



The Geography of Conflict in North & West Africa:

Mapping the evolution
of violence in the region



SAHEL AND
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Growing violence in North and West Africa

Since the early 2000s, a combination of rebel groups, self-defence militias and organisations affiliated with Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State have fragilised the legitimacy and stability of states in North and West Africa. The last five years were amongst the most violent ever recorded in the region with over 16 000 violent incidents and 60 000 fatalities due to the sharp rise in political violence targeting civilians and border regions.

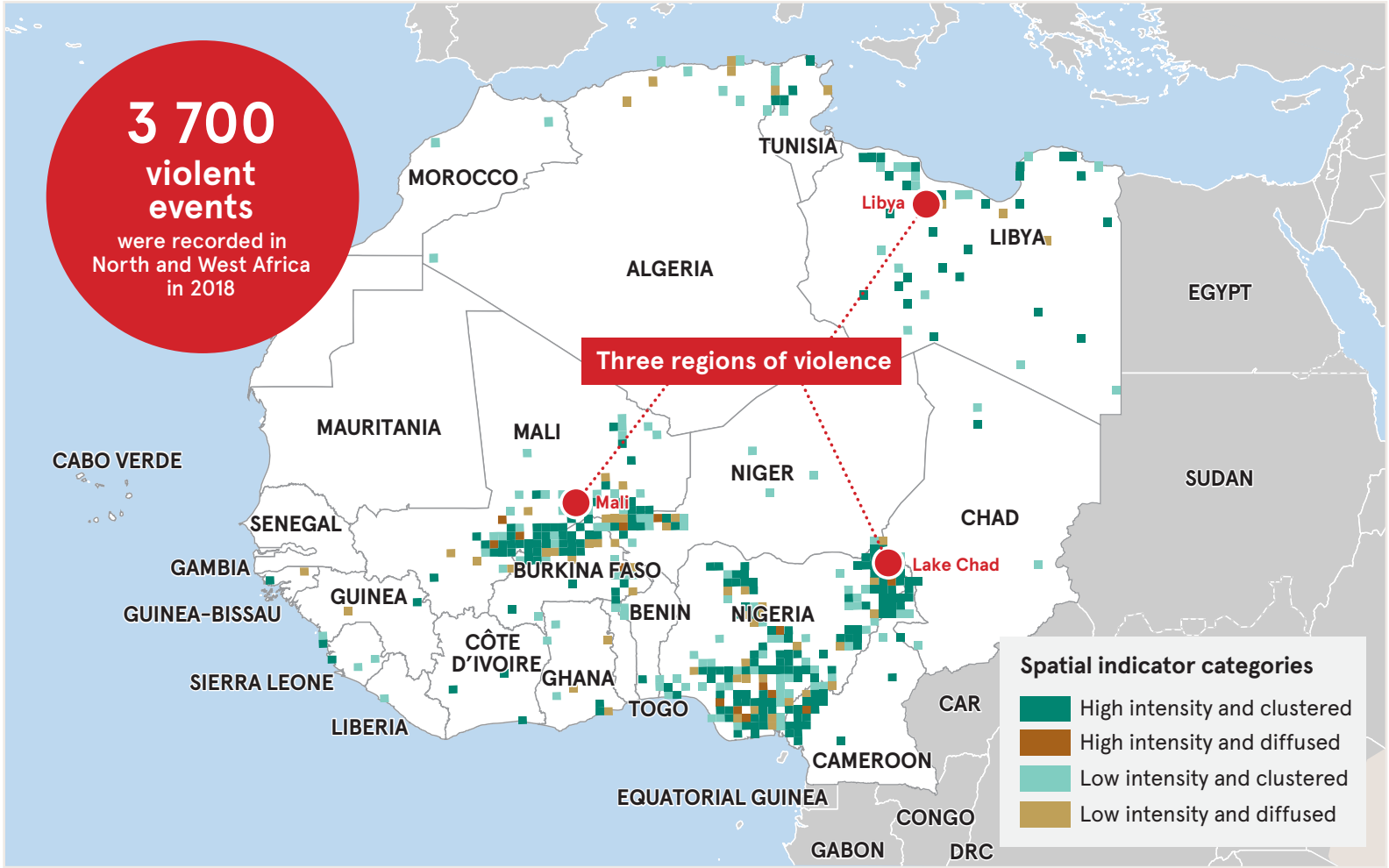
It has been unclear, however, whether violent organisations have been intensifying and targeting their acts of violence in particular localities, spreading insecurity to a growing number of regions, or relocating under the pressure of government forces.

Developing indicators for better understanding conflicts

The Sahel and West Africa Club have developed a Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi) to examine the origins, intensity and the geographic distribution of political violence in North and West Africa. The SCDi uses data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project – a database of nearly 33 000 violent incidents and 144 000 fatalities in 21 countries between January 1997 and June 2019 – to identify four types of conflict according to: (i) their geographical concentration (clustered or dispersed), and (ii) their intensity (high or low violence).

