Locally Grown, Globally Connected: Armed Group Affiliation with the Islamic State and al-Qaeda

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Abstract

With many local Islamist militant groups working as affiliates for al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, terrorism has changed greatly over the past 10 years. Relevant research has yet to provide a comprehensive understanding for the causes and consequences of such affiliations and how they alter the dynamics of terrorism at the local and global levels. To address this shortcoming, this dissertation provides answers to these important questions that help in understanding how global terrorism develops with the increasing number of players.

First, I ask why some local Islamist militants join transnational networks of jihad and others do not. Using new data on 122 Islamist militant groups, over 1998-2016, I find that groups with low local legitimacy have a higher likelihood of affiliation. Second, I ask how groups' rhetoric shifts after affiliation. I analyze the case of Boko Haram, 2006-2023, studying more than 100 speeches and other documents. I find evidence that the rhetoric of the local group shifts from being politically to religiously focused after affiliation, to signal commitment, religiosity, accommodation, and altruism, to the different audiences. Third, with Brian J. Phillips, we examine the consequences of these affiliations on groups' use of violence. Illustrative case studies of al-Shabaab and Boko Haram along with analyses of 95 Islamist militant organizations from 1998-2020 show that groups generally engage in more attacks after affiliation. However, disaggregation suggests that the relationship is only robust for AQ.

The findings of this dissertation contribute to debates about transnationalization of conflicts, dynamics of new jihadist civil wars, and militant alliances. By focusing on aspects of legitimacy, identification of local groups and networks, and consequential violence, this dissertation lays down a path for further development of research on global jihad. The dissertation also demonstrates the importance of local channels, thus potentially contributing to more effective counter-terrorism measures.

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Acknowledgments

When I was studying for my Master's degree, I read the acknowledgments section of a Ph.D. dissertation that touched me deeply. They mentioned how their life changed throughout their study years and how their Ph.D. came to affect their life and cause some of these changes. At that moment, I promised myself that if I ever had to write one, I will do my best to make it personal and from the heart; because a Ph.D. journey is never simply a career phase, it is a personal and emotional journey as well.

By the year 2016, all those who dreamed five years earlier of a better future that accommodates everyone in Egypt were realizing that the story was coming to an end. We were losing meaning and purpose. Then a new dream materialized, shared by many friends who felt the same about their home country. We should resume our lives and move forward. We should not give up on ourselves. We should create our own meanings. We should study. I knew that this was the only option left and maybe it was an escape. However, I gave the Revolution in 2011 all my heart as I thought I knew the answers. What I had not tried so far was to ask the questions and look for answers from scratch.

Indeed, the beauty of the Ph.D. lies in the questions more than the answers. I have been asking questions for the past four years. Some of them are still unanswered, yet it was a blessing for which I am grateful. Most importantly, I am grateful for the opportunity to move forward as we hoped we would. Despite all the tears shed for every possible reason, it was a healing journey. I am also grateful to many of you who were there for me throughout the years. I was only able to see the different opportunities and overcome the challenges because of you.

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To Mama, my true warrior

Chapter 1

Introduction

In 2006, Abu-Ayuub al-Masri, then leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, declared an Islamic State in Iraq (Johnston et al., 2016), and in June 2014, Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi declared an Islamic Caliphate over Iraq and Syria. The threat evolving from this point onwards is still felt everywhere in the world, with the nature and dynamics of conflicts changing in many societies. The effects of the declaration of an Islamic Caliphate ten years ago extended well beyond Iraq and Syria. In addition to the devastating consequences in both countries (e.g., Ianchovichina and Ivanic, 2016), the Islamic State changed the jihadist landscape all over the world. With a new competitor, al-Qaeda, and its affiliates - already operating in Maghreb, Arabian Peninsula and Somalia - had to adjust their strategies (International Crisis Group, 2016). Over the following years, several local Islamist militant groups pledged allegiance to one of the two hubs, to become affiliates in their countries. These groups are engaged in many of the conflicts taking place nowadays as shown in Figure 1.1. For instance, in the year 2023, IS was involved in conflicts in 12 countries (Rustad, 2024).

The level of threat implied by these jihadist activities is not limited to their confined local contexts. I maintain that understanding the causes of modern conflict and their implications, not only at the local and national but also transnational levels, cannot be achieved without addressing the motives of these actors and the consequences of their behavior by focusing on the micro- and meso-dynamics of new jihadist civil wars (e.g., Hamming, 2022; Nilsson and Svensson, 2021; Schwab, 2023; Walter, 2017b). It is thus of great importance to understand what their goals are and the strategies they employ to achieve them and how they adapt to changing context and the repercussions of their adaptations. It is also important to understand how they interact with other actors. Some research has started to look at this (e.g., Bacon, 2018; Blair and Potter, 2023; Drevon and Haenni, 2022; Moghadam, 2017; Schwab, 2023), but there are substantial shortcomings as will be discussed below.

To achieve this end, this dissertation examines several key aspects of jihadist inter-organizational networks. Specifically, I examine three critical questions: 1) Why do local Islamist militant groups pledge allegiance and affiliate with transnational networks of global jihad, such as al-Qaeda or the Islamic State? 2) How do processes of affiliation affect communication strategies? and lastly 3) How does affiliation affect the local affiliates' use of violence?

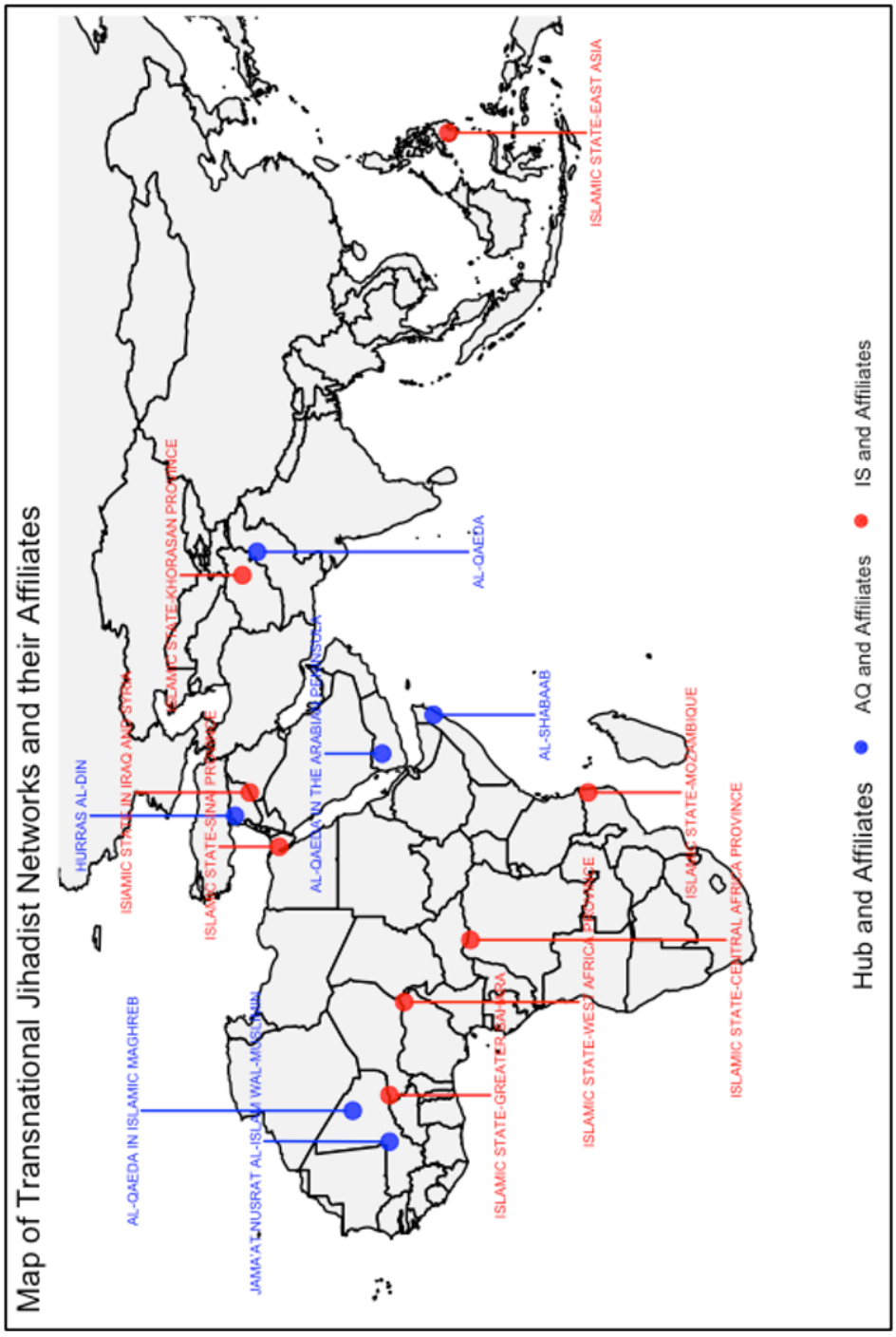

Figure 1.1: Map of Transnational Jihadist Networks and their Affiliates. Regenerated from (Zimmerman and Vincent, 2023).

1.1 Theoretical Framework and Main Concepts

Throughout this dissertation, I employ an organizational framework to the analysis of the causes, processes, and consequences of affiliation. In other words, I engage with the group as a unit of analysis, instead of the whole jihadist movement or the individuals. The analysis of the whole jihadist movement tends to over generalize across heterogeneous militant groups that operate within different local contexts, and it tends to obscure the specifics of these contexts. The analysis of individuals could also run the risk of providing personalized explanations detached from collective factors. Adopting this meso-level approach provides a more comprehensive view of the group dynamics and opportunities in conflict settings as opposed to individual motivations or macro structures. This framework allows for better examination of how groups make decisions, mobilize, and recruit in varying arrangements. Furthermore, it allows for a better understanding of how groups adapt their strategies and tactics.

1.1.1 Affiliation

Affiliation is the central phenomenon around which I structure the dissertation. With it, I refer to the formal pledge of allegiance by local Islamist militant groups to transnational jihadist networks: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. It is a pursued strategy that serves different purposes (e.g., Mendelsohn, 2016; Warner et al., 2021), alters behaviors (e.g., Bencherif, 2021; Filiu, 2009), and has various implications (e.g., Farrell, 2020).

Other forms of cooperation and alliances have long been studied with respect to their effects on survival, lethality, and tactics as will be discussed below. But formal pledge of allegiance for global jihadist networks has seldom been studied systematically. Limited number of studies have engaged with this concept using a global comparative approach[1] . Most of the research examine individual or few case studies, while other analyze AQ and IS affiliates independent of each other (e.g., Day, 2016; Mendelsohn, 2016).

Affiliation is a special form of cooperation. It entails an important oath that should not be reneged on except under specific circumstances, including leadership change or death. This is evident by the fact that once affiliate, mostly always affiliate, except for very few instances, such as Jabhat al-Nusra dissociation from al-Qaeda in 2016 (BBC News, 2016). The allegiance is pledged to the caliphate and ensures obedience in return of military and political protection provided to the affiliates (Wagemakers, 2015).

[1] Farrell (2020) and Blair and Potter (2023) are notable exceptions

Indeed, affiliation provides both material and non-material benefits in the form of financial, logistical support, branding benefits (e.g., Bacon, 2018; Byman, 2015; Cragin, 2009; Warner et al., 2021), and ideological signaling benefits (Gray and Stockham, 2008; Sagramoso, 2012). It also has various costs associated to it, especially with respect to counter-terrorism measures incurred, which could be detrimental to a group's survival. These increased costs and associated risks shed light on the contested level of rationality involved in such forms of alliances and allows for questions pertaining to the complex dynamics of Islamist militants' decision-making and strategies.

Throughout this dissertation, I conceptualize affiliation as a process that starts by local Islamist militants seeking to affiliate with a transnational jihadist network and materializing over a certain period, and results in alterations of organizational behavior. By studying the causes, processes, and consequences of affiliation, I treat it as an outcome variable, a mechanism, and an explanatory variable respectively. By doing so, I devise various theoretical premises that account for its conceptualization as a process.

Lastly, affiliation is a two-way phenomenon, and the process involves not only the local group seeking affiliation but being formally accepted into one of the two networks. I do not explicitly account for the decision of the central hub, on the other hand, I focus on the perspectives of the local militants. In doing so, I provide insights into the local context and organization dynamics that drive the expansion of global jihadism. I prioritize the relevance of local affiliates in the radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization processes. This is not to necessarily say that studying AQ or IS affiliates is more important than studying the hubs themselves. However, the latter has been studied in more capacity than the former. To address the shortcomings in existing literature, this dissertation adopts an affiliate rather than hub perspective.

1.1.2 Legitimacy

Legitimacy is the second crucial concept to the development of most arguments in this dissertation. Legitimacy is what allows different militant groups to have assertive and acceptable claims about their goals and strategies, under different conditions (Schlichte and Schneckener, 2015). Legitimacy is constantly contested and changing based on the behavior of the militant groups and their outcomes *(ibid.)*. Legitimacy is also conceptualized as relational in this research (Podder, 2017), implying that it is affected by and affects the different relationships a militant group has with the different target audiences, whether they are at the local, national, or international/transnational level.

Legitimacy incurs various benefits to the militant groups in conflict. Legitimate perceptions better equip militant groups to garner logistical and material support from external supporters, which in turn strengthens them with respect to the opponent state. This type of support is also extended to the local population. However, legitimacy at the local level not only provides these benefits but also reduce the risks of defection among the population and sharing information with the state.

Affiliation with a transnational jihadist network changes the nature of the local militant group and its self-identification. It is now part of a greater network, and its goals and strategies must align with that of the network. Affiliation not only increases risks of counter-terrorism measures as mentioned above, but it also adds hierarchical complexities at the organizational level with the risks of losing autonomy and independence[2]. Not all members of the groups and the local population might approve the new arrangements. Therefore, leaders of local groups who pledge allegiance to AQ or IS, need to ensure that the process of affiliation does not jeopardize their legitimacy but instead adds to it.

Legitimacy needs to be sustained post-affiliation as well. However, the fact that there is an external patron now to which the affiliated groups are accountable, could potentially exacerbate legitimacy crises after the affiliation, especially if there is divergence in the targets and goals of the parent organization, the group, and the local population. Therefore, the local affiliates would need to adjust their strategies, especially their communication and mobilization strategies, to ensure continued legitimacy even if that entails new projected self-identification. Legitimacy is thus crucial to the militant group at all stages.

Legitimacy also interacts with the outcomes of affiliation, especially those related to violence capabilities. In some cases, increased violence could lead to increased legitimacy and in others the opposite. This could depend on how violent attacks are perceived by the local population and group members, as signs of success or signs of brutality, which in turn depends on levels of civilian victimization, and whether violence is directed towards the group's opponents or also its constituencies. To summarize, legitimacy is important to consider while studying the causes, mechanisms, and outcomes of affiliation.

[2]Some research however suggests that local affiliates maintain their independence and autonomy (e.g., Mendelsohn, 2016; Warner et al., 2021)

1.2 Theoretical Arguments and Empirical Strategies

In this dissertation, I make several arguments for the drivers of affiliation, the process itself, and its consequences. These arguments attempt to paint a picture of the different dynamics in which local Islamist militants operate and how they affect their behavioral strategies and outcomes. These dynamics incorporate both local and transnational elements, mainly the interaction of domestic and transnational support.

In Chapter 2, I ask why some local Islamist militant groups join transnational jihadist networks and others not. I posit an argument rooted in legitimacy seeking rationale, maintaining that when groups operating within states face a legitimacy deficit at the local level, they would substitute for it, by joining al-Qaeda or the Islamic State. This argument is based on the notion that legitimacy is both dynamic and relational. In other words, it changes depending on the context, and with respect to the relational dynamics with the different target audiences. These can be at the local, national, and transnational levels and the militant groups seek to ensure their legitimacy across these different levels. In sum, I argue that shortcomings in local legitimacy could thus be substituted for by affiliation, which could be considered as an act of diplomacy, conferring recognition onto the local group, and adding to its local status.

To test my argument, I code an original variable for affiliation with al-Qaeda or the Islamic State for 122 groups of Islamist militants over the years 1998 to 2016, using the Extended Data on Terrorist Groups dataset (EDTG) dataset. To operationalize legitimacy, I use proxies for high and low legitimacy levels. For the former, I use social service provision and for the latter, I use kidnapping and young age. I use logistic regression as an estimator and conduct various robustness tests with varying sample size, conceptualizations of affiliation and coding of social services. The analysis provides evidence that lower levels of domestic legitimacy are associated with higher likelihood of affiliation with transnational jihadist networks and vice versa. The findings have important policy implications, shedding light on dynamics governing global jihadist networks and their expansion.

In Chapter 3, I zoom onto the process of affiliation and its mechanisms, with a special focus on the communication strategies employed throughout the process. In particular, I ask, what are the rhetorical shifts observed once a group affiliates with a transnational jihadist network. I argue that as a local Islamist militant group affiliates, the focus of its rhetoric will shift from being politically to religiously salient. First, by focusing more on religion, local affiliates can signal commitment and ideological harmony to the parent organization. Second, the more

encompassing religious rhetoric allows the group to send different messages to the local population implying devotion, accommodation of the different backgrounds of potential recruits, and altruistic instead of self-serving goals. These communication strategies are necessary to ensure the legitimation of the affiliation process and the continuation of mobilization and recruitment.

To test my argument, I apply a mixed-method approach to the case of Boko Haram. First, I collect a corpus for Boko Haram rhetoric, from the years 2006 to 2023 to include texts before and after it pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015, to become the Islamic State Province in West Africa. To carry out this task, I rely on existing collected materials to the year 2016, in addition to transcribing and translating videos of the group to create a novel corpus from the years 2016 to 2023. I end up with 129 texts. I apply unsupervised text scaling, along with the case study approach and the qualitative text analysis. Together, the analyses provide evidence that the salience of religious rhetoric relatively increases post-affiliation. Results are robust to the changes in the corpus specifics and size. The findings of this study shed lights on the implications of the different communicative strategies employed by the group throughout the affiliation process.

In Chapter 4, together with Brian J. Phillips, we ask what are the implications of affiliation with transnational jihadist networks on local groups' use of violence? This chapter capitalizes on the notion that affiliation provides various resources to the local groups that could alter their behavioral tactics with respect to their use of violence and attacks. Specifically, we argue that affiliation provides various benefits, including material and financial resources, branding, socialization and learning opportunities. Combined, these resources, with their different aspects and effects, increase the incentives and capabilities of the local affiliates to carry out violent attacks. We further argue that there are qualitative differences in types of affiliation, and that cooperation with AQ in particular should lead to more violence. We differentiate between AQ and IS in terms of their identities and strategies and capitalize the uniqueness of AQ regarding the hypothesized mechanisms. We complement the argument with two case studies of AQ affiliate, al-Shabaab and IS affiliate, Boko Haram, to illustrate the causal mechanisms.

To further test our arguments, we analyze 95 Islamist militant organizations from 1998-2020 relying on Extended Data on Terrorist Groups dataset (EDTG) and Global Terrorism Database (GTD). We test the effect of affiliation on total attacks, total deaths, and suicide attacks, using negative binomial and logistic estimators depending on the type of the dependent variable. We conduct various robustness checks including different estimators and more parsimonious models, among others. Together, the analyses suggest that groups generally engage

in more attacks after affiliation. However, disaggregation suggests that the relationship is only robust for AQ. These findings contribute to debates about the consequences of expanding global terrorist networks, and they add to debates about militant group relationships.

In Figure 1.2, I show a summary of the main arguments and findings of the dissertation.

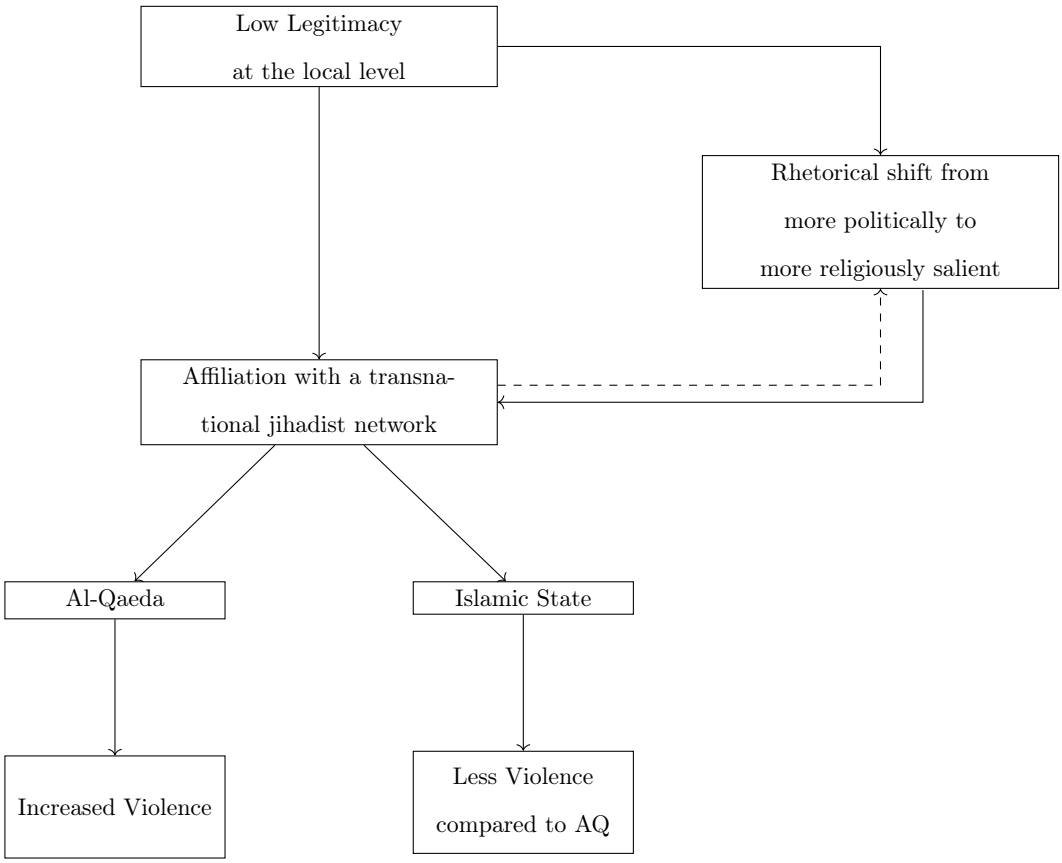

Figure 1.2: Summary of Dissertation Arguments and Findings

1.3 Contribution

Currently, most work on affiliation and global jihad engages with IS or AQ independently (Byman, 2014; Gerges, 2009; Mendelsohn, 2016; Warner et al., 2021). This dissertation analyses the causes and consequences of affiliation with both networks. It provides a theory for the process of affiliation with global jihad and differentiates between the consequences of joining AQ and IS.

In addition, most literature address alliances and cooperation in general (Akcinaroglu, 2012; Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008; Bacon, 2014, 2018; Blair et al., 2022; Gade et al., 2019; Horowitz and Potter, 2014; Topal, 2024). This dissertation, however, analyzes the causes, processes and outcomes of a specific type of alliance - the pledge of formal allegiance to a transna-

tional network of global jihad. By doing so, it engages with this literature in meaningful ways. Most importantly, it shows how similarly Islamist militants act to other groups in different conflict settings, even though the particularities of the alliance itself are very distinct, given the religious conditionalities attributed to it.

This dissertation speaks to a wide range of literature in international relations, conflict, and terrorism studies. By examining the affiliation of local militants with transnational jihadist networks, it engages with literature on transnationalization of civil wars, insurgencies, and terrorism, addressing aspects of conflict diffusion through external support actors (e.g., Bakke, 2014; Checkel, 2013; Crenshaw, 2017; Gleditsch, 2007; Salehyan, 2011). While this literature succeeds in showing the importance of foreign support, by emphasizing the role played by neighboring countries, diaspora communities and foreign fighters, it relatively masks the role of transnational groups networks. In doing so, this dissertation also adds to the literature that focuses on conflict and terrorism causes and consequences (Crenshaw, 1981; Fortna, 2015; Hoffman, 2006; Kydd and Walter, 2006; Polo and Gleditsch, 2016; Thomas, 2014). Therefore, it highlights the factors pertaining to support, including both its internal and external aspects, and the implications it has on recruitment, and mobilization, an angle that is often missed by the current studies (e.g., Bosi and Porta, 2012; Malthaner, 2015; Polo and González, 2020).

In addition, the dissertation engages with the debate on the role of ideational vs. strategic factors in conflict and terrorism. (Conrad and Greene, 2015; Kepel, 2002; Kydd and Walter, 2006; Polo and Gleditsch, 2016; Polo, 2020; Sageman, 2008; Stern, 2003). It attempts to bring both ends closer by integrating material and non-material aspects of militants' organizations necessary for their survival at the different stages. As will be shown below, the dissertation investigates the local particularities where a militant group operates, with a focus on the support and status required, as they incur both material and non-material benefits. It also engages with the changes in projected identification that a militant group would experience upon affiliation with a transnational network of jihad and how they affect its mobilization and recruitment strategies.

Beyond engaging with a ride range of existing literature, this dissertation has also several important contributions at the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical levels. First, at the conceptual level, this dissertation engages with the specific notion of pledging allegiance to AQ or IS. This is a particular form of alliance and collaboration as explained above, and the study of which expands on existing literature. While this dissertation focuses on this specific type of alliances - its causes, processes, and consequences - it shows that it is rooted in legitimacy

deficiency and employs different communicative strategies and increases the capabilities with respect to the use of violence. By doing so, the dissertation sheds lights on the commonalities and distinctions of this concept with other types of alliances along with the level of generalization that could be made about it.

In addition, this dissertation delves into the legitimacy of Islamist militants, at the domestic and transnational levels. Again, this shows that Islamist militants are not exceptional in many ways, as the level of support they accrue at their different stages affects their strategies and behavior. This shows various overlapping aspects between Islamist militants, who are often perceived as terrorist groups, and other rebel groups.

At the theoretical level, the three chapters provide a mid-level comprehensive theory for the why and how local Islamist militant groups join transnational networks of global jihad and the implications for this affiliation. By focusing on local legitimacy deficit as a main driver for affiliation, and the strategic shifts in communicative strategies that accompany the process, along with its effects on the use of violence, this dissertation implicitly combines notions of both levels, the structural (national/macro) and agency (individual/micro), into the decision-making of Islamist militant organizations. This is important for the study of global jihadism, terrorism, and insurgencies, as explanations that single out one of the levels without the other risk providing incomplete explanations to the phenomena observed.

Furthermore, in Chapter 4, Brian J. Phillips and I, differentiate theoretically between the effects of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State on the group's use of violence. This is a novel contribution to the studies of the consequences of alliances that usually analyze alliances to both groups without making this distinction or analyze alliances with one group and not the other. Chapter 4 shows that type of networks also matter, and this should be accounted for while making predictions and generalizations about affiliations with global jihadist networks.

At the empirical level, this dissertation makes several contributions. First, I introduce a new variable that identifies whether a group is an affiliate to IS or AQ or not. This variable is used in the comparative quantitative analysis of Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, as an outcome and explanatory variable, respectively. In Chapter 3, I introduce a novel transcribed and translated corpus for the group Boko Haram that I rely on for the quantitative unsupervised scaling of its rhetoric shift before and after the affiliation. This is the first study that analyzes the rhetoric of Boko Haram using this method. In addition, as mentioned above, in Chapter 4, we differentiate in the analysis between IS and AQ with respect to their use of violence, showing that affiliating with al-Qaeda is associated with more violence than affiliating with IS.

1.4 Organization of the Dissertation

The remainder of the dissertation proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 analyzes the drivers of affiliation with global jihadist networks and explains the causes of variation in the affiliation decision of the different local Islamist militants. Chapter 3 examines the rhetorical shift a local Islamist militant group would undergo upon affiliation. Chapter 4 analyzes the consequences of affiliation on the local affiliates' use of violence. Chapter 5 reiterates the main findings, and discusses the limitations of this study, along with the possible policy implications and venues for future research.

Chapter 2

A Quest for Legitimacy: Drivers of Organizational Affiliation with Global Jihadist Networks

2.1 Introduction

The year 2023 has been one of the most violent years since the end of the Cold War (Rustad, 2024). While this pattern can be partly attributed to heavy death tolls in Ukraine and Gaza, an important dynamic behind this statistic is the increasing expansion of Islamist transnational networks, prominently the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. In fact, although IS and al-Qaeda have made less headlines in major international news outlets, both organizations have seen an increase in local jihadist groups pledging their allegiance to either network.

Why do some groups seek affiliation while others do not? Existing research offers some suggestions as to when and why terrorist groups affiliate with transnational networks. Some qualitative works suggest a shift in strategy as a dominant explanation (e.g., Byman, 2015; Shultz, 2008). Groups appear to be motivated by operational necessity following successful counter-insurgency measures adopted by national governments. More broadly, affiliation with transnational networks is seen as a strategic behaviour aiming at increasing the chances of survival (e.g., Bacon, 2018; Byman, 2015; Cragin et al., 2007). For example, regarding affiliation with IS specifically, has been theorized to be caused by local Islamist groups seeking to distinguish themselves from other competitors, especially nationalist groups; a strategy that has been referred to as "Takfiri outbidding" (Day, 2016).

At the same time, other scholars theorise that groups seek affiliation because of ideological motivations, whether rooted in further radicalization or agreement and convergence (e.g., Gray and Stockham, 2008; Sagramoso, 2012). But such an explanation alone, disregards that not all Islamist groups have adopted a new global jihadist agenda. Analysis of the data collected for this study shows that the majority of Islamist groups remain focused on locally oriented goals and do not seek to affiliate with IS or al-Qaeda. Examples include Hamas, Jemaah Islamiyah (Indonesia), Lashkar-e-Taiba (Pakistan), Ahrar al-Sham (Syria) as well as Bangsamoro and Islamic Freedom Fighters (Philippines). In fact, fewer than a quarter of all Islamist armed groups seek affiliation or become affiliated, which shows a substantial variation in the level of transnationalism of jihadist groups.

To explain this variation, I propose an argument rooted in legitimacy-seeking rationale. Given the importance of legitimacy for armed groups for stature, success, and sustainability (e.g., Schlichte and Schneckener, 2015), I argue that when local Islamist militants run into a legitimacy deficit domestically, they try to substitute for it at the external transnational level by affiliating with a network of global jihad like AQ or IS. I find support for the proposition that high legitimacy levels are associated with lower chances of affiliating with transnational networks of jihad, and evidence that groups suffering from low levels of legitimacy would exhibit higher chances of affiliation.

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows. The first section elaborates onto why this research question constitutes a puzzle. The second section discusses the main benefits attributed to affiliation in the literature. The third section proposes my argument centred around legitimacy seeking. The fourth section discusses the research design, combining new data on global affiliation networks with data on more than 120 jihadist groups, and then the results. The final section concludes with a brief discussion of the implications of the findings and some possible directions for future research.

2.2 The Puzzle of Transnational Affiliation

Given that most nationalist jihadist groups face great challenges at the state level, why do they not all become members of the global jihadist movement, especially since they all share Islamist foundational ideologies, which could be thought of as universal in nature? Specifically, why do some locally oriented Islamist militants affiliate with global networks like Al-Qaeda and IS while others do not? Why did a group like Hamas not join al-Qaeda or IS? In fact, Hamas was in various occasions openly criticized by al-Qaeda (Cragin, 2009), and more recently, in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, where Afghani Taliban perceives alignment with IS-K as a high risk, and violent clashes began to erupt between both groups at the wake of the latter's arrival in the region (Jadoon et al., 2023). And why, in different contexts, various groups in Africa pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda or IS.

For instance, in 2012, Al-Shabaab insurgents released a video pledging allegiance to al-Qaeda. Al-Shabaab has been fighting, since late 2006, the Somali government and the foreign allies intervening to support it (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019). A similar course of events occurred in March 2015, when Abu Bakr Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram in Nigeria, released a video online in which he swore alliance and loyalty to IS and recognized the authority of Abu Bakr al Baghdadi (Ogbogu, 2015). Meanwhile, other Islamist groups in the region, such

Ansar al-Dine in Mali and the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia, never affiliated with a global network.

