

Geopolitics of Violent Non-State Actors

Exploring manifestations of statehood by violent
governors.

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Alla mia famiglia e ai miei amici.

In appreciation

Undertaking a doctoral dissertation is always an arduous journey. However, this voyage becomes even more formidable when initiated amidst a global pandemic, while simultaneously relocating to a different country and working full-time. Several individuals deserve gratitude for helping me getting to where I stand today.

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Abstract

In the twentieth century, violent non-state actors (VNSAs) have emerged as significant contenders to states. These entities thrive in areas of low (or non-existent) formal state control and engage in the delivery of public goods such as security or basic services, enter domestic and international markets, and collect taxes. This thesis seeks to enhance the understanding of how VNSAs approach governance at an age of perforated statehood. It debates on where violent actors play a role, and what this means for national and international approaches to “ungoverned spaces”. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, this thesis consolidates the literature on geopolitics, governance, and violent non-state actors. It integrates theories of rebel governance and quantitative work on VNSA features with original research. By developing a typology of VNSA manifestations of statehood, the thesis underscores the critical connection between the characteristics of violent non-state actors and their evolving engagement in governance. It also provides useful insights on the interplay between different influencing factors – the nature of the VNSA, the nature of the host state, and the presence of external actors – and “manifestations of violent statehood.

Resum

Al segle XX, els actors violents no estatals (VNSAs) han sorgit com a contendents significatius per als estats. Aquests grups prosperen en àrees de baix (o inexistent) control formal de l'estat i es dediquen al lliurament de béns públics com ara seguretat o serveis bàsics, participen en els mercats nacionals i internacionals i recapten impostos. Aquesta tesi té com a objectiu millorar la comprensió de com els VNSAs aborden la governança en una era d'estatalitat perforada. Es debat si els actors violents tenen un paper i què significa això per als enfocaments nacionals i internacionals dels "espais no governats". La tesi consolida la literatura sobre geopolítica, governança i actors violents no estatals, integrant teories sobre governança rebel i treball quantitatiu sobre les característiques dels VNSAs amb investigacions empíriques originals. Desenvolupant una tipologia de les manifestacions de l'estatalitat dels VNSAs, la tesi subratlla la connexió crítica entre les característiques d'aquests actors i el seu compromís amb la governança. També proporciona informació útil sobre la interacció entre diferents factors d'influència, com a la naturalesa dels VNSAs, la naturalesa de l'estat i la presència d'actors geopolítics externs, i "les manifestacions de l'estatalitat violenta".

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List of acronyms

ALS	Area of Limited Statehood
ANSG	Armed Non-State Group
BAAD2	Big Allied and Dangerous 2.0
EU	European Union
FSI	Fragile State Index
GIABA	Inter-Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa
IGO	International Governmental Organisation
IO	International Organisation
IR	International Relations
MOVS	Manifestations of Violent Statehood
MNC	Multinational Corporation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSA	Non-State Actor
NSAA	Non-State Armed Actor
NSAG	Non-State Armed Group
OC	Organised Crime
PMF	Private Military Firm
QSI	Quasi-State Institution
RTG	Reputation of Terror Groups
SOC	Serious Organised Crime
TIOS	Terrorist and Insurgent Organisations' Service Provision
TOC	Transnational Organised Crime
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UN	United Nations
VNSA	Violent Non-State Actor
WHO	World Health Organisation

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INTRODUCTION

i. Perforators of sovereignty

Since the Treaty of Westphalia, the global international order has been shaped by the presence of the sovereign State, identified as that independent political entity that asserts sovereignty upon a defined and delimited territory and the population residing within it (Bull, 1995a).

However, since the end of the twentieth century, several authors (Hollis, 1991; Strange, 1996; Williams, 1994, 2002b) began to point out that this political entity is no longer the dominant actor it was before, as it has to increasingly deal with other actors which slowly reduce its autonomy. This shift can be attributed to various factors, such as the advent of globalisation, technological developments, and geopolitical fragmentation stemming from the collapse of the Soviet Union. These changes have redirected the focus of disciplines such as International Relations and Geopolitics from the centrality of the State to non-state actors (NSAs). As today's geopolitical theorists attempt to reshape geopolitics as a discursive practice (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992), and to focus on how socio-cultural elements shape geographies of international politics, then it becomes necessary to include other actors that are not states in the discourse.

“Globalisation is challenging the dominance of states in international relations from above, while subnational forces are

eroding it from below” (Williams, 2002b, p. 162). These forces challenge the primacy of the State, competing for territorial control and people’s loyalty. They engage in financial and political operations (Napoleoni, 2004) that build their legitimacy, authority, and autonomy to the detriment of the State (Mampilly, 2011). In other words, they perforate the Weberian notions of State and statehood, in favour of a more fluid, pluralist understanding of governance.

Among the subnational forces challenging the *de facto* dominance of the State, violent non-state actors (VNSAs) have emerged as significant contenders to individual states. These entities, which translate into a wide array of different organisations such as transnational organised crime groups, insurgencies, rebel or terrorist organisations, thrive in areas of low (or non-existent) formal state control (Arjona, 2016; Mampilly, 2011; Miraglia et al., 2012) and challenge its claims over the monopoly of coercive power. This is particularly evident in areas where states are transitioning, weak, fragile, or collapsed, where VNSAs may engage in the delivery of public goods such as security or basic services, enter domestic and international markets, and collect taxes. In the same way that states coexist and cooperate in an international system, violent non-state actors also form alliances and engage with each other (Idler, 2012).

Examples of violent non-state actors operating in “ungoverned spaces” (Clunan & Trinkunas, 2010), that is, areas where the State has retreated, exist across the globe. Living true to its name, in Syria, the Islamic State was reported to have set up a justice system

harshly implementing *sharia* law, as well as budget processes systems to collect taxes (Botakarayev et al., 2021). In Rio de Janeiro, criminal groups provide services to favela residents in the city by linking into political and social hierarchies (Arias, 2006). In South Asia, the militant group Tehrik-i-Taliban-Pakistan set camp in Pakistan's federally administered tribal areas and used them as a safe haven to organise itself and plan attacks (Perkins, 2014).

This *modus operandi* of VNSAs carries serious implications for the way that academics theorise about geopolitics and governance and policymakers assess their security and aid policies. Rather than disregarding VNSAs as chaotic, irrational actors, these examples call for a deeper understanding of these groups' versions of governance and the ways they manifest "features and attributes of statehood", intended as those different elements, both spatial and performative, that comprise the concept of "statehood". They also require an enhanced study on the ways VNSAs interact with the territory and local population, to understand whether they are any different from states, or whether they are simply at a different stage of their relationship with geography (Luke, 1994).

Existing literature presents a range of perspectives as relates to violent non-state actors and governance provision. Studies have focused on the intersection of crime and armed conflict (Williams & Felbab-Brown, 2012), the nexus between different typologies of violent non-state actors (Hutchinson & O'Malley, 2007; Makarenko, 2002, 2004, 2021; Ruggiero, 2019; Schmid, 2018), and the motivations behind the involvement of insurgents in criminal

activities (Asal et al., 2018). They also explored the provision of specific services by determined categories of VNSAs such as terrorist organisations (Albert, 2022; Heger & Jung, 2017; Mampilly, 2011) or rebel groups (Arjona et al., 2015), and the way in which some of them attempt to build legitimacy and gain international recognition (Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016). Some other authors have explored late twentieth-early twenty-first century geopolitical dynamics, attempting to explain variations in the importance of territory control (Luke, 1994) and how it differentiates as a result of globalisation and deterritorialisation of the State (Newman, 1998).

Against this backdrop, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive piece of research that would converge all the previous studies and provide a coherent snapshot of the ways in which violent organisations control and manifest spatial features and performative attributes of statehood, the factors that influence these manifestations, and their relationship with each other and the territory. Such a snapshot would have significant implications for scholarship and policy making on non-state actors, armed conflict, and state-building exercises, as it would allow a greater understanding of how VNSAs operate, ways to counter them and, in some cases, cooperate for the sake of the local population at their behest.

ii. Research questions, objectives, and hypotheses

This study seeks to enhance the understanding of how violent non-state actors approach governance at an age of perforated statehood.

In a world where traditional notions of statehood and sovereignty are constantly challenged by non-state actors and supranational organisations, this research debates on where violent actors play a role, and what this means for national and international approaches to “ungoverned spaces” (Clunan & Trinkunas, 2010).

This is of critical importance to policymakers when elaborating strategies that aim to protect the people who live in areas where VNSAs operate. This thesis responds to the need for theoretical tools that guide evidence-based security policies in the context of changing security paradigms, as well as enhancing debates surrounding the erosion of sovereignty and the transformation of statehood.

The thesis asks the following questions: *How do violent non-state actors manifest features and attributes of statehood? What factors affect a greater or lesser degree of these manifestations?*

Addressing these questions requires a transnational perspective. This study then delves into geopolitical dynamics, conceptualised in Chapter 1, understood as “the ability to describe the world in ways that specify appropriate political behaviour in particular contexts to provide ‘security’ against [different] dangers” (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, p. 195). As it seeks to understand the methods employed by violent non-state actors in establishing and maintaining territorial control, the dissertation also aims to explore the governance mechanisms adopted by these actors in contrast to the ones of a state.

The primary objective of this study is to comprehensively investigate and enhance the understanding of manifestations of statehood by violent non-state actors. Aware of the challenge of analytically distinguishing between “state” and “non-state” actors, as well of the different typologies of violent non-state actors, this dissertation conceptualises VNSAs as social organisations that meet the following criteria: (i) they are goal-oriented; (ii) they have a networked structure; (iii) they do not abide by international and national laws; (iv) they are mostly transnational in nature; (v) they interact with and are heavily influenced by the environment; (vi) they enjoy a certain degree of autonomy to make their own strategic choices; and (vii) they deliberately use collective violence. While paying more attention to rebels, terrorist organisations and organised criminal groups due to the increasing interactive dynamics of these organisations, the dissertation uses the term “VNSAs” as a useful umbrella category.

The research seeks to analyse violent non-state actors not only as perforators of sovereignty (García Segura, 1993), but also as actors whose level of *de facto* governance may outdo the performance of internationally-recognised states. It looks at the main spatial features and performative attributes of what it calls “violent statehood”, defined as the capacity of a VNSA to have a permanent population, a defined geographical territory, a government structure, and to enter into relationships with other VNSAs.¹ It looks at what

¹ This definition draws a parallel with the definition of a “state” provided under Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States of 1933 (United Nations Office of Legal Affairs , 1993).

are the implications of violent statehood on governance functions and global geopolitics, by identifying what factors influence or push a VNSA to engage in statehood manifestations itself. These factors are summarised in three hypotheses:

- i. The nature of the violent non-state actor is the main driver behind its decision to manifest spatial features and performative attributes of statehood;
- ii. The nature of the host country is the main driver behind a VNSA's decision to manifest spatial features and performative attributes of statehood;
- iii. The greater or lesser presence of external actors – state and non-state – will determine a VNSA's level of engagement in manifestations of spatial features and performative attributes of statehood.

iii. Significance of the study

This type of analysis stands within a wide range of academic studies that pertain to the field of International Relations and Geopolitics, but also of other disciplines such as Criminology or Security Studies. Its significance derives then from the theoretical and policy contributions that it provides to each and every one of these fields. By examining the possibility of the existence of non-state actors who not only survive in the system, but are capable of performing different duties which have always been internationally recognised as features and attributes of the State, this project contributes to a

reassessment of the significance of statehood, territory control, and governance.

The research is also of considerable importance as it treats violent non-state actors as fundamental players in the international arena and as major challengers to international state dominance (Williams, 2002a). It provides an improved understanding of violent non-state actors' nature, their goals, structure, behaviour and relationship with governance and the territory.

As Miraglia, Ochoa and Briscoe (2012, p. 9) underline, since the end of the Cold War, VNSAs have benefited from state fragility to establish partnerships and strengthen the grasp of their illicit activities. In some cases, VNSAs have infiltrated main government institutions (Naím, 2012); in some others, states have retreated, creating the so-called "black spots" (Stanislawski, 2008), and allowed illicit social structures develop and prevail in the region (Nordstrom, 2000).

Consequently, studying VNSAs has become fundamental for different reasons. First, violent non-state actors pose a real threat to security at both the national and international level. The last twenty years have seen an unprecedented growth of a wide range of illicit organisations, which have benefited from the effects of globalisation to expand their networks and to grow in size, violence, and economic power (Williams, 1994). Even though the threat that VNSAs pose is often exaggerated by policymakers and the media, the widespread sense of insecurity that characterises the twenty-first

century makes this topic extremely relevant, as it gives some answers to questions surrounding violent governance.

Second, violent non-state actors, despite being an all-time present subject in the political agenda, are often treated as irrational actors with whom it is almost impossible to interact. However, the 2020 peace talks between the United States government and the Taliban (US Department of State, 2020) have shown the opposite, that VNSAs can be rational political actors who exert an influence over international politics. As a result, a better understanding of their features would allow policymakers to develop stronger plans of action.

Third, as Berg and Kuusk underline, even though “we tend to specify power in terms of authority (...), legal power for mutual recognition does not necessarily mean that authorities are able to exercise full control” (Berg & Kuusk, 2010, p. 47). This urges to question the concepts of sovereignty and statehood, and see how they apply to new actors operating in the international arena.

As previously mentioned, many are the studies that deal with the several concepts that are analysed in the doctoral dissertation. The expected result is then the mapping and definition of VNSAs’ degree of *de facto* sovereignty, or “violent statehood”, as well as an analysis of the interactions among violent non-state actors that co-exists in parallel with the ones among states. Furthermore, considering the scale of the project and the number of cases included in this study, the project represents in itself a research tool

on violent non-state actors' nature and behaviours. This will be useful for policy development by governmental and non-governmental organisations, that often happen to deal first-hand with VNSAs. Understanding the level of empirical sovereignty (Krasner, 1999) of said actors would allow governmental institutions to, for example, develop strategies aimed at dismantling these criminal organisations.

It could also lead to develop strategies that would keep into consideration the security of the populations who live under VNSAs' *de facto* control. As VNSAs' control is exerted not only over a territory, but also over the population that resides within it, understanding these actors' behaviour and interactions with the local population may open discussions regarding how states, and whether states alone, should interact with VNSAs, in the attempt to grant better protection to the people who are subjected to their control.

Finally, the research is also significant to the academic world, as it situates among several other studies regarding VNSAs and their geopolitics. It is beneficial to the academia as it understands these actors as players operating in two international systems, a licit and illicit one. The latter does not necessarily mean the disappearance of the former. However, the illicit system does not necessarily follow the rules of the licit world either.

iv. Research design

The methodology for this dissertation is based on two elements: a literature review and mixed-methods analysis.

First, literature review was conducted with the aim of providing a conceptual and analytical framework that would cover the main subjects of the research questions, them being geopolitics, features and attributes of statehood,² and violent non-state actors. It covered academic and policy materials in English, French, Spanish and Italian, which allowed the establishment of the theoretical foundations that can be found in PART 1 of this dissertation. The observations surrounding manifestations of statehood also provided the foundation for the identification and, in some cases, elaboration of the different variables that constitute the quantitative analysis of this thesis.

Second, it was decided to conduct mixed-methods research based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of data collected from different databases, as well as original collection. Mixed methods research can be defined as

“The type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combine elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of

² Hereby called “manifestations of statehood”.

understanding and corroboration.” (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 123).

This type of research was chosen for a series of reasons. First, this approach provided opportunities to “compensate for inherent method weaknesses, on inherent method strengths, and offset inevitable method biases” (Greene, 2007, p. xiii). Second, relying on both methods helped corroborating and complementing results from one method with the other’s. In the case of research on violent non-state actors, mixed-methods research helps overcoming some of the limitations deriving from the nature of the study subject.³ For instance, it fills some of the lacuna and knowledge gaps that stem from the subject’s elusive and secretive nature, which complicates the gathering of comprehensive data. Additionally, the difficulty in providing a common definition for the organisations studied in this dissertation is partly overcome by relying on the multiple results stemming from qualitative and quantitative analysis.

Third, mixed-method research allowed to gather data on a wide range of subjects, something that would not have been possible otherwise given the time and research limitations of this study. Indeed, given the multiple sources of data that were identified during the literature review on violent organisations operating across decades and in multiple regions, it was decided to combine them, to provide a comprehensive dataset of violent non-state actors’ attributes of statehood. Whenever data surrounding specific

³ See “Research Limitations” section, page 25.

attributes or features was not quantifiable or not available, a qualitative analysis was conducted.

a) Development of the dataset

To develop the dataset, a series of steps were followed.

STEP 1. First, the project carried out a selection of cases in order to assess the research questions elaborated in the previous section. It used as a starting point the analysis conducted during a previous work,⁴ which explored the delivery of public services by 19 terrorist organisations for the year 2013. The project expanded such analysis, in terms of the number of actors analysed (from 19 to 125), their typologies (violent non-state actors, and not exclusively terrorist organisations), and timeframe (from one year to fifteen years).

The literature review identified the following databases, which were used as the dataset foundations:

1. **The Big Allied and Dangerous (BAAD) Version 2.0** (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2018),⁵ a dataset launched by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) programme which features narratives, relationship information, and social network data on nearly 600 terrorist and insurgent organisations – collectively referred to as “violent non-state actors” – active between

⁴ See Nizzero (2018).

⁵ Hereby referred to as “BAAD2”.

1998 and 2015. The dataset records information on organisational characteristics (demographics, ideology, political activity, structure, leadership, exposure to counter-terrorism activity, social service provision, and engagement in violence) and organisational network relationships of VNSAs. Despite looking at the interactions between crime and insurgent organisations, it does not include information on organised criminal groups alone. BAAD2 allowed to elaborate multiple variables surrounding organisational characteristics and activities. The database was chosen to be the foundation of the thesis dataset for a series of reasons, including:

- A. The dataset focused on “violent non-state actors”, thus matching the focus of the dissertation while avoiding definitional challenges;
- B. The organisations in the dataset had gone through a selection process that ensured that they were not too amorphous, ephemeral,⁶ and had a clear organisational existence;
- C. The dataset had been used by other databases and other research on VNSAs, in such a way that it was easier to integrate data whenever information was missing in either BAAD2 itself or other databases.

2. **The Reputation of Terror Groups (RTG) dataset** (Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016), an analysis of the

⁶ As in, they were not poorly covered in the media, thus ensuring that the qualitative research for variables not covered in the BAAD2 was easier.

reputation of 443 terrorist groups operating across 31 years in multiple locations. The dataset, which is built upon the BAAD2 dataset, provides additional data on terrorist groups'⁷ positive and negative reputation building, and measures of reputation with regards to each target, such as their constituency and target audience.

The RTG dataset was chosen for two reasons. First, the dataset builds and expands on the BAAD2 data, thus presenting similar sets of variables for a wider number of organisations. Second, the RTG dataset allowed to quantify specific performative attributes such as VNSAs' legitimacy or autonomy. The dataset also allowed to operationalise the variable of task complexity by providing data on the presence of external actors (state and non-state) in the territory within which the organisation operated.

3. **The Terrorist and Insurgent Organisations' Service Provision (TIOS) across time (2.0) dataset** (Heger & Jung, 2017, Heger & Jung 2018) includes indicators of types and relative concentrations of services provided for approximately 400 violent organisations between 1969–2013. Reliance on this particular database was limited and qualitative research was conducted whenever it could not provide specific data.

⁷ “Terrorist groups” are not defined in the RTG dataset. Considering that the dataset covered most of the groups included in the BAAD2 dataset, it was assumed they could fit under the “violent non-state actor” umbrella.

4. **The Rebel Quasi-State Institutions (QSI) Dataset** (Albert, 2022) covers 235 rebel groups involved in civil war around the world between 1945 and 2012. It covers the provision of social services such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, but it also includes data on the political and economic setup of rebel organisations, such as the establishment of parallel governments, or their attempt to join international organisations. The QSI, although extremely valuable as it represented an attempt close to this dissertation's, relied on a list of actors which did not match with the majority of actors of the other databases. When possible, it was integrated with TIOS 2.0 data, or with manual research.

For the operationalisation of the variables, these datasets were complemented by two others:

1. **The Fragile States Index (formerly the Failed States Index)** (Fragile State Index - Indicators, n.d.) is an annual report which explores states' vulnerability to conflict and collapse, assessing their governance performance against twelve indicators, grouped by category: Cohesion, Economic, Political, Social. This dataset was used primarily to operationalise the variable of state presence and governance capability.
2. **The Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP) Actor Dataset version 22.1** (Pettersson, 2022), a dataset developed by the Uppsala University about armed external and internal conflicts occurring since 1946. The dataset contains

information on all the actors (including their full names and alternate names) as available in all the UCDP programme datasets.

Given what highlighted in the literature review surrounding the large overlap between the definitions of different violent actors, the project includes a number of groups that meet the requirements expressed in the definition of “violent non-state actor”.

To build the original dataset, the project first combined the aforementioned datasets, identifying a total of 120 organisations operating in 47 countries. For the identification of the list of actors,⁸ given the multitude of spelling variations, all groups were assigned a unique id code from the Uppsala Conflict Database Programme, and a selection was made of organisations that appeared in BAAD2 and at least in one other database. After that, a country base was assigned to all the selected actors, to match with the countries in the FSI. For country bases where BAAD2, TIOS 2.0, or QSI indicated a separatist region, it was chosen to assign them the country where the region is comprised (e.g. Northern Ireland > United Kingdom). Given that, in some cases, the TIOS 2.0 dataset indicated multiple countries, a match was looked in the UCDP list and assigned the most relevant country. Finally, for entries related to “Palestinian Territories”, “West Bank” and “Gaza Strip”, it was decided to assign them “Israel and the West Bank” as country code.⁹

⁸ See Annex II for the comprehensive list of actors included in this study.

⁹ Please note that the FSI's data refers to Israel only.

There is a significant lack of comprehensive datasets surrounding criminal organisations – with the most detailed ones often focusing exclusively on specific geographic regions or countries such as Central America or Mexico. Such a gap could be explained in different ways. First, in many countries, violent organisations are engaged in criminal activities in such a way that it is difficult to discern when the terrorist ends, and the criminal begins. Second, while there are often comprehensive lists of designated terrorist organisations, they do not exist in relation to serious organised crime. While a reason might be the elusive nature of these groups, it is a serious gap that hinders both academic research and regional and global cooperation in tackling organised criminality. Conscious of this gap, an additional qualitative search was conducted to identify potential criminal organisations that had not been included in the combined list of actors (as most databases focused on “insurgents” or “terrorist” groups).

To do this, research was conducted across publicly available sources – both media and government-issued – which identified organisations as “crime syndicates” or “mafias”, in the 47 countries already identified in the actors’ list. The search highlighted approximately 100 groups, many of which were already present in the combined list of actors.¹⁰ Once skimmed through, an additional selection was conducted to ensure that the selected groups were not

¹⁰ This is mostly due to the fact that in regions such as the Middle East and North Africa, as highlighted in the literature review (Curtis & Karacan, 2002), there is virtually little to no difference between serious organised crime and insurgent or terrorist organisations.

too amorphous, ephemeral, and had a clear organisational existence.

The following criteria were followed:

- The groups had to have an official name. Generalist names (e.g. “The Israeli mafia”) of groups with little to no identifiers as to their structures, base location, and operations were discarded.
- The groups had to be reported in more than twenty media sources in any given year between 1998 and 2012;
- The groups had to have a clear organisational existence and not to be loose networks. For instance, the selection excluded groups that existed only in relation to a charismatic leader (e.g. The Noorzai Organisation, which ceased to exist, or to be mentioned by Western media, following the capture of its leader).
- The groups had to be physically located and operate in one of the 47 countries selected. The selection then excluded organisations which, although originally hailing from the countries included in this study, were located in other regions, mostly in Europe or the United States. Examples include Lebanese organised crime syndicates, the Moroccan Mafia, or the Taghi Organisation. Criminal groups that are notoriously active in the provision of services or territory control, such as the Italian Cosa Nostra or the Mexican La Linea, were not included for the same reason, as the countries where they mostly operated did not have any other reported insurgent or terrorist organisation for the chosen timeframe.

This selection process resulted in six additional names which were added to the list, thus reaching a total of 125 actors, operating in 47 different countries, between 1998 and 2012.

STEP 2. Second, once identified the different features and attributes of statehood in the literature review, research looked into ways to operationalise each manifestation. Annex I of this thesis provides a comprehensive codebook explaining the operationalisation of each variable.

In some cases, it was possible to transpose the variables as they appeared in the databases. Examples include “territorial control” or “population”. In other cases, the variables were interpreted differently than in the original databases. For instance, the variable “autonomy” was calculated inversely on whether the BAAD2 and the RTG databases reported that the organisation was known to be directly supported by a state. In other cases, the variables were the result of a combination of multiple variables: for instance, the variable surrounding an organisation’s engagement in illicit activities resulted from a summative of variables in the BAAD2 and other databases surrounding the group’s involvement in drug trafficking, extortion, robbery, and other profit-generating activities.

Not all data provided by the different databases would apply to all actors. For instance, the Fragile State Index only started publishing its data from 2006, which means that it was possible to make a fair assessment of the governance capability of a state only for the period 2006-2012.

STEP 3. Third, given the mismatch in data between the different datasets, it became necessary to conduct original research by looking at media sources mentioning the database samples. It was decided to conduct a search among news sources surrounding the organisations samples, in association with a series of keywords that would indicate a specific manifestation of statehood. In many cases, a similar process as the one conducted by the authors of used datasets was followed: research was based on media mentions by using the Factiva search engine with multiple research strings for a given actor and year. However, for some specific variables, it was not possible to find any additional information and as a result it was decided to leave it blank.

STEP 4. Fourth, to examine the research questions, this research followed the standard modelling approach on non-state actors and infra-state conflict, treating each group-year as a single observation and regressing the independent variables.

Linear regression analysis is a statistical technique used to examine the relationship between a dependent variable (in the case of this dissertation, manifestations of statehood by violent non-state actors), and two or more independent variables (in this dissertation, the hypotheses). It is a particularly useful tool in the fields of statistics as it allows to understand how changes in one or more independent variables can predict or explain variations in the dependent variable.

For the purpose of this dissertation, this statistical method of analysis was believed to be the most straightforward way to see a potential correlation between the hypotheses and the dependent variable. In particular, it allowed a greater control by reducing at a minimum the effects of confounding variables, through the description of how the changes in each independent variable are related to the dependent variable. The findings of the analysis can be found in Chapter 5.

b) Limitations of the dataset

During the creation of the dataset, a series of challenges were encountered, which limit the data analysed in this research:

- *Differences in global awareness of terrorism, insurgency and violent crime:* media and academic attention to terrorism, insurgency, and violent crimes – while being a major concern after the attacks of September 11, 2001 – fluctuated throughout the period covered by the dataset. In particular, there are peaks in media coverage of specific organisations (e.g. the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, Boko Haram, Al-Qa’ida) in specific moments (e.g. the peak of the Islamic State expansion in 2015-2016). These ebbs and flows in attention have a direct result on the way organisations are covered, and therefore the type of information that was available on the least notorious ones. Due to this, there is the chance that groups that received a lot of public attention, such as Al-Qa’ida or the Islamic State, presented a greater coverage in comparison to smaller,

more regional groups. Even less attention is given to criminal organisations, which skewed the capability of adding more SOC actors to this database.

It is also possible that media sources, especially the ones published by Western countries, were biased regarding specific VNSAs, and therefore may have deliberately chosen to omit information regarding the groups' public service delivery.

- *Language coverage*: while sources in different languages (Italian, Spanish, French) were consulted, the datasets used for this dissertation covered information mostly available in English. Thus, it is likely that, for organisations located in non-English speaking regions, sources in other languages that could have provided a deeper insight into an organisation's attributes were not consulted.
- *Spelling and name variations*: a corollary to the previous limitation, difference in the organisations' spellings and names complicated the research.
- *Difficulty in providing a common definition*: as often repeated in this dissertation, academia, policymakers and the media struggle to find a common ground when deciding how to name the organisations analysed in this study. This means that some organisations – which to some readers may fall under the “violent non-state actor” definition - may have not been included in this study. However, a line had to be drawn somewhere, and it was decided to rely on the choices made by other widely-used databases such as BAAD2.

Issues in definitions did not exclusively pertain the organisations that are subjects of this study, but the manifestations of statehood themselves.

- *Difficulty in operationalising some variables:* while some features and attributes of statehood (e.g. population) were fairly straightforward to operationalise, some others were not. For a limited number of variables, it was not possible to elaborate data outside of what provided by a specific dataset. This is due to the lack of information from which the dataset had elaborated their own data. Examples include the elaboration of the variable “legitimacy”, which was extracted by the RTG dataset or the variable “international recognition”, which was based on the QSI dataset. Additionally, it was decided not to include in the study a variable measuring “effectiveness” of a group. Most difficulties were encountered when attempting to operationalise performative attributes of statehood.
- *The simplicity of the operationalisation effort:* calculating the degree of manifestations of statehood by relying on a summative of each individual feature or attribute may be perceived by some readers as rather simplistic. While definitely more articulated methods could have been used, it was decided that it was best to keep it simple. In addition, this method is followed by other datasets, such as the Fragile State Index.

c) Limitations of the linear regression analysis

The regression model has also a series of limitations. In particular, the model indicated a R-square value of 0.2 or less in several instances, suggesting that there are other influential factors not accounted for, limiting the model's explanatory power. A low R-square value also implies a limited capability to predict future observations. In some cases, the R-square value was also combined with a non-significant p-value, resulting in a model that is prone to instability.

Despite these limitations, after discussing it with a subject matter expert, it was decided to proceed with the analysis for two reasons: first, a low significance does still show a behavioural pattern, albeit limited, especially when describing a violent behaviour; second, it was believed that the results were actually indicative of the unstable context within which violent non-state actors operate.

The results definitely suggest the need for further investigation, including considering additional variables, exploring non-linear relationships, and addressing potential violations of assumptions which however were not possible due to the time constraints of this research project. However, they also indicate that there is no clear, structured behavioural pattern applicable to all violent non-state actors in relations to their engagement in governance. Instead, this model suggests that violent statehood is both a consequence of specific contextual factors as well as causality.

v. Research limitations

Dataset aside, this dissertation encountered a series of theoretical and practical limitations. While the majority were also encountered in the creation of the dataset, some broader limitations should be highlighted:

a) Contextual challenges

Research was initially delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which reduced access to available literature and postponed or cancelled most of the opportunities to do fieldwork or visiting fellowships in governance research centres. While these limitations were mostly mitigated by relying on existing datasets on violent governance, they still reduced the overall scope of this thesis.

Geopolitical developments also affected the scope of this dissertation. Indeed, this research started with the assumption that, in the twenty-first century, the primacy of the Weberian State was being challenged by non-state actors – having important implications on the concept of sovereignty, territorial control, and international relations. This was corroborated by the literature review, which was diligently put together during the first two years of the project.

However, the last two years of the project were characterised by a series of geopolitical events that questioned this assumption, and brought the State at the front, back, and centre of international relations. On the one hand, the centrality of state sovereignty and the importance of territory control came back to the centre of the

discussion as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. On the other hand, the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, to all effects a violent non-state actor, in August 2021 led to reconsiderations surrounding the selection of case studies for this research. In particular, the first years of the project had exclusively focused on terrorist and criminal organisations. Looking at the Taliban example, however, it became clear that definitions for the different groups that comprise the umbrella term of "violent non-state actors" are interchangeable and not set in stone. The focus was then shifted to the wider "VNSAs" concept, which significantly amplified the number of case studies included in the dataset.

b) Research on a sensitive topic

Research on violent non-state actors is fraught with various limitations that can impact the depth and accuracy of the findings. One primary constraint is the dangerous and difficult environment in which the researcher should be placed, should they decide to conduct fieldwork (Lee, 1995; Nordstrom & Robben, 1995; Sriram, 2009). Due to limited capacity, time, and resources that would ensure a safe research environment, it was decided to rely on quantitative data provided by other studies. Reliance on other researchers' studies represented in itself a limitation to this research, as in some cases it was almost impossible to ensure whether the data input was reliable.

Working on a research subject that is involved in illegal activities also raises ethical issues – as delving into the topic of violent governance may constantly face biased information. The main

constraint in this sense was the attempt to find a balance between providing reliable information about violent governance, without glorifying or criticising actors living and operating illicitly and illegally. The involvement of state agencies, the media, and geopolitical complexities can also introduce bias and political pressure, influencing the direction of research and limiting the scope of the project.

c) The dynamic nature of the research subject

Violent non-state actors are constantly evolving in nature due to their interactions with the surrounding geography, the host state, and other external actors. This dynamic nature often forces VNSAs to change their behaviour, resulting in them being an extremely volatile subject. Information that is accurate one day may be inaccurate the following one. This was particularly evident when desk research was conducted surrounding the number of casualties stemming from a conflict or terrorist attack.

The ever-changing nature of VNSAs, reactive to territorial and political dynamics, also implied that their behaviour may be the result of context-specific factors. This represented a limitation at the time of elaborating hypotheses what would explain the majority of the actors in the dataset, and was reflected in the low R-square value of the regression model.

d) Lack of data

The last limitation, which was already highlighted in the methodology section of this chapter, was the inconsistent data

available on this topic. The main constraint in this field is, indeed, access to reliable and comprehensive data, due to the sensitive nature of their operations. The lack of information can hinder researchers from gaining a complete understanding of the dynamics and motivations driving their actions.

vi. Thesis structure

The dissertation is divided into two parts: PART 1 is the theoretical and conceptual review; PART 2 is the discussion of the quantitative and qualitative analysis.

In PART 1, Chapter 1 provides a literature review on the evolution of the discipline of Geopolitics within the context of the post-modern debate concerning territory, sovereignty, and the role of the State. It focusses on three interrelated themes: the evolution of Geopolitics towards the acceptance of a pluralist vision; the importance of territoriality and the emergence of non-state actors in state-centric spaces; and the impact of this phenomenon on the role and functions of the State and on the international system of sovereign states. It sets the theoretical foundations to analyse the spatial reconfiguration of the world political map and the extent to which attributes and functions of the State are now being shared among governmental and non-governmental actors.

Chapter 2 discusses the central features of government and governance that represent the theoretical foundations to the explanatory variables to the project's research question on the degree of statehood-like manifestations of violent non-state actors.

It explores literature on governance in areas of limited statehood and non-state actors.

A segway to Chapter 2, Chapter 3 provides the conceptual framework to this dissertation. It analyses how violent non-state actors engage in manifestations of statehood; how they interact with the territory; whether, and how, they manifest territoriality; and how they interact with each other. It also provides a common definition of violent non-state actor.

PART 2 of this dissertation provides the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data included in the Manifestations of Violent Statehood (MOVS) dataset. Chapter 4 outlines an in-depth description of the manifestations of violent attributes of statehood as reflected in the database, which reveals a mosaic of recurring tendencies and significant contributors to the degree of engagement in governance by violent actors. Short case studies complement the descriptive analysis of the data in the MOVS dataset where this is limited or unavailable.

By adopting the linear regression analysis design, Chapters 5 delves deeper into the quantitative insights furnished by the database, aligning them with the hypotheses delineated in Chapter 3. This endeavour aims to further unravel the intricacies of manifestations of statehood within the realm of VNSAs. Following this empirical examination, the chapter pivots to a holistic discussion of the theoretical and practical implication of the findings. Theoretically, the chapter explores how these insights fit within the broader

literature on violent governance. On the practical front, the discussion delves into the policy implications deriving from the results, discussing what they mean for the state and global geopolitics. The concluding chapter summarises the findings and policy implications, and outlines avenues for future research.

PART I: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I. CHAPTER 1 – A FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING GEOPOLITICS WITHIN THE POST-MODERN DEBATE ON TERRITORY, SOVEREIGNTY, AND THE ROLE OF THE STATE

1.1. Introduction

Geopolitics¹¹ as a discipline has undergone significant transformations over the past thirty years. In the past, it was a largely disregarded discipline in Europe and North America due to its perceived determinism and the association to supremacists ideologies. However, in recent years, it has experienced a process of re-evaluation and is now broadly defined as the study of how politics unfolds in the context of geography (O’Loughlin & Heske, 1991). In particular, it has approximated to political geography and

“it is, for some, no more than an alternative way of looking at International Relations (IR), with a stronger emphasis on the ‘geo’ than is apparent in many of the traditional political

¹¹ In this dissertation, disciplines and theories are identified by the use of a capital letter, while their practical application is referred to in the text with a lower case. For instance, "International Relations" indicates the academic discipline, while "international relations" refers to the real-world dynamics and interactions in the global arena.

and IR analyses, from which the territorial and spatial dimensions are frequently lacking” (Newman, 1998, p. 3).¹²

The collapse of the bipolar system following the demise of the Soviet Union has demanded a re-thinking of state dynamics and state formation. Key themes in contemporary geopolitical studies include globalisation, the evolving importance of state sovereignty, the deterritorialisation of the State,¹³ changes in roles and boundary permeability, and the emergence of new political entities (Agnew, 1998; Newman, 1998; Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 1998).

While the State continues to play a central role in the international system, it faces an increasing challenge from various non-state actors that undermine its dominance. These actors erode the fundamental pillars upon which the State derives its legitimacy: its control over a population and a defined territory. When states are

¹² For recent IR approaches to geopolitics, see: George, J. (1994) *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations*, Chapter 1; Albert, M., Jacobson, D. and Y. Lapid (2001) *Identity, Borders, Orders: New Directions in International Relations Theory*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; Goertz, G. and P. Diehl (eds) (1992) *Territorial Changes and International Conflict*. New York: Routledge.

¹³ In this dissertation, "State" is used to indicate the abstract, theoretical construct that embodies a set of conceptual ideas, principles, and theories surrounding a sovereign entity that exerts control over a delimited space and population. In contrast, "state" is used to describe the real-world, tangible manifestations of the theoretical concept. By adopting this distinction, the dissertation aims to clarify the separation between the theoretical foundation ("State") and its real-world implementation ("state"). This distinction aids in ensuring that the analysis remains precise and comprehensible throughout the dissertation.

heavily challenged, they may retreat (Strange, 1996), leaving parts of their land and resident population behind. This creates an opportunity for non-state actors to supplant the State, both in terms of territory control and governance provision.

The following chapter provides a theoretical and conceptual framework aimed at situating the discipline of Geopolitics within the context of the post-modern debate on territory, sovereignty, and the role of the State. It focusses on two interrelated themes: the evolution of Geopolitics towards a pluralist perspective and the shifting importance of territoriality¹⁴ and its impact on the role and functions of states in the international system.

The first section delves into the evolution of Geopolitics, tracing its development from the study of geography as a means to statecraft (Kjellén, 1916; Mackinder, 1919; Spykman, 1942) to an examination of how international politics unfold in the geographical space (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992; Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 1998). Aligned with a pluralist perspective (Hollis, 1991) that acknowledges multiple centres of power coexisting alongside sovereign states in the global system, this revision seeks to understand the place, if any, that violent non-state actors occupy in international politics, despite lacking sovereignty.

The second section of the chapter scrutinises the concept of territoriality, intended as the relationship between humans and

¹⁴ In this case, "territoriality" is intended in terms of deterritorialization of the State and territorialisation of other political entities.

nature, and the importance of territory control. Space and territory have been central in the evolution of both geopolitical and International Relations theories. Despite the decreasing importance of their control, territories remain contested in some parts of the world by way that “the changing function of boundaries does not, by definition, mean a ‘borderless’ world” (Newman, 1998, p. 6). This argument leads to the third section of the chapter, which examines the features and attributes of statehood (Berg & Kuusk, 2010; Crawford, 2010; Grzybowski & Koskenniemi, 2015; Korf et al., 2018; Krasner, 1999) and the concept of sovereignty (Hansen & Stepputat, 2006; Krasner & Risse, 2014; Sørensen, 1999). Despite undergoing significant spatial reconfiguration, the Westphalian state still represents the exclusive governmental jurisdiction over a delimited territory. Therefore, a review of its elements is essential to comprehend the erosion of sovereignty and the emergence of non-state governors.

Lastly, deterritorialisation impacts the global political landscape unevenly. While the State remains a pivotal actor in international relations, certain aspects of state sovereignty are being transferred, or captured, by national, intranational, and supranational entities. The fourth and final section of this chapter, then, directs the attention to the phenomenon of “softened sovereignty” and “ungoverned spaces” (Clunan & Trinkunas, 2010) and the emergence of non-state governance. It raises questions about whether the era of sovereign statehood has ended, and investigates different positions on the matter.

In conclusion, this chapter establishes the theoretical foundations to analyse the spatial reconfiguration of the global political map and the extent to which attributes and functions of the State are now shared among governmental and non-governmental actors. It aligns with Newman (1998) and other post-modern geopolitical scholars (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995; Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992; Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 1998) on the issue of the evolving nature of state sovereignty. To this perspective, it asserts that the extent to which territorial boundaries and manifestations of statehood have become more permeable and shared varies not only geographically, but also among different actors.

1.2. Origin and evolution of Geopolitics: from geographical determinism to dynamic pluralism

The following section aims to explore the evolution of the geopolitical thought throughout centuries – tracing its journey from an alternative approach to statecraft (Kjellén, 1916; Newman, 1972) to its resurgence as a pertinent discipline for understanding contemporary global shifts (Newman, 1998).

Geopolitics is a term known for its challenging definition, largely due to the diverse interpretations it has garnered within different geopolitical traditions. In 1899, Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen (1864-1922) coined the term to describe the relationship between states, geography, and world politics, distinguishing it from the economic and social factors that influenced state composition and power (Kjellén, 1916). In the early twentieth century, the concept served imperialist agendas of strategists such

as Halford Mackinder who advocated the use of geography as a means of statecraft (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995; Ó Tuathail, 2000).

Geopolitics initially centred on the influence of geography on foreign policy, emphasising the perceived permanence of geographical features, which were considered to be static and unchanging:

“Geography is the most fundamental factor in the foreign policy of states because it is the most permanent. Ministers come and go, even dictators die, but mountain ranges stand unperturbed” (Spykman, 1942, p. 41).

Modern geopolitical thought gradually shifted away from this geographic determinism, focusing instead on the role of geography in international politics and its influence on the belligerent conduct of the actors of the international system (Kristof, 1960; Sprout & Sprout, 1960). Scholars like Harold and Margaret Sprout sought to explain how alterations in the physical environment affected international politics, challenging the notion that the environment had no bearing on political interactions (Sprout & Sprout, 1960; Sprout & Sprout, 1965).

Despite their efforts, Geopolitics as a discipline largely lost prominence in favour of political geography. The distinction between the two is subtle: political geography examines the application of power to a particular space; geopolitics explores

interaction of powers operating across different spaces (Glassner & Fahrer, 2004).¹⁵

By the 1980s, these two approaches had merged, to then be subsequently called into question two decades later with the end of the Cold War. The re-definition of borders, the right of self-determination, globalisation, and informationalisation ushered in a new political reality. This created a theoretical void resulting from the incapability of both classical imperialism and the balanced division of power to explain global dynamics.

Late twentieth-century geopolitical theories grappled with an increasingly complex and interconnected world, where notions of spatiality and sovereignty were under scrutiny. As Ó Tuathail and Dalby aptly noted,

“Strategic analysts have been searching ever since [the dismantlement of the bipolar system] for a new global drama to replace it, launching ‘the end of history,’ ‘the clash of civilizations’ and ‘the coming anarchy; among others as new blockbuster visions of global space, only to see them fade before the heterogeneity of international affairs and

¹⁵ For further understanding of this conceptual difference, see for instance Hagan's distinction between the two disciplines:

"Broadly speaking political geography is concerned with a historical and factual account of changes in the circumstances of states [...] Geopolitics (...) observes and speculates upon the influence of geographical necessities upon political events" (Hagan, 1942, p. 484).

proliferating signs of geographical difference” (Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 1998, pp. 1–2).

In response to this uncertainty, Geopolitics shifted from explaining power dynamics and their impact on geography to the study of how international politics unfolds in space. Proponents of this so-called geopolitical “rethinking” rejected both classical and Cold War theories as outdated “mummified remains” (Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 1998, p. 2). Instead, they advocated for a re-conceptualisation of space as a discursive subject, whose meaning and significance were not inherent, but rather the product of a political (or geopolitical) and ideological discourse.¹⁶ By reframing geopolitics as a discursive practice, critical geopolitics scholars sought to position the discipline as an examination of how international political geographies were shaped by socio-cultural elements. This perspective viewed geopolitics not merely in terms of what is “outside” of the state, but rather as the construction of boundaries between “inside” and “outside,” “here” and “there,” “domestic” and “foreign” (Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 1998, p. 4).

¹⁶ According to Agnew and Ó Tuathail (1992) and Agnew and Corbridge (1995), “geopolitical discourse” refers to the rules and conceptual resources that statemen and policymakers use in particular historical contexts to spatialise international politics. Geopolitical discourse uses little geographical knowledge and involves practical analysis rather than formal theoretical models. The authors argue different geopolitical discourses developed over the centuries starting from the so-called “Age of Discovery” around 1492 as a result of the creation of boundaries between Europeans and other civilisations they encountered (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995, p. 49).

While the discipline still considers geopolitics in terms of states – the so-called “rule-writers” for the world community (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, p. 195), post-modern geopolitics researchers increasingly acknowledge that

“Geopolitics is about the ability to describe the world in ways that specify appropriate political behaviour in particular contexts to provide ‘security’ against [different] dangers” (Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 1998, p. 295).

This recognition has led to the inclusion of new global challenges, actors, and trends in geopolitical analysis because “to understand the events of the next fifty years, then, one must understand environmental scarcity, cultural and racial clash, geographic destiny, and the transformation of war” (Kaplan, 1994).

For decades, classical and modern geopolitical thinking portrayed the world map as static, merging the concept of the State with a clearly defined territory, making it the core of international relations, and perceiving geography as an unchanging, trans-historical given. When applied to contemporary world politics, it leads to several critiques.

