REPRESSION, CIVIL CONFLICT, AND LEADERSHIP TENURE: A CASE STUDY OF MALI

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MALI CASE STUDY

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Executive Summary

The history of repression and civil conflict in Mali is primarily a story of repression against the Tuaregs. However, in 2012 the repressed became, for a brief period, the repressors. In the spring of that year, Mali’s Tuareg minority group seeking independence formed an uncomfortable alliance with opportunistic terrorist organizations, and the government was overthrown in a coup. Government officials in France, the United States, and other Western countries recognized that Mali could become a hotbed for terrorism in Africa.

From 1990 until late 2011, Mali was seen widely as the model of a democratic and stable Africa. Like so many post-colonial African states, Mali succumbed to dictatorship in its early years. However, it gradually transitioned to democracy in the early 1990’s. Since that time, Mali has demonstrated relative stability despite its slow economic progress. A coup in the spring of 2012, however, shattered Mali’s image as a template for African democracy. Although the coup was short-lived because of rapid Western intervention, it raised important questions about the stability of democratic countries under pressure from ethnic minorities and outside security threats.

Understanding this crisis in Mali requires an understanding of its history—particularly its colonial heritage and the early Malian governments’ use of violent repression. It also requires an understanding of Mali’s Tuareg ethnic minority—a group of nomadic clans who migrate across borders in the Sahel region. After the establishment of a French colony in the region, French officials asked for the assistance of one Tuareg ethnic confederation in establishing control of the region and protecting trade routes. The Kel Adagh confederation, particularly the Ifogha clan, maintained superiority with French assistance until the time of independence. When the Malian government began imposing new taxes on northern clans and attempting to sedentarize northern nomads (the process by which nomads are forced to become farmers), the Tuaregs revolted. During this rebellion, which was primarily political in nature, the Malian government responded with disproportionate violence. The violent response has increased Tuareg animosity toward the central government for decades (Sears: 2015; Whitehouse: 2015).

During the 1970s and 1980s intense droughts struck Mali, causing many nomadic Tuaregs to flee for Libya, where Muammar Gaddafi (of Berber descent himself) accepted them and trained young Tuareg men in his army. Following the most recent Tuareg uprising in the late 2000s and after the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, soldiers began returning to Mali. Islamic extremists from Algeria were also spilling over the border in northern Mali. Moreover, intragroup conflict within Tuareg society prompted a splinter group with a radical agenda, called Ansar al-Dine, to form. During this time the Tuareg group, National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), which had considered itself secular and possessed of different goals than radical Islam, began to ally itself with various extremist groups in the area. Perhaps bolstered by the influx of money and arms from Libya and the growing popularity of Ansar al-Dine, the MNLA seized the opportunity to further its agenda. Thus, several groups with little in common aligned for mutual benefit. In April of 2012, the government was overthrown by the allied forces of the MNLA and several radical Islamist groups, including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Ansar al-Dine. France and other African states then intervened, primarily to avoid Mali becoming a terrorist training ground.

During the conflict leading to the 2012 coup, both the government and Tuareg and Islamist rebels committed a variety of human rights violations, including extra-judicial killing, forced disappearance, rape,
torture, and the use of child soldiers. Though the coup ended quickly, the country is still experiencing sporadic fighting and terror attacks. Many rebel fighters have been imprisoned for their behavior during the uprising. However, the new Malian government, headed by Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, has been slower to punish its own army officials accused of similar abuses. The new government must address claims of impunity in order to further stabilize the country. Moreover, though both sides have finally agreed to a peace accord, neither the government nor the rebels are happy with the agreement and fresh skirmishes have broken out. This uneasy settlement does not bode well for the future security of Mali.

Mali provides a fascinating qualitative case study. In general, it conforms to our quantitative evidence, which suggests that violently repressive tactics beget violent responses from the public. The initial ethnic protests in northern Mali were “crushed” by the Malian central government, which sought to implement rapidly its industrialist, socialist vision of Mali (Sears: 2015). Perhaps if that initial revolt had been dealt with politically rather than violently, we would not see the country in its current situation. Instead, the descendants of many fighters killed in the first Tuareg uprising are still fighting for greater autonomy in northern Mali. With the emergence of radical Islam in the region, Mali faces new challenges that threaten its stability and stability in the region.

Q1. Do citizens respond differently when confronted with political repression, violent repression or a mix of repressive tactics?

The historical evidence indicates that they do. The scholars I interviewed believe that much of the ongoing tensions between the Tuaregs and the Malian government are a result of the initial violence used against the Tuaregs shortly after independence. Similarly, though the Traoré regime ruled in a centralized and authoritative manner for much of his 23-year tenure, when he turned to violence in the early 1990’s, the public was outraged. Traoré’s use of violent repression caused a small protest to spread through much of the general public and Traoré was ousted from power. When states such as Mali use violently repressive tactics, particularly when those tactics are totally disproportionate, they can prompt decades of unrest.

Q2. Do officials use different types of repression in response to different types of civil conflict?

In Mali, when rebellion has turned from political rebellion to violent rebellion, the Malian government has responded in kind. The answer to this question is unclear. In the case of the 1963 uprising, violent repression was used in response to what was largely a political protest. It was this disproportionate use of force that fueled the Tuareg rebellion 25 years later. So, while the Tuaregs engaged in armed rebellion in the early 1990’s, one could make the argument that they did so in response to the brutal use of force in the previous uprising. Moreover, in the second uprising, the Malian army killed more civilians than it did soldiers. However, Mali's recent situation is complicated because of the intervention by outside forces from Africa and the European Union. The most recent upheavals in 2012 were led by armed soldiers and resulted in a coup d’êtat. That rebellion was met with military resistance from Mali, France, and other African nations.

Q3. Does the use, and type of repression (whether political, violent or some combination) increase the likelihood that rulers retain power?

For the first 30 years of Mali’s statehood, political repression was fairly common. The process tracing approach used here suggests that each time a leader has added violently repressive tactics to the more common political repression, he has subsequently lost power. Keita violently crushed the Tuareg uprising.
in 1963 and 1964. A few years later, he had been ousted from office in a coup. Similarly, when Moussa Traoré had his soldier fire on protesting students, his support diminished and he was removed from office. For the past 25 years, repression in Mali has been limited, coming mainly in the form of political and economic marginalization of the Tuareg and Arab clans in the north. However, the violent tactics of the ruling Islamic extremists were met with resistance from France and several African states, and control of Mali was handed back over to its democratically elected government.
I. Mali Overview and Recent History

The Republic of Mali is a landlocked country in the Sahel region of northwest Africa. Mali is a former French colony, which gained independence in 1960. Upon obtaining independence from France, the Sudanese Republic and Senegal formed the Mali Federation. After just a few months, Senegal withdrew from the federation and what was the Sudanese Republic was renamed Mali (CIA Factbook). The country is primarily arid and desert in the north with some more fertile and cultivated land in the south, and around the Niger River. Mali is bordered by Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal (CIA Factbook). Many historical struggles in the country are linked to these bordering countries. About 90% of Mali’s population lives in the southern part of the country, while the northern regions are inhabited by minority clans (Pezard and Shurkin: 2015). Mali is one of the 25 poorest countries in the world, with 80% of its labor force engaged in farming and fishing and 10% living a nomadic lifestyle (CIA Factbook).

Mali and the Surrounding Countries

![Map of Mali and Surrounding Countries](image)

Taken from the online CIA Factbook on Mali. Last updated on August 6, 2015

Over the past few years, events in Mali took many scholars and policymakers by surprise (Gilmour: 2012; Bresslin and Gray: 2013; Stewart: 2014) because Mali appeared to have consolidated democratic rule. As Stewart (2014) notes, “Mali had often been described as a model of democracy and stability on the continent” (1). Mali has been depicted as a post-colonial, democratic success story in Africa because of its relative stability and democratic institutions (Gilmour: 2012; Stewart: 2014). With the exception of a flurry of academic literature on the most recent upheavals in Mali, we found only a small body of literature on
conflict and repression in the country. However, the influx of Islamic extremists in Mali in the past decade and the subsequent overthrow of the Malian president in 2012 brought the country's historical struggles back into sharp focus. Though France has borne most of the security burden in Mali, a number of countries, including the United States, have committed troops to peacekeeping efforts in Mali (Stewart: 2014). As of the writing of this case study a peace agreement has been signed, but persistent security concerns in the region make it an important focus of both academic investigation and security policy.

