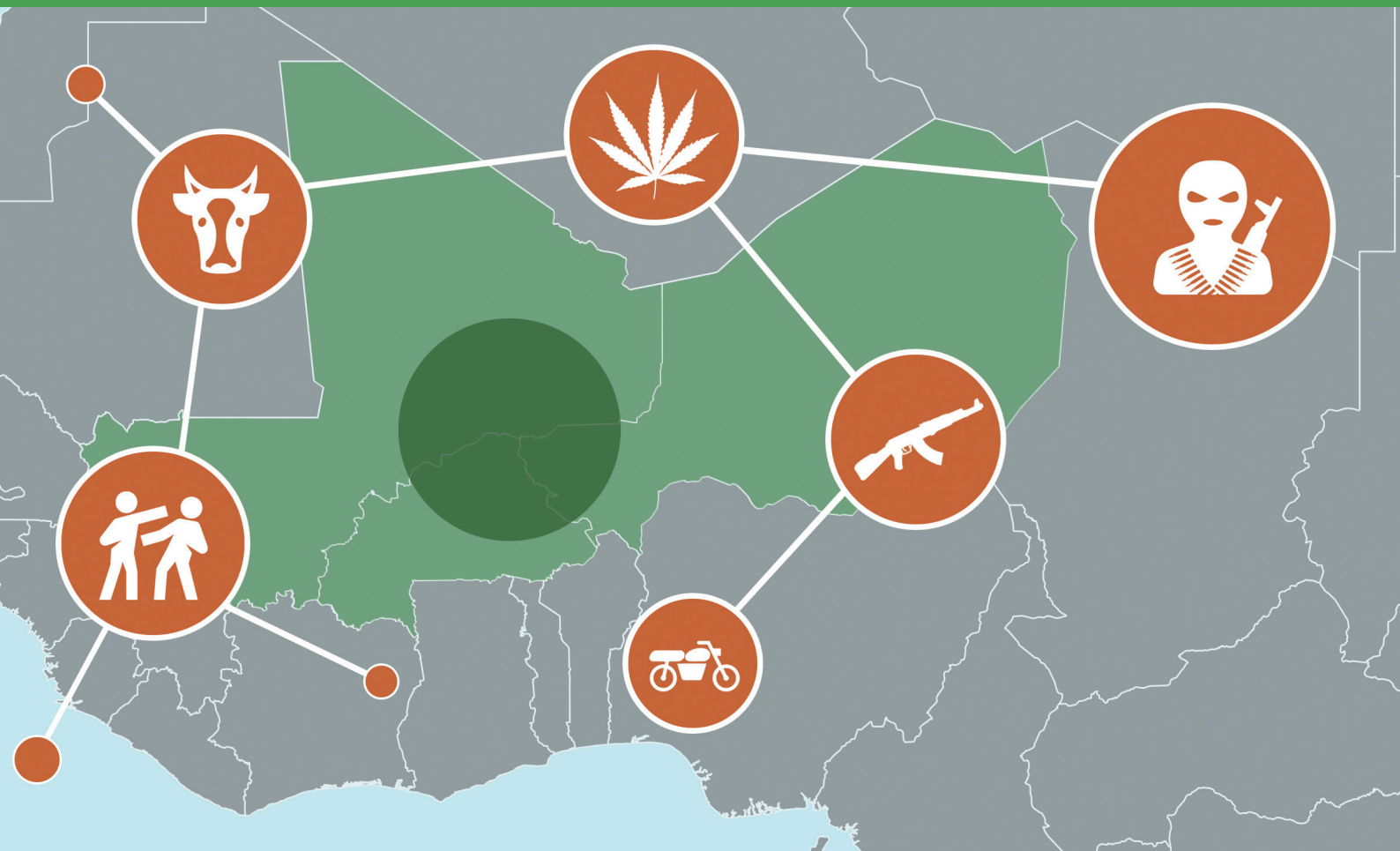


Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma

William Assanvo, Baba Dakono, Lori-Anne Thérroux-Bénoni and Ibrahim Maïga



This report analyses the links between violent extremism, illicit activities and local conflicts in the Liptako-Gourma region. Addressing regional instability in the long term requires empirical data that helps explain the local dynamics that fuel insecurity. This is the first of two reports, and is based on interviews conducted in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. The second report assesses the measures aimed at bringing stability to the region.

Key findings

- ▶ There are several armed groups operating in the Liptako-Gourma region: violent extremist groups, Malian armed groups that are signatories to the peace agreement, and self-defence groups. They are all directly or indirectly involved in illicit activities and local conflicts.
- ▶ Violent extremist groups are generally pragmatic and opportunistic in how they position themselves regarding illicit activities and local conflicts. They are resilient and adaptable. They exploit the nature and vulnerabilities of local economies, rivalries between different socio-professional groups and governance deficiencies.
- ▶ Illicit activities are essential to the establishment, expansion and survival of extremist groups in the Liptako-Gourma region. These mainly take the form of trafficking in weapons, drugs, motorcycles and fuel, along with cattle rustling, artisanal gold mining and poaching. Violent extremists benefit from these activities and also act as service providers or 'regulators' of these activities.
- ▶ Illicit activities enable violent extremist groups to generate an income by selling stolen livestock, imposing zakat (religious tax) on livestock, and managing artisanal gold mining sites. This enables them to purchase vital supplies such as food and medicine, weapons, ammunition, motorcycles, spare parts, fuel and communication equipment.
- ▶ Support for illicit activities such as poaching in eastern Burkina Faso or attitudes towards local conflicts such as the Fulani-Daoussahaq conflict on the Mali-Niger border have enabled violent extremists to establish themselves and recruit in some communities.
- ▶ The argument that violent extremist groups exploit and exacerbate local tensions and conflicts is simplistic. The positioning of these groups in relation to local conflicts varies depending on the context and their strategic objectives. Violent extremists can either be party to conflicts or serve as mediators, and their presence can also lead to temporary cessation of conflicts.
- ▶ The approach of violent extremist groups seems to depend on several factors relating to their needs and strategies: their level of penetration within communities; their sociological composition and that of the communities; and the balance of power between parties in conflict.
- ▶ The findings of this study have implications for countries that share borders with Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire). These neighbouring countries serve as supply or transit zones, particularly for motorcycles, spare parts and fertiliser. They are also sources of financing through for example the sale of stolen livestock for consumption in coastal countries.

Introduction

The Liptako-Gourma region, spanning Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, is the epicentre of the security crisis gripping the Sahel-Saharan strip. Principally concentrated in Northern Mali until the end of 2013, the crisis gradually spread to the centre of the country before spilling over to Niger and Burkina Faso.

The rise in insecurity is attributed to the growth of three phenomena: violent extremism, transnational organised crime and local conflicts. The overlap between these phenomena makes it difficult to understand the threats and find solutions.

This report is divided into four sections. After a brief presentation of the methodology that guided the field research, the report presents the socioeconomic contexts and security situations in Liptako-Gourma. It then analyses the links between violent extremism and illicit activities, on the one hand, and between violent extremism and local conflicts on the other.

Methodology

This study began in November 2017 and aims to shrink the blind spots in our understanding of the dynamics of violence, to ensure that preventive and counter measures are based on contextualised empirical data. The objective is to document the links between violent extremism, transnational organised crime and local conflicts.

On a conceptual level, the decision was made to rely on operational definitions, based on the reality on the ground, rather than on theoretical notions.

'Violent extremism' is approached in this study from the angle of membership or association/cooperation with groups labelled as terrorists or 'jihadists'.¹ Several of them are or were active in the research area: the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin, JNIM),² a coalition made up of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) Emirate in the Sahara, Ansar Dine, al-Murabitun and Katiba Macina; the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS); the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO);³ and Ansaroul Islam. These groups are differentiated by the Islamic-referenced rhetoric that dominates their speech. They all perpetrate acts qualified as terrorist.

Interviewees in this study referred to these armed groups in various ways, including 'armed bandits', 'terrorists', 'jihadists', 'armed groups', 'armed people', 'forest men', 'bush people' and 'non-state armed groups'. In Burkina Faso, where numerous acts are unaccounted for, the expression 'unidentified armed men' is also used.

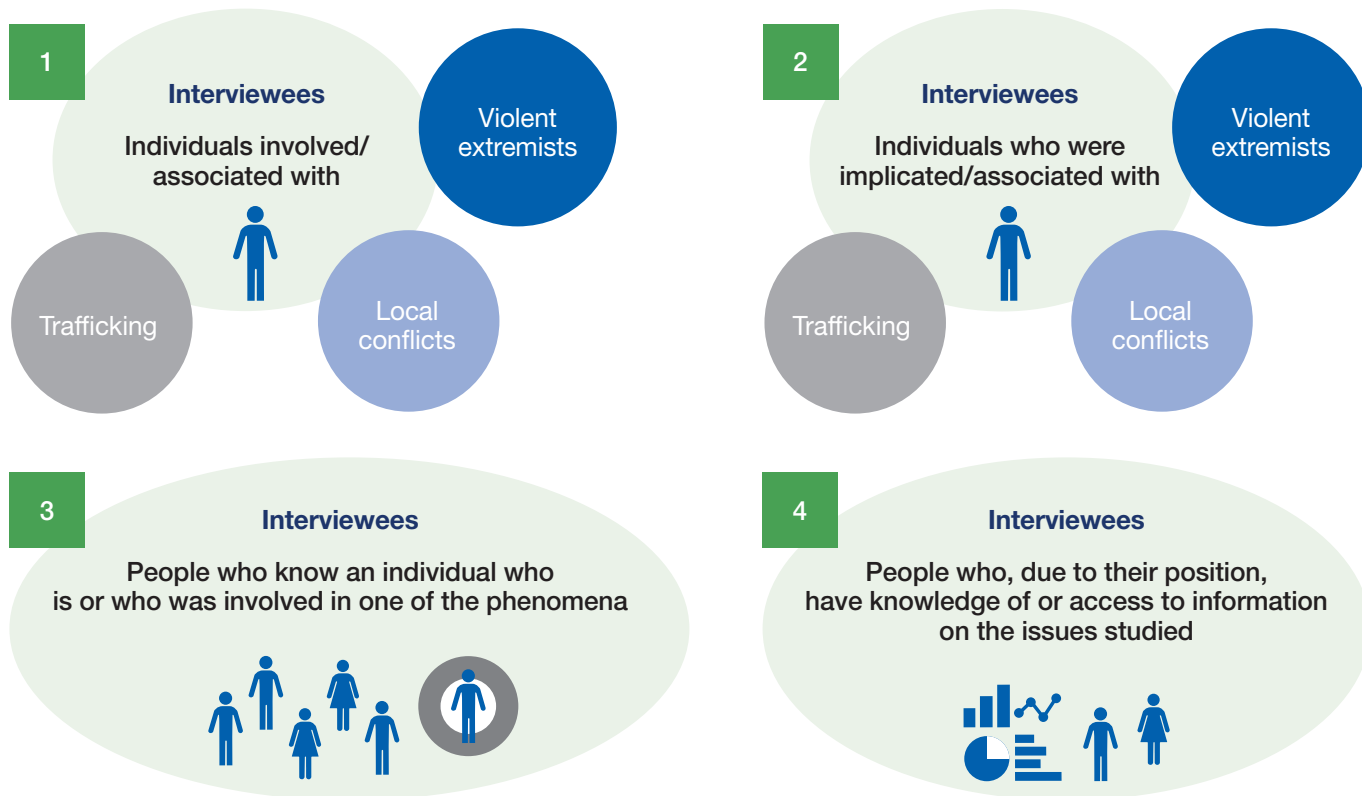
'Transnational organised crime' and its different forms must be understood according to the specific parameters (including legal) of each context. In order to reflect the varied realities in the area researched, the expression 'illicit activities' was chosen to refer to various forms of activity arising from or possibly related to this phenomenon. The research focused⁴ on activities related to contraband of legal goods (medicine, fuel, motorbikes and cigarettes), trafficking of illegal goods (drugs and arms) as well as cattle rustling.⁵ In eastern Burkina Faso and the department of Torodi in the Tillabéry region of Niger, particular attention was given to artisanal gold mining and poaching.

