Conflict, State and Tradition: Self-Defence Groups as Security Actors in Burkina Faso

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CONFLICT, STATE AND TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

Self-defence against terrorism, it hardly seems possible. Yet in Burkina Faso, groups like koglweogo and dozo are making a valiant attempt. How did these groups become part of the Burkinabe security system?

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Introduction

"A soldier without any political or ideological training is a potential criminal." – Thomas Sankara (1987)

The third decade of the twenty-first century has started with a series of international crises. Between the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the looming threat of climate change, it is easy to overlook regional conflicts. One such struggle is the enduring security crisis in the Sahel region in northern Africa. Most countries in the region have in some manner been affected by the rise of jihadism and lawlessness in the area. In 2012, the 'Tuareg Rebellion' catapulted Mali into civil unrest (Oluwadare 2014, 13). Across the border, in Niger and Nigeria, Boko Haram made headline news with their attacks on civilians. Local factions of both Al-Qaeda and Islamic State are also active in the region (Human Rights Watch 2021; Cline 2021, 2).

For many years, Burkina Faso was considered an oasis of peace in this troubled region, an assertion which is unfortunately no longer true. In 2016, the capital city Ouagadougou was struck by an act of terrorism and soon the border regions, already in perilous positions, noted an increased amount of violence and attacks (Barlow, Doboš & Riegl 2021, 152). Some of the violence has spilled over from neighbouring countries, but other groups are native to Burkina Faso. The most active of these is the homegrown Ansarul Islam, a jihadist movement founded by a Burkinabe preacher (Cline 2021, 11-12).

The increased violence in the country is cause for concern, not just because Burkina Faso was long considered a peaceful 'buffer' between the conflicts north and south of its borders, but also because of the humanitarian implications. There were more than half a million internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso in January 2020, and this number has only increased since (UNHCR 2021; iDMC 2022). Perhaps one of the most striking effects of the conflict is continued political unrest in the country. In 2014 continued protests ousted long-time president Compaoré. A coup by Compaoré's 'Regiment of Presidential Security' (RSP), an elite military group, followed in 2015. They announced military rule and faced renewed protests, which led to democratic elections being held later that same year (Hagberg 2015, 110; Van Hessche 2015). These elections did not lead to political stability, however. In 2022 alone, there have been two military coup d'états, each seemingly stemming from the dissatisfaction over the inability to stop the conflict in the north of the country. New elections are slated to happen in July 2024 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2022). This has led to

uncertainty about the security situation in the country. This is not entirely in the hands of the elected officials, however. Aside from the government and military, non-state actors also play an active role in the security situation in Burkina Faso.

Some of these actors are self-defence groups which emerged in rural areas of the country, where there is little police presence. Hagberg describes the two main self-defence movements in Burkina Faso: the Dozos and Koglweogo (Hagberg 2021). The Koglweogo, in particular, have garnered much media attention over the last decade, due to reports of their less than savoury activities (Carayol 2016; Amnesty International 2021; Capron 2022). In 2020, with terrorism on the rise in the northern provinces, the Burkinabe government institutionalised self-defence groups by founding the 'voluntaires pour la défense de la patrie' (VDP) (Tisseron 2021, 22). What the future of this potential partnership will look like under the most recent military rule, is unclear. Despite this potential partnership, most of the news coverage on these groups has been negative, focusing on the lawlessness and brutal tactics of the Koglweogo in pursuit of suspects (Hagberg 2019, 181; Lazarides 2019). This has led to an increased awareness of these groups on the global stage. Much of the media coverage has left the impression that the existence of these groups is a novel phenomenon, though this is far from the truth. Many similar groups have existed throughout time and across the world, however, despite general trends each group also has a unique set of conditions that facilitates their expansion.

This thesis will be examining the conditions that have led to the expansion of these 'self-defence movements' in Burkina Faso over the last decade. First this thesis will provide a review on the literature on statehood and security, war time social orders and the growth of militias in these contexts. After that, literature on the rise to power of self-defence movements in Burkina Faso will be examined. Finally, this thesis will argue that there are four main conditions leading to the embedding of self-defence groups into the security system of Burkina Faso. Due to the unpredictable nature of Burkinabe politics after the coup d'état in January 2022, only events up until 2021 will be covered. This, therefore, excludes the most recent coup d'états and the consequences for the legitimisation of self-defence movements after that period. In doing so, the following research question will be answered:

What conditions led to the embedding of self-defence movements in the security apparatus of Burkina Faso between 2012 until 2021?

Definition of Terms

Before delving into the conditions that allowed for the emergence and growth of self-defence movements, we must define what a 'self-defence movement' is for the purpose of this paper. Groups like the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP), Koglweogo and Dozo all have different backgrounds, and different goals. While these companies call themselves 'self-defence movements', some articles use different terms to refer to them.

One such term used to describe these groups is 'militia'. The understanding of what a militia is differs greatly from context to context. Pro-state militias, for example, might engage in counterinsurgency practices. By this definition, the VDP, which was founded by the government of Burkina Faso, could be considered a militia. Other times militias are founded as a reaction to perceived government overreach. Examples of situations like this can be found in the United States, where several anti-government militia groups were founded after perceived missteps by the FBI (Doxsee 2021). Since Koglweogo and Dozo are neither outwardly pro-state nor outwardly opposed to the state, they do not seem to fall within the classic parameters of a pro-state militia. However, other definitions place less emphasis on the political aspect. Haavik (2022) defines militias as "special forms of organised violence found in many civil wars and fragile states".

As evidenced by this wide range of definitions, the subject of militia groups is a polarising one. By some they might be considered to exacerbate conflict, while others view them as important protectors of civilian and state power. Some militias might offer protection and support local communities in a way similar to a government. Alternatively, they prey on these same local communities (Dirkx 2017, 378). Elements of these descriptions can certainly be found in the practices of self-defence movements in Burkina Faso. Most Koglweogo do not have overt political affiliations, either to combat rebels or the government. A large part of their function is rooted in acts of protection. Koglweogos apprehend alleged criminals and enact punishment on them, thereby protecting the livelihoods of their communities. Furthermore, Koglweogos have also been known to retaliate against alleged terrorist attacks on Burkinabe soil (Wilkins 2020).

Frowd, on the other hand, likens self-defence movements to 'vigilantism'. This term, like the term militia, is open for interpretation, but can involve "informal policing, traditional justice, mob violence, community self-defence" (Frowd 2022, 110). This term focuses more on policing, justice, and a complicated relationship with the state where boundaries are

constantly changing and shifting (Frowd 2022, 112). Burkinabe self-defence movements also exist in this realm of society, both part of and separate from the state. The initial goal of Koglweogo was to solve crimes and deliver justice when the local police failed to do so. Since this overlaps largely with the definition of vigilantism, this thesis concludes that this kind of group might be comparable to Burkinabe self-defence movements in their early stages.

There is no clear definition for 'self-defence movement' apart from the self-explanatory words used in the term. The definition has thus been formed from the descriptions of self-defence movements in Burkina Faso. These can be defined as a group of like-minded individuals who aim to protect themselves and their communities. The means through which they do this is not necessarily legal. This can include anything from policing operations, to protection from bandits and resolving local disputes. Means through which these actions are done can include anything from patrolling to extortion or torture.

In the literature, Koglweogo, Dozo and VDP are commonly referred to as self-defence groups (Hagberg 2019; Soré et al. 2021). In Burkinabe government documents, they are also referred to as 'groupes autodéfense', which is the French term for self-defence group (Assemblée Nationale 2016, 6). This does, therefore, seem to be the preferred local term. Self- or auto-defence has a more positive connotation than 'vigilante' or 'militia', so it is unsurprising that this is the term that the groups themselves use. Some sources refer to Koglweogo, Dozo or VDP as militias or vigilante groups (Frowd 2022; Tisseron 2021). However, the definitions for these terms found in other literature do not seem to match these groups exactly. While there are certainly arguments to be made for calling Koglweogo a militia, the non-political nature of these groups means the definition does not entirely fit. Similarly, the definition of vigilantism is close to descriptions of Koglweogo and Dozo, but does not fit with the state-sponsored VDP. Once Koglweogo and Dozo are enlisted as part of the military, they will no longer be operating outside of the law and will, therefore, no longer be practicing vigilantism. Even within these different categories of groups – Koglweogo, Dozo and VDP – different factions might be more of a militia or more of a vigilante force.

