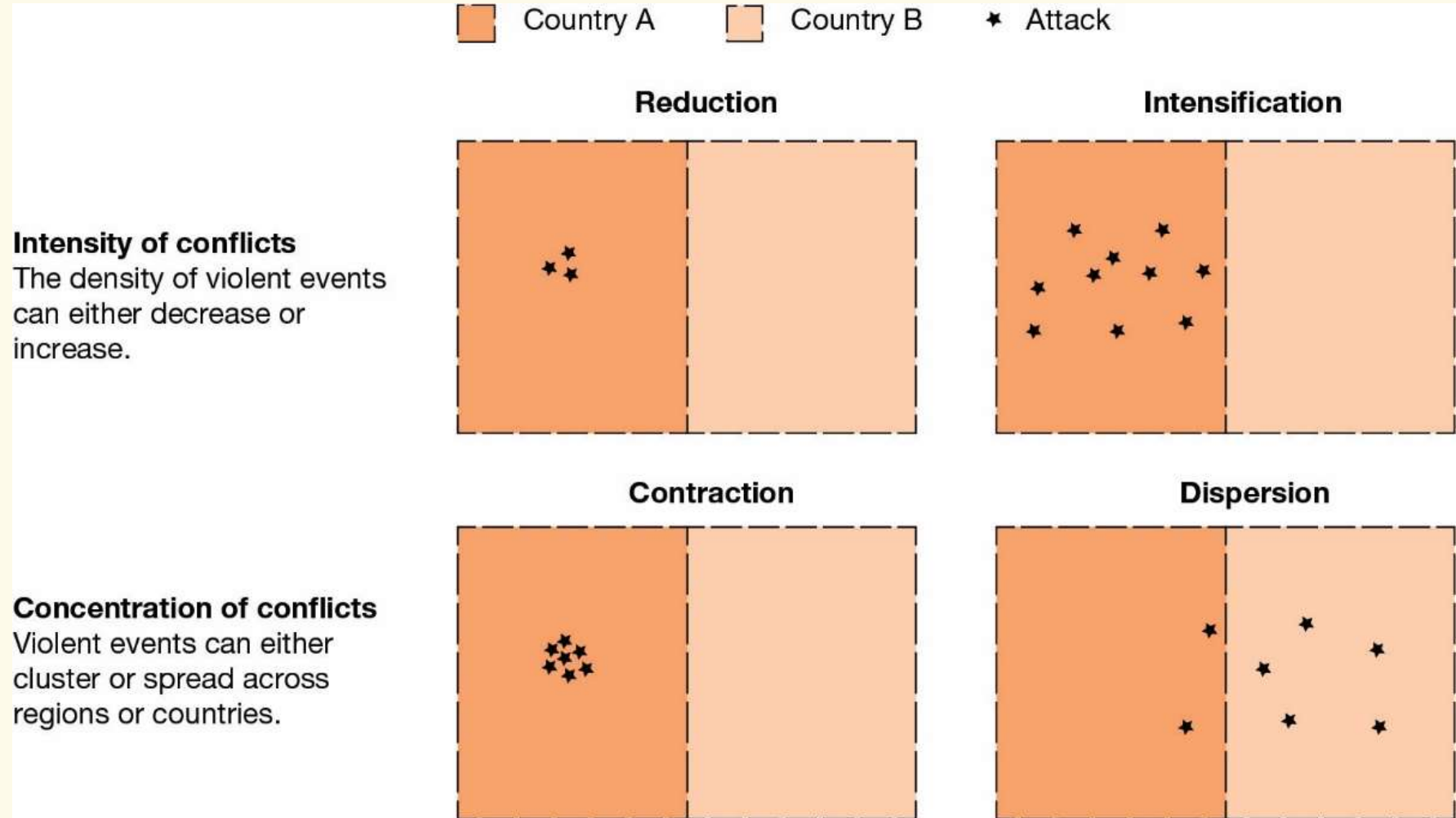
9 947 battles

1 912 remote attacks

10 275 attacks on  
civilians



# New indicator needed for complex, dynamic processes



# The Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi)

Combination of metrics:

- spatial intensity
- spatial concentration

Four unique typologies...  
to characterise conflict  
within places

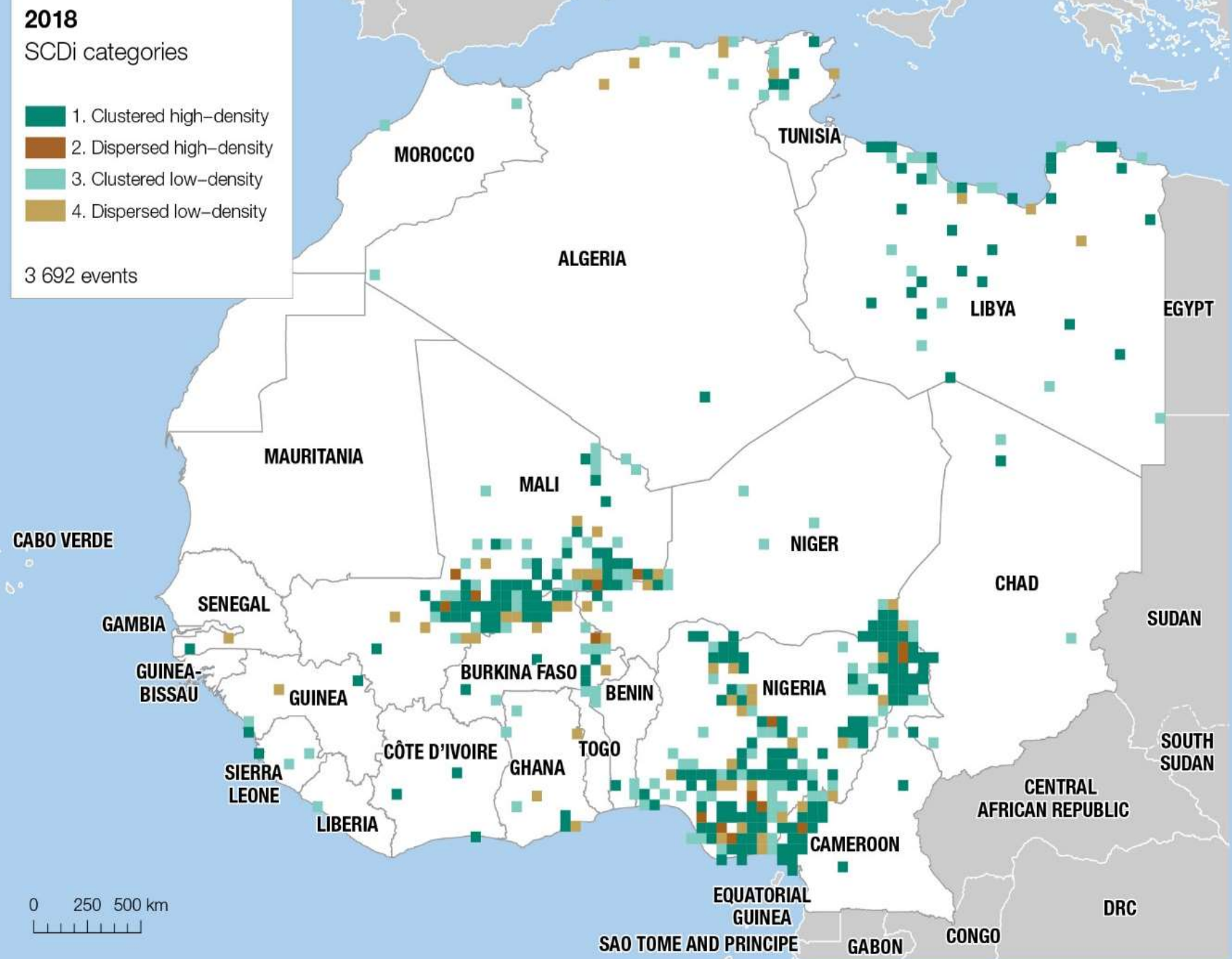
	High intensity of violent events	Low intensity of violent events
Clustered events	(1) The conflict is <b>intensifying locally</b>	(3) The conflict is <b>decreasing</b>
Dispersed events	(2) The conflict is <b>accelerating</b>	(4) The conflict is <b>lingering</b>



