

## **Illicit Economies and Insurgent Strategies: The Political Economy of the Northern Mali Conflict**

Gabriel Delsol  
School of International Service  
American University  
4400 Massachusetts Ave, NW  
Washington, District of Columbia 20016 USA

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Claire Metelits

### **Abstract**

While insurgents in civil wars face strong incentives to provide public goods to civilian populations, few do so. Existing literature on the topic seeks to understand the role of territorial control, ideology, insurgent competition, formal pre-war networks, and political economy in explaining this variation. These explanations fail to interact with the informal structures that generate order in the marginalized periphery areas often witnessing organized rebellion. In order to better assess how these structures affect rebel strategies, this paper tests a model of pre-war political-economic structures, arguing that illicit economies exhibiting strong patrimonial networks constrain insurgents to provide more public goods. To test this, three insurgent groups operating in the northern Mali conflict are compared. The results are consistent with the expected outcomes of the theory, as insurgents interacting with strong patrimonial networks provided significantly greater physical security, economic goods, and inclusive political structures. Additionally, these cases show limited explanatory power for theories of ideology and territory, and demonstrate how local networks can drive insurgent competition from the bottom-up. Such a theory encourages more critical assessments of the role of informal networks in driving micro-level dynamics at the onset of civil wars.

**Keywords:** Insurgency, patrimonialism, public goods

### **1. Introduction**

Insurgents receive a variety of benefits from providing public goods to civilian populations, including safe haven, increased recruitment, economic support, and information against competing political actors.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, insurgents might be expected to provide public goods in a majority of cases across civil wars. However, more than 70% of insurgents provide little to no public goods.<sup>2</sup> Previous research emphasizes the importance of formal pre-war political institutions and labor-intensive illicit economies in explaining this outcome. How do these theories account for complex, informal socioeconomic networks present in periphery areas?

Patrimonial networks help assess these networks, as they describe informal systems of governance based on reciprocal interactions between local elites and civilian bases. To unpack the potential effect of strong patrimonial networks on insurgent behavior, three insurgent groups active during the northern Mali conflict (2012-2013) are compared. The results show that increased insurgent participation in illicit economies with strong pre-war patrimonial networks increases public goods provision. These cases account for other variables such as territorial control and ideology, which were consistent across all three groups. Another potential explanatory variable, insurgent competition, was heavily influenced by the presence of competing patrimonial networks.

The implications of this theory are twofold. First, it expands existing literature on pre-war networks beyond formal institutions and allows for an analysis of the breadth of informal institutions present in periphery areas. This pushes back against existing claims of “ungoverned spaces” as a root cause of conflict by highlighting the complex networks

that exist absent state presence. Second, it focuses on micro-level interactions during civil wars and offers more agency to civilian actors.

## 2. Theoretical Approach

This paper aims to establish a new theoretical approach to analyze insurgent incentives for providing public goods. This literature review frames current findings on the topic, drawing out helpful tools of analysis, such as time horizons and the linkages between local populations and insurgents. It also shows room for further analysis, namely in expanding the type of pre-war structures analyzed and their relationship to illicit economies at the local level.

Five existing theories posit reasons for the variation in insurgent provision of public goods. The first theory identifies a positive relationship between territorial control and public goods provision. Insurgents controlling territory are more likely to provide public goods since they create games with civilian populations, encouraging long-term investments in a mutually beneficial relationship.<sup>3</sup> The value of geography is shaped in part by factor endowments such as the abundance of land and labor. This theory is valuable in its description of time horizons in determining insurgent behavior. However, it gives little agency to civilians in determining the type and scope of public goods provided, and fails to explain conflicts where multiple insurgencies hold contiguous territory yet differ in their distribution of public goods, an increasingly common phenomenon in multiparty civil wars with weak central governments.

The second theory explains how competition affects insurgent's time horizons, with some scholars arguing that competition reduces public goods. Investing in civilian bases is a long term investment that can be interrupted by competition, which results in a shift towards the use of violence to extract resources.<sup>4</sup> Others disagree, arguing that insurgents use public goods to outbid their opponents, establishing themselves as protectors of the population and seizing the benefits of local support to defeat their competitors.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the effects of competition remain unclear, and require further analysis.