Due to the use of the term militia in sources on Koglweogo, Dozo and VDPas well as the contextual overlap discussed above, theories on both militias and vigilantes will be used to contextualise the expansion of these groups in Burkina Faso. Nevertheless, the term used to describe them in this thesis will be 'self-defence movement' or 'self-defence group'. The reason for this is that this term is the one that is the most inclusive of the different kinds of

groups and their different roles. It is also the term used to describe them in official Burkinabe documents (Assemblée Nationale 2016, 6; Assemblée Nationale 2017).

Relevant groups in Burkina Faso

While there are many different self-defence groups in Burkina Faso, the three largest movements will be discussed in this thesis: the Koglweogo, the Dozo and the VDP. There are both differences and similarities in the ways that these groups emerged and rose to prominence.

The most famous or infamous of the self-defence movements in Burkina Faso are the 'Koglweogo', meaning "guardian of the forest" (Van Vyve 2018). These groups operate mostly in the central and eastern regions of the country. Most of the media attention on self-defence movements in Burkina Faso has been on the Koglweogo due to their rapid growth in numbers over the past decade as well as the controversial nature of their methods.

Another prevalent group are the 'Dozo'. These are traditional hunters from the Mande-speaking areas of the Sahel. Where Koglweogo operate mainly in the central and eastern areas of Burkina Faso, Dozo can be found in the east. Notably, they can be found across the border in both Mali and Côte d'Ivoire (Frowd 2022, 119 – 120).

Finally, a recent addition to the fold are the 'volontaires pour la défense de la patrie' (VDP), which translates to 'volunteers for the defence of the homeland' in English. VDP is a government sponsored volunteer militia founded in an attempt to mobilise civilians against the increasing terrorist threat in Burkina Faso. Those in the VDP are sometimes former Koglweogo or Dozo members (Tisseron 2021, 22).

Literature Review

In order to contextualise the rise of self-defence movements in Burkina Faso, it is important to understand theories and literature behind the creation of similar movements around the world. While Koglweogo, Dozo and other Burkinabe groups operate solely within the borders of the country, self-defence movements are far from a uniquely Burkinabe phenomenon. It has already been determined that literature on militias and vigilantism is relevant to the understanding of self-defence movements, but understandings of state-building and governance systems in conflict-stricken areas are also important facets linked to this phenomenon. Other important aspects of the literature are those that give context to the workings of these groups. Understanding how self-defence movements can be contextualised within and without the state, helps to identify how these groups could grow their power and rise to prominence.

Statehood and security

Understanding of the conditions that lead to the legitimisation and growth in power of self-defence groups comes from comprehension of the historical and political context of the localities of these groups. To gain an insight of the security systems in which these groups have become embedded, this section will be looking at theories on statehood and security.

Rousseau's classic conception of statehood emphasises the idea of a social contract, wherein citizens surrender certain freedoms to an authority in exchange for protection and maintenance of the existing social order (Encyclopædia Britannica 2023a). Much of the literature on states and security emphasises the need for a 'monopoly of violence', which in turn legitimises the power of the state. In this theory of statehood, explained by Weber and Hobbes, the fact that the government is the largest or only means of security makes them vital to their citizens, thereby securing their loyalty (Encyclopædia Britannica 2023b).

Another perspective is Tilly's theory on state-building, where the ruler with the strongest armed force is in the position in which it can legitimise itself through coercion, and can thereby levy taxes and create the administration that will later become the state (Tilly 1990, 70). In this theory the state does not simply hold the monopoly of violence, rather it was created through the mechanisms of war with other states. These theories are based on state formation in Europe and the United States, most of which were formed more than a century ago. They may not be applicable to newer states in other parts of the world.

According to postcolonial scholars, it is therefore important to step away from classic Westphalian definitions of the state as described in these traditional theories of statehood. Postcolonialism is a critical International Relations theory. It operates under the assumption that international politics cannot be understood without taking into account the lasting effects of colonialism on international politics, state politics and civil society (Nair 2017).

After gaining independence many post-colonial states modelled their institutions on this ideal state model, but it did not connect well with the realities of the existing social orders already in place (Boege 2019, 114). Some scholars refer to the modern post-colonial state as an 'imported' institution, which exists outside, and at times serves the existing social structures, but has not been infused into it (Chesneaux 1993). Essentially both Boege and Chesneaux suggest a hybrid form of governance in which indigenous social structures and transplanted institutions overlap and interact (Boege 2019, 114; Chesneaux 1993). This hybridity offers an alternative to ideas of statehood and security governance that focus on the Western state (Boege 2019, 113).

Similarly, some research conceptualises a form of security in which the hybridity of the state is reflected in its security apparatus. This system is referred to as 'hybrid security governance', in which security is made up of the "coexistence and interaction of multiple state and non-state providers of security" (Bagayoko et al. 2016, 7). The core of this theory is the understanding that on the African continent in particular, security is not solely provided by the state through formal or official channels. Instead, security is provided through a complex web of actors, spanning from formal governmental institutions to informal non-state actors (Bagayoko et al. 2016, 8). Similar research considers non-state armed actors to be 'auxiliaries of the state'. These straddle the line between amateur and professional, traditional and yet part of the imported state (Frowd 2022, 129).

Traditional theories on security often focus on internal and external threats to security as two separate kinds of conflict, with separate actors responsible for the protection of citizens against these threats (Bagayoko 2012, 6). Increasingly, however, African states are experiencing security threats which blur the lines between the two (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime 2022). Transnational banditry and international terrorism are international problems that are often experienced at the local level. It can be difficult for states with institutions that are not well-embedded in society to navigate the overlap between the two (Bagayoko 2012, 6).

In some cases, local security providers are considered to be more effective than those provided by the government, because they are able to reach places where formal security cannot. Often these are also 'traditional' security providers and they can be seen as more legitimate than the state by local communities (Bagayoko et al. 2016, 13-14). This legitimacy is achieved through many different means, such as endorsement from chiefs or through the, perhaps unconscious, alignment of ideals with local communities.

Though hybrid security governance offers an alternative perspective on state security, other authors consider this hybridity to be a sign of a weak or fragile state. It is argued that the existence of armed non-state actors is caused by the inefficiency of the state security apparatus to protect its citizens (Barlow et al. 2021, 155; Haavik 2022). These informal actors are not part of a hybrid system of governance, but rather emerge to fill a security vacuum left by weak state institutions.

In general, literature shows that there are many different ways to conceptualise the state and its use of force. Traditional theories focus on a state monopoly of violence and are often Eurocentric. Theories on post-colonial statehood suggest that the state and security systems, particularly in Africa, are hybrid, with both traditional and imported elements.

Actors in a wartime social order

The previous segment focused on statehood and security institutions to provide. One of the first theories discussed was that of the 'social contract' underlying the state. During times of conflict, a state may not be able to provide the protection for their citizens stipulated in this social contract. This section will present research on the actors that emerge as protective or quasi-governmental forces during times of conflict.

Pervasive and long-term war can reshape a society into a 'social order of violence' outside of the control of the state. This happens along a continuum from 'quasi-state', which is highly institutionalised authority, to 'warlord system', which is less broadly institutionalised (Bakonyi & Stuvøy 2005, 363-364). For example, the situation in Somalia is described as a warlord system. Warlords derive their legitimacy from lack of connection of citizens with their post-colonial state. Often, they provide security more effectively than the state institutions, which only adds to their legitimacy (Bakonyi & Stuvøy 2005, 373).

A similar term is 'wartime social order' (Arjona 2014). In the article in which this term is coined, Arjona defines two potential circumstances in which authority lies outside of the institution of the state: a rebelocracy or an aliocracy. The main difference between the two

is the extent to which certain aspects of society are controlled by rebel groups. In a rebelocracy, rebel groups function similarly to a state and have a widespread web of control (Arjona 2014, 1374-1375). In an aliocracy, a rebel group has power over public order and taxation, but does not necessarily dictate other aspects of society, which might still be ruled by the state or other authorities (Arjona 2014, 1376).These two status quos are similar to the quasi-state and warlord system proposed by Bakonyi & Stuvøy, but Arjona distinguishes two distinct institutions which share attributes instead of a spectrum of institutions.

Both of these pieces of literature detail actors in long-term conflicts where there is a lack of state authority. These institutions are therefore far reaching and at times almost replace the government authority. There are also many situations in which armed groups emerge on a much smaller scale, often in reaction to increased insecurity. When the livelihood or security of locals is threatened, one might see militias or vigilante groups develop.

Militias

In the definition of terms militias and vigilantism were briefly explained in relation to self-defence movements in Burkina Faso. Since there are similarities between these groups, and some of the literature refers to Koglweogo, Dozo and VDP as vigilantism or militias, this section will lay out some of the research on the formation and dissemination of these groups.