First, although it is accurate to say that “mountain ranges stand unperturbed” (Spykman, 1942, p. 41), geography plays a crucial role as the backdrop for spatial manifestations of universal social processes, such as social stratification, state-building, and ideological hegemony (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995, p. 13). If geopolitics, as critical geopolitics theorists contend, is a social and

cultural construction, which evolves over time, then it is plausible to assume that international politics is not exclusively shaped by territorial states' decision-making processes.

Second, if that is the case, that politics change and states retreat (Strange, 1996), then it is crucial to consider the diverse players in the geopolitical arena, and even recognise that the approach to spatiality and statehood varies for each of them.

Consequently, geopolitical pluralism rests on three assumptions:

- a) *States are not the sole actors in world politics.* The definition of international politics, centred solely on states as the primary actors, has been challenged since the early 1970s. The second half of the twentieth century has also witnessed a substantial increase in the numbers of governmental and non-governmental actors with significant global influence. International organisations, both private and public, have increasingly engaged in global governance; and the interconnected global economy have given rise to new global challenges that require collaboration between states and non-state counterparts. This shift needs to be reflected in geopolitical studies.
- b) *All actors in the international system adhere to a set of routinised rules, institutions, activities, and strategies, which inevitably possess geographical characteristics, including territoriality.*¹⁷ Assumptions about state deterritorialisation

¹⁷ See for instance Agnew and Corbridge's take:

often correlate with the belief in the demise of territorial absolutism. While the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century have witnessed increased border permeability and international movements and flows of people, goods, services and information, this does not signify the abandonment of territoriality. Instead, it signifies a spatial and territorial reconfiguration of the political world map, with variations in intensity among state and non-state actors.

- c) *Actors of the international system will interpret geopolitical arguments differently.* If geopolitics is a social and cultural construct that changes over time and space, then the significance of geopolitical changes in contemporary politics varies according to the actor operating within the system. Not every region in the world is equally interconnected;

"[a geopolitical order is a set of] routinized rules, institutions, activities and strategies through which the international political economy operates in different historical periods. The qualifying term 'geopolitical' draws attention to the geographical elements of a world order. These include the relative degree of centrality of state territoriality to social and economic activities, the nature of the hierarchy of states (dominated by one or a number of states, the degree of state equality), the spatial scope of the activities of different states and other actors such as international organizations and businesses, the spatial connectedness or disconnectedness between various actors, the conditioning effects of informational and military technologies upon spatial interaction, and the ranking of world regions and particular states by the dominant states in terms of 'threats' to their military and economic 'security'" (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995, p. 15).

while hard frontiers suffer from the disintegration of symbolical borders and permeation, elsewhere new frontiers emerge. Instead, the permeation of borders, changing functions, and the importance of performative attributes of statehood and geographical elements are differentiated both geographically and according to the actor's perspective and goals.

To conclude, in the present day, the global political landscape is more complex, with power and elements of governance which are

“diffused both upwards and downwards from the State, and with boundaries taking on multi-dimensions of bordering, excluding and including, not only territories but also social groups and virtual communities” (Newman, 1998, p. 13).

Geopolitical pluralism acknowledges that, while territoriality may be fading for states, its relevance persists among other actors in remote corners of the world. It is plausible that the classical geopolitical thought could still resonate with certain actors and thus should not be entirely dismissed. This brings to question whether a Mahanian doctrine is still relevant in the realm of contemporary geopolitics. While a state may discount it as a thing of the past, the same cannot be said about Somali pirates.

1.3. On Space and the State: the deterritorialisation of the Westphalian State

The analysis of the evolution of the geopolitical discipline highlights two recurring features. Firstly, there has been a consistent

focus on the sovereign state as the primary actor in international politics. Secondly, territoriality has held a significant role in global politics. Traditionally, state, sovereignty, and territoriality have been viewed as interlinked: there is no state without sovereignty,¹⁸ and there is no sovereignty without a territory. However, as previously mentioned, the State has undergone a substantial territorial reconfiguration, as its sovereignty is either transferred to or weakened by other actors in the system.

Territoriality lies at the core of modern geopolitical thinking and has played different roles in other disciplines such as International Relations. But why is it of such importance? Williams (2010, pp. 37–38) argues that a series of assumptions can be drawn from the various interpretations of space:

- i. Space can be controlled.
- ii. Space can be filled.
- iii. Space can be contested.
- iv. Space can offer economic and social opportunities.

To these assumptions, this dissertation introduces a fifth one:

- v. Space can give shelter, intended both as the real and perceived protection from harm from internal and external threats.

¹⁸ In this context, sovereignty can be intended as "the power over the people of an area unrestrained by laws originating outside the area, or independence completely free of direct control" (Glassner & Fahrer, 2004, p. 32).

The characteristics of the Westphalian state (Weber, 1946) align with the five characteristics of space outlined above. First, the State holds sole authority and exclusive jurisdiction over a delimited territory (Krasner & Risse, 2014). Second, a territorial state is filled: with people, its citizens, and assets, subject to its laws. The demarcation of boundaries and the setting of frontiers¹⁹ divides what is “ours” from “theirs”, distinguishes between what is “us” versus “them” and demarcates where one authority ends and another begins (Moreau Defarges, 2009). Third, a state’s territorial control can be contested: historically, matters of demarcation have been, and continue to be, a source of global conflict.²⁰ Fourth, economic opportunities within different spaces can lead to the acceptance or exclusion from the international society. Historical conflicts over resource-rich regions like Alsace-Lorraine and present-day disputes in areas such as the Bougainville region (Jorari & Doherty, 2020) exemplify this. Fifth and last, throughout history, individuals congregated and formed communities in a defined space

¹⁹ There are definitional differences between boundaries and frontiers:

"Boundaries have been loosely described as being linear; in fact, they occur where the vertical interfaces between state sovereignties intersect the surface of the earth. Frontiers, in contrast, are zonal and therefore contain various geographical features and, frequently, populations" (Muir, 1981, p. 119).

²⁰ Since 1945, there have been more than 400 secessionist movements, with a life span of approximately 13 years. Nowadays, all but some 15 states are multi-ethnic states. This often is one of the main reasons for contestation (Griffiths, 2016).

for protection from external threats and access to services they may not provide individually (Tilly, 1985).

According to Agnew (1998, p. 49), all modern geopolitical theories have stemmed from a state-centric account of spatiality. He (Agnew, 1998; Agnew & Corbridge, 1995) argues that the territorial state and international politics, as an extension to its activities are the product of the historical epoch and world region in which they unfold. In contrast, other disciplines, such International Relations, have tended to pay little attention to the significance of space. Most of IR theories, particularly Realism and Liberalism and their neo-variants, consider the State as the primary actor in the international system. As they define it as the political entity which asserts control over a delimited territory and its population, IR theorists often regard space as a trans-historical given.

Agnew (1994) argues that IR theories are founded on three geographical assumptions, namely that state-territorial spaces are fixed units of secure sovereign space; that there is a clear separation between “domestic” and “foreign”; and that state boundaries correspond to societal boundaries. These assumptions, which he calls “the territorial trap” (Agnew, 1994), reinforce a static view of geopolitics,²¹ in which state and territory are fixed and boundaries unchanged, have shaped world politics since 1648 and have been the foundation of International Relations theories.

²¹ In this case, intended as the practical application of Geopolitics and as the spatialisation of the unfolding of international politics (Agnew, 1994).

The literature review highlights that, within IR theories, the centrality of the association between the State and a bounded territory “ranges from realist and neorealist positions where it is vital, to liberalism and idealism where it appears relatively less important” (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995, p. 80).

Realism, closely aligned with classical geopolitical thinking, regards territory as a display of a nation’s spirit. Protecting the integrity of the territory becomes part of the State’s struggle to ensure continuity to its monopoly and sole sovereignty. According to Realism and its neo-variant, the territorial state is the epicentre of international politics. For instance, Waltz (1979; 1986) elevates the conception of the territorial features of the State to such an extent that no spatial unit beyond a state’s territory should be involved in international relations. In realist theory, the spatial features of the State are primarily considered in terms of resource control and security provision. Safeguarding the territory equates to protecting the State, and defending the State is synonymous of defending the nation (Waltz, 1986). In this context, the realist security-territory nexus views the territory merely as a feature of the State “not in its historical particularity, but abstractly, as an idealised decision-making subject” (Ashley, 1988, p. 238). Similarly, neo-realists view the territorial state as a domestic polity operating within the sphere of international anarchy (Milner, 1991), drawing a clear line between what is within the State, the “domestic”, and what is outside of it, the “foreign”.

Liberalism appears to be less concerned with security and more focused on international cooperation (Keohane, 1984; Keohane & Nye, 1987). Liberal theorists expand the categorisation of actors in the international system, acknowledging the presence and significance of other, non-state actors. Even as liberal theorist primarily examine how international cooperation is possible, the territorial state remains the primary actor in international politics. Authors such as Keohane (1984) do not challenge the concept of state territoriality even when they theorise that states no longer maintain full control over their borders due to increasing economic interdependence and democratic politics (Keohane and Nye, 1987).

As witnessed in the previous section, however, the end of the Cold War brought significant changes in the literature on how space is produced, the importance given to territoriality, and its correlation to the notion of sovereign state. For instance, Gottmann (1973, p. 127) argued that the function of space as shelter, and consequently of the state as provider of protection, was being seriously questioned, and that the idea that security and privacy derived from holding a territory was waning. He attributed this mainly to advancements in technology, both in the international economy and in warfare. Living in the Cold War period, he assumed that the nuclear threat posed by weapons of mass destruction and their capacity of reaching every corner of the world would make it impossible for any state to protect its citizens.

In the post-Cold War period, while the nuclear threat diminished, new spaceless dangers have emerged, challenging or homogenising

space in such a way that power is no longer closely tied to a national territory. From cyber-threats to economic sanctions, spatial identity has become detached from state territoriality, losing its strategic importance (Agnew & Corbridge, 1995; Keohane & Nye, 1987; Stopford & Strange, 1991).

“Flows are decentring, despatializing, and dematerializing forces, and they work alongside and against the geopolitical codes of spatial sovereignty. Within the flow, there are new universals and new particulars being created by the networks of accelerated transnational exchange as fresh identities, unities and values emerge from sharing access to the same symbols, markets, and commodities” (Luke, 1993, p. 240).

However, it is important to note that in many parts of the world, territorial control remains a critical issue. To explain this apparent theoretical inconsistency, Luke (1993, 1994, 1995) presents a three-stage narrative on three geographical natures in which manifestations in space are influenced by the main economic and political actors, means of production, and political ideologies of their respective eras. In this narrative, the shift from territoriality to a spaceless, unbounded telemetricity occurs as the natures progress. This narrative, however, is not strictly successionist, meaning that, it does not imply the complete disappearance of previous natures and new ones unfold, thus imagining multiple political actors operating across different geographical natures.

In essence, “territorial change is geographically differentiated as processes of globalisation and deterritorialization impact different places unevenly” (Newman, 1998, p. 7).

This dissertation also follows this premise. By considering this, the project imagines a system in which territoriality and the Westphalian concept of spatiality are still prevailing nature to some actors. State and non-state actors then find themselves at varying stages of their relationship with territoriality, and may continue to regard territory and other tangible resources as the main source of power and authority. Thus, instead of proclaiming the “death of territoriality”, what emerges is a complex world in which pre-modern, modern, and post-modern geopolitical natures interconnect and interact with one another.

1.4. Ungoverned Spaces: when sovereignty defaults

The Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 marked an era where single rulers presided over clearly defined territories and mutually recognised each other’s authority within designated lands and resident populations (Osiander, 2001; Zacher, 1992). The Westphalian ideal state, founded on the premise of sovereign authority, wielded an absolute monopoly over the means of force, or, at least, their legitimate use. It upheld the principle of non-intervention among the participants in the system, as sharply drawn borders demarcated geographically identifiable territories and citizenries.

This model never fully materialised: over centuries, wars reshaped borders to such an extent that nations and states often misalign.

Additionally, the concept of sovereignty has become increasingly challenged by supranational organisations of political, religious, or other nature (Bull, 1995b; García Segura, 1993; Strange, 1996). In recent times, emergent private transnational legal regimes, which are not necessarily territorial, have further blurred the traditional lines of sovereignty. The reduced control over territory and the emergence of new governance actors inevitably led to a shift in the importance attributed to the sovereign State itself in the international system.

1.4.1. Territoriality and sovereignty

Territoriality and sovereignty are strictly intertwined. As the concept of “space”, “sovereignty” has been used in several different ways by scholars. For instance, Jackson defines it as a “legal institution that authenticates a political order based on independent states whose governments are the principal authorities both domestically and internationally” (Jackson, 2005, p. 74). Within this definition, as well as in the Weberian and Glassner’s definitions of the State (Glassner, 1996; Glassner & Fahrer, 2004; Weber, 1946), two types of sovereignty can be distinguished:

- (a) Positive (or internal) sovereignty, which is the right to territorial jurisdiction. It endows the State with effective authority over a population within a delimited territory, manifested through a government, an organised economy, or infrastructure (Kolstø, 2006, p. 2).

- (b) Negative (or external) sovereignty, which is the recognition by states exemplified into the right of non-intervention (Kolstø, 2006, p. 2; Stiliz, 2019).

Krasner (1999, pp. 4–5) identifies four distinct meanings of the term, each offering specific insights into the multifaceted nature of sovereignty:

- (a) International legal sovereignty: the mutual recognition of territorial entities with formal juridical independence.
- (b) Westphalian sovereignty: the exclusion of external actors from authority within a defined territory.
- (c) Domestic sovereignty: relates to Glassner’s (2004) definition of the state as a formalised institution capable of exercising effective control within its borders.
- (d) Interdependence sovereignty: the regulation of information, people, and goods crossing state borders.

These definitions underscore common elements shared among scholars as relates to the concept of sovereignty:

- a) authority and legitimacy, which imply the “mutually recognised right for an actor to engage in specific kinds of activities” (Krasner, 1999, p. 10) relying on the legitimate use of force;
- b) effectiveness, or the “extent to which the system satisfies the basic functions of government” (Lipset, 1959, p. 77); and
- c) autonomy, namely the capacity to act and perform independently without the control of another.

1.4.2. Theoretical approaches to evolving sovereignty

While sovereignty has conventionally been regarded as a fundamental legal principle, its importance within the context of international relations has been subject of debate. In many ways, this debate mirrors the one IR theories had on the importance of territoriality explained in the previous section.

At one end of the spectrum, classic realist scholars maintain that the primacy, centrality, and exclusivity of the sovereign state – intended as a rational actor seeking to maximise its national interests - is still present in today's political system. State-centric theories are built on the assumption that states are, by definition, sovereign. Realists draw from the Machiavellian and Hobbesian conceptions, for which the State is that political authority which organises and, where possible, monopolises the use of legitimate force (Bull, 1995a; Hobbes, 1651; Waltz, 1979). On the other side of the spectrum, liberals and pluralists look at the current political scenario and argue that state autonomy is declining, and that states are being progressively perforated by the activity of non-state actors. They contend that interdependence has shifted a state's focus from military security, the key concern for realists, to globalisation (Cox, 1996; Keohane & Nye, 1987).

As Geopolitics and International Relations ventured into the late twentieth century, scholars began to assess the impact of evolving global dynamics on the sovereign principles of the Westphalian system. The aftermath of World War II brought a transformative period marked by the emergence of new, sovereign, and

internationally recognised states. However, despite this proliferation of states, the contemporary political map has never been more fragmented. Stateless nations account for a staggering 1.7 billion of people, approximately 2,000 ethnic groups, 280 of which with populations exceeding one million (Griffiths, 2016).

This complex landscape, further muddied by failed states and the ascendancy of supranational organisations, has cast a shadow over the traditional notions of sovereignty and international recognition. The retreat of the sovereign State (Strange, 1996), or rather the detachment between sovereignty and territoriality, has given rise to a plethora of anomalous entities (Jackson, 1990) each possessing distinct features that deviate from conventional sovereign attributes. These entities range from states that hold a territory and control a population, but lack of international recognition, to countries that are officially recognised on the global stage but lack a functional government or full authority over territory and population. The result is an extensive array of academic definitions (Table 1), and an international system characterised by what Krasner's (1999) defines as "organised hypocrisy".²²

²² Krasner defines as "organised hypocrisy" the presence of longstanding norms that are frequently violated, in particular sovereignty" (Krasner, 1999, p. 220). The bundle of properties associated with sovereignty—territory, recognition, autonomy, and control—have been understood, often implicitly, to characterise states in the international system. However, only a very few states have possessed all of these attributes.

Lack of internal or domestic sovereignty	Lack of external or international legal sovereignty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Fragile State > Failed State > Collapsed State (Goldstone, 2008): state with progressive lack of control which results in its inability to provide effective government (e.g. Lebanon, 2020). · Anarchic/Aborted/Phantom State (Gros, 1996): state with no central government or central authority; experienced failure before the process of state-building; state authority is performed in restricted areas (e.g. Somalia 1991-2006). · “As-if” State (Stanislawski, 2008): internationally recognised state which cannot perform basic functions of statehood (e.g. Georgia, 1991-1993). · Quasi-State (Jackson, 1990): entity without effective, independent government; entity not performing geographical characteristics of statehood (e.g. Nigeria, 1967-1970). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <i>De-facto</i> State (Pegg, 1998): entity that lacks international recognition (e.g. Central African Republic 2013-2014). · Almost State (Stanislawski, 2008): entity that has managed to gain <i>de facto</i> independence from the main state, but is not recognised (Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic since 1976). · Para-State (Kolstø, 2006; Stanislawski, 2008): entity that seeks or claims but does not have the status of a recognised independent state (e.g. Palestine; Kosovo, 2020). · Quasi-state (Jackson, 1990): entity fully effective, but without international recognition (e.g. The Islamic Emirate and Afghanistan, 1996-2001)
<p style="text-align: center;">Lack of both internal and external sovereignty:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Black Spot (Stanislawski, 2008): area with non-state actors that often do not aspire independence, yet remaining beyond the control of state authority– and thrive in the area (Wahabi Republic, Dagestan, 1998-1999). · <i>Terra Nullius</i>: no-man’s land (e.g. Antarctica). · Ungoverned Space: “social, political, and economic arena where states do not exercise ‘effective sovereignty’ or where state control is absent, weak, or contested” (Clunan and Trinkunas, 2010, p. 17) (e.g. Somalia since 1990). 	

Table 1: Classifications of anomalous entities by different authors.²³

²³ The table shows the interpretation and labelling of anomalous entities operating within the international system by various authors. While some (Gros, 1996; Goldstone, 2008) attempted to distinguish among the entities by placing them on a degree scale of "sovereignty" levels, most agree on a stark division between those political entities that lack internal sovereignty and those that do not enjoy international recognition.

Facing these trends, and to mitigate the creation of no-man's lands, International Law employs the *uti possedetis iuris* principle to ensure that newly-formed sovereign states retain the internal borders that their preceding dependent area had, before their independence. In this way, international lawmakers thought they could maintain the interconnectedness of the State, sovereignty, and territoriality. However, as seen, this legalistic approach does not manifest in practice. Ungoverned spaces have become an inescapable facet of the twenty-first century's geopolitical landscape.

Is then the era of sovereign statehood then drawing to a close? Within the IR literature on the matter, scholars argue three different outcomes for sovereignty in the twenty-first century: its endurance (Mayall, 1999); its erosion (Cooper, 2003; Kaplan, 1994; Krasner, 1999; Stopford & Strange, 1991); and its evolution (Sørensen, 1999, 2016).

Proponents of the first outcome contend that sovereignty continues to be the cornerstone of international politics. Mayall (1999), for example, argues that, despite being contested, sovereignty's importance persists and so does its association with territoriality. "The state has not withered away but its competence has certainly narrowed, in particular in the fact of the globalization of the economy" (Mayall, 1999, p. 501). In Mayall's opinion, while several practices of government have defaulted, the territory over which the state presides has remained under the control of

internationally recognised states, underscoring the relevance of sovereignty.

The second bucket of literature regards the erosion of sovereignty as pivotal. Among others, Susan Strange (1996) argues that state authority is being eroded by advancements in technology and the globalised financial and economic world. She stresses a fundamental shift in actorness from state to non-state actors, in particular transnational corporations, and organised crime (Strange, 1996). This perspective, aligned with the works of Strange and Stopford (1991), emphasises the diminishing significance of territoriality in favour of global competition for market dominance. Similar sentiments are echoed by Ohmae (1991), who contends that the waning of the nation-state is due to its incapability of properly organise the global economy. Instead, the majority of economic decisions are taken at a regional level, crossing national territories and delimited boundaries.

While Strange and Ohmae find in the global economy the culprit for the erosion of sovereignty, Cooper (2003, p. 16) attributes the erosion of sovereignty to political developments. His view, which in some ways echoes Luke's narrative on territoriality (Luke, 1996), divides the geopolitical reality between a pre-modern world and a post-modern world. The former is characterised by "pre-state, post-imperial chaos", where states are fragile structures which have either lost legitimacy or monopoly on the use of force, and thus monopoly on law. "The pre-modern world belongs, as it were, in a different time zone: here, as in the ancient world, the choice is again

between empire and chaos” (Cooper, 2003, p. 17). In this scenario, ungoverned spaces emerge. The latter is characterised by individualistic and post-industrial societies in which governance is shared and intertwined. In both cases, sovereignty is being eroded: in pre-modern states, through humanitarian intervention by Western states, justified as an attempt to avoid chaos to spread;²⁴ in post-modern states, through the devolution of power to supranational institutions or other forms of globalised economy. In general, the author argues, globalisation undermines the autonomy of states.

The third perspective is championed by authors such as Sørensen (1999, 2016), who posits that sovereignty is not disappearing, but simply evolving.

“Sovereignty is an institution that changes over time in order to accommodate new circumstances; globalisation is one such challenge which has helped trigger a new game of sovereignty in some parts of the world” (Sørensen, 1999).

As a result, while the judicial core of sovereignty remains the same, the rules followed by actors of the international fora transform according to the context. Newman (1998) is of a similar opinion, as he argues that, while certain elements of state sovereignty are being

²⁴ According to Cooper, Western governments have learned three lessons about pre-modern states (Cooper, 2003, pp. 66–68): first, chaos spreads, and it endangers not only the state, that often collapse into anarchy, but also its neighbours; second, that when states collapse crime takes over; third, that a "zone of chaos can turn into a major direct threat to state security elsewhere" (Cooper, 2003, p. 68).

transferred, this by no means signals the end of territorial sovereignty in the traditional Westphalian sense.

In conclusion, the twenty-first century political map has never been so fragmented, yet so united. Non-state substitutes to state sovereignty are appearing not only in underdeveloped parts of the world, but also in developed, mainly Western, countries, where states privatise and are united under the aegis of supranational organisations.

Different scenarios are envisioned for the future of the geopolitical map as a result to the evolution of sovereignty. Cerny (1999) suggests that globalisation, once incepted by states, will lead to their delegitimisation, creating a world in which multiple identities will co-inhabit, new areas of lawlessness will emerge, and alternative actors to states will increasingly fight for their position in the international arena. In this reality, the survival of the fittest will come back to relevance. As such, globalisation will more likely result in “a fragmentation of effective governance structures and the multiplication of quasi-fiefdoms reminiscent of the Middle Ages” (Cerny, 1999, p. 1), rather than a new, pluralistic, global civil society.

Kaplan (1994) contends that, rather than an epoch of unprecedented peace, the world will experience increased fragmentation due to weakened powers, unsuited to tackle future problems such as resource and environmental scarcity. In this coming anarchy,

criminal networks will emerge as a strategic danger, and little interest will be given to borders and functional sovereignty.

Bull (1977) foresaw the consequences of the erosion of state sovereignty as a return to the Middle Age. The New Middle Age will manifest if some conditions are met (Bull, 1977), including the disintegration of states and their regional integration, the restoration of private international violence, a growing importance of transnational organisations, and a technological unification of the world. In this new age, the development of the world is uneven, rather than anarchic like it was argued to be in the Westphalian system. Less stability and uneven growth result in the rise of new actors and fragmented political authority, overlapping jurisdictions, and dangerous zones. The New Middle Ages will present a regional distribution of zones of chaos and zones of order, in a similar fashion to what theorised by Cooper (2003) about pre-modern and post-modern states. Failure to manage this global disorder and state decline will lead to a subsequent new epoch, a “New Dark Age” (Williams, 2008). In this, spread of lawlessness and state failure, will likely result in the rise of violent non-state actors, thus creating a framework which would inevitably collapse into chaos.

This catastrophic vision of world politics may not necessarily come into reality. However, the idea of mainstream International Relations theories that the territorial, sovereign state is the “necessary organising principle of politics” (Biersteker & Weber, 1996, p. 167) may not be completely applicable to the current global society. As wondered by Osiander,

“For some time now, this ‘Westphalian system’, along with the concept of sovereignty at its core, has been a subject of debate: Are the ‘pillars of the Westphalian temple’ decaying’? Are we moving ‘beyond Westphalia’?” (Osiander, 2001, p. 251)

While it may be true that sovereignty is being eroded, arguing that chaos is the only plausible alternative to state governance does not match with real-life examples.

“The concern over ungoverned spaces as areas lacking effective state sovereignty is fundamentally a product of the reluctance of policy practitioners and scholars to fully grapple with the world of the twentieth century” (Clunan and Trinkunas, 2010, p. 6).

As an alternative, Clunan and Trinkunan (2010) propose the terms “alternative authority” and “softened sovereignty” to better explain the different types of governance by non-state and state actors. Even though the state has retreated in some areas, it has not left a vacuum and a lack of governance. Instead, new actors, including violent ones, have proliferated and fully or partly exercise mainly spatial features of statehood.

“Yet unlike Hobbes’ nightmare of all-out competition and violence, the areas are in fact governed. Instead of chaos in spaces where state sovereignty is sparse or absent, alternative authorities arise” (Baylouny, 2010, p. 136).

In conclusion, while the players may have changed, the rules of the game are still the same.

1.5. Conclusions

This chapter provided a literature review surrounding various concepts that have held paramount importance in the realms of Geopolitics and International Relations. Initially, it provided a concise summary of the evolution of Geopolitics as an academic discipline. It commenced with the classical notion of geography as a transhistorical given and evolved into its contemporary interpretation as a dynamic social and historical construct. Over time, the discipline has progressively shifted its focus towards two core elements: territoriality and the State. Consequently, this chapter moved to scrutinise the evolution of these two concepts throughout the centuries. Finally, it delved into the concept of sovereignty and its theoretical interpretations. These are fundamental to investigate those “anomalous entities” that thrive and operate in areas of eroded sovereignty. A central question loomed over this review: what happens in areas where the State – defined by its full complement of statehood elements – has retreated, but other actors have appeared instead?

Based on the findings presented in this chapter, several noteworthy considerations have emerged. The first one is strictly theoretical, encompassing the evolution of Geopolitics and International Relations in conjunction with their interpretation of territoriality and sovereignty. An interdisciplinary study of International Relations and geopolitical theories illustrates a discernible shift in the focal

point of both disciplines over the years. This shift has seen a gradual move away from the centrality of the State, grounded in territoriality, towards an acknowledgement of other, non-state actors. These are often cross-border in nature and not intrinsically tied to a specific territory, and have benefited from the advent of globalisation and the development of technology to increase influence in the system.

The second conclusion stemming from this review pertains to the rejection by many contemporary analyses of International Relations and Geopolitics of a linear, successionist concatenation of events. Embracing the perspective that reality is a social and cultural construct (Ó Tuathail and Dalby, 1998), this chapter has introduced a pluralist dimension to the understanding of world politics and history. This perspective underscores that these aspects change over time, space, and actors. Of particular significance, Luke's (1993, 1994, 1995), Bull (1977) and Cooper's (2003) narratives suggest that even as territoriality loses its centrality in the post-modern space, the disappearance of previous paradigms does not uniformly occur worldwide. By considering these arguments, it is possible to envision a fragmented political map in which the Westphalian account of sovereign spatiality continues to hold sway in some areas.

The third and final conclusion that arises from this review pertains to the future of Geopolitics as a discipline dedicated to elucidating the unfolding of international relations in space. As illustrated in the last section of this chapter, numerous entities exist that do not fulfil

the criteria of positive and negative sovereignty. However, only those who lack the negative, or external, sovereignty, are not labelled as states. Conversely, other entities lack recognition despite performing functions of statehood, and thus complying with the positive sovereignty requirements. The lack of international recognition carries significant implications for the role and efficacy of a political entity within the international system, impacting its access to resources and services. It is imperative to acknowledge that many of these anomalous entities still account for territoriality, often housing a permanent population whose security becomes precarious due to these entities' unrecognised status. Disregarding their existence on the grounds of an international legal formality - or organised hypocrisy (Krasner, 1999), as Krasner aptly terms it - entails inherent risks.

In particular, this posits the need for considering all actors capable of performing state-like functions, not only those seeking recognition on the international stage. If we accept that the dynamics of international politics are socially and culturally constructed, it becomes plausible to assume that international politics is not exclusively shaped by territorial states. Instead, it is also influenced by entities that either are not granted or do not seek international recognition. As previously articulated, geopolitical pluralism would start from three assumptions: (i) that states are not the exclusive actors in world politics; (ii) that multiple actors enjoy a series of routinised rules, institutions, activities, and strategies, that inevitably present geographical characteristics, including territoriality, and (iii) that for these actors different geopolitical

arguments may reason differently. Consequently, for these entities, classical geopolitical tenets such as anarchy, violence, and territoriality remain pivotal elements in the geopolitical landscape. Rather than dismissing them as chaotic and irrational actors, the focus should shift towards understanding their unique versions of governance and manifestations of statehood attributes. This possibly find that bear striking resemblance to traditional statehood attributes, albeit at different stages of their relationship with geography.

CHAPTER 2 - ASSESSING THE SHIFT IN THE LOCI OF AUTHORITY: GOVERNANCE WITHOUT GOVERNMENT AND STATEHOOD ATTRIBUTES IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

2.1. Introduction

The analysis in the previous chapter emphasised the significant impact of emerging global trends and threats on the state's role as the primary actor in the international system. This shift has also granted other actors greater influence than before.

As seen, historically, sovereignty has been pivotal in asserting state primacy. Two key aspects of sovereignty, as explained in Chapter 1, were recognised. Firstly, internal sovereignty granted control over a territory, understood by different authors (Kolstø, 2006; Krasner, 2001) as the direct result of the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Secondly, external sovereignty referred to the international community's recognition of a state as a political entity capable of exerting power and participating in the balance of power in the system (Jackson, 1990; Kolstø, 2006; Krasner, 1999).

Different theories (Lipset, 1959; Tilly, 1985; Weber, 1946) have explored why states evolved into the dominant form of political organisation in the modern world. State formation and state-building have always been intricate processes influenced by various factors, including geography, economic interests, ethnicity, culture, and religion. Whether motivated by shared interest or the necessity

to wage war (Tilly, 1985), one of the primary reasons individuals organise politically is rooted in a space's function previously discussed in Chapter 1: shelter. This function encompasses the provision of services and governance, and the protection from domestic and external harm.

On the one hand, at its core, governance can be defined as “the capacity to get things done without the legal competence to command that they be done” (Czempiel, 1992, p. 250). In the Westphalian system, governance and government are perceived as synonymous. This is reflected in the State's sovereign attributes, which include domestic control and governance of its spatial features (that is, a delimited territory and a population), and international legal recognition that its authority is absolute and unchallengeable (Krasner, 1999).

Yet, in the context failed states, governance tasks, to the extent they are performed at all, are often devolved, transferred to, or captured by individuals or organisations, whether endogenous or exogenous of the State, frequently operating independently from the central government (Baylouny, 2010). The emergence of additional governance providers has spurred literature focussing on shifts in the *locus* – or *loci* - of authority. This trend, defined as “governance without government” by Rosenau and Czempiel (1992), suggests that various actors perform governance functions regardless of their origin, whether governmental or internationally-recognised institutions.

On the other hand, governance can be analysed in security terms. Traditional security studies primarily concentrated on exogenous and endogenous threats jeopardising state sovereignty, international borders, and the rule of law (Waltz, 1986). Traditionally, the State was expected to provide protection and uphold justice. At present, however, these threats often transcend Westphalian borders and challenge the State's primacy in the international system and exclusivity as a governor and security provider.

This transformation has coincided with the emergence of non-state actors (NSAs) that meet the requirements of positive or negative sovereignty (Kolstø, 2006; Krasner, 2001). For instance, in a previous work, it was highlighted that

“in Lebanon, Hezbollah is a major provider of social services of different kind, from schools to hospitals to agricultural programmes, while controlling the southern-east region of [the country]” (Nizzero, 2018, p. 1).

Similarly, the terrorist group Al Nusra evolved into a significant provider of essential services in Syria (Shay & Karmon, 2016). Italian mafia groups also play a bifocal role of security providers and security threats, deriving their power from massive exploitation and transnational criminal activities, all while providing services to the community in exchange for money (Gambetta, 1988; Sergi, 2019).

This chapter conducts a literature review on the central features of government and governance, aiming to establish the theoretical and

conceptual foundations for developing explanatory variables to variation of the statehood-like features and attributes of violent non-state actors. It explores various works on contemporary governance in areas of limited statehood, emphasising the absence of a linear correlation between the degrees of statehood and the quality of the provision of services. Consequently, it refrains from asserting a direct and exclusive relationship between government and governance, and states.

Before delving into conceptual and theoretical analysis, a point needs to be highlighted. As Rosenau and Czempiel state, “it is important not to be misled by nuanced differences. We may differ somewhat in our use of terminology, but we are concerned about the same problem” (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992, p. 3). Sovereignty is a political and legal term that refers to the state’s capacity to exercise power and receive formal recognition by other states. In this sense, this term cannot be associated with any other political entity aside from the State. However, there is a substantial difference between *de jure* and *de facto* sovereignty. The former pertains to the legal right to exert control and receive recognition, whilst the latter indicates the factual ability to do so, which this dissertation identifies with the term “governance”.²⁵

²⁵ Krasner (1999, 2001; Krasner & Risse, 2014) makes a distinction between "sovereignty as authority", that is a state's legal right to exert control and receive recognition, and "sovereignty as control", intended as a state's capacity of actually doing so.

However, sovereignty should not be conflated with governance. Sovereignty refers to the authority and control of a State over a delimited territory and population. A state, through its government, provides governance to its citizens. However, considerable governance functions, which are sustained by these criteria, are performed by other actors aside from the State. To analyse violent non-state actors' governance provision, this dissertation draws a parallel line between their features and attributes of statehood (see Section 2.2 for further details). However, at no point does it challenge the legal definition of sovereignty or its exclusive correlation with the State, nor does it assume that violent non-state actors become sovereign by performing governance functions.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, it examines spatial features and performative functions of statehood. Contemporary states can be defined as a combination of formal institutions that possess the authority to enforce decision (Lipset, 1959; Weber, 1968) and the functional capacity of regulating arrangements, allocating values, and making decisions – also defined as “governance” (Keohane & Nye, 2000; Zacher, 1992). However, a State encompasses more than a set of formalised institutions and functions; it relies on spatial elements, such as territory, population, and government (Moreau Defarges, 2009), as well as functional or performative attributes such as legitimacy, effectiveness, and authority (Lipset, 1959).

The second section of the chapter focusses on governance, namely the capacity of getting things done (Czempiel, 1992), and on

governors in contemporary politics. Even in areas where the formalised institutions of the State have receded, different political entities perform its functions. The section also introduces the concept of non-state actors (NSAs) by reviewing the body of literature which studies their role as services providers in “areas of limited statehood”, as termed by Borzel, Risse and Draude (2018).

Finally, the third and last section of the chapter delves into the geopolitics of contemporary governance. If limited statehood is indeed the prevailing condition in the modern political map (Borzel et al., 2018), the priority is to identify the socio-spatial conditions that allow NSAs to contest and claim statehood, and to regulate, negotiate, and practice effective governance. In line with the definition of geopolitics presented in the previous chapter, this chapter investigates the consequences of increased governance by non-state actors in areas of limited statehood, examining what features or attributes of the State, if any, are transferred to NSAs, and what this implies for territoriality and statehood.

2.2. On Statehood: spatial features and performative attributes of Westphalian institutions

The conceptualisation of the State and its key features proves to be a complex task for academics across various academic disciplines, spanning from Politics to Geopolitics to International Relations. To grasp the essence of the State, it is important to explore its fundamental features and attributes and how they intersect.

In Machiavellian and Hobbesian terms, the State is a political authority responsible for organising and, whenever possible, monopolising the use of legitimate force. Building on this, Weber (1946) defined the State as a territorial entity governed by a political unit, which has the monopoly over the legitimate means of violence and that it is recognised by other members of a larger international community.

Political geographers Glassner and Fahrer provide a concise definition of the State as an “independent country consisting of a specific territory and citizens bound by a sovereign government that demands (but does not always obtain) their loyalty” (Glassner & Fahrer, 2004, p. 31). They highlight various measurable qualities intrinsic to the State, including its spatial prerequisites, a territory and a permanent resident population, and its political requirements, encompassing a government, an organised economy, and a circulation system.

Despite these variations in focus, scholars across disciplines concur on a few fundamental elements inherent to the concept of the State: a defined territory and a population upon which it exercises authority; the control of the territory’s resources and of the legitimate use of force; and a civil disposition embedded in the concept of international recognition. As seen, these elements loosely correspond to domestic sovereignty (Jackson, 1990; Krasner, 1999) – the exercise of effective control within state borders – and international legal sovereignty – the formal

recognition of state existence by other members of the international community (Kolstø, 2006).

To further clarify these manifestations of statehood, this dissertation adopts a classification into two types of measurable criteria (Table 2):

- i. *spatial features*: directly related to the functions of space, these features encompass territory, population, government, organised economy, infrastructure, and shelter (provision of security and justice);
- ii. *performative attributes*: these characteristics result from the degree of governance exercised by the entity controlling the spatial elements, and/or which is the bearer of international recognition. They include authority, legitimacy, effectiveness, autonomy, and shelter (generalised sense of protection felt by the population).

Spatial features	Performative attributes
Territory Population Government Organised economy Infrastructure	Authority Legitimacy Effectiveness Autonomy
Shelter (Army and Laws)	Shelter (Sense of protection)
International Recognition	

Table 2: Manifestations of Statehood (adapted from Borzel et al., 2018).

Spatial elements form the core features of a state. By definition, a state has a geographically identifiable territory and a population residing within it. To establish territoriality, the modern state

delineates frontiers that allow it to be perceived as distinct from other states; it ensures for the homogenisation of its territories; and sets a “horizon to push back” (Moreau Defarges, 2009, p. 35). As for the population, the citizens of the State must permanently reside within the territory they have delimited: “an area only traversed by nomads or occupied seasonally (...) cannot be a State” (Glassner & Fahrer, 2004, p. 31).²⁶

As they reside in a bounded territory, citizens rely on administrative systems, trained bureaucracies of office holders, to perform and provide them services. Without political organisation, namely, a government, there cannot be a functioning state. The absence of a government creates vacuums of power susceptible to exploitation by criminal and violent organisations. Somalia’s case exemplifies this concept. For over 15 years, the country was ripped apart by aspiring *de facto* states, clan militias, pirate gangs, and Islamist extremists, as it lacked a central government (Pegg, 1998).

Territory, population, and government are the traditional, tangible elements that several scholars identify as the primary features of statehood. The State, however, also exerts control over the resources within its territory and manages the region’s economic

²⁶ In the MOVS database, the term “population” is used to indicate the demographics and membership of a specific group, rather than the specific control over the people residing within a delimited territory. Indeed, as it will be explained more thoroughly in Chapter 4 (see page 185), “population” can mean different things - from group members, the local population residing within the territory controlled by the violent non-state actor, and other violent partners. However, when operationalising the variable, only the first type is measurable.

activities, from the issuance of a currency to the regulation of foreign trade. For this reason, Glassner and Fahrer (2004, p. 31) add “organised economy” as they explore tangible attributes of a state. The authors (Glassner & Fahrer, 2004, p. 32) also recognise the importance of the circulation system as a mean to allow the transmission and movement of information, people, goods, and capital.

Aside from being filled and providing economic and social opportunities, a space can be controlled, contested, and protected. So does the State. In this context, the concept of “shelter” then encompasses three key aspects:

- i. *provision of services* in exchange for taxes - by some authors also defined as “protection money” (Gambetta, 1988; Strange, 1996; Tilly, 1985);
- ii. *provision of internal security* (or protection of private property and the self), guaranteed by law enforcement authorities and the rule of law;
- iii. *provision of external security* (or protection of the entirety of the population, its resources, and its territory from external threat), embodied in a state’s army.

Spatial features are more susceptible to being captured or transferred to new actors compared to performative attributes. For instance, in 2014, the Islamic State declared itself an Islamic Caliphate only after seizing a significant portion of the Iraqi territory (Hashim, 2014). Similarly, infrastructures, the set of

governmental institutions, and a country's organised economy are attractive targets to terrorist or rebel organisations as they easily lead to a country's isolation and chaos (Mullins, 1988). Spatial features also play a pivotal role in the existence of a state. The loss of any of these features, while not necessarily cancelling its presence in the international system, initiates a decline in a state's political influence (Gros, 1996; Jackson, 1990; Kolstø, 2006). Conversely, entities can assert their geographical significance within the system by manifesting one or more spatial features, even when they are not officially designated as states (Stanislawski, 2008).

Nevertheless, defining a political entity as a state solely on the basis of its spatial elements may oversimplify the concept. For a state to be territorial, it must exert its authority within the delimited geographical area (Herbst, 2000) and population. Territoriality hinges on governance, and the degree of its effectiveness translates into the performative attributes of statehood. These are authority, legitimacy, effectiveness, and autonomy.

Authority "is legal in character and is usually seen as the source of law. It is based on procedural rules which have more general recognition in society than other rules" (Hawkesworth, 1992, p. 12). Authority pertains to institutionalised forms or expressions of power whose legitimacy is acknowledged through normative, uncoerced consent (Hall & Biersteker, 2002, pp. 4–5). According to Weber (1946), it also stems from a state's capacity to assert a monopoly over the use of physical force and over the resources within a given

territory – essentially the capability of a state to perform the physical functions of shelter.

As states gain monopoly over the use of force, they seek recognition and acceptance from their citizens. The concept and definition of legitimacy have evolved over time: at the most basic level, popular legitimacy is rooted in the support of the population and their endorsement of state institutions. Schaar (1981) argues that contemporary definitions of state legitimacy have transformed it into a mere matter of whether the population believes in the State and deems its institutions appropriate. However, as Linz stresses, “no political regime is legitimate for 100 percent of the population, nor in all its commands, nor forever, and probably very few are totally illegitimate based only on coercion” (Linz, 1988, p. 66). Legitimacy is also then contingent on the state’s ability and credibility to protect its population from domestic and foreign threats, once again emphasising its capacity to provide shelter.

Legitimacy also arises from the sense of protection experienced by the population, stemming from the state’s economic and political performance in the spatial shelter attributes, which translates its ability to provide economic and social security. According to Holsti (in Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992) ensuring the population’s compliance to rules also indicates legitimate authority.

The performance of a state, often measured by the extent to which it fulfils the fundamental functions of government (Lipset, 1959, p. 77), becomes another of the attributes of statehood known as

“effectiveness”. Effectiveness and legitimacy are closely intertwined, with the former directly impacting the latter, and *vice versa*. Effectiveness can be measured by analysing the performance of other spatial features of the state, mainly how it performs in its function as a shelter (provision of security and protection from danger) and how it handles its organised economy and infrastructure. For instance, according to Lipset (Lipset & Schneider, 1983), a state may face a crisis of effectiveness in times of economic depression.

A state also needs to act independently without external intervention. Autonomy depends on several other factors, including the recognition by other states of a state’s authority, the state’s ability to provide security from external threats, and its effectiveness and legitimacy. All these factors allow a state to function independently within the international system. However, Zacher argues,

“it [may] no longer [be] accurate to conceptualize states as having their traditional degree of autonomy because the network of formal and informal regions in which they are becoming increasingly involved” (Zacher, 1992, p. 59).

The last element of statehood to consider, which is both a spatial feature and performative attribute, is international recognition. Despite the growing importance of governance beyond the sovereign State, which allows other entities to assume or perform some of the spatial and performative attributes of statehood,

“for a political unit to be accepted as a State with an ‘international personality’ of its own, it must be recognized as such by a significant portion of the international community – the existing states” (Glassner & Fahrer, 2004, p. 32).

Scholars are divided on whether recognition is constitutive or declarative to a political entity’s nature as a State. Some argue that a political entity can be identified as a State only once it possesses all the features and attributes outlined in the previous paragraphs, while others contend that it will not, as long as the other participants of the international community do not recognise it. Returning to the example of Somalia, over nearly twenty years the country has gradually lost all of its elements of statehood, both spatial features and performative attributes. Parts of its territory and population now under the rule of other entities and *de facto* states. Its economy, government and infrastructure are in disarray, and the country struggles to provide security both in terms of establishing the rule of law, providing services, and protecting from internal and external threats. Additionally, Somalia’s authority is dwindling, its legitimacy questioned. The country is widely regarded as one of one of the least effective states and is heavily reliant on foreign and non-governmental aid. Nevertheless, Somalia remains one of the 192 recognised states who form part of the international system, as international recognition is still bestowed upon it by the all the other participants of the system.

In the current international system, recognition is crucial as it grants the State access to the rules of the game, a seat at the international table and the associated benefits. Yet, Chapter 1 stressed the lack of effectiveness of various states and the emergence of NSAs. Why is this the case? The answer relies in governance and the shift in the *loci* of authority.

2.3. Literature on governance and the shift in the *loci* of authority in contemporary politics

Over the decades, the meaning and significance of governance within the fields of Social Sciences and International Relations have undergone profound shifts. This resulted in conceptual ambiguity as relates to their concepts and their relation to statehood and the State. This section explores these transformations, the nuanced definitions of governance, and the implications of these changes.

