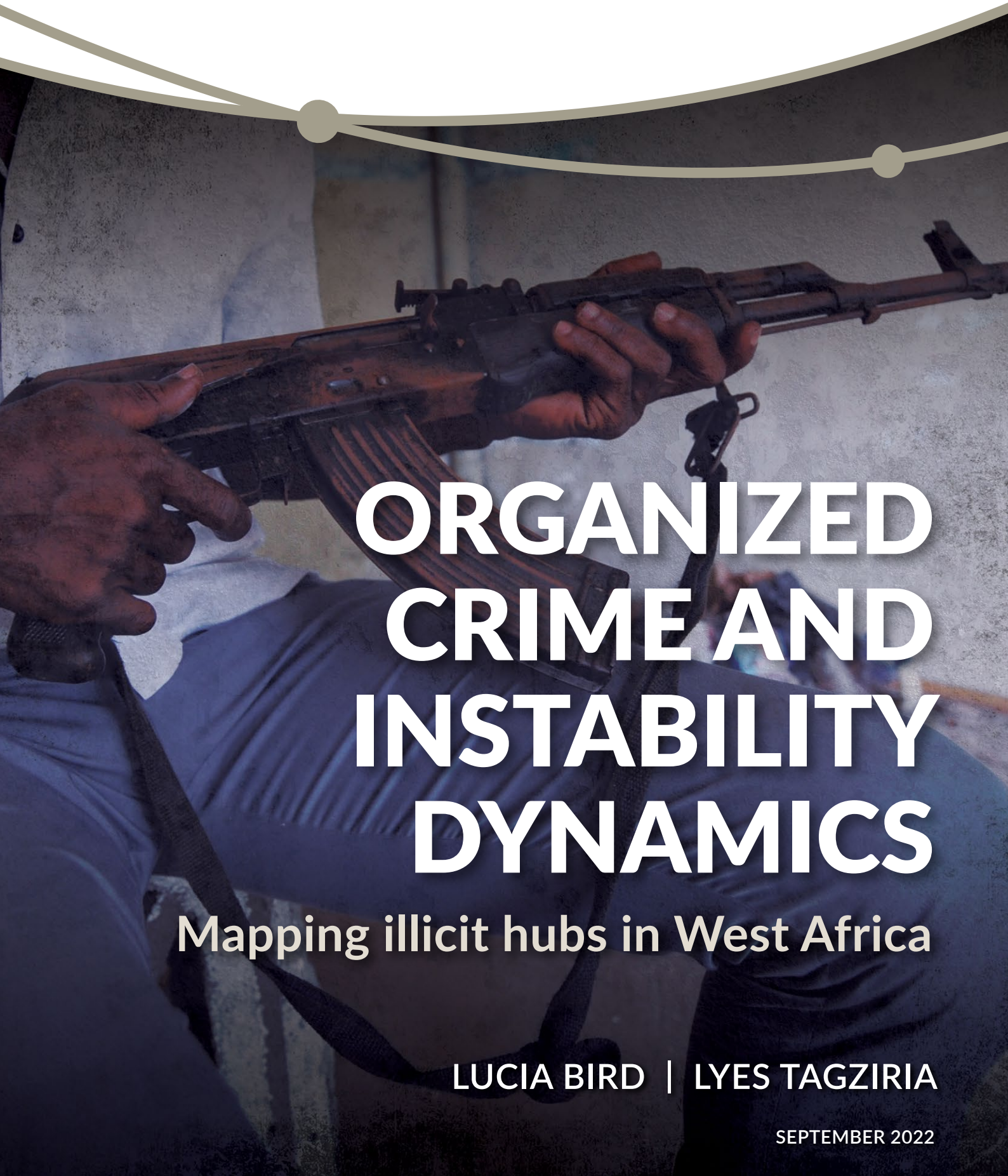
RESEARCH REPORT

GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME



ORGANIZED CRIME AND INSTABILITY DYNAMICS

Mapping illicit hubs in West Africa

LUCIA BIRD | LYES TAGZIRIA

SEPTEMBER 2022

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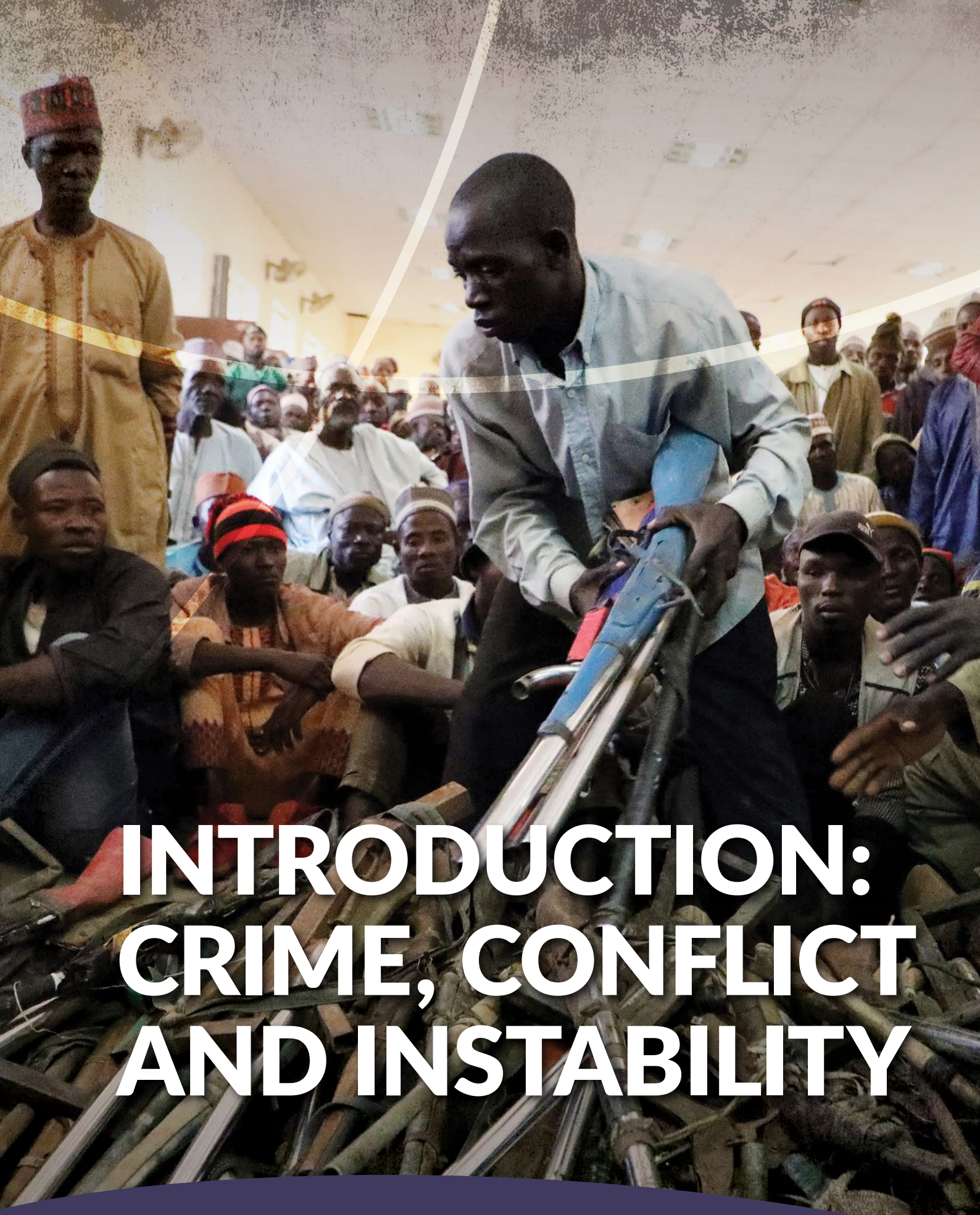
CONTENTS

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACLED	Armed Confliction Location and Event Data Project
CAR	Central African Republic
CMA	Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (Coordination of Azawad Movements)
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FPRC	Front Populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central African Republic)
FTZ	Free trade zone
GABAC	Groupe d'Action contre le blanchiment d'Argent en Afrique Centrale (Task Force on Money Laundering in Central Africa)
GDI	Gender Development Index
GIABA	Inter-governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa
GPI	Global Peace Index
HDI	Human Development Index
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
JNIM	Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (Group to Support Islam and Muslims)
MPC	Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (Central African Patriotic Movement)
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
TEU	Twenty-foot equivalent unit
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNCTAD	UN Conference on Trade and Development
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
UPC	Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique (Unity for Peace in Central Africa Republic)



INTRODUCTION: CRIME, CONFLICT AND INSTABILITY

Members of a vigilante group in Nigeria surrender their guns to the authorities, December 2019. There is a bi-directional relationship between mafia-style groups involved in insurgency and the spread of weapons. *© Kola Sulaimon/AFP via Getty Images*

The deteriorating security situation across parts of West Africa and the Sahel underscores the importance of better understanding the relationship between crime and conflict. As the nature of armed conflict in West Africa is in flux – with the constellation of conflict actors multiplying, the intensity and geographic dispersion of violence growing, civilians increasingly targets of attacks, and conflicts more commonly spreading across borders – now is a key moment to consider the role played by illicit economies in creating the enabling environments for conflicts to develop, and in prolonging them.

While large-scale civil wars have reduced dramatically in frequency over the past two decades, the fall of Gaddafi in Libya and the uprising in northern Mali in 2012 triggered a wave of instability that continues to worsen to this day. Among the principal security threats affecting the Sahel region is violent extremism and jihadist groups. From 2020 to 2021, violence linked to militant Islamist groups in the Sahel almost doubled. Fatalities from such attacks are on the rise and millions have been displaced, in particular in Burkina Faso, which has become the epicentre of violence.

However, while many of the armed actors operating in the Sahel subscribe to extremist interpretations of Islamic jihad, the driving force behind the continued proliferation of violent extremist groups in the region is a combination of various deep-rooted structural issues. These include corruption, poor governance, impunity among state security forces and socio-economic marginalization of communities across swathes of the region.

But there is another important driver of conflict and instability, not just in the Sahel, but also in other countries, such as Nigeria, Cameroon and Senegal, among others. Illicit economies, as we will see, are major sources of funding for countless armed actors across West Africa, and many illicit markets contribute to swelling violence, not least the trafficking of arms. Banditry in Nigeria, for example, is a significant security threat, with bandits frequently raiding, ransacking, attacking and kidnapping in villages across many of the country's northern states.

The other side of the coin, furthermore, is that instability and state fragility more broadly are enablers of illicit economies, with criminal actors exploiting weak rule of law. The economic damage inflicted on communities by conflict can in many cases leave populations dependent on informal, and in some cases illicit, livelihoods.

But the relationship between illicit trade and instability is not straightforward. In some circumstances, informal and illicit economies can sustain a degree of stability by providing communities with a livelihood. As the security situation deteriorates, and the geographies of conflict and illicit economies increasingly overlap, it is crucial to understand how these two dynamics interact.

However, the intersection between illicit economies and instability is an often misunderstood and over-simplified subject of research and debate. The inherently clandestine nature of organized crime poses an obstacle to accurately understanding the dynamics of illicit economies and their relationship with conflict and instability. In West Africa, this is compounded by the paucity of comparable data in much of the region.

This report represents a step towards addressing this deficit. It presents the findings of a new initiative that maps the key geographic hubs of illicit economies across West Africa.

The Illicit Economies and Instability Monitor (IEIM), presented in this report, assesses how the illicit economies identified at each hub impact on instability. 'Instability' is understood in the context of this approach to refer to dynamics relating to armed actors that participate in armed conflict or socio-political tensions that facilitate, trigger or prolong armed conflict. Additionally, instability can also relate to armed actors and socio-political tensions threatening peace ('spoilers'), including in recent post-conflict environments (such as immediately after a peace agreement). In some contexts, instability may be interpreted more widely, to include drivers of significant levels of violence. Instability, broadly speaking, can be either conflictual or political. The study therefore creates a public, consolidated repository of evidence surrounding illicit economies, which could in the future be built on and analyzed over time to reveal longitudinal trends.

The IEIM is a tool designed to assess the relative importance of the role played by illicit markets in any specific hub in fuelling conflict and instability in the region. As a metric, it assesses the degree to which specific hubs of illicit economies drive instability in the region, analyzing illicit economies as vectors of instability. The monitor therefore helps to identify areas where illicit markets play the most significant contributing role to instability and conflict in the region. Although there are several composite indicators centred on conflict and instability, there are few, if any, that focus specifically on the nexus between crime and conflict, which highlights the intrinsic value of the IEIM. The tool is designed to enable policymakers to prioritize specific areas for targeted action to respond to illicit economies, in conjunction with other development-oriented and law enforcement-related response measures to instability.

Mapping illicit hubs

The research presented in this report can be visualized using a specially designed online interactive mapping tool, which can be accessed at wea.globalinitiative.net/illicit-hub-mapping/ (see Figure 1). Several of the maps shown in this report are screenshots taken from the online mapping tool. Please refer to the website to explore the maps in full.

The primary objective of the online tool is to visually represent the 280 illicit hubs identified on a map of 18 countries in West Africa. In addition to the illicit hub classification, the interactive nature of the tool allows users to hover over any illicit hub to see which illicit economies feature, as well as the hub's IEIM classification. There is also a narrative for each illicit hub outlining the key illicit economy dynamics and their relationship with conflict and instability.

However, as emphasized in this report, illicit economies should not be assessed in isolation, and understanding the relationship between illicit hubs and wider issues of conflict and instability is crucial to stabilization efforts. As such, several external datasets are also included on the online tool. Data on armed violence, and protests and riots, are included, given the strong links between illicit economies on the one hand and conflict and instability on the other. Other external data available from the online tool includes migrant deaths, natural-resource-related data, such as mineral deposits and oil fields, and transport infrastructure, such as airports, seaports and key road infrastructure.

Overall, the reason behind the inclusion of supplementary datasets in addition to the original GI-TOC research on illicit hubs is to enable additional research exploring the intersection between illicit economies and other related phenomena, including conflict and instability, natural resources and connectivity.

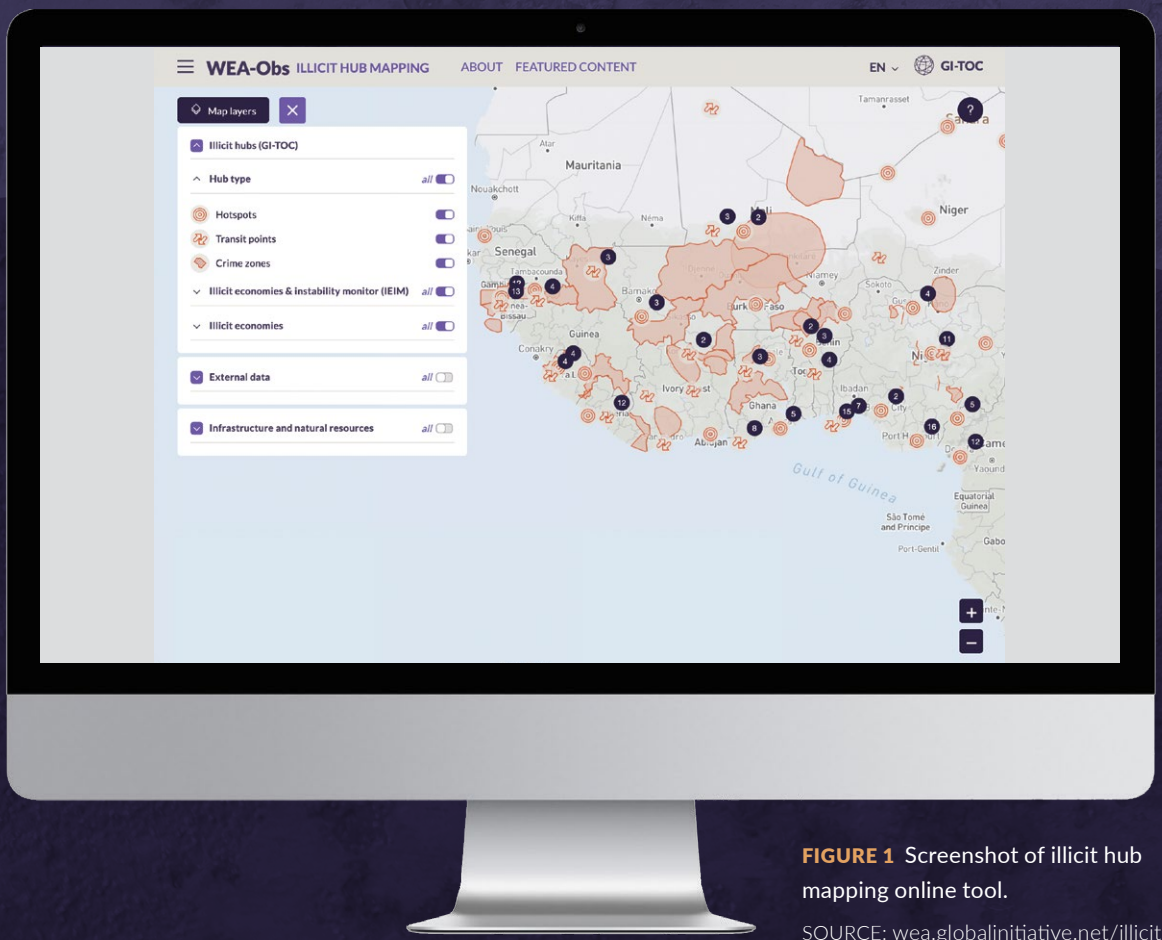


FIGURE 1 Screenshot of illicit hub mapping online tool.

SOURCE: wea.globalinitiative.net/illicit-hub-mapping/

West Africa is experiencing unprecedented levels of armed violence, with the period since 2015 being the most violent on record in the region.

The political landscape is also volatile, with six successful coups (and one reported unsuccessful coup attempt) between 2020 and June 2022. The 2021 Organized Crime Index, a tool that measures global levels of organized crime and resilience to organized crime, not only highlights the pervasiveness of organized crime throughout West Africa – with over three-quarters of the region's population residing in countries with high levels of criminality – but also finds that levels of criminality are on the rise in West Africa. In parallel, resilience to organized crime is deteriorating in most countries in the region.

The Index findings also provide a statistical underpinning for the relationship between illicit markets and conflict, demonstrating a strong negative correlation between criminality and peacefulness. In other words, the less peaceful a country, the more likely it is to be afflicted by high levels of organized crime. This underscores the importance of understanding the role of illicit economies in areas experiencing instability and violence, and crafting appropriate responses.

Criminal markets are often key elements in war economies, entrenching interests in the continuation of the status quo, and perpetuating conflict. Illicit economies provide supplies and financing to terrorist groups and militias, and the role they can play in hindering conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction can be devastating.

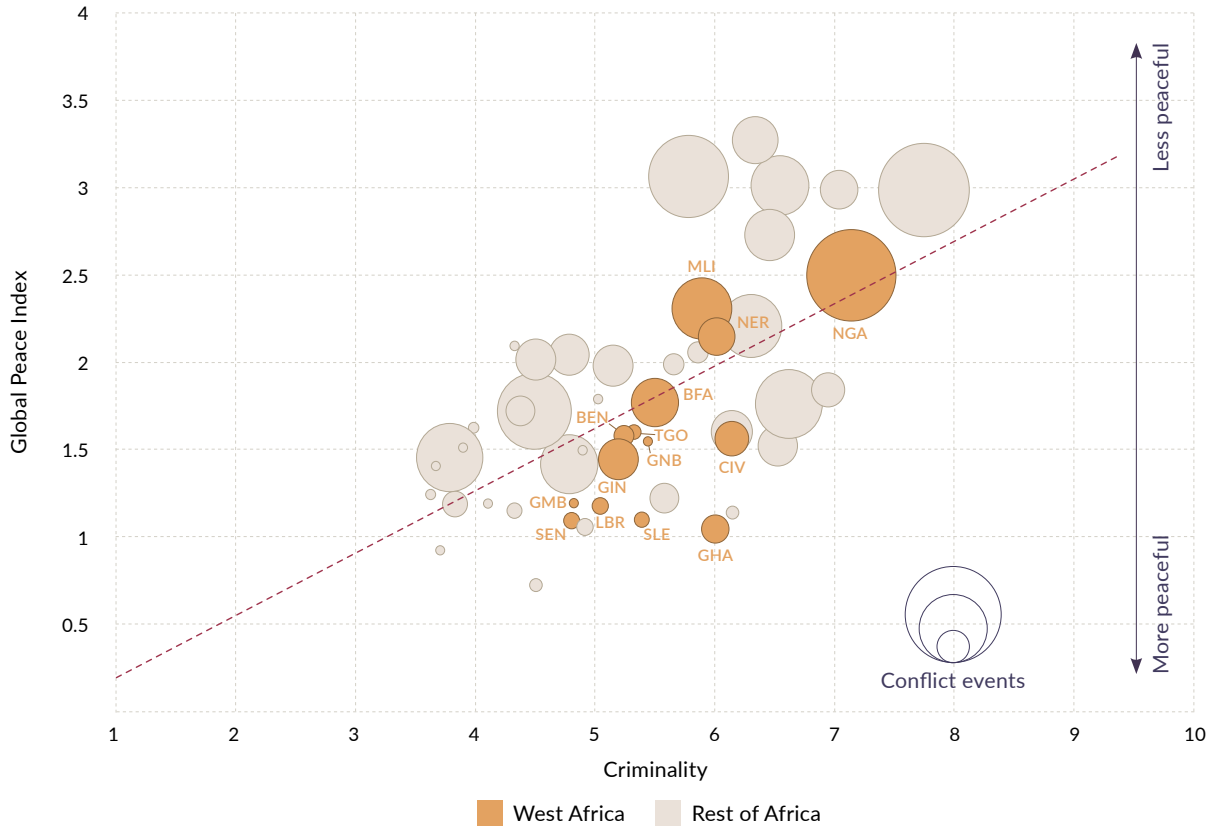


FIGURE 2 Relationship between criminality, peacefulness and conflict.

SOURCE: ENACT, Organised Crime Index Africa 2021: Evolution of crime in a Covid world, A comparative analysis of organised crime in Africa, 2019–2021, November 2021, https://africa.ocindex.net/assets/downloads/enact_report_2021.pdf; Vision of Humanity (Institute for Economics and Peace); Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED)

Defining illicit economies

For the purposes of this report, illicit economies include all markets in which there is illegality, whether that be in the sourcing or production, transport, sale or diversion of commodities from legal to illegal channels. Defining illicit economies is challenging, given the complex nature of the relationships between domestic legislation, international law, informality, illegality and social legitimacy, among other factors.

For the illicit hub mapping exercise, 17 illicit economies were considered (listed in Appendix 2). These include overtly criminal markets, such as arms trafficking and kidnap for ransom, for example. However, they also include illicit economies that overlap with other economic activities, which local populations may consider merely 'informal'. Widespread informality across the West Africa region blurs perceived distinctions between 'illegal' and 'legal', and there is in some cases a disjunct between what the state considers to be legitimate ('legal'), and what communities and actors in transnational networks consider to be legitimate ('licit'), with cannabis use, artisanal gold mining and irregular cross-border trade in foodstuffs being but three common examples. Involvement in many illegal trades may often not be deemed inappropriate by society in the region, although the degree of sanction (or proscription) varies from market to market, evolves over time and exists across a spectrum of risk. Involvement in some illegal economies may enjoy a high degree of social legitimacy. As explained by an activist from Delta State, Nigeria, in the context of illegal oil bunkering, '[To] the government, it is a crime, but for the people [...] it is a necessary informal activity for survival because even the government that is criminalizing them does not feed them.'

Arguably, the role of illicit economies in enabling or prolonging conflicts has received unbalanced focus, while the role of illicit economies in providing a livelihood for marginalized populations, including in fragile, conflict and post-conflict settings, has too often been ignored in designing stabilization operations. This is not to argue that illicit economies are a force for good, but that failing to appropriately factor in their role as a source of livelihood in some cases, or the degree of legitimacy they enjoy can mean that responses tailored predominantly to counter crime can stimulate violence, while interventions primarily designed to counter conflict can trigger expansion in illicit markets.

The relationship between illicit economies and conflict is too often posed as a linear one, while different types of illicit economies are commonly elided in analyses. It is therefore useful to recognize that different types of illicit economies show differing relationships with conflict and instability. Again, the Index results help frame these distinctions. The results of the Index show that most of the global criminal markets analyzed therein have some degree of negative correlation with peace and stability, as measured by the Global Peace Index (GPI). However, arms trafficking (-0.68) and human trafficking (-0.64) stand out as markets with particularly strong relationships with conflict and instability. When one considers the African countries included in the Index, arms trafficking and human trafficking display particularly strong negative correlations with peace (-0.82 and -0.69, respectively). By contrast, the Index shows no statistically significant relationship between the cannabis trade or the illicit wildlife trade and peace, as measured by the GPI.

The relationship between illicit economies and (in) stability is highly context-dependent, and while economies may have typical characteristics, the intersection between the illicit economy and conflict in different environments may vary. Arms trafficking, for example, is both fuelled by conflict (as demand for firearms from conflict actors and communities for self-protection grows) and itself contributes to growing violence, weaponizing existing tensions and conflicts. Human trafficking is often amplified by conflict, which increases the pool of displaced people vulnerable to exploitation, and can fuel demand for the services of trafficked persons. However, with the narrow exception of trafficking of people into combatant or combatant-ancillary roles, human trafficking does not in itself contribute to conflict to the same degree that arms trafficking does.

The structures underpinning illicit markets are best understood as a criminal ecosystem composed of a number of closely interlinked illicit hubs. The socio-political, infrastructure and geographic characteristics of each hub shapes their vulnerability to exploitation by criminal networks. Mapping these illicit hubs, and understanding their role in facilitating illicit markets across West Africa, the Sahel, Cameroon and the Central African Republic enhances the understanding of the regional criminal economy, of the interlinkages between different hubs and actors in illicit markets, and of the cross-border responses required. Although the scope of this project includes some countries outside of the traditional understanding of what constitutes West Africa, for the purposes of this report, unless specified otherwise, all 18 focus countries are referred to as 'West Africa'.

The findings of this report show that although there are several hundred illicit hubs throughout West Africa, the proportion of those that play a key role in fuelling conflict and instability across the region is considerably smaller, with just one in four of the 280 illicit hubs identified as significant drivers of regional instability.

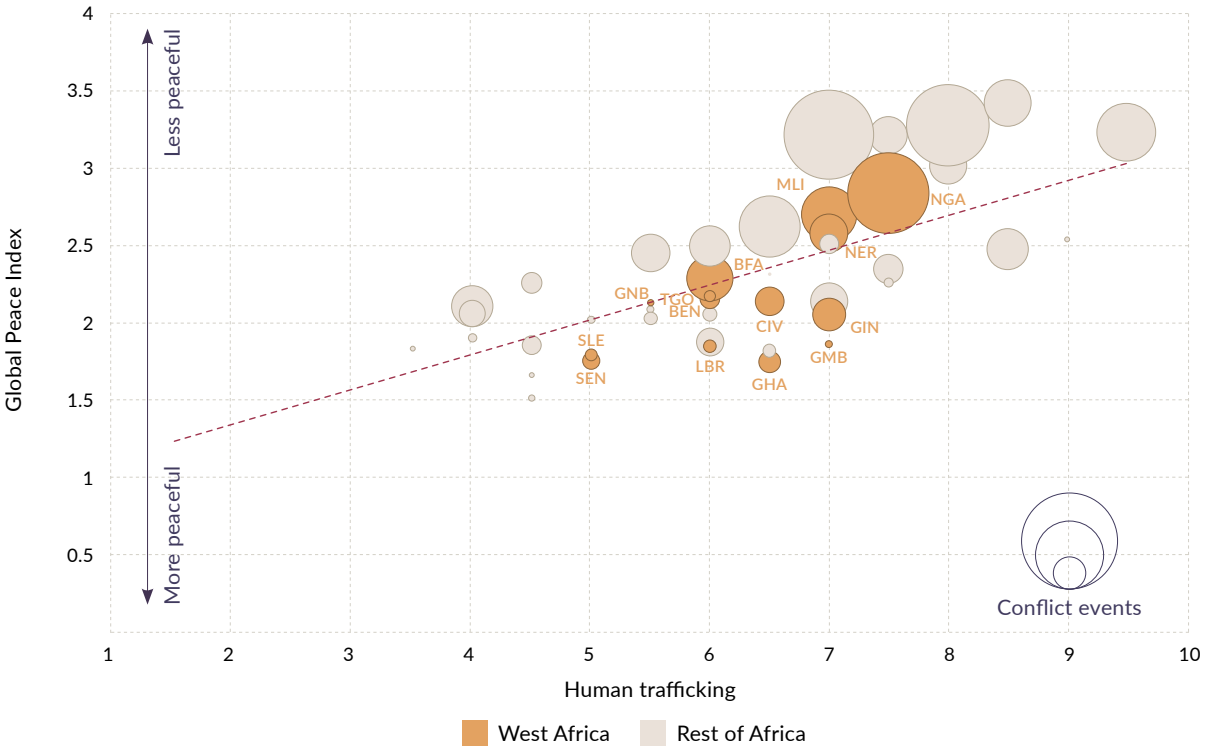


FIGURE 3 Relationship between human trafficking, peacefulness and conflict.

SOURCE: ENACT, Organised Crime Index Africa 2021: Evolution of crime in a Covid world, A comparative analysis of organised crime in Africa, 2019–2021, November 2021, https://africa.ocindex.net/assets/downloads/enact_report_2021.pdf; Vision of Humanity (Institute for Economics and Peace); ACLED

Furthermore, the findings underscore how the relationship between illicit economies and instability varies between different illicit economies. Arms trafficking, cattle rustling and kidnap for ransom are often prominent simultaneously in certain illicit hubs, and are disproportionately prominent in those illicit hubs where illicit economies are significant drivers of instability. Other markets on the other hand – for example the cannabis trade – appear to have a far weaker relationship with instability. The difference between urban and rural hubs in terms of the dynamics of illicit economies must also been taken into account. The illicit economies that feature most prominently in urban hubs tend to be less influential as drivers of conflict and instability. Conversely, illicit economies such as arms trafficking, the illicit gold trade and kidnapping for ransom – all markets with close links to instability dynamics – are particularly prominent in rural hubs across the region, particularly in the Sahel. Recognizing how these different illicit markets influence instability in contrasting geographic spaces, and to different degrees, should be central to crafting crime-sensitive stabilization efforts.

