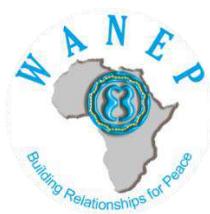




Tracking Violent Extremism Spillover from the Sahel to Littoral West Africa

Analytical Report
June 2021



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands

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Acknowledgments

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Key informant interviews, focus group discussions and expert interviews: Data collection in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana Togo, and Benin, and editing was carried out by WANEP country and regional office staff, with input from the ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate. Expert interviews were carried out by Nakmak Douiti (Togo), Reuben Lewis (Ghana) and Lassina Diara (Côte d'Ivoire). Data collection in Burkina Faso and Niger was carried out by Cabinet International de Recherche d'Audit (CIRA), with editing by Garba Mai-Birni Aboubacar, Director of CIRA.

Cover photo by EC/ECHO/Anouk Delafortrie

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¹ Updated version, 4 October 2021.

Abstract

This report examines the spillover of violent extremism from the Sahel into the states on the Gulf of Guinea - Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo, hereafter "Littoral states". Throughout the research period, we analyzed the growing violent extremist threats and sub-national at-risk areas, assessed the push and pull factors that draw jihadists from the Sahel into Littoral states, and identified appropriate interventions to mitigate the spread of jihadism in the region. The research was carried out in over 300 locations between March 2020 - April 2021, along the shared borders of six countries - Burkina Faso, Niger, Benin, Togo, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. The research concludes that Benin and Côte d'Ivoire face high threats of violent attacks, recruitment, and radicalization from jihadists operating in the Sahel. Ghana and Togo have yet to experience significant jihadist threats, however the illicit economy that facilitates jihadism, is thriving there.

The report is accompanied by a visual [dashboard](#)² (see footnote for access details) and a periodically updated [overview](#)³ of Stabilization and Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) activities and related programming in the region. For any questions about these, please contact amit@elva.org.

² www.tracking-veo.elva.org; enter the following to log in: username: **ve** / password: **TrackingExtremism2021**

³ www.program-mapping.elva.org

Executive Summary

There is evidence that the Littoral states on the Gulf of Guinea have been facing a spillover of violent extremism from Sahel as early as 2018. This was further confirmed following a 2020 summit of jihadist leaders in Mali, which clearly indicated that Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State of Greater Sahara (ISGS) have been planning to expand their area of influence and activity into the Littoral states, and that these groups have already been financing activity there.⁴ Although the Littorals are not as fragile as Sahelian states are, they exhibit vulnerabilities that jihadists can exploit, which are highlighted by their 'north-south' divide. Predominantly Muslim populations in the north face a lack of access to the same resources that the southern regions have access to, which have enabled development and industrialization along the coastline throughout the 20th century.⁵ Meanwhile, the north is typically more connected to the Sahel through commercial trade, and historic familial, cultural and linguistic ties.

This socio-economic marginalization is most pronounced across the Sahel and northern regions of the Littorals with respect to the Peuhl, who have become increasingly dispossessed by institutional and socio-economic changes over the past century. They are disadvantaged by modern interpretations of land and mobility legal frameworks, and the erosion of communal law in favor of international and domestic law in conflict resolution. This marginalization is in large part due to their mobility, and the way colonialism impacted their role in the farmer-herder society. The commercialization of agriculture has left Peuhl herders with little to no capacity to compete with major industry, thus impoverishing a once wealthy and powerful community that historically had significant control over the livestock trade.⁶ Jihadists are exploiting these mounting grievances in Peuhl and other disenfranchised groups. As government security forces continue to target Peuhl communities for harboring sympathies for jihadists, the jihadists use these prejudices as a basis to recruit from, while also providing security to these communities against the abuses of the state and communal militias.

Jihadists' move southward into the Littorals was first seen along transhumance corridors. Local recruits with familiarity of these corridors, were pulled southward along them, in search of safe resting spaces in the dense forests during counterterrorism operations. The W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) Park Complex straddling Niger, Burkina Faso and Benin (see Figure 1), and Comoé National Park in Côte d'Ivoire, offer dense forest cover in what is largely 'ungoverned space'; this makes aerial surveillance challenging and provides jihadists with space for resting and training. They cooperate with other actors such as communal militias, artisanal gold miners, criminal groups and traffickers - who thrive in these lawless areas and have an interest in maintaining state absence or weakening state

⁴ The video in question, featured Iyad ag Ghaly, Amadou Koufra and Abdelmalek Droukdel participating in a summit meeting that laid the plans for JNIM's expansion into the Littoral States. Roger, B., "Côte d'Ivoire - Benin: French Intelligence Warn of Jihadist Expansion", The Africa Report, February 9, 2021, <https://www.theafricareport.com/63807/cote-divoire-benin-why-french-intelligence-released-footage-of-a-jihadist-meeting/>

⁵ Aning, K., Abdallah, M., "Islamic Radicalisation and Violence in Ghana", Conflict, Security & Development, 13:2, May 2013, 149-167, DOI: 10.1080/14678802.2013.796206

⁶ Bisson, L., Cottyn, I., De Bruijne, K., Molenaar, F., "Between Hope and Despair - Pastoralist Adaptation in Burkina Faso, Clingendael Institute, <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/between-hope-and-despair.pdf>

presence, to preserve their illicit economy.⁷ Therefore, interventions to mitigate the spread of violent extremism need to focus on these issues, where the state’s role is marginal.

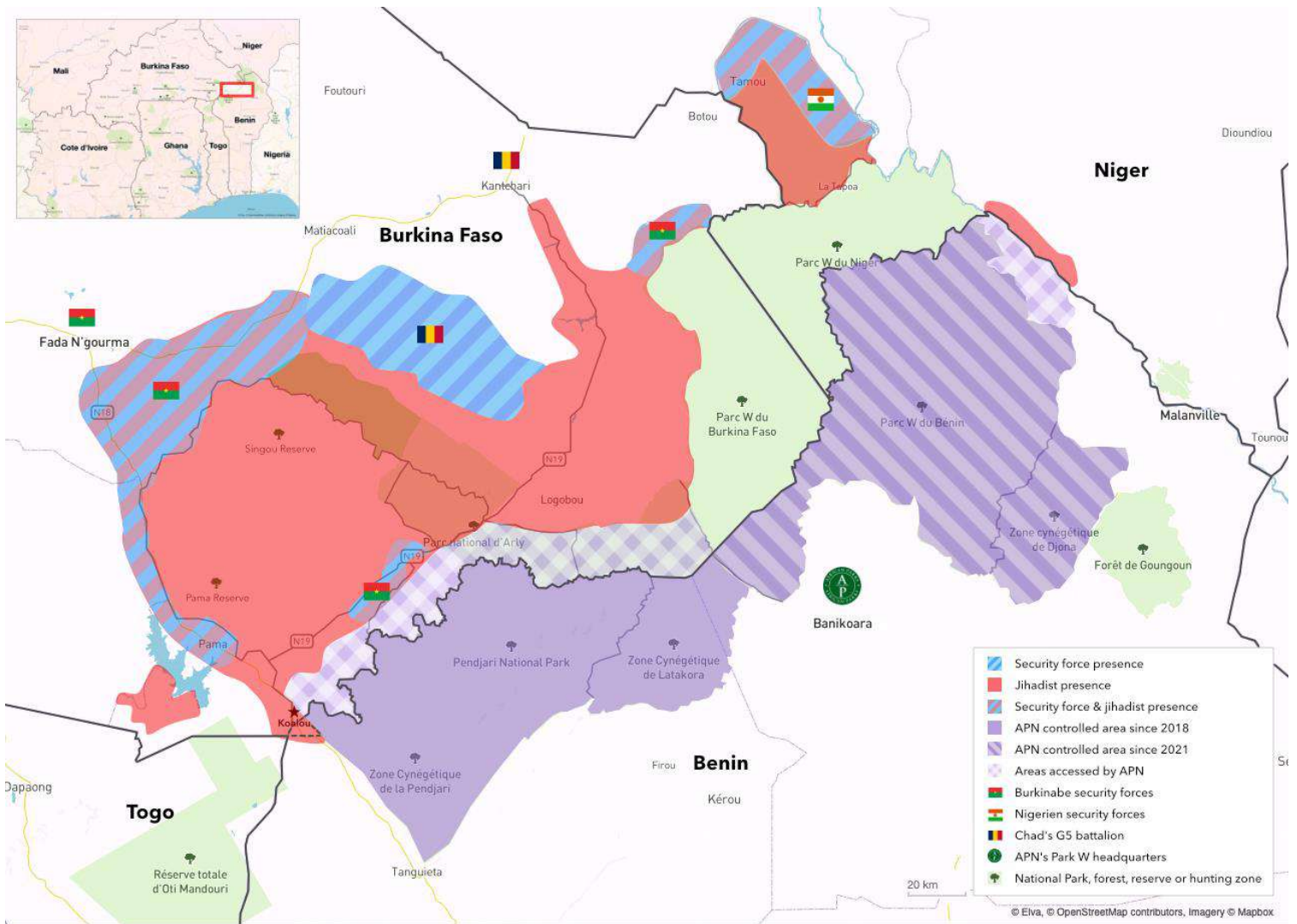


Figure 1. Estimated presence of security forces (blue), jihadists affiliated with ISGS and JNIM (red), African Parks Network rangers (purple), and areas contested by security forces and jihadists (blue and red) in and around the WAP Complex in Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger. Elva, 2021.⁸

⁷ Thérroux-Benoni, L.-A., Adam, N., “Hard Counter-Terrorism Lessons from the Sahel for West Africa’s Coastal States, ISS Regional Office for West Africa, the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, June 5, 2019, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/hard-counter-terrorism-lessons-from-the-sahel-for-west-africas-coastal-states>

⁸ The country flag represents the affiliation of the security force. This includes a Chadian G5 battalion, which has been moved from northern Burkina Faso to support Burkinabe forces in clearing the park complex, and is stationed in Kantchari. All shaded areas are approximations and the areas of Park W in Burkina Faso and Niger left unshaded is due to insufficient data on the extent of jihadist presence there.

Our research showed signs that jihadists appear to move freely through **Niger**'s southwest Tillabéri region into Park W, which they use to cross through Benin and onward into northwest Nigeria. It is theorized that these corridors connect ISGS with ISIS West African Province (ISWAP), which is supported by evidence of these jihadists moving through the Dosso region with some level of impunity. ISGS and elements of JNIM are also present throughout the WAP Complex and the surrounding areas of **Burkina Faso**'s southeast region, near Pama, Logobou, Diapaga, Kantchari and Tamou. As a result, **Benin** is experiencing a growing presence of jihadists in its northern regions, particularly around Tanguieta (bordering Burkina Faso and Togo), in parts of the parks, on a stretch from Pekinga to Malanville (bordering Niger), and from Nikki to Segbana (bordering Kainji Forest in Nigeria).

Since 2019, the southwestern regions of **Burkina Faso** have seen an escalation of jihadist presence from JNIM's Katibat Macina, who are present in the Cascades region and in the forests along the Ivorian border. This explains why **Côte d'Ivoire** saw a major escalation of violent extremism throughout 2020, including its first jihadist attacks since the 2016 Grand Bassam incident. In response, the Ivorian government recently declared the Kong Department (Savanes District) a military zone. The data also captured evidence of regular movement of jihadists from Mali into Côte d'Ivoire's northwest, which respondents claimed had been taking place for some time, detailing how these jihadists were involved in trafficking of drugs, arms and artisanal gold.

Ghana faces a lower risk of jihadist spillover from the Sahel. Nonetheless the Bawku district (bordering Burkina Faso and Togo) and the Sissala East district bordering the Nazinga Forest in Burkina Faso have been experiencing increasing spillover violent extremist related activity. These threats, coupled with weaker communal resilience that is tied to chieftaincy conflicts and illicit trafficking, should be viewed cautiously as possible pull factors for jihadists. Research in **Togo** produced no first-hand reports of jihadist presence in the Savanes region, but there are concerns in Cinkassé and Gouloungoussi of rising instability related to events in Burkina Faso and Ghana's Bawku region. Furthermore, the supply chain that feeds and finances jihadists in the Sahel, is thriving in the market towns of northern Togo and Ghana, so while jihadists do not have a noteworthy presence there, the pull factors that might draw them to these communities are well established.

Tackling an Insurgency with Localized Solutions

In response to these threats, there are now a variety of multilateral counterterrorism missions and efforts underway in the Sahel and across West Africa. However, these kinetic efforts alone do not sustainably eliminate jihadist threats - and in some cases, they have actually exacerbated the insurgency problem.⁹ One major draw towards jihadism for some civilians is that ISGS and JNIM provide an alternative security source, when government forces either fail to effectively respond to crises, or inadvertently target civilians instead. This creates an insurgency instead of a terrorism

⁹ "The Risk of Jihadist Contagion in West Africa", *Crisis Group*, Briefing N°149 / Africa, December 20, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/côte-divoire/b149-lafrique-de-louest-face-au-risque-de-contagion-jihadiste>

problem - wherein the civilian population is being recruited by jihadists with political motivations against the states.

So what can be done? The current approaches fail to address the spiraling crisis. As events in Burkina Faso illustrate, ignoring spiking intercommunal violence as a future indicator of jihadist expansion could mean that by the time the governments do engage, the conflict might have escalated to an untenable state. This is because jihadists are strategic in their approach of exploiting societal and structural vulnerabilities that occur in the periphery, particularly when the social contract between the national government and the civilian population is weakest. Jihadists capitalize on poverty and unemployment, the absence of basic services, and local populations' perception of social and political marginalization. They fill the void with minimal but tangible services, thus building "quasi-governance" to replace the state.¹⁰

In most cases where we point to risks of jihadist expansion into the Littoral states, we are talking about specific pockets of instability that experience this absence of the state. These are political issues that require interventions focused on inclusivity, and while it is not the immediate solution, good governance and economic development should be the primary long-term objectives to ensure stability.

Governance programming, however, can easily fail. Too often programs focus on building the capacity of governments that donors are wary of openly criticizing. So instead, programs tend to either bolster bad government actors, or build governance channels that do not fit into the existing bureaucracy. For example, Several Nigerien government officials echoed concerns about the multiple layers of governance and early warning systems that NGOs had developed in Tillabéri and Diffa, instead of reforming the existing government. These officials claimed that these parallel structures create confusion for the target beneficiaries about which system to trust - their government or the parallel structure that the international community created.¹¹ They requested that this study recommend donors to recalibrate their approach to 'governance and democracy programs' and avoid creating competing systems.

These root causes of illegitimate governments are rarely addressed through governance programming - endemic corruption, aging leadership, cronyism, and the failure to secure their borders. Interventions require a clear strategy that deals with structural causes of corruption and mismanagement, but also acknowledges the importance of building democratic control of security forces that collaborate with civilians in asymmetric conflict environments.¹² **Countering violent extremism should be a civilian-led counterinsurgency effort that focuses on civil-military engagement in the short term, and economic and social development projects that mitigate the root causes of insurgencies in the long-term.**

¹⁰ Interview with Senior U.S. government official, March 2021.

¹¹ Interview with Nigerien government official, March 2020.

¹² Thurston, A., "The Hollowness of Governance Talk in and about the Sahel", Istituto Per Gli Studi Di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), April 13, 2021, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/hollowness-governance-talk-and-about-sahel-30026>

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Cross-Cutting Recommendations

The intra-state dynamics and vulnerabilities that predated the insurgencies in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso - rampant underdevelopment, fragile governments, fraught civil-military relationships, intercommunal conflicts, and a thriving illicit economy - are also present in the Littoral States. Furthermore, the supply chains that finance and supply jihadism in the Sahel, both start and end in the focus countries of this study. The connectivity is ever present, so it is critical that the red flags that premeditate a looming jihadist crisis are addressed.

While each of the six countries presents a unique set of conditions and challenges, there are four cross-cutting factors that require attention throughout the region. The first section outlines interventions that are civilian-driven, and can be carried out by cooperation agencies and diplomatic partnerships. These are categorized as (1) promoting **good governance and accountability**, and (2) **civil society** engagement. The second series of recommendations focuses narrowly on interventions that require a 3D approach (defense, diplomacy and development) for engagement: (3) **multilateral and bilateral coordination on counterterrorism** and (4) **civil-military cooperation**. Each recommendation is followed by a (set of) related programs, identified by Elva, to support donors in knowledge-sharing and avoiding duplication of efforts.

Governance and Accountability

Elections throughout West Africa in 2020-2021 signaled a weakening of democracy across the region. Pre-election opposition protests and demonstrations in Niger, Côte d'Ivoire and Benin were violently dispersed by security forces, while Mali's March 2020 elections culminated in a military coup that overthrew the government in August 2020, followed by another military coup in May 2021. In a region that has experienced multiple coup d'états since decolonization in the 1960s, jihadists know that political grievances are a quick entry point to gain traction with communities and disrupt the political dialogue.

Promote Good Governance: Supporting governance in the Sahel has, in many cases, resulted in supporting the capacity of institutions and individuals that are wrought with corruption and failure, particularly from the standpoint of the citizens who are deciding between state and non-state actors for provision of services.¹³ Many of those in power - whether there through democracy or not - have lost legitimacy through widespread corruption, cronyism, and the inability to protect citizens in the periphery.

¹³ Thurston, "The Hollowness of Governance Talk in and about the Sahel", *ibid.*

Recommendations: To achieve a balanced approach, donors need to reorient their position on promoting governance, by not simply supporting the government in power. Anti-corruption programming should be at the core of democracy, governance, and electoral projects. Accountable governance programming should be based on enhanced conditionality, such that donor assistance is contingent on governments combating corruption.¹⁴ Better recruitment and staffing practices in government that promote a meritocracy, alongside a financial audit of government spending, are first steps towards good governance and accountability. Additionally, emboldening civil society by bolstering their capabilities at the local level is critical in order to fill that ‘governance’ gap. However, donors need to avoid building parallel governance systems in target communities, which can have the after-effect of eroding the legitimacy of the state.¹⁵ **Related programs** include a number of mainly US-funded initiatives in the region that have an accountability component, namely USAID’s \$20 million Burkina Faso Governance Activity, their \$1 million Accountability for Development program in northern Côte d’Ivoire and their ongoing \$4 million program in Ghana to strengthen government accountability, electoral processes and conflict management. Germany is funding a similar, \$12 million “Citizenship, Decentralization and Local Development” program in the Boucle du Mouhoun region of Burkina Faso.

Access to Justice and Governance: Access to justice appears to be the primary complaint of civilians that are politically and socio-economically marginalized. Jihadists have taken advantage of this gap in services, and in some places have offered access to sharia justice and rule of law. Therefore, providing basic access to rule of law can be a first effort in countering reliance on, and influence of non-state actors.

Recommendations: Justice provision to remote communities can occur via deployment of mobile courts to regularly manage local legal matters such as land disputes and intercommunal conflicts. At the national level, each country requires terrorism laws in their penal code, a national counterterrorism strategy and an action plan that elaborates the nuances of adjudicating cases related to terrorism for domestic and foreign terrorists. To ensure government legitimacy, the national court system should take the lead on decentralizing its judges and lawyers, and deploying them to regional courts that might have insufficient personnel to review and adjudicate legal cases in a timely fashion. **Related programs** include the US State Department’s support for the development of Niger’s counterterrorism court and related legislation;¹⁶ Dutch government’s \$22 million program implemented by UNODC and IDLO to promote access to justice in Burkina Faso,

¹⁴ Schmauder, A., Soto-Mayor, G., Goxho, D., “Unpacking Governance within the EU’s Sahel Strategy”, Clingendael Institute, 21 December 2020, <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/unpacking-governance-within-eus-sahel-strategy>

¹⁵ *Inclusion of specific organizations in the recommendations is not an endorsement of them or their activities. It is a recognition of their presence in the country and/or subject expertise, as identified through donor and implementer interviews, and a mapping of programs. For a complete list of over 180 programs, refer to Elva’s overview of stabilization and P/CVE programs in the region at program-mapping.elva.org.*

¹⁶ *Niger’s 2017 addendum to its penal code, which included a law on terrorism, an action plan and the 2018 amendment on defections, are key examples of sophisticated approaches to managing complex terrorism cases, when there is limited infrastructure to deal with these issues. “Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Niger”, Bureau of Counterterrorism, US Department of State, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/niger/>*

Mali and Niger; and the EU Delegation in Ghana has included an access to governance component in their \$6 million NORPREVSEC program.

Civil Society

Decentralization after colonization was a lofty goal of many states in West Africa, due to sectarian divides, lack of a cohesive national identity, and reduced capacity to provide basic services to constituents in the periphery, including securing the borders from external threats. In the absence of accountable government entities, aid programs work locally to engage communities and bolster civil society and traditional (or communal) entities to fill these gaps, so that constituents do not turn to armed groups and jihadists as a proxy.

Social and Political Marginalization: Ideological and religious recruitment by jihadists is not as much the driving force towards jihadism as it was once believed. The associative religious factor is a means by which jihadist groups connect with the local community on a social and political level, once in-roads have already been made. In Niger and Burkina Faso, ISGS and JNIM are using local grievances - such as the erosion of the social contract with the state, and the perception of social and political marginalization based on ethnic identity - to recruit, and adapt to the local context when expanding their area of influence. This has been a successful method for making in-roads in a region where the Peuhl community are typically on the periphery of society, due to their own traditional norms. Throughout the research, respondents point to the Peuhl as the purveyors of jihadism and violence in their communities, and the ones who will bring violent extremism into the Littoral states. They also echoed similar concerns regarding traditional militias like Dozo fraternities, Mossi and Koglweogo.

Recommendations: Donors - as well as the host nations - need to better examine local dynamics and provide a balanced approach to 'social cohesion' projects that is predicated on building trust in the government services.¹⁷ This first, and most importantly, requires a more detailed understanding of the local dynamics, traditions, and the history of conflicts. Programs should then initiate dialogue with community leaders associated with jihadists or those perceived to be at-risk of radicalization. Sensitization campaigns can socialize at-risk groups and promote P/CVE messaging. These should focus on promoting government services and dialogue with local authorities as a means to connect civilians with their local- and national-level officials. However, these types of programs - promoting the government and its services - require the government to have the capabilities to deliver on these promises. **Related programs** mostly consist of social cohesion initiatives, which are a stated objective in over 20% of all the stabilization programs surveyed in the mapping. Most donors include social cohesion in large programs, but the UN

¹⁷ A recent Mercy Corps study on the effectiveness of social cohesion projects highlighted that the efficacy of mitigating VE through these interventions is debatable, unless they are very specifically tailored to CVE narratives. Lichtenheld, A., Inks, L., and Sheely, R. 2021. Understanding the Links Between Social Cohesion and Violence: Evidence from Niger. Washington, D.C.: Mercy Corps.

Peacebuilding Fund in particular funds a large number of social cohesion-only initiatives in Burkina Faso, Niger and Côte d'Ivoire. These are usually implemented by UN agencies such as UNDP. Interpeace and Indigo CI also implement a number of programs in Côte d'Ivoire, while Search for Common Ground is active in the Sahel.

Customary and Traditional Law: Land restitution and property rights are a source of tension that, in leading to sectarian and intercommunal violence, has become an entry point for jihadist groups via localized conflict resolution. Land inheritance, access, and farmer-herder violence, all stem in part from misunderstandings of land ownership, national and local laws, the history of colonial and post-colonial legal regimes, and their interpretation of communal law's role in localized conflicts.

Recommendations: Governments should re-engage politically and legally in traditional land transference rights. Donors can guide this process by providing the tools and know-how for legal reforms, through workshops and embedded consultants. This can be done equitably by restructuring the legality of land transactions and commercial activity in communities where this breeds tension. Implementers will need to review existing legal instruments, engage local and national government officials, and civil society actors who can verify local needs, and inform the policy at the national level. This may require capacity building of the local courts and archives, which would include salaries, training, and local mediation projects. This will result in new or modified legislation on land rights, and protection of common areas for farming and herding. No **related programs** were identified for this recommendation.

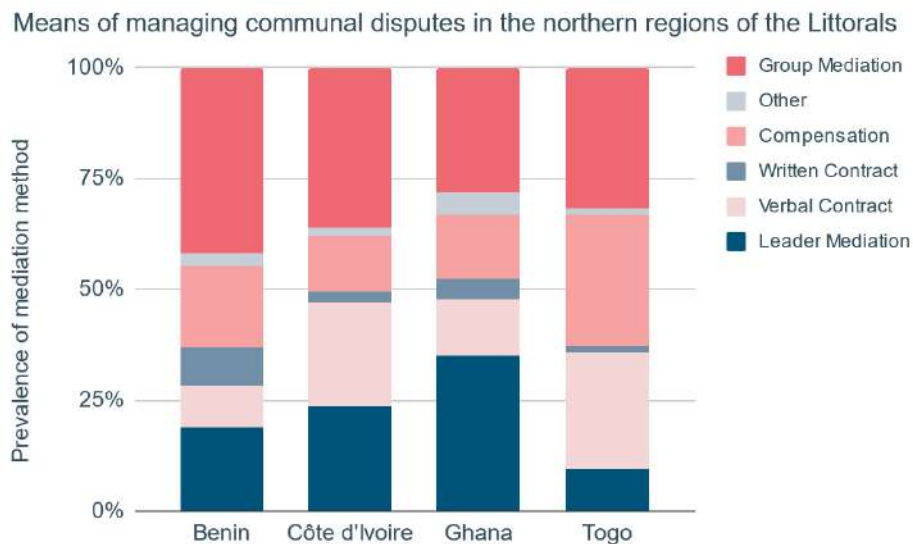


Figure 2. Data is based on responses of 262 key informants in the Littoral states in the November 2020 round of data collection. Respondents could select more than one option. Elva, 2021.

Multilateral and Bilateral Coordination on Counterterrorism

West Africa's security operations span the G5 Sahel, Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad region, and the UN mission in Mali, MINUSMA, among others. Recent additions at the sub-regional level include Taskforce Takuba and the Accra Initiative. In May 2018, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Togo conducted Operation Koudalgou along their shared borders, leading to the arrest of over 200 suspects, with half of them interdicted in Togo. Operation Koudalgou II followed in November 2018 in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, culminating in Operation Koudalgou III, in Togo and Ghana in November 2019, resulting in another 170 arrests of suspected jihadists.^{18,19}

Bolstering Regional and Sub-regional Alliances: Many countries in the region have bilateral cross-border arrangements as well. Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso conducted offensives against Katibat Macina on their shared border in 2020, and Benin and Burkina Faso have an Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) sharing arrangement over the WAP Complex. Although these multilateral efforts have resulted in the dismantling of training camps, and interdiction of presumed jihadists, they remain unable to achieve coherent and coordinated end states.

For example, operations conducted by the Chadian element of the G5 Sahel in late 2020, pushed jihadists in Burkina Faso's Est region into northern Benin. Beninese security forces, not being a G5 Member, were not able to effectively coordinate with these units, leaving Benin at risk of facing an insurgency as a result of another counterterrorism mission. Similarly, the lack of synergy between the Ivorian and Burkinabe militaries during Operation Comoe in 2020 led to fall out at the community level, and eroded some of the trust communities in northern Côte d'Ivoire had in their military counterparts.