The third theory focuses on the ideologies of different insurgent movements, and how specific political ideologies are more geared towards providing public goods. For example, secessionist groups seek international recognition and use governance to mimic the rules of entry into the sovereign state system.<sup>6</sup> Ideology incentivizes public goods provision in order to strengthen ties with a desired constituent whose support is key to achieving the end goal. However, in order to hold true, this theory requires internal unity for insurgent ideology to be implemented at the local level, and assumes that the desired constituents are responsive to the ideology.

The fourth theory analyzes pre-war political structures, the unique social and political configurations that provide governance in a defined area. Strong pre-war institutions increase public goods for two reasons. First, strong economic networks create expectations for good governance, forming civilian preferences.<sup>7</sup> Second, to act on these preferences, politically inclusive networks provide civilians with the repertoires of collective action needed to pressure insurgents into meeting their demands.<sup>8</sup> This theory helps understand civil wars in the context of local politics and treats civilian populations as agentive. However, current theories fail to account for informal power structures and rely solely on collective civilian action in order to pressure insurgents, which requires significant mobilization.

The fifth theory uses political economy to explain how the nature of revenue bases uniquely shapes the incentives of insurgents. Current literature argues that resource bases incentivize political goods for two reasons. First, non-violent profit-seeking actors demand stability and pay insurgent groups to establish order, creating disincentives for predation.<sup>9</sup> Second, insurgents participating in broad economic networks gain political capital from local populations, increasing the group's access to information, resources, and recruits.<sup>10</sup> This model can help explain how different types of revenue bases shape the strategies employed by insurgents. However, the interaction between insurgents and civilians can be developed further by using a new unit of analysis.

This paper tests theories of political economy and pre-war determinants of insurgent behavior using a model of pre-war informal socioeconomic systems. Specifically, it argues that pre-war illicit economies with widespread patrimonial networks create unique incentive structures for insurgents to provide more public goods.

***Hypothesis:** Insurgent participation in patrimonial illicit economies increases public goods provision.*

Illicit economies are a valuable condition of analysis, and are composed of complex and highly fluid networks which mediate interactions between local populations, states, and non-state armed groups. They are highly attractive for insurgent groups as they provide material and social support. The degree to which illicit economies provide political capital is a function of the state of economic development, the labor intensity of the illicit economy, and the presence of predatory actors.<sup>11</sup> In addition, if illicit economies are lootable in nature, or require no investment, insurgents are

more violent against local populations.<sup>12</sup> Analyzing illicit economies provides a unique opportunity to assess informal pre-war structures.

Patrimonialism conceptualizes the actors and exchanges involved in informal networks. Patrimonialism is a type of political system that depends on personal ties between a ruler and their subjects.<sup>13</sup> Rulers distribute resources to their subjects, often along the lines of kin networks, in exchange for services and loyalty.<sup>14</sup> Accountability is generated by social norms emphasizing reciprocity, while formal constraints on the ruler's power are absent.<sup>15</sup> Conflict literature focused on patrimonialism examines the relationship between networks, state power, and wartime predation. Reno's research reveals that greater pre-war proximity of insurgent elites to national-level patronage networks increases their use of predation.<sup>16</sup> Vlassenroot and Perrot argue that while wartime economic predation is driven by top-down forces, its impact is mediated by intermediate power brokers.<sup>17</sup> These intermediate power brokers, described as "Big Men" by Jörgel and Utas, are the nodes that connect national level power actors to local populations and resource bases.<sup>18</sup> This paper moves beyond the macro-level interactions to focus on the micro-level dynamics between insurgents, local patrons, and their constituents.

