



**COMMUNITY-
BASED ARMED
GROUPS IN SUB-
SAHARAN AFRICA**

**RESOLVE Network Research
2018–2022**

RESOLVE /
NETWORK

ABOUT THIS COMPENDIUM

This compendium brings together the collected work of RESOLVE’s 2018–2022 Community-Based Armed Groups Research Initiative. Launched in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development Africa Bureau, this research initiative sought to fill a gap in the literature on community-based armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa—often key actors in conflict-affected and fragile contexts, but highly localized and not well-understood. The papers in this volume are presented in a series of phases corresponding to the development of the research. Phase One involved mapping the existing literature to establish a common definition and typology of these groups, as well as options for engaging with them. Phase Two deepened these understandings through a series of case studies in West Africa. Phase Three added a sub-focus to this research initiative by mapping the available literature on women in community-based armed groups, and Phase Four built upon that knowledge with a series of case studies in East and West Africa. Finally, Phase Five featured a set of case studies in Nigeria and Somalia on disengagement from violent extremist organizations, drawing on the personal experiences of former members to map their journeys into and out of these groups, providing a model for understanding disengagement and reintegration more broadly. Taken together, these publications lay the foundation for improved understanding of and responses to community-based armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa, and provide clear avenues for future research.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the RESOLVE Network, acknowledged partners contributing to the production of this publication, the U.S. Institute of Peace, or any entity of the U.S. government.

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FOREWORD

Community-based armed groups (CBAGs) are a common and complex feature of the African security environment that present a unique set of challenges to governments, local communities, civil society, and international actors working in conflict-affected or fragile contexts. While much attention has been paid to extremist and insurgent groups, fewer policies and interventions are designed to engage CBAGs and they are less well-understood overall. Yet, these groups form an integral part of conflict ecosystems, operating alongside or in opposition to the formal security sector, parties to conflict, and organized crime. In this role, they are uniquely positioned at the intersection of competing interests, seemingly able to both reinforce security and stability, and to undermine them. A nuanced understanding of the composition, behaviors, and relationships of community-based armed groups is thus a strategic imperative for security and development researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to promote peace and stability in sub-Saharan Africa.

CBAGs¹ are a subset of nonstate armed groups (NSAGs) defined by their relationships to the state and a host community. Unlike terrorist or insurgent groups that seek to undermine the state, CBAGs—sometimes vigilantes, local security assemblages, auto-defense groups, or other configurations—have localized agendas that do not include large political ambitions. This is because they often emerge from and are deeply embedded within local communities. Instead, CBAGs may operate alongside state authority or act independently to provide justice and security in areas where the central government is unable or unwilling to do so.

In such cases, at the community level, hybrid arrangements of justice and security provision often replace state services depending on the preferences of the community and the capacity of the state. In hybrid security structures, formal (e.g., government security forces or police) and informal (e.g., vigilantes, community watch groups, cattle raiders, criminal gangs, or peace committees) security actors and mechanisms function in parallel to protect their stakeholders, interests, and power. These actors and groups move along a continuum of formalization. Understood this way, community security is in many cases a hybrid security order where members of the community are not only the beneficiaries but also the agents of human security.²

In such hybrid orders, CBAGs typically enjoy a high level of legitimacy among their communities and can provide some stability. However, they often lack oversight and accountability. As a result, they may operate across physical or political boundaries, act without legal authority, and rely and prey on communities experiencing insecurity. Many formal state and international actors that encounter CBAGs in their work

1 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.

2 Moritz Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), 10, <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.1>.

may therefore be reluctant to recognize or engage with them, despite their proximity to and impact on conflict and stability.

The habitual response by external actors—such as foreign governments or multilateral interventions—to ignore or bypass CBAGs reflects a legitimate concern. Engaging with informal security actors can legitimize them and in turn undermine the state monopoly on the use of force, fragment the security landscape, and weaken the rule of law. On the other hand, the do-not-engage reflex can exacerbate intercommunal conflict by excluding key conflict actors from conflict transformation and peacebuilding efforts. Engagement with national actors can also harm community interests. Overall, a strictly state-centric approach may alienate local stakeholders and undermine community agency for peace and security.³

Responsible engagement with CBAGs requires context-specific, nuanced considerations, conflict sensitivity, and long-term planning. The defining aspects of CBAGs—sources of legitimacy, identity, incentives, resources, and relationships—must be carefully mapped and considered before making decisions about their inclusion in interventions. Micro-level analysis and a holistic, whole-of-community approach can help better understand the challenges and contributions they pose and improve strategies to engage them.

Nuanced mapping of the landscape of community-based armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa enables the international policy community, local governments, and development actors to devise more impactful strategies to understand and address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by CBAGs. That is why, in October 2018, the RESOLVE Network launched a research initiative on Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to develop analytical insights and evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

RESOLVE took a comprehensive and adaptive approach to this project by drawing on the existing literature on security sector reform (SSR), community violence reduction (CVR), alternative dispute resolution (ADR), preventing violent extremism (PVE), and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) to draw lessons learned from the spectrum of possible interventions. To complement the insights from the literature, RESOLVE commissioned diverse experts and scholars to perform in-depth, original research on the composition, behaviors, and impacts of CBAGs across sub-Saharan Africa. Through research reports, case studies, policy notes, stakeholder engagement, and roundtable discussions, the project provided key stakeholders with contextual knowledge on the dynamics of CBAGs and potential approaches to engage, manage, and transform them.

Through the years of the initiative, RESOLVE has learned that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners differ in their assessment of the opportunities and challenges that community-based armed groups present in the African security environment, in terms of the impact on host communities, the capacity of the state security architecture, and overall benefit as agents leverageable towards achieving development and security objectives. The objective of this research project is to help contextualize a complex system

3 Daniel Agbibo, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), 8, <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.2>.

of interactions between groups, civilians, state actors, and international development and security narratives, while recognizing that security and stability are only possible through engaging with the political aspects of armed groups and power distribution at the local and national levels.

The question of whether embracing hybrid security, where these groups are co-producers of justice and security, is a positive or negative approach to addressing low or absent governance capacity remains crucial. While context is key to situating normative questions, policymakers need concrete examples of where these groups have or have not been useful, why, for whom, and for how long. The challenge is finding evidence-based examples where hybrid security has been successful and where regulatory frameworks seeking to limit or control CBAG behavior have been constructive. Following that quest, this compendium collates firsthand accounts of communities' experiences in conflict. These are stories rarely told. The micro-level insights unearthed by RESOLVE's in-depth research reports are indispensable to comprehend drivers of conflict and avenues for peace. Centering the local as the site of knowledge production remains key to recognizing knowledge transfers from the ground up.

This RESOLVE research initiative grapples with a complicated set of interlocking factors in conflict-affected and fragile contexts across sub-Saharan Africa, with implications for the work of multilateral organizations engaging in these areas. Principally, it raises the question: what role for community-based armed groups should external or state actors advocate for, if any? What is the desired end state—for communities, national governments, and security governance? In what context can external actors have the greatest impact in achieving this end state, and what are the most effective tools? For the duration of the project and in discussion with key stakeholders, RESOLVE negotiated these issues toward clarifying and elevating the discourse surrounding community-based armed groups, by providing locally informed, evidence-based research and analysis.

The analytical framework of CBAGs, and their engagement, management, and transformation, offers a novel lens to studying conflict ecosystems. Through this lens, the need for addressing root causes of conflict shines through at every turn. Curing symptoms or mitigating tensions does not bring lasting, constructive, and inclusive peace. Instead, policy and programming should focus on understanding local perspectives, nuanced contextual details, and political realities to craft strategies that target underlying conflict drivers. For that, meaningfully engaging, managing, or transforming CBAGs is often indispensable. This RESOLVE Network research initiative has contributed robust analytical and thematic value to the body of knowledge with the potential to expand beyond the sub-Saharan African context and assist research and analysis on these groups and conflicts around the world.



Photo adapted from: Photo courtesy of the U.S. Institute of Peace. Kenya (2019).

PHASE 1: Mapping the Literature on Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community-based armed groups (CBAGs) vary by their purpose, historical origins, operational focus, deployment of violence, and measures of success. They are distinct in that, unlike terrorist or insurgent groups, they have localized agendas and do not seek to undermine the state. This is because CBAGs form and proliferate in places where communities experience security vacuums, historical inter- and intra-communal conflicts, enmity, marginalization, or deprivation in relation to the state security apparatus. Relationships and affiliations to the state and the community—including sources of legitimacy, funding, and sociocultural norms around the exercise of violence—define and transform CBAGs over time. Sometimes these groups form to counter localized violent extremist and insurgent threats. In certain contexts, they may also have gained historic or cultural significance. Understood in this way, the composition, behavior, and impacts of CBAGs demonstrate their highly contextual and fluid nature. They are known to adapt readily in response to changing environments and have flexible relationships with conflict and security stakeholders around them. The inherent tensions embedded in the shifting bounds of legitimacy and illegitimacy in state-society relationships is central to the CBAG phenomenon.

To map the fluid variability of CBAGs across Sub-Saharan Africa, the RESOLVE Network collaborated with experienced researchers to produce three mapping papers that survey the existing literature on CBAGs and identify gaps in knowledge. These three desk reports launched the research initiative with an extensive a comprehensive literature review. The first research report develops a typology to organize the array of attributes, motivations, and relationships that determine CBAG identity, behavior, and their exercise of violence.¹ The second report provides a comprehensive overview of the factors that drive the formation and evolution of CBAGs, including historical legacies of colonial security governance that contributed to a normative culture of non-state community protection and security mobilization.² The third paper assesses the potential of engaging, managing, and transforming CBAGs through a comparative review of current and historical efforts in technical post-conflict reconciliation methodologies—disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), security sector reform (SSR), alternative dispute resolution (ADR), community violence reduction (CVR), and preventing violent extremism (PVE)—both on the continent and in other conflict-affected regions around the world.³ Research findings from the mapping

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- 1 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>.
 - 2 Daniel Agbibo, *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>.
 - 3 Moritz Schuberth, *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>.

papers inform two in-depth case studies that formulate recommendations under the engagement, management, and transformation (EMT) framework.⁴

Findings

The papers concur that CBAGs are best defined as armed groups that represent the interests of a community or source their power and legitimacy from that community, and do not seek to overthrow the state. At their core, these groups can be understood as a manifestation of sovereignty based on geography, socioeconomic function, or, often ethnic, identity.

The typology developed by Van Metre identifies two factors that “define CBAG identity: (1) the external factor of the group’s relationships with the state and communities, and (2) the internal function of the group’s exercise of violence.”⁵ The typology links external factors—the operational environment, resources, norms, and relationships of groups—to their internal functions, chiefly their exercise of violence. This dynamic model connects CBAG organization and operation to environmental factors to explain group shifts with changes in these factors.⁶ The research recognizes the complex, fluid, and contextual nature of CBAGs. While clear definitions of core concepts are vital for efficient research and conceptualization, strict definitional boundaries are unlikely to capture the full range of CBAG behaviors and relationships. This complexity encompasses their interactions with their associated community, state governance and security apparatus, as well as international actors, insurgent groups, criminal organizations, and violent extremist organizations. These dynamic relationships present both a challenge and an opportunity to working with CBAGs.

Local, state, cross-border, or international actors often leverage CBAGs as part of their strategies of governance or non-governance. Thus, the political nature of CBAGs and their history and mobilization must be accounted for to leverage them in the security landscape or amend their behavior. The legacy of colonial security governance creates tangible friction between states and CBAGs. According to Agbiboa, in postcolonial Africa the emergence of CBAGs “echoes decades of selective, limited, and unrepresentative forms of colonial policing.” A relatively weak and violent state provided limited police presence, especially in rural areas, which drove marginalized communities to devise local solutions to security challenges such as violent crime and threats to the social order. CBAGs as local security actors outside of conventional policing often fill in roles to maintain law and order or organize communal economic activities. Governmental security institutions and regulations around armament and organization can catalyze group formation and participation in licit and illicit activities.⁷

4 Rahmane Idrissa and Bethany McGann, *Mistrust and Imbalance: The Collapse of Intercommunal Relations and the Rise of Armed Community Mobilization on the Niger-Mali Border* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.2>; Rida Lyammouri, *Central Mali: Armed Community Mobilization in Crisis* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.4>.

5 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 40.

6 Ibid, 14.

7 Agbiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 5.

Because CBAGs emerge from and are usually closely tied to their communities, this relationship can serve both as a source of legitimacy and as a potential starting point to develop mechanisms for community-based accountability and oversight. CBAGs' internal rules and regulations can function as a code of conduct endorsed by the community. Accountability mechanisms and community oversight can manage group operations and present an opportunity to leverage customary systems to bring these groups into coherence with national policing and military policies and regulations. Successful examples of such bottom-up social accountability mechanisms have been implemented in communities from Southeast Asia to the Middle East, West Africa, and the Sahel.⁸

However, accountability is difficult to enforce if the group's relationships with the community or the state are coerced.⁹ Although some CBAGs appear to be efficient sub-state security and justice providers with a clear mandate from their constituents, it is important not to romanticize community-led approaches to security. Lack of oversight can result in abuses of power, including failing to adhere to local laws, violating human rights norms and protections, or endorsing excessive violence and torture.

Understanding the context of CBAGs—including their historical roots, formation, and evolution—is key to designing effective interventions. To better understand and categorize external interventions, RESOLVE has developed the analytical framework of engagement, management, and transformation (EMT) encompassing “how intervening actors—communities, governments, civil society organizations, humanitarian and development agencies, and security providers—have approached the challenges posed by CBAGs and how to best measure the success of these interventions.”¹⁰

The holistic approach of EMT embraces the fluidity of intervention programs in between fixed models of technical approaches, responsive to the politicization of these groups embedded in their relationships with the community and the state. The EMT framework has two key components. First, EMT acknowledges that development actors can have different capacities to negotiate behavior change at specific points in time, and that parallel and coordinated efforts between stakeholders can have a positive impact on CBAG behaviors—just as uncoordinated efforts can lead to negative outcomes. Second, the EMT framework encompasses the capacity of these groups to change over time in response to local security dynamics and intervention attempts to alter their operations. In this way, EMT moves beyond existing stabilization methods and standard technical approaches, including SSR and DDR, and opens the possibility of addressing the political domain of the challenge. The strategic value of EMT lies in its flexibility to respond to cultural, historical, contextual specifics, and draw lessons learned from previous interactions with CBAGs.

8 The U.S. Institute of Peace has engaged in justice security dialogue (JSD) programming for over a decade, focused on countries in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and the Sahel and West Africa. The goal of JSD programming is to assist communities in developing locally informed accountability mechanisms for security actors. Learn more here: USIP, “Justice and Security Dialogues: USIP Brings Communities Together to Strengthen the Rule of Law,” <https://www.usip.org/index.php/programs/justice-and-security-dialogues>.

9 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 24; Agbiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 18–20.

10 Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 4.

While measuring the success and impact of EMT approaches is difficult, Schuberth proposes a set of indicators that can help measure the progress of EMT interventions against their objectives and offers lessons learned from past programs.¹¹ Similarly, specific success factors—such as accountability and oversight mechanisms—can showcase constructive transformations in CBAGs towards more capable and accountable community security providers.¹²

Conclusion

The overall objective of the initial mapping phase was to identify the characteristics and contextual factors that either enable CBAG engagement, management, or transformation, or contraindicate specific intervention or programming efforts. Recognizing that these groups change over time, the research attempts to highlight milestones or transition points in their evolution, when groups may be more or less receptive to certain programming or denoting significant events that calcify positive or negative behavior towards communities or states. The research establishes a knowledge base that has potential for field applications and future research on specific groups and diverse community contexts around the world. The second phase of the initiative builds on the findings from the desk research through two field research case studies in the Sahel, in Niger and Mali.

Researching the complexity and nuances of CBAGs is timely due to their rapid proliferation across the deteriorating security environment in the Sahel, instability in West Africa, and persistent civil conflict and state failure in central Africa and the Great Lakes region. Moving forward, it is imperative to clearly define the parameters of successful intervention or behavior change. What does “successful” intervention mean for the local community, the group, the state, or the international community? How can states most effectively engage with CBAGs to promote this outcome? Throughout the project, RESOLVE Network research reports and policy notes not only provide the analytical frameworks to seek to answer these questions through case study investigations in diverse local contexts across the continent.

11 Moritz Schuberth, *Measuring the Success of Approaches to Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37805/pn2020.3.ssa>, 5–6.

12 Moritz Schuberth, *Transforming Community-Based Armed Groups into Community Security Providers* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37805/pn2020.4.ssa>, 3–5.

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FROM SELF-DEFENSE TO VIGILANTISM

A Typology Framework of
Community-Based Armed
Groups

Dr. Lauren Van Metre

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was written and researched by Dr. Lauren Van Metre. Several members of the RESOLVE Network Secretariat contributed to this report's development, including Ms. Bethany McGann, Research & Project Manager; Ms. Boglarka Bozsogi, Research and Communications Coordinator; Ms. Kateira Aryaeinejad, Research and Project Manager; and Ms. Leanne Erdberg, Interim Executive Director. RESOLVE would like to thank the reviewers of this report and the members of the RESOLVE Network Research Advisory Council who lent their support and guidance. Finally, RESOLVE would like to thank the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Africa Bureau for its generous support for this report and RESOLVE's research initiative on Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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From Self-Defense to Vigilantism is part of the RESOLVE Network's Community-Based Armed Groups research series, an initiative investigating the dynamics of community-based armed groups and the contexts they operate in to identify potential approaches to engage, manage, and transform them.

For more information about RESOLVE, its network of experts, and its research projects and activities, please visit our website at www.resolvenet.org and follow the discussion on Twitter via [@resolvenet](https://twitter.com/resolvenet).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

In conflicts across Sub-Saharan Africa, community-based armed groups (CBAGs) are a fixture in the security landscape, presenting a complex challenge to communities, governments, development implementers, and security providers. Community-based armed groups are a subset of non-state armed groups (NSAGs), defined by their relationship to the state and local communities and the ways they exercise power. While NSAGs, such as insurgent or terrorist groups, seek to disrupt or undermine the state to take it over or establish an alternative political system, CBAGs can be aligned with, or complementary to, the state, or they can operate in gray areas with minimal state presence. They do not typically pursue large political ambitions and strategies; rather, they advance the local ambitions of their stakeholders.

Given the influential and growing presence and diversity of CBAGs in conflict-affected states, it is critical to develop analytical frameworks and typologies to support international, state, and community actors interacting with armed groups as political and security actors. Two key questions are (1) how CBAGs can be engaged, managed, or transformed to play constructive roles in local communities in weak, fragile, or conflict-affected states; and (2) how their operations can exacerbate fragility and violence by, for example, preying on communities or aligning with other non-state armed groups. As attention increases on state fragility and predation as the root causes of intrastate violence and the emergence of violent extremism, it is critical to include CBAGs in any analysis of the informal political and security networks that dominate fragile states in the absence of formal state institutions.

This report develops a typology framework to enhance the understanding of these groups and their roles in informal political and security networks. To elucidate CBAG operations, particularly the use of force, this report identifies key internal functions that anchor the position of CBAGs within state-society relations. Further, the report denotes external factors that drive CBAG transformations from one type of armed group to another.

The study hopes to help community, state, and international actors to better monitor these groups, to contribute to a deeper analysis of informal elite power pacts in fragile states, and to identify moments when other actors might engage, manage, or transform CBAGs and the ways to create those moments. Understanding the conditions under which a CBAG may transition from a more positive community role to a more predatory one, or vice versa, is critical for community security and development, as well as for local political stability.

Typology framework

The typology framework builds on a series of studies exploring links between the external operational environments of armed groups and armed groups' internal functions. External factors—negotiated relations with the state and the community, resources, social norms, the threat environment, and inter-

national actors—influence the internal functions of the group—leadership structures, discipline, and recruitment processes. In turn, internal functions determine the fundamental characteristics of CBAGs: how they exercise violence and against whom. The two defining factors of CBAG identity are external in terms of state-community relations and internal in terms of how and if the groups exercise violence. The typology informs a dynamic model linking CBAG organization and operations to environmental factors, and it identifies evidence of CBAG transformations due to shifts in these interrelated factors.

CORE CHARACTERISTICS

Exercise of violence. The core factors defining CBAG identity are its relationship with the state and with its local community, and whether that relationship is negotiated with shared norms and determinations around CBAG activities and duties or coercive entailing violence, predation, or extortion. These core relationships influence the internal functions of the group, which, in turn, determine its first core characteristic: how it exercises violence.

As state-community relations, the exercise of violence can be coercive or negotiated.

- **Coercive violence** is more offensive, conflictive, and indiscriminate, targeting the state or the community, and violating local social norms around violence. A neighborhood gang that extorts funds from local businesses and engages in retributive violence against competitors is an example of a group that exercises coercive violence.
- **Negotiated violence** is more defensive or protective of the community or the state, discriminating, directed against external threats, and more aligned with social norms around violence and a negotiated relationship with the community or state to use violence for political or social goals. A tribal militia that patrols the community perimeter and organizes reconnaissance missions at the behest of tribal elders is an example of a group in a negotiated relationship.

Communities can also authorize the use of coercive violence against others, for example, when a militia is directed to attack state security forces or neighboring militias. How a CBAG exercises violence will define its identity, the purpose it fills in the security environment, and the reasons that a state or community might leverage, coopt, or initially mandate the creation of the group.

Fluidity. Fluidity is a secondary core characteristic of CBAGs. In response to shifting external factors, CBAGs transform their identity and operations to remain viable and relevant. CBAGs operate similarly to other social and political organizations in that they are constrained in their operations from without and from within. This report presents a dynamic model that links CBAG organization to environmental factors and links CBAG transformations to shifts in these factors. As predatory state security actors enter a region, CBAGs may respond to the external threat environment by expanding their organizations and operations, eventually transitioning to an insurgency, as with Boko Haram in Nigeria. In addition, community and government structures and norms can shift in conflict-affected and fragile states as they recover from or fall into violence or undergo political transitions. In these cases, CBAGs, while maintaining the same relative functions, can find themselves in a different relationship between the state and communi-

ties because the surrounding environment has shifted. For example, a hunter group that easily operates across national borders may be perceived by the state as an alien presence when a state begins promoting a purist ethnic identity, as happened with the Dozo hunters' groups of Côte d'Ivoire.

Conclusions

In the final section of this report, the external and internal factors and their dynamic inter-relationships are tested using two historical case studies: the South Africa's People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD), an urban community protection group that morphed into a vigilante and then a terrorist-labeled group; and Cote d'Ivoire's Dozos, which evolved from rural hunting groups to community and government-sanctioned private security groups, and then to an ethnic militia when the government turned against them. The case studies could confirm several hypotheses for this out-of-category transformation:

- If a CBAG grows in size and influence, has significant access to natural resources, and is threatening the state/enters into direct mutual conflict with the state, the CBAG may transition to an NSAG.
- If a CBAG has a strong, historical negotiated relationship of trust with the local community, relies on community resources for its operations, and has mutually-agreed social norms of community protection, it may adopt additional local governance roles beyond security provision, such as dispute resolution.
- If a CBAG exercises violence in ways that violate community and state norms of social order and loses access to patronage and funding by the state or community, it may transition to an autonomous group that exercises coercive violence, such as a gang, vigilante, or criminal group.

For international organizations working in an environment with CBAGs or local civil society groups working within a community impacted by or supporting a group, it is critical to understand CBAG shifts, especially if there is the possibility that CBAGs may change to more pernicious types of organizations based on dynamic external changes. There may be an ideal type of CBAG ripe for engagement: a group rooted in community norms and values, protective, and exercising internal discipline and order. However, these groups may be unique but easily transform in negative ways if factors in their external environment change, such as funding and threat levels.

Holistic monitoring and engagement strategies for CBAGs are key for identifying routes to create defensive, noncoercive hybrid security systems. Strategies must consider the entirety of their existence: norms of social order that may legitimize types of CBAG violence, endorsement by the state, and legitimacy rooted in communities. CBAGs differ greatly, yet engagement policies are often similar. Engagement strategies also need to consider internal characteristics—such as sources of legitimacy and loyalty, leadership capacities, recruitment pools, and institutional structures. As CBAGs are manifestations of local elite pacts, analyzing how they exercise violence and against whom gives international actors key insights into the informal political processes central to fragile state governance

International actors need to recognize that they themselves influence the external factors within which CBAGs operate and can expect responses in internal CBAG functions. For example, if the international community supplies increased resources to a CBAG, then it may attract a wider base of opportunistic recruits who may wield violence indiscriminately and abandon community-based norms. Similarly, the international community may appear as a threat in a CBAG's environment, thereby institutionalizing the CBAG's roles and making it a more disciplined, effective fighting force.

INTRODUCTION

Defining community-based armed groups

“New” wars—intrastate wars perpetrated by non-state actors—have come to dominate the conflicts of the past 30 years.¹ With their rise, international, state, and community actors increasingly operate in environments infused with numerous armed groups. Armed groups have varying goals and strategies but influence the course of violent conflict—whether protecting communities from predatory security forces, expressing local grievances and embodying community empowerment, spoiling peace agreements, or disrupting humanitarian and state-building operations.

In conflicts across Sub-Saharan Africa, community-based armed groups have become a visible fixture in the security landscape; they present a challenge to communities, governments, development implementers, and security providers. Given the influential and growing presence and diversity of community-based armed groups in conflict-affected states, developing analytical frameworks and typologies is critical to support international, state, and community actors to better understand and interact with armed groups. A key question is whether community-based armed groups can be engaged, managed, or transformed to play a constructive role in local communities in weak, fragile, or conflict-affected states; or whether their operations exacerbate fragility and violence by, for example, preying on communities or aligning with other non-state armed groups.

CBAGs are not a new phenomenon. However, with the increasing attention on state fragility and predation as root causes of intrastate violence, CBAGs are influential security actors. As major international intervention policies—such as the United States (US) U.S. government's Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR) and the United Kingdom (UK) government's Elite Pacts in Fragile States Review—elevate the centrality of engaging with fragile state political processes above institution building, CBAGs must be included as a manifestation of those politics. Therefore, security, development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding institutions need to consider their impact. This report develops a typology framework to enhance the understanding of these groups and the possibility of creating moments of hybrid security governance and more constructive elite pacts with their participation.

1 Mary Kaldor, “In Defence of New Wars,” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2, no. 1 (2013). doi:<http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.at>.

To understand the operations of CBAGs, particularly their use of force, this report identifies key internal functions that define their positions in the state-society nexus. Further, the report denotes external factors that affect CBAG transformations. The two defining factors of CBAG identity are the external factor of state-community relations and the internal function of the exercise of violence.

The study hopes to help local civil society, state, and international actors to better monitor these groups and to identify moments when other actors might engage, manage, or transform CBAGs and the ways to create those moments. Understanding how a CBAG may transition from a more positive community role to a more predatory one is critical for community security and development.

This report defines community-based armed groups (CBAGs) as a subset of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) defined by their relationship to the state and the host community and how they exercise power.² Although NSAGs, such as insurgent or terrorist groups, seek to disrupt or undermine the state in order to take it over or establish an alternative political system, the activities of CBAGs can be aligned with or complementary to the state or can occur in gray areas with minimal state institutional presence. CBAGs can be deputized by the state to provide local security or serve at the discretion of informal and formal local governance institutions. They are often deeply embedded³ in communities. They do not operate in support of large political ambitions and strategies; rather, they advance the localist ambitions of their stakeholders.⁴

Examples of CBAGs are youth groups in Kenya sponsored by local and national politicians to protect or project their economic interests, community defense forces in Nigeria that defend communities involved in pastoralist-agriculturalist conflicts, and community-sponsored protective forces in Kenya to combat criminal networks and gangs. Other types of CBAGs are not legitimized by governance officials or community institutions and are self-governed or autonomous. Gangs, criminal networks, and vigilante groups may have relationships with the state and be highly embedded within communities—however, these relationships with the state and the community are coerced rather than negotiated. These CBAGs use violence or the threat of violence to exercise control in areas where the state is largely absent.

How does research and analysis inform the development of a typology framework for CBAGs? Research by Jeremy M. Weinstein on the micropolitics of rebel groups and by Klaus Schlichte⁵ explored the strong link between armed group responses to factors in the external environment (for example, resource endowments, interaction with communities, and the presence of the state) and how a group operates, especially how it exercises violence.⁶ Armed group leaders make decisions or choices about how to

2 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.

3 Paul Stephen Staniland, “Explaining Cohesion, Fragmentation, and Control in Insurgent Groups” (PhD Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010).

4 Schuberth, “The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups.”

5 Klaus Schlichte, *In the Shadow of Violence: The Politics of Armed Groups* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2009), 85, 116, 144.

6 Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6–7.

recruit, organize, lead, mobilize, and resource their organizations, which environmental factors condition and constrain. Weinstein argues that armed groups in his research on insurgent groups operate similarly to other social and political organizations in that they are constrained in their operations from without and from within.⁷ As a subset of NSAGs with different objectives but similar environments, CBAGs also respond to external constraints.

Moritz Schuberth maintains that state absence or fragility conditions the existence of CBAGs.⁸ State fragility can define the existence of different types of CBAGs. For example, vigilante groups are associated with ungoverned spaces, militia groups with new wars conducted in fragile states, and criminal networks with states that fail to manage societal greed and grievances.⁹ CBAGs can shift among different ideal types when their environments change, as when an ungoverned space populated by vigilante groups becomes the battleground for armed clashes with the state, and militias emerge.

This report expands on Schuberth's categorization by state fragility factors, arguing that it is not the nature of fragility that defines CBAGs, but whether the group's relationships with the state and communities are negotiated or coerced in nature. In a negotiated relationship, a CBAG uses violence as one of several approaches—such as dialogue, deterrence, or confidence building measures (CBMs)—to leverage its strategies and goals as agreed with the state or community. In a coerced relationship, the CBAG's primary activity is the exercise of violence to force the state or community to bend or accede to its ambitions.

This report adopts previous research in several ways. Weinstein and Schlichte focus primarily on two external factors that condition CBAG operations: the threat environment and natural resources. First, the emergence of a threat influences CBAG growth and the formalization and institutionalization of group roles. Second, the availability of natural resources conditions recruitment and group discipline. This study identifies additional external factors that condition CBAG internal functions and operations.

The external factors the report analyzes are the relationship of CBAGs to the state and communities, the threat environment, access to resources, norms of social order, and international actors—diaspora groups, other states, and other CBAGs. These external factors condition internal group functions: the leadership structure, group discipline, and recruitment of CBAGs.

Two core factors define CBAG identity: (1) its relationship with the state and the local community, and (2), whether that relationship is negotiated with shared norms and determinations around CBAG activities, or coercive to advance CBAG ambitions at the expense of the state or community. These core relationships influence the internal functions of the group, which determines its fundamental characteristic: how it exercises violence.

7 Ibid., 51.

8 Schuberth, "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups," 304.

9 Ibid.

Exercise of violence. The exercise of violence can be characterized as coercive or negotiated. **Coercive violence** would be more offensive, conflictive, and indiscriminate, targeted against the state or the community, and disregarding local social norms around violence to serve CBAG goals and objectives. **Negotiated violence** would be more defensive or protective toward the community or the state, discriminate, directed against external threats, and align more with social norms around violence, and state and community social and political goals. How a CBAG exercises violence at its essence will define its identity.

Fluidity. Fluidity is another central characteristic of CBAGs. In response to shifting external factors, CBAGs often transform their identity and operations to remain viable and relevant. For instance, the Funga File, a neighborhood watch group in Kisumu, Kenya, turned into a vigilante group, when, having secured the community, the citizens stopped paying for the group's services. In Côte d'Ivoire, Dozo hunters' groups that contributed to the local game meat economy took on the mandate of protecting farmers from cattle rustlers when the levels of big game declined from overhunting. In some conflict environments, CBAGs have been observed to shift rapidly from one group type to another, such as civil society-like organizations, or, at the other end of the spectrum, to align themselves with or incorporate into non-state armed groups, such as violent extremist organizations. The fluidity of these groups in response to changing dynamics makes them particularly complex security actors.

The final section of this report tests the utility of the typology in identifying the impact of changing external and internal factors and their dynamic interrelationships through two historical case studies: South Africa's People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD), an urban community protection group that morphed into a vigilante and then a terrorist-labeled group, and Côte d'Ivoire's Dozos, which evolved from rural hunting groups to community and government-sanctioned private security groups to ethnic militia when the government turned against them. The case studies were selected for their maximum comparative value. Both PAGAD and the Dozos began as community protection groups, but they followed very different trajectories in group identity, allowing the identification and validation of intervening variables.

Methodology

The research identified the core factors that determine CBAG behavior through an extensive literature review and comparative analysis of different examples of CBAGs in Sub-Saharan Africa and around the world. Subsequently, the external and internal factors identified in the literature were validated through the two historical case studies of this report, in Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa. The author employed inductive methods to theorize a typology framework for CBAGs, creating hypotheses that can be tested against historical cases of group operation and transformation. In this way, practical examples support both the construction of the theoretical framework and the testing of the resulting hypotheses, creating a dynamic typology rooted in on-the-ground realities. The external and internal factors listed were selected based on their significance in the case studies reviewed during the desk research process.

The critical role of the state in defining how and against whom CBAGs exercise violence is evidenced in several cases, including the Senegal Islamic Militia¹⁰ and Côte d’Ivoire’s Dozos in the 1990s.¹¹ CBAGs that operate in grey zones of governance in lieu of a state security presence can adopt state governance practices, such as taxation¹² and the exercise of public authority, as in the Democratic Republic of Congo,¹³ and security provision, as in Borno state, Nigeria, where the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) organized to protect communities from violent extremist groups, mainly Boko Haram.¹⁴

Community collective action, protection, and vulnerability in Colombia informs theories regarding community relations, including how CBAGs negotiate power with local communities,¹⁵ act as agents of coercion when it comes to community engagement,¹⁶ and adopt or reflect norms of violence from the communities with which they interact.¹⁷ The CJTF has a mixed reputation in Nigeria, but aspects of its activities in the communities in Borno include constructive governance and civil society roles, such as bringing together community members across ethnic and tribal divides, providing health and justice services, and administering dispute resolution¹⁸—activities similar to the Tatmadaw militias in Myanmar.¹⁹

State influence is consequential even for CBAGs that operate autonomously from any state or community institution, such as gangs, criminal networks, or drug cartels. In urban communities in South and Central America, violence has become normalized through the historical legacy of sustained state repression,²⁰ allowing autonomous CBAGs to exercise violence coercively against citizens and state. This desensitization to violence facilitates recruitment and characterizes operations and command and control for gangs

10 Alassane Ndao, “L’informalisation de la Violence Physique Légitime: Le Sénégal à l’épreuve des Milices Islamiques.” *Lien Social et Politiques* 76 (2016): 96–113.

11 Thomas Bassett, “Dangerous Pursuits: Hunter Associations (Donzo Ton) and National Politics in Cote D’Ivoire,” *Africa* 73, no. 1 (2003).

12 Kasper Hoffman, Koen Vlassenroot, and Gauthier Marchais, “Taxation, Stateness and Armed Groups: Public Authority and Resource Extraction in Eastern Congo,” *Development and Change* (2016): 1197–1456.

13 Kasper Hoffmann and Koen Vlassenroot, “Armed Groups and the Exercise of Public Authority: The Cases Of the Mayi-Mayi and Raya Mutomboki in Kalehe, South Kivu,” *Peacebuilding* 2, no. 2 (2014): 202–20.

14 Chitra Nagarajan, *Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria* (Washington, DC: Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2018), https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018.06.CJTF-Report.Africa-Program.Web_.pdf.

15 Vladimir Caraballo Acuña, “Órdenes Locales, Acuerdos de Paz y Presencia Diferenciada del Estado. Negociación con las Milicias Populares de Medellín” [“Local Orders, Peace Agreements and Differentiated Presence of the State. Negotiation with Urban Militias in Medellín”], *Colombia Internacional* 77 (2013): 241–70.

16 Margarita Gafaro, Ana Maria Ibáñez, and Patricia Justino, *Collective Action and Armed Group Presence in Colombia* (Bogota: Documento CEDE, 2014).

17 Oliver Kaplan, “Nudging Armed Groups: How Civilians Transmit Norms of Protection,” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2, no. 3 (2013): 1–18.

18 “Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria,” *Center for Civilians in Conflict* (2018), https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018.06.CJTF-Report.Africa-Program.Web_.pdf.

19 John Buchanan, “Myanmar and Its Militias,” *Asia Foundation Weekly Analysis*, November 2, 2016, <https://asiafoundation.org/2016/11/02/myanmar-and-its-militias/>.

20 Ailsa Winton, “Urban Violence: A Guide to the Literature,” *Environment and Urbanization* 16, no. 2 (2004): 165–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/095624780401600208>

and criminal groups.²¹ The group, state, and community relationship creates a feedback loop where violence is normalized, rather than deviant, by social norms.

The influence of international actors in the form of funding, diaspora links, ideological influence, or political pressure is also present in several cases. Somali militias in the 1990s flourished on diaspora funding,²² while PAGAD in South Africa adopted foreign ideologies in their affinity for the spread of the Iranian Revolution in Africa.²³ The United States placed pressure on the regime in Côte d'Ivoire to apply international human rights norms after abuses by the Dozo hunters' group, just as Human Rights Watch did in Mali regarding abuses by ethnic militias.²⁴

Social norms of violence were salient in a comparative research study of communities in Syria and Colombia by Oliver Kaplan. The study found that the production of violence by armed groups adheres to local "logics of appropriateness" that arise within communities and influence the chances of the community influencing the behavior of armed groups.²⁵ Another case study on the Dozos of Côte d'Ivoire discusses their adherence to a spiritual belief system and how that system affects recruitment, mission orientation, and community perception.²⁶

Finally, the theses on CBAG fluidity are taken from multiple sources and cases, including Mali, where Bambara and Dogon self-defense groups used the fight against armed Islamist groups to force another ethnic group, the Puehl, from their land. What began as protection against violent extremism evolved into identity-based vigilantism.²⁷ In Kenya, the Funga File shifted from a community protection group to a vigilante group when citizens withdrew their payments because they viewed the original security threat as resolved.²⁸

Relevance

A typology of CBAGs and of the external factors that constrain and support their functions and operations helps to elucidate the roles that they play in communities. This understanding is critical for any community assessment to determine whether CBAG operations contribute to community resilience

21 Ailsa Winton, "Youth, Gangs and Violence: Analysing the Social and Spatial Mobility of Young People in Guatemala City," *Children's Geographies* 3, no. 2 (2005): 167–84, doi:10.1080/14733280500161537.

22 Ken Menkhaus, *Somalia and the Horn of Africa*, (Washington, DC: World Bank, April 2011), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/494981468303085454/pdf/632040WP00WDR0009B0Somalia00PUB.LICO.pdf>.

23 Josh Lefkowitz, "Terror's South African Front," *The National Interest*, August 18, 2004, <https://nationalinterest.org/article/terrors-south-african-front-2742>.

24 "Dangerous Upsurge in Abuse by Ethnic Militias: Protect Civilians, Disarm Self-Defense Groups," *Human Rights Watch*, December 7, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/12/07/mali-dangerous-upsurge-abuse-ethnic-militias#>.

25 Oliver Kaplan, *Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

26 Joseph Hellweg, "Hunters, Ritual, and Freedom: Dozo Sacrifice as a Technology of the Self in the Benkadi Movement of Côte d'Ivoire," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 1 (2009): 41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2008.01529.x>.

27 Corinne Dufka, *We Used to Be Brothers: Self Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali* (Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch, 2018) <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/12/07/we-used-be-brothers/self-defense-group-abuses-central-mali>.

28 Lauren Van Metre, *Community Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kenya* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, September 2016).

or vulnerability, and to identify the role these groups might play in the co-creation of defensive, non-coercive hybrid security systems. Further, a more thorough understanding of how shifts in external factors affect CBAG transformations allows community, state, and international actors to better monitor and identify entry points for engagement, management, and transformation (EMT).²⁹ EMT embraces the applicability of intervention strategies beyond conventional, standard technical approaches common to security sector reform programming; it also appreciates the fluidity of CBAGs and their responsiveness to changes as security dynamics evolve.

Sukanya Podder argues that armed groups are ripe for engagement, if the following are in place:

- Community resource bases that create armed group dependency on local communities for a range of support, which encourages them to be more protective
- High levels of civilian support that lend authority and legitimacy to the armed group
- High internal and external leadership monitoring group member activities and discipline
- Diverse activities, including security and service delivery support.³⁰

Podder's analysis substantiates the need for a typology to strengthen the EMT framework. CBAGs exercise violence within communities in particular ways, depending on their structure and operations. Understanding the conditions under which a CBAG may transition from a community protection group to a criminal network is critical for community security. Similarly, identifying the conditions under which a CBAG may shift from an armed group to a civil society or political organization is critical for governance reform. Understanding the impacts of external factors on CBAGs could identify moments when community, state, or international actors could engage, manage, or transform CBAGs and could elucidate how those moments might be anticipated or shaped.³¹

The research also contributes to the growing attention on elite bargains—the hidden informal power structures that define peace and security in fragile states in which power is weakly institutionalized. Security in fragile states is an extension of politics and power at all levels from national to community. Understanding CBAGs as instruments of informal elite power pacts has important implications for security sector reform in fragile states. In addition, analyzing how these informal security networks are negotiated, legitimized and constrained can inform how international organizations working in these areas can support, leverage, or incentivize power dynamics to promote peace, development, and governance.

29 See Moritz Schuberth's report in this same RESOLVE Network Research Series: Moritz Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned and Measures of Success* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019).

30 Sukanya Podder, "Non-State Armed Groups and Stability: Reconsidering Legitimacy and Inclusion," *Contemporary Security Policy* 34 (2013): 1, 16–39.

31 Claudia Hofmann and Ulrich Schneckener, "Engaging Non-State Armed Actors in State-Building and Peace-Building: Options and Strategies," *International Review of the Red Cross* 93, no. 883 (September 2011).

TYPOLGY FRAMEWORK

The typology framework builds on a series of studies that explore links between the external operational environment of armed groups and the internal functions of the armed groups, in particular, how they exercise violence. This is a dynamic model that links CBAG organization and operation to environmental factors and links CBAG transformations to shifts in these factors.

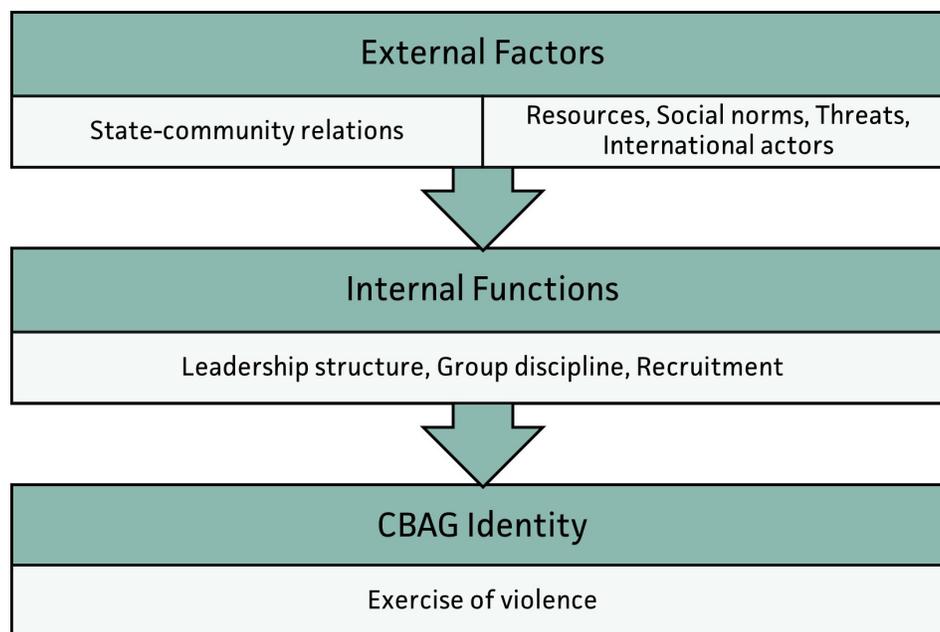
The first typifying factor for CBAGs is whether their relationship with the state or communities is coercive or negotiated. Coercive relationships entail violence, predation, or extortion; negotiated relationships include shared norms or determinations around CBAG activities and duties. Whether CBAGs use violence in support of, complementary to, or in conflict with state or local governance institutions, formal or informal, conditions their identity.

Second, building on the literature, this study explores how external, environmental factors condition CBAG internal operations, specifically how they exercise violence—its target, level, and alignment with the norms of social order. Coercive violent behavior denotes offensive, indiscriminate use of force; negotiated norms around violence signal more protective, discriminate practices. For example, national political entities might deputize a local CBAG to police a community or territory in conjunction with the national police or to fill a security gap. Community protection groups often operate with the authority of formal or informal community leaders to prevent or reduce crime or deter external threats. Other CBAGs are autonomous and exercise self-governance, for example, raider groups, criminal networks, or gangs. They often exercise violence coercively to control their environment, deter competitors, and dominate their communities or state representatives.

Other external factors modify their exercise of violence: international actors, access to resources, the threat environments, and socially accepted norms around violence. Internal functions, as conditioned externally, will influence how CBAGs exercise violence and modify group characteristics. These factors modify the relationship to the state and their communities, pushing and pulling the CBAGs along vectors that explain how they choose to exercise violence.

For example, the rise of a significant threat to a community could modify a community protection group's exercise of violence from defensive or protective to offensive or predatory. If a CBAG gains access to substantial resources, it might recruit more opportunistic members and expand its operations, possibly challenging state authority in a locale. In such a case, its exercise of violence could be more offensive and predatory.

Figure 1. Factors Defining the Identity of Community-Based Armed Groups



Source: Author.

External factors

RELATIONSHIP TO THE STATE

The relationship of CBAGs to the state affects their internal organization and armed operations. In a negotiated relationship, violence is one of many ways of engagement to achieve goals; in a coercive relationship, violence is primarily a means to an end.

Negotiated Relationship: In negotiated relationships, the state can become the authority structure, and the CBAGs operate according to the state's strategic security goals. An authoritative leadership dominating a community or a region—for example, a warlord, politician, or informal community leader—is more likely to direct operations to protect and secure the land or political power granted by the state or to cooperate with state security forces. CBAGs can also operate under state sanction to extend state control into localities. An example of a CBAG that gained the support of the government in power is the Naparama, a peasant militia created by a traditional healer that believed that its members were invulnerable to bullets. In the Mozambique civil war, the Naparama recaptured most of the northern territory held by Renamo insurgents. The governing party, Frelimo, tolerated and, at times, actively supported Naparama operations against Renamo.³²

32 Corinna Jentzsch, "Spiritual Power and the Dynamics of War in the Provinces of Nampula and Zambezia," in *The War Within: New Perspectives on Civil War in Mozambique, 1976–1992*, eds. Eric Morier-Genoud, Michel Cahen, and Domingos M. do Rosário (Suffolk: James Currey): 75–99.

Coercive Relationship: If the group authority is in a coercive or coopted relationship with the state through threats, personal ties, or greed, the community may perceive CBAGs as corrupted by the state and thus as illegitimate. Case studies indicate that state-coopted CBAGs are more likely to respond violently to community opposition. In addition, such CBAGs are organized to protect the state from political rivals, inviting potential violence on the communities within which the CBAG operates. In many cases, CBAGs may operate in tandem with state security forces that predate on the communities to maintain their local power.

Some examples of how a state may use CBAGs in coercive relationships at the community level come from Pakistan. In 1971, the Pakistan Army colluded with armed Islamist militants of the Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing to commit violence in East Pakistan, with both groups in opposition to the establishment of a secular state. In the Pakistani province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, beginning in 2002, a number of local factions made deals with the Pakistani state to act as local stabilizers in areas of unrest, in exchange for the state's noninterference in their operations.³³ This policy changed in 2018 when the Pakistan government reasserted its control over the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.³⁴

Autonomous CBAGs that have coopted state officials can operate with greater impunity in communities than those that must depend on protection and legitimacy from the communities in which they are embedded. For example, a criminal network that bribes local and national security officials is less dependent on the acquiescence of the community for its operations, and, therefore, less careful in how it exercises violence. Gangs or criminal networks that have not coopted the state may exist through coopted or coerced relationships with their communities. In such cases, an autonomous group may treat the communities as safe havens and conduct its activities outside of its home base.

Finally, CBAGs targeted by the state for threatening national security or government officials and posing a threat to state authority face a stark choice: disband or transform. In many cases, the CBAGs will disband, go underground, or retreat. However, others may transform into or ally with non-state armed groups, such as violent extremist groups, insurgents, or armed separatists. The classic case of state suppression forcing a group to go underground and then emerge as a nonstate actor group is Boko Haram. As Boko Haram camps and schools grew and were perceived as a threat, police pressure increased. In 2004, Boko Haram began attacks on local police, resulting in a Nigerian military operation against the compound of its leader, Muhammad Yusuf, in 2009. Yusuf and more than a hundred of his followers were killed. The attack sent Boko Haram underground, although many assumed that the group was defunct. In 2010, it reemerged after a spectacular prison break and resumed operations as a non-state armed group.³⁵

RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMMUNITY

Negotiated relationships with the community build on shared norms and mandates governing the activities, duties, and responsibilities of CBAGs. Often, in traditional societies, these long-established norms

33 Paul Staniland, "Militias, Ideology, and the State," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 5 (2015): 786.

34 Ben Farmer, "Pakistan's Tribal Areas Are Still Awaiting Justice as Army Tightens Grip," *The New York Times*, June 11, 2019.

35 David Cook, "The Rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria," *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 4, no. 9 (September 2011).

create not only reservoirs of social trust but also a shared culture and values. These long-standing symbiotic relationships facilitate recruitment from local populations. With a shared system of values and culture, recruits are easily indoctrinated and gain status in the larger communities as a result of being a CBAG member. The community-CBAG negotiated relationship is especially strong when the community funds the CBAG and community leaders provide guidance. In such cases, CBAGs are institutionalized as security actors at the community level.³⁶

Oliver Kaplan, in his research on armed groups and civilian protection in Syria and Colombia, finds that civilians have agency and influence over CBAGs, even in highly insecure, violent environments. Kaplan asserts that, even in situations where CBAGs can exercise coercive violence against communities, civilians have significant influence and can transmit “norms of protection, good conduct, and responsibility.”³⁷ Communities do this when they organize collectively and negotiate with coercive armed groups around protective norms. These negotiations often create fissures within the CBAG organizations, empowering fighters less inclined to attacking civilians to challenge those more prone to exercise violence indiscriminately to control the civilian population.³⁸

There is another factor that can determine CBAGs’ exercise of coercive violence. Communities that have been exposed to high levels of violence that destroyed community trust and intercommunal networks of support (as members flee and are displaced) are not able to mount the types of collective action that can control CBAG operations.³⁹ In addition, communities in which violence has become normalized are also more vulnerable to CBAG’s exercise of coercive violence, such as in Latin American cities where state-sponsored violence has allowed gang and illicit criminal networks to take root.⁴⁰

RESOURCES

A CBAG’s resource endowment is a significant external constraint on its identity and operations. It drives membership recruitment, operations, and, ultimately, how a group exercises violence. Beyond an organization’s resource wealth is how it mobilizes and disposes of resources. Lootable resources are easily extracted and transported; a related factor is how easily they are obstructed. Drugs, diamonds, and agricultural products are highly lootable and disposable. Drugs and diamonds are also hard to obstruct by the state or competitors and therefore provide easier access to funding.⁴¹

Groups with access to significant resources—through extensive illicit criminal networks, political rents, or control of a local natural resource base—have more opportunistic recruits.⁴² These groups attract low-commitment individuals, who gain short-term material benefits from their participation in the group. Because the reward for participation is monetary, these organizations have less control over their mem-

36 As illustrated by the Côte d’Ivoire dozo case study presented in this report.

37 Kaplan, “Nudging Armed Groups.”

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Winton, “Youth, Gangs and Violence.”

41 Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*, 48.

42 Ibid., 7.

bers, who are likely to engage in violence against citizens.⁴³ In contrast, groups with fewer resources are more likely to attract high-commitment individuals motivated by the norms and principles of the group and the affirmation they receive from upholding them. With a stronger control structure, individuals in these groups self-police and are less likely to engage in willful violence against civilians.⁴⁴

The nature of the resources available to CBAGs also impacts their relationships with local communities. CBAGs with access to significant economic endowments, such as mines and agriculture, can behave in a more coercive fashion to their communities because they need compliant community members to extract or harvest the resources. If the resources are easily accessed or are already part of local economies, CBAGs might choose taxation and theft over citizen suppression.

SOCIAL NORMS

CBAGs can symbolize communities' local sovereignty and independence from the state, governance practices, and aspects of community identity.⁴⁵ CBAGs have a long history in regions where the state has not consolidated its monopoly over security. They also flourish where politicians or customary rulers encourage non-state security groups to deter challenges to their authority. Informal hunter, tribal, youth, and ethnic armed groups, in the absence of the state, play historical roles in providing community security and social order. They also play important symbolic and identity roles, as representatives of communities' strength, purpose, and sovereignty.

In traditional societies, norms of order and violence and the CBAG's role in upholding them are accepted and expected. What may look like outbursts or cycles of violence to outsiders may be community-accepted practices. It is when CBAGs violate community norms around violence and order that their identity, and thus relationship to the community, might shift.

THREAT ENVIRONMENT

CBAGs can form in response to a threat or arm themselves to protect relationships and equities. If the threat environment remains stable, CBAGs can focus on consolidating their internal functions and operations. Changes to the threat environment, however, can impact the organization of CBAGs. The emergence of a new threat or the escalation of an existing threat might increase recruitment levels, expand membership, increase mandate or mission roles, affect leadership structures, or establish a new CBAG.

For example, in 2013, the rise in violent extremism caused the Kenyan government to establish a new community policing system called Nyumba Kumi, dividing neighborhoods nationwide into blocks to monitor and report on suspicious activities.⁴⁶ Similarly, the disappearance of a threat can undercut the legitimacy and resources of CABGs, and the response may entail a transition to an autonomous criminal group

43 Ibid., 204–206.

44 Ibid., 204–205.

45 Melissa Leach, "Introduction to Special Issue: Security, Socioecology, Polity: Mande Hunters, Civil Society, and Nation States in Contemporary West Africa," *Africa Today* 50, no. 4 (Summer 2004): viii.

46 "Community Policing," Government of Kenya, <http://www.communitypolicing.go.ke/about.html>.

to fund and continue operations. For example, when the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, many local militias, previously funded by the United States, turned to drug production and trafficking.

INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

International actors can have amplifying or modifying effects on the external factors in CBAGs' environments that condition their existence. These actors can provide resources through development assistance, diaspora remittances, cross-border financial flows, illicit trade, or natural resources. International actors can provide social resources—a worldview or moral framework—such as a revolutionary ideology or traditional value systems. In some cases, international actors are threats, such as al-Shabaab in Kenya, al-Qaeda in Yemen, or French forces in Mali, that can coopt or target local armed groups. Outside actors can also influence CBAG-state relations. For example, the United States, in the wake of 9/11, pressured South Africa to categorize the People Against Gangsters and Drugs (PAGAD) as an international terrorist organization for its long-held sympathies to Qibla, the ideology of the Iranian revolution.⁴⁷

Internal functions

LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES

One of the most critical factors is whether an authority or authoritative group governs and directs a CBAG, defining its mission and purpose. CBAGs can be either autonomous or subject to an authority, for example, a warlord, community council, or politician. Autonomous CBAGs—gangs, criminal and vigilante groups, and hunters' groups—are self-governed and self-serving, creating their own rules, principles, and ways of organizing.

Four types of authority structures can, in general, dominate CBAGs:

- **Community-based:** Community leaders and members manage CBAGs either because the state is not present in these areas (whether urban or rural) or because the community needs protection from the state as a conflict actor.
- **Political entrepreneur:** CBAGs answer to a para-state or local political power that is not connected with the state and may serve as a governance actor for a community or region, for example, a warlord or tribal or ethnic leader.
- **Politician:** CBAGs serve national or local politicians to protect their personal political and economic interests.
- **State:** State authorities coopt CBAGs to perform security functions, in conjunction with or in lieu of national security services.

47 Rachel Monaghan, "'One Merchant, One Bullet': The Rise and Fall of PAGAD," *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* 12, no. 1 (2004): 1–19

How CBAGs organize for violence depends greatly on the parochial political and security interests of their governance authority, the legitimacy of that authority within their communities, and their relationship with the state. CBAG authorities who have consolidated their legitimacy within the community and have clear negotiated relationships with the state might exercise violence judiciously and predictably to maintain control of their parochial political interests. They might maintain control over the violence and order exercised by their members, prohibiting violence against the groups that extend legitimacy to them. They might act as quasi-governing authorities, relying on rules and norms for maintaining power within the community and exercising violence only against those who challenge their position.

CBAG authorities who have not consolidated their power with their communities and relationships with the state can use violence to demonstrate their desire and capability to dominate. Unconsolidated CBAG authorities can exercise violence strategically and symbolically as part of a broader negotiated process to assert legitimacy and authority, including to establish political alliances, buy loyalty, and terrorize non-loyalists. Paul Staniland argues that social embeddedness—the density of an armed groups networks in the local community and the more they recruit and interact with those networks—is the key characteristic for explaining armed group cohesion and control, more than ideology, provision of services, and popularity.⁴⁸

Communities with little to no state institutional presence and weak local authority structures might see CBAGs emerge that are self-sufficient and extractive—autonomous groups that survive and enrich themselves through illicit activities and take advantage of community weaknesses. Thus, the source of CBAG authority largely directs its mission and exercise of violence; the objectives of these authorities typically fall into three interrelated categories: political, security, and economic.⁴⁹

GROUP DISCIPLINE

How well the leadership of CBAGs can exercise group discipline is a critical factor in the level and types of violence the groups employ. The key to group discipline is institutionalization, the acceptance of norms, roles, and processes defined by CBAGs as an institution. In groups that have no established formalized command and control processes or principles that govern their armed operations, violence may be reactive or indiscriminate and not predetermined, that is, personal, opportunistic, or vengeful. To predict patterns of violence, it is critical to understand when and how institutionalization happens, what it looks like, and what external factors influence it.

Institutionalization primarily occurs to manage growth and security. As CBAGs secure their legitimacy within communities and with states, they may take on new roles and grow in operations and size. They are also likely to grow in response to threats to their territory or groups. Autonomous CBAGs that have not consolidated their autonomy and power may use organizational discipline and secrecy to prevent threats, infiltration, and outside monitoring. Therefore, external factors, such as the level and nature of threats, could have an impact on CBAGs' command and control.

48 Staniland, "Explaining Cohesion, Fragmentation and Control in Insurgent Groups."

49 Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

Organizational growth and security present the leadership of these groups with the management challenge of controlling subordinate units. Most units operate with decentralized command and control, and so communications in the areas where CBAGs deploy are often challenging. Furthermore, CBAGs can suffer from defections—individuals who are primarily interested in their own self-interest can undermine group cohesion and goals by avoiding security operations, targeting civilians indiscriminately, or seeking personal gain.

To institute mechanisms of command and control and to ensure organizational cohesion, the leadership can adopt several strategies:

- An inculcation regimen that includes training, mentoring, or a rite of passage that transmits operational standards and shared beliefs
- An organizational environment that reinforces operational and social norms through codes of conduct, monitoring systems, and incentive structures, such as promotion and punishment
- A shared system of organizational belief systems and social norms that all members, including leadership, submit to.⁵⁰

Formalization—the institutionalization of command and control structures to ensure better coordination and recurring rules that are legitimated within the group—can take many forms. Often, group norms are drawn from the culture of its members—from their communities or previous organizational affiliations, such as military or tribal.⁵¹ Formalized command and control structures are often based on patrimony or bureaucratization, depending on dominant social norms.

When patrimonialism is the mechanism of institutionalization, the command and control chain is normalized but personalized, revolving around the top leader.⁵² In such cases, leadership legitimacy depends on the leader’s reputation to fight, forge alliances, and extend clientelist political rents. The patrimonial relationship is replicated throughout the institution with subordinate leaders mimicking the credentials and fealties of the leader or drawing legitimacy from familial or ethnic relationships. A good example of a patrimonial system is the warlord of Afghanistan, Abdurrashid Dostum, who centralized commands and violence through clientelist networks that advanced his political ambitions.⁵³ In clientelist systems, leaders punish members who defect or subvert harshly and violently, as a warning to others of the dangers of insubordination.

Another form of institutionalization is depersonalized power tied to a position. As CBAGs grow, diversify tasks, or illicit activities become more complex, a degree of formalization of roles and responsibilities

50 Ibid., 137–138.

51 Schlichte, *In the Shadow of Violence*, 164.

52 Ibid., 168.

53 Ibid.

occurs that exceeds the control of one leader.⁵⁴ For example, as a drug cartel expands, it diversifies its business and institutionalizes its operations. Armed groups that are decentralized often have more effective levels of internal discipline. In contrast, centralization may be a response to higher levels of indiscipline both in terms of group control and the exercise of violence.⁵⁵

RECRUITMENT

A group's resources influence options for recruitment and exercise of violence. The recruitment process shapes how CBAGs can respond to organizational challenges and the external factors that influence them. Groups with significant or highly accessible and disposable resources—with primarily economic endowments—can deliver benefits to members immediately and reduce the costs of participation to members by supplying weapons, uniforms, and food. However, this ease of participation for recruits affects the levels of trust and make it difficult to establish when the basis for membership is transactional. Low commitment recruits are more expensive for an organization, less loyal, and prone to ignoring or re-interpreting group mandates. Recruits in materially resourced organization can be freeloaders,⁵⁶ but they can also be mobilized quickly and in large numbers.

CBAGs also have what Weinstein calls “social endowments”: distinctive identities and dense interpersonal networks that can be readily mobilized to provide sustenance and support.⁵⁷ These group identities and norms shared with their communities provide CBAGs with access to recruits and logistical support based on communal identities and values. Social endowments can take different forms, such as lower transaction costs with recruits or communities because of a long-standing reciprocal relationships; shared identities and interests; and horizontal linkages among CBAGs and other groups, such as clans, tribes, or ethnic or kinship groups.⁵⁸ Finally, CBAGs may offer community members an alternative process for political and social agency and collective action as a social good.

Organizations founded on social endowments are more adept at institutionalizing the commitment of their members by building an environment of cooperation and control. Resource-poor groups tend to attract members committed to the group who will sacrifice or postpone individual reward for the success and survival of the group. Strong moral, social, historical, or political identities provide rationales for group purpose and the conduct of operations, a selective recruitment process, and rules for punishing defectors. Resource-poor groups attract members willing and able to cooperate long-term. Their members are more likely to follow leadership orders and remain disciplined in the conduct of their operations.⁵⁹ However, organizations that recruit based on long-term commitments and social endowments do not do so with high levels of success. Their recruits are committed to the organizations, rather than themselves, but they are fewer in number.

54 Ibid., 175.

55 Weinstein, 158.

56 Ibid., 102.

57 Ibid., 49.

58 Ibid., 49.

59 Ibid., 139.

The core characteristics defining CBAGs are their embeddedness with national and local political networks; state power structures, such as political elite or security forces; and local power structures, such as tribal and local government leaders. Whether their exercise of violence on behalf of or outside of these power networks is based on relationships that are negotiated or in the process of consolidation further defines these groups. External factors—such as access to resources, international actors, shifting social norms regarding violence, and the stability of the threat environment—may disturb or disrupt those relationships, and, in turn, how groups exercise violence.

A typology of community-based armed groups

Table 1 helps analyze any given CBAG at any point in terms of its external and internal characteristics to identify potential points of leverage to engage, manage, or transform it. Case studies and future conceptual research can use these factors to think about CBAGs and analyze them on a case-by-case basis, in cross-comparison, or by tracing the evolution of one group across these dimensions. While the factors do not capture the entirety of the complex characteristics of CBAGs and their operational contexts, they provide a comprehensive overview of the key drivers to elucidate the understanding of CBAGs’ behavior and inform the design of potential intervention strategies.

Table 1. Analyzing CBAG Internal and External Functions

INTERNAL FUNCTIONS				EXTERNAL FUNCTIONS				
LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE	DISCIPLINE	RECRUITMENT	EXERCISE OF VIOLENCE	STATE RELATIONS	COMMUNITY RELATIONS	RESOURCES	NORMS	THREAT ENVIRONMENT
AUTONOMOUS/ AUTHORITY	COHERENT/ DECENTRALIZED	TRANSACTIONAL/ PRINCIPLED	NEGOTIATED/ COERCED	NEGOTIATED/ COERCED	NEGOTIATED/ COERCED	RESOURCE RICH/POOR	PREDATORY/ PROTECTIVE	STABLE/ UNSTABLE

Source: Author.

Table 2 provides an illustration of ideal types of CBAG, based on the nature of their relationship with the state and the community and the function their exercise of violence fulfils (security, political, or economic), conditioning group identity.⁶⁰

60 See Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups (CBAGs) in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

Table 2. A Typology of Community-based Armed Groups Based on Their Relationship with the State and the Community and the Function of Violence

FUNCTION/TYPE OF VIOLENCE	RELATIONSHIP	<i>...WITH THE STATE</i>	<i>...WITH THE COMMUNITY</i>
SECURITY	NEGOTIATED	PARAMILITARY, WARLORD, HUNTER, GOVERNMENT-DEPUTIZED	COMMUNITY PROTECTION, HUNTER, NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH, ANTI-CRIME, COUNTERINSURGENCY
	COERCED	WARLORD, PARASTATE, MILITIA	VIGILANTE, PARAMILITARY, TRIBAL/ETHNIC MILITIA
POLITICAL	NEGOTIATED	PARAMILITARY, PRIVATE SECURITY, PATRONAGE	TRIBAL/ETHNIC SELF-DEFENSE
	COERCED	ARMED POLITICAL WING, MILITIA	POLITICAL WING OF VIGILANTES/HUNTERS, CLIENTELISM, PATRONAGE
ECONOMIC	NEGOTIATED	CARTELS, STATE CAPTURE, OLIGARCHY, CLIENTELISM	RESOURCE COMPETITION, ARMED LABOR/OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS, CATTLE PROTECTORS, HUNTERS
	COERCED	GANGS, SMUGGLERS, TRAFFICKERS	BANDITS, ROBBERS, CATTLE-RUSTLERS, TRAFFICKERS, ORGANIZED CRIME

Source: Author.

For example, a CBAG with a weak command and control structure due to quick growth resulting from threats or resource booms, many opportunistic recruits, exposure to high-level violence, and a leadership structure with no negotiated relationship with the community may exercise violence against the community offensively and coercively. In contrast, a CBAG with social norms of community protection and service, institutionalized command and control structure, and negotiated leadership relations with the community will operate as a community protection group, exercising violence defensively and discriminately to prevent threats from entering or impacting the community.

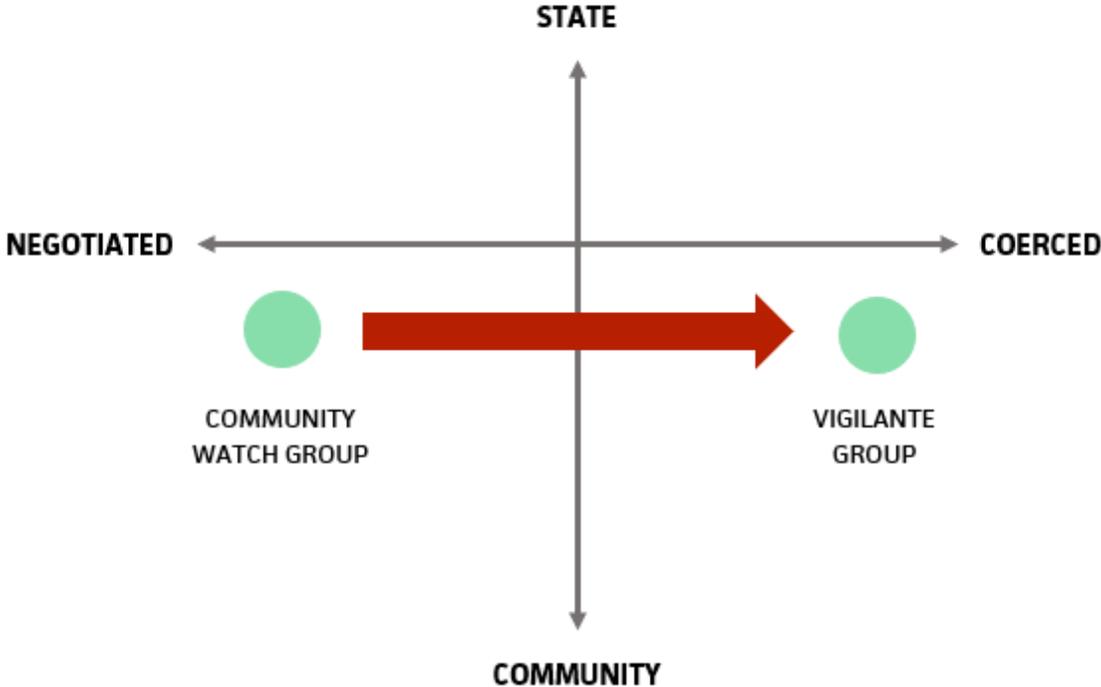
Fluidity

CBAGs are fluid organizations that shift identities among different types; changes in external dynamics drive these shifts. Changes in resources, international influence, threat environment, and norms of social order force CBAGs to modify their recruitment practices and their command and control and leadership structures. When these functions change, they can drive CBAGs to different organizational forms, for

example, from a gang to a politician-sponsored security group, or from a community protection group to a state-deputized police force. In these cases, how CBAGs exercise violence—negotiated, coercive/discriminate, indiscriminate— may fundamentally shift.

Figure 2 tracks a shift that the author discovered in previous research in Kisumu, Kenya. The community paid a community protection group to exercise limited violence against violent criminal gangs, deploying a social order protection norm. When the community stopped paying for the CBAG’s protection services because it had successfully eradicated the threat, the shift in its resource endowment forced the group to seek other sources of funding. The group offered its services to local politicians and criminal networks to protect their clientelist political and economic agenda. In some cases, that meant targeting community members who challenged or competed with the politician’s political ambitions or a criminal network’s territory; accordingly, the group’s exercise of violence moved from protective to predatory. With more resources, the CBAG began to recruit more youth, some of whom were more opportunistic rather than committed to principles of community service and protection. Less able to exercise disciplined command and control, the CBAG members exercised violence on a more ad hoc basis, sometimes indiscriminately, based on personal vendettas. Thus, a shift in resources and community-state relations changed the CBAG’s exercise of violence and thus its identity from a community protection group to a clientelist vigilante.

Figure 2. CBAG Transformation in the Exercise of Violence in Kisumu, Kenya



Source: Author.

In sum, this research presents two main discoveries on the CBAGs typology conceptual framework.

- First, CBAGs can be categorized based on their relationship with the state and the communities in which they are embedded and their use of violence.
- Second, how CBAGs exercise violence is determined by the execution of their internal functions (leadership, command and control, recruitment), which, in turn, is constrained by external factors in its environment (state and community relations, threat environment, societal norms of violence, international actors, and resources).

Shifts in external factors force CBAGs to change how they function to remain relevant. These internal changes can redefine their identities. Through these two discoveries, scholars and practitioners can monitor and assess their potential transitional points, aiding in identifying opportunities to engage, manage, and transform their behavior or the state-community ecosystem in which they operate. The next section tests these discoveries in two historical case studies for validation.

CASE STUDIES

Applying this dynamic typology framework on CBAG transitions to two historical case studies will test the validity of the findings and the interactive effects of external forces on internal functions. What do CBAG operations and their exercise of violence look like under the influence of multiple intervening variables? For example, how does a CBAG recruit, exercise command and control, and use violence when it has legitimacy from the state and community, enjoys access to significant resources, and faces a rising threat? How does a CBAG exercise its functions (recruitment, command and control) and use violence when it is autonomous, coopted by the state, poorly resourced, and rejected by the community?

The two case studies offer a comparative analysis. On the one hand, the People Against Gangs and Drugs (PAGAD) emerged as an urban citizen-led protection group in response to rising criminality in the predominantly Muslim neighborhood of West Cape, South Africa. PAGAD transformed several times during its existence from an unarmed community organization to a vigilante group to a nationally and internationally designated terrorist organization.⁶¹

On the other hand, the Dozo hunters of Côte d'Ivoire and the Benkadi movement also went through multiple transitions from the 1990s to 2010. They started as branches of game hunters in Guinea, Mali, and Sierra Leone, united by a mystical relationship to the god-like Manmory. Precipitous declines in big game

61 Because community based armed groups often play controversial roles in a community or state, this report is careful to indicate when these roles are disputed. In the case of PAGAD, as a predominantly Muslim organization that carried out a series of attacks against South African government officials in the 9/11 timeframe, they came to the attention of the United States. Whether those attacks were retaliatory, meant to push back on a concerted effort by the state to shut PAGAD down, or whether PAGAD intended to overthrow the South African government is a contentious issue.

simultaneous with a country-wide rise in violent crime saw the Dozos in Côte d'Ivoire transition to a nationwide private security force that also engaged in restorative justice in the north. Later, caught up in the violent contestations for political power at the national level, some Dozos joined insurgency groups; most, however, were contained within their homeland in the north, where they were at times labeled an ethnic militia. They operated primarily in the bush to maintain peace and security in communities where state security forces did not reach.⁶²

Côte d'Ivoire: The Dozo and the Benkadi movements

INTRODUCTION

From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, a nationwide crime wave washed over Côte d'Ivoire, caused by a tangling of economic factors: recession, high unemployment, and declining public sector spending.⁶³ The police force, weakened by the administration's austerity programs, could not control the situation, and criminal networks came to dominate swaths of territory.⁶⁴ In the north, these networks controlled a major transport artery and committed acts of highway robbery.⁶⁵ At the same time, the status of Dozo big game hunters in Côte d'Ivoire was declining in tandem with the overhunting of big game.⁶⁶ In response to the growing insecurity, the Dozo living in the farthest northwest, bordering Mali and Guinea, organized security patrols and helped community members to achieve justice. These two forces—the decline in resources occurring at the same time as a national state of emergency—transformed a decentralized network of local, traditional hunting groups into a national security institution that rivaled state institutions.⁶⁷ The transformation of the Dozo analyzed through the framework highlights the external factors that influenced changes in the organizational functions.

ORIGINS AND TRANSFORMATION

Côte d'Ivoire's Dozo hunters' groups inhabit the areas of the north where a Mande diaspora has settled, as in other countries, such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Liberia, Niger, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.⁶⁸ During the 1990s, many of these Mande hunter societies across the West African region transformed as state and aid donors sought their services to fight crime, secure borders, and protect environmental assets.⁶⁹ In Sierra Leone, Mande hunters served alongside government troops in the civil war; in Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali, they were deputized as conservation agents in environmentally protected areas.⁷⁰ A discrete class of hunters, the Dozo are a brotherhood of Mande-speakers distinguished by their mystical power of healing and protecting. They believe that their patron Manimory will only protect them if they

62 Christian K. Hojbjerg, "Review of Hunting the Ethical State: The Benkadi Movement of Cote d'Ivoire," *Ethnos* 77, no. 4 (2012): 564.

63 Thomas J. Bassett, "Dangerous Pursuits: Hunter Associations (Donzo Ton) and National Politics in Cote d'Ivoire," *Africa* 73, no. 1 (2003): 9.

64 Ibid.

65 Hellweg, "Hunters, Ritual, and Freedom," 38.

66 Thomas J. Bassett, "Card Carrying Hunters, Rural Poverty and Wildlife Decline in Northern Cote d'Ivoire," *The Geographical Journal* 171, no. 1 (March 2005).

67 Hojbjerg, "Review of Hunting the Ethical State," 564.

68 Bassett, "Card Carrying Hunters, Rural Poverty and Wildlife Decline in Northern Cote d'Ivoire," 24.

69 Bassett, "Dangerous Pursuits," 9.

70 Ibid.

follow the ethical rules of the group. The Dozo have always held a special societal role beyond game hunting; the communities they live in believe the protective powers of Dozos keep evil away.⁷¹

Requests from citizens and states for Dozo protection came from their right to bear arms, their affinity with immigrants, and their principled (not self-interested) way of operating and interacting with citizens and communities. In Côte d'Ivoire, these communal values were inculcated into their volunteer recruits through a lengthy, three-year initiation that included mentoring by senior hunters.⁷² The Dozo were highly decentralized and headed by the most senior member at the village level. Hunters' groups relied on the inculcation of the hunter culture and morals for discipline and organization. They carried their moral code of reciprocity through the shift in their group identity to community security providers, protecting citizens from what they perceived as the Ivorian state's immoral abandonment of the poor to crime. The Dozo saw their new policing and private security tasks as analogous to hunting; criminal activity degraded their communal ideals and justified their protective operations. It was a model of legitimate violence for social good.⁷³

By the early 1990s, with the decline in big game, hunter associations expanded functionally in the north in two ways that highlighted the absence of the state: as administering justice and as auxiliary to the police. Local farmers often called the Dozo to mediate crop damage disputes with local herders, tracking the cattle that had caused the damage and negotiating settlements with the appropriate cattle owners. The farmers compensated the Dozo for their time and expenses. Their efforts at restorative justice improved food security in northern rural communities, as farmers received compensation for their losses and were able to maintain food production.⁷⁴

STATE RELATIONS

Originating in the Odienne region of northern Cote d'Ivoire, the Dozo also organized a chapter of Benkadi—a hunters' association movement that began in Mali and spread to neighboring countries, such as Burkina Faso. As crime spread rapidly throughout Côte d'Ivoire, government officials in the north began to deputize hunters' associations established originally by the Dozo to patrol streets, maintain roadblocks, and secure thoroughfares. Crime rates declined.⁷⁵ As a result, requests poured in from across Côte d'Ivoire for Benkadi security services, including from border towns and even the south. The effort to transform the Dozo into a government-sanctioned, anti-crime movement had transformative effects on the organization's recruiting and operational functions. The national government under President Felix Boigny recognized the north's regional security success and the trust in Dozo-rooted Benkadi hunters' groups. The government sanctioned Dozo assistance to the police in fighting crime, which allowed hunters' association members to carry arms without penalties if they carried official membership cards.

71 Katharina Heitz Tokpa, "Territorial Power without Sovereignty: Hunters and the State on Cote d'Ivoire's Northern Margins," in *Spatial Practices: Territory Border and Infrastructure in Africa*, ed. Ulf Engel, Matt Boeckler, and Detlef Muller, Mann (Boston: Brill, 2018), 100.

72 Bassett, "Card Carrying Hunters," 24.

73 Hojberg, "Review of Hunting the Ethical State," 565.

74 Bassett, "Card Carrying Hunters, Rural Poverty, and Wildlife Decline in Northern Cote d'Ivoire," 24.

75 Bassett, T., "Dangerous Pursuits," 11.

Membership in the Benkadi movement grew rapidly for several reasons: the ability to own a gun to provide food for poorer households and payment for security services, such as community patrols and road blocks. Other ethnic groups joined the security employment bandwagon (for example, Baoule, Bete, Guere, Gourou, and Yacouba), traveling to the north to join the Benkadi movement.⁷⁶ A local Benkadi chapter in Korhogo took the movement to the national level by establishing the Hunter Association of the Great North and opening the ranks to any individuals who wanted to fight crime.⁷⁷

At that point, the Dozo multiyear initiation process was abandoned. New recruits received some training, and in a nod to Dozo culture, they took an oath of good behavior to an amulet they agreed to carry.⁷⁸ The institutionalization of the Dozo within the Benkadi movement resulted in cleavages within the group as it transformed from an informal network of local hunters' groups to a centralized organization. As Ivorite national leaders initiated systematic discrimination of ethnic groups from the north, questions arose on the role that hunters played in the increasingly violent national political arena.

As the Benkadi movement grew and dispersed throughout Côte d'Ivoire to provide community security, it transformed into a transactional organization, established a bureaucratic command structure, and became enmeshed in national politics. In the 1995 Presidential elections, the President of the Hunters Association of the North, Edouard Coulibaly, announced that the Dozo had entered the national political scene. Rumors spread that Coulibaly had taken money from the *Partie Democratique de Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI) to support Interim President Bedie's candidacy.⁷⁹ His manipulation of the Dozo, which at the time supported many different political parties, led to later suspicions by politicians that the Benkadi were a threat to the holders of political power.⁸⁰ The manipulation, however, was mutual, as politicians competed for Dozo support to boost their electoral ratings.

Unable to coopt the Dozo, Bedie began to fear that they were a threat to his administration and the PDCI party; his rival, Alassane Ouattara, drew his strongest support from the north, the geographic base of the Dozo. The Dozo declared their official stance as apolitical, noting that they worked for their employers' security, regardless of political affiliation. However, their public statements held little sway with the Bedie government, which moved to restrict the Dozo to eleven departments in the north, rather than grant them the legitimate private security organization status that the hunters' association had requested.⁸¹ This meant that the Dozo were no longer to carry arms or work as guards in the south and were restricted to a culturally defined region in the north.⁸² Non-Ivorian citizens were prohibited from joining the hunters' association, and members were stripped of modern weapons. The containment was not simply a political move to weaken the influence of northerners throughout the country and opposition

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Thomas J. Bassett, "Containing the Donzow: The Politics of Scale in Côte d'Ivoire," *Africa Today* 50, no. 4 (Summer 2004): 31–49.

80 Bassett, "Dangerous Pursuits," 11.

81 Ibid., 15.

82 Topka, "Territorial Power without Sovereignty," 101.

leader Ouattara's standing in the upcoming 2000 presidential elections.⁸³ It was intended to strengthen Ivoirite, the policy of manipulating ethnic identities to maintain political control by reducing the Mande diaspora's influence in Côte d'Ivoire.⁸⁴ The Dozo were not only caught up in politics at the national level; they also became a focal point for the politics of ethnicization ravaging Cote d'Ivoire.

In 1999, a coup against Bedie brought the military to power, led by General Guei, who relied on Dozo support symbolically and militarily. The General reinstated the Dozo as an auxiliary security force, guarding checkpoints throughout the country as well as public places in Abidjan.⁸⁵ The Dozo leadership of Abidjan reportedly met with the general to pledge their loyalty and reaffirm their nonpartisanship. The President of the Benkadi movement wrote to the general to express the movement's desire to support the police force on all levels in the service of the people of Côte d'Ivoire.⁸⁶ However, in a remarkable repetition of large-scale ethnicization of Ivorian politics, Guei reinforced Ivoirite to eliminate Ouattara in the presidential elections he now wanted to win. The Supreme Court backed Guei's exclusionary efforts, preventing any candidate from the north from running in the elections.

Guei's attempts to steal the elections ignited massive protests by his competitor's supporters in the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) party. Guei fled in response; Laurent Gbagbo, the opposition leader who had run against Guei, seized the presidency. Ouattara's Rally of the Republicans (RDR) followers refused to recognize his legitimacy, calling for immediate fair elections. As the north, an RDR stronghold, pushed back, requesting Gbagbo officials to leave amid demonstrations, the Dozo protected demonstrators from pro-government gendarmes. As violence and unrest spiraled, pro-Gbagbo forces painted the Dozo as a guerilla arm of Ouattara's RDR.⁸⁷ Gbagbo sought regional opposition to the Dozo at a meeting of the Western African Entente Council. West African foreign ministers committed themselves to controlling illegal immigration (the movement of Dozo groups between states) and disarming Dozo groups considered a threat to the security of states in the region.⁸⁸ These actions fed into Gbagbo's polemic against the Dozo as infiltrated by foreigners, which, in turn, fed into Ivoirite exclusionary dogma. As the Dozo were removed from security provision in the south, the Benkadi movement began to fracture. Some Dozo sided with soldiers of northern origin, who instigated an insurgency against the Gbagbo government. Others acted as an auxiliary force that protected citizens in the north from state gendarme and police. Still others retreated from the violence.⁸⁹

In 2010, Ouattara won the presidential election. When Gbagbo refused to yield office, the international community organized a military intervention, including the United Nations and the French military and the Côte d'Ivoire insurgency forces. During the intervention, the Dozo participated in a massacre in Duekoue in the west. The international community pressured Ouattara to respond; in turn, he outlawed all

83 Ibid.

84 Bassett, "Dangerous Pursuits," 15.

85 Topka, "Territorial Power without Sovereignty," 101.

86 Bassett, "Dangerous Pursuits," 19.

87 Ibid., 24.

88 Ibid., 25.

89 Topka, "Territorial Power without Sovereignty," 101.

state-sponsored private security forces. Despite his criminalization decree, the Dozo continued to play a public role in the north, providing security in areas where the state was not present. They protected communities in the bush, acted as border guards, and guarded village entrances. They coexisted with local state officials, inhabiting urban areas and maintaining the social order in the north.⁹⁰

CONCLUSIONS

The Dozo case study validates the external factors selected for this framework. Natural resource declines drove the group to shift from traditional hunters' groups to private and community-based security forces. State-sanctioned, they migrated throughout Côte d'Ivoire at the request of citizens to protect them from the nationwide crime spree. Legitimized by both the state and citizens, the Dozo institutionalized the Benkadi movement of hunters' associations and expanded rapidly. As a result of the transformation in state and society relations, the Dozo organizational functions changed. First, the groups changed from a dispersed, networked organization embedded in communities to entities with centralized authority in negotiated relationships with the state. Second, the Dozo expanded their ranks to include other ethnic groups and reduced the initiation processes. As a result, when the state began to exercise violence against the Dozo under the Gbagbo regime, the hunters' associations began to fragment into insurgents, auxiliary protectors of northern populations against police and gendarmes, and they returned to their traditional role of community protectors. The Dozo became less restrained in their exercise of violence, committing atrocities against citizens.

Hellwig argued that these "morally dubious choices" of indiscriminate violence should be understood as part of the Dozo culture of sacrifice and community protection.⁹¹ They may seem illegitimate to outsiders but were legitimate within the Benkadi movement that actively reviewed its actions in the context of Dozo spirituality and protective powers. Hunters' groups likely committed acts of violence that violated Dozo principles due to changes in internal organizational functions. Higher recruitment levels, absent the extensive, traditional initiation period, resulted in more opportunistic individuals joining and less institutional discipline in abiding by the norms of Dozo order. New recruits did not join for Dozo lifestyle and values but because the government allowed them to carry guns and because private security service paid.

That said, the strong Dozo value system may explain how the group managed to weather political manipulations and attacks by the state. Many Dozo joined the insurgency and committed large-scale atrocities. However, even after decades of state repression, many Dozo retreated rather than turning into a major insurgency, even when they had the national presence and legitimacy to challenge the state and press for northern political power. The Dozo's instinct was to turn inward to its cultural and spiritual roots.

Figure 3 shows how external factors drove the Dozo to first shift the negotiated relationship from the communities to the state. Then, as the state turned against the Dozo and established a more coercive relationship with them, some Dozo groups responded to attack the state. However, the bulk of the Dozo

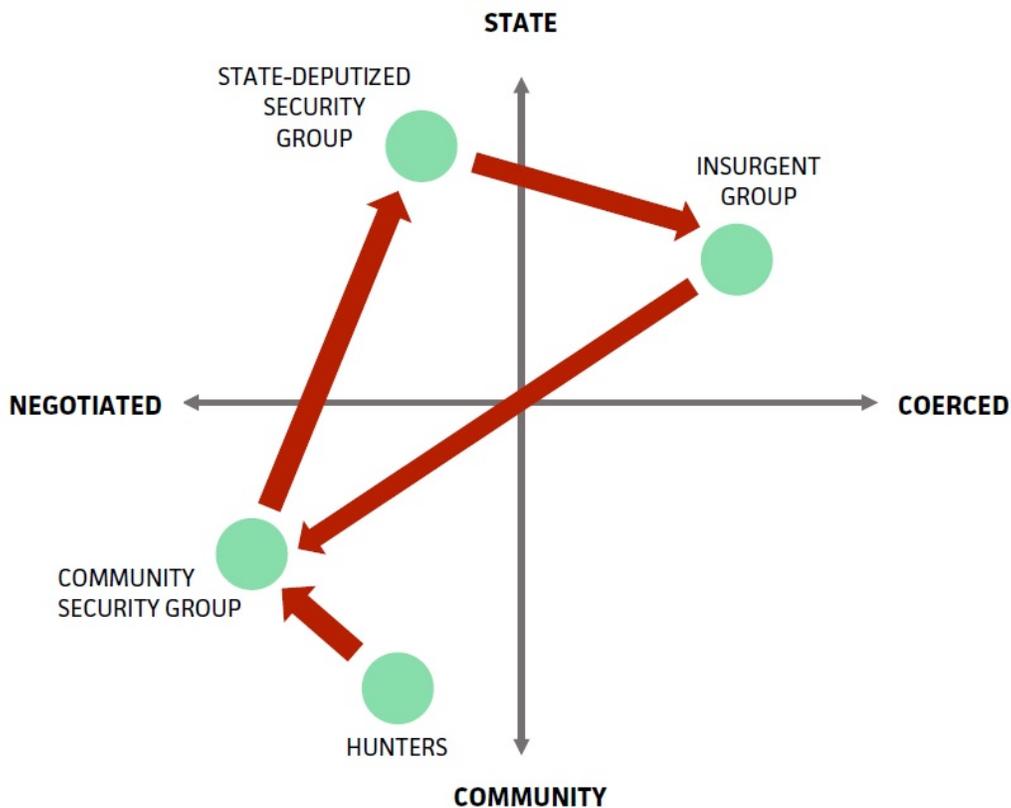
90 Ibid., 102.

91 Hellweg, "Hunters, Ritual and Freedom," 56.

returned or remained in the north and recommitted to their role of providing security and protection to their communities.

Other external factors that appear to have influenced the Dozo and the organizational changes are the international community, which put pressure on Ouattero to disband them, and community expectations of social order, which contributed to Dozo legitimacy. Local communities throughout Côte d'Ivoire respected the integrity of the traditional role of hunters to protect their host communities.

Figure 3. Dozo Identity Shifts according to Their Use of Violence



Source: Author.

South Africa: People against gangsterism and drugs

INTRODUCTION

The main dynamic behind the rise and transformation of the People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) in South Africa is the struggle of a community to manage the effects of the transition from apartheid to democracy. The Cape Flats are located outside Cape Town in South Africa's Western Cape Province, inhabited by the province's colored community; more than half of the 4.5 million people were

colored and predominantly Muslim.⁹² In the 1960s, the apartheid government relocated colored communities from downtown Cape Town to the Western Cape Province. These deportations tore communities apart, in particular, “the informal networks of communal welfare and social control” established around the imams and mosques.⁹³ The removals broke the infrastructure of community care and protection and gangs became prevalent. Citizens in the six districts that made up the Western Cape (Mitchells Plain, Manenberg, Phillipe, Bishop Lavis, Belville South, and Elsies River) frequently organized neighborhood watches to push back against violence and drugs. However, the authoritarian apartheid government suppressed them under the Riotous Assembly Act.⁹⁴

To understand how and why PAGAD formed, it is important to understand the cultural, political, and social transformations in the Western Cape and South Africa after the fall of the apartheid. Throughout South Africa, the privatization of security was common, as the government sought to scale down administrative apartheid.⁹⁵ At the same time, new forms of private security existed, with a long historical and cultural tradition of communities policing themselves and political and religious organizations organizing around social order and restraint.⁹⁶ The new African National Congress (ANC) government also attempted to reform the police, introducing a community policing system at a time when communities in the townships had not yet forgiven the police for their apartheid-era abuse. There still existed a “culture of mutual defiance”; people often did not consent to be policed, and the police still operated with old conceptions of the people as the threat.⁹⁷

At the time, colored communities in Western Cape voted consistently and largely for the opposition to the ANC, the National Party/Democratic Alliance (NP/DA), to resist the dangers of majority black rule. As a result, the Western Cape was the only province where the provincial government provided an institutional home for the political opposition. The tensions between the NP/DA opposition and the national government, dominated by the ANC, played into the state’s response to PAGAD.⁹⁸ Mobilization of security became caught in a partisan political contest in a highly contested constituency, the Western Cape. The ANC viewed community mobilized security movements and groups not only as a security issue, but also as a political problem the opposition could exploit.⁹⁹ All this occurred while the ANC was beginning to crack down on all political opponents.

Meanwhile, the political legacy of the apartheid-era—where the police and the government forged relationships with gangsters to control the townships—later combined with well-documented cooperation between gangsters and liberation movements in the run-up to the 1994 elections, created suspicion on the part of PAGAD and its constituents that the ANC and the police were not really interested in solving

92 Monaghan, “‘One Merchant, One Bullet,’” 2.

93 Bill Dixon and Lisa-Marie Johns, “Gangs, Pagad and the State: Vigilantism and Revenge Violence in the Western Cape,” *Violence and Transition Series 2* (May 2001): 11.

94 Monaghan, “‘One Merchant, One Bullet,’” 2.

95 Laurent Fourchard, “The Politics of Mobilization for Security In South African Townships,” *African Affairs* 110, no. 441 (2011): 609.

96 *Ibid.*, 611.

97 *Ibid.*, p 612–14.

98 Dixon and Johns, “Gangs, Pagad, and the State,” 13.

99 Fourchard, “The Politics of Mobilization for Security,” 621.

the gangster problem.¹⁰⁰ There was a growing alienation by large segments of the population to the ANC's liberal democracy that claimed a human rights agenda but became increasingly corrupt, holding the political elite to different laws.¹⁰¹

Finally, the other tectonic shift occurring in the Western Cape in the 1990s was the decades-long struggle between progressive and conservative Islam and the declining influence of progressive Islam.¹⁰² People in the Western Cape saw PAGAD as the epicenter for the struggle for the soul of South African Islam. Muslim groups in the Western Cape community valued liberal democracy and fought valiantly in the liberation struggle for a democratic state—a struggle that had little to do with religion but everything to do with being a South African citizen. Other Muslim groups felt that Muslims should not participate in politics until they had consolidated their religious position as a faith that could, from a position of unity, advocate from a Muslim religious perspective.¹⁰³ Some of the more conservative elements followed Qibla, a Muslim movement formed in Cape Town in the late 1970s and 1980s that promoted the Iranian Revolution and advocated for South African Muslims to adopt the strict Islamic principles associated with it. Qibla played a militant role in the anti-apartheid movement.¹⁰⁴

ORIGINS AND TRANSFORMATION

PAGAD, which operated primarily in the Western Cape between 1996 and 2001, developed within the community's long-held tradition of neighborhood watches.¹⁰⁵ PAGAD began as a grassroots community response in the new post-apartheid South Africa to a resurgence of crime, drug abuse, and gangsterism in the colored communities of the Cape Flats.¹⁰⁶ Its organizational development was organic. The community recognized that it could not fight the gangs at the street and neighborhood levels. The gangs were too numerous and strong and would retaliate with violence. Communities had to develop a critical mass of popular support that would make it uncomfortable for drug dealers and gang leaders to live in their area.¹⁰⁷ The leaders of PAGAD launched an intensive awareness campaign in churches, mosques, and civic groups. They held vigils and distributed pamphlets, and PAGAD grew from a small group of community organizers to a populist movement of public meetings and protests. In addition to community education, PAGAD engaged the government. The group delivered an ultimatum to Minister of Justice Dullah Omar to take action against drug lords and gangs within 60 days by such measures as implementing the death penalty, confiscating gang and criminal assets, denying bail to drug dealers, and imposing severe penalties for first-time offenders.¹⁰⁸

100 Dixon and Johns, "Gangs, Pagad, and the State."

101 Esack, "PAGAD and Islamic Radicalism: Taking on the State?" 9.

102 Ibid., 9.

103 Dixon and Johns, "Gangs, Pagad, and the State."

104 Monaghan, "'One Merchant, One Bullet,'" 5.

105 Fourchard, "The Politics of Mobilization for Security," 617.

106 Monaghan, "'One Merchant, One Bullet,'" 3.

107 Dixon and Johns, "Gangs, Pagad, and the State," 11.

108 Monaghan, "'One Merchant, One Bullet,'" 6.

In addition to engaging the government, PAGAD became more confrontational with gang leaders and drug lords in the Western Cape, marching in great numbers to their homes and demanding that they leave the community within 24 hours.¹⁰⁹ In August 1996, these clashes escalated; in a showdown at the house of drug dealer Rashaad Staggie, the crowds lost control, beat him to death, and burned his body. Publicly, the attack looked like the old apartheid tactics of necklacing, placing a burning tire around the necks of accused collaborators.¹¹⁰ At that point, the criminal groups began to fight back, organizing among themselves and launching attacks on PAGAD members and local Muslim citizens, including business dealers and religious leaders. Citizen support began to decline, partly due to public disapproval of PAGAD's extreme tactics, but also due to threats to public safety and the launch of a full-blown conflict between PAGAD and the gangs, which raged from 1996–98. Civil society groups that had initially worked with PAGAD as a neighborhood watch group split with the organization because of its hardline stance on negotiations and reconciliations with criminal. The civil society organizations adopted a more lenient, negotiated approach to engaging community gangs and drug dealers.¹¹¹

PAGAD's members were concerned about the increasingly violent resistance of drug dealers to PAGAD's tactics of public demonstration, exposing and confronting the dealers. There was also an increasing disillusionment with the state's ineffectual response to PAGAD's demands for tougher action as negotiations with the Ministry of Justice broke down.¹¹² These factors came together to drive a series of internal changes to PAGAD: new leadership, a tighter organizational structure, and the adoption of more robust tactics.¹¹³

In October–November 1996, a split occurred between the movement's populist-oriented moderates and the more fundamentalist and extremist faction associated with Qibla.¹¹⁴ The division was not only about the increasing ineffectiveness of PAGAD's tactics; differing views on the best strategy were factors as well. The populist leaders Farouk Jaffries, Nathmie Edries, and Ali Parker envisioned PAGAD as a way to restore community values through the construction of community rehabilitation centers and engagement with state authorities to advocate for the community's perspective. This strategy clashed with the Qibla faction's anti-state, pro-jihadist agenda. In the end, the populists (Jaffries, Edries, and Parker) were thrown out of the organization.¹¹⁵ Although PAGAD had always emphasized the power of the community over the power of any individual, there was a growing sense within the community that its populist leaders fancied themselves larger than the organization, engaging in self-promotion nationally and internationally.¹¹⁶

109 Ibid.

110 Dixon and Johns, "Gangs, Pagad, and the State," 21.

111 Ibid., 25.

112 Ibid., 5.

113 Ibid.

114 Monaghan, "'One Merchant, One Bullet,'" 5.

115 Henri Boshoff, Anneli Botha, and Martin Schonteich, "Fear in the City: Urban Terrorism in South Africa," *Institute for Security Studies Monograph* 63 (2001): 29.

116 Dixon and Johns, "Gangs, Pagad and the State," 21, 25.

With experience in the anti-apartheid struggle, Qibla leaders and members brought organizational savvy to PAGAD, institutionalizing it within the Western Cape and in satellite offices, for example, in KwaZulu Natal, Guateng, Port Elizabeth, Kimberley, and Johannesburg.¹¹⁷ The formation of Pagad United, its national organization, elevated PAGAD's local strategy to the national level. To deal more effectively with gangsters and drugs and to have greater influence over the government, PAGAD needed a stronger and larger front.¹¹⁸ PAGAD's national executive coordinated the activities of its satellite organizations, although none became as militant as the original branch in the West Cape.¹¹⁹ After the split in 1996, PAGAD began to develop more formal internal organizational structures:

- **Secretariat:** coordinated all activities within the organization and organized meetings, mass rallies, prayer meetings, conventions, and advertising and community notices
- **Legal:** handled bail, defense, and engagement with law enforcement agencies on behalf of accused members
- **Social welfare:** educated the communities about drugs and gangsterism in the schools and in factories and organized community recreation events, such as prayer meetings, outings, and sporting events; sponsored drug rehabilitation programs and rehabilitation for injured PAGAD member
- **Finance:** controlled and managed PAGAD finances, collected donations at public events, and organized fundraising campaigns
- **Security:** operated in cell structures to protect the homes of PAGAD members; within the security unit was a special unit of the most disciplined and well-trained within each cell that formed a paramilitary arm of PAGAD, known as the Gun Force or G-Force.
- **Education:** developed syllabi on the subject of gangs and drugs and assisted educators in providing classes in biology, science, and mathematics.¹²⁰

The internal organization of PAGAD is controversial and not completely understood. Some analysts and intelligence members believe that the Qibla takeover was complete and that the populist and community activities were a convenient front for its increasingly militant operations. Others, however, feel that while ideologues may have dominated PAGAD in its leadership ranks, the grassroots membership remained only loosely committed to the fundamentalist agenda. The G-Force operated on its own initiatives independently of the mainstream organization.¹²¹

117 Ibid., 33.

118 Ibid.

119 Monaghan, "One Merchant, One Bullet," 5.

120 Ibid., 5.

121 Dixon and Johns, "Gangs, Pagad, and the State," 26.

STATE RELATIONS

If there were internal turning points within PAGAD, such as the confluence of retaliatory violence by the gangs and the lack of response by the state to PAGAD's negotiations, there were also turning points within the state. These were, in many ways, opportunities missed or misunderstood, as the post-apartheid government also underwent a substantial reformation of its institutions, especially the police. Throughout the fall of 1996, the government and PAGAD engaged in negotiations on a police and justice response to the growing threat of drugs and gangs in the West Cape townships. The Western Cape Attorney General suggested that, if PAGAD wanted to do something about drugs, it should focus on entry points. In December 1996, PAGAD organized a demonstration at Cape Town International Airport. The group applied for permission for the demonstration, but the Minister of Transport and the President's Office refused to grant it. PAGAD proceeded with the demonstration, but viewed the whole negotiation process as a set-up for a confrontation with the government. Following the demonstration, PAGAD increased its presence at Muslim international protests outside of the Israeli Embassy and against the arrival of British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Violence escalated between the PAGAD paramilitary forces and the gangs. In response, the government issued a statement in December 1996 that PAGAD was a threat to national security and as anti-state as the gangsters themselves.¹²²

With this statement, the government's position hardened considerably. It began to institute legal and security measures against PAGAD, such as prohibiting members from owning guns and prohibiting demonstrators from wearing masks. Both measures reduced overt popular support for PAGAD; its members and supporters would not challenge drug lords and gang members openly without the ability to remain anonymous or to defend themselves against retaliation.¹²³ The government's twin track of more rigorous enforcement and public condemnation pushed PAGAD further from a popular mass movement into a smaller, tighter, better organized—but also more homogeneous, isolated, and defensive—group.¹²⁴

PAGAD leaders felt that the state response was the ANC-led government's move to quash political dissent and opposition, because the government feared that PAGAD leadership was pushing an internationalist Muslim agenda and its grassroots members were supporting the NA/DP.¹²⁵ Either way, PAGAD was perceived as anti-ANC. PAGAD also cynically noted the ANC's cooperation with the gangs in the lead-up to the 1994 elections and its lack of response to the criminal elements in the West Cape.¹²⁶ The government's statements in December 1996 were an attempt to associate PAGAD with militant Islam and fed into a domestic and global panic over the growth of Islamic fundamentalism. In making this connection, the government attempted to strip PAGAD of its support from moderate Muslims and non-believers.¹²⁷

122 Ibid.

123 Gabeba Baderoon. "Regarding South African Images of Islam: From the Picturesque to Pagad and After," *South African Historical Journal* 6, no. 1 (2009): 109.

124 Dixon and Johns, "Gangs, Pagad, and the State," 6.

125 Fourchard, "The Politics of Mobilization for Security," 617.

126 Dixon and Johns, "Gangs, Pagad, and the State," 25.

127 Ibid., 29.

As both PAGAD and the state positions hardened, the new head of PAGAD, Aslam Toefy, took a more instrumentalist approach in negotiations with the state, not seeking to transform citizen-state relations as previous negotiations had attempted. In 1998, PAGAD approached the government with a list of more than 100 gang and drug group members, identifying where they lived and the crimes they committed. The police responded that they could not pursue the gangsters because their resources were fully engaged in policing PAGAD. PAGAD agreed to stop its demonstrations for a month to allow the police to reallocate resources, but the group perceived very little police action during this time. The police noted that due to the new democratic processes it would take time to compile evidence and prepare for arrests. Soon, however, the police initiated Operation Good Hope, a special operation to arrest PAGAD members and fully undermine the organization. The operation was launched in response to a series of terrorist attacks on the city's soft targets, including restaurants, which the government attributed to PAGAD and which PAGAD denied organizing. PAGAD members believed that, having revealed their leadership team in the negotiations, the police used this information to target them.¹²⁸

The disjointed response by the police, engaging in negotiations while targeting PAGAD for arrest, was largely due to a growing split within the police force based on those who still adhered to apartheid techniques and perspectives and those who took a more nuanced view of PAGAD. The latter group felt that there was a pragmatic element within PAGAD with whom it could negotiate and engage.¹²⁹ That latter group eventually lost to the hardened state position and was itself investigated for its "sympathy" for PAGAD. As the state's position grew more repressive, PAGAD's core became more reactionary, defensive, and militant. In the end, the violence caused by the rise in gangs and drug networks that first led to PAGAD's formation continued unabated, with the state largely unsuccessful in its efforts to break up organized crime.

CONCLUSIONS

The PAGAD case study also confirms that the interplay of external factors identified in this study —community organization, the relationship with the state, international actors, and norms of violence—contributed significantly to PAGAD's original organization and to its transformations. This case demonstrates the complexity of CBAGs' existence in times of post-conflict transitions and democratic consolidations, as government reforms and norms of violence shift. It was difficult for both PAGAD and the government to see through the fog of transition and to understand their new positions and new contexts.

The lesson to be learned is the difficulty of engaging CBAGs in a time of transition. As Figure 4 shows, the shift in how PAGAD exercised violence is more the case that the accepted norms of the state and communities on violence shifted and less the case that PAGAD radically changed its armed operations. Shifts in societal norms regarding acceptable violence may radically affect a CBAG's legitimacy.

It is also clear from both case studies that state-CBAG relationships may not be defined as much by the absence of the state as by the government's perception of whether CBAGs are supportive or aligned with

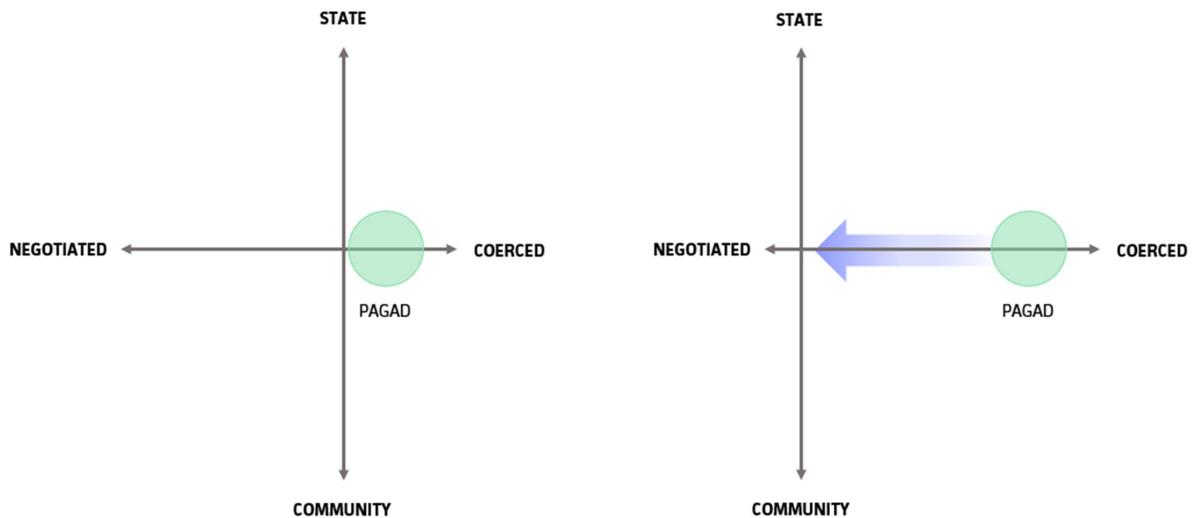
128 Dixon and Johns, "Gangs, Pagad, and the State," 24.

129 Ibid., 27.

political opponents. Thus, the state can view CBAGs as political, not just, security actors. Whether CBAGs are, in fact, political actors is irrelevant to the state, which is more concerned with whether they could become political. Thus, there is the paradoxical aspect of the relationship; the state relies on CBAGs to enhance its legitimacy and allows them to operate and engage, until CBAGs present threats to the state.

Finally, in terms of the internal dynamics of CBAGs, comparisons of the PAGAD and Dozo organizations show that values matter. The Dozo, which had deep organizational values centered around community protection, retreated to the north rather than unleash national government security forces against their homeland. PAGAD, in contrast, wanted to transform an increasingly corrupt liberal democracy by focusing government officials on the needs of the people that it served. In challenging the state and publicly addressing its flaws, PAGAD valued political gains over community security—a position that invited a government response. Thus, external factors ultimately drive CBAG transitions, but internal factors are decisive in determining how well CBAGs navigate external changes.

Figure 4. Shift in State and Community Norms on Violence Increase Perceptions of PAGAD as Coercive



Source: Author.

CONCLUSION

This dynamic typology framework links the organization and operations of CBAGs to environmental factors and links CBAG transformations to shifts in these interrelated factors. External factors (relations with the state and the community, resources, social norms, threat environment, and international actors) influence the internal functions of the group (leadership structures, discipline, and recruitment processes). In turn, internal functions determine the fundamental characteristic of CBAGs: how they exercise violence.

At its core, two factors define CBAG identity: (1) the external factor of the group's relationships with the state and communities, and (2) the internal function of the group's exercise of violence. These two core typifying factors are interrelated and dynamically influence one another. Both state-community relations and the exercise of violence can be characterized as either coercive or negotiated; these two categories encompass diverse practices and meanings, but they demonstrate the underlying fluid sociopolitical and cultural relationships that create the identity.

The two CBAG cases in this report—PAGAD and Dozo—began as community protection groups but followed different trajectories. The comparative analysis of these different trajectories allows insights into the factors that drive the organizational and operational shifts.

The role of the state

The historical, long-standing social protective norms practiced by the Dozo hunters helped them withstand the political pressures exerted by politicians to declare their loyalty to a political party. In contrast, the protective norms practiced by PAGAD quickly fell away under the pressure exerted by the state. South Africa experienced profound changes in how local communities perceived the new state and how the state implemented security, and community support for PAGAD diminished because of its violence against local drug lords. As the group's ties to community networks were broken and the state applied enormous pressure through police raids and incarcerations, PAGAD transitioned to a tight, hardliner group that committed violence against citizens and the state.

What state policies resulted in these divergent trajectories? At first, the Côte d'Ivoire government sought to contain the Dozo to the north, reduce their numbers, and partially disarm them. Later, when the Côte d'Ivoire government used security forces against the Dozo, some factions transitioned into ethnic militias and insurgent groups. The South African government implemented an escalatory option to eliminate PAGAD through police attacks, even as the group sought to negotiate with the government. The comparative analysis suggests that when the state seeks to eliminate CBAGs, they or their fractioned elements become non-state armed groups. However, when the state takes a more measured approach, even if the negotiations are coercive as in Côte d'Ivoire, CBAGs, such as the Dozo, morph into other types of CBAGs with more negotiated relationships to the state and communities.

Expanded human security roles

Both groups began as community protective groups and quickly added additional community responsibilities that responded to a more expansive view of security: human security. These human security tasks, such as dispute resolution for the Dozo and community clinics and youth programs for PAGAD, suggest that CBAGs that have high rates of legitimacy in their communities. Legitimate forces for protection will see their functions expand to fulfill additional aspects of human security if the state is not present and able to do so.

Both groups had international affiliations that the state used to discredit their legitimacy and loyalty to the nation or the state. The Dozo had connections to foreign hunters' groups as the Ivorian government was implementing a racial exclusionary policy. PAGAD's association with the Iranian revolutionary group Qibla supported the state labeling PAGAD as a terrorist group. Thus, political actors can and do manipulate the different identities of CBAGs to discredit them with their communities as a way to assert state control.

Managing factions

Finally, shifts in CBAG identities and exercise of violence causes factionalization within the groups, indicating that not all members accept new modes of operating, especially if new norms challenge long-held organizational principles. In Cape Town, citizens increasingly distanced themselves from the more radical core of PAGAD, fearing the backlash of violence against communities by gangs and drug cartels. They remained focused on PAGAD's community service institutions. In Côte d'Ivoire, the Dozo split as certain groups began to fight the state. Thus, in these transition moments, CBAGs are vulnerable—they can split apart, while certain factions may harden to commit acts of violence. The government and international community should be poised to act in these transitional moments. International actors can seek to leverage different groups to control the increasingly hardened faction and further isolate and contain it as it attempts to consolidate and expand its organization.

If the external indicators and internal functions identified in the typology and in the historical case studies are further validated in current cases, it will enrich a typology for CBAGs based on the type and direction of their armed operations and describe how and why CBAGs shift to other entities. For international organizations working in environments with CBAGs or for local civil society groups working within communities, it is critical to understand these shifts, especially if there is a possibility that CBAGs will change to more pernicious types of organizations, based on dynamic external changes.

This report also establishes the importance of a holistic monitoring and engagement strategy for CBAGs. Their existence is conditioned by their relationship to the state and communities. Thus, initiatives to engage with CBAGs also need to consider the entirety of their existence: norms of social order that may legitimize types of violence, endorsement by the state, and legitimacy rooted in their communities. Any

engagement strategy for CBAGs needs to address the social norms of violence, the history of state or community management or manipulation of armed groups, and their legitimacy.

International actors also need to recognize how they influence the external factors for CBAGs and how to anticipate responses in CBAG operations. For example, if the international community supplies increased resources to a particular CBAG, then it may attract a wider base of opportunistic recruits who may wield violence indiscriminately and abandon community-based norms. Similarly, the international community may appear as a threat in the particular environment, thereby institutionalizing that CBAG's role and making it a more disciplined, effective fighting force. The international community's changes to the external environment have profound effects on the group's internal dynamics. Additional research is needed to more fully elucidate the effects of international and regional dynamics on CBAG operations.

Finally, CBAGs differ greatly, yet engagement policies are often similar. Engagement strategies need to take into consideration the internal characteristics, such as sources of legitimacy and loyalty, leadership capacities, recruiting pool, and institutional structures. A CBAG with extensive resources, whose members enjoy economic benefits, may be more attracted to employment-based or compensation-based transitions. CBAG members motivated by an internal set of principles and norms may be more attracted to transition programs that are more spiritual, intellectual, or rooted in community service, such as becoming an emergency response and rescue group. For example, does a negotiated, legitimate relationship with the state, which might moderate a group's use of violence, predominate when a CBAG has access to significant resources, which might encourage more opportunistic violence? Further research should study interactive effects, determining if some variables are more influential on CBAGs' functions than others.

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**ORIGINS OF HYBRID
GOVERNANCE AND
ARMED COMMUNITY
MOBILIZATION IN
SUB-SAHARAN
AFRICA**

Dr. Daniel E. Agbiboa

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report was written and researched by Dr. Daniel E. Agbiboa. Several members of the RESOLVE Network Secretariat contributed to this report's development, including Ms. Bethany McGann, Research & Project Manager; Ms. Boglarka Bozsogi, Research and Communications Coordinator; Ms. Kateira Aryaeinejad, Research and Project Manager; and Ms. Leanne Erdberg, Interim Executive Director. RESOLVE would also like to thank the reviewers of this report and the members of the RESOLVE Network Research Advisory Council who lent their support and guidance. Finally, RESOLVE would like to thank the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Africa Bureau for its generous support for this report and RESOLVE's research initiative on Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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For more information about RESOLVE, its network of experts, and its research projects and activities, please visit our website at www.resolvenet.org and follow the discussion on Twitter via [@resolvenet](https://twitter.com/resolvenet).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This RESOLVE report, one of three, seeks to understand the origins, dynamics, and drivers of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) in Africa. As an explorative study, this report involves collecting, organizing, and synthesizing available information on non-state security actors and their relationships with local communities and formal state agencies, such as the law enforcement and justice systems. The report builds on academic literature that explores the relationships between the state and civil society, seeking to challenge simplistic renderings of these as distinctly separate entities with clearly defined boundaries. The report is also informed by interviews with members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), a pro-state militia helping to repel the violent insurgency of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria.

A consolidated definition of CBAGs has proven difficult because of their multiple types and characteristics, and because CBAGs are typically located in zones of ambiguity between the presence and absence of law and social order. Across Africa, CBAGs have organized at various levels (from lineage to ethnic group), in various spaces (from village ward to city streets), and for various reasons (from crime fighting to political lobbying to counterinsurgency). CBAGs draw their legitimacy from various and, at times, competing sources, including traditional and communal establishments, religious establishments, and political establishments.

CBAGs are perceived as defining boundaries and protecting or caring for the communities encompassed within these boundaries; they involve surveilling and acting against any threats to these communities. Such boundaries, however, are permeable and shifting and, therefore, amenable to change and vulnerable to conflict. For instance, over time, the expectations of CBAGs may differ from the expectations of the communities, so much so that CBAGs may distance themselves from the communities or may become threats to those communities. In such cases, CBAGs morph from community-based to non-state armed groups with a message and method that alienates the communities.

A common assumption is that state-building is the preserve of official state apparatuses. Yet, so-called weak or fragile states are ordinarily not in a position to provide security and other public goods on their own. Given their degree of embeddedness within communities and the popular legitimacy that they appear to enjoy, at least in the early phases, CBAGs may be well-placed to carry out basic governance responsibilities, establish public norms of compliance and cooperation with local populations, and provide order and dispute resolution services. This situation forces the research to go beyond the narrative of CBAGs as national security threats and consider their roles as contributors to state-building and peace-building.

A study of CBAGs—their origins, dynamics, and drivers—could clarify for researchers and practitioners the multiplicity and complex relationships between these groups and the state, as well as their prominent roles and responsibilities in security provision and service delivery. The results of such research, in turn, could support ongoing efforts to improve civil-military relations and to foster a more stable and productive relationship between CBAGs and the state. Insights from this study could also enhance peace-building and state-building.

Heritage of colonialism

Analyzing how CBAGs were forged in the course of a colonial occupation provides a deeper understanding of these entities in particular and the postcolonial state in general. The rise of CBAGs in postcolonial Africa echoes decades of selective, limited, and unrepresentative forms of colonial policing. The relative absence of protective policing under a weak and violent colonial state encouraged marginalized communities to devise their own solutions to violent crime and challenges to the social order. In areas where the colonial police had limited presence—often rural or peri-urban zones—the maintenance of law and order fell to local security actors. Vigilantes, hunters, and civic guards stepped in to enforce law and order, normally prosecuted outside of conventional policing norms or state procedure.

In general, colonial police and Native Authority police had little to do with serving the local communities. Their primary responsibilities revolved around coercing labor, dealing with threats to colonially imposed law, protecting white-owned property, and upholding the authority of colonial rule. These police forces, which had narrow bases in the communities, relied on coercion rather than authority for compliance. This pattern has continued in postcolonial Africa, where state police forces are often perceived as corrupt, ineffective, and unconnected to the communities they serve. This perception has fueled the rise of self-help groups (for example, vigilantes, militias, and gangs), some of whom exist to challenge predatory and unaccountable modes of governance.

Given the financial, logistical, and knowledge constraints of the colonial state—which would qualify it as a “weak state”—a prevailing ideology emerged that emphasized the responsibility of the African community to police itself (for example, the “indirect rule” system). This system of governance manifests itself in the way that failing states in postcolonial Africa increasingly turn to CBAGs to maintain law and order due to their perceived cost-saving measures, effectiveness, or popular legitimacy.

Categories of CBAGs

This mapping paper discusses three categories of CBAGs:

- CBAGs that organize to fight insurgents or terrorists
- CBAGs that emerge to fight crime
- CBAGs that are manipulated by state actors to target ethnic or political rivals.

Despite the diversity of the threats facing these CBAGs, they all seem to have emerged from a postcolonial context in which the state and its institutions are incapable of delivering security and other public goods, and the primary objective of those who hold or compete for political office is self-enrichment.

This combination of state fragility and elite rapacity has become a trademark of neo-patrimonial¹ states in Africa, giving rise to a range of security responses among local communities, one of which is a return to non-state forms of order.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding community-based armed groups

Most discussions about the provision of public goods, particularly security, focus on the role of formal state institutions. Yet the provision of security has always been a pluralized field of delivery rather than a state monopoly.² Against the backdrop of weak states³ in Africa—characterized by often disempowered, under-resourced police struggling with corruption and politicization—local communities often have to rely on themselves for protection from security threats that range from petty crimes to insurgencies.⁴ They do this, for instance, by mobilizing themselves into community-based armed groups (CBAGs) that may take the form of vigilantes, militias, or gangs.⁵ The effectiveness of these groups in providing protection, and the local legitimacy they seem to enjoy, have been accompanied by a growing recognition that governance exists without government⁶ and that the state does not have a legitimate monopoly over the use of violence. This is particularly true in weak or failing states, where the incapacity to deliver security has eroded trust in their power and authority.

The phenomenon of CBAGs invites us to rethink the common tendency to reduce local communities mired in armed conflict, or facing the absence of an effective state authority, to passive victims of armed conflicts rather than active participants. Describing the significant successes of governance efforts within some local Somali communities in the face of state collapse since 1991, Ken Menkhaus draws attention to “the obvious but often overlooked observation that local communities are not passive in the face of

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- 1 Neopatrimonialism is “a form of organization in which relationship of a broadly patrimonial type pervade a political and administrative system which is formally constructed on rational-legal lines.” See Christopher S. Clapham, *The World Politics: An Introduction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 48.
 - 2 Alice Hills, *Policing Post-Conflict Cities* (London: Zed Books, 2009), 19; see also: Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, “Local Powers and the Co-Delivery of Public Goods in Niger,” *IDS Bulletin* 42, no. 2 (2011): 32–42; Mirco Göpfert, “Security in Niamey: An Anthropological Perspective on Policing and an Act of Terrorism in Niger,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 59, no. 1 (2012): 53–74.
 - 3 A contentious term, “weak state” is generally used to define “a state that is weak in its core functions of providing security to its citizens (security gap), providing basic services to its citizens (capacity gap), and having legitimacy among its people (legitimacy gap).” See: Juhi Tyagi, “Weak States,” *The Wiley- Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization* (February 2012); Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).
 - 4 Betsy Jose and Peace A. Medie, “Understanding How and Why Civilians Resort to Self-Protection in Armed Conflict,” *International Studies Review* 17 no. 4 (2015): 515–35; Keith Krause and Jennifer Milliken, “Introduction: The Challenge of Non-State Armed Group,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 2 (2009): 202–20.
 - 5 This conforms to a recurrent thesis of state-failure, according to which non-state actors fill a security gap created by dysfunctional or absent state organizations. See Bruce Baker, “Living with Non-State Policing in South Africa: The Issues and Dilemmas,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, no. 1 (2002): 29–53.
 - 6 Ken Menkhaus, “Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping,” *International Security* 31, no. 3 (2006): 74–106.

state failure and insecurity; instead, they adapt in a variety of ways to minimize risk and increase predictability in their dangerous environments.”⁷

A definition of CBAGs has proven difficult due to their many types and characteristics, and the fact that they are often located in zones of ambiguity between the presence and absence of law and order. Moreover, CBAGs draw their legitimacy from various and, at times, competing sources, including traditional and communal, religious, and political establishments.⁸

In this report, CBAGs are viewed as entities that define boundaries and protect communities encompassed within these boundaries; they surveil and act against any threat to these communities.⁹ Such boundaries are permeable and shifting, and, therefore, amenable to conflict and change. Over time, the expectations of CBAGs may differ from the expectations of local communities, so much so that CBAGs may distance themselves from the communities or may become threats to the communities.¹⁰ In these cases, the CBAGs morph from community-based to non-state armed groups with a message and method that alienates the communities. The roles and activities of CBAGs are fluid as well.

The boundaries between CBAGs and the state are typically blurred because these groups tend to operate in the shadow of the state or mimic state institutions by delivering protection and punishment traditionally provided by formal state apparatuses. Existing literature repeatedly shows that CBAG roles and activities are closely related to ideas and structures of the state, from Kate Meagher’s analysis of how the Bakassi Boys were hijacked by the Nigerian state, to Micheal Fleisher and Helen Kyed’s ethnography of how the Tanzanian and Mozambican government outsourced policing by domesticating non-state vigilantes and turning them into local police forces.¹¹

The forms and extent of CBAG engagement with the state exhibits wide variations, both geographically and over time. In some cases, the state may actively oppose CBAGs to maintain its monopoly on security and justice delivery. In other cases, it may lend CBAGs its tacit or overt approval. The state (or other states in the region) may look away, seek to infiltrate, and influence CBAGs or may actively assume control over them or reinvent them.¹² Two key advantages for states that condone or even sponsor CBAGs are cost and effectiveness. As Fleisher writes of the state-sponsored Sungusungu of Tanzania: “The government in effect ‘deputizes’ local people and sets them to work fighting ‘crime’ at little or no cost. It harnesses the energy of local people in this struggle, bypassing the lethargic, corrupt formal law enforcement system.”¹³

7 Menkhaus, “Governance without Government in Somalia,” 75.

8 David Pratten, “The Politics of Protection: Perspectives on Vigilantism in Nigeria,” *Africa* 78 no. 1 (2008): 1–15.

9 Pratten, “The Politics of Protection,” 11.

10 Adapted from Göpfert, “Security in Niamey,” 67.

11 Kate Meagher, “The Strength of Weak States? Non-state Security Forces and Hybrid Governance in Africa,” *Development and Change* 43, no. 5 (2012): 1073–101; Michael L. Fleisher, “Sungusungu: State-Sponsored Village Vigilante Groups among the Kuria of Tanzania,” *Africa* 70, no. 2 (2000): 209–28; Helene Maria Kyed, “State Vigilantes and Political Community on the Margins in Post-war Mozambique,” in *Global Vigilantes: Perspectives on Justice and Violence*, eds. David Pratten and Atrayee Sen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 393–415.

12 Fleisher, “Sungusungu,” 210.

13 *Ibid.*

Against this backdrop, adopting a state-centric approach (for example, a weak state thesis)¹⁴ to security governance stops short of explaining the complex relations between CBAGs and the state and the roles and responsibilities that each assumes in security provision. Ideal-typical models of stable and democratic states fail to reflect the societal realities of failing states in contemporary Africa, in which the absent state has been replaced by hybrid security arrangements or CBAGs working “beside the state.”¹⁵ In Nigeria’s Middle Belt, for instance, vigilante groups work beside the state in security delivery.¹⁶

A state-centric approach is likely to alienate local actors. Such an approach may not only undermine the sense of local ownership and agency for managing insecurity; it may ultimately weaken the potential of weak states to govern. In contrast, a hybrid security governance approach that recognizes and supports the roles and responsibilities of CBAGs as co-providers of security and justice can be an effective means to strengthen the capacity of weak states to govern and maintain a strong base in communal forces.

Acknowledging the effective roles and responsibilities of CBAGs with respect to the delivery of security and other public services involves recognizing their limitations as well, and debunking tendencies to romanticize CBAGs as the panacea to Africa’s security challenges. Evidence suggests that CBAGs are capable of morphing from the “saving grace” of local communities to the primary threat to them, reproducing the same weaknesses and abuses of power that plague formal state institutions.¹⁷ The challenge for researchers and policymakers is to recognize and build on the positive potential of CBAGs, while minimizing their negative potential.

EVOLUTION AND HISTORICAL DYNAMICS

Origins of CBAGs

Historically, community-based groups—such as hunter associations, night guard systems, and village patrols—have assumed security prerogatives and service provision in Africa.¹⁸ The interactions between these local security actors and the state have not always been those of resistance but also of complementarity.¹⁹ To gain a deeper understanding of the contemporary dynamics and drivers of CBAGs, it is

14 States are considered “failed,” “collapsed,” or “weak” according to the level of their effective delivery of public goods, the most critical of which is security, especially human security. As Robert Rotberg argues, “The state’s prime function is to provide that political good of security—to prevent cross-border invasions and infiltrations, and any loss of territory; to eliminate domestic threats to or attacks upon the national order and social structure; to prevent crime and any related dangers to domestic human security; and to enable citizens to resolve their disputes with the state and with their fellow inhabitants without recourse to arms or other forms of physical coercion.” See: Rotberg, *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, 2-3.

15 Alice Bellagamba and Georg Klute, *Beside the State. Emergent Powers in Contemporary Africa* (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2008).

16 Other examples include the Koglweogos self-defense movement in Burkina Faso, see: Sten Hagberg, “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): 173–93.

17 Meagher, “The Strength of Weak States?”

18 Laurent Fourchard, “A New Name for an Old Practice: Vigilantes in South-Western Nigeria,” *Africa* 78, no. 1 (2008): 16–40; Raphael Garvin Abrahams, *Vigilant Citizens: Vigilantism and the State* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

19 See Jimam Lar, “Historicising Vigilante Policing in Plateau State, Nigeria,” in *Police in Africa: The Street Level View*, eds. Jan Beek, Mirco Göpfert, Olly Owen, and Johnny Steinberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 79–100.

imperative to examine how the idea of the state was conceived and enacted.²⁰ Doing so entails delving into the historical circumstances that gave rise to CBAGs and other local security providers. We learn a great deal about the evolution and transformation of CBAGs when we analyze their historical dynamics and trace the elements of continuity and discontinuity in their roles, responsibilities, and relations with state security services.²¹

Foregrounding vigilantism in Nigeria as “a new name for an old practice,”²² that is, as an activity that has its roots in pre-independence Africa, Laurent Fourchard shows how the role and activities of the Oodua Peoples’ Congress (OPC), a Yoruba vigilante organization in southwest Nigeria, reclaimed the practices of former night guards and vigilantes of the 1930s, particularly with respect to their extralegal practices that involved the use of charms for crime control and extrajudicial killings tolerated on the grounds of community protection.²³

This section is informed by Mahmood Mamdani’s thesis that the key to understanding the state in contemporary Africa is the realization that it was forged in the course of colonial occupation.²⁴ The emergence and reach of CBAGs in contemporary Africa echoes decades of selective, limited, and unrepresentative policing in colonial Africa, which alienated communities and forced them to look beyond the state for protection and other public goods. The focus here is on British-ruled Africa and the maintenance of law and order, with intermittent contrasts with French-ruled Africa

THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN COLONIAL POLICE FORCES AND THE COMMUNITY

The emergence and legitimacy of CBAGs must be properly contextualized within the legacy of colonial policing in the region, when colonial administrations deployed indirect rule to maintain law and order.²⁵ Indirect rule meant building alliances with local elites and subcontracting security provision to local policing bodies and militias. Because colonialism involved the transfer of laws and legal institutions from one society to another, it resulted in a bifurcated legal system: one for the colonized and one for the colonizers. The prevailing attitude was that “natives” required different treatment under the law.²⁶ This bifurcated legal system applied to British Africa, as well as to French colonial Africa and its policy of assimilation.²⁷ Inhabitants of French colonies in West Africa, for instance, were divided into two groups: citizens and non-citizens; French citizens were subject to French law, and non-citizens (Africans) were governed

20 Philip Abrams, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State (1977),” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1 (1988): 58–89.

21 See: Fourchard, “A New Name for an Old Practice”; Lar, “Historicizing Vigilante Policing in Plateau State, Nigeria.”

22 Fourchard, “A New Name for an Old Practice.”

23 Ibid, 36.

24 Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizens and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

25 Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom, and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 5.

26 David Killingray, “The Maintenance of Law and Order in British Colonial Africa,” *African Affairs* 85, no. 340 (1986): 411–37; Stacey Hynd, “Law, Violence and Penal Reform: State Responses to Crime and Disorder in Malawi, c. 1900-1959,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, no. 3 (2011): 431–48.

27 The ideological basis of French colonial policy in the 19th and 20th centuries, the French taught their subjects that, by adopting French language and culture, they could eventually become French.

by African law.²⁸ As a result, the legal arena became the site of contending interests among diverse and asymmetrical groups in colonial society.

As the most visible public symbol of colonial power and authority, colonial police forces were tools of direct colonial domination and agents provocateur. Colonial police forces served as the eyes and ears of the colonial government and enforced law and order against a largely hostile population.²⁹ Recruitment into the colonial police force was predominantly shaped by the technical needs of the colonial state (rather than the everyday needs of the subject population) and its prejudices about the attributes of different races and cultures.³⁰ Patterns of colonial police recruitment favored the so-called “martial races,”³¹ commonly drawn from the peripheral regions of the colony.³² Consequently, ethnic patterns of recruitment undermined the impartiality of the colonial police, creating and maintaining police forces that were neither representative of nor accountable to the local communities they served. Early colonial police forces were numerically small, hastily raised, and poorly trained. Many were recruited from former slaves, bandits, and brigands.³³ One agent of colonial administration described the Kenyan police as “an armed mob... of partially trained men.”³⁴

Colonial police forces had “hardly anything to do with serving the community.”³⁵ Their primary duties included coercing labor, dealing with threats to colonial-imposed law, protecting white-owned property, and upholding the authority of colonial rule. This pattern continues to this day as many citizens in post-colonial Africa perceive the majority of formal state policing forces as corrupt and strangers to the communities they serve.³⁶ Colonial police institutions mirror the postcolonial state in Africa that “presented itself as an apparatus of violence, and while its base in social forces remained extremely narrow, it relied unduly on coercion for compliance, rather than authority.”³⁷

28 Kwame Opoku, “Traditional Law under French Colonial Rule,” *Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America* 7, no. 2 (1974): 139–53.

See also: Mamadou Diouf, “The French Colonial Policy of Assimilation and the Civility of the Originaires of the Four Communes (Senegal): A Nineteenth Century Globalization Project,” *Development and Change* 29, no. 4 (1998): 671–96.

29 Mathieu Deflem, “Law Enforcement in British Colonial Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Imperial Policing in Nyasaland, the Gold Coast and Kenya,” *Police Studies: The International Review of Police Development* 17, no. 1 (1994): 45–68; John D. Brewer, *Black and Blue: Policing in South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

30 John McCracken, “Coercion and Control in Nyasaland: Aspects of the History of a Colonial Police Force,” *Journal of African History* 27, no. 1 (1986): 142.

31 According to the concept of “martial races,” certain ethnic, religious, caste, or social groups were regarded by British army officials as possessing a more masculine character, as being loyal and therefore especially suited for military service.

32 David M. Anderson and David Killingray, eds. *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority, and Control, 1830-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 10.

33 Killingray, “The Maintenance of Law and Order in British Colonial Africa,” 423.

34 Anderson and Killingray, *Policing the Empire*, 184.

35 Deflem, “Law Enforcement in British Colonial Africa,” 52.

36 Pauline M. Wambua, *Police Corruption in Africa Undermines Trust, but Support for Law Enforcement Remains Strong* (Afrobarometer, 2015); Murray Last, “Nigeria’s Boko Haram: The Anatomy of a Crisis,” *E-International Relations* (January 2012).

37 Claude Ake, *The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa* (Dakar: Codesria Book Series, 2005), 16.

In post-apartheid South Africa, for example, the police are generally perceived as corrupt, incompetent, and non-responsive to the needs of the crime-ridden townships.³⁸ It is against this backdrop that CBAGs such as the Amadlozi emerged to deliver security and justice to black-occupied and crime-ridden townships. The Amadlozi gained popularity based on their effective use of local forms of knowledge (such as gossip and eyewitnesses), physical punishment, and violence to address crimes. The power of the Amadlozi derived from their capacity to react immediately to problems of theft and justice. As a leader of the Amadlozi said, “We act here and now. We do not, as the police do, drag our feet.”³⁹

COLONIAL POLICING AND URBAN BIAS

Colonial policing focused primarily on urban areas, and its principal aim was the protection of property and the propertied classes.⁴⁰ Even in certain urban areas, especially with high concentrations of Africans, colonial policing was sometimes “selective and often only superficial.”⁴¹ By contrast, rural areas and townships were notoriously under-policed and crime-ridden.

