Codebook V2024-10-02

Dataset of Armed Sunni and Shia Islamist Groups (DASSIG)[1]

Introduction and Overview

We built DASSIG to bring armed Shia and Sunni Islamist groups together in one dataset in order to examine whether and, if so, to what extent, the patterns of creation and evolution of armed Islamism differ for Shia and Sunni groups. In particular, we were interested in examining whether the timing and locations of emergence, and the characteristics of those locations (e.g. multisectarian, low/high intensity conflict) differed between predominantly Shia and predominantly Sunni armed Islamist groups. We were also interested in whether sectarian difference has come to play a larger role in the growth of armed Islamism since the 2000s, with the regional increase in political sectarianization since the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, and how this compared to Shia-Sunni Islamist interaction following the Iranian Revolution of 1979 – both of which are listed as key events in the sectarianization of the region.[2] And we wanted to substantiate whether the argument that Islamists are predominantly rebel groups holds for both Shia and Sunni armed Islamists over time.[3]

This dataset is the first to bring together information on the most extensive list of major armed Shia and Sunni Islamist groups to date which have taken part in a conflict involving more than 25 battle-related deaths annually between 1945 and 2021. It lists all major groups we were able to identify that met our inclusion criteria, listing the names by which they are known, the date of their creation, the main country of operation and any other countries in which they have carried out armed attacks, whether their membership is predominantly Sunni or Shia, whether they operate in low or high-intensity armed conflicts and/or in multisectarian contexts, whether they started out as rebel or pro-government and whether they changed

[1] We would like to thank our student researchers Hashim Shubbar, Nahla Mohamed, Salma Moustafa Khalil, Daniyal Burney for their invaluable help in researching aspects of the dataset, and Iben Hasselager Pedersen for her help with standardizing the referencing. We are also indebted to the perceptive feedback we received from the members of the TOI team (https://ps.au.dk/en/research/research-projects/toi), and from the participants in the two TOI-POMEPS workshops on armed Islamists in warscapes and the Final TOI Conference (https://ps.au.dk/en/research/research-projects/toi/toi-events).

[2] Hashemi and Postel 2017a, 2017b.

[3] Kalyvas 2018; Robinson 2020; Hafez 2020; Thurston 2020.

position over time, whether they have been influenced/supported by the Iranian Revolution, and whether they have had negative and/or positive interactions with each other across sect.

This codebook describes DASSIG by proceeding as follows: first, we outline operational definitions of major concepts (non-state armed groups, organized violence and armed conflict, and Islamism); and second, we identify the universe of armed Sunni and Shia Islamist groups, explain which cases we exclude from our dataset and why, and elaborate on the coding protocol for our variables, acknowledge cases characterized by ambivalence and which proved difficult to code, and elaborate on the sources we used.

Definitions and Operationalization

Below we define and operationalize three key terms of our study: non-state armed groups, organized violence and armed conflict, and armed Islamism.

Non-State Armed Groups

DASSIG follows the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)'s minimal definition of a non-state armed group as "any non-governmental group of people having announced a name for their group and using armed force."[4]

We take this definition to include both Islamist insurgent groups (e.g., the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq or *Al-Majlis al-A'la li'l-Thawra al-Islamiyya fi'l-Iraq*, a Shia Islamist rebel group fighting Saddam Hussein's regime in 1980s Iraq) and pro-government armed Islamist groups (e.g., the Baqir Brigade or *Liwa al-Baqir*, a Syrian Shia Islamist militia fighting the rebels on behalf of the Assad regime in 2010s Syria) as well as Islamist communal militias (e.g., Mohammed's Army or *Sipah-e Muhammad*, a Pakistani Shia Islamist militia formed with the goal of avenging Shia civilians killed in the Sunni-Shia communal strife of early 1990s Pakistan). This sets our dataset apart from existing datasets such as UCDP's which focus predominantly on insurgent groups.

Research on pro-government armed groups still lags behind research on rebel groups. Datasets such as the UCDP's and most quantitative civil war research has to date focused primarily on dyadic conflict between governments and rebel groups and not considered pro-

[4] Cunningham et al. 2013; Gleditsch *et al* 2002; Harbom & Sunberg 2009.

government armed groups as disaggregated from the governments they support. Yet, pro-government armed groups often operate outside state institutional structures[5] and thus are also non-state actors. While many are supported by a regime, the precise relationship between pro-government groups, regimes, and grassroots populations varies. Many armed non-state groups have changed sides over time (e.g., Hizbullah in Lebanon or the Al-Mahdi Army in Iraq); additionally, some who are rebels in one country are pro-government in another (e.g., the Zeinabiyoun Brigade who were pro-government in Syria as part of the Iran-led alliance there, are considered rebels in Pakistan).[6] Given this variation and the considerable overlap with rebel non-state armed groups, they can be meaningfully included in a dataset interested in mapping armed non-state Islamist *groups* rather than *conflict dyads* between rebels and governments. Such an inclusion then allows analysis of for example changes over time or by sect in the number of groups that are rebel vs. pro-regime.

DASSIG builds on the Pro-Government Militias Database (PGMD) created by Carey and Mitchell, which, though not coding for sectarian identity or ideology, contained six Sunni and 16 Shia armed Islamist groups.[7] Contra Svensson and Nilsson,[8] we excluded Islamist state actors since we focus on non-state armed groups. Following Carey and Mitchell, we also excluded paramilitaries which are integrated into state structures – as well as groups from the PGMD that we considered too closely aligned with the state (e.g., Aceh's Sharia Police/*Wilayatul Hisbah* which appears to be closer to a state police force than an autonomous nonstate actor).[9] We thus did not use the dataset compiled by Pilster and Böhmelt, as this focuses on military and paramilitary organizations, the latter of which Böhmelt and Clayton subsequently differentiated from pro-government militias, defining paramilitaries as "equipped…, trained and organized under the central government to support or replace regular military forces."[10] We also excluded groups that seemed insufficiently organized and more like localized vigilantes with no clear overarching ideological Islamist orientation (e.g., the Zamfara State Vigilante which Aina describes as "community self-defense vigilante groups").[11] We do include non-state actors who ended up in government (e.g., Hamas, Hizb al-Da'wa, Badr, the Taliban) or controlling the capital which, according to UCDP,[12] makes them

[5] Aliyev 2019, 65–66; Carey et al. 2013, 250.
[6] Khan 2022.
[7] Carey and Mitchell 2022; Carey et al. 2022.
[8] Svensson and Nilsson 2018.
[9] Feener 2013.
[10] Pilster and Böhmelt 2011, 2012; Böhmelt and Clayton 2018.
[11] Aina 2023, 80.
[12] Pettersson 2023a, 4.

the *de facto* government (e.g., the Houthis but not al-Shabab which never controlled all of Mogadishu, including important government structures) and code those as pro-government for that period, recognizing that the original armed non-state organizations are often not, or not fully, integrated into the state structures.

Organized Violence

DASSIG includes non-state armed groups active in organized violence, itself broadly defined by scholars adopting the UCDP's convention as conflicts with an intensity threshold of 25 battle-related fatalities in a calendar year.[13] This is less stringent than the usual definition of armed conflict as one or a series of instances of violence causing 1,000 war-related total deaths with an average of 100 war-related deaths per year.[14] We opted for the less stringent definition to capture a broader range of conflict (particularly as a significant number of conflicts in which armed Islamists have been active have been low-intensity, by this definition)[15], to enable comparison between low/high-intensity armed conflicts and to dovetail with the definition adopted by the UCDP databases on which we draw.

As a result, our dataset includes non-state armed groups which were active in episodes of extremely high organized violence (e.g., Lebanon's 1975-1990 war), but also those which were active in fighting of a much lower intensity (e.g., armed Islamist attacks during the 1970s against Saddam's regime in Iraq, or Shia rebellions in the Gulf during the 1980s and 90s), so long as the conflict meets the 25 battle-related fatalities' cut-off point in at least one year of the group's existence. To enable comparison and building on the UCDP databases and codebook,[16] we include a variable for whether the type of intra-state conflict these groups operated in was low- or high-intensity (respectively defined as less than 999 and more than 1,000 fatalities a year) in order to check whether patterns of growth hold for both conflict types (see "List of variables in DASSIG" for more detail on how we coded conflict intensity for groups operating in multiple countries).

To qualify for inclusion in DASSIG, named groups need to have sufficient levels of organization to be considered a coherent group over time and to be organized for combat. This excludes entities which engage in organized violence but would not fit the generally accepted

[13] Cunningham et al. 2013.
[14] For more on this threshold/definition, see Correlates of War n.d.; Dixon & Sarkees 2015.
[15] Pettersson et al. 2021.
[16] Pettersson et al. 2021.

definition of "organizations," such as individuals, small informal groups or temporary splinters. Unlike UCDP, we do not include "informally organized groups" – groups "without an announced name," which are not "permanently organized for combat, but who at times use their organizational structures for such purposes."[17] Groups without a name often do not have a clearly defined collective ideology, making it difficult to ascertain whether they are Islamist in the way we define the term. They often also lack the level of organization to be considered a coherent group over time. Where an informally organized group is affiliated with a political party (one of the examples given in the UCDP Codebook) – and thus presumably following a defined ideology – lack of formal organization for combat still produces significantly different group dynamics in armed conflict, which is why we exclude them.

Furthermore, DASSIG includes Islamist actors which are party to one or more of the following three subcategories of organized violence:[18]

- State-based armed conflicts: cases where at least one of the parties to the conflict is a state government (e.g., conflict between states, or within states between a government and rebel groups)
- Non-state armed conflicts: cases where the government is not directly involved as party to the conflict (e.g., conflict between rebels and pro-governmental paramilitaries, or between communal militias so long as they have a minimum level of organizational sophistication)
- One-sided violence: cases in which non-state armed groups engage in the targeted killing of unarmed civilians

To test whether the patterns of evolution observed across the whole sample hold for both high- and low-intensity conflicts, we plotted the evolution of group creation in high- and low-intensity conflicts separately. As **figure A1** shows, the pattern of armed Islamist groups created in high-intensity conflicts follows the overall pattern of armed Islamist group creation very closely. The pattern of groups created in low-intensity conflicts (shown on its own in **figure A2**) shows a similar (though greatly attenuated) overall pattern of growth over time, with two peaks mapping roughly onto the 1979 and the 2012-2014 peaks of the overall pattern; but

[17] Pettersson 2023a, 4, 6.
[18] Melander et al. 2016.