Affiliation brings many benefits to locally oriented groups who join global networks of jihad, as will be shown in the following section, yet still few groups affiliate. At the same time, affiliation brings costs as it draws more attention to the groups who undergo such shift, which implies greater counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism measures from their government and the potential of internationalization of the conflict, in addition to costs with regards to the local group's relative autonomy, yet still groups decide to go through with it. This is the main puzzle driving this research.

2.3 Benefits of Affiliation

Analysts have often studied the spread of global jihadists and the expansion of their "franchises." In such studies, the explanations of expansion are derived from the perspective of transnational/global networks and groups, like Al-Qaeda and IS. These networks often perceive themselves as protectors of the Islamic *Umma* and the jihadist movement, especially since 2001, and are thus motivated to find new responses to status decline (Mendelsohn, 2016). Consequently, they might resort to the local groups to help them fight and operate within the locals' confinement, where the transnational groups would not be as effectively equipped (Byman, 2015)

Fewer studies have however focused on why locally oriented and nationalist Islamist militants become members of transnational networks. The conventional wisdom is that external support accrued from expanding network alliances and affiliations provides strength to militant organizations. In fact, the odds of survival significantly increase depending on the number of connections and allies an organization maintains with other militant organizations (Acosta, 2014; Phillips, 2014). This is rooted into the paradigm that violent non-state actors are like states, motivated in their interactions by the pursuit of security as a means to survival (Bond, 2010; see also Fearon, 1994, Walter, 1997)

One set of reasons driving affiliation and changing the scope of operations from national to transnational jihadism is failure, or setbacks. These setbacks are often the result of successful counterinsurgency measures carried out by opponent domestic governments. As a result, sharing best practices and know-how - through technology diffusion and propaganda and branding measures, in addition to training, which is important for gaining new skills and tactics, alongside with providing means of financing and sanctuaries – helps local militant groups increase the threat they pose to state governments, increase their recruits, and resist counter-terrorism

measures (Bacon, 2014; Byman, 2015; Cragin et al., 2007; Weeraratne, 2017).

In sum, it could be argued that larger networks enable smaller groups to attack frequently and effectively. This is strengthened with the literature that analyses the positive effect of the size of militant groups on their survival (Blomberg et al., 2011; Jones and Libicki, 2008). This also goes in line with the strand of literature that explores the effect of alliances and cooperation as well as competition between militants, and survival along with the different attributes associated with survival, including violence. Scholars have argued that cooperation between militant groups increase their lethality and longevity (Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008; Horowitz and Potter, 2014; Phillips, 2014). They have also argued that competition and outbidding are determinants of militants' strategic behaviour that affect the level of violence demonstrated by these groups (Conrad and Greene, 2015; Findley and Young, 2012; Nemeth, 2014; see also Farrell, 2020).

Interestingly though, in Asal and co-authors' (2016) model of terrorist organizations ties, the resource-gathering variable – as proxied by organization size, lacked statistical significance. The authors' explanation to this is that the resource sharing concerns come secondary to issues of trust in matters of terrorist alliances. This is an interesting finding as it sheds light onto the possibility of having other factors at play in making decisive alliance strategies than material resources and benefits.

The above-mentioned reasons for cooperation could generally be grouped under what is known as "process goals," which are the objectives that help sustain the militant organization and help the group "survive and thrive" (Moghadam, 2017). It could be said that they are inspired from their balancing needs in face of a common threat in a power deficit situation (Walt, 1987; as cited in Bacon, 2013), as capitalized in a local or transnational setback to the movement.

Regarding specific explanations advanced to the affiliation of Islamist militants with transnational networks of global jihad, rooted in intergroups dynamics, Day (2016) argues that groups endorse ISIS as "an act of imaginative social outbidding and legitimacy seeking." Considering that the jihadist movement is not a unified movement, it could be thought of as a fragmented competitive marketplace (Drevon, 2017; Hamming, 2017). This gives room to conceptualizing affiliation as a means by the religious factions to outbid the nationalists within a certain local context, and make their claims more visible by reframing the group's mission towards a more legitimate religious identity (Day, 2016). This is particularly true in cases where there is no monopoly over the resistance, in other words, when rival organizations can manoeu-

vre for dominance, which motivates competitors to seek acquiring their share of resources at the expense of others, and engage in selective cooperation (Bacon, 2013).

Lastly, when it comes to explanations that accounted for ideology, some perceived the affiliation with a transnational organization as a manifestation of further radicalization of the domestic group (Gray and Stockham, 2008; Sagramoso, 2012). These explanations usually capitalize on the repression and exclusion faced by most of these groups in their home countries (Warraich, 2018). Another way of approaching ideology-based explanations is proposing that a group will join a transnational network after its ideology has become in harmony with the latter, as it helps to substantiate an organization's identity and reinforce its legitimacy (e.g., Bacon, 2018). Generally, Asal et al. (2016) found that Islamic organizations/groups are more likely to make and seek connections with other Islamically inspired organizations than organizations with different ideologies, showing that Islamically inspired ideologies are powerful drivers of alliances. This finding is mainly corroborated by Blair et al. (2022) who maintain that organizations with shared religious ideology have the strongest effect in sustaining material cooperation in the face of governmental repression.

From this brief overview, one can deduce the following. Most of the survival arguments view transnational jihad as a means to an end. Within this view, actors maximize their expected political utility subject to a binding constraint (Van Um, 2011). This view assumes that the fundamental problem for collective action is the resources available for mobilization, sustainability, and ultimate success. From this view, the establishment of transnational organization capacity is the key solution for sustained contention where emerging movements are incentivized to appropriate existing organizations for collective action (Beck, 2008).

This research tries to find a middle ground between explanations rooted in material benefits and explanations rooted in ideology, departing from the notion that both contribute to survival, however differently. It represents a synergy point where alliances and affiliations are negotiated means to meanings that guarantee survival through various non-exclusionary channels. Affiliation could guarantee propaganda, training, funds, and all the necessary resources for survival; affiliation could increase capabilities and as a result violence; affiliation could also imply ideological harmony or radicalization. Most likely, affiliation is driven by a combination of these causes, and they project a link connecting ideas to resources.

2.4 Factoring Legitimacy In: A Local-Transnational Trade-Off

To reiterate, if actors and jihadists are mere utility-maximisers, that only seek to secure resources, they should engage in their course of actions when they are the most cost-effective alternative available to them. However, an examination of the conditions governing jihadist transnational networks indicate that this is not always the case (Maszka, 2018). An attack carried out by the Somali al-Shabaab group in Kenya or Uganda, might not be proportional in terms of costs to the benefits accrued from being a member of the larger al-Qaeda network, even though the latter could be providing the necessary financial and technical benefits. Other limitations of this view imply that it fails to acknowledge the myriad of emotions, values, traditions, and beliefs that influence human agency (*ibid.*). Hence, I argue that limiting the explanations to material benefits necessary for achieving the goals of the groups undermine the raison d'être of the groups in question and their mission statement. Similarly, limiting the explanations to merely ideational motivations masks important analytical angles.

Alliances between armed militants can confer legitimacy, prestige, and stature, along with many other material benefits. These non-material constructs can later translate into more tangible benefits such as recruits and funds (Bacon, 2014). Legitimacy is indeed important for militant groups, irrespective of their ideologies, as it affects the strategic calculation of the different groups and their self-conceptions (Podder, 2017). In November 1974, when Yasser Arafat addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations to convince them that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was not a terrorist organization but a revolutionary movement, he capitalized his rhetoric on the unique legitimacy attributes of the PLO, as the only organization that represents the Palestinian masses. It is an organization that both earned this legitimacy through its leadership and sacrifices, and "been granted it" by the different segments of the Palestinian society (Finlay, 2010). Representation projects legitimacy (see e.g., Cunningham et al., 2021), as do many other notions related to different pathways of armed groups' governance.

Following Suchman (1995), legitimacy could be defined as the "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions." In simpler and more general words, legitimacy can be seen as being "about making claims and the conditions under which such claims are accepted" (Schlichte and Schneckener, 2015). More specifically, rebel legitimacy is defined as "support and recognition that a rebel group is a viable political authority," which extends to include material and non-material aspects ensuring that the group's institutions are perceived

as the right institutions for their society (Jo, 2015). A legitimate armed group is not different than the political legitimate actors that are seen as the "rightful wielder of power, exerciser of authority, maker and interpreter of rulers or user of force and who thereby warrants support and compliance" (Rapkin and Braaten, 2009; see also Hurd, 1999)

Legitimacy is therefore necessary, albeit not sufficient, for groups to achieve status, sustainability and success; and the three attributes reinforce each other, even though the different groups' strategies and behaviours may not improve an organization's status, sustainability, or success equally (Suchman, 1995), as is the case with the use of violence which has competing effects. On one hand, violence draws attention to the conflict, which incentivize the armed groups involved to make direct use of it; however, it can also affect the legitimacy of the group which reduce their motives to use violence again or at least direct it towards their opponents only and not their constituencies (Schlichte and Schneckener, 2015). Meanwhile, violence can also bestow heroic and glorified attributes to the leaders, thus increasing notions of power and status that have returns on compliance (*ibid.*). The effectiveness of the use of terrorism by militant groups is not straightforward (see e.g., Polo and González, 2020) and it is even more contested with some scholars finding supporting evidence for their usefulness as strategies to enforce coercion, and extract favourable policies and concessions (Goodwin, 2006; Pape, 2003; Thomas, 2014) and others contending these premises (Fortna, 2015), or arguing that terrorism can increase the potential of violent riots among civilians (Brandsch and Python, 2021), thus reversing the compliance effect, or even showing that less civilian killings is a sign of legitimacy seeking directed towards the international community (Jo, 2015).

It might be argued that these problems are more related to insurgent and rebel groups in civil wars than terrorists for instance (Schlichte and Schneckener, 2015). In this research, however, terrorism is conceptualized as a tactic used by any armed group during conflict. This creates a potential overlap between rebel groups and terrorists (Jo, 2015).

In the civil war in Algeria in the late 1990s, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) greatly escalated its level of violence (Bacon, 2018). The GIA's brutal methods and nature resulted in its significant loss of popular support (Smith, 2009). Several GIA leaders started to realize the danger of these consequences. Two leaders, Hassan Hattab and Amari Saifi, issued a fatwa in 1997 calling for the GIA to stop targeting civilians and for the creation of a new Islamic organization that would carry the will of the people. A year later, they defected with others to form the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (*ibid.*), which later affiliated with al-Qaeda and formed al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The GIA indiscriminate violent actions could

be considered as the real reasons for the Islamist groups to lose legitimacy among the civilian population, which was magnified later in the popular support to the Concord Charter proposed by Bouteflika, the Algerian president, as an attempt to restore order by reaching an agreement between those in power and those in the armed opposition (Ottaway, 2021)

Legitimacy is therefore not static, but dynamic, and the politics associated with it change over time (Schlichte and Schneckener, 2015). In addition, it is relational (Podder, 2017). The claims evolve and legitimacy has therefore to reflect progressive acceptance and actions that are aligning with newly emerging social orders (Duyvesteyn, 2018).

I build my argument around notions of legitimacy seeking. The underlying assumption is that when their legitimacy is compromised, Islamist militant groups seek to affiliate with transnational networks of global jihad. My analysis is rooted in the relational approach to legitimacy of armed groups (Podder, 2017; Schlichte and Schneckener, 2015) and the notion of triangulation of armed groups' legitimacy-seeking strategic behaviours during wartime (McWeeney and Cunningham, 2019). The main idea behind this approach is that there are multiple audiences for armed groups' claims, that can be distinguished across three levels as follows: (1) the active supporters and followers among the population, (2) specific local communities or a wider national audience, and (3) the international arena which includes states, international organizations, and transnational NGOs. These audiences serve as targets along the pathways of legitimacy seeking, which can end up by either conferring or withholding legitimacy following distinct reciprocal dynamical relationships (Podder, 2017)

The first two sources are commonly attributed the highest level of importance, but the third level is just as critical for the success of armed groups (Schlichte and Schneckener, 2015)) and that is because the military contest is only one dimension of the conflict, which takes place in different domestic and international political contexts that affect the dynamics and outcomes of the conflict (Huang, 2016; see also Jo, 2015; Salehyan et al., 2011).

The relational approach extends to analyse how the legitimacy of armed groups is affected by the active contextual relationships that develop between them and the respective target audience. The main relationships advanced for considerations are (1) the relationship between the armed group and the civilian population it seeks to represent, determined by levels of violence along with modes of governance. This mainly is reflected in domestic legitimacy but also international legitimacy (e.g., Jo, 2015); (2) the relationship between the armed group and the government of the state where it operates, which affects local, national, and international legitimacy as well. In extended conflicts, distinct types of relationships between the two sides

emerge in which the level of accommodation varies, and they have different effects on the legitimacy of the armed groups; (3) the relationship between the armed group and the international community, extending to include regional states, humanitarian actors and NGOs among others (Podder, 2017)

In this research, I focus on the first and third relationships only and argue that if there is a deficit in the legitimacy within their respective local community, which is arguably the most important source of legitimacy among the three sources highlighted above, the Islamist militant group will seek to substitute this deficit from the external arena by affiliating with a transnational network of global jihad. This is displayed in Figure 2.1. The effect of dealing mostly with Islamist militants that are characterized as terrorist groups, limit the scope of international support they could gather. Therefore, the potential of being supported by the global jihadist movement is higher than being supported by international organizations, or even states. Subsequently, while most understanding of third/external actors is confined to states and international organizations and bodies, I make use of the diversity of the international system and extend it to include transnational non-state armed networks. From that point, the Salafist jihadist networks can be seen as source of legitimacy for Islamist militants, especially if they are seen as the legitimate representatives and members of the jihadist movement. And while AQ and IS compete over the hegemonic leadership of the movement (Drevon, 2017), the acceptance of the allegiance of a group into their networks confers recognition into the movement and projects legitimacy to different audiences.

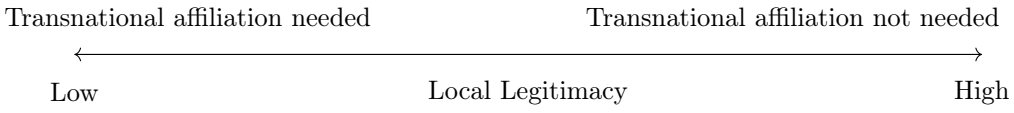

Figure 2.1: Internal-External Legitimacy Trade-Off.

Regarding their relationship with the state, I argue it is usually of "conflictual nature", since most local Islamist militants seek to substitute the current state with an Islamic state. The effect of this relationship on legitimacy is determined by various other factors, including state repression, increasing support for the armed groups, targeted attacks, levels of fragmentation/cohesion between local groups which affect the external support (negatively/positively) the group receives from the international community (Podder, 2017)

Sources of Domestic Legitimacy Legitimacy is a main source of support for the armed groups at the domestic level and it is manifested through civilian compliance, which can vary from voluntary to coercive compliance (Podder, 2017). The literature on rebel governance has depicted various strategies through which cooperation and compliance can be secured, beyond violence, that projects legitimacy. This includes provision of public goods and social services (McWeeney and Cunningham, 2019; Podder, 2017)

The various services and goods can include justice in the form of rule of law strategies, which could vary between the adoption of trials, the implementation of truth commissions, offers of amnesty or reparations payments (Loyle, 2021). In addition, they can provide local security and order in different situations (McWeeney and Cunningham, 2019). This stems from the notion that rule-making and rule-enforcing are essential components to governing because compliance may be broken if transgressions are not properly addressed (Loyle et al., 2019). It follows that involvement in crime is associated with low legitimacy. It is often the case that insurgent groups that are involved in crime would have a predatory behavior towards the general citizens to fund their insurgency, thus jeopardizing their local legitimacy (Asal et al., 2022).

However, it is worthy to note that one aspect of legitimacy does not preclude the other. Social services provision differs from one context to the other, ranging from health care and education provision to more coercive aspects such as taxation and law enforcement and Sharia courts, with the probability of overlap between both aspects. While it is true that what groups may refer to as taxation might be perceived as extortion by some of the population, the legitimization feature of this form of governance relies on the reciprocal level of service provision and how the population perceives these services provided in return. Extortion generally would imply less or no service provision in return, while taxation, would imply more service provision in return. Similar rationale could be extended to Sharia courts, as while they could be seen as repressive modes of governance, to some, their deterrence effects could outweigh their repressive attributes.[3]

If rebel groups controlled a territory and provided security to the local population, civilians would more likely prefer their rule to anarchy or state rule and the rebels would be able to obtain political legitimacy. Rebel groups, which are comparable to the stationary bandits, are then motivated to maintain their rule and order, and provide public goods, as doing so,

[3]In her article, Revkin (2021) argues that within a context of competitive governance between a rebel group and a state, the decisions of displacement are based on perceived effectiveness and fairness of governing institutions, the rebel groups only need to be "less bad" than the state for civilians to decide not to leave. In the survey she conducted in Mosul, 35% reported a decrease in crime under IS rule. This could imply that courts and law enforcement, even the strict Sharia rules, can be preferred by individuals over others, and in these cases, the militant group would be perceived as more legitimate than the state.

would increase their taxable income (Olson, 1993, as cited in McWeeney and Cunningham, 2019). On a related note, institutionalized taxation to a legitimate armed group, would benefit the local community by increasing household welfare through providing insurance and protection (Sabates-Wheeler and Verwimp, 2014). While this lays down the rationalist foundation for domestic legitimacy, as it shows it is rooted in self-interest dynamics between the armed groups and the civilian population, recent literature extends the understanding of legitimacy to constructivist approaches as well showing how it is influenced by interests, but also norms and socialization processes (Jo, 2015; McWeeney and Cunningham, 2019). This leads to a more multifaceted and multidimensional understanding of social services provision and legitimacy altogether where the latter is also rooted in the local perceptions of different attributes (see e.g., Revkin, 2021).

Despite these inherent contradictions stemming from the different perceptions attributed to different overlapping behavior, to date, governance in the form of service provision remains one of the most acknowledged modes of governance that bestows legitimacy and support (see e.g., Cunningham et al., 2021; Loyle et al., 2019; McWeeney and Cunningham, 2019; Podder, 2017). Inclusive provision of goods and services, such as those provided to even non-supporters, by groups like Hezbollah, secures the legitimate group' claims of sovereignty to the different local and international audiences (Stewart, 2018). In addition, services provision has also been shown to positively affect peace talks and negotiations (Heger and Jung, 2017)

Examples of militant groups that provided social services to their population include Hamas, Islamic Army in Iraq, Jemaah Islamiyaa (JI), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood among others as shown in the collected data. These groups distinct themselves from other groups that are solely interested in gaining power and keeping it for themselves and their leaders. They are instead interested in helping their populations after achieving power status (Magouirk, 2008). By examining article 21 of Hamas' Charter, one can find an emphasis on the importance of social solidarity and helping those in need. Hamas has between 70-100 services organizations operating in the Palestinian territories. By doing so, Hamas intends to substitute the social contract between the Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority (PA), rooted in the capacity of the state to deliver the services and incur legitimacy, with a new contract centered around Islamic notions of charity, which increases their popular support (Grynkewich, 2008). Charity activities are important to most Islamist jihadist groups, including Jemaah Islamiyaa (JI) in Indonesia, where sustaining charity activities was one of the main activities pertaining to its resilience (Satria, 2023)

Sources of International Legitimacy Two interrelated notions are linked to the rationale behind armed groups' incentives in gathering international support: armed groups' diplomacy and politics of recognition (see e.g., Huang, 2016; Jo, 2015; Malejacq, 2017). While armed groups' diplomacy was more specifically developed for rebel groups and defined as their "conduct of foreign affairs during civil war for the purpose of advancing its military and political objectives" (Huang, 2016), there are no apparent concerns to extend and generalize this definition to include other militant groups. Armed groups often seek the power and status of states, and throughout their military conflicts, they engage in parallel political contests "over allies, endorsement and legitimacy both at home and abroad" (*ibid.*). Diplomacy confers various strategic benefits in both the short and long terms. In the short term, external ties could provide the armed group with the necessary material support needed during the conflict. For the long term, diplomacy can secure bilateral agreements with states that entail trade agreements or other forms of alliances or political favors (Coggins, 2015b).

Arguably, recognition is the most important benefit associated with external international/transnational support gathering and diplomacy efforts on the micro- and meso-level, of both individuals and groups. Afghan warlord Ahmad Shah Massoud exerted different complex legitimisation strategies that extended to include relationships with foreign actors throughout his journey from a rebel leader to a quasi-state leader. He interacted with foreign journalists to spread the news about the insurgents' resistance to the Soviets, hence increasing his personal legitimacy (Malejacq, 2017). He also established relations with foreign NGOs workers who played an important role with Massoud's autonomous structure, Shurah e-Nazar, in non-military matters. Massoud was able to translate the personal legitimacy gained from international support into material benefits to his organization and followers. Massoud resisted the Taliban in 1996 by employing "fully fledged" diplomatic strategies including forging ties and arrangements with Saudi Arabia and the United States among others (*ibid.*).

Similarly, when an armed group is granted recognition by great powers, great benefits can incur, including being granted legal status to participate in international politics, but also membership in international bodies follow which reflect being accepted as a legitimate representative, as was the case with the Moro National Liberation Front of the Philippines, which was granted membership in The Organization of the Islamic Conference and recognized as the only representative of the Bangsamoro people in the late 1970s (Huang, 2016).

Affiliation could be thought of as an act of diplomacy for the purpose of legitimacy seeking. This point becomes clearer when one considers the functions of armed groups' diplo-

macy, which can include convincing the foreign sponsors that they share their goals and that their interests align through tailored messages to shape their images (Huang, 2016). Islamist militants can, as shown in the previous section, capitalize on ideological harmony, to affiliate with parent organizations. In addition, diplomacy helps armed groups to boost their images domestically by showing that the group is politically active not only at home but internationally (*ibid.*). Along the same lines, through affiliation, Islamist militants can signal outreach, which projects legitimacy.

Similarly, as armed groups are using norms and standards to gain status and recognition and the perception of "rightness" among great powers (McWeeney and Cunningham, 2019), affiliation with the global jihadist movement can be thought of as an attempt to signal "rightness" to be one of the representatives and leaders of the Islamic *Umma*.

From the above discussion pertaining to sources of domestic and international legitimacy of armed groups, I devise the following hypothesis:

H: Islamist groups with a high level of local legitimacy have a lower probability of affiliation with a transnational network of jihad and vice versa.

2.5 Data and Research Design

The analysis relies primarily on an originally coded dependent variable of transnational affiliation combined with the Extended Data on Terrorist Groups dataset (EDTG) (Hou et al., 2020) and other data sources described below. The EDTG includes 760 groups that engaged in terrorist attacks during the period 1970-2016. It is linked to the groups in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD).

The EDTG includes variable for groups' ideology. This variable was mainly examined to reduce the sample to groups that are Islamist, whether they operate at a national or transnational level. I focus on these groups since they are the universe of groups that might join global jihadist networks. Models include 122 Islamist groups over the years 1998 to 2016. The sample starts in 1998 since that is the year that al Qaeda began to be active transnationally, with the attacks on the U.S. embassies in East Africa.

Main Dependent Variable The main dependent variable is onset of affiliation seeking, a binary variable. This variable is coded using a conservative approach, taking the value of 1 only if there is evidence that the group has sought affiliation and if such information is not available, it is referred to the date when the group pledges formal allegiance to either al-Qaeda

or IS at and it becomes widely referred to as an affiliate[4]. This is mainly a measure of sworn affiliation (Igualada and Yagüe, 2021) and not simply cooperative behaviour (e.g., Bacon, 2018; Moghadam, 2017). I relied primarily on online news articles and academic articles along with online resources such as Mapping Militants project and others (e.g., Elbagir et al., 2015; The CNN Wire Staff, 2012). Once a group seeks affiliation or affiliates, it is dropped from the sample. This serves best to model the change of status and because I am interested in the question of why groups affiliate as opposed to why groups stay affiliated. A few groups are coded 1 at the year of their inception, when there is enough evidence that they were formed in a bottom-up approach and not top-down, meaning that the affiliation was initiated by at least individual combatants and not the central hub of the jihadist network[5]. However, most groups existed for years or decades before affiliating. In the final sample, there are 29 groups where seeking affiliation or affiliation onset occurs and are coded as 1, accounting 23.7% for of the total groups examined in the sample and 2.8% of the group-year observations.

Key Explanatory Variables To measure local legitimacy, I choose three main explanatory variables: social services to indicate high legitimacy, as the relationship was highlighted previously (e.g., McWeeney and Cunningham, 2019; Loyle et al., 2019; Loyle, 2021; Podder, 2017), in addition to young age and kidnapping to indicate low legitimacy.

Group age, in particular *young age*, is an indication of low legitimacy. The rationale behind such choice is that the more the group endures the conflict and sustains itself, the more it projects images of success and sacrifices, and this helps with the "group's charisma" (Schlichte and Schneckener, 2015). This charisma reinforces legitimacy in different ways by reinforcing images of credibility. In addition, at later stages, personal loyalty networks develop within group members and between group members and the community which reinforces the legitimacy perceptions of the militant group as in the case of local support to group objectives therefore increasing group longevity (Cronin, 2006; Schlichte and Schneckener, 2015). Furthermore, the youngest groups have not yet had a chance to establish their reputation (Jo, 2015), and possibly gain legitimacy.

As for *kidnapping*, it is a proxy for criminal behavior and it goes against law-making, and law-enforcement as mentioned above. It might be argued that kidnapping might confer coercive legitimacy as it is can be a source of enforcing taxation or securing funds. However, the

[4]Models where the variable affiliate is coded as 1 only at the time of actual sworn allegiance are presented in the robustness checks in Appendix A.

[5]Results are robust when groups that are "born affiliates" are excluded; see Appendix A.

incurred long-term costs of kidnapping make it a double-edge sword, as errors in targeting can increase, and predatory aspects could lead to loss of support among local populations (Gilbert, 2022; Williams and Felbab-Brown, 2012). In addition, it is often the case that kidnapping could be seen as an indicator of involvement in other criminal activities that could further reduce legitimacy. For example, Boko Haram is known for major kidnapping acts, yet the group also engaged in other criminal activities including raids and cattle rustling (Okoli and Nwangwu, 2023). It is true that some forms of social service provision, including taxation and the provision of justice systems includes coercive elements as mentioned in the previous section, and indeed kidnapping and these forms of services share these coercive elements. However, it still depends on how the act is perceived within the local context and that is based on the action/actor intent. In more cases than others, kidnapping is perceived as self-serving, while taxation and law enforcement can be seen as part of stability and deterrence mechanisms.

Social services is coded from two sources, Terrorist and Insurgent Organization Social Services (TIOS) (Heger and Jung, 2017) and Big, Allied and Dangerous (BAAD 2.0)[6]. Whenever the group existed in TIOS, I relied on it, and when a group was not available in TIOS, I relied on BAAD 2.0. In the case of TIOS, the data ended in 2012 or 2013, so inferences were made for the missing data based on secondary research. Also, it is worthy to note that in the TIOS code book, courts are included as service provision while taxation is not. It might be argued that since courts might be perceived as coercive elements of governance, they should be associated with low and not high legitimacy attribute. However, as argued above, strict courts could be perceived differently depending on the context. The decision of whether the group would be considered to still be providing social services was based on two criteria: 1, if it had territorial control, 2, if there was any change in the status quo, including any incurred losses. The final dataset includes group-years observations from TIOS, BAAD 2.0 and my personal coding using secondary resources. In the final dataset, there are 58 groups engaging in social service provision, comprising 47.5% of the groups and 58.8% of group-years observations

Young age is a binary variable, takes a value of 1 if the group age is less than 5 years old. I use this cut-off in line with the finding maintaining that most militant groups do not live so long (Phillips, 2019a)[7]. To code it, I rely on the variable duration from EDTG, which represents the years of the group existence since its formation. In the sample, there are 88 groups that were coded as young at some point in time, comprising approximately 72% of the total groups, and almost 25% of group-years observations that are coded as young,

[6]I thank Victor Asal for graciously sharing the variables of BAAD 2.0, as they have been of great help.
[7]See also Rapoport (1992) and Cronin (2006)

Kidnapping comes from the EDTG. It is a binary variable taking the value of 1 if a group engaged in kidnappings each year, according to the GTD dataset. The final sample has 40 groups engaging in kidnapping, i.e., 33.7% of the groups and almost 10% of group-years observations.

Control Variables *Number of Groups (log)*: I control for group-level data, including number of competitors at country levels per year which I obtain by summing number of militant groups from EDTG. I expect a positive effect of the number of competitors on affiliation based on existing literature that examined terrorist group alliances generally (e.g., Phillips, 2019b), and Day (2016) in the context of Islamist groups affiliation with IS specifically.

Number of Attacks (log): I also control for the number of attacks, obtained from EDTG as well, while expecting a positive relationship on affiliation because more lethal groups can become more alienated from their communities which might reduce their chance in survival.

Peak Size: also obtained from EDTG. I expect a negative relationship between size and affiliation because the larger the size, the more ingrained into the society the group is, the less support and recruits it requires, hence, the less motivated it is to seek affiliation. This is the other side of the coin saying that the larger the group size, the higher are its chances to survive (e.g., Blomberg et al., 2011).

Share of Transnational Attacks: obtained from EDTG. I expect a negative relationship between this variable and affiliation as I side with the notion that groups that engage in transnational terrorism undergo significant increase in risks facing local and international counter-terrorism governments and communities (e.g., Blomberg et al., 2011).

I also control for country level attributes, including: *Liberal Democracy*, which I obtain from the Vdem (Varieties of Democracy) dataset. I theorize a negative relationship between democracy and affiliation. Democracy presents an opportunity for the local groups to exist and continue within the boundaries of the state, due to the complications of the institutional constraints and the incentivising mechanisms induced by civil liberties (see e.g., Li, 2005). Acting together, these would reduce the likelihood of affiliation. *Political Exclusion*: which is a scale interval reflecting when individuals are denied access to services or participation in public spaces based on their identity or belonging to a particular group. It varies by country and year. I expect a negative relationship between political exclusion proxy and affiliation, building on the dominant convention that exclusion would increase local terrorism (Choi and Piazza, 2016; Hansen et al., 2020), thus reducing the motivation and likelihood for engaging in transnational

terrorism.

In addition, I use the Quality of Government (QoG) dataset to control for the *Ethnic Fractionalization*. According to the QoG codebook, ethnicity is defined involving a combination of racial and linguistic characteristic. The result of this index is higher in certain instances than the commonly used ELF index (Alesina et al., 2003). Unfortunately, data is available for only the year 2000 with no variation. I expect ethnic fractionalization to be negatively associated with affiliation, based on the same previous logic rooted in notions linking different aspects of marginalisation and polarisation to local manifestation of terrorism.

I also account for *Population(log)*, obtained from QoG and *GDP per capita (log)*. These variables could have either a positive or a negative relationship with the outcome of interest. Conventionally, they represent state capacity, which would motivate and/or force militants to seek the support of transnational networks after setbacks. Alternatively, they can represent resources, if present to militants, in terms of recruits and state funds, would reduce the likelihood of affiliation. Table 2.1 represents a summary of the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the models.

Since the dependent variable is a binary variable, I employ a logistic regression model, with standard errors clustered at the group level and year fixed effects. This is the primary model since there is variation over time on most variables. I also investigate a cross-sectional analysis because some variables do not have a great deal of variation over time.

