

# DYNAMICS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AFRICA:



Conflict Ecosystems, Political Ecology and the Spread of the Proto-State

Research Paper



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# TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data
AML	Anti-money-laundering
AQIM	Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb
ASWJ	Ahlul Sunna wa Jamma
AU	African Union
CB	Crisis Bureau
CPPRI	Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Responsive Institutions
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
ILLP	Initiatives for Land, Lives and Peace
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
JAS	Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adati wal-Jihad
JNIM	Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen
MNLA	Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad
PVE	Prevention of Violent Extremism
RBA	Regional Bureau for Africa
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VDP	Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie
VE	Violent extremism
VEG	Violent extremist group

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global violent extremist groups (VEGs) Al-Qaida and Daesh have spread into all the regions of study in this report—Sahel (Liptako-Gourma), Lake Chad Basin, DR Congo, Somalia and Mozambique—and many local groups have pledged their loyalty to one or the other.

Despite persistent and costly national and international efforts, States in most regions seem not to be winning the competition with them for control of their territory.

We observe that:

these groups operate in the complex, shifting **conflict ecosystems** of these regions;

their progress must be viewed in the context of the relationships between **populations and their ecosystems** as well as between competing political elites; and

they seem to be evolving from small bands towards **proto-state competitors** for communities' allegiance.

We also observe that VEGs in these regions are both global and local, both ideological and economic.

Reform champions (and VEGs) operate within a wider political economy characterized by the “business models” of patrimonial elites. Insecurity, poverty and violence are no accident of limited capacity, but a product of elite interests. These elites depend on the persistence of identity group grievances and fears to bolster their positions—grievances they may create as well as manipulate. That context means that agendas of reform, modernization or countering instability and violence need to be realistic, reflecting the true room for reform within the balance of power among these competing forces. That, in turn, entails an up-to-date understanding of what enables or impedes the expansion and entrenchment of VEGs.

VEGs prey on local grievances, which cement their foothold within aggrieved communities.

Through their local presence, they generate the (usually illicit) revenues required to operate group structures. Those activities bring them into contact with purely criminal groups, with whom they share an interest in weakening state capacity in the areas they control, regardless of their different motivations and ultimate goals.

Common threads running through these conflicts include:

- **remoteness** from the capital city (and a resulting sense of marginalization, exacerbated by a capital-centric allocation of state resources);
- a sense of **unfairness**, discrimination or victimization among communities (which is readily appropriated for VEG recruitment), often related to abuses by state forces or associated militias;



- perceptions of **corruption** (in the broadest sense of the word) among a wide spectrum of elites and power-holders;
- grievances over (perceptions of) unfair **land** management, which is inextricably linked to water resource access, and associated land degradation (exacerbated by climate change); and
- slow or ineffective state provision of **justice** and dispute resolution.



VEGs also take advantage of environmental degradation and unfair land management to position themselves as righters of wrongs, regulators of access to natural resources and providers of justice and administrative services, as well as livelihood substitutes. Conflict analysis should include not only the political dynamics between various identities, livelihoods, political groups and violent mobilizers but also the “political ecology” relationship between human populations and their ecosystems.

Each place is different and each has its own story. However, the situation seems to be generally evolving towards effective competition with the State. The strategic threat may be shifting from the radicalization of individuals—as explored in UNDP’s ground-breaking *Journey to Extremism*<sup>1</sup>—to include this new dimension.



As they get bigger and richer, some of these groups build local structures that are very like a State. Indeed, they begin to compete with Governments not only through coercion but also by promising some of the most essential local services that people want, like safety and swift decisions on disputes. They may do so cruelly and oppressively, but even that may initially be attractive to communities that are weary of lawlessness and insecurity. This is more evident in longer-standing groups like Al-Shabaab in Somalia than in newer groups like those in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, while those in the Sahel are developing towards the type of capacity seen in Somalia. None is yet a “caliphate,” as Daesh (unjustifiably) proclaimed itself to be, nor are any yet in power like the Taliban in Afghanistan, but the response to threat they pose needs a strategy that acknowledges this new state of affairs.



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These local VEGs claiming inspiration from ideologies espoused by Al-Qaida or Daesh reflect a competitive version of a “mediated state”.<sup>2</sup> Here it is not the State alone, but also more deeply structured local VEGs, that negotiate with (other) non-state sources of authority to provide functions of government. Indeed, the more deeply structured local VEGs have many of the characteristics of a “proto-state”, as originally identified in pre-modern evolving structures but more recently typified by Daesh.<sup>3</sup>

It is important not to imagine local VEGs as one-dimensional opportunistic conflict entrepreneurs. Their ideological grounding instead affects their strategy and structure. Insurgent groups have often associated with terms such as “warlord”, “patrimonial”, or “Big Man”. Some local VEGs carry the name of their central figure (e.g. *Katiba Macina* or “Koufa’s Boys”) but there is also some indication that VEGs are shifting structurally from being classic “Big Man” patron-client organizations to “Big Idea” formations that derive their cohesion from ideological rather than personal alignment.



Deeper and more resilient VEG structures require higher revenues. A detailed understanding of their sources of income might enable disruption of those income streams. Similarly, understanding how VEGs use the money they acquire could enable further disruption of their “business models”. However, that disruption will only be effective if it avoids undermining the legitimate livelihoods and social fabric of specific communities.

VEGs’ state-like behaviour poses a fresh challenge to existing authorities to identify strategic options to hold areas under Government control and retake areas under VEG control. Where the State has been experienced as abusive or ineffective, however, “the return of the State” presents a challenge: “the

return of what kind of State”? Over-militarized responses may indeed exacerbate the problem.

The leadership of these local groups have chosen to affiliate with a sanctioned global group. They may do so for a range of reasons. Undermining the local strategy of global VEGs requires an understanding of the cost-benefit calculations of local elites who join—or hold back from joining—global VEGs.

However, a reductionist picture of these groups as purely economic actors—or, indeed as purely grievance entrepreneurs—would lose sight of the ideological aspects of their strategy, objectives and appeal, through which they filter local grievances to give them advantages in the competition with other elites. Although each group is different and its messages and objectives are specific to its context, VEGs’ positioning as part of global ideological movements is a common theme.

Communities’ responses to VEGs’ strategies are also shaped by Government policies, resource allocations and messages. Limited capacity to monitor the impact of VEGs makes it harder to adapt policies and messages appropriately.



Women and men experience weaknesses in governance, and the violence and economic dislocation wrought by VEG activities, differently. They often play, or are expected to play, different social roles and experience ecosystem degradation differently, and also have different roles in VEGs. Women and young people—both girls and boys—also come to understand their situations through different means or media and their agency when responding to these situations also varies. These differences are important when identifying and implementing response strategies.

There are also gender (and generational) differences in the way that individuals respond to the trauma of VEGs' depredations. That trauma is poorly monitored at present. However, locally adapted sustained support will likely be essential if perverse coping strategies are not to exacerbate tensions and reinforce cycles of violence.

Countering and preventing VEGs does not mean departing from the agenda for accountable and responsive governance. The need is not to do different things, but to do things differently, in a way that is more attuned to the political economy, that challenges VEG business models more effectively and is more alert to ecological constraints, more aware of different impacts on people of different identities and better coordinated.

## Summary recommendations

To frustrate VEGs' evolving strategies, a response must first invest in **understanding** the context and the challenge and then **act** to implement the strategies that emerge. In particular, this includes attention to illicit financial flows, as they affect VEGs, and responses to the trauma that VEGs inflict. As noted above, both gender and generation are factors that need to be taken into account during both the analysis and action stages.

## Understand

- Invest in a careful, gender-aware<sup>i</sup> **political economy** analysis of the processes that enable VEGs to expand at the local, subnational, national, regional and global levels (including Government actions and how they are experienced) and constantly update this analysis. This will include the five dimensions<sup>ii</sup> identified above, at the very least.

- i. Meaning at least reflecting the different experiences, agencies and opportunities of women and men, including their formal and informal rights and powers.
- ii. Remoteness, unfairness (including abuses by state agencies), corruption, land management and justice provision.

- In particular, support a gender-aware **political ecology** analysis in areas threatened by environmental degradation to anticipate the gender-differentiated effects of climate disruptions on livelihoods, violent mobilization and the bargains struck by local elites.
- Invest in continuing analysis of the **ideological and grievance-based** messaging that VEGs use in each theatre and of its effect on women and men (disaggregated by age), including local-language social media and other informal channels of communication. Build on the capacity to deliver alternative messages and monitor their effect.

## Act

- Apply realistic **strategic** analyses of the true requirements for maintaining Government control of areas and of the opportunities for recapturing territory from the VEG. That strategic analysis needs to go beyond the military-tactical assessment of combat options to consider the political economy of the relevant elites and the communities for which they are the key patrons.
- Review the opportunities to deploy peacebuilding, governance and development-based tools, prioritizing them through a VE lens and adapting them to the challenges of these "conflict ecosystems".
- Explore the scope for supporting religious authorities in mediation at various levels, enhancing the credibility of challenges to VEGs' claims to theological justifications for their violence.

- In particular, build on understandings of **political ecology** by enabling national dialogues to create space for inclusive local “story of place” conversations to explore the economic, ecological, cultural and social significance of localities, bringing generations together and giving genders and other identities the opportunity to engage. This should allow the exploration of opportunities for land restoration that also restores the social fabric and reduces the attractiveness of VEGs as apparent short-term solutions for grievances.
- Track the illicit **financial** flows within and between countries that form the revenues that VEGs depend on, to understand their relationships and identify ways of impeding their incomes without devastating local economies. Draw on this information and an understanding of how VEGs use their money to expand and support strategies that effectively impede VEGs’ financial models without undermining communities’ social or economic prospects.
- Invest in locally appropriate mental health and psychosocial support to tackle **trauma**, using approaches that are adapted to local challenges and community resources.



## Introduction

Violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, and there is no clear definition of it. It is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality or belief system. This study, however, looks specifically at how trends in violent extremism in Africa impact local and regional situations, in particular through linkages to local, regional and global corridors. It starts by observing that certain global violent extremist groups (VEGs), notably Al-Qaida and Daesh, have spread across sub-Saharan Africa since 2010. Unlike other transnational violent extremist currents present elsewhere—such as white nationalism—these global VEGs have been expanding the range of their local affiliates in the continent.

Much detailed material is already available on the dynamics of VEGs. However, recent PVE overviews as yet lack an analysis of the dynamics of local groups, especially their leadership, strategies and their internal coherence in relation to global VEGs. Earlier analysis focused largely—though not exclusively—on the individual member level and the drivers of their induction into VEGs, while attending helpfully to the pre-existing conditions that predisposed potential adherents to recruitment.

UNDP has positioned itself to address the persistence of violent extremism through prevention of violent extremism (PVE) and stabilization programming. In 2017, UNDP produced *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*. That pioneering report strengthened UNDP's role in promoting a development response to violent extremism. Building on the work on PVE, and drawing lessons from Libya and Iraq, UNDP is currently

supporting the stabilization of the Sahel through the establishment of stabilization facilities in the Lake Chad and Liptako-Gourma regions. UNDP has produced contextualized research and evidence-based knowledge that help illuminate the relevant drivers and conflict dynamics that enable VEGs to flourish in the affected African States. This has enabled policymakers to reach a comprehensive understanding of the impact, causes and effects of violent extremism from a macroeconomic perspective.

## Purpose

The nature of the global strategic corridors through which transnational VEGs migrate into fresh areas of interest may not be fully revealed by a focus on individual vulnerability, recruitment and retention. This study therefore aims to understand these processes through a greater focus on the dynamics of groups and their leadership elites. It examines the strategic and operational implications of a shift from radicalized individuals banding together against the State to structured groups that credibly challenge the State.

As far as possible, this analysis therefore seeks to include consideration of transnational crime corridors (environmental resources, drug smuggling, human trafficking etc.), security force deployments (army, police etc.) and administrative deployment (leading to corruption analysis). Where possible, it also notes the impact of state security force actions on the conflict drivers in the study areas and the effect that these have on the local (and transnational and global) dynamics of VEGs.

The report concludes with recommendations for the UN and the international community, state authorities and civil society.

# DEFINITIONS

Below concepts this report uses to categorise groups do not reflect official UN terminology. The terms function as analytical framework to offer a nuanced and contextualized description of the manifold dynamics of groups and actors the report studies. They cater to the fact that groups and actors operate at different geographic and strategic levels, with varying inspirations and aspirations. Hence, this report should be read with the understanding that a contextualized response to violent extremism and terrorism requires regular conflict analyses that take into account the volatile and ever-changing threat picture.

## Violent extremist groups (VEGs)

One key term used widely in the literature and popular reporting is “violent extremism” (VE) and the related term “violent extremist group” (VEG). The UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2015) notes that “violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition. It is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality or system of belief. Definitions of ‘terrorism’ and ‘violent extremism’ are the prerogative of Member States and must be consistent with their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law.”

Some VEGs are also UN designated terrorist organizations; however, such distinctions are set aside for the purposes of this report as they are not relevant for the analysis. A more detailed discussion of definitions is found in annexe D.

## VEGs claiming inspiration from ideologies espoused by Al-Qaida or Daesh

The ideological inspiration of a VEG can vary widely – violent white nationalist groups, Black Axe, or the Red Brigades of the 1970s all conform to the definition understood by most usage. However, the VEGs most relevant to sub-Saharan Africa, whose spread forms the focus of this research, are those which claim inspiration from ideologies espoused by Al-Qaida or Daesh.

## Global, transnational and local VEGs

The paradigmatic global VEGs considered in this report are Al-Qaida and Daesh (the so-called “Islamic State”). These groups aspire to global reach and relevance and have a global agenda and narrative.

Transnational VEGs operate across the recognized borders of States. This may reflect tactical spread (e.g. expansion in search of areas in which to recover, retrain or re-equip) or it may reflect a cross-border theatre of operations. However, their focus is geographically bounded.

Local VEGs operate primarily within the borders of a national state. They may be very local – with operations restricted to a small

area or recruitment limited to a narrow identity group – or they may aspire to national reach, but their perspective remains within the confines of national boundaries.

## Reform champions

The societies and Governments in question are all embarking on a range of reform and modernization agendas. “Reform champions”—the actors driving these changes—are important partners for the international community as the latter seeks to support progress.

## Organized criminal groups and money-laundering

Organized criminal networks and groups are distinguished from insurgent and terrorist groups by their attitudes to the State. Both engage in illicit financial activities. Organized criminal activities may lead to money-laundering—a concept focused on the source of funds, which may then be used for purposes that are not in themselves illegal. In contrast, terrorist groups may receive funds from legitimate sources for purposes that are proscribed. Anti-money-laundering (AML) mechanisms treat both types of transaction as sources of risk to the financial system.



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# DYNAMICS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

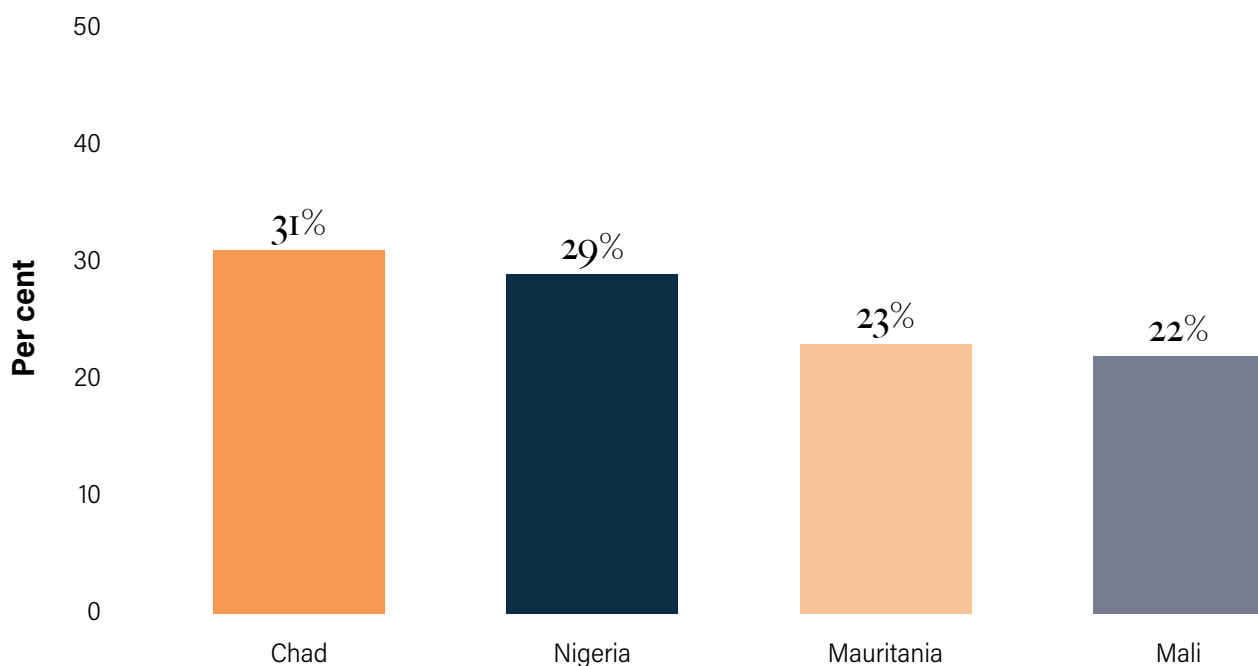
Affiliation with the global VEGs Al-Qaida and Daesh has spread into all the regions of study, with local groups pledging loyalty to one or the other. All these local groups were already operating in the complex and shifting conflict ecosystems of these regions,<sup>4</sup> and their leadership elected to affiliate with a sanctioned global group for a range of reasons (see below). In some cases, these conflict ecosystems are in some cases reflected in Government instability, including some instances of what the UN Secretary-General

referred to in October 2021 as an “epidemic of coups d’état”.<sup>5</sup>

They are also affected by other regional phenomena. “The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) constitutes both a cause and result of the prevailing insecurity and related phenomena, such as armed conflicts, terrorist activities and transnational organized crime, which jeopardize the development prospects in some countries of the Sahel region.”<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 1.**

Military budgets have also grown sharply in many places in 2020, for example.<sup>7</sup>