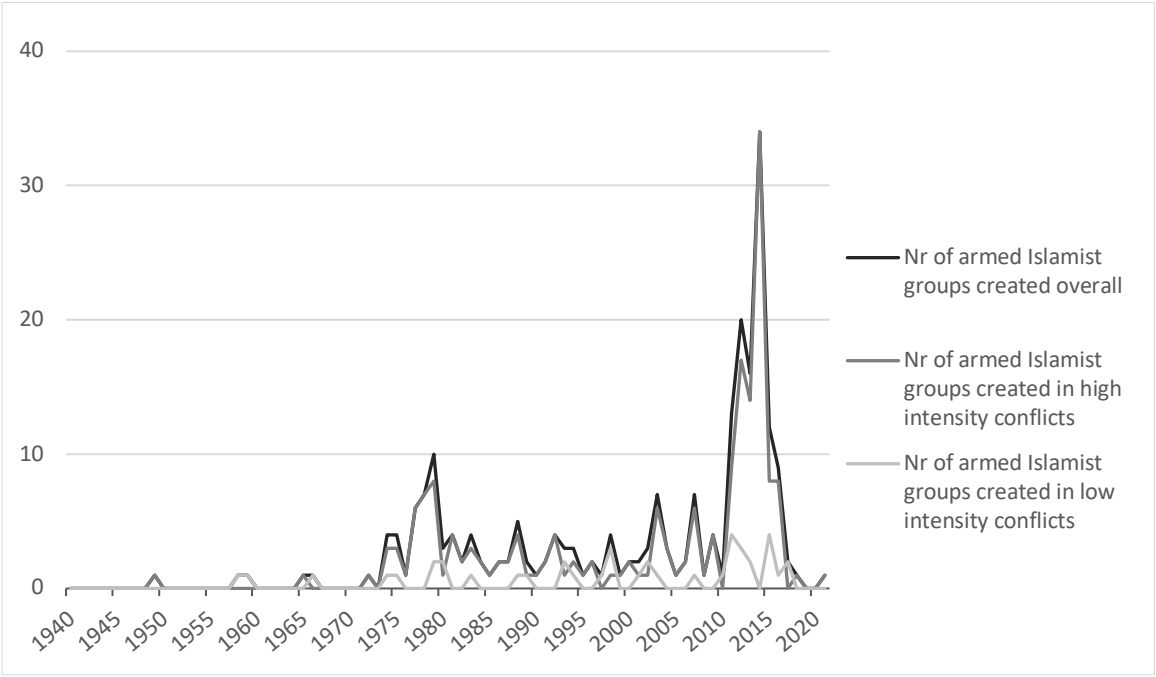

Figure A1. *Number of armed Islamist groups created in high/low intensity conflicts vs. overall (per year)*

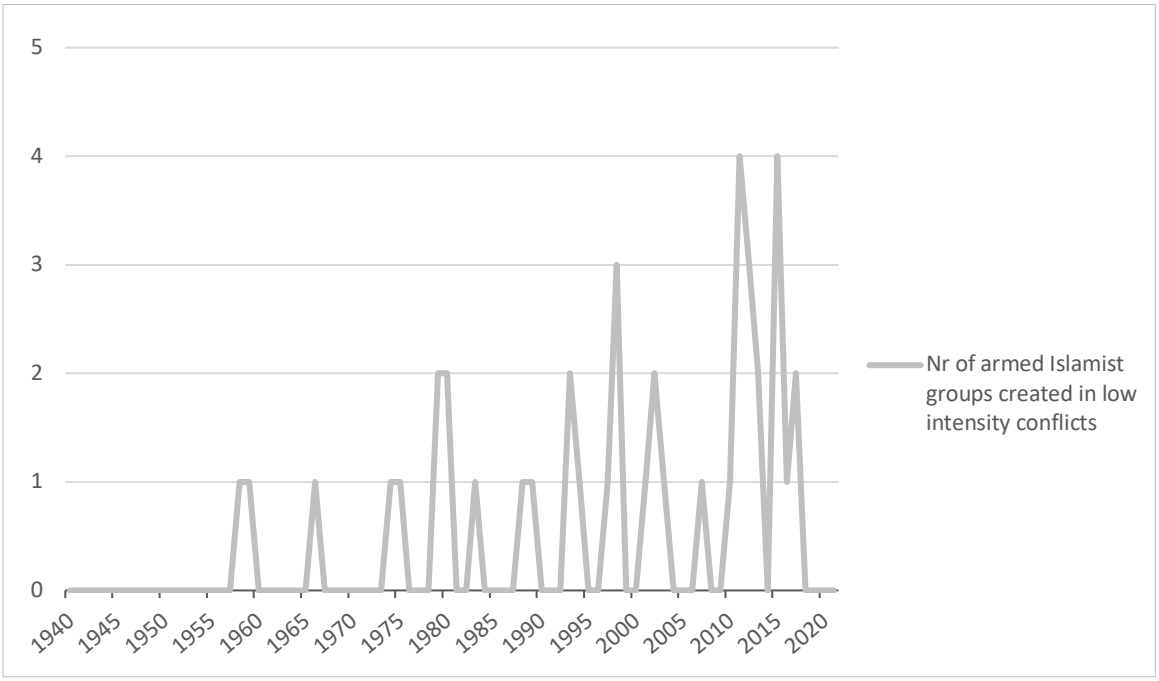

Figure A2. *Number of armed Islamist groups created in low intensity conflicts (per year)*

unlike the overall pattern, which has two smaller peaks in the 2000s (2003 and 2007), it peaks in the late 1990s, with a smaller peak in 2002.

Disaggregation along both sectarian and conflict intensity axes shows that the patterns for armed Shia and for armed Sunni groups created overall map roughly onto those of armed Shia and Sunni groups created in high-intensity conflicts respectively (**figures A3** and **A4**). Armed Sunni Islamist groups created in low-intensity conflicts follow an attenuated but roughly similar pattern to overall armed Sunni Islamist group creation, growing overall over time, with similar peaks in the 2010s and earlier lower peaks in the late 1990s and 2000s (**figure A5**). However, armed Shia Islamist groups created in low intensity conflicts do not follow the overall pattern for Shia Islamist group creation (**figure A6**), as all groups formed after 1993 were formed in high-intensity conflicts and only 9% of groups overall emerged in low-intensity

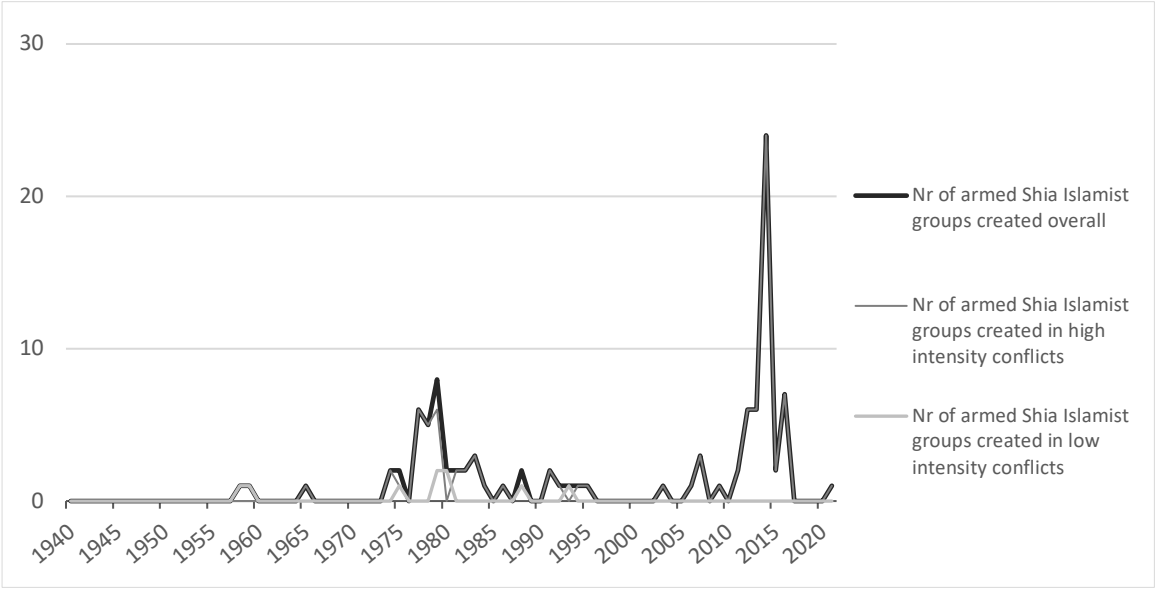

Figure A3. *Number of armed Shia Islamist groups created in high/low intensity conflicts vs. overall (per year)*

conflicts. Thus, armed Islamist groups forming in low-intensity conflicts post-1993 is an exclusively Sunni Islamist phenomenon, with 38%, 19% and 28% of all armed Sunni Islamist groups forming in the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s doing so in low-intensity conflicts – with peaks in the 1990s and the 2010s (the latter despite the density of new groups emerging in high-intensity conflicts such as Syria, Libya and Pakistan). Conversely, during the 1970s and 1980s, armed Sunni Islamist groups were marginally more likely to form in high-intensity conflicts than their Shia counterparts (90% vs 87% and 86% vs 77% respectively).

