NSDS HUB
NATO STRATEGIC DIRECTION SOUTH

University of Kent

INFORMAL GOVERNANCE OF NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS IN THE SAHEL

INFORMAL GOVERNANCE

www.TheSouthernHub.org

This document was produced in collaboration with Dr. Harmonie Toros, Reader in International Conflict Analysis at the University of Kent, UK.

Harmonie Toros is Reader in International Conflict Analysis at the University of Kent. Her research lies at the crossroad between conflict resolution/conflict transformation, peace studies, and terrorism studies. She has published seminal work developing a critical theory-based approach to terrorism and examining the transformation of conflicts marked by terrorist violence. She has carried out extensive field research in Europe, the Middle East, South East Asia, and Africa Her current research focuses on incorporating war experience into the study of conflict, examining some of the key methodological and epistemological challenges involved in translating war experience into knowledge. In 2015, Harmonie was awarded the University's Inaugural Research Prize (Early Career Researchers Category). She is an editor of the journal Critical Studies on Terrorism and a member of the International Studies Association (ISA) and British International Studies Association (BISA). Following a BA in Contemporary History (Sussex) and a Maîtrise in History (Paris IV- Sorbonne), she worked as reporter and editor for major international news agencies (The Associated Press and Agence France-Presse) before returning to academia in 2003 to complete a Masters in Conflict Resolution (Bradford). She completed her PhD at the Department of International Politics of Aberystwyth University in 2010.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

-   **Key Findings:** Non-state armed groups, including violent extremist organizations, self-defense militias, and criminal gangs, are governance providers to local populations in the Sahel to a much greater degree than previously reported in the so-called "ungoverned spaces."
-   NSAGs provide four key forms of governance: security; justice; political and economic administration; social support and enforcement of social rules, across large sections of Mali, but also in Burkina Faso and Niger. Through this informal governance, NSAGs garner support and legitimacy from local leaders and communities at large.
-   **Current Responses:** State and international responses have overall ignored this NSAG informal governance and have pursued: 1. a counter-terrorism strategy that is hampered by its failure to take into account the deeply embedded nature of NSAGs in local communities; and 2. a central state-building strategy that has so far largely failed to replace or even undermine NSAG legitimacy as governance providers.
-   **Relevance to NATO:** Any involvement of international organizations in the Sahel needs to go beyond a strict counter-terrorism understanding of NSAGs, including VEOs. Furthermore, local and international actors on the ground warned that any additional involvement should avoid duplicating and undermining existing activities.
-   Thus, any international involvement in the Sahel needs to take a broader vision of NSAG activities – beyond simply seeing them as "terrorists" or "criminal gangs" – and needs to be carefully coordinated with national and international partners.
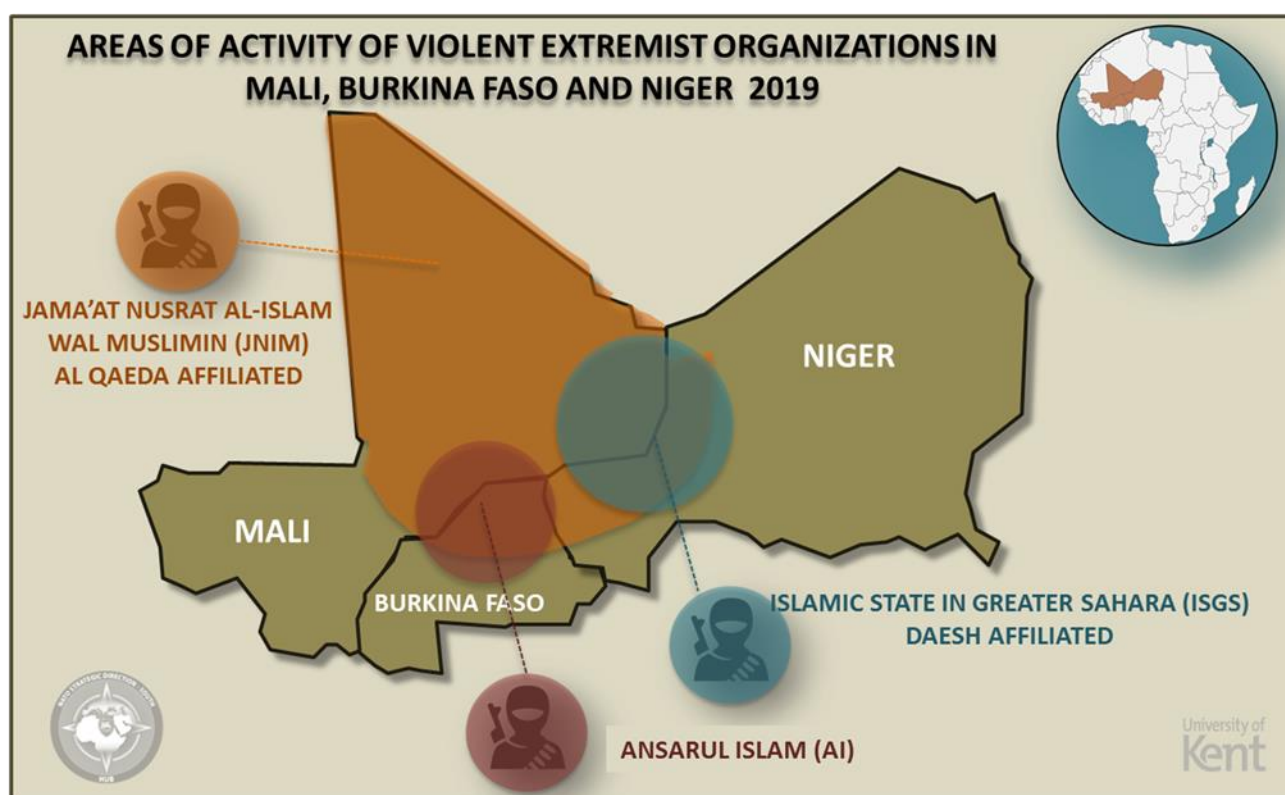
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INFORMAL GOVERNANCE: CONCEPTS AND POLICY RELEVANCE

Informal governance has become a reality of the contemporary world as the notion that nation-states entirely governed by structured hierarchical bureaucracies capable of maintaining the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence and of providing core services to populations becomes increasingly challenged. Indeed, the "ideal-typical conception of a consolidated state is misleading rather than illuminating" in many parts of the world.[1] However, visions of large ungoverned spaces or zones of state absence also fail to represent the realities on the ground. "Governance *de facto* exists in areas frequently claimed as ungoverned spaces … mostly exercised by non-state armed groups ranging from insurgencies to warlords to clans" among others.[2] Even "war zones are often orderly," as a variety of actors set up a "new order, which civilians recognize, that marks many aspects of daily life".[3] Examples across the world show a wide variety of such examples of governance, ranging from elaborate civilian administrations to the simple rebranding of local administrative units.

The aim of this research paper is to investigate non-state armed group (NSAG) informal governance and the most appropriate policy responses to such forms of governance. The paper will focus in particular on the Sahel region examining cases of NSAG governance between 2012 and 2019.

AREAS OF ACTIVITY OF VIOLENT EXTREMIST ORGANIZATIONS IN MALI, BURKINA FASO AND NIGER 2019

JAMA'AT NUSRAT AL-ISLAM WAL MUSLIMIN (JNIM) AL QAEDA AFFILIATED

NIGER

MALI

BURKINA FASO

ISLAMIC STATE IN GREATER SAHARA (ISGS) DAESH AFFILIATED

ANSARUL ISLAM (AI)

University of Kent

MAP 1

Fulfilling key aims of NATO's Southern Hub, this research strengthens understanding of regional dynamics and most importantly reveals opportunities and contributes to coordinate NATO activities in the South. In particular, understanding NSAG governance is essential to comprehend both conflict and post-conflict dynamics and is highly relevant for national and international actors, ranging from non-governmental, to international, to

intergovernmental organizations. Such knowledge "may be essential to understand armed groups' capacity to survive," including financially, and "should illuminate our study of key phenomena such as recruitment, civilian collaboration, and displacement" as it affects "the overall evolution, duration, and cost of war".[4] Such governance also shapes post-conflict dynamics as it has the potential to "transform gender roles, activism, political organization, and labor".[5] It also helps us understand what kind of governance populations are willing to accept as legitimate. Finally, such research can help us understand the potential for NSAGs to transition primarily from violent organizations toward non-violent political organizations.

Crucially, state and international responses can affect NSAG decision to establish governance and what kind of governance, and thus can influence the conflict and post-conflict conditions through this informal governance structure.[6] For example, understanding NSAG governance and thus the complex relationships between NSAGs and civilian populations, can help the international community "limit civilian casualties, prevent displacement, or promote development in war-affected areas".[7] The legitimacy and success of interventions in reconstruction, reconciliation, and reintegration can also depend on an increased knowledge of NSAG governance.

a. STRUCTURE, METHODOLOGY AND DATA LIMITATIONS

Any research on NSAGs in this area suffers from the scarcity and limited quality of the data. States collect little data on NSAG governance, and what they collect is unlikely to be open source. On the other hand, International NGOs, including those who engage with NSAGs (to distribute aid for example), prefer not to collect data on NSAG governance for fear of legitimizing NSAGs and their governance.[8] Finally, NSAGs themselves will publish documents on their governance, though these can contain inflated claims or even hide problematic aspects of the governance for propaganda reasons.

This paper will address this central question in four sections, based on two methodological approaches. The first section will define what is meant by NSAGs and informal NSAG governance. It will then examine the main reasons why NSAGs engage in informal governance and the forms it can take.

