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Long Term Trends across Security and Development in the Sahel

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LONG TERM TRENDS ACROSS SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE SAHEL

This paper has been prepared by

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Abstract

Following the 2013 French military intervention in Mali, significant attention has been paid to issues of security and development in the Sahel. The stability of Sahelian countries and the capacity of their governments to manage social change and resulting tensions have major security implications for migration flows, economic development, and health concerns both for local people and for the broader international community. The rise of violent religious extremism in the region and the varied efforts to curtail its spread have raised international alarm and prompted important resources to be invested by both domestic governments and foreign partners. This paper offers a broad overview of the current situation in the Sahel paying attention to the intersecting and overlapping issues of security and development. The paper then interrogates three central themes—poverty, migration, and conflict—adopting a historical perspective to examine long-term trends in the region. In doing so, it aims to contribute to contemporary policy discussions by offering evidence of how these dynamics have either changed or persisted across this centrally important region during the last several decades.

Key words: Sahel, development, migration, conflict, violent extremism
JEL classification: D74, F51, N47

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Executive summary

In recent years, significant attention and resources have been directed toward improving the security situation in the Sahel. The stability of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal and the capacity of their governments to provide security and manage social change have major implications for migration flows, economic development, and health concerns both for local people and for the broader international community. The 2012-13 Malian political crisis and resulting militant Islamist occupation of the country's northern territory alarmed many regional and global leaders. Concerns that this political instability might spread and persist throughout the region prompted a large-scale international intervention. The French, joined by soldiers from Niger and Chad, led the initial military intervention in 2013 to support the Malian state in its effort to regain control over its vast desert in the north and to re-establish political order. These intervention efforts continue today through regional organisations and a French-led counter-terrorism force.

The initial military intervention in 2013 succeeded in dispersing the militant Islamist groups. However, in its wake, asymmetric conflict, rising violent extremism, depressed economic outlooks, and clandestine migration have emerged to create a situation of perpetual crisis and war in the region (Charbonneau, 2017a). The 2013 international military intervention set off a series of major regional security initiatives in the Sahel including the G5 Sahel, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), and French Operation Barkhane. However, it would be inaccurate to suggest that these contemporary initiatives represent completely new phenomena in the Sahel. In fact, for decades the Sahel has been viewed, from one lens or another, as a region in perpetual crisis and significant resources have been provided to ameliorate Sahelian challenges to development and security. Recognising the link between security and development, today's initiatives frequently call for a connected and holistic approach to addressing insecurity in the region. Recently, for example, France and Germany spearheaded a development initiative to improve the effectiveness of aid known as the Sahel Alliance which will complement the G5 Sahel military joint taskforce (France Diplomatie, 2018).

Regional initiatives aiming to co-ordinate between Sahelian governments and international partners seeking to advance development and reduce insecurity have a long history in the Sahel. The extreme droughts followed by famine in the 1970s and 1980s first catapulted the Sahel onto the international humanitarian stage. Regional and international actors launched

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humanitarian initiatives to address immediate food security challenges and to establish long-term investments in the region. For example, the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) was created in 1973 as a regional organisation charged with mitigating food insecurity caused by drought and continues its work today.

These initiatives and regional investments arrived with a wave of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which subsequently reshaped governance and the delivery of public goods in these countries (Mann, 2014). The ongoing crisis in the Sahel may have renewed this type of governance transformation through the securitisation of governance in the region. Already, the provision and assurance of security –an essential public good associated with governance –has been refashioned to fit a regional model embodied in the nascent G5 Sahel and MNJTF. Similar to the NGOs of the past, these new security frameworks require input and investment not only from Sahelian states as a collective, but from international partners such as the European Union (EU), France, and the United States. However, current efforts to improve security and development in the Sahel follow a long history of international intervention throughout the region that has so far failed to prevent cyclical crises. Additionally, the current trend towards securitisation risks inaugurating a form of permanent military intervention (Charbonneau, 2017a).

While initiatives such as the G5 Sahel and Sahel Alliance appear to be well-suited for responding to the contemporary dynamics of instability in the Sahel, certain questions persist and deserve a contextualised and historical interrogation. For example, why have crises in the Sahel continued to appear and reappear? How have these crises and the humanitarian responses changed and shaped the region? What forms of socio-political change have occurred over the last decades and what impact have these changes had on security and development? Finally, what commonalities and divergences can be observed between the current situation in the Sahel and that of past crises?

This paper offers an initial overview of the long-term security and development trends. It evaluates the contemporary situation of three interconnected themes: economic and human development, migration, and conflict from a historical perspective to examine long-term trends in the region. In doing so, it aims to contribute to contemporary policy discussions by offering evidence of how these dynamics have changed and persisted across this region since the 1980s.

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Economic and human development in the Sahel

Derived from the Arabic word meaning shoreline or coast, the name Sahel most likely referred to the southern edge of the Sahara desert. Situated across this drought-prone and resource-poor region, the countries of the African Sahel are among the least developed on earth. All six countries focused on in this paper rank in the lowest quintile according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (Table 1). It is worth noting that Senegal and Mauritania, which tend to outperform their Sahelian neighbours, also possess a coastline and ports serving to connect each country more closely to the international economy.

Extreme poverty throughout the region is a key contextualising aspect of security and development dynamics as well as the international, regional, and national responses to those dynamics. The region has made tremendous progress on health since the "lost decade" of the 1990s. Key indicators such as life expectancy, stunting and child mortality decreased significantly across West Africa from 2000 to 2015, as shown on Map 1 (Osgood-Zimmerman et al., 2018; Golding et al., 2017), including in Niger which continues to exhibit the highest rates for the region. Nevertheless, these improvements have been varied, with certain countries in the region outperforming others and with high degrees of internal variability as well. Indeed, Sahelian countries remain the most problematic with regard to these health indicators for the West African region. Countries in this region exceed the alert threshold of 10% for Global Acute Malnutrition rates and in many areas, they also regularly exceed the emergency threshold of 15%. Across the Sahel, nearly 40% of children under five years of age are stunted with the exception of Senegal, which outperforms many of its West African neighbours on this indicator.