Table 2.1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Affiliate	0.03	0.16	0	1
Social Services	0.59	0.49	0	1
Kidnapping	0.10	0.29	0	1
Young Age	0.25	0.43	0	1
Attacks (log)	-2.36	3.05	-4.61	7.00
Peak Size	2.07	0.94	1.00	4.00
Number of Groups (log)	2.45	1.09	0.00	4.09
Share of Transnational Attacks	0.05	0.18	0.00	1.00
Exclusion Proxy	0.44	0.22	0.13	0.91
Ethnic Fractionalization (2000)	0.50	0.23	0.04	0.93
Liberal Democracy	0.29	0.17	0.02	0.69
Population (log)	18.37	1.49	15.25	21.05
GDP (log)	7.69	0.99	5.59	10.52

2.6 Results

Table 2.2 shows the results of the models that explain affiliation of local Islamist groups with transnational networks of global jihad. The first model includes only the controls. The main models, Model 2, Model 3, and Model 4, include the three measures of legitimacy, social services, kidnapping and young age, respectively. Social services, in Model 2, is statistically significant and negatively associated with affiliation, showing support for the part of the hypothesis where high legitimacy is associated with lower likelihood of affiliation with transnational network of jihad. Kidnapping, in Model 3, is also statistically significant and positively associated with affiliation, reflecting that low levels of legitimacy are associated with higher likelihood of joining global jihadist networks. The same could be said with regards to Model 4 and the young age proxy.

Among controls, the number of groups is statistically significant throughout most models but showing an opposite direction from the one hypothesized by Day (2016). This reflects that this variable might be playing into the opportunity paradigm assumed for democracy, exclusion, and fractionalisation. It is interesting that outbidding does not seem to lead to affiliation, despite its importance in the literature regarding other outcomes (e.g., Bloom, 2006). The number of attacks is significant in only Models 2 and 3, showing a positive relationship with affiliation. This could be seen as providing partial evidence that more violent groups have a reduced chance at survival which motivate their affiliation with global networks of jihad.

These main findings are robust to multiple specifications shown in Appendix A, including the models using only the main independent variables (no controls) as well as the full models incorporating the three proxies simultaneously, a sample excluding the "born-affiliates," which are groups that exist in the sample as affiliates from the first year they appear, and a more conservative coding for social services obtained from only the BAAD 2.0 dataset. There are also model specifications with time trend and decade dummies instead of year fixed effects, as well as using casualties instead of attacks. In another robustness check, Table 2.3 shows the results of the cross-sectional analysis. Models 6, 7 and 8 show consistent results with those of Table 2.2, with social services being negatively associated with affiliation while kidnapping and young age showing a positive association with the main outcome of interest.

In sum, from the two tables, I find support that the probability of affiliation with groups that provide social services is lower, as they enjoy higher domestic and local legitimacy. In addition, I find support that young age and kidnapping are associated with higher probability

of affiliation, as these attributes correspond to lower domestic legitimacy.

Table 2.2: TSCS Logistic Regression Results of Affiliation with a Global Network

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Social Services		-1.894^{***}		
		(0.667)		
Kidnapping			1.300^{**}	
			(0.659)	
Young Age				2.845^{***}
				(0.667)
Group Peak Size	0.220	−0.372	−0.046	−0.453
	(0.341)	(0.343)	(0.298)	(0.352)
Attacks (log)	0.114	0.152^{**}	0.174^{**}	0.077
	(0.098)	(0.069)	(0.083)	(0.080)
Number of Groups (log)	−0.429	-0.519^{*}	-0.667^{**}	-0.504^{*}
	(0.301)	(0.304)	(0.305)	(0.306)
%Transn. Attacks	0.134	0.240	−0.049	−0.082
	(1.272)	(0.979)	(1.045)	(0.932)
Exclusion Proxy	-3.432^{**}	-2.581^{*}	−2.276	−2.479
	(1.715)	(1.560)	(1.473)	(1.554)
Ethnic Fractionalization (2000)	−2.091	−1.010	−0.673	−1.572
	(1.294)	(1.294)	(1.181)	(1.298)
Liberal Democracy	0.609	−0.074	0.891	0.014
	(1.687)	(1.923)	(1.869)	(1.952)
Population (log)	−0.083	−0.210	−0.165	−0.195
	(0.218)	(0.225)	(0.236)	(0.227)
GDP (log)	−0.103	−0.048	0.000	−0.044
	(0.322)	(0.334)	(0.331)	(0.343)
Intercept	-17.698^{**}	-13.768^{*}	-14.416^{**}	-14.122^{*}
	(7.131)	(7.079)	(6.594)	(7.260)
Year Fixed Effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	190.482	216.432	206.380	214.331
BIC	334.222	355.215	350.119	358.071
Log Likelihood	−66.241	−80.216	−74.190	−78.166
Deviance	132.482	160.432	148.380	156.331
Observations	1050	1050	1050	1050

$^{***}p < 0.01$;** $p < 0.05$;* $p < 0.1$

Table 2.3: Cross-Sectional Logistic Regression Results of Affiliation with a Global Network

	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Social Services		−2.715**		
		(1.129)		
Kidnapping			2.252**	
			(1.106)	
Young Age				18.792***
				(1.088)
Attacks (log)	0.191*	0.234*	0.099	0.200
	(0.114)	(0.133)	(0.123)	(0.138)
NGroups (log)	0.629	0.541	0.504	0.548
	(0.514)	(0.522)	(0.472)	(0.498)
Peak_Size	−0.853*	−0.384	−1.030**	−0.368
	(0.457)	(0.379)	(0.427)	(0.408)
%Transn. Attacks	−0.166	0.295	−1.426	−0.308
	(1.015)	(1.098)	(1.238)	(1.040)
Exclusion proxies	−2.491	−2.467	−1.956	−2.532
	(2.049)	(2.139)	(1.909)	(2.257)
Ethnic Frac. (2000)	−2.001	−2.448	−1.938	−2.320
	(2.074)	(2.160)	(1.922)	(2.044)
Liberal Democracy	−0.725	0.495	−0.397	0.991
	(2.017)	(2.196)	(1.907)	(2.189)
Population (log)	−0.413	−0.443	−0.265	−0.507
	(0.430)	(0.402)	(0.419)	(0.423)
GDPPC (log)	0.115	−0.058	0.371	0.116
	(0.470)	(0.454)	(0.540)	(0.494)
Intercept	7.541	9.336	2.649	−10.015
	(11.857)	(10.978)	(12.290)	(11.523)
AIC	95.830	89.201	92.694	87.977
BIC	121.577	117.523	121.016	116.299
Log Likelihood	−37.915	−33.601	−35.347	−32.989
Deviance	75.830	67.201	70.694	65.977
Observations	97	97	97	97

$^{***}p < 0.01;^{**}p < 0.05;^{*}p < 0.1$

2.7 Concluding Remarks

In this research, I investigate why some Islamist militants affiliate with transnational networks of global jihad and others do not. The argument I propose is rooted in legitimacy-seeking rationale. I propose that local Islamist militants that have local support and are perceived as relatively legitimate would not seek affiliation as opposed to those who lack legitimacy at the local level. I measure legitimacy using three proxies: social service provision (high legitimacy), young age (low legitimacy) and kidnapping (low legitimacy).

I find support for my hypothesis regarding drivers of affiliation, i.e., groups that provide social services have lower chances of affiliating with transnational networks of global jihad, as they are perceived as legitimate in the eyes of the local civilians and could easily gain support at the domestic level and thus lack the incentives to join global jihad. They do not suffer from a legitimacy deficit and seek no substitution at the transnational level by affiliating with AQ or IS. I also find support for the notion that kidnapping and young age should be associated with a higher likelihood of affiliation.

It should be acknowledged that the proxies for legitimacy are only proxies, and they could indicate other attributes or causal mechanisms. Future research could explore additional proxies of legitimacy, capitalizing on a nuanced view of legitimacy. In other words, legitimacy should be understood on a continuous spectrum rather than categorical or binary conceptualization. Groups will always engage in coercive aspects along with social provision, and it will always depend on their balance together. In other words, legitimacy cannot be fully captured by social service provision, kidnapping or age. Different communities in different contexts may weigh things differently based on different perceptions which result in different balance between the factors. For instance, for some, a certain level of coercion might be necessary while for others it could simply imply repression. It is therefore a dynamic concept where strategies can shift from one end of the spectrum to the other or where different aspects overlap.

Most of the literature addressing the question of terrorist affiliation provides answers rooted in material benefits. Other work offers explanations involving ideology. While my analysis does not contradict the rationale of survival analysis dominating the literature on affiliation (Bacon, 2018; Byman, 2015; Cragin et al., 2007; Weeraratne, 2017), it provides a new lens, rooted in the interaction between the local militants and their surrounding audiences and contexts. It thus sheds lights on the importance of factoring the local and group-specific attributes of Islamist militancy to understand the dynamics giving rise to global jihad, highlighting that the

expanse of global jihad depends on local channels. This research aims to help devising better policy recommendations for the international community as well as for the domestic governments where affiliates are localized.

There are multiple avenues for future research. The process of affiliation can be studied with comparative cases to have a deeper understanding of the local context and the interplay between the micro-level and structural factors that trigger affiliation. Furthermore, the rhetorical aspect of the affiliation can be studied qualitatively and quantitatively to determine the major narrative frames that dominate the process of affiliation. In addition, the post-affiliation dynamics can be analysed, in terms of attacks diversity and geographical dispersion, and compare them with the pre-affiliation attacks and geographical presence. This should give us an insight on whether affiliation is merely a verbal and symbolic act, or if it entails actual commitment. The later distinction could serve to give insights on the level of actual threat posed by affiliation. Overall, this research sheds light on an important connection between local audiences and global networks, and the literature will benefit from continued attention to this valuable topic.

Chapter 3

Rhetoric in Flux: Boko Haram's Religious Turn after Affiliating with the Islamic State

3.1 Introduction

After being implicated in the assassination of the Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat, Ayman al-Zawahiri stood in his court cell chanting, "We want to speak to the world... Who are we? We are Muslims. We are Muslims" (Temple-Raston, 2011). This is how the later to be mastermind of al-Qaeda spoke and identified himself: as a Muslim, not as an Egyptian. This identity shift is important to point out when examining the development path of global terrorism. The analysis of global jihadist goals should not be limited to expansion in territories or attacks' reach. Discursive processes that construct identity and meanings in violent settings are also important to analyze (see e.g., Kavrakis, 2023), as they help understanding the motivations and ideologies of the different groups along with their behavioral strategies.

The rhetoric of a local militant group that recently affiliated with a transnational network of global jihad thus sheds light on important developments that occur at the organizational level. It helps to understand the causes of conflict from the perception of the militant group, and what drives the different modes of interactions with the surroundings. In other words, rhetoric drives its relevance from the notion that it represents the communicated ideational constructs with the aim of persuading the target audience (e.g., Charteris-Black, 2011; Finlayson, 2013; Payne, 2001). In general, the different argumentation and debating processes have been analyzed in various field of politics, in particular democratic practices, and institutions, including parliaments and elections among others (e.g., Finlayson and Martin, 2008; Ilie, 2013; Rojo and Van Dijk, 1997). There should be no reason however not to extend such analysis to militant groups in conflict settings.

While Walter (2017a) stresses that more extreme ideologies may not be rooted in grievances or beliefs but could simply reflect a form of "cheap talk", I maintain that rhetoric signals positionality and determination and it is consequential and effective, hence costly, and worthy of careful consideration. Rhetoric can be empty and misleading, but it needs not to be (Finlayson, 2013). Rhetoric generally, and the arguments it presents itself with specifically, constitute an intrinsic part of ideologies and locating these arguments in wider context is crucial

for understanding the development and change of ideologies, institutions, and strategies over time, especially in response to major external factors *(ibid.)*. Such analysis help understanding how the different arrangements of arguments shape the expression of preferences and interests (Finlayson, 2013) and the different levels of persuasion (Blumenau and Lauderdale, 2024). In addition, rhetoric is an adequate space for moral competition which is an effective communicative strategy to mobilize supporters (Kraft and Klemmensen, 2024; Voelkel and Feinberg, 2018). Rhetoric thus serves to differentiate political actors and groups and affects the level of support accrued by these different actors.

In this chapter, I particularly ask how does pledging allegiance to transnational networks of jihad affect local militants' rhetoric? Recent studies have engaged with jihadist rhetoric to analyze the different strategies and priorities of the different groups, such as al-Qaeda (e.g., Hobbs, 2005; Rogan, 2010; Soriano, 2009) and the Islamic State (e.g., Berger, 2015; Termeer and Duyvesteyn, 2022; Williams, 2016; Zelin, 2015). Fewer studies have engaged with affiliates' rhetoric (Berlin et al., 2022; Loidolt, 2011; Page et al., 2011) showing how these groups focus on the near and far elements of jihad. However, an adequate and specific answer to the question above remains under-explored

I present an argument centered around rhetorical shifts upon affiliating with global jihad. I argue that prior to affiliation, local militant groups tend to focus their rhetoric on political matters, while post-affiliation, they will shift to religiously focused rhetoric. I maintain that this is because emphasis on religious rhetoric presents benefits to the recently affiliated group. On the one hand, it signals alignment and commitment to the parent organization, which helps with securing support. On the other hand, it signals religiosity, accommodation, and altruism to the local population. Therefore, it helps with mobilization and recruitment under the new conditions imposed by the affiliation.

A religious identity has numerous benefits and potentially, the most important benefit is providing legitimation to the affiliation and the shifting terms of conflict as it becomes an act sanctioned by God to establish His rules. In addition, religion is different from other identity markers and local groups that join transnational networks of global jihad can take advantage of this. Compared to ethnicity, it is more pervasive, formal, and visible (Stewart, 2009). Newly affiliated groups can thus capitalize on these notions by creating more encompassing narratives that help with increasing the recruitment pools and overcoming barriers to collective action

For instance, when a member of a Pakistani militant group was asked "Aren't you afraid of fighting?" he replied "What is there to be afraid of? I pray for death every day. During my

studies, reading the Koran, I decided to sacrifice my life for jihad. If I die in the jihad, I go to paradise. Allah will reward me' (quoted in Stern, 2003, p.123). Fighting for God thus often relies on "cosmic" features that relate to a metaphysical battle between good and evil (Juergensmeyer, 2017a) and it is particularly true if political claims would not lead to the desired goals. In that sense, the focus on religiosity serves as an opportunity for this understanding to permeate, making emphasis of the ultimate battle of good Muslims and *mujahideen* against the evils of the West and the local apostate regimes as more important for a group's success.

To test my argument, I analyze and scale 129 texts of speeches, messages, sermons, and other communication of the group Boko Haram, operating in Nigeria and Lake Chad region. In 2015, the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, to become the Islamic State West Africa Province. I analyze texts over the period 2006 to 2023 to capture potential shifts in rhetoric. The analysis demonstrates a clear and observable shift from politically to religiously salient rhetoric.

The chapter proceeds as follows: in the second section, I briefly examine the relevance of rhetoric examination in conflict and terrorism studies as I engage with some of the jihadist rhetoric in the literature. In the third section I present my argument and hypothesis, where I maintain that a shift in rhetoric will occur after affiliation, and the groups' rhetoric will be more religiously focused as opposed to being more politically focused before the affiliation. In the fourth section, I develop the methodology I use, a combination of case study, qualitative text analysis and quantitative text scaling. I then discuss the analysis and results and conclude with a brief discussion of the contributions and limitations to this study along with possible venues of future related research.

3.2 Jihadist Rhetoric in the Literature

Rhetoric is important to the different contending actors in any political arena, whether states or non-state actors. The different types of actors engage in various discursive strategies to achieve their goals while targeting different audiences. For instance, rhetoric convenes legitimation which is essential in shaping states' foreign policies and grand strategies, through defining the national interest, identifying, and prioritizing the threats, developing policy options, and mobilizing audiences (Goddard and Krebs, 2015). Legitimation rhetorical practices are of particular importance to autocracies and an important pillar to their stability as well (Dukalskis and Patane, 2019). Autocracies can also employ effective and far-reaching discursive propaganda tactics to ensure their survival (e.g., Carter and Carter, 2021).

Rhetoric is especially important to non-state actors, in particular terrorists. Operating from a weakness position with respect to the opponent government (Kydd and Walter, 2006), and lacking media institutionalization and access to resources, terrorist groups need to invest more heavily into discursive strategies than governments which possess at their reach coercive security apparatuses and media apparatuses to influence and mobilize the public.

Terrorist communication could be considered as ineffective "cheap talk" since it is "insufficient to change minds or influence behavior" (Kydd and Walter, 2006, p.50) as opposed to signaling violent acts that could be directed at both governments and populations (Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson, 2007). Yet, like states, militant groups, including terrorist groups, employ various discursive strategies to confer legitimacy over their strategies and behaviors (Schlichte and Schneckener, 2015). In addition, terrorist acts can follow both strategic (e.g., Crenshaw, 1981; Pape, 2003; Polo, 2020) and symbolic logics with "theatrical forms of violence" (Juergensmeyer, 2017b, p.72)

It thus follows that rhetoric and narratives are constitutive parts of the militants' strategic and symbolic means and ends. Terrorism, with both acts and words, is communicative. In fact, more recently, terrorism is being understood not only in terms of its violent acts which aim at altering behavior by coercion, but also in terms of communication, which uses persuasion instead (Schmid, 2014). Therefore, one can state that discursive processes in violent settings are crucial in conflict development and rhetorical relationships are as important for a better understanding of conflict dynamics.

The different discursive processes contribute to constructing identities and social categories (see e.g., Benford and Snow, 2000; Fearon and Laitin, 2000; Rothenberger et al., 2018), which could help in facilitating the legitimation processes, mentioned above, and the inspiration of the different actions. Over the years, there have been great advances in the analysis of the framing strategies of militant groups and how they attribute meanings to objects and processes, through narratives – as narratives are the medium through which the different ideological concepts are "contested, negotiated, and constituted by the groups as they go along" (Cold-Ravnkilde and Ba, 2022) – and especially with the increased integration of Social Movement Theory into the study of militancy and terrorism (see e.g., Beck, 2008; Snow and Byrd, 2007).

For instance, the analysis of al-Qaeda rhetoric helped understanding various aspects of the organization ideology and priorities (e.g., Hobbs, 2005; Rogan, 2010; Soriano, 2009; Stout, 2009). In recent years, major developments contributed to a surge in the study of militant

groups' rhetoric and in particular Islamist militants. The first is the widespread use of the cyberspace in general and social media in particular by the militant groups, and the second is the declaration of the Islamic Caliphate in June 2014. As a result, Islamist militant content is now made more available to examine with respect to its frames, themes, and linguistic styles as well.

By examining AQAP's magazine Sada al-Malahim, and the different frames employed, Page et al. (2011) and Loidolt (2011) explore the dual agenda of the group, navigating between local and global themes and different Yemeni and non-Yemeni audiences. Such studies contribute to understanding how the group perceives itself and its identity and whether the latter can be constructed differently due to structural and organizational constraints and changes. Along similar lines, Kavrakis (2023) compares the frames of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State and highlights distinctive identity features between the two groups where the former group frames its identity as being "the protector of Muslims from the evil West", while the latter group capitalizes being the "only legitimate religious authority guiding Muslims to true Islam".

Examining the different magazines and other output also helped in identifying the categorical themes the different groups focus on, which helps in understanding the different strategies and priorities. For example, Berger (2015) analyzes IS's Twitter use and emphasizes two important themes: apocalyptic and millenarian. Apocalyptic focuses on "the complete or radical transformation of the world" and the millenarian focuses on "the creation of a perfect society that will transform the world and establish a utopian reign on earth". These themes could be useful templates to connect with diverse political and social topics as they transcend any specific geographical and political situation. A more distinctive categorization of IS media output on Twitter distinguishes between military, governance, commercial, religious and lifestyle related releases (Milton, 2016). Zelin (2015) provides another categorization of the themes covered in IS releases to also include promotion of the caliphate (quoted in Shaw and Bandara, 2018). The different themes portrayed in the jihadist media, in particular the Islamic State's output, attempt to achieve multiple goals. By targeting both sympathizers and hostile audiences, IS is not only aiming to recruit more fighters and supporters, but also to induce fear among its opponents and establish legitimacy and increase acceptance for its status as a state (Williams, 2016)

Other scholars have analyzed the jihadist discourse in relation to specific topics and strategies. For example, Lakomy (2021) focuses on analyzing how IS magazines legitimize the use of violence and shows interesting nuances between Dabiq and Rumiyah, ISIS magazines, with the

second depicting more visible calls to violence than the first which focused more on legitimizng the statehood of the Caliphate. In relation, Dabiq's focus on recruitment was centered around calls for hijrah (migration), while Rumiyah focused on inciting followers to partake in jihad against disbelievers. This shows the strategic messaging of IS and how it employed a dual message technique, especially after it started facing challenges in 2016 and 2017 and decided to focus on inciting violence in developed states instead of calling recruits to join the group in Syria and Iraq *(ibid).*

Termeer and Duyvesteyn (2022) analyze the gendered dynamics surrounding women involvement in jihad within IS magazines. The authors show that the core narratives surrounding women in jihad are consistent over time in IS publications, including the portraying of women as builders of the *Ummah* and representatives of Islam. However, a third narrative that additionally portrays women as guardians of the Caliphate, develops over time showing how women are expected to conduct this defense and their violent agency accordingly. Interestingly, this violent agency is developed also towards the time ISIS is facing challenges. Both studies then suggest that IS messaging is strategic and dependent on the context where the group operates.

This section aimed at highlighting the importance of studying rhetoric and discursive strategies of the different actors in conflict, in particular non-state armed groups. A brief review of how jihadist media analysis has contributed to answering questions pertaining to ideologies and strategies of the Islamist militants shows the importance of rhetoric in identity building, creating unity among followers and othering enemies. In addition, rhetoric changes depending on varying conditions and contexts. It is thus a strategic communicative channel and should not be dismissed as simply self-serving noise or cheap talk.

In spite of the growing research analyzing jihadist discourse, there are still some important questions that need to be addressed to have a better reading of discourse implications. For instance, to what extent is jihadist discourse shaped by geopolitical developments in the region and the world and to what extent is it shaped by local factors? In addition, do rhetorical changes precede or follow major organizational developments such as leadership changes or group alliances? The next section seeks to address some of these gaps.

3.3 Legitimizing Rhetoric: Religion as the Lowest Common Denominator

Within existing literature rhetoric analysis has helped to shed light on diverse international relations and conflict arenas, including but not limited to, foreign policy development in autocracies

and democracies alike (e.g., Goddard and Krebs, 2015; Weiss and Dafoe, 2019), norms development (e.g., Medzihorsky et al., 2017; see also Checkel, 1998, Risse, 2000) and also peacekeeping operations (e.g., Jennings, 2019). Rhetoric is directed towards different audiences (e.g., Schlichte and Schneckener, 2015) and hence requires different persuasion tactics, i.e., framing, to better resonate with the different audiences (e.g,, Payne, 2001) and ensure successful legitimation.

In this section, I develop an argument suggesting that a group will implement rhetorical shifts after affiliating with transnational jihadist network. I maintain that a locally oriented group is likely to display a heavily politically oriented rhetoric prior to affiliation but will undergo noticeable shifts in rhetoric patterns post-affiliation. Particularly I propose that a group will be motivated to emphasize more heavily religion in their discourse. This does not mean that politics will no longer be part of its rhetoric but instead that religion becomes the main framework of reference in its discourse.

Prior to affiliation the main audience in a groups' discourse is the local population. Thus, we are likely to observe a politically focused rhetoric, which would serve best to engage with the local population. For instance, emphasizing local structures and inequalities, grievances, or other critical issues may serve to mobilize for or at least justify conflict (e.g., Cederman et al., 2011, 2013) It can also help signal a distinct positionality with respect to other militant groups with which it is competing on a political spectrum locally.

Although religion may be an important frame of reference prior to affiliation as well, politics is more likely to be more prevalent before affiliation, as the latter would not only dictate but also encourage the group to change the discursive strategy, which will be more suitable to be directed simultaneously at the different audiences and serve a multitude of purposes. Specifically, an emphasis on religious narratives can provide various benefits through a master coherent frame.

Upon affiliation, the pool of audiences of a locally oriented group expands to include the transnational network, the other jihadist groups competing with it locally and regionally, and the local population. Towards each audience, the locally oriented group would need to signal different messages, yet these messages need to be within coherent non-contradicting narratives. A focus on religion serves to engage with what are now all relevant audiences. Making religion the primary frame of reference can signal to the parent organization, ideological alignment and commitment to its religious focus and goals. Meanwhile, to the local population, the newly affiliated group will be able to signal higher religiosity and credibility, especially compared to other groups operating within the country or region. This can also signal accommodation of

different ethnic and tribal backgrounds and portray alignment with altruistic goals. I explain these mechanisms in more details below.

Purpose 1: Signaling Commitment to the Parent Organization Pledging allegiance to a transnational network of jihad is theoretically a form of both material and rhetorical cooperation. Rhetorical relationships derive their value from being public support statements and usually signal believing in the other group's cause along with a level of ideological commitment. For these reasons, rhetorical relationships have substantive reputational costs associated with them - stemming from these signals - that result in groups being concerned about their allies' behaviors, successes, and failures (Blair et al., 2022). In the case of an allegiance pledge, the religious connotations attributed to the concept of *bay'a* and what it entails – in terms of reciprocity rooted in a socio-religious contract where the caliph provides "protection, political and military leadership" in exchange for loyalty and obedience (Wagemakers, 2015) – increases the salience of this specific type of cooperation.

From another perspective, it is likely the case that the most accessible behavior to examine is the rhetorical and discursive strategies a local group employs, since these are public means of communication. While the parent organization might not have the full capacity to monitor the detailed recruitment, organizational structures decisions, and attacks strategies of the locally oriented group and research so far suggests a certain level of independence and autonomy of the locally oriented affiliates post-affiliation (Mendelsohn, 2016; Warner et al., 2021), rhetoric can thus be a very important tool to signal unity and commitment to the parent organization. This can be done without abandoning the original goals of the affiliate group, but through applying different framing processes, the locally oriented group can reconfigure the interpretation and meaning making of their local battles to be more aligned with the parent organization religious agenda.

Cultivating support through frame resonance should not only be understood as being a top-down approach, where movement/group leaders who seek the support of potential recruits would adapt their frames accordingly, but also a horizontal approach, where a group addresses other groups it seeks to ally or cooperate with. It could also be a bottom-up approach, where the group under examination is seeking to merge or affiliate with a parent organization.

Given the potential logistical and material benefits accrued from affiliating with a transnational network of global jihad (Bacon, 2014, 2018; Byman, 2015; Cragin et al., 2007; Phillips, 2014; Weeraratne, 2017), it is only rational to assume that the locally oriented group

would seek to resonate with the frames of the parent organizations to prove its value and signal commitment to the parent ideology. Some explanations for affiliations posit that it develops after ideological radicalization of the local groups or when the groups become in ideological harmony with organizations such as al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (Gray and Stockham, 2008; Sagramoso, 2012).

However, it is worthy to note that rhetorical shifts might occur over extended periods of time and not only at critical conjectures, which implies that rhetorical shifts might start with seeking affiliation and not simply materialize post affiliation, as shown in Figure 1.2, by the bidirectional link between affiliation and rhetorical shift. This goes in line with the notion that legitimacy seeking, which is closely linked to the affiliation, is in itself a process and not simply an outcome, just as affiliation. Legitimacy could then be seen as a continuous process, that starts prior to affiliation, with the necessary rhetorical shift that signals ideological, goals and strategic alignment before affiliation materializes. There is also post affiliation rhetorical shifts that serve related but different purposes, such as strengthening the new identity and reinforcing perceptions. This ensures the continuous support of the parent organization. By considering affiliation and legitimacy as process-based notions, this serves to think of rhetoric shifts, which starts pre-affiliation and continues post-affiliation as a sort of negotiating status and identity which is a continuous and long-term process. In other words, while most of the rhetorical shift is likely to occur after affiliation, it is possible that the process begins earlier.

I maintain that this ideological shift is not necessary for the affiliation to materialize, but it is rather a parallel process that accompanies and follows the local organization structural change. The rationale behind this premise is that an ideological harmony might not necessarily result in cooperation, it could result in competitive outcomes with other Islamist militants including al-Qaeda or the Islamic State, especially if they operate within the same confinements. A safer route for the local group would be to prove added value and worth to the parent organization through different means, by sharing knowledge on local context and terrains for instance (Byman, 2015), and then undertake frame alignment to signal harmony and allegiance. By doing this, the branding effects not only benefit the local affiliate but also the parent organization, by showing the far reach of its ideology to new locations and contexts.

A local group shifting to a religious framing entails two core frame alignment processes that could be at play: frame amplification and frame extension. Frame amplification refers to “the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem or set of events” while frame extension refers to “extending the boundaries” of the

movement's original frames to ensure the inclusion of the interests that may be "incidental to its primary objectives" but are of great salience to potential supporters (Snow et al., 1986). Adapting the narratives around local conflicts with national regimes to incorporate partaking in jihad, in the larger scheme of events, against "Crusaders" and "Zionists" with the historical religious connotations attributed to both enemies, as well as infidels and apostates, potentially serves as frame amplification. In addition, linking the local conflicts to the conflicts of the wider Muslim *Umma* could serve as frame extension.

There are two possible outcomes for the use of this flexible term, *Umma*, which stems from the malleability of the Islamist ideology itself. The first is that it serves to reinforce rather than challenge the hold of the territorial and national state (Halliday, 2002), therefore, capitalizing on local territorial control could not be seen as contradicting with the transnational network's goals or benefits of the wider Muslim nation. Second, it refers to a pan Islamic entity alongside with a collective identity *(ibid.)*. Jihad becomes in the name of the whole nation against the nation's enemies and throughout jihad, Muslims will be able to restore comfort, dignity, security, and honour (Moghadam, 2008b).

In essence, this rhetorical shift would imply a reconfiguration of the interpretation attributed to the identity, goals, and objectives of the local group to correspond to that of the parent organization. Evidently, global jihadist networks managed to promote franchises that instil their global jihadist ideology and agenda. This transformation shows that such groups are social identity groups, and they can foster the identities of their members (Kfir, 2015)

Purpose 2: Signaling Religiosity, Accommodation, and Altruism to Local Populations The benefits of adopting a religious rhetoric are not limited to what it signals to the parent organization, but it also allows signaling different attributes to the local population. To start, upon affiliation, religious rhetoric can help reduce the competition with other groups through specific mechanism, namely religious outbidding through religious framing (Toft, 2007, 2013). Religious outbidding through religious rhetoric can help mitigate the competition with other rivals, as it helps designated groups to signal and differentiate themselves from others through the messages they send to the their different audiences. This is especially true in case of increased competition over limited resources, along with recruits and also legitimacy from the local perspective. This logic is built on the definition of outbidding as occurring when multiple groups exist in a single state and must compete for resources and support so they engage in increased attacks to differentiate themselves from other groups, especially in contexts where the

resources are strained (Bloom, 2006; Farrell, 2020). I only extend it to cover religious rhetoric as another tactic to signal uniqueness where the more religious and more extreme could be better equipped to navigate competitiveness.

Toft (2007) maintains that there are different conditions for religious outbidding through religious framing to develop in a civil war. One of these conditions is of great relevance to my argument and that is when groups need resources to eliminate a threat that has originated, and these resources could be acquired by framing the conflict in religious terms. This is indeed the case when a local group affiliates with a transnational network of jihad, expecting to receive support in various ways upon the pledge of allegiance. It is worthy to note that once they affiliate, locally oriented groups can potentially access the audiences of the transnational jihadist network (Farrell, 2020). While this provides new pools of recruits, it also shows the potential for competition over the resources of the parent organization and rising threats.

A rhetoric that capitalizes on religious legitimacy and divine sanctity can help with mobilization efforts directed towards local population (e.g., Basedau et al., 2011, 2016). Isaacs (2016) finds evidence that political organizations strategically employ religious rhetoric in cases of recent participation in violence, and when intensity of violence and overall duration of violence increase, which also points to the fact that religious rhetoric is used to "help potential entrepreneurs to gain an edge over their rivals". This is particularly true in the case of recent affiliation, which only implies the prolonged duration of conflict. Therefore, there is a need for newly local affiliates to engage in religious rhetoric to be able to ensure mobilization of resources, especially in competing settings.

