

Recent Trends in Pro-government Militias in Africa: A Useful Tool or a Threat?

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This article analyzes the recent trends of pro-government militias in Africa. A total of sixty-eight active pro-government militias were identified in the examined period, 2003-2023. Inductive content analysis was then carried out to categorize these militias and determine the most common type of militia, the most frequent targets of their attacks, their average length of existence, and how they cease to exist. Based on this research, the most common type of pro-government militias in Africa is the emergency militia, which arises primarily for political-power reasons. The article also endeavors to uncover whether these militias also attack state targets and if they pose a threat to their supporters.

Keywords Africa, conflict, pro-government militia, security, violence

Introduction

Several security issues currently affect regions across the African continent. Statistical data (Institute for Economics & Peace 2022, 3) suggests that the continent bears the highest conflict potential, the most significant increase of urbanization (which contributes to the rapid growth of slums), the most uneven economic opportunities, increasing numbers of terrorist organizations and attacks, worsening natural conditions related to the prolongation of dry seasons, flooding, and/or depletion of natural resources. The West has had, and continues to have, significant influence on the development of Africa, through its history of colonization, development programs, and humanitarian aid. In most African cases, the process of decolonization took place in the 1960s, followed by the building of a new state and the consolidation of power. Though most contemporary African states have a sixty-year tradition of modern statehood, some state capacities are weak, inefficient, or even corrupt. Interestingly, to enhance their functionality and stability, almost all African states use some form of non-state armed actor (Carey and Mitchell 2022, 37-48). In the majority of

cases, these are either paramilitary units or pro-government militias (PGMs). These groups are political, armed organizations that are non-state but that mobilize and operate with the assistance of important allies including factions within the state (Mazzei 2009, 4). More precise differences between these two types of violent non-state actors (VNSAs) are explained later in this article.

The use of VNSAs in the form of paramilitary units or PGMs has several advantages but also pitfalls. These units provide cheap offensive power. The responsibility for training is detached from the government, and the use of these VNSAs is economically much cheaper than the use of a regular army or police. In addition, civilians who are co-opted into these units usually know the local conditions well—the terrain, language, and people—which can be advantageous. Outsourcing to private agents also allows for faster adaptation to changing circumstances (Donahue and Zeckhauser 2011, 122). Finally, it is often useful for a state to use VNSAs so it can absolve itself of responsibility for violence or botched operations. Indeed, the connections between states/governments and PGMs are commonly not visible. On the other hand, VNSAs gain no automatic benefit from listening to the government and, therefore, prioritize their own interests over those of the state. In extreme cases, they may even join forces with rebels or other VNSAs and attack the state. These risks are more common with PGMs than with paramilitary units because PGMs often have no official ties to the state, are more autonomous, and are consequently more unpredictable. This article aims to capture the recent trends of PGMs in Africa. The reasoning behind the selection is based on the fact that the continent offers the largest number of countries using this type of VNSA (Carey and Mitchell 2022, 37-48).

The article tries to reveal what types of PGMs exist in Africa and which type is the most widespread. Another goal is to then determine whether the PGMs' aggression is aimed at other VNSAs, civilians, the state, or a combination of several targets. Finally, this research investigates how long, on average, PGMs are active and what causes them to cease their activities. Very few studies describe and provide any comprehensive picture of PGMs in Africa. Those describing this phenomenon are primarily case studies. Tubiana (2017), for example, analyzes PGMs in Sudan, including the notorious Rapid Support Forces. Another case study (International Peace Information Service 2018) dedicated to PGMs describes all PGMs and para-militia in the Central African Republic. The aim of this article is, therefore, to supplement the missing information and cover the general trends of the phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

Definition of Pro-Government Militias

It should be mentioned at the outset that some scholars use the term pro-

government militia and paramilitary units as synonyms. The theory presented by Scobell and Hammitt (1998), for example, distinguishes state paramilitary units from non-state ones, and based on their range of activities, the groups can consist of combat militia units, police units, units intended for rescue, units with promotional purposes, and/or units engaged in border protection. In this context, the pro-government militia is understood as a type of paramilitary unit (ibid., 215). Dasgupta (2016, 3-6) perceives paramilitary units and PGMs in the same way, claiming that paramilitary units can be of three types: pro-government militia, task force, or constabulary. Huggins (1991) also follows the same framework. These scholars thus all conceptualize PGMs as a type of paramilitary unit.

In contrast, other researchers work only with the term paramilitary units, which causes their definitions to overlap with the above definitions of pro-government units. An example is Kaldor (2007, 17-25), whose work has been recognized as pivotal in security studies, defines paramilitary groups as autonomous groups of armed men, generally centered around a single leader and associated with extremist political parties that are established by governments to distance themselves from extreme manifestations of violence. Bowyer (2002) and Klingova and Nagy (2017) share similar conceptualizations. A final group of scholars employ both terms—paramilitary groups and pro-government militia—and makes a clear distinction between the two. Such scholarship includes scientific publications by Böhmelt and Clayton (2018), which identifies the distinguishing features of the two (outlined later in this article). Also included in this body of scientific research are Hristov, Sprague, and Tauss (2021) and Kan (2019).