Liptako-Gourma is the epicentre of the security crisis that is affecting the Sahel-Saharan strip

'Local conflicts' can take the form of intra or intercommunity conflicts or conflicts where populations oppose administrative or traditional authorities. It is often more socio-professional groups (farmers-livestock farmers, farmers-farmers, farmers-gold miners, hunter-wildlife rangers, etc.) that clash. The designation 'local conflicts' has therefore been preferred over that of 'community conflicts'. Three categories of conflicts were documented: (i) conflicts around resources; (ii) local power struggles or struggles against the social order; (iii) tensions between communities and government representatives based on the perception of state failings.

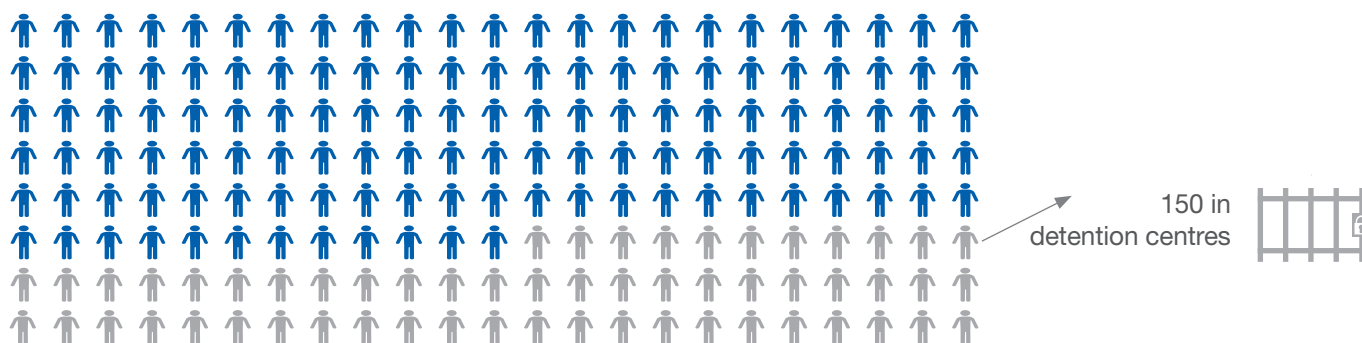
The research was designed and conducted by a team of around 20 people, including nationals from Mali, Niger and Burkina, and comprised of researchers from the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), associate researchers and research assistants.⁶ Data collection in

Infographic 1: Categories of interviewees



Infographic 2: Interviewees with diverse profiles

Close to 800 people interviewed



Interviewees from around 33 communities:

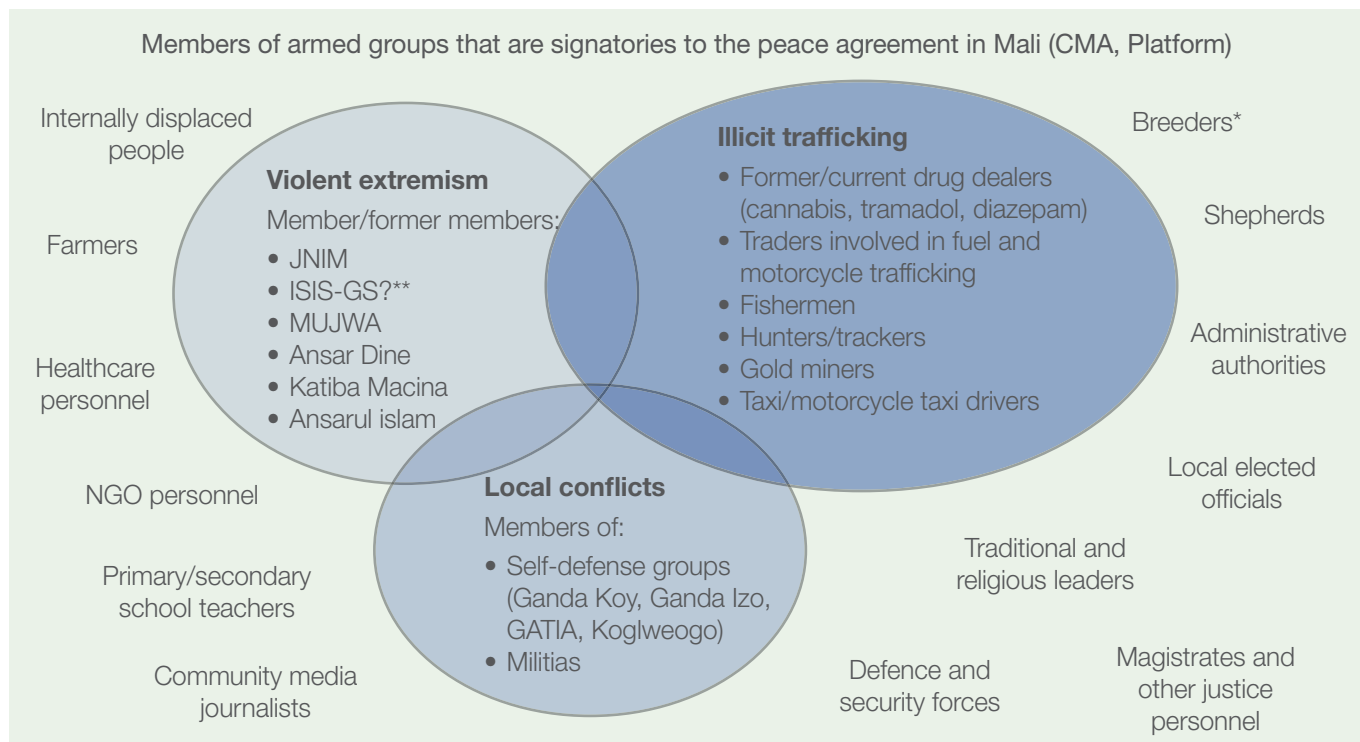
Arab	Dogon	Fula
Bissa	Fulse	Samo
Bobo	Gourma	Sonrhäi
Dafing	Haoussa	etc.

Interviews held in various national languages:

Bambara	Fulfulde	Tamasheq
Dogon	Goulmanchéma	Zarma
Dioula	Haoussa	
French	Mooré	



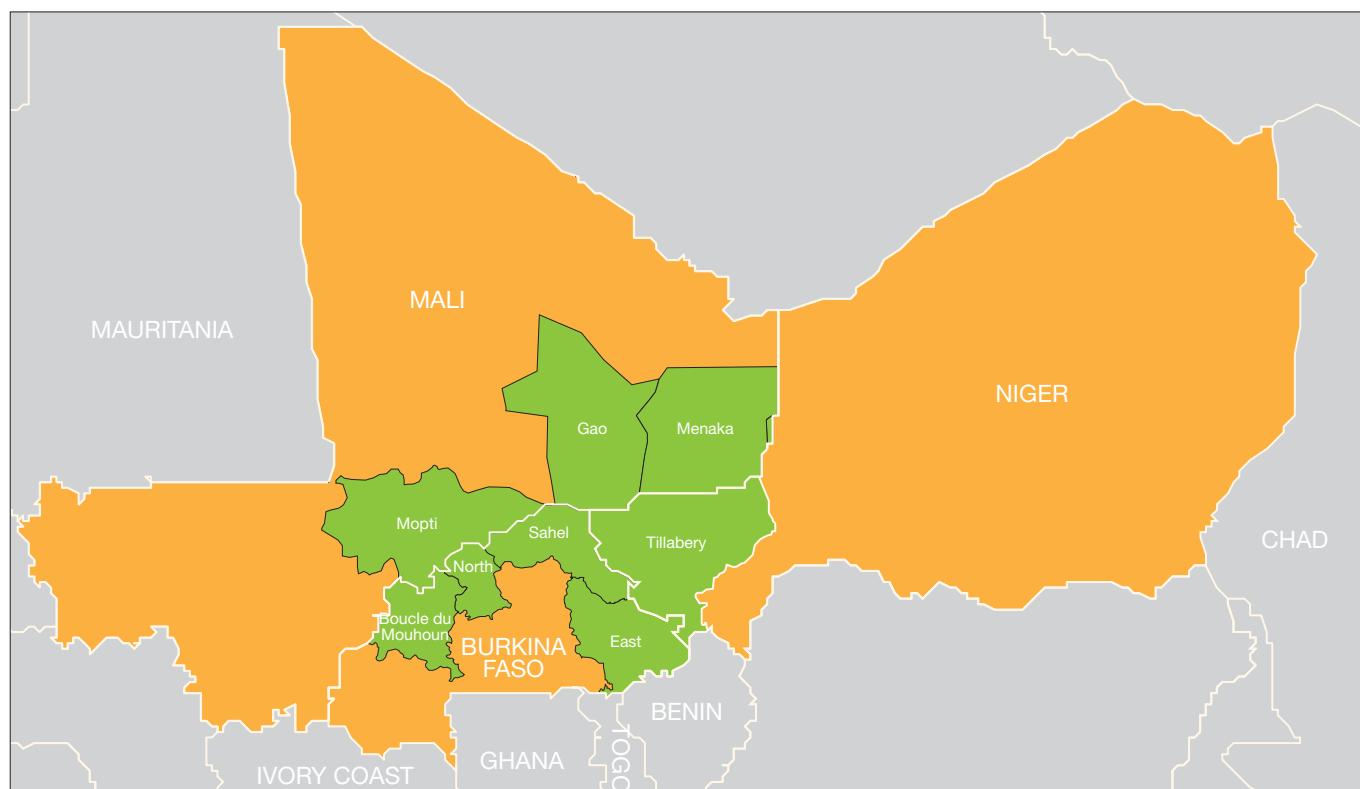
Infographic 3: Profiles of interviewees



* Many interviewees combine occupations (trader/farmer, cattle breeder/farmer) or alternate them (farmer/gold miner) depending on the season.