Though most contemporary scholars and journalists have focused on the recent influx of radical Islamists from post-Gadhafi Libya, we argue that Mali’s most recent conflict stems from decades of tension in the country. Though it only sparked mainstream attention after the emergence of radical Islamist rebels, Mali’s history of rebellion from Tuareg minorities make it an important case study. We use a process tracing approach to outline the historical factors that have contributed to the current difficulties. We note that Mali’s story is primarily one of the Tuareg rebellions and the intra-group conflict that has accompanied them. The country’s history of repression stems from its arbitrarily drawn borders and from the inability of its early leaders to create unity amidst diversity. However, the formation of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), and the subsequent influx of members of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) have made the security situation much more complicated. This case study will shed light on the contemporary implications of unresolved tensions between the Tuareg ethnic minority and the Malian central government. Mali teaches valuable lessons about the results of unresolved political and economic grievances and about the potential for democratic countries to become entangled by the opportunism of terror groups. This case study also teaches the value of restraint when political leaders are faced with public protest. If Mobido Keita had responded with carrots instead of sticks during the Tuareg uprisings in 1963, Mali’s story may be very different.

1. The Tuareg Minority

Most of Mali’s instability, both historically and at present, stems from discontent among Mali’s primary minority groups in the north of the country. To understand Mali’s contemporary security challenges, one must first understand the cleavage separating south and north, central government and clans, and farmers, industrialists, and nomads. The northern part of Mali is largely desert and the southern portion of Mali is subtropical. The Sahelian belt runs between the north and the south. The south is home to the country’s capital of Bamako and the dominant southern ethnic group, the Bambaras, who also dominate the Malian central government (Pezard and Shurkin: 2013, 2015). The Sahelian swathe around the Niger River, particularly the lands surrounding Kidal, is home to many ethnic groups including the Tuaregs and several Arab communities; desert lies north of this region (Pezard and Shurkin: 2013). The Tuaregs that inhabit the Sahelian belt are nomadic peoples who move across national boundaries in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, and Niger, in addition to Mali (Lecocq: 2004; Pezard and Shurkin: 2015). The term “Tuareg” refers to a broad group of “warriors, religious groups and vassals descended from Berbers and Arabs who crossed the Sahara in the 15th and 16th centuries” (Randall 2005: 296).

The Tuareg clans are not united, homogenous groups, but are divided internally (Lecocq: 2002; Pezard and Shurkin: 2013, 2015). They “are organized into confederations divided by caste and clan and both horizontal and vertical hierarchies. Each confederation consists of numerous clusters of noble clans, with
each cluster associated with clusters of subordinate clans, as well as artisan clans and former-slave clans” (Pezard and Shurkin 2015: 3). For example, in figure 1.2, the Kel Adagh confederation is divided hierarchically between noble clans and commoner clans, with specific commoner clans associated with particular noble clans. Horizontally, the Ifoghas are the top tier among the noble clans. The Ifoghas claim to be descendants of the Prophet Mohammed, and they draw their legitimacy as the top tier of clans in the Kel Adagh from this assertion (Pezard and Shurkin: 2013). Within the top tier of nobility, Kel Afella is the traditional leader, or amenokal, of the Kel Adagh confederation.

**ORGANIZATION OF THE KEL ADAGH CONFEDERATION**

The Tuaregs consider themselves distinct from other ethnic groups in the Sahel region (Guiffrida: 2005; Cline: 2013; Pezard and Shurkin: 2013). The Tuaregs also tend to consider themselves ‘white’ and resent being controlled by the ‘black’ majority in Bamako (Cline: 2013; Pezard and Shurkin: 2013; Harmon 2014; Sears interview: 2015).1 Alessandra Giuffrida (2005) cites a letter sent to France prior to Mali’s independence, in which Tuareg groups sought to be separate from the new country that was to be Mali. She translates, “We, the white people of the Sahara, will never accept being governed by blacks who used to be our slaves” (532). Conversely, and rightly so, as Paul Melly noted in our interview, black Malians “sometimes fear that elements of the light-skinned Tuaregs still hanker after a return to slavery” (Melly interview 2015).2 Therefore, Tuareg identity is a complex topic. The Tuaregs are internally divided, but the noble clans still seek to differentiate the Tuareg people from other ethnic and racial groups (the Songhay, Peuls, Mandés and Bambaras) in Mali who consider themselves “black” (Cline: 2013; Melly: 2015; Pezard and Shurkin: 2015; Sears: 2015). This dual problem of identity results from: a) a desire to be differentiated from black Malians and Arabs in the region and b) the complex intragroup tensions within the various

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1 As Jonathan Sears noted in my interview with him construction of different identities based on race is an important cleavage in Mali. He notes that even today, when the Malian government supports “pro-government militias and brigades against separatists/insurgents, these have tended to be darker/blacker persons against lighter/whiter.” This citation is included as (Sears interview 2015): subsequent citations will appear as (Sears 2015).

2 This citation is included as (Melly interview 2015); subsequent citations will appear as (Melly 2015).
Tuareg confederations, clans, and castes. Moreover, not all confederations participate, or have participated, in the various uprisings against the Malian central government. Indeed, though the Kel Adagh traditionally led these rebellions, not all clans within the Kel Adagh confederation participated (Pezard and Shurkin: 2013; 2015). Whereas many scholars and policy-makers have focused on the Tuareg as a distinct ethnic group with specific grievances, we argue that intragroup discord has also played a part in the emergence of new Islamist security threats in Mali. We examine the role of intragroup discord in greater detail below.

From the time of independence until the present, most civil discontent has been defined by three Tuareg uprisings. The Tuaregs revolted first from 1963 to 1964; secondly from 1990 to 1996; and again from 2006 to 2009 (Pezard and Shurkin 2015). The first uprising was crushed violently, and so lasted only a short time. The second uprising also received a violent response until the broader population became involved. The conflict led to the overthrow of the Malian government, and its new rulers offered concessions to the Tuaregs. The third uprising was met primarily with more promises of decentralization. On the heels of this final Tuareg rebellion, a new type of conflict began in 2012. Though the Tuaregs were heavily involved in the latest revolt - some through the MNLA - various other radical groups participated in the uprising, often with different aims than the Tuaregs.

To understand these successive conflicts in Mali, we begin with the colonial roots of the disorder. The first rebellion directly resulted from the presence, and then absence, of the French colonial army and French diplomats. The subsequent rebellions have hinged on events of the first rebellion in 1963 when Mali was still a new country (Melly: 2015; Whitehouse interview: 2015). Thus, the French treatment of the Tuaregs has had a profound impact on the history of uprisings in the country. We argue that the French failed to effectively unify the country, ensure that all citizens contributed and received equitably from the state, and did not pass on a legacy of good governance to the Malian policymakers that followed.

2. The Colonial Roots of Discontent

France established a presence in Mali (then French Sudan) as a military outpost and out of the military’s fascination with great African empires (Klein 1998: 47). Originally an extension of the colony of Senegal, it was called Upper Senegal until 1890, when it became French Sudan (Porch: 1984). French troops first entered Timbuktu on December 28, 1893 and claimed the city as a French possession. French Sudan became an official colony in 1895. However, the Tuaregs resisted French control until 1917 (Benjaminsen: 2008). Thus, the Tuaregs have a long and proud history of rebelliousness and self-sufficiency.

The French tried to rule the country’s diverse population in a centralized manner, but the colonialists also had a fascination with what they deemed a quintessentially nomadic and free ethnic group. Thus, they did not force the Tuareg to change nomadic lifestyle and allowed them freedom from centralized rule. Instead, they sought to protect the Tuareg’s way of life, allowing the clans to regulate their own internal affairs (Keenan: 2002). However, they also realized how useful the Tuaregs might be (Klein: 1998; Keenan: 2002). In fact, the French were partly responsible for the privileged position of the Kel Adagh confederation. The French allied themselves with the Kel Adagh because they needed support of a powerful local clan. The Kel

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3 This citation is included as (Whitehouse interview 2015); subsequent citations will appear as (Whitehouse 2015).
Adagh were chosen by the French to help control trade routes and to secure the border from attack, particularly against the powerful Iwellemmedan confederation (Boilley: 1999; Pezard and Shurkin: 2013, 2015). This placed the Kel Adagh in a privileged social and economic position with the French in Mali, and the Kel Adagh enjoyed good relations with the French up until independence (Bøas and Torheim 2013; Pezard and Shurkin: 2013).