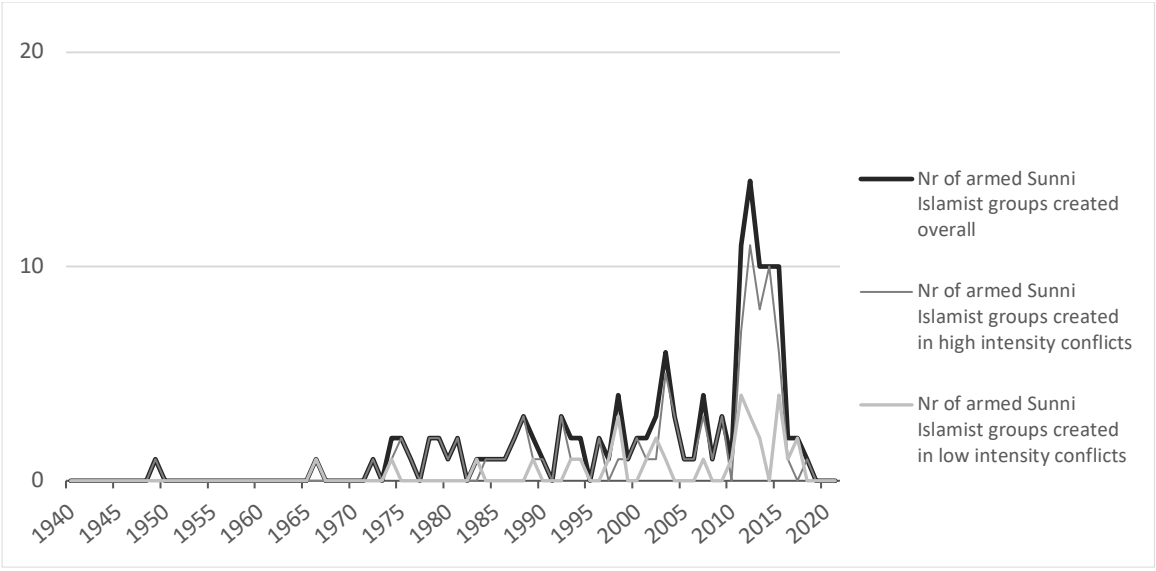

Figure A4. *Number of armed Sunni Islamist groups created in high/low intensity conflicts vs. overall (per year)*

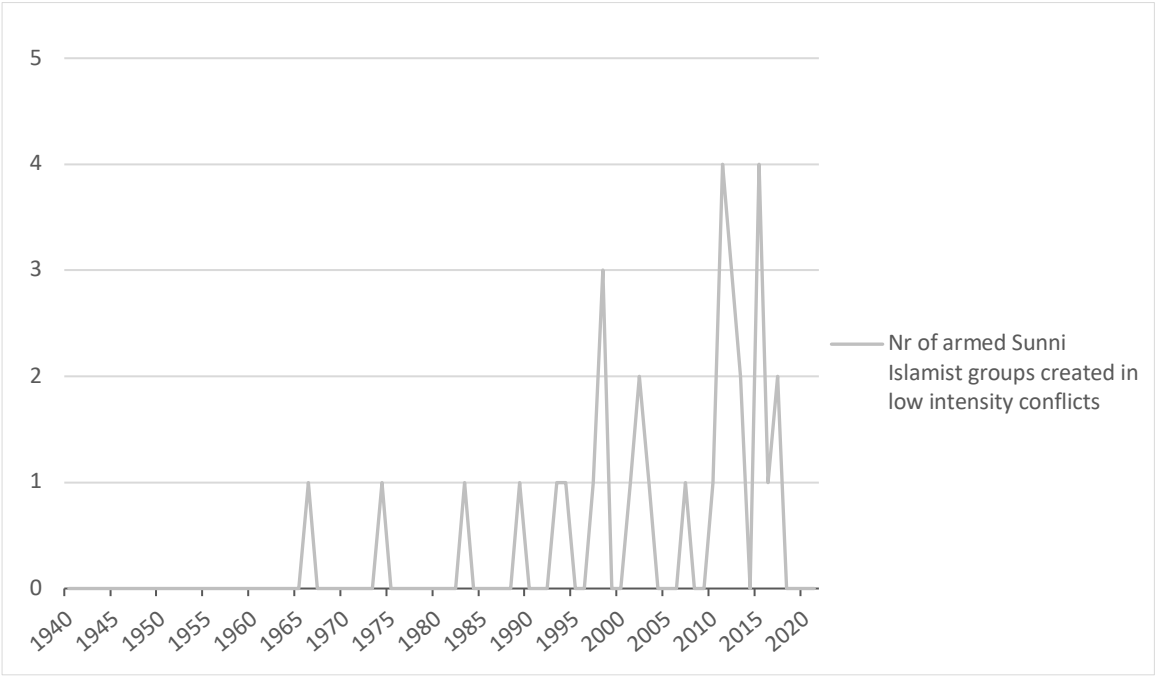

Figure A5. *Number of armed Sunni Islamist groups created in low intensity conflicts (per year)*

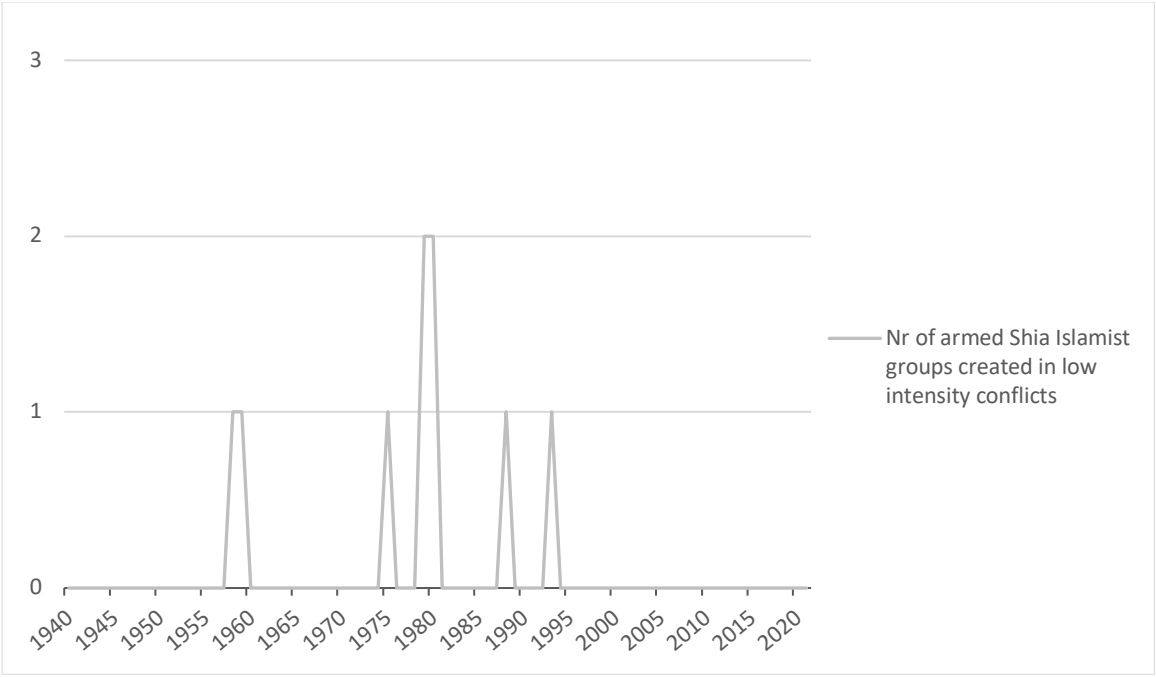

Figure A6. *Number of armed Shia Islamist groups created in low intensity conflicts (per year)*

Armed Islamism

DASSIG includes a repertory of all major non-state armed Islamist groups we were able to identify who have been involved in a conflict resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one year. Although there is still an ongoing debate over exactly how to define "Islamism,"[19] one common way to do so is to refer to those movements that call for Islam to be a key source of inspiration in the organization of their country's social and political life.[20] Although we recognize that this definition is rooted in a conceptual framework that assumes religion to be separate from politics, which is precisely what Islamists dispute, we adopt this definition for the purposes of this project.

Yet, as Lynch notes, operationalizing this definition in the context of conflicts is much harder.[21] Not all armed Islamist groups in the midst of fighting dedicate equal time and effort clarifying the contours of their political ideology as they would during peace time.[22] Moreover, even in cases where an armed group does espouse a clear Islamist ideology, publicly available evidence about it may be lacking. This may be intentional, in cases where the group

[19] See Boubekeur and Roy 2012; Denoeux 2002; Mozaffari 2007; Schwedler 2016.
[20] Cammett and Luong 2014; Volpi 2010; Schwedler 2011; Hamid and Dar 2016; Wagemakers 2021.
[21] Lynch 2019.
[22] For an argument in favour of a broader conceptualization of ideology in conflict contexts as "more or less systematic ideas" bound together, amongst other things, by a "vaguely defined programme of action," see Sanín and Wood 2014.

disseminates its ideology internally but makes a deliberate decision not to publicize it to outsiders (for instance, because it operates in an ideologically hostile external environment). It is often also unintentional (for example, in cases where the infrastructural and human damage associated with conflict destroys the evidence). Further, groups may adopt a more Islamist public persona to secure funding and external support[23] or may be an amalgam of nationalist and Islamist trends, raising questions about the extent to which they can be considered Islamist.[24] For the purpose of this dataset, we follow a comprehensive definition of armed Islamism as the spectrum of armed organizations a) whose discourse is characterized by calls for a greater role for Islam in social and political life, **and/or** b) whose dominant organizational practices, history, members or close networks can be considered Islamist, in the sense of promoting a greater role for Islam in social and political life.

For instance, the Sham Legion (*Faylaq al-Sham*) can be considered an Islamist rebel group in the 2011 Syrian civil war. This is not because its discourse itself is particularly Islamist, as its official propaganda mostly focuses on the need for the downfall of the Assad regime without publicly clarifying the contours of the future state it wants to implement and the role which Islamic law will play – a blurriness stemming from the group's strategy to keep close ties to the opposition's Western backers at the time. Rather, it can be considered Islamist because it draws significantly on the constituency of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, and eventually joined a coalition of other Islamist groups, the Islamic Front.[25] In other words, while the Sham Legion may have shied away from publicly disseminating its Islamist ideology, it can still be considered an armed Islamist group as evidenced by the practices of its members and the networks on which they drew.

