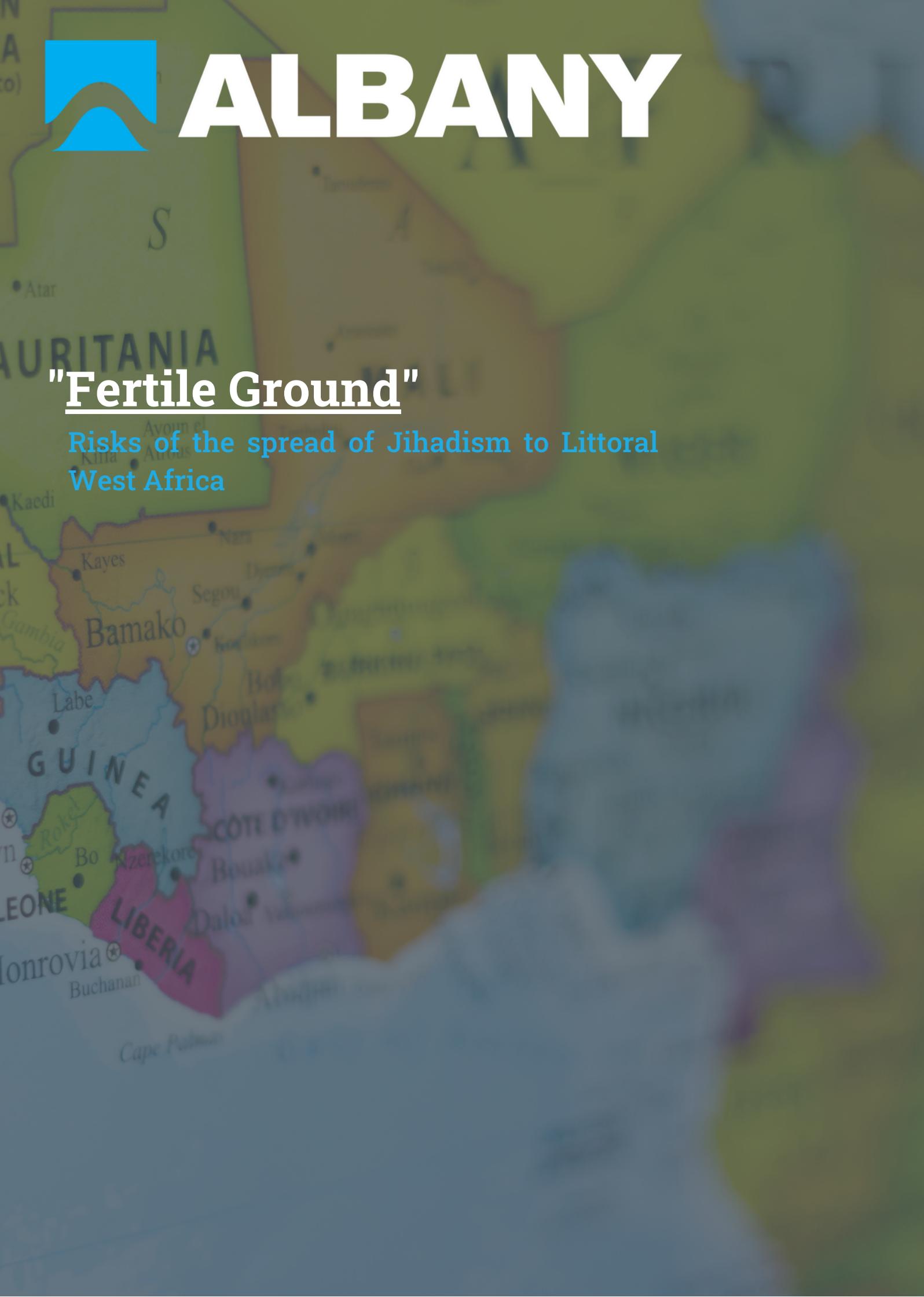




ALBANY

"Fertile Ground"