A review of the theoretical definitions of PGMs and para-militias reveals that the most recent scholarship distinguishes them from each other. Following this conceptual development, the research informing this article also understands the two terms as distinct. These groups are defined as armed groups linked to the government and separate from the regular forces, yet they have a high degree of autonomy (Carey and Mitchell 2019, 3-8). The scholarship, however, points to a basic difference between a paramilitary unit and a pro-government militia, which is that the former is organized under the government to support or replace the regular military, while the latter exists outside the state apparatus. The differences are discussed in detail in the following subsection.

Differences between Pro-government Militias and Paramilitary Units

Perhaps the most well-known distinction between paramilitaries and PGMs is described by Böhmelt and Clayton (2018), who argue that PGMs are more autonomous and informal than paramilitary ones, cheap to mobilize, and without access to the training and equipment of conventional forces. Pro-government militias are usually, but not always, mobilized by members of the government

Table 1. Differences between Paramilitary Units and PGMs

	Paramilitary Forces	PGMs
Government link	Official	Semi-Official, Informal
Functions	Regular and Irregular Activities	Rather Irregular Activities
Autonomy	Low	High
Example	National Gendarmerie, France	Janjaweed, Sudan

Source: Böhmelt and Clayton (2018, 198).

and accept state aid in exchange for political support. They can also emerge autonomously and later become co-opted by the government (ibid., 199). The key characteristics of distinction for Böhmelt and Clayton, therefore, are the degree of autonomy, the form of creation and mobilization (more spontaneous in PGMs), the degree of government control (higher in the para-militia), the degree of training and organization (higher in the para-militia), and the types of duties (PGMs fulfill various irregular duties and paramilitaries often replace and balance government forces). According to Hristov, Sprague, and Tauss (2021), we should also consider whether the state or other powerful groups directly recruit and sponsor paramilitary organizations and indirectly participate in their operations or merely tolerate and benefit from them, in which case they would be considered pro-government militia.

Wuthnow (2019) and Mitchel (2004) claim that only two characteristics are key to distinguishing paramilitary units from PGMs—the degrees of autonomy and dependence on the state. Thus, while PGMs are almost independent and autonomous, paramilitary units, on the contrary, are not. The second characteristic identified by these authors—loyalty and devotion to the state—is again higher in paramilitary units (Wuthnow 2019, 4; Mitchell 2004). The clearest differentiation of PGMs and paramilitaries was prepared by Böhmelt and Clayton (2016), who identified three distinguishing characteristics: government links, functions, and autonomy (see Table 1). The research informing this article also distinguishes between paramilitary units and PGMs in this way.

Typology of Pro-Government Militias

The vast majority of scholars dealing with PGMs claim that these units are created during conflicts, most often in civil wars, and that the government uses these militias to defeat rebels and other VNSAs. Kan (2019) and Dasgupta (2016), for example, claim that PGMs are the type of para-militia most often used during the civil war. Cubides (2001), Romero (2000), and Rangel Suárez (2005) similarly argue that the emergence of paramilitary groups and PGMs responds to struggles against guerrilla groups and other VNSAs. Carey and Mitchell (2019) also posit that PGMs serve to engage and fulfill tasks within conflicts; all militias that their

dataset reflect this connection to their related conflicts. Some authors, on the other hand, claim that it is not the presence of and connection with a conflict that is important, but the weakness of states and the state's inability to ensure the basic requirements of its citizens. These explanations assume that governments choose to delegate violence to support non-state actors either because they lack the coercive capacity to avert direct rebel challenges or because they lack the capacity to acquire private information about rebel constituencies (Cunningham 2003; Davenport 2005).

Raleigh's (2016) approach is unique in the context of the existing scholarly literature. He argues that PGMs are in most cases not formed for the sake of engaging in conflict but are instead often used for other purposes. He is also one of the few authors who created a typology of PGMs. According to him, there are three kinds of PGMs. The first is what Raleigh refers to as the ethnic or local security provider where the militia aims to ensure local security in rural, peripheral parts of the state. Thus, the weakness and decay of the state are typical features of their existence. The second type identified by Raleigh is the emergency militia, which arises in times of state crisis and functions as representatives of and complements to the government or to control of the opposition during periods of war. The third type is the competition militia, which arises in contested states and most often appears in non-war states and periods as a private army for politically active patrons, they are tied to governments, political parties, and elites, and they operate in areas where there is no apparent security vacuum. In many cases, this last type of militia is used during elections to maintain and gain power (*ibid.*, 283-95). This specific typology is used in this research to determine which of the three—ethnic or local security provider militias, competition militias, or emergency militias—is the most widespread in Africa.

The second well-known typology of PGMs is that created by Magid and Schon (2018). These authors divide PGMs into three categories based on ethnic ties (defector PGMs, rival PGMs, and non-Ethnic PGMs) and also ties they have to the government (committed PGMs, opportunist PGMs, autonomous PGMs, and groups that have never attacked the government) (*ibid.*, 1-4). This study is primarily concerned with researching the internal motives of PGMs, which Magid and Schon investigated through statistical analysis. The authors of this research, however, believe it is very difficult to reveal the motives of PGMs based only on their types of attacks and activities. For some groups, these motives cannot be accurately captured without contact with the groups in question. For this reason, the typology developed by Raleigh is more appropriate for this study.

