

Recent trends in Sahelian countries in transition

Part 1: Key challenges and global security dynamics in the Sahel

July – September 2022





Introduction

STRATEGIES! brings you a series on recent developments in a few transition countries in the Sahel over the period July to September 2022.

In this first part, we provide an overview of the main challenges in this sub-region as well as the overall security dynamics of these countries.

The rest of the series will focus on recent developments in Mali (Part 2), Chad (Part 3) and Burkina Faso (Part 4).



Recent developments in transition countries in the Sahel

- Part I: Key challenges and global security

dynamics in the Sahel

- Five strategic challenges for Sahelian countries
- Disquieting developments in the security and humanitarian situation



- Part II : Recent developments in the transition in Mali

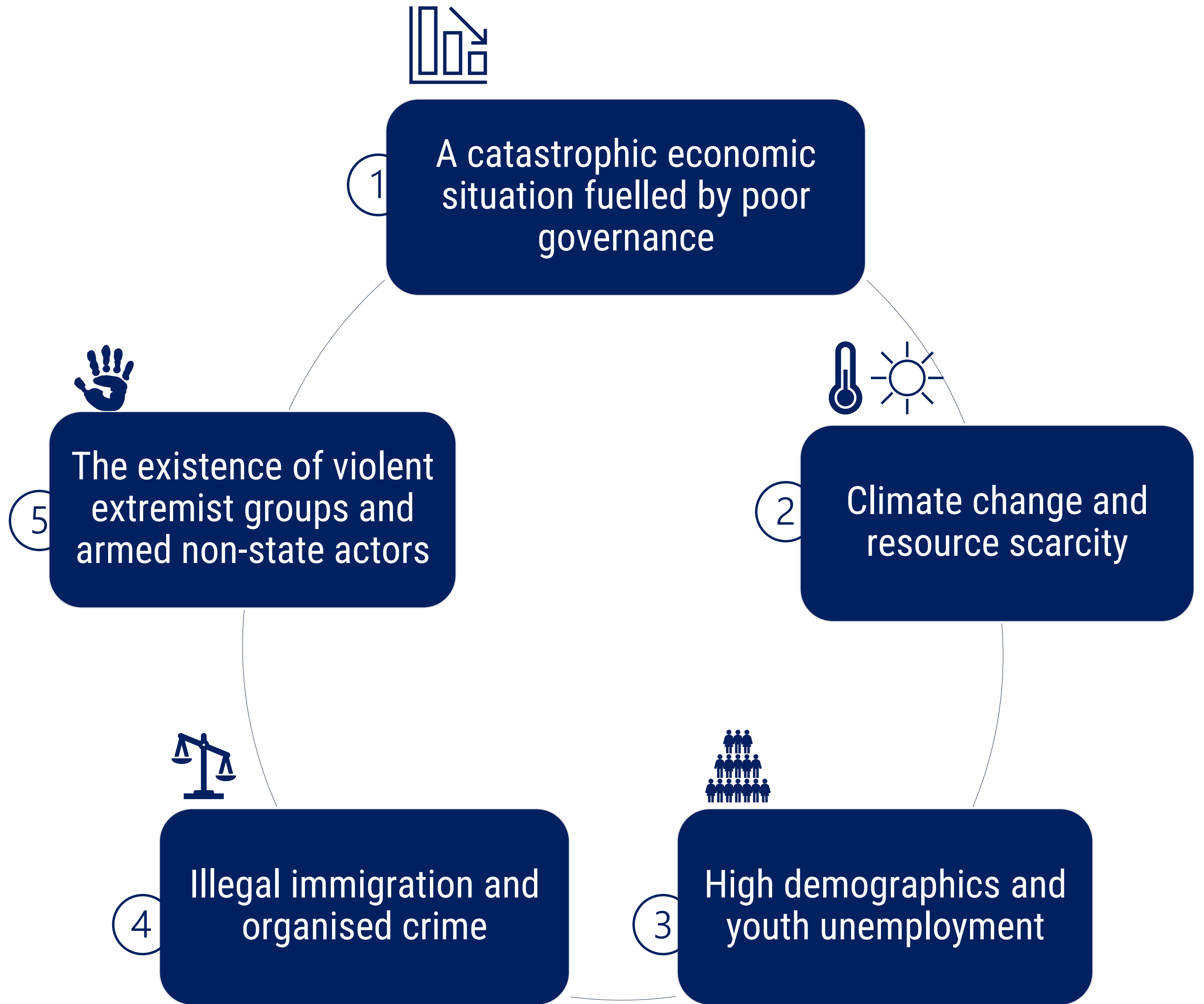
- Part III : Recent developments in the transition in Chad

- Part IV : Recent developments in the transition in Burkina-Faso

Five Strategic Challenges of Sahelian Countries



Overview of key challenges in the Sahelian countries



A Sahelian sub-region faced with major strategic challenges

I – An economic situation fueled by poor governance

- To varying degrees, Sahelian countries are fragile and generally occupy the bottom of international stability and development rankings (Fund for Peace, 2018).
- **40% of their population** live below the poverty line and the level of development in the region is one of the lowest in the world.
- These countries are also among those with the **highest unemployment rates** in agriculture, led by Chad (**87%**).
- Corruption is pervasive and undermines public confidence in government institutions, while raising fundamental doubts about legitimacy.
- Dissatisfaction with these institutions has become one of the main causes of negative political developments in the region.