Recommendations: Littoral states should seek at least observer status membership at the G5 Sahel Command in Mali and the Secretariat in Mauritania. These countries should engage more frequently and have regular counterterrorism summits between heads of states and chiefs of defense. However, coordination at the brigade level is also critical. We recommend regular joint training activities between forces to address this. **Related programs** include the French and EUTF funded \$12 million program, implemented by CIVIPOL to improve coordination between the G5 Sahel partners; and the completed \$10 million, GAR-SI program funded by the European Commission and implemented by Spain's Guardia Civil and FIIAPP, to improve Burkinabe security force deployments to remote and border communities, and reinforce cross-border cooperation in the Sahel.

¹⁸ Matongbada, M., "Stopping the Spread of Terror Onto West Africa's Coast", October 30, 2018, ISS Africa, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/stopping-the-spread-of-terror-onto-west-africas-coast>

¹⁹ *The Accra Initiative was officially launched in September 2017, with Benin, Ghana, Togo and Côte d'Ivoire as members, and Niger and Burkina Faso as observers. It has three pillars: information and intelligence sharing; training of security and intelligence personnel; and conducting joint cross-border military operations to sustain border security.* Kwarkye, Sampson; Abatan, Ella Jeannine; Matongbada, Michael. "Can the Accra Initiative prevent terrorism in West African Coastal States?" Institute for Security Studies. 30 September 2019. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-the-accra-initiative-prevent-terrorism-in-west-african-coastal-states>

Cross-border ISR, Information and Security-burden Sharing: Multilateral engagements often lack coordination, transparency, and a centralized objective with a shared doctrine, which can lead to incoherent strategies on the ground. This lack of synergy has ramifications for the effectiveness of counterterrorism missions. Since borders in the Sahel and the Littorals are porous, when governments pursue counterterrorism initiatives, jihadists fleeing kinetic operations simply move across the border, and relocate to a new area. Instead of shrinking the areas of jihadist control, counterterrorism measures have conversely had the effect of expanding their regional presence. As a result, jihadists now take refuge from kinetic operations in the Littorals, allowing them to ingratiate themselves with the local populations, and connect with jihadists as far as the Lake Chad Region. This connectivity between jihadists groups across the region points to a potential expansion strategy of the Islamic State, in particular through local affiliates, showcasing the groups' capacity to rapidly adapt to changing dynamics. Understanding these relationships between jihadists and the local communities they operate by and through is critical to informing the efficacy of information and intelligence sharing programs between states.

Recommendations: To avoid disruptions to local livelihoods – which can serve as a major push factor towards jihadism – and strengthen their counterterrorism response, governments should set up shared intelligence and security apparatuses. This can be done by building bilateral and multilateral legal instruments that coordinate cross-border hot pursuit, fusion intelligence cells, shared ISR platforms, joint training and missions, and regional development or CVE projects. Donors can support the Littoral states through pre-existing regional initiatives, by coordinating and deconflicting foreign assistance. This type of coordination will be critical when operating in the same environments as private security actors, which is active in counterterrorism operations in the Park W-Arly-Pendjari Complex. It is critical to be aware of their efforts in the park, and coordinate or deconflict where possible.²⁰ **Related programs** include the US support for the development of the Accra Initiative to be a regional coordination instrument. US Special Operations Forces and France's Barkhane also provide security assistance to the G5 Sahel and MNJTF. Multiple Western partner forces conduct direct train-and-equip programs with various African security forces in the region, including through the annual Flintlock exercise. At the national level, France's CIVIPOL is supporting Côte d'Ivoire's security forces' intelligence capacity with almost \$3 million in funding from the EU's IcSP mechanism.

Shared Biometric Databases: In May 2020, Interpol supported Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire's management of biometric intelligence and data collection after the joint Operation Comoe, which cleared a jihadist base in Burkina Faso, and detained Burkinabe JNIM leader, Ali Sidibe, and 40

²⁰ There are multiple conservation NGOs operating in the park areas of the Sahel and the Littorals, including APN, Chengeta Wildlife, Wildlife Angels, and World Wildlife Foundation. Some of these actors conduct anti-poaching and counterinsurgency training with local security forces, among other activities focused on conservation. It is possible that as jihadists expand their area of interest, some states continue to outsource their security to private forces and conservation NGOs.

others.²¹ A shared database will allow for the free flow of information about suspected individuals between the states that many of these people regularly cross.²²

Recommendations: Donors can support the setting up of shared biometric databases with information on known suspicious persons, criminals, and jihadists. This first requires multilateral and bilateral legislation that approves information sharing and access to judiciary files to cases in each country involved. Additionally, it requires assistance in developing the technological capacity to maintain these systems. Finally, these biometric databases are more effective when they are connected to Interpol and other international partners' internal databases. No **related programs** were identified for this recommendation, however, database sharing efforts are already under development within the G5 Sahel, ECOWAS, and on a bilateral basis between donors and African states.

Strengthen border security: Respondents in border communities across all six countries overwhelmingly requested increased security presence in their communities and more responsive security forces. While border security in the Sahel is an ambitious goal, it has been advanced through, among other projects, IOM's integrated border management system. These target capacity building and strengthening official points of entry.

Recommendations: Donors should prioritize more nuanced approaches to border security than tactical control of borders, given how vast the borders are. Donors can help host nations instead build capacity of quick reaction forces (QRF) within the gendarmes, police and military units. Setting up well-trained and well-equipped units that are mandated to take on multiple functions, and that can rapidly deploy and respond to crises at the border, may benefit these states more than traditional border security. This would avoid disenfranchising migratory populations such as herders and merchants, who depend on migration and mobility across borders, for access to basic livelihoods. It would also avoid stretching thin already small security forces. **Related programs** include the support for Mali's Antiterrorist Special Forces (FORSTAT) and Niger's counterterrorism police (SCLCT) - both being QRF multi-ministry units designated for force protection, policing, and immediate response to emergencies and attacks.²³

²¹ "Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso Turn to Tech in Counterterrorism", Africa Times, July 29, 2020,

<https://africatimes.com/2020/07/29/cote-divoire-burkina-faso-turn-to-tech-in-counterterrorism/>

²² *Although sharing sensitive data will raise certain concerns with the donor community and the regional parties, shared intelligence networks are critical in a region that is flooded with foreign assistance and has porous borders allowing for the free movement of persons of interest.*

²³ "EUTM Mali and the Special Anti-Terrorist Forces", EUTM Mali Press, April 4, 2020,

<https://eutmmali.eu/eutm-mali-and-the-special-anti-terrorist-forces/>

Civil-Military Cooperation

Since militaries across the region lack the full capacity to properly address insurgencies, there is a critical need for stronger civil-military relationships to build trust between the parties. In Burkina Faso and Niger, the security forces are increasingly taking on a predatory attitude towards the communities they target, as a result of this broken civil-military dynamic. If the relationship is rebuilt, the civilian population can assist the military in counterterrorism operations and restore stability to the areas affected by violent extremism.

Building Trust with Communities: The jihadist insurgency across the Sahel and Littorals requires a counter-insurgency approach that is more nuanced than simply deploying kinetic counterterrorism operations. This approach requires strong relationships, predicated on trust, between at-risk communities and the security forces. Early warning systems can be a successful way to do this, as long as they are integrated into existing systems. For example, Côte d'Ivoire's national early warning centre, CNCMR,²⁴ is one of the more established centres within the ECOWAS newly decentralized early warning program. CNCMR is a fusion cell that aggregates information from both security forces (both military and police) and the civilian population to inform policy and programs. However, even this system, which hinges on trust between the security forces and the community, has been hampered by the unresolved tensions that surfaced during Operation Comoe in 2020 and eroded trust in the government.

Recommendations: Civil-military cooperation can be reinforced by bringing together security forces with community members in the form of town halls, peace committees or traditional ceremonies. Additionally, at-risk communities could be assigned a civil-military support representative, who will speak for them to the security forces, if they are not deployed to that area. This allows parties to build relationships with each other first, then build trust and the networks that rely on this trust, such as early warning systems, key leader engagements, and civilian-led counterinsurgency campaigns. Within these efforts, marginalized communities should be prioritized through sensitive engagements that do not put the community at risk for being targeted by jihadists for presumed collaboration with the government. **Related programs** include USAID OTI's Nigerien Community Cohesion Initiative, and Search for Common Ground's "Terrain d'entente" program on communal relations with security forces in Burkina Faso and their similar interventions in Niger's Diffa and Tillabéri regions. The Swiss organization Coginta is conducting programming with civil society and the security forces in northern Côte d'Ivoire, while WANEP is also well positioned to engage both civil society and local/national authorities.

Creating Pathways for Dialogue and Demobilization: Dialogue with some insurgents should not be ruled out. VEOs are segmented. Foot soldiers, middle managers and leaders don't necessarily pursue the same interests. However, dialogue and negotiation processes (notably Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration, DDR) need to be sequenced properly, and be inclusive, or they risk

²⁴ Centre National de Coordination du Mécanisme de Réponse à l'alerte précoce (CNCMR) is the Ivorian National Early Warning and Response Mechanism (NEWRM) Centre within the ECOWAS early warning network.

deepening sectarian grievances, delegitimizing the state and failing (e.g. Niger's attempt at negotiating defections with ISGS combatants in Tillabéri in 2018).²⁵ This applies to demobilization and defection programs - where promoting a reward, such as an amnesty, for defecting from an insurgency, can lead to corruption and racketeering.²⁶

Recommendations: There are avenues for dialogue at several levels. Whether such negotiations should be held is a complicated question, but the process should be led by national actors who decide on the timing, interlocutors, format and preferred outcomes. Dialogue between combatants and the state can be held openly, in an open venue such as a forum or town hall. This way it can be doubly used as a messaging campaign, by being filmed and broadcasted on local radio, to encourage the view that the government is open to welcoming home defecting ex-combatants. Depending on the context, this could evolve into a formal DDR effort.²⁷ These processes can also be held in closed forums, with behind-the-scenes conversations with key government officials and other international actors, who can bring consultative advice on how to handle defections, peace negotiations, and cessations of hostilities in return for appropriate compromises. **Related programs:** A US Department of State-led effort in Diffa, Niger was a civilian-led counterterrorism initiative that offered exemption from prosecution for voluntarily surrendering Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa Province affiliates and combatants.²⁸ The program was adapted from Nigeria's Operation Safe Corridor, which similarly offered a rehabilitation program to defecting Boko Haram members.

²⁵ "Sidelining the Islamic State in Niger's Tillabery", Report n°289, International Crisis Group, June 3, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/289-sidelining-islamic-state-nigers-tillabery>

²⁶ *In these environments, the state risks creating an opportunity for jihadists to come in as defectors, receive some form of amnesty and recovery aid, while continuing to moonlight as jihadists when convenient.*

²⁷ *Traditional DDR is complex, and requires a national legal framework that protects the process, and a peace agreement, that creates a cessation of hostilities. However in these terrorism insurgencies in the Sahel, a cessation of hostilities is unlikely. The strategy behind a defections program, instead of DDR, is to pull combatants off the battlefield instead, in order to shrink the size of the insurgency. Defection pipelines should be carried out through a concerted and coordinated effort with the military and intelligence units, but can be led by the civilian population and the NGO community.*

²⁸ Bearak, M., "Boko Haram Brought Terror to Niger. Can a Defectors Program Bring Peace?", Washington Post, November 20, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/world/wp/2018/11/20/feature/boko-haram-brought-terror-to-niger-can-a-defectors-program-bring-peace/>

Methodology

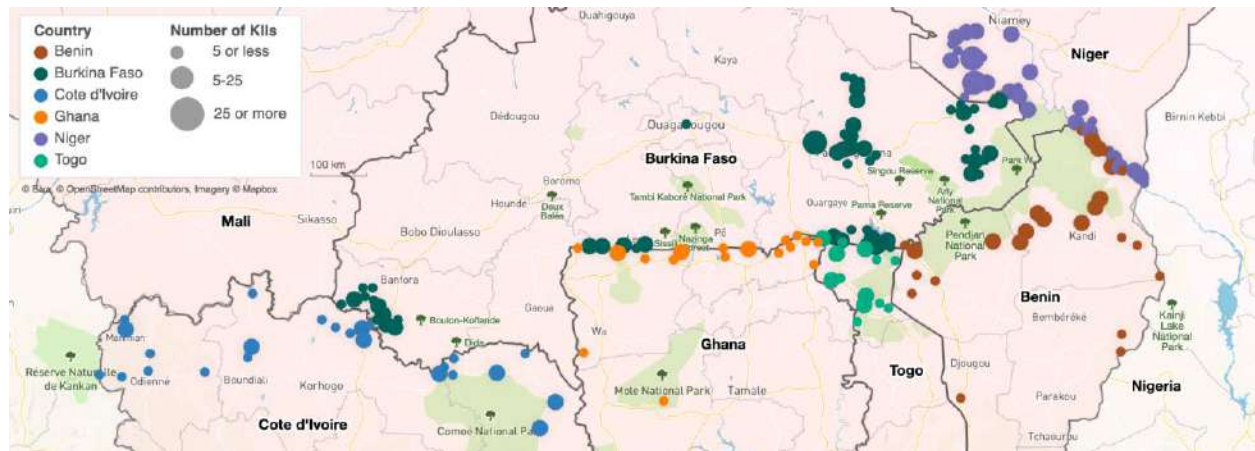


Figure 3. Regional overview of 330 key informant interview location sites, Elva, 2021.

This study was initiated by the Netherlands' MFA to understand the risk of jihadist expansion from the Sahel states (specifically Burkina Faso and Niger), southward into the neighboring Littoral states (Benin, Togo, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire). The research was designed and conducted by a team of Elva staff, consultants, and enumerators from WANEP and CIRA. Data collection was carried out via focus group discussions (FGDs), Key Informant (KI) interviews and expert interviews - often referred to in the text as *respondents* - through open ended and semi-structured guides. This report draws from interviews with 1,250 key informants and local experts across 330 border communities in six countries, carried out over the course of three data collection rounds between March 2020 and May 2021.

In this report, we define any group associated with ISGS or JNIM here to be a *jihadist*, and the activity associated with jihadists to be *violent extremism*. Groups that are aligned with ethnic and self-defense groups, such as the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA), Dozo Hunters, Koglweogo, Dan Na Ambassagou, are generally referred to as *communal militias*. The ethnic group of the Fulfulde language is Fulani in English and Peuhl in French; since we mostly cover francophone countries, we herein refer to this group as *Peuhl*.

KIs that we interviewed include community members, women and youth representatives, merchants, pastoralists, hunters, truck or taxi drivers, school teachers, religious authorities and laborers such as miners. Expert interviewees are academics, government officials, local and traditional authorities, and civil society or NGO staff. Locations for data collection were determined by overlaying incident reporting from databases (e.g. ECOWARN and ACLED) in communities on the northern borders of the Littoral states and southern borders of the Sahel States that were assumed to draw jihadist interest or activity. These included major border crossings, markets, centers of prayer, pastoralist and transhumance corridors, artisanal and industrial mines, forests and major waterways.

Country Analyses

The following chapters present an in-depth analysis of each country, based on 15 months of mixed methodology research. Each chapter details (1) an assessment of the extent of jihadist presence and influence in the Littoral states; (2) an overview of resilience mechanisms in place to tackle the spillover of violent extremism from the Sahel; and (3) a set of thematically specific and geographically targeted recommendations for stabilization-related programming along the borders of the Sahel and the Littoral states of West Africa.

Benin

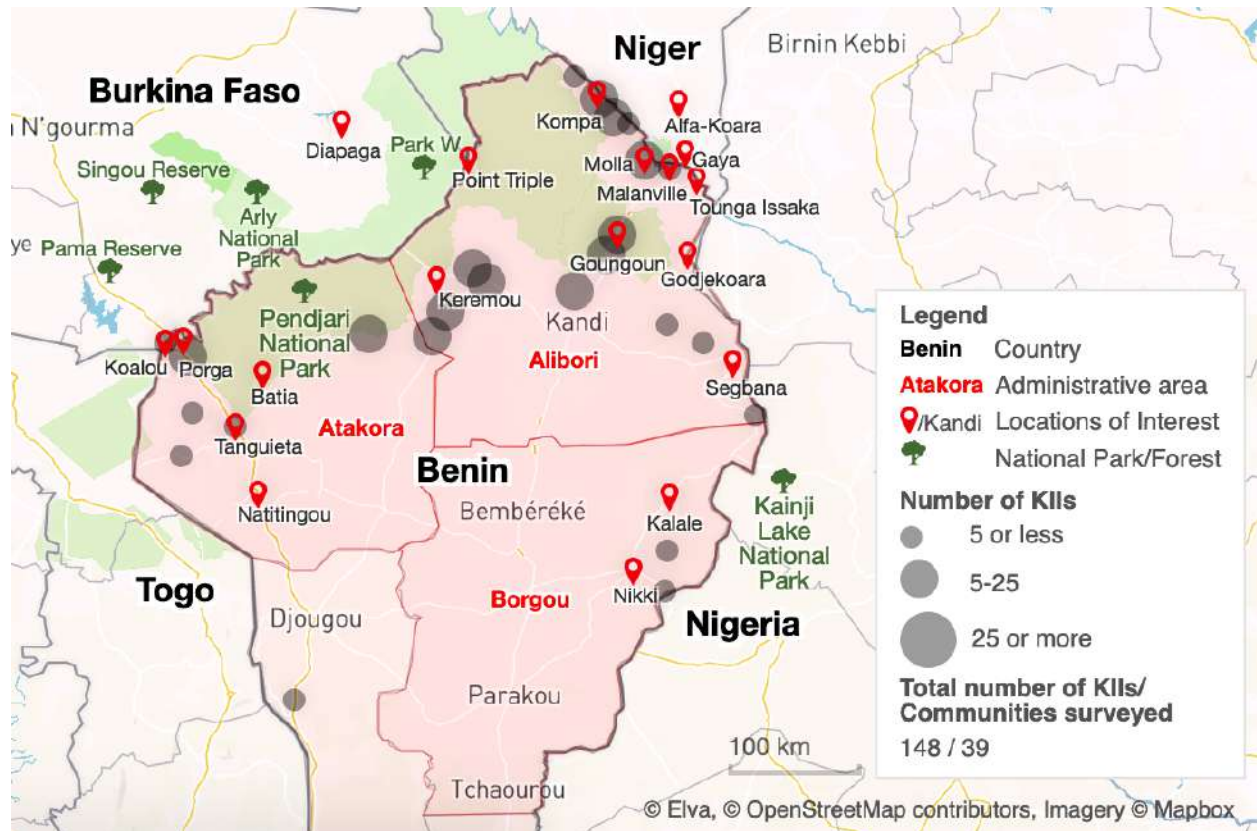


Figure 4. Locations of interviews (grey) and locations of interest (red) referred to in Benin’s northern Alibori, Atakora and Borgou departments, Elva, 2021.

Introduction

Benin shares a 660 km border with Park W, Burkina Faso and Niger to the north, where ISGS and ISIS West Africa Province (ISWAP) come together and operate openly.²⁹ Most Beninese located in these border towns felt relatively secure during the first round of data collection, in March 2020, citing minimal jihadist efforts to garner influence or pass through their communities. However, later rounds of data collection and expert interviews concluded that concern of spillover violent extremism from neighboring countries is now rapidly taking place.³⁰ The February 9, 2020 attack on a police station in Keremou (Banikoara, Alibori region) and the kidnapping of two French tourists in Pendjari Park in May 2019, signaled that terrorism was an imminent risk to Benin’s stability.

²⁹ “40% of respondents said they have witnessed VEOs in their community, with 18% of respondents saying that they were not sure, but admitted to having seen suspicious persons. One-third of the KIIs interviewed cited ISGS as the group present in their communities in the past 3-6 months.” Tracking VEO Spillover from the Sahel into Littoral West Africa. November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 13.

³⁰ Focus Group Discussion, Karimama, March 13, 2021.

There are indications that jihadists have been in Benin for a while - though the shift we saw in perceptions of security noted above, was because the jihadists' approach and the extent of their presence has changed recently, leading to this spike in concerns. As early as late 2018, jihadists from Burkina Faso would use the park in Benin as a resting area, where they would restock on supplies, and take shelter from ongoing counterterrorism campaigns in the Sahel - mostly in Mali and Burkina Faso. By early 2020, jihadists' movement through the communities near Pendjari Park appeared to be more permanent, and were coupled with ideological preaching and attempts to ingratiate themselves with the local population.³¹

Following the February 2020 attack on the police station in the northern Alibori region, the government of Benin closed its main border crossing with Niger, allowing pastoralists only a two-week window to ferry their herds south during the dry season before they had to leave again. These transhumance corridors normally welcome tens of thousands of herds annually, allowing jihadists and criminal groups to easily blend in with local herders when they cross borders between the Sahel and Littoral states.³² Between 50-90% of community members in these northern border towns rely on cross border movement and trade to facilitate livelihoods in Benin. Obstructing these access ways has been destabilizing to the basic livelihoods of these communities and border closures in 2020 have had serious ramifications on the local markets across the region. The full impact of these closures on the social contract between the remote communities and the state is yet to be seen, though we can anticipate that the relationship was weakened, leaving entry points for armed groups to gain influential roles. The government also extended its contract with the African Parks Network (APN) to patrol further north into Park W for jihadists in late 2020, thus limiting access to the park area to herders and communities that rely on it for movement and livelihoods.

Despite efforts undertaken by the government to manage the pending threats of violent extremism from the Sahel, the government of Benin seems intent on shutting down access to grazing and farming areas, in order to clear the country of presumed-jihadists, while also keeping reports of incidents out of the public eye. For example, throughout 2020, media outlets that reported on violence in the North were blacklisted and shut down by the government.³³ This step was likely taken in order to preserve the image of Benin's stability.

³¹ FGD, Karimama, March 2021, *ibid*.

³² Focus Group Discussion, Malanville, June 2020.

³³ Interview with Kars de Bruijne, Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael Institute, March 2021.

Intercommunal issues

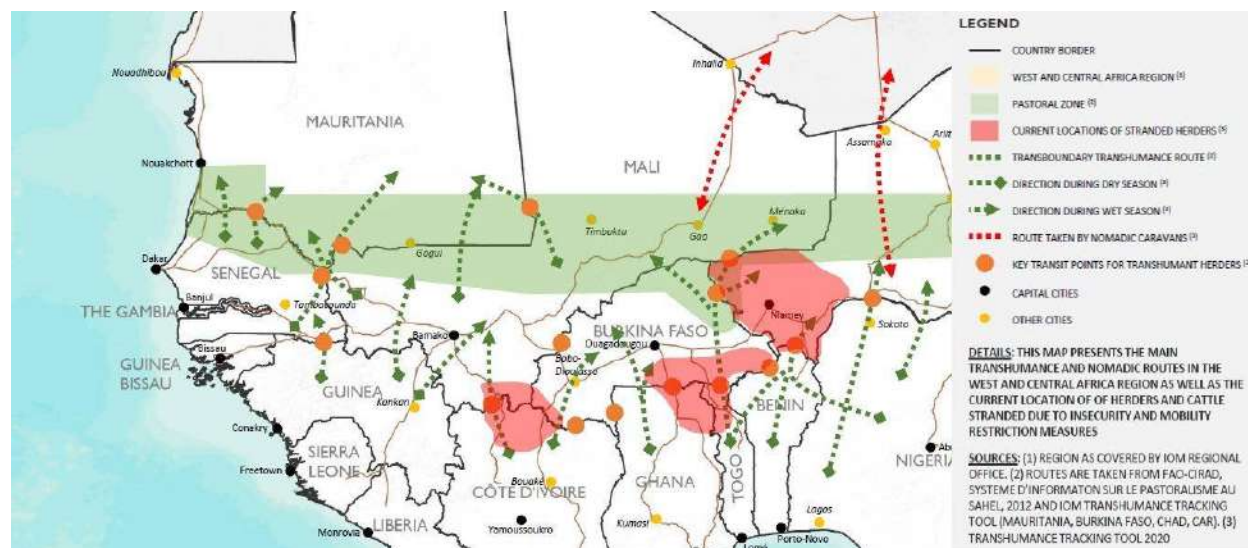


Figure 5. IOM DTM West and Central Africa Transhumance Map: “1.5 million animals and 57,000 transhumance herders are stranded along the border separating Sahelian countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger) from coastal countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin) for security or mobility restriction reasons.³⁴”

The gradual erosion of the symbiosis that once existed between communities, farmers and herders, was in part due to the commercialization of the markets in Benin.³⁵ The national government’s goal to modernize and commercialize Benin’s economy has meant that the political economy of pastoralism has been somewhat uprooted, with implications for Beninese and Sahelian farmers and herders that relied on these local markets in the north.³⁶ This eventually eroded intercommunal relations, as the market economies of these trade centers shrank. Local and small commercial activity in the north is now mostly centered around those who use the transhumance corridors.

After colonization, Benin’s efforts to decentralize the government, with deployed government officials to the north to replace traditional leaders were not quite successful. As a result, the cohesiveness between the local populations and authorities never came together, and this cleavage still exists today. KIs reported that the police do not respond adequately to incidents and community needs, further emboldening armed groups to act with impunity. Citizens also felt that government leadership and security is increasingly politicized, so reports of grievances, violence and those opposing or contradicting the government’s narrative, are ignored by local authorities. Respondents cited this lack of faith in government as a leading reason for why communities turn to armed groups (communal

³⁴ “Regional Mobility Mapping - West and Central Africa”, International Organization for Migration (IOM), January 2021, <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/west-and-central-africa-%E2%80%94-regional-mobility-mapping-january-2021>

³⁵ Djohy, G. 2010. Pastoralism and Socio-technological Transformations in Northern Benin.

³⁶ *This was widely seen recently with Benin’s efforts to install protectionist policies within its cotton industry, and the effects this had on trade with Nigeria, and the smaller farmers and merchants that relied on cross-border trade.*

or jihadists) to defend themselves against raids, banditry and intercommunal violent events.³⁷ Despite frustration with security providers most Beninese respondents said that they receive security from the police, and to a lesser extent the army, but about one-third of respondents also described the presence of traditional and self-defense militias that have a role in society.³⁸

“These [self-defense] associations are focused on improving access to social justice and the living conditions of members of its group... responding to frustrations and stigmatizations based on what we perceive to be social injustice... these social ills are the primary sources of in-security and radicalization.” – Traditional Leader, Malanville, Benin

Violence in the Alibori region increasingly involves non-state armed groups, and many of these incidents have occurred between armed Peuhl and farmers, or between park rangers and security forces against poachers and traffickers.³⁹ Additionally, Dozo hunter groups are active and organized in the Alibori department, and are increasingly active in Atakora, targeting the Peuhl communities there.⁴⁰ As a result of what we assess to be a rapid escalation in violent incidents throughout the reporting period, the data highlighted an urgent shift in favor of self-defense groups, in the absence of security forces capable of repelling threats from jihadists in the north.