Generally, Walter (2017a) explains the advantages that extremist ideologies possess over moderate ideologies in civil war. The author argues that religion helps political entrepreneurs to overcome the challenges of mobilization. For instance, a religious rhetoric can help with promising rewards or payments in the afterlife which reduces the cost of engaging in conflict. Also, by signalling the commitment and dedication to an extreme religious cause, the leaders can screen out the less committed and reduce the likelihood of defection or betrayal. With their screening capacities, religious ties create incentives for external support and alliances (Phillips, 2019b; Salehyan et al., 2011), which help mitigating competition. Finally, these types of ideology, with the sacrifices they entail, can help the leaders signal higher levels of credible commitment as opposed to other competing factions (Walter, 2017a). Stewart (2009) maintains that often, religious leaders enjoy a long personal history of devotion, thus portraying an image of piety, and gaining an edge over their competitors in the eyes of the local population.

Apart from the advantages accrued from a rhetoric that employs religious outbidding with regards to resources mobilization in a competitive environment, focusing on a religious identity can also signal diversity accommodation to local population and populations abroad, which is again extremely relevant to local affiliates who join a transnational network of jihad, and may, on one hand, face the need to welcome foreign fighters, and on the other hand, need to stay legitimate to other transnational local populations and audiences as well, as they now represent all Muslims. A broader religious identity that embraces the different causes, issues and backgrounds can be of important relevance as religion is a more encompassing and overlapping identity marker than language, ethnicity, geography, or nationality. Religion has also a more transnational mobilizing appeal (Breslawski and Ives, 2019). These predominant boundary crossing aspects increase the sense of belonging to the group/movement, even in cases of overlapping identities. For instance, many theories that have been advanced to explain the rise in ethnonationalist conflict focus on notions of constructed identities through interactions, and the role played by intergroup inequalities and grievances (e.g., Cederman et al., 2013), but less attention has been paid to the role of intragroup inequalities and how can this result in the shift in the salience of identification, particularly in the case of overlapping identities.

Birnir and Satana (2023) maintain that under certain conditions including specific demographic opportunity structures, the minority group competing in an interethnic conflict would be able to shift to the religious marketplace, especially in case of a relatively large minority that shares the religion of the majority ethnic group. Stewart (2009) also maintains that in cases where there are many small ethnic minorities, mobilization along ethnic lines might prove to be challenging and a need for an overarching identity might develop. While these scenarios are plausible and sensical, they apply mainly to the politico-religious entrepreneurs and does not provide much information on the followers' perspective. I argue that religious framing echoes not only with opportunities to the leaders of overlapping identities groups, but also followers, especially when the gap between group leaders and the population increases, for various reasons, including but not limited to corruption of the leaders, and their failure and incapacity to exert the desired changes and adhere by their issue claims. This could lead to a process of mobilization depoliticization. In such cases, some detached sympathizers can find it more rewarding to belong to a group capitalizing religious over political identities for reasons pertaining the nature of religion, as is the case of newly affiliated groups. I elaborate on this below.

Religion provides a coherent and strict social order that is sanctioned by God, and the fight for that order to be established, becomes a fight for God and His religion. "The resistance

is not led by commanders. It is directed by the tenets of Islam", said a Lebanese cleric (quoted in Hoffman, 2006, p.91, as cited in Stewart, 2009). This framing, of not serving the self but a religion or a deity, reinforces an image of altruism which could be more appealing to the local population that is usually caught up between self-serving competing political entrepreneurs, even if they centered their rhetoric around real inequalities and grievances. This constitutes an advantage to recently affiliated groups who can signal altruism through religious narratives.

In a framing experiment conducted in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, where participants were presented with either a religious or ethnic context to prime their identity before they choose between candidates, those who were exposed to the ethnic context seemed to be more concerned with local material goods, as opposed to those who were exposed to the religious context, who prioritized social and moral policies (McCauley, 2014). Along a similar notion, according to Juergensmeyer (2017b), ISIS proclaims an apocalyptic conception to its struggle, that is not related to economic or political issues, but that is "between transcendent and worldly goals, between religion and antireligion". Together, these premises reflect a non-material and more altruistic framing that could appeal to supporters and empathizers.

There are self-interested mundane attributes that could be linked to political "real" claims, as opposed to altruistic afterlife postponed rewards of religion. Worthy to note, that Hoffman (1993) maintains that one of the differences between secular and religious terrorism is that the former could be understood in utilitarian notions, in its attempts to bring about changes that would benefit the greatest number, while the latter seeks to attain the greatest number of benefits only for themselves and their co-religionists. I argue however, that delaying the rewards to an afterlife and committing to a fight that aims at restructuring the order of society and that can last forever has relatively more altruistic connotations attached to it. This can have various benefits including working against corruption allegations of the religious elites and authorities, increasing the legitimation of the struggle, and providing a lasting rationale for the continuation of such struggles, all of which could sound more appealing to the different populations.

The above discussion shows that it serves the local affiliate groups to adopt a more religiously centered rhetoric after it joins a transnational network of jihad, leading to the following hypothesis:

H: Upon affiliation with a transnational network of jihad, local Islamist militants increase the salience of religion in their rhetoric as opposed to politics.

3.4 Research Design

3.4.1 Case Selection

To test the proposed argument, I rely on the case of Boko Haram. Boko Haram is a local Islamist militant group operating in Northeastern Nigeria, that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015. Boko Haram constitutes a very important case for analysis for several reasons. First, although the case is not a typical case, it still offers some comparable advantages, particularly to other African Islamist militant groups that share grievances pertaining to weak states, corruption and marginalization driving them to seek support from transnational networks. In fact, the group is among many al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates in parts of Africa, including but not limited to al-Shabaab in Somalia, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in Sahel, and the Islamic State Provinces in Greater Sahara and Central Africa.

Second, the group provides additional distinct characteristics that can only deepen the analysis and provide useful insights for the particularities as well. Specifically, this case provides interesting insights for within case variation which stems from two developments. The first is the history of this group attempts at affiliation with transnational jihadist networks and the history of cooperation with and seeking support of AQIM before affiliating with IS eventually. Although not explored in great details within this dissertation, this comparison should help exploring the difference in rhetoric corresponding to affiliation with different networks. The second stems from the notion that in 2016 a faction of the group officially seceded and the Islamic State officially recognized the splinter group leader, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, as the legitimate governor of the Islamic State in West Africa Province, instead of Abubakar Shekau, who continued to be Imam of Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (International Crisis Group, 2024). By accounting for the various factional disputes and the ensuing dynamics, I contribute to shedding light on the different mechanisms that could affect the rhetoric and cause its shift and how they interact with the affiliation process.

Third, the group itself is a prominent jihadist group, that affected the landscape of jihad in Africa, and was particularly deadly in Lake Chad region. The insurgencies in Northeast Nigeria have caused the deaths of nearly 350,000 people as of the end of 2020 (Reuters, 2021). And during the first four months of 2022, the Islamic State claimed more attacks in Nigeria than in Iraq (Bacon et al., 2022). Boko Haram was expected to expand its operations to neighbouring countries since early 2010s due to various factors including: porous state borders and the general weakness of states in the West and Central African region, alongside with the

political inefficiency and corruption, and supplemented by transnational trading networks used by criminal gangs (Maiangwa, 2014).

Fourth, while the insurgency of Boko Haram has been studied on different occasions, the group's rhetoric is considerably under-explored with respect to the rhetoric of other jihadist groups. This is partially because of language barriers. Larger groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) issued magazines in English targeted at their transnational audiences. Boko Haram's communication is mainly in Hausa, Kanuri, and Arabic. Combined, these four factors contribute to making the case of Boko Haram an illustrative case for the analysis of the rhetoric shift from before to after the affiliation with the Islamic State.

3.4.2 Methodology

To test my hypothesis, I employ a mixed method approach and combine quantitative text analysis with qualitative content analysis of speeches and videos of Boko Haram. In the first part of the analysis, I carry out unsupervised classification to estimate the position of the group before and after the affiliation, along a latent dimension, which approximates a religious-political dimension, as I show below. The unsupervised scaling technique I use is the Generalized Wordfish Model developed by Imai et al. (2016). The rationale behind the Wordfish Model by Slapin and Proksch (2008) lies in the common assumption that the relative frequency with which the word is used reflects its position in a policy space. The choice of unsupervised document-scaling was motivated by the ability of such technique to produce time-series estimates, without requiring the use of reference texts as it assumes an underlying distribution of word counts while using all words in the complete corpus and estimates the relative importance of each word for discriminating against different positions.

I rely on unsupervised technique for scaling over time-series, as opposed to supervised scaling (Laver et al., 2003), for the following reasons. First, the political terms used by the groups are constantly changing and it is challenging to assume they could remain stable over time (Slapin and Proksch, 2008), which is especially true when the context is always evolving to refer to new incidents and events. For example, in the case of Boko Haram, group leaders and alliances change, the group splits and carries different attacks in different locations and so on.

This leads to the second reason, where it is hard to assume that the reference texts required by supervised scaling and that are used to estimate the extreme positions will have all relevant words (Slapin and Proksch, 2008). Unsupervised scaling relaxes the assumptions that

the reference texts chosen represent the most extreme positions during the period *(ibid.)*. In the case of Islamist jihadist positionality being analyzed, while I assume that it is an attribute along a single spectrum ranging from the political centered to the religious centered, it remains a challenge to identify a single text, or even a group of texts that constitute the extreme position on the political-religious spectrum because the focus of the texts is generally narrow in breadth.

In addition, the Generalized Wordfish Model allows for multiple documents per actor as opposed to the original Wordfish Model that only takes a single document per actor (Imai et al., 2016). The model assumes a Poisson distribution for words frequencies as such:

$$p(y_{jk} \mid \alpha_j, \beta_j, \psi_k, x_i) = \text{Poisson}(\lambda_{jk}), \tag{1}$$

$$\lambda_{jk} = \exp(\psi_k + \alpha_j + \beta_j x_{[k]}), \tag{2}$$

where ψ_k represents the degree of verboseness of document k, i.e., the document's fixed effects indicating its length; and α_k represents the overall frequency of term j across all documents, i.e., the word's fixed effects; and β_j represents the discrimination parameter for term j (Imai et al., 2016), it is a word specific weight that captures the importance of the word in distinguishing between different ideological positions (Slapin and Proksch, 2008); and $x_{[k]}$ represents the ideological position of the actor to whom document k belongs (Imai et al., 2016).

The model then adopts a Bayesian formulation by specifying a set of independent prior normal distributions as such:

$$p(\tilde{\beta}_j) \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu_{\tilde{\beta}}, \Sigma_{\tilde{\beta}}), \tag{3}$$

$$p(\psi_k) \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu_\psi, \sigma_\psi^2), \tag{4}$$

$$p(x_i) \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu_x, \sigma_x^2), \tag{5}$$

where $\tilde{\beta}_j = (\alpha_j, \beta_j)$ is a vector of term parameters.

Then the joint posterior distribution becomes as such (Imai et al., 2016):

$$p\left(\{\psi_k\}_{k=1}^K, \{\tilde{\beta}_j\}_{j=1}^J, \{x_i\}_{i=1}^N \mid Y\right) \propto \left[\prod_{j=1}^J \left\{\prod_{k=1}^K p\left(y_{jk} \mid \psi_k, \tilde{\beta}_j, x_{i[k]}\right) p(\psi_k)\right\} p(\tilde{\beta}_j)\right] \times \prod_{i=1}^N p(x_i) \tag{6}$$

The joint posterior distribution, using the priors and the likelihood of the observed data given, is then used in the Expectation-Maximization (EM) framework such as in the first

step (E), the expected value of the log-likelihood over the latent variables is calculated and in the second step (M), the parameters of the model are updated to maximize the expected log-likelihood. The combination of Bayesian inference and the provision of additional information through the priors along with the EM framework allows for the optimization of parameter estimation in a more robust way than other methods that would require larger datasets to converge (Western and Jackman, 1994).

I complement the analysis with the examination of the communication productions of Boko Haram and the development of the group throughout the years, which not only serves as a mean for testing the proposed hypothesis but for validation of the method used.

3.4.3 Data

I rely on Boko Haram text data from two main sources. The first is the book "The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State" by Kassim and Nwankpa (2019). The book includes translated exegeses, lectures, communiqués, debates, sermons, and other forms of public communication. The other source is the companion website of the book "Unmasking Boko Haram: Exploring Global Jihad in Nigeria" by Jacob Zenn (2020), that includes videos of Boko Haram and ISWAP among other related videos. I transcribed and translated the Arabic videos available, which greatly helped in increasing the sample size, especially for the post-affiliation phase. Most of the videos are sermons, lectures, or designated messages, while some are propaganda videos depicting various aspects of life and different attacks. In addition, the website also contains links to transcribed lectures and messages along with a book by the two brothers, al-Barnawi, in 2018, and translated by Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi.

While it might be argued that this sample is not comprehensive, I maintain it is a representative sample of Boko Haram communication, for two main reasons. The first is that the videos in Hausa or Kanuri that were not translated constitute a small minority of all videos gathered on the website. The second is that almost all the Hausa and Kanuri productions were preceded by an Arabic part that should be addressing the same topic and conveying the same message.

I end up with 129 documents over the years 2006-2023. The distribution of documents per year is shown in Figure 3.1. Few years include only one document per year, such as 2006, 2011 and 2023. The maximum number of texts occurs in the year 2015, with 25 documents. The distribution of documents per affiliation status is shown in Figure 3.2. As shown, there are 60 documents before affiliation and 68 documents afterwards (and one document for the pledge

of allegiance removed from graph).

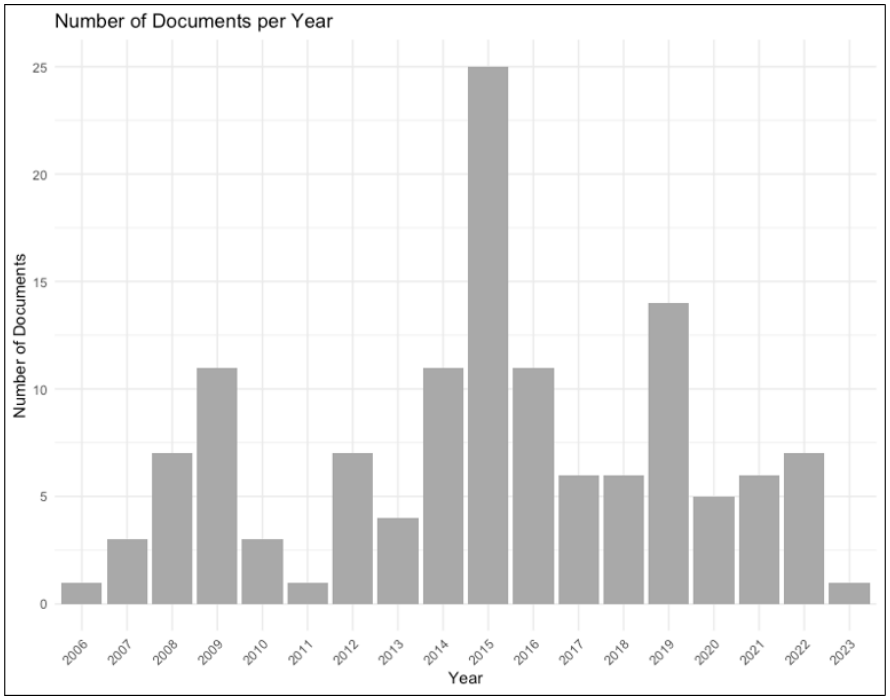

Figure 3.1: Boko Haram Documents by Year

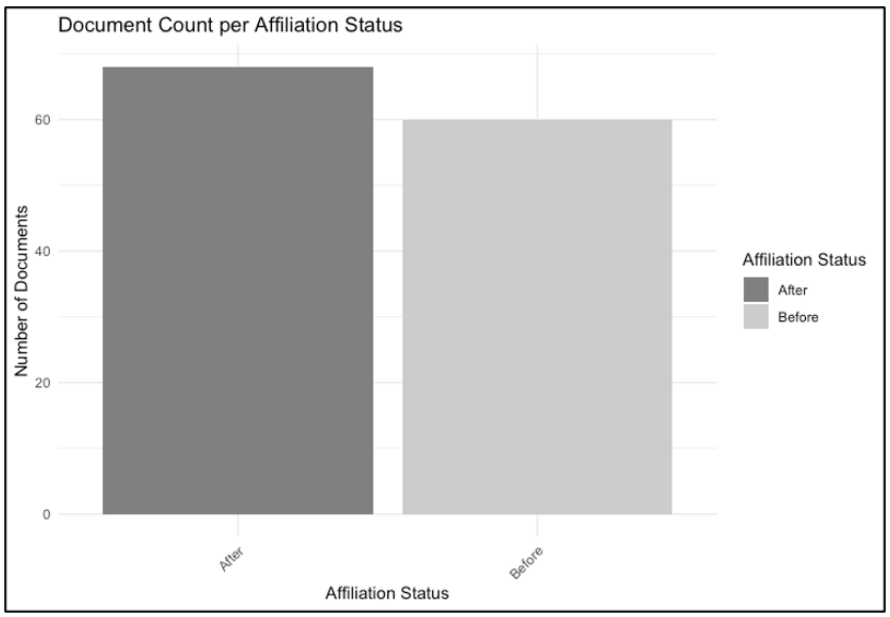

Figure 3.2: Boko Haram Documents by Affiliation Status

To transform the texts into tokens for the analysis, I apply several pre-processing techniques, including removing URLs, symbols, numbers, punctuation, and separators. I also remove the stop words provided for the English language in the package *quanteda* in R. The distribution

of tokens per documents per years is shown in both Figure 3.3 & Figure 3.4. The difference between the two figures is the removal of the book referred to earlier for better visualization of the variation among the remaining documents. I end up with 131,920 tokens

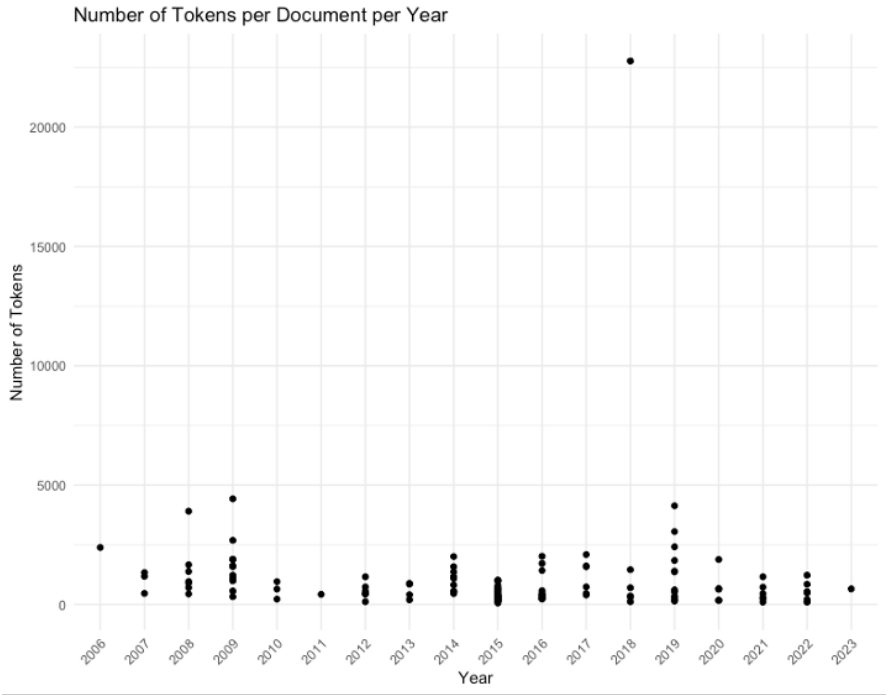

Figure 3.3: Tokens per Documents per Year (all documents)

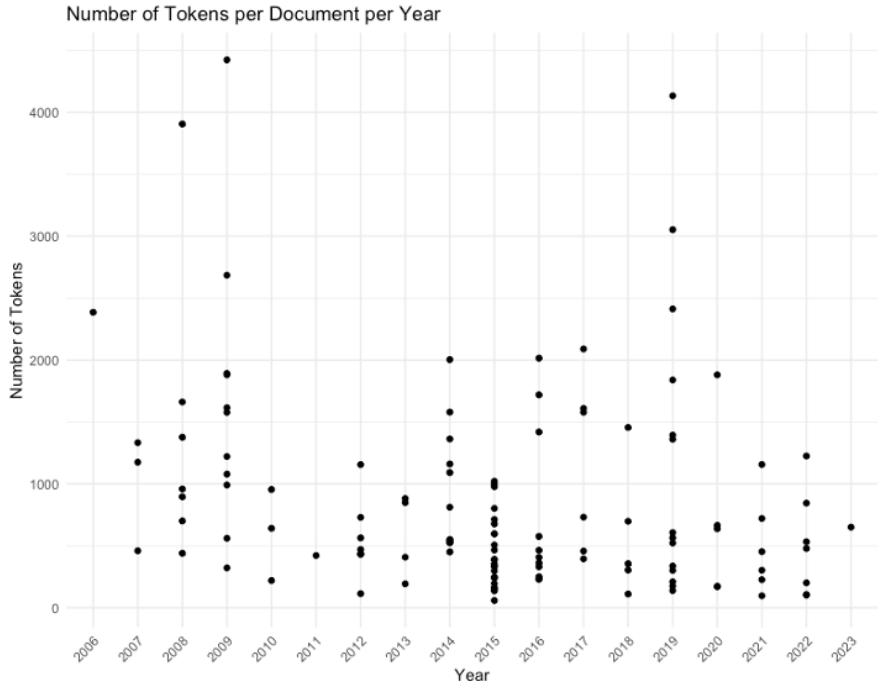

Figure 3.4: Tokens per Documents per Year (without Book)

3.5 Boko Haram: Contextualizing the Rhetorical Shifts

Boko Haram is the name given to Jam'at Ahlu-Sunnah Liddawa'ati wal-Jihad, which means People of the Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad Group. It is a group that evolved significantly over the years from a quietest Salafist group to an affiliate of a global jihadist network: The Islamic State West Africa Province.

The notion of jihad is not new to Nigeria. Dan Fodio's Caliphate, the Sokoto Caliphate, in the early nineteenth century is an important case in point (see Kassim, 2015; Thurston, 2018). More recently, the Maitastine insurgency which left more than 10,000 people dead before it was suppressed by the military in 1985 (Aghedo, 2017), is another example of how rooted the concept of fighting for religion in Nigerian history is, particularly the Northern part. The Maitastine insurgency was initiated by an internal religious crisis that was reflected in the socio-political debate about Sharia in the years 1977-1978, in the Constituent Assembly (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2019).

The conflicts over the implementation of Sharia continued to dominate constitutional politics and ethno-religious relations in Nigeria (Suberu, 2009). In 1999, the Sharia penal code was adopted (Kassim, 2015). Within two years, twelve Northern Nigerian states moved to implement full Sharia. As it proved to be a very administratively complex issue, some Muslim elites called for its gradual implementation, which was perceived as reluctance by the Salafi hardliners across the North, including Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram (Thurston, 2018)

Through his sermons that were against the Muslim establishment and the state, Yusuf was able to attract a wide following (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2019). From 2003 to 2008, the sermons focused on developing accusations against the oppressive and secular Nigerian state and their discrimination against Muslims (Apard, 2015). He emphasized the measures that were designed to target the members of his group. He mentioned policing operations, forced disappearances, and extrajudicial police and army abuse in Northern Nigeria towns. He also referred to conflicts that took place between Muslims and Christians in the South, like the massacre of the Muslim community in Onitsha in February 2006, where Muslims were killed in retaliation for Christians murdered in the North, at the wake of the riots that took place after the cartoon controversy in Denmark *(ibid.)*. Boko Haram's core discourse developed around unresolved inter-religious violence (Thurston, 2018); and Yusuf exploited the feelings of injustice and victimization while not only capitalizing on local events, but by also referring to Muslim injustices from a global perspective, maintaining a political focus in his rhetoric.

Yusuf exhibited an ability to link Quranic stories to the realities of contemporary Nigeria (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2019). He stood against democracy and emphasized the relationship between democracy and Western civilization, which the group opposed, and extended the line of thought to colonialism. On many occasions, he opposed Western education as a colonialist legacy. He continued to emphasize that the only thing "Europeans brought is unbelief" and "this democracy that came from America is unbelief" and that "it is the religion of Bush" that he condemned, and that Allah forbade them from following a country that contradicts His laws.

From 2007 to 2009, Yusuf's relations with the authorities severely deteriorated especially after the elections of a new governor in Borno state who ensured the near absence of any vibrant opposition in Borno (Thurston, 2018). Tensions continued to build up, specially following the launch of an anti-banditry program, the "Operation Flush II", a joint effort between the military and the police. The program, which aimed at securing the lives and property of Borno's citizens, was perceived by Yusuf and the group as a direct threat against them (*ibid.*). Yusuf was successful in his outreach to the marginalized population of Maiduguri, combining anti-statist and anti-Western sermons, showing that the root causes of problems lie in the British colonialism, and the postcolonial Nigerian state that it left behind, and the corrupt Nigerian elites (Warner et al., 2021)

By 2009, Yusuf's non-violent rhetoric was replaced by calling for confrontation with the state (Warner et al., 2021). Following various apprehensions between the authorities and the group, retaliatory violence quickly escalated into a" full-fledged" riot (Pham, 2016). Yusuf delivered an "Open Letter to the Federal Government in Nigeria"; a sermon that had immense influence on the course of events. The sermon is often referred to as "Declaration of War". It could be considered as the culmination of all his rhetoric strategies over the years. He attacked the government of Nigeria, capitalized on the injustices and oppression faced by his members. He portrayed the enmity with the government as a war that will continue forever. He placed it within a broader context of ongoing wars between Muslims and unbelievers since the time of the Prophet (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2019)

Few weeks after the "Declaration of War", the police attacked a Boko Haram safe house. Conflict renewed and subsequent clashes escalated and spread across other Northern states within five days. Police stations were attacked again and in response, the security forces surrounded and stormed the group's mosque in one of the states. The violence only came to an end when Yusuf was arrested, beaten, interrogated, and eventually shot, after more than 700 people were killed and government offices, police stations, schools and churches were attacked

and destroyed. With most of its leaders dead, the group withdrew from the public, and became a clandestine group, remaining behind the scenes for almost a year (Pham, 2016).

Their relative strength was evidently declining, except for a statement issued by Sani Umaru, then leader of the group, in August 2009 where he explained that Boko Haram is an Islamic Revolution whose impact is no longer limited to Northern Nigeria but spreads across the 36 states of Nigeria. In the same message, Umaru clarifies that Boko Haram is just a version of al-Qaeda, which they respect and align with(Kassim and Nwankpa, 2019).

Subsequently, an open statement was made by the leader of AQIM, in February 2010, stated that his group is ready to train Boko Haram's members in how to deal with weapons and to help them with what they need, whether they need men, supplies, or equipment to enable them to defend "their people" in Nigeria. The rhetoric of the statement suggests that it is made in response to a request already made by Boko Haram (Thurston, 2018).

In June 2010, Shekau, Yusuf's second man in command, declared himself leader of the group (Pham, 2016). At the beginning, in 2010, Shekau messages focused on national dynamics, and they were often presented in terms of letters or speeches addressed directly to the Nigerian President. He kept insisting on rejecting the constitution. He capitalized on injustices also, specifically the events of capturing women and children of the group members and demanded their release. In other words, the messages were mainly driven by domestic factors (Mahmoud, 2018). However, not so much later, Shekau started to identify with global Jihadism, especially with Al-Qaeda (Thurston, 2018). He started to incorporate internationally focused themes in his messages. They started to include threats to world leaders and express solidarity with global jihadist struggles in Chechnya, Kashmir, Iraq, and Palestine. He even praised jihadist leaders, including al-Zawahiri, al-Zarqawi, and al-Baghdadi *(ibid.)*.

By September 2010, Boko Haram reprised its violent attacks. In 2011, the group carried out its first suicidal attack, that targeted the Nigerian Police Force in Abuja (Pham, 2016). Worthy to note, is that just two days before the attack, Boko Haram issued a statement saying that very soon they will wage jihad as their jihadists have arrived from Somalia after they received training on warfare from their brothers there *(ibid.)*.

The group he is referring to is al-Shabaab group in Somalia, a well-established affiliate of al-Qaeda. By the end of 2011, Boko Haram has implemented various attacks, not only against the security forces, but also politicians and members of the Muslim religious leaders who have opposed him. In addition, Shekau ordered attacks that have left Muslim civilians killed by the dozens. This has created internal dissatisfaction and some of the members started to criticize

Shekau for displaying *al-inhiraf wal-ghuluw*, which is deviance and excess in the use of *Takfiri* doctrine (Thurston, 2018).

Later that year, the dissatisfied members decided to form a splinter group, called Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan, referred to as Ansaru in the literature. This group was announced in January 2012. It emphasized in its charter how its reading of *al-wala' wal bara'* (loyalty and disavowal) is softer than that of Boko Haram. It also promised not to apply *takfir* excessively. The group emphasized that it would target the Westerners and the Nigerian state. A letter sent by the group leader before splitting from Boko Haram to bin Laden suggests that the group was formed with the blessing of al-Qaeda, which only means that the cooperation between Shekau and al-Qaeda leaders did not last long (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2019; Thurston, 2018). The distance between al-Qaeda (especially AQIM) and Boko Haram grew out of reservations related to Shekau as a leader and his interpretation of Islam and *takfir* (Warner et al., 2021).

From 2012 to 2014, Boko Haram developed into the "deadliest group", often with more casualties recorded than ISIS (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2019). The Nigerian government responded with declaring a state of emergency, to ascertain control over all sort of opposition, including some of the Northern state authorities, and deploying more military forces. However, Boko Haram was more powerful than the Nigerian army, it managed to seize territorial control over some states of Northern Nigeria and declare an Islamic State in Nigeria in August 2014 (Thurston, 2018). Boko Haram communication in 2014 included messages claiming raids and attacks, declaring war against the Civilian Joint Task Force, messages to the world leaders and the Muslim *Umma*, beheading videos of military officers and Arabic and Hausa nashids. In his message to the *Umma*, Shekau, like his predecessor Yusuf, maintained his rhetoric politically focused by opposing democracy, the constitution and Western education, as well as Nigerian infidel and unbeliever leaders.

The same year also witnessed the tragic kidnapping of 276 girls from Chibok. Observing the kidnapping and the declaration of an Islamic State in Nigeria, along with other tactics adopted by Boko Haram, it is uncertain whether Shekau was trying to court the Islamic State or was trying to establish an independent caliphate in Nigeria (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2019), however the timing of various mimicking tactics suggests the former (Warner et al., 2021). In addition, there is no evidence to suggest that Boko Haram was gaining legitimacy, on the contrary, his kidnapping acts were denounced by al-Qaeda and Ansaru, while praised by IS. Also, there is no evidence to suggest that Boko Haram provided any useful form of governance, but only the implementation of harsh Sharia laws, which could have left the group in a legitimacy

deficit, along with the excessive killings and other violent tactics.

Worthy to note is that by 2015, the rhetoric of Shekau started to incorporate more elements of preaching, even when directing his messages to the leaders of African countries, and while not forgoing the links to political matters – such as democracy and secularism – he also included pure religious attributes, for instance, by asking leaders to repent and explaining his own interpretation of the Islamic tradition. Videos in that year also showed the implementation of Sharia under Shekau's leadership. However, with contributions from outside, particularly from Chad and Niger, Nigeria's offensive was able to take back most of the territory it had lost to the group (Thurston, 2018).