In its simplest definition, governance is the process of getting things done. However, as Rosenau and Czempiel (1992, pp. 6–8) delineate, there are several nuances associated to the term, including:

- Governance as government, involving the exercise of authority and control within a territory by a sovereign entity;
- Governance in functional terms, namely the performative attributes of statehood identified in Section 2.2 referring to the tasks that are performed by governors to sustain the order;

- Governance as capacity to “regulate arrangements so that they remain routinised” (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992, p. 7);²⁷
- Governance as “occasions when power is exercised independently of the authority of government” (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992, p. 7);
- Governance as “a mode of allocating values” (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992, p. 7), and
- Governance as functions that operate in an order that lacks a centralised authority.

Given this multiplicity of meanings, some authors contend that governance itself has become an “empty signifier” (Offe, 2009) whose significance shifts according to the field of study. To provide clarity, this dissertation adopts Borzel, Risse and Draude’s definition of governance as “the various institutionalized moves of social coordination to produce and implement collectively binding rules, and/or to provide collective goods” (Borzel et al., 2018, p. 9). According to this view, governance encompasses diverse dimensions and involves various actors, ranging from the state to private actors and civil society.

2.3.1. The evolution of governance studies in a globalised world

The conceptualisation of governance and government has evolved significantly in response to globalisation, the relocation and the

²⁷ Governance then as a source of law – projecting its function of shelter and its spatial attribute of government.

diffusion of political power, and the deterritorialisation and the delegitimisation of the State (Strange, 1996). Earlier studies on governance primarily associated this term with the actions of states and their governments. States could rule hierarchically through top-down command and control, but also by incentivising other actors to take on governance roles themselves (Borzel et al., 2018, p. 10). According to traditional definitions of governance, the State alone could decide to delegate some governance functions to other entities.

However, applying these traditional views of governance to the contemporary world presents challenges. As seen in Chapter 1, scholars recognise the emergence of other entities, which can capture governance functions or find them abandoned retreating states (Keohane & Nye, 1987, 2000; Williams, 2010). Today's governance landscape is inherently hybrid, requiring the participation of multiple actors, both public and private (Colebatch, 2014).

In the late 1990s, a period during which governance studies underwent a paradigm shift like many other disciplines, several authors recognised that the old paradigm of top-down, hierarchical governance did no longer apply to the contemporary landscape. This led to a conceptual division between “governance” and “government”, where government is the

“centralized modes of governing based on the state as the key unit, whereas governance is characterized by the

fragmentation of political authority among regional, global, and transnational private entities” (Krahmann, 2005, p. 12).

The literature review identifies three main buckets of the contemporary discourse on governance and government, each emphasising a different aspect of governance evolution:

1. Globalisation and its impact: The first bucket emphasises globalisation and global change as central to International Relations (Hewson & Sinclair, 1999). This perspective centres on the consequences of global flows on the liberal state, territorial borders, and markets. Globalisation “implied an increased acceptance of a multilevel game of networked governance” (Borzel et al., 2018, p. 151), reflecting economic interdependence and a “worldwide tilt from States to markets” (Hewson & Sinclair, 1999, p. 5). Politically, it also marked a transformation in the *loci* of authority, where the Westphalian state ceased to be the exclusive actor in the international system. Governance became more fragmented, and the state de-territorialised (Rosenau & Czempiel, 2009).
2. International relations and modes of governance: The second bucket of literature focuses on shifts in international regime patterns and their implications for international organisations’ capacity to address global challenges (Hewson & Sinclair, 1999, p. 8; Kratochwil & Ruggie, 1986). It also explores the diffusion of political power from public authorities to semi-public and private actors, and the so-called “relocation of politics”. This relocation involves ascendant political forces

shaping global governance, with politics transitioning from the state to international and sub-national organisations.

3. Global impact issues and non-traditional threats: The third and last bucket of literature on governance places emphasis on global impact issues. This strand highlights the ascendance of new, non-traditional threats and global issues that cannot be solved by traditional means of security and national armies (Aziani, Favarin, and Campedelli, 2020; Fukuyama, 2013; Krasner, 2001).

These buckets of literature give rise to three major debates for the understanding of contemporary governance.

Firstly, there is a debate regarding the extent of de-territorialisation and the creation of a “borderless world”. Scholars examining globalisation have questioned whether the transnational nature of global economic, social, and political flows has eroded national borders and the Westphalian map (Strange 1996). This debate raises questions about the significance of external borders and governance in the modern world. As seen in Chapter 1, on the one hand, some argue that the movement of goods and people, often with minimal constraints, may render physical borders obsolete. On the other hand, others assert that international legal sovereignty remains a steadfast concept.

The second debate is on the centrality of the State as a governance provider.²⁸ State-centric theorists (Fukuyama, 2013; Peters & Pierre, 1998) argue that the presence of the State in the provision of governance is indispensable. Some scholars, like Peters, contend that “governance is inherently a hybrid activity, with public and private sector actors involved in varying degrees and in different ways.” (Peters, 2014, p. 303). Other authors (Krasner & Risse, 2014; Rhodes, 1996, 2012) go further, as they disregard the presence of the State, deeming it irrelevant in the provision of governance. For instance, Rhodes (1997) argues that society is capable to organise and govern itself independently, which results in the irrelevance of the State in the provision of goods. Other authors see the State as remaining dominant in those fields where it is traditionally considered “sovereign”, such as the monopolisation of collective violence, the provision of internal and external security, or the enforcement of law and order (Hirst, 2000).

The third and last debate is on alternative governance providers, granted that governance nowadays is inherently hybrid. Pierre (2000) distinguishes between “old” and “new” types of governance, the former being top-down and state-led, and the latter involving a growing presence of non-state actors (NSAs). Often, the transition to new types of governance is the result of what appears to be the

²⁸ This debate is akin to the debate on the centrality and importance of sovereignty highlighted in the previous chapter. However, as explained in the introduction of this chapter, "sovereignty" and "governance" are not the same.

inevitable “retreat of the State” or “a hollowing-out of the State” (Albrow, 1997; Pierre, 2000; Strange, 1996).

The analysis of the evolution of literature on governance leads to some observations. First, the concept of hybrid governance is not limited to voluntary cooperation between state and non-state actors. In some instances, coordination among multiple non-state actors results in exclusive private governance that does not see the participation of the state. Examples can be found in certain regions of Africa, where multinational corporations operate to extract resources, and employ private military firms (PMFs) to protect their facilities from attacks of local violent groups (Schreier & Caparini, 2005; Walker & Whyte, 2005). In these cases, both multinational corporations and private military firms act like governors, as they become norm (and in some cases, law) makers and providers of security in lieu of the State.

Second, rather than a single *locus* of authority, the contemporary governance landscape is characterised by multiple *loci* of authority. According to Borzel and Risse’s definition, it encompasses two facets: the provision of services and the institution of collectively binding rules (Borzel et al., 2018, p. 9). Today, these tasks are performed not exclusively by the state, but collectively by a multitude of state and non-state actors.

Lastly, non-state actors appear better equipped to provide governance at the regional and local level, particularly in areas where states have retreated, or failed to maintain control over their

spatial and performative attributes of statehood. Limited statehood, in conclusion, provides fertile ground for non-state actors to act like governors.

2.4. Geopolitics of Non-State Actor governance

Non-state actors (NSAs) encompass a diverse array of entities that, despite not being states themselves, operate on both national and international levels, exerting varying degrees of influence on politics and international relations (Arts et al., 2001; Higgot et al., 2000).²⁹

While NSAs have historically played a role in the international system, their proliferation and growing impact on governance have become particularly pronounced since the end of the Cold War. This trend challenges the traditional monopoly of states over elements of statehood and has prompted greater attention to the role of NSAs in shaping international relations. For instance, Keohane and Nye include non-state actors as potential governance providers in their definition of governance:

“[Governance consists of] the processes and institutions, both formal and informal, that guide and restrain the collective activities of a group. (...) Governance need not necessarily be conducted exclusively by governments and the international organizations to which they delegate

²⁹ This definition includes governmental actors such as international organisations (IOs). It is to be noted, however, that some authors may exclude IOs from the concept of "non-state actor", to include only non-governmental groups.

authority. Private firms, associations of firms, NGOs and associations of NGOs all engage in it, often in association with governmental bodies, to create governance; sometimes without governmental authority.” (Keohane and Nye 2000, p. 12)

While transnationalist and state-centric approaches once viewed non-state actors as external to the international system, most contemporary theories now acknowledge their presence and influence, recognising them as potential governance providers. NSAs appear to be better equipped to address pressing global issues such as climate change, transnational terrorism, or pandemics due to their ability to operate beyond territorial boundaries. Consequently, most literature on these actors focuses on their relevance in shaping international relations, rather than questioning their presence.

Various criteria dictate the relevance of a non-state actor in the international system. Morss (1991) lists factors such as size, formal recognition, or political impact.³⁰ The relevance of NSAs also depends on the geographical level (local, national, regional, international) and the sector in which they operate. While the state remains crucial in global governance, international governmental organisations (IOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or multinational corporations (MNCs) are increasingly participating in

³⁰ Morss argues that, if a non-state actor's size is considerable, it means that the actor has the potential or has been impactful on international politics. Because of this, it is granted access to the system by some states, thus becoming relevant global governance player (Morss 1991).

policymaking, particularly at the local and regional levels. Examples can be found in places like Chad, Sudan, or Nigeria, where local actors are deferred security or development roles, effectively compromising these countries' *de facto* sovereignty (Kilne, 2006; Ottaway, 2009), or in European Union (EU), where member states voluntarily defer some policymaking decisions to EU institutions (European Commission, 2019).

2.4.1. NSA approaches to governance

The deferral or overtaking of elements of statehood to and by non-state actors has prompted an increased attention in scholarly research on NSAs and governance. Literature on NSAs also explores the nexus between the shift from government to governance and the development of new forms of coordination among state and non-state actors. It draws on multiple factors, including their role in security functions, their geographical location, and the presence of natural resources in areas of limited statehood.

In particular, geographical attributes of areas of limited statehood (ALS) play a pivotal role in determining NSA intervention. In these regions, state capacity diminishes, resulting in the loss of spatial features and performative attributes of statehood. But while state capacity decreases, geographical features remain, providing opportunities for elements of statehood to be captured. “Non-state actors, even when not exercising any sort of territorial control, also exist in a concrete space that is enclosed and delimited from other spaces” (Ryngaert, 2017, p. 1).

Research highlights that non-state actors are particularly active and prolific in areas where the State has, voluntarily or involuntarily, reduced its presence – also known as “areas of limited statehood”. These areas can be defined as

“Parts of a country in which central authorities (governments) lack the ability to implement and enforce rules and decisions and/or in which they do not command a legitimate monopoly over the means of violence” (Borzal et al., 2018, p. 6).

When ALS are also rich in natural resources, NSA competition in governance provision increases. For instance, in areas of high economic interest and limited state activity, multinational corporations operate alongside private military firms. An example is the multinational corporation Shell, which has maintained a significant presence in various African territories, particularly in Nigeria - a country notoriously characterised by areas of limited statehood. In this context, Shell operates as a *de facto* authority, directly controlling not only the areas where its refineries are located, but also adjacent regions (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2009).

Other scholars (Duffield, 2001; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004) argue that in areas where state presence is limited, but performative attributes are still expected to be exerted upon spatial features of statehood, an archipelago of NGOs and international organisations often emerges to provide services. Conversely, Fruttero and Guari (2005) conclude that funding is the main driver for NGO activity, as

they explore the decision-making process behind a non-governmental organisation's choice of mission location.

The review highlights that NSA approaches to governance are varied and directly related to the way they contest, claim, uphold, and disrupt political authority. These interactions play important roles in setting standards, rules, services, or other practices that the population residing within the territory, and other actors in the system, must abide by. In this way,

“States and non-state actors operate at times independently from each other, at times, in open rivalry, and sometimes as cooperative partners in constructing new emergent structures of order” (Karkkainen, 2004, p. 74).

Depending on these interactions, scholars identify NSAs as “surrogates” (Brass, 2010), “intermediaries” (Schuller, 2009), “contractors” (Walker & Whyte, 2005), or “governors” (Baylouny, 2010).

NSAs can act as contractors, temporary governors or surrogates of the state when they are delegated specific statehood functions (Green, 2017; Krahnemann, 2003). For instance, Brass (2010, p. 3) argues that non-governmental organisations or supranational organisations act as “gap fillers”, complementing the state rather than supplanting it. Breslin and Nesadurai (2018) examine how non-state actors become governors with the state's acceptance and explore the forms of cooperation between non-state, or private, actors and the state. The previously-mentioned cases of MNCs

operating in Sudan or Chad exemplify this relationship (Kilne, 2006).

Other authors theorise that in some areas, non-state and state actors operate as equal partners (Abbott & Snidal, 2009). For instance, Raustiala (1997) contends that the inclusion of NSAs as governance providers can extend state capabilities rather than diminishing state centrality. This is exemplified by peacebuilding and peacekeeping missions in regions like Kosovo, Rwanda, or Somalia by international organisations like North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the European Union, or the United Nations (UN) (Bellamy, 2009).

NSAs can also act as intermediaries, contractors or surrogates to respond to specific global or local needs. Finger and Princen (1994, pp. 34–38), for instance, explore the so-call “political bargaining”, which revolves around the assets with which NGOs negotiate transparency, legitimacy, and transnationalism. Similarly, Marina Ottaway, in describing the behaviour of MNCs such as Shell or ExxonMobil, calls them “reluctant missionaries”, as they are tasked with “preaching the gospel of human rights and democracy to their developing-world hosts” (Ottaway, 2009). By contrast, Brass (2010, p. 6) suggests that NSAs engage in governance to respond to the local need for services in areas where the state has voluntarily or involuntarily retreated. Shreirer and Caparini (2005) highlight how private military and security companies work as proxies for governments, providing not only shelter as protection from external threats, but also shelter as provision of services. especially in areas

of limited statehood, where we will assist to pure private governance.

Finally, NSAs may engage in governance in the face of state incapacity. In areas of limited statehood, it is often possible to witness purely non-state governance. In the case of violent non-state actors, they aim to exploit spatial features while the state is absent. Insecurity, geographical fragmentation, and the delegation of security functions not only to private military firms but also to organisations operating at the international and regional levels result in a complete supplanting of the state by non-state actors. Examples can be found in Syria, Lebanon or Chechnya, where members of organised crime or terrorist groups govern areas where the state has retreated (Siegel, 2012).

2.5. Conclusions

This chapter has delved into the elements of statehood, working under the assumption that limited statehood is, in fact, the default condition in today's political landscape (Borzel et al., 2018). It has analysed the evolution and the shift in the *loci* of authority from being the State's exclusive domain to the rise of multiple non-state actors. This examination focused on the socio-spatial conditions enabling NSAs to challenge and assess spatial features and performative attributes statehood and how they engage in regulating, negotiating, and effectively practicing governance.

A series of conclusions for territoriality and statehood can be drawn from the emergence and increased presence of non-state actors' as

governance providers. First, spatial features of statehood play a pivotal role in determining the location of non-state actors. Whether it is driven by resource availability or the need to provide essential services to the population, spatial features primarily influence the purposes, activities, and interactions of NSAs with political authority.

Second, once non-state actors assume responsibility in these spatial domains, they become governors of spatial features of statehood, ensuring their provision and protection. As a result, territoriality is exercised by non-state actors as a broadcasting of power (Herbst 2000), and authority is transferred from the State to NSAs.

Third, this transition also bestows upon non-state actors performative attributes of statehood. Through their effective governance, they acquire authority and legitimacy, securing autonomy and recognition often with the state's tacit approval. In areas of limited statehood, non-state actors end up effectively supplanting the State.

Fourth and last, it is important to note that certain elements of statehood can be easily transferred or delegated to non-state actors by states themselves. This delegation may occur gradually or abruptly, depending on the context and the degree of statehood. However, aside from a few notable cases, the majority of non-state actors will acquire spatial elements of statehood or perform state's functions under the supervision of, or the acceptance by, the main state and/or the international community. This means that a

different analysis is required for those actors that capture spatial features and performative attributes of statehood without the state's approval. These are violent non-state actors.

CHAPTER 3 - VIOLENT NON-STATE ACTORS: A REVIEW ON DEFINITIONS AND GOVERNANCE APPROACHES

3.1. Introduction

The geopolitical imagination has long insisted on dividing the world into units of sovereign statehood. However, as outlined in Chapter 2, today's geopolitical landscape presents socio-spatial conditions that enable non-state actors to challenge and claim statehood. These actors can also engage in the regulation, negotiation, and practice of effective governance. Chapter 2's review also emphasised that, aside from a few notable cases, several typologies of non-state actors either assume control over spatial features of statehood or perform state's functions under the supervision of or with the acceptance of the parent state and/or the international community.

However, some actors operate without the approval of the state and in defiance of its national and international laws. Their actions inevitably have repercussions on the very international community they seek to defy. Situations of "dual power" appear,

"where a substantial portion of the populace comes to treat a challenger for power as their sovereign and new, legitimate government, simultaneously denying such legitimacy to the previous incumbent" (Wickham-Crowley, 1987, p. 473).

The primary objective of this dissertation is to uncover explanatory factors that influence the features and attributes of statehood and

governance provision by violent non-state actors. These actors, as with other concepts discussed in previous chapters, present definitional challenges that are not easily overcome. For instance, what one author may define as a “rebel organisation” may be termed a “terrorist organisation” by another. The inherent political character of some of these organisations inevitably hinders conceptual conformity. The elusive and illegal nature of these actors makes them prone to interpretation, and definitions are based on the little information available to policymakers and researchers.

Despite these challenges, a review of relevant literature reveals that various non-state actors who engage in the provision of governance in the form of challengers of the state, such as rebel groups, insurgent organisations, or terrorist entities, and criminal organisations, are frequently grouped together by different authors under terms like “violent non-state actors” (VNSAs) (Idler & Forest, 2015), “non-state armed actors (NSAAs)” (Davis, 2009), “armed non-state actors (ANSAs)” (Clapham, 2014) or “criminal and violent non-state actors” (Berti, 2018).

Despite minor differences in terminology, these concepts refer to organisations that, in their simplest definition, operate illicitly outside the direct control of the state. Instead of exerting a monopoly over the use of legitimate force, they resort to violence to achieve their goals. While this phenomenon has historical roots (Berti, 2018), these organisations thrive in the twenty-first century, leveraging the interconnectedness and borderless features of the current geopolitical landscape, and employing technology for

various forms of warfare and trade activities. Even though they engage in contemporary means of warfare and trade, their reliance on violence reflects pre-modern conduct, goals, and lifestyle.

Academia has paid particular attention to how these groups engage in governance. Given the dissertation's focus, it is essential to draw from literature on the governance of violent non-state actors as a whole, but also on some of these organisations' conduct singularly. However, even when exclusively considering violent non-state actors, academia appears to disagree regarding conceptual definitions, as discussed in the previous paragraph. A review of the literature shows that, while authors often discuss the same organisations, from mercenaries to private military firms, guerrillas and criminal kingpins, they differ in how to categorise this collective and identify their main characteristics.

As mentioned earlier, violent non-state actors are not a new phenomenon, and their relationship with statehood and governance provision is well-established. According to Davis (2009), the rationale behind their relationship with statehood draws from Charles Tilly's (1985) interpretation of Max Weber's theories on the State. Building on Weber's assumption that the State is that political entity that exerts a monopoly over the use of legitimate force, Tilly (1985) argues that state-making is intrinsically linked to war-making. In other words, once one entity monopolises the means of coercion, then successful state formation can begin. However, in the early twentieth century, International Law has been regulating

warfare to such an extent that, except from notable exceptions,³¹ engaging war is often too costly. Consequently, violence is pursued by states through alternative means, and those who resort to violence find themselves ill-suited for today's international relations. These actors are violent non-state actors. For them, who rely on violence as the primary mean of coercion, the reasoning of Alfred Mahan holds more weight than that of Agnew or Ó Tuathail. For them, territoriality, and the Hobbesian view of *homo homini lupus* still holds significance (Luke, 1994). However, this reasoning places them outside of the legal boundaries of international laws.

Consequently, Davis argues,

“The struggle to establish state sovereignty rests on armed force, even as the institutional and fiscal capacity to use armed force rests on state power. A closer examination of non-state armed actors suggests that a parallel dynamic may be at play, albeit in non-state domains, where armed actors

³¹ This chapter was written prior to Russia's unlawful aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. As of this chapter's revision in January 2023, the conflict in Ukraine was ongoing, with no indication from Russia of an intention to cease its aggression. While Russia had previously invaded Ukrainian territory, notably annexing Crimea in 2014, the author considers that open warfare could be deemed to have erupted in February 2022, given significant scale of the mobilisation of the Russian army and the response from both the Ukrainian government and Western allies. For more information on implications on modern warfare, see: Zabrodskyi, M, Watling, J., Danylyuk, O. V. and Nick Reynolds, (2022) 'Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022', RUSI Special Resources.

without allegiance to the nation-state are also engaged in struggles over sovereignty and allegiance” (Davis, 2009, p. 226).

She adds

“To a certain extent, elements of this situation hark back to medieval, absolutist, and pre-modern periods before successful state formation. [...] What most distinguishes the contemporary situation from the pre-modern, however, as well as the immediate past is the fact that these new imagined communities are struggling for ‘alternative forms of sovereignty’ – power, authority, independence, and self-governance on a variety of territorial scales, whether formal or informal – in an environment where traditional institutions of national sovereignty and the power of the nation-state still exist and must be reckoned with” (Davis, 2009, p. 229).

The upcoming chapter aims to present the conceptual foundations for developing hypotheses related to the nature of violent non-state actors and their interactions. It does so by analysing how these actors manifest features and attributes of statehood, their interactions with the territory, how and whether they manifest territoriality, and their interactions with each other.

First, the chapter explores multiple definitions provided by authors for the collective “violent non-state actors” and their main characteristics. The elements highlighted lead to the elaboration of a precise definition of “violent non-state actor” as used in this

dissertation. Given the thesis' focus, the chapter then shifts to analysing the definitions of the most common violent organisations, namely terrorist groups, criminal organisations, rebels and insurgencies, their similarities and differences.

Second, in line with this dissertation's definition of geopolitics in socio-spatial terms, the chapter examines how authors have explained the relationship between VNSAs and territory, as well as the interactions these groups have with each other within the illicit system.

Third and last, the chapter delves into previous literature's explanation of how violent actors approach governance, as well as features and attributes of what it identifies as "violent statehood", intended as the capacity of a VNSA to have a permanent population, a defined geographical territory, a government structure, and to enter into relationships with other VNSAs. This last part lays the groundwork for developing hypotheses surrounding the factors that contribute to a greater or lesser degree of features and attributes of statehood by VNSAs.

3.2. Defining Violent Non-State Actors

In today's complex global landscape, various groups operate beyond the boundaries of law and frequently resort to violence, posing a significant threat to national and international security and stability. These groups, which may be referred to as pirates, terrorists, rebels, freedom fighters, or criminals, collectively form a diverse category of actors. However, a precise definition of this

collective remains a matter of ongoing debate and ambiguity. The term “violent non-state actor” is commonly employed as a neutral label, which does not entail the adoption of a normative position, and therefore cannot be used in diplomatic contexts (Grävingholt et al., 2007, p. 22).

This definitional challenge is mainly due to three main reasons. Firstly, scholars (Grävingholt et al., 2007) argue that the language used to describe the majority of these actors is inherently partisan and politically charged (Petrasek, 2000). This bias is evident in the often-cited quote by Laqueur “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” (Laqueur, 1987, p. 302). This saying illustrates how the perception of these actors can vary significantly based on the perspective of those studying or engaging with the phenomenon. Beyond the context of terrorist organisations, similar debates arise surrounding military juntas, rebel groups, and even organised crime entities (Glenny, 2009).³²

³² Throughout the course of this dissertation's research, it became evident that various authors employed different definitions to characterise the same groups. For instance, an article by Roland Marchal (2007) highlighted how entities involved in the Somalian civil war were portrayed differently, labelled as either 'warlords' or 'terrorists,' in an attempt to comprehend the intricacies of complex crises – only for this to complicate the understanding of the conflict. The literature review echoed this discourse, particularly in the context of the Taliban regime, where there was an ongoing debate regarding the distinctions between “warlordism” and “terrorism” (Giustozzi & Ullah, 2007). The same group is also referred to as a "rebel" group by other authors (Terpstra, 2020).

Secondly, retrieving data about these organisations is particularly challenging (Kenney, 2007). As they operate primarily within illicit domains, often relying on non-transparent means, these groups are shrouded in secrecy and have a particularly favourable attitude towards violence. This opacity not only makes it difficult to obtain reliable information, but also deters individuals from sharing said information without the fear of potential reprisals.³³

A third, less explored, challenge is the historical continuity of violent non-state actors and their heterogeneity (Berti, 2016; Grävingsholt et al., 2007; Hofmann & Schneckener, 2011). While these groups have evolved and expanded in size, power, and demands, to become one of the most important security threats of the new millennium,³⁴ they are by no means a recent phenomenon. However, over the centuries, they have adapted, changing their characteristics, goals, structures, and methods, thereby complicating researchers' efforts to identify consistent patterns.

Despite these challenges, some scholars have ventured to provide some collective definitions. Notably, Thomas, Kiser, and Casebeer (2005) are among the main authors that have focused on these actors, referring to them as “violent non-state actors”. According to

³³ This research was no stranger to such challenge. This and other limitations to this research can be found in the Introduction to this dissertation.

³⁴ See, for instance, how the priority given to terrorism and organised crime as security threats changed in the European Union Internal Security Strategies in the first two decades of the 21st century (Council of the European Union, 2010; European Commission, 2019).

these scholars, VNSAs are “organisations that exist and operate outside the classical state system, resorting to collective violence to achieve goals” (Thomas et al., 2005, p. 9). They offer a broader definition: “a non-state organisation that uses collective violence” (Thomas et al., 2005, p. 9). According to these authors,

“VNSAs are much more than individuals armed with small weapons (...). These are merely the most visible elements of the organisations. The VNSAs themselves have all different characteristics, goals, sizes, and methods” (Thomas et al., 2005, p. 9).

Similarly, Schneckener (2009) employs the term “armed non-state groups” (ANSGs) to describe these organisations. He acknowledges the differences in size, aspirations (whether territorial or not), methods (whether they prefer the use of physical or psychological violence), and goals (political-ideological or purely economic) of the different organisations. However, he identifies four common traits that unite them:

“Generally speaking, armed non-state groups are (i) willing and capable to use violence for pursuing their objectives and (ii) not integrated into formalised state institutions such as regular armies, presidential guards, police or special forces. They, therefore, (iii) possess a certain degree of autonomy with regard to politics, military operations, resources, and infrastructure. They may, however, be supported or used by state actors whether in an official or informal manner. (...)

Finally, they (iv) are shaped through an organisational relationship or structure that exists over a specific period of time” (Schneckener, 2009, pp. 8–9).

Grävingsholt, Hofmann and Klingebiel (2007) base their definition on a project on armed groups conducted at the University of Calgary, Canada, referring to these entities as “non-state armed groups” (NSAGs). They define NSAGs as “groups that challenge the state’s monopoly of power by their actions” (Grävingsholt et al., 2007, p. 14). On a similar line, Petrasek (2000, p. 5) provides a generic definition of “armed groups” as groups that are armed, employ violence to achieve their objectives, and are not under state control. Finally, Benedetta Berti (2018) thoroughly explores these organisations, describing them as “violent and criminal groups”. She stands out among authors for her emphasis on the illicit angle that pervades these organisations.

A review of the existing literature on the subject reveals several common assumptions that warrant considerations when discussing violent non-state actors:³⁵

- (I) **Violent non-state actors are social organisations that are goal-directed.** Multiple authors (Berti, 2018; Collier & Hoeffler, 2000; Schneckener, 2009) emphasise that every

³⁵ To reduce confusion and ensure consistency, from this point forward, the dissertation will use the term "violent non-state actors" aside from when it explicitly cites other authors. While they slightly differ, definitions for ANSAs, VNSAs, AGs, ANSGs, and so on all include the actors included and analysed in the dataset.

VNSA has goals, which often fall into either profit or political categories. It is important to note utilitarian and ideological objectives are not mutually exclusive.³⁶ This is particularly well-explained by Diane Davis, who argues that

“The range of activities in which today’s armed actors engage raises important questions about the rather simplistic ‘greed versus grievance’ dichotomy that has dominated the literature on non-state armed actors, suggesting not only that grievance is hardly a universal motivation behind the mobilization of non-state armed actors, but also that the concept of greed may be just as misguided” (Davis, 2009, p. 222).

(II) Violent non-state actors are social organisations that have a networked structure (Grävingholt et al., 2007; Schneckener, 2009; Thomas et al., 2005). Grävingholt, Hofmann, and Klingebiel (2007) also argue that VNSAs not only do they share a defined structure, but also often rely on a social³⁷ and income-generating base. This

³⁶ For this reason, this dissertation decided to include terrorist or rebel organisations that act in conjunction, merge with, or adopt tactics of criminal organisations, and *vice versa*. For instance, Paul Collier defines "rebellion as a distinctive form of organized crime that differs from other crime in its objective, which is the predation of the rents on natural resource exports"(Collier, 2000, p. 839). See page 133 for more information about the crime-terror nexus.

³⁷ The second section of the chapter will highlight the importance for a violent group to rely on a social base to build legitimacy, authority, and to achieve their goals. In the words of Baylouny:

structure may be hierarchical or more loosely organised. According to Schneckener (2009), with the advent of the twentieth-first century, organisations have grown to prefer the latter structure.

(III) Violent non-state actors are social organisations that do not abide by international and national laws. VNSAs are actors that are both illicit and illegitimate, they go against the law, and they are sanctioned by it. For instance, Thomas, Kiser and Casebeer argue that VNSAs are

“Illegitimate as their goals typically put them at odds with the states goals challenging state authority, engaging economic activity deemed inappropriate or conducted outside the white market, or pursuing goals generally deemed as socially undesirable make them targets of the state - or at least that part of the state system the VNSA has not been able to corrupt” (Thomas et al., 2005, p. 10).

Schneckener also highlights the role of non-state armed actors as antagonist to the state, in terms of use of force, but also because “non-state armed actors generally do not

"These actors and their authority are non-traditional or longstanding; they are newly successful, self-made leaders. They establish authority through services to the community and legitimate it in terms of religion, identity, or violence" (Baylouny, 2010, p. 136).

care a great deal for the distinction made by humanitarian international law between combatants and non-combatants” (Schneckener, 2009, p. 14).³⁸

(IV)(Most) Violent non-state actors are social organisations that are transnational in nature. As explained in the previous chapters, globalisation, the advance in technology and the increase of cross-border movement have also implied that groups that were originally exclusively operating at a local level, now increasingly rely on structures that cross international borders.³⁹ Authors (Berti, 2016, 2018; Schneckener, 2009) highlight that VNSAs differ according to the spatial-geographical scale and scope of their operations. According to Schneckener,

“Some groups simply cooperate across borders with other organisations. (...) In other cases, groups build up their own transnational ties and networks, mainly for support and financial and logistical purposes, by using for example diasporas, NGOs, cultural

³⁸ While the majority of authors put violent non-state actors at odds with the state, other authors define different types of interactions between states and VNSAs, ranging from opposition, to competition, to cooperation (Davis, 2009). Considering that the goal of the dissertation is to look at groups that represent an alternative to the states they operate in, the analysis exclusively deals with those groups that either oppose or compete with the main state.

³⁹ It should also be highlighted that sometimes, the official borders of a state do not coincide with the ones aspired by a violent non-state actor.

organisations, businessmen, ethnic and religious ties” (Schneckener, 2009, p. 14).

However, the same as for these organisations’ goals, the boundaries between local and global are ever-shifting (Berti, 2018).

(V) Violent non-state actors are social organisations that interact with the environment. Thomas, Kiser and Casebeer argue that “all violent non-state actors exist within an environment that can create or prevent, can enable or inhibit, and can influence [them] for good or for bad” (Thomas et al., 2005, p. 10). The relationship between these illicit organisations and the environment will be studied more in-depth in the following sections of this chapter. However, it is important to note that an actor’s behaviour, and in particular its decisions to engage in governance provision or violence, will largely depend on its interactions with the environment.

For instance, an increased level of autonomy, such as the one offered by a fragile parent state, allows the VNSA to interact more with the local population, extract more resources, and so on. According to Ruaudel, the environment’s macro-level dynamics, especially conflict situations, also influences the participation and the degree of interactions of the VNSA with other actors (Ruaudel, 2013, p. 19).

Additionally, the more they interact with the environment, the more VNSAs are found to engage in the provision of material and immaterial resources to group members and surrounding communities (Nizzero, 2018).

(VI) Violent non-state actors are social organisations that enjoy a certain degree of autonomy to make their own strategic choices. To Aydinli (2016), two criteria define violent and criminal organisations: their ability to rely on violence, and their distance from the state. While operating within a parent state, VNSAs function outside what the state and the international community deem legal and enjoy a certain degree of autonomy in their decision-making processes. This is because they often dispose of resources and operate in non-transparent or sanctioned channels. Lack of recognition and the so-called mapping of territories governed by VNSAs as “ungoverned spaces” (Clunan & Trinkunas, 2010)⁴⁰ gives them enough legitimacy to operate undisturbed, and to rely on unconventional, or illegitimate methods, such as the use of illegitimate force.

(VII) Violent non-state actors are social organisations that deliberately use collective violence.⁴¹ Collective

⁴⁰ See Chapter 1 and 2.

⁴¹ The decision to focus on the term "collective violence" rather than "armed force", and therefore name these organisations "violent non-state actors", is related to the fact that the former allows to include ways of exerting violence that

violence is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as

“The instrumental use of violence by people who identify themselves as members of a group – whether this group is transitory or has a more permanent identity – against another group or set of individuals, in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives.” (Krug et al., 2002)

In relation to VNSAs, Thomas, Kiser and Casebeer (2005) add that collective violence can be defined as that organised action that causes physical or psychological injury, that it is perpetrated by at least two individuals following a coordination between them, and that it is asymmetric and non-conventional in nature. This excludes, consequently, conflicts as defined in international law. As they deliberately use collective violence, the authors argue, these groups

“Resort not only to random or opportunistic aggression. (...) Collective violence is really an extension of collective action, which is coordinated

do not necessarily require the individual to be equipped with a weapon. As a result, forms of psychological violence and intimidations, which are tactics often preferred by terrorist organisations and organised crime groups, can be included. Additionally, the term "collective violence", as per the WHO definition, already comprises the idea of armed force.

action by the members of the group in pursuit of common ends” (Thomas et al., 2005, p. 9).⁴²

3.2.1. Defining rebel, terrorist and organised criminal groups

In the realm of violent non-state actors, rebel groups, terrorist organisations, and organised crime groups are a phenomenon that has been widely studied by academics and policymakers. Over time, academia has found common threads that set these entities apart from other forms of VNSAs (Makarenko, 2004; Mampilly, 2011; Picarelli, 2006; Schmid, 1996; Shelley & Picarelli, 2002) or at least deserve them special consideration.

On the one hand, terrorist organisations and rebel groups emerge as violent non-state actors driven by political motives, engaging in a perpetual state of conflict and competition with the parent state (Dishman, 2001; Schmid, 1996; Williams, 2007). On the other hand, organised crime groups predominantly pursue economic gains, nurturing a relationship with the state that vacillates between embryonic and parasitic (Napoleoni, 2004; Schmid, 1996; Shelley & Picarelli, 2002). In essence, while the former act as challengers to the *status quo* and the broader international order, the latter often

⁴² Other authors like Schneckener (2009) argue that armed non-state groups use force against civilians. However, as there are instances of terrorist organisations, rebels, and guerrillas, to name a few, attacking non-civilian targets, the dissertation preferred not to focus too much on whom was the recipient of VNSAs' collective violence.

assume the role of preservers, siphoning the life from international relations and corrupting it from within.

Nevertheless, delving into the definitions of “insurgency”, “terrorism”, and “organised crime” exposes challenges akin to those faced in elucidating other concepts within this dissertation, such as “geopolitics” and “violent non-state actors”.

Firstly the inherent political nature of Security Studies renders them susceptible to particularism (Ganor, 2002; Shanahan, 2016). In broad terms, labels such as “insurgency”, “rebellion”, “terrorism” or “organised crime” are affixed to groups operating outside of the boundaries of the law and which, in a way or another, undermine public interest.⁴³ However, defining what is “legal”, what constitutes a criminal activity, and what constitutes “public interest” for a particular regime is not an easy task. It happens, then, that elites may exploit such definitions to exert pressure or silence those who threaten their vested interests.⁴⁴

Secondly, policymakers and scholars grapple with the arduous task of establishing universal definitions for these terms. Achieving clarity in legal framework is essential; however, to do so it is vital

⁴³ See, for instance, the UK’s government 2013 Serious Organised Crime Strategy, which argues that “Serious and organised crime can have a destabilising impact on the governance of countries of strategic importance to our national security” (UK Government, 2013, p. 15).

⁴⁴ For instance, authors have highlighted the risk of weaponisation of anti-financial crime standards and terrorist designations by authoritarian regimes to silence opposition (Reimer, 2022).

to demarcate the elements relevant to specific activities and groups. For instance, definitions surrounding *what* constitutes organised crime (e.g., racketeering, fraud, kidnapping, etc.) vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Nevertheless, there is a broader international consensus on the fact that such activity operates outside the realm of the law (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GITOC), 2021). As noted by van Lampe,

“In the study of organised crime, two distinct aspects need to be discussed, the reality of organised crime on the one hand and its conceptualization on the other. The reality of organized crime consists of a myriad of mostly clandestine, diverse and complex aspects of the social universe. These do not readily fall into place to form an easily identifiable entity” (Von Lampe, 2001, p. 100).

Starting from organised crime, Schelling (1971) provides one of the broadest definitions. The author defines it as “a society that seeks to operate outside of the control of the (...) people and their governments” (Schelling, 1971, p. 644). Ruggiero expands on this definition, emphasising key features that appear in multiple academic definitions of the subject, such as the number of the individuals involved, the scale of the groups’ illegal activities, which surpass conventional criminality, their endurance over time, and the sustained and uninterrupted character of their illicit activities (Hutchinson & O’Malley, 2007; Ruggiero, 2019, p. 50).

At the international level, organised crime was officially defined in the United Nations Palermo Convention of 2000. However, during the drafting of the Convention, consensus proved elusive regarding a general definition of “organised crime”. Consequently, the decision was made to conceptualise what policymakers meant by “organised crime group” instead. This resulted in the following definition:

“[An organised crime group is] a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences established pursuant to this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit” (UNODC, n.d.).

Schmid (2018) highlights the problematic nature of this definition due to its breadth, encompassing a wide array of crimes that are both of the “underworld” and the “upperworld” (that is, white-collar crime). Furthermore, Schmid notes a conspicuous absence in this definition, which fails to acknowledge

“the conspiratorial, secret society character of organised crime groups which can in some times and places even amount to be part of a parallel shadow state, next to - or even inside - the official state” (Schmid, 2018, p. 4).

Van Dijk adds further nuances by pointing out that this definition overlooks several other defining features, including the proactivity of organised crime groups for extreme violence, their corruption of

officials, their infiltration into the legitimate economies and interference in the political process, and their parasitic relationship with the parent state (Van Dijk, 2007, pp. 146,148,157).⁴⁵

Comparable definitional challenges surface when dealing with the definitions of two violent phenomena imbued with political significance: “terrorism”⁴⁶ and “insurgency”.⁴⁷ Starting with the former, almost every academic and institutional definition converges on three key features: the political nature of the act, the deliberate use of violence against civilians, and the fact that perpetrators are non-state actors. However, the conceptualisation of the term remains a contentious issue, for policymakers and scholars alike. Unlike for organised crime, the United Nations General Assembly has thus far failed to reach consensus on a legally binding definition, acceptable to the majority of the 193 member states.

A draft definition, included in the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, exemplifies this discord, with its article 2 characterised by broadness and vagueness and defining international terrorism as:

“Any person commits an offense within the meaning of the present Convention if that person, by any means, unlawfully and intentionally, causes:

⁴⁵ See section b for further characteristics of organised criminal groups.

⁴⁶ In his book "Political Terrorism", Schmid provides more than 100 definitions, gathered from the academia, government documents, and other sources, of what is defined as "terrorism" (Schmid, 1996).

⁴⁷ This dissertation uses the terms "rebel" and "insurgent" interchangeably.

- (a) Death or serious bodily injury to any person; or
- (b) Serious damage to public or private property, including a place of public use, a State or government facility, a public transportation system, an infrastructure facility or to the environment; or
- (c) Damage to property, places, facilities or systems referred to in paragraph 1 (b) of the present article resulting or likely to result in major economic loss, when the purpose of the conduct, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.” (Draft Comprehensive Convention against International Terrorism. A/59/894, 2000).

The definition of rebel groups presents a similar conundrum. According to Rapoport, the distinction between terrorists and rebels lies in the fact that the former “operate unfettered by military rules governing violence” (Rapoport, 2022, p. 3). Mampilly employs the term “rebels” and “insurgents” interchangeably, defining them as “armed factions that use violence to challenge the state” (Mampilly, 2011, p. 3). He further distinguishes these groups from militias, but not terrorists,⁴⁸ on the grounds that militias may or may not include

⁴⁸ Mampilly refrains from using the term "terrorist" in his work and offers a thought-provoking insight into his deliberate choice not to employ the term, which he places on par with "freedom fighter" and "revolutionary". He characterises it as a "politically loaded" expression (Mampilly, 2011, p. 3). In contrast, this dissertation has chosen to employ various terms such as "rebel," "terrorist," or others, instead of "violent non-state actor", only when multiple

a broader range of armed factions that use violence, including those working alongside government forces.

Given the extensive debates within academia and policy circles concerning the definition of these groups, this dissertation has opted not to focus on the definitions of the general phenomena. Instead, it dedicates greater attention to academic analyses of the characteristics exhibited by rebel, terrorist, and organised crime groups.

Furthermore, for the sake of consistency, this dissertation employs definitions for these typologies elaborated by Alex Schmid – one of the key authors on the issues of political and criminal violence. Schmid combined several academic definitions of “terrorism”⁴⁹

reputable authors or sources define a particular organisation as such. In cases where no consensus prevails, the umbrella term "VNSA" has been consistently utilised throughout this dissertation.

⁴⁹ Schmid (2011, p. 74) underlines 10 core features of terrorism:

1. The demonstrative use of violence against human beings;
2. The (conditional) threat of more (violence);
3. The deliberate production of terror or fear in a target group;
4. The targeting civilians, non-combatants and innocents;
5. The purpose of intimidation, coercion and/or propaganda;
6. The fact that it is a method, tactic or strategy of waging conflict;
7. The importance of communicating the act(s) of violence to larger audiences;
8. The illegal, criminal and immoral nature of the act(s) of violence;
9. The predominantly political character of the act;
10. Its use as a tool of psychological warfare to mobilize or immobilize sectors of the public."

with conceptualisations of what constitutes a terrorist organisation, or a terrorist group as follows:

“A ‘terrorist group’ is a militant, usually non-state, clandestine organisation with political goals which – by definition – engages, in whole or in part of its activities, in terrorism, that is, a communication strategy for psychological (mass) manipulation whereby mainly unarmed civilians (and non-combatants such as prisoners of war) are deliberately victimised in order to impress third parties (e.g. intimidate, coerce or otherwise influence a government or a section of society, or public opinion in general), with the help of portrayals of demonstrative violence in front of witnessing audiences and/or by means of induced coverage in mass and social media.” (Schmid, 2018, p. 7).

In the realm of insurgents, Schmid refrains from presenting a definition but posits that the line between a rebel and a terrorist becomes blurred when the former engages, without provocation, in indiscriminate, unilateral violence against unarmed civilians (Schmid, 2023, p. 15). Therefore, “terrorism” is regarded more as a practice that may or may not be adopted by the violent organisation. The classification as either “terrorist” or “rebel” then hinges on whether a group employs indiscriminate violence against civilians.

Finally, similarly to what he had done to defining a terrorist group, Schmid provides a definition for organised crime:

“a violence-prone, profit-oriented clandestine organisation that provides, on a black market, illegal services or illegally obtained licit or illicit products for which there is a substantial demand - but one that governments or regular free market operators do not or cannot meet. The group’s structure might be family- or clan-based and hierarchical, or consist of networks shaped more by the organisation’s type of activities (drug trafficking, prostitution, racketeering, fraud, arms trafficking, migrant smuggling, counterfeiting, money-laundering, gambling, internet-based extortion, contract killing, etc.)” (Schmid, 2018, p. 8).

3.2.2. Rebels, terrorists and criminal organisations: similarities and differences

As seen, the concepts of “terrorism”, “insurgency”, and “organised crime” present unique challenges in terms of precise definitions. However, by examining these definitions, it is possible to gain a clearer understanding of the characteristics each organisation. These groups fall under the definition established in dissertation for violent non-state actors. A review of the literature on these groups reveals several crucial elements⁵⁰:

⁵⁰ As previously mentioned, the distinction between terrorist and rebel organisations hinges on their approach to indiscriminate violence. Nevertheless, the literature review illuminated the fact that scholars have frequently employed these terms interchangeably. Consequently, unlike organised crime groups, the task of differentiating between these categories and assigning specific characteristics to each group presents a challenge which is not easy to overcome.

- **They are goal oriented:** As previously discussed, terrorist and rebel organisations often share political goals, while members of organised criminal groups are motivated by a broader spectrum of reasons, primarily personal enrichment (Schmid, 1996).
- **They have a network structure:** there is a consensus among authors regarding these groups' transition from a pyramidal, hierarchical structure to a more decentralised network structure. Shelley and Picarelli argue that network structures help these organisations conceal their leadership from authorities, and that resemble modern 'flat' business structures" (Shelley & Picarelli, 2002, p. 307).
- **They do not abide by international and national laws:** several authors highlight how these groups stand in opposition to the state (Picarelli, 2006; Schmid, 1996, pp. 66–67), acting illicitly, illegally, and secretly (Schmid, 1996, 2018; Shelley & Picarelli, 2002; Wang, 2010).
- **They are (often) transnational in nature and their activity disregards geopolitical constraints;**
- **They interact with the surrounding environment,** including, for instance, local populations and local authorities. Authors (Felbab-Brown & Forest, 2012) report that common factors in a specific environment such as access to weapons, illicit economies, or safe havens are pivotal for the type and success of an organisation's activities.