The proposed model can be divided into two time periods. In a pre-war period, illicit economies may exhibit patrimonial forms of governance. This model represents the interaction between Local Elites, the distributors of patronage, and the Civilian Base, a connected subset of the population. Local Elites receive support from the Civilian Base, in the form of labor, votes, or taxes. In return Local Elites use their power to secure control over resource bases, distributing the benefits to ensure continued support. This logic follows that of the stationary bandit, although it is separate from traditional theories of insurgency since these networks are highly localized, rarely ideological, and do not seek to significantly alter the political status quo.<sup>19</sup>

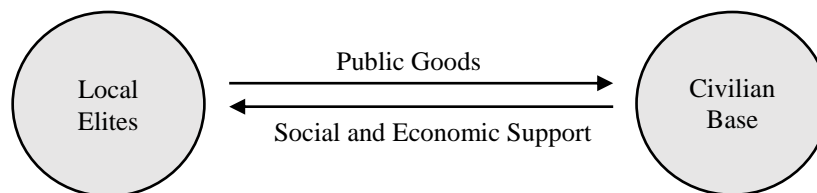


Figure 1. Model of Pre-War, Two-Way Interaction Within Patrimonial Networks

In a wartime period, pre-war networks mediate interactions between Insurgents and the local economy. Insurgents seeking to control territory and access revenue bases must interact with Local Elites, who serve as the nodes between Insurgents and Civilian Bases in three ways. First, seeking stability, Local Elites offer Insurgents low-cost access to their economic base in return for protection. Insurgents provide security, a low-cost service for coercive actors, in return for greater revenue. The alternative to this, in which Insurgents supplant Local Elites, is unlikely, as such actions generate backlash and require Insurgents to manage the economy, an activity they lack experience in. Therefore, patrimonial networks create unique incentives for Insurgents to provide Local Elites and their Civilian Bases with physical security. Second, repeat interactions between Local Elites and Insurgents increases their time horizons and encourages them to provide economic goods to Civilian Bases. Third, in order to co-opt existing political networks and access local economies, Insurgents integrate Local Elites into their systems of governance. Since patrimonial networks create semi-inclusive political structures in which Local Elites are given decision making power, Insurgents who incorporate Local Elites into political structures are more attuned to the needs of the population. In addition, interactions between Local Elites and the Civilian Base remain relatively unchanged.

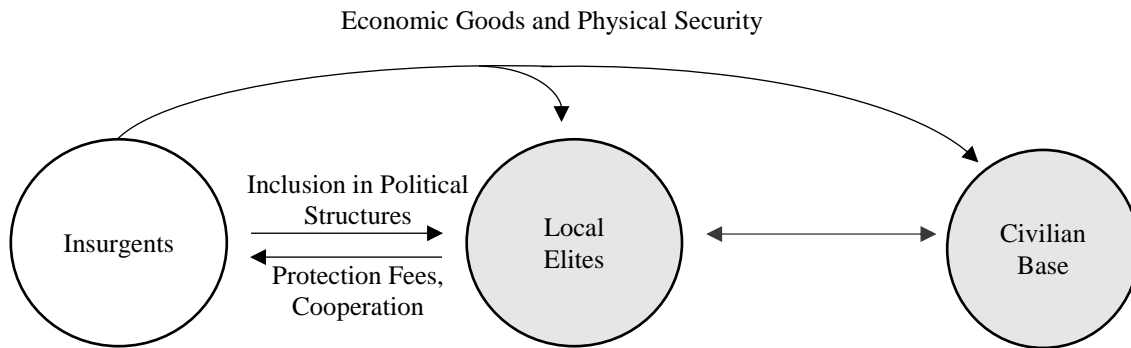


Figure 2. Model of Wartime Interaction Between Patrimonial Networks and Insurgents

### 3. Methodology

This study performs a small-n case comparison to uncover patterns of invariance and analyze specific causal mechanisms in-depth.<sup>20</sup> The cases selected demonstrate variation across the independent variable, the presence of pre-war patrimonial illicit networks, and the dependent variable, the degree of public goods provided. The cases selected are Islamist insurgent groups active during the Northern Mali conflict: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Ansar Dine. Ideology and level of territorial control are constant across all three groups, while competition is present in the case of MUJAO. The explanatory variables are the different patrimonial networks within the illicit economies the insurgent groups depended upon, Kidnapping for Ransom (KFR), Drug Trafficking (DT), and Commodity Smuggling (CS). The three demonstrate varying degrees of insurgent participation and patrimonial networks. There are three variants of patrimonial networks, absent, weak and strong. Illicit economies that require no interaction with the local population lack patrimonial networks. Illicit economies that exclude local elites or maintain small distributional networks represent weak patrimonial networks. Illicit economies that involve local elites who use revenue to distribute public goods to a significant subset of the local population along social lines represent strong patrimonial networks. In addition, insurgents must participate, directly or indirectly, in the illicit economy, for the expected interactions to take place.