In March 2015, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State to become the Islamic State – West Africa Province (ISWAP), potentially to gain legitimacy at the global arena. However, by mid-2016, ISWAP's territorial gains were mostly overturned, and dissident voices were rising criticizing Shekau's leadership style and his strict interpretation of *takfir*, and shedding doubts on his capacity to reverse the losses. And in August 2016, an article came out in al-Naba magazine of IS, that included an interview with the governor of ISWAP, which was not Shekau but Abu-Musab al-Barnawi (Warner et al., 2021). The demotion was not acknowledged by Shekau, as his messages and sermons still ended with his signature including name and date, and the name usually referred to Abubakar Shekau, Imam of Jama'at Ahlu-Sunnah lid-Dawa'ti wal Jihad, West Africa, the Islamic State. Ironically though, al-Barnawi was later perceived as a soft-liner himself by IS and sidelined in 2019.

Shekau's focus to explain Boko Haram's ideology increased over the years 2015 and 2016. While not neglecting to address Nigerian and world leaders as infidels and unbelievers and promising to defeat them, he dedicated larger parts of his rhetoric to explain the rationale behind his acts and how it is rooted in the true interpretation of Islam, which leads to an increase in the religious aspects' salience in his rhetoric. Shekau issued at least one message addressing the appointment of al-Barnawi explaining how the latter's ideology is false and lenient. He also addressed the dynamics of the split in his communication.

By 2017, Shekau was not paying homage to the Islamic State, its leaders, and affiliates in his messages. Instead, he was focusing on denouncing taghut in Nigeria and worldwide, explaining how democracy is on the path of disbelief or *kufr*, and explaining the latter in more details and what it entails. In the following years, Shekau messages - while not disregarding attacking democracy and unbeliever leaders and Nigeria's nationalist elements - often contained elements of explaining the group's ideology and how it coincides with the path of the righteous

predecessors. He also focused on notions of truth and falsehood, loyalty and disavow or *al-wala' wal bara'*, sincerity and the morals of a good Muslim. On some occasions, especially in later years, Shekau and the group returned to address the disbelief and apostasy of the leaders of African countries, and to call onto their brothers in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger to follow their path of jihad.

Interestingly, if one compares the distinct rhetoric styles of ISWAP and Boko Haram, there might not be drastic differences in terms of focus on religious attributes and topics. This shows that Shekau was potentially involved in religious outbidding with the ISWAP faction. In addition, Shekau's production of "IS-style" videos, indicated that he always considered rejoining IS (Zenn, 2020). A key difference however between both groups' media production, was the focus of Boko Haram on beheadings and other punishments, while ISWAP focused on its combat against Nigeria's army and other governance attributes that could possibly win the hearts and minds of the local population, at least until al-Barnawi's demotion in 2019 *(ibid.)*. It could be argued that throughout the years, Boko Haram showed no practical steps to win the support of the population, which could explain why he was keen on maintaining a rhetorical affiliation with IS and a focus on religious aspects to maintain the loyalty of the population, despite his acts.

3.6 Quantitative Text Analysis Results

Assuming no difference between Boko Haram and ISWAP[8], and treating them as one group, I obtain the below results from the quantitative scaling of texts.

Figure 3.5 shows that after 2015 and 2016, the average ideal point estimation of all texts in the following years till 2023 are positive, while before 2015, they were negative, except for the year 2013. To obtain the confidence intervals, I treated all documents/ideal points per year as a sample, computed their mean, standard deviation, and standard error, then computed the 95% confidence interval bounds drawn from a t-distribution. I also computed a t-test for the mean before and after 2015. I obtained a p-value of 2.108e-06.

To have a better understanding of what positive and negative values imply, I conduct a face validity exercise, where, based on the above analytical exercise, I assume that the pre-affiliation rhetoric is more politically focused, that is the negative values; and the post-affiliation rhetoric is more religiously focused, that is the positive values of estimation. To carry out this validity test, I construct a dictionary of political and religious words (shown in Appendix B) and

[8]The results of seperate analysis of ISWAP and Boko Haram are shown in the Appendix B.

graph a wordfish plot highlighting the distribution of these words. I obtain Figure 3.6, where red words are religious words and blue words are political words

From observing Figure 3.6, there is relatively a separation of blue and red words along the 0-x axis, representing the discrimination parameter, or the degree to which the word being analyzed is associated with a latent dimension. So, a higher value, away from the 0-x axis, to the left and to the right, represents a word that is better at discriminating and distinguishing the different positions/points along that latent dimension.

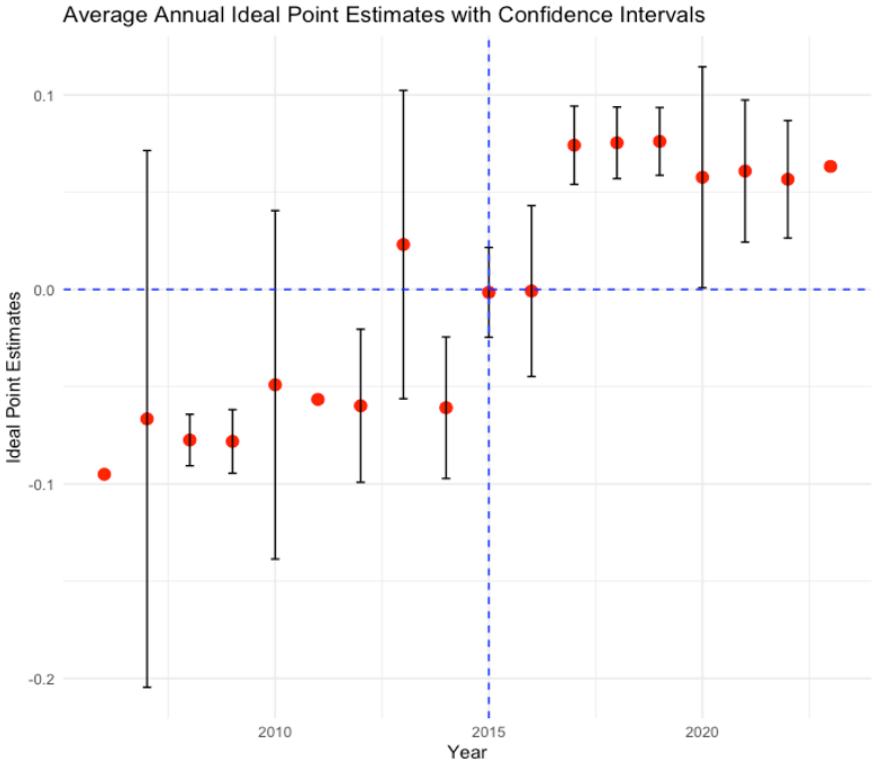

Figure 3.5: Average Ideal Point Estimates of All Corpus (Boko Haram + ISWAP) with Confidence Intervals

In support of my argument, from Figure 3.6, I deduce that red/religious is associated with positive word weights, and blue/political is associated with negative words weights, which by going back to Figure 3.5, provides evidence to my hypothesis, as pre-affiliation rhetoric was more politically focused compared to the more religiously focused post-affiliation rhetoric.

There are some exceptions of course, some are more important than others. For example, the word Izala, Kharijites and scholar have relatively higher discrimination parameter and are positioned on the opposite side than expected (left instead of right of the plot). I can think of one explanation to this, and that words such as Izala, Kharijites and scholars, were used

to discuss opponent groups (e.g., Izala was not a militant group but a preaching group that opposed Shekau), so it is not completely surprising to see this pattern. In addition, following the distinction between political and religious rhetoric, one can also explain the exception in the pattern, that is year 2013. After AQ cooperation ended, and with Ansaru in picture supported by AQIM, the rhetoric turned religious suggesting a form of religious outbidding and an attempt to exert religious legitimacy, specifically with respect to the transnational network of AQ. This was aggravated by the conduct of massacres from the part of Boko Haram and Ansaru dissociating from them (Zenn, 2020; Kassim and Nwankpa, 2019).

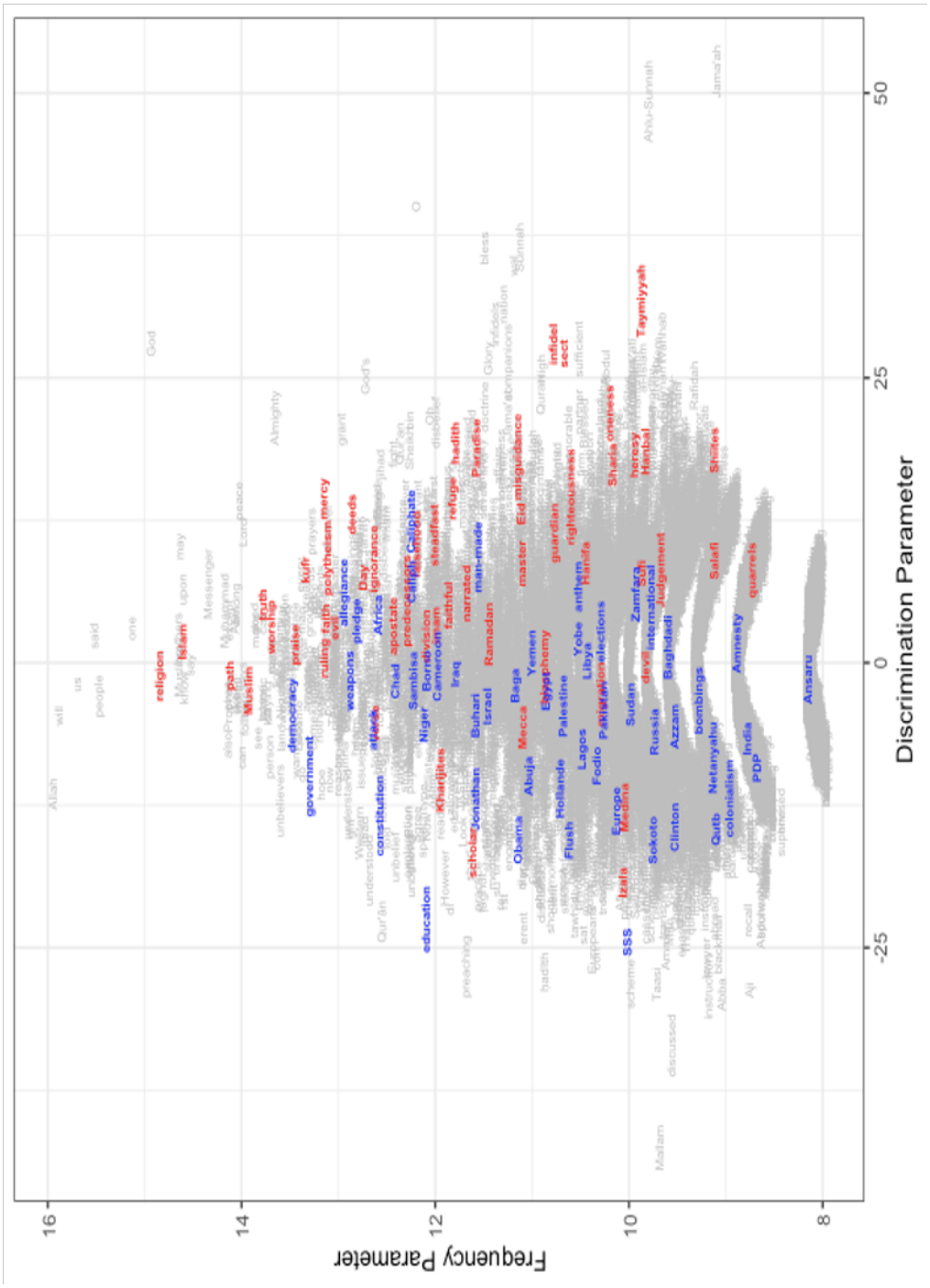

Figure 3.6: Wordfish Distribution of of All Corpus Tokens

3.7 Concluding Remarks

How does the rhetoric of recently affiliated groups change upon affiliation with transnational networks of jihad? This study presents an answer to this question, showing that the rhetoric shifts from more politically salient to more religiously focused. Affiliation is thus not merely about material benefits accrued to the local affiliates. It also entails identity shifts that have consequences upon mobilization and recruitment strategies, and the legitimation of the group as a new integral part of the global jihadist movement.

This study contributes to the examination of terrorist and armed groups communication along with their recruitment and mobilization strategies (e.g., Berger, 2015; Bestvater and Loyle, 2023; Windsor, 2020). It also helps with understanding the dynamics of alliances, especially with transnational networks of jihad (e.g., Clausen, 2022; Mendelsohn, 2016; Warner et al., 2021), through groups' projected narratives and how the local context and variations factor in through this form of cooperation. Both aspects are of great relevance for counter-terrorism strategies that could be better tailored to the specifics of the groups being targeted, depending on the group's stage of development.

It could be argued that while the group remains driven by local context that guides at least part of their attacks and targets, affiliation either adds a new layer to the conflict, a more religiously focused one, or transports the conflict to a new dimension. Either way, the role religion plays is more important upon affiliation. This is potentially what the global parent organizations wants from the beginning, and it explains part of the rhetorical convergence towards the narratives adopted by the transnational network, as it would want to minimize potential sources of conflicts and disagreements among new members of different regions and parts of the world (see e.g., Byman, 2012).

In its conclusions, the implications and generalization potential of this study are however limited to the following assumptions. First, I assume that both IS and AQ focus equally on religion for guiding master narratives in their rhetoric. Second, I assume the data accessible to transcription and translation is a representative sample of the rhetoric of the group studied, Boko Haram. This assumption was made possible as the sample included texts in Arabic, Hausa, and Kanuri languages. Third, I assume that the local context and its variation will not have other effects in different cases, and that the religious rhetoric upon affiliation, will always supersede the politically focused rhetoric, with its local and transnational components. A challenge to that assumption is that militant groups operate generally in rapidly changing contexts which

could affect their rhetoric even post affiliation.

Future research could address some of these limitations. Further data collection of affiliate groups rhetoric, and not only AQ or IS, can help further testing the premise of this study. Obtaining larger corpus will also help with the use of other text analysis techniques, including text inference, with text as input or output (Grimmer et al., 2022) along with other variables to better test the proposed causal mechanisms or alternative explanations. The rhetoric of other jihadist affiliates could be studied in related manners, such as al-Shabaab, Islamic State-Khorasan Province, and AQAP. In addition, comparing the rhetoric shift of al-Qaeda affiliates to the Islamic State affiliates could help understanding differences between communication, recruitment, and mobilization strategies of both networks. This could also be extended to other rebel groups, to highlight differences between the mobilization strategies of both group categories. In addition, this type of analysis could be used alongside surveys to assess how this shift in rhetoric affect the legitimacy perceptions of the newly affiliated groups and how their new attacks are received among the population. Related implications of rhetorical shifts could also be explored, including their effect on violence patterns and recruitment.

Chapter 4

Deadly Differences: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and Local Affiliate Violence

4.1 Introduction

In 2004, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad in Iraq, pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden and formed the first al-Qaeda (AQ) affiliate group, AQ in Iraq (AQI) (Bacon, 2018, pp.188-189). This demonstrated new prospects for the many Islamist organizations and indicated al-Qaeda's diversified strategy to build and strengthen its network. Since then, dozens of militant groups around the world have formally affiliated with the global networks of al-Qaeda or, later, the Islamic State (IS).

How does an organization's pledge of affiliation to a global network affect that group's subsequent terrorism? This question is important because it seeks a more accurate assessment of the level of threat imposed by these alliances. Conflict dynamics are influenced by patterns of relationships among non-state actors (Akcinaroglu, 2012). While there is a range of possible type of cooperation among militant groups, from informal and fleeting coordination to formal affiliation (Moghadam, 2017), research has shown that cooperation can be valuable for involved organizations (Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008; Phillips, 2014). However, there are also reasons to suspect that cooperation such as affiliation could weaken or lead to the elimination of involved groups, as it is likely to bring increased counter-terrorism pressure (Bacon, 2017; Byman, 2014; Mendelsohn, 2011). Alternatively, affiliation could be inconsequential, as principal-agent issues suggest the affiliates might not change their behavior much (*ibid.*).

Regarding formal affiliation, pledging allegiance to a larger group, it is also unclear how this specific and important type of cooperation might affect pledged groups. Some studies have examined affiliation specifically to AQ (Mendelsohn, 2011; Moghadam, 2008a)

Other research studies the more recent affiliates of IS (e.g., Byman, 2016a; Warner et al., 2021). Most of this work has been qualitative, providing rich information on affiliate relationships (Bencherif, 2021; Filiu, 2009), but not explicitly comparing affiliates with non-affiliates to see consequences of affiliation. Few studies look at affiliation more broadly, including both AQ and IS. One important exception is Farrell's (2020) study, although it is focused more on outbidding than affiliation. Additionally, it only analyzes through the year 2014, the year many groups

affiliated with IS, so it is unable to shed light on more than a few months of IS affiliation. Furthermore, the study aggregated AQ and IS together and did not compare the two types of affiliation.

This chapter argues formal affiliation with a global network can lead to increased violence by new affiliates. Violence serves as a signal of commitment to the parent organizations in the context of jihadist allegiances, and this creates an incentive for the local affiliate groups to increase the level of their terrorist attacks. Affiliation also provides the local groups with resources to engage with more terrorist attacks, given they have access to more funding, the brand which can help draw resources from elsewhere, and learning via the hubs. However, we also argue that the effects of affiliation are likely to be conditional. We present reasons why affiliation with AQ in particular should lead to more violence, while affiliation with IS offers a less clear relationship. AQ has focused on encouraging violence (especially internationally) instead of territorial control. It has also usually had advantages over IS in terms of financial resources and learning.

The next section summarizes research on affiliations and alliances and terrorism. After that, we present the argument and mechanisms involved for devising the hypotheses. We then present two illustrative case studies of al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, respectively an AQ affiliate that subsequently increased violence and an IS affiliate that did not increase its violence after affiliation. Then, the quantitative tests are presented, with group-year analyses of 95 Islamist organizations. Affiliation is robustly associated with more terrorist attacks, more fatalities, and the use of suicide terrorism. When we disaggregate by AQ and IS affiliation, only AQ has a robust relationship with violence. This goes in line with the insights from the case studies. We conclude with suggestions for related research.

4.2 Research on Affiliation with Global Networks, and Terrorism

Affiliation Affiliation necessitates pledging of allegiance, *bay'a*, to the leader of the parent organization, followed by the leader accepting the oath and then a public announcement of the affiliation (Mendelsohn, 2016)). Processes of *bay'a* and affiliations are instrumental for expanding the influence of both the affiliates and the networks, especially in a fragmented and competitive jihadi marketplace (Drevon, 2017; Hamming, 2017). Affiliation can be seen as a specific type of cooperation or interorganizational alliance (Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008), and more specifically as "high-end" cooperation, to use Moghadam's (2008a) term. An extensive literature looks at the more general notion of cooperation among militant groups, both in terms

of causes of these relationships (Asal et al., 2016; Bacon, 2018; Balcells et al., 2022; Bapat and Bond, 2012; Phillips, 2019b; Topal, 2024) and their consequences (Asal et al., 2022; Milton and Price, 2020).

Following the logic of interorganizational cooperation or alliances more specifically, affiliation conveys distinct benefits to groups at both ends (Bacon, 2018; Moghadam, 2017). For transnational networks like AQ or IS, local groups could be advantageous during conflict, as they could better fight and operate within their own confinement given their local expertise (Byman, 2015). As for the affiliate group motives, evidence of alliances as means to survival has been advanced in the literature. Alliances could secure financial, training, and logistic support among others, which translate into more recruits and better resilience to counter-terrorism campaigns (Bacon, 2014; Byman, 2015; Cragin et al., 2007; Weeraratne, 2017). Inter-group alliances could then result into higher likelihood of survival and lethality (Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008; Phillips, 2014).

Affiliation with transnational networks of global jihad is expected to have many effects. Pledging allegiance implies committing to global jihad. Affiliation could entail changes in attacks' geographic scope, tactics, and targets. After pledging allegiance to al-Qaeda, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which became al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), started to employ suicide attacks in Algeria and elsewhere (Bencherif, 2021; Filiu, 2009). Pledging allegiance could also result in escalation of violence since groups have to compete for resources with others that are sharing the same ideology (Farrell, 2020). Some studies of individual cases have shown that there are no significant changes in patterns or lethality of post-affiliation attacks (Hsu et al., 2021; Onat et al., 2021). However, these studies only looked at single countries or regions, not global effects. The one previous study to analyse the possible connection between affiliation and violence globally is Farrell's (2020), but it only studies through the year 2001 to 2014, so it is unclear how the ISIS wave of affiliations in 2014 and beyond affected terrorism. Therefore, the consequences of affiliation are still open for research and further investigation.

What Explains Terrorism? There exists abundant literature attributing different causes to terrorism and the different types of violence. Terrorism could be defined as "the premeditated use, or threat of use, of extra-normal violence or brutality to obtain a political objective through intimidation or fear directed at a large audience" (Enders and Sandler, 1995). Terrorism is often viewed as a strategic tool serving multiple purposes as it is a costly signal of resolve (Kydd and

Walter, 2006; Polo and Gleditsch, 2016) that could potentially affect the outcomes of conflict (Fortna, 2015; Thomas, 2014).

Terrorism could be explained by notions of outbidding. Bloom (2004) shows how the motives for suicidal attacks increase, when the competition between the Palestinian groups increases. In another setup, Chenoweth (2010) has developed a link between political competition in democracies and increased likelihood of terrorism. In democracies, she argues, terrorist groups will have to compete against interest groups and organisations. Nemeth (2014) finds that the effect of competition is conditional on the group ideology, which could affect their goals.

On another note, terrorism has traditionally been viewed as the "weapon of the weak" (e.g., Crenshaw, 1981; Kalyvas, 2004; Polo and Gleditsch, 2016; Pape, 2003). Wood (2010) argues that as rebels lose battles, they become more likely to kill civilians. De la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca (2015) argue that the inability to control territory could lead to increase likelihood of terrorism (see also Cronin, 2006).

Other explanations of terrorism rely on structural factors, including regime type and major socio-economic factors. Democracies could be more constrained than autocracies in their measures against terrorism (e.g., Crenshaw, 1981; Li, 2005). Democracies could also be the target of terrorism due to their foreign policies which create enmity with certain terrorist groups (Savun and Phillips, 2009). In a similar line of thought, yet along the economic lines, Crenshaw (1981) argued that the existence of aggrieved groups is one of the major causes of terrorism. Piazza (2011) shows that countries with minority groups that are facing economic discrimination are at higher likelihood of terrorism.

As noted above, some research has looked at how inter-organizational relationships such as alliances might affect terrorism (Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008). The studies on affiliation to AQ or IS in particular have limitations, as discussed. Therefore, the literature paints an incomplete picture of how pledges of allegiance to global terrorist networks might affect terrorism.

4.3 Why is More Terrorism Sought by Local Affiliates?

Alliances and affiliations develop along with specific conditionalities ensuring both sides gain from these collaborations. In the case of a local group affiliating with a transnational jihadist network, the affiliate local group and the network should benefit from this costly association[9].

[9] Alliances entail costs and not merely benefits. New affiliations enforce new loyalties and ideological affinities, which might cost the local group part of their previous popular support. In addition, affiliation with a transnational jihadist network could only increase the counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism measures against the affiliated groups at all levels.

Whether it was at times losses and degenerating capacities of the central hub (see e.g., Mendelsohn, 2016; Piazza and Soules, 2021) or expansive goals or competition between AQ and IS that could drive affiliation, parent organizations benefit from accepting new groups under their banners[10]. Similarly, local affiliating groups are provided with necessary means to secure their survival against various challengers (see e.g., Byman, 2014)

Therefore, it is only logical to expect that such affiliations develop and persist if both ends deliver on their partnership terms. In other words, in return to securing their survival, local groups should participate in achieving the goals and aspirations of the transnational network, using their local expertise and command. Hence, these groups should continue to act in ways that signal their commitment to global jihad, with the different implications. Affiliated groups are now part of larger networks that may have distinct goals, rivals, and allies, both at the state and non-state levels. These networks could also have distinct strategies and tactics to achieve these goals. As a result, pledging allegiance to a transnational jihadist network is expected to have its consequences on the behavior of the local affiliated groups and alter not only their end goals but their means to achieve these ends, making it highly plausible to witness an increase in the use of terrorist tactics at the wake of pledging allegiance to AQ or IS.

Terrorism could be rational and strategic even while serving ideational motivations. It involves weighing the costs of certain tactics against their benefits before choosing to act. Terrorism, by inflicting harm on citizens and states, shows determination, helps coercing the public and secures relative gains over competing groups. Potentially, it serves to enhance the status of the group, which could only translate into more resources and control.

Adopting terrorism to signal commitment and resolve is not a new argument per se (e.g., Hoffman and McCormick, 2004; Kydd and Walter, 2006). Most of the studies however argue that it is often directed towards the state, the group's enemies, and the public they are seeking to control. Yet fewer studies have pointed that signaling could also be directed towards allies. Notably, Farrell (2020) shows that affiliated groups that pledged allegiance to AQ or IS increase their attacks frequency compared to other non-pledged groups. By increasing their level of terrorist activities, local affiliated groups can show to their transnational parent organizations that they can act in their name to achieve set goals. They signal commitment to the global jihadist cause and capacity to act accordingly and hence continue to prove they well deserve the benefits accrued from such affiliations.

[10]Regardless of whether AQ and IS converge or diverge in their immediate strategies and road map, gaining foot locally would help both groups achieving their direct and indirect goals, whether they are first or second on their priority list.

4.4 How Affiliation with Global Networks Relates to Subsequent Terrorism

There are various links along which affiliation with transnational jihadist networks could translate into more terrorist tactics. Affiliated groups benefit from the material and financial resources they are provided with. They also benefit from the new banner under which they are fighting. Finally, they benefit from the consequential socialization and learning processes that develop post-affiliation.

Material Resources Militant groups rely in their survival quest on material and non-material resources. Affiliating with a parent organization that is a transnational jihadist network, provides the local groups with a pool of resources that are of use when engaging in more terrorist tactics. First, money is needed to buy the necessary weapons and sustain the fighters and their families among other necessary activities (Byman, 2012). Cooperation also generally helps with resources mobilization, including personnel and weapons (e.g., Phillips, 2014). Money, weapons, and recruits along with other material resources could serve to substitute for the local support that groups usually depend on to control their local population. Simultaneously, money could serve as means to engage in more terrorism and as a reward for adopting such tactics (see e.g., Byman, 2015). Therefore, one might expect to see an increase in terrorism after a group pledges allegiance to the leader of a transnational jihadist network as this form of alliance would only secure access to necessary resources.

Branding Benefits Once a group pledges allegiance to the leader of transnational jihadist network, AQ or IS, they often change their name to signal this merge: the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Algeria) is now al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb and Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (Egypt) is now Islamic State – Wilayat Sinai. Working under a new banner helps the affiliate groups rebrand themselves which incurs its own benefits. Terrorism at its core is meant to draw attention to different demands. Therefore, when credits are claimed after distinct attacks that are carried out at their local regions, or when a message or any propaganda material are being distributed by the local groups, the new name an affiliate group has taken often helps restoring the expansive influence of the central hub. In relation to this, more media attention could be attributed to such attacks and propaganda outlets, which not only serves the central hub, but also the local affiliates. By drawing further media attention and expanding its reach, the local affiliate groups could gain from winning further recruits and securing additional donations

from the local, national, and international pool of supporters who might be either vouching for local control or global outreach or both simultaneously. Rebranding thus facilitates securing the benefits of the attacks for the local affiliate group as much as the central hub.

Socialization and Learning Processes Apart from direct resources and branding benefits, affiliated groups could learn from the parent organization/network as well. Communication with the leaders of the central organizations and other members of the network that share similar obstacles is of great benefit for the local affiliate groups. There are two sides for the learning and socialization processes. The first is the direct side, which entails learning by information dissemination and sharing expertise with the other groups and members of the network. Research shows that groups learn tactics from each other, and this seems especially to be the case from more powerful and knowledgeable hub groups to the smaller spoke groups (Bacon, 2014; Horowitz, 2010). The other is the indirect side of socialization, following the potential flow of fighters[11] along with other preaching and teaching materials, which shape the cultural and social attitudes and emphasize the global jihadist norms. As a result of both these processes, local groups are more capable and further motivated to carry out more violent attacks. Expert Leah Farrall emphasizes that affiliation does not require a group to give up its own local agenda, "just broaden its focus" (2011, p.132). This suggests that a group might not only attack locally but start to attack globally or regionally as well.

Following this brief discussion, affiliation could be seen as both a motive and a means to engage in increased terrorism tactics. As a result, the following hypothesis could be devised: ***H1: Affiliating with a transnational jihadist network increases an affiliate's use of terrorism.***

4.4.1 Differentiating AQ and IS

At this point, we turn to some differences between the two global jihadist hubs that might help us disentangle some differential effects with regards to the use of terrorism. These differences are rooted in the interrelated concepts: identity and strategy. On the one hand, AQ could be perceived as having a more destabilizing identity, while on the other hand, IS adopts a more controlling identity rooted in territory.

By simply examining the early two fatwas issued by bin Laden in 1996 and 1998 that lay the ground for the future global jihadist agenda, we can highlight the major destabilizing

[11] Migration to the land of Muslims, *hijrah*, is one of the important pillars of global jihad, which dictates the constant mobility of jihadist fighters.

attributes rooted in al-Qaeda's ideology and identity, while the dynamics of ISI/ISIS emergence shed light on the rigid and order-based features of its ideology/identity.

The most important aspect of bin Laden's fatwas that help in understanding the group's mindset, is linking the jihadist message and missions to oppressions and grievances of the Muslims worldwide. Referring to "aggression, inequity and injustice... and atrocities" suffered by Muslims in Palestine, Iraq, Chechnya, Kashmir, Philippines, and elsewhere, the 1996 fatwa calls for fighting against the common enemy, the Americans, and the Israelis (Hoffman, 2006, pp. 168-170). The 1998 fatwa directly calls to kill the Americans and their allies in any country where it is possible, to liberate Palestine and Mecca *(ibid.)*.

Directly linking global jihad to inequalities and grievances shows a level of dissatisfaction with the status-quo and a desire to change it. In addition, the reference to Mecca should not be understated, as it also reflects the core revisionist and destabilizing mindset of bin Laden, a Saudi national. In the first fatwa, he highlights how the Saudi regime lost its legitimacy and calls to expel the polytheists from the Arabian Peninsula (Lawrence, 2005, pp.24-28), while pointing to the global repercussions of the defeat of Islam - in the form of above-mentioned repressions - within the current world order. According to Gerges (2011, p.75), bin Laden's declaration of jihad, was a mean to "level the playing field with the Saudi monarchy" by expelling the American troops. Hence the transnational jihad call should not be differentiated from the need to destabilize local and national governments in favor of AQ and its supporters.

This underlying mindset was translated into two strategic interrelated goals. The first entails fighting the far enemy, as the near enemy was perceived as an instrumental tool to the West and its allies. The second could be thought of as a pragmatic adaptation, yet still rooted in destabilisation guidelines, that seek "local embeddedness within local struggles" in different locations by engaging in "localized insurgencies against local rulers" and positioning themselves within emerging conflicts (Lister, 2017). This would often imply taking sides and engaging violently but also harvesting local support, which is at often a time demanding goal. Relevant affiliates such as AQIM and AQAP managed to adapt narratives and strategies that serve both ideological aspects: the global and the local (Paterson, 2024). The importance of the second goal increased over that of the first since late-2010 with the events of the Arab Spring in the Middle East (Lister, 2017).

While local embeddedness implies adaptation and different contexts would presuppose different adaptation measures, the dual nature of its ideological and strategic behaviour that combines elements of both transnational and local jihad allowed AQ to maintain a relatively

coherent organization where the affiliates goals and strategies do not diverge greatly from the AQ Central's (AQC's), regardless of the loose and decentralized structure and the respective autonomy or dependence of the affiliates, since eventually, they all serve a destabilisation identity rooted in grievances and injustices, local and transnational. At the end, these two goals necessitated postponing the establishment of a Caliphate so that it became a "very-long term goal" (Lister, 2017) for AQ and its affiliates.