Literature describes various conditions underlying different typologies of militias. In her work on militias, Jenzsch details the origins of community-initiated militias (2022). In this book, the formation of militias is considered to be an expression of civilian agency by taking collective action against the insecurity that a community faces at that moment in time (Jenzsch 2022, 3). This insecurity can manifest during times of war or times of peace, though Jenzsch focuses on militias formed during times of conflict.

During civil conflicts, militias could be considered the “antipode of rebel or insurgent movements”, according to Schneckener (2017, 800). A militia often attempts to maintain the existing status quo, rather than overthrowing it and are therefore often ‘anti-rebel’ in origin (Jenszch et al. 2015, 756). Therefore militias often do not threaten the state, but at times even collaborate with it (Schneckener 2017, 800; Thomson & Pankhurst 2022).

Community initiated militias often form as the result of a military stalemate between insurgent forces and government forces, leading to excessive violence against civilians. This leaves room for the growth of local militias who attempt to protect their communities. The

idea for the creation of these groups is often spread between linked communities, or through word of mouth when they prove effective (Jenzsch 2022, 18).

When there is relative equality between local leaders, community initiated militias are more likely to be integrated into the existing institutions at the local level. This equality between local leaders deters one more influential or stronger leader from starting to use the militias as their own personal armies (Jenzsch 2022, 21). Other times, community initiated militias can grow and become part, not just of local institutions, but of state institutions as well. They legitimise themselves through the defensive use of violence, because they claim their presence is a necessary element for the protection of the community or claim to correct injustices and protect the honour and autonomy of their communities (Schneckener 2017, 804).

While community initiated militias are means through which existing rules and social norms are protected, they exist outside of the state apparatus and do not necessarily have overtly political ideologies (Jenzsch 2022, 14). Pro-government militias have pro-government ideals, or support the serving government. Thomson & Pankhurst distinguish between pro-government militias and "official state-run militia programs", because the former still exist outside of the state apparatus (2022, 3).

When state forces seek help from militias by either legitimising them or funding them, they gain and lose power simultaneously. While they gain force, they also add a new armed actor into an already violent situation, running the risk that these forces will at some point grow stronger than them (Schneckener 2017, 802). There is less accountability because these forces operate outside of the state apparatus, so the government is not directly accountable for their actions. This can be a reason for governments to want to collaborate with militias (Schneckener 2017, 803).

The literature shows that community initiated militias often start as an attempted maintenance of the local status quo. In conflict, this happens when state forces are no longer able to maintain the existing state of affairs or are challenged by insurgent groups. These groups can grow more powerful and become institutionalised at a local level. In some cases, groups have pro-government ideologies or are even funded by the state. These processes of dissemination and legitimacy can be compared to processes seen in Burkina Faso during the expansion of self-defence movements over the last decade. The next segment will delve into local theories on the development of these groups in Burkina Faso.

Literature on self-defence movements in Burkina Faso

Security Vacuum on Local and National Level

Some authors consider the existence of Koglweogo to be a sign and consequence of weakness of the Burkinabe institution and advocate against cooperation between the two. Instead, they favour a strong stance against the groups (Barlow et al 2021, 155; Haavik 2022). Based on Charles Tilly's theory on warfare and state-building, the authors argue that the successful securitisation of Burkina Faso by its own government could lead to an increased efficiency of its state institutions (Barlow et al. 2021, 164). Haavik, too, considers the formation of self-defence movements a sign of fragile statehood, wherein the same movements that were meant as a protective force will eventually only perpetuate the conflict (2022). The logical assumption is that, if the presence of these groups within a state is a sign of weakness of its institutions, then the weakness of these institutions is what has allowed them to emerge in the first case.

Supporters of this theory generally believe lack of police presence in rural areas led to the emergence of these groups (Haavik et al. 2022, 332; Tisseron 2021, 12). Later, Groups like Dozo and particularly Koglweogo were able to flourish under the sudden 'security vacuum' in the wake of the ousting of President Blaise Compaoré in 2014. This president had a loyal and effective national guard and had manoeuvred himself and his followers into being important players in regional negotiations (Haavik et al. 2022, 329-331). The security and governance network Compaoré was able to build is referred to by Haavik et al. as a "big man deep state", where informal and formal structures of the state enabled the continued existence of the regime (Haavik et al. 2022, 325). Insecurity in the country grew after the government fell, and the new government was unable to successfully combat the growing insecurity (Haavik et al. 2022, 330).

Different understandings of security

Other scholars focus less on the security void as main reason for the emergence and expansion of Koglweogo and Dozo. Soré et. al attempt to contextualise the situation not as an abject void of security forces, but as a space where too many securitising forces – some legitimised by the state and some legitimised by the citizen more than the state – are in conflict (2021, 130, 143). They describe the relationship between governmental forces and Koglweogos as having suffered a breakdown or 'rupture', despite both forces at times working together (Soré et al. 2021, 138). These Koglweogos have emerged in a postcolonial

context where they represent a more traditional form of security than that of the 'transplanted state' (Soré et al. 2021, 129). What is more important, however, according to the authors, is 'full- and empty belly politics'. This describes the mistrust of much of the public towards the police and the justice system because of a perceived misunderstanding between the well-educated, richer parts of societies, the full bellies; and the less-educated, poorer parts of society, the empty bellies (Soré et al. 2021, 134-136).

The 'politics of the belly' is a term coined by author Bayart in his book *The State in Africa: Politics of the Belly*, which describes neopatrimonial forms of governance (Bagayoko et al. 2016, 21). Neopatrimonialism is a "complex web of patron-client relations parasitically anchored on state offices and resources" (Englebert & Dunn 2013, 132). Under neopatrimonialism, politics are rooted in patron-client relationships, within a legal framework. One feature of a system like this is having a powerful leader who is patron to clients. These clients are promised important positions or other forms of power in return for political support. These clients, in turn, act as patrons to their own clients. Authority is thus handed down in return for loyalty (Englebert & Dunn 2013, 133).

Compaoré and Bosjen consider gaps in the understanding of security between local communities and government officials to be important for understanding in the creation and recognition of self-defence movements (2020, 686-691). The authors aim to challenge the perceptions of which elements of society are part of the system and which are not.

Hagberg, in turn, compares the difference in origins between Dozo and Koglweogo, highlighting the fact that though both groups perform similar functions in Burkina Faso, their histories and territories differ (2021). Dozo stake claim to traditional heritage dating back centuries but play a vital role in modern society as well. In a sense, this is similar to the way in which Soré et al. contextualise Koglweogo as a traditional alternative to the security from the 'imported' state system (2021, 129). However, Hagberg emphasises that both Dozo and Koglweogo have connections with political parties and may have more ambitions to grow beyond their local protective aims. They are essentially "performing tradition while doing politics" (Hagberg 2021, 187-188).

Most literature on self-defence movements emphasises the hybrid nature of their functions and goals. It seems that these groups have dual identities as both local traditional organisations, as well as vital actors within state and global security governance. Perhaps it is

through this hybridity that they are able to receive recognition and continue growing. This will be tested further through means of an analysis of their history.

Methodology

The following work is an analysis of the embedding of self-defence movements into the security apparatus, in which Burkina Faso will serve as the case study. This will be done through a literary and historical analysis of the situation in the country. The literature review provided conditions which lead to the formation and legitimisation of self-defence movements, both in general and in Burkina Faso in particular. In short, the next four chapters analyse the events that made these self-defence movements grow from small local organisations to (in)famous actors within the hybrid security governance of Burkina Faso.

The literature first showed that the hybridity of the post-colonial state led to a system of hybrid security governance and Burkinabe literature showed that this hybridity led to different understandings of security in the country (Bagayoko 2016; Frowd 2022; Soré et al. 2021; Compaoré and Bosjen 2020). Research further showed that during times of conflict, the social order in a particular location can change, and that new forms of order can emerge (Arjona 2014; Bakonyi, J., & Stuvøy 2005). Linked to this, literature on Burkinabe self-defence groups examines the theory of a power vacuum as being a key element to the expansion of these groups (Haavik et al. 2022; Tisseron 2021). Lastly the literature examined the formation and legitimisation of militias in civil war (Jenzsch 2022; Schneckener 2017).

This has been condensed into four conditions that will be examined in this thesis.

1. Historical context.
2. Perceived insecurity due to the hybrid state.
3. Outbreak of conflict which changes the social order.
4. Political legitimisation of self-defence groups.