Pro-Government Militias, Governance and State

Governments worldwide have increasingly turned to unofficial armed groups as instruments of state power, a practice that significantly heightens risks for civilians. The activities of such PGMs are often accompanied by elevated levels

of human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances. While ostensibly serving the interests of the state, these militias frequently operate outside legal frameworks and oversight mechanisms, posing profound challenges to governance, rule of law, and human security. According to Carey and Mitchell (2016), PGMs were used in many countries in Europe, America, Asia, and Africa in the period 1981-2007. At that time, more than one-third of the states that used these militias were in Africa (*ibid.*, 3-4). Stanton (2015, 907-8) further reports that, between 1981 and 2007, PMGs were utilized in nearly half of the 178 countries he examined and that almost two-thirds of civil wars since 1989 involved the presence of such militias. According to certain authors, the utilization of PGMs is closely linked to conflict, particularly civil war. This perspective is articulated by Joo and Sosa (2023), who assert that PGMs are frequently deployed as part of counterinsurgency strategies to undermine insurgent groups. These strategies encompass a range of tactics, including direct engagement in combat, the diversion or punishment of supporters, and efforts to induce defections (Joo and Sosa 2023; Abbs, Clayton and Thomson 2020; Voller 2021). Governments benefit from PGMs because they provide valuable intelligence to combat rebels effectively and increase support by encouraging defections to the government side (Joo and Sosa 2023, 1-3). A similar perspective is shared by Klosek and Souleimanov (2022), who identify three factors influencing the utilization of PGMs: topography, regime type, and wartime conditions. Aliyev (2016) argues that armed conflict is a factor leading to the rise of PGMs. According to him, so-called state-parallel PGMs often emerge in weak states where there is strong armed opposition to the government. In such scenarios, as long as armed conflict persists and the government remains weak, these state-parallel PGMs tend to flourish and increase their power in relation to the state (*ibid.*, 498-501).

On the other hand, there are authors who assert that the use of PGMs is indeed connected with conflict, but they also emphasize that these militias can serve purposes beyond combat, such as governance or regime maintenance. This scholarship (see Raleigh 2016; Ash 2016; Mitchell 2004) argues that the prevalence and role of PGMs are deeply linked to the type of regime, and sometimes there is even a connection with so-called personalist regimes. In the past, certain authors posited that the prevalence of PGMs was primarily associated with weakness and failing states. This perspective is echoed in the works of Aliyev (2016) and Muggah (2010) who have explored the relationship between state fragility and the emergence of PGMs. Carey and Mitchell (2016), however, have demonstrated that PGMs are not solely confined to poor or failing countries. Instead, they suggest, PGMs exist in a diverse array of contexts, ranging from impoverished nations like Sudan and Haiti to more developed and affluent countries, including democracies like Spain. Carey and Mitchell's findings suggest that factors beyond mere state capacity or the presence of a formal security apparatus play a role

in the emergence and proliferation of PGMs (ibid., 3-4). Some scholars (Carey and Mitchell 2016; Abbs, Clayton and Thomson 2020; Staniland 2012) note that PGMs are frequently observed in semi-democracies where governments confront security challenges. In these settings, governments may have a vested interest in maintaining power through repression while simultaneously seeking to distance themselves from direct involvement in violence. Conversely, these scholars also note that the use of PGMs is less common in both democratic and authoritarian regimes. In democratic states, there may be less inclination to employ PGMs due to the constraints imposed by democratic norms and institutions. Similarly, they suggest, in highly authoritarian regimes, the leadership may opt against aligning with PGMs to avoid the potential risks associated with arming independent groups. In other research, Klosek and Souleimanov (2022) argue that PGMs often emerge in personalist regimes. These regimes, characterized by centralized power and a focus on the leader's personality cult, can foster an environment where PGMs feel emboldened to forge alliances with the government. Importantly, whether the regime is authoritarian or democratic is deemed less significant in this context. Instead, they argue, it is the concentration of power and the leader's influence that shape the dynamics of PGM-government alliances. This perspective highlights the role of personalist regimes in facilitating the formation and operation of PGMs, regardless of the broader political system in place (ibid., 6-11). On the contrary, Ash (2016) contends that the crucial factor determining the emergence of PGMs is whether leaders are under threat of a coup. According to Ash, leaders facing the risk of a coup are more likely to rely on PGMs as a means of bolstering their security and maintaining power. This perspective suggests that the perceived threat to leadership is a primary driver behind the formation and utilization of PGMs, regardless of the specific characteristics of the political regime (ibid., 705-12).