- **They enjoy a certain degree of autonomy to make their own strategic choices;**
- **They deliberately use collective violence to pursue their goals.**

The literature review highlights several similarities among these groups:

- I. **They are rational actors** (Dishman, 2001; Schmid, 1996; Wang, 2010).
- II. **They recur to similar tactics such as the use of violence or the threat of its use** (Dishman, 2001; Schmid, 1996, 2018; Shelley & Picarelli, 2002; Wang, 2010). However, Ruggiero denotes, organised crime groups use violence as a supplementary tool for negotiation, while terrorists as a means to achieve radical political change (Ruggiero, 2019, p. 53). Similarly, Schmid (1996) argues that terrorist organisations tend to be less discriminate in their use of violence than criminals. That is the main definitional difference when distinguishing them from rebels (Schmid, 2023).
- III. **They rely on criminal activity to sustain their activities** (Hutchinson & O'Malley, 2007; Napoleoni, 2004; Schmid, 2018; Williams, 2007). As they stand in opposition to the state, these groups operate in secrecy and act both illicitly and illegally. They also need a constant revenue stream to finance their activities. As a result, the preservation and growth of illicit economies becomes a primary goal for both

organisations, regardless of their original motives. Some authors argue that, as soon as they internationalise their base, the financial streams deriving from illicit activities mix with legitimate structures (Shelley & Picarelli, 2002, p. 308). According to Hutchinson and O'Malley, the need to survive in illegality requires organised crime to generate endurance practices that can be summarised as

“(i) A capacity to threaten and deliver violence as a means of securing external compliance, (...); (ii) the development and encouragement of systematic corruption designed to neutralize law enforcement and (...) to produce a legal environment favourable to its activities; (iii) the development of techniques for securing the ongoing loyalty of members; (iv) the repeat performances of acts of crime in order to provide a steady and reliable income stream” (Hutchinson & O'Malley, 2007, p. 1101).

- IV. **They recruit new members from a similar pool of individuals** (Schmid, 2018). Loyalty is also a shared characteristic, although maintaining it may be more challenging for organised crime groups due to the lack of ideological attachment (Dishman, 2001). Schmid (2018, p. 14) also notes that in all types of organisations, for a member to leave the group is difficult, although not impossible.
- V. **They may engage in governance** (Campana and Varese, 2018; Mampilly, 2011; Sanderson, 2004). To Sanderson

(2004, p. 53), these groups provide social services, even though the frequency of these activities is higher among terrorist organisations. For Forest, illicit economies are an essential central and primary means for the local population in those areas of contested governance by terrorist or criminal organisations and the parent state (Forest, 2012).

Regarding criminal organisations, Campana and Varese (2018) categorise the different types of criminal groups and introduce three conceptual variations: production, trade and governance. Production groups focus on manufacturing illegal goods and services, such as drug cultivation. Trade groups specialise in trafficking and marketing illegal goods. Finally, governance-type organised crime groups seek to establish authority and legitimacy over a territory, effectively resembling the state (Breuer and Varese, 2022).

Authors (Napoleoni, 2004; Schmid, 1996; Shelley & Picarelli, 2002) also point out a handful of key differences:

- I. **Their goals:** terrorist and rebel organisations would normally have political aspirations, in contrast to organised crime groups, whose aim will primarily be profit generation and maximisation (Schmid, 1996; Williams, 2007). As argued by Whittaker,

“the terrorist is fundamentally an altruist: he believes he is serving a ‘good’ cause designed to achieve a greater good for a wider constituency (...) the

criminal, by comparison, serves no cause at all, just his own personal aggrandizement and material satiation” (Whittaker, 2012, p. 9).

According to this logic, criminals are often motivated by a broader spectrum of emotions, such as anger or revenge, while terrorists and rebels believe their actions are justified by a higher cause.

II. **Their relationship with the State:** while OC groups generally do not seek to overthrow the state, but rather live in a symbiotic or parasitic relationship with state institutions, the goal of the rebels and terrorists is radical political change through violence (Dishman, 2001, pp. 44–45). Similar views are shared by Shelley and Picarelli (2002, p. 309) but not by Susan Strange, who conversely argues that organised crime is a “source of defiance that undermines state efforts to generate voluntary compliance (i.e., legitimacy) from its citizens” (Picarelli, 2006, p. 13, talking about Strange). Louise Shelley had previously taken a similar position, stating that “these organisations (that is transnational organised crime groups) clearly undermine the concept of the nation-state” (Shelley, 1995, p. 463).

III. **Their relationship with money:** the reasons why terrorist and OC groups engage in illicit finance may be different. According to Loretta Napoleoni, while terrorist organisations are interested in raising money as a means to an end, to fund their activities, to organised crime members money is an end *per se*. As a result, while the former focuses

on money disbursement, the latter centres on accumulation (Napoleoni, 2004, pp. 31–33). However, Ruggiero also alleges that, as they attempt to reproduce themselves, terrorist organisations may pursue “a form of empire building that transcends their original political goal” (Ruggiero, 2019, p. 54). Other authors (Walsh et al., 2018) focus on rebel groups’ exploitation of natural resources and illicit economies for the duration of the conflict, but less research is available as to what happens when the conflict ends.

- IV. **Their use of violence:** To reach their political goal, terrorists will be more likely to use indiscriminate violence against civilians, while organised crime members will be more pauper (Schmid, 1996). Other authors focus on “terrorism” as a violence tactic used by rebel groups instead of civil warfare tactics (Fortna, 2015). Dishman adds that terrorists will aim to kill a significant number of people rather than rely on targeted attacks, like OC groups would, and would also target “symbolic structures (...) seeking to attract national and international attention to an enduring cause” (Dishman, 2001, p. 45).
- V. **Their messaging:** Due to the political element behind their aspirations, terrorist and rebel organisations will also be more prone to claim responsibility for their acts, while organised crime groups prefer to remain concealed (Schmid, 1996). In a 2018 revision of his initial analysis of the

relationship between terrorism and organised crime, Schmid added that

“when brought to trial, political terrorists usually admit to their deeds (though they refuse to see them as crimes) (...) Members of organised crime groups generally try to downplay the degree of their involvement in crime” (Schmid, 2018, p. 13).

3.3. Geopolitics of violent non-state governors? Analysing VNSA-VNSA interactions

The preceding sections of this chapter underscored how part of the literature on violent non-state actors focusses on their increasing involvement in governance tasks and their interaction with the surrounding environment. When addressing violent non-state actors,

“Even when it comes to assessing actors traditionally assumed to have no vested concern in legitimacy or governance (...) a closer look reveals a more nuanced picture. Territorial control does indeed play an important role for a number of criminal actors” (Berti, 2018, p. 277).

Chapter 1 also emphasised how the contemporary geopolitical landscape is characterised by the construction of territorial states acting “in conjunction with the construction of networks to enable flows across the globe.” (Flint, 2016, p. 177). Chapter 2 further noted that territorialisation, and with it, features and attributes of statehood, are a process that can be, and is, continuously contested.

As already established in this dissertation, non-state communities exist independently from the State. Much like the relationships among non-state communities are founded on sets of allegiances, loyalties, and competition, violent non-state communities are increasingly interconnected. Within this framework, violent non-state governors are in constant tension and struggle for their own survival, not only in opposition to the State, but to other violent actors that may emerge. The Hobbesian reality of *homo homini lupus* applies more to VNSAs than to any other non-state actor. However, this does not imply that VNSAs operate in isolation. On the contrary, in today's interconnected world, it is nearly impossible for any actor in the international sphere to exist in isolation.

According to Flint (2016), contemporary geopolitics and notion of power are strongly embedded in the creation of networks of opportunity or advantage across political boundaries. These networks are neither good nor bad, but rather are “political constructs used for political ends” (Flint, 2016, p. 184). Flint introduces the concept of “geopolitical codes” which represents the manner in which an actor orients itself to the world. These codes are also the result of the shifting geopolitical relations that occur between the actor and other participants to the international arena. As such, through a code, the actor identifies potential and current allies and enemies, the means of maintaining alliances, forging new ones, facing enemies, and justifying previous actions to domestic and global audiences (Flint et al., 2009, p. 608).

When engaging with each other, violent non-state actors follow a similar logic, creating geopolitical codes by making relationship calculations concerning the state and other non-state actors. Chapter 2 previously addressed non-state actors' interactions with the state. This section then explores the types of interactions that are established among VNSAs.

Chapter 2 acknowledged that, even when some form of cooperation exists with the parent state, the mere presence of a violent non-state actor within its territory – as it is an illicit presence, challenging the monopoly over the use of force – inevitably leads to a contrast with the state itself. However, violent non-state actors are all part of the illicit underworld, and as such the behaviour may differ. The literature on VNSA-VNSA interaction is however relatively limited, with a significant focus on the terror-organised crime nexus, particularly the relationship between drug trafficking groups and terrorist organisations (Makarenko, 2004; Schmid, 2018). The available literature also tends to examine relationships between violent non-state actors that are of the same typology (terrorists with terrorists, OC with OC, and so on).

Two points need to be made regarding the analysis of this dissertation. First, it exclusively focusses on the relationship among violent non-state actors that operate within the same territory. This is reflected in the way the actors of the database were selected. The main reason behind this is that the goal is to see whether the fact that they both aspire to the same territory leads to an increase or decrease in manifestations of attributes and features of statehood.

Second, rather than analysing all possible VNSA-VNSA relationships, like many authors (Idler & Forest, 2015) do, the dissertation looks at those relationships between violent non-state governors. That is, the focus is to see what happens when a violent actor that not only controls a territory, but also actively engages in governance and presents elements of statehood, interacts with other actors of the same kind (so another violent group engaging in governance).

The literature review reveals that relationships between VNSAs can be categorised into three clusters:

- i. Positive links: in this category, violent non-state actors actively engage with each other, either through a one-time cooperation or long-term allegiances. In the majority of cases, long-term, positive-tie networks are characterised by shared values and norms, and tend to more durable when institutionalised. In some cases, these positive links may lead to the merger of the VNSAs at some point in the relationship.
- ii. Negative links: this category involves active engagement between violent non-state actors, but their relationship is characterised by competition, whether of political or profit-driven nature, or both, and open conflict. This does not necessarily mean that there are no shared values or interest;
- iii. Indifferent or neutral relationship: in this category, violent non-state actors co-exist without engaging with each other.

They share no common value and do not factor each other in their own calculations.

The literature review highlights two motives behind the decision of VNSAs to interact with each other, whether positively or negatively: convenience and shared values.

In a world where violent non-state actors operate within a pre-modern, Hobbesian paradigm, they exist in an anarchic system characterised by constant distrust (Idler, 2012; Idler & Forest, 2015). However, Annette Idler points out that, while “states overcome distrust by establishing rules formalised by laws” (Idler, 2020, p. 9), this approach is inadequate for violent actors operating in an illicit system. Williams (2002b) suggests that criminal actors engage in interactions resembling business networks for joint venture or tactical alliances purposes. Williams’ theory is expanded by Idler (Idler & Forest, 2015), who conceptualises VNSAs relationships based on “distrust-reducing mechanisms”, namely “interest convergence”, and “shared values”. The former works for short-term arrangements, while the latter supports long-term interactions.

Convenience is relatively easy to explain. It can be either political or profit-driven, but it often results in short-lived interactions. For instance, drawing from Phil Williams’ business network theory, Annette Idler describes VNSA interactions as based on “arrangements of convenience” to maximise profits. Convenience underpins short-term agreements, such as spot sales or barter

agreements, as well as tactical alliances that require collaboration with another violent group on a one-off basis, based on immediate benefits and personal considerations (Idler, 2012, pp. 67–70).

However, these are short-term agreements that would not justify the existence of an illicit society. Interactions among VNSAs exclusively based on convenience tend to be unstable, short-lived, and uneventful. To establish enduring interactions, Idler argues, shared values, and mutual trust, are needed:

“Most notably, there is a correlation between the degree of trust and the durability of the arrangements. If there is no trust at all, the VNSAs are likely to fight each other; a minimal degree of trust is necessary in order to engage in spot sales or barter agreements; some more trust is required in order to make a tactical alliance work and so on.” (Idler, 2012, p. 70).

Walther and Leuprecht support the idea that shared values are at the basis of networks with positive ties:

“Positive tie networks also harness more resources, ideas, and knowledge than negative-tie networks since the latter are driven by hatred, avoidance, or conflict. As a result, many centrality measures based on the assumption that social networks serve as conduits for flows of information, advice, or influence, such as betweenness or closeness centrality, are unrealistic in the case of actors in conflict” (Walther et al., 2020, p. 170).

Idler also suggests that the durability of VNSAs interactions depends on how stable and institutionalised the arrangement is. For example, in one of her recent works (Idler, 2020, pp. 1–7), she conceptualises violent non-state group interactions by focussing on the production and distribution of illicit goods. According to the author, illicit supply chain networks happen across four dimensions: (i) an input-output structure, which examines how the chain transforms raw materials into products (e.g. from cultivation to distribution of cocaine), (ii) territoriality, where the supply chain network dispersed across different localities which serve particular functions; (iii) the institutional context, characterised by weak state governance systems, and (iv) the governance structure of the supply chain, which is based on the relationship among the violent non-state actors involved.

To summarise, violent non-state actors create geopolitical codes by making relationship calculations with the primary state and other non-state actors, both positively and negatively. Violent networks are founded on sets of allegiances, loyalties, and competition, through which violent non-state communities will be increasingly interconnected. Convenience and shared values are key motivators for their interactions. While convenience can drive short-term engagements, shared values and trust are necessary for long-term interactions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending the complex web of relationships among violent non-state actors in today's interconnected world. to how non-state communities' relationships.

3.3.1. Terrorist and criminal interactions: the crime-terror nexus

A significant portion of the literature concerning interactions among violent non-state actors primarily centres on either same-type actor interactions, or interactions between terrorist and criminal organisations. This focus arises because, as highlighted in section 3.2, these organisations share numerous traits to the extent that distinguishing between them has become increasingly challenging.

According to several authors (Makarenko, 2004; Shelley & Picarelli, 2002), the advent of globalisation, the end of the Cold War, and the increased permeability of borders have fundamentally altered traits of these groups that were previously considered to be set in stone. While differences still exist among them, the demarcation between terrorist organisations and organised criminal groups has become more blurred in the twenty-first century. Walter Laqueur already noted this trend in the late 1990s, observing that, while a distinction between the two VNSAs clearly existed fifty years prior, “more recently this line has become blurred, and in some cases a symbiosis between terrorism and organized crime has occurred that did not exist before” (Laqueur, 1999, p. 211). A few of years later, in 2001, while analysing the activities of terrorist groups in Colombia and Burma, Dishman argued that “some of today’s terrorist groups have transformed in transnational criminal organisations (TOC) who are more interested in profits than politics” (Dishman, 2001, p. 43).

Thus, different trends emerge: terrorist groups evolving into criminal organisations, criminal organisations becoming politically involved, the merger of terrorist organisations and criminal groups, and these organisations maintaining separate identities while adopting each other's tactics and cooperating as needed.

On the one hand, some terrorist organisations increasingly engage in economic activities, mainly for self-financing purposes (Napoleoni, 2004). Terrorism financing has become a major concern for international regulators akin to money laundering. As some terrorist organisations turn to criminal activities to fund their acts of terrorism, they gradually transition from being a group with political motives to becoming organised crime syndicates - where profit takes the precedence over their initial political objectives. For example, in 2010, the regional anti-money laundering group Inter-Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA) reported instances of Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)'s involvement in the drug trade (GIABA, 2010). Reports of the terrorist organisation's involvement in diamond smuggling were also prevalent in the early 2000s, although little evidence substantiated these claims (Hübschle, 2011, p. 9). Nevertheless, the involvement of terrorist organisations in the West Africa region in criminal activities such as weapons and drug smuggling or corruption was reported in the UN Security Council Report in 2011, arguing that "the lines between Islamic militancy and organized crime are becoming blurred" (UN Security Council, 2011, p. 5).

On the other hand, albeit less frequently, organised crime groups occasionally delve into political activities. The case of Pablo Escobar, the leader of the Medellin cartel who ran for the presidential elections in Colombia in 1982, is a notable example of organised crime groups becoming politically involved. However, this trend extends beyond participation in political elections; at times, organised crime groups engage in terrorist acts to assert their control. Examples include the assassinations of anti-mafia prosecutor Giovanni Falcone in 1992 and judge Paolo Borsellino in 1993 by the Italian mafia. Other studies highlight the increase in the intensity of violence, including homicide, during electoral periods in mafia-affected regions in Italy (Pinotti, 2013, p. 176).

These trends, summarised by authors under terms like “organised crime-terror nexus” or “crime-terror continuum” (Makarenko, 2004, 2021; Makarenko & Mesquita, 2014), indicate the ability by these organisations

“to cooperate to enhance their performance at all levels, to learn from each other, to settle strategically within failed and weak states and to challenge established democracies, as well as to interact with other groups that violently oppose the state” (Carrapico, Irrera and Tupman, 2014, p. 213).

The blurring of these lines has been interpreted differently by researchers, leading to the coining of terms like “crime-terror nexus” and “crime-terror continuum”. These terms, rooted in Latin, describe two distinct phenomena with nuanced semantics. On the one hand, a “nexus” signifies a connection or series of connections

linking two or more things. On the other hand, “continuum” refers to a continuous sequence in which adjacent elements are not perceptibly different from each other, but the extremes are distinct. The same reflects in authors’ use of either “nexus” or “continuum” in their studies on organised crime and terrorist groups’ interactions. Other authors, addressing similar concepts, distinguish between “convergence”, “nexus”, and “transformation” (Williams, 1998).

Research conducted by Tamara Makarenko is key to understand the difference between these conceptualisations. Her studies on the nexus

“have evolved from providing a basic linear model categorizing different forms of the nexus to illustrating a relationship that exists on a series of planes: one operational, one evolutionary and one conceptual” (Makarenko, 2021, p. 1).

Makarenko initially elaborated the notion of “crime-terror continuum”, after observing that, in the post-Cold War period, terrorist organisations had resorted to criminal activities to fund their own due to a lack of the state sponsorship that had characterised the previous period (Makarenko, 2004, p. 130). Much like Williams’ (2002b, 2002a) analysis of non-state actors’ interactions, Makarenko identified seven points of interaction between organised crime groups and terrorist organisations along a continuum. Depending on the operating environment, the actors would slide along the continuum, with varying degrees of

interaction, from alliance to mutation, adoption of some practices of the other group, and full convergence. This last step refers to

“the idea that criminal and terrorist organisations could converge into a single entity that initially displays characteristics of both groups simultaneously; but has the potential to transform itself into an entity situated at the opposite end of the continuum from which it began.”
(Makarenko, 2004, p. 135)

This occurs when a terrorist organisation decides to abandon their political aspirations and fully embraces criminality, or *vice versa*.

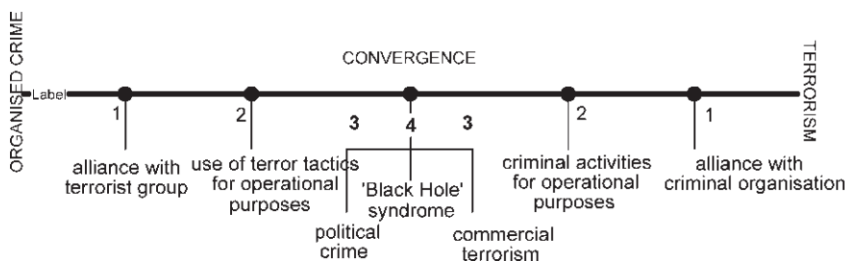


Figure 1: The Crime Terror Continuum (Makarenko, 2004).

Makarenko’s continuum shares similarities with other studies focusing on patterns of associations, between terrorist organisations and OC groups, as well as among violent non-state actors in general. For instance, Curtis and Karacan (2002) highlight three levels of natural progression in these interactions: strategic alliances, direct involvement of terrorist organisations in organised crime activities, and the eventual replacement of ideology by profit. Similarly, Shelley and Picarelli (2005) identify five possible stages across the OC-Terror continuum: activity appropriation, a nexus of

transnational services, a symbiotic relationship, a hybrid group in which both entities merge, and, finally, the transformation of one group into the other if they entirely abandon their original motives.

Makarenko revisited this continuum in a later study (Makarenko & Mesquita, 2014), developing a model that accounts for various linkages between organised crime and terrorist organisations that do not necessarily imply transformation. This refined model, referred to as a “nexus” rather than a continuum, encompasses three planes: an operational plane, in which one group adopts the tactics of the other; an organisational plane, where tactics and methods are appropriated in relation to the other’s groups’ motives; and an evolutionary plane, describing “situations where a terrorist or criminal group transform their tactics and motivations to such an extent that they – by definition – evolve into the other” (Makarenko & Mesquita, 2014, p. 261).

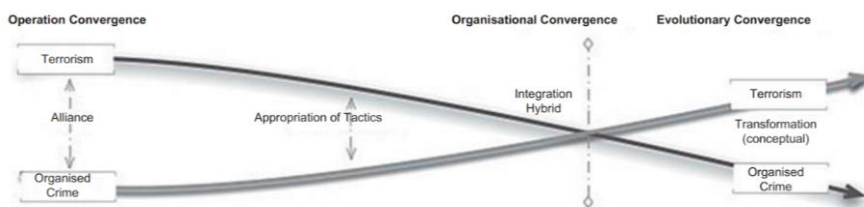


Figure 2: Makarenko’s refined nexus model (Makarenko & Mesquita, 2014).

Authors who focus on the nexus between terrorist and criminal organisations tend to conceptualise these organisations as two distinct typologies of non-state actors with limited collaboration potential. According to most of these authors, the dichotomy “ideology versus profit” discussed earlier is a primary reason

behind the short-lived nature of interactions between these two groups. While recognising the potential for one group to adopt the other's motives, for instance, Dishman argues that there could be either terrorist or criminal organisations, making any form of cooperation short-lived and successful only in the case of tactical, short-term agreements (Dishman, 2001).

Adding to Dishman's interpretation of the OC-Terror Nexus, other authors emphasise shared methods as a basis for engagement between these organisations. Loretta Napoleoni (2004), for instance, highlights the distinction between terrorist organisations, more interested in disbursement than accumulation, and organised crime groups. This convergence in methods but difference in motives is, according to many authors (Dishman, 2001; Sanderson, 2004; Shelley, 2002; Shelley & Picarelli, 2005) the main reason why agreements between these organisations are short-lived. Sanderson (2004) posits that, even though strategic alliances between these organisations are short-term and only tactical, some may evolve into hybrids where criminal activity is a permanent necessity for the terrorist organisation to fund its other violent engagements. In rarer instances, terrorism can serve tactically to organised criminal groups to achieve profit-driven goals, as seen in examples such as the Colombian Cartels' activities.

Other authors interpret the nexus as a sustainable relationship established in relation to the context where these groups operate. Picarelli (2006) introduces the concept of state and sovereignty in determining the longevity of the OC-Terror nexus. He does so as he

starts from the assumptions that lack of trust between terrorists and criminals at the individual level, the risk-averse nature of organised criminal groups at the organisational level, and the difference in motives at the international level would preclude long-term collaboration. As a result, there will be organisations that are “sovereign bound”, to whom the agreements are short-term marriages of convenience. In contrast, “sovereign-free” organisations, which are multi-centric and as a result do not compete for the same state boundaries, engage in long-standing cooperation, resulting in resource-sharing and transnational criminal networks.

According to some other authors, environmental conditions in which they develop influence the establishment of a nexus between terrorist and criminal groups more than motives and tactics. Once again, globalisation is recognised as a factor fostering interaction (Bobic, 2014; Sanderson, 2004). Asal et al. (2015) add that economic factors such as resource constraints or the presence of a shadow economy, social factors such as the presence of impoverished communities, or the shared recruitment pool, and politics, such as state weakness, corruption, or repression are also fundamental to the nexus’ establishment and development.

3.4. Assessing violent non-state actors: literature on violent governance

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 already delved into the various factors that trigger the shift in the *loci* of authority, ultimately reducing the

exclusivity of the state in the provision of governance. Within those chapters, three elements were highlighted:

- Globalisation, which ushered an era of increased acceptance of multiple centres and levels of governance (Borzel et al., 2018, p. 151), economic interconnectedness, and a deterritorialisation of the State;
- A change in patterns of international regimes and their capacity of tackling world problems, coupled with a relocation of politics and new political forces shaping global governance;
- A shift in the definition of security, to include threats that go beyond the traditional military and defence scope and cannot be tackled by traditional means of security.

Despite lacking formal recognition as legitimate actors within the international system, violent non-state actors continue to operate and thrive within delineated territories. Consequently, their activities have a direct impact on the national and economic security of the parent state, as well as on the security of the civilian population residing in these areas, and bear implications for international security at large.

Literature on violent non-state actors has progressively shifted its focus towards understanding how these organisations engage with the territory, exploring overarching frameworks elucidating their interactions with the local population, and unravelling the underlying motives governing their behaviours, including governance provision.

Schneckener (2009) categorises the literature on non-state armed actors into two broad buckets. On the one hand, some scholars classify VNSAs as “spoilers of governance” (Stedman, 1997), portraying them as entities challenging the state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of force. These actors disrupt national security, pose threats to neighbouring states, and thereby imperil both the state and international security. On the other hand, other authors (Arjona, 2016; Mampilly, 2011; Zürcher, 2007) look at non-state armed actors as “governance actors”. In this perspective, these organisations exhibit an interest in, or at least that have the capacity to provide, governance functions.

Consequently, while the former strand of literature perceives VNSAs exclusively as adversaries to the state, or akin to parasites, the latter regards them as competitors. Given the research objectives of this dissertation, this chapter aligns with the latter school of thought. This is grounded in the premise, as expounded in Chapter 2, that effective governance, especially in areas of limited statehood, often grants legitimacy to the provider in the eyes of the local population.

Research on violent governance predominantly stems from studies examining governance provision by rebel groups (Arjona, 2016; Mampilly, 2011). One reason for this focus is that rebel groups tendentially have state-building aspirations. In contrast, other types of VNSAs, driven more by profit motives or oriented towards political aspirations that do not neatly align with the Westphalian model (Podder, 2014, p. 215), have received comparatively less

attention.⁵¹ Nevertheless, scholarly attention has also shifted towards governance provision by warlords, terrorist organisations, and criminal groups (Berti, 2016; Schneckener, 2006). This shift is mainly due to instances of violent governors meeting definitions of different typologies of VNSAs aside from the rebel label, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and its attempt, as the name suggests, to establish a “state”.

These instances underscore the potential for such groups to engage in governance activities and their relentless pursuit of spatial features and performative attributes of statehood. Notably, authors on “violent governance”⁵² have theorised about the provision of governance by violent non-state actors as a means to increase control over spatial features of statehood. Simultaneously, this process indirectly accrues performative attributes such as authority, legitimacy, and effectiveness.⁵³ As such, it is possible to

⁵¹ For rebel governance, see, for instance, Podder's study on the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement's efforts at state-building in South Sudan (1994–2011) and the group's strive for post-conflict legitimacy (Podder, 2014).

⁵² This dissertation uses the term “violent governance” to indicate a type of governance provided by various typologies of VNSAs. This term is used to distinguish it from other authors' analyses on specific types of VNSAs governance, such as “rebel governance” (Arjona et al., 2015; Mampilly, 2011; Podder, 2014).

⁵³ For instance, Huang identifies the creation of the following systems to signify a progressive involvement in governance by violent non-state actors:

- 1) an executive;
- 2) a legislature or regional councils;
- 3) a court or legal system;

conceptualise the idea of “violent statehood” as that capacity of a VNSA to possess spatial features such as a permanent population, a defined geographical territory, a government structure, to enter into relationships with other VNSAs, and to engage in governance in such a way that it accrues performative attributes such as authority, legitimacy, and effectiveness.

Literature on violent governance places an emphasis on two conditions that elucidate the reasons for, and methods of, violent governance provision:

- a) Socio-spatial (geopolitical) conditions: these conditions encapsulate the geographical aspects, including location and resource distribution, within which the violent actors operate. Additionally, they encompass the actors involved, them being the state, the local population, and other competing entities.

-
- 4) a civilian tax system;
 - 5) mandatory boycott of state taxes;
 - 6) a police force;
 - 7) an education system;
 - 8) a healthcare system;
 - 9) a humanitarian relief system;
 - 10) media or propaganda; and
 - 11) foreign affairs" (Huang, 2016, p. 60)."

The establishment of these spatial features leads to the acquisition of performative attributes such as increased legitimacy in the eyes of the local population.

- b) The nature of the violent non-state actors: this condition probes into the motivations driving VNSAs and composition of their structures, shedding light on their organisational dynamics.

3.4.1. Geopolitical conditions

The literature review underscores the pivotal role that socio-spatial (geopolitical) conditions in determining the propensity and feasibility of violent non-state actors to establish alternative governance structures (Berti, 2016, 2018).⁵⁴

Within the realm of literature on violent governance focusing on socio-spatial conditions, two elements emerge: geography, encompassing location and access to resources, and political variables, identified as the presence of specific actors.

- a) Geography (territory and resources).

There is a consensus among scholars examining criminal and terrorist governance surrounding the significance of territory and geographic hot spots in shaping the ability of VNSAs to manifest state-like functions. The geographic characteristics of a territory,

⁵⁴ For instance, Campana and Ducof (2011) identify alternative terrorist governance models that may arise in regions meeting the specific socio-spatial criteria: first, that some states lack the capacity to control spatial features of statehood or fulfil performative attributes of statehood; second, that some primordial structures of governance persist despite the colonial attempts to impose a Westphalian state organisation; third, that the state has willingly or unwillingly delegated authority and other performative attributes to local actors, including violent non-state actors such as criminal or terrorist organisations.

including its strategic location along specific routes, areas that can that would allow refuge, or economically-rich areas resources, significantly influence the emergence of VNSAs enclaves (Berti, 2018; Korteweg, 2008; Williams, 2008).

These same authors (Berti, 2018; Korteweg, 2008; Williams, 2008) underscore several defining characteristics as vital for the formation of a VNSAs enclave:

- Access to abundant natural, human, or other resources, including weapons (Hutchinson & O'Malley, 2007, p. 1096);
- Widespread economic hardship which reduces incentives for the population to fight the presence of violent organisations;
- Geographical conditions that lend themselves to easy protection, and act as a perfect refuge;
- Porous international borders.

These factors not only facilitate the emergence of illicit trafficking routes, but also foster large-scale illicit economies, an appealing incentive for different types of VNSAs. As noted by Annette Idler (2012) territoriality, understood as the dispersion of a supply chain network across various localities to serve specific functions, constitutes one of the four dimensions along which illicit networks develop. Similarly, Korteweg's (2008) "terrorist sanctuaries" are located in areas presenting specific geographic characteristics, such as proximity to targets or economic resources, and likelihood to operate as a refuge or safe haven, or provide economic

opportunities. Moreover, research on the crime-terror continuums stresses that these connections are more likely to occur in those areas where there are large-scale shadow economies (Shelley & Picarelli, 2005).

Areas characterised by low population density and consistent interaction with the local population also wield significant influence. According to Kasfir (2005), service provision assumes paramount importance in rural settings, where garnering popular support proves fundamental to convince the local population to provide guerrillas with food or recruits. In such settings, he argues, violent groups commence introducing structures aimed at delivering social services. Conversely, urban presence by guerrilla diminishes.

Meanwhile, Lessing (2021) observes that the degree of governance exercised by a criminal group hinges on its attachment to the territory. Because of this, “traditional mafias tend to govern their “home” towns and neighbourhoods (...) and have had difficulty penetrating areas dominated by other ethnic and racial groups” (Lessing, 2021, p. 9). Attachment to territory can be also identified in an urban context, as street gangs’ governance activities will be often limited to a specific community, in contrast to prison gangs or larger drug cartels that will operate into corporate structures.

b) Actors

The motivations, capacity, and capability of violent non-state governance are strictly dependent on the ease with which VNSAs can control spatial features of statehood and manifest performative

attributes. Within the spectrum of possible explanations for violent governance, Krasner and Risse (2014, p. 546) list task complexity among the primary factors influencing the degree to which VNSAs engage in the provision of services. Simply put, the simpler the task, the more likely it will be performed. Meanwhile, Arjona contends that the delivery of governance by armed groups is contingent upon their time horizons. She further posits that a second pivotal factor is VNSAs' expectations of finding local resistance or competition - in other words, their expectations on the ease of their settlement as governors. This perspective allows to interpret Arjona's (2016) wartime social order through the lens of task complexity, whereby the presence and behaviour of other actors' in a given territory can heighten or diminish the complexity of governance provision, significantly impacting an organisation's long-term horizons.

However, multiple actors coexist within a specific territory, each exerting distinct influences on the features and attributes of statehood wielded by violent entities.

First, the State. According to Arjona, armed groups with long-time horizons operating in regions characterised by the absence of robust pre-existing institutions tend to give rise to a "rebelocracy" (Arjona, 2016, p. 42). Conversely, when a group operates in a contested territory, lacks an internal order, or is expecting minimal macro-changes in the conflict it is fighting, its horizons become inherently short term (Arjona, 2016, p. 55). As a result, the presence and control of the state are pivotal factors in the realm of violent governance. As Chapter 2 highlighted, non-state actors tend to

flourish in areas of limited statehood, primarily defined as such due to the effective retreat of the state. In places where the state is weak, embryonic states appear, taking roots “solely in situations where the incumbent state is no longer able or willing to pose a challenge to non-state political authority” (Mampilly, 2011, p. 32).

This perspective finds resonance across academia. Hutchinson and O’Malley’s (2007, p. 1096) research underscores that the proliferation of weak or failing states, characterised by the absence of the rule of law, underlies the emergence of areas of violent governance. Similarly, Wickham-Crowley argues that “guerrilla governments arise where the landlord or central government authority has decayed” (Wickham-Crowley, 1987, p. 173). Berman and Laitin (2008) also propose a model for terrorist groups’ public goods delivery that indicates enhanced service provision when the existing public good provision by the parent state is weak.

It can be argued that, given the outlaw status of violent non-state actors, the extent to which authority shifts away from the state directly impacts these actors’ capacity to claim elements of statehood, as well as their ability to regulate, negotiate, and practice effective governance. As Skaperdas succinctly puts it, the existence of organised crime – or in this case, violent non-state actors as a whole – can be attributed to “the existence of a power vacuum and the shortage or absence of ultimate enforcement” (Skaperdas, 2001, p. 180). Conversely, state interventions can significantly affect the capacity, capability, and interests of violent non-state actors in engaging in governance provision.

State presence also influences interactions among different violent non-state actors within a given territory. As previously highlighted by Idler (2012), one of the four dimensions within which illicit supply chain networks happen is institutional contexts where state governance systems are weak. Relationship between terrorist organisations and criminal groups is facilitated by the disappearance of the state: “the nexus is at its most interactive and developed in (post) conflict states where government control is fragmented and extremely weak” (Makarenko & Mesquita, 2014, p. 261). Crime-terror continuums are also more likely to occur in those areas where the state not only has retreated, but where there is high conflict intensity (Shelley & Picarelli, 2005).

Second, violent governance is also contextualised within the dynamic relationship between the violent non-state group and the local population. Pioneering theories of rebel governance put forth by Guevara (1997), Mao (1961) and Cabral (1970, 1972) underscore how rebel organisations recognise the imperative of garnering popular support from the local population in the territories they aspire to control. As a result, they engage in governance practices such as the provision of public goods, but also the provision of shelter, intended as protection from harm,⁵⁵ as a means to secure such support.

Legitimacy building emerges as a central rationale in several theories explaining violent governance provision. Legitimacy serves to streamline and decrease the complexity of multiple tasks, from

⁵⁵ See Chapter 2.

territorial control to the management of illicit economies. Wickham-Crowley (1987), focussing on the rise of guerrilla governance in Latin America, argues that these organisations seek to establish authorities through three “contractual obligations”: protection from harm; provision of the rule of law; and provision of services. These three provisions enhance the group’s legitimacy in front of the eyes of the population, thus conferring authority. Similarly, Krasner and Risse (Krasner & Risse, 2014, p. 546) posit that legitimacy stands as one of the main factors influencing the extent to which external actors, including violent ones, engage in the provision of services. This is because legitimacy allows individual actors to achieve significant outcomes even when they have modestly-institutionalised structures.

VNSA-local population relationships are placed by multiple authors on a spectrum. For instance, Claire Metelits suggests that the “treatment of civilians by insurgent groups ranges along a spectrum from coercive to contractual behaviour” (Metelits, 2009, p. 106). Coercive behaviour is characterised by the extraction of resources without the provision of services, while contractual behaviour equates to violent governance. Similarly, Zahar (2000) outlines typologies of VNSA-local population relationships based on variations in two dimensions: the degree of identification between civilians and the violent group and the type of economic relationship between them. Consequently, relationships can be:

- i. non-existent, if the VNSA relies on independent resources;

- ii. predatory, when the group extorts resources from the local population;
- iii. parasitic, similar to predatory, but with minimal contribution by a violent group; and
- iv. symbiotic, in which the group plays a central role in the local economy.

On this line, Kasfir (2005) also argues that there is a fundamental contradiction in the relation between violent groups and the local population: almost all local population will suffer some way of coercion. As a result, encouraging civilian participation requires expectations of protection, necessitating choices by the group as to when to protect the local population and when to prioritise self-preservation.

Ana Arjona (2016) also introduces different typologies of “wartime social order”. This concept refers to a set of institutions established in a war zone, or rather an area where at least one non-state armed actor is present. The typologies of wartime social order, she contends, vary based on the relationship between the local population and the VNSA. They include domination, when there is no social contract between the violent actor and civilians; surveillance or “aliocracy”, when even though a contract is present, the scope of the VNSA’s intervention is narrow; and “rebelocracy”, when a social contract exists, and non-state armed groups intervene by providing basic services or other forms of governance.

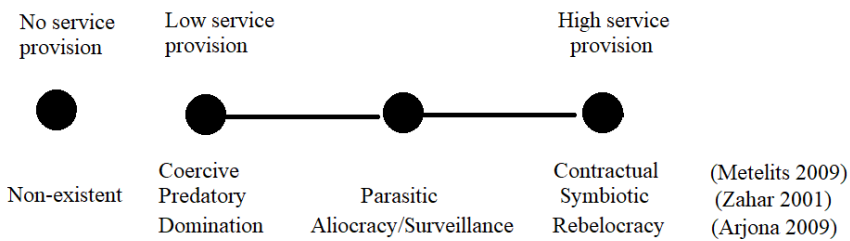


Figure 3: VNSA-local population service provision continuum (adaptation by the author from Arjona, 2016; Metelits, 2009; Zahar, 2000).

Third, the degree of violent governance can also be influenced by the presence of other violent non-state actors. As previously mentioned, task complexity is a pivotal factor in the provision of services by violent non-state actors. When faced with competition from other VNSAs, there is the risk of diluting such efforts. In this context, task complexity is influenced by two types of VNSA-VNSA interactions, as highlighted in this chapter: positive links, encompassing either one-time cooperation or long-term alliances, and negative links, which include competition or open conflict.

Studies demonstrate that a territory where a criminal group operates may attract terrorist organisations:

“Here they offer themselves as protectors of the population against the deficiencies of the states and the predatory behaviour of criminal groups, and in return they expect support for their ideological agenda” (Felbab-Brown & Forest, 2012 in Forest, 2012, p. 176).

Distinguishing between roving and stationary bandits, Olson (1993) also argues that competitive theft by roving bandits diminishes

incentives for production, rendering it unsustainable and unprofitable for both the bandits and the local population. As a result, bandits often find it more advantageous to establish themselves as “stationary bandits” - autocratic entities that monopolise and rationalise theft akin to a form of tax collection (Olson, 1993, p. 568). The acquisition of resources and political influence further motivates violence among rebel groups, as identified by a study by Fjelde and Nilsson (2012).

A brief mention is also warranted regarding other internationally-recognised actors besides the parent state that operate within a territory governed by VNSAs. These entities may range from other internationally recognised states – allies of the parent state, or allies of the violent non-state actors – to international organisations fulfilling peacekeeping roles or other non-state actors such as NGOs providing humanitarian relief or private corporations exploiting local resources. These actors are presumed to escalate the complexity of governance tasks as they either constitute an obstacle to the control and performance of features and attributes of statehood, in the same way as the parent state or other violent non-state actors would;⁵⁶ or act as a competitor in the provision of services, as they act “gap fillers”, supplementing the state (Brass, 2010, p. 3),⁵⁷ and therefore providing an alternative not only to it, but also to the VNSA itself. This diminishes the VNSA’s legitimacy

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Shreirer and Caparini (2005)’s study on private military firms’ provision of the function of shelter against other non-state threats in Chechnya, Syria, or Lebanon.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 2 for more on non-state actors’ role in contesting authority.

in the eyes of the local population, reducing the likelihood of territorial control.

3.4.2. The nature of the violent non-state actor

Multiple researchers on violent governance define it as intrinsically dependent on the nature of the violent non-state actor, encompassing its inclinations and composition. Chapter 2 underscored the traditional association between public service delivery and governance provision, government accountability and features and attributes of statehood. Therefore, territory control and legitimacy building can be interpreted within the broader framework of state-building aspirations.

Benedetta Berti (2018) dissects theories regarding why violent and criminal groups venture into governance, categorising them into four main aspirations: accessing resources; asserting control; increasing legitimacy, and fulfilling state-building aspirations. In one strand of literature, Berti posits that VNSAs may develop “a vested interest in governance if they become concerned with increasing their control over a specific territory and population” (Berti, 2018, p. 275). Here, territoriality plays a pivotal role in exerting control over the local population, by fostering a relationship of dependence (Flanigan, 2014), but also over the territory, by penetrating with centralised infrastructure.

Similarly, territorial and population control can be seen as long-time horizons that can only be attained by an established set of governance practices (Zahar, 2000). For instance, Arjona (2016)

argues that armed groups' strategies, including rebel governance, are contingent upon the VNSA's time horizon and expectations. Consequently, it is more likely to find a rebelocracy established by a group with long-term territorial aspirations (Arjona, 2016, p. 42).

In this regards, Mampilly (2011) contends that natural resources alone cannot account for the variation in violent governance over time. Among several contributing factors, he argues, the group's political goals hold central importance. For instance, if the group seeks to secede, the incentives to provide services to the local population are higher.

Kasfir (2005) argues that, although guerrilla groups engage with the local population to ensure the success of their operations, organisations that intensify their commitment to public service provision to gain popular support are unusual. He (Kasfir, 2005, pp. 272–273) highlights three dimensions that imply a variation on public service delivery, loosely based on the extent of the relationships between violent actors and the local population, namely: whether rebels encourage or coerce civilian participation, whether and how they establish governance structures, and whether they organise civilians to generate high-value goods or services.

While the relationship with and cooperation of civilians are important, Kasfir argues that guerrilla organisations' interest in gaining popular support varies more depending on their goal – thus making the organisation overarching objectives, and therefore nature, more important than engagement with other actors.

Likewise, the structure and the capability of the group to provide governance will have an effect on civilians' legitimacy, rather than the mere presence of civilians themselves.

Kasfir (2005) also emphasises the importance of whether the violent organisation is profit or politically driven. Similarly, Mampilly (2011, p. 28) focusses on economic incentives and the violent group's aspirations. As an example, he argues that warlords provide any public good "solely in pursuit of financial gain" (Mampilly, 2011, p. 29), differing from guerrilla organisations, which may harbour state formation aspirations. However, as mentioned earlier, reducing VNSAs' aspirations to utilitarian or ideological categories oversimplifies their complex reality, as the two are not mutually exclusive (Berti, 2016; Flanigan, 2014). For instance, Gambetta (1988) highlights how mafia groups in Italy collect protection money from the local population in exchange for protection, effectively mirroring what a state legitimately does through tax collection. Following a similar rationale, it could be argued that economic gains can also be one a primary motivator for a violent non-state actor to settle and engage in governance.

Other authors identified in the literature review emphasise that the degree of violent governance hinges not only on the VNSA's interest in governance and motives, but also on its capacity to execute it. For instance, Claire Metelits argues that "rather than resources shaping insurgent behaviour, it is the nature of insurgent competition that determines the way these actors use resources" (Metelits, 2009, p. 105). Similarly to Kasfir (2005), Krasner and

Risse (2014) posit that an actor's institutionalisation influences its provision of services. They argue that "higher legalisation increases the prospects for effective service provision" (Krasner & Risse, 2014, p. 547). Consequently, the more institutionalised and integrated in the system the violent actor is (e.g. through interactions with other non-state actors such as NGOs, or partial recognition by other actors of the international system, or a commitment to participating in the country's political agenda), the more likely it will be to provide services.

The size and composition of the violent group can also bear significance. Research by Blomberg, Gaibullov, and Sandler's (2011, p. 19) suggests that an increase in of the number of members of a terrorist organisation enhances the chances of the group's survival. This aligns with another research by Jones and Libicki (2008, pp. xiv–xv), which indicates that a larger membership often leads a faction to be victorious in war and to last longer in most conflicts. Blomberg, Gaibullov, and Sandler's and Jones and Libicki's arguments about size and survival can also be interpreted through Arjona's concept of long-term horizons: "bigger groups, considering their higher chances of survival, will have a long-term horizon, and therefore will be more likely to provide public services" (Nizzero, 2018, p. 6).

A group's longevity is also potentially a factor that correlates with increased participation in governance. For instance, prior research conducted by this dissertation's author on public service delivery by terrorist groups highlighted that younger groups had the tendency to

engage in public service delivery more than some older organisations (Nizzero, 2018).

