



West African Papers

Pastoralist Violence in North and West Africa

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PASTORALIST VIOLENCE IN NORTH AND WEST AFRICA

This paper has been prepared by

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WEST AFRICAN PAPERS

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Abstract

This study examines the geographical and temporal evolution of violence in which pastoralists are engaged. Building upon an analysis of over 36 000 violent events in North and West Africa between January 1997 and April 2020 in which 206 pastoralist groups were involved, this paper provides a regional report on wider patterns of pastoralist violence over the last two decades. A comprehensive understanding of pastoralists' roles in the region's violence is crucial to facilitating more effective policies to counter violence. Pastoralist violence is widespread in the region, and has both expanded and intensified, as is evidenced by the rapid increase in number of events and fatalities over the past decade. Numerous ethnic groups are involved including the Fulani and Tuareg and two major hot spots have been identified in Nigeria and its peripheries, and the Central Sahel where violence has increased and is spreading transnationally.

Temporally, armed groups with connections to pastoralists are increasing in number, particularly in emerging conflict zones such as northern Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and central Mali. Fulani are the most populous and most geographically dispersed of the groups, and Fulani-associated groups constitute the greatest burden of violent events, groups, and fatalities. Local factors are likely the largest contributor to the violence rather than groups coalescing around a shared interest. The five most violent groups accounted for more than 85% of all fatalities and events, indicating that most pastoralist actors are not involved in high levels of violence. Of the three major forms of violence, communal violence contributes most to pastoralist violence, though religious extremism and remote violence are gaining importance and spreading.

Key words: North Africa, West Africa, pastoralism, security, political violence

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Note to readers

This note is published as part of the partnership between SWAC/OECD and the Sahel Research Group of the University of Florida. The collaboration aims to: 1) Reinforce ties between research and policies for sustainable development that can help better anticipate changes within the Sahel and West Africa region; 2) Promote West African expertise by reinforcing links with African researchers and research centres through the Sahel Research Group network.

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The Sahel and West Africa Club

The Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) is an independent, international platform. Its Secretariat is hosted at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Its mission is to promote regional policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people in the Sahel and West Africa. Its objectives are to improve the regional governance of food and nutrition security and improve the understanding of ongoing transformations in the region and their policy implications. SWAC Members and partners are Austria, Belgium, Canada, CILSS, the ECOWAS Commission, the European Commission, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, the UEMOA Commission and the United States. SWAC also has a memorandum of understanding with the University of Florida Sahel Research Group.

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Executive summary

Pastoralist groups are often associated with the recent rise in political violence observed in North and West Africa since the early 2010s. This study contributes to challenging the presumed link established between pastoralism and violence by examining the spatial and temporal evolution of violence in which pastoralists have engaged. Building on an analysis of more than 36 000 violent events between January 1997 and April 2020, it provides a regional analysis of wider patterns of pastoralist violence in the last two decades to examine their involvement in violent events and inform policies to curtail violence.

The study first confirms that violent events and fatalities in which pastoralists are involved are geographically clustered in two hot spots: Nigeria and its peripheries, already experiencing numerous overlapping conflicts, and the Central Sahel, a vast region destabilised by the Malian conflict and proliferation of extremist groups. Outside of these two regions, most pastoralist groups participated in little violence. Both regions have experienced rapid acceleration of pastoralist violence since the 2012-13 period due to increasing militia and extremist group formation and ramifications of conflicts in Mali, Nigeria, and Libya. The centre of gravity of pastoralist violence in Nigeria has been persistently located in the Middle Belt, where communal violence is widespread, but violent events have also spread to the north and south of the country. In the tri-border region of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, violence involving pastoralists follows the same spatial patterns as the overall violence of the Malian conflict: first focused on Mali proper, then gradually shifting southward toward Burkina Faso as the violence disperses across borders.

The study then shows that pastoralist violence started to increase around 2008 after a decade of relative tranquillity. As this violence has increased in magnitude, so has its potential for transnational spread, as evidenced by the recent emergence of violence in northern Burkina Faso. The growing involvement of pastoralists in acts of violence across the region hides the fact that 81% of the violent events and 85% of fatalities involving pastoralist groups can be attributed to just five groups or large ethnic categories. Fulani groups are associated with the most violent events and fatalities in the region while also being among the largest ethnic groups. Conflicts in the Central Sahel, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso, have had significant Fulani-associated violence, as have the various conflicts in Nigeria. These are the main hotspots of Fulani activity, though Fulani-associated violent events are also occurring in up to 13 nations in the study region.

Violence involving pastoralists mirrors larger trends in the region, such as an intensification of violence, a growing involvement of communal militias, and an increasing number of civilian victims, particularly in border regions and in remote rural regions. As such, there is significant potential for curtailing the intensifying and increasing violence amongst pastoralists by using strategies that are already in place across other conflicts in the region. First, governments must contend with the communal tensions and ethnic violence associated with pastoralists and other groups, which often involves tensions over religion, land, economics, and resources. Second, regional governments must increase investment in certain impoverished, isolated, and rural regions where pastoralists reside and investment, institutions, and infrastructure are deficient, such as in northern Mali. Finally, states in the region should encourage greater integration of pastoralist groups into political, cultural and social institutions. There is a long history in the region of trade between herders, farmers, and other groups. By emphasising the mutual benefits of trade, community participation, institutions, and other relations between ethnic groups, governments can begin to repair the deterioration of trust that has occurred over the past few decades and led to violence and insecurity.

Political violence and pastoralism in North and West Africa

North and West Africa have experienced intensifying and expanding violence since the early 2000's as a result of the complex interplay of religious extremism, rebellion, and communal violence (OECD/SWAC, 2020; Eizenga, 2019). This intensification of conflict has inflamed ethnic, political, and religious divisions, with many states poorly equipped to curtail or prevent violence and insecurity (Boldaro, 2018). The past five years were the most violent on record in the region, with nearly 70 000 people killed in 19 000 violent events, culminating in 2020, the deadliest year ever recorded. Many of the epicentres of violence involved armed Islamists and ethnic self-defence groups carrying out cycles of violence and massacres in Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, and Mali (HRW, 2020). Violence has tended to be transnational (Dowd, 2018), as evidenced in the Central Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin region, and has increasingly targeted civilians (OECD/SWAC, 2020; Williams, 2016; Wood & Kathman, 2015).

Pastoralist groups such as the Fulani and Tuareg are often associated with the recent rise in political violence in the region, with some even labelling violence throughout the region as a “Fulani rebellion” or “Fulani jihad” (Cissé, 2020; Institute for Economics and Peace, 2018; McGregor, 2017). As violence increases, pastoralism is often seen as being incompatible with contemporary African states (Koné, 2017), while pastoralists are perceived to be reacting to marginalization and various resource scarcities and tensions, with violence. The role played by some pastoralists in Jihadist groups such as Katibat Macina or the Ansaroul Islam, and rebel movements such as the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) has only exacerbated prejudices. According to studies and media reports, pastoral communities are becoming increasingly synonymous with violence and insecurity, while governments frame them as nuisances, that disrupt state progress and industry (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019; Cissé, 2020).

This study challenges the presumed link between pastoralism and violence by examining the geographical and temporal evolution of violence in which pastoralists are engaged as victims or perpetrators. A regional overview of wider patterns of pastoralist violence was built through an analysis of over 36 000 violent events in 21 North and West African countries between January 1997 and April 2020, which involved 206 pastoralist groups (Map 1). To study pastoralist involvement in violence in the Sahel, the study leverages disaggregated data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Database (ACLED) project (Raleigh et al., 2010). This comprehensive understanding of pastoralists’ roles in the region’s violence is crucial to facilitating the creation of more effective policies to counter violence.

This paper addresses two crucial questions for the future of the region:

- *Where does pastoralist violence occur?* The study of the geography of violence provides critical information about regional patterns of pastoralist violence in terms of violent events and fatalities. Specifically, it examines the burdens of pastoralist groups engaged in violence in each of the 21 study countries and their share in or responsibility for the violence that is occurring.

Map 1

Study region of 21 countries



Source: OECD/SWAC (2020).

- *How has pastoralist violence shifted over time?* The temporal analysis elucidates the trends and patterns of pastoralist violence since 1997 for the entire region, as well as, specific countries. While violence in general is increasing, it is critical to know whether pastoralist violence closely follows these patterns or if there are any unique qualities of pastoralist violence in terms of its peaks and patterns.

This research expands upon previous analyses of violence and conflict in North and West Africa conducted by OECD/SWAC (2021, 2020, 2014) by narrowing the scale of analysis to certain ethnic groups and militias. While previous disaggregated studies have examined violent events mostly through overall violence patterns, political and governance factors, or by group type (Cilliers, 2018; Raleigh et al., 2020; Sandor, 2017), few have considered the ethnic-level scale of violent conflict. Therefore, this paper explicitly considers ethnicity as its main unit of analysis. Finally, while pastoralists are largely implicated in violence in the region, discussions of their involvement are limited to major groups like the Tuareg and Fulani, thus neglecting the hundreds of other pastoralist groups in the region. This study is the first to include all violent groups primordially composed of pastoralists.

Pastoralism, conflict and the State

CURRENT CONTEXT OF PASTORALISM IN NORTH AND WEST AFRICA

Estimates for pastoralist populations in Africa range from about 250 to 367 million, with the majority living in the Sahel region (Holecheck et al., 2016). North and West African countries have some of the highest proportions of pastoralist populations, with 30-40% in Chad, Mali, and Mauritania, and 10-20% elsewhere in the region (Cline, 2020; UNECA, 2017). Pastoralists also make a significant contribution to the continent's economy. In West Africa, for example, livestock production involves at least 20 million people (Zondi, 2018). Livestock exports, estimated at US\$ 800 million for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), are believed to be the most important agricultural product in the region (De Haan et al., 2016).

The defining trait of pastoralists is their extensive livestock breeding and mobility (UNOWAS, 2018). Far from being a homogenous or unified group, pastoralist groups engage in a wide range of behaviour and subsistence activities, ranging from full nomadic and migration of pastoralists and their livestock between seasonal pastures (transhumance), to settled or semi-settled agro-pastoralism (Brottem & McDonnell, 2020; Cline, 2020; UNOWAS, 2018). Agro-pastoralism involves farming and livestock breeding and requires partial settlement to cultivate crops while maintaining mobility of livestock. Significant numbers of pastoralist groups have become sedentarised and/or shifted into agro-pastoralism due to increasing competition for land and resources that limits their herding possibilities and the need to produce enough food to sustain their families.

All major pastoralist groups reside within at least two countries, making them one of the principal transnational actors involved in trade, migration, and occasionally violence (Williams, 2016). Population growth rates for pastoralist groups across Africa continue to increase, often exceeding the continental average of 2.2% (Holecheck et al., 2016). Increasing populations are putting pastoralists into further contention with other groups, for land and resources. Resource scarcity is having a significant impact on the grievances and insecurity of pastoralists, making it a growing area of concern for academic and policy communities (Holecheck et al., 2016).

Numerous factors contribute to tensions between pastoralists, states and other social groups in North and West Africa. Both states and ethnic groups with power or authority have the potential to capture or control resources, which can provoke anti-state sentiments and resource competition (Brottem & McDonnell, 2020). The outcomes and nature of these tensions have manifold forms. Pastoralists have become associated with militancy and extremism in the past two decades and have also become involved in vicious cycles of inter-communal violence. Some militant and religious extremist groups have recruited heavily from pastoralist communities, whether because the areas in which they operate are predominantly pastoralist – as with Fulani recruitment by Ansaroul Islam in northern Burkina Faso (Cline, 2021) – or because local pastoralists are susceptible to recruitment due to grievances and tensions as with Fulani for Katibat Macina in central Mali (Thurston, 2020). While pastoralists are indeed involved in militant groups, it is important to realise that most pastoralists do not engage in violence.

PASTORALISTS AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE STATE

Pastoralists often remain marginalised and encounter significant tensions with governments despite contributing significantly to economies across much of Africa (HRW, 2020, 2018). Within the study region, state policies have often marginalised pastoralist societies by forcing them to settle, preventing their transnational movements and/or limiting their access to natural resources, social infrastructure, and government jobs (Diallo, 2017). Herding is often not recognised by national laws as a legitimate form of productive land use, and Sahelian states commonly do not acknowledge the specific nature of pastoral land use (UNECA, 2017) and/or do not actively create policies and institutions to protect rangelands and areas for grazing for pastoralist herds. Several countries with specific pastoralist or other land codes to address these issues have been incompletely or ineffectively implemented, and there is a wide-spread lack of sufficient resources.

