



Reviewing Jihadist Governance in the Sahel

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Abstract

The ways in which jihadist insurgents in the Sahel govern is rarely considered in the academic literature. They have often been portrayed as ‘Islamic terrorists’, who achieve their objectives by using brutal force against the civilian population and who finance their activities through criminal networks and activities. However, scattered empirical evidence reveals a different picture. Jihadist insurgents, like other insurgent groups, often use a variety of strategies to rule territory and populations. The scale, character and form of how such groups govern differs not only between countries but also at the sub-national level within the same group. Nevertheless, until recently jihadist insurgent governance in Africa and particularly the Sahel region has largely been overlooked. This synthesis reviews the existing literature on jihadist governance in West Africa, with a particular emphasis on the understudied region of the Sahel. The review is organised as follows: first, we clarify key concepts and provide definitions. Second, we provide a brief overview of Islam and politics in the Sahel, contextualising the rise of Salafist-jihadism as well as historical cases of jihadist governance. Third, we provide a brief overview of the literature and synthesise the existing research on jihadist insurgent governance in the Sahel. Fourth, we examine some key cases of jihadist governance in northern Mali, Nigeria and the Liptako-Gourma region straddling Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Finally, we conclude by summarising our findings, discussing the implications for the study of civil war and insurgency and consider avenues for future research.

Introduction

The Sahel region of West Africa is confronting a multi-faceted crisis, drawing increased attention from academics and policymakers. The Sahel, which means ‘shore’ in Arabic, is a belt of land separating the desert of the Sahara to the north and the Savanna to the south. The region faces multiple violent conflicts, where rebel groups and jihadist insurgents have demonstrated their propensity to mobilise and rule in rural areas. Jihadist insurgencies have continued to prove their resilience in places like Nigeria and Mali, while they expanded and have become deeply entrenched in other Sahelian states like Burkina Faso and Niger. The combined impact of jihadist groups, militias and counter-terror operations have fostered high levels of violence. For example, in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, between 2012 and 2019, there were 1,463 armed clashes, 4,723 civilians were killed, involving 195 violent armed groups (Raleigh, Nsaibia and Dowd, 2020, p. 1). In Nigeria, events involving Boko Haram have been linked to 27, 000 fatalities (ACLED, 2019) with violence reaching a high point in 2015, when the group was reportedly responsible for 6,100 fatalities and labelled ‘the world’s deadliest terrorist group’ (Global Terrorism Index, 2015). As of April 2021, at least 1,000 people, including soldiers and militias have died in attacks in the Sahel this year (Hoije et al., 2021).

Often analysed through the lens of ‘Islamic terrorism’ or the ‘crime-terror’ nexus, these actors were until recently rarely treated as governance actors. This understanding is however, rapidly changing. The limited scholarship that exists reveals that jihadist insurgents develop systems of governance, which varies both across and within sub-factions of groups. In the Sahel, jihadist insurgents have governed, seeking to assert social control, without controlling territory. Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its allies sought to establish an Islamic state in northern Mali between 2012-2013. Boko Haram governed large swathes of territory surrounding the Lake Chad basin, covering an area of almost 50,000 sq. km (ACLED, 2019). Jihadist insurgencies linked to Al-Qaida or the Islamic State (also called ISIS or Daesh) are often described as ‘front groups’, but they each have their own agendas. They are rooted in local conflicts and introduce diverse governing practices, despite not controlling territory or developing formalised, permanent institutions. Examples include the Katiba Macina, Ansaroul Islam and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) which are particularly active in the Liptako-Gourma border zone between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

This report synthesises the literature on jihadist insurgent governance in the Sahel and aims to take stock of the main patterns and findings as a starting point for future research. The paper proceeds in five parts. First, we define and conceptualise key terms. Second, we sketch an overview of Islam and politics in the Sahel, with a specific focus on the rise of Salafist-jihadism and historical cases of jihadist governance. Part three provides an overview of the literature and synthesises existing research, discussing the main explanatory factors which have been identified for understanding variation in governing practices within and across cases. Part four explores jihadist governance in three cases: AQIM and its allies’ governance of northern Mali, Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin and the Katiba Macina, Ansaroul Islam and the ISGS in the Liptako-Gourma region of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Part five concludes, draws together the main findings and suggests avenues for future research.

Our findings challenge the prevailing Weberian informed governance lens as an analytical starting point for studying jihadist governance in the Sahel region. The focus on stable territorial control, institutions and delivery of services, does not illuminate the diverse practices which foster social embeddedness of insurgents in local communities, how they regulate and control social behaviour, their implantation in and regulation of local political economies and clientelist logics which connect insurgents to the local population and other elites. We argue instead that developing an empirically grounded, contextualised and historical understanding of state and non-state governance where jihadist insurgencies emerge would be a more fruitful departure. This approach is aligned with a rich scholarship on non-state armed actors in African studies and emerging research on jihadist insurgencies in the region, which does not conceive of jihadist governance emerging in the absence of the state, but rather as competing with and latching onto existing forms of governance by non-state actors, like local elites, militias, customary and religious authorities. Thus, future work should theorise how emerging local jihadist orders, interact with existing forms of governance – whether through rupture, continuity, or transformation.

Part I: Concepts and Definitions

Jihadism

The political significance of the term ‘jihadism’ is less straightforward than it might appear. As it is commonly understood, jihadism refers to a sub-group of Islamist actors who rely on violent means to reach their goals. The term rose to prominence with the emergence of Islamist-inspired political movements and violent actors in the 1970s. Thomas Hegghammer (2009) pointed out that the dominant tendency in academia has been to rely on Arabic terms with religious connotations to label such groups as ‘*Jihadi*,’ ‘*Takfiri*,’ or ‘*Salafi-Jihadi*.’ Despite the perception that theological terms may bring cultural nuance, they may also create false impressions of the ways in which such groups differ from other types of rebel groups, especially with regards to how their goals and behaviour are religious rather than political. Jihadism is commonly used as a catch-all term for all forms of violence associated with Islam in the media and academia to describe a form of Islamic militancy, perceived by its perpetrators to be religiously sanctioned. However, there is a disparity between this and the multifaceted meanings *jihad* has for Muslims. It overlooks how jihad often refers to an inner spiritual struggle to live as a pious Muslim (Sanneh, 2016; Wiktorowicz, 2005) and outside struggles for the creation of a just society. Even when it comes to religiously sanctioned warfare, the type of violence associated with Al-Qaida and ISIS differs significantly from that of historical and contemporary jihadist movements.

Jihadism has in the last few decades come to be associated with a particular articulation of militant Sunni Islamism, associated with Al-Qaida and its successors, which are also often referred to as ‘Salafi-jihadist.’ In the Sahelian context, there were multiple jihadi movements in the 17th to 19th centuries, but these have very little in common with modern jihadist groups beyond their broad reliance on religion as an organisational identity. Acknowledging this heterogeneity of the concept, we choose to use the label to refer to Islamist militants who broadly associate with Salafist-jihadism which has an intellectual antecedent in the ideas of Sayyid Qutb and which was developed by Islamist volunteer fighters in the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan (Kepel, 2002).

Jihadist Insurgents

Aisha Ahmad (2015, p. 92) defines Islamist groups as ‘...a substate faction that utilizes Islamic ideas, identity, symbols, and rhetoric in its framing, and that espouses political order based on Islamic laws and institutions.’ Islamic rhetoric and symbolism are necessarily inherent to the political profile and activities of jihadist groups, but groups which are Islamist may be both pacifist and militant, totalitarian or democratic, and have widely different visions for society. A reason for this heterogeneity is that political imperatives cannot be derived directly from theological concepts without some degree of interpretation. As Darryl Li (2020, p. 15) points out ‘no doctrinal position or school can be identified as causing the actions of jihadi groups.’ It broadly refers to a religiously informed striving or struggle towards a spiritual or temporal goal, which even in the West African context has multiple meanings, not least because of a legacy of pacifist political movements in the region (Sanneh, 2016).

From a political violence perspective, another common mistake is to use jihadism and terrorism interchangeably (Kalyvas, 2018). Terrorist violence is not unique to jihadists and other insurgent groups use a wide repertoire of coercive tactics, including terrorism, to achieve their objectives (Ibid, p. 41). Distinguishing between jihadist ‘insurgents’ and jihadist ‘terrorists’ is important because of the theoretical assumptions underpinning these terms. For example, non-territoriality has been a definitive feature of how terrorists are understood (Ibid, p. 37). Terrorists are often thought to be organised in small, clandestine cells, operating in a network structure. It is assumed that groups without territory have more superficial contact with civilians (de la Calle & Sánchez-Cuenca, 2012, p. 584) and are not dependent on them for success like classical insurgencies (Duyvesteyn & Fumerton, 2010, pp. 35–38). Conversely, for insurgencies, building support and collaboration from the civilian population is considered a key ingredient of success (Ibid). Indeed, rebels ‘must be rooted in a population who is sympathetic

to them' (Kalyvas, 2018, p. 42). Whereas terrorist groups operate clandestinely and use violence primarily in a communicative way, rebel groups challenge the state's sovereignty by engaging in a competitive state-building project (De la Calle & Sánchez-Cuenca, 2011). Thus, jihadist insurgents can be understood as actors which deploy terrorist tactics as one repertoire of violence among others.

Islamic State, Caliphate and Jihadist Governance

Exactly what such a caliphate or an Islamic State would look like, is rarely clear. The term has a wide variety of meanings and connotations and this flexibility is in part why it is used so frequently. Its intellectual justification revolves around the creation of a society based on a form of Islamic 'authenticity,' associated with the early Umayyad caliphate (Kennedy, 2016). A caliphate is a system of government in which the caliph functions as the temporal ruler of the realm of Islam, beginning after the prophet Muhammad's death. The caliph therefore functions as both a temporal and spiritual leader, though not in a prophetic sense, but rather in a symbolic and to some degree a legislative sense (Liebl, 2009). He governs over sultans and emirates and rejects 'the secular and profane' power (Hisket, 1984, p. 173). What this means practically has been the subject of numerous scholarly theological debates, especially in the wake of the abolishment of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924 (Black, 2011). This ambiguity is even stronger today for the various jihadist movements which pursue the creation of a caliphate, but rarely have a coherent vision for what this implies.

Definitions of rebel governance differ. The most frequently cited is by Arjona, Kasfir and Mampilly (2015, p. 3): 'the creation of institutions and practices by rebels that intend to shape the social, political, and economic life of civilians during civil war.' Building on Lia (2015), Svensson and Finnbogason (2020, p. 7) define jihadi proto-states as 'territories that have been declared as emirates, Islamic states, or caliphates, and that are controlled and governed by militant jihadi groups.'¹ These definitions share an assumption within the rebel governance literature which asserts that territorial control is a key condition for governance (Mampilly, 2011; Kasfir, 2015; Arjona, 2016; Stewart, 2018). However, this scope condition should be challenged. Cross-national research has illustrated that rebels do not necessarily need territory to provide governance (Albert, 2020) and that governance can emerge rapidly with only tenuous territorial control (Huang, 2016). Rebel groups can engage with and appropriate pre-existing practices of power and political structures, exerting control from a distance, for instance through surveillance or other psychological techniques (Worrall, 2017). They can shape civilian behaviour remotely as they tap into patron client relations in a given territory (Hoffmann and Verweijen, 2018) and regulate the circulation of goods and people over territories controlled by their enemies (Cohen, 2021). Lia (2015, p. 32) also observes that jihadist actors govern without having significant territorial control in neighbourhoods, refugee camps, or in prisons. Thus, the scale or permanence of insurgent territorial control is therefore not necessarily an impediment to governance-like behaviour.