Table 1. Analysis of variables across AQIM, MUJAO, and Ansar Dine

Case/Variable	IV: Territorial Control	IV: Ideology	IV: Insurgent Competition	IV: Participation in Patrimonial Networks	DV: Public Goods
AQIM	Complete	Islamist	None	Direct Participation in Weak Network (KFR)	Medium
MUJAO	Complete	Islamist	Violent competition with the MNLA	Indirect Participation in Strong Network (DT)	High
Ansar Dine	Complete	Islamist	None	No Participation in Strong Network (CS)	Low

To measure the expected outcome, this paper analyzes three types of public goods. Physical security represents the use of predictable, coercive action to create a perception of stability and deter predation. Economic goods represent the utilities needed to fulfill a wide variety of basic functions. Political goods include the creation of structures tied to

or separate from insurgent networks, with varying degrees of civilian participation, to affect the provision of the two other forms of goods. Using Arjona's definitions of rebelocracy and aliocracy, a distinction is made between the former, in which insurgents maintain top-down, centralized control, and the latter, in which civilians hold some power through decentralized structures.<sup>21</sup> Since patrimonial networks are already centralized, aliocracies in this context are political structures that incorporate local elites.

Congruence methodology is used to assess the theory's explanatory power. Congruence Theory is helpful in uncovering the "Black Box of Decision Making," understanding how different environmental factors and incentive strategies influence strategic decision.<sup>22</sup> In order to determine congruity, this paper determines if the expected theoretic outcomes are present and if the theory is a necessary and sufficient condition, given other potential explanations. This paper uses in-depth analysis similar to process tracing methodology, enabling the identification of potential intervening variables. Sources used include translations of intra-insurgent communications, and English- and French-language secondary sources, including reports by local news outlets and academics.

## 4. Case Comparison

### 4.1. AQIM

AQIM became a key actor during the northern Mali conflict as the most well-funded insurgent group. After initial insurgent victories in early 2012, the Malian army fled south. The remaining forces in the Timbuktu region were local militias, led by business elites who were involved in DT. These local elites purposefully used their forces to stall the MNLA from entering the city of Timbuktu until AQIM arrived, ensuring that AQIM gained control of the city center.<sup>23</sup> By June 2012, AQIM consolidated its control and non-violently expelled local business elites and the MNLA from the region.

AQIM depended on KFR as its primary source of revenue, with intra-Shura communications stating that "kidnappings are at the top of military action in the Sahara region... We don't know of a single case that the [we] did not oversee."<sup>24</sup> AQIM dominated the KFR market, and between 2003 and 2012 generated approximately US\$90-175 million in ransoms.<sup>25</sup> Revenue from KFR funded its expansion across the Sahel, allowing it to purchase weapons and organize attacks across borders. While it also participated indirectly in DT and CS economies through taxation, KFR remained its primary source of income.