In the late 1950s, the country sought independence. At the time of independence, Mali elected its first president, Modibo Keita, who ruled in a centralized mode as the French had (Sears: 2015). Keita sought to modernize and liberalize the country, seeing the Tuareg clans as inimical to this goal. Ag Baye (1993) asserts that the new Malian government was more hostile to the Tuareg clans than the French had been during their colonization. Indeed, some scholars suggest that the French colonization of the Sahel may have been beneficial to some Tuareg confederations (Pezard and Shurkin: 2015). That position disappeared when colonialism ended. The Tuaregs, and specifically the Kel Adagh confederation, went from being a privileged group in society to a marginalized one. We assert that this change in fortunes after independence has been a primary cause of upheaval in Mali.

The Malian government’s desire to centralize its economy and liberalize its society has further exacerbated the country’s “Tuareg problem” (Lecocq: 2002, 2004; Benjaminsen: 2008; Cline: 2013; Whitehouse: 2015; Sears: 2015). President Keita sought to implement socialist ideas of industrialization and agricultural modernization (Benjaminsen & Berge: 2004; Lecocq: 2004; Benjaminsen: 2008). The Tuareg lifestyle of nomadism “was looked upon as an obstacle to such modernization and development in general. [Mobido] Keita argued, for instance, that sedentarization of nomads was important in order to develop the new nation and to convert nomads into ‘productive’ citizens by having them take up farming” (Benjaminsen 2008: 828). “Sedentarization” refers to the process of converting nomadic people into agrarian people—making nomads into farmers. According to many scholars, the pressure to modernize from the Keita regime, particularly for nomadic northern Malians, is both a cultural and an economic infringement (Lecocq: 2004; Benjaminsen: 2008; Cline: 2013). We argue that this early economic repression is a root cause of Tuareg discontent, particularly since the French colonialists had allowed the Tuaregs freedom to practice a nomadic lifestyle.

In addition to the economic opposition of the Tuareg, “the Kel Adagh were discontent for social and cultural reasons. Seeing themselves as ‘white’ nomads, they refused to submit to rule by ‘black’ farmers and refused the concept of equality implicit in the Malian ideal of citizenship” (Harmon 2014: 24). They opposed the new Keita regime on the grounds that they were nomadic peoples, equally residents of the countries surrounding Mali, and resented being ruled by individuals that they considered to be of an inferior race (Giuffrida: 2005; Cline: 2013; Harmon: 2014). The Malian government was perceived as illegitimate and the Tuareg did not see themselves as Malian. The problem persists today, as Tuaregs see themselves as ethnically and racially distinct from both black Malians in the south and Arabs in the wider region. Whereas the French had treated the Tuareg in an almost reverential way for their nomadic freedom and saw them at least as instrumental to security and economic gain in the North, the new Malian government viewed the Tuaregs as a problem to be dealt with (Sears: 2015). We argue that this shift in status and economic influence has been responsible, in some measure, for much of the discontent in Mali for the past several decades.
3. Resource Scarcity and Discontent

Mali makes the bulk of its income from gold, which constitutes from 59% -70% of annual exports, yet according to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative International Secretariat, the majority of people have not received the benefits from this mineral wealth (EITI: 2015). Historically, the Malian central government (and the French government before it) has managed resources in ways that create discontent among northern minorities (Jalali: 2013). Mali is one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world (CIA Factbook: 2015). Its northern regions are particularly arid and difficult to cultivate, with desertification increasing over the past few decades (UNDP and World Bank: 1992; Benjaminsen: 1993, 1996, 1997, 2008). The Tuareg clans have survived there for centuries because of their nomadic lifestyle. However, the French government, in a desire to ascertain who owned the land during the colonial period, generated long-standing discontent in the north. The problem originated because the French Forestry Service could not determine who owned large swathes of northern Mali. To make such a determination, the French model meant that ownership was established through productive use, which generally meant farming (Benjaminsen: 1997). “Thus, pastoralism, the collection of wood and gathering of wild grains, fruits, and medicinal plants [fell] outside the European notion of property which was used” (Benjaminsen 1997: 131). To make matters worse, agents recruited to enforce French forestry policy were often from military and police backgrounds – and they operated as such (Benjaminsen: 1997).

After independence, Mali’s first two leaders, Keita and Traoré, both maintained the strict agricultural and forestry laws put in place by the French. Modibo Keita’s regime introduced an “Agrarian Reform” in 1963, in which agricultural “land was redistributed according to the principle of ‘first occupier’, which penalized absent pastoralists and migrant” (Giuffrida 2005: 533). The 1963 rebellion began, in large part, because of these ethnically insensitive economic policies (Lecocq 2004; Bøäs and Torheim: 2013). This economic marginalization by the central government, paired with already scarce resources, has had the dual effect of creating conflict and also of impairing its ability to be sustained (Humphreys: 2005; Whitehouse: 2015).

Though the 1963 uprising resulted, in part, from the sedentarization policies of the Malian central government, the climate in northern Mali has simultaneously limited the length and severity of conflict (Lecocq: 2004; Cline: 2013; Whitehouse: 2015). “Conflicts in Niger and Mali have been more difficult to sustain. The regions occupied by insurgents in these countries have not been wealthy enough to support a protracted struggle” (Humphreys 2005: 514). So, while limited resources in the northern region of Mali may have helped foment conflict between the Tuaregs and the central Malian government, the scarcity of resources in the North has also meant that the Tuaregs cannot use them to sustain their rebellions. This is one reason why conflicts in Mali have tended to last for relatively short periods of time (Whitehouse: 2015).

Not all disputes over resources evolved into violent conflict, however. In the late 1990s, the Malian government decentralized its authority over agricultural policy in northern Mali (Hussein et al: 1999). The government allowed Tuaregs a greater say in policies and their implementation. “Litigation, legal action taken by one party against another to clarify who has access to a resource or to obtain compensation for ‘misuse’ of resources, is another non-violent response” (Hussein et al: 1999, 400). Mali’s central government attempted to quell resource-based rebellion by allowing the national courts to adjudicate in
natural resource disputes in the northern arid regions of the country (République du Mali: 1994a, 1994b). However, the droughts in the 1980s caused a large number of young Tuareg men to leave Mali for Libya in an effort to change their fortunes in a country they perceived as friendly to them (Jalali: 2013). The effect of the drought, and the resource scarcity following it, has had long-lasting ramifications as will be explored shortly.

4. Democracy and Dictatorship

Mali’s political climate is a complicated one, having experienced colonial rule, a democratically elected (if authoritative) leader, a military dictator, a popular uprising, and a new round of democratic elections before succumbing to rebels and jihadists in 2012. Throughout this period, the perceived marginalization of the Tuareg people has been the one constant—a problem that would come to a head in 2012.

Following decades of French colonial rule, most Malians were eager for independence, although many Tuaregs in northern Mali felt (and still feel) that they do not belong in the Malian state (Cline: 2013; Stewart: 2014). The French had ceded some powers to the Malian people by allowing them to form political parties (Stewart: 2014). The war with Algeria from 1954 to 1962 provided the catalyst that allowed Malian political activists to push for independence (Hargreaves: 1996; France 24: 2012; Stewart: 2014). As Foltz (1965) notes, Mali experienced a difficult transition period from colonial rule to self-government. The fledgling state lacked many conditions needed for stability; its populace was largely separated from the practice and process of government (Foltz: 1965). Subsistence farmers comprised most of its population and Mali’s most promising young people were emigrating to Europe (Keita: 1998). Moreover, it had only a small, homogenous political elite with underdeveloped state institutions, thus making development of a democracy difficult (Foltz: 1965; Stewart: 2014).

Mali’s first president, as noted earlier, functioned in an authoritarian manner, attempting to modernize and socialize the country (Sears: 2015). Keita faced almost immediate resistance from the Tuaregs who felt marginalized politically and economically. Though he managed to defeat the rebels, the country was not economically stable, and Keita was forced to ask France and other countries for assistance (Snyder: 1969). In 1968, Keita’s regime was overthrown by General Moussa Traoré. Traoré ruled for 23 years as a military dictator and attempted to liberalize Mali’s economy while effectively running Mali as a police state (Keita: 1998; Stewart: 2014). Like his predecessor, he faced an uprising by Tuareg clans in the north and managed to broker a peace settlement with them. Severe droughts in the 1970s and 1980s “helped keep otherwise restive northern groups in check during this period. Many young Tuareg men who might otherwise have risen up against the Malian government instead went to Libya” to escape the droughts (Whitehouse: 2015). Moreover, the droughts, in conjunction with general economic dissatisfaction, resulted in a 1991 uprising among the general population in the south (Keita: 1998; Stewart: 2014). Traoré made the mistake of ordering his troops to fire on student protestors in March of 1991, killing hundreds of people. This sent shock waves through the Malian public, and Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) joined the pro-democracy forces, usurping power, but promising reform and democratic elections (Keita: 1998; Pringle: 2006; Stewart: 2014).