The continued prevalence of stunting in the region suggests that it is a structural problem and emphasises the need to address the root causes of food insecurity. Such causes are tied to extreme levels of poverty which limit access to food, poorly developed health and sanitation infrastructures, and weak social protection systems. The challenges to developing nutritional health and food security in this region are likely to be multiplied as a growing population and climate change intensify pressures for improved health (Campbell et al., 2014). All of the Sahelian countries participate in programs to improve food security and combat malnutrition, but structural change is necessary to make substantial improvements in the short term as the trends over the last fifteen years underscore.

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Table 1
Sahel development indicators, 2016-17

Country	Population (million)	Life expectancy (total years)	GDP per capita, PPP (2011 USD)	Primary school enrolment (%)	Infant mortality (per 1 000 births)	Urban population (% total)
Senegal	14.0	67	2,380	83	34	51
Mauritania	4.1	63	3,597	71	53	42
Mali	17.8	58	2,014	57	66	32
Burkina Faso	18.2	60	1703	75	51	29
Niger	18.9	60	926	64	48	17
Chad	13.4	53	1768	79	73	29
United States	*325.7*	*78*	*54 225*	*93*	*6*	*82*
France	*325.7*	*78*	*54 225*	*93*	*6*	*82*

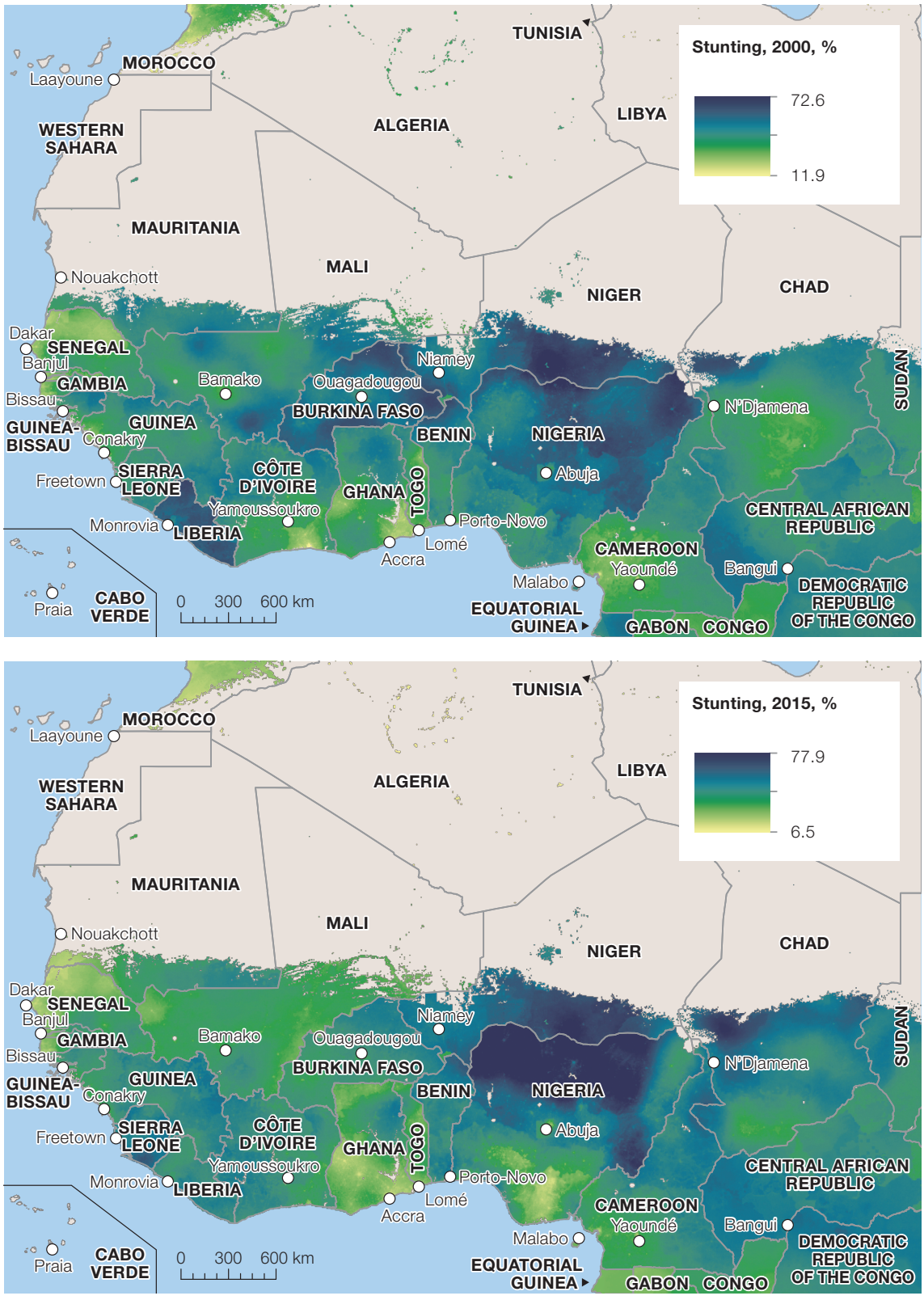
Source: World Bank 2018a

Generally, sub-Saharan Africa has seen dramatic economic growth in the last decade as well, leading some to predict a largescale economic transformation in coming years. Sahelian countries have experienced relative economic growth. However, these improvements have not been at the same pace as their sub-Saharan African neighbours. Thus, while economic performance, health, and education have improved in these countries relative to their levels two decades ago, their overall position compared to others has not improved at the same rate. Indeed, Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger have consistently been ranked near the bottom of the Human Development Index over the last decade alongside countries experiencing significant civil conflict such as the Central African Republic and South Sudan. This suggests that while economic development is taking place and the overall level of development in the region has improved over the last twenty years, Sahelian countries are at risk of being left behind their neighbours (Guèye and Mbaye, forthcoming).