1. Another definition is proposed by Honig and Yahel (2017, p. 1211) who define 'terrorist semi-states' as rebel groups that a) control portions of a weak state's territory, maintaining governance there; b) but still launch terrorist attacks against third party victim states (TPVS).'

Part 2: Islam, Politics and Jihadism in the Sahel

Islam has been present in Africa since the 11th century, but it is only after the 18th century that it grew considerably under the influence of Sufi brotherhoods structured around families of *marabouts*. During colonisation, these brotherhoods came to acquire a central position as they allied with colonial authorities and acted as intermediate between societies and the state. Despite important variations between countries such as Senegal, Mali or Burkina Faso, in the 1990s these brotherhoods and Salafi movements emerged as new solidarity networks and moral prescriptions in a context of Structural Adjustment Programmes, which culminated in state withdrawal from the economy and widespread poverty.

From a historical point of view, jihad as a concept and political praxis is not new in West Africa. Wars in the 19th century took the forms of jihads led by Sufi shaykhs, leading to the formation of several empires. Charismatic religious scholars were mobilising followers against pagan neighbouring groups or ruling classes to establish Imamates already in the mid-17th and early 18th century in Senegal and Mauritania, but these were short-lived (Curtin, 1971). Two examples of Islamic political projects in African history which have been widely studied are the Sokoto Caliphate (1804-1903) established by shaykh Usman Dan Fodio, which came to approximate today's Northern Nigeria, part of Niger and the Far North Region of Cameroon and the Macina Empire (1820-1864), founded by Ahmad Lobbo, more commonly known as Sheku Ahmadu, in today's Mopti and Ségou regions of Mali (Smith, 1961; Nobili, 2020).²

Usman Dan Fodio's uprising occurred in an area where Muslim Fulani lived among, or were subject to, Hausa-speaking populations and governments which normally did not enforce Sharia or were still pagan (Smith 1961, p. 174). It brought together emirates with different political cultures, as well as a system of centralised taxation and trade, while external entities were regulated by the caliph. The emirs who represented the caliph were chosen according to their Islamic knowledge. Justice was provided by representatives of the caliph (Last, 2013, p. 4). The Sokoto Caliphate shifted local power relations in favour of a Fulani aristocracy and was particularly influential, persisting until it was conquered by the British in 1903. The caliphate of Hamdallāhi, also known as the Macina Empire, has been considered one of the most prominent examples of theocratic state-building in West African history. Ahmad Lobbo, an Islamic scholar and political outsider, drew inspiration from the Sokoto Caliphate and launched a rebellion which overturned the existing religious leadership in Djenné and the Fulani elite warrior aristocracy which ruled the region. Its revolutionary underpinning was tied to its fusion of religion and politics (Nobili, 2020). The Macina state was highly centralised and implemented Islamic governance following Maliki law (Loimeier, 2013, pp. 122–123). It developed a codified system for managing access to and use of resources, known as the Dina, which formalised the responsibility of the 'Jowros', noble Fulani pastoralist landlords, to manage access to pasture (Moorehead, 1997), a system which is still in use today. This example of Islamic governance has received renewed interest, primarily because Hamadoun Kouffa, the Islamic preacher and leader of the Katiba Macina, a local jihadist insurgency in Central Mali, evoked the legacy of the Fulani theocratic state in his discourse (Thiam, 2017).

The causes, character, and legacy of Islamic reformist movements in and before the 19th century in the Sahel are complex issues and a subject of continuous academic debate. One thing to note, however, is that these movements were led by Sufi Shaykhs and were therefore part of an intellectual tradition that is very different from Salafi jihadist movements, not least on issues relating to scriptural literalism, the role of religious scholars, the practice of *takfir* or excommunication of other Muslims and the veneration of saints. Usman Dan Fodio, for example, afforded to religious scholars high value in instituting social reforms and focused on reforming non-Islamic communal practices, as well as issuing warnings which accused individual Muslims of disbelief (Dallal, 1993, p. 353). Salafi-Jihadist movements discourage both.

2. The name of the theocratic state differs in the literature between the Macina, Massina, the 'Dina', or the Caliphate of Hamdallāhi.

Contemporary jihadist movements in the Sahel draw inspiration from a broader transnational ideology often referred to as Salafism. There have been different Salafi streams since the emergence of the Muslims brotherhood in the 1920s and the revival of these orthodox religious interpretations. For Lauzière (2015) 'Salafism' as a concept is rife with ambiguities and has been applied to describe a wide range of movements which have different doctrinal and ideological underpinnings. Salafism rejects innovation (*bidah*) and proposes a literary interpretation of the Quran, emphasising prophetic traditions (*sunna*). Since the end of the 1970s, the Salafi movement developed in West Africa and particularly in Nigeria, with support of religious organisations in Saudi Arabia. It typically stood in opposition to the Sufi-emphasis on lived-experience, saints and shrines, which are viewed as heretical by Salafists. The overwhelming majority of Salafi movements are quietists. Salafism can be both politically quietist and militant. Thus, Salafism does therefore not necessarily imply the use of violence, nor is it necessarily the case that Sufism implies less use of violence (Woodward et al., 2013). Wiktorowicz (2006) distinguishes between the quietist movements from political Salafists such as the *Jama'at Izalat al Bid'a Wa Iqamat as Sunna*, which appeared in the North of Nigeria in 1978 and *jihadi Salafists*. There is a broad diversity of political Salafist movement such as the *Ihya wa Sunna, Wahhabia, Ibadou Rahmane*, some of which are reformist and others nationalist (Idrissa, 2018, p. 27). For Nesser (2013, p. 417) jihadi Salafists are 'the ideology of al-Qaida and like-minded movements, mixing Wahhabi-inspired Sunni fundamentalism (Salafism) with a revolutionary program of over-throwing unjust and un-Islamic regimes in the Muslim world, as well as irredentism aiming at expelling non-Muslim military presence and influences from Muslim lands.'

Salafi-jihadism refers to a specific brand of militant Islam that gained traction through the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and the Gulf War, embodied most prominently by Al-Qaida (Elischer, 2019, p. 200). One of the specificities of Salafi-jihadist movements is that they regard armed jihad as the main method to establish a religious state. Another is that they are connected to a more individualised and de-territorialised conception of Islam, because of its emphasis on personal interpretation, along with rejection of Sufi-authority and traditions which tend to be influenced by local beliefs and practices (Maher, 2016). This brand has become the most prominent ideology of insurgency in the post-Cold War order and jihadist groups are involved in a higher proportion of civil wars than any other ideological groups (Gleditsch and Rudolfsen, 2016). However, it is important to note that there is variation in when and where Salafi-jihadist groups gain traction (Walter, 2017). Religion is used to appeal across tribal and ethnic cleavages and these appeals are increasingly directed towards individuals, to achieve unity in the fight against the West and their local allies, or Muslims who are judged to be apostates (Kalyvas, 2018; Walter, 2017).

West African jihadist movements share some broad ideological views, including the notion that current regimes and state institutions must be replaced with a caliphate under Islamic law, that they themselves can determine whether other Muslims are apostates and this invocation of *takfir* makes violence against apostates legitimate even though they are nominally Muslim (Ibrahim 2017, p. 8). The rise of jihadism has occurred in a context of rising Salafi influence in the region since the 1970s. Salafi doctrines have been hostile to traditional religious practices, putting emphasis on the literal interpretation of the Quran to purify societies. Doing so, they challenge Sufi-institutions and shaykhs (Reese, 2014; Westerlund and Rosander, 1998). More generally, the jihadist movements have an individualised approach to religion which allows for direct interpretation, rather than reliance on religious authorities such as the Shaykhs. Sufism is neither pacifist, nor apolitical, but at this juncture in history it tends to be intertwined with actors supportive of the status quo and existing regimes, while some Salafism has become linked to revolutionary agendas which in some cases become violent (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 12).

Part 3: Jihadist Governance and Existing Explanations

From Rebel Governance to Jihadist Governance

A significant portion of the scholarship on rebel governance has studied variations in how rebels govern (Arjona, 2016; Arjona et al., 2015; Mampilly, 2011).³ Scholars have examined under what conditions rebel governance is effective (Mampilly, 2011), its extensiveness and scope (Arjona, 2016; Florea, 2020) and inclusive social service provision (Stewart, 2018). Jihadist governance has not received the same level of systematic research. Nevertheless, according to Lia (2015, p. 31), jihadist governance in the form of what he calls ‘proto-states’ have been a consistent feature of contemporary jihadist movements. Following the Arab Spring in 2011, there was a remarkable upsurge in the number of jihadist proto-states, with a total of 19 emerging between 1989-2015.⁴

Scholars have examined cases of jihadist governance mainly in the Middle East, notably by ISIS (Ahram, 2019; al-Tamimi, 2015; Kadercan, 2019; Revkin, 2018, 2019, 2020; Revkin & Ahram, 2020; Revkin & Wood, 2020; Wagemakers, 2016) and the Taliban (Jackson, 2018; Jackson & Amiri, 2019; Jackson & Weigand, 2019; Terpstra, 2020). Research has been scarcer on Africa, though scholars have produced rich insights on the Somali group al-Shabaab, the continent’s most persistent and arguably successful case of jihadist governance (Doboš, 2016; Hansen, 2013; Skjelderup, 2020). In the Sahel region specifically, research on jihadist governance is embryonic. A sizeable body of work has emerged on Boko Haram (Comolli, 2015; Matfess, 2016; Pérouse de Montclos, 2014; Thurston, 2017), but only a few address how it governs (Cohen, 2021; Ladbury et al., 2016; Omenma et al., 2020). A significant body of scholarship provides insights into the governance of the Mali’s northern jihadist groups (Bøås, 2014; Castelli, 2014; Chelin, 2020; Lebovich, 2013; Raineri & Strazzari, 2015; Svensson & Finnbogason, 2020; Thurston, 2020). Comparative academic work on African insurgencies have incorporated Sahelian cases which provide important insights on governance, but this has not been their core focus per se (Bøås & Dunn, 2017a; Hansen, 2019; Pérouse de Montclos, 2018; Thurston, 2020).⁵

Is Jihadist Governance Distinct?

According to Lia (2015), jihadist governance shares some common features. First, they are ideological projects, based on an imperative to implement sharia and wage jihad. Their ideological commitment to a particular territory is relatively low compared to separatist or nationalist groups. Second, he claims they are internationalist projects, seeking to draw foreign fighters, funding and material support from external sources. Third, they rarely recognise the Weberian state-system and notions of state-sovereignty and international borders. Finally, they share a commitment to effective governance, devoting resources to provide civilian services, justice, training ideological cadres and organising councils for dispute mediation (Lia, 2015, p. 36).