As promised, Touré helped rewrite the constitution and set up elections in 1992. Alpha Oumar Konare was elected president for consecutive terms in 1992 and 1997. The Malian constitution limits the president to
two five-year terms, and in 2002 Amadou Toumani Touré was elected president from among 24 contenders. He was reelected in 2007 (Stewart: 2014). The period from 1992 until 2006 was a relatively stable period in Mali’s history as a nation-state. In 2006, Tuareg rebels in the north launched a third rebellion, which was met with resistance from the Touré administration until it ended in 2009, when Touré ordered the last Tuareg holdout to be destroyed (Pezard and Shurkin: 2013). During this time, from 2003 onward, AQIM began operating in northern Mali, further complicating the already strained relations between the south and the north in the country. However, it took a further 8-9 years before the international community took notice of this splinter group in the north (Pezard and Shurkin: 2013).

5. Contemporary Challenges

Although Mali had experienced three prior uprisings, in the spring of 2012, the security situation in the country became more complicated. Many scholars and policymakers had not predicted the coalescing of traditional Tuareg complaints with radical Islam (Emerson: 2011; Lohmann: 2011). Indeed, so convinced were some scholars that these groups had nothing in common, that they published articles highlighting the incongruence of these groups (Emerson: 2011; Lohmann: 2011). Emerson (2011) writes that the United States was right not to intervene in Mali because of “the complete lack of a terror convergence between Islamist extremists—such as AQIM—and the Tuareg rebels. In fact, the two were bitter foes, having clashed numerous times prior to the rebellions . . . . Thus, there was little benefit, but enormous risk to the United States should it seek a greater role in helping Mali and Niger suppress their rebellions” (681). It is true that until very recently, Mali had been a bastion of moderate, Sufi Islam (Pezard and Shurkin: 2013). But we argue this perspective is somewhat simplistic and does not sufficiently weigh the complicated caste and clan system outlined above coupled with the opportunist nature of AQIM.

At this point, Mali’s story becomes vastly more complicated. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb began operating in the relatively uncontrolled regions in the north of Mali in 2003. Its roots, however, are much older, stemming principally from the Algerian civil war (Whitehouse: 2015). In 1992, the Front Islamique du Salut Islamic (FIS) was banned in Algeria because it threatened the democratic government there (Lohmann: 2011). In response to the ban, the group reformed itself into several splinter groups, most notably the Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA). This relatively unknown splinter group attempted to restore its brand of Islam to Algeria, sparking the Algerian Civil War (Lohmann: 2011). In the late 1990s, another splinter group formed from the GIA, naming itself Salifist Group for Propagation and Combat (GSPC). In 2007, the GSPC renamed itself Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Lohmann: 2011). To complicate matters further, the old racial tensions between black Africans and Arabs ostensibly caused an additional schism in AQIM (Cline: 2013). Due to the reported marginalization of black members of the group, the Movement for Monotheism and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) was formed and began operations in December 2011 (George: 2012; Cline: 2013).

AQIM had been operating in northern Mali since 2003. At that time, it was often at odds with the Tuareg clans, and the two factions fought one another, as Emerson (2011) rightly notes. Similarly, Lohmann (2011) notes that some Tuareg rebels were willing to fight against the influx of AQIM into their territory. In that way, it makes sense that scholars and policymakers did not anticipate their convergence in 2012 (Emerson

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4 The French name is Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat.
The 2011-2012 period brought a “perfect storm” of factors that contributed to the total breakdown of democracy in Mali.

The first factor in this perfect storm was the strengthening of AQIM in the region following the Algerian civil war, as outlined above. Recharged by the Algerian legislature’s exclusion of radical viewpoints, AQIM thrived in Algeria and eventually spread into Mali while prompting the formation of MUJAO. Second, in 2011 came the formation of MNLA. Initially, the MNLA considered itself a secular organization, generally concerning itself with ethnic issues—the traditional Tuareg interest. As Sears (2015) notes, “The historically tolerant form of Sunni Islam practiced by 80-90% of Malians, as well as the avowedly secular MNLA independence movement find little common ideological ground with salafism, which seeks to revive salaf, a conservative interpretation/reconstruction of first-century Islam, to govern society and politics.” Yet, the MNLA would eventually ally itself with AQIM and the radical group Ansar al-Dine.

The third event that complicated the security situation in Mali was not a new one, and it deserves some attention here. The historical and persistent intragroup conflict among the Tuaregs came to a head in early 2012 (Bøås and Torheim: 2013). Perhaps inspired or emboldened by AQIM, the secular message of the leading Tuareg rebels was no longer enough for some clan members. Iyad Ag Ghaly, a prominent member of a lesser Tuareg clan, was ostracized by the Kel Adagh leader Intalla Ag Attaher in January 2012, while the latter was championing his son as the next heir. It is likely that this denunciation was what prompted Ag Ghaly to form Ansar al-Dine (Bøås and Torheim: 2013; Klute: 2013). Ansar al-Dine, meaning “defenders of the faith,” is a rebellious Tuareg group that promotes Sharia law in Mali. The group has alleged links with AQIM, and has engaged in various battles with the MNLA. In March of 2013, the United States officially labeled Ansar al-Dine a terrorist organization (Berkley Center).

Fourth, the fall of the Qaddafi regime in Libya allowed those Tuaregs who had left during the droughts in the 1980s to return to Mali, though well-armed and potentially radicalized (Whitehouse: 2015). Libya had been a natural refuge for disenchanted Tuareg because Qaddafi was sympathetic to the Tuareg nomadic lifestyle, having descended himself from the Bedouin Qaddadfa tribe, and had already invested economically in Mali (Jalali: 2013; Klute: 2013; Ronen: 2013). In an interview with Paul Melly (2015), he notes, “In the 2000s Qaddafi brokered deals between Tuareg rebels and the Malian governments; he also recruited Mali Tuareg former rebels into his own army.” Melly continues, “This kept them occupied, but when the Qaddafi regime was overthrown in 2011, many of these heavily armed and well trained fighters returned to Mali and became a key element in the MNLA rebellion.” When the Qaddafi regime fell, the armed Tuareg returned to Mali, with money and arms (Fessy: 2012; Cristiani and Fabiani: 2013). As Cristiani and Fabiani (2013) note, “Although not sufficient, the end of Qadaﬁ’s rule was necessary in triggering the Malian crisis. Mali’s security and economic dependence on Qadaﬁ’s regime was substantial; from his instrumental patronage of the local Tuareg groups to investments in the weak Malian economy” (80). The precise number of returnees is unclear, and journalists, particularly, may overstate the influence of these returning fighters (Cline: 2013). However, we note that a shift took place among the MNLA around this time. Perhaps bolstered by these returning soldiers, or perhaps threatened by the emerging power of AQIM and Ansar al-Dine, the MNLA began expressing a desire to institute Azawad. They asserted their

5 There is disagreement over the precise date of the formation of Ansar al-Dine, with some identifying it as late 2011, and others claiming it formed in early 2012. Boas and Torheim identify its formation in early 2012, while the Berkley Center at Georgetown University cites the former date.
Muslim heritage, but claimed a more moderate stance than their salafist counterparts (Cline 2013). In March of 2012, a military captain trained by the United States, named Captain Amadou Sanogo, led a group of soldiers in a military coup that overthrew the Malian government (Gilmour: 2012). Limited resources— and government corruption in distributing those resources in the fight against the MNLA/Tuareg in the north—were the stated reasons for the coup (Fanuchi: 2012; Gilmour: 2012; Stewart: 2014). Neighboring West African countries then began imposing sanctions and cut of all of their non-humanitarian trade with Mali (Polgreen: 2012).