# The Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) in West Africa

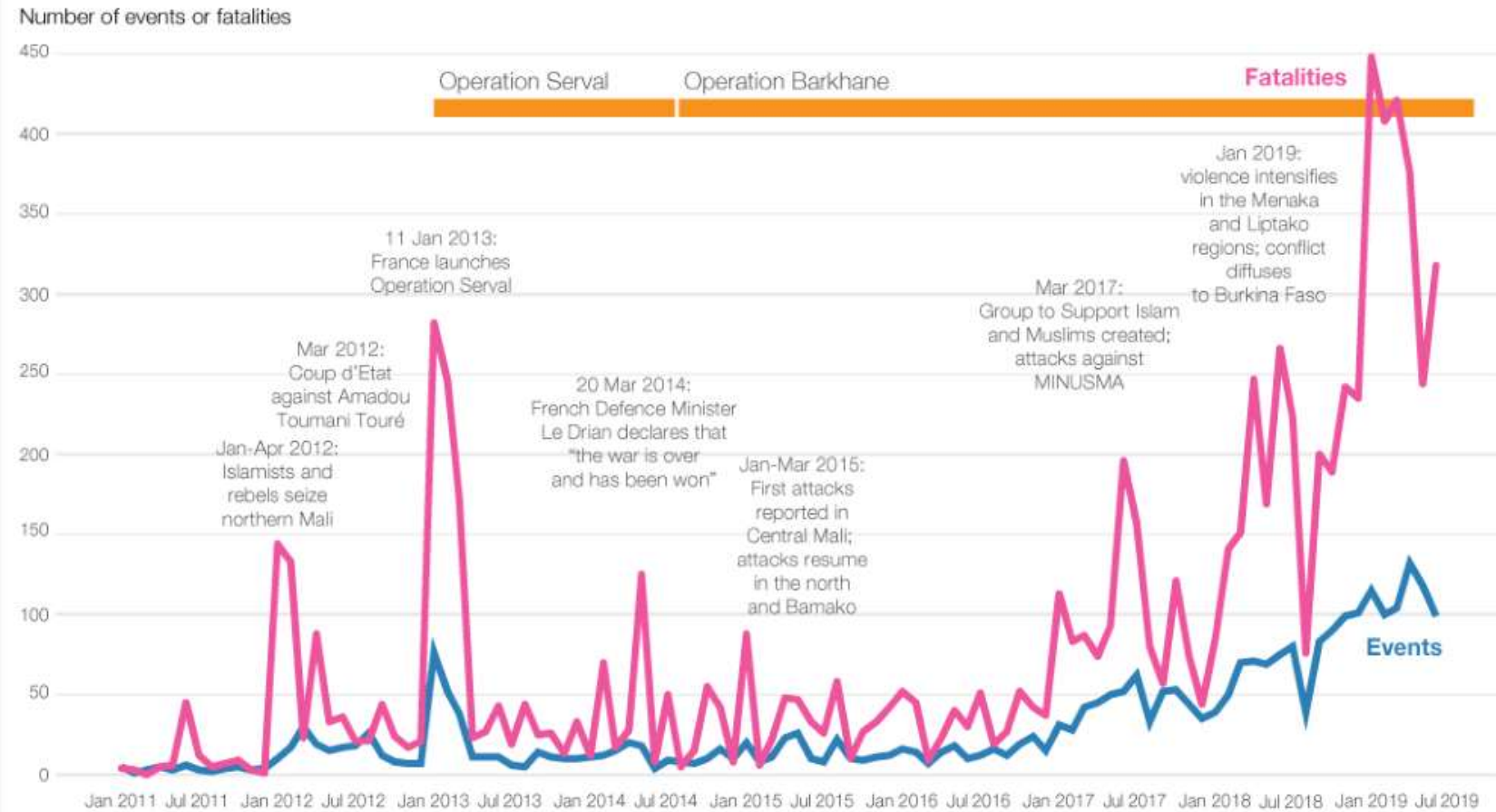
50km\*50km cells

over the year 2018





## Interventions Mali (France, 2013-)



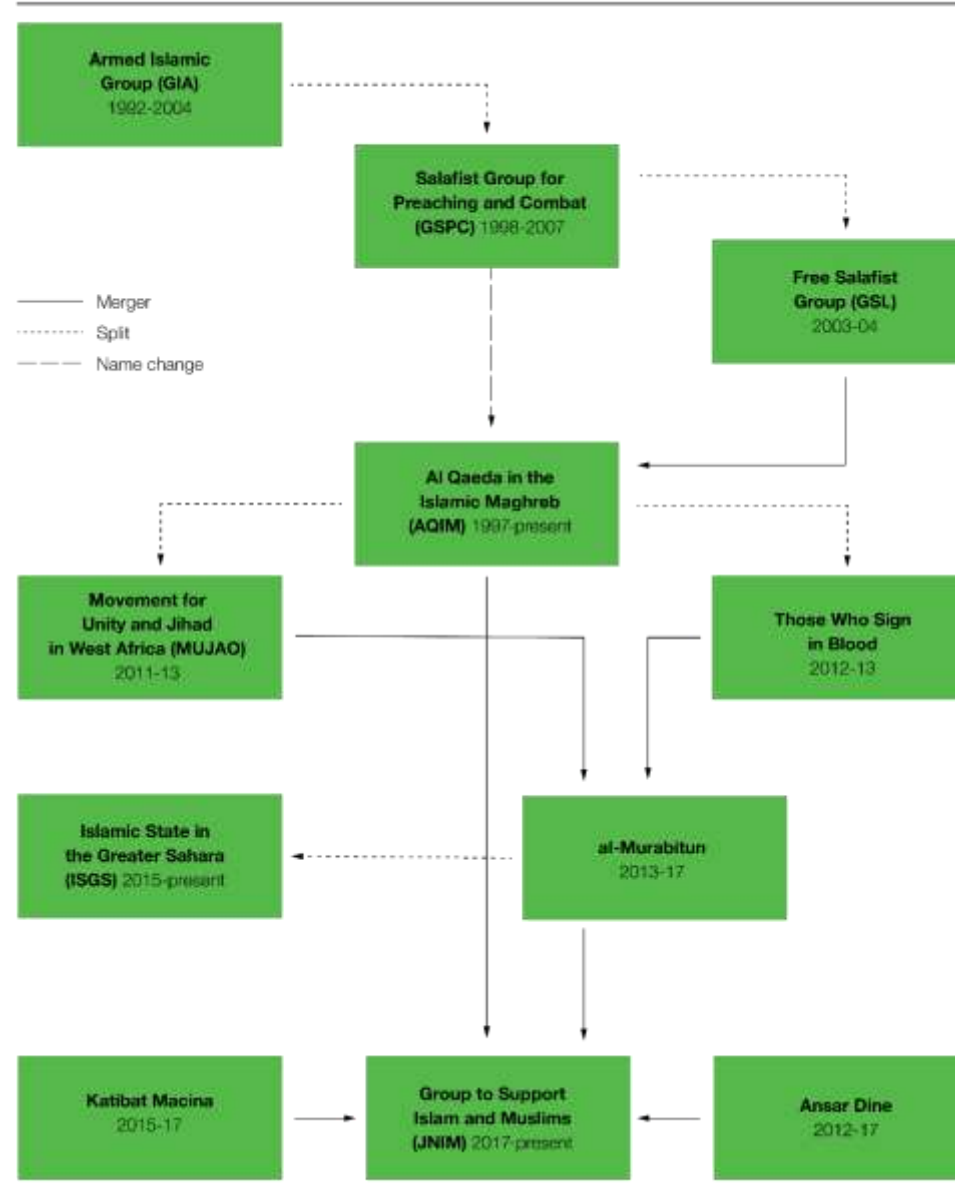
# Policy perspectives

- **SCD indicator maps evolution of conflicts**
- **De-escalating conflict in border regions**
- **Protecting civilian populations**

- Conflicts have become more difficult to resolve
- Complex relationships between belligerents
- Rivalries and alliances shape patterns of violence