In much of colonial Africa, for example, there was only one policeman for every 1,000 inhabitants. In one “Letter from Unprotected” in Tanganyika (today part of Tanzania), it was noted that “majority of the people living in or around these forsaken [African areas] still have to teach children what a policeman looks like.”⁴² This selective nature of colonial policing had a snowball effect on crimes and gangsterism in African villages and townships. Against this backdrop, many postcolonial CBAGs have their origins in rural areas and periurban zones, where the presence of official state policing is generally limited or non-existent and crime abounds. Thandika Mkandawire observed that while postcolonial rebel movements in Africa tend to be fueled by “essentially urban issues,” rebels tend to retreat to the countryside—whence they exact a terrible toll on the peasantry—since incumbent regimes possess a monopoly of force in urban areas.⁴³

Indirect rule, native authority, and the politics of predation

COLONIAL AFRICA

Given the financial, logistical, and knowledge constraints of the colonial state—which would qualify it today as a weak state—a prevailing ideology emerged that emphasized the responsibility of the African community to police itself. In the mid-1920s, Sir Geoffrey Archer of the Karamojong, an ethnic group of agro-pastoral herders in northeast Uganda, stated, “There is only one way to treat these [Africans] and

38 Lars Buur, “Crime and Punishment on the Margins of the Post-Apartheid State,” *Anthropology and Humanism* 28, no. 1 (2007): 37.

39 Cited in Burr, “Crime and Punishment,” 37.

40 Anderson and Killingray, *Policing the Empire*, 10.

41 Andrew Burton, “‘Brothers by Day’: Colonial Policing in Dar es Salaam under British Rule, 1919–61,” *Urban History* 30, no. 1 (2003): 65.

42 Burton, “‘Brothers by Day,’” 80–81.

43 Thandika Mkandawire, “The Terrible Toll of Postcolonial ‘Rebel’ Movements in Africa: Towards an Explanation of the Violence against the Peasantry,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 181–215.

that is (...) to leave them to their own customs, as far as possible, and under their chiefs.”⁴⁴ This perspective is manifest in how failing states in postcolonial Africa increasingly turn to CBAGs to maintain law and order in communities outside their reach.

The distinction between the British and French approaches in Africa is worth noting. In theory, the French mode of governance—direct rule—was the antithesis of the British indirect rule. One of the most significant differences between British and French approaches in the region concerns the degree to which the natives were allowed to govern themselves. Under French administration, the French occupied all the important positions; British administration generally adopted the plan of governing, whenever possible, through native rulers.⁴⁵ Derwent Whittlesey comments that the French, “feeling for logical systems and order, would not accept a scheme of government [like the British] which varied from place to place in conformity with local usage.”⁴⁶ The implications for contemporary security governance is that former French colonies are more likely to exhibit a stronger state-centric focus compared to British colonies. More research is required to better understand how contrasting systems of direct and indirect rule in colonial Africa affected the rise and evolution of postcolonial CBAGs, particularly their relations with local communities and the official state apparatuses.

British colonial policy from the 1920s was guided by the system of indirect rule or “decentralized despotism,”⁴⁷ underpinned by customary law.⁴⁸ The colonial state adapted local hierarchies and judicial practices by delegating some form of Native Authority to administer law and order under colonial oversight.⁴⁹ Writing in the early 1950s, Lord Hailey noted that “[o]rder is today largely secured by the system by which the native community polices itself, in the sense that only the major types of crime are dealt with by the Government Police Force, which has usually a very small establishment, the great majority of offenses or breaches of law being dealt with through the agency of Native Authority or Tribal Messengers.”⁵⁰

The structure of indirect rule varied greatly. In Nigeria, for example, it ranged from the continuing rule of the northern emirs (Muslim rulers), through Warrant Chiefs imposed on acephalous (“headless”) societ-

44 James P. Barber, “The Karamoja District of Uganda: A Pastoral People under Colonial Rule,” *The Journal of African History* 3, no. 1 (1962): 119.

45 As Derwent Whittlesey wrote in 1937: “France is in Africa to make Frenchmen out of the Africans. To this end African life is given no official recognition. Administrative officers from France rule directly, native leaders being allowed to handle their own people only by sanction of custom, never of law.” Further, “all land is French, except that which an individual African registers with the French authorities,” see: Derwent Whittlesey, “British and French Colonial Technique in West Africa,” *Foreign Affairs* 15, no. 2 (1937): 363; see also: Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Africa: Endurance and Change South of the Sahara* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); A. Adu Boahen, ed., *General History of Africa, VII: Africa under Colonial Domination 1880–1935* (London: Heineman, 1989).

46 Whittlesey, “British and French Colonial Technique in West Africa,” 371.

47 Mamdani, *Citizens and Subject*.

48 The first British experiment in indirect rule in West Africa took place in Northern Nigeria. See Whittlesey, “British and French Colonial Technique in West Africa,” 363.

49 Jocelyn Alexander and Gary Kynoch, “Introduction: Histories and Legacies of Punishment in Southern Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, no. 3 (2011): 395–413.

50 Lord Hailey, *Native Administration in the British African Territories. Part IV. A General Survey of the System of Native Administration* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1951), 2.

ies in the southwest, to small chiefdoms and sub-chiefdoms.⁵¹ Many local chiefs were predatory in nature and abused their position to exploit those under their authority and to shore up patronage.⁵² Consequently, many chiefs were “feared and disliked.”⁵³ Colonial officials were under obligation to support the state-appointed Native Authorities against their opponents, which emboldened the despotic and venal nature of the chiefs.⁵⁴ Often, local chiefs abused their messengers to seize livestock and other property in what a colonial official graphically described as a “general civil war against the people.”⁵⁵

In Uganda’s Eastern Provinces in the 1930s, African chiefs used forced labor to grow cotton. The indirect rule system allowed traditional African rulers to exercise a measure of control over Native Authority police, courts, and prisons, which opened up more avenues for authoritarian behavior and chronic opportunism. In northern Nigeria, Native Authorities administered many of the prisons, and until 1936, the courts had the authority to impose capital sentences. Despite the supposed civilizing mission of colonial administrations, many polities ran prisons and inflicted punishments that were at once “brutal and harsh.”⁵⁶ Sir Lord Lugard even allowed northern emirs in Nigeria to retain the practice of beheading and drowning as “humane” methods of execution for principal crimes.⁵⁷ This is not surprising if we consider Whittlesey’s argument that “the autocratic authority of the emirs [was] modified only in so far as necessary to make it conform with British ideals of fair play and justice.”⁵⁸

In colonial Nyasaland (today part of Malawi), the Native Authority police punished tax defaulters by burning down their houses, keeping wives as hostages until their husband paid, and forcing defaulters to labor at public works.⁵⁹ By and large, the central pillars of penal authority in Africa remained executions, floggings, imprisonment, and fines.⁶⁰ A uniform often provided a license to loot, and the people perceived the Native Authority police as predators; this popular perception was not untrue. As early as 1891, the consul general of the Oil Rivers Protectorates in Nigeria denounced the “numerous acts of lawlessness and pillage” by the Native Authority police, who were known in the local communities as the “forty thieves” in police uniform.⁶¹ In Nyasaland, some members of the Native Authority police supplemented their wages by extorting “fowls, food, beer, and even women” from locals.⁶² In Southern Rhodesia (today

51 Killingray, “The Maintenance of Law and Order,” 416.

52 Mamdani, “Citizens and Subject.”

53 Killingray, “The Maintenance of Law and Order,” 93.

54 John Tosh, *Clan Leaders and Colonial Chiefs in Lango: The Political History of an East African Stateless Society, C. 1800–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 188.

55 Killingray, “The Maintenance of Law and Order,” 417.

56 Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order*, 125.

57 Killingray, “The Maintenance of Law and Order,” 434.

58 Whittlesey, “British and French Colonial Technique in West Africa,” 372.

59 McCracken, “Coercion and Control in Nyasaland,” 132.

60 Florence Bernault, “The Shadow of Rule: Colonial Power and Modern Punishment in Africa,” in *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, eds. Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2007), 76.

61 Human Rights Watch, *Everyone’s in on the Game: Corruption and Human Rights Abuses by the Nigeria Police Force* (Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch, 2010).

62 McCracken, “Coercion and Control,” 144.

part of Zimbabwe), the Shona-speaking people taunted the Native Authority police as “imbga dza vasun-gate” that translates as “white men’s dogs.”⁶³

POSTCOLONIAL AFRICA

The predatory and patronage politics that characterized Native Authority and policing in colonial Africa has bled into postcolonial politics where elites appropriate state institutions as a conduit for private accumulation.⁶⁴ This predatory and neo-patrimonial character of political economy, a legacy of colonial rule,⁶⁵ is a key driver of non-state groups throughout the continent, some of which exist to challenge unaccountable modes of governance.⁶⁶ Among the Boko Haram leadership, there is a firm belief that the problems within the Nigerian state are traceable to the corruption of its *yan boko* (Western-trained elites), who are seen as enriching themselves at the expense of the poor. As Andrew Walker argues in a U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) report, the term *yan boko* refers to “the elite created by the policy of indirect rule used by British to colonize Nigeria— the people who have their heads turned away from Allah by easy money and corrupting Western values. To be *yan boko* is to be spiritually and morally corrupt, lacking in religious piety, and guilty of criminally enriching oneself rather than dedicating oneself to the Muslim *umma* (community).”⁶⁷

In sum, the relative absence of protective policing under weak, corrupt, and violent states in colonial Africa encouraged marginalized civilian communities to develop their own solutions to violent crime and challenges to the social order. In areas where the colonial police forces had a limited presence, such as rural and periurban zones, the maintenance of law and order typically fell to local security initiatives.⁶⁸ Vigilantes, hunters, and civic guards stepped in to enforce law and order of a very “rough-and-ready type.”⁶⁹

63 Lawrence Vambe, *An Ill-fated People: Zimbabwe before and after Rhodes* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), 125.

64 See Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Peter P. Ekeh, “Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 1 (1975): 91–112.

65 This is not to say that predatory politics did not exist in precolonial Africa. Between 1804 and 1808, for instance, we know that Shaikh Usman Dan Fodio waged the Sokoto (Fulani) jihad across a series of emirates (in what is today known as Northern Nigeria) against what he perceived as the hopelessly corrupt and apostate Hausa ruling elite of his time. Dan Fodio decried the prevalence of routine exploitative taxes and oppressive practices among officials of the “*sarkis*”—the sovereign authority on which the political, judicial and military powers of the Hausa were invested—which he perceived as unjust and alien to *da al-Islam*, to “true Islam.” See Olufemi Vaughan, *Religion and the Making of Nigeria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 18; M.G. Smith, “Historical and Cultural Conditions of Political Corruption among the Hausa,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 6, no. 2 (1964): 164–94.

66 Meagher, “The Strength of Weak States?”

67 Andrew Walker, *What is Boko Haram?* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2012), 7.

68 Gary Kynoch, “Friend or Foe? A World View of Community-Police Relations in Gauteng Townships, 1947–77,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 37, no. 2 (2003): 310.

69 Killingley, “The Maintenance of Law and Order in British Colonial Africa,” 419.

CURRENT TRENDS

This section traces the patterns of continuity and discontinuity between the colonial state and the post-colonial state in East and West Africa, with particular attention to the dynamics and drivers of contemporary CBAGs. The central thesis of this section is that to understand the circumstances that generated postcolonial CBAGs in the region, we must look closely at not only the functioning of the postcolonial state and its institutions but also the perceptions and responses of the communities on whose behalf CBAGs frequently claim to act.

For analytical clarity, three major categories of CBAGs are identified, with a caveat that the lines between these groups can be fluid in reality:

- CBAGs that organize to fight insurgents or terrorists, for example, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in northeast Nigeria
- CBAGs that emerge to fight crime, for example, the Sungusungu village groups in Tanzania
- CBAGs that are manipulated by state actors to target ethnic or political rivals, for example, the Mungiki youth movement in Kenya

Despite the diversity of the security threats that these CBAGs encounter, they all emerged from a post-colonial context in which, on the one hand, state structures are unable to provide security and other public services on their own, and, on the other hand, the primary objective of elites or those competing for political power is self-enrichment. Such a potent mix of state fragility and elite rapacity has become a prominent feature of neopatrimonial states in Africa, generating a range of responses in local communities. Mkandawire describes these reactions as “voice,” through which local groups openly articulate their discontent, and “exit,” whereby local groups withdraw from state-dominated spaces.⁷⁰

Counterinsurgent CBAGs: The case of Nigeria’s Civilian Joint Task Force

Nigeria’s armed forces are often deployed in communities where they are strangers, with little to no knowledge of the local culture, terrain, and languages of the people whom they serve. This practice makes it difficult for these soldiers to gain the trust of those local communities. In the absence of a proper knowledge apparatus that made society intelligible, feelings rather than fact often became sufficient grounds for arrest, torture, and killings by state security forces in northeastern Nigeria.⁷¹ One security official in Gombe state said: “We feel some civilians are obstructing us in the discharge of our duties.

70 Mkandawire, “The Terrible Toll of Postcolonial ‘Rebel’ Movements in Africa,” 184. See also: Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Decline in Firms, Organizations and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

71 Human Rights Watch, *Everyone’s in on the Game*.

We also feel others are frustrating our efforts by collaborating with Boko Haram, and providing them with information and even a safe abode to hide in, thereby endangering the lives of all those living nearby.”⁷²

As Nigerian security forces deployed to protect communities affected by Boko Haram began to stamp those communities with the label of “suspect,” local residents in northeast Nigeria (particularly in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states) became a “happy hunting ground” for both Boko Haram insurgents and the Nigerian forces. While Boko Haram suspected and punished these communities for siding with government security forces, the Nigerian forces suspected and punished them for shielding Boko Haram insurgents and providing key information to the group. As another security officer noted, “When we can’t see the enemy, civilians become the enemy.”⁷³

This section of the report is based on the author’s fieldwork conducted in Borno State between August 2017 and January 2018, during which he carried out more than 60 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with sectorial commanders and volunteers of the CJTF in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State and headquarters of the CJTF in northeast Nigeria.

THE CJTF AS A CHILD OF NECESSITY

Where a community is viewed as suspect, bonds may grow among the members of the community on the basis of shared experiences of persecution and interest in avoiding being constantly targeted as suspicious. As Breen-Smyth argues: “In the absence of the ability to turn to agents of the state in order to secure one’s safety and freedom, those identified as suspects and the communities they come from have a sense of being left undefended, insecure and are thus more, not less, likely to turn to non-state actors.”⁷⁴ Breen-Smyth further argues that alienation from state security forces can lead to perceptions among the suspect community that “the state, not terrorism, represents the source of greatest threat to their security.”⁷⁵ Nowhere is this most evident than in the rise of the CJTF in Maiduguri.

The CJTF was a product of a brutal war against Boko Haram that targeted local communities. The group emerged in reaction to the twin threats of Boko Haram’s jihad and the brutality of the Nigerian army. In an interview, the Super Overall Chairman of the CJTF in Maiduguri, Baba Shehu Abdul Ganiyu, confirmed that the CJTF was a direct result of “harassment by Boko Haram and harassment by Nigerian Army.” He added that “because Nigerian army did not know who is really Boko Haram, they just come and cordon off any area and take everybody away for screening. Then later on, we the youth of Maiduguri decided that enough is enough. That’s why we agreed to cooperate with the security agencies that we are going to fish those people out of our society. That’s how we started this community-based work in June 2013.”⁷⁶

72 Kyle Dietrich, *When We Can’t See the Enemy, Civilians Become the Enemy: Living Through Nigeria’s Six-Year Insurgency* (Washington, DC: Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2015), 51.

73 Dietrich, *When We Can’t See the Enemy, Civilians Become the Enemy*, 6.

74 Marie Breen-Smyth, “Theorising the ‘Suspect Community’: Counterterrorism, Security Practices and the Public Imagination,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 7, no. 2 (2014): 231.

75 Breen-Smyth, “Theorizing the ‘Suspect Community,’” 234.

76 Author’s interview with Baba Shehu Abdul Ganiyu, November 2018.

Among Maiduguri residents, there is also a sense that the repressive tactics of Nigeria security forces generated the CJTF. “Let me tell you,” says Mohammed, a taxi-driver from the Wulari area of Maiduguri, “we have three types of Boko Haram. We have a real Boko Haram. We have a military Boko Haram. And we have a political Boko Haram. You don’t know who will save you. Just only God. If Boko Haram doesn’t kill you, soldiers will kill you. This is why those CJTF boys took up sticks. Because they say if the state cannot protect us, let us protect ourselves.”⁷⁷

FORMALIZING THE CJTF

Understanding the process through which CBAGs acquire formal recognition is imperative because it can tell us on whose behalf these local security actors will fight.⁷⁸ The CJTF emerged in Maiduguri in June 2013; by late 2013, the group had managed to flush Boko Haram members out of Maiduguri, forcing the insurgents to retreat to the countryside, especially to the mountain terrains and hills. Since then, very few attacks have occurred in Maiduguri, other than suicide missions targeting camps for internally displaced persons on the city’s periphery. Given this achievement, former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan described the CJTF members as “new national heroes.”⁷⁹ In addition, the counterinsurgent vigilante model of the CJTF began to be replicated throughout Borno State, spreading further across northeastern Nigeria, before making its way to neighboring countries in the Chad Basin, including Cameroon and Chad.⁸⁰ Today, the CJTF has an estimated strength of about 26,000 members across northeastern Nigeria.⁸¹

Operating as a pro-state paramilitary force, CJTF members deploy their intimate knowledge of the terrain, language, and people to identify and arrest Boko Haram members in their neighborhoods. “Sometimes when we arrest the insurgents, [and] we try them. If found innocent, we release them. If found guilty, we hand them over to the authority,” says Alhaji Bulama Kawu, a hunter from Gubja area of Yobe State.⁸² By supplying the local knowledge that was lacking in the counterinsurgency operations of the Nigerian military, the CJTF bolstered the war against Boko Haram and reduced the amount of arbitrary arrests and killings of locals by security forces. The CJTF effectively became the “eyes and ears” of the Nigerian military.

Upon seeing the effectiveness of the CJTF, and the popular legitimacy enjoyed by the group, the Borno State government felt compelled to invite the leadership of the CJTF to a security council meeting headed by the governor, Kashim Shettima. Notably, the involvement of the Borno State government came after much lobbying by the Shehu [traditional leader] of Borno State, Abubakar Ibn Umar Garbai El-Kanemi, who, very early on, was impressed by the brave acts of the CJTF and believed the group should be encouraged rather than left alone. Already overstretched by the threat of Boko Haram, the Borno State government officially endorsed the self-help group as a “voluntary organization” to support the Nigerian Joint

77 Author’s interview with Mohammed in Wulari, Maiduguri, December 2017.

78 Meagher, “The Strength of Weak States?” 1096.

79 Akintayo Eribake, “The Maiduguri Civilian JTF Model as Solution to Boko Haram Insurgency,” *Vanguard*, May 18, 2014.

80 International Crisis Group, *Double-Edged Sword: Vigilantes in African Counter-Insurgencies* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2017).

81 Chitra Nagarajan, *Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria* (Washington, DC: Center for Civilians in Conflict, June 2018).

82 Alhaji Bulama Kawu, interview by author, Gubja, Yobe State, Nigeria, December 17, 2017.

Task Force under the official moniker: “Civilian Joint Task Force.” Thereafter, the group joined the official counterinsurgency network in Borno State, a hybrid security arrangement that strengthened rather than weakened the war against Boko Haram. The CJTF was organized into military-like “sectors” and select members received “Special Force” training from the army for about eight months under the Borno Youth Empowerment Scheme (BOYES), including training in firearms and intelligence collection. Those who completed this training became known as “Civilian Joint Task Force Special Forces.”⁸³

ACCOUNTING FOR THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CJTF

COMMUNITY SURVEILLANCE

The information derived from the CJTF’s intimate knowledge of daily interactions greatly bolstered the official war against Boko Haram. In interviews conducted in Maiduguri, locals claimed that any newcomers settling in their neighborhoods would be quickly detected by the CJTF. A hotelkeeper in Wulari noted, “If you are a stranger coming to visit someone who lives in any of the wards [neighborhoods], members of the CJTF will send one of their boys to accompany that newcomer to the house of the person he is visiting, or they will call that person to find out if indeed they are expecting you. If the person you claim to be visiting cannot identify you, members of the CJTF will immediately arrest you and take you to the Nigerian military. If the person says you are their guest, they will tell that person they are responsible for you during your stay. If anything happens, that person you’re visiting will be arrested.”⁸⁴

CHILDREN OF THE COMMUNITY: TRUST, ACCESS, AND LEGITIMACY

The perception of CJTF members as children of the respective communities afforded them a privileged and powerful position of trust and access that Nigeria security forces clearly lacked. As Ali Muhammed, a CJTF driver in Damaturu in Yobe State, explains: “You know we are indigenes. Like most people living here, we suffer and are oppressed by Boko Haram insurgents, with nowhere to go. People either have our phone numbers or those of our relations and they can always reach out to report anything unusual around them. The moment they notice any unusual movement of cars or motorcycles, they phone one of our members; if there is no network, they can use bicycles to connect with someone and give information to be acted on.”⁸⁵

INTERNAL DISCIPLINARY MEASURES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Leaders of the CJTF attributed the group’s effectiveness to the disciplinary and accountability measures within the group that binds leaders and members. “Actually, we in the CJTF don’t tolerate nonsense,” says Bakura Abba Ali, Chairman of CJTF (Sector 5). “If you are a CJTF, you must be law abiding. Whether you like it or not. If not, we ask you to leave. We dismiss you. Even me, Bakura Abba Ali, the Chairman. If I am in violation of anything that brings problem to the CJTF, I will be dismissed as well. But you know, in every society you must get the good ones and the bad ones. When we get a CJTF who stole something from a local, we lock him up in a cell for at least a month. Sometimes we take him to the police and say,

83 Field interview, CJTF headquarters in the NITEL area, Maiduguri, January 2019.

84 Author’s interview with hotelkeeper in Wulari, Maiduguri, December 2017.

85 Author’s interview in with a CJTF driver in Damaturu, Yobe, September, 2017.

‘This is our CJTF member. Let the law work on him.’⁸⁶ By keeping the discipline within the group, says Ali, the CJTF is well respected by the local community. To keep the discipline, leaders of the CJTF established some basic “rules of operations.” Members who joined the CJTF are required to take a sacred oath before the Qur’an (if they are Muslim) or the Bible (if they are Christian) that “they will identify the insurgents where ever found even if related to you.”⁸⁷ The oath represents an inward commitment to abide by three tenets: “One, you will not accuse or implicate an innocent person who is not associated with Boko Haram because of whatever differences between you and them. Two, you must produce a member of Boko Haram, no matter how close they are to you; even if they are your family or brothers. Three, you will not extort money from anybody or take anybody’s property.”⁸⁸

CJTF: NIGERIA’S NEXT SECURITY THREAT?

Despite the celebratory discourses surrounding the counterinsurgency work of the CJTF in northeast Nigeria, mounting evidence suggests that some members of the group are abusing their power and access in the communities in which they serve. Such abuse can take several forms, for example, extorting money from motorists at checkpoints during “stop and search” operations; sexually abusing women and girls in camps for internally displaced persons; recruiting children into its counterinsurgent work; harassing members of the community; and acting as political thugs for self-serving politicians.⁸⁹ In light of these practices, some critical questions have emerged:

- What will be the fate of the CJTF when/if Boko Haram is defeated?
- Could this CBAG of predominantly unwaged young men, desensitized to violence and accustomed to having a sense of power and purpose, pose a threat to the future of the region?

These questions have tempered the celebratory mood of the CJTF as “new national heroes” and prompted a more sober reassessment.

Crime-fighting CBAGs: The case of Tanzania’s Sungusungu

Several postcolonial states have encouraged CBAGs to take on community policing functions based on their local knowledge and/or perceived ability to be more effective than the state in instilling law and order.⁹⁰ This section looks at the case of a crime-fighting CBAG as exemplified by the Sungusungu village groups in Tanzania.

86 Author’s interview with Bakura Abba Ali, Maiduguri, September 2018.

87 Author’s interview with Bakura Abba Ali, Maiduguri, September 2018.

88 Kayode Idowu, “Our Ex-Fighters Now Serving in Army, DSS—Civilian JTF Boss,” *Punch*, July 24, 2016.

89 Eromo Egbejule, “They’re Defeating Boko Haram but are They Nigeria’s Next Security Threat?” *The New Humanitarian*, August 22, 2016; Alexis Okeowo, “The People vs. Boko Haram,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/28/magazine/the-people-vs-boko-haram.html>; International Crisis Group, *Double-Edged Sword*, 14.

90 Suzette Heald, “Mafias in Africa: The Rise of Drinking Companies and Vigilante Groups in Bugisu District, Uganda,” *Africa* 56, no. 4 (1986): 446–67; David Pratten and Atrejee Sen, *Global Vigilantes: Perspectives on Justice and Violence*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

The Sungusungu is a form of village vigilantism in rural Tanzania that emerged in the 1980s as an indignant response to the widespread problem of cattle raiding and robbery and the failure of the law enforcement and justice system to prevent these crimes.⁹¹ Fed up with their situation, rural villages started organizing their own self-help groups called Sungusungu. From the beginning, the Sungusungu faced stiff opposition from the official police and courts, who saw them as a serious threat to the state's administration of law enforcement and justice system; these officials argued that the Sungusungu was "attempting to turn the clock back to primitive punitive measures."⁹² Over time, however, the effectiveness and popularity of the Sungusungu groups, combined with the growing dissatisfaction with the corrupt practices of the police, weakened the resistance to their activities. Ultimately, the state was forced to endorse the Sungusungu as a "revolutionary force within the villages that ought to be encouraged rather than harassed by bureaucracy."⁹³

DISSATISFACTION WITH THE POLICE

The turn to the Sungusungu for law and order was an admission by the Tanzania government of the corruption and lack of trust in the police to deal with cattle theft. The local police routinely "demand a bribe before they will consent to investigate any complaint, and, having received it, they proceed to extort bribes from the alleged perpetrators and, having received those, will go on to demand more money from the complainant, and so on, until one or both sides are either broke or tire of the game."⁹⁴ This sentiment echoes the ways in which colonial police forces were frequently accused of supplementing their wages by extorting fowl, food, beer, and even women from the communities in which they worked (see Part 1). As with the British colonial state and its system of indirect rule, there was a perception among government officials that locals were best positioned to address security threats to their lives. In fact, "[t]he stated, and perhaps honestly intended, justification on the part of district government officials for the implementation of Sungusungu in the villages is that local people are the ones best equipped to identify the cattle thieves in their midst and bring them to justice—far better equipped, many argue, than the police, virtually all of them corrupt, all outsiders frequently contemptuous of local people and indifferent to their concerns."⁹⁵ The Sungusungu provided local communities with law enforcers who are members of the community and accountable to it.

Under government sponsorship and control, the Sungusungu were charged with the responsibility of policing cattle theft, with its hierarchy of village commanders accountable to government officials. As Fleisher explains, "[Sungusungu] village commanders were required to report to ward (kata) commanders, who reported to the divisional commanders, who in turn reported to their Division Officer, a district government official, who in turn reported direct to the District Commissioner, the district's highest-ranking government officials."⁹⁶ As locals, the Sungusungu groups were ordinarily trusted by members of the villages they serviced, who generally saw them as providing an effective alternative to the corrupt,

91 Ray Abrahams, "Sungusungu: Village Vigilante Groups in Tanzania," *African Affairs* 86, no. 343 (1987): 176–96.

92 Ibid, 189–90.

93 Ibid, 189–90.

94 Fleisher, "Sungusungu," 220.

95 Ibid, 218.

96 Ibid, 214.

costly, and inept services of the formal police and courts. However, unlike the police, members of the Sungusungu could be voted out of office if they fail to consistently carry out their responsibilities because they are not “invulnerable to community sentiment.”⁹⁷ Composed of men between ages 18 and 50, the Sungusungu routinely conduct house-to-house investigations, soliciting accusations against anyone suspected of cattle theft and seeking corroborating evidence from other accusers.⁹⁸ Those found guilty of cattle theft are often handed over to the state police to be incarcerated while they awaited official investigation of their cases. Also, to enhance village security, members of the Sungusungu routinely conduct night-time patrols.

SHORTCOMINGS OF THE SUNGUSUNGU

Although the rise of the Sungusungu and its alliance with the police forces led to a dramatic reduction in the incidence of cattle-thieving, the group’s members succumbed to the same corrupt practices that undermined the official law enforcement agencies. For example, some Sungusungu village commanders were accused of soliciting pay-offs from cattle thieves in return for looking the other way. Other commanders were implicated in demanding advance payments from villagers who came to them with various security needs. After collecting these advance payments, the commanders made no efforts to perform the tasks. Others have actively cashed in on their privileged access to, and knowledge of, communal practices (for example, sleeping habits and security regimes) to weaponize their comrades in the cattle raiding business. In addition, some would incarcerate suspects, “sometimes for days, and beat them with a hippopotamus-hide whip.”⁹⁹ All of these abuses notwithstanding, some villagers have argued that the Sungusungu is a “lesser evil” than the official police forces. These villagers are of the view that members of the Sungusungu often demand bribes that are considerably lower than those demanded by the police, and that, not infrequently, the Sungusungu delivers on its promise of security.

State-manipulated CBAGs: The case of Kenya’s Mungiki

The dynamics and drivers of CBAGs in contemporary Africa cannot be properly understood outside of “the instrumentality of electoral violence for the political elites.”¹⁰⁰ Postcolonial states, including Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda, are awash with examples of politicians competing for the services of youth-based vigilantes, militias, and gangs as political thugs to intimidate political opponents, win elections, and tighten their grip on power. This section draws on existing literature to explain how some CBAGs are manipulated by political actors to target ethnic or political rivals, deploying ethnic violence as a tool for winning elections. In particular, it focuses on the Mungiki movement, a largely Kikuyu¹⁰¹-based religio-political gang in contemporary Kenya. It locates this movement within Kenya’s post-independence electoral politics and political violence, with a particular focus on how the state has been a key factor in the trans-

97 Ibid, 218.

98 Ibid, 216.

99 Ibid, 226.

100 Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen, *Violence in African Elections: Between Democracy and Big Man Politics*.

101 The Kikuyu (also known as Gikuyu) is Kenya’s most populous ethnic group.

formation of the gang from a moral ethnic movement into a politically tribal one whose activities have “accentuated insecurity, violated human rights, and disrupted public order.”¹⁰²

ORGANIZATION AND POLITICS OF THE MUNGIKI

Formed in the late 1980s as a “principally cultural and spiritual movement promoting Kikuyu heritage and culture,”¹⁰³ the Mungiki movement demonstrates a continuity with the religio-political revivalism and anti-colonial resistance in Kenya that dates back to the Mau Mau anticolonial war for “land and freedom” in the 1950s. The term Mungiki may be translated as “we are the public,” which implies that the movement seeks to reclaim the rights of the displaced, disaffected, and marginalized in a rapidly globalizing world. Most of the members of Mungiki are between the ages of 18 and 40 years. They were recruited from poor and disenfranchised Kikuyu youth from urban slums and other informal settlements and those displaced by land transition schemes of the 1990s.¹⁰⁴

Communal violence intensified in the wake of Kenya’s 2002 general election that ended Daniel Arap Moi’s 24-year rule (and brought in Mwai Kibaki), resulting in the death of up to 4,000 people and the displacement of 600,000 others. Although Kenyan authorities blamed the violence on the spontaneous consequence of the return to political pluralism, human rights organizations and other sources all pointed to the fact that the Kenyan government provoked the ethnic violence for political purposes and has been reluctant to address the spiraling violence.¹⁰⁵ Government officials adopted a strategy of “informal repression” to “silence and disempower critics and to intimidate, displace and disenfranchise hostile voters in multi-ethnic electoral zones.”¹⁰⁶ The outcome was a rise in bloody clashes implicating ethnic vigilantes and militias.

The Mungiki formed and mobilized in opposition to Moi’s government, especially its system of patrimonial rule. The Mungiki blamed Kenya’s problems on the influence of European colonialism and the injustices of state actors. Mungiki leaders yearned for a generational change in politics and a return to the traditional cultural values of egalitarianism and social order in precolonial society.¹⁰⁷ Central to the Mungiki’s political and religious aims are poverty reduction, overcoming exclusion and marginalization, and tackling historical injustices. These themes reflect the marginalized position that many Mungiki members see themselves occupy within Kenyan society. In keeping with its struggle for the poor and the dispossessed, the Mungiki joined forces with other community-based groups in Nairobi, such as the Organization of the Villagers,¹⁰⁸ in protesting corrupt land-grabbers and oppressive landlords. In poor

102 Peter M Kagwanja, “Facing Mount Kenya or Facing Mecca? The Mungiki, Ethnic Violence, and the Politics of the Moi Succession in Kenya, 1987–2002,” *African Affairs* 102, no. 406 (2003): 28.

103 Human Rights Watch, *Organized Violence in the Rift Valley* (Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch, 2008), <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/kenya0308/8.htm>.

104 Jacob Rasmussen, “Outwitting the Professor of Politics? Mungiki Narratives of Political Deception and Their Role in Kenyan Politics,” *Journal of East African Studies* 4, no. 3 (2010): 437.

105 Human Rights Watch, *Organized Violence in the Rift Valley*.

106 Kagwanja, “Facing Mount Kenya or Facing Mecca,” 36.

107 David M. Anderson, “Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics of Public Order in Kenya,” *African Affairs* 101, no. 405 (2002): 534; Kagwanja, “Facing Mount Kenya or Facing Mecca,” 32; Rasmussen, “Outwitting the Professor of Politics?” 438.

108 A community-based group established among slum dwellers in Nairobi to fight evictions and protect tenants.

parts of Nairobi where state services were nonexistent, members of the Mungiki became involved in social welfare activities, such as “setting up illegal electricity connections, providing access to water, and supplying micro-loans to its members [and] local vigilante groups to provide security in areas with high crime rates.”¹⁰⁹ The Mungiki also launched a successful crusade against drunkenness, drug addiction, broken families, and prostitution.¹¹⁰

However, the Mungiki’s unconventional approach to the struggle for social justice often exacerbated rather than addressed insecurity, including its reputation for extortion and political violence.¹¹¹ Like the Mau Mau rebel movement, the Mungiki relies on strict discipline and tolerates no dissent¹¹² in the promotion of its violent brand of Kikuyu chauvinism. An ex-member of the gang told prosecutors at the International Criminal Court (ICC) that “if a member disobeys, they would cut that member’s head off and put the head in public view at the place where they had a problem with the member.”¹¹³

MUNGIKI-STATE RELATIONS

At the outset, Kenyan government under Moi viewed the Mungiki as a secretive, anti-government, and anti-Christian group of criminals. Not surprisingly, the Mungiki’s relationship with the authorities, especially after 2002, was characterized by harassment, including “persecution, intimidation, jailing of its members, and gross human rights abuse.”¹¹⁴ Under Moi’s successor, Kibaki, the Kenyan police stood accused of “thousands of abductions and extrajudicial killings of Mungiki members.”¹¹⁵ The Mungiki countered with attacks of their own on government targets, especially state security forces who arrested their members and executed their leaders. “By resorting to confrontational methods,” argues Kagwanja, “Mungiki unwittingly provoked further confrontations with the police, drew negative coverage from the press and opened itself to further repression from the state.”¹¹⁶

From 2000 onward, the Kenyan police cracked down on the Mungiki and infiltrated its ranks with the intention of monitoring and controlling its activities from within.¹¹⁷ Over time, the state co-opted the Mungiki, which became a political tool of violence, intimidation, and abuse of human rights in the slums and transit spaces of Nairobi, including organized crime, “extortion rackets, and gruesome punishments.”¹¹⁸ In 2003, Kenyan authorities banned the Mungiki after a 2002 clash with a rival gang that left 20 people dead. Yet the Mungiki remains strong due to its clandestine nature; its leaders maintain strong ties to leading politicians and pursue their own independent political agenda.¹¹⁹

109 Rasmussen, “Outwitting the Professor of Politics?” 437.

110 Kagwanja, “Facing Mount Kenya or Facing Mecca.”

111 Rasmussen, “Outwitting the Professor of Politics?”

112 Christopher Goffard, “Court Sheds Light on Scary Kenya Gang,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 2011, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2011-nov-27-la-fg-kenya-mungiki-20111127-story.html>.

113 Goffard, “Court Sheds Light on Scary Kenya Gang.”

114 Kagwanja, “Facing Mount Kenya or Facing Mecca.”

115 Rasmussen, “Outwitting the Professor of Politics?” 438.

116 Kagwanja, “Facing Mount Kenya or Facing Mecca.”

117 Ibid.

118 Goffard, “Court Sheds Light on Scary Kenya Gang.”

119 Human Rights Watch, *Organized Violence in the Rift Valley*.

In the aftermath of the disputed 2007 presidential election in Kenya, the Mungiki played a key role in the government-sponsored ethnic violence that killed more than 1,000 people. Its long-standing dispute with the Kenyan police notwithstanding, prosecutors at the ICC claim that the police allowed Mungiki members to conduct house-to-house searches, targeting mostly Luo¹²⁰ supporters of the opposition's presidential candidate Raila Odinga, a Kikuyu, who claims that the election was rigged against him. Kenyan authorities rounded up and killed 500 young men believed to be linked to the Mungiki, but these killings only provoked more reprisal attacks from the brutal criminal gang.¹²¹

The media and public discourse accept the state's perception of the Mungiki as violent and dangerous; personal narratives by members of the Mungiki present the movement as a victim of state harassment and highlight their position on the margins of Kenyan society.¹²²

CONCLUSIONS

A state-centric approach to security governance in East and West Africa is less useful to explain the complex relations between CBAGs and the formal state, particularly the roles and responsibilities that each assumes in security provision and service delivery. Ideal-type models of well-functioning states are unlikely to accurately reflect governance in African societies where formal institutions are often absent or ineffective and have been replaced by local security groups and hybrid security arrangements. Moreover, a state-centric approach is likely to undermine the potential of local actors for security and service delivery.

The emergence of CBAGs does not necessarily spell doom for the power and authority of the state; it can help to expand and complement the state or rebuild trust in formal state institutions. A hybrid security approach has the advantage of helping to build up the sense of local ownership and agency for managing various security threats to their daily lives. A hybrid security approach that recognizes and supports the roles and responsibilities of CBAGs as coproviders of security and justice can strengthen the capacity of weak states to govern and to maintain a strong base in social forces. Although local security providers may be thought of as alternatives to weak or failing states, CBAGs as a phenomenon generally aim for "more state, not less state."¹²³ More often than not, their goal is to prop up a weak state by taking on some of its functions.

Acknowledging the effective role and responsibilities of CBAGs with respect to the delivery of security and other public goods, however, involves recognizing their limitations and debunking any tendency to romanticize them as the panacea to Africa's insecurity. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that CBAGs

120 The Luo is an ethnic group in Western Kenya, northern Uganda, and the Mara region in northern Tanzania.

121 William DeLong, "Kenya's Machete-Wielding Mungiki Gang Is One of the Scariest in the World," *ATI*, April 30, 2018, <https://allthatsinteresting.com/mungiki>.

122 Rasmussen, "Outwitting the Professor of Politics?" 445.

123 *Ibid.*

are capable of morphing from the protector of local communities to the primary threat to those communities, replicating the same weaknesses that plague formal state institutions, such as the abuse of power. This was certainly the case with the Mungiki of Kenya. Sometimes, CBAGs may cash in on their powerful presence in local communities and abuse the civilians they are supposed to protect. This dynamic, in turn, undermines the order and security they initially sought to uphold. States may also use CBAGs to perpetuate certain types of violence against civilians.¹²⁴ The challenge for researchers and practitioners is to recognize and build on the positive potential of CBAGs, while mitigating their negative potential.

Early and ongoing oversight and accountability mechanisms by local authorities, such as the traditional and state authorities, can reduce the chances that CBAGs will morph into predators.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the rise of CBAGs establishes the need for state forces (including the police) that are part of the community and accountable to it; state security forces need to understand the local culture and language of the communities they serve. This reform will help to develop the trust, reciprocity, and local legitimacy of the police and courts system, which, although lacking in many contexts, remains a sine qua non for effective and responsible security provision. Any effort to address the issue of CBAGs must include reconfiguring the everyday culture and practice of bribery, corruption, and abusive policing in Africa.

124 Corinna Jentsch, Stathis N. Kalyvas, and Livia Isabella Schubiger, "Militias in Civil Wars," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 5 (2015): 755–69.

125 International Crisis Group, *Double-Edged Sword*, 7.

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APPROACHING COMMUNITY-BASED ARMED GROUPS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Lessons Learned & Measures
of Success

Dr. Moritz Schuberth

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Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa is part of the RESOLVE Network's Community-Based Armed Groups research series, an initiative investigating the dynamics of community-based armed groups and the contexts in which they operate to identify potential approaches to engage, manage, and transform them.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of this study

A surge in the prevalence of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) in sub-Saharan Africa has led to concerns that they pose a growing challenge to governments and citizens across the region. This paper maps how different intervening actors—communities, governments, civil society organizations, humanitarian and development agencies, and security providers—have approached the challenges posed by CBAGs and how to best measure the success of these interventions. The mapping of approaches, analysis of lessons learned, and identification of success factors will contribute to a deeper empirical understanding of the strengths and shortcomings of current responses to CBAGs, which will inform the development of more effective and appropriate practices and policies.

EMT approaches to CBAGs

CBAGs typically fulfill security, political, and economic functions simultaneously. However, three main ideal types of CBAGs can be discerned. Depending on the main function that they fulfill at a given point, they can be classified as (1) vigilantes providing security for their communities, (2) militias working at the behest of political sponsors, or (3) criminal gangs pursuing the economic self-interest of their members. Approaches to CBAGs can be categorized as following three different logics: engagement, management, and transformation (EMT).

- **Engagement** follows a short-term logic; actors pursuing this approach do so for instrumental reasons, that is, because they want to ensure the safety of their own staff members while implementing their projects or because they want to promote mediation and reduce violence within communities.
- **Management** approaches follow a mid-term logic as actors envision a substantive change in the targeted groups. Coercive management approaches include the use of force to defeat CBAGs or incarcerate their members. Cooperative management approaches strive to alter the behavior and roles of CBAGs through co-optation, negotiation, or mediation.
- **Transformation** follows a long-term logic and refers to a set of approaches to replace the functions that CBAGs provide to their members, sponsors, and the communities they are nested in with a modern and accountable state bound by the rule of law. Transformation addresses the root causes and structural conditions that led to the emergence of the CBAG ecosystem. This goal is difficult to achieve because it requires lengthy commitments and buy-in from multiple actors.

KEY FINDINGS

Metrics to measure the success of EMT approaches

Given the multiple confounding factors and overlapping interventions, it is difficult to measure results of EMT approaches, attribute them to specific interventions, and evaluate their impacts. This report proposes a set of specific indicators that intervening actors and interested third parties could use to measure the progress of EMT interventions in meeting their objectives. For instance, a program seems to be on the right track to achieve improved community security if data show an increase in the percentage of the population perceiving increased security and decreased violent incidents in their communities.

CBAGs and the legitimacy of the state

Current literature proposes that state fragility is a key cause for the emergence of CBAGs. However, the concept of state fragility does not offer a universal explanation for the proliferation of such groups, notably in the case of relatively strong states characterized by a high degree of inequality, including South Africa. In such settings, those living in the most affluent parts of the main cities often enjoy or leverage functioning protection by police and private security firms; however, those living in neglected areas are denied access to formal security systems and so turn to CBAGs, which act as informal security providers. Accordingly, it is important for intervening actors not to focus exclusively on state-building efforts, because these might not address the root causes that lead to the emergence of CBAGs.

From CBAGs to community security providers?

Although vigilantes have regularly turned into political militias or predatory criminals, there are also examples of CBAGs with a strong security function that have averted such a devolution. This report identifies potential success factors—including the presence of oversight procedures, a binding legal framework, and accountability mechanisms—that intervening actors may consider when designing strategies to alter the internal and external characteristics of CBAGs to reinforce their constructive potential and limit their destructive potential. These success factors can help to turn multidimensional CBAGs into more accountable, capable, and rule-abiding providers of community security.

Challenge of coordinating EMT interventions

The coordination of EMT interventions can be challenging due to a lack of policy coherence and because various intervening actors pursue conflicting strategies toward CBAGs. Moreover, different intervening actors, such as armed forces and humanitarian agencies, show diverging attitudes to coordinating EMT approaches. Coherence and coordination between the multitude of actors involved in the EMT of CBAGs is important for the overall outcome of interventions and for the security of intervening actors and beneficiary communities. Moreover, improved interagency coordination can help pool existing resources and use them in a more efficient and sustainable way by streamlining efforts and diversifying funding sources.

INTRODUCTION

A surge in the emergence and operations of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) in sub-Saharan Africa has led to concerns that they pose a growing challenge to governments and citizens across the region.¹ Communities, governments, civil society organizations, humanitarian and development agencies, and security providers in these and other settings have developed a wide variety of approaches to deal with them. CBAGs are defined as armed groups that are embedded within communities and whose delineation can be defined by territory, blood ties, or shared identities; this definition includes vigilantes, militias, and criminal gangs.

How have local, national, and international actors approached the challenge posed by CBAGs and how successful have these approaches been? This study seeks to provide an overview of policy-relevant findings from the vast literature on approaches to CBAGs and to offer metrics to assess the success of completed or ongoing initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa. The mapping of approaches, analysis of lessons learned, and identification of success factors will contribute to a deeper empirical understanding of responses to the proliferation of CBAGs, which will inform the development of more effective and appropriate practices and policies. The core research questions pursued by this mapping paper are as follows:

- What approaches have states, civil society, and international actors pursued to engage, manage, and transform CBAGs in sub-Saharan Africa?
- What lessons learned and success factors can be identified from the literature on approaches to engage, manage, and transform CBAGs in sub-Saharan Africa?
- What metrics can help measure the success of approaches to engage, manage, and transform CBAGs in sub-Saharan Africa?

The primary data collection instrument used was an in-depth desk review of the academic and gray literature on approaches to CBAGs. In addition to academic articles, we consulted documents produced by governments, civil society organizations, think tanks, and international agencies, including terms of reference, guidelines, lessons learned or best practices, evaluations and audits of projects, factsheets, and internal reports. We used keyword searches to identify initial source material and subsequently employed snowball sampling by looking up citations from the initial sources. The academic and gray literature on the topics and approaches covered by this mapping paper was too extensive to be elaborated in its entirety. However, an in-depth review of the most relevant publications by the foremost experts and institutions in this field pointed to the most pertinent literature.

1 Clionadh Raleigh, "Pragmatic and Promiscuous: Explaining the Rise of Competitive Political Militias across Africa," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60, no. 2 (2016): 283–310.

Functions and ideal types of CBAGs

In contrast to many non-state armed groups (NSAGs), CBAGs are by definition embedded within their communities, whose delineation can be defined by territory, blood ties, or shared identities. The concept of CBAGs excludes formal security providers, such as private security and military companies. Politically motivated NSAGs like insurgents and terrorists are also excluded from the concept of CBAGs because NSAGs are ideologically or religiously driven and aspire to take over the state to establish another political system. CBAGs do not primarily pursue a political mission; if they are pulled into the political sphere, they act on behalf of political entrepreneurs whose political aims are parochial in nature.²

Although CBAGs typically fill multiple functions simultaneously, three ideal types can be discerned, depending on their predominant function. As table 1 shows, depending on the main function that CBAGs fulfill at a given point, they can be classified as vigilantes providing security for their community, as militias working on behalf of political sponsors, or as criminal gangs pursuing the economic self-interest of their members.³ Each ideal type can be subdivided into two subtypes. It is important to note that the distinctions among different ideal types and subtypes of CBAGs can be blurred, and the functions are constantly shifting, depending on external factors and internal motivations.

Table 1 Functions and Ideal Types of CBAGs

FUNCTION	SECURITY		POLITICS		ECONOMIC/CRIME	
IDEAL TYPES	VIGILANTES		MILITIAS		GANGS	
SUBTYPES	CRIME-CONTROL GROUPS	SELF-DEFENSE GROUPS	ETHNIC MILITIAS	POPULAR MILITIAS	YOUTH GANGS	CRIMINAL GANGS
EXAMPLES	BAKASSI BOYS (NIGERIA)	MAI MAI (DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO)	WHITE ARMY (SOUTH SUDAN)	ZANU PF YOUTH (ZIMBABWE)	MICROBES (IVORY COAST)	GANGS IN CAPE FLATS (SOUTH AFRICA)

Source: Author.

2 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.

3 Ibid.

- **Vigilantes** can be further subdivided into crime control groups directed internally at members of their own communities,⁴ such as the Bakassi Boys in Nigeria,⁵ and self-defense groups protecting communities against external threats,⁶ such as the Mai Mai and Raia Mutomboki in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.⁷
- **Militias** can base their claims to legitimacy on notions of ethnicity and kin- or clan-based identity, such as the Nuer White Army in South Sudan,⁸ or on an ideology that evokes the image of a common enemy of the masses, such as the popular militias made up of the youth wing of ZANU PF, Zimbabwe’s ruling party since independence.⁹
- **Gangs** have two subtypes. First, youth gangs such as the so-called “microbes” in the Ivorian capital of Abidjan are conventionally associated with petty crime and a subculture of juvenile delinquency rather than with organized criminality.¹⁰ Second, the more organized and institutionalized criminal gangs, such as the “Americans” or the “Hard Livings” in South Africa’s Cape Town, include members of various age cohorts and are committed to profit-generating criminal activities, including drug trafficking.¹¹

QUESTIONING COMMON ASSUMPTIONS

Challenging the centrality of state fragility

The emergence of CBAGs is a common theme that runs through the literature on state failure, state weakness, state collapse, and state fragility. Studies in this tradition commonly frame the proliferation of CBAGs within the context of war-torn, conflict-prone, or post-conflict societies, where basic state responsibilities, such as the provision of security, “fall into the hands of those who will fight for it—warlords and gang leaders.”¹² From this point of view, the failure or collapse of the Westphalian state system since the

4 Les Johnston, “What is Vigilantism?” *British Journal of Criminology* 36, no. 2 (1996): 232.

5 Kate Meagher, “Hijacking Civil Society: The Inside Story of the Bakassi Boys Vigilante Group of South-eastern Nigeria,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 45, no. 1 (2007): 89–115.

6 Raphael Garvin Abrahams. *Vigilant Citizens: Vigilantism and the State* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 1998); Bruce Baker, “Nonstate Providers of Everyday Security in Fragile African States,” in *Fragile States and Insecure People?*, ed. Louise Andersen, Bjørn Møller, and Finn Stepputat (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) , 123–47.

7 Kasper Hoffmann and Koen Vlassenroot, “Armed Groups and the Exercise of Public Authority: The Cases of the Mayi-Mayi and Raya Mutomboki in Kalehe, South Kivu,” *Peacebuilding* 2, no. 2 (2014): 202–20..

8 John Young, *Popular Struggles and Elite Co-optation: The Nuer White Army in South Sudan’s Civil War* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2016).

9 Norma Kriger, “ZANU PF politics under Zimbabwe’s ‘Power-Sharing’ Government,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 30, no. 1 (2012): 11–26.

10 Séverin Kouamé Yao, “Nouchis, Ziguéhis et Microbes d’Abidjan: Déclassement et Distinction Sociale par la Violence de Rue en Côte d’Ivoire,” *Politique Africaine* 148, no. 4 (2017): 89–107..

11 Theodore Petrus and Irvin Kinnes, “New Social Bandits? A Comparative Analysis of Gangsterism in the Western and Eastern Cape Provinces of South Africa,” *Criminology & Criminal Justice* 19, no. 2 (2018): 179–96.

12 I. William Zartman, “Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse,” in *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. by I. William Zartman (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 1–11.

end of the Cold War has resulted in the state's loss of the monopoly on the legitimate means of violence.¹³ However, an emerging pool of scholars contest the very concept of state failure as conceptually flawed, historically ill-informed, and culturally biased; they argue that it presents contemporary liberal Western democracies as the universal role model, even for countries where such an archetype never existed and is unlikely to take root.¹⁴

CBAGS are also present in a number of relatively strong, viable, and modern states.¹⁵ South Africa, for instance, ranks in the upper-middle range in the Fragile States Index¹⁶ and in the State Fragility Index¹⁷, but it is frequently listed among the ten most unequal in the world.¹⁸ In the context of such strong but unequal states, not all citizens are equally affected by the state's inability or unwillingness to provide security. Those living in the most affluent parts of the main cities often enjoy or leverage functioning protection by police and private security firms, while those living in neglected areas are denied access to formal security systems and turn to CBAGs as informal security providers.¹⁹ In both fragile and strong states, the marginalized populations living in areas of limited statehood turn to alternative systems of justice and security.²⁰

From state security to hybrid security governance

The focus on state fragility is also reflected in traditional notions of national security or state security that see military security as contingent on the capability of governments to fend off internal and external threats to the nation-state. However, a growing number of non-traditional issues has also been securitized as existential threats, such as migration flows or climate change.²¹ The broadening of the security framework to encompass referent objects other than national or state security has ushered in a shift in the dominant security paradigm.²² This shift has been captured most prominently in the concept of human secu-

13 Edward Newman, "Failed States and International Order: Constructing a Post-Westphalian World," *Contemporary Security Policy* 30, no. 3 (2009): 421–43; Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. Hans Heinrich Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 77–128.

14 Charles T. Call, "The Fallacy of the 'Failed State'," *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 8 (2008): 1491–1507; Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

15 Moritz Schuberth, "Challenging the Weak States Hypothesis: Vigilantism in South Africa and Brazil," *Journal of Peace, Conflict & Development* 20 (2013): 38–51.

16 South Africa was ranked 86th out of 178 countries. See The Fund for Peace, *Fragile States Index 2018*. <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/>.

17 South Africa achieved 8 out of 25 fragility points. See Monty G. Marshall and Gabrielle C. Elzinga-Marshall, *Global Report 2017: Conflict, Governance and State Fragility* (Vienna, VA: Center for Systemic Peace, 2017), 48.

18 See The World Bank, GINI Index. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?page>. The GINI Index looks at the distribution of a country's income or wealth, where 0 represents complete equality and 100 total inequality. South Africa has a high Gini coefficient of 63.

19 David Pratten and Atrejee Sen, *Global Vigilantes: Perspectives on Justice and Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

20 Thomas Risse, "Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood: Introduction and Overview," in *Governance without a State? Policies and Politics in Areas of Limited Statehood*, ed. Thomas Risse (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), –35.

21 Nana Poku and David T. Graham, eds. *Redefining Security: Population Movements and National Security* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998); Oli Brown, Anne Hammill, and Robert McLeman, "Climate Change as the 'New' Security Threat: Implications for Africa," *International Affairs* 83, no. 6 (2007): 1141–54.

22 Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998).

erty, which includes both “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want.”²³ However, the all-encompassing definition of human security, including positive and negative rights and freedoms, has been criticized as too vague, which makes it difficult for policy makers to prioritize certain threats over others.²⁴

In the context of CBAGs, the concept of community security might be more useful because it bridges the gap between initiatives focusing on the state-level and those focusing on the individual as a starting point.²⁵ Community security can be conceptualized both as an end state and as the process leading to this end state. When seen as an end state, community security “is the situation in which communities feel secure from threats exerted by violent conflict [...], crime, and a lack of protection [...] by the state.”²⁶ When understood as a process, community security “means that communities participate in identifying and prioritizing their security needs, as well as in the development and implementation of appropriate responses for their security needs.” In other words, community members are both the beneficiaries and agents of human security. From this perspective, improved community security as an end state can be seen as the overall goal of EMT approaches to CBAG; EMT approaches can be considered as community security in its conception as a process.²⁷

From security providers to sources of insecurity

Following justified critiques of failed states and national security paradigms, the focus of attention has shifted to community security arrangements that provide security “from below” or “from the perspective of end users.”²⁸ Although acknowledging that such hybrid security arrangements include militias and organized crime groups, advocates stress the relatively effective provision of security by CBAGs, compared to state security actors and the higher local legitimacy these groups enjoy.²⁹ From this perspective, CBAGs might offer the best available option for effective justice and security provision in the short term.³⁰ At the same time, CBAGs might be seen as more legitimate due to their strong links to local cultural practices and their greater alignment with the social attitudes and norms of their communities.³¹ In the absence of strong oversight and accountability mechanisms, however, CBAGs might transform from security providers into sources of insecurity.

23 UNDP, *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 1994), 22.

24 Edward Newman, “Human Security and Constructivism,” *International Studies Perspectives* 2, no. 3 (2001): 243.

25 Andrew McLean, *Community Security and Social Cohesion: Towards a UNDP Approach* (Geneva: United Nations Development Programme, 2009).

26 Willemijn Verkoren, Rens Willems, Jesper Kleingeld, and Hans Rouw, “From DDR to Security Promotion: Connecting National Programs to Community Initiatives,” *International Journal of Peace Studies* 15, no. 2 (2010): 4.

27 Will Bennett, *Community Security Handbook* (London: Saferworld, 2014).

28 Alexandra Abello Colak and Jenny Pearce, “‘Security from Below’ in Contexts of Chronic Violence,” *IDS Bulletin* 40, no. 2 (2009): 11–19; Robin Luckham and Tom Kirk, “The Two Faces of Security in Hybrid Political Orders: A Framework for Analysis and Research,” *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 2, no. 2 (2013).

29 Volker Boege, M. Anne Brown, and Kevin P. Clements, “Hybrid Political Orders, not Fragile States,” *Peace Review* 21, no. 1 (2009): 13–21.

30 Bruce Baker and Eric Scheye, “Multi-Layered Justice and Security Delivery in Post-Conflict and Fragile States: Analysis,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 7, no. 4 (2007): 503–28.

31 Lisa Denney, “Overcoming the State/Non-State Divide: An End User Approach to Security and Justice Reform,” *International Peacekeeping* 21, no. 2 (2014): 254.

The literature on vigilantism portrays a general shift in motivation that turns conscientious vigilantes providing security for their communities into self-interested criminal gangs or state-sponsored militias.³² In the context of sub-Saharan Africa, studies have warned that “most of the time, they turn criminals, besides the mandate given to them by the community to keep vigil in the neighborhood”³³ and that in Kenya, among other places, [v]igilantes can turn into gangs, and gangs can turn into armed militia.”³⁴ However, this paper identifies cases of CBAGs, including Arrow Boys in Uganda, that did not turn into predatory gangs or militias due to external factors, such as strong state oversight or a conducive legal framework. The transformation of vigilantes into sources of community insecurity is, therefore, not the inevitable trajectory of CBAGs.

Standard tools as the universal panacea

Over recent decades, numerous national and international actors have developed a set of standard tools to engage, manage, and transform CBAGs.³⁵ The use of such “one-size-fits-all” tools has practical advantages, but it can also be ill-suited when applied to new settings and across circumstances.³⁶ Important differences exist, for instance, between urban and rural-based armed groups, or between CBAGs that emerged in response to petty criminals compared to those that formed to combat violent extremist groups.³⁷ Yet, national and international actors have been slow to adapt to the new operational environment of cities where CBAGs are present, such as Nairobi, Kenya, or Beni, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.³⁸

In Haiti’s capital city of Port-au-Prince, a United Nations Stabilization Mission (MINUSTAH) attempted to deal with urban CBAGs in the same way as rural rebels in Central Africa. Due to poor understanding of the context and nature of CBAGs in Haiti, MINUSTAH was initially tasked with implementing a traditional disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program despite the fact that the conflict environment was not conducive to such an endeavor. When the failure of this initial strategy became clear, MINUSTAH changed its approach to a more adapted Community Violence Reduction (CVR) program. The CVR program focused on disincentivizing at-risk sections of the population from joining Haiti’s CBAGs, which have more in common with street gangs than with rural rebel forces—the conventional targets

32 H. Jon Rosenbaum and Peter C. Sederberg, “Vigilantism: An Analysis of Establishment Violence,” *Comparative Politics* 6, no. 4 (1974): 541–570; Abrahams, *Vigilant Citizens*, 22.

33 Gani Josés Yoroms, “Militias as a Social Phenomenon: Towards a Theoretical Construction,” in *Civil Militia: Africa’s Intractable Security Menace?*, ed. David J. Francis (New York: Routledge, 2005), 40.

34 Mikewa Ogada and Njonjo Mue, *Security Sector Reform and Transitional Justice in Kenya* (Nairobi: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2010): 3.

35 Robert Muggah and Chris O’Donnell, “Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration,” *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 4, no. 1 (2015).

36 Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore, “The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations,” *International Organization* 53, no. 4 (1999): 699–732.

37 Stina Torjesen, “New Avenues for Research in the Study of DDR,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 9, no. 4 (2009): 411.

38 Marion Harroff-Tavel, “Violence and Humanitarian Action in Urban Areas: New Challenges, New Approaches,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 92, no. 878 (2010): 329–50.

of DDR.³⁹ Even though the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations viewed CVRs as a role model for DDR efforts in UN stabilization missions in Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, and South Sudan, others questioned how an approach tailored to urban gangs could be applied to rural armed groups.⁴⁰

MAPPING EMT APPROACHES TO CBAGS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Logic behind approaches to CBAGs

Over the past decade, policy circles have increasingly debated how international agencies working in post-conflict countries should deal with NSAGs,⁴¹ especially in fragile and conflict-affected states.⁴² For instance, Stedman counted three strategies employed by intervening actors vis-à-vis “spoilers”—groups who use violence to undermine peace for their own interest. The three strategies are inducement, coercion, and socialization. Inducement involves “giving the spoiler what it wants,” and coercive strategies rely on the “use or threat of punishment to deter or alter unacceptable spoiler behavior.”⁴³ Socialization combines carrots and sticks by constructing norms and values that define what behavior is acceptable and what demands are legitimate, thereby altering the ecosystem in which spoilers operate.⁴⁴

Although the concept of spoilers had initially been limited to contexts in which a peace agreement between two warring factions had been signed, it has since been applied more liberally to a range of NSAGs⁴⁵ and even to organized crime groups.⁴⁶ As an example, Hofmann and Schneckener categorized strategies toward NSAGs as bargaining, force/leverage, and persuasion, which can be seen as representing Stedman’s inducement, coercion, and socialization, as depicted in table 2.⁴⁷ In contrast to Stedman’s

39 Moritz Schuberth, “A Transformation from Political to Criminal Violence? Politics, Organised Crime and the Shifting Functions of Haiti’s Urban Armed Groups,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 15, no. 2 (2015): 169–96.

40 Moritz Schuberth, “Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Unconventional Settings: The Case of MINUSTAH’s Community Violence Reduction,” *International Peacekeeping* 24, no. 3 (2017): 427; Hugo De Vries, *The Ebb and Flow of Stabilization in the Congo* (London/Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2016): 3.

41 Claudia Hofmann and Ulrich Schneckener, *NGOs and Nonstate Armed Actors: Improving Compliance with International Norms* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2011).

42 Sukanya Podder, *From Spoilers to Statebuilders: Constructive Approaches to Engagement with Non-state Armed Groups in Fragile States* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2012).

43 Stephen John Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes,” *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 13.

44 Ibid.

45 Matthew Hoddie and Caroline A. Hartzell, *Strengthening Peace in Post-Civil War States: Transforming Spoilers into Stakeholders* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

46 Mark Shaw and Walter Kemp, *Spotting the Spoilers: A Guide to Analyzing Organized Crime* (New York: International Peace Institute, 2012).

47 Ulrich Schneckener, *Spoilers or Governance Actors? Engaging Armed Non-State Groups in Areas of Limited Statehood*, SFB- Governance Working Paper Series, No. 21 (Berlin: DFG Research Center (SFB) 700, 2009).

typology, however, Hofmann and Schneckener propose that force/leverage “involve a mixture of sticks and carrots,” thereby classifying bribery and talks with moderate elements within NSAGs as coercive.⁴⁸

Table 2 Timeframes, Objectives, and Examples of EMT Approaches

APPROACH	ENGAGEMENT	MANAGEMENT	TRANSFORMATION
TIMEFRAME	SHORT-TERM	MID-TERM	LONG-TERM
OBJECTIVES	SAFE ACCESS; IMPROVED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND CBAGS	CHANGE IN ROLE, REACH, AND BEHAVIOR OF CBAGS	CHANGE ROOT CAUSES AND STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS OF THE CBAG ECOSYSTEM
EXAMPLES	BARAZA COMMUNAUTAIRES AND ACCESS NEGOTIATIONS BY ICRC AND MSF IN EASTERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO	TALKS WITH GRANDS TRAFIQUANTS IN MALI; CO-OPTATION OF CJTF BY NIGERIAN STATE	DDR, SSR, AND CVR IN UN STABILIZATION MISSIONS IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, AND MALI
LITERATURE ON SPOILERS (STEDMAN, 1997)	INDUCEMENT	COERCION	SOCIALIZATION
LITERATURE ON NSAGS (SCHNECKENER, 2009)	BARGAINING	FORCE/LEVERAGE	PERSUASION

Source: Author.

It may seem logical to include both cooperative and coercive aspects under the banner of force/leverage, but we propose to use the overall term management for these two approaches to alter the behavior of CBAGs. We use engagement instead of bargaining or inducement for approaches that do not attempt to change the behavior of CBAGs, and transformation instead of socialization or persuasion for approaches that try to alter the structural conditions of the CBAG ecosystem. The terminology of engagement, management, and transformation (EMT) acknowledges the spectrum of available responses to CBAGs beyond

48 Claudia Hofmann and Ulrich Schneckener, “Engaging Non-State Armed Actors in State- and Peace-Building: Options and Strategies,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 93, no. 883 (2011): 610.

standard tools such as DDR and SSR, as well as the different timeframes during which intervening actors can reasonably be expected to focus their EMT efforts on specific CBAGs. These timeframes range from short-term engagement to long-term transformation.

Engagement

Engagement follows a short-term logic; actors pursue this approach for instrumental reasons, because they want to ensure the safety of their own staff members while implementing their projects or to promote dialogue between CBAGs and their respective communities. Engagement refers, for instance, to traditional community conflict resolution systems, such as barazas communautaires in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.⁴⁹ Another example of engagement is provided by humanitarian and development actors, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or Médecins sans Frontières (MSF); these groups implement projects in CBAG-controlled areas of Democratic Republic of Congo and need to engage members of such groups to gain safe access for their staff members.⁵⁰ Although this approach does not seek to alter the behavior or structural environment of CBAGs, it can inadvertently strengthen their autonomy vis-à-vis the state or the communities in which they are based if intervening actors provide financial or in-kind compensation in exchange for safe access.

Management

Management approaches follow a mid-term logic, envisaging a substantive change of the targeted groups; they aim to directly impact the role, reach, and behavior of CBAGs, by either coercive or cooperative means.

Coercive management approaches involve security forces and include the use of force to defeat CBAGs or incarcerate their members, such as militarized police raids against gangs in South Africa.⁵¹ If coercive approaches indiscriminately target the communities in which CBAGs are based, they can unintentionally weaken the legitimacy of the state and strengthen the links between CBAGs and their communities, as happened with organized gangs in Cape Town.⁵²

Cooperative management approaches strive to alter the behavior and roles of CBAGs by way of co-optation, negotiation, or mediation. In Mali, for instance, local leaders involved in illicit economies (grands trafiquants) were invited to take part in the negotiations between the government and Tuareg rebel

49 Phil Clark, "Ethnicity, Leadership and Conflict Mediation in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: The Case of the Barza Inter-Communautaire," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2, no. 1 (2008): 8.

50 Johan Pottier, "Roadblock Ethnography: Negotiating Humanitarian Access in Ituri, Eastern DR Congo, 1999-2004," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 76, no. 2 (2006): 151-79.

51 Guy Lamb, "Police Militarisation and the 'War on Crime' in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44, no. 5 (2018): 933-49.

52 Petrus and Kinnes, "New Social Bandits?", 189.

groups.⁵³ In the Central African Republic, local mediation between ex-Séléka rebels and anti-Balaka self-defense groups was more successful than international and regional mediation efforts.⁵⁴ Negotiation and mediation can improve the positive behavior of CBAGs, but they can also strengthen their legitimacy. Co-optation, by contrast, can strengthen the legitimacy of both the state and CBAGs; it can also lead to the uprooting of CBAGs and to more abusive behavior vis-à-vis their communities, as happened with the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) as a result of co-optation by the Nigerian state.⁵⁵

Transformation

Transformation refers to a set of approaches that aim to replace the functions that CBAGs fulfill for their members, their sponsors, and the communities they are nested in with a modern and accountable state bound by the rule of law. According to the logic of transformation, this can be achieved by breaking the patronage between CBAGs and their politico-criminal sponsors through demobilization, disengagement, and reintegration (DDR), by strengthening state security forces through security sector reform (SSR), and by using community violence reduction (CVR) to cut the ties between CBAGs and their communities. As an example, the UN stabilization missions in the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mali all employed a combination of DDR, SSR, and CVR, with varying degrees of success.⁵⁶ Following a long-term logic, transformation seeks to address the root causes and structural conditions that led to the emergence of the CBAG ecosystem. This approach requires lengthy commitment timeframes and the buy-in of local, national, and international actors.

By crossing the EMT framework with the three functions of CBAGs, we developed an intervention matrix of standard approaches to CBAGs. As table 3 shows, the intervention matrix lists the standard tools routinely employed to deal with CBAGs. The matrix is derived from theoretical conceptualization based on an extensive review of the literature. It is feasible and important to coordinate strategies along the y-axis to ensure that the E, M, or T approach tackles all three functions of CBAGs, for instance, by combining SSR, DDR, and CVR. By contrast, coordination along the x-axis—for instance, between coercive and cooperative approaches to manage CBAGs—is difficult because the different approaches follow conflicting institutional logics.

53 Katrin Planta and Véronique Dudouet, *Fit for Negotiation? Options and Risks in the Political Transformation of Non-conventional Armed Groups* (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF), 2015), 5.

54 Marie-Joëlle Zahar and Delphine Mechoulan, *Peace by Pieces? Local Mediation and Sustainable Peace in the Central African Republic* (New York: International Peace Institute, 2017).

55 Kyle Dietrich, *'When We Can't See the Enemy, Civilians Become the Enemy': Living Through Nigeria's Six-Year Insurgency* (Washington, DC: Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2015).

56 Arthur Boutellis, "Can the UN Stabilize Mali? Towards a UN Stabilization Doctrine?," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 4, no. 1 (2015); Muggah and O'Donnell, "Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration"; De Vries, "The Ebb and Flow of Stabilization in the Congo."

Table 3 Standard Tools Employed by Intervening Actors to Deal with CBAGs

		APPROACHES TO CBAGS			
		ENGAGEMENT	MANAGEMENT		TRANSFORMATION
			COERCIVE	COOPERATIVE	
FUNCTION OF CBAGS	SECURITY	HIRE CBAGS AS SECURITY PROVIDERS	DEFEAT CBAGS (PACIFICATION)	CO-OPT CBAGS (HYBRID SECURITY GOVERNANCE)	REPLACE CBAGS WITH POLICE (SSR)
	POLITICS	ENTER CBAG-CONTROLLED AREAS WITH CSOS	GAIN LOCAL SUPPORT (COUNTER-INSURGENCY)	NEGOTIATE WITH CBAGS (POWER SHARING)	REPLACE PATRONAGE NETWORK (DDR)
	ECONOMICS/ CRIME	SIDELINE CBAGS IN COMMUNITY PLATFORMS	INCARCERATE CBAG MEMBERS (WAR ON GANGS)	MEDIATE BETWEEN CBAGS (GANG TRUCES)	REDUCE APPEAL TO JOIN CBAGS (CVR)

Source: Author.

Measures of success of EMT interventions

Among the desired results of EMT approaches are a protective rather than predatory behavior vis-à-vis local communities; a sustainable approach; identification of all key stakeholders and coordination among implementing partners; respect for the principles of conflict sensitivity; and adherence of CBAGs to good governance standards and norms, such as human rights and the rule of law. Given multiple confounding factors and overlapping interventions, it is difficult to measure results, attribute them to specific interventions, and evaluate their impacts.⁵⁷ Table 4 provides an example of potential indicators that intervening actors and interested third parties could use to measure the impact of EMT interventions.

Although the overall goal of EMT approaches is an improvement in community security for the populations living in areas where CBAGs are present, each EMT approach has its specific objective. Engagement focuses on ensuring safe access for intervening actors to areas with CBAGs; coercive management aims to reduce the reach and legitimacy of CBAGs; cooperative management strives to improve the treatment of local populations by CBAGs; and transformation aspires to render CBAGs obsolete for their members, sponsors, and communities. Table 4 proposes two specific indicators each to measure the progress in achieving the overall goal and the four objectives. For instance, a program seems to be on the right track to achieve improved community security if data show an increase in the percentage of the population

57 Tariro Mutongwizo, Lezanne Leoschut, and Patrick Burton, “Co-ownership and Collaboration: Insights into the Measurement of Impact and Change from Evidence-based Community and State Violence Prevention Partnerships,” *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 4, no. 1 (2015).

perceiving security in their communities and a decrease in the number of violent incidents reported in the communities.

Table 4 Indicators to Measure Results of Different Approaches to CBAGs

RESULTS	INDICATORS
GOAL: IMPROVED COMMUNITY SECURITY FOR POPULATION LIVING IN AREAS WITH CBAGS	INDICATOR 1: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION PERCEIVING (IN)SECURITY IN THEIR COMMUNITY
	INDICATOR 2: NUMBER OF VIOLENT INCIDENTS REPORTED
OBJECTIVE 1 (ENGAGEMENT): SAFE ACCESS FOR INTERVENING ACTORS TO AREAS WITH CBAGS	INDICATOR 1.1: PERCENTAGE OF STAFF OF HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT ACTORS PERCEIVING SAFE ACCESS TO AREAS WITH CBAGS
	INDICATOR 1.2: NUMBER AND FREQUENCY OF ATTACKS ON STAFF MEMBERS OF HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT ACTORS
OBJECTIVE 2 (COERCIVE MANAGEMENT): REDUCED REACH AND LEGITIMACY OF CBAGS	INDICATOR 2.1: NUMBER OF PEOPLE LIVING IN COMMUNITIES WITH CBAGS
	INDICATOR 2.2: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION PERCEIVING CBAGS AS LEGITIMATE
OBJECTIVE 3 (COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT): BETTER TREATMENT OF POPULATION IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES BY CBAGS	INDICATOR 3.1: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION PERCEIVING CBAGS AS POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE FORCES IN COMMUNITIES
	INDICATOR 3.2: NUMBER OF REPORTED INCIDENTS OF ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR BY CBAGS TO COMMUNITIES
OBJECTIVE 4 (TRANSFORMATION): OBSCOLESCENCE OF CBAGS FOR MEMBERS, SPONSORS, AND COMMUNITIES	INDICATOR 4.1: NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF CBAGS
	INDICATOR 4.2: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION PERCEIVING STATE SECURITY PROVISION AS SUFFICIENT WITHIN COMMUNITIES

Source: Author.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM EMT APPROACHES

Intervening actors should not export standard templates, such as DDR, from one setting to another. Interventions should reflect contextual variation and focus on the predominant functions of the targeted CBAGs, following a thorough context analysis and actor mapping. Yet, keeping in mind the limitations of blueprints, the findings of this report entail a number of implications for the engagement, management, and transformation of CBAGs, precisely because of the high probability that past experiences will be influential.

Lessons learned from short-term engagement

Although CBAGs rarely control territory in a comprehensive manner or operate in the total absence of government services, the civilian populations living in areas where CBAGs operate often suffer from limited access to basic services, such as security provision, health care, or education. Under these circumstances, national or international actors whose mandate is to provide basic services need to engage

members of CBAGs to gain safe access for their staff members to the areas of operation. Some intervening actors choose to provide CBAGs with financial or in-kind rewards in exchange for safe access to their areas of operation. In Somalia, for instance, aid agencies hired armed clan-based militias to provide protection or to transport food to insecure areas.⁵⁸ Research has shown that this can have adverse effects, however, because it might reinforce the destructive tendencies of CBAGs.⁵⁹

To ensure that aid reaches the most vulnerable sectors of the population, national or international actors could try to enter the strongholds of CBAGs with civil society representatives, since these actors frequently command considerable authority, even vis-à-vis armed groups. Yet, there is often no clear-cut distinction between peaceful civil society organizations and armed criminals, as exemplified by district water committees in Somalia acting on behalf of warlords rather than representing their communities.⁶⁰ Some intervening actors have decided to work only with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) registered with the ministries in charge of their authorization; however, this approach can be problematic because it might exclude credible civil society organizations that have been banned for political reasons.⁶¹

Another approach is to include CBAGs in community platforms as representatives of one sector among others, such as business, education, health, culture, and religion. Doing so can give CBAG leaders the impression that their rule over their territory and the functions they fulfill are respected; actually, however, these leaders are sidelined by the other actors that dominate the decision-making within the platforms. In the same vein, actors with existing relations with CBAGs can facilitate safe access so that other actors are able to implement development projects and deliver humanitarian aid. As an example, the international NGO Medair used well-connected intermediaries, such as medical professionals and traditional leaders, to gather security information and negotiate with military and armed groups to gain access for their staff members to deliver aid in conflict-affected zones of the Democratic Republic of Congo's Ituri province.⁶²

Apart from humanitarian or development actors establishing platforms, communities regularly use or revive traditional conflict mediation institutions to engage CBAGs and enhance community cohesion, often with the support of state authorities.⁶³ Such traditional structures of community conflict mediation aim to promote reconciliation, reinforce reciprocal trust among communities, and prevent local conflicts between CBAGs. In the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, a government initiative reinstalled large meetings called *baraza communautaires* to discuss issues among representatives from different communities and elect local peace committees. However, while the *baraza* and peace

58 Joakim Gundel, *Humanitarian Action in the New Security Environment: Policy and Operational Implications in Somalia and Somaliland* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2006).

59 Moritz Schuberth, "Growing the Grassroots or Backing Bandits? Dilemmas of Donor Support for Haiti's (Un)Civil Society," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 11, no. 1 (2016): 93–98.

60 Gundel, "Humanitarian Action in the New Security Environment," 46.

61 Moritz Schuberth, "To Engage or Not to Engage Haiti's Urban Armed Groups? Safe Access in Disaster-Stricken and Conflict-affected Cities," *Environment and Urbanization* 29, no. 2 (2017): 425–42.

62 Pottier, "Roadblock Ethnography," 166.

63 Verkore, Willems, Kleingeld, and Rouw, "From DDR to Security Promotion," 5.

committees initially succeeded in resolving ethnic disputes and reducing cases of ethnic violence, they broke down due to internal conflicts and community perceptions that they were under the influence of armed groups.⁶⁴ Accordingly, it is important for community-level institutions engaging CBAGs not to be perceived as too close to such groups lest they lose their legitimacy among the population.

Lessons learned from mid-term management

Compared to the short-term engagement of CBAGs, management approaches vis-à-vis CBAGs follow a mid-term logic and envisage a substantive change in the behavior or nature of the targeted groups. Coercive management approaches involve security forces and heavy-handed measures to defeat CBAGs or incarcerate their members, for instance, militarized police raids against gangs in South Africa.⁶⁵ Actors pursuing cooperative management approaches, by contrast, strive to alter the behavior and roles of CBAGs. Such changes can be achieved by negotiating with CBAGs, as happened with *grands trafiquants* in Mali; mediating between them, as occurred the Central African Republic between ex-Séléka rebels and anti-Balaka self-defense groups; or co-opting them, as done in the Nigerian state with the CJTF.⁶⁶

COERCIVE APPROACHES

When CBAGs are perceived as threats to the state, coercive management approaches by state security forces include forceful raids, as well as the mass incarceration of presumed CBAG members. Security forces using pacification or counterinsurgency (COIN) methods—sometimes applied coercively to target the political function of CBAGs—aim to win “hearts and minds” by “competing with the insurgent for influence and control at the grassroots level.”⁶⁷ COIN utilized in this manner is seen primarily as a “political strategy” that needs to focus on building “the political legitimacy and effectiveness—in the eyes of its people and the international community—of a government affected by an insurgency.”⁶⁸

CBAGs with a less antagonistic relationship with state authority can also face coercion, however. In Côte d’Ivoire, for instance, traditional hunters from the North called dozo underwent a state-sanctioned transition to a nationwide private security force, but they were later banned when they became caught up in power struggles at the national level.⁶⁹

Coercive approaches to CBAGs, such as COIN operations or mass incarcerations, have important limitations. Local communities will feel further alienated if their experiences with state agencies are limited to military raids that result in civilian casualties due to stray bullets. This result can have the unintended effect of driving local people to support or join CBAGs “because they are alienated by heavy-handed

64 Clark, “Ethnicity, Leadership and Conflict Mediation in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo,” 8.

65 Lamb, “Police Militarisation and the ‘War on Crime’ in South Africa.”

66 Oluwaseun Bamidele, “Civilian Joint Task Force’(CJTF)—A Community Security Option: A Comprehensive and Proactive Approach of Reducing Terrorism,” *Journal for Deradicalization* 7 (2016): 124–44.

67 David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xv.

68 Ibid, 265.

69 Lauren Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019).

actions of the intervening force.”⁷⁰ Thus, coercive approaches might inadvertently contribute to further alienation of marginalized communities from an already delegitimized state, thereby allowing CBAGs to position themselves as legitimate defenders of the communities against abusive state security forces. For instance, organized gangs in the Cape Flats section in South Africa’s Cape Town provide protection for residents against rival gangs. Many perceive these gangs as more legitimate than law enforcement agencies, associated with violent raids that lead to the deaths of local youths.⁷¹

Refocusing the efforts of the security and judicial sectors to combat high-scale organized crime and corrupted sections of the political elite that instrumentalize CBAGs for their own benefit has been found to be more effective in the long term than simply containing the marginalized sections of society.⁷² Moreover, a key feature of COIN is the building of effective and legitimate local security forces that are able to provide “population-centric security.”⁷³ In practice, doing this involves the “creation of self-defending populations through community-based security measures, such as local neighborhood watch and guard forces.”⁷⁴ Yet, the use of CBAGs as a stop-gap form of law enforcement or as informal defense forces against other NSAGs can unintentionally contribute to the delegitimization of the state and the legitimization of abusive actors that lack oversight, accountability, or internal control mechanisms and are therefore prone to turn on their own communities.

COOPERATIVE APPROACHES

The collaboration of CBAGs and the state as part of COIN interventions is but one example of the multiple types of connections between CBAGs and state actors. Government officials from Kenya to Zimbabwe regularly hire CBAGs to attack or intimidate the opposition or to advance a vested political agenda by spreading insecurity. Governments might also tolerate or even encourage CBAGs as cost-effective crime-control mechanisms in areas of limited statehood, as happened with Sungusungu in Tanzania.⁷⁵ In some conflict-affected states, the state co-opted CBAGs or CBAGs acted as self-anointed defenders of the state against other types of NSAGs, including violent extremist groups such as Boko Haram. To boost their legitimacy, CBAGs might hide connections to the state or proclaim a degree of proximity to the state that goes beyond what the state would officially acknowledge.

When promoted as agents of hybrid security governance, CBAGs are seen as the best available option for effective and legitimate justice and security provision in the short term; as such, they are given the space to fill the security void left by an absent state. In numerous cases across sub-Saharan Africa, efforts to co-opt CBAGs ultimately gave legitimacy to predatory and illiberal armed actors, while they delegitimized the state and other intervening actors that risked being perceived as supporting criminals. Examples range from Kenya, where anti-crime vigilantes were co-opted by the main political parties and trans-

70 Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 38.

71 Petrus and Kinnes, “New Social Bandits?,” 189.

72 Moritz Schuberth, “Beyond Gang Truces and Mano Dura Policies: Towards Substitutive Security Governance in Latin America,” *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 5, no. 1 (2016).

73 Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 265.

74 Ibid.

75 Suzette Heald, “Controlling Crime and Corruption from Below: Sungusungu in Kenya,” *International Relations* 21, no. 2 (2007): 183–99.

formed into political goons and criminal gangs,⁷⁶ to Democratic Republic of Congo, where the promise of lucrative positions for Mai Mai leaders who join state security forces created incentive structures that promoted the proliferation and expansion of CBAGs and led to increased violence.⁷⁷

There are, however, examples of CBAGs providing security without turning into sources of insecurity. The RESOLVE report on the origins of armed community mobilization shows, by means of the case of the Arrow Boys of Teso in eastern Uganda, that early oversight by the national army can limit abuses by CBAGs.⁷⁸ In Kenya, it has been found that faith-based vigilantes—for instance, Kibera’s Nubian-based Al Safa or an antinarcotics vigilante group established by the Council of Imams in Mombasa—have strong religious and cultural foundations and are more resistant to being instrumentalized by drug lords than secular CBAGs.⁷⁹ Another example is the attempt by a former police officer to provide oversight of vigilantes in Nairobi’s Kibera slum by employing them in a private security company. This practice provided members of these groups with regular salaries and embedded them within a framework of clear and enforceable rules by formalizing their role as security providers, thereby removing the incentive to join a CBAG, providing employment, and enforcing regulation.⁸⁰

The common denominator across these cases is that the presence of oversight procedures, a binding legal framework, and accountability mechanisms can help to prevent CBAGs from turning into predatory sources of insecurity. These experiences are in line with findings presented in the USIP typology mapping paper on CBAGs which shows that group discipline and the acceptance of formalized norms, roles, and processes are keys to prevent CBAGs from engaging in unregulated, reactive, or opportunistic violence.⁸¹ External interventions can reinforce the formalization of command and control structures that institutionalize and legitimize norms and rules, for instance, by the socialization provided by shared beliefs, and clearly established organizational norms and codes of conduct, or accountability and oversight mechanisms. Table 5 in the section on Current Trends and New Directions identifies success factors for accentuating the productive aspects of CBAGs and steering them in a favorable direction.

Lessons learned from long-term transformation

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

Security Sector Reform (SSR) follows a transformative logic and is primarily aimed at replacing CBAGs with, or channeling their members into, functioning state security forces. Failed attempts to integrate CBAGs into state security forces, as happened with the Mai Mai in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, have shown that SSR is as much a political process as it is a technical approach; as such, it needs to take local

76 David M. Anderson, “Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics of Public Order in Kenya,” *African Affairs* 101, no. 405 (2002): 531–55.

77 Maria Eriksson Baaz and Judith Verweijen, “The Volatility of a Half-Cooked Bouillabaisse: Rebel–Military Integration and Conflict Dynamics in the Eastern DRC,” *African Affairs* 112, no. 449 (2013): 563–82.

78 Daniel Agbibo, *Dynamics and Drivers of Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019).

79 Moritz Schuberth, “The Impact of Drug Trafficking on Informal Security Actors in Kenya,” *Africa Spectrum* 49, no. 3 (2014): 55–81.

80 Ibid.

81 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*.

politics into account.⁸² Given the long-term and wide-ranging objectives of SSR, it is not enough to train more effective police forces and curb corruption among the members of the judiciary, as difficult as these endeavors are.⁸³ SSR initiatives must be complemented by promotion of the rule of law; state security forces must be subjected to democratic civilian oversight and held accountable to laws that are aligned with international human rights standards.⁸⁴ Moreover, to improve their legitimacy and acceptance among different sections of the population in the host country, SSR initiatives must give special consideration to local ownership, both with respect to political elites and to the communities in which security is provided.⁸⁵

More concretely, special courts or hybrid national and international tribunals can deal with war crimes or transnational organized crime groups and handle politically sensitive cases to tackle the patron-client relationship between CBAGs and their sponsors. For example, the Special Court for Sierra Leone convicted two former leaders of the Civil Defence Forces, a CBAG composed of traditional hunters who defended their communities during the civil war but who were also accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁸⁶ Moreover, SSR can strengthen efforts to expand state security provision into areas formerly abandoned by law enforcement agencies, where CBAGs assumed the roles of informal crime control and self-defense agencies. Intervening actors can do this by enhancing the capacity and legitimacy of the police and judiciary through capacity building and training in contextually appropriate techniques, such as community policing or proximity policing.⁸⁷

DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND REINTEGRATION

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) is another set of tools and approaches that has been discussed in an extensive academic and policy-oriented literature on technical and operational lessons learned.⁸⁸ Such guidelines offer useful guidance for disarmament, which is arguably the most straightforward and technical aspect of DDR.⁸⁹ Yet, as early DDR attempts in Angola and Mozambique showed in the 1990s, DDR is an inherently political endeavor that needs to be informed by a sound understanding of the political economy of post-conflict societies.⁹⁰ The political nature of DDR is notably visible during demobilization, which aims to replace the patron-client relationship between “entre-

82 Baaz and Verweijen, “The Volatility of a Half-Cooked Bouillabaisse.”

83 Adedeji Ebo, “The Role of Security Sector Reform in Sustainable Development: Donor Policy Trends and Challenges,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 7, no. 1 (2007): 27–60.

84 Louis-Alexandre Berg, “Guns, Laws and Politics: The Political Foundations of Rule of Law and Security Sector Reform,” *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* 4, no. 1 (2012): 4–30.

85 Eleanor Gordon, “Security Sector Reform, Local Ownership and Community Engagement,” *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 3, no. 1 (2014): Art. 25.

86 Danny Hoffman, “The Meaning of a Militia: Understanding the Civil Defence Forces of Sierra Leone,” *African Affairs* 106, no. 425 (2007): 639–62.

87 Schuberth, “Beyond Gang Truces.”

88 United Nations, *Operational Guide to the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards* (New York: United Nations, 2010); Tatjana Stankovic and Stina Torjesen, *Fresh Insights on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: A Survey for Practitioners* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2010).

89 See, for example, Savannah De Tessières, *Effective Weapons and Ammunition Management in a Changing Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Context: A Handbook for United Nations DDR Practitioners* (New York: United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, 2018).

90 Mats Berdal and David Ucko, eds., *Reintegrating Armed Groups After Conflict: Politics, Violence and Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

preneurs of violence” within the political elite and ex-combatants by dismantling the former command structures and breaking the bonds of hierarchy.⁹¹

As research in the Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone has shown, former mid-level commanders often play an important role as intermediaries between the elite and demobilized members of armed groups; their influence over their former subordinates often remains sufficiently strong that they can effectively remobilize them.⁹² Moreover, the timing for DDR is crucial; premature disarmament and demobilization will not be sustainable if the external threat that led to the emergence of CBAGs remains in place. This is especially true for CBAGs protecting their communities against NSAGs, such as the CJTF fighting Boko Haram in Nigeria.

Although the successful social, economic, and political reintegration of ex-combatants is both the most crucial and the most complex aspect of DDR, programs in practice too often focus on short-term reinsertion instead of long-term reintegration.⁹³ Community-based reintegration programs aim to improve their sustainability by bringing together ex-CBAG members and their communities to identify and work together on projects that benefit the entire communities, such as the construction or rehabilitation of critical infrastructure.⁹⁴ In Democratic Republic of Congo’s Maniema province, for example, local civil society organizations and Oxfam Novib implemented a “weapons for development” project, whereby voluntary disarmament was rewarded with agricultural assistance and the rehabilitation of schools and a health center.⁹⁵ However, studies have shown that community-centered DDR programs must be truly community-led, while being prioritized by national and international funders, to be successful.⁹⁶

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE REDUCTION

Although community-led DDR efforts are well suited for the reintegration of former CBAG members, they tend to overlook those in a community who have not joined, but are at risk of joining CBAGs. To overcome this limitation, national and international actors have operationalized community violence reduction (CVR) programs that can best be described as community-based DDR programs that incorporate aspects of armed violence reduction and prevention (AVRP).⁹⁷ AVRP focuses on identifying risk factors “that contribute to increasing the likelihood that an individual will commit a violent act” and resilience factors “that aid individuals in adverse circumstances to overcome adversity and avoid violence.”⁹⁸ With the identification of these two sets of factors, targeted interventions can focus on alleviating risks to prevent the occurrence of armed violence.

91 Anders Themnér, “A Leap of Faith: When and How Ex-Combatants Resort to Violence,” *Security Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013): 295–329.

92 Ibid.

93 Alpaslan Özerdem, “A Re-Conceptualisation of Ex-Combatant Reintegration: ‘Social Reintegration’ Approach,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 12, no. 1 (2012): 51–73.

94 Prosper Nzekani Zena, *The Lessons and Limits of DDR in Africa* (Washington, DC: Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2013), 7.

95 Verkoren, Willems, Kleingeld, and Rouw, “From DDR to Security Promotion,” 19.

96 Özerdem, “A Re-conceptualisation of Ex-combatant Reintegration,” 59; Julia Buxton, *Reintegration and Long-term Development: Linkages and Challenges* (Bradford: Centre for International Cooperation and Security, 2008), 23.

97 Verkoren, Willems, Kleingeld, and Rouw, “From DDR to Security Promotion.”

98 Jennifer M. Hazen, “Risk and Resilience: Understanding the Potential for Violence,” in *Small Arms Survey 2008* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2008), 245.

CVR efforts form part of the innovative second-generation approaches to deal with armed violence that focus on addressing the complex set of root causes of violence and insecurity at the local level.⁹⁹ To do so, CVR aims to stabilize communities in the short term by providing alternative means of income to at-risk youth while simultaneously improving community cohesion in the long term. CVR can thus be seen as a comprehensive approach to community-building that offers alternatives to youth at risk of joining CBAGs, replacing the functions that these groups fulfill for their members, such as protection and access to resources and higher status. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), for instance, provided unemployed youth with temporary employment and professional training to sway them away from economic opportunities offered by CBAGs. One key success factor was to include communities themselves in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of CVR projects.¹⁰⁰

CVR's extensive focus on temporary employment through cash-for-work programs has been criticized as unsustainable and prone to corruption and exploitation.¹⁰¹ Another criticism is that the thematic scope of CVR initiatives is too broad, that they are disconnected from one another, and, in many cases, that they are not clearly linked to the ultimate goal of reducing violence.¹⁰² At the same time, the thematically broad scope of interventions in geographically well-delineated communities is precisely what sets CVR apart from traditional and often unsuccessful DDR experiments. Traditional DDR focuses on particular groups, whereas CVR has a clearly defined geographical focus. Accordingly, CVR might be more applicable in settings in which CBAGs with weak hierarchies and loose organizational structures are present, while DDR might be better suited to armed groups with strict hierarchical command.¹⁰³

CURRENT TRENDS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

CBAGs and state legitimacy

As discussed, the lens of state fragility does not offer a universal explanation for the proliferation of CBAGs. In some cases, a lack of state legitimacy rather than a lack of institutional capacity contributes to the formation of CBAGs. At the same time, the security, political, and economic functions that CBAGs fulfill for various stakeholders can have both legitimizing and delegitimizing effects. Research on CBAGs in Kenya shows that while the security function is legitimizing, the economic element tends to

99 Robert Muggah and Francis Sang, "The Enemy Within: Rethinking Arms Availability in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Conflict, Security & Development* 13, no. 4 (2013): 437; Robert Muggah and Keith Krause, "Closing the Gap Between Peace Operations and Post-Conflict Insecurity: Towards a Violence Reduction Agenda," *International Peacekeeping* 16, no. 1 (2009): 136–50.

100 Robert Muggah, "The U.N. Can't Bring Peace to the Central African Republic," *Foreign Policy*, August 16, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/16/the-u-n-cant-bring-peace-to-the-central-african-republic>.

101 Timothy Donais, "Bringing the Local Back In: Haiti, Local Governance and the Dynamics of Vertically Integrated Peacebuilding," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 10, no. 1 (2015): 46.

102 Ibid, 45.

103 Brian McQuinn, "DDR and the Internal Organization of Non-State Armed Groups," *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 5, no. 1 (2016).

be more delegitimizing; the impact of the political factor on the legitimacy of CBAGs is bifurcated along ethnic lines.¹⁰⁴

By providing security in areas of limited statehood that law enforcement agencies neglect, Kenyan CBAGs fill an institutional void and gain legitimacy. On the downside, however, they are known for extorting protection money from residents, which diminishes their legitimacy.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, CBAGs in Kenya have been found to work on the behest of organized crime groups for self-interested motives, further undermining their own legitimacy.¹⁰⁶ Finally, ethnic entrepreneurs manipulated and instrumentalized CBAGs as political tools to attack members of rival ethnic groups around the time of elections. This leads to their complete delegitimization among those targeted in the attacks; however, it contributes to their legitimacy among ethnic peers whom they protect against similar attacks from rival militias.¹⁰⁷

From CBAGs to providers of community security?

The USIP/RESOLVE Research Report on the dynamics and drivers of CBAGS has shown that hybrid security governance is a reality in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa and that plural security provision can manifest itself in more constructive or more destructive ways.¹⁰⁸ The USIP/RESOLVE typology mapping paper on CBAGs underlined how the trajectory of CBAGs is influenced by internal factors, such as their organizational structure, as well as by external factors, such as norms and social order.¹⁰⁹ This Mapping Paper identified a number of case studies in which vigilantes have not transformed into political militias or predatory criminals due to internal factors, such as enforceable rules, and external factors, such as strong state oversight or a conducive legal framework. Intervening actors can thus influence the trajectory of CBAGs and steer their behavior in the desired direction. This process is, however, far from straightforward because multiple factors can influence the behavior of CBAGs and EMT interventions can have unintended consequences, especially if they are not adequately adapted to specific contexts.

Table 5 lists the potential success factors that intervening actors may consider when designing strategies to alter the internal and external characteristics of CBAGs to reinforce their constructive potential and limit their destructive potential.

104 Moritz Schuberth, "Hybrid Security Governance, Post-election Violence and the Legitimacy of Community-based Armed Groups in Urban Kenya," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 12, no. 2 (2018): 386–404.

105 Erik Henningsen and Peris Jones, "'What Kind of Hell is This!' Understanding the Mungiki Movement's Power of Mobilisation," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 3 (2013): 372.

106 Schuberth, "The Impact of Drug Trafficking on Informal Security Actors in Kenya."

107 Schuberth, "Hybrid Security Governance."

108 Agbiboa, *Dynamics and Drivers of Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

109 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*.

Table 5 Success Factors for Transforming CBAGs into Community Security Providers

	LEGAL AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT	ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY	ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT	FINANCIAL VIABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY	SECURITY PROVISION
SUCCESS FACTOR 1	THERE ARE CLEAR LAWS ON THE REGISTRATION OF CBAGS AND CBAGS REGISTER WITHOUT BARRIERS.	CBAGS HAVE AND FOLLOW CLEARLY DEFINED MISSIONS AND OBJECTIVES.	LOCAL AND/OR CENTRAL GOVERNMENTS PROVIDE FUNDS TO CBAGS IN AN OPEN AND TRANSPARENT MANNER AND CBAGS TAKE APPROPRIATE STEPS TO AVOID CONFLICTS OF INTEREST.	CBAGS HAVE ACCESS TO SUSTAINED SOURCES OF FUNDING TO CONTINUE THEIR OPERATIONS IN BOTH THE SHORT AND LONG TERM.	THE SECURITY SERVICES THAT CBAGS PROVIDE REFLECT THE NEEDS AND PRIORITIES OF THEIR COMMUNITIES.
SUCCESS FACTOR 2	THE LAWS AND REGULATIONS ON CBAGS SET OUT CLEAR AND LIMITED ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, LIMITING THE SCOPE OF THEIR PERMISSIBLE ACTIVITIES.	CBAGS HAVE CLEARLY DEFINED MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES AND WRITTEN POLICIES OR PROCEDURES TO GUIDE ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATIONS.	CBAGS HAVE ADOPTED AND FOLLOW A CODE OF ETHICS, OPERATE IN A TRANSPARENT MANNER, AND UNDERGO REGULAR FINANCIAL AUDITS.	CBAGS RAISE THEIR FUNDING FROM LOCAL SOURCES, INCLUDING GOVERNMENTS, BUSINESSES, AND INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS.	CBAGS HAVE CLEAR AND TRANSPARENT PROCEDURES IN PLACE TO DETERMINE THE NEEDS AND PRIORITIES OF THEIR COMMUNITIES.
SUCCESS FACTOR 3	THE LAWS AND REGULATIONS ON CBAGS ARE IMPLEMENTED CONSISTENTLY AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR TERMS.	CBAGS ARE ABLE TO MAINTAIN PERMANENT, PAID STAFF.	THE LAWS AND REGULATIONS PROVIDE CLEAR GUIDANCE ON GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT OVER CBAGS.	CBAGS DO NOT RELY ON FOREIGN FUNDING THAT MIGHT BE INFLUENCED BY SHIFTS IN FUNDING LEVELS AND PRIORITIES OF FOREIGN DONORS.	CBAGS PROVIDE THEIR SECURITY SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS BEYOND THEIR OWN MEMBERS AND WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION WITH REGARDS TO RACE, GENDER, ETHNICITY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, ETC.
SUCCESS FACTOR 4	THERE ARE LAWYERS WHO ARE TRAINED IN AND FAMILIAR WITH LAWS RELATED TO CBAGS WHO CAN PROVIDE LEGAL ADVICE.	CBAGS TRAIN THEIR STAFF IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MEDIATION AS WELL AS IN GOOD GOVERNANCE, INCLUDING ANTI-CORRUPTION, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND RULE OF LAW.	THERE ARE CLEAR AND TRANSPARENT EXTERNAL OVERSIGHT MECHANISMS IN PLACE, INCLUDING THE GOVERNMENT AND NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS.	CBAGS HAVE SOUND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS IN PLACE OR ACCESS TO PROFESSIONAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SERVICES.	CBAGS RECOVER PARTS OF THE COSTS OF SERVICE PROVISION THROUGH VOLUNTARY FEES BUT REFRAIN FROM ENFORCING THE COLLECTION OF COMPULSORY FEES.

Source: Author.

For these strategies to be successful, they need to strengthen and formalize the security function of CBAGs while diminishing their political and criminal functions, without weakening the legitimacy of the state. The success factors aim to turn multi-dimensional CBAGs into more accountable, capable, and rule-abiding providers of community security that function more like civil society organizations than like informal vigilantes.¹¹⁰ It is important to keep in mind, however, that such a transformation is difficult to achieve in complex political emergencies because it is costly and requires long-term commitments by multiple actors.

Challenge of coordinating EMT interventions

Complex political emergencies, a typical context in which intervening actors employ EMT approaches to CBAGs, require a comprehensive approach because of their “multi-causal nature.” However, such an approach remains a challenge given a formal division of labor among different intervening actors—such as development or humanitarian agencies and armed forces—that operate on the basis of differing institutional logics and deep-seated worldviews. In the case of the UN Mission in Sudan, for instance, attempts to pursue an integrated international approach to support national DDR efforts stalled because of tensions between UNDP and DPKO and a lack of political will on the part of the Sudanese government. Moreover, different intervening actors show diverging attitudes to coordinating EMT approaches. For instance, the military tends to seek to subordinate and instrumentalize other actors, while some humanitarian actors developed a general aversion to integration, feeling that it had “systematically compromised their organizations’ core values.”

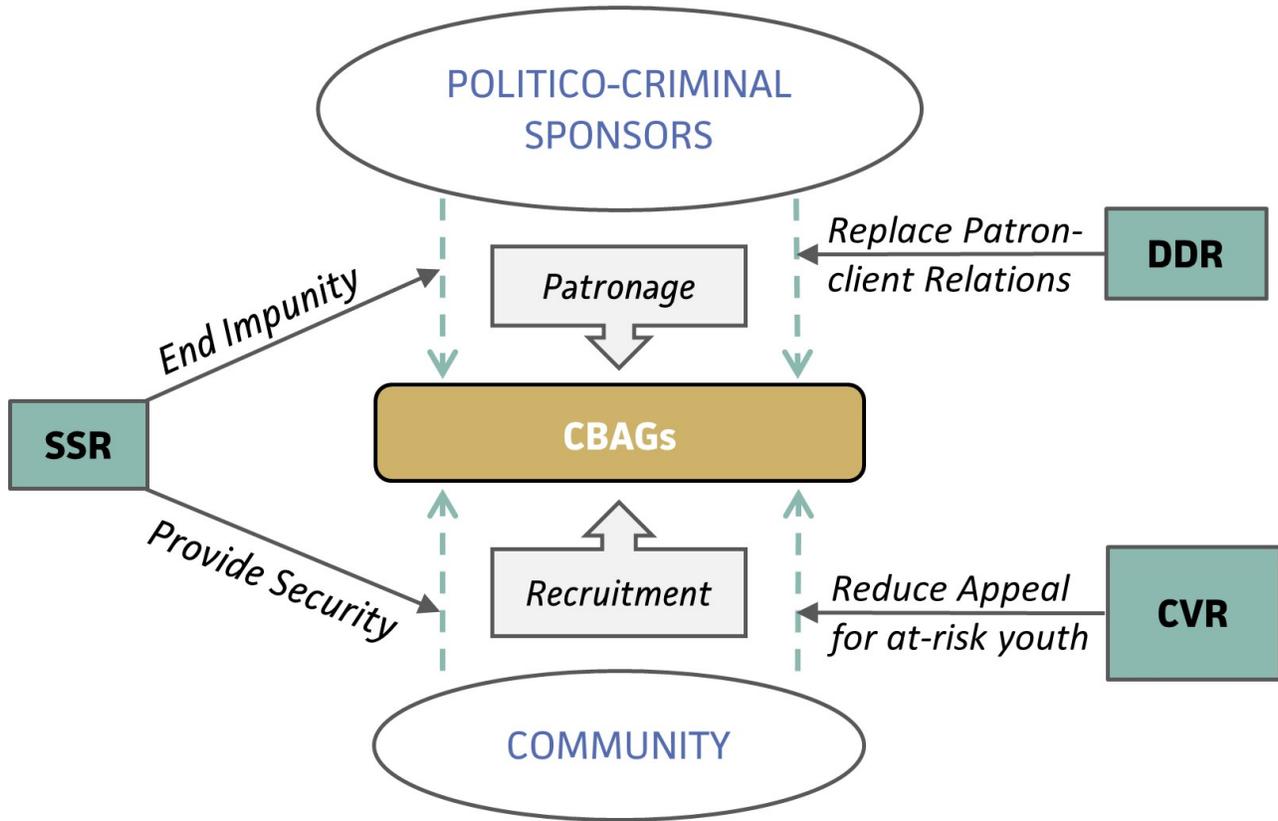
The lack of coherence and coordination among the multitude of actors involved in the EMT of CBAGs can have serious repercussions not only for the overall outcome of interventions, but also for the security of intervening actors and of supposed beneficiary communities. Although coherence and coordination across different E, M, or T approaches is difficult, the challenge of coordinating different tools within the same E, M, or T approach can potentially be overcome by an integrated and coherent framework for action aimed simultaneously at the three functions of CBAGs: security, economic, and political. An example is transformative approaches to replace CBAGs with a modern and accountable state that is bound by the rule of law and serves all sections of society in a fair and equal manner. As illustrated in Figure 1, an integrated transformative approach involves SSR to replace the security function of CBAGs, DDR to substitute their political function, and CVR to supplant their economic function.

DDR can help break the top-down patron-client relationship between CBAGs and their sponsors; CVR aims to cease the bottom-up flow of new recruits from communities to CBAGs. SSR can play a complementary role by contributing to ending the impunity for the politico-criminal elite and improving state security provision in areas of limited statehood. These transformative strategies can be usefully supported by certain coercive and cooperative approaches, such as the precise targeting of CBAG leaders resisting calls to disarm and demobilize and to provide safe access to humanitarian and development

¹¹⁰ The success factors are adapted from indicators presented in the USAID Civil Society Organizations Sustainability Index (CSOSI) and USAID Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Indicator Reference Sheets.

actors. However, transformative approaches may be potentially overambitious, particularly when considering short implementation timeframes and budgetary limitations. Improved interagency coordination can help pool existing resources to improve efficiency and can diversify sources of funding to optimize sustainability.

Figure 1 Integrated Framework for Transformative Approaches to CBAGs



Source: Author.

CONCLUSION

CBAGs rest in a complicated space between security and development, requiring a whole-of-community and whole-of-government approaches. This paper mapped lessons learned from EMT approaches to CBAGs, identified success factors to turn CBAGs into providers of community security, and proposed indicators to measure the progress of EMT approaches against their objectives. It also showed that contrary to much of the literature on state fragility, CBAGs are also present in countries that enjoy relative economic strength and strong statehood within their respective regions but suffer from a high level of social inequality, including South Africa.

Important limitations run across all types of EMT approaches. Intervening actors frequently attempt to apply “one-size-fits-all” tools that have been developed and tested in specific contexts to seemingly similar settings, without taking into account the differences in the context and nature of CBAGs. Furthermore, lack of coherence and coordination among different intervening actors regularly leads to duplication of efforts and the use of contradictory approaches to individual CBAGs. Based on the findings of this paper, there are important additional lessons to be learned from different approaches to CBAGs in a variety of settings. Some of the questions that emerged and that should be explored more in-depth through country case studies include the following:

1. What EMT tools are most appropriate for which type of CBAGs (vigilantes, militias, gangs) and in what context (for example, urban versus rural; presence of violent extremism versus no violent extremism)?
2. What timeline is needed for different EMT tools? When is the situation ripe for different types of EMT approaches?
3. Who are the most effective intervening actors for different types of EMT approaches? Whose buy-in is crucial for the different approaches?
4. How have concrete examples of EMT approaches to CBAGs affected the legitimacy of the state?

To answer these questions, it would be beneficial to conduct in-depth research on select case studies, including from the two main regional conflict complexes in sub-Saharan Africa: the Lake Chad Basin and the African Great Lakes Region. For instance, Nigeria and Democratic Republic of Congo would provide cross-country comparison of one state facing violent extremism and one facing other more pressing threats than violent extremism, even though ISIS has recently reclaimed its first attacks in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Both case studies would allow in-country comparisons of responses to urban and rural CBAGs. Moreover, the Ebola outbreak in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo would provide a unique opportunity to look at lessons learned from the EMT of CBAGs in the context of an epidemic or health crisis; it could lead to urgently needed policy recommendations for how national and international responders can engage them.

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LINKING P/CVE & ILLICIT ARMS FLOWS IN AFRICA

NICOLAS FLORQUIN

COMMUNITY-BASED ARMED GROUPS SERIES

“The synergies between the fields of small arms control and P/CVE are critical, yet only tangentially explored.”

FAST FACTS

- » While some illicit small arms and light weapons in Africa are trafficked from other regions, there are prominent sources within the continent itself.
- » Counter-trafficking interventions need to consider the livelihoods of border and transit communities, while also recognizing the shorter-term imperative of preventing violent extremist actors' access to deadly weaponry.
- » Purely security-centered counter-trafficking approaches risk pushing border and transit communities towards criminality and, potentially, towards facilitating violent extremism.

CONTEXT

Small arms and light weapons are among the main instruments of conflict and violence, including violent extremism, in Africa. The member states of the African Union (AU) have acknowledged this link by prioritizing both small arms control and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) in their strategy to prevent and reduce armed conflict. The 2016 *AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by 2020* makes commitments on both policy fields.¹

1 With respect to P/CVE, these include operationalizing the AU Special Fund for Prevention and Combating of Terrorism and Violent Extremism; adopting human security and community involvement approaches to counter and prevent terrorism and violent extremism; deploying efforts to track down terrorists and their supporting networks; and enhancing national capacities for the prevention and combating of terrorism and violent extremism. See AU, Master

Reliable information and analysis are critical for effectively dealing with such complex and multi-dimensional challenges as violent extremism and illicit arms flows. The AU Commission partnered with the Small Arms Survey to undertake a regional mapping of illicit weapons, culminating in the release of the report *Weapons Compass: Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa* in Addis Ababa, July 2019.² This Policy Note highlights the relevance of the report's findings and recommendations for P/CVE efforts, with an emphasis on arms trafficking across the continent's land borders.

RELEVANCE TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

The overlap between small arms trafficking and violent extremism poses challenges for policymakers and practitioners in terms of inclusivity, coordination, evaluation of best practices, and balancing short- and long-term programmatic objectives.

Contrary to common perceptions that the bulk of illicit small arms and light weapons circulating in Africa is trafficked from other regions, the AU-Small Arms Survey report finds prominent sources of illicit weapons within the continent itself. Fifteen of the twenty-one African states that contributed information to the study ranked the (re-)circulation of arms across land borders as the main source of illicit arms. Evidence from peace support operations, UN embargo monitoring groups, and specialized research institutions also reveals that the majority of materiel confiscated in conflict zones is decades-old and was diverted from once licit stockpiles in the region before being smuggled and recirculated across borders.³

Another intraregional source of arms, although usually a small proportion of arsenals, is craft weapons⁴ produced by local artisans. Craft production of weapons occurs outside of state control, by hand, in small quantities, and with a reduced capability. Their low price makes craft firearms particularly attractive for self-protection and hunting.⁵ Yet craft firearms have also been found in the hands of violent extremist groups such as Boko Haram⁶ and are smuggled across borders.⁷

Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020 (Lusaka Master Roadmap 2016) (Addis Ababa: African Union (AU), 2016), 10–11.

2 AUC and Small Arms Survey, *Weapons Compass: Mapping Illicit Small Arms Flows in Africa* (Addis Ababa and Geneva: AUC and Small Arms Survey, 2019). The report is available in Arabic, English, French, and Portuguese on the Small Arms Survey's website: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/about-us/highlights/2019/highlight-au-mapping.html>.

3 This does not mean that new illicit transfers from other regions no longer take place at all. Recent transfers can comprise old, often surplus materiel. Moreover, the report notes that while they represent a small proportion of seized equipment, weapons and ammunition manufactured since 2010 have been documented in several African conflicts, pointing to recent illicit arms transfers, or to recent diversion of national stockpiles. See: AUC and Small Arms Survey, *Weapons Compass*, 34–35.

4 "Craft production of small arms refers principally to weapons and ammunition that are fabricated largely by hand in relatively small quantities," for more on craft weapons, see: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/weapons-and-markets/producers/craft-production.html>.

5 AUC and Small Arms Survey, *Weapons Compass*, 55–58; Matthias Nowak and Andre Gsell, *Handmade and Deadly: Craft Production of Small Arms in Nigeria, Briefing Paper* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2018), 8.

6 Nowak and Gsell, *Handmade and Deadly*, 1.

7 AUC and Small Arms Survey, *Weapons Compass*, 55.

State security providers are often absent in remote border regions affected by arms trafficking. They can also be part of the problem through the actions of corrupt elements who engage in the illegal trade for personal profit. As a result, local communities seek to arm themselves for protection and thus contribute to the increasing demand for illicit weapons. For instance, informal gold diggers in northern Niger resorted to illicit firearms possession to take security in their own hand, relying on converted imitation handguns smuggled from Libya.⁸ Members of pastoralist groups in Kenya, Somaliland, South Sudan, and Uganda have similarly acquired small arms for protecting cattle and property.⁹ The ensuing availability of these weapons can lead to the rapid escalation of local conflicts and deteriorating security perceptions, which further stimulates the illicit firearm market—local, national, and regional.

Illicit arms flows in Africa are closely connected to the livelihoods of populations in isolated border areas. These border communities often depend on informal cross-border trade to sustain their livelihoods. Cross-border small arms trafficking can be embedded in or use the same routes as other forms of legitimate trade. Consequently, when authorities crack down, they risk further marginalizing border communities and pushing them towards other dangerous and destabilizing criminal activities and trade routes. As research in the Sahel has shown, policies initially aimed at preventing and criminalizing human trafficking have led some traditional, legitimate migrant transporters to engage in drug trafficking, extremism, and insurgency.¹⁰

On the other hand, while counter-trafficking efforts can have unintended consequences, the issue of illicit arms flows often requires a robust response to counter the extremist violence that can stem from it. Analysis of the assault rifles recovered at multiple sites of attacks perpetrated by al-Qaeda-linked organizations in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali in 2015–2016 suggests that some of the weapons were produced in the same factory in 2011 and originated from the same batch—as evidenced by their sequential serial numbers.¹¹ Such cases illustrate how rapidly armed groups can move weapons across borders and use them in terrorist attacks. A particular policy challenge therefore lies in preventing and reducing armed groups' capacity to move deadly materiel across borders, while not marginalizing border communities to themselves become actors of trafficking and violent extremism.

8 Mathieu Pellerin, *Beyond the Wild West: The Gold Rush in Northern Niger* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2017), 8.

9 See Manasseh Wepundi, et al., *Evolving Traditional Practices: Managing Small Arms in the Horn of Africa and Karamoja Cluster* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2014).

10 See Jérôme Tubiana and Claudio Gramizzi, *Tubu Trouble: State and Statelessness in the Chad–Sudan–Libya Triangle*, Joint publication of the Human Security Baseline Assessment project, Security Assessment in North Africa project, and Conflict Armament Research, Working Paper No. 43 (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2017).

11 Holger Anders, *Monitoring Illicit Arms Flows: The Role of UN Peacekeeping Operations*, Security Assessment in North Africa Briefing Paper (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2018, 4–5); CAR (Conflict Armament Research), *Investigating Cross-border Weapon Transfers in the Sahel* (London: CAR, 2016).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The AU-Small Arms Survey study suggests two principal ways to link the policy fields of small arms control and P/CVE. From a prevention perspective, counter-trafficking interventions need to consider the livelihoods of border communities during implementation, while recognizing the shorter-term imperative of preventing violent extremist actors' access to deadly weaponry. Understanding, communicating, and acting upon these contradictions can improve the coordination of interventions, rationalize the use of scarce resources, and enhance policy impact.

As few relevant interventions have been thoroughly assessed to date, further investigation is needed to develop practical guidance and tools in specific and mature policy areas and to coordinate initiatives more efficiently.

Addressing knowledge gaps

- » Improve monitoring and analysis of illicit sources of weapons and ammunition for violent extremist actors. The report notes that international actors and NGOs produce much of the weapons-related intelligence currently available on the continent. States need to report more systematically to the existing weapons-related international¹² and regional information exchange platforms. Under the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, states are also encouraged to develop national indicators to monitor progress towards a reduction of illicit arms flows by 2030 (target 16.4).¹³
- » Better understand the sources of insecurity, the role of border populations, and the gender dynamics in hard-to-access areas affected by small arms trafficking. The report notes instances where women actively participated in trafficking willingly or by lack of choice. Women and girls should not only be considered as victims of small arms-related violence, but also as those with active roles in trafficking, as well as agents for change with insight into stemming arms flows. In Libya, for instance, the UN Mine Action Service supported women to raise awareness in their communities of small arms-related risks and control measures through educational sessions, radio programs, and distributing material on safe storage and handling.¹⁴ Existing initiatives to engage with women in the search for and implementation of solutions need to be

12 For instance, the Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System, see: INTERPOL, *Illicit Arms Records and tracing Management System (iARMS)*.

13 See Glenn McDonald, Anna Alvazzi del Frate, and Moshe Ben Hamo Yeger, *Arms Control 2.0: Operationalizing SDG Target 16.4* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2017).

14 United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), "UNMAS Supports Libyan Women to Organize the First Small Arms and Light Weapons National Awareness Day in Libya," 2017.

scaled up and more thoroughly assessed to leverage women as agents of change in reducing the security risk of small arms and light weapons to civilians and local communities.¹⁵

Generating practical guidance

- » Implement joint border security arrangements. Border security initiatives should engage border communities in their efforts to stem trafficking. Existing efforts include state-led sub-regional cross-border security strategies, tripartite, quadripartite, and joint border commissions,¹⁶ as well as cross-border committees and projects facilitated by civil-society organizations.¹⁷ Creating a monitoring and evaluation framework for these initiatives is a necessary step towards generating practical guidance in this critical operational domain.
- » Organize civilian weapons collection initiatives. While international guidance on voluntary weapons surrender exists,¹⁸ the context-specific experiences of African states require further evaluation. The annual Amnesty Month, held every September to support the AU's Silence the Guns agenda, provides momentum for states and their partners to contextualize their approaches to weapons collection and identify best practices through adequate monitoring and evaluation. During Amnesty Month, AU member states promote and organize weapons surrender programs, while assuring anonymity and immunity to those surrendering their weapons.¹⁹
- » Address craft production and converted firearms. Although craft production has been a challenge for decades²⁰ and across the continent, good practices in this area remain poorly understood. While penalizing supplies to illicit networks, regional governments should provide alternative career paths to artisans and consider regularizing their activities for instance through censuses, registration campaigns, and the marking of products. States also need to clarify and harmonize their national regulations concerning readily convertible imitation firearms to prevent their illicit transformation into lethal weapons and trafficking, similar to policies in other regions.²¹

15 AU Commission, *Continental Results Framework: Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa (2018–2028)* (Addis Ababa: African Union Commission, 2019).

16 See Sami Faltas, *Controlling Small Arms: Practical Lessons in Civilian Disarmament and Anti-trafficking* (Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion, 2018).

17 See, for instance, the work of the Danish Demining Group (DDG) at the Tunisian-Libyan border: DDG, "Tunisian-Libyan Border FactSheet."

18 See, for instance, Module 05.40 in United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), *Modular Small-arms-control Implementation Compendium (MOSAIC)*.

19 AU, "Africa Amnesty Month."

20 See Emmanuel Kwesi Aning, "The Anatomy of Ghana's Secret Arms Industry," in Nicolas Florquin and Eric G. Berman (eds.), *Armed and Aimless: Armed Groups, Guns, and Human Security in the ECOWAS Region* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2005), 78-107.

21 For a review of initiatives and challenges in Europe, see Nicolas Florquin and Benjamin King, *From Legal to Lethal: Converted Firearms in Europe* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2018).

Improving coordination

- » Coordinate small arms interventions at the strategic level. Myriad international and regional actors are involved in implementing small arms-related interventions on the continent, with emphasis on regions affected by conflict and violent extremism, such as the Sahel. Developing regional and national strategies and action plans on small arms can support more effective inter-governmental coordination of these efforts. These policy frameworks are more locally owned, and therefore effective, when elaborated through inclusive processes. Prioritization tools, such as the physical security and stockpile management (PSSM) matrix, can facilitate the development and coordination of such strategies.²²
- » Coordinate with other policy fields. Small arms control is closely interconnected with other policy areas, including security sector reform, the fight against transitional organized crime, women, peace, and security, and P/CVE. All these policy fields have their own strategic frameworks and implementation processes, yet to date there has been insufficient interaction and coordination with them at the national and local levels. There are obvious opportunities for researchers from these different sectors to better coordinate their research agendas and projects through participation in networks such as RESOLVE, for instance. Practitioners from relevant national commissions and civil society groups could identify opportunities to exchange experiences and coordinate their actions with the other communities of practice.

CONCLUSION

The challenges of tackling illicit arms flows in Africa should resonate strongly with P/CVE practitioners. On the one hand, counter-trafficking initiatives must prevent terrorist access to weapons in the short term. On the other hand, if undertaken without consideration for the livelihood of transit communities, security-centered counter-trafficking approaches are bound to be counter-productive in the long-run and may push these populations towards deeper criminality and, potentially, the facilitation of violent extremism. The synergies between the fields of small arms control and P/CVE are therefore critical, yet only tangentially explored. Both fields need more meaningful cooperation between researchers and practitioners.

²² Sarah Parker, *Facilitating PSSM Assistance in the Sahel and Beyond: Introducing the PSSM Priorities Matrix* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, December 2016).

SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS, BY TOPIC

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MSC. *Transnational Security Report. Cooperating Across Borders: Tackling Illicit Flows*. Munich: Munich Security Conference (MSC), 2019. https://tsr.securityconference.de/assets/2019/Transnational_Security/MSC_TransnationalSecurity_Report.pdf

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- AU. *Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by Year 2020 (Lusaka Master Roadmap 2016)*. African Union (AU). 2016. <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/N-Instruments/2018-AU-Silencing-the-Guns-Roadmap-ENG.pdf>
- . "Africa Amnesty Month." <https://au.int/en/africa-amnesty-month>
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LINKING OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL APPROACHES OF ENGAGING ARMED ACTORS

CLAUDIA HOFMANN

COMMUNITY-BASED ARMED GROUPS SERIES

“Conflicts in which one or more of the main actors are not part of the state demonstrate the limitations of engagement in a state-centric system.”

FAST FACTS

- » By using their dependence on a positive public image, NGOs and private actors have been able to persuade some armed actors to change their behavior.
- » Coordinated approaches between different actors utilizing their respective strengths may help achieve specific goals and sustainable resolutions where non-state armed actors are involved.
- » Strategically linking official and unofficial approaches may avoid adverse consequences and provide beneficial and constructive approaches to engaging non-state armed actors now and in the future.

CONTEXT

Internal conflict¹—conflict between a government and a non-governmental party, such as non-state armed actors or community-based armed groups—remains the most common type of conflict today.² In 2015, the number of internal conflicts rose to over 50 and have since remained at that level, vastly outnumbering the two interstate conflicts recorded most recently

1 Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge, Polity, 2013).

2 Definition of “intrastate conflict:” “A conflict between a government and a non-governmental party, with no interference from other countries.” Numbers include those for “internationalized conflict:” “armed conflict between a government and a non-government party where the government side, the opposing side, or both sides, receive troop support from other governments that actively participate in the conflict.” See “Definitions,” Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), accessed March 27, 2020, <https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/>.

in 2018.³ These type of conflicts, occurring within states rather than between them, as well as the involvement of non-state armed actors within them, pose fundamental challenges to the traditional conflict resolution approaches of state actors and international organizations. Conflicts in which one or more of the main actors are not part of the state demonstrate the limitations of engagement in a state-centric system.

From counterinsurgency and containment, through negotiation and mediation, to integration and cooptation,⁴ state and international approaches to address non-state armed actors face a significant obstacle: legitimacy. On the one hand, there is a need to engage armed actors to meaningfully address the conflict. On the other, the assumed illegitimacy of non-state armed actors and community-based armed groups' activities means that there are implications for seeming to accept their grievances as legitimate through such engagement. The appearance of the latter could adversely affect the traditional strategic position of international and state actors with regard to their negotiation position and conflict resolution efforts as well as their status as governing power through their monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force and undermine the effectiveness of their approaches.

In the face of this dichotomy, official, state-based actors, specialized non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private actors—including elder statesmen, influential international figures, and retired high political officials—have developed independent conflict resolution approaches, leveraging their non-state status to fill the gap left by states and international organizations. These unofficial, approaches are mainly centered around:

1. promoting international norms among non-state armed actors with the goal of persuading armed actors to change their behavior, particularly in favor of the protection of civilians and combatants; and
2. engaging in dialogue, mediation, mediation support, and negotiation with the goal to resolve the conflict itself.⁵

In practice, states, international organizations, and these specialized NGOs and private actors frequently operate in the same locations at the same time, yet independently from each other. In the past, this led to unintended consequences that undermined the effectiveness of their respective approaches, such as duplication of effort and the instrumentalization of their efforts. To avoid such adverse effects while

3 Most recent data from 2018. See “Armed Conflict by Type,” Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), accessed March 27, 2020, <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/charts/>.

4 Véronique Dudouet, “Mediating Peace with Proscribed Armed Groups,” *United States Institute of Peace*, Special Report no. 239, 2010; Claudia Hofmann, “Engaging Non-State Armed Groups in Humanitarian Action,” *International Peacekeeping* 13(3) (2006): 396–409; Claudia Hofmann and Ulrich Schneckener, “NGOs and Nonstate Armed Actors. Improving Compliance with International Norms,” *United States Institute of Peace*, Special Report no. 284, 2011.

5 NGOs, particularly in the development field, have also demonstrated constructive engagement with non-state armed actors in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance in territory controlled by armed actors. Such action rarely moves beyond short- and medium-term practical considerations. See Jörn Gravingholt, Claudia Hofmann, and Stephan Klingebiel, *Development Cooperation and Non-State Armed Groups*, Bonn: German Development Institute (DIE) (Studies 29), 2007, chapters 4 and 5.

leveraging their respective strengths in engaging non-state armed actors and state-based actors, these diverse actors alike need to improve communication, coordination, collaboration, and cooperation.

RELEVANCE TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

In many cases, specialized NGOs and private actors have attempted to leverage contacts and access from their existing or previous work to facilitate dialogue with non-state armed actors, conduct informal pre-negotiations, prepare non-papers, and mediate directly between non-state armed actors and host governments. The goal of these unofficial efforts is to mitigate armed actor violence, especially when committed against civilian populations.⁶ Despite considerable limitations, these approaches have offered constructive new avenues for engaging non-state armed actors that can, in some instances, offset the challenges state-based actors encounter.⁷ Policymakers can involve such approaches in their official or unofficial efforts of conflict resolution or stabilization to improve their overall effectiveness, reach, and sustainability.

For example, NGOs and private actors have been successful in leveraging the claims of moral authority, popular representation, and governance of armed actors that promote a political agenda and program—such as traditional rebel groups or clan chiefs—as sources of legitimacy. By using their dependence on a positive public image, NGOs and private actors have been able to persuade some armed actors to change their behavior. This mechanism can also be effective for community-based armed groups that claim responsibility towards a constituency or stakeholders.

For instance, Geneva Call, a Swiss NGO, has persuaded over 50 armed actors to unilaterally sign their “Deed of Commitment”. The Deed commits signatories to adhering to a total ban on anti-personnel mines, undertaking stockpile destruction, allowing monitoring and evaluation of these efforts, adjusting internal orders and directives in accordance with the Deed, and treating this commitment as part of a broader commitment to humanitarian norms.⁸ Incentives for signatories to promote stockpile reduction among their constituencies can range from the provision of training in international humanitarian law and the prestige of engaging with a Swiss organization. In 2018, 52 signatories were actively engaged with Geneva Call in awareness-raising and training sessions, 16 groups were engaged in strengthening their internal rules and procedures, and 2,500 stockpiled anti-personnel mines were destroyed by the Polisario Front in coordination with the Sahrawi Mine Action Coordination Office in the Western Sahara.⁹

6 Claudia Hofmann, *Reasoning with Rebels. International NGOs’ Approaches to Engaging Armed Groups*, RP 11, Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2012.

7 Claudia Hofmann, “Engaging Armed Actors in Conflict Mediation. Consolidating Government and Non-government Approaches,” in *Humanitarian Engagement with Non-state Armed Groups* (London: Chatham House, 2016), 23-37.

8 “Deed of Commitment Under Geneva Call for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action,” Geneva Call, accessed March 27, 2020, <https://www.genevacall.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/DoC-Banning-anti-personnel-mines.pdf>. The impact of individual measures on levels of violence is difficult to establish but Geneva Call conducts long-term monitoring and evaluation missions for each signatory where possible.

9 “Annual Report 2018,” Geneva Call, accessed March 27, 2020, https://www.genevacall.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/GEC-RA2018A4_web-compressed-1.pdf, 12.

The Carter Center—a U.S.-based NGO headed by elder statesman, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter—for example, offers high-level mediation services to both non-state armed actors and states. The approach builds on existing relationships and the rationale that constructive dialogue will eventually lead to a reduction of violence. For instance, the Carter Center successfully negotiated a six months ceasefire between Colonel Omar al-Bashir and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M), and assisted in achieving mutual commitments by Bashir and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda in the Nairobi Agreement in 1999.¹⁰ Similarly, the Carter Center has engaged in conflict resolution efforts between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, resulting in constructive impact on the 2008 Israel-Hamas ceasefire, the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in October 2011, and the May 2011 Fatah-Hamas agreement.¹¹

Initiatives such as these broaden the range of engagement and conflict resolution approaches with non-state armed groups as well as community-based armed groups available to international actors and should be taken into consideration more strategically. Instead of focusing solely on “track 1” or even “track 1.5” approaches, policymakers should consider more careful coordination and support for “track 2” and “track 3” engagement.¹² Coordinated approaches between different actors utilizing their respective strengths may help achieve specific goals and sustainable resolutions where non-state armed actors are involved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The nature of NGOs and private actors allows them to engage non-state armed actors from a different vantage point than state actors. They portray their work as independent from strategic and financial considerations and they lack the resources to coerce armed actors into an agreement. Accordingly, in the field, NGOs and private actors can be perceived as more principled, altruistic, and committed to a sustainable resolution than more political state actors. As a result, some armed actors have been more open to engaging constructively with NGOs and private actors for conflict resolution or violence reduction.

At the same time, NGOs and private actors face a number of challenges in this work that state actors and international organizations should take into account when considering a collaboration. Often, limited financial resources present NGOs and private actors with an obstacle to continued and committed

10 Hofmann, *Reasoning with Rebels*. The Carter Center reduced their conflict resolution involvement in Sudan after the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) established itself as a strong mediator after 2002. The Center remains active with government officials, opposition leaders, and civil society members in Sudan and South Sudan to present. See “Sudan,” Carter Center, accessed March 27, 2020, <https://www.cartercenter.org/countries/sudan.html>.

11 Claudia Hofmann and Carolin Goerzig, “Influencing Negotiation Willingness in the Middle East: The Potential Contributions of Private Actors,” *Negotiation Journal* 32 (2) (2016): 151-163. See also “Supporting Peace in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory,” *Carter Center*, accessed March 27, 2020, https://www.cartercenter.org/peace/conflict_resolution/israel-palestine/index.html.

12 Palmiano Federer, Julia, Julia Pickhardt, Philipp Lustenberger, Christian Altpeter, and Katrina Abatis, “Beyond the Tracks? Reflections on Multitrack Approaches to Peace Processes,” Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, the Center for Security Studies ETH Zurich, Folke Bernadotte Academy and swisspeace, accessed May 27, 2020, <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/Mediation-Multi-Track-01-block.pdf>.

engagement over a longer period, leading to serious questions about the sustainability and feasibility of their efforts. Additionally, the mandate, credibility, and legitimacy of unofficial actors are not as clear-cut as that of official actors, such as states and international organizations. Accordingly, collaboration between a state actor or international organization and an NGO or private actor should be clearly outlined, defined, and in line with the official policy it would complement.

The plurality of simultaneous unofficial initiatives has also led to duplication of effort and instrumentalization in the past.¹³ Programs that underdeliver their potential can present security issues for international personnel and local staff, for example if a particular effort is no longer appreciated by the armed actor. This could affect related efforts of state actors and international organizations. Finally, measuring the longer-term effectiveness and sustainability of unofficial engagement by NGOs and private actors has been almost impossible and often lacking in effective monitoring and evaluation as access and resources wane when funding changes.

Nonetheless, the contributions of specialized NGOs and private actors are worth considering in three particular fields: i) supplementing official policy; ii) taking on responsibility for distinct policy components; and iii) developing policy and early warning.

Supplementing official policy

NGOs, private actors, states, and international organizations do not work independently from each other. Not only are they active in the same fields, especially in development assistance and humanitarian aid, NGOs and private actors can also receive funding for many of their initiatives from states and international organizations. Additionally, NGOs and private actors often provide specialized expertise to states and international organizations through consultations that may impact official policy. To date, the collaboration between NGOs and private actors and states and international organizations primarily remains ad hoc and focused on development and humanitarian aid.¹⁴

- » States and international organizations should increase their engagement with specialized NGOs and private actors' expertise through regular cross-sectoral consultations and exchanges, specifically in the context of engagement with non-state armed actors and community-based armed groups.

Regular and systematic exchanges with officials that have the ability to influence decision-making on armed actor engagement could improve official policy and coordination between unofficial and official actors. An example of such regular exchange and consultation is the Oslo Forum, a series of retreats for international conflict mediators, high-level decision-makers, and other peace process actors.¹⁵

13 Anderson, Mary, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—Or War* (Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1999).

14 Hofmann, "Engaging Armed Actors in Conflict Mediation," 30.

15 "The Oslo Forum," Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, accessed May 4, 2020, <https://www.hdcentre.org/osloforum/the-oslo-forum/>.

- » States and international organizations should engage with and learn from the diverse vantage points that NGOs and private actors can bring to official processes.

Specialized NGOs and private actors may be able to supplement an official initiative with non-state to non-state mediation services and mediation support. As an example, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), a Swiss NGO, provides ongoing support to the Norwegian government in their facilitation of the conflict between the government of the Philippines and the communist National Democratic Front. The HD Centre oversees the work of the Joint Monitoring Committee responsible for receiving and processing complaints of violations of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law.¹⁶ In spaces where community-based armed groups are active, specialized NGOs and private actors can facilitate their official or unofficial engagement in national mediation and reconciliation processes to support a holistic process.