** In eastern Burkina Faso, uncertainties remain as to the association of some interviewees with the ISIS-GS.

Map 1: Research area



the field took place in multiple phases⁷ in the three countries, between October 2018 and June 2019.

Open-ended, structured and semi-structured interviews carried out with modular interview guides were conducted with around 800 participants belonging to four defined categories for the purpose of the study (see Infographic 1) including around 150 in prison. Priority was given to those participants who were involved or had been involved in one or more of the phenomena studied or having information on these subjects (see Infographic 2).

Liptako-Gourma is home to a variety of communities and socio-professional groups

As to the study's geographical context (see Map 1), in Burkina Faso field research was carried out in the administrative regions of Sahel, the North, the East, and Boucle du Mouhoun, bordering Mali, Niger, Benin and Togo. In Mali the regions covered were Gao, Ménaka and Mopti, bordering Burkina Faso and Niger. In Niger the Tillabéry region, bordering Mali and Burkina Faso, was targeted. Interviews were also conducted in Bamako, Niamey and Ouagadougou with key stakeholders and people originating from these regions.

Existing studies focusing on security dynamics in some of the areas covered by the research have also been consulted in order to identify the perennial aspects and the evolutions and cross-check with data collected in the field.

Many operational challenges were encountered in carrying out this study, primarily related to issues of security. The state of emergency⁸ and military operations made travelling to certain locations dangerous, thus reducing access to certain interlocutors and fuelling suspicion, which is not favourable to a discussion of sensitive matters.

The testimonies and information collected cast light on certain dynamics at play in border zones. However, it has not always been possible to collect conclusive data on all the dynamics and practices that may have their source in areas beyond those covered in this study.

The quantity and level of detail of the data collected varies from one country to the next, as well as within countries from one region to the next and from one phenomenon to the next. These disparities prevent us from having a uniform and exhaustive view of all the transnational dynamics across the research area.

Thus the fact that certain phenomena are very well documented in certain zones does not mean that they are necessarily more developed in those areas or that they don't exist elsewhere. The dynamics presented in this report are those that we were able to corroborate in a convincing manner.

Our methodology attempted to document the role and place of women in the phenomena studied. However the data did not contain enough cross-verified information regarding their involvement in local conflicts and organised crime. An ISS study being carried out in Mali and Niger analyses their involvement in violent extremism.⁹ The results of this study will be the focus of a publication to be released in 2020.

Context

Historically, Liptako covers the Burkina Faso-Niger border area where a kingdom was installed in the 19th century. Gourma lies on the right bank of the Niger river loop in Mali. In the 1970s and 1980s, this three-border zone was in the news because of the severe droughts it experienced, the consequences of which are still felt. These climatic disparities greatly upset the lifestyle of certain communities and exposed state's failures in terms of governance.

This zone is characterised by the presence of various communities and socio-professional groups with relationships that are complementary and sometimes conflictual.¹⁰

In Burkina, the eight regions that make up Liptako-Gourma are populated by the Mossi, Bissa, Fula, Sonrhäï, Berber, Tuareg, Fulse and Kurumba. Economic activities revolve around farming, raising livestock, trade and fishing.

In Mali, the area is home to nomadic and sedentary populations. In the north, the first group is made up of Tuareg, Arab and Fula shepherds. The second is mostly Sonrhäï and black Tamasheq called Bella. In the

centre, the most settled populations are Dogon (farmers, farmer-herders and artisans), Fula (livestock farmers and farmer-herders), Bambara (farmers, farmer-herders and artisans), Markas (farmers, farmer-herders and artisans), Bozo-Somono (fishermen and farmer-herders), Sonrhäi (farmer-herders and small businesses) and Bwa (mainly farmers).

In Niger, the Liptako-Gourma region covered by this study is Tillabéry. Located in the far western part of the country, this region borders Mali and Burkina and covers an area of 91 199 km², and has 2 715 186 inhabitants.¹¹ This population is made up of Sonrhäi, Fula, Tuareg, Zarma, Gourmantché and Mossi. The main economic activities are agriculture, raising livestock and fishing.¹²

Liptako-Gourma is a transhumance region. The region has been affected by a decrease in grazing areas due to land being used for crops, as well as the depletion of water and foraging resources. Rising insecurity also increases population displacement and vulnerability, and in turn fuels tensions between socio-professional groups.¹³ In addition to these tensions¹⁴ over access to natural resources, violence is linked to power struggles, contestation of the social order and disagreements between the state and some communities.

The informal economy is predominant in the area. It involves both licit and illicit goods. The flow of licit and illicit goods is so interweaved that it is not always easy to distinguish what is legal, illegal or criminal.

Liptako-Gourma has seen an increase in armed violence since 2015. This is linked to violent extremist groups, the intensification of local conflicts and the persistence of transnational organised crime. Attacks attributed to violent extremist groups have increased and spread across Mali, and into Niger and Burkina.¹⁵

Since the operations led by the French Serval military force and the Chadian army in 2013 to root the 'jihadists' out of Mali's north,¹⁶ the number of violent extremist groups in the Sahel has increased. These groups, comprising mainly of Algerians, Sahrawi and Mauritians until 2012, now have a local combatant base and are led, at least at mid-level positions, by individuals predominantly from the communities within which they established.

Examples of this include Iyad Ag Ghali, founder of Ansar Dine and leader of JNIM; Hamadoun Kouffa, leader of Katiba Macina (affiliated with JNIM); Illiassou Djibo, also known as 'Petit Chafari', one of the lieutenants of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS); and Jafar Dicko, of the group Ansaroul Islam.

Since 2015, armed violence in various forms has grown and expanded across the Liptako-Gourma region

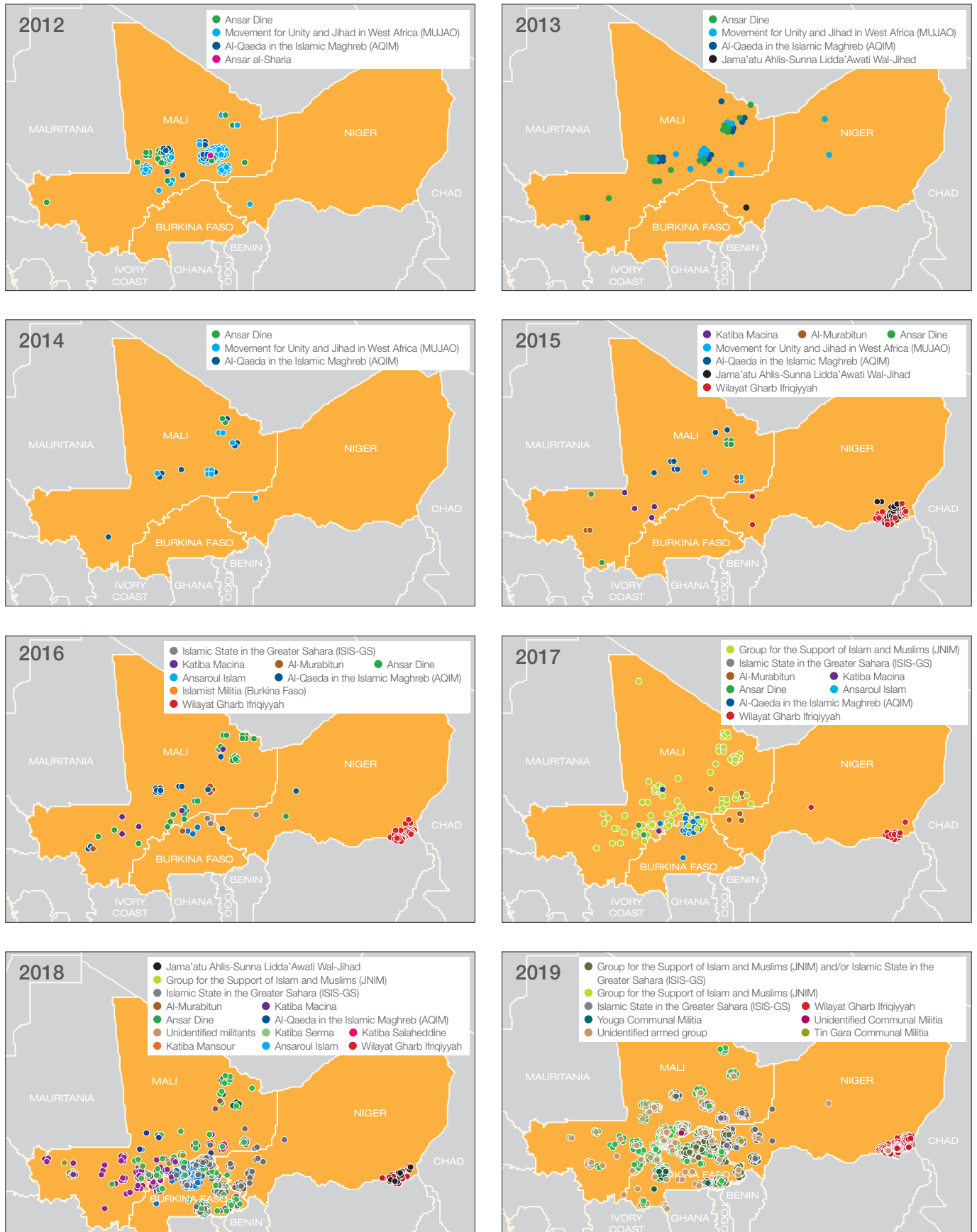
Attacks qualified as 'terrorist' have multiplied. They are being carried out against ever more ambitious targets and are increasing in complexity. They target government symbols and representatives, in particular defence and security forces, as well as water and forestry agents.