Similarly, Syria's Farouq Brigades (*Kata'ib al-Farouq*) has been coded Islamist on the ground that it adopted increasingly Islamist discourse and practices as it turned towards Saudi Arabia for funding and support.[26] Although its re-alignment may have been pragmatic, its Islamist turn had consequences for the networks it was part of and for the way the local population perceived it, and the group can thus be considered as part of the armed Islamist scene. Where groups were border cases, we included them in the dataset if at least a significant part of their ideology, members and/or networks had Islamist elements. Thus, we included Iraq's JRTN (Army of the Men of the Naqshbandi Order or *Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqa al-*

[23] Baylouny and Mullins 2018.
[24] Gunning and Jackson 2011.
[25] Lefèvre and El Yassir 2014.
[26] Baylouny and Mullins 2018.

Naqshbandiya) because it has blended its dominant nationalist framework with Islamist themes, counts Islamists amongst its members and has taken part in Islamist coalitions with other Iraqi insurgent groups.[27] For the same reason, Lebanon's Amal movement has been included for the first years of its existence, before its Islamist members split from the movement (for more on this, see below in the section "Examples of ambivalent cases").

Beyond allowing for the inclusion of Islamist groups which dedicate more resources to fighting than to issuing ideological statements, another advantage of this comprehensive definition of armed Islamist groups is that it eschews the narrower and more confusing term of "jihadism." As Hegghammer remarks, [28] this term means different things to different people – some viewing it as referring to all armed Islamists regardless of their ideological orientation, others interpreting it as a subset of violent, conservative, takfiri and uncompromising Sunni groups adopting jihadi-Salafism.[29] Thus, our broader term of "armed Islamism" alludes to the wide spectrum of armed groups espousing an Islamist ideology or characterized by Islamist practices/members/networks that operate during conflicts. This broader conceptualization allows us to include jihadi-Salafi groups in the dataset, but also to cast the net wider and include more moderate Muslim Brotherhood-inspired armed groups, and armed Shia organizations themselves drawing on a variety of ideological sub-categories.

Universe of Armed Sunni and Shia Islamist Groups in Conflicts

Having defined and operationalized the three key terms of our study – non-state armed groups, organized violence/armed conflict, and armed Islamism – below we elaborate on the coding protocol for our main variables and explain the criteria for inclusion/exclusion.

Armed Islamist groups

DASSIG is a repertory of 228 armed Islamist groups which have operated in conflicts resulting in at least 25 battle-related fatalities in at least one year of their existence. It is in part based on the UCDP Actor Dataset version 21.1[30] which includes 1,453 armed actors. Focusing on non-

[27] Knights 2011.
[28] Hegghammer 2017.
[29] For an example of this latter approach, see Stenersen 2020.
[30] Pettersson et al. 2021.

state armed groups in the Islamic world (the Middle East/West Asia and North Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and parts of Africa), we identified a total of 138 groups espousing an Islamist ideology. In doing so, we followed the definition outlined above according to which an armed Islamist actor is one whose discourse is characterized by a) calls for a greater role for Islam in society and politics, and/or b) whose networks, members and practices can be considered Islamist, in the sense of promoting a greater role for Islam in social and political life. In the vast majority of cases, information about a) was available. In the small number of cases when it was not, we used any available data about b). If no information was available about the Islamist nature of either the group's discourse or its networks/practices, we did not include the group in DASSIG. This means that we excluded from our dataset some cases which were included in Gleditsch and Rudolfsen's dataset[31] but without clear evidence other than the name of the group including "Islamic" in the title.[32] A prominent example is the Sunni insurgent group, the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan (*Junbish-i Milli Islami Afghanistan*), which, in spite of its name bearing a religious connotation, was a secular militia affiliated with the leftist People's Democratic Party (*Hizb-i Demokratik-i Khalq*), and characterized by strong ties to the former Afghan Communist army and especially to general Abdul Rashid Dostum.[33] In this case, neither its publicly available discourse, nor its networks/practices were actually Islamist. Another example is the Philippine group *Al-Khobar*, which in spite of being branded by the government as "Islamist" has been dismissed by the few researchers discussing it as an "extortion gang" or "kidnap-for-ransom gang" with no clear indication that it actually espoused an Islamist discourse or drew on Islamist networks.[34]

In addition, following the definition of "non-state armed groups" outlined above, we looked for a visible level of organizational sophistication as a criterion for inclusion in DASSIG. This means that generic terms at times used in the UCDP database such as "Patani insurgents" or "partisans of Mullah Khadim" are not included in the dataset. It also means that we excluded splinter factions which did not gain full operational autonomy, such as various factions of the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban or the Groupe Islamique Armé's various splinters in Algeria. By contrast, however, the split within the Afghan armed Shia Islamist group, Party of Unity, between an anti-Taliban and a pro-Taliban faction – both of which evolved into separate organizations – is included, alongside other similar cases. We also excluded front

[31] Gleditsch and Rudolfsen 2016.
[32] See also Basedau et al. 2022, 7.
[33] Giustozzi 2009.
[34] Abuza 2008; Strachan 2015.

groups which were proven to have little or no autonomy from their parent organization as well as groups that evolved into an (often larger) group with another name. One example is Islamic Jihad in 1980s Lebanon, whose members came to play a central role in Hizbullah when it was formally launched in 1985 – although the precise relationship between Islamic Jihad and Hizbullah continues to be debated (see further under ambivalent cases).[35] Another example is the emergence of as many as 16 front groups for established Iraqi armed Shia Islamist groups in 2021, whose purpose was to avenge the assassination of Iranian General Qassem Suleimani and attack US positions in Iraq while preserving a modicum of plausible deniability for their parent organizations.[36]

Armed Sunni vs. Shia Islamist groups

We then proceeded to disaggregate between Sunni and Shia organizations in the list of 138 armed Islamist groups recovered from the UCDP database. A group was considered Sunni or Shia if its membership was predominantly Sunni or Shia. This yielded 127 Sunni and 11 Shia armed Islamist groups. Why such a disproportion, given the prominence of Shia Islamists among armed groups? This is partially because the wave of armed Shia Islamist pro-governmental mobilization in 2010s Iraq and Syria has not been factored into the UCDP dataset, which remains formally insurgent-centric (even though ten of the armed Islamist groups we identified in the UCDP dataset also appear in the Pro-Government Militias Database (PGMD) produced by Carey and Mitchell, and, according to our research, 36 of the Islamist groups in UCDP either became or, more rarely, started out as pro-government).[37] Yet the lack of acknowledgement of the role of armed Shia Islamist groups is also reflective of the broader gap in the fields of Islamist politics and Middle East studies, which have tended in recent years to focus more on Sunni Islamist groups, and especially Sunni Islamist groups in predominantly Sunni-inhabited parts of the Muslim world such as Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, and the Sahel than on areas with sizeable Shia populations such as Iran, Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Kuwait, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, or, outside West Asia and North Africa, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.[38]

[35] Daher 2019; Levitt 2013.
[36] Al-Arabi al-Jadid 2021.
[37] Carey and Mitchell 2022.
[38] Valbjørn 2017; Valbjørn & Gunning 2021. The list of countries is ordered by highest percentage of Shia, then highest numbers of Shia, as estimated by Pew 2009.

Seeking to redress this Sunni-centrism, we researched cases of Shia Islamist militancy in countries containing sizeable Shia populations. In doing this, we followed the criteria set out above to decide which groups should be included as "non-state armed groups," engaged in "organized violence" and espousing an "Islamist" ideology. This yielded a list of an additional 88 armed non-state Shia Islamist groups engaged in a conflict that resulted in at least 25 battle-related fatalities in one year, and two additional Sunni Islamist groups, bringing the totals to 99 and 129 respectively.

The criterion of being involved in a conflict with at least 25 battle-related fatalities in at least one year of a group's existence meant that we had to exclude from our dataset eight prominent armed Shia Islamist groups which were involved in politically or strategically important contentious events but did not take part in episodes of organized violence reaching the threshold of 25 people killed in one calendar year. These eight prominent organizations include:

- The Devotees of Islam, or *Feda'iyen Islam*: an Iranian armed Shia Islamist group which conducted a campaign of assassinations of officials in the 1940s and 50s.[39]
- the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, or *Jabha al-Islamiyya li Tahrir al-Bahrayn*, a Bahraini organization whose 1981 foiled coup was an event of strategic importance in Gulf politics but resulted in only two fatalities and one injury.[40]
- Hijazi Hizbullah, or *Hizbullah al-Hijaz*, whose involvement in the 1996 Khobar Tower bombings resulted in close to 500 injuries but, at 19 deaths, did not reach the threshold to be included.[41]
- Bahrain's Brigade of (Malik) al-Ashtar and the Brigade of the Chosen one, or *Saraya al-Ashtar* and *Saraya al-Mukhtar*: two Shia Islamist rebel groups created in 2013 and involved until 2016 in low-level insurgency in Bahrain.[42]
- The Islamic Movement of Azerbaijan, the Northern Imam Mahdi Army in Azerbaijan and Azeri Hizbullah, or respectively *Azərbaycan İslam Partiyası*, *Śimal Imam Mehdi Ordusu* and *Azəri Hizbullahı*: the first was created in 1991 and was reputedly involved in a failed coup in 1995, the second was created in 2006 to conduct insurgent operations

[39] Ferdows 1967.
[40] Alhasan 2011.
[41] Matthiesen 2010.
[42] Knights and Levitt 2018; Smyth et al. 2017.

but was disbanded, the third came to light in 1997 and was accused of criminal activity and an assassination.[43]

Countries of operation

DASSIG records the main country of operation as well as additional states where groups carried out attacks. Main country of operation is defined as the country where the majority of a group's attacks are carried out. For most groups, this is both their country of origin and the country where they operate (both in terms of carrying out attacks and in terms of where they are organizationally based). Where groups carry out attacks in their country of origin from another (usually) neighboring country, the main country of operation identified in the dataset is the country where they carry out their attacks, not the country where they reside (e.g., Jondullah which resides in Pakistan but carries out most of its attacks in Iran). Conversely, if groups carry out attacks in a country other than their country of origin, we identify the country where they are operative. Cases in point are the (Afghani) Fatemiyoun and (Azeri) Husseiniyun Brigades operating in Syria.