Taking responsibility for distinct policy components

States and international organizations continue to experience challenges in engaging non-state armed actors related to the sovereignty, legitimacy, and authority of armed actors, and the credibility of their grievances. Many are hesitant to involve NGOs and private actors more strategically because of potential uncertainty and unintended political consequences of engaging armed groups even through a secondary organization. However, specialized NGOs and private actors may be in a position to step into that space and circumvent broader issues of legitimacy.

- » States and international organizations should support specialized NGOs and private actors to engage armed actors on specific issues through strategic partnerships.

Specific policy components that require cooperation from non-state armed actors and community-based armed groups to be addressed comprehensively could be covered by strategic partnerships with NGOs and private actors. As an example, in its effort to comprehensively address the elimination of the use of anti-personnel landmines and other explosive remnants of war, the Swiss government entered strategic partnerships with Geneva Call, the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), the Cluster Munition Coalition, and the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor.¹⁷ Geneva Call, for its part, engages armed actors to persuade them to unilaterally commit to banning anti-personnel landmines and to destroying any landmine stockpile. This strategy allows the Swiss government to comprehensively approach their mine action policy, without grappling with issues related to sovereignty, legitimacy, authority, and

16 “Philippines NDF,” Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, accessed March 27, 2020, <https://www.hdcentre.org/activities/philippines-ndf/>.

17 “Anti-personnel mines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war,” Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, accessed March 27, 2020, <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/foreign-policy/security-policy/disarmament-non-proliferation/conventional-weapons/mines.html>. The Swiss government also works closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

credibility. The International Committee of the Red Cross utilizes a similar approach of persuasion with non-state armed actors in the field of international humanitarian and human rights law.¹⁸

Developing policies and providing early warning

States and international organizations working on development policy and humanitarian aid employ traditional bureaucracies that rely on established reporting and response systems. While these systems tend to be reliable, they often fail to capture nuanced developments on the ground and can be slow in addressing new ones. Specialized NGOs and private actors' existing proximity to armed actors and community-based armed groups may allow for faster detection and shorter reaction times.

- » States and international organizations should engage specialized NGOs and private actors' in-depth knowledge of situations on the ground.

Their proximity in the field and their personal connections often provide NGOs and private actors with insight into the development of situations in the field. NGOs and private actors may be able to identify windows of opportunity and potential for decline in a situation and provide early warning of imminent risks. An example is the Carter Center's work in Uganda, which seized a window of opportunity and access before an official process through the Northern Uganda Peace Initiative (NUPI) and supported by USAID was established in 2003. Regular cross-sectoral consultations and exchanges between state actors, international organizations, and NGOs and private actors active in the respective field would facilitate the identification of such opportunities.

- » States and international organizations should engage with NGOs and private actors who are already on the ground to act more promptly in a window of opportunity.

NGOs and private actors tend to be more flexible and nimbler in their actions, allowing them to take initial steps towards instituting a constructive dialogue with non-state armed actors and community-based armed groups before states and international organizations are able. Support from states or international organizations could also alleviate concerns regarding lack of resources and appropriate training in negotiation and mediation, situational awareness, and recommended security measures. Seizing immediately on an opportunity may open the door for higher-level talks later on. As an example, the facilitation by Geneva Call between the United Somali Congress/Somali National Alliance and the African Union in 2007 regarding the destruction of land mine stockpiles served as a trust-building measure that benefited the combatant parties in their following interactions.

18 Claudia Hofmann and Ulrich Schneckener, "The Power of Persuasion. The Role of INGOs in Engaging Armed Groups", in *Inducing Compliance with International Humanitarian Law*, ed. Heike Krieger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 79–111. The International Committee of the Red Cross is more accurately classified as an independent quasi-governmental organization.

CONCLUSION

Many intervening external actors—official and unofficial—are involved in engaging non-state armed actors. These external actors employ different approaches, follow different goals, prioritize different instruments, provide different perspectives, and may even compete with each other in terms of goals, funding, and recognition. The lack of coordination between these approaches may not only fail to optimize engagement and maximize outcomes, but it may also lead to unintended, adverse consequences. Strategically linking official and unofficial approaches may avoid such adverse consequences and provide beneficial and constructive approaches to engaging non-state armed actors now and in the future.

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TRANSFORMING COMMUNITY-BASED ARMED GROUPS INTO COMMUNITY SECURITY PROVIDERS

MORITZ SCHUBERTH

COMMUNITY-BASED ARMED GROUPS SERIES

“A number of factors can help transform CBAGs from sources of insecurity into community service providers.”

FAST FACTS

- » In some cases, CBAGs in sub-Saharan Africa enjoy higher local legitimacy than state security forces due to their strong links to local cultural practices and their greater alignment with the social attitudes and community norms.
- » When promoted as agents of hybrid security governance, CBAGs may fill the security void left by an absent state.
- » To turn CBAGs into community security providers, interventions need to strengthen and formalize the security function of CBAGs while diminishing their political and criminal functions, without weakening the legitimacy of the state.

INTRODUCTION

Community-based armed groups (CBAGs) such as vigilantes, militias, and criminal gangs are armed groups that are embedded within communities and whose delineation can be defined by territory, blood ties, or shared identities.¹ While CBAGs have been found to engage in political violence on behalf of their sponsors and to commit crimes for self-motivated reasons, in many contexts including parts of sub-Saharan Africa they are also among the main providers of security. A recent RESOLVE research report mapped how local,

1 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.

national, and international actors have responded to a surge of CBAGs in sub-Saharan Africa and what lessons can be learned from these interventions.²

A number of factors can help transform CBAGs from sources of insecurity into community service providers. The RESOLVE report shows how both CBAGs' internal functions and external factors influence their behavior. CBAGs' internal functions include their organizational structure and internal processes and procedures, while external factors make up the environment in which they operate, such as norms and rules, regulatory and legal frameworks as well as accountability and oversight mechanisms.³ This categorization helps determine at what level approaches to CBAGs should intervene in order to change their behavior. This policy note provides recommendations for intervening actors to reinforce the constructive potential of CBAGs and limit their destructive potential. These recommendations—including the presence of oversight procedures, a binding legal framework, and accountability mechanisms—can help to transform multidimensional CBAGs into more accountable, capable, and rule-abiding providers of community security.

RELEVANCE TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

Hybrid security governance is a reality in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Plural security provision can manifest in more constructive or destructive ways. In some cases, CBAGs in sub-Saharan Africa enjoy higher local legitimacy than state security forces due to their strong links to local cultural practices and their greater alignment with the social attitudes and community norms.⁴ CBAGs may be the best available option for justice and security provision in the short term given the ineffectiveness of state security actors.⁵ However, CBAGs have the potential to be both providers of security and sources of insecurity.⁶

Some governments tolerate or even encourage CBAGs as cost-effective crime-control mechanisms in areas of limited statehood, as happened with *Sungusungu* in Tanzania.⁷ Government officials from Kenya to Nigeria also hire CBAGs to attack or intimidate the opposition or to advance a vested political agenda by spreading insecurity.⁸ In some conflict-affected states, the state co-opted CBAGs, or CBAGs acted as

2 Moritz Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019).

3 Lauren Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019).

4 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.

5 Nelson Kasfir, Georg Frerks, and Niels Terpstra, "Introduction: Armed Groups and Multi-layered Governance," *Civil Wars* 19, no. 3 (2018): 257–78.

6 Kate Meagher, "The Strength of Weak States? Non-State Security Forces and Hybrid Governance in Africa," *Development and Change* 43, no. 5 (2012): 1073–101.

7 Suzette Heald, "Controlling Crime and Corruption from Below: Sungusungu in Kenya," *International Relations* 21, no. 2 (2007): 183–99.

8 Adrienne LeBas, "Violence and Urban Order in Nairobi, Kenya and Lagos, Nigeria," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 48, no. 3 (2013): 240–62.

self-anointed defenders of the state against other types of non-state armed groups (NSAGs), including violent extremist groups such as Boko Haram.⁹

When promoted as agents of hybrid security governance, CBAGs may fill the security void left by an absent state. In numerous cases across sub-Saharan Africa, efforts to co-opt CBAGs ultimately gave legitimacy to predatory and illiberal armed actors. In Kenya, for example, anti-crime vigilantes were co-opted by the main political parties and transformed into political goons and criminal gangs.¹⁰ In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the promise of lucrative positions for *Mai Mai* leaders who join state security forces created incentive structures for the proliferation and expansion of CBAGs and led to increased violence.¹¹

There are, however, examples of CBAGs providing security without turning into sources of insecurity.¹² The common denominator across these cases is that internal functions, such as enforceable rules, and external factors, such as strong state oversight or a conducive legal framework can prevent CBAGs from turning into predatory sources of insecurity.¹³ Group discipline and the acceptance of formalized norms, roles, and processes are keys to prevent CBAGs from engaging in unregulated, reactive, or opportunistic violence.¹⁴ The following recommendations help intervening actors accentuate the productive aspects of CBAGs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

By approaching CBAGs as potential partners in the provision of community security, intervening actors can influence their organizational development trajectory and steer their behavior in a desired direction, similar to engaging with civil society organizations. The following recommendations are far from straightforward, as multiple factors can influence the behavior of CBAGs and interventions can have unintended consequences, especially if they are not adequately adapted to specific contexts.¹⁵

Internal functions

Interventions can reinforce and capitalize on constructive internal functions of CBAGs, for instance by building the organizational capacity of CBAGs, establishing clear organizational codes of conduct, improving their financial viability and sustainability, and formalizing command and control structures that insti-

9 Oluwaseun Bamidele, “Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) – A Community Security Option: A Comprehensive and Proactive Approach to Counter-Terrorism,” *Journal for Deradicalization* 7 (2016): 124–44.

10 Moritz Schuberth, “Hybrid Security Governance, Post-election Violence and the Legitimacy of Community-based Armed Groups in Urban Kenya,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 12, no. 2 (2018): 386–404.

11 Maria Eriksson Baaz and Judith Verweijen, “The Volatility of a Half-Cooked Bouillabaisse: Rebel-Military Integration and Conflict Dynamics in the Eastern DRC,” *African Affairs* 112, no. 449 (2013): 563–82.

12 Daniel Agbiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019).

13 Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success*.

14 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups*.

15 The recommendations are adapted from indicators presented in the USAID Civil Society Organizations Sustainability Index (CSOSI) and USAID Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Indicator Reference Sheets.

tutionalize and legitimize norms and rules. In Nairobi's Kibera slum, a former police officer attempted to formalize vigilantes by employing them in a private security company. This provided members with regular salaries and embedded them within a framework of clear and enforceable rules. Formalizing their role as security providers removed the incentive to join a CBAG, provided employment, and enforced regulation.¹⁶ The following recommendations for intervening actors such as governments and development programs are aimed at strengthening the capacity of CBAGs to provide community security:

» Increase Financial Viability and Sustainability

CBAGs should have access to sustained sources of funding to maintain permanent, paid staff and to continue their operations in the short and long term. In this respect, development programs must ensure that CBAGs do not rely on foreign funding that might be influenced by shifts in funding levels and priorities of foreign donors. Rather, interventions should help CBAGs raise their funding from local sources, including governments, businesses, and individual members. To promote public transparency and accountability, local governments can consult communities on their willingness to fund CBAGs as part of participatory budgeting, a process that allows citizens to directly participate in the allocation of a defined part of a government's budget.¹⁷

» Build Organizational Capacity

CBAGs should have and follow clearly defined missions, objectives, management structures and written policies or procedures to guide organizational operations. To increase the organizational capacity of CBAGs, development programs should conduct trainings on management and logistics as well as in good governance, including anti-corruption, human rights, and rule of law. Interventions should focus specifically on putting sound financial management systems in place or ensuring that CBAGs have access to professional financial management services.

» Reflect Community Needs and Priorities

The security services CBAGs provide should reflect the needs and priorities of their communities. Development programs can help CBAGs put clear and transparent procedures in place to determine the needs and priorities of their communities, for instance through participatory methods such as the community score card (CSC) tool.¹⁸ Intervening actors should make sure that CBAGs consult and provide their security services to individuals beyond their own members and without discrimination with regards to race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.

16 Moritz Schuberth, "The Impact of Drug Trafficking on Informal Security Actors in Kenya," *Africa Spectrum* 49, no. 3 (2014): 55–81.

17 Anwar Shah, ed., *Participatory Budgeting* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2007).

18 CARE, *The Community Score Card (CSC): A Generic Guide for Implementing CARE's CSC Process to Improve Quality of Services* (Malawi: Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc., 2013).

External factors

Interventions can also contribute to the institutionalization and legitimization of CBAGs through enhancing or leveraging norms and rules, shared beliefs, and clearly established accountability and oversight mechanisms. In the case of the Arrow Boys of Teso in eastern Uganda, for instance, early oversight by the national army helped limit abuses by CBAGs.¹⁹ The following recommendations for governments and other intervening actors are aimed at establishing a conducive environment where CBAGs can thrive as community security providers:

» Establish Accountability and Oversight Mechanisms

Governments should pass national laws and regulations that provide clear guidance on government oversight over CBAGs. To put these laws and regulations into practice, governments, national human rights commissions and civil society organizations should establish clear and transparent external oversight mechanisms and provide easily accessible channels through which communities can report complaints related to CBAGs and other security providers, for instance hotlines or online forms. Moreover, local or central governments should provide funds to CBAGs in an open and transparent manner and require CBAGs receiving public funding to undergo regular financial audits.

» Pass Clear Laws and Regulations

A clear legal and regulatory environment is key to governing the security services provided by CBAGs. Governments should pass and consistently implement laws and regulations on CBAGs, including on their registration. Laws and regulations should also set out clear and limited roles and responsibilities for CBAGs, limiting the scope of their permissible activities. To make sure all stakeholders have a common understanding of the legal and regulatory framework within which they operate, governments and legal experts should train CBAGs, communities, and local authorities in specialized laws related to CBAGs.

» Capitalize on Norms and Social Rules

While it is difficult for intervening actors to directly influence long-established norms and social rules, interventions can capitalize on existing beliefs or cultural aspects that are conducive to strengthening the productive features of CBAGs. Faith-based vigilantes in Kenya—such as Kibera’s Nubian-based *Al Safa* and an antinarcotics vigilante group established by the Council of Imams in Mombasa—are more resistant to being instrumentalized by drug lords than secular CBAGs due to their strong religious and cultural foundations.²⁰ Building on deep contextual knowledge and actor mapping will help intervening actors understand what beliefs or cultural aspects can be leveraged to transform CBAGs into more reliable security providers.

19 Agbiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

20 Schuberth, “The Impact of Drug Trafficking on Informal Security Actors in Kenya.”

CONCLUSION

This paper provided recommendations for intervening actors working with CBAGs to reinforce their constructive potential and limit their destructive potential. To turn CBAGs into community security providers, interventions need to strengthen and formalize the security function of CBAGs while diminishing their political and criminal functions, without weakening the legitimacy of the state.

The recommendations aim to turn multi-dimensional CBAGs into more accountable, capable, and rule-abiding providers of community security that function more like civil society organizations than like informal vigilantes. It is important to keep in mind, however, that such a transformation is difficult to achieve in complex political emergencies because it is costly and requires long-term commitments by multiple actors.

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MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY-BASED ARMED GROUPS

MORITZ SCHUBERTH

COMMUNITY-BASED ARMED GROUPS SERIES

“It is difficult to measure results of approaches to CBAGs, attribute them to specific interventions, and evaluate their impacts.”

FAST FACTS

- » Over recent decades, numerous national and international actors working in fragile, conflict-affected, and post-conflict states have developed a set of standard tools to approach CBAGs.
- » Better metrics are needed to measure the success of interventions and to more accurately evaluate their impacts.
- » Although the overall goal of approaches towards CBAGs is an improvement in community security for the populations living in areas where CBAGs are present, each approach has its specific objective.

INTRODUCTION

Community-Based Armed Groups (CBAGs) are armed groups that are embedded within communities and whose delineation can be defined by territory, blood ties, or shared identities; this definition includes vigilantes, militias, and criminal gangs.¹ A recent RESOLVE paper has mapped how different intervening actors—governments, communities, civil society organizations, humanitarian and development agencies, and security providers—have approached the challenges posed by CBAGs in sub-Saharan Africa and how successful these approaches have been.²

- 1 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.
- 2 Moritz Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019).

One of the key findings is that it is difficult to measure results of approaches to CBAGs, attribute them to specific interventions, and evaluate their impacts due to multiple confounding factors and overlapping interventions. This policy note offers recommendations on how to assess the success of different approaches to CBAGs, proposing a set of indicators that intervening actors could use to measure the progress of interventions in meeting their objectives.

RELEVANCE TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

Over recent decades, numerous national and international actors working in fragile, conflict-affected, and post-conflict states have developed a set of standard tools to approach CBAGs.³ Approaches to CBAGs can be categorized as following three different logics: engagement, management, and transformation (EMT).

Engagement follows a short-term logic; actors pursuing this approach do so for instrumental reasons, that is, to ensure the safety of their own staff members while implementing their projects or to promote mediation and reduce violence within communities. Engagement refers, for instance, to humanitarian and development actors hiring armed clan-based militias to provide protection or to transport food to insecure areas in Somalia.⁴ Another example of engagement is provided by traditional community conflict resolution systems, such as *barazas communautaires* in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.⁵

Management approaches follow a mid-term logic as actors envision a substantive change in the targeted groups. Coercive management approaches involve security forces and heavy-handed measures to defeat CBAGs or incarcerate their members, for instance, militarized police raids against gangs in South Africa.⁶ Actors pursuing cooperative management approaches, by contrast, strive to alter the behavior and roles of CBAGs. Such changes can be achieved by negotiating with CBAGs, as happened with *grands trafiquants* in Mali;⁷ mediating between them, as in the Central African Republic between *ex-Séléka* rebels and anti-*Balaka* self-defense groups;⁸ or co-opting them, as done in Nigeria with the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF).⁹

Transformation follows a long-term logic and refers to a set of approaches to replace the functions that CBAGs provide to their members, sponsors, and the communities they are nested in with an accountable

3 Jairo Munive and Finn Stepputat, “Rethinking Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programs,” *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 4, no. 1 (2015): Art. 48.

4 Joakim Gundel, *Humanitarian Action in the New Security Environment: Policy and Operational Implications in Somalia and Somaliland* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2006).

5 Jean Chrysostome Kiyala, “Utilising a Traditional Approach to Restorative Justice in the Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers in the North Kivu Province, Democratic Republic of Congo,” *Africa Insight* 46, no. 3 (2016): 33-50.

6 Guy Lamb, “Police Militarisation and the ‘War on Crime’ in South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44, no. 5 (2018): 933-49.

7 Katrin Planta and Véronique Dudouet, *Fit for Negotiation? Options and Risks in the Political Transformation of Non-conventional Armed Groups* (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF), 2015).

8 Marie-Joëlle Zahar and Delphine Mechoulan, *Peace by Pieces? Local Mediation and Sustainable Peace in the Central African Republic* (New York: International Peace Institute, 2017).

9 Kyle Dietrich, “When We Can’t See the Enemy, Civilians Become the Enemy” - *Living Through Nigeria’s Six-Year Insurgency* (Washington, DC: Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2015).

state bound by the rule of law. Transformation addresses the root causes and structural conditions that led to the emergence of the CBAG ecosystem. This goal is difficult to achieve because it requires lengthy commitments and buy-in from multiple actors. As an example, the UN stabilization missions in the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mali all employed a combination of security sector reform (SSR), disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), and community violence reduction (CVR) programs, with varying degrees of success.¹⁰

Even though standard tools such as DDR and SSR have been applied in various settings and across circumstances, their effectiveness is regularly questioned.¹¹ This is partly due to the difficulty of attributing the results of EMT approaches to specific interventions. Multiple actors typically implement projects with similar objectives simultaneously. External factors such as elections and natural disasters might influence the outcome of any given intervention. Better metrics are needed to measure the success of interventions and to more accurately evaluate their impacts. The following recommendations are aimed at improving the measuring of success of approaches to CBAGs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The desired results of approaches to CBAGs include a protective rather than predatory behavior vis-à-vis local communities; identification of all key stakeholders and coordination among implementing partners; respect for the principles of conflict sensitivity; and adherence of CBAGs to good governance standards and norms, such as human rights and the rule of law. Moreover, approaches should yield sustainable results that persist after funding for the intervention runs out. The following recommendations show how intervening actors can better measure the progress towards these objectives:

Assessments

- » Conduct context analysis

Before deciding to intervene in areas with a high presence of CBAGs, it is essential to understand the nature of these groups and the local power dynamics. In Haiti, for instance, the United Nations Stabilization Mission (MINUSTAH) attempted to deal with urban CBAGs in the same way as rural rebels in Central Africa despite the fact that the conflict environment was not conducive to such an endeavor.¹² It is therefore recommended to design and implement interventions only after a thorough political economy analysis and evidence-based mapping of all local actors in coordination with academics and practitioners knowledgeable of the terrain.

10 Robert Muggah and Chris O'Donnell, "Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration," *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 4, no. 1 (2015): Art. 30.

11 Paul Jackson, "Introduction: Second-Generation Security Sector Reform," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 12, no. 1 (2018): 1–10.

12 Moritz Schuberth, "Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Unconventional Settings: The Case of MINUSTAH's Community Violence Reduction," *International Peacekeeping* 24, no. 3 (2017): 410–33.

- » Conduct baseline study and impact evaluation.

From the outset, intervening actors should plan for undertaking an impact evaluation after the intervention is completed. Rigorous impact assessment requires a thorough methodology that allows for testing underlying assumptions and causal relationships that underpin the intervention. Systematic baseline assessments and monitoring throughout the implementation phase are key to the success of an impact evaluation. Baseline assessments help to understand the environment of the intervention and inform the development of realistic indicator targets. A number of relevant monitoring and evaluation guides are referenced in the suggested further reading section below.

- » Use wide range of available data.

A host of quantitative and qualitative resources are publicly available to conduct micro-level analyses and evaluations at the output and outcome level, including conflict and insecurity data, crime rates, judicial statistics, public perceptions (as measured by opinion polls and focus groups), and reports by civil society organizations.¹³ Moreover, to measure the macro-level impact of interventions, it may be suitable to use global indicators to compare the performance of states with regards to governance, rule of law, or peace and conflict related issues. The suggested further reading section below presents a range of publicly available resources—including conflict and insecurity data as well as global indices—that can be used to design, plan, implement, and evaluate approaches to CBAGs.

Coordination

- » Improve coherence among intervening actors.

It is not only important to address issues of local ownership and ensure coordination between intervening actors and local partners, but also to promote integration between intervening actors themselves. The lack of coherence and coordination among the multitude of actors involved in the EMT of CBAGs—such as development or humanitarian agencies and armed forces—can have serious repercussions both for the overall outcome of interventions and for the application of lessons learned by other organizations, in different contexts. It is therefore imperative for all actors to closely coordinate interventions and their impact evaluation across geographical and institutional boundaries.

- » Harmonize reporting requirements.

Humanitarian and development actors currently use countless formats to report on progress and impact of their interventions. Simplifying and harmonizing reporting practices is one of the main goals of the Grand Bargain, an agreement between large donors and humanitarian organi-

13 Mark Sedra, “Adapting Security Sector Reform to Ground-Level Realities: The Transition to a Second-Generation Model,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 12, no. 1 (2018): 48-63.

zations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of aid delivery.¹⁴ To reduce the administrative burden for implementers and standardize terminology across the sector, the harmonized “8+3” reporting template represents a useful tool to reduce the reporting burden for partners, while providing the necessary information for donors.¹⁵

Indicators

» Take politics into account

Approaches to CBAGs are hardly purely technical in nature; as such, their evaluation needs to take local politics into account. For instance, failures to address political dynamics in the integration of CBAGs into state security forces, as was the case with *Mai Mai* in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, have shown that SSR is as much a political process as a technical approach.¹⁶ Indicators that measure progress against targets should reflect this reality and focus on political as well as technical aspects of the intervention.¹⁷

» Use locally adapted indicators

Just as intervening actors should use locally adapted approaches to CBAGs, they should also use measures of success that reflect contextual variation and focus on the predominant functions of the targeted CBAGs, following a thorough context analysis and actor mapping. The Everyday Peace Indicators research approach¹⁸ or the country-led approach to Governance Indicators in Justice and Safety at the Harvard Kennedy School¹⁹ provide useful guidelines on how to develop locally adapted indicators.

» Use transferable indicators

While it is crucial to use locally adapted indicators as per the previous recommendation, whenever feasible, it is preferable to have a set list of standard indicators that are applicable across contexts to allow for comparability between interventions. Table 1 below shows a set of specific indicators that intervening actors could use across contexts to measure the progress of interven-

14 See <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>

15 The reporting template is called the ‘8+3 template’ for the maximum number of questions donors should request in any report. See <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/harmonize-and-simplify-reporting-requirements/harmonized-reporting-template-83-template-final>

16 Maria Eriksson Baaz and Judith Verweijen, “The Volatility of a Half-Cooked Bouillabaisse: Rebel-Military Integration and Conflict Dynamics in the Eastern DRC,” *African Affairs* 112, no. 449 (2013): 563–82.

17 Paul Jackson and Shivit Bakrania, “Is the Future of SSR non-linear?,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 12, no. 1 (2018): 11–30.

18 See the website of Everyday Peace Indicators, a nonprofit charitable organization registered in the United States: <https://everydaypeaceindicators.org/>

19 See the website of the Indicators in Development: Safety and Justice program at the Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government: <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/wiener/programs/criminaljustice/research-publications/indicators-in-development-safety-and-justice>

tions in meeting their objectives. More resources on key performance indicators can be found in the suggested further reading section below.

Although the overall goal of approaches towards CBAGs is an improvement in community security for the populations living in areas where CBAGs are present, each approach has its specific objective. Engagement focuses on ensuring safe access for intervening actors to areas with CBAGs; coercive management aims to reduce the reach and legitimacy of CBAGs; cooperative management strives to improve the treatment of local populations by CBAGs; and transformation aspires to render CBAGs obsolete for their members, sponsors, and communities.

Table 1 proposes two specific indicators each to measure the progress in achieving the overall goal and the four objectives. For instance, a program seems to be on the right track to achieve improved community security if data show an increase in the percentage of the population perceiving security in their communities and a decrease in the number of violent incidents reported in the communities.

Table 1 Indicators to Measure Results of Different Approaches to CBAGs

Results	Indicators
<p>Goal: Improved community security for population living in areas with CBAGs</p>	<p>Indicator 1: Percentage of population perceiving (in)security in their community Indicator 2: Number of violent incidents reported</p>
<p>Objective 1 (Engagement): Safe access for intervening actors to areas with CBAGs</p>	<p>Indicator 1.1: Percentage of staff of humanitarian and development actors perceiving safe access to areas with CBAGs Indicator 1.2: Number and frequency of attacks on staff members of humanitarian and development actors</p>
<p>Objective 2 (Coercive Management): Reduced reach and legitimacy of CBAGs</p>	<p>Indicator 2.1: Number of people living in communities with CBAGs Indicator 2.2: Percentage of population perceiving CBAGs as legitimate</p>
<p>Objective 3 (Cooperative Management): Better treatment of population in local communities by CBAGs</p>	<p>Indicator 3.1: Percentage of population perceiving CBAGs as positive and constructive forces in communities Indicator 3.2: Number of reported incidents of abusive behavior by CBAGs to communities</p>
<p>Objective 4 (Transformation): Obsolescence of CBAGs for members, sponsors, and communities</p>	<p>Indicator 4.1: Number of members of CBAGs Indicator 4.2: Percentage of population perceiving state security provision as sufficient within communities</p>

Source: Author

CONCLUSION

This Policy Note provided recommendations on how to better measure the progress of EMT approaches against their objectives. Before designing and implementing any interventions, it is crucial to plan and conduct assessments, such as context analysis and actor mapping, baseline studies and impact evaluations. It is also recommended to use a wide range of publicly available data to set indicator targets and measure progress against objectives, both at the macro and micro level. When defining measures of success, it is important to take political dynamics into account and to ensure a good balance between locally adapted indicators and transferable indicators that are comparable across contexts. To improve comparability and application of lessons learned, it is equally important for intervening actors to coordinate their efforts to measure the success of their projects and to reduce duplication of efforts, for instance by harmonizing reporting requirements.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS, BY TOPIC

On Guidance for Monitoring and Evaluation

Seethaler, Franziska. *Assessing the Impact of DDR Programmes: Possibilities and Challenges*. New York: United Nations University, 2016. https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:5546/Assessing_Impact_of_DDR_Programmes_160322.pdf

Mattei, Cristina, and Sara Zeiger. *Evaluate Your CVE Results: Projecting Your Impact*. Abu Dhabi, UAE: Hedayah, 2018. https://www.hedayahcenter.org/resources/reports_and_publications/evaluate-your-cve-results-projecting-your-impact/

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Holmer, Georgia, Peter Bauman, and Kateira Aryaeinejad. *Measuring Up: Evaluating the Impact of P/CVE Programs*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2018. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/09/measuring-monitoring-and-evaluating-pcve-programs>

On Key Performance Indicators

Measuring Progress in Conflict Environments (MPICE) – United States Institute for Peace: [https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/MPICE_final_complete%20book%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/MPICE_final_complete%20book%20(2).pdf)

Post-Conflict Performance Indicators (PCPI) – World Bank: <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/310751531314751676/PCPIcriteria.pdf>

Common Indicators for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs) – International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS)/New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States: https://www.pbsbdialogue.org/media/filer_public/a1/52/a152494f-0bb0-4ff3-8908-14bb007abd25/psg_indicators_en.pdf

Sustainable Development Goal 16 Indicators – United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD): <https://unstats.un.org/wiki/display/SDGeHandbook/Goal+16>

United Nations Rule of Law Indicators – UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Department of Peace Operations: https://www.un.org/en/events/peacekeepersday/2011/publications/un_rule_of_law_indicators.pdf

Security Sector Governance and Justice Indicators Guide – United States Agency for International Development (USAID): <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/SSG-and-Justice-Indicators-Guide-6-2019.pdf>

On Conflict and Insecurity Data

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED): <https://www.acledata.com/>

Uppsala Data Conflict Program (UDCP): <https://ucdp.uu.se/>

Small Arms Survey: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/>

PAX Human Security Survey: <https://protectionofcivilians.org/projects/hss-iraq/> and <https://protectionofcivilians.org/projects/hss-south-sudan/>

The Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX): <https://data.humdata.org/>

On Global Indices

Rule of Law Index – World Justice Project (WJP): <https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/wjp-rule-law-index>

World Governance Indicators – World Bank: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/>

Fragile States Index – Fund for Peace: <https://fragilestatesindex.org/>

Global Peace Index – Institute for Economics and Peace: <http://visionofhumanity.org/indexes/global-peace-index/>

Conflict Barometer - Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIK): <https://hiik.de/conflict-barometer/current-version/?lang=en>

Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) – Mo Ibrahim Foundation: <http://iiag.online/>

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PHASE 2: Case Studies of Community-Based Armed Groups in West Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The RESOLVE Network research initiative on Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa, in partnership with USAID, aims to provide key stakeholders with contextual information on the composition, behaviors, and relationships of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) and different approaches to engage, manage, and transform them. The project seeks to understand the roles and impacts of CBAGs in conflict-affected societies across sub-Saharan Africa. The following two case studies carry out this investigation in Mali and Niger.

Community-based armed groups emerge across sub-Saharan Africa with varying degrees of popular support, often in contexts where state government presence lacks reach, confidence, or resources. The missions and goals of CBAGs vary, ranging from protecting or promoting an ideology or community identity, to defending territory or resources, to providing security for vulnerable populations. They are key actors in local peace and security, which can have both positive and negative implications. Their proliferation and enduring presence necessitate a deeper, empirical understanding of these groups and the contexts in which they emerge. This understanding is especially significant in Niger and Mali, where there is a confluence of weak governance, resource competition, and (in some cases) rising violent extremism.

In partnership with researchers, practitioners, and academics, the RESOLVE Network commissioned an in-depth analysis of these dynamics related to CBAGs in two locations. The first case study focused on areas of southwestern Niger, along its northern border with Mali and its western border with Burkina Faso. This border area is a site of endemic violence. It is punctuated by anti-state attacks, targeted killings of traditional chiefs, and attacks on markets and other community meeting points that normally preserve intercommunal relations. CBAGs of Fulani and Tuareg ethnicity have aligned themselves with external security actors operating in the region, including French and US counterterrorism operations as well as jihadist forces, out of choice, coercion, or both.¹ The RESOLVE Network supported field research focused on local perceptions of the influencing factors, mechanisms, and effects of armed mobilization to further understand the complexities of CBAGs to help provide resolutions to community conflicts.

The second case study focused on Central Mali, where the crisis made its way down from the north, where the volatile security and political situation and the advance of jihadist groups have triggered French counterterrorism interventions and solidified a new jihadist front. Jihadists exploited divisions between communities and grievances toward the state and rival armed groups to expand their influence into Central Mali, notably resonating with Fulani communities. This has fueled tensions with other ethnic groups and, together with the absence of government security forces, led to the creation of ethnic

1 Rahmane Idrissa and Bethany McGann, *Mistrust and Imbalance: The Collapse of Intercommunal Relations and the Rise of Armed Community Mobilization on the Niger-Mali Border*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021, 1. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.2>.

self-defense groups. The proliferation of nonstate groups and CBAGs threw Central Mali into a cycle of retributive violence and transformed it into a conflict epicenter.² Here, RESOLVE mapped the presence of armed groups and their constituencies and perceptions of state responses to security challenges to provide recommendations to curb the violence moving forward.

Through these two cases, the RESOLVE Network offers new perspectives on how historical and economic contexts, resource protection, and women’s engagement interact and affect opportunities to engage, manage, and transform CBAGs.

Findings

To understand the escalatory environment characterized by a proliferation of armed groups—both state-backed and community-based—the studies examined the underlying contextual factors and histories of communal relations. Local research teams conducted in-depth discussions with conflict stakeholders in each area to understand the context and local perspectives. Both research projects sought to understand how the local communities perceived one another, and how they perceived the central government versus local governance administrations. A key limitation of both studies was the difficulty of collecting data under volatile conditions, including data on key events and timelines of armed-group formation.

In Niger, the primary data collection questions focused on how resident communities understand the rise of violence, how they explain its persistence, and how they see the future. Interviews in Mali focused on the history and dynamics of communal mobilization, engagement between the population and armed groups, social changes linked to the emergence of these groups, and recommendations to reduce violence. Researchers disseminated questionnaires to local elected officials, agents of the territorial administration, NGO activists, local leaders, chiefs, and community members. Researchers then contextualized the primary datasets through desk research.

The two research reports produced invaluable findings and unique data on CBAGs in Niger and Mali. Findings from the surveyed populations in study sites Ayorou and Abala, two communities in southwestern Niger, revealed two main factors that characterized the expansion of violence in Niger’s border regions: a pervasive state of violence and mistrust, and intra-ethnic competition over formal and informal governance systems. Local communities expressed confusion, fear, and pessimism. The authors use the term “psychosis”³—signifying generalized fear, insecurity, and threat—to describe public response to the climate of violence. Discerning origination of the attacks, the perpetrators, or the reasoning has been impossible, thus outsiders are broadly viewed with suspicion and as potential attackers. This breeds mistrust, self-imposed restriction of movement among communities, and, absent protection for and by traditional chiefs, suspicion of the state.

2 Rida Lyammouri, *Central Mali: Armed Community Mobilization in Crisis*. Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021, 5–6. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.4>.

3 Idrissa and McGann, *Mistrust and Imbalance*, 16.

Nevertheless, the study notes comparatively more hope for the future in Abala than in Ayorou, potentially because the exchange economy, as embodied in the market at Abala, was restarting, symbolizing the pragmatic mechanism that undergirds communal relationships and interdependence. Interdependence was strong between all communities, except the Tuareg and Fulani, and fractured along the caste status divide within the pastoral communities. These cleavages showcase failing interdependence, which in turn breeds conflict and grievances that drive radicalization. The narratives of the jihadist elements resonate with groups seeking to overcome historical caste interrelations. The Fulani may be the population with the least positive relations with all communities, possibly because of a popular perception that they are the main perpetrators of violence in the region. This perception has led to their greater marginalization, and therefore greater willingness to form alliances with militants that do not perceive them with enmity.⁴

Our research found that similar perceptions affect conflict dynamics in Central Mali. The local jihadist affiliate Katiba Macina exploited already tense conflict dynamics and the grievances of marginalized Fulani communities to increase its power and influence. The ethnic characterization of CBAGs proliferating in response to rising conflict has reinforced local stereotypes and resulted in an endless cycle of retributive violence between these ethnic-based groups. This, together with historical rivalries between farmers and pastoralists, fuels the polarization of identities and ultimately legitimizes the proliferation of CBAGs.⁵

While armed actors in Central Mali have different ideologies and motivations, they all benefit from ongoing conflicts and the absence of the state to legitimize their existence. At the same time, CBAGs share grievances of negligence by the central government and corrupt elites.⁶ Identity-based conflict is only one driver of CBAG mobilization—economic hardship, ecological deprivation and resource competition, youth vulnerability, and the absence of reliable government protection compound insecurity. In the absence of the central government in local decision-making, most trust traditional authorities instead of government authorities. Allegations of abuse by security forces have disillusioned communities. The state's perceived failure has pushed many to join self-defense groups.⁷

Between these case studies in disparate regions of the two countries, there are clearly overlapping factors of armed community mobilization. Economic challenges, competition over sparse ecological resources, intergenerational dynamics between disillusioned youth and elder elites, on top of widespread disappointment in state security and justice provision, interact with ethnic- and religious-based identity shifts among competing and conflicting communities. However, each locale and community deserve close analysis to discern effective and locally sourced approaches to mitigate violence and meaningfully transform conflict.

4 Idrissa and McGann, *Mistrust and Imbalance*, 18–22.

5 Lyammouri, *Central Mali*.

6 Ibid, 24.

7 Ibid, 23–29.

Conclusion

Both reports offer conflict-sensitive recommendations for local and international policymakers, development and security practitioners, and conflict analysts in similar veins.

First, it is important to bolster the protection of human rights and investigate alleged crimes with transparency to amend a security model undone by conflict and distrust. Any government strategy to improve community trust must respond to allegations of abuse by all parties to the conflict. To rebuild trust, government security forces must comply with accountability mechanisms and renounce discriminatory practices.⁸

Second, fixing a conflict-ridden economy goes hand in hand with fixing security models. A community faced with challenging economic prospects could result in greater risks of individuals joining armed groups. As Lyammouri argued, “Following a careful review process, governments and state security actors should conduct thorough assessments of interdictions, bans, and curfews before implementation that may cause economic harm by preventing individuals from accessing markets.”⁹

Third, addressing the sociopolitical issues that motivate conflict actors is necessary to develop an approach to the conflicts that can effectively stem their spread. With a better understanding of an area’s sociopolitical issues, working towards regaining the conditions of balance and taking into account the legitimacy of grievances of community groups are crucial steps.¹⁰ For example, security approaches must acknowledge that tensions amongst ethnically heterogenous communities will not cease to exist if only the violent extremist threat is removed. Governments must empower all segments of society, including women, in reconciliation and counter-jihadist activities. Lastly, to fully map the potential roles women play in peacebuilding processes, further research is required to understand women’s agency in conflict and incorporate their needs and aspirations into peace and security agendas.

The proliferation of armed groups and escalating intercommunal violence continues to rise. The research and work that the RESOLVE Network and USAID produce in partnership continue to assess solutions and methods of implementation. Missed opportunities amidst the ever-worsening security situation in southwest Niger and Central Mali necessitate fresh approaches to stabilization and peacebuilding. Further research to expand the evidence base of how local dynamics evolve and enable the formation and continuity of CBAGs and non-state armed groups—including violent extremist organizations—can help improve these approaches.

8 Lyammouri, *Central Mali*, 31–33.

9 *Ibid.*, 34.

10 Idrissa and McGann, *Mistrust and Imbalance*, 27.

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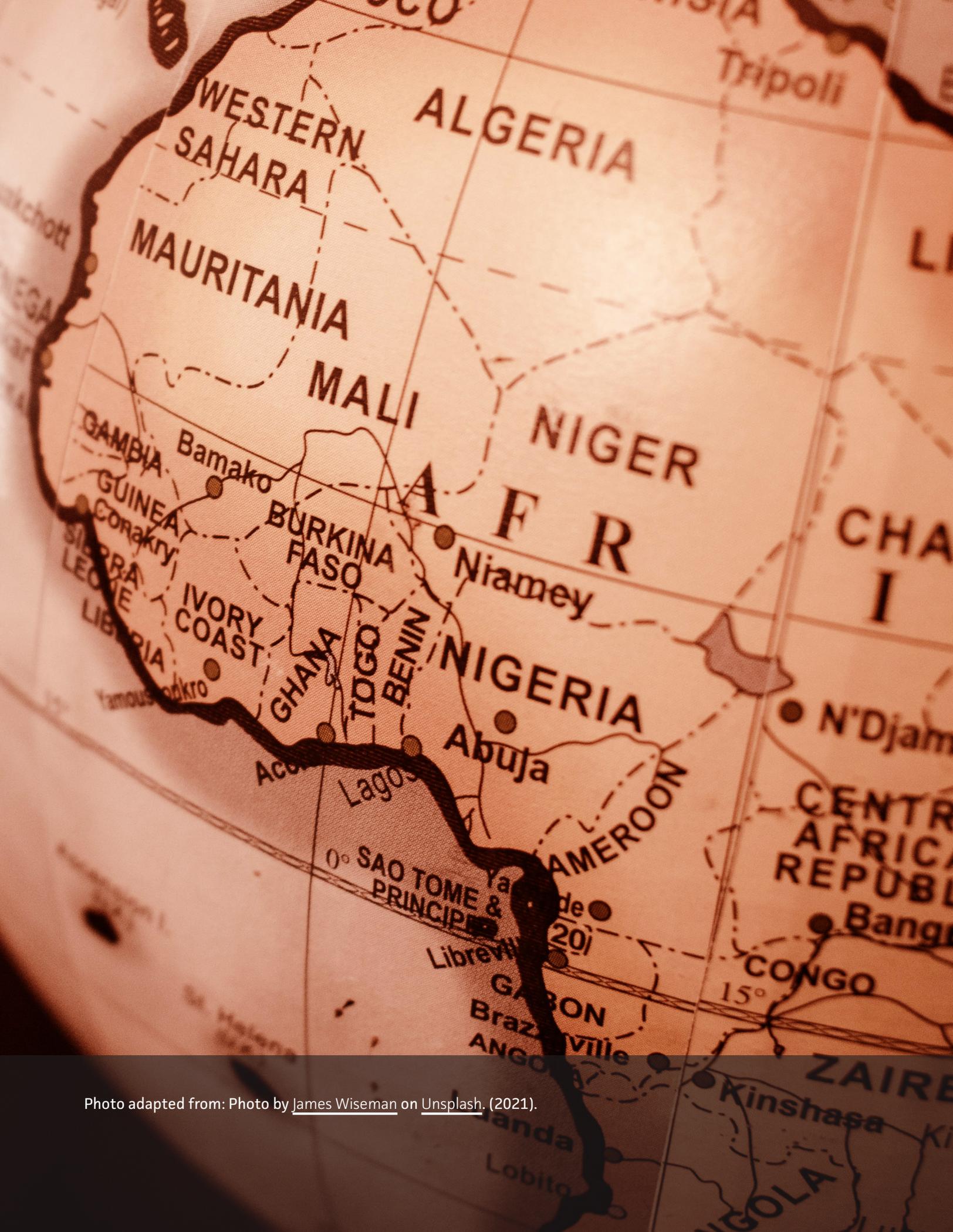


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MISTRUST AND IMBALANCE

The Collapse of Intercommunal
Relations and the Rise of
Armed Community Mobilization
on the Niger-Mali Border

Dr. Rahmane Idrissa and
Bethany McGann

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across much of the Sahel-Sahara,¹ where the footprint of regular administration and state presence is light, communities' relations and interrelations are key to resolving contentious issues and preserving peace. However, these relations are shaped and informed by histories and traditions which may breed conflict and grievance, especially when competition for space and resources is heightened by ecological stress, population pressure, and widespread insecurity, as in recent decades. Community relations form precarious balances through mechanisms such as traditional institutions or the exchange economy despite persistent pressure points and occasional crises. These balancing mechanisms operate at the nexus of formal and informal governance actors, implemented through complex political bargains and social norms managing low-level conflict both with and without state actor intervention. The contemporary shocks to the system presented by violent extremism and militant security threats have ruptured these relationships and resulted in a spiral of violence.²

Similar dynamics are evident in areas of southwestern Niger, along its northern border with Mali, and its western border with Burkina Faso. The border area of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso is a site of endemic violence. The area is punctuated by anti-state attacks, by both the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda's Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), the targeted killing of traditional chiefs, and attacks on markets and other socioeconomic convening locales that otherwise serve as central mechanisms for the preservation of normalized intercommunal interactions. In addition, foreign military interventions (especially France's Operation Barkhane) and asymmetric insurgent warfare pits multiple state and non-state actors equipped with heavy weaponry against one another, adding another level of insecurity and threat to local communities. 2019 and 2020 saw the worst spikes in violence against civilians since the internationalization of the conflict in 2013 (marking the start of the French operation). A significant number of deaths are attributed to state security forces, including state-backed militias.³

In this context, converging and diverging agendas of parties to the violence have further confused efforts to engender and restore peaceful relations. Among these parties, community-based armed groups (CBAGs)⁴ of Fulani and Tuareg ethnicity have aligned themselves with outside actors carrying out operations in the region—including French and U.S. military forces carrying out operations under a counterterrorism framework and jihadist actors—out of choice, coercion, or in some cases both.⁵ Generally, Fulani armed groups have allied with Salafist militants for tactical, but also ideological, reasons. Meanwhile,

1 A West African region extending from Mauritania to Chad through northern Mali, northern Burkina Faso, and northern Niger.

2 Morten Bøås, Abdoul Wakhab Cissé, and Laouali Mahamane, "Explaining Violence in Tillabéri: Insurgent Appropriation of Local Grievances?" *The International Spectator* 55, no. 4 (2020): 118–132, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1833567>.

3 Human Rights Watch, "Sahel: End Abuses in Counterterrorism Operations," February 13, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/13/sahel-end-abuses-counterterrorism-operations>.

4 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>.

5 The issue of coercion is related to the relationship the communities have with groups operating around them, in some cases more of a hostage situation than mutually beneficial association.

Tuareg armed groups have generally allied with the French army for tactical advantage. These are alignments by choice. But some recruits are coerced, taken hostage by jihadist actors to ensure the loyalty of their home community. Such hostages are subjected to indoctrination and may embrace the cause of their abductors.⁶ However, it is difficult to discern who among the community is participating in the violence, to what end, and why, which impedes efforts to address the cycle of escalation in the region.

Building on other research reports in RESOLVE's Community-Based Armed Groups Series⁷, this report explores local perceptions regarding the nature and impact of the violence surrounding two communities in southwestern Niger: the *départements*⁸ of Ayorou and Abala, two of the three main flash points of conflict in the area (the third being Banibangou). The analysis draws findings from desk research as well as data collected from interviews and questionnaires conducted in late 2019. The report provides a summary of understanding of ongoing conflict dynamics from the most impacted communities and an insight on the knowledge and attitudes around actors participating in the violence. It hopes to inform efforts to bring an end to the violence and increase understanding of participating actors.

The study is organized against a backdrop of missed opportunities and the ever-worsening security situation in western Niger and the broader Liptako-Gourma region⁹. The research carried out for this report did not directly focus on CBAGs due to safety considerations and confusion among local communities as to who exactly was involved in the violence. However, this study contributes to the broader evidence base of how local dynamics shape and extend opportunity for CBAG formation and continuity and the tactics used by violent extremist organizations and other external actors to capitalize on these opportunities. Following a discussion of the context, known actors, and research findings and data analysis, the report provides recommendations for those seeking to understand the conditions for the use of non-military options in restoring peace to the region, across three areas relevant to the ongoing violence: sociopolitical and economic dynamics, sociocultural dynamics, and resultant armed group mobilization dynamics.

6 Author interview with High Authority for Peace Consolidation (HACP) official, Niamey, December 11, 2019.

7 Launched in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development Africa Bureau, the RESOLVE Network Community-Based Armed Groups research initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa aims to provide key stakeholders with contextual information on the dynamics of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) and current, prospective, and past approaches to engage, manage, and transform them. The project grapples with a complicated series of questions and decisions negotiated by stakeholders operating in conflict-affected societies across Sub-Saharan Africa. For more, see: <https://www.resolvenet.org/projects/community-based-armed-groups-sub-saharan-africa>.

8 The regions of Niger are divided into ٦٣ departments, forming a level of subnational administrative governance.

9 The continuous areas of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

KEY FINDINGS

- The state of war in the region, waged through subterfuge, mass killings, and violence perceived by civilians as unregulated—both by the state and its enemies—has created an ambiance of mistrust and “psychosis” in the border regions. There is a broad sense of confusion within local populations regarding who the perpetrators of violence are and why they are perpetrating violence.
- This ambiance of general mistrust and “psychosis” negatively impacts the historic balancing mechanisms between and within local communities, their everyday lives, and freedom of movement. Lack of mobility is particularly challenging for pastoralist communities and further fosters contestation over sparse resources. The balancing mechanisms stem from the work of local chiefs and clerics (through intermediation), often backed up by the work of local authorities (enforcement, historically by prefects and sub-prefects who had control over gendarmerie forces, more recently by elected officials) and sustained by market relations (creating interdependence). Therefore, the mechanisms are intermediation, interdependence, and enforcement. The value of each one of those mechanisms varies in accordance with the district and the time.¹⁰
- Dissatisfaction with governance—especially from the central state—is prevalent. But the difference in outcomes between the two research sites suggests that government policy can make a difference in perceptions of the government’s ability to be an effective actor in reducing intercommunal conflicts. However, government function in these rural settings is complex, where several formal and informal authorities are entangled.
- Collapse of the balancing mechanisms has removed the checks on limited violence and reprisals carried out by ethnic, caste, and identity-based militias. Without these checks, and few interlocutors who are able to safely intercede in intercommunal violence due to the presence of jihadists, score settling related to decades of resource competition and political reformation drive additional violence beneath the surface of the conflict taking place in the region.
- Relations between and within communities rest on economic interdependence, but this can be as much a source of moderation as of contestation and radicalization. When communal interdependence is premised on inequality and marginalization of one of the groups in the relationships, the potential gains of alliances with external actors to shift the balance of power in these relations might drive individual recruitment into violent extremist groups or realpolitik deal-making with violent extremist actors. In the case of “Black” Tuareg (given social and political inequality between castes) and some Fulani pastoralist groups this has resulted in their perception as a threat and perceived or actual marginalization. This threat perception is enhanced by the securitization measures implemented by state and allied forces casting suspicion on pastoralist/nomadic communities on assumptions of disloyalty due to transhumance-based livelihoods. Radicalization

¹⁰ See: Rahmane Idrissa, “Traditional authorities in Niger: Politicization and under-representation,” in *The Status Quo Defied. The Legitimacy of Traditional Authorities in Areas of Limited Statehood in Mali, Niger, and Libya*, eds. Fransje Molenaar et al. (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2019), https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/legitimacy_traditional_authorities_mali_niger_libya/.

as well as opportunism resulted from sociopolitical inequality and marginalization *but* in the context of the actions of state and Jihadist forces.

- Armed groups operating in Niger have largely exhausted the recruitment drivers stemming from community-level crises. Current dynamics suggest more of a large-scale hostage-taking than active participation. Unlike Mali, CBAGs did not reach the same level of organization and establishment in Niger. Fulani self-defense militias were active before 2011, and most of the Tuareg groups, active during the rebellions, were operating on the Mali side of the border. Nevertheless, it is possible that the armed groups active in Niger post-2012 do not fit the CBAG typology and that there are likely limitations that frontier CBAGs will reach during the course of the ongoing conflict.

INTRODUCTION

In the areas surrounding the shared borders of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, limited and low-level violence has long been a pattern in social and economic relations between and within communities. This was largely non-state violence caused by competition over resources, even if people were also victims of abuses from state security agents, especially on the Mali side of the border.¹¹ This violence, and the perceptions of injustice and insecurity it was bound up with, spawned negative feelings against the state, as the place where the buck stopped, even in regions where the state has a “weak” or under-resourced presence.¹² That these grievances did not, for many years, lead to extremist violence means that balancing mechanisms were successful in maintaining the status quo of infrequent, limited violence with equally limited violent intercommunal reprisals.

Inherent to this context is competition over ecological resources between herders and farmers on the one hand, and among herders on the other. In recent years, population growth and climate change shaped this competition. Strategies of access to resources are evolving in ways that may intensify competition. Competition, while occasionally flares into open conflict, has been manageable through the balancing mechanism based on intermediation, interdependence, and enforcement of a rural law-and-order system that gives customary chiefs, territorial administrators (prefects), and the gendarmerie, a form of rural police, the function that allows communities to resolve low-level conflicts through mutually agreed customary formats, sometimes including acts of violence and reprisals.

11 This area of Mali is far from the center of the state with which it is less integrated than the regions in the south-west.

12 The author put “weak” in quotation marks because it has become a trope in expert and media discourse, largely inspired by scholarly concepts such as “weak state” or “limited statehood.” The concept of the state is empirically too complex to be reduced to this trope as this case study suggests. In this Nigerien story, for instance, the state includes not only the central government (which is implied in the trope) but also the territorial administration, including the prefects, the traditional chiefs who are a formal component (under the ministry of the interior) of the central government, and local elected authorities (mayors and councilors). In all these guises, the state is very much present in these locales, although not necessarily efficient in government work for a variety of political and economic reasons.

This balance was ruptured following events that started in 2011, when a coalition led by Western militaries destroyed the regime of Col. Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya.¹³ This triggered a chain of events, beginning with the return to Mali of armed men from a Tuareg subgroup of the Kidal region (northern Mali) who (re)started a rebellion there. Northern Mali was then an area where Algerian Salafist militants had found refuge after the end of the Algerian civil war of the 1990s, building a sanctuary from which, as early as the 2000s, they were able to organize the abduction of Western tourists or aid workers. Initially known under their Algerian civil-war-era names Islamic Armed Group (GIA, from the French acronym) or Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC, from the French acronym), these groups shifted and coalesced into a variety of new vehicles, including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and, of late, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).¹⁴ The adoption of violent extremist Islamic ideologies and radicalizing narratives was intensified by initial franchising efforts by, and later the collapse of, the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and the subsequent dispersal of fighters, arms, and logisticians to the Sahel and North Africa.¹⁵

The Tuareg Kidal rebels initially allied with these Algerian militants and routed Mali's armed forces in 2012, aided by combatants originating from other north African countries and Mauritania. However, soon the Kidal rebels fell out with the Salafists.¹⁶ Moreover, Fulani pastoralists have traditionally engaged in transhumance at the border between Niger and Mali and often been in conflict with Tuareg groups from the Kidal and Gao region.¹⁷ These Fulani dreaded the prospect of a Tuareg state in northern Mali and the potential impact on livelihoods and political arrangements on either side of the border.¹⁸ They were drawn into the conflict on the side of the Salafist militants in early 2013. Later that year, the French interventions (Operation Serval, followed by Operation Barkhane) further entrenched the Fulani in their support for the armed Salafists by enlisting the Tuareg groups as on-the-ground allies for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and theatre access purposes and encouraging the Nigerien government to support this strategy.¹⁹

The change in resource endowment—in this case political and security opportunities garnered through engagements with international armed forces and militant groups—overrode the limited (or limiting) benefits of engaging in traditional balancing mechanisms.²⁰ Opportunity to pursue parochial agendas and score settling precipitated escalation of cycles of violence, further spurred by the parallel geopolitical

13 Scott Stewart, "Mali Besieged by Fighters Fleeing Libya," *Stratfor Worldview*, February 2, 2012, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/mali-besieged-fighters-fleeing-libya>.

14 United Nations Security Council, "Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)," <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/islamic-state-greater-sahara-isgs>.

15 Cameron Glenn, Mattisan Rowan, John Caves, and Garrett Nada, "Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State," *Wilson Center, The Islamists*, 2016, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>.

16 See: Radio France Internationale, "AQMI, MUJAO, MNLA: un rapport de force complexe," July 5, 2012, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20120705-aqmi-mujao-mnla-rapport-force-complexe>.

17 Gao region is predominantly of the ethnic-linguistic group Songhay and is adjacent to Kidal and borders north-western Niger.

18 See: Nicolas Normand, "Le Sahel peut-il retrouver la paix?," *Commentaire* 4, no. 164 (2018): 839-846.

19 See: Remi Cayarol, "À la frontière entre le Niger et le Mali, l'alliance coupable de l'armée française," *Mediapart*, November 25, 2018, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/291118/la-frontiere-entre-le-niger-et-le-mali-l-alliance-coupable-de-l-armee-francaise>.

20 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*.

agendas promoted by external actors. On the one hand, Western actors engaged in counterterrorism and stabilization missions in the region.²¹ On the other hand, jihadist elements engaged in a mission to defeat a neocolonialist enemy and free Africa of western influence (a narrative tailored to fit local contexts). Some were perhaps also driven by financial motivations related to access to the prolific trans-Saharan smuggling and trafficking shadow economies.²² The impact of this series of events upset the fragile balance upon which inter- and intra-community peace and function rested in this part of the Sahel-Sahara. This research paper is an effort to understand that balance, what is left of it today, and where it is leaving communities in the border regions and the state of Niger, now facing the wrath of violent extremism.

The dynamics explored in this paper must be considered within the context of the history of the origins of the frustration and violence of elite Tuareg and of the fallout from the changes brought about by democratization and administrative decentralization in 1992²³, which will be discussed at length in subsequent sections of this report. The wider circumstantial factors related to the allied interventions of the French and Nigerien security forces operating in and around Liptako-Gorma were not part of this research.²⁴ It is implicitly recognized though that they have complicated, if not worsened, the regional situation through strategic bargain-making and operational alliances with regional ethnic groups and by developing rules of operation that resulted in the securitization of communities and frequent human rights abuses in eliciting intelligence.

The report is divided into four main sections: 1) an overview of the research methodology and limitations; (2) a review of the context, including the history of conflict and cooperation in the border regions and the armed groups known to have presence there; (3) a presentation and analysis of the research results as they relate to the situation in late 2019-early 2020;²⁵ and (4) a review of the study that positions the analysis within the larger historical and structural context. The report concludes with recommendations derived from findings on the communities about dynamics related to armed community mobilization for restoring moderation in inter- and intracommunal relations held hostage by violent extremists.

21 Oxford Research Group, "The Military Intervention in Mali and Beyond: An Interview with Bruno Charbonneau," March 28, 2019, <https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/the-french-intervention-in-mali-an-interview-with-bruno-charbonneau>.

22 IRIN News, "Briefing: The new Jihadist strategy in the Sahel," *Africa Renewal*, February 4, 2016, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/sahel/news/briefing-new-jihadist-strategy-sahel>; International Crisis Group, "Sidelineing the Islamic State in Niger's Tillabery," June 3, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/289-sidelineing-islamic-state-nigers-tillabery>.

23 Mahaman S. Tidjani Alou, "Decentralization in Niger: An Attempted Approach," *Columbia University*, 1999, <https://www.ciesin.columbia.edu/decentralization/English/CaseStudies/Niger.pdf>.

24 These interventions were responses to the activities of Salafist extremists ("terrorists" in the official Franco-Nigerien language) which also were not part of research for safety and security reasons.

25 The entirety of this research was conducted and completed before the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic and thus does not speak to any changes to the context influenced by the pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

The methods applied for this research sought to respond to questions about the climate of violence from the viewpoint of communities and perceptions of community members regarding each other and the central government versus local governance administration. The research was carried out in the *départements* of Ayorou and Abala, two of the three districts most exposed to the current violence in Tillabéri Region (the third locality, Banibangou, was assessed as too dangerous for research). The peril for all three comes from proximity to northern Mali. Ayorou and Abala give an understanding of how platforms for social interaction contribute to normative balance in intercommunal interactions and feature the ethnic groups participating in armed conflict throughout the region. Ayorou is a small town with an important state administration presence and a big market, making it easier for researchers to meet respondents without having to travel in remote, isolated, and potentially dangerous places. Abala is a cluster of villages harboring both sedentary communities and semi-nomadic Tuareg, Fulani, and Arabs. It has shaped the development of conflict dynamics on the Niger side.

To understand the escalatory environment characterized by a proliferation of armed groups—both state-backed and community-based—it is critical to examine the underlying contextual factors and histories of communal relations. Information, especially data on key events and timelines of armed group formation, is still difficult or impossible to collect under present conditions. Therefore the research developed a partial empirical approach that relied on surveying attitudes and perceptions through interviews and questionnaires throughout the latter half of 2019 in Ayorou and Abala.²⁶ These primary datasets were then contextualized through desk research and interviews with resource persons, i.e. former militants, Niamey-based civil-society representatives of the local communities, and researchers.

In the primary data collection the questions focused on how resident communities understand the rise of violence, how they explain its persistence, and how they see the future. Given the nature of these questions, we developed an open-ended interview questionnaire to collect qualitative data. These questionnaires were disseminated to local elected officials, agents of the territorial administration, NGO activists, chiefs, and people close to traditional authorities in both localities. The research focused on the local communities not so much on the state and its actions (or inactions).

We conducted a small survey on inter-community relations and community perceptions of the state, applied to a total of 200 individuals in Ayorou and Abala, two of the three main flash points of the conflict area. Enumerators were hired in each of these two towns.²⁷ We did not probe opinions on security

26 This study was enumerated during the second half of 2019, and thus the data from interviewees reflects conditions during that period of the evolving Sahelian conflict.

27 This was not easy because other projects were also conducting fieldwork—with larger resources—and the small number of individuals who could work as enumerators were all employed by them. This created a constraint which we solved by conducting all survey efforts on one day, the market day in each locality. A market day is a day in the week when a town or village is known to open its market to buyers and sellers from the surrounding district and thus an opportunity to engage a diverse selection of respondents. The advantage to this survey approach is applying the questionnaire to people from all parts of the districts. Although the exercise proved difficult since

forces due to the difficulty of framing questionnaires about that in the tense atmosphere that prevails in the region. We also avoided asking questions about insurgents, given the “psychosis” later described in the paper. Due to safety constraints (both for us and for our respondents), we did not collect data directly on the security forces and the insurgent groups. However, we did indirectly ask questions about the performance of the branch of the security state—the gendarmerie—that is operationally closest to local populations.

A third method was the organization of a post-fieldwork focus group of resource persons, i.e. people active in Niamey-based associations that represent and lobby for communities in the border regions, including Tuareg and Fulani, and the organization Timidria.²⁸ The objective of this focus group was to help develop the recommendations presented at the end of the paper.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In contextualizing the emergence and expansion of endemic intra- and intercommunal conflict in western Niger, it is critical to understand the historical underpinnings of the balancing mechanisms that served as a moderating force before violent extremist and jihadist-driven insecurity swept across the Sahel. Armed community mobilization and proliferation of armed groups occur against the backdrop of the role of traditional chiefs, hybridized governance and political arrangements, and resource-driven competition between ethnic groups manifest through political reforms and evolutions in localized governance. A precarious balance historically served to resolve conflict in the short term but laid the foundation for vulnerabilities that opportunistic non- and sub-state actors take advantage of. What follows is a review of the relationships between people, places (territorial and social), and power constructed to maintain balance, and agents of conflict.

A precarious balance: People, place, power

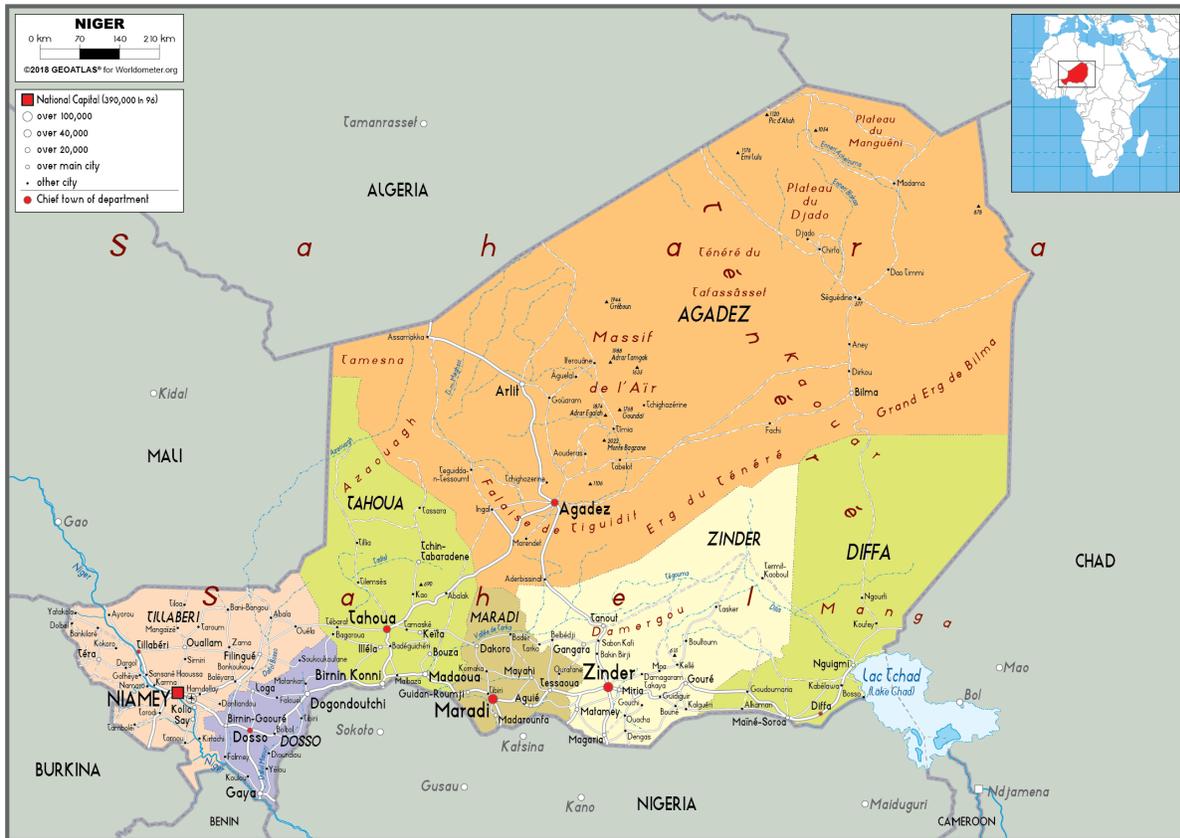
Niger is a landlocked country of West Africa, independent from France since 1960. It has one of the smallest economies of the region, largely dependent on commodities (uranium, groundnuts, onion, cattle) for revenue. Run by authoritarian governments in its first three decades of existence, Niger democratized in 1991. However, the authoritarian impulse remains strong in its political class, and democracy has had a troubled history in Niger. This has created political issues that have frustrated the aspirations of Nigerien citizens for efficient government work, including along the Niger-Mali border.²⁹

marketgoers have little time or patience for responding to strangers asking a list of questions. The questionnaire was relatively short and limited to “yes” or “no” questions as much as possible.

28 Timidria, *L'Association de Défense des Droits de L'Homme et de Développement* (Association for the Defense of Human Rights and Development) works to improve the socio-economic situation of victims of slavery by reintegrating them into society. Timidria strives to preserve social peace and promote national unity and promote human rights in Niger. For more, see: Peace Insight, “Timidria, L'Association de Défense des Droits de L'Homme et de Développement,” <https://www.peaceinsight.org/conflicts/niger/peacebuilding-organisations/timidria/>.

29 For a history of Niger’s democracy troubles up to the early 2000s, see: Leonardo Villalón and Rahmane Idrissa, “A Decade of Experimentation. Institutional Choices and Unstable Democracy in Niger,” in *The Fate of Africa Democratic Experiments. Elites and Institutions*, eds.

Figure 1 Administrative Map of Niger³⁰



The Niger-Mali border has a complex social setting with a turbulent history. Ecologically, the region is part of the agropastoral zone of transition from the Sahel to the Sahara. The farming populations are Songhay in Ayorou, Zarma in Bani-Bangou, and Hausa in Abala. These three localities were chosen for the study because they are the administrative centers of the three districts that are most exposed to the conflicts that have their epicenter in nearby northern and central Mali. However, Bani-Bangou, which sits practically on the border with northern Mali, is so exposed to violence that fieldwork was not feasible.

Ayorou is an old settlement. It served as a retreat to the fleeing Songhay emperor Sonni Baru after his general Askia Muhammad removed him from power in 1493 and took over the Songhay state. Bani-Bangou and Abala are more recent settlements, both born of the 1930s colonial regime's project to expand landed agriculture.³¹ Bani-Bangou means "the good pond" in Zarma, while Abala comes from a Tuareg way of saying "bubbling out" (of water), signifying the aquifers that farmers found favorable to agriculture in a dry environment. The two settlements became anchor points for the territorial government, which provided the safety and amenities needed for a market. The settlements attracted satellite com-

Leonardo Villalón and Peter VonDoepp (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 27-48.

30 Public domain map from United Nations Cartographic Section. Ayorou is North of Niamey towards the border with Mali, while Abala is East and South of Bangi Bangou

31 M. O. Ijere, "Colonial Policy in Nigerian Agriculture and Its Implementation," *Agricultural History* 48, no. 2 (1974): 298-304, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3741237>.

munities that were often, though not exclusively, settled by the pastoral transhumant communities,³² the Tuareg and the Fulani.³³

In 1964, four years after the country became independent from France, both Abala and Bani-Bangou rose to the status of administrative post (*poste administratif*), the lowest rung of the country's territorial administration. By 2011, they had both become *départements*, the second highest rung. In their state-supported drive to colonize land, the farming communities also installed community leaderships that would administer land use and ownership through customary rules. These leaders—village chiefs, at the least³⁴—were integrated into state administration under the Ministry of the Interior and thus became the first mechanism for ensuring balance between the various communities in the districts. This integration was initially only semi-formal, until reforms in the early 2010s made traditional chiefs into formal agents of the territorial administration.³⁵

Administration by way of traditional chiefs has been used to cope with the tensions that rapidly became apparent across the border region. Before colonialism, which started in Niger in 1899, the area was under the hegemony of Tuareg groups who had moved in during the late 18th and early 19th centuries and subjected farming communities to levies under the threat of violence. But in the colonial era and after, the central state became the agent of land colonization. A state hungry for taxes backed Zarma and Hausa land colonization for farming during colonialism and the First Republic (1960-74), while it was fixated on agricultural yields under the “food self-sufficiency” policy of the military regime (1974-91).³⁶

To ease the tensions and conflicts that brewed in this process, the state intended to integrate traditional rulers from the pastoral groups in addition to farming community leadership structures. In this balancing act, the territories became an intricate web of canton and village chieftaincies (leaderships of the farming groups) enmeshed with *groupement* and *tribu* chieftaincies (leaderships of the pastoral groups), each with varying claims over different stretches of land and bases of legitimacy. These leaderships work in close collaboration with the local representatives of the territorial administration, the *préfets*, to defuse or manage conflicts.

32 In Niger, where large-scale transhumance is practiced, sedentary livestock farmers develop localized strategies to move their herds between pastoral enclaves, whereas transhumant herders are driving their herds longer distances over the years. See: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), “Information system on pastoralism in the Sahel: Atlas of trends in pastoral systems in the Sahel 1970-2012,” 2012, <http://www.fao.org/3/i2601e/i2601e.pdf>.

33 E. K. Hahonou, *Les Pouvoirs locaux à Balleyara* (Niamey: LASDEL, 2002); Hamani Oumarou, *La Construction du ‘local’ et la gouvernance communale par le bas. L'exemple de la commune rurale de Banibangou (Niger)* (Niamey: LASDEL, 2011).

34 Village chiefs are part of leadership structures that also include Muslim clerics and sometimes the heads of traditional worship.

35 Mahaman Tidjani Alou, *La Chefferie au Niger et ses transformations* (Niamey: LASDEL, 2009); 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 Institute, 2019), <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/legitimacy-traditional-authorities-mali-niger-libya/>.

36 Fransje Molenaar et al., “The historical trajectory of traditional authority structures in Mali, Niger and Libya,” in *The Status Quo Defied: The Legitimacy of Traditional Authorities in Areas of Limited Statehood in Mali, Niger and Libya*, eds. Fransje Molenaar et al. (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2019), 26-52, <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/legitimacy-traditional-authorities-mali-niger-libya/2-the-historical-trajectory-of-traditional-authority-structures-in-mali-niger-and-libya/>.

Corridors of Conflict

Deadly violence flares at times and remains an issue for the entire agropastoral area of Niger where space sharing between farming and herding is highly contentious. By the early 2010s, there were officially 943 transit corridors and pathways for pastoral cattle transhumance across the national territory.³⁷ Farmers do not accept the legitimacy of many of these routes, and state enforcement is weak or absent, especially as it would often depend on collaboration from local chiefs across ethnic groups. As a result, these routes sometimes turn into conflicts between armed men in the community.³⁸

Before 1991, violence was limited, albeit not absent, and peaceful modes of conflict resolution prevailed. Retrospectively, the period, though not without its problems, is seen as a golden age by actors as different as traditional chiefs and Fulani militiamen. In the 1990s, the transition to democracy reshaped Nigerien politics. A series of governmental crises (including two coups d'état in 1996 and 1999) and submission to the demands of donors (such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other development aid agencies) for austerity and privatization resulted in a general weakening of state authority.³⁹

At the structural level, weak enforcement of the transhumance corridors by the territorial administration was also due to farming's expanding frontier as a result of population growth (particularly among farming or settled communities), extensive agriculture, and the failure of the policies aimed at transforming farming practices to manage resources equitably. Moreover, successive Nigerien governments have tended to treat pastoralism as a lesser sector in their rural development efforts, despite the central importance of livestock both in the domestic economy and for exports.⁴⁰

For half of the 1990s, Tuareg groups rebelled on both sides of the Mali-Niger border, attacking the penurious state(s). In this parlous context, a violent rivalry grew between Fulani and Tuareg (Daousahak) herders across the border in the later years of the decade. Both Nigerien and Malian governments neglected this conflict, seeing the Tuareg rebellions a more urgent and important matter, even as residents of the border region experienced the local violence as an epiphenomenon of those rebellions.

37 Zakary Rhissa, *Revue du secteur de l'élevage au Niger*, FAO/SFW, 2010, https://reca-niger.org/IMG/pdf/Niger_Revue_national.pdf.

38 Community-based armed groups are entities embedded in communal structures that can be based on territorial or ethnic affiliations that contribute to order and disorder through exercise of structural, normative, or outright physical violence. In this case, the presence of arms in a community and use of those arms in limited reprisals is not enough to suggest a level of organization and chain of command to consider these conflicts between CBAGs. See: Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*.

39 Abdoul W. Barry, B. Lynn Salinger, and Selina Pandolfi, "Sahelian West Africa: Impact of Structural Adjustment Programs on Agricultural Competitiveness and Regional Trade," African Economic Policy Discussion Paper Number 37, December 2000, http://hubrural.org/IMG/pdf/usaid_impact_structural_adjustments_on_ag_competitiveness.pdf.

40 Livestock is recurrently Niger's second or third export commodity after uranium and the key cash crop of the day (groundnuts in the 1960s, onion today). See: Claude Raynaut and Souleymane Abba, "Trente ans d'indépendances: repères et tendances," *Politique Africaine*, 38 (June 1990): 3, <https://f-origin.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/1629/files/2020/05/038003.pdf>; Clara Jamart, "Niger's Rural Code and the Pastoralist Issue," AGTER, March 2011, https://www.agter.org/bdf/en/corpus_chemin/fiche-chemin-91.html.

After the rebellions ended (1996-98), the herders' intercommunal conflict was taken more seriously by state actors. Pastoralist groups had mobilized men into armed ethnic militia and created a dangerous demand for firearms.⁴¹ In 1999, and again in the late 2000s, state authorities, especially in Niger, organized peace-brokering and de-escalation forums between the competing ethnic groups. Although these forums resulted in general agreements, they suffered in enforcement each time.

In the 2000s, across Niger local elected authorities emerged as a result of a decentralization process of state governance administration. In Niger's democratic scheme, these new authorities were thenceforth the only local political leaders (in theory), given that traditional authorities occupy a segment of the territorial administration, which is a service, not a political organization. But this apolitical concept of traditional authorities has always been fiction. To affirm their power and keep their privileges, traditional chiefs garner political legitimacy derived from the sociocultural authority of customs, traditions, and blood inheritance. This claim of representing and ruling local communities via tradition conflicts with the elected local officials' claim of doing the same via democracy.

Traditional chiefs ultimately owe their position to state sanction, since the state can sack them at will, but they also form a powerful interest group that has managed to keep control over the crucial issues of land ownership and exploitation.⁴² To preserve this position, traditional chiefs must compete for influence with elected officials. At another level, they are vulnerable to manipulation from the central government and powerful politicians in the capital. Dependence on the state, the need to preserve their class interests, competition with elected officials, and manipulation from the center all combine to create political problems that call into question the value of chiefs as an institutional mechanism for keeping the balance of peace in rural Niger.⁴³

In August 2013, when violence engulfed the neighboring regions of Mali to the north, a forum was convened at Bani-Bangou by a non-governmental organization, the Nigerien Network for the Non-Violent Management of Conflicts.⁴⁴ The organization took stock of the various unresolved issues contributing to violence escalation. The conventional drivers of tolerable sources of violence (within context of limited historical reprisals) and the main grievances of farmers and herders were duly pinpointed. So were newer and more ominous issues, e.g. the increasing prevalence of firearms and drug consumption. Moreover,

41 Until the collapse of Libya and resumption of the Tuareg rebellion in Northern Mali, availability of weapons was largely limited to small and light weapons. Prevalence of heavy military armaments have subsequently contributed to the escalation of violence and operational capacity of armed groups.

42 Christian Lund, "Precarious democratization and local dynamics in Niger: micro-politics in Zinder," *Development and Change* 32, no. 5 (2001): 845–69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00229>.

43 Abdoulaye Mohamadou, "Foncier, pouvoirs locaux et décentralisation dans le département de Dakoro (Niger)," *Bulletin de l'APAD*, 31–32 (2010): 105–136, <https://doi.org/10.4000/apad.4052>; Idrissa, "Traditional authorities in Niger: Politicization and under-representation."

44 Réseau nigérien pour la gestion non violente des conflits (RE-GENOVICO), Niger. See: <https://www.ndi.org/our-stories/supporting-stability-and-counterering-extremism-sahel-region-africa>.

camps of Malian refugees were seen by many as harboring potential bad actors.⁴⁵ In other agropastoral regions of Niger, where the clashing grievances of farmers and herders were no less serious, these three new elements were almost (arms and drugs) or totally (Malian refugee camps) absent elsewhere. But by the time of the forum, the violence it wished to prevent was already becoming endemic, and the precarious balance faltered.

Agents of conflict: Armed actors and (once limited) violence

Assessing the extent of armed group activity and violence is a challenge due to the volatility of the region. Actors are multiple, their agendas differ, and their actions contribute to a degree of confusion that complicates any strategy of peace restoration. Major actors include

- community-based armed-groups (CBAGs) of Fulani and Tuareg ethnicity;
- Salafist armed groups led in many cases by outsiders (especially from North Africa) but attracting people from all resident communities in the Sahel-Sahara;
- criminals, outlaws, and marauders, including drug traffickers, arm smugglers, and cattle thieves, some of which may enjoy complicities both in the governments of Mali and Niger and with the Salafist armed groups; and,
- Western militaries and intervention missions, chiefly French and United Nations, with support from the US and other western powers.
- Some violence is non-state, though not anti-state (e.g. drug traffickers); some other violence is clearly anti-state, but not necessarily for the same reasons (e.g. Salafists, communalists). Divergent histories behind the violence depend on the national context, which, however, does not preclude some contamination effect.

Since 2013, violence has become endemic in the Niger-Mali border region in two ways. First, armed violent extremists target state security and governance actors and those perceived as its allies, especially local traditional chiefs. Violent extremist groups also engage in deadly punitive violence against those who refuse to follow their rules, including tax payments, and attempts to transform the local political order. Second, violent crime markedly increased in the form of armed cattle robbery and forcible removal of people from isolated camps and hamlets (sometimes resulting in fatalities), as opportunistic score-settling over access to natural resources and the political power that comes with land possession.

45 Niger24.org, "Forum de Banibangou: Prévenir et gérer les conflits grâce au dialogue intercommunautaire," *Niamey.com*, August 14, 2013, <http://news.aniamey.com/h/3757.html>.

Although the balance in the region had become precarious by the early 2010s, it may not have collapsed without the Tuareg insurgent groups formed against the Malian government, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA in the French acronym), and jihadist wars of northern Mali.⁴⁶ These wars brought into the border region new patterns of violence that led to a sense of confusion, the “psychosis” described in the findings section. Armed community mobilization from marginalized ethnic groupings consigned to the lower rungs of traditional social hierarchy is a new phenomenon, and in part explains the events described by one interviewee as “chiefs hunting” (“*chasse aux chefs*”): the killing of traditional chiefs.⁴⁷ Once negotiated and limited reprisal-based violent events evolved into a coercive, unbounded effort to eliminate interdependent socioeconomic collaborators. Community-based armed groups in Niger thus must be considered symptomatic of the unraveling of the hybrid political order,⁴⁸ rather than a fixed actor as present in other Sahelian locales.

Armed violence in the name of jihad is also new,⁴⁹ although it often follows old patterns and familiar tactics, such as seizing people’s cattle under pain of death and calling that a tax—this time *zakkat* (the Islamic tax) rather than *jangal* (a Fulani word for cattle tax).⁵⁰ New actors mobilize people with old grievances, using an ideological discourse that mixes Salafist rigorism with more traditional Islamic social criticism. Most who join in are young Fulani and “Black” Tuareg, but people from other communities, including the farming ones, are also attracted, if in much smaller numbers according to local observation or perceptions of interviewees. Moreover, opportunistic, marauding violence grows due to the increased availability of firearms, leading to more cattle theft and lawlessness. This creates conditions of disorder and anomie in which it is difficult to build a consistent policy response.

46 Stewart, “Mali Besieged by Fighters Fleeing Libya.”

47 Radio France Internationale, “Niger: les jihadistes ciblent les chefs de village,” November 24, 2019, <http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20191124-niger-jihadistes-chefs-villages>.

48 Bethany McGann, “Hybridity and Fragmentation: Implications for Regional Security Policy in the Sahel and Beyond,” in *Extremisms in Africa Volume 3*, eds. Stephen Buchanan-Clarke et al. (284-313. Good Governance Africa, 2020), 284–313.

49 Prior conflicts were not predicated on a religious basis and rather used religious norms or practices to litigate resolution and reconciliation measures. See: Yvan Guichaoua, “Mali-Niger: une frontière entre conflits communautaires, rebellion et djihad,” *Le Monde*, June 20, 2016, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2016/06/20/mali-niger-une-frontiere-entre-conflits-communautaires-rebellion-et-djihad_4954085_3212.html.

50 Zakkat is a religious obligation ordering Muslims who meet the necessary criteria to donate a certain portion of wealth each year to charitable causes. The reversal of terminology might speak to tightening bonds between Tuareg and militant Islamist groups versus collective relations based on land use and belonging.

Table 1 Armed Groups and Ethnic Affiliations in Niger

PROMINENT ETHNIC GROUPS IN AYOROU AND ABALA	ARMED GROUP TYPE	ARMED GROUP MANDATE/ORIENTATION	PRE-SAHEL CRISIS ALLIANCES AND RELATIONSHIPS (1991-2013)	POST-SAHEL CRISIS ALLIANCES AND RELATIONSHIPS (2013-2019)
BLACK TUAREG	SELF-DEFENSE RECRUITS TO THE JIHADIST ARMED GROUPS	SELF-DEFENSE AGAINST RED TUAREG AND JIHADISTS	NO ARMED GROUPS IN THE PERIOD	ABSORBED INTO JIHADIST GROUPS
RED TUAREG	REBEL GROUPS (MALI); COMMUNITY MILITIAS (MALI, CROSSING INTO NIGER)	CONTROL OF NORTHERN MALI (PRESENTED AS "INDEPENDENCE") OR OF THE AZAWAD VALLEY	TACTICAL SUPPORT FROM LIBYA ALSO ACTING AS PEACE BROKER; ALLIANCE WITH JIHADIST GROUPS (2011-2012); TACTICAL ALLIANCE WITH THE FRENCH (2012-2013)	ISOLATED
FULANI	COMMUNITY MILITIAS, THEN SELF-DEFENSE RECRUITS TO THE JIHADIST ARMED GROUPS	SELF-DEFENSE AGAINST RED TUAREG AND JIHADISTS	STRATEGIC ALLIANCE WITH JIHADIST GROUPS (2012-2013)	ABSORBED INTO JIHADIST GROUPS
ARABS	NO KNOWN ARMED GROUP	N/A	N/A	N/A
SONGHAY	NO KNOWN ARMED GROUP	N/A	N/A	N/A

In assessing the nature of the violent armed actors engaged in both anti-state and intercommunal violence, Van Metre’s typology of community-based armed groups and the ways in which they exercise violence is a useful tool to both understand the function of armed community mobilization in Niger.⁵¹ It also helps analyze how the breaking of intercommunal balancing mechanisms has contributed to the pervasive sense of “psychosis” (discussed in the findings) and escalation of retributory acts. The presence of traditional chiefs and their role in conflict resolution created constraints on the extent of violence and the levels of violence that would trigger escalation versus resolution. As a result, most, if not all, intercommunal violence was negotiated (before the breakdown in the Sahelian security environment) and within socially tolerable norms around violence. The trajectory of armed mobilization by communities was thus doubly constrained by the negotiated relationship of the chiefs with the state, rendering them in a similarly negotiated position with state security forces.

The role of traditional chiefs as interlocutor is important for jihadist or other militant groups encroaching on Nigerien territory or traversing the hundreds of trade corridors. Where some chiefs were murdered for non-compliance, others enter into negotiated relationships with the armed actors for numerous and rational reasons.⁵² They may have sought protection of the community or from other jihadist groups or realized that if violent extremists hold territory and establish order, they would maintain intercommunal

51 The framework explores links between the external operational environment of armed groups and their internal functions, especially their exercise of violence, linking CBAG organization and operation to environmental factors and CBAG transformations to shifts in these factors. The typology helps analyze a CBAG at a given point in light of its external and internal characteristics to identify potential points of leverage to engage, manage, or transform it. Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 14–24.

52 International Crisis Group, “Sidelineing the Islamic State in Niger’s Tillabery.”

balancing mechanisms through that order—a third party role once held by the state. Absent the chiefs as a primary point of negotiation, the political and physical distance between communities and state security actors and security policy dissolved the negotiated status that prevented or reduced anti-state violence and broad intercommunal conflict. The relationships between communities and jihadist, militant, and criminal forces can be interpreted as a coercive hostage taking, where the mutual benefits are quickly overtaken by leveraging communities via recruitment or propaganda to reinforce jihadist operational capabilities and perceived legitimacy as a governance alternative.

While tensions over natural resources (land, cattle, and demarcation between agricultural and pastoral areas) are factors of frustration that may lead to violence and conflict perpetrated by ethnically aligned groups, economic interdependence is a factor of moderation that historically facilitated non-violent resolution of tensions. However, a non-violent outcome depends to a decisive extent on initiatives and policies at the state level—like the decision to integrate chiefs into the formal state architecture led to a reduction in the pre-2012 violent contestation. The latest peace restoration meeting, arranged by Niger’s prime minister Brigi Rafini in 2011, with disarmament attempts failed due to under-enforcement, as it was brokered just before war—first intrastate, then jihadist-driven—broke out in northern Mali.⁵³

FINDINGS

If economic interdependence reduces outbreaks of extreme violence in the entire agropastoral zone of Niger, it is complicated in specific regions by sociopolitical issues. The following section discusses the findings from the surveyed populations in Ayorou and Abala, which revealed two main factors characterizing the collapse of moderating forces, and thus the expansion of violence, in Niger’s border regions: (1) a pervasive state of violence and mistrust, and (2) intra-ethnic competition over formal and informal governance systems.

Violence and mistrust

The first and most notable finding from the research carried out in Ayorou and Abala in 2019 was the extent of confusion, fear, and pessimism that local communities expressed when asked about the state of violence. The dominant mood about the state of violence based on the interviews can be summarized by three patterns: psychosis, mistrust, and hope.

PSYCHOSIS

The word “psychosis” (French *psychose*) has become a locally developed shorthand for describing the public response to the climate of violence in the region. A popular version of the word signifies generalized fear, a feeling of insecurity, of being threatened in the fog. In Bani-Bangou, where the psychosis is

53 Idrissa, “Traditional authorities in Niger: Politicization and under-representation,” 70–73.

arguably the highest, even bona fide researchers in possession of the necessary research documentation are viewed with suspicion as outsiders and thus potential attackers. This is in part a product of the fact that no one can clearly discern where the attacks come from, who the perpetrators are, or why they carry them out.⁵⁴

In previous episodes of violence, notably in the 1970s and 1980s, it was reasonably clear to violence-affected communities who had attacked whom, why, and when. For example, oral histories exist about local squabbles, often recounted by interviewees going back to the 1970s.⁵⁵ According to these accounts, previous episodes of violence were mostly due to violence by farmers defending their fields and gardens from the depredations of herders' cattle; herders defending their access to pasturelands; and groups from different—and sometimes the same—communities fighting over respective claims of land. A pattern of more gratuitous violence came from Tuareg groups raiding cattle belonging to members of all non-Tuareg communities. The awareness of patterns around the violence occurring in the area, which resulted from traditional tribal chiefs moderating confrontations and establishing norms of violence, has since evaporated.⁵⁶

Current iterations of violence were noted as more mystifying by interviewees for this report in northern Tillabéry. One interviewee used the word “mystification” for what he considered an intentional effort to sow confusion, characterized by perpetrators who disguise themselves in Fulani clothing or speak Fulfulde (the language of the Fulani) to portend that they are Fulani when in reality they are not.⁵⁷

MISTRUST

Psychosis breeds all-out mistrust. The issue of the lack of trust recurred in all the interviews. To some extent interviewees correlate the rise of mistrust with the arrival of outsiders⁵⁸—not only refugees from Mali (“people we do not know”⁵⁹) but also itinerant Arab traders who are based in Mali and may be seen as sharing in the same culture as the Arabic-speaking North African leaders of jihadism. But the mistrust is generalized and shows no clear pattern. “There are too many unanswered questions,” said a villager.⁶⁰

A byproduct of the psychosis is the self-imposed restriction of movement among community members. In Ayorou, the local head of a human rights defense organization explained that while communities experience mass flight, attackers seem to enjoy great freedom of action unbound by concerns about mobil-

54 This information came from strong advice from other researchers not to go to Bani Bangou. A month before our fieldwork, a team from the Niamey-based social science laboratory LASDEL—the institute that hosts EPGA, a think tank in political economy in Niger founded by the author—cut short a fieldwork in Bani Bangou after authorities there warned them that their safety and security could not be guaranteed.

55 Perhaps due to the traumatic times of the Great Sahel Drought in 1968–1985.

56 Focus groups in Niamey after the fieldwork, 2019.

57 Interview with local government official of Ayorou.

58 Interviews with local government officials of Ayorou.

59 Interview with local government official of Ayorou.

60 Interview with a local from Ayorou Goungoukoré, the old village of Ayorou.

ity and security and undeterred by the enhanced presence of security actors that limit mobility.⁶¹ This contrast contributes to a climate of mistrust between communities and also between community and state. If people cannot know where and when attackers will strike, they move about as little possible. As one interviewee vividly indicated: “Before, in the 1980s, herders would march up to Tasara [over 400 km away] to give water to their cattle in the dead of the night. Today, one hesitates to go to Firgoun in broad daylight, even though it is only 8 km distant.”⁶²

Many are convinced that “the bandits” (the word used in the region, rather than “terrorists,” which is current in the capital⁶³) have spies and accomplices in the central government itself. Absent protection for and by traditional chiefs, suspicion of the state is a rational outcome of the disruption in locally derived logics of normative violence and conflict resolution due to terrorist actors and counterterrorism efforts alike.

HOPE

There is a clear contrast between Ayorou and Abala. The pessimistic interview responses that stressed psychosis and mistrust were overwhelmingly from respondents in Ayorou. Respondents in Abala also presented a gloomy picture of the situation but they were comparatively more hopeful for the future. Their hopefulness came mainly from satisfaction that the exchange economy was restarting, giving credit to political initiatives from both the deputy mayor of Abala and the central government (e.g. the High Authority for Peace Consolidation, HACP in the French acronym).⁶⁴ The exchange economy, as embodied in the market at Abala, is the pragmatic mechanism undergirding interdependence.⁶⁵

In Abala, we met a representative of the Movement for the Safety of Azawad (MSA)⁶⁶, a Malian Tuareg separatist group. He was a cattle trader who had come for business and insisted on the friendship between Tuareg Daoussahak and Fulani (the two main antagonists in the local armed conflict), even as he recognized that just a few months before he would not have felt safe coming to the market. All interviewees insisted that more needed to be done to prevent the crisis from waxing again. The work of HACP in particular was praised. The institution appears to have a working early warning system in the area, which helped to prevent a number of inter-community brawls. This system grew out of the relationships that

61 Interview with senior official at the Nigerien Association for Human Rights Defense (ANDDH) in Ayorou.

62 Interview with local government official of Ayorou.

63 The state adopted the language of counter terrorism in its military action against the cross-border militant Salafist threat. Denoting these individuals as “terrorists” trades in the common discourse of othering those responsible for violence as “not Nigerien.”

64 According to its official mission, placed under the supervision of the Nigerien presidency, HACP is responsible for cultivating peace, dialogue, and respect, and identifying solutions to the socioeconomic causes of insecurity, banditry, rebellion, and new sources of insecurity linked to terrorism and trafficking. It develops, implements, and monitors recovery programs for conflict-affected communities and works to identify actions to correct inequality, disparity, and exclusion in the development process, to promote national cohesion and unity. For more, see: “Mission de la HACP,” Haute Autorité à la Consolidation de la Paix (HACP), accessed March 25, 2021, <http://www.hacp-niger.org/>.

65 Sites of intercommunal interaction have a positive impact on the reported psychosis, as regularized interactions between communities reduce the specter of other.

66 The group splintered from MNLA in September 2018.

HACP built with local chiefs and clerics, which are more permanent and continuous than the ones supposed to exist between them and local and regional territorial administration (prefects and governors). In addition, HACP can generally establish more informal and unobtrusive contacts with local informants than other state organizations.

Peacebuilding, dialogue, respect, identifying solution to the socioeconomic causes of insecurity, banditry, and rebellion, and new sources of insecurity linked to terrorism and trafficking. Program implementation and data collection, identify actions to correct inequality, disparity, and exclusion in the development process, national cohesion and unity, validating impact on the communities concerned.

However, these initiatives and efforts do not seem to be capable of placating a key demographic: the radicalized youth of the Fulani herding communities. The Salafist message that organizes the anger of Fulani youth is also attractive to youths from other communities. However, young Fulani (and “Black” Tuareg) are believed to be the bulk of the violent extremist recruits, and they have remained impervious to the attractions of peaceful interdependence. This is small wonder, since their discontent stems in large part from the difficulties of integrating the pastoralist-farmer economic system in the region. According to two individuals from the region of Tahoua⁶⁷ interviewed in the focus group held after the fieldwork, the initial cause of these difficulties in economic integration are the increasing restrictions to transhumance corridors due to security force operations and the lack of well-regulated demarcations between farmlands and pasturelands.⁶⁸ Moreover, the population growth rate is much higher among farmers than among pastoralists, further limiting access to available land and driving grievances among mobile communities.⁶⁹

Interdependence and the state

The social setting in the research area is complex. Across the two sites, there are five ethnic groups, the Songhay-Zarma and the Hausa, who are farming communities, and the Fulani, the Tuareg, and the Arabs, who are mainly pastoralists. All communities possess some cattle and other animals and have a trading caste. Among the Fulani and Tuareg, the divide between “masters” and “slaves” is stark, even though slavery is illegal in Niger. It is also racialized as the local language speaks of “Red” and “Black” Tuareg (also known as Bella, from a Songhay word)⁷⁰, with the former being the purported masters, and the latter the purported slaves.

67 The administrative region of Niger east of Tillabéry.

68 Though this research was conducted in advance of the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic, the impact of COVID-related border closures on pastoralists had similar effect to the increased security operations and scrutiny of transhumant communities.

69 Rahmane Idrissa, “Political Economy of Fertility in Rural Niger: Exploring the Communes of Karma and Aguié,” Study report, Sahel Resilience Learning (SAREL) and USAID, 2016.

70 The concept of “Black Tuareg” (*Touareg noir*) seems to be preferred in public discourse by those who identify as such, and I will use it in the main in this paper. However, in local parlance in the local communities, the term Bella prevails, and I will use it in this section. These words are confusing also because the word Bella, which is a Songhay word, is often used by Songhay speakers for all Tuareg, “Black” and “Red,” despite the fact that the Songhay language actually has a word (Surgu) for “Red” Tuareg.

Table 2 In both research sites, Ayorou and Abala, members of all ethnic groups were surveyed.

Site	Arabs	Hausa	Fulani	Songhay-Zarma	Tuareg	Total
Ayorou	12	03	24	34	30	100
Abala	07	23	27	20	23	100
Total	19	26	50	51	53	200

The numbers that matter are those that distinguish communities with a pastoral and a farming heritage: 61 percent of respondents belong in pastoral, and 39 percent in farming groups. These proportions, though emerged randomly, and maybe precisely because of that, are indicative of the weight of the pastoral communities in the area. These communities are also the main actors in the state of violence.⁷¹ Interdependence was assessed by querying respondents about intermarriage (both between communities and within, in pastoral communities across the status divide), relations in the fields, relations on the market, and languages spoken.⁷²

The patterns that emerged from the survey indicate that interdependence is strong between all communities, except the Tuareg and Fulani, and tends to be weak or fractured along the caste status divide within the pastoral communities. This is showcased in conflicts that oppose “masters” and “slaves” among the Tuareg and the Fulani. These terms mirror the French language words used in public discourse in Niger (“*maîtres*” and “*esclaves*”) to reflect not actual slavery but forms of traditional subordinations originated in times when Tuareg, Fulani, and other local societies lived under a regime where various forms of servitude, including slavery, were practiced.⁷³

Today, descendants of “masters” strive to preserve some of the rights and authority that they derive from that ancient regime, whereas descendants of the subaltern and servile groups strive to resist this, leading to tensions that may erupt into conflicts under certain conditions. These conflicts showcase failing interdependence breeding conflict dynamics that drive radicalization, as groups increasingly interact and intersect with militant forces operating in the area in agitation against the state’s failure to manage contestation. The narratives of the jihadist elements resonate with groups seeking to overcome historical caste interrelations.

71 The pastoralist communities are politically disadvantaged in the state-supported efforts to expand farming and therefore commodity production.

72 This survey attempted to gain a sense of what the interdependence between resident communities entail, as well as how the state is perceived. This single-site market-day survey is not a scientific poll. However, if its results capture common opinions in a snapshot, it is useful when contextualized. Since this is not measurement, this research will not use the numbers to analyze the survey but will instead refer to the patterns indicated when set against contexts.

73 For Benedetta Rossi’s work in the neighboring Ader region, see: Benedetta Rossi, *From Slavery to Aid. Politics, Labour, and Ecology in the Nigerien Sahel, 1800–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

A prime example can be found in Inates, a Tuareg settlement in the department of Ayorou where the Nigerien army suffered a deadly attack in mid-December 2019.⁷⁴ Inates has a chieftaincy held by high-status “Red” Tuareg. The majority of the local community are “Black” Tuareg (or Bella), who resent the domination tinged with condescension, racism, and violence of the “Reds.”⁷⁵ The process of decentralization, which led to the emergence of local elected authorities (mayors and councilors) in the 2000s, saw the rise in power of Bella officials through the vote. Inates became a site where traditional power and democratic legitimacy clashed along the status line: while the chief is still a “Red” Tuareg, the mayor is a Bella. While the cause of the Bella is buoyed by democratic participation, the cause of the “Red” appears to be supported by the state, since chiefs are members of the territorial administration and derive power and influence from that position, allowing them to curtail the progress of local democracy.

In the current climate of violence, two chiefs of Inates—a father and a son—were murdered successively (in April and July 2019). The entire cattle of the mayor (over 800 heads)—and in this context cattle are capital—was stolen by an armed band at the cost of several fatalities. These events signal that the fight between “Reds” and Bella has turned deadly. Inates has since become a recruiting ground for violent extremist actors, with many individuals receptive to the radical criticism against traditional forms of domination, which are seen as vetted by the state. In this area, HACP, perceived to be “on the side of the chiefs (and “masters”),”⁷⁶ is not welcome and performs much less well than in Abala, for instance.

In Inates, there is an economic interdependence between Bella and “Red” Tuaregs, but the case suggests that interdependence leads to moderation when it is based on equality, not on a culture of inequality.⁷⁷ In the case of intercommunal relations in the fields and at the market with pragmatic exchange-based equality, the general pattern is also strong interdependence. This is marked at one end of a spectrum by the Hausa, the population that seem to have most positive relations with all communities, and on the other the Fulani, the population with least positive relations with all communities.

The case of the Hausa may be explained by certain aspects of their community, including stronger engagement in trade and services and less status hierarchy in their society (though it is hierarchical in a different way) and less taboos than others. Unlike the Songhay-Zarma, the other farming community in the region, the Hausa practice the trade of the butcher and meat seller, for instance, an important trade with cross-cutting economic relationships in an agropastoral region.

74 Hannah Armstrong, “Behind the Jihadist Attack in Niger’s Inates,” *International Crisis Group*, December 13, 2019, <https://www.crisis-group.org/africa/sahel/niger/behind-jihadist-attack-inates>.

75 In an interview, an elected official of Inates, a “Black” Tuareg, said of the “Reds”: “These are people who used to kill and plunder as they liked and did not think that the same could happen to them.” The record of this violence belongs in oral history and has not been researched by academics or journalists. It is thus unverified but not unbelievable.

76 Interview with local government official of Inates.

77 Elites, in this culture, believe that slavery is God-ordained. When a French airstrike killed “Black” Tuareg insurgents, they saw in that event not the result of an “anti-terrorist action,” as the French thought it was, but God’s punishment for the “slaves’ treason.” (Interview with local government official of Inates.)

The case of the Fulani may point to two divergent elements of explanation. On the one hand, it might mean that the Fulani are marginalized, which would then contribute to their radicalization. On the other hand, it might mean that the perception that they are the main perpetrators of violence in the region today has led to their greater marginalization and therefore greater willingness to form alliances with militants that do not perceive them as a sociopolitical adversary. The Fulani seem to have the poorest relations with the Tuareg, especially the “Red” Tuareg. Yet, interview data also indicate that in some of the violence groups of Fulani are allied with groups of Tuareg, including Daoussahak.⁷⁸

The Fulani in this area are not a homogeneous group, despite their generalization in political discourse and regional security policy.⁷⁹ They are divided in several communities named after the places of origin they claim and that are sometimes far from the border region. For instance, the Gandakobé Jaalgobé hail from the district of Téra, at the Burkina Faso border, over a hundred kilometers westward; the Adrawa Gorgabé from Ader, a region several hundreds of kilometers to the east; the Doubankobé Gobirankobé from Gobir, even farther than Adar, south-eastward.⁸⁰ These groups do not see eye to eye with each other on all issues and may have different interests and alliances with other communities. The group seen as most committed to violent extremism, the Tolébé, attack other Fulani groups to forcibly levy a *zakkat*, the Islamic impost.⁸¹

The contrast between Ayorou and Abala bears out the hypothesis that weak or fractured interdependence creates less moderation and higher risks of violence. This is also shaped by perceptions of the economy and of the state, i.e. the power that may offset the risks by developing and implementing helpful policies—especially around resource governance. On both scores, the contrast between the two sites remains. To the question whether the economy was going well in their districts, Abala’s respondents were much more sanguine than Ayorou’s.

Table 3 Responses to the question whether the economy is going well in the district, by research site.

State of the Economy	Ayorou	Abala	Total
Rather Good	12	49	61
Rather Bad	79	39	118
No response	9	12	21
Total	100	100	200

Most respondents in Ayorou (above 80 percent) are dissatisfied with government work in Education, Health, and Justice, whereas in Abala most (around 60 percent) are satisfied. In Ayorou, respondents complained most about Justice (43 percent), whereas in Abala about Education (40 percent). These two

78 The researcher was not able to disentangle this situation for want of the right research tools and time. This appears to relate to the overall complexities of the Fulani population in the region.

79 Madeline Vellturo, “Fulani and Jihad in West Africa: a complex relationship,” *Good Governance Africa*, October 13, 2020, <https://gga.org/fulani-and-jihad-in-west-africa-a-complex-relationship/>.

80 Several other groups of Fulani call Niger home. This list is not exhaustive, but relevant to the research sites and direct conflict dynamics.

81 According to one interviewee, in local capital, i.e. animals, this amounts to one bull, one two-year old male calf, and two rams.

sectors strongly correlate with closeness to the state: education fosters state personnel, while justice is the key sector where state intervention is needed to sort out the conflict-nurturing issues. In Niger, the state speaks French, thus a career in state organizations requires school education in French. Therefore, this type of education is strongly associated with the state. A well-functioning justice system—especially according to local criteria—is the frontline prevention for conflict escalation.⁸²

On the question of state/public governance, the governor ranks lowest, perhaps predictably as a more remote authority. Imams rank highest in Ayorou, and village chiefs in Abala. A telling contrast is the one about the gendarmerie, the central figure of the security state in the countryside and in small towns, which is significantly more appreciated in Abala (22 positive responses) than in Ayorou (8 positive responses). Mayors and the HACP also fare comparatively well. Overall, as of the time of this research no authority has reached a rate of positive responses of 50 (the highest rate, with 33 positive responses, was for imams in Ayorou). This suggests that there is more frustration than satisfaction regarding state/public governance.

These numbers are not conclusive. They are reflective of a reality that is not limited to this part of Niger and that gains special salience only due to the conflicts that rage here. Large-scale surveys conducted by Afrobarometer record similar rates of frustration and satisfaction with government work across the country, though much lower feelings and incidence of physical insecurity.⁸³ In that regard, the differences between Ayorou and Abala are consistent enough—and also consistent with interview data—to warrant a conclusion that policies from the state and local authorities can have a positive impact. But to understand the conditions and meaning of any positive change, we need to take a broader view, revisiting the concept of balance and diving into the historical interethnic relations beneath the surface of the state.

REVISITING BALANCE: HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL TRENDLINES

In the broader view, balance in the relations between the resident communities has long been limited by tensions and conflicts that reach deep in history and were precipitated by the political changes around democratization and decentralization in the 1990s–2000s. However, even these changes would not have led to the current conflicts without the war in Mali. Given the salience of these changes in local perceptions, the author has reconstructed them in this section by revisiting the relevant episodes in Niger’s colonial and recent history.

82 See previous RESOLVE research report on dynamics in Chad related to language and secularism. Remadji Hoinathy and Daniel Eizenga, *The State of Secularism in Chadian Higher Education: Testing Perceived Ties to Violent Extremism* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.37805/lcb2019.2>.

83 Afrobarometer, “Résumé des résultats. Sixième série de l’enquête Afrobaromètre au Niger, 2015,” LASDEL, April 2015, <http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/ngr-r6-sor.pdf>.

Historical change

Change in the border area occurred in two great waves. The first wave dates back to the colonial era, the second to the 1990s (see next subsection). A romantic view of African history often faults artificial colonial borders for tensions and conflicts on the continent. This is assuming that what went on before was devoid of conflicts, a thinking that leads dangerously close to the racist notion that Africa had no history before the arrival of the White man. History *is* conflicts and struggles.

Colonialism broke a unified system that stretched from south of Timbuktu to the districts of Ayorou, Abala, and Bani-Bangou, down to areas just south of these towns, across the current border between Mali and Niger. This was the hegemony of the Tuareg Williminden nobility that developed in the late 18th and early 19th century. The Williminden hegemony did not build a state—it had no administration and did not render the services expected from a state—but rather provided a protection racket, enforced thanks to the warlike mobility of the Tuareg elite, cowing farmers for tributes.⁸⁴ The first French military explorer of the region, Émile Hourst, was impressed and called the area “Tuareg country” (“*pays des Touareg*”). The first French book on the colony of Niger, also written by an army man, presented the main farming people of the area, the Songhay, as deserving to be run roughshod over.⁸⁵

However, French colonialism needed labor and taxes, which were more forthcoming from farmers than from roving warlords. The power of the latter was therefore broken, and in the 1930s the farming communities started to expand northward. This is the period when the Zarma founded Bani-Bangou, and the Hausa founded Abala. Many of the disputes about land ownership around Ayorou also run back to this period. Tuareg chiefs claim that land was given to them by the forefathers of the (Songhay) chiefs of Ayorou, who rebuke the claim by implying that the land was actually extorted and must be restored to its rightful owners.⁸⁶

This first wave of change is at the root of much Tuareg violence, which without context looks gratuitous. Many in the Tuareg elite remember this period as a time when the French substituted the Tuareg protection racket for theirs and eventually elevated the “inferior races” of the Zarma and Hausa, who had been ordained to be slaves, to a position of command. This subversion of the “natural order” was intolerable in their eye.⁸⁷

84 Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, *Les Sociétés songhay-zarma, Niger-Mali: chefs, guerriers, esclaves, paysans* (Paris: Karthala, 1984); Bendetta Rossi, *From Slavery to Aid. Politics, Labour, and Ecology in the Nigerien Sahel, 1800-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

85 Émile Hourst, *La Mission Hourst sur le Niger et au pays des Touareg* (Paris: Plon, 1898); Maurice Abadie, *La Colonie du Niger. Afrique centrale* (Paris: Société d'éditions géographiques, maritimes et coloniales, 1927); Olivier de Sardan, *Les Sociétés songhay-zarma, Niger-Mali*.

86 See Xavier Bernier, “Les conséquences des sécheresses récentes sur le développement agropastoral au nord de Filingué (Niger),” (Thesis, Université Joseph Fourie, Grenoble, 1988); and interview data from the Niamey focus group and interview with interview with local government official of Ayorou.

87 This information is from a *The New York Times* reporter who was working on a story on the rebellion ongoing in the region of Agadez in 2007. The Tuareg men interviewed by the reporter supported the rebellion but were from the Niger-Mali border region, not from Agadez. Lidya Polgreen, personal correspondence with author. See also elsewhere in the region (northern Mali): Pierre Boilley, *Les Touareg*

This history surfaces in the interviews conducted for this study. When plundering cattle, Tuareg marauders would refer to this as a tax, in reference to the notion that the country belonged to them. The word used is *jangal* (a Fulani word for cattle tax), not *zakkat*.⁸⁸ According to one interviewee, this behavior became more egregious during the Tuareg rebellions of the 1990s that claimed the region as part of “Tuareg country.”⁸⁹

A former Fulani militiaman the author interviewed for another research effort in June 2019 said that back in the 1980s cattle raiding occurred only within Malian territory, partly because Niger’s strongman of the period, Gal. Seyni Kountché, was willing and able to protect the border. This interviewee also offered a “material” explanation for what he saw as banditry: Mali’s security personnel at a remote outpost from Bamako felt free to assist in the plundering, because stolen Nigerien cattle fetched good prices in markets in southern Mali.⁹⁰ He also stressed that the Fulani engaged in similar behavior too, initially by way of retaliation and afterward because some took a taste for it.

The rebellion of the MNLA, the Malian Tuareg separatist movement that started the wars in 2012, was seen as a direct threat by the Fulani local elite. Its stated objective was to revive the old “Tuareg country,” which could happen only at the expense of other groups in the area. Its initial successes alarmed especially the border-residing Fulani communities, leading them to align with the Fulani-dominated jihadist outfit, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA), which saw a very large influx of Fulani combatants from the Mali-Niger border in 2012-13. Later, open French military support for some of the separatist Tuareg militia (MSA and the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA)),⁹¹ especially as it was not seen to be counterpoised by governments in Niamey and Bamako, further entrenched the Fulani in their alliance with jihadists.

Political change

The second wave of central change occurred in the 1990s. In the colonial and post-colonial eras, governments relied on a reinvented chieftaincy system to keep the peace across the rural areas. This was less true for the First Republic (1960-74) that ruled Niger in the era of modernization theories and consequently sought to unseat “feudalism,” as the chieftaincy system was then labelled. The military regime (1974-91) returned to supporting the chiefs for pragmatic reasons, primarily as assistants in its rural

Kel Adagh. Dépendances et révoltes: du Soudan français au Mali contemporain (Paris: Karthala, 1999), 292-293; André Bourgeot, *Les Sociétés touarègues. Nomadisme, identité, résistances* (Paris: Karthala, 1995), 356; Normand, “Le Sahel peut-il retrouver la paix?”

88 The sociolinguistic distinction is important in identifying why and how Tuareg groups became rhetorically aligned with Islamist militants, from the perspective of their ethnic competitors.

89 From a collective interview with chiefs of Booni Fulani, Daya Peul, and Ayorou Haoussa.

90 Interview with a gentleman from Gao conducted in Bamako in July 2019 for a different project (research on migration networks funded by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung) confirmed this. See: Rahmane Idrissa, *Un dialogue sur fond de divergence: L’impact de la politique migratoire européenne sur l’intégration Ouest-Africaine. Les cas du Nigeria, du Mali et du Niger* (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Section Afrique, 2019), <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/15340.pdf>.

91 The history reported above suggests that the favorable impressions that the French military had about Tuareg military valor from their first entry in the region still hold or were holding in the early 2010s.

development policy. Democratization in 1991 reopened the case against the chiefs, this time in the name of liberalism (freedom and human rights). It was thought that authority should come from the consent of the people, not from “tradition.” The impact of this change became strong for chiefs when decentralization (i.e. democratization at local levels) was launched in the early 2000s, with the first local elections held in 1999. While in many parts of the country the outcome of this change was chiefs learning to live with elected officials who might not be beholden to them, in the agropastoral areas it resulted in the revolt of those suffering from the stigma and, in some cases, the realities of a servile condition.

As soon as Niger adopted democracy, a national association, *Timidria* (“solidarity” in Tamashaq, the Tuareg language), founded in 1991 by the traditional bonded classes, rapidly scored successes that threatened the position of the traditional master classes, especially among the Tuareg. For instance, in the agropastoral districts of Tahoua, “Black” Tuareg turned the chieftaincy system to their advantage by petitioning for the creation of new, “Black”-run chieftaincies that depleted the older ones of their *administrés* (“governed”). We have seen that in Inates, the *timidria* between “Black” Tuareg gave them control of the municipality, i.e. in the democratic context the real local authority. The social-revolutionary character of this change stoked bile among the Tuareg elite and might have invited violence.

However, in the early 2010s, Niger’s government under President Mahamadou Issoufou threw the doors of the state wide open for elite Tuareg, thus creating reassurances to them. Since 2011, the prime minister has been a Tuareg politician from the traditional establishment of the region of Agadez, and many higher echelons of the state were populated by people with a similar background. This created the aggrieved perception among “Black” Tuareg that the central government would still tend to side with the “masters” class. A similar perception grew in local settings with more satisfaction among elite Tuareg. In this way, polarization along the status divide hardened across the agropastoral regions.⁹²

These cleavages set the stage for the current context—the underlying vulnerability hidden by the systems of moderation that limited violence—but failed to address deep-rooted grievances against the advancing democratization of state power, imbalanced economic power between pastoralists and farmers, and legacy enmities based as much on class and social function as ethnic background. As the state is receding as a legitimate actor in border communities and suffers further damage during the ongoing military action against insurgents, with accompanying human rights abuses of civilians by state security actors, it is losing its ability to serve the role of a third-party interlocutor between communities. This vacuum was filled by insurgents, imposing their rule through hostage taking, targeted killings, and periodic outrages following mass killings—these last could be interpreted as punishing communities for intransigence as well as competing for notoriety with other militant actors.

These developments—especially the clash between local democracy and traditional hierarchies—may not necessarily lead to violence, in fact they did not in other parts of Niger’s Sahel-Sahara.⁹³ In the border

92 These deductions come from local primary data and observations of the author.

93 It is likely, however, that the early defeat of the MNLA at the hands of Jihadist groups in Mali helped stem the expansion of violence into Niger. Conceivably, an MNLA success in northern Mali would have led to copycat movements in parts of Niger’s Sahel-Saharan regions.

region, however, the urgencies created by the tangle of conflicts that had plunged northern Mali into insurrectionary warfare engulfed the resident Nigerien communities. In the more polarized, Tuareg and Fulani communities people had to choose a camp, and many among the “Black” Tuareg turned toward ethnicity-based allegiances across the border and against the state of Niger that appeared to be siding with their oppressors. It is unclear how the state will be able to reprise its moderating role in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The contrast observed between Ayorou and Abala demonstrates that local contextual understanding is key. The following recommendations provide considerations for Nigerien state actors, central and local, and external partners to restore the balance and alleviate exacerbating conflict dynamics in the Tillabéry region.

First, a better understanding of the sociopolitical issues may lead the central government to develop an approach to the conflicts that may stem their spread. The reality of economic interdependence means that the conflicts are damaging for all communities. In Abala, it has proved possible to work a policy through that reality and improve the situation to the extent that enemies are now trading on the marketplace. In Ayorou, the grievances of “Black” Tuareg need to be considered for any process of deradicalization to become possible. In particular, interdependence based on legacy master-slave relationship hierarchies needs to be eradicated. This requires contextually specific local political economy analysis to unravel the threads of interdependence, negotiation, and cooperation over resources. Given that inter- and intracommunal relations are complex and sensitive yet vital to peacekeeping, state agents, especially those working in the security sector, should be trained to learn and understand the culture and histories of the locales where they are posted—in addition to addressing corruption and abuses.

To step up crisis prevention, conflict analysis, and peacebuilding efforts already in place one route might be to expand the capacity of HACP or support the establishment of an HACP-like agency that does not focus only on emergency but also looks into caste- and class-related political issues. Any expansion of HACP mandates must be sensitive to pre-existing perceptions that the HACP is more attuned to elite concerns.

Second, to work toward regaining the conditions of balance, the interplay of institutional mechanisms need to improve. In Abala, the state of violence comparatively decreased because the two key institutional mechanisms for keeping the balance in the rural areas, the local elected officials—the deputy mayor in particular—and the traditional authorities were on the same page, and the gendarmerie were perceived to perform better and provide greater support. From the research it is unclear if there was a systemic basis for this effective cooperation. More research, perhaps social network analysis, could tease out the precise nature of the interactions between personal relationships at the local level and their feedback into formal governance structures.

This better performance of the gendarmerie in Abala may derive from the topography of institutions compared to Ayorou. In Abala, the gendarmerie precinct is in the central area of the town, close to the town hall and other public buildings. In Ayorou, the gendarmerie precinct is for all practical purposes outside of the town. The physical distance appears to have resulted in a psychological barrier, which may contribute to the dimmer views of people in Ayorou on the gendarmerie in contrast with Abala. In Inates, the local elected officials and the traditional authorities are at loggerheads. Therefore, while there is evidence of institutional cooperation in Abala, the perception in Ayorou is that institutions are rather a source of conflict.

The resolution of the issues that perpetuate war in the border region is a political matter. It will depend on the political vision and abilities of the national leadership. It is easier to make recommendations on what would make implementation of such a vision simpler. The recommendations fall under two broad categories: (1) mending the institutional mechanisms to keeping or restore a peace-supporting balance (chiefs, rural security personnel, elected officials); and (2) developing a campaign of persuasion targeting the radicalized or those belonging into groups most susceptible to radicalization. The recommendations are summarized from insights collected from interviews and a focus group.

On the first score, the Nigerien government should professionalize the traditional chiefs. 2008 and 2010 laws already gave a formal status to chiefs as agents of the territorial administration. While chiefs may resist further formalization as destructive of their informal privileges—while accepting the formal perquisites provided in their legal status—the real resistance comes from the central government, partly because further formalization will imbue the chieftaincy with the kind of institutional autonomy that would reduce their current vulnerability to politicization and manipulations.⁹⁴ Professionalization of the chieftaincy is a demand from the governed, as often expressed in focus groups. High professional standards would increase the trust that chiefs need to act in complex social settings and not be suspected of being beholden to sectional interests or of being mouthpieces of the rulers of the day. This should be the case especially of proximity chiefs (*village, tribu*), who are the least professional and the least integrated in the administrative scheme.

To establish that local elected officials are the real local authorities in an era of democracy,⁹⁵ their mandate should be extended to land issues. Land issues are still a preserve of chiefs, after they have managed to get ahold of them at the eleventh hour in the democratization debates in 1993. At the time, this was more easily done because Niger had not yet embarked on decentralization. Land issues, including access to natural resources, i.e. demarcation between pasturelands and farmlands, would become less of a source of conflict if they were subjected to local democracy with the norms of accountability, transparency, and publicity that govern rules of decision in that dispensation.

94 Chiefs are under the ministry of the interior and are often seen as strategic assets during electoral campaigns. Ruling parties use powers of incumbency to remove or promote chiefs and sometimes create new chieftaincies. Other politicians—deputies from both majority and opposition—interfere in chieftaincy affairs for patronage in a rural constituency.

95 They are the local equivalents of the national government and the national assembly, which do not have to contend with a traditional king or emperor. The professionalization of traditional chiefs would make such a clarification easier.

On the second score, people interviewed for this study all insisted on the importance of developing and communicating a message of peace. The national leadership should develop its vision in that regard and launch and maintain a sustainable campaign of persuasion. Events can include recurrent forums of the kind that had resulted in an agreement in Abala in September 2019 and was held in the form of a cultural festival. The emotional appeal of culture is key in this context, especially as a response to the Salafist message. Messaging through social networks⁹⁶ and other informational techniques adapted to the context will strengthen the strategy.

Given the enduring grievances between and within ethnic groups, and how these grievances can motivate youths from across ethnic groups to join or support militancy and jihadism, policymakers may be inclined to attempt ethnic-specific interventions. However, from the perspective of interviewees, the main barriers they perceive to inter- and intracommunal conflict resolution stem from their perceived inability to participate in the public square (due to inequities in democratic processes or safety concerns) and their lack of access to decisionmakers (due to absence or distance from the capital where macro security policy is made). Policymakers should be cautious of assumptions of how individual radicalization does and does not correlate to community motivations for violence or peace and instead support platforms allowing local communities to articulate their needs, frustrations, and potential solutions.

Lastly, and crucially, any vision informing policy from the government and outside intervenors must take account of the legitimacy of the grievances of “Black” Tuareg and Fulani pastoralists. This is not the case at present, since both the state of Niger and its Western allies—France especially—view these groups as “terrorists” and treat them with a hostility that further solidifies their alliance with Salafist militants. Recent events such as a documented massacre of 102 “Black” Tuareg and Fulani pastoralists by the Niger army late March 2020 around Inates and Ayorou⁹⁷ only underscore the urgency of a policy turn supported by the Nigerien state and its geopolitical allies and partners on the basis of these recommendations.

CONCLUSION

The proliferation of armed groups and escalating intercommunal violence exposes how external actors exploit long-term sites of contestation and governance failure and other fissures that developed over time as populations expanded and livelihoods changed. The proliferation of groups also exposes how the mechanisms communities rely on at the local levels to limit violence and conflict are deeply reliant on the presence of a third party (in this case the state) to provide additional conflict management support where these mechanisms fail. Competition over resources (both within pastoralist communities and between pastoralists and farmers), demographic growth, and environmental degradation and mismanagement created an intractable situation that the government failed to address and armed groups took advantage of. These armed groups were able to mobilize communities against each other on the basis of initial grievances. As the conflict continued, the focus of the groups changed to subsistence, largely through

96 Social networks are used by violent extremists for their own campaigns.

97 Mondafrique, “Niger, cent deux civils massacrés puis ensevelis dans des fosses communes,” April 22, 2020, <https://mondafrique.com/niger-cent-deux-hommes-massacres-puis-ensevelis-dans-des-fosses/>.

adopting coercive criminal organizational methods and tactics. Extortion, theft, tax, and targeted killings (reminiscent of mafia tactics) demonstrate how jihadists were able to coopt CBAG-like groups away from community protection or score settling into criminal groups and terrorist affiliates.

Armed community mobilization and ethnically affiliated community-based armed groups in Niger in their current form must be viewed as a result of the breakdown in hybrid sociopolitical mechanisms that maintained a precarious balance across several Tuareg rebellions and reformations of local governance processes. The shifting role of traditional chiefs in a process of democratization and decentralization; changing demographics increasing the representative power of farmers versus herders; and the short-term alliances between both western military forces and militant groups are all part and parcel to the complicated security environment in the Nigerien-Malian borderlands. In seeking solutions to escalating insecurity, it is imperative that policymakers and practitioners heed the fruits of historic interdependent economic and political relations and beware inflaming equally historic grievances between and within the diverse populations that call Niger home.

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Photo adapted from: Photo courtesy of the U.S. Institute of Peace. Mali (2021).

CENTRAL MALI

Armed Community
Mobilization in Crisis

Rida Lyammouri

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proliferation of community-based armed groups (CBAGs)¹ in Mali's Mopti and Ségou Regions has contributed to transforming Central Mali into a regional epicenter of conflict since 2016. Due to the lack of adequate presence of the state, certain vulnerable, conflict-affected communities resorted to embracing non-state armed groups² as security umbrellas in the context of inter-communal violence. These local conflicts are the result of long-standing issues over increasing pressure on natural resources, climate shocks, competing economic lifestyles, nepotistic and exclusionary resource management practices, and the shifting representations of a segregated, historically constructed sense of ethnic identities in the region.

The continuous rise of violent incidents perpetrated by jihadist groups and CBAGs in the past five years aggravated the security situation in Central Mali. The jihadist group Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM), through its local affiliate Katiba Macina, exploited already tense conflict dynamics and the grievances of marginalized Fulani communities to increase its power and influence. Through its compelling inclusive narrative, which reinforces perceptions of the government's abdication of reliable security and justice provision, and successful recruitment efforts, JNIM is now firmly established in rural areas of Central Mali.

CBAGs are also capitalizing on the chaos to extend their influence and control. Countering perceived security threats by Katiba Macina, government security forces, and rival groups, they further amplify ethnic tensions through rhetoric that vilifies the "other" based on belonging to an identity group. Consequently, the vicious cycle of attacks has included violence against civilians as a form of retaliation by all armed parties to the protracted regional conflict. It is reframing the political realities in Central Mali toward polarized identities, a militarization of local communities, and the normalization of violence as a political tool. These disturbing trends put Central Mali on a pathway toward an endless cycle of violence and an increase in civilian casualties.

1 According to Dr. Daniel E. Agbiboa: "A consolidated definition of CBAGs has proven difficult because of their multiple types and characteristics, and because CBAGs are typically located in zones of ambiguity between the presence and absence of law and social order. Across Africa, CBAGs have organized at various levels (from lineage to ethnic group), in various spaces (from village ward to city streets), and for various reasons (from crime fighting to political lobbying to counterinsurgency). CBAGs draw their legitimacy from various and, at times, competing sources, including traditional and communal establishments, religious establishments, and political establishments." See: 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>.

2 According to Lauren Van Metre: "Community-based armed groups are a subset of non-state armed groups (NSAGs), defined by their relationship to the state and local communities and the ways they exercise power. While NSAGs, such as insurgent or terrorist groups, seek to disrupt or undermine the state to take it over or establish an alternative political system, CBAGs can be aligned with, or complementary to, the state, or they can operate in gray areas with minimal state presence. They do not typically pursue large political ambitions and strategies; rather, they advance the local ambitions of their stakeholders." See: 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>.

This report untangles the legitimacy of armed groups, mobilizing factors, and the multi-level impact of violence implicating CBAGs. It further explores the relations amongst different actors, including the state, armed groups, and communities. The field research team conducted 35 semi-structured interviews with populations affected by violence at key locations in Mopti and Ségou Regions.³ The interviews, conducted between February and April 2020, focused on local perspectives about the factors, mechanisms, and dynamics of armed mobilization in the interviewees' communities. As a complement to the interviews, and to provide a co

mprehensive overview, the report maps and analyzes the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) to visualize and assess CBAG activities, trends of violence, and hyper-localized dynamics.⁴ The findings provide relevant insight for context-specific policy design toward conflict resolution and hybrid security governance.

3 Special thanks to Modibo Ghaly Cissé, who conducted field interviews in Mopti and Ségou Regions.

4 Special thanks to Héni Nsaibia, who is a Senior Researcher at ACLED.

INTRODUCTION

This research report reviews the security situation in Central Mali focusing on the causes behind the proliferation of non-state and community-based armed groups. The research applies the conceptual framework of CBAGs to Central Mali to analyze the drivers of community mobilization and relationships between communities, ethnic groups, and the state. Through a better understanding of CBAGs and hybrid security governance structures in the area, the research seeks to fill in knowledge gaps on Central Mali community security with recommendations for policy and programming.

Background

Mali has been undergoing a political and security crisis since 2012, signified by two key events: the occupation of the north by a coalition of jihadist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and a coup d'état motivated by the mishandling of the security situation in the north. While the crisis was somewhat limited to northern regions, it started to move into central regions. In January 2013, jihadist groups launched a first assault in Central Mali to expand further south. Their progress was quickly halted by the intervention of the French Operation Serval and the Malian and African militaries. Pressure from France and its allies chased violent extremist organizations (VEOs) out of the key towns and cities that they occupied in 2012. However, they maintained noticeable influence in rural areas and villages in central and northern parts of the country. Subsequently, early 2015 signaled the birth of a new front for jihadists that had previously only operated in northern Mali. A brigade associated with al-Qaeda began a cycle of violence that has since escalated.

The crisis made its way into Central Mali. While occupying parts of the north, jihadists exploited divisions between communities and grievances toward the state and rival armed groups to expand their influence into Central Mali, notably resonating with Fulani communities. The inability of the state to protect Fulani herders against Tuareg armed bandits and local elites provided an opportunity for jihadists to recruit, arm, and train among disadvantaged Fulani communities, in exchange for providing security and justice the state was unable to provide. This alliance served jihadists by enabling them to establish themselves in Mopti and Ségou Regions. They were helped by influential Fulani preacher Hamadou Koufa, who played a key role in jihadists influence and expansion in the center. By 2015, he led al-Qaeda's new front in Central Mali, which earned him the deputy leadership nomination of the newly established al-Qaeda branch, Jama't Nusrat al-Islam Wal Muslimeen (JNIM), in the Sahel. The jihadist recruitment of Fulani fueled tensions with the Bambara and the Dogon ethnic groups and, in addition to the weak presence of the national security forces, lead to the creation of ethnic self-defense groups.

As a result of the escalating crisis, violence in Central Mali has skyrocketed since 2015. Lacking sufficient physical protection from state security forces, the population started to re-organize to protect their communities. Several self-defense and ethnic-based armed groups have emerged under different pretexts. In August 2018, an armed group formed to represent Dogon hunters, called Dan Na Ambassagou. While

the group received initial support from the Malian government, it was repeatedly accused of massacring Fulani civilians. Subsequently, Fulani communities also created their own self-defense militias.

The proliferation of non-state groups and CBAGs therefore has worsened the security situation in Central Mali and transformed it into a conflict epicenter. The number of CBAGs has dramatically increased following the emergence of VEOs in Central Mali after the 2015 peace agreement in Northern Mali.⁵ The implementation of the accord saw modest results in six years. But new destabilizing events continue to be a setback.⁶ The region has witnessed unprecedented massacres. On January 1, 2019, at least 37 Fulanis were killed, including women and children, in Mopti Region⁷; in March 2019, at least 160 Fulani civilians were killed⁸—a Dogon CBAG was suspected to be responsible for both. In June 2019, at least a hundred Dogon civilians were killed by a suspected Fulani CBAG in Mopti Region.⁹ In May 2020, three Dogon villages were attacked, and at least 27 civilians were killed by a suspected Fulani CBAG.¹⁰ Bambara CBAGs reportedly have also committed attacks against Fulani villages in Central Mali.¹¹

Community mobilization

Despite existing tensions between different communities over natural resources and social divides, tensions in Central Mali had been non-violent except for sporadic incidents. However, recently the region was dragged into a quagmire of violent retributions between previously competing communities and ethnic groups. Communal violence in Central Mali intensified following the arrival of jihadist groups in 2015. This transformation of the security environment was accompanied by the creation of armed Bambara, Dogon, and Fulani CBAGs.¹² Communities saw the militarization of civilians as legitimate, as attacks against the Malian army intensified.¹³ Thus, rising insecurity, weakened presence of the state administration, operational weakness of the government forces, and ecological-economic pressures became the rationale for the mobilization and militarization of civilian communities.

Communities affected by inter-communal violence accepted armed groups as security providers. These local conflicts have diverse drivers, including stresses on natural resources, climate shocks, competing

5 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali Resulting from the Algiers Process, July 24, 2014, https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/EN-ML_150620_Accord-pour-la-paix-et-la-reconciliation-au-Mali_Issu-du-Processus-d'Alger.pdf

6 The Carter Center, “L’Observateur Indépendant au Mali: La période de transition est décisive pour progresser dans la mise en œuvre de l’Accord de Paix,” August 23, 2021, <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/2021/mali-082321-fr.pdf>.

7 BBC, “Mali villagers killed in armed raid in Mopti region,” January 1, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46732703>.

8 Katarina Hoije, “Death Toll From Mali Attacks Climbs to 160, Government Says,” Bloomberg, March 26, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-26/death-toll-from-mali-attacks-climbs-to-160-government-says>.

9 BBC, “Mali attack: 100 killed in ethnic Dogon village,” June 10, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48579475>.

10 Al Jazeera, “Many killed in central Mali ethnic attacks: Officials,” May 28, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/28/many-killed-in-central-mali-ethnic-attacks-officials>.

11 Human Rights Watch, “Avant, nous étions des frères,” December 7, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/fr/report/2018/12/07/avant-nous-etions-des-freres/exactions-commises-par-des-groupes-dautodefense-dans>.

12 Minority Rights Group International, “World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples—Mali,” November 2017, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4954ce5bc.html>

13 Interviews in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

economic lifestyles, nepotistic and exclusionary resource management practices, and transforming ethnic identities. The creation of CBAGs continues to cause more harm than the protection they purport to provide, as the number of civilian casualties is on the rise.¹⁴ Communities that once lived together in peace, despite their differences, continue to grow apart. Social cohesion that once brought unity is rapidly vanishing.

Poor governance stands out as a salient driver of the proliferation of armed groups and the current multidimensional crisis. Local communities have lost faith in the central government and its security forces and are looking for alternative actors to provide security, justice, and economic development. Government representatives are perceived as corrupt, unjust, and after their own gain.¹⁵ Security forces are perceived as oppressive actors, at least since 2013, and are repeatedly accused of arbitrary arrests and acts of atrocity against populations suspected to support jihadists in Central Mali.¹⁶ Jihadist groups have tapped into this struggle of the state and the disillusionment of populations.¹⁷ The resulting polarization along ethnic lines spurred the creation of numerous ethnically homogenous CBAGs, further jeopardizing the security condition in the Central Mali Regions of Ségou and Mopti (Figure 1).

The state's failure as a security provider has been the catalytic narrative for the growth of CBAGs. The lack of government institutions at the local level, together with communities' perceptions and responses to government neglect, is a key basis for CBAGs' successful proliferation in Central Mali.¹⁸ Government security initiatives in Central Mali since 2018 have failed to establish stability or community trust. The military-led transition governments set up after the August 2020 and March 2021 military coups had no plans for addressing the region's security gaps.¹⁹ Their transition roadmap highlights the importance of disarming self-defense militias, promoting communal dialogue, launching a dialogue with armed groups,

14 Héni Nsaiba and Jules Duhamel, "Sahel 2021: Communal Wars, Broken Ceasefires, and Shifting Frontlines," *ACLEDA*, June 2021, <https://acleddata.com/2021/06/17/sahel-2021-communal-wars-broken-ceasefires-and-shifting-frontlines/>.