IS on the other hand, pursued the aforementioned goal since its inception. Following IS emergence dynamics, and the differences and tensions arising between the original AQ affiliate in Iraq (AQI) and AQC, we can see that the group differed substantively in how it perceives itself, its duties, and capabilities. The merger of al-Tawhid wal-Jihad group led by Zarqawi into AQI was to establish an emirate state in Iraq to be a "proto-caliphate" (Bunzel, 2015), among other objectives. Despite sharing a common goal, AQI did not consult AQC before the declaration of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). The former had previously shown concerns over the strategies adopted by Zarqawi in Iraq, especially the anti-Shia strategies and tactics (Bunzel, 2015; Mendelsohn, 2016)

For Zarqawi, the Shia were the main enemy and obstacle (Mendelsohn, 2016), a mindset that continued with Baghdadi (Weiss and Hassan, 2016, as cited in Byman, 2016b). This rigid sectarianism and the zero-sum game that it entails reflect a purification and pruging aspect where those who do not qualify as real Muslims ought to be fought and punished. Alongside, it reflects an order-based controlling mindset since the Shia were seen as ruling over the military, security appartus and the economy (Mendelsohn, 2016). Together, they give way to an understanding of IS' ideology and identity as deeply rooted into governance and state-building (Lister, 2017) based on true religion. This then helps to explain the importance of territorial control for IS. It also explains some of the extreme levels of violence displayed by the group towards whomever it percieves as enemy, with little regards given to the public and governed populations (Byman, 2016b; Lister, 2017)

The focus on territorial control and the relative disregard to popular support show a streak divergence from AQC strategies highlighted above. In particular, without territory, IS' core idea is challenged. The different Wilayat/provinces could then be just a mean to control more territory. While it is expected that in this case, these provinces would be directly linked to the center and the decision-making would be highly centralized, evidence suggest that IS affiliates are relatively autonomous (see e.g., Warner et al., 2021). It is however hard to say whether they are more or less autonomous than their AQ counterparts.

However, AQ's dual ideological components and subsequent adaptive measures have allowed the center and the affiliates to be coherent in some ways. The same cannot be ascertained when it comes to IS and its affiliates for two reasons. First, local IS affiliates are likely competing with other rebel groups and AQ affiliates over control. In these cases, adopting the same level of brutality as advanced by the core could only reduce the affiliates chances of survival. This leads to the second reason, where the focus on sectarian, ethnic or communal conflicts could be deprioritized in some local contexts. As a result, the tactics of the affiliates might differ from the tactics of IS-core. This could potentially result into less coherent goals and strategies, which could pose a weakness in some organizations. In sum, AQ and its affiliates are expected to behave in a more coherent way than IS and its affiliates. The below section delves deeper into the difference in tactics.

4.4.2 The Unique Effects of AQ Affiliation

AQ's unique nature is likely to have distinct consequences for violence through two of the mechanisms mentioned above – resources and learning – which should be especially valuable for AQ affiliates relative to IS affiliates. Regarding material or financial resources, AQ has since the 1980s been a wealthy patron, and since the late 1990s or early 2000s it has sent hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars at a time to partner groups (Bacon, 2018, pp. 139-140, 182, 209). It also seems to have had a well-established structure for fundraising and financial distribution, including networks of donors, charities, front businesses, and couriers (Comras, 2007). Despite the fact that since 2001, the organization is under a lot of financial pressure (Basile, 2004; Gómez, 2010), al-Qaeda's continued operations and attacks suggest that it still has access to financial resources (Gómez, 2010). In fact, al Qaeda's money has been supporting operations and operatives and their families even post 9/11 (Roth et al., 2004), all suggesting strong patterns of sustainability. That is partially because AQ has managed to develop "an elusive network" and an "unconventional web" (*ibid.*). In addition, AQ still benefits from international banking system, particularly, non-US regulated banks in weak states, in addition to the Islamic banking and the underground hawala system (Basile, 2004).

This ability and dedication to continuously provide affiliates with necessary means, also reflects the level of agreement between the center and the periphery, in terms of goals and strategies. Indeed, some affiliates were in difficult financial situations before affiliation including GSPC (McQuaid et al., 2017) and al-Shabaab (Mendelsohn, 2016). This suggest the prospect of financial support from AQ core. AQ also has a different and more coherent network than

IS, leading to higher performative effectiveness. For example, affiliates such al-Shabaab and [previously] al-Nusra Front, have benefited from access to AQ donors base (Rosen, 2010), and al-Shabaab benefited directly from the provision and influx of money and foreign fighters (Wadhams, 2010) and post-affiliation, Zarqawi benefited from AQ financial and manpower support channels (McQuaid et al., 2017). In addition, affiliates have benefited from direct attacks funding. For instance, in 2007, AQ core provided AQIM with several hundred thousand dollars to carry out the December 2007 suicide bombing at the United Nations building in Algiers (*ibid.*).

IS, on the other hand, is relatively new. It generated a great deal of wealth in 2014 when it seized Iraqi territory, including oil fields. However, its income declined in 2015 and was cut by more than 50% by 2016 after it lost territory (Heißner et al., 2017). This short-lived and inconsistent income stream suggests less ability to fund partners, and certainly less experience doing so. More recently, a 2022 U.S. government report mentions that IS had sent "tens of thousands of dollars" to affiliates in Asia that year, which is a tiny sum compared to what AQ has given (even recently) and compared to affiliates' local income generation (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2022). With less money flowing from the centre to the affiliates, IS-core would not be able to guarantee the same level of coherence across the different provinces as its rival. This increased stress on the affiliates and need to generate revenue are expected to force them to devise their own strategies, which could diverge from the core's.

Regarding socialization and learning, AQ should offer unique benefits through this mechanism as well. Just as AQ's decades of experience and infrastructure have helped with resource transfer, the group is relatively well-equipped to teach and otherwise influence its affiliates in ways that lead to more violence. AQ spent the 1990s building relationships with many militant organizations – according to the CIA, "every noteworthy Islamic extremist group."[12] AQ used its extensive networks and experience to position itself as the ideological leader of the global Salafi jihadist movement throughout the 1990s (Bacon, 2018, pp. 160-164). It developed its affiliate program gradually through the 2000s and 2010s, learning and updating as it went along (Moghadam, 2017, pp. 148-152; Farrall, 2011). AQ also trained countless organizations in camps in Sudan and Afghanistan (Moghadam, 2008a, pp. 65-68). It is credited with spreading the tactic of suicide bombing (Horowitz, 2010; Moghadam, 2008a). In addition, the duality in its ideology referred to earlier that emphasises both global and local destabilisation allows it to adapt more to the local affiliates needs.

IS engaged in some of these activities, but with less experience and different goals. It was

[12]This is cited in Bacon (2018, p.153)

still affiliated with AQ until February 2014 (BBC, 2014). Regarding influence or socialization via affiliates, IS rolled out its affiliation program in a hurried way compared to AQ's years of development (Moghadam, 2017, pp. 148-152). Some groups had declared their support for IS starting in summer 2014 but IS itself did not indicate a formal affiliation system at that time. In late 2014 – perhaps to counter news of battlefield losses – the group announced that it now had affiliates or wilayat in five countries (Stern and Berger, 2015, pp. 180-187). IS signed on affiliates at "breakneck speed" compared to AQ, apparently without as much screening (McCants, 2015, p.141). Furthermore, the connections were qualitatively different from AQ's. AQ affiliated with other groups to have them attack Western targets, the "far enemy" (Moghadam, 2008a, pp. 129-143), along with local targets as well. IS seems to have created its own network for a number of other reasons: to make its brand seem more powerful than AQ, to create "ink spots" (Lister, 2016) of territory that eventually link up into one state, and to give group members bases to escape to if it lost all of its Syrian territory (Byman, 2016a). The IS focus on territorial control and orderly state-building approaches could, again, impose increased stress over the affiliates, as they may not be equipped to govern in the same manner as IS and this could alienate the population. As a result, the AQ network was built carefully over many years to distribute violence, while the IS network was built quickly, without a clear infrastructure, for territorial control and other reasons. This should have implications for how franchises learned and benefited from the network, providing IS affiliates less chances to learn than their AQ counterparts.

Overall, AQ's decades of experience of providing funds and training to terrorist organizations, along with its franchising model focused more on violence than territory, suggests that an AQ affiliation should be especially likely to lead to an increase in violence. Note that we do not suggest that AQ has more control over its affiliates than IS does. Both networks have struggled with principal-agent issues, and control has varied across groups and over time (Bacon, 2017; Byman, 2014; Mendelsohn, 2011). However, in general AQ has had the resources, experience, and infrastructure to help its affiliates become more violent. In addition, AQC and its affiliates are expected to behave in more agreement. This suggests the following hypotheses, more specific than those above:

H2a: Affiliating with AQ increases an affiliate's use of terrorism.

H2b: The relationship between AQ affiliation and an affiliate's use of terrorism is substantively larger than the relationship between IS affiliation and an affiliate's use of terrorism.

4.5 Illustrative Cases: Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram

To further explore the argument, we present two brief case studies, illustrations of the causal mechanisms we describe. The two cases are somewhat similar in terms of multiple potential explanatory variables (geographic region, general ideology, growth), but differ in the outcome. This follows Mill's method of difference, or Przeworski and Teune's (1970) most similar systems design. However, given space constraints, these are meant to be illustrative cases, to indicate the plausibility of the argument. The cases explain why an AQ affiliation contributed to increased attacks by al-Shabaab, and why an IS affiliation did not lead to an increase in violence by Boko Haram.

4.5.1 Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab emerged in civil conflict in Somalia around 2006[13], fighting against the transitional government and an Ethiopian pro-government intervention force. The group was in some ways like many other Islamist organizations, fighting for religious rule (Hansen, 2013). However, al-Shabaab stood out among Somali groups for its more global worldview and connections (Bacon and Muibu, 2019a). Additionally, its views were more extreme than those of some other groups. It banned cinemas and music studios, restricted shops from opening during prayer times, and restricted what journalists could report (Gartenstein-Ross, 2009). This at times led to backlash. In early 2009, for example, residents of the city of Kismayo rioted after al-Shabaab closed a football stadium. Also in early 2009, huge crowds gathered in Merka to celebrate a local saint, despite an al-Shabaab prohibition against doing so (Marchal, 2009, p.397). Throughout 2009, al-Shabaab increasingly focused internationally, broadcasting more and more propaganda abroad (Faber, 2017, p.12).

In 2010, AQ agreed to have al-Shabaab as an affiliate[14]. As soon as the affiliation had begun, AQ started providing guidance on how the group should govern, suggestions about targets, and information about economic opportunities (Bacon and Muibu, 2019a). In addition to providing funding for al-Shabaab – directly, and through other affiliates like AQ in the Arabian Peninsula - AQ encouraged supporters to donate to the group *(ibid.)*.

Starting in 2010, al-Shabaab increased the pace and lethality of its attacks, according to the Global Terrorism Database. Its July 2010 suicide attack – a classic AQ tactic – on soccer

[13]There are debates about the precise year the group was formed, with more sources indicating 2006, but others saying 2004 (Marchal, 2009, p.383).

[14]AQ wanted to keep this secret and did so until February 2012.

fans in Kamapala, Uganda, killed more than 70 people. This was al-Shabaab's first foreign attack. Two months later, al-Shabaab killed more than 30 people in an attack on a hotel in Mogadishu. In 2012, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which has been fighting al-Shabaab since 2007, along with the Somalian military forces and allied Kenyan and Ethiopian forces , managed to expel the group from the capital and other major Southern cities and ports (Congressional Research Service, 2023). However, the group has shown resilience rooted in adaptation capabilities in the face of a local context ridden with evolving challenges (Anzalone, 2016; Anzolone, 2017). In fact, in Mogadishu, the group still conducts frequent deadly attacks. Among others, in 2017, a truck bombing killed over 500 people; in 2019, a suicide bomber killed the city's mayor and in late 2022, the group killed over 120 people in car bombings outside the education ministry (Congressional Research Service, 2023). AMISOM has been described as "the deadliest peace operation in modern history" with al Shabaab killing hundreds of troops in complex base assaults. While the AU does not report casualty figures, per a senior AU official over 3,500 AU troops have been killed since 2007 (*ibid.*). The group had rarely carried out such high-profile, multiple-dozen-fatality attacks before 2010. Figure 4.1 clearly shows the increase in attacks starting in 2010 – when the group carried out fewer than 100 attacks per year – to totals of at least 300 in every subsequent year.

The increased attacks, however, coincided with an increased capacity to govern and provide diverse services to the local population, along with taxation (Bacon and Muibu, 2019b; Yeşiltaş and Shihundu, 2024). This highlights the focus on local aspects by al-Shabaab, which al-Qaeda does not oppose or interfere with (Bacon and Muibu, 2019b), ensuring its affiliates maintain some aspects of local legitimacy. This in turn allows for alignment in goals and coherence between the local affiliates and the central hub and hence more attacks, along the lines of a dual ideology that focuses on both global and local aspects of jihad.

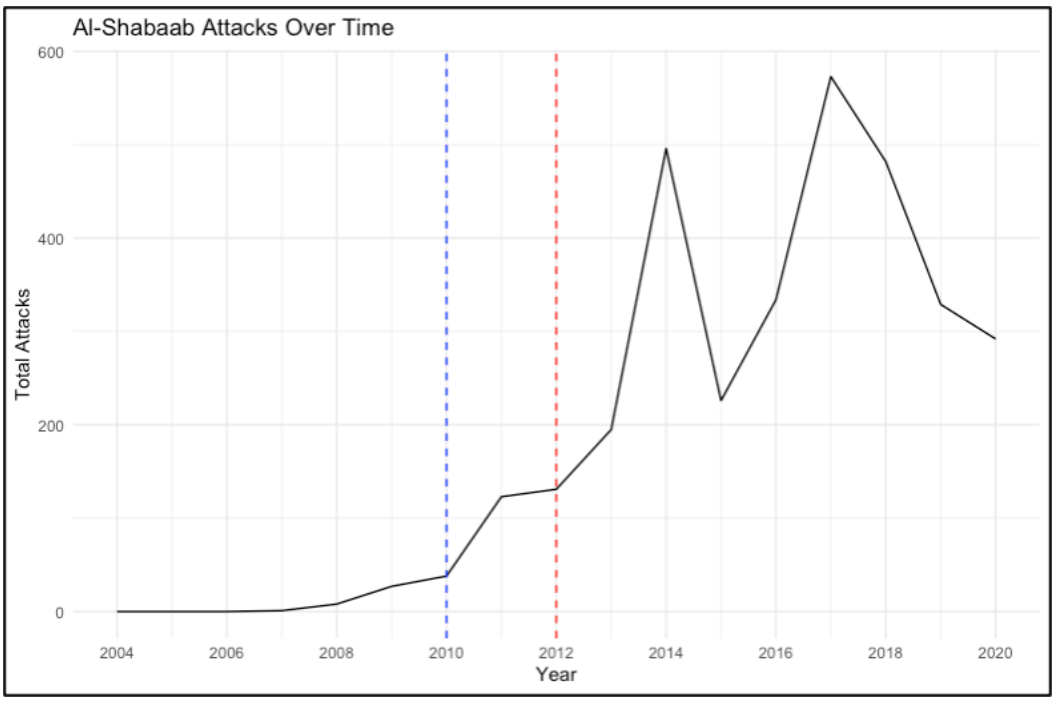

Figure 4.1: Al-Shabaab Attacks and AQ affiliation

Vertical blue line = AQ secretly agrees to affiliate with al-Shabaab.

Vertical red line = AQ publicizes the affiliation.

There are a variety of reasons al-Shabaab's attack count increased starting in 2010, when it affiliated with AQ. Part of the explanation could be a self-reinforcing situation where the group's global outlook alienated local populations, which led the group to be more outwardly focused. To impress AQ, and because al-Shabaab seemed to depend less on local support, it seemed content to carry out massive violence in its region. Funding and other support from AQ probably made this more possible, especially when the local financial situation worsened (Anzalone, 2011). However, the continued governance capacity of al-Shabaab in different social and economic aspects could have provided the group with even more resources, and hence allowing it to continue its attacks; and it is possible that AQ affiliation made these aspects more prevalent. In addition to its governance attributes, al-Shabaab enjoys a "well-run propaganda machine" and media outlets that are run by both al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda (Warner and Weiss, 2017). In addition, upon closer examination, one could argue that in response to counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency measures and operations, the group has moved closer to al-Qaeda. This is evident by the group's use of guerrilla warfare tactics as advocated by Bin Laden (1996); and soft targets attacks (Anzalone, 2016), along with transnational attacks in countries that has dispatched troops to AMISOM (International Crisis Group, 2018). In addition, the

group has prioritized expelling foreign forces (Bacon, 2022). By employing a rhetoric that frames these forces as "crusader enemies", al-Shabaab again moved closer to al-Qaeda's narratives. Together, these factors along with others, resulted in al-Shabaab being able to demonstrate resilience (Anzalone, 2016; Anzolone, 2017) and even overturn the rising threat of its rival: Islamic State-Somalia (Warner and Weiss, 2017). It is difficult to know the counter-factual, what would have happened if al-Shabaab would not have affiliated with AQ, but the affiliation seems to have encouraged more violence in terms of willingness and resources.

4.5.2 Boko Haram and the Islamic State West African Province

Boko Haram[15] was founded in 2002 in north-eastern Nigeria as a conservative Islamist sect opposed to Western culture and education that became more violent around 2009. After suffering counter-terrorism defeats the same year, group leaders apparently retreated to AQIM territory to regroup and train (Zenn, 2017, p.177). Starting in 2011, Boko Haram started a suicide attack campaign, apparently with some support from AQIM and al-Shabaab, and its body count increased through the 2010s *(ibid.)*. However, note that Boko Haram was never an AQ affiliate, and the cooperation did not last long, so it perhaps did not receive as much support as it would have if it were an AQ affiliate. In fact, by the end of 2011, Boko Haram had killed many innocent civilians, which resulted in a level of dissatisfaction among its members and the dissatisfied faction splintered to form another group, Ansaru, in January 2012, with the blessing of al-Qaeda (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2019; Thurston, 2018).

By 2014, Boko Haram was causing more casualties than IS was in Iraq and Syria, and Boko Haram was reaching the peak of its territorial control (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2019). However, by early 2015, Boko Harm has started to lose some of its territories *(ibid.)*. In March 2015, as IS was sweeping across Syrian and Iraqi territory, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the group, and the pledge was soon accepted, potentially driven by the earlier success of the group to gain territory. However, internal disagreements about civilian targeting and leadership continued to cause Boko Haram to fragment (Onuoha, 2016), and by August 2016, Shekau was demoted by the Islamic State (Zenn, 2020). The affiliated group had renamed itself Islamic State West African Province, but a rump segment had left with its original leader and continued to use the original group name (Warner and Lizzo, 2023). The lack of coherence in this case, between the affiliate and the central hub, interestingly works in the opposite direction as the one hypothesized earlier where Boko Haram was the group disregarding the local population

[15]While the group is generally referred to as Boko Haram, its full name is Jama'atu Ahl is Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad.

and not the Islamic State. IS was not approving the excessive use of violence by Shekau and his followers, even though this aligns with its potential disregard to winning the "hearts and minds" of the population, which however opposes Ansaru's directive, as evident by their communications (Kassim and Nwankpa, 2019).

The IS affiliation could have theoretically helped ISWAP carry out more violence, but apparently did not. There is little evidence that the group received continuous adequate financial support from IS, apart from a "presumed transfer of money" of an estimated $1,500,000 in January 2017 and another "vague" Western Union transfer in 2016 to militants who were assumed to join ISWAP (Warner et al., 2021). Boko Haram faction attacks – including those by ISWAP – generally decreased after the 2015 pledge, as can be seen in Figure 4.2[16].

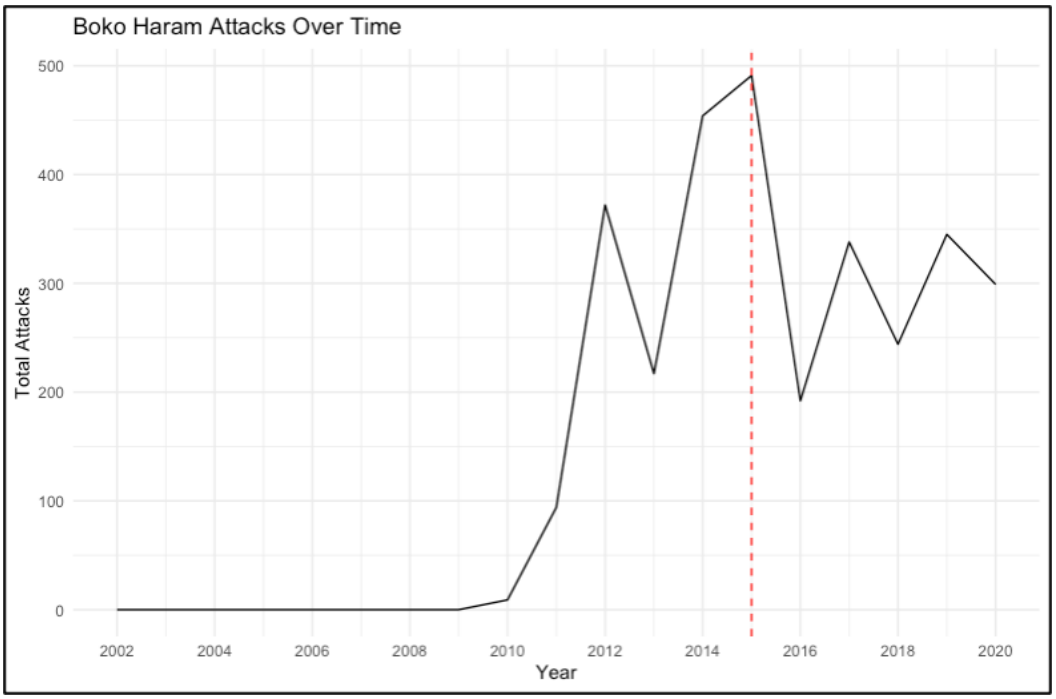

Figure 4.2: Boko Haram Attacks and IS affiliation
Attacks by both ISWAP and (renewed) Boko Haram shown.
Vertical red line = year of affiliation.

Why was IS affiliation followed by a decrease in overall violence? It might not have been due to lack of resources. "ISIS has supported ISWAP financially and operationally, and shaped its leadership and policy," argues one scholar (Bukarti, 2022, p.10). However, perhaps surprisingly, IS seems to have had a moderating effect on ISWAP. It "quickly evolved into the

[16]The GTD does not distinguish between ISWAP and (the fragment group) Boko Haram. This and other sources refer to the entities as Boko Haram factions, or both together simply as Boko Haram (Onuoha, 2016; Warner and Lizzo, 2023). The figure indicates that Boko Haram attacks stayed below their affiliation-year levels until at least 2021.

more capable and disciplined force, with a much more sophisticated "hearts and minds" policy towards local communities," argues one analyst (Burke, 2021). This is consistent with an issue that led to the fragmentation: IS replaced the original leader of Boko Haram at least in part because they thought Boko Haram's violence had been excessive. The IS goal of trying to hold territory (which required some local restraint), as opposed to the AQ goal of increasing violence including foreign attacks, seems to have had implications for violence in this case. More broadly, IS did not seem to provide the resources or encouragement to Boko Haram that AQ affiliates often received.

4.6 Research design

To carry out our quantitative analysis, we use an originally coded independent variable of terrorist network affiliation combined with the Extended Data on Terrorist Groups dataset (EDTG) (Hou et al., 2020). Models include 95 Islamist groups from 1998 to 2020. We only include Islamist groups because other groups in the EDTG do not have a reasonable chance of ever affiliating with a global hub[17]. We start in 1998 because that is when al-Qaeda launched its global network[18]. The EDTG data end in 2016, but because this would not give us many years to analyse IS affiliations, we extend the data to 2020 – the last full year for which there is a terrorism data in the Global Terrorism Database[19]. The unit of analysis is the group-year.

Dependent Variable The dependent variable, the use of terrorism, is measured three ways. The primary measure is *Total Attacks*, which is a count variable indicating the number of attacks carried out by a group in a given year. The second dependent variable is *Total Deaths*, indicating the resulting fatalities associated with a group in the year. Finally, we use *Suicide Attacks*, which is a binary variable indicating if a group engaged in suicide attacks in the year. All these variables are from the Global Terrorism Database, and they are included in the EDTG.

Explanatory Variables The main explanatory variable is *Affiliation (lag)*, a binary variable coded 1 for all years that a group is an affiliate. We code all years of affiliation, and not only

[17]We exclude al Qaeda Central and IS for the same reason. In addition, we exclude al-Qaeda in Iraq from the analysis despite being a former affiliate. This decision is motivated by three main reasons. This decision is motivated by two main reasons. The first reason is that this affiliation lasted for a short time, mainly from 2004 to 2006. This could mean that the support channels and networks may not have fully developed. The second reason has to do with the nature of the shift taken by AQI becoming ISIS. By going through this evolution, AQI became the central network and the strategic goals changed from simple local insurgency to a global jihadist hub. This changes the dynamics of support provision and ISIS becomes the provider instead of the receiver. Furthermore, if we had included AQI, it would have likely strengthened our point as the group only became stronger post-2004. We also exclude Shiite groups because AQ and IS are Sunni networks.

[18]If we start in a later year, for example 2004, results are robust.

[19]See below for details

the first year, because we view affiliation as a process involving resource transfers and learning, and not a discrete event. This variable is coded 1 only if there is evidence that the group has pledged formal allegiance to either al-Qaeda or IS at a certain year and it is widely referred to as an affiliate. There are 19 groups in our sample coded as affiliates, about 20 percent of the sample. Models use a one-year lagged version because we expect it to take time for affiliation to influence attacks, because our hypothesis is about subsequent outcomes. To code this variable, we consulted online news articles, academic articles, and resources such as the Mapping Militants Project (Elbagir et al., 2015; Mapping Militant Organizations, 2018). This is a measure of sworn affiliation, accepted by the hub group, and not lower-level cooperation (Moghadam, 2017) or a pledge of allegiance that is not accepted. Beyond the general affiliation measure, we also code *Affiliation AQ (lag)* and *Affiliation IS (lag)*. There are 14 groups coded as IS affiliates and 5 coded as AQ affiliates.

Control Variables Models also include the following group-level control variables, all of which come from the EDTG. *Number of groups*, a count of the groups in the country, is included because there is some evidence that intergroup competition leads to more violence. *Number of bases* is included because it is a measure for the territorial reach of the group, indicating one dimension of group capacity. *Group size* is an estimate of the number of members of the group, where 0=less than 100, 1=100-999, 2=1,000 to 9,999, and 3=10,000 or greater. This is an alternate dimension of group capacity, which could lead to more violence[20]. *Duration* is the age of the group, in years, and younger groups might use more violence to establish their reputation.

Models also include state-level control variables, all of which come from the Quality of Government project. The V-Dem *liberal democracy regime type* measure is included because some studies find that democratic countries experience more terrorism (Chenoweth, 2013). *Population (log)* is included because groups might survive more easily, and carry out more violence, in more populous countries (Coggins, 2015a). Finally, models include a measure of *gross domestic product per capita*, which is also a logarithm due to extreme values. This and the population measure come from the World Development indicators. Country wealth can indicate state capacity, and more capable states could better deter dissident violence (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004).

[20]When extending the EDTG data from ending in 2016 to ending in 2020, we were unable to gather new data on three variables: number of bases, number of EDTG groups in country, and group size. The values for these groups do not vary much over time. We use their 2016 value for 2017-2020. If models are estimated on a sample ending in 2016, results are substantively the same.

Estimator We use negative binomial regression for models where counts of terrorist attacks or fatalities are the outcome of interest. This is consistent with other research on terrorism, as attack or fatality data is substantially over-dispersed, so a linear model is inappropriate (Hardin and Hilbe, 2014). For robustness checks discussed below, we also use zero-inflated negative binomial regressions[21]. For the models with the dichotomous measure of suicide attacks, we use logistic regression. Results with ordinary least squares return similar results. In all models, we cluster standard errors robustly by terrorist group. Because of concerns about potential reverse causality, we lag explanatory variables one year.

4.7 Results

Table 4.1 shows the results for the first hypothesis. Three models are used to demonstrate the three measures of the dependent variable: attacks, fatalities, and suicide attacks. Across all three models, the key explanatory variable *Affiliate (lag)* is statistically significant and positively signed, suggesting that groups that affiliate with AQ or IS carry out more attacks in the subsequent year than groups that do not affiliate. This suggests support for the first hypothesis. Control variable results are discussed below.

The use of marginal effects on Model 1 suggests that an average non-affiliated Islamist group will carry out three attacks per year, but a group that has affiliated with AQ or IS will carry out more than nine attacks per year. This is an almost three-fold increase. Fatalities show a similar increase. An average non-affiliated Islamist group is predicted to kill about 10 people per year, while an AQ or IS affiliate is predicated to kill more than 41 people. With regards to suicide attacks, non-affiliate Islamist groups have only about a 7% likelihood of carrying out suicide attacks in a given year, while affiliates have a 22% likelihood of using suicide attacks in a given year.

Table 4.2 tests hypotheses 2a and 2b, about AQ affiliation having an independent effect on violence, and the idea that the relationship involving AQ affiliation should be stronger than the relationship involving IS affiliation. In all three models of Table 4.2 the coefficient on *Affiliation AQ (lag)* is statistically significant and positively signed, suggesting that groups that affiliate with AQ subsequently carry out more terrorist attacks. This is consistent with H2a. Regarding IS, in the models where fatalities are the outcome and where suicide attacks are the outcome, the coefficient on *Affiliation IS (lag)* is statistically insignificant. The coefficient is

[21] We do not use zero-inflated models as our primary models because we do not have a theoretical expectation about what factors should be included in the first stage (what explains zeroes), and the first stage can substantially affect the ultimate results (Desmarais and Harden, 2013).

marginally significant (p<.10) in the model with attacks as the outcome. Overall, there is not much support for a relationship between IS affiliation and subsequent violence. Additionally, a Wald test suggests there is a statistically significant difference between the coefficients on the AQ and IS variables. Together, this suggests support for Hypothesis 2b. AQ affiliation, compared to IS affiliation, seems to be more related to subsequent group violence.

Table 4.1: Primary Results, with three DV Measures

	Model 1 Total attacks	Model 2 Total deaths	Model 3 Suicide attacks
Affiliate (lag)	1.021***	1.393***	1.119***
	(0.355)	(0.385)	(0.352)
Total Attacks (lag)	0.021**		
	(0.009)		
Total Deaths (lag)		0.003**	
		(0.002)	
Suicide Attacks (lag)			2.923***
			(0.275)
No. Groups	0.001	0.000	0.012
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.013)
No. Bases	−0.139	0.061	0.122
	(0.093)	(0.104)	(0.082)
Size	0.534***	0.809***	0.439***
	(0.202)	(0.286)	(0.166)
Duration	−0.011	−0.046***	−0.022
	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Democracy	1.509	0.848	0.271
	(0.952)	(1.012)	(0.851)
Population (log)	−0.009	0.118	−0.083
	(0.134)	(0.111)	(0.096)
GDP per capita (log)	0.047	−0.205	−0.137
	(0.166)	(0.187)	(0.180)
Constant	−0.120	0.821	−0.877
	(3.123)	(2.853)	(2.585)
N	1141	1141	1141
(Groups)	(95)	(95)	(95)

***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.1. Standard errors are robustly clustered by militant group

Table 4.2: Comparing AQ and IS affiliation

	Model 4 Total attacks	Model 5 Total deaths	Model 6 Suicide attacks
IS affiliate (lag)	0.874*	0.771	0.589
	(0.453)	(0.471)	(0.461)
AQ affiliate (lag)	1.193**	1.937***	1.681***
	(0.486)	(0.533)	(0.540)
Total attacks (lag)	0.020**		
	(0.009)		
Total deaths (lag)		0.003**	
		(0.001)	
Suicide attacks (lag)			2.880***
			(0.281)
No. groups	0.001	−0.000	0.012
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.013)
No. bases	−0.135	0.068	0.134
	(0.094)	(0.101)	(0.085)
Size	0.527***	0.774***	0.442***
	(0.203)	(0.287)	(0.166)
Duration	−0.011	−0.046***	−0.022
	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Democracy	1.617	1.217	0.634
	(1.027)	(1.084)	(0.869)
Population (log)	−0.005	0.130	−0.073
	(0.135)	(0.111)	(0.098)
GDP per capita (log)	0.034	−0.250	−0.178
	(0.172)	(0.191)	(0.182)
Constant	−0.113	0.918	−0.841
	(3.112)	(2.806)	(2.649)
N	1141	1141	1141
(Groups)	(95)	(95)	(95)

***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.1. Standard errors are robustly clustered by militant group

Substantive significance from the models in Table 4.2 also shows us crucial differences between AQ affiliation and IS affiliation. An Islamist group affiliating with AQ is estimated to go from three attacks per year to more than 11 attacks per year, nearly quadrupling. Meanwhile, IS affiliation is associated with 8 attacks in subsequent years. Regarding attack fatalities, AQ affiliation is associated with a change from 11 to 73 fatalities in a subsequent year. As for suicide

terrorism, AQ affiliates, compared to non-affiliates, are predicted to have a nearly quadruple increase in their likelihood of using suicide terrorism, from a 10% to 37%. IS affiliates are not predicted to have a statistically significant increase in attack fatalities or in their likelihood of carrying out suicide attacks. Overall, these findings suggest substantial support for Hypothesis 2b.