II - Climate change and resource scarcity

- Lack of access to adequate irrigation, poor land quality, drought and erratic rainfall, as well as limited employment opportunities in rural areas, undermine the pastoral and farming economy and have become catalysts for massive migratory movements.
- The race for water and grazing land has long been a source of conflict between vulnerable communities.
- Desertification and resource scarcity caused by climate change, population pressure and poor governance have heightened these tensions and compromised the fragile links between communities and their environment.

A Sahelian sub-region faced with major strategic challenges

III - High demographic and youth unemployment

- If current birth rates continue, the population of the five Sahelian countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) could reach **330 million in 2050**, compared to 135 million in 2015.
- While young people make up the majority of the population in each of the Sahelian countries, their social status and economic opportunities are limited.
- Individuals **under 30 years** of age who lack education, social status and economic opportunities are a Key factor in the political instability in the region.

IV - Illegal immigration and organised crime

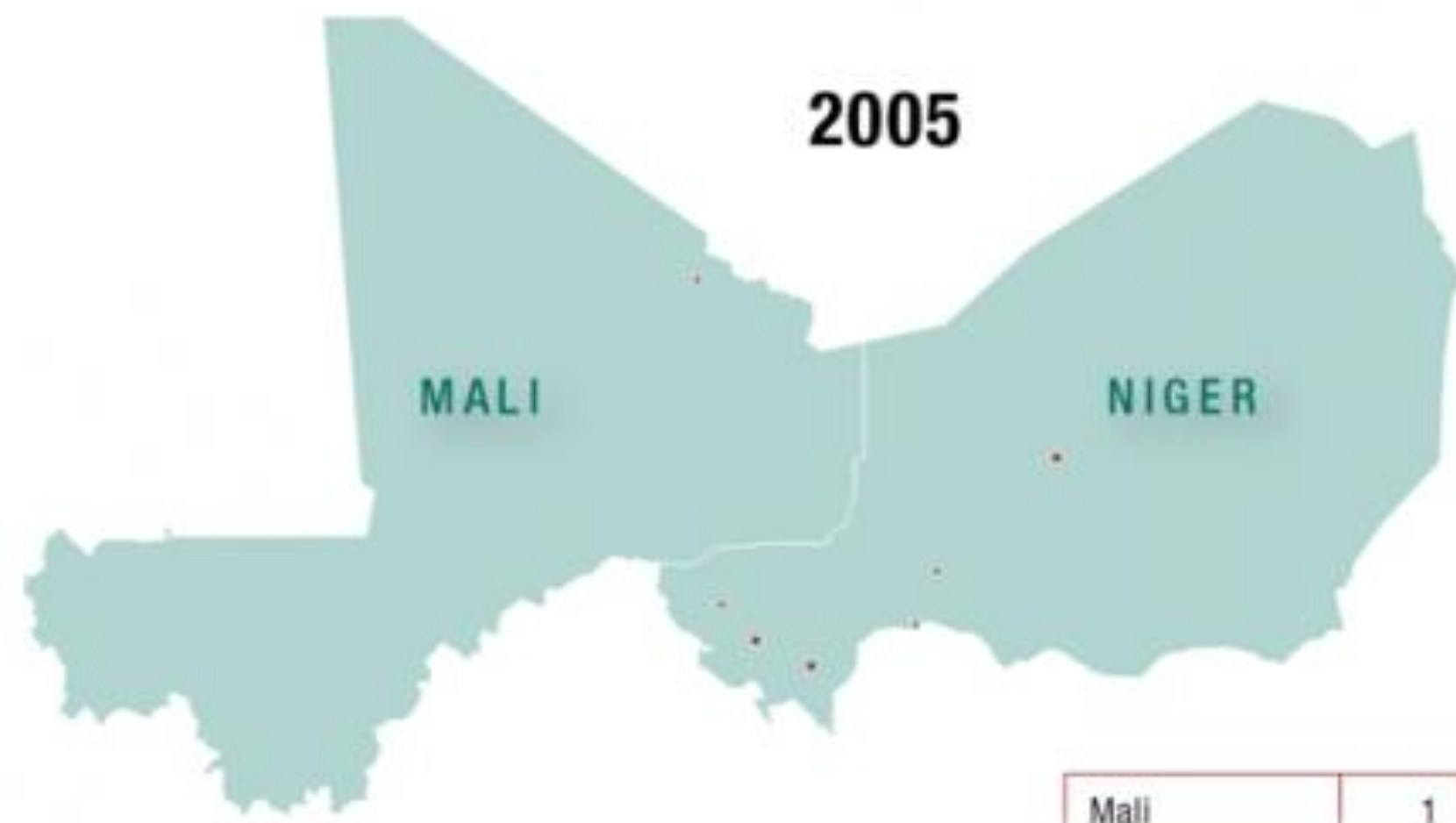
- **Almost 70%** of irregular migrants surveyed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) claim to have been victims of inhumane treatment.
- The tightening of measures taken by European countries is throwing more and more illegal migrants into the arms of criminal, terrorist and insurgent groups. This increases human trafficking.