Governments often portray pastoralists as problematic because pastoralists function outside of state administrative and security frameworks. The pastoralist production and lifestyle are seen by many government officials as fundamentally incompatible with the state because its mode of production relies on mobility and can less easily be taxed and monitored than economic activities that use localised resources, such as agriculture, fishing, and mining (Retaillé & Walther, 2011). There are myriad mechanisms by which authorities and states oppress or marginalise pastoralists – including excessive fees and fines, punishments, arrests, exploitation, and coerced eviction or movement (Brottem & McDonnell, 2020).

In countries such as Mali, pastoralist institution building remains a low priority, which has left pastoralist organisations, NGO's, and ethnic associations to regulate individual and collective actions to protect and preserve their economic, social, cultural, and political interests (De Haan et al., 2016). Across many North and West African countries, this means pastoralists experience a dearth of options in terms of protecting their livelihoods (Chauzal & Damme, 2015; UNOWAS, 2018). Pastoralist communities are often vulnerable to extortion, neglect, poverty, taxation, and cattle-raiding, while also susceptible to accusations and threats from communities accusing them of encroachment on their protected lands (Rupesinghe & Bøås, 2019). In Nigeria, for example pastoralist groups complained that the state failed to punish or investigate the killings of over 1 000 pastoralists and theft of 2 million cattle between 2017 and 2018 (Brottem & McDonnell, 2020).

In some cases, the neglect of pastoralist issues can exacerbate ethnic tensions and fuel rebellions. The eruption of insecurity associated with the 2012 rebellion in Mali is seen by some researchers as a prototype for social and pastoralist tensions throughout much of North and West Africa (Diallo, 2017; Thérroux-Bénoni et al., 2016). There are issues of deep-rooted and entrenched instability in the broader Sahara-Sahel region related to weak states and institutions, corruption, neglect of rural areas, and ethnic and social tensions related to allegiances and political power (Wehrey and Boukhars, 2013). Other more micro-scale and local factors compounding these issues are lack of opportunities, illicit markets, and criminality related to trafficking, drugs, arms, and radicalism and extremism. The initial “Tuareg question” in the north of Mali has gradually expanded into the central Mopti region and beyond, perhaps transforming into a subsequent “Fulani question” (Chauzal & Damme, 2015).

Table 1

Three main types of violence in Africa

Type	Definition	Example of pastoralist involvement
Violent religious extremism (radical Islamism, Jihadism)	An emphasis on violent struggle (jihad) as the primary or even exclusive method for pursuit of political change.	Katibat Macina has recruited heavily among the Fulani in the Central Sahel, exploiting long-held grievances over competition for land and water, government oppression, and ethnic tensions.
Communal violence	Conflicts of land disputes between herders and farmers or violence across rival ethnic communities.	The 2019 Ogossagou massacre in which at least 110 Fulani herdsmen were killed involving Dogon hunters (Reuters, 2019).
Rebellion	Armed combat within the boundaries of a recognised sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of hostilities	Pastoralists are represented in the MNLA, a Tuareg group from northern Mali (Azawad) advocating for rights, autonomy, and recognition. Pastoralists are also involved in the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA) and Co-ordination of Azawad Movements (CMA).

Source: Author.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Pastoralists have been involved as victims or perpetrators. in all three major types of violence observed in North and West Africa: violent religious extremism, communal violence, and rebellion (Table 1).

- **Violent religious extremism** (radical Islamism, Jihadism). This vision of Islamic political order rejects the legitimacy of modern sovereign nations states, attempts to revive or create new pan-Islamic polities, and/or emphasises violent struggle (jihad) as a principal or even exclusive method for pursuing political change (Mandaville, 2014). Extremist groups differ in their ideologies and emphasis on various dimensions of radicalism. The Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims (JNIM), for example, wants to challenge sitting government and foreign assistance domestically. Proselytising is more prominent in a group like the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) that instead seeks a global caliphate and radicalises violence against non-supporters and non-believers (Raleigh et al., 2020). Jihadism is thus a strategy adopted by religious extremists to achieve their goals. These non-state actors use threats or actual violence to achieve political, economic, or social objectives through intimidation of an audience that usually transcends their immediate victims (Phillips, 2014).

Violence perpetrated by extremist groups contribute to fueling existing ethnic tensions (Thurston, 2020). Some pastoralists have found common ground with jihadists on ideological points related to anti-state, anti-elite, and pro-pastoralist topics (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019). There is significant Tuareg membership in armed groups, such as the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Ansar Dine (Bencherif & Campana, 2016). There are reports of both Fulani and Tuareg members joining various extremist groups in the region, as a mechanism to further resist or oppose the political and social grievances held by pastoralists in the countries where they claim to be marginalised or oppressed (Raleigh et al., 2020). The early recruits of Katibat Macina in Central Mali, were predominantly Fulani and their membership was for the purpose of self-defence from threats from Tuaregs and the concomitant arming of neighbouring Bambara and Dogon by Malian security forces. Ethnicity has thus become a salient and exploitable dimension of violence in the region.

- **Communal violence** involves land disputes or conflicts across ethnic communities (ICG, 2017). One of the major factors contributing to this violence is the disagreement between groups over power, politics, resources, land, and water. While this can be especially pronounced between farmers and herders (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014), these disputes can also emerge amongst those with similar subsistence patterns. In Mali,

communal violence while particularly centred in the central Mopti region, has also spread throughout much of the country. Ethnicities involved in these attacks include Bambara, Songhai, Dogon, and Fulani. Two major massacres against Fulani communities were perpetrated by traditional hunters (Dozos) in Koulogon (Mali) and by Koglweogo self-defence groups in Yirgou (Burkina Faso). Communal violence tends to increase when extremist or rebel groups are present, as local communities form communal, ethnic, or militias for self-protection against violent events (UNOWAS, 2018). Extremist groups exploit local grievances, increasing the entanglement of self-defence groups, vigilante groups, and communal and ethnic militias in counter-terrorism efforts (Raleigh et al., 2020).

- **Rebellion** is a general term that also includes civil war, insurgency, and some forms of political violence. It typically refers to an internal conflict with external influences, with insurgents attempting to seize power and counterinsurgents or existing authorities attempting to retain power (Galula, 2006). Insurgents or rebels seize power through three mechanisms: revolution, coup d'état, or insurgency. Contemporary civil wars often involve a diverse mix of non-state actors, including paramilitary groups, local militias, foreign fighters, allied or rival rebel factions, extremists, multinational forces, and others (Wood & Kathman, 2015). Due to the mobility of pastoralists, conflicts involving these populations can be difficult to contain and often spill across borders. Rebellions involving pastoralist groups include the 2012 MNLA rebellion in Mali involving Tuaregs and the Polisario Front in Morocco involving Sahrawi.

A spatiotemporal approach to pastoralist violence

This study leverages violent incidents collected by the ACLED project since the late 1990s. This disaggregated, actor-based dataset focuses upon political violence, defined as “use of force by a group with a political purpose or motivation” (ACLED, 2019, p. 6). According to the ACLED dataset, 35 332 violent events resulting in the death of 151 174 people have been recorded in the 21 countries of North and West Africa from January 1997 through April 2020 (ACLED, 2020). During this period, 4 059 groups were involved in violent events in the region, including 206 pastoralist groups, either as victims or perpetrators. For the purposes of this study, pastoralism is defined as a “finely-honed, symbiotic relationship between local ecology, domesticated livestock, and people” (Bevan and UNDP, 2007) and pastoralist groups are those participating in extensive livestock breeding and mobility (UNOWAS, 2018).

To identify actors that were pastoralists, the study first selected those groups named after pastoralist groups (i.e., “Fulani Ethnic Militia”) irrespective of their actor category in the ACLED database. The database codes large groups by their livelihoods or ethnicity, such as “Ethnic Militias”, “Ethnic Groups”, “Pastoralists” and “Tuareg Ethnic Group” either because of insufficient information or because the actors did not identify themselves as belonging to a specific group. These groups are fundamentally different from concrete organisations such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and merely describe the group of actors involved in an event as belonging to a certain ethnicity. For this reason, this paper differentiates these groups from other more recognised and legitimate groups. The issue with ethnic designations of “militias” or “groups” is that the same nomenclature is applied to these groups across the region in different countries, though they have no relationship, affiliation, or co-ordination. For example, “Fulani Ethnic Militia (Mali)” and “Fulani Ethnic Militia (Nigeria)” are two unrelated militias comprised of Fulani in two different countries.

Secondly, groups known to include a large proportion of Tuareg, Fulani or Arab militants were also included in the analysis. This strategy allowed inclusion of the most prominent pastoralist groups, such as the May 23, 2006 Democratic Alliance for Change (ATNMC), the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA), MNLA, and any groups associated with Tuareg and Fulani. Thirdly, violent events that included reference to pastoralist groups were also included by checking the ACLED notes against existing literature corroborating that the specified group was indeed pastoralist. Finally, every single actor mentioned by ACLED was scrutinised to identify any remaining groups that could match the definition of pastoralists provided above, and then were coded as such (Table 2).

Table 2
Transnational pastoralist groups by ethnic groups

Groups	Countries
Tuareg	
MNLA	Algeria, Mali, Burkina Faso
ATNMC	Algeria, Mali
"Tuareg Ethnic Group"	Burkina Faso, Mali
"Tuareg Ethnic Militia"	Libya, Niger, Mali
"Dawsahak Ethnic Group"	Mali, Niger
Toubou	
"Toubou Ethnic Militia"	Chad, Niger
Fulani	
"Fulani Ethnic Militia"	Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo
"Fulani Ethnic Group"	Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria
Ansaroul Islam	Burkina Faso, Mali
Katibat Macina	Burkina Faso, Mali
"Fula Ethnic Militia"	Burkina Faso, Mali
Unidentified pastoralists	
"Pastoralists"	All countries except Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Libya, Algeria
Sahrawi	
"Sahrawi Ethnic Militia"	Algeria, Morocco
Polisario Front	Algeria, Mali, Mauritania

Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Note: groups defined by ethnicity, not organisation, are indicated between quotation marks.

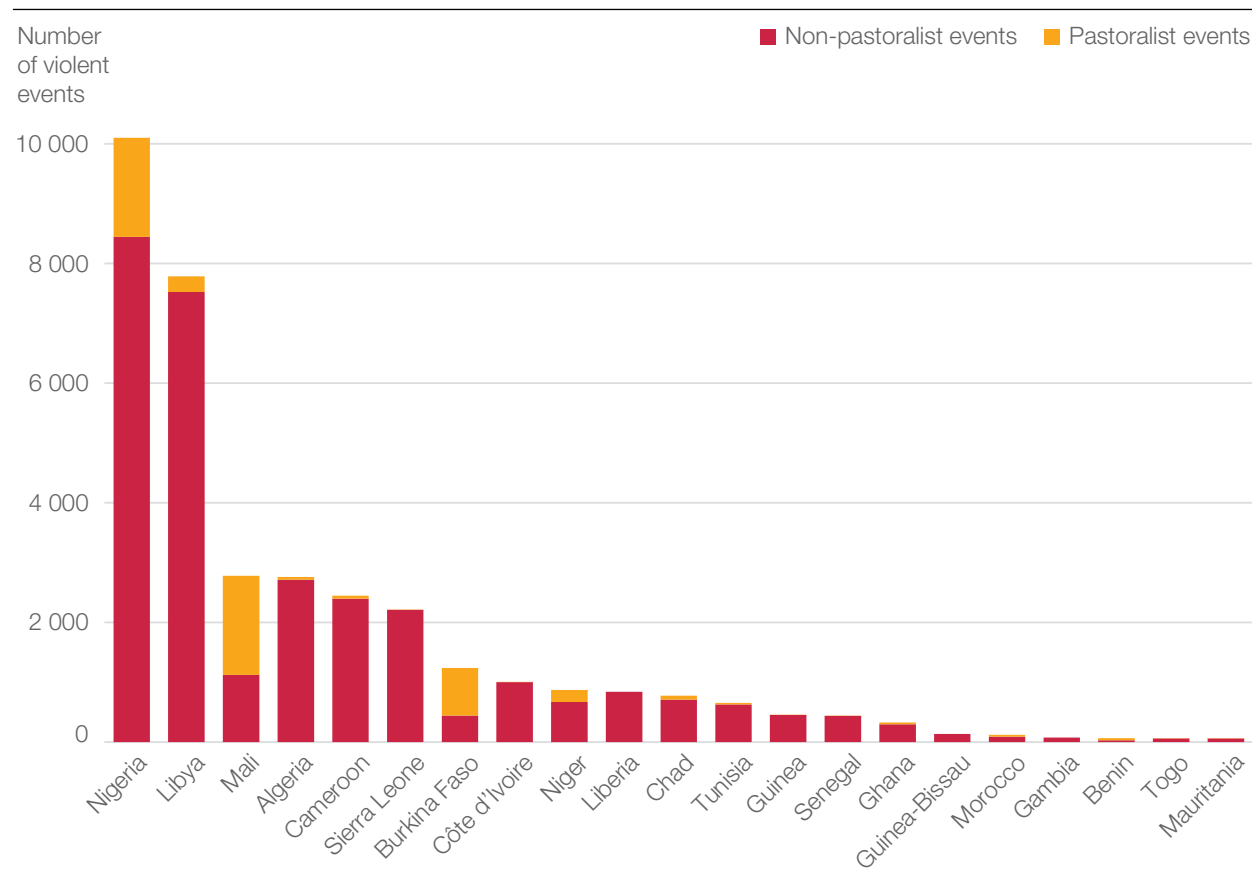
The diversity of pastoralist groups in North and West Africa

Pastoralist groups involved in violent events are found in all countries of North and West Africa except Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia, and Liberia (Figure 1). Only 206 of 3 818 total actors (5%) involved in violent events are pastoralist according to our classification. The highest percentages of pastoralist actors within a country is recorded in Mali (21%), Benin (14%), Niger (14%), and Burkina Faso (11%). Nigeria has the most violence in the region, while within the country, only 2% of actors are pastoralist. There is no clear association between total number of groups involved in violent events and number of pastoralist groups, as pastoralist groups greatly vary by country and sub-region within North and West Africa. Historical and traditional migration patterns, state policies, and environmental conditions have all resulted in differential concentrations of pastoralists within the region.