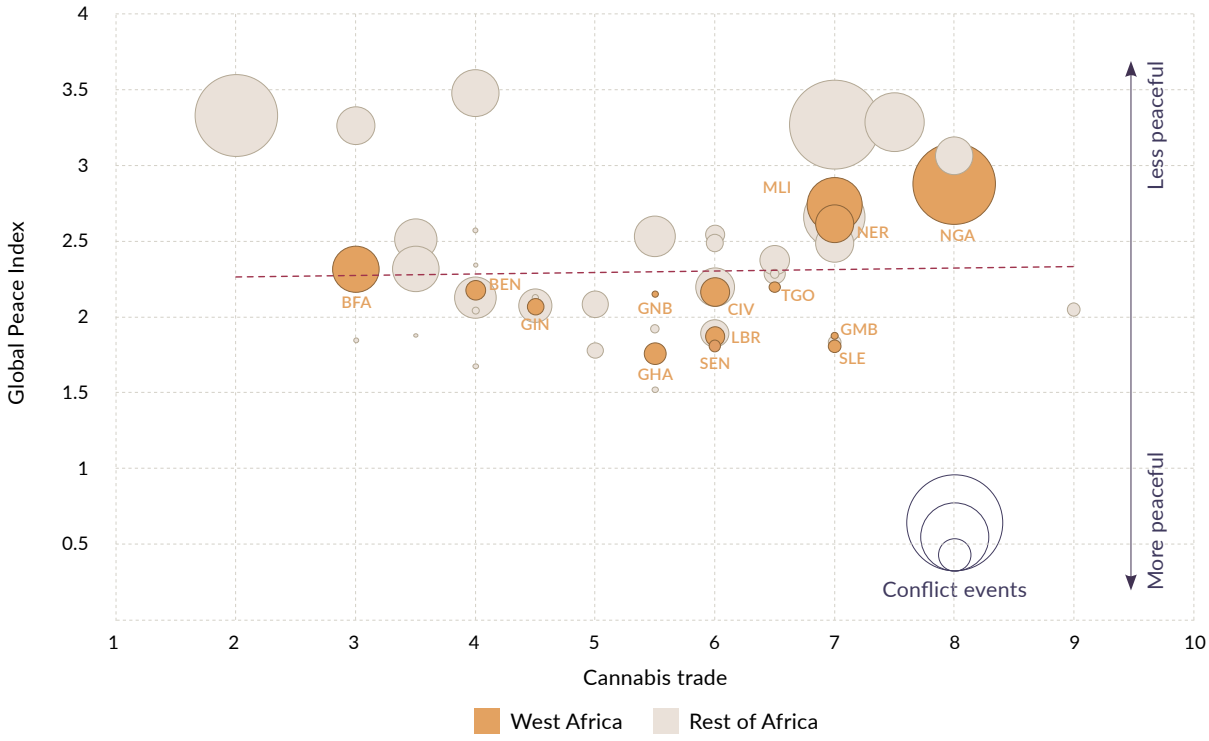


FIGURE 4 Relationship between the cannabis trade, peacefulness and conflict.

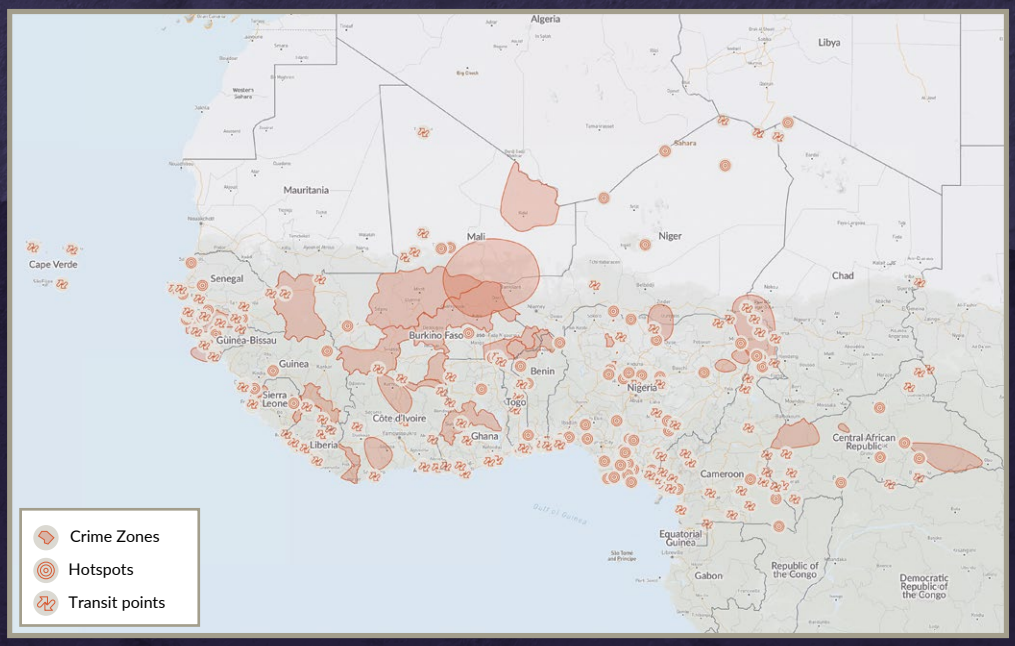
SOURCE: ENACT, Organised Crime Index Africa 2021: Evolution of crime in a Covid world, A comparative analysis of organised crime in Africa, 2019–2021, November 2021, https://africa.ocindex.net/assets/downloads/enact_report_2021.pdf; Vision of Humanity (Institute for Economics and Peace); ACLED

KEY FINDINGS

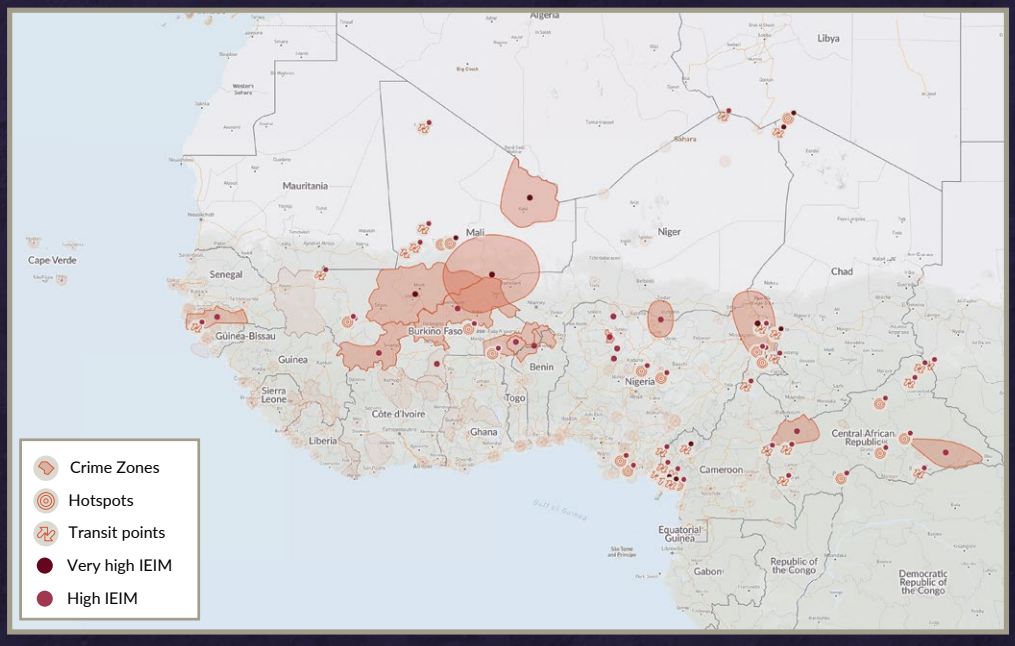
1. **Of the 280 illicit hubs identified across West Africa, one in four are significant vectors of conflict and instability.**

   Across West Africa, 280 illicit hubs, comprising hotspots, transit points and crime zones, were identified. The IEIM finds that just under a quarter (23%) of the hubs identified have high or very high IEIM scores, meaning that a high nexus has been identified between the illicit economies in that hub and instability. Conversely, 45% of all illicit hubs (127) across the region have low IEIM scores.

ALL ILLICIT HUBS



HIGH AND VERY HIGH IEIM HUBS



SOURCE: To further explore the details of these maps, please visit wea.globalinitiative.net/illicit-hub-mapping/

2. **Arms trafficking is more than twice as likely to feature as a major market in high- and very high-IEIM scoring hubs.**

   The prominence of certain illicit economies varies considerably across the IEIM spectrum. Arms trafficking, for example, is assessed to be a major market in more than half (54%) of all illicit hubs in the 'high' and 'very high' IEIM classifications, which indicate a strong connection between illicit markets in that hub and instability. Conversely, only 27% of low- and medium-IEIM hubs across West Africa feature arms trafficking as a major market. These findings highlight the close relationship that has repeatedly been identified between arms trafficking and instability.

3. **Geography plays an important role in illicit economy and instability dynamics: coastal hubs play a far less important role as drivers of instability than hubs further inland.**

   The dispersion of the illicit hubs at either end of the IEIM scoring spectrum differ across the geographic categories. The overwhelming majority of illicit hubs (91%) located on or close to the coast have low or medium IEIM scores (only two illicit hubs on the coast have very high-IEIM hubs). While 45% of all illicit hubs across West Africa are low-IEIM hubs, that proportion rises significantly to 67% when looking only at hubs on the coast. These findings are in line with known epicentres of conflict and violence in the region.

4. **Illicit hubs identified in Cameroon, Central African Republic and the Sahel are over 10 times more likely to have high or very high IEIM scores, compared to coastal West Africa.**

   Due in large part to the fact that these are the geographies most affected by conflict and violence, illicit hubs across Central Africa and the Sahel are far more likely to be high- or very high-IEIM hubs. Of the 83 illicit hubs identified in Central Africa and the Sahel, 53 (64%) are high- or very high-IEIM hubs. This is in stark contrast to the 6% across coastal West Africa (which decreases to 3% when Nigeria is excluded). In fact, there are no very high-IEIM hubs in coastal West Africa.

5. **Transport infrastructure, such as seaports and airports, are key nodes in regional and global illicit economies.**

   Although coastal hubs play, in general, a far less important role as drivers of instability than hubs further inland, littoral areas are nevertheless crucial geographies in the regional and global criminal landscape. A major factor in coastal areas' propensity to become hubs for illicit activity is the presence of seaports. Across West Africa, maritime ports and airports are identified as important illicit hubs, highlighting the role these play as key nodes in regional and global illicit economies. While most airports and seaports are low-IEIM hubs, several ports act as important transit points for commodities that flow to conflict areas – and thus conflict actors – within the region.

   Road infrastructure is similarly important in facilitating flows of illicit commodities. The vast majority of illicit hubs are located on or near major operational roads: 203 hubs (73%) are located on or near primary roads, with an additional 49 (18%) located on or near secondary roads. Only 10% of illicit hubs are not located on or near major operational roads, underscoring the importance of connectivity to the majority of illicit economies. In addition to their role as connectors between illicit hubs, roads also often sites of illicit activities themselves, including banditry, kidnap for ransom, illicit taxation and extortion.

6. **Arms trafficking often goes hand-in-hand with cattle rustling and kidnap for ransom, which are all disproportionately prominent in illicit hubs where illicit economies are significant drivers of instability.**

   Kidnap for ransom is among several illicit economies to feature far more prominently in illicit hubs that are more significant vectors of conflict and instability than those that are not. This illicit economy is a major market in just 13% of hubs with low IEIM scores; conversely, of the high- and very high-IEIM hubs, 22% feature kidnap for ransom as a major market. Cattle rustling is similarly disproportionately prevalent in illicit hubs where illicit economies are drivers of instability, featuring in 15% of high- and very high-IEIM hubs but only 4% of low-IEIM hubs. These two markets were commonly identified as major markets in tandem with arms trafficking, highlighting the high degree of weaponization that is often linked to them.

7. **The cocaine trade and trade in counterfeit medicine have less salient links to conflict and instability**

   The counterfeit medicine illicit economy features in a far greater proportion of low-IEIM hubs (13%) than high- and very high-IEIM hubs (2%). The difference in prominence of the cocaine trade is even more pronounced, featuring in just 8% of high- and very high-IEIM hubs compared to almost a third (33%) of all low-IEIM hubs. These findings correlate with the greater prevalence of the markets across hubs in coastal areas of West Africa, which tend to have lower IEIM scores. While certain armed groups do earn some revenue from the cocaine trade, it is by no means among the most prominent illicit economies feeding into regional conflict dynamics. State-embedded actors are disproportionately common in hubs featuring the cocaine economy, supporting analyses pointing to the high degree of protection enjoyed by this market (which often results in a lower degree of violence associated with it). This is likely in part to be linked to the high profitability of the cocaine market: protection networks for high-value commodities such as cocaine are likely to include the highest levels of state. The cocaine trade is, therefore, particularly important when considering political instability across the region, as opposed to conflict.

8. **Although its relationship with instability is complex, the illicit gold trade has notable links to instability dynamics.**

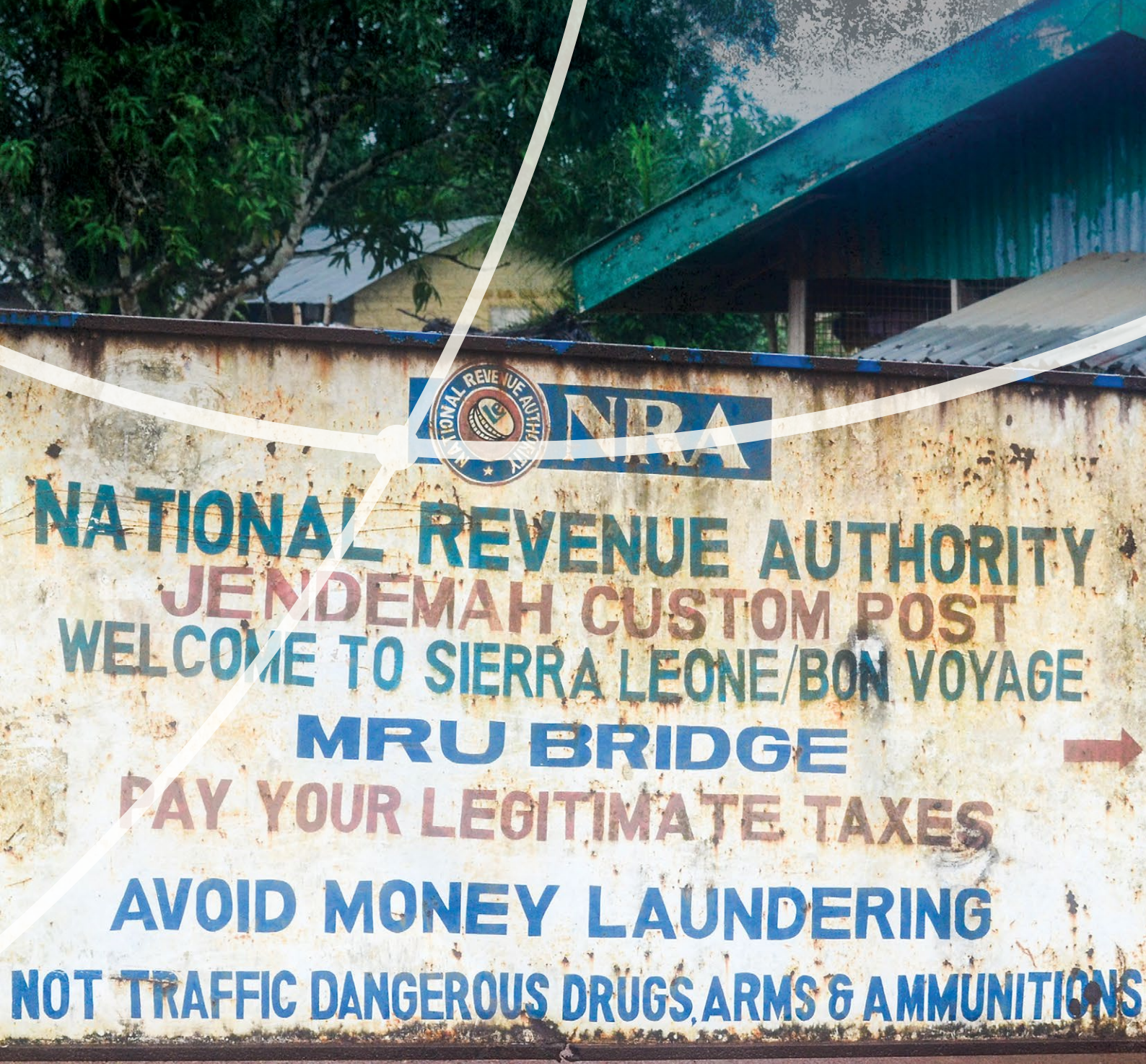
   The illicit gold trade is more prominent in illicit hubs with higher IEIM scores, compared to lower-scoring hubs. It features in 29% of high- or very high-IEIM hubs, in contrast to just 12% of low-IEIM hubs in the region. This pattern is largely a reflection of geography, with gold being particularly prevalent across a significant range of hubs in the Sahel and Central African Republic (CAR), as well as to a lesser extent in Cameroon, which plays a significant role as a transit country for gold mined predominantly in CAR, in many contexts coordinated by armed groups. The gold trade was commonly identified as a major market alongside arms trafficking, underscoring the common connection between the market and an increase in weaponization.

9. **Although criminal networks are the most commonly identified criminal actor type, insurgent mafia-style groups and terrorist mafia-style groups are both strongly linked to arms trafficking and instability.**

   Overall, mafia-style groups of an insurgent or terrorist nature are fairly uncommon across the 280 illicit hubs in West Africa, featuring in only 18% of hubs. However, in the subset of illicit hubs where arms trafficking is prevalent, insurgent and/or terrorist mafia-style groups were identified as a major criminal actor far more often – in 28% of hubs. A direct comparison of insurgent and/or terrorist mafia-style group prevalence between illicit hubs with and without arms trafficking shows a rate of more than double in the former (28% compared to 13%).

10. **Illicit economy dynamics can differ significantly between urban and rural illicit hubs.**

    The enhanced connectivity of cities means that they often operate as key nodes for both licit and illicit business. The characteristics of the illicit hubs across West Africa underscore this dynamic. The vast majority (71%) of the 280 illicit hubs identified across the region are located in or near urban areas. Furthermore, the illicit economy dynamics differ drastically between urban and rural areas. The illicit economies that feature most prominently in urban hubs are also those that tend to be less influential as drivers of conflict and instability. Conversely, illicit markets in rural hubs are far more likely to fuel instability, with 35% of rural hubs falling into the high- or very high-IEIM bands. The illicit economies prevalent in these hubs are known to have close connections with instability dynamics: arms trafficking, for example, is the most commonly identified illicit economy in rural hubs, with the illicit gold trade and kidnapping for ransom also notably prominent.



METHODOLOGY

The Jendemah border post between Sierra Leone and Liberia. Nearly half of identified illicit hubs in this research were located along or close to national land borders. *© jbdodane/Alamy Stock Photo*

The countries falling within the geographic scope of the illicit hub mapping exercise are as follows: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

Defining illicit hubs

For the purpose of this research, three types of illicit hubs have been identified: hotspots, transit points and crime zones. These are defined as follows:

- **Hotspots**: places where there is a strong presence of criminal actors, which may be involved in various kinds of illicit markets and criminal activities, and which may have the support of people with political power. These should be understood as hubs of illicit activity that feed into national and regional instability/security dynamics.
- **Transit points**: border crossings, ports, airports and trafficking corridors used for trafficking illicit commodities.
- **Crime zones**: areas with a high concentration of various types of criminal activities and actors (such as criminal groups). This may be an area of weak and fragmented security and other institutions. Ethnic divisions or tensions may contribute to the situation. Crime zones are broader geographic areas than hotspots, and may encompass a number of hotspots and/or transit points.

Throughout this report, the term 'illicit hub' refers to hotspots, transit points and crime zones, as outlined above.

Identifying illicit hubs

Researchers were provided with guidance regarding the classification of hubs (as outlined above), together with the key characteristics identified of illicit hubs (detailed in the section below 'The geography of crime: Criminal ecosystems and illicit hubs').

Identifying illicit hubs across the 18 countries in West and Central Africa that fall within the scope of this research was a multi-stage process. Based on an extensive review of the literature and institutional expertise, the GI-TOC research team drafted a preliminary mapping of illicit hubs across each of the focus countries. The initial mapping was subsequently supplemented with the findings from remote interviews with regional and national stakeholders, together with fieldwork and in-person interviews across the region. Country-specific roundtables, both virtual and in-person, were then convened, for validation of the illicit hub mapping results.

Overall, across all stages of the research, the GI-TOC research team engaged with 655 different stakeholders, including 103 individuals from international organizations, 170 national government stakeholders and 382 civil society and community members. The team sought to ensure that stakeholders consulted represented a wide range of demographic backgrounds, ethnicities and genders in order to ensure inclusivity in the research process.

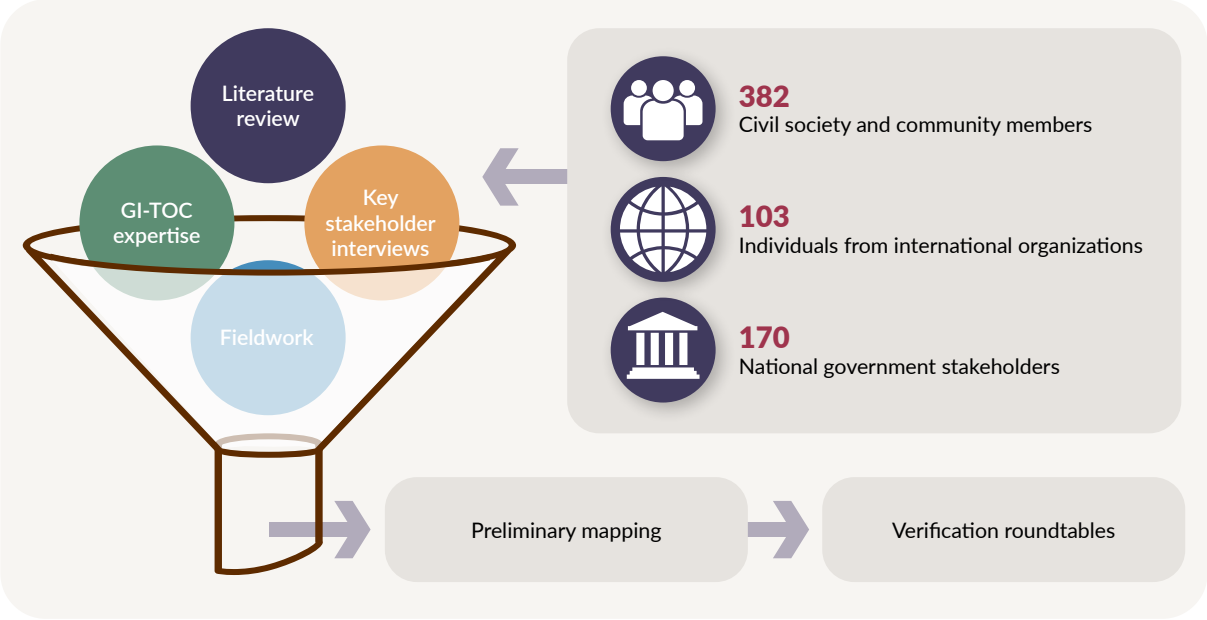


FIGURE 5 Methodological approach to identifying illicit hubs.

In addition to identifying and classifying the illicit hubs, for each hub, researchers also collected information on the most prominent illicit economies in each illicit hub, henceforth referred to as 'major markets' and the most influential criminal actor types ('major actors') in the hubs' illicit economies.

Fostering a better understanding of the relationship between illicit economies and instability is a key objective of this research, and the GI-TOC has consequently developed a monitor designed to assess this strength of the crime-conflict nexus in each illicit hub. The following section introduces the Illicit Economies and Instability Monitor.

Illicit Economies and Instability Monitor

While 280 different illicit hubs have been identified across West Africa, not all have the same relationship with regional instability. The IEIM is a tool designed to assess the relationship between illicit markets in any specific illicit hub, and conflict and instability in the wider region. Elements of the IEIM assess the degree to which specific hubs fuel instability, analyzing illicit economies as vectors of instability. Although there are several composite indicators centred around the issue of conflict and instability, the IEIM is the first of its kind to focus specifically on the links between illicit economies and instability, which highlights the value added of the monitor.

An IEIM score for each illicit hub is calculated as a score out of 30, where the higher the score, the greater the nexus between the illicit economies in the illicit hub and instability. The IEIM scores are subsequently used to categorize illicit hubs into one of four score bands:

- Low (scores below 10)
- Medium (scores between 10 and 15)
- High (scores between 15 and 20)
- Very high (scores above 20)

The IEIM comprises three components: violence and instability; crime–conflict links; and accelerators (which, in turn, is composed of two subcomponents: infrastructure and stress factors). These components encapsulate key factors and characteristics of organized crime hubs that feed into conflict and instability dynamics which are measured, in turn, by a set of underlying indicators.

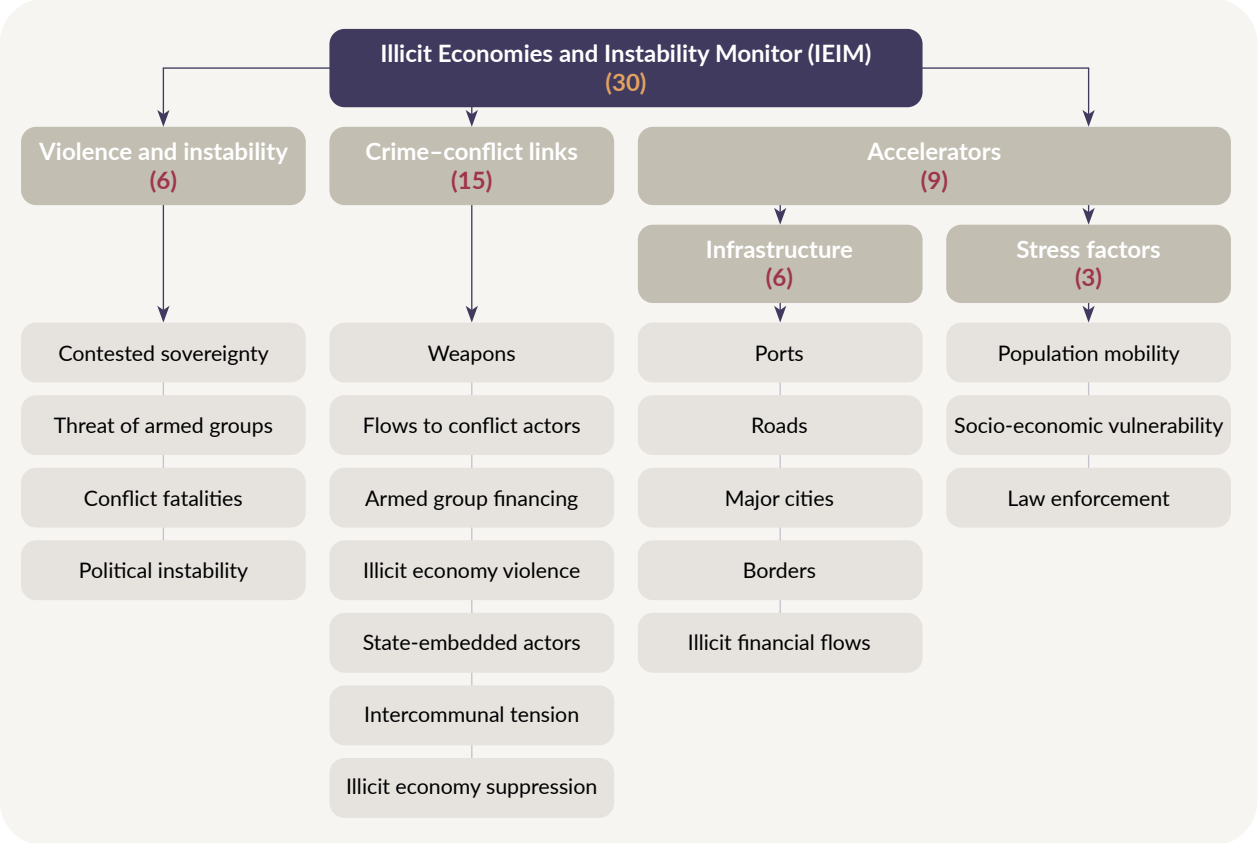


FIGURE 6 Structure of the Illicit Economies and Instability Monitor.

The first component of the IEIM, *violence and instability*, assesses the degree to which underlying conditions identified through the literature and GI-TOC research to be drivers of instability, and factors enabling the emergence of illicit hubs, are present in each hub. This includes assessments of governance capabilities, and conflict and violence.

The second component, *crime–conflict links*, captures the relationship between illicit economies on the one hand and conflict and instability on the other. Assessed under this component are the levels of violence featuring in illicit markets in the location identified; whether illicit markets are supplying conflict actors in the subregion; and the degree to which armed actors are earning revenue from the illicit economies. Other indicators pertaining to weapons, state-embedded actors and state responses are also included. The crime–conflict links are at the centre of the characteristics the IEIM seeks to assess, and as such, this component has the highest weighting of the three IEIM components.

Lastly, the *accelerators* component captures the various structural factors and socio-economic dynamics that may act as an accelerator of the degree to which illicit hubs drive instability. This component comprises two subcomponents: *infrastructure* and *stress factors*.

The first subcomponent, *infrastructure*, encapsulates a location's propensity to play a significant role in transnational flows – both licit and illicit – as a function of their geography and trade infrastructure. Proximity to transport infrastructure, major cities and national borders are examples of some of the indicators captured in this subcomponent.

Stress factors are those conditions that may exacerbate tension within communities, potentially driving instability in the context of illicit hubs. Demographic factors such as levels of mobility (both forced and voluntary) are captured in this subcomponent, as are various measures of socio-economic vulnerability.

The majority of indicators (14) within each of the IEIM components are based on expert assessment, with the remaining indicators scored according to existing quantitative data (6), or facts or calculations (6). See Appendix 3 for the full indicator and components table.