To map which groups are operating transnationally, defined here as operating in more than one state, we list additional states where groups carry out armed attacks as part of an armed organization. For both methodological and conceptual reasons, we focus on *successful* armed attacks rather than other potential indicators of transnationalism, such as training camps in third-party states, smuggling, fundraising, media organizational presence or unsuccessful attacks, as data on these alternative indicators is often ambiguous and/or difficult to obtain or verify and they are not necessarily indicative of transnational goals (e.g., groups operating from neighboring states usually do so for tactical reasons).[44] The armed attacks have to be carried out by an armed organization. Where it is unclear whether this is the case – e.g., the kidnapping of Iranian diplomats at the UN's headquarters in New York by activists supportive of the Iranian MEK, armed only with knives[45] – we did not code it as such. Following this method, we coded 29 Shia and 27 Sunni armed Islamist groups as operating in more than one state.

[43] International Crisis Group 2008; Valiyev 2018.
[44] See also Valbjørn et al. 2024.
[45] McFadden 1992.

In a few instances, the main country of operation is not the country of origin, even though attacks have been carried out in the country of origin. The Pakistani Zeinabiyoun Brigade, for example, was created to fight in Syria. Yet, since the war in Syria has lessened in intensity, a number of fighters have returned to Pakistan and carried out organized attacks there.[46] Although members of the Fatemiyoun Brigade have also returned to Afghanistan, by the cut-off date of the dataset (2021), they did not appear to have carried out attacks as part of a centralized armed organization[47] – so, they have not been coded as operating in Afghanistan, only in Syria.

Date of creation of armed groups

DASSIG identifies the date of creation of the 228 armed Sunni and Shia Islamist groups that have been involved in episodes of organized violence since 1945 as a proxy to capture patterns of temporal evolution in armed Islamism. This raises four important methodological problems which need to be acknowledged and tackled.

The first is that there are cases in which the date of creation does not match with the date of involvement in armed activities. Some Islamist groups were first created in political institutional settings and took part in elections or peaceful protests, before later getting drawn into militancy. This was the case, for instance, with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun fi Suriya*): it was created in 1946 and ran for parliament, but when the Baath regime of Hafez al-Assad hardened its stance towards the opposition, it then engaged in insurgent operations from 1976 until 1982.[48] Another example is the Da'wa Party or *Hizb al-Da'wa* in Iraq, created in 1957 but only engaging in instances of organized violence from 1977 and creating an armed wing from 1979 onwards. To capture this nuance, we identify when the armed organization first emerged – not when the group itself was created.

A second methodological problem linked with using the date of creation of armed Islamist groups as a proxy to capture patterns of temporal evolution in armed Islamism is that, in theory, this proxy could be revealing of organizational fragmentation and splintering rather than of the growth of armed Islamism. After all, the 1970s witnessed the multiplication of Marxist insurgent groups in the Third World but, arguably, this was more a symptom of fratricidal struggles between ever smaller armed organizations than of any growing momentum

[46] Khan 2022.
[47] Taneja 2023.
[48] Lefèvre 2013.

of revolutionary Marxism at the time. Thus, when a conflict gave birth to more than three armed Islamist groups, we delved into specialized literature on the conflict in order to learn more about the specific context in which armed Islamist groups were created. For instance, during the Islamist insurgency against the Shah of Iran in the mid and late-1970s, no less than 12 Islamist rebel groups were created – some were splits from established Islamist organizations, but their creation still matched with evidence of growing acts of armed Islamism. Similarly, in 2010s Iraq and Syria, according to our data, no less than 47 clearly delineated and distinctly Islamist new armed Shia groups were established, and this corresponded to a period marked by a vast increase in armed Shia Islamist mobilization (we excluded armed groups whose ideological orientation was not explicitly Islamist, e.g., many localized groups following Iraq's Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani). Conversely, the creation of umbrella groups could be an indicator, not of growth, but of purely tactical rebranding, resulting in a possible exaggeration of Islamist growth through the double-counting of participant groups that also appear separately in the dataset. For an umbrella group to be included in the database, it has to have a level of organizational integration (although we recognize that in many cases the participant groups maintain their organizational identity) and it needs to connote an upscaling of armed Islamist activity. For instance, the Levant Front in Syria, led by Ahrar al-Sham, took on a life of its own and led to an intensification of fighting, even though its participant groups remained separately identifiable. In this case, we follow UCDP's practice of regarding a new alliance – "when two or more already registered non-state actors join together under a new name in a tight coalition with joint military operations" – as a new actor.[49]

A third methodological problem is that it would also in theory be possible that the sudden proliferation of groups reflects an attempt by existing armed groups to create front organizations that have no real organizational autonomy, either in order to carry out certain operations while keeping a modicum of plausible deniability, or as a way of artificially bolstering the sense that armed Islamism is undergoing momentum. This was the case in 2021 in Iraq, when the assassination of Iranian general Qassem Suleimani led to the sudden creation of 16 armed Shia Islamist groups in Iraq which claimed they were going to avenge his murder by attacking US forces in Baghdad – yet they were front groups for existing organizations, not

[49] Pettersson 2023a, 5.

new militias that had operational autonomy. As a result, then, we excluded these 16 organizations from DASSIG.[50]

A final problem concerns the longevity of armed groups. If three groups are created in short succession but two disband within a short time frame, the dataset would give the impression of significant growth when in fact growth was limited. However, not only have the vast majority of groups included in the dataset existed for a considerable length of time but even where groups had a relatively short live span, the formation of multiple groups within a short time frame can still be considered evidence of a growing momentum and is thus important to capture. In order to ensure the empirical integrity of our dataset, we excluded two cases of armed Islamist groups included in the UCDP dataset but on which we were not able to find detailed information in the secondary literature, suggesting they were not major groups (Syria's Brigades of the Dawn of the Caliphate or *Kata'ib Fajr al-Khilafa*; and Syria's Movement of the Islamic Holy Warriors or *Harakat Mujahedin al-Islam*).

Finally, existing datasets do not all cover the period DASSIG covers. Some start after the emergence of the first wave of Shia Islamist armed groups in the 1970s.[51] Some end before most of the slew of new Shia groups in Iraq and Syria had fully emerged.[52] DASSIG's coverage of the entire period 1945-2021 is thus particularly important for capturing both early and late developments in the emergence of Shia Islamist armed groups.

The nature of the interaction between armed Sunni and Shia armed Islamists

DASSIG includes information coding the nature of the interaction between armed Sunni and Shia Islamist groups. For all of the 228 groups in the dataset, we included information about whether Sunni and Shia Islamist organizations had positive or negative interactions with each other across sect, and when this happened. By "positive" interaction, we mean evidence of at least one explicit alliance between Sunni and Shia Islamist actors. This can entail the provision of money and/or weapons or an alliance on the battlefield to defy a shared enemy. By "negative" interaction, we mean evidence of at least one explicit confrontation between Sunni and Shia Islamist actors. This can entail an armed clash or attacks on members of the other group. In this iteration of the dataset, we do not focus on ideology and whether a group espouses

[50] Al-Arabi al-Jadid 2021.
[51] Carey and Mitchell 2022; Finnbogason et al. 2019; Svensson and Nilsson 2018.
[52] Gleditsch and Rudolfsen 2016; Svensson and Nilsson 2018; Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020; Carey and Mitchell 2022.

explicitly anti-Sunni or anti-Shia positions. Note that "positive" and "negative" interactions between Islamists across sect need not be mutually exclusive – a small number of Sunni and Shia Islamist armed actors in fact developed both types of interactions, often as a result of evolving context. Here, the earliest date of when we found evidence of such interaction, which we record in DASSIG, may give clues as to that changing context. These interactions often unfold on the ground during a conflict, but they need not be only between geographically proximate actors. For instance, during the Lebanese war, the Shia Islamist Hizbullah in Beirut forged an alliance with the armed Sunni Islamist group Tawhid in Tripoli – they did not per se fight together against common enemies, but they did issue shared statements in which they clearly referred to each other as ideological allies.[53]

Most groups involved in cross-sect interactions operated in multisectarian contexts (for context, 75% of all groups founded between 1945-2021 and 56% of armed Sunni Islamist groups emerged in multisectarian states; armed Shia Islamist groups only emerged in multisectarian states, defined as having a minority sect population of more than 5%). However, it is noteworthy that 17% (seven from 42) of groups involved in positive interactions did not operate in multisectarian contexts (the figure for groups involved in negative interactions in non-multisectarian contexts is much lower at 2% or two from 115). Also noteworthy is that the number of newly founded groups involved in positive interactions dropped dramatically from the 1990s, while the number of new groups engaged in negative interactions started to increase from the 1990s, with a huge expansion in the 2010s (**figure A7**).

Moreover, it is important to note that, for the purpose of recording negative or positive interactions with Islamists from a different sect, we code the Islamic Republic of Iran as a Shia Islamist (state) actor, and Pakistan and Saudi Arabia as Sunni Islamist (state) actors. All three states clearly espouse Islamism as an ideology as defined above. While the Islamic Republic was founded by Ayatollah Khomeini and the circle of Shia Islamist activists around him,[54] General Zia ul-Haq's coup in Pakistan in 1977 led to the establishment of Islamic law over the country and the infiltration in the state apparatus of supporters of the Islamic Group (or *Jamaat-e Islami*),[55] and Saudi Arabia's system further integrated the religious into the political from the 1970s and 80s onwards (including through the global diffusion of Wahhabism).[56] Factoring in these three states as Islamist actors allows the data to reflect important interactions between

[53] Lefèvre 2021.
[54] Abrahamian 2008.
[55] Abou Zahab 2002; Abou Zahab 2020.
[56] Commins 2005; Farquhar 2016; Mandaville 2022.