The second section will provide an overall analysis of NSAG governance in the Sahel from 2012 to 2019. Taking into account the above mentioned data limitations, this section uses a methodological approach which identifies and analyses these principal forms of NSAG governance in the Sahel region during that timeframe, chosen based on the start of the fourth Tuareg rebellion which led to large parts of northern Mali being controlled by NSAG until the French military intervention in 2013. References to specific cases of informal governance carried out by self-defense militias, criminal groups and faith-based organizations in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger respectively will also be made. This analysis has been included in a mapping exercise specifically undertaken for this project and examined based on triangulated data drawn using three different methods: documentary analysis of open source primary and secondary documents, informal discussions with and feedback from Sahel area specialists, and semi-structured interviews with international, regional and local partners.

Based on this overview, the third section adopts a second methodological approach which involves the in-depth analysis of two case studies of NSAG governance, both in Mali, which will allow for a deeper understanding of the micro-dynamics of informal NSAG governance and the impact of state and potentially international responses to such governance.

The fourth and final section will offer policy recommendations on how to best understand and engage with NSAG informal governance. These recommendations are based on data collected in interviews but also on crucial feedback offered by regional organizations – in particular the African Union's African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), the United Nations Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the African Union mission in Mali (MISAHEL), and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) – at a workshop held in Accra, Ghana, in June 2019.

b. KEY ELEMENTS OF INFORMAL GOVERNANCE

Investigating NSAG governance means understanding NSAG as groups that go beyond only engaging in kinetic exchanges with state security forces or other armed actors. For this paper, NSAGs are defined as *armed organizations motivated by political or economic goals using violence either against the state, other armed groups, or civilians. They can include state- or internationally-designated terrorist groups, paramilitary groups in support of the state, and organized criminal gangs*. NSAG can thus include politically-motivated (usually identified as rebels, ethnic groups, or violent extremist organizations -VEOs-), self-defense militias or criminally or financially-motivated organizations. They are complex actors often involving numerous different factions that have different approaches and levels of engagement with violence. NSAGs need to be seen as actors with multiple identities that engage in a myriad activities, because the "tendency to focus on violence in discussions about rebel behavior occludes an understanding of the real issues that affect civilian life in contemporary war zones".[9] Most relevant for this research, NSAGs engage in informal governance practices. Governance is defined here as a "set of practices and norms that govern daily life in a specific territory";[10] these practices and norms "structure the possible field of action of others".[11] NSAG governance is defined "on the basis of two characteristics: first, governance takes place in areas where the armed actor has some territorial control (partial or total); and second, it entails the establishment of rules or institutions to regulate civilian populations, the relation between combatants and civilians, or both".[12] Governance thus involves control of territory, population, activities and the provision of goods and services.

It is important to distinguish governance from state formation – two concepts which are related but not equivalent. As Mampilly points out, NSAGs do not always aim to replace the state – at least not in the short-term – but rather aim for "the formation of political order outside (and against) the state".[13] It is thus argued here that NSAGs do not take over "state-like" functions but rather aspects of governance.

There are differing approaches on how to break down governance into identifiable elements. Mampilly divides them into two: strategic services ("including a police force and judicial mechanism") and technical services ("provision of health and education"); and development of legislative bodies which "seek to represent the population on the ground".[14] While drawing on Campana and Ducol,[15] one could divide NSAG governance into three somewhat different key elements: "the control of physical force that guarantees political authority, the distribution of economic resources, and the production and preservation of symbolic-cultural patterns that shape behavior and provide an identity to a specific group."

This paper will draw on these seminal works as well as on the study of cases within the Sahel – so as to make our mapping context-specific - to divide NSAG governance in four key elements: security, justice, political and economic administration; and social support and rules.

I. Security

Security is understood as internal and external, with NSAGs seen as having full internal security if the entire policing functions within the territory are carried out by the NSAG and partial if they share policing functions with state police, local police, informal policing run by other NSAGs or if they are only able to carry out policing functions in some areas. NSAGs are seen as having full external security if they control all access to the territory (i.e. across all access routes); they are seen as having partial control of the territory if they share this control with state actors, with local leaders or other NSAGs if some access routes remain uncontrolled.

II. Justice

Justice is composed of court systems and punishment capability and can be formal or informal. When NSAGs establish formal justice/penal systems, they set up courts ruled by some form of authority ("judges") which follow rules with a minimum level of codification to judge acts seen as violating acceptable practice in a territory ("criminal acts") and to resolve disputes between parties ("civil disputes"). In formal systems, prisons are identified as such. In informal systems, members of the NSAG judge criminals with no codification but are able to enforce their judgements. Prisons can be ad hoc detention centers controlled by the group.

III. Political and Economic Administration

Political and economic administration is understood as involving: forms of taxation which exceed extortion and involve some level of registration of taxes paid (NSAG may also use their control of territory to eliminate state taxation); and representation, i.e. the establishing of local, regional, or central administrators that play a role in running specified areas, including but not limited to the distribution of funds. This may include distribution of what can be seen as "humanitarian aid" by NSAGs, including food, water, cash and other donations as well as development projects, or more simply, allowing international humanitarian organizations to operate on the territory they control.

iv. Social Support and Rules

NSAGs often provide social services while at the same time trying to impose their social rules in territory they control. This can involve the provision of health services through clinics, the opening of schools or other forms of education/training (excluding armed training), as well as the regulation of cultural, social and family affairs (e.g. who can marry whom, under what circumstances, what kind of behavior is expected and allowed according to gender and what kind of social relations are allowed between genders, etc.).

Not all of these aspects are of equal importance to NSAGs and authors have pointed out that security is often of primary concern to NSAG.[16] This paper recognizes which each element may not be of equal importance but each represents a facet of NSAG informal governance which helps us understand the complexity of this governance and its impact on conflict and post-conflict dynamics.

c. NSAG Motivation and Behavior

Having defined the key elements, it is important to note that in some cases these groups evolve and change their aims and behavior over time, and as shown in part 2, all of these forms of NSAG have engaged to varying degrees in informal governance in the Sahel. A central question of debate is why. NSAGs have a variety of reasons to engage in forms of governance. Firstly, "the rewards offered through effective taxation of the population are much greater than the mere looting that typifies the behavior of the roving bandit".[17] Furthermore, NSAGs, particularly with secessionist goals, often see themselves and want to present themselves as "governments-in-waiting".[18] This is particularly true for political NSAGs with secessionist goals who want to prove that they can govern the territory they claim better than the state. Finally, governance forces NSAGs to "strengthen their organizational capacity" thus strengthening the group as such.[19] Informal governance can become a central goal of NSAGs and is crucial to our understanding of the group's aims and methods, and to identify best responses to NSAGs.

Informal governance can be imposed through varying degrees of violence and it is important to be aware that "violence per se is not always the strategy used by transnational terrorist groups" and NSAGs often prefer "negotiation and inducement" with local leaders and population.[20] For this research, the degree of violence in NSAG governance will be divided into three categories: "coercive" to denote governance which is primarily imposed through widespread use of violence; "surveillance-based" in which NSAGs monitor that the local population is adhering to NSAG-imposed rules and resource extraction, threatening violence if they are not; or "participatory", involving the wide-scale participation of local leaders and population where violence is primarily

used for security and justice provisions. There are no clear boundaries between the three categories but rather that violence in NSAG governance exists across a wide spectrum.

The choice to engage in violence to impose informal governance is seen as being linked to two factors: the strength of the existing governance structures prior to NSAG taking control, and whether the NSAG has long term or short term aims in the area. The efficacy and legitimacy of prior governance makes local leaders and the civilian population more likely to resist rebel control and ensure some level of negotiation between local power-holders and the NSAG.[21] The ultimate aims of the NSAG in the territory – which can change from territory to territory for the same NSAG – will also affect the level of violence, with longer-term timeframes likely to induce NSAG to engage in less coercive and more participatory methods of governance.[22] Thus, there are a variety of rationales for NSAG informal governance as well as differing degrees of violence through which such governance is enforced. The next section will focus on the discussion on the principal forms and behaviors of NSAGs in the Sahel region.

2. NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS IN THE SAHEL

a. THE SAHEL

The term Sahel is used in a variety of ways from designated large areas, from the Atlantic to the Red Sea, to much more defined areas. This research adopts a more restricted understanding of the region, including only Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger as much scholarship presents these three countries as a social space which has common characteristics in terms of the presence and practices of NSAG in the area. Indeed, many NSAGs function across two or more of these states and are particularly active in the border areas between them (this justifies the focus of a regional security initiative – the G5 Sahel-Joint Force – in the border areas – see *Map 2*). Despite using this more restrictive definition of the Sahel, the paper has key implications for countries across the broader region from Algeria in the North, Mauritania in the West, Nigeria in the South, to Chad in the East.

The Sahel has seen a considerable rise in insecurity in the past decade. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed deep concern "about the deterioration of the security situation in Mali and the Sahel region.[23] The Sahel faces severe transnational challenges, including: climate change and drought; irregular migration; trafficking in weapons and drugs; and violent extremism and terrorism." NSAG presence is thus only one of several sources of insecurity in a region and it needs to be understood as part of this broader social landscape. Indeed, Guterres warned that "security initiatives in the Sahel will only have a lasting effect if underdevelopment, poverty, governance, the lack of access to basic services and economic opportunities, systematic exclusion and the effects of climate change are addressed simultaneously".[24] Thus, the presence and practices of NSAG needs to be viewed as part of this broader security, development, and governance landscape.

b. TYPOLOGY OF NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS IN THE SAHEL

As in most parts of the world, NSAG have cohabited with states ever since state formation, in the Sahel mainly following the collapse of the colonial system. Indeed, state presence, particularly in rural areas of the Sahel, has

arguably always been scarce, particularly in regions far from the capital or major cities. Tuareg leaders have also been highly suspicious of attempts to govern them from other ethnic groups based in the South. Nevertheless, as noted above, most area specialists warn against understanding these areas as "ungoverned spaces" or more recently "terrorist safe havens." As shall become clear, these areas are indeed best understood as spaces of contested governance or shared governance between representatives of the state, local tribal leaders, self-defense militias, criminal gangs, and politically-motivated NSAGs.