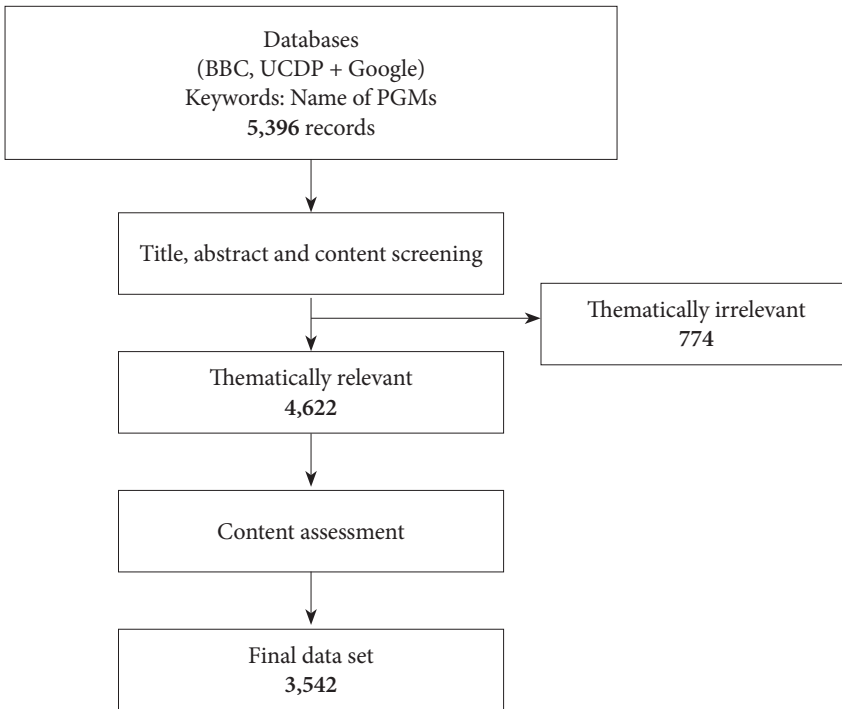
Methodology

This research aims to capture the recent trends of PGMs in Africa. The research seeks to answer four research questions. The first is: *What type of PGMs (based on Raleigh's typology) is the most widespread in Africa?* At the same time, the research tries to determine whether this typology covers all PGMs or not. The second question asks: *What is the most common attack target of PGMs?* That is, whether the targets are other VNSAs, civilians, the state, or combinations of targets, and whether some targets are more common among certain types of PGMs. The third research question is: *In what way do PGMs most often cease to exist?* Are the majority of PGMs still active? Or are they disappearing, either through their incorporation into formalized state groups, withdrawal of state support and subsequent disappearance of the group, physical destruction, or physical

disarmament? The final research question examines which African countries—and, in particular, which kind of state (authoritarian, semi-democratic, or democratic)—utilize PGMs most frequently: *Are PGMs more commonly employed in authoritarian regimes, hybrid regimes, or flawed democracies?* This classification is drawn from the “Democracy Index” by Economist Intelligence (2023), which categorizes countries into four groups. Notably, however, the fourth category—full democracies—is absent in Africa.

The research questions further needed to have time and space limitations. The goal, therefore, was set to cover PGMs from all African countries, and since the aim of the research is to uncover recent trends, the research deals with the last twenty years—that is, PGMs that formed or were active between 2003 and 2023. This time interval is long enough to capture the latest trends. At the same time, the studies that attempt to create sets of modern African PGMs are mostly old and work either with data up to 2014 (Magid and Schon 2018, 1-4) or with data up to 2017 (Carey and Mitchell 2019, 3-8), and consequently do not sufficiently cover the last few years. Additionally, Carey and Mitchell (2022) only examine PGMs involved in civil wars. For these reasons, this study aims to expand the examined sample. The research sample of PGMs is selected based on the analysis of the datasets provided by Magid and Schon (2018), Carey and Mitchell (2022), and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP 2023) concerning non-state armed actors. Furthermore, other secondary sources were also used, which were found using keywords (see Figure 1). The sample in this study contains a total of sixty-eight PGMs.

For each militia in the sample, activity was examined to answer the four research questions. Inductive content analysis was used for these purposes and, therefore, the coding of categories was not predetermined. However, the author focused primarily on the length of activity, the types of attacks in terms of targets, and the environment and conditions in which the group operates (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, 1279). BBC, UCDP, and Google archives were used for content analysis and searched using the names of the PGMs as keywords (see Figure 1). Individual groups were typologically coded (based on Raleigh’s typology), coded based on the target of attacks (if more than fifty percent of a group’s recorded attacks fell into one category, that category was assigned, but if it was less than fifty percent, then the “mix” category was assigned), and coded based on each group’s existence or type of demise. The limits of this work are mainly related to the lack of sources. Small events and attacks are often not recorded and reported. The author has attempted to mitigate this limitation by using BBC (2023) articles, information from UCDP (2023), which is one of the most accurate and well-used databases dealing with conflicts-, and other sources found through Google. Information regarding the militias was further supplemented with the dataset created by Carey and Mitchell (2022).

Figure 1. Flow Diagram of Data Acquisition

Source: Author's compilation based on Böhmelt and Clayton (2018), BBC (2023), Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2023), and others.

Recent Trends of Pro-Government Militias in Africa

The total dataset contains sixty-eight cases of PGMs, as detailed in Table 2. The most PGMs in the selected period (2003-2023) were located in Libya and Sudan. While several dozen militias were counted in these two countries, only the most renowned ones were included in the research. Had the small militias been included in the research, the total dataset would have contained almost half of its cases from only two states. Without cases evenly distributed across Africa, an accurate continent-wide analysis would be difficult. In addition, not enough information about some small local militias (in Sudan and Libya, and also in other states) could be found, so they could not be included in the analysis either. At the same time, some militias were not included in the research on purpose, due to their difficult classification. This is the case with the various Mai-Mai militias in the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo), which cannot be considered as a single militia (there are several of them), yet these factions have overlapped and regrouped in a variety of ways over the years. Due to the ambiguous classification

of the Central African Seleka—considered by some researchers to be pro-government and not by others—was also excluded from the research (Magid and Schon 2018, 1-4). While above-average numbers of PGMs were also recorded in Zimbabwe and Uganda, there are states where no information about the existence of PGMs during the examined timeframe was found. Such was the case for, for example, Lesotho, Senegal, Mauritania, and Morocco. Such states where PGMs were not found, have been considered mostly stable with good security situations. In Senegal, however, a frozen long-standing conflict in Casamance may have the potential for the creation of PGMs.

