

Why civil war? Geography

POL 126

Prof. Juan Tellez
Spring 2022

TODAY

The homework

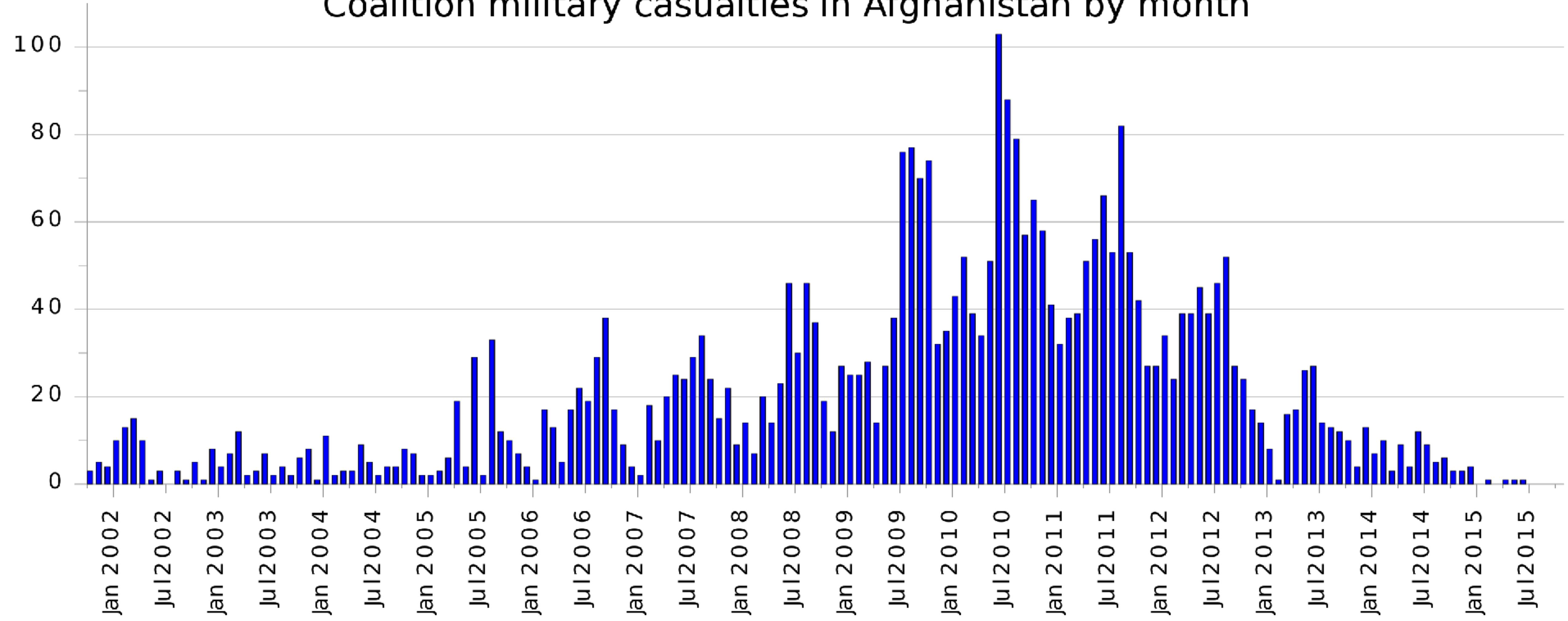
The geography of war

Motive and opportunity revisited

The homework

Fighting season

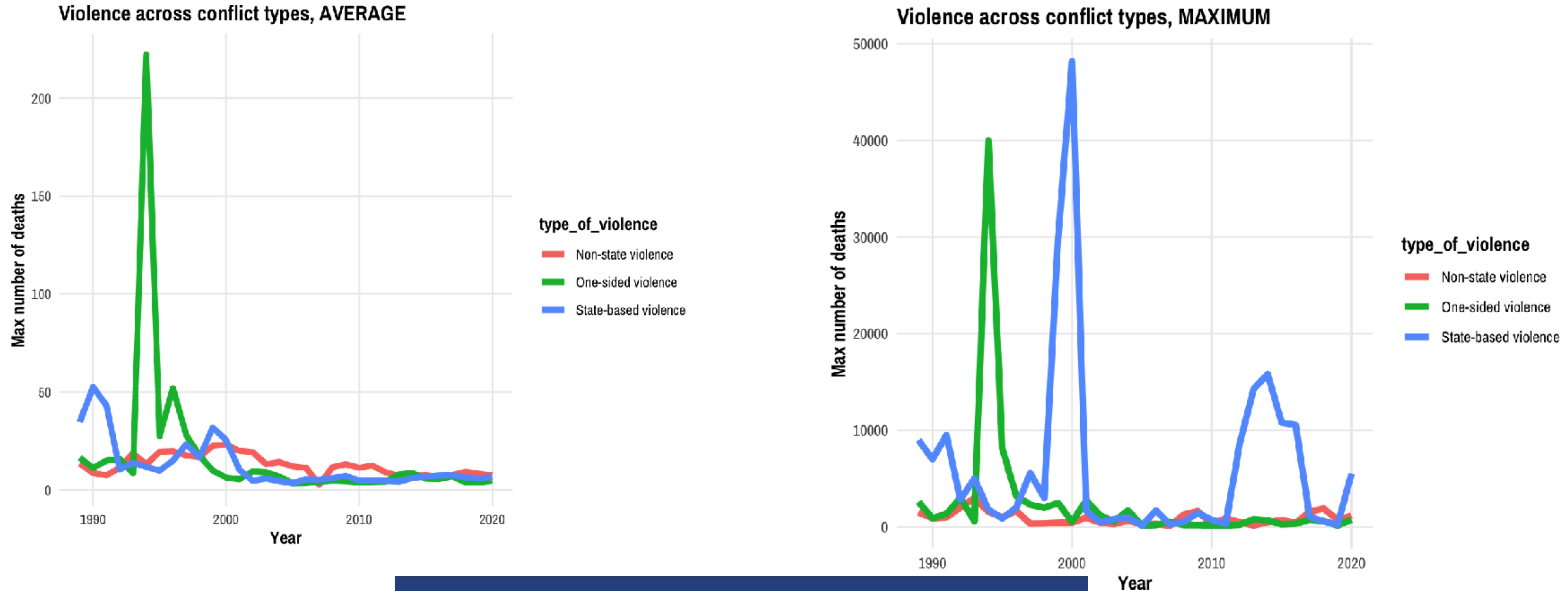
Coalition military casualties in Afghanistan by month



9 According to the UN, more than half of Afghanistan's gross domestic product in 2005 came from the production of drugs. In many parts of the country 'opium was the only commercially viable crop', *UNODC Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005* (<http://www.unodc.org/newsletter/en/200504/page008.html>).



Types of fighting



When elephants fight, the grass suffers

Fighting on your birthday

What did you see?

Post your screen cap in the
Discord

Geography and war

The shift

What motivates people to
rebel

What makes rebellion
possible

Grievances, identity,
ethnicity

Lootable resources,
geographic conditions

Geography?

American Political Science Review

Vol. 97, No. 1 February 2003

Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War

JAMES D. FEARON and DAVID D. LAITIN *Stanford University*

An influential conventional wisdom holds that civil wars proliferated rapidly with the end of the Cold War and that the root cause of many or most of these has been ethnic and religious antagonisms. We show that the current prevalence of internal war is mainly the result of a steady accumulation of protracted conflicts since the 1950s and 1960s rather than a sudden change associated with a new, post-Cold War international system. We also find that after controlling for per capita income, more ethnically or religiously diverse countries have been no more likely to experience significant civil violence in this period. We argue for understanding civil war in this period in terms of insurgency or rural guerrilla warfare, a particular form of military practice that can be harnessed to diverse political agendas. The factors that explain which countries have been at risk for civil war are not their ethnic or religious characteristics but rather the conditions that favor insurgency. These include poverty—which marks financially and bureaucratically weak states and also favors rebel recruitment—political instability, rough terrain, and large populations.

War in Russia

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/13/podcasts/the-daily/russia-ukraine-war.html>

The geography of war



War has always been deeply influenced by geography

Movement of troops, supply lines, use of cover

Exploited heavily in **irregular warfare**

The graveyard of empires



This map is presented for information only. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade accepts no responsibility for errors or omission of any geographic feature. Nomenclature and territorial boundaries may not necessarily reflect Australian Government policy. For the latest travel advice visit smartraveller.gov.au. Provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia licence.