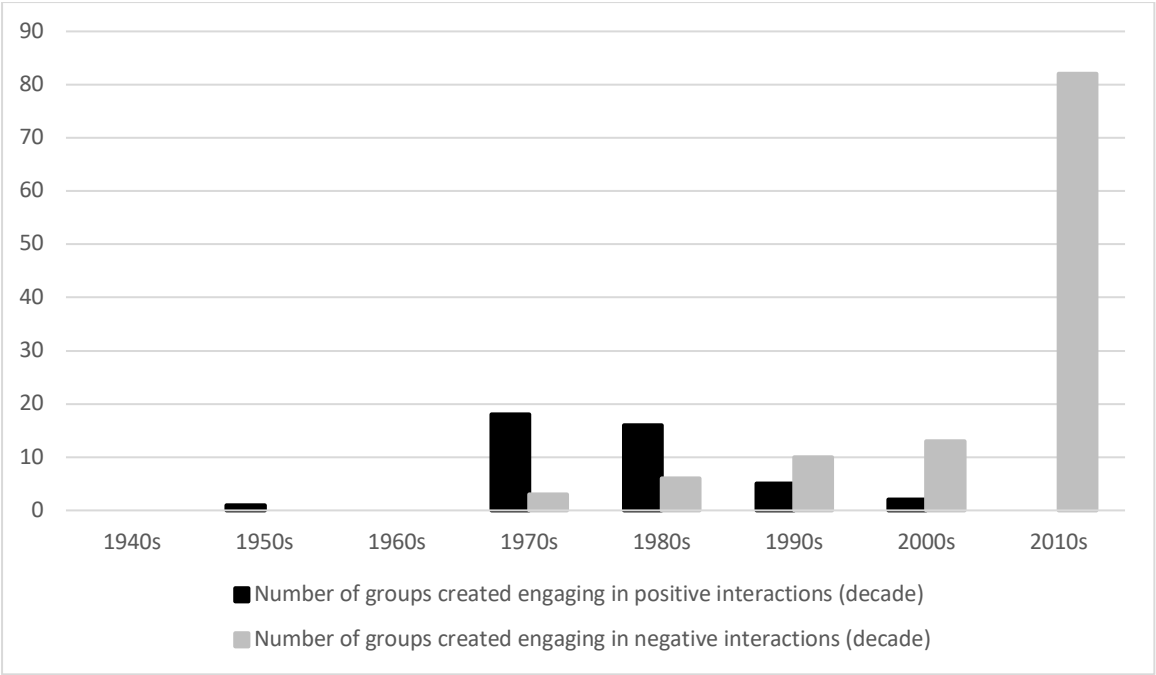

Figure A7. *Number of armed Islamist groups created engaging in positive or negative interactions (per decade)*

Islamists across sect. Indeed, in the 1970s and 1980s, a number of armed Sunni Islamist groups looked upon the 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution as a model, regardless of it being led by Shia and not Sunni clerics and espousing an ideology rooted predominantly in Shia interpretations of Islam (though with important Sunni influences and presented in an ecumenical way at the time).[57] This resulted in some armed Sunni organizations such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad forging a close and long-lasting alliance with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Support for/from the 1978-1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran

DASSIG also includes information about whether or not armed Sunni and Shia Islamist groups created during the 1970s and 1980s supported the 1978-1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran or were supported by the Islamic Republic in its first decade. At first, the Iranian Revolution included an ideologically wide range of armed and non-armed actors, from the communist Tudeh Party of Iran and its leftist splinters all the way to the Islamo-Marxist organization *Mujahedin-e Khalq* and to Khomeinist Islamist movements and militias. Yet the latter soon took control of the revolutionary process and, after the Shah fled Tehran into exile, swiftly

[57] See also Valbjørn and Gunning 2024.

cemented their control over the nascent state institutions, turning the Iranian Revolution into a distinctly Islamic Revolution where calls for the involvement of clerics in politics and for the birth of an Islamic Republic became prevalent.[58] This column is coded "yes" if there is evidence that prominent members or the entire leadership of specific Shia and Sunni Islamist groups under investigation explicitly backed, took inspiration from what became known as the "Iranian model" of direct clerical involvement in politics or received support from the post-1979 Iranian government. In other words, our coding is based on views regarding the Iranian Revolution as an outcome – not as a process.

Multisectarian context

DASSIG also includes information on whether the conflict in which the armed Sunni or Shia Islamist group operated was located in a country featuring a multisectarian religious composition – in this case defined as a country in which the minority sect was more than 5% of the population according to the Pew Research Center 2009 report "Mapping the Global Muslim Population." We included Nigeria in this list despite its Shia population being less than 5% as its Shia population, at nearly 4 million, is larger than the Shia populations in 15 of the 23 countries included in the report.

Examples of ambivalent cases

As always with coding complex phenomena, particularly when marrying a qualitative approach to quantification (see "Sources used"), we faced a number of ambivalent cases during the research phase. Below, we discuss our coding decisions in the most ambiguous cases, as illustrations of the kind of ambivalences encountered more broadly.

- **Supporters of God (or *Ansar Allah*, known as the Houthis)**: this Yemeni Islamist group is made up of Zaydis, who hail from a branch of Shiism that has significant differences with the dominant Twelver Shi'ism to which all other groups belong and whose religious practices have historically been more closely aligned with Yemen's Sunnis. We code the group as Shia on the ground that Zaydis are typically considered

[58] Abrahamian 1982a; Abrahamian 1982b; Abrahamian 1989; Keshavarzian and Mirsepassi 2021; Maloney 2020.

a branch of Shi'ism in Shia Studies.[59] Further, there is evidence that since 2008, and even more so 2015, the movement has drawn closer to specifically Khomeinist interpretations of Twelver Shia Islam as it has become more closely aligned with, and supported by, the Shia Islamist leadership in Iran and other prominent Shia Islamist groups in the Iran-led Axis of Resistance, such as Hizbullah.[60]

- **Organization of the Poor Mujahedin (or *Sazman-i Mujahedin-i Mustazzafin*)**: this Afghan armed Islamist group was the only organization in Afghanistan to accept both Shias and Sunnis in terms of practice and doctrine, which thus defied easy categorization into either Shia or Sunni Islamist movement. Its actual membership, however, was largely Shia.[61] We therefore coded the group as Shia.

- **Amal**: this Shia Lebanese militia in its later incarnations during the mid and late 1980s as well as since the end of the war in 1990 is neither known for its discourse calling for a greater role of Islam in the society and politics of Lebanon, nor for its Islamist practices and/or networks. However, in its early days from the time of its creation in 1974 until 1982, it can be considered to have been an Islamist actor, for three reasons. First, its discourse and that of its founding father, the cleric Musa Sadr, were imbued with religious references and calls for a greater role of Islam. And in a statement in June 1980, one of its officials claimed that it was "a movement of the believers," while its members rejected the notion that theirs was a secular movement.[62] Second, this is also exemplified by the split which occurred in 1982 when Amal had come to embrace a more ethno-nationalist form of Shi'ism in the wake of Nabih Berri's takeover of the movement following Musa Sadr's disappearance in 1978. The breakaway, explicitly Islamist faction, Islamic Amal, stated that the mother organization had deviated from the original purposes for which it had been founded. This gives credence to the argument that, pre-1982, Amal can be considered to have espoused, at least in part, an Islamist ideology and that, at least part of its members, including key leaders, considered themselves Islamists (and even after 1982, Amal continued for some time to emphasize its religious credentials and proximity to Iran in its contest with Hizbullah

[59] E.g., Daftary et al. 2015; Louër 2020.
[60] Khalaji 2015; Valbjørn 2018; Juneau 2024.
[61] Dorronsoro 2005.
[62] Shaery-Eisenlohr 2008.

over control of the resistance and the allegiance of the Shia community in Lebanon).[63] And, third, the particular organizational networks and practices of Amal between 1974 and 1982 can themselves be said to be Islamist. Although the movement was founded by Musa Sadr and initially relied heavily on his own charismatic leadership, the organizational networks on which Amal drew originated in the Islamist Iraqi Da'wa Party[64] as well as in the connections of Mustafa Chamran, an Iranian Islamist opponent of the Shah who was embedded in Amal and would become Khomeini's Minister of Defense after 1979.[65] For these three reasons, then, we code Amal as an armed Shia Islamist group for 1974-1982.

- **Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)**: in this case, we found conflicting evidence about the date when the group was created. Different sources mention 1977, 1981 and 1984 as the date of the group's creation. The reason for these discrepancies is that not all authors agree on what group "creation" means. For some, the MILF was created when a faction in the Moro National Liberation Front broke away from the mother organization in 1977. However, we found no clear evidence that the faction became actually active in armed operations and took a new name until 1984.[66] This is why we coded the group's creation for 1984.