A large number of the found militias had already formed in the 1990s or at the beginning of the 20th Century. This was typical for Angola, the Central African Republic, and Zimbabwe. In some countries, the formation of militias is associated with the beginning of a conflict or civil war, such as in Libya and Algeria. The latest militias have been created in the Sahel, specifically in Burkina Faso and Mali, and are related to the deteriorating security situation in the region and the increase in terrorist attacks (Institute for Economics & Peace 2022, 3-10). On the other hand, comparing the situation in Niger with that in Mali and Burkina Faso reveals great differences—there is no formation of PGMs in Niger, even though there has been an increase in the activity of terrorist groups. The Niger government has thus adopted a completely different strategy compared to other Sahelian states affected by terrorism (De Bruijne 2022). Niger has been cautious in engaging with local and PGMs over the years. According to some (Molenaar et al. 2019, 53-56), this is because the Niger government had a negative experience with the control and demobilization of Fulani and Arab militias in the 1990s. The involvement of PGMs in Mali and Burkina Faso, such as Dan Na Ambassagou or Koglweogo, is similarly very problematic because they frequently commit violence against civilians. These different approaches are why Niger is sometimes considered more successful in the fight against terrorism (Institute for Economics & Peace 2022, 3-10).

Based on the calculation regarding the average length of existence of African PGMs, African PGMs exist, on average, for 13.6 years. Of course, some PGMs have been operating for much longer and some for a much shorter period time. The Mungiki militia in Kenya, still active after forty-three years, has existed the longest. Likewise, some militias in Zimbabwe continue to be active after more than thirty years. In contrast, Camara's Militias in Guinea existed for only one year, and the Jungle Fire Militia in Liberia existed for just two years. Twenty-nine PGMs from the surveyed sample were active in 2023. The remaining thirty-nine militias in the dataset were dissolved over the years. Of these thirty-nine no longer existing militias, twenty-eight disappeared due to elimination and gradual loss of support; these cases are recorded as "W-support" (withdrawal of state support and subsequent disappearance of the group). Their disappearances were either related to the end of war (e.g., Front for the Liberation of the Greater West

in Côte d'Ivoire), a change of government (e.g., Popular Committees in Egypt), or an overall improvement in the security situation (e.g., Local Defense Force in Rwanda). Of the other nine militias who were dissolved, only five were integrated into the official armed forces (e.g., Battalion 64 in Ghana and Ganda Izo in Mali), three were physically destroyed whereby they disappeared because they lost battles (e.g., Camara's Militias in Guinea and Kiboko Squad in Uganda), and three were physically disarmed, which led to their demise (e.g., Jungle Fire Militia in Liberia and Southwestern Militias in Côte d'Ivoire) (Carey and Mitchell 2019, 3-8).

Based on the conducted research, it is evident that PGMs do not usually attack other VNSAs during conflicts, as described by Carey and Mitchell (2022) in their dataset analysis. Rather, they most often use violence against civilians. The militias use their strong positions, gained through government support, to hold civilians to account. In some cases, the militias may suspect civilian involvement in the VNSAs, but in other cases, different ethnicity or religion among civilians plays a role in their targeting, as we see in Mali and Burkina Faso. In some cases, attacks are deliberately used by the government to strengthen its power during demonstrations, protests, or violent clashes. This is the case of PGMs in Zimbabwe or Uganda (Freedom House 2015, 99-103). Roughly seventy-eight percent of the PGMs in the dataset (fifty-three militias out of the sixty-eight) have attacked civilians at some point. Of course, the question remains how many of these attacks were government-ordered, and how many were carried out because of the excessive power of PGMs. Nonetheless, the high percentage of civilian attacks reveals the fact that the use of PGMs can pose a direct threat to the civilian population. This is, however, one of the mentioned reasons why governments use these militias because they avoid direct responsibility for the committed crimes. Moreover, roughly thirty-eight percent of all surveyed PGMs primarily attack the civilian population, which means that, in practice, most attacks by these groups are deliberately directed against civilians. Popular Committees in Egypt, Youth Cadets in Malawi, and League/Committees for the Protection of the Revolution in Tunisia are typical examples of groups that have committed attacks mainly against civilians. However, most groups combine violence directed against civilians with violence directed against other VNSAs or violence directed against the state. Forty-one percent of groups (twenty-eight out of sixty-eight) use a combination of this violence. In contrast to this finding, only fifteen PGMs (twenty-two percent of the militias in the dataset) attack only the VNSAs, without threatening the state or civilians in any fundamental way. Some of the militias even violate their primary intention to be pro-government or pro-state, and commit violence against the state's armed forces (army and/or police). In such cases, the militias are starting to either cooperate with political opponents or participate with other VNSAs, or in other cases, they may even completely turn against the state and start a war, such as in Sudan, where the Rapid Support

Forces started an armed conflict in April 2023 (Reuters 2023). The situation in Sudan is an extreme case where a state-supported and long-term cooperating militia turned against its supporter, but it is not an isolated case. In the past, for example, Kiboko Squad has attacked the Ugandan army and Liberators are known to have attacked the army in the Central African Republic. None of the examined militias attacked the government as their primary target for the duration of their existence, but their goals changed over the years, which led some to target the government. In eleven groups (sixteen percent), disagreements instigated attacks directed at their supporters. Pro-government militias can therefore be a source of threat to the government itself.