The lack of systematic studies of jihadist governance in the Sahel means that ways in which jihadist groups govern similarly or distinctly from other groups is somewhat of an enigma. Jihadist insurgents also seek to establish control over territory to varying degrees, use violence to assert power, depend on popular consent and vary with regard to their ideological commitments and practical implementation of ideological goals (Svensson and Finnbogason, 2020, p. 3). While research must account for what is unique about jihadist governance, it should not assume that it is so different that it does not share traits with governance by secessionist or Marxist groups. As Li (2015, p. 16) notes, the challenge is ‘how to understand the distinctiveness of jihadi groups without lapsing into an all-too-often racialized exceptionalism.’ The same can be said of ideological and religious features, which most of the literature focuses on. The first distinction worth pointing out is organisational: jihadist insurgencies are often affiliated to global

3. For reviews see Arjona (2008), Duyvesteyn et al. (2015), Péclard and Mechoulan (2015) and Furlan (2020).

4. These include real and attempted cases of jihadist proto-state governance.

5. Numerous reports have been published which examine jihadist groups in the Sahel in a comparative perspective. See for example Bøås et al (2019) and Pellerin (2019).

jihadist-Salafist movements, which gives them a transnational character (Kalyvas, 2018, p. 42). Groups such as al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, for example, opted to affiliate themselves with the global brands of Al-Qaida and ISIS (Bøås and Dunn 2017a; Kalyvas, 2018, p. 42). The degree to which local groups interact with outside co-ideologists can vary immensely, as some groups tap into flows of financial resources and foreign fighters, while others remain mostly nominally associated (Hegghammer, 2010). These transnational ideological aspirations may clash with local political realities, such as the norms and traditions of local communities and power brokers. Consequently, jihadists must find a balance between adhering to a transnational ideology which may have little resonance with local communities, while maintaining their jihadist credibility.

The second is ideational: they share the notion that acts of both violence and governance are legitimized by the goal of implementing, or carrying out, a system of sharia law (Crenshaw, 2017). However, as Hallaq (2009, p. 15) reminds us speaking of 'Islamic Law' in itself risks reductionism, given that 'local and regional differences of this practice are varied, having been influenced by a multiplicity of cultural, economic, customary, geographical, historical and myriad other factors.' There are heated debates between all branches of Salafism with regard to the way to apply sharia and adapt institutions (Ostien, 2007). Heterogeneity of beliefs and interests is inherent to insurgent groups and jihadist groups are no exception (Kalyvas, 2018, p. 37). Ideological commitment also makes jihadist groups exceptional because they tend to be excluded from mainstream politics in ways which makes political bargaining with the state, and notions of power-sharing after war, an unlikely option (Thurston, 2020, p. 9).

The third relates to their objectives, which tends to veil sub-national or national goals in global rhetoric. Since those with regionally or globally orientated goals transcend the confines of the nation-state, some scholars have suggested that jihadist governance is distinct to other rebel governance projects whose territorial imperative tend to be limited to a subnational region of the state (Svensson and Finnbogason, 2020, p. 3). However, such groups tend to be based within local social groups and target particular states, even though their regionally oriented or global rhetoric may downplay local dynamics. Insurgencies which are loosely affiliated to a global jihadist group like Al-Qaida or ISIS emerge are often active in specific subnational regions of the state, positioning themselves in local politics and societal cleavages, which could include subverting local elites, intervening in local conflicts or dissolving social hierarchies, rationalising these objectives through an egalitarian, religious language (Bøås & Dunn, 2017a; Jourde, 2017).

Fourth, analysts have suggested that jihadist state-building projects may be distinct because they are marked by futility. According to Lia (2015, p. 31) few of the jihadist proto-states in his survey study survived for more than a year or controlled territory over time. This contrasts with other cases of rebel governance which ruled for extended periods such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka (18 years), The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador (12 years) or The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) (13 years) (Huang, 2016, pp. 72–73). Thurston (2020) suggests that jihadist groups remain stuck between a reliance on spectacular attacks and experiments in caliphate-building which are swiftly dismantled by military interventions (Thurston, 2020). Due to international norms and post-9/11 counter-terror policy, jihadist actors are considered as 'terrorists' to be fought with military force. Consequently, overt, territorially defined governance projects are vulnerable to international intervention, but this does not impede their resilience to transform into other another organisational form which still involves governing (Hansen, 2019).

Synthesis of existing explanations

Given that the state of the literature on jihadist insurgent governance in the Sahel is embryonic, we have primarily reviewed the few works which directly deal with jihadist governance in the Sahel and the scholarly work beyond this which held insights on governance. We have identified five broad types of explanations: a) macro-level b) the role of the state and rival armed non-state groups, c) religious ideology, d) the organisation and its leaders and finally e) how local conflicts and politics mediate governance.

Macro-level explanations

There is a large literature examining the relationship between state weakness and the onset of insurgency. These theoretical intuitions can be traced back to Fearon and Laitin (2003)'s article, which argued that weak state capacity, proxied by GDP per capita makes rebellion more feasible. Certain conditions of weak states, notably: poverty, mountainous terrain, large populations and political instability make it easier for rebels to mobilise but equally hard for the state to deter rebellion (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). Hansen (2019) argues that when states lack the capacity or willingness to penetrate areas where insurgencies are active, it will be easier for jihadists to conquer and hold territories.⁶ In his typology, jihadist groups can be organised in four ways as a function of state capacity: a 'clandestine network', which emerges in a stable but hostile state; 'accepted presence' where the state hosts, tolerates and even exploits jihadists as a form of proxy rule; 'semi-territorial presence', where jihadists take over territory and govern peripheries, but the state lacks resources or willingness to reclaim the territory; and finally, 'territorial control', where insurgents set up more permanent institutions for governing. Others consider failed states to be central in accounting for why 'terrorist semi-states' emerge (Honig & Yahel, 2019).

While intuitive, there are several problems with the state weakness thesis. First, the state weakness explanation cannot easily explain when jihadist governance emerges, or why we observe variation in governance in rural areas with low levels of state presence at subnational levels. In many localities where the state is weak or absent, jihadist mobilisation and governance has not emerged, so it is necessary to consider further explanatory factors. Second, jihadist mobilisation and governance has also emerged in strong states. For example, Thurston (2020, p. 264) criticises the state weakness approach, pointing out that the Groupe Islamique Armée (GIA) governed in Algeria, which is a relatively strong state in the region. In Lia's (2015, p. 32) survey of proto-states, he notes that the GIA developed partial territorial control and civilian institutions in Mitidja, parts of Greater Algiers and the cities of Lakhdaria and Medea from 1993-95.

Third, state weakness is often treated as a deterministic condition, which does not account for how state policies to manage jihadist insurgencies have fluctuated over time (e.g; Elischer, 2019). Unexpected events and crises may rapidly undermine the state's internal position and pave the way for jihadist groups in ways not easily captured by structural factors. In Mali it was the coup d'état and the jihadist occupation of the north and parts of central Mali, which prompted state representatives to flee their posts (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2016; Rupesinghe & Bøås, 2019; Sangaré, 2016). In Burkina Faso, it was the deposing of Blaise Compaoré's regime which eroded existing rural conflict regulation and monitoring mechanisms, as well as the dissolution of state intelligence services (International Crisis Group, 2017, 2020a). What these examples demonstrate is that it is not necessarily blanket state failure, but specific disruptions or crises in state authority, which created permissive windows of opportunity for rebels to organise and introduce governance more feasibly.

Another set of approaches reject the notion of 'weak' or 'fragile' states, 'ungoverned spaces' or 'absence' of governance but recognise the plurality of governance as the starting point from which to analyse the emergence of insurgent order (Bøås & Strazzari, 2020, p. 7).⁷ Scholars have highlighted the presence of 'twilight institutions' (Lund, 2006, 2007), 'modes of governance' (de Sardan, 2011), 'heterarchy' (Hüsken & Klute, 2015), or 'hybrid emerging political orders' (Bøås & Strazzari, 2020). The core idea behind these approaches is that spaces where the formal state appears to be weak, are sites where complex forms of overlapping, multi-layered governance by a range of other non-state actors, such as local chiefs, big men, tribal or village councils, religious leaders and militias compete for authority, social control and influence. In this context, insurgents represent one competing claim for authority (Bøås & Dunn, 2017a). While peripheral areas of the state provide leeway for rebel entrepreneurs to organise and expand because state monitoring and security enforcement may be lacking, they still have to contend with a range of other non-state actors, not an empty vacuum. Moreover, it is not inevitable that in peripheral state contexts jihadists will gain influence in their social and political navigation among communities, powerbrokers and militias in these areas.

6. He proposes the term 'ungovernability' as (1) the level of state penetration of society (2) the extent to which the state has a monopoly on the use of force (3) the extent to which the state controls its borders and (4) whether the state is subject to external intervention by other states (p. 12)

7. The 'ungoverned spaces' argument assumes that weak states are 'ungoverned' and anarchic which can illicit all kinds of security threats, from insurgency, civil war to terrorism. This thesis lacked specific causal mechanisms, as well as empirical evidence and was built around flawed assumptions about how authority is organised in so-called peripheral areas of the state. For critiques of the 'ungoverned space' argument, see for example Raleigh and Dowd (2017) and Bøås and Strazzari (2020).

The State (revisited), Militias, Rivals

Scholars who closely study domestic politics of states confronting jihadist insurgencies have offered a more dynamic analysis, challenging the notion that weak states are ‘hotbeds’ of Islamic extremism (Elischer, 2019, p. 213). Sahelian states have adopted a variety of institutional strategies to manage jihadist insurgencies (Elischer, 2019; Idrissa, 2017; Raleigh & Dowd, 2013; Thurston, 2020; Villalón, 2020). Elischer (2019) argues that Niger, Chad, Mauritania and Mali adopted a range of strategies from concession, toleration, co-optation, institutional regulation and repression to deal with rising currents of Salafism since independence. He asserts that Niger and Chad have been quite successful in undermining radical Salafist activity. Niger co-opted Salafi clerics into the state bureaucracy, while Chad targeted Salafi clerics with force. Mali and Mauritania, by contrast, were less successful. Mali did little to curb increasing trends of radicalism in the north, which provided fertile ground for the jihadist occupation to take hold in 2012. In Mauritania, governments used indiscriminate repression to target Salafism, which spurred radicalisation (Elischer, 2019).

Counter-terror operations also impact on jihadist dynamics, though understanding how this affects governing practices remains understudied. Intensive military operations do not provide a conducive environment for governance and could force jihadist insurgents to retreat from territory, as was the case with Boko Haram, or dismantle governance structures completely, as was the case with AQIM and its allies in northern Mali. A growing number of studies find that repressive state actions, which have indiscriminately targeted communities suspected of being allied with jihadists has spurred the mobilisation of jihadist insurgencies (Bøås et al., 2020; Higazi, 2015; Osland & Erstad, 2020; Pérouse de Montclos, 2018; Raineri, 2020; Rupesinghe & Bøås, 2019; Thurston, 2020). Proxy militias have been deployed by states to varying degrees, targeting ethnic groups, accused of being jihadists, which has contributed to fuelling recruitment (Raineri, 2020; Thurston, 2020). This has raised communal demands for protection – an important service jihadists have tried to offer (Bøås et al., 2020; Raineri, 2020).