“We want a military base at the border [with Nigeria], or if not, we want authorization from the government to stand up self-defense militias or hunting groups, to protect us.” - Women’s commercial association representative, Tchikandou, Alibori region, March, 2021

Violent Extremism

The Alibori and Atakora regions share a geographic proximity to three theatres of ongoing jihadist insurgencies: a) Burkina Faso’s Est region where ISGS and JNIM cells operate; b) Niger’s Tillabéri and Dosso regions where ISGS operates; and c) northwest Nigeria where gangs and a diverse array of jihadists, including ISWAP, operate.⁴¹

Local authorities and respondents cited a regular transitory presence of armed groups arriving from Burkina Faso and Niger, substantiating the local belief that there are no “homegrown” violent extremists at this point, and any jihadist dynamics in their community originate in the Sahel (ISGS and JNIM) or Lake Chad region (Boko Haram and ISWAP).⁴² Reports of recruitment and attacks remain

³⁷ Focus Group Discussion, Karimama, March 2021.

³⁸ November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 16.

³⁹ Interview with Former Park W employee, currently part-time consultant with African Parks, January 2021.

⁴⁰ Focus Group Discussion, Tanguieta, Atakora Department, March 2021.

⁴¹ Interview with Kars de Bruijne, Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael Institute, March 2021.

⁴² “[None] of the normal indications of [VE] permanence exist, such as preaching, graffitiing buildings, levying taxes or forcing the community to adopt certain religious attire and trends.” November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 14.

sporadic, however, the security environment is rapidly changing. Multiple respondents mention the presence of foreign 'agitators' within certain (Peuhl) communities. While the jihadists from the Sahel are not as present as they are in daily life in Niger and Burkina Faso, respondents fear that the Peuhl have grown increasingly more coordinated. When there are intercommunal attacks on Peuhl communities, the Peuhl have begun to band together across the regions in Benin, and sometimes across borders, to carry out reprisal attacks.⁴³

"The presence of jihadists in our community is increasing. They pass through the Niger river near Tara (Niger) heading southward towards Tounga Babou Lada, Monsey, and the Guene-Karimama crossing point - three piers located on the Benin side of the Niger River. Two jihadists of Tuareg ethnic groups were arrested in Tara by Nigerien security forces." - Interview with Traditional Leader, Alibori region, March 13, 2021

Alibori Region

Respondents felt that armed groups moved freely throughout the Alibori region and that sightings reported to security officers regularly resulted in inaction. Respondents located in Molla, across the border from Gaya, Niger, spoke of arms trafficking being the pull factor for jihadists passing from Burkina Faso and Niger into Benin. Other respondents in the area of Goungoun said that jihadists transited through their town and deliberately did not engage with or create tensions with community members, to avoid detention by security operators.

"Jihadists are not yet operating in Karimama. But they are in the park and the hinterland. They burned down a hotel in the hinterland less than 800m from Benin. In February 2021, they were in Park W (Triple Point) 80m on the Benin side. In 2020, they were in the Kompa area in the park, in Goulabangou. On July 12, 2020, they were seen in Alfa-Koara with 14 men and 7 motorcycles." - Focus Group Discussion, Karimama, March 2021

Data collection revealed several reports of groups of approximately 15-20 foreigners, carrying "advanced weapons", transiting through northern Benin towns, en route to and from Burkina Faso and Nigeria, multiple times in late 2020. The data is corroborated by several sources, including security operators in Benin and associates of APN.⁴⁴ The armed group - which we presume to be associated with ISGS and/or ISWAP - originated from Burkina Faso, and passed through Park W and Goungoun en route to Nigeria. Based on data collected in Niger, it is possible that this group passed through the Torodi department of Tillabéri, via Burkina Faso into Park W, and onward through Benin

⁴³ Focus Group Discussion, Karimama, March 2021.

⁴⁴ Interview with a former guide at hunting reserves around Park Arli in Burkina and Pendjari in Benin, Atakora region. January 28, 2021.

into Nigeria. The data indicated that armed groups, bandits and traffickers regularly use this corridor to move back and forth between Burkina Faso, Niger and northwest Nigeria.

The sources claimed that despite civilians reporting these movements to security officials, the groups continued to freely cross the borders of the three countries and visit Beninese individuals, who were presumed to be facilitators of jihadists. The group numbers reportedly grew, suggesting they were recruiting members among the Beninese. Respondents in Goungoun identified certain Peuhl community members who facilitated the movement of these armed groups, and have since left to join the group, but return intermittently.⁴⁵

Respondents near the border market town of Malanville claimed that there is an ISGS cell operating cross-border, most likely originating in Niger or Burkina Faso.⁴⁶ This group is allegedly moving between villages in Benin and Niger and they sometimes stay up to a month in each town.⁴⁷ Local sources indicated that the group is operating with a certain level of impunity, by moving throughout these towns without concern of security officials. In Wollo Chateaux (Malanville) the leader of the cell is known as “Mr Shangania”.⁴⁸ There were further rumors of recruitment in Mamassy Gourma.⁴⁹

“They [jihadists] cross the Niger river into our town on a regular basis.” - Dendi women’s association representative, Molla, Alibori Department, March, 2021

Respondents cited the town of Tounga Issaka, near Malanville, as the resting spot for an armed group from Zamfara, Nigeria; this is further evidence that the jihadists and armed groups operating in Nigeria are increasingly connected to groups operating in Niger and Burkina Faso, given the proximity of this town to the Sahel.^{50,51} Experts reported jihadist-related activity around Kalale and the Forêts de Trio Rivières (between Kalale and Kandi) that is linked to jihadist activity in Nigeria’s Kainji forest.⁵² This

⁴⁵ Multiple interviews with Key Informants in Goungoun, Alibori region, March 13, 2021.

⁴⁶ *“The VEOs were described as dressing like Tuaregs in “white or black”, with turbans and sheared pants. VEOs spoke French, Arabic, Hausa Fulfulde, and some reportedly spoke Mossi. A handful spoke the local language, Dendi.”* November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 14.

⁴⁷ *“One KI claimed a tell-sign that a stranger is a combatant or [a jihadist] is that he does not act like other ‘visitors’ would, by being kind to the community, engaging in local customs, and eating local foods; instead a VEO member will not engage the community and shy away from customs. One respondent claimed that jihadists were seeking refuge in Benin from authorities pursuing them in Niger. He further claimed that in retaliation against the perception that jihadists are coming into Benin, there are quiet efforts underway by the local population to stop this, by capsizing boats filled with men who appear suspicious, so that they can’t make it into Benin, across the Niger River.”* November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Interview with village chief, Wollo Chateaux, Malanville, Alibori region, January 27, 2021.

⁴⁹ Interview with community leader, Karimama, Alibori region, March 18 2021; *“[Respondents] cited examples of [jihadists] passing through their towns, explaining that these men spoke Arabic or Fulfulde, and chanted “allahu akbar”.*” November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 14.

⁵⁰ Focus Group Discussion with women, Kandi, Alibori region, March 18, 2021.

⁵¹ Interview with a tailor from Lete, Kandi town, Alibori region, March 18, 2021.

⁵² Interview with Kars de Bruijne, Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael Institute, March 2021.

potentially links ISGS and ISWAP, which moved into northwest Nigeria in 2020 and has been staging out of Sokoto, Kaduna and Katsina. According to experts and local sources,⁵³ the Nigerian government is rumoured to be actively targeting the cell in Nigeria, and based on the data, Beninese security forces are now regularly patrolling the roads from Nikki to Kalale, policing for these cells.⁵⁴

Some elements of armed groups in Segbana are assessed to be originally from ethnic groups and communities located inside Park W, who had been pushed out in recent years when the park was being policed for jihadists.⁵⁵ This highlights the likelihood that the armed groups near Nikki, that appear to be aligned with armed groups in Nigeria, have connections to JNIM or ISGS in the Sahel, due to their connection to the park. Furthermore, due to ongoing counterterrorism operations in Burkina Faso and Niger, it is increasingly likely that jihadists operating in the Sahel will actively seek safe haven with family and friends in Nigeria and Benin.

Atakora Region and Pendjari Park

JNIM influence spans Burkina Faso's Est region, southward into Park W and Pendjari Park and reaches into Atakora, near the ungoverned space around Koalou— an area used for supply inside the park bordering the Pama Forest in Burkina Faso. The data corroborated other reports of significant trafficking networks by armed bandits in these areas.⁵⁶

Since APN began operating in Benin, much of the Pendjari Park access has been closed to the movement of jihadists and others that use the park to move, herd and farm (see Resilience section for more details on APN). However, to the west of Porga, jihadists and criminal elements, such as traffickers, have discovered an ungoverned space - a disputed territory between Togo, Burkina Faso and Benin - to freely operate in and through. The main town in this ungoverned space, Koalou, sits on route N-18, which passes through Pama and connects Benin to Burkina Faso. The town, and smaller towns near it, including Tantegea and Gounde, have become lively trading and resting zones for those involved in illicit trafficking, criminal activity and violent extremism. The ungoverned space likely serves as a major pull factor driving jihadists from Burkina Faso and Niger into the Park and into the Littorals.⁵⁷ APN's clearing of jihadists out of the areas of Pendjari Park under their jurisdiction inadvertently resulted in armed groups being pushed to the border with Togo and further southward into Atakora.

⁵³ Interview with Kars de Bruijne, Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael Institute, March 2021.

⁵⁴ Interview with a merchant, Tchikandou, Kandi, Alibori department, March 18, 2021.

⁵⁵ FGD in Kandi, *ibid*.

⁵⁶ Kwarkye S., "Breaking terrorism supply chains in West Africa", ISS Today, *Institute for Security Studies*, June 8, 2020, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/breaking-terrorism-supply-chains-in-west-africa>

⁵⁷ Interview with security and conservation advisor to Beninese authorities, May 2021.

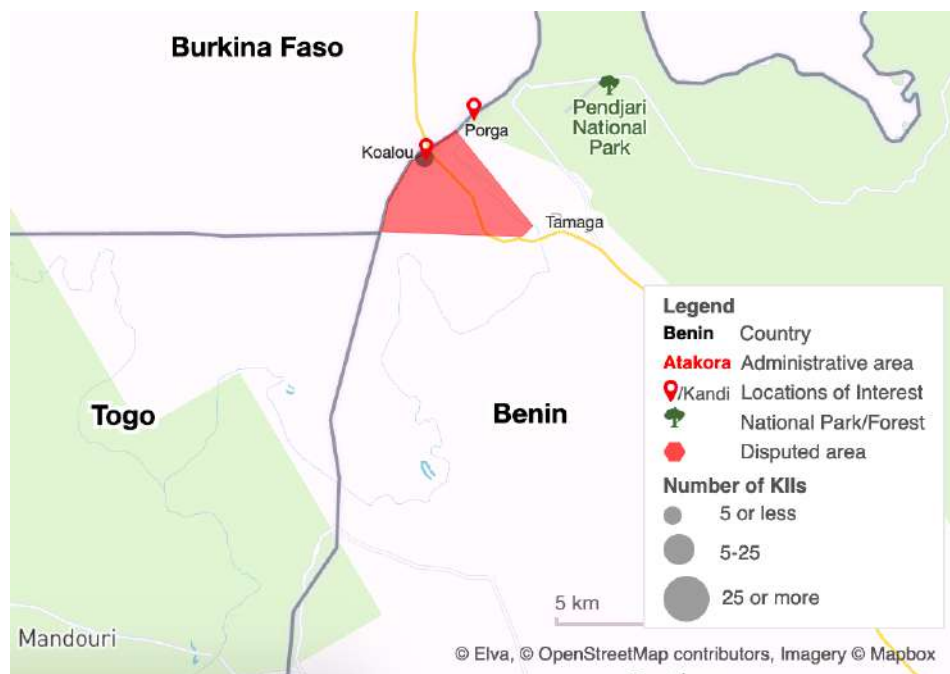


Figure 6. The disputed Koalou area between Benin and Burkina Faso, and their border with Togo.⁵⁸

Respondents explained that jihadists have informants in Tanguieta and the neighboring villages. By January 2020, groups of jihadists were actively operating in Tanguieta and the neighboring region, mobilizing on motorbikes. Upwards of 50 motorcyclists were spotted exiting the park near Tanguieta, heading towards Djougou, with no police interdiction stopping them from moving across the country freely. These groups are suspected to be Burkinabe Peuhl, who are still using Benin for resource resupply and rest when clearing operations are underway in Burkina Faso, where their bases are located.⁵⁹

Interviews with respondents highlighted details on the activities of the local authorities, politics and market events, specifically the reception of trafficked goods. The jihadists are identifiable because they do not speak the local language and are part of the trafficking nexus. They are unemployed but carry with them laptops and other signs of wealth; implying they earn their money from illicit activity. The jihadists and their local facilitators sleep in mosques, and present themselves as salespeople, despite not selling goods. The informants are casing the neighborhoods, collecting information, gauging the population's perception of jihadists and purchasing resources. Beninese in general do not appear receptive to importing jihadism, though the jihadists have successfully recruited youth in

⁵⁸ Note, the shaded area presents an approximation of the total disputed area. Parts of the border between Burkina Faso and Benin remain contested, which has resulted in several violent events since 2000. In May 2009, both countries signed an agreement to make the zone neutral, until the International Court of Justice can issue a final decision on the territorial claims. "Le Burkina et le Bénin déclarent Koualou-Kourou zone neutre", Jeune Afrique, 20 May 2009, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/143423/politique/le-burkina-et-le-b-nin-d-clarent-koualou-kourou-zone-neutre/>

⁵⁹ Focus Group Discussion, Tanguieta, March 2021.

Tanguieta and its neighboring communities, who are in turn informing the jihadists about Benin's culture and local dynamics.⁶⁰

“There are young people who are recruited and who provide them with information. They do nothing during the day, but their activity begins between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m. in cafeterias or brothels where drugs are sold.” - Retired Security Officer, Tanguieta, March 2021

Resilience

Confidence in the authorities and security operators has recently waned, which experts attribute to the increasing politicization of security in the lead up to the presidential election.⁶¹ Nonetheless, the see-something-say-something channels are well used by community members, and respondents cited these as a means by which they share suspicious activity with the government, despite politics hampering these processes.

The presence of jihadists passing through northern Benin does not necessarily confirm that Benin is their next target. These jihadists require safe resting areas due to the military operations ongoing in Niger, Nigeria, Mali and Burkina Faso. Based on the national government's policy response, it appears that Beninese policy-makers operate under the assumption that jihadists are only transiting through and temporarily resting in Benin, with no intention to recruit, radicalize or attack Beninese citizens.⁶²

Nonetheless, the government is aware of the destabilizing intercommunal violence in the north, and the possible connection to violent extremism in the Sahel. In response, the government started several initiatives over the past decade to develop preventative measures to mitigate the spillover of jihadism from the Sahel. Beginning in 2012, Benin's Agency for the Integrated Management of Border Spaces (ABeGIEF) undertook new initiatives to reduce poverty in border areas and increase a sense of citizenship among the locals in the Alibori and Atakora departments through community development projects such as building infrastructure and income generating projects in remote border towns.⁶³ Benin is also currently on track to establishing potable water systems across the entire country.

⁶⁰ Focus Group Discussion, Tanguieta, March 2021.

⁶¹ *Under communism, the government of Benin replaced traditional authorities with state functions and hybrid organizations linked to the state, in order to consolidate power at the national level. In recent years, state-led efforts to decrease the influence of traditional and communal legal authorities in remote communities, was rumored to be undertaken in order to remove political competition. The removal of traditional leadership has also eroded traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and resiliencies, and in turn, created less trust in the government. We believe this led to a certain bias in the data, whereby local authorities are members of the national government and have less localized understanding of real time events on the ground. Additionally, it is possible that some respondents were concerned to speak openly about socio-political dynamics.*

⁶² Interview with Kars de Bruijne, Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael Institute, March 2021.

⁶³ Agence Béninoise de Gestion Intégrée des Espaces Frontaliers (ABeGIEF), <http://www.abegief.org/>.

The government initiated a see-something say-something campaign in 2020 to encourage citizens to report suspicious persons and behavior to government officials. Government agencies such as ABeGIEF, customs, police and the army have since expanded their presence to secure the northern borders. Nonetheless, community reports of suspicious activity still result in little action by security operators in Alibori, which is likely due to a lack of capacity to readily respond and regularly police at-risk areas, coupled with increasing politicization of the security forces in the lead up to the April 2021 elections.

African Parks Network

Centre National de Gestion des Réserves de Faune (CENAGREF) and the Union des Associations Villageoises de Gestion des Réserves de Faune (AVIGREF) had operational control of the parks until 2017. There was an informal arrangement for local communities to access the park under CENAGREF, for farming, herding and tourism, including big game hunting.⁶⁴

APN replaced CENAGREF and was granted control of Pendjari Park in 2017, with additional control over Park W granted in 2020.⁶⁵ This move to secure the parks and prevent jihadist spillover into Benin's interior frustrated parts of the local population that were reliant on the parks for access to livelihoods.⁶⁶ APN now has close to complete operational control of the Pendjari Park interior, extending from Porga in Atakora to Banikoara in Alibori; with APN's expansion into Park W, APN's ranger presence in Benin has increased rapidly. According to respondents and conservationists, if anyone enters the area of the park that falls under APN's jurisdiction, they are allowed to be there for up to 48 hours before APN has the authority to detain or deter them.⁶⁷

Multiple respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the approach that APN has taken to secure the parks, by respondents in neighboring communities. These respondents spoke about the approach APN rangers have towards the local community, both in confiscating local lands and produce, and using indiscriminate force against farmers and herders that enter Pendjari.⁶⁸ APN's takeover of park management led to immediate demonstrations and clashes between APN's rangers and hunters that lived inside and near the park.⁶⁹ Although there was significant tension between the civilian population and APN early on, with rangers allegedly carrying out indiscriminate violence against civilians, APN appears to have recently taken steps to mitigate the tense relationship it has with the local communities. This suggests the need for further assessments of their approach to policing and

⁶⁴ Interview with Kars de Bruijne, Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael Institute, March 2021.

⁶⁵ W National Park, African Parks Network, 2021, <https://www.africanparks.org/the-parks/w>

⁶⁶ Hessoun, C., "Après le Parc de la Pendjari : Le Parc National du W sur le point d'être cédé à Apn, La Nouvelle Tribune, 2017, <https://lanouvelletribune.info/2017/09/benin-parc-w-bientot-cede-apn/>

⁶⁷ Multiple key informant interviews in Alibori and Atakora regions, March 2021.

⁶⁸ Multiple key informant interviews in Alibori and Atakora regions, March 2021.

⁶⁹ Hessoun, C., "Affrontements Entre Chasseurs et Forestiers à Tanguiéta : Ce Qui S'est Réellement Passé", La Nouvelle Tribune, 2018, <https://lanouvelletribune.info/2018/02/affrontements-entre-chasseurs-et-forestiers-a-tanguieta-ce-qui-sest-reellement-passe/>.

conservation to ensure that their presence does not further erode the relationship between the state and community in these remote areas.⁷⁰

“They [APN] destroy the fields and disregard the old rules of the park, which allowed certain protected areas for farming. Fishing activities are now prohibited in the park, so fishermen are now farming, creating land access issues for everyone. There will be a confrontation during the next sowing period. The people say they will confront the APN rangers if they try to stop the farmers from accessing the farming areas inside the park.” - Farmers Association representative, Karimama, March 2021

The annual rainy season and the return of Peuhl herders from the Sahel has tested this tension, and led to violent interactions between APN rangers and herding communities. APN continues to divert these herders to designated grazing areas around Park W instead. APN has also recently expanded its area of operations into the border areas with Niger and Burkina Faso, and is rumored to have the authority to carry out 15 km hot pursuit of jihadists into the park that lies across the border.

Recommendations

Strengthen border security: Respondents in border communities overwhelmingly requested increased police presence in their communities, and better engagement and response to threats reported by them to the security forces. While border security in the Sahel is an ambitious goal, it has been done through, among other projects, IOM’s integrated border management system. These target capacity building and strengthening official points of entry.

Recommendations: We recommend building capacity of quick reaction forces (QRF) within the gendarmes, police and military units. Setting up well trained and well equipped units that are mandated to take on multiple functions, that can rapidly deploy and respond to crises at the border, may benefit Benin more than traditional border security. This would avoid disenfranchising migratory populations such as herders and merchants, who depend on migration and mobility across borders, for access to basic livelihoods. **Related programs** include the support for Mali’s Antiterrorist Special Forces (FORSAT) - a QRF multi-ministry unit designated for force protection, policing, and immediate response to emergencies and attacks.⁷¹

There are additional needs to secure gaps along the borders with the security forces and ABeGIEF, including establishing permanent presence in Porga and Batia (near Tanguieta); sensitization of both civilians and security forces to improve reporting and response to communal reports; establishing security focal points in underserved communities and protecting whistleblowers who

⁷⁰ “Nord des pays du Golfe de Guinée: La nouvelle frontière des groupes djihadistes?” Étude, Promediation, March 2021.

⁷¹ “EUTM Mali and the Special Anti-Terrorist Forces”, EUTM Mali Press, April 4, 2020, <https://eutmmali.eu/eutm-mali-and-the-special-anti-terrorist-forces/>

provide information. However, these types of interventions require a balanced and delicate approach, because establishing security in these communities will further expose them to armed groups - specifically jihadists - who might perceive the community as a pro-government town, and therefore make it a soft target.

Preserve transhumance corridors and farming space and elevate traditional leaders' roles: Park W (and Pendjari Park) and the traditional transhumance corridors have become areas of contention in Benin. Due to the use of these spaces as staging and rest areas for jihadists and their affiliates, security entities are policing and clearing them, and with that, disrupting local communities that are based in or reliant upon them for basic livelihoods. Traditional authorities are often better recognized than official ones, especially in Borgou and Alibori departments. Their role in administering access to resources (land and water) in remote areas may diminish due to a new land reform that will leave them less control over lands and expose communities to more tension.⁷² The Beninese government should recognize the traditional authorities as relevant stakeholders in these municipal debates and processes.

Recommendations: Once in control of the parks, the government should restore access rights for farmers and herders, and be involved in the management of land access, to mitigate land disputes and farmer-herder clashes. This can include setting up wells, designated farming and herding areas, reviewing existing legislation on farming and herding in common spaces, and evaluating measures to sustain security in the parks. NGOs can then be deployed to sensitize communities on what access designations will mean for each community dependent on these. Additionally, there is a need to support the government to reform agrarian policies and communicate this to local officials, to ensure that they can manage park and common area access. Traditional leaders can be designated as the representatives of the local community in these efforts. They can be engaged to liaise directly with the government on these matters and represent their constituents. **Related programs** in the region include Search for Common Ground's work on cross-border farmer-herder conflicts in the Sudano-Sahel funded by the US State Department and an \$8 million EUTF-funded programs implemented by VSF and EDUCO in Burkina Faso.

Park ranger capacity building: The government of Benin brought in the African Parks Network (APN) in 2017 to clean up Pendjari Park and Park W. APN's work in the parks in Benin currently restricts civilian access to previously designated shared herding and farming spaces, and the hunting zones that are critical for local livelihoods. Nonetheless, in the short term, APN has cleared Pendjari Park of jihadists, and is underway to do the same in Park W.

⁷² Interview with Kars de Bruijne, Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael Institute, March 2021.

Recommendations: There should be an initial review and audit of APN compliance with Beninese policies, their relationship with local farmers/herders and their approach to counterterrorism, interdiction, and community engagement is necessary as a primary intervention.

APN's work in Benin needs to be more transparent - even if this simply includes regular community engagement to discuss their work with the communities that they impact. The government could, for example, integrate the Centre National de Gestion des Réserves de Faune (CENAGREF) with APN, among other civil society networks that operate near the park.

Civilian oversight might be required for APN or ranger activity, in liaising this work with Beninese security entities that will backfill APN in the future. This can be achieved by strengthening local community engagement with APN; an effort that was started in Kandi. Building trust between communities and APN management through enlisting local leaders as recognized representatives to regularly engage and coordinate with APN (like the AVIGREF did in the past) will help local communities accept APN activities and increase accountability of APN rangers. No **related programs** addressing this were identified in Benin or the neighbouring countries.

Burkina Faso

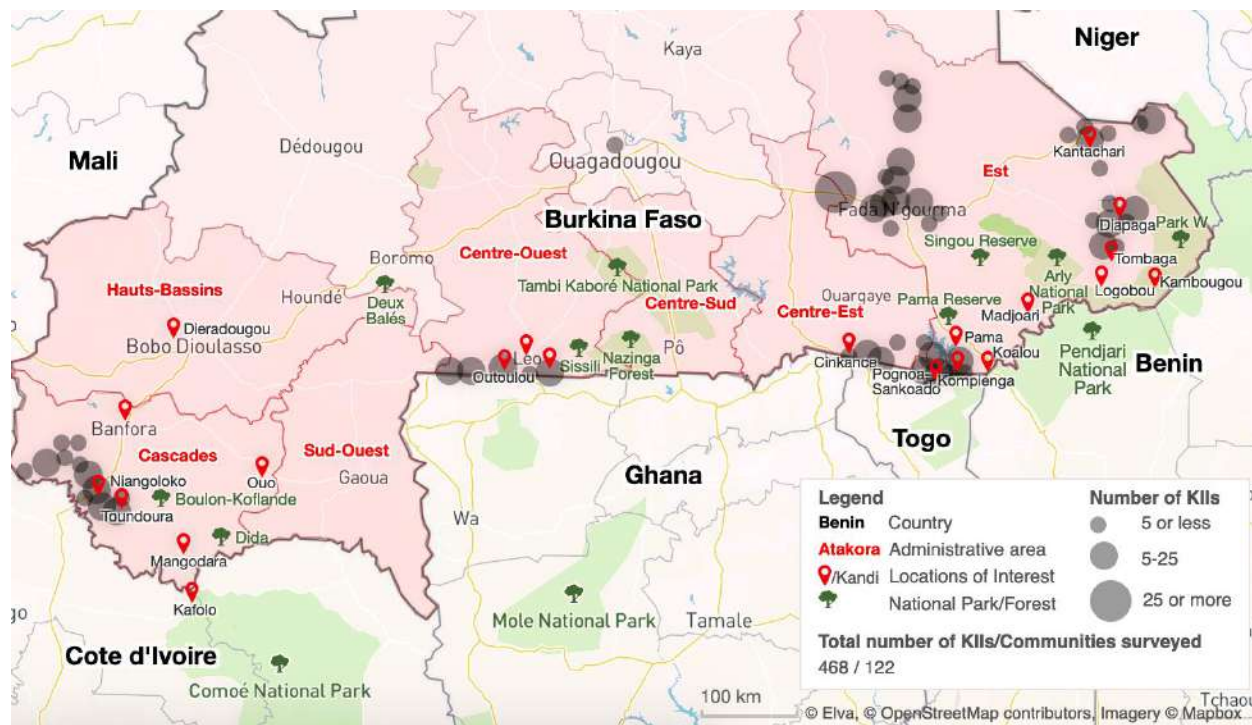


Figure 7. Locations of interviews (grey) and locations of interest (red) referred to in Burkina Faso's southern regions, Elva, 2021.