Challenges and limitations

A great deal of research, expertise and methodological rigour has gone into the development of the illicit hub mapping tool and the IEIM, resulting in an extremely rich database of almost 300 illicit hubs across West Africa. Moreover, the IEIM is an innovative metric that fills a major gap in the literature, assessing the links between crime and conflict in one single framework. Nevertheless, there are challenges involved in an endeavour of such scope and scale, and certain limitations of the research are worth outlining, both with regard to the illicit hub mapping – the first phase of the research – and the development of the IEIM. While some of the challenges and limitations are outlined briefly here, for a full analysis, in addition to further detail on the methodology used to identify illicit hubs and the IEIM methodology, please see the separate paper on the methodology of this project.

The primary limitation of the illicit hub mapping phase is that, despite the extensive data-collection phase and rigorous verification process in place, the illicit hubs identified are not exhaustive. Secondly, one major challenge to both the identification of the illicit hubs in the first instance and the subsequent development of the IEIM is accurately analyzing the complex issue of causality with regard to illicit economies and instability (see the section below 'Crime and instability: complicated chains of causality')**.** Furthermore, the topic of organized crime is undoubtedly a sensitive one; while places are identified as 'illicit hubs', the objective of the mapping is not to label these locations as inherently 'criminal'. Furthermore, while this research project focused on West Africa, the Sahel, Cameroon and the Central African Republic, it is clear that similar exercises in other regions would also identify a high number of illicit hubs. Finally, the data-collection

phase of the research took place between July 2021 and December 2021, but illicit economies and their interaction with conflict and instability are not static, and the changing nature of the dynamics studied in the context of this research are such that elements of the mapped data may become inaccurate with time. Although there will be a second phase to the illicit hub mapping initiative, resource limitations mean that it may not be possible to keep the data across the illicit hubs accurate over time.

Several challenges also surround the development of the IEIM. Firstly, the reliance on expert assessment (given the scarcity of relevant quantitative data) introduces a degree of subjectivity into the methodology. The GI-TOC does, however, have considerable experience in designing metrics based on expert-led assessments, not least the Organized Crime Index. The issue of subjectivity notwithstanding, however, the involvement of experts provides an invaluable benefit to the research process, as it allows for interpretation of existing data, local granular analysis provided by people who understand the situation in communities, and the ability to gather evidence on indicators that are not otherwise easily measurable.

Other challenges are the selection, and subsequent weighting, of the components, subcomponents and underlying indicators. The weighting approach taken in the development of the IEIM is based on conceptual importance of the various dimensions that make up the monitor, as per the GI-TOC's foundational research.

Regarding the challenges and limitations that have presented themselves in the illicit hub mapping research and in the development of the IEIM, the GI-TOC has endeavoured to address as many of the issues as possible and minimize methodological weaknesses to the greatest extent possible. Feedback on the methodology and results are welcomed and shall be considered as part of ongoing work to deepen the current evidence base on illicit economies and instability in West and Central Africa. While the research may inevitably contain some imperfections, these are outweighed by the value added to our existing understanding of illicit economies in this region, and their relationship with conflict and instability. It is this analysis that is at the heart of the following sections.

ILLICIT HUB MAPPING ANALYSIS

Although the density of paved roads across Africa lags behind global averages, roads remain the predominant mode of transport across the continent. © *Souleymane Ag Anara/AFP via Getty Images*

Overview

Of the 280 illicit hubs identified across the 18 focus countries, IEIM scores show that approximately one in four illicit economies contribute significantly to conflict and instability (i.e. scoring above 15, falling into the high or very high IEIM bands), while 45% of all illicit hubs (127) across the region have low IEIM scores, scoring below 10. In other words, the illicit economies in almost half of the hotspots, transit points or crime zones identified in West Africa were assessed to play a relatively limited role in directly contributing to conflict and instability across the region. A further 31% (88) have medium IEIM scores (namely, scores between 10 and 15).

Of the remaining 65 illicit hubs in which illicit economies contribute to conflict and instability to a significant extent (falling into the 'high' or 'very high' bands of the IEIM scores), 12 (which represents just 4% of the total number of hubs across West Africa) are located in the highest-scoring band with very high IEIM scores.

These findings add to the growing body of evidence underscoring the complexity of the relationship between illicit markets and instability, and questioning causal assumptions; they also provide guidelines for prioritizing interventions closely tailored to address the impacts of illicit economies in fuelling conflict.

The 18 focus countries can be grouped into four broad geographic zones:

- Coastal West Africa
- Nigeria (which, given its importance in regional illicit economies and instability, as evidenced by the number of illicit hubs identified in the country, is assessed as a separate geographic category)
- The Sahel
- Central Africa

The dispersion of the illicit hubs at either end of the IEIM scoring spectrum differs across these geographic categories.

In coastal West Africa, the overwhelming majority of illicit hubs have low or medium IEIM scores. In fact, there are no very high-IEIM-scoring hubs in the littoral states. Across Central Africa and the Sahel, on the other hand, more than half of the illicit

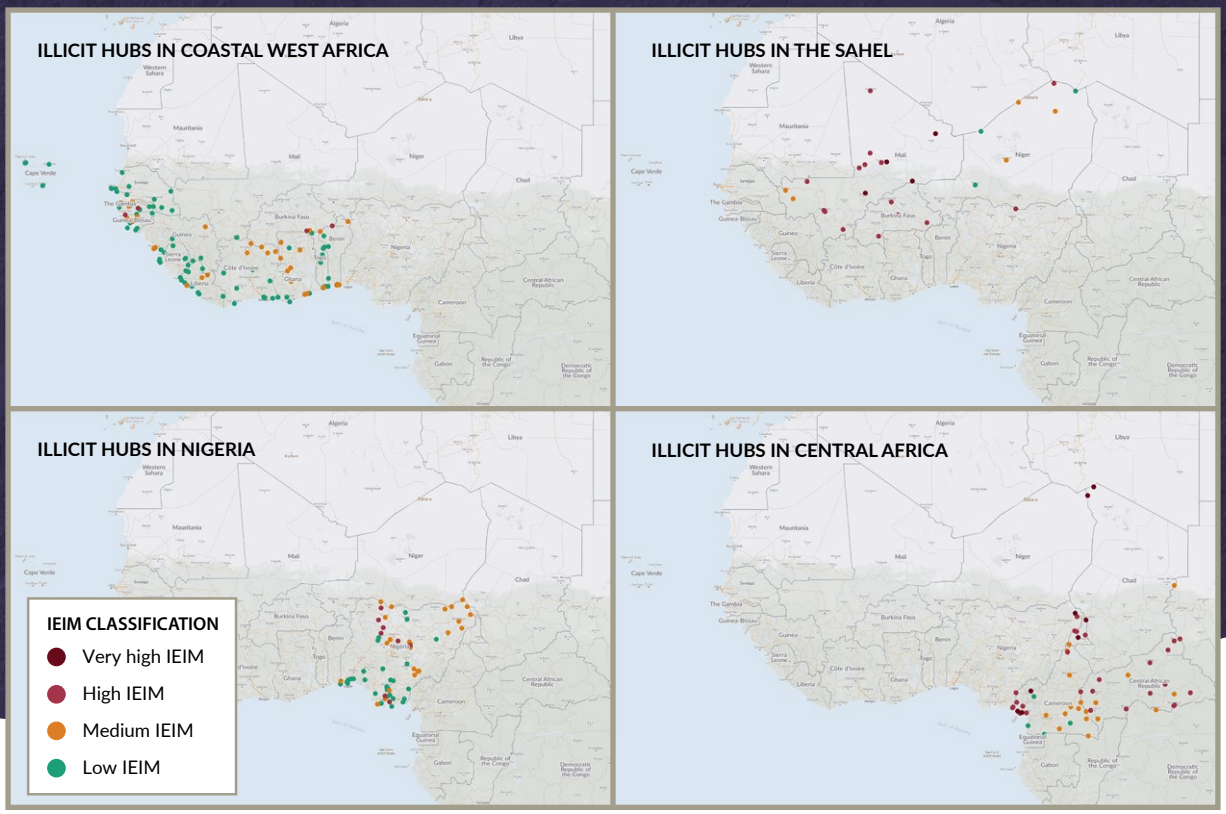


FIGURE 7 Illicit hubs in each key geographic zone, highlighting IEIM classification.

SOURCE: To further explore the details of this map, please visit wea.globalinitiative.net/illicit-hub-mapping/

hubs identified are high- or very high-IEIM hubs. This is largely a function of the geography of conflict, with swathes of Central Africa and the Sahel being heavily affected by conflict and violence, and therefore they score highly on indicators tracking these dynamics. The IEIM findings also reflect additional geographic nuances that support existing research, including the growing role of northern areas of some regional littoral states, particularly Benin, Togo and Ghana, as areas where illicit markets are increasingly intersecting with conflict actors and providing supply chains to armed groups.

Of the 280 illicit hubs, half (140) are classified as transit points; just over a third (102) are identified as hotspots; and the remaining 38 illicit hubs are classified as crime zones. This composition of the illicit hubs reflects West Africa's prominent, although by no means exclusive, roles as a transit region for a range of illicit commodities.[1] It also reflects the nature of the illicit hub typologies. Taking the illicit gold trade as an example, there may only be one gold mining site in a particular area that hosts a high degree of informality or outright illegality, thus making it a hotspot. However, there may be several roads, towns or border crossings where the gold may be transported, engendering several different transit points. This difference between hotspots, which are often physical marketplaces in and of themselves, and transit points, which are nodes along which illicit commodities are moved, is an important distinction to recognize when examining the interaction between illicit economies and spatial geography.

While recognizing that categories of criminal actors can blur – for instance that insurgent-type groups may be embedded within the state, as has occurred in the Central African Republic, where armed groups have infiltrated and exert a high degree of control over many state structures[2] – researchers identified the most prominent category of criminal actor in any particular hub, granting insights into illicit market control, including protection economies. This data shows that both insurgent and terrorist mafia-style groups are far more prevalent in the high- and very high-IEIM hubs than the others.

In contrast, state-embedded actors – which can include low-level law enforcement officers as well

as high-level state officials – are broadly half as common in high-scoring and very-high-scoring IEIM hubs. This reflects the fact that in hubs where there is a marked nexus between illicit economies and conflict and instability, there is a greater involvement of armed groups that are politically motivated (i.e. insurgents and mafia-style terrorist groups) in illicit markets.[3] Furthermore, there is often less state presence entirely in such hubs, resulting in lower state protection of illicit markets. This also reflects the geography of conflict, with conflict-affected areas identified as those with higher IEIM scores, and is a direct result of the fact that conflict implies a contestation of the monopoly on the use of force by the state. Conversely, where state-embedded actors are prominent, it is often in areas where state control is higher, and where state protection structures can lend a veneer of stability.[4] In Guinea-Bissau, for example, rent drawn from illicit economies, such as illegal logging and the cocaine trade, have built and sustained a political system, which, while politically volatile, as evidenced by the number of coups and attempted coups, has retained a degree of stability in the country.

Illicit markets under a high degree of state control are often characterized by limited levels of violence – as reflected in the lower IEIM scores. With lower levels of violence, the manifestation of criminal economies is often less visible, which often means it flies under the radar. However, while illicit markets under a high degree of state control may not directly beget instability in the form of physical violence, they can – and often do – act as an important source of political instability, by exacerbating corrupt practices, fomenting power struggles within the state apparatus and aggravating community grievances. Gambia's illicit logging market during the long rule of Yahya Jammeh (1996–2017), the former president, is one such example of an illicit economy operating with a high level of state protection, eroding governance and expanding corruption. Furthermore, when corruption becomes entrenched, it undermines the development of state authority and its institutions, leaving a weak state with potentially more space for insurgents to operate.[5] Corruption can also be a key grievance fuelling conflict.[6] While the IEIM includes indicators relating to political instability – such as recent occurrence of coups and areas of contested sovereignty – areas where illicit economies are not linked to armed conflict will score lower on the IEIM.

The following sections analyze the findings of the illicit hub mapping and the IEIM through two different lenses: geographic dimensions and illicit market dynamics. These are drawn on to further explore the relationship between illicit hubs and conflict and violence.

Crime and instability: complicated chains of causality

That there is a relationship between crime and instability is undeniable (see Introduction for a discussion of the relationship between illicit economies and peace). However, one major challenge pertinent to the identification of the illicit hubs and the subsequent development of the IEIM is accurately analyzing the complex issue of causality with regards to illicit economies and instability. In other words, is criminality attracted to areas of instability or does criminality generate instability?

Although illicit economies do not, by nature, lead to armed conflict, there is often geographical overlap in areas where traffickers and criminal groups operate for a long period and where instability and conflict occur. Illicit activity undermines systems of governance, distorts economic practices and undermines local investment in the rule of law. In doing so, illicit economies are part of the enabling environment in which conflicts can emerge. Once conflicts do emerge, interests in illicit economies can contribute to the prolonging of conflict, and illicit economies can be key sources of financing for conflict actors.

On the other hand, unstable and conflict areas often have a range of characteristics that permit illicit economies to thrive. Low levels of state control can enable illicit actors to operate with impunity, while conflicts often swell demand for a range of illicit commodities, including weapons and illicit drugs, and create a need to divert legal commodities into illegal supply chains furnishing conflict actors. More generally, a range of legal economic activities move into the grey zone or become illicit when armed groups take control of them, the exploitation of natural resources being one key example.

Arms trafficking is a prime example of a criminal market for which the relationship between the illicit commodity and conflict flows in both directions. In Nigeria, for example, rising insecurity has contributed to an increase in demand for weapons by communities and vigilante groups for self-protection,[7] while a proliferation in the number of weapons in circulation has also weaponized existing tensions, contributing to higher levels of violence (as occurred in the cattle rustling markets in the North-West).

The IEIM has been designed to provide insights into the extent to which the illicit economies in the relevant hub contribute to instability and conflict in the region. However, the IEIM does not provide insights into whether illicit economies or instability in a given hub developed first and, consequently, does not provide a definitive conclusion to the question of whether crime attracted conflict or conflict attracted crime in a given location. Neither does the IEIM aim to analyze all the potential roots of the conflict in a given location. Instead, the IEIM is squarely focused on the role of illicit economies in contributing to instability in the region.

The IEIM specifically considers the role that illicit economies play in fuelling conflict and instability through a number of indicators in component two: crime–conflict links. These indicators include whether the illicit economies present in an illicit hub finance armed groups, and whether the illicit commodities flowing through the hub supply conflict actors (see Appendix 3 for a full list of IEIM indicators).

Analysis of the IEIM shows that while all three components of the monitor are positively correlated with the overall IEIM score, the crime-conflict component, the component comprising the indicators aimed at evaluating the direct impact of illicit economies on conflict and instability, has the strongest correlation. This component accounts for around 90% of the variation in the overall IEIM score.

In order to ensure the finding – that the overall IEIM is a reliable assessment of the causal relationship between illicit economies and instability – is even more robust, analysis was carried out on just those underlying indicators explicitly evaluating the causality under examination. When analysing only weapons, flows to conflict actors, armed group financing, illicit economy violence and intercommunal tension, the results show an extremely strong correlation with the overall IEIM score. This finding means that illicit hubs with high scores on the 'causal' indicators are extremely likely to also have high IEIM scores overall. Looking at it from the opposite perspective, if an illicit hub scores high on the IEIM, in the near totality of cases, they will also score high on the causal indicators (see Figure 8).[8]

The IEIM identifies spaces where illicit economies and instability overlap, by applying component one (violence and instability) to hubs of illicit economies identified through the first stage of the hotspot mapping. The identification of key illicit hubs across West Africa, and an analysis of where these hubs overlay spatially with conflict, provides considerable opportunities for future research examining the development over time of conflict and instability, on the one hand, and illicit economies, on the other. This would enable further analysis of the causal mechanisms at play.

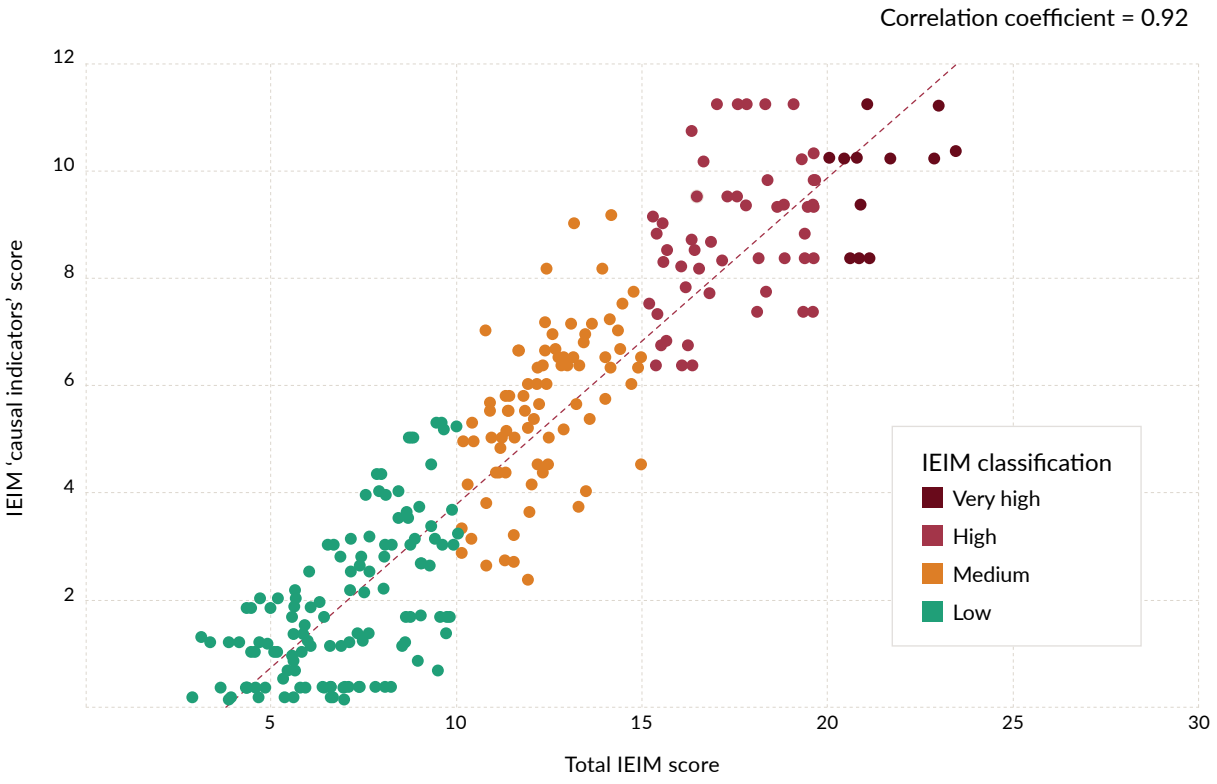


FIGURE 8 Impact of illicit economies on conflict and instability: Analysis of IEIM reliability in assessing causal relationship between illicit economies and instability.

Nigerian Army soldiers find the remains of a crashed military jet in Sambisa forest, Nigeria, March 2022. Sambisa is identified as a medium-IEIM hub. © *Nigerian Army/Handout/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images*

Geography

The structures underpinning illicit markets are best understood as a criminal ecosystem composed of a number of closely interlinked illicit hubs.[9] The socio-political, infrastructure and geographic characteristics of each hub shapes their vulnerability to exploitation by criminal networks.

Although various geopolitical and socio-economic conditions have been identified in the literature and GI-TOC research to be favourable to the development of illicit hubs, there are, broadly speaking, four characteristics that influence where illicit hubs, and the interconnecting transit points and crime zones, emerge (see Figure 9).[10]

The geography of crime: criminal ecosystems and illicit hubs

Firstly, underpinning the connectivity integral to these nodes is the infrastructure of mobility, namely roads, seaports and airports. Infrastructure connects the local to the regional space, and beyond, to criminal networks of international supply chains and marketplaces. Infrastructure also facilitates connections between criminal actors.

Secondly, an informal economy is crucial to the development of illicit hubs, while access to formal financial systems is desirable. Largely cash-based, the informal economy can facilitate laundering of the proceeds from the illicit economy. Where an informal economy exists alongside licit business, 'black' money can be injected into the formal financial system.[11] For example, in Guinea-Bissau the cashew business, an industry where many transactions are informal, is believed to be used as a channel for laundering

illicit proceeds.[12] It should be noted, however, that illicit proceeds generally constitute a small proportion of the finances of informal economies, and indiscriminate crackdowns on informal economies can disproportionately harm vulnerable populations without significantly impacting illicit economies.

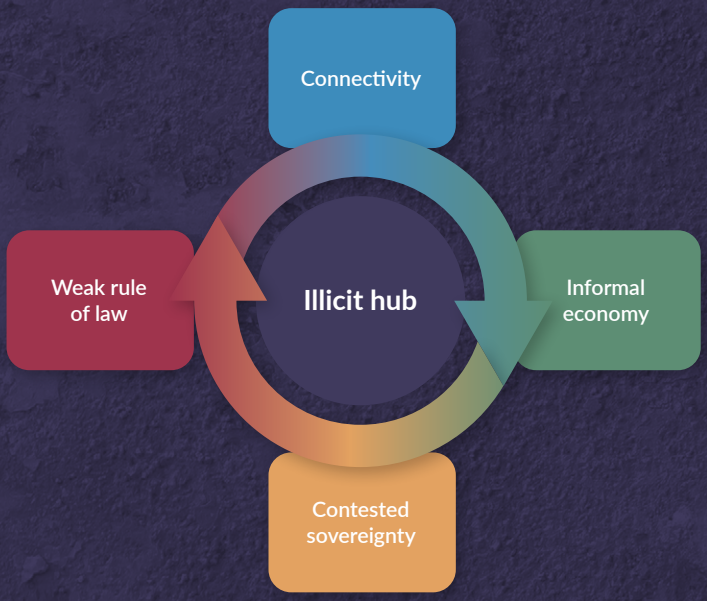


FIGURE 9 Factors in the emergence of illicit hubs.

Moreover, illicit hubs commonly develop in or near spaces of contested sovereignty (for example, where the government has limited control, and other groups or actors seek to step into the void). Such environments create opportunities for informal regulatory frameworks and criminal governance. This can often be found in border areas, geopolitically liminal spaces typically characterized by lower levels of state control.[13] Such spaces of contested sovereignty often include a degree of armed conflict, as different actors vie for control of the area. In Kourou/Koalou, a portion of land of just under 70 square kilometres contested by Benin and Burkina Faso, the disputed nature of the territory, as well as the rapid progression of violent groups in this triangular zone, has led to security forces largely vacating, allowing illicit economies such as the illicit oil trade, for example, to flourish.

Finally, and related to the issue of corruption previously mentioned, illicit hubs typically emerge in areas where the rule of law is weak, but not entirely absent.[14] Corruption, which greases the wheels of the illicit economy, is widespread and tends to flourish in areas of weak governance, facilitating protection economies.[15] However, as detailed above, criminal networks need reliable infrastructure to operate successfully. In the case of highly unstable or failed states, infrastructure is compromised. For example, in the context of the drugs trade, the potential loss of a consignment to bandits or armed groups – types of groups commonly found in failed states – presents an unacceptable risk to profits. Therefore, while conflict areas often provide an opportunity for illicit market expansion, high levels of instability are likely to result in illicit trafficking routes being displaced elsewhere, as occurred with trans-Sahelian cocaine trafficking routes in the period following state collapse in northern Mali in 2012 when terrorist groups took control.[16]

A ranger at Pendjari National Park, Benin. There is threat of armed-group penetration in the wider tri-border national park complex area, which reaches into Niger and Burkina Faso. *© Stefan Heunis/AFP via Getty Images*

Borderlands

The geographic distribution of illicit hubs is characterized to a large extent by clustering around political borders, with 49% of identified illicit hubs located along or close to national land borders.[17] The prevalence of illicit hubs near borders (138 of the 280) attests to the advantages provided by border areas to criminal networks, extremist organizations and armed groups.[18]

Border areas in the region are highly porous (albeit to differing degrees), and in many areas national boundaries exist more in theory than practice, cutting across communities that were present long before states were delineated. Across West Africa and the Sahel, armed groups repeatedly use border areas as bases from which to operate, recruit and launch attacks.[19] Border areas are often spaces characterized by patchier state governance, enabling alternative, informal regulatory structures to emerge there. Criminal and conflict actors strategically positioned close to national borders can exploit jurisdictional tensions between states and the porosity of the borders,[20] which enables circulation of illicit commodities, including weapons, as well as fighters and hostages.[21] Notably, of the 138 hubs within 50 kilometres of a national border, 80 (58%) are classified as transit points, indicating transnational flows of illicit commodities occur through them.

Many of the hubs near land borders are also located in borderlands in which various armed groups operate, where borders are blurred and sovereignty contested. The Liptako-Gourma area of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso is a prime example, as are other violence-affected border regions, such as Burkina Faso's southern areas bordering Benin and Togo. Taken together with the growing concentration of violent events near political borders in West Africa (a key finding of the OECD's Spatial Conflict Dynamics indicator[22]), this underscores the growing geographic overlap between illicit economies and instability in the region, which over time is likely to lead to growing entrenchment of armed actors in illicit markets.[23]

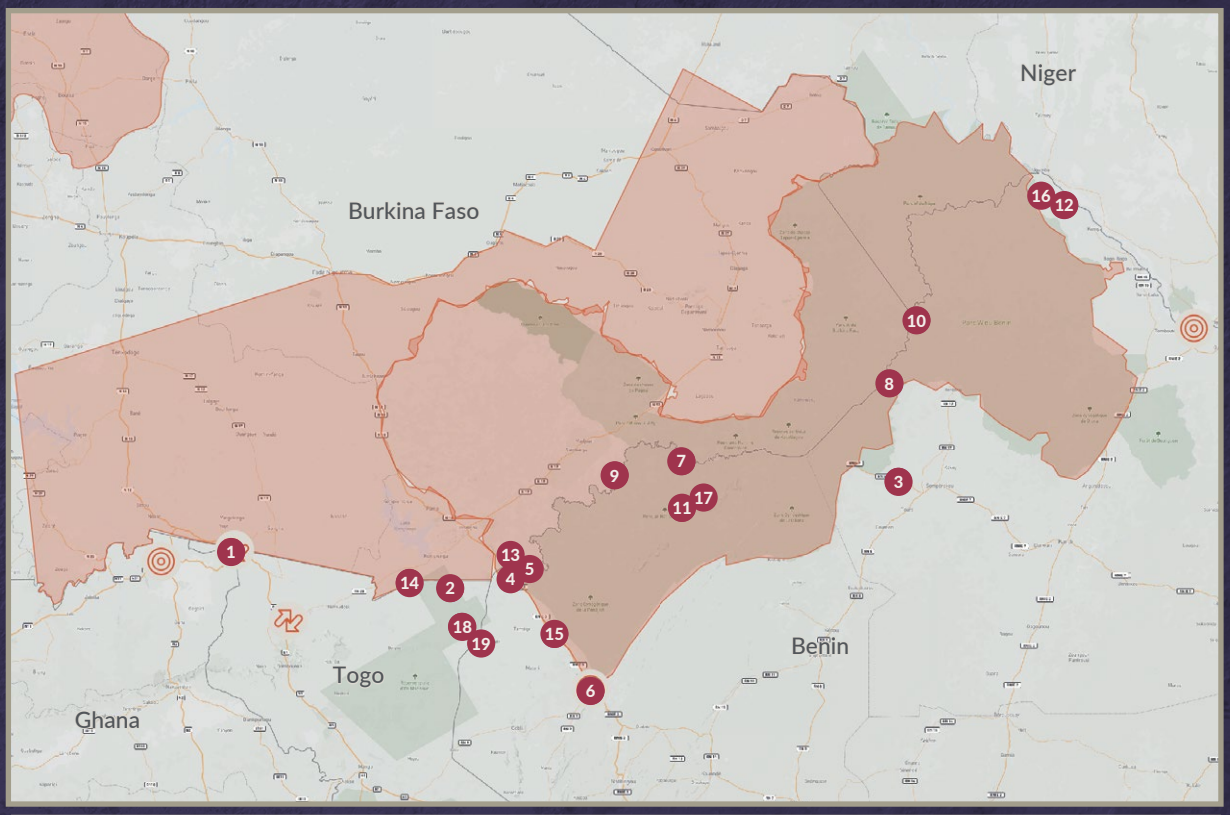
View of Aflao, Ghana, near the border with Togo. Illicit hubs close to borders tend to play more prominent roles as vectors of conflict and instability. © *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aflao*

The marginally higher IEIM scores of illicit hubs close to borders also suggest these hubs tend to play slightly more prominent roles as vectors of conflict and instability. The IEIM results suggest that, of the illicit hubs located on or close to borders, it is those in Central Africa and the Sahel that are most relevant.[24] This reflects the pattern of illicit hubs in those regions more broadly, in borderlands or otherwise, having higher IEIM scores. It also corroborates the findings of the OECD Spatial Conflict Indicator, which not only finds that border regions are deadlier than any other area in the region, but that those in the Sahel are particularly violent.[25] This adds to the growing base of evidence exploring the important role of borderlands in regional illicit markets and violence, and reflects literature on conflict, which broadly confirms that non-state violence initially builds in rural hinterlands, often near borders.[26]

There are growing concerns that the increasing presence of armed groups in the northern areas of several littoral states in the region (namely Benin, Togo, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire) is also evolving into their involvement in borderland illicit economies, as the geographies of armed groups' presence and illicit markets in these areas increasingly overlap. Even in contexts where armed groups are not drawing revenue from illicit markets, they can constitute important customers for illicit networks, forging relationships that can evolve over time. Where armed groups attain a degree of territorial control and even start to exert governance over specific areas, it becomes increasingly common that revenues are drawn from bisecting trafficking routes, most prominently through protection payments.