To understand the rise to prominence of these self-defence movements, one must first understand their origins. For this reason, the first part of the analysis will be dedicated to understanding the historical context that led to the formation of these groups. Once this is clear, this thesis will examine three conditions that led to the growing prominence of these groups in Burkina Faso from 2011 to 2021. The second chapter will study the hybridity of the Burkinabe states and its effects on the growth of self-defence movements. The third chapter will argue that the growing insecurity and outbreak of conflict after the fall of the government in 2014 was a key condition leading to self-defence movements becoming part of the security system. Finally, the last chapter will examine how the founding of the VDP and the consequent political legitimacy for self-defence impacted Koglweogo and Dozo influence.

Analytical tools

Almost exclusively, this thesis will use literary analysis to describe and examine the conditions leading to the rise of these groups. Both secondary and primary sources will be used. Secondary sources include academic literature as well as literature research done by organisations such as Human Right Watch or the Clingendael Institute. Primary sources will mostly consist of news articles published over the last decade as well as government reports. Aside from these, the ALCED database provided detailed accounts of conflict events involving the Koglweogo, Dozo and VDP groups in Burkina Faso since 2016.

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) Project is a non-profit organisation that collects, maps and analyses data related to conflict. It specifically focuses on "dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and types of all reported violence and protest events around the world" (ACLED 2023). This data is publicly available. On the 'dashboard', data can be viewed in graphs, per country or region, and filtered by type, fatality or action. It is also possible to download the raw data that this dashboard is made up of, filtering information specifically by certain groups. The output then provides information on violent events from those particular groups. This data will be used to map out the effects of the founding of the VDP on different self-defence groups.

Furthermore, the theory of postcolonialism provides the framework for the analysis of the conditions leading to the emergence of self-defence groups in Burkina Faso. Postcolonialism is the underlying theory upon which the model of the hybridity of the post-colonial state is based. This theory is applicable to the understanding of self-defence movements because of the history of Burkina Faso as a former colony and the influence that both tradition and the colonial past of the country has had on the creation of the state and its citizens.

Chapter 1: Historical overview of politics in Burkina Faso

To understand the rise of self-defence movements such as the Koglweogo, it is important to understand the history of Burkina Faso. Burkina Faso is a land-locked country in the Sahel region. Before colonial history, the territory now known as Burkina Faso was home to smaller chiefdoms as well as a larger kingdom known as the Mossi empire (Harsch 2017, 22). In the present day the Mossi are still the largest ethnic group in the country, accounting for just over half the population (CIA 2022).

The late nineteenth century saw the beginnings of French colonial rule in the area and by the year 1919, the French founded a colony called Haute-Volta, or Upper Volta, which would later become Burkina Faso (Harsch 2017, 24). Almost forty years later, in 1958, Haute-Volta joined the Franco-African Community, which offered limited autonomy under continued French rule. For two years it functioned essentially as a self-governed colony, before achieving independence on August 5th 1960 (Harsch 2017, 34). The country's first president, Maurice Yameogo, remained in office until 1966, when he was ousted in a military coup by Lt. Col. Sangoulé Lamizana. Lamizana remained in power until 1980, first through military governance and later through election, when he was overthrown by Col. Saye Zerbo. Zerbo was subsequently overthrown by Maj. Dr. Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo in 1982.

In 1983, Thomas Sankara became Prime Minister and later President after a military coup led by Captain Blaise Compaoré. This new government called itself the "Conseil national de la révolution" or National Council of the Revolution (CNR) and also gave the country its new name: Burkina Faso (Harsch 2017, 65 – 67).

Sankara actively challenged the state institution as it was and had been since its independence and attempted to completely transform the state apparatus through a series of ground-breaking programmes (Harsch 2017, 65 – 70). Programmes such as the "comités de défense et de la revolution" or Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR) were founded (Van Vyve 2018). Through the use of CDRs, the government effectively centralised the power away from local chiefs to a mix of elected and appointed officials (Harsch 2017, 19, 70). These committees were deemed protectors of the citizens' 'revolutionary' power, and were expected to defend the new government by reforming civil society and exercising social control (Otayek 1990, 22). While deemed largely 'repressive' and 'abusive' by some, others considered the possibility for ordinary citizens to be involved in both local and national politics to be a positive structure (Otayek 1990, 21 – 23; Harsch 2017, 20). Even the CNR

itself sported opposing opinions, considering CDRs to be ‘necessary’, while also criticising the ignorance and low levels of training and education of the committee leaders (Labazée 1989, 21). This discourse surrounding the CDRs is similar to that on self-defence movements, which are often deemed both necessary and at times abusive.

The reign of the CNR ended in 1987 when Blaise Compaoré led another coup, this time against his former co-conspirator and president, Thomas Sankara. Sankara and twelve of his officials were assassinated during this coup and Blaise Compaoré became the new President (Harsch 2017, 129-131). He would hold this function until 2014.

Blaise Compaoré

Compaoré led the Popular Front party, which had a more pragmatic approach to politics. While not entirely shunning the revolutionary spirit of the CNR, his government restructured the CDRs. These were renamed simply ‘Revolutionary Committees’ (CRs), and had less of a ground-up approach, as evidenced by the lack of participation in the first elections for the CRs in 1988 (Harsch 2017, 132). The long reign of Compaoré provided both security and insecurity in different areas of society and of the country. While the lack of change in government led to a steadiness in policy, there was also dissatisfaction with the way the country was run. From 1998 to 1999, after the assassination of an independent journalist called Norbert Zongo, wide-spread protests arose against politically motivated killings (Harsch 2017, 188, 208). This dissatisfaction lasted into the early 2000s as well, and many of the ensuing protests were led by trade unions (Phelan 2016, 108). Compaoré was able to remain in power for such a long time, partly due to the efficacy of the presidential guard called the Régiment de Sécurité Présidentielle (RSP) and their loyalty to him (Hagberg 2015, 109).

In 2014, the civil unrest and dissatisfaction with the CDP government came to a head when Compaoré proposed an amendment to the constitution which would allow him to run for another term in the 2015 elections. This would be his fifth consecutive term as president of Burkina Faso (Phelan 2016, 118). A revolution, led by the trade unions, caused the abdication of Compaoré from his presidency and a transitional government under command of Michel Kafando. A year later, the RSP led a coup d’état in an effort to restore Compaoré to power. This led to wide-spread protest, including everything from a nationwide strike to thousands of women marching to an RSP army base in the Bobo-Dioulasso region (Phelan 2016, 118-119; Harsch 2017, 251). After a period of instability, the military coup failed: RSP retreated, reinstating the interim government under Kafondo (Hagberg 2015, 111).

Koglweogo and Dozo

There is some uncertainty concerning the period of time in which Koglweogo emerged. The idea for Koglweogo seems to have originated in the 1990s (Van Vyve 2018). In an inland security document from the Burkinabe government, the Koglweogo initiative is stated to have existed since 1996 (Government of Burkina Faso 2010, 18). Others place the emergence of Koglweogo in the year 2000 when El Hadj Ouédraogo organised the first Koglweogo into a self-defence group (Hagberg 2019, 180). Many even only start speaking of Koglweogo in any serious capacity from the 2010s onwards (Traoré 2018, 347). As a constantly evolving community practice, it is likely that all these dates are correct in some way. The Koglweogo initiative as a forestry protective programme may have started in 1996; Ouédraogo may have organised it into a self-defence group for the first time in 2000 and the Koglweogo could have grown into the groups they are now after 2010, for example.

Dozo were originally traditional hunter groups for the Mande people in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Benin. These groups of hunters existed before colonial rule and claim legitimacy through their connection to ancient tradition. Among other things, they were involved in anti-colonial conflicts in Western-Africa. It is virtually impossible, therefore, to pinpoint the moment these groups emerged. What is certain is that their existence precedes the postcolonial Burkinabe state. They did not always exist as they do now, however. Similar to Koglweogo, the Dozo as they were in 2021 originated in the 1990s. Also similar to Koglweogo, they have been involved in conservation efforts (Hagberg 2019, 177).

Historical overview Burkina Faso from 2016-2021

The history of Burkina Faso after the first official presidential change in more than two decades, starts with a terrorist attack in the capital Ouagadougou, on January 15th, 2016. More than thirty people lost their lives. The attack was claimed by the jihadist group al-Qaeda in Islamic Magreb, better known under the acronym AQIM. The group had formerly been active mostly in Mali, and this was their first prominent attack in Burkina Faso (Harsch 2017, 259). Unfortunately, this would only be the first of many instances of terrorism in the country over the following years.

By the end of 2018, a state of emergency had been declared in parts of Burkina Faso, but this did little to deter new attacks from happening. In fact, in 2019, attacks were happening almost daily. This led to a government crisis in which military leaders were fired and new elections were declared (Al Jazeera 2022). President Marc Roch Kaboré won in these

2020 elections, though this victory was met with fraud allegations from the opposition (McAllister 2020). He was nevertheless sworn in as president.