One contributor to this trend and partial explanation could lie in the lack of economic diversification within Sahelian economies coupled with limited specialisation. All six economies rely heavily on livestock and agricultural markets which have seen an increase in the last two decades. Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso and to a lesser degree, Niger, have also benefited from the production and exportation of oil and/or minerals at certain times but they remain very dependent on the world market's variability resulting in highly volatile economic growth (Guèye and Mbaye, forthcoming). The boom and

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Map 1
Prevalence of stunting in children under the age of five in West Africa, 2000 and 2015



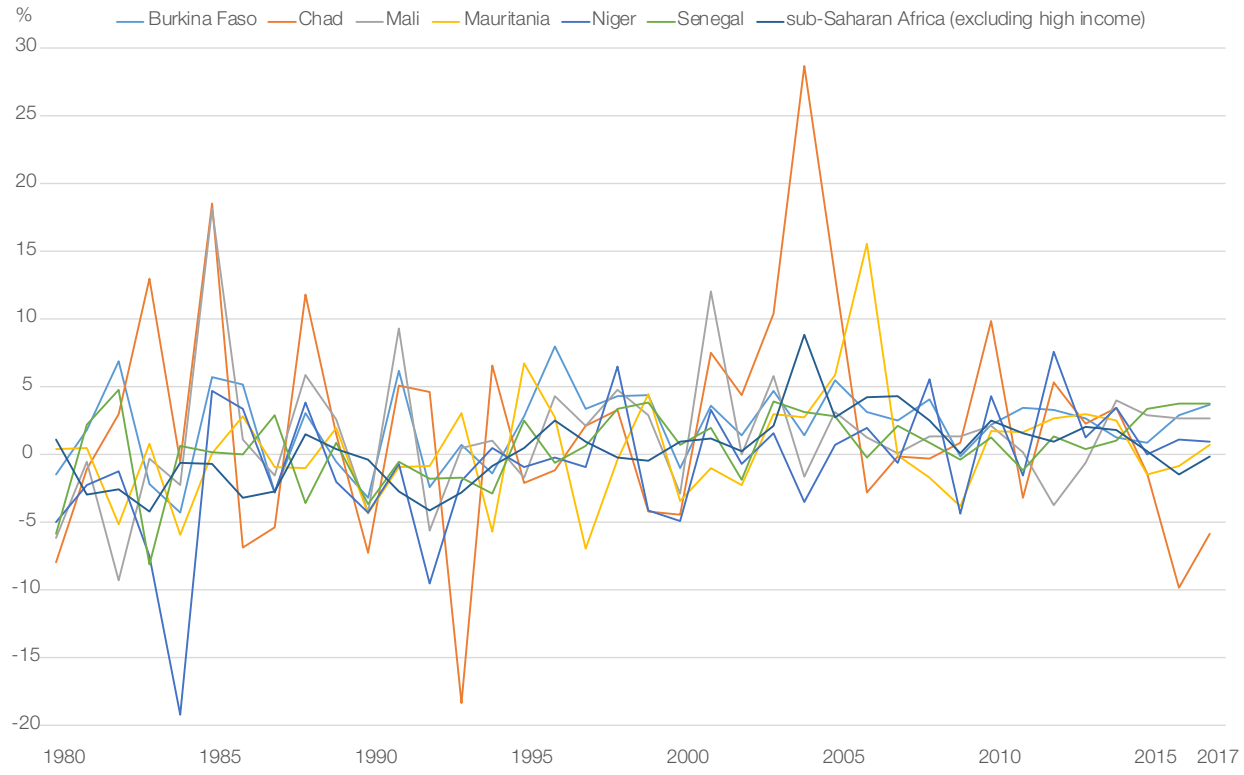
Source: OECD/SWAC 2019. Adapted from Osgood-Zimmerman et al. 2018 and Golding et al. 2017.

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bust cycles experienced by Niger's uranium production are an excellent example of the country's economic dependence on global market prices. The economic gains made by uranium booms in Niger have historically benefited a select few rather than improving economic conditions for the majority of Nigeriens (Robinson, 1991). More recent research has shown that mismanagement of the uranium sector coupled with growing competition between mineral rich African countries has led to a "race to the bottom," as government officials entice international investors with more profitable, and at times corrupt, opportunities (Larsen and Mamaosso, 2014, 72). These practices and trends are found throughout the Sahelian region with regard to the management of natural resource production and exportation.

Figure 1 displays growth rates for all six countries focused on in this paper from 1980 to 2017. Mali and Chad stand out as having particularly volatile economies, but Senegal, the most stable economy, still experiences more than a two percentage point shift from year to year on average. With this degree of volatility, and the dependence of Sahelian economies on a few sectors, it is clear that the trend of other sub-Saharan African economies outpacing those in the Sahel is likely to continue.

Figure 1
Average change in gross domestic product (GDP) in the Sahel, by country from 1980-2017



Source: World Bank 2018b

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In addition, as the Nigerian economy continues to grow and dominate the West African region, these trends become more alarming for the Sahelian economies which increasingly depend on Nigeria as a regional economic driver. Map 2 displays the economic dominance of Nigeria in the region and the prospective reverberating effects of Nigeria's economic recession on neighbouring countries. In 2016, West Africa as a region recorded the lowest growth rate, 0.4%, for the entire continent. The recession in Nigeria is the primary explanation for this trend which coincides with a recession in neighbouring Chad, in both cases due to plummeting oil prices and a fragile security situation leading to political uncertainty. The impact of Nigeria's recession on the larger region should not be understated since the country accounts for two-thirds of West Africa's GDP and nearly one-third of Africa's GDP.