Risks of the spread of Jihadism to Littoral West Africa



Regional Overview

- There have been a notable increase of Jihadist influence on the West African coast linked to instability in the Sahel region, as jihadist groups use their presence there as a launchpad into the South.
- In April 2019 in Burkina Faso, Oumarou Diallo, the commander of a local jihadist group known as the Diawo Group, was arrested. A list of contacts in Benin, Togo and Ghana was found on his person, demonstrating links with these countries.
- The primary VEOs are Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and an Islamist militant coalition, Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA). JNIM includes several regional groups, including Ansar Dine, the Sahara-based branch of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and Al Mourabitoun. MOJWA is particularly active in recruiting from Guinea, Ghana and Benin. Hizballah has a strong presence in the region as well, but is focused on financing rather than attacks or ideological expansion.
- Like in the Sahel, local conflicts in coastal states can serve as entry points for violent extremist groups, who pose as arbiters or supporters of various sides. In a video dated 8 November 2018, three leaders of the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM) – Iyad Ag Ghali, Djamel Okacha and Amadou Koufa – a coalition of jihadist groups created in 2017 and affiliated with al-Qaeda, called on the Fulani people across the Sahel and West Africa to “pursue jihad” in other countries, notably citing Senegal, Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Cameroon.
- In rural communities, where basic infrastructure or public services are lacking, violent extremists gain support by filling the states' absence.
- Cooperation between the actors in the region remains difficult, even though there have been some isolated successes.

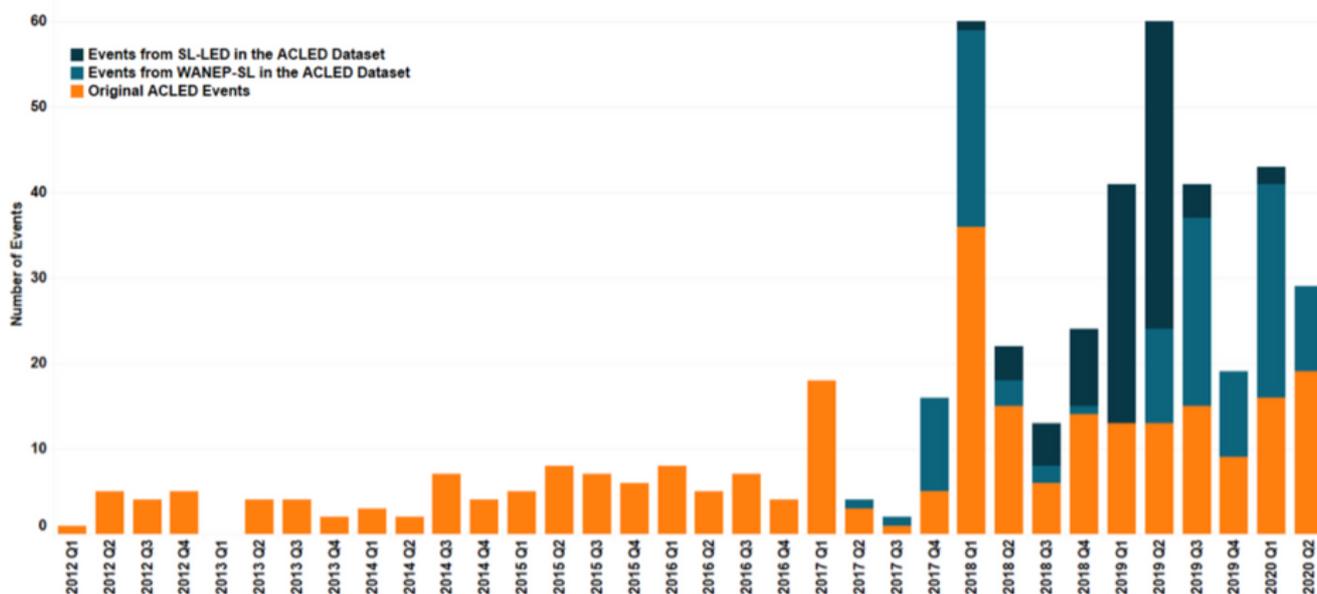
Regional Overview

- Several studies (by the United Nations Development Programme, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, or the Institut français des relations internationales) have shown that young people are drawn to Jihadist movements by a sense of injustice, local conflicts, and the behaviour of local military and security forces. The Fulani people are a particular target.
- Ecological issues related to climate change will likely act as a pressure multiplier that will act as a driving factor in ethnic tensions and local conflicts in the region that Jihadists will seize on.