Regarding control variables in the tables, one consistent finding is the relationship between group size and all outcomes of interest. Larger groups are more likely to carry out more attacks, kill more people through their attacks, and use suicide terrorism. This is generally consistent with the literature (e.g, Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008). Additionally, the results on the duration variable in the lethality models, are significant and negatively signed in models 2 and 5, suggesting that younger groups are more likely to be more lethal. This is expected. Lagged outcome variables are also statistically significant, which is consistent with expectations. A group's violence and use of suicide terrorism in one year is associated with its use the following year. The lack of robust significance on control variables is perhaps because most models of terrorism (or fatalities or suicide terrorism) use broader samples of terrorist groups, while we only examine Islamist groups. Some arguments about terrorism generally might not apply to Islamist terrorist groups in particular.

Robustness checks The results of Tables 4.1 and 4.2 are robust to many changes to model specification, some of which we show in Appendix C. For example, if zero-inflated negative binomial regressions are used instead of negative binomial regressions, results are robust[22]. If linear regression is used instead of logistic regression for the models with the dichotomous suicide attack dependent variable, results are robust. If more parsimonious models are used, excluding state-level explanatory variables or other explanatory variables, results are substantively the same[23]. If we include the AQ and IS affiliation explanatory variables separately instead of together in Table 4.2, results are robust. However, we prefer to include our full set of explanatory variables to reduce concerns about omitted variable bias, and because goodness-of-fit tests suggest the fit of our models declines with explanatory variables removed.

Some readers might be curious about whether affiliation is perhaps explained by ex ante group violence, or if for other reasons the correlation we see does not imply the causal

[22]The coefficient on *Affiliate IS (lag)* loses all statistical significance, instead of being marginally significant, in Model 5

[23]The coefficient for *Affiliate IS (lag)* sometimes gains statistical significance with fewer control variables, but it always has a lower level of statistical significance than *Affiliate AQ (lag)*, and almost always less substantive significance.

mechanisms suggested in our theory section. However, we have some reason to believe affiliation is not driven by violence. First, we control for lagged group violence in the models shown above. Second, if we instead use a measure of cumulative previous group violence, results hold. Third, Chapter 2 included attacks as an explanatory variable in models of affiliation, and the violence measures were often statistically insignificant. Overall, it does not seem that previous violence is driving the relationship between affiliation and subsequent violence.

4.8 Concluding Remarks

Terrorism for the past 25 years has been shaped fundamentally by two global networks: AQ and IS. Dozens of groups around the world, some of the most lethal, have been affiliates of these organizations. Has their membership in the network contributed to affiliates' violence? And is there a difference between a group becoming a part of the AQ network, as opposed to the IS network? Extant research had not yet sufficiently addressed these questions, especially the latter.

Examining Islamist terrorist organizations through 2016, we found that groups that affiliated with AQ or IS subsequently carried out more violence than non-affiliates. This is consistent with some research, which has mostly looked at the AQ network (Farrell, 2020). Going further, we disaggregated the two networks, arguing that AQ affiliation should be especially violent-encouraging due to the group's resources and experience, and the goals behind its affiliation system. Empirically, we found that the apparent connection between affiliation and violence seems to be mostly driven by AQ. We do not find a robust relationship between IS affiliation and subsequent violence.

Our findings have important implications for the study of terrorism and counter-terrorism. The finding that affiliation generally leads to more terrorism contributes to research suggesting the importance of militant group relationships (Bacon, 2018; Gade et al., 2019). The disaggregated results, however, point to important heterogeneity in terrorist networks. Some work has highlighted the variation in terrorist cooperation types (Moghadam, 2017), but more work is needed on this topic. More practically, the results suggest concern has been warranted about growing terrorist networks – affiliation is not simply brand-boosting and might not be a sign of weakness. Policy practitioners should continue their vigilance about global terrorist networks, but perhaps consider how to allocate resources to particular types of networks. Affiliations formed quickly, as they were with IS, might not be as threatening as affiliations developed over years.

Future research can build on the findings in a number of ways. First, our quantitative comparison of AQ and IS suggests important differences between the two networks along characteristics and strategies. Most work has analysed these networks in isolation (Mendelsohn, 2016), and a smaller set of studies has compared AQ and IS qualitatively (Mueller and Stewart, 2016; Raineri and Martini, 2017), but more comparison is needed that incorporates differences along the ideology, organizational structure, leadership, and other features of the two hubs. Second, what can differences between the affiliation processes of AQ and IS tell us about cooperation among militant organizations more broadly? To what extent are lessons from terrorist group cooperation applicable for alliances among rebel organizations (Christia, 2012)? Most of the work on cooperation among militant groups has looked at cooperation as either existing or not, without examining the nuance in types of relationships. Scholars can advance our understanding of these topics by carrying out more work on how distinct types of interorganizational relationships might lead to different consequences. Overall, armed groups frequently team up for violence, but some types of connections are more deadly than others.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This dissertation analyzes the causes, processes and consequences of local Islamist militants joining transnational networks of jihad: Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. In Chapter 2, I examined why local Islamist militants affiliate with global jihad. I provided an explanation rooted into the organizational legitimacy-seeking rationale. I argued that when local groups suffer from legitimacy deficit at the domestic and local level, they turn to global jihadist networks to substitute for said deficit at the transnational level. Using newly coded variable, I show that when groups have low local legitimacy, proxied by their young age and their engagement in kidnapping, they exhibit higher likelihood of affiliation. When they have high local legitimacy, proxied by their social services provision, they exhibit lower likelihood of affiliation.

In Chapter 3, I analyzed the process of affiliation, and in particular the communicative strategies employed by recent affiliate and the accompanying rhetorical shift. Using novel text corpus and quantitative unsupervised text scaling, I show that a group's rhetoric shifts from being politically focused to being religiously focused upon affiliation. This serves to signal commitment to the parent organization. It also serves to signal devotion, accommodation, and altruism to the local population. I thus maintain that this rhetoric shift is used by the local affiliates to further legitimize the process of affiliation to secure the sustainability of mobilization and recruitment along the process.

Lastly, in Chapter 4, the dissertation provided an analysis of the implications of affiliations on local groups' use of violence. Together with Brian J. Phillips, we combined illustrative case studies and quantitative analysis to suggest that affiliation provides the resources and incentives for local groups to conduct more attacks. We also show a distinctive effect of al-Qaeda compared to the Islamic State, where only affiliation with the former is associated with more violence. We attribute the finding to difference in network types, in particular their strategies and identities.

The dissertation synthesizes many literature strands together. For instance, it combines literature on militants' cooperation and alliances (Akcinaroglu, 2012; Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008; Bacon, 2014, 2018; Blair et al., 2022; Gade et al., 2019; Horowitz and Potter, 2014; Phillips, 2014; Topal, 2024) with literature on rebel governance (Cunningham et al., 2021; Loyle, 2021; Loyle et al., 2019; McWeeney and Cunningham, 2019; Podder, 2017). This helps with a more

comprehensive understanding for conflict dynamics. Both alliances and governance strategies are integral parts of conflict development, and it is of considerable added value to analyze them simultaneously to obtain a better grasp onto how they could affect each other.

In addition, this dissertation combines rhetoric analysis of jihadist groups (Berger, 2015; Hobbs, 2005; Kavrakis, 2023; Lakomy, 2021; Loidolt, 2011; Milton, 2016; Page et al., 2011; Stout, 2009; Rogan, 2010; Soriano, 2009; Termeer and Duyvesteyn, 2022) along with alliances. With most of the literature analyzing the rhetoric of either AQ or IS and not their affiliates, this contributes to a better understanding of the affiliation process itself, how it develops and how it affects the recruitment and mobilization strategies of the local groups. Such analysis provides valuable addition to existing literature on alliances and affiliation. In addition, it helps weighing the nature of ideational factors involved in the process as well.

Furthermore, the dissertation combines literature on the causes of terrorism (Crenshaw, 1981; Kalyvas, 2004; Kydd and Walter, 2006; Pape, 2003; Polo and Gleditsch, 2016), with alliances, showing the extent of affiliation consequences on a very important aspect: the use of violence. By integrating the role of interorganizational group networks, this dissertation further contextualizes terrorism within existing conflict dynamics. In addition, by transporting this synergy to the Islamist militants' space, this dissertation attempts to show both the specific and general attributes of affiliation with global jihad.

This dissertation has also several policy implications. First, for counter-terrorism policies, I highlight the importance of local context and show how local Islamist militants constitute an important channel for the expansion of global jihad. Chapter 2 findings show that groups with lower legitimacy are more likely to affiliate. This helps with predicting the next steps of militant groups. Monitoring the level of legitimacy at the local level can tell researchers and policymakers about the prospect of conflict transnationalization. Governments should then try to disrupt the international ties of low-legitimacy groups.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the communicative strategies of affiliated groups, to show how they shift to ensure continued support and legitimacy. Stakeholders should pay close attention to the rhetoric of Islamist groups and the shift towards a more religious rhetoric as this could indicate a group sending different messages to the hub and the local population, to maintain its legitimacy. Concurrently, they should work on the collaborative development of narratives that could counter further radicalization of the prospect members.

In Chapter 4, we analyze the consequences of affiliation, which helps in understanding the level of threat posed by the different affiliates in different contexts, showing that it would not

be the same for all affiliates, but rather depending on the type of network the group affiliated with. Countering al-Qaeda affiliates might require different strategies than countering the Islamic State affiliates. More resources should be dedicated to the former. In addition, countering al-Qaeda efforts need to include disruption of its financial resources and networks, which might require strong international collaboration.

This dissertation, while making several contributions at different levels as highlighted in Chapter 1, has also different limitations. First, at the theoretical level, this dissertation provides explanations based at the organizational level of Islamist militant groups. This approach could have some analytical limitations. To start, it assumes a more-or-less rigid structure of jihadist groups, which could mask the fluid nature of jihadist formal and informal networks and their high adaptive capacities. In addition, it focuses less on the macro-level structural factors that accompany the changes in behavior of Islamist militants. Furthermore, it does not include micro-level changes, such as individual preferences and leadership changes. It could thus be seen as overly simplifying the different factors contributing to affiliation.

Second, at the empirical level, there are various limitations to the generalizability of the findings of this dissertation. For instance, the analysis of Chapter 2 ends at the year 2016 and that of Chapter 4 ends at the year 2020. This could pose challenges to the external validity especially since there are major recent developments (post-2020) with many of the affiliates in different locations such as African Sahel and Af-Pak Region in Asia. Relatedly, the analysis of Chapter 3 is limited to the communicative strategies of one case study, Boko Haram. This also could pose a limit on the generalizability of the findings given the local particularities of the case and the rapidly changing contexts within which Islamist militants and other armed groups operate. It is therefore advisable to be aware of the limited scope of this part of the study and the degree to which it depends on the context.

Third, there are limitations to the analysis and methodologies used, imposed by the data availability, especially with refined group-level data. Often, there is no noticeable variation among the data over time which increases the challenges of identifying changes in trends. In addition, the data is mostly only recorded at the binary or categorical level, masking a lot of information and variance.

To address some of these limitations and more, there are various future research venues to explore. A starting point would be delving more into the interactions at the organizational level and other analytical levels, the national/macro, and the individual/micro levels. By showing how the factors at the different levels interact and affect the outcome of interest, affiliation, we

can have a more comprehensive theory that synthesize the different motives and factors. For example, it would be valuable to understand how low/high legitimacy at the local level affect the individual motivation to join a group in the affiliation process. Similarly, it would be interesting to examine how counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency strategies, affect the legitimacy level of Islamist militants and the prospects of affiliation.

In addition, more nuances could be added to the current analysis. For instance, I identified three proxies for legitimacy seeking. In my analysis, I assume that the three proxies equally matter. However, it would be valuable to identify the governance related attributed that matter the most for legitimacy of militant groups. Similarly, when studying the consequences of affiliation on the use of violence, differentiating between the type of targets, civilian vs. military, could be of added value in more accurately depicting the differentiated level of threat posed by these affiliates.

With respect to the data, there could be important improvements with further data collection. Further data on social services provision and other types of militant governance would greatly enhance the analysis. In addition, survey experiments could help in collecting data on the level of support gathered by Islamist militant groups before, during and after the affiliation. Similarly, collecting more textual data for the communication of the different groups and conducting a comparative analysis would be of great help to a more systematic analysis of the communicative strategies of the groups upon affiliation.

In addition, there are various research questions that could build on this dissertation. First, what explains the decision of the central hubs to accept the pledge of allegiance of the affiliates? Is the criterion of al-Qaeda in this regard, similar to that of the Islamic State? Second, how do the costs of affiliation factor in the calculations of the local affiliates who seek to join global jihad? Also, how is the popular support and legitimacy of the local Islamist militant affected by affiliation? Furthermore, we can build on this dissertation by asking if the communicative strategies and rhetorical shifts shown in Chapter 3 can still be observed in other cases. Fourth, the implications of affiliation with regards to various outcomes of interest are still underexplored. For instance, the effect of affiliation on illicit drug trafficking could shed further light on the terror-crime nexus. In addition, the effect of affiliation on evolving peace processes should shed light on the dynamics of conflict, including its longevity, and conflict resolution.

Lastly, I would like to end with some open questions. Considering this dissertation and the analysis it provides, should we still perceive jihadist groups and conflict to be different from other armed groups and conflicts? Is jihadist violence still an exceptional form of violence?

Should the same questions and analytical tools used to study jihadists be applied to other armed groups? Can the study of jihadist dynamics also inform questions related to the far right or other forms of violent extremism? Can it contribute to enhancing de-radicalization efforts? In other words, how can we use insights from the study of terrorism for advancing approaches to contemporary conflict resolution in a world in which an increasing number of conflicts are linked to jihadist groups?

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Appendix A: Supplementary Material for Chapter 2

A.1 Data Description

In this part of the appendix, I describe the dataset and the distribution of the affiliate groups. Figure A.1 shows the total groups by country with Pakistan having 22 Islamist militant groups.

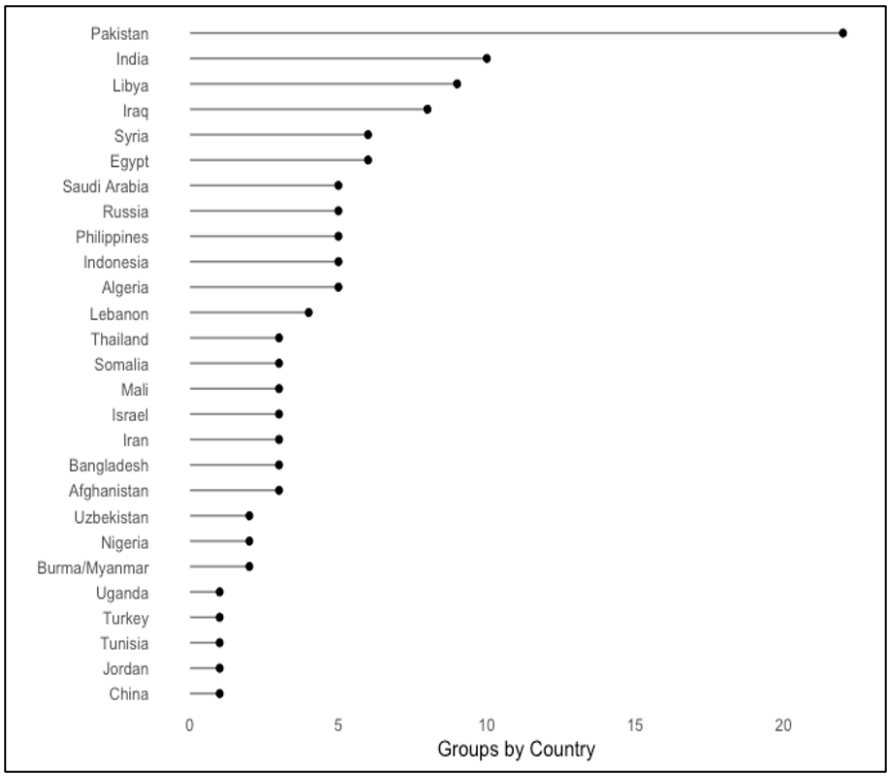

Figure A.1: Groups by Country

Figure A.2 shows the distribution of militant groups by year, highlighting the years 2001 and 2014, as important years in the development of global jihad, with the 9/11 attacks and the declaration of the Islamic Caliphate in Iraq and the Levant.

Figure A.3 shows the distribution of the affiliate groups relative to the total groups while Figure A.4 shows the total and cumulative counts of affiliate groups by year, with year 2014 as the year that had the most affiliate counts per year in the dataset.

Table A.1 show the list of affiliate groups in the dataset. Note that Al-Nusrah Front dissociated itself from al-Qaeda later in 2016. Therefore, it is considered active till the end year of the sample.

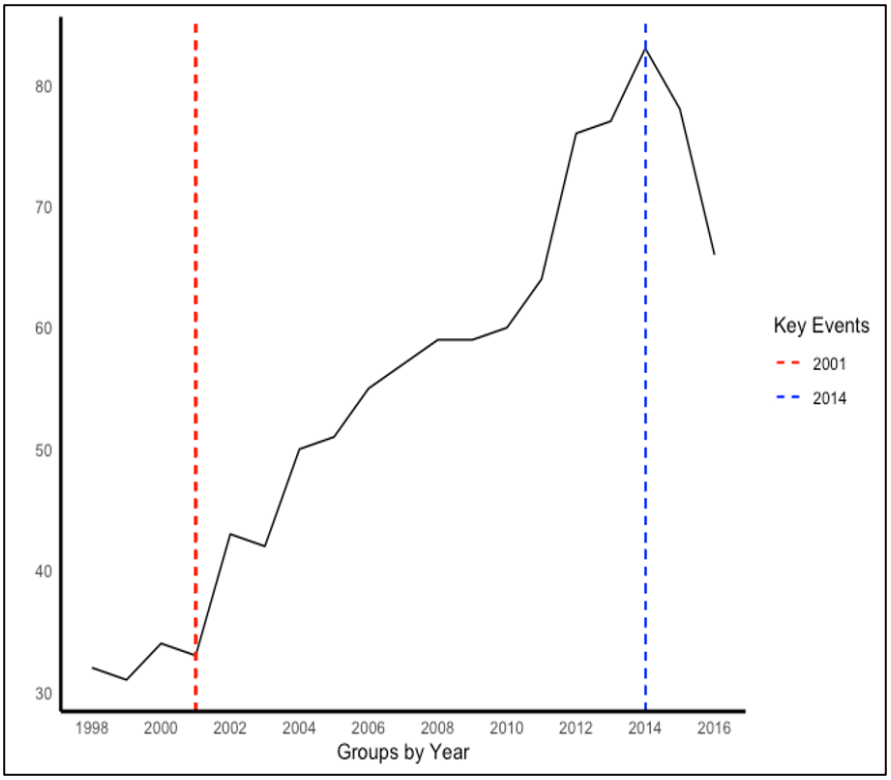

Figure A.2: Total Groups by Year

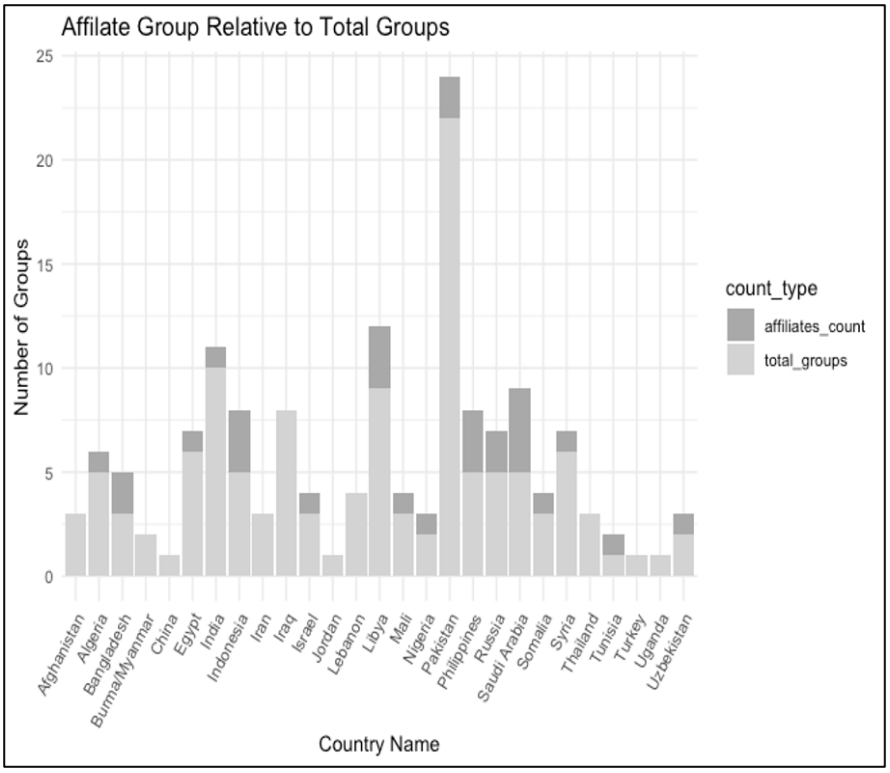

Figure A.3: Affiliate Groups Counts Relative to Total Groups by Country

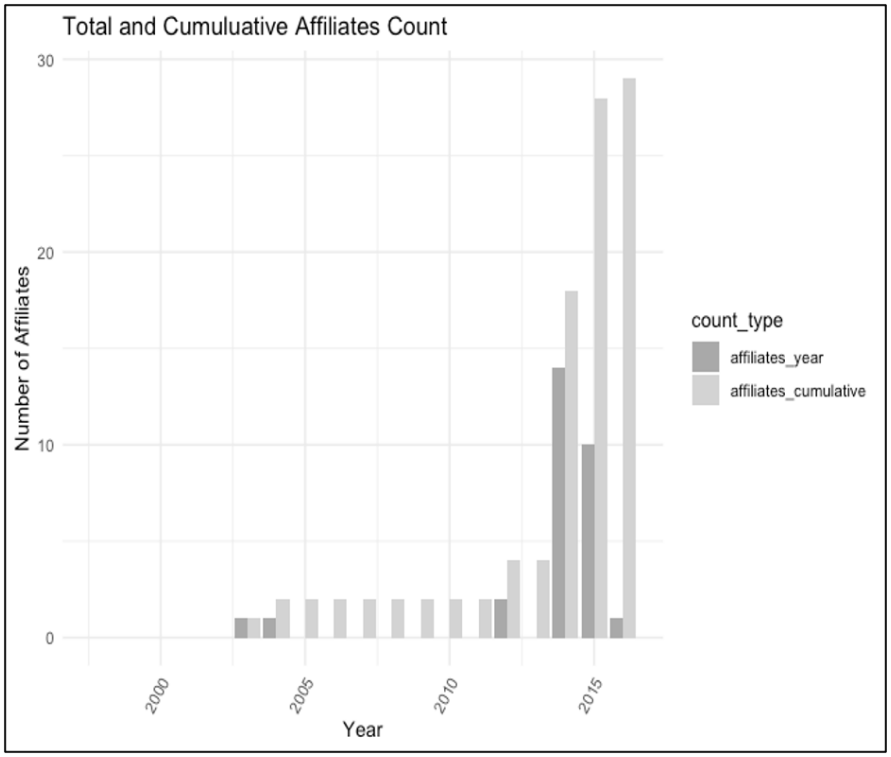

Figure A.4: Total and Cumulative Counts of Affiliate Groups by Year

Table A.1: List of Affiliates in Dataset

Group Name	**Country of Origin**	**Year of (seeking) Affiliation**	**Affiliated With**
Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)	Philippines	2014	IS
Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent	India	2014	Al-Qaeda
Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)	Saudi Arabia	2004	Al-Qaeda
Salafist Group for Preaching and Fighting (GSPC) / Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb	Algeria	2006	Al-Qaeda
Al-Nusrah Front	Syria	2012	Al-Qaeda
Ansar al-Khilafa	Philippines	2014	IS
Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Ansar Jerusalem)/Sinai Province of the Islamic State	Egypt	2014	IS
Bahrain Province of the Islamic State	Saudi Arabia	2015	IS
Barqa Province of the Islamic State	Libya	2014	IS
Boko Haram	Nigeria	2014	IS
Caucasus Province of the Islamic State	Russia	2015	IS
Dagestani Shari'ah Jamat	Russia	2015	IS
Fezzan Province of the Islamic State	Libya	2015	IS
Hijaz Province of the Islamic State	Saudi Arabia	2015	IS
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan	Uzbekistan	2014	IS
Islamic State in Bangladesh	Bangladesh	2014	IS
Islamic State in Greater Sahara	Mali	2015	IS
Jabha East Africa	Somalia	2016	IS
Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)	Bangladesh	2015	IS
Jamaah Ansharut Daulah	Indonesia	2015	IS
Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT)	Indonesia	2014	IS
Jundallah (Pakistan)	Pakistan	2014	IS
Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State	Pakistan	2014	IS
Maute Group	Philippines	2015	IS
Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT)	Indonesia	2014	IS
Najd Province of the Islamic State	Saudi Arabia	2015	IS
Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade	Tunisia	2012	Al-Qaeda
Sheikh Omar Hadid Brigade	West Bank/Gaza	2015	IS
Tripoli Province of the Islamic State	Libya	2014	IS

A.2 Robustness Checks

This section includes the following robustness checks of the primary table (Table 2.2). Table A.2 shows the results of the regression models using the bivariate models. Table A.3 shows the respective full models. It is worth noting that since the full models include proxies of the same concept, legitimacy – in both directions- issues of multi-collinearity might rise, hence, the lack of statistical significance in some of the models should be interpreted with caution. Table A.4 shows the results of the model using the formal allegiance date as data of affiliation. Table A.5 shows the results using a time trend variable instead of year fixed effects; and Table A.6 uses decades variables. In Table A.7, I code social services only from the BAAD 2.0 dataset; Table A.8 shows the results with casualties instead of attacks and finally Table A.9 shows the results with the sample excluding the born affiliates groups.

Table A.2: Bivariate Models

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Social Services	-1.875***		
	(0.492)		
Kidnapping		1.650***	
		(0.417)	
Young Age			2.197***
			(0.442)
Intercept	-2.801***	-3.837***	-4.610***
	(0.243)	(0.237)	(0.354)
AIC	271.369	278.905	259.750
BIC	281.382	288.919	269.764
Log Likelihood	-133.684	-137.453	-127.875
Deviance	267.369	274.905	255.750
Observations	1104	1104	1104

***p $<$ 0.01; **p $<$ 0.05; *p $<$ 0.1

Table A.3: Key Variables Included Together, Although They Proxy Same Concept

	Model 1	**Model 2(TSCS)**	**Model 3(CS)**
Social Services	-1.300***	-0.655	-1.351
	(0.477)	(0.759)	(1.058)
Kidnapping	1.515***	0.718	2.553**
	(0.438)	(0.692)	(1.281)
Young Age	1.674***	2.426***	17.964***
	(0.428)	(0.747)	(1.517)
Group Peak Size		0.217	-0.434
		(0.352)	(0.414)
Attacks (log)		0.079	0.133
		(0.114)	(0.143)
NGroups (log)		-0.452	0.368
		(0.328)	(0.464)
%Transn. Attacks		-0.070	-1.226
		(1.153)	(1.346)
Exclusion proxies		-3.136*	-1.728
		(1.765)	(2.076)
Ethnic Frac. (2000)		-2.197	-2.860
		(1.361)	(1.947)
Liberal Democracy		0.902	1.913
		(1.787)	(2.360)
Population (log)		-0.091	-0.369
		(0.243)	(0.390)
GDP (log)		-0.096	0.224
		(0.334)	(0.665)
Intercept	-4.145***	-17.188***	-12.632
	(0.411)	(6.414)	(12.940)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	No
AIC	243.299	192.586	84.462
BIC	263.326	346.239	117.934
Log Likelihood	-117.649	-65.293	-29.231
Deviance	235.299	130.586	58.462
Num. obs.	1104	1050	97

***p $<$ 0.01; **p $<$ 0.05; *p $<$ 0.1

Table A.4: Models with Affiliate Coded as Pledge of Formal Allegiance Date

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Social Services		-2.364***		
		(0.842)		
Kidnapping			1.285*	
			(0.718)	
Young Age				3.265***
				(0.795)
Group Peak Size	-0.636	-0.214	-0.729*	0.071
	(0.407)	(0.336)	(0.416)	(0.365)
Attacks (log)	0.168**	0.190**	0.094	0.106
	(0.070)	(0.079)	(0.084)	(0.094)
NGroups (log)	-0.492	-0.676**	-0.489	-0.348
	(0.334)	(0.326)	(0.339)	(0.342)
%Transn. Attacks	0.218	-0.099	-0.122	0.293
	(0.953)	(1.022)	(0.874)	(1.262)
Exclusion proxies	-3.376**	-3.009*	-3.245**	-4.513***
	(1.654)	(1.556)	(1.602)	(1.733)
Ethnic Frac. (2000)	-1.410	-0.965	-1.962	-2.756*
	(1.402)	(1.306)	(1.367)	(1.435)
Liberal Democracy	0.024	1.089	0.108	0.758
	(2.010)	(1.888)	(2.042)	(1.701)
Population (log)	-0.292	-0.241	-0.279	-0.165
	(0.222)	(0.217)	(0.234)	(0.218)
GDP (log)	-0.146	-0.085	-0.143	-0.191
	(0.342)	(0.341)	(0.343)	(0.344)
Intercept	-10.577	-11.321	-10.878*	-15.122**
	(6.453)	(7.191)	(6.420)	(6.190)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	209.722	196.963	207.893	179.899
BIC	348.611	340.813	351.743	323.749
Log Likelihood	-76.861	-69.482	-74.946	-60.949
Deviance	153.722	138.963	149.893	121.899
Observations	1054	1054	1054	1054

***p $<$ 0.01; **p $<$ 0.05; *p $<$ 0.1

Table A.5: Models with Time Trend

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Social Services	-1.810***		
	(0.620)		
Kidnapping		1.375**	
		(0.612)	
Young Age			2.706***
			(0.628)
Group Peak Size	-0.072	-0.493	0.223
	(0.307)	(0.358)	(0.302)
Attacks (log)	0.198***	0.113	0.134*
	(0.075)	(0.081)	(0.081)
NGroups (log)	-0.630**	-0.432	-0.364
	(0.291)	(0.312)	(0.264)
%Transn. Attacks	0.189	0.025	0.309
	(0.857)	(0.832)	(1.027)
Exclusion proxies	-2.429	-2.596	-3.385**
	(1.585)	(1.718)	(1.677)
Ethnic Frac. (2000)	-0.479	-1.144	-1.911
	(1.221)	(1.289)	(1.305)
Liberal Democracy	0.428	-0.721	0.132
	(1.804)	(1.995)	(1.557)
Population (log)	-0.144	-0.165	-0.061
	(0.192)	(0.210)	(0.188)
GDP (log)	0.113	0.143	0.048
	(0.296)	(0.330)	(0.284)
Time Trend	0.303***	0.326***	0.394***
	(0.096)	(0.092)	(0.109)
Intercept	-2.646	-2.799	-6.992
	(5.973)	(6.662)	(6.020)
AIC	213.567	220.330	196.639
BIC	273.046	279.808	256.118
Log Likelihood	-94.784	-98.165	-86.320
Deviance	189.567	196.330	172.639
Observations	1050	1050	1050