Categorizing the groups based on Raleigh's typology was the most difficult part of this research. Some groups reflected a trend in which they were created for a certain purpose but their role in relation to the state changed over time. The groups that transformed the most often were those that formed in the course of conflicts and whose primary goal was to fight other VNSAs. Over time (often after the end of the conflict), the roles these groups played in relation to the state transformed. Their goals became either securing an unstable area or supporting the government and repressing the civilian population to maintain power. To capture these transformations, groups were categorized based on both their primary purpose and the behavior they held for the longest period.

The conclusions of this study refute those of previous research by Magid and Schon (2018) and Carey and Mitchell (2022) that claimed that PGMs and their emergence are most often related to conflicts and civil wars. On the contrary, these conclusions confirm those of Raleigh (2016) who found that the most common reason for the use of PGMs is the competition (i.e., a threat to political power and the effort of certain groups to maintain this power). Pro-government militias that Raleigh characterize as competition militias, most often arise in times of political instability or uncertainty, and their goal is to support government officials. They are often deployed against the civilian population during protests and demonstrations as it was seen during several demonstrations in Zimbabwe and during protests and social unrest in Burundi (Jamar 2016, 1-7). Pro-government militias designated as competition militias represent thirty-one cases in this study (45.5% of all surveyed militias). The second most common type of pro-government militia is what Raleigh calls the provider militia, which often arise in weak states with poor security situations or in rural areas and on the periphery of the state that may not be weak but may be unable to ensure security in these outskirts. These militias represent nineteen cases (roughly twenty-eight percent of all militias in the dataset). The last type of Raleigh's typology are the emergency militias, which are created in times of conflict to defeat opponents and end the fighting. These militias represent only eighteen cases of PGMs (26.5% of cases surveyed). Apart from the problem of the changing agenda of some militias, there was no problem classifying any of the examined PGMs using Raleigh's typology.

Table 2. Recent Pro-Government Militias in Africa (2003-2023)

State	Pro-Government Militia Name	Active Years/ Demise	Type of Attacks	Group Type
Algeria	Communal Guards	1995-active	VNSA, civilians	Emergency
Algeria	Groups for Legitimate Defence (Patriots)	1990-2012 W-support	VNSA, civilians	Emergency
Angola	Civil Defence Organization (ODC)	1980-2011 W-support	Civilians	Emergency
Burkina Faso	Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland	2020-active	VNSA, civilians	Provider
Burkina Faso	Koglwego	2020-active	VNSA, civilians	Provider
Burundi	Imbonerakure	2009-active	Civilians	Competition
Burundi	Guardians of Peace	1997-2005 Disarmament	VNSA	Emergency
Cameroon	President Biya's Youth (PRESBY)	1996-2003 W-support	VNSA	Competition
CAR	African Rainforest and Rivers Conservation	2001-2003 Destruction	VNSA	Provider
CAR	Liberators	2003-2006 W-support	Civilians, state	Competition
Chad	Chadian Special Guard	2002-2005 W-support	VNSA, civilians	Competition
Côte d'Ivoire	Front for the Liberation of the Greater West	2004-2011 W-support	State, VNSA	Competition
Côte d'Ivoire	Death Squads	2002-2011 W-support	Civilians	Competition
Côte d'Ivoire	Southwestern Militias	2005-2008 Disarmament	VNSA	Emergency
Côte d'Ivoire	Student Federation of Cote d'Ivoire (FESCI)	1990-active	Civilians	Competition
DRC	Forces for the Defense of Democracy (FDD)	1999-2003 W-support	VNSA	Emergency
DRC	Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda	2000-active	Civilians, state	Emergency
DRC	Coalition of Congolese Patriotic Resistance (PARECO)	1993-active W-support	VNSA, civilians	Provider
Egypt	Mubarak's Thugs/Baltagiya	1990-active	Civilians	Competition
Egypt	Popular Committees	2011-2014? W-support	Civilians	Competition

Table 2. (continued)

State	Pro-Government Militia Name	Active Years/ Demise	Type of Attacks	Group Type
Egypt	Vigilantes Bullying Voters	2005-2011 W-support	Civilians	Competition
Ethiopia	Weyane Militia	1994-2009? W-support	VNSA	Emergency
Ghana	Battalion 64	1999-2004 Incorporation	Civilians	Competition
Guinea	Camara's Militias	2008 Destruction	Civilians, state	Competition
Guinea	Donzos Militia	2008-2014? W-support	Civilians	Competition
Guinea- Bissau	Aguentas Militia	1998-2008 W-support	VNSA, civilians	Emergency
Kenya	Mungiki	1980s - active	Civilians	Competition
Kenya	Kisungusungu	2003-2007 W-support	Civilians	Provider
Liberia	Jungle Fire Militia	2003-2004 Disarmament	Civilians, VNSA	Emergency
Liberia	Vigilante Groups	2006-active	Civilians	Provider
Libya	Avengers Blood	2014-active	Mix	Emergency
Libya	17 February Martyrs Brigade	2011-2014 Incorporation	Civilians	Provider
Libya	Al-Qaqa' Brigade	2011-2014 W-support	State, civilians	Competition
Malawi	Young Democrats	1993-2005 W-support	Civilians	Competition
Malawi	Youth Cadets	2011-2012 W-Support	Civilians	Competition
Mali	Ganda Izo	2006-2012 Incorporation	VNSA	Provider
Mali	Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies	2014-active	VNSA	Provider
Mali	Ganda Koy	1994-2013 W-Support	VNSA	Provider
Mali	Dan Na Ambassagou	2016-active	VNSA, civilians	Provider
Mozambique	Village Militias	2022-active	VNSA	Emergency
Nigeria	Civilian Joint Task Force	2013-active	VNSA	Provider