An analysis of events and fatalities across the region for all groups indicates high variation in the region. Countries with the highest share of pastoralist violent events include Burkina Faso (64%), Mali (60%), Benin (54%), Morocco (23%), and Niger (23%). There were a few interesting cases in which countries with little overall violence, such as Benin (70 violent events), had the majority of violence being pastoralist. While the violence in Benin is not as severe as conflict countries like Mali or Nigeria, the high proportion of pastoralist violence in the country is concerning. In Nigeria, which has both the most violent actors and the most violence in the region, only 16% of violent events were perpetrated by pastoralists – while representing nearly one-fifth of violent events, pastoralist violence is only one part of the different overlapping conflicts in the country.

There is not a perfect association of total violent events and pastoralist violent events, as evidenced by Nigeria and Mali: Mali has about the same amount of pastoralist violent events as Nigeria, yet about a third as many total violent events. Burkina Faso also has a relatively high number of pastoralist violent events (Figure 1). Some countries have high levels of violence and very little pastoralist violence, including Libya, Algeria, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. There are some surprising cases in terms of violent events and fatalities. For example, Mauritania is geographically proximate to several countries with high levels of violence (Algeria, Mali, and Burkina Faso) yet thus far has experienced very low levels of violence in general or pastoralist violence.

Figure 1
Non-pastoralist and pastoralist events by country, 1997-2020



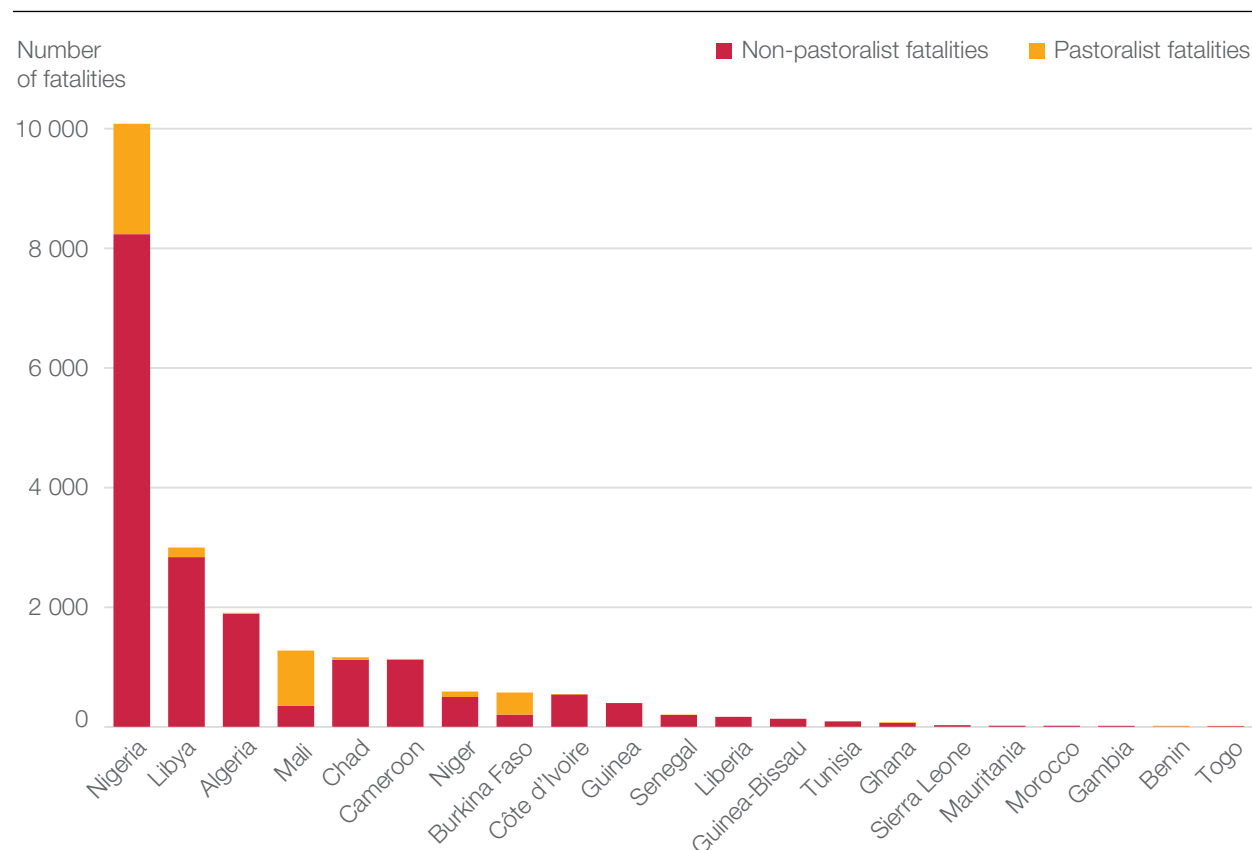
Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

There was a total of 24 694 fatalities associated with pastoralists during this period. Nigeria, Libya, Mali, and Algeria had the most fatalities for both total and pastoralist violence (Figure 2). The largest share of pastoralist fatalities relative to total fatalities occurred in Mali (72%), Benin (78%), and Burkina Faso (64%). There are concerning trends in Mali and Burkina Faso, given that both countries have experienced rapidly increasing violence over the past decade, demonstrated potential for transnational dispersion, and significant proportions of their violence involve pastoralists. There are only two countries in the study region with significant violence and where more than 50% of the fatalities were associated with pastoralists.

For fatalities in the region, the pattern is similar to violent events. Nigeria, Mali, and Burkina Faso have the most pastoralist fatalities and the highest share out of all fatalities (Figure 2). Violence associated with pastoralist groups is increasing in these countries, a concerning trend. Despite significant violence associated with pastoralists in several other countries, the fatalities caused by pastoralists in Libya, Algeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon remain quite low.

Figure 2

Non-pastoralist and pastoralist fatalities per country, 1997-2020

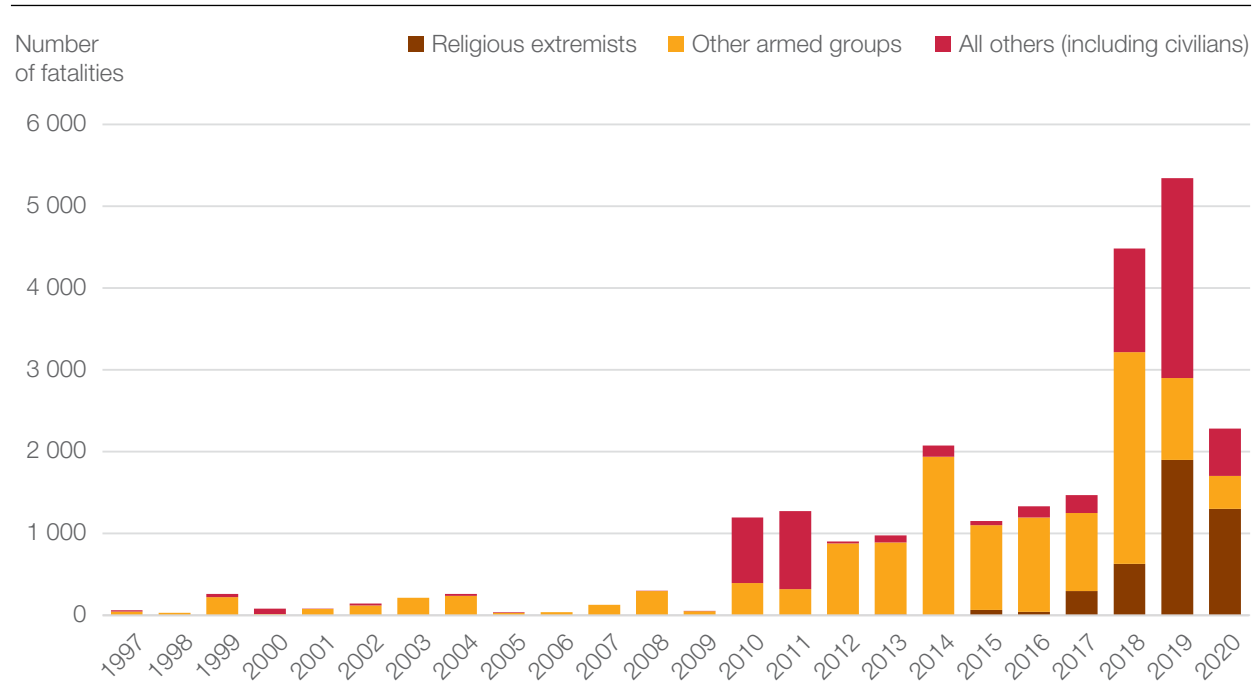


Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

Pastoralists may join violent groups with diverging agendas. Therefore, to facilitate the spatial and temporal analysis, the study groups actors into three categories.

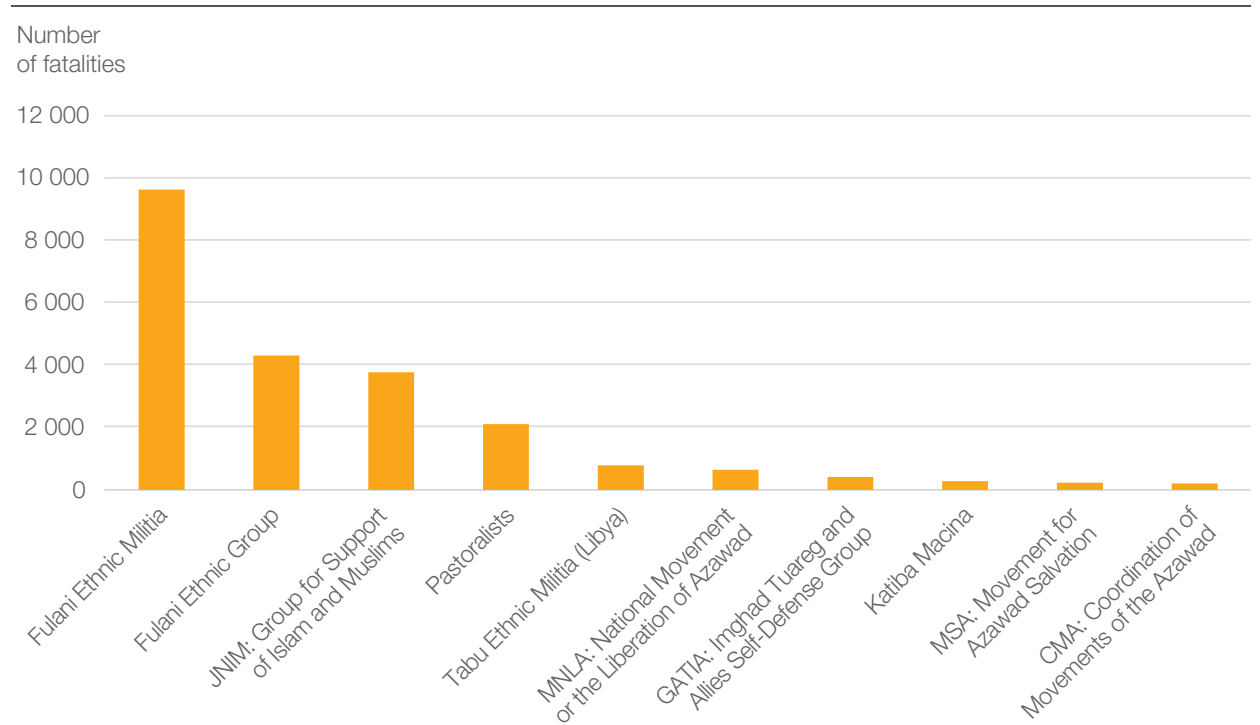
- The first category includes extremist groups with a fundamentalist, or jihadist ideology. This group includes six organisations: JNIM, Ansaru, Katibat Macina, Katiba Serma, Al-Mourabitoun, and Ansaroul Islam.
- The second category includes non-extremist armed groups such as ethnic militias, communal militias, rebels, insurgent groups, and self-defence groups. This category includes 45 groups, like ATNMC, GATIA, and Toubou ethnic militias.
- The third category includes all the other groups not belonging to the two previous categories, and civilian groups.