Malian authorities in the north were unprepared and underequipped to deal with the armed rebels. They had paid lip service to decentralization, but had not fully funded any Tuareg security forces. Indeed, as Cline notes, “The removal of many security forces out of the north further exacerbated what already was somewhat of a security vacuum in the north” (2013, 627). Thus, decades of government concessions to northern clans left the region vulnerable. In the spring of 2012, tempted by the guns and money of Ansar al-Dine, the MNLA joined forces with the group. AQIM capitalized upon this weakness and managed to mesh with Ansar al-Dine and began imposing sharia law in the area. However, Sanogo’s rule did not last long, as he signed an accord on April 6, 2012 (Gilmour: 2012). The head of Mali’s national assembly, Dioncounda Traoré, was made interim president after the signing of the accord until September 2013 (Gilmour: 2012). The country, however, remained unstable. After Sanogo stepped down, the Tuareg fighters in the north proclaimed an independent Azawad. Neighboring countries rejected the independence claim (Tripoli Post: 2012). From January until June, the country was under emergency rule. In late January of 2013, after French and African forces had intervened to end the conflict, the MNLA reversed course and declared its desire to align with the Franco-African alliance to fight the Islamist forces with which it had previously been allied (Birrell: 2013). In September of 2013, “the government had entered into peace negotiations with northern armed groups to resolve the northern conflict, resulting in the release of prisoners associated with the conflict” (State Department: 2014). International actors finally constructed an agreement that both the new Malian government and the rebel fighters agreed to, though neither did so enthusiastically. Neither side would talk to the other, but the agreement was signed in May of 2015. However, since then, some fighting has broken out again in the north.

Much of the most recent conflict is the result of historical misunderstandings of intergroup and intragroup differences. Early efforts to unify Mali and civilize Tuaregs and Arabs in the north amounted to economic and political marginalization and repression. The next section examines the nature of repression in Mali through both a historical and a contemporary lens. We cannot understand repression in the country without referring to the historical context outlined above. However, the influx of Islamic extremists into Mali in the past decade has presented new challenges to stability.

II. The Nature of Repression in Mali Since Independence

While conducting our research, we have struggled with how to discuss repression in Mali in a clear and concise way. Because Mali was a democracy, policymakers typically repressed minorities through political and economic marginalization rather than through outright forms of violent repression or explicit repression of civil or political rights (Sears: 2015). As Paul Melly (2015) stated in our recent interview with him, “In recent times one cannot talk about political leaders deliberately ordering serious repression; there have been occasional military abuses, but I do not know of any recent government or political leader

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deliberately resorting to serious repression or pursuing it as policy.” As has been outlined, understanding repressive tactics in Mali requires an understanding of the Tuareg uprisings since independence. For much of Mali’s history, repression has been synonymous with repression of the Tuaregs in the north. Recently, however, following the opportunistic influx of Islamic extremists into Mali, repression has taken on a new character. The government still avoids policies of repression, but the army has occasionally abused its power and rebel fighters have engaged in violence against civilians in the recent security crisis (Amnesty: 2015; State Department: 2014; Melly: 2015).

1. Political and Economic Repression

For most of Mali’s history as an independent state, the central government has used political and economic marginalization as its most common form of repression. Historically, the Tuaregs have been the primary focus of these marginalizing tactics. Repression by the government, of its citizens, is most clear-cut in the actions of Mali’s first two rulers Modibo Keita and Moussa Traoré (Sears: 2015). In more recent years, political repression has been much less prominent. Moreover, because of Mali’s underdevelopment, many contemporary modes of repression are less prevalent than in other countries. For example, as of 2014, only about 2.5% of Mali’s population had Internet access and only 1.4% had Facebook (IWS: 2014). Moreover, the International Federation of Library Associations reports that though the Malian central government has occasionally cracked down on dissenters on radio and social media, the government does not practice widespread use of filtering software (IFLA: 2007). However, repression by the Malian government is still present, particularly through political and economic marginalization. Moreover, a more nuanced look at the repressive tactics used by different groups suggests that the Tuaregs engage in their own internal repression, which has resulted in some of the recent upheaval in the country.

a. Repression of the Tuaregs

The Malian central government was so hostile to the Tuareg nomads that they labeled the northern pastures “le Mali inutile” (the useless Mali), and this marginalization helped result in the first revolt in 1963 (Lecocq: 2004; Benjaminsen: 2008). Shortly after French occupation, the problem of conflicting Tuaregs and Malian nationalisms arose. Moreover, shortly after gaining independence, the Malian government attempted to reduce the power of the chiefs in the north, seeing their powerful positions as relics of French colonialism (Harmon: 2014). One particularly offensive policy to the nomadic Tuaregs was the government’s effort to regulate the movement of livestock across borders. The Kel Adagh “regarded a cattle tax and customs duties imposed in February 1962, as well as the creation of the Malian franc to curtail illegal exports, especially cattle, as hurtful to their interests. Their main export was cattle, many of which they sent to the oasis towns of the Algerian Touat in exchange for commodities” (Harmon 2014: 24). However, Lecocq challenges this explanation by noting that the Tuaregs did not rebel because they paid high taxes. They rebelled because they did not pay the taxes, and the Malian central government dispatched the army to northern Mali to enforce the new taxes. In Lecocq’s (2002) view, the real source of the 1963 uprising stemmed from this attempt at political and economic coercion. Subsequently, the violent reaction of the Malian government to the first Tuareg uprising laid the foundation for future revolt in the country.
The Keita government’s desire to sedentarize the nomadic Tuareg people has been the basis of each successive rebellion. During his administration, and particularly during the Traoré administration, development aid often found its way into the hands of elite supporters of these regimes rather than to the northern communities who needed it (Gutelius: 2007). This same pattern of marginalization characterized each subsequent Tuareg rebellion (Klings: 1995). For decades, the Malian central government has promised decentralization and has delivered on such promises to varying degrees. At the time of independence, the Tuaregs asked for several concessions from the Keita administration, such as teaching in Arabic instead of French, greater regional autonomy and an autonomous police force (Boilly: 1999; Seely 2001). All demands were categorically denied, and little effort was made to incorporate the northern Tuaregs and Arabs into government roles (Klute: 2013). Similar demands were made, and somewhat met, in the early 1990s. Yet even after that rebellion, Sears (2015) notes, “[T]he promise of the Peoples’ Revolution, which helped precipitate multiparty democracy in 1991–1992, has been thwarted by ongoing and excessive dominance by the executive branch (especially from the President’s office), as well as incomplete and poorly implemented administrative decentralization and devolution.” Moreover, the state is reluctant to devolve too many powers to the northern rural population, because they are skeptical that the “illiterate rural population will be capable of organizing elections, collecting taxes, and so forth” (Benjaminsen 1997: 135).

Interestingly, efforts by Bamako to fight some forms of repression, particularly the repression of women, have further fanned the flames of discontent among Tuareg clans. In 2009, when the Malian government introduced legislation to reform the Code de la famille to provide more rights to women, religious leaders organized mass protests (Cline: 2013). This marked a shift in the factors motivating civil conflict. Far from reacting to repressive government tactics, this effort to alleviate a particular form of oppression resulted in a further schism between the north and the south. Likewise, although the secularist Tuaregs have little in common with radical Islam, government efforts to introduce greater women’s rights unwittingly provided common ground for these two groups (Cline: 2013; Sears: 2015).

b. Intragroup Conflict among the Tuaregs

Interestingly, intragroup conflict among the Tuaregs has also taken on a repressive nature. From the time of French rule, the Ifoghas were the privileged confederation of clans. They sought to maintain their position in the hierarchy through repression of the lesser clans. The disagreement over whether or not to continue fighting the Malian government in the 1990s led to violent intragroup conflict between two factions of the Tuareg rebel group (Klute: 2013). As Bøås and Torheim (2013) notes,

[In Kidal], a power struggle broke out after the implementation of the 1996 peace agreement between traditional leaders and a generation of emerging leaders. The latter were not from the traditional ruling lineages, but were a mixture of ex-rebels and drug traffickers. Thus, the particular Kidal predicament is just as much about intra-Tuareg tensions as it is a conflict with the Malian state (1284).

The intragroup conflict that fueled the “fratricidal war” in the 1990s (Klute and Von Trotha: 2004), has continued to influence Tuareg dynamics and the effect of these on Mali more generally. The power structures at play within the Tuareg minority's system of rule are partly responsible for AQIM’s recent
success in the country. In the most recent crisis, intragroup conflict may have proven more vital in the formation of extremists groups than most scholars and policy-makers realize. The ostracizing of Iyad Ag Ghaly by the Kel Adagh clan led directly to the formation of Ansar al-Dine, as outlined above.