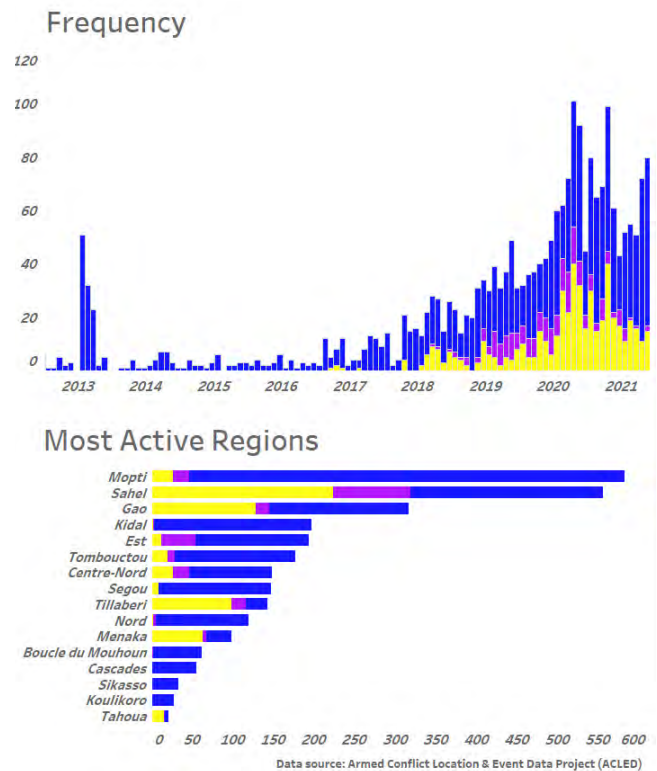
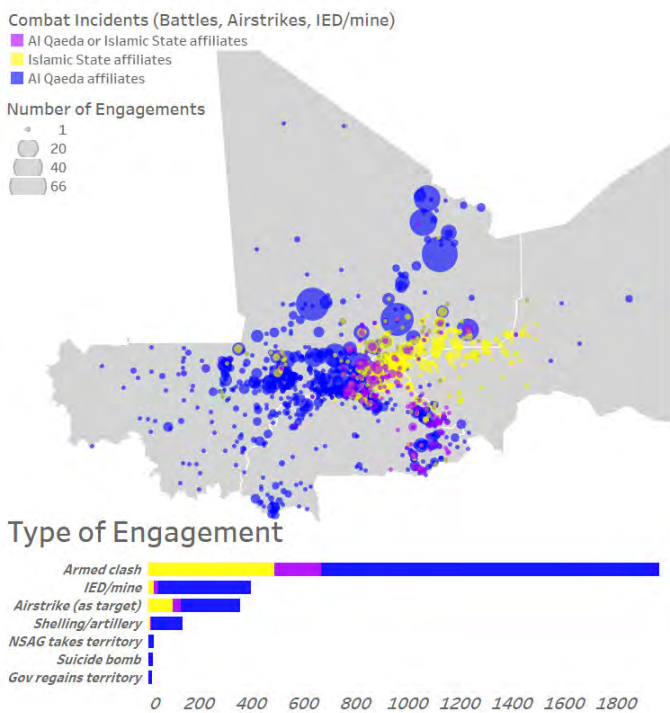
Global VEGs' strategies for local expansion vary. Al-Qaida now seems to take more of a "franchise" approach, providing little support or guidance to its affiliates and making relatively few claims on them. Daesh, in contrast, seems to have a relatively more direct approach, in some cases, and provides more resources for some of its affiliates and attempts to exert greater control on them. These resources may include funding; they are widely reported to include training and foreign fighters who are dispatched to "support" local groups.<sup>8</sup> This may in turn contribute to the greater lethality demonstrated by Daesh affiliates: local custom imposes less restraint on militants from outside, and local fighters come to hold kinship in less regard as foreign fighters' approaches become normalized within the group.

The data in the graphics below are taken from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project data set. This reports both deaths and incidents consistently across time, using a transparent methodology that draws on material from across the theatres of interest. This allows for credible comparisons of trends and changes in levels of violence. Other data sets (e.g. the Uppsala Conflict Data Program) constitute important sources of information on fatalities but they do not currently cover non-fatal violent events, so the quantitative material here draws on ACLED material for consistent overviews.

**FIGURE 2.**

Combat incidents in Central Sahel

**Central Sahel**



## BOX 1. MALI

Mali exemplifies the trends described in this paper. Its more remote areas have long been difficult for the Government to control from Bamako, and the post-colonial State has struggled to establish its legitimacy. “The 2012 coup d’état in Mali, and the political destabilization that followed, brought an abrupt end to the country’s success story as a ‘donor darling’ and as a model of successful democratization”.<sup>9</sup> Despite signing a peace treaty, violent extremist and terrorist groups that were not party to the peace accord continue to launch attacks in the country’s northern and central territories and challenge the Government and state institutions of Mali. More recent coups have done nothing to enhance the Government’s legitimacy with its partners.

However, the seeds of the 2012 events are argued to lie deeper. In 2020, Kanon Tsuda, for example, suggested:

the state has largely failed to contain the conflicts induced by armed militias, ethnic rebels, terrorist groups and inter-communal tensions—and today the nation is once again marked by instability and the flourishing of criminal activity. This instability has caused Mali’s human rights situation to rapidly deteriorate, with Human Rights Watch reporting in 2019 that 85,000 civilians fled their homes as a result of violence, hundreds were killed by ethnic self-defense groups, and Islamic terrorist groups and Malian security forces subjected numerous suspects to degrading and inhumane treatment with several dying in custody or being forcibly disappeared over the course of the year. ...





In the last two decades, Tuareg rebels have sought greater autonomy for Northern Mali, renaming it the Azawad region in an attempt to establish a unified identity that transcends the artificial borders left behind by European colonialism. ... Their January 2012 rebellion, a protest against discrimination and marginalisation by the state towards their people, marked the fourth time the Tuaregs have rebelled since independence.<sup>10</sup>

However, Tuareg dynamics are complex, and they are not necessarily in the majority in all parts of northern Mali. Moreover, internal dynamics—some dating back to colonial days and some deriving from tensions between elite and subordinate social strata—also affect how the conflict has evolved.<sup>11</sup>

As Tsuda argues, “a lingering post-colonial legacy has been a catalyst for poor governance and socio-economic conditions and has significantly contributed to the cultivation of Mali and the Sahel region as fertile grounds for terrorist activities. ... Socioeconomic insecurity too has inevitably exacerbated these movements. Extremist groups have purposely targeted their recruitment in rural areas with food shortages and high unemployment ... Moreover, while there has been a global investment in the combating of Islamic terrorism in Mali, the long-standing socio-economic instability driving it in the first place has been given little attention by the international community”.<sup>12</sup>

**FIGURE 3.**

Attacks against civilians in Central Sahel

**Central Sahel**

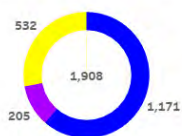
Attacks against Civilians

- Al Qaeda or Islamic State affiliates
- Islamic State affiliates
- Al Qaeda affiliates

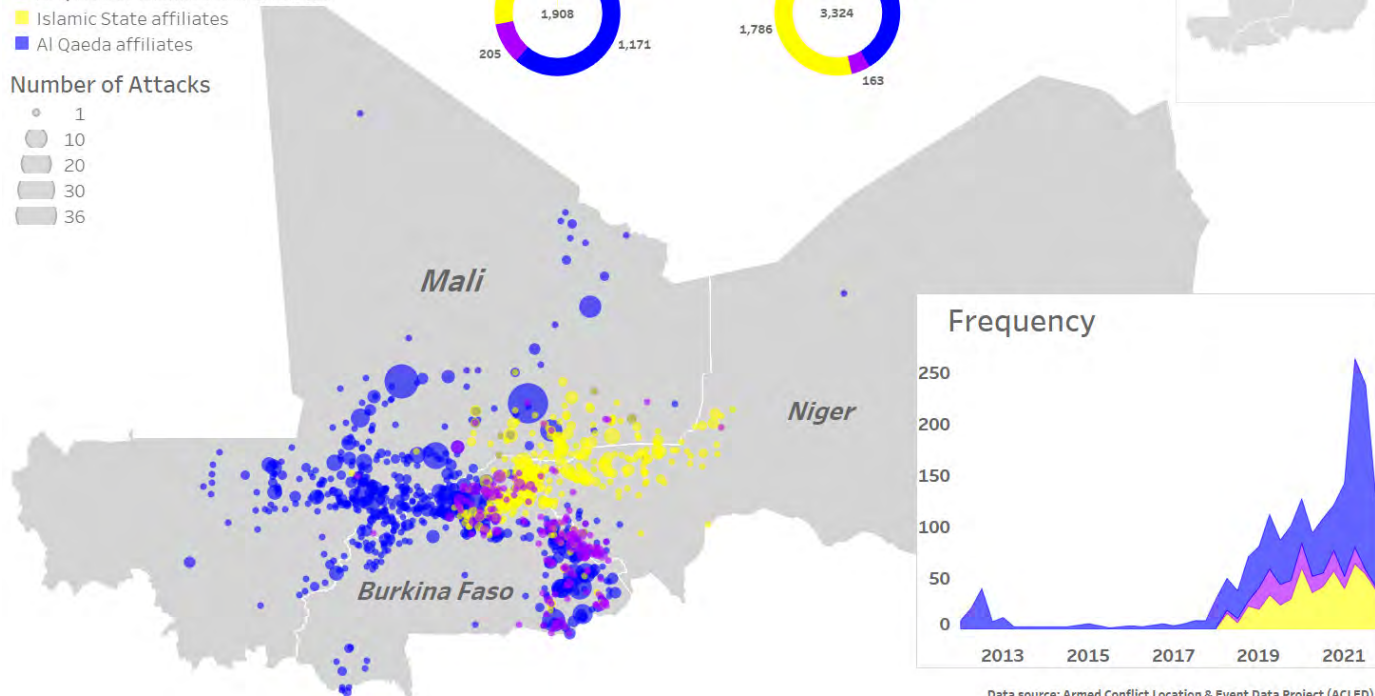
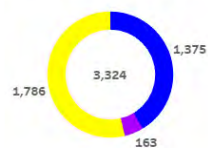
Number of Attacks

- 1
- 10
- 20
- 30
- 36

Number of Attacks by Actor



Number of Fatalities by Actor



Data source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

Visible in these graphics is the acceleration in civilian casualties following the end of the “Sahel exception” and battles between Al-Qaida and Daesh affiliates from 2019, and the greater lethality of groups affiliated with Daesh despite their lower number of attacks.<sup>13</sup>



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## BOX 2.

### BURKINA FASO

Violent extremism is on the rise again in several regions of Burkina Faso after talks between authorities and insurgent groups collapsed in early 2021. An attack on the north-eastern village of Solhan in June 2021 resulted in the death of over 150 people and was carried out by children between the ages of 12 and 14, according to the Burkinabe Government and the United Nations. This atrocity was one of the most violent assaults on Burkina Faso since the security crisis started in the country in 2015. The strategic location of Burkina Faso in the heart of West Africa means that its security situation is deeply linked to transnational trends. That said, the depth of cohesion between global VEGs and their affiliates or regional offshoots remains unclear.

The two key regional VEGs are Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen (JNIM), an umbrella coalition of co-called Salafi-jihadist insurgents led by Iyad Ag Ghaly, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), whose leader, Adnan Abou Walid al-Sahrawi, is reported to have been killed by French forces in September 2021. JNIM has pledged allegiance to Al-Qaida, ISGS to Daesh.

Local VEGs are predominantly scattered throughout the north and east of Burkina Faso and—as with regional groups' relationships with global groups—the depth of their relationship with regional groups is often uncertain. Local groups often take credit for an attack that they did not plan, target opposition groups without permission from regional group leadership or engage in violence rooted in ethnic grievances rather than ideological struggle.

The behaviour and strategic goals of VEGs in Burkina Faso also vary with geographical location. In the northern Sahel region, religious ideology appears to be a key feature of violent extremism, though it is unclear whether this is driven by the groups' control of key institutions such as mosques, through which they can

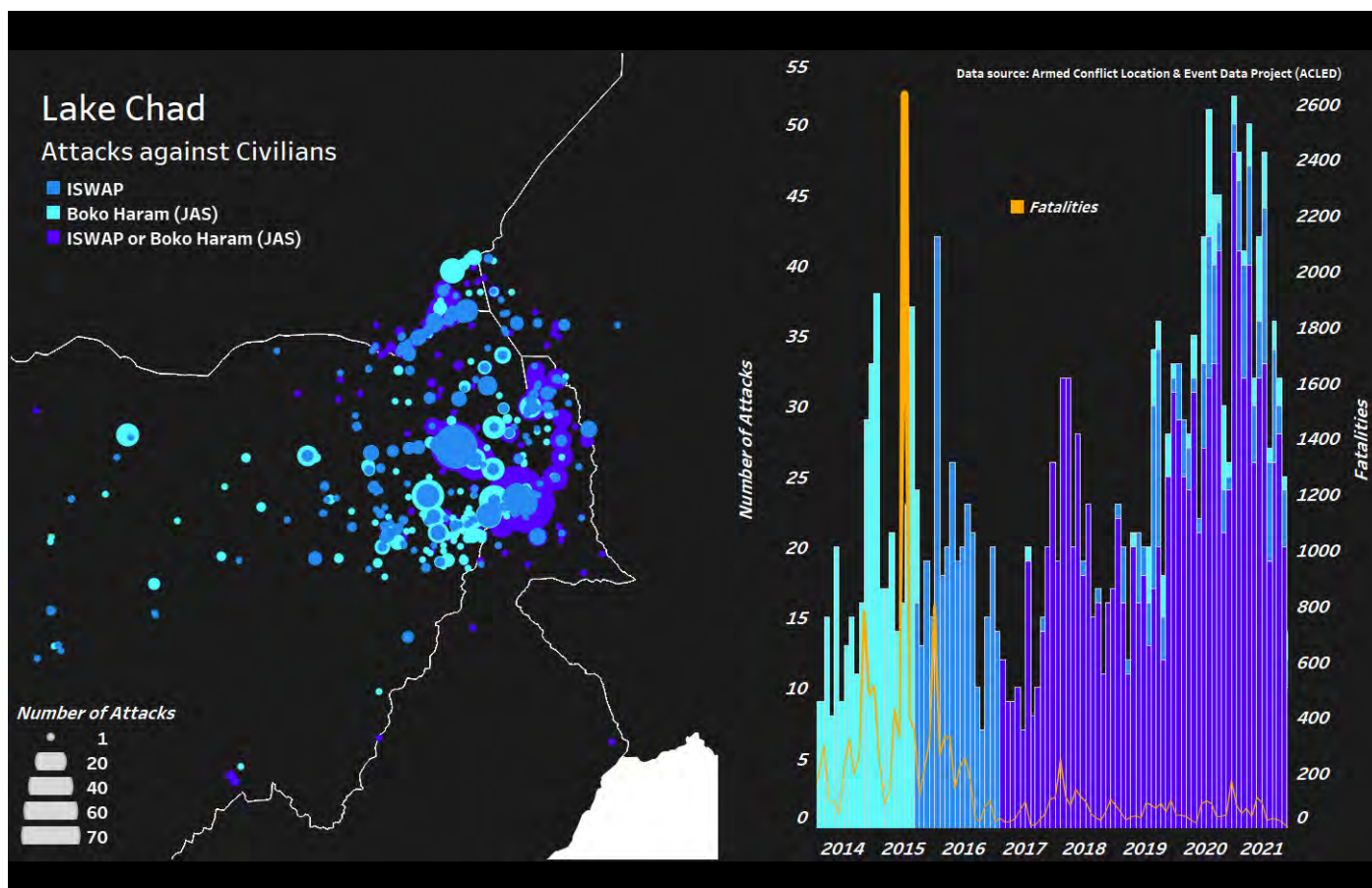
influence communities. In the east, economic factors play a significant role in both group allegiances and land disputes. In the centre-north region, which is home to the majority of the country's internally displaced population, conflict between local groups is often fuelled by ethnic grievances that were established before the Sahel crisis or exacerbated by it. The growing number of internally displaced persons has also created tension in this region.

The introduction of the *Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie* (VDP) in January 2020 further added to the complexity of the security crisis in Burkina Faso. Created as auxiliaries to support the country's beleaguered security forces, these are essentially armed local groups that are given a little training and the authority to defend their community through force. Instead of improving the security situation, they have often worsened it by targeting pastoralists, such as the Peul (Fulani), using their new powers for economic gain, or exacerbating intercommunal tensions. They have sparred with other self-defence groups such as the Koglweogo and Dozo, who are also accused of abuses against civilians. While the VDP's official strategic goal is to fight violent extremism, their desire for influence may not rule out their playing a role in criminal networks, especially those engaged in the smuggling of everyday goods.

The situation may change rapidly due to the failure of negotiations, generations-old land disputes, control of strategic locations, the implementation of religious ideology or shifting alliances among VEGs. The expansion of VEGs' strategic goals is not the only factor that has led to the weakening of security in Burkina Faso. Land degradation due to the impact of climate change and changing land ownership laws have also triggered competition for natural resources which has, in turn, benefited VEGs.<sup>14</sup>

**FIGURE 4.**

Attacks against civilians in Lake Chad



In the Lake Chad Basin, too, alliances shift rapidly, as do the tactics and approaches of local VEGs such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adi wal-Jihad (JAS). In this region, observers rarely attribute an attack to one group or the other.

Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), ADF (which is increasingly linked rhetorically to Daesh) is one of a large number of local non-state armed groups (NSAGs) who prey on income streams—both legal, such as mining and agro-pastoralism, and illegal, such as timber, drugs or wildlife products.

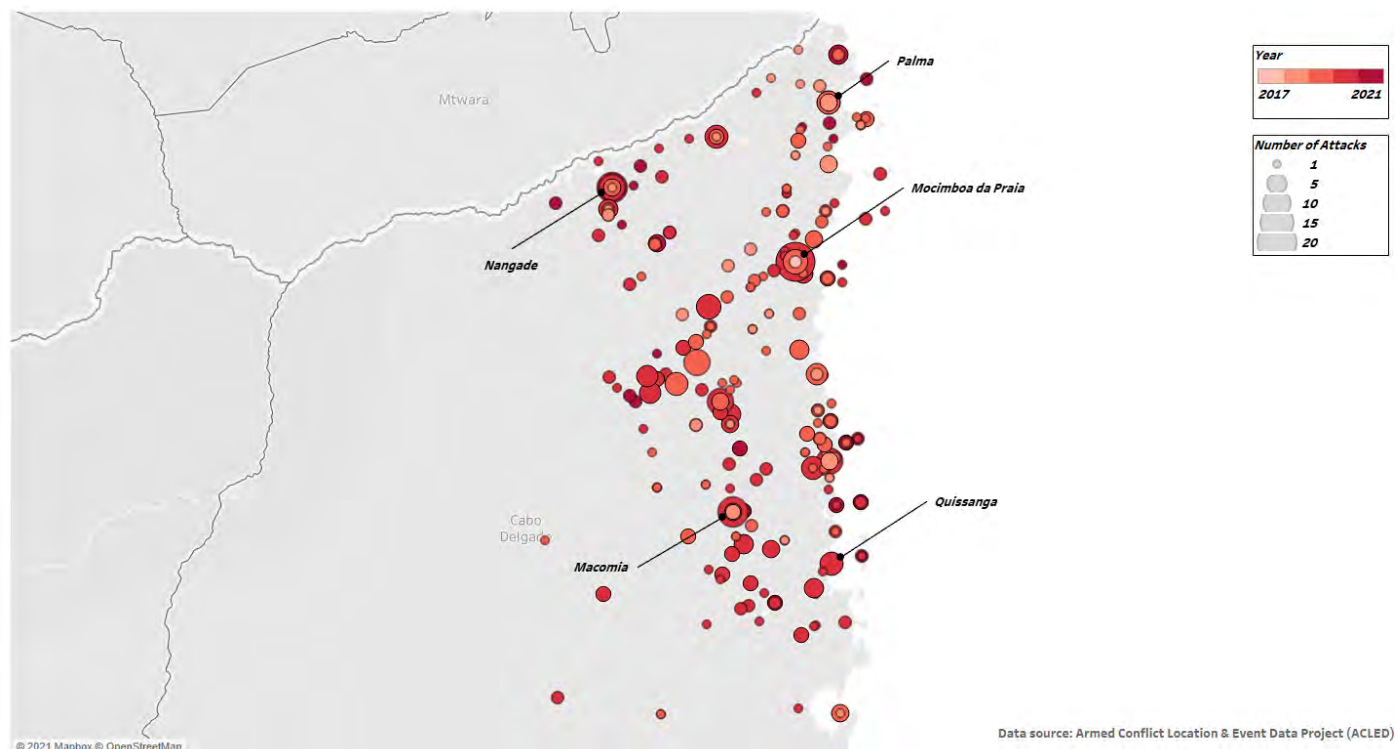
In Mozambique, long-standing local grievances that have long been associated with local violence formed the basis for Al-Shabaab, also known as Ahlul Sunna wa Jamma (ASWJ). Al-Shabaab is claimed as a Daesh affiliate and sometimes linked with the Somali group of the same name, though there is little evidence for these connections. Local illicit income streams (e.g. drugs and timber) are mainly linked to NSAGs, a category into which Al-Shabaab fits.