CT Landscape

- In comparison to the rest of the region, and especially compared to its civil war period, Sierra Leone remains relatively stable. However, there are suggestions that political violence in the country is on the rise.
- In the middle of 2019, Sierra Leone dropped 10% on the Global Peace Index, and was among the five sub-Saharan countries with the worst deterioration of stability, while an Afrobarometer survey in 2020 revealed that 80% of Sierra Leoneans surveyed believed that politics “often” or “always” leads to violence. The survey also showed that more than half of the population experience violence at political rallies and events.
- Sierra Leone’s status as a mineral rich nation and coastal access providing an inroad for contraband have also made it a centre of terrorist financing.
- Hizballah has a prominent presence as part of the financing, but as of yet has committed no direct terrorist acts within the state.
- There have been reports of attempts by ISIS-linked groups in the Sahel branching down into the West African coast and across from Nigeria, including Sierra Leone, as jihadists have recognised its importance for financing. This may cause VEO-linked OCG turf wars.

Figure 1: Political Disorder in Sierra Leone
(January 2012 - June 2020)



Source: [Acleddata](#)

Driving factors

- Data from 2020 suggests that Sierra Leone has four dominant forms of political violence (statistics from [acleddata](#)):
 1. **Violence accompanying political competition** (51%) - This includes electoral violence and inter-party disputes, occasionally involving local militias recruited by local politicians that have arisen as a result of demand.
 2. **Communal violence** (21%) - Mostly aimed at major firms or local chiefs over perceived exploitation or inequality.
 3. **Violence targeting civilians by state security forces** (14%) - Over the past two years, governments across West Africa have exploited the Covid-19 crisis to clamp down on dissent; leading to violent clashes and heavy handed policing. In Sierra Leone, a one-year state of emergency that restricted the potential to mobilise coincided with the ruling of a commission of inquiry on the former regime, while opposition protests were banned under the pretext of a health response.
 4. **Riots and protests over national issues** (13%) - As a result of the above issues, infrequent political riots break out, leading to violence.
- As of yet these conflicts have not attracted a jihadist element, but they contain the traditional elements that these groups seek to latch onto.

CT/CVE National Strategy, local partners and info ecology

- In its statement to the UN on Oct 5th 2021, the delegation for Sierra Leone asserted its continued commitment to combatting terrorism through the strengthening of its anti-money laundering laws and introduction of biometric verification at points of entry into the state.
- In the same statement, the Sierra Leone delegation called for more support for "capacity building" of member states of the UN Counter-Terrorism Strategy, including increased intelligence sharing. As well as the finalisation of comprehensive convention on international terrorism and greater support for ECOWAS to cope with the growth of terrorism in West Africa.
- Since 2017, the government of Freetown has allegedly utilised vigilante groups to counter Jihadist threat and improve rural security. This is not a new development: during the Civil War (1991-2002), the government gave significant support to the Kajamors, who proved an effective fighting force. But the group was also accused of rampant human rights abuses and allegations have arisen of their modern incarnations acting in a similarly brutal fashion.
- As of 2018, 83% of the population have access to a mobile phone, 81% have access to radio, 45% have TV access and 16% have internet access.

CT Landscape

- The Global Terrorism Index 2022 report has ranked Cote d'Ivoire at 42 on its list of states, a fall of two places from previously (less impacted). Nevertheless, a number of terror attacks from the previous year are a cause for concern, particularly as Cote D'Ivoire accounts for 1 million of 11 million licit and illicit small arms in West Africa.
- Hizballah are reported to have established both a religious and financial presence through the sizeable Lebanese diaspora community (100,000 expats, 90% in the capital), particularly through the al-Gahir Mosque. Although primarily concerned with fundraising, there have been some instances of proselytising. In 2018, Hizballah led an outreach campaign targeting Moroccans in Côte d'Ivoire to convert them to Shi'a Islam. Hezbollah-affiliated mafia elements also play major roles in the narcotics trade.
- Since 2020, Sunni jihadists have attacked Cote D'Ivoire about 16 times, killing at least 22 members of the security forces, while at least 11 soldiers were killed or injured in multiple attacks in the first half of 2021.
- In one incident alone on March 29 2021, an estimated sixty gunmen attacked two small military installations in Kafolo and Kolobougou, both located on the border with Burkina Faso.
- In February 2021, the head of the French External Intelligence Service (DGSE) warned that Benin and Cote D'Ivoire were areas of focus for expansion among Jihadist groups.