An important characteristic of Sahelian conflicts is the mobilisation of non-state armed actors including militias, communal protection and self-defence groups or bandits, which can become important military and even governance competitors. Militias may be controlled or co-opted by the state, but their loyalties shift as the conflict evolves and they may develop more autonomous agendas that may not be in the state’s interest. One important distinction to analytically disentangle these groups is militias’ ‘anti-rebel dimension’ (Jentzsch et al., 2015, p. 756). In the Sahel, such militias, have come to play a key role, posing not only military constraints for jihadist insurgent expansion but also as an actor competing to delegate authority and governance. For example, in Central Mali, the jihadist group, the Katiba Macina consolidated control over the Inner Niger Delta, but have faced violent counter-mobilisation by Dogon militias in other parts of the country, impacting the extent of the jihadist control and rule (Baldaro & Diall, 2020, p. 74).

Finally, another important actor to consider are rival jihadist groups, which can influence the character and scope of governance jihadist insurgents provide. One example is the competing governance provided by the Katiba Macina and ISGS in Central Mali for local support (Baldaro & Diall, 2020). The Katiba Macina sometimes avoided using the most severe forms of punishment in their implementation of sharia. They have also retained the traditional customary system for managing access to land but reduced the tributes to be paid to the Jowros, who control access to pasture. Meanwhile when ISGS sought to expand their influence in the same area, they accused the Katiba Macina of not implementing Islamic law properly, criticising their non-use of corporal punishment. ISGS sought to offer a more revolutionary agenda by putting the collectivisation of land at the centre of its agenda to earn support from lower Fulani classes who have to pay for access to pasture (Baldaro & Diall, 2020, p. 79), a group from which the Katiba Macina initially drew support.

Religious ‘Ideology’

Political goals, ideologies and doctrines are consequential for rebel governance of civilians and the type of institutions rebels develop. Weinstein (2007, pp. 167–174) suggests ideological groups are more likely to share power and facilitate civilian participation. Secessionist insurgencies are more likely to provide inclusive goods

because this legitimates insurgents' claim to sovereignty (Stewart, 2018). Marxist insurgencies tend to provide greater social administration than groups with conservative beliefs (Arjona et al., 2015c), while Maoist communist insurgencies provide more effective governance (Mampilly, 2011, p. 78). Ginsburg (2019) argues that 'ideologically' motivated rebels, defined as communist and religious groups, are more likely to establish justice systems.

Current insurgencies, including those in the Sahel do not easily fit into established analytical categories (Bøås & Strazzari, 2020, p. 10). For example, Clapham (1998) distinguishes between secessionist, liberationist, reformist, and warlord movements with regards to African insurgencies. He argues that reform insurgencies are disciplined organisations with a clear ideology, seeking to create a new kind of state. Warlord insurgencies, however, lack a coherent ideology and revolve around highly personalised leadership warlords who exploit existing social cleavages to gain personal benefits. Jihadist groups may seem closer to the former category, but this misses how commanders, sub-commanders, and local communal elites organise under the broad umbrella of an Islamist ideology to pursue their own narrow interests. One consequence of this is that governance informed by jihadi-Salafism is far from homogenous. The goals and interests of local Islamist actors, may differ significantly from programmatic notions of their ideology, influencing how they govern. Though a group may be under a broad ideological umbrella, like 'jihadism', or even associated with specific organisations, such as Al-Qaida, there can be significant differences in the strategic interests and ideological visions of the central leadership and local sub-factions (Kalyvas 2018; Martin 2014).

Ideology is essential to give a reason for rebellion and a common set of goals around which individuals unite. However, even purportedly global ideologies such as Islamism must be interpreted and articulated in the context of local realities which resonates among target audiences. It helps draw the boundaries between in-group belonging and the 'other' around which the ideological struggle must be fought (Thurston, 2017). Though jihadism portrays this as a conflict of true Muslims against others, this definition may overlap significantly with pre-existing local cleavages. Ideology therefore also defines who violence can legitimately be used against. Nevertheless, jihadist movements do differ significantly regarding the use of violence against civilians and definitions of *takfir*. The Al-Qaida affiliated Ansar Dine and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) displayed some degree of restraint in targeting Muslim civilians with violence. Conversely, the ISIS-affiliated Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS) or the Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad (JASDJ) faction of Boko Haram have advocated harsher punishments of civilians who disobey sharia in the territories they control. The difference follows both from ideology and the types of local actors these groups are willing to compromise or ally with (Nsaiba & Weiss, 2020, p. 10; Raleigh et al., 2020, p. 12).

As such, the nature of Islamist insurgent governance is influenced by the group's interactions with and embeddedness in pre-existing institutions and traditions as well as their compatibility with the group's ideological goals. As argued by Lia (2015), jihadist proto-states are deeply ideological projects where the goals of applying sharia and waging jihad often lead to a non-negotiable position to internal dissent or cultural heterogeneity. This can take the form of banning and severely punishing 'un-Islamic' practices, which may impact religious or ethnic minorities particularly severely. The rule of such groups is therefore often highly interventionist and their implementation of sharia can clash with local norms and practices in ways which generates resentment among governed populations (Kalyvas, 2018, p. 44).

Organisation and leadership

Jihadist insurgents, like all insurgents, are political actors who experience political contestation within their own ranks. The behaviour of insurgent groups often depends on the internal negotiations and rivalries between sub-factions within the group. The nature of governance by specific jihadist groups is therefore shaped by the organisational and symbolic balance of power within such groups and the ways in which sub-factions use this to pursue their political visions and interests (Thurston, 2020, p. 3). Local commanders of jihadist groups have to adapt, improvise and interact with local power brokers. No ideological programme can give a uniform guide on how to deal with such complexity, though uniformity may be an ideal (Hansen 2018, p. 588). The decision-making of sub-commanders can therefore define what jihadist governance means in practice.

Group organisation, including the degree to which it exercises centralised decision-making and distribution of goods can significantly influence the way a group governs and utilises violence. For example, the Katiba Macina in Mali was strongly tied to Hamadoun Kouffa as a leader who presided over a loose network of sub-leaders who exerted their autonomy locally (Rupesinghe & Bøås, 2019). In this decentralised governance system, sub-leaders manage tax-collection, judicial matters, and military activities (Baldaro & Diall, 2020). At the same time, such a decentralised system leaves significant room for sub-leaders to defect, impacting the overall cohesion and viability of the group. For example, the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) has experienced defections of Fulani fighters to ISGS, which has been a source of tension between the two groups (Nsaibia and Weiss, 2020, p. 9). Another well-known example was the conflict which emerged when AQIM's emir rebuked his mid-commanders for hastily and brutally applying sharia law when they governed northern Mali, which garnered international outcry and which contributed to catalysing the military intervention that would dismantle their governance project (Thurston, 2020).

While rebel governance is often portrayed as flowing from a set of informal or formal institutions, Utas (2012) and Bøås and Dunn (2017b) emphasise the increasing importance of 'Big Men' in armed insurgencies in Africa, who have easily shifting alliances and which constitute networks of governance. These Big Men function as nodal points within networks of relevance to governance, markets, and violence. As Bøås (2015) argues this leads to pragmatism and shifting alliances, rather than lasting and ideologically coherent allegiances. Iyad Ag Ghaly is an example of a regional Big Man who was a Tuareg rebel commander in the 1990s, took on government positions, subsequently joined Ansar Dine in 2012 and now leads the jihadist umbrella organisation, JNIM. Mokhtar Belmokhtar is another example, as he used the umbrella of AQIM to become immersed into smuggling and kidnapping networks (Bøås & Dunn, 2017b, p.7). Research can build on insights from insurgencies which adopt more of a network-type structure (e.g. Raeymaekers et al., 2008; Reno, 1998; Roitman, 2005; Utas, 2012) to assess and theorise implications for governance.

Local Politics and Conflicts

A growing body of scholarship explores the relationship between local politics and conflicts and jihadist insurgent dynamics (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019; Bøås & Dunn, 2017a; Dowd, 2015; Raleigh et al., 2020; Thurston, 2020; Collombier & Roy, 2018). An important feature of jihadist insurgents is that they may adhere to a more globally oriented discourse of jihadist-Salafism, but still 'remain rooted in local cleavages' (Bøås et al., 2020, p. 120). Assessing how jihadist groups interact with existing conflicts, as a means of governance, but also how existing cleavages may influence their governance is therefore important to explore.

Societies in the Sahel are characterised by ethnic diversity and social stratification. Additionally, conflicts over resources like land, water and pasture are common, often pitting social groups like farmers and herders against each other. To make inroads into society, jihadist insurgents have drawn support by mobilising aggrieved groups in pre-existing local conflicts. In Central Mali, jihadists have intervened to provide justice in conflicts between farmers and herders over land rights (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019). In Niger, ISGS recruited among Fulani herders who felt threatened by agricultural encroachment on their land, as well as competition from northern Daoussahak pastoralist communities (Bøås et al., 2020, p. 126). Both JNIM and ISGS seek influence in the broader context of intercommunal conflicts. However, some scholars argue that JNIM has more explicitly adopted the grievances of local communities to ally with local militants, while the ISGS has been less willing to compromise with rival militias or the state. The groups also differ on governance with regards to the regulation of pastures, as well as taxation (Nsaibia & Weiss, 2020, p. 10).

Alliance-building and engagement with local politics is crucial to any governance project, given that governing through force alone is a suboptimal strategy. A variety of case studies illustrate the diversity of alliance-building by jihadist groups. Thurston (2020) argues that jihadist groups adopt multiple strategies to build their coalitions, which in turn may shape their overall success. He illustrates that jihadists in northern Mali developed alliances with key elites, including local politicians, from the top-down, while in Central Mali, the jihadists forged alliances primarily from the bottom-up with pastoralists. Others have also suggested that JNIM's alliance building strategy

appealed to a broader base of local communal groups, drawing on ‘pastoralist populism’ (Raleigh et al., 2020, p. 4). They have focused on ‘horizontal local alliance building’, integrating local groups in a nodal network (ibid). On the other hand, ISGS tried to integrate local groups in a more ‘hierarchical system of allegiance and affiliation to IS central’, relying on ‘pillage and reprisal’ dynamics, as well as violence (ibid).

Jihadist insurgents’ engagement with existing social and economic structures in their governance also remains under-theorised but will be an important avenue for future research. Svensson and Finnbogason (2020) argue that one significant source of variation in governing strategies of jihadist groups is how they integrate into local networks and adapt to the concerns of local power brokers. Thus, the agency of local actors proves critical in shaping governing practices. Roy (2018, p. 1) observes that local ‘Islamic emirates’ tend to emerge in ‘tribal lands’. At the outset, Salafism appears to be opposed to tribes, because they promote sharia and sharia courts, which are contrary to customary law (ibid). To cite one example, ISIS and Al-Qaida developed governance in tribal areas and sought to impose sharia to replace local customs, but they diverged in their approach. ISIS tried to replace the tribal system with an Islamic state which would undercut segmentation and communal identities. Conversely, Al-Qaida sought to build alliances with tribes they considered important to their success (ibid, p. 12). Local actors such as tribes can have their own interests in joining jihadist governance projects, which suggests this is not a one-way relationship. Tribes can join jihadists for practical reasons but also to recast tribal structures, gain influence, enhance fighting capacity, status and resources (ibid, p. 7).