For example, Benin, which together with Côte d'Ivoire appears at highest risk of violent extremist attacks spreading from its inland neighbours, has long been used as a retreat and resupply base by armed groups operating in Burkina Faso and Niger. More recently this has manifested in growing incidence of attacks by violent extremist organizations in the northern regions.[27] While there is no evidence to suggest violent extremist organizations have a significant permanent presence in Benin yet, it is clear that elements of Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin, (JNIM) (Group to Support Islam and Muslims), the most prominent violent extremist group operating in Burkina Faso, procure supplies in Beninois territory, and have developed a temporary presence in the areas of Alibori, Atacora and Borgou.[28] In Togo, since the country suffered its first fatal terrorist attack in May 2022, dozens of people have been killed in attacks by violent extremists. Several factors, including the number of separate attacks, the use of improvised explosive devices and the shift in targets from primarily military targets to civilians, suggest that JNIM has now embedded itself in northern Togo, specifically the Kpendjal and Tone prefectures of the Savanes region.[29]

Armed group attacks in northern Benin and Togo



	Annotation	Date
1	Suspected violent extremists kidnapped two French citizens and killed their local guide in the Pendjari National Park	1 May 2019
2	Military forces repelled a suspected Ansaroul Islam/JNIM attack on a military post in Sanloaga, Kpendjal prefecture.	9 November 2021
3	Clash between an army patrol and suspected jihadists near Keremou, Alibori department.	30 November 2021
4	JNIM attacked a border security post in Porga, Atacora department, killing two soldiers.	1 December 2021
5	Four soliders severely wounded when a Beninese army vehicle struck an IED likely planted by JNIM militants near a mining site near the town of Porga.	10 December 2021
6	Presumed JNIM militants attacked a Beninese army position near Tanguieta, killing one soldier.	22 December 2021
7	An army vehicle struck an IED likely planted by JNIM militants near Hotel Pendjari, Tanguieta, killing three soldiers.	6 January 2022
8	Presumed JNIM militants attacked the tourist site of Chutes de Koudou. The militants fired at the site director who escaped unharmed, looted supplies, and burned the facility. A guard who attempted to resist was wounded and briefly abducted before being released.	4 February 2022
9	Soldiers repelled an attack by presumed JNIM militants on an army position in Yangouali.	5 February 2022
10	A series of roadside bombings in the W National Park killed 9 people, including 5 park rangers and a French anti-poaching trainer	8–10 February 2022
11	Suspected jihadists ambush an army convoy in Pendjari National Park, killing at least five soldiers.	11 April 2022
12	JNIM burned the Monsey police station and killed a policeman in Karimama subdivision.	26 April 2022
13	Suspected JNIM militants attacked an army position in Porga.	7 May 2022
14	Suspected JNIM attack on a military post in Kpendjal prefecture. First successful jihadist attack in Togo, in which at least eight soldiers were killed.	11 May 2022
15	Suspected jihadists launched attack on a police station in Dassari, Atakora department, killing two officers.	26 June 2022
16	Presumed JNIM ambushed Beninese Forest Guard soldiers near Park W. Two soldiers died, and their motorcycles, weapons and ammunition were stolen.	4 July 2022
17	Forest guards exchanged fire with presumed JNIM in Pendjari National Park. Five people were arrested and one injured.	5 July 2022
18	Armed men killed at least 12 civilians in overnight raids on villages in northern Togo.	14 July 2022
19	An armed forces patrol was ambushed by suspected terrorists in the village of Tiwoli, Kpendjal prefecture. Two members of the patrol were killed.	18 July 2022

SOURCE: To further explore the details of this map, please visit wea.globalinitiative.net/illicit-hub-mapping/

The armed group Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie in Burkina Faso. Armed groups are a significant source of demand of informal and illicit supply chains.
© https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volunteers_for_the_Defense_of_the_Homeland

Armed groups have become major (although by no means exclusive) end consumers of informal and illicit supply chains bisecting these areas, including for fuel, foodstuffs, counterfeit medicines, and smuggled vehicles and motorbikes. As these groups are a significant source of demand, relationships with smuggling networks to facilitate procurement of supplies can crystallize into increasingly steady alliances, as has been tracked in the areas around the town of Malanville, a key market town.[30] These relationships, based on mutual assistance, have reportedly in some areas in the tri-border national park complex[31] and surrounding villages resulted in payments being made by communities and smuggling networks to armed group elements, which in some contexts is repaid in the form of protection across certain smuggling routes.[32]

Border porosity not only lowers barriers for criminal actors, but also creates jurisdictional challenges in pursuing illicit and conflict actors, while hampering law enforcement and militarized responses.[33] Efforts to crack down or quash illicit economies in one country often result in the displacement of networks and routes across borders in what is known as the balloon effect.[34] Similarly, conflicts tend to spread across state borders as armed groups relocate to other jurisdictions in response to counter-insurgency efforts. Many of the key obstacles to an effective response to illicit economies stem from the asymmetrical nature of state and non-state actors' relationship with national borders. Given that boundaries are inherently artificial, in that 'they interpose barriers between people which do not exist by any fundamental law of human organization',[35] they are not always respected as strict boundaries. Whereas national law enforcement agents are limited by these borders that are 'arbitrary and artificial',[36] non-state actors, from local borderland communities to armed groups, tend not to be.

Corruption exacerbates these criminal advantages and legal challenges, as it facilitates irregular cross-border movement of people and commodities, and often stymies cross-border law enforcement cooperation. Within the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) region, free cross-border movement protocols also facilitate movement of people, while the cooperation agreements between national law enforcement entities that exist often lag in practical implementation. Differences between neighbouring jurisdictions, most notably with regard to tax regimes but also in respect of legislative frameworks, which are exploited by the actors involved, also make border areas favourable for smuggling economies.

The port of Cotonou, Benin. Illicit markets transiting some seaports in West Africa contribute to instability across the region. *© Photo by Wolfgang Kaehler/LightRocket via Getty Images*

Coastal hubs and maritime trade infrastructure

The vast majority of world trade moves through seaports, and illicit economies take advantage of the opportunities provided by maritime trade for concealment of commodities.[37] This makes ports, and port cities, central to both international commerce and illicit trade. The West African coastline, extending almost 17 000 kilometres through 13 countries, is no exception, and plays an important role in transnational, and in particular transcontinental, illicit flows.

Typically, seaports and airports (as explored in the following section) are located far from conflict areas and levels of violence are low. Consequently, these transport hubs tend to have low scores across the IEIM indicators tracking violence and conflict, and therefore do not reach the high/very high IEIM bands.

However, seaports often play a major role in influencing regional conflict and instability, given the importance of illicit flows through these transit points for commodities that flow to or from conflict actors in the region. While the majority of the 13 seaports identified as illicit hubs in this study are low-IEIM hubs, some – we have identified the Port of Lomé, Togo, the Port of Cotonou, Benin, Banjul, Gambia, Bissau, Guinea-Bissau, and Conakry, Guinea – are medium-IEIM hubs, suggesting that the role of illicit markets transiting these ports in driving instability across the region is not insignificant.

Almost 30% of the illicit hubs identified across the region are located on the coast; of these, the vast majority (71%) are classified as transit points, reflecting the role played by access to maritime routes and shipping infrastructure in the organized crime landscape. This echoes other research findings that highlight the importance of access to water for the development of illicit hubs, which conclude that 67% of the illicit hubs studied in that research are on or near water.[38]

As vectors of conflict and instability, however, coastline hubs are far less instrumental than inland illicit hubs. While 45% of all illicit hubs across West Africa are low-IEIM hubs, that percentage rises significantly to almost 70% when looking only at hubs on the coast. The mirror image of that analysis highlights the difference in prevalence of high- and very high-IEIM hubs: whereas almost a quarter of all illicit hubs are high- and very high-IEIM hubs, only 9% of illicit hubs on the coastline are.

Meanwhile, certain illicit economies are noticeably more pervasive in coastline hubs, including the cocaine trade and the illicit oil trade (see Figure 11).

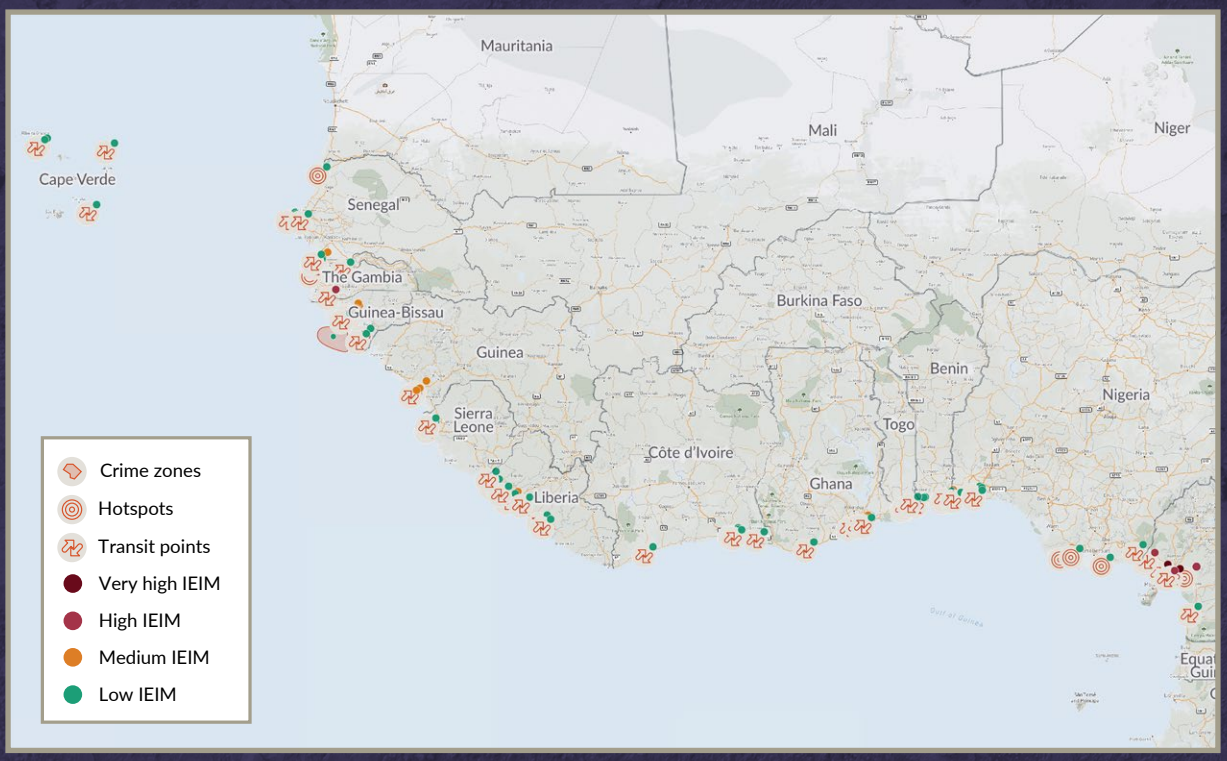


FIGURE 10 Coastline hubs by IEIM classification.

SOURCE: To further explore the details of this map, please visit wea.globalinitiative.net/illicit-hub-mapping/

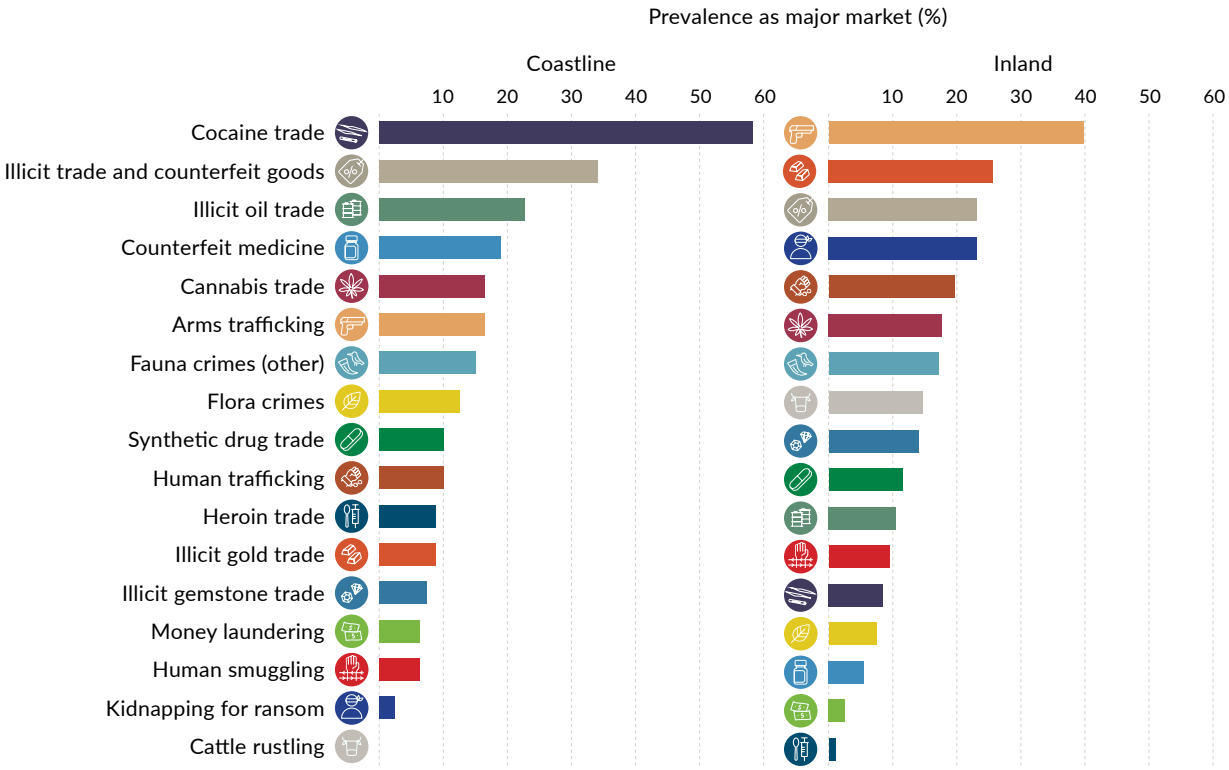


FIGURE 11 Illicit economy prevalence in coastline hubs versus inland hubs.

The prominence of the illicit oil trade along the coast reflects the importance of the market in the southern coastal states of Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta region. The coastal city of Oron, for example, is a major transit point for oil smuggling. It hosts both oil-producing communities and transit routes for the transportation of refined crude oil by multinational companies. Criminal actors use Oron's waterways and rivers, which provide access to the sea and to areas in the hinterland, to smuggle illegally refined oil from oil-bunkering sites in Ikot Abasi and Oruk Anam to other parts of Akwa Ibom State, and across the border into Cameroon.

State-embedded actors play a pivotal role in illicit flows through the region's seaports, as evidenced by the fact that they are identified as major actors in each of the 13 seaports identified as illicit hubs. This finding highlights the significant role of corruption in maritime transport infrastructure sites in the region.[39]

The Port of Cotonou is a good example of a seaport that plays an important role in transnational illicit flows, including, to a degree, of commodities that are trafficked to conflict areas and actors. The port scores in the medium IEIM band. A major trade hub, accounting for over 60% of Benin's GDP,[40] Cotonou is a strategic illicit trafficking channel, supplying Nigeria (whose higher tariffs make that country's ports less attractive to economic actors, both licit and illicit) as well Niger and other landlocked countries to the north. Over 80% of all goods entering Benin via the port are destined for re-export to surrounding countries, highlighting the strategic importance of the port in regional supply chains, both in the formal and informal economies.[41]

To give an example from the drug trade, a significant volume of cocaine moves through Cotonou. In 2020 and 2021 alone, 557 kilograms of cocaine were concealed in a cashew container bound for Antwerp, Belgium; and nearly 150 kilograms of cocaine were

FIGURE 12 Seaport illicit hubs.

SOURCE: To further explore the details of this map, please visit wea.globalinitiative.net/illicit-hub-mapping/

found hidden in sugar containers.[42] These recent seizures suggest possible cracks in the protection structures that enable the cocaine trade. From Cotonou, cocaine is redistributed by air, sea and land. The latter includes routes northwards, bisecting areas where armed groups are known to provide protection for commodities. Vehicles, motorbikes and motor parts are also smuggled into Cotonou port and dispersed across the region, including to parts of the Sahel and Nigeria where there is demand for these goods from armed groups.[43] Cigarettes imported through the port of Cotonou have also fuelled smuggling economies in the Sahel, including in Mali, where they have provided a source of revenue for armed actors.[44]

If one compares the illicit economies prevalent in seaports with those found in other illicit hubs, the cocaine trade and counterfeit medicine, which feature as two of the top four illicit commodities in port hubs together counterfeit goods and flora crimes, are disproportionately prominent at seaports. This attests to the key role played by seaports as entry points for these illicit commodities in the region. Although some domestic manufacturing does occur in certain West African states,[45] maritime entry points, predominantly for imports from India, remain central to the import and regional distribution of counterfeit medicine. Lomé, Togo, and Cotonou, for example, are regularly among the regional ports where largest volumes of counterfeit pharmaceuticals are intercepted.[46]

Transport infrastructure

Transportation structures are fundamental to the 'glocal' nature of illicit economies, connecting local with global markets.[47] While some illicit flows have a domestic or regional reach, others, particularly high-value commodities such as gold or cocaine, require transportation to international end-markets.[48] In areas of instability, understanding the intersection of local and global interests is key to understanding the influence of illicit networks on conflict dynamics.[49]

In addition to maritime ports, as considered above, airports play a key role in transnational illicit flows. Airports were identified as key illicit hubs in 12 different countries across West Africa.[50]

The vast majority of the 15 airports identified as illicit hubs fall into the low-IEIM band. Many commodities pivotal to conflict actors in the region, including weapons and fuel, do not typically use air corridors. By contrast, illicit drugs, a prevalent illicit commodity flow through many regional airports,

Kotoka International Airport, Ghana. Airports play a key role in transnational illicit flows, although the majority of the airports identified as illicit hubs fall into the low-IEIM band. © *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kotoka_International_Airport*

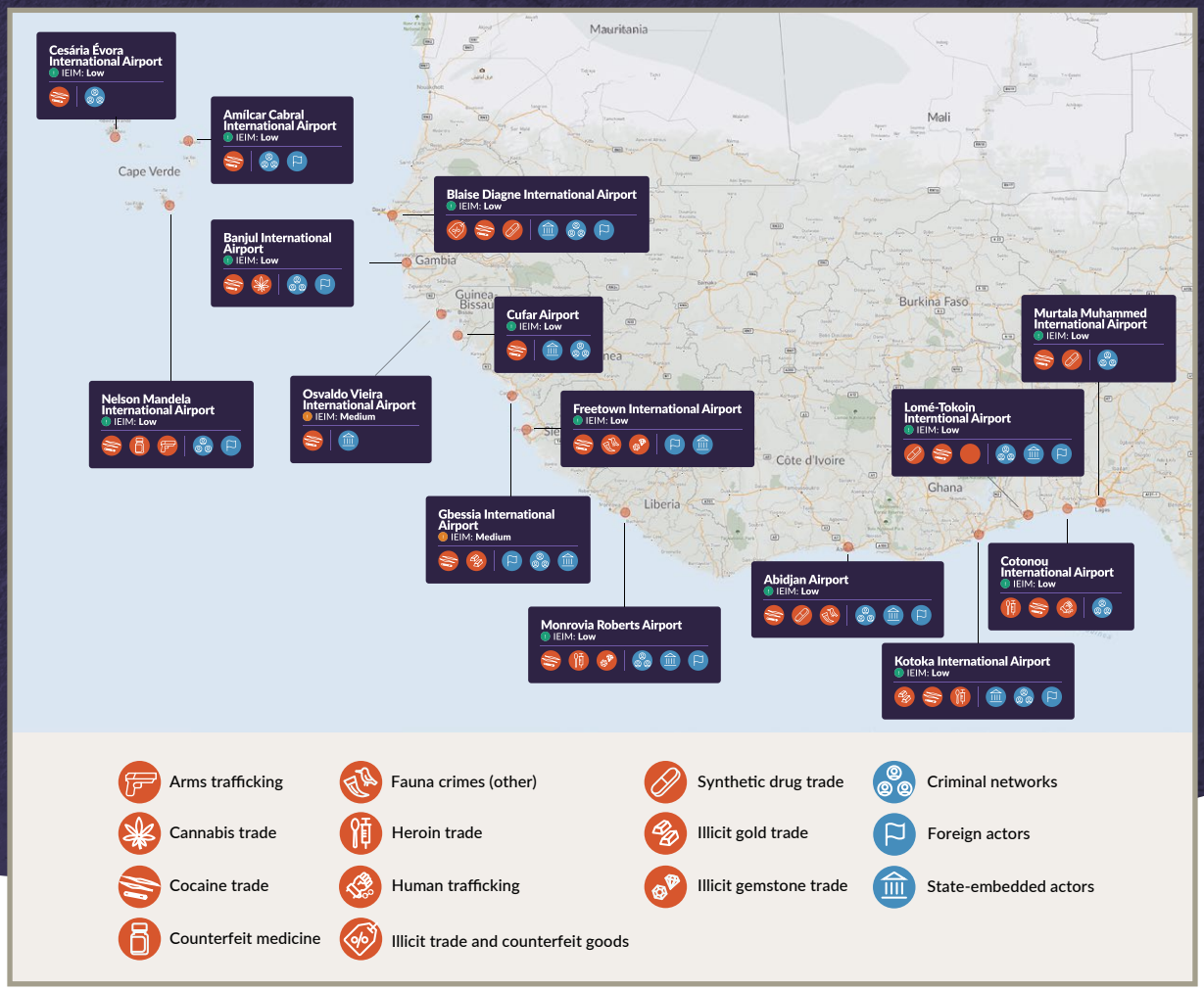


FIGURE 13 Airport illicit hubs.

SOURCE: To further explore the details of this map, please visit wea.globalinitiative.net/illicit-hub-mapping/

have more tenuous links to conflict actors across a significant element of the region.

This finding is shaped in part by the fact that, as explained with seaports above, airports are typically far from conflict and violence and therefore tend not to score highly on component one, which measures levels of conflict and instability. Nevertheless, the second component of the IEIM analyses the links between illicit economies and conflict, including flows to, and financing of, conflict actors from the relevant illicit hubs. Here, there are certain airports whose role in supply chains involving conflict actors is noteworthy.

One commodity that is linked to the financing of conflict actors in the region is gold, which is exported in significant volumes through regional airports to international processing hubs. As mentioned in the section on the illicit gold trade below, Conakry's main airport is a transit point for significant quantities of gold exported from Mali where gold mining is intimately linked to conflict and instability. Moreover, Togo's Lomé–Tokoin International Airport, for example, is used as an exit point for gold predominantly sourced in Burkina Faso. Togo is not a gold-producing country, but smugglers move considerable volumes of gold into the country from Burkina Faso to exploit Togo's favourable tax policies.[51] This gold is then exported, with the involvement of trading intermediaries, via Lomé airport to destination countries, the most common of which is Switzerland.[52]

The majority of airports identified as illicit hubs are the countries' primary international airports, but other smaller airports, such as Guinea-Bissau's Cufar Airport and Cabo Verde's Cesária Évora International Airport, were also assessed to play important roles in regional illicit economies, most prominently the cocaine trade.

The Kaduna–Abuja highway. The majority of illicit hubs are located on or near major operational roads. *© Irene Becker Photography via Getty Images)*

Our findings show that these airports are not alone: the cocaine trade is a major market in all 15 of the airports identified as illicit hubs, which highlights the importance of the increasingly well-connected airports in the cocaine criminal ecosystem across West Africa.[53] Corruption is a major feature of organized criminal activity taking place in transport hubs. Illicit economies prevalent in airports across the region are facilitated and protected by members of the state apparatus. Law enforcement involvement in drug trafficking has been highlighted in a number of airports across the region, including in Côte d'Ivoire,[54] Ghana,[55] Liberia[56] and, notably, Guinea-Bissau, where, according to one interviewee, 'impunity [goes] to the top'.[57] Reflecting this, as with seaports (see previous section), state-embedded actors were far more prevalent across airports than across hubs as a whole: of the 15 airports identified as illicit hubs, state-embedded actors were identified as major criminal actors in nine of them.

Although the density of paved roads across Africa lags far behind global averages,[58] roads remain the predominant mode of transport across the continent, used to move at least 80% of goods and 90% of passengers, according to the African Development Bank.[59] Illicit commodities, and the irregular movement of people, typically use the same transport infrastructure as the licit economy, with road networks underpinning most land trafficking routes.

Reflecting this, the vast majority of illicit hubs are located on or near major operational roads: 203 hubs (73%) are located on or near primary roads, with an additional 49 (18%) located on or near secondary roads. Only 10% of illicit hubs are not located on or near major operational roads, underscoring the importance of connectivity to most illicit economies. Not only are road networks important in shaping illicit hubs themselves, but easy accessibility is also a key facilitator of the links between different illicit hubs. Across West Africa, illicit hubs rarely develop in isolated areas, but rather rely on interconnectivity with other hubs of economic activity, both formal and informal. Only 6% of the 280 illicit hubs identified across the region are not located within 100 kilometres of an urban area.[60] Researchers were asked to consider not only the proximity of a road, but how operational it was, taking into account whether the road was impassable for parts of the year, or whether road conditions severely affected the connectivity offered by the road.[61]

The connectivity offered by distinct road networks shapes illicit markets relying on this infrastructure. For example, Liberia's south-east region, where informal gold and diamond mining is prevalent, is

cut off from the capital for over seven months of the year, as a result of flooded roads. This incentivizes the smuggling of a range of goods and commodities, including gold, diamonds, rubber and cocoa, from the south-east over the border to Côte d'Ivoire, rather than encouraging transportation to end markets in Monrovia. Similarly, researchers have posited that it is likely that Liberia's poor road network makes the Freeport of Monrovia a less attractive import option to criminal networks, as the cost and time involved in moving goods, both licit and illicit, from the port to other areas of the country or region are high.

A greater proportion of illicit hubs in Nigeria, than across the region as a whole, are not located near major operational roads (although around half of illicit hubs are situated close to major operational roads).[62] This reflects both the fact that much of the road network, particularly in rural areas, is not operational in the rainy season (a challenge affecting a significant proportion of the region), and that a number of illicit hubs in Nigeria are in rural areas. Further, illicit economies prominent in Nigeria are among those that appear most frequently away from major roads. Kidnap for ransom and arms trafficking, the two most commonly identified major markets across Nigeria, both feature among the most prevalent major markets in illicit hubs with no proximate operational roads.[63]

Where roads do not underpin smuggling routes, more specialist equipment or knowledge is typically required to make the transit. This is the case, for example, in the Sahara Desert in the far northern regions of Niger, which grants Chadian bandit groups, predominantly composed of former mercenaries and rebels with good access to vehicles and close knowledge of the terrain, an operational advantage over other local criminal networks who

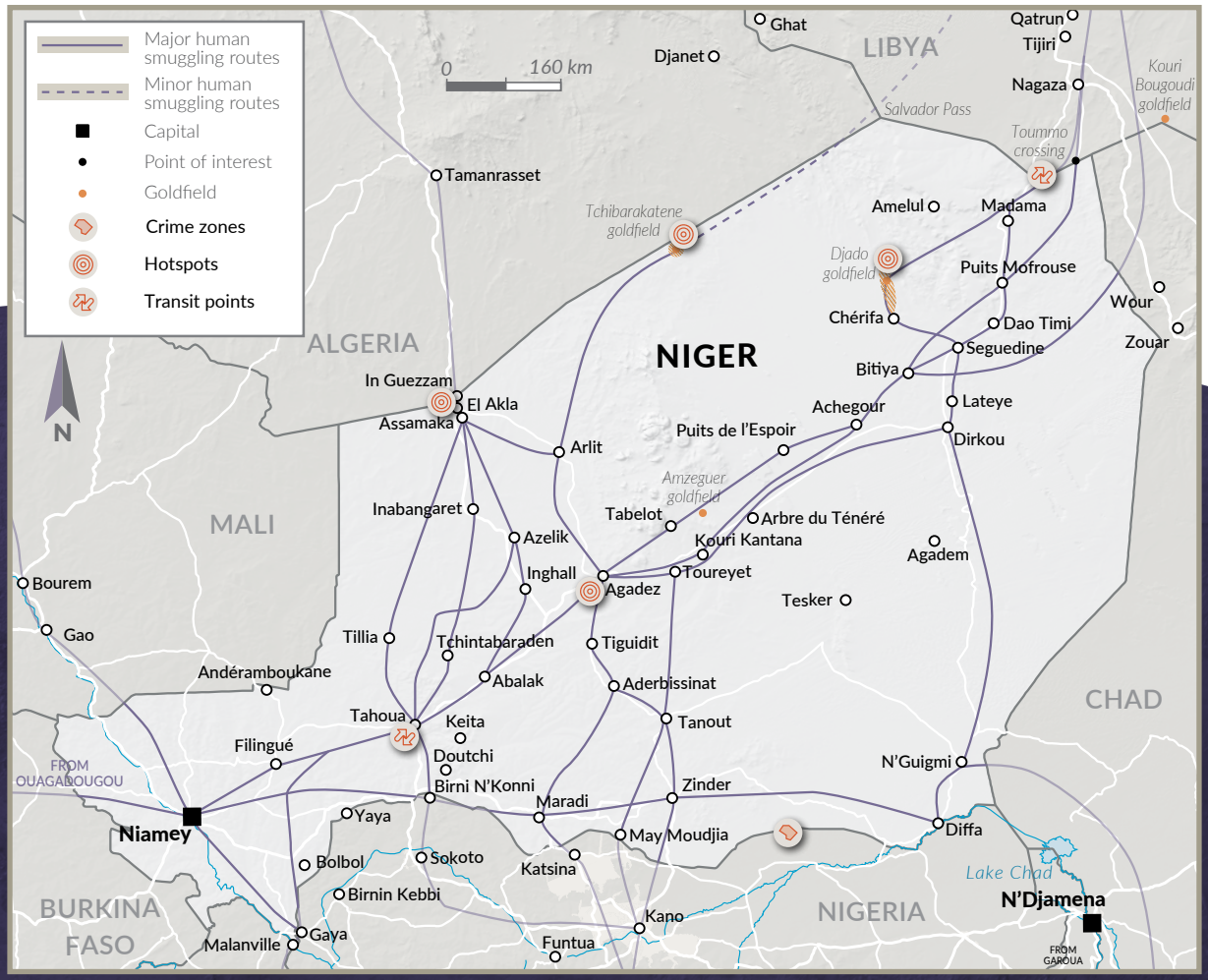


FIGURE 14 Illicit hubs of human smuggling in Niger.

Police officers check a vehicle at the Benin–Nigeria border city of Krake, December 2020. *© Yanick Folly/AFP via Getty Images*

typically operate on motorbikes, vehicles unsuitable to the terrain.[64] Similarly, human smugglers operating in Niger typically avoid main roads to mitigate the risk of interdiction, and therefore require specialist knowledge of often remote routes.[65]

Interestingly, illicit hubs where human smuggling features as a major market (which cluster in the Sahel, a region where around half of illicit hubs are close to major operational roads) are more commonly far from a major operational road than hubs featuring other markets.[66] This may reflect the fact that in many regions well connected by road infrastructure, irregular migrants are more empowered to move independently, including by using forms of public transportation. Where specialist support is required to transit a particular area – whether due to geographic barriers or political ones – this creates demand for human smugglers. Human smuggling networks are best understood as service providers, where the service is the facilitation of movement across a particular obstacle.