Khyber Pass



Some weirdo made this



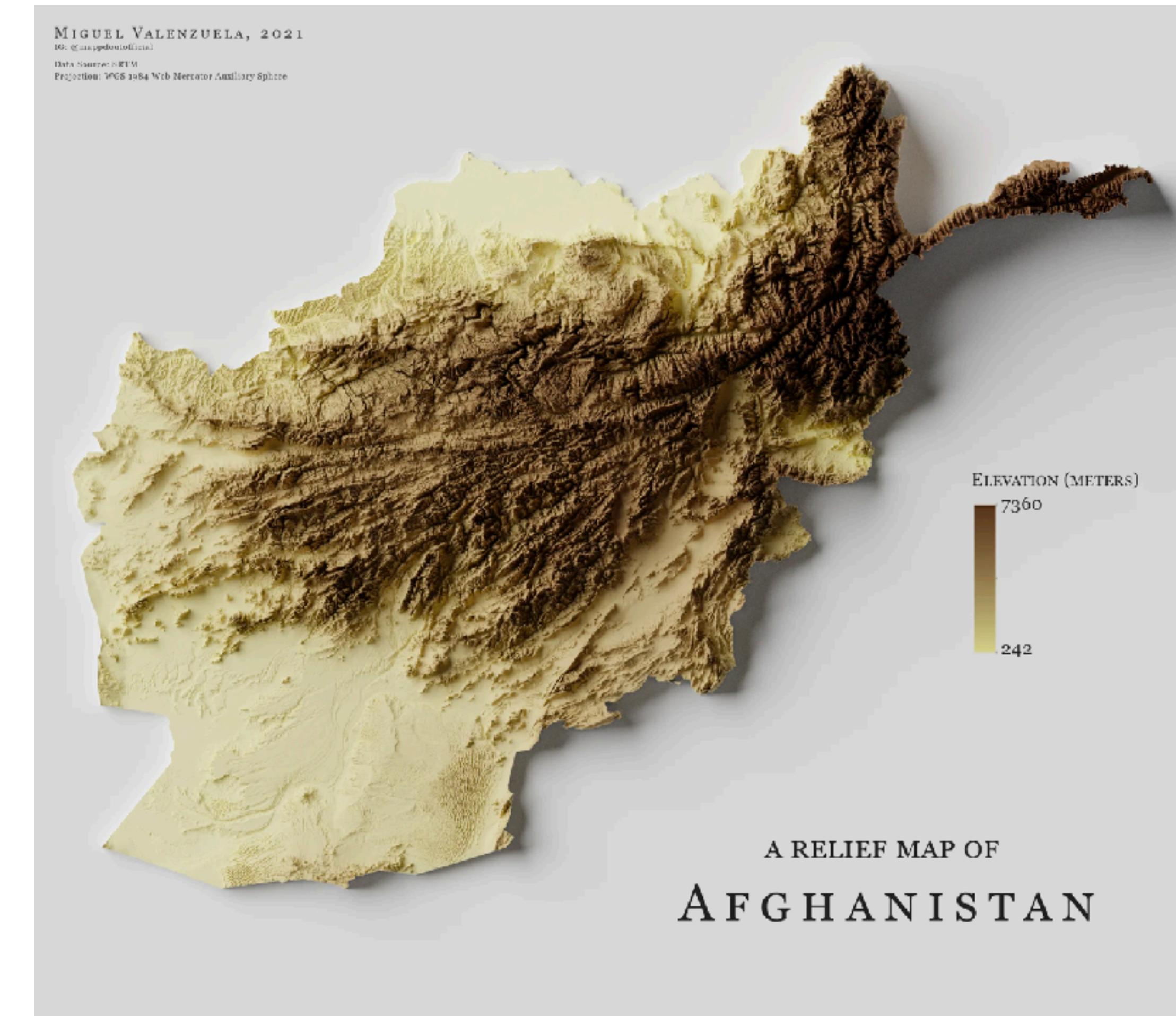
Geography of Insurgency

Geography is key to
irregular warfare

—> where rebellions form/live

—> what **tactics** rebels use

—> how war “spreads”



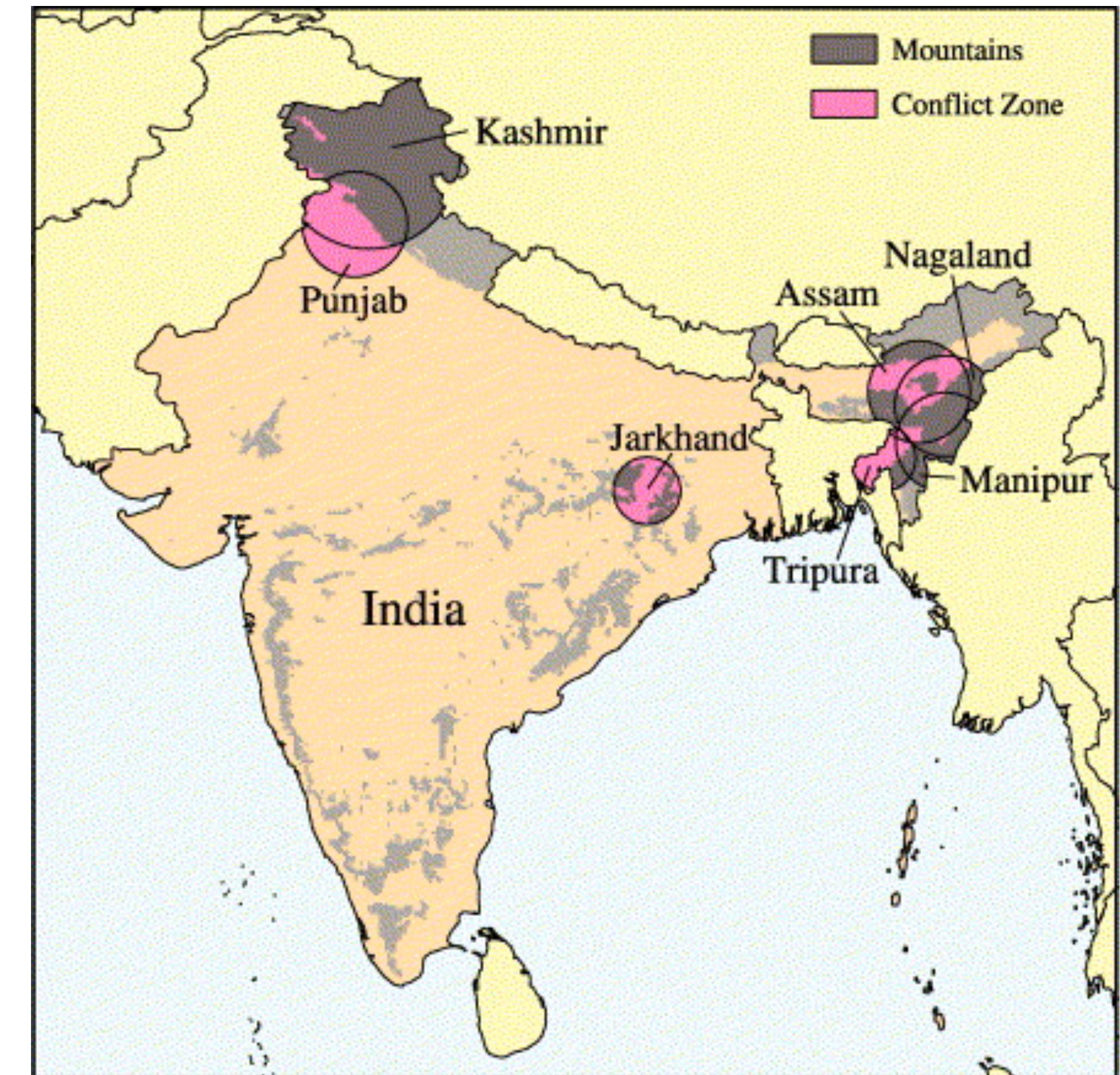
Mountains help the weak

Rough terrain – mountains, jungles, etc. – **advantage** to rebels over the state