Civilian resistance is another important factor which shapes rebel governance (Arjona, 2015, 2016; Barter, 2016; Kaplan, 2017; Masullo, 2020, 2021; Sanaullah, 2021; van Baalen, 2021). Though under-researched, the phenomenon of non-violent civilian resistance to jihadist governance is widespread (Svensson & Finnbogason, 2020). A few studies explore civilian opposition to ISIS (Aarseth, 2018; Revkin, 2020; Stephan, 2015) and recently in opposition to jihadist rule in northern Mali (Bouhleb & Guichaoua, 2021; Svensson & Finnbogason, 2020). Svensson and Finnbogason (2020) examine the conditions for civilian resistance in three jihadist proto-states. They argue that civil resistance is more likely to occur when jihadists introduce a type of rule which local populations perceive as alien, generating grievances and motivations for resistance and when civil society organisations with collective action capabilities are activated. They examine cases where civil resistance occurred, in the Islamic Emirate of Azawad in Mali (2012-2013) and two where it did not, the Islamic State of Iraq (2006–2008) and the Islamic Principality of al-Mukalla in Yemen (2015–2016). Collombier (2018) has illustrated that ISIS was able to consolidate its control in Sirte, eastern Libya, largely because military capacity for resistance was devastated from war and because ISIS affiliates did not directly challenge tribal elders or clans close to the former regime. However, when they sought to exert complete control over local religious institutions, they encountered resistance from the city’s Salafist current who had strong influence among local tribes, as they fought for control over religious discourse and mosques (Collombier, 2018, p. 175).

Part 4: Case Studies

The Islamic Emirate of Azawad: a short-lived experiment in jihadist governance

This case study examines the case of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) governance of northern Mali between May 2012 to January 2013. While short-lived, this experiment in implementing jihadist governance proved to be one of AQIM's most important successes in the region (Thurston, 2020). Case studies have provided valuable insights into specific insurgent groups who ruled northern Mali (Ba, 2020a, 2020b; Bøås, 2014, 2015, 2017; Desgrais et al., 2018, 2018; Lebovich, 2013; Raineri & Strazzari, 2015; Solomon, 2015; Svensson & Finnbogason, 2020; Thurston, 2020), though few have explored how governance varied sub-nationally (for an exception see Bouhleb & Guichaoua, 2021). Due to the scarcity of empirical research, this case draws not only on scholarly work but also on reports from various non-governmental organisations.

A jihadist coalition consisting of AQIM, Ansar Dine and MUJAO (an AQIM splinter group), together with the secular Tuareg rebels, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), fighting in favour of independence, took control over two-thirds of Mali's territory, in the northern regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu. Due to a fallout, including over the future character of the state, the jihadists eventually ousted the MNLA from the northern territory. This paved the way for the declaration of the Islamic Emirate of Azawad in March 2012 and the consolidation of jihadist control (Svensson and Finnbogason, 2020, p. 9). The territory of northern Mali was divided between the jihadist groups. Timbuktu was governed by AQIM and a hardliner faction of Ansar Dine, Gao by MUJAO and Kidal by Ansar Dine. Droukdel had executive decision-making authority over AQIM's so-called 'Saharan emirate', channelling strategic guidance and training to the mid-level commanders (Thurston, 2020, p. 79).

Some commonalities are identifiable across subregions. The jihadist coalition shared a Salafist-jihadist inspired ideology, sharia rule was introduced and each group established local institutions to maintain order, such as an Islamic police and courts to administer public life. Cultural life was tightly restricted. Alcohol, tobacco, music, television, dancing and sport were banned. Men and women were segregated in public. Women had to be covered with the hijab, while men were forced to roll their trousers up to their ankles (Ba, 2020; Bouhleb & Guichaoua, 2021; ICRC, 2020, p. 20; Roetman et al., 2019; Svensson & Finnbogason, 2020; UN International Commission of Inquiry for Mali, 2020). The UN International Commission of Inquiry for Mali (2020) documented sexual violence by all groups, which was the most widespread in Timbuktu through the Islamic police or Hisbah morality police, as well as in Gao (UN International Commission of Inquiry for Mali, 2020, pp. 83–84). There was significant variation in their use of *hudud* punishments and other forms of violence, as well as relations with local elites and communities in general (Bouhleb & Guichaoua, 2021; ICRC, 2020). These differences depended on the social composition and history of the jihadist groups, the influence of local actors in mediating governance (Bouhleb & Guichaoua, 2021; ICRC, 2020) and also arguably the role of mid-level commanders implementing governance (see e.g., Lebovich, 2013; Thurston, 2020).

Ansar Dine Rule of Kidal: January 2012 – February 2013

Ansar Dine, 'Defenders of Faith' was established in 2011 and is led by Iyad Ag Ghali. It is perceived to be the most local group, which has the aim of establishing sharia law in Mali. It drew its membership primarily from the Tuareg and specifically from local tribal networks among the Ifoghas, part of the Tuareg aristocracy (Bouhleb & Guichaoua, 2021; Roetman et al., 2019).

Kidal was governed by the more moderate section of Ansar al-Din and the Ifoghas tribe largely retained control (Thurston, 2020, p. 85, 134). Given that Kidal is a majority Tuareg region, Ansar Dine consolidated its control without much resistance from the Tuareg MNLA separatists (ICRC, 2020, p. 48). Ansar Dine aimed to draw support by seeking to maintain public order, for instance establishing an emergency hotline (International Crisis Group, 2012, p. 15), local

patrols and reportedly distributing food which it had looted from humanitarian organisations (AMDH/FIDH, 2012, p. 7). It has been suggested that under Ansar Dine's rule of Kidal corruption and local banditry was reduced (Diallo, 2017). According to Ferdaous Bouhleb and Yvan Guichaoua, Ansar Dine employed less violence in comparison to MUJAO because of its vertical line of command and due to its strong community links in Kidal (Bouhleb & Guichaoua, 2021, pp. 10-12; ICRC, 2020, pp. 6-51). It built on a pre-existing Islamic legal system to interpret governance, retaining the authority of the local sharia judges (*qadis*) from the Kunta tribe. These judges were able to influence how rules were implemented in Kidal, including the rejection of the application of corporal punishment in 2012. However, their restraint waned following the French intervention, which involved widespread arrests in the community, not only of combatants but of civilians providing logistical support to the jihadist combatants.

MUJAO's Rule of Gao: June 2012 – January 2013

MUJAO's membership was more heterogeneous, consisting of Arabs and Moors from Mauritania, Algeria and Saharawi Polisario ranks, Malian Arabs and tribes involved in the drug trade in northern Mali, as well as Fulani and Songhai (Raineri and Strazzari 2015, p. 259; Thurston, 2020, p. 97; Lebovich, 2013, p. 8).

Between June 2012 to January 2013 Gao was governed by MUJAO (Bouhleb & Guichaoua, 2021, p. 14) under Mokhtar Belmokhtar, an Algerian jihadist veteran. MUJAO was initially welcomed by locals for its commitment to restore order. Its application of sharia was seen by many as preferable to the generalised violence which emerged during the MNLA's rule (Raineri and Strazzari, 2015, p. 263). In contrast to Ansar Dine in Kidal, MUJAO undermined the existing judicial system in Gao, electing new judges and establishing a new set of social rules which were harshly enforced, while local *qadis* lost much of their influence and were targets for violence (ICRC, 2020, p. 50). At the same time debates took place in Islamic tribunals which gave way to some popular participation (ibid). However, MUJAO became known for exercising corporal punishments and several instances of flogging and amputation were recorded (UN Commission of Inquiry for Mali, 2020, p. 96). According to Lebovich (2013) local recruits were often the most hard-line in enforcing sharia, igniting local conflicts and taking out frustrations on the population. Other studies have highlighted instead that foreign jihadists in northern Mali played a role in alienating the local population through *hudud* punishments (Svensson & Finnbogason, 2020).

However, MUJAO did not consolidate its governance through force alone. Gao was a complex region to govern because it was ethnically diverse, with a history of local conflicts and it was a strategic region with important trading routes and smuggling networks (Raineri and Strazzari, 2015, p. 258; Bouhleb & Guichaoua, 2021, pp. 13–16). MNLA rule of Gao had been very unpopular. Thus, MUJAO built alliances with business elites, who were interested in evicting the MNLA because their rule had threatened their interests in cross-border trade. These elites provided political and financial support for MUJAO to consolidate their control to safeguard their business interests and protect civilians (ICRC, 2020, pp. 49–50). MUJAO also portrayed themselves as supporters of the Songhai, the majority ethnic group in Gao, against Tuareg separatists (ICRC, 2020, p. 48). Local notables from Arab and Songhai groups allegedly provided some support to MUJAO. Eventually, MUJAO also gained support from the *cercle des notables*, an important local representative body of wealthy merchants. These notables volunteered as mediators in a *Comité de Concertation des Sages* between MUJAO and the local population during their rule (Bouhleb & Guichaoua, 2021, p. 14; Raineri and Strazzari, 2015, p. 262; Lebovich, 2013, p. 9).

MUJAO also provided some basic services, including economic aid, ensuring electricity and water maintenance as well as keeping prices of basic food staples low (Lebovich, 2013, p. 9, note 69). In a region where people had strong grievances against banditry and the inability of the state to address it, MUJAO gained some support due to their curtailment of crime (International Crisis Group, 2014). Their eviction of the MNLA and introduction of a more stable order, through the enforcement of justice and provision of some assistance garnered some local sympathy for MUJAO (Lebovich, 2013, p. 9). However, this local sympathy did not mean there was no civilian opposition to their rule.

AQIM-Ansar Dine allied rule of Timbuktu: April 2012 – January 2013

AQIM was established in 2007 but has its origins in the Algerian civil war. It is led by the now allegedly deceased Abdelmalek Droukdel and governed by a 14-member council of notables who manage the group from Algeria (UN International Commission of Inquiry for Mali, 2020, p. 58). AQIM's predecessor, the GSPC, started integrating in

the region approximately a decade before. It became deeply rooted into local society in northern Mali, through developing alliances with trafficking and business networks, but also through providing charitable services which benefited people and marriage to low-caste women (Lebovich, 2013; Bøås, 2014; Lounnas, 2014). They specifically developed a 'network of local alliances' including with Arab militias in Timbuktu (International Crisis Group, 2012, p. 17). They also built relations with local *marabouts*, encouraging them to preach their version of Islam. As such, AQIM did not replace but 'rather utilised a pre-existing traditional structure' to consolidate its influence (Bøås, 2014, p. 4).