While roads play a pivotal role in illicit flows and in connecting illicit hubs, they also often host illicit economies themselves, namely banditry, kidnap for ransom and illicit taxation and extortion. In Nigeria, several major highways were identified as areas in which attacks are routinely launched. The highway between Dansadau, Gusau and Anka, for example, is notorious for kidnapping and armed robbery. On 19 May 2021, for instance, 18 passengers were abducted by bandits along the road.[67] The highway connecting Makurdi and Lafia is another site of frequent armed robbery and kidnapping incidents.[68]

Finally, road networks are also key enablers – or limiting factors – of the mobility of rebel groups and state armed forces, and therefore also play an important role in shaping conflict dynamics. A lack of road connectivity binding remote regions to the capital, often also engenders more limited central state engagement, which itself can fuel marginalization of communities.[69] When considering the IEIM distribution of hubs against their proximity to major operational roads, this points to a marginally higher proportion of hubs where illicit economies have a close connection with instability being positioned far from major operational roads.[70] This mirrors the slightly higher proportion of high- and very high-IEIM hubs in rural, rather than urban, areas.

Urban hubs

Cities often emerge on long-standing trade corridors, and particularly at locations where goods were transhipped from one mode of transport to another (e.g., from sea to land via a port).[71] Reflecting this, all international airport and seaport hubs identified are located in or near cities. This enhanced connectivity, with cities often acting as the interface between the local and the global, means that cities often operate

as key nodes for both licit and illicit business.[72] The characteristics of the illicit hubs across West Africa underscores this dynamic. The vast majority (71%) of the 280 illicit hubs identified across the region are located in or near urban areas.[73]

Cities, thanks to their larger populations, provide larger consumer markets for illicit commodities – in particular, consumable goods such as illegal drugs and counterfeit medicine. The cocaine economy is a prime example, featuring as a major market in 27% of urban hubs, compared to only 12% of rural hubs. After the cocaine trade, the next three illicit economies with the greatest discrepancies in prominence between urban and rural hubs are also elements of the drugs trade – namely, counterfeit medicines, synthetic drugs and heroin. Drug markets are particularly pronounced in capital cities; the cocaine trade and the cannabis trade feature among the top three most prominent markets in almost half of the 15 capital cities identified as illicit hubs across West Africa. In Dakar, for example, cannabis cultivated in Zone des Niayes is sold by small dealers in both inner-city districts and suburbs alike. In Banjul, cannabis is sold in the old market area, formerly known as Tati Pere, which is a hub for criminal networks.

Other characteristics often associated with major urban agglomerations, such as greater connectivity and more developed banking services, can also facilitate illicit activity.[74] Banks and other financial institutions, which are largely concentrated in capital cities, are among the most common vehicles for laundering illicit money.[75] While money laundering is identified as a major market in very few illicit hubs across West Africa (10), eight of those hubs are urban hubs, with five being capital cities. In Monrovia, for example, the burgeoning counterfeit-currency market, coordinated largely by Fulani traders and reportedly involving Lebanese nationals,

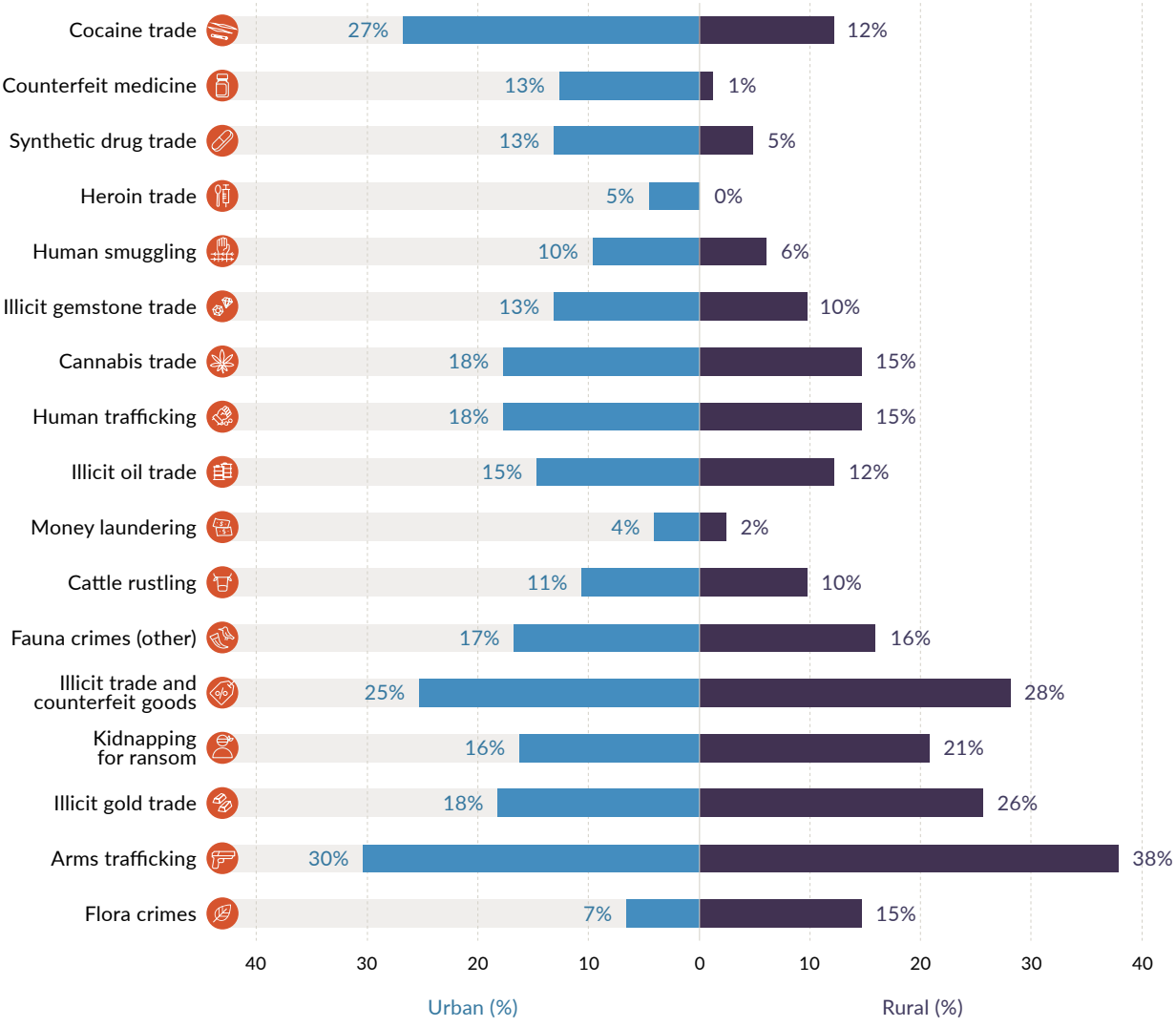


FIGURE 15 Illicit economy prevalence in urban hubs (left) versus rural hubs (right).

is a suspected conduit for the laundering of funds linked to armed and jihadist groups in the subregion.[76] This is one example of how the inherently cosmopolitan character of large urban areas, with foreign national and migrant communities, is an important facilitator of linkages to foreign markets, both licit and illicit.

The illicit economies that feature most prominently in urban hubs are also those that tend to be less influential as drivers of conflict and instability, as will be discussed in the following section. It is unsurprising, therefore, that 82% of urban hubs are low or medium-IEIM hubs; only 3% of urban hubs are very high-IEIM hubs (with the remaining 15% of urban hubs being high-IEIM hubs). Conversely, illicit markets in rural hubs are far more likely to have close ties with instability, with 35% of rural hubs falling into the bands of high or very high IEIM. The illicit economies prevalent in these hubs are known to have close connections with instability dynamics: arms trafficking, for example, is the most commonly identified illicit economy in rural hubs, with the illicit gold trade and kidnapping for ransom also notably prominent. As will be explored in the following section, these illicit economies have particularly close, albeit complex, relationships with conflict, violence and instability.

Illicit economies

One of the original contributions that the illicit hub mapping project provides to the existing knowledge base on organized crime in West Africa is qualitative information on the prominence of specific illicit economies in the different illicit hubs. While analyses of the scope and scale of illicit economies in the region exist at a national level – such as the ENACT Organised Crime Index – the illicit hub mapping provides insights into market concentration at a sub-national level.[77]

The findings show that arms trafficking and the illicit trade and counterfeit goods were the two markets most commonly identified by researchers as major markets across hubs in the region, identified in 33% and 26% of illicit hubs respectively, followed by the cocaine trade (23%) and the illicit gold trade (21%). These markets are prevalent across the whole region, with arms trafficking, illicit trade and counterfeit goods, and the cocaine trade identified as among the three most prevalent markets in illicit hubs located in 14 of the 18 countries; the illicit gold

Workers from Gambia and Guinea load timber onto a container, April 2014. *© Reuters/Alamy Stock Photo*

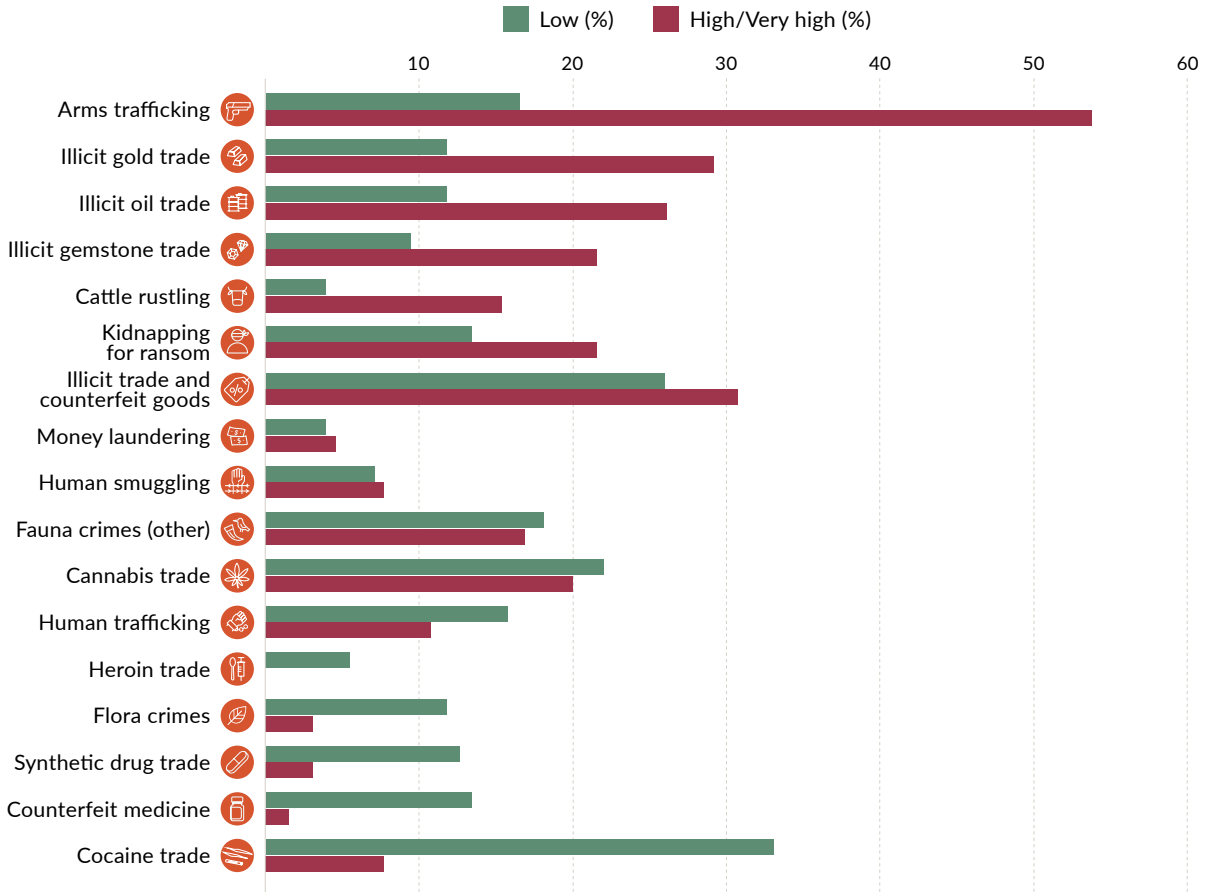


FIGURE 16 Illicit economy prevalence in high- and very high-IEIM hubs compared to low-IEIM hubs.

trade was identified in illicit hubs across 13 different countries in West Africa.

Examining illicit economy prevalence through the lens of the IEIM provides insights into the differing relationship between distinct illicit economies and conflict and instability. As shown in Figure 16, the prevalence of certain illicit economies differs significantly between illicit hubs with low IEIM scores and those with high IEIM scores.

The illicit trade and counterfeit goods market, for example, is similarly prevalent in low-IEIM hubs and high/very high-IEIM hubs. Similarly, the cannabis trade and fauna crimes, for example, are also relatively evenly represented across the IEIM spectrum. Interestingly, analysis of these two criminal markets and instability at the country level (using findings from the Organised Crime Index) also shows no discernible statistical relationship.[78]

However, there are certain illicit economies – notably, arms trafficking; the illicit trade in gold, oil and gemstones; kidnapping for ransom; and cattle rustling – that feature far more prominently in those illicit hubs that are more significant vectors of conflict and instability. This suggests that these illicit economies are typically more closely linked to instability, supporting existing research findings emphasizing the differentiated impact of distinct illicit economies on stability.[79]

Conversely, the cocaine trade, as well as the illicit trade in counterfeit medicine, are both far more common in low-IEIM hubs than in high-IEIM ones – this correlates with the greater prevalence of these markets across coastal hubs, which have lower IEIM scores.

The section below focuses on exploring the dynamics surrounding markets with contrasting relationships with instability and conflict. Aside from the three illicit economies with the largest discrepancies in

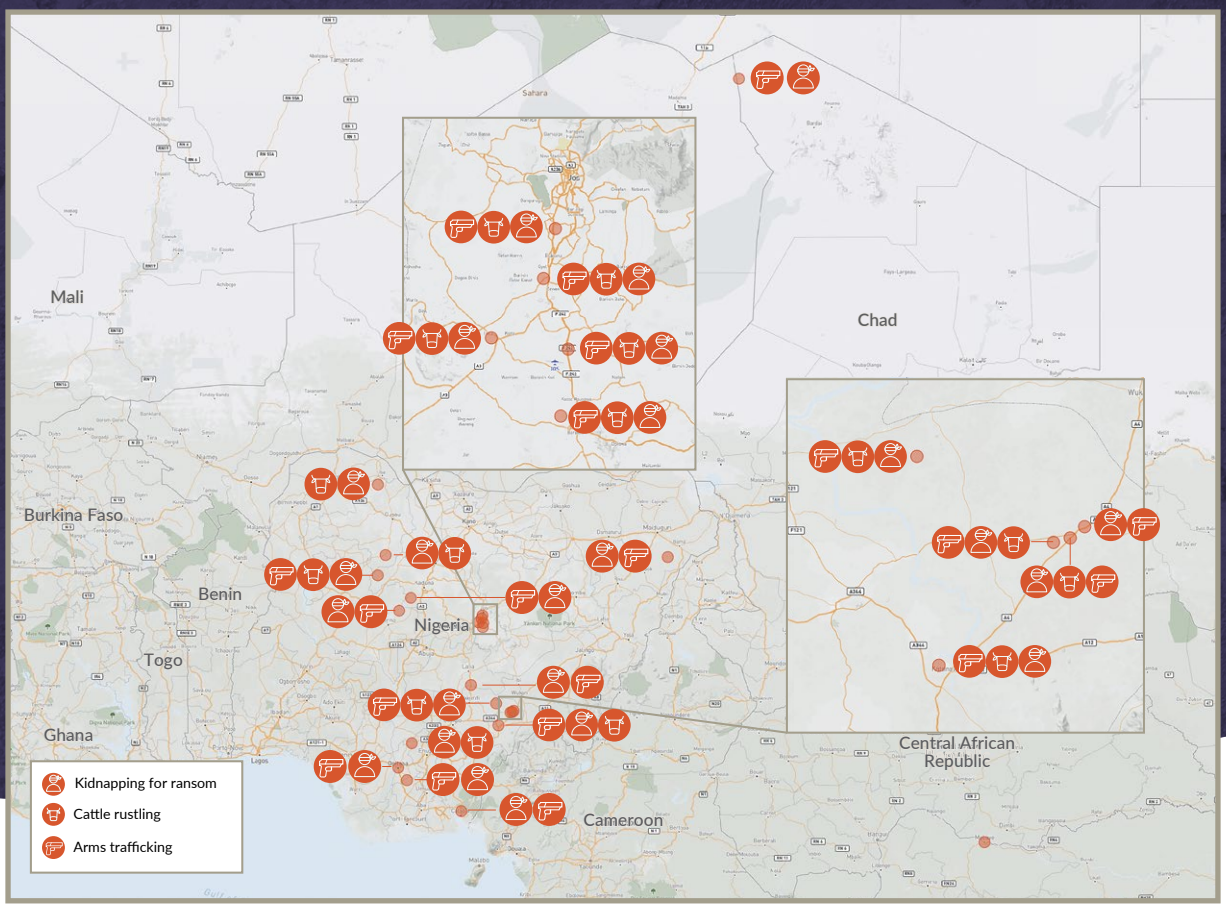


FIGURE 17 Map of illicit hubs featuring arms trafficking, cattle rustling and kidnap-for-ransom.

SOURCE: To further explore the details of this map, please visit wea.globalinitiative.net/illicit-hub-mapping/

prevalence in high- and very high-IEIM hubs compared to low-IEIM hubs (arms trafficking, the cocaine trade and the illicit gold trade), the following section also examines two other markets – cattle rustling and kidnap for ransom – that are intimately linked to conflict and instability.

Accelerant markets: Arms trafficking, kidnap for ransom and cattle rustling

The findings of this research highlight the close relationship between arms trafficking and instability.[80] Arms trafficking can be considered an 'accelerant' market, in that not only does it fuel violence in the immediate sense, but it also contributes 'to the fragmentation of conflict, increased numbers of criminal groups, increased violence as a vehicle for market control, and strengthening of armed ideological and criminal groups against state responses.'[81]

Arms trafficking features as a major market more commonly in high- and very high-IEIM hubs than in medium- and low-IEIM hubs, present in over half (54%) of hubs in the former, compared to just over a quarter (27%) across the latter.[82] This relationship between arms and conflict and instability at the sub-national level is also clearly identifiable at the national level. Across the region, countries with the most pervasive arms trafficking markets according to the Organized Crime Index, including Niger, Nigeria, Mali and Burkina Faso, are all epicentres of violence.[83] Figure 18 shows the strong correlation between the prevalence of the arms trafficking market and peacefulness.

In contrast, only 16% of illicit hubs that do not feature arms trafficking as a major market are high- or very high-IEIM hubs. It is likely that this reflects the self-reinforcing relationship between arms and instability: the arms trafficking market

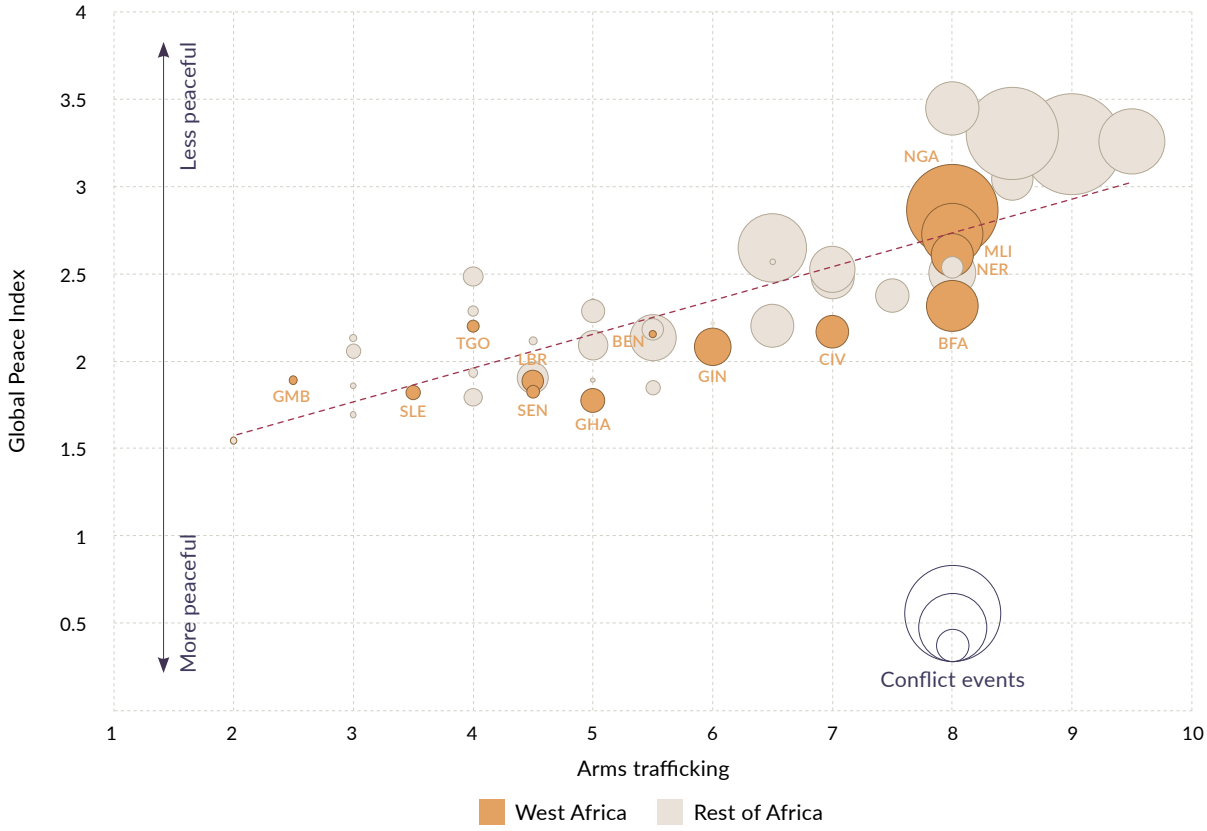


FIGURE 18 Relationship between arms trafficking, peacefulness and conflict across Africa.

SOURCE: Organised Crime Index Africa 2021; Vision of Humanity (Institute for Economics and Peace); ACLED

accelerates violence by weaponizing conflict,[84] while violent actors generally turn to illegal supply chains to obtain arms when legal sources are blocked (for example, when arms embargoes are imposed). Furthermore, instability fuels demand for weapons for self-protection, swelling the arms market. Demand is met through both artisanal arms manufacturing and the trafficking of weapons into the region. Nigeria, for example, plays an important role as a hub for both the trafficking of arms, with weapons imported into the country originating primarily in Mali and other key conflict zones in the Sahel and North Africa, and local arms production.[85]

This cycle of swelling demand for arms amid growing instability is illustrated by dynamics in the Malian city of Ber, which scores very high on the IEIM. Located at the edge of the Sahara Desert and close to an important regional port on the Niger River, Ber scores highly across several components of the IEIM. In terms of connectivity, Ber offers direct overland and river access to Timbuktu and Gao, in addition to conflict areas in central Mali. The absence of the Malian state and international forces allows criminal actors to operate relatively undisturbed. It has long served as a key market town and storage point for licit and illicit goods, including consumer products smuggled from Algeria. Gold is also sourced from Kidal and Gao regions, and Ber is used to warehouse narcotics trafficked through northern Mali – in fact, until recent agreements between rival groups reduced violence over trafficking routes, Ber was one of the locations that armed groups clashed over.

Since 2020, Ber has been a key node in the transnational weapons trafficking industry, largely operated by actors from northern Mali's Arab communities. Demand for arms has increased, particularly since 2016, from armed groups, self-defence militias, and communities for protection. One contributing factor to this increase in demand for weapons was Mali's haphazardly implemented disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme.[86] When the DDR programme was launched in 2018, individuals sought to 'mobilize' in order to participate in

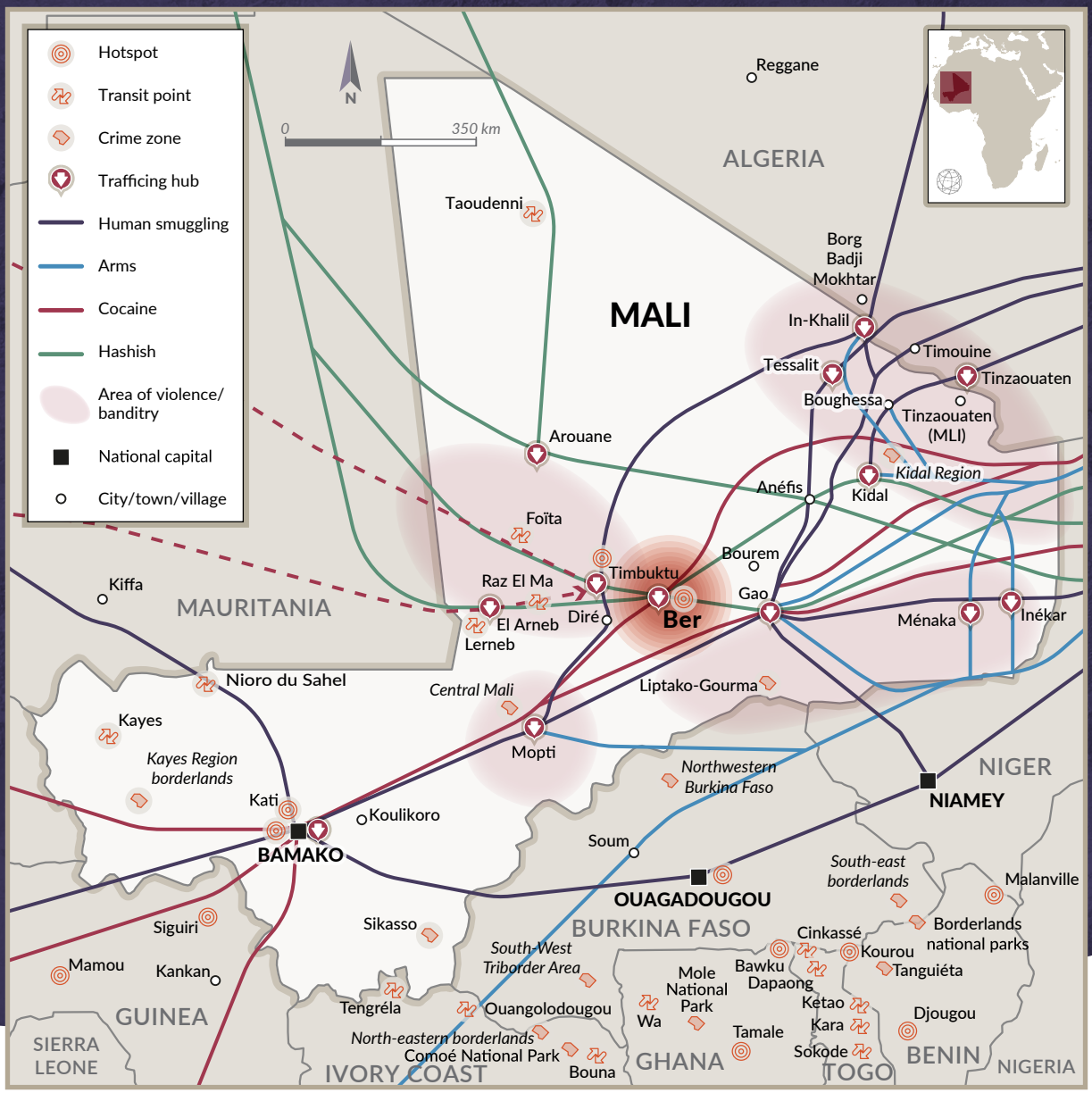


FIGURE 19 Illicit flows through Ber, Mali.

the process and armed groups swelled their ranks to 'demobilize' combatants without meaningfully reducing their military capabilities.[87] Communities that previously used hunting rifles or artisanal weapons for protection are now also seeking automatic weapons.[88] This heightened demand has led to a rise in the prices of weapons.[89]

The illicit hub mapping findings also shine a light on the interlinkages between arms trafficking and other illicit economies. Unsurprisingly, the arms trafficking market commonly appears in tandem with three other illicit economies that are often linked to a high degree of weaponization: kidnap for ransom, cattle rustling and the illicit gold trade.[90] There are 10 illicit hubs that feature arms trafficking, cattle rustling and kidnap for ransom as major markets, for example. All 10 are located in Nigeria, underlining the particularly strong nexus between these illicit economies in the country, and their relative prevalence.[91]

These markets tend to cluster in hubs that score highly on the IEIM. The Liptako-Gourma region, straddling the borders of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and falling in the very high IEIM band, is another example of where markets – in this case, cattle rustling, illicit gold mining and arms trafficking – intersect in conflict settings. The tri-border area, a hub for violent extremism, with both JNIM and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) active in

the area, lies largely beyond the reach of each territory's respective state. Armed groups have in turn benefited from the weakening of state presence and drawn substantial revenues from illicit markets.

In a region of the world so dry that growing crops is not sustainable, livestock production is a major source of livelihoods for millions of people across West Africa and the Sahel. Cattle rustling, a key and growing source of revenue for armed actors in the Liptako-Gourma area, has emerged over the past decade as a significant driver of conflict and instability across many parts of Africa, but particularly in the Sahel region and surrounding countries. Cattle rustling is, for example, one of the major markets in the Lake Chad illicit hub, and particularly prevalent in areas of north-eastern Nigeria and far-northern Cameroon. Criminal networks and armed groups, including actors linked to Boko Haram, are among the primary perpetrators.

Although cattle rustling is not new, over the past five years it has surged in Nigeria and the Sahel as instability has increased, and it continues to escalate across several epicentres of conflict. For example, in Mopti region (central Mali), herds stolen rose threefold between 2020 and 2021, from an average annual figure of 100 300 in previous years to circa 270 000 in 2021.[92] Cattle rustling represents an important instability factor both locally and regionally, owing to its correlation with high levels of armed violence in the area and the increasing involvement of Boko Haram.[93] Although cattle rustling is an illicit economy prevalent in other regions of the continent, namely East Africa,[94] its prominence as a source of financing for armed groups is unique to West Africa.[95]

Similarly, kidnap for ransom is intricately linked to the illicit arms trade. Almost 50% of the hubs in which kidnap for ransom is a significant market also feature the arms trafficking market. Although the kidnap for ransom market is a major phenomenon across the Sahel,[96] the overwhelming majority of illicit hubs in which the illicit economy is prevalent are located in Nigeria, which is home to 38 of the 48 hubs (79%) where kidnap for ransom is a major market. Of the 67 illicit hubs identified in Nigeria, over half feature kidnapping for ransom as a major market.