Figure 3
Pastoralist fatalities by category of group, 1997-2020



Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

Figure 4
Top ten pastoralist groups with most fatalities, 1997-2020



Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

All three categories contribute significantly to fatalities in the region (Figure 3), but there were few fatalities associated with religious extremism prior to 2015, though fatalities associated with this group have rapidly increased since then, with a surprising decline in fatalities caused by non-extremist armed groups. Some years, such as 2019, had very high fatalities caused by “All others” category, likely due to large massacres associated with communal violence, such as the infamous case of Ogassagou.

Violence is unevenly distributed amongst violent groups, with five major groups accounting for more than 80% of the total pastoralist fatalities: Fulani ethnic militias (40%), Fulani ethnic groups (18%), JNIM (16%), Pastoralists (9%), and Toubou ethnic militias (3%) (some of these groups combine several distinct entities, see Figure 4). These groups are coded in the ACLED database according to their methodologies, so that some groups (such as “Fulani ethnic group”) were likely not unified or formal group, but rather several Fulani who were involved in a violent event. Of the ten major groups involved in violent events, non-extremist armed groups are the most numerous, followed by extremist groups, and ethnic and civilian groups.

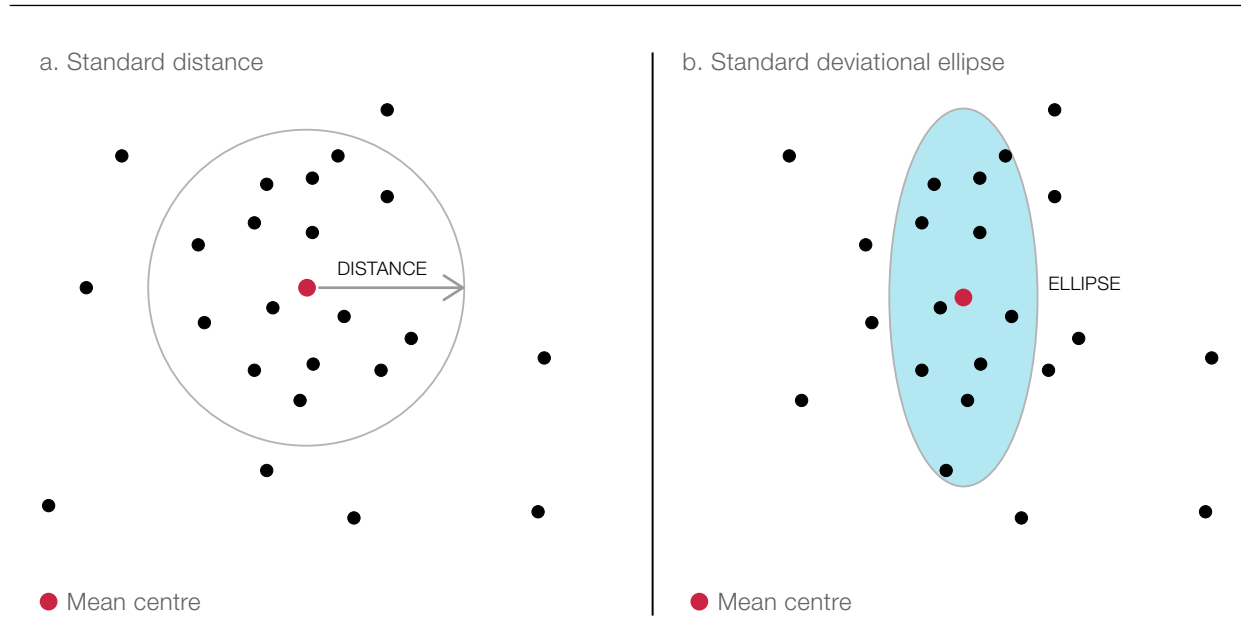
The largest violent event of any group caused 326 fatalities and occurred in April of 2011 in Kagarko, Nigeria, involving the Christian Militia and Berom Ethnic Group on one side and the Fulani Ethnic Militia and Civilians on the other side. Only 17 of all 2 016 pastoralist groups had over 100 fatalities, suggesting most of the groups are not involved with high levels of violence.

Shifts in pastoralist violence over the period were identified using three spatial tools:

- The first tool is the centre of gravity (or mean centre), which identifies the most central location of a distribution of events, from which the distance to all events is the smallest. The centre of gravity indicates whether violence tends to remain located in one region or shift from one region to another over time.

Figure 5

Standard distance with mean centre and standard deviational ellipse



Source: OECD/SWAC (2017).

- The second tool is the standard distance, which measures the degree to which violent events are concentrated or dispersed around the centre of gravity. Most violent events are located within one standard distance of the centre of gravity in what constitutes the area of greatest concentration (Figure 5). The smaller the figure, the more concentrated the distribution of the violent events.
- The third tool is the standard deviational ellipse, which shows whether the distribution of violent events follows a particular direction. Like the standard deviation used in statistics, the standard distance quantifies the amplitude of the dispersal of a set of spatialised values. The smaller the standard ellipse, the more violent events are concentrated within the region. In Figure 5, the points representing violent events delineate a north south ellipse, in which the concentration of points is particularly high (OECD, 2017).

Where does pastoralist violence occur?

The location of violent events is the most precise information available to understand the geography of pastoralist groups involved in politically motivated violence across the region. This information is used to map all pastoralist violent events and fatalities throughout the entire period (1997-2020) and during three consecutive periods that capture important shifts in the region, such as the MNLA rebellion (1997-2004, 2005-12, and 2013-20).

Regionally, pastoralist violent events are geographically dispersed, with 4 942 total events from 1997 to 2020 (Map 2). Countries with significant pastoralist violence include Algeria, Chad, Ghana, Libya, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. The two main hot spots within the region with the highest burden and activity are the Central Sahel, and Nigeria and its peripheries. These two regions over the past decade have become significant sources of violence, with the Central Sahel experiencing rebellions and the subsequent proliferation of armed militias, extremism, and communal violence, and Nigeria experiencing several simultaneous conflicts in the Lake Chad region, the Middle Belt, and the Niger Delta (Table 3).

Table 3

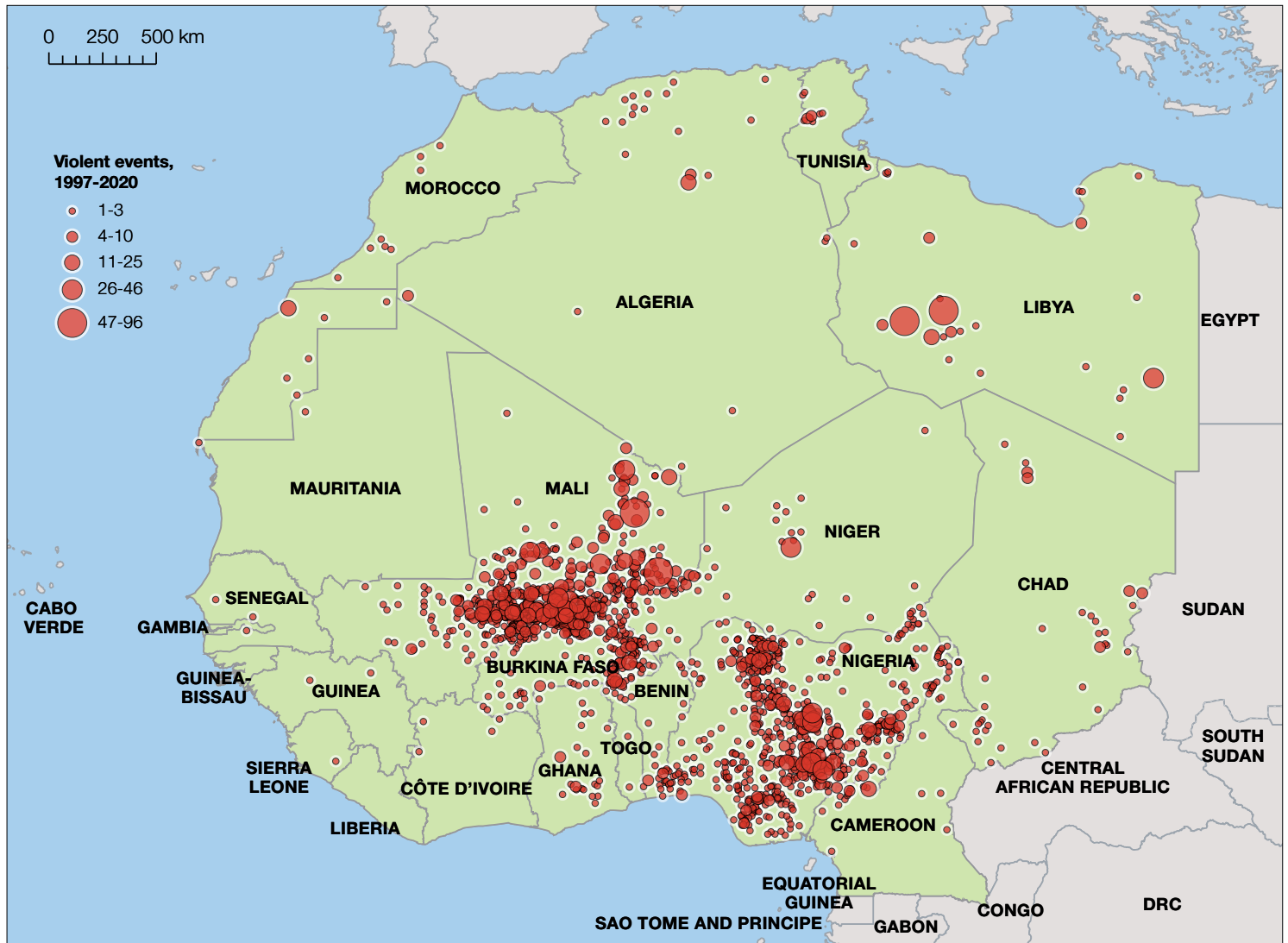
Violent events and fatalities involving pastoralists by hot spot regions, 1997-2020

Hot spots	Violent events		Fatalities	
	Number	Percentage of region total	Number	Percentage of region total
Nigeria, northwest region of Cameroon, southern region of Niger, southeast region of Chad	1 831	37	13 796	56
Central Sahel: Mali, northern Burkina Faso, western Niger	2 411	49	9 125	37

Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

Map 2

Violent events involving pastoralists, 1997-2020



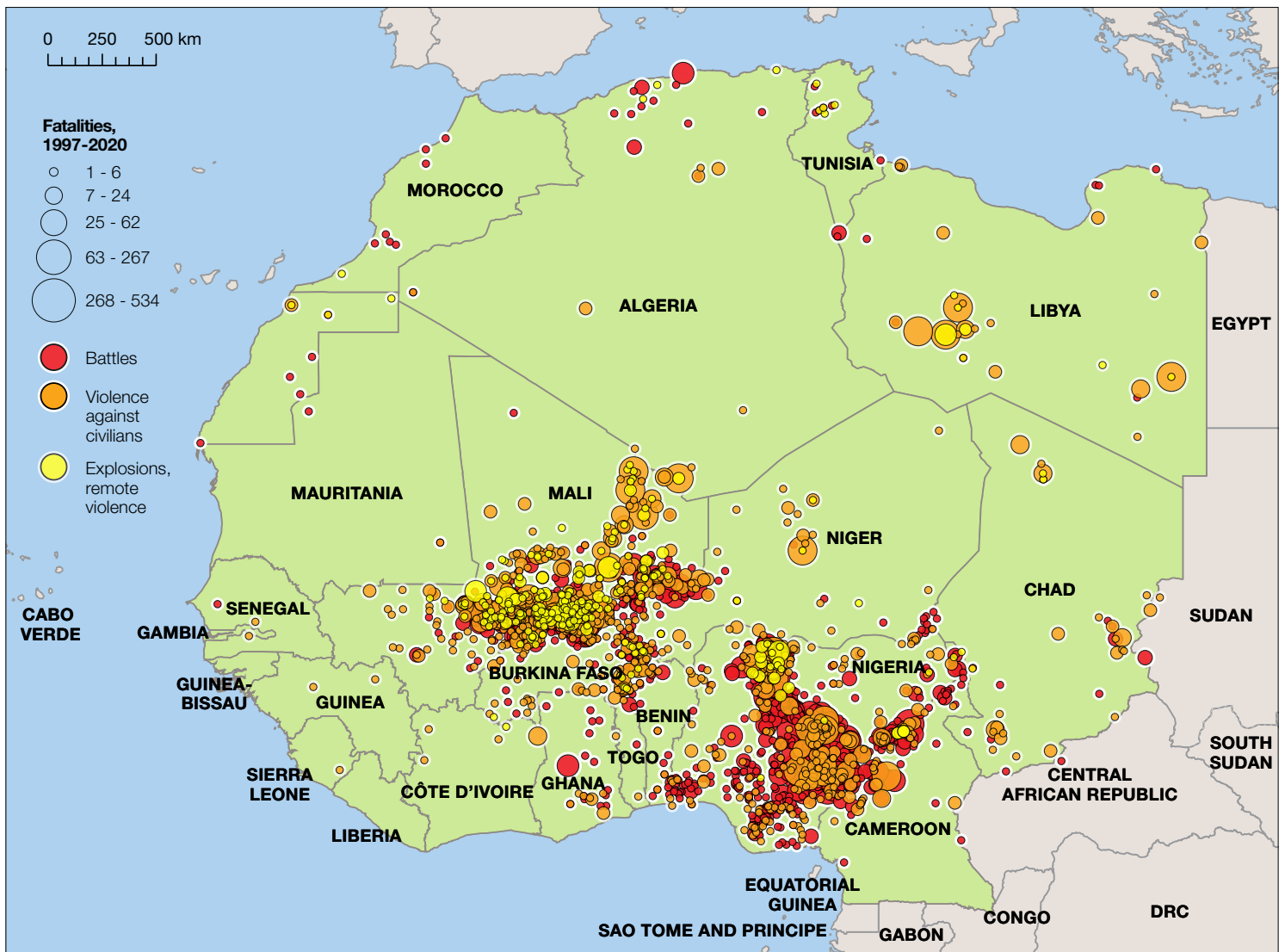
Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