## Mapping conflict networks in North and West Africa

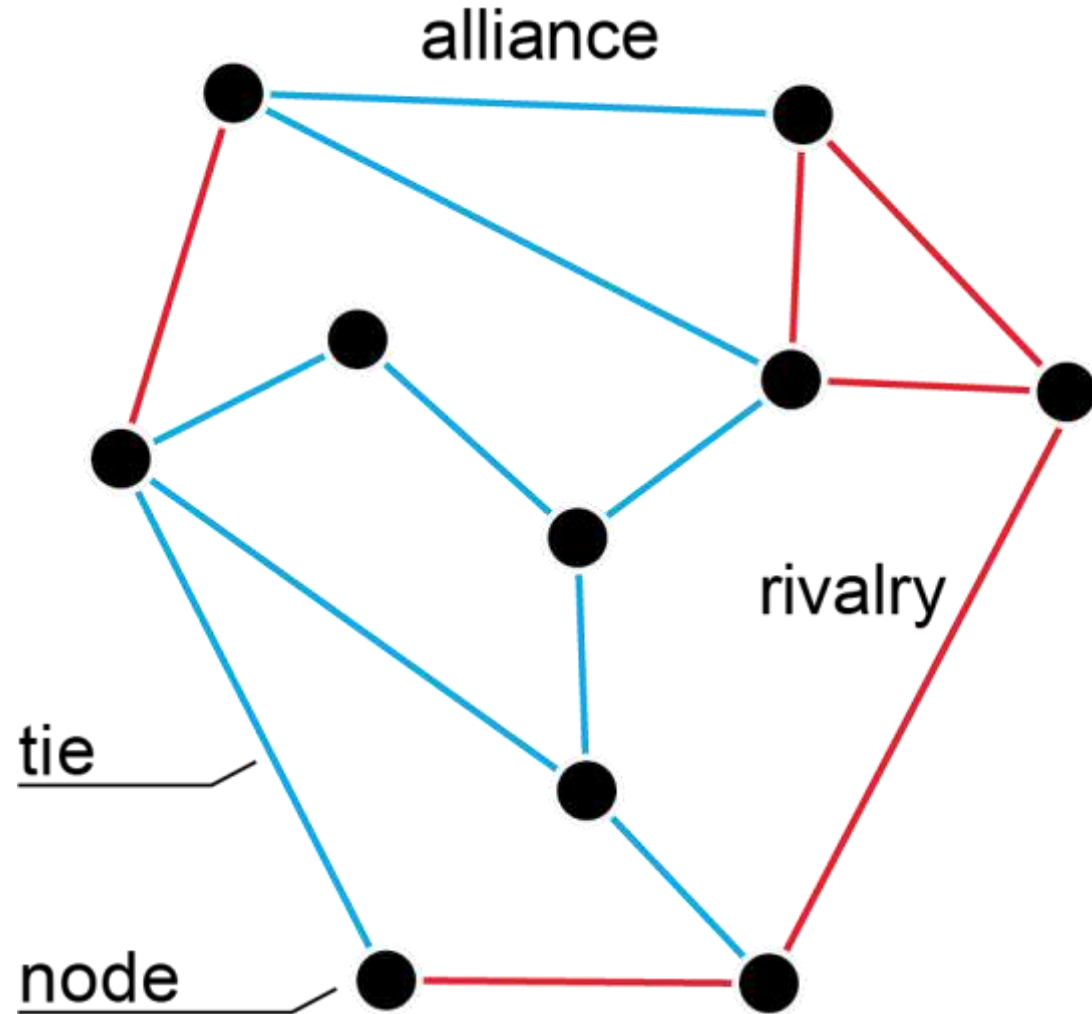
Simplified evolution of AQIM-related groups, 1992–2020



Source: OECD/SWAC (2021)

- Who is allied and in conflict with whom?
- How do rivalries and alliances change over time?
- How do military interventions affect conflict networks?

## How rivalries and alliances shape conflicts





- 21 countries, 1997-2020
- 3 case studies:  
Central Sahel, Lake  
Chad, Libya
- Armed Conflict  
Location & Event  
Data Project  
(ACLED)
- 37 000 violent  
events
- 155 000 deaths

# A regional approach to conflicts

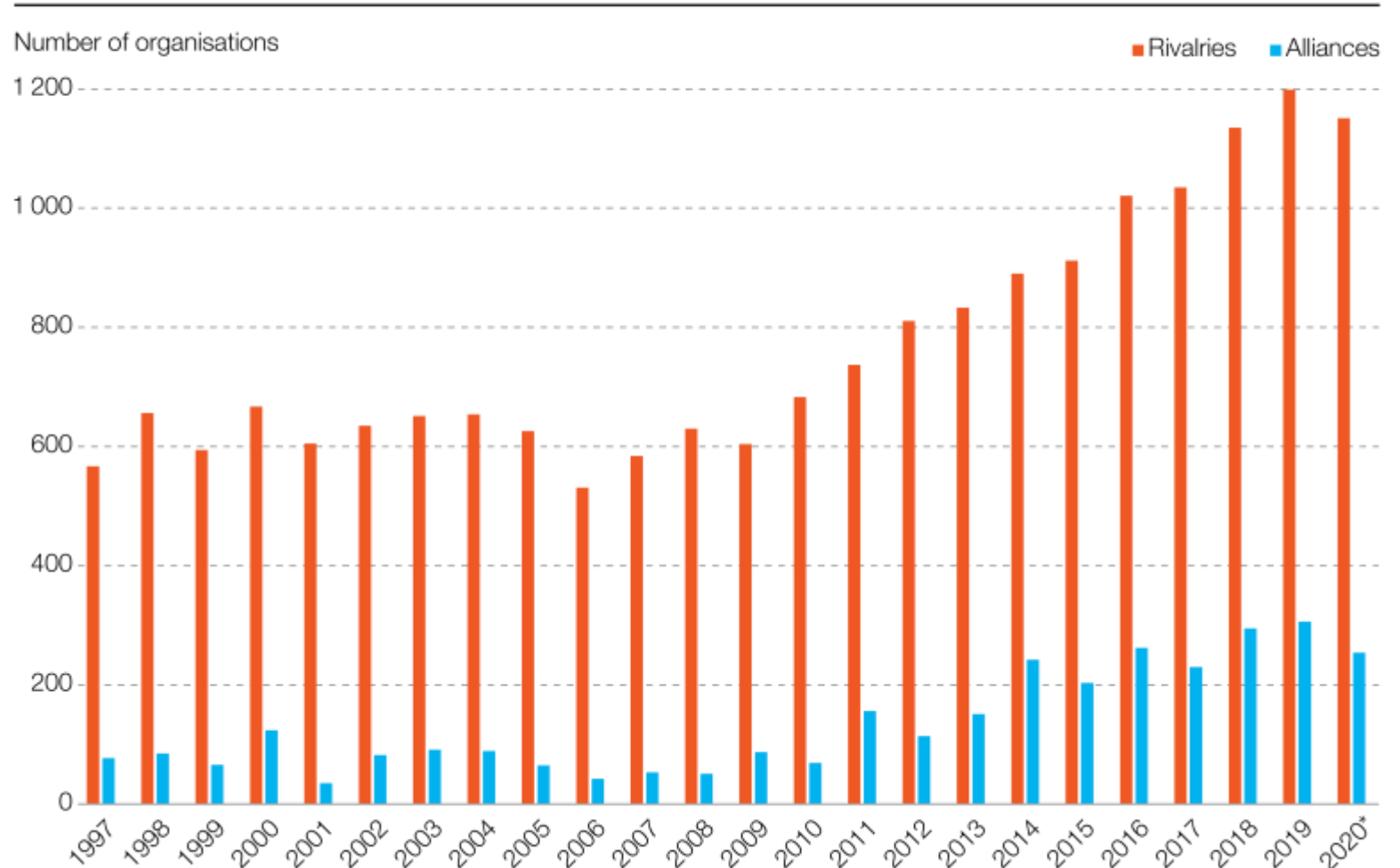
Countries covered in this report



- Difficulty of building long-lasting coalitions between organizations that use violence to pursue local and opportunistic agendas
- Violent organizations often share a common enemy without developing an ideological project

## More enemies than allies

Rivalries and alliances in North and West Africa, 1997–2020

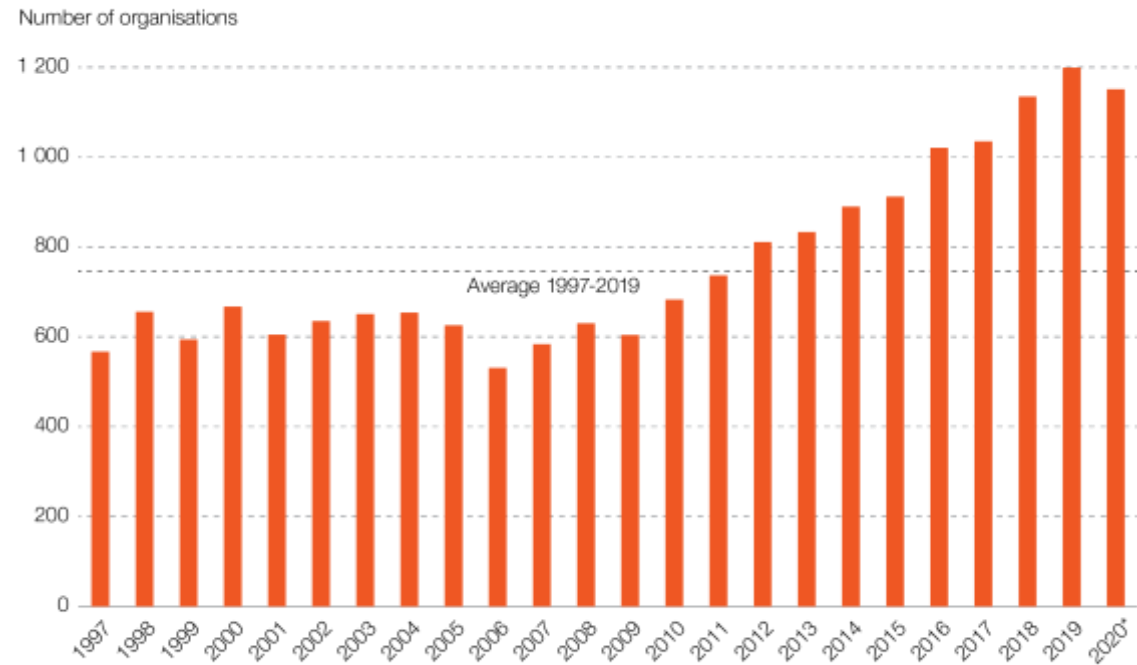


\* Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020)