Regarding composition, ethnic, cultural, and religious homogeneity among the group's members is associated with governance provision by different authors. Korteweg (2008) suggests that the presence of a particular ethnic or religious community is one of the several elements that makes an area a suitable "terrorist sanctuary". Meanwhile, Mendelsohn (2011) examines the relationship between terrorist organisations and the local population, arguing that foreign fighters may hinder the efforts of the organisation due to their lack of local knowledge about territory composition and conditions. "Sometimes the level of 'foreignness' can be greater than the commonalities, potentially rendering foreign volunteers a divisive factor rather than a force multiplier" (Mendelsohn, 2011, p. 193). Lessing also reports that mafia groups face difficulties in "penetrating areas dominated by other ethnic and racial groups" (Lessing, 2021, p. 9) - and as such a racial or cultural identity is necessary to engage in service provision. However, a homogenous ethnic composition may be a double-edged sword: the same author reports of how multiculturalism in Brazil's prison gangs allows a city-wide hegemony (Lessing 2021).

3.5. Conclusions

This chapter explored literature review on violent non-state actors and their intricate interactions and approach to governance provision. The review underscores that these actors are not a new

phenomenon, but have rather exhibited a growing interest over time in engaging in the provision of services and displaying features and attributes of statehood.

Subsequent to this extensive review, it is possible to formulate a series of hypotheses regarding the factors that influence the extent to which these organisations manifest spatial features and performative attributes associated with statehood. As highlighted, the common trends are the nature of the violent group and socio-spatial conditions such as the geographical attributes of a given territory and the presence of other actors within it. It often appears that authors suggest that is the synergy of these elements that collectively influences the degree of manifestations of violent statehood, rather than indicating one exclusive factor as the main driver of violent governance.

3.5.1. Hypotheses

Drawing from the insights garnered through the literature review, and informed by the theoretical and conceptual framework expounded in PART 1 of this dissertation, the ensuing hypotheses are delineated to address the question of which factors exert influence on the degree to which violent non-state actors exhibit features and attributes reminiscent of statehood:

H1: *The nature of the violent non-state actor is the main driver behind its decision manifest more features and attributes of violent statehood;*

This hypothesis centres on the primary role played by the VNSA's nature in steering its inclination to engage in governance provision. It draws direct correlations from the findings of this chapter's literature review. In alignment with the argument that the provision of services by VNSAs is interwoven with the process of state formation, the hypothesis reflects Mampilly's arguments surrounding the difference in governance provision between politically-driven and profit driven organisations, as well as Krasner and Risse (2014)'s idea of legitimacy.

It then posits that a VNSA with a more national, delimited, and state-centric agenda is more likely to manifest features and attributes akin to those of a state. It also considers Arjona's (2016) and Blomberg, Gaibullov, and Sandler's (2011) arguments insights regarding the nature and composition of jihadist groups, and Mendelsohn's (2011) arguments regarding the possible ineffectiveness of foreign fighters within a terrorist organisation. As such, it formulates three sub-hypotheses:

H1a: Older VNSAs will exhibit a greater number of features and attributes than their younger counterparts.

H1b: Larger VNSAs will demonstrate a greater number of features and attributes than smaller ones.

H1c: More homogenous VNSAs will display a greater number of attributes than culturally, ethnically, or religiously diverse counterparts.

H2: *The nature of the host country is the main driver behind a VNSA's decision to manifest more features and attributes of violent statehood;*

This hypothesis hinges on the pivotal role played by the nature of the host country in steering a VNSA's decision to partake in governance provision. It derives its foundations from the observations made by Mampilly (2011) and Mendelsohn (2011) on the political aspirations of certain VNSAs, particularly rebel and terrorist organisations, which impel them to surpass states in governance provision.

Moreover, this hypothesis builds upon Arjona's (2012) concept of task complexity (where a more competent state poses a greater challenge to the violent actor), and the notion of the retreat of the state and "ungoverned spaces" (Clunan and Trinkunas 2010). A positive correlation between this hypothesis and manifestations of violent statehood would indicate that the extent of the control wielded by the central state – as reflected in its legitimacy, security provision, and public service delivery – significantly impacts the extent to which attributes associated with statehood are manifested by VNSAs.

H3: *The greater or lesser presence of external actors – state and non-state – will determine a VNSA's level of engagement in violent statehood.*

This hypothesis posits that the presence or absence of external actors, both state and non-state, serve as the principal determinant

of a VNSA's level of engagement in governance provision. In line with Arjona's observations (2016, p. 55), it emphasises that the complexity of the task at hand – namely, governance provision and the manifestation of violent statehood – is profoundly influenced by the concurrent existence of other state and non-state actors. Consequently, the third hypothesis of this dissertation bifurcates into two sub-hypotheses:

H3a: Enhanced support from an external force e.g. other governmental actors and other violent non-state actors, augments the likelihood of VNSA's manifestations of attributes and features of statehood.

H3b: Heightened opposition from an external force diminishes the likelihood of VNSAs manifesting attributes and features of statehood.

PART II: ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 4 – A TAXONOMY OF MANIFESTATIONS OF “VIOLENT STATEHOOD”

4.1. Introduction

As explained in Chapter 2, authors agree that there are some attributes that are associated with the State. The chapter demarcated these facets of statehood in two typologies: “spatial features”, encompassing elements of statehood that are directly connected with spatial functions, and “performative attributes”, denoting those aspects that are a direct consequence of the degree of governance of whoever controls the former attributes.

Chapter 3 also delved into the exhibition of manifestations of statehood by non-state actors, and their intricate interactions with states and other non-state actors (violent and otherwise). It also cast a light on how research has been increasingly focussing on the intersection between crime, insurgency, and terrorism, leading to definitional difficulties in distinctly categorising different typologies of VNSAs.

Moving from theory to practice, features and attributes of statehood of violent non-state actors will manifest in different ways. Chapter 3 already dealt with the literature review on those manifestations, in particular as concerns terrorist organisations, rebels, and organised criminal groups.

Outside of theoretical analysis, empirical research has also examined violent governance from different perspectives. First, some studies focused on the intersection between crime and armed conflict (Williams & Felbab-Brown, 2012), both in terms of exploring the implications of such connection and the reasons behind the involvement of insurgents in criminal activities (Asal et al., 2018). Second, other research (Albert, 2022; Heger & Jung, 2017) provided empirical data on the provision of specific services by violent non-state actors, elucidating on both the nature of these services and their connection to the violent disposition of the groups in question. Third and last, other empirical studies (Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016) have looked at insurgents and other violent non-state actors' state-building endeavours, examining their efforts to acquire legitimacy and international recognition.

Collectively, the body of knowledge and data concerning violent non-state actors is extensive. Nevertheless, what remains conspicuously absent is a comprehensive piece of research that would converge all the previous studies and provide a snapshot of the ways in which violent statehood manifests in real life, and factors that influence such manifestations. Such a snapshot would hold profound implications for scholarship and policy making on non-state actors, armed conflict, and state-building exercises. It would offer valuable insights into the operational dynamics of VNSAs, strategies to counter their influence and, in certain cases, avenues for cooperative endeavours aimed at safeguarding local populations under their dominion.

The following chapter seeks to explore how, in practice, violent non-state actors perform spatial features and performative attributes of statehood. It represents an initial attempt to provide a taxonomy of the manifestations of statehood by violent non-state actors, based on the data included in an original database which was created during the course of the dissertation project.

The chapter is divided as follows: first, it provides a brief explanation of the Manifestations of Violent Statehood (MOVS) database⁵⁸ and an overview of the list of actors used as case studies, geographies, and common trends. Second, it provides a description of each attribute of violent statehood as it is represented in the database, combined with some brief qualitative examples in case this is not possible. Third and last, the chapter provides some conclusions as to the taxonomy of violent statehood.

4.1.1. The Manifestations of Violent Statehood (MOVS) database

The analysis of this chapter is grounded on interpretation of data retrieved from the Manifestations of Violent Statehood (MOVS) database. This database represents a collection of annual data on organisational behaviours of 125 violent non-state actors active from 1998 to 2012 across 47 countries.

⁵⁸ A more detailed explanation can be found in the Research Design section of this dissertation, see page 10.

Regarding the dataset, a couple of observations⁵⁹ on its data need to be made. First, throughout this dissertation, an earnest effort was made to distinguish governance by different typologies of VNSAs. This demarcation is rooted in the recognition that definitions concerning various categories of violent non-state actors may not always align – a recurring theme throughout the literature review presented in PART 1 of this work. Definitional issues become evident at the time of producing empirical research, as different databases identify the same groups at times as “violent non-state actors”, at times as “terrorist groups”, at times as “rebels”.

Second, while empirical data concerning terrorist organisations and insurgent groups is widely available, the same cannot be said for criminal organisations. After consulting subject matter experts and conducting a thorough literature review, it became evident that there is a clear gap of comprehensive databases for OC groups.

Given time and resources constraints, the quantitative analysis of this dissertation predominantly focussed on violent non-state actors that are not exclusively driven by profit motives. In other words, it does not include a large number of actors that fall under the definition of “transnational criminal organisations”. For this chapter, however, which aims at providing a taxonomy of manifestations of violent statehood, it was decided to present qualitative examples of case studies for mafia-type organisations as

⁵⁹ Explained more in detail in the Limitations section in the Introduction to this dissertation, see page 25.

well, to give a broader overview of common trends among violent non-state actors of different kinds.

Considering these points, the database combines data extracted from four different databases with original research. It thus looks at 125 violent non-state actors that – as per the original databases definitions – would fall under the categories of either rebel, insurgent, or terrorist groups, alongside a – albeit limited⁶⁰ - number of VNSAs who could be defined as transnational criminal groups. Accounting for the fact that some groups were not active for the full 15-year period covered by the database, the final dataset is an unbalanced panel of 1148 observations on groups operating in 47 jurisdictions. A detailed explanation of case selection has been provided in the Methodology section of the Introduction to this thesis, while an explanation of coding protocols is provided in the Annex I.

Each attribute of statehood was coded largely aligning with coding decisions from other databases, as well as findings highlighted in the literature review. Each attribute was then aggregated to give a final “violent statehood” score, graded on a scale from 1 to 20. A separate score was assigned to spatial features and performative attributes of violent statehood, on a scale from 0 to 13 and from -1 to 8, respectively. Keeping into account that the same actor can be found in different years with a different score, the picture that comes out of the database is the following:

⁶⁰ Explained more in detail in the Limitations section in the Introduction to this dissertation, see page 25.

Table 3: Violent statehood score (MOVS database).⁶¹

	Violent statehood score			
	1-5	6-10	11-15	15-20
Number of violent non-state actors	63	93	61	15
Most prominent ideology type	3 ⁶²	3	3	2 ⁶³
Average age of VNSA	15.40	17.55	23.20	25.94
More prevalent group size	3 ⁶⁴	2-3	3	3

Table 3 illustrates that majority of actors scrutinised in this project exhibited a moderate level (6-10) of violent statehood. The database reveals that groups adhering to ethno-nationalist ideologies were the most prevalent, a trend also reflected in the groups' scores of violent statehood. Conversely, religious-inspired actors stood out as the most common ideological group among organisations boasting very high levels of violent statehood attributes. The average age of a violent actor also rose in conjunction with its violent statehood score. Size did not seem to exert a substantial influence on the MOVS score.

Regarding geographical coverage, the violent non-state actors included in the database operated different regions. A map (Figure 4) detailing their locations highlights that instances of violent statehood were most frequently documented in West and Central

⁶¹ A more detailed analysis of the factors influencing a greater or lesser score can be found in Chapter 5.

⁶² The VNSA stands on behalf a certain ethnic group and advocates for the rights or expansion of that ethnic group.

⁶³ The VNSA is guided by some form of religious principles.

⁶⁴ The VNSA counts between 1,000 and 9,999 members.

Africa, South-East Asia, and the Middle East. Notably, only two European countries, Spain and the United Kingdom, were included in the database due to the persistent presence of ethno-nationalist terrorist organisations during the years covered in the database. Among all regions covered, as Figure 4 shows, groups situated in South-East Asia and the Middle East scored higher levels of violent statehood than those in other regions, including Central Africa.

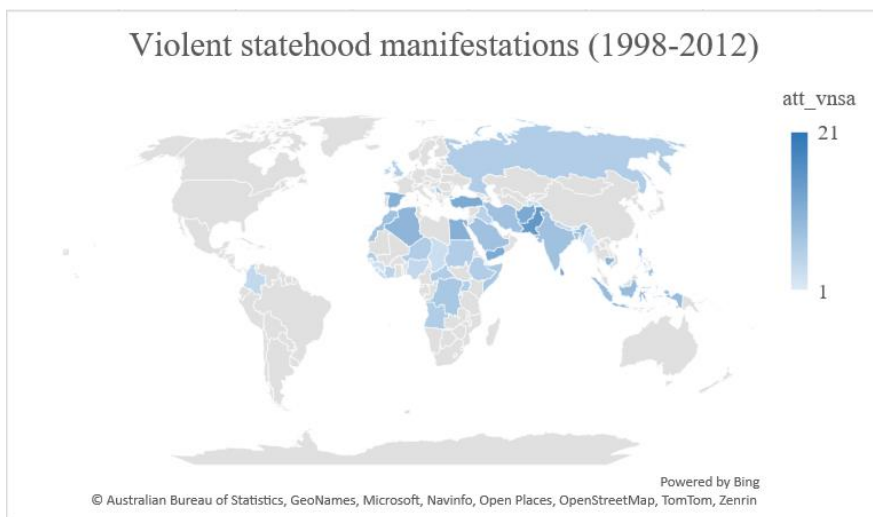


Figure 4: Violent non-state actors per country covered by the MOVIS database on a gradient based on their movis score at any given time between 1998 and 2012.

A discernible trend also emerges, indicating that more actors were situated in countries which scored 8 or 9 in the Fragile State’s Index Security Indicator (*Fragile State Index - Indicators*, n.d.).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Such an indicator considers the security threats to a state, its capacity to deal with such threats, and the perceived trust of citizens in domestic security. A high score indicates low security capacity by the host state (*Fragile State Index - Indicators*, n.d.).

Similarly, countries scoring 7 and 9 in the FSI's State Legitimacy Indicator⁶⁶ harboured a higher concentration of violent actors (Figures 5-6). Across all the jurisdictions, the majority scored 6 or higher for both FSI's Security and State Legitimacy Indicators (Figures 5-6).

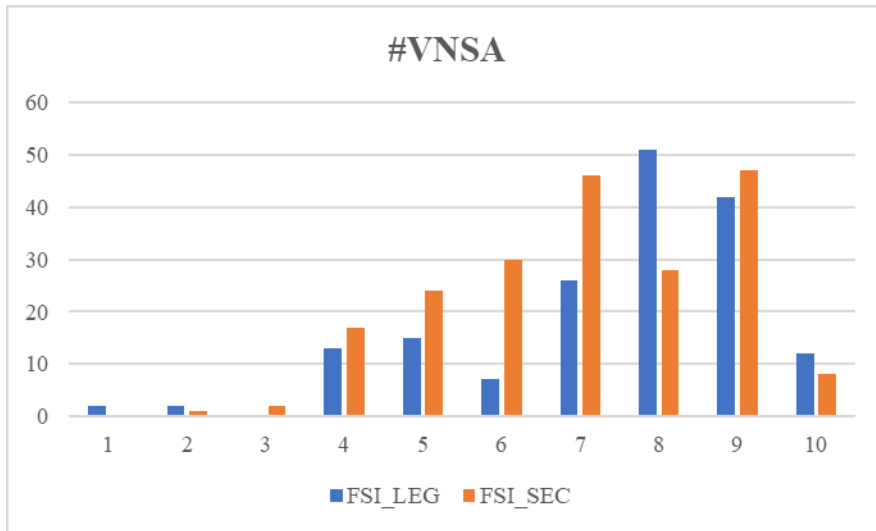


Figure 5: Number of violent non-state actors according to a country's levels of security capacity and state legitimacy (Fragile State Index / MOVS dataset).

⁶⁶Such an indicator considers the population's level of confidence in state institutions and processes. A high score indicates low state legitimacy by the host state (*Fragile State Index - Indicators*, n.d.).

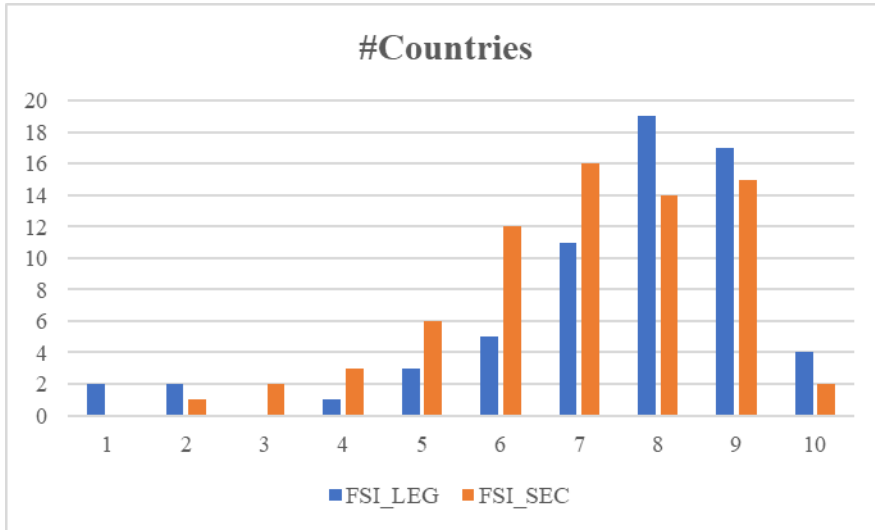


Figure 6: Number of countries included in the MOVS dataset according to their levels of security capacity and state legitimacy (Fragile State Index / MOVS dataset).

4.2. Coding spatial features of violent statehood

The following section of the chapter is dedicated to offering a description of the manner in which each spatial feature manifests in the context of violent non-state actors (Figure 7). The process of codifying spatial features of statehood proved to be relatively straightforward, primarily owing to the copious from the databases consulted for the elaboration of the MOVS dataset. Each attribute was deemed amenable to codification, with data either deriving from other databases, or supplemented through desk research. The following section describes each of said attributes as they appear in the dataset, reinforcing empirical findings with qualitative research, where required.

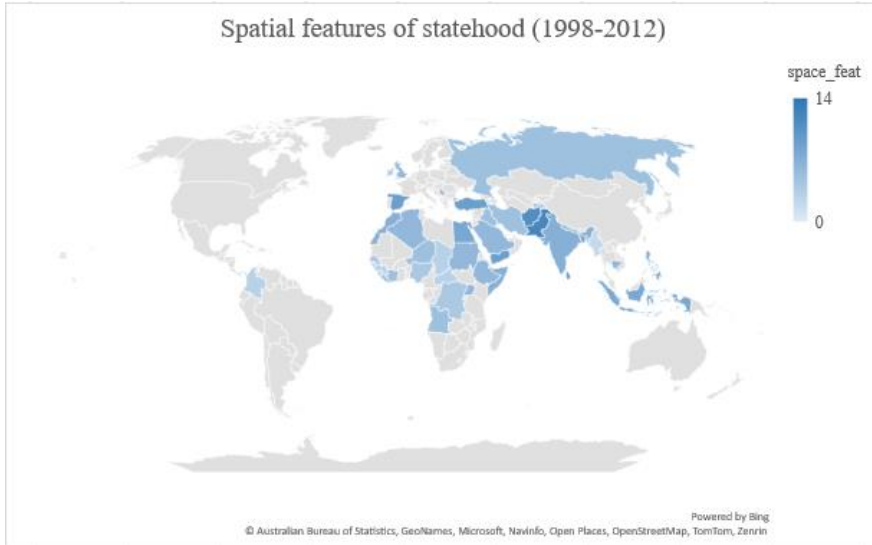


Figure 7: Violent non-state actors per country covered by the MOVS database on a gradient based on their `space_feat` score at any given time between 1998 and 2012.

4.2.1. A territory

By virtue of its definition, a geographically-identifiable territory constitutes the foundational feature of statehood upon which a state builds its legitimacy. The literature review expounded on a series of common characteristics of such territory, including the presence of defined borders and a homogenisation of the state’s territories – often encapsulated in the expression of a nation (Moreau Defarges, 2009). The literature review also posited that non-state actors are inclined to engage in governance in those regions where a state has retreated, designating these areas as “ungoverned spaces” (Mampilly 2012). In these zones, non-state governance substitutes, either partly or in its entirety, state governance. Drawing back from Williams’ assumptions (Williams, 2010, pp. 37–38), a territory

offers control, protection, economic and social opportunities and, by proxy, a claim to legitimacy.

Data on violent organisations' territorial control is varied. The Big Allied and Dangerous (BAAD2) project identifies 73 organisations exercising control over a territory for a consistent period of time between 1998 and 2012.⁶⁷ The project defines "territorial control" as

"Existing when the organisation is able to control movement into, out of, or within a given territory. In some instances organisations will perform functions or provide services, similar to that of a legitimate government. Territory may be controlled by threat or use of force, or if the government grants the organisation the authority to do so. The territory must be a substantial area (city, region, etc.) and not just an organisation occupying a building or a couple of buildings. Thus this excludes military bases and checkpoints. Though bases may indicate that the organisation does have control over territory, they may also be covert and thus not exercising social control

⁶⁷The BAAD Dataset covers "violent non-state actors", including terrorist organisations and "insurgents", which are identified as those organisations that have "committed at least one terrorist attack as defined by START's Global Terrorism Database (GTD) criteria between 1998 and 2012" (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2018). The GTD defines a terrorist attack "as the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation" (START, 2021). This definition is in line with the one used by this dissertation – see Chapter 3 for more information.

over civilians in the area of the base. Additionally, the organisation must have control over the territory for more than a few days.” (Asal et al., 2018, p. 7).

As such, territorial control is not defined exclusively as the mere presence of an organisation within a delimited space, but rather as its interaction with it over a prolonged period of time.

Territorial control, according to this dataset (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2018), already implies two other attributes: the existence of a government, and the exercise of authority. A similar approach has been followed by a more recent empirical study, the Global Organised Crime Index 2021 (GITOC 2021b), which centres its focus on transnational criminal organisations. The Index identifies “mafia-style groups” as

“Clearly defined, organised criminal groups. This typology also includes militia and guerrilla groups that are primarily funded by illicit activities. There are four defining features of a mafia-style group: a known name, a defined leadership, territorial control and identifiable membership.” (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2021b, p. 146).

Once again, territorial control goes hand in hand with a clear organisation and authority (“defined leadership”, Figure 8).

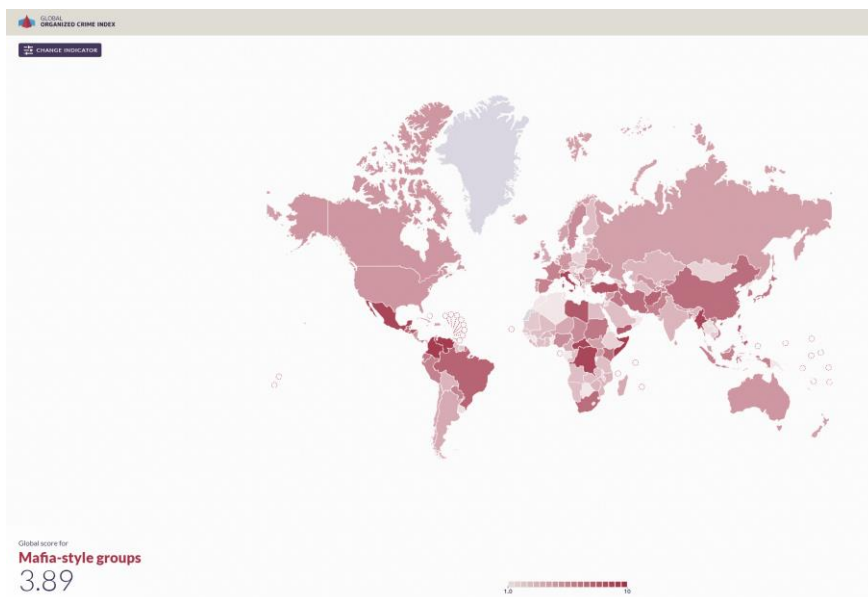


Figure 8: The Global Organized Crime Index 2021 (The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2021).⁶⁸

In light of these definitions, and combining their data with other databases⁶⁹ and original research, the MOVS dataset finds that 103 organisations exerted control over a delimited territory between 1998 and 2012. Notably, ethno-nationalist groups were the most predominant,⁷⁰ comprising 36 of these organisations (Figure 9).

⁶⁸ The Index reports that criminal organisations exerting a control over a territory, defined as “mafia-style groups”, were the least pervasive criminal actor type in four out of the five continents (GITOC 2021).

⁶⁹ In particular, the RTG database (Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016), which, however, does not provide a specific definition of what it means by “territorial control”.

⁷⁰ As the dataset is an unbalanced panel of 1148 observations on violent non-state actors across time, numbers do not always add up to a total of 125. This is because some organisations may appear multiple times in the database depending

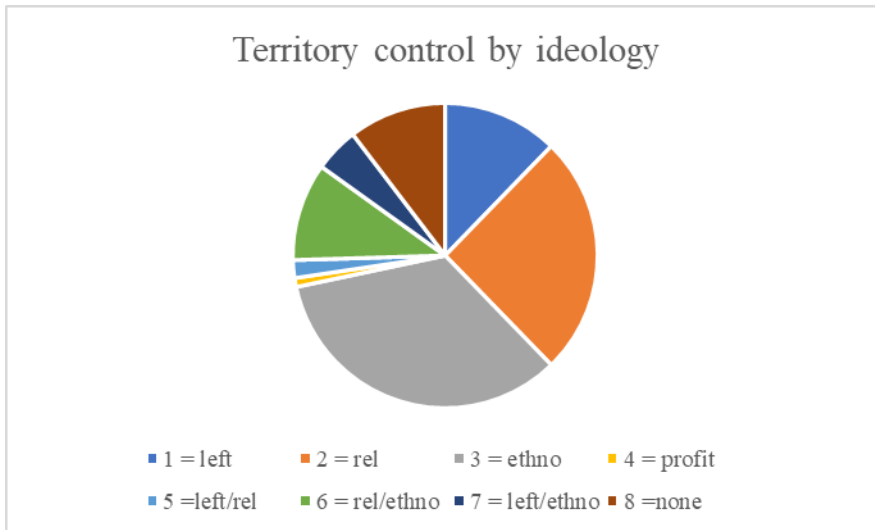


Figure 9: Territory control by ideology type (MOVS dataset).

Religious-inspired violent organisations were the second largest group, with 27 organisations exercising territorial control. Organisations with no specific ideology, but primarily engaging in illicit activities – thus matching the definition of organised criminal groups - were the smallest ideology group in terms of territory control during the period covered by the dataset (Figure 9).

on the year (e.g. one organisation may be coded as ethnonationalist in 1998, and then as a criminal organisation in 2004).

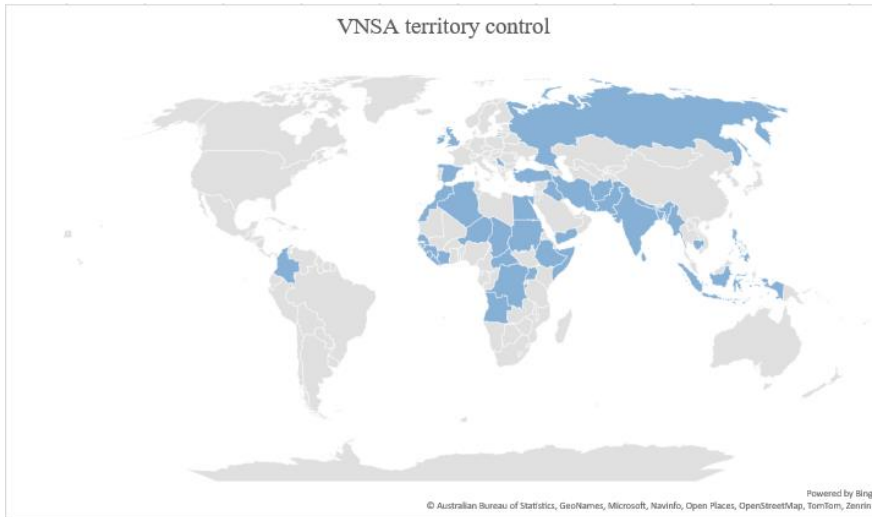


Figure 10: Location of violent non-state actors controlling a territory (MOVS database).

The MOVS dataset pinpoints several common characteristics as relates to the territory held by violent organisations. In line with the literature review (Mampilly 2011, Arjona 2016, Williams 2010), VNSAs are more likely to exert territorial control in areas where state presence has waned, resulting in a reduction in public service delivery.

Among the 47 countries subjects to this study (Figure 10), only two, namely Spain and the United Kingdom, scored less than 50/120 in the Fragile State Index, signifying relative stability, robust institutions, and a lower risk of conflict compared to countries with higher scores. These same two countries were also the only ones to consistently score less than 5 in the FSI's State Legitimacy Indicator for five years or more, reflecting higher legitimacy within their populations.

An overwhelming majority (93%) of the countries covered in the MOVS dataset also ranked 50 or above in the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Indexes⁷¹ between 2006 and 2012, with approximately 40% of them ranking 150 or higher. More than 68% of the countries had a gross-domestic product (GDP) per capita of US\$ 5,000 or less, a reflection of the literature review's findings indicating a correlation between violent governance and low socio-economic conditions.

As for the characteristics of the territories under violent governance, the literature review had emphasised a proximity to strategic targets or natural and economic resources. It was not possible to confirm this data with quantitative analysis, given the scarcity of data on specific countries' resources.⁷² While quantitative data remains inadequate for these assumptions, qualitative analysis can supplement this argument for some of the organisations included in the MOVS database. An analysis of maps indicating the territorial control of some of the subjects of the MOVS dataset (Figure 11-12) also corroborates some of the literature reviews findings.

⁷¹ The Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) is an annual global assessment that measures the perceived level of public sector corruption for 180 countries (Transparency International, 2022).

⁷² Quantitative data on natural resources is scarce and varies from country to country. For instance, it was possible to extrapolate data for the 45 countries included in the MOVS database only in terms of mineral production: data from the World Bank shows that relatively low percentages (<30%) of the countries covered by the dataset were high producers in the most common minerals. Said data, however, is not a good indicator of whether such an extraction happens in a territory under the partial or total control of a territory organisation or not.

For instance, at the peak of its territorial control between 2014 and 2015, the Islamic State controlled more than 110 km of territory spanning Iraq and Syria, about 40% and a third of each country respectively (Jones et al., 2017). Maps (Figures 11-13) illustrate the expansion of the group along the river Euphrates from the city of Raqqa to the city of Ramadi. Most of the remaining territories were located in the Syrian Desert, a politically-fragmented area inhabited by nomadic tribes. These strongholds were the last to escape from the group’s control during the counteraction against the territory organisation (Figure 11).

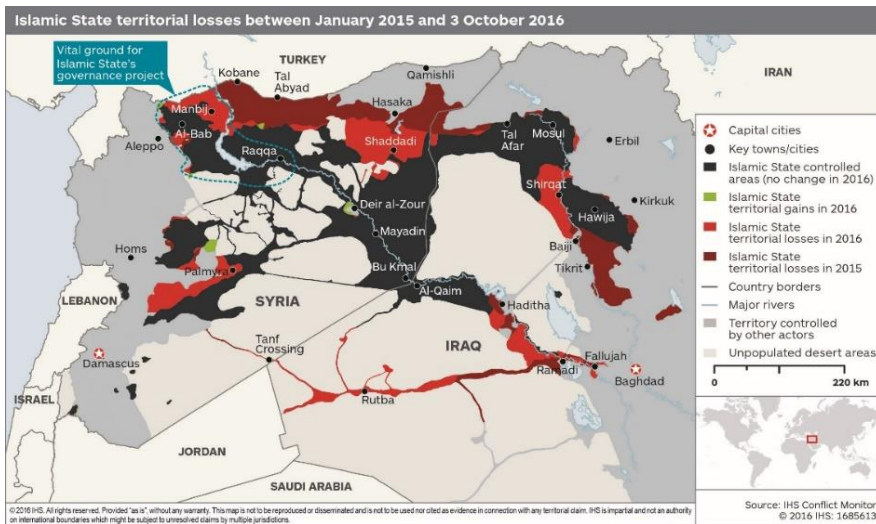


Figure 11: Islamic State territorial losses between January 2015 and October 2016 (Hutt, 2016).

Another subject of this study, Boko Haram, was reported to control the water supply in the Lake Chad region, and to demand taxes or force conscription in exchange for access (Nett & Ruttinger, 2016).



Figure 12: Territory under Boko Haram control as of January 2015 (Blair, 2015).

Case studies further validate the importance of proximity to natural resources for profit-driven mafia-style groups. A study by the GITOC (Bird & Tagziria, 2022) underscores the competition among various criminal and rebel organisations for control of revenues in different regions of West Africa, leading to the creation of crime zones (Figure 13).

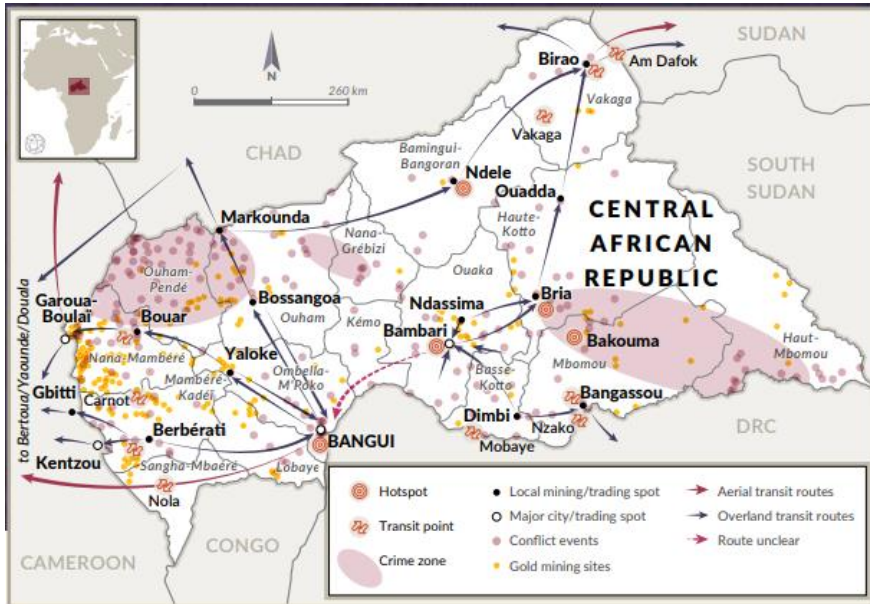


Figure 13: Central African Republic’s gold mining sites, security incidents and key supply-chain routes (Bird & Tagziria, 2022, p. 50).

4.2.2. Group membership

The existence of a population is an indispensable element for the formation of a state, just as it is for violent organisations. The MOVS dataset offers insights into the demographics of violent non-state actors, revealing that the majority of the groups included had a membership ranging from 1,000 to 9,999 individuals (Table 4).

An interesting correlation also emerges from the data, indicating that the likelihood of a VNSA holding territory increases with the size of its membership. Notably, only two groups reported to have 10,000 or more members did not score positively in relation to territorial control for more than one year. One of these groups, Al Fatah – a religious-inspired terrorist organisation based in the West Bank – did not score positively for the earlier half of the years in

which it is reported in the MOVS database (1998-2005). Looking at the organisation MOVS score, there is a significant increase (from 8 in 1998 to 15 in 2005), which begins in the year when the organisation is reported to begin to exert control over a specific area in the region.

Furthermore, the data demonstrates that the range of manifestations associated with violent statehood also increased alongside the size of a violent group. The highest score of violent statehood (21) was reported to be manifested by groups with 1,000 members or more. One prominent example is the Taliban, which boasted the largest membership and consistently scored the highest violent statehood for more than one year.

Table 4: Population size at any given year between 1998 and 2012 (MOVS database).

Population size	# vnasa	VNSAs holding a territory	Range of movs score per actor	VNSAs scoring 15+ in movs
1 = 0-99	7	4	2-6	0
2 = 100-999	53	46	2-15	3
3 = 1000-9999	78	61	3-20	18
4 = 10,000+	26	25	4-20	9

The literature review, including works by Bloom (2017) and Kenney (2007), had underscored the critical relationships between an organisation’s recruitment pool and the security environment in which it operates. Violent groups are shown to adapt reflexively to the changes in such an environment. This argument is reflected in the MOVS dataset, which reports that among the groups with 10,000 members or more, the majority were located in countries

that, within a given year between 2006 and 2012, scored 8 points or more in the Fragile State Index Security Indicator. Examples include religious-inspired organisations such as the Taliban or Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), located in Afghanistan and Pakistan respectively, and insurgent organisations such as Forces Nouvelles, based in the Ivory Coast, or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), based in Colombia. Additionally, more than a third of groups with between 1,000-9,000 members – such as Al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) between 2011 and 2012 - operated in countries which scored 9 or more in the Fragile State Index’s security indicator between 2006 and 2012.

Alakoc, Werner and Widmeier (2021) had also argued that terrorist organisations exploit a wide range of violent and non-violent tactics to increase the allure of their propaganda and boost recruitment. In particular, they exploit poor governance and social and economic conditions and use social and charitable activities to weaken a population’s loyalty to their government and attract new recruits. According to the MOVVS dataset, no violent non-state actor with 10,000 members or more operated in a country that scored less than 5 in the Fragile State Index’s indicator for state public service delivery. Only one actor belonging to the medium-to-large category (the Basque Fatherland and Freedom) and one in the small-to-medium category (the Rear Irish Republican Army), operated in countries, Spain and the United Kingdom respectively, that scored less than 5 in the same indicator.

Regarding the legitimacy of violent organisations, the Reputation of Terror Groups Dataset by Efe Tokdemir and Seden Akcinaroglu (2016), which was used to build part of the MOVS dataset and provides the only information for the VNSA's legitimacy score, had concluded that, to a violent organisation, engaging in actions that build a positive reputation (e.g. building a positive media outlet or providing public services), albeit costly, will tend to offer high returns in terms of voluntary recruitment. Conversely, groups resorting to coercive recruiting methods tended to have a negative reputation among their constituency (Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016, p. 374). Medium-to-large groups⁷³ were also more likely to engage in forced recruitment than smaller groups,⁷⁴ and more likely to engage in forced taxation (that is, protection money) and public service delivery.

The same data is reflected in the MOVS database, which covers most of the groups studied by the RTG dataset but also adds some additional groups. For instance, it reports of multiple medium-to-large groups located in Asia such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT),⁷⁵ scoring positively in both tax collection and public service delivery. Other examples include Kachin Independence Army (KIA), an ethnonationalist group operating in Myanmar between 1998 and 2011, or the Haqqani Network, a religious-inspired group which operated at the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the

⁷³ The VNSA is identified as having between 1,000 and 9,999 members at its peak size.

⁷⁴ The VNSA is identified as having between 10-99 members at its peak size.

⁷⁵ Lashkar-e-Taiba is a religious-inspired organisation located in Pakistan.

mid-2000s and which, like many other groups located in that region, revolved around the figure of warlord and insurgent commander Jalauddin Haqqani.

Table 5: VNSAs involved in tax collection, provision of justice, and public service delivery functions depending on population size (MOVS database).

Population size	Total VNSA	tax =1	justice = 1	psd = 1
1 = 0-99	7	2	2	3
2 = 100-999	53	21	27	42
3 = 1000-9999	78	35	37	57
4 = 10,000+	26	13	13	23

At this point, a clarification needs to be made. The MOVS dataset primarily relies on reports from the BAAD2 (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2018) and RTG datasets (Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016), which both offer loose definition of a violent group’s “members”.

Literature review recognised that the term “population” for violent organisations can mean different things, with Lessing (2021) distinguishing between the organisation’s members, non-member criminal actors, and non-criminal civilians.

The first group, consisting of the organisations’ leadership and general footmen, is governed through the imposition of a strong set of rules and code of behaviours. Studies on the homogeneity of this first group abound. For instance, it was argued in Chapter 3 that foreign fighters may deter the efforts of the organisation due to the lack of local knowledge about territory composition and conditions (Mendelsohn, 2011) and thus potentially hinder a group’s capacity and increase the complexity of manifesting violent statehood. Other authors (Blomberg et al., 2011; Hou et al., 2020) had highlighted

how ethnic diversity and fractionalisation (which would potentially increase the recruitment pool) have a positive impact on a terrorist group's longevity. The more global the organisation, the more likely to include foreign fighters within its ranks – pointing to ideology, rather than ethnicity, as the main cohesive factor for these groups (Mendelsohn, 2011). Literature review also reported similar arguments as relates to mafia-style organisations, whose structure is based on the concept of “family”, and for which loyalty and honour play an important role for their core population. All these assumptions could not be verified through quantitative analysis given that reports on homophily in terms of race, gender, or marital status are fragmented across all categories of violent actors.⁷⁶

Lessing's (2021, p. 5) second group of individuals referred to what the author called “criminal-market governance”. This indicates all type of relationships between the criminal or terrorist organisation with individuals who, despite not being members, are criminal actors on their own. Quantitative examples for this category will be discussed more in depth in the section on “violent recognition”. As a general reference, the BAAD dataset (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2018) reports of 24 violent organisations out of the 48 controlling a

⁷⁶ An exception is terrorist organisations which attracted increased media attention due to their attacks in Western countries, such as Al-Qa'ida in the post 9/11 period, or the Islamic State at the peak of its territorial expansion and terrorist activities. As for criminal organisations, Anna Sergi (2019) anecdotally reports of the 'Ndrangheta structures in Australia as being divided in clans as units of reference grounded on family bonds, historical reputation, marriage, and other blood affiliations.

territory between 2006 and 2012 as engaging in one or more relationships with a criminal organisation. A lesser percentage (40.77% instead of 50%) is reported in the MOVS database under the `violent_rec` attribute. An example of these organisations is the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP), primarily active in the Chad Basin, which resulted from a split between the terrorist organisation Boko Haram and a pro-Islamic State faction (Al Tamimy, 2018; Joscelyn & Weiss, 2019).

Lessing's third and last population group is comprised of the local population living before and during the takeover by the violent organisation. Local population, often victim to the violence of the group, is the hardest to convince to buy in the organisation's values. However, the bond between the local population and the criminal group becomes extremely strong and works in a way in which the organisation provides services and protection - as the parent state should - in exchange for cooperation. During the territory takeover, civilian compliance is guaranteed through a mixture of coercion and persuasion. For instance, looking at the case of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, Terpstra and Frerks (2017) highlight how a local population is won over by the terrorist group by ensuring forms of legitimation rooted in local nationalism, tradition, charismatic leadership and protection, but also through forced recruitment and intimidation. According to the authors, even though the latter was the base of the LTTE's rebellion, the former elements were the foundation for broader civilian compliance.

4.2.3. A government

A functioning State necessitates political organisation, primarily in the form of a government. The same principle applies to violent groups, regardless of their territorial control. This dissertation looks exclusively at those groups that are “organised” and whose activities show signs of premeditation. As such, it could be argued that all the subjects of this study present government-like structures.

Violent non-state actors share numerous inherent organisational similarities (Dishman, 2001; Makarenko, 2002). In the MOVS dataset, this organisational variable was coded using information from the QSI (Albert 2022) database and the BAAD2 (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2018) dataset. In particular, the former provided a variable which captured when a violent organises itself with departments akin to those in a state (Albert 2022). Meanwhile, the latter (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2018) only provides information about whether the group is organised hierarchically or not. These two variables, although capturing different aspects, were combined to represent government-like organisation. Consequently, 51 violent non-state actors were reported to score “1” in the “government” category at various points between 1998 and 2012 in the MOVS database. Examples include religious-inspired organisations which have been previously mentioned in this dissertation, such as the Abu Sayyaf Group, Al-Qa’ida, Al-Shabaab or Boko Haram, but also several insurgent organisations such as the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), which operated in Indonesia between 1998 and 2012, or the Karen National Union and the Liberation Tigers of

Tamil Eelam (LTTE), active in Myanmar and Sri Lanka respectively for the same period.

The literature review (Jordan, 2014) had highlighted that bureaucratisation and communal support helped an organisation's longevity and capability of withstanding a leadership blow. For instance, an analysis (Jordan, 2014) of the effectiveness of Al-Qa'ida following the death of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 argued that the group remained, albeit weakened, a resilient organisation, especially in those territories where it held territorial control despite the death of its leader. The study also reported that where territorial control is strong, then leadership decapitation would unlikely result in the dissolution of groups.

In the MOVS database, an organised or hierarchical structure was more likely in medium-to-large groups and groups with between 99 and 1,000 members. Violent non-state actors adhering to religious ideologies were also more likely to present an organised structure than groups adhering to other ideologies.⁷⁷ They were followed in numbers by ethno-nationalist organisations.

Additionally, the older the group, the more likely it was to be reported to be structured either hierarchically or in a similar form as a government (Table 6). For instance, the MOVS database reports of the Karen National Union scoring "1" under the "government" variable between 2007 and 2012, when it was aged 60 and over. The organisation, which was established in the mid-1960s and

⁷⁷ See page 102 for some examples.

remains active to the present day, reportedly went through different phases of development corresponding to the regimes controlling Burma/Myanmar over the decades. In particular, Bjorklund (2010) stresses the organisation having a clear decision-making structure which resembles the one of a state - with a party congress, an executive committee, a defence department, and other administrative organs.

Table 6: Violent non-state actors that are reported to be structured like a government per age category (MOVS database).⁷⁸

	Age						
	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
gov = 1	23	21	18	14	8	3	1
total #vnsa	72	50	41	31	15	4	1
%	31.94%	42%	43.90%	45.16%	53.33%	75%	100%

The review also underscored a strong relationship between an organisation’s control of a territory and its organisational structure. Using previously-mentioned Al-Qa’ida’s example, studies show that the group used territory and territorial aspirations of partner groups to its advantage to create a spread and networked organisation (Radil & Castan Pinos, 2019, p. 14). However, in the MOVS database, territorial control did not necessarily correspond to a group’s organised, government-like structure. Surprisingly, only 40 out of 103 violent non-state actors that are reported in the

⁷⁸ Please note that actors may fall in multiple age categories depending on the year. This data is to be considered an approximation given that information is not available for equally for all the groups.

database to be holding a territory were also reported to be organised like a government and/or hierarchically.