Table 2. (continued)

State	Pro-Government Militia Name	Active Years/ Demise	Type of Attacks	Group Type
Republic of the Congo	Ninjas	1990-2008 W-support	Mix	Competition
Rwanda	Local Defence Force	1999-2013 Incorporation	VNSA	Provider
Sierra Leone	Bokkie Crew	1999-2003 W-support	VNSA, civilians	Emergency
Somalia	Raskamboni Movement	2009-active	VNSA, mix	Provider
Somalia	Barre Hiiraale's Militia	2012-active	VNSA, civilians	Provider
Somalia	Gurgurte Militia	2014-active	VNSA	Provider
South Africa	Red Ants/Wozani Security	2001-active	VNSA, civilians	Provider
South Africa	Mkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans' Association (MKVMA)	1996-2021 W-support	Civilians	Competition
South Sudan	Youth Militia	2014-active	VNSA, civilians	Competition
Sudan	Rapid Support Forces	2013-active	Mix	Competition
Sudan	Janjaweed	1987-active	Mix	Emergency
Sudan	Popular Defence Forces	1989-2019 Incorporation	VNSA, civilians	Emergency
Sudan	Border Guards	2003-active	VNSA, civilians	Emergency
Sudan	Toposa Tribesmen	1998-2011 W-support	VNSA, civilians	Emergency
Tanzania	Sungu Sungu	1981-2004 W-support	VNSA, civilians	Provider
Togo	Death Squadrons	2005-active	Civilians	Competition
Tunisia	League/Committees for the Protection of the Revolution (LPR)	2012-2014 W-Support	Civilians	Competition
Uganda	Amuka	1990-2008 W-support	VNSA	Provider
Uganda	Arrow Boys militia	1997-2007 W-support	VNSA	Emergency
Uganda	Kalangala Action Plan	2001-active	Civilians	Competition
Uganda	Kiboko Squad	2007-2011 Destruction	State, civilians	Competition
Uganda	Village Crime Preventers	2011-active	Civilians	Competition
Zimbabwe	Chipangano	2003-2013 W-support	Civilians	Competition

Table 2. (continued)

State	Pro-Government Militia Name	Active Years/ Demise	Type of Attacks	Group Type
Zimbabwe	Jochomondo	2000-2013	Civilians	Competition
Zimbabwe	War Vets	1989-active	Civilians	Competition
Zimbabwe	Green Bombers	2000-active	Civilians	Competition
Zimbabwe	ZANU-PF militia	1985-active	Civilians	Competition

Source: Author's compilation based on Magid and Schon (2018), Carey and Mitchell (2022), Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2023), and others.

The utilization of PGMs in relation to regime type presents an intriguing aspect of analysis. Contrary to prevailing theories, which suggest that PGMs are less prevalent in both democratic and authoritarian regimes, it appears that they are most extensively employed in semi-democratic systems that are often labeled as hybrid regimes in the Democracy Index (Economist Intelligence 2023). The empirical results derived from Africa over the past twenty years, however, challenge this theoretical framework. Remarkably, authoritarian states accounted for PGM usage in fifty-four percent of cases, followed by hybrid states at forty-one percent, with only a mere five percent attributed to states categorized as flawed democracies. This unexpected discrepancy prompts a deeper exploration into the dynamics underlying PGM usage within different political contexts in Africa. One plausible explanation for the higher usage of PGMs by authoritarian regimes could be the prevalence of such regimes during the examined period. If we consider that more countries were labeled as authoritarian rather than hybrid during this time frame, it naturally follows that there would be a higher likelihood of PGM usage by authoritarian states. This may be due to the centralized control and authority typically wielded by authoritarian governments, which could facilitate the implementation and enforcement of PGMs. Additionally, authoritarian regimes may perceive PGMs as effective tools for maintaining power and quelling dissent, thus leading to their increased utilization. This suggests that the political landscape, characterized by the predominance of authoritarian regimes, plays a significant role in shaping the patterns of PGM usage observed in Africa over the past twenty years.

Conclusion

Pro-government militias are an instrument of the state that is currently widely used around the world. Records of the use of these militias can be found not only in Africa but also in Asia, America, and even Europe. According to many

authors, it is a counterinsurgency tool that governments use during conflicts and civil wars (Pankhurst 2022). The use of these militias has several advantages, but also pitfalls. In some cases, they may become agents of violence and spoil peace processes. In extreme cases, they may even turn against their patron and start attacking the state, as is the case in Sudan. While the majority of studies assume that their purpose relates to conflict, there are exceptions, such as the study by Raleigh (2016) who created a new and unique typology that assumes PGMs are not only related to conflict situations. This research mainly used Raleigh's classification that describes three types of PGMs based on their purpose and conditions of formation. The goal of this study was to find out how many active PGMs existed in Africa in the period under review (2003-2023), and what type of militias they were: provider, emergency, or competition militia. The research reveals that at least sixty-eight PGMs were found in Africa during this period. Some small militias about which the author did not find enough information, as well as several problematic cases, were not included in the research dataset. Therefore, based on the author's estimates, the total number of PGMs active during 2003-2023 in Africa is around one hundred. The examined sixty-eight PGMs, however, were the most significant in the given period in terms of activity and size.