Violence continued to rise in 2020 and 2021. One of the deadliest strikes to date caused the death of 160 civilians in Solhan, a village in the north-east of Burkina Faso (Haavik 2022). This horrific incident prompted demonstrations which led to the dismissal of the defence and security ministers. Despite this, more attacks were to follow. December 2021 saw the resignation of the prime minister, another deadly attack and growing dissatisfaction among both citizens and military personnel (Al Jazeera 2022). A month later, on January 23rd, military leaders committed a coup which led to the ousting of President Kaboré (NOS 2022).

Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie

While the origins of Koglweogo and Dozo are rooted in inequality and a disconnect from the state, the origins of the VDP are somewhat different. In January 2020, the Burkinbe government legalised the mobilisation of citizens against the growing terrorist threat. This new group was to be called the 'Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie' (VPD), or 'Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (Tisseron 2021, 22).

Recruitment for the VDP played on an element of the Burkinabe national identity: revolutionary struggle. As a spokesperson from le Balai Citoyen, a political movement inspired by Sankara's politics, said, "Insurrection is rooted in the DNA or the Burkinabe people." (Guy Hervé Kam in Harsch 2017, 261). This is also evidenced by the litany of political coups in Burkinabe history. Power has more often exchanged hands through a coup than through elections (Hagberg 2015, 119). Political and social change have historically taken place through unofficial channels in Burkina Faso.

The idea that revolutionary ideals are something ingrained deeply in Burkinabe culture plays into the theory of hybrid security governance, in the sense that security in Burkina Faso does not have to be in the hands of only the formal security actors. This would go some way into explaining the rise of movements such as the VDP. The VDP offers citizens a chance to legally protect their homeland, much in the same fashion that Sankara made 'committees for the defence of the revolution' a vital part of his political structure. For some Dozo this national identity also plays a part in their willingness to work together with the military. Idrissa Cisse, a Dozo working together with government officials against terrorist threats in 2021, said, "We help them because we are real Burkinabe, we are real fighters" (RFI 2017).

The VDP are built on a rich history of local defence groups. Most famous are the aforementioned CDR groups created by Sankara, but before that there were 'vigilance committees' in the Bobo-Dioulasso in the 1970s and 1980s (Tisseron 2021, 10-11; Harsch 2017, 20). Then, the creation of 'local security committees' was authorised by the government in 2003 and expanded on in 2005 (de Bruijne 2022; Tisseron 2021, 10 – 11). In 2010, implementation of "police de proximité" further expanded on the idea of local, grass-roots policing (de Bruijne 2022; Van Vyve 2018). These different versions of local self-defence groups contributed to the idea of local protection and most likely helped normalise the idea of self-defence movements in Burkina Faso. This paved the way for these groups to become more prominent actors in the Burkinabe security apparatus.

Chapter 2: Translation of security in the hybrid state

The previous chapter detailed the history of Burkina Faso and highlighted elements which may have provided historical precedent for the formation of local self-defence groups. The following chapter will delve into how community-initiated self-defence groups like Koglweogo and Dozo fit into the Burkinabe security system.

Different understandings of security

In the literature review, the hybridity of the postcolonial state and its security system was discussed. The gaps between the 'imported' postcolonial state and the existing social structures is said to lead to a security system in which official and unofficial actors perform security together (Frowd 2022, 129). This was identified as a form of 'hybrid security governance' (Bagayoko et al. 2016, 13-14).

In Burkina Faso, this hybridity can be seen in the divergent understandings of the meaning of security. Koglweogo, for instance, can be considered as working outside the system: an informal or amateur actor within the security sector. However, for citizens who have more contact with Koglweogo than with state officials, it is the state that is outside of the norm (Compaoré & Bojsen 2020, 680). Research has shown that Burkinabe citizens have long been reluctant to collaborate with law enforcement, because of corruption and lack of resources (Kalfelis 2021, 601). The language of "*État-ité*", or '*stateness*' is not always clearly understood by locals due to different understanding of security. In local languages, security means more than simply security from bodily harm, but also includes welfare aspects such as financial and social security, as well as the idea of living together peacefully (Compaoré &

Bojsen 2020, 685). Koglweogo address these elements of security as well as offering bodily protection (Kalfelis 2021, 601).

Furthermore, Frowd analyses Koglweogo groups as “auxiliaries of the state” (2022, 117). By this he means that Koglweogo are not officially part of the national security structure but have nevertheless become indispensable in the counterterrorism efforts in Burkina Faso (Frowd 2022, 117). He posits that instead of looking at security providers in terms of legality or whether they are part of the state apparatus or not, one should consider Koglweogo to be both amateur and professional in their provision of security (Frowd 2022, 129). The dichotomy between the amateur and professional aspects of the services provided by Koglweogo fit with the broader system of hybrid security governance in Africa.

Due to this multifaceted identity within the security system of Burkina Faso, Koglweogo seek recognition and legitimacy in untraditional ways. Koglweogo have a complicated relationship with the state because they both aim to be recognised by the state and yet were created in critique of the state (Frowd 2022, 117, 129). In some cases, local security providers are considered to be more effective than those provided by the government, because they are able to reach places formal security cannot. Often local security providers are also ‘traditional’ security providers. These providers are viewed by some communities as more legitimate than the state because they are perceived to be more accessible and effective (Bagayoko et al. 2016, 13-14).

This legitimacy is achieved through many different means, such as endorsement from chiefs or through the alignment of ideals with local communities (Willeme et al. 2021, 29). The reason these self-defence groups have been able to grow is that enough people in local communities perceive the justice meted out by Dozo and Koglweogo to be more effective than that of state authorities. In one interview, a shopkeepers’ representative stated, “I would have preferred to rely on modern justice and respect universal rights. But they don't apply to Burkina reality. The laws are not dissuasive." (Van Vyve 2018).

Dangers of Generalisation

However, these different understandings of security may not be universally applicable to all those who live in the vicinity of self-defence movements. Considering the occasionally violent means of these groups, it is possible that local communities may be afraid to speak out against Koglweogo and may show support that they do not truly feel, out of fear for

repercussions. There are also voices who highlight the unlawfulness of the actions of self-defence movements (Capron 2022).

One example of actions that brought negative media attention to Koglweogo is the discrimination against the Fulani ethnic group, also referred to as Peuhl. The Northern region of Burkina Faso is a majority Fulani region, as is the Malian province across the border. This is also the area in Burkina Faso where most of the terrorist attacks have taken place, though they have also spread to other parts of the country (Cline 2021, 11). Some of the jihadist groups operating in this area are exclusively ethnically Fulani. Other groups, like Ansarul Islam, also consist mostly of Fulani but also have members of other ethnic groups in their company (Cline 2021, 11). This has contributed to the Fulani being framed as 'jihadists in disguise' by Koglweogo (Haavik 2021). This framing excuses violent reactions from Koglweogo towards the Fulani. If all Fulani are terrorists, then Koglweogo can argue that they are defending those under their protection by attacking Fulani.

Already, Koglweogo have been involved in retaliatory attacks on Fulani villages (Haavik 2022; Amnesty International 2021). Most infamous is the 'Yirgou massacre' that took place on January 1st 2019 and led to anywhere from 49 to 210 casualties, depending on the source (Amnesty International 2021). Other coverage includes titles like "Tied up and humiliated: Victims of the Koglweogo, a militia network, filmed in Burkina Faso", detailing the ways Koglweogo arrest and interrogate suspected criminals (Capron 2022). These acts have greatly contributed to the international notoriety of these groups, as the stories were covered by global media (RFI 2019; Traoré 2019; Faivre 2022).

Ethnically motivated and retaliatory actions such as these highlight the fact that Koglweogo really operate on a smaller scale than for example the military of Burkina Faso. They react to attacks against their small communities rather than combatting the larger trend of increasing terrorism. In these cases, Koglweogo may act as protector to their own community, but are an aggressor towards other Burkinabe citizens. This might suggest that instead of simply being actors in a hybrid security system, Koglweogo actually form a danger to the security system of Burkina Faso. The question then remains: should a group engaging in ethnically motivated massacres be considered part of the security system or as a danger to it?

In the case of Koglweogo, both could be possible. Historically, national security forces have on many occasions committed atrocities towards their own citizens, for example in

Germany during the Second World War, or in Uganda during the reign of Idi Amin. Additionally, Koglweogo have been very involved in the protection of their communities against jihadist violence. The following chapter will examine these developments.