Introduction

Under its former ruler Blaise Compaoré, Burkina Faso remained stable, in part due to relatively strong and capable security forces. Additionally, his inner circle of political elites was rumored to be openly engaged in discussions with groups associated with the jihadists, until France's Operation Serval began in January 2013.⁷³ His resignation in 2014 sparked paralyzing countrywide demonstrations, leading to a 10-day military coup in September 2015 and elections that brought current President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré into power. Then in January 2016, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb carried out its first attacks in Burkina Faso, on a restaurant and a hotel in Ouagadougou. In early March 2021, the Kabore government denied any negotiations with jihadists, after a press piece floated the rumor that the government was working with JNIM to negotiate the release of 20 hostages.⁷⁴ Presidential and national assembly elections took place in November 2020, amid countrywide violent extremist threats, and despite the years-long delay of municipal elections due to rampant and increasing violence, with incumbent president Kabore winning a second term.⁷⁵

⁷³ Crisis Group, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ "Crisis Watch, Tracking Conflict Worldwide", International Crisis Group, April 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/april-alerts-and-march-trends-2021#niger>

⁷⁵ "Burkina Faso Election Takes Place Amid Jihadist Threat", BBC News, November 23, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55014928>

Violence in Burkina Faso has continued to escalate since 2015, when jihadists from Mali first carried out attacks in Ouagadougou. Since 2016, the country’s northern Sahel, Est and Centre-Nord regions have been consumed by a homegrown insurgency from Ansaroul Islam (which is now realigned under JNIM and ISGS respectively) and intercommunal violence spurred by multiple local self-defence groups. The eastern part of the country, which is overwhelmed by a humanitarian crisis, remains largely abandoned by state and aid workers who cannot access the area due to rampant violence. 450,000 people were displaced in 2020 alone, creating a humanitarian crisis of over 1.2 million displaced people.⁷⁶

Much of Burkina Faso’s violence against civilians is driven by the government’s aggressive and predatory counterterrorism strategy. This strategy includes the use of ethnic and communal militias - those that are both aligned with the state and against it. Communal militias began to make these alignments, for or against the state, following the early days of the insurgency. The Islamist expansion in Burkina Faso began with Burkinabe fighters that had returned from Mali and found space to propagate jihadism among rural communities that were frustrated with the government, and in some cases, their own abusive clan hierarchy. In response to these growing insurgencies, communities leaned on their self-defense and communal militias in the absence of Burkinabe security forces.

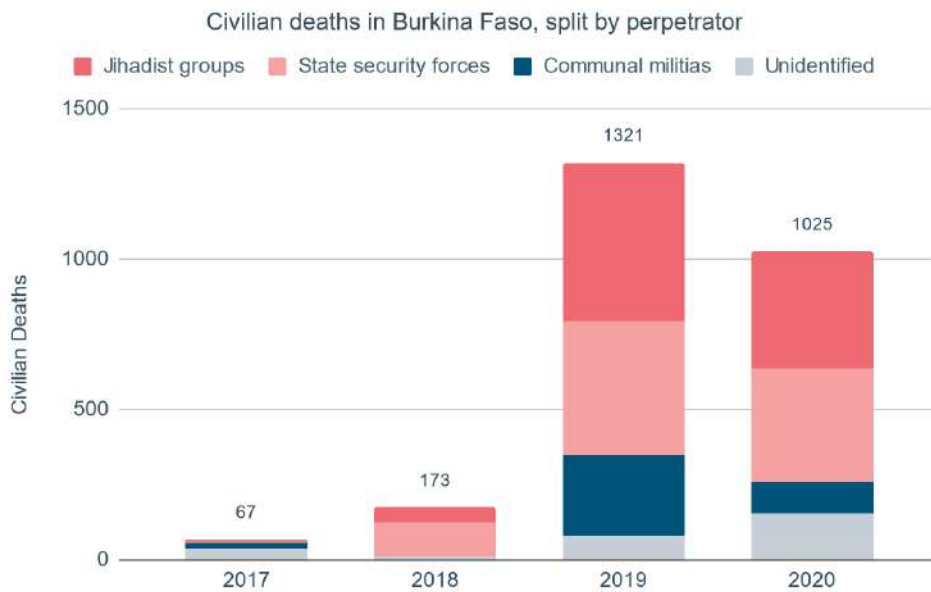


Figure 8. Civilian deaths in Burkina Faso in 2017-2020 caused by jihadist groups, security forces, communal militias and unidentified actors.⁷⁷

It was around this time in 2015, when the Koglweogo groups began to emerge across northern communities to counter jihadists. This spiraled when jihadists then tried to recruit among Kogleweogo. In response, the government began to support these pro-state militias, including some of the Kogleweogo brigades, in counterterrorism missions. They, in concert with Burkinabe forces,

⁷⁶ Burkina Faso, Operational Data Portal, UNHCR, April 2021, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/bfa>

⁷⁷ Data from “Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)”, 2021, www.acleddata.com.

carried out attacks against communities perceived to be in alliance with jihadists, committing widespread abuses and human rights violations. Local grievances fueled by state actions, in turn, became an easy recruitment tool for jihadists.⁷⁸

By late 2018, jihadists began to move southward. Burkina Faso's southern regions are a sought after area for jihadists to move into, as their dense forests allow for safe refuge. These forests are often 'protected areas' - and are therefore closed off to civilians and have little security presence - which is why even before the arrival of jihadists, illicit trafficking networks, criminal organizations and self-defense groups typically staged themselves out of them.⁷⁹ Moreover, transhumance corridors pass through many of these forested areas, so routes have long been informally paved for the movement of groups without interjection by authorities.

Illicit Trafficking

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in and through Burkina Faso is an growing concern, as armed groups - both jihadist and communal militias - are fueling sub-state violence with more sophisticated weapons. SALW are being manufactured in and around gold mines in Burkina Faso's Sahel and Est regions, and in the markets in Ouagadougou and northern Ghana. They are then exported regionally, with signs of arms trafficking across Benin, Nigeria, and Niger.⁸⁰ Jihadists are also known to regularly raid military stockpiles in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso for most of their arms.⁸¹

Artisanal gold mining, which accounts for 40-80 tons of gold annually in Burkina Faso and Mali - approximately 25 tons coming from Burkina Faso alone - is a significant source of terrorism financing. The OECD estimates that artisanal gold mining produces over \$2 billion annually, drawing in 200,000 people for labor from across the continent.⁸² Jihadists have a role in artisanal gold mining in the region, though their objectives for controlling the gold trade, aside from quick cash, remain unclear. In some cases jihadists and armed groups have attacked and fomented the local community around the mines to rise up against industrial mining efforts seeking to commercialize the market, and displace locals in the industry. This alone showcases the ability these armed groups have to influence the local community against the state and international actors.⁸³ In general though, jihadists quietly

⁷⁸ "Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence", Report N°287/Africa, International Crisis Group, February 24, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/287-burkina-faso-sortir-de-la-spirale-des-violences>

⁷⁹ "Nord des pays du Golfe de Guinée: La nouvelle frontière des groupes djihadistes?" Étude, Promediation, March 2021.

⁸⁰ Multiple interviews with key informants across Benin, Niger and Burkina Faso.

⁸¹ Assanvo, W., Dakono, B., Thérroux-Bénoni, L.-A., Maïga, I., "Violent Extremism, Organised Crime and Local Conflicts in Liptako-Gourma", ISS Africa, December 2019, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-eng.pdf>

⁸² "Gold at the Crossroads, - Assessment of the Supply Chains of Gold Produced in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger", The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2018, <https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/Assessment-of-the-supply-chains-of-gold-produced-in-Burkina-Faso-Mali-Niger.pdf>

⁸³ *For example, the Youga Mine was ransacked after industrial giant, Endeavor, replaced local labor with foreign nationals. Ansarul Islam is known to loot and carry out banditry against mines with impunity in the Sahel region, having kidnapped for ransom mine workers from Inatta in early 2018.*

exert control over the artisanal mining sector, having their young men join the labor force for quick cash, and charging local communities a tax to return for providing security at the mine.⁸⁴

In Mali's north and Burkina Faso's northeast, where jihadist groups have used rudimentary forms of governance to gain a foothold, their involvement in mines is more welcomed than that of foreign investors who extract resources without reinvesting in the region. In the southeast, jihadists are taxing artisanal mines, bribing traders at checkpoints, and providing proxy security and governance to communities illegally operating mines that were previously shut down by the government.⁸⁵ Miners - often young migrants from neighboring countries, such as Sudan, Chad, and Mali - provide a recruitment pool for jihadists. There is no oversight over the flow of money from artisanal gold exports and sales by jihadists in the Sahel.⁸⁶

Pro-Burkinabe Government Militias

The government's lack of capacity to address rising violence⁸⁷ culminated in January 2020, with Burkina Faso's passage of legislation authorizing state training, arms, healthcare and monetary compensation to vigilante groups that fight jihadists on behalf of the government.⁸⁸ This move, although strategic, is risky, because communal militias are difficult to control and organize, even more so in a country that is incapable of securing its own interior. Furthermore, the lack of clear accountability measures for any abuses or excesses by communal militias enable community resentment among those targeted by pro-government forces. This risks further entrenching impunity, which is already a problem within the Burkinabe security forces, with armed groups that are rarely held accountable for excesses in counter-terrorism operations.

The data collection showed that over 50% of Burkinabés believe that the government does not provide sufficient security and governance. This supports the fact that many continue to rely on, and support, their communal and self-defense militias.⁸⁹ According to respondents, these self-defense militias used to actively oppose jihadists, which they claim originated in Mali (Ansar Dine, Ansarul Islam, and JNIM). However, in recent years, some of the groups, including some regional factions of

⁸⁴ Interview with former Burkinabe Ministry of Mining official, March 2020.

⁸⁵ Interview with former Burkinabe Ministry of Mining official, March 2020.

⁸⁶ Interview with U.S. Department of Treasury, Office of Foreign Asset Control official, March 2020.

⁸⁷ *In the November 2020 round of data collection, intercommunal violence was reported in Kompienga and Koulpelego, near Park W (Gourma region); border area in Comoé region, across from Ouangolo in Côte d'Ivoire; guerilla warfare in Toundoura, near Niangoloko; on the Ghana border around the Nazinga forest, Ghana's Gbele game reserve, and the towns of Outoulou, Leo and Sissili; and Cinkance department on the border with Togo, which locals referred to as a jihadist insurgency.* November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 21.

⁸⁸ "Burkina Faso Approves State Backing for Vigilantes Fighting Jihadists", Reuters, January 22, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-burkina-security/burkina-faso-approves-state-backing-for-vigilantes-fighting-jihadists-idUSKBN1ZL1UT>

⁸⁹ November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 21.

the Koglweogo,⁹⁰ are now said to be joining jihadists in opposition of the state, and in defense of their community.⁹¹

“The Koglweogo are operational in the East and Sahel regions. They are sometimes working for the Burkinabe Security Forces, but we hear that they have been complicit with them [Ansarul Islam] as well.” - Traditional Leader, Gayeri, Komandjari province, Burkina Faso

Among the groups the government is working with are Dozo, which has become a blanket term used across the region to describe traditional hunters' brotherhoods. The Dozo have a strong presence in the western part of the country, and have become increasingly aligned with state security forces in response to intercommunal and jihadist dynamics. Dozos have clashed with Koglweogo that have tried to move into Dozo communities, exacerbating localized conflicts and intercommunal dynamics. The Volunteers for Defense of the Homeland (VDP) - raised at the behest of the Burkinabe government, and which include elements of Koglweogo and Dozo militias, is another pro-state communal militia that has benefited from the recent legislation. Although VDP was established as a means to bring together the various communal militias under one pro-state federation, they have in some cases further worsened the intercommunal dynamics that jihadists have fed off of, particularly the targeting of Peuhl, a discrimination tactic that jihadists use as a basis from which to recruit. The VDP also stands accused of criminal activity, and using the anti-jihadist cause to extort the local population.⁹²

Jihadist Recruitment Among Peuhl

The Peuhl population in Burkina Faso play an important role in the proliferation of jihadism in the Sahel and Est Regions, and thus in the expansion of jihadists into the Littoral states. Peuhl have become increasingly sidelined in recent decades due to institutional and infrastructural changes in the region that have worked against them, including modern interpretations of land and mobility legal frameworks (i.e. border controls). The erosion of communal law in favor of national and international law as it pertains to conflict resolution, has also worked against the Peuhl population.⁹³ The

⁹⁰ *The Koglweogo - translated as guardians of the Bush, from Mossi - were initially established across rural communities in the 1990s, but they grew in popularity as an alternative to state security in 2014, in response to the rising banditry and violence, and the absence of law enforcement.*

⁹¹ Interview with former Burkinabe Ministry of Mining official, March 2020.

⁹² Schmauder, A., Willeme, A, The Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland, Clingendael Institute, March 9, 2021, <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/volunteers-defense-homeland>

⁹³ *There are multiple examples of national governments stepping into intercommunal violent events to broker a cessation of hostilities when these events escalate. In the early 2000s, escalating intercommunal violence between the Daoussahak Tuaregs and the Tolebe Peuhl, in the Tillabéri-Menaka corridor forced Malian and Nigerien governments to step in and moderate talks. The Peuhl, who had limited representation in government, were sidelined in the peace negotiations. This group of Peuhl inevitably turned to traditional defense and legal processes to address their grievances, which resulted in reinforcing their need for dependence on their self-defense militias. However, lacking arms, these groups were easily accommodated by leadership of the nascent ISGS cell in the region at the time, and eventually became a local katiba of ISGS in Niger - the group that years later in 2017, carried out the Tongo Tongo raid on US and Nigerien Special Forces in Tillabéri.*

commercialization of agriculture and livestock has left Peuhl herders with no capacity to compete with major industry.⁹⁴ Continuous marginalization has culminated in a series of grievances that jihadists recruit on the basis of.

Respondents in the data emphasized that the jihadists, unlike the government and security forces, do not operate with prejudice against certain ethnicities, specifically the Peuhl. For example, Ansarul Islam did not discriminate when it recruited - Peuhl, Gourmantché, and others actively participated in their expansion efforts. They recruit easily because they act as a stronger security force than government forces in eastern Burkina Faso. Once they present a social contract with the communities based on shared security, jihadists were able to spread their ideology through their interpretation of the sharia (koranic law), the shearing of pants, and the donning of black hijabs.⁹⁵

Violent Extremism

JNIM and ISGS operatives that moved into Burkina Faso's southern regions have found the ideal refuge by staging themselves out of the many forests that hug the southern border with the Littoral states. It's from these densely covered, unattended areas that jihadists can easily carry out intelligence collection to identify communities for recruitment and locations of security installations. These forests include: Deux Balés, Boulon-Koflande, Comoe-Leraba, Dida, among others in the southwestern regions, along the border with Côte d'Ivoire; Tambi Kaboré National Park, Nazinga Forest and the Sissili forest in the central regions, along the border with Ghana; and the Park W-Arly-Pendjari complex along the south-eastern borders with Togo and Benin.⁹⁶ Early indications suggest that presumed jihadist attacks in southwestern Burkina Faso began occurring in late 2018, with operatives retreating to Côte d'Ivoire during counterterrorism operations.⁹⁷

Est, Centre-Est, & Centre-Sud Regions

In March 2019, Burkina Faso led a joint counterterrorism offensive with Benin, Togo and Niger, called Opération Otapuanu⁹⁸ throughout the eastern regions, pushing jihadists south into Park Arly and Park W.⁹⁹ Burkinabe intelligence alerted neighbouring Littoral states that they believed jihadists had fled

⁹⁴ Bisson, L., Cottyn, I., De Bruijne, K., Molenaar, F., "Between Hope and Despair - Pastoralist Adaptation in Burkina Faso, Clingendael Institute, <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/between-hope-and-despair.pdf>

⁹⁵ Focus Group Discussion, Tambarga, Est region, April 2020.

⁹⁶ "Nord des pays du Golfe de Guinée: La nouvelle frontière des groupes djihadistes?" Étude, Promediation, March 2021.

⁹⁷ Promediation, *ibid*.

⁹⁸ DD Sidwaya. "Opération Otapuanu : Plusieurs Présumés Terroristes Neutralisés, Une Centaine Interpellée." Sidwaya: Le Quotidien burkinabè d'information, April 14, 2019. <https://www.sidwaya.info/blog/2019/04/14/operation-otapuanu-plusieurs-presumes-terroristes-neutralises-une-centaine-interpellee/>

⁹⁹ *In the November 2020 round of data collection, "Tombaga and Madjoari, the two major border crossing towns near Parks W and d'Arly, [were] difficult to access due to the forest, lack of security and presence of [jihadists] operating in this area. Authorities in Pama – the area bordering these parks – warned that land mines are rampant in the park area. The park was inaccessible due to insecurity, and rumors that [jihadists] controlled the area within the park between Burkina Faso and Benin."* November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 20.

the operations and were taking refuge with presumed friends and family located in Ghana, Togo and Benin.¹⁰⁰ Those fleeing into Benin - who respondents cited as ISGS - took the road south from Diapaga, towards Kambougou, before entering Park W on the road heading directly towards Banikoara, Benin.¹⁰¹

In the first two rounds of data collection, respondents in Benin spoke about the presence of ISGS cells in the Singou reserve, near the Pama forest, that were crossing into Benin through the park.¹⁰² Most villages hugging the Singou and Pama reserves are now tacitly, if not directly, under the control of ISGS, based on the final rounds of data collection. There were reports of jihadists attempting to control areas around Pama, Logobou, Diapaga, Kantachari and Tamou in the Est region.¹⁰³ Both ISGS and JNIM are operational in the Est and Centre-Sud regions. During focus group discussions in Kompienga, respondents cited rampant insecurity in the nearby areas around the town of Pognoa-Sankoada noting that the region had become overrun by jihadists in the past six months.¹⁰⁴

Respondents during the third round of data collection in early May 2021 were keenly aware of the April 26 ambush on the documentary crew and the conservationist NGO, Chengeta Wildlife, in Fada-N’Gourma. Focus group participants in Kompienga, 130 km south, closer to the border with Togo, spoke of the increased presence of jihadists in the lead-up to the attack, and the presence of jihadists moving southward into the Pama reserve, and further into Park Arly, after the attack. Most participants said they felt uneasy by the sudden calmness in their community after the ambush, and that they were concerned they were being spied on by locals who reported back to the jihadists hiding inside the park. Respondents in Kompienga also said that jihadists had recently attacked the village Koalou, in the Pama region, on the border with Benin and Togo.¹⁰⁵

“I do not know which group it is but they are active in the classified forest towards Pama, Tambarga and the village of Koalou. We’ve heard that they attack nearby towns, stealing cattle and other goods.” - Traditional Gourmantche leader, Kompienga, Est region

Meanwhile, respondents in the Nahouri province, Centre-Sud region, on the border with Ghana, report having rarely seen jihadists moving through their communities, and have not experienced any violent extremist attacks or events.¹⁰⁶ Most respondents in these border areas expressed a desire for security force presence - as compared to their neighbors in the Est and Sahel regions who have cited fears of government forces indiscriminately attacking their communities. Respondents expressed extreme concern over the absence of security forces in the Centre-Sud and Centre-Est regions.

¹⁰⁰ “Des jihadistes présents au Bénin, au Togo et au Ghana, selon les services burkinabé”, Jeune Afrique, April 16, 2019, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/762638/politique/burkina-des-jihadistes-de-lest-se-seraient-refugies-au-benin-au-togo-et-au-ghana/>

¹⁰¹ Focus group discussion, Karimama, Aliboro Department, Benin, March 2021.

¹⁰² November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 13.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 19.

¹⁰⁴ Focus group discussion, Kompienga, Est Region, May 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Focus group discussion, Kompienga, Est region, Burkina Faso, May 2021.

¹⁰⁶ Focus group discussion, Nahouri district, Centre-Sud region, May 2021.

According to reports, the security forces are deployed along the borders with Côte d'Ivoire and southern Niger to manage imminent threats, which leaves the border areas with Togo and Ghana exposed.¹⁰⁷ It was widely cited that the security forces are lacking in numbers, in comparison to jihadists and communal militias, and are therefore incapable of securing the populations. These concerns played out after the attack on a Spanish Priest in Boulga, Centre-Est region, in 2019 reverberated across towns in neighboring Togo and Ghana. Increased intercommunal violence in the Cinkansé department, Centre-Est region, has subsequently been tied to violent extremism by locals as a result of this attack.¹⁰⁸

"We cannot say that we are safe... we are barely 100km from the villages that are attacked by armed groups. We did not directly suffer attacks but it is our parents, brothers, sisters who live and work in these localities. So, indirectly we are affected by these terrorist attacks." - Kassena farmer, Zelogo, Nahouri district, Centre-Sud region

Centre-Ouest, Sud-Ouest, & Cascades Regions

Operation Comoé, a joint counter-terrorism offensive between Burkinabe and Ivorian forces, targeted jihadist cells in forested areas around Comoé National Park throughout May 2020.¹⁰⁹ The jihadists suffered significant setbacks during these operations, including the dismantling of logistical infrastructure and the arrests of suspected cell members and key operatives. However, following the operation, in June 2020, presumed Katibat Macina jihadists - Amadou Koufa's branch of JNIM - launched a counterattack on a security installation in Kafolo, Côte d'Ivoire. The attack appears to be a reprisal by Katibat Macina against the Ivorian government for their involvement in the counterterrorism operation.¹¹⁰

Violent extremist threats have rapidly increased in the southwest over the past 18 months, and the Cascades region experienced a significant increase in attacks by Katibat Macina.¹¹¹ An outpost was again attacked by jihadists in Kafolo in March 2021, who quickly retreated to Alidouougou, across the border into Burkina Faso, following the attack. Respondents in Côte d'Ivoire explained that jihadists from Burkina Faso have been collecting intelligence around the Ivorian military outpost ahead of the March 2021 attack, crossing regularly into Burkina Faso (see Côte d'Ivoire chapter for more details).

¹⁰⁷ Focus group discussion, Pognoa Tikanti, Kompienga District, Est Region, May 2021.

¹⁰⁸ November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 21.

¹⁰⁹ "In October 2019, Burkinabe security forces took out a small VEO cell in the Nahouri Province (Centre-Sud region), near the border with Ghana. [...] Operation Comoé, has focused on Katibat Macina cells (Amadou Koufa's splinter from JNIM) in Alidouougou, the border crossing town with Côte d'Ivoire, and the nearby communities of Mangodara, Ouo, Dieradougou, Niangoloko and Banfora." November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 20.

¹¹⁰ "In Light of the Kafolo Attack : the Jihadi Militant Threat in the Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast Borderlands", Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 2020, <https://acleddata.com/2020/08/24/in-light-of-the-kafolo-attack-the-jihadi-militant-threat-in-the-burkina-faso-and-ivory-coast-borderlands/>

¹¹¹ ACLED data, 2021. "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)", www.acleddata.com.

Respondents further west, in towns near the market town, Niangoloko (Comoé province, Cascade region), cited the presence of jihadists groups operating in their communities, but were wary about providing details to the research teams. Respondents were less forthcoming in the second round of data collection as a result of what presumably was a rapid escalation of jihadist movement through these areas. There was a clear indication that respondents were scared to speak with the research team out of fear that jihadists might attack them for speaking out.¹¹² Reports of radicalized preaching and influence campaigns took place in communities in Niangoloko as well. The Comoé province reported significant upticks in violent events led by jihadists during the summer reporting period, coinciding with the uptick in violence across the border in Côte d'Ivoire.¹¹³

Resilience

Insecurity has more or less consumed the entire country. Though most respondents requested additional security reinforcements from the state, they also noted that existing security installations (including checkpoints) are ineffective in stopping jihadist activity and illicit movement in the region.¹¹⁴ This was particularly evident along the border with Côte d'Ivoire, where respondents suggested movement was fluid due to a lack of border controls, particularly along transhumance and trade corridors. Respondents located along the borders with Ghana and Togo cited similar cross-border issues and ineffective security, though they pointed to intercommunal tensions - specifically land conflict and farmer herder violence - as the main drivers of insecurity, that the state was incapable of managing.¹¹⁵

In most interviews, respondents cited the presence of local authorities and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms as a means to mediating intercommunal tensions. These include localized mediation vehicles, such as traditional leaders and “conseils villageois de développement” (CVDs).¹¹⁶ Respondents indicated that they rely on these customary legal systems particularly for dealing with cross-border issues, since state participation is limited in general, but particularly when dealing with neighboring countries.

¹¹² November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 22.

¹¹³ Elva report, *ibid*.

¹¹⁴ “87% of respondents said that the best way to manage [VE] threats would be to deploy security forces to at-risk communities. Additionally, 78% also said to build social cohesion between security forces and the civilian population. 71% said increased food security would help reduce the risk of individuals resorting to criminality to get by. 55% said that access to justice is the most critical need to manage [VE] influence. Only 6% called for more international forces in the region to support local security forces in kinetic counter-terrorism (CT) operations.” November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 21.

¹¹⁵ Multiple key informant interviews in Nahouri and Kompienga Provinces, May 2021.

¹¹⁶ CVDs are either an individual “counselor” or a group of select individuals in a community, comprising a “Village development committee”, whose role is to contribute to the reduction of poverty and the improvement of living conditions. This is done by initiating, implementing and evaluating activities that target development of the village by the local community members. These entities target issues of sanitation, health, local governance, conflict resolution, and are often tasked with informing the community of news and sensitizing them towards PVE and CVE initiatives.

“For land disputes and farmers and herders, it is managed in a traditional way with customary and traditional leaders, advisers and CVDs. If we fail to resolve the problem between us leaders and others, the problem is sent to the gendarmerie or to justice in Pama.” - Gourmantche Traditional leader, Komienga, Est Region, May 2021

The research captured another trend in security perceptions throughout the reporting period: locations that were hardest hit by violence against civilians, or threat thereof - either by jihadists or the state - expanded from the eastern regions to the southwest regions. The data captured reluctance to respond to questions - a signal that jihadists were present in the eastern regions near the Pama forest and Komienga, in April 2020. However by September 2020, these respondents were alleging war fatigue, and appeared less inclined to adhere to jihadist threats and were therefore more willing to speak with the researchers. Meanwhile, respondents in the Cascades and Sud-Ouest regions grew increasingly more intimidated by the threat of jihadists by the fall, and were less willing to speak openly about the presence of jihadists in their communities.¹¹⁷

Burkinabe security forces appear less capable of managing these dynamics through their own means, and attempts to outsource security to vigilante groups do not appear to restore security to the region either. Moreover, the government's authorization for the use of vigilante groups to operate as proxies to the military has been widely criticized by experts and the international community with concerns that these groups would indiscriminately target civilians with impunity, committing human rights violations.¹¹⁸ Nonetheless, most key informants, across the target localities - specifically in the Est and Cascades regions - in all three rounds of data collection felt that their communal militias were more capable of stabilizing their communities than jihadists, the state or international security forces.¹¹⁹ As a result, government actors in Burkina Faso are increasingly interested in opening dialogues with jihadists.¹²⁰

The security environment in Burkina Faso's southeast could shift with increasing joint military efforts between Burkina Faso and neighboring countries. The government of Burkina Faso is rumored to be planning major clearing operations in Park Arly and Park W throughout the next 6-18 months, in an attempt to secure the park to open it to the public for big game hunting and tourism. The Burkinabe security forces reportedly began conducting clearing operations in this region in January 2021. They are now present along Route 18, from the North, in Fada-N'gourma, along the road to Pama.