AQIM provided significant pre-war governance in the form of economic goods. When it first arrived in northern Mali in 2003, its fighters bought goods from local vendors for above market price, paid dowries to marry into local families, and distributed cash, medicine, and SIM cards.<sup>26</sup> This involvement created new economic networks through the recruitment of locals and the provision of foodstuffs, fuel, and equipment.<sup>27</sup> By 2005, using funds from KFR, AQIM had spent US\$5.6 million in northern Mali.<sup>28</sup> Beyond providing economic goods to the general population, it used its money to build ties with local elites. In Tarkint, Gao region, it channeled US\$1 million ransom payment received for the release of two Canadian diplomats towards influencing local elections by bribing polling officials and voters to favor certain Tuareg elites.<sup>29</sup>

During the conflict, AQIM Emir Abdelmalek Droukdel cautioned his subcommanders against imposing ideological rule immediately, and recommended providing public goods such as healthcare, water, and electricity.<sup>30</sup> According to Droukdel, "the aim of building these bridges is to make it clear that our Mujahideen are no longer isolated in society, and to integrate with the different factions, including the big tribes and [the MNLA] and tribal chiefs."<sup>31</sup> To win support from the local population, AQIM increased its expenditure on salaries and provided additional foodstuffs, fuel, and medicine for free. It also provided physical security, although these goods had mixed popularity. While its fighters gained local support initially for distributing their cell-phone numbers as hotlines to report criminality, they soon faced backlash over the establishment of an unpopular Islamic Police force, which triggered protests by women's organizations and youths.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4.1.2. analysis

AQIM interacted primarily with KFR, which exhibited a weak pre-war patrimonial network due to its small distributional networks and lack of local elite involvement. Prior to AQIM's entry into KFR in 2003, the market was operated by low-level criminal gangs with little social power. As a result, the profits were distributed to the criminal actors and their immediate families. During the conflict, KFR networks remained concentrated, as AQIM carried out a majority of the labor, while local elites were largely absent in the process. The majority of revenue went straight

from the insurgent group to the civilian base, removing the need for local elites to act as intermediaries.

AQIM provided a mixed array of public goods. In terms of physical security, it offered protection to the local population, although the Islamic police created backlash. Economic goods remained consistent prior to and during the conflict, with AQIM increasing ransom demands to meet up with the mounting costs of controlling territory.<sup>33</sup> AQIM established a rebelocracy, excluding civilian participation. While AQIM provided some of the functions expected with strong patrimonial networks, it also failed to include local elites in its governance structures and enacted unpopular policies. Certain actions demonstrate clear links between the nature of AQIM's participation in KFR and the public goods it provided. First, AQIM's takeover of Timbuktu depended on support from local elites involved in DT. Yet after taking control, AQIM expelled them from the city. While DT was a lucrative business in the region, AQIM's direct control over KFR reduced the attractiveness of participating in a local economy with more constraints. Second, despite Droukdel's warnings, AQIM commanders implemented unpopular Islamic Police services, which hurt the group's popularity. This was arguably the result of the absence of inclusive political structures and a lack of economic linkages between the local civilian base and AQIM. Had AQIM depended on the civilian base for economic revenue, and had they incorporated local elites into decision making structures, they would have faced far greater costs from pursuing such actions. The case of AQIM shows how weak patrimonial networks with little to no local elite involvement reduce reciprocal interaction between civilians and insurgents. As a result, insurgents are less in tune to the direct needs of civilians, who lack the informal or formal pressures to demand goods. AQIM's interactions with the KFR network in Timbuktu region aligns with the patrimonial theory.

## 4.2. MUJAO

MUJAO grew rapidly during the onset of the conflict, arriving in the city of Gao alongside MNLA forces on March 30. It took control of the city center after being invited to do so by prominent local Arab and Songhai elites.<sup>34</sup> On June 26, as residents of Gao held a funeral for a municipal representative, MUJAO fighters rallied the crowd into an anti-MNLA protest.<sup>35</sup> On June 28, MUJAO fighters supported by local youths launched violent attacks targeting MNLA positions, resulting in 35 deaths and the expulsion of the MNLA from the city.<sup>36</sup>

MUJAO depended predominantly on DT, with Gao serving as a regional hub for the cocaine trade. Most of MUJAO's involvement came in the form of reciprocal relationships, in which it offered protection to local Tilemsi and Lamhar Arabs elites involved in drug trafficking in return for payment, fuel, vehicles, and recruits.<sup>37</sup> It was also involved in CS, supported by its ideologically based pro-smuggling stance, which argued that economic barriers to trade were un-Islamic.<sup>38</sup> Support for CS led to reduced consumer prices for fuel and food.<sup>39</sup> MUJAO carried out a few kidnappings between 2011 and 2013, although these represented a small share of the industry.<sup>40</sup>