The previous chapter’s review had also posited that violent groups tend to have separate political, military, and social wings which serve different functions.⁷⁹ While the MOVS database does not delve into the specifics of these services, it does distinguish between a group’s involvement in the provision of public services or infrastructure, as well as whether it enforces a justice system. Albeit scarce, the data in the database suggests that groups engaging in rebel justice systems, infrastructure, and service provision are more likely to possess an organised, government-like structure (Table 7).

Table 7: Violent non-state actors that are reported to engage in the provision of services or other government functions (justice, infrastructure, police) while also being structured like a government/hierarchically (MOVS database).

	psd = 1	justice = 1	media = 1	infra = 1	militia/ police = 1
gov = 1	42	42	40	15	29
# vnsa	91	60	73	26	53
%	46.15%	70%	54.79%	57.69%	54.71%

⁷⁹ For instance, the United States 2003 National Strategy for Combating Terrorism highlighted that open borders and access to capabilities, and physical (e.g. safe houses) and virtual (e.g. reliable communication and financial networks) determine the structure of the terrorist organisation as well (The White House, 2003, pp. 6–7). Jordan also reported the existence of wings of Hamas and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam which, "through their social or political branches (...) often provide social services to the communities in which they are based." (Jordan, 2014, pp. 13–14).

Examples of groups that scored positively to the government variable in the MOVS database and scored "4" in "shelter" (which is a summative of the different services mentioned in the previous paragraph, minus "media") are several and relate to groups already mentioned in the previous sections. In particular, with the exception of the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham and Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), they are all groups aged 10 years or older located in the Middle East and South-Asia regions, such as the FARC, LTTE, the Karen National Union or the Taliban. Previous qualitative literature review on most of these groups indicated a propensity towards having an organisational structure as well as the provision of services.

4.2.4. An organised economy

An enduring and reliable income stream constitutes a vital prerequisite for the operations of violent non-state organisations. The costs of running such operations include gathering materials and expertise on an ongoing basis, training of new recruits, maintaining secrecy and accumulating intelligence, and sustaining the needs of their members and to ensure compliance – or loyalty - of those under their domain. As a result, VNSAs oversee the extraction of resources, the production and exchange of goods and services, and the subsequent generation of revenues. Shadow economies serve as the lifeblood of these organisations.

The literature review underscored that violent non-state actors engage in three types of activities to secure their financial sustenance: legitimate businesses or donations; illegal revenues that

result from breaking or circumventing regulations, such as diverting funds; and criminal activities (Napoleoni, 2004).⁸⁰ The MOVS dataset aimed to capture these dynamics as it codified “organised economy”. However, it encountered challenges in discerning the nature of involvement in both the global economy and shadow economy networks. This complexity stems from the blurred lines between these organisations, especially when money and fundraising activities are concerned. This is further compounded when an organisation holds control over a delimited territory.

The dataset classified under the variable “ideology – 4” whether a VNSA is not associated with a specific ideology, but is profit-driven. However, due to limitations in available data explained in the Introduction to this dissertation, only six out the 125 organisations covered in the MOVS database are codified under the ideology 4. Of these six, only two – the Colombian Black Eagles and the Office of Envigado – were reported in multiple sources (Montoya Prada 2009; Croda 2016) to be primarily transnational criminal organisations.⁸¹ Nevertheless, approximately half (62/125)

⁸⁰ For instance, the GIABA's Nigeria Second Mutual Evaluation Report (GIABA, 2021b) reported that ISIS-affiliated terrorist groups operating in Nigeria raised funds through forms of non-inherently criminal activity, such as running cattle and small traders' markets, while engaging in financial activities such as providing microloans.

⁸¹ The other groups, All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), the Movement for Democracy and Justice in Chad, and the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, despite the names, were reported in the BAAD2 and RTG databases not to be adhering to a specific ideology. Desk research codified Boko Haram for the

of the MOVS database subjects were reported to be involved in at least one form of illicit activity. These activities included mostly drug trafficking, extortion⁸², kidnapping, and robbery.⁸³

The literature review had also highlighted VNSAs' vetted interest in the preservation and growth of illicit economies - often with the goal of ensuring local legitimacy (Felbab-Brown & Forest, 2012; Forest, 2012), and their intertwining with legitimate businesses and the "overworld" (Shelley 1995, Ruggiero, 2019, p. 52). While it was fairly easy to gather data from other databases as well as other media sources about the participation of a violent organisation in illicit activities, very little information was found for VNSAs engagement with legitimate businesses. This is likely to be due to the fact that, even when engaging with legitimate businesses, violent non-state actors still operate outside the boundaries of the law and therefore would not make such relationships public.

Studies had also found the type of ideology, whether religious-inspired or ethnonationalist, to which the group adheres to had an effect over its involvement in illicit activities (Asal et al., 2015). This was not fully reflected in the MOVS dataset, where religious-

first year of its existence as a mostly-profit driven organisation due to its beginnings as a student cult.

⁸² The category "tax" was used to indicate the involvement of the organisation in the collection of "protection money".

⁸³ An example is the Abu Sayyaf Group – which is also one of the actors of the MOVS dataset for which the dataset reports a large amount of data - and involvement in a kidnap-for-cash financing model (McKenzie, 2012).

inspired organisations such as the Taliban, Boko Haram, the Islamic State, or the Abu Sayyaf Organisation, constituted the largest category of VNSAs engaged in illicit activities aside from exclusively profit-driven organisations,⁸⁴ followed by groups promoting economically leftist policies. Less than 40% of groups reported to be ethnonationalists were coded to be involved in illicit activities in the MOVS dataset.

In terms of other attributes, the previously-mentioned study (Asal et al., 2015) had also found that the greater size and territory control of a group could facilitate an entrée of the organisation in the drug economy. This was also not reflected in the MOVS dataset, where small-to-medium groups were relatively more likely than medium-to-large and large groups (52.83% against 50% and 46.15% respectively) to score “1” in the illicit economy variable. For instance, Ellis (2016) reports of the residual elements of the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso to be engaging in taxing narcotrafficking and other criminal activities - something also reflected in the MOVS database. Another example is the Abu Sayyaf Group – which is also one of the actors of the MOVS dataset for which the dataset reports a large amount of data - and involvement in a kidnap-for-cash financing model (McKenzie, 2012).

Medium-to-large groups were also more likely to control a larger area while being involved in illicit activities.

⁸⁴ A reminder that the MOVS dataset does not distinguish between the types of illicit activity.

4.2.5. Infrastructure

Chapter 2 defined infrastructure as those “basic physical structures and facilities needed for a country to operate”. Other authors have defined it as those features and facilities which help a violent organisation “finding refuge, but also managing logistics, garnering capital, performing training and recruitment activities and establishing bases for operations.”(Korteweg, 2008, p. 65).

Other literature on the subject had also associated “infrastructure” with any activity which proves and organises training camps, safe houses, and transportation networks. In particular,

“training camps play a critical role in converting supporters into either member of the active cadre. Safe houses are where terrorists plan for future clandestine activities in relative security and seek refuge when required. Secure transportation networks are required to move leaders, terrorists, and weapons.” (Chappel Jr, 2002, p. 8).

The MOVS database attempts to account for this complex notion of infrastructure. It includes a variable that considers whether a violent non-state actor is involved in infrastructure services such as building or repairing roads, bridges, wells, or community buildings, providing electricity or water, but also in broadcasting of propaganda and other news. While media engagement was relatively easier to codify, the engagement in other tangible forms of infrastructure was more challenging and relied exclusively on the QSI dataset (Albert 2022). Despite this, the general data on

infrastructure remains limited and less reliable due to a smaller number of actors from the QSI dataset being included in the MOVS dataset.

Even though the database struggles to provide such information, qualitative examples of this type of infrastructure provision abound. For instance, Mozambique⁸⁵ provides a good example of a country with an established organised crime infrastructure. There, OC groups are reported (GIABA, 2021a) to organise trafficking routes for different kinds of licit and illicit goods, such as drugs to natural resources. The same routes can then be co-opted for terrorist financing purposes. In this context, the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering (GIABA) reports that the northern region of Cabo Delgado, a key economic corridor into southern Africa, sees the presence of ISIS-affiliated groups as well as organised criminal groups, facilitated by porous borders with neighbouring countries (GIABA, 2021a). The watchdog also reports that cash couriers working on behalf of OC groups in north-eastern Nigeria typically have connections with other jihadist groups and other smuggling and trading networks, thus demonstrating fluidity and interactions between these two types of organisations. This was not reflected in the MOVS database, where the two groups reported to be located in Nigeria scored 0 or “n/a” under the “infrastructure” variable for all the years they were covered.

The previously-mentioned GITOC report on West African illicit economies (Bird & Tagziria, 2022) also points out that transport

⁸⁵ This country’s experience is not reflected in the MOVS database.

infrastructure, including seaports and airports, also represent transit points for regional and global illicit economies. Roads control is also important: according to the GITOC study, 73% of all the hubs (203 in total) were located on or near primary roads, and only 10% were located far from road infrastructure (Bird & Tagziria, 2022, p. 10). Infrastructure placed on borderlands also provided a useful starting point for transit points and illicit networks hubs (Figure 15).

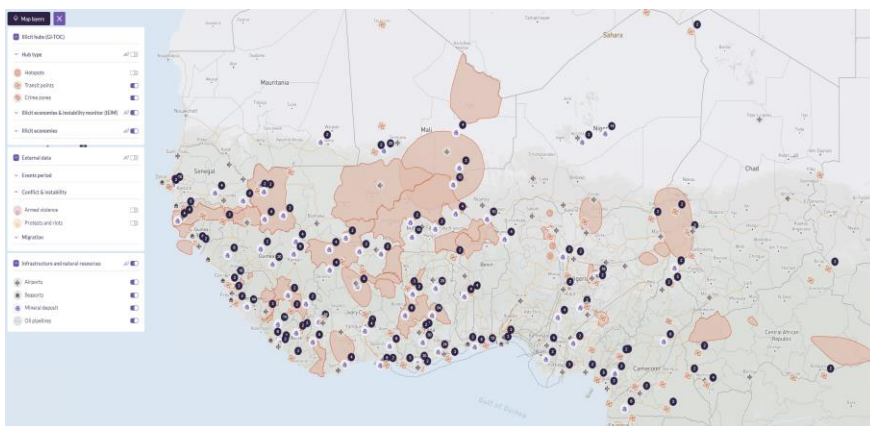


Figure 15: Map highlighting transit points and crime zones and infrastructure locations in West Africa (Bird & Tagziria, 2022).

Regarding media engagement, the majority of the subjects of the MOVS dataset (73/125) were reported to engage in broadcasting of propaganda or other types of news. The level of media engagement varies among different groups. Most small-to-medium and medium-to-large groups (around 64.15% and 62.82% respectively) engaged in media propaganda. So did a large majority (57.69%) of groups with 10,000 or more members, while smaller groups showed little media engagement (14.28%). Media engagement was reported across groups of all ages, in particular among groups that were 31 years or older (Figure 16). Examples include the Abu Sayyaf

organisation, which set up media channels providing a narrative about the group quite different from the one given by Philippines and Western media sources (Ugarte & Turner, 2011). A study by Magdalena El Ghamari (2017) on pro-ISIS jihadist propaganda published in 2017 reported of jihadist organisations such as Al-Shabaab and Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb using social media accounts since 2010 (El Ghamari, 2017), only to intensify their presence on social media and gaming platforms with the advent of the Islamic State. All these groups scored “1” in the MOVS dataset and presented a high violent statehood score.

Interestingly, ideology was found not to play a significant role in media broadcasting, as nearly all groups, except for one category (category 8 – the group is not reported to adhere to a specific ideology) were reported to be involved in media activities in substantial numbers (50% or more).

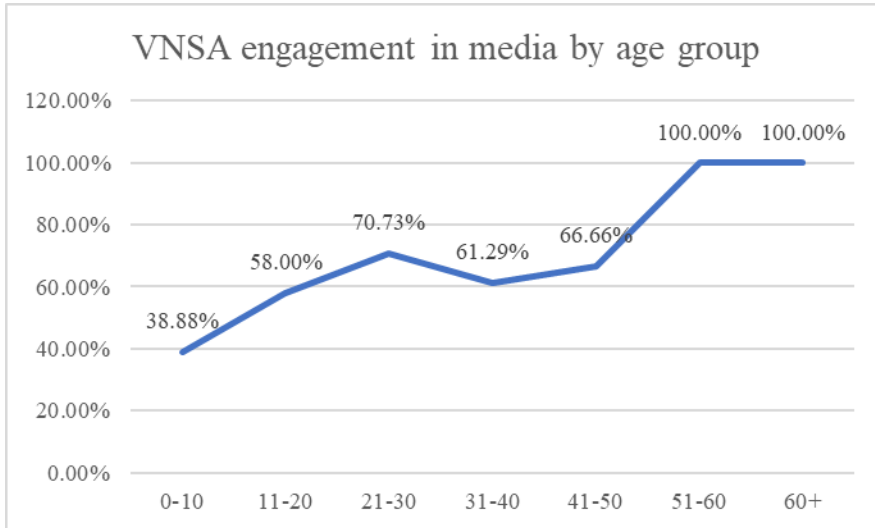


Figure 16: Violent non-state actors that are reported to be engaging in some sort of broadcasting or propaganda activity according to age group (MOVS database).

Finally, the data suggests a direct relationship between a group’s legitimacy and its media engagement (Table 8), with an increase in the percentage of VNSAs scoring “1” under the variable “media” as their score under the “legitimacy” variable increases. This indicates that groups with higher levels of perceived legitimacy tend to be more engaged in media propaganda. For instance, groups such as Hamas, the Taliban, or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) all scored the highest score in "legitimacy" in the MOVS database for several years while also being reported to be engaging in media propaganda.

Table 8: Violent non-state actors that are reported to be engaging in some sort of broadcasting or propaganda activity according to their legitimacy score (MOVS database).

	legitimacy					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
media = 1	5	15	24	26	20	6
total #vnsa	16	41	51	42	24	7
%	31.25%	36.59%	47.06%	61.90%	83.33%	85.71%

In contrast, desk research and the MOVS database did not identify evidence of mafia and criminal organisations actively engaging in media propaganda. This underscores a distinction between the two types of groups, with VNSAs being more involved in media activities.

4.2.6. Shelter (Services, Security, and Justice)

The last spatial feature of statehood defined in Chapter 2, “shelter”, bears a three-fold meaning:

- I. *provision of services* in exchange for taxes;
- II. *provision of internal security*, guaranteed by law enforcement authorities and the rule of law;
- III. *provision of external security* from external threats.

Regarding the first meaning, data shows that the provision of services in exchange for taxes is undertaken by profit driven and ideology-drive organisations, which exert a control over a delimited territory. The MOVS dataset indicates approximately half of its listed actors (60/125) to be collecting taxes through the use of violence at any given year between 1998 and 2012.

The dataset does not record a strong correlation between the longevity of a group and its involvement in tax collection. Analysis shows the percentage of violent non-state actors engaging in tax collection to be below 50% for all age groups with the exception of those groups aged between 31-40.

Ideology did not seem to play a crucial role in tax collection either: analysis shows that the percentage of VNSAs engaging in tax collection was 50% or higher for the majority of the ideology categories (5/8). The exception was primarily religious-inspired VNSAs, much more likely than other groups (64.64%) to engage in tax collection. For instance, Botakarayev, Tolegenov and Benli (Botakarayev et. al, 2021, p. 126) report that the Islamic State had a system of budget processes dividing taxation in different areas: fixed taxation of entrepreneurs on income, capital, or purchases; taxation housing and high-value goods; custom fees when crossing the IS' border; tolls and transport payments for all goods transiting through the IS' territory; and a "membership fee" for joining the Caliphate if captured within the territory.

The BAAD database (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2018) also reports of 31 organisations providing medical, welfare, education, infrastructure, protection (intended as security) or other services between 1998 and 2012. The majority (23/31) exerted control over a delimited territory. A light majority (17/31) was identified as religion-inspired, followed by ethnographic ideology (13/31) and left-wing beliefs (6/31)⁸⁶ (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2018). The larger Reputation

⁸⁶ Some ideologies may overlap.

of Terror Groups Dataset, reports of 84 terrorist organisations actively engaging in the delivery of public goods between 1980 and 2011, with a stronger prevalence of ethno-nationalist organisations (47/84), followed by religious-inspired (30/84) and leftist (27/84) (Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016).

The MOVS dataset provides a wider pool of data surrounding this aspect. Among the different types of shelter provision, public service delivery was the most common. 91 out of the 125 violent non-state actors analysed in the MOVS dataset were reported to have provided any medical, welfare, education, or other services to the local population in any given year between 1998 and 2012. Engagement in public service delivery was high (>50%) among all the ideology categories. For the variable “justice”, religious-inspired/ethno-nationalist groups and fully religious-inspired groups were among the categories which showed the highest percentage of VNSAs engaged in public service delivery. An example is the terrorist organisation Al Nusra,⁸⁷ which was reported to be trying to “win the hearts and minds of the Syrian people, building an Islamic society from the bottom-up through *dawa* activities providing basic services to earn residents’ trust” (Shay & Karmon, 2016, p. 4). Other studies also suggested the organisation was involved in the delivery of multiple services, from the distribution of bread to the setting up of the first hospital camps (Nizzero, 2018).

⁸⁷ Not covered in the MOVS dataset, as the organisation started to be actively covered by Western media around 2015.

Not adhering to a specific ideology meant in the dataset that a group was least likely than others to provide services. Profit-driven groups, albeit a very small number in the actors' list, were reported to have a 50% chance of being involved in the delivery of public services. The percentage of involvement in the delivery of public services was also higher as the groups became older - with groups aged 50 and over - Al-Fatah, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Karen National Union, and the Kurdish Democratic Party-Iraq (KDP) - to all be reported to provide some sort of service (Figure 17).

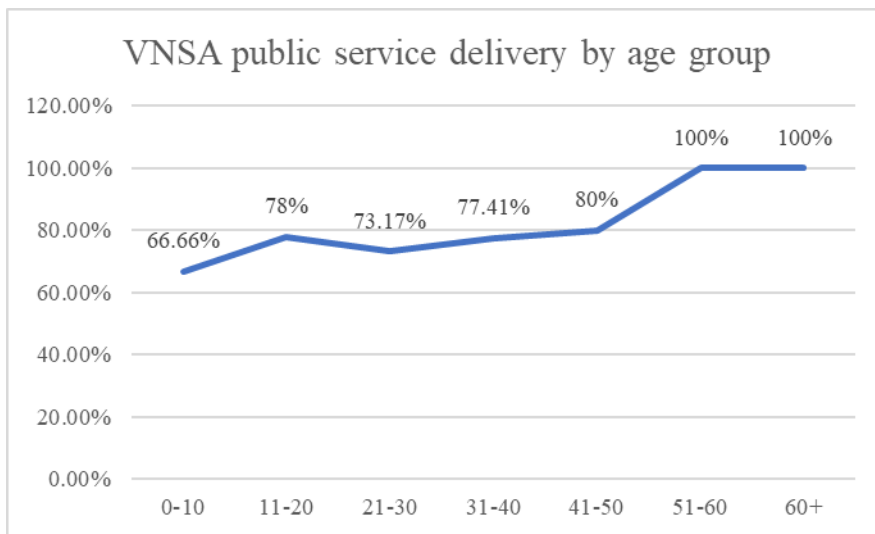


Figure 17: Violent non-state actors that are reported to be engaging in public service delivery according to age group (MOVS database).

Research could not identify any dataset providing a comprehensive list of criminal organisations engaging in the provision of services. While different authors (Gambetta, 1988; Lessing, 2021; Paoli, 2002) highlight the involvement of these organisations in welfare provision, their participation in the delivery of everyday basic

services is anecdotal or country-specific, thus hindering the elaboration of general assumptions surrounding common criminal behaviour. Reports of criminal governance abound in particular in relation to the Central and Latin American region. Examples include provision of social services by criminal organisations operating in Brazilian favelas (Arias, 2006; Goldstein, 2003) or in neighbourhoods in Jamaica (Jaffe, 2012). Reports of the drug trafficking cartel La Familia Michoacana (LFM) highlight how the criminal organisation donates portions of income to fund schools, churches, and other projects (Gibbs, 2009), and provide loans to community members (Rodriguez, 2009).

Conversely, there is a wide range of literature and qualitative examples of terrorist organisations' delivery of public services. As previously stated, the terrorist group Al Nusra evolved into a significant provider of essential services in Syria (Shay & Karmon, 2016). In the MOVS dataset, other previously-mentioned groups such as the Islamic State, the Taliban, or Al-Qa'ida were all reported to have provided services at some point between 1998 and 2012.

Regarding the second meaning of "shelter", the provision of internal security, respect of the rule of law by enforcing a justice system and law enforcement, the MOVS dataset reports that nearly half (60/125) of the violent non-state actors had set up a rebel justice system that included courts, prisons, and enforcement of judicial decisions of civilian nature, between 1998 and 2012.

Groups following religious and leftist ideologies were more likely to establish a rebel justice system: religious-inspired groups were more likely (57.57%) to have said system, followed by groups which promoted more economically leftist policies (56.25%). For instance, there are reports of Al-Shabaab and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria setting up sharia courts in the territories under their control (Olojo, 2019; Rudaw, 2015). Profit-driven groups, albeit a small sample in the actors' list, were least likely (16.67%) to have a set justice system than others (Figure 18).

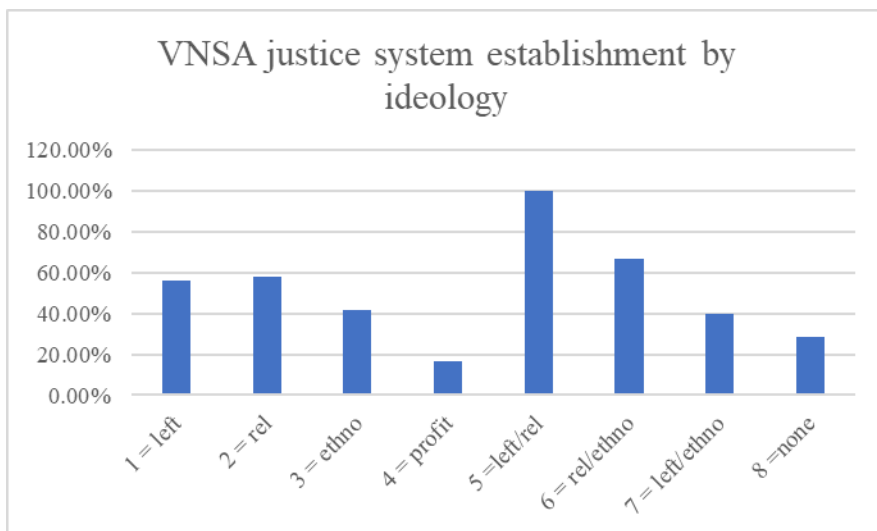


Figure 18: Violent non-state actors that are reported to have set up a justice system at any given time between 1998 and 2012, according to their ideology (MOVS database).

Regarding the third meaning of shelter, protection from external threat, the variable “militia/police”, which captured whether a group engaged in militia or patrolling activities, was the least common. 53 out of the 125 violent non-state actors analysed in the MOVS dataset were reported to have some kind of militia or police force

between 1998 and 2012.⁸⁸ Religious-inspired groups were also more likely to be reported as having a militia/police force of some sorts. For instance, the Islamic State relied on its army in Iraq and Syria to consolidate territory control and destabilise these countries' neighbours, but also its army of foreign fighters scattered around the Western world to destabilise other adversaries (Byman, 2016, p. 160). Older groups were also more likely than younger groups to do the same.

4.3. Coding performative attributes of violent statehood

Chapter 2 indicated several performative attributes as particularly crucial for state governance. These attributes, namely authority, legitimacy, effectiveness, autonomy, and shelter (in the context of providing a sense of protection), are also essential for the survival of violent groups.

This chapter has already addressed these concepts to some extent. Particularly when discussing the so-called "population" of organised crime and terrorist organisations, the distinction between

⁸⁸ This data should be taken with a pinch of salt for a couple of reasons. First, this variable was calculated based on the TIOS V2 dataset (Heger et al. 2018) variable "militia" and on the QSI (Albert 2022) variable "policing". The data was available only for a fraction of the total number of actors analysed in the MOVS dataset. Second, it is likely that the concept of "militia" fell under the umbrella concept of "population". Given what was said in the previous section, the larger chunk that comprises a violent non-state actor's population is indeed the militants who decide to join its cause. Likewise, it is possible that the concept of "police" was included already in the one of "justice" already analysed in this text, on the grounds that police are, indeed, the enforcers of the rule of law.

the groups' members, external actors who share similar characteristics, and the local population, reflect the importance of performative attributes to a VNSA to guarantee loyalty or respect from each of these categories. The existence of specific infrastructure, the provision of services over a prolonged period of time, and even the growth in numbers of the very same violent organisation also indicate a minimum level of effectiveness of a VNSA.

Figure 19 illustrates the distribution of violent non-state actors' performative attributes scores across the 47 identified jurisdictions between 1998 and 2012. Compared to spatial features, data on performative attributes was considerably scarcer, even for those variables that were deemed to be "codable". Maps displaying the distribution of these attributes (Figure 10, Figure 19) also suggest that actors could have a high score in spatial features but relatively limited performative attributes, or *vice versa*. While this may be partly attributed to the limited data available, it could also indicate that performative attributes are more dependent to specific factors such as a jurisdiction's own effectiveness and authority, compared to spatial features.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ See for instance the difference between spatial features for violent organisations operating in India or the United Kingdom, in comparison with the performative attributes in the same jurisdictions (Figure 10, Figure 19).

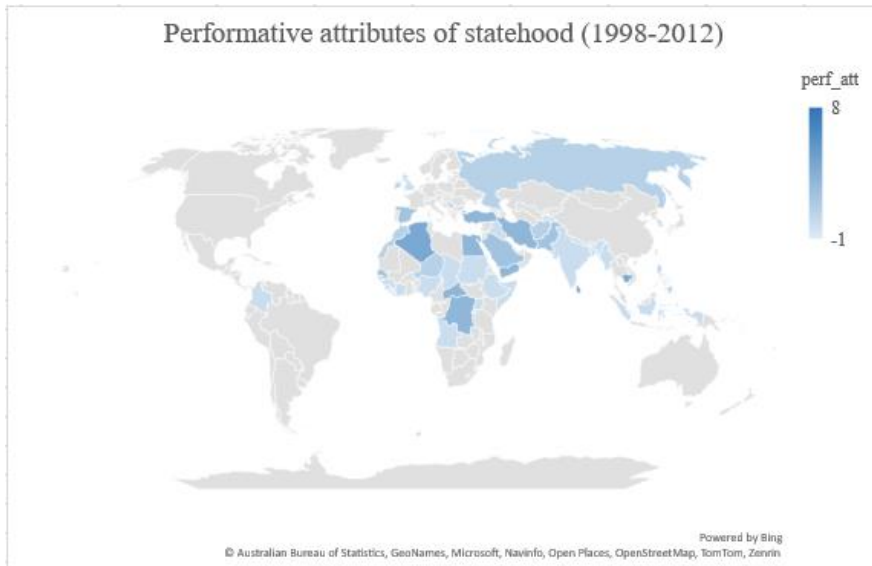


Figure 19: Violent non-state actors per country covered by the MOVS database on a gradient based on their *perf_att* score at any given time between 1998 and 2012.

As explained in the Codebook,⁹⁰ this project faced particular challenges in coding performative attributes and providing qualitative analysis when quantitative data was unavailable. The primary performative attributes that were not operationalised were effectiveness and “shelter”. The former attribute was considered non-codable since it could be interpreted and measured in too many ways, including an organisation’s longevity,⁹¹ peak size,⁹² death counts,⁹³ public service delivery or state governance capacity,⁹⁴

⁹⁰ See Annex I.

⁹¹ As in, a VNSA is effective if it manages to endure and last over time.

⁹² As in, a VNSA is effective if it manages to increase its members.

⁹³ As in, a VNSA is effective if it fulfils its original nature statement of being “violent”.

⁹⁴ As in, a VNSA is effective if it manages to behave just like a state.

among others. As for “shelter”, which pertains to the perception by the population of a sense of security, research could not identify a method to quantify this attribute, aside from interviewing an organisation’s members and the civilians subject to its control. Such an endeavour fell beyond the scope of the project due to constraints related to time, resources, and the safety of the interviewer.⁹⁵

Transitioning to the concept of authority, the literature review had described it as stemming from a state’s ability to claim the monopoly over the use of physical force (Weber, 1946) and its capacity of providing shelter functions. With this definition in mind, the variable was assessed by considering the parent state’s capacity alongside the VNSA’s ability of providing shelter functions. Consequently, a higher effectiveness of the security apparatus of the parent state, coupled with a low score in the shelter attribute of the VNSA, indicated lower authority of the violent organisation, and *vice versa*. It was possible to codify this variable only for the years between 2006 and 2012, due to the fact that data provided by the Fragile State Index only covered that time period.

On authority, the MOVS dataset provides an intriguing snapshot (Table 9) of the different ways in which it manifests among various

⁹⁵ A considerable gap in research that was identified by this project was the lack of empirical and qualitative data on the sense of security perceived by the local population and the VNSA’s members. A similar model to the one used by the Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index could be used to measure the level of perceived security as relates to VNSAs, however it would require significant work and potentially put interviewers at risk.

violent non-state actors. Groups with stronger authority (level 3) were more likely (86.96%) to hold a territory compared to groups with no authority. Data from the MOVS database also demonstrates a correlation between level 3 authority violent non-state actors and a propensity to organise themselves with departments akin to those found in a state. Examples of this correlation are the Taliban or the Islamic State groups, which both had an interesting approach to statehood: the former by officially taking control over a country in 2020, and the latter by pushing this aspiration in its very establishment.

Table 9: Violent non-state actors that engage in different spatial features depending on their level of authority (MOVS database).

	authority			
	0	1	2	3
territory =1	28.57%	42.86%	81.33%	86.96%
illicit economy = 1	57.14%	45.71%	45.33%	69.57%
government = 1	14.29%	42.86%	38.67%	60.87%
media = 1	28.57%	48.57%	64.00%	60.87%
tax = 1	42.86%	37.14%	45.33%	73.91%
public service delivery = 1	28.57%	54.29%	74.67%	100.00%
justice = 1	0.00%	37.14%	44.00%	69.57%
militia/police = 1	42.86%	28.57%	40.00%	60.87%
total #VNSA	7	35	75	23

Groups with medium to strong (level 2) and strong authority (level 3) such as the Islamic State or the Taliban were more inclined to engage in some sort of media propaganda. Meanwhile, engagement in profit-generating illicit activities was reported to be high between both groups with strong authority (level 3, 69.57%) and those that had no authority at all (57.14%). Groups in the process of building

authority (level 1 and 2) such as the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade,⁹⁶ the Caucasus Emirate⁹⁷ or the Oromo Liberation Front⁹⁸ - were less likely to engage in such activities.

The most significant contrast was found in the relationship between a violent non-state actor's authority level and their involvement in tax collection, public service delivery, provision of justice, and provision of protection from external threats and enforcement of a violent rule of law. The percentage of groups involved in these parameters increased as authority grew stronger, as indicated in Table 9.

The most prevalent spatial attribute varied across the different levels of authority. Groups with a high level of authority were more likely than others to exhibit all the spatial features of statehood mentioned above. Specifically, all groups in the MOVS database that had a strong authority engaged in the provision of public services. Among the 75 groups that were reported to have medium to strong authority (level 2) between 2006 and 2012, establishing a justice system was the most common spatial attribute (74.67%) after the holding of a territory (81.33%). Thirty-five groups were reported to manifest some level of authority (level 1) between 2006

⁹⁶ The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade is a religious-inspired coalition of armed groups operating in the West Bank.

⁹⁷ The Caucasus Emirate was a jihadist organisation founded in 2007 which was active in Syria and, previously, in the North Caucasus region.

⁹⁸ The Oromo Liberation Front is an ethno-nationalist opposition group founded in 1973, based in Ethiopia.

and 2012. Among those, the most common spatial feature was the delivery of public services (52.29%). A small number of groups (7, including transnational criminal organisations such as the Colombian Black Eagles) was reported to have no authority at all between 2006 and 2012. Involvement in an illicit economy was the most common attribute for this category. Meanwhile, no organisation in this group was reported to have set up at any time between 2006 and 2012 a justice system.

The literature review underscored the importance of positive relationships between the local population and the violent organisation as a factor driving manifestations of violent statehood. Strong local support, and thus legitimacy, was shown to increase the chances of an organisations' survival, thus reducing the overall complexity of the task (that is, survival), and incentivising provision of services and manifestations of other attributes of statehood.

As previously explained, the MOVS dataset defined legitimacy based on input from the RTG dataset (Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016) as relates to whether a violent organisation enjoys a positive reputation among both its target audience and members. Due to the differing scales on which authority and legitimacy are calculated, analysis of the correlation between them could be skewed. As it is, data shows that violent groups with no authority also lacked high levels of legitimacy. Those with stronger authority displayed a medium level of legitimacy. Violent groups with a medium level of authority also exhibited a medium level of legitimacy. Finally, the

MOVS database did not reveal a correlation between increased legitimacy and high authority among these groups.

All but two violent non-state actors that are reported in the MOVS dataset as having a high level of legitimacy (level 5) were located in countries which scored 8 or more in the Fragile State Index's security indicator. Groups included LTTE, the FARC, the Taliban, and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. A similar relationship was observed regarding the host country's legitimacy, with the relevant FSI indicator scoring 7.5 or higher. However, the host country's ability to provide public services seemed to have a weaker connection with high levels of legitimacy, with the indicator FSI_serv score oscillating between 5.6 and 8.9.

The MOVS database also does not report a strong link between the group's size and its legitimacy levels. Instead, it reveals a correlation between legitimacy levels and groups with membership between 99 and 10,000 individuals. Groups with less than 99 members such as the Armed Islamic Group,⁹⁹ Black Axe,¹⁰⁰ or the Ninjas¹⁰¹ were reported to have little to no legitimacy, while larger groups with 10,000 members or more enjoyed an average level of legitimacy among their members and the local population.

⁹⁹ The Armed Islamic Group was religious-inspired group based in Algeria in the early 2000s.

¹⁰⁰ Black Axe is a transnational criminal group mostly operating in Nigeria which originated in the 1970s in Benin.

¹⁰¹ The Ninjas were a ethno-nationalist militia operating in Congo in the 1990s and 2000s.

Table 10: Violent non-state actors in the MOVS dataset at any given year between 1998 and 2012, per size and legitimacy score (MOVS database).¹⁰²

		population size			
		1	2	3	4
legitimacy	0	2	7	7	1
	1	2	25	22	3
	2	1	22	28	9
	3	0	17	20	9
	4	0	8	15	7
	5	0	1	6	3

Data in the MOVS dataset also does not indicate a strong correlation between holding a territory and increased legitimacy. High percentages (between 93% and 100%) of groups holding a territory were encountered across all levels of legitimacy. As previously mentioned, a correlation can also be identified between the presence of a government and increased legitimacy, as well as the engagement by the violent organisation in media propaganda or daily broadcasting through TV and/or radio channels (Figure 20).

¹⁰² Once again, it is important to highlight that, given that reporting in the MOVS dataset is made by VNSA/year, it is possible that a group may appear with one size one year and another size the other. An example is the Taliban group, which in 2001 scored 2 in population size and 4 in legitimacy, and then in 2011 increased to 3 in population size and 5 in legitimacy score.

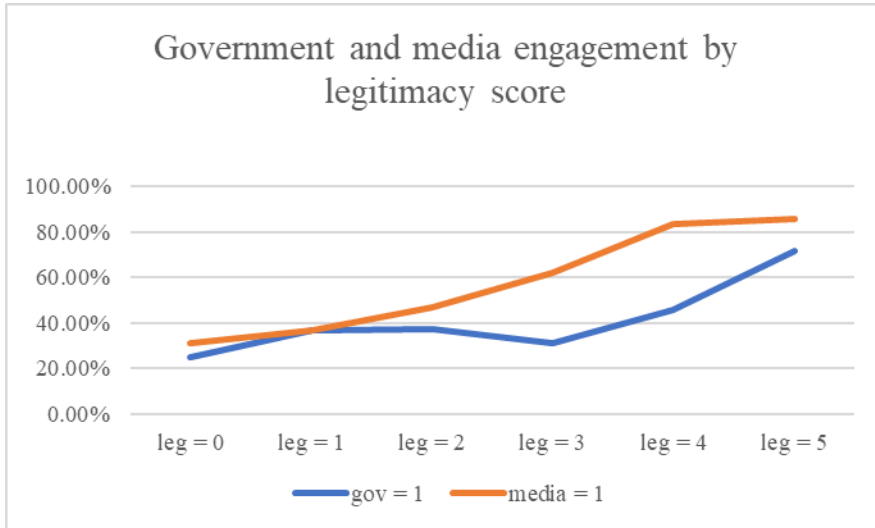


Figure 20: Correlation between a violent non-state actor’s legitimacy level and their engagement in media propaganda and organisation as a state (MOVS database).

Likewise, an increase in violent non-state actors’ legitimacy level was observed when they engaged in all the different elements that comprise the spatial attribute of “shelter” - that is, public service delivery, the provision of some sort of justice, the engagement in militia, and tax collection. Groups in the database with the highest score in legitimacy were the most likely to score “1” in all said categories. Notably, all groups with the highest score in legitimacy engaged in the delivery of public services (Figure 21). Examples included the previously mentioned Hamas, LTTE, FARC, the Taliban, or TTP, and two other groups - the Communist Party of India - Maoist (CPI-M)¹⁰³ and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

¹⁰³ The Communist Party of India - Maoist (CPI-M) is a leftist-inspired organisation founded in the early 2004 in India from the merger of the CPI (M-L)-People's War and the Maoist Communist Centre.

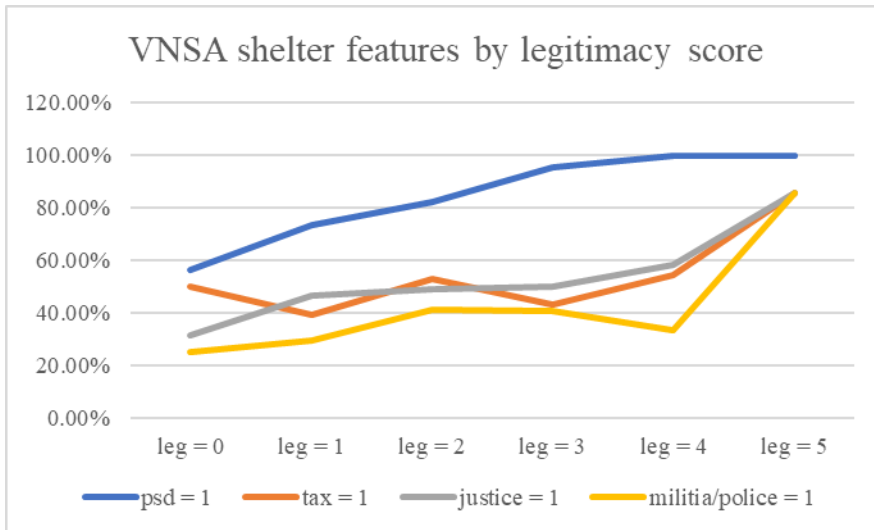


Figure 21: Correlation between a violent non-state actor’s legitimacy level and their engagement in different types of shelter activities (MOVS database).

The literature review (Forest 2012) had also reported that legitimacy for violent organisations could stem from these groups’ involvement in illicit economies, or in their role as protectors of such economies. This chapter has already emphasised the importance of illicit economies for both sustaining a violent organisation and meeting the needs of the local population. Ensuring that such economies are protected will grant loyalty from the locals while ensuring the group’s financial sustenance.

The authority and influence of a violent organisation deriving from illicit economies depend on four factors: the extent upon which the local population depends on illicit economies, the character of the illicit activities, the presence of independent or competitive groups, and the government response to the illicit economy (Felbab-Brown 2010, pp. 184-186). The extent of participation to illicit economies

then becomes particularly relevant in zones of competing governance, where violent non-state actors not only compete against the state for influence and control, but also with each other.

According to the MOVS dataset, participation in illicit economy was likely for the majority of groups benefiting from high levels of legitimacy (85.71%). Notably, groups were reported to engage in illicit activities at any point of their relationship with legitimacy building. However, participation fluctuated among the different categories, to then peak with the group which scored the highest (level 5). For the limited data available,¹⁰⁴ high scores were observed in the security apparatus indicator of most host countries. With the exception of one VNSA located in India (the Communist Party of India - Maoist, CPI-M), the remaining actors operated in countries which were reported to have low levels of legitimacy and high intervention by external forces.

Illicit economies are also a pivotal element for organised criminal groups. The arguments made by Felbab-Brown (2012) on the political capital stemming from a terrorist organisation's participation in illicit economies resonate even more for criminal organisations whose primary goal is, indeed, economic. Picarelli (2006) had also argued that terrorist organisations and organised crime groups that are "sovereign-bound" do share a common

¹⁰⁴ Data on state performance for actors reported in the MOVS dataset on high legitimacy levels and engagement in illicit activities is limited. This is because the fact that the Fragile State Index data is only available from 2006 onwards, and most of said organisations were mostly active in the years prior to that.

approach to authority and legitimacy. Criminal organisations that are sovereign-bound have a stronger relationship with the territory and the local population and, as such, seek authority and legitimacy, effectively substituting themselves to the state, to ensure the collection of protection money. These attributes are then dependent on the criminal organisations' effectiveness: in enforcing the organisations' code of behaviour, in conducting successful illegal businesses and, inevitably, in providing protection and services to the groups' members and locals.

It was possible to retrieve data on the legitimacy levels of only one out of the very small number (6) of groups that were indicated in the MOVS database to be exclusively profit-driven at any point between 1998 and 2012. For that group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF)¹⁰⁵, legitimacy scores were low (level 2). Likewise, it was not possible to retrieve nor calculate levels of authority for any of the profit-driven organisations.

While the MOVS database struggles to provide a full picture of criminal organisations and their work to build legitimacy and authority, it is possible to provide some qualitative examples on the matter. For instance, Letizia Paoli reports that for a long time, ruling

¹⁰⁵ The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was a rebel organisation which fought in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2002. Despite this, most databases reported it as either being exclusively profit-driven or adhering to no specific ideology. The MOVS dataset decided to reflect said decision.

bodies of Italian¹⁰⁶ mafia groups like Cosa Nostra and the ‘Ndrangheta had a “higher degree of effectiveness and legitimacy than that exercised by the state” (Paoli, 2008, p. 18) thanks to the very set of rules highlighted in the previous section:

“Even today, although most mafia rules are no longer systematically enforced, mafia families exercise a certain “sovereignty” through a generalised system of extortion [...] Moreover, whenever mafiosi are asked to mediate conflicts, guarantee property rights and enforce rules compatible with their own legal order, they do not hesitate to intervene” (Paoli, 2008, p. 18).

In other words, mafia groups in the country ensured effectiveness, legitimacy and, with it, authority by substituting themselves to the State and providing the services that were expected from it. State instability is then as important for criminal organisations as it is for terrorist groups. Notably, southern Italy’s mafia organisations have

¹⁰⁶ Italy was one of the countries which were excluded from the MOVS dataset, despite being one of the main case studies as relates to elements of statehood manifested by criminal organisations. This exclusion was pondered for a long time, but it was taken given that the databases which were used to build the MOVS database did not include actors operating in Italy between 1998 and 2012 aside from a couple of sporadic, unreliable examples. The lack of this starting point, and the need to draw a line somewhere as relates to case selection, led to the decision of excluding one of the most prominent examples of countries with well-recorded cases of provision of violent statehood. A similar decision was made surrounding Mexican criminal organisations.

orchestrated, or participated, in several terrorist plots since the 1970s, reaching a climax in the early 1990s.

4.4. Coding “international” and “violent” recognition

The concept of “autonomy” was included in the performative attributes section of the literature review. However, the analysis of the MOVS dataset data requires a different approach because the definition and discussion of this specific attribute vary for different categories of violent non-state actors.

One of key features of violent non-state actors is how their existence is dependent on the actions of the parent state. Using Lessing’s words, violent groups are “born of, shaped by, and in opposition but complementary to” (Lessing 2021, p. 2) the parent state. They are “born of” the state because the characterisation of an organisation as “violent” depends on the state legislating and thus outlawing specific conduct. They are “shaped by” the state because state presence and actions aimed at either supporting the local population or disrupting violent networks necessarily influences a group’s lifespan and effectiveness.

The key difference among different categories of VNSAs stands in the third element outlined by Lessing: “criminal governance, while it seeks to keep some parts of the state out, may allow others in (...) can lead to reduced state repression, in part by being useful to states” (Lessing, 2021, p. 2). The “symbiotic” relationship between criminal groups and the parent state thus defines these groups’ autonomy. Conversely, the overarching goal of ideology-driven

organisations is to antagonise the state, thus critically influencing their relations with it. As a result, autonomy becomes much more relevant, but then difficult to operationalise, on the grounds that it is dependent on a group's effectiveness in antagonising the state.

Separate considerations also need to be made surrounding state-sponsored violent organisations and their relevant autonomy. States can be involved with violent groups to various degrees of support. For instance, Ganor warns against the politicisation of designation processes by states in the attempt to avoid criticism for supporting potential terrorist organisations (Ganor, 2002, p. 228). Authors have also reported political elites in some countries resorting to organised criminal groups in support of their geopolitical strategies (Belton, 2020; Naím, 2022).

As Byman and Kreps argue, “the very nature of delegation means that principals are granting some degree of autonomy to an agent, which introduces a host of inefficiencies from the standpoint of the principal” (Byman and Kreps, 2010, p. 6). In this context, more autonomy is given to the organisation when the state enhances the capability of its agents, to the detriment of the VNSA's overall capacity to pursue its own interests. Therefore, it can be argued that autonomy of a violent organisation reduces depending on its level of dependency on state support.