VIOLENCE BY TYPE

While violent events are dispersed throughout the North and West Africa region, there are certainly sub-areas with high levels of fatalities, in particular, the border area between Mali and Burkina Faso, and between Nigeria and its neighbours. Although the Lake Chad region has the highest level for general and overall violence – mostly due to Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) insurgency – this is not the case for pastoralist violence, which is most concentrated in a south-east to north-west band of Nigeria (Map 3).

Map 3

Fatalities involving pastoralists by type, 1997-2020



Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

The ACLED database distinguishes between three main types of violent events: battles, violence against civilians, and explosions/remote violence. Civilian fatalities involving pastoralists represent the most fatalities of the three event types (13 813), with battles (9 729) the second highest and explosions (1 083) the lowest.

- Battles are “a violent interaction between two politically organised armed groups at a particular time and location” (ACLED, 2019, p. 7), and can occur between armed state, non-state actors, and external groups

in any possible combination. Some of the battles with highest fatalities occurred in northern Mali near Aguelhok (125), Tessalit (128), and Kidal (267), in central Mali near Borko (109), Mopti (90) and Dioungani (112), and throughout Nigeria (Dumni River, 101; Makardi, 93; Jos, 88; Kafanchan, 161; Zumi, 90; and Birmin Magaji, 179; to name a few).

- Violence against civilians is defined as “violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants” (ACLED, 2019, p. 11). Following the definition for civilians in ACLED, they are unarmed and cannot engage in political violence. Violence against civilians is mostly concentrated in three sub-areas: Central Nigeria, the Mali-Burkina Faso border, and Algeria. The most fatal events of violence against civilians occurred in Nigeria, likely explained by the large-scale community violence occurring there, with high-fatality events in Zonkwa (534), Kagarko (345), and multiple events around Jos totalling more than 1 000 deaths. Finally, battles with significant fatalities have occurred in western Libya, throughout central Nigeria, and throughout Mali, with a few isolated battles in Niger and Chad.
- Finally, explosions/remote violence are defined as “one-sided violent events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the target to respond” (ACLED, 2019, p. 9). These events are mostly concentrated in north-western Nigeria and central Mali, with a few scattered in Chad, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Interestingly, most explosions caused low numbers of fatalities relative to some of the larger battles and violence against civilians, except for two large-scale explosions in central Mali near Nampala (40) and Gao (62). Remote violence is a relatively recent strategic adoption mostly utilised by jihadist groups, so it is likely that only a few groups with sufficient training and resources have used them.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL

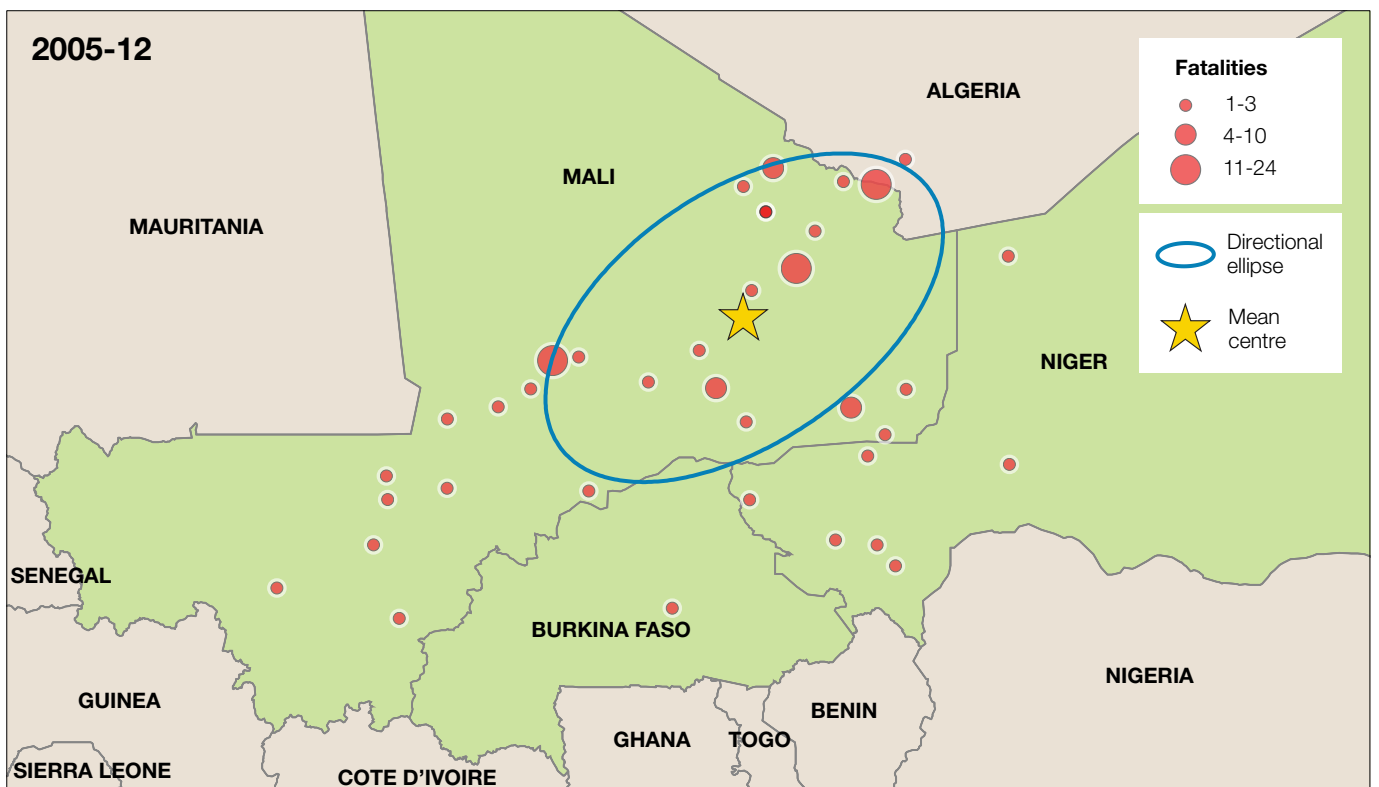
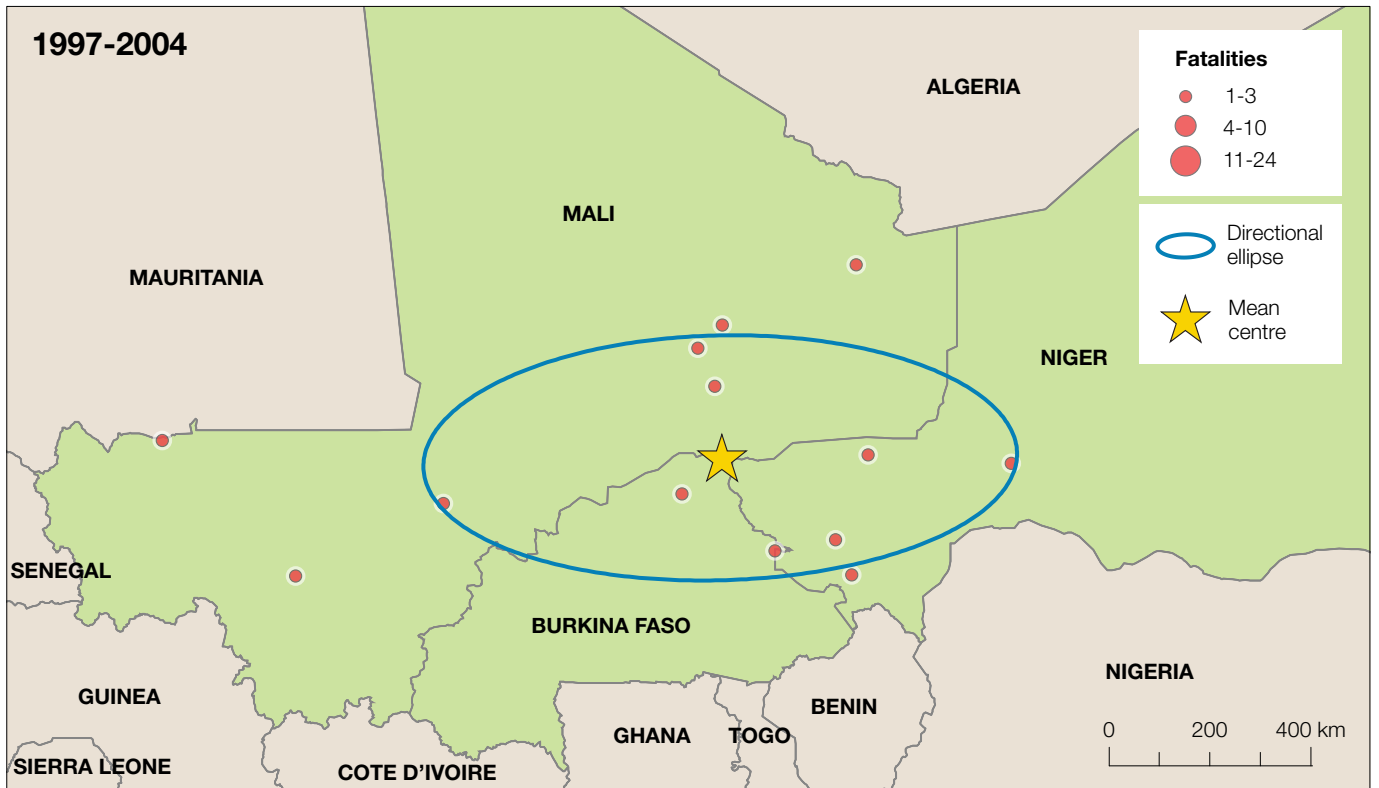
The Central Sahel region has experienced significant pastoralist violence since the late 1990s. The centre of gravity of violent events has shifted considerably (Map 4). During the first period, between 1997 and 2004, the centre of gravity was near the borders with Niger and Burkina Faso, between the Malian commune of Tessit, Burkinabe departments of Tin-Akoff and Markoye, and Nigerien commune of Gorouol. Because there were few events scattered across the region during this period, the deviational ellipse, which represents the area of highest concentration of violent events, is relatively large and encompasses most of the Central Sahel.

During the second periods, between 2005 and 2012, the region experienced a significant increase in violence. There were far more events in general and some locations were targeted repeatedly by rebels and violent extremists.