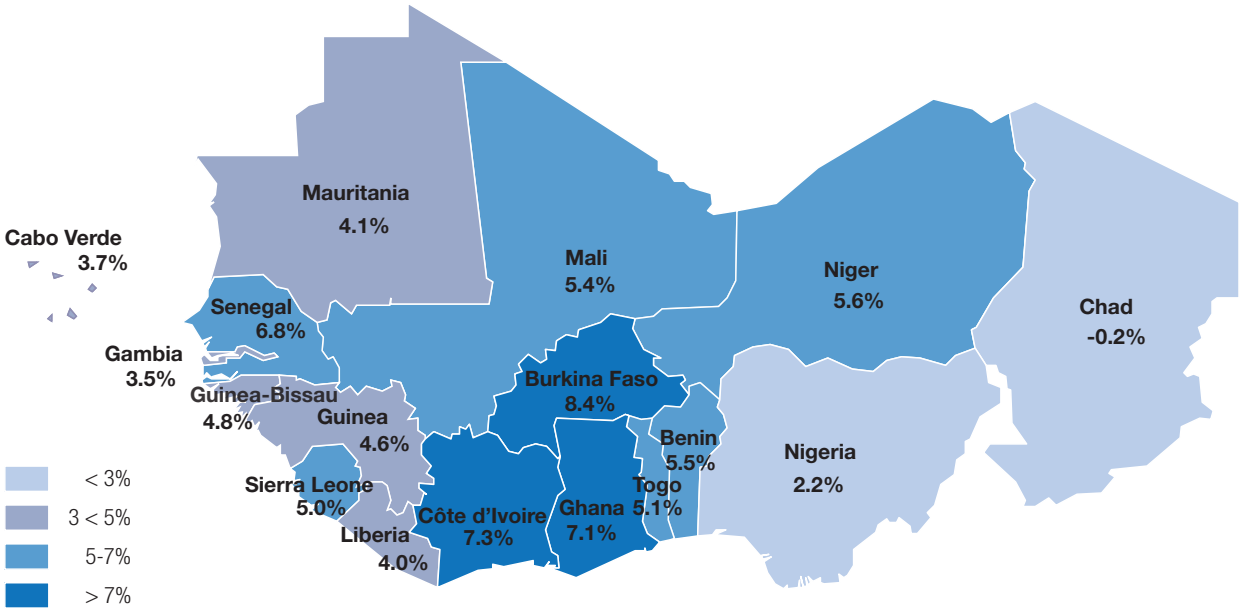
A closer look at GDP growth rates per country reveals that all eight economies of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) recorded positive growth rates in 2016, ranging from 4% in Benin to 8.4% in Côte d'Ivoire and growth rates above 5% in Senegal, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. However, the reliance of these economies on exporting raw materials, especially cotton, groundnuts, and other crops which are subject to global price fluctuations and climate, makes it difficult to accurately predict the long-term prospects for continued economic growth. With the rebound of oil prices, West Africa can anticipate improved growth rates in the immediate future, but the dependence of Sahelian economies on raw material exports coupled with oil and mineral exploitation suggest that sustainable development is far from being established throughout the region.

In sum, extreme poverty in the Sahel persists due to structural features and a number of challenges to long lasting economic and human development. These features and challenges are unlikely to change in the short term. Notably, the reliance of Sahelian economies on commodity markets based on livestock and agricultural production, as well as world mineral and oil markets leaves the region's economic outlook unpredictable. This economic unpredictability increases the strain on regional governments, inhibiting their ability to craft long-term economic plans. It also prevents them from being able to invest in and strengthen public services and impedes efforts to improve food security, malnutrition and education.

While improvements in these areas have occurred in the last several decades, these positive trends appear weak and worrying when cast next to other regions of the continent. Considering the potential impacts that population growth and climate change are likely to have over the course of the next twenty-five years, the tempered progress made over the past few decades raises further alarm for the prospects of development in this impoverished region.

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Map 2
Real GDP growth rates for West Africa, 2017 projections



Source: SWAC/OECD 2017

Regional migration

Migration and mobility are defining features of daily life in the Sahel. Populations engaged in the trans-Saharan trade networks have existed in this region for millennia and pastoralism has historically been a central economic livelihood. Similarly, the seasonal migration of agricultural workers plays an integral role in the economic livelihoods of many people in the Sahel who migrate to Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. However, in contemporary times, the perceived threat of growing migration flows from sub-Saharan Africa through the Sahel and North Africa to Europe has captured the attention of Western politicians and policymakers. Beginning in the 2000s, European policy initiatives have invested heavily in preventing African migrants from reaching Europe through securitising borders in North Africa and more recently with similar initiatives in Sahelian countries. Most of these migrants traverse the Sahara through transportation networks connecting sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa. The irony of policies that attempt to prevent this movement is that the vast majority of people migrating to and from the Sahel do so in order to reach other African countries.

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Past research suggests that the number of migrants seeking to reach Europe by traversing the Sahara is very limited (Lessault and Beauchemin, 2009), and instead that the vast majority of sub-Saharan migrants aim to reach North Africa with no intention of leaving the continent (Bensaâd, 2009). More recent research suggests that most West Africans would prefer to stay in their country, but that those who decide to migrate are motivated by economic opportunities and remain undaunted in the face of mounting risks posed by recent initiatives to securitise borders and criminalise migration (Kirwin and Anderson, 2018). Those who attempt the voyage from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe tend to be those with sufficient accumulated resources to do so (Kirwin and Anderson, 2018: 11). Thus, as sub-Saharan African countries continue to experience economic growth and individuals gain access to the resources necessary to attempt the dangerous journey across the Sahara, the number of potential migrants is likely to increase as long as the perceived economic opportunities of doing so remain high.