As Jonathan Sears (2015) notes, "These communities might appear to outsiders as relatively unified and homogenous, but are sites of ongoing negotiations and struggles about what are the contents of 'justice,' 'peace,' 'well-being,' and 'prosperity' for different groups and individuals." The Tuareg clans disagree about how to best organize themselves politically—how to best form the Tuareg opposition to the Malian central government. The traditional mode of opposition has been through the dominant Kel Adagh confederation of clans, which has maintained intra- and inter-clan hierarchies. However, at least as far back as the 1990s, the concept of temust had also taken hold. The notion of temust is popular among many in the Tuareg community, and it suggests that their ethnicity as a stateless and nomadic people supersedes any intragroup hierarchies or any affiliation with the Malian government (Kohl: 2010; Elliott: 2013). However, an adherence to temust also raises the possibility for dominant clans to lose the political gains they have made over several decades, as temust emphasizes statelessness. Thus, the intragroup conflict within and among the Tuareg clans generates instability about the direction of the Tuareg minority groups. As Georg Klute (1995) writes,

> The dissidence within the Malian Tuareg rebel movement is also the expression of the struggle between two possibilities to build Tuareg identity: one according to the societal norms of the group, by tribe and confederation or through the traditional hierarchy, the other as part of an ethnic design, expressed by the notion of temust. It is also a struggle between two social models, one traditional, hierarchical, aristocratic, the other new, egalitarian, republican (56).6

And so, insofar as historical instability in Mali has been the result of Tuareg resistance to central Malian political and economic policies, so too has it been the result of tension within the Tuareg community (Klute: 1995; Kohl: 2010; Elliott: 2013). It is perhaps this intragroup conflict and search for identity that has provided an avenue for Mali's latest challenge—Islamic extremism.

### c. Inadequate Governance and Impunity in Mali

Mali also suffers from inadequate and ineffective governance, which further complicates the relationship between repression and civil conflict. Following the 1963 uprising, the Tuaregs in the north asked President Mobido Keita for specific set of demands to be met by the Malian government (Boilly: 1999; Klute: 2013). The demands were never met and the Tuaregs continued to harbor feelings of resentment toward the central government. The Tuaregs made similar demands of the government in the 1990s, with the result that they were given greater sovereignty in cultural affairs, a regional police force, and the ability to negotiate directly with aid agencies, among other concessions (Klute: 2013, 59). Again, however, the agreement failed to be put fully into practice. Though these concessions indicate that the government sought greater decentralization to placate restive northerners, we argue that the government's failure to implement reforms signals two problems—capacity and ineffective governance. The former is primarily the result of limited economic resources (Cline: 2013). We focus on the latter.

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6 Translation from French to English is my own.
Historically, the problem of governance has been linked to the government’s continued reliance on its sedentarization policy. In the 1980s, President Traoré had accepted the failure of his predecessor’s vanguard socialist policies (Fearon: 1988; Sears: 2015). To tackle his country’s economic insecurity, Traoré accepted funding from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (Gutelius: 2007). However, “Nearly 25 years after the first IMF intervention, cast market and government reforms, and major natural resource extraction projects under way generating hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues for foreign companies and certain Malian partners . . . most Malians today live in extreme poverty and die young—much as they did 25 years ago” (Gutelius: 2007, 60). Even with all this investment, the World Bank and IMF, as well as the UNDP, reported high levels of incompetence and corruption among government officials (Zulu and Nsouli: 1985; Gutelius: 2007). As several authors have shown, throughout the 1980s and 1990s in particular, both the Traoré regime and the Konaré government used investment in Mali to solidify and reward their ruling coalitions and coerce their opposition groups (UNDP and OECD: 2000; Baxter: 2002; Gutelius: 2007). Indeed, as Gutelius (2007) notes, “The Traoré government in particular kept development dollars close to its sycophants, which, coupled with droughts and lack of viable economic activity, helped push the Moor and Tuareg communities into revolt in 1990 and encouraged a coup d’etat and the election of a new government in 1992” (61). Even if we assume good intentions on the part of the government, the push for sedentarization meant that development of Mali was only viable if aid was provided (Guiffrida: 2007). “Under the decentralised government, members of a small elite act as mediators between national, regional and local authorities and the local communities. The more people local leaders can persuade to become sedentary, the more political support they attract” (Guiffrida: 2007, 540). However, we argue that history has shown that when the money runs out, or does not reach the north, two possibilities emerge: either the northerners revolt – as happened in the early 2000s – or they become nomadic again, and the process repeats itself (Guiffrida: 2007). Thus, inadequate governance undermines development projects and creates a cyclical pattern of revolt, migration, sedentarization, and revolt as the money is shifted to elite cronies in southern Mali instead of invested in the north.

The Malian government historically has not fulfilled its guarantees of decentralization and adequate aid to the north. These unfulfilled promises erode trust in the government’s willingness and ability to support the north. James Cohen of Transparency International suggests that military corruption is one cause of inadequate security provision in northern Mali (no date). 7 Tuareg trust in government has been further eroded by allegations of human rights abuses and impunity (Cline: 2013; Human Rights Watch: 2014). “[I]mmediately after Mr. Keita was elected, the leader of a coup that precipitated much of the country’s collapse last year, Capt. Amadou Sanogo, was promoted to the rank of lieutenant general, despite being linked to what Human Rights Watch calls ‘serious’ human rights abuses” (Nossiter: 2013, A4). Although some soldiers responsible for human rights abuses during the recent uprising have been imprisoned, many have yet to be arrested, with the government facing charges of impunity (Human Rights Watch: 2014; State Department: 2014).

The following graphs show some slight improvements in governance and rule of law following the uprisings in the early 2000s. However, those gains have been largely erased in the wake of the 2012 coup. The World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators suggest that inadequate governance and corruption

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are significant problems in Mali, and have worsened since the 2012 crisis.


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentile Rank (0 to 100)</th>
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<td><strong>Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Government Effectiveness</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Regulatory Quality</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Rule of Law</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Control of Corruption</strong></td>
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Source: Kaufmann D., A. Kraay, and M. Mastruzzi (2010), The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytical Issues
TIME SERIES OF WORLD GOVERNANCE INDICATORS (1996-2013)

Income Group, Region, or Country: Mali

The inner, thicker blue line shows the selected country’s percentile rank on each of the six aggregate governance indicators. The outer, thinner red lines show the indicate margins of error.
In an interview, Jonathan Sears (2015) noted that if the Malian central government is to gain the trust of the northern Tuaregs, it must first tackle issues of governance, corruption, and impunity that have derailed decentralization and development over the past few decades. Unfortunately, at present, the outlook is bleak (Nossiter: 2013; Cohen: no date).

1. Violent Repression

Violent repression in Mali has come in waves. It has occurred in conjunction with each Tuareg uprising, but using somewhat different tactics. As Bruce Whitehouse (2015) explains in an interview,

In the 1960s the government intervened directly, declaring martial law in much of the far north. By the 1990s the approach changed, with the government tending to act through intermediaries and proxy forces, i.e., various ‘self-defense’ groups populated by people of low-status northern groups harbouring historical grievances with the high-status northerners who have led rebellions against the central government.

The two most obvious instances of violent repression came during the tenure of Mali’s first two leaders, at the beginning of Mali’s statehood from 1963 to 1964, and before the fall of the Traoré regime in the early 1990s. Rebels who briefly seized control in 2012 and 2013 also employed violent repression. These instances demonstrate the use and effects of violent repression in very different contexts.

The violence employed following the 1963 uprising was disproportionate. The Tuaregs expressed their dissatisfaction with their changing roles shortly after independence, most specifically by avoiding new taxes. But in response, the Keita regime responded with extreme and disproportionate violence. Indeed, as Sears (2015) notes, the administration crushed the rebels and created lasting acrimony. According to Bruce Whitehouse (2015), many of the rebels in the most recent uprisings of 2000-2009 and the rebels in 2012-2013 were descended from those who were violently repressed in the 60s. Thus, there is a direct link between the actions of the government then and the rebellion that took place in 2012.

Jonathan Sears (2015) states, “If, in the early period of Moussa Traoré’s regime, northern minority populations enjoyed some relief from Modibo Keita’s vanguardist socialism, in practice Traoré ultimately continued in similarly coercive habits.” Over time, according to Sears, Traoré was “[i]ncreasingly disconnected from the mass population and isolated, Traoré became still more brutally oppressive. To consolidate power within the military he purged many of his former collaborators and resorted increasingly to violent crackdown on civil society groups and their activities.” In the early 1990s, in response to a student demonstration, Moussa Traoré’s troops fired into the crowd of protestors. In the wake of widespread discontent, he was overthrown in a coup led by General Touré. Moreover, the
persistent if somewhat sporadic violent repression used by the army has left the north of Mali in constant fear. This fear is worsened by the fact that when violence is used, it is often used indiscriminately. Mali’s army has responded brutally in the past to northern upheavals. For example, during the rebellion in the 1990s, civilian casualties inflicted by the Malian army outweighed combatant casualties (Lecocq: 2002).