# An increasing number of belligerents

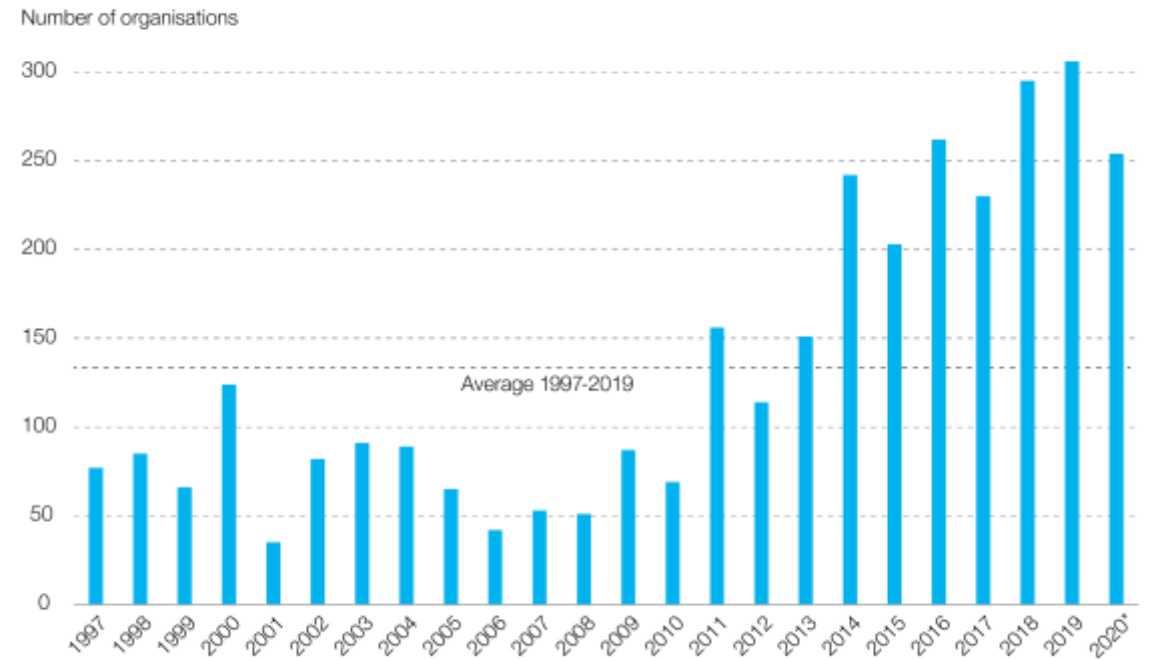
Organisations in conflict in North and West Africa, 1997–2020



\* Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020)

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



\* Data available through 30 June 2020.

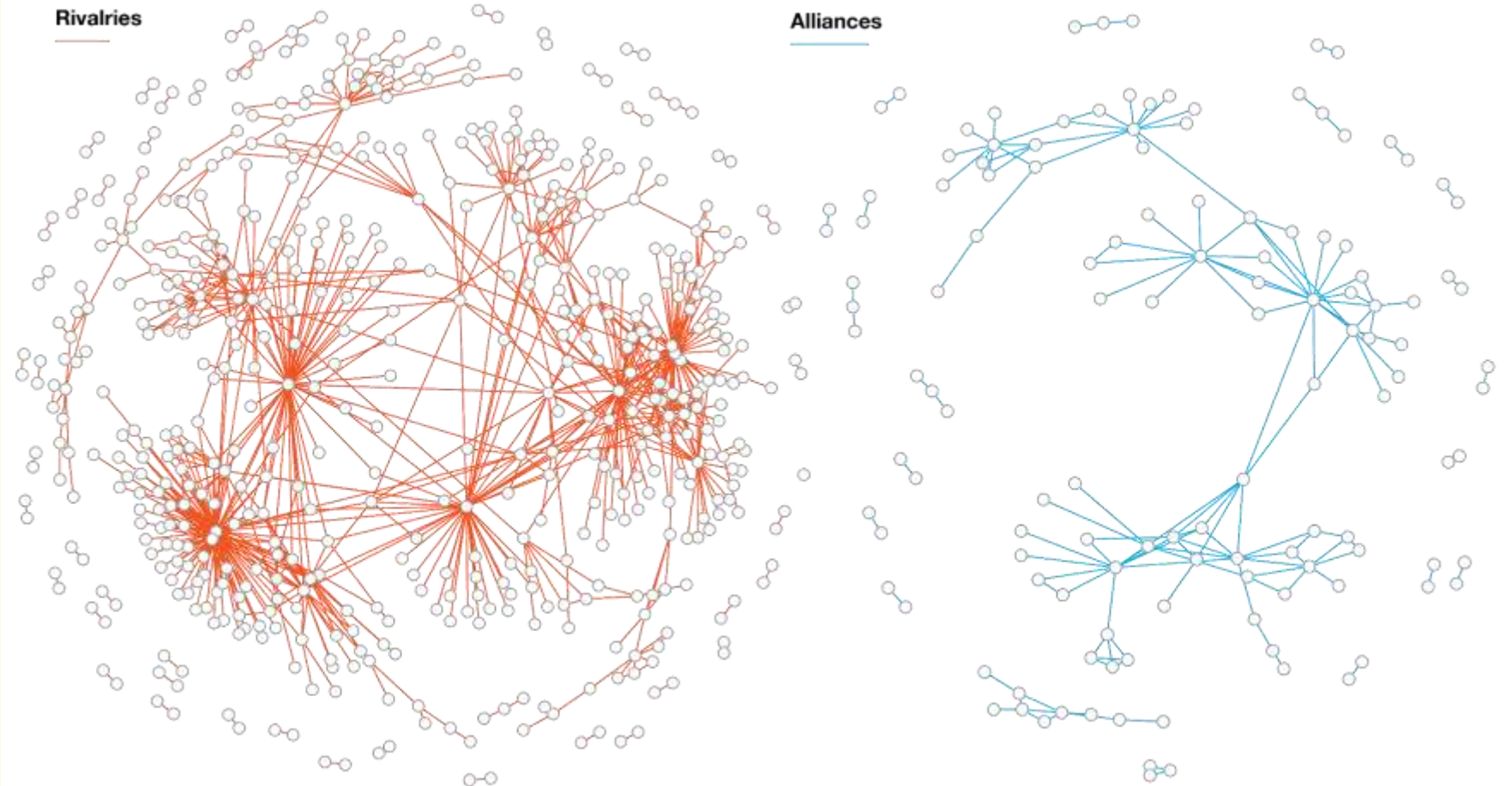
Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020)

- The number of organizations in conflict has doubled since 2009
- Alliances are explained by new military partnerships among state forces

- Both networks are decentralized and organized around a few key organizations
- Flexible and opportunistic nature of relationships that bind violent organizations