These groups have also claimed responsibility for several attacks on the three countries' national armies and partner forces from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, the G5 Sahel Joint Force and French Operation Barkhane. Local officials, traditional leaders, religious figures and teachers are also victims of acts of intimidation, threats, kidnappings, and even assassination. More than 2 000 schools have been closed in Burkina, 750 in Mali and 100 in the Tillabéry region in Niger.¹⁷

Liptako-Gourma is also seeing an intensification of local conflicts, which affects social cohesion and humanitarian efforts. Since 1 January 2019, at least 400 people have died as a result of communal violence in Burkina and Mali.¹⁸ In addition to the human cost, these conflicts have led to the displacement of thousands of people. As of 30 September 2019, Mali had recorded 187 139 displaced people, particularly in the Mopti region.¹⁹ As of 8 October, Burkina had 486 000 internally displaced people.²⁰

Extremist groups are not the only violent actors²¹ in Liptako-Gourma. A panoply of movements with diverse identities and interests rub shoulders there. In Mali, the security landscape is marked by the presence of armed groups that signed the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation resulting from the Algiers Process.²² They

Map 2: Evolution of the terrorist threat from 2012 to 2019



Source: Maps produced from Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) data

are divided into former rebel movements brought together under the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA)²³ and groups considered to be pro-government assembled under the Platform of 14 June 2014.²⁴

The deterioration of the security situation has favoured the emergence of vigilante groups and militias that are most often constituted on a community basis. Some interviewees belonging to the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA) and the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) also portray their groups as a response to insecurity, with the mindset of defending their communities, the Tuareg, Imghad and Dawsahak.

In Central Mali, several vigilante groups claiming to be from the Dogon and Fula communities have surfaced in recent years. Dan nan Ambassagou, suspected to be behind several attacks against civilian populations, particularly Fula, is the most well known.²⁵ This is also the case of the Koglweogo in Burkina, a group initially intended as a response to day-to-day insecurity.

Links between violent extremism and illegal activities

Notwithstanding the religious or ideological beliefs that the extremist groups claim – which force them to restrain from participating in certain activities – they are generally driven by pragmatism and opportunism when it comes to illicit activities. The goal is to take care of their troops and maintain their operational capabilities and their influence.

Participating, even indirectly, in trafficking or maintaining links with traffickers allows violent extremist groups to procure means of subsistence (in particular consumable goods – food, medicine, etc.), operational means (arms, ammunition, motorbikes, spare parts, fuel and means of communication such as phones, top-up cards or phone credit) and generate financial resources (namely through selling stolen livestock).

‘Our group is not involved in trafficking. But without the traffickers, we cannot stay in the bush. They supply us with provisions and medicine.’

*Former member of JNIM, Boni, Mali
17 December 2018*

The attitude of some groups towards smuggling or activities considered illegal in certain places (hunting, gold mining) also allows them to ensure either active or passive support from communities in the areas where they operate and seek to settle or recruit.

Two main situations can result from the involvement of violent extremist groups in illicit activities. They may simply benefit from contraband products, either legal (food, motorbikes, fuel) or illegal (arms, ammunition, drugs). Certain legal products whose commercialisation is regulated and whose usage can be misappropriated, including for criminal ends, enter into this second category. This refers notably to medicines, such as tramadol, which is used as a stimulant by combatants during operations, and fertilisers or explosives used in mining that are diverted to produce improvised explosive devices.

Violent extremist groups can also, without being involved in certain activities, profit from them in several ways: by collecting taxes on convoys of goods transiting through an area under their control, by providing escort, protection or transportation services,²⁶ or by selling goods such as stolen livestock. The group’s gain is not only financial – it can be through consumable goods such as food, medicine or fuel.

The groups intervene as beneficiaries, service providers or ‘regulators’ of illegal activities. Their involvement generally appears indirect, in that they are not the holders of the trafficked products. Hence their relationship with the traffickers and their accomplices is crucial to understanding how connections are established and maintained.

The study has brought to light often vital links between violent extremist groups operating in Liptako-Gourma and various illicit activities. These are established around the trafficking of arms, drugs, motorbikes and fuel, cattle rustling, artisanal gold mining and poaching. The sections that follow address each of these illegal activities.

Arms

Arms are at the heart of violent extremist groups’ activities. Arms are what allow them to maintain their characteristically insurrectional and belligerent attitudes. These groups have a varied armament made up of assault rifles (AK-47), light machine guns (PK),

heavy machine guns (12.7 mm and 14.5 mm), rocket launchers and mortars. They also use improvised explosive devices.²⁷

This research identified two main supply channels – arms dealers and weapons recovered following attacks on defence and security forces positions and barracks.

‘All the armed groups work with arms dealers, who serve as the link between them.’

*Former member of MUJAO in prison in Mali,
4 December 2018*

Arms trafficking in West Africa, notably in the Sahel region, has been fuelled over the past decades by the dissemination of arms left over from the different rebellions in Mali (1991-1996, 2006 and 2012) and the flow of arms from the rebellions and civil wars in Liberia (1989-1996 and 1999-2003), Sierra Leone (1991-2002), Niger (2007-2009) and Côte d’Ivoire (2002-2011).

The fall of Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 and the resulting instability also contributed to the proliferation of weapons throughout the Sahel. Weapons and ammunition caches²⁸ are regularly discovered in southern Algeria, particularly in the border region with Mali. It is estimated that two tons of weapons and ammunition are seized each quarter by the French Barkhane force.²⁹

Several stories told by members of armed groups (Malian groups who signed the peace agreement, ‘jihadist’ groups and vigilante groups) mention arms traffickers. All of the armed groups are their clients. Former members of Ansar Dine and MUJAO confirm the existence of commercial links and client/supplier relationships.

‘We maintain commercial ties with the arms traffickers. We meet and provide services to each other, that’s all.’

*Former member of Ansar Dine in prison in Mali,
10 December 2018*

However arms traffickers are not the only party involved. Members from Signatory Malian armed groups are also involved in illegal arms trafficking in central Mali and on the border between Mali and Niger. The name MNLA came up repeatedly with interviewees.

In North Tillabéry, members of this group are present as intermediaries in arms trafficking. A former member of MNLA who joined Ansar Dine describes³⁰ the independence movement’s involvement in weapons trafficking in the regions of Gao and Timbuktu. The group ensures the transport and protection of weapons in all-terrain vehicles.



EXTREMIST GROUPS GET WEAPONS
FROM ARMS TRAFFICKING AND
ATTACKS ON SECURITY FORCES

'I bought weapons with members of MNLA. [...] It's the Arabs who organise this trafficking.'

*Former member of MUJAO in prison in Mali,
4 December 2018*

The legitimacy afforded to armed groups by their participation in the peace process, as well as the freedom of movement they enjoy in northern Mali, allows them to stockpile arms, partly fuelling the black market.

Violent extremist groups also participate in arms trafficking as suppliers. This role has been clearly indicated on the border between Mali and Burkina with arms transfers between 'jihadists' operating on either side of the border in Central Mali and in the Burkina regions of the Sahel and the North.

'The MNLA people have a lot of weapons. We buy arms with them. Often, we sell them to jihadists in the Boni area.'

*Bandit in prison in Mali,
1 January 2019*

These transfers fall within the scope of links established between the Burkina group Ansaroul Islam and Katiba Macina which have been strengthening in recent years. These ties took the form of support (provision of weapons and training in handling them) which was instrumental in catapulting their activity to the level of an armed insurrection beginning in 2015-16.

'We've witnessed arms deals between jihadists from Burkina and Mali at the border. Some of our parents buy weapons from the jihadists to sell them to Fula vigilante groups.'

*Livestock farmer in prison in Mali,
24 January 2019*

Drugs

Drug trafficking and use is widespread in Liptako-Gourma. In North Tillabéry and along the border with Burkina,³¹ illegal drug markets feed a local consumption that reaches even villages and touches all socio-economic levels, even farmers raising crops and livestock.

The drugs in question are cannabis, tramadol, diazepam and other psychotropic drugs.³² The scale of the trafficking and consumption of tramadol³³ was confirmed by this study. This trafficking relies on cross-border supply and marketing networks.



ILLICIT DRUG MARKETS FEED
LOCAL CONSUMPTION – EVEN
IN VILLAGES

Accounts revealed mainly in the Douentza Cercle in the centre of Mali and in the Gao region underline the involvement of all armed groups, including ‘jihadists’, in this trafficking. They are compensated for the necessary protection they provide to merchandise convoys. The collection of ‘transit taxes’ by these groups also seems to be a well-established mode of operation.

‘Drug trafficking is organised by other people. We only ensure the safety of convoys coming from Mauritania and passing through Timbuktu.’

*Member of Ganda Koy, Ansongo, Mali,
6 December 2018*

‘All the groups are involved in drug trafficking. Our leaders often ask us not to search certain freight vehicles.’

*Member of GATIA, Douentza, Mali,
28 December 2018*

‘The drugs are hidden in vehicles that transport food products. Armed groups facilitate their passage and transport in the areas they control.’

Trader, Douentza, Mali, 30 October 2018

Drug use in ‘jihadist’ groups is another important aspect. A former member of JNIM³⁴ who operated in Central Mali says some members take drugs, especially before heading out on operations. The main drugs mentioned are cocaine, cannabis and tramadol. The substances are supplied by their ‘leaders’, who receive them from their superiors who come around once every three months, or they are bought at the markets of Boni, Boulikessi and Timbuktu.