Since democratization in the mid-1990s, Mali’s central government has shown more restraint in dealing with disaffected northerners. However, the persistent centralized approach to governance, which politically marginalizes northern minorities, often leads to violence. For example, in 2010 the Malian government sought to repress the MNLA (then the MNA). The Malian government refused to recognize the movement, and the police were violently repressive in response to demonstrations (Lecocq and Belalimat: 2012).

AQIM and its allies perpetrated most of the violence in the aftermath of the recent coup. First, in conjunction with the MNLA, Islamic extremists sought violent overthrow of the regime. The United States State Department reported that the MNLA and other rebel groups used extreme violence during the uprising, including “summary execution, sexual violence, torture, and use of child soldiers” (State Department: 2014). AQIM was guilty of killing civilians and military, as well as peacekeepers. However, the Malian government also committed serious human rights abuses, including summary executions, torture, and forced disappearances (State Department: 2014).

Human Rights Watch has commended president Keita for his efforts to fight impunity, noting, “The arrests in late 2013 and early 2014 of over 20 soldiers, including former coup leader General Amadou Haya Sanogo, for the torture and enforced disappearance of 21 elite ‘Red Berets’ in 2012, represents meaningful progress in this area” (Human Rights Watch: 2014). However, they note, “there have been scant efforts to hold accountable those involved in serious abuses committed during the 2012-2013 armed conflict in the north involving ethnic Tuareg separatists and Islamist armed groups” (HRW: 2014). Similarly, Amnesty International (2015) notes, “Few prosecutions were brought in connection with other cases of enforced disappearances and there were long delays in bringing to justice those responsible for committing human rights violations in the context of the conflict” (243). If the Malian government is to reestablish amicable links in the north, it must seek out its own soldiers who committed abuses and bring them to trial.

After the split between MNLA and Al-Qaeda, AQIM began using violent tactics on their former allies. Most recently (January 2015), AQIM engaged in a suicide bombing against the MNLA in northern Mali. The Malian government had been using the Gatia to help secure the region, but it is likely that AQIM operatives have infiltrated the Gatia, and are intent upon killing rebels in the north (BBC News: 2015). Meanwhile, according to African Economic Outlook, the humanitarian situation is dire in northern Mali. “Multiple attacks and battles persist against Malian army positions and UN peacekeeping forces (MINUSMA), and even between different armed groups. The situation has resulted in serious food insecurity and malnutrition, requiring urgent food aid for some 1.7 million people (including 260,000 in crisis). Refugees and displaced people returning to their areas of origin must do so in difficult conditions” (Konaté et al: 2015, 2). As such, the security situation in the country is still dire and is likely to result in more violent incidents in the near future.

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8 Translation from the French report is my own.

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III. The Relationship between Civil Conflict and Repression

We found it different to delineate whether conflict begets repression or repression foments conflict. However, the scholars and researchers interviewed for this study agree that the disproportionately violent response to the uprisings of 1963 and 1964 have had very dire consequence for the country (Melly: 2015; Sears: 2015; Whitehouse: 2015). Specifically, Paul Melly pointed out that “the father of Mohamed Ag Najem, the current military chief of the MNLA, was killed by the Malian army back in the 1960s. This gave a bitter Ag Najem the motivation to play a big role the recent MNLA revolt.” These initial violent responses to political differences have been responsible for creating a climate of tension in the country. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Traoré administration was heavy-handed in its approach to governance and was politically repressive in the north, primarily through economic and political marginalization. When protesters demonstrated against this form of political repression, they were met with a violent response. This led to mass mobilization and the ousting of President Traoré.

In our opinion, the most recent violent conflict is the result of decades of Tuareg repression and the opportunism of Islamic extremists. Our primary sources and secondary research suggest that the MNLA, desperate for an opportunity to assert itself politically against the Malian central government that it felt had repressed it for years, made the radical move of aligning itself with groups possessing funds and guns. Though the Tuaregs had little in common ideologically with AQIM and Ansar al-Dine, they were willing to use the resources of these groups to finally get the autonomy they had been demanding since 1960.

IV. The Economic and Political Consequences of Malian Repression

1. Economic Consequences

Mobido Keita’s grand socialist plans in the 1960s were ultimately a failure, and his tenure was characterized by generally poor economic performance across Mali. Though the country was extremely poor before Keita’s grand socialist plans, it was no better off after them. The 1970s and 1980s saw severe drought in the country. Even after the return of the many young men who migrated to Libya, it is unclear what all the soldiers will be employed to do now that a peace has been brokered. There are few jobs and the development aid given to Mali often does not make it to the areas that need it most, landing instead in the hands of political elites (Benjaminsen: 1997; Gutelius: 2007). From the 1980s to the present, Mali has received a good deal of international monetary support, being perceived as the West’s “donor darling,” but the money does not seem to produce sustainable development (Sears: 2015). GDP growth dropped in the wake of the recent upheavals. It has been climbing through 2013 and 2014, and the World Bank forecasts it to stabilize, and potentially to decline, after 2014. Meanwhile, economic repression of minority groups and favoritism, as delineated earlier, did not stimulate sufficient growth for the country as a whole or for specific regions. Finally, the government has not been able to diversify the economy or encourage growth throughout the nation. The country does not have a very visible international economic footprint: Mali ranks 31st and 136th on merchandise exports and imports, respectively, and 156th and 131st in commercial service exports and imports, respectively (WTO: 2014).
TIMES SERIES OF MALI’S GDP GROWTH

Mali’s GDP Growth in 2010 US Dollars

Created from the World Bank Data page:

Mali’s GDP GROWTH COMPARED TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Real GDP growth(%)

From the World Bank’s Economy and Region Specific forecasts and data page:

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2. Domestic Political Consequences

In each instance in Mali’s early years of statehood, harsh and violently repressive tactics were met within a few years with stout political upheaval. In the case of Keita and Traoré, their violently repressive tactics led to their ouster from office. Their administrations and the recent instability in the country have created a climate of distrust and uncertainty in Malian society. The Malian government fears allowing greater autonomy in the northern regions, particularly in light of groups like AQIM operating in the broader Sahel region. But, historically, the Malian government did not trust rural groups to administer themselves, deeming them too unsophisticated for self-governance and devolved powers. Such attitudes only exacerbated animosity for the government in Bamako. Moreover, those in the north are distrustful of government officials of all kinds, particularly the army. However, historically, even the agricultural agents sent to the region acted in a police capacity, which generated fear among the population. Therefore, the tension between the Malian government in the south and the minority populations in the north runs deep and has been built over decades.

3. International Political Consequences

Because Mali was looked upon as a bright spot of democracy in West Africa for many years, the West was keen to support it, particularly with monetary assistance (Gilmour: 2012; Bresslin and Gray: 2013; Stewart: 2014; Sears: 2015). As has been outlined, the repressive tactics used in the 1960s through the 1980s were typically non-violent and relied on marginalization and de facto rather than de jure repression (Krings: 1995). During this period, Mali was not a foreign policy priority for many countries, including its former colonizers. As such, there has been little economic motivation for involvement in Mali’s political and economic affairs. Politically, the United States sees Mali as a country with the “shared goals of strengthening democracy and reducing poverty through economic growth” (State Department: 2013).

However, attitudes and the subsequent level of international involvement changed in 2012. Northern Mali, in particular, had been a remote corner of Africa, “geographically at the periphery of Mali, socially and politically at its margins. Now that region became globalized; a number of global actors appeared in the region” (Klute 2013: 60). The international community, particularly Europe and the United States, suddenly had reason to show interest in Mali, largely because of the role of radical Islam in the unfolding events. Economically, and as a result of the March 22, 2012 coup, “the United States formally terminated assistance to the Government of Mali on April 10, 2012” (State Department: 2013). Militarily, the United States became involved before 2012 in training soldiers to resist extremist fighters (Bresslin and Gray: 2013). After 2012, France led the way in military operations, crushing the opposition in northern Mali and forcing the resignation of coup leader Sanogo. To complicate the situation further, France’s assistance in northern Mali may have negative consequences for lasting security in Mali (Bresslin and Gray: 2013; Reeve and Pelter: 2014). “As there were already elements and accusations of imperialism from France before, now facing an organization that was created based upon these very beliefs, the insurgents may be able to capitalize on this sentiment and gain supporters” (Bresslin and Gray 2013: 83). In our assessment, Western governments are in a precarious position in Mali and countries similar to it. Intervention risks alienating the population and strengthening the message of radical Islam, while doing nothing risks allowing a formerly stable country to descend into chaos, or rule by sharia law.