V - The existence of violent extremist groups and armed non-state actors

- **Over the past 20 years**, the Sahel has become a kind of melting pot for violent extremist movements.
- These movements, which do not hesitate to commit bloody attacks in the region, are excessively fragmented.

Disquieting developments in the security and humanitarian situation





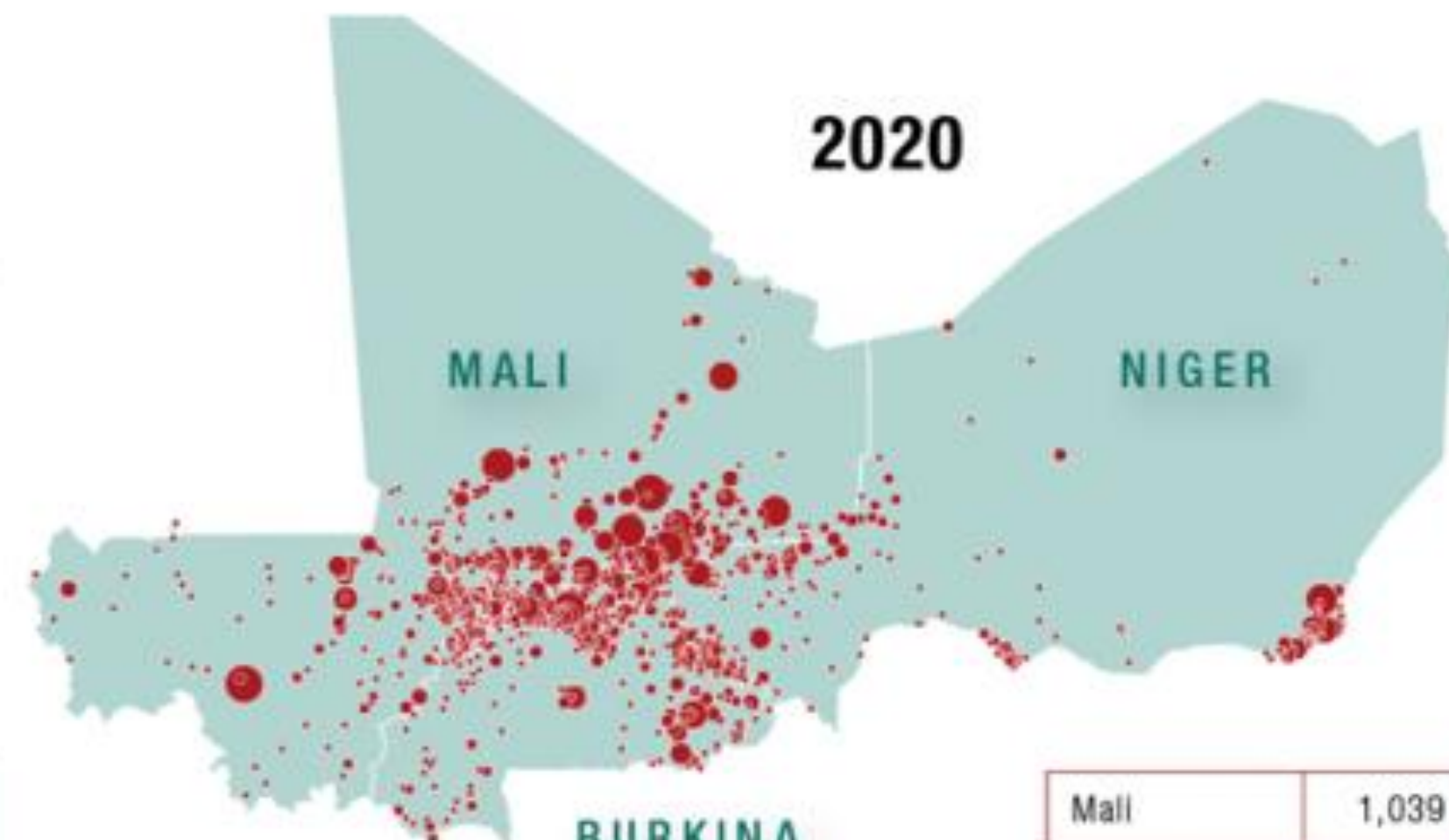