Chapter 3: Outbreak of conflict in security vacuum

Security Vacuum

References have already been made in the literature review to the 'security vacuum' in Burkina Faso after the end of the presidency of Blaise Compaoré. Vital to the understanding of this vacuum is the situation before the change in political power. In Burkina Faso, the political elites and the military enjoyed a close, symbiotic relationship. Most important player in this was the presidential guard (RSP). This was both the most powerful military unit in the country and a very effective intelligence service. Through the close connection between Compoaré and RSP leader General Diendéré, the RSP was also closely involved in politics (Haavik et al. 2022, 323-324).

Trouble in the armed forces had been brewing for some time due to the difference in treatment between the army and the RSP. Soon after the fall of Compaoré's government, the RSP was disbanded, leading to the 2015 coup led by former RSP members (Haavik et al. 2022, 330-331). These actions caused the rift between different parties in the Burkinabe armed forces to deepen, thereby destabilising national security (News Wires 2019). Non-RSP military members were less well trained and had less security experience than their RSP counterparts, and unfortunately proved ineffective replacements for this elite team, leaving the security system in Burkina Faso in a precarious state (Haavik et al. 2022, 331). This state is sometimes referred to as a 'security vacuum' (de Bruijne 2022).

This so-called 'security vacuum' was only able to occurred largely due to the sudden political change after 2015. Aside from the RSP's fall from grace, the absence of Compaoré also left a security vacuum in the political sense. Over the course of his presidency, Compaoré and his followers had built up a reputation as important mediators in regional conflicts (Harsch 2017, 259; International Crisis Group 2013). A well-known example of this is Compaoré's role in the 2012 Mali conflict, where he was appointed for the regional institution ECOWAS, which is the Economic Community of West African States. Compaoré's mediation led to a joint military operation that was supposed to bring stability to Mali (Oluwadare 2014, 15). This role may also have contributed in his reign being as peaceful as it was, because it tied him to powerful allies in the region and around the world.

There are in fact widespread, but largely unproven rumours that Compaoré's mediatory role in kidnappings for ransom by insurgents was part of a 'non-aggression' pact between insurgents and Compaoré, thereby keeping them out of Burkina Faso (Harsch 2017,

259). Other rumours suggest the former president could have armed Tuareg factions, some of who, the aforementioned AQIM for instance, would later perform terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso (Reitano & Shaw 2015, 39). Similarly, Captain Diendéré of the RSP has been accused of being closely connected to leaders of armed groups around the Sahel (Harsch 2017, 259; Reitano & Shaw 2015, 39). If this is true, then these connections might be what kept Burkina Faso the peaceful 'oasis' in the Sahel for so long, because these armed groups would have been warned not to bring trouble to Burkina Faso. Those agreements ended with the end of Compaoré's presidency.

In either case, whether through official or unofficial channels, Compoaré and his government managed to create a "big man deep state" which created a state-wide security network against potential violent forces from outside the country (Haavik et al. 2022, 330). The intense interconnectedness of the former regime with the country's security system meant that when power changed hands in 2015, this precarious network of arrangements fell apart. Since large parts of the security system were not institutionalised, the many security actors that held this system together now started competing with each other (Haavik et al. 2022, 334). It was in this state of insecurity that self-defence movements like Dozo and Koglweogo flourished.

Koglweogo groups, in particular, grew in numbers and spread across a larger territory (Leclerq & Matagne 2020, 10). Effectively, the Burkinabe government lost its monopoly of violence and private security actors were left floundering under new political rule. Local self-defence groups, operating within a different realm of the hybrid security system in Burkina Faso, were less dependent on the existing political structures for their existence and therefore remained effective.

Within this context of a fractured military and, perhaps, the absence of the informal politics that kept international militant Islamic groups at bay, the fall of the Compaoré presidency left behind a scattered security system. Unfortunately, self-defence groups were not the only ones to take advantage of the precarious security situation during the political transition. Insurgent Islamist groups also saw the chance to start acting in Burkina Faso (Haavik et al. 2022, 333). It was in the resulting increase in violence that self-defence groups could prove themselves as important actors in the protection and security of Burkinabe citizens. This violence and insecurity will be discussed in the next section.

Regional unrest

According to a national assembly session in Burkina Faso in April 2016, Koglweogo started to grow in prominence in 2015. It was at this time that their actions started to attract the attention of local authorities (Assemblée Nationale 2016). This was the same period of time that terrorist attacks started to occur increasingly frequently in Burkina Faso (Barlow, Doboš & Riegl 2021, 152). It was at this point that the Burkinabe government started to discuss the possibility of enlisting these groups in an effort to combat terrorism (Assemblée Nationale 2016).

While jihadism had been on the rise in the Sahel region for some years hence, Burkina Faso had until 2015 managed to steer clear of its threats. The increased security threat from terrorism, coupled with a change in leadership in the country seemingly allowed the Koglweogo groups to flourish. To understand the conditions that led to self-defence groups becoming more prominent actors in the national security governance of Burkina Faso, we must first understand the broader context of jihadism in the Sahel.

Jihad in the Sahel

This paper understands Jihad as the struggle by some Muslim groups to proliferate their religion (Miles 2018, 188-190). Furthermore, this paper will focus on those who use violent means to do so. Jihadism can be seen as the international expansion of the Muslim ideology. This inherently contests the legitimacy of the African state borders as we know them now. In a sense, this Islamic extremism is a challenge to the colonial heritage of today's borders in Africa (Miles 2018, 200). These jihadist groups often consist of networks that transcend borders in order to escape scrutiny and custody and are therefore inherently expansionary.

There is a long history of jihad in the Sahel. The first wave dates back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and a second wave followed a century later (Miles 2018, 188-190). Currently, jihadism in the Sahel is led by two major groups: the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Regional players include Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Boko Haram and Burkinabe organisation Ansarul Islam (Cline 2021). In 2017, in Mali, Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin' (JNIM) was founded as a collection of four prominent militant Islamist groups with links to al-Qaeda: al-Mourabitoun, Katibat machine - also referred to as the Macina Liberation Front (FLM)-, Ansar Dine and AQIM (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime 2022; Eizenga & Williams 2020, 1-2).

Many of these factions are not bound by state lines and are difficult to track down in the wide-spread and largely empty Sahel region. Often, jihadist violence is said to 'spill over' from one country to another. For example, by 2021, Nigerian Boko Haram was also active in Niger (Human Rights Watch 2021). Such is also the case with terrorism in Mali and Burkina Faso. JNIM has become one of the most active groups in Burkina Faso, apart from Ansarul Islam. The latter of these two groups is local to Burkina Faso that was started by a protégé of a former Ansar Dine leader (Eizenga & Williams 2020, 2).

The increasing frequency of terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso led to security discussions within the government of Burkina Faso. One suggestion was the institutionalisation of self-defence groups, giving them legal power to fight alongside the military against insurgencies (Assemblée Nationale 2016). Some were opposed to this idea due to the unlawful arrests and incidences of torture attributed to Koglweogo specifically. In the end, the continuous attacks and unsuccessful security strategy led to the January 2020 decision to call for civilian mobilisation against terrorism. This created the newest of the self-defence movements in Burkina Faso, the VPD (Tisseron 2021, 22).

For the most part, up until the early 2010s, Dozo in Burkina Faso stuck to their traditional roles of hunters and protectors of nature. These are even mentioned to be their primary tasks in a 2010 government security report, with their counter-criminality efforts being limited mostly to information gathering and dissemination (Government of Burkina Faso 2010, 17). A decade or so later, many news articles are referring to them as self-defence militias (RFI 2017; Carayol 2020; Chambraud 2021). This change seems to stem clearly from the increased terrorism and insecurity in Burkina Faso, as well as from the collaboration of Dozo with military and law officials, as evidenced in a 2017 interview with the Grand Dozo, leader of the Dozo groups, and a 2021 interview about the traditional medicine and plants used by Dozo in their fights against terrorism (RFI 2017, Chambraud 2021). It is around this same time that, with or without government support, Koglweogo started turning towards anti-terrorism more than anti-banditry (Tisseron 2021, 22).

Literature on war time civil war suggests increased violence can reshape a society and cause a new social order to arise (Arjona 2014; Bakonyi & Stuvøy 2005, 373). During the combined rise of violence and political unrest in Burkina Faso after 2014, this new social order included increased activity from Dozo and Koglweogo groups. Due to the inefficiency of the new governments military forces, self-defence groups were forced to step in in order to maintain the previously existing status quo which was being endangered by the growing

number of violent events in the years following the coup. Eventually, the government saw these existing power systems and decided to collaborate with them (Tisseron 2021, 22).