Places to hide

Ambushes/hit-and-run

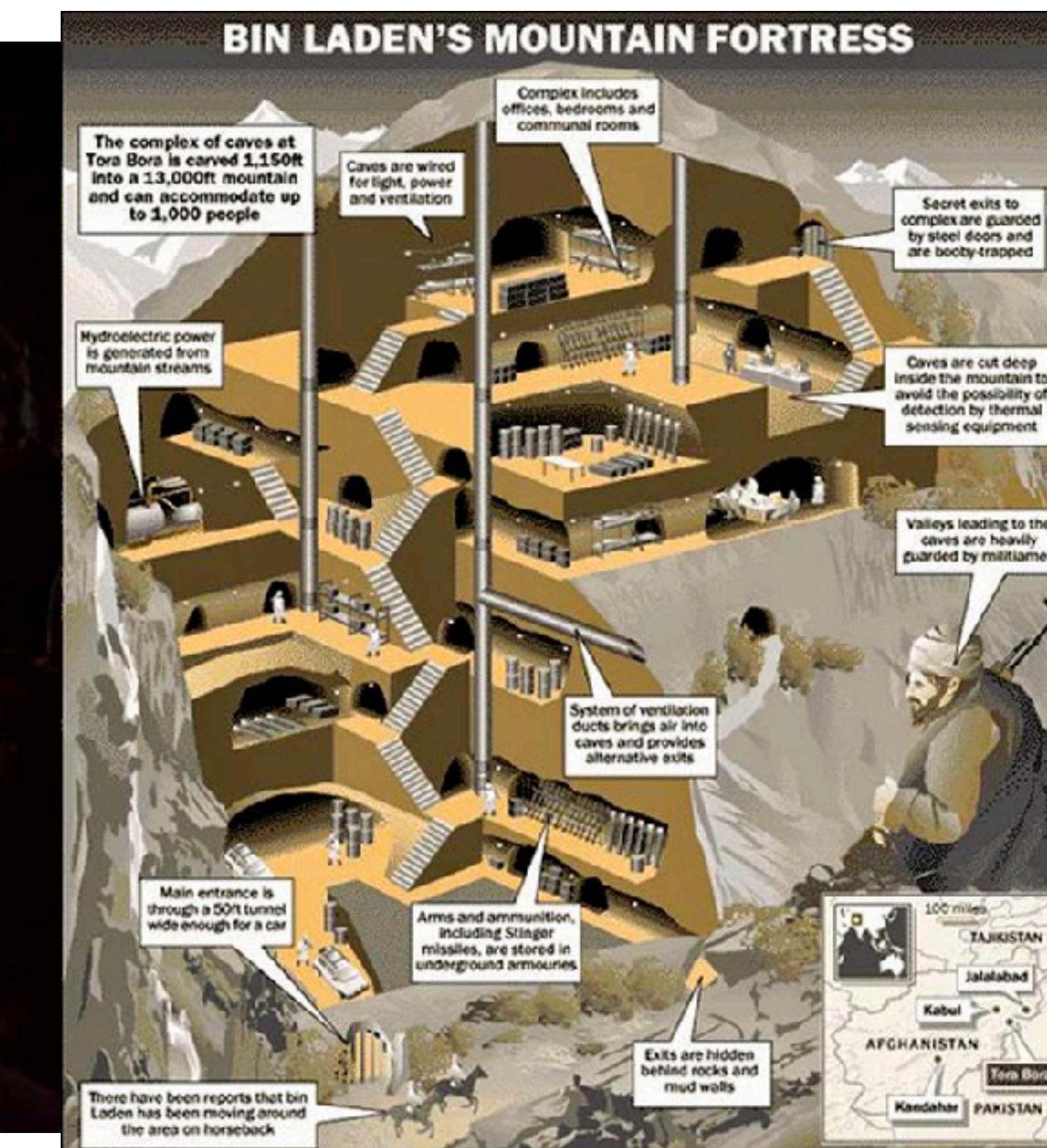
Difficult to navigate



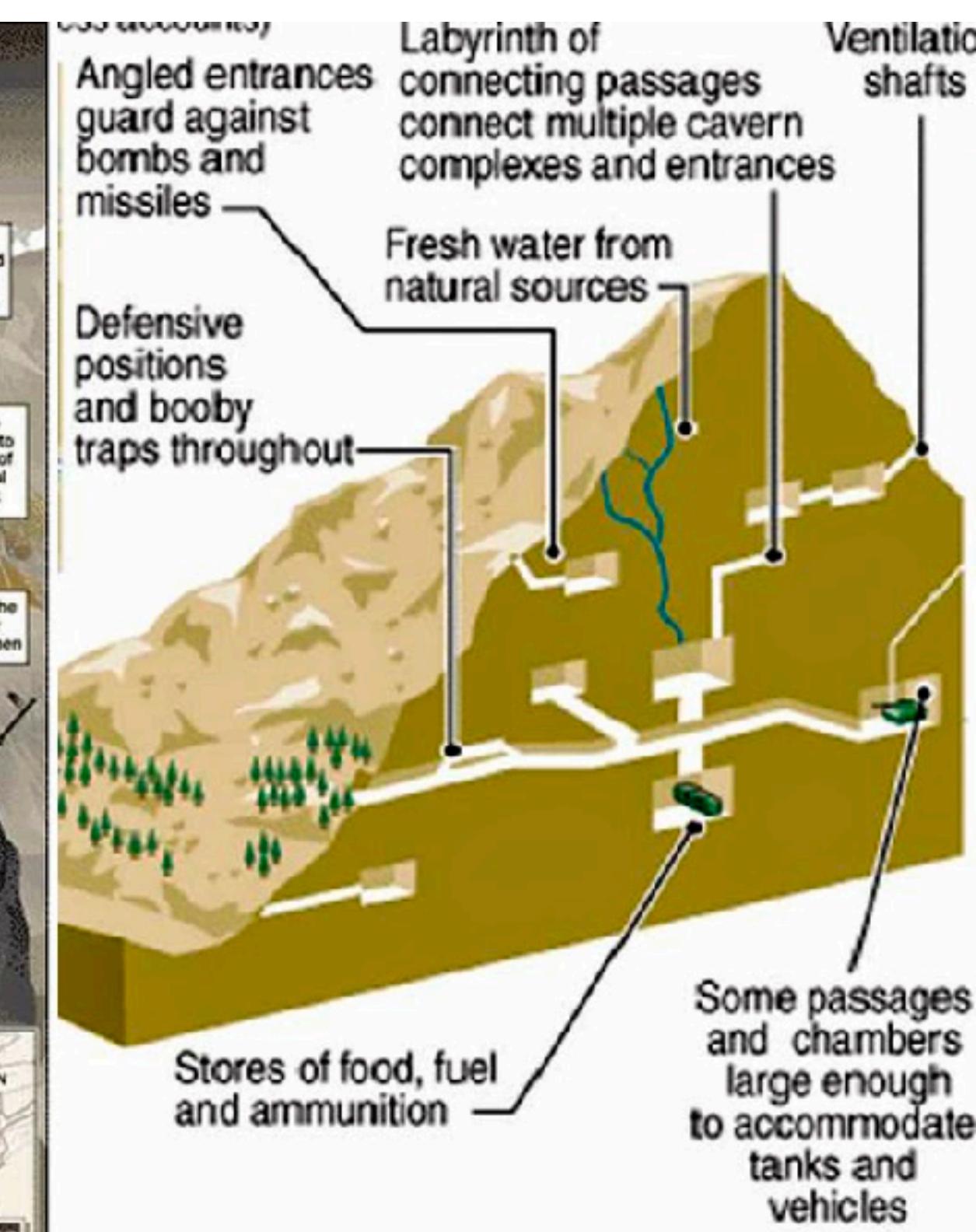
Cave networks in Afghanistan



Cave network in Pakistan,
used by Taliban/Al Qaeda



Journalist depiction of Bin Laden “fortress”
(lol)



Terrain navigation

Often terrain navigation is all about local knowledge

Advantage to rebels — recruit from locals vs. states who recruit from elsewhere

The mountains which cover four-fifths of Afghanistan sweep from the Pamirs in the east, where Tajikistan, India, Pakistan, and China join, almost to the frontier with Iran beyond Herat in the west. They divide the country from north to south, and the people into different and often hostile groupings who speak different languages, have different cultures, and for much of history had different religions as well. They are pierced by valleys and defiles, which are negotiable by people on foot: local farmers and shepherds, merchants, smugglers, travellers, tourists, hippies, and guerrilla fighters with their caravans of weapons. Proper roads are a luxury; until the twentieth century there were little more than tracks, passable enough by men and pack animals, but not at all friendly to wheeled traffic.

These mountains are hard enough to fight in at the best of times. The locals know all the paths and tracks, often cutting along the sides of precipitous mountains, easy to ambush, easy to defend, hard to find. But it is worse than that. At sixteen thousand feet, where some of the fighting took place, you can be incapacitated by altitude sickness until you become acclimatised. If you are wounded it can take as many as six of your comrades to get you down to help, often under fire.

Here even quite small numbers of determined men can hold their own against a powerful enemy column. You occupy the overlooking