Motorbikes

There are many advantages for extremists using motorcycles in attacks. They consume little fuel, are easy to maintain, accessible and relatively cheap when compared to all-terrain vehicles. The study showed that in North Tillabéry trafficking helped extremists access motorcycles. Interviewees who were involved in this activity provided details about its organisation, players, modes of operation and routes used.

According to several interviewees, each week dozens of motorcycles (as many as 60 according to some accounts) are sold on market day in Sanam³⁵ (Tuesday) and Abala (Thursday), two cities in North Tillabéry portrayed as the main hubs for that activity. Most of these motorcycles come from Nigeria and



MOTORCYCLES GIVE EXTREMISTS
ADVANTAGES IN TERMS OF MOBILITY
AND OPERATIONS

are transported to North Tillabéry. Some of the motorcycles sold are taken towards northern Mali (in particular to the Ménaka region).

Another motorcycle trafficking route into Niger through the east of Burkina Faso was identified. The motorcycles come from or transit through Cinkassé, a town on the border between Togo³⁶ and Burkina Faso. They cross eastern Burkina Faso, then the department of Torodi (Tillabéry region) and go towards Niamey. Some of the motorcycles passing through these zones may be sold.

Some sources also report motorcycle trafficking coming from Togo towards the region of Boucle du Mouhoun in Burkina Faso, on the border with Mali. Some of these motorcycles may then be heading towards Mali.

The motorcycles commercialised in North Tillabéry are of several brands: Kasea, Royal and Haojin. Honda motorbikes are commonly called 'Boko Haram' or 'Boko'³⁷ because they are said to be popular among violent extremist groups for their robustness and the fact that they are less noisy than others. They are so closely associated with extremist groups that dealers are hesitant to sell them for fear of being suspected as suppliers to these groups.

Young Nigeriens are sent by traders from Sanam to Nigeria, in particular to Illela (in Sokoto State), a key commercial hub between the two countries, to collect and transport motorcycles. This activity employs many young people in the Tillabéry region (Sanam, Abala, Téra, Bankilaré, Torodi), as well as in the localities on the border between Niger (Birni-N'Konni) and Nigeria (Illéla).

In some cases dealers from Sanam pass orders to dealers in Nigeria. The motorcycles are thus transported to Sanam by young Nigerians or Nigeriens living in border areas. They take indirect routes and trails to avoid police and customs checks. Informers communicate the position of patrols along the entire route to them.

The information gathered doesn't enable any direct or indirect involvement of violent extremist groups in the organisation of this trafficking to be established, or even to conclude that they get any financial gain from it.

However trafficking constitutes one of the primary modes of motorcycle sales in these zones, making them easily obtainable for extremists. According to the information gathered, this is done through accomplices who stock up on motorcycles from dealers to convey them to extremist groups. The complicity of motorcycle vendors was also noted on several occasions.

'Our leaders buy the motorcycles with the vendors, who then delivered them to us.'

*Member of Ansaroul Islam in prison in Burkina,
26 June 2019*

Fuel

Fuel trafficking shares many similarities with motorcycle trafficking, both in terms of organisation and links to extremist groups. The trafficking revealed by this research feeds North Tillabéry, as well as northern Mali (the Ménaka and Gao regions) and Burkina Faso (the Sahel region).

This fuel also finds its way into the eastern Burkina Faso and beyond. The trafficking takes place in the open, to the point where it is considered 'legal'. The fact that the fuel is cheap, because it is not taxed, makes smuggled fuel a particularly attractive product to the population living in those areas.

The trafficked fuel available in North Tillabéry comes from Nigeria,³⁸ in particular from the border localities of Sokoto State, where it is loaded in 25-litre canisters for transport in all-terrain vehicles – with Nigerian number plates – to the Nigerien town of Sanam, which is also one of the hubs for this activity. From there, the fuel is loaded onto all-terrain vehicles coming from Mali to be carried³⁹ along various routes.

This traffic provides employment and a livelihood for many people in Nigeria and Niger, as well as in other destination countries (notably Benin and Burkina Faso). These actors are 'wholesalers' from Sanam, owners of Nigerian, Nigerien and Malian all-terrain transport vehicles, drivers and retailers.

The drivers rely on a network of informers all along the route (Nigeria-Niger-Mali) who tell them where Nigerien patrols are stationed, allowing them to take alternative

routes. According to some interviewees, the vast number of vehicles and the freedom that traffickers seem to enjoy suggests that arrangements have been made with defence and security forces.

Like with motorcycle trafficking, the information gathered could not establish the direct or indirect involvement of violent extremist groups in this activity or conclude that they receive any financial gain from it. But with trafficking being the primary source of fuel sales in border zones, it supplies these groups with what they need. The groups are suspected of using accomplices to help them obtain fuel from towns such as Abala, Ayorou and Filingue.

The fuel is then transported on motorcycles, in 25-litre canisters, to outposts along the border between Niger and Mali. This is confirmed by the accounts of individuals associated with or suspected of association with JNIM and Katiba Macina.

These groups rely on individuals charged with procuring various supplies for them such as food (rice, oil, etc.), clothing and means of communication (phones, chips, top-up phone cards). This is also how fuel is acquired. Complicity with vendors often facilitates these operations. In some cases, ordinary individuals living near a group's camp are forced to procure and provide these goods.

'The jihadists get fuel near Abala. They carry it in 25-litre canisters to Mali. They also buy their motorbikes after selling stolen livestock.'

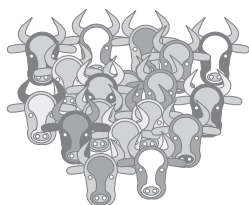
*Refugee farmer in Ballayara, Niger,
23 March 2019*

Cattle rustling

Cattle rustling is not a new problem in Liptako-Gourma. All livestock-owning communities are targets. This practice is particularly frequent in the border area between Niger and Mali, where it was, in part, the cause of the antagonism between the Fula community in Niger and the Dawsahak community in Mali.

This activity is widespread, well organised and transnational. Its nature, as well as its scale, vary. Despite the lack of precise data on the extent of the phenomenon, stolen livestock of all types (cows, sheep, goats) accounts for a huge amount of livestock in the region.⁴⁰

The prevailing insecurity in the area seems to have aggravated the phenomenon.⁴¹ Until the present security crisis – with the exception of the situation in the border area between Mali and Niger, which arises from a historic conflict between the Fula and Dawsahak communities – cattle rustling was simply 'ordinary banditry'. If this dimension still persists, it has become marginal.



THOUSANDS OF CATTLE ARE
STOLEN IN LIPTAKO-GOURMA

The most widespread phenomenon at this time is better described as livestock abduction.⁴² Such incidents are on the rise. On the Dogon Plateau in Central Mali, for example, attacks on villages and hamlets are generally followed by livestock theft.

'All the armed groups in the area are involved in cattle rustling; their survival depends on it.'

*Former member of MUJAO, Banibangou, Niger,
2 October 2018*

The real identity of the perpetrators and the nature of the phenomenon are unclear. Some think ordinary bandits, with no connection to extremist groups, are taking advantage of the insecurity and confusion that prevails. For others, extremist groups are clearly involved, which explains the frequency of incidents. Still others believe these acts result from an association between bandits and extremist groups – the former carrying out abductions on behalf of and with the authorisation of the latter.

These interpretations are not mutually exclusive. Regardless of which may be correct, the information gathered points to the involvement, at varying levels and degrees, of several actors: bandits, 'political' armed groups, militia, vigilante groups and extremist groups.

For all these players, and particularly extremist groups, cattle rustling has become both a source of financing and livelihood. The sale of stolen livestock allows them to procure arms and other operational means (notably motorbikes), as well as a variety of consumer goods such as food and fuel. Stolen cattle also provide the groups with meat, which reduces the risk of being caught when buying at the markets.

Another practice related to cattle rustling is a form of zakat – a tax that the livestock farmers are obliged to pay 'jihadist' groups in return for protection. According to several farmers, this is particularly widespread in the Ayorou and Banibangou area (North Tillabéry, Niger). Some interviewees also mentioned it in the Tin-Akoff zone, in the Burkinabe Sahel region located within the tri-border area where ISIS-GS reputedly operates.

The stolen livestock is generally taken to markets where it is sold, often far from the areas where the animals

were abducted. This may be local markets or markets on the other side of the border, in a neighbouring country. Nigeria and Mauritania were mentioned, respectively in North Tillabéry and in Central Mali, as destinations for selling stolen livestock.

'The jihadists impose the "zakat" on herds in exchange for protection from cattle rustling. We don't have a choice.'

*Livestock farmer, Ayorou, Niger,
22 November 2018*

'I was forced to pay 5 000 CFA francs for my two cows. If you don't pay, they kill you and take your animals.'

*Trader, Ayorou, Niger,
24 November 2018*

'The Fula bandits from MUJAO take our livestock as zakat. If we complain about it, they kill us.'

*Refugee farmer in Ballayara, Niger,
20 March 2019*

Livestock stolen in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger may also be taken to other countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Benin. The artisanal gold mining sites are also destination points because of the many types of illegal trafficking they harbour, namely drugs, arms, medicines, prostitution, forced child labour, etc.

In order to sell livestock at the market, the animals are given to accomplices who have access to the marketing channel, for example because they have a membership card in a livestock dealers' association. They are in charge of selling the cattle and then handing the profit over to proxies. The stolen livestock are also sold, generally at less than market price, to accomplice butchers who don't ask questions about their origin and quickly slaughter the animals to sell the meat. This is how the stolen livestock is 'laundered'.

Artisanal gold mining

The artisanal mining of gold is widespread in Liptako-Gourma.⁴³ Numerous sites are mined in the eastern regions of Burkina Faso, in the Sahel (in particular Oudalan Province) and Boucle du Mouhoun regions, and in Niger in the Torodi and Téra departments.⁴⁴

The national survey on Burkina Faso's artisanal gold mining industry conducted in 2017⁴⁵ identified 53 mines in the east, with the number of working shafts estimated at 1 640. The annual production of artisanal gold in the region was estimated at 406 kg in 2017. At the current official rate⁴⁶ this production would be valued at close to 11 billion CFA francs, which gives an idea of the sector's financial potential.