## Conflict and cooperation networks look alike

Opposition and co-operation networks in North and West Africa, 2020

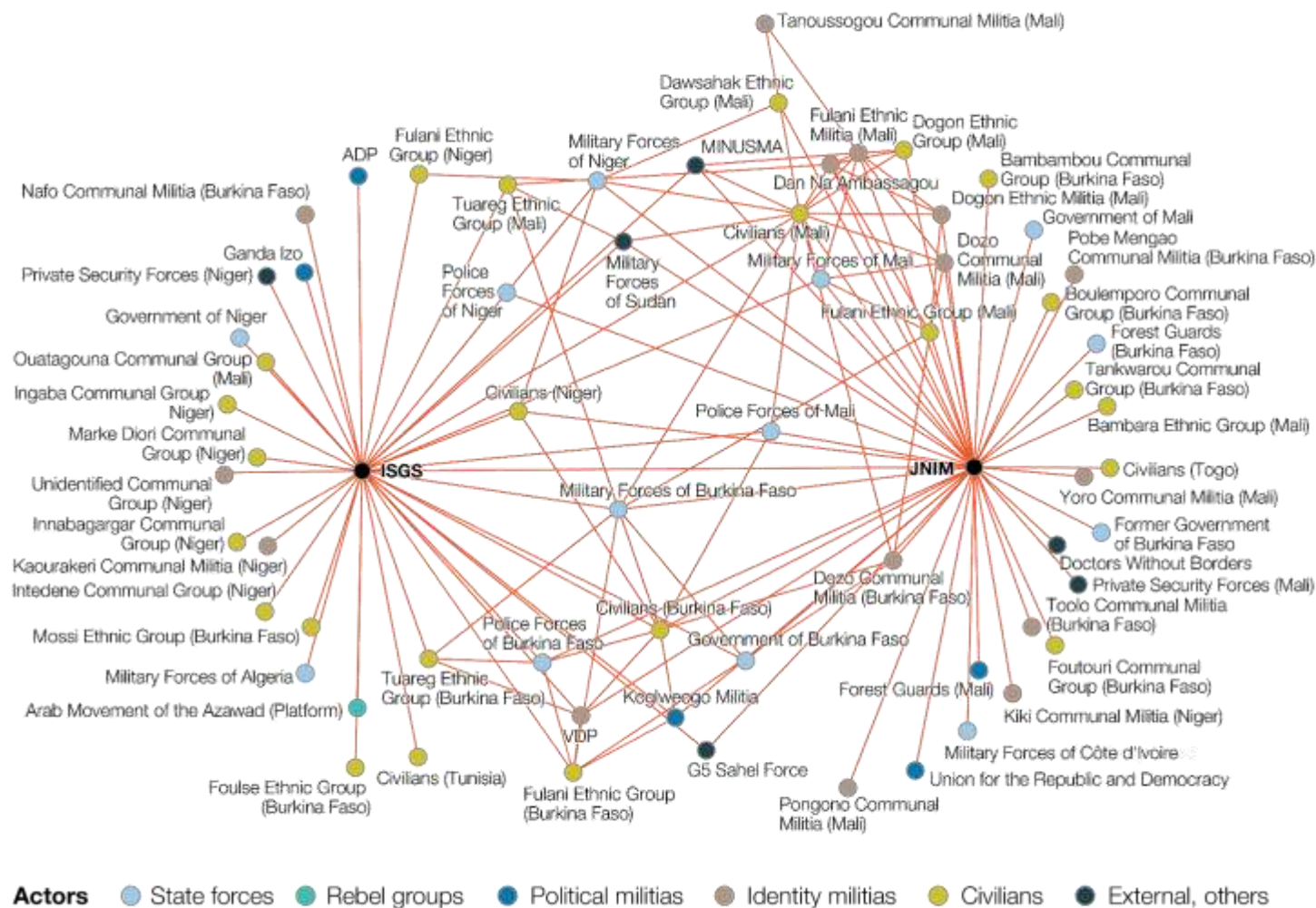




- JNIM and ISGS are the organizations with the most enemies (44 and 37)
- They are also the largest brokers of violence in the region, i.e., fight organizations that do not fight each other

## A conflict network polarized by Jihadist groups

JNIM and ISGS opposition network in the Central Sahel, 2020

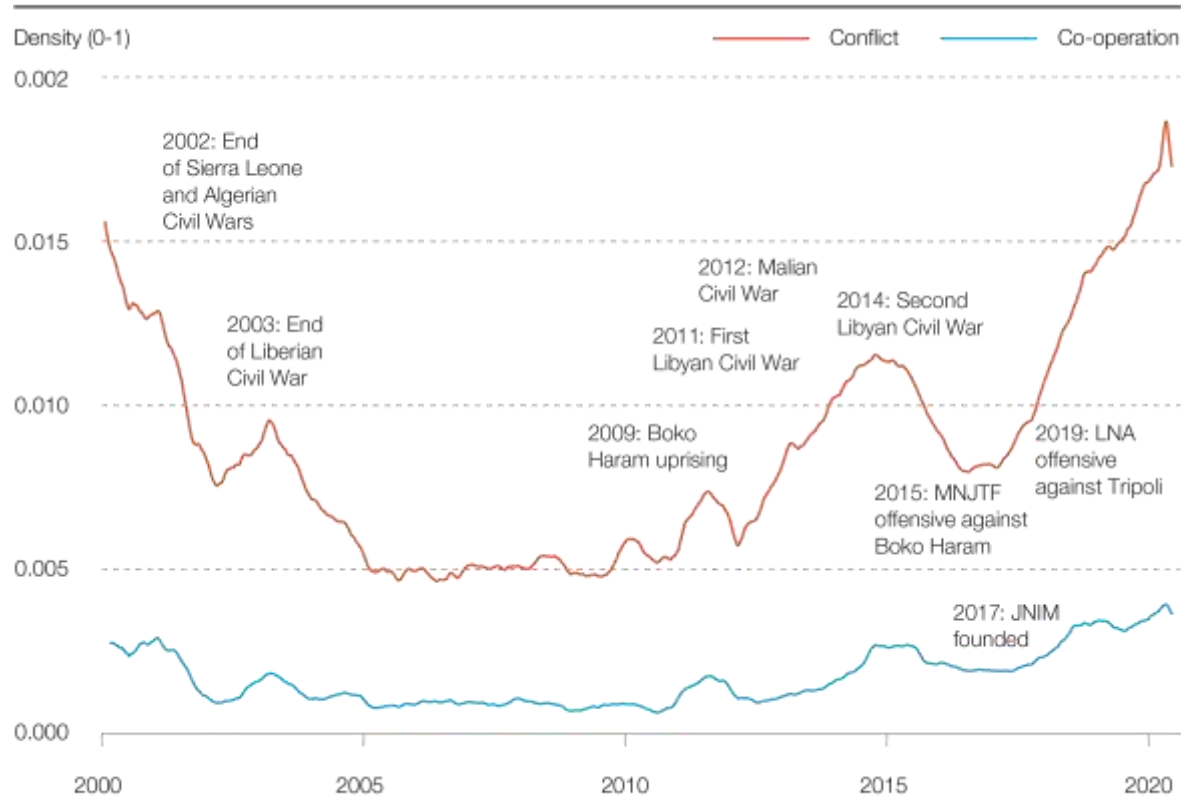


Note: Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: Authors, based on data from ACLED (2020)

# An increasingly dense network of enemies

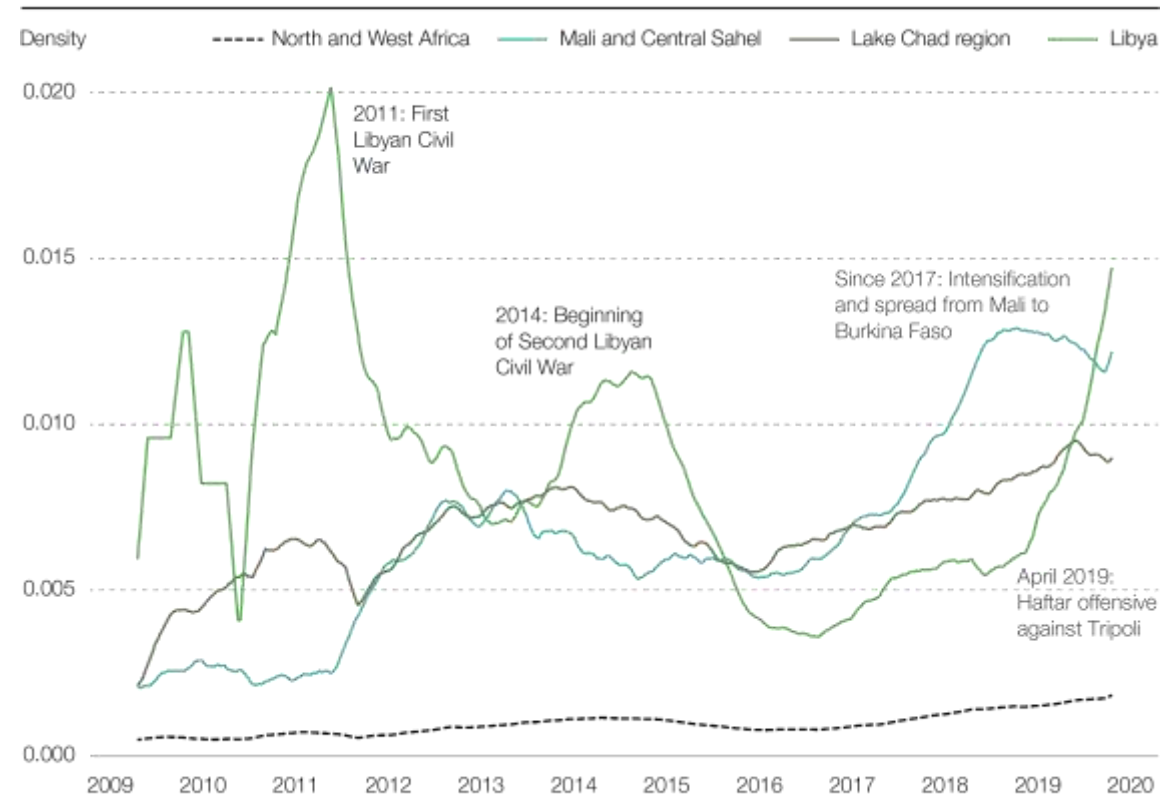
Network density in North and West Africa, 2000–2020



\* Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: OECD/SWAC, based on data from ACLED (2020)

Opposition network density, 2009–2020



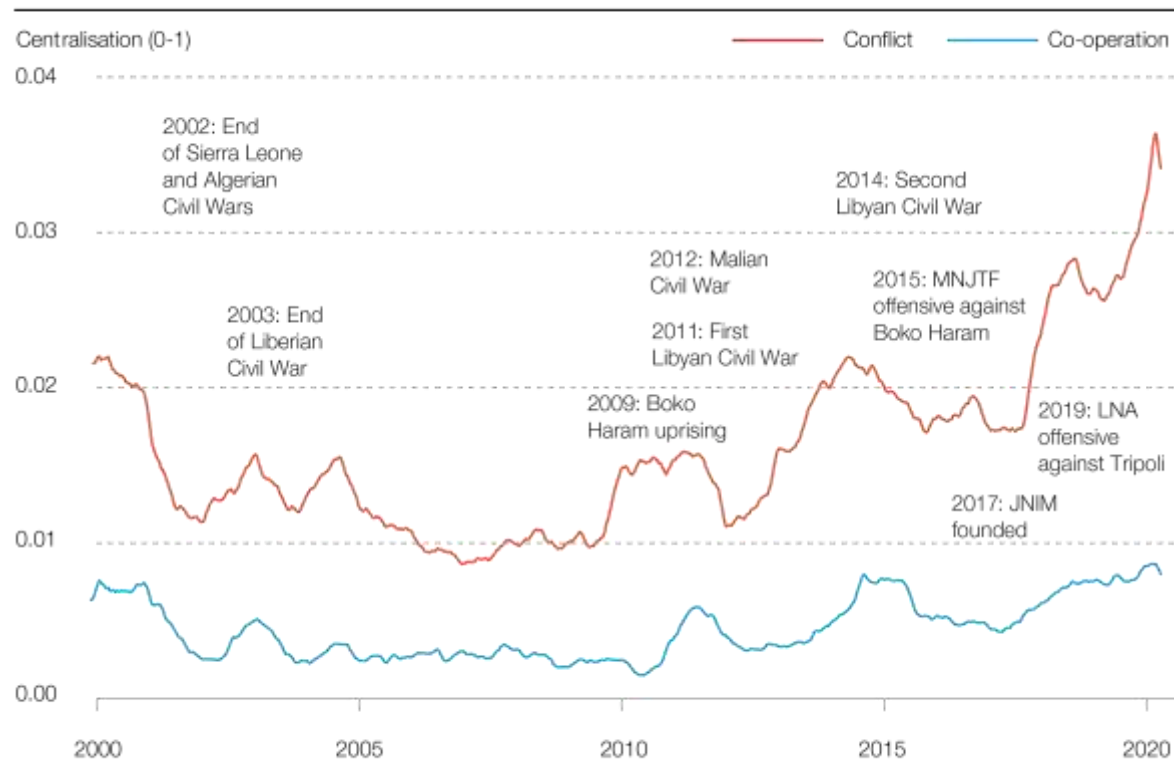
\* Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: OECD/SWAC, based on data from ACLED (2020)

- An alarming sign for the region due to three major conflicts

# An increasingly centralized network of enemies

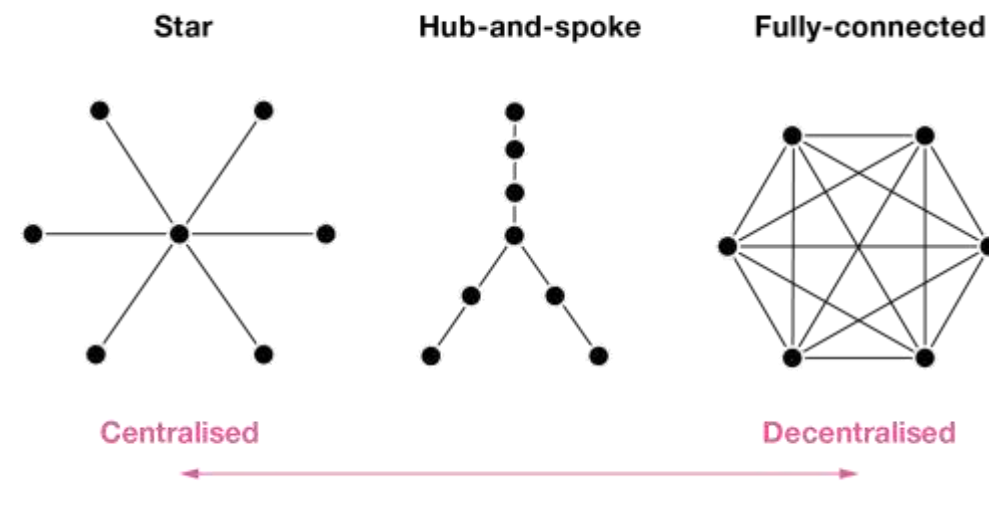
Network centralisation in North and West Africa, 2000–2020



\* Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: OECD/SWAC, based on data from ACLED (2020)

Centralisation in networks

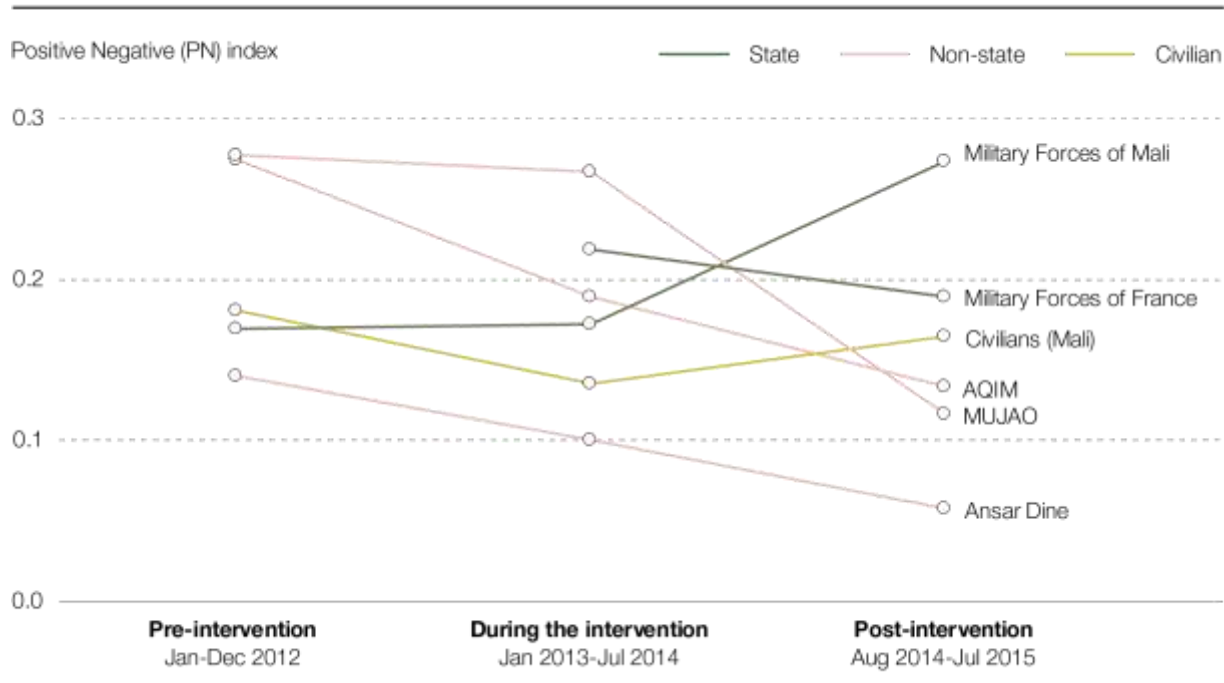


Source: OECD/SWAC (2021)

