
Foreword

Since the early 2000s, a combination of rebel groups, transnational organisations affiliated with Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (IS), and independent self-defence militias has challenged the legitimacy and stability of states in North and West Africa. In this region, governments are increasingly confronted with new forms of political violence. The geography of these conflicts is often elusive, due to the large number of actors involved, their shifting alliances and their transnational movements.

The new Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator (SCDi), developed by the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) and presented in this report, addresses many pressing questions related to the evolving nature of such threats. It examines the origins, intensity and spatial distribution of political violence, as well as its evolution in the region, notably in the Lake Chad region, in Libya and in the Central Sahel. Building on a database of around 30 360 violent incidents recorded in 21 countries from January 1997 to June 2019, the report maps the changing geography of conflict in North and West Africa.

It also provides additional knowledge on what drives terrorist movements. Indeed, military interventions have had differential effects on the geography of conflicts in the area, although none have resulted in durable peace.

The last five years were the most violent ever recorded in the region, with the number of areas experiencing local intensification of political violence rising sharply. According to our indicators, political violence remains mainly concentrated in border areas, with over 40 percent of violent events and fatalities recorded within 100 kilometres of land borders. Violence targeting civilians also soared, especially in West Africa, where attacks against civilians now exceed clashes between the respective governments and armed groups.

Degrading security has led West African countries and their partners to launch military interventions to stabilise the region, prevent the spread of extremism and end violence against civilians. Since 2010, some African countries have formed coalitions that pool military personnel and share intelligence. While some of

these partnerships concentrate on issues related to security, such as the Nouakchott Process, other alliances combine security, governance and development. Unfortunately, the SCDi shows that while military interventions have generally reduced the intensity of violence in North and West Africa in the short-term, they have not brought about durable conflict resolution.

As our report argues, the specificities of current conflicts in the region call for innovative responses from national and local governments, but also from the international community. Stronger attention must be paid to understanding the local drivers of insurgencies. This work and the SCDi indicator aim to provide a better insight into the impact of geographic levers on the emergence, development and spread of conflict, as well as on the impact of military intervention on the diffusion and concentration of violence. We hope to provide evidence-based quantitative and qualitative knowledge to enrich and promote a more focused security discussion, with

the goal of contributing to improve regional and international responses to the changing and complex landscape of political violence in a region with enormous importance and potential. Ultimately, we hope that this work will help improve the lives of people in North and West Africa.

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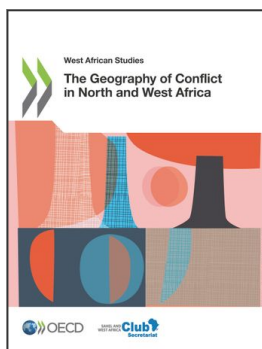
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