Although artisanal gold mining is not illegal in Burkina Faso, several aspects of the business are illegal, or at least fraudulent. Any individual or legal entity wanting to operate an artisanal mine must be authorised by the mining administration. Gold exports are subject to prior approval and, like its sale, to the payment of taxes and licence fees.⁴⁷

'We resell our gold locally to Nigerien or Beninese buyers. Sometimes we sell it directly on the other side of the border.'

*Artisanal gold miner, Gayéri, Burkina,
23 April 2019*

The reality on the ground is however different.⁴⁸ The 2017 survey revealed that part of the extracted gold isn't purchased by buyers on the sites. For the eastern region, the accounts collected indicate that much of the gold is illegally exported to neighbouring countries to be sold or processed there. The countries mentioned most often are Benin, Togo, Niger and Ghana. The gold is also resold locally to buyers from these countries. This method is favoured because it allows freedom from taxes and increased profit.

It is in this context that extremist groups have set up in eastern Burkina Faso, predominantly in the border areas between Burkina Faso, Niger, Benin and Togo. Many interviewees in the town of Torodi (Tillabéry region) mentioned the presence of 'jihadists'⁴⁹ in the extreme

west of the department in 2018, specifically in the remote villages of the Sirba region, on the border with Burkina Faso, home to numerous artisanal gold mines.

The gold mines play a role in extremist groups' strategy to establish themselves, as the groups have clearly demonstrated the desire to take over the management of mines. The takeover of gold mines by armed groups suspected of belonging to the jihadist movement has also been confirmed by the Burkinabe mining minister on several occasions.⁵⁰

In Burkina Faso and Niger, the groups have chased security guards from these sites. In eastern Burkina Faso, this role is played by security and defence forces or by Koglweogo vigilante groups. The extremist groups then fill the void they've created and emerge as the guardians of security for the mines. In exchange for this 'protection', gold miners are forced to pay a 'tax'.⁵¹

These groups also imposed rules on the mines, like prohibiting prostitution and drug and alcohol use. These groups have also opened new sites to exploitation in the Kompienbiga presidential hunting grounds, situated in eastern Burkina Faso.

'I joined the terrorist groups because they offered me a better financial and social situation and allowed me to keep working in the mines.'

*Labourer, Gayéri, Burkina,
23 December 2018*

Extremist groups also became involved in mining and selling gold. They have authorised buyers (from Burkina Faso, Benin and Togo) to access sites under their control. There are also reports that these groups have purchased gold directly from the miners. It was impossible to gather information on the amount of revenue these groups collect, which makes it difficult to determine the scale of financial resources they draw from gold mining.

To stop the exploitation of gold mines by extremist groups, the authorities in the East region ordered the temporary closure of gold mines in several departments in March 2019.⁵² As certain zones in the East are inaccessible, it is unlikely that this measure was completely effective.

Poaching

Eastern Burkina is home to a number of national parks and reserves: W and Arly national parks, the Singou Reserve and the Pama partial reserve. Some of these forest areas cover thousands of square kilometres, like the W park, and straddle the borders with Niger or Benin. The W park is famous as the home to large mammals such as buffalo, cheetahs, elephants, leopards and lions.

Access and occupation of these areas is regulated, as are the activities carried out there, whether hunting or fishing. These restrictions are perceived by the populations as an injustice. This view has engendered strong resentment towards the state and its representatives, particularly forest rangers. The development of hunting activities, like in the Pama partial reserve, generally carried out by Westerners, has stoked the fire of this resentment.

‘The terrorist groups came to restore justice and prevent the government from pillaging our natural resources. Since their arrival, we’ve been free to use our land.’

*Farmer, Gayéri, Burkina,
21 December 2018*

‘The jihadists authorised us to hunt without any restrictions and promised to protect us. We haven’t had any problems with them.’

*Hunter, Partiaga, Burkina,
2 January 2019*

The difficulty in finding a compromise, considering the lifestyles in the communities that earn their living from hunting and fishing and the need to preserve the fauna and flora, has prompted a continuation of poaching and trafficking of protected species.

These illegal activities are carried out by people living in the villages that border the parks and forests in the East. The animals are primarily hunted for their hides (this can be buffalo, cheetahs, elephants, leopards or lions) or for ivory. The animals are also hunted as trophies, to sell to Westerners. Beninese and Nigerian nationals buy these products and take them back to their respective countries. Togo is also cited as a destination. The involvement of Chinese nationals is also cited in the illegal trafficking of ivory.

Extremist groups became involved in these illegal activities when they settled in this area. The area offers them many advantages. First, the region is exceptionally woody, offering natural protection that allows them to set up base camps for living, logistics and training that are hard to



POACHING AND TRAFFICKING OF
PROTECTED SPECIES CONTINUES IN
THE REGION

detect. Second, the abundant animal life makes it easy to procure food and third, this border area makes it easy to move between countries.

The extremist groups' strategy to establish themselves in this region consists of earning the sympathy of communities and ensuring their support, whether active or passive. This objective is obvious in their rhetoric that aims to take advantage of the tensions between locals and the government. They present their actions as a way to repair the wrongs and injustices that communities feel the government has inflicted on them.

Several accounts indicate that the groups have successfully instilled this perception and enjoy a fairly favourable image. Some believe the extremists are responsible for restoring people's 'natural right' to use the resources of the forests and make a living from them.

This perception has motivated young people in the area – including those involved in illegal activities such as poaching – to associate with or join these groups. In turn, the extremists have benefited from the knowledge these young people have of the land (trails and trafficking routes, checkpoints, etc.).

Moreover, young people offer the extremists local anchorage, and therefore the ability to blend in with the population and strengthen their control. In this new security deal, some have found the opportunity to get even with state representatives. It is no coincidence that water and forestry agents have been among the prime targets of attacks in the region.

'Since these groups arrived, we've been able to hunt in peace. Many of our brothers and children have joined them.'

*Tracker, Ougarou, Burkina,
16 April 2019*

Links between violent extremism and local conflicts

Many analyses suggest that increased violence linked to local conflicts in Central Mali, Burkina Faso and on the Mali-Niger border⁵³ results mainly from manipulation by extremist groups. While it may be true that violent extremist groups take advantage of certain

intercommunity or socio-professional divides to extend their influence, this study shows that they don't always seek to exacerbate or provoke local violence.⁵⁴ As with illicit activities, extremist groups are pragmatic and opportunistic when facing conflict situations.

The data collected shows that violent extremist groups' positions vary regarding local conflicts. Their attitude seems to be influenced by a number of factors, including their capacity (strength and resources), their objectives (desire to settle in the area, to expand their recruitment base, etc.), their sociology (their members) and the sociology of the conflict zone.

Three main scenarios illustrate the attitudes adopted by groups regarding local conflicts: they become directly involved in the conflict as stakeholders; they intervene as 'mediators' or arbitrators; or they adopt a stance of non-interference, which sometimes leads to the de-escalation of conflicts.

In the first two cases, the groups are involved in the conflict in three ways: collaboration or strategic or circumstantial alliance; social regulation through the reparation of perceived wrongs; or dispute management.

Collaboration or circumstantial alliance

Taking sides with one of the parties is the prevailing pattern in the conflict that has pitted the Fula community of Niger against the Dawsahak people of Mali for several years, in the border strip between the two countries. This antagonism initially developed over access of livestock that was driven by Fula herdsmen from Niger onto grazing land in Mali, and acts of racketeering and aggression inflicted on them by individuals from the Dawsahak community.

Over the years, these acts on the Niger side turned into raids in which livestock belonging to the Fula community was stolen. Reprisals and acts of violence against individuals followed on both sides of the border.

The antagonism between these two communities first led the Fula community to form militias and arm itself. Faced with this persistent conflict, some members from the Fula community allied with MUJAO during the Malian crisis of 2012, then with ISIS-GS. This alliance is essentially based on a desire for protection.

‘The Fula in MUJAO play a key role in communal conflicts. They intervene every time the Fula are attacked by Tuaregs.’

*Former member of MUJAO, Banibangou, Niger,
2 October 2018*

A similar pattern is occurring in the conflict between Fula Tarabobo livestock farmers from Burkina Faso and Imghad Tuareg livestock farmers from the Malian town of In Tillit in Gourma (Gao region), and also in the conflict between the Fula and Dogon communities on the Dogon Plateau in Central Mali. In these conflicts, extremist groups have mobilised in favour of the Fula community. ‘Community solidarity’ or more precisely identity-based affinities played a role in the position adopted by extremist groups.

This pattern has often fuelled or exacerbated the existing tensions between communities. The involvement of extremist groups necessarily changes power dynamics. In counter-reaction, and in response to more generalised insecurity, the communities form vigilante groups or militias charged with protecting their villages, and seek to procure arms. Certain vigilante groups receive financial support from elites and nationals from the diaspora. Central Mali has therefore become a key destination for the trafficking of weapons from both the north and south of the country.

The direct involvement of extremist groups can also take the form of technical and material help provided to a community or group including the provision of weapons and training on how to use them in combat operations. This was the case for some members of community militia in Central Mali who were trained by Katiba Macina fighters.

‘Our Fula neighbours protect the jihadists by sheltering them or acting as their guides. In return, they receive weapons and training.’

*Member of the
Dan nan Ambassagou movement, Bankass,
Mali, 23 July 2019*

‘Everyone protects himself as best they can. In the villages, some joined the jihadists to seek revenge for the death of a family member or friend, or to protect themselves.’

*Member of a local militia, Mopti, Mali,
12 December 20188*

The group’s combatants may also participate directly in actions carried out against ‘enemies’ of the community. This support allows them to strengthen their local presence. In fact, members of the community who have been trained become auxiliary agents for the extremist groups.

Social regulation

Extremist groups present themselves as a force for change to counter the practices of certain local and state elites that are considered abusive, for example by stopping the collection of taxes and reducing the fee livestock farmers have to pay to access the bourgou pastures. They also use a rhetoric based on defending marginalised communities, thus recruiting from these communities to expand their ranks.

In Mali, the message disseminated by Hamadoun Kouffa, leader of the Katiba Macina, and by MUJAO before him, has boosted recruitment in the places where they operate. This message rejects traditional hierarchies and state authority, which are said to be responsible for corruption and for introducing norms that are contrary to the local culture.

