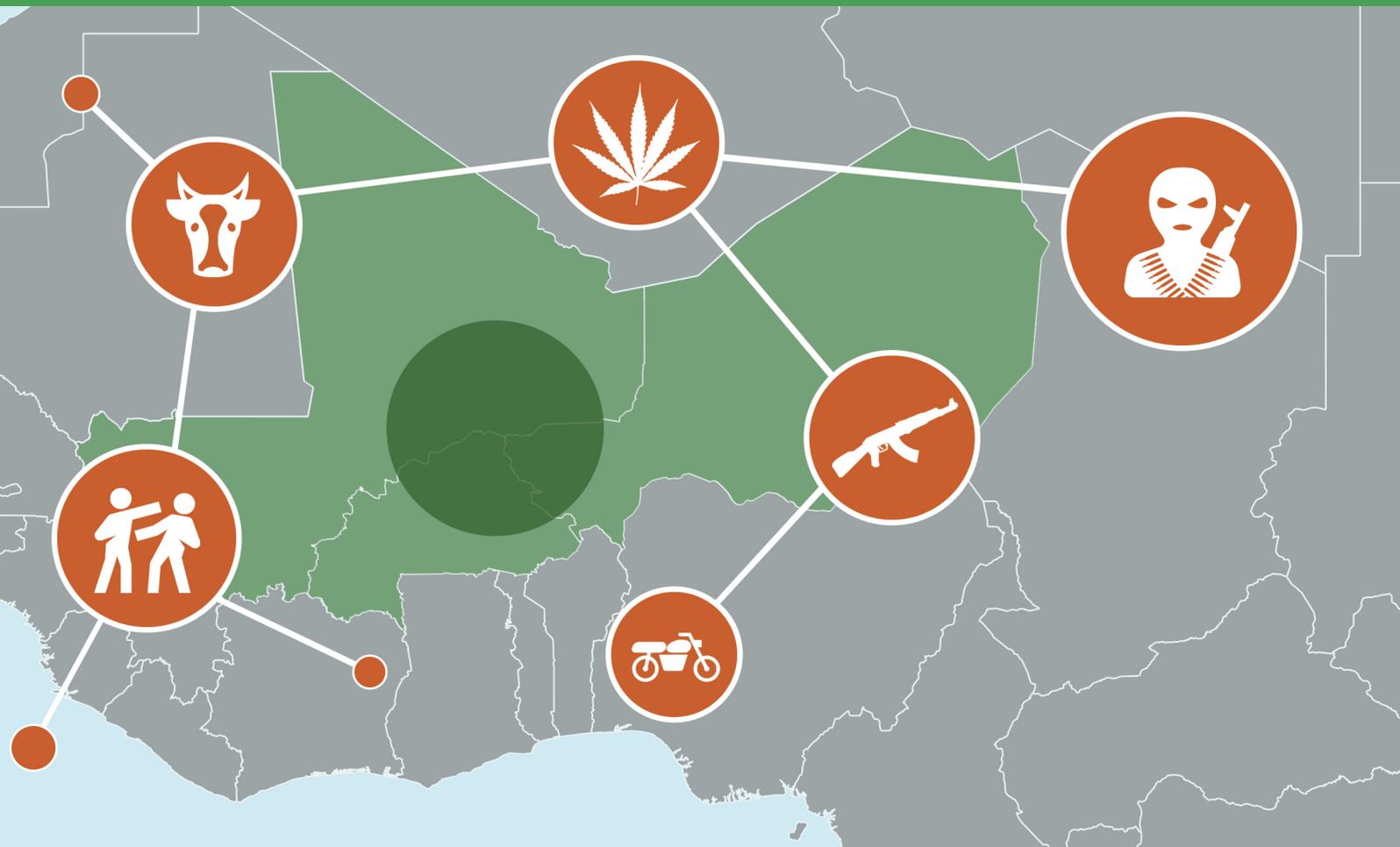


# Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma

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

## Key findings

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

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