15 Cédric Jourde, Marie Brossier, and Modibo Ghaly Cissé, "Prédation et violence au Mali: élites statutaires peules et logiques de domination dans la région de Mopti," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 53, no. 3 (2019): 431-445, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2019.1666016>.

16 Human Rights Watch, "Mali: Malian Army, Islamist Groups Executed Prisoners," February 1, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/node/248691/printable/print>; Agence France Press, "Mali Army Arrests Soldiers Accused Over Torture Video," *Barron's*, October 13, 2021, <https://www.barrons.com/news/mali-army-arrests-soldiers-accused-over-torture-video-01634151006>.

17 Corinne Dufka, *How Much More Blood Must be Spilled? Atrocities Against Civilians in Central Mali* (USA: Human Rights Watch, 2020), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/mali0220_web.pdf; Le Monde, "Nouveau Massacre dans des Villages Dogon dans le Centre du Mali," July 4, 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/07/04/nouvelles-tueries-au-mali-au-moins-40-villageois-et-soldats-tues_6045207_3212.html; Baba Ahmed, "Massacres dans le Centre du Mali: Pourquoi l'Armée ne Parvient pas à Protéger la Population," *Jeune Afrique*, November 12, 2019, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/794794/politique/massacres-dans-le-centre-du-mali-pourquoi-larmee-ne-parvient-pas-a-protger-la-population/>.

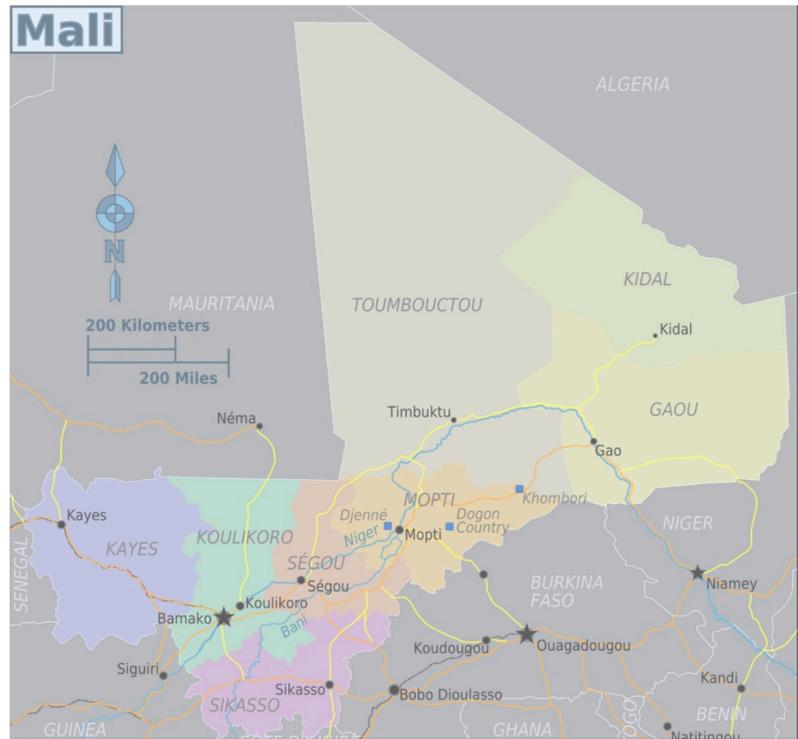
18 Agbiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance*.

19 United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission (MINUSMA), "Trois Projets MINUSMA pour Soutenir la Stratégie de Stabilisation du Centre du Mali," *Reliefweb*, December 1, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/trois-projets-minusma-pour-soutenir-la-strategie-de-stabilisation-du-centre-du-mali>; United Nations Development Programme, "A Ségou, le Comité Régional du Cadre Politique de Gestion de la Crise au Centre du Mali a été Lancé," July 2, 2020, <https://www.ml.undp.org/content/mali/fr/home/presscenter/articles/a-segou--le-comite-regional-du-cadre-politique-de-gestion-de-la-.html>.

and redeploying the state; however, it provides no action plan.²⁰

However salient, this “weak state” analysis²¹ alone cannot explain the creation and proliferation of CBAGs in Central Mali. State presence and governance provision in rural areas, including in Central Mali, have always been inadequate and insufficient.²² It is a parochial analysis and an insufficient approach in understanding and responding to the crisis. Such a limited analysis could undermine security efforts by negating the agency of local non-governmental actors in establishing security and could weaken the government’s ability to play a role in local security and governance.²⁴

Figure 1 Regions of Mali²³



Daniel Agbiboa explains that hybrid security governance emerges where the recognition and support of CBAGs are necessary in security and justice provision to bolster a weak state’s presence and ability to govern.²⁵ The argument stems from the historical dynamics in colonial and post-colonial Africa and the disconnect they created between political institutions both under colonial rule and post-independence for policing the communities they claim to secure. This disconnect spurs the need for communities to access political resources locally.

CBAGs are difficult to define because of their diverse behaviors, tactics, and motivations. CBAGs are fluid, and though in Central Mali they initially intended to protect their communities, their political objectives might change over time and become threats to their communities. Lauren Van Metre offers a typological framework for understanding potential shifts in CBAG identities.²⁶ Van Metre positions state-community relations, resources, norms, threats, and international actors as external factors that feed into an armed

20 International Crisis Group, “Enrayer La Communautarisation de La Violence au Centre du Mali,” November 9, 2020, <https://www.crisis-group.org/fr/africa/sahel/mali/293-enrayer-la-communautarisation-de-la-violence-au-centre-du-mali>.

21 International Crisis Group, “Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?,” July 6, 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/mali/central-mali-uprising-making>.

22 Mamadou Bodian, Aurélien Tobie, and Myriam Mareending, “The Challenges of Governance, Development and Security in the Central Regions of Mali,” *SIPRI*, March 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/challenges-governance-development-and-security-central-regions-mali>.

23 Large regions map of Mali, *Mapsland*, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www.mapsland.com/africa/mali/large-regions-map-of-mali>.

24 Agbiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance*, 8.

25 Ibid.

26 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*.

group's internal structure to give it a specific identity and assume the likelihood and nature of violence. Given the fluid nature of these group identities and their importance in drafting successful stabilization policies toward CBAGs, this report focuses on understanding relationships amongst CBAGs, affected communities, and the central government, as well as clarifying group influence.

Building on a decade of studies of the evolution of different armed groups in Mali and the wider West African Sahel, this report will identify and provide background about different armed groups operating in Central Mali and their key mobilization factors. It will then unpack the legitimization and motivation behind the emergence of CBAGs in different geographic areas of Central Mali and discuss the complex security dynamics connected to CBAGs. The report concludes with practical programmatic recommendations based on the findings of the study.

METHODOLOGY

This research report seeks to contextualize theoretical literature on CBAGs to Central Mali. The aim is to apply knowledge about CBAGs to the localized conflict dynamics in Central Mali to provide relevant insight for policymaking toward hybrid security governance. The research's purpose is threefold:

- First, to map community-based armed groups and their mobilization efforts in Central Mali.
- Second, to investigate relationships between community-based armed groups, the government, and local populations to understand the conditions that lead to their proliferation.
- Third, to provide a comprehensive overview of trends in violence and conflict involving jihadist groups and CBAGs, and how these groups use violence when they engage with each other and communities.

The study used qualitative research methods, including 35 field interviews, in addition to a comprehensive review of the relevant academic and gray literature. Data from the ACLED online dataset was also used to create graphs and maps.

The data collection was based on in-depth individual interviews, structured and unstructured, with stakeholders relevant to the Central Mali crisis. To adequately investigate relationships with local populations, the sampling process for the interviews attempted to capture different perspectives representative of all of society, including gender, age, and occupations to include administrative agents, traditional authorities, local social actors, and religious leaders. The 35 interviewees were participants living and working in Central Mali. The researchers conducted preliminary screening to select only participants known to be aware and knowledgeable of this important and complex topic. The 35 participants included men and women from Dogon and Fulani communities (Table 1). After validation of the data collection tool and guide, interview questions were translated into local languages, Bamanakan and Fulfulde.

The interviews were conducted at three key locations in Mopti and Ségou Regions selected for their relevant experiences. Additional interviews were also conducted in Bamako (Table 1).

- **Bandiagara**, Mopti Region: the research site was selected due to its accessibility, because the general population was broadly affected by the inter-communal conflict between Dogon and Fulani ethnic groups, and for the presence of jihadist brigades connected to al-Qaeda affiliate JNIM.
- **Macina**, Ségou Region: harbors the largest number of fighters in the region and is considered a leading supplier of combatants to groups in neighboring cercles.²⁷
- **Diafarabé**, Mopti Region: inter-communal conflict remains a serious concern in the area.

Table 1 Interview participants

Actors	Ségou Region		Mopti Region		Bamako District
	Macina	Kolongo-Tomo	Diafarabé	Bandiagara	Bamako
Local Inhabitants		2	3	2	
Communal Council	1	0	1	1	
Village Council	1	0	1	2	
Women Leaders	1	1	2	2	
Youth Leaders	2	1	1	1	
NGO	0	0	0	1	
Traditional Hunters	2	0	1	1	
Others	0	2	2		7
Total	7	6	11	10	7

The focus of all interviews was the presence of armed groups and their constituencies, the history of communal mobilization and its legitimacy among the population, mobilizing factors and dynamics of engagement between the population and armed groups, social changes linked to the emergence of these groups, perceptions of state responses to security challenges, and recommendations by the population

²⁷ The highest level of Mali’s administrative structure consists of eight regions, all named after the capital. The second level administrative divisions are 56 Cercles. At the third level they are divided into 703 communes. See: Regions of Mali, *Mappr*, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www.mappr.co/counties/mali-regions/>.

to reduce violence. In addition, data related to violent incidents involving both jihadist groups and CBAGs between 2015-2020 in Mopti and Ségou Regions are drawn from the ACLED dataset.²⁸

The fieldwork and data collection faced some challenges. The data collection phase in Macina and Ténénkou was scheduled to take place days after the first round of the legislative elections on March 29, 2020, and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collection was conducted in person via local researchers then by phone to respect COVID-19 measures. During the meetings participants often assumed the discussion was about the elections and/or COVID-19. The research team invested time explaining the purpose of the meeting and the importance to remain focused. Simultaneously, and as expected in the tense atmosphere in the region due to increased violence, participants were hesitant to speak about armed actors. However, the research team's ability to speak to local concerns was key to gaining the trust of participants.

CONTEXT: CENTRAL MALI'S VIOLENT CONFLICT

Mopti and Ségou Regions are two ethnically diverse regions situated in the heart of Mali, with important economies mostly based on agriculture, livestock herding, and fishing. Both regions are inhabited mainly by Fulani, Dogon, Bambara, Songhai, and Tuareg ethnic groups. The Tuareg and the Fulani are known as nomadic ethnic groups of pastoralists who move their herds across the regions in search of grazing and water for their animals. The Songhai, the Dogon, and the Bambara have a sedentary farming and fishing lifestyle. Being the primary livestock herding region in Mali, Mopti is critical not only for Mali's economy but also for the neighboring countries of Algeria, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Rice production makes the Ségou Region equally important. However, investment in rural communities and livestock herding remains low. In addition to a lack of sufficient state investment, intra- and inter-community conflicts in recent years have further deteriorated the conditions for these economic activities that the local population depends on. Pastoralism is threatened today by insecurity throughout West Africa, not just in Mali.²⁹

28 Clionadh Raleigh, Andrew Linke, Håvard Hegre and Joakim Karlsen, "Introducing ACLED: Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset: Special Data Feature," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 5 (2010): 651-660, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310378914>.

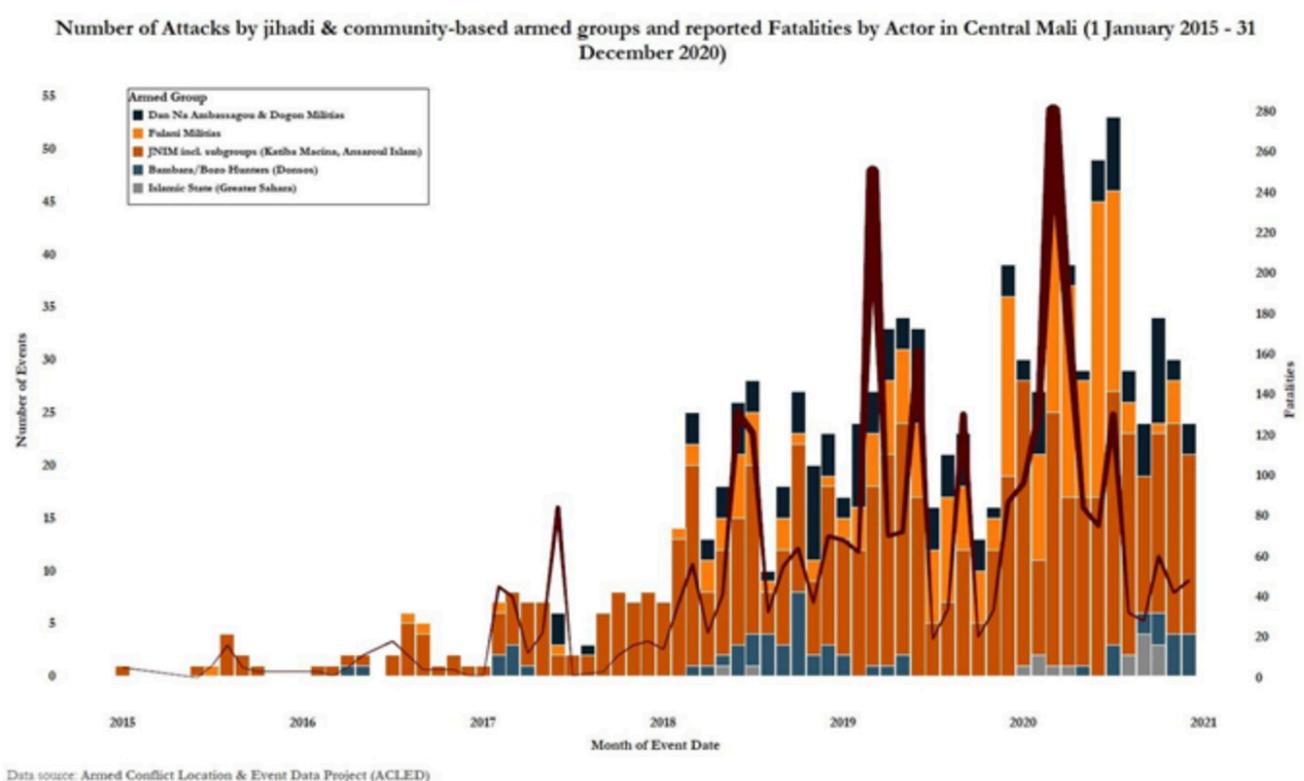
29 Mathieu Pellerin, *Entendre la Voix des Eleveurs au Sahel et en Afrique de l'Ouest: Quel Avenir Pour le Pastoralisme Face à l'Insécurité et ses Impacts?* (Niamey: Réseau Billital Maroobé et partenaires, 2021), <https://www.maroobe.com/images/DOCS/Rapport%20Etude%20-Avenir%20du%20pastoralisme%20face%20%C3%A0%20l'ins%C3%A9curit%C3%A9%20-RBM.pdf>.

Unprecedented violence

In 2015, the movement of jihadist-linked armed groups into Central Mali and attacks against military camps in Ségou and Mopti Regions officially launched a new jihadist front. In the following years, jihadists gained momentum and embedded themselves in different parts of both regions. Government forces struggled to halt the jihadist expansion, while government representatives, including traditional authorities, either fled the area or negotiated a co-existence.³⁰

Jihadist groups exploited the narrative of inequalities to source support and recruit from disadvantaged Fulani pastoralist communities.³¹ Access, power, and protection were key mobilizing factors for local communities to engage with jihadist groups.³² In 2016 and 2017, the assassinations of two Dogon leaders by jihadists were turning points in the conflict, leading the Dogon to create their own CBAG. They started targeting Fulani civilians under the pretext of their support for jihadists operating in Central Mali.

Figure 2 Violence trends in Ségou and Mopti Regions, Mali, by armed groups (January 1, 2015–December 12, 2020).³³



30 International Crisis Group, “Parler aux jihadistes au centre du Mali: le dialogue est-il possible?,” May 28, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/sahel/mali/276-speaking-bad-guys-toward-dialogue-central-malis-jihadists>; International Crisis Group, “Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence,” November 9, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/293-enrayer-la-communautarisation-de-la-violence-au-centre-du-mali>.

31 Sangaré Boukary, “Le Centre Du Mali: Épicentre Du Djihadisme?,” *Groupe de recherche et d’information sur la paix et la sécurité (GRIP)*, May 20, 2016, <https://grip.org/le-centre-du-mali-epicentre-du-djihadisme/>.

32 Jourde, et al., “Prédation et violence au Mali.”

33 Source: ACLED

Violence by Dogon self-defense groups against Fulani villages became recurrent. In response, Fulani civilians established Fulani CBAGs to protect their communities against repeated attacks by Dogon CBAGs. At first, the violence was a byproduct of the domino effect of newly created CBAGs, resulting in a cycle of retaliatory violence.

While jihadist groups in the Macina area inflamed conflicts, it was the shift in intra- and inter-community power politics that spurred the multiplication of armed groups and the cycle of unprecedented violence of the past five years (Figure 2). The ACLED data shows that since 2015 the number of casualties in Central Mali has been increasing every year as a result of the establishment and armed mobilization of different armed groups, both CBAGs and jihadists. Mopti's eastern Cercles of Bandiagara, Koro, and Bankass harbor multiple armed groups who contest influence over the population and territory and are experiencing the highest levels of attacks (Figure 3). The area is also known as *zone exondée*. Territorial contestation represents a key factor in the violence between jihadist groups and CBAGs. Multiple elements play into the mobilization of armed groups.

The role of the state

The proliferation of CBAGs in Ségou and Mopti Regions can be traced to the Malian state's retrenchment as a security provider and its history of reliance on ethnically aligned self-defense groups to supplement its armed forces during internal conflicts.³⁴ For instance, at least since the 1990s, to counter the rise of Tuareg and Arab rebellions in the North, the Malian government relied on the Ganda Koy militia.³⁵ In 2014, the Malian government created the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA in French, *Groupe d'Autodéfense Tuareg Imghad et Alliés*) to challenge other armed groups seeking independence of the North.³⁶ The emergence of CBAGs and reliance on ethnic-based armed groups is not a new phenomenon, and Central Mali demonstrated similar trends in recent years.

In 2012, a coalition of jihadist and separatist groups occupied northern Mali, capturing feelings of victimhood that also existed within the country's Fulani population. The state's abandonment of the Fulani, who were violently targeted by Tuareg rebels, pushed many Fulani to seek protection by joining jihadist groups.³⁷ The community radicalization of Fulani populations in Douentza Cercle, Mopti Region, is one example of the results of a vulnerable community's neglect by the government and its international partners who focused exclusively on addressing the crisis in Northern Mali to the detriment of Fulanis in

34 Ousmane Aly Diallo, "Ethnic Clashes, Jihad, and Insecurity in Central Mali," *Peace Review* 29, no. 3 (2017): 299–306, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2017.1344529>.

35 Nicolas Florquin and Stéphanie Pézard, "Insurgency, Disarmament, and Insecurity in Northern Mali, 1990-2004," in *Armed and Aimless: Armed Groups, Guns, and Human Security in the ECOWAS Region*, eds. Nicolas Florquin and Eric G. Berman (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2005), 46-77, <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/armed-and-aimless-armed-groups-guns-and-human-security-ecowas-region>.

36 Andrew Lebovich, "Mapping Armed Groups in Mali and the Sahel," *European Council on Foreign Affairs*, May 2019, https://ecfr.eu/special/sahel_mapping/.

37 Boukary, "Le Centre Du Mali: Épicentre Du Djihadisme?"

Central Mali.³⁸ Malian authorities have never had a strong presence in rural areas and have struggled to provide adequate public services.³⁹

Access to natural resources

In the 1990s decentralization and land code reforms created a hybrid system of governance that outsourced several government duties to local elites, including resource management and land allocation. The paradigm shift caused by decentralization beginning in the 1990s shifted competition over land rights to a natives versus non-natives narrative.⁴⁰ It marginalized settled communities such as non-elite Fulani from free access to pastoral resources, while favoring Fulani elites (Djowros) or Dogon farmers. The elite Djowros became gatekeepers of scarce land and levied taxes on nomadic Fulani herders searching for water and vegetation. Politicians would collect a share of the tax.⁴¹ The levels of corruption and rent-seeking practices by elites toward increasingly marginalized nomadic groups became a risk factor for violence.⁴²

The arrival of jihadists in 2015, however, gave non-elite pastoralists access to pasture.⁴³ Narratives of inequalities related to access to resources used by jihadist groups after their arrival resonated well with disadvantaged Fulani pastoralists and played a key role in mobilizing and arming new recruits.⁴⁴ Local youth joined jihadist groups because of their desire to elevate their social status and challenge the elites over access to land and natural resources.⁴⁵ Despite this access, the power dynamic between elites and non-elites did not greatly shift, as both elites and non-elites developed relationships with jihadists and sought military training and access to arms. Access to natural resources, power, and protection were a greater motivation for communities to align with jihadist groups than ideological alignment, which jihadists exploited to build ties with whole communities regardless of people's elite or non-elite status.⁴⁶

The escalation in multi-directional violence further provides CBAGs new opportunities for mobilization. The dominant farmer-herder conflicts in Central Mali suddenly became absorbed by the overall insecurity and, as one interviewee described it, "The position of history in conflictual cohabitation [recurrent conflicts between farmers and herders] in the mobilization of the masses is in favor of the armed groups.

38 Mirjam de Bruijn, ed., *Biographies of Radicalization: Hidden Messages of Social Change* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110623628>.

39 Bodian, Tobie, and Marening, "The Challenges of Governance, Development and Security in the Central Regions of Mali."

40 De Bruijn, ed., *Biographies of Radicalization*.

41 Tor A. Benjaminsen and Boubacar Ba, "Farmer–Herder Conflicts, Pastoral Marginalisation and Corruption: A Case Study from the Inland Niger Delta of Mali," *Geographical Journal* 175 (2009): 71–81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4959.2008.00312.x>.

42 Matthew D. Turner, "The Micropolitics of Common Property Management on the Maasina Floodplains of Central Mali," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des études Africaines* 40, no. 1 (2006): 41–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2006.10751335>.

43 Jourde, et al., "Prédation et violence au Mali."

44 Boukary, "Le Centre Du Mali: Épicentre Du Djihadisme?."

45 Adam Thiam, *Centre du Mali: Enjeux et Dangers d'une crise négligée* (Genève: Centre pour le dialogue humanitaire; Bamako: Institut du Macina, 2017), <https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Centre-du-Mali-Enjeux-et-dangers-dune-crise-n%C3%A9glig%C3%A9e.pdf>.

46 Jourde, et al., "Prédation et violence au Mali."

Nowadays, we tend to forget the conflict between farmer and herder so much [because] the current crisis has ravaged the communities. Among the deepest causes, this historical conflict is the basis of visceral hate the communities have toward each other.”⁴⁷ Still, despite the farmer-herder conflict being seen as the main conflict driver and source of hate, data between 1992 and 2009 from the Mopti Regional Court of Appeals indicates that 69.9 percent of the cases were between farmers, while only 12.2 percent were between farmers and herders, and 7.7 percent were between fishermen and farmers.⁴⁸ The competition over land and access to natural resources intensifies with the climate emergency.⁴⁹

This sentiment of hate does not appear to be widely shared among all community members but is rather a growing feeling among those who suffered directly from the massacres Central Mali witnessed since 2017. CBAGs are seen as taking control of their safety, because their respective communities and their properties are left unprotected and exposed to attacks by those now seen as rival communities. Easy access to firearms has contributed to the development and militarization of CBAGs, making existing community tensions increasingly deadly.⁵⁰ The Bambara and Dogon communities with an agricultural tradition, and the Fulani community with a pastoral tradition, have long been in conflict over access to water sources and land. However, disagreements were usually resolved peacefully.⁵¹

Shifting identities

With the arrival of jihadist organizations, the occupational basis of identity-building in Central Mali was renegotiated as religious identity, particularly amongst Fulani communities who were more likely to align with jihadists for protection. The economic and environmental impacts of violence and climate change, compounded with the effects of decentralization on marginalizing non-elite Fulanis, resulted in significant losses of cattle—key for livelihoods.⁵² The need for protection and the safeguarding of a nobility⁵³ status pushed many Fulani “herders” to become Fulani “Muslims.”⁵⁴ This, alongside worsening political-ecological factors,⁵⁵ redesigned how ethnic groups engage. Bambara, Dogon, and Fulani communities present in Central Mali had their differences, issues, and conflicts, but these tensions took another turn after jihadist groups arrived in 2015. With insecurity increasing and the state unable to provide safety, local communities had to pick sides. As a result, ethnically aligned CBAGs (Bambara, Dogon, and Fulani) began vying for legitimacy from their respective communities, control over natural resources, and strengthen-

47 Interview in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

48 International Crisis Group, “Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence.”

49 Tor A. Benjaminson, Koffi Alinon, Halvard Buhaug and Jill Buseth, “Does Climate Change Drive Land-Use Conflicts in the Sahel?,” *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 1 (2012): 97-111, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343311427343>.

50 Human Rights Watch, “Avant, nous étions des frères.”

51 Ibid.

52 International Crisis Group, “Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence,” 6.

53 Alfhild Birkeland, “Managing Fulbe Identity: Exchange Relations and Ethnic Discourses in a Village in Central Mali” (PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2007).

54 Mirjam de Bruijn and Han van Dijk, *Peuls et Mandingues: Dialectiques Des Constructions Identitaires* (Leyde: Afrika-Studiecentrum, 1997).

55 Tor A. Benjaminsen and Boubacar Ba, “Why Do Pastoralists in Mali Join Jihadist Groups? A Political Ecological Explanation,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 46, no. 1 (2019): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2018.1474457>.

ing of their political positions. This dynamic construction of ethno-religious identities, alongside Central Mali’s security and economic challenges, thus became the dominating paradigm in the mobilization of CBAGs.

A paramount impact of the proliferation of CBAGs is the changing patterns of violence, that is, the dramatic increase observed since 2015 (Figure 2). Conflict involving jihadist groups and CBAGs has generated numerous mass atrocities, including the deadliest attacks recorded against civilians in Mali. The engagement of ethnic groups has severed ethnically-diverse ties at the familial level as inter-community relations deteriorate over pervasive fear and distrust based on ethnic and religious differences.⁵⁶ Familial ties are breaking, as the crisis has resulted in mixed marriage divorces between Fulani and Dogon.⁵⁷ These family cases might be rare and do not capture the bigger picture, however, the cohabitation and coexistence between Bambara, Dogon, and Fulani communities is undergoing a tough test.

OVERVIEW OF CENTRAL MALI’S ARMED GROUPS

Table 2 Organized armed groups in Central Mali

Armed Groups and CBAGs	Background	Purpose	Triggers and Motivations	Areas of Operation (see Figure 2)
Katiha Macina (JNIM)	Fulani-dominated, but also includes Dogon, Bambara, Tuareg, Arab, and other minorities	Fight Malian state and international forces Spread jihadist ideology Enact Sharia Law	Emerged in 2012 and became more visible in late 2014 and early 2015 under the externally attributed name the Macina Liberation Front (MLF)	Heartland in the Inner Niger Delta Control or influence in rural areas Sporadic presence in villages in Ségou and Mopti Regions
Fulani self-defense groups	Fulani, Wouwarbe in Macina	Self-defense Vengeance Protection of Fulani from from Donso, Dan Na Ambassagou and Malian military	Burning of Fulani villages since 2017 by the Malian army and Dan Na Ambassagou	Visible in Fulani villages
Dan Na Ambassagou (DNA)	Dogon, Dafing, Samogo, Bobo, Telem, Mossi	Self-defense Vengeance Protection of the Dogon country from jihadists	Advent of jihadists in the region Support Malian government security forces in security provision	Villages in Mopti Region’s Bandiagara Bankass, Koro, and Douentza Cercles Control over checkpoints along national roads
Donso or Dozo Hunters	Bambara, Bobo, Bwa, Marka, Dafing, Bozo	Self-defense Vengeance Protection of community from jihadists	Attacks in Ténénkou and Macina in 2015 and 2016 by Katiha Macina	Visible in urban areas and villages mainly in Ségou Region’s Macina and Niono Cercles and Mopti Region’s Dienne Cercle

56 Interviews in Bandiagara and Diafarabé, Mopti Region, and interviews in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

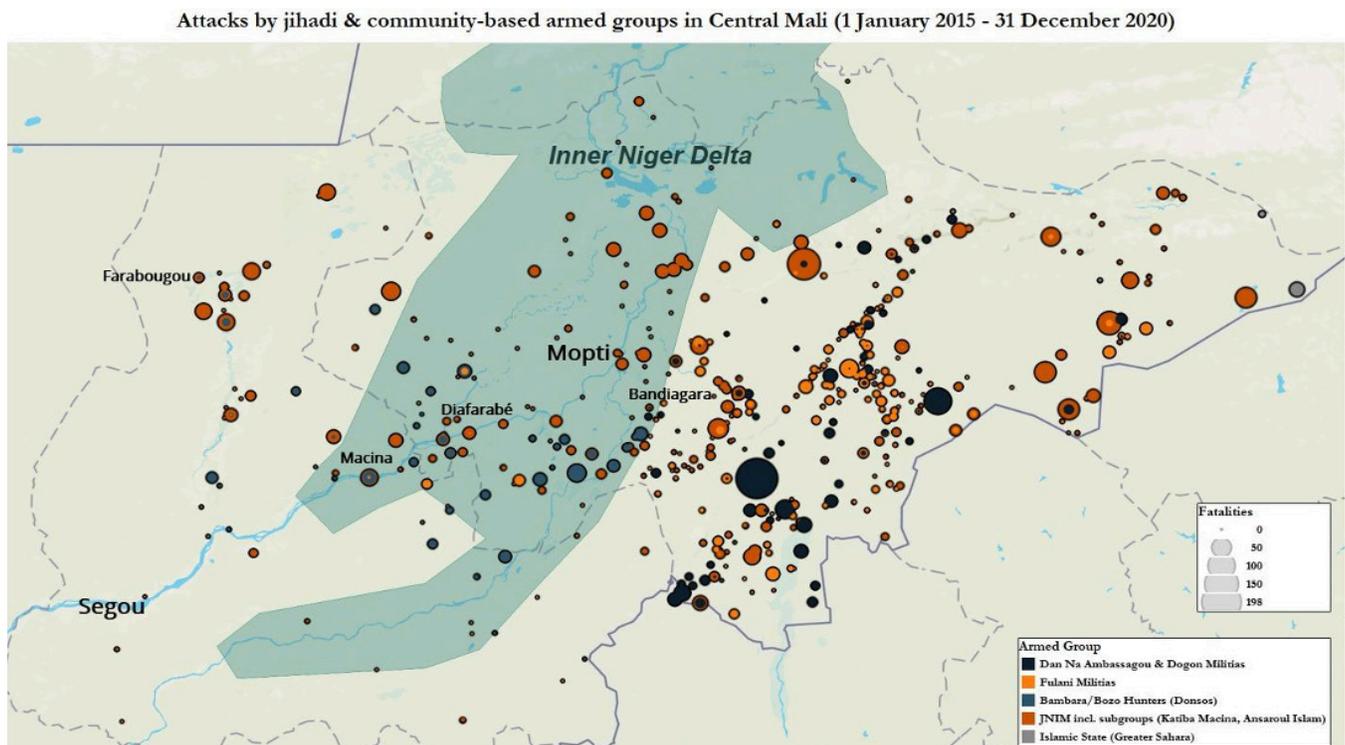
57 Interview in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

The constituencies and membership of CBAGs and other ethnic-majority jihadist groups fall primarily along ethnic lines (Bambara, Dogon, and Fulani). The ethnic affiliation is a byproduct of the evolution of each group’s initial mobilization to protect and avenge or the ethnic affiliation of an influential leader.⁵⁸

Katiba Macina

The Central Mali contingent of the Jihadist group JNIM, Katiba Macina, became prominent in early 2015 and remains the dominant armed group in Mali’s central regions. The creation of the jihadist umbrella organization, JNIM, in March 2017 subsumed Katiba Macina into its organizational structure. Through its insurgency in Central Mali, the group has become the de facto authority in most of the Inner Niger Delta, which constitutes the group’s heartland. The Inner Niger Delta comprises the flood-prone and vegetation-rich wetlands in the west of Mopti Region and the east of Ségou Region. In the north-south direction, the area is situated along the Niger river between the cities of Timbuktu and Ségou. This area, which includes the towns of Ténénkou and Youwarou, are the least affected by conflict since 2015 (Figure 3). However, militants frequently deter traditional social behaviors by intimidating locals, imposing dress codes, and extorting zakat, or religious taxes.

Figure 3 Conflict locations in Ségou and Mopti Regions, Mali (January 1, 2015–December 12, 2020).⁵⁹



58 For example, Hamadou Koufa’s leadership of the Fulani-majority Katiba Macina. Aurélien Tobie and Boukary Sangaré, “The Impact of Armed Groups on the Populations of Central and Northern Mali,” *SIPRI*, October 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/other-publications/impact-armed-groups-populations-central-and-northern-mali>.

59 Source: ACLED.

Through Katiba Macina, Amadou Koufa, a “jihadist entrepreneur” and local preacher who relied on a pointed discourse about local social and political grievances, became a powerful representative for Fulanis.⁶⁰ Koufa, who is a Fulani, relied on a discursive strategy speaking to the nomadic pastoralist Fulanis’ grievances against the state,⁶¹ Bambara and Dogon farmers,⁶² and Fulani elites (Djowros).⁶³ Putting this discourse at the forefront of his strategy helped to expand the jihadist group’s influence to Central Mali.⁶⁴ Katiba Macina was seen as a possible advocate to reclaim otherwise denied rights, such as access to pastoral lands and natural resources.⁶⁵

Furthermore, abuses by security forces against civilians, especially Fulani since 2013 in Central Mali, encouraged some Fulani community members to join Katiba Macina.⁶⁶ In 2013 the Malian army was responsible for several atrocities and summary executions against Fulani civilians in Mopti.⁶⁷ In the following years abuses mainly against Fulani communities continued in Central Mali. Thus, JNIM’s jihadist designation has taken on CBAG characteristics—namely its ethnic character, despite the slow integration of Dogon members as JNIM gained control and power in Dogon areas. The integration of Dogon fighters into JNIM is difficult to unpack; motivations could be ideological affiliation, a search for protection, a lack of an alternative, and forced recruitment. Some Dogon saw it as favorable to align with JNIM as the stronger armed actor in the area, thus altering the equilibrium in intra-Dogon conflicts. Simultaneously, while difficult to quantify, segments of the Fulani community remain unswayed by the jihadists’ justice-oriented discourse and oppose the ideas and presence of Katiba Macina.

While primarily portraying itself as a jihadist group, the discourse and actions of Katiba Macina oscillate between a jihadist and a Fulani identity. This overlap could be described as a hybrid of a jihadist insurgent group and a self-defense militia.⁶⁸ Katiba Macina’s leader Amadou Kouffa occasionally refutes claims that Katiba Macina is a Fulani armed group, even though his Fulani brethren do comprise the bulk of the group’s fighting force. The group has often portrayed itself as a defender of the Fulani community by publicly “ethnicizing” local conflicts in its propaganda.⁶⁹

60 Ibrahim Yahaya Ibrahim, *The Wave of Jihadist Insurgency in West Africa: Global Ideology, Local Context, Individual Motivations* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1787/eb95c0a9-en>.

61 Examples are a predatory behavior of the forest services, corruption of state officials and the justice system in favor of other groups, etc.

62 Conflictual events such as the attack on Sari village in 2012; these are triggered by farming activities blocking cattle corridors.

63 The elite, alongside state representatives, would position themselves as gatekeepers for pastures, taxing the nomad pastoralists an entrance fee per head of livestock.

64 Benjaminsen and Ba, “Why Do Pastoralists in Mali Join Jihadist Groups?”

65 Jean-Hervé Jezequel and Vincent Foucher, “Forced Out of Towns in the Sahel, Africa’s Jihadists Go Rural,” *International Crisis Group*, January 11, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/mali/forced-out-towns-sahel-africas-jihadists-go-rural>. See also: Clionadh Raleigh, Héni Nsaibia, and Caitriona Dowd, “The Sahel Crisis Since 2012,” *African Affairs* 120, no. 478 (2020): 123–143, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adaa022>.

66 Boukary, “Le Centre Du Mali: Épicentre Du Djihadisme?”

67 Thiam, *Centre du Mali: Enjeux et Dangers d'une crise négligée*.

68 Alexander Thurston, *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel: Local Politics and Rebel Groups* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 158, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108771160>.

69 MENASTREAM (@MENASTREAM), “#Mali: While #JNIM on several occasions have claimed attacks against #Dozos, there is a notable shift in the discourse, saying it is in defense of Fulani brethren, and giving Dozos the attribute “pagan”, previously described as a militia backed by the army,” Twitter, January 23, 2019, <https://twitter.com/MENASTREAM/status/1088193830061514752?s=20>.

Katiba Macina's approach affected the region's marginalized ethnic groups in two distinct ways. First, it resonated with the most marginalized Fulanis as an option to escape perceived injustices. Second, it negatively resonated amongst other ethnic groups, primarily the Dogon, who felt further threatened by the Fulanis as their identity shifted and "jihadist" and "Fulani" were seen as the same identity. This conflation of Fulani and jihadist identities amplified pre-existing stereotypes and stigmatization of the Fulani by the Dogon, who have previously said, "One needs to understand that the Fulani [for the Dogon] can also be understood as the evil coming from the grassy wilderness."⁷⁰ As such, Katiba Macina is perceived as an imminent threat to Dogons.

Nonetheless, the group is becoming more accepting of local cultures to establish greater control in the area. Abdel Kader Sidibé, who heads the Sahel mission for the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), argues, "In the Dogon country, they (the jihadists) do not impose Sharia. It is strategic: to have a grip, they want to be accepted locally."⁷¹ JNIM's religious leader has actively pushed a pro-Dogon discourse to portray Dogon communities as part of the general Muslim population. This was in disagreement with Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS), which tended to conflate the Dogon ethnic group with Dozo hunters.

Jihadists present themselves as security and governance providers to push for their religious agenda.⁷² Members of JNIM's constituent groups have since 2012 increasingly relied on their influence to engage in conflict resolution and justice provision in the Bandiagara area to establish legitimacy and build ties with local populations.⁷³ Interviewees also noted jihadists are only semi-present and mainly dwell in more remote and rural areas, operating at a distance.⁷⁴ To operate clandestinely, JNIM units have established themselves within rural communities after counter-militancy efforts pushed JNIM out of major towns and villages.⁷⁵

Fulani self-defense groups

Several CBAGs emerged alongside Katiba Macina. As persecution by government security forces and reprisals by rival communities increased, young Fulani formed self-defense groups to protect their villages from the abuses of security forces and hunter-style militias such as the Donsos, or Dozos. Although they formed as a self-defense mechanism, Fulani militias themselves often perpetrate attacks and are suspected of mass atrocities, notably the 2019 Sobane-Da massacre.⁷⁶ Fulani communities are not always accepting of these CBAGs, questioning their claims of protection in Macina and Ténénkou Cercles for instance, where some consider CBAGs opportunists taking advantage of disorder and chaos for profit.

70 This is represented in the funeral rituals of the Dogon. See also: de Bruijn and van Dijk, *Peuls et Mandingues*.

71 Ibid.

72 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

73 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

74 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

75 Jezequel and Foucher, "Forced Out of Towns in the Sahel, Africa's Jihadists Go Rural."

76 RFI, "Mali: la Minusma a rendu son rapport sur le massacre de Sobane Da," August 9, 2019, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20190808-mali-minusma-enquete-massacre-sobane-da-violences-entre-communautes>.

Fulani CBAG members and Katiba Macina members are rooted in the same socio-political context, co-habit the same geographic areas, and claim to protect and provide justice to Fulani communities.⁷⁷ They are members of the same communities and are therefore not easily distinguishable. Fulani self-defense groups have sought support from powerful jihadist groups, JNIM and in rare cases ISGS, in their quest for protection, resources, and weapons, further challenging their distinction from jihadist groups.⁷⁸

The cycle of tension followed by violence amongst Fulani, Dogon, and other minority ethnic groups became more prominent after Fulanis began forming their own CBAGs. This started when jihadists began targeting Dogon leaders and cultural sites.⁷⁹ Because many within the Dogon community view the Fulani CBAGs as jihadists, the Fulani CBAGs are seen as threats to Dogon and legitimize the existence of Dan Na Ambassagou, a Dogon-majority CBAG. From the perspective of Fulani CBAGs, the Dogon are viewed as a legitimate target for reprisals because of Dogon attacks on Fulanis, notably in the Bandiagara Cercle.

As a case in point, in Macina Cercle Fulanis from the Wouwarbe faction formed a CBAG after the arson of villages by Donso hunters in February 2017.⁸⁰ The Wouwarbe Fulani CBAGs attack and steal cattle from Bambara farmers associated with Donsos, demonstrating the cycle of Fulani and Bambara justifications for armed self-defense activities. Similarly, the connection between Fulani CBAGs and jihadists automatically made them rivals to the Donsos, whose multi-ethnic composition tends to associate them with farmers and fishermen as opposed to one ethnic group but who nevertheless are considered by Fulanis as aggravators and abusers.⁸¹ For the Fulani community, the scope of its CBAGs do not extend beyond the local level. Fulani CBAGs are only responsible for protecting their individual community and exacting revenge in their immediate vicinities.

Dan Na Ambassagou

The Dogon-majority Dan Na Ambassagou emerged in eastern Mopti Region and frames itself as a protector of the Dogon Country, a perception shared by many Dogon.⁸² An interviewee claimed that Dan Na Ambassagou is “present where the army is absent . . . securing national roads.”⁸³ Its support and legitimacy hinge on a sense of insecurity in the face of a jihadist threat. This affects the multifaceted relationship between Dan Na Ambassagou, who must provide justification for their actions as protection, and

77 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020. See also: International Crisis Group, “Enrayer La Communautarisation de La Violence au Centre du Mali”; Boukary, “Le Centre Du Mali: Épicentre Du Djihadisme?”; Thiam, *Centre du Mali: Enjeux et Dangers d'une crise négligée*.

78 Dougoukolo Alpha Oumar Ba-Konaré, “Entre faux djihadistes et faux chasseurs traditionnels, les civils piégés dans le centre du Mali,” *The Conversation*, October 22, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/entre-faux-djihadistes-et-faux-chasseurs-traditionnels-les-civils-pieges-dans-le-centre-du-mali-105181>.

79 Abdoulaye Diarra, “Douentza: Les Islamistes Détruisent le Toguna de la Ville,” *L'Indépendant*, October 10, 2012, <http://news.abamako.com/h/6760.html>.

80 Interviews in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

81 Interviews in Diafarabé, Mopti Region, and Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

82 Several Dogon rallies been held in the capital Bamako and Bandiagara, Mopti Region, to show support for Dan Na Ambassagou.

83 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

the Dogon community it claims to protect. The group has slowly become Katiba Macina's archenemy, and both groups contest territorial control and influence over local populations.

Dan Na Ambassagou is composed of traditional hunters (Dozos), though it also recruits from several minority ethnic groups not associated with Fulani or Katiba Macina efforts. In Bandiagara, the group also includes members from ethnic groups such as Samogo, Dafing, Bobo, Telem, and Mossi.⁸⁴ The movement's heartland is located on the Bandiagara Escarpment, or Cliffs of Bandiagara. It is also active across the four eastern Cercles of Mopti, including Bandiagara, Bankass, Douentza, and Koro, and maintains representation in Mopti and Sevaré in Mopti Cercle.

Dan Na Ambassagou relies on the Dogon community for recruitment, fundraising, and support. These needs incentivize it to assert security narratives by creating a state of insecurity and even targeting Dogon community members who defy or subvert its authority. Recently, Dan Na Ambassagou has targeted its own community by extorting, kidnapping, and murdering Dogon villagers in Bandiagara, Koro, and Bankass in Mopti Region, especially those who refuse to submit to the group's demands for funds and recruits.⁸⁵ Some Dogon have come to perceive Dan Na Ambassagou as a source of insecurity in a context where it is the jihadists that offer prospects of peace.⁸⁶

Dan Na Ambassagou's creation intensified violence in Central Mali. The killing of a key Dogon leader and hunter, Théodore Soumbounou, in October 2016 by jihadists triggered the mobilization of Dan Na Ambassagou. However, according to local interviews, its rise in Bandiagara was not visible until 2018 and coincided with the increased presence of Katiba Macina and attacks against Malian forces.⁸⁷ The group has been responsible for multiple massacres against Fulani civilians, despite its claim of only targeting jihadist groups.⁸⁸

During the first months of its existence, Dan Na Ambassagou enjoyed close, strategically established ties with the Malian government and its security forces under the pretext of fighting jihadists connected to Fulani communities.⁸⁹ However, this relationship between Dan Na Ambassagou and the Malian government suffered a major setback following the March 2019 Ogossagou massacre, where suspected Dan Na Ambassagou fighters killed at least 153 Fulani civilians, which signaled the revival of intercommunal vio-

84 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

85 Nathalie Prevost, "Des Dogons Harcelés Par La Milice Dans Le Centre Du Mali," *Mondafrique*, September 18, 2020, <https://mondafrique.com/des-dogons-harceles-par-la-milice-dans-le-centre-du-mali/>.

86 Célian Macé, "Au Mali, Les Jihadistes Se Font Parrains de La Paix," *Liberation*, September 21, 2020, https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2020/09/21/au-mali-les-jihadistes-se-font-parrains-de-la-paix_1800137.

87 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

88 Human Rights Watch, "Avant, nous étions des frères"; International Federation for Human Rights, "Central Mali: Populations Caught between Terrorism and Anti-terrorism," November 2018, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/mali/central-mali-populations-caught-between-terrorism-and-anti-terrorism>.

89 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020; Human Rights Watch, "Avant, nous étions des frères"; International Crisis Group, "Enrayer La Communautarisation de La Violence au Centre du Mali"; Olivier Dubois, "Mali – Mamadou Goudienkilé: Nous ne Négocierons pas avec les Djihadistes," *Le Point*, April 13, 2020, https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/mali-mamadou-goudienkile-nous-ne-negocierons-pas-avec-les-djihadistes-13-04-2020-2371193_3826.php.

lence.⁹⁰ Following the massacre, the Malian government was criticized for supporting a non-state actor who is committing atrocities. Even though Dan Na Ambassagou has suffered from the subsequent fallout with the central government, as Malian security forces targeted its bases, the group continued to enjoy popularity among Dogon communities in the area and Dogon diaspora.⁹¹ Repeated attacks by Fulani and jihadist groups against Dogon villages justify popular support and Dan Na Ambassagou's continuous existence despite pressure from international and national human rights organizations.⁹²

Donso or Dozo hunters

Similar to the Dogons of Dan Na Ambassagou, other ethnic groups have also formed self-defense groups. Traditional hunters, or Donsos, from the Bozo fishermen community are present along the Niger river banks between Djenné and Ténénkou, Mopti Region. The Bambara, Bobo, Bwa, Marka, Dafing, and other ethnic groups organize hunter fraternities in the areas they inhabit: the Bwa and Dafing between Dillasagou in Bankass Cercle and Tominian in Tominian Cercle, Ségou Region; and the Bambara in Ténénkou, Mopti Region, and Ké-Macina and Niono, Ségou Region.

Competition and contention between the Bozo and Fulani have resulted in violent confrontations between Bozo hunters and Katiba Macina. Nouhoun-Bozo, a village famous for its boat-builders, was the focal point of the fighting between the two armed groups in 2018⁹³ and 2019.⁹⁴ Katiba Macina militants further imposed protracted embargoes on Bozo-majority villages such as Toguéré-Coumbé and Kouakourou, Mopti Region.⁹⁵ Initially, small conflicts related to the application of Sharia law triggered these embargoes. In Niono, Katiba Macina militants accused the Bambara Donso hunters of abuses against the Fulani community and since early October 2020 imposed an embargo on the village of Farabougou and its surroundings (Figure 3).

90 United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission (MINUSMA), "Conclusions préliminaires de la mission d'enquête spéciale sur les graves atteintes aux droits de l'homme commis à Ogossagou le 23 mars 2019," United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, May 2, 2019, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/fr/communiqué-de-presse-conclusions-preliminaires-de-la-mission-denquete-speciale-sur-les-graves>.

91 International Crisis Group, "Reversing Central Mali's Descent into Communal Violence."

92 International Federation for Human Rights, "Central Mali: Perpetrators of Ogassagou massacre should be arrested and sentenced to stop the spiral of violence," March 26, 2019, <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/mali/central-mali-perpetrators-of-ogassagou-massacre-should-be-arrested>.

93 Rida Lyammouri, "Mali – Sahel: August 2017 – April 2018 Chronology of Violent Incidents by Al-Qaeda Affiliate Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), Ansaroul Islam, and Armed Banditry and Inter-Community Violence," Sahel Memo, May 29, 2018, <https://www.sahelmemo.com/2018/05/29/mali-sahel-august-2017-april-2018-chronology-of-violent-incidents-by-al-qaeda-affiliate-jamaat-nusrat-al-islam-wal-muslimeen-jnim-islamic-state-in-the-greater-sahara/>.

94 MENASTREAM (@MENASTREAM), "#Mali: Yesterday, presumed Katiba Macina (#JNIM) militants aboard pickup trucks encircled the village of Nouhoun-Bozo (Djenné), #Mopti, a #FAMa aircraft reportedly intervened, forcing the assailants to withdraw," Twitter, June 29, 2019, <https://twitter.com/MENASTREAM/status/1144961923374624773?s=20>.

95 International Crisis Group, "Parler aux jihadistes au centre du Mali : le dialogue est-il possible?"; Sahelien.com, "Au centre du Mali, trois villages sont assiégés par des djihadistes depuis plus d'un an," February 6, 2019, <https://sahelien.com/au-centre-du-mali-trois-villages-sont-assiégés-par-les-djihadistes-depuis-plus-dun-an/>.

Like in Dogon areas, Katiba Macina militants have bombed bridges to hamper movement and prevent access, fired upon farmers while working on their fields, and instigated frequent clashes. While Katiba Macina is better armed, organized, and more motivated and experienced in warfare, the Donsos enjoy intermittent support from Malian government security forces.⁹⁶ Historically, the Malian government has relied on and supported armed militias, often ethnic-based, to combat a group threatening the state. In the same vein, in Central Mali, government security forces have been struggling to counter the rise of jihadist groups, in turn supporting militias and armed groups against jihadists.

The Malian armed forces' patrols in these Bozo-majority villages complicated the security situation, as Katiba Macina militants accused the villagers of bringing the army to the area. Consequently, the security situation in the villages worsened, with increased killings of villagers, roadside mines aimed at the security forces and Bozo hunters supporting them, and violent assaults on military positions. At present, a peace accord between Donsos and Fulani has become a tool for Katiba Macina to delegitimize Donso leaders. The Donsos' participation in any peace agreement has resulted in Dan Na Ambassagou, Katiba Macina's enemy, considering them traitors and legitimate targets of violence, even though Dan Na Ambassagou is led by a Donso and recruited heavily from Donsos when first established.⁹⁷

CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF ARMED COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

While CBAG members come directly from the communities they claim to protect, a combination of other factors also motivate individuals, especially youth, to join or support CBAGs.⁹⁸ Ethnicity is only one mobilizing factor among others such as youth vulnerability and economic deprivation. Some CBAGs are multi-ethnic and sometimes multi-national, which indicates that mobilization across ethnic boundaries occurs amid common threat perceptions in hyperlocalized but cross-border contexts.

Cycles of retributive violence

The ethnic characterization of Dan Na Ambassagou and Katiba Macina reinforces some local stereotypes that every armed Fulani group is affiliated with the jihadists of Katiba Macina and every Dogon militia is linked to Dan Na Ambassagou.⁹⁹ This explains the endless cycle of violence between these ethnic-based groups. All armed actors in Central Mali might have different ideologies and motivations; however, all of them benefit from ongoing conflicts and the absence of the state to legitimize their creation and justify

96 Tobie Aurélien and Boukary Sangaré, "Impacts des groupes armés sur les populations au nord et au centre du Mali : Adaptations souhaitables des stratégies de rétablissement de la paix," *SIPRI*, May 19, 2020, <https://www.wathi.org/impacts-groupes-armes-mali-sipri/>.

97 One such example is Ali Dolo, the mayor of Sangha Commune. See: "Le maire de Sangha sur la crise du centre: 'Cette guerre profite à certaines personnes,'" *Bamada.net*, September 17, 2020, <http://bamada.net/le-maire-de-sangha-sur-la-crise-du-centre-%e2%80%89cette-guerre-profite-a-certaines-personnes%e2%80%89>.

98 Interviews in Bandiagara and Diafarabé, Mopti Region, and interviews in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

99 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

their actions. Simultaneously, all groups might have similar grievances and sentiment of negligence by the central government and corrupt elites.

On the one hand, a Dogon farmer said, “The members of the self-defense group Dan Na Ambassagou are our gods who protect the Dogon community; the other group (jihadists) is made up of the enemies of Mali.”¹⁰⁰ The statement captures discourse that further legitimizes CBAGs, to the point that this participant labeled Dan Na Ambassagou as the ultimate protector, not the state.

On the other hand, Macina and Ténénkou Cercles are largely under the control of Katiba Macina and Donso hunters.¹⁰¹ Here, Fulani Katiba Macina group members were vulnerable to recruitment because of a lack of state representation and grievances against local authorities, making them natural targets for Katiba Macina to increase their support in the area.¹⁰²

In Macina Cercle, connecting Fulani communities to jihadist groups was almost immediate¹⁰³ and became evident in February 2017 following the assassination of Chaka Dembélé, a Bambara Donso hunter, attributed to Katiba Macina.¹⁰⁴ In reprisal, Donso hunters violently attacked Fulani villages; at least 21 civilians were killed. Since 2017, the area goes through cycles of revenge killings, legitimizing the further proliferation of CBAGs in the Cercle.¹⁰⁵

Historical tensions

The underlying conflict between farmers and pastoralists in the region and the cycle of reprisals fueling the growing polarization of identities are linked and ultimately legitimize the proliferation of CBAGs.¹⁰⁶ The relationship between Fulani and Dogon communities is strained due to ancestral rivalries over influence. These relations are increasingly stressed by worsening ecological conditions straining livelihood resources and by the struggle of the central government and traditional and local authorities to address natural resource management effectively, all putting the populations in competition over access to land, water, and natural resources.¹⁰⁷

Due to a lack of resources and priorities, state presence in these rural areas is limited. When the state is present, it is usually through security forces. Without a sufficient presence of local authorities to address this level of conflict, jihadists and self-defense groups have taken advantage of the power vacuum by

100 Interview in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

101 Interviews in Diafarabé, Mopti Region, and Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

102 Benjaminsen and Ba, “Why Do Pastoralists in Mali Join Jihadist Groups?.”

103 Interviews in Diafarabé, Mopti Region, March 2020.

104 Boubacar Sidiki Haidara, “Des Violences Intercommunautaires Font 21 Morts dans le Cercle de Macina,” *Journal du Mali*, February 14, 2017, <https://www.journaldumali.com/2017/02/14/violences-intercommunautaires-21-morts-cercle-de-macina/>.

105 Interviews in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

106 Raleigh, Nsaibia, and Dowd, “The Sahel Crisis Since 2012.”

107 Tor A. Benjaminsen 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>.

incorporating the ecological conflict into a broader discourse: they pose as necessary for protecting against the other, or enemy, relying on a narrative of Fulani herders versus the Dogon farmers in Central Mali.¹⁰⁸

The Fulani-Bambara tensions are attached to the rivalry between farmers and pastoralists. The strained relations between Bambara and Fulani are felt by Fulani presence within jihadist ranks, which from the Bambara's perspective necessitates reliance on the community's Donso CBAGs for protection. Repeated attacks and cattle thefts on both sides further exacerbate tensions between the two communities, producing growing distrust. A degree of obscurity regarding the actual groups behind attacks and cattle thefts may result in scapegoating of whole communities or villages rather than of an organized group or militia.

Youth vulnerability

Central Mali youth are considered the most marginalized and vulnerable, alongside rural and nomadic pastoralist groups. Interviewees repeatedly cited insufficient job opportunities, poverty, poor access to education, social pressures to marry and start a family, and poor access to vocational and skills training to improve job prospects as factors contributing to youth associations with CBAGs.^{109,110} Female youth have also engaged in supporting or fighting in CBAGs. Religion is considered a driver of female direct participation in armed groups and jihadist groups, however, reasons remain unclear.¹¹¹ Female youth might be participating in CBAG activities acting as informants providing information about opponent locations, recruiters, and transporters of goods and weapons through checkpoints.¹¹² While there has been overwhelming evidence of women being forced into jihadist groups in the Lake Chad Basin, the role of women among jihadist groups and other armed groups in Central Mali remains understudied and unclear.¹¹³

The support from marginalized, disenfranchised youth is furthered through discourses of identity and communitarianism, alongside promises of weapons and profit amid conditions of poverty.¹¹⁴ While the idea to create CBAGs often comes from elders, youth are mobilized to be in the frontline. One interviewee in Macina said, "The impact of youth on the birth of armed groups is minimal; the idea of cre-

108 Ibid.

109 Interviews in Bandiagara and Diafarabé, Mopti Region, March 2020.

110 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

111 Zoe Gorman and Gregory Chauzal, "Hand in Hand: A Study of Insecurity and Gender in Mali," *SIPRI*, December 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/hand-hand-study-insecurity-and-gender-mali>. See also: Hilary Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>.

112 Gorman and Chauzal, "Hand in Hand: A Study of Insecurity and Gender in Mali." For more on women's roles and importance in armed groups, see: Jakana Thomas, *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>.

113 Ella Jeannine Abatan and Boubacar Sangaré, "Katiba Macina and Boko Haram: Including Women to What End?," *Institute for Security Studies*, March 31, 2021, <https://issafrica.org/research/west-africa-report/katiba-macina-and-boko-haram-including-women-to-what-end>.

114 Interview in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

ating militias does not come from the youth. They were incited, encouraged, and then recruited.”¹¹⁵ A Ségou interviewee said that youth are often led into vengeful cycles of violence they barely understand and find themselves conducting violent acts against unarmed civilians, including women and children.¹¹⁶ Youth-perpetrated violence appears less tactical and politically referential and thus decreases the likelihood of peaceful resolution, whereas elder-led violence and reprisals tend to be limited by intercommunal norms that are fast becoming outdated.

With the proliferation of armed community mobilization came a general sidelining of traditional authorities and fragilization of locally-led dispute resolution mechanisms. Simultaneously, religious leaders have been engaging in religious debates with members of jihadist groups.¹¹⁷ Thus, the mobilization of youth for violent conflict has generated adverse effects by subverting social norms and distorting hierarchies.¹¹⁸ Women are increasingly exposed to sexual and gender-based violence by both armed groups and security forces.¹¹⁹ According to an interviewee in Macina, “It is the youth of no value that we see in arms. Thanks to this weapon they are holding, they believe themselves vested of all power. With the weapon, they are everything: fathers of their fathers, big brothers to their elder brothers.”¹²⁰ The possession of weapons has become a symbol of manhood. “Weapon carrying is now a badge of honor. Being a member of an armed group confers us a status of a full man.”¹²¹ This affects the region’s social dynamics by presenting armed confrontation as an acceptable solution to protecting one’s family and also legitimizing the growth in illicit small arms and light weapons.

Economic and ecological deprivation

Omnipresent in the Central Mali crisis literature is the competition over natural resources.¹²² The Central Mali economy is dependent on farming, fishing, and livestock herding, making employment opportunities limited and seasonal due to irregular rainfall. After the harvest, temporary field workers are unemployed, herders struggle to find sufficient vegetation for their cattle and compete over jobs in transportation limited by route insecurity, and fishers’ income-generating opportunities are impeded by the dry season.¹²³ Since 2015, the area’s economy has worsened further due to, in part, security restrictions on travel and bans on motorbikes—an essential means of transportation between markets and fields.¹²⁴

115 Interview in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

116 Interview in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

117 David Baché, “Mali: «Les habitants vivent très mal, tout manque» dans les localités soumises aux jihadistes,” *RFI*, August 12, 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/podcasts/invit%C3%A9-afrique/20210812-mali-les-habitants-vivent-tr%C3%A8s-mal-tout-manque-dans-les-localit%C3%A9s-soumises-aux-jihadistes>.

118 Tobie and Sangaré, “The Impact of Armed Groups on the Populations of Central and Northern Mali.”

119 Shantelle Spencer, *CARE Rapid Gender Analysis Mopti – Mali* (CARE, 2020), <https://careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Mali-RGA-April-2020-Final-draft-clean.pdf>.

120 Interview in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

121 Interview in Diafarabé, Mopti Region, March 2020.

122 Anca-Elena Ursu, *Under the Gun: Resource Conflicts and Embattled Traditional Authorities in Central Mali* (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, April 2018), <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/under-the-gun.pdf>.

123 Interview in Macina, Ségou region, March 2020.

124 Tobie and Sangaré, “The Impact of Armed Groups on the Populations of Central and Northern Mali.”

This economic deprivation, compounded by environmental shocks, contrasts with the relative riches of CBAG members who access funding through various means. Fulani self-defense groups are partially supported by funds raised through livestock trade.¹²⁵ Cattle theft is a common source of revenue for armed groups in Central Mali and is considered an incentive to join armed groups on two accounts: for the prospective income generated from reselling stolen cattle and for the protection of one's own cattle from theft.¹²⁶ Availability of and access to weapons for protection of livestock and property have additionally encouraged the recruitment of herders, farmers, and merchants. Some residents are more cynical—as one Macina interviewee said, “Jihadists as well as young Donsos make use of the disorder to get richer through theft, racketeering, banditry.”¹²⁷

Driven by economic hardship, members of different armed groups might use their position of power to generate income. For instance, jihadist groups rely on money and goods collected through Islamic taxation, known as zakat.¹²⁸ Interviewees said jihadist groups require payments from the communities they protect, be it under the guise of zakat or voluntary financial contributions. Some non-jihadist groups also find ways for community members to financially support them. One interviewee in Macina explained, “In a commune where the Donso hunters were regularly patrolling overnight, the people arrested would be taken to camps and they have to pay a fine of around 4-5 USD (2,000-3,000 CFA).”¹²⁹ Some support comes from across the borders. One interviewee mentioned that Dan Na Ambassagou receives funds from diaspora in West African countries such as Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, and Cameroon since 2018.¹³⁰ Access to financial resources, albeit limited, might entice members of local communities to join armed groups to generate income.

State absence

Donso CBAGs are primarily present in towns and villages, and, like in Bandiagara, Katiba Macina control more remote and rural areas. Katiba Macina are said to control most of Ténénkou Cercle, Mopti Region,¹³¹ while the Donsos have a stronger hold in urban areas and villages in the Macina Cercle, Ségou Region. The Malian government's security forces are partially present in Macina and Ténénkou Cercles, though the presence is limited within a few villages and in Diafarabé, Mopti Region.¹³² What limited presence they do have is controversial, with one interviewee saying, “The Malian police and judiciary pillage the population. The police are an accomplice of the cattle thieves and impose themselves on the population. The judiciary does not manage conflict but exacerbates it. I can say they are very corrupt.”¹³³

125 Interview in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

126 Interview in Diafarabé, Mopti Region, March 2020.

127 Interview in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

128 Interview in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

129 Interview in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

130 Interview in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

131 Interviews in Diafarabé, Mopti Region, and Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

132 Interviews in Diafarabé, Mopti Region, March 2020.

133 Interview in Diafarabé, Mopti Region, March 2020.

The limited government security presence fuels feelings of insecurity amongst villagers and reinforces the reliance on CBAGs as security providers. The armed forces' alleged preference for and partiality toward the Bambara community in disfavor of the Fulani community negatively impacts perceptions of those government security forces who are present. A Diafarabé interviewee said, "With the arrival of the partial Mali army, and their collusion with the Donso militia against the Fulani, I am one of those who pray for the future victory of the jihadists who had so far not killed women and children or burned huts."¹³⁴ This non-neutral position frames the state as a participant in the ongoing conflict rather than a mediator.

However, not all views are negative. "The state cannot be everywhere," a Bandiagara interviewee said. "It does a lot by being present in half the communes of the [Ténénkou] Cercle. The state and its partners provide help in health, food, security, training, awareness, dialogue, and mediation."¹³⁵

Central Mali populations of all ethnicities think the Malian government authorities should occupy a central role in ensuring local security and stability.¹³⁶ However, given the central government's absence in impactful local-level decision-making, the majority trust local and customary authorities more than government authorities.¹³⁷ Several existing governance issues are decades old, and the accumulation of mishandling disputes and conflicts is not a result of recent developments in Central Mali.¹³⁸

Most Fulanis, except the elites profiting from their relationships with the government, view the state's absence as a root cause of the current crisis. "The state has failed," was a common sentiment across interviews.¹³⁹ "The state needs to take on its responsibilities," a Fulani interviewee said. "It is only present in Bandiagara city . . . It has only helped us escape when we were subject to executions . . . We, Fulani, need to act nicely toward the Dan Na Ambassagou, since the state is unable to provide us with security."¹⁴⁰

For Dogons, the state in Bandiagara is seen as a silent accomplice to the attacks on the Dogon villages.¹⁴¹ "The state, I do not recognize it anymore. It does not exist over here," an interviewee expressed.¹⁴² "I consider the state to have abandoned the Dogon country," said another interviewee.¹⁴³

It is perceptions of the state's absence that pushed many to join self-defense groups. The shift in local governance mechanisms put justice, security, and governance decision-making at the heart of each com-

134 Interview in Diafarabé, Mopti Region, March 2020. See also: International Federation for Human Rights, *Dans le centre du Mali, les populations prises au piège du terrorisme et du contreterrorisme* (FIDH/ AMDH, November 2018), https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/fidh_centre_du_mali_les_populations_prises_au_pie_ge_du_terrorisme_et_contre_terrorisme.pdf.

135 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, and Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

136 Bodian, Tobie, and Marenging, "The Challenges of Governance, Development and Security in the Central Regions of Mali."

137 Ibid.

138 International Crisis Group, "Reversing Central Mali's Descent into Communal Violence."

139 Interviews in Bandiagara and Diafarabé, Mopti Region, March 2020.

140 Interview in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

141 Interview in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

142 Interview in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

143 Interview in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

munity and created space for CBAGs to fill the gap in security-based decision-making. As a Donso from Macina said, “We are openly present and exercise control over our localities abandoned by the Malian state.”¹⁴⁴ However, because CBAGs are numerous and each one has its areas of operation, the murky division of control amongst armed groups confuses communities about who is the security and justice provider in their area.¹⁴⁵ In Mopti and Ségou Regions control and influence over territories shift, and the strength of different groups is difficult to assess. However, their narratives as providers of protection, vengeance, and governance remain a constant in the absence of a central government capable of resolving conflict.¹⁴⁶

Discourses of legitimacy

The presence of jihadist groups bolsters CBAG legitimacy in parts of Central Mali. Interviews in Kolongo-Tomo, Macina Cercle, Ségou Region, highlighted that Donso self-defense groups’ activities were less accepted, because the lack of a noticeable jihadist presence negated a need for protection.¹⁴⁷ Thus, local youth “have boycotted recruitment into self-defense groups.”¹⁴⁸ According to the interviewees, this is due to a non-permanent threat and presence of jihadists in the community. Without an imminent threat to security and livelihoods from non-Donso armed groups, there is little justification for Donso CBAGs to perpetrate violence in the eyes of the communities they purport to protect. Hence, residents perceived the Donso hunters as illegitimate, citing abuses of power and violent treatment of the local population and referring to them as disruptors rather than guarantors of peace.¹⁴⁹

In addition to security aspects, the mobilization of armed groups and related conflict dynamics have a clear effect on the economy of Central Mali, which CBAGs can capitalize on. For instance, in fear for their safety, merchants traveled less to Central Mali and between markets to conduct trade. The lack of mobility challenged the ability of populations to participate in weekly markets that are also key social events. Aware of this, CBAGs have framed themselves as crisis managers supporting economic recovery, while local communities represented by traditional leaders are taking governance into their own hands. The legitimization discourse of CBAGs in the region primarily focuses on the provision of security in the state’s absence¹⁵⁰ and is generally unable to extend past ethnically driven conflict. Community members have praised CBAGs’ actions for securing agricultural land, pasture, and market space.

CBAGs are also credited for their efforts to reach a peace agreement between jihadist groups, Donsos, and Dogon to support economic recovery.^{151,152} An accord signed on August 1, 2019, successfully curbed

144 Interview in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

145 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

146 Interviews in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

147 Interviews in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

148 Interview in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

149 Interviews in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

150 All interviewees deemed this to be the most important element in armed groups’ continued existence and operation in the region.

151 Interviews in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

152 Interviews in Diafarabé, Mopti Region, and Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

the violence between the Fulani and Bambara communities in the commune of Femaye, Mopti Region, and enabled the return of internally displaced people.¹⁵³ Such peace efforts allowed transit routes to reopen and guaranteed safety to traveling merchants and populations, appeasing tensions and giving respite to conflict-affected communities.¹⁵⁴ While these accords might not last long—the Niono Accord in Ségou Region quickly fell apart¹⁵⁵—they allow CBAGs, including jihadists, to present themselves as those looking out for the people while the central government remains distracted and occupied by the political and security turmoil in the country. Communities obey armed groups, including jihadists, and peace accords in search of peace, tranquility, and survival in ongoing conflict. However, compliance does not necessarily translate into providing active fighters and other means of material support.

CONCLUSION

The scale of violent incidents and the ethnic dimensions of the conflict, specifically in Mopti and Ségou Regions, is alarming. 2020 was the most violent year, putting the area on a trajectory of further escalation.¹⁵⁶ In Central Mali, the conflict's rural nature makes it more prone to protraction and casualties. The recurrent village massacres are a source of traumatization and moral outrage. The government's historical inability to intervene neutrally disqualifies it from leading any de-escalation efforts. The consistent increases in killings and availability of weapons heightens the likelihood of more large-scale violence, and the legitimization of CBAGs as security providers positions them to maintain at least partial community support. Current dynamics between the different communities foresee an ascendant trend in violence if no de-escalation initiatives are undertaken. This research mapped current local perceptions and hopes to point to some pathways forward.

Many locals perceive the current crisis as temporary and look forward to the return to a stable life where “Mali stays one and indivisible, secular, and open to the world.”¹⁵⁷ As no single group has gained majority acceptance amongst the diverse populations settled in Central Mali, there is an opening for the new transitional government¹⁵⁸ to present themselves as a neutral party to mediate a sustainable peace agreement amongst the various CBAGs, spur economic growth that considers youth employment needs, and support reintegration programs for jihadists and other armed group members.¹⁵⁹ The

153 Pauline Rouquette, “L'accord de paix entre Peuls et Dogons au Mali, une chance de neutraliser les groupes armés,” *France24*, August 6, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/fr/20190806-mali-accord-paix-peuls-dogons-chance-repousser-groupes-armes-terroristes>.

154 “Koro: Les Acteurs Economiques Saluent la Reprise du Trafic Routier,” *L'Essor*, June 2021, <https://www.lessormali.com/koro-les-acteurs-economiques-saluent-la-reprise-du-traffic-routier>.

155 Baché, “Mali: «Les habitants vivent très mal, tout manque».”

156 Annika Björkdahl, and Susanne Buckley-Zistel, eds., *Spatializing Peace and Conflict: Mapping the Production of Places, Sites and Scales of Violence* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Jana Krause, *Resilient Communities: Non-Violence and Civilian Agency in Communal War* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108675079>; José Luengo-Cabrera (@J_LuengoCabrera), “Mali: monthly civilian fatalities by attributed perpetrator. Data provider: @ACLEINFO,” Twitter, June 15, 2021, https://twitter.com/J_LuengoCabrera/status/1404852979912609794.

157 Interview in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

158 Although this report was written before May 2021, this is also relevant to the current transitional government.

159 Interviews in Diafarabé and Bandiagara, Mopti Region, and in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

transitional government's roadmap for Central Mali highlights the importance of disarming self-defense militias, promoting communal and armed group dialogues and redeploying the state—all improvements in considering the multidimensional, intercommunal drivers of instability.¹⁶⁰ However, without a clear action plan, this model could fall back on the previously unsuccessful approach of solely focusing on jihadist threats.

The government and its security forces must comply with accountability mechanisms and renounce discriminatory practices to rebuild trust.¹⁶¹ The government also needs to give voice to all segments of society, including women, in reconciliation and counter-jihadist activities. “It is women who must be on the front line [in trust-building within the population], given that they are in touch directly with the men, who have taken up arms or are willing to do so, who are their fathers, husbands, sons and brothers.”^{162,163,164} Women are key political actors and should be included in conflict management mechanisms.

Just in the past three years, the allegations of abuse by security forces have disillusioned communities. In February 2018, in response to the government's Integrated Security Plan for the Central Regions (PSIRC),¹⁶⁵ the military reinforced its presence in Koro, Bankass, and Douentza cercles.¹⁶⁶ By July 2019, 3,500 security forces were deployed in the area, but these forces were repeatedly accused of extra-judicial abuses against civilians, especially the Fulani who were accused of collaboration with Katiba Macina.¹⁶⁷ Allegations against domestic and international security forces have received little attention from the central government or the international community, leaving local human rights organizations in a difficult position to investigate and bring to light potential human rights violations. For instance, in January 2021, Fulani local organizations and villagers alleged that a French air strike had killed 20 civilians and described other incidents of killing women and children. These allegations have been dismissed as false by the French and Malian governments, further eroding the trust between Fulani communities in Central Mali and the central government.¹⁶⁸

160 Stephen L. Esquith, “Mali’s roadmap for lasting peace has laudable goals: but it doesn’t go far enough,” *The Conversation*, August 24, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/malis-roadmap-for-lasting-peace-has-laudable-goals-but-it-doesnt-go-far-enough-166419>.

161 Interviews in Diafarabé and Bandiagara, Mopti Region, and in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

162 Interviews in Diafarabé, Mopti Region, March 2020.

163 Interview in Bandiagara, Mopti Region, March 2020.

164 Interview in Macina, Ségou Region, March 2020.

165 Ministère de la Sécurité et de la Protection Civile, République du Mali, “Plan de Sécurisation Intégrée des Régions du Centre (PSIRC—Mopti et Segou),” February 2017, <https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/PLAN-DE-SECURISATION-INTEGREE-DES-REGIONS-DU-CENTRE.pdf>; Aurélien Tobie, “Central Mali: Violence, Local Perspectives and Diverging Narratives,” *SIPRI*, December 2017, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2017/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/central-mali-violence-local-perspectives-and-diverging-narratives>.

166 International Crisis Group, “Speaking with the ‘Bad Guys’: Toward Dialogue with Central Mali’s Jihadists,” May 28, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/276-speaking-bad-guys-toward-dialogue-central-malis-jihadists>.

167 Zeenat Hansrod, “Central Mali: Populations Caught between Terrorism and Anti-Terrorism,” *RFI*, November 21, 2018, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20181120-malian-civilians-trapped>; *RFI*, “Mali : Boubou Cissé annonce des mesures sécuritaires dans le centre,” July 8, 2019, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20190708-mali-boubou-cisse-annonce-mesures-securitaires-le-centre>.

168 Associated Press, “French minister insists troops didn’t bomb Mali wedding fete,” *AP*, January 10, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/weddings-mali-france-393f1b822dac7c5cc03aaa15667c95b0>.

The PSIRC faced further setbacks as jihadist attacks pushed back the Malian forces, weakening their visibility and interaction with local communities.¹⁶⁹ The government's shift from a military approach to a governance approach aiming to increase community trust via the December 2019 Stabilization Strategy for Central Mali (SSCM)¹⁷⁰ has not yielded any significant results. But with a transition government in place, making its transition roadmap actionable is one key step toward improving government responsiveness to community needs.

Recommendations

Based on the review of the relevant literature and the field research conducted in Central Mali, the report concludes with recommendations for local and international policymakers, development practitioners, and conflict specialists to better understand conflict-sensitive potentials to de-escalate violence and design more effective security initiatives and peacebuilding efforts. On many aspects of this conflict, further research is needed to explore current dynamics in detail and viable opportunities for a more tranquil future in Central Mali.

- » Allegations of abuse and discrimination by Malian security forces exacerbated key grievances within Fulani communities. For any government-led strategy to improve community trust in political leadership to succeed, government leaders and the international community must consider and respond to allegations of abuse by any parties to the internal armed conflict. The Malian government and international stakeholders must elevate the voice of local human rights and development organizations and investigate alleged crimes followed with well-publicized actions to fix a security model undone by conflict and distrust.
- » Peaceful co-existence is inconceivable until the long-term damage of jihadist groups and CBAGs in stoking ethnic violence is reversed. CBAGs will continue being legitimized to drive security behaviors based on identity politics led by the growing population of marginalized, radicalized youth. Any security approach must acknowledge that tensions amongst ethnically heterogeneous communities will exist even if the jihadist threat is removed.
- » Lessons learned from French alignment with Tuareg groups in northern Mali for counterterrorism efforts must be applied to avoid any national, international, or multilateral security effort aligning with CBAGs. Rumors of French alignment with Dan Na Ambassagou are likely to intensify already existing social and ethnic tensions by more clearly pitting Fulanis and Dogons against one another—namely through reinforcing the Fulani-jihadist connection by creating Dogon-French linkages. The potential for an evolving mission or a set of principles of CBAGs in their fight to

169 International Crisis Group, “Enrayer La Communautarisation de La Violence au Centre du Mali.”

170 International Crisis Group, “Reversing Central Mali’s Descent into Communal Violence”; Camillo Casola, ed., *Unraveling the Sahel: State, Politics and Armed Violence* (Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2021), https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/publicazioni/sahel_march_2021.pdf.

maintain power could entangle external actors into siding with certain ethnic communities over others, further harming to social cohesion and government trust-building.

- » Security sector reform and disengagement, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) are unlikely at this time, and any effort to integrate CBAG members into a larger, national security force or law enforcement organization is primed to fail. DDR should not be a priority now for stabilization efforts, when ethnic tensions remain unaddressed. CBAG members will likely hold a single-minded objective to protect their own community or ethnic group. Integrating too soon would serve to empower CBAGs—an obvious liability to national-level sustainable peace and justice.
- » Women are not a monolithic group: age, ethnicity, location, and religious beliefs all play roles in women’s diverse opinions and associations with the ongoing violence.¹⁷¹ Taking a conflict-sensitive approach to addressing women’s needs, behaviors, and potential contributions to positive change has not been adequately explored. To fully understand the potential roles women in Central Mali can play in peacebuilding processes, further research is required to understand women’s roles in the current conflict and opportunities to positively incorporate women’s voices into peace and security agendas.
- » Communities believe that poor economic prospects are resulting in greater risk of individuals joining armed groups. Following a careful review process, governments and state security actors should conduct thorough assessments of interdictions, bans, and curfews before implementation that may cause economic harm by preventing individuals from accessing markets. For the transitional government to begin normalizing economic activity, opening trade and providing skills training are simple measures to engage youth and adults in licit income production.
- » Responses thus far have been slow and impeded by implementation challenges. Given the fluid, constantly evolving dynamics, programming related to conflict and violence prevention, economic development, and humanitarian assistance requires more flexibility and more speed. An increase in rapid assessments and analysis could improve the ability of implementers and program decision-makers to proactively respond to dynamic changes in the situation.

171 Rida Lyammouri and Anna Schmauder, *Supporting Efforts in Engaging with Local Religious and Traditional Leaders in Burkina Faso and Mali* (Helsinki: The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, 2021), <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Supporting-efforts-in-engaging-with-local-religions-and-traditional-leaders-in-Burkina-Faso-and-Mali-1.pdf>; Abatan and Sangaré, “Katiba Macina and Boko Haram: Including Women to What End?”

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About the Report

This report was written and researched by Rida Lyammouri. Several members of the RESOLVE Network Secretariat contributed to this report's development, including Ms. Rachel Sullivan, Program Officer; Dr. Alastair Reed, Executive Director; Dr. Brandon Kendhammer, Senior Research Advisor; Ms. Boglarka Bozsogi, Executive Coordination & Network Manager; and Ms. Shivapriya Viswanathan, Research Assistant. RESOLVE would like to thank the reviewers of this report, colleagues at the U.S. Institute of Peace, and members of the RESOLVE Network Research Advisory Council who lent their support and guidance. Finally, RESOLVE would like to thank the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Africa Bureau for its generous and long-standing support for this report and RESOLVE's research initiative on Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa.

ADDRESSING THE DOZO IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

JESSICA MOODY

COMMUNITY-BASED ARMED GROUPS SERIES

“The dozo’s connection to many senior politicians and members of the armed forces has boosted their political gravitas.”

FAST FACTS

- » The importance of the dozo to the government’s hold on power has made them difficult to disarm or hold accountable in the post-war period.
- » One of the reasons behind the dozo existence and proliferation in remote areas is an absence of regular security and police forces, which allows the dozo to undertake government security roles with impunity.
- » Encouraging cohesion and communication between communities in northern and western Côte d’Ivoire, where the dozo are omnipresent, would assist with reconciliation.

CONTEXT

Côte d’Ivoire is home to around 200,000 traditional hunters known as the dozo.¹ These traditional hunters are common throughout West Africa and have often filled gaps in state security provision in remote areas by settling local disputes and protecting residents from banditry and theft. In Côte d’Ivoire, the dozo traditionally hail from the north and are predominantly of Dioula ethnicity. They were heavily repressed under previous non-northern-led administrations who feared the power of the dozo as a pro-northern militia.² However, after supporting the

1 Youenn Gourlay, “Les Chasseurs Dozos, Gardiens Sacrés et Encombrants du Nord Ivoirien,” *Le Monde Afrique* November 14, 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/11/14/les-chasseurs-dozos-gardiens-sacres-et-encombrants-du-nord-ivoirien_6019188_3212.html.

2 Rodrigue Koné, “La Confrérie des Chasseurs Traditionnels Dozo en Côte d’Ivoire : Enjeux Socioculturels et Dynamiques Sécuritaires,” *Centre Franco Paix* (June 2018): 30.

Civil War

The nine-year civil war stemmed from longstanding tensions over access to land, national identity, and ethnic rivalries. Under the country's first President Felix Houphouet Boigny, northern people, including the dozo, had been encouraged to migrate to the southwest of the country to farm an abundance of cocoa plantations. But as the cocoa price plummeted in the 1980s and jobs became scarce, southwestern ethnic groups grew angry at the presence of foreigners on their land and sought to push them out. This sentiment was galvanized by numerous politicians in the years after Houphouet Boigny's death in 1993. Ethnic tensions mounted and eventually led to an attempted coup against President Laurent Gbagbo in 2002, triggering a civil war. When the mutinous troops failed to seize control of the presidency, they took control of the northern part of Cote d'Ivoire, dividing the country in half. The rebels, who became known as the Forces Nouvelles (FN) and were strongly supported by the dozo, claimed that northern populations had been heavily marginalized for decades and sought greater equality for northern people. The UN established a ceasefire line in the center of the country, reducing the propensity for violence and preventing the FN from marching on the capital. From 2002 onwards, the international community sought to mediate a peace agreement to end the conflict with little success. In 2010, Gbagbo finally agreed to hold a presidential election, long demanded by the FN. The poll pitted northern politician Alassane Ouattara and central former President Henri Konan Bedie against then-President Gbagbo, who hailed from the southwest. The electoral commission announced Ouattara the winner of the poll, though Gbagbo refused to step down, sparking some of the worst violence of the conflict in which more than 3,000 people died. Ouattara was eventually installed in the presidency with the assistance of UN and French troops, as well as the assistance of the FN.

current government during a 2002–2011 war, which pitted the north against the south and ultimately saw northern leaders come to power, the dozo have grown in political status and strength.

The failure to fully disarm or demobilize the dozo after the end of the conflict and the government's decision not to hold them accountable for abuses they committed during or since the war have imbued them with impunity. Moreover, many senior dozo, who were accused of committing crimes during the war, have been promoted to positions in the armed forces and the government since 2011.³ The dozo's connection to many senior politicians and members of the armed forces has boosted their political gravitas.⁴ Further, because of their close ethnic ties to the current administration, their support for the president during the 2002–2011 conflict, and the government's lack of action to demobilize them, the dozo have been accused of acting almost as a parallel militia in favor of President Alassane Ouattara.⁵

3 Koné, "La Confrérie des Chasseurs," 43.

4 Many of those rebels who fought with the dozo during the 2002–2011 conflict are now in power, providing the dozo with extensive connections to politicians and members of the armed forces. Notably, Zakaria Kone and Ousmane Cherif, senior dozos who were both rebel commanders during the conflict, took up high-level positions in the armed forces after the conflict ended.

5 Richard Banegas, "Reconstruction 'Post-Conflict': Violence et Politique en Côte d'Ivoire," *Les dossiers du CERI* (October 2012): 6.

Amid longstanding tensions over land ownership that remain unresolved in the aftermath of the 2002–2011 conflict, northern and central populations have increasingly joined dozo self-defense forces in an effort to protect their land from seizures by southwestern ethnic groups.⁶ This has bolstered the dozo’s strength in numbers; they are now significantly more numerous than the Ivoirian police force and military, respectively.⁷ In addition to their traditional base in the north, the dozo are now present in Abidjan and have become stronger in the west. The dozo migrated to that part of the country as part of a mass migration of northerners to the arable farmlands in the 1960s-1970s but since the 1990s had been repressed by non-northern-led governments, who protected the southwestern ethnic groups.⁸ However, they have been allowed to operate relatively uninhibited in the west since Ouattara’s accession to power in 2011.

Since the end of the conflict in 2011, external policy advisors have encouraged Côte d’Ivoire to depoliticize, demobilize, and disarm the dozo once embroiled in the 2002–2011 conflict and urge them to return to their traditional hunter roles.⁹ In 2012, the Ivoirian government seemingly complied, introducing several laws forbidding the dozo from establishing roadblocks or carrying unauthorized weaponry or munitions.¹⁰ That year, the defense minister also arranged a meeting of clarification with the dozo, thanking them for their support during the conflict and urging them to scale back their role in security provision.¹¹

These moves rarely had much of an impact. Law enforcement does not arrest the dozo for violating the laws, and the number of traditional hunters has continued to grow in the years since the conflict ended.¹² The dozo continue to play security roles without a mandate. They persistently mount roadblocks, especially in the southwestern part of the country, underscoring the significant strength of the community-based armed group outside of their traditional northern strongholds. Moreover, many dozos allege that they still work closely with the security forces. The government strongly denies this claim, though reinserting several senior dozo into the military at the end of the conflict suggests that at least some connections remain between the community-based armed group and the security forces.¹³

Banegas argues that the government’s reluctance to eliminate the dozo as a parallel security force may be a result of its fear of another conflict. Should this conflict occur, the government may decide to utilize the dozo again if the Ivoirian military choose to side with prominent politicians against the administration.¹⁴ The new regime relied on the dozo following the 2002–2011 conflict to maintain power during an unstable political transition and continued to depend on them to bolster security in a heavily politicized post-conflict period. Moreover, the traditional hunters have often claimed that they deserve compen-

6 Koné, “La Confrérie des Chasseurs,” 34.

7 Koné, “La Confrérie des Chasseurs,” 34. ; Gourlay, “Les Chasseurs Dozos.”

8 Koné, “La Confrérie des Chasseurs,” 26.

9 United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI), “Rapport Sur les Abus des Droits de l’Homme Commis par des Dozos en République de Côte d’Ivoire,” *United Nations* (June 2013): 1–28.

10 UNOCI, “Rapport Sur les Abus,” 23–25.

11 UNOCI, “Rapport Sur les Abus,” 24.

12 Gourlay, “Les Chasseurs Dozos,” UNOCI, “Rapport Sur les Abus,” 26.

13 UNOCI, “Rapport Sur les Abus,” 24.

14 Banegas, “Reconstruction ‘Post-Conflic’,” 6.

sation for their support to the government during the civil war and therefore cannot be demobilized.¹⁵ Marginalizing the dozo from the formal security system, therefore, may be a security risk in itself.¹⁶

RELEVANCE TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

At least partly because of the impunity they have been granted, much of the population in Côte d'Ivoire fear and mistrust the dozo, particularly in the west of the country where the Guere and Bete people have often clashed with the dozo, who generally do not belong to these local ethnic groups.¹⁷ Civilians in the west have accused the traditional hunters of involvement in massacres during the civil war, as well as land seizures and persistent banditry, executions, and extortion after it ended.¹⁸ Despite this, and the few efforts the government claims it has made to disarm them and prevent them playing a security role for which they do not have the mandate, it continues to enable them.¹⁹

This persistent tension between the Guere and Bete ethnic groups and the dozo, particularly in the southwest, is problematic. This dynamic prevents reconciliation between the government and traditionally pro-government northern populations and western ethnic groups, who perceive the ongoing strength of the dozo as an existential threat and an indication of the government's pro-northern, or even pro-Dioula, stance.²⁰ Moreover, the longstanding friction between the dozo and other communities, especially the Guere and the Bete, poses a risk in the context of a potential incursion by Islamist extremist groups, particularly Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM). Neighboring countries, notably Mali and Burkina Faso, who are already struggling with vast insurgencies by both JNIM and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), have found that tensions between citizens and community-based-armed groups like the dozo can exacerbate the militant threat.²¹ In those countries, jihadist insurgents have mobilized long-standing grievances against dozo-like organizations to facilitate recruitment and encourage violence.²²

In turn, vigilante groups in Burkina Faso and Mali have sought to tackle the expansion of violent extremists themselves—sometimes with the backing of the government, which lacks resources and reach in more remote areas of their country.²³ Côte d'Ivoire may be tempted to mobilize and arm its dozo in a similar fashion, should it have to deal with sustained extremist violence. The Ivoirian government has

15 UNOCI, "Rapport Sur les Abus," 13.

16 Koné, "La Confrérie des Chasseurs," 47.

17 UNOCI, "Rapport Sur les Abus," 11; Author interviews with civilians, Man, Duekoue, Bolequin, Guiglo, October 2017–October 2018.

18 Author interview with civilians, Man, Duekoue, Bolequin, Guiglo, October 2017–October 2018; UNOCI, "Rapport Sur les Abus," 16–23.

19 UNOCI, "Rapport Sur les Abus," 23–25.

20 Banegas, "Reconstruction 'Post-Conflict,'" 6; The New Humanitarian, "Dozo as Protector, Dozo as Assailant," August 1, 2011, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/fr/node/259696>; UNOCI, "Rapport Sur les Abus," ۲۳–۱۶.

21 Caleb Weiss, "Analysis: Jihadist Exploitation of Communal Violence in Mali," *FDD's Long War Journal*, July 17, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/07/analysis-jihadist-exploitation-of-communal-violence-in-mali.php>; Laurence-Aida Ammour, "How Violent Extremist Groups Exploit Intercommunal Conflicts in the Sahel," *Africa Centre for Strategic Studies*, February 26, 2020, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/how-violent-extremist-groups-exploit-intercommunal-conflicts-in-the-sahel/>

22 Weiss, "Analysis: Jihadist Exploitation."; Ammour, "How Violent Extremist Groups."

23 Reuters, "Burkina Faso Approves State Backing," January 22, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-burkina-security/burkina-faso-approves-state-backing-for-vigilantes-fighting-jihadists-idUSKBN1ZL1UT>

allegedly already used the dozo in a similar manner in 2016, deploying the dozo to assist with the aftermath of the Grand Bassam attack by al-Mourabitoun.²⁴

Government cooptation can boost the availability of fighters and provide invaluable local intelligence in the short term. However, these efforts are misguided. Poorly trained and ill-equipped traditional hunters often end up targeting entire communities thought to be associated with Islamist insurgents and massacring and torturing civilians.²⁵ Such actions are rarely brought to justice and drive wedges between communities, exacerbating local grievances and thus furthering a potent recruitment tool for extremists. Neither in Mali, nor in Burkina Faso has the cooptation of community-based armed groups been effective in halting the expansion of Islamist extremist violence. An alternative approach to the militia is therefore necessary in Côte d'Ivoire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Among many Ivoirian communities, particularly in the west, the dozo are unpopular, opening the prospect for Islamist extremist groups to use them in the same way as in neighboring Burkina Faso and Mali to encourage intercommunal violence and facilitate recruitment. What can be done to encourage the government to address this challenge, given the government's close alliance with the dozo?

Reframe the challenge of the proliferation of the dozo as a counter-terrorism issue

The importance of the dozo to the government's hold on power has made them difficult to disarm or hold accountable in the post-war period. However, reframing this challenge as a key factor in the government's counter-terrorism response would change the dynamic of the dozo predicament and assist in depoliticizing the issue. The dozo's role in the country becomes a question of national security rather than party politics. Reframing also makes the problem more pertinent and urgent to the government, which has been preoccupied with the danger posed by the expansion of Islamist extremism from the Sahel into coastal West Africa. Côte d'Ivoire witnessed an Islamist extremist attack in 2016 and foiled a series of further planned assaults in Abidjan in 2019.²⁶ The government must see that unless an appropriate security strategy is adopted vis-à-vis the traditional hunters, the group will potentially exacerbate jihadist violence, as evidenced in neighboring Burkina Faso and Mali.

Workshops or strategy meetings focusing on counterterrorism responses with senior government officials in advisory roles or overseeing security sector reform initiatives could be a tool for reframing the

24 On 13 March 2016 al-Mourabitoun militants from Mali attacked the beach resort of Grand Bassam, around 40 km from Abidjan. The attack left at least 16 people dead.; Koné, "La Confrérie des Chasseurs," 45.

25 Ammour, "How Violent Extremist Groups."

26 Africa Intelligence, "Alassane Ouattara Does Battle with Katiba Macina in Abidjan," June 12, 2019, https://www.africaintelligence.com/central-and-west-africa_politics/2019/06/12/alassane-ouattara-does-battle-with-katiba-macina-in-abidjan,108361003-art

issue. These meetings could raise the role of the dozo in the security response to the growing Islamist extremist threat, while also highlighting the problems this has posed in neighboring countries and the need for a different approach. The case studies of Burkina Faso and Mali could be a springboard for alternative ideas to address the intersectional threat posed by community-based armed groups and Islamist extremists while reducing the security role of the dozo.

Respond to security shortfalls incorporating the dozo and civil society where possible

One of the reasons behind the dozo existence and proliferation in remote areas is an absence of regular security and police forces, which allows the dozo to undertake government security roles with impunity. The most obvious way to combat this security gap is to expand statutory security forces into these rural areas, correcting the security shortfalls the dozo respond to. The government should make a concerted effort to increase troops and police in these more remote reaches of the country, particularly in the north, where the dozo are prominent and Islamist extremists are most likely to enter the country.

This does not mean that the dozo should be entirely dismantled, nor that they should no longer play any security roles. As security forces expand their presence into rural areas, they should seek to formalize links with select senior dozos and encourage them to play a role in intelligence provision while discouraging their role as armed security providers. Regulating the relationship between the dozo and security forces would help hold the dozo accountable for their actions and enable the government to monitor them more carefully. Unlike in Burkina Faso, this should not involve the provision of weaponry or training that emboldens these community-based armed groups to continue to behave like a militia.

The expansion of security forces in the north and the incorporation of the dozo would be a delicate change in the security dynamic, which would need to be handled carefully. It would be necessary to consult community members and dozo groups in the north before slowly moving statutory forces into the area. To a certain extent, such conversations could be facilitated by the continued presence of senior dozo in the armed forces, who should be able to establish and oversee the discussions between the state and the self-defense groups. The dozo would likely be willing to cooperate on some level, given their patriotism and desire to protect Cote d'Ivoire from Islamist insurgents.²⁷

Such a dialogue would be incredibly useful not just to ensure security forces were not immediately rejected by the local population and the dozo, but also for fomenting better longer-term relationships between the dozo, civil society, and the armed forces: three parts of society that are vital for generating an appropriate security response and that have traditionally turbulent relations. Such conversations would be beneficial exercises in and of themselves, providing security services with much needed access to local intelligence and building their currently weak relationships with civilians.

²⁷ Author interviews with dozo Man, Bouake, Duekoue, Blolequin, Guiglo, Korhogo, October 2017–October 2018.

Local forums would also go some way to uniting communities against the jihadist threat. Ivoirians are typically highly patriotic and, in the north in particular, are deeply concerned about Islamist extremists encroaching over the northern Ivoirian border from Burkina Faso or Mali.²⁸ Working together to prevent this threat could bring these divergent groups closer. Both the dozo and security forces have poor reputations among civilians in parts of the north, but more notably the west.²⁹ Thus, they should work to be regarded by communities as less of a threat and more of a partner in tackling an emerging danger.

Regular meetings between these groups would also allow for the emergence of locally owned strategies to preventing the encroachment of Islamist extremists onto Ivoirian territory. Strategizing meetings would be a platform that empowers the dozo to continue to play a role in community protection and security in a way they long sought to do but without the use of force. Civil society could also be emboldened through such a dialogue. In particular, civil society actors who are already engaged in local resource governance, the expansion of women's or young people's rights and political participation could be mobilized. This would likely contribute to creating a more cohesive civil society, thereby generating positive externalities for development projects as well.

Finally, this dialogue could establish an appropriate means of incentivizing the dozo in their collaborative role, which would likely require some payment, possibly in the form of development projects, such as schools or medical facilities in the communities of the dozo who collaborate effectively in intelligence provision. This type of exchange has been attempted for disarmament programs already in Cote d'Ivoire.³⁰ Regular and external evaluations would be needed to assess the distribution of these projects and the effectiveness of collaboration to reduce the potential for corruption.

Mitigate grievances between communities and the dozo

One of the most significant challenges that community-based armed groups faced in Burkina Faso and Mali is Islamist extremist organizations' ability to mobilize grievances against traditional hunters to intensify violence and facilitate recruitment.³¹ Improving relations between the dozo and communities in Côte d'Ivoire could preempt this, should Islamist insurgent groups gain a foothold. Encouraging cohesion and communication between communities in northern and western Côte d'Ivoire, where the dozo are omnipresent, would assist with reconciliation. Focus groups involving objective arbiters, wherein communities could raise concerns with the dozo's security role in the area, would enable both sides to air grievances, many of which have not been addressed since the conflict. There is little precedent for such pre-emptive intercommunal dialogue in the region. Involving legitimate mediators from civil society and customary chiefs who tend to be responsible for local cohesion would probably be vital pre-requisites for success.

28 Author interviews with civilians and ex-combatants, Korhogo, October 2017–October 2018.

29 Author interview with civilians, Man, Duekoue, Bolequin, Guiglo, Korhogo, October 2017–October 2018.

30 Author interviews with COMNAT employees Duekoue, Guiglo, October 2017–October 2018; COMNAT ALPC, "Poursuite des actions de sécurisation communautaire," *Ivoirian Government*, accessed April 28, 2020, http://comnat-alpc.org/zoom/article.php?ID_ACTUZ=167

31 Weiss, "Analysis: Jihadist Exploitation."

Additionally, more concerted government attempts to tackle obvious causes of tension, including pervasive roadblocks and land seizures by the dozo would be beneficial, particularly in the west e.g. in Duekoue, Gagnoa, Man, and Tai, and in northern towns such as Ouangolo and Ferkessedougou. Reducing the dozo roadblocks in these areas and clearly delineating land ownership could significantly diminish tensions between western communities and the dozo. The government's efforts to address the land question to-date involve the expensive and time-consuming acquisition of land titles.³² Programs that made acquiring a land title much simpler and affordable for communities in the west, such as easily accessible sites in rural areas where titles could be acquired in a matter of hours, would go some way to resolving this issue.

CONCLUSION

Côte d'Ivoire does not yet have a serious problem with Islamist insurgents. It does, however, have an enormous dozo population. Constructing a more strategic way of mobilizing traditional hunters in the fight against Islamist extremists is essential for prevention and preparedness for a potential violent extremist incursion. There is a need to frame the dozo issue in terms of counterterrorism to encourage the government to take action, while urging more effective efforts to rebuild poor relationships between the dozo and local communities to facilitate a more robust local security response, should extremists gain a foothold in Côte d'Ivoire.

Difficulties persist, however, and will require further research. The depoliticization of the dozo and the armed forces requires greater understanding, especially in the context of countering violent extremism. Given that the threat of Islamist extremism is imminent and there is scant possibility of totally disarming and demobilizing the dozo, the strategies suggested here involve closer cooperation between the government, state security forces, and the dozo in counterterrorism efforts.

Yet, in building stronger ties with state officials, the dozo might grow closer to former warlords and politicians they fought with in the civil war and who are already in the armed forces. Should a political crisis occur during the October presidential election, a strengthened relationship between state actors and traditional hunters might allow pro-government actors to more rapidly remobilize the dozo for their own ends. Strategies aimed at depoliticizing the dozo, while simultaneously encouraging greater cooperation with the government and political figures, will be important to consider in future research.

32 Human Rights Watch, "That land is my family's wealth," October 9, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/10/09/land-my-family-wealth/addressin0g-land-dispossession-after-cote-divoires-post>; Author interviews with civilians Toulepleu, Blolequin, Duekoue, Guiglo, October 2017-October 2018.

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THE ROLE OF CBAGS IN COMBATTING THE EXPANSION OF ISLAMIST EXTREMISM IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND BENIN

JESSICA MOODY

COMMUNITY BASED ARMED GROUPS SERIES

“As experiences from the Sahel demonstrate, the appropriate use of CBAGs in the government response is essential to preventing a rapid escalation of violence.”

FAST FACTS

- » The failure of Malian, regional, and international forces to contain the violence has led to an exponential expansion of [Islamist] extremist groups into central Mali, as well as neighboring states.
- » The increasing scope and sophistication of jihadist attacks in coastal states is concerning. Extremist groups are not simply launching hit-and-run assaults from bases in Burkina Faso, but are recruiting from and working more closely with local communities. In such a scenario, the role of CBAGs is crucial.
- » The vast local knowledge and connections that CBAGs have provide an opportunity for them to assist in state responses to violent extremism without deploying them militarily.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

While Islamist extremist groups had been present and involved in criminal activities in northern Mali since the early 2000s, they began to gain ground in the Sahel around 2012, when small, local insurgencies connected with al-Qaeda began launching attacks in northern Mali. The situation was exacerbated by the fall of Colonel Khadafi's regime in nearby Libya in 2011 and that country's destabilization, gradually leading to an influx of radicalized Sahelian nationals and large amounts of weaponry into Mali. The failure of Malian, regional, and international forces to contain the violence has led to an exponential expansion of extremist groups—now mainly Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP)—into central Mali, as well as neighboring states. In particular, in Burkina Faso, the north-

ern regions of Soum and Oudalan have faced growing pressure, while groups have also expanded to the south and the east and have posed a threat to Ouagadougou.¹ Niger has also been targeted frequently and the regions of Tillabéry, Diffa, and Tahoua have been particularly badly affected.² In turn, this expansion now poses a growing threat to coastal West Africa as well.

Now, both Benin and Côte d'Ivoire find themselves periodically targeted by these groups. Benin has witnessed at least five attacks since the start of the year, and Côte d'Ivoire experienced 13 assaults over the course of 2020 and 2021.³ The attacks have involved the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), including at least four successful and two failed in Côte d'Ivoire, and indicate the intent, particularly of JNIM, which has been more frequently linked to these attacks than ISSP, to target both of these countries in a more sustained manner than has hitherto been the case.⁴ Recurrent attacks in these coastal countries underscore a strategy that French intelligence services drew attention to in 2020: the desire by groups such as ISSP and JNIM to expand from their strongholds in the Sahel towards the coast of West Africa, from where valuable access to ports would allow them to expand their involvement in trafficking routes considerably.⁵ An uptick in attacks in the first half of 2021 in Côte d'Ivoire and more recently in Benin and Togo—exemplified by the first successful attack on Togo occurring on May 10-11—suggests that the armed groups are making moves towards this objective.

The role of community based armed groups (CBAGs) within this evolving threat is extremely important. As JNIM and ISSP have expanded, governments lacking military resources in Burkina Faso and Mali have mobilized CBAGs, typically in the form of traditional hunters such as the dozo and the Koglweogo, to combat the insurgents.⁶ While this has assisted these governments in targeting insurgents, especially in areas where the military has a limited footprint, the use of CBAGs to combat the expansion of jihadist groups has also raised a number of challenges. These armed groups are not trained or equipped to target sophisticated insurgencies. They have

1 Adele Orosz, "Violent Extremism in the Sahel is Strengthening its Grip in West Africa," *LSE Blogs*, February 15, 2022, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2022/02/15/violent-extremism-in-the-sahel-strengthening-grip-west-africa-mali-burkina-faso-niger-jihadi/>.

2 Ibid.

3 Caleb Weiss, "Jihadist Attacks Flow Into Littoral West Africa," *Long War Journal*, December 3, 2021, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2021/12/jihadist-attacks-flow-into-littoral-west-africa.php>; Francois Mazet, "Attaque Dans l'Extrême-Nord du Bénin: «Cet Incident n'est pas un Incident Isolé," *RFI*, February 2, 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20220210-attaque-dans-l-extr%C3%Aame-nord-du-b%C3%A9nin-cet-incident-n-est-pas-un-incident-isol%C3%A9>.

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5 Aneliese Bernard, "Jihadism is Spreading to the Gulf of Guinea Littoral States, and a New Approach to Countering it is Needed," *Modern War Institute*, September 9, 2021, <https://mwi.usma.edu/jihadism-is-spreading-to-the-gulf-of-guinea-littoral-states-and-a-new-approach-to-countering-it-is-needed/>; Daniel Finnan, "Sahel Jihadists Eye Expansion into Côte d'Ivoire and Benin Says French Spy Boss," *RFI*, February 3, 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20210203-sahel-jihadists-eye-expansion-into-cote-d-ivoire-and-benin-says-french-spy-boss-africa-attacks-military-aqim>.

6 Koglweogo are a CBAG, which emerged in 2014–2015, largely comprising Mossi and Gourmantché communities. Koglweogo have become increasingly involved in efforts to tackle jihadist expansion with state support.

also been prone to human rights abuses and have extensively targeted herding communities, perceived to be associated with jihadist groups, such as the Peuhl, from which ISSP and JNIM have recruited considerably, without evidence that they have committed crimes.⁷ This kind of violence has undermined the state's response by marginalizing some communities, in turn facilitating jihadist recruitment.⁸ The relationship between the state, local communities, and CBAGs is therefore crucial for coastal West African states to manage effectively, as JNIM and ISGS expand into the littorals. This is not least because CBAGs' local knowledge and connections make them, if mobilized well, potentially valuable resources in combatting the proliferation of jihadist violence in coastal states.

RELEVANCE TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

The main response to the expansion of extremist violence in Côte d'Ivoire and Benin thus far has been military. Both countries have significantly expanded their military presence in the northern border regions. In July 2019, Côte d'Ivoire launched an operation called *Frontière étanche* along its northern borders, before declaring a militarized zone in the northern region and deploying an additional 3,000 troops to the border in November 2021.⁹ In Benin, military and police reinforcements have been sent to the north, and mobile positions have been set up.¹⁰ Additionally, in April 2020, Benin further expanded its security force presence along the borders of Burkina Faso, Niger, and the north-western quarter of Nigeria, and further special forces are due to be posted to the region by 2025.¹¹

This prioritization of a military response raises many problems. While reinforcing security is required, neither Côte d'Ivoire nor Benin has a particularly effective military.¹² Côte d'Ivoire's armed forces are prone to mutinies and have been undergoing extensive, though often inef-

7 Peuhl communities are traditionally nomadic herders, which has generated varying levels of conflict in coastal and Sahel states in West Africa. This has periodically resulted in attacks on Peuhl communities by farmers who perceive the herders to have trampled their land or stolen their livestock. Protection and dispute resolution in these disagreements has been minimal and the Peuhl have often perceived themselves to be unfairly attacked for being herders. Jihadist groups have mobilised this feeling of marginalisation to recruit widely in Peuhl communities, which has exacerbated local negative sentiment towards Peuhl people, who are now perceived negatively for being herders as well as because of the perception that they are all involved with jihadist groups. In turn this has led to further attacks on Peuhl communities by self-defense groups seeking to eradicate jihadist forces, spurring still more recruitment of Peuhl people to jihadist groups. "The New Frontier for Jihadist Groups?," *KAS* (2021): 42; "A Vicious Cycle: The Reactionary Nature of Militant Attacks in Burkina Faso and Mali," *ACLEDA*, May 31, 2019, <https://acleddata.com/2019/05/31/a-vicious-cycle-the-reactionary-nature-of-militant-attacks-in-burkina-faso-and-mali/>.

8 "The New Frontier," 42; *ACLEDA*, "A Vicious Cycle."

9 Georges Ibrahim Tounkara, "Lutte Contre le Terrorisme: l'Armée Ivoirienne Recrute," *DW*, November 23, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/fr/c%C3%B4te-divoire-arm%C3%A9e-recrutement-terrorisme/a-59912946>; "The New Frontier," 14.

10 "The New Frontier," 43.

11 "The New Frontier," 43; "Le Bénin Renforce la Coopération Sécuritaire Avec ses Voisins Face à la Recrudescence d'Attaques," *RFI*, February 14, 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20220214-le-b%C3%A9nin-renforce-la-coop%C3%A9ration-s%C3%A9curitaire-avec-ses-voisins-face-%C3%A0-la-recrudescence-d-attaques>.

12 "The New Frontier," 44; Bernard, "Jihadism is Spreading."

fective, security sector reform since the end of the civil war in 2011.¹³ Equally, Benin's President Patrice Talon is widely believed to fear a coup against his presidency and has therefore starved his armed forces of resources, making sustained operations in the north much harder.¹⁴ In the Sahel, a lack of resources combined with poorly trained armed forces has resulted in poor military outcomes. In Burkina Faso, for example, the military has often struggled to retain territory it has taken during offensives.¹⁵ Additionally, security forces have often resorted to brutal methods, largely because they are poorly trained and struggle to differentiate between civilians and jihadist forces, leading to mass extrajudicial killings of communities thought to be involved with jihadists. According to Human Rights Watch, this approach has resulted in the extrajudicial execution of several hundred men, and contributed to a loss of trust in the security services among the local population and to an increasing spiral of violence in the region.¹⁶ There are already signs that a similar situation is occurring in the littoral states, where Peuhl people in Côte d'Ivoire have complained that they are being arbitrarily arrested and mistreated for their alleged role in jihadist activities.¹⁷

The role of CBAGs in the military response of both Côte d'Ivoire and Benin is also of concern. In Côte d'Ivoire, CBAGs such as the dozo traditional hunter groups are prominent, particularly in the north and the west, and have often been used as a parallel army by the government.¹⁸ As yet there are few indications that the dozo are being systematically used to target jihadist forces in the north. There are signs, however, that the government is considering using them in such a manner, having already deployed them to assist with the aftermath of the al-Mouribatoun attack in Grand Bassam in 2016.¹⁹ Given the human rights violations that appear to be committed by security personnel in the north, the way that the government intends to operationalize the dozo in its response to rising insecurity is of concern, particularly given the precedent set in the Sahel. The situation in Benin is slightly different because traditional hunters there are not as closely tied to the government, although the challenge that CBAGs pose to the government's response to increasing Islamist extremist violence remains. This is not least because in northern Benin, traditional hunters have been marginalized by recent regulations against hunting in the northern national parks, reducing their ability to make a living.²⁰ This raises the risk that these traditional hunters could be recruited by jihadists and their potentially valuable assistance—given their vast local knowledge and connections—in combating the expansion of Islamist extremist groups will be lost.²¹

13 The temperament of the Ivoirian armed forces has improved somewhat since former rebel leader and head of the national assembly Guillaume Soro went into exile in 2019. Soro had been heavily implicated in numerous mutinies in Côte d'Ivoire, which have since dissipated – the last one occurring in 2017. However, following years of reshuffles and reorganisation of the military, the level of discipline and the extent to which the forces are well organised remains highly questionable. Bernard, "Jihadism is Spreading."

14 Kars de Bruijne, "Laws of Attraction: Northern Benin and Risk of Violent Extremist Spillover," *Clingendael CRU Report*, June 2021: 39.

15 "The New Frontier," 45.

16 Ibid.

17 Henry Wilkins & Nanythe Talani, "Dans le Nord Ivoirien, les Groupes Jihadistes Exploitent les Fractures Sociales," *VOA*, April 11, 2022, <https://www.voaafrique.com/a/dans-le-nord-ivoirien-les-groupes-jihadistes-exploitent-les-fractures-sociales-/6523091.html>.

18 Richard Banegas, "Reconstruction 'Post-Conflict': Violence et Politique en Côte d'Ivoire," *Les dossiers du CERI*, October 2012: 6.

19 Rodrigue Koné, "La Confrérie des Chasseurs Traditionnels Dozo en Côte d'Ivoire: Enjeux Socioculturels et Dynamiques Sécuritaires," *Centre Franco Paix*, June 2018: 45.

20 "The New Frontier," 42.

21 Ibid.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Challenge 1: Operationalization of CBAGs in combating jihadist violence is uncertain and relationship between military and CBAGs is unclear

While the Ivorian government has a better relationship with the dozo in northern Côte d'Ivoire than the Beninese government has with traditional hunters in the north of that country, the way that CBAGs are to be used in combating the expansion of jihadist violence has yet to be defined in either country. This raises questions over the training of the traditional hunter groups and what rules of engagement they are following. This is particularly problematic if the military is being accused of human rights abuses already, as in Côte d'Ivoire, and if CBAGs are mobilized with the support of the state, as in Burkina Faso and as has often been perceived as the case in Côte d'Ivoire historically. In such scenarios, popular perceptions will likely conflate the actions of the military with those of CBAGs, and human rights abuses committed by one will likely affect the reputation of both. Moreover, given CBAGs' limited training for conflict with jihadist groups and widespread stereotypes about the affiliation of Peuhl communities with jihadist groups, the potential for CBAGs to engage in human rights abuses is high, as has been witnessed in Burkina Faso and Mali. For example, in Burkina Faso, Koglweogo self-defense militias help the government in security crackdowns by identifying members of the Peuhl community involved in militant activities, a behavior that has led to human rights abuses and can provoke retribution against the perceived constituency of the Koglweogo – the Mossi and the Gourmantche.²²

Challenge 2: Communities are more likely to escalate violence or join jihadist groups in response to perceived prejudices and abuses of power by military or CBAGs

One of the major problems in countering Islamist extremism that has occurred in the Sahel is the lack of trust that local populations have for the government and the armed forces, as well as CBAGs who have committed human rights abuses while working with the state.²³ This can result in a tendency to cooperate more closely with the jihadist groups. In cases where jihadist groups offer security and basic services, local communities can rapidly develop a more trusting relationship with them. That the Peuhl community in northern Côte d'Ivoire is already claiming discrimination at the hands of the military and dozens have left the northern town of Kafolo, fearing reprisals for jihadist violence, suggests that this challenge could escalate rapidly in the northern border regions.²⁴ Equally, the Beninese state's implementation of

22 ACLED, "A Vicious Cycle."

23 Bernard, "Jihadism is Spreading."

24 AFP, "Jihadist Threat Stirs Anti-Fulani Hostility in Ivory Coast," *Africa News*, January 26, 2021, <https://www.africanews.com/2022/01/26/jihadist-threat-stirs-anti-fulani-hostility-in-ivory-coast/>.

strict regulations around herding and farming within its northern national parks has marginalized many northern communities, which may facilitate their recruitment by jihadist groups.²⁵

Opportunity 1: Governments can build more trust with local communities through improving land management and development policies

There is a considerable opportunity to address latent tensions between Peuhl communities, traditional hunters, and armed forces in northern parts of Benin and Côte d’Ivoire by enhancing understanding of land access and acquisition and providing more accessible legal means to dispute land access. This is crucial because if these tensions, which occur predominantly over land, are left unaddressed, they are likely to facilitate recruitment among communities which perceive themselves to be marginalized in the north of both Benin and Côte d’Ivoire. Indeed, both states struggle with populations disputing and claiming land access, leading to regular conflict between different communities.²⁶ This can relate to disputes involving the nomadic Peuhl herders, traditional hunters, and more settled farming communities, as in the Sahel, but can also be problematic among other ethnic communities, and is largely due to a lack of recognized land titles. In Benin, in the northern provinces of Alibori and Atakora, more than 80 percent of households do not have land titles, even though the overwhelming majority of the population (between 80 and 90 percent) live on agriculture, hunting, or fishing.²⁷ In Côte d’Ivoire, longstanding tensions over land acquisition and access, complicated by the influx, over the past 100 years, of large numbers of ‘non-autochthonous’ populations, predominantly from Burkina Faso, lead to regular outbreaks of violence.²⁸ The government can do more to address these problems. Currently in Côte d’Ivoire, to demarcate land and gain a land title is prohibitively expensive for most farming communities.²⁹ The government could expedite this process by decreasing the cost significantly and making it much easier for communities to acquire titles by establishing one-stop shops in rural areas. Establishing a clear process for disputing land access with local government and subsequently initiating sensitization campaigns surrounding this process would also help to reduce tensions and violent clashes over land in both countries.

25 Matthieu Millecamps, “Benin : Has Talon’s Government Underestimated the Jihadist Risk?,” *The Africa Report*, June 18, 2021, <https://www.theafricareport.com/98859/benin-has-talons-government-underestimated-the-jihadist-risk/>; “The New Frontier,” 49.

26 Koné, “La Confrérie des Chasseurs,” 34; Matthew Mitchell, “Land Reform and Peacebuilding in Côte d’Ivoire: Navigating the Minefield,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* (December 2021): 1–20; “The New Frontier,” 29; De Bruijne, “Laws of Attraction,” 8.

27 “The New Frontier,” 28.

28 Koné, “La Confrérie des Chasseurs,” 34; Matthew Mitchell, “Land Reform and Peacebuilding in Côte d’Ivoire: Navigating the Minefield,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* (December 2021): 1–20.

29 Matthew Mitchell, “Land Tenure Reform and Politics in Post-Conflict Côte d’Ivoire: A Precarious Peace in the Western Cocoa Regions,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* (August 2014): 203–221; Author interviews with civilians, farmers and government officials in Toulepleu, Duekoue, Guiglo October 2017 – October 2018.

Expanding development programs would also reduce competition for minimal resources and increase opportunities for civilians to make a living in northern Côte d'Ivoire and Benin. This in turn would reduce community tensions over land access. Côte d'Ivoire has already made a good start on significantly expanding its development programs for the north of the country, which is a crucial part of building trust with local communities and convincing them that the state will support them. For example, Côte d'Ivoire has begun developing a dry port at Ferkessedougou and an integrated agro-industrial center in the far north.³⁰ The project is part of a series of large investments that will boost local processing of cotton and cashews.³¹ Meanwhile, in Benin, the government set up the Beninese Agency for the Integrated Management of Border Areas (ABeGIEF) in 2012.³² The agency is intended to foster a sense of belonging among the Beninese people by building infrastructure and implementing poverty-reduction policies.³³ Since its creation, ABeGIEF has built 50 wells, 150 classrooms, markets, processing units, and police stations.³⁴ The expansion of and the addition of more similar programs, particularly surrounding education, health, and infrastructure, would be a highly effective and cost-efficient way of reducing the potential for civilians to join armed groups in the northern parts of these countries.

Opportunity 2: In contributing to countering violent extremism, CBAGs should be mobilized in local community trust-building exercises instead of military functions

The vast local knowledge and connections that CBAGs have provide an opportunity for them to assist in state responses to violent extremism without deploying them militarily. Indeed, CBAGs could be incorporated into dialogue and sensitization campaigns with local communities, acting as focal points in the community, along with civil society representatives such as youth and women's groups, for coordinating these kinds of meetings.³⁵ These forms of dialogue should be as inclusive as possible, involving heads of farmers associations, leaders of CBAGs in the area, and other actors that are regularly coming into conflict with others in the region, such as the African Parks Network (APN) NGO in Benin.³⁶ Programs already in action could be expanded: as a leading example, the ABeGIEF is actively developing relationships with civil society networks and

30 Ange Aboa, "Ivory Coast Says it Will Invest in North to Counter Jihadism," *Reuters*, November 8, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ivory-coast-says-it-will-invest-north-counter-jihadism-2021-11-08/>.

31 Aboa, "Ivory Coast Says."

32 "The New Frontier," 27.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Bernard, "Jihadism is Spreading."

36 APN provides armed rangers in northern Benin and is deployed to protect the northern nature reserves. However, APN's role in northern Benin has been contentious because it has cracked down heavily on hunting and herding in national parks, which had been a key form of livelihood for many members of northern Beninese communities, leading to recurrent outbreaks of small-scale violence between APN and communities in the north.

supporting border communities that have peaceful relationships with their neighbors.³⁷ Regular dialogue of this kind would improve the level of trust between CBAGs and local communities, reducing the scope for members of communities like the Peuhl to feel marginalized, thereby disrupting jihadist recruitment strategies.

CONCLUSION

The increasing scope and sophistication of jihadist attacks in coastal states is concerning. The challenge is made more pertinent by the fact that extremist groups are not simply launching hit-and-run assaults from bases in Burkina Faso, but are recruiting from and working more closely with local communities.³⁸ In such a scenario, the role of CBAGs is crucial. As experiences from the Sahel demonstrate, the appropriate use of CBAGs in the government response is essential to preventing a rapid escalation of violence. To this end, several steps can be taken. The governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Benin can do more to delineate the way that they intend to operationalize CBAGs in the response to extremist violence and place the emphasis on their role in community trust-building rather than in heavy-handed violent attacks on communities allegedly affiliated with jihadists, as has been witnessed in the Sahel. The government can also, with the assistance of international donors, expand existing development initiatives and land management programs that would serve to reduce communal tensions which, if left unaddressed, are likely to facilitate jihadist expansion.

37 De Bruijne, "Laws of Attraction," 9.

38 De Bruijne, "Laws of Attraction," 1.

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THE CHALLENGE OF STATE-BACKED INTERNAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA: CONSIDERATIONS FOR AMOTEKUN

JENNIFER OBADO-JOEL

COMMUNITY-BASED ARMED GROUPS SERIES

“Accountability mechanisms and the design of a transition program are required to support the success of Amotekun in responding to security threats in the Nigerian Southwest.”

FAST FACTS

- » To address tensions, and the potential for conflict or further security challenges resulting from them, a coherent framework of engagement across different levels of governments and stakeholders is necessary.
- » The inclusion of civil society in the training of recruits and members of all participating CBAGs and CBAs is the first step in building social accountability mechanisms in the implementation of Amotekun.
- » Including CDAs and Joint CDAs in the monitoring and engagement framework for the Amotekun corps will support trust-building with local communities.

CONTEXT

Nigeria faces immense internal security challenges, including the Boko-Haram crisis in the northeast and violent farmer-herder conflicts in the southwest and north-central states. Across the Nigerian federation, pockets of violent clashes have sprung and escalated in new locales in the last decade. Community responses to these violent crises have been diverse and included the establishment of armed groups to supplement or act in parallel to the security efforts of the Nigerian state—in some cases with backing from federal or local governments.

In the Northeast, for example, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) was launched by Maiduguri’s youth in 2013 as a community-led response to counter violent attacks by Boko-Haram insurgents in Borno state, the main theatre of the Boko Haram insurgency. The CJTF

has since grown into a community-based armed group (CBAG) backed by the federal government to complement the Joint Military Taskforce (JTF) of the Nigerian Army, to some degree of success.¹ The group continues to exist as a Counter Insurgency (COIN) mechanism by the Nigerian government, with the opportunity for its members to become regularized as members of the Nigerian armed forces.²

Nigerian CBAGs recognized by the state, including the CJTF, vary in their composition, mandate, and relative success. This Policy Note focuses on the characteristics, challenges, and opportunities of Amotekun, a recently formed CBAG in Southwest Nigeria. Drawing from the experiences of similar groups, the Note details recommendations that may facilitate greater success and lessen potential risk associated with Amotekun's formation.

Amotekun: Origins, composition, and controversy

In 2019, with increasing incidents of violence and attacks on farmers and travelers, the governors of Southwestern Nigerian states initiated a campaign to establish Amotekun ("Leopard" in the Yoruba language), or the Western Nigeria Security Network (WSN). Citing concerns about the capacity of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) to provide security to rural and urban residents in the region,³ Amotekun was to complement the operations of national security forces, such as the NPF.⁴ In March 2020, Amotekun was established by an act of law, making state governments responsible for its funding and administration. Certain characteristics of Amotekun, however, distinguish it from other similar security providers, such as the CJTF.

First, unlike the CJTF, which functions as a singular body, in its design Amotekun is intended to function as a paramilitary force comprised of an aggregation of existing CBAGs, such as:

- » the "hunters association"
- » "Agbekoya farmers association,"
- » "Oodua People's Congress" (OPC) in Southwest Nigeria,
- » socio-political groups such as the Pan-Yoruba socio-political group "Afenifere," as well as units of newly recruited corps members.⁵

1 Daniel Agbibo, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Armed Community Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington D.C.: Resolve Network, 2019). <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.2>.

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3 Henry Ojelu, "Constitutional implication of Operation Amotekun," *Vanguard*, January 10, 2020, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/01/constitutional-implication-of-operation-amotekun/>.

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Given this distinction, for the purposes of this policy note, Amotekun will be referred to as a **state-backed supra-CBAG (SBSC)**. Defining Amotekun as an SBSC underlines its unique character as part of an aggregation of cross-regional CBAGs and community-based associations (CBAs) responsible for the security of rural and urban communities in Southwest Nigeria.

The groups party to Amotekun have a long history of security mobilization in the Nigerian Southwest. These groups, initially formed as a response to political contestation, eventually expanded their mandate into security operations. The Agbekoya Farmers Group launched a successful violent revolt in response to a new tax regime on peasant farmers between 1968 to 1969 against the military administration in Western Nigeria.⁶ Similarly, the Yoruba Council of Leaders formed Afenifere, a powerful socio-cultural and political group in advance of the Fourth Republic in 1999.⁷ Leaders of Afenifere are considered custodians of the socio-cultural and political agenda of the Yoruba ethnic group, one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria.⁸

The Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC) is also a socio-cultural group with a militia corps committed to the protection and furtherance of the Yoruba ethnic group's political interest.⁹ Although OPC had similar ideals to Afenifere, the leadership or membership does not necessarily overlap. Given their history, the groups' involvement in Amotekun raises questions as to what its political aspirations or objectives may be or evolve into, if not limited by federal, state, or community mechanisms for security provision objectives.

Second, although with a similar mandate, Amotekun has no focal adversary, in contrast to the CJTF's central mission against Boko Haram insurgents. A critical factor in the community acceptance and success of the CJTF is the clarity of its mission and target opposition. The mandate of Amotekun, however, is vaguely described as supporting internal security forces. This vagueness in mandate lends to fears of the potential for operational overreach and resultant abuses, especially targeting particular ethnic groups such as the Fulani.¹⁰

Third, unlike other state-backed CBAGs and paramilitary corps that predate it across Nigeria, Amotekun is the first regional SBSC in the country. Additionally, unlike the CJTF, Amotekun is backed by the governors of Nigerian states, not the federal government of Nigeria or the NPF. There is, as of yet, no framework that delineates operational and administrative jurisdictions related to Amotekun between the NPF and state governments.

6 Tunde Adeniran, "The Dynamics of Peasant Revolt: A Conceptual Analysis of the Agbekoya Parapo Uprising in the Western State of Nigeria," *Journal of Black Studies* 4, no. 4. (1974): 363-375.

7 Mahmud Jega, "A Reflection on 20 Years of Democracy in Nigeria," *Africa Portal*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/reflection-20-years-democracy-nigeria/>

8 Charles Kumolu, "Amotekun is tokenism, struggle for real solution continues," *Vanguard*, January 13, 2020, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/01/amotekun-is-tokenism-struggle-for-real-solution-continues-odumakin-afenifere-spokesman/>.

9 "The O'odua People's Congress (OPC): Fighting Violence with Violence," *Human Rights Watch*, January 2003, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2003/02/28/oodua-peoples-congress-opc/fighting-violence-violence>.

10 The Fulani are a pastoralist ethnic group present across West African countries.

RELEVANCE TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

Concerns about the institutional character of Amotekun provoked reactions from the Inspector General of the NPF. The federal Attorney General issued a letter citing the illegality of Amotekun a few days after its launch.¹¹ On August 25, 2020, the Nigerian Office of the President issued a statement asserting that the NPF will determine the operational structure of Amotekun.¹² In a television interview on August 27, 2020, the governor of Ondo state (one of several supporting Amotekun operatives) denied claims that Amotekun would be institutionalized as part of the Ondo state police infrastructure.¹³ In reality, the Amotekun Law situates administrative jurisdiction for its operation with state governments and not the Inspector General of Police.

Pro-Amotekun legal practitioners justified the constitutionality of Amotekun by comparing it to the establishment of the Kano State Hisbah Corps (*hisbah*) through legal statute in Kano (Northwestern Nigeria), citing the operationalization of the *hisbah* as setting precedent for Amotekun.¹⁴ Although nominally established as a religious organization in 2003, *hisbah* evolved to include policing activities and direct reporting to the state police in Kano. Supporters of Amotekun also reference the existence of state-backed CBAGs such as the “Kaduna State Neighborhood service” and the Ebonyi State “Neighborhood Watch Group” in Northwestern and Southeastern Nigeria, respectively. The ongoing debates over the jurisdiction and governance of Amotekun highlights the oft-contested boundaries of administrative powers between the national and sub-national governments. The controversy and disparate rulings from the federal judiciary lend to additional concern that intergroup competition will increase over access to security resources and further accentuate pre-existing ethnic and religious tensions.

The creation of Amotekun has also accelerated calls by other ethnic socio-political groups for the formation of their own security forces. Ethnic socio-political groups, such as the Myetti-Allah (based in the north) and the Pan Niger Delta Forum, have agitated for the right to have their own security forces.¹⁵ Myetti-Allah have raised concurrent concerns that Amotekun could become a paramilitary force deployed for private purposes by state governments and politicians in the Southwest.¹⁶

Concerns about Amotekun’s negative potentials are not far-fetched. Amotekun appears more as an armed social movement backed by sub-national governments than a hyper-locally generated and supported

11 Remi Feyisopo and Iwok Iniobong, “Controversy trails attorney-general’s pronouncement of ‘Amotekun’ as illegal,” *Business Day*, January 16, 2020, <https://businessday.ng/politics/article/controversy-trails-attorney-generals-pronouncement-of-amotekun-as-illegal/>.

12 Eniola Akinkuotu, “IG will determine Amotekun’s structure, says Presidency,” *Punch Newspapers Nigeria*, August 25, 2020, https://punchng.com/ig-will-determine-amotekuns-structure-says-presidency/?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1598364364.

13 Dawn Commission, “Interview with Rotimi Akeredolu (SAN),” Channels Television video on Facebook, August 27, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/dawncommission/videos/758006591714802/?extid=ridqXo5mEeonyYl>.

14 Femi Falana, “On Volte Face of Attorney-General on Amotekun by Femi Falana,” *Sahara Reporters*, January 23, 2020. <http://sahara-reporters.com/2020/01/23/volte-face-attorney-general-amotekun-femi-falana>.

15 “23 States Run Local Security Outfits as Groups Demand Decentralised Policing,” *This Day*, January 13, 2020, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2020/01/13/23-states-run-local-security-outfits-as-groups-demand-decentralised-policing/>.

16 Channels Television, “‘We are Afraid of Amotekun’, Miyetti Allah’s Alhassan Disagrees with Olasupo Ojo over Initiative,” *Youtube video*, January 21, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekWAQR9gjc>.

CBAG. Opponents to the establishment of Amotekun consider it a social movement due to aggregation of recruits from preexisting CBAGs and CBAs. Furthermore, the strength of Amotekun is perhaps its main weakness. Amotekun’s power derives from the strong collective cultural identity between states in the Southwest and the shared grievance over the alleged attacks and killings committed by the nomadic herdsman from Northern Nigeria.¹⁷ The strength of the collective identity underpinning Amotekun could be a force for good or destruction.

To address these issues, it is important to implement appropriate organizing and administrative frameworks and to draw on lessons learned from the operations and transformations of other state-backed CBAGs, including the CJTF and OPC (the latter of which is Included within Amotekun) in the ongoing implementation of Amotekun.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Accountability mechanisms and the design of a transition program are required to support the success of Amotekun in responding to security threats in the Nigerian Southwest. The launch of Amotekun has created concern about the possibility of ethnic-based attacks by non-indigenous residents—ostensibly in reaction to the asymmetry in representative security actors—and proposals of similar groups by other ethnic groups. Given the relative absence of successfully implemented accountability and transition programs in the CBAGs context, the success of the Amotekun as a positive contributor in community security rests on the delicate balance of protecting rural and urban communities in the Nigerian Southwest without simultaneously escalating already heightened ethnic tensions in Nigeria, and managing the competition between federal and state administrative bodies.

The recommendations below detail strategies to ensure Amotekun’s effectiveness, legitimacy, and accountability to citizens, state governments, and the Inspector General of Police. Ensuring Amotekun remains a positive actor in local security provision will require a comprehensive engagement process by the Nigerian federal government, state governments, and civil society actors such as the media and advocacy groups.

Codify a coherent, operational, and administrative framework for Amotekun

As noted earlier, unlike the CJTF, Amotekun is administered by the governments of Southwestern Nigerian states, not the federal government of Nigeria or the NPF. Operation by state governments has already led to tensions on the convergence of the operational and administrative jurisdictions between the NPF and state governments. To address these tensions, and the potential for conflict or further security chal-

17 Dayo Johnson and Dapo Akinrefon, “HERDSMEN: Tension, anger in South West,” *Vanguard*, May 31, 2019, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/05/herdsmen-tension-anger-in-south-west/>.

enges resulting from them, a coherent framework of engagement across different levels of governments and stakeholders is necessary.

The transformation of the Oodua People' Congress (OPC) provides a cautionary tale on the importance of designing a coherent operational and administrative framework for Amotekun. The OPC was a socio-political group formed in 1993, towards the end of Nigeria's military dictatorship. However, with the re-emergence of democracy in 1999 and a change in the political environment, the OPC's youth arm launched a vigilante corps to provide security for rural and urban communities in response to rising crime rates in the Southwest.

With minimal operational and administrative oversight, some OPC members undertook arrests, prosecution, and extra-judicial killings of suspected criminals.¹⁸ OPC members would arrest suspected criminals, take them to their homes, and burn them in the presence of their families.¹⁹ While residents and the Lagos state government in Southwest Nigeria first hailed their efforts at controlling crime, their activities soon escalated to indiscriminate acts of violence targeting locals, especially traders from other ethnic groups in major markets.²⁰ Increases in violent attacks on citizens culminated in the announcement of a ban of the OPC by President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2002. However, the OPC led by Ganiyu Adams still exists in some form today.

Devise a merit-based recruitment process for Amotekun corps members

The recruitment calls by state governments for Amotekun corps members are already available online.²¹ Required qualifications include a minimum of primary school education and documentation submission to prove the applicant's indigeneity.²² By its indigeneity requirement, applicants for the Amotekun corps must show documentation proving their ethnicity to the Yoruba tribe or other ethnic groups in the Southwest. Therefore, non-ethnic residents or migrants will not qualify as a recruit, creating a polarization potential between the Amotekun corps and non-ethnic residents in the Nigerian Southwest. The indigeneity requirement will likely escalate preexisting ethnic tensions in southwestern states.