Mali	1
Niger	9
Burkina Faso	0



Mali	243
Niger	17
Burkina Faso	12



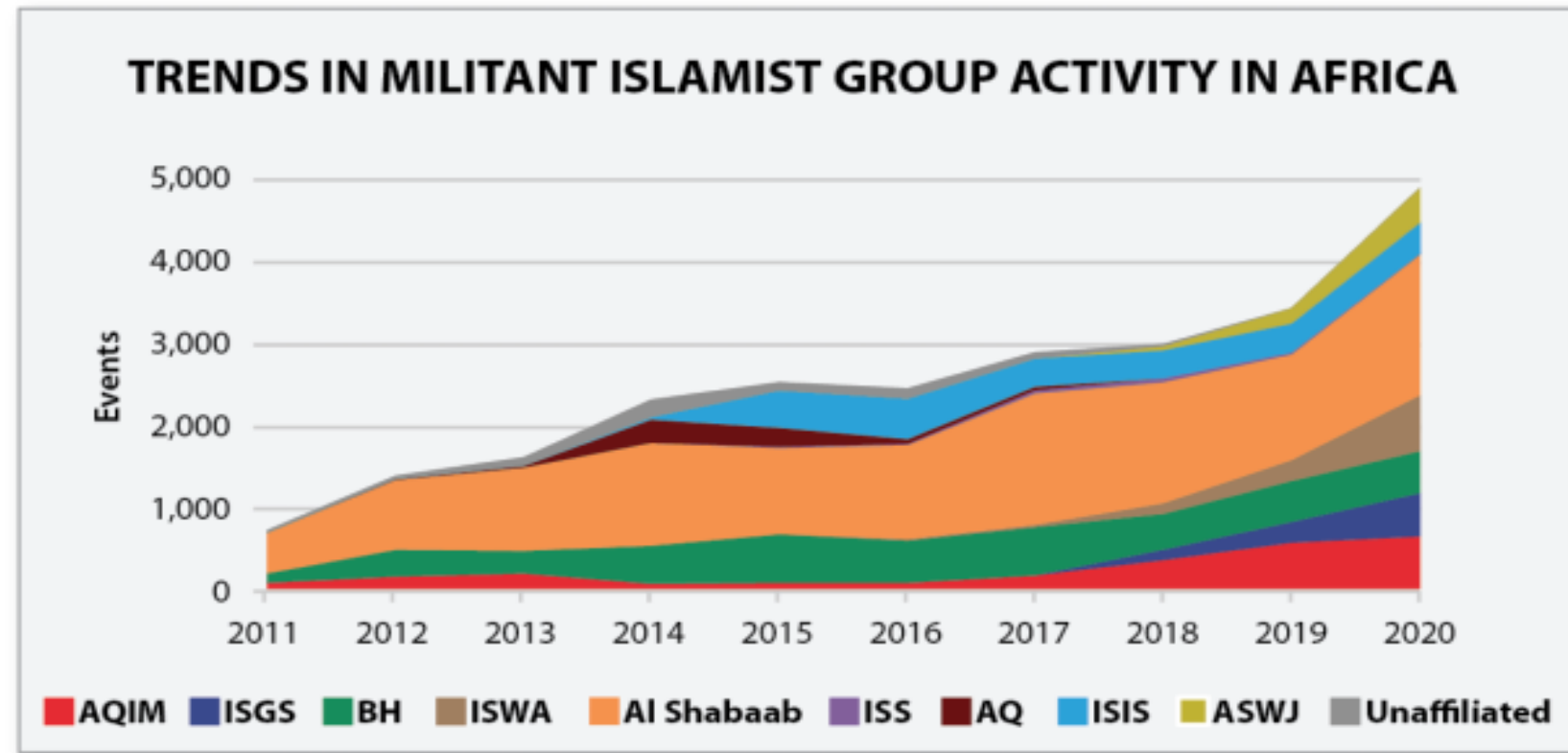
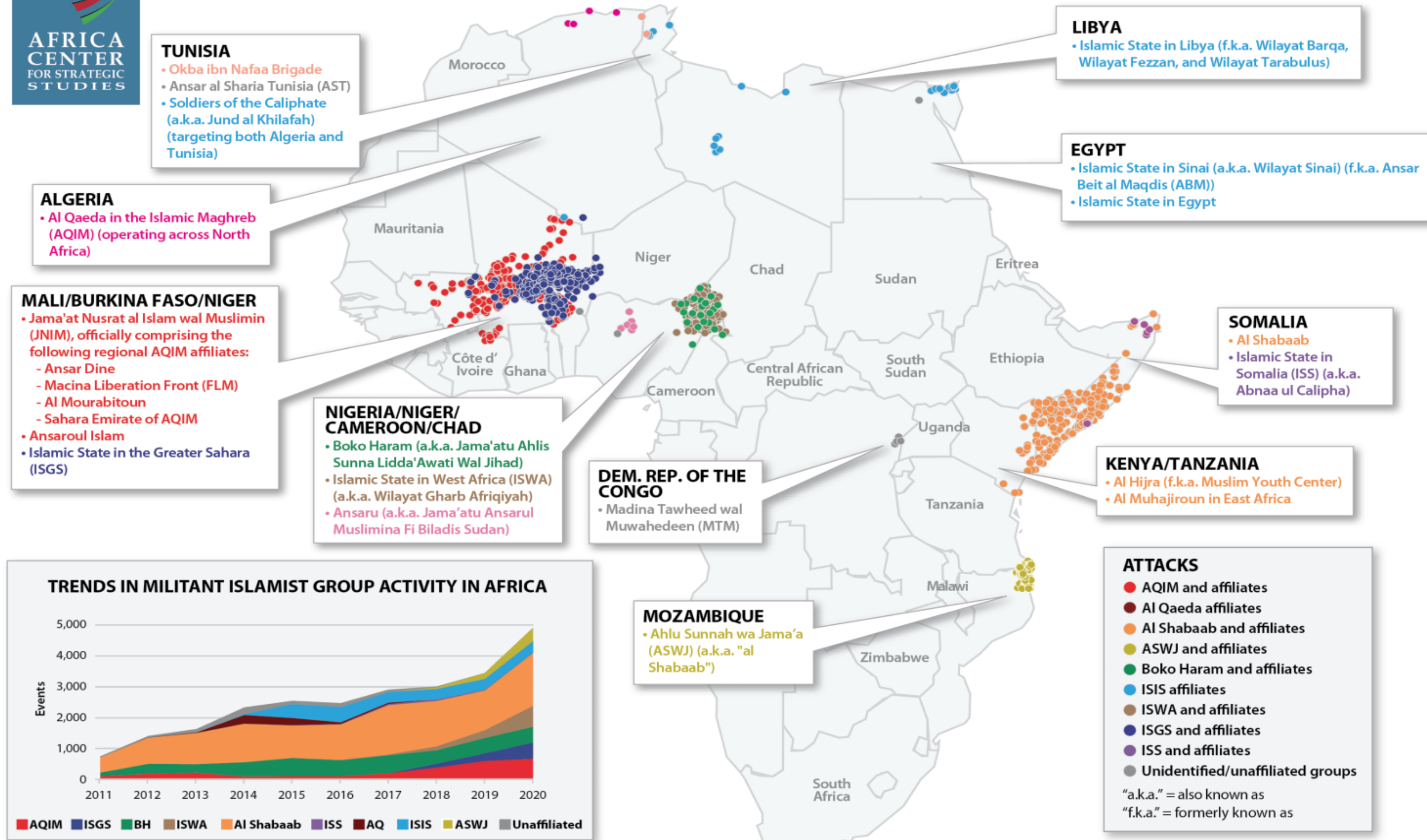
Mali	243
Niger	17
Burkina Faso	12