¹¹⁷ November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 19.

¹¹⁸ “Double-edged Sword: Vigilantes in African Counter-insurgencies.” Report No 251/Africa, International Crisis Group, September 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/sierra-leone/251-double-edged-sword-vigilantes-african-counter-insurgencies>

¹¹⁹ Multiple key informant interviews throughout the reporting period. *Notably, interviews in the border region with Ghana cited the need for more international security forces.*

¹²⁰ Douce, S., “Négocié Avec les Djihadistes?, Au Burkina Faso, une Option de Moins en Moins Taboue”, Le Monde Afrique, February 10, 2021, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/02/10/negocier-avec-les-djihadistes-au-burkina-faso-une-option-de-moins-en-moins-taboue_6069462_3212.html

One unit of the Chadian battalion attached to the G5 Sahel, normally stationed in the Gourma region, was recently deployed to the eastern side of the Singou reserve to provide security in complement to the Burkinabe cordoned zone. APN, who is active in Benin's park complex, is reported to have arrangements with the Burkinabe military to conduct 15 km cross-border hot pursuit into Burkina Faso from Benin (within the park). The park ranger network is allegedly sharing ISR with the Burkinabe forces inside Park Arly.¹²¹

Recommendations

Security Sector Reform: The Burkinabé military has a track record of committing human rights violations through extrajudicial killings and indiscriminate attacks on civilians living in (presumed) jihadist-controlled areas. The military and police are losing credibility with the civilian population in several regions of the country, making it challenging for the security forces to legitimately control parts of Burkina Faso.¹²²

Recommendations: Support security sector reform and rebuilding of trust between civilians and the military by holding individuals at the battalion and command level accountable. This can be partially achieved by (1) increasing resources for the poorly funded military justice directorate, (2) ensuring the presence of gendarme provosts (military police) on all operations, (3) supporting international cooperation and advise-assist-accompany mentorship of Burkinabe security forces, and finally, (4) clarifying accountability of communal militias such as VDP. The latter includes developing a reporting mechanism to ensure ease of reporting violations to the Ministry of Justice, or human rights commissions, that should be able to provide this information to the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces (CEMGA).

Publicly, (5) the government may need to show accountability through truth and reconciliation hearings, that engage the parliament as well as the presidency. This can be supported with (6) reforms of the justice and penal system, to allow room in prisons for suspects, so the military uses legal remedies rather than indiscriminate killing of suspected jihadists. The government should (7) slow its efforts to outsource security to vigilante groups who are not responsive to the state; in doing so, they need to (8) increase their presence in remote communities, even if this requires increasing military recruitment campaigns. **Related programs** are already underway, though most focus on force capacity rather than reform. It is not clear to what extent capacity-building programs focus on accountability, such as the EU's 2018-2023 \$94 million budgetary support for the Burkinabe security forces. A program initiated in 2020 by Expertise France, with \$8.5 million

¹²¹ Interview with security and conservation advisor to Beninese authorities, May 2021.

¹²² Dufka, C., Sahel : « Les atrocités commises par des militaires favorisent le recrutement par les groupes armés », Le Monde, 29 June, 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/06/29/sahel-les-atrocites-commises-par-des-militaires-favorisent-le-recrutement-par-les-groupes-armes_6044601_3212.html

funding from EUTF, aims to support Burkina Faso security force' deployments to respect the rule of law and maintain trust with communities.

Improve joint military cooperation: The joint operation between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso – Operation Comoé – was disjointed, with excessive intelligence leaks and lack of cohesion between the respective security forces and commanding structure.¹²³ The result was an ineffective clearing operation that resulted in several retaliatory attacks by Katibat Macina in both countries.

Recommendations: Reinforce coordination between security forces in Sahel and Littoral states both at the command level – with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and concept of operations (CONOPs) – and at the battalion level, between units. This requires conducting regular joint combined exchange training (JCETs) with partner forces, and embedding nationals in foreign military units to ensure cohesion at each level. The fusion cell of the Accra Initiative should be expanded to include joint operations with Sahel countries. **Related programs** include the French and EUTF funded \$12 million program implemented by CIVIPOL to improve coordination between the G5 partners and a completed, \$10 million European Commission funded GAR-SI program, which was implemented by Spain's Guardia Civil and FIIAPP in the Sahel to improve security force deployments to remote and border communities, and reinforce cross-border cooperation.

Humanitarian Aid: In the absence of major reforms and an overhaul of security services, a significant part of the country remains displaced - with nearly 1.2 million displaced persons as of early 2021 - with inadequate access to basic services. Respondents indicated that there is a dire need for basic amenities in their communities as a result of government or jihadist sanctions on roads and accessways. Youth and women's unemployment remain a major driver towards extremism and the illicit economy.

Recommendations: Prioritize development and humanitarian aid to communities beset by violent extremism and intercommunal violence. Almost all respondents requested water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food aid, health centers, schools and telecommunications infrastructure. Additionally, the refugee and internally-displaced persons (IDP) problem in Burkina Faso continues to protract, leaving the local population absent of necessary livelihoods and access to aid. Communities in the Cascade and Sud-Ouest region could still be positively impacted by delivery of services. However, since Burkina Faso's humanitarian problems are large in part due to their failure to provide services to their population, NGOs should prioritize offering these aid and development packages through government entities, when possible. No **related programs** are indicated for these recommendations, but UNOCHA offers an extensive overview of humanitarian programming in the region.

¹²³ "Côte d'Ivoire : Échec d'une Opération Antiterroriste Dans le Nord", Jeune Afrique, May 22, 2020, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/985885/politique/cote-divoire-echec-dune-operation-anti-terroriste-dans-le-nord/>

Social Cohesion: The southward movement of violent extremism could amplify intercommunal violence and the perception of violent extremism in these communities risks the deployment of security forces who respond with force against civilians. This creates a century old dynamic – the spillover of violence into the Littoral states will draw in security forces that exacerbate the problem by targeting at-risk communities, as shown in the Est and Sahel regions of Burkina Faso. As a result, jihadists find entry points to engage with local communities on conflict resolution and governance efforts, and proliferate their ideology as a political insurgency against the state.

Recommendations: Sensitization and community cohesion programs are critical and require imminent attention, so that communities at risk of being targeted by security forces or jihadists do not succumb to intercommunal violence and resort to insurgency tactics to survive. Emphasis should be placed on education, sensitization and awareness, and communication with government services. The Cascades and Sud-Ouest region could still be positively impacted by delivery of these types of services. The government should look back at land and herding policies that are likely outdated, and reform those to adjust to the shifting dynamics locally that often play out in land conflict, or herder-farmer conflict. Adjustment to the legal code can have major impacts on social cohesion issues and regularly need to be updated to reflect the population size, demographics, and needs - this includes legal code related to education, land access, justice, women's health, marriage and traditional rights. **Related programs** are numerous, ranging from foreign implementers such as Search for Common Ground, Interpeace, Expertise France and Mercy Corps, to local NGOs such as CECI-Burkina Faso, AJDS and EDUCO. These are predominantly funded by the EU IcSP and EUTF, US and German governments, and UN-PBF. However, most programs focus on the Sahel, Nord and Est regions, with only a handful targeting Burkina Faso's southern borders. Examples include a PATRIP Foundation-funded Mercy Corps and SOS Sahel program on the border with Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, and Hans Seidel Foundation's EU and German funded SECUCOM program on the border with Benin.

Côte d'Ivoire

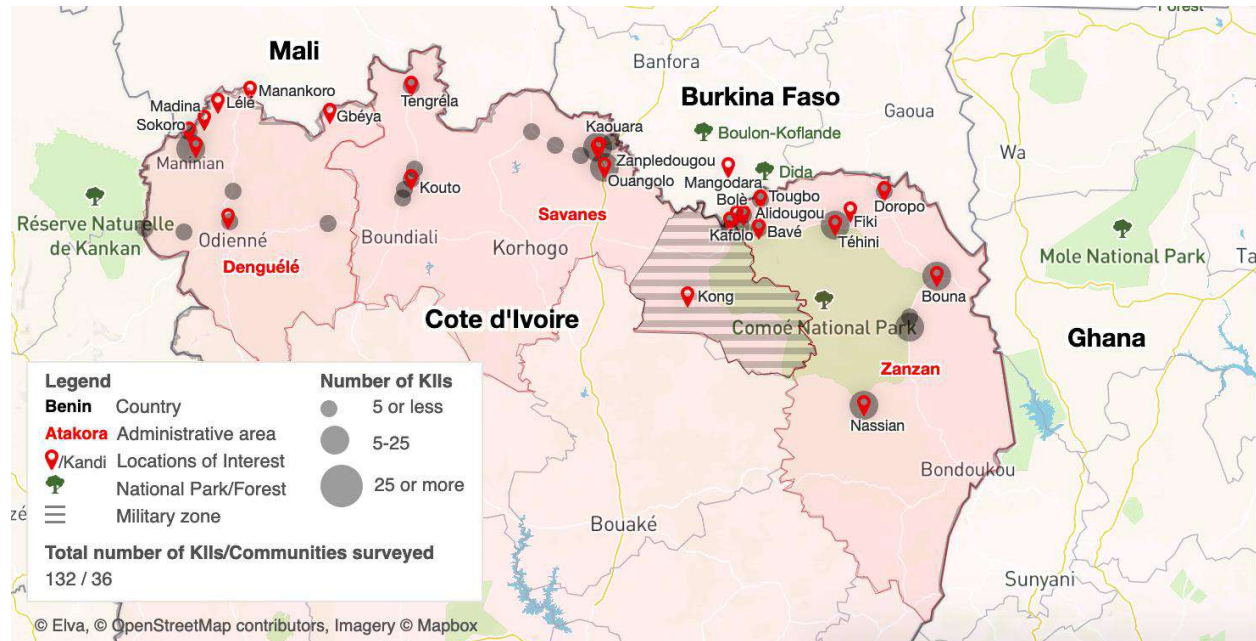


Figure 9. Map representing locations of interviews (grey) and locations of interest (red) referred to in Côte d'Ivoire's northern Denguélé, Savanes and Zanzan districts, Elva, 2021.

Introduction

Côte d'Ivoire is facing an intensifying jihadist insurgency on its northern borders. Since early 2020, the security situation has rapidly deteriorated in the northern Savanes and Zanzan districts. The security response following the June attack on a security installation in the north is a clear indication that the Ivorian government has taken these incidents seriously. The response includes a clearing operation, coupled with authorization for security forces to interdict movement of all suspicious persons and activity.

"We are in a war, and the jihadists are the outlaws." - local official, Mapinan, Tchologo region, April 2021

Although the data collection was only able to capture the local responses to the early days of a state of emergency in northern Côte d'Ivoire, there is an urgent need to monitor fall out between security officials and the civilian population, to avoid eroding civilian trust in the government. This is important since the jihadist insurgency in Côte d'Ivoire has so far only targeted security actors and installations, and has not yet posed a direct threat to civilians in the north.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ FGD, Mapinan, Tchologo District, Savanes Region April 2021.

Less than 50% of Ivoirians are Muslim, and most practice moderate or secular Islam. However, fears of radicalization surround followers of Wahhabism in the north and children attending talibé schools. The north-south divide in Côte d'Ivoire is one of the country's key weaknesses in the fight against extremism - the north is beset by underdevelopment, sectarian divisions, rural poverty, lack of access to education and work, and more orthodox approaches to religion. Moreover, Côte d'Ivoire's status as an economic powerhouse draws in migrants from other West African nations. This adds pressure in insular communities in the north and deepens the north-south divide by raising anti-Muslim/Sahel sentiments in the Christian-francophone south against migrants from the Sahel, and their connections to Muslim communities in northern Côte d'Ivoire.¹²⁵

The threat of violent extremism is most severe in the Zanzan and Savanes regions, near Park Comoé, bordering the Sud-Ouest region of Burkina Faso, where Katibat Macina, and local militias associated with JNIM, such as Katibat Alidougou, are known to operate. Increasingly the border areas with Mali's Sikasso region, in the north west, are also at risk of cross border incidents led by Katibat Macina from Mali.

Intercommunal Issues

The 2020 October elections could have been an inflection point for intercommunal dynamics given the reported clashes in the south and political violence that transpired.¹²⁶ There were concerns that the elections would trigger long-standing grievances against the government and play into jihadists' recruitment. For ethnic groups in the north, particularly those who were on the losing side of the 2010-2011 civil war, there was a lack of representation and a sense of let down when Ouattara entered the race.

Dozo hunter associations report feeling disenfranchised by the ruling party and resent how the state takes advantage of their members to push back jihadist groups without providing them any material assistance or appropriate compensation.¹²⁷ Communities in the north look to some Dozo hunters for security, but some traditional Ivorian leaders fear that due to Dozo attacks on Peuhl in Mali and Burkina Faso, leaning on these militias for self-defense in Côte d'Ivoire could serve as a target for reprisal attacks from the Peuhl and jihadists groups associated with them. Respondents shared rumors that Peuhl families are paid 135,000 CFA (~200 EUR) or a cow, to send their youth to Burkina

¹²⁵ Campbell, C., "Concern Grows About Jihadi Activity in Ivory Coast", Council on Foreign Relations, March 31, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/concern-grows-about-jihadi-activity-ivory-coast>

¹²⁶ "Côte d'Ivoire : Post-Election Violence, Repression", Human Rights Watch, December 2, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/02/cote-divoire-post-election-violence-repression>

¹²⁷ Interview with village leader, Ouangolodougou, Tchologo Region, Savanes District, April 2020; *Before 2011, the Dozos were mobilized to wage war against the soldiers of former President Laurent Gbagbo. In return for their assistance, they were promised integration into the national army, legal recognition of the Dozo brotherhood, and cars and money for all Dozo chiefs. However, the current ruling party never followed through with these promises. However, security forces continue to request Dozo assistance during operations, in providing force protection to areas the security forces are incapable of reaching.*

Faso and Mali to participate in the hostilities. This is not exclusive to the Peuhl, as Dozo hunters are also joining jihadists in the Sahel for financial incentives.¹²⁸

Otherwise, intercommunal tensions are usually related to farmer-herder clashes, which are regularly mediated through local and traditional efforts, and financial reparations.¹²⁹ Distrust in local-level government authorities and military forces is prevalent in the Bounkani region, in northeastern Côte d'Ivoire. In contrast, access to traditional forms of justice - customary law - and trust in prefecture representatives is observed in most places in the northwest of the country.¹³⁰

“It’s conceivable that ex-combatants from the Civil Wars would join with the jihadists, and leverage that force to once again, go against the government.” - Women’s association representative, Tehini, Bounkani region, Zanzan District.

Furthermore, ex-combatants from the civil wars of the early 2000s were singled out by respondents as a population of concern due to political, social and professional marginalization. These populations have not been well re-integrated into society, and since many of them were never formally demobilized, they remain armed and trained, and therefore a possible recruitment pool for jihadists looking to exploit local aggrieved populations. Several respondents reported knowing ex-combatants who had been unemployed and socially marginalized for some time, and had left to join jihadist cells in Burkina Faso and Mali.¹³¹

Artisanal Gold Mining

“Artisanal gold mining is unregulated here, so it draws in regular labor migrants, as well as other illicit actors, who mine gold clandestinely. They use the transhumance corridors, which are not regulated either, to cross borders without being seen by law enforcement” - youth leader, Minignan, Folon region.

Respondents suggested that jihadists are drawn to Côte d'Ivoire for artisanal gold mining and trafficking in goods. They indicated that traffickers are using the same transhumance corridors to move across borders as the herders do, which are typically not policed or regulated.¹³² The north is connected financially to criminal organizations - and jihadist groups - in the Sahel through the trafficking of artisanally mined gold, in addition to other illicit and trafficked items, such as drugs and

¹²⁸ Focus Group Discussions, Kafolo, Savanes Region, April 2021.

¹²⁹ Focus Group Discussion, Kompinguié, Bounkani Region, Zanzan District, April 2021.

¹³⁰ However, 50% of KIs in the northwest mention that access to farmlands and herding grounds leads to disputes. November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 29.

¹³¹ Interview with local government authority, Bouna, Bounkani region, Zanzan district, April 2021; “[...] Those who joined the [jihadists] are now trying to recruit some of their associates. Others have returned or have been arrested upon their return. [...] There used to be a national association that represented “some material and moral interests” called “cell 39”, but this association has largely been dissolved by the state when its leader Aboudou Diakité was arrested in Bouaké in 2017.” November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 28.

¹³² Interview with traditional leader, Kafolo, Ouangalo, Tchologo region, April 11, 2021.

arms.¹³³ Artisanal gold mining in northern Côte d'Ivoire is nothing new - it was a rich source of financing for rebel groups that took part in the civil wars from 2002-2011. However, there is a new gold rush booming in the area around Comoé Park and across the border in Burkina Faso.¹³⁴ Most of the mines are located around Kouto, Odienné, Tengrela and Ouangolo; there are an estimated 60 sites across Denguélé, Savanes, and Zanzan districts, and an estimated 20 artisanal gold mining sites in Comoé Park alone.¹³⁵

These artisanal gold mines do not just finance illicit activity in the Sahel. They draw in migrant labor from Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ghana, Liberia and elsewhere, which has served as a pull factor for cartels, human traffickers, and jihadist groups in other gold boom towns across West Africa. These mines require security, which has in some cases been localized, by hiring nearby Dozo hunters. In other cases, when the mines themselves are located within the territory of jihadist groups, security is provided by the foot soldiers of these groups in return for extra cash.

Violent Extremism

Côte d'Ivoire faces extreme spillover effects from Mali and Burkina Faso. Though it appears that jihadist attacks and movement remain in the prospecting phase, unlike the jihadists' permanent fixture in Burkina Faso and Mali. There is no sign yet of jihadists spreading their influence through mediating local conflicts or other quasi-governing efforts seen in the Sahel, though these jihadists have informants and facilitators that support their movement southward by providing intelligence and resources. Respondents overwhelmingly expressed fears about the presence of jihadists in their communities in the last round of data collection, suggesting that the security environment has deteriorated dramatically since early 2020.¹³⁶ Almost all respondents claimed that jihadists' motivation in Côte d'Ivoire is to control access to the Comoé National Park, in order to use the forested area to hide, rest and train in.¹³⁷

“Terrorists are people just like us. They live among us without us knowing it. They are in the Parc de la Comoé. In Kafolo, for example, there was an informant who passed himself off as a shopkeeper and settled near the military camp... In Tehini, they are in the Parc, they pretend to be illegal gold miners, or herdsmen. Today, when you take the Nassian axis to Kafolo, there are mines that are set

¹³³ Mangan, Fiona and Matthias Nowak. “The West Africa-Sahel Connection.” *Small Arms Survey*, December 2019.

¹³⁴ Vincent Duhem, “Côte d'Ivoire : La Ruée Vers l'Or”, *Jeune Afrique*, January 28, 2021, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1103094/societe/serie-cote-divoire-la-ruée-vers-lor-3-4/>

¹³⁵ “Individuals searching for gold request material and financial support from a financier, of which the Burkinabe brothers Issiaka and Sayouba Ouedraogo (also known as “Mr Le Maire”) are the most prominent ones. The financiers bring in a “team” to ensure that the miner does not sell the gold to someone else. These initial buyers sell the gold to an intermediary, who then sells the gold to principal buyers, who are located in the gold markets in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso and Bamako, Mali. It is estimated that one ton of artisanal gold was sold to Burkina Faso in 2019.” November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 33.

¹³⁶ Focus Group Discussion, Kafolo, Tchologo, Region, Savanes District, April 2021.

¹³⁷ Multiple interviews and Focus Group Discussions, Savanes District, April 2021.

up along the road. Really... we are scared and today we cannot travel to the fields to farm." - Local official, Kafolo, April 2021

Reports from the Haute-Bassins region in Burkina Faso, and the Sikasso region in Mali suggest that jihadists located there are increasingly interested in territorial expansion into the Littoral states, similar to the expansion these groups took in 2018 into Niger and south-eastern Burkina Faso.¹³⁸ The data shows jihadist activity stretching from the Ouangolo hub (Ouangolodougou, hereafter "Ouangolo", Kaouara, and Zanpleldougou) to Téhini and Bouna (Zanzan district), Doropo down to Nassian, and in Comoé Park.¹³⁹ In Bavé, our data indicated that locals are afraid to farm for fear of encountering jihadists or being mistaken as a jihadist by the military. In 16 out of all 29 KI sites, particularly in and around Ouangolo and Téhini, enumerators noted that people were afraid to be interviewed. Analysts have identified several Sahel-based jihadist groups operating there, namely, brigades from Katibat Alidougou, Katibat Macina, and two remnants of Katibat Khalid Ibn Walid, one of which is operating east of Bouna.¹⁴⁰

Côte d'Ivoire first experienced a violent extremist attack from Sahel-based jihadists on March 13, 2016, when three gunmen opened fire on a beach resort in Grand Bassam, killing 19 and injuring 33 people. The attack was later claimed by AQIM and al-Mourabitoun. Although there were no significant attacks in Côte d'Ivoire following the Grand Bassam incident until 2020, there are reports that Amadou Koufa's group, Katibat Macina,¹⁴¹ have been active for some time in the Comoé and Kamelôkô forests, located 30 km from Ouangolo.¹⁴² They were allegedly surfacing along the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso following the double attacks on military installations in June 2020. Katibat Macina combatants have also been seen near the Comoé River, in the Dida Forest and Mangodara, and in the village of Kafolo (see Figure 10).¹⁴³

Armed attacks had become more frequent since 2018; a shift from intercommunal violence and rural banditry. This change should have signaled to authorities that organized criminal activity, linked to violent extremism, was spreading.¹⁴⁴ The lack of attention to this corner of Côte d'Ivoire corresponds with a neglect by Burkinabe security forces and the international community of the Haute-Bassins, Cascade and Sud-Ouest regions of Burkina Faso, which saw dramatic shifts in violence in the second half of 2020.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸ "L'extension de la menace djihadiste aux frontières du Burkina Faso, du Mali, et de la Côte d'Ivoire." Note d'analyse. Promediation. November, 2020.

¹³⁹ Multiple interviews with KIs in the Savanes and Zanzan Districts, June and November, 2020.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Kars de Bruijne, Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael Institute, March 2021.

¹⁴¹ *Katibat Macina, or the Macina Liberation Front, is Amadou Koufa's Mali based splinter unit from Ansar Dine, an operational arm of JNIM. However, rumors that Koufa was killed in French Air Strikes, have led to shifting alliances by the group, and the current leadership under Mamadou Mobbo pledged allegiance to ISIS in January 2020.*

¹⁴² "[...] In August [2020], 18 out of 38 KIs reported the presence of [jihadists] in the Comoé Park. [...] Three experts say individuals have been seen there since 2016." November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 27.

¹⁴³ Interview with youth leader, Tehini, Bounkani Region, Zanzan District, July 2020.

¹⁴⁴ "In light of the Kafolo Attack : The Jihadi Militant Threat in the Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast Borderlands", Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), August, 24, 2020, <https://acleddata.com/2020/08/24/in-light-of-the-kafolo-attack-the-jihadi-militant-threat-in-the-burkina-faso-and-ivory-coast-borderlands/>

¹⁴⁵ November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020.



Figure 10. Following the June 11, 2020 attack on a military outpost in Kafolo, the Ivorian government established a military zone in the north to address spillover from Burkina Faso.

On 11 June 2020, there were simultaneous attacks on hard targets in the north; one attack on a military post in G'béya (near Tengrela) had no casualties, and so far no group has taken credit for it. The second attack on the outpost in Kafolo was attributed to Katibat Macina. However, there is speculation that it was Katibat Alidouougou; a local cell more closely aligned with JNIM leadership. They branched out from Koufa's Katibat Macina in 2015 and established a cell in Alidouougou, near the Burkinabe border. This Katibat has not claimed credit for the attack, and maintains a low profile, mostly attempting to push out Dozo militias from their roles in protecting artisanal gold mines. The Ivorian government declared this region around Kong, a military authorization zone after the June 2020 attacks.

On 29 March 2021, suspected members of Katibat Macina again attacked a military post in Kafolo, killing 2 soldiers, and injuring 4 others. The 3 assailants were also killed, and 4 others arrested. In a simultaneous attack, presumed Katibat Macina assailants attacked a gendarmerie post in Kologoubou, 15 kilometers away from Togolokaye (Bounkani, Zanzan), killing one gendarme, and injuring another. Reports claim that up to 60 assailants from Burkina Faso descended on these two northern outposts at the same time.¹⁴⁶ On May 7, the Ivorian military reportedly attempted to intercept 20 armed jihadists that were spotted in Bolé, 10 km from Kafolo, en route to Moromoro (near

¹⁴⁶ ACLED data, 2021. "Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)", www.acleddata.com.

Tougbo). Simultaneously, there were reports that up to 60 jihadists arrived in Bolé, from Alidouougou. According to sources, the jihadists had been engaging with the local community, and preaching at the local mosque that they would provide security in return for actionable intelligence on Ivorian security forces whereabouts and plans.

These events signal a wider and more deliberate effort by JNIM, vis-a-vis Katibat Macina jihadists, to spread influence, recruit and undermine the Ivorian military in the Tchologo region of northern Côte d'Ivoire. The attack in June 2020 on Kafolo was initially seen as a one-off event, signaling the nascent spillover of jihadists into Côte d'Ivoire, though these recent events indicate that experts underestimated the magnitude, capacity and objectives of these jihadists. Moreover, it appears that these jihadists are using a stronghold in Alidougou, Burkina Faso,¹⁴⁷ to launch offensives and cultivate relations with the local community across the border in Côte d'Ivoire.

Savanes and Zanzan Districts

The forests connected to Comoé National Park and others along the border with Burkina Faso have, since 2018, become a growing space of concern. Locals cite the presence of training camps in these areas, and Dozo hunters have worked closely with security forces on both sides of the border to pursue and shut down these encampments. Ouangolo is backed by three forests - Leraba, Koba and Nougbo, themselves contiguous to the "Burkinabé" forest of Comoe-Leraba - which allows assailants associated with Katibat Macina and JNIM use to move easily across the borders into Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁴⁸

The security environment has shifted dramatically since the beginning of 2020. Respondents spoke about regular kidnappings, attacks, and ambushes taking place in the area near Bouna and the Comoé National Park, in Zanzan. In the Bounkani region, they described jihadist operatives speaking Ffulfulde and Bambara, pointing to their ties to Burkina Faso. In Savannes district, communities near Ouangolo said that a newly discovered artisanal gold mine has been a draw for young miners from across the Sahel. They are concerned this could draw in jihadists to profit from artisanal mining and/or to secure the mine.¹⁴⁹

Prior to the deployment of security forces to the Téhini region, respondents testified that the area near the Comoé Park was insecure and the presence of jihadists was widely known. The government's declaration of the area as a military zone - such that former border security would be replaced by a force protection barrier at the northern border - has allowed stability to return to the area. However, respondents were concerned that the current calm is temporary, and that jihadists would deliberately attack the region more now due to the military presence. Respondents described the presence of well-established clandestine intelligence and resource networks that jihadists had set up before the attacks this summer in Kafolo and Gbéya, that were growing in strength and

¹⁴⁷ November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 20.