The question of indigeneity vis-a-vis citizenship is a challenging discussion in the Nigerian context, as it focuses on the ethnic group of the applicant rather than Nigerian citizenship. Therefore, a focus on merit-based rather than an ethnic-based recruitment process will likely alleviate concerns of Amotekun

18 Insa Nolte, "Ethnic Vigilantes and the State: The Oodua People's Congress in South-Western Nigeria," *International Relations* 21, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 217-235, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0047117807077005>

19 "The O'odua People's Congress (OPC): Fighting Violence with Violence," *Human Rights Watch*, January 2003, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2003/02/28/oodua-peoples-congress-opc/fighting-violence-violence>.

20 Ibid.

21 "Amotekun Recruitment 2020/2021—Application Form & Portal," Hotjobsng, September 8, 2020, <https://hotjobsng.com/amotekun-corps-recruitment/>

22 Tosan Olajide, "Amotekun Ekiti recruitment form portal," *Financial Watch Nigeria*, July 11, 2020, <https://www.financialwatchngr.com/2020/07/11/amotekun-ekiti-recruitment-form-portal-www-amotekun-ekitistate-gov-ng/>.

becoming a tribe-based armed group. Furthermore, selected applicants should show strong ties to the local communities they are assigned to. Examples of strong community ties may include applicants' birth in the neighborhood and/or a minimum of 10 years of residence in the community, rather than their membership of an ethnic group in the Nigerian Southwest.

The Nigerian senate is already proposing a law that confers indigeneity on Nigerian citizens who have resided in a locality for at least ten years.²³ By reframing what it means to be “indigenous” to a local community, the law will support a decrease in restrictions on non-indigenes to purchase lands, qualification for local government and state government elections, bursaries, and scholarships for students among other benefits. The new law may also incite fresh inter-ethnic clashes due to fears of economic or demographic domination. Therefore, within the design and implementation of Amotekun are possible instigators of internal security challenges, as well as potential solutions to sources of localized contestation.

Build social accountability mechanisms

State governments serving as civilian principals of Amotekun must monitor its recruits' actions and activities and participating CBAGs and CBAs. Monitoring activities and operations of the Amotekun corps will require mechanisms that allow state governments and civil society groups to observe the group directly. The inclusion of civil society in the training of recruits and members of all participating CBAGs and CBAs is the first step in building social accountability mechanisms in the implementation of Amotekun. Effective monitoring mechanisms for Amotekun should include early warning signals that indicate when Amotekun operatives are neglecting their duties or undertaking activities beyond their institutional mandates. To counteract opportunities of elected officials for using Amotekun to villainize political opponents or victimize an ethnic group, civil society groups should establish monitoring programs for Amotekun.

Civil society groups should partner with landlord associations and community development associations (CDAs) in local areas to monitor and report incidences of victimization by Amotekun recruits. An example of such monitoring programs by civil society organizations is the “Follow the Money” champions campaign by Connected Development (CODE), a civil society group empowering residents of local communities to track the implementation of public projects in their neighborhoods.²⁴ Furthermore, public engagement in the fiscal administration of Amotekun will foster trust between the Amotekun operation and the public. An example of such participation in budget administration is Budg.IT, a tech-based civil society group that monitors and tracks national and sub-national public spending in Nigeria.²⁵ Moreover, civic engagement in the budgetary process will clarify funding sources for Amotekun, which might prevent its capture by political entrepreneurs for private gains.

23 Sunday Aborishade, “Resident of a state for 10 years should become indigene –Senate,” *Punch*, March 8, 2020, <https://punchng.com/resident-of-a-state-for-10-years-should-become-indigene-senate/>.

24 Connected Development (CODE), accessed August 27, 2020, <https://www.connecteddevelopment.org/>.

25 Budg.IT Nigeria, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://yourbudgit.com/>.

Amotekun should use social media platforms for engagement and public accountability, similar to the Nigerian Police Force. Similarly, advocacy coalitions and groups can also leverage social network platforms' extensive usage for non-violent accountability campaigns. One such movement is the #EndSars campaign on Twitter, through which citizens report human rights abuses of citizens by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police Force.²⁶ The active role of Twitter in mobilizing citizens and groups to protest against police brutality, social media platforms can also serve as a feedback mechanism for Amotekun as a means of gauging public perceptions of the efficacy and legitimacy of its operations. However, to avoid competition with the NPF, federal and sub-national coordination frameworks for the implementation of Amotekun should include modalities on public engagements for all collaborating security agencies. Media reportage on the activities of Amotekun could also serve as another form of checks and balances on Amotekun.

Include Community Development Associations (CDAs) in the monitoring and engagement framework for Amotekun

Another strategy for checks and balances is the inclusion of Community Development Associations (CDAs) and Joint Community Development Associations in the monitoring framework for Amotekun. The membership of CDAs consists of all adult residents of a given community, who meet regularly to discuss and collaborate to address challenges and development projects. Likewise, the Joint CDA membership includes the leadership of all CDAs in a Local Government Area (LGA) within a state. Often, CDAs and Joint CDAs represent the voice of the communities they serve.

Already, CDAs monitor activities of local vigilantes and also support LGA administrators in enforcing movement restrictions during the monthly sanitation exercises in many states. Therefore, including CDAs and Joint CDAs in the monitoring and engagement framework for the Amotekun corps will support trust-building with local communities, which could also serve as sources of security information.

Strengthen responsiveness to changing threat environments

The institutionalization of Amotekun would support the legitimacy of its mandate. However, changes in the threat environment may necessitate the demobilization of Amotekun or transition to an informal group supporting the maintenance of law and order in communities. Moreover, the availability of transition plans will reduce the likelihood of the emergence of Amotekun corps members' grievances who will face job loss if the threat environment changes. This recommendation is similar to the proposed integration of the CJTF into the Nigerian armed forces and police force at the end of the Boko-Haram COIN operations.

²⁶ At the time of writing this policy note, the nationwide #EndSARs protests had not kicked off.

Any framework accounting for the possibility that Amotekun will at some point need to be adapted or dismantled should take into consideration similar challenges facing the CJTF. The CJTF, in this regard, should also serve as a caution to state governments on the implementation of Amotekun. Even with its success, policy analysts are concerned about the demobilization, disarmament, settlement, and reintegration of CJTF post the Boko-Haram crisis.²⁷ With their military training and access to weaponry, the CJTF may become a new security threat to the local populace after their primary adversary is defeated.

Concerns about the possibility of future predation on local communities by the CJTF resonate with current worries of the NPF and other ethnic socio-political groups about the proposed access of Amotekun recruits to weaponry. As Amotekun begins its operations, it is important that governors in the Nigerian Southwest work with the Nigerian Police Force to design an exit strategy for Amotekun. Such exit strategy may include their absorption into the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), a gradual phaseout of Amotekun corps within a stipulated number of years supported by a re-orientation of its recruits into civilian life.

CONCLUSION

The rapid proliferation of community-based, state supported hybrid security forces shows no sign of slowing as conflict and insecurity continue to wreak havoc across West Africa. It is imperative that state security and governance strategies around these groups take into account the local politics that shape these groups, include transparent social accountability mechanisms, and acknowledge that efforts to increase capacity in the short term must be married with plans for eventual off-ramps in the long term. Operation Amotekun presents the Nigerian state an opportunity to lay the foundation to transform community security provision and the relationships between civilians and security actors, for better or for worse.

²⁷ Chitra Nagarajan, *Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria* (Center for Civilians in Conflict, June 22, 2018) <https://civiliansinconflict.org/publications/research/cjtf-yan-gora/>.

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PHASE 3: Mapping the Literature on Women in Community-Based Armed Groups in East and West Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) would be incomplete without an examination of the complex and diverse roles of women. Not only do the mobilization, networks, and operations of CBAGs affect women, often most harshly, but women also assume active roles in community-driven security and armed groups. Yet, despite decades of feminist research documenting the gendered aspects of violence, significant gaps remain in our understanding of how women navigate conflict. While the negative effects of communal violence on women have been well-studied, less attention has been paid to the ways in which women contribute to and even benefit from this type of violence. Similarly, though there is a robust literature on the role that women can play as peacebuilders following civil war, there is less attention paid to women’s ability to promote non-violence in contexts of low-grade violence. These gaps in understanding have significant implications for policymakers and practitioners seeking to address conflicts where women play critical—though often obscured—roles.

This phase of the RESOLVE CBAGs research initiative begins with two research reports that map the available literature on women’s participation in CBAGs in East and West Africa. In the East Africa mapping paper, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups*, author Hilary Matfess examines the myriad roles of women in CBAGs, how different women relate to these groups, and how women can contribute to peacebuilding initiatives in communities affected by violence. The report underlines that women, as a group, are heterogenous and have different abilities and willingness to participate in CBAGs, violence, or peacebuilding. In *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa*, author Jakana Thomas reviews the current literature on women’s participation in community security and proposes research questions for further study, and examines accounts of recruitment into CBAGs in four West African countries. The report offers recommendations, informed by the reviewed cases, for policymakers and practitioners to integrate an understanding of gender dynamics affecting the behavior of West African CBAGs into their work.

Findings

While the reports analyzed the available literature on micro-level perspectives and local dynamics specific to their regional focus, they did not find a stark deviation between East and West Africa. The research found that women’s motivations for joining CBAGs are often similar to those of men. “Few uniquely female reasons for seeking membership in CBAGs are apparent, with the pursuit of gender equity as one

notable exception,” according to Thomas.¹ The research also found that affiliation with or participation in CBAGs can be an avenue to gain social status, transcend traditional gender roles, or pursue gender equality. Generally, security-related drivers are prominent, as women feel a sense of duty to defend their homeland or the need to seek protection for themselves. Participation in CBAGs can also serve to avenge loss and grievances, and groups that enjoy high levels of community support and legitimacy can rely on voluntary or grievance-driven recruitment. Women in economically precarious situations may also be incentivized to join a CBAG for material benefits, career opportunities, or political opportunism.

Outside of women’s desire to participate in CBAGs, the norms of these groups determine whether women are able to do so. As these norms are often informed by local norms, community gender relations and traditions determine the scope and way of women’s engagement. Their participation is also affected by additional identity characteristics, such as marriage status and partner, age, ethnicity, clan, religious identity, and socioeconomic factors. This finding highlights the need to see women not as a monolithic group but as diverse as men in populations where CBAGs operate. Frequently, “women’s contributions to CBAGs mirror their contributions to their families and communities more generally,” writes Matfess. In some cases, women engage in violence directly, while some CBAGs proscribe women’s direct participation in violence. In turn, indirect contributions include non-combat tasks such as logistics management, clandestine operations, intelligence gathering, searching other women, and transporting and smuggling in support of group operations. When women’s involvement is limited, this seems to be a sign of suppression rather than of disinterest. Nevertheless, the research proves that while norms affect women’s opportunities, women can also bend and transform norms.

Even without formal affiliations, women exert substantial influence over CBAGs as arbiters of morality and legitimacy. Women have used traditional sources of influence or symbolism, songs, poetry, rituals, blessings, and public proclamations to express their support of or opposition to conflict and compel fighters into action or constrain violence. Across West Africa, by leveraging matrifocal morality or gerontocracy, women have summoned female sources of power to express anger or desperation such as female genital power: defiant disrobing weaponizing nakedness as a curse and protective amulet. Such rituals can avert violence, legitimize group activity to the community, or encourage violence and inspire bravery, boosting members’ morale or recruiting more men into fighting.

Precisely because of the informal and customary nature of their influence, women’s contributions are often downplayed and underestimated. Even when women are involved in CBAGs in a way that subverts gender norms, their participation does not transform gender dynamics in their societies. Thomas argues that “women’s participation in CBAGs appears to have failed in producing large-scale, sweeping changes for women, writ large.”² The East Africa study found that CBAGs, often by nature, incorporate women in accordance with existing communal, customary gender norms and roles. Since CBAGs tend to be armed groups that are not revisionist but rather aim to uphold the status quo, their operations cannot

1 Jakana Thomas. *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>, 12.

2 Ibid, 23.

be assumed to facilitate changes to political and social orders, and, likewise, female participation to reap straightforward benefits for women.

The findings on women’s agency in security governance carry implications for policy and practice. This research strives to promote policy options for inclusive and gender-sensitive conflict prevention, peacebuilding, post-conflict reconciliation and stabilization, demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR), and security sector reform (SSR).³ Women can contribute to all phases of the engagement, management, transformation (EMT) framework⁴ with the potential of reducing the destructive edge of CBAGs. In short- and medium-term engagement, women can build trust and legitimacy between a CBAG and the wider community, influence group-community relationships, prevent atrocities against women, and mitigate CBAG violence.

Conclusion

At its core, the project seeks to understand the reality of women’s political agency and capacity for violence and security beyond the mainstream conceptualization framed by their relationship with men. As such, a key takeaway from the mapping effort is the heterogeneity of women and the fluidity of their engagement with CBAGs. “Not all women will be equally well-positioned to exercise influence over CBAG activity. Not all women will be equally likely to experience predatory behavior at the hands of coercive CBAGs, and not all women will be equally able to contribute to peacebuilding.”⁵ Instead of reinforcing stereotypes, the focus must remain on understanding the specificities of women’s grievances, motivations, roles in conflict, and contributions to peace.

Not all women can or will be peacemakers. Just like men, women can curb violence, promote peace, or add further instability; they can be potential veto-players, arbiters of violence, or sources of legitimacy. When and why do women make the choice to advocate for peace over violence? “In this vein, peace and conflict can be viewed as instruments; when it is considered necessary to achieve a desired outcome, women are likely to promote violence. When conflict has reached its productive limits, women may pursue peace with equal fervor.”⁶ Rather, since women shape community norms, acquiring their buy-in can increase the legitimacy of externally designed, funded, or implemented programs.

Assessing the formal and informal contributions women make to armed community mobilization and hybrid security reveals opportunities for gender-specific engagement. However, the research findings suggest that unidimensional considerations of women’s relationship to conflict and security may under-

3 See: Jakana Thomas, *Gendered Security Sector Reform: What Can We Learn from Women’s Participation in Community-Based Armed Groups?* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.37805/pn2022.1.cbags>.

4 Moritz Schuberth, *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>.

5 Hilary Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>, 30.

6 Thomas, *Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa*, 31.

mine violence reduction and peacebuilding efforts. Further research is suggested to help explain how these dynamics work in practice. Comparative case study research can help to illuminate key variations in women's involvement across groups and geographic regions.

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POLICY NOTES

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BROKERS OF LEGITIMACY

Women in Community-
based Armed Groups

Hilary Matfess

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Hilary Matfess is a PhD Candidate in Yale University's Political Science department, where her research examines gender and conflict, with a regional focus on sub-Saharan Africa. *Women and the War on Boko Haram*, Hilary's first book, was published in 2017. Her academic research has been published in *International Security*, *Security Studies*, and *African Studies Review*. She has also written for the Washington Post's 'Monkey Cage Blog,' Lawfare, *Quartz Africa*, and *World Politics Review*, among others.

For more information about RESOLVE, its network of experts, and its research across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, please visit our website at www.resolvenet.org and follow the discussion on Twitter via [@resolvenet](https://twitter.com/resolvenet).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Community-based armed groups (CBAGs) represent a persistent, but understudied threat to stability throughout sub-Saharan Africa. These organizations, in contrast to other types of non-state armed groups (NSAGs), are distinguished by their relationships with the communities and identity groups from which they emerged and their circumscribed political objectives, which exclude competing against the state for national authority. The risks that CBAGs pose demands that we pay closer attention to these groups' membership bases, the ways in which they legitimize themselves to the communities they operate within, how they conduct their operations, and the community interventions that can promote peace in areas marked by CBAG violence. Doing so requires examining the myriad roles of women in these organizations, examining how different types of women relate to CBAGs, and documenting how women can contribute to peacebuilding initiatives in communities affected by this violence.

Need for further research

Despite decades of feminist research documenting the gendered aspects and implications of violence, significant gaps remain in our understanding of how women navigate and contribute to conflict. Though both the deleterious effects of communal violence on women and the characteristics of CBAGs have been documented, less attention has been paid to the ways in which women contribute to these armed groups and benefit from their operations. Women play critical—though often obscured—roles in CBAG activities. Similarly, though there is a robust literature on the role that women can play as peacebuilders following civil war, there is less attention paid to women's ability to promote non-violence in contexts of low-grade violence.

This report seeks to remedy this oversight by documenting women's forms of participation in both CBAGs and peacebuilding in areas affected by CBAG violence in sub-Saharan Africa, with a focus on East Africa.

Contributions

In examining women's relationship with these armed groups, this report finds that women participate in violence and clandestine operations, provide logistical support to CBAGs, and legitimize the groups' activities to the civilian population. Though many narratives of women and conflict emphasize conscription and coercion as pathways for women's entry into armed groups, women also lend support to CBAGs to advance their economic, social, or personal interests.¹

1 Though this report recognizes that coercion and sexual violence are common features of women's experiences in armed groups and important phenomena for policymakers and academics to understand, such experiences have been well-detailed elsewhere and are not the focus of this project.

Veiled engagements

Women's contributions to CBAGs are often underestimated in part due to their influence in informal or customary venues or through personal relationships; in many contexts, women express opinions through songs or customary rituals. Such fora may not be accessible or legible to the international community or even domestic governments. As a part of gender mainstreaming efforts, policymakers should seek to identify these fora, their participants, and the degree to which women can access such fora to express their influence.

The implications of heterogeneity

This report also underlines that women are not a homogenous group and not all women are equally placed to participate in CBAG activities. Age, ethnic identity, socioeconomic status, religion, reputation, and other characteristics shape ability and extent of contributions to armed groups. Recognizing this, policymakers and analysts must take a more nuanced approach to identifying women's contributions to and participation in armed groups, as well as to understanding their post-conflict. Failing to do so risks privileging a certain subset of women over others, contributing to discriminatory dynamics that may facilitate further conflict. This finding underlines the need to ask not only "where are the women?"² but also "which women are where?"³ and "how are these distinctions made and enforced?" when discussing gender and conflict to understand how different types of women contribute differently to community-based armed groups.

Contributions to peace

Just as women contribute to the conduct of violence, women can contribute to peacebuilding efforts. This report identifies a number of instances when women have worked to mitigate conflict in their communities. Women are often well-placed to diffuse non-violent norms and help legitimize peacebuilding efforts. Though women can be powerful advocates for peace, adopting a gender-essentialist assumption that women's interests are automatically aligned with policymakers' and peacebuilders' objectives undermines the effectiveness of peacebuilding and stabilization efforts. Furthermore, policymakers must also acknowledge that increasing women's participation in formal peacebuilding activities will only be transformational under two conditions: (1) if these fora consider conflict dynamics, and (2) if they critically engage a plurality of women's interests. If policymakers want women to constructively engage with peacebuilding initiatives, the grievances or conditions that drive women to support or participate in CBAG activity must be identified and addressed in peacebuilding programs engaging influential power-brokers. Ultimately, addressing women's issues and engaging them in peacebuilding activities should be considered complementary, but not synonymous objectives.

2 Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

3 Helen Kinsella, "Feminism," in John Baylis, ed., *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 148.

Recommendations

Recognizing women’s contributions to CBAGs is critical to understanding how these groups operate and to designing effective peacebuilding programs for communities impacted by CBAG violence. Recommendations for policymakers and academics engaging with these conflict dynamics include the following:

- » **Incorporate informal structures and fora into peacebuilding programming where women may have a comparative advantage in peacebuilding.** Policymakers should acknowledge the influence women exercise in the home, within social networks, or through customary practices and incorporate women’s abilities to shift community norms to facilitate peacebuilding. Policy and programming should produce gendered analysis of formal peacebuilding programs on women’s well-being, particularly of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs. These formal, technical programs may increase women’s economic or social vulnerability, further raising the risk of gendered violence.
- » **Ensure that peacebuilding and redevelopment programs engage meaningfully with a wide range of women’s interests.** Policymakers should fund participatory research to engage a broad cross-section of women and other relevant demographics. Engaging women along the socioeconomic spectrum, of different ages, religions, and ethnicities, is critical to understanding the landscape of women’s interests and capabilities in CBAG-affected contexts.

INTRODUCTION AND STUDY SCOPE

This mapping paper contributes to the effort to take a more nuanced and holistic approach to understanding women and conflict by detailing women’s participation in community-based armed groups (CBAGs) in sub-Saharan Africa (with a focus on East Africa) and the implications of their participation for post-conflict stability and reconciliation. The category ‘CBAGs’ encompasses a variety of armed groups; this report will focus on a subset of those groups, predominantly in East Africa.⁴ It will also provide snapshots of case studies that detail examples of women’s experiences with demobilization of CBAGs in the Karamoja region in Uganda, the Mungiki in Kenya and their influence in the *Gadaa/Siqqee* system in Ethiopia, and the Al-Hakkamat Baggara women of Darfur. Though this report primarily focuses on women in East African CBAGs, it draws on the literature on women in non-state armed groups (NSAGs), a broader category of armed groups, to provide theoretical grounding or comparison between different types of armed groups and discuss examples of women’s contributions to CBAGs throughout the continent.

4 In this research report, I will primarily discuss women’s contributions to vigilante and identity-oriented CBAGs. Such case selection means focusing mostly on security-focused community based armed groups, as laid out in Van Metre’s typology. Lauren Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), 24, summarizing table 3. Worth noting, however, is that perceptions of CBAGs and their functions can shift overtime; what is one man’s community defense militias can be another man’s cattle rustlers and seen by another man as a gang or criminals.

The report begins by describing the core characteristics of CBAGs and delineating the geographic and substantive scope of the research. Following sections interrogate the process of women’s incorporation into CBAGs and unpack the caveats and nuances surrounding the nature of women’s contributions to these organizations. This endeavor builds on a long history of feminist security studies, which has sought for decades to identify what women do during wartime, how they shape conflict dynamics, and the impacts of violence on women’s lives. The relative lack of information about women’s roles in CBAG activities arises from both the nature of their contributions—which are often clandestine, channeled through personal relationships, or are channeled through fora that pose difficulties for policymaker engagement—and a persistent gender bias that discredits women’s capacity to engage in violence. Women, however, often lend their support to armed groups voluntarily, with full knowledge of the groups’ objectives. These groups, on the other side, often actively seek women’s support and encourage their participation because of the tangible benefits brought by their membership. It is critical to dispel myths about women’s (non)participation in conflict—a better understanding of what women contribute to armed groups will result in more impactful peacebuilding programs in the aftermath of conflict and can inform efforts to prevent recruitment into armed groups.

The report also discusses potential post-conflict challenges for women. This section focuses on the economic and social marginalization that women associated with CBAGs may face after conflict, suggesting that the characteristics of conflict shape the nature of women’s post-conflict issues, thus, programming cannot be directly repurposed from other post-conflict contexts and applied to CBAGs. Emphasizing separate discussions of women-specific issues and women’s participation is intended to underline that gender-sensitive programming must do more than ensure women’s participation in programs—it must engage with context-specific gender dynamics and the diversity of women’s interests that influence conflict dynamics. The report concludes with a summary of the findings; an outline of avenues for future research on women’s contributions to CBAGs; a set of policy recommendations for gender-sensitive peacebuilding programs; and a discussion of how women can contribute to the engagement, management, and transformation (EMT) of community-based armed groups.⁵

What are CBAGs? And What Will Identifying Women’s Contributions Yield?

DEFINING CBAGS

‘Community-based armed groups (CBAGs)’ is a broad category that encompasses a number of armed group types: warlords, vigilantes, cartels, gangs, self-defense militias, and traffickers, among a number of other kinds of armed groups.⁶

5 Moritz Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), 16. https://www.resolve.net.org/system/files/2019-10/RSVE_CBAGs_Approaches_Schuberth_Oct2019_0.pdf.

6 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 24, summarizing table 3.

Agbiboa notes that “a definition of CBAGs has proven difficult due to their many types and characteristics, and the fact that they are often located in zones of ambiguity between the presence and absence of law and order.”⁷

Though a definition of CBAGs is elusive, one of the most important distinguishing features of CBAGs is their proximity to the community. Agbiboa notes that “CBAGs draw their legitimacy from various and, at times, competing sources, including traditional and communal, religious, and political establishments,” rather than transnational ideologies or external sources.⁸ The repertoire of violence that CBAGs can employ is similarly varied—these groups may engage in political, economic, and security provision activities, and deploy a wide variety of tactics to those ends.⁹

Previous RESOLVE reports define CBAGs as a form of non-state armed group, distinguished from other NSAGs by “their relationship to the state and local communities and the ways they exercise power. While NSAGs, such as insurgent or terrorist groups, seek to disrupt or undermine the state to seize power or establish an alternative political system, CBAGs can be aligned with, or complementary to, the state, or they can operate in gray areas with minimal state presence. They do not typically aspire to extensive political ambitions and strategies; rather, they advance the local ambitions of their stakeholders.”¹⁰

Van Metre identifies two core features of CBAGs: “(1) the external factor of the group’s relationships with the state and communities,” which includes the resources accessible by the group, the threat environment in which the group is operating, and the norms of community-CBAG relations, and “(2) the internal

7 Daniel Agiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019).

8 Agiboa, “Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa.”

9 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 24.

10 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*.

function of the group’s exercise of violence,” which includes the leadership structure, recruitment tactics, intra-group discipline, and the degree to which its exercise of violence is coerced or negotiated.¹¹

Though CBAGs are distinguished from NSAGs more generally by their relationship to the community they are defending, not all CBAGs enjoy cooperative relationships with civilians. Van Metre notes that CBAGs can operate in negotiated relationships or coercive relationships with civilians and that the relationship can change over time.¹² However, CBAGs can become NSAGs if the nature of their objectives or relationship to the community changes. This research report focuses on a subset of CBAGs and their activities, primarily on the political and security-related activities of vigilante and identity-oriented armed groups.

REVELATIONS OF A GENDERED CBAG ANALYSIS

This report builds on previous RESOLVE work mapping CBAGs by detailing the ways in which women shape the core characteristics of CBAGs. Both as individuals and as symbols of the community, women play important roles in shaping CBAG activity. The ways in which CBAGs treat women or the roles that women play within CBAGs often reflect the broader social context from which CBAGs emerged. Women, as individuals, are often tasked with logistical work such as cooking, cleaning, and serving as porters for fighters; thus, the internal organization and day-to-day functioning of CBAGs often rely on women’s contributions, though this assistance may be difficult to observe. The position of women within the organization serves as an important organizational principle for CBAGs and may reflect the gender ideology of the armed group. For example, when women are excluded from certain tasks within a CBAG, it may be a means by which men demonstrate their masculinity; if men fail to do so, they can be held responsible by women for this shortcoming. The delineation of tasks gendered masculine and those considered feminine may reflect the social norms from which the CBAG emerged, and the practice of such a division of labor may help legitimize the armed group in the eyes of the community.

Women also play important roles in defining relationships between CBAGs and civilian communities; women’s participation in and approval of CBAGs activities can be an important method for the group to gain legitimacy and garner positive social sanction from the communities within which they operate. Women may play this bridging function as a result of their active participation and agency, or as a result of the symbolic weight they carry as targets of violence. An example of the former is a woman choosing to endorse or decry CBAG activity to the local community; examples of the latter are the abduction of women into CBAGs or armed groups targeting women associated with rivals. Similarly, in a number of contexts marked by CBAG activity, marriage signifies social status, and the significance of a man’s ability to marry may facilitate recruitment into the group.¹³ The following section will delineate the range of women’s roles in CBAGs and will briefly discuss how these contributions shape CBAG activities.

11 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 23, summarizing table 2.

12 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 23, summarizing table 2.

13 Phoebe Grace Donnelly, “Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups,” PhD diss., Tufts University, 2019; Valerie M. Hudson and Hilary Matfess, “In Plain Sight: The Neglected Linkage between Brideprice and Violent Conflict,” *International Security* 42, no. 1 (2017): 7–40.

THIS WOMAN'S WORK, THIS WOMAN'S WORLD: WHAT WOMEN DO IN CBAGS

How do women join CBAGs?

Before discussing women's contributions to the groups, the question of *how* women come to be involved must be considered. A dearth of sex-disaggregated data on recruitment into CBAGs makes it difficult to systematically assess the similarities and differences in how and why men and women join these groups.¹⁴ Qualitative accounts, however, suggest that women's reasons for joining CBAGs are often similar to men's.¹⁵ As with men, women may see conflict as a means of increasing their individual or community prestige. Watson, in a study of Turkana women in Kenya, notes that women who are affiliated with successful (generally male) raiders have the opportunity to gain social status and increase their livestock holdings.¹⁶

A number of studies examining pastoralist conflicts note the connection between men's participation in violence and women's interests: women's desire for higher brideprices¹⁷ or demands that men exact revenge in response to previous violence or insult, for example, can inflame tensions.¹⁸ More direct economic motivation can also encourage women to join such groups. Nolte notes that the Nigerian vigilante group the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) comprises of "many men and women from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, such as market women and street traders who resented their suffering under state brutality and the declining economy."¹⁹ Thus, economically precarious women may have the same incentives to join a CBAG as their economically precarious male counterparts.

Not all armed groups, however, are enthusiastically supported by the community or rely on community sanction to operate. Thus, they cannot rely as easily on voluntary or grievance-driven recruitment. In contrast to CBAGs that broker a "negotiated" relationship with the community, "coercive" CBAGs, or CBAGs

14 This issue also confronts those who study women's participation in NSAGs more generally.

15 Similar drivers of recruitment among men and women is not a feature unique to CBAGS— though gendered portrayals of conflict dynamics can obscure women's agency in the recruitment process. Henshaw, Alexis Leanna. "Where women rebel: Patterns of women's participation in armed rebel groups 1990–2008." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18, no. 1 (2016): 39–60.

16 C. Watson and R. Grahn, "Pastoral Women As Peacemakers," (Nairobi: USAID, DFID, AU/IBAR, 2003), <https://web.archive.org/web/20110615183320/.https://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0708/DOC12925.pdf>

17 Brideprice is a term for the resources that must pass from the groom's family to the bride's family ahead of their marriage; this custom is the inverse of "dowry" and is widely practiced. Naomi Kipuri and Andrew Ridgewell, *A Double Bind: The Exclusion of Pastoralist Women in the East and Horn of Africa* (London: Minority Rights Group International, 2008), <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/494672bc2.pdf>, 18; Janpeter Schilling, Francis EO Opiyo, and Jürgen Scheffran, "Raiding pastoral livelihoods: motives and effects of violent conflict in north-western Kenya," *Pastoralism: Research, Policy and Practice* 2, no. 1 (2012): 1–16.

18 M. Padmanabhan, "Pastoral Women as Strategic and Tactical Agents in Conflicts: Negotiating Access to Resources and Gender Relations in Afar, Ethiopia," *Quarterly Journal of International Agriculture* 47, no. 3 (2008): 233–234.

19 Insa Nolte, "Ethnic Vigilantes and the State: The Oodua People's Congress in South-Western Nigeria," *International Relations* 21, no. 2 (2007): 222; Insa Nolte, "'Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed': Yoruba Women in the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Nigeria," *Africa* 78, no. 1 (2008): 93.

that are “more offensive, conflictive, and indiscriminate, targeted against the state or the community, and disregarding local social norms around violence to serve CBAG goals and objectives,” would by definition rely more heavily on abduction—of men, women, boys, and girls—to fill their ranks.²⁰ The abduction of women and girls intended as wives for male members represents a common coercive method of women’s incorporation into community-based armed groups. This form of violence, however, is not always linked to armed-group activity—in some contexts, bride kidnapping or abduction is a practice unaffiliated with armed group activity. Distinguishing between the degree to which such abductions are a conflict dynamic—as a result of CBAG organizational needs or longer-standing community practices—is difficult.²¹

Women’s participation may fluctuate across an organization’s different units and over time. As in other armed groups, the roles that women play in CBAGs depend in part on the organization’s vision for society.²² Across a number of different cases, CBAGs have incorporated women into their organizations in a manner that implicitly or explicitly invokes traditional gender relations, mirroring community norms or evoking a shared history.²³ For example, both the OPC and the al-Hakkamat—a group of influential women that were integral to mobilizing and legitimizing CBAG violence through public performances in Sudan— included women in leadership positions throughout the organization in a manner that explicitly positioned their contributions as complementary to men’s.²⁴ These differentiated roles for men and women may reflect that many CBAGs, particularly those that emerge as community-defense militias, are mobilized in response to violent challenges to state order. Within the same armed groups, certain units may be more amenable to female participation than others. Nagajaran’s study of vigilante groups in Northern Nigeria found significantly different degrees of women’s participation between different units of the Yan Gora, or the Civilian Joint Task Force.²⁵

Female participation in CBAGs is often conditioned on additional identity characteristics. Marriage status and partner, age, ethnicity, clan, religious identity, and other social factors all shape a woman’s rela-

20 Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 10; Kennedy Agade Mktutu, “Pastoralist Conflict, Governance and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa” (PhD diss., University of Bradford, 2005), 343.

21 Scott MacEachern has discussed the historical precedent for mass abductions with regards to Boko Haram’s practices of raiding and abduction in the mountainous areas between Nigeria and Cameroon. Scott MacEachern, *Searching for Boko Haram: A History of Violence in Central Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); see also Stephen Morewitz, “Bride Abduction,” in *Kidnapping and Violence* (New York, NY: Springer, 2019) 11–22.

22 This is a commonality between CBAGs and other types of NSAGs. Valentine Moghadam, for example, distinguishes between “the women’s emancipation” and the “woman-in-the-family” models of revolutionary behavior. Valentine M. Moghadam, “Gender and revolutionary transformation: Iran 1979 and East central Europe 1989,” *Gender & Society* 9, no. 3 (1995): 335.

23 This is not to suggest that tradition is not constructed.

24 The opportunities for female leadership may be limited to opportunities to exercise power *over other women*, as Henshaw et al found among rebel groups. Alexis Henshaw, June Eric-Udorie, Hannah Godefa, Kathryn Howley, Cat Jeon, Elise Sweezy, and Katheryn Zhao, “Understanding Women at War: A Mixed-Methods Exploration of Leadership in Non-State Armed Groups,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, no. 6–7 (2019): 1089–1116. Nolte, “‘Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed,’” 93; Suad M.E. Musa, *Hawks & Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict: Al-Hakkamat Baggara Women of Darfur* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer), 49; the Khail-Hakkamah is the “pinnacle” of al-Hakkamah, 51, and is responsible for a number of important tasks.

25 Chitra Nagajaran, “Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria,” (Washington, DC: Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2018): 10.

tionship to and role within CBAGs.²⁶ A number of studies note that older women or women married to high-ranking men are better able to exert influence over their communities. Pre-existing or traditional power brokers often mediate mobilization into CBAGs, and these power brokers may recruit along ethnic or religious lines and limit the degree to which women can join these organizations at all.²⁷ Age may be an especially important differentiating factor. Al-Hakkamat women, for instance, need “confidence, charisma, social relationships . . . local knowledge and cultural insight”—qualities that may take time to develop; on the other hand, these women must also be physically and mentally capable of carrying out the variety of tasks they are assigned.²⁸ Similarly, Nagajaran notes that “in much of northern Nigeria, women’s freedoms and opportunities are curtailed when they are of reproductive age but increase once they become older,” meaning that women past their reproductive years may have more opportunities than younger women to join the vigilante groups that emerged from long-standing hunters organizations.²⁹ This has implications for CBAG recruitment strategies and may shed light on which categories of civilians may be more likely to face violent (as opposed to negotiated or voluntary) recruitment. Women are not a homogeneous social group, which makes it necessary to ask not only “where are the women?”³⁰ but also “which women are where?”³¹ and “how are these distinctions made and enforced?” when discussing gender and conflict.

Women Tasks in Community Based Armed Groups

Across a variety of CBAG types and organizations, women participate in a number of different tasks; in many of these cases, women’s contributions to CBAGs mirror their contributions to their families and communities more generally. In some CBAGs, women have engaged in violence directly. Women’s non-combat contributions include logistics management, clandestine operations, and legitimizing group activity to the community, boosting CBAG members’ morale and recruiting men into violence. As with women in armed groups, women affiliated with CBAGs often wear many hats, providing more than one service to the CBAGs with which they are affiliated; Mazurana et al. found that more than 40 percent of the women they interviewed who had been members of Sierra Leonean armed groups had received “basic military and weapons training from their commanders or captor ‘husbands.’”³² Narratives that emphasize merely one of these roles (particularly those that emphasize women’s contributions as wives)

26 Donnelly and Petrich note the hierarchy between Kenyan and Somali women within al Shabaab, for example. See Katharine Petrich and Pheobe Donnelly, “Worth Many Sins: Al-Shabaab’s Shifting Relationship with Kenyan Women,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, no. 6–7 (2019): 1169–1192.

27 Jonathan Filip Forney, “Who Can We Trust with a Gun? Information Networks and Adverse Selection in Militia Recruitment,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 5 (2015): 824–849.

28 Musa, *Hawks & Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 49.

29 Hunters refers to bush hunters; their characteristics are discussed by Colin Freeman, “Meet the hunters tracking down Boko Haram fighters using musket guns and their wits,” *The Telegraph*, March 30, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/03/30/meet-hunters-tracking-boko-haram-fighters-using-musket-guns/>; Chitra Nagajaran, “Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria,” *Center for Civilians in Conflict*, (2018), 10.

30 Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*.

31 Kinsella, “Feminism,” 148.

32 Dyan Mazurana and Khristopher Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and girls of Sierra Leone* (Washington, DC: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2004), 12.

obscure the degree to which women contribute to a variety of CBAG efforts and military objectives; thus, the tasks described below should not be considered mutually exclusive.

DIRECT ENGAGEMENT WITH VIOLENCE

Female participation in direct combat as a part of CBAG activities is rare but not unheard of in sub-Saharan Africa. There is some evidence that women's participation in direct conflict is generally an outgrowth of organizational need in the face of a stronger enemy.³³ Wood asserts that conflict severity predicts the use of female combatants by armed groups; he also notes that the leaders of leftist armed groups may be more comfortable deploying women in gender-bending roles like direct combat. Because CBAGs are often engaged in low-intensity conflict and rarely espouse an ideology of anti-state, radical political change, one would expect relatively low levels of female frontline combat. Nevertheless, some studies point to fairly high levels of women's participation in conflict as combatants in the Democratic Republic of Congo³⁴ and women's active participation in violence in clan-conflict in Kismayo.³⁵

In the subset of CBAGs considered in this report, female participation in direct combat activities appears more common in vigilante groups than in those that are identity-oriented community-based armed groups. Three percent of those arrested by the Nigerian police after clashes with the OPC were women.³⁶ Nolte suggests that though this is a low proportion, "the fact that they were arrested as fighters is an indicator of high female mobilization for active OPC work."³⁷ In recent years, women in the Yan Gora in Northern Nigeria have played an important role in screening other women; this position is particularly important to security in the region because of the frequency with which Boko Haram deploys female suicide bombers.³⁸ There are also reports of (often young, unmarried) women participating in Sungusungu vigilante groups in Tanzania and of women participating in South African neighborhood watches.³⁹

LOGISTICS AND MANAGEMENT

Women in CBAGs contribute to logistics by supporting military operations and through intra-organizational management.⁴⁰ In addition to maintaining order in CBAG camps or in fighters' homes, women

33 Nathalie Wlodarczyk, "Creating Magic Soldiers: Kamajor Mobilization and Initiation," in *Magic and Warfare*, 93–111 (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009); Reed M. Wood, *Female Fighters: Why Rebel Groups Recruit Women for War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

34 Chris Coulter, Mariam Persson, and Mats Utas. *Young female fighters in African wars: conflict and its consequences*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008.

35 Judith Gardner, "Increasing Women's Participation and Inclusion in Jubbaland Peace Processes: Life Histories: Women, Conflict and Peace: Learning from Kismayo," (2018).

36 Nolte, "c'Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed,'" 97.

37 "Nolte, "Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed,'" 97.

38 Nagajaran, "Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria."

39 Kimani Njogu and Hervé Maupeu, eds., *Songs and politics in Eastern Africa* (African Books Collective, 2007), 230; Ray Abrahams, "Sungusungu: Village Vigilante Groups in Tanzania," *African Affairs* 86, no. 343 (1987): 179–196; Christopher Clark and Saun Swingler, "On night patrol with a South African vigilante group," *Al Jazeera*, October 24, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/night-patrol-south-african-vigilante-group-181022110640921.html>.

40 A survey of women affiliated with armed groups in Sierra Leone found that 72 percent of women interviewed worked as cooks. Mazurana and Carlson, *From Combat to Community*.

provide food to fighters, carry weapons and supplies, provide support to the frontlines, and care for wounded fighters—in addition to maintaining order in CBAG camps or in fighters’ homes.⁴¹ One woman from Kismayo reported that “Until my clan community lost, I participated in the conflict by bringing fighters water, food or ammunition. I even remember that I was seven months pregnant when I carried water to the fighters.”⁴² Search for Common Ground notes that in the pastoralist conflict in Nigeria there are “reported cases of women indirectly supporting men in preparing for attacks for example, in the Mangu-Bokkos conflict in 1997–1998 women were allegedly involved in the selection of stones and other objects to use in this fight.”⁴³ Women who are not formally members of the organization may contribute to these support functions. A review of pastoralist violence in the Horn of Africa notes that women can demonstrate their support or opposition to a campaign by providing (or not providing) food or coffee to men involved in the violence.⁴⁴

Women also often contribute to CBAG logistical operations and external relations in their positions as wives—both when these unions are coerced and when they are voluntary. The responsibilities that women take on as wives and mothers reduce the burdens on men, freeing their labor for combat or other tasks. Less evident is the way that marriage shapes the relationship between the CBAG and the local community.⁴⁵ The process of making women into wives, which women are made into wives, and the roles that these wives play in supporting CBAG operations together constitute an oft-overlooked phenomenon that provides valuable insight into CBAGs’ relationships with civilians and the groups’ internal hierarchy.⁴⁶

CLANDESTINE OPERATIONS

For a number of different CBAGs, women’s presence helps evade suspicion from government or enemy forces. Women are often valuable in smuggling or porting positions because they arouse less suspicion than men. Mkutu, reflecting on pastoralist conflict in the northern Rift Valley, in northeastern Africa, notes that “It is easy to carry bullets in food bags, milk gourds or water jugs. Security forces rarely check women, making it relatively easy for them to carry loads of ammunition across the border—it is difficult [for socio-cultural reasons] for men to carefully search women.”⁴⁷ Gender stereotypes of women as inherently peaceful or uninterested in the activities of armed groups make them effective actors in clandestine operations and smuggling.

41 Bukoa I. Ademola-Adelehin, Achakpa Priscilla, Jamila Suleiman, Donli Patricia, Osakwe Bridget, “The Contributions and the Impact of Farmer-Herder Conflict on Women,” (Washington, DC: Search for Common Ground, 2018), 20. https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Policy_Brief_on_the_Impact_of_Farmer_Herder_Conflict_on_Women_in_Adamawa_Gombe_and_Plateau_States_of_Nigeria.pdf; Gardner, “Increasing Women’s Participation and Inclusion in Jubbaland Peace Processes.”

42 Gardner, “Increasing Women’s Participation and Inclusion in Jubbaland Peace Processes,” 28.

43 Ademola-Adelehin et al., “The Contributions and the Impact of Farmer-Herder Conflict on Women,” 19.

44 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*.

45 Natasja Rupesinghe and Yida Diall, “Women and the Katiba Macina in Central Mali,” *Nupi Policy Brief* (Oslo: Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt, 2019); Donnelly, “Wedded to Warfare.”

46 For a discussion of these dynamics with regard to NSAGs, see: Donnelly, “Wedded to Warfare.”

47 Mkutu, “Pastoralist Conflict, Governance, and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa,” 275.

Furthermore, women's ability to access civilian's homes and different types of civilian spaces without arousing suspicion makes them particularly effective at intelligence gathering. Information on rival or enemy groups may be collected in the course of everyday activities. For example, Search for Common Ground reports allegations of "Fulani women spying on farming communities, in the process of selling *nono*" (a fermented milk dish).⁴⁸

Women do not necessarily have to be members of an armed group, or ideologically sympathetic to its objectives, to contribute to clandestine operations. Petrich and Donnelly document the role that sex workers in Kenya play in al-Shabaab's intelligence gathering efforts.⁴⁹ Al-Shabaab's relationship with sex workers allows the organization to gather information on Kenyan security forces who patronize them; in exchange, the sex workers enjoy an additional income source.⁵⁰ Other armed groups may also contract such labor from women outside of the organization.

SOCIAL SANCTIONING, LEGITIMACY, AND RECRUITMENT INTO VIOLENCE

Women play important roles mobilizing and legitimizing violence.⁵¹ A number of reports documenting conflict dynamics throughout sub-Saharan Africa note that women use songs and public proclamations to articulate their preferences and attitudes. In some contexts, women use traditional symbols to express their support or opposition to violence. This support dynamic can also manifest in informal and non-institutionalized methods, such as expression in familial and interpersonal relationships. Though women are often not able to express their opinions in formal community discussions, they may be able to listen to these conversations and discuss their preferences with their husbands and family members in the privacy of their home, as has been observed in Kenya and Ethiopia.⁵² The intimate, less-overt manner in which women may exercise influence partially explains why scholars and policymakers frequently overlook their impact. In Kismayo, "some women judge and humiliate men unwilling or unable to fight" and compel men to engage in violence by threatening to uncover their hair (a manner of undermining their masculinity).⁵³

Mkutu relays the observations of a nun who noted that in pastoralist conflict in the North Rift women "wear the arapet skin in a special way when they want to send their sons to raid. They smear them and they make them pass through their legs. When they return from revenge, they dance and sing songs

48 Ademola-Adelehin et al., "The Contributions and the Impact of Farmer-Herder Conflict on Women," 20.

49 Petrich and Donnelly, "Worth Many Sins."

50 Petrich and Donnelly, "Worth Many Sins."

51 It's worth noting that women have used the tactics described in this section for decades; Decker's discussion of women's resistance in the colonial era makes clear that these are long-standing patterns. She notes "the Igbo Women's War" illustrates "how women used traditional forms of protest and how oblivious colonial officials were to the meanings and significance of their actions." Alicia C. Decker, "Women and National Liberation in Africa," in *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest*, ed. Immanuel Nass, (Blackwell Reference online, 2009), 2.

52 Watson and Grahn, "Pastoral Women As Peacemakers,"; Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*."

53 Gardner, Judith. "Increasing Women's Participation and Inclusion in Jubbaland Peace Processes: Women, Conflict and Peace: Learning from Kismayo." (2018).

of praise.”⁵⁴ Turkana women in Kenya have encouraged conflict by providing their blessings (formally or informally) before a raid, preparing food for combatants, welcoming fighters back with celebrations, and ridiculing and emasculating men reluctant to engage in conflict.⁵⁵ Among the Karimojong in North-eastern Uganda, warriors traditionally receive a blessing from an older woman prior to embarking on a raid. Onyango notes that “The warriors leave with the confidence and full support of the women in their lives. As they march away to battle, the women sprinkle water on them as the journey to acquire wealth begins.”⁵⁶ Even once the men are out of ear and eye-shot, “Mothers or wives of the already married warriors continue in ritual...Each of the warrior’s stools must be kept in an upright position at the centre of the hut as a symbolic sign that the warrior stands strong in combat.”⁵⁷

These rituals not only bolster the morale of combatants but also represent important connections to the community from which the CBAG emerged. While difficult to quantify or measure, cross-continental similarities in customary displays of support by women suggest that these rituals are important for CBAG operations.

Women’s homecoming rituals for men also shape conflict dynamics. Reflecting on the dynamics of cattle raiding in Tanzania, Fleisher notes that when “cattle raiders return home from a raid,... the three dozen or so village women living in homesteads along their path rush out to greet them, ululating joyfully, knowing that the raiders will likely distribute all the sheep and goats they have taken to village women as gifts, retaining only the cattle to sell for cash.”⁵⁸ Even in armed groups where women contribute to frontline combat, they may also bolster morale among members through songs expressing approval and praising them in the armed-group base camps.⁵⁹

In some instances, the legitimizing role is formalized and institutionalized, as with the al-Hakkamat women in Sudan. Al-Hakkamat women play a critical mobilizing role in the community: they “seize every opportunity to inculcate a sense of moral responsibility in the community, and to emphasize adherence to social values and customs,” which can lead to violence aimed at preserving the community’s well-being or in retribution to past violence.⁶⁰ Musa describes the al-Hakkamat’s use of “mocking and inciting diction, which has become a characteristic feature of the mobilization methods.” It is a continuation of “a cultural method of censorship and discipline” rooted in precolonial times in some African societies (like the Igbo in Nigeria and the Kom in Cameroon), in which women’s groups were influential in economic and social activities.⁶¹

54 Mkutu, “Pastoralist Conflict, Governance, and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa,” 140.

55 Watson and Grahn, “Pastoral Women As Peacemakers.”

56 Eria Olowo Onyango, “Pastoralists in Violent Defiance of the State,” 152.

57 Onyango, “Pastoralists in Violent Defiance of the State,” 152.

58 Michael L. Fleisher, “‘Sungusungu’: State-Sponsored Village Vigilante Groups among the Kuria of Tanzania,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 70, no. 2 (2000): 220.

59 Remco Van Hauwermeiren, “The Ogaden War: Somali Women’s Roles,” *Afrika focus* 25, no. 2 (2012).

60 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 56.

61 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 85, 63.

OROMO SIQQEE / GAADA

The example of Siqqee under the Gaada system demonstrates how women can articulate their interests through customary systems of governance. The Gaada system is an “indigenous democratic socio-political system” of governance among the Oromo in the Horn of Africa, recognized by UNESCO’s list of Intangible Cultural Heritages of Humanity.⁶² The practice dates back to at least the 16th Century.⁶³ Though this system is subordinate to the national government’s laws, Gaada remains an important customary practice.⁶⁴ Women have developed “a parallel system, the Siqqee, and through a strong bond through women’s familial, and non-familial relationships” to advance women’s interests in the Gadaa system.⁶⁵ Berhane notes that this system enables “Oromo women to have control over resources and to form mechanisms of solidarity and sisterhood to deter men from infringing upon their rights and promote gender equality.”⁶⁶

Thus, the Siqqee system is an important way for women to voice their grievances and advance their interests. Under this system, if women’s rights are being impinged on, “women leave their homes and children to travel to a place where there is a big tree called Qilxuu and assemble there until the problems they face are solved through negotiation by elders of men and women.”⁶⁷ This system represents a way in which women shape social norms regarding acceptable behavior and influence their community. As Muchie and Bayeh note, “though it is indirect, the Oromo women also have a great role in solving conflicts among Oromo clans by intervening and requesting for reconciliation” through Siqqee.⁶⁸ This system also distributes power unevenly among women. “Women may also enjoy different rights and privileges according to their seniority,” even privileging senior wives over junior wives in the household.⁶⁹

62 Daniel Berhane, “Briefing: What is Oromo’s Gada system?” *Horn Affairs*, December 1, 2016, <https://hornaffairs.com/2016/12/01/description-oromo-gada-system/>.

63 Asafa Jalata and Harwood Schaffer, “The Oromo, Gadaa/Siqqee Democracy and the Liberation of Ethiopian Colonial Subjects,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 9, no. 4 (2013): 277–295.

64 Dejene N. Debsu, “Gender and Culture in Southern Ethiopia: An Ethnographic Analysis of Guji-Oromo Women’s Customary Rights,” *African Study Monographs* 30, no. 1 (March 2009): 15–36.

65 Firaol Belay and Sehin Teferra, “Siqqee and Atteetee Rituals among the Guji and Borana Oromo of Ethiopia,” *Setawet*, (May 2018).

66 Berhane, “Briefing: What is Oromo’s Gada System?”

67 Belay and Teferra, “Siqqee and Atteetee Rituals among the Guji and Borana Oromo of Ethiopia.”

68 Muchie Zelalem and Bayeh Endalcatchew, “Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms among Ambo Woreda Communities,” *International Journal of Research* 1, no. 11 (2014): 822–829.

69 Jeylan W. Hussein, “A cultural representation of women in the Oromo society,” *African Study Monographs* 25, no. 3 (2004): 103–147.

KARAMOJA REGION AND DISARMAMENT⁷⁰

The Ugandan government's disarmament efforts in the Karamoja region shed light on the methods through which peacebuilding efforts can leverage women's role in society towards peaceful ends and demonstrate the consequences of failing to engage in gender-sensitive program analysis. The Karamoja region has struggled for decades to contain intercommunal violence; the government has attempted to implement numerous disarmament programs, dating back to 1945.⁷¹ Women played important roles in the government's most recent demobilization effort in the mid -2000s. The Ugandan Government reported that "Women formed groups of ten per sub-county, composed songs encouraging voluntary surrender of guns."⁷² Not only were women able to provide public support for the demobilization effort through such public displays, women were able to provide information about weapons in the community because "because women are custodians of weapons in the homes."⁷³

Yet, despite women's participation in these programs, disarmament efforts have not been an unmitigated good for women. The government's heavy hand during these efforts makes women more vulnerable and has also facilitated the rise of community-level coping mechanisms that place additional burdens on women.⁷⁴ A Feinstein Center report noted that as economic production shifted away from livestock, women were increasingly responsible for providing for the household. The report notes that "Women are supporting their households through increased exploitation of natural resources at the same time that access to remote bush areas has become more dangerous."⁷⁵ The study also found "increases in incidents of gender-based violence against women and girls as part of the overall rise in insecurity," with different contexts producing different forms of gendered insecurity.⁷⁶

70 Discussions of conflict dynamics in the region that refer to the "Karamoja" obscure the number of ethnic groups that reside in that area; though there are "shifting alliances" between these groups the region is home to an array of ethnic groups; "roughly speaking, the Jie inhabit the central portion of the region, the Dodoth are to the north, and the Karimojong to the south. The Karimojong are further divided into three territorial groups— the Matheniko, Bokora and Pian." Elizabeth Stites and Darlington Akabwai, "We are now reduced to women': Impacts of forced disarmament in Karamoja, Uganda," *Nomadic Peoples* 14, no. 2 (2010): 24–43.

71 James Bevan, "Crisis in Karamoja: Armed Violence and the Failure of Disarmament in Uganda's Most Deprived Region," (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2008), <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/B-Occasional-papers/SAS-OP21-Karamoja.pdf>.

72 "Creating Conditions for Promoting Human Security and Recovery in Karamoja, 2007/2008-2009/2010," Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda, (January 2007). <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5b44c3ee4.pdf>

73 "Creating Conditions for Promoting Human Security and Recovery in Karamoja, 2007/2008-2009/2010," Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda, (January 2007). <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5b44c3ee4.pdf>

74 Bevan, "Crisis in Karamoja."

75 Elizabeth Stites and Darlington Akabwai, "Changing Roles, Shifting Risks: Livelihood Impacts of Disarmament in Karamoja, Uganda," (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2009).

76 Stites and Akabwai, "Changing Roles, Shifting Risks."

AL-HAKKAMAT

Though not as well-known as the Arrow Boys or the Janjaweed, al-Hakkamat were an important element of conflict dynamics in Darfur, a civil war in western Sudan in the early 2000s. The activities and trajectory of al-Hakkamat, a group of women that perform songs and dances that act as powerful molders of community norms, demonstrate not only demonstrate the degree to which women legitimize conflict, but also illustrate how the state can co-opt customary institutions and how practices can be coopted by the state.

Al-Hakkamat is a hierarchical organization of rural Baggara women, an ethnic group spread across a number of countries in the Sahel.⁷⁷ Women obtain entry into and prestige within the organization by “the quality of the expressions used and their succinct brevity, the number of stanzas, the musical tone and the coordination and performance among the chorus. This must be integrated with the ability to react spontaneously and poetically to instant occasions or incidents and to compose on the support of the moment.”⁷⁸

Al-Hakkamat Khail-Hakkamah is the “pinnacle” within the hierarchy and is typically selected in a process supervised by the tribe’s head of defense (the Ageed al-Augada).⁷⁹ Musa notes that the nomination of a potential Khail-Hakkamah is “endorsed by notable village women, and generally by other community members, based on her skills and qualities of agency, personality, experience, knowledge, and outgoing character.”⁸⁰ Once installed in her position, she “is required to undertake massive social responsibilities, along with helping the Ageed and his horsemen to undertake security missions, which may involve fighting.”⁸¹ Additionally, “the horsemen makes no move on tribal affairs unless this Hakkamah is informed,” making them of “vital importance during conflict.”⁸²

The Sudanese government, recognizing the influence that al-Hakkamat women exercise over their communities, has sought to further formalize and co-opt the group as a part of its efforts to draw Darfuri Arabs into its coalition.⁸³ The relationship between al-Hakkamat and the government included “organized military training” and providing the provision of “military identities and rank titles” to these women.⁸⁴ Musa adds that, whether women have been enthusiastic or reticent to engage in such activity, their activities since this relationship was brokered have “included, among many others, mobilizing for war in South Sudan and against the Darfur insurgency, escorting the army, providing sustenance (food rations), recruiting women and engaging with officials and public events.”⁸⁵

77 See, “Baggara, Shuwa Arab in Sudan,” The Joshua Project, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/14926/SU accessed May 2, 2020.

78 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 49.

79 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 51–52.

80 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 52.

81 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 53.

82 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 53.

83 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 117.

84 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 126.

85 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict*, 131.

MUNGIKI

The role of women and gender norms in Mungiki demonstrates the ways women's presence and their performance of specific gendered roles are powerful methods through which armed groups legitimize their actions. Mungiki is a violent youth movement that purports to represent the Kikuyu, a demographically, politically, and historically significant ethnic group in Kenya. The Mungiki has dabbled in a variety of different CBAG roles, ranging from thuggery for Kenya African National Union (KANU) to enforcing their perceived code of moral conduct. Though its membership is drawn predominantly from lower-class youth and has ties to modern businesses such as the matatu industry.⁸⁶ The Mungiki rely on the traditions and iconography of the Kikuyu to legitimize themselves. Dreadlocks, sniffing tobacco, and oath-swearing are all aspects of the 1952–1962 Mau Mau rebellion and Kikuyu tradition that the Mungiki have adopted.⁸⁷

Despite its absence from many of the qualitative accounts of the Mungiki, an estimated 20–25 percent of the group's membership is female.⁸⁸ The delineation and enforcement of proper gender roles (in addition to venting youth grievances), appears to be an important aspect of the Mungiki's activities. The group's propaganda, for example, states that a woman is "the guardian of, and has obligation to, the house of her husband and his children."⁸⁹ There are also reports that the Mungiki enforce circumcision among female members and the group is linked to attacks on women for being "improperly dressed" in pants.⁹⁰

Qualitative accounts suggest that women in Mungiki are often responsible for domestic tasks but that they also may play a role in the recruitment of members and the management of women within the group.⁹¹ Many accounts frame women's participation in domestic duties as an apolitical act, contrasting it to male members' meetings.⁹² Dismissing their participation as such, however, overlooks how the performance of domesticity can itself be a political act. Furthermore, these accounts overlook the possibility of political conversations taking place amidst the quotidian tasks of running a household.

The very presence of women associated with Mungiki has helped the CBAG with its reputation. As Rasmussen notes:

The young women played a significant role in the temporary change of the media discourse about Mungiki, as their testimonies as wives, widows, sisters and mothers were essential in recording the

86 Reuters, "Factbox: Key Facts about Kenya's Mungiki Gang," March 6, 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-gang-mungiki-sb/factbox-key-facts-about-kenyas-mungiki-gang-idUSTRE52537620090306>; Adams Oloo, Okumu Wafula, and A. Ikelegbe, "Marginalization and the Rise of Militia Groups in Kenya; The Mungiki and the Sabaot Land Defence Force," (South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2010).

87 Reuters, "Factbox: Key Facts about Kenya's Mungiki Gang."

88 Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal, "Country Advice Kenya Kenya," January 13, 2012, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5033b44c60.html>

89 Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal, "Country Advice Kenya Kenya."

90 Nyabola, H. Nanjala, "The Legal Challenge of Civil Militia Groups in Kenya," *African Security Studies* 18, no. 3 (2009): 89–102.

91 Australian Government Refugee Review Tribunal, "Country Advice Kenya Kenya."

92 Jacob Rasmussen, "Mungiki As Youth Movement: Revolution, Gender and Generational Politics in Nairobi, Kenya," *Young* 18, no. 3 (2010): 301–319.

police brutality and the disappearances of the young Mungiki men. At the same time, the women also offered a different picture of Mungiki from the well-known portrait of a violent, criminal band of young Kikuyu men. The young women described the everyday life of poor Kikuyu families struggling to get by on the margins of both city and society. Thus, the role of young women within the movement also changed since they were instrumental in shaping and temporarily changing the public image of Mungiki.⁹³

This not only highlights the tangible benefits that its female membership have brought the CBAG, but also demonstrates that women within the Mungiki are hardly apolitical. These young women acted not only as individuals with relationships to those abused by the state, but also as individuals with grievances against the current system.

The use of traditional mechanisms to legitimize CBAG behavior may be complementary to the rarity of women in direct fighting roles; both reflect a CBAG strategy of legitimizing itself by way of rigid gender relations and appeals to traditional beliefs. Such activity may thus be an outgrowth of the fact that, as Kipuri and Ridgewell noted in their examination of pastoralist women in East Africa, “Women and girls tend to be regarded, and regard themselves, as the custodians of cultural values and beliefs, much more so than men and boys.”⁹⁴ Though traditional cultural practices are not often considered a part of conflict dynamics, Watson notes that “songs are a legitimate way for women to express their views in public - either their approbation or their disapproval.”⁹⁵

WOMEN’S POST-CONFLICT ISSUES AND THE CHALLENGES OF PROMOTING RECONCILIATION IN SOCIETIES WITH CBAG ACTIVITY

After the guns fall silent, women’s contributions to conflict are often erased and their potential contributions to peacebuilding are frequently overlooked. In the post-conflict period, women face economic and social hurdles to societal reintegration. Some of these challenges are shared with their male counterparts, while others are gender-specific. Women’s marginalization presents an issue both because of the denial of women’s rights that it represents, as well as being associated with a higher risk of conflict recidivism.⁹⁶ Detailed below are the social and economic hurdles women face in the post-conflict era.

93 Rasmussen, “Mungiki As Youth Movement.”.

94 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*, 6.

95 Watson and Grahn, “Pastoral Women As Peacemakers,” 23.

96 Valerie M. Hudson Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli, and Chad F. Emmett, *Sex and World Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

Social status

The fate of women associated with CBAGs may be linked to the post-conflict reputation of the CBAG. How much women's contribution to CBAGs affects their social status may also depend on how visible or well-known these activities are. Musa notes that during peace negotiations in Sudan...

the role played by al-Hakkamat in conflict was either obscured or only mentioned obliquely. When it was mentioned, some 'silly bureaucrats' simply suggested that these Hakkamat must be put on trial. But these alien and naive ideas were simply met with scornful laughter from both sides to the conflict. Apparently, this ignorance on the part of the executive participants about local knowledge about rural women and gender power relations in these societies further explains the failure to take on board the experience of women, their capabilities and their interests, and to listen to their voice.⁹⁷

The degree of stigma that women face at the individual level after conflict may be a function of the degree to which their activities deviated from social norms.⁹⁸ Women who were involved in frontline combat or another gender-bending activity may face particular hurdles to reintegration. Women who were integrated in a fashion that did not subvert traditional gender norms may not face such challenges.⁹⁹ An additional source of social marginalization may be post-conflict shifts in gender norms. Efforts to promote women's post-conflict social reintegration must take into account the degree of male resistance and men's attitudes towards women's contributions to CBAGs. Male resistance to women's empowerment can manifest in a number of different ways—or not at all.¹⁰⁰

Because CBAGs often incorporate women into their activities in line with prevailing gender norms, women may face fewer difficulties in their attempts to reintegrate into their communities after conflict. This may come at the expense of the existence of conflict-related shifts in social norms that can be institutionalized in the post-conflict era to improve women's status.¹⁰¹ Designing post-conflict social reintegration programs to address women's roles in CBAGs requires engaging with a number of gendered dynamics, including the degree to which women's participation broke with prevailing norms, the community's attitude towards the CBAG generally, and men's attitudes towards women's participation in these organizations.

97 Musa, *Hawks and Doves in Sudan's Armed Conflict*, 155.

98 Miranda Worthen, Angela Veale, Susan McKay, and Michael Wessells, "'I Stand Like a Woman': Empowerment and Human Rights in the Context of Community-Based Reintegration of Girl Mothers Formerly Associated with Fighting Forces and Armed Groups," *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 2, no. 1 (2010): 55.

99 Worthen et al., "'I stand like a woman,'" 55.

100 Judy El-Bushra, "Fused in Combat: Gender Relations and Armed Conflict," *Development in Practice* 13, no. 2–3 (2003): 257.

101 Fallon and Viterna, analyzing the extent to which democratic transitions are likely to result in women's post-conflict empowerment note that women whose activities "'bent gender' or broke with traditional understandings of the feminine (e.g., guerrilla combatants or political organizers), are thought particularly likely to launch strong feminist movements under new democratic regimes." Jocelyn Viterna and Kathleen M. Fallon, "Democratization, Women's Movements, and Gender-Equitable States: A Framework for Comparison," *American Sociological Review* 73, no. 4 (2008): 668–689.

ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION

Women may have taken on new economic roles or responsibilities during conflict. Attempts to return the economy to pre-conflict production levels or arrangements may displace women who have taken on new roles and jobs during the conflict. Annan et al. note that women's participation in armed groups in northern Uganda did not adversely affect their stock of human capital or opportunities for employment, relative to women that did not participate in armed groups. They note, however, that this is a function of "low educational investment and few opportunities for skilled employment" for women generally.¹⁰²

These discriminatory dynamics are at play in a number of contexts with active CBAGs. Thus, while women may not be as disadvantaged by wartime losses in human capital, their exclusion and marginalization represent a challenge for policymakers seeking to stabilize communities affected by CBAG violence. Ultimately, targeting only ex-combatants (or those who participated directly in fighting) in post-conflict economic redevelopment programs obscures the ways in which communities, individuals, and markets responded to wartime economies.

ENGAGING WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING

Engaging women and women's issues in the EMT framework

As discussed in *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa Lessons: Learned & Measures of Success*, the Engagement, Management, Transformation (EMT) approach to CBAGs is comprised of short-, medium-, or long-term strategies to confront the challenges presented by CBAGs.¹⁰³ Schuberth outlines the different objectives of each phase of the EMT approach, noting that "engagement focuses on ensuring safe access for intervening actors to areas with CBAGs; coercive management aims to reduce the reach and legitimacy of CBAGs; cooperative management strives to improve the treatment of local populations by CBAGs; and transformation aspires to render CBAGs obsolete for their members, sponsors, and communities."¹⁰⁴

In assessing how policymakers have responded to CBAGs, Schuberth calls for more engagement with questions concerning the necessary buy-in for each of the stages of the EMT approach. This report partially takes up this call, asserting that women can contribute to each of the phases of the Engagement, Management, Transformation (EMT) approach to CBAGs. Identifying women's comparative advantage

102 Jeannie Annan, Christopher Blattman, Dyan Mazurana, and Khristopher Carlson, "Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender in Northern Uganda," *Journal of conflict resolution* 55, no. 6 (2011): 981.

103 Moritz Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons Learned & Measures of Success* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019), https://www.resolve.net.org/system/files/2019-10/RSVE_CBAGs_Approaches_Schuberth_Oct2019_0.pdf.

104 Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 16.

in each of these stages and the ways that they can contribute to objectives in each phase is a promising agenda for those interested in promoting gender-sensitive peace-building.¹⁰⁵ A preliminary assessment reveals that efforts to engage and manage CBAGs under the EMT framework requires including women and assessing their roles in these groups.

Below, the report highlights the benefits of engaging women in peacebuilding programs as a part of the cooperative management approach to CBAGs.¹⁰⁶ In particular, public proclamations, symbolic rituals and organizing provide ways for women to contribute to cooperative management efforts. The following methods of engaging women should not be regarded as the only possibilities for including women in the EMT approach to CBAGs, but rather a starting point for a broader research and policy agenda.

Legitimizing peace

SERVING AS LEGITIMIZERS OF PEACE PROCESSES, DIFFUSING NON-VIOLENT NORMS, AND PROMOTING PEACE THROUGH CEREMONIES AND RITUALS

Given women’s ability to act as intermediaries, they seem well-suited to contribute to the “improved relationship between communities and CBAGs” EMT objective in the management phase of the EMT approach.¹⁰⁷ As Marks notes, “relationships are a central unit of analysis and theoretical driver for understanding gender norms and equality during and after war.”¹⁰⁸ Women’s ability to use social norms, informal influence, and symbolism to shape men’s behavior can form a valuable contribution to peacebuilding endeavors.

The songs and public declarations that women use to express their opinion about the prospects of conflict can also feature messages of peace or promote reconciliation; women’s symbolic power is thus a double-edged sword, capable of stoking conflict and promoting peace. Reflecting on ethnic groups in eastern Ethiopia, Tadesse and Beyene note that “Women praise victory and success as fruits of peace in order to promote peace and stability instead of enmity. Their ideological propaganda in the community to prevent conflict is important.”¹⁰⁹ This support for peace can include defusing tension by using “traditional phrases” that extol the virtues of peace.¹¹⁰ In Dillo, a region in southern Ethiopia, a campaign to “promote non-violent values” among the community’s women resulted in the women singing songs of peace rather than pro-war songs.¹¹¹

105 A starting point for this may, for example, be gendering the indicators Schubert lays out in her report.

106 Schubert, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 4.

107 Schubert, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 13.

108 Zoe Marks, “Gender, Social Networks and Conflict Processes,” *feminists@ law* 9, no. 1 (2019): 23.

109 Bamlaku Tadesse, Yeneneh Tesfaye, and Fekadu Beyene, “Women in Conflict and Indigenous Conflict Resolution among the Issa and Gurgura Clans of Somali in Eastern Ethiopia,” *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 10, no. 1 (2010): 92.

110 Bamlaku, Tesfaye, and Beyene, “Women in Conflict and Indigenous Conflict Resolution among the Issa and Gurgura Clans of Somali in Eastern Ethiopia,” 92.

111 Luke Glowacki, and Katja Gonc, “Customary Institutions and Traditions in Pastoralist Societies: Neglected Potential for Conflict Resolution,” *Conflict Trends* 2013, no. 1 (2013): 26–32.

Watson notes that women can engage in important ceremonies promoting peace or serve as symbols of peace themselves.¹¹² Women associated with armed groups in Karamoja can “choose to go on peace crusades of their own, sharing milk and tobacco with enemy communities as peace offerings.”¹¹³ Onyango notes that “these offerings are rarely refused, as it is believed that to reject a woman’s peace initiative is to invite a curse.”¹¹⁴ In one pastoralist community in Uganda “mothers from warring groups may swap babies and breastfeed them as a symbolic alliance between the two warring communities.”¹¹⁵

Following an intervention to promote peace, women of the Dassanech in southern Ethiopia that were affiliated with local peace committees or that participated in local peacebuilding efforts often decided to withhold beads that honored men’s participation in violence.¹¹⁶ One woman reported: “I can no longer give beads, I cannot bless my sons to go to conflict, because I am on the peace committee.”¹¹⁷ In other instances, women have intervened directly to prevent conflict from escalating. In Somalia, for example, “women at times employed desperate measures to stop inter- and intra-clan wars. They formed a human chain, lined themselves up between the warring parties, and refused to leave until the two groups backed down.” An UNESCO report noted that “their immediate objective was to see to it that the two armies did not shoot at each other. A related objective was to bring in alternative conflict resolution methods based on dialogue and peace.”¹¹⁸ This sort of advocacy in the midst of conflict is an example of “high-risk feminism”—in which women putting their lives on the line to prevent a further degradation of their rights and well-being.¹¹⁹

Similarly, women may make use of customary rituals not directly connected to conflict to enforce community dictates (in addition to lending or withholding support to CBAG operations, as discussed above) and shape social norms towards non-violence. Research shows that improving women’s security in the home contributes to overall state stability.¹²⁰ Across a number of pastoralist communities in East Africa, “women’s institutions have customarily mitigated the abuses of husbands and other male kin.”¹²¹ Kipuri and Ridgewell note that Maasi women can organize to “mob a man, or a woman, who has violated sanctions” through the ol-kishiroto institution. Ol-kishiroto is a form of “ritual attack” that women can undertake in response to “serious moral affronts to their fertility and procreative powers.”¹²² Kipuri and Ridgewell also

112 Watson and Grahn, “Pastoral Women As Peacemakers.”

113 Onyango, “Pastoralists in Violent Defiance of the State,” 150.

114 Onyango, “Pastoralists in Violent Defiance of the State,” 150.

115 Mkutu, “Pastoralist Conflict, Governance, and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa,” 140.

116 Glowacki and Gonc, “Customary Institutions and Traditions in Pastoralist Societies,” 32.

117 Glowacki and Gonc, “Customary Institutions and Traditions in Pastoralist Societies,” 32.

118 Josephine Ntahobari, Basilissa Ndayiziga, and Anatole Ayissi, “Women and Peace in Africa: Case Studies on Traditional Conflict Resolution Practices,” (Geneva: UNESCO, 2003), 103, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00000133274>.

119 Julia Zulver, “High-Risk Feminism in El Salvador: Women’s Mobilisation in Violent Times,” *Gender & Development* 24, no. 2 (2016): 171–185.

120 Valerie M. Hudson, Mary Caprioli, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Rose McDermott, and Chad F. Emmett, “The Heart of the Matter: The security of Women and the Security of States,” *International Security* 33, no. 3 (2009): 7–45.

121 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*, 9.

122 Dorothy L. Hodgson, *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters between Maasai and Missionaries* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 65.

observe that “Boran women in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia carry a stick called a *siiqqee*, which provides them with a symbolic rallying point for collective action.”¹²³ The *siiqqee* represents a powerful check on moral behavior and community standards. Kipuri and Ridgewell assert that “In extreme cases of trespassing, a group of women will embark on a *godaansa siiqqee*, or *siiqqee* trek, leaving their homes and children for the men to look after. The perpetrator must pay a fine or perform degrading actions for the women to return. If the abuse continues, the community can prohibit the perpetrator from holding positions of authority within the community.”¹²⁴ Though women are often excluded from positions of formal power, these informal or customary practices offer women the ability to exercise moral influence over the community and could thus be a powerful tool for building peace and promoting norms of peace.

Recent decades have seen ‘grassroots’ or customary reconciliation post-conflict programs grow in popularity. A thorny issue that policymakers must also confront when engaging with women’s organizations or influential women is the possibility of ‘tradition’ being used to obscure oppression along identity lines.¹²⁵ As a UN report notes, “in some cases, transitional justice measures can affect women negatively, for example by reinforcing gender stereotypes, dealing inappropriately with issues such as sexual violence, or even institutionalizing new forms of hardship or unfairness for women.”¹²⁶

Women’s inclusion in formal peacebuilding programs and venues

In addition to the difficulty of harmonizing women’s interests with peacebuilding efforts, policymakers must grapple with how they can meaningfully engage women in formal peacebuilding endeavors. The relatively low levels of international mediation of CBAG conflicts (as compared to conflicts involving rebel groups) may put women at a disadvantage, as local institutions may have less of a commitment to the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which “affirms that peace and security efforts are more sustainable when women are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict, the delivery of relief and recovery efforts and in the forging of lasting peace.”¹²⁷ Context-specific norms and practices shape whether women are likely to seek redress for their grievances or support through formal or informal mechanisms. Incorporating women into more formal negotiations or programs may help shift gender norms or establish new roles for women but it would not necessarily capitalize on women’s comparative advantage in these informal channels.

123 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*, 9.

124 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*, 9; Belay and Teferra, “Siiqqee and Atteetee Rituals among the Guji and Borana Oromo of Ethiopia.”

125 As Anderson notes “while ‘traditional’ or grassroots justice programs may address many of the issues that top-down decontextualized post-conflict reconciliation programs have exhibited, they are not a panacea. Tradition is malleable and subject to interpretation—and can thus contribute to backlash against women after war” or overlook women entirely. Jessica L. Anderson, “Gender, Local Justice, and Ownership: Confronting Masculinities and Femininities in Northern Uganda,” *Peace Research* (2009): 59–83.

126 Astrid Jamar and Christine Bell, “Transitional Justice and Peace Negotiations with a Gender Lens,” (New York: UN Women, 2018), 2, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/inclusive-peace-processes-transitional-justice-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1200>.

127 United States Institute of Peace, “What is UNSCR 1325? An Explanation of the Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security,” accessed May 2, 2020, https://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325.

In the instances in which the international community intervenes to help manage CBAG violence, attempts to tell women how to exercise their power—and to what end—may result in resistance and frustration, whether expressed in formal or informal settings.¹²⁸ Before designing and implementing their own interventions, the international community should take careful note of how women work to advance their own interests, documenting both the fora and manners in which they exercise their influence. Programs can then be developed to strengthen efforts local women themselves have initiated.

Furthermore, improving women’s representation in formal contexts (a metric often adopted in line with UNSCR 1325 recommendations) may not promote stabilization if conflict is mediated primarily through customary organizations; meaningfully implementing UNSCR 1325 means not only women’s presence in political fora, but also their engagement in deliberations of consequence.¹²⁹ Though women may be able to exercise influence to promote defection and community reconciliation, this influence should not obscure the degree to which women themselves need support to transition from war to peace. Peacebuilding programs in general must recognize the degree to which conflict has or has not opened space for revisions to social norms and gender relations and work within the local context to promote peacebuilding and gender equality.

Hudson suggests that “a four-fold approach to feminist peacebuilding, which would “(1) analyze women’s varied and often invisible roles in conflict and their needs in peacebuilding, (2) establish a post-conflict reconstruction framework that takes account of gender and women’s issues, (3) empower women’s groups to effectively build the bridge between the current neglect of gender in peacebuilding processes and gender mainstreamed processes which would be more effective and more gender-emancipatory, and (4) adapt international frameworks for gender equality in culturally sensitive ways.”¹³⁰ At the heart of this approach is a recognition of women’s agency and the diversity of women’s interests after war. Women cannot and should not be used as a Trojan horse for external mediators’ interests.

Finally, the potential for backlash against female activists, shifts in gender norms, or increases in women’s involvement in the public sphere also presents an additional hurdle to involving women in peacebuilding activities.¹³¹ Backlash against women’s empowerment is neither fore-ordained nor universal—but when it does manifest, it can take different forms. As El-Bushra notes, shifts in women’s power in the home have been met with recognition of “women’s resourcefulness and industry,” that “have pulled them through crises” in Somalia and Angola, a re-writing of gender roles in Rwanda, and “increased alcoholism among men and . . . domestic violence” in Sudan and Uganda.¹³² Monitoring and evaluation of activities aimed at improving women’s status in post-conflict contexts must include regular assessments of whether there is backlash in both public and private institutions.

128 Watson and Grahn, “Pastoral Women as Peacemakers.”

129 Heidi Hudson, “Peacebuilding through a Gender Lens and the Challenges of Implementation in Rwanda and Côte d’Ivoire,” *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009): 287–318.

130 Hudson, “Peacebuilding Through a Gender Lens and the Challenges of Implementation in Rwanda and Côte d’Ivoire.”

131 El-Bushra, “Fused in Combat,” 257.

132 El-Bushra, “Fused in Combat,” 257.

Women’s organizing and nuancing the concept of women’s Inclusion

The shifts in gender norms that often accompany conflict may open up opportunities for women to create new organizations to lobby on behalf of women’s issues and advocate for peace. Shared threats that emerged or became more acute during conflict may provide grounds for women to mobilize across social divisions. There is some evidence that higher levels of sexual violence during war is associated with higher levels of women’s activism in NGOs in the post-war period.¹³³ After the genocide in Rwanda, women’s organizing around identities as victims and widows resulted in a robust civil society network advocating for women’s issues.¹³⁴

In a number of identity-based conflicts, women may be particularly well-placed to serve as intermediaries between communities and peace-brokers. The development of ‘the Sixth Clan’ in Somalia demonstrates the possibility of such organizing as a form of community reconciliation and peacebuilding; the Sixth Clan is “the clan of women.”¹³⁵ Women’s ability to mobilize *as women* can be “considered to be extensions of women’s existing gender roles,”¹³⁶ as “Somali women have always been the integrative girdles that through marriage brought together and cemented two different and distant clans.”¹³⁷ Yet, serving in this intermediary role also presents a risk to women. As Ingiriis and Hoehne note, because “a woman’s identity was split between her father’s and her husband’s group,” she has the opportunity to serve as a “go-between,” but may be hamstrung by the lack of a clear political position and the mistrust on both sides of her identity categories.¹³⁸

Not all women are equally well-positioned to mobilize for peace. Economically or socially marginal women may find it difficult to participate in peace processes or vocalize their concerns to the community. In Somalia, for example, “there is ample evidence that demonstrates the exalted status of elderly, specifically widowed, pastoralist women in their own households and wider communities”—women outside of this demographic will be less able to exercise influence.¹³⁹ Similarly, Berry’s work in Rwanda observes that women’s networks can produce a hierarchy of victimhood that privileges certain women’s experiences or loss over others.¹⁴⁰ The tendency to consider women’s activism apolitical obscures women’s balancing of multiple identities and interests and divorces women’s organizing from the oppression they face as women and members of other identity groups. Though the inclusion of women’s perspectives is import-

133 Anne-Kathrin Kreft, “Responding to Sexual Violence: Women’s Mobilization in War,” *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 2 (2019): 220–233.

134 Marie E. Berry, *War, Women, and Power: From Violence to Mobilization in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

135 Mohamed H. Ingiriis and Markus V. Hoehne, “The Impact of Civil War and State Collapse on the Roles of Somali Women: A Blessing in Disguise,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 2 (2013): 314–333.

136 Padmanabhan, “Pastoral Women As Strategic and Tactical Agents in Conflicts,” 243–244.

137 Ntahobari, Ndayiziga, and Ayissi, “Women and Peace in Africa.”

138 Ingiriis and Hoehne, “The Impact of Civil War and State Collapse on the Roles of Somali Women.”

139 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*, 6.

140 Berry, *War, Women, and Power*.

ant, assuming that female representatives will be in a position to represent the full spectrum of women's interests and experiences is problematic.

Furthermore, women's inclusion in peacebuilding activities should not be regarded as a surefire guarantee of success. Despite frequent proclamations that women are inherently more peaceful than men, it is clear that women's mobilization and social influence can facilitate both violence *and* peacebuilding. A task for policymakers seeking to promote peace and post-conflict reconciliation is to harmonize women's interests with peace or to identify the groups already working toward this end and broker partnerships with them. Though it is often observed that women bear a particular burden during conflict, they may see conflict as a means of advancing their status or well-being. Some reports suggest that women encourage men to go on raids or participate in violence because of the material or social benefits that they may gain.¹⁴¹

If women feel insecure or threatened, they may see mobilization into violence as the best means of ensuring their own safety and pursuing their interests. Describing dynamics in the northern Rift Valley, Mkutu observes that "When women are told that their sons or husbands have been killed in raids, the first thing some of the cross border women will request is the deceased's gun, since the gun can be used to protect the home and is also a convertible currency."¹⁴² He also notes reports "that widowed women buy guns for their sons, so their boys will get cows, and the security of the homestead will be assured."¹⁴³ In other instances, women's feelings of insecurity lead them to encourage men to take up arms either to improve their security or retaliate in retribution for violence they experienced violence.¹⁴⁴

Failing to identify and incorporate women's interests into peacebuilding activities produces blind spots and perpetuates drivers of violence to continue. Peace builders are ill-served by the assumption that all women in a community will identify disarmament or the cessation of hostilities as being in their immediate self-interest. In some instances, part of the peacebuilding process will involve bringing women's interests (and women's organizations) into alignment with the objectives of peacebuilding programs.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Women can contribute to peacebuilding activities, particularly by helping to legitimize peacebuilding efforts and diffusing non-violent norms. Leveraging women's social influence for peace, however, requires engaging with women's interests and ensuring that the grievances and conditions that drive women's participation in and contributions to armed groups are adequately addressed in peacebuilding programs. Given women's roles in shaping community norms, getting women's buy-in may be

141 Kipuri and Ridgewell, *A Double Bind*.

142 Mkutu, "Pastoralist Conflict, Governance, and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa," 350.

143 Mkutu, "Pastoralist Conflict, Governance, and Small Arms in North Rift, North East Africa," 350.

144 Some of the dynamics of retaliatory violence are discussed in Jana Krause, "Stabilization and Local Conflicts: Communal and Civil War in South Sudan," *Ethnopolitics* 18, no. 5 (2019): 478–493.

a means of increasing the legitimacy of externally designed, funded, or implemented peacebuilding programs. The following recommendations outline how policymakers can build gender-sensitive peacebuilding programs for CBAG-related conflict.

- As a part of gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding programs, policymakers should fund participatory research to engage a broad cross-section of women and other relevant demographics. Engaging women along the socio-economic spectrum, of different ages, religions, and ethnicities, is critical to understanding the landscape of women’s interests and capabilities in CBAG-affected contexts. Doing so will not only help policymakers engage women in programming but also identify hierarchies within women’s access to power and groups of women that are doubly marginalized by dint of their gender and other identity markers. Participatory research would also help policymakers identify the venues in which women are most effectively engaged as peacebuilders and which women are best placed to promote peace.
- Policy and programming should produce gendered analysis¹⁴⁵ of the impact of formal peacebuilding programs (particularly disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs) on women’s well-being. These formal, technical programs may make women more economically or socially vulnerable, raising the risk of violence against women.
- Incorporate informal structures and fora into peacebuilding programming where women may have a comparative advantage in peacebuilding. Gendering the EMT approach to CBAGs reveals that women may be especially effective at managing and transforming CBAGs through shaping norms about the acceptability of violence outside of formal venues.
 - » Policymakers should acknowledge the influence women exercise in the home, in their social networks, or through customary practices and incorporate women’s abilities to shift community norms to facilitate peacebuilding.
 - » Those seeking to promote peace in CBAG-affected areas can provide women with the fora to collaborate on pro-peace messaging and encourage women to leverage their social influence to reduce violence.
 - » Blessings and ceremonies are important aspects of conflict dynamics in a number of CBAGs described in this report. In some contexts, the performance of violence is a means of achieving manhood or demonstrating masculinity. Policymakers can work with communities to pro-

145 The Canadian government defines gender analysis as “the variety of methods used to understand the relationships between men and women, their access to resources, their activities, and the constraints they face relative to each other. Gender analysis provides information that recognizes that gender, and its relationship with race, ethnicity, culture, class, age, disability, and/or other status, is important in understanding the different patterns of involvement, behaviour and activities that women and men have in economic, social and legal structures.” Government of Canada, “Gender Analysis,” https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/funding-financement/gender_analysis-analyse_comparative.aspx?lang=eng, accessed May 2, 2020.

mote ceremonies and rites of passage that do not depend on the exercise of violence. This may require working with community leaders to develop ceremonial achievements of adulthood and markers of social standing that do not reward violence or association with violence.

- Ensure that peacebuilding and redevelopment programs meaningfully engage with a wide range of women’s interests. Women are not a homogenous bloc—various categories of women will be affected by conflict differently and will have divergent interests and capabilities in the post-conflict period. Understanding how peacebuilding programs impact various categories of women is critical for ensuring their effectiveness and durability.
 - » Women involved in perpetrating violence as a part of a community-based armed group may be a minority of combatants, but should not be overlooked in demobilization and reintegration efforts. Recruitment into these programs, in addition to being context specific, should not demand that women produce a weapon to qualify.
 - » Peacebuilding initiatives should ensure that the interests of a broad cross-section of women are represented in formal conflict resolution programs. The implementation of UNSCR 1325 requires not only women’s involvement in programs but also the meaningful incorporation of a diverse array of women’s interests. This may require adopting more nuanced measures than merely the quota of women participants, to include the involvement of women of different religions, ethnicities, classes, and identity groups.
 - » Gender-sensitive program analyses should disaggregate the anticipated effect of programming of women of different socio-economic classes, ethnic groups, religious communities, and other relevant social groupings.
 - » Policymakers must bear in mind that a return to pre-conflict social or economic orders may not benefit women and may put specific categories of women at a disadvantage.

CONCLUSIONS

Though not always as visibly, women play important roles in community-based armed groups (CBAGs). Women affiliated with CBAGs engage in a variety of tasks, including frontline fighting, logistics and management, clandestine operations, and legitimizing the CBAG within the community. Women’s contributions to CBAGs are often made through informal, private, or otherwise difficult-to-observe channels, including personal relationships with their husbands, brothers, fathers, and suitors.

This study finds that, in contrast to some revisionist or radical armed groups, CBAGs often incorporate women into their organizations in line with pre-existing gender norms or in a manner that corresponds to customary roles for women. Not all women may be in a position to contribute to these organizations; identity characteristics beyond gender shape whether and how women can contribute to CBAGs. Overlapping and intersectional identities shape the ways in which women interact with CBAGs. Analysts and policymakers concerned with the implementation of UNSCR 1325 must grapple with the reality that not all women will be equally well-positioned to exercise influence over CBAG activity. Not all women will be equally likely to experience predatory behavior at the hands of coercive CBAGs, and not all women will be equally able to contribute to peacebuilding.

Future analysis examining women's participation in community-based armed groups and conflict dynamics should examine the degree to which women help shape norms of masculinity, the ways in which women's performance of domesticity or traditional femininity is a political act, and the relationship between women and weapons in places marked by community-based armed-group violence. Additionally, there may be lessons learned from a more detailed discussion of instances in which women's interests have not been aligned with peacebuilders' objectives.

This study also found that effectively engaging women in peacebuilding often means engaging the fora in which women exercise authority. Policymakers, more accustomed to engaging with government bodies and formal institutions, may struggle to do so. Though women may be able to leverage traditional or customary systems to advance their interests, policymakers should be cognizant of the ways in which these fora or practices can entrench marginalization along other relevant demographic lines. Furthermore, peacebuilding efforts must recognize that women affiliated with CBAGs may face a different set of challenges related to social and economic integration relative to women affiliated with other types of NSAGs.

There are no defined set of post-conflict peacebuilding activities that are best for women's interests or inclusion across different contexts. Peacebuilding and redevelopment programs must take into account a diverse set of women's experiences, perspectives, and priorities. Ultimately, peacebuilders are better served by identifying a set of gender-sensitive analytical practices that can be adapted to specific contexts than attempting to develop a one-size-fits-all approach.

Though challenging, it is imperative to incorporate women into peacebuilding programs responding to CBAG violence. Failing to engage women in peacebuilding efforts and post-conflict reconciliation programs will undermine the durability and effectiveness of these programs.

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DUTY AND DEFIANCE

Women in Community-Based
Armed Groups in West Africa

Dr. Jakana Thomas

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This desk report explores how West African community-based armed groups (CBAGs)¹ facilitate women's engagement with politics, create avenues for female expressions of anger, commitment to community values and national identity, and enable women to push for change in their communities by opening spaces for female participation. According to Agbiboa, CBAGs include security-oriented organizations such as hunter associations, vigilante groups, militias and gangs that *protect* communities from “petty crimes to insurgencies.”² Assessing the formal and informal contributions women make to armed community mobilization and hybrid security reveals opportunities for gender-specific engagement, and cautions that unidimensional considerations of where and how women intersect with conflict and security have the potential to undermine violence reduction and post-conflict peacebuilding efforts.

In some CBAGs, such as Mali's Ganda Koy, women are among the formal leadership of community security organizations. In other contexts, such as in Northern Mali's Tuareg community, women are largely absent from active security roles. Women are also found in gray areas, where it is hard to assess whether their activities are formal or informal, or active or supportive. Given the ambiguity of female roles within such organizations, it is often difficult to evaluate the significance of women's activities in and to CBAGs. Indeed, women often articulate their roles as more instrumental to security provision than organization or community leaders do. This is not to suggest that women overestimate their accomplishments; instead in communities where men are typically assigned political agency while women are agents only in the domestic sphere, communities are more apt to rely on women's contributions without giving them due credit. This dynamic persists because women's participation is often offered and accepted out of necessity. Due to the ephemeral nature of these security arrangements, communities often have little interest in allowing the immediate security circumstances to upend enduring social structures, particularly gender hierarchies. Thus, CBAGs are often willing to accept women's help in a *marriage of convenience*, as long as it does not lead to long-term changes in traditional roles. This suggests a disjuncture between organizations' and women's interests, as many women who risk their lives to further community security do so for their own emancipation and for that of their nation.

Although many women hope to gain from their participation in CBAGs, most engage in community security provision for pragmatic reasons; both women and men find it important to seek out collective security arrangements when they perceive no other options. Likewise, community-based armed groups are most likely to assent to the incorporation of women when they recognize a strategic benefit to female participation. CBAGS are most likely to recruit women when they are needed as specialized labor or to fill

1 Launched in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development Africa Bureau, the RESOLVE Network Community-Based Armed Groups research initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa aims to provide key stakeholders with contextual information on the dynamics of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) and current, prospective, and past approaches to engage, manage, and transform them. The project grapples with a complicated series of questions and decisions negotiated by stakeholders operating in conflict-affected societies across Sub-Saharan Africa.

2 Daniel Agbiboa, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.37781/cbags.19.2>.

manpower shortfalls. Women’s participation in CBAGs can be beneficial to women as well. Armed groups offer women opportunities to advance community welfare, exercise political power and transcend their proscribed domestic roles. These benefits should not be taken as given, however. Since women’s roles in CBAGs are often dictated by local gender hierarchies,³ the prospects for meaningful gender empowerment owing from women’s participation in CBAGs during conflict is uncertain and the potential for long-term change appears to be minimal. Relatedly, this report cautions that women’s participation does not always improve the prospects for peace, nor reduce the prevalence of gender-based violence and related human rights abuses. Thus, a strategy of “add women and mix” may be ill-advised. Instead, solutions that acknowledge local gender hierarchies, recognize the diversity of women’s motives and orientations toward peace and conflict, and address root causes of male and female participation in CBAGs may contribute more to successful peacebuilding efforts.

Finally, it is important to recognize that while some CBAGs fulfill vital security and political roles in their communities, they may also undermine peace and security by exacerbating and perpetrating violence, which often inordinately affects women. Moreover, a subset of the community-based armed groups that women support openly work to subjugate and actively undermine women’s interests. Thus, any benefits women gain from participation in these groups must be weighed against the potential negative externalities these groups produce. Ultimately, there exists important heterogeneity in CBAGs that should not be overlooked when crafting policy and programmatic responses; these groups are not all helpful or harmful. They should not all be accommodated nor should they all be disbanded. Further study of these groups is necessary to parse their positive attributes from their destructive potential in order to determine whether women’s participation in CBAGs constitutes a net positive.

INTRODUCTION

Women often work toward the provision of community security during war through formal and informal membership in self-defense, paramilitary and vigilante organizations. Women fought as paramilitaries in the recent conflicts in both Ukraine and Syria. Some Ukrainian women joined the 39th Women’s Maidan, Aidar, and Azov battalions and were propelled by personal circumstances, while others saw their participation in self-defense units as an expression of their nationalist ideology or duty to protect their homeland.⁴ On the other hand, women in the Syrian Kurdish forces, particularly the Kurdish Women’s Protection Units (YPJ), mobilized against ISIS to protect women’s rights and advance the organization’s leftist, egalitarian vision of society.⁵ Colombian women also made up approximately 10 percent of the forces of the repressive United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).⁶

3 See Hilary Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington DC: RESOLVE Network, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>.

4 Jessica Trisko-Darden, Alexis Henshaw, and Ora Szekely, *Insurgent Women: Female Combatants in Civil Wars* (Georgetown University Press, 2019), 19–20.

5 Trisko-Darden et al, *Insurgent Women*, 2019.

6 Andrea Méndez, “Militarized Gender Performativity: Women and Demobilization in Colombia’s FARC and AUC” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 2012).

African women have participated similarly in formal community security organizations across conflict zones, civil wars, and hyperlocal territorial disputes. Women were active in the Civil Defense Forces and, to a lesser extent, the Kamajor militia during the civil war in Sierra Leone, the pro-Gbago militias in Côte d’Ivoire and many vigilante and self-defense forces across time and space in Nigeria. This desk report, which focuses particularly on women’s relationships to community-based armed groups (CBAGs) in West Africa, uses existing narratives and depictions in the literature to better understand women’s work within these groups. This report draws heavily on evidence from Mali, Côte d’Ivoire, and Nigeria to show that women often work toward the provision of an important public good within their communities—security—often with little acknowledgement.

In this report, CBAGs are defined as non-state armed groups that are either aligned with or complementary to the state and are marked both by their local ambitions and ties to communities.⁷ According to Agbibo, CBAGs include security-oriented organizations such as hunter associations, vigilante groups, militias, and gangs that *protect* communities from “petty crimes to insurgencies.”⁸ While this report focuses mainly on CBAGs that mobilize against rebel or terrorist organizations, it also speaks to the ways in which these same groups function to fight local crime. Invariably, CBAGs emerge in contexts of pervasive insecurity, principally as a result of weak state institutions, and are particularly encouraged by insufficient, inept, malevolent, or absent state security forces.⁹

CBAGs are not always in competition with the state, however. They sometimes collaborate with the government to enhance local security.¹⁰ In Nigeria, for example, both the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and Islamic Hisba cooperate with counterinsurgency forces, as do self-defense militias in Mali.¹¹ In each of these cases, state security forces recognized that CBAGs’ embeddedness in local communities offered them a distinct advantage over forces from the “outside.” These cases present the opportunity to assess whether and how women’s participation plays a significant role in the “success” of CBAG efforts.

To date, few studies have examined women’s participation in African community-based security organizations explicitly. Although this oversight is surprising, the intense scholarly interest in women’s participation in rebellion suggests that there is a fertile research agenda to be implemented. While the explosion of research on female engagement with violent extremist organizations has been aided by advances in both theory and data, the study of gendered participation in CBAGs has been hampered by a dearth of data and a lack of theoretical inquiry. This report seeks to address at least one of these shortcomings and map a way forward for research on the gender dimensions of CBAGs.

7 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>.

8 Daniel Agbibo, *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>.

9 Agbibo, *Origins of Hybrid Governance and Armed Community Mobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 6.

10 Ibid.

11 Hisba is a structure responsible for enforcing Sharia law within Islamic communities in northern Nigeria.

This report makes three primary contributions. The initial objective of this report is to review the current state of literature on women’s participation in community security and propose a set of research questions that have yet to garner scholarly attention. Second, existing scholarly accounts of recruitment into CBAGs in four West African countries—Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Mali—are examined to generate preliminary explanations of women’s integration into community armed groups. This is not an exhaustive or geographically representative set of cases. Instead, this report focuses on several prominent cases where CBAGs have been operative to examine the formal and informal roles that women have played within these movements.

This study utilizes a process-tracing approach, which relies on the description and sequencing of events, to make inferences about the causal process by which women come to participate in CBAGs. An inductive exercise suggests a number of salient explanations that can prime the further study of gender in these groups. Future researchers may use cross-national, time-series data to examine the generalizability of the relationships proposed in this report. Third, in recognition that academic research may lag behind practice, this study proposes a set of preliminary policy recommendations, informed by the selected cases, for practitioners hoping to better understand how gender dynamics affect the behavior of West African CBAGs.

Given the lack of scholarly attention to women’s contributions toward the security of their communities, a number of questions about the scope and form of female participation in formal community-based armed groups remain. For example, we still do not know how frequently women join these organizations, the motives for their participation, or the impact their involvement has on communities. Moreover, a casual glance at contemporary CBAGs within West Africa shows that women’s involvement varies across groups and geographic regions, even within a single country. What explains such variation? Finally, how does women’s participation in CBAGs differ from or accord with their activities in dissident organizations? These questions should be examined in future research.

EXISTING LITERATURE ON WOMEN’S FORMAL PARTICIPATION IN VIOLENT POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

Existing research on women in violent political organizations (VPOs) provides a useful starting point for understanding the decisions that underlie women’s recruitment into CBAGs given the shared emphasis on the use of violence as the primary means to achieve a group’s political aims; the use of violence is likely to provide similar incentives and disincentives for the enlistment of women across types of violent political organizations. This body of literature has coalesced around two main classes of explanations for women’s formal membership in violent non-state groups: women’s recruitment is a function of supply and demand. Supply-side factors explain why women are attracted to violent politics, while demand-side explanations describe an organization’s (dis)incentives for recruiting women within their ranks. Supply-side arguments assert that women join violent organizations for personal, political, and strategic reasons.

Women become attracted to violent politics as a means to pursue revenge, redemption, and retribution;¹² to advance gender equality and other political goals;¹³ for protection;¹⁴ and because they are pulled into rebellion by pre-existing network connections.¹⁵

Interestingly, with few exceptions, women's motivations, especially those centered on practical concerns like protection and other material benefits, and those focused on political affinities and vengeance largely mirror the push factors for male combatants.¹⁶ That is, supply-side explanations describe why an individual is attracted to a particular organization, movement or cause, but cannot necessarily explain if or when they become members or the roles they adopt within those groups if they do.¹⁷ Moreover, since men and women share largely similar motivations, supply-side explanations alone are insufficient for explaining the tendency for men to participate in violence more frequently than women. Therefore, to better understand why women may not participate in political violence despite strong motivations to do so, scholars have looked to group decision-making or demand-side explanations.

Demand-side explanations, which attempt to explain when, why, and how organizations create space for female recruits, largely discuss gendered recruitment in terms of either the expected costs or benefits of women's inclusion. Violent political organizations are more amenable to women's recruitment when discord is unlikely to result from decisions to diversify. Groups with ideologies that incorporate gender egalitarian ideals, such as leftist organizations¹⁸ and those with positive gender ideologies¹⁹ will find the recruitment of women attractive and less costly. Such groups will also yield a greater number of voluntary female recruits. Similarly, organizations that are convinced of—or affirm rhetorically—women's capabilities will find female recruits more appealing.²⁰

12 Miranda Alison, "Cogs in the wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *Civil Wars* 6, no. 4 (2003): 37–54; Yoram Schweitzer, "Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers: Reality Vs. Myth" no. 84 Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 2006; Miranda Alison, *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-national Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

13 Karen Kampwirth, *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas* (Ohio University Press, 2014); Jocelyn Viterna, *Women in War: The Microprocesses of Mobilization in El Salvador* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Karla J. Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26, no. 3 (2003): 171–195; Maxine Molyneux, "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua," *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 2 (1985): 227–54.

14 Dara Kay Cohen, "Dueling Incentives: Sexual Violence in Liberia and the Politics of Human Rights Advocacy," *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 3 (2012): 445–458; Irma Specht, *Red Shoes: Experiences of Girls-Combatants in Liberia* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2006); Miranda, *Women and Political Violence*, 2009.

15 Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, "'Like Going To A Fiesta'—The Role of Female Fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no. 4 (2008): 609–634; Viterna *Women in War*, 2013; Chris Coulter, "Female Fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the Assumptions?" *Feminist Review* 88 (2008): 54–73.

16 Elisabeth Jean Wood, "The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks," *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008): 539–661; Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry, *Women, Gender, and Terrorism* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009).

17 Jakana L. Thomas and Kanisha D. Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 3 (2015): 3488–506.

18 Reed M. Wood and Jakana L. Thomas, "Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (2017): 31–46; Reed M. Wood, *Female Fighters: Why Rebel Groups Recruit Women for War* (Columbia University Press, 2019); Alexis Leanna Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups* (Taylor & Francis, 2016).

19 Thomas and Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations," 2015.

20 Jakana L. Thomas and Reed M. Wood, "The Social Origins of Female Combatants," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35, no. 3 (2018): 215–232.

Women's recruitment is also a function of a group's strategic and tactical decision-making.²¹ Organizations that face manpower shortages or other resource constraints will be more inclined to incorporate women.²² Organizations that rely on coercive recruitment will be more likely to draft any able bodies, including women's.²³ Groups that rely on stealth are also likelier to open membership to women to capitalize on gender stereotypes that women are more pacific, harmless, and innocent in an effort to exploit their targets.²⁴ Militants concerned about their images are expected to diversify their ranks as well, given the legitimacy boost expected from women's participation.²⁵ Additionally, groups may rely on female recruits to encourage men to take up violence and shame those who choose not to.²⁶ Finally, women's participation may be most likely when supply and demand factors intersect. Women are most attracted to organizations that offer women-specific benefits (e.g. gender equality, political power, skills) as well as autonomy and clear channels for female influence, while groups already providing women-specific benefits find it easier to embrace gender diversity in their ranks.²⁷

This literature provides a useful framework for understanding women's membership in violent rebellion. However, most of this work draws inferences from data on rebel and terrorist organizations.²⁸ The exclusive focus on groups engaged in contention with the state and the lack of systematic research on other non-state armed groups has led scholars to generalize these findings to all armed groups. Thomas and Bond, an exception, examine women's participation in a sample of African violent political organizations which includes community-based self-defense organizations.²⁹ However, even this study does not examine whether women's participation differs across groups organized for and against the state. This may be an important oversight, however, as women's motivations for engaging in anti-state contention may not correspond to those mobilized to maintain the status quo. For example, research argues that women who intend to maintain the status quo are often less attracted to rebel and terrorist organizations, which tend

21 Pheobe Donnelly, "The Interactive Relationship between Gender and Strategy," *Global Society* 32, no. 4 (2018): 457–476.

22 Wood, *Female Fighters*, 2019; Jason Warner and Hilary Matfess, "Exploding Stereotypes: The Unexpected Operational and Demographic Characteristics of Boko Haram's Suicide Bombers" Combating Terrorism Center, 2017.

23 Dara Kay Cohen and Amelia Hoover Green, "Sexual Violence in Liberia and the Politics of Human Rights Advocacy," *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 3 (2012): 445–458.; Thomas and Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations"; Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel*; Wood and Thomas, "Women on the Frontline"; Thomas and Wood, "The Social Origins of Female Combatants."

24 Lindsey A. O'Rourke, "What's Special About Female Suicide Terrorism?" *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009): 681–71; Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism"; Thomas and Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations"; Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel*; Wood, *Female Fighters*.

25 Elise Barth, "Peace as Disappointment: The Reintegration of Female Soldiers in Post-conflict Societies: A Comparative Study from Africa," International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, August 2002; Judith Steim "The Effect of Myths about Military Women on the Waging of War" in *Women and the Military System*, ed. Eva Isaksson (New York: St. Martin's, 1988); Devorah Manekin and Reed M. Wood, "Framing the Narrative: Female Fighters, External Audience Attitudes, and Transnational Support for Armed Rebellions," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, forthcoming, 2020.

26 Linda Grant De Pauw, *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); Alisa Stack, "Zombies versus Black Widows: Women as Propaganda in The Chechen Conflict" in *Women, Gender and Terrorism*, eds. Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Barth 2002.

27 Kampwirth, *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution*; Shelli Israelsen, "Women in Charge: The Effect of Rebel Governance and Women's Organizations on Karen Women's Political Participation," *Civil Wars* 20, no. 3 (2018): 379–407.

28 See, for example, Wood and Thomas, "Women on the Frontline"; Thomas and Wood, "The Social Origins of Female Combatants"; and Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel*.

29 Thomas and Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations."

to be subversive. Status quo-oriented women, however, may be more attracted to CBAGs that work to reinforce existing political structures and policies that sustain communities. Relatedly, although women are less likely to participate in religious rebel organizations,³⁰ religion and religious motivations may push women into CBAGs. As a result, understanding the similarities and differences between recruitment to CBAGs and subversive VPOs is consequential.

While there are likely key differences between rebel organizations and community-based armed groups, some of the motivators of women's participation are likely to be consistent across different types of armed groups, especially when considering supply-side explanations. For example, women are likely to seek protection from violence, whether that violence is used by groups armed to support or oppose the government. Revenge and retribution motivations may also explain women's desire to participate in violence against predatory rebels and states alike. On the demand-side, organizations with manpower shortages and those that generally have non-discriminatory recruitment policies are likely to draft women. Therefore, forced recruitment should explain women's participation across armed group types. Also, if CBAGs prioritize covert action, they may find the use of women to be helpful. This report examines the validity of some of these demand-side explanations for understanding patterns of female participation in CBAGs.

Focusing on the aforementioned cases in West Africa yields a number of novel insights. First, this report demonstrates that women are often motivated to participate in community-based security organizations for many of the same reasons that women join rebel organizations. Personal motivations often intersect with practical and political incentives to determine the supply of women to CBAGs. Women in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Sierra Leone joined community-based organizations to ensure their own protection as well as that of their communities. For some women, revenge and retribution were as potent a driver as politics. Second, demand-side explanations are largely consistent with those uncovered in research on violent political organizations. In particular, community-based vigilante and paramilitary groups recruit women to fill manpower shortages, to score unique tactical advantages, and when women's participation is largely compatible with community norms. Where women's involvement in security provision and politics is incompatible with a community's ideology, female participation is likely to be less formal.³¹

The subsequent sections discuss women's participation in CBAGs from both supply- and demand-perspectives and offer insights on a few of the unique ways women have gendered community-based armed organizations. Finally, this report examines implications for policy and practice at the nexus of security and development and offer recommendations.

30 Women do participate in some religious organizations, but are more likely to gain membership in secular organizations. Wood and Thomas, "Women on the Frontline."

31 Dyan Mazurana, "Women, Girls and Non-State Armed Opposition Groups," in *Women and Wars: Contested Histories, Uncertain Futures*, ed. Carol Cohn (Malden: Polity Press, 2013), 164.

EXISTING ACCOUNTS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN WEST AFRICAN CBAGS

Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali have seen significant CBAG activity in recent years. In Mali, militias like the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GAITA) and the Ganda Koy, which have operated for decades, have become increasingly important since the crisis in Northern Mali flared up in 2011.³² The rise in Mali's self-defense militias has resulted from the lack of protection and security afforded by the Malian government.³³ Similarly, Nigerian vigilantes have long been filling the gaps left by weak policing and a decline in government services, particularly in rural areas.³⁴ These militias have been raised by communities left defenseless by absent, corrupt, or politicized security forces that have "failed to protect Nigeria's territorial integrity."³⁵ Nigerian civilians have mobilized for protection against militants and counterinsurgency forces alike.³⁶ Invariably, community defense in northeast Nigeria has been shaped by a lack of trust in the state.³⁷

The Yoruba Oodua People's Congress (OPC), an ethno-nationalist group, which emerged as a pro-democracy protest movement in Nigeria in the 1990's, transitioned into militia activity as a response to the rising corruption and repression of the security forces and burgeoning crime in Yorubaland. The Islamic Hisba, an informal security structure formed in northern Nigeria in the late 1990s, began as a community-based vigilante organization but has become more institutionalized in some Nigeria states, namely Zamfara and Kano in the northwest.³⁸ The need for such an informal policing body emerged as a reaction to the perceived ineptitude of the local state authorities in enforcing moral codes as dictated by Islamic law; hisba justice has been perceived as impartial and less corrupt than that provided by the state police.³⁹ The Pan-African Congress of Young Patriots (Young Patriots) was founded in 2001 to support Côte d'Ivoire's President Laurent Gbagbo due to the weakness of his armed forces and pervasive threats to his leadership.

In the absence of strong central institutions that exert power and provide security, communities have been forced to rely on localized security solutions, which has increased the number of armed actors and

32 Helené Lackenbauer, Helené, Magdalena Tham Lindell, and Gabriella Ingerstad, "If Our Men Won't Fight, We Will: A Gendered Analysis of the Armed Conflict in Northern Mali," FOI-R, November 2015.

33 Lackenbauer et al., "If Our Men Won't Fight"; Marc-André Boisvert, "Failing at Violence: the Longer-lasting Impact of Pro-government Militias in Northern Mali Since 2012," *African Security* 8, no. 4 (2015): 272–298.

34 Georgia Holmer, "Nigeria's Double-Edged Front Line," *Foreign Policy*, December 2014; "Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram," International Crisis Group, no. 244, February 2017.

35 Mustapha Muhammad and Chris Kay, "Vigilantes Fight Battle for Nigeria Against Boko Haram," *The Leader-Post*, December 18, 2014.

36 "Watchmen of Lake Chad," International Crisis Group; Alexis Okeowo, "The Women Fighting Boko Haram," *The New Yorker*, December 22, 2015.

37 Oluwaseun Bamidele, "Civilian Joint Task Force'(CJTF)—A Community Security Option: A Comprehensive and Proactive Approach of Reducing Terrorism," *Journal for Deradicalization* 7 (2016): 124–144.

38 Fatima L. Adamu, "Gender, Hisba and the Enforcement of Morality in Northern Nigeria," *Africa* 78, no. 1 (2008): 136–152.

39 Adamu 2008; Ernest Ogbosor, "Understanding the Informal Security Sector in Nigeria," Special Report 391. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2016.

fanned the flames of conflict in Mali, Nigeria, and Côte d'Ivoire. Yet despite these negative externalities, state forces have recognized the value of civilian defense. Mali has become reliant on local militias to repel the separatist Tuareg (MNLA) and Islamist rebel groups (e.g., Ansar Dine, Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)) operating with impunity in Mali, while Borno State's CJTF has been deemed essential in the Nigerian government's counterterrorism efforts against Boko Haram. In both cases, the CBAGs were able to leverage their connections with local communities to provide superior security, which has been largely tolerated and sometimes exploited by the state. This suggests negotiated relationships with both states, according to Van Metre's typology.⁴⁰ The OPC, on the other hand, provides a variety of local governance functions, including combating crime, taking on criminalized state institutions, and resolving local disputes.⁴¹ Though noted for its challenges to and contention with the Nigerian state and local security forces, the OPC has also engaged in national politics, which has, in some ways, legitimized the state.⁴² Thus, the OPC can be considered a CBAG with both a coerced and negotiated relationship with the Nigerian state consistent with Van Metre's typology.

HOW HAVE WOMEN PARTICIPATED IN CBAGS?

When their communities were forced to mobilize for security provision, Malian, Nigerian, and Ivoirian women were present. West African women have made clear contributions to CBAGs; yet, the form and frequency of their participation has varied significantly across communities, cultures, and regions. Across West Africa, women have taken on formal and informal roles in CBAGs with the intention of both waging war and sowing peace. They have been inducted as formal members in some CBAGs, while attaining status as only supporters or associates in others. In the Malian conflict, women have most frequently participated as informants; they helped pass on information to rebels and have secured their communities by outing suspected criminals to militia members.⁴³ Women have also acted as suppliers of material goods and economic services and have supported the conflict by marrying fighters.⁴⁴ Women from across the country have participated formally as well. Women in the center of Mali were most likely to hold formal membership in militias and violent dissident movements, while Northern women were least likely to do so.⁴⁵

40 See Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*.

41 Insa Nolte, "'Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed': Yoruba Women in the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Nigeria," *Africa* 78, no. 1 (2008):84–106.

42 Nolte, "'Without Women, Nothing Can Succeed.'"

43 Zoe Gorman and Grégory Chauzal, "'Hand in Hand': A Study of Insecurity and Gender in Mali," *SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security*, 2019/6.

44 While some Malian women were forced into these relationships with combatants, others were consensual (Gorman and Chauzal 2019). Likewise, in Nigeria, betrothed women were often forced into marriage by Boko Haram, although in some cases families opted to give their daughters to be married in exchange for generous dowries. Some girls choose to marry fighters themselves for financial gain.

45 Gorman and Chauzal, "'Hand in Hand.'"

Women's participation in the Ganda Koy militia in Northern Mali, for example, was significant, even if infrequent.⁴⁶ Some women gained military training which enabled them to serve in combat, while others were among the militia's leadership, which afforded them the means to transcend their domestic roles.⁴⁷ Despite any equality of opportunity, however, women were still expected to do much of the support work for the militia, including cooking and cleaning.⁴⁸ Malian women also served in the self-defense oriented Patriotic Resistance Forces (FPR), a coalition of half a dozen militias including the Front for the Liberation of the Northern Regions (FLN), which formed in 2012 to combat the armed insurgents in the north.⁴⁹ FLN's female recruits receive military training and are expected to engage in combat against the insurgents terrorizing the north. While Tuareg women also contributed to security provision in Northern Mali, they did so in different ways. Women figured prominently in the propaganda of Tuareg rebel organizations, which suggests they may have participated as combatants in those groups.⁵⁰ They also offered logistical support to rebels, largely in the form of information gathering.⁵¹ It appears, however, they were generally less active in self-defense militias, at least as formal members.

Nigerian women have also participated in a number of community-based armed groups across multiple conflicts and time-periods. Anioma women volunteered for the Biafran civil defense militia in the late 1960's to help maintain local security during the Nigerian-Biafran War and were generally viewed as indispensable to the war effort.⁵² According to Amadiume, "women formed a strong core of the militia" but also ensured that the entire nation was fed and that the Biafran economy remained solvent.⁵³ Thus, while women held formal membership within the militia, their support work was equally vital. Nigerian women have also been active in the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) and Islamic Hisba. Women have been among the founding members and leaders of the OPC; they are believed to constitute up to 20 percent of the organization's 3 million members.⁵⁴ Though female OPC members are typically discouraged from active participation in violent vigilante activities,⁵⁵ they still play a prominent role in the organization's

46 Andrew Hernandez, "The Ganda Koy Militia: Ethnicity, Politics and Mobilisation in Northern Mali," *Identités sahéliennes en temps de crise: Histoires, enjeux et perspectives* eds. Baz Lecoq and Amy Niang, LIT Verlag Münster, 2019.

47 Lackenbauer et al., "If Our Men Won't Fight, We Will," 46; Hernandez, "The Ganda Koy Militia."

48 Starkey, "Women are Bent on Revenge Against Tuareg Rebels in Mali."

49 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Mali: The Front for the Liberation of the Northern Regions (Front de libération des régions du Nord, FLN) [also called Forces for the Liberation of the Northern Regions (Forces de libération des régions du Nord), Front for the Liberation of the North (Front de libération du Nord) and National Liberation Front (Front de libération nationale)], including activities; links to the Songhai; treatment of group members and of people of Songhai origin by the state (2014-July 2016), 5 July 2016, MLI105562. FE, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/598c71074.html>, accessed 14 April 2020.

50 Lackenbauer et al., "If Our Men Won't Fight."

51 Gorman and Chauzal, "'Hand in Hand'"; Lackenbauer et al., "If Our Men Won't Fight."

52 Ifi Amadiume, "Women's Political History," *West Africa* 1839-1838 (1988) 10; Egodi Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007); Amina Mama and Margo Okazawa-Rey, "Militarism, Conflict and Women's Activism in the Global Era: Challenges and Prospects for Women in Three West African Contexts.," *Feminist Review* 101, no. 1 (2012): 97-123; Judith Van Allen, "Aba Riots or the Igbo Women's War? Ideology, Stratification and the Invisibility of Women," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1975): 11-39. Jane Bryce, "What is the Country? Reimagining National Space in Women's Writing on the Biafran War" in *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*, eds., Toyin Falola and Ogechukwu Ezekwem, Boydell and Brewer, 2016.

53 Amadiume, "Women's Political History"; Van Allen, "Aba Riots or the Igbo Women's War?"

54 Nolte, "'Without Women, Nothin Can Succeed'"; Guichaou (2010) suggests that only around 10 percent of the organization is made up of women.

55 Nolte, "'Without Women'"; Guichaoua 2010.

security functions.⁵⁶ In hisba, women's roles have been largely confined to the enforcement of morality within Muslim communities.

In recent years, scores of Nigerian women have also joined CBAGs to combat Boko Haram's insurgency in northeast Nigeria. In 2017, more than one hundred female militia members were registered in the CJTF, though many more women are believed to maintain informal ties with the group.⁵⁷ Other estimates suggest that the CJTF may have double that number of women among its ranks.⁵⁸ Women serve in both support and active military capacities. In addition to their combat participation, women have been employed to guard camps for internally displaced persons (IDP) and have been used frequently to frisk female suspects at checkpoints. This latter role is particularly important in light of the large number of women used by Boko Haram as suicide bombers. Women have also engaged in formal intelligence gathering and worked unofficially as informants.⁵⁹ Kungiyar marhaba, a longstanding multiethnic, mixed-gender militia in Nigeria's Borno State, also counts women among its ranks. Kungiyar marhaba has for generations been charged with securing food for community consumption as well as protecting traditional political leaders and borders from outside incursions. In this group, female militia members are assigned similar duties as men, including those related to hunting and community defense.

Finally, women have participated in both the Ivoirian pro-government militias (i.e., Young Patriots)⁶⁰ and rebel organizations (i.e., the army of the New Forces (FAFN)),⁶¹ though significantly less is known about their participation in Côte d'Ivoire's CBAGs. Existing studies have been clear, however, that Ivoirian women's contributions to both conflict and security have been important.

WHEN DO WOMEN PARTICIPATE IN CBAGS?

It is evident that women were formal and informal participants in many Nigerian, Malian, and Ivoirian CBAGs, but what explains the degree and form of their involvement? Overall, variation in women's participation across CBAGs appears to have been motivated by several salient supply- and demand-side factors. On the supply side, desires for protection, retribution, gender parity, and the attempt to defend one's homeland are particularly important explanations. On the demand-side, strategic concerns as well as gender norms and participatory institutions at the community and group levels help explain women's presence and roles in CBAGs. Each of these explanations are discussed in turn.

56 Nolte, "Without Women."

57 "Watchmen of Lake Chad," International Crisis Group; Orji Sunday, "The Brave Women Fighting Boko Haram in Nigeria," *Al Jazeera*, July 10, 2019.

58 Sally Hayden, "Nigeria's self-styled Warriors: Meet the Vigilante Army Taking on the World's Deadliest Terror Group," *Vice News*, April 28, 2016; "Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency," International Crisis Group, no. 242, December 2016.

59 "Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency," International Crisis Group; Warner and Matfess 2017.

60 Ofeibea Quist-Arcton, "Ivory Coast's 'Young Patriots' Volunteer To Fight," NPR, 2011.

61 Kamina Diallo, "When Women Take Part in the Rebellion: The Ex-Fighters from Ivory Coast," 2017.

Supply-side explanations

Consistent with existing cross-national research on women's participation in violent political organizations, female militia members appear to be motivated by similar factors as their male comrades, even though they do not always do the same work or face the same barriers to participating.⁶² Few uniquely female reasons for seeking membership in CBAGs are apparent, with the pursuit of gender equity as one notable exception. For instance, a sense of responsibility for one's community or duty to one's homeland has motivated many men and women to join CBAGs. In Côte d'Ivoire, men and women joined both rebel organizations and pro-government militia organizations in a bid to defend their homeland.⁶³ One pro-Gbagbo recruit, Jo Nicole rationalized her participation in the Young Patriots militia by arguing that "Our country has been attacked by rebels and terrorists. We need to free this country. I'm not afraid. I'm going to carry a Kalashnikov and liberate my country." This outlook is consistent with the rallying cry ("let's free our country") of the Young Patriots who vowed to "die for their motherland."⁶⁴ Female (and male) rebels in the Forces Nouvelles (New Forces) have similarly invoked ideals of nationalism and claimed to be acting in defense of their country.⁶⁵ This is unsurprising given that the current running through the Ivorian crises since the 1990's has been issues of citizenship and national identity, often referred to as Ivoirité; politicians and their supporters on both sides of the conflicts have claimed to be fighting for the nation.

Malian women also joined militias out of a sense of duty. Aminata, a member of Mali's Ganda Koy militia asserted that she was compelled to join the group after witnessing the treatment of her people and the army's unwillingness to do anything about it.⁶⁶ Another recruit, Mariam, offered the following explanation for her presence in the Ganda Koy: "My family is from the north. It was my duty to join. Here, I am not a woman. I am a man. There is no woman here."⁶⁷ Her claims suggest that responsibility for one's country may be gender-blind. Another potential female recruit asserted she was "ready to go and fight" because Mali was her country and she had nowhere else to go.⁶⁸ FLN member Fatoumata Toura from Niafunke took up arms against Ansar Dine out of a duty to her country and in rejection of the oppressive customs thrust upon the areas under its control.⁶⁹ Finally, "Mrs. A," an OPC vigilante in Nigeria, suggested that participation in vigilantism is part of a women's obligation since "[a] mother is responsible for her children. If one of them goes astray, she has to punish him."⁷⁰

A desire to avenge loss and protect oneself from future violence is also a common supply-side factor motivating women to join militias. Barka Dicko joined the Ganda Koy after witnessing her niece's rape

62 Hernandez, "The Ganda Koy Militia," 169; Diallo, "When Women Take Part in the Rebellion."

63 Diallo, "When Women Take Part in the Rebellion"; Quist-Arcton, "Ivory Coast's 'Young Patriots' Volunteer To Fight."

64 Quist-Arcton, "Ivory Coast's 'Young Patriots' Volunteer To Fight."

65 Diallo questions the sincerity of these motives, proposing that combatants are merely adopting rebel discourse to justify their participation in violence.

66 Hernandez, "The Ganda Koy Militia," 169.

67 Boisvert, "Failing at Violence," 282.

68 Tamasin Ford and Bonnie Allen, "Mali Civilians Vow to Take Up Arms Against Islamist Extremists," *The Guardian*, December 4, 2012.

69 Adam Nossiter, "Saying Mali 'Is Our Country,' Militias Train to Oust Islamists," *The New York Times*, August 6, 2012.

70 Nolte, "Without Women," 98.

at the hands of the Tuareg MNLA rebels.⁷¹ Another female Ganda Koy member confessed to joining only after her brother had been killed by rebels.⁷² Among the most cited reasons for female participation in Nigeria's CJTF has been the pursuit of revenge and the search for personal protection. Lami, a female CJTF member in Borno, offered up her reason for joining the civilian defense force explaining, "We decided to join this fight to end [Boko Haram] because our relations, brothers, sisters and parents are being killed by [Boko Haram]. Peace has eluded us and we are fed up. We want to sanitize our city to what it used to be."⁷³ Another, Fatima Muhammed, joined the militia in Maiduguri to protect herself from Boko Haram's violence as she explained that "they will kill you, they will kill everyone you know."⁷⁴ Her initial decision to work against Boko Haram came after a close family member was killed by militants. Similar to Muhammed, Komi Kaje joined CJTF after both her brother and boyfriend were killed by Boko Haram in quick succession, while Aisha Bakari Gombi was motivated to join the militia by Boko Haram's attack on her village.⁷⁵ In Aleita, a village outside of Abuja, Janet Oyebade, took part in community defense for her own protection, explaining that her husband lived far away and therefore could not make sure she was safe.⁷⁶ Notably, protection and revenge are also common justifications proffered by rebel recruits. Badmus finds that many of the Ivoirian women that volunteered for rebellion did so "as a matter of kill or be killed."⁷⁷ A displaced Malian living in Bamako indicated she might join the liberation movement to hasten her return to her home in Gao.⁷⁸

Many Malian women also viewed participation in ongoing hostilities as a way to boost the country's defense and ensure their own personal security. Security is viewed as a more encompassing issue than just the severity of violence in their communities though.⁷⁹ As Mackenzie notes, "'security' always already depends on the construction and reconstruction of normal, domestic and peaceful politics."⁸⁰ As such, some Northern women noted that if the Malian government continued to fail at providing key public services it would push more women into violence, with one affirming that "[she] will personally take up arms if nothing changes."⁸¹ In Northern Mali, food security and employment were also seen as priorities.⁸² This is largely consistent with research showing that material inducements help mobilize reluctant individuals for violence.⁸³

71 Jerome Starkey, "Women are Bent on Revenge Against Tuareg Rebels in Mali," *The Times*, November 23, 2012.

72 Starkey, "Women are Bent on Revenge Against Tuareg Rebels in Mali."

73 "Civilian Vigilante Groups Increase Dangers in Northeastern Nigeria," *IRIN Africa Service*, December 12, 2013.

74 Okeowo, "The Women Fighting Boko Haram."

75 Rosie Collyer, "Aisha: Boko Haram Huntress," *Al Jazeera*, April 12, 2018.

76 "Nigeria; Women Join Vigilante Groups in Aleita."

77 Isiaka Badmus, "Explaining Women's Roles in the West African Tragic Triplet," *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2009): 823.

78 Ford and Allen, "Mali Civilians Vow to Take Up Arms Against Islamist Extremists."

79 Lackenbuger et al., "If Our Men Won't Fight"; Gorman and Chauzal, "'Hand in Hand.'"

80 Megan MacKenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-conflict Development* (NYU Press, 2015), 8.

81 Lackenbauer et al., "If Our Men Won't Fight," 56.

82 Gorman and Chauzal, "'Hand in Hand.'"

83 Stathis Kalyvas and Matthew Kocher, Matthew, "How 'Free' is Free Riding in Civil Wars? Violence, insurgency, and the Collective Action Problem," *World Politics* 59, no. 2 (2007): 177–216; Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, "Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (2008): 436–455.

Like with rebellions, a range of practical concerns have spurred women's participation in militias. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the main factors encouraging both male and female participation in the crises were "identity, material needs and security" along with social ties.⁸⁴ In the aftermath of the contested 2010 Ivorian elections, important motivators for both male and female supporters of Alassane Ouattara's presidential bid were the prospect of a career in the new government, including in the security forces, and demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) benefits.⁸⁵ Participation in violence appears to have been driven by opportunism as well; some women who joined pro-Ouattara forces had previously fought for the pro-Gbagbo self-defense groups, while others switched their loyalty from Ouattara to Gbagbo. The importance of material inducements and the fluidity of membership across violent organizations suggests it is not always possible to separate the types of women who join rebellions from those who enlist in self-defense militias.

There is also evidence that women join CBAGs to transcend their traditional roles. While this does not appear to be a primary impetus for male participation in CBAGs, it is a reason that many women have joined rebellions. For instance, many Biafran women joined militias for personal emancipation, and though their participation was accepted, they were commonly considered "stubborn girls who rebelled against the norm by doing what they were not asked to do."⁸⁶ According to Uchendu, the exceptional actions of militia women flouted traditional gendered expectations of women in Igboland and challenged ideas of what women were capable of.⁸⁷ Similarly, a female Ganda Koy member noted more recently that the militiawomen's participation showed that "a woman can do anything a man can do, while another reveled in the notion that they do in fact "do everything the men do."⁸⁸

While female participants offer the search for gender equality as a primary motivator for their recruitment,⁸⁹ it is also evident that local and group gender norms have a substantial effect on whether organizations create space and extend opportunities for women's formal participation in CBAGs. That is, CBAG norms, which are often informed by local rules and traditions, determine whether women are *able* to participate if they wanted to. For instance, Gorman and Chauzal's survey indicates that nearly three-quarters of Malian women expressed a deep interest in being included in community security provision, a much larger proportion than male respondents.⁹⁰ Yet, women participate in Mali's CBAGs far less frequently than their male counterparts, suggesting that women's lack of involvement may result from suppression rather than disinterest.

84 Diallo, "When Women Take Part in the Rebellion."

85 Ibid.

86 Egodi Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 121; It is likely that Igbo women were not prevented from participating in the infantry despite being discouraged by Biafran men since traditional Igbo culture did not bestow any institution the power to issue commands. Instead, "only within a family compound could an individual demand obedience to orders." See Van Allen, "Aba Riots or the Igbo Women's War?" 18.

87 Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War*.

88 Anne Look, "Malian Militias Train to Retake the North," *Voice of America*, October 8, 2012; Starkey, "Women are Bent on Revenge Against Tuareg Rebels in Mali."

89 In some cases a search for gender equality is on an individual basis, and about personal emancipation. In others women participate in effort to change perceptions and policies about women's capabilities and rights.

90 Gorman and Chauzal, "Hand in Hand," 20.

Women throughout Mali have practical incentives to concern themselves with the security realm given their increased vulnerability during conflict; most Malians have named young girls as the most likely to be victimized by rebel groups and jihadists, followed closely by older women.⁹¹ Malians have also noted that women are the group most prone to domestic and gender-based violence.⁹² This increased risk of victimization constitutes a pathway by which women are recruited into armed groups, as Gorman and Chauzal found that the need for physical protection was the most significant driver of women’s recruitment into Mali’s rebel organizations.⁹³ Despite these pragmatic reasons for women to join, the path to formal CBAG membership is harder for some women, namely those from Northern communities, given the immutability of women’s roles and the strength of gender hierarchies. Northern women have been most engaged, however, when their communities created inclusive participation structures to facilitate their participation.⁹⁴

Demand-side explanations

Among the most important demand-side factors determining women’s work in community-based armed groups is a community’s gender relationships, which can either facilitate or hamper women’s roles in security matters. Local gender norms have an outsized effect on the scope and structure of women’s engagement with CBAGs. In contrast to rebel organizations, which do not often shy away from subverting status quo norms and dictates, CBAGs tend to adhere more closely to the ideals and values of the localities in which they are embedded. This makes sense given CBAGs’ often-extensive ties to local political structures, which frequently mobilize, sanction, and legitimize these armed groups. Thus, malleable local gender norms allow women to participate in security matters formally, while more rigid traditions can limit women’s roles in public life, politics, and security, leading them to adopt less overtly security-oriented roles. Where local traditions already make space for women’s participation, CBAGs are more apt to recruit women. Moreover, when women are already involved in local security provision, CBAGs are also likely to employ women in security roles. On the other hand, CBAGs tend to adopt more restrictive membership requirements in societies that are more restrictive. This rarely leads to the wholesale absence of female participants, though it does suggest less formalized, and possibly less overtly violent, female participation. Importantly, local institutions and values—not state-wide norms—appear to undergird this process.

In Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone, alignment with traditional all-male or all-female initiation societies or hunter societies, for example, shape women’s participation in CBAGs given their pervasive political salience. Women are less likely to participate in CBAGs when a group’s membership is aligned strongly with all-male associations.⁹⁵ By contrast, when armed groups have drawn from or maintain strong relationships with women’s organizations, CBAGs are more permissive of female members. Women’s wings

91 Gorman and Chauzal, “‘Hand in Hand.’”

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid., 15.

94 Ibid.

95 Ama Mazama, “Ogboni Society,” in *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, eds. M. K. Asante & A. Mazama (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2009), 479.

and associations promote female participation in CBAGs and communities more broadly. For example, institutionalized women's associations (i.e., ogbo and inyemedi/mikiri) facilitated women's political roles in the Biafran community by organizing their demands and enabling collective action. These traditional associations gave women the ability to craft community legislation that affected men and women alike.⁹⁶ Similarly, women's participation in the OPC was facilitated by the organization's Women's League,⁹⁷ while the Sande and Poro initiation societies enabled women in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone to influence local politics and traditional institutions. These dynamics emphasize the intersections between traditional and CBAG politics.

In both the Nigerian Biafran militia and Odua People's Congress, gender norms were permissive of women's active contributions in security functions, while local gender norms suppressed women's formal participation in the Tuareg militias in Mali and in Hisba and some CJTF sectors in Nigeria. The significant variation in women's participation and roles across CJTF and OPC chapters shows that group recruitment patterns are not necessarily determined endogenously. For example, despite substantial female participation in CJTF overall, women were considered supporters but not formal members in some sectors despite performing essential duties for the militia, including frisking, disarming and interrogating female terror suspects. In other sectors, however, they attained full membership.⁹⁸ This appeared to be motivated by differences in community norms. Similarly, the depth of women's participation and the roles that they adopted within the OPC were circumscribed by local gender norms and hierarchies.⁹⁹ While OPC women play a prominent role in security institutions in Lagos and Ibadan, they are largely sidelined in some Ijebu and Remo communities in Nigeria's Ogun state. In the latter communities, security is viewed as the purview of men because OPC militia operations overlay with the activities of the traditional all-male Oró associations.¹⁰⁰ Given women's inability to participate in Oró activities, their involvement in vigilantism is proscribed.¹⁰¹ This can be juxtaposed with women's activities in Ibadan where tradition accords reverence to participation in war and thus encourages militancy, even among women.¹⁰²

In Biafra, Igbo women were traditionally politically active, with strong delineations between male and female roles in the community. While this demarcation often left women with less overt political power, Igbo women were not considered subordinate to men. Instead, the existence of separate roles for men and women bestowed by tradition, afforded women an "autonomous sphere of authority" that facil-

96 Women's associations were instrumental in the organization of the so-called Aba riots that the Igbo women staged against the British colonial administration in the early twentieth century. This example of women-led collective action generate significant reforms in the colonial administration, although they were primarily enjoyed by Igbo men (Van Allen 1975).