Driving factors

- Internal divisions provide an opening for jihadi groups: the South, centred on Abidjan, is predominantly Christian and much more prosperous than the predominantly Islamic north, leading many northern residents feel marginalised by a southern Christian francophone elite.
- According to the World Bank, "the northern and north-western regions of the country have higher poverty rates (over 60 per cent) than coastal areas and the south-western region (under 40 per cent)".
- There have been historical clashes between farmers and semi-nomadic pastoralists that have flared up again due to climate factors.

Cote D'Ivoire

CT/CVE National Strategy, local partners and info ecology

- Cote D'Ivoire is a member of the **Accra Initiative**, which seeks to prevent the spillover of extremism from the Sahel via information and intelligence sharing; training of security and intelligence personnel; and conducting joint cross-border military operations to sustain border security.
- More than 400 service members from more than 10 African partner and allied nations will participate in **Operation Flintlock 2022** in Cote d'Ivoire from Feb. 15-28, 2022, who is acting as host this year.
- It is reported that in Flintlock 2020 even elite Ivorian troops struggled with basic military tasks. Many did not know how to check a pulse or apply a tourniquet, while one trainer commented that civilian engagement and building trust with locals "is quite new for them". Another trainer admitted that units earmarked for winning over locals often exist "only on paper".
- National authorities in Côte d'Ivoire, in collaboration with religious leaders, have adopted a teaching kit (Mallette pédagogique) as a tool that helps track radicalisation activities and promotes peaceful religious practices. The country is also developing a national strategy for countering and preventing violent extremism.
- A growing number of Dozos have organised local defence militias who work with the rangers, the police and the gendarmerie.
- In January 2022, Prime Minister Achi announced the government would spend \$55 million to create jobs in the north in a bid to offer an alternative to jihadist recruitment.
- Radio is the most popular media medium and there are nearly 200 stations. Online news sources are increasingly popular, but print newspapers have limited circulation. BBC World Service in French is available on FM, including in Abidjan (94.3). There are also FM relays of Radio France Internationale and Voice of America.
- The government operates the outlets with the widest reach: two radio stations, two TV stations and the leading daily newspaper.
- Around 46% of the population have internet access. There are no formal restrictions on internet use. Facebook is the most popular social network.



CT Landscape

- As of date of this report's writing, there have been no Jihadist attacks within Ghana, but a number have occurred on near the border, causing mounting concern. The President of Ghana, Nana Akufo-Addo, said that he sees the jihadist terrorism that's striking the neighbouring Sahel region as "the most important security challenge" for Ghana and the other 14 ECOWAS countries.
- There has also been a history of ethnic clashes over land use. In January 2019, one clash led to the death of eight people.
- Increase in jihadism in the region is beginning to lead to an anti-Muslim backlash; the Ghanaian National Peace Council has had to intervene several times in response to discourage radical preaching and anti-Muslim sermons among Christian churches.
- Decades-old chieftaincy conflicts that the Ghanaian government have been unable to quell have traditionally played a role in Ghanaian politics and are now drawing in Burkinabe armed groups with cultural and familial ties to one side or the other.

Driving factors

- The popular narrative and perception among the population is that Ghana is strongly divided into the north and the south. The southern region is relatively rich and geographic isolation is said to play a role in the northern region's economic backwardness. This is oversimplified but there is a strong economic disparity.
- There have been historical clashes between farmers and semi-nomadic pastoralists that have flared up again due to climate factors.
- Religion plays a strong role in civil society; with preachers, churches, loudspeakers, bill boards, flyers and other signs of religious institutions dominating the everyday environment. This has not traditionally caused conflict, but the increased threat of jihadism has led to instances of anti-Muslim preaching that could grow.
- Urbanisation has yielded manifold benefits to Ghana, but 'imported' peripheral communities, which are mainly the rural Muslim northerners, appear to be experiencing less success in the cities; hampered by general difficulties and corruption. One report by Clingendael cited interviews suggesting there are a growing number of mosques with unknown backgrounds and the potential risks for foreign recruitment.