“Affiliation with the global VEGs Al-Qaida and Daesh has spread into all the regions of study, with local groups pledging loyalty to one or the other. All these local groups were already operating in the complex and shifting conflict ecosystems of these regions, and their leadership elected to affiliate with a sanctioned global group for a range of reasons. In some cases, these conflict ecosystems are in some cases reflected in Government instability, including some instances of what the UN Secretary-General referred to in October 2021 as an “epidemic of coups d’état”.

**FIGURE 5.**

Number of “Islamist” attacks against civilians in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. November 2017–November 2021 (data as of 19 November 2021)



Violence can be seen spreading more widely following the proclaimed affiliation with Daesh in Cabo Delgado in 2018.

In Somalia, the local Daesh affiliate is small. Al-Shabaab (originally an arm of the Islamic Courts Union—ICU) is internationally proscribed in the country, after forming in the violent context of the fractured “warlord” politics of Somalia from the early 2000s. However its relationship with Al-Qaida has evolved since it pledged allegiance in 2012, it remains embedded in local contests (and local economies), and its highly

nationalist character sets it apart somewhat. While evidence on its ties to Al-Qaida is thin and changes are not obvious to all observers, one commentator concluded that “[b]y 2015, Al-Shabaab had significantly downgraded its ties to Al-Qaida central. While the group continues to advertise its Al-Qaida allegiance, it now sees them as more of a marketing brand and source of general advice”.<sup>15</sup> “Al-Shabaab continues to operate as both an insurgency and a proto-state power, controlling and governing wide swathes of land within the southern, central and western parts of the country”.<sup>16</sup>



### BOX 3.

## AL-SHABAAB IN SOMALIA

“Al-Shabaab originally emerged as a remnant of al Itihaad al Islamiya (AIAI)—a Wahhabi Islamist ... organization which arose in Somalia in the 1980s with the intention of replacing the regime of Mohammed Said Barre with an Islamic State. In 2000, AIAI remnants—mostly young members—reformed into Al-Shabaab and were incorporated into the ICU as its radical youth militia.”<sup>17</sup> However, the evolution of Al-Shabaab occurred in a wider Somali political context. “The political settlement undergirding the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) reflects a ‘limited access order’, an elite division of spoils in which rival political cartels control and divert financial flows to and through the rentier state, in what is widely believed to be the most corrupt country in the world.<sup>iii</sup> Elite bargaining over the terms of that political settlement of spoils is largely responsible for the government’s chronic political paralysis and episodic ‘embedded’ political violence. It is also a major factor in the de facto clan partitioning of the country into autonomous regional states, each of which enjoys its own “rent” in the form of seaport customs and other opportunities.”<sup>18</sup>

Within this (clan) bargain, tacit understandings include “the use of embedded political violence (assassinations, or orchestration of communal clashes), [which] remain a tool of choice in inter-elite competition but are constrained compared to the years of open civil war; ... [and] a generally (but not universally) shared commitment to maintaining weak rule of law.”<sup>19</sup>

In theory, Al-Shabaab rejects the political settlement that frames the FGS. “Numerous attempts have been made to explore a negotiated settlement between Al-Shabaab and the FGS, but to date, Al-Shabaab has rejected those overtures: instead, it has effectively penetrated the FGS, and could be interpreted as having entered its own loose elite bargain with political actors, somewhat akin to a mafia protection racket. Its intra-elite ‘understandings’ with other political actors in Somalia constitute the most nuanced ... forms of elite bargaining in the country.”<sup>20</sup>

Since 2018 much has changed, and the FGS may have played a greater role in rejecting approaches to a negotiated settlement. The FGS has played a continuing role in clan bargaining, while Al-Shabaab projects an image of unity beyond clan (see Mobilization messages for local VEGs, below)—though it may also play the clan bargaining game better than most competitors.<sup>21</sup>



In most cases, state responses have been slow to adapt to new local VEG tactics and changing grievances—which, unlike persistent conflict ecosystems, may be a symptom of limited capacity that gives violent groups greater opportunity. Agility in response to changing conditions is a natural advantage for a group seeking to attack existing structures, and state structures have to develop fresh levels of agility in response.

iii. Though Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index 2021 places it at 178/180, rather than 180, as Menkhaus noted it was rated in 2018.



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# “VISION IS GLOBAL, GRIEVANCES ARE LOCAL”<sup>22</sup>

Local VEGs in the region are both globally connected and locally embedded; both ideological and economic; both “justice”-providing and criminal.

## Local versions of global goals

An Al-Qaida-affiliated alliance of local VEGs in the Sahel, JNIM proclaimed a goal of creating conditions for a global caliphate, in line with Al-Qaida’s normal rhetoric. ISGS, however, looks to local caliphates—in keeping with typical Daesh approaches. Despite these differences, both proclaim a global vision; neither endorses state boundaries in the longer term.

Some local VEGs grew out of an entity that aimed to govern the State (e.g. Al-Shabaab in Somalia, which grew out of the Islamic Courts Union). Such groups seek control of the State itself, but it is not clear how far this is an end goal (reflecting, perhaps, the nationalist currents in their ideological messaging), a stepping stone to global ideological goals of their own, or as their contribution to a wider global agenda.

Some local VEGs grow out of ethnic or livelihood interest groups whose end goal was fairer treatment within the existing state. Some aspects of Katiba Macina’s recruitment strategy among Rimaibé and other non-elite Fulani pastoralists are an example of this. However, especially given its role as a founding member of the JNIM alliance, it is fair to see Katiba Macina as essentially being a local VEG

(drawing on the piety and radical preaching of its key leader, Amadou Kouffa) that gained a foothold through such interest-group conflicts.

Some local groups had a local goal that required a redefinition of state boundaries but not of the concept of the State, such as the formation of an independent state of Azawad—essentially a Tuareg project. In this case, groups which began with a nationalist goal—notably the Mouvement national de libération de l’Azawad (MNLA)—clashed with other supporting groups with a more definitively so-called Islamist ideology, notably Ansar ad-Dine. Supported by the Mouvement pour l’unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l’Ouest (MUJAO), a breakaway from Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar ad-Dine drove MNLA out of Gao (the proclaimed interim capital of Azawad) in June 2012. MUJAO was listed as a terrorist organization by the UN on 5 December 2012<sup>23</sup>, but MNLA retained an alignment focused on Azawad rather than the globalist ideologies of Ansar ad-Dine and MUJAO.

Ansar ad-Dine gained prominence as a local VEG feature on the Azawad landscape, and in 2012 it declared allegiance to the global VEG Al-Qaida. Boko Haram, which had long been a regional VEG, affiliated with Al-Qaida in 2010, and despite its splits, it has always had a faction that remains affiliated with Al-Qaida—currently JAS. The group known as Ansaru (formally amāllatu Anṣārīl Muslimīna fī Bilādīs Sūdān) split from Boko Haram in 2012 but has remained closely linked with it and declared allegiance to Al-Qaida in 2021.

These groups' connections with communities are local—indeed, one author<sup>24</sup> describes those of Katiba Macina as “hyperlocal”—and driven by relationships of power and grievance at almost the village level. They are also very diverse. Thus the approach of one component of JNIM, AQIM, reflects elite political entrepreneurs positioning themselves in a “top-down” struggle among shifting elite politics, although the investment in theological depth and credibility made by figures such as Iyad ag Ghali should not

be overlooked. However, another component of JNIM, Katiba Macina, has drawn on non-elite Peul anger at the perceived complicity of elite Peul in state abuses to construct a “bottom-up” movement.<sup>25</sup> These “top-down” and “bottom-up” appropriations of grievances within a single VEG alliance also reflect their scope for appealing to different audiences through contradictory offers. Both of these contrast with the highly nationalist messaging of Al-Shabaab in Somalia, for example.

**One common place observation among commentators, both academics and practitioners, is that responses based on security actions alone do not address the factors driving the spread. This is even more**

**the case if the actions of security forces breach local and international norms and alienate communities, especially if they are still unable to provide the stability and security that communities seek.**

Thus, for example, ACLED reaches the following conclusions about the operations of an ad hoc alliance of local ethnically based militias in the border strip between the Tillaberi and Tahoua regions in Niger and the Menaka region in Mali:

[The alliance] had adverse effects as violence increasingly took on inter-communal and inter-ethnic proportions. The operations eventually spiraled out of control.

**As a result, ISGS grew as it mobilized many militants and attracted other factions to the group. ... While Niger has avoided the internal and rampant “militiafication” of neighboring Burkina Faso and Mali, arming civilians for self-defense appears to be gaining**

**momentum due to ISGS’s disproportionate violence. Paradoxically, some senior ISGS commanders are former militiamen who initially took up arms to protect their communities. ISGS itself mobilized support by making claims of protection against the state and Malian militias.<sup>26</sup>**



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All these VEGs prey on grievances that give them a foothold within communities.<sup>27</sup> Study interviews<sup>28</sup> confirmed that the mobilization of local grievances was the primary route of entry for local VEGs. Similar observations are commonplace in the literature: to take just one

example, as Mikhael Hiberg Naghizadeh<sup>29</sup> notes, “they [local VEGs] must be studied as complex political organizations emerging from local sociopolitical and economic contexts. Jihadists<sup>iv</sup> support often comes from aggrieved groups seeing an opportunity for advancement.”

**Many years of experience have proven that short-sighted policies, failed leadership, heavy-handed approaches, a single-minded focus only on security measures and an utter disregard for human rights have often made things worse. ... The international community has every right to defend against this threat using lawful means, but we must pay particular attention to addressing the causes of violent extremism if this**

**problem is to be resolved in the long run. There is no single pathway to violent extremism. But we know that extremism flourishes when human rights are violated, political space is shrunk, aspirations for inclusion are ignored, and too many people – especially young people – lack prospects and meaning in their lives.**

Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary-General, 2016

## Operating in an ecosystem of violence

Through their local presence, local VEGs generate the revenue they require to operate group structures, usually through illicit means.<sup>30</sup> These activities bring them into contact with purely criminal networks, with whom they share an interest in weakening state capacity in the areas

they control,<sup>31</sup> a process facilitated by remoteness from central control. This shared interest may be simply economic on the part of purely criminal groups, but for local VEGs it serves the dual purpose of facilitating revenues and expanding their ideological reach.<sup>32</sup>

Some of these activities link local VEGs with organized crime networks, usually transnational ones, such as through export networks for illicitly

iv. UNDP does not endorse the use of the term “jihadist” to apply to these currents.

logged timber or illicitly mined minerals.<sup>33</sup> VEGs may also provide protection for organized criminal trafficking routes passing through territories they control, extracting fees for this service and benefiting from these trafficking routes by receiving weapons and materiel, and sometimes fighters, on the return leg.

Local VEGs and organized criminal groups appear to collaborate while also competing for control of illicit market share. Local VEGs' role in these illicit markets is not perceived as "corruption" in the same way as similar sorts of participation by state officials.<sup>34</sup>

Although this activity was originally a means to their ideological end, in some cases it appears to have become an end in itself,<sup>35</sup> with those local VEGs becoming indistinguishable from purely commercial organized criminal groups. In those cases, it is not clear whether communities continue to regard their activities in a different light to those of "corrupt" bodies.

VEGs also benefit from the wider economic dislocation they create.<sup>36</sup> The erosion of other livelihoods positions them as economic magnets in an emerging war economy, along with competing criminal and insurgent groups. Abusive state reactions to the actions of criminal or ideological groups further contribute to economic dislocation and, perversely, reinforce local VEGs' positions within communities.

Illicit economic activities such as kidnapping, extortion ("taxation"), cattle theft and the facilitation of illicit trade in goods ranging from drugs to minerals provide the means for ideological action. But ideology mobilizes followers, gives local VEGs significance and potentially differentiates them from rival groups organized around ethnicity or livelihood. Indeed, a reductionist picture of these groups as purely economic actors—or indeed as purely grievance entrepreneurs—would lose sight of the ideological aspects of their strategy, objectives and appeal.

Although each group is different and its messages and objectives are specific to its context, their positioning as part of a global ideological movement is a common theme.

The language of Al-Qaida and Daesh makes sense of communities' experiences of marginalization and victimization, giving a sense of meaning and status. Groups benefit from presenting themselves as authoritative interpreters of Islam, and some local VEG leaders invest in scholarly credibility as part of their path to power.<sup>37</sup> This narrative also explains social roles, including cases where a local VEG challenges traditional hierarchies by recruiting from lower-status groups. Local VEGs can therefore take advantage of these ideological narratives in their competition for power with other groups. Affiliation with Al-Qaida or Daesh may reinforce the image of themselves that they project as adherents to a global ideology, adding further competitive advantages.

However, local VEGs' religious standing is also contested, especially where educated and more credible clerics can remain in position and can preach theologically grounded Islam. Local VEGs are not alone in being able to mobilize faith and ideology in contested spaces.

## Intentional instability

Local VEGs operate within a wider political economy in which power-holders of all kinds—official and unofficial, modern and traditional, private and public, overt and covert—contest for resources in shifting alliances.<sup>38</sup> Local VEGs find themselves embedded in these force fields and are affected by the "business models" of political entrepreneurs of all sorts.<sup>39</sup> One way to visualize the resulting "pathways of predation" is to see them as a triangular balance among those power-holders who rely on patron-client relationships; the communities to whom they relate; and the armed groups operating among those communities.<sup>40</sup>

This is not specific to low-income, weak or “fragile” states.

**“Rather than working to resolve conflicts, it is often powerful elites that encourage shifts and increases in violence to cement their positions or to take advantage of changing political circumstances.**

**There are clear benefits to engage in violence, and chief amongst them is that it is an effective weapon through which to garner political power. In short, politics causes political violence.”<sup>41</sup>**

It is also widely recognized that elites benefiting from war economies and violence overlap with governing authorities. In 2020, PVE expert Peter Baumann noted “I hope that greater focus is placed on state actors who promote and support VEGs. I would also like to see more research, analysis and transparency on who benefits from violent extremism, both financially and politically”.<sup>42</sup>

“Reform champions”, or political actors who seek significant progress in governance, may find their scope for action trammelled by these contexts. Some elites may also speak out publicly in favour of modernization and progress while acting to protect interests threatened by stability and inclusion. Discerning which actors are genuinely interested in reform and which only pay lip service to it is a challenge for international partners, but doing so is important in devising successful strategies to support positive change. So is accurately assessing the scope for reform in the face of the complex combinations of interests and powers engaged in the “pathways of predation”.

One should therefore not see these as one-dimensional conflicts between farmers and herders, or so-called jihadi groups and state authorities, nor as an ineluctable slide into violent conflict. For example, in Mali:

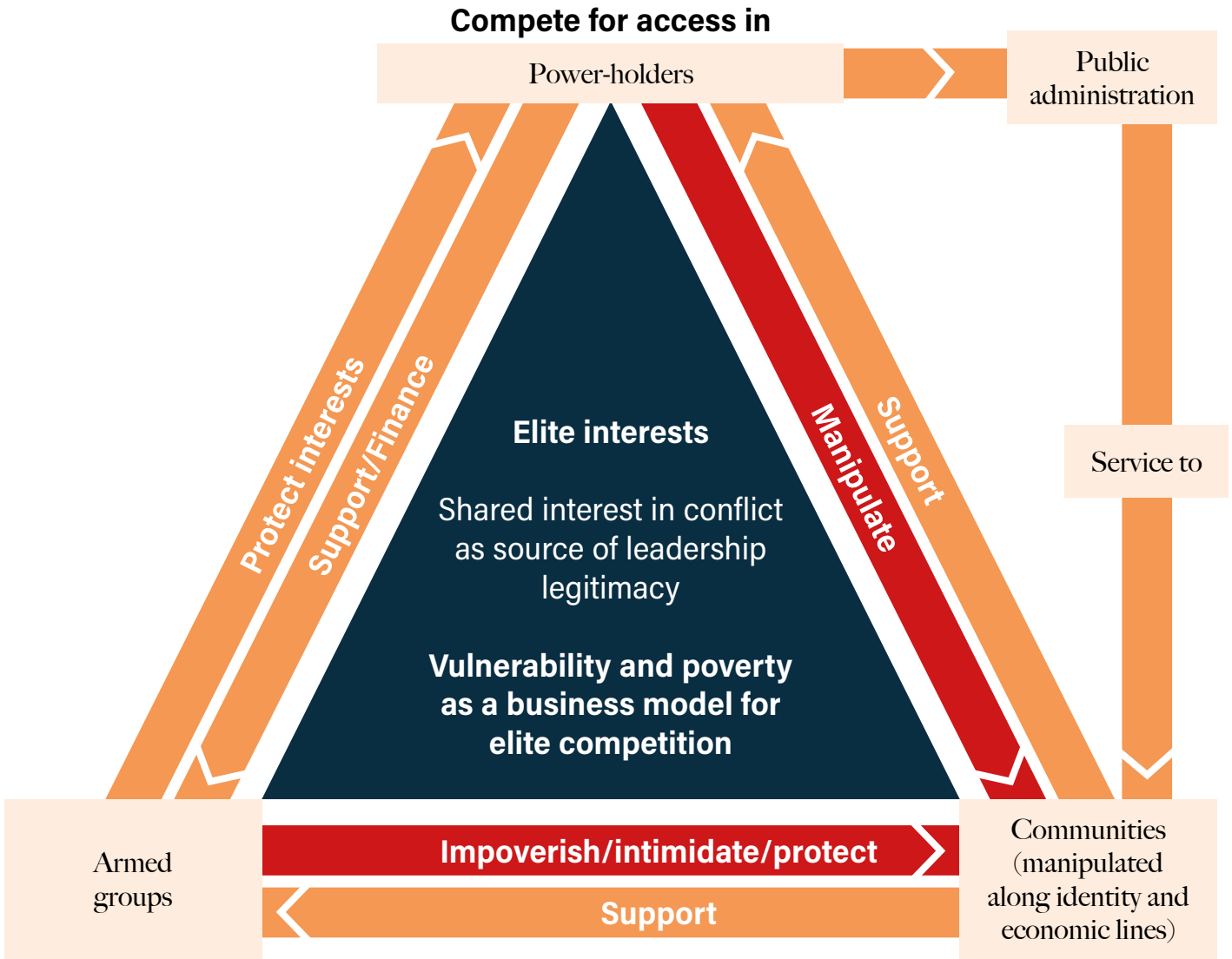
more recently, however, many Dogon have formed a counter-movement against the violent Dogon militia, and [are] instead promoting peace and negotiations with Fulani groups including ‘jihadists’. This has led to an internal conflict among Dogon. At the same time, there are fights for control over pastures between armed groups dominated by Fulani and associated with Al-Qaida on the one hand and the Islamic State on the other.<sup>43</sup>

In eastern DRC, “conflict and violence are often linked to the competition between different power networks. over resources, territory and political authority. A key characteristic of these networks—as is the case with the networks of the Congo wars—is that they are unstable, changing, and constantly adapting and multi-scalar in essence”.<sup>44</sup>



**FIGURE 6.**

Pathways of predation



Power-holders from all identity groups whose position depends on their patrimonial relationship with clients in “their” identity group benefit from (indeed, may depend on) the persistence of identity group grievances and sense of being threatened. They therefore share an interest in continued instability and poverty.