With this institutionalisation of self-defence groups, these groups became cemented in the security system of Burkina Faso. That is why jihadism in the Sahel, in conjunction with the failing of the Burkinabe security sector, is one of the conditions that allowed self-defence groups such as Koglweogo and Dozo to expand in numbers and power. It also led to the founding of a new group: the VDP. These are institutional aspects. However, there are also more traditional and informal elements to Burkinabe society which allowed for the growth of Dozo and Koglweogo.

Chapter 4: Political legitimacy

Previous sections of this thesis have discussed the lack of security that caused self-defence militias to grow within their communities and the outbreak of conflict. The following chapter will explore the way these groups have become part of the security institution in Burkina Faso.

Traditional legitimacy

Despite growing within a supposed 'security vacuum', self-defence groups do not exist in a political vacuum within their localities. While a lack of government presence might be felt, there is no lack of authority. There is a power structure that runs parallel to that of the electoral government: that of the customary local chiefs (Van Vyve 2018). Chiefs often endorse the Koglweogo, thereby legitimising these groups. In some cases, the existence of Koglweogo units might even depend on the endorsement of chiefs. In an interview conducted in 2020 a Koglweogo leader in Gayéri stated, "All our activities are carried out thanks to them [chiefs] – spiritually, material, economically – without them the Koglweogo would disappear" (Schmauder 2021, 29). This relates to Jenzsch's analysis of the way in which community-initiated militias become integrated into local institutions (Jenzsch 2022, 21). She suggested that long-term dissemination of these groups is achieved through endorsements from local leaders.

In a sense, endorsements by chiefs undermine the power of the elected government, casting aside the 'imported' French ideals of statehood and judiciary power in favour of more traditional elements which are perceived to predate colonialism (Van Vyve 2018). Dozo groups also claim legitimacy through their ancient tradition of hunters being protectors. Notably, Dozo also fought against colonial rule (Hagberg 2021, 177).

This ties into the theory of hybrid security governance, where different political and security actors interact within different levels of governance. In Burkina Faso, one can see the elected government, the traditional chiefdoms, the official military and self-defence groups each take on different aspects of the security sector (Bagayoko et al. 2016, 7). At the same time, they influence each other: a Koglweogo may be legitimised through endorsement from a local chief, and the chief could at the same time strengthen his position within his community by collaborating with a self-defence group. Even within these groups, members can inhabit both formal and informal aspects of security. A Koglweogo member may be practising

vigilantism when laying down the law on a perceived criminal, but when joining a VDP group, be part of a lawful militia.

Legality and the 'Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie'

January 2020 came with a new development surrounding the legality of self-defence movements in Burkina Faso. Following a call for the civilian mobilization and recruitment to fight the growing jihadist threat, a new law was created which allowed for the recruitment of civilian volunteers in what is essentially a state-supported militia called the VDP. The recruits would receive fourteen days of training before being given the necessary equipment to protect their country: communication devices and weaponry (Tisseron 2021, 22 – 23; AfricaNews 2022). The initial goal was to recruit 13,000 people. Only about 2,000 civilians had been recruited by June 2020, but after a recruitment drive in 2022 an estimated 90,000 people were enlisted (VOA 2023; Tisseron 2021, 23).

According to Tisseron, the goal of the creation of the VDP was to ensure better protection for communities that were out of reach of state protection programmes and also to "provide an institutional framework for the militia dynamics that [have] emerged beyond the government's control" (2021, 6). A member of the VDP is beholden to the laws of Burkina Faso, in a way that Dozo or Koglweogo are not. The 2020 Burkinabe law that formally institutionalised the VDP grants the members certain rights, such as payment, formal training and health insurance (Law n.002-2020, 4-6). However, they are also obligated to follow the customs of war and international conventions that Burkina Faso has signed, and they are not allowed to carry out acts of judicial policing or law enforcement (Law n.002-2020 6-7). This directly contradicts some of the main objectives of groups such as Koglweogo and Dozo, who were founded partly through the protection of their communities against criminality.

In effect, the previous chapters have shown that self-defence groups were able to informally become important actors in the security apparatus of Burkina Faso by offering protection in areas where there was little to none, or where the protection of the state was considered ineffective. Though this could be interpreted as a sign of weakness of the state, an alternative understanding may be that the state and society have different understandings of security, as explained in Chapter 2 of this thesis (Compaoré & Bojsen 2020, 685). This law may be an attempt to regain control over non-state armed groups in the country, but to an extent it also attempts to bridge the gap between the traditional social structures and the post-colonial 'imported state' (Boege 2019, 114). The VDP then is truly a hybrid creature borne from both these elements of Burkinabe statehood and security.

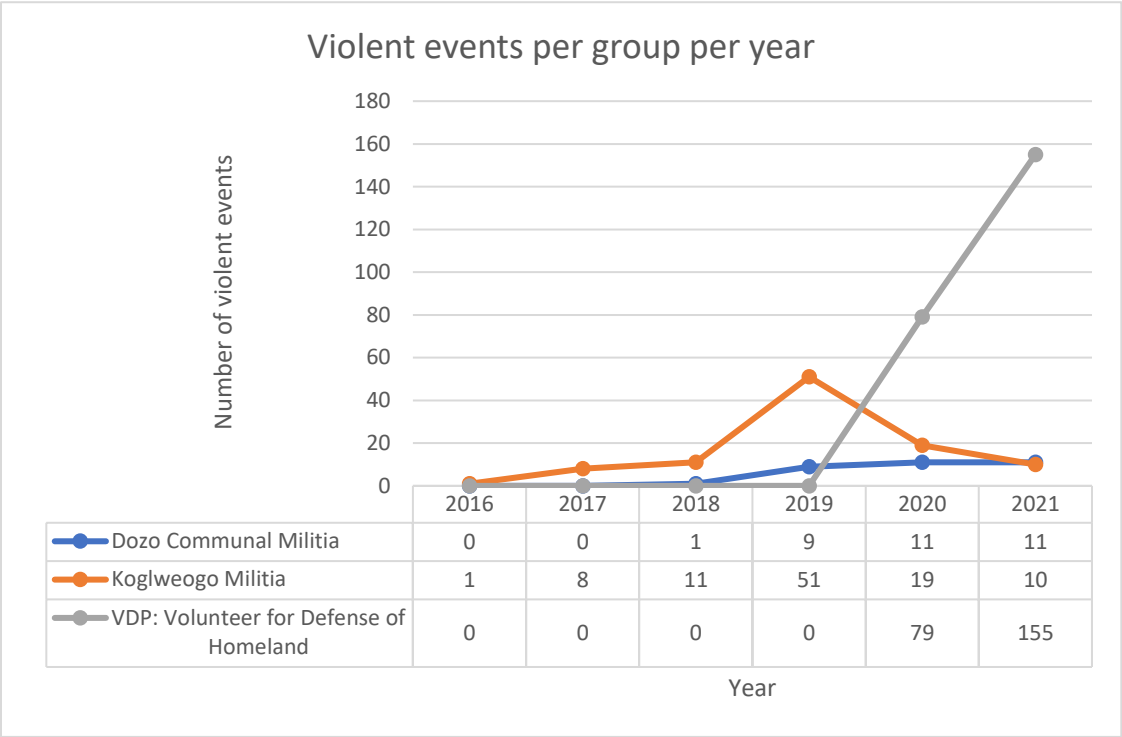
Rise and fall?

The main question of this thesis is how groups like Koglweogo and Dozo have become embedded into the Burkinabe security apparatus. For years they played an unofficial role within this apparatus and grew larger, before finally becoming recognised through the ratification of the VDP law in 2020. Interestingly, there seems to have been a decline in new activity from Koglweogo and Dozo after 2020.

For this thesis, ACLED data on Koglweogo, Dozo and VDP were requested between 2012 and January 1st 2022. This yielded 366 violent events in which one or more of these groups was involved between the years 2016 and 2021. It should be noted that, while very extensive, this is likely not a definitive list of violent events related to these groups. Many events may be small-scale or unreported. Likewise, not all events reported in the graph are of equal magnitude. According to the ACLED, most were 'political violence', of which most were then battles. What is also not clear from the graph created for this thesis, but is expounded upon in the dataset, is the manner of involvement each group regarding the event that the data connects them to.

The following figure, Figure 1, was not created by the ACLED, but was formulated from the data provided by that organization. The graph shows a steady incline for VDP events from 2020 onwards. At that point there is a decline in events in which Koglweogo were involved, declining further even after 2020. Interestingly, Dozo involvement rose from 2018 to 2020 and then remained the same after the founding of the VDP.