To better understand the current landscape of NSAGs in the region, it is important to briefly retrace the presence of two typologies of groups: Tuareg rebel groups and violent extremist organizations (VEOs) with links to al Qaeda (AQ) and to a lesser degree, DAESH. Indeed, Tuareg rebellions have come in phases, starting shortly after independence from France in 1960, through to a strong (and for a short time successful) push at establishing an independent Azawad state in 2012. It is the "exhaustion and failure of negotiated solutions to cyclical Tuareg rebellions" that led to the rise of VEOs with links to al Qaeda or DAESH in the region.[25] An influx of militants from Algeria who rejected the peace agreement with the Algerian government led to the creation of al Qaeda in Islamic Magreb (AQIM), which succeeded in implanting itself firmly in Mali and more broadly in the Sahel. Over a relatively short period of time, the landscape of NSAGs came to be characterized by a constantly evolving series of alliances and feuds between tribal/ethnic-based groups and VEOs. Indeed, the constant name changing and alliance formation is seen by some analysts as "itself instrumental to an extremely asymmetrical war context" as it leaves the "observer in doubt about who is fighting or outflanking whom".[26]

In this fluid context it is important to point out the recent formation of three groups. First, in 2017 the establishment of the umbrella "Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims" (JNIM) which brought together the already strong Sahara branch of AQIM, Ansar Dine, Macina Liberation Front, and al Murabitoun. Roughly half of violent incidents recorded in the Sahel in 2018 were linked to JNIM. Also important to note is the rise of Ansar al Islam in Burkina Faso in late 2016 which is attributed to 26 percent of all reported violent incidents, and of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), largely based in Niger, linked to 15 percent of incidents (See *Map 1*). Indeed, the last three years have seen a dramatic increase in recorded violence linked to VEOs, with violent incidents doubling every year since 2016 to reach 465 in 2018. This exceeded all VEO activity recorded from 2009-2015 combined.[27] The UN indeed worries that the "security situation in the Sahel continues to deteriorate, having spillover effects in neighboring countries including Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, and Togo".[28]

Added to the VEOs, and at times in alliance with them, are criminal gangs – or ethnically-based armed groups involved in various illegal trafficking activities – as well as local militia or self-defense groups, which have worked at times alongside the state and other times against the state. Particularly relevant are two armed groups – Plateforme and Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) which broke away from the 2012-2013 rebellion and signed a peace agreement with the state in 2015 in Algiers.

Countering VEOs and criminal gangs, the Sahel is also host to a variety of armed national and foreign forces. At the top of the list of national armed forces (estimated at about 60,000 personnel in total), there are almost 15,000 uniformed personnel (military and police) of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) launched in 2013, and some 4,500 French troops as part of Operation Barkhane also since 2013. Regional actors (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) have also regrouped in the G5 Sahel intergovernmental cooperation framework since 2014 and established a military component - G5 Sahel Joint Force – which patrols areas within 50km of the borders of each of these countries. At full operational capacity, the joint force aims to have 5,000 soldiers (see *Map 2*).


MAP 2

c. NSAG INFORMAL GOVERNANCE IN THE SAHEL: CURRENT SITUATION

Informal NSAG governance has covered large areas of the Sahel since 2012, in particular in Mali, and continues to do so today. The Malian state today for example is believed to control less than 25% of the national territory. As can be seen in *Map 3*, a variety of non-state armed groups control or in some cases simply maintain a presence in about 75 percent of the territory. Although to a much lesser extent, NSAG governance also covers part of the territory of Burkina Faso and Niger, particularly in the border regions, through the presence of VEOs, self-defense organizations, and other NSAGs.

Central to understanding the control and presence of NSAGs are the Main Supply Routes (MSRs) which are used by the population, but also by traffickers of all kinds, from drugs to human beings. Indeed, numerous local and international officials on the ground stressed the salience of MSRs in understanding why NSAGs choose to control certain areas rather than others. These routes "represent a considerable sum of money" and international officials have noted a clear strategy of NSAGs – whether government allied or not –to gain full control of MSRs over long stretches to ensure revenues from the trafficking across Mali. "It is about securing the trafficking routes: The cake has been divided up" among NSAGs, said one official. Whether the control of trafficking routes is a key motivator or not, this research suggests that NSAGs have engaged in governance practices in these areas going beyond simply extorting resources from illegal traffickers, merchants and the general population. However, as can be seen from *Map* 3, there is an obvious connection between MSRs and the areas controlled by NSAGs. Drawing on data gathered from primary and secondary sources as well as discussions with local and international officials, Map 3 represents an up to date picture of NSAG direct control of territory, of areas where VEOs are known to have a permanent presence (but do not necessarily have full

control) and hotspots of VEO activity. It also shows the line of demarcation between the government controlled area in the South and East and the rest of the country. The mapping thus offers a visual analysis of the extent of the phenomenon of NSAG informal governance in Mali.
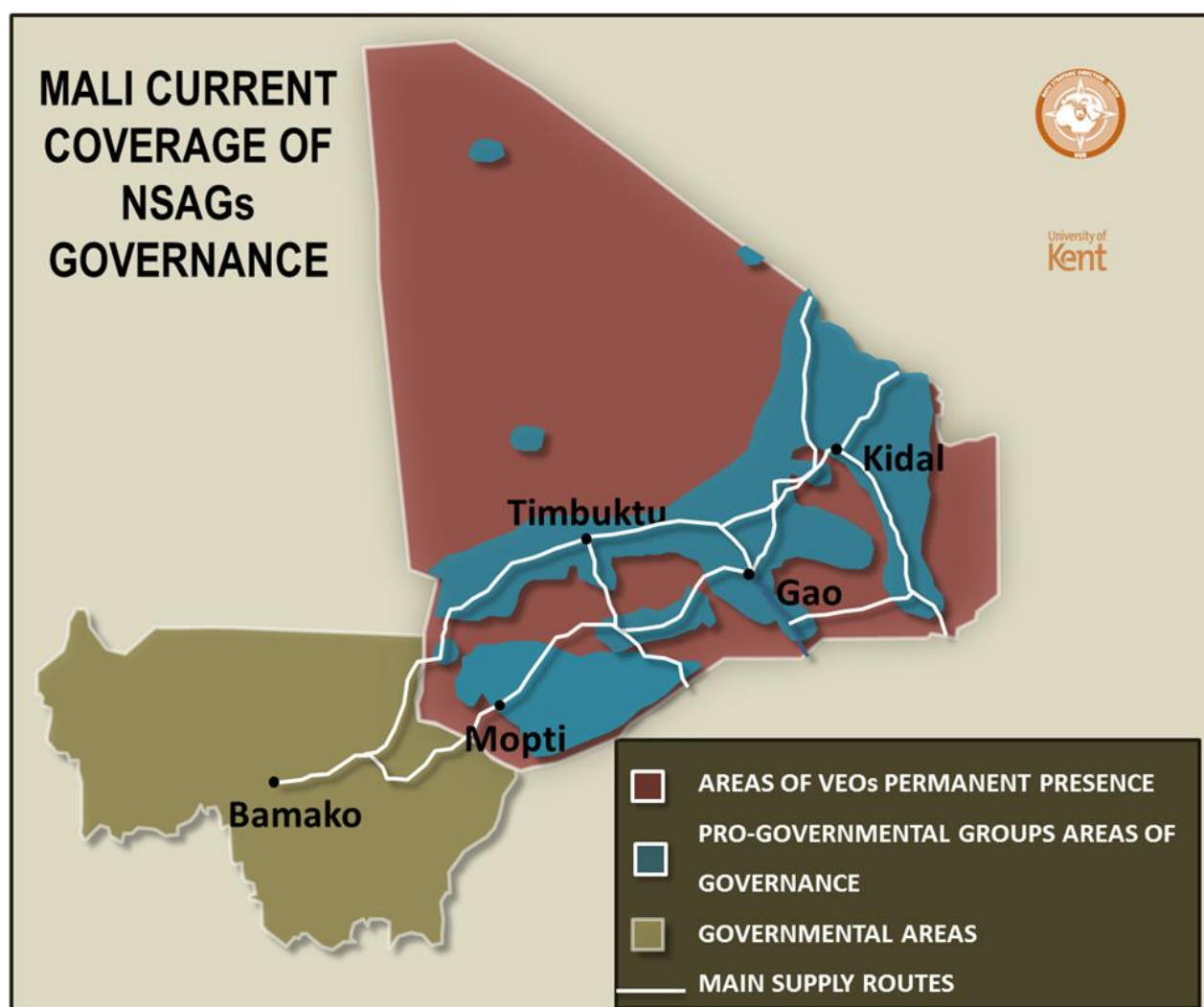
MAP 3

d. ANALYSIS OF TYPES OF NSAG INFORMAL GOVERNANCE

Aside from examining the extent of NSAG governance in the region, it is important to go through the considerable variety of NSAGs and of forms of informal governance. As noted earlier, NSAGs in the Sahel include politically motivated groups and VEOs, which will be examined in greater detail in two case studies in Part 3, but also criminal gangs, ethnic groups and self-defense militias. Nevertheless, there is often overlap between these categories, as VEOs can ally themselves with armed ethnic groups or self-defense militias, support or, on the contrary, attack trafficking gangs. This does not mean that all groups in the region can be simplified to the "equivocal concept of narco-jihadism, confusing the figures of the jihadist and the drug trafficker, who actually have complex interrelationships".[29] There are indeed complex relationships determined largely by local realities.