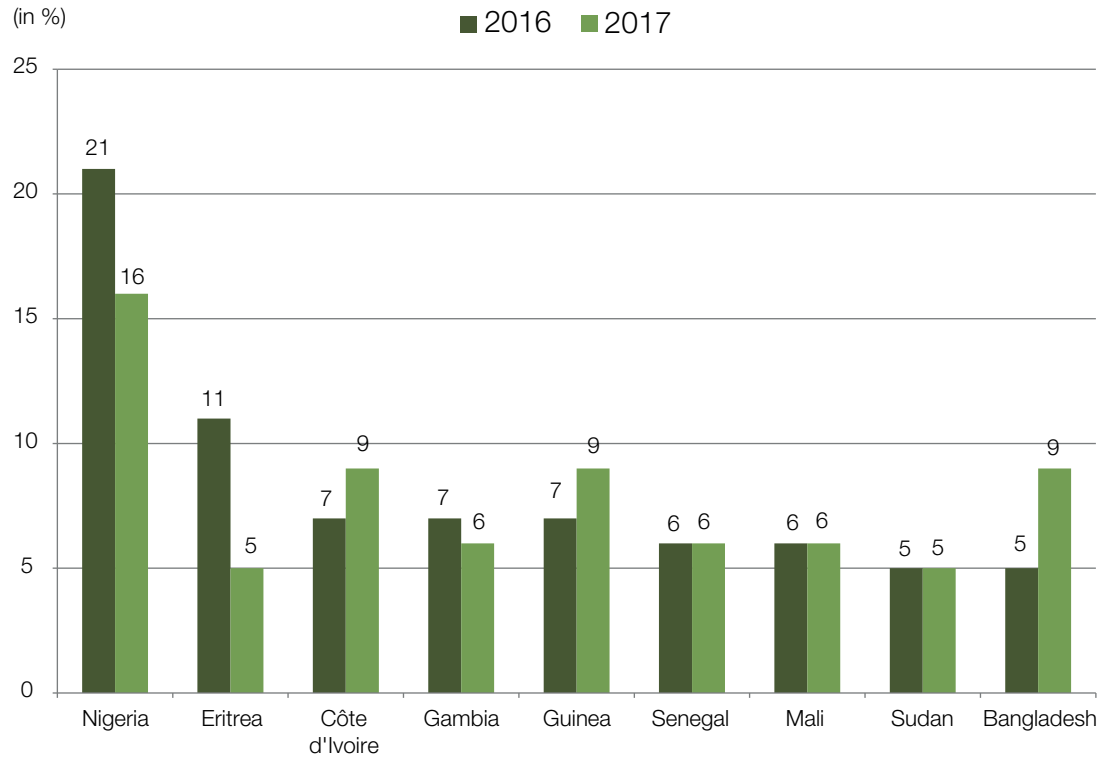
Figure 2 displays the breakdown of migrants who arrived to Italy in 2016 and 2017 by percentage. The only Sahelian countries to represent a significant percentage of the group were Mali and Senegal each with 6% of the migrants for each year, far from a majority. Indeed, relatively few Sahelians seek to migrate, however the region benefits from the economic spill over linked to the migration which crosses it. Thus, traders who transport goods through the Sahara stopping at places like Agadez in Niger or Faya in Chad, on their way to North Africa, engage in transporting people as well.

What remains unclear is the extent to which international efforts have stymied these incentives and curtailed migration to Europe. Indeed, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports that thousands of migrants are declared dead or missing on their way to Italy from North Africa. This figure is, almost certainly, underestimated as most contemporary attempts to cross the desert are undertaken so as to avoid authorities. Consequently, this estimate cannot factor in those migrants abandoned in the desert or who perish in detention centres en route to or through North Africa (Kirwin and Anderson, 2018: 11). Given that economic opportunities drive individuals to pursue migration to Europe regardless of the risks, increasing the risks through the criminalisation of migration, and in turn promoting deleterious effects on local economies, is likely to exacerbate the dangers associated with migration rather than discourage individuals from attempting the journey (Brachet, 2018).

The business of transportation has grown in these trading hubs on the edge of the Sahel and Sahara, resulting in local economies based on supporting passengers and migrants. This has perhaps been best documented in Agadez in recent years (Damon et al., 2017; Politzer and Kassie, 2016). In response to the perceived threat of African migration from North Africa to Europe, however, authorities have begun to more actively disrupt migration flows

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Figure 2
Nationality of migrants who arrived in Italy by boat, 2016-17



Source: Kirwin and Anderson 2018

through Agadez. Efforts to curb migration from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa through Agadez have had a destabilising effect on local economies that are dependent on the trade and the transportation of goods between the Sahel and North Africa. They have also almost certainly resulted in a growing number of deaths. In the last several years, significant resources have been spent on building stronger more secure borders in North Africa, but these actions have introduced greater uncertainty to the region's frontiers where local economies depend on the movement of goods (Gallien and Herbert, 2018).

Initiatives led by European policymakers have also sought to prevent migration from the Sahel to North Africa by criminalising the transportation of people, establishing detention centres, and repatriating migrants found in North Africa. European development initiatives have a specific mandate and permission to maintain a permanent contingent in Agadez charged with improving Niger's ability to prevent migration (European Union, 2016). The criminalisation of transporting people by labelling those engaged in this activity as human smugglers, has pushed operators and migrants to partic-

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ipate in riskier practices, travel routes, and behaviours to avoid authorities and state sanction (Brachet, 2018). The EU also augmented its work with the IOM, through increased support to IOM's attempts to document the movement of, and provide assistance to, migrants (European Union, 2018). Paradoxically, when the movement of people from the Sahel to North Africa was still a legitimate activity supported and organised by businessmen and traders in Agadez, much of this documentation already took place or would have been much easier to implement (Brachet, 2018: 24). The transformation of this sector into a clandestine affair further entrenches its connection to organised crime and smuggling throughout the region. It also undoubtedly increases the risks and the costs that those seeking to reach North Africa bear.

In Niger, where many of the EU's policies to curb migration have been initiated, the programmes addressing migration flows have failed to garner local support (Lebovich, 2018). To date, these initiatives have lacked the funding and assistance promised to local communities that previously depended on migration for their economic livelihoods.

The EU's efforts to curb migration represent a larger trend led by international partners across the Sahel, and contributes in part to the securitisation of economic and political issues. Increasing the overall security apparatus and infrastructure to address these political objectives without consideration of local dynamics, contributes to a deterioration of local economic livelihoods. The strategy of securitising migration will almost certainly continue to disrupt migratory patterns and the economies reliant on the flow of people and goods in the Sahara-Sahel. Unfortunately, these efforts also run the risk of worsening insecurity by indirectly promoting organised crime, other clandestine activities, and humanitarian crises.