Timbuktu was governed through an alliance between AQIM and a more hard-line faction of Ansar Dine led by 'Abd al-Hamid Abu Zayd, who became the governor of Timbuktu (Thurston, 2020, p. 85). Abu Zayd became notorious for the destruction of mausoleums, public floggings and amputations which fuelled local resistance towards the jihadists and created international outcry. To administer the city, they established a media commission, moral police (Hisbah), Islamic police, an Islamic Tribunal and Security Battalion (Bureau du Procureur de la Cour Pénale Internationale 2018 as cited in Roetman et al., 2019, p. 13). The purpose of the Hisbah, as described by its leader Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi, was 'to "promote virtue and prevent vice" – to combat all acts that, in its eyes, contravened the precepts of Islam' (Barrack, 2017). An Islamic court was set up to apply its interpretation of sharia law, which included corporal punishment (UN International Commission of Inquiry for Mali, 2020, p. 81). Public flogging, amputation and executions were documented in Timbuktu (ibid, p. 82). Local Malian intermediaries played a crucial role in governance of the north, especially in Timbuktu and Gao (Lebovich, 2013). In fact, locals often developed a reputation for harsh treatment of civilians, like Mohamed ag Moussa (ibid, p. 9).

Infamously, in Timbuktu, the jihadists attacked nine mausoleums, one mosque and tombs of local Sufi saints. Ba (2020a) argues that the destruction of cultural sites formed a key part of the political vision undergirding the jihadist governance project. The destruction of Sufi shrines fit into their broader project, which rejected both local and universal values that these cultural heritage sites represented. In targeting these, Ba (2020a, p. 6) suggests 'the jihadists sought to establish a new state built upon their espoused interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence and culture'.

At the same time, AQIM and Ansar Dine kept the city's electrical generators and water pumps operating, although they later reportedly destroyed the city's electrical network (Lebovich, 2013, p. 9, note 69). It had also set up a number to call if people were harassed by the MNLA or bandits (Bøås, 2017, p. 148). The hospital remained in function in Timbuktu, which benefited its combatants but also showed the populace that they could run basic services (International Crisis Group, 2014, p. 9, note 36).

Non-violent resistance to the jihadists took on various forms ranging from everyday acts of protest to organised collective demonstrations. Local imams and notables fled or refused to cooperate with AQIM and Ansar Dine (Lebovich, 2013). Local librarians and ordinary people hid sacred texts in their homes, to prevent them being destroyed in Timbuktu (Bennoune, 2013, p. 310). In addition to these acts of resistance, Svennson and Finnbogason (2020, p. 10) find that organised, collective civilian resistance occurred in all the occupied towns between May and October 2012: In Kidal, at least 150 people protested the imposition of sharia; in Gao, civilians mobilised to prevent the Islamic police from punishing a suspected thief, formed a protective belt to prevent the destruction of ancient tombs and protested the ban on football and TV, while in Timbuktu hundreds protested the harsh application of sharia rule (Svennson and Finnbogason 2020, p. 10).

Two key sources of friction emerged around the use of violence and whether to expand southwards. The rushed and harsh application of sharia, triggered a rebuke from Abdelmalek Droukdel, evidenced through a letter he wrote to his field commanders (Callimachi, 2013). Finally, the Ifoghas clan of the Tuareg did not support the advance into Konna in Central Mali, spearheaded by Iyad Ag Ghali, Abu Zayd and Hamadoun Kouffa, which they argued exceeded the territorial bounds of 'Azawad' territory (Thurston, 2020, p. 138). By late 2012, Thurston (2020, p. 85) argues that

Droukdel's inability to control his Saharan commanders undermined the jihadist state-building project in northern Mali. The offensive and takeover of Konna, prompted intervention of the French military operation, Serval, on 11 January 2013 which swiftly dismantled their governance, killed high-level commanders and dispersed the insurgency. Several conclusions can be drawn. While sharia was implemented across Mali, there were nuanced variations in how it was exercised and practiced. This suggests the importance of not assuming uniformity in the implementation of a Salafist-jihadist ideological project and that local actors and leadership played a role in mediating its application. Second, the case illustrates that jihadist governance is not imposed only from the top-down with force; the role of local elites proved crucial in mediating how the new modes of governance were implemented. As a result, jihadists must strike a delicate balance between ideological purity which risks alienating civilians and generating but also maintaining civilian support over time. Third, jihadist governance is vulnerable to internal fissures and local dissent, as much as external military intervention (Thurston, 2020).

Boko Haram in Nigeria: moral police, predation and a new form of governance

Despite an impressive number of publications, the literature on Boko Haram has focused on the dynamics and reasons behind the emergence of the jihadist group. Less attention has been given to the governance that Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad (JASD), more commonly known as Boko Haram,⁸ has implemented under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau since 2009. Moreover, little is known about the political project of the caliphate that the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) faction promoted after its 2016 schism with Boko Haram.

Boko Haram emerged around 2003 as an offshoot of various Salafi movements that would gather around the charismatic leader, Mohammed Yusuf and a shura of key executives. It started to make the headlines after launching a violent uprising in Maiduguri (Borno State) in July 2009. After the Nigerian army's extrajudicial killing of Yusuf, members took refuge in the Mandara Mountains and the Sambisa Forests. Although Boko Haram displayed certain similarities with the Maitatsine sect in the early 1980s (Adesoji, 2010), some have questioned its links with religious and jihadi movements of the Sahel (Onuoha, 2010). It has been described as a product of the growing influence of Salafism in North-eastern Nigeria (Loimeier, 2012). However, Boko Haram opposed Nigerian Salafi creeds. Boko Haram was designated as 'Kharijites' (secessionists) by Izala scholars (Mohammed 2014) who attempted to control youth who could have joined the insurgency (Thurston, 2015).

The emergence of Boko Haram must be understood within a context where most local elites viewed sharia as a way of improving governance (Kane, 2003). However, there was also popular discontent with the implementation of sharia, which had been officially introduced in 2003 in the northern states of Nigeria (Ostien, 2009). That provided a political opportunity for Boko Haram to position itself within the frame of local grievances. When a new jihad was proclaimed in 2010, Shekau declared war against the Nigerian state and Christian Western tenets, to enforce the 'true religion'. Boko Haram members who survived the 2009 Maiduguri uprising took refuge in rural areas of Borno and Adamawa, particularly in the Gwoza Hills and Mandara mountains. The group engaged in targeted killing of traditional chiefs along with leaders of the Quadiriya, Tidjaniya and Izala Salafi communities (Mohamed, 2014). In 2011 and 2012 it orchestrated a campaign of suicide bombing, including against UN headquarters in Abuja, which led Zenn (2012) to argue that the group was driven by AQIM.

Two factors contributed to the debate on what it was that drove the insurgency. The first was Boko Haram's territorial expansion and its seizure of major towns in Borno State in 2013 and 2014. Some have argued that the ideology of the group has been extensively shaped by al-Qaida (Zenn et al., 2013) and that its expansion was supported by al-Qaida and al-Shabaab (Zenn, 2014). Others hold that the Nigerian army's repression and human rights abuses have fuelled recruitment to Boko Haram and facilitated its expansion (Pérouse de Montclos, 2012). After May 2013, Boko Haram's attempts to take control of Maiduguri were repelled by the army and a newly created Civilian Joint Task Force consisting of local vigilantes and hunters. These were replicated in Borno, Yobe

8. Hereafter, we refer to JASD by its more commonly known name, Boko Haram, and the faction which split from it as the ISWAP faction.

and Adamawa states (Higazi, 2013). These militias were delegated the role of intelligence collection and filtering the local population (Agbiboa, 2018), gradually becoming one of Boko Haram's main enemies (Nagarajan, 2021). Other authors have argued that its expansion cannot be explained in terms of religious conflicts (Gyang Mang, 2014; Roelofs, 2014) or Kanuri vs. Hausa ethnic cleavages (Higazi, 2015). Boko Haram has adapted its modus operandi to local strategic realities, using suicide attacks, kidnappings, bank robberies and asymmetrical warfare (Mohammed, 2014). Sociological approaches have held that Boko Haram's mobilisation drew on local grievances and the appeal of Islamic governance and sharia following the spread of corruption after Nigeria's transition to a civilian regime in 1999 (Pérouse de Montclos, 2014).

The second event which shaped the debate was the widespread media attention to the mass abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok in April 2014: the UNSC placed Boko Haram on the al-Qaida Sanctions list (Comolli, 2015), sparking interest among scholars of terrorism and security studies. This triggered the internationalisation of the conflict, spurring Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon to form the Multinational Joint Task Force, with the aim of defeating the insurgency with the support of the USA and France (Comolli, 2015; Thurston, 2017).

In the wake of these events, terrorism and religious studies have sought to explain the group's use of violence and increased targeting of civilians. Some hold that Boko Haram created a hybrid *takfiri* ideology influenced by the Sokoto Caliphate (Pieri & Zenn, 2016), which could explain its use of violence as well as the split from the Shekau faction in 2012 to form *Ansaru al-Musulmina fi Bilad al- Sudan* ('Ansaru'). Rejection of man-made (as opposed to divine) laws could explain its ability to maintain international links (Kassim, 2015), a dimension which came under scrutiny when Abubakar Shekau pledged allegiance to ISIS in March 2015. Further, Aparad (2015), Brigaglia (2019) and Iossi & Brigaglia (2020) have compiled and analysed sermons, publications and videos to detail the evolution of Boko Haram's rhetoric against its enemies, highlighting doctrinal divergences between Boko Haram (JASD) and ISWAP on the issue of Takfirism and relations with Muslim populations living under the authority of the state. However, more than foreign influence or religious conflict, it was Yusuf and Shekau's interpretations of Salafi concepts such as *al wala al bara* (exclusive loyalty to 'true Muslims') and the idea that submission to other rules is idolatry that shaped the categorisation of local populations, organising political relations with communities of believers and the state (Thurston, 2016; 2017). Although Zenn (2017; 2019) explains variations in governance in terms of ideological reasons, Thurston (2017) and Higazi et al., (2018) challenge the contention that internal or ideological factors could explain the evolution of the insurgency.

Indeed, since 2014, several studies have pointed to the role of multi-level dynamics of the conflict while offering key insights into the kind of governance Boko Haram established at the local level. Its attempts to establish relations with Al-Qaida and then the ISIS have been described as a 'franchise' or 'labelling' strategy (Aparad, 2015; Cohen, 2017; Pérouse de Montclos, 2018). As the group's expansion relied on partnership and the recruitment of bandits or cattle rustlers, it was sometimes (mis)identified with these groups (Higazi, 2013). Boko Haram developed an economy of looting and used economic incentives to recruit young members from rural areas or the urban informal sector (Higazi, 2015). Boko Haram exploited the population's need for protection from the army (Higazi, 2016) and targeted Fulani and Shuwa pastoralists along with their cattle, which they stole (Higazi, 2021). Despite its ideological discourses, the movement has also recruited and garnered support from women (Matfess, 2017), also for suicide bombings (Warner et al., 2019).

Boko Haram replaced local elites and traditional chiefs (Pérouse de Montclos, 2014) with the group's military hierarchy of *cheiks*, *munzr* and local emirs (Cohen, 2015; Higazi, 2016) but did not develop an administration or civil institutions (Ladbury et al., 2016). It has governed through religious discipline: the Hisbah, its religious police enforced sharia and harsh corporal punishment in the 'House of Islam', the name given to the territory of the Islamic state (Ladbury et al., 2016; Thurston, 2016; Zenn, 2019). The group 'purified' this territory, prohibiting the use of 'juju' (charms), games or amoral attitudes (Cohen, 2015) organising *purdah*, the strict separation of genders (Matfess, 2017). It established religious schools for children (Ladbury et al., 2016), some of whom had been abducted and later became fighters (Warner et al., 2019).