97 Nolte, "Without Women."

98 Wale Odunsi, "Women Civilian JTF Emerges in Borno, Targets Female Boko Haram members," *Daily Post*, August 24, 2013.

99 Nolte, "Without Women."

100 The Oró is a secret all-male group within the mixed-gender Ogboni secret society, which is prevalent among the Yoruba across West Africa. Ogboni, which dates back to pre-colonial times, has acts as councilor to traditional rulers, protects the community from the excesses of political leadership and upholds law and order in society. The Oró acts as Ogboni's enforcer (Mazama, "Ogboni Society," 479).

101 Nolte, "Without Women."

102 Nolte, "Without Women"; Watson (1999) offers that women held vital roles in the militarized civic society of pre-colonial Ibadan. Masculinized women directed and supported the city's war economy. Moreover, she argues that political ascendancy for both men and women was based on participation in battle.

itated their political engagement.¹⁰³ For instance, Igbo tradition considered women significant players in community conflict resolution efforts. As such, they were typically consulted as informal arbitrators and charged with promoting order in their communities.¹⁰⁴ Though traditionally, women used non-violent means of coercion, including demonstrations and strikes, singing and dancing, and ridicule to wield power and influence over their villages, the existence of a set of customs that provided for women's influence in politics enabled them to also have a deeper role in the Biafran war.¹⁰⁵ This is similar to the types of power and structures embedded in Yoruba culture, which likely explains their active roles within the OPC.

Like Igbo women, Yoruba women had a reserved seat in political institutions, even if their traditional roles were not clearly related to performing security functions.¹⁰⁶ It is important to note, however, that even though Yoruba convention provided a clear pathway for women's participation in politics, it sometimes also restricted their roles. This was especially so in places where security was more strongly associated with male power. Again, in communities where militia activity aligned with the all-male hunting societies, women's formal participation in security activities was rare. Here, parallels can also be seen with women's relationships to the traditionally all-male Kamajor militia in Sierra Leone.

Although it is accepted that women participated in the Sierra Leonean Civil Defense Forces (CDF) umbrella group to repel the Revolutionary United Front (RUF),¹⁰⁷ few women were associated with the Kamajor militia, which formed the backbone of CDF military operations.¹⁰⁸ Though a small number of women engaged with the group both formally and informally,¹⁰⁹ they participated less in this group than in other CDF militias because of the strong link between membership in the Kamajors and Mende male tradition.¹¹⁰ Traditionally, a kamajor (*kamajoi*) is an elite *male* hunter charged with protecting his community.¹¹¹ According to Hoffman, [t]he kamajoi as hunter operates in an expressly male domain. The gun in the kamajoi hunter's hand is both linguistically and symbolically phallic.¹¹² Thus, it is unsurprising that a militia that recruited among the kamajoi would not actively encourage female participation. This point is further underscored by a militiaman who asserted that "Kamajor business is for men and I have never

103 Van Allen, "Aba Riots or the Igbo Women's War?" 19.

104 Ibid.

105 Van Allen, "Aba Riots or the Igbo Women's War?"; Matfess (2020) argues informal and symbolic displays of power by women are frequently performed to influence the behavior of East African CBAGs as well.

106 Nolte, "Without Women."

107 Dyan Mazurana Khristopher Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls of Sierra Leone* (Washington, DC: Hunt Alternatives Fund, 2004).

108 Cohen suggests that only 2 percent of CDF members were women; Ned Dalby, "In Search of the Kamajors, Sierra Leone's Civilian Counter-insurgents," *International Crisis Group*, March 2017.

109 Mazurana and Carlson, *From Combat to Community*; MacKenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone*.

110 Muana, "The Kamajoi Militia."

111 According to both Hoffman and Muana, in Mende tradition a Kamajoi is most closely charged with establishing new Mende communities. Ferme and Hoffman (2004) and Muana (1997) suggest that most of the Kamajor's recruits during the war had no prior experience with hunting. Danny Hoffman, *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Duke University Press, 2011); Dalby, "In Search of the Kamajors."

112 Hoffman, *The War Machines*, 64.

seen a woman.”¹¹³ Despite this rhetoric, the militia did ultimately incorporate a small number of women into their ranks, but only after experiencing significant manpower constraints due to the ongoing war.¹¹⁴ Similar to the Biafran case, the Kamajor leadership never tacitly acknowledged their female recruits.¹¹⁵ In fact, one former cadre noted that the Kamajors prevented her from participating in the formal demobilization process due to a “taboo that they do not touch or come close to a woman,” which in her account was a “lie to fake self-praise.”¹¹⁶ She added “[a]ll of us were combatants but treated as housewives and sex slaves.”¹¹⁷ The disregard of women’s participation is a recurrent theme among CBAGs and other non-state groups and is not exclusive to formal participation in violence.

The Kamajor illustration shows that many CBAGs encourage women’s direct participation only reluctantly. Across almost every case examined, women’s participation was encouraged or tolerated only after CBAGs recognized the potential for tactical or strategic gains. In CJTF, many women joined the militia after Boko Haram shifted their strategy toward using female militants. Since it was controversial for men to search women’s bodies or their homes, female militia members were genuinely needed. Nagarajan proffers that CBAGs that have incorporated women have been more effective against insurgents because of the unique benefits female members can provide, including their ability to search and interrogate suspected female militants and the ease in which they are able to extract information from other civilian women.¹¹⁸ In many cases, women were encouraged to seek information or transport and smuggle contraband because they were less likely to be suspected of complicity with CBAGs. The Biafran militia also exploited stereotypes of female innocence to secure food rations from the Nigerian federation, which were later distributed to other militia members. In the OPC, women engaged in violent vigilante activities as a “second line of defense” only when men were unable to fulfill their duties, suggesting that women are mainly deployed for violence to fill manpower shortfalls.¹¹⁹ In other instances, OPC women are used to encourage men’s violence and help to inspire their bravery.

These examples suggest that demand-side factors drive gender diversity within CBAGs. Groups employ female recruits when strategic, tactical, or material concerns dictate they open their membership to women. However, the reluctant inclusion of women has consequences for demobilization and reintegration as well as the potential for long-term transformation of women’s roles and advancement of their interests. If CBAGs are only willing to incorporate women reluctantly, they may be less inclined to promote women’s needs. If groups fail to acknowledge female participants officially during conflicts, they may also be unlikely to encourage their enrollment in demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) programs, which often connotes tacit acknowledgment of their activities. Consequently,

113 “Sierra Leone: Presidential Spokesman Refute Claims that Kabbah’s Late Wife Transported Arms to Kamajors,” *Africa News*, October 3, 2003.

114 Pressure from the RUF rebellion also caused another Sierra Leonean militia, the Gbethis, to recruit women into their self-defense organization (Mazurana and Carlson, “From Combat to Community”).

115 Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War*. Individual Biafran soldiers did commend the achievements of women militia members, though the organization refused to publicly recognize their activities.

116 Mackenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone*, 94.

117 Ibid.

118 Chitra Nagarajan, “To Defend or Harm? Community Militias in Borno State, Nigeria, Center for Civilians in Conflict,” April 2020.

119 Nolte, “Without Women.”

exclusion from DDR programs can mean that women are not extended the same post-conflict opportunities as men, which leaves open the possibility that women will remain vulnerable to the recruitment appeals of armed actors.

Among the most universal and significant civic associations across West Africa are the all-female Sande, sometimes referred to as Bondo/Bundu, and generally all-male Poro masquerade societies that are particularly active in the Upper Guinea Coast region, which covers parts of Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Liberia.¹²⁰ These societies may offer us key insight into gendered participation in CBAGs across West Africa given their command of local political power, especially in rural areas and their influence on community gender relations. Both the male and female variants are inextricably linked to traditional political power, where initiation into one can be required for ascension to high-level political positions, such as chieftancies.¹²¹ The institution of female chieftancy, in particular, has strong links to initiation societies.¹²²

While some politically savvy women have used their participation in all-female societies to amass political power and influence, often through brokering politically expedient marriages of Sande women,¹²³ others have pursued political clout through all-male societies. In Sierra Leone's Mende communities, for example, female (and male) aspirants needed to first attain the support of the all-male initiation society to ascend to the position of chief, which often meant pursuing formal membership. Where there were strong prohibitions on female members, women could be barred from achieving this important position of power. Conversely, female chiefs were installed in places where the male initiation societies were more tolerant toward female members.¹²⁴ While Poro sometimes inducted women, the Wunde association, which held currency among Sierra Leone's Kpaa Mende, barred women's initiation entirely which disqualified women as chiefs. As Wunde lost influence over local politics however, women had greater access to local power.¹²⁵

Like other women's wings and associations tied to West African CBAGS such as the Yoruba OPC, the various initiation societies such as Poro and Sande have been built around and work to advance ideas of gender complementarity in societal and political affairs.¹²⁶ Sande and Poro organizations maintain separate authority structures and functions, with responsibilities delegated along gender lines. Despite the near-perfect gender divide, the female unit is not necessarily subordinate; on the contrary, it has been suggested that Sande is,

120 Since these societies operate across different ethnic groups and countries, the names of the groups vary from community to community with the all-female association being most often referred to as Sande/Sandogo or Bondo/Bundu, but also sometimes Poro. The all-male society is typically known as Poro, though it is also called Ragbenle; Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

121 Lynda Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone: Women Chiefs of the Last Two Centuries* (Springer, 2012); Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*.

122 Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*.

123 Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué, *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon* (University of Michigan Press, 2019).

124 Although several instances of women taking part in all-male societies are recorded, much allure, secrecy and skepticism still surrounds the discussion of women's participation in these traditional male prerogatives, not unlike other organizations.

125 Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*.

126 Rosalind Hackett, "Women in African Religions," in *Religion and Women*, ed., Avind Sharma (SUNY Press, 1994); Laura S. Grillo, *An Intimate Rebuke: Female Genital Power in Ritual and Politics in West Africa* (Duke University Press, 2018). Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*.

at times, more powerful than the male-only society.¹²⁷ While Poro enforces and instills within its initiates the traditional responsibilities of a male member of his community, Sande defines what it means to be a woman in society.¹²⁸ Both generally seek to advance traditional values but, depending on the specific community's value-set, chapters could offer flexibility with respect to gender norms, allowing women to step out of their circumscribed roles.¹²⁹ Poro's female initiates are considered gender-ambiguous and socially men, which accords them with the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of any other male Poro initiate at their rank. Thus, future research might investigate further whether there is a correlation between female membership in all-male initiation societies and women's formal participation in violence and matters of security.

The importance of these cultural institutions to communal security cannot be overstated. Among Sierra Leone's Mende, for example, Poro was the "primary arbiter of civil and political relations ... and the key institution supporting chieftancy."¹³⁰ The organization also dominated issues of public welfare and security, with the reach of Poro transcending specific chiefdoms. An injunction issued by Poro, for example, would be considered binding across chapters, while a call to war by a Poro chapter would generate inter-community alliances that would mobilize across communities, ethnic, and language groups.¹³¹ Most relevant is the fact that Poro exercises dominance over matters of war and peace and initiates are charged with serving as warriors and protectors of their communities.¹³² In fact, historically, in order to enter into the warrior society in Liberia, one first needed to be initiated into Poro, as the latter stood as a gatekeeper.¹³³

Sande also maintains an important role in West African society and commands a great deal of respect. Among the matrilineal Senufo, for example, Sande unites the various households and kinship groups of the entire village and is responsible for setting social controls.¹³⁴ Senufo women are also essential to the formation of a new male Poro society, as the ritual that governs that process requires both a man and a woman.¹³⁵ Sande also provides individual female members with a path for political attainment. Most apparently, women are able to mobilize widespread support among their Sande networks for their political pursuits. The institutional structure also delegates clear roles for women in traditional politics. For instance, among the Mende, Sande is consulted on all local matters requiring the consensus of community, with the head of a Sande chapter earning a particular pride of place. Among the Senufo, she was responsible for maintaining harmony between the human and spirit worlds.¹³⁶ Mende Sande leaders are considered to be high-priestesses and warriors and are accorded both the same respect as male warriors and the privileges of a chief.¹³⁷ This suggests an alternative pathway for women's influence in security matters outside of joining Poro directly. Women's

127 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*; Grillo, *An Intimate Rebuke*.

128 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*; Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*.

129 Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*. Also see Donnelly (2018) on how armed groups use traditional gender norms instrumentally, applying their rules selectively.

130 Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*, 38.

131 Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*.

132 Ibid.

133 Utas, Mats. 2003. *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War*. Uppsala University Dissertations in Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University (Sweden), 115.

134 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 96.

135 Ibid.

136 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*.

137 Day, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone*.

roles in Sande tend to be largely spiritual and ritual, but these roles are not unimportant for the conduct of war and peace. According to Hackett, Sande was vested with the power to “apprehend and punish transgressors” even if the offending behavior was done in secret.¹³⁸ Additionally, although women are generally prevented from attaining formal membership in Wunde, they are accorded an important role. While Wunde men are considered the warriors, women are delegated the public role of peacemaker. This is consistent with their traditional roles in many West African societies.

HOW DO WOMEN INFLUENCE CBAGS INDIRECTLY?

Despite tactical or strategic benefits that may accrue from women’s integration, a subset of CBAGs actively proscribe women’s direct participation in violence. This does not imply that women will have no impact on security-related matters or that they do not influence the execution of violence or the establishment of peace in their communities. Instead, women may influence these processes in less direct ways. Even the most gender-restrictive societies provide opportunities for women’s activism, even if informally. Matfess argues that women’s informal participation within CBAGs can be construed as an attempt to gain legitimacy by appealing to traditional gender norms, as women play important roles in upholding cultural values.¹³⁹ Thus, in groups where tradition is central to a CBAGs legitimacy and identity, women may be more likely to adopt supportive and symbolic roles. In the cases examined for this report, women have used traditional sources of influence to compel younger generations into action or constrain their use of violence. They have leveraged long-established gendered norms regarding gerontocracy and “matrifocal morality,” and traditional institutions, including civic associations and customary societies, to indirectly influence CBAG behavior.

Across West Africa, women have utilized their traditional roles as arbiters of morality to influence the conduct of conflict. Elder women in West Africa hold great weight in domestic affairs and are believed to exercise substantial power over their households. This has important consequences for security. For example, Tuareg women, especially older ones, have used their traditional roles as elders to encourage the younger generations within their families to either further the cause of war or work toward peace.¹⁴⁰ According to Poulton and ag Youssouf, Tuareg “women may not be visible at public meetings, but no decision may be taken, let alone implemented, without their consent.”¹⁴¹ This reverence allows women immense influence over both domestic and communal decision-making. Thus, it is erroneous to conclude women play a marginal role in CBAGs business when they lack formal affiliations.

138 Hackett. “Women in African Religions.”

139 Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy*.

140 Lackenbauer et al., “If Our Men Won’t Fight, We Will.”

141 Robin Edward Poulton and Ibrahim ag Youssouf, *A Peace of Timbuktu: Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking* (NY: United Nations, 1998).

In Mali, Northern women have been most active in peacebuilding activities, but have also stoked tensions between communities.¹⁴² Some women have mobilized young men to engage in both violent and nonviolent contention, when older men were reluctant.¹⁴³ Tuareg, Songhai, and Fulani women have also engaged in repeated physical altercations within the UN-sponsored Women’s Peace Huts and during peace conferences—spaces for women to unite across ethnic lines and foster peace between groups. Women have also mobilized in opposition to the various policies implemented by Islamist groups that have taken control in areas such as Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu, within the confines of their traditional roles;¹⁴⁴ in some cases they expressed their dissent through poetry and song. Malian women have also acted as focal points where allegations of sexual and gender-based violence could be reported and potentially relayed for judicial review.¹⁴⁵

In Côte d’Ivoire, women have engaged in genital cursing or acts of defiant disrobing to express anger and desperation at the violence plaguing their communities.¹⁴⁶ Grillo considers these acts of contention an appeal to *Female Genital Power (FGP)*, a spiritual power believed to be possessed by elder women in traditional African societies that can be used to issue a collective “rebuke of immoral and injudicious governance” or to check abuses of political power.¹⁴⁷ Here, authority is vested in older women in societies structured around ideas of gerontocracy, or the elders’ right to rule over younger generations. Ivorian women are believed to be endowed with “matrifocal morality,” the authority to legitimize political leadership, punish societal threats on traditional values and norms, and intercede in violent conflict.¹⁴⁸ This power has been embodied in several traditional rituals that appeal to distinctly female sources of power. Invocations of female genital power, which draws on the mysticism of (nude) female bodies, can be seen in the Egbiki ritual of the Abidji and Adiokrou, the Adajanou ritual of the Baoulé, and the Gbona Api (fokwé) ceremony among Akyé communities of Côte d’Ivoire.¹⁴⁹ In these explications of traditional power, women weaponize their nakedness as a “curse” against opponents and as an amulet that extends protection to their communities. Since older women’s nakedness is considered taboo, female participants are able to demonstrate the seriousness of the perils they face when they disrobe. These rituals have also been held to protect and boost the morale of male fighters. Notably, female genital power has also been the centerpiece of customary rituals that initiate a community’s youth into full citizenship and induct a new generation of “patriot warriors.”¹⁵⁰ Women’s centrality to the initiation of a community’s new political leadership and new cadre of protectors demonstrates their weight in traditional politics.

142 Poulton and ag Youssouf, *A Peace of Timbuktu*; Gorman and Chauzal 2019.

143 Many West African communities function as gerontocracies, including in Mali. That is, power is delegated by age. Thus, older women often have more influence and power over younger women and even younger men.

144 Lackenbauer et al., “If Our Men Won’t Fight, We Will.”

145 Gorman and Chauzal, “Hand in Hand.”

146 According to Naminata Diabate, genital cursing refers to the belief that the power in women’s bodies can cause harm to those to whom it is exposed. Insurgent nakedness and defiant disrobing refer to instances where women exploit the taboo of the nude female body as a form of political protest. See Diabate, *Naked Agency: Genital Cursing and Biopolitics in Africa* (Duke University Press, 2020).

147 Grillo, *An Intimate Rebuke*.

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid., 36.

150 Ibid.

Given the belief that female power can help end conflict, Ivoirian women performed Adajanou at the outset of the 2002 rebellion after being implored by the leader of the Young Patriots militia, Charles Blé Goudé, to resist attacks against then-President Laurent Gbagbo.¹⁵¹ After performing the “genital cursing” ceremony to stave off upheaval, rebels kidnapped and murdered the elderly female performers, which has only deepened the belief in the potency of these interventions for some Ivoirians. Ivoirian women also made appeals to female genital power in 2008 to protest living conditions and again in 2010 to register their displeasure with Gbagbo during the post-election crisis. The 2010 women’s revolt denounced the government’s attacks on their children and the rape of their women.¹⁵² Unfortunately, like women’s naked protest in 2002, this campaign ended in violence, as pro-Gbagbo forces intentionally fired upon the crowds of peaceful female protestors, killing a number of them.¹⁵³

COSTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN CBAGS

The overall effect of CBAG participation on female participants is not straightforward. While some women have experienced long- and short-term benefits of their activities with CBAGs, this is far from a universal experience. Some women have been able to realize their individual goals for liberation, yet it is not obvious that this outcome is representative or can be generalized to the broader female population. Plainly, women’s participation in CBAGs appears to have failed in producing large-scale, sweeping changes for women, writ large.

Scholars have argued that war has the potential to transform gender relations.¹⁵⁴ When women participate directly in war, they have the ability to experience roles they were never before exposed to and become aware of their own political agency. Existing literature asserts that war can alter women’s positions in society even when they do not take on active positions within violent organizations. This is because women often adopt new responsibilities in their households and are sometimes thrust into the formal labor market for the first time.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, war can create new opportunities for women. Scholars are careful to note, however, that post-war reversions to the status quo are common. For instance, at the conclusion of the Biafran conflict, there was a return to “community politics in which everyone knew... their appropriate status.”¹⁵⁶ This caused women to largely fade into the background after the war. According to Van Allen, “women will end up where they have always been: invisible except when men, for their own purposes, whether personal or political, look for female bodies.”¹⁵⁷ In this vein, the

151 Ibid; Diabate, *Naked Agency*.

152 Grillo, *An Intimate Rebuke*.

153 Diabate, *Naked Agency*.

154 Aili Mari Tripp, Isabel Casimiro, Joy Kwesiga, and Alice Mungwa, “African Women’s Movements,” in *Changing Political Landscapes* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Aili Mari Tripp, *Women and Power in Post-Conflict Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

155 T. David Mason, “Women’s Participation in Central American Revolutions: A Theoretical Perspective,” *Comparative Political Studies* 25, no. 1 (1992): 63–89.

156 Amadiume, “Women’s Political History,” 1839.

157 Van Allen, “Aba Riots or the Igbo Women’s War?” 30.

post-conflict period in Côte d'Ivoire has also been marked by a return to the status quo for women, as their participation in conflict did little to overturn gender roles and norms.¹⁵⁸

Not only has female participation often failed to yield meaningful social and political change for women at the society level, individual participants have struggled to gain acknowledgement for their activities. The discount of women's contributions appears to be a consistent theme across West and East African CBAGs.¹⁵⁹ Mazurana suggests this is because "some armed opposition groups' religious, cultural and social identities are so militarized and masculinized that the existence of females inside their ranks has to be handled in ways that do not destabilize a central component of their ideology, recruitment, organization and identity—that of the male fighter/warrior/martyr, the male who is powerful and in control."¹⁶⁰ Subsequent research should examine two related questions: First, why is women's work acknowledged in some cases, but consistently downplayed in others? Second, why does women's participation so often fail to materialize into post-conflict rewards for women when it is recognized?

There are reasons to believe that reversions to the status quo may be particularly common for women involved in community-based armed groups. Rebels, especially those with revolutionary aims, often work against the status quo and encourage women to circumvent traditional gender expectations. Conversely, CBAGs, by definition, work within existing community structures and are shaped by local or traditional norms. Thus, women's potential for transformation within CBAGs is bounded by a community's gender norms. As Lackenbauer et al., argue, women's influence within CBAGs is often episodic; when the needs that prompted their recruitment evaporate, opportunities for expanded gender roles and responsibilities are also likely to dissipate. Donnelly contends, however, that armed groups are not just shaped by local gender hierarchies but may also shape them. Thus, researchers should pay closer attention to the ways in which women's participation in CBAGs restructures a community's gender norms as well as the mechanisms by which women are able to cement gains that allow them greater participation in post-conflict politics. For example, displaced Tuareg women have noted they have already experienced significant transformations in their roles and have had to become more independent. In being dislodged from their homes, Tuareg women have been exposed to other cultures, which has encouraged them to consider ways in which their political roles might be expanded in the future.¹⁶¹ This begs the question: will Tuareg women be able to retain these gains in peace time? If so, by what means?

It is crucial to note that even if positive changes emanate from war, CBAG participation will not always constitute a net benefit for female participants or the broader community. First, women assume substantial risks by joining CBAGs. While Tuareg women in Mali risk their social standing by participating in security provision formally, other women compromise their physical security and well-being.¹⁶² Many female vigilantes have died or been injured while conducting their duties for CBAGs. In the CJTF in particular, a

158 Diallo, "When Women Take Part in Rebellion."

159 See Matfess (2020) for a discussion of women's roles in East African CBAGs.

160 Mazurana, "Women, Girls and Non-State Armed Opposition Groups," 166.

161 Lackenbauer et al., "If Our Men Won't Fight, We Will," 58.

162 Gorman and Chauzal, "Hand in Hand."

non-trivial number of female vigilantes have been killed by female suicide bombers during the course of their operations.¹⁶³ Additionally, many female providers of local security have been chided by neighbors and/or threatened by armed groups. Female OPC members have been targeted by the state, arrested, and imprisoned, in connection with the group's activities.¹⁶⁴ On at least one occasion, female OPC cadres were killed because of their affiliation with the organization.¹⁶⁵ Even women exercising peaceful resistance to violence have been subject to retribution, as seen in Côte d'Ivoire.

Additionally, some CBAGs are vehicles for women's subjugation.¹⁶⁶ Bagayoko et al. suggest that security organs affiliated with traditional political institutions do not always work to benefit women and can be regressive.¹⁶⁷ Posel argues that the South African Mapogo has emerged to re-establish men's traditional authority over women in response to pervasive calls for female empowerment,¹⁶⁸ while Hisba has actively sought to retract women's freedoms. Thus, it is unclear how adding women to a CBAG with such an agenda would yield progressive outcomes for women. Further, women in both Ganda Koy and CJTF have made clear that expanding their political roles has not necessarily transformed their everyday lives. Many militia women struggle to balance their CBAGs activities with their care responsibilities at home.¹⁶⁹ Finally, the notion that some former female combatants have tried to cast their behavior and roles within violent organizations as largely conforming to gendered expectations to avoid stigma from their communities suggests that wartime transformations can actually hurt women during times of peace.

There is also overwhelming evidence that militia activity can actually exacerbate violence in communities, which inordinately affects women. According to Strauss, the Ganda Koy has been implicated in some of the worst massacres against civilians.¹⁷⁰ In Nigeria, it is widely reported that the security forces, including the state military, CJTF, and Bakassi Boys militias have all worsened violence. Although the CJTF has done much to combat militants' violence, they have also invited reprisal attacks from the insurgents and been implicated in their own human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and the rape and abuse of women and children.¹⁷¹ Task force members have also been accused of forcing transactional sex on those detained unlawfully.¹⁷²

163 "Suicide Bomber Kills 15 in Yobe," *The Nation (Nigeria)*, July 25, 2015 Saturday; "Nigeria; 12 Killed in Suicide Attacks in Yobe, Borno," *Africa News*, February 18, 2015; "Two Killed in Boko Haram Raid on Army Chief's Village: Residents," *Agence France Presse – English*, July 22, 2015.

164 "Nigeria: Reports of Women Being Arrested in Connection with the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) (January 2000–February 2001)," Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 14 February 2001.

165 "Nigeria: The O'odua People's Congress: Fighting Violence with Violence," *Human Rights Watch* 15, no. 4, February 2003.

166 Given the dearth of data on women's participation in CBAG-type groups, this paper does not discuss prevalence of sexual violence perpetrated on women who are part of these groups. However, there is evidence of civilian women being violated by CBAGs.

167 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.

168 Deborah Posel, "Afterword: Vigilantism and the Burden of Rights: Reflections on the Paradoxes of Freedom in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Africa Studies* 63, no. 2 (2004): 231–236.

169 Hernandez, "The Ganda Koy Militia," 170; Collyer, "Aisha: Boko Haram Huntress."

170 Scott Strauss, *Making and Unmaking Nations: War, Leadership, and Genocide in Modern Africa* (Cornell University Press, 2015).

171 "2017 Trafficking in Persons," U.S. Department of State; Holmer, "Nigeria's Double-Edged Front Line."

172 Adbulkareem Haruna, "Soldiers, CJTF Make Us Give Sex for Food – Wives of Detained Boko Haram Suspects Write Buhari," *Premium Times*, March 12, 2018.

Yet, there may be some cause to be (cautiously) optimistic that CBAG women could play a role in quelling human rights violations. Nagarajan argues that militiawomen can play a direct role in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse of civilian women.¹⁷³ To wit, in 2017 over two thousand women involved with Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), a semi-official community policing organization, were trained to detect and report abuse against women and children, including sexual violence and human trafficking.¹⁷⁴ Additionally, some female CJTF members report that their presence and vigilance has led to a reduction in sexual exploitation and abuse by military officers in the IDP camps where they were stationed.¹⁷⁵ If more women within militias received such training, they could potentially prevent some atrocities, though it is unclear if it would avert more violations than are caused by the groups themselves. Additionally, if CBAGs encouraged women to use their connections and influence within communities to convince latent violent actors to turn away from violence, they could foster peace in their communities. The evidence shows, however, that women do not all have such power or more importantly, such a disposition.

The assumption that women will always play a pacific role in conflicts is perhaps too strong, as available evidence does not support this contention. Mature Tuareg women in Mali and OPC women in Nigeria, for example, have instigated violence in their communities directly. Matfess details similar roles among the Turkana women of Kenya and the Ugandan Karamojong.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, incidents among Malian women in the context of UN brokered peacebuilding events demonstrates that women sometimes carry on inter-ethnic feuds, advance grudges and actively work against peace even when there is infrastructure in place. While women within these communities have the capacity and leverage to promote peace in their communities,¹⁷⁷ it is important that their potential for aggravating violence is not overlooked. If one considers women's dual predilection for supporting both conflict and peace, it is obvious that a "add women and mix" approach to peacebuilding cannot not always yield peace. Instead, understanding women's orientations toward peace or conflict is vital for understanding their impact and requires policymakers to consider women's incentives for joining CBAGs in the first place.

In this report, revenge and retribution was found to be a common supply-side motivator of female recruits. If women are frequently motivated by vengeance, peacebuilding efforts that do not include measures to alleviate conflict-induced grievances are likely to be ineffective. For instance, one militiawoman with the Ganda Koy asserted that "even if there are negotiations, even if everybody agrees to peace, if I get my hands on one of [the rebels] I won't just slit their throat, I will chop their heads off."¹⁷⁸ Ideas of retribution are not necessarily specific to women. This concern is largely consistent with historian Gregory Mann's contention that "there was a risk that militias would pursue their own objectives and 'open the Pandora's box of conflict; a set of grudges and grievances that have been difficult to contain in the past."¹⁷⁹

173 Nagarajan, "To Defend or Harm?"

174 "Vigilantes Empower Members Against Rape," *Weekly Trust*, April 8, 2017; Jan Beek, Mirco Göpfert, Olly Owen, and Jonny Steinberg, Jonny, *Police in Africa: The Street Level View* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

175 Ene Osang, "Zainab: Female CJTF That Protects Girls, Women From Rape," *Global Sentinel*, April 22, 2019.

176 Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy*.

177 Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy*.

178 Starkey, "Women are Bent on Revenge Against Tuareg Rebels in Mali."

179 Ford and Allen, "Mali Civilians Vow to Take Up Arms Against Islamist Extremists."

Therefore, policymakers should consider integrating peace and justice mechanisms that may alleviate such concerns and facilitate the rehabilitation of society.

Additionally, as noted above, the leadership of armed groups are apt to devalue women's participation within CBAGs. There is an impulse to label women's work within security organizations as supportive or informal; some women's activities may be labeled as informal even if identical tasks are assigned to formal members. These labels diminish the importance of women's work to CBAGs, but more importantly cast doubt on whether they qualify as combatants worthy of resources, support and accolades. The policy community has embraced the term *women associated with armed groups* (WAAGS) to identify informal participants within armed groups. Yet, there are unintended consequences of such a delineation, especially for peace. In the CJTF, for example, spouses of male CJTF members are not considered members in their own right despite being deployed to the front lines. They are instead considered "wives," which carries the connotation that they engage in these actions to support their husbands. It is important to consider whether being married to a CJTF member makes women any less involved, invested in the outcome, or central to an organization's efforts? Additionally, if women's blessings are required for men to go off to battle or to sit at the peace table, do women not constitute important veto players that should be included in the resolution process?

Finally, this report shows that practitioners should not always place great stock in claims that women do not participate formally—even if from armed group leaders—given their strong impulse to overlook, belittle and render invisible, women's contributions to security.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

This report examines women's participation in community-based armed groups and finds that across West Africa, women play a number of vital roles that sustain CBAGs and influence important conflict processes. The key findings from this report are that women participate formally and informally in CBAGs for many of the same reasons they participate in rebellion and often express similar motivations as men. The report also proposes a number of fruitful avenues for scholarly research and offered a number of key policy prescriptions.

This manuscript dialogues with the "EMT" framework, which proposes strategies for responding to the emergence of CBAGs, emphasizing the *engagement, management, and transformation* of such groups.¹⁸⁰ With regard to *engagement* and *management*, stakeholders should consider whether incorporating women could blunt an armed organization's edges. Women are often seen as bridges to their communities and can help CBAGs build trust and gain legitimacy from the wider community. In this regard, their recruitment can have important consequences for a community's relationship with armed groups and

180 Moritz Schuberth, *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>.

violence, more broadly. In the short-term, women may have the ability and will to prevent atrocities against other women as well as election-related violence. Thus, promoting women may mitigate the effect of CBAG violence on community members and outside actors.

The *transformation* of CBAGs is likely to be more difficult, however, especially if recommendations propose the decommissioning of armed groups. Since many of the CBAGs examined here are rooted in local traditions with seemingly inseparable connections to preexisting cultural and political institutions, it may not be possible to retire CBAGs without severe damage to communities themselves. The West African initiation societies provide one example of the firm connection between traditional and security politics, while hunter associations provide another. While hunters have fought on the front lines of conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Nigeria, their organizations have enjoyed broader political, social, and moral standing in their societies.¹⁸¹ According to Leach they have “always done much more than just hunt;” they have informed society of “the governance of proper conduct between people, and between people and animals, plants and other forces of the ‘bush.’”¹⁸² Thus, disbanding such groups to improve security outcomes would likely deprive communities of their moral and social grounding as well as the informal mechanisms for conflict resolution that these groups promote. Such a policy would also deprive women of important sources of political legitimacy and influence. Work on hybrid-security governance in Africa suggests it is possible for states to coexist and interact with security producing non-state actors. Moreover, research finds that such arrangements can provide both safety and public services to hard-to-reach populations that have been historically neglected by the state.¹⁸³ While these efforts are likely to be most germane to rural areas on the periphery, they may also matter to centrally located communities as well.¹⁸⁴ In this context, policymakers and practitioners must consider the following in any efforts to prevent or reduce violence in areas where gender diverse CBAGs are active.

LOCAL NORMS DETERMINE PATTERNS OF WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION

The findings of this report suggest that, in contrast to rebel organizations, recruitment practices of CBAGs are often prompted and informed by local norms. This report, however, was unable to determine which specific sources of local norms were most relevant across cases. Agbiboa argues that CBAGs may be legitimized by different, sometimes competing, local institutions including traditional, communal, religious, and political bodies. Thus, a first recommendation from this report is that *policies should be crafted around specific communities, taking into account local dynamics, rather than being formulated at the country-level. Interventions should identify and target CBAGs’ local sources of political legitimacy and power.*

181 Melissa Leach, “Introduction to Special Issue: Security, Socio-ecology, and Polity: Mande Hunters, Civil Society and Nation-States in Contemporary West Africa,” *Africa Today* 50, no. 4 (2004): VII-XVI. <https://doi.org/10.1353/at.2004.0052>.

182 Leach 2004, VIII.

183 Bagayoko et al., “Hybrid Security Governance in Africa.”

184 Ibid.

NOT ALL WOMEN ARE OR CAN BE PEACEMAKERS

Women's participation in CBAGs may produce both positive and negative outcomes. Where women are working for peace both formally and informally and position themselves as protectors of their communities, they may be able to curb group violence. When women are working against peace, they have the potential to add further instability to already volatile situations. In Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali, women are revered in most communities; they carry with them legitimacy and the ability to persuade their fellow community members. Thus, they have the potential to be important veto-players that can either support or destroy the prospects for peace. Policymakers should avoid relying on essentialist notions of women's preferences and avoid assumptions that all women have incentives to work toward peace. *Practitioners should recognize that women may at different times work toward both peace and conflict with equal fervor. Practitioners should identify and elevate specific women in communities with known predilections for peace. Since women's roles, centrality, and importance to their communities vary by age cohort, policymakers should carefully consider age when formulating recommendations on how to engage with and manage CBAGs.* In gerontocratic societies such as Mali, older women have more influence than younger women, and certainly more biographical availability. In the Ganda Koy, for instance, older, financially secure women with the means to balance domestic responsibilities and outside activities were most likely to participate in CBAG activities.¹⁸⁵ This carries with it the potential for elder women to impact matters of peace and conflict in different ways than their younger counterparts. *Paying attention to the intersection of age and gender is all the more important given that efforts to quell violence are often focused on younger males.*

ADDRESSING CONFLICT-INDUCED GRIEVANCES MAY MATTER

Since so many female CBAG members appear to be motivated by the desire for retribution, it is important that mechanisms are in place to alleviate some of the individual-level grievances that promote recruitment. Without such efforts, women have the potential to undermine community security. In Sierra Leone, for example, women actively engaged in spoiling activities in an attempt to stoke violence between the RUF/AFRC and Kamajor factions by spreading false stories of the armed groups' intentions to break ceasefires and engage in sneak attacks during the demobilization stage of the Lome peace process.¹⁸⁶ Not attending to the preferences and interests of such women during the peace process could have real consequences for peace and stability.

It is also crucially important to consider and address the fact that the root causes of CBAG recruitment may be peripheral to the conflicts themselves. This often requires the state to step up social service provision, including but certainly not limited to protection. Additionally, feelings of anger, frustration, and resentment have been potent drivers of women's interest in violence. Therefore, efforts to address the grievances that prompt such feelings may go a long way in reducing the appeal of violence as well as

185 Hernandez, "The Ganda Koy Militia," 169.

186 Sulaiman Momodu, "Sierra Leone: Woman War-Monger Executed in Panguma," Africa News, January 7, 2000.

attempts at spoiling peace. Short of boosting state capacity, *policymakers should make efforts to address conflict-induced grievances by promoting and supporting relevant transitional justice mechanisms.*¹⁸⁷

CONCLUSION

Women's participation in CBAGs is complex. There is not a common pathway for women's involvement nor is there a single way in which women participate in community-based armed groups. Women interact with CBAGs through both formal and informal channels, yet the overall consequence of their engagement does not appear to rest upon this distinction; women may impact peace and security through their support roles as well as through formal membership ties. Further, women's formal participation should not be considered more efficacious automatically. While in some cases women's active roles in security organizations challenge conventions about women's capabilities and deepen female political engagement, in others, women see no long-term, broad changes in their own statuses or the standing of women in their communities after conflict. At the same time, women are able to act as agenda setters and veto-players without wielding weapons or attaining official standing within an armed group. As a consequence, future research should attempt to better understand the differential impact of women's participation and how it relates to the ways in which they interact with CBAGs .

Relatedly, the report suggests that enduring gendered social changes rarely emanate from women's participation in CBAGS. However, when one considers that several of the primary drivers of female participation are practical and personal (e.g., protection, revenge, material) and not necessarily aimed at broader social change, it raises the question of whether significant revisions to the status quo should be expected. Further, although many scholars argue that conflict can create windows of opportunity to produce sweeping changes in women's rights and freedoms, these arguments have not considered the heterogeneity in women's interests and how the type of violent groups women support influence what they are able to get out of conflict. Many West African CBAGs are associated with traditional political institutions and maintain symbiotic or cooperative relationships with the state. If armed groups are not revisionist and work to preserve the status quo, should their activities be expected to facilitate changes to existing political and social orders? Scholars should examine the circumstances under which CBAGs are able, interested and willing to be socially progressive. While the report uncovered many similarities between rebel groups and CBAGs in terms of supply and demand for women participants, these different types of armed movements are notably dissimilar when it comes to their aims and interests. These deviations are nontrivial, as they likely influence a group's orientation toward broad social change.

Finally, questions about whether CBAGs are "good" or "bad" and whether they should be supported or disbanded continuously emerge. The preliminary evidence suggests that there is no simple answer. CBAGs often have laudable aims and produce positive public goods. They also offer women important

187 Cyanne Loyle and Benjamin Appel, "Conflict Recurrence and Postconflict Justice: Addressing Motivations and Opportunities for Sustainable Peace," *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2017): 690–703.

opportunities for political engagement and can facilitate community building and cohesion. Some CBAGs also work hard to establish peace with women at the forefront. However, in their quest to “secure” their communities, some CBAGs also work extrajudicially, mete out gross abuses on civilians and exacerbate tensions with other non-state actors. Interpreting their impact requires nuance and a recognition that CBAGs, like women, are heterogenous. For instance, the Benkadi, raised by the dozos in Mali and Côte d’Ivoire, appear to maintain benevolent and productive relationships with their communities, while Burkina Faso’s Mossi dozo militia, the koglwéogo, are viewed as both defending and menacing the communities in which they operate.¹⁸⁸

Future research should focus not on how to rid states of all CBAGs entirely, but how to manage them at the conclusion of these conflicts. Moreover, since West African women have played important roles as moral arbiters and peacemakers in many conflicts, one must ask what role women could play in helping to mitigate CBAG violence. Preliminary evidence suggests their participation can constrain violent actors. However, this should only be expected when participating women have the will to constrain. Scholars should attempt to uncover when and why women make the choice to advocate for peace over violence. In this vein, peace and conflict can be viewed as instruments; when it is considered necessary to achieve a desired outcome, women are likely to promote violence. When conflict has reached its productive limits, women may pursue peace with equal fervor. Identifying when one strategy is viewed as superior to the other is crucial.

188 Margaret Ariotti and Kevin Friday, *Informal Governance as a Force Multiplier in Counterterrorism: Evidence for Burkina Faso*, JSOU Report 20-3, Joint Special Operations University, 2020.

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GENDERED SECURITY SECTOR REFORM: THE CHALLENGE OF STATE-BACKED INTERNAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA: CONSIDERATIONS FOR AMOTEKUN

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COMMUNITY BASED ARMED GROUPS SERIES

“Women’s participation in CBAGs holds important implications for the national security of conflict-affected states.”

FAST FACTS

- » That women have been active in local security can serve as a point of reference for states seeking to integrate more women into security institutions.
- » For many African states pursuing gender integration in military institutions, public support has remained elusive.
- » Key inhibitors of women’s integration into armed forces are concerns about potential consequences for national security when militaries become gender diverse.
- » While concerns that women will be abused, harassed and mistreated within military institutions are valid, greater scrutiny should be placed on those who engage in bad behavior.

CONTEXT

West African women are frequently absent from discussions of community security, despite their substantial contributions to local defense. Women are often viewed primarily as beneficiaries of attempts to reduce local violence, such that their roles in community-based security are typically overlooked. Yet, West African women have long been on the front lines providing protection for their communities from internal and external threats. In 18th Century Whydah, now part of modern-day Benin, contingents of royal wives were tasked with interrupting conflicts between communities and enforcing the kingdom’s laws.¹ Dahomean women also served as royal palace guards and, more infamously, as feared warriors on the battlefield. A century later, Biafran women

¹ Stanley Alpern, *Amazons of Black Sparta: The Women Warriors of Dahomey* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

participated in community-based militias to protect their communities during the Republic's war with Nigeria. These trends are not anachronistic. Women have attained formal membership in many modern African community-based armed groups (CBAGs), including Nigeria's Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), Oodua People's Congress and Hisba militias, Sierra Leone's Civilian Defense Forces, as well as the Malian Ganda Koy and Patriotic Resistance Forces (FPR) coalition. CBAGs, which include security organizations as varied as hunter associations, vigilante groups, militias and gangs, engage in the important work of protecting their communities from everything from "petty crimes to insurgencies."²

Though these forces are often portrayed as necessary vessels to defend vulnerable women and children, scarce attention is given to the women that join these organizations to protect their communities and themselves. Yet women's participation in CBAGs holds important implications for the national security of conflict-affected states. Understanding women's participation in community-based armed groups matters for successful demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration programs and for states' implementation of the global Women, Peace, and Security agenda, particularly gendered security sector reform. That women have been active—and in some cases instrumental— in establishing and maintaining local security can serve as a point of reference for states seeking to integrate more women into security institutions. States can use the gender dynamics of CBAGs as models to better understand the benefits and consequences of creating more gender-inclusive military institutions. Moreover, since CBAG politics are often governed by local norms and practices, understanding how women have become integrated into these local security structures can suggest means of achieving gendered security sector reform that are consistent with and respectful of local customs. This policy note briefly outlines and expounds upon some of the main insights of my recent study on women's participation in West African CBAGs.³ It proposes a set of considerations for states and stakeholders to structure efforts around gendered security sector reform.

RELEVANCE TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

Women's increased involvement and integration into the security sector is an important way to improve women's security and well-being. In a recent digest, USAID proffered that "the security sector must include women and girls in decision-making roles in security institutions to ensure their services benefit women and girls as much as they benefit men and boys."⁴ Integrating women into security forces has been shown to decrease violence against civilians—especially women—support peacebuilding efforts, and shore-up civil-military relations.⁵ Therefore, a bedrock of successful security sector reform has been the integration of women into vital security institutions.

2 Daniel Agbibo, *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>.

3 Jakana Thomas, *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community Based Armed Groups in West Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>.

4 Chemonics International Inc., *Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit* (Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development, 2021), <https://www.usaid.gov/democracy/documents/gender-and-security-sector-reform-toolkit>.

5 See, for example: Nina Wilén and Lindy Heinecken, "Regendering the South African Army: Inclusion, Reversal and Displacement," *Gender Work Organization* 25, no. 6 (2018): 670-686, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12257>; Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

African states have been at the forefront of embracing the global Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and the attendant calls for gendered security sector reform. At the end of 2019, 50 percent of the states in the African Union had already integrated parts of the WPS agenda into national action plans. Implementation of such plans has continued to prove challenging, however.⁶ Nigeria, for example, has attempted to make good on its commitments to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 by integrating parts of the agenda into its domestic law.⁷ Despite progress, including the creation of its first Army Women's Corps in 2018, improvements have been inconsistent across its security sector with substantial heterogeneity across Nigerian states.⁸ To wit, fewer than half (14) of Nigeria's 36 states have implemented the country's National Action Plan (NAP) into domestic law.⁹ Benue State, for instance, has recently adopted a WPS Action Plan but still has far to go in getting "public buy-in on the importance of engaging women in decision-making" in the security sector.¹⁰

For many African states pursuing gender integration in military institutions, public support has remained elusive, in part due to persistent stereotypes alleging that women do not belong or will not thrive in the security realm.¹¹ Bineta Diop, Senegal's Special Envoy to the African Union (AU) Commission on Women, Peace, and Security, has asserted that implementation is being stymied by "the patriarchal attitudes on the continent and the strong discrimination against women in the security world."¹² Ultimately, these beliefs lead critics to conclude that security work is not appropriate for women, resulting in resistance to change when gendered security sector reform is attempted.¹³

In South Africa, for example, even after the integration of a substantial number of female members in the armed forces, women are still confronted with the charge that they are not well-suited for security work. Despite a constitutional mandate and gender mainstreaming policy—which has helped propel female participation in the military to about 31 percent of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), including 33 percent in leadership positions—sexual harassment, denigration, and an overall lack of consideration of their specific needs are still regular experiences for women in South Africa's military institutions. In an interview with a female Lieutenant, Adrian Van Breda revealed that "the men feel

6 Brigitte Hugh and Deekshita Ramanarayanan, "Africa in Transition: The Role of Women in Peace and Security," *Wilson Center*, October 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/africa-transition-the-role-women-peace-and-security>.

7 "Placing gender at the center of security sector reforms in Nigeria," UN Women: Africa, April 30, 2021, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/04/news---placing-gender-at-the-center-of-security-sector-reforms-in-nigeria>.

8 Ibid.

9 Idris Ibrahim, "Nigeria Launches National Action Plan on Women, Peace, Security," *Premium Times*, May 10, 2017, <https://www.peace-women.org/resource/nigeria-launches-national-action-plan-women-peace-security>; "Women, Peace and Security Agenda Takes Centre Stage in Benue State, Nigeria," UN Women: Africa, July 1, 2021. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/07/benue-state-sap-launch>.

10 Ibid.

11 Salem Solomon, "African Women Surmount Obstacles to Redefine Their Countries' Militaries," *Voice of America*, February 24, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/a/african-women-surmount-obstacles-to-redefine-their-countries-militaries/4802120.html>; Wilén and Heinecken, "Regendering the South African Army."

12 "APSACO 2021: Women, Peace and security in Africa Press Release," African Peace and Security Annual Conference, June 22, 2021, <https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/SummaryAPSACO2021day1.pdf>.

13 Fiona Pearce, "Why are So Few Women Deployed in UN Peacekeeping?," *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, May 29, 2020, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/why-are-so-few-women-deployed-in-un-peacekeeping/>; Karim and Beardsley, *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping*.

as though women are inferior: only there to cook, clean and even expect sexual favours.” A female Sergeant in South Africa’s Air Force articulated that “most of [sic] women are harassed by senior ranks and don’t want to come forward about it, because they’re scared of their future.”¹⁴ Even in leadership roles, women soldiers struggle to make male subordinates respect their authority. Men have also expressed incredulity about their female colleagues’ emotional and physical capabilities, despite women persisting in the forces for decades and men facing similar challenges.¹⁵

Policymakers around the world have voiced concerns that their state’s national security will be placed at risk when women are unprepared for security challenges they are likely to face on battlefields.¹⁶ They question whether adding women will imperil unit cohesion or distract their male comrades to disastrous effects¹⁷ and agonize about the prospect that female soldiers will be abused in the field.¹⁸ They also wonder whether their citizens are ready to embrace women in these untraditional roles.¹⁹ Some have suggested gender integration wait until gender norms and civilian attitudes become more receptive.²⁰ These attitudes, as with all cultural and gender norms, are difficult to change and remediate, however. Without buy-in—or demands for greater inclusion of women—from the public, states have incentives to slow-walk the reform process.²¹ Yet, one way to generate greater acceptance of women’s roles in security would be to demonstrate they would do well in security environments. An even better way to engender public support would be to show that women have already thrived in military institutions. Every day, women take on important security roles across the world, including in African states. This work continues to go unnoticed or ignored.²²

Women make up significant proportions of the UN peacekeeping forces contributed by African states, including Ghana and Ethiopia.²³ Women have also gained recognition for their often-extensive roles in

14 Adrian Van Breda, “Women Claiming Space in the Military: The Experiences of Female South African Soldiers,” *Journal of Human Ecology* 53, no. 1 (2016): 25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09709274.2016.11906952>.

15 For instance, motherhood is often invoked as a barrier to women’s participation in the military, while fatherhood is not. Similarly, male soldiers frequently highlight women’s fear in the field to disparage female participation, even in instances where male colleagues are also fearful and emotional. Wilén and Heinecken, “Regendering the South African Army.”

16 Lindy Heinecken, “Conceptualizing the Tensions Evoked by Gender Integration in the Military: The South African Case,” *Armed Forces & Society* 43, no. 4 (2016): 202-220, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0095327X16670692>.

17 Anna Simons, “Here’s Why Women in Combat Units is a Bad Idea,” *War on the Rocks*, November 18, 2014, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/11/heres-why-women-in-combat-units-is-a-bad-idea/>; “Women in Combat Pros and Cons,” *Sisters in Arms*, n.d., <https://sistersinarms.ca/history/women-in-combat-pros-and-cons/>; Leeanne K. Simpson, “Eight myths about women on the military frontline – and why we shouldn’t believe them,” *The Conversation*, April 1, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/eight-myths-about-women-on-the-military-frontline-and-why-we-shouldnt-believe-them-55594>.

18 Wilén and Heinecken, “Regendering the South African Army.”

19 Yomi Kazeem, “Nigeria’s army has considered not admitting female combatants for training,” *Quartz Africa*, November 14, 2017, <https://qz.com/africa/1128815/nigeria-will-block-female-combat-soldiers-as-eritrea-ethiopia-algeria-boost-theirs/>.

20 “APSACO 2021: Women, Peace and security in Africa Press Release,” African Peace and Security Annual Conference.

21 “Deployment of Female Personnel Boosts Effectiveness, Says Secretary-General, as Security Council Holds Open Debate on Women in Peacekeeping,” *United Nations*, April 11, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13773.doc.htm>.

22 Thomas discusses several cases where significant numbers of West African women participated in CBAGs, yet women’s participation was eventually erased or downplayed. Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

23 Pearce, “Why Are So Few Women Deployed.”

non-state armed groups by both policymakers and academics.²⁴ They have participated as supporters and combatants in rebel organizations and have long made contributions to community-based security organizations.²⁵ Within these armed groups, women have worked alongside men, making important contributions to vital conflict processes. In states with hybrid-security arrangements, where local defense is provided by local security actors, women's participation amounts to a proof of concept. Women's contributions are already essential for the provision of security in these highly insecure environments. Thus, arguments suggesting the implausibility of gendered security sector reform at the national-level have less merit.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The following section provides insights and considerations for policymakers and practitioners when devising integrated efforts for gendered security sector reform.

Leverage women's unique contributions

Key inhibitors of women's integration into armed forces are concerns about potential consequences for national security when militaries become gender diverse. These reservations often reflect worst-case scenarios about what may go wrong when national security is vested in women's hands. While these concerns are foreboding, the lessons from CBAGs demonstrate the potential benefits for security organizations that effectively embrace gender diversity.²⁶

There have been improvements in multiple domains when women were integrated into CBAGs. Women's participation in risky counterterrorism efforts has enhanced national security. Their integration into militias has led to decreased violence against civilians in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and disruptions to terrorist activities.²⁷ In Nigeria, militia women have been used to search and interrogate female suspects, which has preempted attacks by Boko Haram's would-be female suicide bombers. Nigerian female militia members have also leveraged their interpersonal connections to extract and share pertinent security information with militia and military members, which stymies violence by male militants as well.²⁸

24 Ibid.

25 Jakana L. Thomas and Kanisha D. Bond, "Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 3 (2015): 3488–506, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000313>; Reed M. Wood and Jakana L. Thomas, "Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (2017): 31–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022343316675025>; Alexis Leanna Henshaw, *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups* (London: Routledge, 2016); "U.S. Strategy to Support Women and Girls at Risk from Violent Extremism and Conflict," U.S. Department of State, Office of Global Women's Issues, February 13, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-strategy-to-support-women-and-girls-at-risk-from-violent-extremism-and-conflict/>.

26 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

27 Chitra Nagarajan, *To Defend or Harm? Community Militias in Borno State, Nigeria* (Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2020), https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CommunityMilitiasFINAL_June2020lowres.pdf; Ene Osang, "Zainab: Female CJTF That Protects Girls, Women From Rape," *Global Sentinel*, April 22, 2019.

28 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

These are countering violent extremism (CVE) successes that can be attributed directly to women’s formal involvement in CBAGs. They are also benefits that directly scale up from the community to the national level. Some of the dangerous missions and assignments female CBAG members have been tasked with are on par with the types of duties members of national armed forces and international peacekeeping missions may face in conflict zones. As Fiona Pearce, gender advisor at the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, put it: “Women are as capable as men to perform military roles, and diversity in any organization makes that organization better.”²⁹

Women have also used their informal connections with other women to deter young men’s recruitment to Boko Haram and dissuade community members from supporting these violent actors.³⁰ The unique positioning of Nigeria’s Igbo women and Mali’s Tuareg women in their communities, informed by local gender norms, has enabled them to influence the uptake of violence or peace in their local areas.³¹ Women in security forces are also sometimes able to serve as bridges to the civilian population, which can improve civil-military relationships.³² Female peacekeepers in states as varied as Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kosovo, and Afghanistan have in some instances been able to play a vital role where—unlike their male counterparts— they have been able to gain “access to 100 percent of the population, not 50 percent.”³³ Likewise, the UN Female Engagement Teams and U.S. Special Operations Cultural Support Teams (CSTs), have also been able to engage with parts of the population (e.g., women, children) that might be inaccessible to male soldiers.³⁴ Improved relationships with the local population are essential for information gathering, trust-building, dispersal of conflict, and the implementation of early warning systems, all important ingredients for successful peacekeeping.³⁵ In addition to increasing access to hard-to-reach populations, studies have also shown that women are able to form greater interpersonal connections with other women and are viewed as more trustworthy than men in similar positions.³⁶ These attributes can facilitate high-level peace negotiations, local peacebuilding efforts, and operational or tactical counterinsurgency missions.

29 Pearce, “Why Are So Few Women Deployed.”

30 Orji Sunday, “Hajiya Hamsatu Allamin is One of the Most Powerful Conflict Mediators with Boko Haram, So Why Won’t Anyone Listen?” *The Establishment*, September 13, 2018, <https://medium.com/the-establishment/hajiya-hamsatu-allamin-is-one-of-the-most-powerful-conflict-mediators-with-boko-haram-so-why-wont-2a4927a39f26>; Orji Sunday, “The Brave Women Fighting Boko Haram in Nigeria,” *Al Jazeera*, July 10, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/7/10/the-brave-women-fighting-boko-haram-in-nigeria>.

31 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*; Hilary Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington DC: RESOLVE Network, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>.

32 Wilén and Heinecken, “Regendering the South African Army.”

33 Alexandra Ivanovic, “Why the United Nations Needs More Female Peacekeepers,” *United Nations University*, July 9, 2014, <https://unu.edu/publications/articles/why-un-needs-more-female-peacekeepers.html>.

34 Terri Moon Cronk, “Cultural Support Team Women Serve with Distinction,” *U.S. Army*, April 30, 2015, https://www.army.mil/article/147493/cultural_support_team_women_serve_with_distinction; Ivanovic, “Why the United Nations Needs More Female Peacekeepers.”

35 Ibid.

36 Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, *Women Don’t Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Tamra Pearson d’Estree and Eileen F. Babbitt, “Women and the Art of Peacemaking: Data from Israeli-Palestinian Interactive Problem-Solving Workshops,” *Political Psychology* 19, no. 1 (1998): 185–209, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3792121>.

Women also provide stability for peace processes and stop abhorrent behavior by armed actors, including state and local forces.³⁷ The reduction of civilian victimization when women are integrated into military forces has been noted with respect to UN peacekeeping forces by both practitioners and academics.³⁸ Reporting of sexual and gender-based incidents also increases when women are more prevalent among peacekeeping contingents.³⁹ Similarly, in Nigeria, Female CJTF members have reported that their presence and vigilance has led to a reduction in sexual exploitation and abuse by military officers in IDP camps.⁴⁰ Thousands more women in the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) have been trained to detect and report abuse against women and children, such as sexual violence and trafficking.⁴¹ Recognizing these potential benefits of women's inclusion, military forces should concentrate their attention on providing support, training, incentives, and encouragement for female soldiers to protect other women. It is vital, however, to be cautious about overstating the responsibility for—and ability of—women to prevent abuses against civilians. Men in the military, armed groups, and the general population must also be held accountable for their actions.⁴² Efforts that change attitudes and set consequences for bad behavior must be a part of the process of security sector reform.⁴³

Even in states reluctant to allow women to participate in overt combat or in roles considered “men's work,” women's unique positions can be leveraged by engagement teams. Further, states should not allow arguments about women's fitness to hold them back from allowing women to be integrated in the military. In instances where women have participated in conflicts willingly, they have demonstrated their ability to operate efficiently and effectively under pressure.⁴⁴ Most important, however, is that in conflict zones, women's lives are already at great risk regardless of their overt participation in conflict. Thus, restricting female participation in the military over fears women will be harmed in conflict⁴⁵ overlooks the everyday dangers women endure and manage in conflict-affected states, while simultaneously preventing them from being a part of the solution.⁴⁶

37 Solomon, “African Women Surmount Obstacles to Redefine Their Countries' Militaries.”

38 Karim and Beardsley, Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping; “Deployment of Female Personnel Boosts Effectiveness,” *United Nations*.

39 “Deployment of Female Personnel Boosts Effectiveness,” *United Nations*.

40 Osang, “Zainab: Female CJTF That Protects Girls.”

41 Hussein Yahaya, “Vigilantes Empower Members Against Rape,” *Daily Trust*, April 3, 2017, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201704030209.html>.

42 For example, see: Christopher Isike, “Change What South African Men Think of Women to Combat their Violent Behaviour,” *The Conversation*, October 4, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/change-what-south-african-men-think-of-women-to-combat-their-violent-behaviour-167921>.

43 Ernest Hersh, “Security reform key to protecting women,” *Africa Renewal*, 2012, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/special-edition-women-2012/security-reform-key-protecting-women>.

44 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

45 Heineken, “Conceptualizing the Tensions Evoked by Gender Integration in the Military.”

46 Women often join violent political organizations to protect themselves and other women within their communities from sexual and gender-based violence. Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

Recognize women’s contributions to replicate lessons learned

Despite women’s substantial contributions to the initiation, maintenance, and termination of conflicts, their participation has been frequently ignored, overlooked, and diminished.⁴⁷ Governments, local political figures, and armed groups have denied women’s involvement and centrality to local security activities. For instance, even though the Kamajor militia drafted female recruits at a crucial point during the civil war in Sierra Leone, they not only denied that women were ever among their ranks but also prohibited female members from taking part in the demobilization process.⁴⁸ Tuareg and Biafran women’s contributions to security provision were similarly downplayed, even though in both cases their involvement was vital for the execution and sustenance of their communities’ war efforts.⁴⁹

Failing to recognize women’s contributions to security not only renders the work women have done invisible, it also makes it difficult to replicate any success attributed to women’s participation. If women make specific, meaningful contributions to security at the community and national levels, but those contributions are overlooked or denied, they cannot be leveraged in the future. By downplaying women’s historical activities, especially as it relates to counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and peacebuilding, practitioners who hope to learn lessons that can be transposed onto other contexts will miss key ingredients responsible for success. Moreover, if women do not receive recognition contemporaneously for their contributions, they are unlikely to be credited later, which could convince well-meaning actors there is little merit to investing in women’s integration into CBAGs or military institutions. On the other hand, by acknowledging what women do on the frontlines and behind the scenes, political actors may have a greater impetus to prioritize women’s inclusion in the future. Also, seeing women thrive in these positions may empower other women to pursue new opportunities in security, which may help boost female recruitment in cases where too few eligible women seek out these roles.⁵⁰

47 Ibid.

48 Megan MacKenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-conflict Development* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 8.

49 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*; Egodi Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 121; Zoe Gorman and Grégory Chauzal, “‘Hand in Hand’: A Study of Insecurity and Gender in Mali,” *SIPRI*, 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2019/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/hand-hand-study-insecurity-and-gender-mali>. Although it is alleged that Tuareg women have little involvement with conflict, they do offer support to the fighters and have unique power to sanction conflict in their homes or communities.

50 Women are more likely to seek out combat roles in militaries when they observe other women joining as well. See, for example: Douglas Yeung, Christina E. Steiner, Chaitra M. Hardison, Lawrence M. Hanser, and Kristy N. Kamarck, “Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women in the Military Views from the Field,” *RAND*, 2017. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1500/RR1538/RAND_RR1538.pdf; Jena McGregor, “Getting More Women into Army Leadership,” *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2014/06/03/getting-more-women-into-army-leadership/>; “Military Women Discuss Taboos and Stigmas They Face in UN Peace Operations,” *International Peace Institute*, October 20, 2020, <https://www.ipinst.org/2020/10/woman-first-soldier-second-taboos-and-stigmas-facing-military-women-in-un-peace-operations#2>.

Include women in DDR programs

Gendered demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) is an essential pillar of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. UNSC 1325 implores all stakeholders to consider gendered perspectives, including female ex-combatants' unique needs, when designing and implementing DDR programs in conflict-zones. This provision recognizes that peace and stability cannot be achieved, if women are systematically excluded from the benefits of DDR. To this end, it is important to consider the range of violent actors that need to be demobilized and reintegrated after a conflict. While rebel women's exclusion from DDR programs has garnered significant attention recently, DDR programs' omission of women from pro-government, self-defense, and civil defense forces has evaded the spotlight. Yet, concerns about gender equity in DDR are also likely to exist among militias and have similarly dire consequences if left ignored.

A sizeable challenge of demobilizing women within rebel groups has been gleaning which women constitute legitimate combatants and which are attempting to gain benefits they are not entitled to. While gaining access to DDR programs is problematic for some male combatants as well, women—as a group—are often excluded from participating in DDR programs, while this is never the case for men. In other words, while DDR equity is a problem for both men and women, these programs are often biased against women as a group, while only unfair to some specific men. Those overseeing DDR programs are hesitant to assume that “all women or girl ex-combatants should be considered soldiers; a hesitation that does not exist with respect to male ex-combatants, even though some men and boys also fill support rather than combat roles.”⁵¹ Armed groups and DDR programs often adopt terms that distinguish women's participation (i.e., women associated with armed forces/groups, war wives) from men's, even when women take on active and risky roles in conflicts.⁵²

The 22,000 women that signed up for Liberia's demobilization process were registered as “women associated with the fighting forces” (WAFF), despite more than two-thirds of these women self-identifying as combat soldiers.⁵³ A similar distinction was not made of male soldiers. Moreover, although the program was supported by a peace process with a clear gender perspective and a mandate to take the needs of women seriously, women were incorporated into the program at a far lesser rate than their actual participation in the conflict.⁵⁴ Amnesty International suggests this discrepancy may have resulted from the program being led by a group of men who believed women should not be involved in the DDR process, poor information disseminated specifically to women, commanders' gender discrimination, and the stigma of

51 Kathleen Jennings, “The Political Economy of DDR in Liberia: A Gendered Critique,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 9, no. 4 (2009): 475-494, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800903345770>; See also: Chris Coulter, Mariam Persson, and Mats Utas, *Young Female Fighters in African Wars: Conflict and Its Consequences* (Stockholm: Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2008), <http://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:241304/FULLTEXT01>.

52 Amnesty International, *Liberia: A flawed process discriminates against women and girls*, March 31, 2008, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/afr340042008eng.pdf>.

53 Jennings, “The Political Economy of DDR in Liberia,” 482.

54 Amnesty International, *Liberia: A flawed process*.

being branded a WAFF.⁵⁵ Women's activities were similarly vital to the Mozambican, Sierra Leonean, and Indonesian civil conflicts, but women were largely overlooked as candidates for demobilization in these conflicts, even where compensation was afforded to civilian women.⁵⁶

Determining whether women qualify for DDR programs is likely to be similarly difficult when it pertains to community-based armed groups. This is because CBAGs, particularly those raised by conservative communities, often downplay women's contributions, even when significant and indispensable. These militias tend to recruit women reluctantly and only when their needs are great, which makes them less keen to admit how central or important women were to their efforts. Some groups go so far as to deny that any women ever participated, even when clear evidence confirms the contrary.⁵⁷ In more traditional or conservative communities, arguments about women's place in security drives this sleight-of-hand. But these denials do more than undercut women's achievements; they also make it difficult to justify including women in DDR processes, which creates incentives for women to seek alternative means of recouping the material benefits they lose out on when they are excluded from DDR.

In the past, DDR programs have promoted the idea that reintegrating male combatants into society is a more important goal, since only idle men are believed to threaten stability.⁵⁸ However, research on civil conflict makes clear that most individuals join armed groups to gain and maintain material benefits, and the importance of these selective incentives as a recruitment tool appears to be consistent across genders.⁵⁹ In Cote d'Ivoire, for example, some women and men that initially joined pro-government militias switched to the rebel side when the expected costs and benefits of supporting a given side changed. Likewise, male and female former rebels joined militias when pro-government activism appeared more beneficial.⁶⁰ This supports arguments that conflict actors can be swayed by pecuniary incentives during conflicts. Thus, if only men are enticed away from violence by promises of the rewards they will receive during demobilization, women have few incentives to turn away from violence and return to society. Moreover, women in armed groups often face higher barriers in assimilating back into society after conflicts, given societal attitudes about women's involvement in violence.⁶¹ Thus, it may be easier for women to return to violence than to their communities when they lack the tools and support that DDR programs can offer.

55 Ibid.

56 Wenche Iren Hauge, "Gender Dimensions of DDR – Beyond Victimization and Dehumanization: Tracking the Thematic," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22, no. 2 (2019): 206–226, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2019.1673669>.

57 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

58 Jennings discusses that in Liberia providing for male employment and re-entry into the workforce is more important than women's, as only unemployed men would pose a threat to peace. With women, they are only concerned about prostitution. Jennings, "The Political Economy of DDR in Liberia."

59 Thomas, *Duty and Defiance*.

60 Ibid.

61 Alexis Leanna Henshaw, "Female Combatants in Postconflict Processes: Understanding the Roots of Exclusion." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 5, no. 1 (2020): 63–79, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz050>.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, from a practical standpoint, to achieve long-term peace and stability, robust DDR programs must acknowledge and accommodate the full range of conflict actors. Three practical recommendations follow.

- » DDR programs should have specific provisions for militias, groups that are often left out of DDR and related peace processes, despite strong incentives and ability to continue fighting.⁶² This is consequential, since research shows that when militias act as counterinsurgents, conflicts are significantly more likely to recur.⁶³
- » Policymakers and practitioners that oversee the implementation of DDR programs should be skeptical of pronouncements like those in Mali, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria that women writ large are absent from a war effort. Program officers should recognize the broad array of contributions that women make to armed groups, including those in militias, and should avoid minimizing or trivializing the types of participation women more frequently engage in. To ensure that more women have access to DDR benefits, practitioners, funders, and stakeholders should avoid making distinctions between women fighters and women supporters, ensure that DDR applications of male and female recruits are similarly scrutinized, and understand how male commanders' biases uniquely disenfranchise women applicants to DDR programs.⁶⁴
- » Policymakers should not prioritize men's participation in DDR over women's based solely on assumptions that men's buy-in is more essential to peace and stability. Both men and women's participation contribute to war, so both men and women should be offered the same incentives to make the transition to peace attractive and feasible.

CONCLUSION

The many examples provided in this report indicate that even when female fighters have been integral to armed groups' success, they have been excluded disproportionately from post-conflict benefits, includ-

62 Christoph Steinert, Janina I. Steinert, and Sabine C. Carey, "Spoilers of peace: Pro-government militias as risk factors for conflict recurrence," *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 2 (2019): 249–263, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022343318800524>.

63 Steinert, Steinert, and Carey, "Spoilers of peace."

64 As in the case of Liberia, women are often left out of DDR processes when commanders provide false information about women's participation to DDR officials, intentionally misinform women about whether they are qualified for demobilization, and confiscate women's weapons for their own personal monetary gain. Thousands of UNIMIL applicants incorrectly received benefits, often at the expense of women and girls who should have qualified. See, for example: Dyan Mazurana, Roxanne Krystalli, and Anton Baaré, "Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: Reviewing and Advancing the Field," in *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict*, eds. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Naomi Cahn, Dina Francesca Haynes, and Nahla Valji (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199300983.013.35>; Amnesty International, *Liberia: A flawed process*.

ing participation in their states' post-conflict militaries.⁶⁵ Conflict experiences, however, have been sufficient to qualify men for recruitment into post-conflict armed forces.⁶⁶ Therefore, after demonstrating their ability to engage in security work in armed groups and militias, there are few justifiable reasons for women to be barred from state militaries writ large.

If states, including those with ambitious WPS state action plans, hope to move forward with gendered security sector reform, there are familiar models they can reference that could guide this process. In particular, non-state armed groups, including community-based militias, have already leveraged West African women's participation successfully. States can look to these experiences for a better understanding of the consequences or benefits of gender diversity.

While concerns that women will be abused, harassed and mistreated within military institutions are valid, greater scrutiny should be placed on those who engage in bad behavior, rather than potential victims of abuse. Moreover, it is important to remember that civilian women are not safe from abuse in war zones, as the recent crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray region demonstrates.⁶⁷ Preliminary evidence suggests, however, that sexual exploitation and abuse decrease when militaries integrate women, and even more progress can be made when institutions prioritize gender equality.⁶⁸

65 Mazurana, Krystalli, and Baaré, "Gender and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration"; Amnesty International, *Liberia: A flawed process*. For example, female soldiers were excluded from Eritrea's and South Sudan's militaries, despite substantial contributions to rebels' wartime armies.

66 Steinert, Steinert, and Carey, "Spoilers of peace."

67 Civilian women endure many types of violence during conflicts, including increased rape, sexual exploitation and abuse, and intimate partner violence. Jocelyn T. D. Kelly, Elizabeth Colantuoni, Courtland Robinson, and Michele R. Decker, "Quantifying the Ripple Effects of Civil War: How Armed Conflict Is Associated with More Severe Violence in the Home," *Health Human Rights* 23 no. 1 (2021): 75–89, <https://www.hhrjournal.org/2021/06/quantifying-the-ripple-effects-of-civil-war-how-armed-conflict-is-associated-with-more-severe-violence-in-the-home/>.

68 Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, "Explaining Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Peacekeeping Missions: The Role of Female Peacekeepers and Gender Equality in Contributing Countries," *Journal of Peace Research* 53, no. 1 (2016): 100–115, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022343315615506>.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

On Community Based-Armed Groups

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About the Note

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the RESOLVE Network, the U.S. Institute of Peace, or any entity of the U.S. government.



2016–2018

National Action Plan

for the Implementation
of the United Nations
Sustainable Development
Goals

PHASE 4: Case Studies of Women's Engagement with Community-Based Armed Groups in Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A nuanced understanding of women's engagement with CBAGs can help to develop more effective violence reduction and peacebuilding programs. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to delineate a general conclusion on the roles that women play in conflict and security while maintaining a view of both their individual agency and diverse contexts. From an applicability perspective, it is equally unhelpful to simply list women's functions and contributions characteristic in different contexts. This research initiative thus takes a comparative case study approach to capture the range of women's relationships to CBAGs.

The RESOLVE Network research initiative on women, peace, and security in relation to CBAGs contributes to a rich body of knowledge by providing nuanced context and specific examples of the roles and contributions that women have in both conflict and peace. The following two case studies look at women's engagements with CBAGs and community security mechanisms in two very different contexts: Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire. In both cases, the studies investigate the roles women play in conflict ecosystems, either as a formal member of CBAGs or through informal engagement and relationships, and their motivations behind that engagement. Within the two countries, the reports offer localized insights across a diverse range of study sites that reveal a broad range of variations, for example between urban and rural locations, depending on the local climate and geography, history and colonial heritage, social and ethnic dynamics, and economic issues.

In *Agitators and Pacifiers: Women in community-based armed groups in Kenya*, authors Phoebe Donnelly and Boglárka Bozsógi examine gender dynamics in Kenyan conflict ecosystems, including social perceptions about women. The report analyzes the drivers of women's engagement with armed groups and the roles they play in conflict and reconciliation through their engagement. In *Women, CBAGs, and the Politics of Security Supply & Demand in Côte d'Ivoire*, Arsène Brice Bado and Brandon Kendhammer explore how women are involved in their communities by participating both formally and informally in community-based security groups through investigating and illustrating their motivations and roles, the context, and the dynamics that underpin their participation in both the supply side and demand side of security provision. Both research reports are based on extensive field work by local field researchers including original datasets of interviews and focus group discussions, engaging and enriching the academic literature.

Findings

Just like men's, women's motivations to engage with armed groups vary on an individual basis, not only by location but also socioeconomic circumstance, ethnic identity, and political affiliation. The field research was able to identify key themes of women's roles in CBAGs and the drivers of their engagement, with similarities and differences between Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire, that have implications for policy and programmatic planning and implementation moving forward.

First, both studies found that economic concerns were a key motivating factor for women's involvement with CBAGs. In Kenyan urban informal settlements, poverty and ethnic and economic marginality of women amount to economic pressures, while the expectation of material benefits remains a powerful incentive for women to join or support CBAGs. Similarly, in Côte d'Ivoire women joined self-defense committees or security groups because of economic vulnerability, to meet their material needs, or because they considered it a viable job opportunity. Here, some women who participate directly in, i.e., members of, CBAGs also engage in criminal activity, selling stolen goods or participating in robberies. Women's socioeconomic empowerment through education, training, and support can be a crucial tool for strengthening women's independence and mitigating the economic needs that drive CBAG participation.

Another common motivation for joining or supporting CBAGs was personal tragedies and a desire to avenge loved ones, such as husbands, fathers, and brothers killed in violence or exposed to rights violations, especially in cases where state intervention is deemed unjust. The desire for justice was found to be a driver in Côte d'Ivoire too. Bado and Kendhammer write that "women have joined CBSGs [Community-based Security Groups] or have supported armed groups because of the frustrations and injustices that they are directly subject to or have indirectly suffered through their community."¹ Improved security sector oversight and accountability, conflict- and gender sensitive interventions, and a greater inclusion of women in the formal security and justice sectors can be avenues to address and prevent injustices and tame tensions.

The studies also found that women have a high demand for security and protection especially in areas where state security provision is insufficient or absent. In Côte d'Ivoire, being a member of a CBAG was found to provide protection for self, relatives, and assets. In Kenya, government neglect and insufficient security was a key driver of violence and armed community mobilization, which influenced women's experiences of and participation in conflict. In the words of an interviewee in Marsabit county, "Women are members of society in areas where this is the situation. It's very hard for them not to be involved. It's their home."² In ethnically polarized contexts, where mistrust between the state and communities and among communities is rife, many ethnic groups in Kenya rely on CBAGs for protection. To support CBAGs, women were reported to withhold information from national authorities, use their social networks to

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- 1 Arsène Brice Bado and Brandon Kendhammer, *Women, CBAGs, and the Politics of Security Supply & Demand in Côte d'Ivoire* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2022.1>, 24.
 - 2 Prisca Kamungi, Phoebe Donnelly, and Boglárka Bozsogi, *Agitators and Pacifiers: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in Kenya* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2022.4>, 13.

spy for community members and warn of planned attacks, thus contributing to the protection of themselves and their communities. Insecurity and violence caused by CBAGs also led women to find ways to assert their own security and survive in the informal, often illicit, economy.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the need for protection triggered a special type of indirect participation with security groups. There are wealthy businesswomen who coopt or establish CBAGs to meet their needs for security, to have them as escorts for trips or guard their property. These women, referred to as “patrones” (bosses) or “vieilles mères” (old mothers) wield authority and influence over the group. Thus, “women’s influence in shaping the trajectory of community-based armed and security providing groups extends not just to their roles as suppliers of security (or insecurity, in the case of some groups), but as demanders of security.”³ The patronne phenomenon warrants further research as these private security entrepreneurs shape the informal security sector when the state is unable or unwilling to provide adequate services.

Finally, the research findings suggest that women’s participation in CBAGs reflects social dynamics. Some women get involved in CBAGs in a search for community and belonging. A desire to be recognized and accepted was characteristic of Ivorian women participating in CBAGs from stigmatized social groups. Women’s social identity and networks can facilitate their integration into CBAG networks, and their engagement with CBAGs may also be shaped by cultural expectations, relationships and social networks are a powerful explanation of why people join violent groups. Moreover, it was reported in Kenya that some women who joined CBAGs felt empowered, and their gendered identity changed. In the Côte d'Ivoire context, some women experience their participation as a challenge to social norms; namely, carrying a firearm challenges the state and society, which seems to drive some women and girls to join groups. Women’s participation in CBAGs was at times perceived negatively in Kenya, as if reflecting a breakdown in the gendered social order. Women’s multifaceted engagement in security supply and demand, their parallel challenges and contributions to social order and security structures necessitate complex considerations for gendered socialization trajectories.

Conclusion

The case study research on women and CBAGs in Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire embodies the commitment of the RESOLVE Network to ensure that programming and policy can have a solid background in rigorous research and local perspectives. Such contextual analysis is indispensable for the implementation of the WPS agenda, and the micro-level insights from these reports prompt considerations for gender-sensitive and inclusive policy and programming.

The research reports concur that women’s and men’s motivations to engage in conflict and violence, including CBAGs, are diverse, and even similar drivers manifest differently through CBAG formation and mission, ways of engagement, activities, and levels of violence or insecurity. Policy and programming will look different depending on gender and on the causes of CBAG formation, group legitimacy, local econ-

3 Bado and Kendhammer, *Women, CBAGs, and the Politics of Security Supply & Demand in Côte d'Ivoire*, 6.

omy, contextual gender norms, legal frameworks, availability of weapons, and other conflict dynamics. Because of the diversity of conflict outcomes and plurality of security actors, efforts to mitigate violence and enhance stability should focus on the root causes of conflict at the community level in each specific case. Any intervention for stabilization, mediation, conflict management, disarmament, disengagement, and reconciliation must therefore be based on locally grounded gender analysis.

While further research is recommended, findings from the two case studies suggest some initial pathways for effective engagement. First, they find that addressing economic needs and supporting women's economic empowerment will be paramount for preventing women from resorting to illicit, violent, and dangerous livelihoods and offering pathways out of CBAG participation. Beyond the economic sphere, women's meaningful inclusion in the political and societal aspects of communities and societies is a cornerstone of the WPS agenda. Second, the findings indicate that effective disengagement and reintegration efforts must address the needs of individuals by accounting not only for gender and age, but also urban and rural locations, socioeconomic background, cultural norms, and ways of engagement and activities. Addressing stigma around women who are agents of security or conflict and whose behavior does not conform to social gender norms must also be a key component of these programs. Healing stigma and trauma and rebuilding social trust are key components of prosocial, psychosocial, and political reintegration, post-conflict reconciliation, and social cohesion. Taken together, these recommendations can help to address key gaps in existing and future programs.

RESEARCH REPORTS

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**WOMEN, CBAGS,
AND THE POLITICS OF
SECURITY SUPPLY &
DEMAND IN
CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

Arsène Brice Bado &
Brandon Kendhammer

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INTRODUCTION

For much of Côte d'Ivoire's history, women have been excluded from direct participation in the formal and informal security sectors. Even today, women represent a vanishingly small proportion of the country's official security forces, at roughly 2% of uniformed police and military personnel in 2018.¹ In the informal sector, however, the 2002–2007 civil war² and 2010–11 post-electoral crisis³ marked a sea change in how women engaged in security and conflict. During both conflicts, women enlisted openly in armed groups and served in a diverse array of auxiliary and support positions, taking a more direct role in the provision of security and violence than ever before. According to the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), 6,105 women entered the national program for disarmament, demobilization, and reinsertion (DDR)⁴ conducted between 2012 and 2015.⁵ Not all female ex-combatants joined the DDR program, which required a public registration process with the attendant social risk of being stigmatized as a former rebel.⁶ This suggests that the number of women involved in armed groups was even higher.

Despite their lack of representation in the formal sector, in the post-war era women have continued to play important roles in Côte d'Ivoire's contemporary debates over both the supply of and demand for community-level security provision. These debates take place in a complicated and contested security environment,⁷ including the widespread illegal circulation and use of firearms,⁸ intercommunal violence,⁹

1 Kamina Diallo, "La Femme Dans Le Secteur de Sécurité Ivoirien : Représentativité et Participation," *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*:59.

2 The first civil war occurred from September 19, 2002, to March 4, 2007.

3 The second civil war, commonly known as the "post-election crisis," is a euphemism used in official language. This second war was the deadliest, with more than 3,000 deaths between November 28, 2010 and May 4, 2011.

4 Magali Chelapi-den Hamer, "Les Tribulations Du Dispositif Désarmement, Démobilisation Et Réinsertion Des Miliciens En Côte d'Ivoire (2003-2015)," *Hérodote* 158, no. 3 (2015): 200-218, <https://doi.org/10.3917/her.158.0200>.

5 "Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in Côte D'Ivoire," ONUCI, September 29, 2016, <https://onuci.unmissions.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-ex-combatants-c%C3%B4te-d%E2%80%99ivoire>; Kamina Diallo, "La Démobilisation et La Réintégration Des Femmes Ex-Combattantes Ivoiriennes," *Bulletin du Centre FrancoPaix en résolution des conflits et missions de paix* 3, no. 7 (2018).

6 Kamina Diallo, "La Cellule 39 en Côte d'Ivoire. Processus d'identification et mobilisation d'un groupe d'ex-combattants." *Afrique contemporaine* 263–264, no. 3–4 (2017): 177–96. <https://doi.org/10.3917/afco.263.0177>.

7 Maxime Ricard, "Sous Pression: Les Défis Du Secteur de La Sécurité En Côte d'Ivoire." Paris, 2021.

8 Savannah de Tessières, *Enquête Nationale Sur Les Armes Légères Et De Petit Calibre En Côte D'Ivoire: Les Défis Du Contrôle Des Armes Et De La Lutte Contre La Violence Armée Avant La Crise Post-Électorale* (Genève: Small Arms Survey, 2012).

9 "Arms Proliferation and Abuse Shatter Communities in Côte D'Ivoire" Amnesty International, June 23, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/03/arms-proliferation-and-abuse-shatter-communities-c-te-divoire/>.

polarized violent politics,¹⁰ conflicts related to land tenure issues,¹¹ organized crime groups,¹² as well as frequent terrorist attacks in the north.¹³ Despite a range of important recent security reforms¹⁴ they also take place amidst low overall levels of community trust in the police/gendarmerie and military. The 2019 Afrobarometer survey, for instance, found that not only do majorities of Ivoiriens express little or no confidence that state security forces can protect their communities, but women express lower levels of trust in these institutions than men.¹⁵

In response to this distrust and the persistent security challenges of the post-conflict era, Ivoiriens have increasingly turned to formal private security companies¹⁶ and informal private security providers to meet their needs. From vigilantes to community-based security organizations and criminal armed groups,¹⁷ non-state security actors have become increasingly central to the lives of many Ivoiriens. Despite this increasing role and the greater visibility of women in the informal security sector during the civil war era, we know relatively little about how women shape and participate in this important ecosystem and the factors and forces that drive women's participation.

10 Arsene Brice Bado and Mollie Zapata, "Election Uncertainty: Preventing Atrocity Crimes in Côte d'Ivoire," *Early Warning Project*, July 29, 2019, <https://earlywarningproject.ushmm.org/reports/election-uncertainty-preventing-atrocity-crimes-in-cote-d-ivoire>; Arsène Brice Bado, "Evaluating Practices of Civil Society Organizations in the Prevention of Electoral Violence in Côte D'Ivoire and Burkina Faso," in *The Politics of Peacebuilding in Africa*, ed. Thomas Kwasi Tiekou et al. (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022).

11 Alfred Babo and Yvan Droz, "Conflits Fonciers. De l'Ethnie à La Nation," *Cahiers D'Études Africaines* 192, no. 4 (2008): 741–764, <https://doi.org/10.4000/africanstudies.15489>; Catherine Boone et al., "Push, Pull and Push-Back to Land Certification: Regional Dynamics in Pilot Certification Projects in Côte D'Ivoire," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 59, no. 3 (August 26, 2021): pp. 247–272, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022278x21000124>.

12 Francis Akindès, in *Social Theories of Urban Violence in the Global South towards Safe and Inclusive Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erin Salahub, Markus Gottsbacher, and John de Boer (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018).; Maxime Ricard and Kouamé Félix Grodji, "Fumoirs Et Relations d'Interdépendance : Négocier l'Ordre Social à Abobo, Abidjan," *Politique Africaine* 163, no. 3 (2021): pp. 23–43, <https://doi.org/10.3917/polaf.163.0023>.

13 "Côte D'Ivoire : Deuxième Attaque Djihadiste En Moins D'une Semaine à La Frontière Burkinabé," TV5MONDE, December 24, 2021, <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/cote-d-ivoire-deuxieme-attaque-djihadiste-en-moins-d-une-semaine-la-frontiere-burkinabe>; "Terrorism in Côte D'Ivoire Is No Longer Just an External Threat," ISS Africa, June 15, 2021: Lassina Diarra, "Radicalisation Et Perception De La Menace Terroriste Dans l'Extrême Nord De La Côte d'Ivoire : Le Cas De Bounkani," n.d., <https://africacenter.org/fr/security-article/radicalisation-et-perception-de-la-menace-terroriste-dans-lextreme-nord-de-la-cote-divoire-le-cas-de-bounkani/>.

14 Alina Leboeuf, *La Réforme Du Secteur De Sécurité à L'ivoirienne* (Institut français des relations internationales, 2016). In fact, the reform of the security sector in Côte d'Ivoire after the post-electoral crisis (2010-2011) was operationalized in 108 reforms. These include the redefinition of a national defense and security policy, the creation of a new army called the Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI) by integrating the defeated army loyal to Laurent Gbagbo, the Defense and Security Forces (FDS), and the former rebels of the Armed Forces of the New Forces (FAFN) loyal to Alassane Ouattara, the reform of the police and the gendarmerie, etc. The list of security sector reforms is available at: https://www.defense.gouv.ci/ministere/role_defense.

15 "Résumé Des Résultats: Enquête Afrobarometer Round 8 En Côte d'Ivoire, 2019," (CREFDI, July 3, 2020), https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/cdi-r8-sor_2019.pdf. The question: "How much do you trust each of the following institutions, or have you not heard enough about them to pronounce yourself: 1) the police or gendarmerie? (see results in Table1); 2) the armed forces of Côte d'Ivoire? (see results in Table 2).

16 According to DW, in 2016 there were more than 600 formal private security companies, a trend that DW qualified as a boom of security companies. "Le Boom Des Sociétés De Sécurité En Côte D'Ivoire" (Deutsche Welle, May 27, 2019), <https://www.dw.com/fr/le-boom-des-soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9s-de-s%C3%A9curit%C3%A9-en-c%C3%B4te-divoire/a-48894802>. The government has taken more laws to regulate the activities of formal private security companies. See the list of approved security companies in 2019: <https://news.abidjan.net/document/18779/liste-des-societes-privees-de-securite-agreees>.

17 Ricard, "Sous Pression"; Ricard and Grodji, "Fumoirs et relations d'interdépendance."

Based on extensive field research and an original dataset of interviews with a wide range of informal security actors, this paper aims to address this gap in our knowledge. It offers two key findings that, we suggest, should inform the work of policymakers and practitioners interested in security provision and peacebuilding. The first is while the civil war era created new and more visible roles for women in community-based armed and informal security groups, the overall role of women in this field remains highly contested in the post-conflict space. While women continue to engage directly and indirectly with these groups with a wide range of motivations—economic, a search for community belonging, a desire for justice/revenge, and even to challenge traditional gender roles—their overall place in the landscape of these groups is in flux and those who participate bear social costs for doing so.

The second finding is women’s influence in shaping the trajectory of community-based armed and security providing groups extends not just to their roles as suppliers of security (or insecurity, in the case of some groups), but as demanders of security. Throughout the interviews, we found extensive evidence that women—particularly those with business interests—experience insecurity in the absence of effective state security provision and created demand for informal security actors, shaping and even funding these actors’ actions and goals. These complex dynamics point to the fact that women’s roles as participants, organizers, and mobilizers/legitimizers in CBAGs in ostensibly post-conflict settings like Côte d’Ivoire are no less complex than in overt conflict settings.¹⁸

This study explores the drivers of participation and the roles women play within their communities in participating both formally and informally in community-based security groups. More specifically, it seeks to understand how women are involved in community-based security groups by investigating and illustrating, among other things, their motivations and roles, the context, and the dynamics that underpin their participation in both the supply side and demand side of security provision. Therefore, the main research question is *how do women influence, engage with, and participate in community-based security groups in Côte d’Ivoire?*

CBAGs and CBSGs in the Côte d’Ivoire context

As defined by Lauren Van Metre,

“Community-based armed groups are a subset of non-state armed groups (NSAGs), defined by their relationship to the state and local communities and the ways they exercise power. While NSAGs, such as insurgent or terrorist groups, seek to disrupt or undermine the state to take it over or establish an alternative political system, CBAGs can be aligned with, or complementary to, the state, or they can operate in gray areas with minimal state presence. They do not typically pursue large political ambitions and strategies; rather, they advance the local ambitions of their stakeholders.”¹⁹

18 Hilary Matfes, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>

19 Lauren Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2019), 4, <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2019.3>.

Of the various non-state local and community-based groups involved in Côte d'Ivoire's post-2011 informal security provision and conflict landscape, some fit the CBAG definition better than others. For instance, the traditional hunters, called “dozos,” have long “filled gaps in state security provision in remote areas by settling local disputes and protecting residents from banditry and theft,” despite an uneasy relationship with national authorities.²⁰ During the 2002–2011 conflict, the dozo became politicized, participating in the conflict on the side of northern ethnic and political interests. Today, the dozo remain a major national force (arguably more numerous than the national police), operating with considerable impunity and (allegedly) the tacit support of state security forces.²¹

Other prominent post-war community-based security groups have a more complicated relationship with the CBAG concept. Officially, the Ivorian state does not recognize or support any informal or unofficial armed groups (even the dozo), and local security committees or vigilante groups that armed themselves openly have triggered repressive government action. Across many interviews for this project, respondents were reluctant to openly acknowledge that such groups—which operate widely and publicly in both rural and urban areas—were ever armed, attributing whatever violence occurred in their communities to criminal gangs. However, it is also widely known (and quietly acknowledged in informal settings) that at least some of these groups use locally-made weapons or have recourse illegally and clandestinely to firearms, and often have complex, even contested relationships with the law and local authorities. Given these dynamics, we will refer to non-dozo groups that use or threaten violence and coercion in spaces where the state struggles to maintain security as *community-based security groups* (CBSGs).

METHODOLOGY

To answer the research question, first, this case study relies on an extensive literature review on women and security issues in Côte d'Ivoire. The literature review led to the identification and the selection of the northern, western, and southern regions of Côte d'Ivoire where local communities face the most security challenges such as inter-community violence, the circulation of small arms, criminality, etc. Moreover, each of these three regions poses specific security challenges for communities as described below:

- The northern region includes Korhogo and its surroundings. This region borders Burkina Faso, which struggles with violent extremist groups. Moreover, this region is also known for its high proliferation of weapons due to the high number of people who use weapons such as the dozos, ex-combatants, and criminal groups. In addition to Korhogo, interviews were conducted in the towns of Bondiali and Ouangolodougou which are illegal gold panning sites where small arms circulate.

20 Jessica Moody, *Addressing the Dozo in Côte d'Ivoire* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), 2, <https://doi.org/10.37805/pn2020.6.ssa>.

21 Moody, *Addressing the Dozo*, 3.

- The western region includes Man and its surroundings. This region is located at the borders of Liberia. Since the civil wars in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, this region is known for the proliferation of weapons and the presence of a high number of civilians who can use them. Moreover, this western region is often affected by land conflicts and intercommunal conflicts. Ethnic communities tend, therefore, to organize their own security. In addition to the city of Man, interviews were conducted in the towns of Duekoue and Guiglo.
- The southern region includes the cities of Abidjan, Divo, Dabou, and San Pedro. Abidjan is the largest city with its populous suburbs such as Yopougon and Abobo, which are known for crime and local insecurity. Divo is known as a mining city. Mining locations are known for the proliferation of illegal weapons, drugs, and criminal groups. Interviews were also conducted in Dabou where inter-community clashes often occurred between Adjoukrous (local population) and Malinkés (population from the northern region). Interviews were also conducted in the city of San Pedro known for drugs and illegal circulation of light weapons.

Two sampling strategies were used for data collection in the selected regions of study. First, participants were sampled purposively based on preselected categories of respondents such as civil society organizations mostly female organizations, community leaders, female police and army officers, etc., who might have information on women's participation in armed groups or community-based security groups. Second, I also used chain referral sampling (snowball sampling) to allow informants with whom contact was already made to suggest other potentially relevant informants. Interviews and focus groups were conducted between December 15, 2020, and November 13, 2021.

The sample size is 71 people. As displayed in Table 1, 36 people were interviewed in person, 22 people by phone, and 13 people participated in focus groups in Abobo (4 women), in the city of Man (5 women), and in Duekue (2 women and 2 men, all of which were ex-combatants). Participants to focus groups were selected based on their active participation in community-based security groups

Table 1. Sample by location and by type of interviews

Regions	Cities/Towns	Interviews in Person	Participants in Focus Groups	Interviews by Phone	Total	Total Male	Total Female
Northern Region	Korhogo	4	0	2	6	3	3
	Bondiali	1	0	1	2	1	1
	Ouangolodougou	0	0	2	2	0	2
Western Region	Man	10	5	4	19	6	13
	Duekoue	2	4	2	8	4	4
	Guiglo	2	-	3	5	1	4
Southern Region	Abidjan (Yopougon)	12	0	1	13	4	9
	Abidjan (Abobo)	5	4	0	9	2	7
	Divo	0	0	3	3	0	3
	Dabou	0	0	2	2	0	2
	San Pedro	0	0	2	2	0	2
	Total	36	13	22	71	21	50

Table 2 presents the sample by gender, professional occupation, and membership in a CBSG. In terms of gender, the sample includes 50 women, which represents 70% of the total sample, and 21 men, which represents 30%. In terms of professional occupation, 38% of respondents are members or leaders of civil society organizations; 18% are household wives; 13% are businesswomen; 10% are government officials (police, army, civil servants); 3% are dozos (traditional hunters' brotherhood); 3% are community leaders (local chiefs); and 7% are others. Moreover, of the 22 surveyed people (31%) who have membership in a CBSG, 14 are women (20%) and 8 are men (11%). Participation in a CBSG appears to be a part-time job as members of CBSGs tend to identify themselves with other professions.

Table 2. Sample by gender, professional occupation, and membership in a CBSG

Profession	Total Female	Total Male	Total by Profession		Female Members of a CBSG		Male Members of a CBSG		Total Members of a CBSG	
Associations, NGOs, CSO leaders	16	11	27	38%	6	8%	4	6%	10	14%
Ex-combatants	4	2	6	8%	4	6%	2	3%	6	8%
Traditional hunters (Dozo)	0	2	2	3%	0	0%	2	3%	2	3%
Government officials (police, civil servants)	4	3	7	10%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Community leaders	0	2	2	3%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Businesswomen	9	0	9	13%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Household wives	13	0	13	18%	4	6%	0	0%	4	6%
Others (3 security companies, 1 researcher, 1 businessman)	4	1	5	7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	50	21	71	100%	14	20%	8	11%	22	31%

One of the most important limitations of the study was the sensitivity around describing the status and operation of community-based security groups. While many of the groups profiled here can be understood (at least some of the time) as CBAGs, others have only intermittent or clandestine access to firearms and other deadly weapons. More importantly, many of our interviewees were extremely reluctant to discuss the question of these groups' possession and use of weapons, given strong official government prohibition on armed informal security actors. As such, throughout the paper we have described most of these groups (and discussed them with the interviewees as community-based security groups (CBSGs), to avoid some of the reluctance to speak about their activities openly.

Finally, it is important to note that the goal of the study was not to map CBAGs/CBSGs in Côte d'Ivoire, in general, and there are likely important limits to its representativeness in this wider regard. It focuses instead on the dynamics of women's influence, engagement, and participation in the groups that we have been able to document. Further research mapping the entire terrain of post-conflict CBAG/CBSG activity can and should be seen as an important next step.

EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY-BASED SECURITY GROUPS, 1960–2011

The dynamics of women's current participation in and influence on CBSGs in the post-war Ivorian landscape demonstrate both continuities with past challenges and limitations, and evidence of the conflict era's remaking of security-related gender roles and expectations. Before the 2002 civil war, women's direct participation in both the formal security sector and CBSGs was rare. Between independence in 1960 and the end of the 1970s, "the Ivorian miracle" of booming cocoa and coffee exports drove high levels of growth and state investment in infrastructure and socio-economic development. While challenges related to land use and tenure lurked under the surface, and President Félix Houphouët-Boigny presided over a one-party political system, there was relatively little communal conflict and confidence in state security authorities was relatively high during this period, providing few opportunities for women to redefine the most gendered dimensions of CBSG participation.

The most important example of these dynamics in the pre-civil war era was the role of women in the traditional hunting groups called the "dozos."²² The dozos are CBAGs most commonly found among ethnic communities of the Bambara, the Dioula, the Malinke, and the Senoufo. At that time, women were not visibly members of the dozos, and the copious scholarship on these groups makes little reference to women's engagement or participation beyond their limited roles as the wives of initiated male participants.²³ Even today, women are not allowed to join the initiatory society of the dozos. However, starting in the 1990s during the run-up to the 2002 civil war, a few wealthy women hired some dozos for the protection of their property. But since insecurity was relatively low at that time compared to the period after 2002 characterized by armed conflict, few women collaborated with dozos and other formal or informal security groups for the protection of their assets.

From the late 1970s until the late 1990s, the country fell into a phase marked by declining economic growth as well as rising social unrest and insecurity. At the end of the 1970s, the international price of cocoa collapsed and with it, the economic model of the development of Côte d'Ivoire was dependent on the export of cocoa and other cash crops.²⁴ As the state was no longer able to assume its former welfare state status, it lost the confidence of its people. On top of the fall in commodity prices, the currency,

22 Joseph Hellweg, "La Chasse à l'Instabilité : Les Dozos, l'État Et La Tentation De l'Extralégalité En Côte d'Ivoire," *Migrations Société* 144, no. 6 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.3917/migra.144.0163>; Joseph Hellweg and Nicolas Médevielle, "Zakaria Koné Et Les Transformations Des Chasseurs Dozos En Côte d'Ivoire," *Afrique Contemporaine*, 2018, pp. 41–58, <https://doi.org/10.3917/afco.263.0041>; see also: Moody, Addressing the Dozo.

23 See, for instance: Joseph Hellweg, *Hunting the Ethical State: The Benkadi Movement of Côte D'Ivoire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) and Thomas J. Bassett, "Dangerous Pursuits: Hunter Associations (Donzo Ton) and National Politics in Côte D'Ivoire," *Africa* 73, no. 1 (2003): pp. 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2003.73.1.1>.

24 Anna Lipchitz and Thierry Pouch, "Les Mutations Des Marchés Mondiaux Du Café Et Du Cacao," *Géoéconomie* 44, no. 1 (2008): pp. 101–124, <https://doi.org/10.3917/geoec.044.0101>.

the FCFA, was devalued by 50% in January 1994,²⁵ and social benefits were suppressed for several social groups. This led to strikes by civil servants and secondary and university students and lasting social unrest. Capitalizing on social discontent, Laurent Gbagbo emerged as a political opponent who demanded the end of the one-party rule system inaugurated upon independence in 1960. Political unrest intensified with the death of President Houphouët-Boigny in 1993, and the battle for his succession led to the outbreak of the first civil war in 2002.

It was in this situation of socioeconomic and political turmoil with a weakening state and deteriorating security that a wider range of CBSGs gradually emerged. The rise of banditry as well as the frequent looting and destruction of property during the numerous political demonstrations and strikes increased the demand for security that the state was unable to satisfy. Communities began to organize their own security, giving rise to formal and informal security groups and companies. Women played an important role in the emergence of these security groups, as it was them who demanded more security. As the interviews carried out in Yopougon, Abobo, and in the city of Man with self-defense groups suggest, it was first and foremost the women in the neighborhoods who worked together to find a solution to issues of insecurity (robberies, assaults, thefts, etc.). For example, while residents in better-off neighborhoods called on professional private security companies for assistance, those in working-class and less well-off neighborhoods set up informal security groups.²⁶ Although in most cases women were not themselves armed (or even members of these groups), they were often responsible for generating the demand.

In addition to the emergence of numerous self-defense groups, this time witnessed a transformation of the dozos, which were set up into private militias and even parallel police forces to ensure the safety of local communities.²⁷ As Joseph Hellweg explains,

“We could, moreover, qualify the dozos as parallel police given the ‘roadblocks’ they set up everywhere on the roads of the interior of Côte d’Ivoire to curb the growing criminality that had imposed itself in the country at the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s. The dozos turned into security agents because the Ivorian police were powerless in the face of growing insecurity, especially in poor urban areas and in rural areas.”²⁸

Women’s collaboration with the dozos intensified during this period as the security situation deteriorated. In this collaboration, women sometimes played the role of helpers, providing food or other ser-

25 Kako Nubukpo, “Politique Monétaire Et Servitude Volontaire,” *Politique Africaine* 105, no. 1 (2007): pp. 70–84, <https://doi.org/10.3917/polaf.105.0070>.

26 In fact, this is a characteristic of poor neighborhoods where the informal sector reigns. People in poor neighborhoods are used to organizing themselves with little state intervention. For example, in poor neighborhoods, most commerce is done on the streets, while in wealthy neighborhoods, residents tend to go to supermarkets and other formal shops for their purchases. This same dynamic can be observed in regard to the demand for and supply of security.

27 Thomas J. Bassett, “Containing the DONZOW : The Politics of Scale in Cote D’ivoire,” *Africa Today* 50, no. 4 (2004): pp. 31–49, <https://doi.org/10.1353/at.2004.0038>; Frederic Dorcé and Francois Cayatte, “Guerre Contre l’insecurite En Côte d’Ivoire,” *Jeune Afrique Economie* 184.

28 Joseph Hellweg, “La Chasse à l’Instabilité : Les Dozos, l’État Et La Tentation De l’Extralégalité En Côte d’Ivoire,” *Migrations Société* 144, no. 6 (2012): pp. 163–182, <https://doi.org/10.3917/migra.144.0163>.

vices. They sometimes played a more decisive role by hiring dozos to ensure the protection of their property and their businesses.²⁹ Thus, several dozos were at the service of influential women who paid them monthly, which allowed them to exercise greater influence over the dozos' daily activities.

In rural areas during this period, the contestation of the government and its inability to provide security had given rise to ethnic rivalries over control and management of land. The intensification of inter-community conflicts over land issues pushed some ethnic communities to create their own self-defense groups, as illustrated by this quotation from a young man of the Wê community of western Côte d'Ivoire:

"This land and its forests are those of our forefathers, those of the Wê people. . . For decades, and in waves, the Baoulé [another important Ivorian community] and the Burkinabe people are illegally settling in the Goin-Débé classified forest to cultivate cocoa and the state is doing nothing. While we, we respect the law and have, for a long time, deserted the classified forests. A few months ago, we organized ourselves [by creating the Wê Youth Alliance] to go get our land. We too want to work our land, to enjoy its fruits."³⁰

The Wê Youth Alliance, which is the Wê community-based security group, was created in April 2017, and its land reclamation operation was launched three months later and resulted in seven deaths by bladed weapons and firearms.³¹ Thus, the actions of these community-based security groups sometimes went beyond self-defense to the extent that they became sources of armed conflict and attacked rival communities.³²

The role of women in self-defense groups during inter-communal conflicts is not well known.³³ The interviews provide little evidence of the armed participation of women in self-defense groups. However, women tend to show solidarity with their husbands and sons engaged in ethnic violence and provide them with various forms of logistical support, information, and moral support.³⁴ A focus group carried out in the Duékoué area in December 2020 with the Guéré community suggests that women played a role in the mobilization of men for the security of ethnic communities. As stated by one of the elderly men who had played an important role in the organization of security within the Guéré community,

29 Hellweg, *Hunting the Ethical*, 45–50.

30 Haby Niakaté, "Dans l'ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire, une terre trop convoitée," *Le Monde*, December 7, 2017, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/12/07/dans-l-ouest-de-la-cote-d-ivoire-une-terre-trop-convoitee_5226378_3212.html.

31 Niakaté, "Dans l'ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire."

32 Hellweg, *Hunting the Ethical*; Hellweg and Médevielle, "Zakaria Koné et les transformations."

33 Researchers have well documented the role of women during the wars as combatants or as ex-combatants; see for example: Kamina Diallo, "When Women Take Part in the Rebellion: The Ex-Fighters from Ivory Coast," Noria Research, February 2, 2021, <https://noria-research.com/women-fighters-ivory-coast/>; Arsene Brice Bado, "Building Peace by Supporting Post-Conflict Electoral Processes" (PhD. diss., Université Laval, 2018), <https://corpus.ulaval.ca/jspui/bitstream/20.500.11794/27103/1/32646.pdf>; a few publications also documented the roles of women in the formal security sector such as the police, the gendarmerie, and the army. See, for example: Diallo, "La Femme Dans Le Secteur." However, we have not yet come across a scholarly publication on the role of women in self-defense groups during inter-communal conflicts. Newspaper articles tend to present women as victims of inter-communal conflicts.

34 Bado Arsène Brice, *Dynamiques Des Guerres Civiles En Afrique: Une Approche Holiste* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2015); Matfess, "Brokers of Legitimacy."

“[In 2009] My wife sent to call me while I was extracting palm wine in the bush. When I got home, she made me go to the meeting with our community leader. This is how I was chosen to be part of the group of men who should organize our security against the Dioula who were becoming more and more arrogant. (...) Even today, I can say that there is no man or young boy who is part of the protection committee of his neighborhood who does not have the support of his wife or his mother. (...) Even those who are involved in gangs and assault the people often have the support of their wives, girlfriends, and moms; otherwise, they would have reported them to the police.”³⁵

As the country slid into civil war in 2002, women’s roles in CBSGs continued to evolve—and accelerate. The rise of new armed rebel groups such as the Forces Nouvelles de Côte d’Ivoire (FNCI, New Forces of Côte d’Ivoire),³⁶ Mouvement populaire ivoirien du Grand Ouest (MPIGO, Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West),³⁷ Movement Patriotique de Côte d’Ivoire (MPCI, Patriotic Movement of Côte d’Ivoire),³⁸ and Movement pour la Justice et la Paix (MPCI, Movement for Justice and Peace)³⁹ contributed to the proliferation of firearms across the country,⁴⁰ with many formerly unarmed or intermittently armed local CBSGs evolving effectively into CBAGs.⁴¹ In particular, a large number of the dozos joined the rebellion with modern weapons and military uniforms.⁴² Likewise, self-defense groups from certain ethnic communities also evolved into overt rebel movements, as was the case with the Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest (MPIGO) from the Dan/Yacouba communities in the West. Equally importantly, however, was that as security conditions deteriorated, new and existing local-level, community-driven security and self-defense groups (and criminal gangs) proliferated.

Across the board, the civil war created an exceptional situation for women, who began to participate publicly in CBSGs and CBAGs while carrying firearms. Notably, many dozo groups began to admit women, who played various roles ranging from support to combatants alongside men during both the periods of conflict, as did the MPIGO.⁴³ In local-level CBSGs, young women who carried firearms to defend their neighborhoods or their communities alongside men were socially valued as patriots; they risked everything to defend their communities, as evidenced by this interview conducted with a woman from the Dioula ethnic community in the city of Man in the West of Côte d’Ivoire:

35 Focus group conducted in Duékoué on December 18, 2020.

36 The Forces Nouvelles de Côte d’Ivoire (FNCI) was a coalition of rebel movements made up of MPIGO, MPCI and MJP whose armed elements controlled the central, northern, and western regions of Côte d’Ivoire, which represented 60% of the national territory in 2004.

37 The *Mouvement populaire ivoirien du Grand Ouest* (MPIGO) was one of two rebel movements in western Côte d’Ivoire. In 2004, the MPIGO joined the rebel coalition of Forces Nouvelles led by Guillaume Soro.

38 The *Movement Patriotique de Côte d’Ivoire* (MPCI) was a rebel militia in northern Côte d’Ivoire. In 2004, the MPCI joined the rebel coalition of Forces Nouvelles.

39 The *Movement pour la Justice et la Paix* (MJP) was with the MPIGO in western Côte d’Ivoire. In 2004, it joined the rebel coalition of *Forces Nouvelles*.

40 de Tessières, “Enquête Nationale Sur Les Armes”; “Arms Proliferation and Abuse Shatter Communities”; Jean Delors Biyogue-Bi-Ntougou, *Les Politiques Africaines De Paix Et De sécurité* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2010).

41 Bado, *Dynamiques des guerres civiles en Afrique*.

42 Hellweg and Médevielle, “Zakaria Koné et les transformations”; Bassett, “Containing the Donzow.”

43 Diallo, “When Women Take Part.”

“It was in 2004 that I joined the self-defense group in our neighborhood of Dioulabougou (...). On several occasions, some rebel leaders stationed here in the town of Man invited me to join the Forces Nouvelles; but I refused to join the rebellion. Because I just wanted to protect my neighborhood. People in the neighborhood looked up to me when they saw me with the men who kept our neighborhood safe. I received many donations and even the boys were jealous. (...) However, things changed when the rebels left the city and peace was restored. The same people from the neighborhood who admired me looked at me strangely. On two occasions, families have refused to let their son marry me because they think the girls who have carried guns are thugs. (...) Therefore, I find myself with two children but I cannot live with their fathers.”⁴⁴

The story of this woman illustrates how the participation of women in CBSGs evolved over the years and that during times of war the participation of women in armed groups was socially tolerated.⁴⁵ The experience of this woman is shared by several other interviewees who continue to participate in CBSGs but who feel rejected by their relatives, and who are in search of a community of belonging.⁴⁶ In addition to this direct participation in the CBSGs, women became closer to the armed men who could ensure their protection and the security of their property and businesses. Women in some neighborhoods such as Adjamé in Abidjan had to ask young people to organize themselves to strengthen the security around the market with the help of the police. They took the lead in the establishment of CBSGs where needed.⁴⁷

WOMEN AND CBSGS IN THE POST-2011 ERA

Côte d’Ivoire’s post-conflict hybrid security landscape

During the current, post-conflict period, women’s participation in CBSGs has gone through a new transformation linked to changes in the security context. The reform of the security sector after the post-electoral armed conflict of 2010-2011 significantly improved security throughout Côte d’Ivoire.⁴⁸ The integration of ex-rebels into the regular army made it possible to create a new national army called “Armed Forces of Côte d’Ivoire” (FACI). After years of training, this army has become more professional, and it is now deployed throughout the national territory. The same is true for the police and the gendarmerie. This has enabled a degree of security throughout the country. However, the defense and security forces still have to gain the trust of the population.⁴⁹

Officially, the state does not tolerate the existence of any organized non-state armed group, such as ethnic militias and armed political organizations. Similarly, other than with the case of the dozos, communi-

44 Interview, city of Man, November 11, 2020.

45 Philippe Hugon, “Armed Conflicts in Africa: Contributions, Myths, and Limits of Economic Analyses,” 2003, <https://doi.org/10.1787/aeo-2014-graph40-en>; Diallo, “La Femme Dans Le Secteur.”

46 For more information, see the section below titled “Search for a community of belonging.”

47 Interviews, Abidjan, November 2021.

48 Leboeuf, “La Réforme Du Secteur.”

49 See: “Résumé Des Résultats,” 45.

ties are reluctant to be seen as officially “sponsoring” or directly supporting CBAGs. However, some community self-defense groups possess weapons clandestinely and illegally, and some criminal gangs also provide local community security services. There is considerable uncertainty about just how widespread access to firearms is among CBSGs or precisely when they are most likely to be used. But our interviews suggest that firearms are more likely to be used during inter-communal clashes and other violent outbreaks than in the day-to-day informal security work of many local CBSGs.

The dozos have adapted to the post-conflict period. At the end of the post-electoral crisis in 2011, they had become a major force. In 2012, the Small Arms Survey estimated that there were 42,000 firearms held by dozos, 32,000 of which were shotguns and 10,000 handmade guns.⁵⁰ Despite the DDR process that ended in 2015,⁵¹ dozos still possess not only traditionally manufactured firearms but sometimes also modern automatic weapons. Since they participated, alongside the Forces Nouvelles, in the overthrow of President Laurent Gbagbo to install in power the current President, Alassane Ouattara, they are spared and tolerated by the security and defense forces.⁵² This social position makes the dozos sought-after security partners for local communities. As noted by an interviewee in Korhogo, “people have more faith in the dozo than in the government.”⁵³ The dozo are now active in many communities outside the northern region of Côte d’Ivoire. If initially, the dozo were traditional hunters, nowadays with the transformation of lifestyle in rural areas, they can no longer live from hunting. They need to have other jobs that provide them with the means of survival in an increasingly modern context. This explains why nowadays dozo are found all over the country where they often take on security guard roles.

Field-based observation and interviews suggest that women’s engagement with other kinds of community-based security groups reflects these basic dynamics. Despite the improvement in the security context in Côte d’Ivoire, the state is struggling to meet the demand for security in rural areas as well as in the poor neighborhoods of big cities. Added to this, as the data from Afrobarometer attest, only 21.2% of people “have a lot of confidence” in government security forces, while the recent history of civil war and atrocities has placed populations in need of enhanced security.⁵⁴ This explains the proliferation of informal security groups in both urban and rural areas.

In rural locations plagued by intercommunal violence over land tenure issues, communities tend to organize their own security groups, sometimes called “response committees,” where women play a secondary role either as consumers of security services or as auxiliaries to men engaged in CBSGs. This may reflect the conservatism of rural communities around gender roles and security. In rural areas, in the

50 Savannah de Tessières, *Enquête Nationale Sur Les Armes Légères Et De Petit Calibre En Côte D’Ivoire: Les Défis Du Contrôle Des Armes Et De La Lutte Contre La Violence Armée Avant La Crise Post-Électorale* (Genève: Small Arms Survey, 2012).

51 Magali Chelipi-den Hamer, “Les Tribulations Du Dispositif Désarmement, Démobilisation Et Réinsertion Des Miliciens En Côte d’Ivoire (2003–2015),” *Hérodote* 158, no. 3 (December 5, 2017): pp. 200–218, <https://doi.org/10.3917/her.158.0200>; Chrysantus Ayangafac, “Peace in Côte D’Ivoire: an Analysis of the Ouagadougou Peace Accord,” *Conflict Trends* 2007, no. 3 (January 1, 2007), <https://doi.org/10520/EJC15979>; “Atelier : Défis Liés Au Processus DDR Et RSS En Côte d’Ivoire : Quelle Contribution De La Société Civile Ivoirienne ?” (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, n.d.).

52 Bado and Zapata, “Election Uncertainty”; Bado, *Dynamiques des guerres*.

53 Interview, Korhogo, November 3, 2020.

54 See: “Résumé Des Résultats”, 45.

north of the country, the dozo remain arguably the most important security provider, functioning not just as CBAGs but taking on governance functions and local conflict resolution tasks (retrieving stolen or lost cattle, collecting customs duties on cross-border trade), as well.⁵⁵ However, some female elites may have significant investments in a village that push them to use the paid services of dozo to secure their property. In this case, these women may find themselves in a position of patronage over the dozo. But this is a rare situation in the villages. Moreover, these elite women are generally settled in cities.

Unlike in rural areas, women's participation in CBSGs in urban areas tends to be more proactive. Women are often at the origin of the creation of vigilante groups to meet the need for security in business districts, marketplaces, and populous neighborhoods where crimes are frequent. Likewise, personal body-guard services are also on the rise for businesswomen. Coopting these groups of young people, women with wealth or business interests exert influence on CBSGs. They may not be members of CBSGs but they can direct their creation and functioning. Therefore, women exercise a measure of control over many CBSGs.

CBSG/state and CBSG/community relationships and the role of women

As in other contexts, relationships between CBSGs and both the state and their host communities in post-conflict Cote d'Ivoire tend to oscillate between cooperation, competition, and hostility.⁵⁶ While many of these dynamics are shaped by factors specific to Cote d'Ivoire's continued political conflicts and the difficulty of state security agents in managing violence across the country, patterns of women's engagement with CBSGs, both as demanders and suppliers of security, also play a major role.

Generally, CBSGs in Cote d'Ivoire reflect a community-based authority structure emerging upwards out of a local need for security in the absence of effective state institutions, with support from political entrepreneurs (urban vigilance committees) or the state itself (dozos, which operate with tacit state recognition) playing a secondary role. Yet the relative weakness of state security institutions and the proliferation of new kinds of internationally funded security assistance programs following the end of the civil war means there is considerable local variation in how CBSGs interact with and are shaped by local community and security service leadership.⁵⁷

Despite the state's official stance on the illegality of non-state armed groups, some CBSGs cooperate strategically with state security forces, especially in urban areas. This kind of collaboration emerges from the reform of the municipal police that created community police initiatives in many Abidjan communities in February 2015.⁵⁸ The current community policing program aims to engage with vigilante groups to

55 See: Kathrin Heitz-Tokpa, "Mande Hunters and the State: Cooperation and Contestation in Post-Conflict Côte d'Ivoire," *African Studies Review* 62, no. 1 (March 13, 2019): 148–172, <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2018.143>.

56 Van Metre. *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, 15–17.

57 This is a key observation from Ricard and Grodji.

58 Leboeuf, "La Réforme Du Secteur"; Ricard, "Sous Pression."; Diallo, "La Femme Dans Le Secteur."

prevent insecurity, radicalization, and terrorism. That is why some technically illegal CBSGs nevertheless serve as auxiliaries to security forces by providing them with information and intelligence about their neighborhoods. Moreover, as interviews conducted in Yopougon and Abobo attest, CBSGs are usually the first to intervene when there is trouble in the neighborhood and then they refer the suspects to security forces.⁵⁹ Most of the leaders of CBSGs interviewed said that they have a personal phone number of a security officer whom they can call at any time if needed.⁶⁰ The police and gendarmes downplay these relationships in public (and often avoid officially tracking them on paper), but nonetheless, depend on them in many urban communities.⁶¹

Despite this semi-formal cooperation, interviews with police officers and gendarmerie officers in Yopougon reveal that there is sometimes significant competition between state security forces and CBSGs over who will provide local services.⁶² As a police officer interviewed in Yopougon-SICOGI said: “When there is a security issue here, people will first call members of vigilante groups; they will later call the police when the vigilante group could not handle the situation. . . It is the members of the vigilante groups who decide who is right and who is wrong; they even fine the people. . . This is not their job!”⁶³ Much of this competition seems to extend from the choices being made on the demand side by local community members, who wield the power of choice to engage state or CBSG forces when they need assistance.

Here, our interview data suggests that women, in particular, are a key driver of demand for CBSG services, because they often prefer to work with or engage them over the state security agencies. Indeed, it often seems to be women who call on members of CBSGs in their neighborhood when there is a security issue, not just related to their own immediate needs, but at a wider community level. Several self-defense groups confirm this. As one of the few young girls to be a member of a security committee in the Yopougon-SICOGI neighborhood attests, “Very often it is women who call us to intervene. Men tend to solve security problems by themselves until it gets past them. . . Men do not like to call for help; it is women who usually call for help.”⁶⁴ In the same perspective, interviews with the police and the gendarmerie confirm that calls to intervene when there is a problem most often come from women in working-class neighborhoods.⁶⁵ In our interviews, women in small commercial roles or housekeepers described CBSGs as more proximate and accessible and as having less red tape to work through to receive help.⁶⁶ This suggests that any efforts to improve cooperative relations between the CBSGs and the security forces by reducing competition between them must necessarily involve women.

Another underexplored vector of competition that shapes women’s participation in the security sector is that among CBSGs and CBAGs. During previous times of conflict, dozos that provided local security for

59 Interviews, Abidjan, November 2021.

60 Interviews, Abobo and Yopougon, November 2021.

61 Interviews with police and gendarmerie officers show that there are no official records of these groups.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Interview, Yopougon, November 2021.

65 Interview, Yopougon, November 2021.

66 This is attested by several interviews conducted across the country, for instance, interviews in Yopougon, Abobo, Korhogo, Man, Duékoué, etc.

private citizens were in great demand. In this post-conflict period, security has improved, and women's demand for alternative security arrangements has declined, creating a competition between individual members of the dozos' brotherhood to find a patronne (a female boss). This puts wealthy women in a dominant position, as they are the ones who hire, pay, and instruct dozos. The competition between the dozos to find a job with a patronne increases the power of the latter insofar as she can easily change guardians according to her convenience. This forces the dozos who ensure their safety to be more loyal because the dozo needs the protection and support of his patronne to keep his job. Thus, women are not only on the supply side of security but also on the demand side, leveraging competition between CBSGs to meet their security needs. This shift in the dynamics of security supply and demand is significant, even revolutionary, in the patriarchal societies of northern Côte d'Ivoire.

Women's roles in clashes between CBSGs/CBAGs and between CBSGs and the Ivoirien state are difficult to discern and require further research. It is clear that the line between CBSGs providing local security or acting as community self-defense groups and criminal gangs is sometimes blurred. Interviews with police and civil society organization leaders point to widespread suspicion of CBSG members, particularly those who are unemployed or have criminal records.⁶⁷ CBSG members are often surveilled by state agents as potential criminals and have also been occasionally arrested for possessing firearms.⁶⁸ However, they rarely commit crimes in their neighborhood where they are in charge of security; they usually operate far from their neighborhood where they think they are not known. The key exception here is in the neighborhood of Abobo, where the phenomenon of the "enfants microbes"⁶⁹, loosely organized and often temporary armed groups that operated at times as local security providers and criminal gangs operated as both security groups and gangs within their own community.⁷⁰

CBSGs also sometimes have hostile relationships with the communities they purport to protect. In urban areas, these groups sometimes compete over territories where they can control protection payments and threaten local businesses that attempt to resist. As a woman trader in Abobo said: "Even if you have hired a formal security company, you still have to give money to these vigilante groups in the neighborhood. That is a shame. Therefore, we have no choice; they are imposed on us."⁷¹ This points to the limit of the demand model of women's relationships with CBSGs, suggesting that while some influential women may indeed be able to shape CBSG priorities and behaviors, many others cannot.

67 Interviews in Abobo, Yopougon, and city of Man.

68 Ricard, "Sous Pression."

69 The phenomenon "enfants microbes" is limited to the commune of Abobo. An interview with a criminologist specializing in this phenomenon could not confirm any participation of women in the "enfants microbes." His explanation is that this gang group is too violent for women to join it.

70 Francis Akindès, "Understanding Côte d'Ivoire's 'Microbes': the Political Economy of a Youth Gang," in *Social Theories of Urban Violence in the Global South towards Safe and Inclusive Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erin Salahub, Markus Gottsbacher, and John de Boer (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 161–182.

71 Interview, Abobo, November 2021.

Women as agents of (in)security

The question of precisely how much of a direct role women play in Ivorian CBSGs is a contested one. By all accounts, women are less likely and free to engage in violence than during the 2002–2011 conflict period, but at least some of the social norms and prohibitions from the pre-war period against such participation continue to be challenged and contested. As seen in the previous section, women play both active and auxiliary roles in state/CBSG and CBSG/CBSG conflicts. Initial interview data suggests that the most violent groups tend to rely on and recruit women to a greater degree than those that stick to security provision, which may speak to their particular importance in support/logistics.⁷² There is some evidence that these groups employ women as spies and informers and for the circulation of arms and ammunition and the distribution of drugs.⁷³ Nonetheless, our interviews and field observations suggest that women are most influential not as direct CBSG participants, but through their role in shaping and even directing CBSG activity through their demand for greater security provisions in precarious communities.

DIRECT PARTICIPATION

Women who participate directly in CBSGs are diverse, but there are some basic patterns. One is that women directly involved in CBSGs tend to be (but are not universally) of a lower economic status or come from underprivileged social groups.⁷⁴ Even after joining CBSGs, these women still often live in precarious conditions. Many are child mothers who have to fight on their own to meet the needs of their families.⁷⁵

Another common characteristic of women directly involved in CBSGs is relatively low levels of educational attainment. While the research did not encounter any female members of CBSGs who were illiterate, it also did not find anyone with a college education. Many had dropped out of school for family reasons, such as the death of a parent or guardian who paid for schooling or to help their families in their economic activities of survival. Nevertheless, girls and women contribute to CBSGs with intellectual authority, strategic analysis, and decision-making. As a woman member of a self-defense group in Yopougon remarked, “Here the boys rely a lot on their muscular strength to command respect, but I stand out for my advices that help to make good decisions. My fellow boys realized that I was often right. That is why they listen to me and respect me.”⁷⁶ Interviews revealed that female members of CBSGs tend to be willing to engage with their co-members as equals, even in patriarchal cultures.⁷⁷ Women who are members of CBAGs adopt traits or behaviors that are traditionally coded as “masculine,” leading people to refer to these women as “being boys.”⁷⁸

72 Interview, Yopougon, November 2021, and cities of Duékoué and Man, December 2020.

73 See: Jakana Thomas, *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>.

74 Interviews across the country from December 2020 to November 2021.

75 The average remuneration of the members of security committees in the neighborhoods is around 30,000 FCFA (52 USD) per month. Therefore, it is not a full-time job.

76 Interview, Yopougon, November 3, 2021.

77 Interviews across the country from December 2020 to November 2021.

78 They are called in French “filles-garçons.” See interviews in Yopougon, November 2021, and in the city of Man, December 2020.

A more complex phenomenon is that of women who participate directly in CBSGs that also engage in criminal activity. Several women members of this type of CBSG have already served in prison or are known to the security forces. A security officer (Gendarme) interviewed in Duékoué confirmed that a few young girls (children under 18) who worked with vigilante groups in the neighborhoods have been arrested and jailed because of their participation in armed robberies. As he said: “There are girls who cooperate with groups of bandits who carry out armed robberies. We apprehended and put some girls in jail. However, the number of girls involved in the robberies is still relatively low. It is still a somewhat rare phenomenon.”⁷⁹ Two women interviewed in the cities of Man and Duékoué (western region) said that they personally knew a relative, a young woman who is in prison for armed robbery and who was a member of the security committee of their neighborhood.⁸⁰ None of the people interviewed confirmed the existence of an all-female armed group.

Another way women engage in armed CBSGs or those that also operate as criminal gangs is by acting as intermediaries between these armed groups and the rest of the population. As a female member of a women’s association (Fédération des Associations Féminines) interviewed in the city of Divo explains: “When [members of neighborhood security groups turned into] bandits carry out armed attacks, it is women who sell the stolen goods. . . These women are generally the friends of the robbers; in the market, they are easily recognized by their indecent dress and behavior;⁸¹ they always sell a variety of second-hand items.”⁸²

In the city of Man, a leader of a women’s organization who was interviewed suggested speaking to another woman who sells fruit at the marketplace but was also selling ammunition as a secondary and hidden activity.⁸³ The ammunitions belonged to the “boss”—she did not dare give more information about his identity. We heard similar stories from women selling pills and food (and also drugs) for artisanal miners in Divo and Bondiali.⁸⁴ As a researcher from a think tank who conducted fieldwork in Bondiali on violent extremism explains: “In Bondiali, like in other artisanal mining towns in Côte d’Ivoire, dealers of drugs and light weapons use women to distribute their products. These are usually young or middle-aged women. They are poorly dressed and live in difficult social conditions. Therefore, these women do not profit much from this trade around arms and drugs.”⁸⁵

INDIRECT INFLUENCE

This research suggests that there are at least two ways of engagement for women who are linked to CBSGs but are not members. First, there are businesswomen who act as godmothers of CBAGs and CBSGs (vigilante groups, dozos). They are wealthy women who, to meet their needs for security and protection of their property, initiate security groups that may or may not be armed. The members of these security

79 Interview, Duékoué, January 4, 2021.

80 Interview, city of Man, December 21, 2020.

81 The interviewee means that the dress and behavior of these women are sexually deviant or inappropriate.

82 Interview conducted by phone on January 19, 2021, in Divo, with a member of the *Fédération des Associations Féminines*.

83 Interviews, city of Man, December 16, 2020.

84 Interviews conducted by phone in the cities of Divo and Bondiali on January 4 and 7, 2021.

85 Interview conducted with ARK in the city of Korhogo on December 15, 2020.

groups can act either as an escort to accompany these wealthy women from afar (especially during long trips) or as a vigilante group to guard the neighborhoods where the women's businesses and properties are located. The members of CBSGs recognize the authority of these women whom they commonly call "patrones" (bosses) or "vieilles mères" (old mothers).⁸⁶ The quote from the interview below describes this type of CBSG's "godmother" profile:

"I am a trader. I have a shop where I sell foodstuffs. So, here in town, I know the young thugs who can attack me. In fact, I have already been attacked one night when I was leaving my store. When I later learned the identity of the young people who attacked me, I did not call the police because I knew it was not going to be effective. So, I approached them to tell them: what can we do so that it will not happen again? They said to me that they were hungry and that I must give them food. . . That is how I started giving them something every month. . . You know, you cannot be a trader in the region here without having protectors. If the young people ask for weapons to protect you, you must find them weapons. Now, if they are going to do something else with these weapons, that is their problem. . . I also give them advice so that they don't use drugs that will lead them to do stupid things."⁸⁷

These women who coopt or help establish CBSGs exercise significant power over their functioning and activities. As the quotation above demonstrates, this businesswoman has transformed this group of young people into a group that ensures the safety of herself and her property, she provides them with weapons they were not able to get on their own in their small town of Odienné, and she gives them advice. In short, this woman controls this group of young armed men.

Second, middle-class housewives in the neighborhoods may feel the need for greater security and often initiate the creation of security committees to protect the neighborhood. It is also these women who are in contact with the CBSGs for their remuneration or to respond to their grievances. Even if the money comes from their husbands, it is the wives who handed the money to the neighborhood security committee.⁸⁸ Therefore, in the end, women are more in touch with the neighborhood security committees than men. Sometimes, in certain neighborhoods, it is a woman who is responsible for collecting the amount needed to pay the security committee. Thus, these middle-class women participate indirectly in the functioning of the CBSGs and exert direct influence. As with businesswomen, their role is important in setting up CBSGs.

86 This expression "*vieilles mères*" (old mothers) is not related to the age of the women, but to their authority. This is colloquial language used by young people on the street. Its meaning is similar to "patronne" or "godmother." All these terms express the idea of authority in a patron-client relationship.

87 Interview, city of Odienne, December 16, 2020.

88 This practice is attested to by several interviews conducted across the country.

Drivers and motivations for women's engagement with CBSGs

Just as men's motivations for supporting non-state armed groups vary and are often highly contextual, our fieldwork finds considerable variation in the drivers and motivations of women's participation in CBSGs. However, a few key themes dominated the interviews, including economic motivations, the desire for justice and revenge, the need for protection, the search for a community of acceptance, the choice to belong to a group that carries arms, or the desire to challenge social norms on gender.

ECONOMIC MOTIVATIONS

The second category of women who participate in CBSGs for economic motivation are women who are of lower socioeconomic class. As the analysis of women members of CBSGs uncovers, they come from underprivileged families. When asked why they joined the neighborhood self-defense committees or armed groups, they often respond that it is to meet their needs and those of their families.⁸⁹ It is usually a part-time job because these women often have other small informal jobs,⁹⁰ except for the few and rare women who are full-time in CBSGs.⁹¹ Economic motives also drive several female ex-combatants. Before enrolling in armed groups during wartime, female combatants were economically vulnerable. They were either unemployed or self-employed. Some of them enrolled in armed groups because they received the promise of a job and to be incorporated in the army or to receive a reward at the end of the war.⁹²

We also found that women who choose to participate in CBSGs that sometimes slide into criminal activity are similarly motivated by economic opportunity. As one of the ex-combatants stated during a focus group in the city of Duekoue: "Sometimes they are young unwed mothers, and with the difficult situation in the village, they do it to find something to eat. We can see in the region of Guemon, the unmarried mothers, the minor mothers are numerous. And that makes girls go into anything, it reinforces insecurity, because it is difficult for them to take care of themselves and their child. So, very often they are involved in robberies."⁹³ Interviews also suggest that some women who do not directly participate in criminally active CBSGs benefit from them by receiving and concealing the spoils that the armed men were able to obtain.⁹⁴ They are also sometimes responsible for facilitating these groups' trade in illicit goods. The trafficking of weapons is considered particularly lucrative by women food traders who can easily conceal them in loads.⁹⁵

89 This is attested by several interviews conducted across the country, for instance, interviews in Yopougon, Abobo, Korhogo, Man, Duékoué, Divo, and Korhogo conducted between December 2020 and November 2021.

90 Interview, city of Man, October 23, 2021.

91 There was no female research participant who is full-time in a CBSG. Though some interviewees referred some women who were said to be full-time in a CBSG to the researcher, they later denied that they were in CBSGs full-time. Therefore, if there are women who are involved in CBSGs full-time, these women are certainly rare.

92 Diallo, "When Women Take Part."

93 See interview conducted on December 18, 2020, with the association of ex-combatants named *Génération Consciente* (Geco-CI) in Duekoue.

94 See interviews conducted between December 2020 and November 2021 in the cities of Man, Odienne, Duekoue, and Divo.

95 See interview in market above.

Anecdotally, many of the women participating in CBSGs and CBAGs interviewed for this project did not seem to be satisfied with the economic benefits of their engagement. While money certainly changed hands, most seemed to have other jobs or other money-making projects as well, and we found little evidence of CBSG participation serving as a path out of poverty for women.⁹⁶ A question then arises: if their participation in CBSGs does not allow them a decent economic situation, what keeps them in these CBSGs? Is it out of resignation—like many others who work in the informal sector that barely help them survive from day to day? Interviews show that most women see their participation in CBSGs as a job or a service like any other to their neighborhood. As an indication, at least three women surveyed in Yopougon, Duékoué, and Divo asked insistently if I knew someone who was looking for a woman as a security guard because they were interested in working full time.⁹⁷

DESIRE FOR JUSTICE AND REVENGE

Another motive that drives women to participate in CBSGs is the desire for justice and/or revenge. As with the civil war period when some women enrolled in the rebellion because they were subject to injustice,⁹⁸ interviews suggest that women have joined CBSGs or have supported armed groups because of the frustrations and injustices that they are directly subject to or have indirectly suffered through their community. “Some women have felt frustrated. They have seen their husbands being murdered; others saw their homes or fields occupied by foreigners. So, it was all the frustration, the injustice that drove them to voluntarily enlist in armed groups,” explains a female officer of the Conseil Regional (Regional Council) of Duekoue, a public administration that was involved in the reintegration of ex-combatants.⁹⁹ Even today, some women are part of the neighborhood security committees because they were tired of being victims of various violence against their communities.¹⁰⁰

This desire for justice and revenge is higher within women’s associations in rural and agricultural areas plagued by conflicts over land ownership,¹⁰¹ which often induce intercommunal violence, displacement, and destruction of property.¹⁰² Interviews in the towns of Western Côte d’Ivoire such as Goin-Débé and Guiglo confirmed the participation of young girls alongside boys in armed CBSGs against rival communities. Anger and discontentment may nourish a feeling of revenge, which drives women in CBSGs against rival communities or the state,¹⁰³ especially in polarized ethnic and political contexts.