Sububu forest, for example, situated in the Shinkafi local government area of Zamfara State in

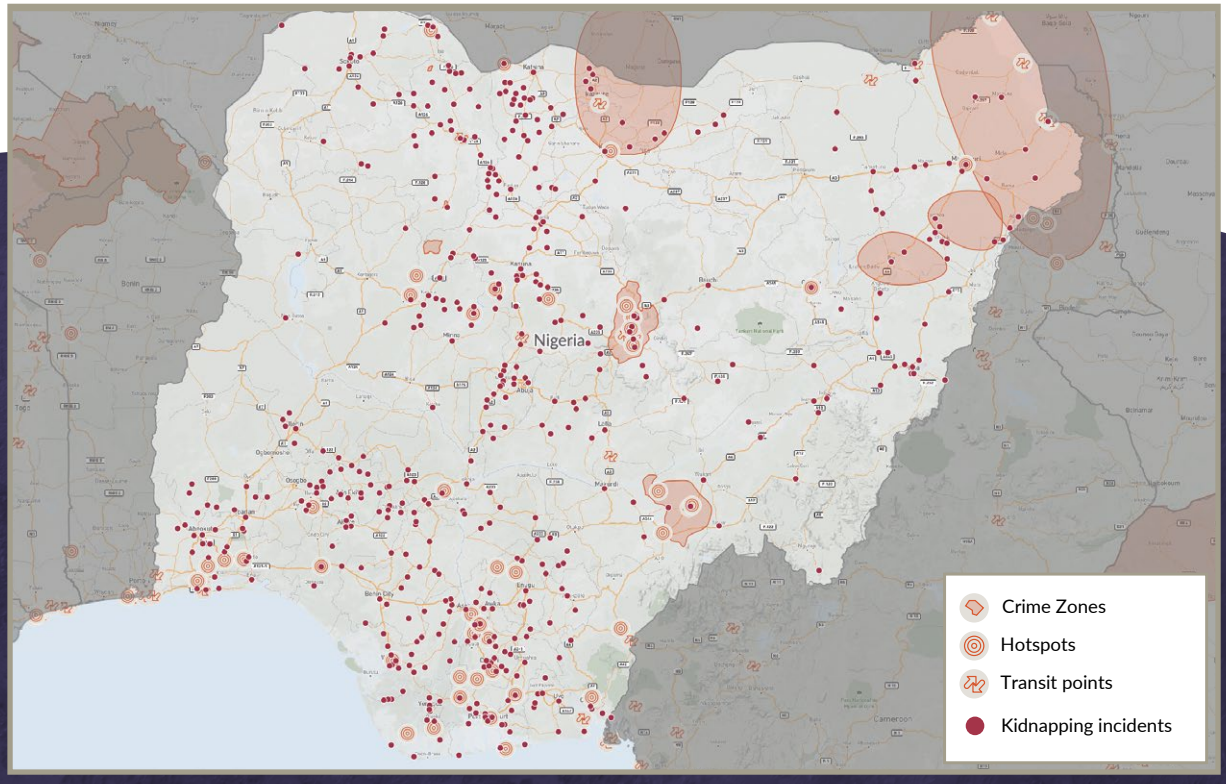


FIGURE 20 Kidnapping incidents in Nigeria, 2016–2021, and illicit hubs featuring kidnap-for-ransom, cattle rustling or arms trafficking, showing also proximity to major operational roads.

SOURCE: ACLED data for kidnapping incidents. To further explore the details of this map, please visit wea.globalinitiative.net/illicit-hub-mapping/

North-West Nigeria, is the base of operations for various groups of armed bandits involved in kidnapping for ransom, as well as arms trafficking and cattle rustling. The forest serves as a safe haven for armed groups, whose activities have continued despite military campaigns launched by the Nigerian government.[97] Armed actors have in some instances moved between distinct markets that feature prominently in areas of high instability for revenue. For instance, the dramatic rise in kidnapping incidents in North-West Nigeria is in large part due to declining revenues from cattle rustling, as herds have become depleted over time and owners have moved cattle to safer areas. At the same time, buyers grew reluctant to purchase what were known to be stolen cattle, which drove down prices from 2016.[98] As armed groups and criminal networks sought to replace their largest source of funding, there was a clear upwards trend in the number of people being kidnapped and a parallel increase in ransoms being paid.[99]

Violent criminal networks, as exemplified by the bandit groups in Nigeria, are the primary actors involved in kidnapping for ransom across West Africa. However, insurgent and terrorist mafia-style groups are also important perpetrators, not least in the national parks area in the borderlands of Benin, Niger and Burkina Faso. An incident in May 2019, in which four tourists and their guide were kidnapped in Pendjari National Park, shone a spotlight on the existing threat of armed-group penetration in the area.[100]

Overall, however, mafia-style groups of an insurgent or terrorist nature are fairly uncommon across the 280 illicit hubs in West Africa, featuring in only 18% of hubs. This reflects the broader, national-level organized crime dynamics across West Africa and the African continent as a whole, as evidenced by the findings of the 2021 ENACT Organised Crime Index, which shows that of the four different criminal-actor types assessed (mafia-style groups, criminal networks, state-embedded actors and foreign actors), mafia-style groups are by far the least pervasive.[101]

However, in the subset of illicit hubs in which arms trafficking is prevalent, insurgent and/or terrorist mafia-style groups were identified as the most dominant actors far more often – in 28% of hubs. A direct comparison of insurgent and/or terrorist mafia-style group prevalence between illicit hubs with and without arms trafficking shows a rate of more than double in the former (13%, compared to 28%).

This points to the bi-directional relationship between mafia-style groups involved in insurgency and/or terrorism, on the one hand, and the spread of weapons, on the other. While the proliferation in the number of armed groups is a direct result of the increasing accessibility of small and light weapons, it is also itself a factor in the heightened demand for weapons, by both insurgents and others for self-protection, as explored above.

Cocaine

Whereas arms trafficking features far more prominently in high IEIM-scoring illicit hubs, the cocaine trade is the illicit economy with the greatest discrepancy in prevalence rate between lower and higher IEIM-scoring hubs. Overall, the cocaine trade was identified as a major market in just under a quarter of all illicit hubs across the region (23%). However, it features in only 8% of those illicit hubs with IEIM scores above 15 (i.e., hubs assessed to be important vectors of conflict and instability across West Africa). This contrasts considerably with the prevalence of the cocaine trade in the hubs with the lowest IEIM scores (33%).

This disproportionality reflects the concentration of illicit hubs along the coastline featuring the cocaine trade. These coastal hubs appear to have less direct links between illicit economies and instability, tending to have significantly lower IEIM scores compared to hubs further inland (see Figure 21). Cocaine is among the most high-value commodities flowing through the region, so trafficking networks often avoid the most high-risk environments in the Sahel region. This can be tracked across the region's recent history.

In 2012, for example, surging instability in the Sahel and the breakdown of order in Libya in the post-revolutionary political transition negatively affected the trans-Saharan cocaine trade. The rise of highly armed militia groups resulted in repeated violent clashes over key trafficking hubs, a surge in banditry targeted high-level trafficking in both Niger and

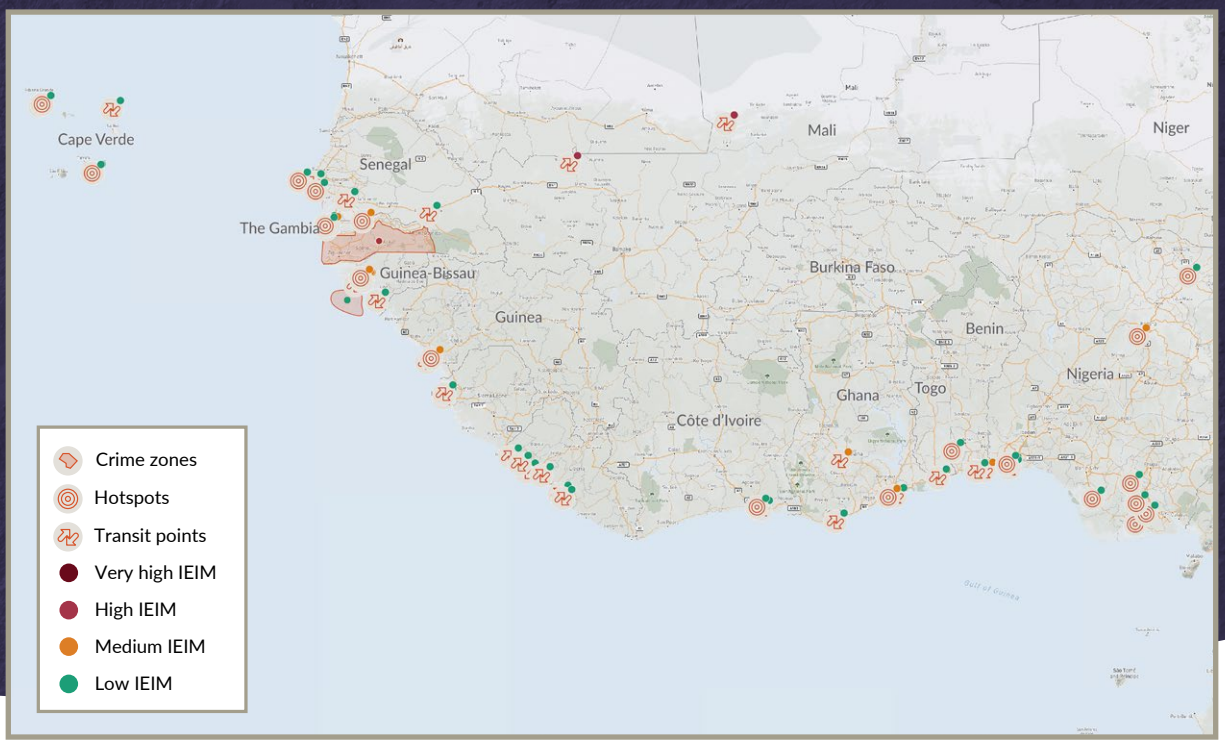


FIGURE 21 **Illicit hubs featuring the cocaine trade as a major market.**

NOTE: No hubs feature cocaine as a major market in Chad, CAR and Cameroon, which are therefore not included in the map.

SOURCE: To further explore the details of this map, please visit wea.globalinitiative.net/illicit-hub-mapping/

Libya, and the increased presence of international troops further heightened risks to trafficking.[102] This increased the cost of trafficking, particularly of the most targeted high-value commodities, such as cocaine and weapons.

This high level of instability across trans-Sahelian land routes displaced more trafficking to maritime routes, including re-containerization in the region.[103] Cocaine busts in North African coastal areas, which rose six-fold between 2015 and 2016 (accounting for 69% of all African seizures in 2016), seem to confirm this trend.[104] Overland routes shifted to avoid the most insecure areas: bulk supplies of cocaine started to be frequently transferred from Guinea-Bissau through Senegal and on to Mauritania, from where fishing boats are then used to take the commodity to Europe. Alternatively, cocaine is driven over the Senegalese border, on to Mali, and then to Mauritania. The land route to Libya has become less frequently used for bulk supply, given ongoing conflict there, as the value of a large cocaine shipment is too high to lose to bandits or militias.[105] Currently, as northern Mali enjoys a greater degree of stability, cocaine continues to transit Saharan routes, albeit in volumes believed to be lower than prior to 2012. These shifting dynamics illustrate the fact that, in general, illicit economies and criminal actors are attracted to areas where the rule of law is weak, but not entirely absent.[106]

With regards to criminal-actor typology, state-embedded actors are far more likely to be among the most influential criminal-actor types in the illicit hubs where the cocaine trade is particularly pervasive than elsewhere. Across the full set of 280 illicit hubs identified across West Africa, state-embedded actors were identified in 31% of them. In cocaine trade hubs, however, this figure doubles to 60%. This is potentially due in part to the high profitability of the cocaine market – protection networks for high value commodities, such as cocaine, are likely to reach the highest levels of state. Lower-value commodities are by contrast unlikely to engage at that level, and typically rely instead on corruption at lower and mid-levels of state institutions, or otherwise operate outside state influence.

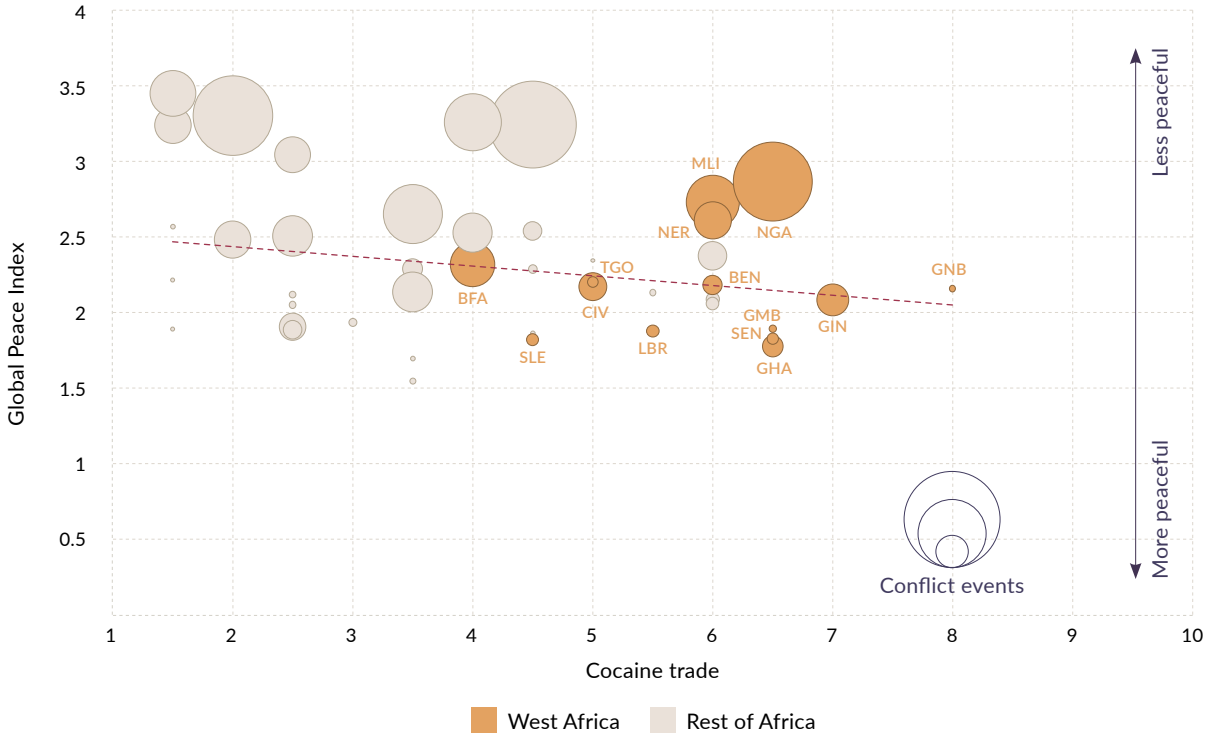


FIGURE 22 The cocaine trade, peacefulness and conflict.

SOURCE: Organised Crime Index Africa 2021; Vision of Humanity (Institute for Economics and Peace); ACLED

It is clear that certain armed groups in the Sahel do earn some revenue from cocaine trafficking through involvement in the trade (typically indirectly through provision of protection) or predation of the trade (by attacking consignments). For example, the Salvador Pass on the Nigerien border with Libya is targeted by armed banditry groups involved in, among other forms of criminality, the lucrative business of drug-convoy interception. But the illicit hub mapping findings underscore that the trade is by no means among the most prominent illicit economies feeding into conflict dynamics (see Figure 22).

It is, nevertheless, particularly important when considering political instability across the region. In Guinea-Bissau, for example, where the cocaine trade is prevalent in seven of the 13 illicit hubs identified, competition over the cocaine trade is a key driver of political volatility.[107]

Illicit gold trade

Lastly, the illicit gold trade merits further analysis, given the complex nature of its relationship with conflict and instability. As with arms trafficking, kidnap for ransom and cattle rustling, as explored above, the illicit gold trade is also more prominent in illicit hubs with higher IEIM scores, compared to lower-scoring hubs. The illicit economy features in 29% of high- or very high-IEIM hubs, in contrast to just 12% of low-IEIM hubs in the region.

As with the cocaine trade, this pattern is largely a reflection of geography, with gold being identified as a major market across a significant range of hubs in the Sahel and CAR. The illicit gold trade was also identified, to a lesser extent, in Cameroon, which plays a significant role as a transit country for gold mined predominantly in CAR, in many contexts coordinated by armed groups. Guinea also plays an important role as a transit point for illicit gold flows in the Sahel region (mirroring that of Cameroon to CAR, to a degree). The gold-mining region of Singuiri in Guinea is a source of gold smuggled across the border into Mali. In addition, Conakry, specifically Gbessia International Airport, is a transit point for important quantities of gold exported from Mali, in particular Bamako, due primarily to the different export-tax regimes between the two countries. The ECOWAS-mandated closure of land and air borders of ECOWAS countries with Mali – with the exception of Guinea, which refused to comply – has made

Guinea an even more important transit point for illicit commodities from Mali, including gold. (It has also engendered the establishment of additional land and air trading routes, including the creation of a new direct flight between Bamako and Conakry).[108] The vast majority of gold is trafficked out of the region, to international processing hubs, most prominently the UAE.

The relationship between gold and instability is heavily defined by the involvement of armed groups, but also of elements of the state apparatus and the private sector. Corrupt and criminal political and business elites are able to capture illicit gold flows as a result of the widespread informality in the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector, which in turn can exacerbate community tensions that drive fragility and can give rise to conflict.[109]

The complex relationship between the gold sector, violent extremism and instability is illustrated in Mali and Burkina Faso, among the major gold-producing areas in West Africa.[110] There has been a noticeable increase in jihadist activity in Kayes region in Mali since 2020, with attacks on both military and civilian targets on the rise. While jihadist activity fits within a broader pattern of jihadist group expansion throughout Mali, the presence of both major industrial mines and artisanal mines makes the region attractive given its potential to both generate revenue and serve as a base for expansion into Senegal and Guinea.

Moreover, in Mali's Kidal region, armed groups – specifically elements within the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) – have established control at many artisanal gold-mining sites. At these locations, miners are required to pay the CMA in exchange for protection, access to water and food, and the right to set up encampments at gold sites. Notably, there is a degree of blurring between some elements of the CMA and elements of the jihadist group JNIM in Kidal, meaning that some financing from the gold sites is likely to be flowing to elements of JNIM. Artisanal gold mining is a key livelihood for many communities in Kidal, and the funds from this economy are probably one of the factors behind the current degree of stability enjoyed by the region (in comparison to the surging violence in the centre of the country, where armed groups continue vying for control). The gold economy is also a key element of armed group governance strategies in Kidal – enabling communities to access gold resources is a key source of legitimacy for armed groups operating in the area.

Gold miners in Ndassima gold mine, CAR. The relationship between gold and instability is heavily defined by the involvement of armed groups, but also of elements of the state and the private sector. *© Thierry Bresilion/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images*

In Burkina Faso, gold mining is also a source of revenue for jihadist groups, predominantly JNIM-affiliated actors. Gold mined from sites under jihadist control easily enters licit and illicit gold markets, making it difficult for authorities to distinguish the illicit gold within formal supply chains. Local mining companies have reportedly reached arrangements with jihadist groups that allow them to continue to operate and transport goods in areas that the jihadists control. JNIM has democratized access to gold resources in many areas under its influence, upending the social hierarchies that benefited landowners and security providers and excluded communities

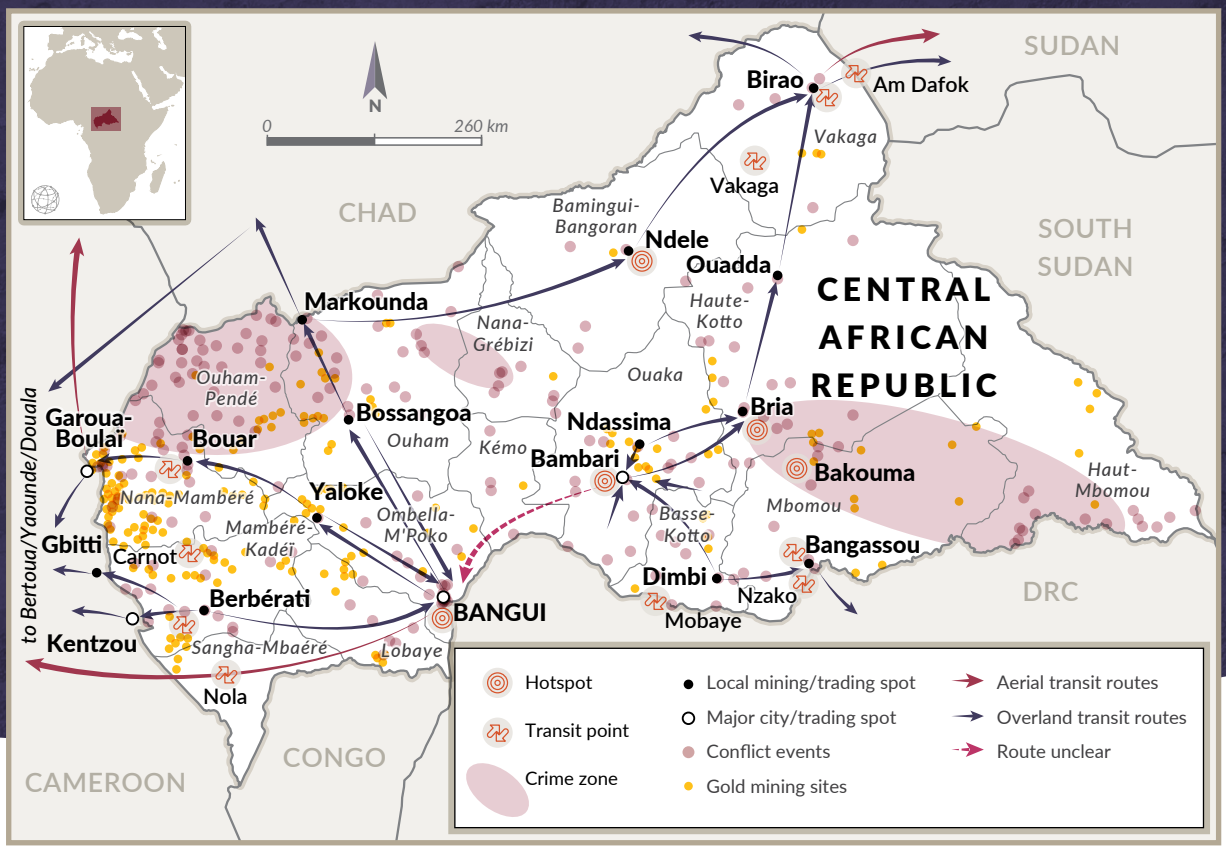


FIGURE 23 CAR's gold mining sites, security incidents and key supply-chain routes.

NOTE: Conflict events data includes battles, violence against civilians and explosions/remote violence from 2020 to 2022.

SOURCES: Alexandre Jaillon and Guillaume de Brier, Mapping artisanal mining sites in the Western Central African Republic, IPIS and USAID, November 2019; Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project

from the majority of profits. This democratization has translated into significant support for and increased legitimacy of JNIM.

The gold sector also provides an important source of revenue for armed groups in CAR. For example, Bambari – which scores high on the IEIM – is a major hub in the illicit metals and minerals trade. The town has been at the centre of conflict between armed groups on the one hand, and international forces (including the Russian Wagner Group, which has also developed interests in CAR's minerals sector) and national forces on the other.

Competition over control of revenues from gold mining areas can shape conflict between different armed actors. Between December 2018 and March 2019, for example, fighters from the Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC) (Central African Patriotic Movement, a rebel group operating in the north in a large territory extended westwards), Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC) (Unity for Peace in Central Africa Republic), and the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) (Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central African Republic, a rebel group controlling north-east CAR territory) reinforced their presence in the Bakala area located near Bambari, taking over several gold-mining sites previously controlled by anti-balaka elements.[111] It is reported that Bambari is currently controlled by armed groups and gold is a crucial funding source for conflict actors involved.

Artisanal gold-mining sites, which provide a livelihood for many communities lacking alternative options, are often zones of polycriminality. Kouri Bougoudi, in addition to being Chad's largest artisanal goldfield, is a major regional hub for polycriminal armed groups involved in the smuggling of fuel and food staples, as well as drug and arms trafficking and banditry. Kouri Bougoudi lies at the heart of regional arms trafficking operations, fuelled in part by the proliferation of small arms that followed the collapse of the Qaddafi regime in Libya in 2011.

Weapons and ammunition from Libya are brought there along clandestine routes through southern Libya via Um al-Aranib, Qatrun, Domozo and Emi Madama. At the goldfield, arms traffickers run operations from locations such as Hour Madanine, a notorious marketplace for drugs and arms trafficking. The weapons supply local, regional and international markets, including Chad's neighbouring countries, notably Sudan and Niger.[112]

Illicit markets in Kouri Bougoudi are strongly linked to local and regional dynamics and have for the most part led to an increase in instability both locally and regionally. Certain illicit economies such as gold mining – and to a lesser extent, the smuggling of drugs, fuel and basic commodities – provide revenue flows to armed opposition groups, namely Libya-based Chadian rebels who share community and political ties with groups involved in gold mining in Kouri Bougoudi.

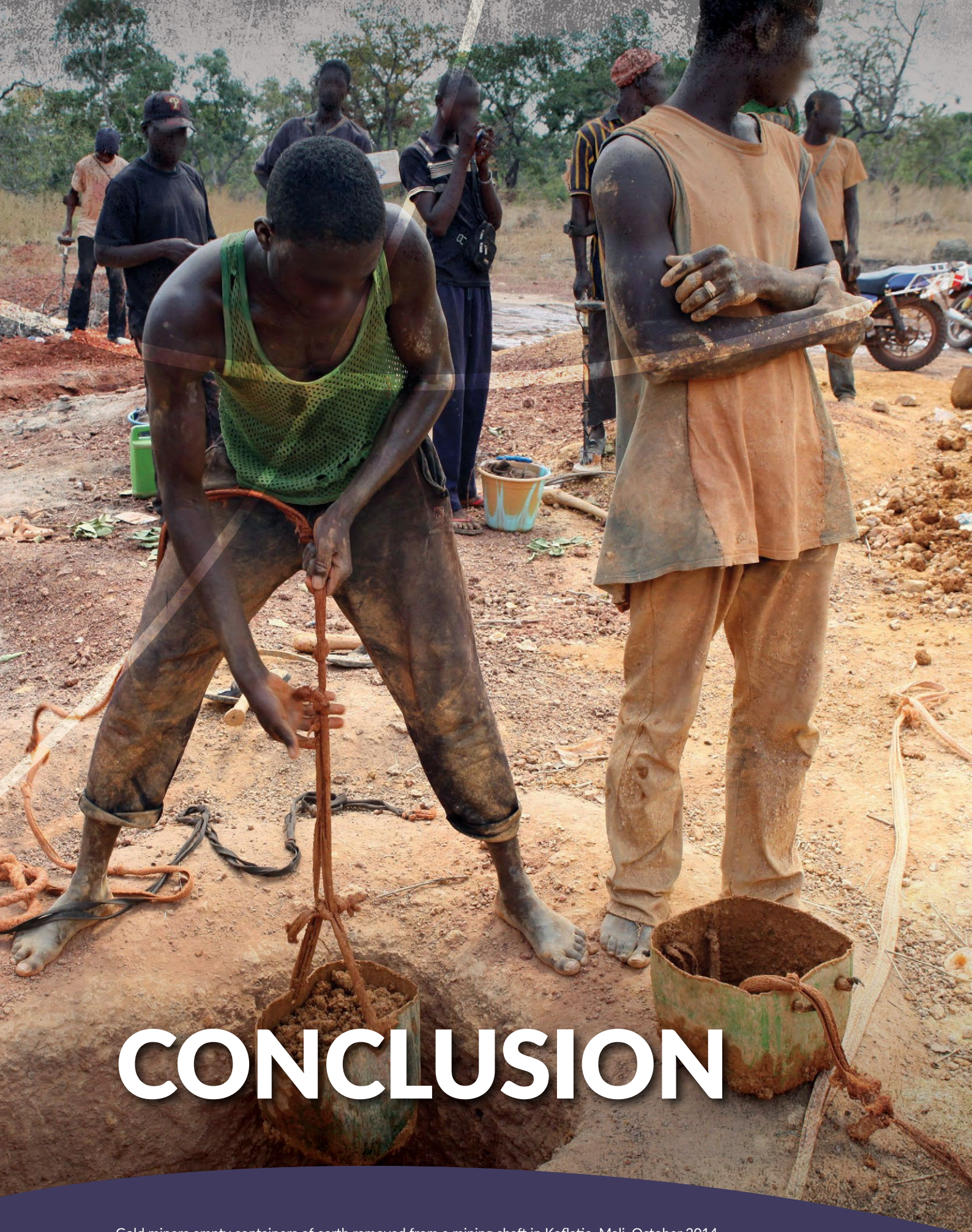
However, gold mining also provides livelihoods for many young Chadians in a context in which formal economic opportunities are scarce, and it may in fact have contributed to containing risks of further rebellions and unrest.[113] The results of repeated efforts by the Chadian state to clear Kouri Bougoudi, most recently in June 2022, illustrate the dangers of seeking to quash revenue flows to armed groups without sufficiently prioritizing the role of the gold economy in local livelihoods: crackdowns at Kouri Bougoudi have not only been unsuccessful, they have been counterproductive, depriving communities of livelihoods, fuelling tensions between communities, and encouraging the recruitment of former miners into armed groups.[114]

Conflict and violence

As explored in the previous sections, there are strong links between certain illicit economies and violence. In total, a significant minority of illicit hubs identified across the focus countries are located in areas with high levels of conflict and violence: just over 30% of illicit hubs are located in areas in which there have been over 500 conflict fatalities over the past decade (henceforth referred to as 'high-fatality regions').[115] The vast majority (66%) of high- and very high-IEIM hubs are located in high-fatality regions: of the 12 very high-IEIM hubs, 10 are located in such regions; 33 of the 53 high-IEIM hubs are found in high-fatality regions.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, arms trafficking is the most prominent illicit economy in high-fatality regions, featuring in 56% of them. Furthermore, the fact that kidnap for ransom, a fairly uncommon illicit economy across West Africa as a whole, features in almost 40% of all illicit hubs in high-fatality regions underscores the role that this illicit economy plays in conflict dynamics, particularly in Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria.[116] Cattle rustling is another market disproportionately pervasive in areas affected by high levels of conflict and violence: 66% of illicit hubs featuring cattle rustling are located in high-fatality regions.