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V. The Malian Public’s Response to Repression

As noted earlier, much of the reaction to the Malian government’s repressive tactics has come from the Tuaregs in the north. However, in the 1990s there was a more widespread uprising and the ouster of Moussa Traoré from office. This revolt was in direct response to the violent tactics used against protesting students in 1993 – an event for which he was charged with crimes against humanity (Baxter: 1999). Though the public had largely tolerated the heavy handed rule of the Keita and Traoré regimes for many years, violent repression has tended to result in more extreme revolt from the general public and some elites. Democratization helped ease tensions between the people and the government, but devolved powers were slow to develop and the northern rural minorities were still without much political influence or authority.

Though the government and armed groups signed a peace agreement in May 2015, none of the parties to the agreement would speak directly to one another and international actors wrote the agreement. For the average Malian, though security is important, placing so much emphasis on it at the expense of other social services misses the point (ICG: 2015a). Malians, particularly in the north of the country, desire incorporation and inclusion without a loss of identity (Sears: 2015). The new agreement fails to recognize this. According to the International Crisis Group (2015a),

It prioritises the restoration of order and stability rather than aiming to meet a desire for genuine change that runs deep among northern populations. The agreement makes scant mention of issues like the access to basic social services, jobs or justice – concerns at the heart of popular demands. Prioritising security overshadows the need to restore the state’s social function across the Malian territory.

In our opinion, and in the opinion of all those interviewed, without addressing government corruption, clientelism, and the redundant and outmoded models of decentralization, Mali is unlikely to see much improvement in relations between the public in the rural north and the government in Bamako (Melly: 2015; Sears: 2015; Whitehouse: 2015).

Though polls taken at the end of 2012 suggested that most Malians supported intervention in the country (ORB: 2013), many individuals in West Africa, including Mali, are suspicious of the sudden involvement of Western powers (Reeve and Pelter: 2014). France’s swift intervention in Mali in 2012 was key to halting the advancing rebels. In 2014, France also established counter-terrorism operations in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger, with no indication of when it may leave those countries (Reeve and Pelter: 2014). Many individuals and leaders in the Sahel region believe that France’s involvement in the region has less to do with security and more to do with resources. These individuals (undisclosed by the ICG) point to France’s colonial history, the uranium and gold in the area, and the possibility for France to engage in arms deals (ICG: 2015b). This view is furthered by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which has maintained a presence from April 2013 until the writing of this report (UN). Though the mission states that the United Nations’ purpose is to support reconciliation and dialogue in Mali and to support the reestablishment of state authority (UN Resolution 2164), Malians may see this as Western occupation. Thus, Western involvement provides yet another security hurdle for Mali. If individuals in the country see the government as a puppet of France or the West, future rebellion seems
much more likely. Moreover, a recent coup in Burkina Faso sets a dangerous precedent for other West African governments (Posthumus: 2015). Mali’s history of conflict, paired with its government’s typical unresponsiveness to northern demands promotes uncertainty and instability in a country that is already a tinderbox.

VI. Mali Repression, Civil Conflict and Leadership Tenure: Answers to our 3 Questions

Q1. Do citizens respond differently when confronted with political repression, violent repression or a mix of repressive tactics?
The historical evidence indicates that they do. The scholars I interviewed believe that much of the ongoing tensions between the Tuaregs and the Malian government are a result of the initial violence used against the Tuaregs shortly after independence. Similarly, though the Traoré regime ruled in a centralized and authoritative manner for much of his 23-year tenure, when he turned to violence in the early 1990’s, the public was outraged. Traoré’s use of violent repression caused a small protest to spread through much of the general public and Traoré was ousted from power. When states such as Mali use violently repressive tactics, particularly when those tactics are totally disproportionate, they can prompt decades of unrest.

Q2. Do officials use different types of repression in response to different types of civil conflict?
In Mali, when rebellion has turned from political rebellion to violent rebellion, the Malian government has responded in kind. The answer to this question is unclear. In the case of the 1963 uprising, violent repression was used in response to what was largely a political protest. It was this disproportionate use of force that fueled the Tuareg rebellion 25 years later. So, while the Tuaregs engaged in armed rebellion in the early 1990’s, one could make the argument that they did so in response to the brutal use of force in the previous uprising. Moreover, in the second uprising, the Malian army killed more civilians than it did soldiers. However, Mali’s recent situation is complicated because of the intervention by outside forces from Africa and the European Union. The most recent upheavals in 2012 were led by armed soldiers and resulted in a coup d’état. That rebellion was met with military resistance from Mali, France, and other African nations.

Q3. Does the use, and type of repression (whether political, violent or some combination) increase the likelihood that rulers retain power?
For the first 30 years of Mali’s statehood, political repression was fairly common. The process tracing approach used here suggests that each time a leader has added violently repressive tactics to the more common political repression, he has subsequently lost power. Keita violently crushed the Tuareg uprising in 1963 and 1964. A few years later, he had been ousted from office in a coup. Similarly, when Moussa Traoré had his soldier fire on protesting students, his support diminished and he was removed from office. For the past 25 years, repression in Mali has been limited, coming mainly in the form of political and economic marginalization of the Tuareg and Arab clans in the north. However, the violent tactics of the ruling Islamic extremists were met with resistance from France and several African states, and control of Mali was handed back over to its democratically elected government.
VII. Concluding Thoughts

As we noted earlier, the Malian case study teaches valuable lessons about the results of unresolved political and economic grievances and the potential for democratic countries to become entangled by the opportunism of terror groups. We asserted that Mali has not been effectively unified, but it is unclear why—whether it is because of inadequate governance or because the state is not able or willing to treat all its citizens equitably. Until the Malian government deals with issues of governance and problems of impunity, it is unlikely to restore trust from ethnic minorities, particularly the Tuaregs. Our analysis suggests that Tuareg resentment runs incredibly deep. Our bleakest prediction has Mali’s northern Tuaregs eventually following the route of South Sudan and breaking away from the central Malian government. The MNLA is stronger than ever, and though an uneasy peace was brokered this year, the MNLA's leaders refused to meet with government officials, signifying persistent discontent and animosity. We struggle to see a unified Mali in the near future. However, with terrorist groups now operating freely in northern Mali, an independent northern Mali is undesirable. If the secular MNLA gained independence for Azawad in northern Mali, we believe it would succumb to Islamic extremists and become a hotbed for terrorists.

Therefore, we consider an alternative outcome. If Bamako is to avoid losing the Sahel region, it must make new attempts at unification. In the past, such attempts resulted in either a demand for economic and cultural uniformity from the Tuaregs or neglect of the northern territories. As Cristiani and Fabiani (2013) state, “the dysfunctionality of the Malian state can be explained by this lack of national cohesion and the presence of strong territorial imbalances” (81). However, others argue that the cry for unity and cohesion is misplaced. Jonathan Sears (2015) communicates, “The unsophisticated discourse of ‘unity’ no longer serves well as the central narrative of Mali’s present and future.” We argue that to find peace and reconciliation in the country, southern leaders must improve governance, address impunity, and come to grips with the differences of those in the north and of different ethnic backgrounds. Instead of marginalizing and repressing the Tuareg and Arab populations in Mali, leaders must search for ways to incorporate them into fold without stripping them of their diversity.

Making sustainable livelihoods accessible and viable for Malians from diverse backgrounds (herders, farmers, fishers, gardeners, traders, weavers, woodworkers, blacksmiths, etc.) is fundamentally important to preventing desperate people and communities from taking up arms, which are available in the Sahel cheaper than anywhere in the world (Sears: 2015).

Like so many post-colonial countries in Africa, Mali is struggling with how to incorporate different ethnic groups within one nation-state. For Mali, northern tribes should continue to receive devolved powers. But if the country is to stave off Islamic extremists, it cannot let devolution of powers dissolve into abandonment of the region, as was the case in 2012. Malian officials in Bamako must recognize the differences in custom and lifestyle of those in the north while allowing them greater representation in a functional government.
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