As will become clear in the examples offered below, this means that self-defense militias have gone beyond simply policing neighborhoods, trafficking gangs have gone beyond using territory as bases or transit routes for drugs or other goods; and VEOs have gone beyond terrorizing populations or engaging in extortion. Considering the numerous examples of NSAG governance which can be found in the region, it is impossible here to discuss every combination witnessed since 2012. This paper will therefore examine in this section one example of informal governance by each NSAG type.

I. Koglweogo of Burkina Faso

Emerging in the mid-2000s as very localized groups set up to protect their community's belongings in areas in which the Burkinabe state was unable to maintain an ongoing presence, the Koglweogo (loosely translated as "Guardians of the Bush") now have an estimated 4,500 members across the country.[30] Crucially for this study, the groups in some areas have taken over a series of governance functions beyond neighborhood patrolling. Indeed, from capturing suspected criminals and handing them over to authorities for trial and sentencing, some Koglweogo groups have moved to carrying out interrogations, sentencing and imprisoning suspects.[31] This demonstrates the start of judicial/penal governance, further strengthened by the codification of fines and punishments, indeed by what Dupuy and Quidelleur call "the control of penal procedures." In some areas, Koglweogo have gone further into governance practices by "doing random road checks of goods and cattle [and] by collecting taxes and fines".[32] It is important to note that the Koglweogo are not unified nationally although there are relationships between the local groups. They have also had a complex relationship with the state, initially working with state approval, but eventually being banned from carrying arms without government permission, running private prisons, or imposing fines.[33]The state has indeed come under increasing pressure due to Koglweogo practices which often violate basic human rights. Nevertheless, the groups often benefit from popular support having positioned themselves as "alternatives" to the state, arguing that "Koglweogo are all the population, when the police is a ministry".[34] The Koglweogo thus present an interesting case in the investigation of NSAG informal governance in the Sahel. Following our framework outlined in Part 1, they engage in partial security governance (controlling partially or in collaboration with other parties policing functions), informal and formal justice/penal system provisions (judging, sentencing, and imprisonment), and some level of administrative governance (collection of taxes and fines). They are not replacing the state and neither do they appear to have such aspirations, but are nonetheless part of complex informal governance patterns in large areas of Burkina Faso today.

II. Lahmar Traffickers in Mali

An Arab community from the northern Malian valley of Tilemsi, the Lamhar have become known for their role in trafficking in the region.[35] Indeed, the infamous "Cocainebougou" or "Cocaineville" neighborhood of Gao filled with luxury mansions is seen as their making, the result of fortunes amassed by facilitating the transit of Latin American drugs into Europe via the Sahel.[36] But aside from building flashy neighborhoods for their own benefit, Lamhar traffickers joined forces with VEOs in the Gao region in 2012-2013 to support their informal governance. According to the International Crisis Group,[37] "major traffickers and bandits have acquired local and even national influence," investing in communities and thus becoming "local notables". In some cases they have engaged in the redistribution of earnings as well as the distribution of humanitarian aid such as food to the population, either directly or via VEOs controlling the territory at the time.[38] They have thus been involved in

political and economic administration either directly – through the direct provision of goods – or indirectly by funding VEOs who control the region. The collaboration also allowed VEOs in the region – primarily MUJAO – to attract and recruit local youth, further strengthening the armed group.[39] Again, as noted above, these are not cases in which NSAGs aim to take over all the roles of the state or all governance functions, but rather examples of overlapping and contested governance, part of it carried out by criminal NSAGs.

III. Izala Movement in Niger

In both of the above examples, what began as armed groups – either for self-defence or criminal ends – have turned to governance practices at a later stage. The Izala movement in Niger offers an interesting counter example of a faith-based movement originally aimed at the broader transformation of society taking on the role of "security providers" later.[40] In the overwhelmingly Muslim country, the Salafist Izala, linked to the similar movement in Nigeria, was created in 1993 focusing on spreading Islamic reform discourses and practices.[41] However, it also started delivering social public services (education, health) and humanitarian aid (food and cash support for the poor) and became involved in "dispute resolution and justice institutions, microfinance, markets, NGOs, and even security services, such as the police (called Yan Agaji)".[42] Indeed, "they are increasingly viewed as legitimate security providers, especially in the eyes of the poorest, but also some middle-class civil servants who actively engage with them".[43] Izala can thus be seen as taking over informal governance in terms of security, justice/penal system, as well as political economic administration, and social support and rules – i.e. all the forms of governance identified in Part 1. This has led some Nigerians to see the Izala movement "as one of the most serious threats to security in Niger" while "others see them as a possible path towards a form of Nigerian society and politics".[44] Whether a threat or an opportunity for reform, Izala can be understood as an important actor engaging in various forms of informal governance in Niger today.
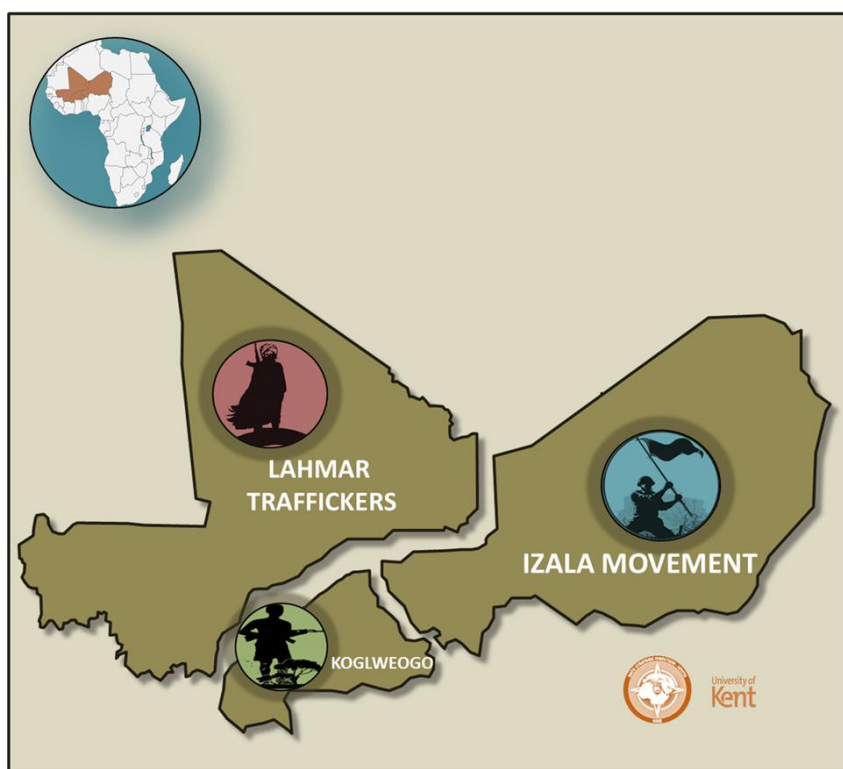
3. PRIMARY CASE STUDIES

To better understand the processes and implications of NSAG informal governance and crucially to design appropriate responses to it, it is essential to delve in greater depth into the micro-processes of such governance and the responses to it in the past. This is best done through case studies. This study has selected two cases: the informal governance of large swaths of Northern Mali between 2012 and 2013 first by separatist NSAGs and then specifically by VEOs, and the informal governance of armed groups in Central Mali since 2015, both VEOs and ethnic / tribal NSAGs. Interestingly, both case studies, although very different in nature, have been described by using the overly simplistic concepts of "safe havens" and "ungoverned spaces" and both need to be examined in greater detail to illustrate how NSAG governance goes well beyond such descriptors.[45]

The case studies have been selected for reasons linked to data availability and accessibility and, more crucially, to rationales of research design – i.e. how they help us understand the phenomenon of NSAG informal governance in the Sahel. In terms of data, the case of 2012-2013 in Northern Mali is one of the most substantial cases of NSAG governance the region has witnessed in recent years. As such, there is considerable primary and secondary data which can be drawn upon to analyze this case in terms of documentary analysis of primary documents (news and NGO/IO reports) and of secondary documents in the form of academic research. The case of the Mopti region is one of the most recent and ongoing cases of NSAG informal governance and as such there key data from local actors was accessible. Indeed, the analysis of both case studies is based on documentary analysis and on semi-structured and open interviews with a variety of local and international actors in Mali. To carry out the interviews, the academic on the project successfully applied for ethical approval from the School of Politics and International Relations of the University of Kent (UK) to ensure non-maleficence (not causing harm), beneficence (doing good), autonomy (allowing people to choose and treating them with respect), and justice (examining who may be advantaged and disadvantaged by the research). The interviews were carried out on the basis of anonymity and interlocutors are identified in generic terms.