***p $<$ 0.01; **p $<$ 0.05; *p $<$ 0.1

Table A.6: Models with Decade Dummies

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Social Services	-1.787***		
	(0.584)		
Kidnapping		1.370**	
		(0.594)	
Young Age			2.525***
			(0.561)
Group Peak Size	-0.206	-0.605*	0.007
	(0.290)	(0.349)	(0.277)
Attacks (log)	0.229***	0.147*	0.182**
	(0.069)	(0.076)	(0.072)
NGroups (log)	-0.489*	-0.309	-0.237
	(0.269)	(0.291)	(0.244)
%Transn. Attacks	0.020	-0.121	-0.027
	(0.820)	(0.789)	(0.962)
Exclusion proxies	-2.098	-2.355	-2.853*
	(1.460)	(1.627)	(1.499)
Ethnic Frac. (2000)	-0.362	-0.915	-1.606
	(1.147)	(1.233)	(1.170)
Liberal Democracy	-0.109	-1.409	-0.595
	(1.727)	(1.838)	(1.410)
Population (log)	-0.154	-0.154	-0.069
	(0.192)	(0.211)	(0.189)
GDP (log)	0.165	0.231	0.150
	(0.292)	(0.330)	(0.284)
decade2000	13.553***	13.888***	13.526***
	(0.777)	(0.714)	(0.827)
decade2010	15.848***	16.470***	16.640***
	(0.463)	(0.464)	(0.490)
Intercept	-13.777**	-14.800**	-17.620***
	(5.499)	(6.448)	(5.566)
AIC	221.316	228.193	205.937
BIC	285.751	292.628	270.372
Log Likelihood	-97.658	-101.097	-89.969
Deviance	195.316	202.193	179.937
Observations	1050	1050	1050

***p $<$ 0.01; **p $<$ 0.05; *p $<$ 0.1

Table A.7: Models with BAAD 2.0 Social Services Data only

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Social Services	-2.119*		
	(1.230)		
Kidnapping		1.259*	
		(0.690)	
Young Age			3.131***
			(0.615)
Group Peak Size	-0.132	-0.464	0.269
	(0.313)	(0.358)	(0.370)
Attacks (log)	0.193***	0.067	0.092
	(0.074)	(0.081)	(0.097)
NGroups (log)	-0.623*	-0.508*	-0.447
	(0.321)	(0.302)	(0.323)
%Transn. Attacks	-0.785	-0.611	-0.401
	(1.271)	(1.129)	(1.659)
Exclusion proxies	-2.250	-2.028	-3.445*
	(1.625)	(1.645)	(1.956)
Ethnic Frac. (2000)	-0.557	-1.504	-2.088
	(1.321)	(1.269)	(1.406)
Liberal Democracy	1.741	0.741	1.104
	(2.161)	(1.997)	(1.777)
Population (log)	-0.300	-0.187	-0.048
	(0.233)	(0.234)	(0.288)
GDP (log)	-0.117	-0.120	-0.128
	(0.352)	(0.354)	(0.402)
Intercept	-12.407*	-13.992**	-19.917***
	(6.849)	(6.381)	(6.956)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	196.299	199.236	173.272
BIC	336.581	339.519	313.554
Log Likelihood	-69.149	-70.618	-57.636
Deviance	138.299	141.236	115.272
Observations	932	932	932

***p $<$ 0.01; **p $<$ 0.05; *p $<$ 0.1

Table A.8: Models with Casualties instead of Attacks

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Social Services	-1.946***		
	(0.687)		
Kidnapping		1.305**	
		(0.624)	
Young Age			2.886***
			(0.676)
Group Peak Size	-0.016	-0.456	0.222
	(0.297)	(0.355)	(0.341)
Casualties (log)	0.137**	0.066	0.098
	(0.063)	(0.065)	(0.078)
NGroups (log)	-0.685**	-0.507*	-0.433
	(0.301)	(0.308)	(0.301)
%Transn. Attacks	-0.028	-0.082	0.110
	(1.063)	(0.925)	(1.278)
Exclusion proxies	-2.129	-2.382	-3.375*
	(1.481)	(1.560)	(1.739)
Ethnic Frac. (2000)	-0.597	-1.532	-2.050
	(1.195)	(1.305)	(1.307)
Liberal Democracy	1.382	0.185	0.981
	(1.923)	(1.952)	(1.737)
Population (log)	-0.167	-0.195	-0.090
	(0.210)	(0.225)	(0.222)
GDP (log)	0.017	-0.039	-0.098
	(0.328)	(0.342)	(0.324)
Intercept	-14.932**	-14.302**	-17.948***
	(6.448)	(6.946)	(6.322)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	206.091	214.085	190.018
BIC	349.830	357.824	333.758
Log Likelihood	-74.045	-78.042	-66.009
Deviance	148.091	156.085	132.018
Observations	1050	1050	1050

***p $<$ 0.01; **p $<$ 0.05; *p $<$ 0.1

Table A.9: Models without "born affiliates"

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Social Services	-1.815**		
	(0.710)		
Kidnapping		1.427*	
		(0.771)	
Young Age			2.507***
			(0.683)
Group Peak Size	0.219	-0.152	0.336
	(0.302)	(0.337)	(0.325)
Attacks (log)	0.122	0.007	0.095
	(0.089)	(0.099)	(0.093)
NGroups (log)	-0.848**	-0.668**	-0.606**
	(0.338)	(0.313)	(0.301)
%Transn. Attacks	-0.173	-0.056	-0.228
	(1.303)	(1.178)	(1.488)
Exclusion proxies	-1.265	-0.989	-2.539
	(1.609)	(1.750)	(1.885)
Ethnic Frac. (2000)	-1.255	-1.961	-2.371*
	(1.187)	(1.306)	(1.241)
Liberal Democracy	2.868	2.216	2.115
	(2.156)	(2.220)	(2.069)
Population (log)	-0.147	-0.166	-0.079
	(0.206)	(0.217)	(0.224)
GDP (log)	-0.275	-0.328	-0.319
	(0.345)	(0.375)	(0.324)
Intercept	-13.859**	-14.134**	-16.624**
	(6.218)	(7.180)	(6.495)
Year Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
AIC	186.153	191.988	177.077
BIC	329.699	335.534	320.623
Log Likelihood	-64.076	-66.994	-59.539
Deviance	128.153	133.988	119.077
Observations	1043	1043	1043

***p $<$ 0.01; **p $<$ 0.05; *p $<$ 0.1

Appendix B: Supplementary Material for Chapter 3

B.1 Political and Religious Dictionary

In this section, I present the list of words of both religious and political concepts used in the dictionary. As can be seen from Table B.1, the political terms include aspects related to local and transnational politics and anti-West sentiment. This includes leaders names, country names, and ohter words that are specifically related to Nigerian local politics such as Fodio, JTF. Religious terms include words associated with notions of worship, righteousness and sins, names of religious figures and scholars, aspects of belief and disbelief, unity and divisions and so on.

Table B.1: Political and Religious Dictionary Terms

Political Terms	**Religious Terms**
Laden, Osama, Caliphate, Caliph, weapons, bombings, attack, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Yemen, Israel, America, France, Africa, Russia, Europe, England, Pakistan, Mali, Cameroon, Niger, India, Rome, Somalia, Qaeda, Obama, Hollande, Déby, Baghdadi, Chad, Clinton, Hebdo, Libya, Rome, Flush, SSS, Abuja, Baga, Borno, Buhari, Jonathan, Maiduguri, Chibock, Lagos, Zamfara, Sambisa, Fodio, JTF, elections, government, constitution, man-made, democracy, anthem, education, colonialism, allegiance, Wadud, Droukdel, Filistini, Pakistan, VOA, PDP, Azzam, Moon, Biya, Amnesty, Netanyahu, Ansaru, Gwoza, Sudan, barricades, pledge, Fulani, Sokoto, national, international, Qutb, Banna, Yobe	Taymiyyah, Wahhab, guidance, scholar, hadith, Hanifa, Hanafi, Hanbal, belief, ruling, polytheism, faith, monotheism, falsehood, truth, righteousness, deeds, heresy, innovation, oneness, doctrine, approach, Sufi, Izala, Shiites, Kharijites, takfir, kufr, excommunication, ignorance, Ummah, division, quarrels, path, religion, Islam, Muslim, sins, Satan, Mecca, Medina, steadfast, predecessors, Salafi, sect, refuge, migration, book, method, worship, verse, Judgement, blasphemy, Day, serenity, servant, punishment, mercy, Prophet, Sharia, evil, interpretation, master, guardian, praise, faithful, devil, misguidance, infidel, apostate, Eid, Ramadan, Paradise, narrated, imam, doubt

B.2 Additional Analysis

In the following parts, I show the analysis when conducted for the corpus of 1) Boko Haram, and 2) ISWAP individually.

B.2.1 Boko Haram Corpus

The below graph, in Figure B.1 shows that from pre- to post- affiliation, the rhetoric scaling changes from positive to negative values. To have a better understanding of what positive and negative entails, I conduct a face validity exercise displaying the political and religious dictionary terms, as shown in Figure B.2. From the figure, the positive values are seen to be associated with the political terms, and the negative values are associated with the religious terms. This again provides evidence for my hypothesis, as a shift occurs from before to after affiliation, towards a more religiously focused rhetoric. However, the demarcation between the red and blue words is not as strong as the case with both corpuses combined as shown in main text. This could imply the emergence of another latent dimension that could be more accurately depicted the rhetoric shift. However, worthy to note that the demarcation is never perfect and to judge whether there is a need of incorporating additional dimensions into the analysis could be subjective. The t-test between the means of pre- and post- affiliation yields a p-value of 4.234e-05

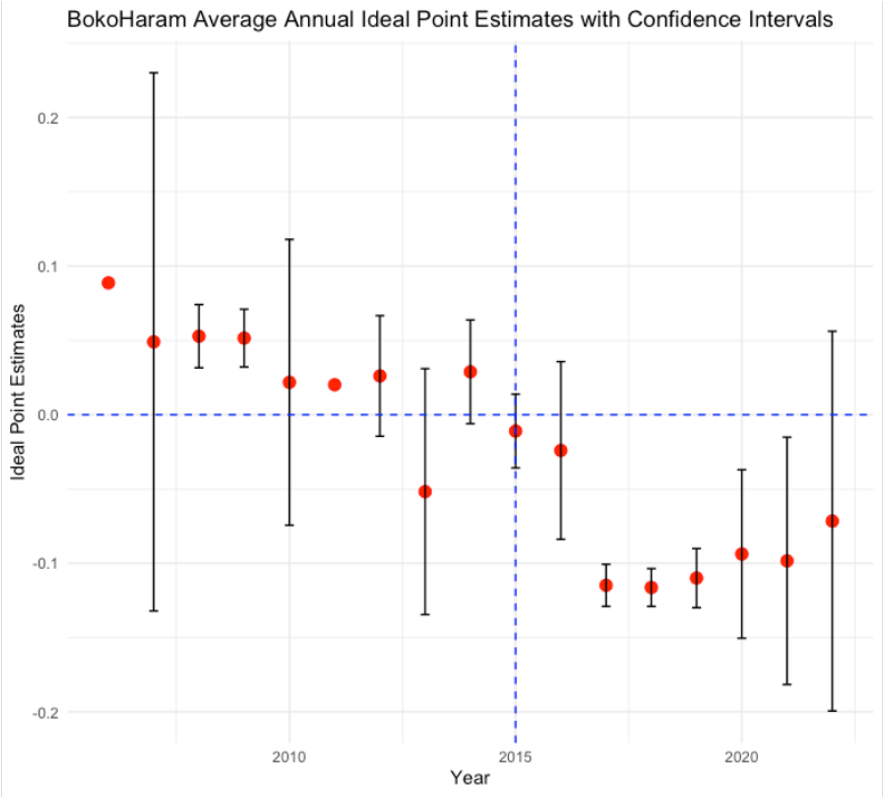

Figure B.1: Average Ideal Point Estimates of Boko Haram Corpus Only with Confidence Intervals

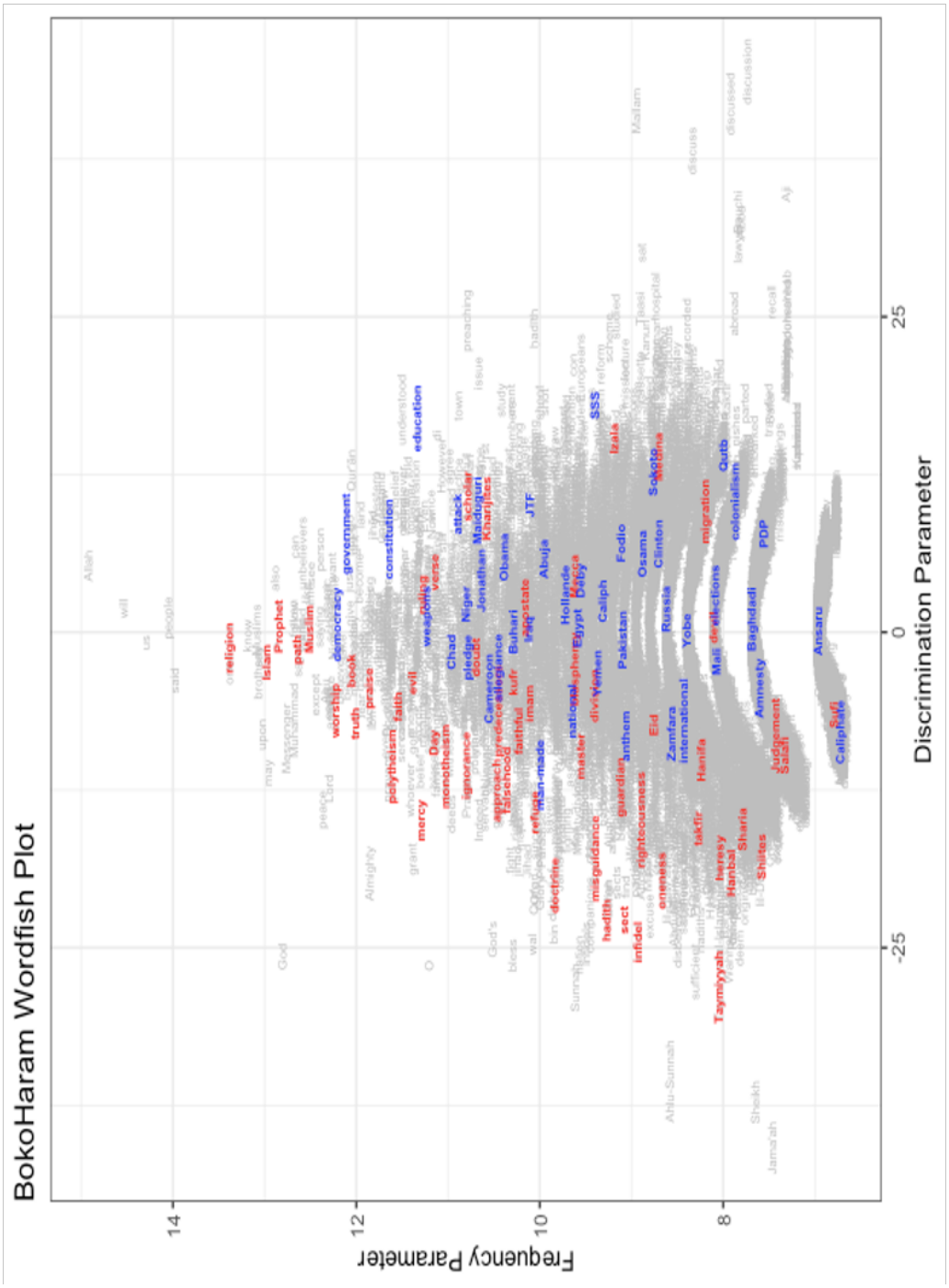

Figure B.2: Wordfish Distribution of Boko Haram Tokens Only

B.2.2 ISWAP Corpus

I conduct the same exercise for the corpus of ISWAP, composed of mainly Boko Haram corpus before the affiliation, and ISWAP corpus afterwards. I obtain the estimation as shown in Figure B.3 The results display a similar pattern as Figure B.1, with positive pre affiliation values, and negative post-affiliation values. The face validity exercise in Figure B.4, also shows that blue political words are associated with positive values and red religious words are associated with negative values, showing that the rhetoric shifts from politically to religiously focused upon affiliation, again with less than perfect demarcation between the religious and political terms. The t-test between the means of pre- and post- affiliation yields a p-value of 1.981e-06.

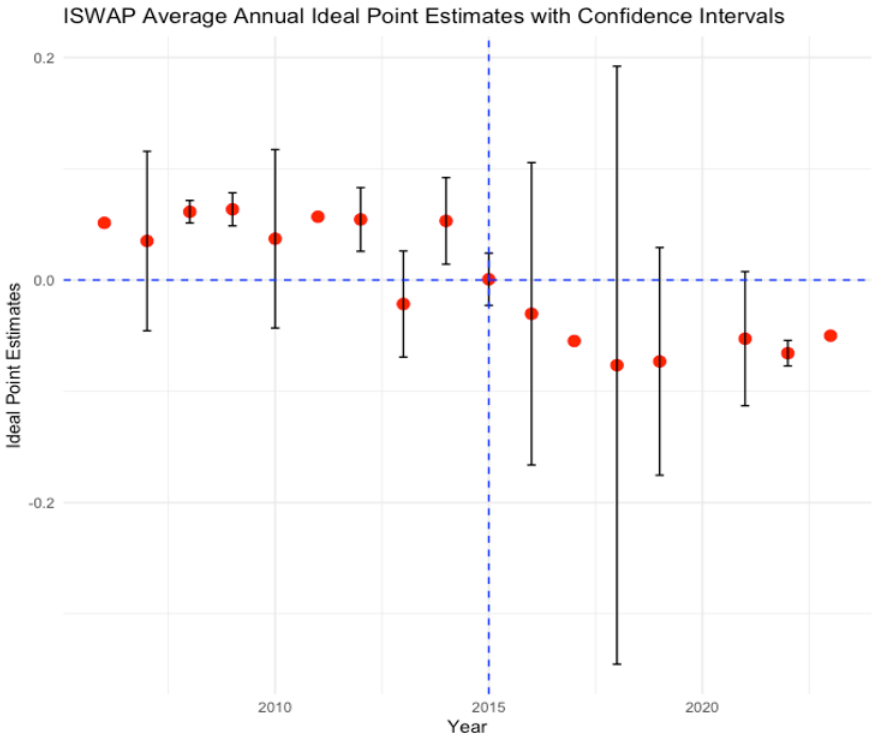

Figure B.3: Average Ideal Point Estimates of ISWAP Corpus Only with Confidence Intervals

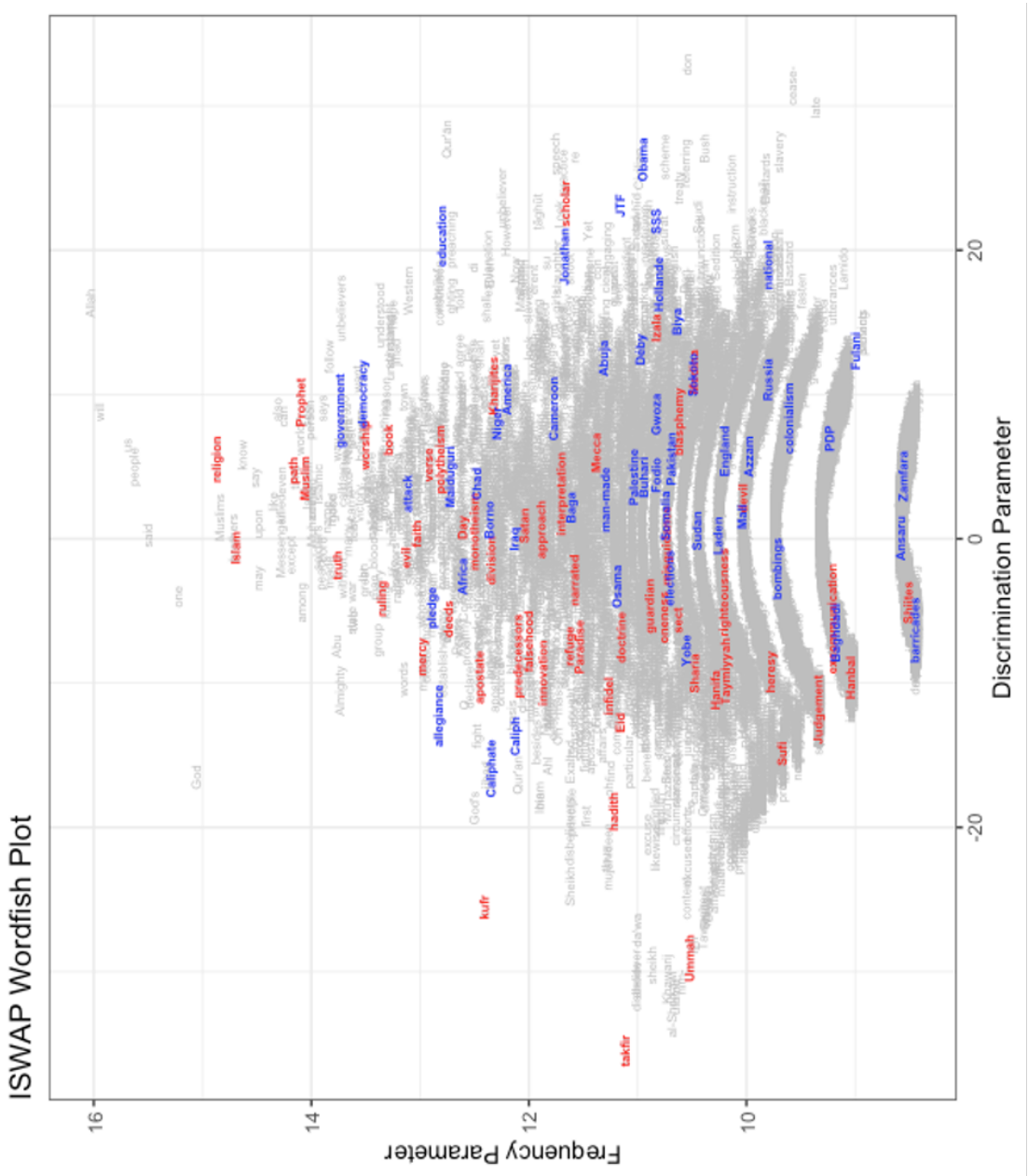

Figure B.4: Wordfish Distribution of ISWAP Tokens Only

Appendix C: Supplementary Material for Chapter 4

C.1 Robustness Checks

Table C.1: Replicating Table 4.1 with Zero-Inflated and OLS models

	Model C1 **Total attacks** **Zero-inflated**	**Model C2** **Total deaths** **Zero-inflated**	**Model C3** **Suicide attacks** **OLS**
Affiliate (lag)	1.122***	1.651***	0.143***
	(0.385)	(0.469)	(0.051)
Total Attacks (lag)	0.019**		
	(0.008)		
Total Deaths (lag)		0.003**	
		(0.001)	
Suicide Attacks (lag)			0.535***
			(0.051)
No. Groups	0.002	−0.001	0.001
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.001)
No. Bases	−0.151*	0.039	0.010
	(0.086)	(0.084)	(0.007)
Size	0.432**	0.647**	0.042**
	(0.185)	(0.264)	(0.016)
Duration	−0.015	−0.050***	−0.002
	(0.010)	(0.015)	(0.001)
Democracy	2.384***	2.149**	−0.008
	(0.887)	(0.880)	(0.072)
Population (log)	0.048	0.176*	−0.007
	(0.131)	(0.103)	(0.008)
GDP per capita (log)	−0.011	−0.315	−0.010
	(0.178)	(0.197)	(0.017)
Constant	−0.636	0.718	0.205
	(3.195)	(2.869)	(0.231)
Inflation models			
Size	−2.274***	−2.882***	
	(0.779)	(0.943)	
Democracy	13.983***	18.466	
	(4.748)	(17.277)	
GDP per capita (log)	−3.295***	−4.445**	
	(0.999)	(2.253)	
Constant	18.120**	25.788***	
	(8.193)	(9.362)	
N	1141	1141	1141
(Groups)	(95)	(95)	(95)

***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.1. Standard errors are robustly clustered by militant group

Table C.2: Replicating Table 4.2 with Zero-Inflated and OLS models

	Model 4 **Total attacks** **Zero-inflated**	**Model 5** **Total deaths** **Zero-inflated**	**Model 6** **Suicide attacks** **OLS**
IS affiliate (lag)	0.710	0.567	0.075
	(0.450)	(0.466)	(0.061)
AQ affiliate (lag)	1.527***	2.410***	0.227***
	(0.535)	(0.597)	(0.073)
Total attacks (lag)	0.019**		
	(0.008)		
Total deaths (lag)		0.003**	
		(0.001)	
Suicide attacks (lag)			0.526***
			(0.053)
No. Groups	0.002	−0.001	0.001
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.001)
No. Bases	−0.141	0.054	0.011
	(0.088)	(0.082)	(0.007)
Size	0.411**	0.578**	0.042**
	(0.182)	(0.264)	(0.017)
Duration	−0.015	−0.051***	−0.002
	(0.010)	(0.014)	(0.001)
Democracy	2.672***	2.737***	0.022
	(0.943)	(0.907)	(0.070)
Population (log)	0.060	0.191*	−0.006
	(0.131)	(0.105)	(0.008)
GDP per capita (log)	−0.046	−0.396*	−0.012
	(0.185)	(0.209)	(0.016)
Constant	−0.623	1.040	0.187
	(3.173)	(3.079)	(0.223)
Inflation models			
Size	−2.279***	−2.832***	
	(0.757)	(0.861)	
Democracy	13.927***	17.037	
	(4.671)	(27.387)	
GDP per capita (log)	−3.335***	−4.293	
	(0.936)	(3.175)	
Constant	18.492**	25.385**	
	(7.458)	(10.897)	
N	1141	1141	1141
(Groups)	(95)	(95)	(95)

***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.1. Standard errors are robustly clustered by militant group

Table C.3: Replicating Table 4.1 with Controls for Cumulative Attacks, Deaths, or Suicide Terror Use

	Model A7 **Total attacks**	**Model A8** **Total deaths**	**Model A9** **Suicide attacks**
Affiliate (lag)	1.111**	1.390**	0.881**
	(0.409)	(0.395)	(0.441)
Cumulative attacks	0.004		
	(0.002)		
Cumulative deaths		0.001	
		(0.000)	
Cumulative suicide attack years			0.508**
			(0.091)
No. Groups	−0.000	−0.003	−0.005
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.013)
No. Bases	−0.121	0.062	0.084
	(0.095)	(0.095)	(0.116)
Size	0.489**	0.735**	0.187
	(0.224)	(0.302)	(0.169)
Duration	−0.018	−0.050**	−0.063**
	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.029)
Democracy	1.354	0.861	−1.924**
	(1.024)	(1.055)	(0.963)
Population (log)	−0.015	0.102	0.164
	(0.128)	(0.111)	(0.114)
GDP per capita (log)	−0.028	−0.247	−0.331
	(0.156)	(0.178)	(0.229)
Constant	0.751	1.573	−2.283
	(2.921)	(2.707)	(2.914)
N	1141	1141	1141
(Groups)	(95)	(95)	(95)

***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.1

Table C.4: Replicating Table 4.2 with Controls for Cumulative Attacks, Deaths, or Suicide Terror Use

	Model A10 **Total attacks**	**Model A11** **Total deaths**	**Model A12** **Suicide attacks**
IS affiliate (lag)	0.918*	0.776	0.649
	(0.527)	(0.496)	(0.520)
AQ affiliate (lag)	1.327**	1.931**	1.201*
	(0.524)	(0.556)	(0.690)
Cumulative attacks	0.004		
	(0.002)		
Cumulative deaths		0.001	
		(0.000)	
Cumulative suicide attack years			0.501**
			(0.093)
No. Groups	−0.000	−0.003	−0.004
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.013)
No. Bases	−0.115	0.072	0.090
	(0.096)	(0.093)	(0.119)
Size	0.481**	0.703**	0.191
	(0.225)	(0.301)	(0.166)
Duration	−0.018	−0.051**	−0.063**
	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.029)
Democracy	1.487	1.222	−1.683*
	(1.116)	(1.153)	(0.967)
Population (log)	−0.009	0.114	0.166
	(0.131)	(0.113)	(0.115)
GDP per capita (log)	−0.043	−0.292	−0.353
	(0.163)	(0.188)	(0.235)
Constant	0.728	1.661	−2.222
	(2.922)	(2.732)	(2.957)
N	1141	1141	1141
(Groups)	(95)	(95)	(95)

***p $<$ 0.01; **p $<$ 0.05; *p $<$ 0.1. Standard errors are robustly clustered by militant group.

Table C.5: Replicating Table 4.2 with IS Explanatory Variable Excluded

	Model A13 **Total attacks**	**Model A14** **Total deaths**	**Model A15** **Suicide attacks**
AQ affiliate (lag)	1.141**	1.910**	1.642**
	(0.490)	(0.546)	(0.530)
Total attacks (lag)	0.022**		
	(0.009)		
Total deaths (lag)		0.003**	
		(0.001)	
Suicide attacks (lag)			2.904**
			(0.283)
No. groups	0.001	−0.000	0.012
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.013)
No. bases	−0.138	0.056	0.125
	(0.094)	(0.096)	(0.085)
Size	0.485**	0.734**	0.443**
	(0.188)	(0.278)	(0.165)
Duration	−0.014	−0.046**	−0.023
	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Democracy	1.795*	1.365	0.673
	(1.014)	(1.068)	(0.862)
Population (log)	0.011	0.138	−0.060
	(0.133)	(0.111)	(0.099)
GDP per capita (log)	0.036	−0.254	−0.171
	(0.165)	(0.188)	(0.180)
Constant	−0.326	0.859	−1.076
	(2.989)	(2.757)	(2.650)
N	1141	1141	1141
(Groups)	(95)	(95)	(95)

***p < 0.01; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.1. Standard errors are robustly clustered by militant group.

Table C.6: Replicating Table 4.2 with AQ Explanatory Variable Excluded

	Model A16 **Total attacks**	**Model A17** **Total deaths**	**Model A18** **Suicide attacks**
IS affiliate (lag)	0.818*	0.689	0.472
	(0.436)	(0.458)	(0.472)
Total attacks (lag)	0.023**		
	(0.009)		
Total deaths (lag)		0.004**	
		(0.002)	
Suicide attacks (lag)			3.070**
			(0.277)
No. groups	0.002	0.002	0.009
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.012)
No. bases	−0.172*	0.002	0.071
	(0.092)	(0.105)	(0.083)
Size	0.545**	0.825**	0.416**
	(0.206)	(0.297)	(0.161)
Duration	−0.013	−0.045**	−0.023*
	(0.011)	(0.016)	(0.014)
Democracy	0.879	−0.147	−0.255
	(0.940)	(1.043)	(0.932)
Population (log)	−0.028	0.088	−0.070
	(0.140)	(0.125)	(0.094)
GDP per capita (log)	0.141	−0.058	−0.061
	(0.153)	(0.195)	(0.198)
Constant	−0.257	0.590	−1.329
	(3.221)	(3.285)	(2.670)
N	1141	1141	1141
(Groups)	(95)	(95)	(95)

***p $<$ 0.01; **p $<$ 0.05; *p $<$ 0.1. Standard errors are robustly clustered by militant group.