MUJAO placed a major emphasis on providing security in Gao. It limited predation by its own fighters and expelled the unpopular MNLA from the city.<sup>41</sup> It offered protection to the trafficking networks of its local allies, attacking competing networks controlled by Idnan and Ifoghas Tuareg, and Kounta Arab elites.<sup>42</sup> In terms of economic goods, MUJAO used its profits from DT to provide public goods. It provided free electricity and funded a transportation network of buses, called Mohamed Transports, which circulated between the town of Douentza, the city of Gao, and the Nigerien border.<sup>43</sup> It paid civilians salaries of between US\$8-50 for tasks such as sewing uniforms and painting cars. Most significantly, MUJAO included local power brokers into political structures. In Gao, it established an executive council with five MUJAO members appointed to ministerships through local elections to administer governance. The Minister of Justice determined punishments; the Minister of Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice promoted MUJAO's ideology in daily life and ensured that Quran's were accessible as books or downloads on electronic devices; the Minister of the Interior controlled the Islamic Police across the 11 departments of Gao; the Minister of Health ran the town hospital and met with foreign NGOs to negotiate medical donations; and the Minister of Communication ensured that council directives were transmitted through local radio, organized debates and communication campaigns, and archived key videos.<sup>44</sup> Beyond this executive council, MUJAO also created a local council (*Cercles des notables*) to represent the interests of the population of Gao to MUJAO, staffed by local elites with expansive ties to the drug trade.<sup>45</sup>

### 4.2.1 analysis

DT represents a strong pre-war patrimonial network due to the social nature of the networks involved and the widespread distribution of public goods by local elites. The social aspect stems from DT's potential to provide economic mobility and the involvement of kinship networks in trafficking. Youths facing an otherwise weak job market can earn substantial profits from joining, and often face family pressures to do so.<sup>46</sup> In northern Mali, cocaine

trafficking gangs of 10-15 youths often form on behalf of their elders.<sup>47</sup> The nature of kinship networks imbues DT with social legitimacy since licitness in northern Mali is determined by the extent that a good is distributed along social ties rather than its legal status.<sup>48</sup> In addition to the importance of social networks in DT, local elites involved provide public goods. Key traffickers finance political campaigns and invested in goods such as wells, generators, schools, and religious festivals.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, DT represents a strong patrimonial network.

MUJAO provided significant public goods. Physical security extended beyond protecting civilians and establishing an Islamic Police, as MUJAO fighters guarded drug convoys and launched attacks against rival trafficking networks. Economic goods mimicked pre-war goods and were relatively widespread, providing utilities and expanding the local job market. MUJAO also established political structures that included civilian participation in the form of elections and the appointment of local elites who were tied to civilian bases through patrimonial networks, demonstrating the creation of an alicocracy. MUJAO's actions are consistent with the expected outcome of insurgent interactions with strong pre-war patrimonial networks, as showcased by two aspects of their involvement. First, MUJAO fighters protected drug convoys operated by local elites, a form of physical security that provided MUJAO with revenue and protected local elites' economic base from competing traffickers and the MNLA. Second, local elites mediated interactions between insurgents and civilian bases. From the top-down, they used their status on the local council to ensure that the goods provided aligned with the expectations of civilian bases. From the bottom-up, Lamhar and Tilemsi elites channeled the material resources of their networks, in the form of fuel and vehicles, to MUJAO, while also socially sanctioning youths to join the group. Overall, MUJAO's interactions with the DT economy aligns with expectations provided by the patrimonial model but requires further cross-case analysis to assess the explanatory power of the theory of inter-group competition.

### 4.3. Ansar Dine

Ansar Dine is led by Iyad Ag Ghali, a notable Tuareg elite, and was closely aligned with AQIM, which provided it with financial support.<sup>50</sup> During the first few months of the conflict, Ansar Dine was involved in combat alongside the MNLA, seizing the towns of Tessalit, Kidal, and Aguelhok. During the remainder of the conflict, it controlled Kidal region and maintained a presence in Timbuktu region.