The analysis of the cases is further supported by internal documents from VEOs found after their retreat which offer a crucial understanding of their rationale behind their practices. The second case is chosen since the complexity and shared nature of governance visible in central Mali has been identified by analysts and officials as the current modus operandi of NSAGs in the region.

a. NORTHERN MALI: 2012-2013

I. 2012-2013: NSAGs Take over Northern Mali

The takeover by NSAGs of Northern Mali in 2012 came as part of what is considered the fourth Tuareg rebellion. Separatist groups armed with the sudden availability of Libyan Army stockpiles, quickly overran the army and its pro-government militias, and by April 6, 2012 declared Gao the capital of free Azawad. Allied to VEOs - particularly AQIM, Ansar Dine and MUJAO - the separatist groups were soon overcome by the VEOs which had "built very credible firepower through massive ransoms they had collected from the kidnapping of Westerners".[46] Indeed, by July 2012, the former head of the US Africa Command, General Carter Ham, described AQIM as al-Qaeda's "wealthiest affiliate".[47] Added to this, the VEOs had for years cemented relationships in Northern Mali also by marrying locally, not only into powerful families but also in poor lineages.[48]

The three VEOs essentially ruled Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao for 10 months before being ousted by the France's Operation SERVAL. This period therefore represents a crucial case to examine considering the length of time and extent of territorial control by the NSAGs (as can be seen in *Map 4*). Most importantly, the NSAGs took over "the administration, the justice system, police, i.e. all the prerogatives of the state – what is called le "pouvoir régalien," according to an international official who was present at the time. This thus represents a remarkably complete case of NSAG governance, covering security, justice, political and economic governance, and the establishment of social rules and support.

MAP 4

The security governance of VEOs during this period is the most obvious form of governance by NSAGs for this case. The groups controlled access to the territory both within the country as well as the Malian-side of cross border points into the country from the North. Importantly, they also assured some level of security for the population in the North. This involved a variety of checkpoints, but also patrols throughout towns and cities and beyond. This represented a marked change for many Northern Malians, who had generally suffered from state absence outside of main cities and garrison towns.

The amount of violence used by NSAGs to impose themselves as "security providers" differs according to sources. Some organizations reported brutality as well as the use of children to take over policing functions ("manning checkpoints, conducting foot patrols, riding around in patrol vehicles, guarding prisoners".[49] Others, including local and international officials interviewed for this project, on the contrary argue that although they engaged in violence to take over the territory, the actual rule was not characterized by exceptional violence. "Once in, they explained to the population why they were there and what was their vision," said a local official present in Northern Mali during this period.

Indeed for Boas, AQIM "should not be viewed merely as an invading external force but as an actor that, over time, has managed to integrate into local communities through a combination of appropriating local grievances and emerging as a local security provider".[50] To do this, the VEOs often relied on local actors, primarily actors who had been involved in providing security to the population prior to 2012.This is a pattern of reliance on local actors that we shall see the NSAGs used commonly, including in the provision of justice and political and economic governance. In our distinction between partial and full security, the security control of VEOs during this period was more full than partial although shared among the groups and with the support of local chiefs.

Regarding the provision of justice, there are also differing accounts of how VEOs engaged in governance and the levels of violence they used. Human rights monitors denounced punishments being meted out in the streets following "summary trials" as well as amputations.[51] Indeed, the local VEO leaders were reprimanded even by AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel for "extreme speed with which you applied Shariah, not taking into consideration the gradual evolution that should be in an environment that is ignorant of religion".[52] Droukdel warned them of a backlash against the VEOs if they continued to impose these new judicial proceedings so rashly.

Whether the local VEO leaders, in this case Mokhtar Belmokhtar, heeded Droukdel's call or whether his information was mistaken, numerous other sources point at a much softer judicial governance by VEOs. A local official stressed that amputations were extremely rare and aimed primarily at signaling among the armed groups. Indeed, an international official present at the time said they "aimed to present themselves as the 'soft guys'" and executed informants, but not civilians. The NSAGs relied primarily on traditional local forms of justice, known as Kadi, and even increased the latter's role in judicial governance. International officials point at how the Kadis had previously been primarily in charge of civil and family matters but that VEOs also made them responsible for criminal matters. "They did well: It was efficient and people were satisfied by the judgements made," said the official. This system is to this day remembered as efficient in delivering justice to ordinary people as opposed to a corrupt and extremely slow state system that has so far largely failed to impose itself in the North. The VEOs thus engaged in both formal and informal judicial governance practices that are to this day remembered as widely effective.

As noted above, NSAGs (first Tuareg and then VEOs) took over "le pouvoir regalien" – the powers of the state – in Northern Mali during this time. Indeed, they engaged in administrative matters as well as the distribution of goods and aid. Several officials present at the time stated that the NSAGs distributed free electricity and water, as well as distributing all goods available in government depots. "They did this every month. The population didn't lack of anything and the market was always open." One local official reported that all forms of taxation were eliminated and that even price of petrol was reduced by some 30 percent during their rule. "During the brief inter-regnum, many (if not most) people living in Timbuktu appreciated AQIM and Ansar Dine control of the town and surrounding areas since these groups provided services that had previously been lacking".[53] Humanitarian officials also confirmed that these groups further strengthened their reputation as providers simply by allowing international humanitarian agencies to enter territory they controlled and offering them protection while aid was distributed.

Administrative governance was undertaken through local chiefs, in the North through the powerful "Chef de Fraction." Rather than challenging their rule, VEOs chose to reinforce the local chiefs as the latter had authority and legitimacy. "Any authority has to compose with them as if you don't have their blessing you will have some problems," noted an international official. This can be seen as part of AQIM's "clear strategies of integration in the Sahel that are based on a sophisticated reading of the local context".[54] Thus, officials confirm studies underlining that rather than imposing an external governance or engaging in extortion of the population (through the imposition of arbitrary taxes), VEOs during this period governed through recognized local actors and engaged in the distribution of goods. This strategy was clearly outlined by Droukdel in his letters to local leader Belmokhtar: "We should also take into account not to monopolize the political and military stage. We should not be at the forefront … Better for you to be silent and pretend to be a 'domestic' movement that has its own causes and concerns. There is no reason for you to show that we have an expansionary, jihadi, al-Qaida or any

other sort of project".[55] They thus engaged in political and economic governance through the administration and distribution of wealth and aid, often working through local actors rather than trying to replace them.

Finally, NSAGs and in particular VEOs entered the governance of social relations as well as in the longer term projects of education. Al Qaeda-linked groups are known across the world for establishing strict social rules and Northern Mali was no exception. As noted by a local official, they banned smoking and contact between unmarried couples: "All forms of pleasure were forbidden." Interestingly, the top leadership of AQIM expressed opposition to the imposition of such social rules. Indeed, Droukdel chided Belmoktar for "the fact that you prevented women from going out, and prevented children from playing … Your officials need to control themselves".[56]

In education as in other areas, VEOs during this period opted to work through local actors and "established alliances with local marabouts and made them teach their version of Islam." State schools, viewed as "French" schools teaching the Western and former colonial lifestyle and knowledge, were shut down and Koranic schools were set up in the areas, often run by the local "marabouts," a term used for Muslim teachers in West Africa. In a possible sign that Koranic schools gained ground during this period, the Malian government set up a commission in July 2013 "to reflect on the integration of Qur'anic schools in the Malian education system."

Thus, overall NSAGs were involved in all forms of informal governance during the 2012-2013 period from security all the way to education. This was carried out with at least some degree of violence, indeed largely starting as a coercive governance during the takeover and often transforming into a surveillance-based or even possibly a participatory form of governance. They utilized "a preexisting structure of cultural importance that lacked much real power and transformed it for its own purposes, empowering local clients by giving them cars, money, weapons, and bodyguards".[57] As can be noted from the AQ documents retrieved after the retreat of AQIM from towns and cities, it was the clear strategy of the VEOs to leave a lasting "good memory" of their governance (some reports say that Belmokhtar even paid his debts prior to escaping the region) – something they appear to have at least in part succeeded in achieving as even international officials report on their governance as "well administered."

II. Post-2013: The "Return" of the State and ongoing NSAG Informal Governance

In order to draw lessons learned from the Northern Malian experience of 2012-2013, it is important to examine the state and international responses on NSAG governance following their ousting. Indeed, the responses of the state – largely inadequate in terms of introducing direct state governance in large sections of northern Mali – has served to reinforce the narrative that this area was overall "well administered" by NSAGs.

The Malian state, supported by the international community, largely ignored the informal governance practices undertaken by NSAGs, and advocated the establishment of formal state governance throughout the territory. "There was a rejection of what others had brought," commented a local official. Indeed, formally the state advocated a return of a formal judicial system, the re-opening of state run schools, and the deployment of administrators (prefects, sub-prefects, and mayors) and security forces (firstly the armed forces, then when possible law enforcement).

The state has however so far failed to ensure such governance beyond the main towns and cities and, in the case of Kidal, even within a main city. Indeed, much of northern Mali remains in the hands of a variety of armed groups, some of them allied to the government, some of them neutral, some of them designated as international terrorist groups (JNIM) or allied to them. Kidal is entirely controlled by the allied CMA (Coordination of Azawad Movements) and never really saw a "return of the state." Indeed, in 2013 the armed group in control (then the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)) handed over the governor's building and the state and radio buildings to state actors in a symbolic ceremony that was not followed by a real deployment of governance. To this day, the governor is described by an international official as "hostage in his own house: he has no security, no authority."

In terms of security, a variety of armed groups patrol areas and set up checkpoints across the main roads and supply routes (MSRs). In the Timbuktu region alone, a local official reported 46 checkpoints controlled by NSAGs, which also control at least one border crossing into Algeria. Some armed groups even give out their own identity card which they argue is more recognized than the official state card at checkpoints in the area. Armed groups also indirectly guarantee security of some humanitarian actors, thus gaining further political capital amidst the population which see them as securing the provision of increasingly needed aid. They also provide security for medical staff – at times state medical staff – to visit areas during epidemics for example. Finally, VEOs have been known to dismantle checkpoints by other armed groups extorting money from civilians, further reinforcing their image as providers rather than exploiters.