- Towards a star-like structure: many conflicts with a few key organizations

# Military interventions reshuffle conflict networks

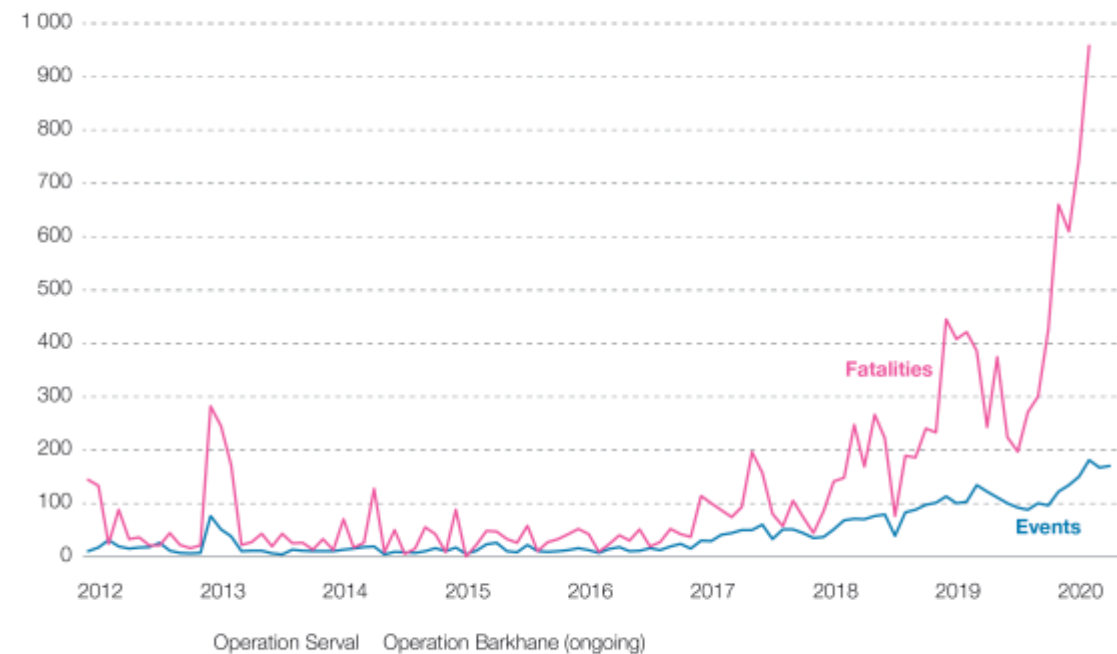
How France's Operation Serval affected political power in Mali, 2012–15



Source: OECD/SWAC (2021) based on data from ACLED (2020)

Events and fatalities in Mali and Central Sahel, 2012–20

Number of events or fatalities



Source: OECD/SWAC (2021) based on data from ACLED (2020)

- Military interventions temporarily weakened their opponents without achieving long-lasting stability

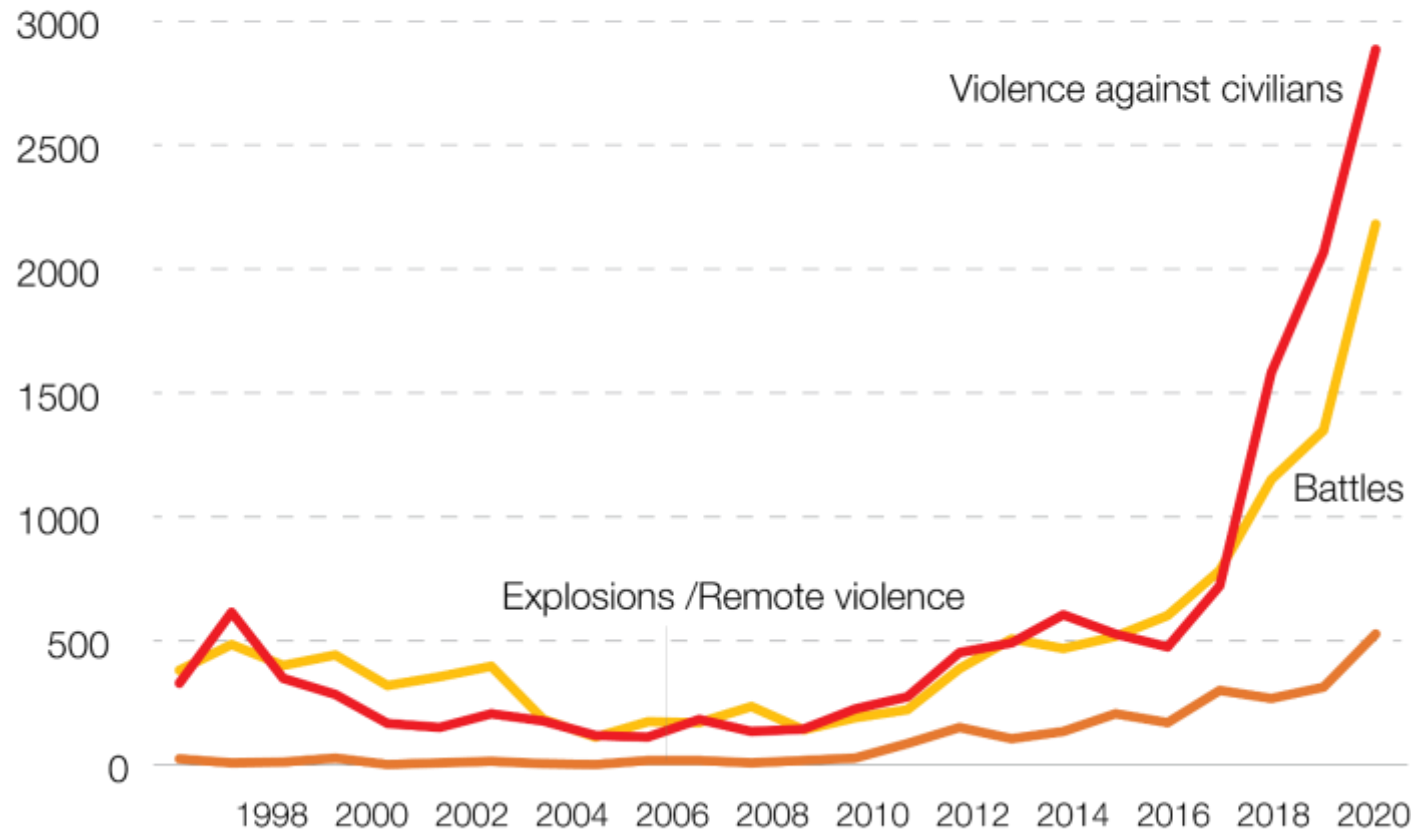


- The control of civilians has become the main objective of conflicts
- The most effective way to counter jihadists is by addressing civilian issues, particularly in rural and border regions