Prior to the conflict, Ag Ghali served as a local elite in KFR networks, mediating ransom negotiations, a role that helped him build ties with AQIM.<sup>51</sup> Ansar Dine had little involvement in illicit economies, instead depending on financial support from AQIM and Ag Ghali's status to attract recruits.<sup>52</sup> At most, it relied on the services of smugglers to secure resources but held no role in these networks beyond purchasing goods.<sup>53</sup>

Ansar Dine provided relatively few public goods. Ag Ghali's efforts to co-opt local elites in Kidal largely failed. From June 18-20, he convened Imams and tribal leaders in an attempt to gain their support, which resulted in the majority of the attendees denouncing his goals, contesting his claim to legitimacy as an Islamic scholar, and warning that he would be held accountable for any violence committed against the local population.<sup>54</sup> The most influential elite in Kidal, Amenokal Ag Attaher, remained politically opposed to Ansar Dine, and limited local support to the group.<sup>55</sup> Ansar Dine focused heavily on providing physical security. At the onset of the conflict, its predictable use of force, backed up by a consistent ideology, resulted in local support in Kidal.<sup>56</sup> Ansar Dine also implemented sharia law, banning music, adultery, football, alcohol, smoking, and "improper" clothing, with offenses punishable by beatings, amputation of limbs, and death.<sup>57</sup> These harsh punishments angered local populations who clashed with Ansar Dine.<sup>58</sup> Ansar Dine provided relatively little goods and faced the greatest level of civilian backlash.

#### 4.3.1. *analysis*

Ansar Dine depended almost entirely on AQIM for financial support, representing the absence of patrimonial networks. By participating in an economic base that required no material investment, its ties to the population were significantly weakened. Therefore, while Ansar Dine interacted with local elites and the civilian base, it lacked any economic linkages to formalize ties.

Ansar Dine provided some physical security and little to no economic or political goods. Physical security manifested in the form of Ansar Dine's implementation of sharia law, which involved significant violence for local populations. While such violence was predictable, it mapped poorly onto existing social structures and expectations of justice, generating backlash and complicating efforts to co-opt local elites. Therefore, Ansar Dine's governance was relatively limited, and the group maintained a strict rebelocracy.

The absence of patrimonial networks aligns with Ansar Dine's failure to provide certain goods. In terms of its limited governance, Ansar Dine acted similarly to insurgents depending on rentier resource bases, which face few incentives

to invest in public goods. With Ag Ghali initially enjoying local recognition, Ansar Dine may have expected to use its social legitimacy to ensure support, explaining why Ag Ghali attempted to win over local elites on an ideological basis. However, they refused, using the same cost-benefit analysis that led elites in Gao to embrace MUJAO. Amenokal Ag Attaher sent his son to join Ansar Dine's leadership to constrain Ag Ghali's actions, which Ag Attaher feared would compromise Tuaregs ability to negotiate with the government.<sup>59</sup> This reveals two assumptions in line with the patrimonial theory. First, Ag Attaher saw no benefit from aligning with a group that would provide no additional goods to local networks, elevating the costs of associating with Ansar Dine. Second, Ag Attaher's assumption that future negotiation with the government would have to take place reveals short time horizons, the result of limited repeat interactions that would otherwise occur if Ansar Dine embedded itself into the local political economy. Therefore, the absence of patrimonial networks in Ansar Dine's management of Kidal lends itself to the outcome observed, of coercive violence, politically opposed local elites, and a lack of public goods.