CT/CVE National Strategy, local partners and info ecology

- Ghana acts as the central coordinator of the **Accra Initiative** through its National Security Directorate.
- Ghana has also developed a counter-terrorism framework and an action plan, acting within ECOWAS's wider counter-terrorism strategy for the whole region. One of its pillars to addressing the root causes of extremism. However, progress has been slow across the region.
- In 2020, the EU funded Action Document for the Preventing Electoral Violence and Providing Security to the Northern Border Regions of Ghana (NORPREVSEC) Programme was initiated.
- There are several local groups to partner with:
 1. **Ghanaian National and Regional Peace Councils** - Established in 2011 by the Parliamentary Act 818 as an independent state mechanism to facilitate the prevention of local conflicts. As empirical evidence in the Northern, Upper West and Upper East regions shows, the RPCs serve as an effective early warning, mediation and conflict prevention and resolution body in the country, but in suffer staffing and institutional capacity shortages.
 2. **The Regional and National Houses of Chiefs** - According to Article 270 of Ghana's 1992 constitution, the chieftaincy institution is recognised as part of the country's governance system; making them important stakeholders to engage. Among the most prominent is the Committee of Eminent Chiefs, which proved successful in mediating the Dagbon conflict of 2002. In case of the five northernmost regions there are three RHCs present (in Northern, Upper West and Upper East regions).
 3. **The West Africa Network for Peace building** - remains one of key partners for RPCs and RHCs on the ground, providing them with early warning information that is also used as a source of intelligence for the security agencies in their effort to respond by averting potential security threats.
- Ghana has one of the most free media in Africa and a vibrant press.
- Radio is the most popular medium.
- As of Jan 2022, 53% of Ghana's population have access to the internet.
- As of 2021, 89% of Ghanians use whatsapp, 73% of Facebook and 61.9% use instagram.



CT Landscape

- Lack of media is resulting in attacks going unreported and the true scale of the problem difficult to clarify.
- Terrorist and armed groups are reported to have a transitory and temporary presence in northern Benin, foremost for tactical hideout and procurement, while having their regular bases in neighbouring Sahel countries.
- There is some evidence that terrorist cells are present in Benin for some time; in May 2018, 42 people were arrested during counter-terrorism operations.
- Violence is concentrated in the northern regions of Alibori, Atacora and Borgou.
- A kidnapping for ransom of two tourists in northern Benin resulted in the death of a Beninese tour guide and two French Special Forces soldiers in 2019.
- In February 2021, the head of the French External Intelligence Service (DGSE) warned that Benin and Cote D'Ivoire were areas of focus for expansion among Jihadist groups.
- On 8 and 10 February 2022, Benin recorded its deadliest attacks yet when patrols in its National Park struck improvised explosive devices. The government said one soldier and eight park officers, including their French instructor, were killed and 12 others wounded.
- Previously, a string of assaults in northern Benin between late November 2021 and January 2022 led to several deaths.
- There are indications that gold buyers from Togo and Benin are accessing some gold mining sites controlled by violent extremists in the Sahel.
- In northern Benin, there has been a wave of new mosque construction, accompanied by a more rigorous interpretation of Islamic law.