In some cases in Central Mali, the intensity of violence escalated with the arrival of extremist groups, notably MUJAO and then Katiba Macina, but also with military campaigns by the Malian army, in particular Operation Seno in 2015. The use of arms and the involvement of armed groups led to a vicious escalation of violence. The cycle reached its peak with the creation of community-based vigilante and militia groups like Dan nan Ambassagou. These groups were affiliated with the traditional Dozo hunters whose aim was to protect the Dogon community.

As was the case with Operation Seno, the army’s informal reliance on Dozo pathfinders as well as

arbitrary arrests, mistreatment, stealth search and sweep operations and extrajudicial executions of Fula civilians, reinforced the feelings of victimisation and stigmatisation in this community.

‘Fula livestock farmers have long been discriminated against by village chiefs. When the jihadists arrived, they joined forces with them to seek revenge.’

*Member of a local militia, Mopti, Mali,
30 November 2018*

Following a similar logic, the violence carried out by Ansaroul Islam in the province of Soum (Sahel region, Burkina Faso) is a type of insurrection and armed revolt against the social order. It is based on challenging a long-standing system of social stratification characterised by the existence of castes, with nobles, slaves or descendants of slaves, and marabout families who hold the monopoly on religious authority. Joining extremist groups thus helps to challenge the social order.

‘A friend told me a lot about Malam Ibrahim Dicko and his fight for social equality and the practice of pure Islam. I became interested in his sermons, which were very convincing. My Mossi relatives rejected me because I joined a Fula armed group, but there are people from all the ethnic groups in it.’

*Member of Ansaroul Islam, Burkina,
25 June 2019*

This type of conflict illustrates the tensions that exist within communities. In this way, the legitimacy of traditional authorities is radically challenged by those who feel marginalised. The arrival of extremist groups has sometimes served as a vehicle for protests, suggesting that it’s an expression of social revolt with the aim of disrupting hierarchies.

Dispute management

With the weakening of traditional authorities’ ability to resolve disputes, the extremist groups’ powers of deterrence and repression have turned them into ‘mediators’ capable of settling differences. For

example, they play the role of arbitrator between livestock farmers and crop farmers in Ténenkou in Central Mali, in Gabero in the Gao region, and in Oudalan province in Burkina Faso.

While some aggravating factors or triggers for local conflicts are economic, many others are linked to how traditional justice actors manage disputes, especially over land. Disputes that are poorly resolved or undecided, particularly by judges, tend to fuel local violence.

In Central Mali, Katiba Macina has settled certain disputes including the Koubi chiefdom case in the flood zone, which had been awaiting judgment since 1999. Paradoxically, violent extremist groups can have a deterrent effect in conflicts due to their control over actors and territories or their mediation efforts.

In other conflicts, the presence of terrorist groups or their activity has momentarily reduced the intensity of antagonisms and tensions. For example, in Youwarou Cercle and Mopti Cercle in Mali, many conflicts existed related to property and the local chiefdom before the arrival of extremist groups. The armed groups’ capacity for dissuasion put the tensions on hold, including in towns in Mopti Cercle such as Sah and Dialloubé. This also happened in the East of Burkina Faso.

‘We haven’t seen any livestock farmer/crop farmer conflicts this year. The armed groups that controlled the area always intervened and found decisive solutions while remaining impartial.’

*Tracker, Ougarou, Burkina,
16 April 2019*

Conclusion

Peaceful coexistence and community cohesion are severely strained in the region. The security, stability, and even viability of certain states in Liptako-Gourma are at stake. Finding lasting solutions to the growing regional instability and preventing the spread of violent extremism requires factual data and a better shared understanding of the threats and dynamics at work.

This study sheds light on the opportunities and vulnerabilities resulting from organised crime and local conflicts that violent extremists use to grow their

financial capabilities, strengthen their local footholds, improve their living conditions and maintain their operational capabilities.

All armed groups operating in Liptako-Gourma participate in one way or another in the economy of trafficking and local conflicts. It is therefore necessary to understand the dynamics and the roles and impact of all actors involved.

Efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism, and other forms of insecurity, must be based on an understanding of the links between the various phenomena that feed it. This will ensure that no action taken in relation to one phenomenon or actor will have

counterproductive consequences. This kind of analysis will minimise the collateral effects of interventions and provide for alleviation measures.

This study shows that in order to set up a base, recruit members and extend their influence, violent extremist groups feed off the structure and vulnerabilities of the local economies, rivalries between different socio-professional groups and failings in local governance. Tackling insecurity in the Liptako-Gourma region requires a restructuring of local governance, economic and social development and cross-border cooperation, not just between the states and their local representatives, but also between communities.

Notes

- 1 The term 'jihadist' to designate these groups is contentious and controversial. It was used in this report because it was frequently used by those interviewed for the study.
- 2 W Assanvo and I Maiga, Mali's jihadist merger: desperate or dangerous?, ISS Today, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/malis-jihadist-merger-desperate-or-dangerous>, 3 April 2017.
- 3 MUJAO, together with Those who signed with Blood (El-Mouaguine Biddam) represented one of the two components of Al-Mourabitoun, does formally no longer exist since its former spokesperson Adnan Abou Walid al-Sahraoui pledged allegiance to Islamic State (ISIS) in May 2015. Some of its members remained within Al-Mourabitoun and others joined the group born from allegiance to ISIS, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS). Many interviewees in North Tillabéry continue, however, to refer to MUJAO when referring to the group operating along the border between Niger and Mali.
- 4 Other illegal activities are carried out in the research area, notably human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants attempting to reach Europe through Burkina, Mali and Niger. There are reports of migrants being transported between Burkina and Niger on motorcycles through alternative routes. In 2017, a migrant smuggling network was dismantled in Makalondi (a rural commune in the department of Say, Tillabéry region, on the border with Burkina), with the arrest of the person presented as its leader. Possible cases of human trafficking were also mentioned in North Burkina, with girls reportedly transported to Ouagadougou (domestic exploitation) and children moved from locality to locality to work as shepherds for individuals or to serve as labourers for farmers (child labour).
- 5 The term 'cattle rustling' refers to two different situations in the Sahelian environment: the theft of livestock which is a form of banditry prevailing in rural areas. This activity is carried out by groups of bandits whose motivation is essentially material. There is also livestock abduction, a practice generally arising in the context of disputes or conflicts between individuals or communities. In such contexts, abducting livestock is similar to settling a score or a form of retaliation. In both cases, however, the result is the same: an individual or a community is deprived of some or all of their livestock.
- 6 Four researchers in Burkina and three and five assistants in Niger and Mali respectively. The assistants who conducted the interviews in the Mopti, Gao and Ménaka regions in Mali live there. Likewise for the researcher who conducted interviews in the Sahel region in Burkina. Data collection in the field also benefited, in certain areas in Niger, from the help of 'facilitators' who identified relevant interviewees and organised interviews. In Burkina, because of the precarious security conditions in some areas, some interlocutors identified beforehand made the journey to meet the researcher.
- 7 September and November 2018, and March 2019 in Niger; from October 2018 to February 2019 in Mali; November 2018, April and June 2019 in Burkina.
- 8 In Burkina, the regions of Boucle du Mouhoun (Kossi and Sourou provinces), the East (Gnagna, Gourma, Komandjari, Kompienga and Tapoa provinces), the North (Loroum province) and the Sahel (Oudalan, Séno, Soum and Yagha provinces) have been under a state of emergency since 31 December 2018. This state of emergency was extended for six months on 13 July 2019, see <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article90714>. A state of emergency was declared in the Tillabéry region (Ouallam, Ayorou, Bankilaré, Abala, Banibangou, Say, Torodi and Téra departments) of Niger in February 2015, and has been extended several times since, with the most recent extension declared on 20 September 2019 for three months. See <https://www.presidence.ne/conseils-des-ministres/2019/9/20/communiqué-du-conseil-des-ministres-du-vendredi-20-septembre-2019>.
- 9 This three-year-long project, titled 'Responding to young women's engagement in violent extremist groups in Mali and Niger', is financed by the International Development Research Centre in Canada and the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund in the United Kingdom.
- 10 Interpeace, IMRAP, Analyse locale des dynamiques de conflit et de résilience dans la zone de Koro-Bankass. Région de Mopti, Mali, www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-Interpeace-IMRAP-Portraits-Crois%C3%A9s-Koro-Bankass.pdf, June 2017; Centre d'études, de recherches, de communication et d'animation pour le développement (CERCAD), Mapping study of conflicts in Central and North Mali regions, Gao Region (April 2018), Ménaka Region (May 2018), Mopti Region (July 2018); Search for Common Ground, Building Mutual Trust and Confidence between Security and Defence Forces, Communities and Local Authorities in Mopti, Gao and Tillabéri, www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Rapport-Baseline-MLI504_NIG507-Vf-Emilie-Roy.pdf, December 2018; Search for Common Ground, The UN Refugee Agency, Niger: Conflict Scan, Irmakay Tillabéri Ce! Unis pour Tillabéri!, www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SFCG_-_NIG712_Rapport-Conflict-Scan_Tillab%C3%A9ri_092018-VF-30_01_2019-Emilie-Roy.pdf, September 2018; Search for Common Ground, Mali: Scan de conflit, Ensemble, semons les graines de la paix ! Promouvoir la cohésion sociale et le développement d'un environnement favorable à la scolarisation des enfants dans les régions du Centre et du Nord du Mali (Together, let's sow the seeds of peace! Promoting social cohesion and the development of an environment suitable for educating children in the Central and Northern regions of Mali), in the Ségou, Mopti and Gao regions and Timbuktu, www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/MLI704_Conflict-Scan_VF.pdf, November 2018.
- 11 According to the last general population and housing census conducted by the National Statistical Institute in 2013. The population growth rate is 3.2%.
- 12 High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace in Niger, Nord-Tillabéri : analyse du conflit lié à l'accès aux ressources naturelles, http://base.irenees.net/docs/publication_hacp_modop.pdf, August 2017.
- 13 United Nations Regional Resilience Working Group in Central and West Africa, Working Group for Emergency Preparedness and Response and the OECD Crisis and Fragility Unit, Preliminary analysis of risks, vulnerabilities and the resilience of assets in the Liptako-Gourma region, February 2019, 20.
- 14 These acts of violence mainly took place in the villages of Koulogon, Ogossagu and Sobane Da, in the Mopti region of Mali, as well as in the Yirgou and Arbinda areas, in the North-Central and Sahel regions of Burkina respectively.
- 15 S Gaye, Connections between jihadist groups and smuggling and illegal trafficking rings in the Sahel, Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/fes-pscc/14176.pdf>, 2017.
- 16 L Théroux-Bénoni, Mali in the Aftermath of the French Military Intervention: New Opportunities or Back to Square One?, Situation Report, Institute for Security Studies, https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/SitRep2013_18_03Mali.pdf, February 2013.
- 17 OCHA, Burkina Faso, Mali and Western Niger: Humanitarian Snapshot, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20190809_BFA_MLI_NER_humanitarian%20snapshot_en.pdf, 9 August 2019
- 18 International Organization for Migration, Mali: Displacement Report, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), September 2019.
- 19 Data compiled from the ACLED database, International Federation for Human Rights, Association Marocaine des Droits Humains, Central Mali: Populations caught between terrorism and anti-terrorism, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/fidh_centre-of-mali_population-sized-between-terrorism-and-counter-terrorism_727_en_novembre2018.pdf, Fact-finding Mission Report, November 2018.
- 20 UN Refugee Agency, Conflict, violence in Burkina Faso displaces nearly half a million people, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2019/10/5da03eee4/conflict-violence-burkina-faso-displaces-nearly-half-million-people.html>, 11 October 2019.
- 21 International Crisis Group, Drug Trafficking, Violence and Politics in Northern Mali, Report No 267, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/267-drug-trafficking-violence-and-politics-in-northern-mali-english.pdf>, 13 December 2018.
- 22 I Maiga, Armed groups in Mali: beyond the labels, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/WestAfricaReport17.pdf>, June 2016.
- 23 When it was created in June 2014, the CMA was made up of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, the High Council for Unity of Azawad and a splinter group from the Arab Movement of Azawad. It was joined by a splinter group from the Coordination of Patriotic Resistance Movements and Forces (CMFPR) in August and the Coalition for the People of Azawad in September 2014. The principal demand made by this coalition is the independence of the regions in the north of Mali which it calls 'Azawad'. In 2016, the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) was created following internal quarrels in the CMA.