96 See interview, city of Man, October 23, 2021, and in Yopougon, November 3, 2021.

97 Interviews in Duékoué, December 18, 2020; in Divo, January 4, 2021, and in Yopougon, November 8, 2021.

98 Diallo, “When Women Take Part”; Bado, *Dynamiques des guerres civiles*.”

99 Interview conducted by phone on January 5, 2021.

100 Interview conducted on January 4, 2021 in the city of Duekoue.

101 See: Babo and Droz, “Conflits fonciers, ethnicité politique”; see also: Jean-Pierre Chauveau and Paul Richards, “Les racines agraires des insurrections ouest-africaines: Une comparaison Côte d’Ivoire-Sierra Leone,” *Politique africaine* 111, no. 3 (2008): 131–167, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-africaine-2008-3-page-131.htm>.

102 Alfred Babo, “L’Étranger à travers le prisme de l’ivoirité en Côte d’Ivoire: retour sur des regards nouveaux,” *Migrations Société* 144, 6 (2012): 99–120.

103 Often symbols of the state, such as police stations and prefectures, are set on fire during inter-community conflicts by communities who think the state is more sympathetic to the rival community.

NEED FOR PROTECTION

Women have a high demand for security for themselves, their families, and their economic assets.¹⁰⁴ The need for protection in areas where the provision of security by state security forces is insufficient is a driver for women to participate in CBSGs. However, this need for protection triggers two different types of women's participation in CBSGs.

First, being a member of a CBSG provides protection for self and relatives. As a female ex-combatant said: "Women came on their own. . . for a survival issue, for a security issue as well. Because [during the war period 2010-2011] when we see you with a soldier, or if you yourself have joined an armed group, we know that your family is safe."¹⁰⁵ In Abobo, a young woman who joined the neighborhood's security committee a year ago also said: "I joined this security committee to protect my relative. . . To be honest, the people who can bring trouble in the neighborhood are the same who can secure the neighborhood. Now that I am part of the group, they respect my family, my friends, and me. . . There are many young girls and other people who come easily to me to expose their grievances who would be afraid to meet with some of my colleagues."¹⁰⁶

The second is the previously discussed role of wealthy businesswomen who participate in CBSGs, not as members, but as security entrepreneurs who initiate the establishment of CBSGs as their "godmothers."¹⁰⁷ Notably, this dynamic appears especially important in western Côte d'Ivoire (Man and Guiglo), where there are intercommunal conflicts with the destruction of properties and women acquire the support of CBSGs for the protection of their properties, when state security forces are unable to provide proper security.¹⁰⁸

SEARCH FOR A COMMUNITY OF BELONGING

The search for a community where one is recognized and accepted is a motivation for some women to get involved in CBSGs. Interviews suggest that many of the women who join CBSGs do so at least in part out of a desire to be recognized and accepted and come from stigmatized social groups (unwed mothers, sex workers or low-level criminals, or young women who adopt traditionally masculine traits and are referred to by other Ivoirians as "girls-boys"). As a young mother and member of the security committee for her neighborhood in Guiglo affirms: "I'm happy with these guys because we look alike and we like the same things. . . I play football with them, I do weight training, I like to go for a walk at night to do my work. . . You see, ordinary girls don't do like me, so I don't have any female friends. Some girls are even afraid of me. My mother considers me a failed boy. . . In any case, I am at peace with these guys who look rogue but are good people."¹⁰⁹

104 This has been attested by several interviews conducted in all the selected regions of study.

105 Interview, city of Man, January 5, 2021.

106 Interview, Abobo, November 2021.

107 Interview, Odienne, December 16, 2020. See also interviews in Yopougon on October and November 2021.

108 See: Jean-Pierre Chauveau and Samuel Koffi Bobo, "Crise Foncière, Crise De La Ruralité Et Relations Entre Autochtones Et Migrants Sahéliens En Côte D'ivoire Forestière," *Outre-Terre* 11, no. 2 (2005): pp. 247–264, <https://doi.org/10.3917/oute.011.0247>.

109 Interview, Guiglo, October 22, 2021.

CHALLENGING SOCIAL NORMS ON GENDER

If some women unconsciously defy social norms by their membership in CBSGs, others experience their participation as a more deliberate challenge to social norms. This is often specifically linked to carrying firearms. Carrying a firearm is generally illegal unless one navigates a difficult administrative process to obtain a clearance. Moreover, ordinarily, Ivoirien women do not tend to carry firearms. Therefore, the choice to carry a firearm challenges the state and society. This challenge seems to drive some women and girls to join CBSGs. The only girl of a CBSG in the city of Man who agreed to admit that she owns a gun said,

“It’s about defying society. Here, everyone knows that I have my gun. . . Even the police officers and the gendarmes know it. With my clothing style, it is easy for everyone to see that I have a gun. . . I’m happy to scare everyone here. You know, for once, there is a girl who scares men. . . Even within the neighborhood security committee, my fellows who are boys respect me. Everyone is a leader for a week; when my turn comes, I command the whole group and everyone obeys me. . . With my black belt in taekwondo, I train the group in the evening on the school grounds, and people come to watch. . . Things have to change, and people should see women differently. . . My gun has changed my life and I would always be with a group that carries arms. However, I do not want to join the police or the gendarmerie because over there, it will be the leaders who will give me orders. I do not want to receive orders that I do not like!”¹¹⁰

Although it is difficult to generalize from this, women in CBSGs may also be motivated by the desire to challenge existing social norms on gender that tend to devalue women. There is a desire for emancipation to free oneself from certain social norms by claiming functions and territories culturally reserved for men, such as authority in the security sector and carrying firearms. Women’s membership in CBSGs has made it impossible to think about community safety initiatives without taking into account the contribution of women. They play an important role in both the security and the insecurity of communities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research report has mapped women’s different forms of participation in CBSGs in Côte d’Ivoire. It sought to explain why women are involved in community-based security groups by investigating and illustrating their motivations, their roles, the historical context, and the dynamics that underpin their participation in community-based security groups. Thematically, the most significant finding is that women play key roles in shaping the CBSG landscape not simply as direct or auxiliary participants in these groups but as engines of demand for security provision in the absence of effective state institutions. The nature of these demands varies across the country’s landscape—in rural areas, insecurity is shaped by post-conflict land tenure and communal tensions, while in urban areas, crime and the needs of business owners and entrepreneurs to protect their property are key drivers. But across the interviews, the theme

¹¹⁰ Interview, city of Man, October 19, 2021.

that women who needed security and brought that need to their community then came to shape the resulting organizations was a reoccurring theme.

A second important theme is that the conflict period of 2002–2011 reshaped social norms and expectations around women’s participation in security provision and violence but in uneven and impermanent ways. By any measure, women are more involved now—in both formal and informal ways, actively and more indirectly—in security provision and violence than in the years before the decline of state security capacity in the 1990s. Some are even openly motivated by a desire for justice or revenge, outgrowths of the social costs of a decade of conflict, and another of continued community tensions amidst a weak state security response. Yet strong stigmas and social norms that challenge women’s legitimacy in these arenas remain, and at least some women involved in the more violent aspects of CBSG participation frame their personal stories of engagement in terms of challenging these norms or finding a new kind of community that accepts them. Nevertheless, women are more likely to be indirect or auxiliary participants—handling logistics, spying or reporting, and trafficking drugs or arms—than to be bearing arms.

A third key theme is that among the women who have encouraged the emergence and consolidation of CBSGs in their community to provide needed security, a small but influential subset has achieved a level of operational and strategic control over these groups. As “patronnes” or “godmothers,” these women have effectively structured CBSGs around their private security needs, an alternative to professional private security or relationships with state authorities that have downstream consequences for the wider communities in which they operate. While we can identify and describe this trend here, in brief, it merits considerably more future attention from researchers and practitioners.

A fourth significant theme is that much as in the wider literature on participation in violent extremist groups and CBAGs generally, women’s participation and engagement with Ivoirien CBSGs is driven by a complex mix of forces and factors. In particular, we note that among women who emphasized their economic reasons for direct participation, few seemed satisfied with the outcome. CBSG engagement among poor women does not seem to function as an enrichment scheme, but often instead simply helps them to keep afloat during difficult times while leaving them vulnerable and (at least sometimes) stigmatized.

Recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars:

- » **Greater inclusion of women in the formal security sector:** Despite their lack of representation in the formal sector (0.66% in the armed forces in 2016), in the post-war era women have continued to play important roles in Côte d’Ivoire over both the supply and demand for community-level security provision. Therefore, the government should incorporate more female personnel within the armed and security forces to mitigate women’s membership in armed groups and in informal community-based security groups, including a more intersectional lens to show how people’s social identities can overlap, creating compounding experiences of discrimination.

- » **More research/assessment of the patronne phenomenon and its consequences:** Some wealthy businesswomen have become security entrepreneurs who initiate the establishment of vigilante groups or local community-based security groups for the protection of their properties when state security forces are unable to provide proper security. These women shape the informal security sector. Therefore, it is critical for researcher to assess their influence and for policymakers to involve them in program interventions that aim at the transformation of the informal security sector.
- » **Addressing economic needs as pathways out of CBSG participation:** Women who are of lower socioeconomic class are more inclined to participate in CBSGs for economic motivation. Therefore, to mitigate women's participation in CBSGs, it is important to support programs that aim at improving women's economic conditions, especially in locations affected by frequent intercommunal violence and in underprivileged urban neighborhoods.
- » **Addressing stigma as pathways out of CBSG participation:** The search for a community where one is recognized and accepted is a motivation for some stigmatized women to get involved in CBSGs. Young women whose behavior does not correspond to social gender norms and who are engaged in the security sector are stigmatized as abnormal women who behave like men. This social stigma pushes these women to join CBSGs where they find a welcoming community. It is therefore important for policymakers to initiate awareness programs to fight the stigmatization of women whose proportion will increase over the years as social norms change under the influence of modernity. It is therefore urgent to take this challenge seriously to strengthen social cohesion and peace.
- » **Mitigate women's participation in gun-related activities within their communities:** Despite preliminary evidence that women are playing increased roles in CBAG-related arms trafficking, we still know relatively little about their overall relationship with weapons in the context of informal security provision. Despite the visible role of women as armed actors in the civil war period, there is still a considerable social stigma around acknowledging that women can be and are engaged in armed violence, and this serves as a potential barrier to engaging in peacebuilding efforts that seek to better assess and prevent women from becoming more involved in these activities. Support for programs that examine these dynamics in culturally sensitive ways and avoid activating stigmas that may make it more difficult for women to choose off-ramps from participation in CBAG-related arms trafficking is an important next step.
- » **Working to bring armed CBSGs out of the shadows as a mechanism for disarmament and rebuilding trust at the community-level security:** Since in Côte d'Ivoire any suspicion of the existence of an armed group within a community will trigger government repression, therefore, armed CBSGs will evolve under the radar. This situation can undermine the state's security as terrorist networks that are active in neighboring countries Mali and Burkina Faso could take advantage of these clandestine armed CBSGs to expand in Côte d'Ivoire. It is therefore urgent for policymakers to initiate programs targeting women that aim at bringing armed CBSGs out of the shadows as a mechanism for disarmament and rebuilding trust at the community-level security.

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AGITATORS AND PACIFIERS

Women in Community-Based
Armed Groups in Kenya

Prisca Kamungi, Phoebe Donnelly,
and Boglárka Bozsogi

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report is a case study of women's participation in community-based armed groups (CBAGs) in Kenya. It examines:

1. the diversity of women's motivations to participate in community-based armed groups in Kenya;
2. women's roles and agency within community-based armed groups, communal conflicts, as well as community security and peacebuilding structures; and
3. gender dynamics in conflict ecosystems, including social perceptions about women's engagement in conflict.

This case study contributes to the literature on women and CBAGs by examining the variations in their engagement across a single country, based on diverse local contexts. Data collection sites for the study included 1) the capital city, Nairobi; 2) Isiolo County; 3) Marsabit County; 4) Mombasa County; and 5) Bungoma County. Together, these sites provide insight into local conflict dynamics in rural and urban areas; on country borders and on the coast; and in communities with ethnic polarization, land conflicts, criminal gangs, and histories of violent extremism and secessionist movements. The Kenyan research team employed a qualitative approach to data collection through key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and the use of secondary source data.

The findings show that there is no single template for understanding women's engagement with CBAGs; instead, women's motivations and roles within these groups are varied and highly contextual, just as with the motivations and roles of men. This study demonstrates the utility of context-specific analyses at the sub-national level to capture the range of women's participation in and engagement with CBAGs and their greater contributions to the local security landscape.

A common theme across the study sites in Kenya was that personal tragedies and the desire to avenge loved ones remains one of the main motivations for joining or supporting CBAGs. The effects of worsening poverty and the unique ethnic and economic marginality of women also played a key role in women's support of CBAGs. Expectation of material benefits remains a powerful incentive for women to join CBAGs. Women's support of CBAGs was also found to respond to complex societal pressures within their communities. In pastoralist communities, data showed that cultural expectations to support men in cattle raiding were part of the motivation for women to then support CBAGs by providing food to raiders, serving as spies, providing surveillance information, and/or transporting weapons. In ethnically polarized contexts where many ethnic groups look to CBAGs for protection, women supported CBAGs by withholding information from national security agencies and authorities that could lead to the arrest or prosecution of fellow community members.

Beyond their material support to CBAGs, women's active roles within these groups were as diverse as their motivations. One of their key roles is motivating fighters and inciting violence through interpersonal ties and communal rituals and rites. Women also hold operational roles in recruitment, intelligence, networking, and planning. For example, in certain groups women obtaining and conveying information about security threats were considered particularly valuable. Armed groups also exploit female stereotypes in two ways. First, groups use women for operational tasks, such as messengers or traffickers, because they are less likely to raise suspicion and be searched. Second, women also perform traditionally feminine tasks such as emotional support and cooking and cleaning.

Some groups were composed entirely of women, meaning that women not only participate in violent groups, they *are* the groups. While women's integration into CBAGs may *challenge* stereotypes, it might not alter gender norms at large. Communities may resent CBAGs' integration of women into their ranks as a reflection of a breakdown of community traditions and cultural, gendered norms and hierarchies.

Community perceptions of these women differed: while some viewed them as transgressive, others saw them as essential to community security. Women in CBAGs were seen as providing useful information and advanced warning to community members regarding security concerns such as planned robberies and extrajudicial executions planned by other groups or secret security units, and generally contributing to the protection of their neighbors. Other community members saw women's engagement with CBAGs as symbolic of a breakdown of social order. This was especially true for women's engagement with CBAGs in urban areas where CBAGs engage in drug dealing, illicit alcohol brewing, and prostitution. The tension between these two perceptions is a key finding from this research.

In addition to their roles within CBAGs, women contributed to other types of community security mechanisms, including peace committees, community policing committees, and neighborhood security efforts known as *Nyumba Kumi*.¹ While the inclusion of women in peace committees is largely applauded, interviews with community members showed their inclusion is not always welcome because of perceived interference in community traditions, cultural norms, and practices.

The field research indicated important considerations for the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda and improving the gender sensitivity of broader peacebuilding strategies. Data suggest that policy and practice should tailor interventions—including disengagement, rehabilitation, and violence prevention—to the contextual needs of both women and men. Stakeholders should also support the economic empowerment of women and promote the inclusion of women in community security mechanisms and sociopolitical decision-making fora. The research suggests that further peace and stability considerations should include the broad provision of support, education, and counseling to protect and strengthen women's rights across rural and urban locales in Kenya, and buttressing women's networks and organizing for long-term and meaningful social and political transformation. Further research would benefit

1 *Nyumba Kumi* translates to ten households in Swahili. *Nyumba Kumi* was launched as a government initiative to guarantee local-level peace and security. It aims to bring together Kenyan residents in clusters defined by their physical locations with the vision of a neighborhood where residents know each other and look out for each other.

from situating these recommendations in the existing academic literature and comparing the findings across different contexts. Additional future research could explore the aspects of potential empowerment in women’s participation in violence.

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies, including two RESOLVE research reports,² show that women provide logistical support to community-based armed groups (CBAGs), participate in violence and clandestine operations, and legitimize the groups’ activities to the civilian population. Women also lend support to CBAGs to advance their economic, social, or personal interests. This study fills a gap in the gender and conflict literature by examining women’s active participation and agency in CBAGs through microlevel analysis across different socioeconomic and geographical settings in Kenya.

CBAGs are prevalent in Kenya, driven by evolving conflict dynamics, political mobilization, and criminal violence. They usually emerge as a response to a perceived threat against the community.³ Public roles for women in CBAGs have challenged the stereotype that they are only composed of men; female gangsters especially have featured in national headlines and are often portrayed using gendered stereotypes.⁴ Moreover, reported attacks by “girls only” gangs in Mombasa County are a sharp departure from stereotypes of all-male CBAGs.⁵

This report begins by reviewing the existing literature on CBAGs and its applicability to the Kenya context, and then outlines the methodology for its field research and data analysis. As a part of this section, the report discusses key aspects of the local context in each of the five study sites, which represent a diverse set of security needs, challenges, and opportunities. Findings from the field data give insight into women’s motivations or incentives to engage with CBAGs, their roles and agency in conflict and violence, and their participation in local reconciliation or dispute settlement processes.

This research contributes to the gender and conflict literature and WPS policy framework by examining women’s active participation and agency across CBAGs in urban and rural settings in Kenya. The discussion of recommendations drawn from field data offers insightful and practical suggestions for future research, policy, and practice to inform approaches to Kenyan security governance, including CBAGs, in a

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- 2 Jakana Thomas, *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>; Hilary Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>.
 - 3 H. N. Nyabola, “The Legal Challenge of Civil Militia Groups in Kenya” *ISS African Security Review* 18, no. 3, (2009): 90–102, <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/the-legal-challenge-of-civil-militia-groups-in-kenya/>.
 - 4 Eddy Mwanza, “Tales of Kenya’s Notorious, Bold & Beautiful Gangsters” *Kenyans.co.ke*, August 19, 2020, <https://www.kenyans.co.ke/news/56555-theses-kenyas-notorious-bold-beautiful-gangsters>.
 - 5 Mohamed Ahmed, “All-female criminal gang unleashes terror on coastal residents,” *Nairobi News*, May 6, 2018, <https://nairobinews.nation.africa/all-female-criminal-gang-unleashes-terror/>; and Major SD Mwachinalo, *Nexus between Organized Criminal Gangs and Terrorist Groups: Case of Mombasa County* (Karen, Kenya: International Peace Support Training Centre IPSTC, 2019), 43, <https://ipstc.org/index.php/downloads-publications/publications/category/56-2019?download=191:occasional-paper-10-2-2019>.

conflict- and gender-sensitive manner. The recommendations focus on viewing women as political actors whose inclusion is key to policy and programming in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Programs and policy should focus on setting women up for success in obtaining social, economic, and political power within their communities. Further research is encouraged to draw comparative lessons across contexts and to further develop understandings of women’s relationships to violence and armed groups.

Community-based armed groups

Community-based armed groups are a subset of nonstate armed groups that can be aligned with or complementary to the state or operate in gray areas with minimal state presence. According to Moritz Schuberth, “CBAGs are embedded within their communities, whose delineation can be defined by territory, blood ties, or shared identities.”⁶ According to Daniel Agbibo, CBAGs can be “viewed as entities that define boundaries and protect communities encompassed within these boundaries; they surveil and act against any threat to these communities.”⁷ Violent extremist organizations (VEOs) do not constitute CBAGs, as defined in this study, but instead are defined as nonstate armed groups more broadly. VEOs interact, align, or fight with CBAGs and are significant actors in conflicts in which CBAGs operate and thus cannot be separated from the discussion of nonstate armed groups in Kenya.

Schuberth argues that while CBAGs typically fulfill different functions simultaneously, three main ideal types of CBAGs can be discerned depending on their primary function at a given point:

1. vigilantes providing security for their communities;
2. militias working at the behest of political sponsors; or
3. criminal gangs pursuing the economic self-interest of their members.⁸

CBAGs in Kenya mostly correspond with these three ideal typical functions but may carry the overlapping characteristics of more or all of them and can be mobilized by a variety of drivers and actors.

The conduct and behavior of CBAGs, as in any social grouping, is greatly influenced and shaped by the intersection of various identities and status of its members.⁹ A comprehensive understanding of these groups appreciates the relationships and effect of structural and contextual factors—such as race, ethnicity, religion, class, age, and gender—on the general experiences of individuals both in the community

6 Moritz Schuberth, *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>.

7 Daniel Agbibo, *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>. See also 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>.

8 Schuberth, *Approaching Community-Based Armed Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 4.

9 Crenshaw, K, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” (University of Chicago Legal Forum 1989:139-167).

and the group.¹⁰ The contestations, negotiations, and rejection of these identities greatly influence the dynamics and power relations within the groups and perceptions in society. At an individual level, these reflect how individuals, including women and girls, navigate their agency within the group structure.¹¹

In Kenya, a key part of understanding CBAGs relates to ethnic division and the way CBAGs claim to support certain ethnic groups. The emergence and activities of CBAGs in Kenya are closely tied to politics and the electoral calendar. Inadequate presence of the state, impunity in conflict-affected contexts, and protracted marginalization provide incentives for vulnerable community members to seek out alternative means of ensuring community security amid intercommunal violence and exclusion.¹² CBAGs exist because they are seen to serve a legitimate purpose, i.e., to augment security for the in-group.

Due to strong popular support and social endorsement of their activities, the groups not only form relationships with local communities and formal government security forces but also challenge state authority.¹³ On one hand, the Kenyan legal system is supposed to prosecute illegal groups and ethnic militias, as they threaten security, terrorize communities, and can gain control of entire neighborhoods, undermining the credibility of the state security and judicial systems. In October 2010, the government of Kenya enacted the Prevention of Organized Crimes Act.¹⁴ This act declared thirty-three organized criminal groups illegal—including the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), the Sabaot Land Defense Force (SLDF), Forty-Two Brothers, and the Taliban¹⁵—and accused them of criminal activities that elicited fear in society. On the other hand, relations between the government and armed groups are ambiguous and inconsistent, as the complicity of the national elite and the apparent toleration of civil militias cast doubt on the willingness and ability of the judicial system to address the security concerns posed by these groups.¹⁶

The social and political dynamics that facilitate CBAGs in Kenya affect the entire population, which of course includes women. Engaging with CBAGs is a political act, and women, like men, boys, girls, and other gender and sexual minorities in society, are involved in shaping the political landscape of their societies. This study aims to better understand their relationships to and engagements with CBAGs in different parts of the country in order to capture the range of their experiences and impacts.

10 Potter, Hillary. "Intersectional criminology: Interrogating identity and power in criminological research and theory." *Critical Criminology* 21, no. 3 (2013): 305; See also Lynch, M. J., & Michaelowski, R. (2006). *Primer in radical criminology: Critical perspectives on crime, power & identity*. (4th ed.). Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press, 131.

11 Nagel, Joane. "Constructing ethnicity: Creating and recreating ethnic identity and culture." *Social problems* 41, no. 1 (1994): 152–176.; See also Bakewell, Oliver. "Some reflections on structure and agency in migration theory." *Journal of ethnic and migration studies* 36, no. 10 (2010): 1689–1708.

12 The number of these groups were said to have increased to 108 by 2016, and to over 326 by 2021, a trend attributed to political mobilization. Mombasa and Bungoma counties have the highest numbers of such groups.

13 Nyabola, "The Legal Challenge of Civil Militia Groups in Kenya."

14 Prevention of Organised Crimes Act No. 6 of 2010. Revised Edition 2012 [2010] by the National Council for Law Reporting with the Authority of the Attorney-General, http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/Prevention_of_Organised_Crimes_Act_No._6_of_2010.pdf

15 Note that this group is distinct from the well-known Taliban in Afghanistan.

16 Nyabola, "The Legal Challenge of Civil Militia Groups in Kenya."

METHODOLOGY

Research questions

This case study of women's participation in community-based armed groups (CBAGs) in Kenya examines:

1. the diversity of women's motivations to participate in community-based armed groups in Kenya;
2. women's roles and agency within community-based armed groups, communal conflicts, as well as community security and peacebuilding structures; and
3. gender dynamics in conflict ecosystems, including social perceptions about women's engagement in conflict.

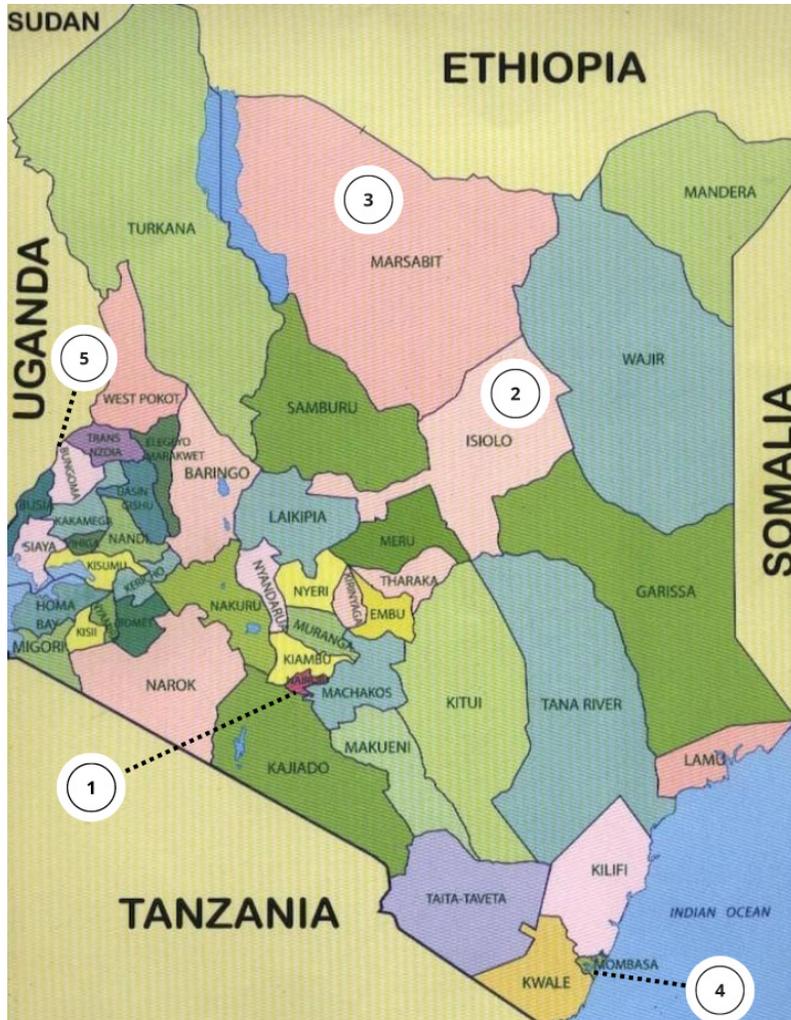
The report shines a light on the reality of women's political agency and capacity for both violence and peacebuilding. What factors motivate women to engage with or participate in CBAGs? What roles do women fulfill both within and adjacent to CBAGs? How do their communities perceive their involvement? What roles are available to them in community peace and security? By examining these questions in the diverse contexts of the study sites, this report provides insight into not only the range of women's engagement and agency in CBAGs, but also the challenges and opportunities presented by their inclusion in local peace and security efforts.

Study sites

The local research team conducted the study in five selected counties that represent Kenya's pastoral, urban, and rural clusters, each with unique conflict types and actors.¹⁷ The range of conflicts in these five sites provides ample opportunity to understand the diversity of CBAG composition and behaviors including women's varying roles in and relationships to violence and reconciliation across these contexts.

17 B. Rohwerder, *Conflict Analysis of Kenya Birmingham* (UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, 2015), <https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/KenyaConflictAnalysis.pdf> <https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/KenyaConflictAnalysis.pdf>

Image 1: Counties in Kenya¹⁸



1. In *Nairobi*, the capital of Kenya, the study focused on urban gangs that provide security and, in many cases, services such as water, garbage collection, and electricity in informal settlements, particularly Mathare.¹⁹ These groups retain distinct ethnic identities and mutate over time throughout the electoral calendar, with some participating in political and ethnic violence around elections.²⁰ Informal settlements are largely unplanned and lack adequate formal structures for public service delivery, creating gaps in security provision that non-state actors may step in to fill.

2. *Isiolo County* is home to a multi-ethnic, predominantly pastoralist population. The main ethnic groups are the Borana, Turkana, Samburu, Somali, and Meru, and tensions exist over boundary disputes, historical injustices, and land access issues. Described as “a hub for the small arms

trade from Kenya’s northern neighbors,”²¹ Isiolo experiences recurrent cattle raiding and resource-based conflicts as groups clash over water and pastureland. In such rural areas, given the prominence of land-based conflict and cattle rustling, ethnic grievances, and strong tribal structures, ethnic-based CBAGs organized as a community militia are the most common conflict actors filling the gap in security provision.²²

18 Image adapted from: maps-kenya.ke.com Source: UGC. Read more in “Counties in Kenya: Their governors and headquarters,” <https://www.tuko.co.ke/261970-kenya-counties-know-47-counties-governors.html>

19 For more on the role of gangs in informal settlements and crime in Kenya, see: Simone Haysom and Ken Opala, *The Politics of Crime: Kenya’s Gang Phenomenon* (Geneva: Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime, 2020), 21, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The-politics-of-crime-Kenyas-Gang-Phenomenon_GITOCESAObs.pdf.

20 See also: “Kill Those Criminals”: Security Forces Violations in Kenya’s August 2017 Elections (Human Rights Watch, 2017), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/10/15/kill-those-criminals/security-forces-violations-kenyas-august-2017-elections>.

21 Kennedy Mkutu Agade and Abdullahi Boru Halakhe, *Isiolo County, Kenya - Rapid Assessment of the Institutional Architecture for Conflict Mitigation : Rapid Assessment on Institutional Architecture for Conflict Mitigation Isiolo* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group), <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/ar/131951587730959660/pdf/Rapid-Assessment-on-Institutional-Architecture-for-Conflict-Mitigation-Isiolo.pdf>.

22 Focus group discussion with mixed community members, Isiolo, July 19, 2021; Interview with local cleric, Isiolo, July 19, 2021.

3. *Marsabit County* is a neighbor of Isiolo county that sometimes gets drawn into their local conflicts, as well as conflicts on the Kenya and Ethiopia border. Marsabit experiences cattle rustling as well as resource-based and political, ethnic, or clan-based conflicts that also play out across the border with Ethiopia. Deep-seated tribalism, ethnicized politics, competition for the distribution of power and resources, and high levels of violence have eroded trust in state security to restore security or promote justice and social cohesion. Residents have experienced recurrent massacres, communal raids, and armed robberies. In this context, ethnic militias may be perceived by communities as a means to ensure self-defense and maintain hard boundaries between the conflicting Borana and Gabbra communities.²³

4. In *Mombasa County* the study concentrated on the Kenyan coastal counties of Mombasa and Kwale, which are hotbeds of criminal gangs, militias, and violent extremist organizations such as al-Shabab. Mombasa County has experienced political violence, radicalization to violent extremism and human rights violations from government counter-terrorism efforts. The Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) operates in Mombasa and neighboring counties, agitating for secession from Kenya, arguing that the coastal region is not part of Kenya (*Pwani si Kenya*).²⁴ The MRC also agitates for land ownership by the native community, claiming that “non-locals” have dispossessed the indigenous people of their natural land rights.²⁵

5. *Bungoma County* is the home of the Sabaot Land Defense Forces, a violent ethnic militia originally aiming to recover ancestral land from later migrants.²⁶ In the Mt. Elgon constituency, violence between the Soy and Ndorobo clans of the Sabaot community at the center of these land disputes was perpetrated by the SLDF, comprised of Soy fighters. There have been multiple accounts of SLDF killings and abductions, displacement, mutilation (particularly of women), rape and sexual violence, and forced recruitment of young men and women.²⁷ The government military operation that ultimately defeated the militia left residents of the region deeply traumatized as a result of human rights abuses by both sides.²⁸ Today, clan disputes among the Bukusu, Tachonyi, Teso, Luhya, and Kikuyu groups, among others, exist, but the area is more cosmopolitan, and the previously common interethnic conflict has given way to crime-related violence.²⁹

23 For further information on these dynamics, see: Marsabit County: Rapid Conflict Assessment (Interpeace, 2022), <https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Marsabit-Report.pdf>.

24 The MRC was declared illegal by the Kenyan government in 2010, but in 2012, a court overturned that declaration. See: Joseph Akwiri, “Kenya Arrests Leader of Separatist Coastal Movement,” Reuters, October 14, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/cnews-us-kenya-politics-idCAKCN0I41WX20141015>; Winnie Atieno, “Kenya: Why Government Wants MRC Members to Surrender,” AllAfrica, July 29, 2021, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202107290991.html>.

25 Emmanuel Kisigani and Masha Lewela, “Mombasa Republican Council is demanding secession and campaigning to mobilise inhabitants not to participate in the forthcoming general elections, what can the state do?” Institute for Security Studies, June 27, 2012, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/kenyas-mombasa-republican-council-liberators-or-nascent-radical-fanatics>.

26 “Submission to 41st Session of the United Nations Committee Against Torture on Kenya,” Human Rights Watch, September 15, 2008, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CAT/Shared%20Documents/KEN/INT_CAT_NGO_KEN_41_9383_E.pdf.

27 For further information, see, for example: “All the Men Have Gone”: War Crimes in Kenya’s Mt. Elgon Conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2008), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/07/27/all-men-have-gone/war-crimes-kenyas-mt-elgon-conflict>.

28 Ibid.

29 Interview, Cheptais, Bungoma, August 25, 2021.

Data collection and limitations

The findings from this study come from primary qualitative data. The local research team, led by principal investigator Prisca Kamungi, collected qualitative data through key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and secondary source data. KIIs were held with government officials, including chiefs and county commissioners, independent experts working on CBAGs, representatives of civil society and nongovernmental organizations, religious leaders, community-based organizations and community elders, youth leaders, at-risk persons, and active, inactive, and convicted members of CBAGs, their relatives, friends, and victims. FGDs were held with only a few women, men, youth, and community members working to promote cohesion, reconciliation, and reintegration. The study targeted only respondents above the age of eighteen, acquiring their informed consent to participate.

Data collection began in the summer of 2021 after passing ethical clearance processes in both Kenya and the United States. The principal investigator drafted the data collection instruments (interview guide and focus group discussion guide) in a consultative process and then translated them into the national language (Kiswahili). A team of local researchers³⁰ conducted the data collection, which took place through face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, and virtual meetings respecting local COVID-19 safety regulations. A risk assessment process guided the project to ensure the safety, security, and health of researchers and participants and guarantee data security and anonymity.

Table 1: Type and location of data collection

County	Face-to-face Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	Telephone Interviews	Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
Nairobi	21	42	2 (men and women)
Mombasa	18	11	1 (men)
Isiolo	9	15	2 (men and women)
Marsabit	12	31	2 (men and women)
Bungoma	7	22	2 (men and women)
Total	67	121	9

30 Special thanks to the local researchers Peter Mwamachi, Brian Kimari, Symphorosa Oundo, and Jamal Abdalla, with the leadership of Prisca Kamungi.

Participants were identified through purposive sampling, snowball sampling, and convenience sampling. There are acknowledged biases in the sample, and it does not reflect the whole population of these countries. The interviews were semi-structured, with the talks directed by the respondents' circumstances and their willingness to address specific topics. Consequently, not all respondents discussed all the topics addressed in the study.

Further, due to COVID-19, the team revised the data collection methodology to focus more on KIIs and online methods than on FGDs. This affected the sample size, while phone interviews for such a sensitive topic may have affected data quality. The research team also dealt with their own health challenges during the process yet were committed to continuing the field research. In the end, data gathered by the research team was incredibly rich and insightful but, given health and safety concerns there were limited opportunities to analyze the data collaboratively. A broad literature review and secondary source data supported primary data to develop further analysis and the discussion and recommendations of this report.

FINDINGS: WOMEN IN CBAGS IN KENYA

The comparative, microlevel findings from the field data give insight into the diversity of women's motivations or incentives to engage with CBAGs, their roles and agency in conflict and violence, gender dynamics including community pressures and perceptions of women's engagement with conflict, and their participation in local reconciliation or dispute settlement processes. These insights, taken together, demonstrate a central premise of the WPS agenda: that women are complex political actors whose motivations and roles cannot be simplified.

Women's motivations for participation and engagement with armed groups

Insecurity, impunity, lack of effective policing, and political polarization are key drivers of CBAG formation in different regions in Kenya, as well as sources of legitimacy within communities. Impunity for violence, ineffective political and security structures, commercialization of cattle raids, and emerging bandit economies in urban informal settlements are key contextual factors for understanding the conditions that lead to the formation of CBAGs and can help explain their appeal to some women in Kenya.

INSECURITY AND GRIEVANCE

In conflict-affected places such as Marsabit, women were seen as joining or supporting CBAGs for pragmatic reasons: lack of choice. The importance of the security context in understanding women's engagement with CBAGs was summarized by an interviewee: "Women are members of society in areas where this is the situation. It's very hard for them not to be involved. It's their home."³¹ In Bungoma, focus group

31 Interview with CSO representative, Marsabit, July 23, 2021.

participants reiterated this theme: “Women are just as involved as the boys. They have the same challenges in the society, so even they can commit crime.”³²

In Isiolo, focus group participants noted, “Our patriarchal systems mean that it’s the mother handling the problem. Polygamy also means that the men can easily just take off. Conflict for women is usually quite personal. Men might have interests. Women have revenge ideas because they’ve been very affected.”³³ The data showed that personal tragedies and the desire to avenge loved ones killed in violence or exposed to rights violations were the main motivations for joining or supporting CBAGs, especially in areas where state response to conflict is deemed unjust.

In the Coast region [Mombasa] and Isiolo, seeking security in the absence of murdered or disappeared loved ones and revenge against security agencies for human rights violations may contribute to women’s support for and engagement in CBAGs.³⁴ In the absence of effective state security, the sense of responsibility to protect their people and support formations tasked with protecting the community was thought to propel young men and women to join or support the activities of CBAGs.³⁵

In Mombasa, CBAGs were thought to have some support from the population, and were described as an outlet for retribution against abuses perpetrated by the Kenyan security forces against communities.³⁶ As a result of reports of unjustified detentions, harsh police practices, and extrajudicial killings and disappearances by Kenyan security forces, individuals in communities sympathize with CBAGs, gangs, and violent extremist organizations.³⁷ Interviewees noted that the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) had received increased support from the population in the Coast region following perceived intimidation and human rights abuses in the context of countering violent extremism³⁸ as well as accusations of the Kenyan government of marginalization, discrimination, and neglect.³⁹

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

A common explanation for women’s support of CBAGs across Kenya was the perceived financial benefit or security from associating with CBAGs. In Mombasa, poverty and a lack of sustainable livelihoods to support themselves or their families were the most frequently discussed reasons for women joining CBAGs.⁴⁰ In Nairobi’s informal settlements, irregular sources of income, such as monetary handouts from

32 Focus group discussion with women, Tongaren Bungoma, August 28, 2021.

33 Focus group discussion with community leaders, Isiolo, July 19, 2021.

34 “Conflict for women is usually quite personal. men might have interests. Women have revenge ideas because they’ve been very affected.” Focus group with community leaders, Isiolo, July 19, 2021. “Due to their extensive networks and connections in the community, women push community members, particularly men, to join in vengeance, leading to some girls idolizing young men in armed gangs because they feel safe in their company.” Analysis by field researcher, Mombasa.

35 Analysis by field researcher, Mombasa.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Kisgani and Lewela, “The Mombasa Republican Council is demanding secession and campaigning to mobilise inhabitants not to participate in the forthcoming general elections, what can the state do?”

40 Data analysis report from Mombasa field researcher, February 2022.

politicians or political agents; criminal activities, including political violence and extortion; and illegal taxation for providing security to the community, are legitimized in everyday discourse as livelihood options for poor women.⁴¹

The appeal of the expected financial security from CBAGs is heavily influenced by changing gender and household dynamics across Kenya. As stated by one interviewee, “Men have shirked their responsibilities [as bread earners], so women have all the obligations” and are in a “constant state of stress and worry.”⁴² Financial pressures are amplified by women’s inability to own land, access titles and deeds, and being disinherited as widows, according to a community chief in Bungoma.⁴³

In areas where cattle raiding was common and a predominant form of pastoralist conflict, such as Marsabit and Isiolo, previous research has suggested that rites of passage for men, like the acquisition of livestock to pay the bride price, may be linked to security dynamics.⁴⁴ An interviewee in Isiolo specifically noted that “in some communities, men can’t marry women if they don’t raid.”⁴⁵ Other interviewees in both Marsabit and Isiolo frequently referred to women as “inciting” violence and raids (as discussed further below). An interviewee in Isiolo suggested, while not involved in direct combat “women mainly just encourage raids,”⁴⁶ while another in Marsabit explained women “also will incite their men to fight when they feel as though they are not doing enough. They know how to do this. Immediately you call the man a woman, he will do what you want to prove otherwise.”⁴⁷ This introduces the possibility that young, unmarried women may encourage cattle raiding and support members of CBAGs in cattle raiding because having the animals for their dowries increases prospects of marriage and prestige, although the extent to which this is the case remains unclear.

In addition to economic considerations, relationships and social networks are one of the most powerful explanatory factors as to why individuals join violent groups.⁴⁸ Data from Mombasa indicated that CBAGs stemmed from criminal gangs that fulfilled social gathering roles. Some social networks that started as non-security providing groups like *chamas*⁴⁹ or football teams later become CBAG networks. If women were already a part of these social networks, this could translate into their integration into CBAG networks. When women’s social networks fail to give appropriate emotional, financial, and economic support, they turn to *maskanis*.⁵⁰

41 According to the principal investigator’s research, Nairobi, 2021.

42 Interview with Chief, Mbakalo location, Bungoma, August 28, 2021.

43 Ibid.

44 See, for example: Kennedy Mkutu, Pastoralists, Politics and Development Projects: Understanding the Layers of Armed Conflict in Isiolo County, Kenya (BICC Working Paper, 7/2019) (Bonn: Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC)), <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-68074-7>.

45 Interview with District Peace Committee chair, Isiolo, July 18, 2021.

46 Interview, NGO Director, Isiolo, July 18, 2021.

47 Interview with former army member, Marsabit, July 22, 2021.

48 See, for example, “Turning Point: A Comprehensive Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (November 2016), <https://www.csis.org/features/turning-point>.

49 Groups with economic goals, they save money and support each other.

50 Maskanis are “bases” where young men in slums meet up to socialize.

Women's roles in armed groups and conflict

It is often difficult to assess whether women's relationships with and activities in CBAGs are formal or informal, active or supportive and whether these labels are even relevant.⁵¹ Women's supportive role in these formations extends to protecting members of their own community by withholding information that could lead to their arrest or other forms of punishment and accountability. Conversely, testifying against a community member attracts social censure and potential reprisals by CBAGs for the perceived betrayal of community, values, and interests.

INCITEMENT AND SUPPORT FOR VIOLENCE

Women were commonly seen supporting CBAGs across field locations through inciting and motivating violence. Women draw on gendered norms and encourage their men to fight by emasculating men who fail to fight.⁵² One participant explained that men are motivated to fight "because they don't want to be regarded as women."⁵³ Masculinities play a key role in inciting men to fight, as men perform masculinity to gain approval from women.⁵⁴ In Kenya, as elsewhere, it seems women support CBAGs by recruiting, mobilizing resources, spying, or serving in more organizational roles as messengers, legal representatives, treasurers, and secretaries.

Community rituals such as songs and praise from women are powerful and "push the men to plan more for violence so that they get the praise."⁵⁵ A group of elders in Isiolo noted that women's rituals around fighting give men the spirit to fight.⁵⁶ "The power in song is very important. If a woman sings a prayer, the men won't even fear death at that point."⁵⁷

Women were involved in inciting conflict in a variety of ways across field locations, for example by engaging in illicit or illegal activities as part of their role in inciting violence between CBAGs. In Bungoma, a focus group noted, "Women make the illegal brews and cannabis for the young men. This is important because the men use it to get courage for fighting."⁵⁸

51 Jakana Thomas, *Duty and Defiance: Women in Community-based Armed Groups in West Africa* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2021.1>.

52 An interviewee in Marsabit noted, "They will incite their men to fight when they feel as though they are not doing enough. They know how to do this. Immediately you call the man a woman; he will do what you want to prove otherwise. They'll call for men to take their dresses and the men are quick to plan the next raid." In Isiolo, the role of masculinity in women's support of CBAGs was reiterated by an interview participant noting women provide "powerful incitement based on emasculation of young men not willing to fight." Interview with former army and FBO member, Male, Marsabit, July 22, 2021; Interview with security consultant, Isiolo, July 18, 2021; Focus group discussion with Community members, Isiolo, July 2021.

53 Interview with member of Samburu Council of Elders, Female, Isiolo, July 20, 2021.

54 The way in which women have used ideas about gender identities to shame men to participate in violence was also documented in a study in Kismayo, Somalia. See: Life & Peace Institute, Peace Direct, and Somali Women Solidarity Organization, "Learning from Kismayo: A Study Report," April 2018, <http://life-peace.org/resource/learning-from-kismayo/>.

55 Focus group discussion with community members, Isiolo, July 2021.

56 Interview, Gabra Council of Elders, Isiolo, July 20, 2021.

57 Interview with member of Samburu Council of Elders, Female, Isiolo, July 20, 2021.

58 Focus group discussion with men, Tongaren Bungoma, August 24, 2021.

NETWORKS AND INTELLIGENCE

Women were also described as key recruiters, especially in recruiting their children and relatives to join CBAGs. In Mombasa, interview participants saw women as ideal recruiters because of their large networks and the communities' trust in them. Female recruiters have higher network linkage than male recruiters; they are more effective in distributing the group's message than their male counterparts. For instance, in Bungoma, one interview participant explained that women would "trick boda boda⁵⁹ riders to lure them to gangs."⁶⁰

Women's roles in intelligence and harboring information were discussed across study contexts. In Isiolo, a male security consultant explained that "Women provide a lot of intelligence. They spread information, especially where there is intermarriage between communities."⁶¹ He gave the example of a Borana woman married to a Somali man. In Bungoma, one interview participant explained that women hold much information in the community and some contributed to conflict by supplying intelligence to men. She noted that while the men might lead the operational aspect, the women are heavily involved in the planning [of CBAGs activities] because they are the ones with the intelligence.⁶² In Mombasa, the women who are linked to armed groups are usually informers, part of the armed groups' intelligence gathering mechanisms in the community.⁶³

EXPLOITING STEREOTYPES AND TRADITIONALLY FEMININE ROLES

While many women broke with feminized roles through their participation in CBAGs, they also leveraged stereotypes to support CBAGs in other ways. "Women are utilized by men because it's not easy to identify that they are criminals. The perception is that they can't be involved," according to a Bungoma focus group.⁶⁴ In Mombasa and Isiolo, women were being used by CBAGs, as well as violent extremism organizations, possibly because they were less likely to be suspected of being armed and thought to be able to access information more easily than men.⁶⁵

Women in CBAGs in Kenya also perform more stereotypical feminine tasks, including emotional labor. For example, an interviewee in Isiolo explained that women provide "solace to fighters."⁶⁶ In addition to emotional support, women were discussed to varying degrees across research sites, including in Isiolo,

59 Boda bodas are motorcycle taxis, a common feature of the Kenyan transportation sector. See Douglas Lucas Kivoi, "Boda bodas are critical to Kenya's transport system. But they've gone rogue," *The Conversation*, March 17, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/boda-bodas-are-critical-to-kenyas-transport-system-but-theyve-gone-rogue-179234>.

60 Focus group discussion with men, Tongaren Bungoma, August 24, 2021.

61 Interview with security consultant, Isiolo, July 18, 2021.

62 Interview, Chief Cheptais location, Female, Bungoma, August 28, 2021.

63 Data analysis report from Mombasa field researcher, February 2022.

64 Focus Group with Women, Tongaren Bungoma, August 28, 2021.

65 This suggestion is based on repeated suggestions from respondents that women are used to store and conceal weapons and provide intelligence, primarily in Isiolo and Bungoma.

66 Interview with security consultant, Isiolo, July 18, 2021.

Bungoma, Marsabit, and Mombasa, as key to CBAGs in their support in terms of cooking, medical support, storing arms, and cleaning.⁶⁷

PARTICIPATION IN VIOLENCE AND WOMEN-ONLY GROUPS

A topic that emerged across field locations was women’s roles in the violent aspect of CBAGs. Gangs composed entirely of women seem particularly noteworthy because in certain contexts not only do women participate directly in violent groups, but they *are* the only members of the groups. In Mathare, Nairobi County, *the Queens* are known to be a group of violent women who fight to protect fellow women from violence by men and provide support to male members of both criminal gangs and informal security arrangements.⁶⁸ Other research has documented the presence of women-led prostitution rings in the informal settlements of Nairobi.⁶⁹

When women-only gangs were discussed in interviews, their violence was often compared to men’s or seen as a result of men. For example, in Mombasa, interviewees described women gangs as “just as violent as men’s and more aggressive in the pursuit of their agenda.”⁷⁰ The accuracy of this statement is unknown—women’s violence is often viewed as more notable than men’s.⁷¹

WOMEN IN COMMUNITY SECURITY AND PEACEBUILDING

The range of expressions of agency indicates that women do not only support CBAGs or incite conflict, but they also soothe tensions and attempt violence prevention between CBAGs. For example, one female interviewee in Bungoma explained that “women also leaked information to their friends when they knew about plans to kill people in that area. The women are most affected by conflict, so they’ll try hard not to have fights, especially when they think their side will lose.”⁷²

In addition to their (mis)alignment with CBAGs, women may also pursue peaceful outcomes through other types of community associations, including peace committees, community policing committees, and *Nyumba Kumi*.⁷³ Those consulted in the research suggested that, in some cases, women were seen to

67 Focus group with men, Tongaren Bungoma, August 24, 2021; Interview with male security consultant, Isiolo, July 18, 2021; Data analysis report from Mombasa field researcher, February 2022; Interview with Chief, Male, Marsabit, July 21, 2022; Focus group with local government and local organization members, Kapsokwon Mt. Elgon, Bungoma, August 25, 2021; Focus group with women, Tongaren Bungoma, August 28, 2021.

68 According to the principal investigator’s research, Nairobi, 2021.

69 Katharine Petrich and Phoebe Donnelly, “Worth Many Sins: Al-Shabaab’s Shifting Relationship with Kenyan Women” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, no. 6-7 (2019): 1169–1192, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2019.1649814>.

70 Interview with a community elder, Mombasa.

71 Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women’s Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2007).

72 Interview with Chief, Cheptais location, Bungoma, August 28, 2021.

73 Translated as ten households in Swahili, Nyumba Kumi was launched as a government initiative to guarantee local-level peace and security. It aims to bring together Kenyan residents in clusters defined by their physical locations with the vision of a neighborhood where residents know each other and look out for each other. Clusters are made up of at least ten households within a given location, be it a number of houses, a street, a village, a gated community, or flats in a residential neighborhood. The initiative is associated with preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE). It was premised on the idea that citizens know their areas and are indeed able

be at the forefront of peacebuilding initiatives,⁷⁴ but further opportunities to support women’s involvement in peace committees and economic activities were needed.⁷⁵ Based on an interview in Marsabit, women’s inclusion in peace committees may not always be welcome due to perceived interference in community traditions, cultural norms, and practices.⁷⁶ Moving forward, communities and supporters of peace efforts should be careful to avoid only a tokenistic inclusion of women in hitherto male-dominated structures.⁷⁷ Structural changes in gender relations and power dynamics should be explored as opposed to an “add women and stir” approach in which just the inclusion of women is regarded as the endpoint in the process of institutional change.

Perceptions of women’s engagement with armed groups and conflict

Despite the recognition that women, like men, were embroiled in conflict dynamics, the perception of women’s participation in CBAGs was sometimes negative and seen as a reflection of the breakdown of the gendered social order. At the same time, communities also relied on women as a key resource for CBAGs.

THE BREAKDOWN OF SOCIAL ORDER

The increased visibility of women in CBAGs may be reflective of shifts in conflict dynamics; worsening poverty; and the unique ethnic, economic marginality, and social pressures affecting women—especially those with weaker social networks from broken or homeless families.⁷⁸ Gender dynamics, including violence by male members of CBAGs, leave women to ensure their own security and survival in the informal,

to report suspicious or unusual activities, hence contributing to efforts to counter crime and violent extremism. See: Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism*, and Nyumba Kumi Initiative, *A Critical Analysis*.

74 Focus group participants in Isiolo specifically mentioned the important role women already played in grassroots and peacebuilding efforts, highlighting women’s leadership in doing so. Focus group with civil society organizations, other organizations, and community leaders, Isiolo, July 19, 2021; –Focus group with community members, mixed, Mombasa, July 19, 2021; Interview with female peace ambassador, Marsabit, July 22, 2021.

75 The importance of empowering women was noted in terms of access, resources, engagement in peace efforts, and economic support in the following consultations, among others: Focus group discussion with women, Bungoma Town, August 26, 2021; Interview with Samburu Council of Elders, female, July 20, 2021; Interview with female NGO employee Isiolo, July 18, 2021; Interview with NGO representative, male, Isiolo, July 20, 2021; Data analysis report from Mombasa field researcher, February 2022; Interview with peace ambassador, female, Marsabit, July 21, 2021; Interview with CSO representative, male, Marsabit, July 23, 2022.

76 A member of a peace committee in Marsabit observed, “Let us be careful to protect our culture; not everything from outside is good for us. In our community, security is a man’s role; what are you bringing women into? There are things we cannot talk [about] in their presence because they have not undergone certain rituals that are for men only. Some views about women persist and make it difficult for us to make them core members of our committee; we include them because we are forced to.”

77 PeaceRep, Political Settlements Research Database, <https://www.politicalsettlements.org/publications-database/>.

78 Respondents in Mombasa and Kwale noted that “When women’s social network fails to give appropriate emotional, financial, and economic support, they turn to maskani’s that are at times chamas, football teams, that later end up being CBAGs networks which fill the need...Because of their allegedly weaker social networks, orphans, ex-gang members, and recent converts, for example, have been portrayed as more solitary and vulnerable to VE as well.” Data analysis report from Mombasa field researcher, February 2022.

often illicit, economy of the informal settlements.⁷⁹ The links between CBAGs and drug dealing, illicit alcohol trade, and prostitution may additionally influence or stigmatize the perception of women who were involved in these groups.⁸⁰

Community attitudes towards women's support for or participation in CBAGs exist in tandem with an understanding that women's support for CBAGs may be a symptom of a declining social order, to varying extents depending on the context. For example, in Bungoma county, women associated with armed groups are "viewed as being just as culpable as the men who actually went to fight. It took some time for them to be accepted in the community."⁸¹ In Mt. Elgon, study participants noted that women members of SLDF were both offenders and victims, an overlap caused by the harsh treatment they faced at the hands of male members, including beatings, degrading verbal abuse, and sexual violence.⁸² In Mathare, interviewees noted that some women had to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM) to be allowed to join the Mungiki,⁸³ a banned criminal gang/organization in Kenya.⁸⁴ The data from across Kenya illustrated that the line between perpetrator and victim is blurred during political violence, and women, like most individuals, inhabit both roles.⁸⁵

HEROISM

Communities often rely on women's participation in CBAGs for providing intelligence to community members, such as information on planned robberies and extrajudicial executions or security units, thus contributing to the protection of their neighbors. Community leaders in Isiolo discussed the respect given to women who support CBAGs. One community leader said that women in CBAGs are seen as heroines by their community and praised for the support they give to CBAGs (specifically through giving information and keeping secrets).⁸⁶ In Marsabit, a man interviewed described women as "heroes" and noted, "they are supporting the cause of the community through motivating the warriors. It's important

79 For example, in a focus group in Isiolo, participants noted that "the women are also often neglected by their husbands often and left to engage in illegal businesses e.g., selling drugs." Participants noted that "a lot of people have gotten into criminal activities because of unemployment and the rising cost of food and services. Women have been forced into prostitution and alcoholism, others have started robbing people and they are so desperate they will kill if need be." Focus group with women, Bungoma Town, August 26, 2021. Focus group with community leaders, Isiolo, July 19, 2021. In Marsabit, an interviewee noted that women "do a lot of incitement because they suffer. Interview with CSO representative, male, Marsabit, July 23, 2021.

80 In a focus group in Isiolo, for example, participants noted that "the violent extremist ones are usually recruited because of drug abuse. They are seen as people who've abused drugs although we know they don't" and "people have a lot of disdain/disregard for women who join VEOs- they seem uncultured, rejected by the communities really." Focus group with community leaders, Isiolo, July 19, 2021.

81 Further, "after some time people realised that it's the environment they were in and pressure they were under that made them do that. You get sucked in. the culture requires women not to move from stressful environments, they had to stay there." Focus group with men, Tongaren Bungoma, August 28, 2021.

82 "They had to endure so much suffering, like being beaten, denied food, or even raped, to prove themselves tough and loyal to the cause. I believe some would have wanted to escape but could not do so for fear of being killed or the knowledge that the community would not embrace them after what that group did to people." Interview with member of peace committee, Bungoma county.

83 According to the lead author's research.

84 "Mungiki is a violent youth movement that purports to represent the Kikuyu, a demographically, politically, and historically significant ethnic group in Kenya" and assumed a variety of CBAG roles. Hilary Matfess, p. 18.

85 For further discussion, see: Erin Baines, "Gender, Responsibility and the Grey Zone: Considerations for Transitional Justice," *Journal of Human Rights* 10, no. 4 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2011.619405>.

86 Focus group discussion with CSOs, FBOs, community leaders, Isiolo, July 19, 2021.

to have this . . . motivating them is equally important because warriors need confidence, and [women’s] songs will make you feel unbeatable.”⁸⁷

GENDERED STEREOTYPES

Some CBAGs seem to demonstrate a nuanced understanding of gender norms and stereotypes and exploit social constructions of masculinity and femininity to tap into various vulnerabilities among men and women in specific local contexts in order to attract, recruit, and retain adherents.⁸⁸ In Mombasa, there was the sense that men and women participated in CBAGs for different reasons. Loyalty was seen as particularly important for men participating in CBAGs, and they were expected to pledge allegiance to their group. In contrast, women were seen as more self-motivated in their engagement with CBAGs—working with them for tactical reasons. However, when women joined CBAGs, they seemed changed and felt empowered, and “gendered identities have been altered.”⁸⁹ New ideas about women’s gender roles were thought to cause tension in Mombasa upon return to their home environments from CBAGs.⁹⁰ Understanding how men and women use ideas about masculine and feminine roles is an essential part of gender analysis and key to the WPS agenda moving forward.

The comparison between men and women in CBAGs reveals aspects of how femininity and masculinity operate in perceptions of gangs. Women in gangs are seen to be fulfilling men’s roles in gangs in Bungoma, where women are armed with guns and occupy the vacuum left by men, participating in violence because, “They need to not to be seen as weak. They can be just as violent as the men.”⁹¹

Gendered stereotypes framed popular perceptions around women’s roles in intelligence in Isiolo: “Women distort information—because of the nature, it can be seen as a call to violence. They just talk that way, loud.”⁹² Women’s incitement or support of CBAGs was viewed negatively at times, for example by a male politician in Marsabit: “Emotive speeches on their suffering can poison the air. The men listen to them and want to protect them, especially through revenge.”⁹³

To conclude, while women’s integration into CBAGs may challenge stereotypes, it may not alter gender norms at large. While research demonstrates incorporation of women into CBAG membership, it is unclear if the goal of this behavior was to challenge gender norms more broadly. CBAGs occasionally faced resistance from communities for integrating women into their ranks, as this was seen as breaking community traditions, cultural values, and norms that dictate gender roles and hierarchies. However, women’s presence in CBAGs does not necessarily reduce gender stereotypes or violence against women,

87 Interview with former army and FBO member, Male, Marsabit, July 22, 2021.

88 Data analysis report from Mombasa field researcher, February 2022.

89 Ibid.

90 “Disengagement from a radical political community, on the other hand, can be extremely stressful, especially when it involves settling in a local community where others, such as mothers and other elderly female relatives who act as moral gatekeepers, are still committed to the old feudal and gender-biased order.” Analysis by field researcher, Mombasa.

91 Focus group discussion with local government, CSO, CBO, FBO members, Kapsokwon Mt. Elgon, Bungoma, August 25, 2021.

92 Focus group discussion with community leaders, Isiolo, July 19, 2021.

93 Interview with county officer, Marsabit, July 21, 2021.

including inside the groups. In certain CBAGs, women experience violence by male members, especially in internal struggles for power and control of rent.⁹⁴

DISCUSSION: DIVERSITY OF AGENCY

The literature on gender and conflict, and specifically on women in conflict, has sought to capture the diversity of women's roles and motivations in conflict. However, this study is unique in its revelation of this diversity within a single country through its use of micro-level analysis. This theory-building from the ground by examining local contexts is an attempt to respond to criticisms of the WPS's reproduction of colonial hierarchies, with scholarship and analysis erasing the perspectives of those from the Global South.⁹⁵ Since space and location inform claims to ownership and authority over the agenda, centering the local as the site of knowledge production remains key⁹⁶ to recognizing knowledge transfers from the ground up.⁹⁷

A key theme that emerged from this grassroots knowledge production under this research project was not only about women's agency but the diversity of said agency. This analysis fits well in feminist security studies literature yet is a unique, context-specific contribution from Kenyan study sites. The data in this study is an important step to building a database of individual micro-level analyses about the perceptions and experiences of women in CBAGs.

Feminist literature on women's engagement in armed groups and social movements cautions against the overgeneralization of women's motivations, as women are a diverse component of all societies.⁹⁸ The experiences and roles of women in CBAGs and polarized societies are often narrated as that of victims, mothers, lovers, wives, or persons defined by their relationship to men and boys. While the data identified personal tragedies and grievances as the main motivations for joining or supporting CBAGs, it is important to not overgeneralize such personal motivations for women. To compare, in the literature on women's engagement in violent extremism, some scholars have focused on personal motivations for women's participation in violence,⁹⁹ while others argue that women are no more motivated by personal narratives like revenge than men are: "the primary motivations for both men and women comes from

94 The use of different forms of gender-based violence against women members of different types of armed groups has been well-documented, see for example, Phoebe Donnelly, "The Interactive Relationship between Gender and Strategy," *Global Society* (June 27, 2018): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2018.1490252>; Megan Mackenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-Conflict Development* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); and Jocelyn Viterna, *Women in War: The Micro-Processes of Mobilization in El-Salvador* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

95 Soumita Basu, "The Global South Writes 1325 (Too)," *International Political Science Review* 37, no. 3 (2016): 362–374, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0192512116642616>.

96 Laura J. Shepherd, "Situating Women, Peace and Security: Theorizing from 'The Local,'" *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22, no. 4 (2020): 456–461, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2020.1796262>.

97 Miriam Mona Müller and Ambika Varma, "Advancing the WPS Agenda through Regional Governance in, for or by the Global South?" OurGenforInclusivePeace, December 8, 2020, <https://ogiporg.wixsite.com/home/post/advancing-the-wps-agenda-through-regional-governance-in-for-or-by-the-global-south>.

98 Viterna, *Women in War*.

99 Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

a loyalty to their community.”¹⁰⁰ Our research confirms both cases in Kenya: while personal grievance motivates some women to engage with CBAGs, community ties and socioeconomic networks were also strong pulls for women to participate in armed or violent groups in Kenya.

In some of the deeply polarized communities in Kenya, while women might not technically join because of coercive enlistment, engaging with CBAGs might not be viewed as a choice. Jakana Thomas and Kanisha Bond explore the contextual factors at the group level that can explain women’s participation in violent organizations. They conclude that the most salient variables are group size, positive gender ideology, and the use of terrorist tactics, notably, “violent organizations that use coercive enlistment are much more likely to have women participants than groups that rely on volunteers.”¹⁰¹ Although coercion does occur, women are not always forced into CBAGs, nor do they always pursue peaceful outcomes in the process of restoring stability and rehabilitation. Gendered assumptions of women’s powerlessness or peaceful nature obscure their agency and anger. As partisan individuals in polarized political contexts, women reinforce polarities through the everyday discourse of difference and memory of violence or discrimination.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The micro-level insights that follow hope to fortify gender-sensitive and inclusive policy and programming considerations and inform grassroots initiatives for peace and security in Kenya. The recommendations are directly drawn from interviews and focus group discussions in the study sites, based on what research participants see as security challenges and opportunities in their communities, and are buttressed with analysis from the gender and peacebuilding literature. Given the focus of this study on women’s engagement with CBAGs, these considerations concentrate on women and their motivations, empowerment, and impacts on community security, with the objective of conveying local perspectives. Further research is encouraged to situate these grassroots recommendations from this research in Kenya in the existing academic literature and compare them across different contexts in Kenya and sub-Saharan Africa. Future research could explore whether women’s involvement in CBAGs promotes gender equality and women’s empowerment goals, recognizing that not all women pursue peace agendas.

Support women’s economic security in unstable environments

Across the study sites, respondents stressed the need for women’s economic security. Providing education and training, raising literacy levels, and enabling women to learn business skills will offer alternatives to pursue income, build a stable home, and break out of violent environments, which, in turn, can help

100 Lindsey A. O’Rourke, “What’s Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?” *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (December 2, 2009): 681–718, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410903369084>.

101 Jakana L. Thomas and Kanisha D. Bond, “Women’s Participation in Violent Political Organizations,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 03 (August 2015): 488–506, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000313>.

forgo turning to violence or illegal dealings for self-sustenance.¹⁰² Education for more girls, especially in pastoralist areas, is crucial to providing opportunities in decision-making positions in patriarchal societies.¹⁰³ Some interview participants suggested “training of trainers” and knowledge exchanges: “There are women here who have done tremendous jobs. They need to be exposed to other places so that they can learn even more and exchange ideas with other communities.”¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, an equal education system will be central to “dismantling the patriarchal nature of Kenyan society and in the process increasing the chances that women will play a more active and recognized role in Kenyan society.”¹⁰⁵

Participants agreed that women should receive more support and business opportunities¹⁰⁶ despite existing efforts. According to a respondent in Marsabit, local organizations do a lot to provide education and training for women on savings and loan schemes. Financial inclusion, when appropriately applied, can be a tool for women’s empowerment, as it reduces poverty for financially disadvantaged people. With the ability to save and manage their money, women can gain financial stability and resiliency against economic shocks and changing circumstances.¹⁰⁷

Ensuring that women can earn a living outside of conflict is crucial to overcoming cultures of conflict.¹⁰⁸ In Bungoma, local organizations mobilize women to participate in budgeting processes and to apply good farming practices.¹⁰⁹ Other research found self-help groups can increase confidence in financial decision-making, promote income-generating activities, and expand credit access to vulnerable women.¹¹⁰ Addressing problems inherent in patriarchal societies—for example, around property ownership—could serve as a springboard for economic independence and encourage women to safeguard their property.¹¹¹ While economic stability cannot on its own resolve conflict dynamics, it can provide women with increased independence and ability to take care of their needs and enjoy their rights.¹¹²

102 Interview, Samburu Council of Elders, Isiolo, July 20, 2021; Interview with female representative, Cheptais location, Bungoma, August 28, 2021; Focus Group Discussion with women, Tongaren Bungoma, August 25, 2021; Interview with NGO representative, Marsabit, July 23, 2021.

103 Focus group discussion, CSOs, FBOs, community leaders, Isiolo, July 19, 2021.

104 Focus group discussion with local government, CSO, CBO, FBO members, Kapsokwon Mt. Elgon, Bungoma, August 25, 2021.

105 Peter Nordström, *Gender and Reconciliation in the New Kenya: Equality at the Heart*, Policy Brief no. 3., Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, (July 2013); and USAID, Kenya Gender Equality & Female Empowerment Fact Sheet, 2020, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Gender_Fact_Sheet_for_Kenya.pdf

106 Focus group discussion, Tongaren Bungoma, August 24, 2021.

107 B. M. Mulili, “Financial Inclusion as a Tool for Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa: Achieving UN’s 2030 SDG,” in Adeola, O. (eds) *Empowering African Women for Sustainable Development* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-59102-1_12.

108 Interview with former army member, Marsabit, July 22, 2021.

109 Focus group discussion with local government, CSO, CBO, FBO members, Kapsokwon Mt. Elgon, Bungoma, August 28, 2021.

110 Philip Onyango Were and Sarah Wairimu Kimaru-Muchai, “Evaluation of Self-Help Groups in Promoting Women Socio-Economic Empowerment in Kibra Sub-County, Nairobi County, Kenya,” *Journal of Global Awareness* 2, no. 1 (2021), <https://scholar.stjohns.edu/jga/vol2/iss1/6>.

111 Interview with NGO representative, Marsabit, July 23, 2021.

112 Wanga Patrick Wambunya, Ndung’u J. B. Ikenye, and Enos Mukadi Barasa, “Effect of Women Economic Empowerment on Family Stability in Imenti North Sub-County, Kenya,” *Journal of Psychology, Guidance, & Counseling* 1, no. 3 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjpgc.v1i3.94>.

Include women in political and economic leadership

Education and economic independence link closely with social and political inclusion and participation in decision-making. Political openness and strong leadership are necessary to include all relevant actors and alter the structures and practices that discriminate against women,¹¹³ thus enhancing the efficiency of peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. Bringing women into different decision-making, community-building, and local political fora is indispensable to ensuring women as conflict actors are invested in peacebuilding goals.¹¹⁴ To be effective agents of peace and security, women should be involved in decision-making from the family to the wider community level and have access to government and community programs, e.g., Nyumba Kumi, as well as resources and services.¹¹⁵

Already, the research found that the inclusion of women in a largely male-dominated peace and security structure has given them the space to take part in decision-making, local dispute resolution, and peace negotiations. According to the Kenya National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace, and Security, efforts to integrate women into Kenyan peace and security architecture have led to a two-fold increase in the number of women in peace committees, from 14 percent in 2013 to 29 percent in 2018, enhancing women's "ability to influence decision-making processes related to the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict."¹¹⁶ However, integrating women into peace and security institutions does not mean that their ideas will be heard.

An NGO worker in Isiolo suggested there should be more efforts to popularize UNSCR 1325¹¹⁷ to ensure women are protected from conflict and involved in prevention and response.¹¹⁸ In reality, "the full and meaningful participation of women in the political, economic and social aspects of states and societies" is a prerequisite for the full implementation of the WPS agenda. The inclusion of women in traditional institutions, or just the popularization of the agenda itself, alone will not help the uneven implementation of WPS principles.¹¹⁹ But women's transformative leadership in the different sectors and at different levels can challenge social perceptions about women's leadership and agency.¹²⁰

113 Nordström, *Gender and Reconciliation in the New Kenya*.

114 "When we talk about conflict, we have to bring everybody on board. We need to have all stakeholders on board around the mountain. We need to know how far they've come and find out the challenges they faced, so we can learn from them." Interview with elder, Cheptais location, Bungoma, August 25, 2021.

115 Interview with elder, Cheptais location, Bungoma, August 25, 2021; Focus Group Discussion with women, Bungoma Town, August 26, 2021.

116 Kenya National Action Plan on UNSC Resolution 1325, 4, <https://www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/sites/www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/files/kenya-2nd-1325-national-action-plan-knapii-2020-2024.pdf>.

117 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted on October 31, 2000, to formalize what we now know as the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda. The resolution seeks to recognize the contributions of and better integrate women into peace and security processes. More information is available at <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>.

118 Interview, NGO employee, Isiolo, July 18, 2021.

119 Vanessa F. Newby and Alanna O'Malley, "Introduction: WPS 20 Years On: Where Are the Women Now?" *Global Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (September 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksab017>.

120 REINVENT, Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development (CCGD) and African Women Study Centre (AWSC), *Expanding Women's territory in Leadership and Nurturing the Nation. A Guide to Women's Leadership*, A PROJECT OF Women in Leadership and Decision Making Committee, October 5, 2020, <https://ccgdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/EXPANDING-WOMENS-TERRITORY-Approval-4thnov.pdf>.

Crucially, men must be involved in addressing gender inequality. Including men in discussions around gender is a way to avoid othering women, especially in the security sector, and to embrace a human security perspective that sees threats to women’s security as a priority.¹²¹ Men must understand women’s issues as community issues to champion women’s rights. There is a need to bring boys and men to the table and educate them to be empowered beyond the patriarchal systems in which they have lived.¹²²

Tailor programming to gendered needs

Since women are an integral part of CBAGs and other communal security mechanisms, they must be stakeholders of any effort to engage, manage, or transform CBAGs and build lasting peace.¹²³ Gender considerations must form the cornerstone of reconciliation processes including disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and resocialization programs.¹²⁴ New research on DDR-related activities for women, more focused on the context of violent extremism, recommends that even within countries, women need specifically tailored reintegration programs and benefits.¹²⁵ It is also important to differentiate the needs of rural and urban locations in terms of gender programming, as well as community security issues from criminal and armed gang activity.¹²⁶

Fieldwork in Mombasa County found that women who joined armed organizations as children or young adults and therefore entered a militarized social-relational world—as many women do in armed conflict contexts—are socialized through the norms and values of that context. During demobilization and reintegration, they encounter a world where the military frameworks they have grown accustomed to may no longer apply or be relevant. Masculinity plays a significant role in gang formation, as gangs are partially the product of gendered socialization processes occurring in the context of violence to which young males are exposed.¹²⁷ These trajectories related to gendered socialization must be considered when designing disengagement programs.

The pattern of women’s engagement in CBAGs, like in other social movements, reflects patriarchal systems. In particular, when women are demobilized from armed groups, tension arises in attempts to return to traditional gender roles after engaging in armed group activities. Women’s post-war economic and political success after demobilizing also varies depending on their specific positions and locations during the war.¹²⁸

121 Newby and O’Malley, “Introduction: WPS 20 Years On.”

122 Interview, elder, Cheptais location, Bungoma, August 25, 2021; Focus Group discussion with local government, CSO, CBO, FBO members, Kapsokwon Mt. Elgon, Bungoma, August 25, 2021.

123 Moritz Schuberth, *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>.

124 Nordström, *Gender and Reconciliation in the New Kenya*.

125 Orly Maya Stern and Catherine Peterson, “Assisting Women Formerly Associated with Al-Shabaab: A proposed approach to programming,” *Adam Smith International*, June 2022, 49.

126 Data analysis report from Mombasa field researcher, February 2022.

127 Data analysis report from Mombasa field researcher, February 2022.

128 Viterna, *Women in War*, 9–10.

Ex-armed group members, particularly women, face dangers to their safety and lack of acceptance into the community. As with violent extremist disengagement, reconciliation and restorative justice have to lower barriers to prosocial behavior in the individual and open spaces for engagement in affected communities to reduce stigma, heal trauma, and offer a feasible alternative.¹²⁹ Attitude shifts and prosocial skills can contribute to continued social, psychosocial, and political reintegration and should be prepared and presented in a gender-sensitive manner in order to reach both female and male former gang members and contribute to the equity of the process.¹³⁰

Disarmament efforts should create strategic operational guidelines that address the needs of both men and women and integrate gender equality advocates and (women's) civil society organizations to develop a common reconciliation agenda and action plan. For instance, women who had escaped armed organizations and returned to their families did not want to be associated with these groups again through engagement with civil society organizations. Disengagement programs should empower women's groups with technical skills, entrepreneurship, business management, and life skills through training sessions to address gaps in economic opportunities for women.¹³¹

Recognize women's influence in violence prevention

Women's potential influence in reducing violence is often overlooked and underutilized, not just as wives, partners, and mothers of ex-members of gangs, CBAGs, or violent extremist groups, but also as community members with their own complex relationships to violence, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding. Our research found that women hold sway over the timing, ferocity, and outcome of violent raids and have the ability to prevent violence. Women, in many contexts across Kenya, were seen as custodians of cultural events and rites and thus in the position to address the culture of livestock raiding.¹³²

Women are often the most affected by conflict, and it has been proven that peace negotiations that include women are more likely to result in a final agreement that is sustainable and upholds gender provisions.¹³³ Programs seeking to address violence and insecurity therefore should consider women's diverse, complex experiences as valuable sources of knowledge and influence. As returnees or recruiters,

129 Chris Bosley, *Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reconciliation: A Peacebuilding Approach* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2020), <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/07/violent-extremist-disengagement-and-reconciliation-peacebuilding-approach>.

130 Data analysis report from Mombasa field researcher, February 2022. See also: Hollie Nyseth Brehm, *Identity, Rituals, and Narratives: Lessons from Reentry and Reintegration after Genocide in Rwanda* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37805/pn2020.8.vedr>.

131 Data analysis report from Mombasa field researcher, February 2022.

132 Interview with local woman leader, Isiolo, July 2021.

133 Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and Kathleen Kuehnast, "The Women, Peace and Security Agenda at 20: Setbacks, Progress, and the Way Forward," *Just Security*, October 30, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/73120/the-women-peace-and-security-agenda-at-20-setbacks-progress-and-the-way-forward/>.

women can help others defect and reintegrate; as first targets, they can detect recruitment; as interlocutors, they can shape policies and programming.¹³⁴

Interventions on intercommunity violence must begin at the household level and integrate women's views, perceptions, and experiences of conflict effects: loss of their children, property destruction, discrimination, inability to marry once widowed, etc.¹³⁵ This recommendation is aligned with international policy work on community violence reduction (CVR) programs and the need to integrate women as beneficiaries and targets in these programs.¹³⁶ Household-level interventions can also be effective in preventing recruitment into violent extremism.

In Kenya, there are opportunities for initiatives to work with women leaders to demobilize former conflict actors and promote community disarmament. Strong, existing cross-county social networks can be essential for regional peacebuilding interventions. "Women need to be empowered because they are the ones that can reach the youth. The youth need to learn peace from them."¹³⁷

Support women's networks to transform society and policy

The research showed that social networks are a serious pull factor to violent groups, and CBAGs' allure in fulfilling social gathering roles can attract women supporters if their support systems are lacking. Therefore, strengthening interpersonal social relationships and women's organizations can mitigate alienation, offer constructive, gender-sensitive socialization avenues, and advocate for women's empowerment and sustainable livelihoods. Kenyan women have a high level of experience in organizing around a common agenda, transcending divisions of class, qualifications, professional background, and ethnicity, which enables them to mobilize for women's leadership at various levels of politics.¹³⁸

Civic education can play an important role in women's empowerment to advocate for and protect women's rights. It is the responsibility of local leadership to sensitize the community about gender balance and equality.¹³⁹ A female elder in Bungoma concluded, "there is a need to lift them from the poverty they have existed in. Women need to be treated with dignity, and they need to know their rights."¹⁴⁰ In Bungoma, participants said they needed "more NGOs in the region to educate and help address some of the issues in the area."¹⁴¹

134 K4D, "K4D Factsheet: Gender, Countering Violent Extremism and Women, Peace and Security in Kenya" (November 2020), <https://reliefweb.int/report/kenya/k4d-factsheet-gender-countering-violent-extremism-and-women-peace-and-security-kenya>.

135 Interview with local peace committee member, Isiolo, July 21, 2021.

136 See UN IDDRS Module 2.30 on Community Violence Reduction available at <https://www.unddr.org/modules/IDDRS-2.30-Community-Violence-Reduction.pdf>.

137 Interview, elder, Cheptais location, Bungoma, August 25, 2021.

138 REINVENT, "Expanding Women's territory in Leadership and Nurturing the Nation."

139 Focus Group discussion with local government, CSO, CBO, FBO members, Kapsokwon Mt. Elgon, Bungoma, August 25, 2021.

140 Interview, elder, Cheptais location, Bungoma, August 25, 2021.

141 Focus Group discussion, Tongaren Bungoma, August 24, 2021.

Women’s organizations, particularly those focused on violence prevention and peacebuilding, have been found to be effective in allowing women more say in conflict prevention programs.¹⁴² Women’s groups should be supported to lead in intercommunal relations, prevent violent extremism, and conduct needs assessments for at-risk individuals.¹⁴³ Civil society organizations have been the engine of the WPS agenda at the local level, and listening to their expertise is critical.¹⁴⁴ Civil society continues to play a pivotal role in pushing for reforms moving towards reconciliation, social cohesion, and empowering women in their roles in society, politics, and the economy.¹⁴⁵

In Mombasa, research participants called for interventions that develop and enhance social networks, particularly carefully designed family-based interventions and mentorship programs that point youth in the direction of alternate paths and give them access to role models who have overcome comparable challenges. Support groups and counseling with other women whose families have also been impacted by the conflict or recruited into armed groups show them that they are not alone and that they should not blame themselves.¹⁴⁶ One focus group thought that there is power in building new norms at the family level to avoid resorting to tribalism and vengeance by focusing instead on treating all community members with respect, dignity, and patience.¹⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

Community-based armed groups in Kenya have proliferated in urban informal settlements, such as Nairobi and Mombasa, conflict-prone pastoral areas, such as Marsabit and Isiolo, and rural contexts, such as Bungoma, where land disputes have sustained high levels of insecurity, entrenched intercommunal tensions, and eroded trust in formal security provision. Insecurity, impunity, lack of effective policing, and political polarization remain the main factors for contributing to CBAG formation, membership, activities, and legitimacy within communities.

Women join or support CBAG activities directly or indirectly, motivated by political agendas of their group or personal economic and social interests. Common perceptions of women in conflict see them as extensions of men in their lives or as inherently peaceful and nonviolent. However, this research demonstrates the complexity of women as political actors operating in challenging contexts. As members of societies afflicted by violence or political polarization, women are not bystanders seeking only peaceful outcomes; they also can use or support the use of violence, and their actions or inactions can contribute to cycles of violence and impunity. While their contribution to and participation in peace and security mechanisms was regarded by research participants as important, both in terms of their potential and actual involvement, women’s agency and influence in these efforts remain tenuous, and in some cases, were regarded as contrary to desired social norms based on location. This underscores that women’s

142 Data analysis report from Mombasa field researcher, February 2022.

143 Interview with security consultant, Isiolo, July 18, 2021; Interview with local cleric and CVE expert, Isiolo, July 19, 2021.

144 de Jonge Oudraat and Kuehnast, “The Women, Peace and Security Agenda at 20.”

145 Nordström, *Gender and Reconciliation in the New Kenya*.

146 Data analysis report from Mombasa field researcher, February 2022.

147 Focus Group Discussion with women, Bungoma Town, August 26, 2021.

presence alone, either within peaceful security structures or within CBAGs, does not necessarily reduce gender stereotypes or violence that impact women's lives, self-sufficiency, and ability to contribute to decision making structures.

Policymakers and practitioners are recommended to consider local, micro-level analysis on the diversity of gendered motivations, roles, and perceptions around women's participation in CBAGs in order to craft more efficient approaches to engaging, managing, and transforming violent groups. Addressing conflict must ultimately transform gender dynamics and promote women's socioeconomic inclusion and empowerment.

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Photo adapted from: Photo by [Babatunde Olajide](#) on [Unsplash](#). Lekki - Ikoyi Link Bridge, Lagos, Nigeria (2019).

Phase 5: Case Studies of Violent Extremism Disengagement in Nigeria and Somalia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The final component of RESOLVE's Community-based Armed Groups (CBAGs) research initiative is a set of case studies on pathways for disengagement from violent extremist organizations (VEOs). Much like CBAGs, exiting from VEOs and reintegrating into the local community is typically a fraught experience, full of stigma and mistrust. Yet, more attention has been paid to developing structured programs to help members seeking to leave VEOs. Policymakers and practitioners typically turn to structured programs, sometimes referred to as Violent Extremism Disengagement and Reconciliation (VEDR) programs, to provide a safe and accessible pathway out of violence, with psychosocial support to enable rehabilitation and re-integration. The findings and lessons learned from former extremists participating in these programs can provide an illustrative model for similar disengagement initiatives for the members of CBAGs, increasing the options available for Engagement, Management, and Transformation (EMT) interventions.

RESOLVE commissioned two case studies to examine the trajectories of former VEO members in East and West Africa. In *Journeys through Extremism: The Experiences of Forced Recruits into Boko Haram*, authors James Khalil, MaryAnne Iwara and Martine Zeuthen conducted research at Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC), a program established in 2016 by the Nigerian state to provide an off-ramp for members of Boko Haram¹ and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) deemed 'low risk' by military intelligence. Located at Mallam Sidi on the outskirts of Gombe, the OPSC program houses cohorts of around six hundred people at a time, and provides tailored service such as basic education, vocational training, psychosocial support, family and community visits, spiritual support, and various other activities. The research team interviewed thirteen OPSC 'clients' (as they are referred to by the program) who had been forcibly recruited into Boko Haram, and were purposively selected to capture variance in their former roles within the group. The team focused on how they entered the organization, the conditions they experienced in camps and settlements, their exits from the group, their subsequent experiences in state hands, and their perspectives about future reintegration.

In *Journeys through Extremism: The Experiences of Former Members of Al-Shabaab*, authors Sif Heide-Ottosen, Yahye Abdi, Abdullahi Ahmed Nor, James Khalil, & Martine Zeuthen applied the *Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model of Violent Extremism* to map personal journeys in and out of al-Shabaab, the al-Qaeda affiliate operating in Somalia and the wider Horn of Africa. The ABC Model provided a framework through which to analyze individual trajectories as they relate to an individual's sympathy for and actual involvement in violent extremism, offering a platform to explore a broad range of factors that drive attitudinal and behavioral change over time². The team employed a life history approach to their

1 Also referred to, more formally, as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad*, JAS.

2 James Khalil, John Horgan & Martine Zeuthen, "The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model of Violent Extremism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, Is. 3 (2022).

interviews with thirteen former members of al-Shabaab, to gather granular insights from their experiences to inform the design of interventions to prevent further recruitment and facilitate disengagements from the group.

Taken together, these studies deliver granular insights about how and why VEO members participate in these groups, starting from their recruitment and including key decision points about their level of engagement throughout, as well as their experiences in VEDR programs. Their journeys provide an initial set of lessons learned for future programs seeking to facilitate disengagement and reconciliation.

Findings

A key finding across both case studies was the extent to which the personal journeys of former VEO members varied. Their experiences spanned a broad spectrum, from how they became involved in these organizations, to their experiences within their respective groups, and their modes of disengagement. Together, they illustrate the diverse motivations and mechanisms of VEO participation, while also helping to fill in specific gaps on disengagement from Boko Haram and al-Shabaab. Finally, the findings offer insights into the different programs available for former VEO members.

In both Nigeria and Somalia, the research team found that there was a broad spectrum of motivations and mechanisms for VEO recruitment. This finding is particularly notable in the case of Nigeria, where all the respondents reported being coercively recruited into Boko Haram, but in different ways. For example, one respondent reported being forced to join by a relative who held him at gunpoint, while others reported being captured during raids of their towns or villages. Once in the group, they took on a variety of military and civilian roles, with a great deal of fluidity between them, and lived in camps and settlements with dramatically different living conditions, including the availability of basic supplies and extent of religious instruction.

This case contrasts with the experiences of those in Somalia, where at least some respondents chose to join al-Shabaab, although again for a variety of reasons. Some respondents claimed to have been at least partly motivated to enlist by support for the group's ideology and aims, while others desired protection against other armed actors, the desire for revenge, or financial incentives. The researchers found that in-person social networks also play a key role on the pathway into al-Shabaab, notably through connections with relatives and friends, and that territorial control effectively caused some to become absorbed into the group. Notably, the study also found that some only became sympathetic to al-Shabaab's ideology after they joined, highlighting the extent to which training and socialization can generate a sense of purpose and belonging.

When it came to exiting the groups, both case studies found that leaving posed a serious risk to members. For those who had been forced to join Boko Haram, fear presented a key obstacle to disengagement. Many identified state-sponsored communications campaigns via radio, leaflet drops from planes, and personal phone calls as highly influential in motivating and facilitating their exits from Boko Haram. While

their routes out of the group were as varied as their ways in, they typically fled in groups of between five and twenty people, often accompanied by their wives and children, with two recounting that their exit parties numbered over a hundred. Most accounts involved nighttime escapes, and long journeys to facilities where they could surrender to security forces.

In the case of al-Shabaab, respondents reported facing similar difficulties in exiting the group. Many took months or even years to leave, often under the threat of death. Prior arrangements for safe passage with security forces before disengagement, typically facilitated by members of the family or wider clan, were instrumental to their exits. However, the research also revealed a few instances where al-Shabaab permitted individuals to leave freely on medical and compassionate grounds.

Another key difference in the Somalia case study was the importance of attitudinal change prior to departure. Unlike the respondents in the Nigeria case study, some of the Somalia respondents joined willingly, and others became sympathetic to the group's ideology after joining. However, most respondents asserted that they were 'very strongly opposed to al-Shabaab' at the point of their departure, highlighting how prior attitude changes often provoke disengagement. These opinions were influenced by the group's poor treatment of the local community, including instances of extortion, physical punishments, and killings.

Finally, the case study in Nigeria offered critical insights into the experiences of forced recruits in disengagement program. The initial processing point for those who have left Boko Haram, Giwa Barracks, came up as a weak point in the state-sponsored pathway for many respondents. Some reported being detained there for up to five years, and one respondent reported that the conditions were extremely poor, including issues of overcrowding, sleeping on a concrete floor, and periods of up to two months without a shower. This reputation of Giwa Barracks, further tarnished by allegations of human rights abuses and false confessions, is likely to disincentivize disengagement³. Further, the study's findings suggest that the screening criteria used at Giwa to determine eligibility for OPSC is overly exclusive, such that nearly all participants were forced recruits. While further research would be needed to validate this finding, such a threshold would disqualify individuals who were initially driven to join by adventure, status, economic incentives, or peer pressure, individuals who do not necessarily represent a threat to public safety and may not have been sufficiently involved in the group to warrant referral to the judicial system. Taken together, these shortcomings highlight important barriers to disengagement, even for forced recruits actively seeking opportunities to leave Boko Haram.

Conclusion

The two VEDR case studies in the CBAGs initiative provide insight into the key factors that influence disengagement for VEO members in East and West Africa, providing a framework for similar programs geared toward CBAGs. The findings from both illustrate the highly varied nature of pathways into and

³ While it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the validity of these claims, the reputation is well-known and likely to influence the attitudes and behaviors of those seeking to disengage from Boko Haram.

out of violence, but they also reveal common factors, such as the importance of social networks and territorial control. The case of al-Shabaab highlights further how the sympathies of members toward group ideologies and objectives can change in response to their experiences, and how these changes may precede disengagement. The case of Boko Haram underscores how difficult exiting a VEO can be even for those who have been forcibly recruited, and offers further lessons on the obstacles that they face from state-supported programs.

While there are key differences between VEOs and CBAGs, there are also many overlaps between them, including the challenges and stigma that can exist for disengagement. Some interventions seek to formalize CBAGs into legitimate security and justice providers, or incorporate them into hybrid security arrangements negotiated with the state, but this is not appropriate in all cases. An approach centered on disengagement and reconciliation provides an alternative route for those seeking to reintegrate into their communities without violence.

This set of research concludes the RESOLVE Network's initiative to map, understand, and provide recommendations for engaging, managing, and transforming CBAGs in sub-Saharan Africa. Future research initiatives will seek to connect these findings to further study on mechanisms for disengagement and local peacebuilding initiatives, focusing on community level conflict dynamics and pathways toward peace and security.

RESEARCH REPORTS

Khalil, James, MaryAnne Iwara, & Martine Zeuthen, *Journeys through Extremism: The Experiences of Forced Recruits in Boko Haram*. Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2022.2>.

Heide-Ottosen, Sif, Yahye Abdi, Abdullahi Ahmed Nor, James Khalil, & Martine Zeuthen, *Journeys through Extremism: The Experiences of Former Members of Al-Shabaab*. Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2022.3>.

JOURNEYS THROUGH EXTREMISM

The Experiences of
Forced Recruits in Boko Haram

James Khalil, MaryAnne Iwara
and Martine Zeuthen

ABOUT THE REPORT

This study provides exploratory research with forced recruits into Boko Haram, focusing on how they entered the organization, the conditions they experienced in camps and settlements, their exits from the group, their subsequent experiences in state hands, and their perspectives about future reintegration. These themes are particularly pertinent at the time of writing (spring 2022) given the mass disengagements currently being experienced by Boko Haram, and the extent to which federal and state systems lack the capacity to absorb and handle the large numbers involved. Our research was undertaken at Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC), which was established in 2016 by the Nigerian state to provide an off-ramp for members of Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) deemed to be ‘low risk’ by military intelligence. We conducted thirteen in-depth interviews with OPSC ‘clients’ (as they are referred to by the program) who were purposively selected to achieve variance in their former roles in Boko Haram.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the RESOLVE Network, acknowledged partners contributing to the production of this publication, the U.S. Institute of Peace, or any entity of the U.S. government.

ACRONYMS

CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DRR	Deradicalization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IS	Islamic State
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
JAS	<i>Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad</i>
JIC	Joint Investigating Center
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
OPSC	Operation Safe Corridor
PCVE	Preventing & Countering Violent Extremism
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction & key findings

This study provides exploratory research with forced recruits into Boko Haram (more formally referred to as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, JAS*), focusing on how they entered the organization, the conditions they experienced in camps and settlements, their exits from the group, their subsequent experiences in state hands, and their perspectives about future reintegration. These themes are particularly pertinent at the time of writing (spring 2022) given the mass disengagements currently being experienced by Boko Haram, and the extent to which federal and state systems lack the capacity to absorb and handle the large numbers involved. Our research was undertaken at Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC), which was established in 2016 by the Nigerian state to provide an off-ramp for members of Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) deemed to be 'low risk' by military intelligence. Located at Mallam Sidi on the outskirts of Gombe, the OPSC program houses cohorts of around six hundred clients at any point in time. The services offered are tailored to personal needs, and include basic education, vocational training, psychosocial support, family and community visits, spiritual support, and various other activities. However, OPSC certainly is not without controversy, with critics highlighting alleged human rights abuses (primarily at Giwa Barracks where individuals are screened for eligibility, rather than within the Mallam Sidi facility itself), extensive delays in the process, and various other concerns.

We conducted thirteen in-depth interviews with OPSC 'clients' (as they are referred to by the program) who were purposively selected to achieve variance in their former roles in Boko Haram. Our respondents were male, with their ages ranging from twenty to thirty-four (six were minors at the time of their initial involvement in Boko Haram). The interviews were semi-structured, allowing us to delve into topics of particular interest while also ensuring we covered all core themes. We also conducted interviews with key stakeholders and observed clients participating in psychosocial, vocational, and drug awareness training while receiving a tour of the OPSC facility. Our principal findings include:

- **Key Finding #1:** Despite being coercively recruited by Boko Haram, our respondents were forced into involvement through notably different means.

While our respondents were all forced into involvement with Boko Haram (with one exception), this research revealed the extent to which these journeys varied. For instance, one respondent claimed that his Almajiri teacher escorted his entire class into the bush for involuntary incorporation into the group.¹ Another observed that his uncle tried to persuade him to enlist several times before eventually forcing him to join the group at gunpoint. Others reported that they were essentially captured during Boko Haram raids of their towns and villages, or that they were forced to join when the group seized control of their community. Many claimed that those who attempted to resist this forceable recruitment were killed.

¹ Almajiri schools offer Islamic education for teenagers in Northern Nigeria.

- **Key Finding #2:** Boko Haram assigned our respondents to a wide variety of roles in their camps and settlements, with degrees of fluidity in these posts.

Our respondents included a military commander, members of the military police, foot soldiers, and individuals in a variety of civilian roles (medical officer, trader, tailor, butcher, and handyman). There were relatively high degrees of fluidity between these roles, with certain military respondents also performing civilian tasks on the side. Conversely, some of those in civilian roles were at least occasionally also forced to act as foot soldiers, with one respondent reporting that in his location it was compulsory for all members to actively participate in battle if required.

- **Key Finding #3:** Boko Haram camps and settlements differ dramatically, both in terms of their conditions and in relation to the rules and regulations imposed by the group.

While many respondents reported shortages of food, water, fuel, and medicine in their camps and settlements, others claimed that these remained in plentiful supply (frequently through the plunder of nearby settlements). The extent of ideological training provided by Boko Haram also varied substantially between contexts, with our respondents reporting that their religious guidance lasted anywhere between two weeks and six months. The group's policies and preferences regarding marriage and family life also varied between locations, with certain respondents claiming that the group compelled members to get married, and others asserting that they played no role in such matters.

- **Key Finding #4:** State-sponsored communications campaigns via radio, leaflet drops from planes, and personal phone calls were highly influential in motivating and facilitating the exit of many of our respondents from Boko Haram.

Most respondents claimed to have been aware of rehabilitation and reintegration opportunities available to former members of Boko Haram through radio messaging, leaflets dropped from planes, and (to a lesser extent) phone calls with family members or former members of the group. Some of these respondents accessed these means of communication in secret, as they were formally banned in many camps and settlements. These messaging campaigns highlighted 'success stories' of prior community reintegration after involvement in Boko Haram, and in certain cases suggested suitable routes and locations where members could surrender.

- **Key Finding #5:** The accounts of how individuals were able to leave Boko Haram also varied substantially.

Our respondents typically fled in relatively small groups of between five and twenty people, often accompanied by their wives and children, with two claiming that their exit parties numbered over a hundred. Most accounts involved nighttime escapes, and long journeys to facilities where they could surrender to security forces. Two respondents reported travelling to neighboring Cameroon to surrender, as this presented the most viable route through which to avoid Boko Haram. One claimed that his uncle arranged

for his safe passage with the military, with members of the OPSC team claiming that this occurred relatively often. Another respondent claimed that his escape party was recaptured by Boko Haram, but that they were able to bribe their captors to allow their continued passage.

- **Key Finding #6:** Unsurprisingly, fear represented a key obstacle to disengagement from Boko Haram, with attempts to escape being punishable by death.

Various respondents reported that it took them several years to leave Boko Haram because of the fear that they would be caught and punished, with others providing examples of those who had been put to death for such acts. While less common, other respondents asserted that disengagement was also inhibited by a fear of repercussions by the military and/or the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF).

- **Key Finding #7:** Giwa Barracks represents a critical weak link in the state-sponsored exit pathway from Boko Haram, undoubtedly disincentivizing many from disengagement.

Disengaged members of Boko Haram are processed and screened at Giwa Barracks, with those deemed to be low-risk then transferred to OPSC. However, the barracks is notorious for human rights abuses, and for extracting false confessions through violence. While our research was not designed to validate or discredit such claims, there is little doubt that this reputation alone continues to disincentivize disengagement from Boko Haram. Our respondents also reported having been detained at the barracks for up to five years, which undoubtedly also inhibits further disengagements.

- **Key Finding #8:** The screening criteria to determine eligibility for OPSC has seemingly narrowed to the extent that it now excludes individuals who should certainly qualify for rehabilitation and reintegration.

Previous research by USAID revealed that only around 50 percent of prior OPSC clients had been forced into involvement in Boko Haram, with the remainder motivated by ideology, status, adventure, economic incentives, peer pressure, and so on.² By contrast, the OPSC management team reported that the current cohort *only* includes individuals who had been forced into involvement, with just one obvious exception. *If* this is correct, this apparent narrowing of eligibility criteria is highly problematic given that it is essentially inconceivable that all those who are now ineligible for OPSC represent a current threat to public safety and/or were sufficiently involved in violence to warrant being referred to the judicial system.

² USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation (DDRR) in Northeast Nigeria* (USAID, 2020), 25.

Continued gaps in our knowledge

This research was designed to collect information about personal journeys through Boko Haram. While it provides important insights into the state-sponsored off-ramp from this organization, it was certainly not intended to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the various stages of this process, nor the government's role in their implementation. In particular, there remains scant information about the communications campaigns designed to motivate and facilitate exits from this group, as well as the reception and screening phases that precede OPSC. It is also important to recognize that OPSC represents a single node in a far broader network through which former members of Boko Haram and ISWAP are either returned to their communities or transferred to prisons, depending on the nature of their involvement with these groups. Although the prison-based rehabilitation program has been suitably documented,³ very little is known about the processing of 'high risk' individuals at a military base in Kainji, Niger State, the Sulhul initiative to facilitate defections of entire units through their commanders, and the recently established IDP camps in Borno State in which many individuals formerly associated with these groups are believed to reside. There is also scant information about the pathways of women through Boko Haram and ISWAP, reflecting the usual gender biases in this field.⁴ These represent clear knowledge gaps for donors seeking to support and strengthen these processes.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research was originally designed as a pilot study to map personal trajectories out of 'Boko Haram' (more formally referred to as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, JAS*) in relation to attitudinal and behavioral changes, drawing on interviews with current clients of Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC).⁵ However, once at the Mallam Sidi facility where OPSC is implemented, the management team reported that the current cohort (unlike previous ones) only included individuals who had been forced into involvement in Boko Haram, with just one obvious exception. As such, our respondents had been hostile to the group from the outset, resulting in effectively no attitudinal change to measure. This being the case, we adapted the study to conduct exploratory research with this group, focusing on the following key themes:

- Joining Boko Haram
- Roles within the group
- Life under the group
- Leaving the group
- The road to reintegration

3 This program is described in Atta Barkindo & Shane Bryans, "De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria: Developing a Basic Prison Based De-Radicalisation Programme," *Journal of Deradicalization* 7, (2016), 1–25.

4 Although, see, for instance, International Crisis Group, *Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency* (ICG, 2016); Hilary Matfess, *Women, and the War on Boko Haram: Wives, Weapons, Witnesses* (London: Zed Books, 2017); and Temitope B. Oriola, "'Unwilling Cocoons': Boko Haram's War Against Women," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, Is. 2 (2017): 99–121.

5 This would have relied on the approach outlined in James Khalil, John Horgan & Martine Zeuthen, "The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model of Violent Extremism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, Is. 3 (2022).

Regarding the first four of these themes, this research provides originality through relating personal stories covering a broad range of topics, many of which remain substantially underexplored or are essentially neglected by the literature. On the final theme, it offers up-to-date information (as of spring 2022) about the rapidly evolving OPSC program, drawing from our rarely-granted access to this facility and its clients. Placing our findings in context, Boko Haram has experienced major reversals over recent years, having lost its leader and much of its fighting force (as discussed in the subsequent section). These events have also contributed to mass disengagements from the group,⁶ which the current federal and state systems (including OPSC) do not have the capacity to absorb. With such issues in mind, this study is designed to enhance our understanding of personal journeys into and out of violent extremism, with the objective of delivering actionable recommendations relating to disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration. Following on from this introductory section, we discuss the conflict in northeast Nigeria (Section 2) before outlining our research methodology (Section 3). We then deliver the main research findings (Section 4), with these sequentially covering the five core themes identified above. This is followed by a final discussion and our actionable policy recommendations (Section 5).

2. THE CONTEXT

The rise of Boko Haram

Founded by Mohammed Yusuf in the north-eastern city of Maiduguri in Borno State, *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* (JAS, more popularly known as 'Boko Haram')⁷ was a mass movement long before it turned to violence. While comprised predominantly of individuals from the locally dominant Kanuri ethnic group, the group represents 'a complex organization and a melting pot for a range of identities.'⁸ In terms of ideology, it advocates a strict interpretation of Sharia Law, and the rejection of democracy and 'Western' education and influence. As observed by Boko Haram's subsequent leader, Abubakar Shekau:

This is the area by which education is a source of destruction for our children, our friends, our daughters, and our brothers. This source of destruction is inscribed in the white man's philosophy of writing and the faith of its implementation. Followers of western education have usurped our hearts with a philosophy and method of thinking that is contrary to the demands of Allah.⁹

In November 2008, Borno State launched an anti-banditry program known as Operation Flush II, which Yusuf interpreted as a measure against Boko Haram.¹⁰ In response, in June of the following year he delivered his notorious 'Open Letter to the Federal Government of Nigeria', in which he highlighted supposed

6 International Crisis Group, *After Shekau: Confronting Jihadists in Nigeria's Northeast* (ICG, 2022), 6.

7 The formal title translates to 'People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad.'

8 Zacharias P. Pieri & Jacob Zenn, "The Boko Haram Paradox: Ethnicity, Religion and Historical Memory in Pursuit of a Caliphate," in *Understanding Boko Haram: Terrorism and Insurgency in Africa*, ed. James J. Hentz & Hussein Solomon (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 54.

9 Quoted in Pieri & Zenn, "The Boko Haram Paradox", 47.

10 Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of An African Jihadist Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 132.

patterns of anti-Muslim violence, and called for an uprising.¹¹ On July 29, the security forces stormed Yusuf's compound and killed him, alleging that he had been trying to escape in the process.¹²

Having long encouraged Yusuf to follow a more hardline approach, Shekau assumed control of the movement. Between 2009 and its peak in early 2015, Boko Haram expanded its influence across much of northeastern Nigeria and parts of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, to ultimately control an area the size of Belgium.¹³ Its attacks have primarily focused on soft targets, including markets, schools, healthcare centers, mosques, churches, police stations, and so on. It is also notorious for the abduction of women and children (with the case of Chibok achieving international notoriety), forced conscription, and child marriages. In March 2015, Shekau pledged loyalty to the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS), rebranding the organization as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).¹⁴ However, in an apparent attempt to distance itself from Boko Haram's extensive violence under Shekau, IS then announced that ISWAP was formally under the control of Abu Musab al-Barnawi (believed by many to be Yusuf's son) the following year.¹⁵ This action prompted Abubakar Shekau to establish a breakaway faction under the group's original name.

ISWAP expanded its power and influence after the split, with some commentators partly attributing this to its greater capacity to deliver governance to local populations. For instance, the International Crisis Group (ICG) claimed in 2019 that 'it has cultivated a level of support among local civilians that Boko Haram never enjoyed and has turned neglected communities in the area and islands in Lake Chad into a source of economic support.'¹⁶ While ISWAP had an estimated 3,500 to 5,000 members at that point, Boko Haram had only 1,500 to 2,000.¹⁷ Also commenting in 2019, Jacob Zenn reported that 'Boko Haram under Shekau's leadership is now a marginalized faction within the insurgency with its base areas relegated mostly to Sambisa Forest, whereas ISWAP is predominant around northern Borno State, in parts of Yobe State, and in southeastern Niger and on the islands of Lake Chad.'¹⁸ Following years of confrontation, ISWAP caught and killed Shekau in Borno State's Sambisa Forest in May 2021. The ICG reports that when ISWAP 'offered him a path to surrender, he detonated a suicide vest, killing himself and wounding ISWAP fighters.'¹⁹

11 Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 133-4.

12 Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 138.

13 Zacharias P. Pieri & Jacob Zenn, "Under the Black Flag in Borno: Experiences of Fightsoldiers and Civilians in Boko Haram 'Caliphate'", *Journal of Modern African Studies* 56, no. 4 (2018), 646; & Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 228.

14 Pieri & Zenn, "Under the Black Flag in Borno," 645-647; Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 271-272; & Jason Warner & Stephanie Lizzo, "The 'Boko Haram Disaggregation Problem' and Comparative Profiles of Factional Violence: Challenges, Impacts, and Solutions in the Study of Africa's Deadliest Terrorist Group(s)," *Terrorism & Political Violence*: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09546553.2020.1860950>

15 Warner & Lizzo, "The 'Boko Haram Disaggregation Problem'"; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 276-7.

16 International Crisis Group, *Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province* (ICG, 2019), 25.

17 International Crisis Group, *Facing the Challenge*, i.

18 Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Factional Feuds: Internal Extremism and External Interventions," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 33, Is. 3 (2021), 21.

19 International Crisis Group, *After Shekau*, 4.

The state response

The state response to Boko Haram is often characterized as being reliant on excessive and counterproductive force, beginning with the extrajudicial killing of Yusuf. One of the most infamous examples of state brutality occurred in April 2013, when the military allegedly killed over 200 civilians during the ‘Baga massacre.’²⁰ In May 2013, then President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in the worst hit states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe, with this lasting until November 2014 when the House of Representatives refused to grant any further extensions. As reported by Alexander Thurston:

On the ground, the state of emergency translated into mass arrests of young men, especially in May and June 2013. Some raids resulted in deaths on the spot. The security forces took hundreds of other men to two military prisons, Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri, and Sector Alpha in Damaturu, a site also known as “Guantanamo.” . . . In these prisons, suspected Boko Haram members were often tortured, sometimes to death. Other detainees died of starvation or disease.²¹

The year 2013 also witnessed the emergence of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), which are community-based armed groups to which the state still essentially ‘outsources’ much of its military response.²² Corresponding with Boko Haram’s peak of territorial control in January 2015, Jonathan deployed an intensive military response in the lead-up to national elections.

In 2016 the Nigerian state established OPSC, providing an off-ramp for those wishing to exit Boko Haram and ISWAP. While we discuss this program in more detail below (see Section 4), it is worth briefly introducing its key components for the purposes of the current discussion. Members of these groups who surrender to local security forces are transported to Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri for assessment (with others reportedly transferred to parallel state-run programs). Those deemed to be low-risk are then transferred in ‘batches’ of several hundred to OPSC at Mallam Sidi camp, located on the outskirts of Gombe. The services offered at Mallam Sidi are tailored to personal needs, and include basic education, vocational training, psychosocial support, family and community visits, spiritual support, and various other activities. While OPSC is federally administered, it is the states (supported by various international agencies) that assume responsibility for the subsequent reintegration of clients. As considered in greater detail below (again, see Section 4), this off-ramp is certainly not without controversy, with critics highlighting alleged human rights abuses (particularly at Giwa), extensive delays in the process, and various other concerns.

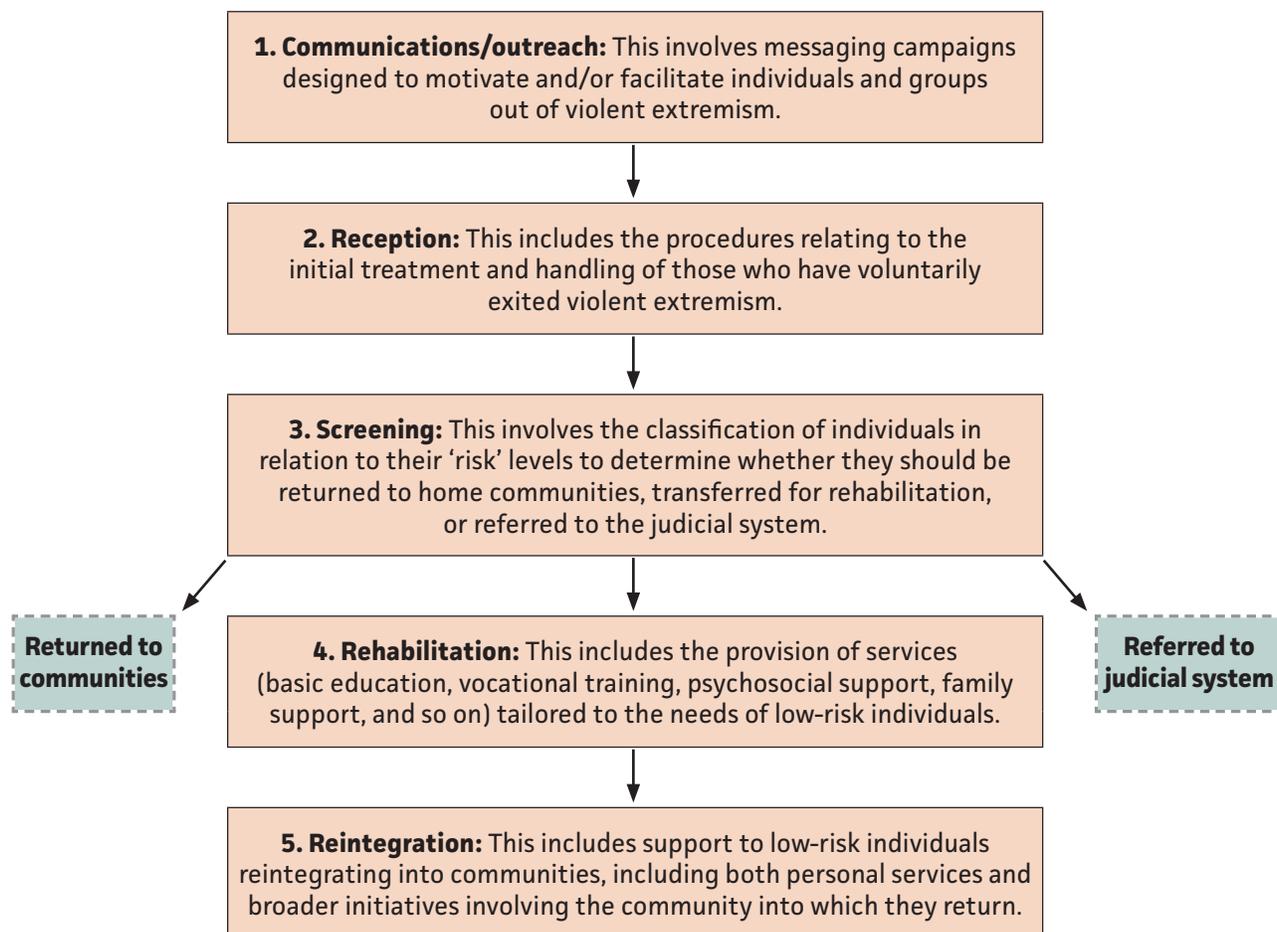
While the OPSC team frames its intervention in terms of Deradicalization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DRR), programs of this nature are often viewed through reference to the Disarmament, Demobilization

20 Olabanji Akinola, “The Elusive Quest for Peace: Boko Haram and the Hollowness of Nigeria’s Counter-insurgency Strategy and Weak Security Architecture,” in *Understanding Boko Haram: Terrorism and Insurgency in Africa*, ed. James J. Hentz & Hussein Solomon (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 136; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 200.

21 Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 204.

22 Idayat Hassan & Zacharias P. Pieri, “The Rise and Risks of Nigeria’s Civilian Joint Task Force: Implications for Post-Conflict Recovery in North-eastern Nigeria,” in *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency*, ed. Jacob Zenn (Combating Terrorism Centre at Westpoint, 2018), 74-86; and Thurston *Boko Haram*, 207–224.

Figure 1. Stages of Disengagement, Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programming



and Reintegration (DDR) lens.²³ The DDR framework was originally designed for contexts in which sustained peace agreements had been achieved, but its scope gradually expanded to also include environments of ongoing conflict, such as Nigeria.²⁴ The OPSC team also draws insight from programs designed to rehabilitate violent extremists in correctional settings, with a key stakeholder interviewed for this research (S1) even observing that the services offered at Mallam Sidi were modelled on those provided by the Nigerian prison program. Yet, while it is important to draw certain ‘lessons learned’ from external interventions such as these, it is also necessary to acknowledge limits in the extent to which they represent the most pertinent of frameworks. In particular, it is worth noting that DDR and prison-based programs offer little or no guidance on how to design outreach campaigns to encourage exits from groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP, or the reception of individuals once they have disengaged. With such issues in mind, we adopt the five-stage model presented in Figure 1 to help frame the discussions throughout this paper. This draws heavily from Somalia’s ‘National Program for the Treatment and Handling of Disengaged Combatants’,²⁵ and is intended specifically for contexts of active insurgency.

23 For instance, see USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation*.

24 Robert Muggah & Chris O’Donnell, “Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration,” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 4, no. 1 (2015), 1–12.

25 As described in James Khalil, Rory Brown, Chris Chant, Peter Olowo and Nick Wood, *Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia: Evidence from a Rehabilitation Programme with Former Members of al-Shabaab* (UK: Royal United Services Institute, 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

As already observed, this research was originally designed as a pilot study to map personal trajectories out of Boko Haram in relation to attitudinal and behavioral changes, drawing on interviews with current OPSC clients. However, once at the Mallam Sidi facility where OPSC is implemented, the management team reported that the current cohort of clients (unlike previous ones) only included individuals who had been forced into involvement in Boko Haram, with just one obvious exception. In practice, this meant that our respondents had been extremely hostile to Boko Haram from the outset, resulting in effectively no attitudinal change to measure. As such, we adapted the study to conduct exploratory research with this group, focusing on the following key themes:

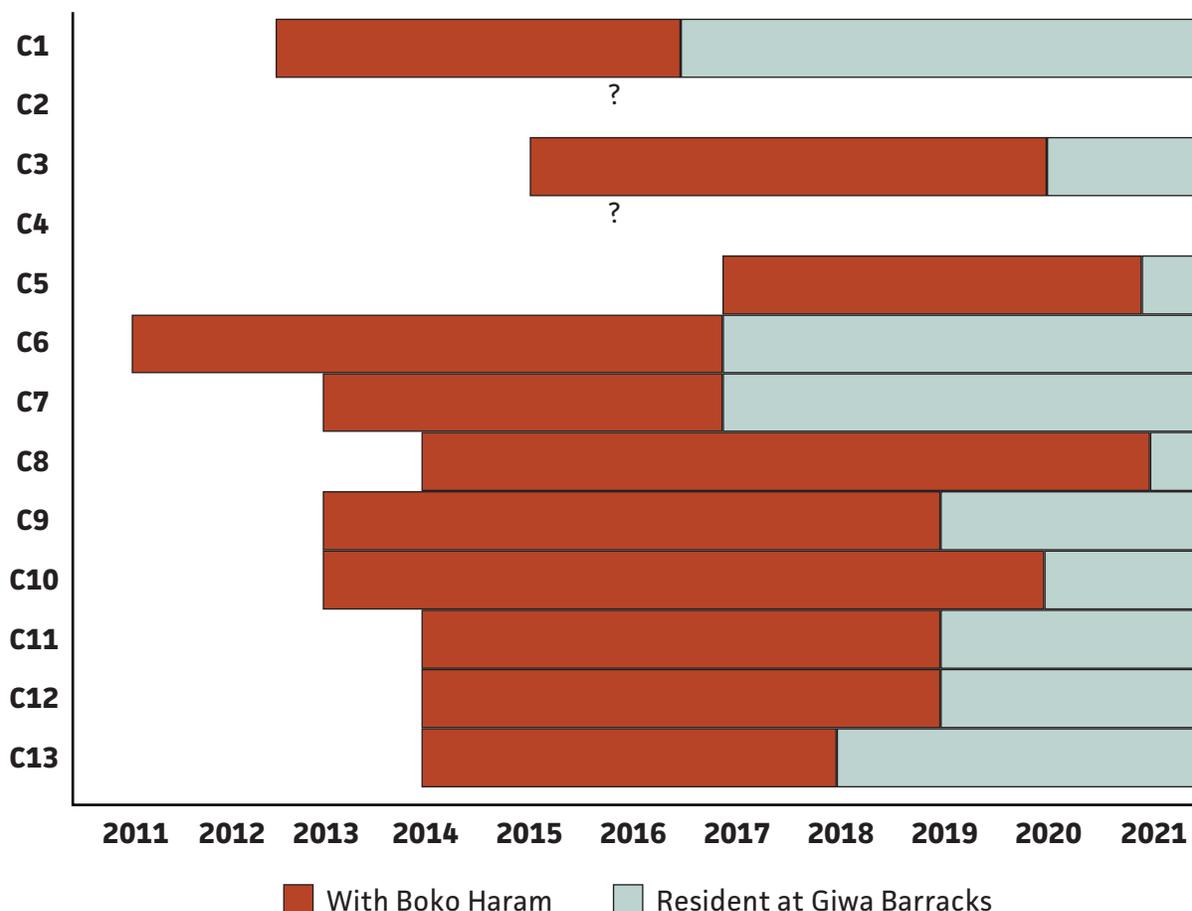
- Joining Boko Haram
- Roles within the group
- Life under the group
- Leaving the group
- The road to reintegration

We conducted thirteen in-depth interviews with OPSC clients in March 2022 (we label these C1 to C13 throughout the remainder of this report), whose approximate timelines prior to their arrival at Mallam Sidi are mapped in Figure 2. These interviewees were male, with their ages ranging from twenty to thirty-four (six were minors at the time of their initial involvement in Boko Haram). With support from the OPSC team, we purposively selected respondents to achieve variance in relation to their former roles within Boko Haram (as described in Section 4).²⁶ Our Research Assistant translated twelve of the interviews between English and Hausa, with an OPSC translator assisting in the remaining case with translation from Kanuri. The instrument (which was redesigned on the first day following the issues described above) was semi-structured, allowing us to delve into areas of specific interest while also covering the key themes. We collected extensive notes during the interviews, rather than record them, to help provide a comfortable environment in which the respondents were forthright and open. We also conducted interviews with four key stakeholders (we label these S1 to S4), and the OPSC team provided us with a tour of the facilities, which allowed us to observe clients participating in vocational training and drug awareness training.

Regarding research ethics, we introduced ourselves to the respondents prior to the interviews, and presented the purposes of the study (see Appendix A). We also clarified that the process was entirely voluntary, and that they were free to skip particular questions or even to conclude the interview early for any reason. We asked the respondents to provide verbal consent prior to the interview, explaining that this involved accepting our use of information they offered in anonymized form. Throughout the interviews we attempted to avoid questions that could retraumatize the respondents, particularly given they had

26 The OPSC management team maintains case files that include such information, but we were not granted access to these during the research.

Figure 2. Respondent Timelines (Approximate)



been forced into participation by Boko Haram. While everyone involved had been fully vaccinated against Covid-19, precautions were taken to avoid close personal contact at all times. Of course, it is important to consider the limitations associated with our methods, and to comment on the extent to which these may influence the findings. We identify these as follows:

- **Resource constraints:** The findings we present below are based on the personal experiences and opinions of a limited number of respondents. This research was resourced as a pilot study, and as such it was not possible to draw from a bigger sample of clients or stakeholders. We also lacked access to the extensive program documents undoubtedly generated by the various agencies involved with OPSC and the wider off-ramp from Boko Haram (as represented in Figure 1).
- **Non-contemporary information:** Given that the conflict in Nigeria continues to evolve rapidly, and the average date when our respondents left Boko Haram was 2018 or 2019 (to the extent that this can be reliably ascertained), it is important to acknowledge that some information provided during the interviews may reflect conditions that no longer exist. For instance, this may relate to Boko Haram recruitment methods, conditions within their camps and settlements, their

policies and preferences relating to family matters, and so on. It may also relate to conditions and treatment in the facilities through which clients passed prior to their arrival at Mallam Sidi.

- **Potential data reliability issues:** Respondents may provide misleading or even false information for a variety of reasons, including to be viewed favorably by others (widely referred to as social desirability bias), because they are ill-informed, to avoid perceived threats associated with divulging information, or because their memories are flawed.²⁷ Regarding our research more specifically, certain respondents may have downplayed the nature of their involvement with Boko Haram to avoid potential punishment by the state. Unlike many other forms of social science research, it was not possible to ‘triangulate’ the personal information generated through these interviews with data from other sources. As already observed, we attempted to mitigate such issues through providing reassurances about the nature of the research before the interviews began, as well as through asking validation questions where applicable.
- **The possible influence of OPSC staff:** With the research team reliant on OPSC staff for the identification of suitable respondents, it is also plausible that the latter intentionally selected clients they felt would be more likely to portray the program or other facilities *en route* to Mallam Sidi in a positive light. Members of the OPSC team were also present throughout much of the interviews, and this may also have influenced the responses provided by certain clients. On this basis, we relied heavily on secondary sources regarding findings relating to reception, screening, rehabilitation, and reintegration (representing stages 2 to 5 of our model in Figure 1).

4. FINDINGS

In this section we present the core research findings regarding how our respondents entered Boko Haram, their roles within the organization, the conditions that they experienced in camps and settlements, their disengagement from the group, and their trajectories through the stages of our model presented as Figure 1.

Joining Boko Haram

It is increasingly recognized that involvement in ideologically justified violence can be driven by the confluence of many different political, social, economic, psychological, and other ‘variables’, with these varying between locations and over time. Recent research on this subject has emphasized the notion of equifinality, which is the principle that given end-states (in this case involvement in this violence) may be driven by different factors or combinations of factors.²⁸ Yet, the debate in Nigeria tends to revolve more narrowly around a limited number of factors. It is clear that Boko Haram’s interpretation of Islam plays a critical role for many, with Mercy Corps observing that ‘religion was a thread that ran through many

27 James Khalil, “A Guide to Interviewing Terrorists and Violent Extremists,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 42, no. 4 (2019).

28 See, for instance, Khalil et al, “The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model”.

stories of youth choosing to join.²⁹ The authors of this report elaborate that ‘many recruits spoke about wanting to become more devout, or being drawn to a promise of paradise.’³⁰ Indeed, among the respondents interviewed for this study, one individual (C13) from Gamboru in Borno State claimed to have been initially convinced by the message that his involvement would ensure his place in heaven. Importantly, while certain accounts downplay the relevance of ideology on the basis that certain members only have a rudimentary understanding of the Boko Haram belief system, Lorne Dawson correctly observes that the sincerity and strength of an individual’s commitment to their chosen ideology matters far more than the depth of their comprehension.³¹

Certain accounts also emphasize the extent to which state repression, political exclusion, and inadequate service provisions have contributed to sympathy for Boko Haram.³² For instance, drawing on interviews with members of both Boko Haram and ISWAP, Chitra Nagarajan highlights that these respondents reported that ‘many community leaders are seen as corrupt, biased, ineffective, self-interested, politicized, and linked to (corrupt) politicians.’³³ However, this stance is contested, with USAID drawing on interviews with former OPSC clients to conclude that ‘frustrations with the government did not appear to play a prominent role influencing individuals to join, with zero graduates identifying it as a reason why they joined.’³⁴ Economic incentives are also often identified as a driver, with Mercy Corps highlighting the role of loans provided by Boko Haram to new recruits.³⁵ Research also focuses on the extent to which psychosocial factors such as status, belonging and identity often drive involvement.³⁶ For instance, Nagarajan maintains that ‘a number of respondents spoke of how they felt comfort and belonging as they were introduced to the group.’³⁷ The importance of personal contacts is also routinely observed, for instance, with Hilary Matfess, Graeme Blair, and Chad Hazlett highlighting that ‘Boko Haram relies on social networks and peer-group influence to drive recruitment.’³⁸

Of course, debates about the relative importance of such factors are somewhat tangential to this particular study, given our almost exclusive focus on those who were forced into involvement (see Section 3). This method is also routinely identified in the literature, for instance, with Matfess, Blair, and Hazlett reporting that ‘there are widespread reports of intimidation to coerce membership,’ and that ‘many children become associated with Boko Haram due to direct or indirect physical coercion.’³⁹ Reporting in

29 Mercy Corp, *Motivations and Empty Promises: Voices of Former Boko Haram Combatants and Nigeria Youth* (Mercy Corps, 2016), 14.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Lorne Dawson, “Bringing Religiosity Back In: Critical Reflections on the Explanation of Western Homegrown Religious Terrorism (Part 1),” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15, no. 1 (2021), 5–6.

32 Mercy Corps *Motivations and Empty Promises*.

33 Chitra Nagarajan, *We Were Changing the World: Radicalization and Empowerment among Young People Associated with Armed Opposition Groups in Northeast Nigeria*, USAID (2018), 14.

34 USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation*, 6–7.

35 Mercy Corp, *Motivations and Empty Promises*, 13.

36 USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation*, 25.

37 Nagarajan, *We Were Changing the World*, 18.

38 Hilary Matfess, Graeme Blair & Chad Hazlett, “Beset on all Sides: Children and the Landscape of Conflict in Northeast Nigeria,” in *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict*, ed. Siobhan O’Neill & Kato van Broeckhoven (United Nations University, n.d.), 184.

39 Matfess et al, “Beset on all Sides,” 182

Figure 3. Spectrum from Forced to Voluntary Involvement



2020, Amnesty International also claims that Boko Haram had become more reliant on this method over time.⁴⁰ Importantly, while this phenomenon is often mistakenly interpreted in black-and-white terms (for instance, in UNDP’s highly influential *Journey to Extremism in Africa* report),⁴¹ the reality is that it is more accurately portrayed as representing a spectrum, with Mercy Corps explaining that ‘the paths that youth take to joining Boko Haram defy neat categories of “voluntary” and “forced.”’⁴² These authors elaborate on this point through reference to a five-point scale, reproduced above as Figure 3. While the lack of definitions prevents us from firmly classifying our respondents according to this system, the majority would almost certainly have fallen within the ‘abducted’ category.

Two respondents claimed that their involvement with Boko Haram began when the group seized control of their local communities. One of these individuals (C4) from Hong in Adamawa State maintained that the organization forced all youths from the community to enlist. Many others reported that they were essentially captured by Boko Haram during raids of their communities of residence. For instance, one respondent (C1) from near Maiduguri claimed that he was abducted with about fifteen other students at his school. Boko Haram had attacked a CJTF post on the edge of his community, with the combatants then shifting attention to his school, largely because of its proximity. Another respondent from Ngala (C9) claimed that the group abducted him and five friends who happened to be visiting town. The respondents consistently reported that they were forced to comply with Boko Haram demands, with several (C1, C3, and C8) adding that at least some who resisted were killed in the process.

One respondent from Bama (C5) reported that he received Islamic education for six years at an Almajiri school when the teacher (who happened to be his uncle) escorted the class to the bush for involuntary incorporation into Boko Haram. He claimed that his parents were unaware that this would occur, and that there had been no obvious prior indications. Another respondent from Ngala (C11) maintained that his uncle tried to persuade him to enlist several times before eventually forcing him to join the group at gunpoint. His uncle was a Boko Haram foot soldier, and he died in combat in 2018. While many of the respondents were presumably selected by Boko Haram simply as ‘fighting aged males’, this was not universally the case. For instance, one respondent (C7) reported that the group abducted him specifically to become a butcher in their territory, having seen him grilling meat in Kumche.

40 Amnesty International, *We Dried our Tears* (Amnesty International, 2020), 24.

41 For instance, United Nations Development Program, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives, and the Tipping Point for Recruitment* (New York: United Nations Development Program, 2017), 5.

42 Mercy Corp, *Motivations and Empty Promises*, 11.

Roles within Boko Haram

Shifting our attention to the respondents' roles within Boko Haram, it is worth first reiterating that we make no claims about representativeness, due to both the selection processes and small sample size (as previously described in Section 3). Indeed, it seems likely that the positions occupied by our respondents (shown in Table 1) *may not* accurately reflect those of the broader membership *if* we assume that forced recruits are generally placed in lower value roles. That said, it is worth observing that certain respondents did achieve positions of authority, including the individual who was escorted into Boko Haram territory by his Almajiri teacher (C5). Having first received weapons training, he was assigned to a security detail before being tasked with defusing mines. Operating as an occasional foot soldier, he displayed particular bravery by refusing to retreat during battle, with this act being rewarded with promotion to military commander with thirty subordinates. Among the thirteen individuals consulted for this study, this respondent was the only one who also fought with ISWAP after the groups split.

Two respondents (C9 and C12) were assigned to the military police (*Hisbah*), having initially operated as foot soldiers, and with one claiming that his promotion was based on trust. As discussed in more detail shortly, the *Hisbah* is responsible for enforcing Boko Haram's strict Islamic code and maintaining public law and order.⁴³ Two other respondents were tasked with personal security roles, with one of these (C2) responsible for protecting the family of a local commander. He reported that this commander had first encountered him after Boko Haram seized control of his community in Adamawa State, and that he required him to convert from Christianity to Islam (changing his 'infidel' name in the process). The second individual (C4) asserted that he was initially attached to a medical unit, where he was responsible for dressing wounds. He was sent on operations while in this role but remained behind the lines to assist those injured in battle. He was eventually tasked with ensuring the personal security of the Chief Medical Director, with this promotion reportedly based on the perception that he was trustworthy and hardworking.

Among those in civilian positions, one respondent from Bama (C3) reported that he was provided with a sewing machine and assigned the role of tailor, with this reflecting his livelihood prior to being abducted. A respondent from Damboa (C6) claimed to have been used as a handyman, with his varied roles ranging from auto-mechanics to crushing millet. Another respondent from Bama (C8) reported that he worked as a trader, with this again reflecting his prior livelihood. Within Boko Haram he managed a kiosk selling items such as food and clothing, with his supplies coming from the central market in the settlement. He was not the only trader interviewed during the research, with another one (C11) claiming that he asked to be transferred into that role to avoid the violence he previously experienced as a foot soldier. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, he reported being allowed to remain a trader despite pressure from Boko Haram to return to his initial position.

43 Zacharias P. Pieri & Jacob Zenn, "Under the Black Flag in Borno," 662.

Table 1. Roles Assigned to Respondents within Boko Haram⁴⁴

Involvement (Highest 'Value' Role)	#
Military commander	1
Military police	2
Personal Security	2
Foot soldier	3
Medical Officer	1
Trader	1
Tailor	1
Butcher	1
Handyman	1
TOTAL	13

It is worth highlighting the extent of fluidity in relation to roles, with certain military respondents performing civilian tasks on the side, including a former member of the military police (C9) who also operated as a food trader to generate income. Indeed, he reported that Boko Haram provided him with seed funding to start this business, and that he was allowed to buy goods from nearby markets that were not under the control of the group. The other respondent in the military police (C12) similarly claimed that he was engaged in farming, with some of his produce sold on the market in the settlement. Conversely, some of those in civilian roles were at least occasionally also forced to act as foot soldiers, with this including one of the traders (C8) and the butcher (C7). Indeed, the latter reported that in his location it was compulsory for all members to actively participate in battle if required, regardless of their role.

Life under Boko Haram

While certain respondents (C2 and C7) claimed to have spent some time in towns and villages under Boko Haram control, most were exclusively based remotely in camps and settlements. The size and composition of the locations in which they resided varied substantially, with a respondent from Ngala (C9) claiming that he and 2,000 other soldiers occupied a settlement that had previously been abandoned. By contrast, a respondent from Goza (C12) asserted that there were no solid structures in his camp, which housed around 500 military and civilian members of Boko Haram. While single men were assigned to tents, those who were married were allowed to reside in zinc huts with their families. The trader (C8) claimed that there were roughly 1,000 civilians in his settlement, with many more soldiers in surrounding camps (he was unable to provide an estimate). He added that the settlement had been captured by Boko Haram from prior occupants, and that it was fifteen kilometers from the nearest town. A foot soldier from Ngala (C11) claimed that there were around 1,000 other military members located in his camp, and that there had previously also been civilians, but that they had escaped.

44 We determine highest 'value' roles loosely in relation to each respondent's proximity to violence, and the extent to which they maintain agency over outcomes.

The respondents consistently reported that Boko Haram did not provide a salary, in notable contrast to groups such as IS and al-Shabaab.⁴⁵ However, the respondent from Hong in Adamawa State (C4) claimed that he could request money from his superiors as required, and that these were generally granted if justified. For instance, he claimed that on one occasion he received 40,000 Naira (around 100 USD) to repair damages to his house. While the broader subject of Boko Haram's financing is beyond the scope of this study,⁴⁶ various respondents highlighted the extent to which their resources were gained through pillage, although the procedures for dividing this loot varied substantially between locations. For instance, a former member of the military police (C9) claimed that plunder was split into three parts, with the senior commander receiving one of these, and the raid leader and foot soldiers distributing the remainder. Another former member of the military police (C12) maintained that in his settlement civilians received half of the bounty, with the remainder being shared between those involved in the raid. By contrast, a former foot soldier (C11) claimed that the local commander simply split the loot as he saw fit.