Hence their interests lie in fostering identity rifts between groups and undermining trust. In this, they readily collaborate with local VEGs who share these interests, even while they compete with one another for control and influence. Shared elite interests in continuing grievance, insecurity and poverty accompany acute intra-elite competition both within and between identity groups.

This undermines public service delivery, which is increasingly driven by private elite interests, and further erodes communities’ trust in the State. Elite access to administrative controls generates such internal competition that local VEGs can readily use the ineffectiveness of public service as an entry point.

Understanding this nexus of predatory incentives in local detail is essential in working out what prospects reform champions really have, given that vulnerability and poverty are the central business model for these patrimonial elites.

#### BOX 4.

### MUTUALITÉS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

In eastern DRC, elites compete for access to regional government positions through an elaborate shadow governance system called “*mutualités*”. Each major ethnic group possesses at least one *mutualité*, whose creation dates back to the start of the Congolese civil war in the 1990s. Each *mutualité* is organized in a highly hierarchical but informal structure, topped by a mixed-gender committee that organizes strategies for access to economic and political resources.

One can read the dynamic between various *mutualités* as resulting from the competition between ethnic groups for access to and means of power and resources. This is certainly one dimension worth taking into account. But a more accurate reading is how elites from all ethnic groups find common interests in organizing competition within each and organize patronage networks that ensure they are seen as protectors of their community even though they loot resources in the name of community protection. For example, *mutualités* organize specific recruitment task forces in universities, where they cherry-pick individuals for ascent to the elite. Those individuals have a better chance of surviving and achieving social prestige if they reach elite status. University recruitment demonstrates that *mutualités* themselves understand the recruitment opportunity in youths’ quest for socioeconomic progress and better social status.

Elites play on competition for survival and security within their own communities and keep this competition in place to maintain their own position of power and, therefore, access to resources. In other words, elites compete to maintain dependence networks that allow them to use institutions and private businesses for organized—albeit informal—exploitation

and extraction. In northern Kivu, for example, the ministries for which elites compete include the Planning Ministry (for access to information on international organizations and budgeting flows); the Ministry of Tourism (for access to information on the lootable area of Virunga Park, where biodiversity, mineral and timber resources remain) and the cadastral service (where elites compete for corrupt access to vast land concessions).



Communities have neither democratic nor judicial leverage against elites. **The predation system is thus based on two pillars at the local community level: insecurity and poverty. These are the elements that make communities that are collectively organized around the identity notion of ethnicity rather than citizenship dependent on their respective elites.**

Communities support influential individuals in positions of power, in the hope that elites will protect them and serve the interests of their ethnic group. In the Kivus, some elites end up forming and supporting local armed groups with a twofold objective: giving an impression to ethnic bases that armed groups protect the interests of aligned communities, and maintaining an armed competition and therefore a chaotic state of insecurity that enables the extraction of lucrative resources (e.g. timber, minerals, fertile land or biodiversity). Armed groups themselves end up falling into a logic of predation on community vulnerability, leading to a toxic dependence–abuse relationship between communities and localized armed groups. All these elites have an interest in keeping the system in place and therefore preventing stability.<sup>45</sup>

## Mobilization messages for local VEGs

In each case studied, the local or regional VEG mobilizes communities through local grievances.<sup>46</sup>

**These grievances may be ethnic (e.g. Fulani perception of being targeted by state and state-supported forces in Mali), livelihood-based (e.g. pastoralists discriminated against by land policies), regional (e.g. Kidal is a long way from the nexus of power and wealth in Bamako) or religious (e.g. Kimwane Muslims**

**feel disadvantaged in comparison with Catholic Makonde in Cabo Delgado).<sup>47</sup> Indeed, in many cases, grievances may intersect, with a community perceiving itself as being victimized on ethnic, religious and occupational lines simultaneously (e.g. Muslim Fulani herders in parts of Nigeria).**

Local VEGs compete for allegiance in these complicated and sometimes complex contexts. Sometimes they seek to gain recruitment advantages across ethnic divides exploited by other NSAGs, drawing on the ideology they espouse. They may also compete through class-based appeal, such as Katiba Macina recruiting non-elite Fulani who are alienated by the elite's compliance or complicity with Government processes that disadvantage them. Both of these can sometimes be challenging when recruiting on an ethnic basis and require complicated balancing acts.

As Coakley observes, based on interviews with a human rights activist and international analyst in 2021, among other sources, "The strength of Ansaroul Islam [a Burkina Faso-based local VEG] has directly impacted civilian Peul communities who have been branded 'extremists' by local self-defence groups such as the Koglweogo and later, the *Volontaires pour*

*la défense de la patrie* (VDP). The group's strategic goal is thought to be a mix of rebuilding the ancient Peul empire Djeelgodji, thus establishing a safe haven for the community, and advancing JNIM's influence through support, coordination, and collaboration."<sup>48</sup>

However, local VEGs' mobilization of communities often takes advantage of dysfunctional and abusive state security operations. "Broad-based military operations accompanied by gross human rights violations alienate local populations and undermine any short-term gains they might achieve. When these operations end and security forces leave, militants inevitably fill the void and tighten their grip. If current dynamics persist, and local and international forces fail to establish a permanent presence in contested areas that can bridge the gap with key segments of the population, it will enable militant groups to continue to pose as 'community protectors' and further consolidate their control."<sup>49</sup>

*Journey to Extremism* showed that state agency abuse was a “tipping point” into violence for individual recruits. It is also reported as a tipping point for communities, either into organized “self-defence” or to join existing groups contesting abusive state power.<sup>50</sup> For such communities, the experience of victimization and unfair targeting by state or state-associated bodies (such as “self-defence” militias) based on identity—usually ethnic identity—is then an avenue for the entry of local VEGs.<sup>51</sup> A local VEG that offers targeted communities protection from attacks such as those by state or state-assisted forces that identify those communities as “terrorists” on ethnic, religious or livelihoods grounds is naturally welcomed by the community. Rather than ideology, “the driving force behind the emergence and resilience of non-state armed groups in the Sahel is a combination of weak states, corruption and the brutal repression of dissent, embodied in dysfunctional military forces”.<sup>52</sup>

Local VEGs offer credible power. Hyperlocal dynamics allow them to attract adherents and strike deals with power brokers. Their longer time horizon and persistent objectives may also give them some comparative advantage in the medium term. The choices that local VEGs make between stressing their global vision, mission and identity and emphasizing their ability to address local grievances, evolve and differ from place to place.

However, Al-Shabaab in particular is reported as being “ruthless” to those who oppose it,<sup>53</sup> and other local VEGs (e.g. ISGS and JNIM) have similar reputations for violence towards those who stand against them. Consequently, the “choice” by a group or its leaders to join a local VEG may be a highly coerced decision. The comparative advantage of local VEGs over other NSAGs may lie partly in their frightening reputation, derived in part from that of their global patron, and partly from the appeal of their ideological “offer” to potential elite allies. All the same, they have by no means eliminated the competition, and the conflict ecosystem remains crowded and complex.



One grievance expressed in all study countries is corruption (or at least the perception of it).<sup>54</sup> This is an elastic term, ranging from local state or traditional office-holders soliciting bribes, to power-holders abusing their position for personal or group gain, to participation in illicit activities such as drug smuggling.<sup>55</sup> It also features in all reporting on local VEG mobilization messages. Corruption is not the exclusive preserve of Government officials, though anger at official abuse of office is widely reported. State corruption therefore exacerbates insurgency alongside other forms of corruption, through loss of value from public expenditure it also undermines state capacity to contest local VEGs either kinetically or through service provision.

Many local VEGs have strong messaging on corruption, although this is not necessarily matched by a strong track record. In some cases, local VEGs can claim righteousness because they are focused on their mission rather than on personal or community gain. In cases where that claim is plausible, —it provides them with a ready foothold in communities as a result, or strengthens existing footholds.

Where VEGs occupy territory and drive out state services through violence and threats, many of them then impose a form of rule which offers “justice” in a form that contrasts with state judicial services in that it is swift and decisive, and is often seen as being free from corruption. Some VEGs, such as Al-Shabaab in Somalia, also provide other state-like public services—including even COVID-19 prevention—within the ambit of their ideological perspective.<sup>56</sup> They contrast their payments to militants and to the families of dead fighters with the approach of state agencies, which are at best slow to provide such payments.

The grievances through which local VEGs embed themselves in communities are, as noted, acutely locally specific and diverse. One common thread

in almost all cases, however, is the remoteness from the capital cities, of the regions in which local VEGs operate, at least initially.<sup>57</sup> Long-standing biases of public service provision towards the capital and its immediate surroundings are familiar development concerns and undermine any sense of “belonging” in more remote areas. Private investment, too, is limited in remoter areas, except in extractive industries, which frequently undermine other local livelihoods and traditions instead of providing jobs.

This sense of distance is noted in many study areas: in Cabo Delgado, for instance, the remoteness of Maputo is more than a geographical phenomenon in reported local grievances—Pemba is closer to Mogadishu than to Maputo and Maputo may also be culturally and economically very different from Cabo Delgado. The retreat of state service delivery in the face of local VEG violence (or its reduction to security or repression) further facilitates insurgency, which local VEGs are immediately in a position to capitalize on.

Fiscal resource allocations are key government choices. Both geographical aspects (e.g. the spatial distribution of public expenditure) and sectoral

aspects (e.g. the relative sizes of security and social service allocations and outlays) affect the State’s capacity to improve citizens’ lives, especially in more remote areas. Taken together with questions as to whether the government gets good value for money in its spending—which sometimes reflect concerns over corruption and its impact on public spending—these affect the State’s reach in addressing citizens’ priorities and may, indeed, be determining factors in this.

## Land, climate and conflict

Annexe A sets out some details underlying at least a few aspects of the land-climate-conflict nexus as it comes to bear on local VEGs. Many conflicts erupt over land rights, which are closely linked to water management, usually outside urban areas.<sup>58</sup> These are exacerbated when land management policy is perceived as favouring one identity group over another, such as favouring sedentary farmers (who are often Christian or animist) over pastoralists (who are mainly Muslim). In Burkina Faso, for example,<sup>59</sup> “[c]hanges to land laws introduced capitalist frameworks, which in some cases abolished the tradition of familial land inheritance.



Under these new rules, land could be sold to the highest bidder, who was often an outsider, [which] helped to create disenfranchised youths and hostility towards alien property investors.<sup>60</sup>

Land governance is also a vehicle for rent-seeking by both statutory and traditional local authorities, which also adds grievances over corruption or prolonged delay in dispute resolution—grievances that are readily exploited by local VEGs.<sup>61</sup> Regulation can also have perverse effects both on the environment and on social solidarity, as is the case with tree preservation under the colonial Niger Forest Code. This can enable predatory behaviour by, for example, Forest Service officials in remote areas.

Climate change is not in itself a cause of conflict. However, “climate disruption is a crisis amplifier and multiplier,” to quote the UN Secretary-General.<sup>62</sup> As annexe A notes, “the destitution of livelihoods due to desertification processes and environmental degradation play into the hands of VEGs in regions already marked by structural marginalization”. While the range of experiences across the arid and semi-arid regions of West Africa demonstrates that land-use policy and land governance can make a great difference, both socially and environmentally, the pressures of climate change remain a factor to be weighed up as efforts to resist the spread of local VEGs are appraised.

The consequences—land degradation, pressure on pastures, shifts in migration patterns and reduced soil fertility—leave communities impoverished. This makes them vulnerable to malign offers and precipitates farmer-herder conflict when livestock and arable uses contest the same land. Livelihoods are often ethnicized (e.g. herders are typified as Fulani, even if half the livestock may belong to sedentary owners) so livelihood-based conflicts may carry ethnic baggage. Land governance policy and practice are often similarly perceived as ethnicized, which further enables local VEG narratives that seek to mobilize communities through grievances over restricted livelihoods.<sup>63</sup>

Land governance is linked to violent extremism through both ecology and economy. In the former, areas where environmental degradation—often to the point of desertification—leads to disrupted livelihoods or destitution are often perceived as having been deliberately neglected by the State and sometimes also by traditional leadership, the rich world, and private capital. Land governance also encompasses control over water resources, another key focus of conflict and one that is intimately bound up with the value of land and with its use for cultivation, pasturage and livestock husbandry. In the north-eastern Central African Republic, for example, accelerating desertification is seen as being linked to marginalization and sparks a sense of injustice among those affected by this. These are the areas where local VEGs are mobilizing grievances.<sup>64</sup> Similar patterns may be discerned in the *bourgoutières* of Mali, for example. Overall, conflict and violence analysis should include not only the political dynamics between various identity, livelihood and political groups and violent mobilizers but also on the relationship between human populations and their ecosystems.

Economically, elites at the subnational, national and international levels compete for control over land. In a context like North Kivu, for example, elites compete to rig the cadastral system to gain access to large land concessions that favour their own private accumulation at the expense of communities. The latter are often driven out of their ancestral lands, which are the backbone of their livelihoods and identity. These elites exploit the fissures between customary and statutory law to gain private control over land. This compounds the stresses from community dislocation, ecological extraction, structural marginalization and dependency on aid.

Local VEGs position themselves as righters of wrongs, providers of justice, regulators of equitable access and livelihood substitutes. While weaknesses in land governance offer local VEGs entry points, better land management policy and implementation offer the State a potential comparative advantage over local VEGs.<sup>65</sup> However, this window of political and ecological opportunity may be closing fast.<sup>66</sup>

## Misogyny, gender and the social fabric

Misogyny is evident in local VEGs and also in other insurgent groups. Despite reports of sexual abuse and exploitation of women, some local VEGs provide active roles for them as suicide bombers, scouts and in logistics and recruitment etc.<sup>67</sup> In Chad, the most common role respondents to a recent survey ascribed to women recruited into local VEGs was as combatants.<sup>68</sup>

Pastoralist groups in Somalia traditionally had important economic and social decision-making roles for (senior) women. Ethnic and clan militias reflected that deference within male-dominated military structures.<sup>69</sup> However, despite Boko Haram's tactically conditioned use of female suicide bombers, there is no available evidence to indicate that women occupy command positions in local VEG military hierarchies.

On the other hand, misogyny and exclusion of women is evidently a key factor underlying terrorist tactics and extremist violence.<sup>70</sup> As one study concludes:

**we believe that there are at least three pathways that help explain this outcome. One is that perpetration of ... gender-based violence is a bootcamp for learning the use and functionality of violence. The second, also supported by our findings, is that chronic structural marriage market obstruction causes specific and acute grievances for men, which may catalyse**

**an extraordinary search for economic resources that may culminate in joining terror or rebel groups that promise such resources. The final pathway, which is only indirectly addressed in our research findings, is that the specific disempowerment of those whose voices might mitigate the allure of violence, lowers the barriers to political violence.<sup>71</sup>**

Communities affected by conflict—especially that arising from the actions of VEGs—suffer deep and abiding trauma (one in five suffer some degree of trauma, and one in twenty severe trauma<sup>72</sup>). Coping mechanisms often erode relationships and further damage the social fabric. If unresolved, such

trauma runs the risk of replicating the damaging conditions that caused it.<sup>73</sup> However, mental health and psychosocial support need to be persistent and locally adapted. One-off medicalized visits may do more harm than good if they raise expectations that cannot then be met.<sup>74</sup>

## Does form follow function? The operational structures of local VEGs

In many places, the operational structure of local VEGs seems to mirror that of other insurgent groups. Some are relatively diffuse, operating more as “franchises” than as vertically structured command-and-control units. Some (such as the JAS faction of Boko Haram) seem to function much like other marauding bands. These groups show little structured provision for local governance. In Somalia, however, Al-Shabaab offers a wide range of state-like services in areas it controls. The depth of its local organization, with structures reaching down to the district level, also reflects much more closely the structure of a classic state. “The extent to which they differ, we hypothesize, is based on their leadership profile; the resources available to them through extraction, taxation, and trade; and their level of external and internal economic support”.<sup>75</sup>

By this point, Al-Shabaab “has successfully replaced the state in most functions where it has control. It provides health care, COVID prevention, even compensation for damage by its own cadres”.<sup>76</sup> Overall, “Al-Shabaab has erected a shadow government with reach throughout most of southern Somalia that outperforms the government, especially in dispute resolution and the provision of a semblance of order”.<sup>77</sup> Indeed “most people prefer to take cases to Al-Shabaab’s courts”.<sup>78</sup>

In the face of Somalia’s pervasive clan structure, Al-Shabaab capitalizes on widespread resentment—especially among non-elite youths—at the persistent clan-based hierarchy and the marginalization or exclusion this results in. It emphasizes “unity in faith” and consciously balances powerful positions among clans to make the message of opportunities beyond clan lines seem more real. It also delivers a highly nationalist narrative that sets it apart from other local VEGs.<sup>79</sup> The ideological coherence of a message combining nationalism with a particular interpretation of their ideology seems to fit well

with local VEGs’ operational coherence. In the Central African Republic, in contrast, insurgent groups seem to exhibit more classic “Big Man” structures of patronage, in which adherents—typically young men—are tied to a patron by expectations of gain.<sup>80</sup>



In Mali, the components of JNIM seem to be moving in a direction similar that of to Al-Shabaab in Somalia. For example, the long-standing Sossobe-Salsalbe conflict in Mopti over access to the richer *bourgoutières* pastures was resolved by



both communities bringing the matter to a *Cadi* (traditional Islamic judge) provided by Katiba Macina. While at one point there were reports that Sossobe parties had denounced the April 2021 ruling, in November and December 2021 it became clear that the judgment was holding.<sup>81</sup>

The hypothesis advanced in annexe B suggests that groups with greater resources can establish deeper structures with greater ideological coherence. If correct, this is coherent with a general pattern of successful local VEGs evolving from insurgent bands by widening their areas of influence and coming to compete with the governing authorities in the provision of the “survival functions” of a state.<sup>82</sup>

This suggests that the seminal analysis in *Journey to Extremism* of the factors tipping individuals into violence may reflect a stage in the evolution of local VEG expansion. While in 2016 few local VEGs in the region represented serious competition for the State (Al-Shabaab in Somalia being the sole exception), by 2021 this picture had been changed by the expansion of local VEG power, the retreat of state security and justice provision and the deepening of internal political crises. It may now be more of a case of communities facing competition for their social contract—a choice often made under a degree of

coercion by both bidders—such that both ordinary citizens and their elite patrons may “buy in” to a local VEG’s offer.