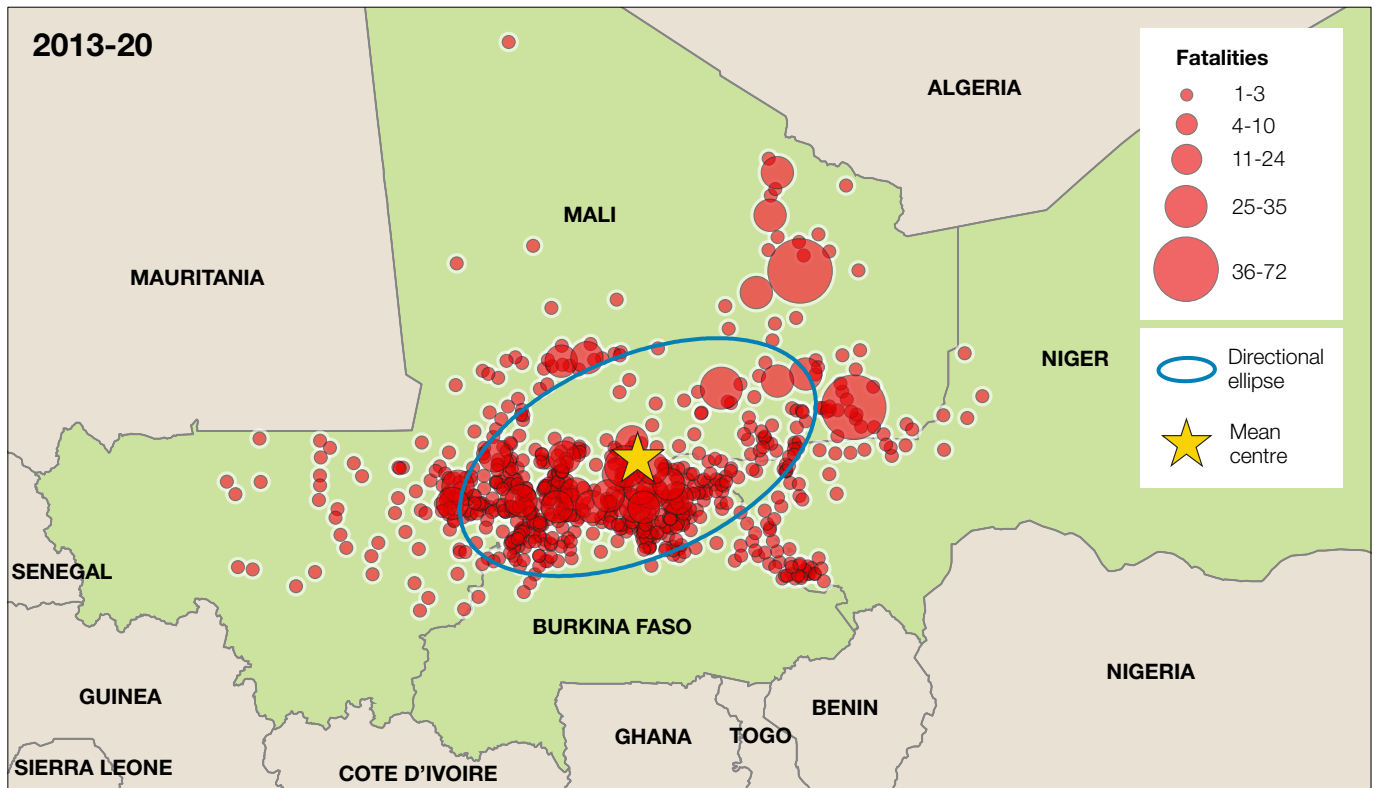
Where does pastoralist violence occur?

Map 4

Distribution of violent events involving pastoralists in the Central Sahel, 1997-2020



Map 4

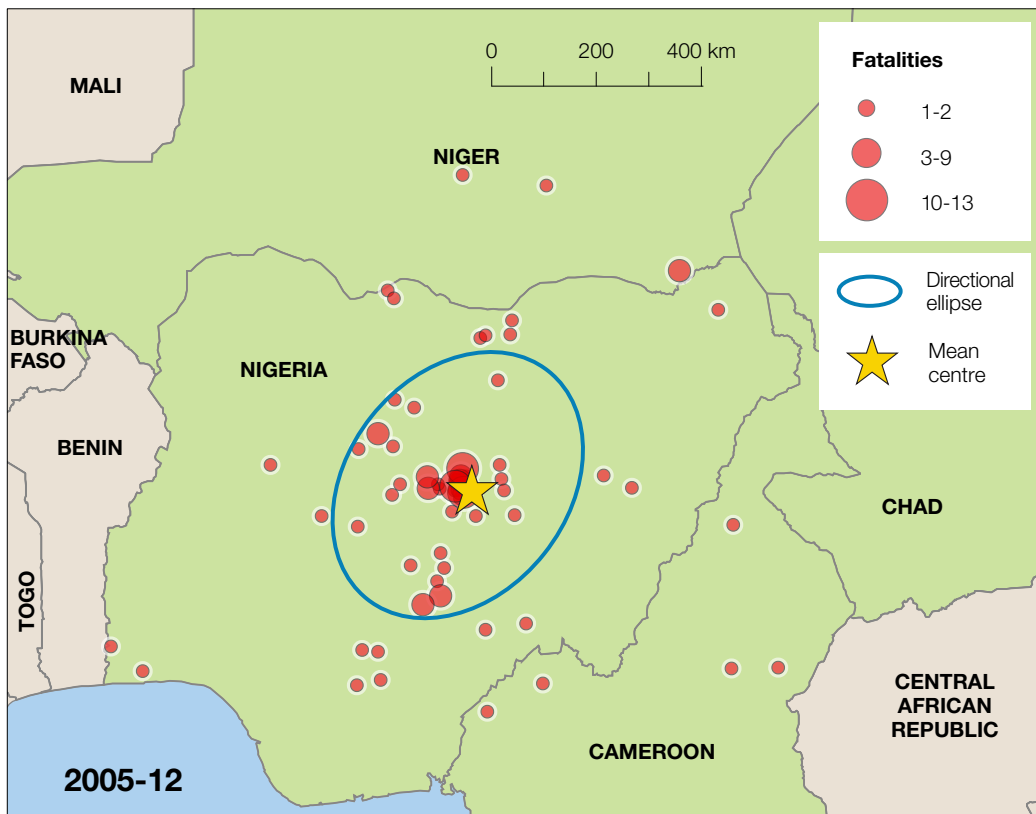
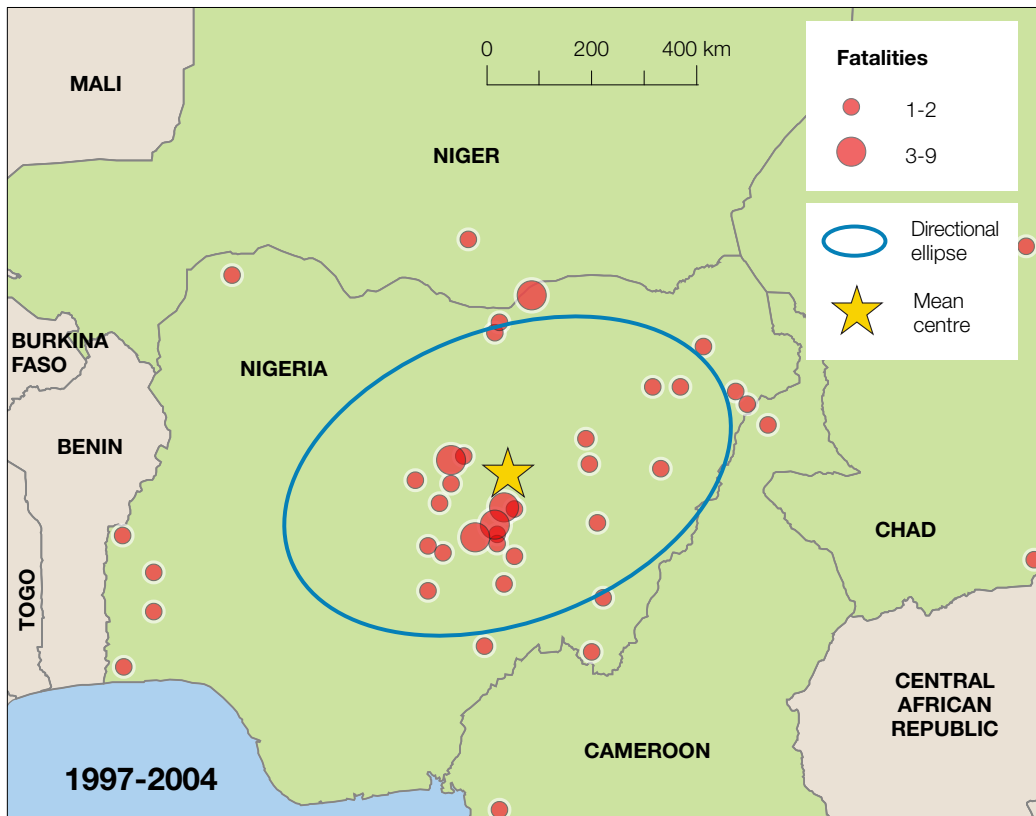


Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

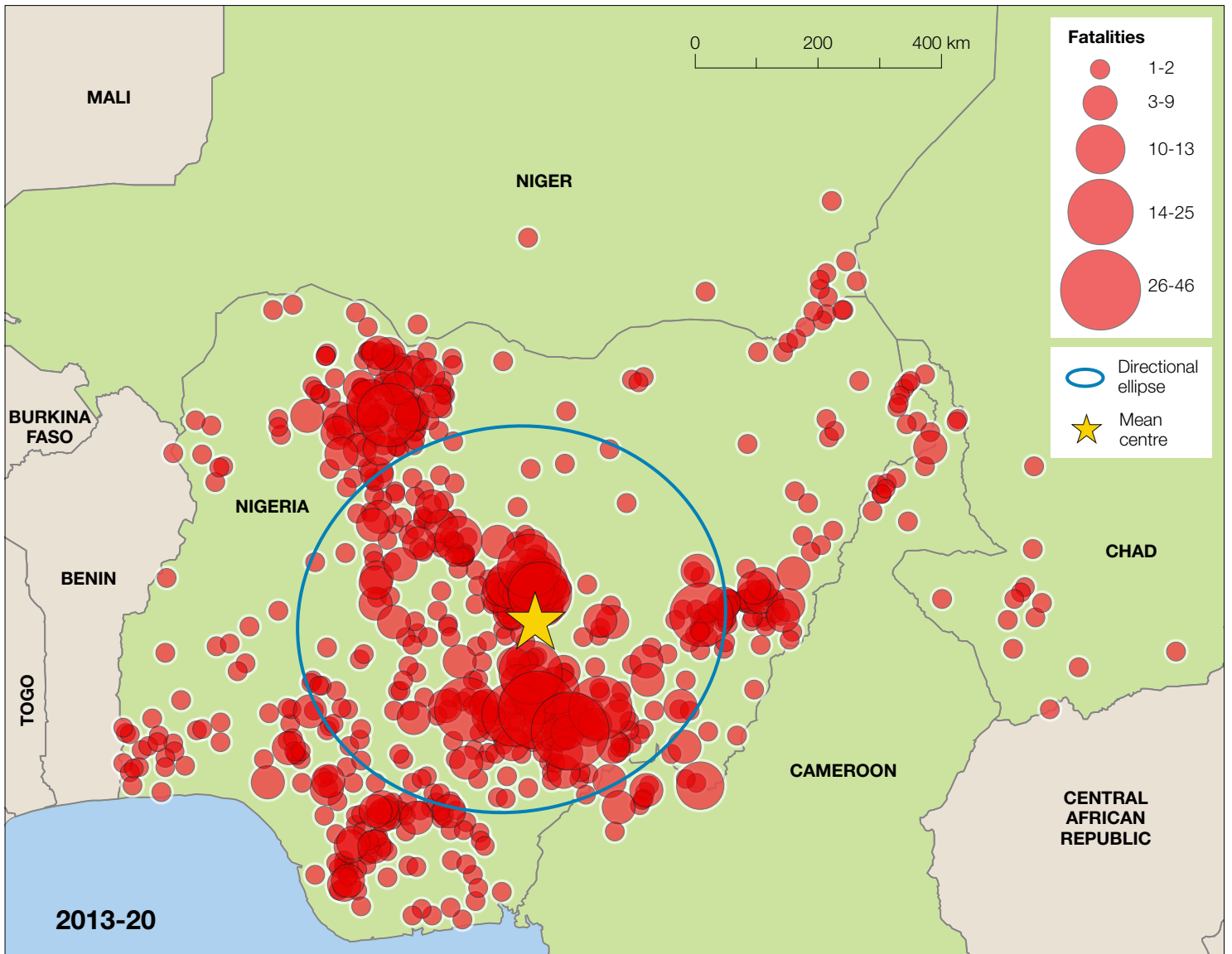
Where does pastoralist violence occur?

Map 5

Violent events involving pastoralists in Nigeria and its peripheries, 1997-2020



Map 5



Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

The centre of gravity shifted slightly northward, to the Malian commune of Tarkint. The directional distribution also shifted in the north-east direction, given the expansion of events in the northern three Malian provinces, towards Kidal, where the 2012 Tuareg rebellion began. During this period, the bulk of the violent events was concentrated in Mali, and the deviational ellipse is nearly entirely contained within this country.