¹⁴⁸ "Nord des pays du Golfe de Guinée: La nouvelle frontière des groupes djihadistes?" Étude, Promediation, March 2021

¹⁴⁹ Focus Group Discussion, Kafolo, Tcholo Region, Savanes District, April 2021.

capacity now, even despite the presence of a military zone in the region.¹⁵⁰ Several key informants identified the village chief in Kafolo as a suspect colluding with the jihadists by providing information and reporting the whereabouts of security elements. Ivorian security forces are aware of this, as reported by an official deployed to the Commandant Post of the northern military zone in Kong.¹⁵¹

“During the most recent attack in Kafolo on March 29, 2021, there was a shopkeeper located near the military camp who informed the jihadists about military movements and actions. He also regularly brought the jihadists in the park food and resources.” - Farming cooperative member, Mapinan, Tchologo District, Savanes Region, April 2021

Respondents in the focus group discussions believed that the Kafolo attacks were reprisal attacks by jihadists associated with Katibat Macina. Therefore, these were deliberate, and not just the result of Operation Comoe pushing jihadists into Côte d’Ivoire.^{152,153} The communities in and around Ouangolo have become inhabited by jihadists operating with some freedom of movement, as they frequent the town center, and quietly return to Burkina Faso.¹⁵⁴ Respondents expressed concerns over the rapidly changing security situation. They described a rapid deployment of security forces in the past six months, tasked with policing the neighborhood and detaining persons suspected of being jihadists or collaborating with them.¹⁵⁵ This has resulted in random arrests of Burkinabes living in the Savanes region - irrespective of whether they are jihadists or not. According to respondents, this has led to a mass exodus of Burkinabes fleeing back to Burkina Faso.¹⁵⁶

Denguélé District

“It is really difficult to distinguish jihadists from the local population - they are Muslim, we are Muslim... we speak the same language... they know our customs and practices better than we do sometimes. And then because we see them as part of our community, we are blind to things they do that lead up to attacks. We are not suspicious of the jihadists because they act and look like us.” - Interview with a teacher, Minignan, Folon region.

Trafficking is a significant problem in the area around Minignan, near the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso. Respondents cited trafficking networks that center on the market in Sokoro - specifically the towns of Madina, Lélé, and Naguina in the sub-prefecture of North Kambrila - as a

¹⁵⁰ Focus Group Discussion, Mapinan, Tchologo Region, Savanes District, April 2021.

¹⁵¹ Interview with KI in Kong and Focus Group Discussion, Mapinan, April 2021

¹⁵² Focus Group Discussion, Kominguié, Boukani Region, April 2021.

¹⁵³ “In Light of the Kafolo Attack: The Jihadi Militant Threat in the Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast Borderlands”, *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)*, August 24, 2020, <https://acleddata.com/2020/08/24/in-light-of-the-kafolo-attack-the-jihadi-militant-threat-in-the-burkina-faso-and-ivory-coast-borderlands/>

¹⁵⁴ Interview with village chief, Ouangolodougou, Tchologo region, Savanes District, April 2021.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with youth civil society leader, Ouangolodougou, Tchologo region, Savanes District, April 2021.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with community leader, Kadaribougou, Tchologo region, Savanes District, April 2021.

hub for smuggling illicit goods, and suspicious persons who move clandestinely. Though these are pre-established illicit networks, jihadists have already made in-roads with the local population. One local official spoke about a senior member of Katibat Macina, who was killed in the Malian town of Manankoro in 2020, and had a wife, children, and a well-established life in the Ivorian town of Tiefinso. In sharing this story, he explained that the radicalization process had already begun in the Folon region, due to its proximity to Mali.¹⁵⁷

Resilience

Fearing spillover of jihadist violence, the Ivorian government surged 300 troops to the north and launched Operation ‘Frontière étanche’ (“Watertight border”) in July 2019, in order to counter possible attacks and to prevent militants from using Ivorian territory as refuge.¹⁵⁸ The military surge and subsequent declaration of the military zone has essentially stopped highway banditry and localized criminality, but many respondents maintain that the violent extremism threat is more pervasive as an insurgency, with a spy network that the military has yet to dismantle.¹⁵⁹ Burkina Faso was slow to respond to developing insurgencies in its southwest, which has eroded the relationship between Ivorian and Burkinabe security operators. In May 2020, Operation Comoé was launched as the first joint counterterrorism operation between the two countries, targeting JNIM combatants. The operation lasted from May 12-22 and successfully dismantled a jihadist base in Alidouougou.¹⁶⁰ Three days later, JNIM combatants overran a Burkinabe security outpost in Faramana, followed by the June 11 Kafolo attack. These events culminated in a major air campaign by Ivorian security forces.

“We have started to collaborate with the Army, and when we operate in the forests, we do reconnaissance of the areas that the Army cannot go, and report back to them.” - Dozo Hunter, Kadaribougou, Tchologo region, Savanes district.

Despite some commendable actions by local authorities to involve communities in counterterrorism initiatives, civil-military relations are deteriorating amid an intense ‘period’ of racketeering by personnel deployed under Operation Comoé in 2020.¹⁶¹ Local authorities indicated that the early warning systems that had once worked in these communities are now quiet, as the civilian population

¹⁵⁷ Interview with local government official, Minignan, Folon region, Denguele District, April 2021.

¹⁵⁸ Gourlay, Y., “Opération “Frontière étanche” : Comment la Côte d’Ivoire se Protège de la Contagion Terroriste”, Le Monde Afrique, November 12, 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/11/12/operation-frontiere-etanche-comment-la-cote-d-ivoire-se-protège-de-la-contagion-terroriste_6018904_3212.html

¹⁵⁹ Multiple interviews and Focus Group Discussions, April 2021.

¹⁶⁰ “Opération Antijihadiste Conjointe Côte d’Ivoire-Burkina : Abidjan Salue d’Excellents Résultats”, Jeune Afrique, May 25, 2020, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/987353/politique/operation-antijihadiste-conjointe-cote-divoire-burkina-abidjan-salue-d-excellenresultats/>

¹⁶¹ Reports of racketeering came from “Téhini, Fiki and Doropo (north of Comoé Park), Bolé and Bavé (towns north of Kafolo), and Bouna and Nassian (west and south of the park, respectively). One KI claims that the military is “complicit with illegal gold miners”. Two KIs from Téhini describe that the racketeering takes place at the military checkpoints that were set up near Téhini.” November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 30.

is increasingly less willing to report information about suspicious activity through them. This is due to the growing presence of jihadists that threaten the community, coupled with corruption among security forces that have recently eroded confidence in the government. In turn law enforcement claim that they do not trust the information received through these channels anymore either.¹⁶² If the distrust between security officials and civilians in the north increases, this will create space for jihadist operatives to recruit from the local population. Nonetheless, Ivorian authorities continue to cite the success of these early warning systems in providing the necessary information to security forces to capably interdict jihadist activity.¹⁶³

Côte d'Ivoire also has a civilian agency policing the park interiors, Association Villageoises pour le Contrôle du Parc (AVCD), that is active in the Comoé National Park. However, according to respondents the AVCD has limited capacity to thoroughly police and protect the forested areas from the jihadists and criminal elements that operate in and through the parks.¹⁶⁴

Recommendations

Civil-Military Coordination/Cohesion: Trust between security forces and the civilian population is critical in order to deal with an insurgency type of jihadism that plagues this region. There is a need for counter-insurgency tactics that lead with civilians. This requires strong relationships between at-risk communities and the security forces. Côte d'Ivoire's national early warning centre, CNCMR,¹⁶⁵ is one of the more established national centres within the ECOWAS early warning decentralization program. CNCMR is well positioned to serve as a fusion conduit for the security forces (both military and police) and the civilian population.

Recommendations: Civil-military coordination, particularly as it pertains to CNCMR's role within communities - can be reinforced by establishing peace committees in areas that do not have them - and reinforcing existing ones through funding, training and sensitization. These should include community leaders, religious authorities, self-defense groups, youth groups, labor unions, and government and security officials (military, law enforcement and gendarmes) so that both groups can first build relationships before being forced to work together. Additionally, military and police recruitment campaigns should target these communities, to ensure that security is represented by their own community members. Finally, each community should be assigned a civil military support element, who will represent the community directly to security forces if they are not deployed to that area. **Related programs** include Interpeace and Indigo CI conducting social cohesion

¹⁶² Interview with local government official, Zanzan district, April 2021.

¹⁶³ Interview with the Centre National de Coordination du Mécanisme de Réponse à l'alerte précoce (CNCMR) officials, April 2021.

¹⁶⁴ Focus Group Discussion, Maginan, April 2021.

¹⁶⁵ *Centre National de Coordination du Mécanisme de Réponse à l'alerte précoce (CNCMR) is the Ivorian National Early Warning and Response Mechanism (NEWRM) Centre within the ECOWAS early warning network.*

programming in western and northern Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁶⁶ USAID has committed \$19.5 million to P/CVE programs in northern Côte d'Ivoire for the next five years through its Resilience for Peace (R4P) program. While a number of programs focus on social cohesion, including several UN-PBF funded programs, few specifically target the relationship between citizens and security forces.

Security Sector Reform and Capacity Building: The Ivorian military is a capable security force, but recent instances of corruption could have ramifications for civil-military relations, particularly in the north, where the military zone is in place. During Operation Comoe – the joint Ivorian-Burkinabe counterterrorism operation that took place in summer 2020, reporting of Ivorian forces participating in racketeering and other corrupt activities circulated across northern communities and gave rise to anti-military sentiment. A thorough and transparent review and house-cleaning of the security forces could help mitigate further anti-state sentiment in communities that are at-risk of being influenced by jihadists in Mali and Burkina Faso.

Recommendation: Support Ivorian authorities with SSR programming, with a focus on forces deployed in the north of Côte d'Ivoire - Téhini (identified as a hotspot of misconduct), Fiki, Doropo, Bouna, Nassian, Bolé, Bavé, Tengrela and Kong. Information sharing between the military and the police on criminal activity in border regions could be reinforced further. Donors have funded a number of capacity building initiatives, but the majority of this targeted national institutions and programs in Abidjan. **Related programs** in Côte d'Ivoire and the wider region are those carried out by France's CIVIPOL, Expertise France, Spain's FIIAPP and Belgium's ENABEL, all via EU funding, Hans Seidel Foundation via German funding, or NGOs, such as the Switzerland-based Coginta. A further two programs to support the security forces and criminal justice mechanisms are underway with funding from JICA.

¹⁶⁶ *Inclusion of specific organizations in the recommendations is not an endorsement of them or their activities. It is a recognition of their presence in the country and/or subject expertise, as identified through donor and implementer interviews, and a mapping of programs. For a complete list, refer to Elva's overview of international programs in the region at program-mapping.elva.org.*

Ghana

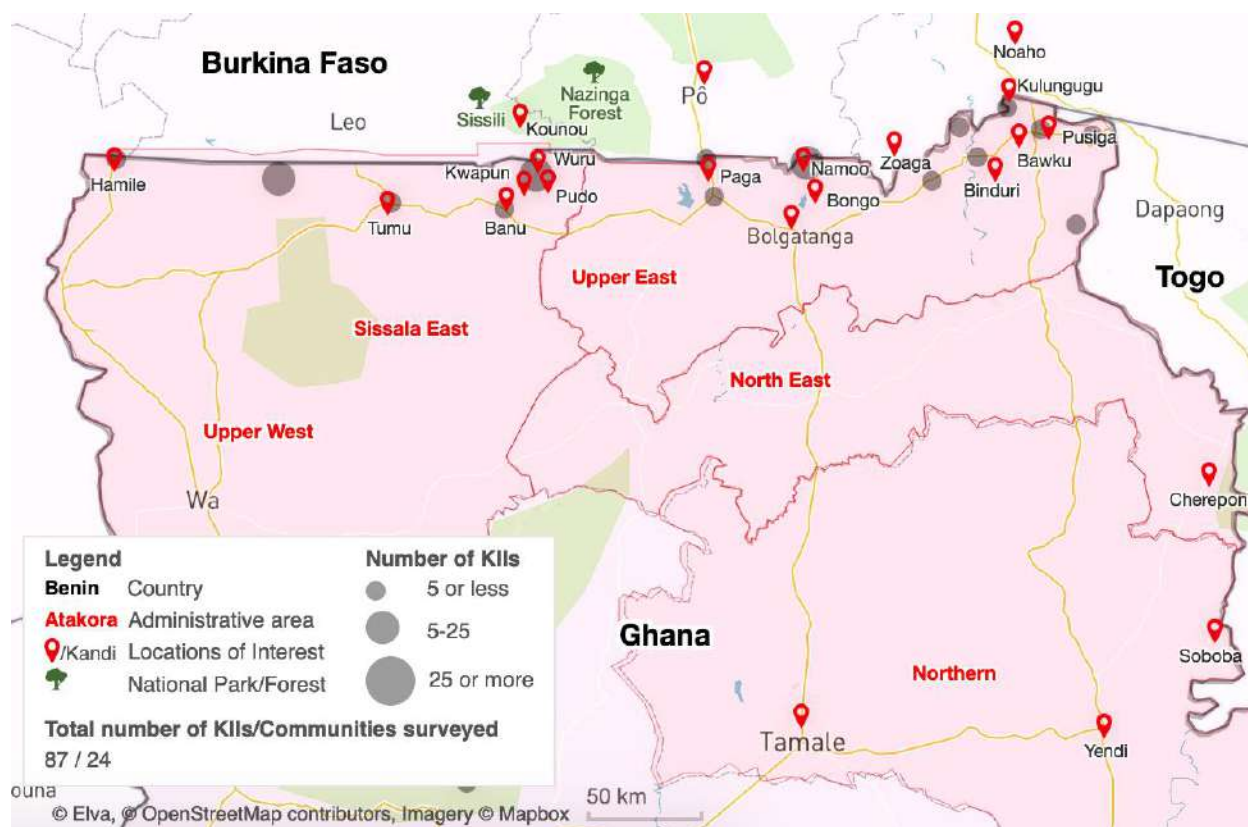


Figure 11. Locations of interviews (grey) and locations of interest (red) referred to in Ghana's Upper West, Upper East, North East and Northern regions, Elva, 2021.

Introduction

Ghana is facing a lower imminent risk of violent extremism spillover from the Sahel, compared to its neighboring coastal states. Though security forces in Ghana are among the more capable regionally, the borders with Burkina Faso, Togo and Côte d'Ivoire remain porous, so the risk of jihadist attacks spilling over from neighbouring countries is high. Although there are rumors that ISGS is active in Ghana, our research did not produce evidence of this happening. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that jihadists might make incursions into Ghana during counterterrorism operations, to take refuge with families and friends there, and to engage in the illicit trafficking networks which operate through Ghana's north.

The country's pluralistic society provides a certain degree of tolerance for other religions and cultures. Despite this, some dynamics in northern Ghana - as well as in the Ashanti region and separatist movements in the Volta region - could be exacerbated by politics and socio-economic shocks. These can be used by Sahelian jihadist groups to radicalize parts of communities more deliberately. Moreover, the general indicators of instability are also present in the northern regions - poverty, youth

unemployment, lack of access to basic resources, education and governance, political and social marginalization, inequality, and pervasive localized conflicts linked to ethnic and chieftaincy disputes.

Nonetheless, Ghana is one of the strongest democracies on the African continent. The December 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections took place relatively smoothly, paving the way for a peaceful democratic transition of power, despite the contestation of results in court. The court confirmed President Nana Akufo-Addo and his New Patriotic Party (NPP) as the winner, despite it resulting in a hung parliament. Only a few instances of political violence linked to elections were reported, which resulted in five fatalities.

Intercommunal Issues

Still, politics have a significant impact on intercommunal issues in Ghana. Internal politics and friction between the current ruling party, the NPP, and the opposition, the National Democratic Council (NDC), have at times led to sectarian divides in Ghana, where armed groups (referred to in Ghana as vigilantes) are aligned with the political parties.¹⁶⁷ Although there are concerns that politicized violence could spread across the country, these factions have not aligned with jihadist groups operating in the Sahel. Additionally, Ghana's religious cohesion has experienced increased tension and unfavourable religious influences, some of which has originated with returning scholars of Islamic study from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Egypt. Examples include conflicts between Sunnis and Tijaniyyah since the 1990's, particularly in Tamale; clashes between the Sunni's and the Shite; and between Tijaniyyah and the quadrias migrating to Ghana from Senegal.¹⁶⁸ An expert reported that there is insufficient scrutiny of (religious) NGOs that provide community services in the north.¹⁶⁹

The northern part of Ghana is beset by more regular sectarian issues centered on chieftaincy and tribal issues, such as those around the Bawku area in the Upper East, Chereponi in the North East and Soboba in the Northern Region. Between 2019-2020, clashes between Peuhl herdsmen and communities near Yendi were attributed by some observers to influences from Burkinabe Peuhl associated with ISGS, despite there being no evidence thus far that ISGS is active in this area. Violence against Christians was alleged to also be increasing, after an armed male in Tamale attempted to attack a church in early 2020, but was apprehended by members of the congregation. Similar threats against the Christian community have been reported by local police, however none of these issues have risen to a level that would trigger a national counterterrorism response.¹⁷⁰

“We are close to the border, and events in Burkina Faso, in places like Manga and Kaya, where the Catholic Church was attacked, concern us. [...] There are

¹⁶⁷ Existing vigilante groups were disbanded and formation of new groups was forbidden under the 2019 Vigilantism and Related Offences Act, but while in effect nominally, the groups exist in practice in one form or another. Interview with senior member of a local NGO, April 2021.

¹⁶⁸ Interviews with Professor at Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KA IPTC) and Director of CVE NGO, April 2021.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Research Fellow at a Ghanaian security institute, April, 2021.

¹⁷⁰ Focus group discussion, Tamale, Northern region, June 2020.

various entry points the jihadists are likely to use to enter our community.” -
 NGO Consultant, Navrongo, Upper East Region.

Islam is the predominant religion in northern Ghana, representing around 80% of the population there. However, this accounts for less than 20% of the country’s total population, with a majority of the population practicing Christianity. The Muslim population is therefore underrepresented in civil society and in the media. Radio and television programs are also not conducted in the languages spoken by Muslims in the north - Hausa, Dagbani, Wali, Zarma, etc. This information vacuum has pushed local Muslim communities to get their sermons and news from radio, TV, and news from sources in Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. However, some of these Sahel-based news outlets circulate misinformation and anti-state propaganda more widely, leading to concerns that they are a conduit by which Ghanaians might import violent extremism.

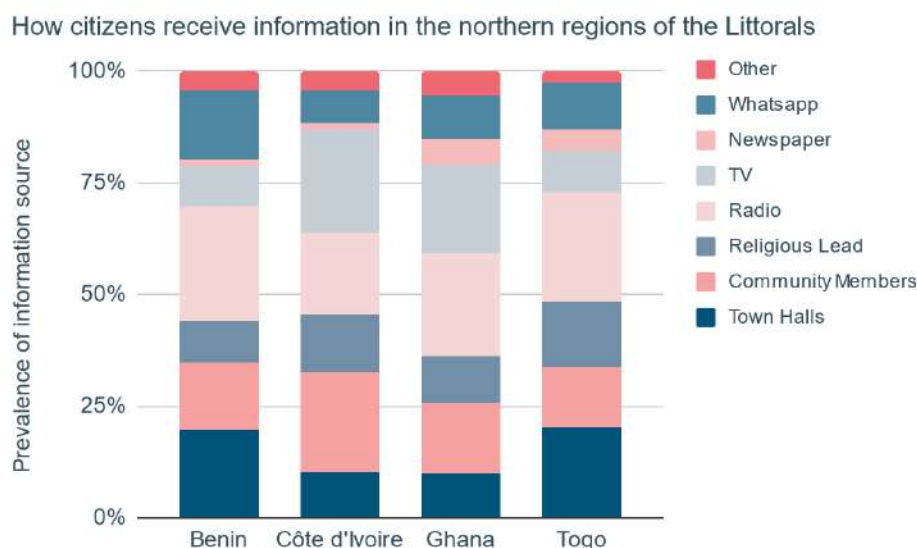


Figure 12. Data is based on responses of 262 key informants in the Littoral states in the November 2020 round of data collection. Respondents could select more than one option. Elva, 2021.

The five northern regions (Northern, North East, Savannah, Upper West and Upper East) continue to experience localized communal, chieftaincy and religious conflicts. In most cases, such divisions relate to land rights and inheritance issues. Chieftaincy issues also tie local conflicts in Ghana to the neighboring communities in Burkina Faso. The cross border nature of these chieftaincies pulls communities from Burkina Faso that are related to the same tribe across the border into Ghana, exacerbating local conflicts. Respondents in Nahouri district in Burkina Faso, across the border from Ghana, said that land access and land ownership over property that hugs the border between these two countries has also led to intercommunal tensions that spillover into Ghana. This has regularly escalated into more intense violent interaction.¹⁷¹ Experts are concerned that these conflicts could be exploited by jihadists - especially those located across the border in Burkina Faso, and pull them into Ghana. Chieftaincy dynamics often devolve into protracted conflicts that draw in local armed

¹⁷¹ Focus Group Discussion, Garwede, Nahouri Province, Centre-Sud region, Burkina Faso, May 2021.

groups, such as the Abudu-Andani conflict in the Northern Region and the Kusasi-Mamprusi conflict in the Upper East Region.¹⁷²

“Here (Paga) there is land conflict, since we are right at the border with Ghana. So there are often altercations with Ghanaian communities. To resolve these conflicts, the land chiefs of our village and those of Ghanaian villages meet to discuss the issues and find amicable solutions. It has always worked and it still works today.” - Gourounsi farmer, Zecco, Nahouri District, Centre-Sud Region, Burkina Faso, April 2021

The presence of Burkinabe migrant laborers in the Upper West Region has further exacerbated chieftaincy and intercommunal violence related to land access; the Doba and Kandega communities, Kologo and Navrongo communities and Bavungnia and Wusungu communities have all experienced recent disputes in Banu, Pudo and Kwapun over land use and the migration of farmers and herders from Burkina Faso.¹⁷³

Displaced Persons and Immigrant Communities

Intercommunal tensions in Ghana have become exacerbated by inflows of refugees, primarily from Côte d'Ivoire (approximately 7,400) and Togo (approximately 3,500), due to the stress these communities put on the limited resources.¹⁷⁴ In 2019, the area around Bawku in the Upper East Region, experienced an influx of displaced persons from Burkina Faso, who were fleeing chieftaincy related violence in Zoaga, Boulgou province.¹⁷⁵ A further 1,600 refugees registered with UNHCR in Sissala East district in the Upper West Region in 2019 and 2020, fleeing violence from the Pô region, in Centre-Sud, Burkina Faso.¹⁷⁶

Displacement can exacerbate existing tensions over limited resources, and in these northern communities that are growingly suspicious of Burkinabes, the increased presence of refugees increases tension with the host communities.¹⁷⁷ Additionally Burkinabe migrants and refugees fleeing violence and displacement due to the heavy rains in 2020 into Ghana, are raising tensions with the host communities they resettle in, particularly local youth. Discord over local farming practices caused land access conflicts, and farmer-herder clashes between locals and these Burkinabe

¹⁷² Abdallah, M., “Assessing the risk of radicalization leading to violent extremism in Ghana.” Support report for USAID’s Preventing Violent Extremism in West Africa and the Lake Chad Region (PPREV-UE II), 2018.

¹⁷³ *These were “conflict[s] over land rights between Doba and Kandega communities, Kologo and Navrongo communities and Bavungnia and Wusungu communities [...]”* November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 35.

¹⁷⁴ The UN Refugee Agency, “UNHCR Fact Sheet”, Ghana January/February 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Ghana%20-%20Factsheet%20Jan-Feb%202021.pdf>

¹⁷⁵ Refugees are reportedly settling down in the nearby Nabdum district.

¹⁷⁶ The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR,) “Briefing Note - Burkinabe Refugees”, May 31, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/69820.pdf>

¹⁷⁷ Interview with farmer association representative, Namoo, Bongo district, Upper East region, October 2020.

migrants. This led to rumors that Burkinabes could be aiding criminal and extremist activities by sheltering their members or accomplices.¹⁷⁸

Respondents also spoke about their concerns that Zongo communities could devolve into hotbeds of radicalization, due to their intrinsic ties to Islam in the Sahel, their perceived marginalization due to their immigrant status, and the Hausa language commonality tie to Sahelian jihadist groups. Zongo communities experience endemic poverty and high unemployment as well as insufficient integration in Ghanaian society. These communities are prevalent across the Littoral states, and could serve as entry points for more extremist Muslim rhetoric and anti-state sentiment.¹⁷⁹

Violent Extremism

Primary concerns over violent extremism in Ghana stem from the perception of imminent cross-border attacks by jihadists, and the recruitment of Ghanaian citizens by armed groups operating in Burkina Faso and through social media propaganda.¹⁸⁰ However, the thriving illicit trafficking networks in the north is another pull factor that could in the long term drive jihadists into Ghana.

Upper West Region

Reports of jihadist involvement in artisanal gold mining in the Nazinga Forest between Wuru, Sissala East district, and across the border in Kounou, Burkina Faso raised concerns locally that violent extremism was looming. However, the links between artisanal gold mining in the Sahel and jihadism remains ambiguous. Artisanal mines draw in migrant labor, in particular from the northern Sahel, causing renewed intercommunal tensions in parts of northern Ghana. Similar to Ghanaian responses to Burkinabe refugees, our data highlighted increased racist rhetoric towards migrants from the Sahel.

“There are unmanned border areas, and there are still attacks on the Burkina side of the Border, Kandeme-gangn and along the Black Volta river. The security units sometimes have conflicting reports and there seem to be lapses within the units.” - Farmer, Hamile, Upper West Region.

Upper East Region

Several respondents described armed attacks by Burkinabe assailants in Bitu, in the Binduri district. One attack was also reported along the Black Volta river, in areas of Burkina Faso close to the border

¹⁷⁸ Focus group discussion, Namoo, Bongo district, Upper East region, October 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Zongo means "a settlement of Hausa speaking traders." In Ghana, Zongos are predominantly Muslims, Hausa speaking migrants from the Sahel. These immigrant communities are generally impoverished, and beset by extreme marginalization - socially, linguistically, and of course politically, since they are underrepresented or not at all in local and national level politics. The government of Ghana is actively addressing this issue, and established the Ministry of Inner City and Zongo Development in response.