Selection from Afgansty

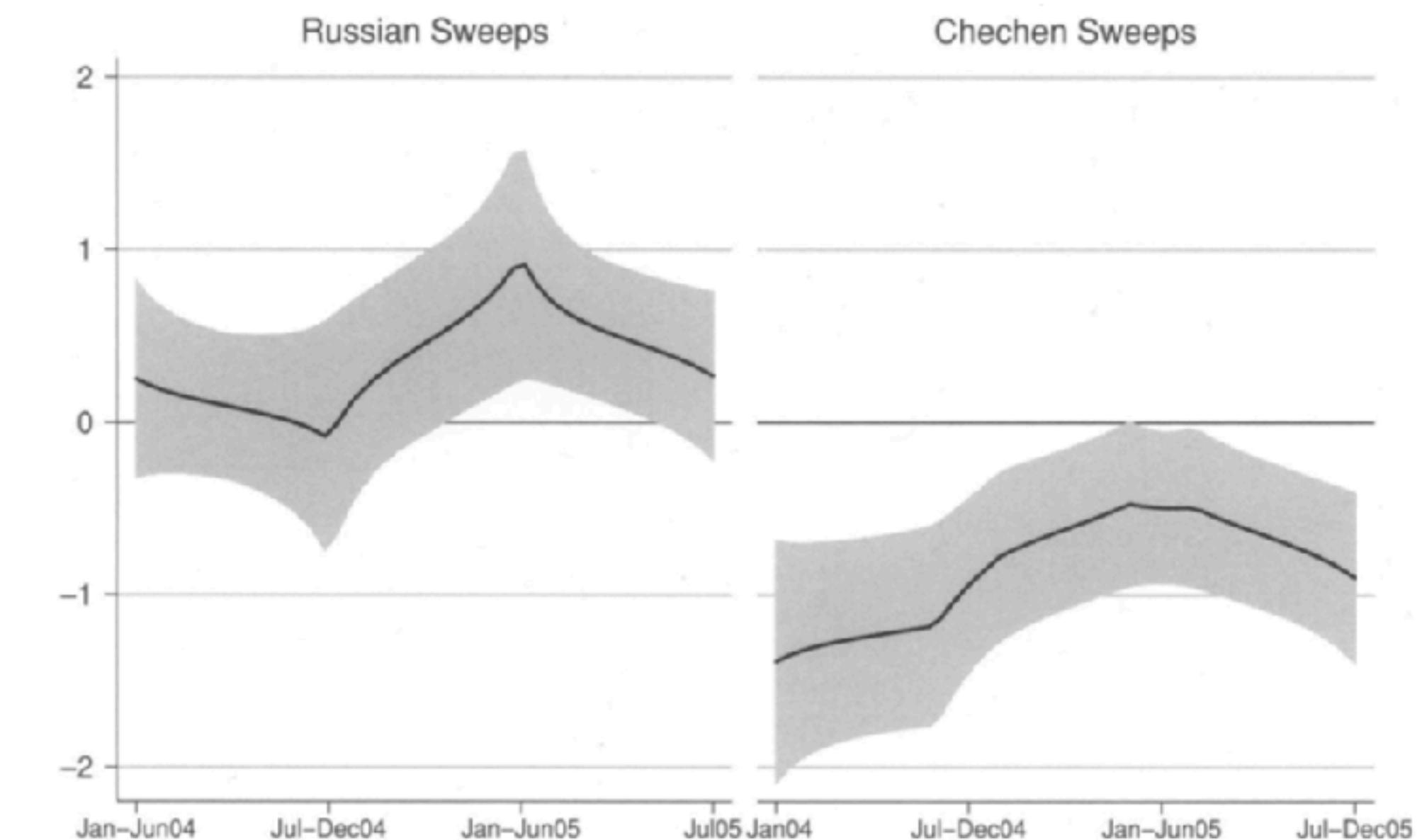
Local knowledge is key

To find a bandit, I would quietly gather information and appear at his door at two or three at night, shake his hand, and say hello. After such a visit, this bandit would disappear. With three or four more operations, everyone would be clear on everything.

—Akhmed Kadyrov, April 2002, in Politkovskaya 2003, 142

FIGURE 1. EVALUATION OF SWEEP OPERATIONS IN CHECHENIA BY VILLAGE, 2000–5

FIGURE 2. Difference in Mean Postsweep Attacks, by Sweeper Identity, 2004–5



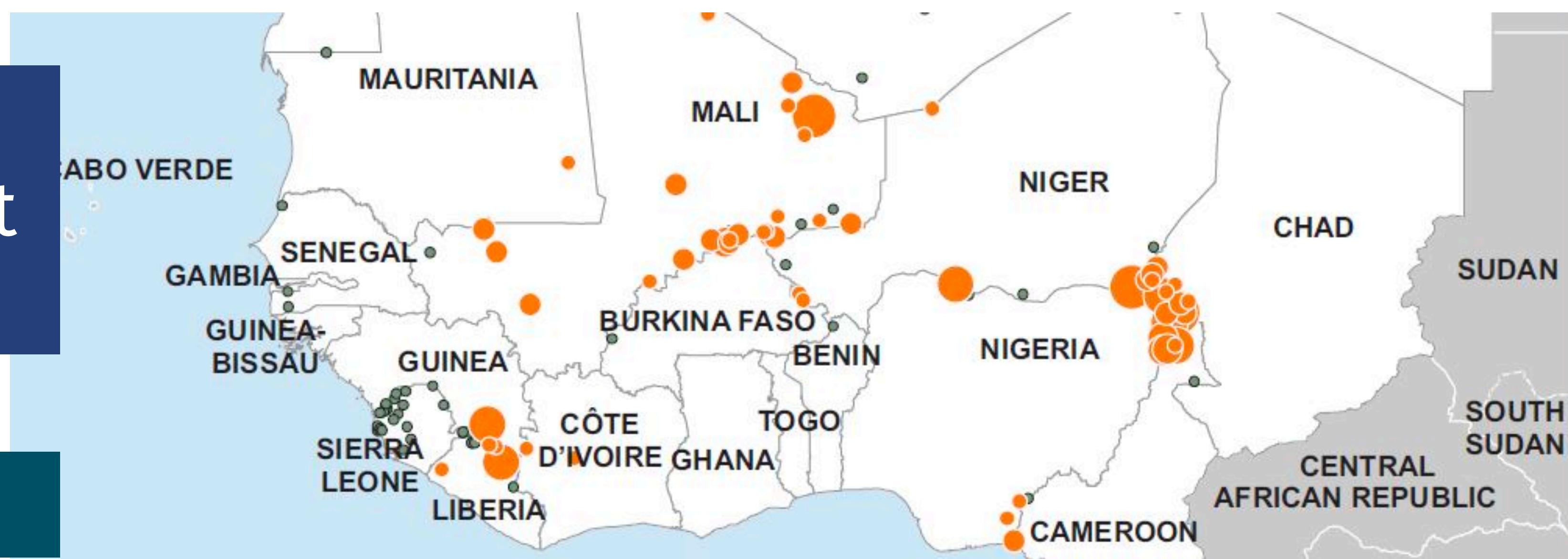
More on this later! But terrain →
legibility of population

Borders

International borders
are a frequent hotspot
for violence – why?

Spillovers

Sanctuaries

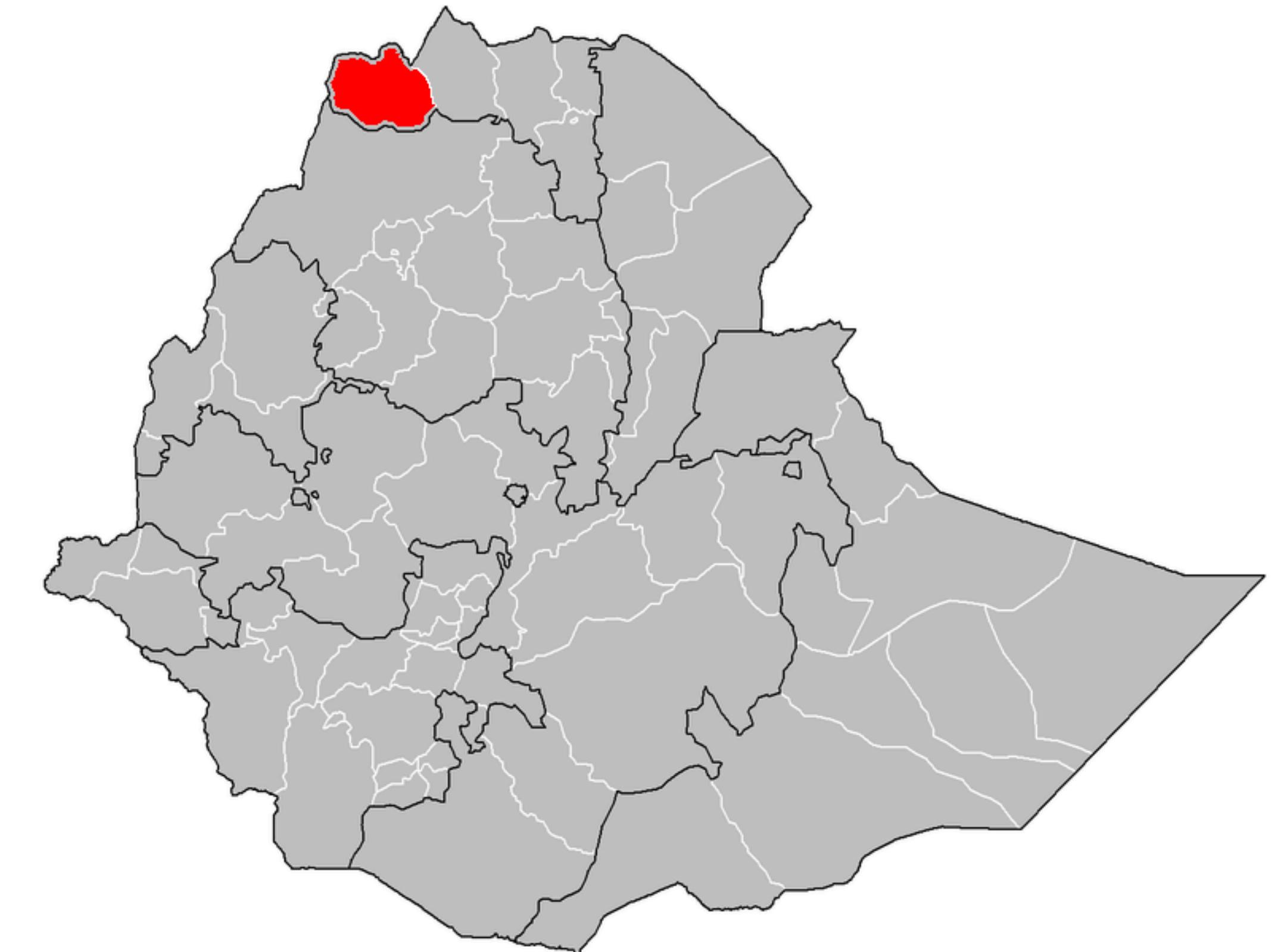


Spillovers

Fighting near borders can
“spillover” into neighboring states

Neighboring states can also take
advantage of fighting

Eritrea took a “chunk” of Ethiopia
during Tigray War



Western Tigray, Ethiopia

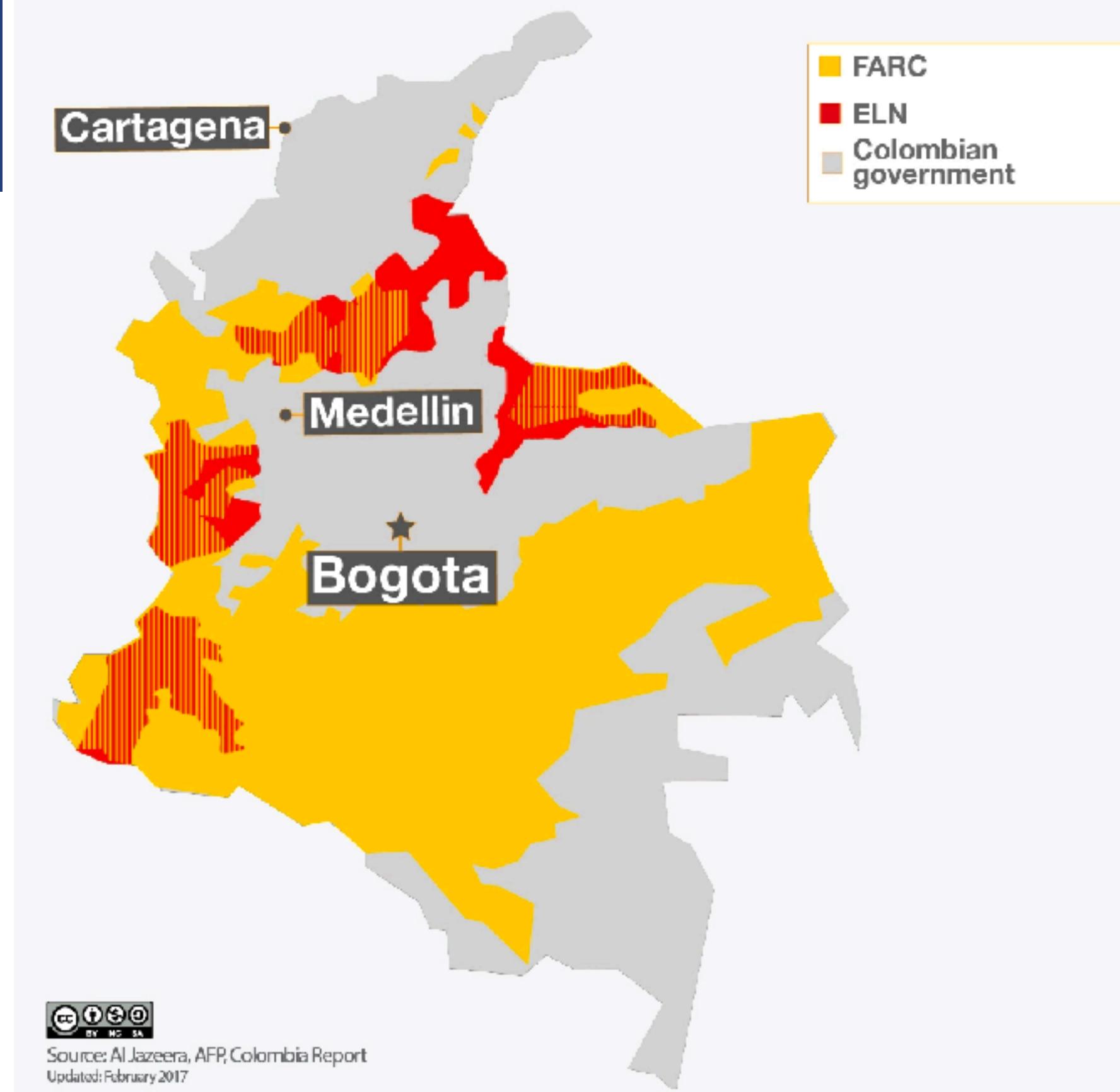
External sanctuaries

Rebel groups often have **bases abroad**
(with **and** without knowledge of “host”!)

gies employed by rebel groups to evade state repression. Extensive data collection on rebel groups since 1945 indicates that a majority (55 percent) have used external bases to some extent. This finding alone casts considerable doubt upon analyses that treat states as self-contained units of analysis, ignoring their broader regional context.

What challenge does this pose for states fighting rebels?

Colombia: Areas of influence



Operation Fenix

2008: Air strikes by Colombian military in Ecuador

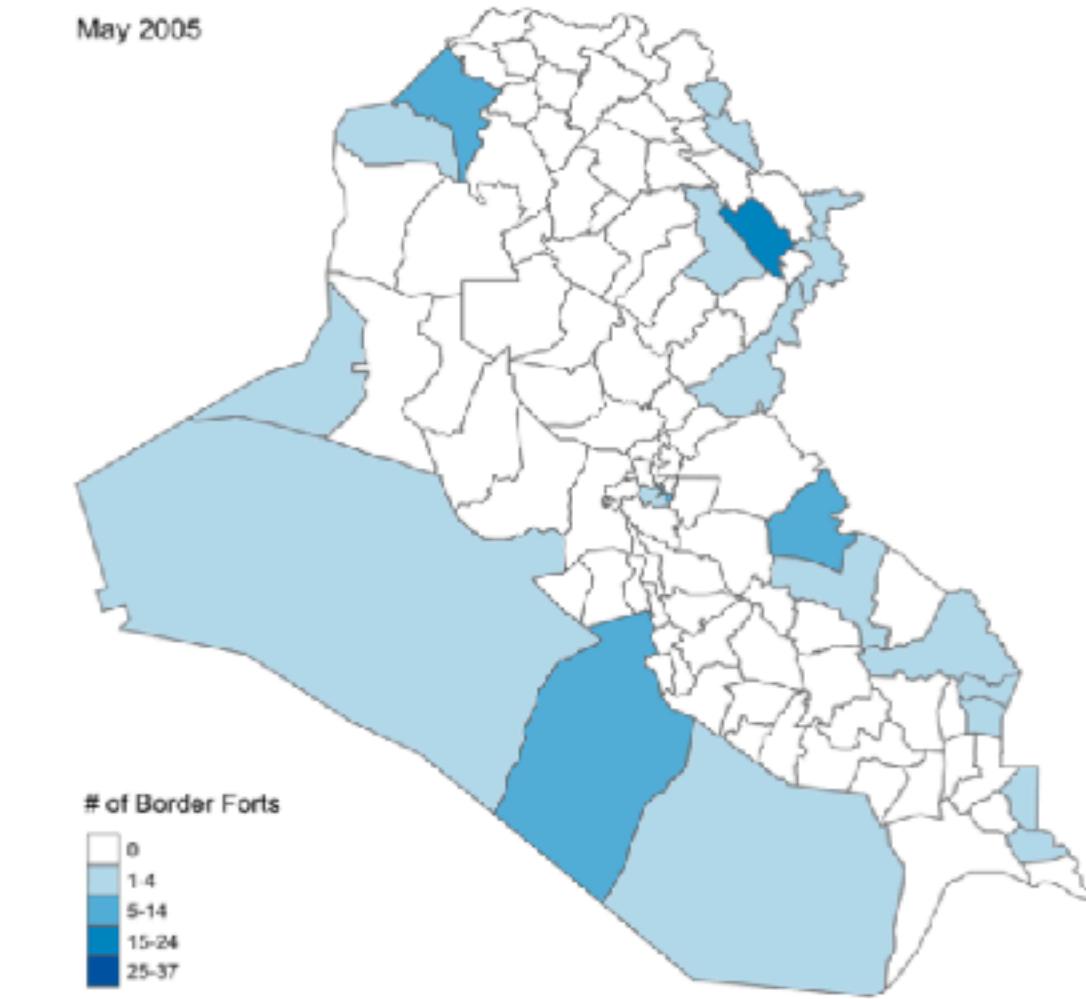
Kills second in FARC command –
but also...

Ecuadorean and Mexican citizens 😬

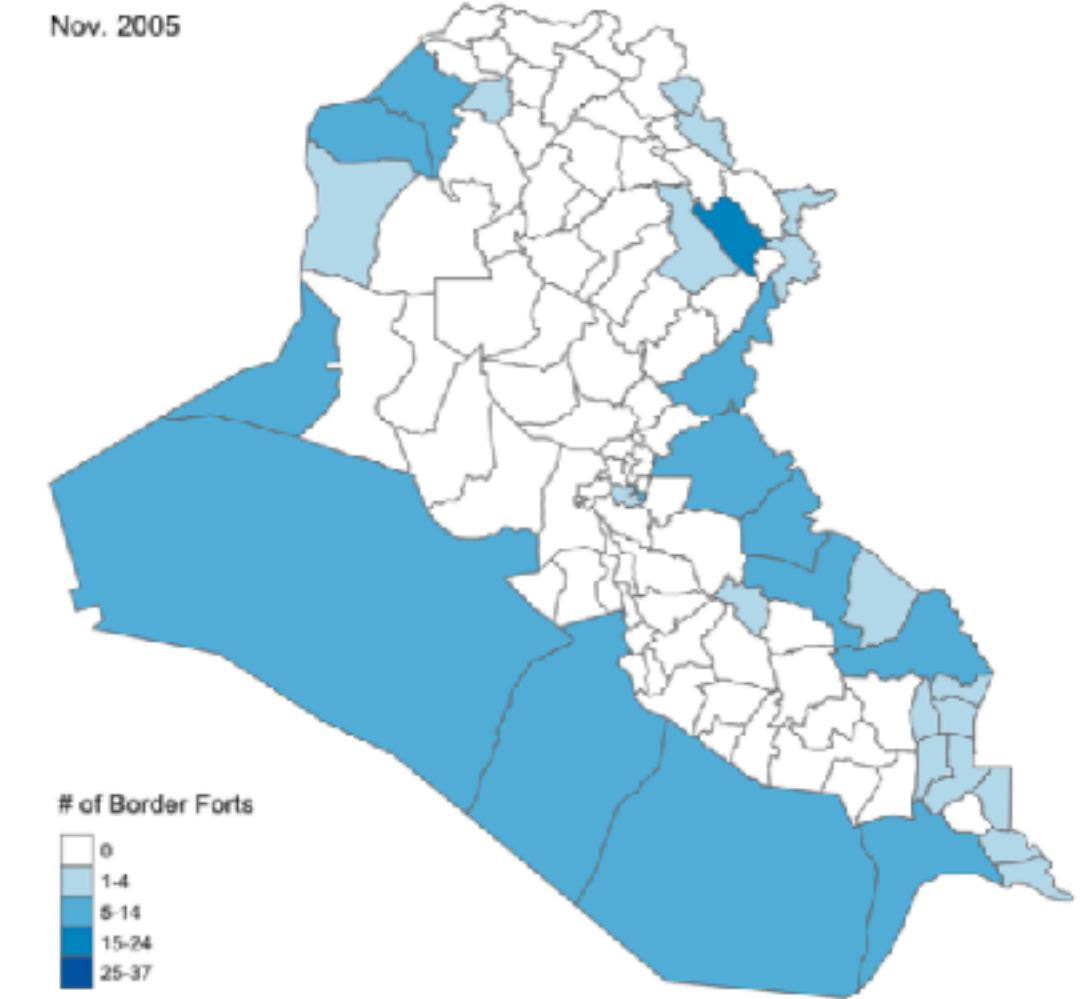


States expend considerable effort (often in vain!) on fortifying borders

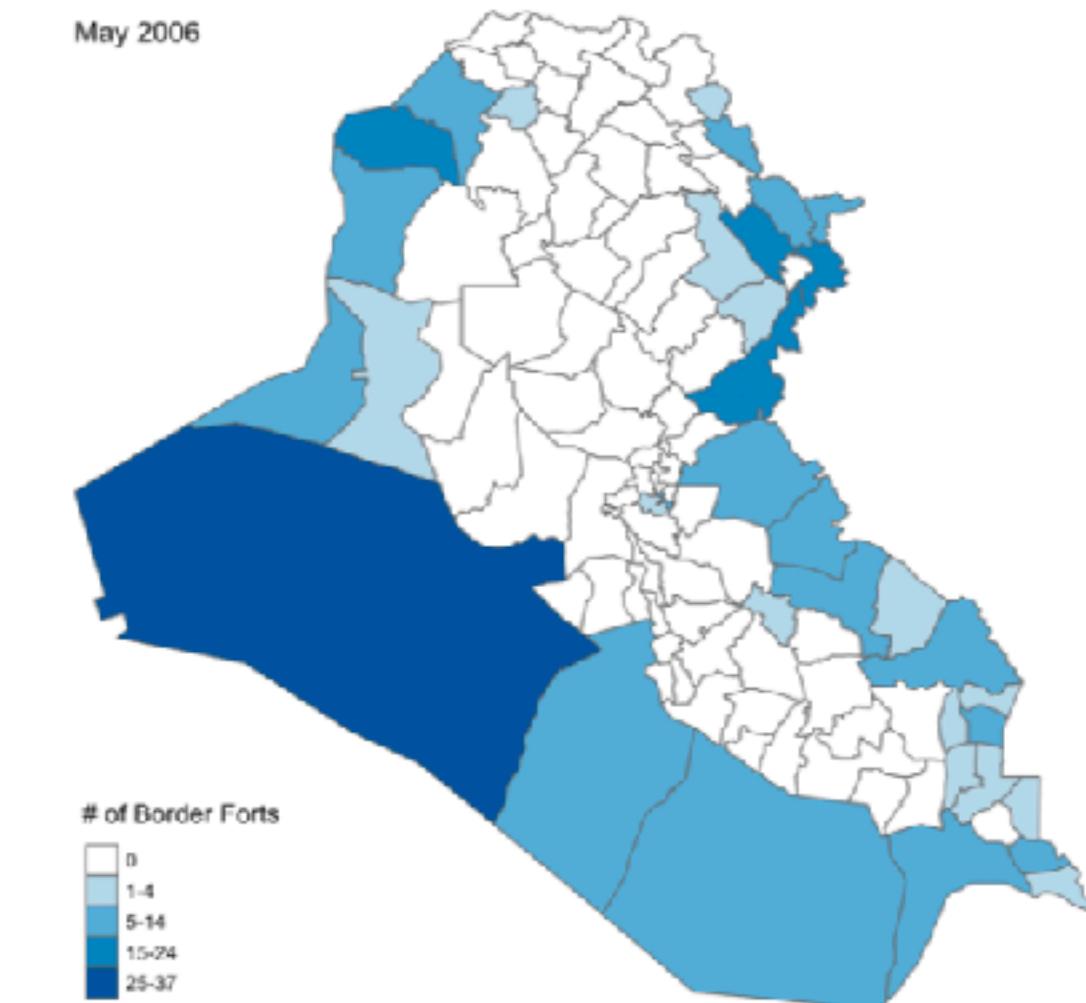
(c) Forts in May 2005



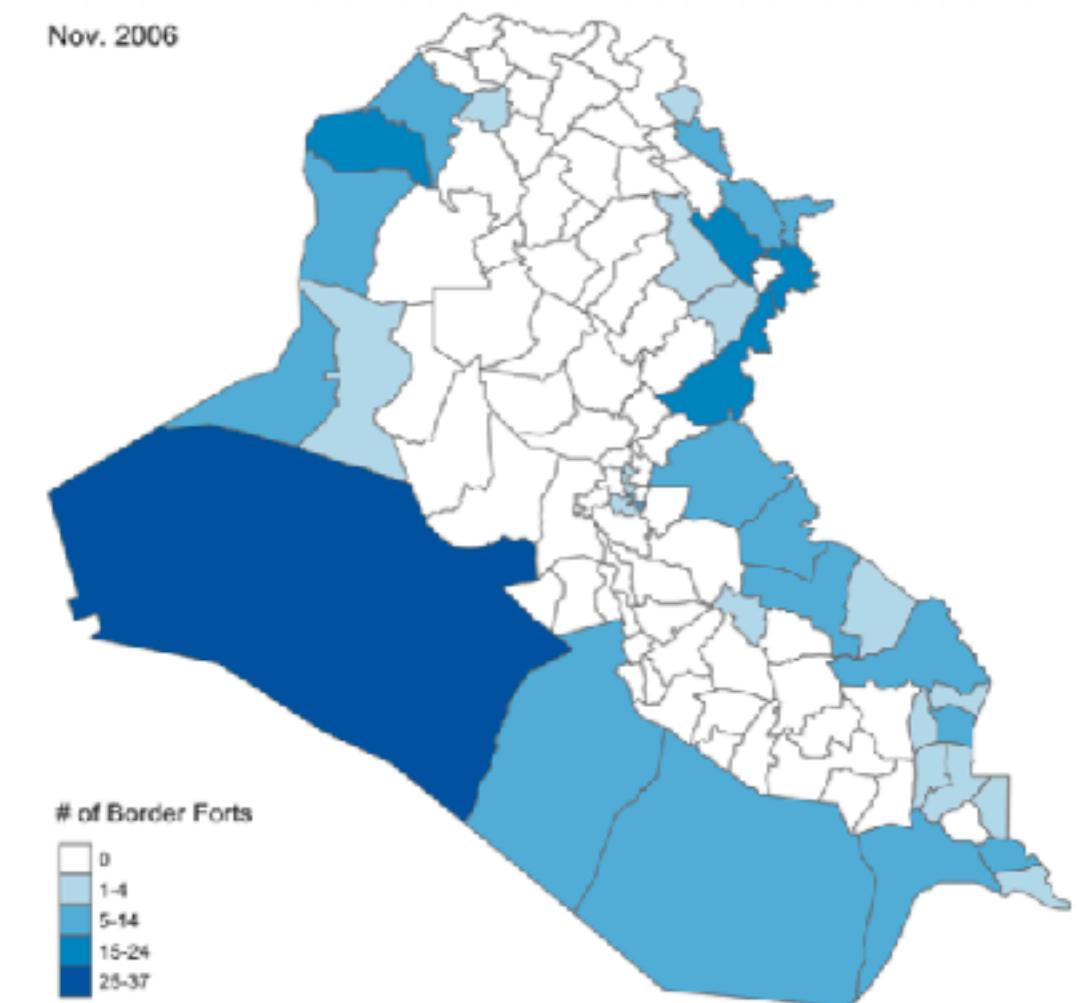
(d) Forts in November 2005



(e) Forts in May 2006



(f) Forts in November 2006



Note: Darker shades indicate more forts.

Roads

Roads (and other transport)
can also help rebellion spread

Villages linked by road –
conflict spread (Zhukov, 2012)

Road **networks** can also make
some places **strategically**
valuable – worth fighting over

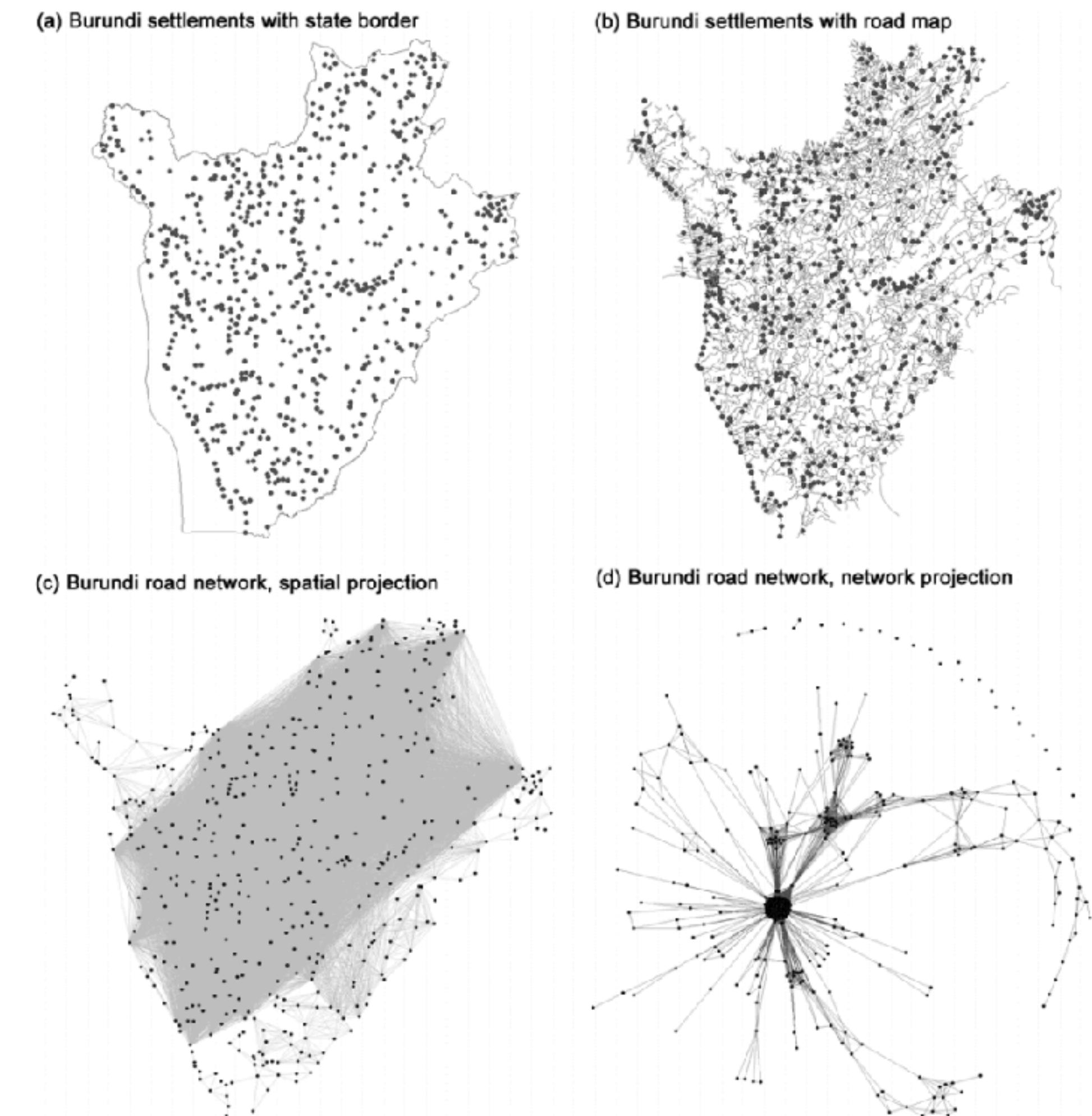
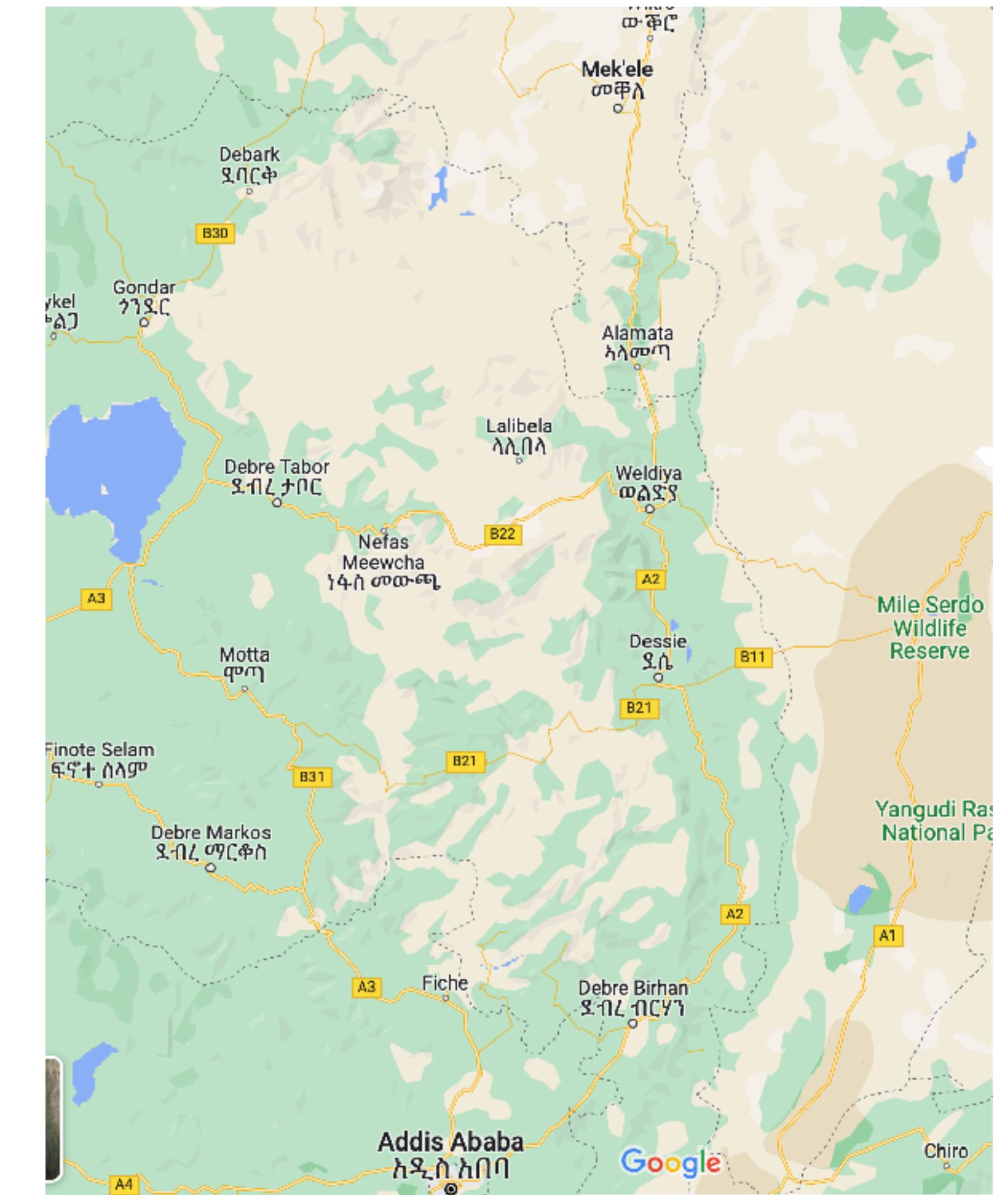


Figure 2. Spatial and network-centric representations of Burundi's population settlements

The Tigray War

Ethiopian government and Tigray rebel movement fought viciously for control of A2 highway



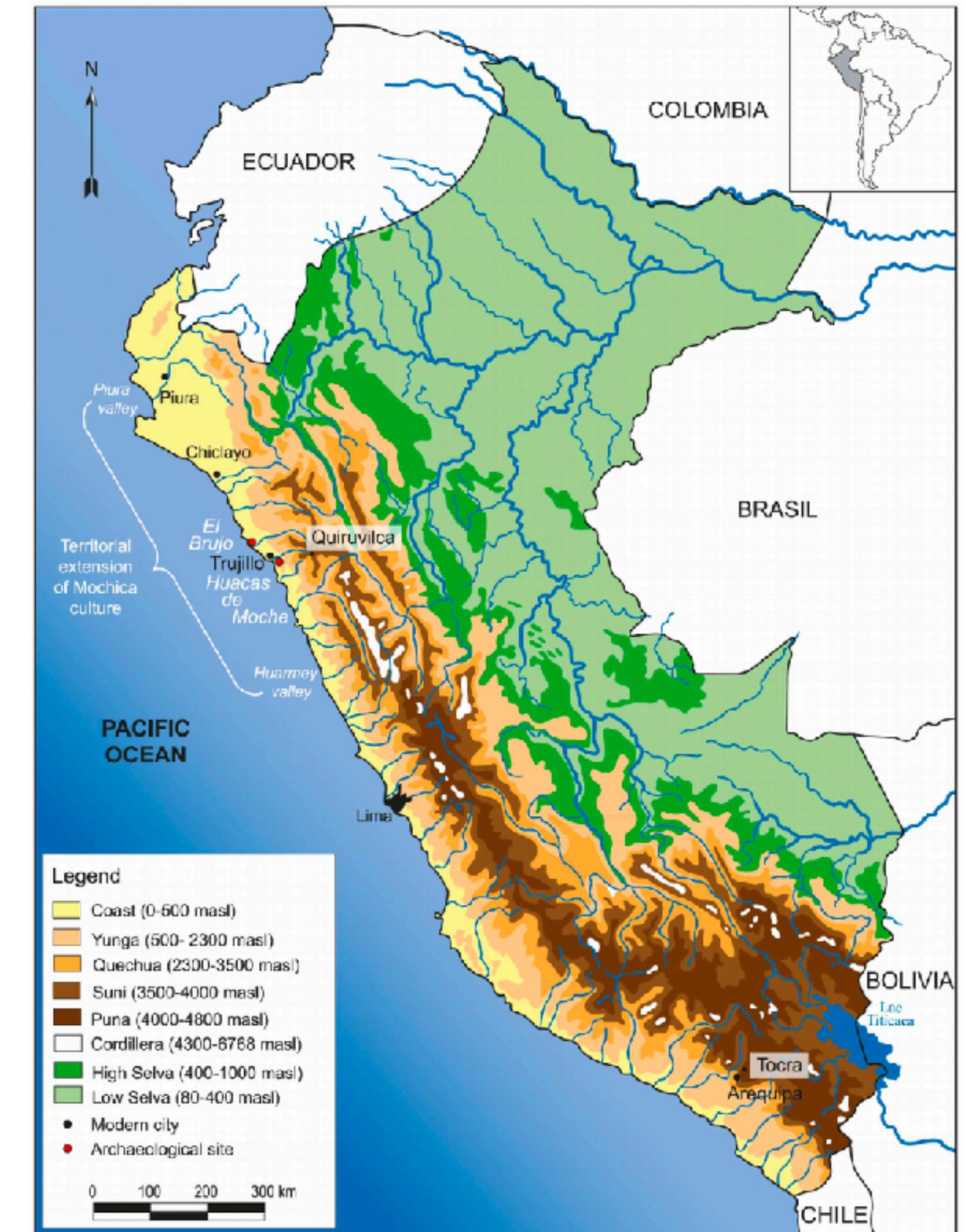
Geography and war

Geographic features (mountains, jungles, roads, borders) —> **conflict**

These are factors related to making conflict **feasible**, not **motivating** conflict... right?

Carter et al on terrain

How does Carter et al connect terrain, ethnicity, grievances and conflict?



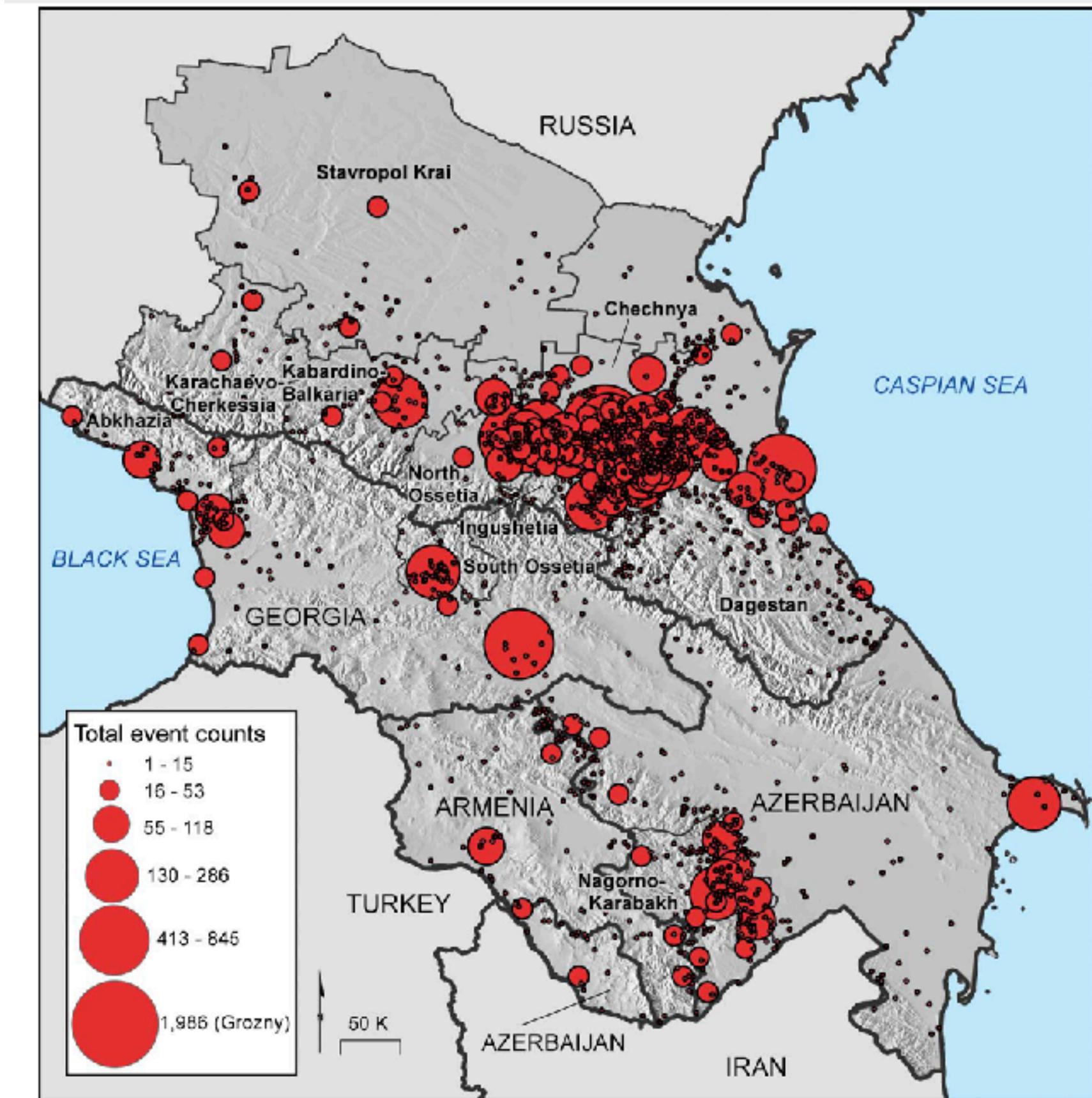
Chicken or the egg?

Mountain fighting; what does it mean?

One interpretation: feasibility

Another: grievances, marginalization

Distinct groups, exclusion



Chicken or the egg?

Border fighting; what does it mean?

One interpretation: feasibility

Another: colonialism!

Divided homelands