Conflict in the Sahel

Communal conflict between identity groups

Sahelian countries are generally tolerant and highly diverse. Periodic clashes between pastoralist and farming communities occur throughout the region on a seasonal basis with varied frequency. These types of conflict generally remain contained to specific areas within particular countries. While occasional clashes between communities owing to property disputes is far from unheard of, the forms of organised and lethal violence being employed by ethnic militias has become increasingly common. Numerous factors have contributed to an increase in this form of conflict in recent years including: cyclical changes in transhumance patterns due to environmental changes such as drought, an increase in the overall population of subsistence farmers

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and thus a reduction in the land available for grazing and farming, and new constraints placed on the mobility of individuals in the Sahelian zone. The clashes are also indicative of weak governance structures that are unable to effectively adjudicate claims between communities over land use rights (Mattfess, 2018).

Inter-communal violence has become particularly worrying in central Mali where the almost complete deterioration of security services has given way to a dramatic rise in communal militias (Pinaud, 2018). The deterioration of security in central Mali over the last three years presents a worrying example of how quickly these inter-communal tensions can transform into more persistent and lethal forms of violence. Recent events in Burkina Faso indicate that this phenomenon may not be contained or unique to Mali (Eizenga 2019). The rise of ethnic militias in the Sahel — mostly unrelated to militant Islamist groups, but sometimes targeted by them — points to a failing security apparatus as well as a lack of justice for local communities which have in turn acted to protect themselves and to seek retribution on their own terms (Ibrahim and Zapata, 2018). The potential for this form of violence to spread to other areas of the Sahel justifies immediate investments in and mobilisation of security forces. However, long-term reforms to governance in the region will be necessary to prevent this form of violence from spreading.

As the Sahel continues to experience a population boom and warming climate, these pressures will likely intensify relations between farmer and herder communities (Benjaminsen et al., 2012). Already, in neighbouring Nigeria, new laws and regulations enacted by the state are exacerbating tensions between these communities and run the risk of instigating further conflict rather than preventing violence (International Crisis Group, 2018). Efforts to mitigate tensions between these communities should take paramount importance for regional governments and international partners seeking to re-establish a lasting peace in the region.

The rise of militant Islamist groups

Historically, political violence and civil conflict have taken different forms in the Sahel. Chad, for example, has a long history of rebellious conflict which continues to manifest in periodic insurgencies and cycles of instability (Debos, 2016). The current regime came to power in 1990 through force and has successfully maintained power despite multiple rebellious challenges, the most intense of which culminated in 2006 and 2008. Since the 2008 rebellion in Chad, most political violence and insecurity has been contained to neighbouring countries, the exception being the conflict with Boko Haram which spilled over into Chadian territory in 2015 and to a lesser degree conflict across the Libyan border with Chadian rebels.

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Other past Sahelian conflicts were rooted in identity that at times took the form of separatist movements. For example, the Casamance region of southern Senegal experienced a protracted separatist rebellion beginning in 1982 and officially lasting until a peace agreement and ceasefire was reached in 2014. However, the conflict resulted in comparatively few deaths and had relatively little impact on the overall stability of the country. Other examples of similar separatist movements can be found in the histories of Mali and Niger in which the Tuareg communities have periodically rebelled and called for an independent state for their communities. Historically, the Tuareg rebellions have been rather limited in extent and duration resulting in peace agreements, rebel incorporation in the security services, and Tuareg inclusion into the Malian and Nigerien governments. The 2012 rebellion in Mali took on an entirely different character as certain rebels defected from the separatist groups and joined militant Islamist groups (Walther and Christopoulos, 2015). These actions and subsequent events mark the beginning of a new form of conflict in the Sahel: insurgency steeped in militant Islamist ideology.

The convergence of the historically limited, yet nevertheless cyclical, conflicts with militant Islamist groups awaiting an opportunity to disrupt the Malian state, has produced a devastating conflict across the region. Some have argued that this conflict might have been avoided had the Malian state not failed to provide the essential public goods needed by communities in the country's northern and central regions (Bleck and Mitchelitch, 2015) or had the state been constructed in a fashion more attuned to its resources and conditions (Craven-Matthews and Englebert, 2018). Similarly, the conflict in northeastern Nigeria led by Boko Haram — which also professes a militant Islamist ideology — has its roots in the failure and perceived corruption of state representatives, and abuses by security forces (Kendhammer and McCain, 2018). Over the last five years, Boko Haram has been responsible for tens of thousands of killings and has displaced millions of people in the larger region, making it the deadliest conflict actor operating in these countries. In other regions, such as Liptako-Gourma which crosses over northern Mali, western Niger and northern and eastern Burkina Faso, conflict continues to be limited to militant Islamist groups or small-scale insurgencies that tend to target security officials and increasingly civilians. Poor governance and a general failing of authorities, particularly to maintain rule of law, coupled with abuses from security forces, have mobilised these groups to take arms against the state.

These conflicts broke with recent precedents in the region by aligning in some cases with a militant Islamist ideology that calls for an entirely different form of governance. However, it should be noted that some historical precedent for religious conflict does exist in the region. Several jihads took place in the Sahel during the 19th century in the areas that now comprise contemporary Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and northern Nigeria (Walther and Miles,