During the final period, between 2013 and 2021, the mean centre shifted to Mali's Mopti region in the Mondoro commune, again close to the border with Burkina Faso. Violent events increased dramatically. Directional distribution was much more concentrated around a narrow band of Central Mali. The transnational nature of the Malian insurgency is clearly visible during this period, as violent events expanded and intensified around the border region with Burkina Faso and Niger. The number of events in some locations increased to a maximum of 72.

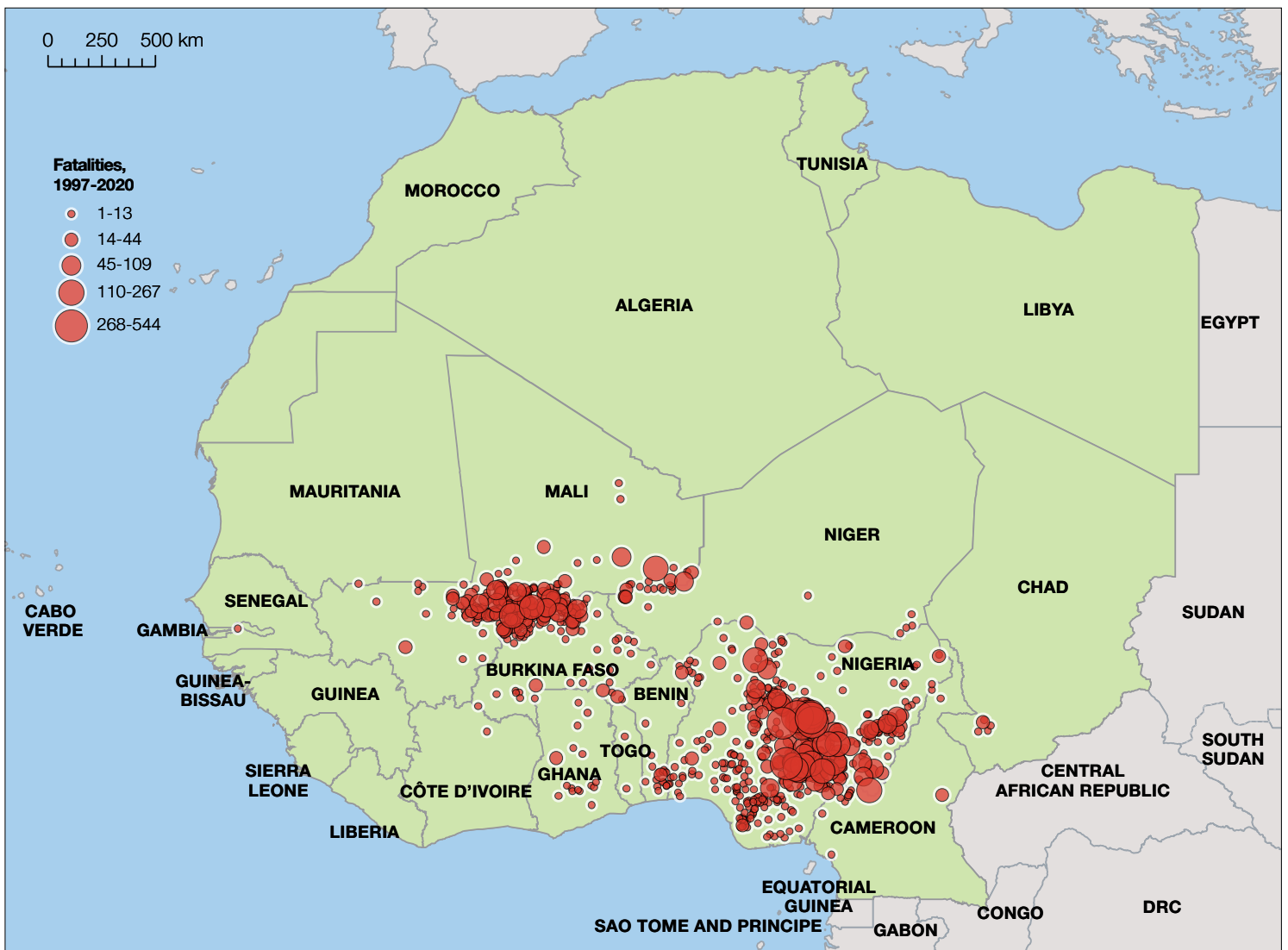
POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA AND ITS PERIPHERIES

Most violent events involving pastoralists between 1997 and 2004 were in Nigeria, likely related to communal violence in the north (Map 5). There were few events in Niger, Cameroon, and Chad during this period. The mean centre was in the local government area of Kanam in Plateau State, with a concentrated distribution around central Nigeria and expanding into northern Nigeria. The mean centre shifted slightly to the west, in the local government area of Jos South (also Plateau State), between 2005 and 2012. There was an expansion and intensification of events, with 138 events presaging the significant communal violence in Nigeria. Violence did not rapidly accelerate until the early 2010s, with total events reaching 1 619, almost twelve times that of the previous period. The greatest expansion was recorded in the Middle Belt. The mean centre moved slightly southward to the city of Sanga in Kaduna State. Far more events were also recorded in north-western region than around Lake Chad, which is the hotspot of overall violence in the entire North and West Africa region.

Another interesting dimension of pastoralist violence is the significant number of pastoralist events in southern Nigeria. This suggests pastoralist groups have migrated further south in Nigeria and are engaged in both communal violence and struggles related to resources in the Niger Delta. This is not altogether surprising given widespread migration of pastoralist groups related to political insecurity and environmental factors including desertification, rainfall, and drought (UNEP, 2011). The evidence suggests that the main climate indicators linked to migration in the Sahel have shifted significantly over the past 40 years and worsened in significant

ways in terms of drought and climate variability. Specifically, overall temperatures have risen, droughts are more recurrent and severe, rainfall has increased, and floods have increased in frequency and intensity. Cumulatively, these four factors, combined with social, economic, and political factors, have provoked migration in the region, particularly among populations directly dependent upon natural resources such as pastoralists (UNEP, 2011).

Map 6
Fulani-related fatalities, 1997-2020



Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

FULANI-RELATED VIOLENCE

The Fulani are the most represented pastoralist group involved, as victim or perpetrator in episodes of violence in the region, with 44 unique groups (21% of all groups) with violent events occurring in 13 countries. The countries with the most Fulani-associated groups include Nigeria (8), Mali (10), and Burkina Faso (7). They include armed militias, civilian groups, pro-government militias, and extremist groups. Several Fulani groups are transnational (Table 2).

Fulani-associated violence is widespread but concentrated in two bands: one from Central Mali running to the border with northern Burkina Faso, and the other in a band from south-east Nigeria running north-west to the border with Niger (Map 6). Although Fulani-associated pastoralist events occurred in 13 different countries, most of all events were in Nigeria and Mali, with the remainder of countries experiencing relatively little compared to these two.

Cumulatively, 2 669 of 4 889 total pastoralist events (55%) and 16 182 of 24 694 total pastoralist fatalities (66%) involve the various “Fulani ethnic militias” and “Fulani ethnic groups” recorded by ACLED despite not being a co-ordinated or unified group. Actors classified as “Fulani ethnic groups” are victims or perpetrators of many of the highest-fatality events, likely related to large-scale massacres in the vicious cycles of revenge and violence centring on communal violence in the Middle Belt. In Nigeria, there were large-scale fatalities in Obangedde (341), Kagarko (345), Zonkwa (544), and multiple large-scale events in the region around Jos (Barkin Ladi, 454; Kuru Karam, 344; Riyom, 153; Dogon a Hawa, 199; Bukuru, 121; and Jos, 245). The events in Mali, while significant, were not as large-scale as those in Nigeria, with the three largest being in and Ogossagou (198), Menaka (120), and Dioungani (118).

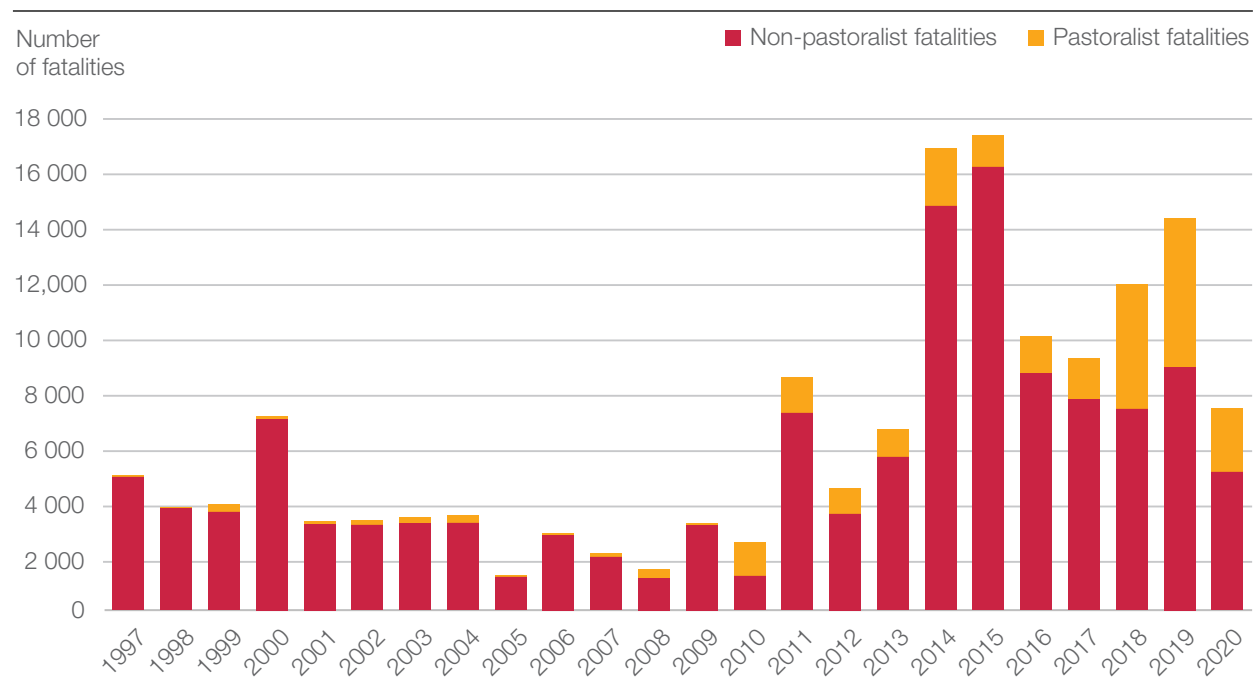
How has pastoralist violence shifted in time?

Timelines over the period indicate that pastoralist violence started to increase around 2008 after a decade of relative tranquillity (Figures 6 and 7). The peak for violence occurred in 2019, consistent with the media and scholarship that depicted serious rises in pastoralist violence in Burkina Faso, Nigeria, and Mali. As this violence expands in magnitude, it also has the potential for transnational spread, as evidenced by the recent emergence of violence in northern Burkina Faso, which has become one of the highest per-capita countries for violence in the region (ACLED, 2019).