- **Forces of Sadr the Martyr (Islamic Da'wa Party or *Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islami*)**: The start date of the armed wing of the Iraqi Da'wa Party is similarly ambiguous. Jabar mentions a failed coup against the Baath Party in 1970 and highlights the presence of "Daawa militants" during mass discontent at the Ashura rituals of 1974 and 1975.[67] But the first acts of organized disturbances including violence (as a response to repression) appear to have occurred in 1977 during the Safar uprising, and the party did not start to arm itself and carry out "military operations against government officials and organs of repression" until after the arrest of Baqir al-Sadr in 1979.[68] The Da'wa Party, like its Iraqi rival SCIRI, was more cross-sectarian in its early years, both in discourse (although it drew heavily on Shia ideas) and their membership (although the leadership

[63] Alkhayer 2024.
[64] Shanahan 2004.
[65] Chehabi and Mneimneh 2006.
[66] McKenna 1998.
[67] Jabar 2003.
[68] Al-Ruhaimi 2002, 155–156.

and membership was predominantly Shia), but became more Shia-centric subsequently.[69]

- **Islamic Jihad/Lebanese Hizbullah**: Although Hizbullah did not formally announce itself until its "Open Letter to the World's Oppressed" in 1985, the movement had already adopted this name in May 1984. Structure-wise, it emerged from the Committee of Nine, established shortly after Israel's June 1982 invasion of Lebanon from representatives of the groups that would together make up Hizbullah. This was replaced in early 1983 by the Council of Lebanon, which was tasked with "setting up the organization, drawing up a hierarchy, establishing rules, systems and programmes, forming the working groups and specialized committees."[70] We therefore take 1983 as the start date of Hizbullah. The precise relationship between Hizbullah and Islamic Jihad, which claimed responsibility for the 1983 and 1984 attacks on the American Embassy and the barracks of the US Marines and French paratroopers in Beirut and was linked to many of the kidnappings between 1982-1992, remains contested. While Western intelligence agencies saw it as a cover for Hizbullah, scholars with more local knowledge note not only that Hizbullah, while praising them, has never claimed responsibility for Islamic Jihad's attacks and hostage-takings, but also that the alleged leader of Islamic Jihad, Imad Mughniyeh, had closer relations with the Iranian government than with Hizbullah, even while he has played a central role in shaping Hizbullah's military operations. Moreover, hostages were taken for many different reasons, including for financial and family reasons.[71] However, because key Islamic Jihad leaders, such as Mughniyeh and Mustafa Badreddine, played important roles within Hizbullah, in terms of organizational and strategic development, and were recognized by Hizbullah as having done so, we did not create a separate entry for Islamic Jihad.

- **MEK/Mujahedin-e Khalq**: although there were enduring tensions between the MEK and the post-revolutionary regime in 1979, for a brief period the group supported the new government and Khomeini, participating in elections and arguing that disloyalty to the regime would be to play into the hands of the imperialists. Although it does not

[69] Laval 2023; Kotinsky 2022.
[70] Daher 2019, 50–52.
[71] Op. cit. 70–71, 222; Harik 2004, 169–175.

appear that the group carried out armed attacks on behalf of the regime, it remained an armed group in this period and picked up armed struggle against the regime after the elections when it became clear that they would not be allowed to be a loyal opposition.[72] For this reason, the group was coded as having changed from rebel (against the Shah's regime) to pro-government (before changing back to rebels).

Sources used

To gather the information above which is contained in DASSIG, we used a wide range of primary and secondary sources in different languages, including English, French, Arabic and Persian.

As stated above, a main source of information was the UCDP Actor Dataset version 21.1[73] which includes data on 1,453 armed actors. We also used the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict, UCDP Nonstate Conflict and UCDP One-Sided Violence datasets as well as the UCDP's Encyclopaedia, which includes information about the conflicts in which armed groups operate, such as conflict narratives, descriptions of the warring actors and information about the ideology and conflict dyads of armed organizations. Importantly, the threshold for non-state armed groups to be included in the data is similar to ours, with involvement in organized violence that resulted in over 25 battle-related fatalities in a calendar year. Given that the UCDP itself follows a stringent coding protocol,[74] we are confident in relying on this information for parts of our data collection and coding (though we departed from it when we found convincing contradictory information in the secondary literature on movements). In addition, we drew on the Pro-Government Militias Database for information on pro-government groups, as described above, and, where needed, on the Global Terrorism Database[75] for additional data on transnational attacks and fatalities (although we only used data that had actual references attached in the dataset – many do not – and where it was clear from the references that a group had claimed the attack and carried it out). Both of these last datasets have better coverage of armed Shia Islamist groups than most UCDP-based datasets.

However, because of the limitations of most existing datasets regarding *Shia* Islamist groups specifically and to complement this material, we went beyond the usual sources,

[72] Abrahamian 1989, 186–205.
[73] Pettersson et al. 2021.
[74] For details, see: http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/faq/#How_are_UCDP_data_collected_.
[75] https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/.

deploying a more qualitative approach to dataset creation. The UCDP scrapes news media, complementing them where necessary with "reports and data from non-governmental organizations (NGO) and international organizations (like the UN), case studies, truth commission reports, historical archives…." Svensson and Nilsson's dataset[76] also relies on news media and reports. These sources, on their own, are problematic for two reasons. First, commonly used databases such as Factiva draw on the BBC's global Monitoring Service for non-English news,[77] significantly limiting what is covered. Second, news media and reports target particular audiences, again shaping, and limiting, what is reported.[78] This is particularly problematic given the legal and political context in which many armed Islamist groups operate, both nationally and internationally. We have therefore also consulted academic literature to extend coverage and help mitigate against biases, just as adding NGO reports does for relying overly on news media.[79] Academics write for a different audience and are often less at risk of prosecution than a news outlet or NGO within an authoritarian country, especially if they do not live in that country. Secondary academic literature is particularly valuable when researching periods, groups or areas covered less widely by NGO reports, such as the 1960s-1970s, or, in Anglophone media, the Afghani groups of the 1980s (and especially the subset of Afghani Shia Islamists). Some other datasets also list academic literature or regional experts as complementary sources, so this is not a novel practice.[80]

Following this more qualitative approach to creating datasets, we relied on a wealth of country-specific sources in books, journal articles, NGO reports, PhD theses and news items in English, French, Arabic and Persian languages. For instance, given the dearth of information on the Shia Islamist insurrection against the regime of Saddam Hussein in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, we used the most authoritative source in Arabic on the topic.[81] We also used unpublished PhD theses.[82] Similarly, since little has been published on armed Shia Islamist groups in 1980s Afghanistan, a key source was the best account in Persian.[83] We systematically checked these references against other sources to improve reliability.

[76] Svensson and Nilsson 2018.
[77] Dietrich and Eck 2020.
[78] Davenport and Ball 2002.
[79] Dietrich and Eck 2020.
[80] Carey and Mitchell 2022; Svensson and Nilsson 2018.
[81] al-Mu'min 1993.
[82] al-Shamrani 2001; Alkhayer 2024.
[83] Rajaee 2020.

List of variables in DASSIG

Below we discuss each of the variables recorded in DASSIG.

a. ActorID

The unique identifier of all armed Islamist groups in our dataset.

b. Name

Identifies the common name or acronym of the armed Islamist group in question. Note that for rows 1-127 and 130-140, variables b, c, d and e build on the UCDP database. We recognize that there are inconsistencies in the entries of the UCDP database (including the use of acronyms, transliterated rather than translated names, and a number of transliterations/translation mistakes in English and Arabic). However, we did not correct them in this column in order to facilitate compatibility between our database and UCDP's. For the additional entries, we did not standardize transliterations from, for instance, Arabic and Persian; instead, the most common transliteration we found in English-language texts was used.

c. NameAddEng

Identifies additional names the group in question is known by in English or name changes the group has undergone (e.g., *Jabhat al-Nusra* renaming itself *Jabhat Fateh al-Sham* before turning into *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* – UCDP has it listed as *Jabhat Fateh al-Sham*). Note that for rows 1-127 and 130-140, variables b, c, d and e build on the UCDP database. As with b, we did not correct any inconsistencies in the entries of the UCDP database to facilitate compatibility, but we added additional names if those were common. We did not repeat English names already listed in the Name column in the NameAddEng column, except when we wanted to indicate a group's affiliation with a political party, in which case the name was repeated with the name of the political party in brackets behind it, e.g., Movement of the Iraqi Holy Warriors (Islamic Da'wa Party). We did not translate non-English names from the Name column in the NameAddEng column if the name is usually given in its original language (transcribed) in English-language texts. We only included non-English names that have become common in English-language texts in the NameAddEng column if there were common alternative English spellings (e.g., Hizballah, Hizbullah for "Hezbollah"). Where commonly used acronyms are

based on an additional English name of the group, they have been listed in brackets behind the name.

d. NameAddOth

Identifies additional names the group in question is known by in their language of origin (e.g., Arabic, Persian, Azeri, etc.) or in French (if the group operates in a Francophone area), as well as any name changes the group has undergone in their language of origin or French. Note that for rows 1-127 and 130-140, variables b, c, d and e build on the UCDP database. As with b, we did not correct any inconsistencies in the entries of the UCDP database to facilitate compatibility, but we added additional names if those were common. We did not repeat non-English names already listed in the Name column in the NameAddOth column. Where a group is affiliated with a political party, the name of the political party is given in its (transliterated) language of origin in brackets behind it, e.g., *Faylaq Badr* (*Al-Majlis al-A'la li'l-Thawra al-Islamiyya fi'l-Iraq*). Where commonly used acronyms are based on an additional name of the group in its language of origin or French, they have been listed in brackets behind the name. Transliterations from, for instance, Arabic and Persian have not been standardized; instead, the most common transliteration we found in English-language texts was used.

e. ActorID_UCDP

The unique identifier of the group in the UCDP database. Groups not in the UCDP database were coded -999.

f. PGMD

Identifies whether a group was listed in the Pro-Government Militias Database (PGMD) of Carrey and X. 1 denotes listed, 0 denotes not listed.

g. Country

Identifies the primary country in which armed Islamist groups carried out armed attacks during a conflict. As discussed above, this is not necessarily the group's country of origin. Where groups carried out attacks in multiple countries, additional countries are listed in column h (CountriesAdd).

h. CountryCode

The unique identifier of the primary countries in which armed Islamists operated. The codes have been taken from the Correlates of War database.[84] Where country borders are part of the dispute, we have taken the country code that most closely matches the area in which the groups' attacks have taken place, which typically matches their declared position on country borders. For instance, the area in which Palestinian Islamist groups have carried out the majority of their attacks most closely matches Palestine (British Mandate) since these groups do not recognize Israel and operate in the area covered by the British Mandate, including both Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

i. CountriesAdd

Where a group has carried out attacks in more than one state, we list additional countries in this column both to record the geographical spread of their operations and to have as complete a picture as possible for decisions on how to code for conflict intensity (see k). See above ("Countries of operation") for our justification for determining additional countries on the basis of where successful armed attacks were carried out. For the purpose of coding for maximum conflict intensity (see k), only countries where groups carried out armed attacks and thus were actively part of that conflict were deemed significant (having a training camp across the border from where attacks are carried out does not necessarily expose the group to the conflict intensity recorded in that country).