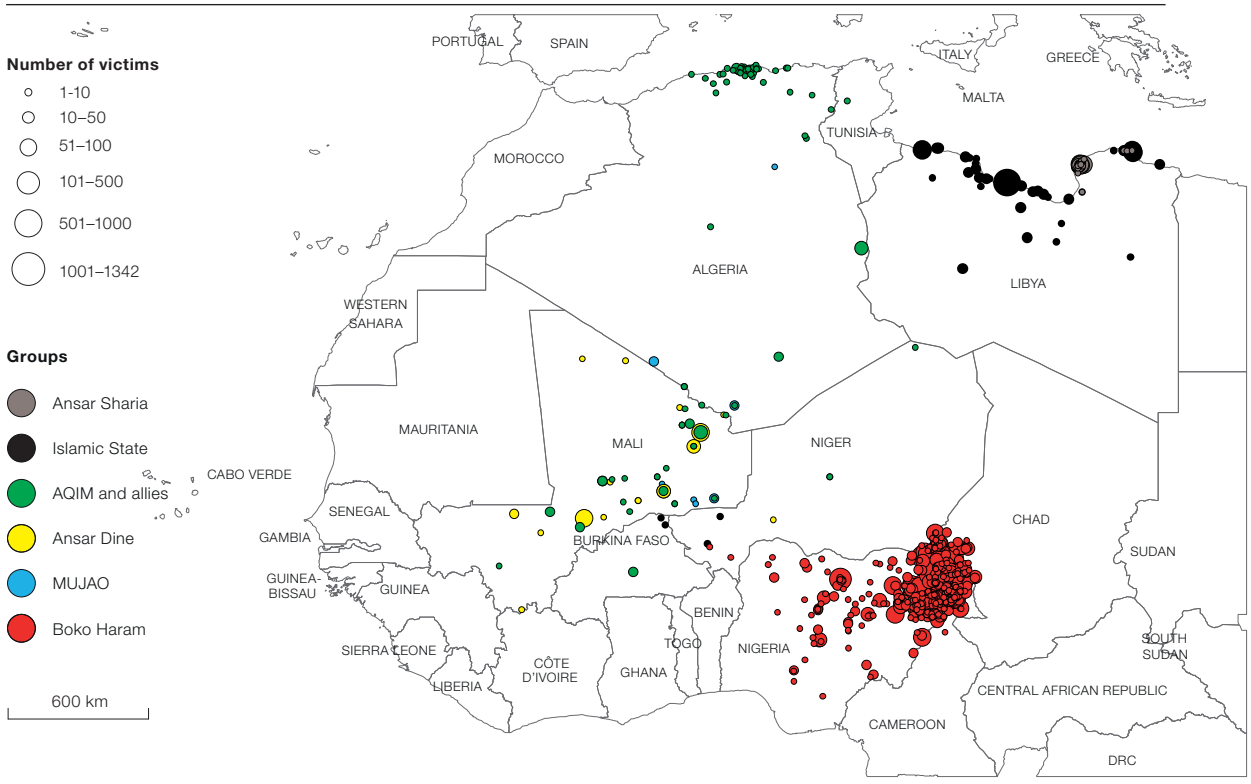
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2018). Although it is difficult to determine their connection, if any, to the contemporary phenomenon of violent religious extremism in the Sahel, these historical religious conflicts continue to occupy an important space in the remembered history of this region.

The militant Islamist occupation of northern Mali triggered the 2013 French military intervention and has since devolved into various forms of overlapping violence between various groups comprised of communal militias, militant Islamists, security forces, and organised crime syndicates (Gonin et al., 2013). The tactics and strategies employed by the warring parties in these conflicts are multifaceted, dynamic, and transnational. Map 3 demonstrates the transnational activity of the different groups that have carried out attacks in the region since the start of the war in Mali in 2012. With more than 20 000 causalities, the Boko Haram insurgency has caused an overwhelming majority of the civilian deaths. Given the transnational nature of these conflicts, responses have sought to develop a regional and, thus transnational approach. However, the asymmetric character of each insurgency's tactics allows for the conflicts to shift easily. These shifts have complicated the attempts of local, regional and international efforts to restore peace and political stability much less counter the spread of violent religious extremism in the region.

Map 3

Violent Extremism in the Sahara-Sahel, 2012-16



Source: Walther (2017)

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Since the beginning of the post-colonial era, religion in the Sahel has not typically been characterised by extremism or violence. Indeed, for many years, scholars pointed to the moderate forms of Islam in the Sahel as examples of where Islam and democratic governance melded together shaping their interpretations of government and religion (Villalón, 2010). Adherents of militant Islamist ideologies remain a tiny fraction of the overall Sahelian population. However, the ongoing conflicts attest to their durability and worrying signs suggest that terrorism may be increasing throughout the region (Pinaud, 2018).

During the 2000s, attacks by radical groups were primarily limited to the kidnapping of westerners for ransom in Mali, Mauritania and Niger, and targeted attacks on the Nigerian state by Boko Haram. In the last eight years, the situation has changed dramatically with a significant rise in terrorist acts and the entrenchment of insurgencies in northern Mali and northeastern Nigeria. In the Sahel, since the beginning of 2016, groups operating between northern Mali, Algeria, Libya, Niger and Burkina Faso have organised attacks on so-called soft targets that have taken place near Bamako, Grand Bassam in Côte d'Ivoire, and three times in Ouagadougou claiming the lives of dozens of civilians. New groups have emerged that target schools by sending armed men to threaten teachers who do not exclusively teach the Quran. Public officials, religious leaders, and citizens collaborating with security forces have also been targeted in assassinations. These events have little historical precedent in the Sahel.

Response to violent religious extremism in the Sahel

Current attempts to address militant Islamism focus almost entirely on a security approach and to a lesser degree on countering forms of radical ideology. Concerns over the deteriorating security situation have led to calls for co-ordinated regional action, to which Sahelian governments have quickly responded. The French military intervention in Mali sparked several international efforts to counter terrorist groups, which today is perhaps most evident in the military build-up that the French operation accelerated (Frowd and Sandor, 2018). However, the aftermath of the intervention proved to be a fluid and changing scenario that regional governments quickly identified as a major risk to larger regional stability and thus requiring a regional solution. So far, however, these regional initiatives and co-ordinated efforts lack the programmes and policies necessary to reform and improve governance across this area.

Initially, in 2013, the United Nations authorised and deployed its own peacekeeping mission MINUSMA (Lotze, 2015). By 2014, regional states established the Sahel G5 organisation with the dual purpose of ensuring security and development co-operation across Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and

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Chad (Diallo, 2018). Similarly, in 2015, the MNJTF began a regional response to Boko Haram with its headquarters in N'Djamena and co-ordinating forces from Chad, Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Benin within the Lake Chad Basin. To date, these new purveyors of regional security have contributed to counter-terrorism operations across the region, but have yet to fulfil their development agenda.