Amnesty International reports that the rate of pillage has increased over recent years, with this reflecting increased shortages in Boko Haram camps and settlements.⁴⁷ Our research lends weight to this thesis, with several respondents highlighting key supply issues towards the later stages of their involvement with the group. For instance, the trader (C8) claims that while conditions were generally satisfactory during his involvement, he observed severe shortages of food, fuel, and medicine prior to his departure in 2020 or 2021. A former member of the military police (C12) who fled around 2019 made similar assertions about food, fuel, and water. A former foot soldier (C11) likewise maintained that while water was in plentiful supply from a nearby lake, food, fuel, and medicine were scarce by the time of his departure in 2019. To be clear, this was not a universal trend, with the other former member of the military police (C9) claiming that there were no shortages at the time of his exit during the same year, with local land being fertile and other supplies often bought from nearby settlements.

The amount of ideological training provided to the respondents also varied substantially, ranging from two weeks (C10) to six months (C9). Much of this training involved condemning state corruption and explaining how heaven awaits those who kill 'infidels' (which often amounted to anyone outside of Boko Haram). The group also attempted to impose its social control through more direct means, administering punishments such as flogging for a failure to attend prayers, listening to music, using drugs (as reported by C9 and C11), and other crimes. Punishments were also inflicted on those who violated Boko Haram regulations regarding the means of communication (also see Box 1). Various respondents (C4, C5, C6, C7, C11, and C12) claimed that phones (or sim cards more specifically) were banned in their camps and settlements, although with most (C6, C7, C9, and C11) adding that some residents retained them in secret. Access to radio was more varied, with certain interviewees claiming no restrictions (C1, C7), and others stating that their usage was regulated or banned entirely (C4, C8, C11, and C12). Two respondents

45 Haid Haid, *Reintegrating ISIS Supporters in Syria: Efforts Priorities and Challenges* (International Centre for the Study of Radicalization, 2018), 11; & Khalil et al, *Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia*, 16.

46 On this topic, see for instance, Omar Mahmoud, "Local, Global, or In Between: Boko Haram's Messaging, Strategy, membership, and Support Networks," in *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency*, ed. Jacob Zenn (Combating Terrorism Centre at Westpoint, 2018), 87–114.

47 Amnesty International, "We Dried our Tears," 7, 28–29.

(C4 and C7) also maintained that the penalty for possession of state-produced leaflets dropped by plane was death, while others reported that Boko Haram simply warned them to disregard their message.

Boko Haram's policies and preferences regarding marriage and family life also varied substantially between locations. This subject has already received considerable attention in the literature,⁴⁸ for instance, with ICG reporting that 'Boko Haram used women and girls as rewards to fighters, a significant enticement since raising the resources for marriage is not easy.'⁴⁹ By contrast, one of the former medical officers in our sample (C4) claimed that Boko Haram forced him to marry a woman who had also been abducted. A former member of the military police (C9) similarly claimed that they compelled single people to wed 'to avoid fornication', and that they funded their marriage ceremonies. He added that men were allowed to choose their brides, with many selecting multiple wives. Indeed, one of the former foot soldiers (C10) claimed to have had nine wives, with this totaling only four at any one time in accordance with Sharia Law. Yet, other respondents (C11 and C12) claimed that Boko Haram played absolutely no role in family matters, and that they also did not finance marriage ceremonies. One of these (C12) elaborated on a typical traditional process within a Boko Haram settlement, in which he first spoke to the younger brother of his future wife, before providing a dowry to her father. While some respondents (C4 and C10) reported that Boko Haram had abducted their future wives, the design of this research did not allow us to meaningfully explore marriage from a female perspective.⁵⁰

Leaving Boko Haram

Many studies focusing on exits from violent extremism rely on the binary distinction between 'push' and 'pull' factors. For instance, Mary Beth Altier and her colleagues treat the former as including unmet expectations, disillusionment with the strategy or actions of the organization in question, disillusionment with personnel, difficulties with the clandestine lifestyle, an inability to 'cope' with violence, loss of faith in the ideology, and 'burnout.'⁵¹ In the latter category they include competing loyalties, employment or educational demands or opportunities, family demands and desires, positive interactions with 'moderates', financial incentives, and amnesties. By contrast, James Khalil and his colleagues divide many of these same drivers into the categories of structural motivators, individual incentives, and enabling factors.⁵² Drawing on interviews with former members of Boko Haram and community actors throughout the Lake Chad Basin, Fonteh Akum and his colleagues more specifically emphasize the extent to which disengagement is motivated by disillusionment with the organization, misalignment between personal objectives and those of the group, and the lack of consistency between Boko Haram messaging and their internal practices.⁵³

48 See, for instance, Matfess, *Women, and the War on Boko Haram*.

49 ICG, *Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency*, 8.

50 While essentially beyond the scope of this report (see Section 1), marriage has been considered from a female perspective elsewhere. See, for instance, Amnesty International, "We Dried our Tears"; & Matfess et al, "Beset on all Sides," 196.

51 Mary Beth Altier, Christian Thoroughgood & John Horgan, "Turning away from Terrorism: Lessons from Psychology, Sociology and Criminology," *Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol. 51, no. 5 (2014).

52 Khalil et al, "The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model".

53 Fonteh Akum, Remadji Hoinathy & Malik Samuel, *Managing the Journey out of Violent Extremism in the Lake Chad Basin* (Institute for Security Studies, 2021).

Without overlooking that our respondents never wanted to become involved with Boko Haram in the first place, it is worth observing that several (C5, C6, C7, C10, and C11) emphasized how they were repulsed by the violence perpetrated by the group, and the extent to which this reinforced their desire to exit. For instance, one former foot soldier (C10) stated that ‘they killed people like animals’, with reference to specific attacks on a mosque and marketplace. Such matters were particularly personal for the handyman (C6) and the trader (C8), who respectively reported that Boko Haram had killed a friend and a brother who had tried to escape. The respondent tasked with providing security for the Chief Medical Director (C4) also emphasized how he was motivated by the risks to his personal safety, poor living conditions (especially the lack of food), inadequate treatment by his commanders, and because he missed his family. The butcher (C7) claimed that he was partly motivated by the ‘tribal’ nature of Boko Haram, adding that he felt discriminated against as a Hausa. Critically, eight of the thirteen respondents (C1, C3, C4, C6, C7, C8, C9, and C11) were also explicit that they had been partly motivated to disengage by the provisions offered by OPSC (see Box 1).

Of course, accounts of disengagement must also consider obstacles to these journeys,⁵⁴ with many reports focusing on the pervasive fear of Boko Haram responses to such efforts. For instance, Mercy Corps observes that ‘most former members we interviewed described a harrowing process of escaping the group, either fleeing during the chaos of battle or slipping out at night,’ adding that ‘many worried they would be killed in the process, and spoke soberly of companions who tried unsuccessfully to escape.’⁵⁵ Drawing on interviews with minors, Hilary Matfess and her colleagues similarly report that:

Would-be defectors or escapees were threatened with death nearly constantly, according to multiple children interviewed; some even reported witnessing the insurgents kill those who had been caught during an attempt to flee. . . . A number of children formerly associated with Boko Haram, even now that they’ve left the group and are living in IDP camps, expressed fear that Boko Haram would find them.⁵⁶

This was certainly supported by our research, with the trader (C8) claiming that his brother was killed by Boko Haram for trying to escape shortly after they were abducted together. The medical officer (C1) similarly reported that his first attempt to flee with six others was thwarted largely because they were unfamiliar with the bush, with the ringleader executed as punishment. While less common, certain respondents (C6 and C10) maintained that disengagement was also inhibited by a fear of repercussions by the security forces or CJTF (although this was contested by C8 and C11).

Our respondents typically fled their camps and settlements in relatively small groups of between five and twenty people, with two (C4 and C7) claiming that their exit parties numbered over a hundred. One of the foot soldiers (C10) maintained that he began planning his escape around 2015 (having joined Boko Haram in 2013), and that he only achieved exit five years later. Two of his wives also based in the settlement had threatened to leave him if they remained much longer. While with Boko Haram, he retained

54 Khalil et al, “The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model”.

55 Mercy Corp, *Motivations and Empty Promises*, 16.

56 Matfess et al “Beset on all Sides,” 192.

Box 1. Spreading information about OPSC

Those tasked with supporting OPSC must ensure that current members of Boko Haram and ISWAP are aware of the rehabilitation provisions provided through this program, and how it offers a potential avenue towards their eventual community reintegration (with this outreach element corresponding to Stage 1 of Figure 1). Among the thirteen study respondents, five (C1, C6, C8, C9, and C11) claimed that they had heard about these provisions through radio messages,^a with two of these (C8 and C11) elaborating that the campaign involved former members recounting their personal stories, including the benefits they received via OPSC. Nine respondents reported that they had heard about these provisions through leaflets dropped from planes (C1, C3, C4, C6, C7, C8, C9, C11, and C12), with two (C7 and C11) observing that they displayed pictures of former members of the group. One of these respondents (C11) alleged that the images were not updated between 2015 and 2019, and was critical of this fact.

While certain respondents claimed that phones (or at least sim cards) were banned in their camps and settlements (as also discussed in the main text), others (C6 and C10) maintained that this provided a key avenue through which family members based outside of Boko Haram control helped motivate or facilitate their disengagement. OPSC also exploited this means of communication through their voluntary ‘ambassadors’ initiative, which involves encouraging certain former clients to reach out to current members via phone (C5, C11, S1). The study respondents generally deemed other sources of information to be less relevant, including television and word-of-mouth.

a On this issue, also see International Crisis Group, *An Exit from Boko Haram? Assessing Nigeria’s Operation Safe Corridor (2021)*, 4; & USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation*, 28.

phone communications with a family member who identified a place where he could surrender in Maity. He fled with nineteen other individuals, including women and children, of which fifteen were recaptured during the escape. One of those who successfully achieved exit was sufficiently young for the authorities to release him directly back to the community, where he was subsequently killed by Boko Haram. By contrast, the trader (C8) left his settlement with nine others at midnight, before waiting until daybreak to surrender to the military at Pulka. He claimed that he knew where to surrender as he had heard on the radio of locations that had already been liberated (see Box 1).

A former member of the military police (C9) claimed that he was among a large group that arranged for a forward party of around twenty people to surrender in Cameroon. From there, the Cameroonian military (despite having a reputation as being ruthless) contacted their Nigerian counterparts to collect them, with the remaining party also escaping roughly eight months later. The tailor (C3) stated that his escape party of eight people was actually caught by Boko Haram, but that he bribed their captors for passage with 40,000 Naira (with this money having been earned tailoring on the side). The handyman (C6) claimed he had heard about the provisions provided by OPSC through the radio and leaflets, and that he had confirmed the validity of these claims through a phone call with an uncle. This uncle then arranged for his safe passage with the military when he exited with two friends in 2017. Although this was the only instance of safe passage being reported during our research, OPSC staff (S1) claimed that

such arrangements were relatively common. Two respondents (C5 and C11) recounted the influence of an OPSC ‘ambassador’ (again, see Box 1), who helped motivate both to exit by phone. In one case (C5), this individual then ferried fifteen escapees from Cameroon on a motorbike, carrying three at a time. Two others highlighted the importance of knowing the local terrain, with one (C1) escaping with a foot soldier who was familiar with the bush, and the other (C4) relying on local farmers.

The road to reintegration

Many individuals who escape from Boko Haram are transferred to Giwa Barracks for screening by the Joint Investigation Center (JIC), which is comprised of military intelligence personnel.⁵⁷ Despite often disengaging from the group in relatively large groups, they are individually screened into one of the following three categories (also see Figure 1):⁵⁸

- **Innocent:** These individuals are allowed to return to the community or IDP camps.
- **Low-risk:** Those in this category are transferred to OPSC for rehabilitation.
- **High-risk:** These individuals are referred to the judicial system through Kainji Barracks.

This process is regularly criticized for its lack of transparency, with USAID observing that ‘there is still little visibility into the details of the screening,’ and Amnesty International reporting that that the process remains ‘opaque.’⁵⁹ Indeed, even key stakeholders (S1 and S2) directly involved in running OPSC claimed they knew little about the process. While this lack of transparency limits our ability to draw firm conclusions about screening, the issues we encountered through the sampling for this research are certainly suggestive of major problems, as we return to in the subsequent section.

These concerns aside, our respondents (C4, C8, C10, C11, and C12) reported relatively short processing times between their initial surrender and arrival at Giwa Barracks, with this typically lasting less than one week. However, this contrasted dramatically with the time they spent at Giwa, with detentions at these barracks lasting up to five years (C7). To be clear, some of these individuals voluntarily acted as informants while at the barracks (C1, C5, and C10), with this seemingly extending their residency. Nevertheless, while we acknowledge that screening can be a time-consuming process, these extensive delays undoubtedly represent an important disincentive to disengagement. More importantly, although our research was not designed to validate or discredit such claims, Giwa Barracks is also notorious for human rights abuses. Although several of our respondents claimed that the conditions were adequate, we cannot discount the hypothesis that these responses may have reflected the presence of OPSC team members during our interviews. Indeed, it is perhaps revealing that the only respondent who was openly

57 Certain sources suggest that screening also occurs prior to Giwa Barracks, including Amnesty International “We Dried our Tears”, 38.

58 Akum et al, *Managing the Journey*, 19; Amnesty International “We Dried our Tears,” 38-39; International Crisis Group, *An Exit from Boko Haram*, 6; & USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation*, 11–12.

59 Amnesty International “We Dried our Tears,” 38, 59; Vanda Felbab-Brown, *The Limits of Punishment: Transitional Justice and Violent Extremism: Nigeria Case Study* (Institute for Integrated Transitions & United Nations University, 2018), 21; & USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation*, 8, 11.

critical of the barracks expressed his views when these team members temporarily left the room. He reported overcrowded conditions, sleeping on a concrete floor (often without a mat), and periods of up to two months without a shower.⁶⁰

Switching our attention to OPSC, while the clients spoke positively about the services and conditions at Mallam Sidi, we must again be cautious with the information provided given the presence of staff during the interviews. It is also worth reiterating that this research was not designed as a formal evaluation (as discussed in Section 3), and so our ability to draw firm conclusions are constrained by our lack of access to the extensive documentation that such programs invariably generate. The services provided at OPSC are tailored to personal needs, and include basic education, vocational training, psychological and psychosocial support, family and community visits, spiritual support, civic education, drug awareness training, art therapy, and recreational activities. Considering these in turn, Amnesty reports that:

Several aspects of Safe Corridor have had a meaningful impact. Many men and boys, particularly those who grew up in Boko Haram-controlled areas, arrive with limited or no formal education; some are illiterate. Several boys and younger men told Amnesty International they learned the ABCs, counting, and spelling at Safe Corridor, along with basic grammar, during weekly adult education classes.⁶¹

It is notable that several of our respondents claimed that they intended to continue with their ‘Western’ education after leaving OPSC (C4, C8, C9, and C12). The vocational training includes hairdressing, carpentry, laundry services, leatherwork (shoe making), tailoring, welding, weaving, and farming, with the latter being compulsory.⁶² Drawing on interviews with over one hundred program graduates, USAID reports that 70 percent claimed that they were earning a living through the training provided by OPSC.⁶³ Several of our respondents also claimed that once back in their communities they intended to generate income through their newly acquired skills (C4, C5, C7, C8, C9, and C11). It is worth also noting that while Amnesty stressed the physical dangers associated with training to produce soap and related products,⁶⁴ this option is no longer offered. Moving on to the psychosocial support, Amnesty also claims that:

Several men and boys formerly detained at Safe Corridor mentioned a positive impact of the psychosocial programs. Encouragingly, every person interviewed by Amnesty International said most sessions were one on one, with an interpreter as needed, and that soldiers and military intelligence respected privacy and confidentiality – remaining outside the room where psychosocial professionals and detainees spoke.⁶⁵

Helping to prepare for the subsequent reintegration of beneficiaries, OPSC facilitates visits by family members, community and religious leaders, government officials, and CJTF representatives. Unfortunately,

60 We have not referenced the respondent in the main text due to his apparent desire for discretion.

61 Amnesty International, “We Dried our Tears”, 62.

62 Akum et al, *Managing the Journey*, 20.

63 USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation*, 5.

64 Amnesty International, “We Dried our Tears”, 66.

65 Amnesty International, “We Dried our Tears”, 62.

these provisions were largely curtailed on health grounds during the Covid-19 pandemic (C8, S1), particularly for families. Regarding the ideological training at the facility, Audu Bukarti and Rachel Bryson report that resident imams ‘focus on Islamic textual authorities that relate to forbidding violence and enjoining peaceful and harmonious co-existence.’⁶⁶ Of course, the relevance of such efforts is somewhat open to question for clients who never subscribed to the Boko Haram system of beliefs in the first place. This is not to suggest that they are entirely redundant, but rather that they are more pertinent for individuals who joined voluntarily (those located towards the right of Figure 3), and particularly those who were ideologically motivated.

As already observed, the responsibility for reintegration falls on the individual states, with support from agencies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In practice, this often results in graduates spending additional time at ‘transit centers’, including Shokari in Borno State, which was opened for this specific purpose in September 2020.⁶⁷ This compounds delays already experienced during the screening (at Giwa) and rehabilitation (at Mallam Sidi) phases.⁶⁸ A lack of prior planning certainly also contributed to problems with reintegration during the early years of OPSC, with ICG reporting that:

In Safe Corridor’s early days, the process of reintegration was messy. When the first batches of graduates were released from the program, the Borno state government had to improvise, setting up graduates at the Umaru Shehu rehabilitation camp in Maiduguri. . . . In some cases, graduates encountered public hostility when they arrived. In one famous episode, authorities tried to bring a large group of graduates originally from Gwoza local government area to a Maiduguri displaced persons’ camp and then to their homes, but in both places residents protested, forcing authorities to send the graduates again to Umaru Shehu, until they could be relocated again.⁶⁹

However, USAID reports that this experience ‘led to improvements in community preparation and sensitization activities.’⁷⁰ In particular, the USAID authors observe that OPSC and Borno state representatives ‘have taken to television to raise awareness about OSC [OPSC] and advocate for community acceptance with radio shows like Dandal Kura,’ and that the former have ‘hosted dialogues with community leaders in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa to discuss reintegration and reconciliation.’⁷¹ Yet, the extent to which communities support reintegration remains subject to considerable debate, with the evidence somewhat contradictory. Commenting in 2018, Vanda Felbab-Brown asserted that:

Community members from areas where Boko Haram has operated, and some journalists openly say that they do not want to accept back either Boko Haram members or those who lived under Boko Haram rule. The consistency of rejection of those associated with Boko Haram in any way and the

66 Audu Bulama Bukarti & Rachel Bryson, *Dealing with Boko Haram Defects in the Lake Chad Basin: Lessons from Nigeria* (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2019), 18.

67 USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation*, 11.

68 Amnesty International, “We Dried our Tears”, 60; & USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation*, 18.

69 International Crisis Group, *An Exit from Boko Haram*, 10.

70 USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation*, 45.

71 USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation*, 45.

extreme distrust of returnees appears in many surveys and focus group studies. A typical view is that those who lived under Boko Haram rule, even if they had been abducted by the group, must have been brainwashed.⁷²

More recently, while observing that many clients ‘are welcomed back into their communities,’ ICG also highlights broad opposition ‘to the idea that any former Boko Haram recruit should benefit from government forgiveness and donor support.’⁷³ By contrast, USAID paints a more positive picture, reporting that:

Only 21% of community members strongly agreed that DDRR [demobilization, disassociation, reintegration, and reconciliation] beneficiaries are dangerous and should not be accepted [back into the community], while 37% strongly agreed that DDRR beneficiaries are victims. In addition, 59% of community members believe their fellow community members have mostly or fully accepted DDRR beneficiaries. ... [Furthermore] over 75% of community members completely or somewhat agree that DDRR beneficiaries are sincerely seeking forgiveness.⁷⁴

Our respondents consistently claimed that they expected to be welcomed back ‘with open arms’, with several adding that this was because their communities understood that they had been abducted (C3), or because their time spent rehabilitating at OPSC offers the necessary reassurances that they pose no risk (C8). Of course, we cannot reject the possibility that, in at least certain cases, such responses may have been designed to help prevent further delays in the process by providing reassurances to the OPSC team members in attendance.

5. DISCUSSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

Research that draws from interviews with former members of groups such as Boko Haram often downplays or even entirely neglects the extent to which personal experiences vary. Even though our respondents were all coercively recruited by the group (with one exception), they were forced into involvement through notably different means. This variance was also apparent in relation to the roles performed by these individuals within Boko Haram, including in relation to their involvement in violence. Striking differences were also apparent regarding the conditions experienced within the various camps and settlements, the rules and regulations imposed in these locations, and how our respondents were able to escape. These pronounced differences underscore the need to ensure that communication campaigns designed to promote exit from Boko Haram (represented by Stage 1 of Figure 1) should be tailored to local contexts. They also underline why the services provided through programs such as OPSC (Stage 4) must be tailored to reflect the particular social, economic, psychological, and other needs of each indi-

72 Felbab-Brown, “The Limits of Punishment,” 10.

73 International Crisis Group, *An Exit from Boko Haram*, 9–12.

74 USAID, *Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation*, 6.

vidual client. While the package of services offered at Mallam Sidi is comprehensive, the management team should continue to explore additional options, particularly given the rapidly evolving nature of this programmatic field.

Considering the off-ramp from Boko Haram more broadly, we can conclude with some certainty that Giwa Barracks represents a critical weak link. Despite some apparent improvements in conditions at the barracks over time, human rights abuses remain widely reported in the literature. For instance, Amnesty International makes allegations about physical violence, insufficient food and water, inhumane sanitation, and extreme heat at Giwa, with these frequently resulting in the death of detainees.⁷⁵ Fonteh Akum and his colleagues from the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) also observe that:

Former detainees told the ISS that they spent between three months and four years in the barracks in very poor conditions that included overcrowding; lack of hygiene, a proper bed or ventilation; and a hostile reception from members of the JIC. These conditions fuel the spread of rumors, including that those who surrendered would be condemned to death.⁷⁶

Of course, our research was not designed to validate or discredit such claims, particularly given the presence of OPSC staff during the interviews. Indeed, it is perhaps revealing that the one respondent who was openly critical of Giwa expressed his views when these team members temporarily left the room. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that this reputation alone continues to disincentivize disengagements from Boko Haram, with this compounded by the extensive delays in the screening processes. Former detainees themselves have effectively also drawn such conclusions, with Amnesty reporting that ‘many former child detainees said that, after their experience, they would not counsel others to come out from the bush.’⁷⁷ Akum and his colleagues also reported that ‘some ex-associates told the ISS that at the JIC facility, they gave up hope of freedom and regretted surrendering.’⁷⁸

While the lack of transparency limits our ability to draw firm conclusions about the screening process through which eligibility for OPSC is determined, we certainly agree with ICG’s argument that individuals who did no more than continue to remain in locations that happened to come under Boko Haram control should be categorized as ‘innocent.’⁷⁹ As previously discussed, this classification would allow them to return to their communities (or often IDP camps if these communities have been destroyed or remain in Boko Haram hands). However, this was not applicable to any of the respondents in our sample, with all effectively falling under the direct command of Boko Haram, including those in civilian roles. That said, we also believe that several of our interviewees should potentially still have been categorized as innocent based on their assertions that they had not been ideologically motivated, and as they had never directly contributed to violence. By instead treating them as ‘low-risk’, the authorities raise the numbers who pass through OPSC and increase the extent to which it provides a bottleneck in the broader off-ramp

75 Amnesty International “We Dried our Tears,” & International Crisis Group, *An Exit from Boko Haram*.

76 Akum et al, *Managing the Journey*, 20.

77 Amnesty International, “We Dried our Tears”, 8.

78 Akum et al, *Managing the Journey*, 20.

79 International Crisis Group, *An Exit from Boko Haram*.

from Boko Haram. Of course, this is particularly problematic in the current context of mass disengagement from the group.

More concretely, it is hard to avoid concluding that the methods applied to distinguish between ‘low’ and ‘high-risk’ individuals are flawed. As previously observed, the OPSC team maintained that the most recent cohort of beneficiaries only included those who had been forced into involvement in Boko Haram, with only one clear exception. *If* this information is correct, it means that those originally driven by adventure, status, economic incentives, peer pressure, and so on, were ineligible for Mallam Sidi. This is problematic as it is essentially inconceivable that all such individuals represent a current threat to public safety, and/or that their involvement in violence was sufficient to warrant referral to the judicial system. By way of comparison, former members of al-Shabaab are eligible for rehabilitation at equivalent facilities in Somalia if they (a) have voluntarily disengaged, (b) have denounced the group’s ideology, and (c) are not seen to pose a future risk to public safety.⁸⁰ We suggest that this represents a far more robust and defensible means through which to determine eligibility as it correctly emphasizes the current attitudes of the individuals in question, rather than their historical motives for involvement.

Policy recommendations

In presenting our policy recommendations, it is worth reiterating that the issues considered in this report are particularly pertinent at the present time given the mass disengagements currently being experienced by Boko Haram, and the extent to which the federal and state systems lack the capacity to absorb and handle the large numbers involved. Our key recommendations are as follows:

- » Communication campaigns that aim to promote exit from Boko Haram and ISWAP should appeal to varied motives and should be tailored to local contexts in terms of both their message and media. Even those who are forced into involvement often leave such groups for a variety of reasons, and those tasked with designing communications campaigns should attempt to appeal to multiple of these motives simultaneously. For instance, these may include a desire for enhanced security outside of a conflict context, improved living conditions, the prospects of reuniting with family, community reintegration, opportunities to earn a living through newly acquired vocational skills, and so on. With conditions and regulations varying substantially between Boko Haram camps and settlements, they should also ensure that both the messages and the means of communication (radio, leaflets, phone, and so on) are appropriate to local contexts.
- » The issues associated with Giwa Barracks must be resolved as a matter of priority. While our research was not designed to validate or discredit claims of human rights abuses at this facility, there is little doubt that this reputation alone (alongside the notorious delays in processing individuals through the center) continues to disincentivize many still in Boko Haram

⁸⁰ Khalil et al, *Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia*, 2.

camps and settlements from disengaging. The relevant authorities should ensure that human rights abuses have entirely ceased across all facilities, while also promoting greater transparency in the process to provide reassurance that this has occurred. Given the extent of the reputational issues, they should also consider identifying alternative facilities at which disengaged members of Boko Haram and ISWAP can be processed.

- » The screening processes should be made transparent and the eligibility criteria for OPSC should be relaxed. As reported by the OPSC management team, the recent batch of program beneficiaries included only those who were forced into involvement with Boko Haram, with only one obvious exception. *If* this information is correct, it means that those originally driven by adventure, status, economic incentives, peer pressure, and so on, were ineligible for OPSC. This is problematic as it is essentially inconceivable that all such individuals represent a current threat to public safety, and/or that their involvement in violence was sufficient to warrant being referred to the judicial system. This excessively high threshold also almost certainly disincentivizes many who remain in the bush from disengaging.
- » While the rehabilitation services offered at OPSC are comprehensive and are seemingly suitably tailored to individual needs, the management team should continue to explore additional options. As observed, current services include basic education, vocational training, psychological and psychosocial support, family and community visits, spiritual support, civic education, drug awareness training, art therapy, and recreational activities. As with many similar programs in other locations (including those in prison settings), the OPSC team should continue to explore novel means to pursue rehabilitation through additional intervention types. Critically, they should also ensure that the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes are sufficiently robust to help guarantee that each individual component is optimally designed to contribute to the broader objectives of the program.
- » The relevant authorities should continue to ‘upscale’ their disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration programming to help ensure that those who disengage from Boko Haram and ISWAP return to their communities in a timely manner. This is necessary not only on moral grounds, but also because continued delays in the processing disincentivize many who remain in the bush from disengaging. In practice, this upscaling is likely to involve enhancing the capacity of existing facilities, as well as increasing the number of facilities used for such processes. It will also involve substantial efforts to build the technical capacity of the increased numbers of staff required for these interventions. It may also involve a greater emphasis on community-based models of rehabilitation that do not involve extended residency at facilities tailored for this purpose.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview introduction

The following information was provided to each respondent prior to interviews:

We are conducting independent research to try and improve our understanding of how and why people like yourself join and leave Boko Haram. We hope to turn the research findings into a report, with the idea that it can help improve programs that aim to counter Boko Haram and similar organizations by encouraging people to leave these groups.

We are interested to hear more about your story, as an interesting and relevant example of a journey out of Boko Haram. I want to clarify that absolutely no personal details will appear in the report. These personal details are not important to telling your story.

However, please be aware that if you provide us with information of immediate national security concerns (e.g., about an imminent attack), we will be required to report that. Please also be aware that members of the OPSC team will be present throughout the interview, and there is chance that they may share information that you provide.

This process is entirely voluntary. If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, please let me know and we can move on. Similarly, you are free to stop the interview at any point if you do not wish to proceed.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Do you agree to take part in this discussion?

Appendix B: Respondent list

	Location of Origin	Highest 'Value' Role in Boko Haram	Period Active with Boko Haram (Approximate)
C1	Maiduguri, Borno State	Medical Officer	2013–2016 (3 years)
C2	Uba, Adamawa State	Personal Security	?
C3	Bama, Borno State	Tailor	2015–2020 (5 years)
C4	Mangali, Adamawa State	Personal Security	?
C5	Bama, Borno State	Commander	2017–2021 (4 years)
C6	Damboia, Borno State	Handyman	2011–2017 (6 years)
C7	Bama, Borno State	Butcher	2013–2017 (4 years)
C8	Bama, Borno State	Trader	2014–2021 (7 years)
C9	Ngala, Borno State	Military Police	2013–2019 (6 years)
C10	Undisclosed	Foot soldier	2013–2020 (7 years)
C11	Ngala, Borno State	Foot soldier	2014–2019 (5 years)
C12	Goza, Borno State	Military Police	2014–2019 (5 years)
C13	Ngala, Borno State	Foot soldier	2014–2018 (4 years)

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JOURNEYS THROUGH EXTREMISM

The Experiences of
Former Members in
Al-Shabaab

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Abdullahi Ahmed Nor, James
Khalil, and Martine Zeuthen

ABOUT THE REPORT

This research applied the *Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model of Violent Extremism* to map personal journeys in and out of al-Shabaab, the al-Qaeda affiliate operating in Somalia and the wider Horn of Africa. The ABC Model provides a framework through which to analyze individual trajectories in relation to sympathy for and actual involvement in violent extremism. We selected al-Shabaab as a case study partly because it remains the deadliest violent extremist organization (VEO) in Africa. As the research team had been involved in rehabilitation work with former members of the group, we also chose it for relative ease of access to respondents. Adopting a life history approach, we interviewed thirteen former members of al-Shabaab. Our core objective was to deliver granular insights about their personal journeys to inform the design of interventions to prevent further involvement and to facilitate disengagements from the group.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the RESOLVE Network, acknowledged partners contributing to the production of this publication, the U.S. Institute of Peace, or any entity of the U.S. government.

ACRONYMS

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
ICU	Islamic Courts Union
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ICG	International Crisis Group
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
NISA	National Intelligence and Security Agency
PCVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
SNA	Somali National Army
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This research applied the *Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model of Violent Extremism* to map personal journeys in and out of al-Shabaab, the al-Qaeda affiliate operating in Somalia and the wider Horn of Africa. The ABC Model provides a framework through which to analyze individual trajectories in relation to sympathy for and actual involvement in violent extremism.¹ We selected al-Shabaab as a case study partly because it remains the deadliest violent extremist organization (VEO) in Africa. As the research team had been involved in rehabilitation work with former members of the group, we also chose it for relative ease of access to respondents. Adopting a life history approach, we interviewed thirteen former members of al-Shabaab, including those from its intelligence agency (the *Amniyat*), military wing (the *Jabhat*), and police force (the *Hizbah*), as well as drivers, teachers, and others in support roles. Our objective was to deliver granular information about their trajectories to inform the design of interventions to prevent further involvement and to motivate and facilitate disengagements from the organization. Based on our findings, our policy recommendations relate to the communications campaigns designed to incentivize exits from al-Shabaab, rehabilitation services provided for those who have already disengaged, and the relevance of territorial control as a critical determinant of entrance into and exit from the organization.

Key findings

We summarize our key findings as follows:

- **Key Finding #1: Individuals join and leave al-Shabaab for many different reasons.**

It is increasingly recognized that individuals become involved in and leave violent extremism for a broad range of reasons, and our research lends weight to this thesis. Four of our respondents claimed to have been at least partly motivated to enlist by their support for al-Shabaab's ideology and aims. Other notable drivers included protection against other armed actors, the desire for revenge, financial incentives, and forced recruitment. Regarding exits from al-Shabaab, most of our respondents claimed that they became increasingly hostile to the group over time, with these negative opinions primarily driven by its harsh treatment of local populations. Three also reported being punished by al-Shabaab (either for alleged involvement in khat smuggling or for taking leave without approval), and this also caused their opinions of the group to decline. While less prominent, our respondents also flagged the relevance of poor living conditions with al-Shabaab, fear of injury and death, and the inadequacy of the salary provided by the group.

1 James Khalil, John Horgan, and Martine Zeuthen, "The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model of Violent Extremism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 3 (2022).

- **Key Finding #2: In-person (rather than virtual) social networks play a key role in entrance and exit from al-Shabaab.**

Many of our respondents reported that relatives, friends, and other personal connections played a critical role in their journeys into al-Shabaab, both motivating and facilitating this involvement. For instance, one respondent reported that his sheikh and peer group members convinced him to join, whereas another pointed to the importance of his clan acquaintances. Social networks were also of key importance in exits from the organization—three of our interviewees noted that they had been encouraged or pressured to disengage by members of their immediate families.

- **Key Finding #3: Territorial control provides a key determinant of entrance and exit from al-Shabaab.**

While largely neglected by the terrorism studies literature, our findings underscore the importance of territorial control as a key determinant of sympathy for and participation in al-Shabaab. Two of our respondents reported being essentially absorbed into the group through regular interactions with members in areas under its control, with the organization effectively acting as the default employer in their regions. Three others explicitly observed that they enlisted only once al-Shabaab had seized control of their community. Regarding exits from the group, one respondent reported that he was arrested by the security forces after his home community was recaptured.

- **Key Finding #4: Certain members become sympathetic to al-Shabaab's ideology and aims only *after* joining the organization.**

Three individuals within our sample became sympathetic or more sympathetic towards al-Shabaab only *after* joining the organization, highlighting the extent to which its training and broader socialization processes can generate a sense of purpose and belonging. This pattern goes essentially unrecognized in the Somalia literature (although not in that relating to other cases, particularly in the Global North), where most accounts simply assume that sympathies precede involvement.

- **Key Finding #5: Arrangements of safe passage with the security forces provide a key avenue for members of al-Shabaab to disengage.**

Several of our respondents observed that they established safe passage with the security forces prior to their exit, often facilitated by members of their family or wider clan. For instance, one reported that his mother-in-law established the necessary connections to facilitate his transfer to the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA). Another claimed that his parents contacted clan elders, who reached out to members of their kinship group in the military. Such avenues are less available to individuals from families with fewer connections, and those from less influential clans with more limited access to the security system.

- **Key Finding #6: While al-Shabaab severely punishes most of those who attempt to escape, certain individuals are allowed to leave freely.**

Many of our respondents took months or even years to leave al-Shabaab, with such exits potentially punishable by death. Yet, our sample also included two respondents who were permitted to leave the group on medical and compassionate grounds, a pattern that also goes underreported in the Somali literature. As neither of these cases had been assigned to the intelligence or military wings of al-Shabaab, we can speculate that those more deeply involved may not have been allowed to exit in this manner.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research applied the *Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model of Violent Extremism* to map personal journeys in and out of al-Shabaab, the al-Qaeda affiliate operating in Somalia and the wider Horn of Africa. The ABC Model provides a framework through which to analyze individual trajectories in relation to sympathy for and actual involvement in violent extremism.² The study was designed to deliver key insights to policymakers and practitioners through revealing the extent to which these journeys vary between respondents. Adopting a life history approach, we conducted interviews with thirteen ex-members of the group, including those from its intelligence agency (the *Amniyat*), military wing (the *Jabhat*), and police force (the *Hizbah*), as well as drivers, teachers, and others in support roles. The ABC Model was also designed as a platform through which to explore drivers of attitudinal and behavioral change, offering a granular understanding of the processes of joining and leaving the group. Following on from this introductory section, we consider the Somali conflict (Section 2) and the ABC Model (Section 3), before elaborating on our research methods (Section 4). We then deliver the main findings from this study (Section 5), presenting the trajectories of eight of the most revealing and informative respondents. This is followed by a final discussion and our policy recommendations (Section 6).

2. THE SOMALI CONFLICT

While the origins of al-Shabaab are contested in scholarly literature, it is broadly recognized that the group rose to prominence as a faction of the military wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). The ICU emerged as a coalition of Sharia courts in 2004, generating widespread public support as it restored law and order in Mogadishu following decades of infighting between clan-based factional leaders and their militias.³ This stood in stark contrast to the poor record of other administrations that had ruled Somalia since the fall of the central government in 1991, including the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which was formed in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi.⁴ The ICU subsequently expanded across most of South-Central Somalia, and was enthusiastically received by many local populations.⁵ It became the strongest political and military force in Somalia, feeding a widespread sense of inevitability about Islamist

2 Khalil et al, "The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model."

3 Ken Menkhaus, "Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping," *International Security* 31, no. 3 (Winter 2006/07): 74–106.

4 Ken Menkhaus, "The Crisis in Somalia: Tragedy in Five Acts," *African Affairs* 106, no. 424 (2007): 357–390.

5 Michael Skjelderup, Mukhtar Ainashe, and Ahmed Mohamed Abdulle "Qare," "Militant Islamism and Local Clan Dynamics in Somalia: The Expansion of the Islamic Courts Union in Lower Jubba province," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (2020): 553–571.

ascendance across the rest of the country.⁶ Yet, a TFG counter offensive in Mogadishu led to the ICU's rapid collapse in 2006. This was supported by Ethiopian forces, with this "invasion" playing a prominent role in fueling the subsequent rise of al-Shabaab.⁷ Indeed, as observed by Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph:

From the moment the Islamists lost Mogadishu, al-Shabaab's priorities changed. The group held fast to its goal of creating a strict Islamic state. But in terms of fund-raising recruitment, and publicity, al-Shabaab stressed a new top objective: driving out the Ethiopians. It did not take a genius to recognize that an appeal to Somalis' nationalism could hit home in ways that appeals to their religion might not.⁸

Mohammed Ibrahim Shire similarly notes that at this point al-Shabaab branded itself "as a staunch nationalist-jihadist group fighting a Somali struggle to expel Ethiopian forces from Somalia."⁹ He adds that "being able to draw on deep-rooted antipathy to Ethiopia and reveling in public approval, the group engaged in internal mobilization, increasing their ranks with thousands of local and diaspora nationalist volunteers."¹⁰

However, al-Shabaab experienced a major rift in its leadership from 2010, with key disagreements revolving around its application of force against the civilians, and its distribution of power. These disputes, alongside military pressure from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), contributed to key losses of territory from 2010. While controlling one third of Mogadishu, al-Shabaab opted to withdraw from the city in August 2011. Despite these reversals, al-Shabaab established formal ties to al-Qaeda in 2012, greatly strengthening its global appeal. This linkage also seemingly enhanced its ability to carry out attacks in other parts of East Africa, pressuring regional governments to withdraw their troops from Somalia.¹¹ In Somalia, al-Shabaab recognizes clans as the "building blocks of power," and endeavors to maintain their political and material support.¹² Many of these clans hedge their bets, with some strategically allying themselves to the group for its military clout and its protection against stronger adversaries. As observed by the International Crisis Group, al-Shabaab "plays on the political inferiority complexes of clans, offering support to those squeezed between larger rivals; the Murosade and Duduble-Habar Gedir, both of which provided numerous fighters, are examples in Mogadishu and central regions."¹³ This dynamic is also described by Stig Jarle Hansen as follows:

6 Menkhaus, "The Crisis in Somalia."

7 Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012* (London: Hurst & Company, 2013); and Mohamed Haji Ingiriis, "From Al-Itihaad to Al-Shabaab: How the Ethiopian Intervention and the 'War on Terror' Exacerbated the Conflict in Somalia," *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 11 (2018): 2033–2052.

8 Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of Al-Qaeda's Most Powerful Ally* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018), 48.

9 Mohammed Ibrahim Shire, "Dialogue and Negotiation with Al-Shabaab," *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17531055.2020.1863099>.

10 Shire, "Dialogue and Negotiation with Al-Shabaab."

11 International Crisis Group, *Al-Shabaab Five Years after Westgate: Still a Menace in East Africa* (ICG, 2018).

12 Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*.

13 International Crisis Group, *Somalia – Al-Shabaab: It will be a Long War* (ICG, 2014), 14.

Figure 1. Al-Shabaab Timeline



As al-Shabaab expanded, it became embroiled in clan conflicts around Somalia, at times involuntary, at times deliberately. In Kismayo, for example, Marehan fighters attempted to join al-Shabaab in order to offset the dominance of the Ogadeen clan around Kismayo. Al-Shabaab now had to deal with the clan-based realities of Somali politics, and at times chose to play the clan games, supporting one sub-clan against others at the local level.¹⁴

In areas under its control, al-Shabaab maintains law and order, regulates the economy, and provides social services.¹⁵ Its command and control are relatively decentralized, with local units retaining relative

¹⁴ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 76.

¹⁵ Bohumil Doboš, "Shapeshifter of Somalia: Evolution of the Political Territoriality of Al-Shabaab," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 5 (2016): 937–957.

autonomy at the operational level.¹⁶ Each region has an appointed Governor (*Waali*) that oversees all the civil service and revenue administration in areas controlled by the organization, and each location is provided a police force (the *Hizbah*).¹⁷ Members of the *Hizbah* (including three respondents featured later in this report) are responsible for enforcing al-Shabaab's strict Islamic code and maintaining public law and order. As observed by Maruf and Joseph:

Hizbah members had two primary tasks: to keep public order and to enforce the strict Islamic code.... It was Hizbah officers who ordered people into mosques for mandatory prayer.... They arrested women for not wearing *hijab* or, in some areas, a burka, and forced haircuts on men whose hair was deemed to be overly long. Smoking cigarettes, playing Western music, and chewing the mild drug khat—the last a very common habit in Somalia—were crimes for which Hizbah officers stayed on personal watch.¹⁸

Al-Shabaab's military wing (the *Jabhat*) is comprised of geographical formations ('brigades') affiliated with local political units. The *Jabhat's* primary task is to seize and maintain territory, fighting on the frontlines against the Somali government and African Union troops. Each division, typically consisting of three hundred soldiers, has their own commanders and bases.¹⁹ The intelligence wing (the *Amniyat*) is responsible for special operations, including suicide bombings, assassination attempts, and attacks on the centers of government power. It is also tasked with collecting intelligence and identifying state collaborators within the organization.²⁰ Al-Shabaab also relies on the services of many members in support roles, including drivers, teachers, and cooks.

3. THE ABC MODEL

Pathways to violence

Having now considered al-Shabaab and the context within which it operates, our attention can turn to personal trajectories in and out of the group. At the heart of the ABC Model lies the prominent disconnect between sympathy for ideologically justified violence (attitudes) and direct involvement in its creation (behaviors), as shown schematically in Figure 2.²¹ Individuals further to the right of the "attitudes" axis are more sympathetic to this violence, whereas those more towards the left are increasingly opposed to such acts. As described in greater detail in the next section, we place "high-value" members

16 Matt Bryden, *The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab. A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?* (Centre for Strategic & International Studies, 2014); and Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*.

17 Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*.

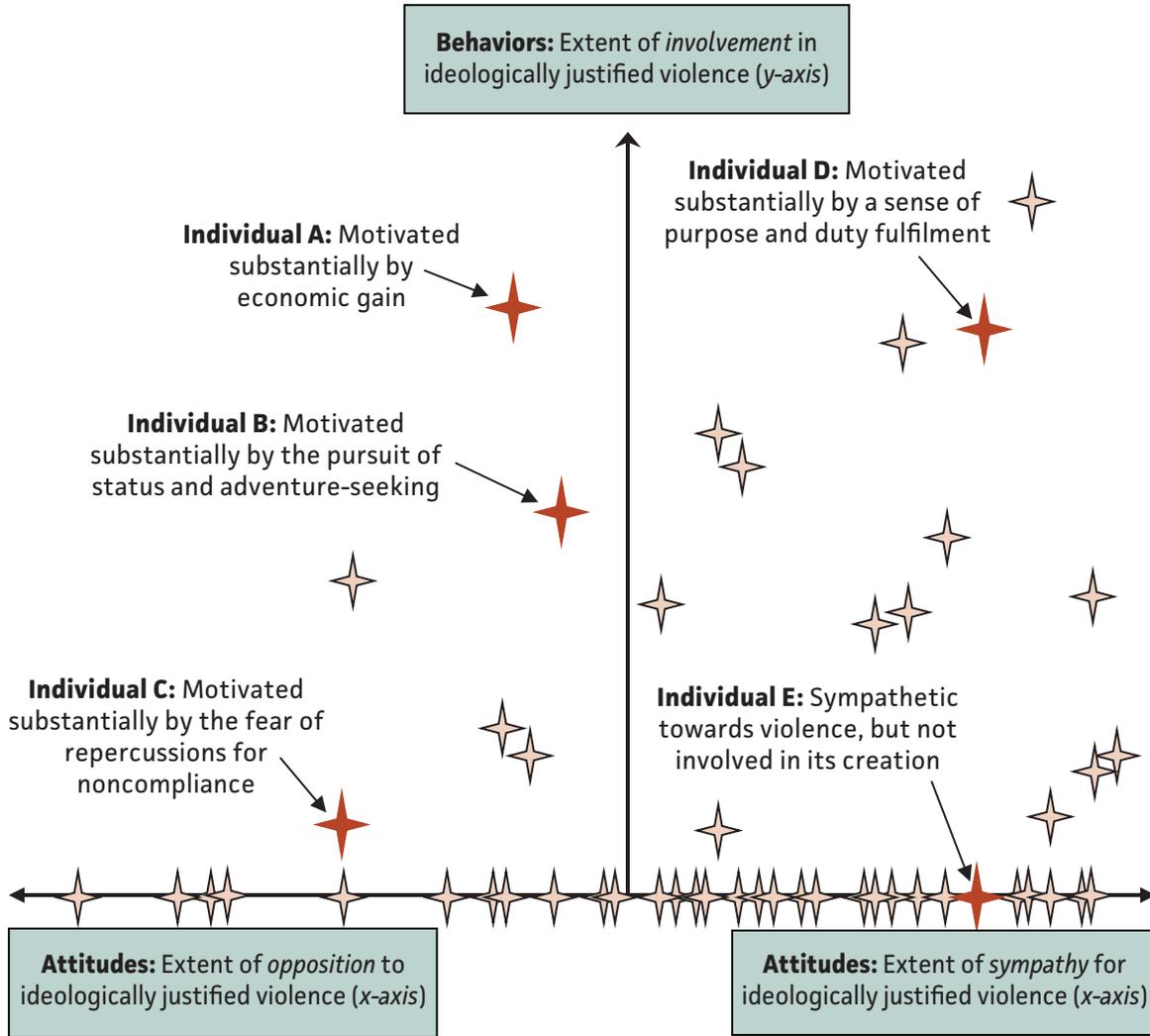
18 *Ibid.*, 86–87

19 *Ibid.*

20 Zakarie Ahmed nor Kheyre, "The Evolution of the Al-Shabaab Jihadist Intelligence Structure," *Intelligence & National Security*, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02684527.2022.2095599>.

21 Khalil et al., "The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model."

Figure 2. The (Partial) Disconnect between Attitudes and Behaviors



(*Jabhat* commanders, *Amniyat* operatives, and so on) further up the “behaviors” scale than rank-and-file adherents, who in turn are located above those in support roles (drivers, cooks, teachers, and so on). In general, individuals who sympathize with this violence are more likely to participate in its creation, as represented by the greater numbers above the x-axis located toward the right of the Figure 2 (including Individual D). Nevertheless, the critical point of the diagram is that sympathizers are often uninvolved in creating this violence (Individual E), and conversely those who do contribute to its production are not necessarily supportive of its ideology and aims. Instead, the latter are frequently driven by status, adventure, economic incentives, security motives, and so on (Individuals A, B, and C).

A key corollary of this prominent disconnect between attitudes and behaviors is that it is generally insufficient to ask generic questions such as “what drives this violence?” Instead, in any given location two core lines of enquiry are required:

- Q1:** What drives sympathy for this violence?
- Q2:** What drives participation in this violence?

Table 1. Common Drivers of Ideologically Justified Violence

Structural motivators	This first category of drivers is comprised of contextual factors, including state repression, political exclusion, social discrimination, corruption, economic deprivation, inequality, and so on. Depending on the ideology and aims of the perpetrators in question, it may also include external state interventions into the affairs of other nations, an absence of Sharia law, the presence of migrant communities deemed harmful to existing cultures, and other structural factors.
Individual incentives	This second category is composed of economic, security, and psychosocial rewards that are contingent on the individuals in question contributing to violence. These include material rewards, security, status, a sense of identity, purpose, belonging, self-esteem, adventure, duty fulfilment, vengeance, salvation, and so on.
Enabling factors	This third category is distinct from the previous two through being comprised of factors that channel, facilitate or predispose sympathy for violence or involvement in its creation, rather than motivate them <i>per se</i> . These often include peers, family members, mentors, and other online and offline contacts. In terms of settings, they can include locations over which the groups involved in the creation of this violence exert influence or control, detention facilities that house radical agents, and certain online forums. At a personal level, they can include cognitive rigidity, self-control issues, sensation-seeking, and other psychological factors.

Pursuing answers to these questions, the ABC Model distinguishes between structural motivators, individual incentives, and enabling factors. The lists presented in Table 1 (slightly adapted from those in the original ABC article) are not intended to be exhaustive, but instead offer a sample of the most commonly identified drivers from the literature on terrorism and insurgency at a global level.²² Many or most of these factors are also identified in studies that specifically consider the case of al-Shabaab.²³

Leaving violence behind

Switching our attention to journeys out of violence, it is helpful to distinguish between the dual concepts of disengagement and deradicalization. The former is generally interpreted in behavioral terms, often in relation to individuals exiting organizations involved in violence. For instance, focusing on *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA), Fernando Reinares asserts that “disengagement is considered to have occurred when an individual ceased belonging to the terrorist organization and no longer felt subject to the discipline imposed on militants.”²⁴ However, this interpretation is problematic in contexts where the notion of “belonging to” is ambiguous, particularly if the groups in question lack formal procedures for membership. With this in mind, it is preferable to treat disengagement simply in terms of a voluntary end to involvement

22 See, for instance, Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter, *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism* (USAID, 2009); and Jerrold M. Post, Keven G. Ruby, and Eric D. Shaw, “The Radical Group in Context 1: An Integrated Framework for the Analysis of Group Risk for Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25 (2002): 73–100.

23 See, for instance, James Khalil, Rory Brown, Chris Chant, Peter Olowo, and Nick Wood, *Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia: Evidence from a Rehabilitation Programme with Former Members of al-Shabaab* (UK: Royal United Services Institute, 2019); Christian Taylor, Tanner Semmelrock, and Alexandra McDermott, “The Cost of Defection: The Consequences of Quitting al-Shabaab,” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 13 (2019): 1–13; and United Nations Development Program, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives, and the Tipping Point for Recruitment* (New York: United Nations Development Program, 2017).

24 Fernando Reinares, “Exit from Terrorism: A Qualitative Empirical Study on Disengagement and Deradicalization Among Members of ETA,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 5 (2011): 781.

Table 2. Common Drivers of Deradicalization and Disengagement

Structural motivators	In the contexts of exits from violence, these contextual factors often relate to the groups responsible for such acts, including disillusionment with their ideology, objectives, strategy, tactics, or personnel. They can also include broader structural changes, including in relation to decreased state repression, increased political openness, enhanced community sympathy for reintegration, and so on.
Individual incentives	This second category is again comprised of incentives that are contingent on personal behaviors, which in this case involves ending participation in violence. Depending on the context, these rewards may include greater personal safety, improved living conditions, enhanced financial prospects, improved relationships with those outside the group (spouse, children, and so on), the fulfilment of familial obligations to exit, and so on.
Enabling factors	This third category is again distinguished from the previous two by being comprised of factors that facilitate or channel movements on the ABC figures presented thought this article, rather than motivate them <i>per se</i> . In the context of disengagement and deradicalization, these can include the influence of ‘moderate’ religious leaders, family members or other connections able to facilitate exit. In terms of contexts, they can include prison environments that enable inner reflection, a loss of territorial control by the organizations responsible for this violence, communities supportive of reintegration, and so on.

in ideologically justified violence (represented by returns to the x-axis of Figure 2). By contrast, the concept of deradicalization is widely interpreted in relation to positive attitudinal change (shown as movements to the left of Figure 2).²⁵ As observed by Sarah Marsden, while disengagement “encompasses behavioral change related to the move away from political violence,” deradicalization is “generally understood as attitudinal and ideological change leading to a reduction in the commitment to militancy.”²⁶

As with sympathy for violence and involvement in its creation, the broader point is again that research into this theme requires at least two core research questions, paralleling those presented above:

Q3: What drives reductions in sympathy for this violence?

Q4: What drives a voluntary end to participation in this violence?

Of course, the first of these corresponds to the notion of deradicalization, whereas the second relates to disengagement. Seeking answers to these additional questions, the ABC Model again distinguishes between structural motivators, individual incentives, and enabling factors.²⁷ Table 2 provides a sample of drivers commonly identified in the terrorism and insurgency literature.²⁸ Again, many or perhaps most of these are also identified in studies that specifically consider the case of al-Shabaab.²⁹

25 To be clear, this is not a consensus understanding, with some instead asserting that deradicalization can refer to *both* attitudinal and behavioral change. See, for instance, Hamed El-Said, *New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 10.

26 Sarah Marsden, *Reintegrating Extremists: Deradicalization and Desistance* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2017), 8.

27 These have been slightly modified from the original ABC article.

28 See, for instance, Mary Beth Altier, Christian Thoroughgood and John Horgan, “Turning away from Terrorism: Lessons from Psychology, Sociology and Criminology,” *Journal of Peace Studies* 51, no. 5 (2014): 647–661.

29 See, for instance, Khalil et al., “Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia”; and Taylor et al., “The Cost of Defection.”

Of course, we must also consider factors that inhibit the dual processes of deradicalization and disengagement. These obstacles are often psychosocial in nature, with Tore Bjørgo noting that far right groups in Scandinavia, for instance, provide “community, a substitute ‘family’, identity, security against external threats and enemies, excitement, and adventure.”³⁰ He adds that “even if a person has completely lost faith in the group’s ideology and politics, ties of friendship and loyalty may for some individuals constitute more than sufficient reasons for staying with the group.”³¹ As discussed in Section 6, threats of retaliation against those attempting to disengage represent another common inhibitor. For instance, Michael Jonsson highlights that in Colombia “there was intense fear of execution inside FARC if someone attempted to defect but was caught.”³² To be clear, this is not a universal pattern—former members of the Provisional IRA attested to the fact that individuals could freely exit the group if they so desired, provided they did so in a manner that did not compromise security.³³

4. METHODOLOGY

It is worth briefly recalling that the core purpose of this study was to apply the ABC Model to map personal journeys in and out of al-Shabaab. Through this mapping exercise our intention was to help assess and capture the extent of variance in these personal journeys in Somalia, while also providing a platform to explore the diverse factors that help explain attitudinal and behavioral change. This research involved in-depth interviews with thirteen male, former members of al-Shabaab, relying on personal networks established through our professional work in Somalia.³⁴ It is worth highlighting that while such access is relatively common in many post-conflict scenarios, it is rare in contexts such as Somalia where hostilities are ongoing. As previously observed, our sample included former members of the group’s intelligence agency (the *Amniyat*), military wing (the *Jabhat*), and police force (the *Hizbah*), as well as al-Shabaab drivers, teachers, and others in support roles. To achieve the above objectives, we purposively sampled according to the following criteria:

- Respondents with diverse personal trajectories;
- Respondents who were driven to join or leave the group by varied factors; and
- Respondents we believed would be open and forthright about their personal experiences.

The research was conducted by the lead author of this report, with translation and sampling assistance provided by our local researchers. The interviews adopted a life history approach, through which we mapped a timeline of the attitudes and behaviors of each respondent (see Appendix B). This approach

30 Tore Bjørgo, “Processes of Disengagement from Violent Groups on the Extreme Right,” in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, eds. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (London, UK: Routledge, 2008), 40.

31 Bjørgo, “Processes of Disengagement from Violent Groups on the Extreme Right,” 40.

32 Michael Jonsson, *A Farewell to Arms: Motivational Change and Divergence Inside FARC-EP 2002–2010* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 2014), 251.

33 Khalil et al, “The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model,” 441.

34 We were unable to access female respondents through our existing networks, and we strongly recommend that this study should be repeated (with suitable adaptations to the behaviors scale of the ABC diagrams) with female former members of al-Shabaab (also see Section 6 on this issue).

was developed in close collaboration with our local researchers and built on our shared experiences of interviewing respondents in Somalia and elsewhere. The use of a timeline helped respondents reflect on their experiences, assisting us to delve deeper into their prior experiences. The team also collected extensive notes during the interviews, rather than record them, providing an environment in which the respondents were more likely to be forthright and open.³⁵ For this reason, the quotes in the subsequent section are paraphrased, rather than reported verbatim. The research guide (presented in Appendix C) relied heavily on the ABC Model's distinction between structural motivators, individual incentives, and enabling factors (as discussed in the previous section), as well as insights from the limited number of studies that rely on interviews with former members of al-Shabaab.³⁶

The interviews were held in a secure location in Mogadishu and the thirteen respondents used a side entrance to help ensure their anonymity. Regarding research ethics, we introduced ourselves to the respondents and presented the aims of the study at the outset (again, see Appendix C). We also clarified that the process was entirely voluntary, and that they were free to skip questions or even to conclude the interview early for whatever reason. We asked the respondents to provide verbal consent prior to the interview, explaining that this involved accepting our use of the information they provided in anonymized form. All interviews were conducted in Somali, with English translations provided by the local researcher in real-time.³⁷ Throughout the interviews we attempted to avoid questions that could retraumatize the respondents. To identify movements on the attitudinal axis of the ABC diagrams, the guide included closed questions relating to sympathy for al-Shabaab. The respondents were asked to select from among the following Likert scale options at key points during their trajectories (see Appendix D):

- Very strongly sympathized with al-Shabaab
- Strongly sympathized with al-Shabaab
- Somewhat sympathized with al-Shabaab
- Neither sympathized nor opposed al-Shabaab
- Somewhat opposed al-Shabaab
- Strongly opposed al-Shabaab
- Very strongly opposed al-Shabaab

Movements on the “behaviors” axis were determined by recording the nature of the respondents’ involvement over time, and subsequently scaling their participation as in Figure 3. This scale reflects our professional judgement about the relative importance of roles within al-Shabaab in relation to their ability to influence outcomes and their proximity to physical violence. For instance, because *Amniyat* members were responsible for “high-value” tasks such as suicide bombings, assassination attempts, and

35 Prior experiences revealed that many former members of al-Shabaab become suspicious when researchers suggest recording interviews.

36 For instance, Khalil et al., “Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia”; and Taylor et al., “The Cost of Defection”; and UNDP, *Journey to Extremism in Africa*.

37 The interview format was somewhat distinct from in many other contexts given Somalia’s strong tradition of storytelling. The responses to certain questions took up to ten minutes, with the lead researcher unable to help steer the conversation as interruptions may have been viewed as disruptive or discourteous. As such, these interviews often take a conversational tone.

Figure 3. Behaviors Scale

	Intelligence (Amniyat)	Military (Jabhat)	Police (Hizbah)	Supporting Roles	
7	Senior operative	Commanding 250+ subordinates			
6	Junior operative	Commanding 51 to 250 subordinates			
5		Commanding 21 to 50 subordinates			
4		Commanding up to 20 subordinates			Senior police officer
3		Foot soldier			Junior police officer
2				Medium responsibility	
1	In training / inactive			Low responsibility	

so on, we assessed their role to approximately equate to senior *Jabhat* commanders, scoring six or seven on the behaviors scale. By contrast, members of the *Hizbah* score three or four on the scale, reflecting their relative distance from physical violence, while also acknowledging their influence over events at the community level.

Of course, it is also important to consider the limitations associated with our approach, and to reflect on the extent to which these may have influenced our findings. First, because some of our respondents left al-Shabaab as early as 2011, it is important to acknowledge that certain accounts may reflect earlier conditions in an ever-evolving conflict. For this reason, notable changes in the approaches adopted by al-Shabaab, as well as those relating to the wider context, are highlighted at the relevant junctures throughout the remainder of the report. It is also necessary to flag possible issues with data reliability—respondents could potentially provide misleading or even false information to be viewed favorably by others, as their memories are flawed, to avoid perceived threats associated with divulging information, and so on.³⁸ As noted previously, we attempted to mitigate such issues through providing reassurances about the nature of the research and anonymity before the interviews began, as well as through asking validation questions where applicable. Finally, it is worth noting that our sample was certainly not broadly representative of ex-members of al-Shabaab, and so readers are advised not to draw inferences beyond our respondents. As previously discussed, this is not problematic for the purposes of this study given that our primary objective was to demonstrate variance in relation to trajectories and drivers.

38 James Khalil, “A Guide to Interviewing Terrorists and Violent Extremists,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 42, no. 4 (2019).

5. FINDINGS

This section presents the core findings of this research, considering the trajectories of eight of our thirteen respondents in turn (relying on pseudonyms in all cases). In keeping with our core objectives (as presented in Section 1), these individuals were selected to best demonstrate variance in terms of personal trajectories, as well as to highlight the importance of different driving factors. We present the respondents in order of their highest score on the behaviors scale (as described in the previous section). We deliberately omit information about our respondents that risks revealing their identities, including their clan affiliation and specific locations of residence.

Abdi Noor (R1)

Abdi Noor was highly sympathetic to al-Shabaab at the time of his initial engagement in 2005 (see Figure 4), claiming that he joined because he perceived it to be a religious obligation. He had been excelling in his Koranic studies, under an influential sheikh. During this period, many sheikhs were involved in administering ICU-established Sharia courts and teaching in associated mosques. However, clan-based factional leaders began targeting these sheikhs in an attempt to curb the influence of the courts (see Section 2). Abdi Noor maintained that these attacks were a key driver of his sympathy for al-Shabaab, the military wing of the ICU. His sheikh and members of his peer group played a pivotal role in convincing him to enlist in the organization. He received military training in Lower Shabelle, and three months later he became a foot soldier in the *Jabhat*. He was subsequently transferred to a series of frontline locations to fight the TFG and Ethiopian forces. In 2008, he was tasked with commanding a platoon of fifty soldiers, and while in this post he became acquainted with key leaders of al-Shabaab, including Ahmed Abdi Godane, who was the emir at that time.

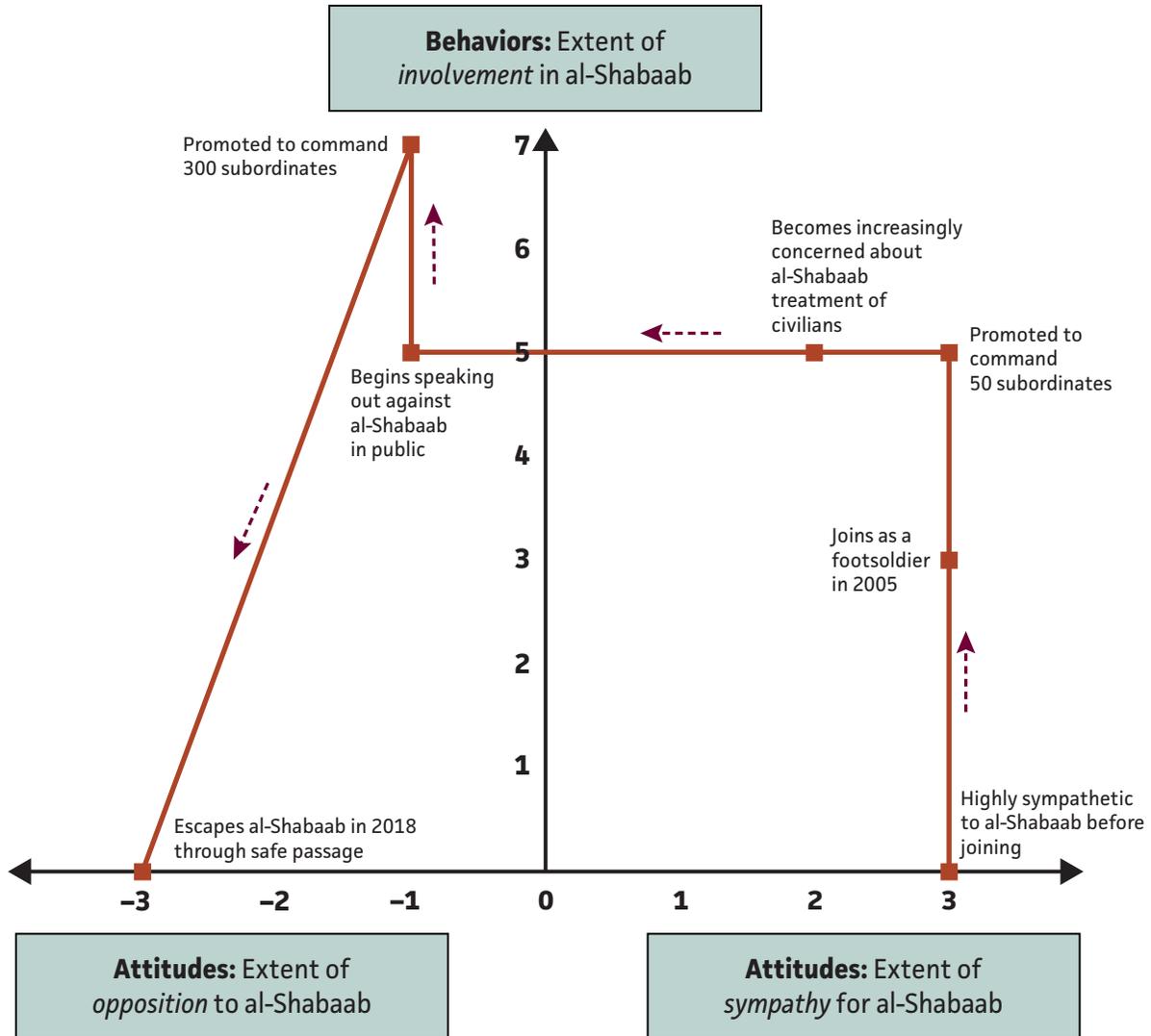
Yet, shortly after this promotion Abdi Noor began to become aware of al-Shabaab's abusive treatment of the local communities under their control. Based on his knowledge of the Koran, he identified many of their actions as un-Islamic, and he began to consider leaving the group. As he explained:

I began thinking about leaving in 2009 [a total of nine years before his eventual exit]. The main reason I joined was to defend my religion, but the whole group became a militia and extortionate thieves. I was experiencing this, they are killing people illegally, I had seen all of this.³⁹

In 2014, Abdi Noor began speaking out against al-Shabaab's violence at a local mosque. While the *Amniyat* closely monitored these activities, he was effectively protected from punishment by his personal ties to the leadership. Indeed, in 2015 he was promoted again to command three hundred soldiers, despite his actions. At this point, Abdi Noor began actively exploring avenues to disengage by contacting clan elders in Mogadishu, only to discover that they were aligned with the group. His own plans to escape were also disrupted by al-Shabaab transferring him to a new location, where he was less familiar with

³⁹ Interview with R1, 11 June 2022.

Figure 4. Abdi Noor's Trajectory



the terrain. It was around this time that Abdi Noor's contacts among the core leadership started to doubt his commitment. While on leave from active duty, he was informed that another member had taken over his command. Members of the *Amniyat* were sent to arrest him in March 2018, and several individuals lost their lives in the fighting that ensued (he provided few details about this incident). The FGS became aware of this event and offered him safe passage out of the organization, which he duly accepted.

Feisal (R2)

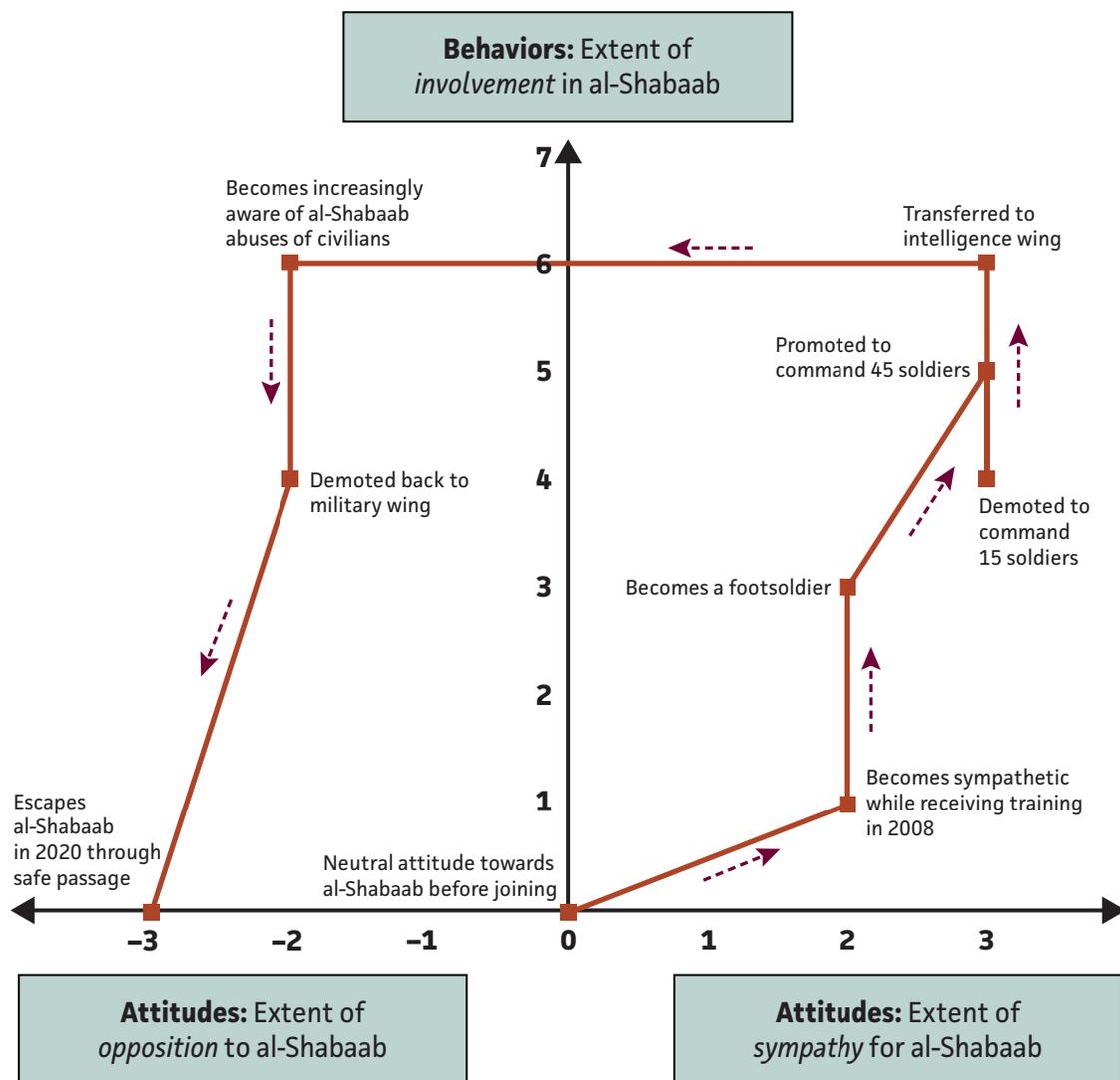
In 2007, Feisal and his mother had been displaced from their home in the Bay region by the ongoing drought, and they were living in an IDP settlement in Lower Shabelle. Feisal's mother earned a meager income selling basic goods, although much of this was extorted by the settlement gatekeepers and their clan militia.⁴⁰ Al-Shabaab seized Lower Shabelle in 2008, and Feisal enlisted shortly after they took the

⁴⁰ "Gatekeepers" have established themselves as representatives of displacement-affected communities and as managers of humanitarian aid in much of Somalia, providing these communities with security in exchange for a proportion of their aid.

district containing the camp. Certain clan acquaintances were already members of the organization, and they convinced him to join and facilitated his entry. At that moment, Feisal held a neutral perspective of al-Shabaab (see Figure 5), and his motivation for joining was largely revenge against the settlement gatekeeper and the militia. He received three months of military training, during which time he was praised by senior members of al-Shabaab, and this provided him with a sense of purpose and belonging. He joined as a *Jabhat* foot soldier, and in 2009 he was promoted to command a unit of thirty in an al-Shabaab stronghold in Middle Juba. He continued to become more supportive of the group, taking pride in his work, and enjoying the camaraderie in his unit. In 2011, Feisal was promoted once again to command forty-five soldiers, and he was moved to Mogadishu.

One year later, Feisal was relocated to his region of origin, and demoted to command only fifteen soldiers. As with other respondents, he reported that such events were common within al-Shabaab, providing the group with a means to test the loyalty of mid-ranking officers. In 2015, Feisal was transferred to the *Amniyat*, where he contributed to assassinations and reported to the al-Shabaab core leadership. He reported witnessing the inner workings of the organization while in this role and was horrified by their

Figure 5. Feisal’s Trajectory



abuse of the population. After colleagues noticed a change in his attitude, he was demoted to foot soldier once again in 2020. It was at this juncture that he began to consider leaving the organization. When government forces began retaking parts of Lower Shabelle, he was instructed to transport al-Shabaab vehicles to a secure location. Feisal obliged but was accused of stealing secret documents located in one of these vehicles by other members and this contributed to his growing hostility towards the group. Meanwhile, his family had also been pressuring him to leave the organization for several months. In 2021 Feisal seized an opportunity to escape during the night, which he described as follows:

Each night a member of *Jabhat* must protect the camp. I went on the first shift, then after, I pretended to sleep while others were keeping watch. When I suspected that they were not watching, I slowly took my gun and went to a remote area. I could not enter any towns, as I knew there would be people there collaborating with al-Shabaab.⁴¹

Feisal's parents contacted clan elders, who reached out to members of their kinship group in the military to arrange safe passage. They met at an agreed location, and Feisal subsequently joined the national rehabilitation program.

Yusuf (R3)

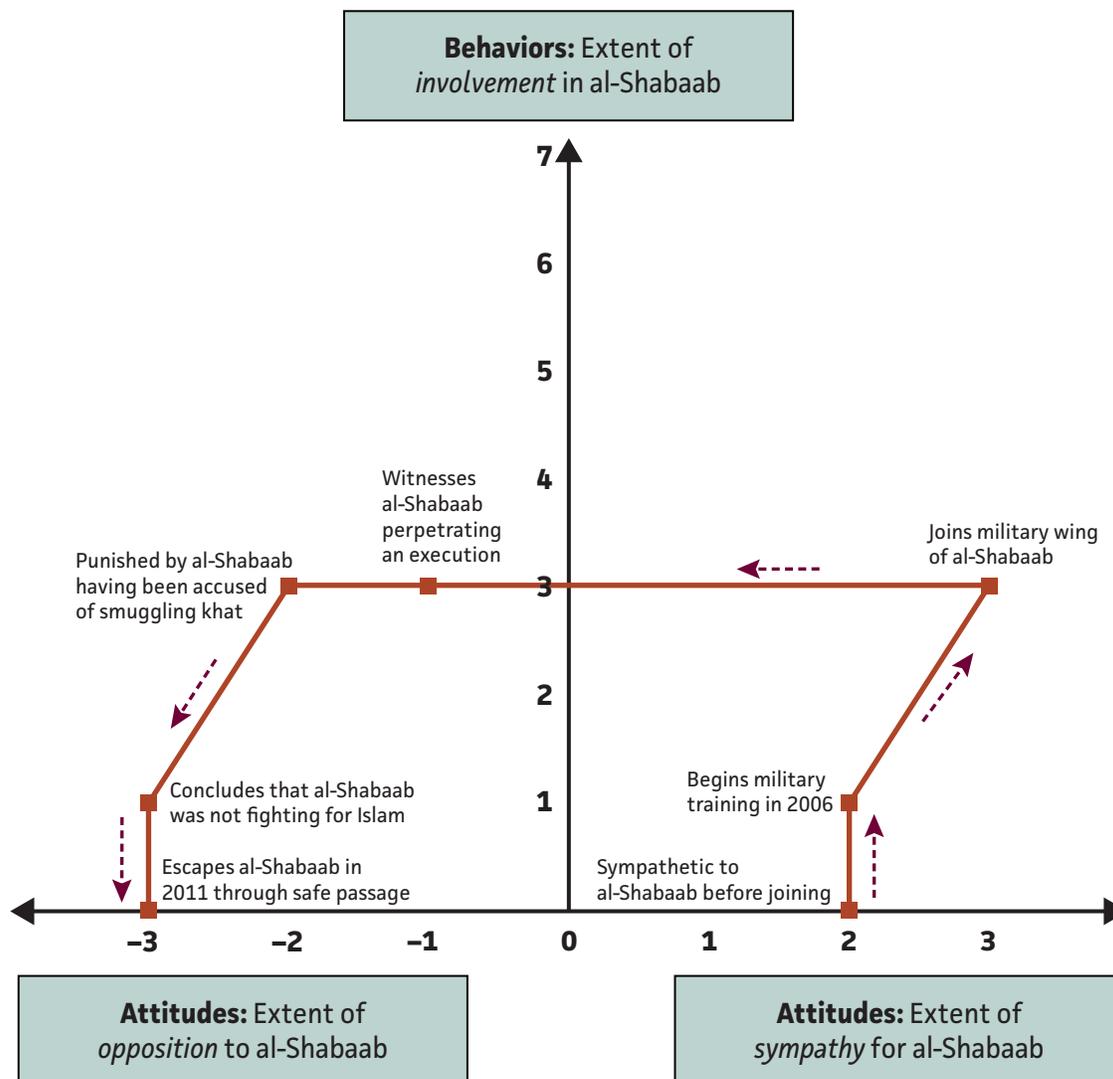
Yusuf was sympathetic to al-Shabaab before joining (see Figure 6) and he wanted to help defend his country from Ethiopian “enemies” and the TFG (see Section 2). A friend convinced him to enlist, and took him to Afgoye in Lower Shabelle, where al-Shabaab ran an enrollment facility. Yusuf then received five months of military training, after which he reported feeling even greater sympathy for the group and was convinced that they would eventually control Somalia in its entirety. In 2006 he joined the *Jabhat* as a foot soldier in Beledweyne, and soon after he witnessed al-Shabaab execute two women who had been accused of spying. The women rejected the accusations against them, but their pleas to the judge were unsuccessful. Alongside other incidents of harsh treatment of the local community, this caused Yusuf's support for the organization to dramatically decline. Reinforcing this trend, al-Shabaab also accused him of smuggling khat (it was unclear whether this was justified) and placed him under arrest.

In 2011 Yusuf was transferred to Mogadishu to help defend al-Shabaab strongholds in the northern part of the city. He was injured in battle, resulting in his hospitalization for a prolonged period, and this experience convinced him that al-Shabaab had little interest in his wellbeing. In particular, he was aggrieved about having his phones confiscated to prevent him from contacting his family. In his words:

When I was injured, the group threw me in the hospital. They didn't care for me, they didn't give me any contact, and they took my phones. The group did not want me to contact my family. Even when people died in the group, they did not inform their families. If the family knows [about a member

41 Interview with R2, 12 June 2022.

Figure 6. Yusuf's Trajectory



being injured], they will come and be involved in his treatment, and al-Shabaab is afraid he will leak secrets. At that time, I felt that the purpose we are fighting was not Islam, and that they [al-Shabaab leaders] are fighting for their own interests. When I got injured, they showed me they did not need me.⁴²

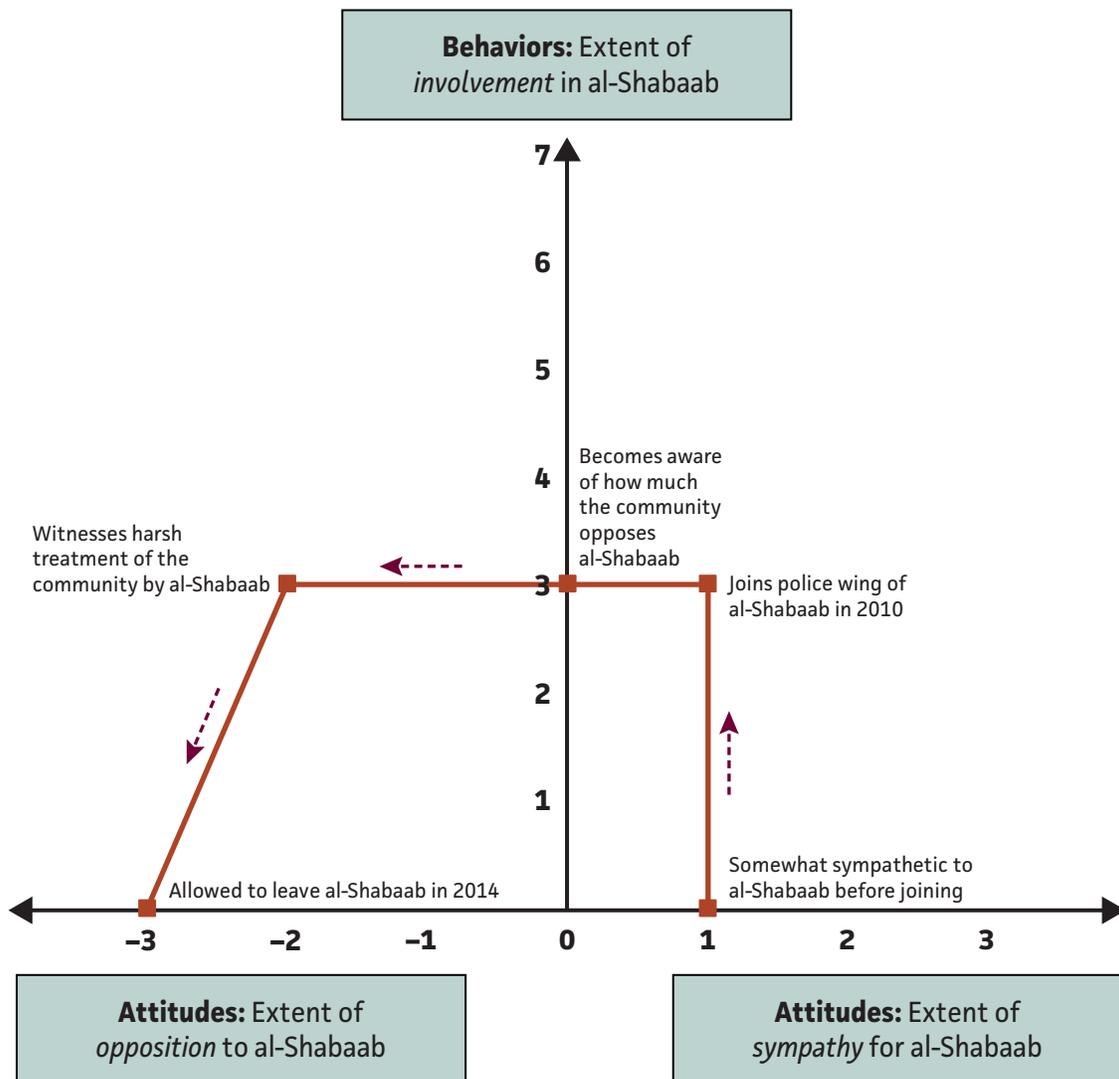
It is worth clarifying that this occurred during a period when al-Shabaab was suffering heavy losses, and it is safe to assume that their resources were stretched. In any case, Yusuf eventually convinced a nurse to contact his mother, who helped transfer him to another hospital in a government-controlled part of Mogadishu. He returned to Lower Shabelle after recovering, but then felt that it was unsafe to remain given al-Shabaab's reputation for punishing deserters. His mother then contacted an uncle in the Somali National Army (SNA) to facilitate his safe passage back to Mogadishu.

⁴² Interview with R3, 13 June 2022.

Sadiq (R4)

Prior to his involvement in al-Shabaab, Sadiq reported that his hometown in Barawe was insecure and that many of the residents were exploited by clan-based factional leaders and their militias. He explained that these groups used to hijack vehicles from members of the local community, and that on one occasion they stole from his store. This changed once al-Shabaab seized control of the district in 2008, and this contributed to Sadiq feeling “somewhat sympathetic” to the group prior to enlisting (see Figure 7). Yet, he was also partly motivated to join for protection from al-Shabaab itself, maintaining that “as a young person who was living in that area at that time, it was not easy to walk freely if you are not involved with the group.”⁴³ Sadiq already had several friends and acquaintances in the group, and he described his gradual inclusion as follows:

Figure 7. Sadiq’s Trajectory



43 Interview with R4, 13 June 2022.

The group was controlling Barawe at that time, so it was very easy to join the group, and interact with them. I remember I used to go to their places and locations, we knew the people in the group, and slowly I began to feel like I am with them. Without knowing I was joining the group, I was with them. Some of the members convinced and talked to me, and advised me to join the group.⁴⁴

Sadiq was eventually given a role within the *Hizbah* in his hometown and received a small and irregular salary. However, his sympathy for the group began to decline as he became increasingly aware that many in his local community opposed the group. His role involved enforcing al-Shabaab's social rules (as described in Section 2), and he experienced hostility from neighbors as a result, and even close friends turned against him. This was compounded when al-Shabaab accused him of assisting a khat trafficking ring in 2013 (it was unclear whether this was justified), placing him in custody for one month. Unusually, Sadiq was allowed to leave al-Shabaab in 2014 as his wife had recently passed away, arguing to the organization that he needed to dedicate more time to parental care. His initial request was denied, but this changed after his clan elders intervened. Nevertheless, he reported being monitored by al-Shabaab from this point onwards, which caused him to become even more hostile to the group. He remained in his hometown for two more years before his district was retaken by government forces.

Jabir (R5)

Jabir joined al-Shabaab in 2011 after the group seized control of his home district, claiming that he “neither sympathized nor opposed” the group at that time (see Figure 8). As he explained:

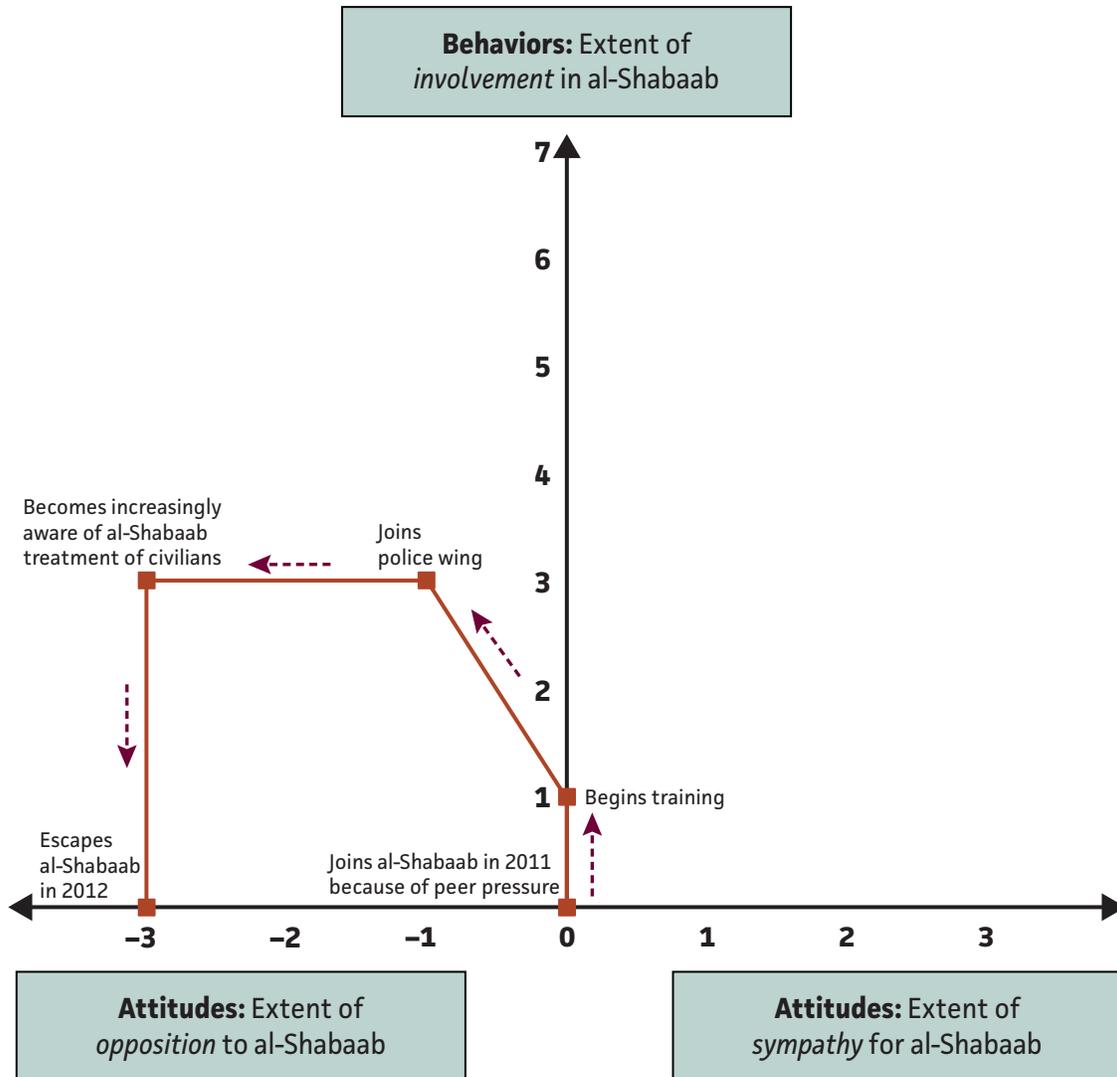
I didn't have any big reason to join al-Shabaab, I just followed my peers, all people of my age were joining the group at that time. Maybe it was ignorance because I did not know anything about the group. My main reason was not ideology.⁴⁵

Jabir received three months of military training, during which time his attitude towards the group remained essentially unchanged. He was subsequently posted to the southern port city of Kismayo as a member of the *Hizbah*. He soon became disillusioned with al-Shabaab after witnessing its treatment of civilians, including in the form of severe punishments and killings. Jabir also felt dissatisfied with the living conditions provided by the organization, as well as their inadequate healthcare. His family also began pressuring him to leave, at which point he began to plan his escape. Unfortunately for him, it was at this point that the organization relocated him to Lower Shabelle, where he was unfamiliar with the local terrain. Unlike various other cases considered through this research (R1, R2, R3, and R8), Jabir did not arrange safe passage with security forces prior to his exit from al-Shabaab. Instead, with his lack of local knowledge, he simply boarded a bus headed towards Mogadishu. This was a remarkable step given that attempts to leave al-Shabaab may be punishable by death (as discussed in Section 6). With no personal contacts in the capital, Jabir handed himself over to security forces upon arrival.

44 Ibid.

45 Interview with R5, 13 June 2022.

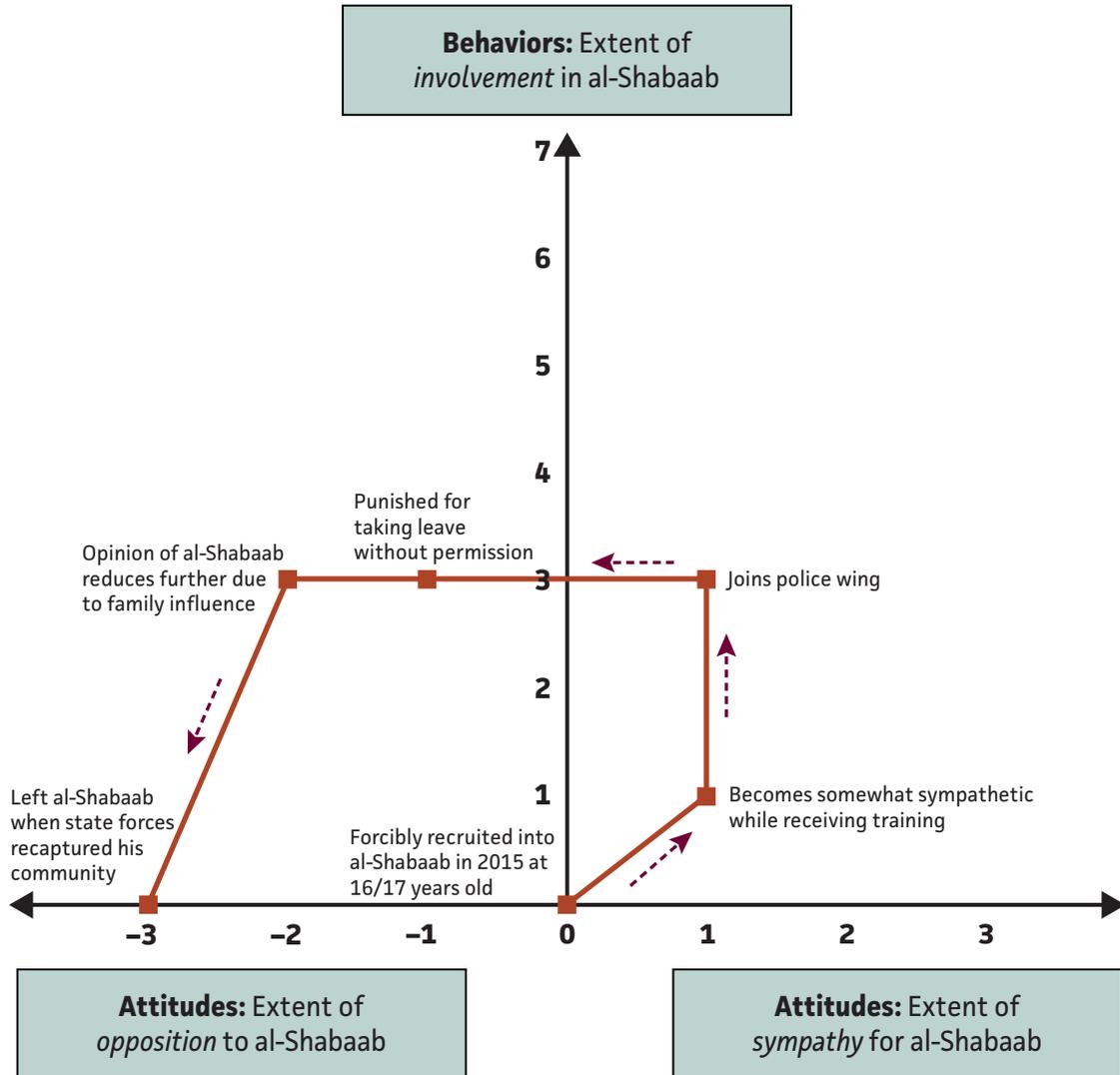
Figure 8. Jabir’s Trajectory



Mukhtar (R6)

Mukhtar is unique among our sample in being the only respondent forcibly recruited by al-Shabaab, with this occurring in 2015 when he was sixteen or seventeen years old. He was sitting outside a store with five friends, when an al-Shabaab patrol group took them by force. They were transported to a village in Middle Shabelle by truck, where they were joined by hundreds of other forced recruits for military training (see Figure 9). Mukhtar’s parents attempted to rescue him, but they were denied access by the group. Despite this experience, he reported that the training made him somewhat sympathetic to al-Shabaab, as it taught him about their ideology and aims. Mukhtar was originally posted as a member of the *Hizbah* in his region of origin. Soon after, he requested personal leave to visit his family (he was unclear about dates through the remainder of the interview) and proceeded to travel despite the denial of his request. He was punished for this transgression upon his return—the organization seized his weapon and no longer allowed him to patrol alone. Mukhtar began to oppose al-Shabaab as a result, with this compounded by his increasing awareness of their mistreatment of the local community and growing pressure from his

Figure 9. Mukhtar’s Trajectory



family to disengage. His subsequent exit from the group occurred when government forces reclaimed his home community. Mukhtar described the events as follows:

When the government captured the town, everyone deserted the group and left the area. At that time, I went back to my parents’ house. The government forces came looking for members of al-Shabaab, they captured me and others. There is a place in the town where they gathered those associated with the group. Then they transferred us to the NISA [National Intelligence and Security Agency] . . . and after that, I was transferred to the rehabilitation centre.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Interview with R6, 14 June 2022.

Mohamud (R7)

Mohamud was a teacher in Lower Shabelle when he enlisted in 2011 (see Figure 10), with this region under al-Shabaab control at that time. As with Sadiq (R4), he described the process as being somewhat gradual, as follows:

I was a teacher living in a location under al-Shabaab control, they had state-like institutions, such as an education sector. They were responsible for the teachers, and slowly we realized that we were taking their orders. Sometimes they transferred you to another location, and I felt we were trapped in the system. It was better to be part of the group. It was not forced into joining, but then I also could not reject them.⁴⁷

Once within the group, Mohamud continued working as a teacher in secular education (as opposed to religious education) in locations across Lower Shabelle, and in 2016 he became a school principal. Because al-Shabaab's provisions of secular education are largely overlooked in relevant literature, it is worth noting his observation that:

Formal education is so highly valued by al-Shabaab. They have many who can educate in Islamic studies, but there is a scarcity of people who teach formal education. If someone is well educated, they move them into the Ministry of Education, even if they are in the military.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, Mohamud's sympathies for al-Shabaab began declining shortly after he enlisted, largely because his family had informed him about their treatment of civilian populations in other locations. He also fell seriously ill after his promotion and was unable to work for around six months. He offered the following reflections on his predicament at that point:

Most people faced many challenges and if they tried to escape, al-Shabaab tried to capture them. I was afraid to leave earlier, they would hang me, and come after me. I felt afraid of both sides, the government and al-Shabaab. The government thinks that those associated with al-Shabaab will not be clean, and I was deeply afraid of this perception. I was also afraid that al-Shabaab may hang me if I leave them.⁴⁹

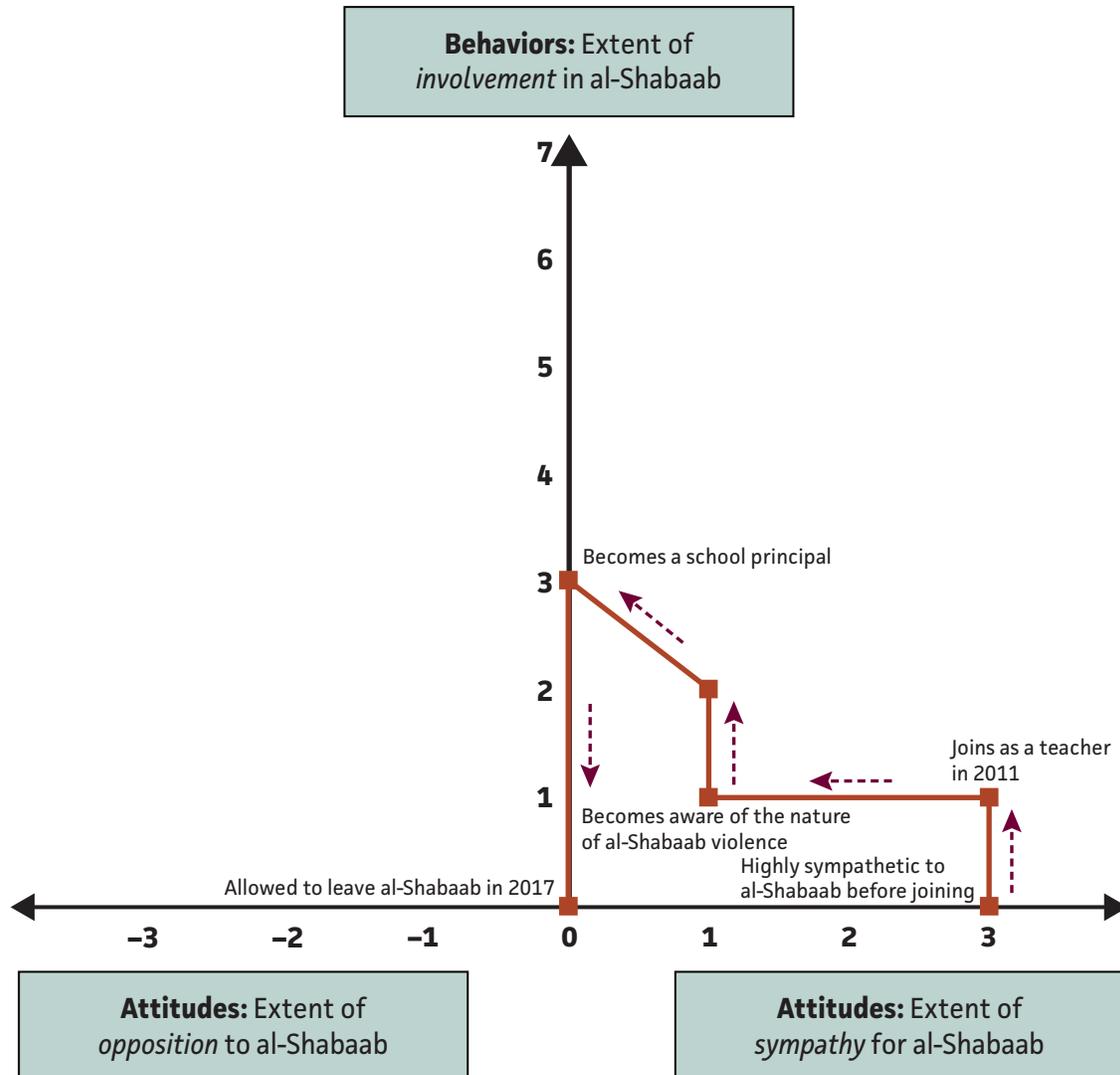
Nevertheless, he requested medical leave, and this was granted as his condition required specialist treatment in Mogadishu. A member of NISA, his brother helped convince him that he would receive state protection if he surrendered to security forces. Mohamud was unique among our respondents in being the only one who held a neutral view of al-Shabaab at the time of his departure—the remainder asserted that they were strongly opposed to the group at that point in time.

47 Interview with R7, 11 June 2022.

48 Interview with R7, 11 June 2022.

49 Interview with R7, 11 June 2022.

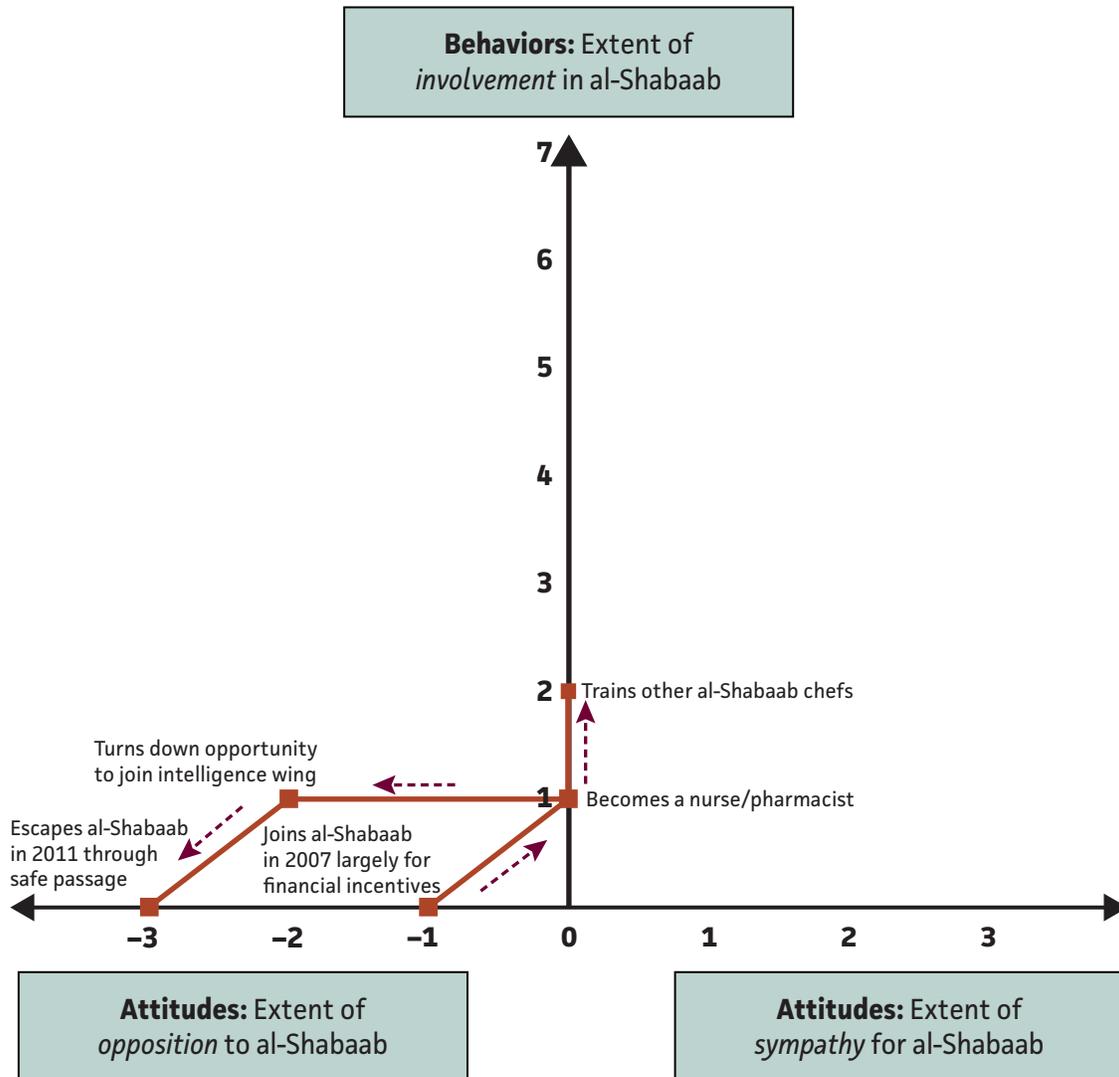
Figure 10. Mohamud’s Trajectory



Ahmed (R8)

Ahmed was the only respondent from our sample who claimed to have been opposed to al-Shabaab (albeit only “somewhat”) prior to his involvement in the organization (see Figure 11). While working as a pharmacy assistant, a member of the group asked to borrow a small amount of money. A few weeks later, this same individual returned the money to Ahmed and asked him to enlist. Believing that he would receive a salary, he replied that he was not willing to play an active role in combat, but that he would assist in supporting roles. Ahmed was also unique among our respondents for being the only one primarily motivated by money, which he maintained that he needed to buy medicine. Ahmed’s recruitment was gradual (as was the case with Sadiq and Mohamud), and during the first two months he largely participated only in evening events organized by the group. In early 2007 he was given a permanent role and relocated to Mogadishu to cook for fighters on the frontline. He operated in secret locations across the capital and the food was distributed through safehouses. His role also involved buying groceries in the market, and subsequently teaching other members how to cook.

Figure 11. Ahmed's Trajectory



Two years later, Ahmed changed roles to become an in-house nurse for members of al-Shabaab requiring medical assistance. He claimed that he never fully felt part of the organization, and that his attitude during most of his involvement was essentially neutral (again, see Figure 11). Nevertheless, despite having never been directly involved in violence, he had gained the trust of al-Shabaab, and in 2010 they proposed that he join the *Amniyat*. This prompted him to reflect on his involvement with the organization, and he soon became disillusioned with their actions. He subsequently contacted relatives who knew members of the security forces who could arrange safe passage in Mogadishu. After staying in the capital for one month, he was taken to the NISA screening center, and subsequently transferred for rehabilitation. Al-Shabaab later attacked his home, which unsurprisingly enforced and furthered his opposition the organization.

6. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Distinguishing between attitudes and behaviors

The accounts presented in the previous section reinforce the importance of the critical disconnect between attitudes and behaviors at the heart of the ABC Model (as discussed in Section 3). While some respondents reported being sympathetic to the organization at the point of entry (R1, R3, and R7), others claimed to be neutral (R2, R5, and R6), or even somewhat unsupportive (R8) at that moment. Interestingly, some became sympathetic (R2 and R6) or more sympathetic (R3) only *after* enlisting, highlighting the importance of al-Shabaab's training and broader socialization processes in generating a sense of purpose and belonging. This pattern goes largely unrecognized in the literature on al-Shabaab, where most accounts assume that sympathies precede involvement. Yet, it is widely acknowledged beyond Somalia—for instance, Randy Borum observes that:

Ideological commitment may lead to group affiliation, but social or group affiliations may also lead to ideological commitments. In some cases, the strength of personal conviction and commitment to the cause may precede a person's willingness to take subversive action. For others, engaging in subversive actions strengthens their personal conviction and commitment to the cause.⁵⁰

Other respondents reported that they remained unsympathetic to al-Shabaab throughout their involvement (R5 and R8), strengthening the case that not all former members of the group require deradicalizing per se. The disconnect between attitudes and behaviors is also revealed by Abdu Noor (R1), whose peak involvement occurred only after he had ceased sympathizing with the group. Of course, this relates to the fact that members often fear leaving al-Shabaab as this action is potentially punishable by death (as discussed shortly).

Drivers of involvement in al-Shabaab

At a more granular level, this mapping exercise also offered a platform to explore the broad range of factors that drive attitudinal and behavioral change. Four of the respondents featured in the previous section (R1, R3, R4, and R7) claimed to have been at least partly motivated to enlist by their support for the ideology and objectives of al-Shabaab. These individuals joined the group when it was at the height of its power, controlling large areas of territory in southern Somalia, and providing popular (albeit harsh) public order after decades of instability. Two other respondents (R2 and R4) reported enlisting largely because of al-Shabaab's ability to provide protection against other armed actors. As previously discussed (see Section 2), this was of particular importance in locations such as Lower Shabelle where the group provided a counterweight against powerful clan militias. Other notable drivers included a desire for revenge (R2), financial incentives (R8), and forced recruitment (R6). Of course, with this study designed

⁵⁰ Randy Borum, "Assessing Risk for Terrorism Involvement," *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management* 2, no. 2 (2015): 67–8.

to help reveal variance in such motives (see Section 4), we make no claims about the relative importance of these drivers among the broader al-Shabaab membership. Indeed, it seems that both coercion and financial incentives may have become more prominent after many of our respondents had already joined the organization.⁵¹

Transitioning to enabling factors, friends and other personal connections provide common facilitators of entry into al-Shabaab (as noted by R1, R2, R3, R4 and R7). For instance, Abid Noor's (R1) reported that his sheikh and peer group members played a pivotal role in convincing him to join. Feisal (R2) similarly pointed to the importance of clan acquaintances in persuading him to join and enabling his enlistment. While the importance of such networks is widely recognized in the literature, less attention is paid to the role of territorial control as a key determinant of involvement (particularly in the *terrorism studies* literature). Of particular relevance, Stathis Kalyvas identifies seven mechanisms through which this control can provoke or encourage individuals to collaborate with nonstate actors such as al-Shabaab:⁵²

- It helps these groups apply coercive force effectively;
- It shields the population from competing claims of sovereignty;
- It produces “mechanical ascription” (where joining appears ‘a natural course of action’);
- It signals that the group is credible;
- It helps groups provide goods and services (winning “hearts and minds”);
- It facilitates monitoring of the population; and
- It creates a self-reinforcing dynamic (with sympathizers relocating to the region).

While it was beyond the scope of our research to consider these seven mechanisms in any detail, our interviews lent weight to the importance of some. For instance, two of our respondents (R4 and R7) reported being essentially “absorbed” into al-Shabaab through their regular interactions with existing members in areas under the group’s control, with the organization also effectively acting as the default employer in their home communities. Three others (R2, R4, and R5) also explicitly observed that they only enlisted once al-Shabaab had seized control of their community.

Drivers of disengagement

Although perhaps somewhat less pronounced than with enlistment into al-Shabaab, this study also revealed the extent to which the drivers of disengagement vary. With the sole exception of Mohamud (R7), our respondents asserted that they were “very strongly opposed to al-Shabaab” at the point of their departure, highlighting how prior attitudinal changes often provoke disengagement. These opinions were primarily driven by the group’s treatment of the local community, including in the form of

51 On this issue, see Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 105–106; Khalil et al., “Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia,” 13–15; Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 153; and United Nations Security Council, *Panel of Experts on Somalia: Monitoring Report* (UNSC, 2021), 31.

52 Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 124–132.

extortion, physical punishments, and killings (as observed by R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, and R6). Perhaps most notably, Yusuf (R3) reported witnessing the execution of two women who al-Shabaab accused of spying, and whose appeals to the judge were unsuccessful. Three of our respondents also reported having been punished by al-Shabaab, either for taking leave without approval (R6), or because the organization accused them of involvement in smuggling khat (R3 and R4). In all three cases, this also significantly contributed to their increasingly negative attitudes of the group. Yusuf (R3) was also aggrieved about al-Shabaab's apparent disinterest in his wellbeing after becoming injured while helping to defend Mogadishu. While less prominent, our respondents also highlighted the importance of poor living conditions within al-Shabaab (R2, R3, R4, R5, and R7), fear of injury and death (R1, R3, R4, R5, R7, and R8), and the inadequacy of the salary provided by the organization (R2 and R4).

This research also helped reveal the importance of social networks in motivating and facilitating exits from al-Shabaab. For instance, several of our respondents (R2, R5, and R7) reported that they were encouraged or pressured to leave the group by members of their immediate family. This corresponds to research previously conducted at the Serendi rehabilitation center, where one former member reported that his family promised to identify him a wife as a reward for disengaging (a service also frequently provided by al-Shabaab), and another claimed that his parents had threatened to disown him if he remained with the group.⁵³ Families and clan networks were also often essential for establishing safe passage with the security forces (R2, R3, and R8), a critical avenue out of the group that receives insufficient attention in the literature. Mohammed Ibrahim Shire is one of the few researchers who have previously observed this phenomenon, noting that from among his sample of interviewees, "most rank-and-file defectors identified that their defections were facilitated by family members (mostly mothers), and those in government (mostly uncles and cousins), who put them in touch with their respective clan elder to act as a guarantor."⁵⁴ Yet, such avenues are less available to those from families with fewer connections, and those from less influential clans and subclans. This is particularly important insofar as al-Shabaab often maintains strongholds in areas which are inhabited by socially and politically weaker clans. While only applicable to one of our featured respondents (R6), it is worth also acknowledging the role of territorial control in relation to disengagement from the group. Specifically, Mukhtar reported that he was arrested by state forces after his home community of Afgoye was recaptured.

Of course, it is also important to consider factors that inhibit deradicalization and disengagement (as previously discussed in Section 3). The most prominent of these in the case of Somalia is undoubtedly the fear of being caught leaving al-Shabaab, with this act often being punishable by death.⁵⁵ A former member of the *Jabhat* interviewed at the Serendi center claimed to have reported his desire to leave to a commander, and to have been consequently blindfolded and beaten.⁵⁶ Two respondents from our sample (R1 and R5) also reported that al-Shabaab hinders exits from the group by transferring members

53 Khalil et al., "Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia," 16.

54 Shire, "Dialogue and Negotiation with Al-Shabaab."

55 Parallel research with former member of Boko Haram revealed the same pattern, as reported in James Khalil, MaryAnne Iwara, and Martine Zeuthen, *Journeys through Extremism: The Experiences of Forced Recruits into Boko Haram* (Washington, D.C.: RESOLVE Network, 2022).

56 Khalil et al., *Journeys through Extremism* 17.

between locations, resulting in them lacking the necessary social networks and knowledge of the terrain to escape. It is for these reasons that several of our respondents reported spending months or years preparing to escape. That said, our sample also included respondents who were permitted to leave the group on medical (R7) and compassionate (R4) grounds. While the disengagement literature acknowledges individuals permitted to disengage in cases such as Northern Ireland,⁵⁷ or to “go inactive” in places such as Indonesia,⁵⁸ this phenomenon is not widely recognized in the case of Somalia. Because both of these individuals only scored a maximum of three on our behavior scale, we can speculate that those more deeply involved may not have been allowed to exit in this manner.

Policy recommendations

With the above findings in mind, our key recommendations are as follows:

- » **Communications campaigns that aim to promote exit from al-Shabaab should appeal to varied motives and should be tailored to local contexts.** With the drivers of involvement and disengagement from the group varying substantially between individuals, those tasked with designing communications campaigns to motivate and facilitate the latter should appeal to multiple drivers simultaneously. For instance, these may include a desire for enhanced security outside of a conflict context, improved living conditions, prospects of reuniting with family, opportunities to earn a living through newly acquired vocational skills, and the availability of rehabilitation programs designed to facilitate these aims. Campaigns should also include geographically specific guidance on how to disengage, including key information on where to surrender and other such practical matters.
- » **Programs designed to encourage and facilitate exit from al-Shabaab should leverage the family and wider clan networks.** This research helped demonstrate the importance of family and clan members in motivating and facilitating exits from al-Shabaab, and programs that attempt to contribute to this objective should aim to leverage these personal networks. This could be done, for example, by bringing clan elders, women, and youth leaders from locations that are prone to al-Shabaab recruitment to a secure location in Mogadishu to inform them about rehabilitation and reintegration programming. These individuals can then act as focal points for information in their communities, with others reaching out to them if their family members seek to disengage from al-Shabaab.
- » **Programs that aim to rehabilitate and reintegrate former members of al-Shabaab should be tailored to the needs of each beneficiary.** Because the drivers of involvement and exit from al-Shabaab vary substantially between individuals, as well as the psychosocial, educational, and other requirements of each beneficiary, those tasked with rehabilitating and reintegrating former members of the group must ensure that their programs are sufficiently

57 Khalil et al., “The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model,” 441.

58 Michael Kenney and Julie Chernov Hwang, “Should I Stay or Should I Go: Understanding how British and Indonesian Extremists Disengage and Why they Don’t,” *Political Psychology* 42, no. 4 (2021).

tailored to personal needs. For instance, individuals who enlisted largely on ideological grounds, or who remain at least somewhat sympathetic to al-Shabaab’s objectives after their departure from the group, are most likely to require religious guidance. By contrast, those motivated primarily by material gain may benefit more from vocational training. Of course, provisions of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) should also be adapted to the personal needs of each beneficiary.

- » **Policymakers must recognize the importance of territorial control as a key determinant of sympathy for and involvement in al-Shabaab.** This research highlighted the extent to which territorial control plays a critical role in both recruitment into al-Shabaab, and (perhaps to a lesser extent) subsequent exits from the organization. In doing so, it underscores the need for proportionate military efforts to reclaim territory, as part of a holistic response that also includes PCVE programming. These findings also highlight the need for adequate coordination between PCVE, stabilization, and transitional justice programs in newly “liberated” territory, and for reconciliation initiatives that account for the blurred line between perpetrators and victims of violence.
- » **Donors should explore opportunities to apply the ABC Model in other locations to inform policymaking and programming.** This research has shown that the model can be applied to map personal trajectories in and out of al-Shabaab. In doing so, it revealed certain patterns that are not widely acknowledged in the Somalia literature, including how some members become sympathetic to al-Shabaab only after joining the organization, the importance of safe passage arrangements, and the fact that certain individuals are freely allowed to leave the group. With this in mind, we suggest that policymakers are likely to develop a more granular understanding of how and why individuals join and leave other violent extremist groups by repeating this mapping exercise in other geographical locations. Beyond the existing study, we also recommend the application of the ABC Model to other cohorts of former members of al-Shabaab, including women and those incarcerated on terrorism charges.

APPENDIXES

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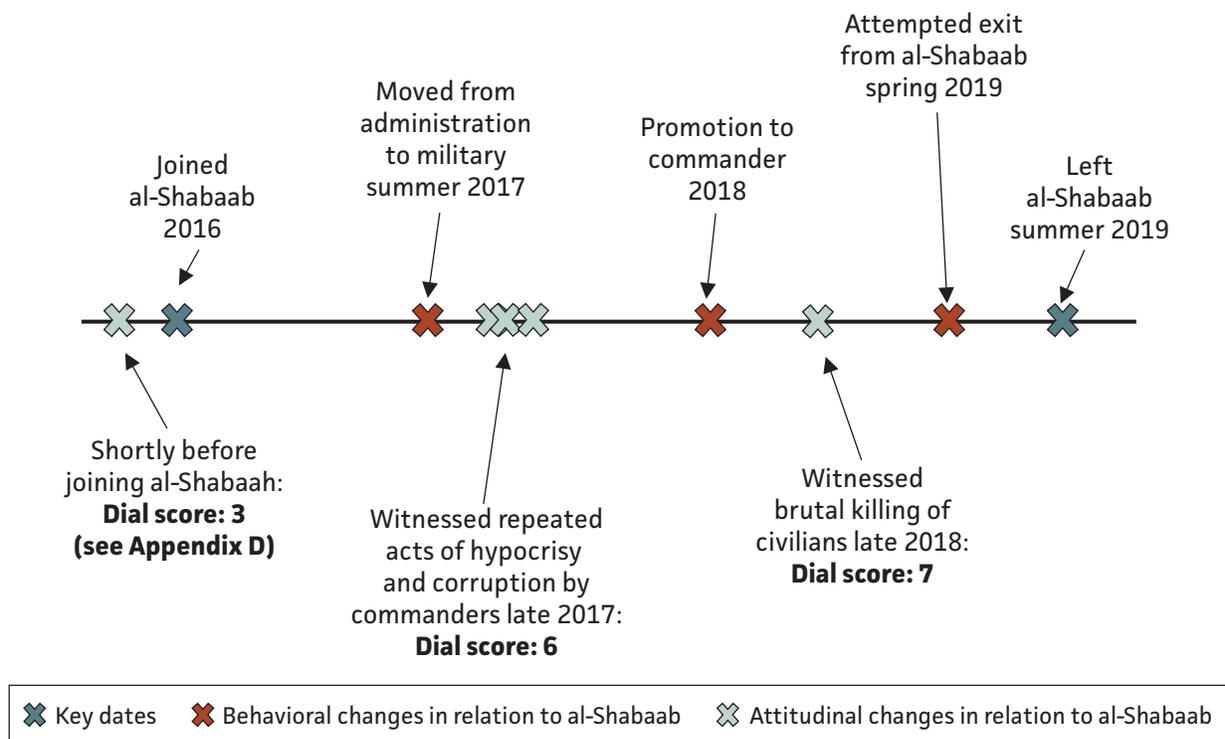
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Appendix B: Timeline Template



Appendix C: Research guide

A: Introduction

My name is **[pseudonym]** and this is **[insert Local Researcher pseudonym]**. We are conducting independent research to try and improve our understanding of how and why people like yourself join and leave al-Shabaab. We hope to turn the research findings into a report, with the idea that it can help improve programs that aim to counter al-Shabaab and similar organizations by encouraging people to leave these groups.

We are interested to hear more about your life story, as an interesting and relevant example of a journey out of al-Shabaab. I want to clarify that absolutely no personal details through which you may be identified will appear in the report. These personal details are not important to telling your story. This process is entirely voluntary. If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, please let me know and we can move on. Similarly, you are free to stop the interview at any point if you do not wish to proceed. The process should take between 1 and 2 hours.

As I believe you discussed with **[insert Local Researcher pseudonym]**, we will compensate you for your transport costs at the end of the discussion. The biggest risk we can identify to you taking part of this research is being identified by NISA at the checkpoint. In this case, please present a photo of your rehabilitation certificate or your identification, and if necessary. If you do have any issues, please contact **[insert Local Researcher pseudonym]**.

Are there any other concerns you would like to discuss with us before we begin? Do you have any questions before we start? If you have any more questions after we complete this process, please feel free to contact me through **[insert Local Researcher pseudonym]**.

Do you agree to take part in this discussion?

B: Demographic questions

I would like to start with a few questions to help us understand about your background.

1. Where are you originally from? Which district and region?
2. Where did you live immediately before you got involved in al-Shabaab? Which district and region?
3. Where do you live now? Which district and region?
4. How old are you?
5. Did you complete any education (religious or secular) before you joined al-Shabaab? What level?
6. Did you have an income before you joined al-Shabaab? What did you do?
7. What is your clan?
8. Who did you live with before you joined al-Shabaab? Are you married? How many times have you been married? If so, did you get married before you were involved with al-Shabaab, during your involvement, or after (or both in case of more than one marriage)?
9. Do you have children? How many? Did you have these before, during or after becoming involved with al-Shabaab (or all)?

C: Life history

Step 1: Draw a line on a big piece of paper and explain that the purpose of this is to map key dates during their journeys. Mark an 'x' towards the left for the point when they joined al-Shabaab, and another 'x' towards the right for when they left al-Shabaab. Ask them the dates for these two events, and record these dates above the marks (see Appendix C).

Step 2: Ask them how they joined al-Shabaab, and what role others (family members, peers, recruiters, etc.) played in that process.

Step 3: Ask them why they joined al-Shabaab (open question).

Step 4: Say that there are many different reasons why people join al-Shabaab, and you are going to mention a few of these to see if they apply to the respondent. Say that you only need very brief answers, and that all they have to say is 'a lot', 'a little' or 'not at all'.

- It provided status or power ('a lot', 'a little', 'not at all')
- It provided adventure or excitement ('a lot', 'a little', 'not at all')
- It provided a sense of belonging ('a lot', 'a little', 'not at all')
- It provided an opportunity for revenge ('a lot', 'a little', 'not at all')
 - » Clarify against whom
- Because of an expected salary from al-Shabaab ('a lot', 'a little', 'not at all')
 - » Clarify how much they expected to get
- Because of pressure or force from someone I know ('a lot', 'a little', 'not at all')
- Because of pressure or force from al-Shabaab ('a lot', 'a little', 'not at all')
- Because of expectation that al-Shabaab could provide protection ('a lot', 'a little', 'not at all')
 - » Clarify from whom
- Because of a religious duty to become involved ('a lot', 'a little', 'not at all')
- Because of a perception that al-Shabaab was creating a better society ('a lot', 'a little', 'not at all')

Step 5: Ask them about key dates relating to behaviors once they were within al-Shabaab and add these on the line with additional 'x' marks (using a different color from previously) and record dates (approximated as necessary), e.g.:

- Unit/role/task changes within al-Shabaab (clarify what these were)
- Changes in where they were located with al-Shabaab (clarify where they were based)

- Promotions within al-Shabaab (clarify what these were, and if they had subordinates)
- Demotions within al-Shabaab (clarify what these were for)
- Punishments by al-Shabaab (clarify what these were for)
- Unsuccessful attempted exits from al-Shabaab (ask them to elaborate on these)

Step 6: Ask them how they left al-Shabaab, and what role others (family members, other members of al-Shabaab, etc.) played in that process. Ask if they left voluntarily or if they were captured (**skip to Step 10 if captured**). Ask if they had arranged safe passage (i.e., if the security forces were expecting them) before they left, and how that was arranged.

Step 7: Ask them why they left al-Shabaab (open question), and how long they had been thinking of leaving.

Step 8: Say that there are many different reasons why people leave al-Shabaab, and you are going to mention a few of these to see if they apply to the respondent. Say that you only need very brief answers, and that all they have to say is ‘a lot’, ‘a little’ or ‘not at all’.

- Because the living conditions with al-Shabaab were poor (‘a lot’, ‘a little’, ‘not at all’)
 - » Ask them to describe what the particular issues were, e.g., food, sleeping, etc.
- Because of fear for life or health (‘a lot’, ‘a little’, ‘not at all’)
- Because of treatment by superiors (‘a lot’, ‘a little’, ‘not at all’)
 - » Clarify what was wrong with the treatment
- Because of family pressure to leave (‘a lot’, ‘a little’, ‘not at all’)
- Because the money provided by al-Shabaab was not enough (‘a lot’, ‘a little’, ‘not at all’)
- Because of perception of contributing to the suffering of others (‘a lot’, ‘a little’, ‘not at all’)
- Because their interpretation of Islam was wrong (‘a lot’, ‘a little’, ‘not at all’)
- Because of the amnesty/opportunities at centers like Serendi (‘a lot’, ‘a little’, ‘not at all’)

Step 9: Ask them what the most difficult thing was about leaving al-Shabaab, and why they did not leave earlier. Ask them if they were afraid to leave because of al-Shabaab, the state security forces, or anyone else. Ask if it was difficult to leave because of personal commitments to others in al-Shabaab, e.g., wives, friends.

Step 10: Introduce the 7-point dial covering attitudes (see Appendix D), and ask them to reflect back on how they felt about al-Shabaab shortly before they joined the group. Add a new ‘x’ to the timeline to the left of the one representing when the respondent joined al-Shabaab (using a third color), and record their dial score at this point.

Step 11: Ask them if their opinion of al-Shabaab changed once they were in the group, either positively or negatively. Ask why their opinions changed (open question).

Step 12: Say that there are many different reasons why attitudes may change once within al-Shabaab, either positively or negatively, and you are going to mention a few of these to see if they apply to the respondent.

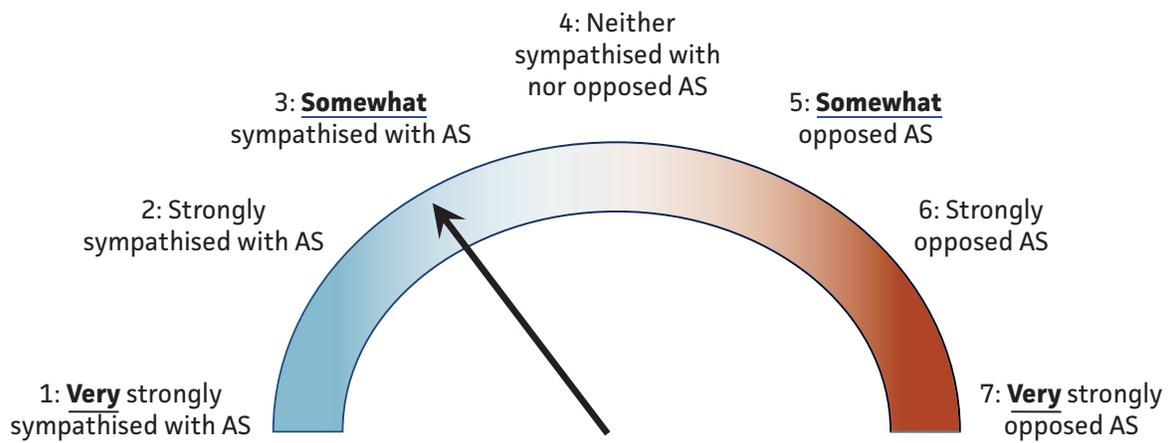
- The nature of their recruitment into al-Shabaab
- A better understanding of al-Shabaab ideology or objectives (e.g., through training provided by al-Shabaab)
- The nature of al-Shabaab rules, or change in these (clarify which rules in particular)
- How they were treated by superiors, or changes in this (clarify the nature of this treatment)
- Other behaviors of superiors or leaders (clarifying what these behaviors were)
- Factional fighting within al-Shabaab
- Particular al-Shabaab acts of violence or broader changes in how al-Shabaab applied violence
- Their personal involvement in violence (clarify what this was)
- Broader political, social, or economic conditions outside al-Shabaab, e.g., election of a new President

Step 13: For each of the attitudinal changes identified through the previous step, (a) locate them on the timeline in relation to the events marked in Steps 1 and 5 (e.g., asking “did this change in attitude occur before or after you were promoted”) with additional ‘x’ marks (using the third color), (b) record the dates (approximated as necessary, and noting that these may be sudden or gradual), and (c) record their attitude using the dial. As necessary, clarify what their attitudes were in any gaps.

D: Wrap up

Thank you very much for taking part in this research. I really appreciated the time that you took out of your day to help me, and the information that you provided. As I said at the beginning, we hope to turn the research findings into a report, with the idea that it can help improve programs that aim to counter al-Shabaab and similar organizations. Would you mind if we followed-up with you briefly by phone if we have any more questions or clarifications? Do you have anything you would like to add, or any questions for me about this research or the process?

Appendix D: The attitudes 'dial'



About the Authors

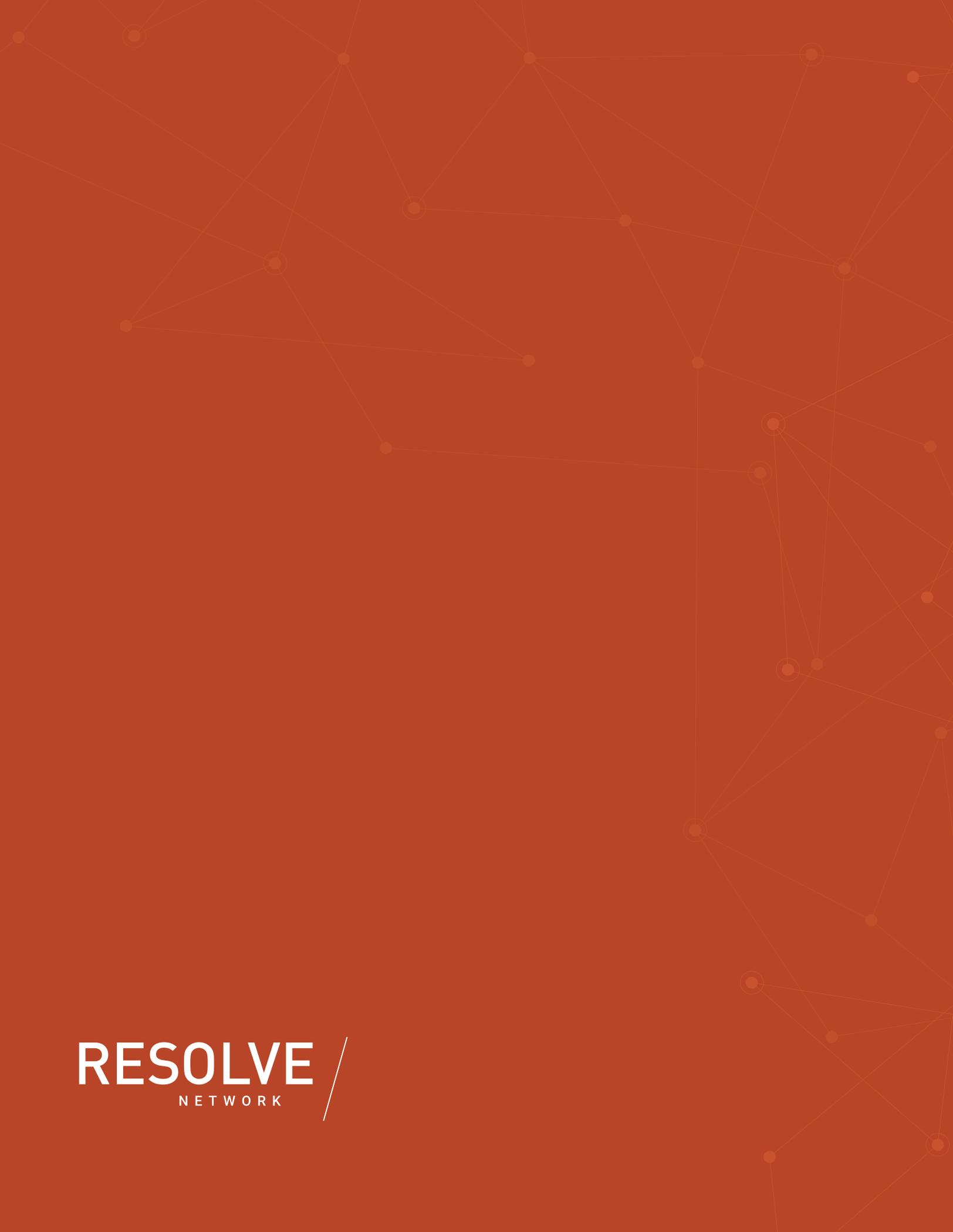
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