Mali	1,039
Niger	423
Burkina Faso	668



AFRICA'S ACTIVE MILITANT ISLAMIST GROUPS



Updated: February 2021
Note: Compiled by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, this graphic shows violent events involving the listed groups over the 12-month period ending December 31, 2020. Data on attacks or fatalities does not attempt to distinguish the perpetrators of the events. Group listings are intended for informational purposes only and should not be considered official designations. Due to the fluid nature of many groups, the listed affiliations may change.
Sources: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED); Daniel Byman; HumAngle; Thomas Joscelyn; SITE Intelligence Group; The Soufan Group; Stanford University's Mapping Militants Project; Stratfor; Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC); and Aaron Y. Zelin.

Today, more deaths from militant Islamist groups have occurred in the Sahel than in any other region of Africa.

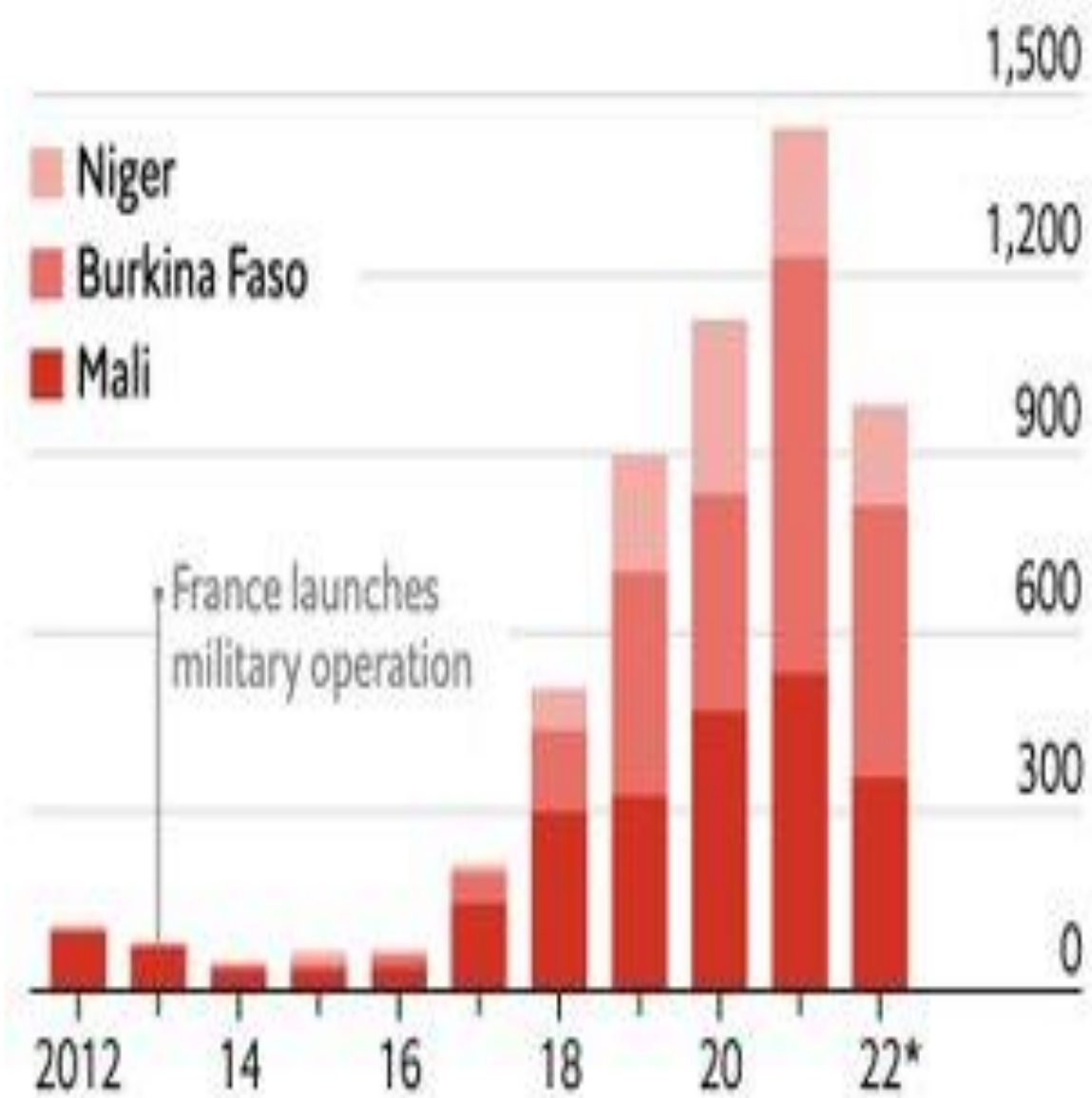
An estimated **4,838 people** have died in the Sahel as a result of these violent events.

This figure represents an increase of **17%** compared to the previous year, when an increase of **57%** was recorded.