The articulation of global claims with the local dynamics of the group accounts for important variations in forms and intensity of violence between Local Government Areas (Pérouse de Montclos, 2020) or even in neighbourhoods (Monguno & Umara, 2020, pp. 68–74). That can also explain the diversity of forms of governance. Boko Haram collected various types of arbitrary taxes and organized relations with villages according to their pledges of allegiance, tributes and reputations (Cohen, 2015). In the area of Gwoza for instance, it drew on pre-existing political conflicts and was supported by certain district heads, as the local rulers were reluctant to inform the army of a threat (Higazi, 2015, pp. 43–45). Historical approaches show that the *modus operandi* of the insurgents also reflects legacies of slave raiding and *razzia* (MacEachern, 2018; Seignobos, 2014).

Limited attention has been paid to the political economy of the conflict. However, forms of governance and violence cannot be separated from historical models of wealth creation: they account for the specificity of Boko Haram's implantation and warfare in the Mandara Mountains or Chari Logone area in Cameroon, seen historically as a 'pagan land' which was subjected to intense slave raiding until the 1920s (MacEachern, 2020). This also explains why, after splitting off from Boko Haram in 2016, the ISWAP faction settled in the resource-rich Lake Chad area: it benefited from the marginalisation of Buduma communities who joined the group, seeking to challenge local elites who controlled their access to fishing incomes (Cohen, 2015; Seignobos, 2016). Overall, the territorial expansion of Boko Haram was fueled by its model of looting (Seignobos, 2016; Higazi, 2015), which was highly centralised and shaped a political economy that enabled it to establish patron–client relations with former outcasts (Cohen, 2021).

Despite internal tensions, which led to the killing of Mahaman Nour and the replacement of Abu Musab Al Barnawi by Ba Idrissa and then by Ba Lawan in 2019, evidence indicates that the ISWAP developed a different model of governance. This can be accounted for by ideological motivations, but also by different strategic visions and different political economies that do not rely on looting and conscription. The ISWAP has targeted armies but tried to protect Muslim populations while delivering services and medical support for those in need (International Crisis Group, 2019a, 2020d). It has engaged in the provision of justice and protection for those paying taxes in the area it controls (Cohen, 2021), has allocated grazing lands (International Crisis Group, 2019a) and tried to use the resources of the Lake Chad area to attract new residents (The New Humanitarian, 2019), as well as collecting taxes on fishing, which it also regulates.

In conclusion, the literature on Boko Haram has extensively discussed the drivers of the insurgency and debated the role of ideological or international connections. However, research has shown that the evolution of and variation in the group's governance have changed over time and space. These differences can be broadly explained with reference to the military evolution of the conflict, competing governance by other actors, and the group's adaptation to local populations. This highlights the importance of looking not only at ideology, but also the daily practices of jihadist insurgency, including policing, justice provision and taxation. Thus far, the literature has not examined the political economies underpinning jihadist groups and how they adapt to civil war or conflict economies. Historical and anthropological research indicates that models of accumulation are influenced by historical legacies of slave raiding, practices of banditry and the local context – but relevant data and research concerning jihadist groups are scarce. Also lacking is an approach that examines the governance of jihadist groups in comparison to that provided by the state and how local populations understand these differences. Boko Haram has not established a civil administration and focused on moral policing. However, it is not clear if the ISWAP's mode of governance and taxations in exchange of justice and service provision enjoy popular support. It is also unclear if it differs significantly from existing forms of government, especially in rural areas. What is regarded as a jihadist proto- state might indeed reflect the limited role of states in the organisation of political orders in the region, the role of governance by delegation of power and an appeal for stricter moral regulations in Sahelian societies.

The Katiba Macina, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and Ansaroul Islam: social control, justice and protection

This case study examines three jihadist insurgencies: the Katiba Macina, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Ansaroul Islam.⁹ These are primarily active in the Liptako-Gourma region in the Central Sahel, straddling Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. There is now a growing scholarly literature examining the origins and mobilisation of these groups (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019; Campana & Jourde, 2017; Jourde et al., 2019; Raineri, 2020), as well as a few studies which explore their governing practices (Baldaro & Dially, 2020; Bøås et al., 2020; Rupesinghe & Bøås, 2019; Sandor & Campana, 2019).

After the dismantling of the jihadist governance project of the north, jihadist groups re-organised in rural areas. From about 2015 onwards, these groups became known through launching violent campaigns which targeted mainly state representatives in the region. However, over the last five years, they have evolved considerably: the Katiba Macina has consolidated control in the Inner Niger Delta, while its rule is more contested in the eastern parts of Central Mali. The ISGS has established considerable presence in the Tillabéri region in Niger as well as along the Mali-Niger border zone, while Ansaroul Islam has become less cohesive and has largely been absorbed by JNIM, operating alongside other jihadist groups in northern and eastern parts of Burkina Faso.

While these insurgencies are affiliated to the al-Qaida linked JNIM and Islamic State, they have had distinctly local agendas. The Katiba Macina is formally part of JNIM, an Al-Qaida led umbrella organisation, which in 2017 merged several jihadist groups and Ansaroul is aligned to JNIM. In contrast, ISGS pledged allegiance to the Islamic State central in 2015. The Katiba Macina appears to have more nationally oriented goals, namely, to establish sharia in Mali, but it also challenges the Malian state, Westernised elites and seek to persuade locals to adopt a more stringent approach to Islam (International Crisis Group, 2019b, p. 12). Little is known about Ansaroul Islam's goals. Initially the insurgency's leader, Ibrahim Dicko employed the rhetoric of Islam to challenge the unequal social order in northern Burkina Faso calling for the removal of class hierarchies and equality (International Crisis Group, 2017). The goals of ISGS, appear more transnationally orientated. They aim to establish a 'global caliphate', sanctioning the use of violence against non-supporters and non-believers (Raleigh et al., 2020, p. 11). Following a renewed pledge of allegiance to Islamic State central, it announced its campaign will target governments, local self-defence units and Christians (ibid, p. 12).

The Katiba Macina and Ansaroul Islam have both been led by local Fulani Islamic preachers, who had amassed a significant following in their respective localities prior to taking up arms. In contrast, the ISGS is led by Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui, who is from the Western Sahara and a former spokesperson of MUJAO. Despite its foreign leadership, ISGS has recruited key local elites, including Doundoun Cheffou and Illiassou Djibo, also known as 'Petit Chafor', nomadic warriors who were once part of militias defending their interests in the face of raiders (Assanvo et al., 2019; International Crisis Group, 2020a).

In contrast to the jihadist proto state in northern Mali and the shifting territorial control of Boko Haram, the Katiba Macina, Ansaroul Islam and ISGS have not exercised territorial control in an overt, stable manner over time. Yet, they still managed to develop some rudimentary civil institutions and provide some limited services to local populations. The Katiba Macina resembles a decentralised network of battalions or 'katibas', which take orders from insurgent leaders exercising authority from the top (Rupesinghe and Bøås, 2019; Baldaro and Dially, 2020). Baldaro and Dially (2020) have illustrated that the Katiba Macina espouses a decentralised governance system whereby Kouffa delegates authority to military and political leaders who are known as 'chefs de markaz', who are responsible for overseeing the training camps (markaz). They also have broader governing responsibilities: they collect *zakat* (religious tax), deliver justice with the support of *qadis* (Islamic judges), organise attacks and administer finances (ibid).

9. Notably these are not the only groups that are active in this area, others include the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), Ansar Dine, al-Mourabitoun, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Ansaroul Islam, See Assanvo et. al (2019, p. 3)

These groups have generally cracked down on civic and cultural life and introduced a strict moral code, common to most other Salafist-jihadist insurgencies. As the Katiba Macina consolidated its control from 2017 onwards, it started collecting *zakat* (Islamic tax), banned music, football and alcohol (International Crisis Group, 2019b; Rupesinghe & Dially, 2019). Their rule has also had gendered implications, enforcing sex segregation in public, restricting women's mobility and livelihood activities and banning local festivals to prevent social mixing (Rupesinghe & Dially, 2019). ISGS has forbidden smoking, prostitution, alcohol, music and parties. While traditional Tijani Sufi brotherhood preaching is tolerated in some mosques, religious practice and tradition have been curtailed (International Crisis Group, 2020a, p. 6).

Protection stands has been a service which jihadist groups have sought to provide, though their actual capacity and track record in doing so is not well understood. The counter-terror campaigns launched by the state which have indiscriminately targeted ethnic Fulani, have spurred this community's mobilisation towards the Katiba Macina in Central Mali, Ansaroul Islam and other jihadist groups in Burkina Faso and ISGS in Niger (Bøås et al., 2020; International Crisis Group, 2016, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Raineri, 2020; Sangaré, 2016; Thurston, 2020). These dynamics generate a demand by communities for protection, which in turn becomes a key governance service insurgent can provide (Raineri, 2020).

Due to the endemic problem of banditry, providing security from cattle-rustling is another key service. The Katiba Macina, Ansaroul Islam and ISGS have drawn members by offering protection from cattle-raiding, banditry and plunder (Bøås et al., 2020; International Crisis Group, 2019b; Nsaibia & Weiss, 2018; Raineri, 2020). The ISGS have helped return stolen cattle (Bøås et al., 2020, p. 130), while the Katiba Macina has reportedly reduced cattle theft (International Crisis Group, 2019b, p. 13). On the other hand, jihadist actors have also been accused of stealing cattle from local communities, through arbitrary application of *zakat* (Islamic tax) in the form of cattle (Nsaibia & Weiss, p. 24, 2018; Pellerin, 2019).

Research on welfare assistance provided by jihadist insurgents is limited. In Central Mali, the Katiba Macina allegedly provided bags of rice to vulnerable, food insecure communities in the early stages of mobilisation (Rupesinghe and Bøås, 2019). In eastern Burkina Faso, a journalist reported that 'jihadists' which could refer to Ansaroul Islam, ISGS and JNIM, providing 'maize, medicine and money' (Maclean, 2019). It is likely these types of actions fulfil short-term recruitment aims, which may garner some quick wins for local legitimacy. More research is needed to explore the extent, type and distribution of these goods, in what areas, to whom and under what conditions.

Jihadist insurgents have taken on governance functions through the management of resources. This service provision becomes particularly salient in contexts like the Central Sahel, which is plagued by endemic conflict over resources like land, water and pasture and which have witnessed cyclical disputes particularly between farmers and herders. Benjaminsen & Ba (2019) have demonstrated that the Katiba Macina sought to challenge the authority of the 'Jowros', part of the land aristocracy responsible for collecting fees required to access pastures. For example, during the transhumance in 2016, the Jowros were told not to collect any access fees in advance (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019, p. 12). Baldaro and Dially (2020, p. 78) have illustrated that the Katiba Macina entered into an alliance with the Jowros elites, preserving their authority but reducing the tribute fees paid to them to access pasture.