In the context of the “pathways of predation” business models of elites who depend on instability and poverty for their leadership positions, this development poses two striking challenges. First, while local VEGs may enter into deals with other actors with an interest in instability, local VEGs’ own interests do not require instability—indeed, they benefit from stability in the areas they control, though they of course benefit from instability in state-controlled areas. In this respect, they offer communities the relative predictability and security that both ordinary citizens and elite patrons may value.

The second is that as a local VEG expands its area of control, it becomes more and more like a state in itself—an oppressive and partial state, admittedly, but one that demonstrates a quasi-monopoly of coercive force in its area of control and the ability to enforce its “laws” reasonably promptly. Although such bodies may not be recognized by the international community or accepted by neighbouring states, at least initially, geopolitical interests may invite some parties to engage with them despite opposing them.

**In this sense, local VEGs reflect a competitive version of a “mediated State”. Here it is not the State alone but also more**

**deeply structured local VEGs that negotiate with (other) non-state sources of authority to provide functions of government.**

Indeed, the more structured local VEGs have many of the characteristics of a “proto-state” as originally identified in pre-modern evolving structures but also as more recently typified by Daesh: “in an arena of extreme competition for loyalty and authority,

its policies on policing, taxation, marriage, and education build clearly specified identities of membership in the group and demonstrate its authority, in ways that mimic statehood ... Daesh exhibits classic characteristics of a proto-state,

trapped in a perpetual state of instability, flux, and fluidity, and yet coalesces and finds form as it challenges and forcibly remakes authority”.<sup>83</sup>

When VEGs expand their areas of control and compete effectively for the allegiance of some communities, the State and its international partners may draw two conclusions. First, they need to understand in detail why these shifts in governance and political economy have come about and what aspects of State and VEG actions have led citizens in the areas they control to align preferentially with the VEG. This is a difficult question to answer when the areas are under the control of violent and potentially abusive forces.

Second, if the VEG in question has gained control of significant areas of the country, realistic strategic analysis of the requirements for holding areas under effective Government control is needed, along with an analysis of opportunities for recapturing territory from the VEG. This strategic analysis needs to go beyond the military-tactical assessment of combat options to consider the political economy of the relevant elites and the communities for which they are the key patrons. A rigorous analysis of the true implications of the present strategic configuration will be needed to avoid optimism and confirmation bias in both assessment and planning.

Military responses have ejected local VEGs affiliated with Al-Qaida or Daesh from some spaces, allowing the “return of the State” that was widely described as the objective in earlier theatres such as Iraq. UNDP COs expressed concern that this may actually be a return to the “*status quo ante*”, including behaviours that previously precipitated local support for local VEGs. Practitioners also noted the risk that international assistance may focus on the ability to combat, but not contest, the threat.<sup>84</sup> This point was also reiterated by other analysts.<sup>85</sup> Academic commentary notes that local VEGs flow back in after heavy security presence declines, which some communities acquiesce to.<sup>86</sup> Recurrence of

ethnic targeting (which is seen as tantamount to collective punishment)—particularly of Fulani in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin—serves to drive communities and individuals into welcoming local VEGs, which are perceived as defending them. Community elites then come under triple pressure: from state agencies wreaking retribution for failing to hold back local VEGs, from rival ethnic militias seeking revenge for past hostilities, and from local VEGs seeking to deter collaboration with the State.<sup>87</sup>

## Strategies and operational modalities

Differences between Al Qaeda and Daesh were noted above, in the “Dynamics of violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa” section. There may also be deeper differences in the ideological direction of Daesh, which is perhaps more openly ready to endorse killing civilians when opportunities to expand arise from the resulting chaos.

Local VEGs’ actions seem to include deliberately undermining intergenerational trust (e.g. by undermining the position of traditional elders and religious and social authorities). This fraying of the social fabric reinforces their control over communities and is part of local VEGs’ offer of “belonging” to their alternative order instead. This may help them to appeal to youth, adding to their social base.

Specific regional studies give some indication of local peculiarities, such as Amanda Coakley’s contemporary work for ILLP (Initiatives for Land, Lives and Peace) on Burkina Faso. However, each theatre is specific, contingent and shifting rapidly. Even within a single, relatively coherent movement, strategies may vary. For example, the Somalia interviews indicated that Al-Shabaab’s priorities in Mogadishu have become increasingly commercial; in other regions, ideological objectives remain central.

## Impact of global events on local VEG approaches

Local VEGs have used violence against civilians and state forces to sustain control over areas. This allows revenue extraction associated with activities such as drug smuggling in Mali<sup>88</sup> or gold mining in Burkina Faso<sup>89</sup>, albeit probably not on the scale suggested in media coverage. Revenues are in turn essential to sustaining local VEG structures (and/or to promoting their ideological goals).

Recent years have seen increased use of kidnapping for ransom as a revenue strategy.<sup>90</sup> In Nigeria, local VEGs compete with non-ideological “bandit” gangs and sometimes claim responsibility for attacks of uncertain provenance, sparking concerns that violent extremist ideology may be spreading into those areas. Competition between local VEGs and between these and purely criminal “bandits” for control of territory does not, of course, prevent collaboration either in sharing out territories or in contesting state control where common interests are judged to predominate.<sup>91</sup>

Strong networks of informants (and fear) enable continued control of communities and thus of areas. This applies both to local VEGs and to other violent criminal groups, such as smuggling gangs. However, in areas that are supportive of local VEGs, religious endorsement of controls may reinforce pressure to affiliate, building on fear and relatively generous funding (e.g. payments to families of “martyrs”, in contrast with minimal state support for families of fallen soldiers<sup>92</sup>).

Local VEGs do not yet make use of global narratives of climate change—though the opportunity to attribute deteriorations in land quality to the misdeeds of the “far enemy” and former colonial masters cannot be far off.<sup>93</sup>

Similarly, shortcomings in global action on adaptation run the risk of providing local VEGs with a ready source of further grievance around which to mobilize both individuals and communities. Few Governments in the areas under threat from local VEGs have ready narrative responses to such challenging discourses.

The Daesh “caliphate” offered a model in which a VEG holds territory, exploits resources to finance group operations, and defies “foreign” control.<sup>94</sup> Emulated in areas where Daesh-affiliated groups hold control, this may inspire affiliates elsewhere to seek similar control.

Daesh’s focus on the “near enemy” (regional Governments which defy its authority) is convenient for groups with local revenue streams to protect (e.g. drug trafficking, illegal timber, artisanal mining). Contests with state forces over area control and revenues are made easier by this focus on the “near enemy”.

The defeat of the Daesh “caliphate” in Iraq and Syria undermined some of its lustre. However, it also brought foreign militants with experience in holding and running territory to African zones. There is now some indication that Daesh HQ has pressed affiliates to support a deliberate expansion into sub-Saharan Africa.

The recent victory of the Taliban was a vindication of strategic patience in a campaign lasting 20 years and showed the benefits of a longer time horizon. It also appeared to validate Al-Qaida’s focus on the “far enemy”<sup>95</sup> (with Taliban negotiations with the US presented as a victory in this regard). However, Al-Qaida affiliates in sub-Saharan Africa have hitherto shown little interest in US targets. Given French engagement in the Sahel, Berkhane is instead the most prominent external enemy in the theatre of conflict.

The “Sahel exception” to the conflict between Daesh and Al-Qaida broke down in 2019. JNIM-ISGS fighting in 2020 (which entailed over 100 battles and over 700 dead) demonstrates the depth of the antagonism and rivalry between Al-Qaida and Daesh. However, JNIM and ISGS also collaborate against state and international forces.

ISGS is itself a splinter from a JNIM component (al Mourabitoun). This shows Daesh capitalizing on divisions within rival (but similar) local VEGs. It has similarly capitalized on the split in Boko Haram (to which it probably contributed) by forming ISWAP. Indeed, local VEGs in most regions have split (e.g. Boko Haram, al Mourabitoun, AQIM and others). Some of these splits have made space for global groups to enter

areas where they had not already engaged. In Mali, Fulani disillusionment with state actions was led by elite elders, but younger poorer herders resented their dominant and exclusive position. This split the ethnic coalition that had formed to contest state and state-backed militia actions that were seen as oppressive. As noted earlier, this provided a receptive community base for Katiba Macina.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendations that follow from this analysis are:

- understand (including by exploring the hypotheses in annexe B); and then
- act.

These recommendations are structured into three blocks:

- Political economy (which derives particularly from the analysis in the “Operating in an ecosystem of violence” and “Intentional instability” sections)
- Political ecology (which derives particularly from the analysis in the “Land, climate and conflict” section)
- Ideology and grievance (which derives particularly from the analysis in the “Local versions of global goals” and “Mobilization messages for local VEGs” sections)

The analysis contained in the sections entitled “Does form follow function? The operational structures of local VEGs” and “Strategies and operational modalities” particularly feeds into recommendations relating to the different strategic challenges posed by groups as they evolve into proto-state competitors. These are found in both the “Understand” and “Act” sections.

Elements of the analysis of grievances, including corruption (or perceptions of this), and the operational structures and modalities both feed into the recommendations on “Follow the money”, which are set out as a specific section of action. Similarly, the analysis of grievance and mobilization messages feeds into the recommendations in the section entitled “Ease the pain”.

It is striking how significant a gender lens is for each recommendation. Ensuring that the different experiences, perceptions, risks and needs of women and men are reflected in the analysis at each stage will be essential for almost all recommendations. One exception to this might be the tracking of the income streams of local VEGs, for example, where establishing what actually happens seems not to have a significant gender dimension, though of course there will be a gender dimension to the assessment of the damage caused and counter-actions to be taken. Moreover, it will be important to ensure that women have agency in the execution of almost all actions that draw on the “Understand” section.

"So what?"—what do we **do** with understanding?

So what?	Caveats
First, <b>do no harm</b> . Then:	
Identify promising partners	"Traditional leaders" are often complicit or compromised or disabled by "empty power"—titles and roles without resources to deliver. <sup>96</sup>
Identify interests in peace	Identify actors in the field (and at the national level, if possible) with an interest in peace, paying attention to the "business model" that they actually operate.
Identify supporting investments	This may mean policies, people, projects (and perhaps protection from predators).
Identify policies that enable predation	For example, policies on tree preservation that unintentionally enabled corrupt rent-seeking by forestry officials etc.
Identify policies that incentivize predation	For example, requiring traditional leaders to "deliver" communities to the State without providing them with resources, thus encouraging them to "prey on their own".
Help national authorities to connect positively with inclusive local processes	Local governments are rarely predominant powers locally, but still have important resources. Where conflicts are local, responses need locally attuned efforts, which national authorities are unlikely to possess—but national resources and permissions are still vital for conflict resolution and community trust.
Develop messaging that makes alternative "belonging" credible and attractive	Has to be real; promises that raise expectations which are then dashed do more harm than silence. Service delivery is not a sufficient condition for "belonging", but its absence is a strong message of "you don't belong".
Be realistic	Recognize the limitations of international capacity to understand and influence political economy at the local, national and regional levels; understand limits to reform champions' freedom of action in the face of power-holders' "business model" (see figure 5: Pathways of predation, above).

# BROAD RECOMMENDATIONS

Each recommendation below is followed by the actors to whom it applies (*italicized, in parentheses*).

## Understand

### Political economy

- U. 1. Understanding the political, economic and security-related processes through which VEGs gain footholds and then deepen control in communities at the local, subnational and national levels is essential. This requires tracking the alignments of key local power-holders' political, economic and security-related choices, along with the way that those actions are received by others. It also includes an analysis of conflict factors—at each level—and their implications. All of this is deeply gendered (*UN and international community*).
- U. 2. The three hypotheses set out in annexe B are, of course, avenues for early research efforts. In particular, understanding the cost-benefit calculations of local VEG leaderships—and that of Al-Qaida and Daesh in seeking or accepting their affiliation—has implications for other efforts to limit the expansion of those global groups. Ensuring women's perspectives are heard and heeded will be especially important in this.
- U. 3. Such understanding also entails analysis of accidental and deliberate damage to the social fabric. UNDP and other researchers are already doing work on this, which could be integrated with other research (where, again, a gender perspective will be appropriate and essential) to provide a comprehensive, up-to-date picture and extract key policy insights (*UN, international community, state authorities and civil society*).
- U. 4. There are specific challenges to understanding corruption—in all senses of the term—and its effects, including those of perceptions and reports of corruption, and the different experiences and perceptions of women and men, including the use of sexual services as a form of payment. This includes the opportunities for corrupt conduct and the incentives that exist and can be created for non-corrupt conduct. UN family and civil society research already covers this field, which should be integrated with wider research to provide actionable insights (*UN, international community, state authorities and civil society*).
- U. 5. One important additional layer of analysis is the spatial dimensions of conflict and violent extremism, which is facilitated by developments in GIS mapping of events and data. Overlaying geographical data on poverty, fiscal allocation and expenditure, service provision or land management, for example, onto conflict event data (e.g. ACLED, UCDP and other similar event data sets) may offer fresh insights—along with an understanding of what forms of remoteness are associated with the spread of violent extremism (*UN, civil society researchers, international community*).

U. 6. Understanding the impact of public expenditure beyond its macroeconomic and technical indicators requires an examination of its distributional effects. These may include unintended spatial, generational or gender-related disparities, for example. Such disparities may further weaken the social fabric. Fiscal impact analysis (including the spatial overlays described above) would therefore help identify opportunities for the State to reduce the appeal of local VEGs (*international financial institutions, state authorities, civil society*).

U. 7. Understanding the political, economic and security-related processes through which state and regional actors seek to frustrate VEGs' strategies, and the effect those have on communities and their reception of local VEGs among both women and men, will be important in enhancing counter-measures (*UN, international community, state authorities*).

### **Political ecology**

U. 8. Understanding conflict and violence analysis includes not only the political dynamics between various identity, livelihood and political groups and violent mobilizers but also the relationship between human populations and their ecosystems. Analysis and follow-on programming should include a political ecology focus (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).

U. 9. Specific political ecology analysis will be particularly needed in areas menaced by environmental degradation, making it possible to anticipate the effects of climate disruptions on livelihoods, violent mobilization and elite bargains (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).

### **Ideology and grievance**

U. 1. Understanding the messaging through which local VEGs propagate their vision at the local, subnational, national, regional and global levels, especially that through which global VEGs expand their influence. This requires social media monitoring (usually in local languages) to detect both expansions of local VEGs' ambitions and the spread of global VEGs' messages and influence. It also requires a gender- and age-differentiated assessment of the impact of VEG messaging and positive counter-messaging. The UN is already engaged in monitoring hate speech, for example, and could expand its analytical capacity with additional resources. The UN, the international community, state authorities and civil society all have important roles to play in deepening understanding, speeding up analytical turnaround and identifying key opportunities for counter-messaging (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).

U. 2. Local non-state analytical capacity will be important in obtaining valid and locally attuned understanding. While some local capacity may be built simply by commissioning appropriate products and supporting quality assurance, further explicit capacity-building for local research bodies may be needed. One important aspect may be the creation of safe forums in which local researchers and civil society can engage power-holders (including state authorities) in productive conversation. The UN is already doing significant work in this field (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).



## Act

- A. 1. Apply the outcomes of the “Understand” section to policy analysis and advice, reflecting the various avenues of focus above and maximizing opportunities to enhance Government–civil society engagement through supportive policy dialogue processes that provide clear space for women’s voices to be heard and heeded (*UN, international community, civil society*).
- A. 2. In view of the observations about grievances in the analysis (as highlighted by *Journey to Extremism*), apply that understanding to ensure that the actions of state agencies and state-enabled armed groups at the very least comply with human rights obligations and, by preventing abuses, avoid creating fresh openings for VEGs to embed themselves in communities or mobilize aggrieved elites (*state authorities, UN, international community*).

### Political economy

- A. 3. In particular, apply that understanding to the development of strategies to consolidate Government control and recapture areas where Government influence is thin, in the light of local VEGs’ position along the trajectory from bands of individuals to proto-state competitors for community social contracts (*state authorities, UN, international community*).
- A. 4. Apply the outcomes of the “Understand” section to assess how realistic strategies to support reform champions are, in the light of political economy constraints (*UN, international community*).
- A. 5. The UN family also provides extensive support for anti-corruption efforts. Where resources are limited and these efforts have to be prioritized, one criterion may be to

identify the forms of corruption that are most actively exploited in VEG messaging or found by work triggered by the “Understand” section to be most significant in encouraging communities to engage with local VEGs. These forms of corruption might merit the highest priority (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).

- A. 6. Specific applications of the understanding gained from the proposed analysis to the challenges of corruption (in the broadest sense of the term) and unfairness could include dialogue (including well-prepared women’s groups) and advice on correcting policies and regulations that incentivize rent-seeking, on re-allocation of public expenditure to maximize the sense of inclusion and minimize the sense of unfairness, and on messaging strategies that communicate the benefits to citizens flowing from state engagement with these challenges. This will need to take account of the “pathways of predation” diagnosis of elites’ business model and therefore reflect reform champions’ real freedom of action (*UN, international financial institutions, international community, state authorities, civil society*).
- A. 7. The UN already supports Governments in PVE-related aspects of the governance of security forces. Given that these forces’ conduct plays a central role in community engagement with VEGs, local research centres and civil society—including organizations that capture and reflect women’s and young people’s experiences and concerns—could expand their monitoring of the effectiveness of that support, and the support itself may need to be expanded and deepened (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).
- A. 8. The UN family has supported regional countries in developing PVE strategies and

National Action Plans (NAPs). Further gender-sensitive governance analysis of PVE strategies, especially of the incentives and relationships affecting power-holders, could be a helpful additional focus to apply as the next generation of NAPs are developed and as countries provide periodic reporting on implementation and effectiveness to their citizens (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).