Bad blood

Violence against civilians

Attacks



Sources: ACLED; José Luengo-Cabrera

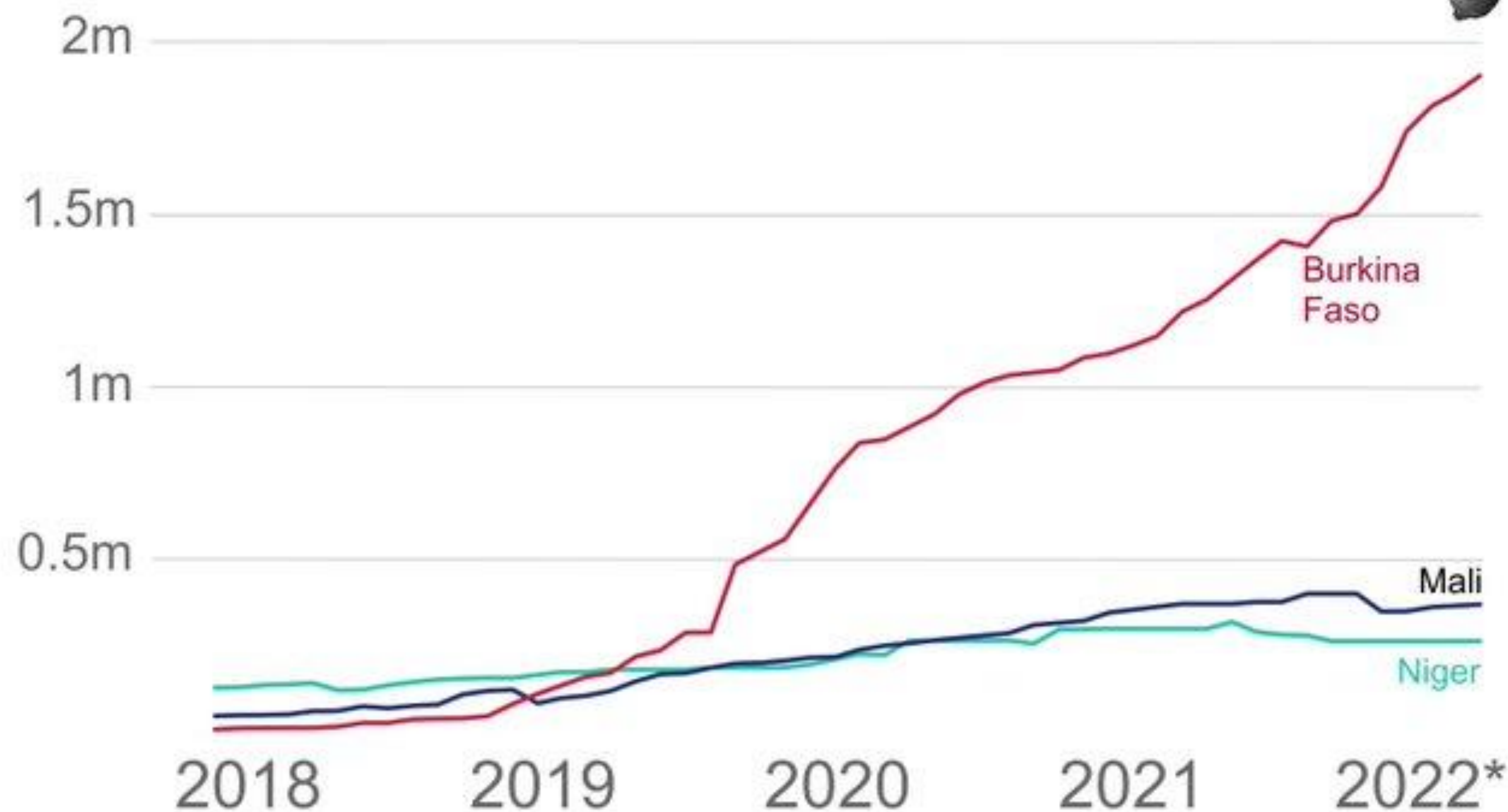
Deaths



*To July 31st

Central Sahel

Internally Displaced Persons

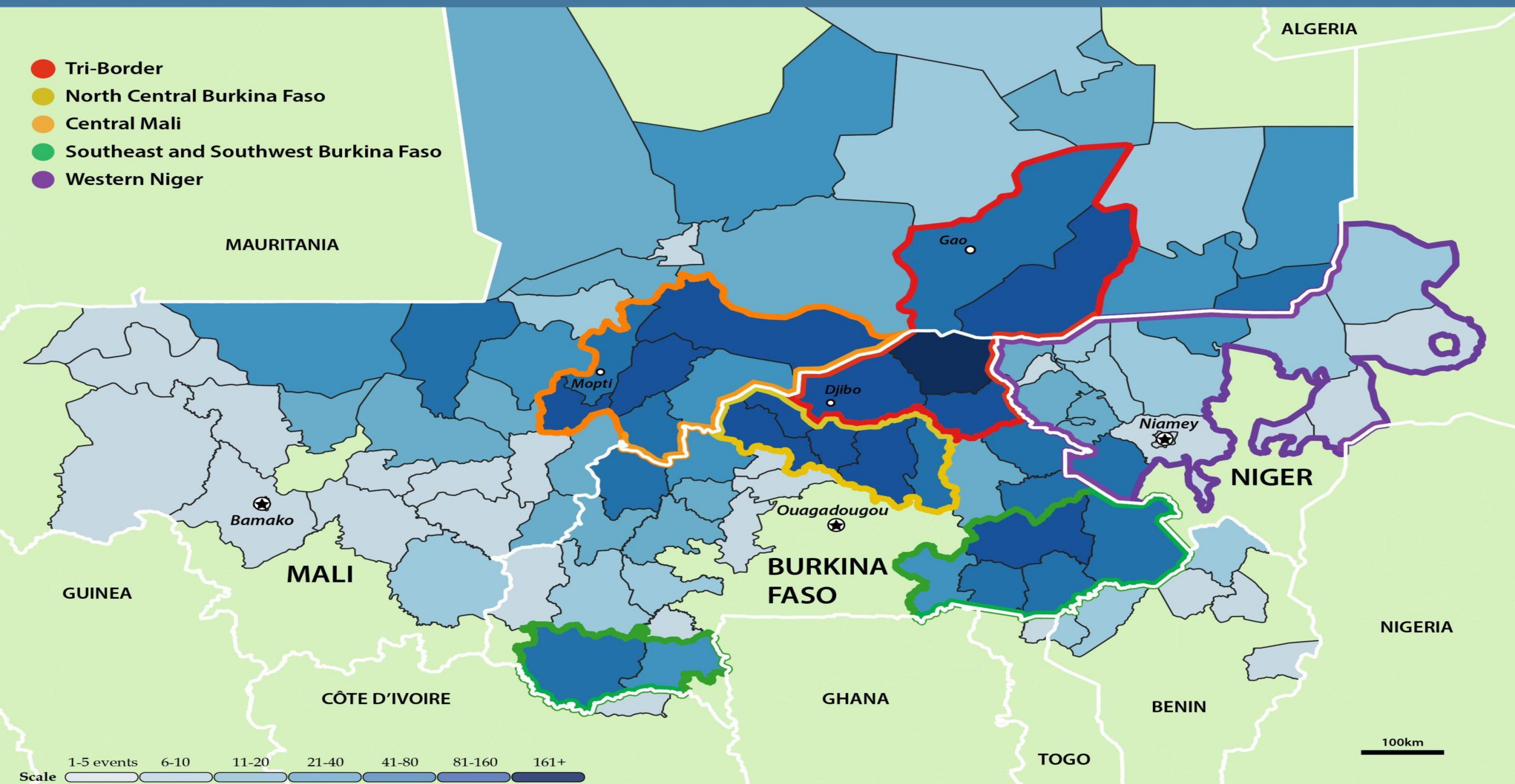


Data: UNHCR (*Q1 2022)

Visualization: José Luengo-Cabrera

- A clear consequence of the violence in the Sahel is the forced displacement of **more than 2.4 million** people, including **190,000** refugees and **2.2 million** internally displaced persons.
- Burkina Faso has experienced the majority of this phenomenon, with approximately **1.6 million** forcibly displaced people.

- Tri-Border
- North Central Burkina Faso
- Central Mali
- Southeast and Southwest Burkina Faso
- Western Niger



Overview of some violent events in Sahel

- 2019, the number of violent events involving militant Islamist groups has fourfold in the western Sahel.
- The expected **2,800 violent events** in 2022 are twice as many as the previous year.
- This violence has expanded in intensity and geographic scope:
 - Of the **135 administrative districts** in Mali, Burkina Faso, and western Niger, 84 districts, or nearly two-thirds, have experienced violent extremist attacks in 2022. In 2017, this figure was **less than one-third** (40 districts).
 - **More than 80 percent** of all violent events took place in **30 districts** of northern and central Mali in 2017. In 2022, more than two-thirds of the violent events linked to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel took place outside of Mali, mostly in Burkina Faso.
 - **Seven administrative districts** in the Sahel are each projected to face **more than 100 violent events** in 2022. This 100-event threshold had only been crossed 5 times before this year.