¹⁸⁰ November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, pp. 35-36.

with Ghana. Zabire, close to the Ghana-Burkina Faso border, near the Bongo district, also experienced increased violent incidences by groups of assailants, however this likely relates to a local chieftaincy conflict. Respondents in Pusiga, at Pulimakom town, stated that militants coming into border towns are usually suspected members of JNIM.¹⁸¹

At the local level, the ongoing Kussasi-Mossi ethnic violence in Bawku is worrying local security forces, who fear it could escalate and divert attention from jihadist groups operating across the border in Burkina Faso.¹⁸² Bawku lies across the border from Noaho, Bitou region, Burkina Faso, where the Spanish priest from Togo was killed by suspected jihadists. Nonetheless, purported movement of jihadist groups operating in Burkina Faso has not actually impacted daily lives in northern Ghana, nor has it disrupted commercial activity or infringed upon security operations.¹⁸³

“Our border is very loose. People from Burkina come in and out every day... We have intermarriage. Also the foreigners come in to buy or smuggle our fertilizer which we don't even get to buy ourselves.” - Business woman, Pusiga, Upper East Region

There are growing reports of youth joining jihadist groups operating in Burkina Faso and Mali. Young students from Paga¹⁸⁴ have reportedly joined ISGS in Burkina Faso and a woman from Yendi was reported to be in close contact with ISGS.¹⁸⁵ However, reports of ties to jihadists remain largely anecdotal. There are emerging reports of clandestine violent extremism-related activities taking place on the border with Côte d'Ivoire, including the use of fishing boats to smuggle weapons across the border.¹⁸⁶

Northern Region

Some Imams in Tamalé and Bolgatanga are known to preach radicalized interpretations of Islam in schools and during prayer, particularly at Tamalé's Fatih College.¹⁸⁷ However, experts believe that the more radical branches of Islam that proliferate in these religious centers - specifically the Ahlussunna Waljama'a - will not be leveraged to threaten political authority in Ghana the way radicalized factions of Islam have been used by Ansar Dine in northern Mali and Boko Haram in

¹⁸¹ Multiple interviews with respondents, Binduri District, Upper east Region, June 2020.

¹⁸² Lund, Christian. “Bawku Is Still Volatile’: Ethno-Political Conflict and State Recognition in Northern Ghana.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2003, pp. 587–610. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3876355; *Despite this, some respondents argue that “Bawku is relatively safe, with the presence of a district police command, a divisional police headquarters stationed in Gingade, and a nearby military detachment base to oversee security.”* November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 36.

¹⁸³ November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, pp. 34-36; Interview with local official, Feo, Bongo province, Upper East region, October 2020.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with teacher, Feo, Bongo province, Upper East region, October 2020.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with local official, Tamale, Northern region, October 2020.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with senior member of a local NGO, April 2021.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with teacher, Tamale, Northern region, June 2020.

northeast Nigeria.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, the increasing use of digital media (e.g. Facebook and Whatsapp) to broadcast religious sermons has been used in Tamalé to counter radical interpretations of the Koran by circulating moderate sermons through social media.¹⁸⁹

Additionally, Ghanaian Muslims regularly reckon with a radical, and yet non-violent group, called Tablighi Jamaat (or Tabliq), which is present across many West African countries, but has a significant presence in Ghana. The worshippers are ideologically trained and inspired by Pakistani preachers, with outside retreats as a core element of their identity. Their number is still limited in Ghana, though there is a Lamashegu suburb in Tamalé that has a community of Tablighi followers.¹⁹⁰

Online Radicalization

Despite the border spillover, jihadism in Ghana is more imminently linked to the proliferation of internet access: in 2017, the World Bank estimated that nearly 40% of Ghanaians were connected to the internet.¹⁹¹ Between 2015-2016 jihadist threats in Ghana began to centre around the youth and their exposure to online recruitment from ISIS and other groups that use internet platforms, social media and online gaming sites to recruit.¹⁹² In 2018, there were several arrests of youth that had been recruited online by ISIS and Boko Haram in northern Ghana.¹⁹³

“The enduring culture of engagement in chieftaincy conflicts has produced individuals who are committed to using violence as a tool to deal with their grievances. In November last year we did some workshops in the North, and heard directly from individuals who confessed that they had interacted with ISIS elements in Burkina Faso.” - Director, CVE NGO, April 2021.

Resilience

Resilience in Ghana is supported by a number of well-developed national and local infrastructures. At the national level, Ghana’s National Peace Council is a consortium of traditional, religious, academic and civil society experts, that effectively manages conflict resolution, although their credibility waned following their intervention in the 2020 election.¹⁹⁴ The Inter-Faith Religious group, similarly, was established by Ghanaian officials to further address inter-religious conflict.¹⁹⁵ Tactically,

¹⁸⁸ Aning, K., Abdallah, M., “Islamic radicalisation and violence in Ghana.” Conflict, Security and Development, vol. 13, no. 2, 2013, pp. 149-167.

¹⁸⁹ Aning and Abdallah, *ibid*.

¹⁹⁰ Expert interview with religious authority, Tamale region, October 2020.

¹⁹¹ World Bank Data, “Individuals using the Internet - Ghana”,
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=GH>

¹⁹² Interview with director of a CVE NGO, April 2021.

¹⁹³ Interview with director of a CVE NGO, April 2021.

¹⁹⁴ Interviews with two senior members of local NGOs, April 2021.

¹⁹⁵ Knoope, P., Chauzal, G., “Beneath the Apparent State of Affairs: Stability in Ghana and Benin”, Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations, January 2016,
<https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2016-02/Ghana%20Benin%20-%20January%202016.pdf>.

Ghanaian border security continues to capably interdict suspected militants trying to cross into Ghana, and detain or deport them back to their Sahel states of origin.¹⁹⁶

Experts identify Bawku, Paga, Hamille and Tumu border communities as particular areas of concern, with Hamille hosting an estimated 16-25 informal border crossings with Burkina Faso.¹⁹⁷ These informal crossing points remained unaffected even by the strict imposition of Covid-related border closures and continued to serve as conduits for smuggling and trafficking, particularly for rice, plastics, motorbikes, fertilizers, explosives components, and people.¹⁹⁸

“[On a forested stretch of road near Bawku that is regularly targeted by armed bandits] the police are placed at the two ends of that part of the road. They don’t have a vehicle, so when you get to that point, one of the police officers will jump into your car and give you protection because he is armed, until he crosses with you through that forest.” – Director, CVE NGO, April 2021.

Ghana’s security forces appear more focused on online radicalization, narcotics trafficking through the maritime ports, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and the threat of Ghanaian foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) returning and driving an insurgency locally.¹⁹⁹ Growing access to the internet across the country has created further concerns that locals - particularly communities like the Tablighi and Zongo - could be radicalized by FTFs or others online. UNODC hosted a conference with Ghanaian officials in October 2020 to begin the process for monitoring the return of FTFs, and training law enforcement on how to demobilize and reintegrate such individuals.²⁰⁰ Ghanaian FTFs known to return from conflicts abroad, including Libya and northern Nigeria, are reportedly routinely monitored by Ghanaian security services.²⁰¹

Recommendations

Ghana remains the most stable of the countries targeted in this report. It nonetheless maintains known root drivers of extremism that can be exploited by jihadists, including inter-ethnic violence, conflicts over land rights and endemic youth unemployment, which all need to be addressed for sustained stability. Ghana’s border security and the ability to maintain social cohesion, however, are key variables that will shape Ghana’s resistance to violent extremism spillover in the near term.

Strengthen border security: Respondents in all the targeted border communities stressed that the border with Burkina Faso is inadequately secured, with limited numbers of ill-equipped immigration,

¹⁹⁶ Focus group discussion, Kwapun, Sissala East, Upper East region, October 2020.

¹⁹⁷ Interviews with a senior officer at Ghana’s Ministry of Defence (MoD), representative of local NGO and religious studies professor, April 2021.

¹⁹⁸ Interviews with professor at KAIPTC and senior officer at Ghana’s MoD, April 2021.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with director of a CVE NGO, April 2021.

²⁰⁰ “Developing an Effective Response to Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Ghana”, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), November 4, 2020, <https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/2020-11-04-ghana-foreign-terrorist-fighters.html>

²⁰¹ Interview with senior member of a local NGO, April 2021.

police and other security personnel at the borders. Local experts argue for a need to increase the capacity of the border force by means of deploying modern surveillance equipment to the borders, building intelligence networks within local communities, providing officers with equipment, and training officers to recognize jihadists' modus operandi.²⁰²

Recommendations: The government, through security assistance from donors, should support capacity building of security deployments to remote outposts in the Upper East districts such as Bongo, Binduri, Pusiga and Namoo, and the Sissala East district in the Upper West; reinforce the effectiveness of existing cooperation between community leaders, security services and immigration officials; further expand train and equip programs for the Ghanaian border forces deployed on the border with Burkina Faso.

Support intelligence-led policing, coordination and information sharing amongst immigration, police and the counter-terrorism task force, and their counterparts in neighbouring countries to intercept cross-border threats. Ghana should take the lead in promoting cross-border communication, information sharing, and ISR support with neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and Burkina Faso. This could be a feasible leading role for Ghana to take within the Accra Initiative and other regional security efforts. **Related programs** include the EUTF-funded, EU Delegation and ICMPD-implemented \$6 million capacity building and coordination improvement program for Ghanaian security forces.

Maintain peacebuilding activities: Ghana witnesses sustained violence due to chieftaincy disputes, land and inter-ethnic conflict, particularly with minority groups and recently displaced/immigrated communities from the Sahel. Community leaders stressed that current mechanisms, such as the Northern Regional Peace Council are an effective platform to resolve localized conflicts. Though as inter-communal violence persists, peacebuilding remains necessary.

Recommendations: NGOs can intervene by building on programs to strengthen existing local peace infrastructure. There are opportunities to further operationalize conflict management mechanisms that respond to disputes in communities, such as conflict monitoring initiatives, community partnerships towards mediation of local disputes and institutional support to the locally recognized peace infrastructure such as the Customary Land Secretariat²⁰³ and the National Peace Councils (NPC). Preventive mechanisms such as early warning systems at the community level can provide early-warning data and analysis that can alert stakeholders for response. Capacity building workshops to enhance understanding of violent extremism and its drivers should target youth in the Zongo communities, traditional and religious leaders, local government officials and teachers. **Related programs** include the UN-led \$6.5 million international support program for the NPCs, a Danish-funded, \$0.5 million program to support capacity building of NPCs in partnership with

²⁰² Interviews with senior officer at Ghana's MoD, director of a CVE NGO and senior member of a local NGO, April 2021.

²⁰³ An institution that arbitrates over land disputes with the consent of the involved parties.

WANEP, and an EU National Indicative Program-funded, \$6 million electoral violence prevention program implemented by Coginta, WANEP and FIIAPP in the northern regions of Ghana.²⁰⁴

Fill the information vacuum and expand CVE messaging: Counter-messaging and sensitization programming through radio, whatsapp, social media and tv are prevalent interventions across the Sahel. In Ghana, there are growing risks of radicalization through foreign information sources, as Muslim minorities, Burkinabe and other migratory groups seek Sahelian media outlets, in the absence of Ghanaian information sources available in their languages.

Recommendations: Support media outlets operating in languages spoken by the Muslim minority in the north, such as Hausa, Dagbani, Wali and Zarma, and expand sensitization programs to improve the recognition of Burkinabe, other migratory and displaced communities in Ghana, and local minorities such as the Zongo and Tabliq. The Regional and District Security Councils should engage religious, youth and traditional leaders to include peace messaging and counter narratives in their engagements with their subjects. This can be highly effective as traditional and religious leaders command higher legitimacy in their local communities. No **related programs** were identified for this recommendation, however Search for Common Ground and Equal Access International have previously carried out such programs in Niger, Nigeria and Burkina Faso.

²⁰⁴ For more details, refer to Elva's overview of international programs in the region at program-mapping.elva.org.

Niger

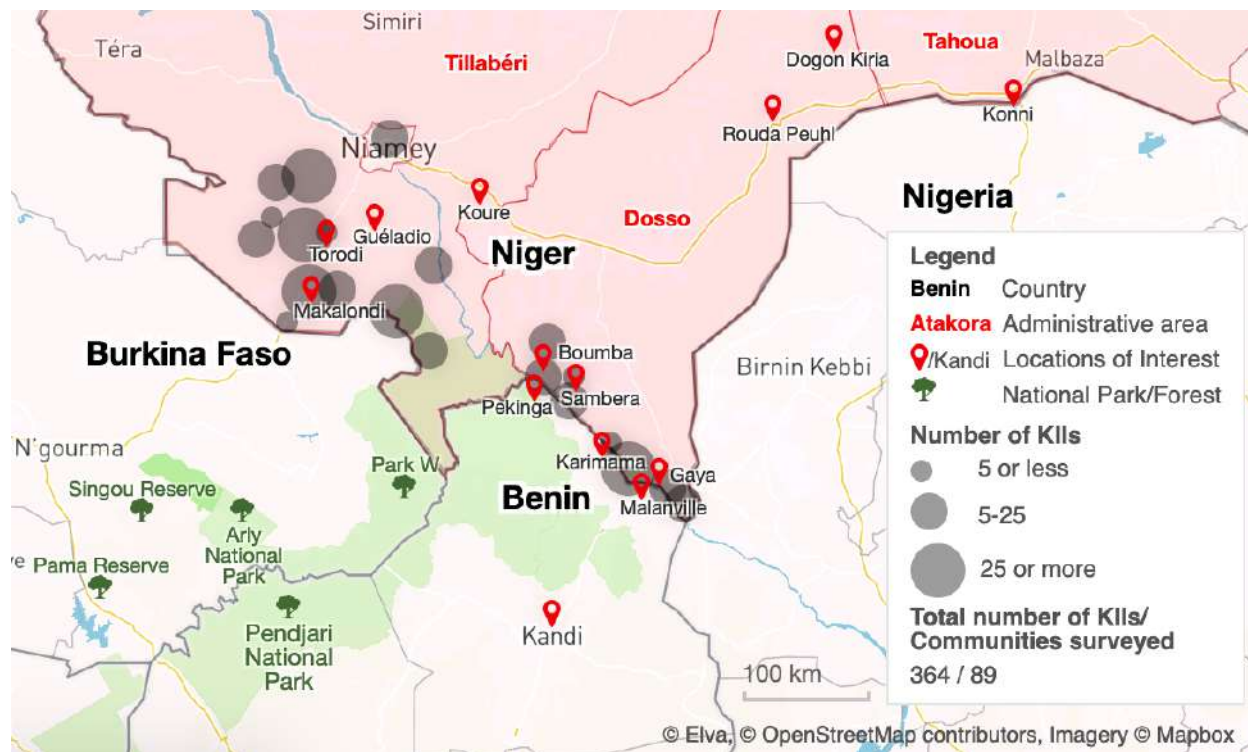


Figure 13. Map representing locations of interviews (grey) and locations of interest (red) referred to in Niger's Tillabéri, Tahoua and Dosso regions, Elva, 2021.

Introduction

“Everyone in Niamey has someone, a friend or family member, who was killed in the 2019-2020 Inantes attacks on the FAN... and everyone is angry with the government for how it was handled.” - Nigerien Government official, March 2020.

Niger's stability has rapidly declined since late 2019. Following the August 2020 attack on six French humanitarian workers in Koure – 30 km from the capital, Niamey – France listed the entire country of Niger as high risk. The kidnapping of an American expatriate in Konni on October 26, 2020 further reinforced the threat against westerners in previously stable corners of Niger. The violence led by ISGS and JNIM against Nigeriens also escalated throughout 2020 and 2021 to an untenable level. A January 2021 ISGS attack in the northern Tillabéri region that left 60 ethnic Zarma dead was quickly followed by an attack in Tahoua region resulting in 141 civilian casualties in March. Both incidents fueled intercommunal violence between ethnic Peuhl and other groups in the area throughout early 2021, namely the Zarma and ethnic Tuareg communities.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ ACLED data, 2021. “Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)”, www.acleddata.com.

The first few months of 2021 were Niger's deadliest to date, and in March 2021 an attempted military coup against the incoming President Mohamed Bazoum further weakened Niger's legitimacy. The escalating political and jihadist-linked insecurity have drastically shifted the environment in Niamey, which only two years ago, was still viewed as a bulwark of stability set against a backdrop of unstable neighbours. Moreover, prior to the December 2019 Inates attack, the professionalism of Niger's security forces was considered exceptional compared to neighbouring security forces. Now, Niger joins neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso as a state in full defense, fighting to repel jihadists from threatening its capital, with the help of the French, U.S. and other European partners.

Intercommunal Issues

In Tillabéri, communal militias continue to multiply and gain traction with local communities. The Tillabéri Zarma - an ethnic group native to southwest Niger, requested government approval in late 2019 to organize self-defense militias in response to ongoing sectarian violence between groups associated with the Peuhl, Dogon, and Tuareg of the Liptako-Gourma region.²⁰⁶ They did this in response to jihadists' attempts to consolidate local armed groups and communal militias in the region into their ranks, as ISGS did with Tolebe Peuhl in northern Tillabéri.

Respondents from Gaya, the major border town in Dosso that shares a border crossing with Malanville, Benin, reported having witnessed intercommunal violence, and regular movement of armed groups from Benin into Niger and Park W.²⁰⁷ Much of the violence was linked to farmer-herder clashes and transhumance violence, resulting from the presence of herding corridors in this area. Respondents believed herders are increasingly arming themselves with more sophisticated weapons in order to protect themselves and their livestock from cattle rustling and banditry that has increased in recent years. The proliferation of arms among bandits and herders is driven in part by concerns of growing jihadist elements in the region. The border crossing between Gaya and Malanville is highly trafficked during the market season by herders and merchants coming from all over the region, thus exacerbating intercommunal and transhumance tensions.

Violent Extremism

In November 2019, ISGS ambushed the Malian military in Indelimane, across the border from northern Tillabéri. The Malian government withdrew its forces from the area after they incurred over 50 casualties, leaving Tillabéri vulnerable to ISGS advances from just across the border. Soon after, Niger faced a major defeat with the December Inates attack and the subsequent January 2020 Chinagodrar assault on Nigerien military outposts, which together resulted in 160 FDS casualties. It is assumed that ISGS's initial objective for this assault was to clear the operating space on the border between Niger and Mali, which would make it easier for their southward progression to take place.

²⁰⁶ Interview with Nigerien government official, Niamey, Niger, March 2020.

²⁰⁷ Interview with village chief, Kotcha, Gaya department, Dosso region, Niger, April 2021.

“Those who have left to join the fight, joined ISGS... because they were thieves, or because their parents are involved... for others who join it's for revenge for a family that was unjustly killed by the Nigerien or Burkinabe government.” – Peuhl women's leader, Boulwaga, Makalondi department.

ISGS and JNIM elements have increased their attacks and presence inside Niger's Tillabéri and Tahoua regions since late 2019. Throughout 2020, almost all respondents had regularly witnessed jihadists passing through their communities and carrying out nearby attacks and recruitment.²⁰⁸ In 2020, the attack on French aid workers in Koure, and the kidnapping of an American missionary in Konni, further signaled jihadists' growing confidence to operate inside Niger. Previously, jihadists appeared reluctant to attack Westerners, or carry out attacks close to the capital, due to the presence of Western military installations.²⁰⁹ The strategic significance of these attacks is not only their capacity to directly confront the local military, which is armed, trained and backed by France and the U.S., but also that these groups' growing ranks can now withstand significant casualties without breaking.

ISGS has deliberately targeted key local and traditional authorities who represented the Nigerien government and the aid community when they led CVE programs in Tillabéri and Tahoua. This strategy was used by ISWAP in northeast Nigeria: jihadists first remove the local leadership that stands in opposition to violent extremism, which invariably erodes civilian trust in government and makes it easier for jihadists to recruit from these communities.²¹⁰ Moreover, the ISGS assaults on northern Tillabéri in 2021 showcased the regional connectivity of the Islamic State in West Africa, as ISWAP (ISIS branch associated with Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin), reportedly supplied reinforcements to ISGS to carry out these attacks.²¹¹

This new chapter of ISIS connectivity across northwest Nigeria and Benin could change the dynamics in the Littoral states. In past years, counterterrorism experts were able to isolate ISIS-related activity in the Lake Chad region and the Sahel. It was clear that with the groups separated, their capacity was limited. However, their connectivity - with Niger sitting between these two theaters - means that the groups are mobile, increasingly more sophisticated, and collaborative, as seen in Islamic State media referring to both groups as ISWAP. Coordinated attacks will require more adaptivity to local

²⁰⁸ “50% of respondents witnessed armed groups operating in and around their community, who had been hiding in the bush near the border with Burkina Faso, or Park W. [...] A majority of respondents witnessed [jihadist] operatives heading in the direction towards Park W and Tapoa, after passing through their communities. [...] About half of the respondents said that [jihadists] move along the transhumance corridors that herders use, to move north to south.” November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, pp. 42-43.

²⁰⁹ With few exceptions, including the kidnappings of UN Diplomat Robert Fowler in 2008 and two French men in 2013, and other known plans by jihadists to attack the Grand Hotel and other expatriate localities in the past.

²¹⁰ Interview with USAID official, March 2020.

²¹¹ Campbell, J., Quinn, N., “Multiple Jihadi Insurgencies, Cooperating With Bandits, Appear to be Converging in the Sahel”, March 23, 2021, Council On Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/multiple-jihadi-insurgencies-cooperating-bandits-appear-be-converging-sahel>

contexts, which includes local recruitment across a large swath of territory, possibly connecting the insurgency in Diffa to Tillabéri.²¹²

Tillabéri region

In Niger, ISGS poses the most direct threat to the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions. Under the leadership of Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, ISGS has expanded its area of influence not just among the Peuhl population, but also with the Daoussahak Tuaregs and Zarma, so that they can control large swaths of the unpatrolled territory in the Gourma region.²¹³ Through this tactic, ISGS set up an insurgency across the Tillabéri region, by using access to local communities as a means to strike and retreat ahead of a Nigerien security force-led response.²¹⁴ Their reach into the marginalized communities in the border areas was further supported after 2018, when the Governments of Mali, France and Niger engaged with local militias - specifically the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) and the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA). These groups indiscriminately targeted civilians perceived to be sympathetic towards ISGS, which furthered the sectarian divisions that ISGS used to recruit, and entrenched the Peuhl population against the state.²¹⁵

“The attacks are increasing, despite the presence of security forces here... this is because they [jihadists] have invisible accomplices in the area.” - Focus Group Discussion, Goungoube, Makalondi, Tillabéri region, February 2021

Some communities in Torodi and Makalondi are growing complacent and complicit towards jihadists in the absence of state presence.²¹⁶ JNIM’s Katibat Macina and ISGS operate with a certain level of impunity, due to the absence of significant security in the southern Tillabéri region, and according to locals, these groups regularly cross into Niger from Burkina Faso. Without a strong response from the state, ISGS and JNIM’s Katibat Macina have been publicly conducting influence campaigns through the deployment of sharia, and raiding and burning schoolhouses and military outposts.

Men are told to cut their pants, and women are forced to wear black hijabs, according to expert interviews and key informants. These groups also levy a zakat, or tax (i.e. first marriage is 5,000 CFA, second marriage is 2,000 CFA) and attack mostly government installations and western-styled schools (mostly avoiding civilian casualties). For example, they reportedly plant improvised explosive devices (IED) at border crossings in anticipation of attacking military convoys. However, when

²¹² “[Since] 2019 – following the church burnings in Maradi – [...] these regions [have] begun to be viewed as potential areas of influence for [VE] to take root in.” November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 40.

²¹³ “Sidelining the Islamic State in Niger’s Tillabery”, Report N°289/Africa, International Crisis Group, June 3, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/289-sidelining-islamic-state-nigers-tillabery>

²¹⁴ Interview with U.S. Military, February 2021.

²¹⁵ “Sidelining the Islamic State in Niger’s Tillabery”, Report N°289/Africa, International Crisis Group, June 3, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/289-sidelining-islamic-state-nigers-tillabery>.

²¹⁶ Focus Group Discussion with Torodi traditional leadership, March 2020.

civilians are passing by, the jihadists remove the IEDs to avoid civilian casualties. The “ISIS flag” has also been sighted in villages across the border from Makalondi in Burkina Faso.²¹⁷

“They [referring to Katibat Macina] come to preach, enforce the teaching of Arabic in lieu of French, and steal our cattle.” - Village Chief, Koulbou, Makalondi, Tillabéri region, February 2021

Gourmantche and Zarma respondents in the Makalondi area were hesitant to answer survey questions related to the presence and reliance on communal militias and the government's deployment of early warning systems. Some said that even speaking to our research teams could be reason for a jihadist visit. Although early warning systems are still operational in communities that remain pro-state, the community members were reluctant to speak about their existence, out of concern of retaliation if the information gets back to jihadist operatives. According to several respondents, ISGS facilitators (local recruits) first research local coping mechanisms, such as the presence of communal militias or intelligence networks, and then disrupt these systems before engaging with the community. This corresponds with how ISGS deliberately targeted local leadership in northern Tillabéri in 2019, and assassinated local village chiefs that were informants for the Nigerien security and intelligence forces. By removing these nodes of contact with the government, jihadists can more easily spread their own influence.

Dosso Region

In October 2019, clashes between FDS and heavily armed assailants near Dogon Kiria, in Dogondoutchi (bordering northwest Nigeria) signaled a shifting security environment in this region that had been otherwise largely spared of jihadist-linked violence.²¹⁸ In response, in January 2020, the government instituted a ban on motorbikes in Dosso, in order to slow jihadist movement. Similar bans were put in place in Diffa in 2015 and Tillabéri in 2017, to allow security forces to better distinguish locals from jihadists. Amid these concerns, in August 2020, suspected jihadists killed two people in Katanga, near Sambera. Then in December 2020, suspected ISGS assailants attacked the Peuhl village of Rouda Peuhl in Dogondoutchi, killing one.²¹⁹

In comparison to Tillabéri, the Dosso region has been spared of significant jihadist encroachment from Tillabéri so far, and few respondents had witnessed jihadists passing through their communities. Although, we believe that this could be a result of underreporting of jihadist movement in the region.

²¹⁷ Focus Group Discussion with Torodi traditional leadership, March 2020; “[In] smaller towns near Guéladio, Tillabéri (near Makalondi), our enumerators saw jihadist groups operating in plain sight, controlling road access, and policing the areas. [...] In Guéladio, Tillabéri, respondents said that they regularly witnessed strangers collecting information on individuals in their markets and towns, and asking questions about specific individuals and the presence of security forces; often, following these events, jihadists based in Burkina Faso would come into town.” November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, pp. 40-41.

²¹⁸ “Niger Soldiers Killed in “Terrorist” Attack in Southwestern Dosso Region”, The Defense Post, October 8, 2019, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2019/10/08/niger-terrorist-attack-dogondoutchi-dosso/>

²¹⁹ Interview with local leader, Gaya, Dosso, February 2021.

Banditry and criminality predate terrorism in Gaya, but respondents dismissed the presence of jihadism in their locality, citing banditry instead. However, reports of violent extremism linked to ISGS are increasing in Dosso, along the Niger river, including insecurity near Boumba, across from Pekinga, Benin. On December 4, 2020, the French conservationist NGO, Wildlife Angels was ambushed in a coordinated late night assault by 60 jihadists at their camp in Tapoa.²²⁰ APN, on behalf of the Beninese government, is said to have deployed more than 200 rangers to the area in early 2021 to respond to this uptick in insecurity.²²¹ Respondents and experts are concerned that the lack of security presence and persistent banditry in the region could leave the communities open to risk.²²²

The data concludes that jihadists are not using the formal crossing points between Niger and Benin to move southward. Rather, these groups are more likely passing through the Park W complex, entering Benin at the top of the Park, and then exiting near Karimama before heading eastward towards Kandi, and over to Nigeria, where they can travel without much interdiction from security forces, or following the road south towards Kouarou and into the Atakora region. In rarer cases, ISWAP appears to be moving north into Niger's Zinder and Maradi regions from northwestern Nigeria.