- 24 The Platform of June 14, created in 2014, brings together the armed movements in favour of Mali's territorial unity and integrity. These consist primarily of the CMFPR, the MAA, and the Imghad Tuareg and Allies Self-Defense Group (GATIA)
- 25 Human Rights Watch, *We Used to Be Brothers*, exactions made by vigilante groups in central Mali, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/mali1218_web.pdf, December 2018.
- 26 The products transported by the groups are generally drugs, arms or cigarettes.
- 27 ACLED, *Explosive developments: the growing threat of IEDs in western Niger*, <https://www.acleddata.com/2019/06/19/explosive-developments-the-growing-threat-of-ieds-in-western-niger/>, 26 June 2019.
- 28 These include a wide range of equipment such as GRAD-type missile launchers, 82 mm mortar shells, 107 mm rockets, etc.
- 29 Hearing of the French armed forces minister before the French Senate Commission on Defense and the Armed Forces, www.senat.fr/compte-rendu-commissions/20190218/etr.html#toc4, 20 February 2019.
- 30 This observation should however not necessarily be interpreted as an indication that the trafficking and consumption of drugs are more developed in this zone. It can be explained by the fact that in this zone first-hand information was obtained from actors who were directly involved.
- 31 'The arms are transported ... following an order. We have an isolated depot in the desert where even the Malian military are afraid to go. The weapons are sold wholesale and certain individuals resell them on the markets. There is no fixed price, it depends on the customer. When they are from armed groups, the price goes down (between 40 000 and 100 000 francs for a Kalashnikov). For heavy weapons, the price can go up to one million. We work with everyone, including terrorists. They are our partners; they don't attack our convoys and we often bring them goods. They know what we do and we know where to find them.' Interview in prison, Mali, 13 November 2018.
- 32 Very little concrete information on the trafficking or consumption of cocaine was obtained.
- 33 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Sahel and beyond: UNODC sounds the alarm on the increase in trafficking and consumption of tramadol and its security and health implications*, press release, https://www.unodc.org/documents/westandcentralafrica//2017.11.30._Press_Release_tramadol_REVISED.pdf, 11 December 2017; UNODC, *Key findings of UNODC Study on Tramadol Trafficking in West Africa* discussed at a regional meeting, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2019/July/key-findings-of-unodc-study-on-tramadol-trafficking-in-west-africa-discussed-at-regional-meeting.html>, 29 July 2019.
- 34 Interview with a former member of the JNIM, Boni (Mopti), 17 December 2018.
- 35 Sanam is a rural municipality located in the department of Filingue.
- 36 Benin is also presented as a country of origin for the motorbikes. These motorbikes are likely to come from Nigeria, which appears to be a major supply centre.
- 37 In reference to the extremist group Boko Haram, which operates in the Lake Chad Basin (Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger and Chad).
- 38 Fuel sold in Nigeria is subsidized, which reduces its price and makes trafficking to its neighbouring countries particularly attractive. Fuel trafficked from Nigeria also comes from millions of litres of crude oil stolen or diverted to be refined in artisanal distilleries. This fuel feeds contraband, both nationally and regionally, to neighbouring countries (Benin, Cameroon, and Niger).
- 39 Northern Mali is also supplied from Niger by fuel transported in tankers. Fuel is also smuggled from Algeria to Northern Mali. However, it's the organisation of this particular form of contraband that the data gathered in this study have shed light on.
- 40 According to a leader of the vigilante group from the Dogon community, interviewed in the Mondoro area (Central Mali, Mopti region) on 7 December 2019, 'more than 1 500 cows, herds of sheep as well as goats and more than 60 camels were stolen just in 2018'. However, it was impossible to verify this information. In Burkina, as of 31 July 2019, over 12 000 cows, more than 3 000 small ruminants and around 50 camels were reportedly been stolen in the Oudalan and Soum (Sahel region) provinces, see Souaibou Number, *Theft and abduction of livestock in the Sahel: Actors seek strategies for securing transhumance*, Sidwaya, 3 October 2019, www.sidwaya.info/blog/2019/10/03/vol-et-enlevement-du-betail-au-sahel-des-acteurs-cherchent-des-strategies-pour-securer-la-transhumance/. This information provides a sense of the scale of livestock theft in these three countries.
- 41 This feeling is particularly widespread in northern Burkina, bordering Mali, where it was expressed by several interviewees.
- 42 See note 5 above on the different realities behind the term 'cattle rustling'.
- 43 See OECD, *ALG, Gold at the crossroads: Assessment of the supply chains of gold extracted in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger*, <https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/Assessment-of-the-supply-chains-of-gold-produced-in-Burkina-Faso-Mali-Niger.pdf>, 2018.
- 44 In Mali, artisanal gold mining is more widespread in the south and the west, outside the research area, notably on the borders with Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. The data collected within the framework of this study on gold mining focused only on the regions of eastern Burkina and Torodi in Niger.
- 45 See National Institute of Statistics and Demography, *National Study on the Gold Mining Sector (ENSO)*, www.insd.bf/n/contenu/enquetes-recensements/ENSO/Principaux_Resultats_ENSO.pdf, 1 September 2017.
- 46 See Law No. 028-2017, on organising the marketing of gold and other precious materials in Burkina, https://lavoixdujuristebf.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/loi_028-2017_portant_organiser_commerce_or_subst_derniere_version.pdf.
- 47 Artisanal gold mined is generally purchased in the field at a price below the official rate, between 83 and 94%. See Alliance for Responsible Mining, *Supply Chains of artisanal gold in West Africa*, Analysis Report, p. 8, www.responsiblemines.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Publication-supply-chains-artisanal-gold-west-africa_-ENGL_-baja.pdf, October 2016. For the price of gold, see <https://or.fr/cours/or/xof>.
- 48 See also Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the Management of Mining Rights and the Social Responsibility of Mining Companies, *General Report*, www.assembleenationale.bf/IMG/pdf/rapport_general_de_commission_enquete_parlementaire_sur_le_minier.pdf, September 2016; Alliance for Responsible Mining, op. cit.
- 49 One interviewee involved since 2008 in the trafficking of cannabis, talking about a shipment made in October 2018 to Dogona (a town located in the border area known to be an area where 'jihadist' groups operated) indicates that these individuals presented themselves as 'supporters of Hamadou Kouffia', head of Katiba Macina, mainly operating in Central Mali. When these 'jihadists' raided villages, they reportedly gathered the inhabitants together to preach. They are then said to have burnt down the school, banned smoking and forced the women to wear the hijab. Interviewed in Torodi on 2 December 2018.
- 50 It was not possible, in the context of this research, to collect information on the amount of this 'tax'.
- 51 See Oumarou Idani, *Des terroristes exploitaient des mines d'or à l'Est*, Sidwaya, www.sidwaya.info/blog/2019/05/05/oumarou-idani-des-terroristes-exploitaient-des-mines-dor-a-lest/, 5 May 2019.
- 52 Radio Omega, *Est du Burkina : le gouverneur de la région annonce la fermeture temporaire des sites d'orpaillage de 5 départements, pour des raisons sécuritaires*, <http://omegabf.info/politique/est-du-burkina-le-gouverneur-de-la-region-annonce-la-fermeture-temporaire-des-sites-dorpaillage-de-5-departements-pour-des-raisons-securitaires/>, 21 March 2019.
- 53 The following events were widely covered in the media. On 1 January 2019, an attack in the village of Yirgou, in North Central Burkina, killed 49 people. On the same day, an attack in the village of Koulogon, in Central Mali, left 39 people dead. On 23 March, nearly 160 people were killed in a massacre in the village of Ogossagou, in the Mopti region of Mali. Following these were the 1 April attacks, the first in the Arbinda municipality, in the north of Burkina, claiming around 60 lives, and the other one at Sobane Da, a village located in Central Mali, at the Burkina border, causing the death of 35 people.
- 54 L Thérroux-Bénoni and B Dakono, *Are terrorist groups stoking local conflicts in the Sahel?*, ISS Today, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/are-terrorist-groups-stoking-local-conflicts-in-the-sahel>, 14 October 2019.

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