They also continue to provide some degrees of justice. Three detention facilities have been identified run by NSAGs in Northern Mali, although one has been shut down and the largest one is believed by international officials to hold only eight detainees. In terms of judicial proceedings, even actors accused of being members of terrorist organizations have returned to carry out judgements, including Houka Houka, known for his particularly harsh sentences during the 2012-2013 occupation of Northern Mali. Koranic schools continue to be established although the link to NSAGs and VEOs in particular is unclear. NSAG governance thus continues in a variety of forms in northern Mali, more than six years after AQIM and its partners were ousted from major towns and cities.
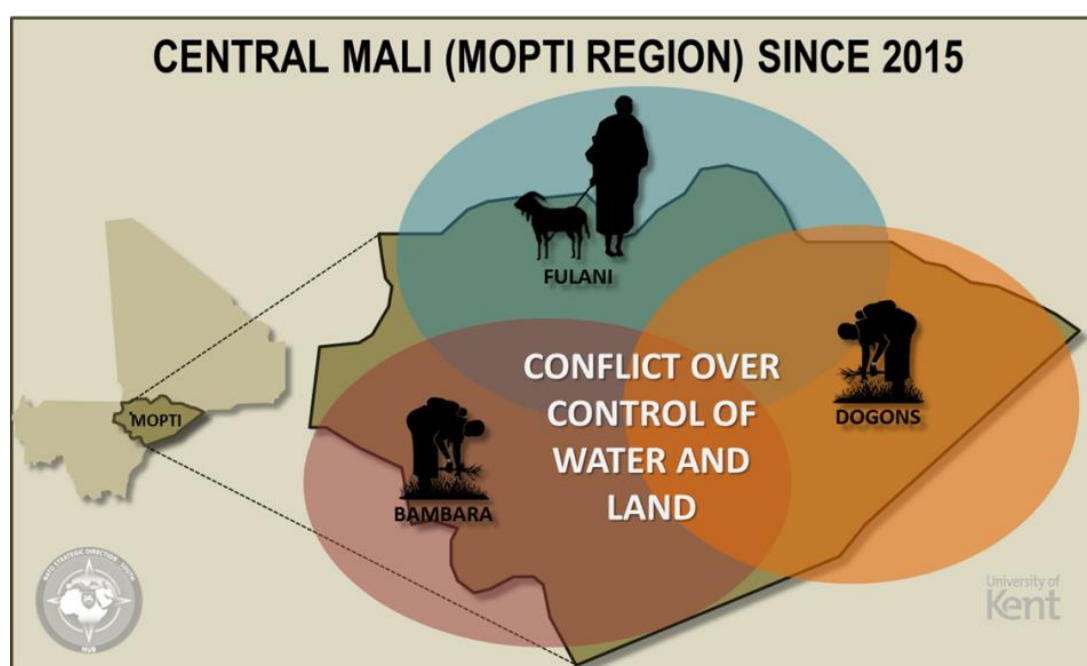
b. CENTRAL MALI SINCE 2015

The second case study focuses on central Mali and more specifically on the Mopti region. As in the north, factors such as poor governance have promoted the arrival of these groups. However, unlike the north, the center has been the theater of conflicts mainly due to the distribution and use of natural resources. Increased pressure on land due to climate change, population growth and changing population distribution has led to differences between farmers and herders, who are fighting for the use of the same lands, the former to grow their crops, the latter for cattle grazing. Indeed, without reducing this to an ethnic-based conflict, analysts have underlined the important rivalry between pastoralists (Fulani) and sedentary populations (Dogons and Bambaras). So "in Mopti, the conflict has a more communal dimension, in which individuals organize themselves along a shared identity, that includes but is not limited to ethnicity".[58]

It is not however so much the rivalry over natural resources as such, but the failure of conflict resolution systems that turn simple tensions into community conflicts. A dual system of conflict resolution, local/traditional on the one side and Bamako-based on the other, offers the losing party of any procedure the opportunity to

escape its final resolution by navigating between the two systems. The lack of enforceability of the traditional justice had pushed those wealthy enough to afford the costs of the formal justice to seek redress before judiciary. "Formal justice only speaks the truth when one pays" or "Judicial power equals economic power which equals corruption" are common impressions in Mopti area.[59] As a result, many disputes over natural resources remain unsolved. Impunity and the resulting sense of injustice reinforce the public's belief that each community must take responsibility for redressing the harm suffered.

This region was long off the radar of international counterterrorism efforts, although it is now clear that the security concerns of the centre are as pressing as those in the north. "The main ethnic groups of the Pays Dogon – Fulani and Dogon – have clashed violently for years. Tensions rose as the Dogon accused the Fulani of supporting radical movements, and the Fulani countered by accusing the Dogon of colluding with the security forces to oppress the pastoralist community", resulting in the significant internal displacement of people.[60] The region of Mopti now accommodates the vast majority (70%) of IDPs in Mali.[61] International officials warn of a likely spill over into neighbouring areas, even countries. In an encouraging sign however, in August 2019 armed groups linked to the two communities signed a ceasefire and promised to restore freedom of travel in the area.[62] Adding to this, is the presence of VEOs in the region. The main VEO present in the Mopti region since 2015 is the Macina Liberation Front (FLM) of Katiba Macina, which in March 2017 joined JNIM. Its founder, Amadou Koufa, a Fulani radical preacher coming from the Mopti region who travelled to the Middle East and Afghanistan, latched onto feelings of discrimination and injustice among the Fulani communites to call for the restoration of their community's former greatness.[63] "The FLM can be characterized as an opportunistic movement" (Spotlight, Pauline LeRoux, 2019). It has emphasized its domestic roots and downplayed its ties to global jihadist groups, following thus Droukdel's strategy. So while appropriating the grievances of the Fulanis, the Katiba Macina started to offer alternatives in areas of state absence or poor governance. They began to implement basic social services (justice, security, economy and education), while applying the religious principles of social and judicial equality.

CENTRAL MALI (MOPTI REGION) SINCE 2015
FULANI
CONFLICT OVER CONTROL OF WATER AND LAND
DOGONS
BAMBARA
MOPTI
University of Kent

Importantly, aside from Katiba Macina, other armed groups are present in the region, in particular the self-defense militia Dan Na Ambassagou. This group, created in 2016 for the Dogon community, boasts highly effective members with a training camp for fighters trained are former soldiers. They also share the territory of Mopti region with other groups of local 'hunters', referred to as Dozo. It is important to note that jihadist and local armed groups occupy more or less the same territories and their areas of influence are overlapping.

NSAGs present themselves as protectors of local communities in areas where the state is absent or where the state has harassed the population. Katiba Macina for example claims to be protecting the Fulani community. Indeed, even when attacking soldiers or other armed groups, the VEO claims to be fighting to protect or avenge the Fulani. In March this year, they announced that an attack against an army base at Dioura in Mopti was "revenge for crimes committed against the Fulani, and a response to 'heinous crimes' by the security forces and pro-government militias".[64]

The Dan Na Ambassagou group meanwhile are believed to have several hundred fighters available to, they contend, defend the territorial integrity of Dogon country against enemies. "Our mission is not to maintain an ethnic war, it is to secure the entire Dogon Country, where the state is almost non-existent in certain areas, because, there are no sous-prefets, no administration, nor army".[65] Moreover, a local group called the Sevare – Gao Fondaa movement said on September 2 2019 that "travel to the north over land now takes two weeks, while banditry, sexual assault and other armed attacks have increased".[66] An inhabitant of Mopti recently said that the militia represented the only form of security for many Dogon villages.

Even though formal judicial institutions played a marginal role in dispute resolution before the arrival of VEOs, the latter have now explicitly banned the population from resorting to it. Very often they have forced traditional authorities to implement their decisions or have substituted themselves to these authorities, using their interpretation of Sharia law as a basis. Anyone who violates their regulations is arrested and sanctioned according to this interpretation. Some reports state that VEOs have executed criminals or punished corrupt officials,[67] while others report them engaging in public lashings.[68] However according to officials on the ground, VEO judicial governance appears to have the support of at least part of the population and they appear to be also involved in dispute resolution that parties willingly bring to them. Executions overall appear to be limited to state officials, including village chiefs, imams, mayors, and administrators, for their alleged collaboration with the security forces, according to interviewees.

VEOs are not the only ones involved in justice practices. Dan Na Ambassagou group provides similar judicial governance in its area of influence. A local official in Mopti reported that wrongdoers are brought to the Dan Na Ambassagou group for punishment. These punishments inflicted vary from fines to 'brotherly scoldings,' and they also maintain detention facilities. "You are kept as long as you have not paid the fine." Reoffenders are punished with physical punishment or even death, while those accused of treason are killed.

