Sten Hagberg, Ludovic O. Kibora, Sidi Barry, Yacouba Cissao, Siaka Gnessi, Amado Kabore, Bintou Kone, and Mariatou Zongo. 2023. *Security from Below in Burkina Faso: Citizen Perceptions and Perspectives*. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet. 123 pp.

As implied by the title, the field workers who collected data for this study believe that the matter of a nation's security should not merely be discussed at briefings where provincial maps are displayed with arrows describing offensives and retreats, descriptions of such and such number of forces given, reinforcements of gendarmerie stations noted, etc. The narrative of the country's situation should not merely come from "the center." In Burkina Faso, where as much as 40-50 percent of the country has fallen to insurgents or is out of government control, how do the citizens themselves describe the situation? Shouldn't their fears, hopes and aspirations be taken into account in creating measures to retrieve the situation? What are the views "at ground level?"

The authors of this work conducted interviews and meetings in thirteen municipalities across Burkina Faso, noting observations and complaints regarding brigandage, rebel activity, the treatment of women, economic problems, distrust of outsiders (several countries border on Burkina Faso), narcotics activity, and gold mining (also disruptive). Since roughly 64 percent of the population is Muslim, but 26 percent is Christian, and there are many animists, a strictly sectarian or religious orientation to a future Burkina Faso government would not be a panacea for all problems.

The field workers examined "security" from several viewpoints. Citizens of Burkina Faso referred to "absence of fear"—in other words, I want to walk down the street safely, I want to ride my motorcycle between provinces without fear of being robbed. There is also "absence of need"—I need to have shelter, my food supply should not be interrupted. Citizens in different municipalities saw the need for security in different ways.

Regarding the Islamist insurgents, the head of Ansarul Islam, Ibrahim Malam Dicko, a native of Djibo in northern Burkina Faso, was killed in June 2017 in joint French-Burkina Faso operation. But three groups came together in March of that year to form the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM, several translations: "Group for the Victory of Islam and the Muslims"), initially swearing allegiance to Ayman al-Zawahiri (killed 31 Jul 2022), but now, perhaps nominally giving the nod to Saif al-Adel (b. 1960), headquartered in Iran.

Related to the foregoing, but only touched upon tangentially in this study, is the question: what is going on in the areas controlled by the insurgents? What do they want? In the few examples given the rebels urge that "women are not to work in fields alongside men" (pp. 76, 89); "women are not to wear pants" (p. 89); no festivities should be observed in connection with baptisms, marriage, or feast days (p. 76); women should wear some kind of veil (p. 76); and that the rebels want to proscribe music (p. 76). While some of these points may seem petty to readers, they are all typical of Islamic fundamentalist and in many cases Salafist groups. In other words, if JNIM were to prevail, a Taliban type of regime would emerge. Other reports of behavior of the rebels simply describe incidents of brigandage and robberies.

The Burkina Faso government has at different times employed its own troops, called in French forces to help, encouraged the formation of self-defense militias, and even used Russian mercenaries in attempts to roll back these insurgents and guerrillas. Currently, in many of the

thirteen municipalities of Burkina Faso, there are up to four groups contending for power: the self-defense forces of the Fulbe herders called the Ruba; the government gendarmerie and associated elements; JNIM, coming in from the outside; and the not-always-trusted self-defense Koglweogos militias. It's easy to see how this produces a chaotic situation, increasing the anxiety of civilians.

The book's final chapter was rewritten and an epilogue added (early 2023) to catch up with events in the country. These late-breaking chapters make a contribution. The final pages offer six suggestions on combatting insecurities (pp. 105-06). The proposals are modest, but it is not too late to implement them in many locales. They are: (1) encouragement of the role of women in community decision-making, (2) promotion of local and democratic debates on community circumstances—or in the parlance of historical scholars, "creation of public space," (3) intercultural and interreligious dialogues within communities, (4) increasing community policing (how this would mesh with the Kgolweogos and other militias is not elucidated, and (5) honoring those who have fallen in national struggles (etc.). A summarizing sixth point stresses that municipalities should be places of public interaction, where democracy is strengthened and so forth. All of these points plead that security and community-building be nurtured from below, not merely imposed by the central authority and its organs.

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