Resilience

“Despite the means provided by the State, we note the gradual advance of jihadists in our community” - Women's representative, Koulbou, Makalondi, Tillabéri region, February 2021

Due to the low level of jihadist activity in Dosso, this region has not been prioritized by the government or NGOs working in stabilization and CVE.²²³ The Nigerien security forces are spread thin, and have had to prioritize northern Tillabéri and Diffa. Nigerien officials point to the state's failure to decentralize the government as a major cause for the state's inability to secure and control its territory. Prioritizing the border areas in Diffa and Tillabéri/Tahoua with extra security forces and stronger governorates, leaves other borders void of any security apparatus.²²⁴

“There's never been a Government in Niger – this lawlessness is what we know, what we're used to.” - Peuhl Ruga, Torodi, Tillabéri Region

²²⁰ Wildlife Angels' internal security report, December 4, 2020.

²²¹ Interview with security and conservation advisor to Beninese authorities, May 2021.

²²² *“Banditry and crime across Niger's south – to include Dosso, Maradi and Zinder – has always been pervasive, due to the popularity of cross border relations with Nigeria and Benin. [...] Incidences of arms trafficking, particularly where women were involved, were largely reported by respondents in Dosso, near the Gaya border crossing with Benin.”* November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, pp. 40-41.

²²³ Focus Group Discussion, Tounouga, Dosso region, February 2021.

²²⁴ Interview with Peuhl Ruga (traditional leader), Torodi, March 2020.

Recommendations

Inclusive Recruitment: The government of Niger attempted to carry out a countrywide recruitment campaign in 2019 to stave off the perception that the Peuhl are not included in government service. The recruitment campaign doubled as an intervention to discourage youth in Tillabéri from joining jihadist groups. However, the campaign resulted in a short-lived effort that deployed a few hundred new Peuhl recruits to Zinder. Since many Peuhl had joined ISGS in order to better protect themselves against cross-border attacks from Tuareg militias in northern Tillabéri, deploying these Peuhl units away from their homes failed to address the primary reason this community was radicalized to begin with.

Recommendation: Security assistance should include human resource reform programs for the military and law enforcement that encourages more transparent and merit-based staffing priorities, while encouraging the state to carry out countrywide recruitment campaigns that hire from all ethnic groups, to minimize the perception that the military targets specific ethnic groups - specifically the Peuhl. **Related programs** on social inclusion and/or security sector capacity in the region are managed by organizations such as Expertise France, CIVIPOL, Coginta, Search for Common Ground and IOM. The programs, however, are usually not specifically focused on inclusive recruitment within the security forces.

Interministerial coordination, and connectivity with decentralized regions: Access to justice is insufficient in the regions that are beset by violent extremism. Due to the presence of jihadists in Torodi and Tillabéri, government - mainly security - abuses go unreported as well. Niger has the High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace (HACP), an institution that's sole objective is to conduct CVE and community cohesion programming. However, the HACP suffers from its own limitations, both through its reputation as being biased against the Peuhl and through being unable to effectively manage the conflicts.

Recommendations: These issues need to be managed by the national government, through deployments of mobile courts and judges from the anti-terrorism tribunal. Donors can support capacity building of the HACP to better coordinate activities with the Ministries of the Interior, Justice and Defense. To complement this, there is a need to sensitize communities to ongoing aid work, and ensure that information about development, P/CVE and government efforts is well communicated in remote areas. **Related programs** include EU funding to the HACP to support judicial processes for reintegrating combatants and support the security forces in interjecting illegal migration and jihadist movement, and the French AFD's support for the HACP within its \$55.5 million "Trois Frontières" program in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

See something-say something campaigns: Most security-focused or development programs that have a communications component are well received and sustained over time. Moreover, Nigeriens have historically had a positive relationship with security forces, which has only begun to wane in recent

years, due to rampant insecurity and security force excesses. However, it is not too late to restore the relationship between the security forces and the civilians in these remote areas.

Recommendation: Donors and NGOs can support the government of Niger in national level and local level efforts to reinforce early warning systems, and hold regular activities and trust-building engagements with local communities and security forces, to sustain civil-military cooperation. This can also be strengthened by inserting community liaison officers or civil military committees that complement the existing (usually one-man strong) Action-Civilo Militaire (ACM) elements in each region. **Related programs** focused on community cohesion are operated on a large scale by organizations such as Mercy Corps and Search For Common Ground. USAID and the EU Trust Fund for Africa are active donors in this space. However, few activities focus specifically on early warning and trust-building between citizens and security forces.

Togo

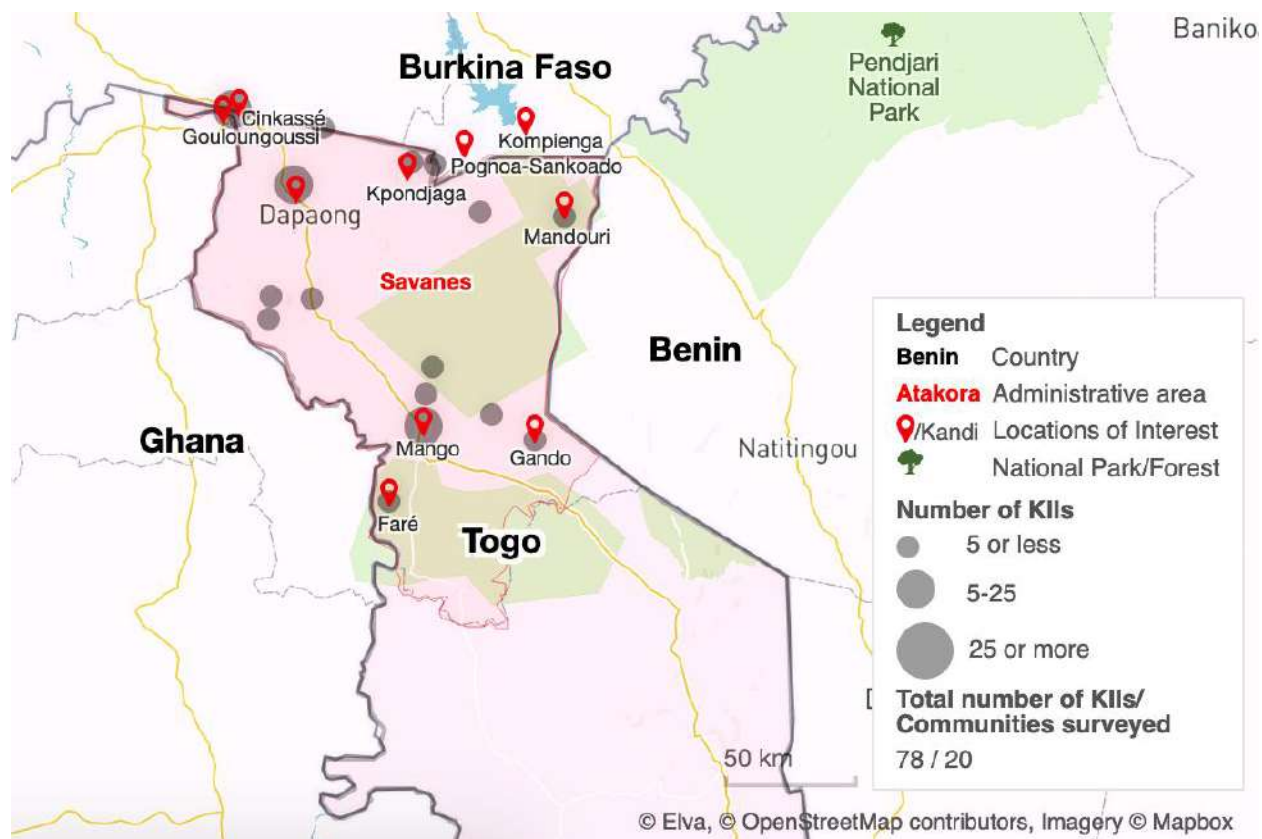


Figure 14. Locations of interviews (grey) and locations of interest (red) referred to in Togo's Savanes region, Elva, 2021.

Introduction

Though small in size, Togo's location is strategic, squeezed between Ghana - the beacon of stability in the region, and Benin - which have become new resting spaces for jihadists. Evidence of actual violent extremism in Togo is limited, but a dried-out river bed is all that separates it from jihadist groups operating in Burkina Faso. Northern Togo also presents a number of jihadist pull factors that were seen in the Sahel ahead of the insurgencies those states experience today: underemployment, social grievances, recurrent socio-political conflicts, electoral disputes, a sense of marginalization, youth boom and conflicts with migratory populations.²²⁵ These pressure points have been exacerbated by a restrictive political space, resulting from a history of one-party rule by the Gnassingbe family since 1967.

²²⁵ Amedsenu-Noviekou, P.D.N., Handy, P-S., Ella, J., Matongbada, M., "Togo ups its ante against terror threats", ISS Africa, October 30, 2019, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/togo-ups-its-ante-against-terror-threats>

The threat of violent extremism is most severe in the northern areas of Gouloungoussi and Cinkassé, on the border with Burkina Faso and Ghana. Communities reported that known agitators and members of jihadist groups, and their affiliates, frequent markets and motorbike repair shops in Togo's northern Cinkassé prefecture.²²⁶ It should be noted however that when asked for examples, respondents and experts cite second-hand reports or widely reported incidents from the news, rather than real time events in their communities, demonstrating limited evidence of actual jihadist presence and influence.

“Jihadism may arrive in Togo from the Sahel, because there is limited and weak cooperation between us and the security forces, despite there being significant security forces in the north... it will find its way into the local communities...” – Interview with a Representative of the Taxi-Moto Association, Mango, Oti Prefecture, November 2020.

Internal politics present an added risk to the threat of violent extremism spillover. Political challenges to Faure Gnassingbe's rule in 2009-2012 drew his attention away from state issues, so the civil society group – Sauvons le Togo – emerged in response to longstanding discontent with his authoritarian rule. Protests in 2017 and 2018 demanding the restoration of presidential term limits attracted mass crowds, but in February 2020, Gnassingbe comfortably won his fourth term as president.²²⁷ The ruling class holds its power in large part due to its ethnic ties to the military. Nearly 75% of security officials are from Togo's northern regions, mostly coming from the Kabyè tribe, the Gnassingbe family ethnic group.²²⁸

Despite tensions between state and civil society due to the governments' authoritarian rule and lack of transparency in policy making, confidence in government and security forces was higher in Togo relative to the other countries in this study. In September 2017, Togo became a member of the Accra Initiative and began participating in the joint military Operation Koudalgou.²²⁹ Later in September 2018, the Togolese government launched Operation Koundjoare in the Savanes region, in order to stop jihadist movements into Togo's territory from Burkina Faso. Togolese armed forces otherwise have extensive experience with UN peacekeeping operations and intelligence training by states such as the US, France and Israel.

“Spread the message that without security, there can be no development.” – Member of Comité Villageois de Développement (CVD).

²²⁶ “[A] key informant from Gouloungoussi reported that unidentified [jihadists] had passed through neighboring communities. These individuals are reported to have stayed near the river that delimits Zoumbeco village, and were apprehended and questioned by the police after the local population raised suspicions about their motives.” November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 47.

²²⁷ “Freedom in the World 2020 - Togo”, Freedom House, 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/togo/freedom-world/2020>

²²⁸ Douti, Nakmak. “Time for the world to listen to the muffled voices of the Togolese People”, OSIWA, June 2012.

²²⁹ Kwarkye, S., Abatan, E., J., Matongbada, M., “Can the Accra Initiative Prevent Terrorism in West African Coastal States?”, ISS Africa, September 30, 2019, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-the-accra-initiative-prevent-terrorism-in-west-african-coastal-states>

Intercommunal Issues

Since the 2017 anti-government protests, the Savanes region has been under a precarious peace, with a heavy military presence that is unpopular with the local population. Communities located in the Oti Prefecture, notably Mango, Gando, and Faré, described a tense environment between citizens and the government.

Inter-ethnic violence over land is regularly observed, particularly in Oti and Kpendjal Prefectures.²³⁰ In the June 2020 round of data collection, 81% of respondents in Oti prefecture described intense land conflicts between the Tschokossi (Anoufoh) and Gangnanm ethnic groups. In Mango, these same intercommunal conflicts are said to date back centuries. For example, further intercommunal tensions began to surface with the recent installation of a new market place location, with tension escalating between the cantons of Boadé and Gouloungoussi in 2018. Construction on the new market was finally finished in 2019, but it is not in use due to this lack of consensus between the cantones and the chieftaincies over who would control it.²³¹

Additionally, cross-border land disputes are common between communities that hug the border with Burkina Faso. Respondents in Pognoa-Sankoado, Burkina Faso - across the border from Kpondjaga, on the main road to the market city Dapaong - spoke about the ongoing, but mostly low-grade, violence in this border area with Togo, that is related to land disputes and land access. Dapaong is a major commercial center for the region, drawing in commercial activity from Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Benin, and so communities in and around the hub have significant cross-border movement on a regular basis, which relates in part to land access and ownership disputes for communities that span the border.

“The violence we experience is from land disputes with the Togolese communities just across the border. They come at any time to provoke us by wanting to build or settle on our land. For them we are on Togolese land and for us, we are within our rights. So far the authorities have not said anything when it escalates into violence.” - Gourmantche village chief, Pognoa-Tikonti, Kompienga province, Est Region, Burkina Faso, April 2021.

Violent Extremism

Togo has had no reported jihadist attacks, despite its proximity to the WAP Complex and areas with significant jihadist activity, such as Koalou and Kompienga, near the Pama Forest in Burkina Faso. The country experiences low grade intercommunal violence, that is unlikely to draw significant traction with jihadists operating in Benin or Burkina Faso. However, the supply chains for trafficking

²³⁰ “In Kpendjal prefecture, there are various reported land tenure issues involving the Sinam, Boudam, Sankarba, and Kountom clans.” November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 48.

²³¹ Interview with Cantone Chief and traditional leader in Gouloungoussi, Kpendjal Prefecture, Savanes Region, Togo, November 2020.

across the region pass through northern Togo, and could draw in criminal entities associated with jihadist groups.

Cinkassé & Kpendjal Prefectures

Cinkassé is the major town in the Cinkassé prefecture in the Savanes region. It serves as a dry port and a central market town, drawing significant commercial activity from the Burkina Faso-Ghana-Togo tri-border area.

In Gouloungoussi, a township near Cinkassé, the presence of the Togolese military has increased tremendously since 2019. The ambush on a Spanish priest traveling from Togo, who was passing through Noaho, Bitou, Burkina Faso, 30 km north-west of Gouloungoussi, rattled Togo's national security actors. The incident led to swift reactions to fortify the northern border, including locally led initiatives for the community to take control of its own security. With the rush to securitize the north, came a see-something-say-something protocol in the markets and town-centers, which the security forces now readily rely on.²³² Local authorities requested that the government deploy additional security forces to patrol the borders with Ghana and Burkina Faso, but also to police the roads for banditry and associated jihadist actors.²³³

“Jihadism will come to Togo as a result of the rural exodus, migratory movements to and from countries affected by violent extremism, poverty, ignorance of the dangers of violent extremism, and the anarchic and uncontrolled establishment of Koranic schools.” – Priest, Cinkassé town.

In the interviews, respondents in Cinkassé were mainly preoccupied with how jihadism could negatively impact their market economy, which is reliant on trade with Burkina Faso and Ghana.²³⁴ Most respondents were less concerned with the capacity of security forces to respond to threats in real time, and the prevalence of these actual threats impacting their personal security. Similarly, respondents in the Mandouri area, Kpendjal Prefecture, across the border from Kompienga in Burkina Faso, reported satisfaction with the security providers and their response to incidents. Respondents also feel safe reporting incidents to the security forces, particularly regarding the presence of banditry and roadblocks - known as road cutters - in Mandouri and surrounding areas.

Leadership in Gouloungoussi reported that a significant supply chain of trafficked goods, persons and arms passes through the region, facilitated by corrupt border security forces, who receive kickbacks from traffickers.²³⁵ Trafficked goods primarily consist of sand and gravel. Fertilizer, shea

²³² Interview with Koranic School teacher, Gouloungoussi, Kpendjal Prefecture, Savanes Region, Togo, November 2020.

²³³ Interview with Cantone Chief and traditional leader in Gouloungoussi, Kpendjal Prefecture, Savanes Region, Togo, November 2020.

²³⁴ Interview with representative of the Wahhabi Islamic Council, Cinkassé, Kpendjal Prefecture, Savanes Region, Togo, November 2020.

²³⁵ “33% of [respondents] in Gouloungoussi and all the [respondents] in Cinkasse indicated the presence of routine illicit flows of goods.” November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 48.

butter, and other marketable items are regularly trafficked from Ghana via the Savanes region. Additionally, artisanal arms manufactured in markets in northern Ghana, along with explosives, pass through these same supply chains, en-route to markets in Burkina Faso and Benin. Merchants also explained that pharmaceuticals and narcotics are trafficked and sold in markets in Cinkassé Prefecture, for petroleum.²³⁶

Oti Prefecture

In contrast to Kpendjal, respondents in Oti Prefecture expressed concern that jihadism from Burkina Faso was inevitable. The government began to address the concerns at the border by deploying security forces to police pockets of insecurity, along with a clearing operation established through Operation Koundjoare. Nonetheless, the surveyed communities remain fearful. This more urgent view of jihadism is likely due to less exposure to what is happening on the border with Burkina Faso. The communities in Kpendjal have more access to immediate information coming across the border than those in Oti, including family and friends that might live in Burkina Faso, who can provide perspective into the situation there. The actual threat to Oti is less than the threat that the northern prefectures face, due to Oti's distance from Burkina Faso. Respondents parroted significant misinformation in Oti about security threats on the border with Burkina Faso and Ghana, embellishing dynamics that communities on the border downplayed.

“Yes, a feeling of fear. If stringent measures are not taken and maintained, the terrorism can spread from Sahel countries to Togo” – Interview with Local Government Official, Mango, Oti Prefecture, Togo, November 2020

Mango is safer relative to Cinkassé and other northern border communities, but has a history of local disputes and intercommunal tensions that escalate into violence. These are largely driven by land disputes between the Anoufoh and Gangan tribes in the township of Gando, in southern Oti Prefecture. In June 2019, a violent incident between these two tribes resulted in four deaths, twenty injuries, and significant damage to buildings and houses.²³⁷ In 2020, violence erupted between the Anoufoh and the Moba tribes in the cantons of Barkoissi and Galangashi.²³⁸

“There are of course endogenous factors that can lead to radicalization here, notably poverty and unemployment. To this, I will add all the socio-political crises and the latent conflicts that are ill managed... such as land conflicts, transhumance, interethnic conflicts...” – Interview with Journalist for La Voix de l'Oti, Mango, Togo, November 2020.

Local initiatives to carry out ecological restoration of the parks and forests represent another stressor for intercommunal tensions. In 2015, the government led a conservation effort to restore and protect

²³⁶ Interview with Youth Association leader and Cantone Chief/traditional leader in Gouloungoussi, Cinkassé Prefecture, Togo, November 2020.

²³⁷ Interview with Imam, Mango, Oti Prefecture, Savanes Region, Togo, November 2020.

²³⁸ Interview with Journalist for le Voix de l'Oti, Mango, Oti Préfecture, Savanes Region, Togo, November 2020.

wildlife and park areas in the Mango district, which resulted in several accounts of human rights violations and killings.²³⁹ Such actions obstruct basic livelihoods and exacerbate intercommunal tensions over property rights, which have historically been a source of intercommunal violence. Local officials may need to carry out sensitization campaigns to clarify roles of security actors and citizens' limitations in the event that private security is deployed in the park.

Resilience

The government is actively engaging in counterterrorism and CVE efforts.^{240,241} Togo established local CVE inter-ministerial committees (CIPLEV) in 2019 and with the support of the UN, EU, USAID, US Embassy and WANEP, is formulating a CVE strategy based on the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) framework.²⁴² CIPLEV was established in May 2019 in response to rising insecurity in the Sahel; the committee has a national level working group, and a civil society counterpart that reaches back to local community early warning and political groups.²⁴³ The Togolese government also deployed experts to carry out trainings and seminars on violent extremist influences and sensitization campaigns in Koranic schools and with youth, to counter the threat of jihadist ideology among the youth.²⁴⁴ The process, however, continues to lack transparency.²⁴⁵

The Togolese government is participating in regional counterterrorism efforts, including the Accra Initiative and Operation Koudalgou. It also initiated Operation Koundjoaré – a multi-sector security force composed of military, law enforcement and gendarmes – along the borders with Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Benin. The government has so far withstood a destabilizing jihadist insurgency by readily addressing communities' requests for security, in contrast to the approaches in Niger and Burkina Faso, which left populations vulnerable to jihadist penetration and willing to seek protection from alternative forces or communal militias. 85% of respondents in Togo reported satisfaction with security provision by the state. However, Togo's lack of transparency and authoritarian governance likely means that KIs were self-censoring their responses about the government's capabilities.

Individual initiatives and community-led efforts contribute to the civil society resistance of extremism and violence. In 2019, a local imam in Dapaong, who has been credited with preaching moderate teachings of the Koran in order to dispel any extremist ideology, actively undertook unseating a

²³⁹ Interview with local mayor, Mango, Oti Prefecture, Savanes Region, Togo, November 2020.

²⁴⁰ "Le Togo dispose d'une nouvelle loi sur la décentralisation et les libertés locales", République Togolaise, June 26, 2019, <https://www.republiquetogolaise.com/politique/2606-3285-le-togo-dispose-d-une-nouvelle-loi-sur-la-decentralisation-et-les-libertes-locales>

²⁴¹ "Vers une Loi Pour Renforcer la Sécurité Intérieure et Garantir les Libertés", République Togolaise, May 16, 2019, <https://www.republiquetogolaise.com/securite/1605-3143-vers-une-loi-pour-renforcer-la-securite-interieure-et-garantir-les-libertes>

²⁴² "UNODC and Togolese Authorities Work Together to Develop a National Strategy to Prevent Violent Extremism", United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, September 15, 2020, <https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/2020-09-16-togo-violent-extremism.html>

²⁴³ *There was an absence in acknowledgement of CIPLEV among respondents in the November 2020 data collection round, suggesting they are either not yet well informed and/or are distrusting of government initiatives.*

²⁴⁴ Interview with a Priest, Cinkassé, Kpendjal Prefecture, Savanes Region, Togo, November 2020.

²⁴⁵ Assanvo, W., Abatan, E., J., Matongbada, M., "Evidence must guide terrorism prevention in Benin and Togo", ISS Africa, January 28, 2021, <https://issafrika.org/iss-today/evidence-must-guide-terrorism-prevention-in-benin-and-togo>

Muslim NGO that sought to seed extremist ideology through mosque planting efforts. Communities throughout the Savanes region boast a number of (youth) volunteer security groups, though their effectiveness and relationship with the security forces remain unclear.²⁴⁶ Campaigns for youth employment and creation of community centers for disenfranchised youth are already a part of the broader Togolese government's CVE campaigns.²⁴⁷ More local efforts can be successful if community members are educated on identifying extremist influences and presence, and know who to report these to.

In Mango, the government has deployed security to both Christian and Islamic places of worship, and local leaders have established community cohesion networks to educate community members on the risks of jihadist influences. The armed forces have increased their deployment presence at the border with Burkina Faso, and regularly patrols roads and market towns. There are also efforts underway to set up civil-military dialogue for the prevention of conflicts between the armed forces and the populations.²⁴⁸

Recommendations

Togo has known root causes for instability, including periods of intense civil unrest, inter-ethnic violence, conflicts over land rights and youth unemployment. While crucial for long-term stability, the research has identified social cohesion and civil relations with security forces as key variables that will shape Togo's resistance to VEO spillover in the near term.

"In my opinion, we can combat violent extremism by intensifying the presence of security forces, while increasing sensitization campaigns countering jihadist ideology." - representative of the Wahhabi Islamic Council, Cinkassé Town, Cinkassé Prefecture, Togo, November 2020

Capacity building of existing CVE structures: Togo's CIPLEV is currently expanding presence at the local level through structured funding, but it still needs to build up local networks that can inform officials about real time events near the border areas of concern. Local experts also showed concerns that misinformation from Burkina Faso about jihadism was trending among youth and disenfranchised members of their communities.

²⁴⁶ Presence of volunteer groups was noted in Gando, Pogno, Mandouri, Fare, Yembour, Tampialine, Kokoumbou and Lokano. "In Gando, [...] there is a group called l'Organisation citoyenne de l'Oti sud (OCO) that comprises over 50 youth from different ethnic groups. OCO was created in 2017 in response to the continuing antagonism between the Gangnanm and Tschokossi ethnic groups. [...] When there is a conflict, OCO youth are the first responders who try to resolve the situation. If the conflict escalates, OCO turns to the police or the army." November Situation Report, Elva, November 2020, p. 48.

²⁴⁷ Interview with Catholic Priest, Mango, Oti Prefecture, Savanes Region, Togo, November 2020.

²⁴⁸ Interview with local mayor, Mango, Oti Prefecture, Savanes Region, Togo, November 2020.

Recommendation: Reinforce CIPLEV with community engagement support via NGOs with P/CVE experience and disseminate information from CIPLEV dialogue outcomes through radio, social media and other local networks, to sensitize the community and elevate civil society organizations in these local efforts to prevent radicalization, particularly in Oti Prefecture.²⁴⁹ **Related programs** on P/CVE in Togo are predominantly managed by UNDP, UNICEF and IOM, funded via the UN Peacebuilding Fund, amounting to over \$8 million in the 2020-2022 period. On a smaller scale, a number of social cohesion and CVE programs are being carried out by WANEP, in part with funding from the US Embassy in Lome.

Recommendation: Expand sensitization campaigns to counter misinformation, focusing on inter-religious dialogue, promoting moderate views of religion (specifically Islam) and community cohesion targeting the youth, particularly in the Kpendjal, Cinkassé and Oti Prefectures, in the Savanes region. This will be challenging to undertake without approval and oversight from the Togolese government, due to their absolute control of the media and community programming. No **related programs** were identified for this recommendation.

Civil-military cooperation: The Togolese military will increasingly face civilian resentment and pushback, as civilian protests against the ruling party’s authoritarian policies continue. The military – which is predominantly composed of leadership and staff from the ruling party’s ethnic clan – has previously used disproportionate violence against youth protests, particularly in the Mango area.

Recommendation: While actual security sector reform depends highly on the political willingness of the Togolese government to expand recruitment to other ethnic groups, foreign donors can support local NGOs/CSOs in engaging the military. **Related programs** include the German-funded Hans Seidel Foundation’s “Promoting citizen-friendly police in West Africa/Sahel” program and a \$12 million EU National Indicative Program-funded support package for the justice sector, implemented by UNICEF and the Togolese authorities.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Assanvo, W., Ella Jannine Abatan and Michaél Matongbada, “Evidence Must Guide Terrorism Prevention in Benin and Togo”, ISS Africa, January 28, 2021, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/evidence-must-guide-terrorism-prevention-in-benin-and-togo>

²⁵⁰ For more details, refer to Elva’s overview of international programs in the region at program-mapping.elva.org.

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