Security trends in Sahel

- **Three areas**, central Mali, the Tri-borders and north-central Burkina Faso, account for **more than half (55%)** of the violent events in the region. This underlines the importance of central Mali as a base and preparation area for attacking neighbouring areas.
- **Militant Islamist groups in the Sahel continue to exploit border areas** where they can benefit from a reduced security presence. For example, border districts accounted for **65%** of violent incidents in 2022.
- Given increasing levels of violence, **exposed borders remain particularly vulnerable**, especially in Niger and for coastal countries.
- **Targeting civilians appears to be a deliberate tactic to intimidate local communities into either cooperating or fleeing.** This gives militant Islamist groups both greater power and territorial control.
- At least some of the violence against civilians seeks to control gold revenues and trafficking networks, reflecting **the increasingly criminal nature of militant group activity** in many of these areas.

About the authors

This fact sheet is produced by *STRATEGIES!* based in Douala, Cameroon. It is a firm specialised in leadership and management that delivers its services in Africa as well as in Europe and the United States.

STRATEGIES! supports private companies as well as national and international public institutions. It has been in existence for 27 years and is headed by Kah Walla.



Contact us



BP 3940 Douala, 322 Rue Bonamandone,
Behind ESAO-Bali College – face SOLEX



Tel: (237) 233 43 38 76 / 233 43 82 37
Cell: (237) 699 89 08 99



Website: www.strategiesconsultingfirm.com
Email: cabinetstrategies@gmail.com