To address the potential overlap between the variable “autonomy” and the variable “international recognition,” the MOVS dataset calculated the former inversely in relation to state sponsorship,

primarily in terms of financial support. Meanwhile, international recognition¹⁰⁷ was calculated by considering reports of when a violent organisation was a member of an international organisation.

The resulting picture includes 24 actors in the MOVS dataset reported to have received some sort of support by an officially-recognised state between 1998 and 2012. Out of the 47 jurisdictions which are covered by the database, VNSAs that received state support were mostly located in the Horn of Africa, India, and the Middle East (Figure 22), such as the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Hamas and Hizballah, or the Philippines-based Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).¹⁰⁸ Medium-to-large and large religious and ethno-nationalist VNSAs were more likely to receive state support. Age did not affect the group's likelihood to receive state support. However, groups aged between 31-40 and 41-50 years such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ),¹⁰⁹ the MNLF, Hamas or Hizballah, presented the higher percentage of groups receiving support (19.35% and 20% respectively). Groups that received state support were more likely to have no or low levels of authority (all groups that scored 0 in authority received state support). While less than 50% of groups received state support for every level of

¹⁰⁷ Explained more in details in the section below.

¹⁰⁸ The Moro National Liberation Front is an organisation operating in the Philippines that was founded in 1972 which is reported in the MOVS dataset as belonging to the ideology category "6", indicating a violent actor that adheres to religious-inspired and ethnonationalist ideologies.

¹⁰⁹ The PIJ is an Islamist paramilitary organisation formed in 1980s operating in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

legitimacy, those who scored a medium-to-high legitimacy (level 4) were more likely than the other groups (37.50%) to do so.

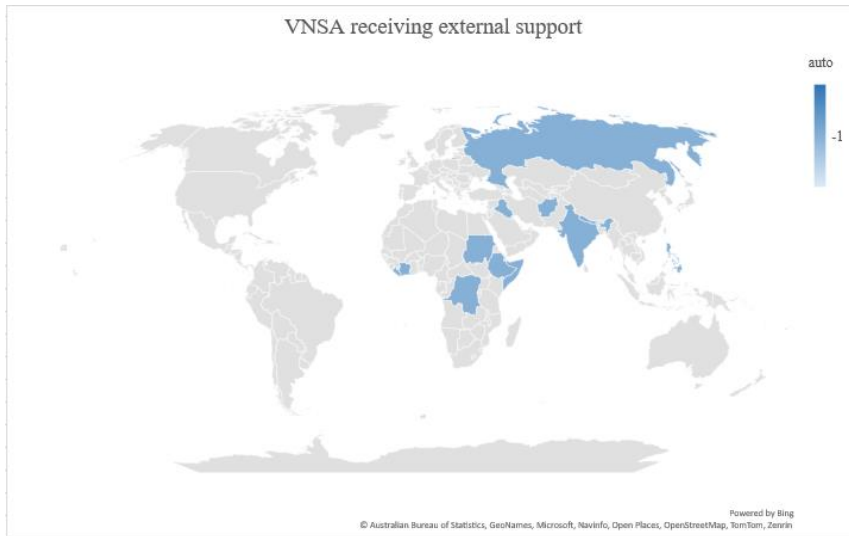


Figure 22: Map of violent non-state actors which receive state support in the MOVS database.

4.4.1. International recognition

Mutual recognition of sovereignty over a delimited territory and population has been one of the core elements of state making since the 18th century. It has also been argued that the classification of a political structure as a state often hinges on whether it is officially recognised as such by the international community of states. In the twenty-first century, international recognition remains at the centre of several disputes, with independentist movements seeking to legitimise their claims.

As explained in the previous section, international recognition for violent non-state actors was calculated by looking at reports mostly identified in the Quasi-State Index (Albert 2022) of said groups

joining an international organisation. The term “international organisation” could be then loosely interpreted as the engagement in formally-recognised IOs or alliances, - reflecting in part the concept of “rebel diplomacy” as elaborated by Coggins (2015). This concept refers to the establishment of bilateral relations between the violent non-state actor and third parties, but mostly with the states. Indeed, Arias reports that

“while criminals and state actors may sometimes work together, these contacts are almost always hidden from public view since the state’s legitimacy is, in part, based on protecting society against criminals” (Arias, 2006, p. 300).

In the case of the “international recognition” variable,¹¹⁰ the participation of a violent group in an international organisation is reported for 70 out of the 1148 observations in the dataset. By removing duplicates across time, only 10 organisations are reported to have attempted to join and/or joined an international organisation between 1998 and 2012.

The literature review had highlighted that some violent non-state actors appear to be generally disinterested in gaining international recognition. Depending on their objectives, violent non-state actors will be more or less interested in gaining international

¹¹⁰ The same caveat that applies for the variable “justice” or for the variable “militia/police” needs to be pointed out for this variable. In a few words, data is likely to be available for a limited number of actors across the dataset due to the fact that the operationalisation of this variable is dependent exclusively on one specific database.

recognition. Despite being a very small number, the majority of the organisations that scored “1” under the category of international recognition were ethno-nationalist or leftist such as the Communist Party of India - Maoist (CPI-M). This seems to suggest a, albeit weak, correlation between an organisation’s interest in being officially recognised as a member of the international system and their attempt to join organisations that would increase its legitimacy in the eyes of the other states.

Groups that actively attempted to join IOs were most likely to be medium-to-large in terms of size, and aged between 20 and 29 years. For instance, the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), scored positively between 1998 and 2005, when it was aged 22 and older.¹¹¹ A similar case is the Front for the Liberation of Cabinda / Cabinda Armed Forces (FLEC-FAC),¹¹² based in Angola, or the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF),¹¹³ which was reported to have attempted to join an international organisation at the age of 31.

¹¹¹ The Free Aceh Movement was a separatist group which was active in the region of Sumatra, Indonesia, between 1976 and 2005.

¹¹² The Front for the Liberation of Cabinda / Cabinda Armed Forces (FLEC-FAC) is an ethno-nationalist organisation operating in Angola since the country’s independence from Portugal in 1975.

¹¹³ Similar to the MNLF, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is a militant organisation operating in the Philippines since the 1970-1980s. The MILF is a splinter, religious-inspired cell of the MNLF, which concluded peace negotiations with the Philippine government for the creation of an autonomous region in the country called Bangsamoro.

No organisation between 31-40 years old and over 52 years old was reported to have attempted to join any IOs in the covered timeframe. This could indicate either that an organisation loses interest in gaining recognition after engaging in violent activities for a long time, or that there is no interaction with the international system for the same reason. Among them, only a small percentage received state support. Almost all of the organisations (9/10) held a territory at some point between 1998 and 2012 – confirming what highlighted in the literature review of Chapter 1 about the importance of holding a territory for recognition in the international system.

Half of the VNSAs still engaged in illicit activities despite their involvement in an international organisation. Organisations that benefited from international recognition were also likely to be organised in a similar way as to a state (6/10), engage in media propaganda (8/10), have a set justice system (7/10) and deliver public services (8/10). Reduced involvement was found in the collection of taxes (5/10), and the organisation of a militia (4/10). In synthesis, despite representing a very small number of organisations in comparison to the larger number of violent non-state actors, those that enjoyed international recognition were the ones that were more likely to have a clear set up that resembled the one of a state.

4.4.2. Violent recognition

As thoroughly presented in Chapter 2 and 3, authors (Arjona et al., 2015; Coggins, 2015; Huang, 2016; Kasfir, 2005) have delved into the concept of “shadow networks”. These networks emerge when

“communities form, ideologies evolve, and worldwide alliances and antagonisms” develop among “dominions (...) that follow hierarchies of authority, rules of conduct, ways of punishing transgression and codes of behaviour” (Nordstrom, 2000, p. 46).

They exhibit the following characteristics:

- They are “more formalized, integrated, and bound by rules of conduct than studies of the grey and black market (...) imply (...);
- by definition international (...);
- not simply (shadow) markets or economies – but a compilation of political, economic, and sociocultural forces; [and] (...)
- not marginal to the world’s economy and politics.”
(Nordstrom, 2000, p. 46)

Violent recognition was intended by this dissertation as the establishment of shadow networks, alliances, and connection between violent non-state actors. If a VNSA engaged in such activity, it was assumed it would receive recognition by other VNSAs.

To operationalise violent recognition, the MOVS dataset examined the number of alliances and connections between violent non-state actors. This variable relied on BAAD2 data (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2018), which specifically focussed on the alliances and connection between VNSAs¹¹⁴ and non-state actors that engaged in criminal

¹¹⁴ See page 13 for the BAAD2 definition of “violent non-state actor”.

activities, effectively approximating this data to the organised crime-terror nexus explained in Chapter 3. While not all violent actors participate in profit-generating illicit activities, both MOVS and BAAD2 datasets indicate that an overwhelming majority do. Consequently, this dissertation inferred that these alliances were VNSA-VNSA interactions, regardless of an actor's criminal nature, and therefore a good representation of violent recognition. This decision resulted in a total of 277 observations indicating a violent non-state actor's engagement or participation in an alliance with another VNSA in the previous year during the 1998-2012 period. By removing duplicates over multiple years, this amounted to 53 unique actors.

As emphasised by Coggins (2015, p. 98), external legitimacy significantly impacts effective domestic authority. Literature review also highlighted that "even rebels strongly disinclined to perpetuate war as an end in itself - may find diplomatic engagement valuable" (Coggins, 2015, p. 99). Perliger and Palmieri's study (2022) had also reported a series of factors as encouraging cooperation, including governance capacities, the legitimacy of the political leadership/system, and demographic characteristics. Their study found that groups are more likely to cooperate across borders than with local groups operating, particularly if they share similar ethnic or religious traditions, as well as shared interests. Cooperation is also linked to greater organisational longevity and a more institutionalised structure.

Data in the MOVS dataset is consistent with the literature review. Specifically, the majority (42/53) of the organisations participating to violent alliances controlled a territory between 1998 and 2012. Reflecting the literature on the organised crime-terror nexus, that often explored religiously-inspired terrorist organisations, violent organisations adhering to religious principles such as Al-Qa'ida were also more likely to exhibit violent recognition in the MOVS database.

Slightly contradicting the literature review, the MOVS dataset does not identify a strong correlation between violent recognition and population increase. In fact, small-to-medium groups (more than 49%) engaged in alliances with criminal organisations more than larger groups (more than 30%). This observation may suggest that larger groups aim for international legitimisation rather than violent recognition. Although the analysis could not confirm this hypothesis, it recorded that the ratio of large groups benefiting from international recognition compared the those benefiting from violent recognition was 10 to 8.

Overall, the MOVS dataset reports that the percentage of groups involved in alliances with criminal organisations increased as their authority levels became stronger. A similar trend is observed in relation to their legitimacy levels: approximately 80% of groups with strong legitimacy (level 5) were involved in alliances with criminal organisations.

To test Perlinger and Palmieri (2022) assumptions about a group’s institutionalisation and its cooperation with other violent groups, the analysis examined the percentages of VNSAs that scored “1” under violent recognition for each spatial element of statehood. This under the assumption that more spatial features indicate a major or minor institutionalisation. As Figure 23 illustrates, slightly over half of these groups were involved in each activity, with a slightly higher percentage in the provision of public services and, unsurprisingly, illicit economic activities.

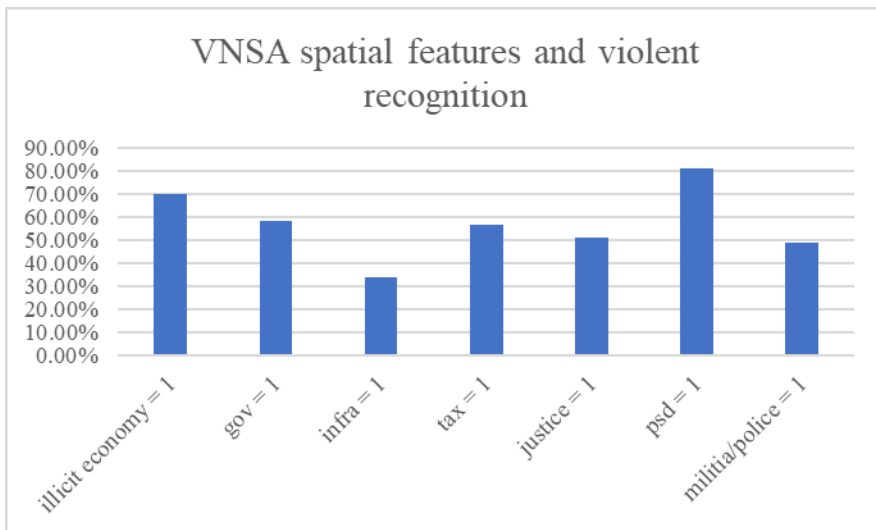


Figure 23: Violent non-state actors involved in alliances with criminal organisations also engaged in different spatial features (MOVS database).

Regarding the organisation’s durability in relation to violent alliances, the analysis sought to determine if longevity correlated with a group’s pursuit of violent recognition. It found that the percentages of involvement in alliances with criminal organisations increased as the organisations became older, reaching a peak when VNSAs were between 21-30 years old, and then decreased

drastically. By the time a group reached 53 years or older, this involvement disappeared entirely (Figure 24).

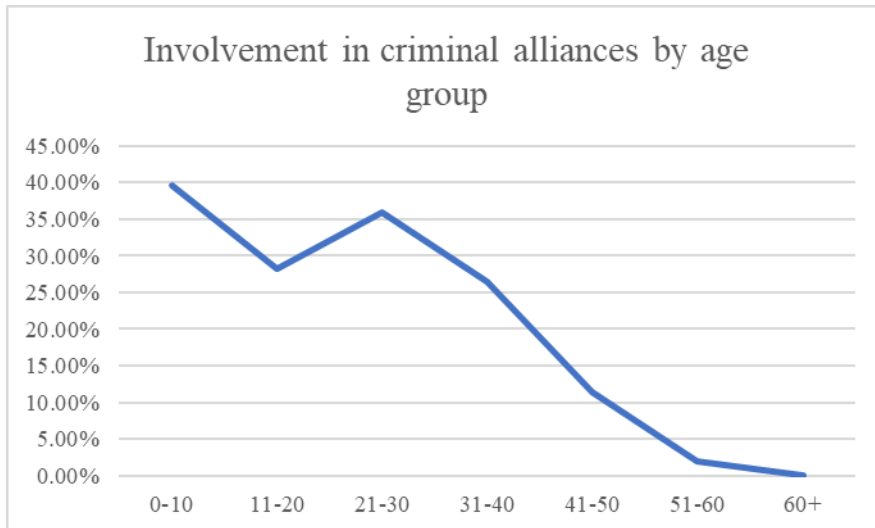


Figure 24: Violent non-state actors involved in alliances with criminal organisations according to age group (MOVS database).

Lastly, violent recognition was also theorised to be related to geopolitics. According to Makarenko and Mesquita,

“the various linkages seen to exist between OC and terrorism depend upon the (geo) political traits prevalent; that is, the level of stability within the geographic region in which they operate determines the type of relationship that exists, its comparative opacity and the predictability of its actions.” (Makarenko & Mesquita, 2014, p. 261).

The MOVS dataset reflects this argument. A larger number of violent non-state actors engaged in violent alliances was located in countries scoring 8-9 in the Fragile State Index’s Legitimacy Indicator. Similarly, a high percentage of VNSAs scoring “1” under

violent recognition were located in countries scoring 7-8 in the FSI's Security Indicator.

Regarding geographical distribution, the data in the MOVS does not offer qualitative case analyses of individual VNSA-VNSA alliance. However, it does demonstrate a pronounced recurrence in the countries where these alliances occurred, highlighting groups located in the same countries (e.g. India, Israel and the West Bank, and Colombia), as well as within the same region (e.g. Horn of Africa) (Figure 25).

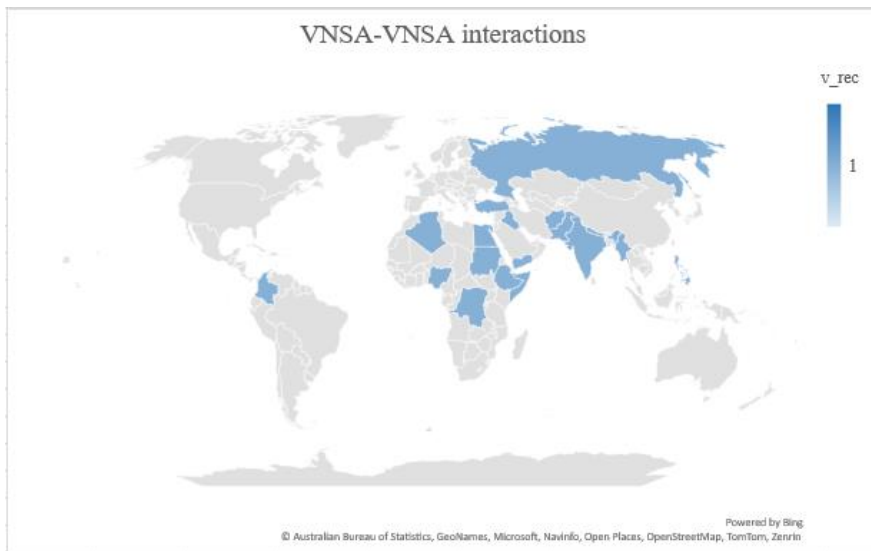


Figure 25: Map illustrating the location of violent non-state actors engaging in violent alliances (MOVS database).

4.5. Conclusions

This chapter undertook a comprehensive analysis of features and attributes of statehood exhibited by violent non-state actors operating within 47 jurisdictions between 1998 and 2012. The data

from the MOVS dataset, along with select case studies employed to offer qualitative insights in data-scarce scenarios, has yielded several significant findings that bear relevance for policymaking, academic discourse on VNSAs, and the ongoing analysis within dissertation.

Firstly, the chapter not only validated the assumptions outlined in the literature review regarding the emergence of “criminal governors”, but also expanded upon them to include several elements that influence the extent of this governance. Factors linked to VNSAs’ characteristics, including age, ideology, location, and population size exert varying degrees of influence on elements of statehood, spatial and performative alike.

Secondly, the study underscored that territorial control remains a pivotal factor for most violent governors. However, it is not a *sine qua non* condition contingent to a VNSA’s capability to manifest other spatial features. While territorial control does empower a violent actor to execute governmental functions, it does not invariably translate into impacting other performative attributes such as legitimacy or authority.

Thirdly, this chapter disclosed that legitimacy and authority of violent non-state actors are significantly contingent to their capacity to provide various components constituting the spatial aspect of “shelter”. These components encompass tax collection, the establishment of a justice system, the provision of public services and, to a lesser extent, the organisation of a militia or police force.

Delivering essential services to both group members and civilians was directly associated to heightened legitimacy and authority levels. Notably, engagement in media services and propaganda played a role in elevating VNSAs' legitimacy and authority. Among all the various spatial features, public service delivery and engagement in media propaganda were more prevalent in older, larger groups with high legitimacy and authority scores.

Fourthly, this chapter emphasised the significance of geopolitical factors in shaping the statehood dynamics of VNSAs. It confirmed that a host country's instability and limited capacity to provide security and services are correlated with an increased presence of violent actors, violent alliances, and higher manifestations of violent statehood attributes. In essence, VNSAs exploit power, legitimacy, and security vacuums to bolster their own violent governance capacity. However, despite often outperforming the host country's governance levels, only a very limited number of violent organisations are benefiting from international recognition.

Finally, the analysis highlighted the significance of financial resources, either expressed through participation in illicit activities or financial support by a sponsor state, in sustaining and consolidating the governance capacity of violent non-state actors. However, it did not provide data regarding any transition from the illicit to the licit profit-generating activities at any point in the lifespan of the violent organisation.

In sum, this chapter has aimed to construct a taxonomy (Table 11) of the multifaceted nature of manifestations of features and attributes of statehood among violent non-state actors. By comprehensively examining features such as territorial control, service provision, financial resources, and attributes such as legitimacy and authority, and so on, this study contributes to the broader understanding of the evolving nature of sovereignty in contemporary violent environments.

Table 11: Summary of attributes of statehood and spatial features and performative attributes of criminal and violent statehood (adaptation from Table 1-2 of (Chappel Jr, 2002, p. 4,7).

Attributes of statehood	State	Violent Governors
Government	Government	Technical core (command and control; political leadership; military leadership) Peripheral nodes (departments)
Organic essentials (organised economy)	Organised economy	Financial network Illicit businesses Supply network Participation in legitimate businesses
Infrastructure	Roads, logistics, factories	Training camps/Safe Houses Transportation networks and smuggling routes Propaganda/Communication channels
Population	Citizens	Group's members Civilians (local population) Non-members criminals
Shelter (Security and Justice)	Military Police Laws Taxation Service provision	Active cadre Security enforcers Laws and code of behaviour Protection money collection Service provision
Performative attributes	Legitimacy Autonomy Authority	Legitimacy Autonomy Authority
Recognition	International recognition	State sponsorship Participation in IOs Violent diplomacy

CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 provided an in-depth description of the manifestations of violent statehood as reflected in the MOVS database. It revealed a mosaic of recurring tendencies and significant contributors to the degree of engagement in governance by violent actors. These trends shall be taken as they are - a reflection of numerous observations stemming from media reporting, which may not encompass the entirety of the attributes manifested by the selected case studies and may not explain the full reality for these actors' violent attributes. Nonetheless, when juxtaposed with the literature review on the subject, distinct assumptions emerge, aiding in the formulation of a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon.

The process of case selection that was conducted for the creation of the dataset unveils a series of shared traits among the diverse array of violent non-state actors. Notably, these include the existence of power and legitimacy vacuums within the regions in which violent groups operate, a correlation between public service delivery and a group's legitimacy and authority, and a link between the manifestation of specific elements of statehood and the longevity of the groups. By delineating these consistent patterns, Chapter 4 laid a fairly solid foundation for further analysis.

The following chapter seeks to delve deeper into the quantitative insights supplied by the database, aligning them with the hypotheses delineated in Chapter 3. This endeavour aims to further unravel the

intricacies of manifestations of statehood within the realm of VNSAs.

Linear regression analysis was selected as the methodological cornerstone for this type of analysis. A statistical technique, linear regression analysis enables the examination of the relationships between multiple independent variables and a dependent variable. Specifically, it enables the identification of patterns, the prediction of trends, and the quantification of each variable's impact on the dependent variable.

In the context of this dissertation, the chosen independent variables represented an operationalisation of hypotheses one, two, and three. The dependent variable, representing the overall expressions of attributes of statehood by VNSAs, was encoded in the database as "movs". This variable encompassed violent actors' spatial features and performative attributes such as control over territories, population dynamics, governance structures, legitimacy, and so on.

The selection of linear regression analysis as the design of choice stems from this method's capacity to offer a quantitative perspective through which substantiate the hypotheses delineated in the previous chapters. By quantifying the impact of the various variables, it was decided that linear regression analysis would provide a systematic framework to discern which factors play significant roles in shaping the dynamics of violent statehood. It was swiftly realised, however, that the vastness and diversity of the observations within the MOVS dataset represented both a blessing

and a curse. The multitude of observations posed a challenge for analysis accuracy, leading to diluted and limited results applicable only to a small percentage of the total number of actors analysed in this study.

The chapter is divided as follows. First, it presents a comprehensive data analysis and interpretation of each hypothesis surrounding the relationships - or lack thereof - between the selected independent variables and the manifestation of statehood by VNSAs. Following this empirical examination, the chapter pivots to a holistic discussion on the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. Theoretically, the chapter explores how these insights fit within the broader literature on violent governance. On the practical front, the discussion delves into the policy implications deriving from the results (both found in Chapter 4 and this chapter), discussing what they mean for the state and global geopolitics.

5.2. Hypotheses testing

The following section aims to examine each hypothesis and its relationship with statehood elements manifested by violent non-state actors. Each subsection explains each hypothesis, how it was codified within the MOVS dataset, and what the linear regression analysis can reveal regarding its influence on degrees of violent statehood. Due to the fact that the Fragile State Index is only available for the years 2006-2012, the hypothesis testing was limited to this timeframe.

5.2.1. Hypothesis 1: The nature of the violent non-state actor.

Hypothesis 1 posits a relationship between the inherent nature of a violent non-state actor and the extent to which it displays elements of statehood normally attributed to the ones of a state. Building upon the theoretical assumptions presented by Arjona (2016) and Blomberg, Gaibullov, and Sandler (2011), it assumes that a group's longevity and size would affect its propensity to engage in activities that resemble the ones of a state. The underpinning hypothesis is that the older and larger the group, the more established it becomes, and the less complex the task of acting like a state.

Three additional assumptions were added to the concept of "nature" of a violent non-state actor. First, the assumption that, the more violent the group, the less likely it would engage in violent statehood. This relates to Arjona's (2016) concept of task complexity, as engaging in violent activities consumes time and resources that could be dedicated to "acting like state" activities. The second assumption was that more homogeneous groups would more likely engage in governance, following Mendelsohn (2011)'s arguments regarding the ineffectiveness of foreign fighters within a terrorist organisation. The third assumption was that a group's ideology would influence its engagement in governance. This stemmed from the descriptive analysis of the MOVS dataset provided in Chapter 4, which indicated that factors related to the nature of the VNSAs, such as age, ideology, location, and population size were all elements which, to different degrees, affect

all features and attributes of statehood, spatial and performative alike. In terms of ideology, it was shown that the religious-inspired category was the most common ideology for groups with high levels of violent statehood attributes.

Hypothesis 1 was then conceptualised by examining data in the MOVS database under the variables “ideology”, “population”, “age”, and “ucpbd”.¹¹⁵ As for homogeneity, the lack of data represented an insurmountable task that prevented the codification of this variable.¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, hypothesis 1 was tested against the remaining variables. Ideology had also to be tested singularly due to its qualitative nature. Meanwhile, population, longevity, and violence were tested both singularly and combined under the variable “task complexity_1”. A higher task complexity score implied an easier task, under the assumption that older, larger, and more peaceful groups would have more time and resources to dedicate themselves to governance provision.

5.2.2. Hypothesis 2: The nature of the host state

Hypothesis 2 introduces a conjecture that underscores the pivotal role of the host country in shaping the manifestation of violent

¹¹⁵ The number of deaths the organisation inflicted in battle; derived from the UCDP Battle Deaths dataset.

¹¹⁶ This is because the limited structured data on this topic mostly focused on jihadist organisations. Meanwhile, only unstructured, anecdotal information was available for the majority of other typologies of organisations.

statehood by VNSAs. The underpinning assumption is based on Mampilly's (2011) and Mendelsohn's (2011) remarks on the political aspirations of some of the violent non-state actors, mostly rebel and terrorist organisations, and their need to outperform a state in governance provision. Likewise, this hypothesis builds on Arjona's (2012) concept of task complexity (a better performing state implies a harder task for the violent actor), and the concept of the retreat of the state and "ungoverned spaces" (Clunan and Trinkunas 2010).

The hypothesis also builds on Chapter 4's descriptive analysis of the MOVS dataset, which indicated that more VNSAs were located in countries which scored 7 and 9 and 6 or higher for both FSI's Security and State Legitimacy Indicators respectively, and that scored 50/120 or higher in the Fragile State Index's overall score.

The hypothesis was then conceptualised by looking at data surrounding a state's legitimacy, capability of providing security, governance, and economic wellbeing. These are encapsulated in the variables "FSI_leg" and "FSI_sec", "FSI_psd", and "FSI_eco" of the Fragile State Index. Like the previous task, these variables were explored independently and then combined together under the variable "task complexity_2". A higher score in this variable indicated an easier task, to reflect the scoring method utilised by the FSI.

5.2.3. Hypothesis 3: Competition by other actors

Hypothesis 3 introduces an intriguing perspective that shifts the focus from the inherent nature of both violent non-state actor and its host state to the dynamic influence of external actors engaged in similar activities (violent actions as well as governance).

In contrast to the previous hypotheses, this proposition posits that the degree of violent statehood exhibited by the VNSA is more dependent on two elements: on the one hand, whether there are other violent organisations operating in the territory; on the other hand, whether there are other state forces that engage in governance. This hypothesis underscores that the complexity of the task undertaken by VNSAs – that is, the provision of governance and the manifestation of violent statehood – is significantly impacted by the concurrent existence of other state and non-state actors. The rationale is that an increased presence of external actors creates competition for both the local population’s allegiance and the limited available resources. Consequently, the pursuit of governance becomes less feasible, due to the diversion of capacity and resources by the VNSA toward outcompeting external actors.

This hypothesis was then conceptualised by looking at data surrounding the presence of other violent non-state actors within the same territory, as well as of the provision of support to the host state by external governmental bodies. The former was encapsulated in the variable “nmbtrrr” of the RTG Dataset, which reported the number of other terrorist organisations operating in the same territory as the main actor within a given year. Whenever data was

not available, data was manually added whenever it was reported in the dataset that another VNSA was operating in the same country in a given year. The latter was operationalised by looking at the variable “FSI_ext”, which provided information on whether external actors were supporting the host state in governance and security provisions.

As for the previous hypotheses, these variables were explored independently and then combined together under the variable “task_complexity_3”. A higher score in this variable would indicate a more difficult task, highlighting a greater presence of external actors.

5.3. Data analysis and interpretation

Linear regression analysis was conducted for the three hypotheses in their combined form (task_complexity_1, task_complexity_2, task_complexity_3). The resulting analysis (Table 12) provides a coherent picture surrounding the significance of these hypotheses concerning the manifestations of features and attributes of statehood manifested by VNSAs. The R-square value¹¹⁷ of 0.27 indicates that

¹¹⁷ For the purpose of this dissertation, the following values were considered as relevant to the analysis:

- R-square value: answers the question “is there a resemblance between the data with a linear trend and how much noise is there?”
- Significance F: answers the question “is this a good model?”
- Coefficients: answers the question “what is the dependent-independent variables relationship?”
- P-value: answers the question “is this variable significant?”.

approximately 27% of the observations in the dataset can be explained by the three independent variables. This suggests a moderate level of explanatory power, indicating that there may be other factors not included in the analysis that also influence the degree of violent attributes of statehood.

Table 12: Last steps (1 and 2) in the linear regression analysis of task_comp 1,2,3 against movs.

	(1)	(2)
Intercept	0.254	-0.22
task_comp_1	1.812*** ¹¹⁸	1.820***
task_comp_2	-0.090	-
task_comp_3	0.543***	0.499***

The model found weak statistical significance between task_complexity_2, which relates to a state’s nature, and movs. Conversely, the model found a stronger statistical significance of the other two hypotheses (1 and 3).

The coefficients of these two hypotheses also provide valuable insights into how changes in these variables impact the dependent variable (movs). On the one hand, the coefficient of task_complexity_1 (1.8) suggests a positive relationship between the first hypothesis and degree of violent statehood. In other words, as the nature of the violent actor becomes more pronounced in terms of its age, size, and peacefulness, there is a substantial increase in its engagement in governance (Figure 26). The statistical significance of its coefficient further strengthens the validity of this

¹¹⁸ *** indicates that the p-value is < 0.005.

relationship, indicating that this association is unlikely to be due to chance.

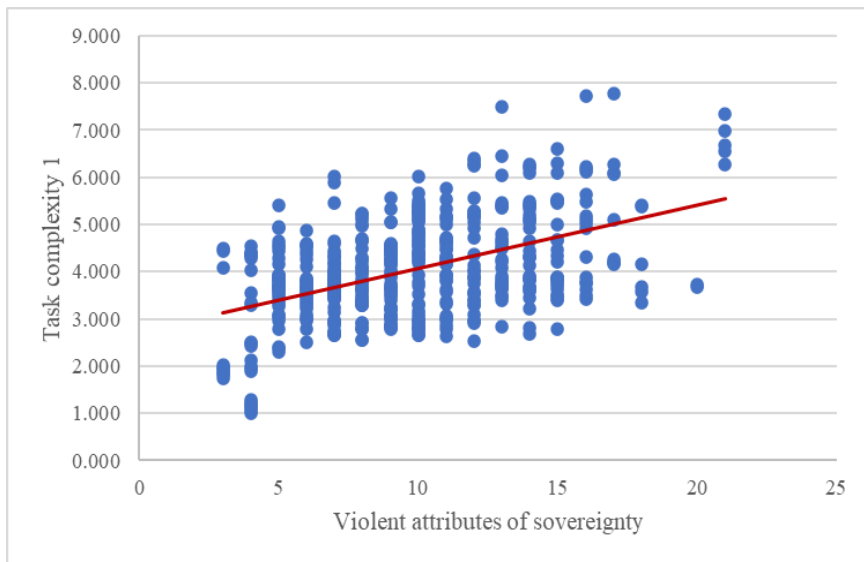


Figure 26: Impact of the nature of the VNSA on governance engagement.

On the other hand, the coefficient of `task_complexity_3` (0.5) shows that there is a moderate increase in the degree of features and attributes of statehood manifested by a violent non-state actor if competition by external actors increases. Comparing these two coefficients, it becomes evident that hypothesis 1 has a more substantial impact compared to hypotheses 3.

Linear regression analysis was also conducted against the three task complexities by removing 13 observations surrounding the only two countries that scored 5 or less in multiple categories of the Fragile State Index, namely Spain and the United Kingdom. This was done to test whether these observations (which were the only “odd ones out” in the database) were just noise affecting and diluting the results. The removal of said observations increased the overall

relevance of the model as it slightly increased the R-value. However, it gave very similar results with regards to the hypotheses' relevance to manifestations of violent statehood.

Multiple linear regression analysis was also conducted on the single variables that compose task_complexity_1, task_complexity_2, and task_complexity_3. This decision was made on the grounds that the elaboration of the different hypotheses had proven to be difficult due to the various ranges used by each (e.g. the Fragile State Index uses a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the best and 10 is the worst). As for the previous analysis, reverse stepwise regression was conducted to reach a parsimonious model (see Table 13) that would not contemplate superfluous variables.

Table 13: Linear regression analysis for each variable against movs.

R Square	0.413		0.413		0.412		0.411	
	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
Intercept	3.949	***	4.034	***	4.045	***	4.054	***
Age	0.019	***	0.018	***	0.017	**	0.019	*
ucdpbd	0.001	***	0.001	***	0.001	***	0.001	***
population	1.983	***	1.982	***	2.021	***	2.008	***
nmbvnsa	0.107	***	0.110	***	0.105	***	0.105	***
FSI_sec	0.072	0.631	-	-	-	-	-	-
FSI_leg	0.556	***	0.596	***	0.591	***	0.513	***
FSI_serv	-0.775	***	-0.789	***	-0.697	***	-0.716	***
FSI_ext	-0.122	0.238	-0.110	0.272	-0.100	0.314	-	-
FSI_eco	0.095	0.472	0.123	0.297	-	-	-	-

The resulting model (R-square value 0.411) increases in significance in comparison to the previous one, but still assumes the

existence of other factors influencing a greater or lesser degree of violent statehood manifestations.

The model partly confirmed the results of the previous analysis, giving it greater granularity. In particular, it found that the main features of the host state, namely the degree of economy, provision of security, and external actors presence, were less meaningful to the degree of elements of statehood manifested by a violent non-state actor. The provision of security by the host state was the least significant variable to the manifestation of violent statehood.

Two features of the host state were found by the model to be highly significant to variations in attributes of violent statehood. On the one hand, the model found that higher legitimacy fragility is associated with an increase in the degree of violent statehood demonstrated by violent non-state actors.

Meanwhile, factors influencing the nature of the violent non-state actor appeared to have relative significance to variations in “movs”. Variables related to a VNSA nature such as size and violence levels were found to be significant in early stages of the regression model. In particular, the model highlighted that an increase in size and in violence was associated with an increase in an actor’s violent statehood score.

Age was also found to be linked to variations in the degree of governance engagement by the VNSA, albeit not as significantly (p-value < 0.1). The number of violent non-state actors operating in the host state was also associated with an increase in the statehood

features and attributes by violent non-state actors. Looking at the model's coefficients and p-values, it is fair to argue that even the smallest variation in any of these variables is associated with a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable "movs."

To be even more confident of the data results, an additional multiple regression was conducted, this time by filtering the dataset according to the three most-common ideologies: religious, ethno-nationalist, and leftist. This decision stemmed from evidence found in the literature review surrounding the difference in governance provision by jihadist organisations and ethno-nationalist groups. This decision was also made considering Chapter 4's analysis, which had found that the type of ideology to which a group adhered played a particular influence over specific features of violent statehood such as territory control and public service delivery. It was then considered it would make sense to see which factor influenced more governance provision in ideologically-different violent non-state actors.

The analysis found that the factors influencing the degree of manifestations of attributes of statehood varied among the three ideology types (see Table 14). Age was only a significant factor for ethnonationalist groups (ideology 3). Meanwhile, population was relevant for ethnonational and leftists organisations (ideology 3,1). The host-state provision of services was only statistically significant for religious-inspired groups (ideology 2), whose degree of governance engagement was also found to be susceptible to

minimal variations in the number of other violent non-state actors operating in the host territory and their own level of violence.

Somewhat unsurprisingly given their shared political nature, leftist organisations and ethnonationalist groups shared a couple of statistically significant factors in common, namely population and the host-state legitimacy. However, while for ethnonationalist groups a decrease in legitimacy in the host state would mean an increase in their engagement in governance,¹¹⁹ for leftist organisations the opposite was found to be true. For both these groups, the presence of external actors had little to no significance.

Table 14: Top-three statistically-significant factors influencing the degree of violent governance, according to ideology category.

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Ideology 1		
R Square	0.486	
Population	4.043	1.7E-07
FSI_leg	-1.476	4.1E-05
Ideology 2		
R Square	0.521	
Ucdpbd	0.001	9.3E-11
Nmbrvnsa	0.136	0.0002
FSI_serv	-1.229	4.67E-06
Ideology 3		
R Square	0.578	
Age	0.117	1.7E-14
Population	1.594	2.7E-08
FSI_leg	0.914	3.0E-06

¹¹⁹ It needs to be reminded that the Fragile State Index is calculated from 1-10, with 1 being the best and 10 the worst. Therefore, if a country scores 10 in FSI_leg means that it completely lacks legitimacy.

5.4. Discussion

The analysis of the single features and attributes of statehood manifested by VNSAs provided in Chapter 4 and the statistical analysis of the combined score of violent statehood show an interesting perspective on violent governance that has theoretical and policy implications.

When considered independently, each factor hypothesised in this thesis exerts a moderate to high level of influence on the singular elements of statehood. For instance, the lack of security provision by the host country is likely to impact a violent organisation's size at any given point in time. Similarly, age affects the engagement of violent actors in specific features, such as media propaganda, territory control, the establishment of a justice system, or the provision of public services. However, when examined in the broader context, and analysed over multiple years against an organisation's overall MOVS score, these same factors lose some of their significance. Their relevance also varies depending on the ideology of the group.

This calls for a nuanced understanding of the diverse factors influencing VNSAs' manifestations of statehood. These factors encompass regional dynamics, governance deficits, corruption, and socio-economic conditions, as well as the nature of the violent actor and its interactions with external groups. The resulting theoretical and policy implications also need to be context-specific, and recommend strategies that address fragility, governance gaps, corruption, and economic disparities.

5.4.1. Relevance of the violent state's features

The linear regression analysis conducted for this chapter underscored a correlation between the nature of the violent actor, gauged by factors such as age, size, and peacefulness, and a substantial increase in its engagement in governance. This trend is consistent with the findings of Chapter 4, which explored the influence of a group's age, size, and ideology on the manifestations of independent statehood elements. It is worth noting, however, that the analysis highlighted another observation: when examining the individual components of the VNSA's nature hypothesis in relation to the overall MOVS score, their significance reduces in comparison to other external factors. Their significance also varies depending on which ideology to which the group adheres.

The analysis also unveiled a correlation between group size and more structured organisations, underscoring the role of group dynamics in influencing their governance effectiveness and their reach. This correlation suggests that larger, older groups are more inclined to explore avenues to resemble a state. This finding can be explained through the lens of institutional inertia and resource accumulation. On the one hand, older groups accumulate experience and internal cohesion over time, leading to acquisition of skills and developing into structures which, albeit not equivalent to the ones of a full-fledge state, may mirror rudimentary governance structure. Following the theory of institutional inertia (Aksom 2022), older, more established groups are more inclined to maintain and expand their existing, rudimental governance structures. This inclination

leads towards institutionalisation, and as a result a greater degree of statehood. On the other hand, a group with a larger population would need to acquire more resources to satisfy the increased population's demands. As a result, spatial features increase. The availability of more resources also leads to the diversification of the group's members' activities into sectors that go beyond military forces.

Both Chapter 4 and this chapter also provided interesting insights into the interplay of ideology in the context of violent governance. Chapter 4 emphasised that ideology wields the most influence when assessed against the engagement of VNSAs in individual elements of statehood. The absence of a clear ideology reduces a group's involvement in public service delivery, suggesting a weaker commitment to act like a state and potentially a focus on more opportunistic activities. Chapter 4 also stressed that groups that actively attempt to join international organisations are most likely to be medium-to-large in terms of size, and aged between 20 and 29 years. Older and larger groups with a clearer political goal (e.g. ethnonationalist organisations or leftist organisations) could be better positioned to negotiate with external actors and establish diplomatic ties.

In parallel, linear regression analysis conducted in this chapter identified different influential factors for each ideology. The analysis also highlighted a relationship between the level of violence in which a VNSA engages and its degree of statehood manifestations. In this case, it is important to stress how the nature

of violence itself is intertwined with governance dynamics and ideology. Understanding the underlying motivations and goals of violent actors is essential for predicting their engagement in governance activities. For instance, policymakers should keep into consideration the fact that violence levels and the number of other VNSAs in a specific territory were the most significant factors exclusively influencing the degree of statehood of religious-inspired VNSAs. As such, strategies must be context-specific and keep into consideration a group's history and specific characteristics.

5.4.2. Relevance of host-state features

The linear regression analysis conducted for this chapter and its findings suggest a re-evaluation of certain commonly-assumed relationships between a host state features and violent statehood manifestations. Notably, the degree of a country's economic stability and security provision were not found in this study to be as influential as previously thought. This does not mean that the host state does not play a role in the development of a violent actor's features and attributes of statehood.

First, the geographical distribution of instances of violent statehood sheds a light on regions heavily affected by conflict and fragility. The fact that, in the MOVIS database, all but two countries among the 47 scored 7 or more in the Fragile State Index indicates that there is a propensity of violent actors to appear in countries with

limited governance capability.¹²⁰ The concentration of these instances in West and Central Africa, South-East Asia, and the Middle East reflects the complex interplay of political, economic, social, and historical factors that contribute to the emergence and persistence of VNSAs.

Second, while a host state's specific features such as security provision or economic stability were found not to be significant factors in the overall degree of statehood by VNSAs over time, it does not mean they are not relevant to VNSAs' singular elements. For instance, the majority of MOVS actors were located in countries which scored 8 or 9 in the Fragile State's Index Security Indicator. More than 68% of the countries covered in the database also had a gross-domestic product (GDP) per capita of US\$ 5,000 or less. The lack of a strong statistical significance may be attributed to multiple factors, including the potential time lag between economic changes and their effects on a violent actor's governance engagement.

Third, these disparities indicate that the factors driving VNSAs' manifestations of statehood are nuanced and context-dependent. A future theoretical and policy framework must consider regional variations in factors such as historical changes, instances of

¹²⁰ This thesis keeps into consideration the potential of "availability bias" surrounding the date in the MOVS dataset, due to the fact that it is heavily dependent on Western news reporting. Even so, it is undeniable that there is a propensity of violent non-state actors reported to control a territory in countries heavily affected by conflict and fragility.

religious or ethno-nationalist or leftist extremism, and external influences to provide a more accurate understanding of VNSAs' behaviour.

For instance, the linear regression analysis did not consider corruption levels on the grounds that they were partly included in the FSI legitimacy, economy, and security scores. However, qualitative analysis provided in Chapter 4 highlighted a correlation between higher Fragile States Index scores and the presence of VNSAs. This indicates that fragility and weak state institutions could be a factor that creates fertile ground for non-state actors to assert attributes of statehood. Conscious of the correlation between corruption and state legitimacy, this finding emphasises the need for states to focus on bolstering their legitimacy through transparent governance, effective institutions, and public engagement. This recommendation is corroborated by the regression model's findings about the link between higher legitimacy fragility and an increase in violent statehood manifestations. Neglecting legitimacy concerns could inadvertently facilitate the rise of violent non-state actors. In particular, it is to be observed that when an organisation has a more clearly-defined political objective (e.g. leftist or ethno-nationalist), its degrees of governance are affected by the host-state display of legitimacy.

5.4.3. Relevance of external competition

The analysis found a moderate correlation between an increase in the degree of statehood manifested by a violent non-state actor and an increase in the presence of external actors in the same territory.

A more granular analysis of the two elements that comprised task complexity 3, namely the presence of other violent non-state actors and of other state-supporting actors, however, indicated that only the former had a significant influence.

These findings reflect a series of considerations. On the one hand, a VNSA is not affected by competition or increased task complexity caused by actors supporting the host state. This could be interpreted in terms that the VNSA is already used to competing with the host state, so its governance provision is not affected by the presence of an additional institutionalised actor.

Further research should be conducted to assert whether this statement changes depending on the level of involvement of said actor and its policy and governance capacity. For instance, research should look at potential variations in the degree of governance by VNSAs in territories where external actors provide humanitarian aid, in comparison to external intervention only engaged in military activity.

Furthermore, the typology of the actor which provides support should be further explored. In particular, research should focus on exploring variations in the degree of violent statehood in territories where external military support is provided by a private military firm rather than an officially-recognised state.¹²¹ A similar conversation should be initiated surrounding the role of non-

¹²¹ For instance, the military interventions of the Wagner Group in multiple African states.

governmental organisations involved in public service delivery and their significance on variations of a VNSA's statehood degree. As for state actors, research should focus on looking at variations in MOVS depending on which country is engaged in such external intervention, and its governance capacity.¹²²

On the other hand, the model highlighted a positive correlation between an increase in MOVS degrees and the number of violent non-state actors operating in a same area. With the literature findings of Chapter 3 in mind, this observation could be interpreted in the light of VNSA-VNSA competition, or cooperation.