## Political ecology

- A. 9. Supporting gender-sensitive improvements to land management policy and governance that address community grievances on which local VEGs prey, and that sustain environmental regeneration to forestall further conflicts over remaining high-value land, would help significantly to impede local VEGs' appeal<sup>97</sup> and reduce conflict more generally (*UN, international community, state authorities*).
- A. 10. Applying the political ecology analysis to areas threatened by environmental degradation should enable effective attention to be paid to land regeneration and environmental peacebuilding, thus anticipating the effects of climate disruptions on livelihoods, violent mobilization and elite bargains (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).
- A. 11. National dialogue on ecosystem-economy interactions and their political implications can identify the key issues for Government or social action. It can also provide the high-level political cover to enable local conversations addressing land regeneration and land management (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).
- A. 12. Inclusive local conversations to relate the "story of place" in a location can, for example, allow elders to explain the cultural and spiritual significance of a place and

youths to explain the consequences that traditional constraints have for them. Such conversations can help to re-weave the social fabric, bridging intergenerational gaps. With suitable facilitation, they can also help to identify, and eventually bridge, gender inequities. Bringing identity groups together in such conversations can then address some of the other divides around land use in a context that addresses the meaning of place for all parties as well as the interests it embodies and enables (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).

## Ideology and grievance

- A. 13. UNDP and other UN family agencies have explored the scope for religious authorities and faith-based organizations to play a role in challenging inappropriate interpretations of religious teaching and in engaging devout elites in more deeply grounded theological discourse. There may also be opportunities to expand the role of these religious authorities in mediation at various levels, enhancing the credibility of negotiations (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).
- A. 14. As myths about women's role in local VEGs are dispelled, their voices need to be heard in identifying the challenges they face and the contributions they can make. Their agency, at the community and policy level, can be an essential ingredient in shifting the discourse on violence and governance. This should include their opinions on public expenditure allocations. While entry points will differ between the national and local levels and from place to place, specific attention is needed to identify ways in which women's active participation can be made "normal", safe and effective (*UN, international financial institutions, international community, state authorities, civil society*).

- A. 15. Building on existing PVE/CVE communications, supporting enhanced gender-sensitive communication of credible messages that provide positive opportunities for meaning, belonging and esteem through alternatives to violent extremism—“Governments should be less concerned with reacting to the terrorists’ messages and more concerned with building their own reputation and standing amongst the people”<sup>98</sup> (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).

### **Follow the money**

- A. 16. The UN already supports efforts by state authorities to identify how funds reach VEGs, such as through the CTF/AML mechanisms and the Financial Action Task Force more generally. However, tracking other more local funding streams (e.g. revenue from cattle theft or kidnapping and ransom) poses a further challenge. Enhancing national capacity to trace such funds and coordinating such tracing mechanisms at a regional level could bring significant benefits (*UN, international community, state authorities*).
- A. 17. Fewer resources have been devoted to how VEGs use the funds they acquire. However, understanding their spending patterns (both spatially and sectorally) would help to understand their strategies in practice. Again, national capacity will require resource allocation by Government and international support (*UN, international community, state authorities*).
- A. 18. As VEG finances are better understood on both the revenue and expenditure sides, opportunities should emerge to frustrate VEG strategies. For example, areas of VEG spending might identify areas where either the state “offer” of essential services, policy, regulation or safety and justice needs enhancing to rival that of the VEGs, or malign VEG

activities can be contested. Enforcement efforts might be focused on illicit activities which are particularly significant for VEG incomes. This requires an enhanced capacity for the planning and execution of appropriate responses (*UN, international community, state authorities*).

- A. 19. Legislative action might include measures to deter the engagement of non-terrorist organized criminal groups with VEGs. These might include consideration of “guilt by association” with terrorism where appropriate and applicable, within proper consideration of citizens’ proper human and civil rights (*UN, international community, state authorities*).

### **Ease the pain**

- A. 20. While there is broad recognition of the general significance of trauma resulting from conflict, and especially the actions of VEGs, there is less locally specific understanding of the nature of trauma in each theatre or of the nature and implications of coping strategies that communities and individuals adopt. Local capacity to assess this and listen sensitively to victims will be essential to understanding the priorities for support. Building that capacity—which will need acute sensitivity to issues of shame and stigma, and to the differentiated experiences of women and men, boys and girls and the different expectations of them—will be an urgent need (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).
- A. 21. Addressing the trauma experienced by victims of VEG actions offers a potential way forward, using long-lasting and locally adapted mental health and psychosocial support mechanisms that reinforce women’s agency. This may also create natural opportunities for positive religious counter-messaging (*UN, international community, state authorities, civil society*).

# METHODOLOGY



This report seeks to bring together academic and practitioner perspectives on the challenge of the spread of VEGs in sub-Saharan Africa. It has been compiled drawing on reviews of published literature and UN reports. It has combined these with interviews with UNDP country teams and other relevant UN specialist agencies, key informant interviews with local researchers and activists, interviews with relevant regional and African Union (AU) bodies, and interviews with international experts working in the field, rather than primary fieldwork or individual surveys.

This approach reflects the challenges of combining academic and practitioner perspectives to best effect. The two communities have different styles of discourse and engagement, but the methodology of this study seeks to bridge the gap.

It reflects the search for “learning and creative organization wherein academics and practitioners can learn from each other”<sup>99</sup> by combining insights from academic publications (both refereed and directly published) with those from practitioners in the field. UN reports (including primary research such as *Journey to Extremism*) were important sources of both information and analytical insight.

A specific report on VEGs in Burkina Faso was conducted for a global policy group at the same time and informs this report, which contains an excerpt from the executive summary.

Because of travel restrictions, no visits to the region were possible; all interviews were conducted via Zoom or other online platforms.

# ANNEX A: PREVENTING THE NEXT WAVE

## Anticipating the inevitable and preventing the next wave of recruitment: capturing climate breakdown in ideological narratives

Research on linkages between climate change, environmental degradation and violence has already unearthed clear connections that are unfolding across Africa. The focus has often been placed on conflicts between farmers and herders, but the growing intensity of conflicts between nomadic and sedentary populations is only one aspect of the intersections between insecurity and climate change. Another concerns the links between violent extremism and climate change. On this particular issue, the analysis must focus on highly contextual drivers of recruitment and evolving global dynamics, in line with the analysis outlined in this paper.

It is well known that livelihood destitution due to desertification and environmental degradation plays into the hands of VEGs in regions already marked by structural marginalization. Such is the case for certain regions of Somalia, where Al-Shabaab has managed to tap into grievances related to poverty, often linked to loss of soil fertility, drought and tensions over land resources, which heighten the vulnerability stemming from lack of social services and public goods. Environmental degradation can therefore easily play into narratives of injustice that VEGs aim to position themselves as solutions for.

The Central African Republic is one such example. The north-eastern part of the country is experiencing accelerating rates of desertification. Incidentally, this is also where insurgent groups have attempted to use so-called jihadi ideology to mobilize local grievances. Desertification and loss of economic opportunities (related to livelihoods and beyond) resonate with more structural issues relating to marginalization and therefore echo sentiments of injustice among communities.<sup>v</sup> Insurgent groups, including ones that have attempted to use Islamist ideologies, have taken up this sense of injustice and attempted to regulate the use of natural resources.

Similarly, in central Mali, some VEGs have positioned themselves as key regulators of access to the larger *bourgoutières* ecosystem—a wetland in the Niger river delta that has historically served all clan-based structures in larger Mali. However, the health of the *bourgoutières* is deteriorating as a result of unsustainable agricultural policies promoted by Bamako, hydro-energy infrastructure development and more generally rising temperatures due to climate change over decades.<sup>100</sup>

The continued presence of violence in central Mali since 2012 can be correlated in large part to the degradation of environmental resources. Both insurgent and violent extremist groups have capitalized on grievances related to this degradation. These examples demonstrate that environmental degradation and climate disruptions should now actively be taken into account when

v. Field interview, O. Lazard, CAR, 2018

attempting to understand how livelihoods and communities fall into the type of vulnerability that VEGs can leverage. So far, analyses seeking the drivers and narrative construction that link violent extremism and environmental degradation or climate change have remained largely localized.

Such vastly different contexts have a common pattern to them: conflict and violence analysis should centre not just on the political dynamics between various identity, livelihood and political groups and violent mobilizers but also the relationship between human populations and their ecosystem. In other words, analysis and follow-on programming should include a political ecology approach.

Another dimension that is central to understanding the links between land, natural resources and violent extremism is predation and corruption. Land is increasingly a resource that elites at the subnational, national and international levels are competing for. In a context like North Kivu in eastern DRC, elites compete to rig the cadastral system and have access to large land concessions that favour their own private accumulation at the expense of communities. The latter are often driven out of their ancestral land that is the backbone of their livelihoods along with their administrative identity. Once displaced, communities end up with little to no resources through which to obtain means of justice or reparations, and they become dependent on aid to survive.

DRC provides some of the most egregious examples of land governance corruption, but many countries showcase similar patterns, including in contexts where the effects of violent extremism are endemic such as Mozambique and the Sahel. Often, in these contexts, elites play on legal fissures between customary and positive law systems regarding land administration to gain access to private resources. This results in a compounding of risks regarding community stress and ecological extractivism (in the form of timber, biodiversity, minerals and other goods), which

have repercussions on wider environmental health, structural marginalization and aid dependency. In all cases, VEGs aim to position themselves as rights of wrongs, regulators of access to natural resources, providers of justice and administrative services, as well as livelihood substitutes.

Global VEGs have not yet developed a narrative around climate change. This will likely change rapidly, however. The impact, scope, pace and geographical reach of climate disruptions are going to intensify. Even the best climate models underestimated the timeline for incoming impacts by an average of 20 years, according to the estimates of the best climate scientists. Climate disruptions will impact climate-vulnerable nations more rapidly, beginning with many sub-Saharan nations such as Zimbabwe, Somalia, Cameroon, the Sahelian countries etc. Historically, climate negotiations have focused on mitigation and raising ambitions for transition planning. After over 15 years of COP negotiations, there remains a serious risk that the international community will collectively fail to rein in global greenhouse gas emissions to stay within the 1.5°Celsius of global warming that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change identifies as the relatively safe threshold that should not be crossed. In addition to failing on mitigation targets, COP26 demonstrated that climate finance for adaptation is still vastly inadequate.

A country like Cameroon already spends more than 9 percent of GDP per year on recovery from and adaptation to climate disruptions. By comparison, the current contributions to the Global Adaptation Fund register a total amount of about USD327 million per year, amounting to no more than 5 US cents per person throughout the so-called developing world.<sup>101</sup> This staggering gap is partially mitigated by various forms of aid that may contribute to adaptation goals. This simple equation reveals an inequity that fosters dangerous trust gaps between highly climate-vulnerable nations and more resilient ones (most of which are located in the developed world).

It is therefore highly likely that transnational VEGs will find it an easy task to craft a global narrative positing climate change as the ultimate form of structural violence imposed by developed countries upon the rest of the world. The climate justice agenda, which is incredibly important in the journey towards greater global resilience in the face of a historic and global challenge such as climate change, is likely to be characterized by complex negotiation tensions between highly climate-vulnerable nations and those that are less so. The lack of positive and concrete results is likely to generate growing pockets of fragility, social tensions, misgovernance and, ultimately, violence. One particular example already comes to mind: the Maldives is a middle-income country that acts as a canary in the coal mine, like many small island States in the Indo-Pacific and the Caribbean. The Maldives is already struggling with violent extremism at home and abroad, and up until a few years ago, the second-biggest foreign fighter contingent in Syria stemmed from the country.<sup>102</sup> While many factors are driving leading young men and women to fly into Syria to fight with VEGs, the lack of economic and purely territorial prospects in the Maldives is certainly one such factor. Climate change plays into this story in a country where disruptions are set to accelerate. As such, the Government may experience growing difficulty to deliver a vision and the means for a future that young people can meaningfully project themselves into.

This annexe therefore posits a theory that the ideological and narrative reach of VEGs will increase over the coming years, and will increasingly include grievances relating to lack of international action on climate change, weak collective solidarity and financial mechanisms for adaptation, loss and damages and structural injustice. These narratives will likely include a fundamental questioning of the nation State's effectiveness in providing resilience and public goods. In other words, the ideological narrative will reinforce a reading of international relations compatible with the centre-periphery theories which are central to analysing the phenomenon of violent extremism. *Journey to Extremism*, for example, highlighted that VEGs

manage to recruit more easily in areas marked by destitution and marginalization, such as peri-urban or cross-border areas. In this case, since this issue is global, narratives may transpose that thinking to global centres and peripheries, with the developed world being understood as the centre, and developing and highly climate-vulnerable countries being understood as the periphery. The dual nature of globality and locality for narrative construction will remain, but they will align more evidently as climate change—a global phenomenon—causes more and more disruptions at highly localized and regional levels and as it diminishes the global capacity for resilience while increasing polarization and widening political divides.<sup>103</sup>



# ANNEX B:

# HYPOTHESES FOR FURTHER INQUIRY

Three hypotheses have emerged that merit closer examination. These are separate from, and additional to, the continued investment in the “Understand” section items set out in the Recommendations section, as they represent more time-bound inquiries with a prospective conclusion (“true”, “false”, or “uncertain”).

## The involvement of Al-Qaida and Daesh makes ending conflict harder, but some form of negotiation remains inevitable for peace.

ACLED and other data demonstrate that local affiliation with Al-Qaida or Daesh seems to increase the lethality of conflict, especially for civilians. It is also clear that the involvement of Al-Qaida or Daesh is associated with impediments to access to humanitarian aid (though state forces may also impede access). However, it has not been possible to demonstrate quantitatively that the involvement of such global VEGs also prolongs conflicts.<sup>104</sup> There is a plausible logic to such a hypothesis, given the prohibition on engaging with proscribed groups, but too few conflicts of either kind have come to a definite end to allow a firm inference. However, while no study has definitively linked VEGs to longer conflicts, many of these groups’ characteristics and tactics are associated with more enduring conflict.

There is evidence to indicate that conflicts involving ideologically motivated groups, foreign fighters and those that use terrorism last longer.<sup>105</sup> Conflicts in which external actors provide support to violent groups (sometimes described as “proxies”, although the relationships are rarely simple) are also understood to be more prolonged.<sup>106</sup>

*Implication:* preventing the entry of proscribed global groups is likely to reduce the human cost of instability. Detaching local VEGs that have become involved with Al-Qaida and Daesh may be difficult but might perhaps contribute to bringing an end to conflict.<sup>107</sup> However, both policy-related and practical challenges may make this acutely difficult in specific cases. Defining what “detachment” might mean would inevitably be both controversial and locally specific—perhaps renouncing a global mission and terrorist intentions might be different from renouncing the imposition of a local VEG’s interpretation of sharia law.

## Local VEGs shift from “Big Man” to “Big Idea” as resources permit. This enhances their resilience.

It remains important not to imagine local VEGs as one-dimensional opportunistic conflict entrepreneurs. Their ideological grounding affects their strategy and structure. Their resilience is evident, but understanding how they achieve it



moves into realms of plausible hypotheses. These require further investigation, which might be a valuable aspect for future research to explore.

Insurgent groups have often been associated with terms such as “warlord”, “patrimonial”, or “Big Man”. Some local VEGs carry the name of their central figure (e.g. *Katiba Macina* or “Koufa’s Boys”) but there is also some indication that local VEGs, especially better-funded ones, are more structured and respond differently to the loss of a leader figure. More refined data on succession planning and internal dynamics would be needed for a confident diagnosis.

The interviews suggest that the structure of VEGs is shifting from classic “Big Man” patron-client organizations to “Big Idea” formations whose cohesion derives from ideological rather than personal alignment, although there is not yet any conclusive evidence to this effect.<sup>108</sup> This shift requires resources, and so may lie beyond the reach of groups with less funding. However, some local VEGs (like Al-Shabaab in Somalia) have developed extensive subnational and local structures. These allow them to provide something like state services—notably “justice” and dispute resolution—and help them embed more deeply in local society. They therefore compete with the state “offer”—an offer which international partners are helping to enhance in many areas.

Affiliation with global VEGs like Al-Qaida or Daesh provides a global narrative and an image of global reach. It also offers a long time horizon—Al-Qaida and Daesh both speak in terms of a long history reaching back to the Crusades—which may be helped by the example of strategic patience demonstrated by the Taliban in Afghanistan. This narrative also allows VEGs to explain (however incompletely or anachronistically) the source of their grievances to communities in terms of global actors<sup>109</sup>—“the West” or “Crusaders”—which reinforce their justification of the VEG’s resistance to state authorities they condemn as *kufir* (infidel or unbelieving).<sup>110</sup> It also provides adherents, especially

youth, with a sense of “meaning” that state agencies may find hard to rival, although international partners are helping them to present alternative positive narratives.<sup>111</sup>

Groups with deeper local (and subnational) structures may also be more resilient. If ideological groups are impelled to create such structures for messaging and to provide dispute resolution services and so on, this may contribute to their apparent greater resilience. Local VEGs that embed through local grievances and also have largely local revenues may have deeper local roots but less resilience through regional networks if local bases are threatened. However, local VEGs operate readily across national borders and seem able to combine local rootedness with regional connectedness for now, although this may be vulnerable to counter-messaging that draws attention to these inconsistencies.

*Implication:* taken together, these offer an explanation for the persistence and resilience of VEGs in the face of the loss of central actors. They also suggest that removing the leadership of such a VEG may not be effective in reducing the impact of its activities.

## Resisting the entry of Al-Qaida or Daesh requires shifting the cost-benefit calculations of local VEGs

Local VEGs affiliate with global VEGs, and global VEGs accept affiliation. It therefore seems clear that for both leaderships, the benefits of such affiliation outweigh the costs.<sup>112</sup> Since it is difficult to ascertain what Al-Qaida or Daesh think about accepting affiliation, and affiliation appears to be broadly consistent across regions, it is probably best to focus on the cost-benefit calculations of the leaderships of local VEGs if affiliation is to be discouraged by raising the cost or lowering the benefit to them and their goals.

However, it would be helpful to understand whether global networks view groups as potential franchises when they are on the rise, or whether groups instead seek alignment with global networks to reclaim legitimacy when they are on the back foot. Securing access to those involved in the process to learn who approaches whom would offer valuable insights into this question.

This calculation is hard to observe, and more research is needed to be confident about it.<sup>113</sup> However, it seems clear that local VEGs benefit from the image of the global group which they are affiliated with<sup>114</sup>, in terms of both its global ideological standing and its frightening nature. There are reports (especially with respect to Daesh) of some transfer of experienced fighters, skills and techniques as well as funding.<sup>115</sup>

Where local groups are already being targeted by national and international efforts, both economic

and involving armed force, the initial cost of affiliation for the local VEG may seem low, unless it discourages followers. In Somalia, the limited nature of Al-Shabaab's use of its connection with Al-Qaida in its communications suggests that in Somalia, at least, the global nature of the relationship may not help it in its relationships with local elites (or, perhaps, in its local recruitment efforts). However, there may be a broader opportunity to impose a prospective cost on affiliation by excluding groups from local negotiations over economic and security arrangements unless they credibly dissociate themselves from the proscribed global group in question—though both parts of that possibility remain fraught with difficulty.

*Implication:* frustrating the local strategies of global VEGs requires an understanding of the cost-benefit calculations of local elites who join VEGs or hold back from doing so. That, in turn, requires detailed local inquiry.