Figure 1. Violent events per group per year (ACLED, 17 June 2023). Data parameters modified for the purposes of this thesis.



This may suggest that once the VDP was legalised, other self-defence groups became less powerful. The total number of violent events certainly did not decline, but the presence of Koglweogo did. One explanation for this could be that many former Koglweogo members left their own community-initiated self-defence groups in favour of joining those sponsored by the state. It has been noted that the way VDP recruitment is structured favours the recruitment of former members of self-defence groups. This is because former experience in a similar field is considered an asset for becoming a VDP member (Schmauder & Willeme 2021).

Many former Koglweogo members joining the VDP is a sign of the further enmeshment of these self-defence groups with the security apparatus of Burkina Faso. On the other hand, less Dozo seem to be taking the same step, so from this data it is not possible to draw a firm conclusion. Then again, this may once more show the hybridity of the security system in Burkina Faso.

On both a local and national level, groups like Koglweogo and Dozo seek and receive endorsement from leaders. On a local level, chiefdoms play an important part in the legitimization of self-defence groups and on a national level, the formation of a state-sponsored defence group has attracted many former members of Koglweogo groups. It is necessary for Koglweogo and Dozo to be legitimised by local leaders because they receive both material and spriritual support from these leaders. The spiritual aspect ingratiates them to

local communities and the material allows them to continue protecting those same communities (Schmauder et al. 2021, 29).

The Burkinabe government, as an ‘imported’ postcolonial state, lacks the traditional legitimacy that local chiefs can offer (Boege 2019, 114). On the other hand, they are able to offer material support, and more importantly, legal support. The choice to offer a legal manner of mobilisation for citizens, is a way for the Burkinabe government to offer an alternative to traditional self-defence movements.

Discussion

The purpose of this thesis has been to analyse the different conditions that underlie the embedding of self-defence movements in Burkina Faso into the state security system. A review of the literature on the subject revealed that there are multiple theories on statehood and security. Due to the hybrid nature of the Burkinabe state, the security system also has a hybrid nature. This hybridity led to different understandings of security within the country, with the state institutions not matching the social structures already present in Burkina Faso. These conditions were really elements of a deeper issue in Burkinabe society that created a rift along socioeconomic lines, the so-called 'politics of the belly'. This then related to a deeper issue of the alienation of parts of the Burkinabe population to the state. State policy at times seemed less tangible than local politics, leading to the perception that the state was 'transplanted' instead of a natural state of being.

This hybridity has led to the emergence of groups like Koglweogo and Dozo as an answer to perceived insecurity within the country. Initially, these groups engaged in vigilantism and community protection, but were not yet prominent actors in the Burkinabe security apparatus. The 2014 coup that ousted Compaoré led to a security vacuum. For the armed forces in particular, it was difficult to maintain the same level of security without the presence of the RSP. This, in conjunction with the rise of terrorism in Burkina Faso, left the government floundering.

The fact that Burkina Faso functions as a 'hybrid security system' has aided in both the emergence and the expansion of self-defence movements. Groups like Koglweogo and Dozo thrive when operating in the gap between formal and informal, which has allowed them to grow in this system. Even when Compaoré was still president, the complex network of security woven by him and his government was a hybrid security system. When the formal aspects of that system started falling apart, the informal aspects like Koglweogo and Dozo took a greater part of the system for themselves.

The perceived inefficiency of the new government in 2015 coincided with an increase in violent events in Burkina Faso. It is difficult to ascertain whether this increasing conflict was caused by the security vacuum or if these processes simply happened simultaneously. Either way, this growing conflict was felt by local communities and government forces did not seem to be able to stop the conflict from happening. At that moment communities turned to the groups such as Koglweogo and Dozo for protection. Self-defence groups changed their

tactics from policing to the protection of communities against insurgent violence. At this point, the Burkinabe government had not yet acknowledged these groups as elements within the security system. However, in a system of hybrid security governance, actors need not play an official role in a security system to still form an integral part in it. Such was the case for Koglweogo and Dozo.

Another interesting element to note regarding the security vacuum is that much of it is contingent on there having been a relatively strong security system when Compaoré was still president. Even though no hard evidence regarding the informal network that Compaoré and his followers had built up has been found, the perception that it existed may also have kept potential aggressors at bay. When Compaoré was no longer in power, it was then expected that the security sector would fail and a larger number of attacks was launched. It is even stated by some sources that it is impossible to know whether the security sector as it was under Compaoré's government would have been able to counter the onslaught to Burkinabe security from 2016 onwards. It is very true though that the first leadership change in 25 years led to political uncertainty and it is very likely that this led to uncertainty in other parts of Burkinabe society which may have fed into the jihadist threat. In a sense, the security vacuum was a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the perception of a security vacuum led to greater violence which was then more difficult to curb.

This subsequently fed into the power of self-defence groups like Koglweogo and Dozo. The government may have been in a precarious position, but these groups could offer at least a modicum of protection regardless of the state of politics in the country. This corresponds with literature the societal changes found in areas with long-term conflict. New forms of social order are often created by communities as a reaction to insecurity and violence.

The growth of these groups in conjunction with the still increasing threat of violence led to the creation of the VDP by the Burkinabe government. For the government this is beneficial because it creates an auxiliary force to that of the government. While Koglweogo and Dozo continue to exist next to the state-sponsored VDP, the latter was increasingly involved in violent events, compared to the other two groups. Particularly events regarding the Koglweogo have declined, and a certain exodus has been noted from former Koglweogo members to the VDP. By providing a legal way for citizens to mobilise themselves in local divisions, the government essentially took a step towards bridging the gap between traditional social structures and the postcolonial state.

Further research

Within this hybrid security system, self-defense movements work alongside many different security forces and inhabit many different layers of security. An element of this security system which has not been examined in this paper, but which nevertheless greatly influences many conflicts across the globe, is private security. Private military security companies (PMSCs) inhabit many of the same spheres as self-defence movements, and often even interact with them, but do so from the opposite direction. While groups like Koglweogo are grassroot and based in local traditions and communities, PMSCs are imported security forces. There are some similarities between the two. Both straddle the line of state and non-state. What is also interesting, is that Koglweogos at times mimic the governmental forces by wearing uniforms, keeping arrest registers, helping with local disputes and even, at times, levying taxes. This paradox between distancing from military or police forces while at the same time mimicking their ways, is something which PMSCs have also been shown to do in other parts of the world (Puck 2017, 75). This toeing the line between official and unofficial is what makes these movements unpredictable.

Up until the end of 2021 there was relatively little PMSC presence in Burkina Faso while neighbouring countries such as Mali, have long been known to have enlisted the help of PMSCs such as the Wagner group (Ochieng 2023). Considering the conflict in the country is not yet over, it would be interesting to see what steps this government will take in terms of security. As it is a military government, so perhaps the new leaders plan to solve the issue themselves. If they do reach outside of their own military for help, it would be interesting to see which direction they go. Reaching out to the United Nations or the French military for aid, as was done in Mali during the 2012 crisis, or perhaps buying the services of a PMSC. Thus, a recommendation for future research would be to examine the newest developments in the Burkinabe security sector and their effect on the popularity and power of self-defence movements in the country.

Conclusion

By looking into academic literature on states and their security, the changing of social orders during times of conflict and finally the trends behind the expansion of militias, this thesis gained an understanding of theories on the development of non-state armed groups. The ideas in the literature were then further condensed through literature on the formation and legitimization of self-defence movements in Burkina Faso specifically. Together, this formed

the basic understanding of the kind of conditions that could lead to self-defence movements to become part of the security structure of a country.

These four trends were the following: historical precedent, hybrid state and security governance, societal changes due to increasing conflict and the legitimization of self-defence groups by the government.

Analysis of the history of Burkina Faso, focusing in particular on events throughout the past decade, found these conditions to also have led to the expansion of Koglweogo and Dozo in Burkina Faso. Previously formed revolutionary committees created historical precedent, after which the lack of integration of the post-colonial state into existing social structures allowed Koglweogo and Dozo to grow as a viable alternative to official security. This created a form of hybrid security governance. Growing conflict in conjunction with political upheaval created a 'security vacuum', which Koglweogo and Dozo filled, thereby filling in a new social order. Eventually these overlapping conditions culminated in the creation of the VDP, providing political legitimacy to the phenomenon of self-defence groups.

Not all self-defence groups have shown equal exuberance in joining VDP groups, citizens who were not previously involved in Koglweogo or Dozo are also joining the VDP. Through the described events self-defence groups are now both formally and informally enmeshed with the Burkinabe state security apparatus.

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