On the one hand, it could signify that the presence of more violent actors within a given territory spurs the main VNSA to outcompete them in terms of governance provision. The presence of so many violent actors could also mean that the state's ability to counter violent infiltration is reduced. In this sense, then, the complexity of the task for the violent non-state actor decreases, rather than increasing.

On the other hand, it could also mean that violent actors in a delimited territory are more prone to cooperation, thus once again increasing the complexity of the task for the state, while augmenting the opportunities of engagement for the violent actor. Regardless of the explanation, this finding should be kept into consideration at the time of developing international strategies, as

¹²² For instance, external intervention provided by the United States as opposed to Iran, China, or Saudi Arabia.

potential priority should be given to those countries which are facing threats from multiple violent actors.

5.4.4. Theoretical and policy implications

The linear regression analysis models applied to analyse the data included in the MOVS database have different limitations. In particular, the fact that these models explain only part of the observations in the database represents a key factor that needs to be kept into consideration at the time of developing policy responses. This on the grounds that there could be other explanatory factors to variations of degrees of governance that have not included in this study.

Despite this limitation, the combination of the statistical analysis of this chapter with the more nuanced descriptive analysis of each attribute and feature presented in Chapter 4 allows to derive a set of assumptions that lead to pertinent theoretical and policy implications.

First, from a theoretical standpoint, this study has confirmed several assumptions identified in the literature review on non-state governance and the perforation of sovereignty by non-state actors. However, the fact that this dissertation's models account only for a limited number of observations indicates that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all theory on violent governance. Instead, the resulting theoretical contributions need to be nuanced, keeping into consideration the typology of violent non-state actor (e.g. terrorist organisation, rebel group, organised criminal group), their main

features (e.g. size, longevity, location), as well as the regional differences and host country characteristics.

Second, this study has emphasised the significance of the nature of violent non-state actors in shaping their engagement in governance. From a theoretical perspective, this highlights the importance of examining VNSAs not just as amorphous entities, but as complex organisations with internal hierarchies and conflicting priorities. The engagement of these actors in the very same activities typical of an internationally-recognised state also calls for an assessment of VNSAs as rational, rather than irrational, actors equal to a state.

The findings also stress that, despite the convergence of different categories of violent organisations, they still cannot be broadly branded under the umbrella term of “violent non-state actors”. Ideology continues to play a crucial role in defining objectives and strategies of violent non-state actors and their involvement in governance and influences their engagement in public service delivery, provision of justice, or legitimacy building. Because of this, while useful, the term “violent non-state actor” can be used, but research should also focus on each actor individually. Further research is also needed on criminal organisations’ behaviour and their approach to governance, to update the MOVS dataset with more data on these organisations.

Third, the identification of areas of weak governance and their relation to specific violent non-state attributes of statehood underscores the importance of understanding local context and

dynamics when analysing non-state actors' influence on statehood. This implies that research should focus on ways violent actors exploit governance gaps and establishing themselves as alternative authorities. While it has been established by the literature on this topic that there are hardly ever any “ungoverned spaces”, this study reports that specific factors that affect weak governance are more influential than others.

Finally, Chapter 4 has already highlighted that territory and violence remain essential elements for most violent governors. However, they are not indispensable conditions for a VNSA to increase its degree of violent statehood – especially depending on the ideology category to which it belongs. The statistical linear regression analysis confirmed these findings. It also highlighted the key importance of VNSA-VNSA relations to their engagement in governance. While, up until now, research had mostly examined this sort of interactions in the context of a group's longevity, this study has highlighted that the presence of other violent non-state actors in a host state is significant to the degree of engagement in statehood features and attributes by VNSAs. As such, violent interactions need to be further researched in the context of governance provision.

The findings also have a series of implications at the policy level. From a policy perspective, the low R-square and limited relevance suggest that tailored approaches to countering VNSAs are crucial. One-size-fits-all strategies are unlikely to succeed given the diverse motivations and characteristics of these groups. Policymakers

should work with local stakeholders to develop context-specific initiatives that address the drivers of VNSAs' engagement in governance. Considering the underscored link between higher legitimacy fragility and the increase in violent statehood manifestations, host states should be focusing on bolstering their legitimacy through transparent governance and public engagement.

Policies should also consider the shift in goals of the violent organisation and the main features of each group. This study shows that the oldest the organisation, the more likely it is to become involved in governance provision. Attempts at international recognition increase as the organisation grows in size and degree of statehood.

This study has also shown that conflict and external intervention are unlikely to mitigate the involvement of a violent organisation in governance. Policymakers should consider the best ways to engage with established violent non-state actors in ways that go beyond military intervention, by applying tailored policies that may change from violent actor to violent actor even within the same territory. Additionally, addressing one actor at a time might not be enough. Instead, there needs to be regional collaborative endeavours, with countries pooling resources and intelligence to facilitate a coordinated action.

Finally, the findings usher in a paradigm shift in power dynamics. States might need to recalibrate their strategies to account for the underpinnings of legitimacy and governance, shifting the lens

through which security is understood and perceived. A move beyond the traditional military-centric approach to security to include other kinds of threats will likely mitigate the emergence and permanence of violent non-state actors.

In particular, from a policy perspective, addressing fragility and corruption should be central to any strategy aimed at countering VNSAs. Targeting illicit financial flows is also likely to curb efforts and capability of violent non-state actors to engage in governance. By addressing governance gaps, reducing corruption, and enhancing accountability, states can decrease the appeal of VNSAs as alternatives to state authority.

5.5. Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to give statistical relevance to unstructured observations on violent non-state governance. Because of the variety of the data that was used to feed into said observations, the availability bias which this research encountered, and the elusive nature of the subject of these studies, the findings only provide a small peek into the reality of violent non-state actors and their relationship to governance provision.

However, this study underscores the critical connection between the characteristics of violent non-state actors and their evolving engagement in governance. It also provides useful insights on the interplay between different influencing factors – the nature of the VNSA, the nature of the host state, and the presence of external actors – in a more comprehensive way that includes both qualitative

and quantitative case studies. While the data's variety introduced challenges, it also enriched the analysis by capturing the heterogeneity across context and represents a starting point for future research that could deepen the understanding on violent governance.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has aimed to construct a taxonomy and provide a better understanding of the multifaceted nature of manifestations of violent statehood among violent non-state actors.

It started from a series of observations. First and foremost, it was believed that the perceived threat posed by VNSAs, often sensationalised by policymakers and the media, needed to be placed under the critical lens of academic inquiry. As such, understanding violent non-state actors, their operations, motivations, and implications on state governance and international relations was considered paramount in addressing academic and policy questions surrounding security and governance in the twenty-first century.

Secondly, the research had identified the need to contribute to a better understanding of the key features that characterise violent non-state actors, to help policymakers develop more robust and effective plans of action. While an initial review had identified multiple studies on specific typologies of VNSAs and their approach to statehood, the lack of a study that would provide a comprehensive snapshot on violent non-state actors as a whole was felt necessary.

The third guiding assumption was that, considering how VNSAs challenge traditional notions of state-based authority and territorial control, research should venture into a re-evaluation of these concepts in light of new actors operating in the international system,

and their impact on the dynamics of global governance. As such, comprehending how empirical sovereignty is exercised by these actors held the potential to aid in the development of policies aimed at dismantling and countering these organisations.

To bridge the existing research gap, the project has delved into the overarching question how violent non-state actors manifest features and attributes of statehood, and what factors influence the extent to which these manifestations occur. It explored theoretical and conceptual definitions surrounding matters of geopolitics, sovereignty and statehood, governance, and non-state actors, and developed its own definitions of “violent non-state actor” and “violent statehood”. From there, this research constructed a comprehensive taxonomy of the multifaceted nature of statehood features and attributes among VNSAs. The analysis encompassed various dimensions, including territorial control, service provision, financial resources, legitimacy, and authority. By engaging in this multidimensional examination, the aim was to contribute to a deeper understanding of how sovereignty is evolving in contemporary environments marked by violence and instability.

The preceding chapters in PART 2 presented a thorough analysis based on evidence gathered from both quantitative and qualitative research. This concluding chapter recaps the findings pertaining the geopolitics of violent non-state actors. Then, it discusses the study’s theoretical and policy contributions to the field of International Relations and Geopolitics, particularly in the context of VNSAs, statehood and governance. The final section of this chapter sets the

gaze upon the future, indicating potential avenues for further research. These future endeavours aim to build upon the foundations laid by this dissertation, fostering a deeper and more holistic understanding of VNSAs and their geopolitical implications. As the global landscape continues to evolve, so too must our understanding and responses to the challenges posed by violent non-state actors.

i. Theoretical and policy implications of the research findings

The research presents several theoretical and policy implications that challenge the traditional understanding of international relations and the role of state actors in the global arena. In a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape, the findings of this research offer valuable insights that can shape both theoretical frameworks and practical policies. While Chapter 5 has already dealt with some of these implications, this section explores them a bit more in detail.

a) Geopolitical Pluralism and the changing nature of global politics

PART I of this dissertation has highlighted the gradual theoretical shift away from the centrality of the State, grounded in territoriality, with deep consequences on the structure of global politics. This transformation is marked by the emergence and influence of non-state actors, particularly VNSAs, who can often operate across borders and not inherently tied to specific territories. Despite this, these non-state actors establish their own rules, institutions,

activities, and strategies, many of which possess geographical characteristics, including territoriality.

As we contemplate these changes, it becomes apparent that a uniform global political landscape no longer prevails. Rather, the post-modern conditions exhibit a fragmented political map where the Westphalian concept of sovereign spatiality persists in some regions, while in others, the traditional state-centric paradigm is challenged. This geopolitical pluralism, intended as the capacity of geography of being shaped by multiple socio-spatial conditions and actors, fundamentally alters the understanding of international politics. It calls for a re-evaluation of existing theoretical frameworks and the construction of new paradigms that can accommodate the evolving dynamics which recognise the loss of centrality and exclusivity of states in world politics.

This has consequences at the theoretical and policy level. Theoretically, this shift has profound implications for International Relations theory, which has already been reflected by multiple authors analysed in Chapter 1 and 2 of this dissertation, from Strange (1996), to Ohmae (1991), to Sørensen (1999). What this dissertation does is introducing the concept of “violent statehood”, expanding the traditional focus on the actions and interactions of sovereign states to accommodate the complexities introduced by violent non-state actors. By drawing a parallel with traditional definitions of statehood, proper of sovereign states, it defines as the capacity of a VNSA to have a permanent population, a defined

geographical territory, a government structure, and to enter into relationships with other VNSAs.

This definition differs from endeavours by other authors such as Mampilly (2011) and Arjona (2016), who have focused more on the concept of “rebel governance”. It is different because, on the one hand, it includes multiple actors that may or may not fit under the category of “rebel” or “insurgent” organisations. On the other hand, it broadens the focus, from “governance” to “statehood”, not only as the capacity of VNSAs to perform governance functions, but as the capacity of a VNSA to have a permanent population, a defined geographical territory, a government structure, and to enter into relationships with other VNSAs.

The conceptualisation of violent statehood also contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding geopolitics, particularly in the context of state deterritorialisation and the demise of territorial absolutism. While the late twentieth century has witnessed increased border permeability, the findings in this research have highlighted that there is not a complete demise of territoriality, especially by violent non-state actors. This research contributes to the exploration of the variations in intensity with which state and non-state actors engage in these evolving dynamics. Permeation of borders, changing functions, and the importance of performative attributes of statehood and geographical elements are differentiated both geographically and according to the actor’s perspective and goals. Not all entities react to the changing geopolitical landscape and adapt to the new paradigm of deterritorialisation in the same

manner – and as such every actor’s behaviour is contingent to the stage of its current relationship with space.

The analysis also recognises that VNSAs may be driven by ideologies or interests that differ significantly from those of established states. In this context, the conventional geopolitical tenets of anarchy, violence, and territoriality remain pivotal elements. Rather than dismissing these non-state actors as chaotic and irrational, the focus should shift towards understanding their unique versions of governance and manifestations of statehood attributes. These may bear a striking resemblance to traditional statehood attributes, although at different stages of their relationship with geography.

In this evolving theoretical landscape, this dissertation also calls for the recognition that VNSAs are not uniform in their objectives, motivations, or behaviours. The taxonomy presented in Chapter 4, as well as the analysis of the multiple factors influencing degrees of violent statehood conducted in Chapter 5, request theories must be adaptable and context-specific, allowing for a clearer and more focused understanding of different categories of VNSAs, such as terrorist organisations, rebel groups, and organised criminal groups. The typology of VNSAs, their characteristics (e.g., size, ideology, location), and the regional differences and host country characteristics all play significant roles in shaping the behaviour of these non-state actors. The shift towards geopolitical pluralism is also reflected in policy implications. Policymakers must navigate the complexities introduced by the presence and influence of

VNSAs in the international system. Informed by this theoretical re-evaluation, they must develop context-specific policies that address the drivers of VNSAs' engagement in governance.

b) VNSA nature and Governance

The role of ideology in shaping the objectives and strategies of VNSAs is a critical finding of this research. As shown in Chapter 4, ethno-nationalist organisations and religious-inspired groups consistently appeared in the research as being more likely to hold territory, engage in the provision of services, establish justice systems, and, in essence, mirror the structure of a recognised state. Chapter 5 has also highlighted that the nature of the violent non-state actor is crucial for its engagement in statehood features and attributes. Additionally, Chapter 3 and 4 have underscored the complexity of VNSAs as organisations. Rather than viewing them as amorphous entities, they should be recognised as complex organisations with internal hierarchies and conflicting priorities.

The research indicates that the age, size, and location of VNSAs influence their involvement in governance together with ideology. As VNSAs evolve and grow, their goals shift, and their involvement in governance becomes more pronounced. Attempts at international recognition also increase as the organisation grows in size and degree of statehood. In a few words, the bigger and older the violent actor is, the more likely it will act like a State. However, will it ever become one?

There is an interesting theoretical and policy lesson in the MOVS database surrounding the correlation between growth in size, longevity, and institutionalisation and violent statehood degrees, which is exemplified by the cases of the Taliban and the Islamic State.

In 2021, following the withdrawal of US troops, the Taliban ultimately overran the Afghan government and retook control of the country after 20 years. In the MOVS database, the organisation's gradual accumulation of features and attributes of statehood over the years, its growth in size, legitimacy, and endurance is evident. While the database does not provide data about the nine years prior to the organisation's 2021 takeover of Afghanistan, its 15-year snapshot from 1998 to 2012 provide a clear indication of their state-building efforts. The inevitable, correlated decline of Afghanistan's security, legitimacy, and service provision capabilities – despite external interventions – registered in the dataset is another indicator that the Taliban's efforts were working.

Meanwhile, the Islamic State's case comes as a cautionary tale when it comes to VNSAs efforts to act like a state. The group experienced a rapid ascent, with a correlated sudden increase in numbers and degree of violent statehood (from 6 to 15 over the span of eight years). However, the group potentially did too much, too quickly: its overly ambitious state-building attempts without the necessary foundations led the group too close to the sun and ultimately to its downfall. By the end of 2017, it had lost almost all the territory they had captured in the previous years.

While not all groups that are as big in size and as long-lived as the Taliban have yet reached the level of institutionalisation the group did in the 2020s for the takeover of Afghanistan, and might never do, the findings of this research highlight that institutionalisation, when executed meticulously over time, can lead to a VNSA to resemble a state.

These findings also have policy implications, particularly in the context of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts. Policymakers must recognise that ideology plays a crucial role in determining the behaviour of VNSAs. Therefore, policies aimed at countering these groups must consider their ideological underpinnings and motivations.

A one-size-fits-all approach to addressing VNSAs is unlikely to succeed due to the diverse motivations and characteristics of these groups. Instead, policy-makers should work with local stakeholders to develop context-specific initiatives that address the drivers of VNSAs' engagement in governance. This may include tailored strategies for ethno-nationalist organisations or religious-inspired groups that focus on addressing the specific ideological factors that drive their governance activities.

c) Illicit finance and violent statehood

Chapter 4 specifically highlighted that financial resources, whether derived from illicit activities or sponsor states, play a significant role in sustaining and consolidating the governance capacity of

VNSAs. This financial aspect is critical to their ability to govern effectively.

From a theoretical perspective, the financial aspect is, alongside the recurrence to violence, the key common thread among the different typologies of violent non-state actors. This research has confirmed the convergence of these violent organisations in particular when it comes to cooperate or operate within illicit financial networks. Illicit finance also becomes an important element when analysing the concept of security. This finding should push for expanding its understanding to include it as a security threat in the twenty-first century.

From a policy perspective, this means that disrupting VNSAs' access to funds is a paramount for any effort aimed at limiting their capacity to govern and gradually capture features and attributes of statehood. The fact that strategies aimed at tackling illicit financial flows are still missing from important security strategies at the national and international level is a key missing point that needs to be addressed.

Policies aimed at targeting illicit financial flows should be a priority for states and international organisations. For instance, this research highlighted that violent non-state organisations appeared consistently in specific countries and areas of the world. Said countries should look to include action aimed at disrupting illicit financial flows in their security strategies. Other international organisations such as NATO should also consider adding illicit

finance as a strategic threat to tackle in iteration of the 2030 global strategy.

d) Rethinking Security

As state, a recalibration of national security strategies to account for the underpinnings of legitimacy and governance in the context of VNSAs is needed. This necessitates a move beyond traditional military-centric approaches to security. From a theoretical perspective, the findings suggest that the concept of security must be redefined. Security can no longer be solely understood as the absence of military threats from other states. Instead, it must encompass a broader spectrum of threats, including those posed by VNSAs in the realm of governance. As stated in the previous section, it should also include non-traditional threats such as illicit financial flows.

Reconceptualising security has several policy implications. Policymakers and security agencies must broaden their focus to include other dimensions of security, such as human security and economic security. This expanded view of security recognises that VNSAs can pose significant threats to the well-being and stability of a region, even in the absence of traditional military aggression.

The main point highlighted in the previous section about the need to include new threats such as illicit financial flows in national and international security strategies becomes even clearer in the context of rethinking security. In particular, this shift in understanding security demands a more holistic approach to addressing the

challenges posed by VNSAs. Strategies should focus on enhancing the economic resilience and financial and socio-political stability of regions affected by VNSAs. This may involve addressing governance gaps, reducing corruption, and fostering accountability.

e) Geopolitical factors and statehood dynamics

Throughout the chapters, this thesis has emphasised that geopolitical factors play a pivotal role in shaping the statehood dynamics of VNSAs. The spatial features of statehood, driven by resource availability or the need to provide essential services, primarily influence the activities and interactions of these non-state actors. Theoretically, this thesis has confirmed – up to a point – the importance of territoriality in pre-modern contexts. It has also stressed the key role of “ungoverned spaces” in the global politics, as VNSAs exploit power, legitimacy, and security vacuums to bolster their governance capacity.

The fact that all countries covered in the MOVS database, with the exception of two, scored high in terms of economic fragility, instability, and corruption, is not due to chance. Instead, policies must be tailored to the unique geopolitical and ideological characteristics of each region and group. Collaborative efforts involving multiple states may be necessary to coordinate actions and address the root causes of VNSA presence.

ii. Scope for future research

This study has confirmed several assumptions identified in the literature review regarding non-state governance and the erosion of

state sovereignty. However, the inherent limitations of this research and the rich dataset provided by the Manifestations of Violent Statehood (MOVS) database offer substantial scope for further exploration and research in various dimensions. The findings of this thesis give rise to at least four future research avenues.

First, this study has provided a snapshot of VNSAs' governance attributes at a specific point in time – the period between 1998 and 2012. Future research can adopt a longitudinal approach to understand how and why certain VNSAs evolve over time and acquire statehood features and attributes. The MOVS database contains a wealth of historical data, and an in-depth analysis of how specific organisations develop over the years would be extremely useful. For instance, the MOVS tracks the gradual increase in the score of violent statehood of groups like the Taliban. In this specific case, it is possible to note a gradual increase which has led to the group's eventual control of Afghanistan. Studying how this increase happens for specific groups can shed light on the factors influencing these groups' trajectories and identifying common patterns and red flags. Understanding the connection between violent statehood degrees and potential territorial takeovers is crucial to prevent security disasters and inform policy decisions, such as the withdrawal of troops from volatile regions as it happened with US troops in 2021.

Second, while this study has employed the term “VNSA” to encompass a broad range of non-state actors, this one-size-fits-all approach should be replaced with more granular analysis of

individual actors. In particular, this research has highlighted that, while terrorist organisations and insurgent groups are extensively studied by quantitative research, criminal organisations remain relatively under-researched. There is a clear gap in comprehensive databases for these groups. Future research should focus on their behaviour, governance approaches, and territoriality. Updating the MOVS dataset with more comprehensive data on these organisations is essential to gain a holistic understanding of VNSAs.

Third, previous research has predominantly examined VNSA interactions in the context of short-term arrangements of convenience or competition (Idler, 2012; Williams, 2002a). This study has introduced the idea that the presence of other VNSAs in a host state significantly influences the degree to which VNSAs engage in statehood features and attributes. Future research should delve into interactions between violent governors, rather than just violent organisations, particularly in the context of governance provision. Exploring how VNSAs compete, cooperate, or coexist within a shared territory could help understanding how and whether there is a violent system operating in parallel to the one of internationally-recognised states.

Fourth and last, the MOVS dataset highlighted the different relationship between each and every one of the features and attributes of statehood and violent non-state actors. This database should be used to analyse the variation in approaches by VNSAs to each element of violent statehood. The Manifestations of Violent

Statehood database, as a valuable resource, should continue to expand. The expansion of the MOVS database with more comprehensive and up-to-date information, potentially less reliant on media reporting and more on on-the-ground research, will enhance the quality and accuracy of research in this field.

iii. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the research on the Geopolitics of Violent Non-State Actors presents a wealth of theoretical and policy implications that demand a re-evaluation of our understanding of global politics and security. The shift from a state-centric model to one of geopolitical pluralism, driven by the rise of VNSAs, requires a multifaceted approach to both theory and policy.

Theoretical frameworks in international relations must expand to accommodate the complex landscape of contemporary geopolitics. In particular, traditional state-centric theories need to make way for more inclusive paradigms that consider the role and impact of non-state actors, particularly VNSAs. While still operating in a Westphalian context, the diverse motivations, characteristics, and contexts of these violent actors require context-specific theoretical and policy approaches.

Policymakers must navigate this evolving landscape with flexibility and adaptability. Geopolitical pluralism and the presence of VNSAs translate into a redefinition of security and governance towards a holistic view of security that encompasses human security, economic security and violent governance.

The findings of this research underline the need for collaborative efforts, both within regions and at the international level. Considering the importance of other actors, from the local population to NGOs, to VNSAs operating in the territory of the violent governor, policymakers should work with local stakeholders, neighbouring states, and international organisations to develop strategies that address the root causes of VNSA engagement in governance. By recognising the complexities of the contemporary geopolitical landscape and adopting flexible and context-specific policies, it should be possible to better navigate the challenges posed by violent governors.

ANNEX I: CODEBOOK

Category	Definition
id_vnsa	Unique numeric identifier that represents the primary entity as identified in the Actors' master list.
vnsa_name	Name of the violent non-state organisation.
ucdp_id	Unique numeric identifier that represents the primary entity and can be used to look up aliases within the Uppsala Conflict Database Actors' master list.
year	Year for the data reported in the row.
ucdpid_year	Concatenation of the UCDP identifier of the violent non-state organisation and year.
age	The organisation's age, measured in years, which denotes how long a violent non-state organisation has been in existence. According to the BAAD Dataset, "ages are calculated from best known founding date, and founding dates may be well before the database data window. Age increments for each year in the data set. For organisations founded during the database window, the age for the organisation in its first year of operation is zero (0)." (Asal et al. 2018)
hbase	Country where the organisation is based. The BAAD dataset identifies it as the "“main” base/area of operations, as many violent non-state organisations operate in multiple countries." (Asal et al. 2018). For other databases which indicated multiple locations, research was conducted to identified sources that reported the country where the VNSA had primarily based its operations.

hbase_year	Concatenation of country where the organisation is based and year.
ideology	<p>Ideology to which the organisation adheres. Based on an operationalisation of variables reported in BAAD (left, reli, ethn) and RTG (left, reli, nat), and original research. Given that most organisations engaged in illicit activities to finance themselves, no score ((left, reli, nat) + profit) was given. As a result, 4 indicates those organisations that are reported to be organised criminal groups or that are reported not to adhere to a specific ideology, but engage in illicit activities.</p> <p>1 = the VNSA is reported to be promoting economically leftist policies such as redistribution of wealth by the government and nationalisation of industry.</p> <p>2 = the VNSA is guided by some form of religious principles.</p> <p>3 = the VNSA represents a certain ethnic group and advocates for the rights or expansion of that ethnic group.</p> <p>4 = the VNSA is not reported to adhere to a specific ideology, but is profit-driven.</p> <p>5 = the VNSA is reported to adhere to leftist and religious ideologies.</p> <p>6 = the VNSA is reported to adhere to religious and ethnonationalist ideologies.</p> <p>7 = the VNSA is reported to adhere to leftist and ethnonationalist ideologies.</p> <p>8 = there are no reports of the VNSA adhering to a specific ideology nor to be profit-driven.</p>
ucdpbd	The number of deaths the organisation inflicted in battle, derived from the UCDP Battle Deaths dataset. This variable is used to indicate how violent the organisation is within a specific year.

territory	<p>Territory is identified as the capability of the organisation "to control movement into, out of, or within a given territory. In some instances organisations will perform functions or provide services, similar to that of a legitimate government. Territory may be controlled by threat or use of force, or if the government grants the organisation the authority to do so. The territory must be a substantial area (city, region, etc.) and not just an organisation occupying a building or a couple of buildings. Thus this excludes military bases and checkpoints" (Asal et al. 2018).</p> <p>Whenever there was a mismatch between BAAD2 and RTG, prevalence was given to reports of the organisation holding a territory.</p> <p>1 = the VNSA is reported to control any given territory. 0 = the VNSA is not reported to control any given territory.</p>
logarea	<p>Logged surface area of the country where the terrorist group operates.</p>
population	<p>Categorical variable that indicates the approximate number of members in the organisation. Primarily based on BAAD2 variable SIZE_REC, integrated with data under the variable "peaksize" by RTG.</p> <p>1 = unknown/0-99 2 = 100-999 3 = 1000-9999 4 = 10,000+</p>
illicit_eco	<p>The organisation engages in profit-making illicit activities. The variable surrounding the involvement in extortion activities was counted for both the calculation of this variable as well as</p>

for the "security" variable, on the grounds that extortion is both a profit-generating activity as well as a protection tax for violent organisations.

form_eco Based on the QSI variable "Negotiate resources", which captures when the rebel group negotiates the rights to extract a natural resource, or an agreement to share a natural resource. When there was no match between the QSI and the Actors' list, research was conducted to determine whether there are reports of the organisation engaging in legitimate businesses.

Research was conducted on the news database Factiva with the following search string: "`((NAME(S) VNSA) same (((legitimate or legal) and business*) or fund* or financ*))))`".

1 = there are reports of involvement in legitimate businesses

0 = there are no reports of involvement in legitimate businesses.

org_economy This attribute was calculated by summing variables in multiple databases surrounding the involvement of the organisation in illicit profit-generating activities. Whenever qualitative research identified that there was an involvement in legitimate businesses, such report was added.

government This variable is based on the QSI variable "organised like a government", which identifies when a rebel group organises itself with departments like those found in a state. When there was no match between the Actors' list and the QSI database, it was decided to rely on BAAD's variable "lead_hierarchy", which reflects whether the VNSA was reported to have a clear set hierarchy or not. This choice was made on the grounds that the BAAD2's organisation samples were already defined as having a clear indication

as regards to their organisational existence.

1 = there are reports of the VNSA as being organised like a government or with a hierarchical structure.

0 = there are no reports of the VNSA as being organised like a government or with a hierarchical structure.

media The organisation engages in broadcasting of propaganda and other news. Based on the RTG dataset "media", which equals 1 when a terrorist group has daily broadcasting TV and/or radio channel; and on QSI variable "media", which captures when the rebel group has a media outlet through which they publish information.

1= the VNSA is reported to have a daily broadcasting TV and/or radio channel.

0 = the VNSA is not reported to have a broadcasting TV or radio channel.

infra The organisation provides some sort of infrastructure to the population. Based on the QSI dataset "infrastructure" variable, which equals 1 when the violent non-state actor provides infrastructure services such as building or repairing roads, bridges, wells, or community buildings, providing electricity, water, sewage, or trash collection. Also based on a re-elaboration of the TIOS 2.0 variable "infrastructure", which sums results from across septic, trash, and reconstruction.

1 = the VNSA is reported to provide infrastructure services.

0 = the VNSA is not reported to provide infrastructure services.

tax Based on the concept of "protection money", this variable keeps into account whether the organisation collects taxes through the use of

violence. Data derives primarily from the variable FEXTORT from the BAAD2 dataset, with integration from the RTG dataset for some groups (variable ffund).

1 = the VNSA collects resources by threatening local communities with violence.

0 = there are no reports surrounding the VNSA collecting resources by threatening local communities with violence.

justice

This variable is dependent on the TIOS2.0 variable "court" and on the QSI variable "Justice", which capture rebel justice systems, which includes courts, prisons, and enforcement of judicial decision of civilian nature.

1 = the VNSA has set up some sort of justice system

0 = there are no reports surrounding the VNSA having set up some sort of justice system.

militia/police

This variable is dependent on the TIOS V2 dataset variable "militia" and on the QSI variable "policing", that capture whether the group engages in militia or patrolling activities.

1 = the VNSA is reported to provide policing for intra-civilian relations and protection from external attacks.

0 = there are no reports of the VNSA providing policing for intra-civilian relations and protection from external attacks.

psd

This variable indicates whether the organisation engages in public service delivery. Primarily based on BAAD2, data has been integrated with RTG's variable "pgood", and then the operationalisation of the variables "health" and "education" for both QSI and TIOS2.

1 = the VNSA provides any medical, welfare,

	education, infrastructure, or other services. 0 = there are no reports of the VNSA providing any medical, welfare, education, infrastructure, or other services.
shelter	This attribute is based on the three different meanings that the dissertation has given to the concept of "Shelter", namely public service delivery, provision of internal security (rule of law and justice) and provision of security from external threats.
space_feat	This variable indicates the degree of spatial attributes manifested by the organisation samples. Summative of territory, population, government, org_economy, infrastructure, shelter.
autonomy	This variable is calculated inversely in relation to state sponsorship, which is believed to reduce the autonomy of the group. Based on the FDSTATE and state support variables from the BAAD2 and RTG databases respectively. -1 = the organisation is known to be directly supported by a sovereign state in this year. 0 = there are no reports of the organisation being directly supported by a sovereign state in this year.
authority	As defined in the dissertation, authority is intended as deriving from a state's ability to claim the monopoly over the use of physical force (Weber 1946) and the capacity of providing shelter functions. This variable was then built by looking at such ability from the parent state within which the VNSA is located (thus looking at the FSI variable "Security"). To this, the VNSA's ability of providing shelter functions (codified under the variable "shelter" in the Database) was added. A lower score in the security apparatus indicator of the FSI, coupled with a low score in

the "shelter" attribute, indicates a lower authority of the violent organisation, and vice versa.

0 = the state has a relatively strong authority over the territory, or no data is available. FSI + shelter score is <5.

1 = the VNSA exerts a low to moderate authority over the territory. FSI + shelter score is <8.

2 = the VNSA exerts a moderate to strong authority over the territory. FSI + shelter score is <11.

3 = there is indication that the VNSA has a relatively strong authority over the territory. FSI + shelter score is > 11.

legitimacy This attribute is calculated by looking at whether the organisation is backed by its population and enjoys public consent. Positive reputation among both the target audience and the constituency are assumed to increase the legitimacy of the group.

This variable is calculated as a summative of RTG's "outnegrep" variable, a summative index measuring reputation of a VNSAs among its target audience, intended by the RTG database as a group of people outside of the constituency in each country of operation, and the variable "intposrep", which is a summative index measuring the reputation of a VNSAs among its constituency, intended by the RTG dataset as the aggrieved population the group is fighting for or the group of people the organisation claims to represent.

effectiveness This attribute was deemed as not-codable, given that effectiveness can be measured in multiple ways, including by looking at an organisation's longevity, peak size, death counts, public service delivery, state governance capacity, and so on.

perf_att This variable indicates the degree of performative

attributes manifested by the organisation.

Summative of autonomy, authority, legitimacy.

int_rec This variable indicates whether the organisation is recognised or not by other state actors. Based on the QSI variable "JoinIO", which captures the years when a rebel group is a member of an international organisation (identified, however as also comprised of other entities that are not formally recognized as independent states). Consideration has been given as to whether counting the "fdstate" variables of RTG and BAAD2 as indicators of international recognition. However, given doing so would automatically nullify the variable "autonomy", it was decided not to, also on the grounds that financial support does not always equate to official recognition.

1 = the organisation known to be directly supported by a sovereign state in this year.

0 = there are no reports of the organisation being directly supported by a sovereign state in this year.

violent_rec This variable indicates whether the organisation is recognised or not by other violent non-state actors. Alliances with criminal organisations are identified as recognition. Based on the BAAD2 variable "CRIM_DEGR_PY", which counts of the number of alliances connections between the focal organisation and violent nonstate actors that engaged in crime in the previous year.

movs This variable indicates the overall degree of attributes of statehood by violent organisations within any given year.

Summative of space_att + perf_att + rec.

nmbrvnsa	<p>Number of violent organisations active in the country where the terrorist group operates. This variable, summed with logmil, indicates the competition by other actors in a specific area.</p> <p>This variable, summed with logmil, indicates the competition by other actors in a specific area. This variable represents an estimate, as it counts the number of organisations that are reported in the MOVS database and in the RTG database (under variable "nmbrtrr", which however only indicates other terrorist organisations active in the region) operating within a country at any given year - as such, the number could be higher. However, considering the purpose was looking at other governance competitors, it was decided to follow this approach.</p>
FSI_security	<p>Security Apparatus indicator of the FSI. It considers the security threats to a state and the state's monopoly over the use of force and also considers serious criminal factors, such as organised crime and homicides, and perceived trust of citizens in domestic security. FSI data is only available from 2006 onwards, which means that it cannot be provided for half of the years covered by this database.</p>
FSI_leg	<p>Legitimacy indicator of the FSI that measures a state's legitimacy among its population. FSI data is only available from 2006 onwards, which means that it cannot be provided for half of the years covered by this database.</p>
FSI_serv	<p>Public service delivery indicator of the FSI that measures a state's provision of public services to the local population. FSI data is only available from 2006 onwards, which means that it cannot be provided for half of the years covered by this database.</p>

FSI_ext	Based on the External Intervention indicator of the FSI, which considers the influence and impact of external actors on the functioning of a state. This includes external military assistance or participation in a conflict or economic intervention or aid. FSI data is only available from 2006 onwards, which means that it cannot be provided for half of the years covered by this database.
logpop	Logged GDP of the country where the violent non-state actor operates at any given year.
logmil	Logged number of military personnel of the country where the violent non-state actor operates at any given year.
task_comp_1	Task complexity 1 looks at the "competition" provided by the parent state to the vnsa governance. The stronger the state's legitimacy, security apparatus, and service delivery, the higher the complexity of the task. This is calculated inversely by combining FSI_sec, FSI_leg and FSI_psd: a low number should indicate high task complexity.
task_comp_2	Task complexity 2 looks at the competition provided by external actors to the vnsa governance. The higher the number of other vnsa in the area (nmbrrtr) and the stronger presence of external forces (FSI_ext), the higher the complexity of the task. A high number should indicate high task complexity.
task_comp_3	Task complexity 3 looks at the military exercise required to the vnsa as it has to face both external violent competition (nmbrrtr) and internal violent resistance from the state (logmil). High number indicates high task complexity.

ANNEX II: LIST OF ACTORS

Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)
Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade
Al-Fatah
Al-Gama'at Al-Islamiyya (IG)
Al-Ittihaad Al-Islami (AIAI)
All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)
Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)
Allied Democratic Forces of Guinea (RDFG)
Al-Qa'ida
Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)
Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQLIM)
Al-Shabaab
Ansar Al-Islam
Armed Forces for a Federal Republic (FARF)
Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)
Armed Islamic Group (GIA)
Baloch Liberation Army (BLA)
Baloch Republican Army (BRA)
Black Axe
Black Eagles
Boko Haram
Caucasus Emirate
Cocoyes
Communist Party of India - Maoist (CPI-M)
Communist Party of Nepal- Maoist (CPN-M)
Communist Party of the Philippines, Marxist-Leninist (CPP-ML)
Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD)
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)
Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)
Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement (EIJM)
Forces Nouvelles (FN)
Free Aceh Movement (GAM)
Front for the Liberation of Cabinda / Cabinda Armed Forces (FLEC-FAC)
God's Army
Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement)
Haqqani Network

Hizballah
 Hizbul Al Islam (Somalia)
 Islamic Army in Iraq (al-Jaish al-Islami Fi al-Iraq)
 Islamic Courts Union (ICU)
 Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)
 Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS)
 Ivorian Movement for the Greater West (MPIGO)
 Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)
 Kachin Independence Army (KIA)
 Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)
 Karen National Union
 Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)
 Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)
 Lashkar-E-Islam (Pakistan)
 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)
 Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)
 Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)
 Mahdi Army
 Maoist Communist Center (MCC)
 Military Junta for the Consolidation of Democracy, Peace and Justice
 Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)
 Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)
 Movement for Democracy and Justice in Chad (MDJT)
 Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance
 Movement of Niger People for Justice (MNJ)
 Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK)
 National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP)
 National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)
 National Liberation Army of Colombia (ELN)
 National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT)
 National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM)
 National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K)
 National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA)
 Ntsiloulous
 The Office of Envigado
 Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)
 Oromo Liberation Front
 Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)
 Patriotic Movement of Ivory Coast (MPCI)

People's Liberation Army (PLA)
 People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)
 People's United Liberation Front (PULF)
 People's War Group (PWG)
 Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)
 Popular Liberation Army (EPL)
 Popular Resistance Committees
 Purbo Banglar Communist Party
 Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA)
 Restoration Council of Shan States
 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)
 Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (FRETILIN)
 Revolutionary United Front (RUF)
 Shining Path (SL)
 Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC)
 Sudan Liberation Movement
 Sudan Liberation Movement/Army - Minni Minawi Faction
 Sudan Liberation Movement/Army-Unity
 Taliban
 Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)
 The Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave - Renewed (FLEC)
 United Front For Democratic Change (FUC)
 United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)
 United National Liberation Front (UNLF)
 United Tajik Opposition (UTO)
 Hizb-I-Islami
 Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People (PALIPEHUTU)
 National Council for Defense of Democracy (NCDD)
 Khmer Rouge
 Ninjas
 Free Papua Movement (OPM-Organisasi Papua Merdeka)
 Kurdistan Free Life Party
 Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)
 Kurdish Democratic Party-Iraq (KDP)
 Amal
 Ansar al-Sunna
 Basque Fatherland and Freedom (ETA)
 Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT)
 Dima Halao Daoga (DHD)

Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)
Jemaah Islamiya (JI)
Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK)
Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)
Laskar Jihad
Muttahida Qami Movement (MQM)
Salafist Group for Preaching and Fighting (GSPC)
Turkish Communist Party/Marxist (TKP-ML)
United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS)
United Self Defense Units of Colombia (AUC)

ANNEX III – REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Table 15: Regression analysis of all variables.

R Square	0.414		0.413		0.412		0.411	
	(i)		(ii)		(iii)		(iv)	
	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	3.949	***	4.034	***	4.045	***	4.054	***
age	0.019	***	0.018	***	0.017	**	0.019	*
ucdpbd	0.001	***	0.001	***	0.001	***	0.001	***
pop	1.983	***	1.982	***	2.021	***	2.008	***
#vnrsa	0.107	***	0.110	***	0.105	***	0.105	***
FSI_sec	0.072	0.631						
FSI_leg	0.556	***	0.596	***	0.591	***	0.513	***
FSI_serv	-0.775	***	-0.789	***	-0.697	***	-0.716	***
FSI_ext	-0.122	0.238	-0.110	0.272	-0.100	0.314		
FSI_eco	0.095	0.472	0.123	0.297				

Table 16: Model 1.

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.643
R Square	0.414
Adjusted R Square	0.404
Standard Error	2.912
Observations	545

ANOVA					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>Significance F</i>	
Regression	9	3199.456	355.495	41.924	1.3E-56
Residual	535	4536.496	8.479		
Total	544	7735.952			

	<i>Standard Error</i>		<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>		<i>Lower 95%</i>	
	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Error</i>			<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	3.949	0.928	4.256	2.5E-05	2.126	5.771	2.126	5.771
age	0.019	0.009	2.043	4.2E-02	0.001	0.037	0.001	0.037
ucdpbd	0.001	0.000	9.133	1.4E-18	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002
population	1.983	0.173	11.456	2.5E-27	1.643	2.323	1.643	2.323
mbrvnrsa	0.107	0.018	5.840	9.1E-09	0.071	0.143	0.071	0.143
FSI_sec	0.072	0.150	0.481	6.3E-01	-0.223	0.368	-0.223	0.368
FSI_leg	0.556	0.167	3.331	9.2E-04	0.228	0.884	0.228	0.884
FSI_serv	-0.775	0.166	-4.661	4.0E-06	-1.102	-0.449	-1.102	-0.449
FSI_ext	-0.122	0.103	-1.182	2.4E-01	-0.324	0.081	-0.324	0.081
FSI_eco	0.095	0.132	0.720	4.7E-01	-0.164	0.353	-0.164	0.353

Table 17: Model 2.

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.643
R Square	0.413
Adjusted R Sq	0.405
Standard Error	2.910
Observations	545

ANOVA					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>Significance F</i>	
Regression	8	3197.495	399.687	47.204	2.0E-57
Residual	536	4538.457	8.467		
Total	544	7735.952			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	4.034	0.910	4.433	1.1E-05	2.246	5.822	2.246	5.822
age	0.018	0.009	2.002	4.6E-02	0.000	0.036	0.000	0.036
ucdpbd	0.001	0.000	9.182	9.2E-19	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002
population	1.982	0.173	11.458	2.4E-27	1.642	2.321	1.642	2.321
mbrvnsa	0.110	0.017	6.423	3.0E-10	0.077	0.144	0.077	0.144
FSI_leg	0.596	0.145	4.120	4.4E-05	0.312	0.880	0.312	0.880
FSI_serv	-0.789	0.164	-4.812	1.9E-06	-1.111	-0.467	-1.111	-0.467
FSI_ext	-0.110	0.100	-1.100	2.7E-01	-0.306	0.086	-0.306	0.086
FSI_eco	0.123	0.118	1.044	3.0E-01	-0.108	0.354	-0.108	0.354

Table 18: Model 3.

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.642
R Square	0.412
Adjusted R Sq	0.404
Standard Error	2.910
Observations	545

ANOVA					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>Significance F</i>	
Regression	7	3188.262	455.466	53.782	4E-58
Residual	537	4547.690	8.469		
Total	544	7735.952			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	4.045	0.910	4.445	1.1E-05	2.257	5.833	2.257	5.833
age	0.017	0.009	1.920	5.5E-02	0.000	0.035	0.000	0.035
ucdpbd	0.001	0.000	9.223	6.6E-19	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002
population	2.021	0.169	11.969	2.0E-29	1.689	2.353	1.689	2.353
mbrvnsa	0.105	0.016	6.389	3.6E-10	0.073	0.138	0.073	0.138
FSI_leg	0.591	0.145	4.089	5.0E-05	0.307	0.875	0.307	0.875
FSI_serv	-0.697	0.139	-5.028	6.7E-07	-0.970	-0.425	-0.970	-0.425
FSI_ext	-0.100	0.100	-1.007	3.1E-01	-0.296	0.095	-0.296	0.095

Table 19: Model 4.

<i>Regression Statistics</i>								
Multiple R	0.641							
R Square	0.411							
Adjusted R Square	0.404							
Standard Error	2.910							
Observations	545							

<i>ANOVA</i>								
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>			
Regression	6	3179.672	529.945	62.575	8.9E-59			
Residual	538	4556.281	8.469					
Total	544	7735.952						

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	4.054	0.910	4.455	1.0E-05	2.266	5.841	2.266	5.841
age	0.019	0.009	2.137	3.3E-02	0.002	0.037	0.002	0.037
ucdpbd	0.001	0.000	9.207	7.5E-19	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002
population	2.008	0.168	11.927	2.9E-29	1.678	2.339	1.678	2.339
mbrvnsa	0.105	0.016	6.391	3.6E-10	0.073	0.138	0.073	0.138
FSI_leg	0.513	0.122	4.202	3.1E-05	0.273	0.753	0.273	0.753
FSI_serv	-0.716	0.137	-5.210	2.7E-07	-0.986	-0.446	-0.986	-0.446

Table 20: Model 5.

<i>Regression Statistics</i>								
Multiple R	0.637							
R Square	0.406							
Adjusted R Square	0.401							
Standard Error	2.920							
Observations	545							

<i>ANOVA</i>								
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>			
Regression	5	3140.985	628.197	73.689	9.4E-59			
Residual	539	4594.968	8.525					
Total	544	7735.952						

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	4.744	0.854	5.557	4.32E-08	3.067	6.421	3.067	6.421
ucdpbd	0.001	0.000	8.969	4.93E-18	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.002
population	2.089	0.165	12.687	1.85E-32	1.766	2.412	1.766	2.412
mbrvnsa	0.102	0.016	6.217	1.01E-09	0.070	0.135	0.070	0.135
FSI_leg	0.490	0.122	4.015	6.78E-05	0.250	0.730	0.250	0.730
FSI_serv	-0.753	0.137	-5.500	5.86E-08	-1.021	-0.484	-1.021	-0.484

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