# ANNEX C: METHODOLOGY

The 2015 UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism recognized that

“[n]arratives of grievance, actual or perceived injustice, promised empowerment and sweeping change become

attractive where human rights are being violated, good governance is being ignored and aspirations are being crushed”.

Much detailed material is already available on the dynamics of VEGs, including numerous overviews,<sup>116, 117, 118</sup> regional thematic studies,<sup>119, 120</sup> and more recent country-specific studies,<sup>121, 122</sup>. Overview surveys of wider political violence<sup>123</sup> also provide valuable material on African case studies.

However, the PVE overviews as yet lack an analysis of the dynamics of local groups in relation to global VEGs, especially their leadership, strategy and internal coherence. Their analysis was largely—though not exclusively—at the level of the individual members and the drivers of their induction into VEGs, while attending helpfully to the pre-existing conditions that predisposed potential adherents to recruitment. The 2018 UK Stabilisation Unit report,<sup>124</sup> for example, identified four broad “steps”:

1. The existence of core vulnerabilities;
2. The creation of an ideological narrative;
3. Group or social interaction; and
4. The experience of “being” a violent extremist.

In *From Freedom Fighters to Jihadists*, Vera Mironova argues that the VEGs that “have less corruption and provide more for their members become the most popular with fighters”. Thurstone, however, argues that recruitment into VEGs and schisms within VEGs are “heavily shaped by social networks, relationships between field commanders and sheer contingency”. He suggests that “the jihadist field commander achieves the greatest success when the distinctive promise he offers meets the needs of multiple constituencies; it is then that the potential for a wide-ranging coalition appears, with one foot in the partly-realized jihadist counter-order and another foot still in the existing order. These coalitions and the political projects are highly unstable”. Similarly, in *Insurgent Fragmentation in the Horn of Africa*, Woldemariam observes that VEGs “are coalitions that depend on cooperation among differentiated, heterogeneous units”.

There is some available literature on the relationships between NSAGs and VEGs. For example, in *Alliance Formation*, Christia observes that “the key actors vis-à-vis warring group alliance

formation and fractionalization are often local elites, operating at a 'meso level' that links national-level cleavages with individual-level motivations", which we might describe as "organizational" or "corporate" or "collective". In *Tribes and Global Jihadism*, Collombier and Roy relate VEGs to tribes, particularly tribes in conflict with state authority, as one of the key local elite formations in the areas of their study. They argue that "by translating their local struggle into a regional or even global one, tribes increase their agency. But this 'rational actor' explanation does not explain why tribesmen should stick to a jihadist agenda that might also backfire or

attract repression, not only from the State but also from foreign forces".

In addition to understanding the dynamics of VEGs in the region, it will be desirable to try to understand their goals as far as possible. Do they seek, for example, to capture the State, to divide it (capturing part), to disrupt and attenuate it (in pursuit of freedom of action), to subsume it in a wider regional or global polity (e.g. a caliphate or a province of a caliphate), to eliminate authority in favour of chaos (whether for criminal or ideological reasons) or some other wider strategic goal?



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# ANNEX D: DEFINITIONS

## Extremism

Astrid Botticher<sup>125</sup> provides the following definition:

extremism characterizes an ideological position embraced by those anti-establishment movements, which understand politics as a struggle for supremacy rather than as peaceful competition between parties with different interests seeking popular support for advancing the common good. Extremism exists at the periphery of societies and seeks to conquer its center by creating fear of enemies within and outside society. Extremists, viewing politics as a zero-sum game, tend—circumstances permitting—to engage in aggressive militancy, including criminal acts and mass violence in their fanatical will for gaining and holding political power. Where extremists gain state power, they tend to destroy social diversity and seek to bring about a comprehensive homogenisation of society ... At the societal level, extremist movements are authoritarian, and, if in power, extremist rulers tend to become totalitarian. Extremists glorify violence as a conflict resolution mechanism and are opposed to the constitutional state, majority-based democracy, the rule of law and human rights for all.

Borrowing perhaps from Berger,<sup>126</sup> UNDP's *Misogyny: the Extremist Gateway?* (2021) suggests “one way of understanding it is to think of it as the belief that the very survival of a group depends on enacting violence against their opponents.” Both definitions allow for the possibility of a State itself being extremist.

## Insurgency

UNDP's RBAP 2020 report *State of Violence* distinguishes violent extremism from other forms of insurgency: “Violent extremists target all members of the out-group for violence. The ingroup sees violence as the only way to secure its future and political aims. ... Insurgency, in the sense of an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict, is typically a non-state phenomenon, though insurgencies can often be sponsored or succoured by States external to the insurgency.”

## Violent Extremist Groups (VEGs)

Violent extremists can be purely individual, can form into groups, or can be recruited into existing groups. Individual violent extremists may pose a significant security challenge, but VEGs, which pose a different degree of threat, form the subject of this paper.

On the other hand, a group may deploy violence – indeed, may make violence a feature of its workings – without any binding impulse other than financial gain; drugs gangs in many parts of the world are paradigmatic examples.<sup>128</sup> However, the term VEG is typically used to denote a group which organises around an extremist ideology (in the sense described above) and routinely deploys violence as part of its workings.<sup>129</sup> This paper uses the term in that sense.<sup>130</sup>

## VEGs claiming inspiration from the ideologies espoused by Al Qaida or Daesh

VEGs may be inspired by a range of ideologies. While there are and have been many transnational VEGs (such as white nationalist groups in Europe, or Black Axe spreading from Nigeria) and a number of global VEGs that espoused global ideologies and sought global spans of action (such as the Red Brigades in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, which forged a putative alliance with the Japanese Red Army Faction), the global current of violent extremist action relevant to sub-Saharan Africa today is that of groups claiming to be inspired by an ideology similar to that proclaimed by Al-Qaida or Daesh.

## Global, transnational and local VEGs

There are then three groups of actors to consider. The first are global VEGs. Al-Qaida and Daesh represent the archetype of a global VEG. Such global VEGs have a global agenda and global aspirations; they also seek global reach.

The second are transnational VEGs. These operate across the recognized borders of a State. This may reflect tactical spread (e.g. expansion in search of areas in which to recover, retrain or re-equip) or it may reflect a cross-border theatre of operations. However, they regard their remit as regional rather than global.

The third are VEGs whose operations are confined broadly within the boundaries of a single national state. They may be very local – operating in a single region of a country or mobilising from a single identity group – or they may operate across much or all of a country, but their remit is national.

There are also non-state armed groups that may mobilize around grievances that give them ideological form (e.g. occupation, ethnicity or class), but which may be drawn into a relationship with VEGs instrumentally (on either part). This paper distinguishes them from the VEGs claiming inspiration from the ideologies espoused by Al-Qaida or Daesh which form the focus of the research

## Reform champions

The societies and Governments in question are all embarking on a range of reform and modernization agendas. “Reform champions”—the actors driving these changes—are important partners for the international community as the latter seeks to support progress. These reform champions, whether leaders of formal Government processes or social movements, operate within the constraints discussed in this paper. In doing so, their projects intersect with those of local VEGs and other actors in the political economies of the regions in which they work.

## Organized criminal groups and money-laundering

It is useful to distinguish between insurgents, terrorists and organized criminal networks and groups. The latter are generally not explicitly anti-state groups that establish their own legal and ethical rules or enforce an ideology on constituencies. They do not seek to uproot state authorities nor to completely upend state territorial control over particular geographic areas. Instead, they leverage state weakness and deficiencies (at times exacerbating them) in a way that serves their interests. Organized criminal networks generally seek a degree of equilibrium between the public, state authorities and their own private goals. Indeed, they need an “organized” apparatus and

networks for crime, which is why they are generally more inclined to establish relationships with state personnel that act as interlocutors or middlemen. The role of these state-level counterparts varies significantly, and so do the methods leveraged by organized criminal networks to establish relationships with them. Some mean to ensure a political, military and judicial climate that is conducive to successful organized criminal activities, while others may be in charge of mobilizing state resources or levers to enhance organized criminal networks' opportunities for revenue generation. The relationship between organized crime and the State is often transactional—a dynamic that does not exist with insurgents or terrorists, whose *raison d'être* is often to confront the State, leveraging violence as the primary method for doing so.

Organized criminal networks and insurgent or terrorist groups therefore differ: the former tend to prefer “using” the State to penetrate formal and informal political, economic and social spheres, while the latter have an explicitly antagonistic relationship with state authorities. Depending on how mature they are, organized criminal networks may be predatory (selectively leveraging violence to penetrate the State and maintaining a certain degree of monopoly on the illicit use of force), parasitic (where violence declines as relationships between organized criminal networks and the State are cemented), or symbiotic (where organized criminal networks have become more powerful than the State, generally by penetrating the State so deeply that the boundaries between criminal networks and the State become obsolete, as in the case of narco-States).

These dynamics also explain why alliances between organized crime networks and terrorists are generally unsustainable in the longer term—they have long-term objectives that cannot be reconciled. They are, however, amenable to striking ad hoc agreements (as noted in the main report in terms of providing protection for financial gains or procuring illicit material). There are also historical instances of organized criminal groups leveraging

political violence and terrorism when their interests are significantly threatened (e.g. in Italy)—though here, too, they chose to wield this form of violence to force the State to make political choices rather than to upend the State as such.

AML efforts are partly an acknowledgement of the fact that one of the main weaknesses of transnational organized criminal networks was their need to use the legal channels of banking and financial systems to transfer funds and conceal the origin of their assets.

Money-laundering and terrorist financing are different, however. The former aims to make dirty money appear legal, while the latter aims to obfuscate the end goal of asset transfers (some of which may be of legal origin). The international AML apparatus does not generally make this distinction because both modalities represent threats to the financial system and public institutions, and the strategies that can be leveraged to fight criminals financially can be applied similarly when combating terrorist financing. Moreover, the AML apparatus is not concerned with the transaction that is intended to further money-laundering or terrorist financing as much as the money and the individuals or entities behind the transaction.

However, there are problems for AML systems that are due in part to the fact that transactions associated with money-laundering go through channels that are outside the purview and range of control of law enforcement:

- For their money-laundering activities, criminal networks can secure the complicity of members of the financial sector, upon which state authorities depend for the exchange of information to detect and operationalize AML activities;
- Terrorist networks can establish ad hoc relationships with criminal networks through which they leverage the organized criminal networks' ability to transfer funds.

AML efforts are also often siloed: for bureaucratic, procedural and compliance reasons, these efforts are compartmentalized from more “developmental” efforts to combat terrorists, particularly at the subnational level. There is an opportunity to improve coordination between the global and local policy spheres. For instance, one of the main sources of terrorist financing globally is trafficking (through organized criminal networks), and this financing mechanism can be tackled in a multitude of ways at a more national level in light of the marriage of convenience

between organized criminal networks and terrorist groups. Efforts could be focused on “divorcing” organized criminal networks and terrorists rather than on lumping the two together. Such initiatives might include:

- Strengthening AML legislation at the national level and supporting the establishment of legislation that would incriminate those who are “guilty by association” in terrorist financing (which could disincentivize organized criminal networks from cooperating with terrorist groups).





# ENDNOTES



1. UNDP (2017), *Journey to Extremism: drivers, incentives and the tipping point for recruitment*, <https://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/>
2. “A mediated form of statehood, in which governments rely on diverse strategies of negotiation with non-state sources of authority to provide certain functions of government, including public security provision, justice, and the management of local conflicts in the country’s periphery”. Menkhaus (2007), *Governance without Government in Somalia*, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249564774\\_Governance\\_Without\\_Government\\_in\\_Somalia\\_Spoilers\\_State\\_Building\\_and\\_the\\_Politics\\_of\\_Coping](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249564774_Governance_Without_Government_in_Somalia_Spoilers_State_Building_and_the_Politics_of_Coping)
3. “In an arena of extreme competition for loyalty and authority, its policies on policing, taxation, marriage, and education build clearly specified identities of membership in the group and demonstrate its authority, in ways that mimic statehood ... Daesh exhibits classic characteristics of a proto-state, trapped in a perpetual state of instability, flux, and fluidity, and yet coalesces and finds form as it challenges and forcibly remakes authority”. Brown K.E. (2018), *Violence and Gender Politics in the Proto-State “Islamic State”*. In Parashar et al. (2018), *Revisiting Gendered States*, Oxford Scholarship Online.
4. “African jihadist movements are first and foremost local movements that arise from local social and political dynamics, and their struggle is primarily geared toward addressing local—not global—grievances”. Quoted in Ibrahim, I.Y. (2017), “The Wave of Jihadist Insurgency in West Africa: Global Ideology, Local Context, Individual Motivations”, *West African Papers* No. 07, OECD Publishing, Paris, [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/the-wave-of-jihadist-insurgency-in-west-africa\\_eb95ca9-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/the-wave-of-jihadist-insurgency-in-west-africa_eb95ca9-en).
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/an-epidemic-coups-un-chief-laments-urging-security-council-act-2021-10-26/>.
6. UNREC/UNDP (2016), *Assessment Survey on Small Arms in the Sahel Region and Neighbouring Countries*, [https://www.unrec.org/ged/download.php?itemId=161&language=en\\_GB](https://www.unrec.org/ged/download.php?itemId=161&language=en_GB).
7. SIPRI (2020), [https://sipri.org/media/press-release/2021/world-military-spending-rises-almost-2-trillion-2020#:~:text=Military%20expenditure%20in%20sub%2DSaharan,Uganda%20\(%2B46%20oper%20cent\)](https://sipri.org/media/press-release/2021/world-military-spending-rises-almost-2-trillion-2020#:~:text=Military%20expenditure%20in%20sub%2DSaharan,Uganda%20(%2B46%20oper%20cent))
8. Interview with regional security expert, interview with Nigeria UNDP Country Office team.
9. Schulz, D.E., *Political Legitimacy in Post-Colonial Mali* <https://boydellandbrewer.com/9781847012685/political-legitimacy-in-postcolonial-mali/>
10. Tsuda, K. (2020), <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/humanrights/2020/03/20/continued-instability-in-mali-and-west-africa/>.
11. Previous Tuareg-led revolts occurred in 1963, 1990, 2006, 2012. Tuareg dynamics are complex, however: “the Kidal-based Kel Adagh resented their integration into a new Malian state that gained independence from France in 1960. They quickly found themselves at odds with the new Malian government that sought to curb their freedom. Next to complaints about the central government, however, the Tuareg rebellions and their aftermaths also reflected internal power dynamics dating back to colonial alliances and hostilities, as well as internal political conflicts pitting tribal traditionalists against the leaders of lower social strata and politically subordinate tribes in favour of more progressive egalitarian society”. Clingendael (2019), [https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/legitimacy\\_traditional\\_authorities\\_mali\\_niger\\_libya/4-traditional-authorities-in-mali-armed-alliances-and-insecurity/](https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/legitimacy_traditional_authorities_mali_niger_libya/4-traditional-authorities-in-mali-armed-alliances-and-insecurity/)
12. Tsuda, K. (2020), <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/humanrights/2020/03/20/continued-instability-in-mali-and-west-africa/>.
13. “The Sahel crisis entered 2021 following a record year of conflict and violence in 2020, during which more than 6,200 fatalities were reported in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. In 2020, more civilians were killed in Mali and Niger than in any previous year”, <https://acleddata.com/2021/08/05/mid-year-update-10-conflicts-to-worry-about-in-2021/#1612195879250-fd67dc25-cc2cc431-25b1>
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19. Menkhaus, K. (2018), *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Somalia Case Study*. DFID Stabilisation Unit.
20. Menkhaus, K. (2018), *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Somalia Case Study*. DFID Stabilisation Unit.
21. Interviews with Somali civil society activist and country experts.
22. Interview with regional expert on security and organized crime.
23. See [https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aq\\_sanctions\\_list/summaries/entity/mouvement-pour-l%E2%80%99unification-et-le-jihad-en](https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/mouvement-pour-l%E2%80%99unification-et-le-jihad-en).
24. Thurstone, A. (2020), *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel*, CUP, p.54, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108771160>.
25. “Violent extremist mobilization is rooted in deep-seated socio-economic and political grievances particularly among disadvantaged groups.” NUPI/UNDP, *Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Central Mali* [https://www.nupi.no/nupi\\_eng/Publications/CRISTin-Pub/Local-Drivers-of-Violent-Extremism-in-Central-Mali](https://www.nupi.no/nupi_eng/Publications/CRISTin-Pub/Local-Drivers-of-Violent-Extremism-in-Central-Mali).
26. ACLED (2021), <https://acleddata.com/2021/06/17/sahel-2021-communal-wars-broken-ceasefires-and-shifting-frontlines/>
27. Repeated in the literature, both academic and practitioner—see, for example, Bacon, T., and Warner, J. (2021), *The Threat in Africa—the New Epicentre of Global Jihadi Terror*, West Point, CTC Sentinel., <https://ctc.usma.edu/twenty-years-after-9-11-the-threat-in-africa-the-new-epicenter-of-global-jihadi-terror/>. “Above all, local social, political, and economic dynamics within African states have created the void that jihadi actors have exploited post-9/11, and these conditions show no signs of improving.”
28. Interviews with UNDP Country Offices in Somalia, DRC, Nigeria and Mali; with civil society activists from Somalia; and with experts from CAERT and IGAD.
29. *Africa Report*, 20 September 2021.
30. “Experts believe that JNIM-affiliated groups jointly earn between \$18 and \$35 million annually, mostly through extortion of the transit routes under their control, communities engaged in artisanal mining, and to a lesser extent kidnapping for ransom.” Eizenger, D, and Williams, W. (2021), *The Puzzle of JNIM and Militant Islamist Groups in the Sahel*, ACSS.
31. Confirmed in interviews with UNDP Country Offices in Mali, DRC, Mozambique, Somalia and Nigeria; with experts from GI-TOC, IGAD and CAERT; and with expert observers in Burkina Faso and Mali.
32. Interview with academic specializing in CVE.
33. “Groups operating in the Sahel are already tapping into gold mining. This helps them obtain the financial, logistical and operational resources needed to carry out attacks and sustain themselves”, ISS (2021), <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/how-western-mali-could-become-a-gold-mine-for-terrorists>.
34. Interviews with Somali civil society activists, UNDP Mali CO.
35. Al-Shabaab in Southern Mogadishu was cited as an example (interview with Somali activist)
36. “Porous borders between the Lake Chad Basin countries facilitate the penetration of SALW and other contraband goods that help sustain the inter-ethnic and farmer-herder conflicts exploited by extremist groups in order to increase their grip on this fragile region. Rising Boko Haram and ISWAP violence has harmed livelihoods in a region that was already facing sustainability threats” Frimpong, O.B. (2020), *Climate Change and Violent Extremism in the Lake Chad Basin: Key Issues and Way Forward*, Wilson Centre, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/Climate%20Change%20and%20Violent%20Extremism%20in%20the%20Lake%20Chad%20Basin%20Key%20Issues%20and%20Way%20Forward\\_o.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/Climate%20Change%20and%20Violent%20Extremism%20in%20the%20Lake%20Chad%20Basin%20Key%20Issues%20and%20Way%20Forward_o.pdf)
37. For example, Iyad ag Ghali, a Tuareg noble of the Ifoghas who spent over a decade in theological study and self-representation alongside other activities. Thurstone, A. (2020), *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel*, CUP, p. 113, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108771160>.
38. “The ways in which those involved in narcotics trafficking position themselves within formal and informal political, economic and security structures have changed to conform with the new realities on the ground. The result is a tenuous criminal equilibrium that allows drug trafficking through northern Mali to continue, despite the fact that the region remains divided among rival armed groups”, ENACT (2020), *Drug Trafficking in Northern Mali*.
39. “Despite the fact that the Malian government is barely present in northern Mali, illicit economies are, in fact, quite highly regulated through systems of patronage networks, protection economies and informal agreements.” ENACT (2020), *Drug Trafficking in Northern Mali*.
40. “An examination of the ways in which established patronage systems stop producing stability also helps expose how neopatrimonialism can become an engine for perpetual crisis. When it breaks down, the lack of a more formally institutionalized structure can create fragmentation that sustains itself into possibly even deeper levels of fragmentation. ... These systems of governance rely on the utilization of violence for security, resistance, and predation, but any understanding of these armed groups must recognize the larger context in which they are embedded”. Dunn, K.C., and Boås, M. (2017), *The Evolving Landscape of African Insurgencies*. In *Africa’s Insurgents: Navigating an Evolving Landscape*.