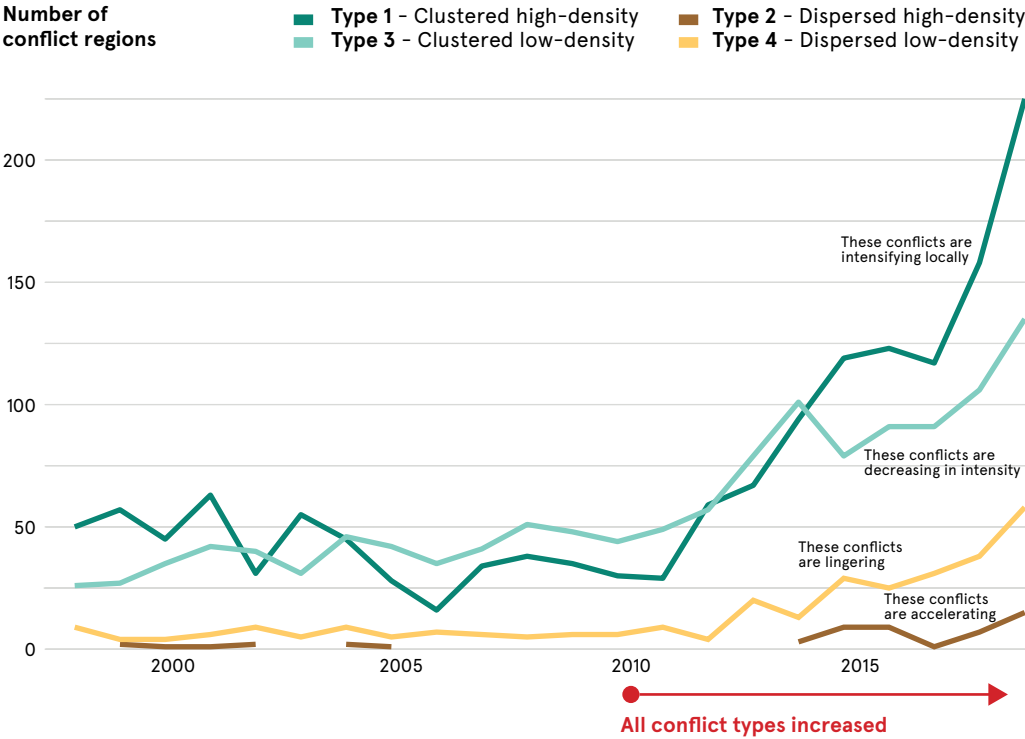
Mapping conflicts in North & West Africa

Spatial distribution and classification of violent events in North and West Africa, 2018



60 000
people died

from violent conflict in the last five years



85%
of violent acts against women
in the region were in Nigéria

68 000
victims
due to conflicts in the Lake Chad
region since 2009

20%
of suicide attacks
were carried out by women
in the Lake Chad region between 2011 and 2019

40%
of violent events and fatalities
between 1997 and 2018 were located within
100 kilometres of a land border

| The nature of conflicts has changed dramatically

Focusing on the region's violent hotspots – Lake Chad, Libya and the Central Sahel accounted for approximately 80% of all fatalities since 1997 – the report demonstrates that the nature of conflicts in North and West Africa has changed dramatically over the last 20 years.

Violent events have become less geographically isolated due to clustering of high-intensity local conflicts. These high-intensity conflicts have the capacity to spill over into neighbouring regions and

countries with increasing frequency, and are surrounded by a periphery of lower-intensity violence. Border regions account for an increasing number of violent events and casualties.

Military interventions have generally limited the intensity and geographical spread of conflicts in North and West Africa to remote areas. However, these locations persist as zones of conflict where violence has not diminished in intensity but dispersed.

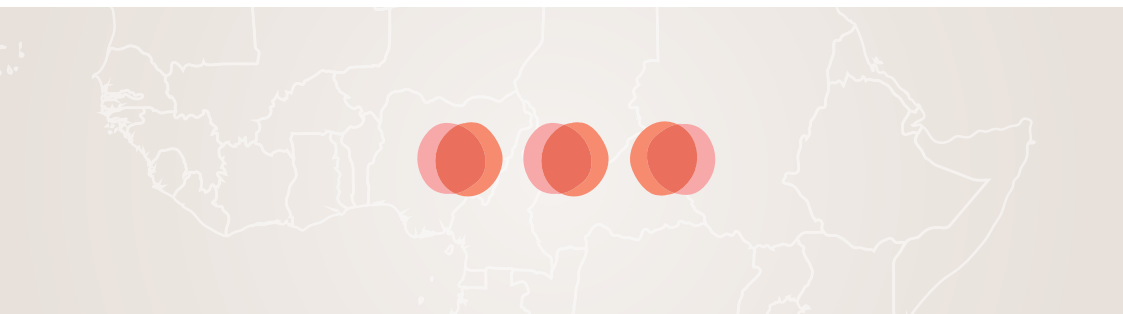
| Informing security policies in North and West Africa

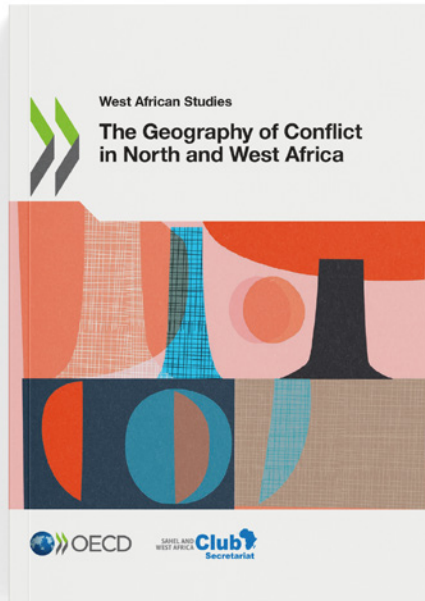
The report has shown that spatial approaches to mapping conflicts are important for better understanding how conflicts emerge, develop and spread, and what impact government interventions have on their intensity and spatial distribution.

The diffusion of political instability across international borders should encourage

policy makers to consolidate their efforts of co-ordinating surveillance at regional and multistate levels.

Policy options should therefore prioritise the protection of civilian populations and particularly women in border regions, where violence has been more deadly.





| Read and download

An online version of the book *The Geography of Conflict in North and West Africa* is accessible via www.oecd.org/swac/publications

The book is part of The **West African Studies** series, which examines current economic and social issues in West Africa. The full series, along with the **West African Working Papers** series, is accessible via www.oecd.org/swac/publications