j. Sect

Identifies the predominant sectarian orientation of a group, where 1 is for Sunni and 2 for Shia. To be coded Sunni or Shia, a group must have had a membership which was predominantly Sunni or Shia over most of its lifetime. This does not necessarily translate into groups being explicitly sect-coded in their discourse and beliefs. Many of the groups in DASSIG changed over time in terms of how much they emphasized their sectarian identity, as opposed to their Islamist or other identities (such as being a resistance movement).[85]

[84] Correlates of War Project 2017.
[85] Valbjørn and Gunning 2024.

k. DateStart

Identifies the year of creation of the group in question. Note that when an organization was first created as a political party in a context not marked by organized violence but later set up a military wing or began carrying out organized armed attacks in a conflict, we only code for the date of creation of its military wing, where known; where information on when a group's military wing was created is ambiguous, we take its first reported organized armed attack as a proxy. Preparing for battle in military training camps without carrying out actual attacks or being reported to have planned a thwarted attack does not meet our threshold for being considered an armed group. For instance, despite its members being trained in weapons' use at PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) camps in Lebanon in 1976–1979, the Islamic Action Organization is coded as having been created in 1979, as that is when it became a clandestine organization ready to wage violence, with its first public armed attack in November 1979 when one of its members attacked Baathist officials taking part in Ashura (months later, in 1980, the group would try to assassinated the VP of Iraq Tariq Aziz).[86]

l. IntensityMax

Identifies the maximum intensity level of the conflict a group has been part of. Two different intensity levels are coded, drawn from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset version 21.1:

1. Low-intensity armed conflict (25-999 battle-related deaths)
2. High-intensity armed conflict or "war" (at least 1,000 battle-related deaths)

Where groups were active during conflicts that fluctuated between low- and high-intensity, we coded the highest level of intensity it took on as a rough overall indicator of the conflict environment they were part of. Similarly, where groups were active in conflicts that dropped below the 25 annual battle-death threshold for some years while the conflict is coded as ongoing by UCDP, we coded for the highest level of intensity over the duration of the group's activities.

As not all groups were listed in the UCDP/PRIO Dataset, we followed the following methodology:

[86] Jabar 2003, 216–222.

a) if a group was listed in the UCDP/PRIO Dataset, we recorded the highest level of conflict intensity given for the country or countries the group was operating in. In cases where the UCDP/PRIO Dataset listed a group only as part of a low-intensity conflict for particular years, but where the specialist literature suggests that the group was also active during years when their country/countries of operation was/were involved in a high-intensity conflict, we recorded a high-intensity conflict. Where the literature suggests that the UCDP/PRIO coding is too conservative, we similarly adjusted the coding (e.g., UCDP/PRIO codes the Iranian Revolution as low-intensity whereas the emerging consensus in recent literature suggests that the conflict was high-intensity).[87] Where there were different conflicts within one country that were geographically clearly demarcated (as in India's Kashmir and Punjab, or Pakistan's conflict with Balochi separatist groups), we used the code for the relevant area within the country, rather than the highest code for anywhere in the country (for instance, a group operating in Punjab during a low-intensity phase was coded low-intensity, even if the UCDP/PRIO Dataset recorded the Kashmir conflict as high-intensity during that period).
b) if a group was not specifically listed in the UCDP/PRIO Dataset, we recorded the highest conflict intensity code given to the country or countries they were operating in during the years they were active; if the group was listed in the UCDP One-sided dataset[88] as involved in over 25 deaths, we used that information if that conflict was not listed in the UCDP/PRIO Dataset (for instance, the conflict between GICM and the Moroccan government is not listed in the latter, but appears in the former).
c) Where the UCDP/PRIO Dataset listed a collective of groups without naming individual groups (e.g., "Syrian insurgents"), we recorded the highest conflict intensity level for all relevant groups operating in that country during the years listed in the Dataset.
d) Where groups operated across country borders, we recorded the highest conflict intensity code across the relevant countries for the period of operation (again, taking into account regional differences, if conflicts within countries are geographically clearly demarcated; see a).

[87] E.g., Tucker 2017; Toft 2021.
[88] Davies et al. 2023; Pettersson 2023b.

l. MultiSect

Identifies whether the country where the armed group was created is characterized by the presence of Shia/Sunni minorities or is (broadly speaking) homogeneously one or the other. We code 0 for non-multisectarian (defined as having a majority of one sect of more than 95%), and 1 for multisectarian (defined as having a minority of one sect of more than 5%). Data are drawn from the Pew Research Center 2009 report "Mapping the Global Muslim Population."

m. ProGov

Identifies whether a group was pro-government at any point over its lifetime, where "pro-government" is defined as actively supporting a government. Pro-government non-state armed groups usually have links with the government in question and often receive some level of support from that government. But they are not integrated into the state structures to the same extent as paramilitary groups are (see "Non-State Armed Groups").

We do not code groups that happen to be fighting on the same side as a government as pro-government if there are no clear indicators that they actively support the government. For instance, although the Ajdabiya Revolutionaries Shura Council in Libya fought against the armed forces of Field Marshal Haftar, when he opposed the Tripoli-based government, and was thus effectively on the same side as the internationally recognized government, we have not seen reports of it being supported by the government or being pro-government. This contrasts with the Benghazi Defence Brigade (BDB) in Libya with which it is often linked in alliance; here, there are clearer indications that it supports the government, for instance through declaring its allegiance to the government-linked Dar al-Iftar office and through being supported by ministers. The BDB has thus been coded as having changed from rebel to having become pro-government (column p=1), and thus as pro-government at some point over its lifetime (column n=1). The Ajdabiya Revolutionaries Shura Council, conversely, has been coded as 0 across columns n, o, and p.

In cases where a pro-government group emerged out of rebel groups, we code it as having started as pro-government if that was the umbrella group's orientation from the start. For example, we coded the Holy Warriors of the Islamic Revolution Organization (MIR) in Iran as pro-government from the start because it was founded *after* the Shah had fled and Khomeini had taken over, by merging seven pre-revolution rebel groups. All seven participating groups

are labelled rebel, with no change to pro-government, as the focus of activity after the merger appears to have become primarily the new umbrella organization (group numbers 146–152).[89]

n. ProGovStart

Identifies whether a group started out as pro-government when it was created.

o. ProGovChange

Identifies whether a group changed its attitude towards the government. In most cases, this involves a rebel group becoming pro-government and, in most instances, such groups remain pro-government after having switched (an exception is MEK; see "Examples of ambivalent cases"). Only in one case (the Zeinabiyoun Brigade) did a group change from having started out as pro-government to becoming a rebel group – in this case, because members of the group returned home where they are considered rebels (see "Countries of operation"). In all other cases, this column simply confirms that there is a difference between columns m and n.

For a group to be coded as having become pro-government, it must remain an armed non-state actor. If a group turns into a political party and ceases attacks, as was the case with, e.g., the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan in 2003 or Hizbul Islam in Somalia in 2014, it ceases being an armed group in any meaningful sense and thus no longer meets the criteria for inclusion in the dataset. Such groups remain coded as rebel groups because they were rebels while they were an armed group.

p. Iran1979

Identifies whether the armed group stated ideological/intellectual proximity with the Islamic Republic of Iran and/or whether the group was supported by the Islamic Republic Iran. Note that we code for this variable only for groups which operated in the 1970s and 1980s, as by the 1990s the Iranian revolution was no longer as salient a reference point. Groups created before 1970 or after 1989 were coded -999.

[89] Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2019; Ostovar 2016; Ariabarzan 2012.

q. PosInter

Identifies whether the armed group in question had at least one positive interaction with another armed Islamist group across sect, where positive interaction is defined as evidence of an alliance between armed Islamist actors across sect.

r. PosInterConf

Identifies the confidence the coder had in the value given to PosInter. Building on the Varieties of Democracy project's practice to ask coders to record their confidence in values given,[90] this value is coded 1 if there is definitive evidence from a reputable source of positive interaction, 0.5 if there is ambiguous evidence or if there is no definitive evidence yet sufficient contextual evidence to make it highly likely that positive interaction has taken place.

p. PosInterStart

Identifies the first year when we found evidence of a positive interaction between armed Islamist groups across sect.

q. NegInter

Identifies whether the armed group under question had at least one negative interaction with another armed Islamist group across sect, where negative interaction is defined as evidence of armed clashes between armed Islamist actors across sect.

r. NegInterConf

Identifies the confidence the coder has in the value given to NegInter. Building on the practice of asking of the Varieties of Democracy project to ask coders to record their confidence in values given, this value is coded 1 if there is definitive evidence from a reputable source of negative interaction, 0.5 if there is ambiguous evidence or if there is no definitive evidence yet sufficient contextual evidence to make it highly likely that negative interaction has taken place. For example, jihadi-Salafi armed groups fighting the Syrian government and its allies in the Aleppo area in 2015 are highly likely to have fought one of the many armed Shia Islamist groups that fought on the side of the government. Thus, even if no definitive evidence was found of a negative interaction, they would have been coded 1 for NegInter, and 0.5 for NegInterConf.

[90] Coppedge et al. 2022.

s. NegInterStart

Identifies the first year when we found evidence of a negative interaction between armed Islamist groups across sect.

t. Sources

Sources 1-12 contain a list of the sources we used for each of the groups (see also "Sources used" above). The sources vary in quality and orientation. We aimed at having a minimum of two sources, preferably academic (books, journal articles, PhD theses) but we also consulted think-tank reports, news media articles and existing databases, such as CISAC (n.d.). A number of the sources were written from a "security threat" or "terrorism" perspective and thus not necessarily conveying the groups' complexity (in particular their political, social and historical context) (for a critique of the "terrorism" lens and its analytical effects, see Gunning 2007, 2009). But we included them if they contained credible data on start and end dates or on the relations between different groups or between groups and governments. The full details of the references listed in the dataset can be found in the document "DASSIG Bibliography", which is divided between references in English and French, and references in Arabic and Persian.

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