In Central Mali, the Katiba Macina has developed a court system responding to longstanding grievance against state provided justice, which is considered to be ineffectual and corrupt (Rupesinghe & Bøås, 2019). The ISGS has in a similar vein established local courts for regulating land disputes (Bøås et al., 2020, p. 130). For groups with strong religious programmes aimed at societal transformation, courts may not only provide the function of solving disputes, but also fulfil aims of social control and law-making (Ginsburg, 2019). In the Sahelian context, the demand for dispute resolution is high because conflicts between groups erupt intermittently and there are often overlapping institutional arrangements regulating disputes, including state or customary ones. Providing this key service is thus a persuasive way for jihadists to garner local legitimacy.

These jihadist insurgents have all deployed coercion in various forms, though there are nuanced variations between the intensity and targets of violence. The Katiba Macina mainly employed selective violence targeting state representatives, the security forces and non-collaborator. For example, between 2015-2017, the Katiba Macina killed more than 30 village chiefs (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019, p. 9). Relying on the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) dataset, Raleigh et al. (2020, p. 12) find that ISGS, in comparison with JNIM engages domestic military forces and foreign forces at a much higher rate and is responsible for higher levels of civilian fatalities.¹⁰ Other reports suggest that ISGS have been involved in attacks on Christian places of worship, while the Kouffa has prohibited the Katiba Macina from carrying out such attacks. ISGS has also allegedly been blamed for jihadist attacks on civilians in Burkina Faso, which intensified in 2019 (International Crisis Group, 2020a, p. 13). 2021 has been the deadliest year for Niger since the start of the crisis: in January 2021, more than 100 civilians were killed in northern Tillabery, presumably by ISGS militants. In March 2021, a string of deadly attacks were carried out in and around Tillia, a town in western Niger, killing 137 civilians (Hoije et al. 2021), presumably by combatants of the ISGS, which signals a sharp escalation in an already established pattern of anti-civilian violence by this group.

Engagement with local politics and conflicts have been essential for the Katiba Macina, ISGS and Ansaroul Islam to build their membership bases, which has in turn facilitated their integration into local communities. While they have recruited across ethnic communities and particularly among marginalised social groups, their main membership base is from the Fulani ethnic group. Bouju (2020) argues land is at the heart of the jihadist conflict in Central Mali and Northern Burkina Faso. Scholars have illustrated that the Katiba Macina, have engaged in grassroots alliance building with marginalised Fulani pastoralists, appealing to grievances surrounding access to pastures (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019; Rupesinghe & Diall, 2019; Thurston, 2020). It has also intervened in both intra and inter-communal conflicts over land (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019). Jourde et al. (2019) underlined how intra-communal cleavages around access to pasture within the Fulani community between the autochthone (or 'sons of the soil') from the Delta and non-autochthone pastoralists from drier, more arid regions provided entry points for jihadists to mobilise and regulate access to resources.

Theological rivals have shaped governance of these groups. While ISGS initially cooperated with JNIM, this relation descended into fratricidal warfare (Baldaro and Diall, 2020, p. 7; Nsaiba and Weiss, 2020). One study has shown that differences in governance shaped inter-jihadist competition, prompting defections and fragmentation. Baldaro and Diall (2020) argue that the Katiba Macina centralises resource management through the collection of *zakat* or pillage, whilst the ISGS allows combatants to keep spoils collected during warfare. The other issue at stake was the degree of violence to be used against state and rival jihadist groups. The Katiba Macina has traditionally taken a more restrained approach, while fighters defecting to ISGS advocated for more aggression (ibid, p. 77).

To conclude, it is clear the emergent insurgencies of the Katiba Macina, ISGS and Ansaroul Islam have all engaged in governing practices, in tandem with when they launched guerrilla warfare. State abuses, which have targeted the Fulani ethnic group disproportionately, which form part of the core membership base of these groups has fuelled their mobilisation, raising demands for protection by targeted communities. Providing protection, dispute resolution and some rudimentary social services in a context where state authorities are predatory or absent and where communities face threats of cattle-rustling and banditry, have contributed to making the jihadists an appealing force for local order in rural regions. Nevertheless, their emergent rule has also been punctuated by varying degrees of coercive force and this differs between groups, with the ISGS being the most violent of the three. The insurgencies have also demonstrated a propensity to adapt to and position themselves within pre-existing social conflicts, politics and grievances to garner support, particularly through involvement in resource conflicts. Given the decentralised organisation of the insurgencies, future scholarship should strive to take an in-depth, qualitative approach to examine governing practices in a given locality in which the insurgent groups operate, to probe how these have evolved over time and how local actors play a role in mediating its application.

10. Specifically, 'there are 3.5 civilian fatalities for each ISGS attack, compared with 2 per JNIM attack,' They also assert that up to 40 percent of JNIM activities are directed against domestic militaries, while 20 percent is against foreign forces. In contrast, ISGS target domestic military forces at a 25 percent rate and foreign forces at 13 percent Raleigh, Nsaiba and Dowd (2020, p. 12)

Part 5: Concluding Discussion

Synthesis of Findings

This paper has reviewed a significant body of literature to survey the state of the research on jihadist governance in the Sahel. Most of the literature focuses on explaining the emergence of jihadist insurgents, only indirectly addressing aspects of their governance. There is limited comprehensive and systematic empirical data available on governance practices. Moreover, the literature also does not tend to agree on what jihadist governance is. It is not clear if it entails the establishment of a civilian administration with a bureaucratic body which can provide services such as justice and dispute resolution, or if more ad-hoc practices like the provision of protection should be regarded as governance or as a feature of insurgency.

We have identified several patterns and existing explanations for jihadist governance and its variation. These were the macro-level context of *state weakness, actions of the state, rivals and militias, ideology, organisation and leadership and lastly, local politics and conflicts*. First, a crisis in state authority which contributed to a departure of local state officials or a breakdown in security monitoring mechanisms can create permissive conditions for insurgencies to organise. However, initial mobilisation was not necessarily evident or a pathological outcome of state weakness. The state dysfunction arguments have thus far proven to have limited analytical purchase in explaining the emergence or variation of governance. More precise mechanisms need to be traced between the specific conditions of the state and how these create or constrain political opportunities for rebel governance to emerge and be sustained. We are not arguing that the physical absence of state officials, infrastructure and services do not create permissive conditions for insurgencies to operate; it is clear that it would be much more difficult for insurgents to govern in an urban city context. However, we argue that the specific domestic politics and conditions of the state and its relationship to the jihadist governance need to be carefully and systematically studied, not assumed.

Second, close attention to competing governance actors, including the state, militias and rivals will be important for future work, to develop a more holistic understanding of the context in which jihadist governance emerges. Third, Salafist-jihadist governance as an ideological project cannot be treated as unified and cohesive. While jihadist governors implement local variants of sharia law, its application is not uniform across or even within cases, which suggests much closer attention to dynamics and practices, rather than relying on doctrinal texts alone. Little is known about the distinctiveness of the Salafist-jihadist ideology as practiced by various insurgencies in the Sahel, beyond what we can infer about general doctrinal guidance from Salafist-jihadist ideology espoused by organisations like Al-Qaida. Fourth, principal-agent relations can have implications for the character of governance implemented locally. Internal schisms around how to implement governance can be a source of friction at the intra-organisational level, stemming from command-and-control issues but also due to the divergent political ambitions of commanders. Fourth, jihadist insurgent governing projects are not introduced onto a blank state, but often engage with and build on pre-existing forms of governance including tribal, customary, religious forms of authority as well as entrenched grievances and conflicts. Furthermore, local elites, communities and other non-state armed actors like militias have often played important roles in shaping the terms of the jihadist order.

Two more general points can be made. First, the Weberian-informed analytical framework will have limited analytical utility for studying jihadist governance in the Sahel and may instead function more as a yardstick for measuring its 'effectiveness'. Jihadist governance is considered as an anomaly because much of the existing literature is informed by a view which considers the state as an entity with the monopoly of law and violence on a territory. One common feature of these factions is that they do not exert stable or permanent territorial control. These insurgencies therefore defy Mancur Olson's dichotomous categorisation of 'stationary' or 'roving' bandits (Olson, 1993). Olson considers that stationary bandits invest in holding territory, developing a form of social contract, because of the potential benefits they can accrue from taxation. Roving bandits in contrast, exploit the local population, relying

on brute force, extracting rents as they move from one location to another. That these insurgents govern without holding territory thus challenges conventional assumptions in the rebel governance literature, which suggests that territorial control is a prerequisite for governing (see e.g., Kasfir, 2015), though this is not necessarily unique to jihadist groups.

Second, jihadists seek to build on or transform existing forms of order using a broad repertoire of strategies and tactics. The pattern that emerges across contexts is that the minimal services provided by these groups has often exceeded what the state has provided, which has contributed to fostering some local legitimacy and support. They latch onto and work with existing systems of governance and more research is needed to understand the extent to which this represents a complete rupture, transformation or continuation. This view aligns with a rich tradition of scholarship which has argued the importance of studying hybrid political orders, rather than adopting a state-centric lens which emphasises the dysfunction of the state.

Avenues for Future Research

From a methodological perspective, future research could benefit from conducting high-quality, in-depth case studies of single cases, informed through field research or through collaboration with researchers in the region. Such research could also benefit from examining in detail the dynamics and processes of governing by asking ‘how’ and not only ‘why’ questions. Second, we suggest that such studies should pay attention to subnational conflict dynamics, which will help illuminate the local dynamics and politics of governance. By disaggregating the unit of analysis to a more micro-level, a range of patterns emerge that tend to be masked at the macro, country level. More rigorous field research is needed to build the empirical evidence base on jihadist insurgencies in the Sahel.

Researchers should engage in a thorough ethical and methodological discussions about how to best collect data about jihadist groups in the Sahel. All methods have advantages and flaws and probably have to be mixed: data collection in the field is dangerous, doing interviews with local people might endanger them, access to members of jihadist groups can produce first-hand, rich empirical data, but cannot be easily cross-checked and raises a host of ethical and security risks. Conducting interviews with ex-jihadists in prison raises serious issues of a researcher’s potential complicity with torture or human right abuses. Videos and photos can provide insight into the inner world of jihadist groups, life under their rule, as well as the rhetorical ideas underpinning the jihadist project, but the authenticity and reliability of this type of data must be scrutinised, particularly with the explosion of data shared via social media networks like WhatsApp. Moreover, without deep contextual knowledge, it would be easy to misinterpret such data.

Substantively, future research could emphasise the historical context of governance in the locality of interest, rather than taking Weberian-informed governance as the starting point of analysis. These could draw on approaches which study the organisation of power in pre-colonial, colonial and independence contexts and the specificity of political orders in the Sahel. Research could take as a starting point that jihadist governance emerges as one form of alternative authority in a field where several actors operate and how jihadist governance ruptures, continues or seeks to transform existing modes of governance, authority and power. In addition, the research agenda could benefit from more attention to the political economy underpinning jihadist insurgent governance, such as informal taxation and trade, to further understand how insurgents regulate this realm, in tandem with other actors, moving beyond simplistic crime-terror analyses. Finally, research could benefit from a relational analysis of governance, which would incorporate how a range of other non-state actors influence these processes.

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