These regional initiatives are supported by a growing presence of Western armed forces. In 2014, the French concluded Operation Serval and transformed the military intervention into a standing regional force under Operation Barkhane. Comprising roughly 5 000 French soldiers, Barkhane conducts operations across the Sahel G5 countries and is tasked with countering terrorist groups through support of G5 forces (Charbonneau, 2017b). Other notable deployments include: 1 000 troops from Germany, more than 1 000 troops from the United States and hundreds from Italy, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Taking these deployments alongside the 13 289 military personnel authorised by the UN for MINUSMA, there may be more than 20 000 foreign soldiers currently deployed to the Sahel.[1] Additionally, the EU has established military and police training programmes specifically for Sahelian countries (Dworkin, 2016). Germany and Italy have sent troops to Niger while Americans have increased the number of Special Forces in Burkina Faso and Niger (Penney, 2018). What remains to be seen is the extent to which these international efforts have improved the overall security situation in the region and whether they have addressed any of the root causes of insecurity.

These significant international forces and efforts created the impetus for a new regional security apparatus that took the form of the G5 Sahel Joint Military Force and the MNJTF (Shurkin et al., 2017). Within this securitising context, Sahelian governments adapted their initiatives to improve security and quickly abandoned the multidimensional issues related to development. Instead, the G5 leadership pivoted to a focus on establishing and maintaining stability through military force. In doing so, the member countries of the Sahel G5 shifted their efforts to address issues of security and counterterrorism from a holistic approach to a military solution. The new Sahel Alliance — launched by Germany and France and which seeks to promote aid co-ordination between regional governments and international partners to enhance development initiatives — represents an attempt by international actors to recalibrate this outcome by refocusing attention on the root causes of insecurity, poor governance and a lack of development in Sahelian communities. This is undoubtedly a needed realignment. The overdetermined focus on terrorism and violent religious extremism risks ignoring the failings of regional governments to provide the public goods needed by their citizens and in turn perpetuating, or exacerbating, the root causes of conflict in the region.

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The costs of security-based solutions

The Sahelian context is marked by significant social diversity, extreme poverty, mounting demographic pressures, and an expansive geographic space. In this context, establishing and maintaining political order poses immense challenges to governments. And yet, very little of what is known about the Sahel more broadly provides insights into how this tragic security situation came about. Having turned their attention to this long-ignored region, terrorism experts around the globe are attempting to track and disband the global networks of perpetrators of such acts. Their analyses offer scant explanation for why these countries — among the least developed and materially poorest on earth, but also until not so long ago marked primarily by their social peace and security — are now on the brink of collapse. Furthermore, while Muslims are large majorities in much of the Sahel (and a small majority in Burkina Faso and Chad), the overwhelmingly dominant religious ideologies of the region have been distinguished by their categorical refusal of religious, social or political violence. Experts of the region have also so far failed to offer a fully satisfactory explanation for the current state of affairs in the Sahel.

If there seems little which can be done to prevent the contemporary insecurity, it is nevertheless possible to attempt to mitigate its costs. Beyond the tragic and immediate loss of life caused by the ongoing conflicts, continued attention should be paid to the political and economic ramifications. The consequences for democratic governance throughout the region cannot be understated. Since the securitisation of the response to the challenges posed by insecurity and underdevelopment in the Sahel, trends toward authoritarian and autocratic rule have emerged in Niger (Elischer, 2018) and become increasingly entrenched in Chad (Eizenga, 2018). Increased policing and security will also translate into increased economic costs, potentially undermining regional promises on development, and incentivising actors to engage in the political economy of conflict.

Beyond the direct costs of additional security personnel and their activities, the indirect costs of insecurity are potentially devastating on the region's limited economy. The once budding tourism sector in the Sahel and Sahara, already struggling because of political instability, faces near collapse due to ongoing insecurity. The challenges confronting Sahelian governments are enormous — far more than what they faced in previous decades. While there is certainly capacity among these governments to confront such challenges, the risks of taking this for granted must be acknowledged. Even major international intervention focused on security has failed to stop the deterioration

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of security in Mali's central and northern regions, the consequences of which are still unfolding throughout the region.

Much care should be taken before further focusing on the securitisation or militarisation of the region. The increasingly globalised security apparatus at work in the Sahel blurs the boundaries of local, regional and global as well as what is military and civilian, domestic and international (Charbonneau, 2017a and Walther, 2017). These developments obscure the pathway forward limiting the possibilities for viable and legitimate political order. Steps need to be taken by regional governments, non-governmental organisations, the international community, and other donors to help provide the kind of support needed to sustain a functioning justice system and rule of law throughout the Sahel. Failure to do so will result in continued momentum for terrorism in the region, exacerbating insecurity and limiting any attempts to improve development.

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Note

1. It is difficult to obtain accurate and current data on the number of troops of any one country in the Sahel. These estimates were derived by consulting recent news reports which the author attempted to confirm through official platforms.

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Long Term Trends across Security and Development in the Sahel

Following the 2013 French military intervention in Mali, significant attention has been paid to issues of security and development in the Sahel. The stability of Sahelian countries and the capacity of their governments to manage social change and resulting tensions have major security implications for migration flows, economic development, and health concerns both for local people and for the broader international community. The rise of violent religious extremism in the region and the varied efforts to curtail its spread have raised international alarm and prompted important resources to be invested by both domestic governments and foreign partners. This paper offers a broad overview of the current situation in the Sahel paying attention to the intersecting and overlapping issues of security and development. The paper then interrogates three central themes—poverty, migration, and conflict–adopting a historical perspective to examine long-term trends in the region. In doing so, it aims to contribute to contemporary policy discussions by offering evidence of how these dynamics have either changed or persisted across this centrally important region during the last several decades.

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