Central Mali has been and still is one of the poorest regions in Mali. In this context Katiba Macina has clearly offered an alternative to severe poverty, by offering money or goods to their recruits for carrying out different tasks. "It is commonplace that they recruit youth, give them motorcycles and phones and ask them to spy on the communities and relay the information in return".[69]

A new tax or "zakat" has been instituted by the Katiba Macina, stating that every producer pays a portion of any wealth exceeding an established minimum. "Although taxes are a form of governance, zakat is portrayed as a

way to level the socioeconomic differences between groups in Mopti by redistributing goods".[70] In addition to this new tax, they are also involved in the redistribution of the access to natural resources. Pasture areas and agricultural areas are more clearly delimited, the fees that landowners charged herdsmen for the access to the bourgou (pasture areas) are abolished and the seasonal cattle migration has been facilitated by organizing specific migration routes. By doing so the customary distribution of land is challenged.[71]

Armed groups have entered every part of communal life and have placed members of their own group in key administrative bodies. "Katiba Macina is also systematically targeting state symbols: at least three village chiefs or mayors were assassinated in Mopti in early 2017, city halls or custom houses have been attacked, militaries, policemen and judges have also been targeted".[72] Finally, although Katiba Macina discourses are strictly anti-western, the group has allowed humanitarian organizations to operate in their area as long as the western humanitarian organizations respect certain conditions. By doing so they are showing the population that it cares about its well-being. Very often the services delivered by these humanitarian organizations cannot be provided by the armed group (especially in the case of the health care providers).[73]

By July 2019, up to 65 percent of shut down schools in the country were in Central Mali, with some 600 schools shut down, representing nearly a third of all schools in Mopti, according the UN's Children agency, UNICEF.[74] This is largely the result of "intercommunal violence and the presence of armed groups". Other analysts, however, note that security was not always the reason for the closing down of schools, stating that public state schools are seen by the armed groups dispensing a "Western education" (Institute for security studies, 2017). One quarter of shut down schools in Mopti have nonetheless reopened recently.[75]

To make up for the absence of public schools, local and international officials reported that Koranic schools have been set up. The schools tend to be more accessible and flexible because of their significant number and their geographical spread. As a result, international officials state that these schools are better adapted to the needs of a pastoral population and its nomadic way of life, but there is no control over what education is being provided. In the Mopti region, children are also moved from one Koranic teacher to another for three week periods, according to a local official

The imposition of strict social norms and rules has also become an important element of governance by NSAGs in central Mali, according to numerous international organizations on the ground.[76] With the strict interpretation of the sharia, women and children have been the most affected by these normative rules. Women face a long list of interdictions: they are no longer allowed to work and to sell their goods on the market, to search for firewood, to do the laundry or bath themselves in the river. Travel restrictions have been imposed on women along with strict dress codes. Men and children are no longer allowed to play football, drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes. No music can be played in public and celebrations have to be modest. The celebration of marriages and baptisms are prohibited.[77]

Finally, international officials confirmed that, even though marriages have always been used to establish long-term links between families (especially on the level of clan leaders), intermarriages with 'foreigners' of armed groups are undertaken as a form of gratitude for security offered by them. These marriages are practiced at all clan levels.

State absence or inefficiency have provided a fertile ground for informal governance of a variety of NSAGs in central Mali, from VEOs to self-defense militias. Insecurity and the lack of functioning judicial provisions in

particular have supported the increasing presence and role of NSAGs in the life of the citizens of central Mali, offering them a starting point from which to expand into political and economic administration and the governance of social rules and support. Nevertheless, in central Mali, NSAG governance has been far less structured that it was in the North in 2012-2013 with a variety of groups with very different agendas (Katiba Macina, Dan Na Ambassagou) engaging in certain forms of governance but not others. The question is what kind of challenges such a diffuse informal governance poses to states and international actors and whether this is likely to be the type of NSAG governance we will witness increasingly in the future.

4. CONCLUSIONS

NSAG informal governance is a crucial challenge facing the Sahel and there is urgent need for national and international policymakers to recognize the salience and complexity of this question. Theoretically-grounded research which engages in primary data collection and interviews is essential to increase international understanding of a phenomenon affecting the lives of tens of millions of people across Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger and could spill over into the broader region. Indeed, large-scale examples of NSAG governance such as in Northern Mali in 2012 are not unique phenomena, and local and international actors warn that given similar conditions a new takeover of large geographical areas is possible in the future. Furthermore, past examples of NSAG informal governance are a key component in VEO propaganda and it is important to be able to establish the extent to which the narratives put forward by these groups actually reflect what occurred on the ground.

Of central importance, therefore, is how to respond to NSAG informal governance. This primarily concerns local and national administrations but also the numerous regional and international political and military actors active in the region. This research project and the essential feedback received from numerous regional and international organizations point to three key recommendations for actors seeking to address NSAG informal governance.

Firstly, this research demonstrates that any analysis of NSAGs in the Sahel needs to go beyond the current narrow focus on counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism, and recognize that NSAG informal governance is a consequence of long-standing conflicts over legitimacy and governance structures across the region. Such a broader understanding demands that any response be deeply contextualized: NSAG informal governance carried out by a mostly criminal organization cannot be dealt with in the same manner as governance carried out by a VEO or by a self-defense militia. The historical context of the areas in which the governance occurs is also important to be able to understand why certain groups – based on ethnic divisions for example – may be seen as more legitimate in their attempts to govern populations than others. Such an understanding requires a constant monitoring of the forms of NSAG informal governance identified in the paper – security, justice, political and economic administration and social rules and support – to alert national and international actors to the increased prominence of NSAG or indeed to their potential takeover of areas. Thus, a first policy recommendation is that an ongoing monitoring system should be undertaken by national and/or international organizations to assess the evolution and spread of NSAG informal governance in the Sahel.

Secondly, as argued here, at the heart of how to respond to NSAG informal governance is the legitimacy and the capacity to govern across very large areas populated by a variety of groups with differing political visions.

This then opens up the difficult issue of how and if some NSAGs and their structures of informal governance may be integrated into formal state-sanctioned governance. Based on this research, three potential policy responses can be identified.

1. **Dismantling:** The current strategy of states, supported by intergovernmental organizations, has largely been aimed at the dismantling of NSAG informal governance structures and their replacement by legal state structures. However, local and international officials interviewed for this report warned that expecting states in the Sahel to take over all areas which are currently governed (with varying degrees of success) by NSAGs is an unrealistic demand to make on institutions which are struggling with a lack of security, funding and high levels of corruption. This could also lead to a backlash from the local population who may see NSAGs as more legitimate than the state. If this strategy is pursued it requires a clear and well-resourced plan which takes into account the state's legitimacy deficit in numerous areas and communities.

2. **Replacement:** A second strategy could involve the acceptance of informal governance structures as temporary necessities which are to be slowly replaced by formal state institutions as state-building continues. The danger of such a strategy is that the longer the informal structures remain, the more likely they are to gain legitimacy with local communities and the more difficult it is for state institutions to be accepted by these communities. This strategy would nonetheless avoid a governance vacuum that has occurred in the past in the "dismantling" approach.

3. **Integration:** A third strategy which local and international officials identified as potentially fruitful is the integration of NSAG informal governance structures by the state which could allow for more inclusive forms of governance which benefit from greater legitimacy among local communities. This would offer the advantage of avoiding a governance vacuum and allow for the establishment of hybrid governance structures which accept local traditions while ensuring their respect of international human rights standards. The difficulty of such a strategy however is how to establish which NSAGs should be integrated and which should be banned. International officials warned of the danger of allowing NSAGs, particularly VEOs, which have carried out atrocities and other human rights violations to be legalized and legitimized thus further victimizing local communities who have suffered under their rule. Such a strategy also required a fine-grained knowledge of which groups actually have the support of local communities and which groups are simply imposing their rule through violence. Nevertheless, steps have been taken toward the integration of governance structures (security and justice in particular) of signatory groups in Mali, for example, potentially offering an example of how such a strategy can be undertaken.

Finally, any response by international actors needs to be coordinated among the numerous national, regional, and international actors already involved in the area. Each actor should not only contribute with its specific expertise – regional organizations for example pointed at NATO as being able to support national governments and regional organizations in setting up early warning systems – but they need to coordinate such interventions to avoid duplication or, worse still, contradiction.

To conclude, there is a need for all actors to understand and engage with NSAGs from beyond the narrow remit of counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism so as to recognize that any intervention requires a far more encompassing response which takes into account the widespread informal governance structures and practices undertaken by these groups in the Sahel today.

LIST OF REFERENCES

1. Krasner, S. and Risse, T. (2014). External Actors, State-Building, and Service Provision in Areas of Limited Statehood: Introduction. *Governance*, [online] 27(4), p.545.
2. Clunan, A. and Trinkunas, H. (2008). *"Ungoverned Spaces? Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty".* Paper presented at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, San Francisco, [online] p.2. Calhoun.nps.edu. Available at: https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/58530 [Accessed 19 Apr. 2019]
3. Arjona, A. (2016). *Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Colombian Civil War*. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.2.
4. Arjona, A. (2009). *Armed Groups' Governance in Civil War: A Synthesis*. [online] p.8. Anamarjona.net. Available at: http://anamarjona.net/docs/2008%20Arjona.Synthesis_rebel_governance.pdf [Accessed 7 Mar. 2019].
5. Ibid., p.9.
6. Mampilly, Z. (2007). *Stationary Bandits: Understanding Rebel Governance*. [Online] p.96. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles. Available at: http://pages.vassar.edu/mampilly/files/2013/11/Mampilly-Dissertation-Final.pdf [Accessed 17 April 2019], p.96.
7. Arjona, A. (2016), p.9.
8. Mampilly, Z. (2007), p.90.
9. Ibid., p.15-16.
10. Ibid., p.61.
11. Michel, F. (1982). *The Subject and Power*. [online] p.220. The University of Chicago Press. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197 [Accessed 8 May 2019].
12. Arjona, A. (2009), p.2-3.
13. Mampilly, Z. (2007), p.56.
14. Ibid., p.19.
15. Campana, A. and Ducol, B. (2011). Rethinking Terrorist Safe Havens: Beyond a State-Centric Approach. *Civil Wars*, [online] 13(4), p.402. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13698249.2011.629868?scroll=top&needAccess=true [Accessed 8 Apr. 2019].
16. Mampilly, Z. (2007)
17. Ibid., p.54.
18. Zahar, Marie-Joelle. 2001. "Protégés, Clients, Cannon Fodder: Civil-Militia Relations in Internal Conflicts." In Civilians in War, edited bySimon Chesterman, 43-66. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
19. Arjona, A. (2016), p.7.
20. Campana, A. and Ducol, B. (2011), p.408.
21. Arjona, A. (2016)
22. Mampilly, Z. (2007)
23. United Nations. Undocs.org. (2019). *Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. Report of the Secretary-General*. [online] p.9. Available at: https://undocs.org/S/2019/371 [Accessed 9 Jun. 2019].
24. Ibid., p.11.
25. Desgrais, N., Guichaoua, Y. and Lebovich, A. (2018). *Unity is the exception. Alliance formation and de-formation among armed actors in Northern Mali*. [online] p.660.Taylor & Francis. Available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09592318.2018.1488403 [Accessed 6 May 2019].
26. Strazzari, F. (2015) "Azawad and the Rights of Passage: The Role of Illicit Trade in the Logic of Armed Group Formation in Northern Mali." NOREF: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre. Available at: https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Strazzari_NOREF_Clingendael_Mali_Azawad_Dec2014.pdf (Last Accessed on 16 September 2019). P. 2
27. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. (2019). The Complex and Growing Threat of Militant Islamist Groups in the Sahel – Africa Center for Strategic Studies. [online] Available at: https://africacenter.org/spotlight/the-complex-and-growing-threat-of-militant-islamist-groups-in-the-sahel/ [Accessed 15 Mar. 2019].
28. United Nations. Undocs.org. (2019). Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel. Report of the Secretary-General. [online]
    Available at: https://undocs.org/S/2019/371 [Accessed 9 Jun. 2019].

29. International Crisis Group. (2018). Drug Trafficking, Violence and Politics in Northern Mali. [online] Available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/267-narcotrafic-violence-et-politique-au-nord-du-mali [Accessed 10 May 2019].

30. The Economist. (2019). *States in the Sahel have unleashed ethnic gangs with guns.* [online] Available at: https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2019/05/02/states-in-the-sahel-have-unleashed-ethnic-gangs-with-guns [Accessed 2 May 2019].

31. Southworld.net. (2016). Burkina Faso. The Koglweogo's rough justice - News & views from emerging countries. [online] Available at: https://www.southworld.net/burkina-faso-the-koglweogos-rough-justice/ [Accessed 23 Mar. 2019].

32. Dupuy, R. and Quidelleur, T. (2018). *Self-Defence Movements in Burkina Faso: Diffusion and Structuration of Koglweogo Groups - Noria.* [online] Noria. Available at: https://www.noria-research.com/self-defence-movements-in-burkina-faso-diffusion-and-structuration-of-koglweogo-groups/ [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019].

33. Southworld.net. (2016).

34. Dupuy, R. and Quidelleur, T. (2018)

35. Strazzari, F. (2015). Crisis Group. (2018)

36. Freeman, C. (2012). Revealed: how Saharan caravans of cocaine help to fund al-Qaeda in terrorists' North African domain. [online] Telegraph.co.uk. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/mali/9829099/Revealed-how-Saharan-caravans-of-cocaine-help-to-fund-al-Qaeda-in-terrorists-North-African-domain.html [Accessed 6 Jun. 2019].

37. Crisis Group. (2018)

38. Lacher, W. (2012). Organized Crime and Conflict in the Sahel-Sahara Region. [online] Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/2012/09/13/organized-crime-and-conflict-in-sahel-sahara-region-pub-49360 [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019]. Strazzari, F. (2015)

39. Strazzari, F. (2015).), p.8.

40. Hahonou, E. (2016). Stabilizing Niger: The Challenges of Bridging Local, National and Global Security Interests. [online] p.7. Pure.diis.dk. Available at: http://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/669407/DIIS_WP_2016_9.pdf [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019].

41. Sounaye, A. (2012). Heirs of the Sheikh Izala and its Appropriation of Usman Dan Fodio in Niger. Cahiers d'études africaines, (206-207), pp.427-447.

42. Hahonou, E. (2015). Niger: Regional Conflict, State Abandonment, and the Rise of Non-State Security Providers. [online] p.40.Files.ethz.ch. Available at: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/189843/diis_report_01_protection_and_insecurity_beyond_the_state-web.pdf [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019].

43. Hahonou, E. (2016), p.7.

44. Hahonou, E. (2015), p.40.

45. Council on Foreign Relations. (2013). Denying Jihadists Safe Haven in Mali. [online] Available at: https://www.cfr.org/blog/denying-jihadists-safe-haven-mali [Accessed 19 Sep. 2019]. Boas, M. (2015) Crime, Coping, and Resistance in the Mali-Sahel Periphery, Bøås, M. (2015). Crime, Coping, and Resistance in the Mali-Sahel Periphery. African Security, 8(4), pp.299-319.

46. Desgrais, N., Guichaoua, Y. and Lebovich, A. (2018), p.660.

47. Council on Foreign Relations. (2013).

48. Boas, M. (2015) Crime, Coping, and Resistance in the Mali-Sahel Periphery, Bøås, M. (2015). Crime, Coping, and Resistance in the Mali-Sahel Periphery. African Security, 8(4).

49. Human Rights Watch. (2012). Mali: Islamist Armed Groups Spread Fear in North. [online] Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/09/25/mali-islamist-armed-groups-spread-fear-north [Accessed 19 Sep. 2019]

50. Boas, M. (2015), p.318.

51. OHCHR. (2012). Top UN official condemns amputations, human rights violations in northern Mali. [online] Available at: https://news.un.org/en/story/2012/09/419792 [Accessed 19 Sep. 2019]. Humans Rights Watch (2012)

52. Callimachi, R. (2013). In Timbuktu, al-Qaida left behind a manifesto. [online] Pulitzer.org. Available at: https://www.pulitzer.org/files/2014/international-reporting/callimachi/04callimachi2014.pdf [Accessed 19 Sep. 2019]

53. Sandor, A. (2017). Insecurity, the Breakdown of Social Trust, and Armed Actor Governance in Central and Northern Mali. [online] Dandurand.uqam.ca. Available at: https://dandurand.uqam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Sandor-english-Report.pdf [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019]

54. Boas, M. (2015), p. 310.
55. Callimachi, R. (2013)
56. Ibid.
57. Boas, M. (2015), p. 310.
58. Clingendael. (2018). Under the gun: Resource Conflicts and Embattled Traditional Authorities in Central Mali. [online] Available at: https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2018/under-the-gun/ [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019], p. 24.
59. Clingendael. (2018), p. 22.
60. Clingendael .(2018), p. 25.
61. UNICEF. (2019). Protracted crisis in central Mali impacting all aspects of children's lives. [online] Unicef.org. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/protracted-crisis-central-mali-impacting-all-aspects-childrens-lives [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019]
62. France 24. (2019). Feuding ethnic groups in Central Mali sign ceasefire accord during PM's visit. [online] Available at: https://www.france24.com/en/20190806-mali-ceasefire-accord-boubou-cisse-fulani-dogon [Accessed 11 Jun. 2019]
63. IFRI. (2018). Macina: Mali's second insurgency - Ultima Ratio. [online] Ultima Ratio. Available at: http://ultimaratio-blog.org/archives/8676 [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019]
64. BBC Monitoring. (2019). BBC Monitoring – Essential Media Insight. [online] Monitoring.bbc.co.uk. Available at: https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c200pstp [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019]
65. Malijet.com. (2019). Malijet Insécurité au pays DOGON : Dana Ambassagou ou la Résistance Bamako Mali. [online] Available at: https://malijet.com/actualite-politique-au-mali/flash-info/231832-insecurite-au-pays-dogon-dana-ambassagou-ou-la-resistance.html [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019]
66. Dailybrief.oxan.com. (2019). Mali insecurity disrupts north-south travel. [online] Available at: https://dailybrief.oxan.com/Analysis/ES246217/Mali-insecurity-disrupts-north-south-travel [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019]
67. Clingendael. (2018), p. 41.
68. FIDH. (2019). Central Mali: Perpetrators of Ogassagou massacre should be arrested and sentenced to stop the spiral of violence. [online] International Federation for Human Rights. Available at: https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/mali/central-mali-perpetrators-of-ogassagou-massacre-should-be-arrested [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019]
69. Clingendael. (2018), p. 35
70. Ibid., p.34.
71. Simon-Skjodt Center. (2018). Regions at Risk: Preventing Mass Atrocities in Mali. [online] Ushmm.org. Available at: https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Mali_Report_English_FINAL_April_2018.pdf [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019], p.10.
72. IFRI. (2018)
73. International Crisis Group. (2019). Speaking to the 'Bad Gays': Toward Dialogue with Central Mali's Jihadists. [online] D2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net. Available at: https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/276-speaking-with-the-bad-guys_0.pdf [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019], p. 20.
74. UNICEF. (2019). Protracted crisis in central Mali impacting all aspects of children's lives
75. UNICEF. (2019)
76. Di Razza, N. (2018). Protecting Civilians in the Context of Violent Extremism: The dilemmas of UN Peacekeeping in Mali. [online] ipinst.org. Available at: https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/1810_POC-in-the-Context-of-Violent-Extremism.pdf [Accessed 20 Sep. 2019]
77. Di Razza, N. (2018), p. 10.