The number of pastoralist groups has also rapidly increased since the early 2010's (Figure 7). The heart of the Sahel region has been impacted by complex crises in Libya, Mali, and Nigeria, along with increasing demand for weapons for self-protection, extremism, or political violence (de Tessières, 2017). Several different conflicts account for this expansion of groups, though the Malian

Figure 6

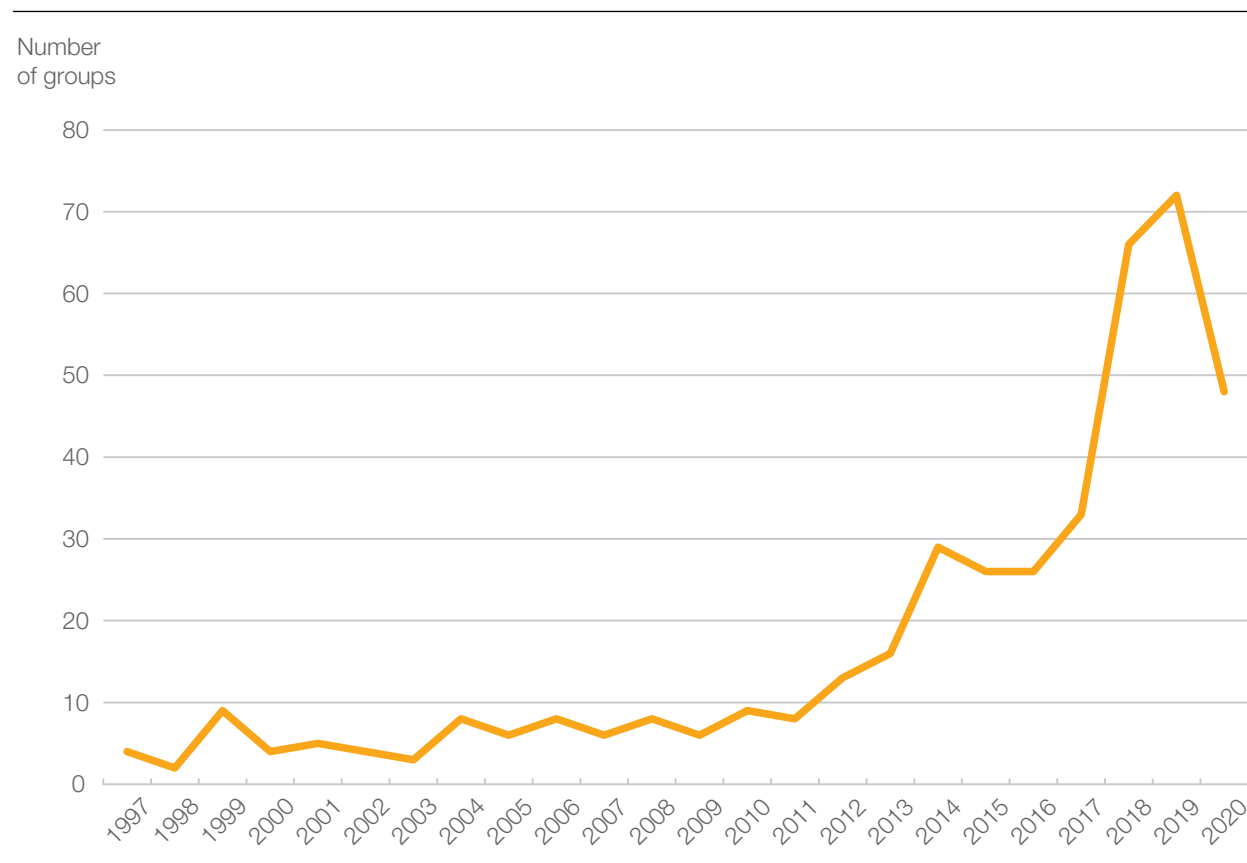
Annual number of fatalities in North and West Africa, 1997-2020



Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

Figure 7

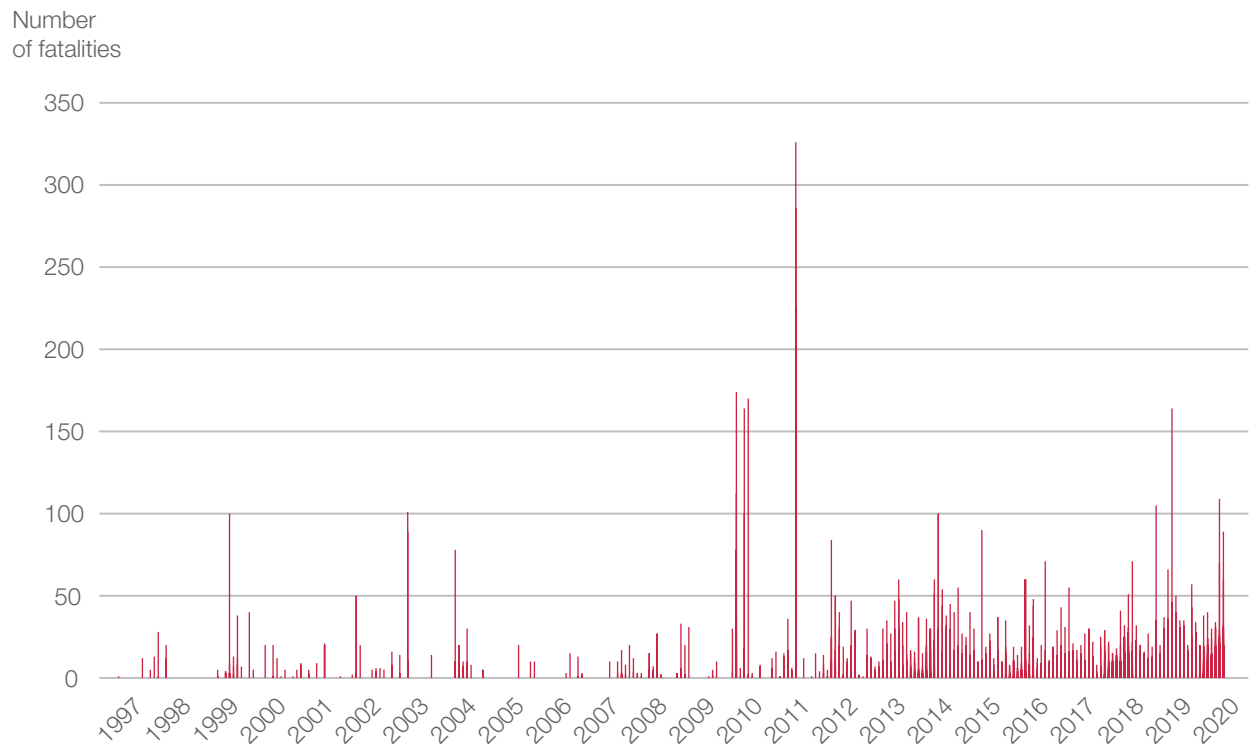
Pastoralist groups involved in violent events per year, 1997-2020



Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

conflict that started in 2012 has witnessed numerous armed and extremist groups forming, allying, and fragmenting during this period (OECD/SWAC, 2021). Groups such as AQIM, Ansar Dine, MUJAO, JNIM, Ansaroul Islam, ISGS, and Al-Mourabitoun have all emerged or reconfigured in the aftermath of the Malian conflict. These various groups have formed for a myriad of reasons, including self-defence, rebellion, pro- or anti-government activity, communal violence, territorial control, and extremism. In several countries, armed, rebel, and self-defence groups have formed to protect their people and territories and contributed to the increase in communal violence in the region (HRW, 2018). Nigeria and Burkina Faso are two particularly salient examples of countries with rapidly expanding armed militias over the past decade. The Boko Haram conflict has also provoked disorder and insecurity in the Lake Chad region, though the involvement and presence of pastoralist actors tends to be minimal in this region, unlike with generalised violence.

Figure 8
Monthly pastoralist fatalities in the region, 1997-2020



Source: Author based on ACLED (2020). Data available through April 2020.

Daily fatalities for the region related to pastoralist violence shows that violence was somewhat sporadic until the early 2010's. There were some days with significant fatalities throughout the period, but in 2012 the monthly fatalities started to increase and become more regular. Monthly average fatalities have increased, and there has been a more persistent occurrence of fatalities. Boko Haram's emergence and the Malian conflict are the two major provocations for expanding pastoralist-related violence in the region, with both creating insecurity, proliferation of armed groups, and inflaming ethnic tensions (Figure 8).

The increase of actors involved in violent events for overall violence is reflected amongst pastoralist actors as well, as they have proliferated across different types of violent events. In Nigeria, they are involved in communal violence – which has existed for centuries, but has certainly intensified and increased in the past two decades. The 2012 Malian MNLA rebellion, which was later supported by various extremist groups, has also spread, and

intensified both spatially and through proliferation of various groups. There are many extremist groups, armed militias, and self-defence groups in both northern and central parts of Mali. Finally, the transnational dispersion of violence has likewise provoked the formation of new groups, or the expansion of violent events by existing groups in new territories or nations. The violent events in Burkina Faso are a good example of this development, with new groups forming in the country, but also existing extremist and militia groups from Mali expanding their presence in Burkina Faso.

Incidents involving pastoralists in both Nigeria and the Central Sahel, the two hot spots of politically motivated violence in West Africa, can help to explain much of the recent increase in violence. While only 93 events were recorded from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s in both regions, the number of incidents involving pastoralists have multiplied by 22 in Nigeria and by 120 in the Central Sahel, reaching 1 619 and 2 273 respectively during the period from 2013-20.

Pastoralist violence is increasing but concentrated among a few key actors

The number of violent events involving pastoralist groups is rapidly increasing in North and West Africa. In 2019, 4 878 were recorded in the region, against 560 in 2010 and 888 during the late 1990s, when the first disaggregated data were available. Pastoralist groups are engaged, as victims and perpetrators, in violence in all the 21 countries of the region with the exceptions of Liberia, Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau. These violent events have catastrophic consequences on livelihoods and political stability. The monthly data suggests a persistent and significant number of fatalities since the early 2010s, a period that corresponds to the beginning of the Malian civil war and the Boko Haram insurgency. The share of violence associated with pastoralists in several countries is also increasing, suggesting pastoralists are involved in forms of violence that should be addressed by policy makers and explored in further scholarship.

The growing involvement of pastoralists in acts of violence across the region hides the fact that 81% of the violent events and 85% of the fatalities involving pastoralist groups are attributed to just five groups or large ethnic categories created to classify events for which the identity of the victims or perpetrators remains unknown. The various Fulani groups are associated with the most violent events and fatalities in the region and also represent numerically some of the largest ethnic groups in the region. There were over forty Fulani-associated violent actors of the 206 pastoralist actors, indicating that Fulani are among the most significant pastoralist actors involved in violent events. This is likely due to their large population and territory, varying levels of tensions with other groups and governments, and finally the increasing access to and availability of weapons. The conflicts in the Central Sahel and Nigeria have significant Fulani-associated violence. These are the main hotspots of Fulani activity, though Fulani-associated violent events are also occurring in up to 13 nations in the region. The two most violent actors, although not unified groups, were also Fulani, suggesting policy for curtailing pastoralist violence must address the underlying factors provoking Fulani to be engaged in violence – both as perpetrators and victims.

Violent events and fatalities in which pastoralists are involved are geographically clustered in two hot spots: Nigeria and its peripheries, and the Central Sahel. Outside of these two regions, most pastoralist groups experience little violence. Both regions experienced rapid acceleration of pastoralist violence since the 2012-2013 period, indicating the seriousness of addressing the underlying causes of violence in both regions. The centre of gravity of pastoralist violence in Nigeria is persistently located in the Middle Belt, where communal violence is widespread, but violent events have also spread to the north and south of the country. In and around Mali, violence involving pastoralists follows the same spatial patterns as the Malian conflict: first focused on Mali proper, the centre of gravity of violent events is moving south, as communal and religiously motivated violence spread across the border with Burkina Faso and Niger.

Violence involving pastoralism reflects larger trends in the region, marked by an intensification of violence in general, a growing involvement of communal militias, and an increasing number of civilian victims, particularly in border regions and in remote rural regions (OECD/SWAC, 2021, 2020). There is significant potential for curtailing the intensifying and increasing violence among pastoralists. First, governments must contend with the communal tensions and ethnic violence associated with pastoralists and other groups, often involving tensions over religion, land, economics, and resources. Second, regional governments must improve their investment in the regions where pastoralists reside, as this has been proved to relate to feelings of marginalisation and has provoked tensions among many groups. Lack of investment provokes grievances among pastoralist groups but also lower their quality of life, access to education, economic possibilities, employment, and integration into the state.

Finally, states in the region should encourage greater participation and integration of pastoralist groups by involving them in government, politics, decisions, and cultural and social institutions. Expanding ties between pastoralists and other groups through social cohesion, education, outreach, communities, trade, and other institutions will provide benefits for all sides. States must also address the lingering and intensifying issues of land disputes and communal violence, which are often related to herding, grazing, mobility, and trade of livestock. These issues must be addressed through improved grazing policies, taxes, licensing, and fees and fines. There is a long history in the region of mutual trade between herders, farmers, and other groups. By emphasising the mutual benefits of trade, community participation, institutions, and other relations between ethnic groups, governments can begin to address the tensions that have arisen over the past few decades and provoked violence and insecurity.

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Pastoralist Violence in North and West Africa

This study examines the geographical and temporal evolution of violence in which pastoralists are engaged. Building upon an analysis of over 36 000 violent events in North and West Africa between January 1997 and April 2020 in which 206 pastoralist groups were involved, this paper provides a regional report on wider patterns of pastoralist violence over the last two decades. A comprehensive understanding of pastoralists' roles in the region's violence is crucial to facilitating more effective policies to counter violence. Pastoralist violence is widespread in the region, and has both expanded and intensified, as is evidenced by the rapid increase in number of events and fatalities over the past decade. Numerous ethnic groups are involved including the Fulani and Tuareg and two major hot spots have been identified in Nigeria and its peripheries, and the Central Sahel where violence has increased and is spreading transnationally.

Temporally, armed groups with connections to pastoralists are increasing in number, particularly in emerging conflict zones such as northern Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and central Mali. Fulani are the most populous and most geographically dispersed of the groups, and Fulani-associated groups constitute the greatest burden of violent events, groups, and fatalities. Local factors are likely the largest contributor to the violence rather than groups coalescing around a shared interest. The five most violent groups accounted for more than 85% of all fatalities and events, indicating that most pastoralist actors are not involved in high levels of violence. Of the three major forms of violence, communal violence contributes most to pastoralist violence, though religious extremism and remote violence are gaining importance and spreading.

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