## 5. Conclusion

This research sought to investigate variations in insurgent provision of public goods by building on existing literature about pre-war networks and political economy, and examining the impact of informal pre-war networks on shaping insurgent incentives. Specifically, stronger pre-war patrimonial networks were expected to mediate interactions with insurgents participating in illicit economies, resulting in increased public goods. All three cases analyzed provide support to the patrimonial network theory of insurgent governance. MUJAO, which embedded itself in Gao's strong patrimonial networks through DT, invested in economic, security, and political goods, holding itself accountable to the civilian population through repeat interactions with local elites. AQIM, which maintained an imperfect monopoly on KFR, provided security and economic goods to the civilian population in Timbuktu. However, the lack of local elite participation in the industry reduced the need for AQIM to provide inclusive political goods, allowing them to pursue otherwise costly actions like deploying unpopular Islamic Police forces. Ansar Dine enjoyed full financial support from AQIM, and therefore circumvented strong patrimonial networks in Kidal. It provided little to no public goods and generated the most civilian and local elite backlash, which would weaken it significantly during the French intervention, as Tuareg elites in Kidal convinced the majority of its fighters to defect and sue for peace.

These cases provide insight for theories on territorial control and ideology. In terms of territorial control, AQIM invested in public goods as early as 2003, when it was still a covert network. While all three groups controlled contiguous territory, they provided varying levels of public goods, showing poor explanatory power for the theory of territorial control. In terms of ideology, each group sought to implement a highly ideological form of governance that was carried out in different degrees, with Ansar Dine engaging in the highest level of violence and MUJAO the lowest. This variation shows the importance of political inclusion, with *aliocracies* constraining insurgent actions. In Gao, where local elites were represented in the local council and civilians voted for ministers, greater accountability existed to pressure insurgents to mediate the implementation of an unpopular form of governance. Overall, ideological explanations of insurgent provision of public goods provide no explanatory power in the case of Mali. The third theory, of insurgent competition, may explain variation across the three cases, since MUJAO competed directly with the MNLA and provided the highest amount of public goods. MUJAO may have chosen to provide public goods to local populations to outbid its competitor and ensure local support. However, the MNLA was also active in Timbuktu and Kidal as well, and drew from the same recruit pool as Ansar Dine. Yet only MUJAO chose the costly strategy of attacking the MNLA. One potential reason for this outcome is that patrimonial networks in Gao opposed each other, and used ties with MUJAO and the MNLA to pressure insurgents to compete. Prior to the conflict, the emergence of profitable DT economies increased contestation between local elites. This explains why local Lamhar and Tilemsi Arab elites welcomed MUJAO into the city, and supported them throughout their campaign to remove the MNLA, which had been mobilizing Ifoghas and Idnan Tuaregs. Since the MNLA posed no direct threat to MUJAO, MUJAO's choice to attack the drug trafficking convoys, shrines, and rural bases of Kounta Arab and Idnan and Ifoghas Tuaregs reveals how local elite's profit motives affect insurgent behaviors. While further analysis of this dynamic through primary source research is needed, this series of events shows how insurgent competition can be mediated by local competition.

The results hold important implications for future conflict dynamics in Mali. In the aftermath of the French intervention, all three groups relinquished their control over territory and reverted to classic insurgent tactics involving the use of guerilla warfare and terrorist attacks. All three have since merged under the group, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), led by Iyad Ag Ghali. In addition, the restoration of state presence in the north has yet to address the chronic lack of investment in public services and continued corruption, both of which provide space for the emergence of illicit economies. Given the potential for insurgents to continue to mobilize along patrimonial illicit



networks in opposition to the state, policymakers should critically analyze current approaches towards counterinsurgency, counternarcotics, and development. Beyond Mali, the patrimonial model provides a useful tool in expanding analyses of pre-war networks to include informal systems of governance. In the context of conflict studies, this theory pushes back against conflict frames that rely on “ungoverned spaces” as the root cause of conflict, and instead highlights how areas lacking state presence still exhibit order and governance according to local networks, which shape insurgent strategies accordingly.

The use of congruence theory holds certain limitations and provides opportunities for additional research. While the informal nature of the systems analyzed limits certain methodologies, ethnographies on informal structures could provide useful insight into the specific sequence of events that occur from the pre-war to wartime period. Moreover, the groups analyzed had a relatively short lifespan. Given that insurgents increasingly shape local institutions as they grow stronger, further research could explore the degree that initial interactions between insurgents and local elites persist beyond conflict onset.

## 6. Acknowledgements

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