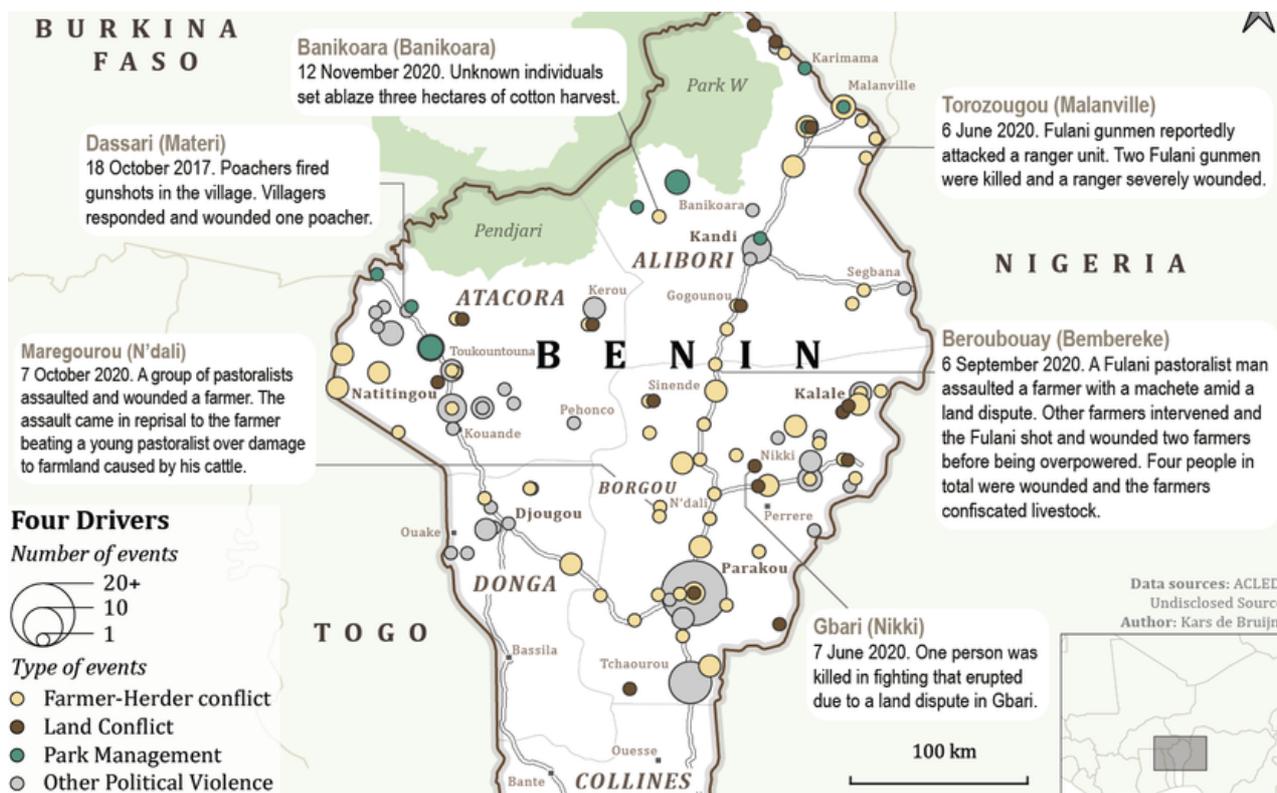


Incidents of suspected VEO activity in Benin May 2020-Feb 2021. [CRU report](#)



Driving causes

- Political violence in northern Benin has three different but linked causes.
 1. Farmer-herder conflict (45%).
 2. Ownership of and access to land, which is tied to farmer-herder conflict (10%).
 3. The privatisation of Park W and Pendjari Park (10%), which has caused tensions over disruption to traditional life in favour of tourism.



Incidents of pastoralist and farmer violence, 2017-2020. [CRU Report](#)

CT/CVE National Strategy, local partners and info ecology

- Benin is a member of the **Accra Initiative**.
- Benin's border management agency is tackling vulnerabilities in border areas by implementing developmental projects in affected localities.
- The **African Park Network** (partly supported by donors) is trying to improve community relations by organising community meetings where it can listen to local people's views, understand their needs, and engage in job creation activities. They also supply training to their Rangers for counter terrorism efforts.
- There remains a distinct lack of trust between locals and security forces, particularly from the Fulani.
- Radio is the dominant media medium, particularly in rural areas.
- As of 2021, internet access stood at only 28%.