41. ACLED (2020), <https://acleddata.com/2020/02/14/global-conflict-and-disorder-patterns-2020/>.
42. ISS (2020), quoting Peter Bauman, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/time-to-rethink-the-prevention-of-violent-extremism-in-africa>.
43. Benjaminsen and Ba (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2021.1925035>, which also observes that “there is in practice more cooperation than conflict between farmers and herders in the Sahel, and that most conflicts are peacefully solved”, Moritz (2010), <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.471.5037&rep=rep1&type=pdf>”).
44. GIC Insecure Livelihoods Project <https://www.gicnetwork.be/insecure-livelihoods-series/>.
45. Lazard O. (co-author), unpublished field interviews, DRC 2016.
46. “A conflict-induced breakdown of customary arrangements for shared use coupled with state incapacity to regulate access to resources and mediate between groups is a critical variable for intercommunal conflict, which can provide an opening for violent extremist groups functioning as ‘antagonists, mediators or suppressors of violence’ depending on the context.” Cater UNDP (2021), *Toward New Policies for the Climate Change and Violent Extremism Nexus in Africa*.
47. “The root causes of this insurgency are all Mozambican: inequality, abject poverty, local elite and ethnic politics, and organized crime.” Vines, A. (2021), “Responding to Mozambique’s Islamic Insurgency: Will Foreign Military Assistance Make a Difference”, Georgetown Journal of International Affairs.
48. Coakley, A. (2021), ILLP.
49. <https://acleddata.com/2020/05/20/state-atrocities-in-the-sahel-the-impetus-for-counter-insurgency-results-is-fueling-government-attacks-on-civilians/>.
50. One of many references in the literature reads “When the security forces re-entered these areas, ‘ethnic profiling’ of Fulani herdsmen as ‘jihadists’ led to mass arrests, abuse and torture ... This event facilitated the development of the Katiba Macina, by generating frustration, resentment, and humiliation among Fulani pastoralist herdsmen, effectively catalysing their mobilization towards the group”. NUPI/UNDP, *Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Central Mali*.
51. Interviews with UNDP Country Offices in Mali, DRC, Somalia, Nigeria and Mozambique; a civil society activist from Somalia; experts from IGAD and CAERT.
52. Pérouse de Montclos (2021), *Rethinking the Response to Jihadist Groups Across the Sahel*, Chatham House, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/2021-03-02-response-jihadist-groups-sahel-perouse-de-montclos.pdf>.
53. Interview with UNDP Country Office, confirmed by interview with Somali civil society activist.
54. UNDP governance survey of Country Offices; interviews with Nigeria, Mali, Mali, Somalia, Mozambique, DRC; interviews with civil society activists in Nigeria and Somalia.
55. “The Congolese state is a key actor in the eastern part of the country. Its weakness, and sometimes complicity, can exacerbate local conflicts.” Streans, J., The Africa Report <https://www.theafricareport.com/73449/is-the-islamic-state-really-operating-in-eastern-drc/>
56. This is not unique to Somalia; in the Lake Chad Basin, for example, “in contrast to government extortion, cargo seizures, and crackdowns on trade, ISWAP’s taxation of goods is generally accepted by civilians. Some of the population in the Lake Chad area even credit ISWAP with fostering a better environment for business, primarily in the trade of rice, fish, and dried pepper.” Bacon, T., and Warner, J. (2021), *The Threat in Africa—the New Epicentre of Global Jihadi Terror*, West Point, CTC Sentinel.
57. Interviews with Country Offices in DRC, Mozambique, Nigeria, Mali. Ibrahim Y Ibrahim 2017 notes “most states in Africa have ‘consolidated statehood’ at least in their capital cities; that is, they possess the military and administrative capacities to regulate social behaviour and resolve conflict in these places. This is different, however, in rural and remote areas where states may have only ‘limited statehood’. Jihadist entrepreneurs have tended to establish their bases in peripheral areas where the state has only a limited statehood”. *The Wave of Jihadist Insurgency in West Africa: Global Ideology, Local Context, Individual Motivations*, West African Papers No. 07, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eb95c0a9-en>.
58. “Violent extremist groups also use social tensions and frustrations linked to local land disputes—a grievance that has formed fertile ground for them to take hold elsewhere in the Sahel.” ISS (2020), quoting Peter Bauman, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/time-to-rethink-the-prevention-of-violent-extremism-in-africa>.
59. Coakley, A. (2021), ILLP.
60. The Local Roots of Violence in Eastern Burkina Faso, <https://norria-research.com/the-local-roots-of-violence-burkina-faso/>.
61. “Local mediation efforts cannot replace the need for a political solution to the conflicts affecting the Sahel region and an institutional solution to the marginalization of nomads.” CHD (2021), *Agro-Pastoral Mediation in the Sahel*
62. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2021-02-23/secretary-generals-remarks-the-security-council-addressing-climate-related-security-risks-international-peace-and-security-through-mitigation-and-resilience-building>

63. "Pastoralists seem to support the jihadist take-over, because of an anti-state, anti-elite and pro-pastoral jihadist discourse, because they have become increasingly fatigued and disgruntled by a predatory and corrupt state, and because the development model imposed by the state and international donors has not responded to pastoral priorities. Rent-seeking by government officials has been especially intense in relation to conflicts over pastoral land, environmental management and the fight against desertification". Benjaminsen and Ba (2019), *Why Do Pastoralists in Mali join Jihadist Groups?* <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2018.1474457>
64. Field interviews 2018, Lazard O. (co-author).
65. Interviews with UNDP Country Offices in DRC, Mozambique; two Somali civil society activists; CAERT.
66. Interview with expert on transnational and organized crime.
67. "Al-Shabaab also appears to rely on a network of trusted women to provide secure hiding places where fighters can organize operations. According to one former militant, such women tend to be older, based in major towns and paid for their work. Older women tend to elicit even less suspicion from government security forces. Al-Shabaab's use of such women for this role reflects the militants' ability to exploit stereotypical gender norms to operational advantage." ICG (2019), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b145-women-and-al-shabaabs-insurgency>.
68. "A relatively high proportion of respondents in Nigeria thought that women from their community could play roles in extremist armed groups, including training (31 per cent), providing logistics and domestic support (46 per cent), as collectors of financial resources (44 per cent), intelligence gatherers (43 per cent), and combatants (40 per cent). ... In Chad the most frequently cited role for women was that of combatant (16 per cent), while only negligible proportions of Nigerien respondents assigned any of these roles to women." Small Arms Survey (2021), *Violent Extremism in the Southern Libya Borderlands*.
69. Interview with Somali civil society activist.
70. See, for example, UNDP (2021), *Misogyny: The Extremist Gateway?*, <https://www1.undp.org/content/oslo-governance-centre/en/home/library/misogyny--the-extremist-gateway-.html>
71. Hudson, V.M., and Hodgson, K.B. (2020), *Sex and Terror: Is the Subordination of Women Associated with the Use of Terror?* <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2020.1724968>
72. Charlson, F., van Ommeren, M., Flaxman, A., Cornett, J., Whiteford, H., and Saxena, S. (2019), "New WHO Prevalence Estimates of Mental Disorders in Conflict Settings: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis", *The Lancet*, p.240-48
73. For example, a study from a similar conflict zone concludes that "exposure to unprocessed traumatic events impede peaceful coexistence and healing, in such a way that if these psychological problems are not addressed, it is not possible to live in peaceful coexistence. Furthermore, recovering from traumatic experiences is an essential foundation for [peacebuilding]". Tankink, M. and Otto, B. (2019). *"Peace Starts with Peace of Mind": Study on the Intersection Between Post-Conflict Trauma and Peacebuilding in Northern Uganda*. Research report. Uganda, TPO Uganda.
74. Interview with sectoral expert, November 2021.
75. Dunn, K.C., and Boàs, M. (2017), *The Evolving Landscape of African Insurgencies. In Africa's Insurgents: Navigating an Evolving Landscape*.
76. Interview with Somali civil society activist.
77. Bacon, T., and Warner, J. (2021), *The Threat in Africa—the New Epicentre of Global Jihadi Terror*, West Point, CTC Sentinel.
78. UNDP Country Office survey response (2021).
79. KII with UNDP country expert (2021).
80. Field interviews by team members (2019).
81. "Comme pour dire que la logique d'engagement de la Katiba Macina avec une nouvelle approche de gestion sensible des conflits fonciers anciens et nouveaux prend corps dans le centre du Mali." Message from Malian researcher, December 2021.
82. DFID (2009), *Building the State and Securing the Peace*, <https://gsdrc.org/docs/open/con64.pdf>
83. Brown, K.E. (2018), *Violence and Gender Politics in the Proto-State "Islamic State"*. In Parashar et al. (2018), *Revisiting Gendered States*, Oxford Scholarship Online.
84. "The drivers of the region's [Lake Chad Basin] 'violent extremism' are rooted in opportunistic and criminal enterprise that draws from the region's distinct political economy. ... Such groups actively exploit local grievances at the individual level centered around the region's endemic poverty and marginalization as well as the heavy-handed military approach to fighting the insurgency." Connor, G. (2017), *"Violent Extremism" in the Lake Chad Basin: Understanding the Drivers of the Boko Haram Insurgency*, NUPI.
85. See ICG, Coakley, A. (2021), ILLP.
86. For example, West Point CTC Sentinel noted that "Rather than treating jihadism as a complex combination of transnational affiliations and local drivers, capacity building efforts focused on the former, resulting in an emphasis on building security and military capability. But this investment was not matched by effective capacity building to improve governance and address underlying grievances. In other words, capacity building may have built some local government capacity to fight jihadism but not to address what fueled

- it.” Bacon, T., and Warner, J. (2021), *The Threat in Africa—the New Epicentre of Global Jihadi Terror*, West Point, CTC Sentinel.
87. Thurstone, A. (2020), *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel*, CUP, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108771160>.
  88. <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/26948>.
  89. Interview with organized crime expert, 2021.
  90. Notably in Mali and Nigeria, according to interviews with UNDP COs and regional security expert, November–December 2021.
  91. For example, in North-Western Nigeria, where “bandit” gangs and VEGs (JAS and ISWAP) are reported to collaborate in impeding the return of effective state authority.
  92. Interview with Somali civil society activist.
  93. See annexe A for more details.
  94. “IS claimed that state building is attainable and should not be delayed. To implement its enduring and expanding strategy, IS used its ideological, militant, social, and economic instruments of power. AQ’s gradualist strategy dictates that the establishment of such a state requires meeting several conditions, such as educating and gaining the support of Muslim populations in those areas in which its affiliates, front organization, and allies operate.” Almohammad, A. (2019), *Seven Years of Terror: Jihadi Organizations’ Strategies and Future Directions*, ICCT.
  95. “Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda had prioritized the fight against the United States and the West—the ‘far’ enemy—while delaying attacking the regimes in Muslim-majority states—the ‘near’ enemy. By contrast, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and the Islamic State prioritized the near war over the far war, while still seeking to inspire attacks in the West.” Zimmerman, K. (2021), *AQ and ISIS 20 years after 9/11*, Wilson Centre
  96. In Mali, for example, “high-level traditional elites in northern Mali have become entrenched in armed governance structures, either as founders of non-state armed groups or as allies of these groups. At the lower level of village and fraction chiefs, ... while still seeking to exercise their traditional governance functions, traditional authorities are in many cases hampered, sidelined and even threatened against the backdrop of a volatile security situation, their lack of enforcement power and the impact of armed governance on their legitimacy.” Clingendael (2019), [https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/legitimacy\\_traditional\\_authorities\\_mali\\_niger\\_libya/4-traditional-authorities-in-mali-armed-alliances-and-insecurity/](https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/legitimacy_traditional_authorities_mali_niger_libya/4-traditional-authorities-in-mali-armed-alliances-and-insecurity/)
  97. Challenging Al-Shabaab’s videos asking “Are you content with Muslim lands being grabbed and usurped by the Kuffar?”, referring to emotionally powerful grievances around unjust land ownership.” Quoted in RUSI (2020).
  98. RUSI (2020), <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/rusi-newsbrief/how-east-africas-terrorists-build-their-brand-strength>.
  99. Barth, T.J., & Bartenstein, J. (1998). Fostering a Learning, Innovative Government: the Role of Academic/Practitioner Collaboration. *The Public Manager: The New Bureaucrat*, 27(1), 21-26.
  100. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/07/12/climate-security-conflict-prevention-and-peacebuilding-pub-84876>.
  101. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/85791>.
  102. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/the-maldives-the-new-kid-on-the-islamist-block/>.
  103. Observations by Lazard, O. (co-author).
  104. At best, there are analytical observations such as “the influence of foreign leaders [with Al-Qaida or Daesh links] tends to push these local dimensions of the jihadist insurrection into the background, making the ideological facet more salient instead.” Ibrahim, I.Y. (2021), Crisis Group, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/la-mort-du-chef-de-letat-islamique-au-grand-sahara-une-occasion-de-dialogue>.
  105. See, for example, Page Fortna, V. (2015), *Do Terrorists Win?* <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-organization/article/abs/do-terrorists-win-rebels-use-of-terrorism-and-civil-war-outcomes/4729B2B926904616190DC38DB3240C8F>.
  106. Elbadawi, I.A., and Sambanis N., (2000), *External Interventions and the Duration of Civil Wars*, <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/pdf/10.1596/1813-9450-2433>.
  107. “Dialogue may also reveal key differences between the various militant Islamist group factions. Disparities between Ag Ghali and Koufa’s goals, such as how to interpret and implement Sharia, may further weaken the cohesion of their coalition. The willingness of Ag Ghali and Koufa to engage in settlements with national authorities may also split fighters seeking a political agreement from hardline factions within their ranks.” Eizenger, D, and Williams, W. (2021), *The Puzzle of JNIM and Militant Islamist Groups in the Sahel*, ACSS.
  108. Interviews with Somali civil society activist. Supportive comments from UNDP Country Offices in Mali, DRC, Somalia and Mozambique.
  109. “In particular, Salafi-jihadist groups do not only benefit from local grievances and poor governance but they have also become responsive to local sentiments and broader national politics: their rhetoric builds on anti-colonialism and they present themselves as local actors expelling foreign forces.” Faleg, G., and Mutsasilta, K. (2021), “Salafi-jihadism in Africa”, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/salafi-jihadism-africa>.
  110. The fact that VEGs attribute these grievances to “Crusaders” should not be taken as meaning that they express a full political economy-oriented analysis of the

- geopolitical forces at play in each theatre of conflict. Instead, their rhetoric provides a narrative that suits their mobilization of communities and individuals to their cause.
111. “The armed groups in question consist mostly of locals who have found in radical Islamist ideology a way to make sense of local conflicts and mobilize local grievances. Ideology counts, and the US government and its partners should explore ways to counter radical ideology, or rather encourage friendly local actors to do so.” Shurkin, M., and Bernard, A., <https://warontherocks.com/2021/08/ten-things-the-united-states-should-do-to-combat-terrorism-in-the-sahel/>.
  112. For example, “local leaders of a group may choose to seek out closer engagement with a Salafi-jihadist network and/or its regional province to get access to better resources and/or build their own political leverage. In turn, the larger organization benefits from viable local branches to maintain momentum, expand networks of resources and increase power vis-à-vis its strategic competitors.” Faleg, G., and Mutsasilta, K. (2021), “Salafi-jihadism in Africa”, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/salafi-jihadism-africa>.
  113. Interview with academic specializing in CVE. Confirmed by interview with expert on transnational and organized crime.
  114. “There is analytical value in understanding AQIM’s, Boko Haram’s, and Al-Shabaab’s adherence to a global jihadist ideology as part of employing a ‘global brand.’” Dunn, K.C., and Boås, M. (2017), *The Evolving Landscape of African Insurgencies. In Africa’s Insurgents: Navigating an Evolving Landscape*.
  115. Interview with regional security expert, December 2021
  116. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA543686.pdf>.
  117. H. Allan, A. Glazard et al. (2015), *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), <http://www.dmeformpeace.org/peaceexchange/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Drivers-of-VE-Hypotheses-and-Literature-Review.pdf>.
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  120. Faleg, G., and Mutsasilta, K. (2021), “Salafi-jihadism in Africa”, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/salafi-jihadism-africa>.
  121. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/webcast-violent-extremism-west-africa-are-current-responses-enough> Wilson Centre reporting USIP “began by discussing the drivers of recruitment to violent extremist organizations (VEO), which often cater to legitimate grievances, injustice, and repression felt by civilians. She emphasized that while violence is not the answer, it is important to consider what drives people to it. Insecurity and the perception of insecurity are on the rise, and there are three dynamics to this. The first is local sources of insecurity. When community security needs are not met, these lay the ground for recruitment to violent organizations. Civilians begin to wonder whether the state really cares about their security or just its own power, and terrorists take advantage of this divide. The second is intercommunal conflict, especially over resource management issues. Informal conflict resolution mechanisms between groups are breaking down, creating distrust, and making peacebuilding difficult. The third is whether people believe there is an avenue for change. Steadman then interrogated what is and is not working in countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts. What’s working is allowing civilians to decide their own future and good governance. What’s not working is under-scrutinized security assistance, and the heavy focus on eliminating today’s terrorists while not doing anything to stop tomorrow’s terrorists. Steadman recommended that policymakers focus on prioritizing local agency and support—not supplant—local peacebuilding mechanisms. She also recommended adjusting CVE narratives to recognize the humanity in affected people and communities (something VEO narratives already do), and improving state behavior towards its citizens by focusing on human security and the role of security services as protectors of the civilian population”
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  130. It was added to the UN sanctions list under UNSCR 2253 (2015) in 2020 <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14118.doc.htm>.
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