The convergence between illicit economies and conflict is reflected to a large extent in the types of criminal actors identified to be most prominent in illicit hubs. More than half of the 51 illicit hubs in which mafia-style groups of a terrorist or insurgent nature are present are located in high-fatality regions. In other words, whereas these criminal-actor types are only identified in 18% of all illicit hubs across West Africa, they feature as major actors in over 34% of illicit hubs in high-fatality regions – almost double the rate. Furthermore, 57% of hubs where terrorist or insurgent mafia-style groups are among the most prominent criminal actors are located in high-fatality regions.



CONCLUSION

Gold miners empty containers of earth removed from a mining shaft in Koflatie, Mali, October 2014.
© Sebastien Rieussec/AFP via Getty Images

The illicit hub mapping initiative seeks to support analysis and design of programming interventions that are sensitive to local illicit market dynamics across West Africa, with a particular focus on aiding stabilization programming. The findings reinforce narratives that emphasize the importance of adopting nuanced responses that accurately cater to the contrasting characteristics of distinct illicit economies, and how they play out in different geographical locations.

Several factors are likely to increase the future reliance of many communities on illicit economies, including in areas affected by instability and conflict. These include climate change, which challenges traditional agricultural approaches and in some areas – including Burkina Faso – contributes to an overall increase in reliance on alternative livelihoods, such as informal artisanal gold mining. Globally escalating inflation, triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, is driving up the prices of core foodstuffs, enhancing economic stresses, and forcing more communities to turn to informal livelihoods where no formal alternatives exist. This underscores the importance of ensuring that regional programming is sensitive to illicit economies at a sub-national level – dynamics that the illicit hub mapping initiative explores.

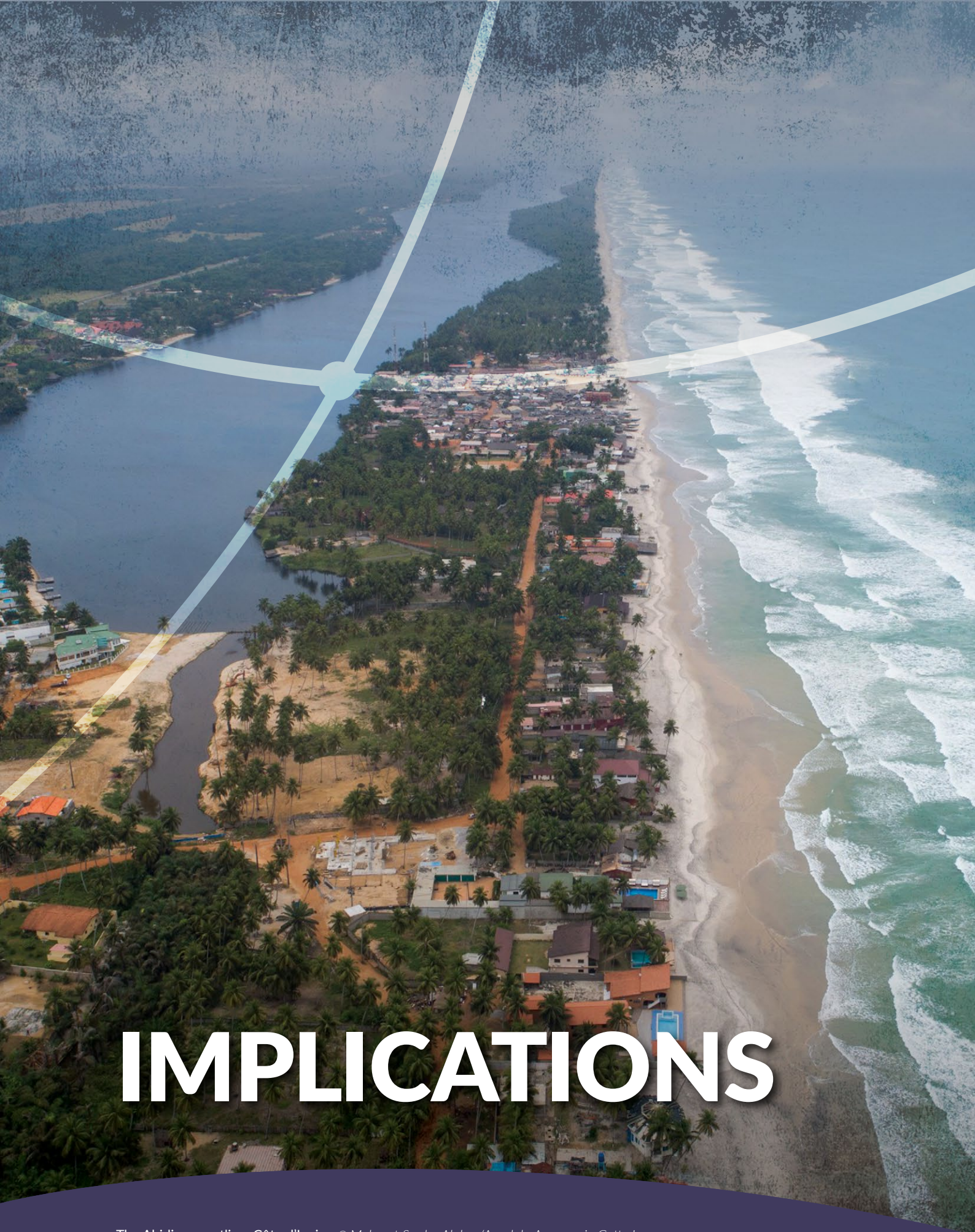
One of the main takeaways from this research is that interventions aimed at stabilization must not only consider the role played by illicit economies in the first place but must also be sensitive to the nuanced nature of the relationship between illicit economies and instability. While policymakers often opt for broad-brush responses to illicit economies, the priority should be to address those illicit economies that generate violence and foment tension and conflict among communities across West Africa (namely, arms trafficking, cattle rustling and kidnap for ransom). Furthermore, it is crucial that policymakers and other development actors recognize that while illicit economies are significant drivers of instability in many cases across the region, this is not always the case. Indeed, as highlighted in many of the interviews coordinated to better understand the market dynamics in identified hubs, and supported by a growing body of literature, illicit economies can also, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, serve to maintain a degree of stability by providing alternative sources of livelihood to individuals who may otherwise resort to armed violence.[117] Misdiagnosing the relationship between communities and illicit economies can render interventions counterproductive.

The findings presented in this paper pave the way for multiple new avenues of research, including, as mentioned earlier in the report, a systematic analysis of the development of instability and illicit economies in specific hubs over time, and further examination of the causal links between the emergence of illicit economies and conflict and instability. Key illicit hubs having been identified in each country across West Africa (taken in this report to include the Sahel, Cameroon and CAR) and the links to instability assessed, researchers will now be able to explore in more detail the causal dynamics at play.

While the dynamics of the various illicit hubs are assessed as they currently stand today, one line of analysis that will be available in the future is an assessment of the lifespan of the illicit hubs. This could include an examination of the rise and fall of illicit economies, whether as a result of an organic evolution or due to exogenous interventions, and how these trends over time interact with instability dynamics.

Furthermore, having identified the major illicit hubs across the region and the ways in which they can exacerbate – as well as stem from – conflict and instability, it is important to identify the best ways in which different stakeholders can and should respond. Civil society actors, for example, can and should play a crucial role in responding to illicit economies and building community resilience. The role of women, both in terms of the impact of the illicit hubs and in designing community responses to organized crime, is another potential avenue for further research that could stem from this project.

The preliminary findings of the illicit hub mapping approach have been debated with a wide range of regional and international government and civil society stakeholders: the key points emerging from such workshops around findings are outlined below in the implications section.



IMPLICATIONS

The Abidjan coastline, Côte d'Ivoire. *© Mahmut Serdar Alakus/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images*

1. **Stabilization interventions should have clearly delineated goals, be crime-sensitive, and prioritize reducing violence over broad-brush attempts to respond to illicit economies.**

   Illicit economies intertwine with violence and instability across the region. Across many high-fatality regions, illicit markets are intricately connected with conflict, and in some cases coordinated by armed groups and other players in violent clashes. Recognizing this, it is key that interventions designed to counter conflict are sensitive to the dynamics of illicit economies at a sub-national level. Misdiagnosing the relationship between illicit economies and conflict can undermine the efficacy of peacekeeping operations and development interventions, and render counter-crime initiatives counterproductive, triggering increased violence.

   The key goal of supporting stability and reducing violence across the region should be prioritized across interventions. Often the goals of addressing illicit economies and pursuing stability are assumed to be aligned. However, this should be challenged in the particular context of focus, and the two goals should not be conflated as they may in fact be at odds. Assumptions of alignment are based on perceptions that armed groups draw revenues and supplies from illicit economies, and posit that tackling illicit economies therefore cuts off economic opportunities for armed groups. However, while such alignment is in some cases correct, in others it is not.[118]

   The benefits of cutting off certain illicit supply chains, to the extent this is even feasible, may be offset by the impacts of such steps on local communities. Where addressing illicit economies fuels tensions, these have repeatedly been exploited by armed actors as entry points for gaining legitimacy with local communities. Consequently, where responding to illicit markets ultimately undermines the legitimacy of the state, the long-term effects of such responses are likely to be counterproductive. In a resource-challenged environment of heightening security concerns, responding to illicit markets that are not fuelling violence, or where responses are likely more likely to have significant second-order consequences, should not be a priority for stabilization programming.

   Contexts of high crime but low violence – typically enabled by a high degree of corruption – should certainly remain priorities for programming seeking to enhance governance or tackle illicit economies, but are unlikely to be central to stabilization interventions seeking to address conflict.

2. **Stabilization interventions seeking to address the role of illicit economies in armed conflict should concentrate on the illicit hubs ranked in the high and very high IEIM bands.**

   Although 280 illicit hubs were identified throughout West Africa, a far smaller proportion are assessed as being major vectors for conflict and instability across the wider region. Twelve illicit hubs, all of which are located in Central Africa or the Sahel, are very high-IEIM hubs, reflecting the degree to which illicit markets in these hubs are drivers of instability. While the propensity for illicit economies to fuel conflict is well established, interventions with a peacebuilding or peace-keeping mandate should focus their attention specifically on those illicit hubs that are known to be vectors of instability. Illicit markets should constitute a key element of programming design in these areas. Addressing the illicit economy in this small subset of hubs could subsequently have a positive spillover on stability dynamics across the region, which requires bringing anti-crime approaches into the mainstream of peace operations and stabilization processes. Stabilization interventions should also, however, target illicit hubs that although in lower IEIM bands have nonetheless been identified as hubs of flows to conflict actors.

3. **Tailor responses to illicit markets to the market typology, its role in shaping instability and violence, and contextual dynamics.**

   As explored above, while the nature of illicit economies is highly context specific, and the same illicit economy may manifest very differently at different locations, illicit economies do tend to be characterized by distinct levels of violence and contrasting relationships to (in)stability. A set of indicators that can be used to start analyzing illicit market impacts and craft appropriate responses include:

a) ***Revenue sharing arrangements.*** Are profits from the illicit market shared among a narrow group or do they disperse widely across the community? In analyzing this, also consider revenues that are ancillary to direct engagement in the market (e.g., provision of storage capacity, providing food or services to illicit actors). Wider dispersion of profits is likely to translate into greater legitimacy and greater destabilization in the face of crackdowns, and may point towards the need for a development-centric response.

b) ***Community concepts of legitimacy.*** Linking to the indicator above: where a market is broadly perceived to be legitimate, crackdowns are likely to engender backlash and may drive recruitment into insurgent groups. Creating space for conflict actors to regulate legitimate but 'illicit' markets is damaging not only because it provides conflict actors with revenue flows, but because it enhances their legitimacy, at the expense of the state's.

c) ***Transit or production?*** Is the illicit market premised on the transit of a certain commodity through a region that has no local market itself, with the profits realized elsewhere? Does the commodity have a local consumption market, or is it produced or cultivated in the region? Transit commodities with no local market will typically benefit a narrower group of stakeholders and, particularly where the commodities are high value, engender structured protection economies. Transit markets will typically be displaced in response to crackdowns unless issues of supply and demand are tackled; however, they are less likely to cause backlash from local populations if dispersed.

d) ***Relationship with intercommunal tensions.*** Does the illicit market typically pit different ethnicities or religious groups against each other, fuelling existing rifts? These characteristics are of significant concern, point to the role of the market in fuelling short- and long-term conflicts and demand a prompt response.

4. **Recognize the role played by arms trafficking as an accelerant market and driver of other illicit economies.**

   Arms trafficking is highly prominent across West Africa and the Sahel and is the illicit economy most often identified as a major market across the 280 hubs in the region, featuring in over a third of all illicit hubs. Arms trafficking is a major driver of conflict and violence, not only because weapons themselves are tools for violence, but because it exacerbates conflict and instability by strengthening non-state actors in opposition to the state and contributing to the fragmentation of conflict. Moreover, the illicit arms trade is intimately linked to a number of other illicit economies – including kidnap for ransom, the illicit gold trade and cattle rustling – that also have a close nexus with instability. Recognizing the importance of the arms trafficking market in driving other forms of illicit activity is key to breaking the cycle of instability.

5. **Integrate analysis of illicit economies into early-warning assessments and crisis prevention agendas.**

   When identifying priority geographies for preventative stabilization programming, include the escalation of illicit economies known to exacerbate tensions – such as cattle rustling, kidnap for ransom, and arms trafficking – as an indicator of growing tensions and instability, and encourage stakeholder responses (whether law enforcement or developmental) to this phenomenon. This includes prioritizing areas in which illicit economies strongly link areas of greater stability with those in conflict, either through the flow of commodities or financing (as highlighted in the crime–conflict pillar of the IEIM).

6. **Tackling corruption and protection structures at seaports should be prioritized.**

   Illicit hubs located on or near the coastline tend to have lower IEIM scores, because they are typically not areas of high violence or conflict. However, findings from the illicit hub mapping research and the IEIM show that certain seaports play an important role as transit points for commodities flowing to conflict actors (and thus sustaining armed conflict), as well as commodities integral to high-level protection structures, eroding governance and contributing to political instability. State-embedded actors are disproportionately prominent in illicit economies present in seaports, suggesting that tackling corruption at seaports should be a priority. This is particularly the case given the important role that maritime trafficking routes play in the transit of certain illicit economies (such as counterfeit medicines) that can cause particularly severe harms to communities across the region. Reducing the incentives for corruption is one avenue towards achieving this, and may include a greater use of technology, the automation of systems, the introduction of cashless policies at entry points, and changes to protocols that would require joint examination of shipments, among others.

7. **It is important to enhance collaboration between authorities in source, transit and destination countries.**

The findings of this research underscore the pivotal role played by West Africa as a transit region for illicit flows. Half of the illicit hubs identified across the region are classified as transit points, and while most are likely to be transit points for intra-regional illicit trade, a significant number are part of transnational supply chains connecting source and destination countries around the world. Cooperation at the state level between countries all along the supply chain is of paramount importance. In particular, countries in which consumer markets are concentrated – e.g., Western Europe, in the case of cocaine markets – must accept their share of responsibility and continue efforts to address demand for illicit commodities. Likewise, countries outside the region that act as transit points for illicit flows also have an important role to play.

8. **Monitoring instability dynamics over time and space is crucial for understanding the impact of responses.**

The West Africa illicit hub mapping project allows for an in-depth analysis of illicit economy and instability dynamics across one of the regions most affected by violence, conflict and organized criminal activity. These threats are increasingly being recognized by government stakeholders and several successful interventions have been recorded. Monitoring these dynamics over time, therefore, is crucial to understanding the impact of such responses. Frequently, however, law enforcement action leads to the balloon effect, whereby enforcement in one area merely displaces the illicit market elsewhere. As such, continuing to monitor future trends would allow for the identification of where such displacement, not only of the illicit markets themselves but also of related instability dynamics, is occurring. A key part of this monitoring should also include paying attention to ethnic and religious community dynamics in the illicit hubs, given the importance of historical tensions that play heavily into currently activity and criminal dynamics in the context of several illicit economies – including, for example, the illicit gold trade and cattle rustling.

9. **Investing in border regions may pay dividends in the long term.**

Violent events are concentrated in regional borderlands, which also play crucial roles in illicit economies. Connecting peripheral border areas more closely to capital cities – through transport infrastructure, investment and enhanced engagement – should decrease perceived marginalization and exclusion, mitigating the grievances that violent extremist actors have proved adept at exploiting, and growing the range of formal livelihood options. As armed groups increasingly cross from the Sahelian states into the northern areas of certain littoral states – most prominently, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire – investment in these border areas is overdue and should be prioritized. Such infrastructure development is also likely to operate as an enabler for illicit economies, effects that should be assessed for each specific context. However, the long-term development benefits may outweigh such impacts in many areas.

APPENDIX 1

ILLICIT HUB IEIM CLASSIFICATIONS

LOW (127)	MEDIUM (88)	HIGH (53)	VERY HIGH (12)
Aba (NGA)	Abong-Mbang (CMR)	Am Dafok (CAF)	Bamenda (CMR)
Abengourou (CIV)	Accra (GHA)	Anka (NGA)	Ber (MLI)
Abidjan (CIV)	Agadez (NER)	Bakassi (CMR)	Central Mali (MLI)
Abidjan Airport (CIV)	Ahoada (NGA)	Bamako (MLI)	Idenau (CMR)
Aby Lagoon (CIV)	Alagarno forest (NGA)	Bambari (CAF)	Kidal Region (MLI)
Aflao (GHA)	Autonomous Port of Cotonou (BEN)	Bangassou (CAF)	Kouri Bougoudi (TCD)
Aflao (TGO)	Baga border crossing (NGA)	Bangui (CAF)	Kourzo Pass (TCD)
Amílcar Cabral International Airport (CPV)	Bakouma (CAF)	Bawku (GHA)	Kousseri (CMR)
Aného (TGO)	Bambara (GMB)	Berbérati–Gamboula axis (CAF)	Lake Chad area (TCD)
Aplahoué (BEN)	Banjul (GMB)	Birao (CAF)	Liptako-Gourma (MLI)
Bafoussam (CMR)	Barkin Ladi (NGA)	Borderlands national parks (BEN)	Maroua (CMR)
Bagwu (LBR)	Bassa (NGA)	Bouar (CAF)	Tiko (CMR)
Bakau (GMB)	Batouri (CMR)	Bria (CAF)	
Banjul International Airport (GMB)	Bertoua (CMR)	CAR–Cameroon–Chad (CAF)	
Barkin Ladi–Jos South highway (NGA)	Bissau (GNB)	Casamance (SEN)	
Bijagós Archipelago (GNB)	Bouna (CIV)	Dansadau (NGA)	
Biombo coastal zone (GNB)	Cacheu region (GNB)	Douala (CMR)	
Blaise Diagne International Airport (SEN)	Carnot (CAF)	Ekok (CMR)	
Blitta (TGO)	Central Belt (GHA)	Foïta (MLI)	
Bo Waterside (LBR)	Chikun (NGA)	Fotokol (CMR)	
Bonny (NGA)	Cinkassé (TGO)	Garoua (CMR)	
Bouaké (CIV)	Comoé National Park (CIV)	Garoua-Boulaï (CMR)	
Bowila (LBR)	Conakry (GIN)	Idabato (CMR)	
Bwea Town (LBR)	Cotonou (BEN)	Jegue (São Domingos) (GNB)	
Canquelifá (GNB)	Damasak (NGA)	Jos South (NGA)	
Cesária Évora International Airport (CPV)	Dansadau–Gusau–Anka Road (NGA)	Kamuku forest (NGA)	
Cotonou International Airport (BEN)	Djado goldfield (NER)	Kati (MLI)	
Cufar Airport (GNB)	Djoum (CMR)	Kolofata (CMR)	
Dakar (SEN)	Dollar Power (GHA)	Kumba (CMR)	
Dapaong (TGO)	Dourbey (CMR)	Lerneb (MLI)	
Djougou (BEN)	Farafenni (GMB)	Limbe (CMR)	
El Akla (NER)	Ganta (LBR)	Maga Pouss Lake (CMR)	
Elubo (GHA)	Gashiga (CMR)	Mayo-Sava (CMR)	
Farim (GNB)	Gbarnga (LBR)	Mundemba (CMR)	
Forécariah (GIN)	Gbessia International Airport (GIN)	N'Délé (CAF)	
Forested Guinea (Guinée forestière) (GIN)	Geidam (NGA)	Niger–Nigeria border (NER)	

LOW (127)	MEDIUM (88)	HIGH (53)	VERY HIGH (12)
Freeport of Monrovia (LBR)	Idiroko (NGA)	Nioro du Sahel (MLI)	
Freetown (SLE)	Jibiya (NGA)	North-western Burkina Faso (BFA)	
Freetown International Airport (SLE)	Jos North (NGA)	Nzako (CAF)	
Gola Rainforest National Park (SLE)	Kaduna–Abuja expressway (NGA)	Omoku (NGA)	
Gombe (NGA)	Kaga-Bandoro, Batangafo and Kabo Triangle (CAF)	Ouagadougou (BFA)	
Goxu Mbathie (Saint Louis) (SEN)	Kasoa (GHA)	Port Harcourt (NGA)	
Hilacondji (BEN)	Katsina-Ala (NGA)	Raz El Ma (MLI)	
Ijebu Ode (NGA)	Kayes (MLI)	Rijana (NGA)	
Ikom (NGA)	Kayes region borderlands (MLI)	Salvador Pass (NER)	
Ikorodu (NGA)	Kenzou (CMR)	Sikasso Region (MLI)	
Ilha de Caiar (GNB)	Kette (CMR)	South-east borderlands (BFA)	
Isiokolo (NGA)	Kourou (BEN)	South-eastern zone (CAF)	
Itagunmodi (NGA)	Kumasi (GHA)	South-West Tri-border (BFA)	
Jendema–Bo Waterside (SLE)	Logo (NGA)	Sububu forest (NGA)	
Kailahun District (SLE)	Lomé (TGO)	Taoudenni (MLI)	
Kambia District (SLE)	Maiduguri (NGA)	Timbuktu (MLI)	
Kano metropolis (NGA)	Mallam Fatori (NGA)	Vakaga (CAF)	
Kano–Daura highway (NGA)	Malanville (BEN)		
Kaolack (SEN)	Mansabá (GNB)		
Kara (TGO)	Maritime Port of Bissau (GNB)		
Kartong (GMB)	Marte border crossing (NGA)		
Katsina-Ala–Wukari highway (NGA)	Mobaye (CAF)		
Kédougou (SEN)	Monrovia (LBR)		
Ketao (TGO)	Mouloundou (CMR)		
Kidira (SEN)	N'Gaoundéré (CMR)		
Koidu (SLE)	Nola (CAF)		
Kolda (SEN)	North-central zone (CIV)		
Kono District (SLE)	North-eastern borderlands (CIV)		
Kotoka International Airport (GHA)	Orlu (NGA)		
Kribi (CMR)	Osvaldo Vieira International Airport (GNB)		
Kye-Ossi (CMR)	Ouangolodougou (CIV)		
Lagos (NGA)	Plateau North Senatorial District (NGA)		
Lake Nokoué–Ouémé delta (BEN)	Port of Banjul (GMB)		
Lake Togo (TGO)	Port of Conakry (GIN)		
Lofa-Mano National Park (LBR)	Port of Lomé (TGO)		
Lomé–Tokoin International Airport (TGO)	Riyom (NGA)		
Lomié (CMR)	Sabon Birni (NGA)		
Madina Gounass (SEN)	Safim (GNB)		
Makurdi–Lafia highway (NGA)	Sambisa forest (NGA)		
Mamou (GIN)	Sankera axis (NGA)		
Man (CIV)	Sèmè-Kpodji (BEN)		
Mariga (NGA)	Shiroro (NGA)		
Maritime Port of Dakar (SEN)	Siguiri (GIN)		
Mbour (SEN)	Southern Ijaw (NGA)		

LOW (127)	MEDIUM (88)	HIGH (53)	VERY HIGH (12)
Mendekoma (LBR)	Tamale (GHA)		
Mindelo (CPV)	Tchibarakatene goldfield (NER)		
Mole National Park (GHA)	Techiman (GHA)		
Monrovia Roberts International Airport (LBR)	Tiné (TCD)		
Murtala Muhammed International Airport (NGA)	Ukum (NGA)		
Nekede (NGA)	Wa (GHA)		
Nelson Mandela International Airport (CPV)	Yaoundé (CMR)		
Niokolo-Koba National Park (SEN)	Yokadouma (CMR)		
Nnewi (NGA)			
Noé (CIV)			
Obajana–Okene Road (NGA)			
Odukpani (NGA)			
Ogbia (NGA)			
Ohaji-Egbema (NGA)			
Okija (NGA)			
Onitsha (NGA)			
Ore (NGA)			
Oron (NGA)			
Outamba-Kilimi National Park (SLE)			
Port of Abidjan (CIV)			
Port of Apapa (NGA)			
Port of Freetown (SLE)			
Port of San-Pédro (CIV)			
Port of Takoradi (GHA)			
Port of Tema (GHA)			
Praia (CPV)			
Rafi (NGA)			
Sagamu (NGA)			
Saliégné (SEN)			
Seme (NGA)			
Serekunda (GMB)			
Sokodé (TGO)			
South-East (LBR)			
South-western zone (CIV)			
Tahoua (NER)			
Tambacounda (SEN)			
Tanguiéta (BEN)			
Tarkwa (GHA)			
Tengréla (CIV)			
Timbo (LBR)			
Touba (SEN)			
Toummo (NER)			
Uzo-Uwani (NGA)			
Vélingara (SEN)			
Warri (NGA)			
Western Area Peninsula National Park (SLE)			
Yela (LBR)			

APPENDIX 2

ILLICIT ECONOMIES AND CRIMINAL-ACTOR TYPES

	Illicit economies	Criminal-actor type
1	Human trafficking	Mafia-style group (criminal)
2	Human smuggling	Mafia-style group (insurgent)
3	Arms trafficking	Mafia-style group (terrorist)
4	Flora crimes	Criminal networks
5	Cattle rustling	State-embedded actors
6	Fauna crimes (other)	Foreign actors
7	Illicit gold trade	
8	Illicit oil trade	
9	Illicit gemstone trade	
10	Heroin trade	
11	Cocaine trade	
12	Cannabis trade	
13	Synthetic drug trade	
14	Counterfeit medicines	
15	Money laundering	
16	Kidnap for ransom	
17	Illicit trade and counterfeit goods	

APPENDIX 3

ILLICIT ECONOMIES AND INSTABILITY MONITOR (IEIM) INDICATOR TABLE

IILLICIT ECONOMIES AND INSTABILITY MONITOR (30 points)					
Indicator	**Variable**	**Measurement**	**Maximum score**	**Justification**	**Source**
VIOLENCE AND INSTABILITY (6 points)					
Contested sovereignty	Is the sovereignty of the relevant area contested? (For example, do rebel secessionist groups operate in the area? Are there areas where law enforcement or other security forces cannot enter/govern?)	0 = no 1 = yes	1	In addition to exploiting the tensions between sovereignty and globalization by setting up operations in borderlands, those engaged in transnational criminal activities also appear to select safe havens within states with weak institutions, those that have difficulty providing goods and services as well as policing and protection to citizens in all parts of their 'sovereign territory'.[119] One of the key necessities of organized crime, particularly the drugs trade, is the need for protection from law enforcement authorities, which often means exerting control over territory. This control of territory is an inherently political act and one that degrades the power of the state. Indeed, the loss of control over pieces of territory is one of the hallmarks of state failure.[120]	Expert assessment
Threat of armed groups	To what degree do jihadist and/or armed groups pose a threat?	0 = no 0.5 = limited 1 = limited but growing 1.5 = moderate 2 = high	2	Terrorist and armed groups, fuel illicit arms trafficking and threaten security across the region.[121]	Expert assessment
Conflict fatalities	Conflict fatalities per 100 000 (since 2020)* *Includes any fatalities arising from battles, explosions/remote violence, protests, riots, and violence against civilians	0 = 0 0.5 = <2 1 = 2-10 1.5 = 10-50 2 = >50	2	Some 86% of illicit hubs identified by recent research are located near where there has been a recent conflict, be it a war, civil war, or violence between opposition groups.[122] Conflict fatalities can give an indication of the severity of conflict in an area.	ACLED
Political instability	Has there been a recent (successful) coup?[123]	0 = more than 5 years ago 0.5 = 1–5 years ago 1 = within last 12 months	1	Coups often generate conditions that make legitimate business nearly impossible, such as economic collapse, deteriorating rule of law and spreading chaos, which creates fertile ground for organized criminals.[124]	Powell & Thyne (2011)[125]

Indicator	Variable	Measurement	Maximum score	Justification	Source
CRIME–CONFLICT LINKS (15 points)					
Weapons	Does gun manufacturing take place?	0 = no 1 = yes	1	Indigenous craft production is an important source of illicit weapons in a number of countries in West Africa, with armed actors of diverse backgrounds using locally made weapons in armed conflicts across a number of the region's conflicts, including in Nigeria.[126]	Expert assessment
	Does gun smuggling take place?	0 = no 0.5 = limited 1 = significant	1	Conflict in West Africa and the Sahel region has escalated in recent years, due to an alarming rise of violent extremist organizations and the proliferation of weapons – some having been pilfered from the Libyan conflict in 2011. In this current conflict zone, legal sales and illegal trafficking of small arms and light weapons become jumbled together in black and gray markets where violent actors are poised to take advantage.[127]	Expert assessment
	Estimate of civilian firearms per 100 population	Normalized on a scale of 0-1	1	The concentration of most of Africa's estimated 100 million uncontrolled small arms and light weapons in crisis zones and other security-challenged environments often exacerbates and elongates conflicts.[128]	Small Arms Survey[129]
Flows to conflict actors	Are commodities, other than guns, moving through the area known to be trafficked or smuggled to conflict actors in the subregion, or to illicit markets that finance conflict actors?	0 = no 1 = limited 2 = moderate 3 = significant	3	Illicit hubs may play an indirect role in fuelling conflict and instability by supplying various materials and products, such as fertiliser or electrical cords using in the production of explosives, to conflict actors in the region.[130] Another common example is the trafficking of mercury and cyanide to artisanal and small-scale gold-mining sites controlled by conflict actors in the Sahel.[131]	Expert assessment
Armed group financing	Are armed groups earning revenue from illicit activities present, or flowing through the area?	0 = no 1 = limited 2 = moderate 3 = significant	3	In Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, a gold boom is attracting the attention of diverse armed groups. Artisanal gold mining provides armed groups, including jihadists in some cases, with a new source of funding and potentially even recruits. If left unregulated, it risks fuelling violence in the region.[132]	Expert assessment
Illicit economy violence	Is violence associated with the illicit economies present?	0 = no 1 = limited 2 = significant	2	Where violence is a common feature of an illicit economy, this can act as catalyst in the establishment of militias and other forms of self-protection groups.[133]	Expert assessment
State-embedded actors	Are state-embedded actors involved in the illicit economy?	0 = no 1 = limited 2 = significant	2	State-embedded actors are often the primary vectors of organized crime domestically, which has implications for countries' resilience to illicit economies.[134] When corruption becomes entrenched, it undermines the development of state authority and its institutions, leaving a weak state with potentially more space for insurgents to operate.[135] Corruption can also be a key grievance fuelling conflict, for example, ethnic war.[136]	Expert assessment