CT Landscape

- According to Togo's Security and Civil Protection Minister Yark Damehame, suspected militants ordered residents of Lalabiga village in the Savanes region to leave within 72 hours on 19 February.
- In the same month, a Spanish priest and four customs officers were killed at the Togo-Burkina border.
- Togo suffered its first-ever attack when assailants raided a security post in the northern border village of Sanloaga on 9 November 2021.
- There are indications that gold buyers from Togo and Benin are accessing some gold mining sites controlled by violent extremists in the Sahel.
- Crisis Group has received reports from several sources that armed militants from Burkina Faso are moving regularly along the Ghanaian and Togolese borders, on their way to "rest areas" in these countries.
- Togo's leader has openly expressed concern that Jihadist cells are establishing themselves in the country.
- The northern area has been particularly effected, nearest the Burkina-Togo border; with the region around Dapaong being designated a "red-zone" for tourists and aid workers.
- Decades-old chieftaincy conflicts that the Ghanaian and Togolese governments have been unable to quell are now drawing in Burkinabe armed groups with cultural and familial ties to one side or the other.
- Togo is also believed to be a key smuggling route for gold out of Burkina Faso, creating the possibility of future VEO-linked OCG turf wars.

Driving factors

- The Gnassingbé clan has ruled the country since 1967 in a dynastic dictatorship with the support of the Army. In May 2019 parliament re-introduced a presidential two-term limit. However, the term limit did not apply retroactively, permitting the incumbent, Faure Gnassingbé, to stand for another two terms, leading to protests that turned violent after the incumbent, Gnassingbé, won in February 2020. Direct instability has ceased, but tensions remain.
- Tensions between ethnic groups that date back to Togo's colonial past still play a considerable role in limiting equal access to remunerative and strategically important public authorities, abetting nepotism and compromising good governance. the biggest split is between the Kabyè of northern Togo, who dominate Togo's politics and security services, and the economically more powerful and largest tribe Ewé of southern Togo. Since 2012, three in 10 Togolese have thought that their ethnic group had often or always been unfairly treated by the government.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has pushed the economy into recession, and led to an increase in illicit activities like money-laundering, illegal money transfers and narcotics trafficking. The later of which is believed to be funding Islamist VEOs further north. Overall, Togolese believe their government handled the pandemic well; but this 'rally-around' sentiment is unlikely to last.



CT/CVE National Strategy, local partners and info ecology

- Togo is a member of the **Accra Initiative**, which seeks to prevent the spillover of extremism from the Sahel via information and intelligence sharing; training of security and intelligence personnel; and conducting joint cross-border military operations to sustain border security.
- In May 2019, Togo established an inter-ministerial committee for preventing and countering violent extremism partly to strengthen community resilience.
- The Army has been involved in providing basic services to build trust; providing free medical consultations, repairing damaged schools and building wells, while elected mayors and district administrators work hand in hand with religious leaders and traditional chiefs to obtain and pass on information.
- However, Antonin Tisseron, an associate researcher with the Thomas More Institute, has asserted that "Cooperation is undermined by a culture of distrust between states" while "poverty, the absence of jobs and prospects, the repression of all forms of social protest and the stigmatisation of Muslims create a breeding ground where jihadists can thrive."
- There is a wide range of daily and weekly newspapers, though circulation is primarily urban.
- Radio is the most popular medium, particularly in rural areas. Most of the private radio networks are religious stations. Moreover, there are two state-owned and five private TV stations that regularly broadcast news. However, only a limited percentage of the population have access to it.
- According to a study published by Hootsuite and We Are Social, 1.71 million Togolese were connected to the internet in January 2020. The overall internet penetration rate is now 21%.

Further Reports

BTI Transformation Index. Togo Country Report 2022

Clindaegel. BENEATH THE APPARENT STATE OF AFFAIRS: STABILITY IN GHANA AND BENIN

Clindaegel. NORTHERN BENIN AND RISK OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST SPILLOVER

EU Action Document. Preventing Electoral Violence and Providing Security to the Northern Border Regions of Ghana (NORPREVSEC) Programme.

GIS. Jihadists open a new front in West Africa

Institute for Economics and Peace. Global Terrorism Index 2022.

Institute for Security Studies. Can the Accra Initiative prevent terrorism in West African coastal states?

Institute for Security Studies. West African coastal terror attacks: just the tip of the iceberg

International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. Small Arms and Light Weapons (SLAW) in West Africa

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. The new frontier for jihadist groups?

Pangea Risk. SPECIAL REPORT: THE TERRORISM THREAT TO WEST AFRICA'S COASTAL CITIES

Resolve Network. LINKING P/CVE & ILLICIT ARMS FLOWS IN AFRICA

Statement by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the UN. "MEASURES TO ELIMINATE INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM"