

The imperfect co-production of security

*Tracing the emergence and development of community-based armed groups in
Mali & Burkina Faso between the 1990s and 2022*

Paula van Voorthuizen

6156568

Utrecht University

15 December 2022

A Thesis submitted to the Board of Examiners in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
degree of Master of Arts in Conflict Studies & Human Rights

Supervisor: François Lenfant

Date of Submission: 15 December 2022

Program Trajectory: Internship (15 ECTS) & Thesis (15 ECTS)

Word count: 15,228 words

Abstract

The year 2022 marks the tenth anniversary of violent conflict in the central Sahel, characterized by escalating and increasingly generalized violence. So-called self-defense groups are taking on a growing role in Burkina Faso's and Mali's security landscape, as both states are struggling to counter a "jihadist" insurgency. Based on a literature review complemented by several expert interviews, this thesis contextualizes the current proliferation of these groups by examining their emergence and development since the 1990s through the typology of community-based armed groups. It demonstrates that such groups in Mali and Burkina Faso have developed as co-providers of security within a hybrid governance structure, in which the state's historically limited presence in rural areas has stimulated local communities to form their own security initiatives. Community-based armed groups emerged in the 1990s among local insecurities related to insurgencies and crime, and have since transformed in line with evolving security issues. With their increasing prominence in the conflict with jihadist groups, it is crucial that security strategies in the Sahel are informed by an improved understanding of the role these groups play in the imperfect co-production of security in Mali and Burkina Faso.

Keywords: community-based armed groups; self-defense ; security; hybrid governance; Sahel; Mali; Burkina Faso

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to those who have been invaluable to the completion of this thesis.

Thank you to my supervisor François Lenfant for your continuous guidance and feedback. For knowing when to provide critical comments and when to provide words of reassurance. You have been a source of reason.

Thank you to the Sahel and West Africa team at Clingendael for an insightful internship experience, and for providing knowledge and sparring sessions when I first became interested in the topic of self-defense groups. You have been a source of motivation.

Thank you to all the experts that contributed to this research for extending your nuanced perspectives, experiences, and helpful suggestions. You have been a source of expertise.

Thank you to my classmates for sharing thoughts, ambitions, ideals and the overall experience of the MA Conflict Studies & Human Rights. You have been a source of inspiration.

Thank you to my friends and family for listening to me talk about this project for the past six months. For putting up with my passionate monologues, anxious indecisiveness, and existential crises along the way. You have been a source of encouragement.

List of Abbreviations

ANSIPRJ	Alliance Nationale pour la Sauvegarde de l'Identité Peule et la Restauration de la Justice
ASS	Alliance pour le Salut au Sahel
CBAG	Community-Based Armed Group
CDR	Comités de Défense de la Révolution
CMA	Coalition des Mouvements de l'Azawad
CMFPR	Coordination des Mouvements et Front Patriotique de Résistance
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
EU	European Union
FAMa	Forces Armées Maliennes
FPR	Front Patriotique de Résistance
GATIA	Groupe d'Autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs Alliés
IISP	Islamic State Sahel Province
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen
MNLA	Mouvement National Pour la Libération De l'Azawad
MSA	Mouvement pour le Salut de l'Azawad
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NSAG	Non-State Armed Group
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs
UN	United Nations
VDP	Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie

Map of Mali & Burkina Faso



Figure 1: Geographical visualization of political violence involving “political or communal militias” in Mali & Burkina Faso since 1997, according to data from ACLED¹

¹ “Data Export Tool,” ACLED, accessed 15 December 2022, <https://acleddata.com/data-export-tool/>

Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements	3
List of Abbreviations.....	4
Map of Mali & Burkina Faso	5
List of Figures	7
Appendices	7
Chapter 1: Introduction	8
Research Approach & Methodology	12
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	15
Community-Based Armed Groups.....	15
Hybrid Security Governance.....	18
Comparing the historical trajectories of CBAGs in Mali & Burkina Faso	20
Appendix 1: Overview of examined Community-Based Armed Groups	22
Chapter 3: Context & Origins.....	24
Communal divisions and natural resources.....	24
Colonial governance	27
Early independence	28
Chapter 4: Emergence.....	30
Mali: insurgency & counterinsurgency	30
Burkina Faso: Compaoré, crime and insecurity.....	34
Chapter conclusion	39
Chapter 5: Development & Proliferation	40
Mali: a continuum between self-defense and power?	41
Burkina Faso: from counter-crime to counterinsurgency.....	47
Chapter conclusion	53
Chapter 6: Conclusion	54
An imperfect co-production of security	56
Bibliography	58
Appendix 2: Interview list	65

List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of Mali & Burkina Faso.....	6
Figure 2: Schuberth's typology of community-based armed groups.....	18
Figure 3: Factors influencing the identity of community-based armed groups.....	19
Figure 4: The distribution of ethnic groups in Mali.....	27
Figure 5: The distribution of ethnic groups in Burkina Faso.....	27
Figure 6: The distribution of ethnic groups in the Sahel in the mid-20th century.....	28

Appendices

Appendix 1 Overview of examined Community-Based Armed Groups.....	23
Appendix 2: Interview list.....	71

Chapter 1: Introduction

The ten year anniversary of the Sahelian conflict

The year 2022 marks a decade of violent conflicts in the central Sahel countries Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, ever since the 2012 crisis in Mali. What started as a secessionist Tuareg uprising rapidly turned into a jihadist occupation of two-thirds of Mali. Since then, the conflict with jihadist groups has intertwined with existing conflicts related to governance. Despite a plethora of overlapping military interventions by France, the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and the regional G5-Sahel to combat the “jihadist threat,” both national states and international actors have been unable to establish security for the local population. In fact, violence has continuously increased and is expanding into neighboring Togo, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire and Benin.² Already bearing the brunt of the violence, civilians are progressively targeted by armed groups as well as by national armed forces. Additionally, the past two years have been marked by political backsliding, exemplified by several military coups; two in Mali, two in Burkina Faso, and an attempted coup in Niger. Moreover, rapidly deteriorating relations between Mali’s military junta and France have led to the withdrawal of French Barkhane and European Takuba troops in the second half of 2022, whilst the Malian junta has allied itself with Russian private military company Wagner Group.³

The so called “traffic jam” of security interventions in the Sahel has been further complicated by the rise of self-defense groups. Across Mali and Burkina Faso, numerous local communities have organized themselves into armed groups; the *Koglweogo* have flourished in Burkina Faso, *Dan Na Ambassagou* dominate in central Mali, while the *Dozo* exist in both countries. The dominant narrative goes that these self-defense groups arise to protect their communities because the central state has failed to do so. In Burkina Faso, the government has mobilized civilians volunteers and existing self-defense groups into a state-controlled force called the *Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie* (VDP) since January 2020. Moreover, some self-defense groups have been accused of violence against civilians and fueling conflict along ethnic

² Héni Nsaibia, Jules Duhamel, “Sahel 2021: communal wars, broken-ceasefires and shifting-frontlines,” ACLED June 17, 2021, <https://acleddata.com/2021/06/17/sahel-2021-communal-wars-broken-ceasefires-and-shifting-frontlines/>; Héni Nsaibia, “10 conflicts to worry about in 2022: the Sahel,” ACLED February 15, 2022, <https://acleddata.com/10-conflicts-to-worry-about-in-2022/sahel/>

³ Héni Nsaibia, “10 Conflicts to Worry About in 2022: The Sahel | Mid-Year Update,” ACLED, 15 August 2022, <https://acleddata.com/10-conflicts-to-worry-about-in-2022/sahel/mid-year-update/>

lines.⁴ Whether for better or for worse, they are becoming relevant forces in the Sahel conflict and must be taken into account by policy makers, humanitarian workers and analysts alike.

Although they are increasingly mentioned in policy circles and think tank reports, there is a lack of critical analysis of the self-defense groups in the Sahel. Their existence is often taken for granted, and distinctions or nuances between a wide range of groups are forgone in favor of the general term self-defense groups. It is rarely questioned how these groups arise, how they operate, the ways in which they attempt to establish order and security, and how they develop over time.

While there is considerable academic research on self-defense groups and other forms of local security across the world, it falls short when it comes to groups in the Sahel. In West Africa, self-defense movements have grown since the 1990s, and with them, the body of research.⁵ The evolving role of the traditional hunters as the *Dozo* in Côte d'Ivoire as security providers has been extensively studied,⁶ as well as the role of traditional hunters known as the *Kamajors* in Sierra Leone's civil war,⁷ and the Civilian Joint Task Force in the counterinsurgency against Boko Haram in Nigeria.⁸

Yet, self-defense groups in the Sahel remain understudied, especially in the post-2012 conflict. The current rise of jihadist insurgency, the departure of the French and the according arrival of Wagner make a comprehensive study of these groups (and how they evolve) very timely. Some groups are better documented than others; most existing academic research focuses on the *Koghlweogo*, a self-defense group in Burkina Faso that emerged in the 2000s in response to theft and highway robbery. Some of the most extensive research includes that of

⁴ Human Rights Watch, "We used to be brothers" *Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2018), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/12/07/we-used-be-brothers/self-defense-group-abuses-central-mali>; Viljar Haavik, *Self-defence militias and state sponsorship in Burkina Faso*, (Durban: ACCORD, 2022), <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/self-defence-militias-and-state-sponsorship-in-burkina-faso/>; International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence*, (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2020), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/287-burkina-faso-sortir-de-la-spirale-des-violences>; International Crisis Group. *Reversing Central Mali's Descent into Communal Violence*, (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2020), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/293-enrayer-la-communautarisation-de-la-violence-au-centre-du-mali>

⁵ Sten Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics: A comparative study of the dozos and koghlweogos self-defense movements in Burkina Faso," *African Studies Review* 62, no. 1 (2019): 174 doi:10.1017/asr.2018.52.

⁶ Some examples are: Joseph Hellweg, "Encompassing the State: Sacrifice and Security in the Hunters' Movement of Côte d'Ivoire," *Africa Today* 50, no. 4 (2004): 3–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4187608>; Thomas J. Bassett, "Containing the Donzow: The Politics of Scale in Côte d'Ivoire," *Africa Today* 50, no. 4 (2004): 31–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4187609>; Thomas J Basset, "Dangerous Pursuits: Hunter Associations (Donzo Ton) and National Politics in Côte D'Ivoire," *Africa* 73, no. 1 (2003): 1-30. doi:10.3366/afr.2003.73.1.1; Sten Hagberg and Syna Ouattara. "Vigilantes in War: Boundary Crossing of Hunters in Burkina Faso & Côte d'Ivoire." In *Domesticating Vigilantism in Africa*, edited by Thomas Kirsch and Tilo Grätz, 98-117 Oxford: James Currey, 2010.

⁷ Patrick K Muana, "The Kamajoi Militia: Civil War, Internal Displacement and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency," *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 22, no. 3/4 (1997): 77–100.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43658005>; Einar Braathen, Morten Bøås, and Gjermund Sæther, *Ethnicity Kills? The Politics of War, Peace and Ethnicity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

⁸ Daniel E. Agbiboa, "The precariousness of protection: Civilian defense groups countering Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria." *African Studies Review* 64, no. 1 (2021): 192-216. doi:10.1017/asr.2020.47

Professor in Cultural Anthropology Sten Hagberg, who has studied local security providers across the region,⁹ and has compared how the Koglweogo and the Dozo in Burkina Faso articulate themselves between local tradition and the national politics.¹⁰ Other scholarly research on the Koglweogo likewise focuses on their interactions with the state.¹¹ PhD candidate Tanguy Quidelleur appears to be the only recent scholar to research self-defense groups in both Mali and Burkina Faso.¹² Although some scholars have discussed self-defense groups in Mali, detailed analysis remains limited.¹³ Next to academic research, there are some insightful reports by think tanks and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as Dr. Antonin Tisseron's paper on militias in Burkina Faso, which examines the Koglweogo and Dozo in relation to the VDP law.¹⁴ Nevertheless, there is a lack of in-depth, systematic research and hence a lack of understanding of how the currently active groups in the region emerged, and how they evolved in light of recent events. Furthermore, most existing research is empirically-heavy, based on

⁹ Sten Hagberg, "Beyond regional radars: Security from below and the rule of law in the Sahel," *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 25, no.1. (2018): 21-37, DOI: 10.1080/10220461.2018.1417903 ; Sten Hagberg, et al. *Securite par le bas: Perceptions et perspectives citoyennes des défis de sécurité au Burkina Faso*. Uppsala University, 2019.

<http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1368559&dswid=3821>

¹⁰ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics."

¹¹ Notable papers include:

Ismaël Compaoré, and Heidi Bojsen, « Sécurité d'en bas au Burkina Faso. Koglweogo, gardiens de la brousse, gardiens de la société ? » *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 239, no. 3 (2020): 671-697, <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.4000/etudesafricaines.31833> ; Romane Da Cunha Dupuy, and William Snow, "Bureaucratizing self-defence and reframing identities: The case of Koglweogo in Burkina Faso," In *Identification and Citizenship in Africa*, pp. 279-292. Routledge, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003053293> ; Sidney Leclercq, and Geoffroy Matagne, "'With or Without You': The Governance of (Local) Security and the Koglweogo Movement in Burkina Faso," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 9, no. 1 (2020), DOI:

<http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.716> ; Melina C. Kalfelis, "With or Without the State: Moral Divergence and the Question of Trust in Security Assemblages in Burkina Faso," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15, no. 5 (2021): 598-613, DOI: [10.1080/17502977.2021.1986255](https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2021.1986255) ; Philippe M. Frowd, "The Politics of Non-State Security Provision in Burkina Faso: Koglweogo Self-Defence Groups' Ambiguous Pursuit of Recognition," *African Affairs*, 121, no. 482 (2022): 109-130, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adab033> ; Zakaria Soré, Muriel Côte, and Bouraïman Zongo. "Politisier le «vide sécuritaire»: à propos des groupes d'autodéfense koglweogo au Burkina Faso," *Politique africaine*, 3 (2021): 127-144, <https://www-cairn-info.proxy.library.uu.nl/revue-politique-africaine-2021-3-page-127.htm>

¹² Tanguy Quidelleur, *The Local Roots of Violence in Eastern Burkina Faso. Competition over resources, weapons and the State*, (Paris: Noria Research, 2020). <https://noria-research.com/the-local-roots-of-violence-burkina-faso/> ; Romane Da Cunha Dupuy, and Tanguy Quidelleur. *Self-Defence Movements in Burkina Faso: Diffusion and Structuration of Koglweogo Groups*, (Paris: Noria Research, 2018), <https://noria-research.com/self-defence-movements-in-burkina-faso-diffusion-and-structuration-of-koglweogo-groups/> ; Tanguy Quidelleur, « Courtiser l'État et traquer les djihadistes : mobilisation, dissidence et politique des chasseurs-miliciens dogons au Mali. » *Critique internationale*, 94, no. 1 (2022) : 53-75, <https://doi.org/10.3917/cii.094.0056> ; Tanguy Quidelleur, « Les dividendes de «la guerre contre le terrorisme»: milicianisation, États et interventions internationales au Mali et au Burkina Faso, » *Cultures Conflits* 125, no. 1 (2022): 115-138, <https://www-cairn-info.proxy.library.uu.nl/revue-cultures-et-conflits-2022-1-page-115.htm>

¹³ Several papers include a brief discussion of self-defense groups, but not a thorough analysis. Some noteworthy mentions are: M. A. Boisvert, "Failing at Violence: The Longer-Lasting Impact of Pro-Government Militias in Northern Mali since 2012," *African Security* 8, (2015): 272-98, doi:10.1080/19392206.2015.1100505 ; Tor A. Benjaminsen, and Boubacar Ba. "Fulani-Dogon killings in Mali: Farmer-herder conflicts as insurgency and counterinsurgency," *African Security* 14.1 (2021): 4-26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2021.1925035> ; Nicolas Desgrais, Yvan Guichaoua, and Andrew Lebovich. "Unity is the exception. Alliance formation and de-formation among armed actors in Northern Mali," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29, no. 4 (2018): 654-679. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1080/09592318.2018.1488403>

¹⁴ Antonin Tisseron, *Pandora's box. Burkina Faso, self-defense militias and VDP Law in fighting jihadism*, (Dakar: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2021), <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/fes-pscc/17590.pdf>

ethnographic fieldwork in a specific community. A handful of researchers have compared groups within Mali or Burkina Faso,¹⁵ but to date no study has compared groups across both countries. Hence, there is a need for an overarching, conceptual understanding of the different groups involved in the current conflict, and how they differ or resemble one another.

This thesis contributes to the body of research by providing a more nuanced understanding of the different groups in Mali and Burkina Faso, particularly how they have emerged and evolved over the years. Specifically, this thesis addresses the following question:

How have community-based armed groups emerged and developed in Burkina Faso and Mali between the 1990s and 2022?

The adoption of Moritz Schuberth's typology of *Community-Based Armed Groups (CBAGs)*¹⁶ enables both a comparative and historical analysis of the emergence and transformation of various groups. In contrast to other conceptualizations of self-defense groups that limit the study to militias or vigilantes, this framework incorporates several subtypes and recognizes that these groups may evolve from one type to another.

By comparing the historical trajectories of groups in Mali and Burkina Faso, certain patterns, trends and dynamics can be identified concerning their nature and characteristics. The timeframe covers the period when self-defense movements first emerged across the region, up to their present proliferation in Mali and Burkina Faso among jihadist insurgent groups. The analysis is structured accordingly into three historical stages: origins, emergence and development. Within each stage, groups are compared in order to assess how they differ or resemble each other regarding the context in which they developed, their relationship to the state, and the community in which they operate.

First follows a theoretical chapter, which positions this thesis within academic debates on the conceptualization of self-defense groups and hybrid security governance. Next, Chapter 3 provides the historical context of governance in Mali and Burkina Faso, to which the origins of CBAGs can be traced. Subsequently, Chapter 4 examines the emergence of CBAGs over the 1990s and 2000s among political conflict and liberalization, and Chapter 5 analyzes how these groups have developed in the post-2012 conflict up until the time of writing in 2022. Finally, the

¹⁵ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics." ; Tisseron *Pandora's box*. ; Rida Lyammouri, *Central Mali: Armed Community Mobilization in Crisis*, *Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.4>.

¹⁶ Moritz Schuberth, "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups: Towards a Conceptualization of Militias, Gangs, and Vigilantes," *Contemporary Security Policy*, 36 no. 2 (2015): 296-320, DOI: 10.1080/13523260.2015.1061756

conclusion composes an answer to the main research question, reflects on the contributions and limitations of the thesis and explores possible avenues for further research.

Research Approach & Methodology

This thesis pursues a developmental puzzle, aiming to delineate the evolving nature of various groups over a certain period of time. Ontologically, the research question aims to study “evolution, development, progress” and “others, collectivities, confluences, groups, movements.”¹⁷ Additionally, the comparison between two countries and between different groups gives the research a comparative element. This comparative component aligns with a positivist epistemology, in which the researcher attempts to explain social phenomena. Yet, since the primary aim is to understand how groups have developed, this research is principally interpretivist.¹⁸ The chosen analytical framework of community-based armed groups aligns with this blended epistemological nature, as it allows for the classification of several types of groups, and understanding their historical transformation.

Data collection

This research is based primarily on a literature review, complemented by several interviews with experts on local security in Mali and Burkina Faso. Considering the relative lack of research on these groups, the interviews served to triangulate the data found in the literature by providing insights from experts with fieldwork experience and/or knowledge of security on the ground.

The examined groups, literature and interviewees were strategically sampled. The number of samples is therefore not meant to be statistically representative. Instead, sources were selected for exhibiting specific characteristics deemed significant for the study.¹⁹ The original plan was to compare groups in the three central Sahel states currently affected by conflict: Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. I first inventoried all the self-defense groups currently active in the three countries, so that I could strategically select which ones to study. This selection was based on the three following criteria, informed by my analytical framework: 1) the groups were active in the chosen timeframe for comparison; 2) the groups could be considered a community-based armed group 3) there was sufficient research available on the group. Based on these criteria, I decided to exclude Niger from my research simply because there was little to be found. Unlike Mali and Burkina Faso, CBAGs barely exist in Niger, partially because the

¹⁷ Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 2017), 5.

¹⁸ Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 8-12.

¹⁹ Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 57-61.

Nigerien state has long suppressed them to prevent alternative centers of power at the local level.²⁰ Hence, comparing groups in Mali and Burkina Faso was more feasible. The data collection process started based on an initial sample of CBAGs, but remained open to changes as the presence of new groups could be revealed to me throughout the process. The decision to focus on historical trajectories was based on the analytical framework as well as practical considerations, as the lack of inside perspectives on most groups made it difficult to analyze internal dynamics or their impact on the community.

The reviewed literature was selected based on significance to the topic of self-defense groups and security governance in Mali and Burkina Faso. The 55 reviewed articles were a combination of academic papers, NGO reports and think tank analyses, found through google and google scholar. Academic papers included scholars from disciplines such as anthropology, history and political science, and non-academic articles included think tanks such as Clingendael, International Crisis Group, African Security Sector Network, Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung and Resolve Network, and the NGOs Human Rights Watch and Saferworld. Although some of the authors are from the Sahel, the majority comes from the Global North.

Likewise, the interviewees were selected for their expertise on local security groups in Burkina Faso and Mali. A total of 30 experts were contacted, including academic scholars, and analysts at think tanks and NGOs, both from the region as well as international. This resulted in 8 online interviews held in English, as well as 2 interviews in French through email contact. The interviews were conducted online through Microsoft Teams or Zoom and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. They followed a semi-structured format, with several questions prepared beforehand and room to elaborate or explore other topics, depending on the expertise of the interviewee. With the consent of the interviewee, most of the interviewees were recorded and transcribed, and for others only notes were taken.

There are limitations to this research strategy. The interviews were conducted in English, as my French is not sufficient for interviewing. This limited access to local, French-speaking experts. Consequently, the majority of interviewees come from the global North. Although knowledgeable, their insights are inevitably biased. Furthermore, the remotely collected literature and interviews provide a limited understanding of these groups. The

²⁰ For a more extensive comparison of self-defense groups in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, see: Kars de Bruijne, and Paula van Voorthuizen, *Self-defence Groups, Politics and the Sahelian state*, (The Hague: Clingendael, 2022), <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/self-defence-groups-politics-and-sahelian-state> ; Ornella Moderan, *Proliferation of Armed Non-State Actors in the Sahel: Evidence of State Failure?* (Milan: ISPI, 2021), <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/proliferation-armed-non-state-actors-sahel-evidence-state-failure-29329> ; Saferworld, *How not to lose the Sahel: Community perspectives on insecurity and international interventions in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso*, (London: Saferworld, 2022), 14, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1385-how-not-to-lose-the-sahel-community-perspectives-on-insecurity-and-international-interventions-in-mali-niger-and-burkina-faso>

situation on the ground is complex and constantly changing, and the particular nature of each group is highly localized and contingent on the community in which they operate. Fieldwork in Mali and Burkina Faso would have provided more local and in-depth insights, but this was not possible due to the limited scope of the thesis and significant security risks. Hence, the aim of this thesis is not to understand the groups to this local level of detail.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Conceptualizing self-defense

This thesis examines how local communities have formed and operated as armed groups in Mali and Burkina Faso since the 1990s. I study this empirical phenomenon through the analytical lens of community-based armed groups (CBAGs). This chapter outlines the components of this analytical framework and situates it within academic debates on the conceptualization of local security through self-defense and the broader literature on hybrid governance.

Community-Based Armed Groups

In order to systematically analyze these so-called self-defense groups, it is necessary to clarify some concepts and definitions. However, when reviewing literature on self-defense groups, one is initially puzzled by the many different terms used to conceptualize them: *militias*²¹, *vigilantes*²², *non-state security actors*²³, *local security initiatives*,²⁴ *community-based armed groups*²⁵ and *civilian defense groups*²⁶ all appear in existing literature. Other scholars forgo conceptualization completely and simply use the term self-defense groups.²⁷ Yet, these different terms are often used interchangeably without a clear definition. Many scholars prefer an extensive empirical description of their case studies over a well-defined concept, which results in overlap in analytical literature on militias and vigilantes.²⁸ This conceptual ambiguity may be partially because the dynamic and multidimensional nature of these groups defies a single categorization, and instead fluctuates between different categories of security actors.⁹

This issue is exactly the subject of Moritz Schuberth's 2015 article "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups: Towards a Conceptualization of Militias, Gangs, and

²¹ Haavik, *Self-defence Militias and State Sponsorship in Burkina Faso*; Tisseron, *Pandora's box*.

²² Frowd, "The Politics of Non-State Security Provision."; Kalfelis, "With or Without the State."

²³ Kasper Hoffmann, Louise Wiuff Moe, Eric Hahonou, and Lotte Pelckmans. *Protection and (in) security beyond state: Insights from Eastern Africa and Sahel*. (Copenhagen: DIIS, 2015), <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/120396>

²⁴ Leclercq and Matagne, "With or Without You,"

²⁵ Lauren Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups*, (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.3>; Lyammouri, "Central Mali."

²⁶ Agbiboa, "The precariousness of protection."

²⁷ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics."; Compaoré and Bojsen, « Sécurité d'en bas au Burkina Faso. »; Soré, Cote, Zongo « Politiser le 'Vide Sécuritaire' ».

²⁸ Frowd, "The Politics of Non-State Security Provision," 110.; Eduardo Moncada, "Varieties of vigilantism: Conceptual discord, meaning and strategies," *Global Crime* 18, no. 4 (2017): 403-423. DOI: 10.1080/17440572.2017.1374183; Regina Bateson, "The politics of vigilantism," *Comparative Political Studies* 54, no. 6 (2021): 923-955. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020957692>; Schuberth, "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups," 306.

Vigilantes.”²⁹ He argues that there is a lack of understanding of how such groups tend to transform over the course of their existence, and thus proposes a typology that includes transformed counterparts.³⁰ **Community-based armed groups (CBAGs)** can be seen as a sub-type of the category *non-state armed-groups (NSAGs)*, characterized by their relations to the state and host community, their fluidity and the ways in which they exercise power.³¹ According to Schubert, the literature on NSAGs includes between five and eight different types of actors, among which criminals, warlords, terrorists, insurgents, and mercenaries. In order to avoid analytical inconsistencies, Schubert instead proposes the term community-based armed groups. This term avoids the misleading state/non-state dichotomy, as CBAGs are in reality often related to, intertwined with or even created by the state, whilst usually not formally recognized or regulated by law. This means that formal actors such as private security or military companies are excluded from the CBAG framework. The CBAG category also excludes politically motivated groups such as insurgents or religious extremists,³² whose primary aim is to further their political or ideological cause and take over the state. Although CBAGs may be “pulled into the political sphere” by political entrepreneurs, this is not their primary objective.³³ Most importantly, CBAGs are characterized by their embeddedness in their community, whether defined by territory, blood ties or a shared identity.³⁴

Within community-based armed groups, Schubert distinguishes between three ideal types according to a predominant security, political³⁵ or economic dimension. **Vigilantes** operate primarily to provide security to their communities, whilst **militias** work on behalf of political sponsors, and **gangs** engage in criminal activities mainly in pursuit of economic self-interests.³⁶ Within each ideal type, Schubert also distinguishes between two subtypes: vigilantes may take the form of *crime-control groups* or *self-defense groups*; militias may be either *popular* or *ethnic*; and there may be *youth gangs* or *criminal gangs*. These basic ideal types may over time turn into transformed types, which operate on a much larger scale and tend to combine strong characteristics of all three dimensions.

²⁹ Schubert, “The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups.”

³⁰ Schubert, “The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups,” 297.

³¹ Van Metre, “From Self-Defense to Vigilantism,” 8.

³² Since the War on Terror, “terrorism” has become the dominant term to refer to acts of terror by religious extremists, specifically militant jihadist groups. However, terrorism is “above all a tool or, if you will, a technique [that] is as old as warfare itself” that any armed group may use in order to create fear among a larger audience. Schubert, “The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups,” 299.

³³ Schubert, “The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups,” 298.

³⁴ Schubert, “The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups,” 298-300.

³⁵ NB: Political not in the sense that groups have political ambition to challenge the national state, but rather that they operate on behalf of political entrepreneurs.

³⁶ Schubert, “The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups,” 301.; Moritz Schubert *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: lessons learned & measures of success*, (Washington D.C.:RESOLVE network, 2019), <https://www.resolve.net.org/research/approaching-community-based-armed-groups-sub-saharan-africa-lessons-learned-measures>

Each ideal type – vigilantes, militias, gangs – is typically discussed in different policy debates and analyzed through different explanatory frames. Vigilantes are generally studied through the lens of state failure and ungoverned spaces; militias are explored through the lens new wars and patronage; gangs are studied from the perspective of criminality an delinquency in greed-grievance debates.³⁷ Yet, Schubert emphasizes the dynamic and fluid nature of these groups by noting that groups may shift between these different types over time. Apart from developing into a transformed type, groups can also transform into another ideal type, or have aspects of several ideal types by engaging with multiple dimensions. The ideal types are after all, ideal, and in reality the boundaries between them are blurred. According to Schubert, CBAGs have a tendency to "turn bad."³⁸ Many well-intentioned crime-control or self-defense groups end up as criminal gangs or hired thugs for political entrepreneurs, and in their transformed type they may threaten the security and integrity of the state. In the end, the very civilians who the CBAGs pledged to protect, are often the ones who suffer the most.³⁹

Figure 2: Schubert's typology of CBAGs⁴⁰

Dimension	Ideal type	=> Transformed Type
Security	Vigilantes - Crime-control groups - Self-defense groups	=> Para-state
Political	Militias - Ethnic militias - Popular militias	=> Warlord state
Economic	Gangs - Youth gang - Criminal gang	=> Criminal fiefdom

Building on Schubert's typology, Lauren van Metre explores links between internal functions that characterize CBAGs (leadership structure, group discipline and recruitment), and external factors that drive their transformations from one type to another (state-community relations, resources, social norms, threats, international actors).⁴¹ Like Schubert, van Metre emphasizes the fluidity of CBAG identity, as shifts in external factors may lead CBAGs to transform their internal organization and operations.⁴² She presents a dynamic model through which the transformation of CBAG identity can be interpreted along shifts in the external

³⁷ Schubert, "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups," 301.

³⁸ Schubert, "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups," 303; 311-312.

³⁹ Schubert, "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups," 312.

⁴⁰ Schubert, "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups," 300-302.; Schubert, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups*, 7.

⁴¹ van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*.

⁴² van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 8-9.

environment and according internal organization and practices.⁴³ According to van Metre, the two key factors that define CBAG identity are external in terms of state-community relations, and internal as to how the group exercises power through violence. Considering the broad chronological and geographical scope, this thesis will focus on the key factor state-community relations to structure the analysis of the groups' historical trajectories.

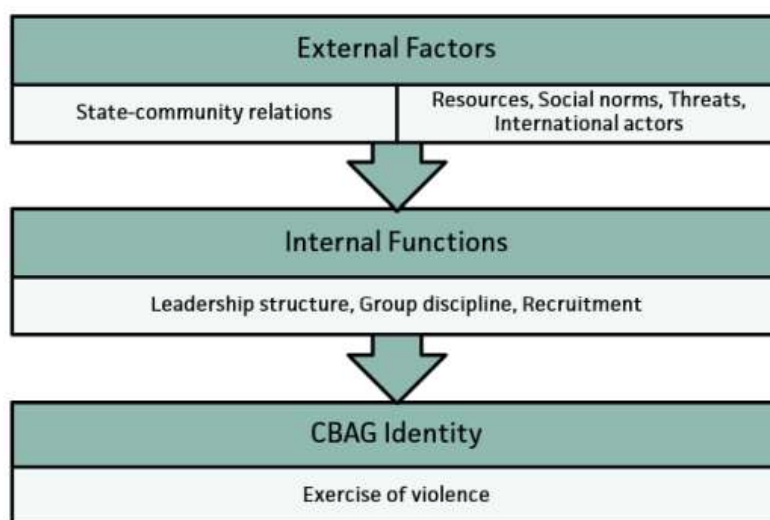


Figure 3: factors influencing the identity of community-based armed groups⁴⁴

Hybrid Security Governance

Whereas scholars debate on the appropriate conceptualization of local security or self-defense phenomena, there is a general consensus that such initiatives emerge in a context of (perceived) state absence. More precisely, the sense that the central state has failed to provide basic services to significant parts of the population, particularly security and safety.⁴⁵ When the state does not (sufficiently) provide security or safety to local populations, communities organize their own security provision by forming armed groups, which may take different forms (vigilantes, militias, gangs) according to the challenges the communities face. Yet, these groups do not exist in a complete security vacuum, but remain related to “the ideas and structures of the state.”⁴⁶ The forms and extent of the engagement with the state varies wildly, from active opposition, tacit approval, open support, to direct control.

⁴³ van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 4-5.

⁴⁴ van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 15.

⁴⁵ Hagberg, “Performing tradition while doing politics.” ; Daniel Agbiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.2>.

⁴⁶ Agbiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance*, 7 ; Leclercq and Matagne, “With or Without You,” 7.

This coexistence of and interaction between state and non-state – or formal and informal – providers of security has been conceptualized as **hybrid security governance**.⁴⁷ This concept is part of a growing body of literature that argues that governance is contested and constructed, also known as *negotiated statehood*,⁴⁸ *twilight institutions*,⁴⁹ *mediated state*,⁵⁰ *real governance*,⁵¹ *hybrid political orders*,⁵² and *simultaneity of authority*.⁵³ These scholars challenge the notion of the Weberian state with a monopoly on violence, and the accompanied discourse of the “failed state” and “ungoverned spaces” that dominated international relations thinking in the 1990s and 2000s. The pathological conception of a failing, fragile or weak state fails to reflect the realities in African countries, where “state authority and hence security is not only exercised but also contested by a vast array of different actors.”⁵⁴ Likewise, the idea of ungoverned spaces obscures a power struggle between a range of actors that compete over governance functions and practices.⁵⁵

From a hybrid governance perspective, security is therefore a field of political contestation. Rather than a security vacuum, there is an overflow of actors – local and national – competing with each other to enforce their version of security.⁵⁶ Here it is important to note the contested meaning of the concept *security*. According to Luckham and Kirk, security has two faces: 1) from the supply side, security is a “process of political and social ordering established and maintained through authoritative discourses and practices of power”; 2) from the demand side, “an entitlement of citizens and more widely human beings to protection from violence” and the ensurance of safety, livelihood and welfare.⁵⁷ Within international relations, the focus has traditionally been on the supply side, with security discussed from a state-centered approach. In recent decades however, there has been growing attention for the demand-side,

⁴⁷ Niagale Bagayoko, Eboe Hutchful, and Robin Luckham, "Hybrid security governance in Africa: rethinking the foundations of security, justice and legitimate public authority," *Conflict, Security & Development* 16, no. 1 (2016): 1-32, DOI: 10.1080/14678802.2016.1136137

⁴⁸ Tobias Hagmann, and Didier Péclard. "Negotiating statehood: dynamics of power and domination in Africa," *Development and change* 41, no. 4 (2010): 539-562. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01656.x>

⁴⁹ Christian Lund, "Twilight institutions: public authority and local politics in Africa," *Development and change* 37, no.4 (2006): 685-705. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2006.00497.x>

⁵⁰ Ken Menkhaus, "Governance without government in Somalia: Spoilers, state building, and the politics of coping," *International security* 31, no.3 (2006): 74-106. <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2007.31.3.74>

⁵¹ Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, "Researching the practical norms of real governance in Africa," *Africa, Power and Politics* Programme Discussion Paper 5 (2008).

⁵² Volker Boege, M. Anne Brown, and Kevin P. Clements. "Hybrid political orders, not fragile states." *Peace Review* 21, no.1 (2009): 13-21. DOI: 10.1080/10402650802689997

⁵³ Peter Albrecht, and Louise Wiuff Moe. "The simultaneity of authority in hybrid orders," *Peacebuilding* 3, no.1 (2015): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2014.928551>

⁵⁴ Bagayoko, Hutchful, Luckham, "Hybrid Security governance," 2.

⁵⁵ Soré, Cote, Zongo « Politiser le 'Vide Sécuritaire'. » ; Bagayoko, Hutchful, Luckham, "Hybrid Security governance," 2 ; Schuberth, "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups," 303-304.

⁵⁶ Soré, Cote, Zongo « Politiser le 'Vide Sécuritaire'. »

⁵⁷ R Luckham and T Kirk, "The Two Faces of Security in Hybrid Political Orders: A Framework for Analysis and Research," *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 22, no 44 (2013): 5, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.cf>; Bagayoko, Hutchful, Luckham, "Hybrid Security governance," 7.

characterized as human security or “security from below.”⁵⁸ Hybrid security governance addresses the interface between these two dimensions of security.

Bagayoko, Hutchful and Luckham identify four key sets of issues within hybrid security governance for research and policy to pursue, including the role of non-state or informal actors in security provision “beyond the confines of the state.”⁵⁹ This thesis is therefore embedded within a hybrid governance approach that recognizes the “roles and responsibilities of CBAGs as co-providers of security and justice” whilst avoiding romanticized notions of these local actors as “the panacea to Africa’s security challenges.”⁶⁰

Comparing the historical trajectories of CBAGs in Mali & Burkina Faso

The CBAG typology accounts for the dynamic and evolving nature of these groups. It provides a framework to analyze and compare the evolving characteristics of different groups over time, without locking them into a fixed category. Since the CBAG framework incorporates the concepts vigilantes and militias, this thesis will include both and explore the differences and similarities between them.

Moreover, adopting CBAGs as analytic lens means that I exclude insurgent armed groups, such as the secessionist Tuareg *Mouvement National Pour la Liberation De l’Azawad* (MNLA), and the jihadist *Jama’at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen* (JNIM) and *Islamic State Sahel Province* (ISSP). Although the jihadist group *Katiba Macina* is entrenched within Fulani communities across central Mali, its incorporation into JNIM and ideological-political motivation to establish an alternative political system set it apart from groups whose objectives remain confined to their community. Furthermore, although the CBAG typology also incorporates economically-motivated gangs, I do not include this type of CBAG in my analysis due to the limited scope of this thesis. Although the network of armed groups in the Sahel engaged in criminal activities such as trafficking or gold mining are certainly an interesting object of analysis, this is somewhat distinct from the overlapping literature on militias and vigilantes related to security provision. To retain some analytical depth, I therefore narrow my analysis to the militia and vigilante subtypes within the CBAG framework.

Finally, I recognize that these concepts are politically sensitive, which means that community-based armed groups may still be framed as terrorists as a way to undermine their legitimacy. This political contestation is also why I prefer CBAG to the term self-defense groups (*groupes d’autodéfense*), even though it is widely used in Burkina Faso and Mali. Many of these

⁵⁸ Bagayoko, Hutchful, Luckham, “Hybrid Security governance,” 7-8. Hagberg, “Beyond regional radars.”

⁵⁹ Bagayoko, Hutchful, Luckham, “Hybrid Security governance,” 9.?

⁶⁰ Agbiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance*, p7

groups justify their actions in the name of self-defense, even if they are committing violence against innocent civilians. Hence, from this point onwards, I describe these groups as community-based armed groups or CBAGs.

In brief, this thesis employs the community-based armed groups framework, and specifically the key factors identified by van Metre – their relationship with the state and their host community⁶¹ – to outline and compare the historical trajectories of various groups in Mali and Burkina Faso.

⁶¹ Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 8.

Appendix 1: Overview of examined Community-Based Armed Groups

Group	Area	Development	Objective	State relations	Community relations
Ganda Koy	North Mali	Created in 1994 during the Tuareg insurgency. Remobilized in 2011, expanded operations together with Ganda Iso during the 2012 insurgency. Demobilized after 2013, continuing as local security actor for communities. Political dimension through integration into CMPFR and Plateforme since 2014.	Protect (the interests of) Songhai and other sedentary communities, originally from Tuareg & Arab attacks.	Supported with arms, funds and training by Malian state to counter Tuareg insurgency in the 1990s and 2012. First leader was a former colonel.	Embedded in Songhai communities, but also supported by Fulani, Bozo, Bella communities. Temporarily expanded recruitment beyond local communities during 2012, but remained focused on protecting their community, both through local security and national political peace process. Little information on community-level perceptions.
Ganda Iso	North Mali	Created in 2008 during Tuareg insurgency. Remobilized in 2011, expanded operations together with Ganda Koy during 2012. Demobilized after 2013, continuing as local security actor for communities. Political dimension through integration into CMPFR and Plateforme since 2014.	Protect (the interests of) Fulani and other sedentary communities, originally from Tuareg & Arab attacks.	Supported with arms, funds and training by Malian state to counter Tuareg insurgency in the 2000s and 2012.	Embedded in particular Fulani communities, including former members of Ganda Koy. Temporarily expanded recruitment beyond local communities during 2012 insurgency, but remained focused on protecting their community, both through local security and national political peace process. Little information on community-level perceptions.
GATIA	North Mali	Created in 2014 after a defeat of the FAMa by Tuareg insurgents. Initially engaged in violent conflict against the CMA, but later shifted focus on fight against jihadist groups. Allied with MSA in 2016, conducted joint operations with MSA, FAMa, Barkhane and the Nigerien state during 2017-2018. Political dimension as part of the Plateforme.	Protect the (interests of) Imghad-Tuareg community, primarily against the dominance of Ifoghas-Tuareg, but also against jihadist groups.	Supported with arms, funds and training by Malian state to counter the CMA, and later jihadist groups. Deeply intertwined with the state: leader is a Malian General, core members are deserted soldiers.	Embedded in the Imghad-Tuareg community around Kidal and Gao, who have grievances against the historically dominant Ifoghas-Tuareg. Little information on community-level perceptions.
MSA	North Mali	Created in 2016 as a breakaway group from the CMA, the Daoussahak segment allied with GATIA. Conducted joint operations with GATIA, Barkhane and the Nigerien state during 2017 and 2018. Political dimension as part of the Plateforme.	Protect (the interests of) Daoussahak communities by fighting jihadist groups and ensuring improved political representation.	Supported with arms, funds and training by Malian state to counter Tuareg insurgents and jihadist groups.	Embedded in the Daoussahak communities around Gao and Ménaka. Little information on community-level perceptions.

Dan Na Ambassagou	Central Mali	Created in 2016 after assassination of renowned Dogon hunter, and quickly became most active CBAG in central Mali. The group's violent practices have led to fragmentations. In 2020, a countermovement called <i>Dana Atem</i> emerged to unite Dogon and Fulani against jihadist groups.	Protect Dogon country, primarily against jihadist groups	Ambiguous relationship: > Critical of lacking state presence, but presented itself as a state ally in the fight against jihadist groups > 2017-2019: support and close collaboration with Malian state > April 2019: state orders dissolution of the group after alleged massacre, but continued collaboration unofficially.	Embedded within Dogon communities, most members are also Dozos. The group has abused Fulani communities, and sometimes its own community for not complying to demands for funding and recruitment. This has reduced support among Dogon communities, although there is little information on community-level perceptions.
Fulani groups	Central Mali	Since 2012, several groups have emerged among Fulani communities, though very little is known about them. > <i>ANSIPRJ</i> created in 2016 > <i>ASS</i> created in 2018 > <i>Sékou Bolly group</i> , created by and named after a Fulani business man.	Protect (the interests of) Fulani communities, primarily against attacks of jihadist groups, other CBAGs and state forces. Sékou Bolly is more politically oriented, aiming to reintegrate former Fulani jihadists.	Very little information on this, although Sékou Bolly has some level of cooperation with the state. As Fulani are marginalized, stigmatized as jihadists, and often abused by state forces, it may be expected that there is little affinity between the two.	All groups are embedded within Fulani communities and most operate on village-level. Little information on community-level perceptions, as it is difficult to distinguish them from Fulani aligned with jihadist groups.
Dozo	Central Mali & West Burkina Faso	Traditional hunters present across West Africa. Since the 1990s, Dozos in Mali and Burkina Faso have created different armed groups. > In Mali: <i>Benkadi</i> (1980s) and <i>Dan Na Ambassagou</i> (post-2012) > In Burkina Faso: <i>Benkadi</i> (1990s-2000s), and the <i>Union Nationale de Dozo</i> and <i>Confrérie des Dozo sans Frontières</i> (post-2012). Since 2020, many Dozo have been incorporated into the VDP.	Dozos traditionally protect their community. Since the 1990s, Dozo groups have had various security roles depending on local circumstances, e.g. environmental protection, countering crime, securing gold mining sites, and recently fighting jihadists.	Dozo in formal armed groups intermittently collaborate with the state. The Burkinabe <i>Benkadi</i> group had ties to state politicians. Currently, Dozo groups in both countries collaborate with the state against jihadist groups.	Dozo groups exist among various farmer communities. Each Dozo group in Mali and Burkina Faso is rooted in its own community, such as the Dogon hunters that formed Dan Na Ambassagou.
Koglweogo	North, east, central Burkina Faso	Prototypes existed in the 1990s, but officially created in 2005 in the Central Plateau. Spread across most of the country after 2014. There is a national presidency, but, there are significant differences between Koglweogo groups, depending on local circumstances. Since 2020, many Koglweogo have been incorporated into the VDP.	Primary objective is to protect communities against crime and delinquency. Some groups involved in environmental protection. Since 2015, activities expanded towards justice, taxation, conflict mediation, protection of gold mines, and recently the fight against jihadists.	Operate autonomously from the state, but there are increasing connections. > Ties with state politicians. > growing collaboration in the fight against jihadists > Contradictory stance: criticize the state's lacking presence and resist integration into the state security sector, but also seek recognition by mimicking state symbols and practices	The Koglweogo originated in Mossi communities, but with their current nationwide presence there are also multiethnic groups, although they consist mostly of farmer communities. They enjoy general local legitimacy and support due to their effectiveness and transparency in combatting crime.
VDP	Burkina Faso	Created by the state in 2020 to mobilize civilian volunteers, including existing CBAGs, e.g. Koglweogo and Dozo. The precise number of recruited VDP is unknown, but they are most present in the north. The state launched extra recruitment in late 2022.	Protect local communities and support state security forces in the fight against jihadist groups	Created by the government, VDPs are under authority of the national army. Officially, they receive training, weapons, and financial compensation by the state. In practice, little is known about the status of the VDP. State supervision and collaboration with the armed forces appears limited.	VDPs are based and recruited at community-level. Due to overlap with the Dozo and Koglweogo and a discriminatory recruitment process, sedentary communities dominate the VDP, pastoralists are underrepresented. The general population seems to welcome the VDP initiative.

Chapter 3: Context & Origins

Colonial legacies and hybrid security governance

CBAGs are not a new phenomenon in West Africa. In fact, the region has a long-standing history of hybrid security governance, also described as a “co-production of security between local and national actors.”⁶² A prime example are *Dozos*, traditional hunters that have existed across the West African savannah for over a thousand years.⁶³ Their history can be traced back to the tenth century in the regions that would later become the Mali Empire. More than hunters, *Dozos* also have a mystical element to them, constituting a cult that worships the spirits of *dozoya* ancestors. To become a hunter and join the *Dozo* brotherhood requires a strict initiation. Next to the practice of hunting, they have historically played key roles within medicine, local knowledge and military strength, including in wars against colonial armies.⁶⁴ Today, *Dozo* brotherhoods exist in Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, and Guinea, which will be discussed in following chapters. However, most contemporary CBAGs have their origins in the colonial era. This chapter outlines political-economic and historical foundations underlying the emergence of CBAGs in Mali and Burkina Faso during 1990s. The limited presence of the colonial administration, continued by postcolonial governments, set the stage for hybrid security governance and the emergence of community-based initiatives.

Communal divisions and natural resources

When analyzing governance in Mali and Burkina Faso, several points of departure must be noted. First, current state borders were artificially drawn by European elites during the “Scramble for Africa” at the end of the nineteenth century. They do not align with the geographic distribution of populations, which means that most ethnic groups are scattered throughout several states.

⁶² Tisseron, *Pandora’s box*, 9.

⁶³ In Mali, these hunters are known as *Donso* (sing.), *Donsow* (plur.). I follow Sten Hagberg in the spelling *Dozo* (sing.), *Dozos* (plur.) as it is commonly used to refer to contemporary hunters’ movements within public debate. I alternate between *Dozo* and hunter throughout this thesis.

⁶⁴ Hagberg, “Performing tradition while doing politics.” 177. ; Hagberg and Ouattara, “Vigilantes in War,” 102. ; Vladimir Arseniev, « Les chasseurs Donso du Mali à l’épreuve du temps, » *Afrique contemporaine*, 223-224, no. 3-4 (2007) :341-361. <https://doi.org/10.3917/afco.223.0341>

Especially Mali is a mosaic of different ethnicities, clans and tribes. Within northern Mali, there are deep divides between and within Tuareg, Arabs, Songhai and Fulani communities.⁶⁵ The Tuareg constitute the majority of the northern population,⁶⁶ but are internally divided by a rigid social hierarchy that differentiates between the *Ifoghas* (nobility), *Imghad* (subordinate vassals) and *Bella* (a sedentary lower class that were used as informal slaves) clans. Each clan is divided into several groups and sub-clans, some with different agendas. These internal divisions have historically affected the unity of Tuareg insurgencies.⁶⁷ Moreover, many sedentary Songhai and Fulani⁶⁸ communities have harbored resentment against the nomadic Tuareg and Arab. They have criticized the Tuareg insurgencies, which they perceive as Tuareg grievances overshadowing their own needs.⁶⁹ Likewise, tensions exist in central Mali between pastoralist Fulani and sedentary Dogon and Bamabara communities.⁷⁰ The Fulani are also present in northern Burkina Faso. Here they encounter similar tensions with sedentary communities, such as the Mossi, the largest ethnic group in Burkina Faso. Among other communities, there is a sense that the Mossi have dominated the state and

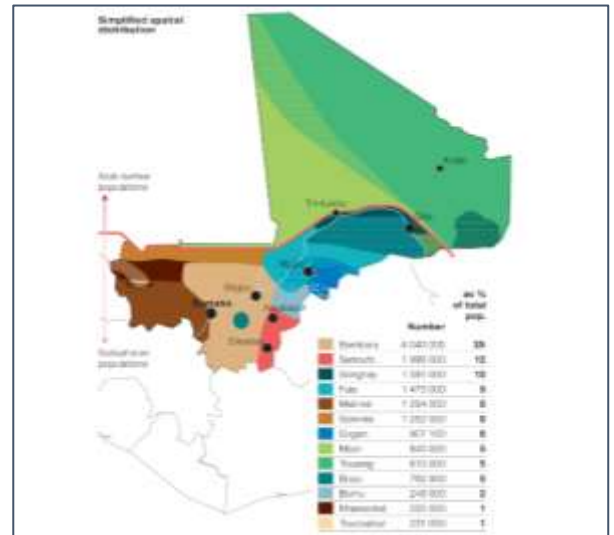


Figure 4: The distribution of ethnic groups in Mali (Source: OECD 2015 <https://www-oecd-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/swac/maps/11-population-North-Mali.pdf>)



Figure 5 : The distribution of ethnic groups in Burkina Faso (source: https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1007447/3256_136802419_7_upper-volta-ethnic-1968.jpg)

⁶⁵ Grégory Chauzal, and Thibault Van Damme. *The roots of Mali's conflict. Moving beyond the 2012 crisis.* (The Hague: Clingendael, 2015.), 35-39, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/The_roots_of_Malis_conflict.pdf

⁶⁶ As a nomadic population, the Tuareg have been historically present across the Sahara and Sahel. Today, they are spread over Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

⁶⁷ Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali's conflict*, 35-39.

⁶⁸ The Fulani are also known as the Fula, Fulbe or Peul. They are a nomadic group spread over 15 West African countries, including Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Like the Tuareg, the Fulani have a strict internal hierarchy. Although there are many subdivisions of Fulani, they are primarily pastoralists. Their livelihoods are increasingly threatened due to land privatization and climate change, which brings them in conflict over natural resources with sedentary populations. See: Fransje Molenaar et al., *The Status Quo Defied: The legitimacy of traditional authorities in areas of limited statehood in Mali, Niger and Libya*, (The Hague: Clingendael, 2019), 29, https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/legitimacy_traditional_authorities_mali_niger_libya/

⁶⁹ Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali's conflict*, 39-40.

⁷⁰ Benjaminsen, and Ba. "Fulani-Dogon killings in Mali," 9-12. ; Lyammouri, "Central Mali.": Ousmane Aly Diallo, "Ethnic Clashes, Jihad, and Insecurity in Central Mali," *Peace Review*, 29, no.3 (2017): 299-306, DOI: 10.1080/10402659.2017.1344529

increasingly encroach on their lands.⁷¹ In both countries, these communal divisions have been historically exploited by colonial and postcolonial actors as part of divide-and-rule strategies.



Figure 6: The distribution of ethnic groups across the Sahel in the mid-20th century⁷²

Communal tensions are often related to disputes over natural resources, which play an essential part in people’s livelihoods. Mali and Burkina Faso have a traditional economy based on agriculture and pastoralism.⁷³ Different communities have specialized in certain activities, including fishing (Somono, Bozo, Sorko), pastoralism (subgroups of Fulani and Tuareg) and farming (wide range of communities, including sedentary Fulani and Tuareg). This has historically generated competition over natural resources, particularly between sedentary farmers and nomadic pastoralists. Whereas these tensions were previously locally resolved in a more or less peaceful manner through mediation of customary authorities, violence over natural resources is on the rise. Although demographic growth and climate change have played a role, it is the “increasingly failing and exclusive (local) governance structures that lie at the heart of the problem.”⁷⁴ Over the past decades, land privatization and agricultural reforms in both countries

⁷¹ Tisseron, *Pandora’s box*, 19. ; Hagberg, “Performing tradition while doing politics,” 185 ; Quidelleur, *The Local Roots of Violence*.

⁷² Molenaar et al., *The Status Quo Defied*, 28

⁷³ Idrissa, R. *Tinder to the Fire: Burkina Faso in the Conflict Zone*. (Leiden: RLS Research Papers On Peace And Conflict Studies In West And Central Africa, 2019), 9-10.

<https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2981745/view>

Löic Bisson, et al. *Between hope and despair : Pastoralist adaptation in Burkina Faso*. (The Hague: Clingendael, 2021), 5, <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2021/between-hope-and-despair/>

⁷⁴ Löic Bisson, et al. *Between hope and despair*, 12-14. ; Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde, and Boubacar Ba, *Unpacking ‘new climate wars’: Actors and Drivers of Conflict in the Sahel*, (Copenhagen: DIIS, 2022), 17,

https://pure.diiis.dk/ws/files/5417749/Actors_and_drivers_conflict_Sahel_DIIS_Report_2022_04.pdf

have disadvantaged pastoralists, particularly certain classes of Fulani.⁷⁵ Additionally, the arrival of jihadist groups has undermined the customary conflict resolution mechanisms. Consequently, conflicts over natural resources have become increasingly violent.

Another complicating factor is the boom of the gold mining economy in the Sahel over the past decade.⁷⁶ An increasing share of Mali and Burkina Faso's economy relies on gold mining, while both states are unable to oversee the rapidly growing sector.⁷⁷ Aside from an array of social, environmental and political issues, the gold rush has generated new security issues as various armed groups have taken over control of mining sites as a source of financing.

Finally, mobility and migration throughout the region are long-standing, natural patterns. For many, transhumance is an essential part of life.⁷⁸ Hence, state borders in the Sahel region have historically been porous, with a continuous flow of goods, peoples and ideas. This porosity facilitates the spread of violent conflict over state borders. Especially the border areas, where state presence is limited, are prone to conflicts, which is exemplified by the current conflict hotspot in the three-border area known as in the Liptako-Gourma region.

Colonial governance

Contemporary CBAGs in the Sahel have their origins in the colonial era, when the colonial administration would delegate its policing, justice and security provision to local actors such as colonial companies, indigenous police or local committees for self-defense.⁷⁹ According to Agbiboa, the emergence of CBAGs in Africa “echoes selective and limited colonial policing.”⁸⁰ The colonial police was not meant to serve or protect local African communities, but rather to enforce the authority of colonial rule, functioning as the eyes and ears of the colonial administration. Their principal aim was to protect property and the propertied classes, which led to a focus on urban areas. As a result, rural areas were under-policed and crime-ridden. The maintenance of law and order in these areas therefore fell to the communities itself, encouraging the creation of local security initiatives.⁸¹ Indeed, Tisseron confirms the existence

⁷⁵ Benjaminsen, and Ba. “Fulani-Dogon killings in Mali,” 10-15. ; Lyammouri, *Central Mali*, 14. ; Saferworld, *How not to lose the Sahel*, 1213.

⁷⁶ Gold mining has existed for centuries across Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, but has increased since the environmental crises of the 1970s and 80s. See Luca Raineri. “Gold Mining in the Sahara-Sahel: The Political Geography of State-making and Unmaking,” *The International Spectator*, 55, no.4 (2020):100-117, DOI: [10.1080/03932729.2020.1833475](https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1833475))

⁷⁷ According to Crisis Group estimates, more than two million people in central Sahel are directly involved in artisanal gold mining: one million in Burkina Faso, 700,000 in Mali and 300,000 in Niger. The number of indirectly employed people is estimated to be three times as high. See: International Crisis Group. *Getting a Grip on the central Sahel's Gold Rush*, (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2019), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso-mali-niger/repandre-en-main-la-ruee-vers-lor-au-sahel-central>

⁷⁸ Rida Lyammouri, *Mobility and conflict in Liptako-Gourma*, (The Hague: Clingendael, 2020), https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/default/files/liptako-gourma_study-march_2019-web.pdf

⁷⁹ Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 10. ; Agbiboa, *The Origins of Hybrid Governance*, 5.

⁸⁰ Agbiboa, *The Origins of Hybrid Governance*, 5.

⁸¹ Agbiboa, *The Origins of Hybrid Governance*, 5, 11.

of various village self-defense committees in the twentieth century, which interacted with colonial monitoring networks on an improvised basis.⁸²

In Mali and Burkina Faso, the French colonial administrations practiced divide-and-rule strategies in order to enforce authority and suppress local insurgencies, consciously contributing to tensions between different social groups.⁸³ In Mali – then part of French Soudan – the French exacerbated tensions between northern and southern populations by educating a ruling class that consisted almost exclusively of “black”⁸⁴ southerners. The French thus downgraded the north to a political periphery and disrupted the internal structure of ethnic groups, particularly the Tuareg, to reduce the threat to the colonial administration.⁸⁵

In Burkina Faso - then known as Upper Volta – the French collaborated with Mossi chiefs in the Central Plateau.⁸⁶ When the Upper Volta colony was temporarily divided into three regions from 1932 to 1947, this shifted the center of power from central Ouagadougou to southwestern Bobo Dioulasso. Lobbying of Mossi chiefs eventually led to the political restoration of the Upper Volta in 1947, but generated competition between the two cities and the corresponding central and western regions. Thereafter, state building in Burkina Faso centered on these two regions, reducing the east and north to forgotten peripheries. Their smaller population and inferior land meant they remained remote from the networks of production and exchange created by the colonial administration, leaving the population feeling abandoned and disenfranchised.⁸⁷

Early independence

Following the independence of Mali and Burkina Faso in 1960, the new governments struggled to establish political authority over diverse populations. In Mali, the French-educated southern elites asserted their authority over the large northern expanse of Mali through a combination of favoritism, patronage, marginalization, divide-and-rule strategies and military control.⁸⁸ They continued the colonial practice of co-opting customary elites to represent the state in peripheral communities.⁸⁹ Moreover, redefined natural resource governance favored farmers over

⁸² Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 10.

⁸³ Saferworld, *How not to lose the Sahel*, 5-6.

⁸⁴ The Tuareg and Arab populations are more light-skinned than most sedentary, southern Malian populations, generating local perceptions of “lighter-skinned” or “white” Tuareg in contrast to other “black” populations.

⁸⁵ Fransje Molenaar et al., *The Status Quo Defied*, 35. ; Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali's conflict*, 17.

⁸⁶ Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 23-26.

⁸⁷ Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 24. ; Quidelleur, *The Local Roots of Violence*.

⁸⁸ Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali's conflict*, 17. ; Interview 2, 23 September 2022.

⁸⁹ Adam Sandor, *Insecurity, the Breakdown of Social Trust, and Armed Actor Governance in Central and Northern Mali*, (Montréal : Centre FrancoPaix en résolution des conflits et missions de paix, 2017), 20-21.

<https://dandurand.uqam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Sandor-english-Report.pdf>

Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali's conflict*, 20-21. ; Fransje Molenaar et al., *The Status Quo Defied*, 39-42. ; Saferworld, *How not to lose the Sahel*, 12.

pastoralists.⁹⁰ Decades of economic and political marginalization by the state in Bamako stirred a sense of neglect by and resentment against the state among rural communities, especially in northern Mali.⁹¹ This discontent with the state would be at the base for the rise of CBAGs, as well as the four Tuareg insurgencies that have characterized Mali's postcolonial history.

Meanwhile in Burkina Faso, the newly independent state continued the co-production of security by actively engaging communities in the maintenance of security and public order.⁹² In the 1970s and 80s, *comités de vigilance* (vigilance committees) collaborated with the city council in Bobo-Dioulasso to perform nightly patrols and surveillance to protect the local community from banditry when and where the police and gendarmerie were unable to do so.⁹³ During the revolutionary era led by Thomas Sankara (1983-1987), *Comités de Défense de la Révolution* (CDR) were created as part of a broader nation-building project. The CDR united citizens in securing urban and rural areas under the banner of defending the ideals of the Revolution. Additionally, the Sankara regime attempted to break the neglect of the North and East through land reorganization.⁹⁴ However, the pattern of neglect would recontinue after the assassination of Thomas Sankara in 1987 and the following rule of President Blaise Compaoré.⁹⁵

In sum, this chapter has demonstrated how community-based security groups in Mali and Burkina Faso have their origins in the colonial era, when selective and limited colonial policing left local communities to set up their own security and policing initiatives. This pattern has continued since independence, as the Malian and Burkinabe governments have not been sufficiently able (nor entirely willing) to extend their governance to all parts of the populations. In Mali, the marginalization of northern populations fostered resentment against the state, which would give rise to several Tuareg insurgencies. While the north and east of Burkina Faso suffered a similar neglect, the state's engagement of local communities in security and policing would stimulate a culture where community initiatives were seen as legitimate. In both cases, the limited state presence in rural peripheries generated a sense of neglect among local communities, which laid the groundwork for the emergence of CBAGs in the 1990s.

⁹⁰ Benjaminsen, and Ba. "Fulani-Dogon killings in Mali," 10-15. ; Fransje Molenaar et al., *The Status Quo Defied*. ; Lyammouri, *Central Mali*, 14. ; Saferworld, *How not to lose the Sahel*, 12. ; Interview 2, 23 September 2022.

⁹¹ Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali's conflict*, 29.

⁹² Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 10 ; Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 177 ; P. Kouraogo, A. Kaboré, and L. Kibora, *Les groupes d'auto-défense Koglweogo au Burkina Faso*, (Accra :African Security Sector Network, 2016), 2, <http://africansecuritynetwork.org/assn/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Les-groupes-dauto-d%C3%A9fense-Kogl-Weogo-au-Burkina-Faso-1.pdf>

⁹³ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 177.

⁹⁴ Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 17-18.

⁹⁵ Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 17-20.

Chapter 4: Emergence

1990s – 2000s

Following the end of the Cold War, many African countries were increasingly exposed to Western neoliberalism and shifting market forces. Under the pressure of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) promoted by international financial institutions, previously authoritarian regimes transitioned towards capitalist democracies.⁹⁶ The restructuring of national economies and state structures led to an overall decline of state authority.⁹⁷ As states lost leverage over their national economies, their monopolies of legitimate violence began to fragment. External actors settled into the African political and security marketplace, buying influence through their control over flows of surpluses and political goods. This led to the informalization of the state, where power and resources are networked through informal channels that often transcend state borders.⁹⁸

The emergence of CBAGs in West Africa falls under this hybrid governance dynamic, appeared in varying forms in response to security issues such as crime, insurgency and war. For instance, Dozo hunters in several countries organized into associations and took on new roles, depending on local circumstances. During the 1990s, they counteracted banditry and theft in Mali, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, participated in military and political conflicts in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, and engaged in environmental protection programs in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire.⁹⁹

The rise of CBAGs in Mali & Burkina Faso over the 1990s and 2000s is therefore part of this regional development. This chapter examines how CBAGs emerged in the two particular domestic contexts, illustrated through a case study. In Mali, the rise of CBAGs was related to the Tuareg insurgencies, whilst CBAGs in Burkina Faso arose in response to an exponential increase in crime rural communities.

Mali: insurgency & counterinsurgency

In Mali, several CBAGs arose during the 1991 and 2006 insurgencies to support the Malian state's counterinsurgency efforts. Note that the insurgents cannot be considered as CBAGs, since their political ambitions to establish an independent state transcends that of their

⁹⁶ Bagayoko, Hutchful, Luckham, "Hybrid Security governance," 3.

⁹⁷ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 174. ; Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 11.

⁹⁸ Bagayoko, Hutchful, Luckham, "Hybrid Security governance," 3.

⁹⁹ Sten Hagberg, "Political decentralization and traditional leadership in the Benkadi hunters' association in western Burkina Faso," *Africa Today* 50, no. 4 (2004): 55, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4187610>.

community. I explore these dynamics through the case of *Ganda Koy* in the 1990s and *Ganda Iso* in the 2000s.

Background on the insurgencies

Since independence the Malian state had never properly extended its governance beyond the Ségou region, leaving communities in peripheral regions feeling abandoned and disenfranchised.¹⁰⁰ This paved the way for separatist ambitions in the north, manifesting in four Tuareg uprisings: in 1963, 1991, 2006 and 2012. Instead of addressing the underlying political-economic issues for the insurgencies, the Malian state primarily dealt with them as a military issue; through violent repression and “buying a precarious peace” by co-opting insurgent leaders in negotiations.¹⁰¹ Hence, the peace agreements that ended each insurgency also fed tensions between northern communities, dividing the rebel movement and complicating the conflict.

The first Tuareg insurgency in 1963 was small in scale and lacked a concrete political goal, but the memory of the state’s brutal repression became an important mobilizing factor in the years to come.¹⁰² Severe droughts and a repressive new military regime in the 1970s and 1980s pushed many Tuaregs and Arabs abroad to Tuareg groups in Niger and the Libya of Muammar Qaddafi, who trained and equipped them to fight in his wars. These exiles were the leading forces behind the second insurgency in 1990, driven by the political goal for an independent northern state. Again, the Malian state ignored these motivations and took brutal measures to shut it down. The Tamanrasset peace agreements signed in 1991 generated divisions between the insurgents and was questioned altogether with the overthrow of the military regime in March 1991, which transformed Mali into a democracy. The second insurgency formally ended when the insurgents and new Malian government signed the *Pacte National* on April 11 1992, but the worst violence was yet to come. The Pacte intended to address the issues underlying the insurgency, but the government fell short in its implementation. Moreover, the agreement fostered conflict between the different northern communities, leading the insurgency to splinter. Violence now broke out between these communities, notably between the Ifoghas-Tuareg and non-Ifoghas communities: Imghad-

¹⁰⁰ Saferworld, *How not to lose the Sahel*, 6 ; Sandor, *Insecurity*, 9.

¹⁰¹ Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali’s conflict*, 30-32 ; Interview 2, 23 September 2022.

¹⁰² Alexander Thurston, and Andrew Lebovich, *A handbook on Mali’s 2012-2013 crisis*. (Evanston: Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa, 2013), 21-22
<https://scholar.archive.org/work/tuuohaamkrhi3dxhwlrj6exvm/access/wayback/http://arch.library.northwestern.edu/downloads/1544bp252>

Tuareg, Bella-Tuareg and Songhai. This conflict ended in 1996 with the Timbuktu peace agreement and a ceremonial burning of weapons known as *des Flammes de la Paix*.¹⁰³

However, a third insurgency broke out in May 2006, with insurgents demanding the implementation of the 1992 Pacte, which the government had poorly upheld. Although a peace agreement was already brokered in July 2006, many non-Ifoghas groups considered it disproportionately beneficial to the Ifoghas-Tuareg, led by Iyad ag Ghali. Again, the insurgency fragmented and fighting between different communities escalated. Eventually, the third insurgency ended in October 2009 with the signing of a new peace agreement in Libya.¹⁰⁴

Counterinsurgency-through-proxy: Ganda Koy & Ganda Iso

During both insurgencies, several CBAGs emerged in northern Mali that can be characterized as **ethnic militias**: they were organized around a certain tribe, caste or ethnicity and supported the Malian state in repressing the insurgencies. Although numerous grassroots groups existed during this period, the most structured and well-known are *Ganda Koy* and *Ganda Iso*. These groups arose in northern communities with grievances against the Tuareg insurgents; they were tired of the Tuareg claiming dominance over the north, and were regularly the victims of Tuareg and Arab raids. On their part, the Malian state resorted to instrumentalizing these groups to bolster their counterinsurgency efforts, making up for the lack of resources, skills, moral and leadership within the Malian army.¹⁰⁵ The support for these ethnic militias was part of the state's divide-and-rule strategy to exacerbate tensions between different northern communities and undermine the unity of the insurgency.¹⁰⁶

Ganda Koy ("Masters of the Land") emerged during the second insurgency in 1994 to protect sedentary communities from attacks by the nomadic Tuareg and Arabs. The group consisted mostly of ethnic Songhai, but was supported by Fulani, Bozo and Bella communities, as well as the Malian state. Created by several community leaders and funded by wealthy Songhai merchants and army defectors, *Ganda Koy*'s first leader was a former Malian colonel, Abdoulaye Mahamahada Maiga. According to some, the main instigator behind *Ganda Koy* was Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga, former head of the Malian intelligence service, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence.¹⁰⁷ The group collaborated with the Malian state and allegedly received funding, weapons and trainings to counter the insurgents. However, *Ganda Koy* also conducted brutal attacks on Tuareg and Arabs communities, producing a cycle of

¹⁰³ Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali's conflict*, 30-32; Thurston and Lebovich, *A handbook*, 21-24; Andrew Lebovich, *Reconstructing local orders in Mali: Historical perspectives and future challenges*, (Washington D.C.:Brookings, 2017), 5-8, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/lebovich_mali.pdf

¹⁰⁴ Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali's conflict*, 32-33.; Lebovich, *Reconstructing local orders in Mali*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Benjaminsen, and Ba. "Fulani-Dogon killings in Mali," 18.

¹⁰⁶ Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali's conflict*, 20.

¹⁰⁷ Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali's conflict*, 40.

communal violence that would last until the 1996 peace agreement. Although its leaders claimed to be fighting in self-defense, the high level of violence against Tuareg communities and the allegiance with the state characterizes Ganda Koy as an **ethnic militia**.¹⁰⁸ The group even made calls for ethnic cleansing against the “white” Tuareg and Arab populations. Ganda Koy was officially dissolved after 1996, but was never dismantled.¹⁰⁹ The group would remobilize with the fourth Tuareg insurgency in 2012.

During the third insurgency, *Ganda Iso* (“Sons of the Land”) was formed in 2008-2009 as a successor to Ganda Koy. The political branch was led by Seydou Cissé, one of the leaders of Ganda Koy, while the military branch was led by a Fulani, Sergeant Amadou Diallo.¹¹⁰ *Ganda Iso* initially emerged as a self-defense group, claiming to protect Fulani in the Asongo district from Tuareg attacks. Yet, like Ganda Koy, the group later engaged in ethnic violence, killing four Tuareg civilians in a public market. This event triggered a cycle of retaliative violence between Tuareg communities and *Ganda Iso*, as well as a split between the military and political leadership. Although dormant between 2009 and 2011, *Ganda Iso* was never demobilized.¹¹¹

The Malian state set up two other ethnic militias between 2008 and 2009 for counterinsurgency support. One was an Imghad-Tuareg group led by El Hajj Gamou, and the other militia consisted of Tilemsi Arabs, led by Major Colonel Abderahmane Ould Meydou. The militias fought against Tuareg insurgents but also attacked civilians, contributing to the communal cycle of violence.¹¹² There is little information on these militias, but the Imghad leader El Hajj Gamou would later become the leader of another militia in the post-2012 context.

Essentially, *Ganda Koy* and *Ganda Iso* aimed to provide security to their communities, both through physical protection and the securing of political-economic interests.¹¹³ There was a strong sense among these sedentary communities that the Tuareg were favored¹¹⁴ by the state, and they hoped to improve their position by supporting the state in their counterinsurgency campaign. However, the state rejected these political ambitions, supporting the militias for its own ends, but sidelining them during peace negotiations by attempting to dismantle them

¹⁰⁸ Schubert, “The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups,” 301. ; Moritz Schubert *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups*, 7-8.

¹⁰⁹ Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali’s conflict*, 40 ; Benjaminsen, and Ba. “Fulani-Dogon killings in Mali,”; Boisvert, “Failing at Violence,” 277-78 ; Lebovich, *Reconstructing local orders*, 40 ; Edoardo Baldaro, “A dangerous method: How Mali lost control of the north, and learned to stop worrying,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29, no. 3 (2018): 568-87. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1080/09592318.2018.1455323>

¹¹⁰ Boisvert, “Failing at Violence,” 277-78.

¹¹¹ Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali’s conflict*, 41. ; Boisvert, “Failing at Violence,” 277-78.

¹¹² Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali’s conflict*, 33. ; Thurston and Lebovich, *A handbook*, 25. ; Lebovich, *Reconstructing local orders*, 9.

¹¹³ Boisvert, “Failing at Violence,” 279.

¹¹⁴ NB: Tuaregs had been disenfranchised by the state as well, but when insurgent Tuareg groups became too powerful for the state to repress, the state would cut a deal with them, granting certain demands

instead of engaging with them.¹¹⁵ At the same time, connections between militia leaders and state elites remained. Although the instrumentalization of ethnic militias such as Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso helped quash the insurgencies in the short term, their brutality against other communities further alienated them from political elites and heightened communal tensions, thereby contributing to the outbreak of a new cycle of violence in the long term.¹¹⁶

All in all, the case of Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso illustrates how CBAGs in the form of **ethnic militias** emerged in Mali over the 1990s-2000s to oppose insurgent groups. These groups had a certain security dimension, aiming to provide physical security against attacks and a broader form of security through (attempted) improved political representation. Nonetheless, their primary function was political, since they operated as a counterinsurgency force on behalf of the state. Although they justified violence in the name of self-defense, these groups became known for their ethnic targeting of Tuareg villages and were instrumentalized by the Malian state for counterinsurgency campaigns. The Malian state thus continued colonial divide-and-rule strategies by playing northern communities against each other.¹¹⁷ In contrast to Mali, Burkina Faso did not experience any insurgencies, and therefore the CBAGs that emerged were of a different nature.

Burkina Faso: Compaoré, crime and insecurity

Over the 1990s and 2000s, Burkina Faso experienced an exponential increase in theft and banditry. Together with economic and political reforms of the Compaoré regime, this crime wave contributed to a profound sense of insecurity among primarily rural populations. In response, CBAGs emerged to reestablish security in their communities. This is illustrated through the case study of the *Benkadi* association.

The Compaoré regime

The revolutionary era ended abruptly when Thomas Sankara was assassinated on 15 October 1987 in a military coup led by Blaise Compaoré, who would rule the country for the next 27 years. The Compaoré regime was primarily focused on remaining in power, serving the self-centered interests of the political elites and maintaining the loyalty of those sections of the populations that were key to its activities.¹¹⁸ Under his regime, Burkina Faso underwent

¹¹⁵ Boisvert, "Failing at Violence," 279.

¹¹⁶ Lebovich, *Reconstructing local orders*, 10.

¹¹⁷ Lebovich, *Reconstructing local orders*, 12.

¹¹⁸ Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 29.; International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso*, 4.

economic privatization and security decentralization. I briefly discuss the significance of these policies for the rise of CBAGs.

On the economic level, the socialist Sankarist policies were reversed and the economy was opened up to private interests according to the model of SAPs. As a result, the north and east were again marginalized, as they did not offer the same potential for profit as the other regions.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the pursued principle of competition privileged farming over pastoralism, leading to the expansion of farming land at the expense of pastoralists.¹²⁰ On the security level, the Compaoré regime pursued decentralization, proclaiming that communities could police themselves.¹²¹ Most of the money went to an elite military corps created to protect the regime against coups, while the rest of the army suffered a state of neglect.¹²² Over the years, the regime delegated policing responsibilities to local communities. The 2003 *Loi relative à la sécurité intérieure* (“Internal Security Law”) provided the basis for the creation of *comités de sécurité* (local security committees) in 2005, as well as a *police de proximité* (community police). Like in the 1970s, these state-created initiatives served to engage local communities into security policing. However, a 2009 survey revealed that they were barely working due to a lack of funding and participation of key community members.¹²³ The official explanation for their failure stated that traditional social-cultural structures were not sufficiently taken into account. This indicates that state officials were accepting community-based policing initiatives that were grounded in local culture instead of state law.¹²⁴ Dubbed “local initiatives for security” by the government, these initiatives can be seen as CBAGs, appearing over the 1990s-2000s.

A need for security

The privatization and decentralization policies generated certain circumstances that together resulted in a growing sense of insecurity among Burkina Faso’s rural population during the 1990s and 2000s.¹²⁵ Economically, the SAPs severely heightened the costs of living.¹²⁶ Moreover, land privatization in combination with increasing droughts reinforced conflicts over natural resources. These circumstances produced a disillusioned youth with limited legal economic

¹¹⁹ Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 17-20.

¹²⁰ Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 18-20; L’öic Bisson, et al. *Between hope and despair*, 14.

¹²¹ Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 36-38.

¹²² Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 29-30.

¹²³ Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 36.; Compaoré and Bojsen, « Sécurité d’en bas au Burkina Faso, » 684 ; Frowd, “The Politics of Non-State Security Provision,” 126. ; Soré, Cote, Zongo « Politiser le ‘Vide Sécuritaire’ » 126.

¹²⁴ Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 36.

¹²⁵ NB: Privatization and decentralization reforms were also implemented in Mali in this period. However, the insurgencies stimulated the creation of more politically-oriented CBAGs in the form of militias. Meanwhile in Burkina Faso, where there were no insurgencies or major political crises, CBAGs took the form of security-focused vigilante groups.

¹²⁶ Compaoré and Bojsen, « Sécurité d’en bas au Burkina Faso, » 684.

prospects, which stimulated the informal economy.¹²⁷ Crime and banditry rose in rural areas and big cities, particularly armed robberies and theft of livestock, goods and motorbikes.¹²⁸ This severely impacted local communities where the possession of a motor bike or a goat was essential to survival.

The state's response to the crime wave was insufficient.¹²⁹ Decentralization policies had delegated security provision to the comités de sécurité and police de proximité, but as previously mentioned these were mostly dormant. The state police and gendarmerie were stationed in the larger cities, and would therefore arrive too late to respond to crimes in rural areas. In addition, aggrieved parties usually have to pay for the fuel required to come to the scene.¹³⁰ This inadequate response was coupled with a general mistrust of state institutions, which many civilians see as incompetent and corrupt.¹³¹

Together, the rising insecurity, the discontent with state forces, and Burkina Faso's history of community security initiatives formed the backdrop against which CBAGs emerged in the late 1990s. In Western Burkina Faso, some Dozo started to organize themselves in armed groups and took on a new roles as security actors.¹³² Later in 2005, the first recognized Koglweogo association was created in Namissima.¹³³ These groups aimed to counteract crime and establish some sort of security within their community.¹³⁴ What this security entailed, varies according to the local meaning of security. Fieldwork in the Sahel has shown that local perspectives on security include more than the functioning of state security forces, but also access to food, water, economic opportunities and education, the ability of free movement, speaking and hearing the truth, and "living well together."¹³⁵ For instance, next to countering crime, some CBAGs were involved in environmental conservation programs, cooperating with state forces and NGOs to protect forests and nature reserves from illegal hunting and abusive logging.¹³⁶ Unlike the politically-oriented militias that emerged during the insurgencies in Mali, CBAGs in Burkina Faso had a predominant security function, which characterizes them as **vigilantes**, specifically **crime-control groups**. The remainder of this chapter explores the case

¹²⁷ Quidelleur, *The Local Roots of Violence*.

¹²⁸ Compaoré and Bojsen, « Sécurité d'en bas au Burkina Faso, » 684-685.

¹²⁹ Quidelleur, *The Local Roots of Violence*. ; Heidi Bojsen, and Ismaël Compaoré, "Enquête anthropologique et documentation visuelle sur la sécurité chez les Koglweogo au Burkina Faso," *Mande Studies* 21 (2019): 91-113. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2979/mande.21.1.07>

¹³⁰ Compaoré and Bojsen, « Sécurité d'en bas au Burkina Faso, » 684-685 ; Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 36-37.

¹³¹ Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 10. ; Quidelleur, *The Local Roots of Violence*.

¹³² Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 10-11.

¹³³ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 180. ; Kouraogo, Kaboré, and Kibora, *Les groupes d'auto-défense Koglweogo*, 2-3.

¹³⁴ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 178.

¹³⁵ Compaoré and Bojsen, « Sécurité d'en bas au Burkina Faso, » 685. ; Sten Hagberg, et al. *Securite par le bas*. ; Saferworld, *How not to lose the Sahel*, 20 ; Bojsen and Compaoré, "Enquête anthropologique."

¹³⁶ Interview 6, 27 September 2022. ; Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 9. ; Compaoré and Bojsen, « Sécurité d'en bas au Burkina Faso, » 684-685.

study of the Dozo association *Benkadi*, which became a significant security actor in Burkina Faso in the late 1990s.

From hunting game to hunting thieves: Benkadi

As previously mentioned, traditional hunters known as Dozos had existed across West Africa for centuries. However, in the 1990s, Dozo in Mali, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire first established formal associations, transforming the traditional Dozo brotherhood into organized armed groups. Although Dozo associations in these countries are related to one another, they do not form a single movement.¹³⁷ I show how the movement spread across the three countries, but focus on Benkadi in Burkina Faso.

Traditionally, becoming a Dozo required a strict process of initiation, which would ideally take seven years. During initiation the apprentice was bound to a master hunter, who would teach him the secrets of dozo. Being a Dozo involved not only the practice of hunting, but skills in herbal medicine and divination as well as a general exhibition of moral behavior.¹³⁸ Dozos are part of farming communities, although the Dozo brotherhood spans hunters across different communities and excludes notions of tribe, class and caste.¹³⁹ Thus, the traditional notion of the Dozo was focused first and foremost on the cultural ideals of the sole hunter.

In contrast, the Dozo associations that emerged in the 1990s emphasized the collective endeavor, whether that was countering banditry, engaging in political conflicts or participating in environmental protection programs.¹⁴⁰ According to Ferrarini, this transformation was brought about by two factors: the disappearance of big animals that gave Dozos their prestige, and the restrictive environmental state policies that illegalized their hunting practices.¹⁴¹ In response, Dozos sought recognition by organizing into formal Dozo associations. The first recorded legally recognized Dozo associations appeared in Mali in the 1980s, where they functioned as mediators between illiterate farmers and the Malian bureaucracy in legal matters.¹⁴² The *Association Nationale des Chasseurs du Mali*, otherwise known as *Benkadi*,¹⁴³ aimed to negotiate state gun permits and hunting permits for Dozo, in exchange for collaboration with the state's environmental management policies. The Benkadi movement spread to neighboring

¹³⁷ Hagberg and Ouattara, "Vigilantes in War," 102. ; Hagberg, "Political decentralization," 54-55. ; Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 17-18.

¹³⁸ Hagberg and Ouattara, "Vigilantes in War," 102.

¹³⁹ Hagberg, "Political decentralization," 54.

¹⁴⁰ Hagberg, "Political decentralization," 55.

¹⁴¹ Lorenzo Ferrarini, "The dankun network: the donso hunters of Burkina Faso between ecological change and new associations," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 34, no. 1 (2016): 80-83. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1080/02589001.2016.1190529>

¹⁴² Ferrarini, "The dankun network," 83.

¹⁴³ "*Benkadi* is a compound of *bèn* (agreement), *ka* (the copula) and *di* (good). It is a name that can be given to all sorts of associations where Bamana–Mandinka–Jula languages are spoken. Ferrarini, "the dankun network," 93.

Côte d'Ivoire in the 1990s, which was experiencing severe banditry and theft. In this context, the Benkadi association took on the role of local security force. Benkadi then spread to Burkina Faso through master hunter Tiéfing Coulibaly in 1996.¹⁴⁴ Like in Côte d'Ivoire, the creation of Benkadi in Burkina Faso aimed to respond to the widespread crime and insecurity in rural areas, in lieu of the inadequate the police and gendarmerie.

To boost membership, the traditionally required seven-years initiation was shortened to only one day. Consequently, Benkadi expanded rapidly to include local farmers, regardless of whether they had hunting skills.¹⁴⁵ Although derived from the traditional Dozo brotherhood based on initiation and knowledge, Benkadi was thus a new movement organized around a supra-ethnic identity that mobilized local farmers into **vigilante** groups to counter crime.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the hunting of game gave way to the hunting of thieves.¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, the politics of the association became increasingly intertwined with state politics.¹⁴⁸ Because Benkadi enjoyed local legitimacy, politicians used hunters for political campaigns and community mobilization. There were significant connections between Dozos and Compaoré's ruling party. For instance, the former president of the National Assembly, Mélegué Maurice Traoré, was also a member of Benkadi.¹⁴⁹ However, state politicians also sought to contain Benkadi by refusing to officially recognize the association, reshuffling provincial boundaries and making an arms census.¹⁵⁰ On their side, master hunters took advantage of the state's reorganization of provincial boundaries to settle rivalries and contest the leadership of Coulibaly.¹⁵¹ Their political influence also granted Benkadi an air of impunity, even when breaking state law.¹⁵² Although Benkadi became a significant force under Tiefing Coulibaly in the late 1990s, the association diminished after his death in 2002 due to power struggles. Thereafter, various Dozo associations would rise and fall in Burkina Faso, all increasingly distant from the practice of hunting, and closer to the politics of the state.¹⁵³

The case of Benkadi shows how existing Dozo structures formed the basis for the emergence of an organized CBAG that aimed to counter crime in rural western Burkina Faso.

¹⁴⁴ Ferrarini, "the dankun network," 83-84; Hagberg 54

¹⁴⁵ Hagberg 2004 54-57

¹⁴⁶ These local farmers were mostly ethnic Senufo that contrasted themselves to Fulani pastoralists and Mossi farmers, whom they perceived respectively as thieves and invaders encroaching on their land. Hagberg, "Political decentralization," 56, 62.

¹⁴⁷ Ferrarini, "The dankun network," 85. ; Hagberg, "Political decentralization," 54-57.

¹⁴⁸ Ferrarini, "The dankun network," 86.

¹⁴⁹ Hagberg, "Political decentralization," 63-65.

¹⁵⁰ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 179.

¹⁵¹ This reorganization of provincial boundaries was part of the state's decentralization policies. In 1996, the Burkina Faso's 30 provinces were reshuffled into 45. Tiéfing Coulibaly had defined Benkadi as a provincial association of Comoé Province, but this Province was split up by the new law. This circumscribed Coulibaly's power. For more details, see: Hagberg, "Political decentralization," 56-60.

¹⁵² Hagberg, "Political decentralization," 52-54; 60-66.

¹⁵³ Ferrarini, "The dankun network," 85-86. ; Hagberg, "Political decentralization," 63.

Although Benkadi's primary objective was security, the increasing connections to state politicians demonstrate how the state may utilize these groups, even if they are not working on the state's behalf (like the Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso militias in Mali). This underlines the importance of studying CBAGs in relation to the state.

Chapter conclusion

In sum, this chapter has contextualized the rise of CBAGs in Mali and Burkina Faso over the 1990s and 2000s among liberalization, decentralization and declining state authority. Although the manner and extent differed, all groups were somehow connected to the state. In both countries, CBAGs mainly emerged in rural areas, and participated in environmental protection programs. Furthermore, the Benkadi association developed in both countries, taking on a different function depending on domestic circumstances.

Indeed, the different domestic contexts in Mali and Burkina Faso resulted in a different type of CBAG. In Mali, CBAGs that emerged during the Tuareg insurgencies had a strong political dimension. Based in a certain ethnic community, groups such as Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso opposed the Tuareg insurgents and functioned as a counterinsurgency militia in support of the state. This counterinsurgency-through-proxy strategy would continue in the post-2012 environment. In contrast, CBAGs in Burkina Faso primarily functioned as an alternative security provider for their communities. This dimension reflects the widespread crime in rural Burkina Faso, a symptom of the broader insecurity under the Compaoré regime. These groups were not so directly involved with the state as the militias in Mali, but there were connections nonetheless. The Benkadi case illustrates that the Burkinabe state welcomed these CBAGs, but simultaneously sought to contain them. In a sense, the patterns of the 1990s and 2000s would continue after 2012, but within a changed context.

Chapter 5: Development & Proliferation

2012 – 2022

This chapter examines how CBAGs have developed in Mali and Burkina Faso since the 2012 crisis in Mali, which has been a critical juncture for both countries. A fourth Tuareg insurgency turned into a jihadist occupation of northern Mali, prompting a French military intervention in 2013 that drove the jihadist insurgent groups out of occupied territories. However, jihadist groups then regrouped in border regions, bringing the conflict to central Mali, Burkina Faso and eventually Niger in the following years. The post-2012 environment has been characterized by escalating, generalized violence with a growing intercommunal dimension and progressive state withdrawal.¹⁵⁴

Within this context, CBAGs have proliferated across Mali and Burkina Faso, both through the remobilization and expansion of existing groups and the creation of new ones. In Mali, the state has continued to instrumentalize ethnic militias as counterinsurgency forces. In northern Mali, this is illustrated through the remobilization of Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso in 2012, as well as the creation of GATIA in 2014 and MSA in 2016. In central Mali, CBAGs emerged to protect communities from jihadist groups but quickly engaged in ethnic targeting, generating a cycle of communal violence between sedentary and pastoralist Fulani communities. This is illustrated through the creation of Dan Na Ambassagou in 2016 as well as several Fulani and Dozo groups. Meanwhile in Burkina Faso, the fall of the Compaoré regime in 2014 and the consequent breakdown of the state security apparatus, together with increasing jihadist attacks from 2016 onwards magnified insecurity among the population. This stimulated the expansion of existing groups like the Koglweogo and Dozo, and the creation of new groups that emulated their model. The Burkinabe state continued its historical balancing act between encouraging community security initiatives and striving to contain them, of which the creation of the VDP is the latest example. I explore the case of the Koglweogo to further highlight these dynamics of development in relation to the state.

¹⁵⁴ Nsaibia and Duhamel, "Sahel 2021." ; International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso*. ; International Crisis Group. *Reversing Central Mali's Descent*.

Mali: a continuum between self-defense and power?

In Mali, the 2012 Tuareg insurgency turned jihadist occupation combined with a military coup, caused a complete collapse of state authority. This generated a process of multiplication, mixing and realigning of a wide range of armed groups centered around ethnic identities with diverging agendas.¹⁵⁵ While acknowledging that the boundaries between the groups are blurred, I limit my analysis to groups whose objectives remain embedded within their community, thus excluding those driven by political, ideological or economic objectives that transcend their community. The groups included in this chapter are Ganda Koy, Ganda Iso, GATIA, MSA, Dan Na Ambassador, and various Fulani and Dozo groups. I structure my analysis between northern Mali and central Mali, although in practice the dynamics do not adhere to such neat geographical divisions.

Northern Mali: Ganda Koy, Ganda Iso, GATIA & MSA

In northern Mali, the fourth Tuareg insurgency stimulated the remobilization of existing militias Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso, and the creation of new ones such as GATIA and MSA.

Ganda Koy & Ganda Iso

After lying dormant for several years, both *Ganda Koy* and *Ganda Iso* remobilized their fighters in December 2011 to fight alongside Malian troops against Tuareg insurgents.¹⁵⁶ Since then, the groups have undergone several transformations, merging, aligning and breaking with similar groups. Before 2012, the groups had operated at community-level with loose political coordination. During 2012, the groups formalized their organizational structure and centralized their operations, blending local tensions into a national narrative.¹⁵⁷ Both groups expanded recruitment into new areas beyond their local communities and established systematic and longer-term training camps. In July 2012, Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso merged with four smaller movements to form a national framework to liberate northern Mali, the *Front Patriotique de Résistance* (FPR). Following the French intervention in 2013 and the end of the “rebel occupation,” the training camps were closed and the militias demobilized. Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso returned to their community bases and resumed their role as local security providers, as the state security forces remained absent from those northern areas.¹⁵⁸

Furthermore, both groups have acted to secure the interests of their communities through their participation in the Peace Agreement as part of the *Plateforme*. In June 2014, the FPR became the *Coordination des Mouvements et Front Patriotique de Résistance* (CM-FPR) and

¹⁵⁵ Edoardo Balduino, “A dangerous method,” 591. ; Tobie and Sangaré, *The Impact of Armed Groups*, 7.

¹⁵⁶ Boisvert, “Failing at Violence,” 280 ; Chauzal and van Damme, *The roots of Mali’s conflict*, 40.

¹⁵⁷ Boisvert, “Failing at Violence,” 280-287.

¹⁵⁸ Boisvert, “Failing at Violence,” 287-88.

joined the peace negotiations as part of the *Plateforme*, the signatory armed group aligned with the Malian state.¹⁵⁹ They opposed the *Coalition des Mouvements de l'Azawad* (CMA), the umbrella organization that united the former pro-independence groups.¹⁶⁰ Although constant changes in alliances quickly fragmented Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso leaders among splinter groups CMFPR-II and CMFPR-III, it was the first time that militias were included in the peace negotiations.¹⁶¹

There is little information about their development in recent years, but Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso clearly transformed from grassroots militias into more professionalized organizations, most explicitly between 2012 and 2013. Since then, they have continued their role as security provider at community-level, while seeking to secure the interests of their communities through involvement in the peace process.

GATIA & MSA

A similar counterinsurgency dynamic has persisted with the *Groupe d'autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs alliés* (GATIA), created in 2014 after insurgents defeated the FAMA in Anéfis. Since creation, GATIA has played a significant role in supporting state forces against insurgent groups allied under the CMA, and later against jihadist insurgent groups.¹⁶² GATIA is deeply intertwined with the Malian state through a core of deserted Malian soldiers and its leader General Ej Hajj ag Gamou. As a General, past leader of a pro-government militia in the 2006 insurgency and as chief of the Imghad Tuareg tribe, Gamou has had a significant position as intermediary between the state and northern populations.¹⁶³ Financed and equipped by the government, GATIA ticks all the boxes of a militia, yet the name literally means self-defense group. The communal base of GATIA constitutes ethnic Imghad-Tuareg, who are primarily driven by their resistance against the historical domination of Ifoghas Tuareg.¹⁶⁴ Their support of the state against the insurgents is thus as a way to defend the interests of their Imghad-community.¹⁶⁵ As with Ganda Koy and Ganda Koy, the Malian state exploited communal grievances to stimulate the creation of GATIA and instrumentalize them as a counterinsurgency militia.

¹⁵⁹ The Plateforme also includes the *Groupe d'autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs alliés* (GATIA), the *Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad* (MAA-PF), the *Mouvement pour la défense de la Patrie* (MDP), and since July 2019 the *Mouvement pour le salut de l'Azawad* (MSA). For an overview of all armed groups in Mali, see: Andrew Lebovich, "Mapping armed groups in Mali and the Sahel," ECFR. Accessed 6 December 2022. https://ecfr.eu/special/sahel_mapping

¹⁶⁰ The CMA includes the *Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA), the *Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad* (HCUA), and part of the *Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad* (MAA-CMA). Lebovich, "Mapping armed groups."

¹⁶¹ Boisvert, "Failing at Violence," 288.

¹⁶² Boisvert, "Failing at Violence," 276.; Sandor, *Insecurity*, 21-22.

¹⁶³ Boisvert, "Failing at Violence," 276.; Sandor, *Insecurity*, 21-22.; Lebovich, *Reconstructing local orders*, 13-14.

¹⁶⁴ Boisvert, "Failing at Violence," 288.; Interview 2, 23 September 2022.

¹⁶⁵ It must be noted that not all Imghad necessarily support GATIA. Some Imghad joined the MNLA, and others have continued to live among Ifoghas in Kidal. See Sandor, *Insecurity*, 22.

Next to armed combat, Gamou collaborated with state officials to undermine the CMA by stimulating the breakaway of a Daoussahak and Chamanamass communities in 2016 to create a new armed group: the *Mouvement pour le Salut de l'Azawad* (MSA). Although Daoussahak and Chamanamass were well-represented within the MNLA, they developed grievances against the CMA leadership, which they found too Ifoghas-dominated.¹⁶⁶ Together, GATIA and Malian state officials managed to create a sense of rapprochement between the Imghad GATIA and Daoussahak, for example by GATIA fighters undertaking security operations between Ménaka and Kidal to return stolen livestock to Daoussahak communities. Just two months after creation of the MSA, the Chamanamass section broke away, forming a separate MSA branch. The remaining Daoussahak then allied with GATIA. Since then, GATIA and MSA have mainly operated in Gao and Ménaka as a counterinsurgency force alongside the FAMA against jihadist groups.¹⁶⁷ They also collaborated with Barkhane and the Nigerien state to counter the rise of IISP in 2017-2018, but this collaboration ended in 2019 because GATIA and MSA were increasingly accused of civilian abuses.¹⁶⁸ Although there is little information on their activities at communal-level, the groups also act as local security actor, conducting patrols to prevent theft and banditry.¹⁶⁹ Similar to the other militias, the trajectory of the MSA has been driven by a dual logic: to secure the interests of the Daoussahak community,¹⁷⁰ and to benefit the national state (through involvement of state officials). Although in slightly different circumstances, a similar trend can be identified among CBAGs in central Mali.

Central Mali: Dan Na Ambassagou, Dozo and Fulani groups

Although central Mali had not been involved in the northern insurgencies, there were similar issues among local communities concerning grievances towards the state and intercommunal tensions, particularly between sedentary and pastoralist (mainly Fulani) communities.¹⁷¹ When jihadist groups settled in Mopti after being driven out of northern Mali, they capitalized on local grievances to mobilize local populations, mostly among the Fulani.¹⁷² This led other communities as well as the FAMA to stigmatize all Fulani as terrorists, stimulating ethnic

¹⁶⁶ Sandor, *Insecurity*, 23 ; Desgrais, Guichaoua, and Lebovich, "Unity is the exception," 670.

¹⁶⁷ Sandor, *Insecurity*, 23-24.; Desgrais, Guichaoua, and Lebovich, "Unity is the exception," 670-71.

¹⁶⁸ Interview 2, 23 September 2022 ; International Crisis Group, *Sidelining the Islamic State in Niger's Tillabery*, (Brussels: International Crisis group, 2020), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/289-sidelining-islamic-state-nigers-tillabery>

¹⁶⁹ Interview 7, 03 October 2022. ; Lebovich, "Mapping Armed Groups."

¹⁷⁰ Like with GATIA, it must be noted that not all Daoussahak support the MSA. See: Desgrais, Guichaoua, and Lebovich, "Unity is the exception," 671.

¹⁷¹ Diallo, "Ethnic Clashes," 299. ; Lyammouri, *Central Mali*, 13. ; Tobie and Sangaré, *The Impact of Armed Groups*, 7. ; Benjaminsen, and Ba. "Fulani-Dogon killings in Mali," 6-7, 15-17.

¹⁷² Tobie and Sangaré, *The Impact of Armed Groups*, 7-10. ; Benjaminsen, and Ba. "Fulani-Dogon killings in Mali," 6-7, 15-17; Diallo, "Ethnic Clashes," 302. ; Lyammouri, *Central Mali*, 20. ; Interview 2, 23 September 2022.

targeting of Fulani. Together with a spike in robberies and theft, and targeted attacks on community leaders due to the collapse of state authority, this generated a rise in insecurity.¹⁷³ As a result, communities formed their own armed groups to protect themselves from external threats, whether jihadist groups, other communities or even state forces. This protection from outward threats aligns with the category of **self-defense groups**. However, these armed groups also function as a means to advance the sociopolitical position of these communities.¹⁷⁴ Although groups in central Mali have not been as strongly involved in the politics of the peace process, they still provide a “surefire way of getting a seat at the negotiating table.”¹⁷⁵

In addition to these local circumstances, the proliferation of CBAGs is sustained by the state’s historical instrumentalization of certain communal armed groups for counterinsurgency. Similar to northern Mali, this aggravated intercommunal relations and favored the rise of similar armed groups among other communities, contributing to a cycle of communal violence.¹⁷⁶

Dan Na Ambassagou

The most (in)famous CBAG in central Mali is *Dan Na Ambassagou*.¹⁷⁷ This group consists mainly of ethnic Dogon, many of whom are traditional hunters. Created after alleged jihadists killed renowned Dogon hunter Théodore Somboro in October 2016, Dan Na Ambassagou presented itself as a **self-defense group** that aims to protect the so-called “Dogon country.”¹⁷⁸ The group’s military leader is Youssouf Toloba, himself a former member of Ganda Koy and Ganda Iso.¹⁷⁹ Over the next few years, Dan Na Ambassagou became the main adversary of the jihadist Katiba Macina.

They were boosted by governmental support, consisting of weapons, funding and direct collaboration with the FAMa.¹⁸⁰ Although Dan Na Ambassagou criticized the state’s inability to protect Malian civilians, it positioned itself as a useful ally for the state in the fight against jihadists.¹⁸¹ From 2018 onwards however, Dan Na Ambassagou reportedly increasingly attacked

¹⁷³ Tobie and Sangaré, *The Impact of Armed Groups*, 7.

¹⁷⁴ Quidelleur, « Courtiser l’État, » 54. ; Tobie and Sangaré, *The Impact of Armed Groups*, 10.

¹⁷⁵ Diallo, “Ethnic Clashes,” 303.

¹⁷⁶ Diallo, “Ethnic Clashes,” 300; Tobie and Sangaré, *The Impact of Armed Groups*, 17.

¹⁷⁷ Also spelled as Dana Amassagou, the name is a compound of the words Danam (hunters, Amba (God) and Sagou (trust) and roughly translates to “the hunters who put their trust in God.” Quidelleur, « Courtiser l’État, » 53.

¹⁷⁸ This refers to the area where the Dogon population has historically concentrated, particularly the four cercles Bandiagara, Bankass, Douentza and Koro. International Crisis Group, *Reversing Central Mali’s Descent*, 12.

¹⁷⁹ Dan Na Ambassagou’s leadership is split between a military branch led by Youssouf Toloba, and a political branch led by Mamadou Goudienkilé, who was formerly in the military. The military branch is dominant, and relations between the two are often strained. For a more detailed analysis of the group’s leadership, see Quidelleur, « Courtiser l’État, » 58-60.

¹⁸⁰ Benjaminsen, and Ba. “Fulani-Dogon killings in Mali,” 18. ; Lyammouri, *Central Mali*, 21. ; International Crisis Group, *Reversing Central Mali’s Descent* 12-13 ; Cold-Ravnkilde and Ba, *Unpacking ‘new climate wars’*, 17. ; Héni Nsaiba, “Actor Profile: Dan Na Ambassagou,” ACLED, 9 May 2022. <https://acleddata.com/2022/05/09/actor-profile-dan-na-ambassagou/>

¹⁸¹ Quidelleur, « Courtiser l’État, » 63-66. ; Nsaibia, “Actor Profile.”

Fulani communities, notably massacring 160 Fulani civilians in the village of Ogossagou in March 2019. These attacks strained the group's relations with the state, which eventually gave into public pressure and ordered the dissolution of Dan Na Ambassagou.¹⁸² Yet, the group itself denies responsibility for these attacks, and has continued operations. Although the state officially no longer support them, collaboration has continued in practice, recently together with suspected Wagner troops.¹⁸³

Furthermore, while Dan Na Ambassagou claims to protect Dogon communities, the group does not have unanimous support amongst Dogons. The group has been known to target members of its own community when they do not submit to the group's demands for funding and recruitment.¹⁸⁴ This violence stimulated the creation of a Dogon countermovement called *Dana Atem* in 2020, which has supported local negotiations between Fulani and jihadist groups.¹⁸⁵

Fulani and Dozo groups

Similar to the Dogon, other communities have also formed armed groups to protect themselves against external attacks. For instance, traditional hunters from ethnic Bambara, Bobo, Bwa, Marka, and Dafing groups in the region have also organized into self-defense groups to protect their communities. These Dozo groups have resisted attacks by Katiba Macina, occasionally with support of the FAMA.¹⁸⁶ Yet, they have also targeted Fulani communities, whom they suspect of supporting Katiba Macina.

This in turn has stimulated Fulani communities to form their own armed groups, as they are targeted by jihadists, other communities and state forces alike.¹⁸⁷ As most of these groups do not extend beyond the village-level, not much is known about them. Moreover, it is often difficult to distinguish between Fulani self-defense groups and Fulani aligned with jihadist groups, as they operate in the same context. A few groups are known by name, such as the *Alliance nationale pour la sauvegarde de l'identité peule et la restauration de la justice* (ANSIPRJ) formed in 2016, and the *Alliance pour le Salut au Sahel* (ASS) formed in 2018.¹⁸⁸ Another group led by Fulani businessman Sékou Bolly has focused on reintegrating former Fulani jihadists,

¹⁸² International Crisis Group. *Reversing Central Mali's Descent*, 14. ; Benjaminsen, and Ba. "Fulani-Dogon killings in Mali," 4. ; Cold-Ravnkilde and Ba, *Unpacking 'new climate wars'*, 32.

¹⁸³ Interview 2, 23 September 2022. ; Interview 5, 27 September 2022 ; Interview 7, 3 October 2022.

¹⁸⁴ Lyammouri, *Central Mali*, 21. ; Quidelleur, « Courtiser l'État, » 62-63 ; International Crisis Group. *Reversing Central Mali's Descent*, 13.

¹⁸⁵ Benjaminsen, and Ba. "Fulani-Dogon killings in Mali," 19.

¹⁸⁶ Lyammouri, *Central Mali*, -22-23. ; Human Rights Watch, "We used to be brothers", 25.

¹⁸⁷ Lyammouri, *Central Mali*, 19. ; International Crisis Group. *Reversing Central Mali's Descent*, 15.

¹⁸⁸ Ambroise Dakouo, *Les communautés peules au Mali*. (Accra : African Security Sector Network, 2016), <http://africansecuritynetwork.org/assn/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/les-communaut%C3%A9s-peules-au-Mali.pdf> ; Human Rights Watch, "We used to be brothers", 30 ; ¹⁸⁸ Diallo, "Ethnic Clashes," 303.

aligned with the political process of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR).¹⁸⁹ Next to self-defense, some Fulani CBAGs have engaged in reprisal attacks against Dogon communities, reinforcing a cycle of retributive violence.¹⁹⁰

Hence, the rise of CBAGs in central Mali since 2012 is driven by local grievances, but shows similarities to northern groups. First, all groups are centered around communal identities. According to an interviewee, the groups exist on a “continuum between self-defense and gaining more power.”¹⁹¹ On one side, the groups possess a security dimension, which includes physical protection and the securing of political-economic interests. However, the latter also relates to a political desire for power. In the existing power balance, some communities are dominant over others, granting them the power to decide over resources. Therefore, on the other side, CBAGs serve to strengthen the position of certain communities in the power balance, either by maintaining or challenging the status quo.¹⁹²

The current conflict with jihadists has intertwined with these long-standing communal power struggles. Because the state supports groups associated with a particular communal identity, social identities become increasingly politicized. People are forced to take sides and increasingly withdraw into their communities and respective armed groups, which further reifies social boundaries.¹⁹³ As a result, “simply belonging to a community or an ethnic group is gradually interpreted on the local security scene as signifying tacit opposition to, or support of, the state.”¹⁹⁴ Moreover, some communities have used the fight against jihadists as an opportunity to fight out communal rivalries. Hence, CBAGs created under the banner of self-defense against jihadists are simultaneously involved in a political struggle for power.¹⁹⁵ These intercommunal attacks in the name of self-defense have led to a cycle of retributive communal violence.

Nevertheless, the communal violence, fought through CBAGs – is ultimately the product of insurgency and counterinsurgency; communal tensions have been aggravated by the Malian state’s instrumentalization of certain ethnic groups for counterinsurgency purposes.¹⁹⁶ Dan Na Ambassagou is yet another example of this long-standing dynamic between ethnic militias and the Malian state, similar to Ganda Koy, Ganda Iso and GATIA. Moreover, the failed dissolution

¹⁸⁹ Dakouo, *Les communautés peules*. ; Diallo, “Ethnic Clashes,” 303. ; International Crisis Group. *Reversing Central Mali’s Descent*, 15.; Tobie and Sangaré, *The Impact of Armed Groups*, 10. ; Interview 2, 23 September 2022.

¹⁹⁰ Lyammouri, *Central Mali*, 20.

¹⁹¹ Interview 2, 23 September 2022.

¹⁹² Interview 2, 23 September 2022.; Quidelleur, « Courtiser l’État, » 54-55.

¹⁹³ International Crisis Group. *Reversing Central Mali’s Descent*, 4.

¹⁹⁴ Tobie and Sangaré, *The Impact of Armed Groups*, 17.

¹⁹⁵ Interview 2, 23 September 2022. ; Quidelleur, « Les dividendes de ‘la guerre contre le terrorisme’.»

¹⁹⁶ Benjaminsen, and Ba. “Fulani-Dogon killings in Mali,” 7-9.

of Dan Na Ambassagou illustrates that the Malian state is losing control over these groups. The military framing of the conflict since 2012 has obscured the governance-related issues that lie at its heart.¹⁹⁷ The same holds true for Burkina Faso, although in a slightly different circumstances.

Burkina Faso: from counter-crime to counterinsurgency

The proliferation of CBAGs in Burkina Faso since 2012 has occurred within a context of socio-political upheaval and ever-increasing insecurity. The 2012 Mali crisis set into motion a chain of events that led to the fall of the Compaoré regime in 2014 and the consequent dissolution of the state security apparatus.¹⁹⁸ In rural areas, this reduced an already fragmented state presence. Existing sources of insecurity – a sense of state neglect, disputes around natural resources and crime – were magnified, with banditry in the northeast escalating to a point where some main roads were no longer used at all.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, a new source of insecurity was the increasing jihadist violence spilling over from Mali from 2015 onwards. By 2021, Burkina Faso replaced Mali as the epicenter of violence, and at the time of writing in 2022 the state has experienced 2 military coups within 10 months and is unable to counter jihadist groups, which control 40% of the country.²⁰⁰ Jihadist attacks generated further state withdrawal from the northeastern rural areas, and a call for local defense initiatives.

In this context, CBAGs have multiplied and expanded their role as local security provider, and as partners with the state in the fight against jihadist groups. Existing groups like the Koglweogo and Dozo have spread across the country, and similar groups emerged that modeled themselves after them.²⁰¹ Among Dozo, different associations continue to coexist, but none have asserted a national authority.²⁰² There has been an overall evolution from the fight against banditry to the fight against jihadists, although the issue has divided members of different associations.²⁰³

Some CBAGs are becoming more professionalized and adopt broader security tasks, including taxation, the fight against jihadists and involvement in the gold mining sector. Whereas Compaoré had delegated the security of gold mining sites to private security companies (known

¹⁹⁷ Diallo, “Ethnic Clashes,” 304.

¹⁹⁸ Da Cunha Dupuy and Quidelleur. *Self-Defence Movements*. ; International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso*, 3-4.

¹⁹⁹ International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso*, 4.

²⁰⁰ Héni Nsaibia, “10 conflicts.” ; Le Burkina Faso lance le recrutement de plus de 50 000 civils supplétifs de l’armée pour combattre les djihadistes, » *Le Temps*, 26 October 2022. <https://www.letemps.ch/monde/burkina-faso-lance-recrutement-plus-50-000-civils-suppletifs-larmee-combattre-djihadistes>

²⁰¹ Tisseron, *Pandora’s box*, 9.

²⁰² Presently, the *Union Nationale de Dozo* led by Ali Konaté is one of the most important, with 17,000 members and 142 brotherhoods. Another important figure Yacouba Drabo, who leads the *Confrérie des Dozo sans Frontières* (formerly the National Union of Dozo Traditional Health Practitioners of Burkina). While many Dozo groups in areas of jihadist activity have become involved in the fight of terrorism, not all Dozo have necessarily organized into self-defense groups. Tisseron, *Pandora’s box*, 17. ; Interview 3, 23 September 2022.

²⁰³ Tisseron, *Pandora’s box*, 21-22.

as *concessionaires*), this structure disintegrated with his departure and left the door open to local actors. Both Koglweogos and Dozos are employed as security forces in various parts of the country, often linked to political interests.²⁰⁴ Moreover, Koglweogos and Dozos have been accused of civilian abuses against other communities, mainly against Fulani.²⁰⁵ Although this reflects communal tensions similar to those in Mali, Burkina Faso has not experienced the same level of communal violence as its neighbor.

While the Burkinabe state welcomed the expansion of CBAGs to support security provision, it has simultaneously sought to (re)gain control over them. The mobilization of civilian volunteers through the VDP in 2020 can be seen as a way to institutionalize CBAGs, as it incorporates many Dozos and Koglweogos.²⁰⁶ However, the VDP seem to be a new kind of phenomenon that cannot be properly fitted in the CBAG framework. They are similar to an institutionalized, national militia, as they receive training, weapons, salary, pension from the state.²⁰⁷ Yet, the fact that they are recruited and operate primarily within their own communities makes them community-based. Furthermore, the dominance of Dozos and Koglweogos within the VDP blurs the boundaries between the different groups.²⁰⁸ Although the VDP officially adhere to state law, poor regulation has led many VDP to engage in similar civilian abuses as Dozo and Koglweogo groups.²⁰⁹ Despite these concerns, the new military junta launched a massive expansion of 50,000 extra VDP fighters in October 2022 to reinforce the fight against jihadist groups.²¹⁰ I further explore these trends through the case of the Koglweogo, currently the most widespread CBAG in Burkina Faso.

Koglweogo: “Guardians of the Bush”²¹¹

The Koglweogo emerged within farmer communities in central Burkina Faso during the 2000s in response to widespread rural banditry. Their rise has been influenced by previous forms of local security, such as the CDRs in the 1980s and traditional hunter groups.²¹² Early versions of

²⁰⁴ International Crisis Group. *Getting a Grip*, 3-4.

²⁰⁵ Tisseron, Pandora's box, 29-30. ; Merel Demuynck, *Civilians on the Front Lines of (Counter-) Terrorism: Lessons from the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland in Burkina Faso*. (The Hague: ICTT, 2021), 4-5.
<https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2021/11/Civilians-on-the-Front-Lines-of-Counter-Terrorism-1.pdf>

²⁰⁶ Demuynck, *Civilians on the Front Lines*, 11. ; Tisseron, Pandora's box, 29-30. ; Anna Schmauder, and Annabelle Willeme, *The Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland*. (The Hague: Clingendael, 2021),
<https://www.clingendael.org/publication/volunteers-defense-homeland>

²⁰⁷ Demuynck, *Civilians on the Front Lines*, 3-5.; Interview 6, 27 September 2022. ; Interview 4, 23 September 2022.

²⁰⁸ Interview 4, 23 September 2022 ; Demuynck, *Civilians on the Front Lines*, 8-10.

²⁰⁹ Demuynck, *Civilians on the Front Lines*, 10. ; Schmauder and Willeme, *The Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland*.

²¹⁰ Le Temps, “Le Burkina Faso lance le recrutement »

²¹¹ A combination of the Mooré words *kogle* (to guard) and *weogo* (the bush), the name *Koglweogo* refers to a range of measures undertaken to “secure community life in rural areas.”²¹¹ Hagberg, “Performing tradition while doing politics,” 180.

²¹² Da Cunha Dupuy and Snow, “Bureaucratizing self-defence,” 280.

the Koglweogo appeared in the 1990s related to environmental protection,²¹³ but the first legally-recognized group was created in the village of Namissima in 2005. This group was set up El Hadj Ouédraogo, who had been inspired by the way people in Côte d'Ivoire had formed self-defense groups to combat theft in coffee and cacao plantations.²¹⁴ Since 2015, the Koglweogo have expanded across the country amidst amplified insecurity and increasing withdrawal of state security forces from rural regions.²¹⁵

The Koglweogo refer to themselves as a self-defense group, whose primary objective has been to combat crime and delinquency within their communities.²¹⁶ They deal particularly with theft of livestock and equipment, as these are essential sources of income for the rural population. Their main practices revolve around patrolling, arresting, judging and prosecuting perceived offenders. Imposed sanctions include fines, public humiliation, popular trials, the detention of weapons, the swearing of oaths, and physical punishment such as whipping.²¹⁷ There is also a strong sense of morality among Koglweogos; they see crimes committed against neighbors and relatives as a sign of moral decay.²¹⁸

Although methods of physical punishment have sparked public debate and criticism by human rights organizations, the Koglweogo are widely recognized for their effectiveness and transparency in combatting crime.²¹⁹ A 2018 survey for the *Institut Supérieur de Sécurité Humaine* found that 90% of the respondents valued the Koglweogo as an informal police force.²²⁰ Furthermore, two interviewees that conducted fieldwork with the Koglweogo emphasized that the sense of insecurity significantly decreased among local communities.²²¹

you hear a lot of anecdotal things of a sense that at least things were getting safer. People can sleep at night without worrying that their cattle will be stolen, that their car will be stolen. And especially in a country where people rely on motor cycles, that is a very primordial thing. It might be people's most expensive possession.²²²

²¹³ Interview 6, 27 September 2022 ; Interview 4, 23 September 2022. ; Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 9.

²¹⁴ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 180. ; Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 11. ; Kouraogo, Kaboré, and Kibora, *Les groupes d'auto-défense Koglweogo*, 2-3.

²¹⁵ Estimates in 2020 set the number of Koglweogo groups at 4,400 with a total of 45,000 members across the country. Frowd, "The Politics of Non-State Security Provision," 110.

²¹⁶ Da Cunha Dupuy and Snow, "Bureaucratizing self-defence," 281.

²¹⁷ Da Cunha Dupuy and Snow, "Bureaucratizing self-defence," 280-82. ; Kouraogo, Kaboré, and Kibora, *Les groupes d'auto-défense Koglweogo*, 2-3. ; Kalfelis, "With or Without the State," 601. ; ²¹⁷ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 180. ; Compaoré and Bojsen, « Sécurité d'en bas au Burkina Faso, » 686. ; Interview 4, 23 September 2022.

²¹⁸ Interview 4, 23 September 2022. ; Kalfelis, "With or Without the State," 601 ; Da Cunha Dupuy and Snow, "Bureaucratizing self-defence." 281. ; Compaoré and Bojsen, « Sécurité d'en bas au Burkina Faso, » 694. ; Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 181.

²¹⁹ Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 14. ; Kouraogo, Kaboré, and Kibora, *Les groupes d'auto-défense Koglweogo*, 4-5. ; Leclercq and Matagne, "With or Without You," 5-7.

²²⁰ Idrissa, *Tinder to the Fire*, 37.

²²¹ Interview 6, 27 September 2022. ; Interview 4, 23 September 2022.

²²² Interview 6, 27 September 2022

The Koglweogo's efficient and quick response to crime coupled with their proximity to the community, stood in contrast to the lacking response of state forces.²²³ The fact that the Koglweogo come from the people within the community,²²⁴ was highlighted by an interviewee:

These men are neighbors of the people that seek their help. They live in a house, and a couple of streets apart of that there are the Koglweogo. Everybody knows them. They are well-settled in their communities because they have probably been raised there all of their lives... This is also a very strong form of control, to keep these groups in check. That has also led them to really adapt to the do's and don'ts. The things that people find good and the things people criticize.²²⁵

Lords of the bush?

Over the years, the Koglweogo have expanded both geographically as operationally. First, while most CBAGs are restricted to a certain village, town or region, the Koglweogo have spread across the country. Like CBAGs in the 1990s, they initially arose in rural areas and peri-urban areas with few police and gendarmerie, but the Koglweogo are now also established in urban areas.²²⁶ This geographic expansion has generated both tensions with the Dozo and internal tensions. The Koglweogo are less present in the West, where Dozos have historically dominated.²²⁷ The Dozo have resisted Koglweogo expansion, seeing them as a threat to their authority as security provider.²²⁸ They see themselves as a well-organized group due to their initiation process and their claim to the historical legacy of dozoya. In contrast, the Koglweogo are a more recent and unstructured group; anyone can join them.²²⁹ Yet, there are also many similarities between the Dozo and Koglweogo; both act as security provider to local communities, and both are intertwined with state politicians.²³⁰

In addition, although there is a national Koglweogo organization, the Koglweogo are not a homogeneous or unified movement.²³¹ There are considerable differences between Koglweogo groups in different regions, and their practices and rules may vary from one locality

²²³ Da Cunha Dupuy and Quidelleur. *Self-Defence Movements*. ; Leclercq and Matagne, "With or Without You," 7. ; Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 14. ; Da Cunha Dupuy and Snow, "Bureaucratizing self-defence," 281.

²²⁴ Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 14. ; Da Cunha Dupuy and Snow, "Bureaucratizing self-defence," 281.

²²⁵ ; Interview 4, 23 September 2022.

²²⁶ Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 9-10. ; Interview 4, 23 September 2022 ; Interview 6, 27 September 2022.

²²⁷ Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 18. ; Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 183-186.

²²⁸ This tension also relates to the social opposition between the Mandingo (represented by the Dozo) and Mossi (represented in the Koglweogo). Since the 1980s, the Mossi have increasingly occupied more land in western Burkina Faso. The Dozo's resistance against the expansion of Koglweogo thus reflects resistance against a sense of Mossi domination among other populations. See: Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 183-186. ; Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 18.

²²⁹ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 184. ; Interview 6, 27 September 2022.

²³⁰ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 186.

²³¹ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 180. ; Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 5-16.

to another, since they are rooted in their community and local power structures.²³² An interviewee described the Koglweogo as “a mirror of the political and social issues,” shifting practices according to the local issues.²³³ When studying the Koglweogo, one must therefore be careful not to generalize the actions of one group for all Koglweogo.

Secondly, the Koglweogo have expanded their operations as security actor. Next to combatting theft, some groups have adopted additional governance tasks, including the imposition of fines and taxes, the administration of justice, conflict mediation, and an overall degree of bureaucratization.²³⁴ Moreover, they are playing a growing role in the fight against jihadists, providing intelligence and surveillance support to the state forces.²³⁵ Hence, the former “guardians” have become “lords of the bush.”²³⁶

This expansion has brought them closer to the state, although this relationship fluctuates between collaboration, autonomy and tension.²³⁷ While critical of the state’s lacking response to insecurity, the Koglweogo have no intentions to replace the state. In fact, the shared security objectives of Koglweogo and state security forces often leads to cooperation in criminal investigations and recently in counterinsurgency operations against jihadists.²³⁸ While the state has welcomed the Koglweogo’s effectiveness as a local security actor, it has simultaneously attempted to contain the group. In 2016, the government attempted to incorporate the Koglweogo as part of a neighborhood police and gain oversight on their actions, although this was rejected by Koglweogo leaders. Likewise, the creation of the VDP in 2020 was an attempt for the state to incorporate and control the Koglweogo.²³⁹ Furthermore, there are significant ties between Koglweogos and state politicians. Boukary Kaboré (known as “the Lion”) is a Koglweogo leader as well as a former army colonel and a presidential candidate, and former Minister of Security Simon Compaoré has been a fervent supporter of the Koglweogo, for a time even named Honorary President of the Koglweogo.²⁴⁰

On their part, the Koglweogo have a contradictory discourse: they seek recognition by the state, whilst wishing to retain their autonomy.²⁴¹ Koglweogo leaders rejected the attempted

²³² Tisseron, *Pandora’s box*, 16. ‘Kalfelis, “With or Without the State,” 601. ; International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso*, 9. ; Interview 4, 23 September 2022 ; Interview 6, 27 September 2022. ; Frowd, “The Politics of Non-State Security Provision, 126.

²³³ Interview 4, 23 September 2022

²³⁴ Da Cunha Dupuy and Quidelleur. *Self-Defence Movements*. ; Da Cunha Dupuy and Snow, “Bureaucratizing self-defence.” ; International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso*, 9-10. ; Interview 4, 23 September 2022.

²³⁵ Frowd, “The Politics of Non-State Security Provision.”; Tisseron, *Pandora’s box*, 21-22.; Compaoré and Bojsen, « Sécurité d’en bas au Burkina Faso, » 686.

²³⁶ International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso*, 9.

²³⁷ International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso* ; Leclercq and Matagne, “‘With or Without You,’ 6-8.

²³⁸ Leclercq and Matagne, “‘With or Without You,’ 8. ; Frowd, “The Politics of Non-State Security Provision,” 125.

²³⁹ ; Interview 6, 27 September 2022. ; Interview 4, 23 September 2022; Demuyne, *Civilians on the Front Lines*, 6.

²⁴⁰ Da Cunha Dupuy and Snow, “Bureaucratizing self-defence,” 288. ; Hagberg, “Performing tradition while doing politics,” 188.

²⁴¹ Interview 6, 27 September 2022 ; Frowd, “The Politics of Non-State Security Provision,” 121-22.

incorporation into the state security apparatus, and have been reluctant to professionalize on the state's terms.²⁴² Yet, they do seek recognition by adopting professional or state repertoires of security, which they combine with "traditional" repertoires.²⁴³ On one side, they derive legitimacy from ties to customary authorities and their engagement with certain spiritual elements, such as the performance of rituals and swearing of oaths on the Bible, Quran or other mystical powers.²⁴⁴ On the other side, they seek public authority by mimicking the state. The use of membership cards and uniforms, processes of patrols and investigations and practices of bureaucratization²⁴⁵ are similar to or inspired by the state. Hence, by drawing on the professional repertoire of the state, the Koglweogo seek to produce public authority, presenting itself as a provider of security whilst differentiating itself from state security forces.²⁴⁶

In sum, the Koglweogo evolved from early forms of environmental protection in the 1990s into an explicit crime-control group in 2015, and expanded into a broader, formalized group today that engages with larger questions of insecurity.²⁴⁷ Whereas they have remained embedded within their community, their development has increasingly interwoven with the state. Similar to Benkadi in the 1990s, Koglweogo members are involved with state politicians. This demonstrates a continuation of the state's tendency to profit from CBAGs whilst containing them.

Together, the Dozo and Koglweogo have become increasingly significant in Burkina Faso's security landscape. Although their history differs, both groups are based in farmer communities and have combined local tradition with involvement to state politics. Especially with their recent integration into the VDP, Koglweogos and Dozos are becoming progressively interconnected with a state that is unable to properly oversee and regulate their actions. Combined with an under-representation of pastoralist populations in many Koglweogo and Dozo groups, and by extent the VDP, this may reinforce community tensions and sustain violent conflict. There have already been a few incidents where Koglweogo reportedly attacked Fulani communities.²⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the general population recognizes the Koglweogo's effectiveness in combating crime. This illustrates that CBAGs have become progressively important as security provider alongside a state struggling to face jihadist groups.

²⁴² Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 16-17. ; Frowd, "The Politics of Non-State Security Provision," 127. ; Interview 6, 27 September 2022. ; Interview 4, 23 September 2022.

²⁴³ Frowd, "The Politics of Non-State Security Provision," 124-124. ; Interview 6, 27 September 2022.

²⁴⁴ Hagberg, "Performing tradition while doing politics," 189. ; Leclercq and Matagne, "'With or Without You'," 6-7. ; Compaoré and Bojsen, « Sécurité d'en bas au Burkina Faso, » 688-689. ; Frowd, "The Politics of Non-State Security Provision," 121-22.

²⁴⁵ Da Cunha Dupuy and Snow, "Bureaucratizing self-defence."

²⁴⁶ Leclercq and Matagne, "'With or Without You'" 7.

²⁴⁷ Interview 6, 27 September 2022

²⁴⁸ Demuyne, *Civilians on the Front Lines*, 10-11 ; Tisseron, *Pandora's box*, 23-24.

Chapter conclusion

Altogether, the trajectories of CBAGs in Mali and Burkina Faso since 2012 can be understood as the continuation of old habits in a new context. As in the 1990s and 2000s, the trajectories of CBAGs in Mali have been heavily influenced by the Malian state, which has stimulated or directly created ethnic militias to support their counterinsurgency campaigns, first against Tuareg and then against jihadist insurgents. Whereas this was previously restricted to the north, CBAGs have also developed in central Mali since 2014. Compared to the militias in northern Mali, these groups have been less involved with the politics of Tuareg independence, and more focused on the defense against jihadists. Nonetheless, every group seems to have some sort of political ambition, as collaboration with the state in the fight against jihadists may also strengthen the position of their community in the power balance. The extent of interaction with the state differs, ranging from GATIA's direct overlap with military officials, to the clandestine collaboration between Dan Na Ambassagou and the FAMa. Only the Fulani groups do not seem connected to the state.

In Burkina Faso, the state has continued to seek a delicate balance between the encouragement and containment of CBAGs. Like with Benkadi in the 1990s, state politicians capitalized on the Koglweogo's successes in countering crime, whilst attempting to control them through their institutionalization, most recently through the VDP. Although CBAGs were previously focused on countering crime, they have expanded their role to broader security issues, particularly through fighting jihadists. This has increased their collaboration with the state, especially through the incorporation of Koglweogos and Dozos into the VDP. Hence, CBAGs in Burkina Faso are becoming engaged in counterinsurgency, although not to the same extent as in Mali, where this has been a long-standing practice.

Furthermore, CBAGs in both countries have become implicated in intercommunal conflict, notably targeting Fulani, who are widely stigmatized as jihadists. This communal violence is particularly strong in Mali, where CBAGs were already strongly based in ethnic identities in the 1990s. Although CBAGs in Burkina Faso are not as much centered on a single ethnicity, the Koglweogo, Dozo and hence the VDP consist predominantly of farmer communities, and have been hostile towards pastoralist Fulani.

Finally, with the departure of French and EU forces from Mali, and both states preoccupied with the political transition process, CBAGs are increasingly on the front lines against better-trained and better-armed jihadist groups.²⁴⁹ It remains to be seen how this will impact their development in the years to come.

²⁴⁹ Quidelleur, *The local roots of violence*. ; Quidelleur, « Les dividendes » ; Nsaibia, "Mid-year Update"

Chapter 6: Conclusion

How have Community-Based Armed Groups emerged and developed in Burkina Faso and Mali between the 1990s and 2022?

In order to better understand the contemporary proliferation of “self-defense” groups in Mali and Burkina Faso, this thesis studied their emergence and development since the 1990s through the analytical lens of community-based armed groups.

The historical trajectories of CBAGs have been arranged into three phases: origins, emergence, and development. The origins of CBAGs in Mali and Burkina Faso date back to the colonial era, when the limited presence of the colonial administration in rural and peri-urban areas stimulated communities to organized their own forms of security provision and policing. This limited state presence has continued since independence, and together with a corresponding sense of insecurity among local communities, it has been central to the emergence and development of CBAGs. First emerging during the 1990s, CBAGs have had evolving roles in security provision amidst crime, insurgency and overall violence, and gained increasing prominence in the aftermath of the 2012 crisis among the rise of jihadist groups.

In Mali, CBAGs mainly emerged as **ethnic militias** in northern regions during succeeding Tuareg insurgencies in the 1990s, 2000s and 2012. A continuing pattern is the state’s instrumentalization of these militias as a counterinsurgency force, initially against Tuareg insurgents, and later against jihadist groups. However, the CBAGs that emerged in central Mali following the growing jihadist presence in 2014 have a less pronounced political dimension, as they were not entangled in the politics of Tuareg insurgency. These CBAGs emerged as **self-defense groups** against jihadist groups, although they are also a means to fight out communal rivalries. This politicization of communal identities is a growing pattern in Mali, where communal boundaries have been reinforced by the state’s support for certain CBAGs, stimulating other communities to retreat behind their respective armed groups.

In Burkina Faso, CBAGs have consistently had a predominant security function. The first groups emerged in response to widespread theft and banditry in the 1990s, and proliferated among the sociopolitical upheaval following the fall of the Compaoré regime and the rise of jihadist violence after 2014. In the current context, CBAGs are transforming their main objective from **crime-control** to **self-defense** against jihadist groups. A continuing pattern is the state’s balancing act between the encouragement of community security initiatives and the containment of these groups. However, the interaction between CBAGs and the state has grown with CBAGs’ involvement in counterinsurgency against jihadist groups. This role has been

institutionalized with the creation of the VDP, the latest attempt for the state to control CBAGs. As a state-created force with recruitment and operations based in local communities, the VDP are similar to a militia, although the blurred boundaries with existing CBAGs complicates classification into the CBAG typology. So far, the status of the VDP remains largely unknown, due to the state's limited ability to supervise VDP groups. However, two primary concerns are the VDP's responsibility for civilian abuses, and the further blurring of the lines between civilians and combatants. With the recently announced expansion, it remains to be seen how the VDP develop as a force within the Burkinabe security landscape.

Considering these trajectories, several main findings arise. First, while CBAGs have flourished in the post-2012 environment, they must be understood in the broader historical context of hybrid security governance in Mali and Burkina Faso. These groups are often studied through the "fight against terrorism" framing, which decontextualizes them as a recent phenomenon. Rather, this thesis has shown that the emergence of CBAGs in both countries can be traced back to a long-standing sense of insecurity in local communities, and the corresponding shortcomings of the state. This finding highlights state-community relations as a key factor determining CBAG transformations.²⁵⁰ In both countries, CBAGs emerged in response to (perceived) insecurities within their communities; in Mali, the main source of insecurity were the Tuareg insurgencies, while in Burkina Faso it was the widespread theft and banditry. Since the 1990s, CBAGs have transformed along with evolving insecurities; such as the Koglweogo's transformation from environmental protection, to crime-control, and into counterinsurgency. Hence, the conflict with jihadists is only the latest source of insecurity to which CBAGs have adapted their role as security provider. Although their impact on their communities is difficult to discern, all groups essentially performed some sort of security function.

Secondly, the examined CBAGs also have a political dimension, seeing as they are all in some measure connected to the state; Malian CBAGs have supported the state's counterinsurgency to strengthen the position of their community in the power balance, and Burkinabe CBAGs have likewise sought recognition and enjoyed ties to state politicians. Moreover, CBAGs in both countries have been accused of violence against other communities. In this aspect, the fight against jihadism has become an excuse for increasingly generalized violence. Especially in Mali, communities have exploited the fight against jihadism to justify the creation of armed groups and violence against other communities. Ganda Koy, Ganda Iso, GATIA and Dan Na Ambassagou claim their violence is in self-defense, even though their close collaboration with the state and ethnic targeting of other ethnic communities are classified by outsiders as the actions of a militia. This emphasizes that the categorization of these groups is

²⁵⁰ van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 4-5.

contested; while the CBAG typology may help to analyze these groups, their constant evolution and peculiarities ultimately defy a neat classification.

An imperfect co-production of security

Whether in parallel with, opposed to, or in support of the state, these CBAGs are part and parcel of hybrid security governance. Yet, these hybrid dynamics remain insufficiently understood and considered by policymakers. The rise of jihadist groups has led the conflict to be framed in military terms as a fight against terrorism in the Sahel, which obscures the underlying governance issues in Mali and Burkina Faso. The already limited state presence has further reduced in rural areas, as the national armed forces prove unable to counter the jihadist attacks. Consequently, most CBAGs have become involved in the fight against jihadist groups alongside state forces and international actors. As both states increasingly rely on CBAGs for security provision and counterinsurgency, they seem to be losing what little control they had. Whereas CBAGs have grown, the state has decreased. In the past two years, both Mali and Burkina Faso have experienced two military coups. With politicians preoccupied by political transitions, the state's position towards CBAGs is undefined and gives these groups free rein.

Meanwhile, “the fight against terrorism” framing has generated international interventions with predominantly military, short-term objectives that overlook the governance issues at the heart of the conflict. The stabilization strategies of European policymakers continue to be informed by Weberian notions of the state. Hence, the prescribed medicine for the “fragile” Sahelian state has been to invest in state security forces and “bring back the state.” Yet, these strategies fail to understand the hybrid character of these states, where CBAGs such as the Koglweogo, GATIA and Dan Na Ambassagou play a significant role in the security provision alongside the state. As long as these dynamics between CBAGs, the state and local communities are not considered, stabilization missions set themselves up for failure.

Considering the scarce research on contemporary CBAGs in Mali and Burkina Faso, the literature review and interviews conducted for this thesis function as an explorative step towards a more comprehensive understanding of the wide range of groups. This thesis has explored drivers behind their emergence and development, specifically their relationship with the state and communities. These insights are relevant for anyone engaged with security in the Sahel, including researchers, policymakers, analysts and NGO-staff.

However, as a master's thesis, this research has significant limitations. The data collection was restricted by my desk-based position and limited French. Since I did not conduct fieldwork, I did not have access to the groups themselves. Likewise, because I was not able to conduct live interviews in French, this limited the inclusion of local French-speaking experts.

Therefore, this thesis provides limited insights on the internal dynamics of CBAGs and the communities in which they operate. Furthermore, due to the broad geographical and chronological scope of comparison, the analysis of individual groups is relatively superficial. This is partially because, for most groups, the reviewed literature did not provide more in-depth information. Moreover, the studied groups in this thesis excluded other types of armed groups, such as insurgents and criminal gangs. Finally, this thesis has not examined the influence of international actors on CBAG trajectories.

Considering these limitations, more research is needed to advance the understanding of these armed groups. A possible avenue for future research is to examine the other factors driving CBAG transformation in van Metre's model. This thesis focused on the state-community relations, but further research could analyze the influence of resources, social norms, the threat environment, international actors; leadership, discipline, and recruitment.²⁵¹ Considering the multitude of international interventions in the Sahel, it would be interesting to explore how these have interacted with CBAGs. Above all, more research is needed at the grassroots level to get a better grasp of how these groups operate and how they impact security in local communities. With the growing prominence of CBAGs in Mali and Burkina Faso, the recent emergence of similar groups in Niger, and the ongoing reconfiguration of the European interventions, any reassessment of security in the Sahel should be informed by further research into the role of community-based armed groups within this imperfect co-production of security.

²⁵¹ van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 4-5.

Bibliography

- Agbiboa, Daniel. *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.2>.
- Agbiboa, Daniel E. "The precariousness of protection: Civilian defense groups countering Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria." *African Studies Review* 64, no. 1 (2021): 192-216. doi:10.1017/asr.2020.47
- Albrecht, Peter, and Louise Wiuff Moe. "The simultaneity of authority in hybrid orders." *Peacebuilding* 3, no.1 (2015): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2014.928551>
- Arseniev, Vladimir. « Les chasseurs Donso du Mali à l'épreuve du temps, » *Afrique contemporaine*, 223-224, no. 3-4 (2007) :341-361. <https://doi.org/10.3917/afco.223.0341>
- Bagayoko, Niagale, Eboe Hutchful, and Robin Luckham. "Hybrid security governance in Africa: rethinking the foundations of security, justice and legitimate public authority." *Conflict, Security & Development* 16, no. 1 (2016): 1-32, DOI: 10.1080/14678802.2016.1136137
- Baldaro, Edoardo. "A dangerous method: How Mali lost control of the north, and learned to stop worrying." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29, no. 3 (2018): 579-603. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1080/09592318.2018.1455323>
- Bassett , Thomas J "Dangerous Pursuits: Hunter Associations (Donzo Ton) and National Politics in Côte D'Ivoire ." *Africa* 73, no. 1 (2003): 1-30 . doi:10.3366/afr.2003.73.1.1
- Bassett, Thomas J. "Containing the Donzow: The Politics of Scale in Côte d'Ivoire." *Africa Today* 50, no. 4 (2004): 31–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4187609>
- Bateson, Regina. "The politics of vigilantism." *Comparative Political Studies* 54, no. 6 (2021): 923-955. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020957692>.
- Benjaminsen, Tor A., and Boubacar Ba. "Fulani-dogon killings in mali: Farmer-herder conflicts as insurgency and counterinsurgency." *African Security* 14, no.1 (2021): 4-26.<https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2021.1925035>
- Bisson, Loïc., Ine Cottyn, Kars de Bruijne, and Fransje Molenaar. *Between hope and despair : Pastoralist adaptation in Burkina Faso*. The Hague: Clingendael, 2021. <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2021/between-hope-and-despair/>
- Boege, Volker, M. Anne Brown, and Kevin P. Clements. "Hybrid political orders, not fragile states." *Peace Review* 21, no.1 (2009): 13-21. DOI: 10.1080/10402650802689997
- Boisvert, M. A., "Failing at Violence: The Longer-Lasting Impact of Pro-Government Militias in Northern Mali since 2012," *African Security* 8, (2015): 272–98. doi:10.1080/19392206.2015.1100505

- Bojsen, Heidi, and Ismaël Compaoré. "Enquête anthropologique et documentation visuelle sur la sécurité chez les Koglweogo au Burkina Faso." *Mande Studies*, 21 (2019): 91-113. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2979/mande.21.1.07>
- Braathen, Einar, Bøås, Morten, and Sæther, Gjermund. *Ethnicity Kills? The Politics of War, Peace and Ethnicity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.
- Chauzal, Grégory, and Thibault Van Damme. *The roots of Mali's conflict. Moving beyond the 2012 crisis*. The Hague: Clingendael, 2015. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/The_roots_of_Malis_conflict.pdf
- Cold-Ravnskilde, Signe Marie and Boubacar Ba. *Unpacking 'new climate wars': Actors and Drivers of Conflict in the Sahel*. Copenhagen: DIIS, 2022. https://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/5417749/Actors_and_drivers_conflict_Sahel_DIIS_Report_2022_04.pdf
- Compaoré, Ismaël, and Heidi Bojsen. « Sécurité d'en bas au Burkina Faso. Koglweogo, gardiens de la brousse, gardiens de la société ? » *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 239, no. 3 (2020): 671-697. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.4000/etudesafriaines.31833>
- Da Cunha Dupuy, Romane, and William Snow. "Bureaucratizing self-defence and reframing identities: The case of Koglweogo in Burkina Faso." In *Identification and Citizenship in Africa*, pp. 279-292. Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003053293>
- Da Cunha Dupuy, Romane, and Tanguy Quidelleur. *Self-Defence Movements in Burkina Faso: Diffusion and Structuration of Koglweogo Groups*. Paris: Noria Research, 2018. <https://noria-research.com/self-defence-movements-in-burkina-faso-diffusion-and-structuration-of-koglweogo-groups/>
- Dakouo, Ambroise. *Les communautés peules au Mali*. Accra : African Security Sector Network, 2016. <http://africansecuritynetwork.org/assn/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/les-communaut%C3%A9s-peules-au-Mali.pdf>
- de Bruijne, Kars, and Paula van Voorthuizen. *Self-defence Groups, Politics and the Sahelian state*. The Hague: Clingendael, 2022. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/self-defence-groups-politics-and-sahelian-state>
- Desgrais, Nicolas, Yvan Guichaoua, and Andrew Lebovich. "Unity is the exception. Alliance formation and de-formation among armed actors in Northern Mali." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29, no. 4 (2018): 654-679. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1080/09592318.2018.1488403>
- Demuyneck Merel. *Civilians on the Front Lines of (Counter-) Terrorism: Lessons from the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland in Burkina Faso*. The Hague: ICTT, 2021. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2021/11/Civilians-on-the-Front-Lines-of-Counter-Terrorism-1.pdf>
- Diallo, Ousmane Aly. "Ethnic Clashes, Jihad, and Insecurity in Central Mali." *Peace Review*, 29, no.3 (2017): 299-306, DOI: 10.1080/10402659.2017.1344529

- Ferrarini, Lorenzo. "The dankun network: the donso hunters of Burkina Faso between ecological change and new associations." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 34, no. 1 (2016): 80-96. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1080/02589001.2016.1190529>
- Frowd, Philippe M. "The Politics of Non-State Security Provision in Burkina Faso: Koglweogo Self-Defence Groups' Ambiguous Pursuit of Recognition." *African Affairs*, 121, no. 482 (2022): 109–130, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adab033>
- Haavik, Viljar. *Self-defence militias and state sponsorship in Burkina Faso*. Durban: ACCORD, 2022. <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/self-defence-militias-and-state-sponsorship-in-burkina-faso/>
- Hagberg, Sten. "Political decentralization and traditional leadership in the Benkadi hunters' association in western Burkina Faso." *Africa Today* 50, no. 4 (2004): 51–70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4187610>.
- Hagberg, Sten. "Beyond regional radars: Security from below and the rule of law in the Sahel." *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 25, no.1. (2018): 21-37, DOI: 10.1080/10220461.2018.1417903
- Hagberg, Sten. "Performing tradition while doing politics: A comparative study of the dozos and koglweogos self-defense movements in Burkina Faso." *African Studies Review* 62, no. 1 (2019): 173–193. doi:10.1017/asr.2018.52
- Hagberg, Sten, Kibora, Ludovic O., Sidi Barry, Yacouba Cissao, Siaka Gnessi, Amado Kaboré, Bintou Koné, and Mariatou Zongo. *Securite par le bas: Perceptions et perspectives citoyennes des défis de sécurité au Burkina Faso*. Uppsala University, 2019. <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-396643>
- Hagberg, Sten and Syna Ouattara. "Vigilantes in War: Boundary Crossing of Hunters in Burkina Faso & Côte d'Ivoire ." In *Domesticating Vigilantism in Africa*, edited by Thomas Kirschand Tilo Grätz , 98 – 117 . Oxford : James Currey, 2010.
- Hagmann, Tobias, and Didier Péclard. "Negotiating statehood: dynamics of power and domination in Africa." *Development and change* 41, no. 4 (2010): 539-562. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01656.x>
- Hellweg, Joseph. "Encompassing the State: Sacrifice and Security in the Hunters' Movement of Côte d'Ivoire." *Africa Today* 50, no. 4 (2004): 3–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4187608>
- Hoffmann, Kasper, Louise Wiuff Moe, Eric Hahonou, and Lotte Pelckmans. *Protection and (in) security beyond state: Insights from Eastern Africa and Sahel*. Copenhagen: DISS, 2015. <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/120396>.
- Human Rights Watch. "We used to be brothers" *Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/12/07/we-used-be-brothers/self-defense-group-abuses-central-mali>
- Idrissa, R. *Tinder to the Fire: Burkina Faso in the Conflict Zone*. Leiden: RLS Research Papers On Peace And Conflict Studies In West And Central Africa, 2019. <https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2981745/view>

- International Crisis Group. *Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence*. Brussels: International Crisis Group 24 February 2020. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/287-burkina-faso-sortir-de-la-spirale-des-violences>
- International Crisis Group. *Getting a Grip on the central Sahel's Gold Rush*. Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2019. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso-mali-niger/repandre-en-main-la-ruee-vers-lor-au-sahel-central>
- International Crisis Group. *Murder in Tillabery: Calming Niger's Emerging Communal Crisis*. Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2021. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/b172-murder-tillabery-calming-nigers-emerging-communal-crisis>
- International Crisis Group. *Reversing Central Mali's Descent into Communal Violence*. Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2020. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/293-enrayer-la-communautarisation-de-la-violence-au-centre-du-mali>
- International Crisis Group. *Sidelining the Islamic State in Niger's Tillabery*. Brussels: International Crisis group, 2020. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/289-sidelining-islamic-state-nigers-tillabery>
- Kalfelis, Melina C. "With or Without the State: Moral Divergence and the Question of Trust in Security Assemblages in Burkina Faso." *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15, no. 5 (2021): 598-613. DOI: [10.1080/17502977.2021.1986255](https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2021.1986255)
- Kouraogo P, A. Kaboré and L. Kibora. *Les groupes d'auto-défense Koglweogo au Burkina Faso*. Accra : African Security Sector Network, 2016. <http://africansecuritynetwork.org/assn/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Les-groupes-dauto-d%C3%A9fense-Kogl-Weogo-au-Burkina-Faso-1.pdf>
- Lebovich, Andrew. *Reconstructing local orders in Mali: Historical perspectives and future challenges*. Washington D.C.: Brookings, 2017. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/lebovich_mali.pdf
- Lebovich, Andrew. "Mapping armed groups in Mali and the Sahel." ECFR. Accessed 6 December 2022. https://ecfr.eu/special/sahel_mapping
- Leclercq, Sidney, and Geoffroy Matagne. "'With or Without You': The Governance of (Local) Security and the Koglweogo Movement in Burkina Faso." *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 9, no. 1 (2020). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.716>
- Le Temps. "Le Burkina Faso lance le recrutement de plus de 50 000 civils supplétifs de l'armée pour combattre les djihadistes." 26 October 2022. <https://www.letemps.ch/monde/burkina-faso-lance-recrutement-plus-50-000-civils-suppletifs-larmee-combattre-djihadistes>
- Luckham, R and Kirk, T. "The Two Faces of Security in Hybrid Political Orders: A Framework for Analysis and Research." *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 22, no 44 (2013): 1-30, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.cf>
- Lund, Christian. "Twilight institutions: public authority and local politics in Africa." *Development and change* 37, no.4 (2006): 685-705. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2006.00497.x>

- Lyammouri, Rida. *Central Mali: Armed Community Mobilization in Crisis*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.4>.
- Lyammouri, Rida. *Mobility and conflict in Laptako-Gourma*. The Hague: Clingendael, 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/default/files/liptako-gourma_study-march_2019-web.pdf
- Mason, Jennifer. *Qualitative Researching*. Manchester: University of Manchester, 2017.
- Molenaar, Fransje, Jonathan Tossell, Anna Schmauder, Abdourahmane Idrissa & Rida Lyammouri. *The Status Quo Defied: The legitimacy of traditional authorities in areas of limited statehood in Mali, Niger and Libya*. The Hague: Clingendael, 2019. https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/legitimacy_traditional_authorities_mali_niger_libya/
- Moderan, Ornella. *Proliferation of Armed Non-State Actors in the Sahel: Evidence of State Failure?* Milan: ISPI, 2021. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/proliferation-armed-non-state-actors-sahel-evidence-state-failure-29329>
- Menkhaus, Ken. "Governance without government in Somalia: Spoilers, state building, and the politics of coping." *International security* 31, no.3 (2006): 74-106. <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2007.31.3.74>
- Moncada, Eduardo. "Varieties of vigilantism: Conceptual discord, meaning and strategies." *Global Crime* 18, no. 4 (2017): 403-423. DOI: 10.1080/17440572.2017.1374183
- Muana, Patrick K. "The Kamajoi Militia: Civil War, Internal Displacement and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency." *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement* 22, no. 3/4 (1997): 77-100. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43658005>.
- Nsaibia, Héli. "10 conflicts to worry about in 2022: the Sahel." ACLED, 2022. <https://acleddata.com/10-conflicts-to-worry-about-in-2022/sahel/>
- Nsaibia, Héli. "10 Conflicts to Worry About in 2022: The Sahel | Mid-Year Update." ACLED 15 August 2022. <https://acleddata.com/10-conflicts-to-worry-about-in-2022/sahel/mid-year-update/>
- Nsaibia, Héli. "Actor Profile: Dan Na Ambassagou." ACLED, 9 May 2022. <https://acleddata.com/2022/05/09/actor-profile-dan-na-ambassagou/>
- Nsaibia, Héli, Jules Duhamel. "Sahel 2021: communal wars, broken-ceasefires and shifting-frontlines." ACLED, June 17, 2021. <https://acleddata.com/2021/06/17/sahel-2021-communal-wars-broken-ceasefires-and-shifting-frontlines/>
- Olivier de Sardan, Jean-Pierre. "Researching the practical norms of real governance in Africa." *Africa, Power and Politics* Programme Discussion Paper 5 (2008).
- Quidelleur, Tanguy. « Courtiser l'État et traquer les djihadistes : mobilisation, dissidence et politique des chasseurs-miliciens dogons au Mali », *Critique internationale*, 94, no. 1 (2022) : 53-75. <https://doi.org/10.3917/cii.094.0056>

- Quidelleur, Tanguy. "Les dividendes de «la guerre contre le terrorisme»: milicianisation, États et interventions internationales au Mali et au Burkina Faso." *Cultures Conflits* 125, no. 1 (2022): 115-138. <https://www-cairn-info.proxy.library.uu.nl/revue-cultures-et-conflits-2022-1-page-115.htm>
- Quidelleur, Tanguy. *The Local Roots of Violence in Eastern Burkina Faso. Competition over resources, weapons and the State*. Paris: Noria Research, 2020. <https://noria-research.com/the-local-roots-of-violence-burkina-faso/>
- Raineri, Luca. "Gold Mining in the Sahara-Sahel: The Political Geography of State-making and Unmaking." *The International Spectator*, 55, no.4 (2020): 100-117, DOI: [10.1080/03932729.2020.1833475](https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1833475))
- Saferworld. *How not to lose the Sahel Community perspectives on insecurity and international interventions in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso*. London: Saferworld, 2022. <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1385-how-not-to-lose-the-sahel-community-perspectives-on-insecurity-and-international-interventions-in-mali-niger-and-burkina-faso>
- Sandor, Adam. *Insecurity, the Breakdown of Social Trust, and Armed Actor Governance in Central and Northern Mali*. Montréal : Centre FrancoPaix en résolution des conflits et missions de paix, 2017. <https://dandurand.uqam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Sandor-english-Report.pdf>
- Schmauder, Anna and Annabelle Willeme. *The Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland*. The Hague: Clingendael, 2021. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/volunteers-defense-homeland>
- Schuberth, Moritz. "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups: Towards a Conceptualization of Militias, Gangs, and Vigilantes." *Contemporary Security Policy*, 36 no. 2 (2015): 296-320, DOI: [10.1080/13523260.2015.1061756](https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2015.1061756)
- Schuberth, Moritz. *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.1>
- Soré, Zakaria, Muriel Côte, and Bouraïman Zongo. "Politiser le «vide sécuritaire»: à propos des groupes d'autodéfense Koglweogo au Burkina Faso." *Politique africaine* 3 (2021): 127-144. <https://www-cairn-info.proxy.library.uu.nl/revue-politique-africaine-2021-3-page-127.htm>
- Thurston, Alexander, and Andrew Lebovich. *A handbook on Mali's 2012-2013 crisis*. Evanston: Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa, 2013. <https://scholar.archive.org/work/tuuohaamkrhi3dxhwroj6exvm/access/wayback/http://arch.library.northwestern.edu/downloads/1544bp252>
- Tisseron, Antonin. *Pandora's box. Burkina Faso, self-defense militias and VDP Law in fighting jihadism*. Dakar: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2021: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/fes-pscc/17590.pdf>
- Tobie, Aurélien and Boukary Sangaré. *The Impact of Armed Groups on the Populations of Central and Northern Mali*. Stockholm: SIPRI, 2019.

https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/1910_sipri_report_the_impact_of_armed_groups_on_the_populations_of_central_and_northern_mali_en_0.pdf

Van Metre, Lauren. *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019.
<https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.3>.

Appendix 2: Interview list

Interview 1. 21 September 2022, think tank research fellow.

Interview 2. 23 September 2022, consultant.

Interview 3. 23 September 2022, scholar.

Interview 4. 23 September 2022, scholar.

Interview 5. 27 September 2022, NGO staff member.

Interview 6. 27 September 2022, scholar.

Interview 7. 3 October 2022, think tank research fellow.

Interview 8. 14 November 2022, scholar.

Email correspondence 1. Between 28 September and 19 October, scholar.

Email correspondence 2. Between 29 September and 12 October 2022, NGO staff member.