In addition, the results of this research refute the claim that there is a necessary connection between PGMs and conflict. According to several authors (see Carey 2021), these types of militias are primarily used in times of war, which is not consistent with the discovered results. In the African environment, 45.5% of militias can be characterized as competition militias, which arise for political-power reasons in a period of political uncertainty. Roughly 28% of militias are provider militias, which most often arise due to poor security conditions in weak states. Only 26.5% of militias are emergency militias, which arise in times of conflicts and civil wars. Another finding is the fact that the uses and goals of militias transform over time. This happens most often with provider militias, which usually do not disappear after the end of the conflict but change their motives and the goals of their activity. Furthermore, of the militias are often long-lasting, existing for an average of 13.6 years. The fact that 78% of these PGMs are responsible for some attacks against civilians should be cause for serious concern for the international community and the states themselves. Thirty-eight percent of militias primarily attack civilians, who represent the main target of these groups. The fact that 16% of all PGMs in the examined period attacked state targets and thus violated their intention to serve the state may also concern government officials. Governments should consider more carefully whether the pros of using these types of militias outweigh the cons and whether they are capable of fully controlling and directing these militias. In extreme cases, poor control and dissatisfaction of PGMs can lead to civil war.

A notable revelation from this research is the unexpected dominance of

PGM utilization by authoritarian states in Africa over the past two decades. Surprisingly, these regimes accounted for the highest proportion of PGM utilization at 54%, surpassing hybrid states, which stood at 41%, and, lagging behind, were democratic states, which employed PGMs the least. This unexpected trend challenges conventional assumptions and underscores the complex interplay between political regimes and the adoption of PGMs within African contexts. Moreover, the findings of this research shed light on the intricate relationship between PGMs and governance in Africa. The unexpected dominance of PGM utilization by authoritarian states, as evidenced by the study, raises critical questions about the nature of governance and state power on the continent. The prevalence of PGMs under authoritarian regimes suggests a concerning trend wherein state actors resort to non-state armed groups to maintain control and suppress dissent. This phenomenon underscores underlying governance challenges, including issues of accountability, legitimacy, and state capacity. Furthermore, the transformation of PGM goals over time, particularly the persistence of provider militias beyond the cessation of conflicts, highlights the complex dynamics shaping governance and security in weak states. Governments must confront the implications of relying on these militias, given their propensity for violence against civilians and potential destabilizing effects on state institutions. Therefore, the findings underscore the urgent need for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners to reevaluate current approaches to governance and security in Africa, emphasizing the imperative of strengthening state institutions, promoting accountability, and fostering inclusive governance processes to mitigate the reliance on PGMs and address the root causes of conflict and instability on the continent.

This research significantly advances our understanding of PGMs by shedding light on their motivations and targeting patterns, offering novel insights within the realm of PGM studies. Particularly noteworthy is the revelation that PGMs are not primarily utilized due to conflicts but rather for political-power reasons during periods of political uncertainty, a finding that supports Raleigh's (2016) approach. This insight underscores the complex relationship between political instability and the emergence of PGMs, providing valuable context for their deployment within the African context. Moreover, the discovery that authoritarian regimes utilize PGMs in 54% of cases challenges prevailing theories that suggest otherwise put forth by Carey and Mitchell (2016), Abbs, Clayton, and Thomson (2020), and Staniland (2012). This departure from conventional wisdom invites further examination into the dynamics of authoritarian regimes and their utilization of PGMs, offering an avenue for future research to explore the mechanisms underlying this phenomenon. Additionally, future studies could extend into the implications of PGM utilization by authoritarian regimes, investigating its impact on state stability, civil-military relations, and conflict dynamics within the African context. Such research holds promise for enriching

our understanding of PGMs and their role in contemporary governance and conflict resolution.

Furthermore, based on this study, other analyses dealing with reasons for using PGMs can be created. Studies that investigate causal mechanisms can derive some causes for the use of PGMs from the conclusions of this research, such that PGMs are used most often by authoritarian regimes and in times of political instability. This underscores the significance of this study as a foundational resource for further exploration into the drivers of PGM deployment, offering a roadmap for future investigations. Additionally, researchers can leverage the dataset generated from this study to look more deeply into other aspects of PGM utilization. Key areas of inquiry may include the factors driving the use of PGMs outside conflict environments, strategies for the effective management and control of these militias, and measures to mitigate the prevalence of attacks on civilians. The implications of the current data also highlight the need for continued research into PGM dynamics and their broader ramifications for regional stability and civilian security. Moreover, similar research carried out on other continents would allow for comparative analysis with these results from Africa to better capture global trends in PGM utilization. By synthesizing findings from diverse geographical contexts, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the drivers and patterns of PGM deployment worldwide, informing more nuanced policy responses and intervention strategies.

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