## Protecting civilians should become a priority

Violent events by type in West Africa, 1997-2020

### Number of violent events

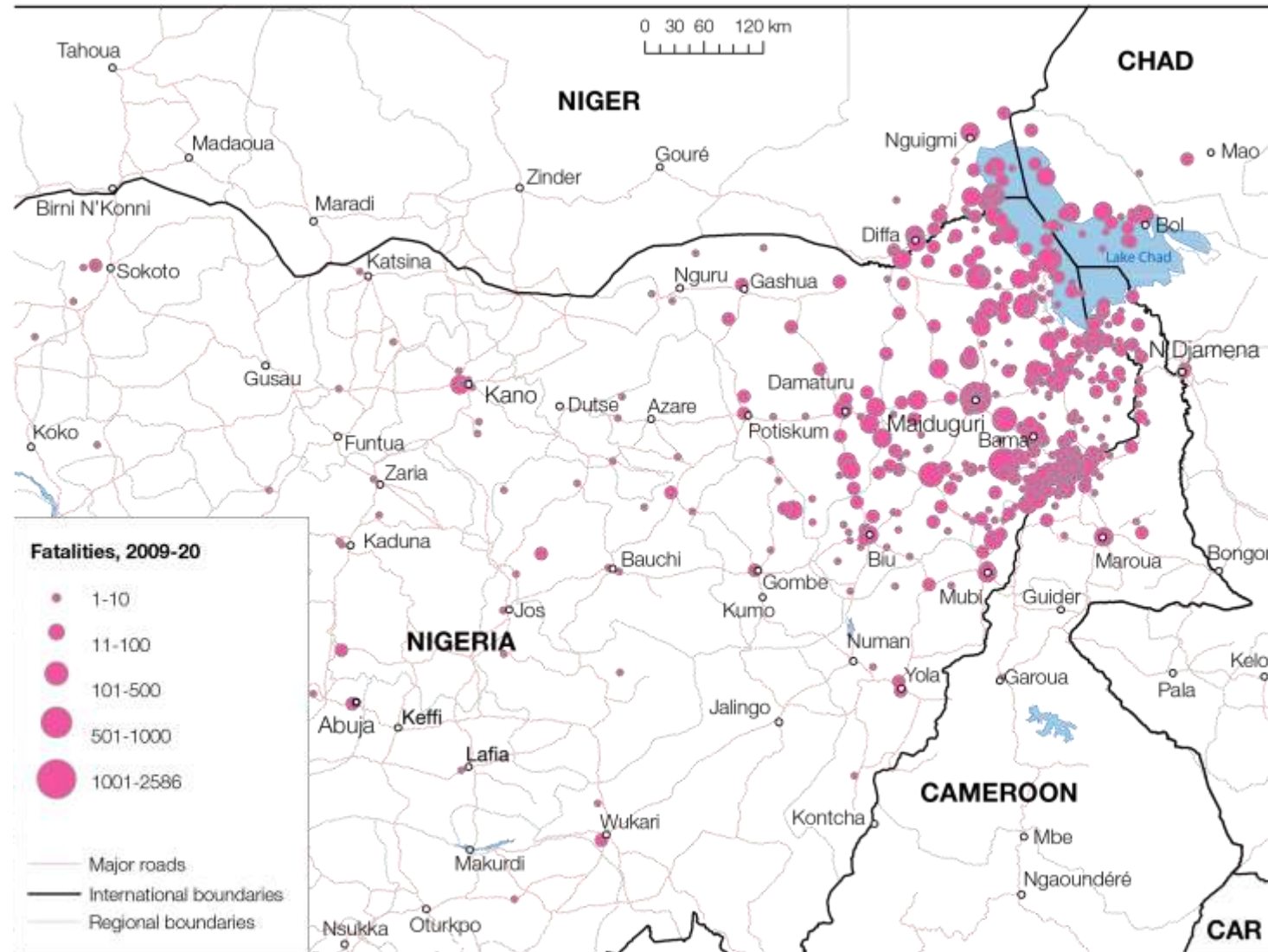


Source: OECD/SWAC (2021)

- Lake Chad: deadliest conflict of the region
- 59 000 deaths since 2009 (6 times more than in Mali), including more than 36 000 civilians
- Boko Haram + ISWAP: deadliest groups in the region (20% of all events recorded)

# Protecting civilians should become a priority

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



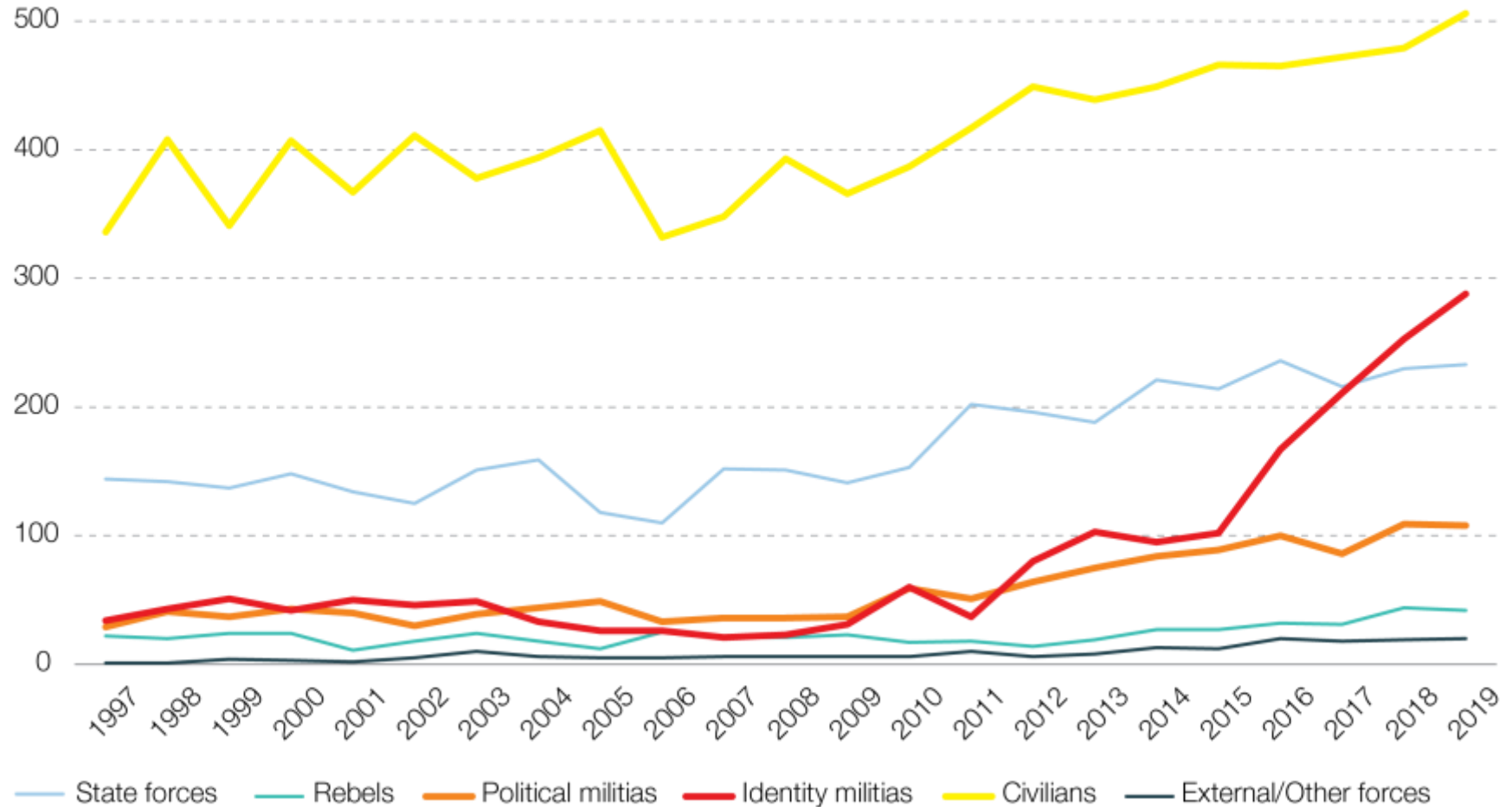
Source: OECD/SWAC (2021), based on data from ACLED (2020)

- Militias represent 1/3 of the organizations in conflict in NW Africa
- A primary cause of insecurity in democratizing states
- Used by political, religious and community leaders as private armies to compete for power and resources

# Militias should be demilitarized

Organisations in conflict by type in North and West Africa, 1997–2019

Number of actors



\* Data available through 30 June 2020.

Source: OECD/SWAC, based on data from ACLED (2020)

# Military interventions should keep belligerents apart

- Jihadist groups weakened by military interventions have either pledged allegiance to violent global organizations, split according to ethnic and geographical lines or merged with other groups
- Jihadist groups have also moved to more remote or less monitored areas, participating in the regional diffusion of violence observed in North and West Africa since the late 2000s
- Intervene militarily to keep parties apart rather than to take sides



# Conflicts that cannot end?

- A peaceful resolution of the conflicts is more elusive than ever
  - Increasing number of belligerents
  - Increasing density of conflictual relationships
  - Polarization among powerful organizations
- Political violence has evolved and coalesced into multiple conflict theatres that have resisted all efforts of resolution to date
- Conflict networks will continue to enlarge, intensify, and centralize

# Contacts

- Marie Trémolières, SWAC/OECD Secretariat, email: [marie.tremolieres@oecd.org](mailto:marie.tremolieres@oecd.org)
- Olivier Walther, Ph.D., University of Florida, email: [owalther@ufl.edu](mailto:owalther@ufl.edu)

# Publication

- English version: <https://oe.cd/il/3zZ>
- Version française : <https://oe.cd/il/3z>