Indicator	Variable	Measurement	Maximum score	Justification	Source
Intercommunal tensions	Do illicit markets operate across ethnic lines, and do they feed into inter-community tensions?	0 = no 0.5 = somewhat 1 = yes	1	Cattle rustling, for example, is deeply intertwined with, and exacerbates, community tensions in Nigeria[137] and Mali.[138] Community tensions can escalate into full blown conflicts, spawn the creation of self-defence groups, and create tensions which jihadists are able to exploit to gain community legitimacy.[139]	Expert assessment
Illicit economy suppression measures	Are illicit economy suppression measures in place that have precipitated a displacement effect, or a surge in violence?	0 = no 0.5 = somewhat 1 = yes	1	All too often, suppressing illicit economies or the crime-conflict nexus in one area merely pushes it into another, destabilizing wider regions in the process. Counternarcotics policies are notorious for generating such spillover effects, referred to in the drug field as "balloon effects."[140]	Expert assessment
ACCELERATORS (9 points)					
INFRASTRUCTURE (6 points)					
Port infrastructure	Is the location nearby an international airport or seaport, either in the country or in neighbouring countries?	0 = > 200 kilometres 0.25 = 100–199 kilometres 0.5 = 50–99 kilometres 0.75 = 0–49 kilometres 1 = 0 kilometres	1	Access to transportation is also critically important in determining illicit hubs, given the need for multiple ways to exit the space and redundancies so that there is no dependence on only one way of ensuring commodities get to market. Access to rivers, airports and sea ports are key factors.[141] Ports and airports across Africa continue to be targeted by organized crime groups to traffic illicit goods.[142]	Expert input
	Magnitude of container port traffic (nearest seaport)?[143] OR Total number of passengers per year (nearest international airport)	0 = < 0.25 million TEUs 0.25 = 0.25–0.5 million TEUs 0.5 = 0.5–1 million TEUs 0.75 = > 1 million TEUs 1 = > 1 million TEUs and plays a role in transhipment overland to neighbouring states OR 0 = < 1 million 0.5 = 1–5 million 1 = > 5 million	1	Major nodes of global trade – for example, ports or airports – are vulnerable to becoming hubs of the illicit economy. In turn, investments in improving Africa's trade infrastructure could increase the continent's risk of falling prey to organized crime in the absence of proper oversight and control mechanisms.[144] Across Africa, air transport has played a role in allowing for illicit arms flows and highly prized natural resources to be transported in and out of conflict zones.[145] While almost all coastal countries in West Africa border at least one landlocked country, not all coastal states play an important role in supplying goods – both licit and illicit – to neighbouring landlocked countries in the hinterland.[146]	UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) / open source (expert input)
Road infrastructure	Is the location situated on/near an operational major road?	0 = no 0.5 = secondary roads 1 = primary roads	1	Access to transportation is also critically important in the selection of a place. There need to be multiple ways to exit the space and redundancies so that there is no dependence on only one way of ensuring commodities get to market. Roads, almost regardless of condition, are important – 95% of the black spots under study are linked to the outside world by roads.[147]	Expert assessment

Indicator	Variable	Measurement	Maximum score	Justification	Source
Proximity to major cities	Is the location close to a large city?[148]	0 = > 200 kilometres 0.5 = 50–199 kilometres 1 = 0–49 kilometres	1	Cities, thanks to their larger populations, provide bigger consumer markets for illicit economies, as well as more opportunities for extortion and vote-selling, for example. Furthermore, other characteristics often associated with major urban agglomerations, such as greater connectivity and more developed banking services, can also facilitate illicit activity.[149] Finally, rapid urbanization can result in a situation in which the state is unable to provide adequate protection and social services. This, in turn, can create a power vacuum that is seized by those profiting from illegal economies.[150]	Expert calculation based on World Population Review data[151]
Proximity to national borders	Is the location in close proximity to a national land border?	0 = > 200 kilometres 0.25 = 150–199 kilometres 0.5 = 100–149 kilometres 0.75 = 50–99 kilometres 1 = 0–49 kilometres	1	In situations in which a conflict has broken out, border zones have frequently been overtaken by flows of refugees, arms, and other contraband. Cross-border attacks have occurred as militants have attempted to use the territory of a neighbouring state as a source of food and supplies or to recruit or kidnap potential fighters and workers.[152] Organizations engaged in transnational criminal activities exploit this increased porousness of borders by locating places where they can easily move back and forth between states and link with others involved in similar enterprises. Having places along borders provides such organizations with a certain degree of invisibility, as they fit in with all the other movement occurring around them.[153] Most violence occurs near borders and tends to decrease over distance from borders. This aligns with our expectation that borderlands in the region are typically less politically controlled spaces and that armed groups have fewer impediments to movement or other activities within them.[154]	Expert calculation
Illicit financial flows	Are there formal financial institutions used to launder illicit proceeds?[155]	0 = no 0.5 = somewhat 1 = yes	0.5	Financial services institutions such as banks, non-banking financing companies, insurers, and capital market firms are generally the most favoured channels through which illicit money is laundered across the globe.[156] In addition to the drugs trade and arms trafficking, among others, the extraction of funds from money laundering on the part of terrorist groups is commonplace.[157]	Expert assessment
	Is the location (situated in) a free trade zone?	0 = no 1 = yes	0.5	Many characteristics of a free trade zone (FTZ), such as exemptions from duty and taxes; simplified administrative procedures; and the duty-free importation of raw materials, machinery, parts and equipment, in addition to boosting economic opportunity, can result in a reduction in finance and trade controls and enforcement, creating opportunities for money laundering and the financing of terrorism. Because the same characteristics that make FTZs attractive to legitimate business also attract abuse by illicit actors, FTZs are a concern that the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) should address.[158]	Expert input

Indicator	Variable	Measurement	Maximum score	Justification	Source
STRESS FACTORS (3 points)					
Population mobility	Have local populations been forcibly displaced people in the last 12 months?	0 = no 0.5 = minor 1 = yes	0.5	A second significant factor that contributes to conflict spillover is the exodus of civilians from a country in turmoil. Such movements directly and detrimentally affect the receiving nation. Refugee encampments can be detrimental economically to first-destination nation states. Not only do these types of population movements cause neighbouring states to divert resources away from state capacity building and core infrastructure planning, but opposition forces may find solace within such encampments that also serve as fertile recruiting grounds for insurgencies and for establishing a viable weapons supply route.[159]	Expert assessment
	Are there high levels of mobility into, through or out of the location?	0 = no 0.5 = minor 1 = yes	0.5	Nomadic groups, for example, have experience in trans-Saharan trade with a range of goods dating back to pre-colonial times. Therefore, they are very familiar with the terrain and know the practical requirements and pitfalls of trade, both licit and illicit. Given their economic hardships, due to repeated droughts and economic marginalization, many of them feel that they have no other choice than to look for new sources of income.[160]	Expert assessment
Socio-economic vulnerability	Is the location characterized by low levels of development?	Normalized (and inverted) on a scale of 0-1	0.33	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.[161]	Human Development Index (HDI)[162]
	Is the location characterized by high levels of poverty?	Normalized on a scale of 0-1	0.33	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.[163]	Global Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI)[164]
	Is the location characterized by high levels of gender inequality?	0 = <2.5 % 0.25 = 2.5 – 5% 0.5 = 5 – 7.5% 0.75 = 7.5 – 10% 1 = > 10%	0.33	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.[165]	Gender Development Index (GDI)[166]

Indicator	Variable	Measurement	Maximum score	Justification	Source
Law enforcement presence	Is the location considered to be one with limited law enforcement reach?	0 = no 0.5 = somewhat 1 = yes	1	In West Africa, fear of internal coups led political leaders to systematically allow their militaries and law enforcement to deteriorate, which left 'political systems and "rule-of-law" arrangements highly susceptible to penetration by the drug trade and other dangerous criminal flows from unstable areas.'[167] Conversely, 'in the United States, Western Europe, and East Asia, law enforcement retains a far greater deterrence capacity toward criminal groups'.[168]	Expert assessment

NOTES

1 Although some analysis can be done of contrasting hub typologies across the region, it is important to recognize that the patterns of illicit hub classification vary across the different geographies, partly in line with researcher approaches. For example, whereas Cameroon is dominated by transit points, which account for almost 80% of all illicit hubs located in the country, in Nigeria, hotspots are overwhelmingly the most commonly identified type of illicit hub, accounting for over 70% of hubs in the country.

2 For example, the regional directorates of mines.

3 This recognizes the strategic nature of organized crime, particularly within conflict areas. See James Cockayne, Chasing shadows, *The RUSI Journal*, 158, 2 (2013), 10–24, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2013.787729.

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8 For more details on the analysis of causality in the context of the IEIM, see the full methodology report: GI-TOC, Illicit hub mapping in West Africa and the Illicit Economies and Instability Monitor – methodology, August 2022, ADD LINK

9 Stuart S. Brown and Margaret G. Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots: Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

10 These categories draw on the literature of illicit geography; see, for example, Michael Miklaucic and Jacqueline Brewer (eds), *Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization*, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2013, and Stuart S. Brown and Margaret G. Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots: Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

11 Cities built along trading corridors, and which constitute the centres of global finance and trade, often offer these first two characteristics.

12 Interviews with civil society, law enforcement, international officials, Bissau, 2018–2020.

13 In Brown and Hermann's mapping of global illicit hubs, 80% of those identified lie within borderlands. See Stuart S. Brown and Margaret G. Hermann, Transnational Crime and Black Spots: *Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

14 Several studies have found a relationship between weakness in the rule of law and the prevalence of organized crime within a state's borders. See Edgardo Buscaglia and Jan Van Dijk, Controlling organized crime and corruption in the public sector, *Journal on Crime and Society*, 3, 1 & 2 (2003), 3–34, https://ssrn.com/abstract=931046; Jan Van Dijk, *World of Crime: Breaking the Silence on Problems of Crime, Justice, and Development Across the World*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008; Hung-En Sung, State failure, economic failure, and predatory organized crime: A comparative analysis, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 41, 1 (2004), 111–129, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427803257253.

15 Some protection economies evolve into 'criminalized states' focused on facilitating and predating illicit economies, rather than providing public state services.

16 Summer Walker and Mariana Botero, Illicit economies and armed conflict: ten dynamics that drive instability, GI-TOC, March 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/illicit-economies-armed-conflict/.

17 Maritime borders are not included in this count, so the proportion of hubs in proximity to all political borders is even higher.

18 This feeds into the growing body of research looking at the role of borderlands in instability across the West African region See, for example: OECD/SWAC, The geography of conflict in North and West Africa, West African Studies, Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020, https://doi-rg/10.1787/02181039-en.

19 Ibid.

20 Stuart S. Brown and Margaret G. Hermann, T*ransnational Crime and Black Spots: Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

21 OECD/SWAC, The geography of conflict in North and West Africa, West African Studies, Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1787/02181039-en.

22 A key finding of 2020 research into the geography of violence in North and West Africa was that violence is increas-

ingly targeting border regions. Violent events located within 50 kilometres of a land border are found to represent a third of fatalities recorded in West and North Africa. This rises to 40% if one considers political violence alone. See OECD/SWAC, The geography of conflict in North and West Africa, West African Studies, Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1787/02181039-en.

23 Summer Walker and Mariana Botero, Illicit economies and armed conflict: Ten dynamics that drive instability, GI-TOC, March 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/illicit-economies-armed-conflict/.

24 Conversely, in the coastal states in the region, most (over 66%) borderland hubs have low IEIM scores. Again, this mirrors the general trend of illicit hubs in coastal West Africa scoring lower on the monitor than in Central Africa and the Sahel. The mean average IEIM for illicit hubs located within 50 kilometres of a national land border is 11.8 compared to 10.8 for illicit hubs not located near a national land border.

25 OECD/SWAC, The geography of conflict in North and West Africa, West African Studies, Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1787/02181039-en.

26 Steven M. Radil, Ian Irmischer and Olivier J. Walther, Contextualizing the relationship between borderlands and political violence: A dynamic space-time analysis in North and West Africa, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 37, 2 (2022), 253–271, https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2021.1968926.

27 Kars de Bruijne, Laws of attraction: Northern Benin and risk of violent extremist spillover, Clingendael Institute, June 2021, http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep33374.1.

28 Ibid.

29 The Signal Room, Togo – Escalating extremism, *Analysis briefing*, 28 July 2022.

30 Based on interviews conducted in Benin, 24–28 January 2022.

31 Composed of Arli National Park in Burkina Faso, Pendjari National Park in Benin, and the Parc W complex across Niger, Burkina Faso and Benin.

32 Interviews with civil society and government stakeholders in Benin, January 2022. Further analysis of the relationship between armed groups and communities in the tri-border complex, and in Burkina Faso, is set out in Eleanor Beevor, JNIM in Burkina Faso as a strategic criminal actor, GI-TOC, forthcoming.

33 The liminal space of border areas also applies to sea borders. The boundaries of a country's territorial waters are often poorly mapped out, and international waters usually offer safe havens from interdiction in part due to the dizzying complexity of jurisdiction. See Ian Urbina, *The Outlaw Ocean: Crime and Survival in the Last Untamed Frontier*, Random House, 2019.

34 Vanda Felbab-Brown, Organized crime, illicit economies, civil violence & international order: more complex than you think, *Daedalus*, 146, 4 (2017), 98–111, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00462.

35 Paul Nugent and Anthony Asiwaju, *African Boundaries: Barriers, Conduits and Opportunities*, London: Pinter, 1996.

36 Wafula Okumu, *Delimitation and Demarcation of Boundaries in Africa: General Issues and Case Studies*, Addis Ababa: Commission of the African Union, Department of Peace and Security (African Union Border Programme), 2014, https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/au-2-en-2013-delim-a-demar-user-guide.pdf.

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38 Stuart S. Brown and Margaret G. Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots: Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

39 This echoes findings in other regions of the world that evidence the key role played by collusion between transnational smuggling networks and port and customs officials at seaports. See GI-TOC, Hotspots of organized crime in the Western Balkans, May 2019, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Hotspots-Report-English-13Jun1110-Web.pdf.

40 Port Autonome de Cotonou website: https://www.portcotonou.com/index.php/communaute-portuaire/27-a-propos.

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43 Roseline Goundjo, *Bénin : deux individus arrêtés pour trafic de fusils d'assaut au port de Cotonou*, Africa Zoom, 1 November 2021, https://africa-zoom.com/benin-deux-individus-arretes-pour-trafic-de-fusils-dassaut-au-port-de-cotonou/.

44 Aisha Kehoe Down, Gaston Sawadogo and Tom Stocks, British American Tobacco fights dirty in West Africa, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, February 2021, https://www.occrp.org/en/loosetobacco/british-american-tobacco-fights-dirty-in-west-africa.

45 Clandestine make-shift laboratories manufacturing counterfeit medicine have been identified in Nigeria, for exam-

ple. See BBC, Fake pharmaceutical industry thrives in West Africa, 14 July 2020, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-53387216.

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47 Dick Hobbs, Going down the glocal: The local context of organized crime, *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 37, 4 (1998), 407–422, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2311.00109.

48 See analysis of differing reach of illicit commodities in conflict areas in Judith Vorrath and Laura Marcela Zuñiga, Key features of illicit economies in African conflicts: insights from the reports of UN Panels of Experts, SWP Comment, May 2022, https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/key-features-of-illicit-economies-in-african-conflicts.

49 The widespread nature of 'local–global connections' is one crucial element of contextual dynamics key to understanding the relationship between armed conflict and illicit economies. See Summer Walker and Mariana Botero, Illicit economies and armed conflict: Ten dynamics that drive instability, GI-TOC, March 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/illicit-economies-armed-conflict/.

50 Where airports are not identified as standalone illicit hubs across other elements of the region, they are analyzed as part of the hub in which they are positioned, often capital cities. These analyses consider illicit flows through the airports; for example: In Bamako, where the international airport is assessed as part of the dynamics of the city, authorities regularly intercept drug mules carrying smaller amounts of cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin and pharmaceuticals believed to be intended for local consumers. Furthermore, individual or small quantities of weapons have also been confiscated at the airport. Examples of recent seizures can be found here, here, here and here.

51 Marcena Hunter, Curbing illicit mercury and gold flows in West Africa: Options for a regional approach, GI-TOC, November 2018, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Final-UNIDO-ECOWAS-gold-and-mercury-report-English.pdf.

52 A Berne Declaration Investigation, A golden racket: the true source of Switzerland's 'Togolese' gold, September 2015, https://www.publiceye.ch/fileadmin/doc/Rohstoffe/2015_PublicEye_A_golden_racket_Report.pdf.

53 Lucia Bird, West Africa's cocaine corridor: Building a subregional response, GI-TOC, April 2021, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/GB-W-Africa-Corridor.July22.REV-web.pdf.

54 Interview with UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) expert, Abidjan, 14 October 2021.

55 Interview with journalist, Accra, 1 September 2021. Corroborated by additional interviews with civil society and security officials in Accra, September 2021.

56 Experts at a Validation Workshop to discuss Liberian hotspots, 9 December 2021.

57 Interview with airport official, Bissau, July 2019.

58 With an average of 204 kilometres of roads per 1 000 square kilometres, of which only a quarter are paved, the density of national roads in Africa lags far behind the world average of 944 kilometres per 1 000 square kilometres, of which more than half are paved. See Ashurst, Road infrastructure in Africa: A step-by-step guide to avoiding potential potholes, 1 September 2015, https://www.ashurst.com/en/news-and-insights/legal-updates/road-infrastructure-in-africa-a-step-by-step-guide-to-avoiding-potential-potholes/.

59 African Development Bank Group, Tracking Africa's progress in figures, 2014, https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Tracking_Africa's_Progress_in_Figures.pdf.

60 'Isolated' hubs are defined as illicit hubs located outside a 100 kilometre buffer zone of an urban area with a population greater than 500 000 (2015 population data, as per Africapolis, available at: https://africapolis.org/en).

61 The aim of the IEIM indicator was to capture whether an illicit hub is well connected by road, for which the question 'Is the hub situated on a major road?' is a proxy. So, when scoring this indicator for crime zones, experts were to use their best judgement as to whether a major road running through the crime zone, or close to the hotspot, was relevant or not. As such, crime zones may be designated a 0 or 0.5 even though technically a primary road does run through the geographic area, either because the road was not operational or because the role it plays in providing access to the crime zone is minimal.

62 The Sahel has a similar proportion of illicit hubs located close to major operational roads.

63 Kidnap for ransom features in 36% of hubs with no proximate operational roads and arms trafficking in 54% of hubs with no proximate operational roads.

64 Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, Banditry in northern Niger: Geographic diffusion and multiplication of perpetrators, Risk Bulletin – Issue 4, GI-TOC, June 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/weaobs-risk-bulletin-4/.

65 Mark Micallef et al, After the storm: Organized crime across the Sahel-Sahara following upheaval in Libya and Mali, GI-TOC, November 2019, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/After_the_storm_GI-TOC.pdf.

66 Human smuggling and, to a lesser extent, kidnap for ransom are more likely than other illicit economies to feature in illicit hubs with poorer proximate road infrastructure. Of the hubs featuring human smuggling and kidnap for ransom, 29% and 21%, respectively, are not located on or near major operational roads, compared to only 10% for all 280 illicit hubs.

67 Channels Television, Gunmen abduct 18 passengers in Zamfara, 19 May 2021, https://www.channelstv.com/2021/05/19/gunmen-abduct-18-passengers-in-zamfara/.

68 *Daily Trust*, Benue, Nasarawa to check robbery along Makurdi-Lafia highway, 11 December 2013, https://dailytrust.com/benue-nasarawa-to-check-robbery-along-makurdi-lafia-highway.

69 Yuri M Zhukov, Roads and the diffusion of insurgent violence: The logistics of conflict in Russia's North Caucasus, *Political Geography*, 31, 3 (2012), 144–156, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0962629811001910.

70 66% of high and very high hubs are positioned close to a main operational road, compared to 73% of all hubs.

71 While a growing body of evidence globally demonstrates that hubs can be either urban or rural, those in the coastal

ecosystem are all cities. Research by Stuart Brown and Margaret Hermann found relatively even spread across rural and urban spaces. See Stuart S. Brown and Margaret G. Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots: Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

72 Consequently, each of the hubs in the coastal ecosystem constitutes a 'intermodal transhipment point' (i.e., where transhipment occurs between different modes of transport). See Adolf KY Ng et al, Transport Networks and Impacts on Transport Nodes, *Transport Nodal System*, 2018, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7149560/.

73 Urban hubs are defined as illicit hubs within a 10 kilometre radius of an urban centroid, as per the Africapolis data (https://africapolis.org/en). Illicit hubs that fail to meet this criterion are labelled as rural hubs. The urban centroids identified by Africapolis are likely to be an undercount of actual urban areas, as the data is based on satellite imagery of 'built-up' area polygons that dates back to 2015. Moreover, due to the nature of the illicit hubs classified as crime zones, for the geoprocessing analysis centroids had to be used, entailing an imperfect measure of urban/rural divide, as some of these areas or regions have some urban areas within their delimitations.

74 Lucia Bird and Tuesday Reitano, Smugglers' paradise – cities as hubs of the illicit migration business, Mixed Migration Centre, April 2021, https://mixedmigration.org/articles/smugglers-paradise-cities-as-hubs-of-the-illicit-migration-business/.

75 Santosh Ejanthkar and Leepa Mohanty, The growing threat of money laundering: The significant role financial services institutions can play in curbing money laundering activities, Capgemini, 2011, https://www.capgemini.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/The_Growing_Threat_of_Money_Laundering.pdf.

76 Experts at a Validation Workshop to discuss Liberian hotspots on 9 December 2021.

77 The findings of this research broadly reflect the results of the 2021 Organised Crime Index. The cocaine trade, for example, is among the top three more prominent criminal markets in both the illicit hub mapping research and the Index results. Similarly, the heroin trade is assessed to be the least pervasive or commonly identified market across both studies. However, one noticeable discrepancy is the perceived prominence of human trafficking. Whereas the Index places human trafficking as the most pervasive criminal market in West Africa, it is only the sixth most common major market across the region's illicit hubs. There are various potential reasons behind the differences in the findings, most important of which is the fact that the illicit hub mapping research is a sub-national research initiative and, as such, is also shaped by geographic prevalence and not just the country-level scope and scale. There are other limitations to comparisons between the findings of the two studies, including the fact that while the Index only covers 10 criminal markets, researchers involved in the illicit hub mapping project were asked to identify the major markets from a list of 17 different illicit economies. Furthermore, the country composition of what is considered 'West Africa' is marginally different across the two pieces of research.

78 Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, The Organised Crime Index Africa 2021 underscores differing relationships between certain illicit markets and instability, Risk Bulletin – Issue 3, GI-TOC, 31 March 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/WEA-Obs-RB3.pdf.

79 See, for example, Crisis Group, Getting a grip on central Sahel's gold rush, Africa Report N°282, 13 November 2019, https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/282%20Getting%20a%20Grip%20.pdf; Alexandre Bish et al, The crime paradox: Illicit markets, violence and instability in Nigeria, GI-TOC, April 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/GI-TOC-Nigeria_The-crime-paradox-web.pdf.

80 See, for example, Matthias Nowak and André Gsell, Handmade and deadly: Craft production of small arms in Nigeria, Small Arms Survey, June 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep20048; Genevieve Jesse, Arms trafficking: Fueling conflict in the Sahel, *International Affairs Review*, 29, 2 (2021), 62–75, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f2ed301da84567c22edd5bf/t/6140bc63289bb62f9f55e273/1631632488026/IAR_SpringSummer_2021.pdf#page=68; Adesoji Adeniyi, The human cost of uncontrolled arms in Africa: Cross-national research on seven African countries, Oxfam Research Reports, March 2017, https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/rr-human-cost-uncontrolled-arms-africa-080317-en.pdf.

81 Summer Walker and Mariana Botero, Illicit economies and armed conflict: Ten dynamics that drive instability, GI-TOC, March 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/illicit-economies-armed-conflict/.

82 Of the 65 hubs with high or very high IEIM scores, 35 feature arms trafficking as a major market. Conversely, of the 215 illicit hubs with low or medium IEIM scores, arms trafficking is a major market in only 56.

83 Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, The Organised Crime Index Africa 2021 underscores differing relationships between certain illicit markets and instability, Risk Bulletin – Issue 3, GI-TOC, 31 March 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/WEA-Obs-RB3.pdf.

84 Genevieve Jesse, Arms trafficking: fueling conflict in the Sahel, *International Affairs Review*, 29, 2 (2021), 62–75, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f2ed301da84567c22edd5bf/t/6140bc63289bb62f9f55e273/1631632488026/IAR_SpringSummer_2021.pdf#page=68.

85 Alexandre Bish et al, The crime paradox: Illicit markets, violence and instability in Nigeria, GI-TOC, April 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/GI-TOC-Nigeria_The-crime-paradox-web.pdf.

86 For more on the shortcomings of Mali's DDR process in Mali, see Anne Savey and Marc-André Boisvert, The process of Disarmament-Demobilization-Reintegration (DDR) in Mali: A journey full of pitfalls, *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique*, December 2018, https://www.frstrategie.org/en/programs/observatoire-du-monde-arabo-musulman-et-du-sahel/process-disarmament-demobilization-reintegration-ddr-mali-journey-full-pitfalls-2018; Annelies Hicckendorff and Jaïr van der Lijn, Renewal of MINUSMA: A missed opportunity for new generation of DDR, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, June 2017,

https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2017/renewal-minusma-missed-opportunity-new-generation-ddr; Marielle Harris and Judd Devermont, Why Mali needs a new peace deal, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, April 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/why-mali-needs-new-peace-deal; Mathieu Pellerin, Mali's Algiers peace agreement, five years on: An uneasy calm, Crisis Group, June 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/laccord-dalger-cinq-ans-apres-un-calme-precaire-dont-il-ne-faut-pas-se-satisfaire; Claudia Breitung, Why there is a need to reframe the discourse on armed groups in Mali: Requirements for successful disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, Bonn International Center for Conversion, August 2019, https://www.bicc.de/uploads/tx_bicctools/BICC_Policy_Brief_8_2019.pdf.

87 Peter Tinti, Whose crime is it anyway? Organized crime and international stabilization efforts in Mali, GI-TOC, February 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Whose-crime-is-it-anyway-web.pdf.

88 Key informant interviews, Mali, October 2021.

89 Key informant interviews, Mali, October 2021.

90 Arms trafficking features together with kidnap for ransom in 24 different illicit hubs, making it the most common combination of illicit economies; arms trafficking is also prevalent together with cattle rustling in 16 illicit hubs and the illicit gold trade in 16 illicit hubs. The only other pairs of illicit economies to feature in more than 20 illicit hubs are the illicit gold trade and the illicit gemstone trade; and arms trafficking and the illicit trade and counterfeit goods market.

91 Alexandre Bish et al, The crime paradox: Illicit markets, violence and instability in Nigeria, GI-TOC, April 2022, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/GI-TOC-Nigeria_The-crime-paradox-web.pdf.

92 *Bureau du Gouverneur de la Région de Mopti, Rapport de la Conférence régionale sur le vol de bétail dans la Région de Mopti, Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale et de la Décentralisation*, 7 December 2021.

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96 Data from ACLED illustrates the upward trend in abductions/forced disappearances, with incidents spiking in 2021, in particular, in Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. In Mali, the number of abductions/forced disappearances since 2017 are as follows: 23 in 2017, 56 in 2018, 46 in 2019, 89 in 2020, 184 in 2021 and 58 as of May 2022. In Burkina Faso, there were eight in 2017, 33 in 2018, 55 in 2019, 61 in 2020, 261 in 2021 and 98 as of May 2022. In Nigeria, there were 23 in 2017, 44 in 2018, 78 in 2019, 211 in 2020, 412 in 2021 and 161 as of May 2022.

97 In September 2021, the Nigerian government launched a military campaign against bandits across the North-West region. However, although the crackdown reportedly recorded some successes, the groups from Sububu have continued to organize kidnapping raids in both Zamfara and Sokoto.

98 For example, between 2011 and 2016, the price of large cattle decreased as follows: 600 000–750 000 naira (€1 235–€1 544) to 450 000–500 000 naira (€926–€1 029). More details provided in Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, In north-western Nigeria, violence carried out by bandit groups has escalated so fast that killings now rival those that take place in Borno state, where extremist groups hold sway, Risk Bulletin – Issue 1, GI-TOC, September 2021, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WEA-Obs-RB1-GITOC.pdf. Sources included interviews with Nigerian armed bandits in Kaduna, 22 July 2021, and Zamfara, 20 July 2021.

99 Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, In north-western Nigeria, violence carried out by bandit groups has escalated so fast that killings now rival those that take place in Borno state, where extremist groups hold sway, Risk Bulletin – Issue 1, GI-TOC, September 2021, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WEA-Obs-RB1-GITOC.pdf.

100 Africa News, French soldiers killed during rescue op of four foreigners in Benin, 10 May 2019, https://www.africanews.com/2019/05/10/release-of-the-four-hostages-including-two-french-nationals-kidnapped-in-benin/.

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103 Mark Shaw, Illicit financial flows: Illicit narcotics transiting West Africa, OECD Development Co-operation Working Papers, No. 64, Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1787/18f49f16-en.

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105 GI-TOC interviews, Bissau, July 2019.

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