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Untangling the Politico-Security Knot

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A Report of the CSIS Africa Program

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Authors' Note

The field research for this report was conducted in the winter and spring of 2024, when Malian army forces were still successfully taking back new areas under jihadist control and opening new transport routes connecting the capital to previously isolated regions in Mali's north. In the intervening months, the army, and its Russian counterparts, have suffered a series of dramatic setbacks on the battlefield. First, an ambush by Tuareg separatists against Russian and Malian forces in July 2024 resulted in the deaths of a reported 80 Russian troops, their largest number of casualties since undertaking private military operations in Africa. Subsequently, a brazen attack on Mali's capital, Bamako, which had been previously insulated from fighting, occurred in September 2024, resulting in 77 government and Russian fatalities and including the destruction of numerous Malian military planes. Taken together, these attacks have reversed some of the feeling of confidence the authors noted in their earlier interviews and have left residents of Bamako feeling a renewed anxiety, according to follow-up interviews conducted since the attacks took place. Again, these sentiments mark a shift in the public attitudes the authors heard during their field research and suggest that ongoing acceptance of the military or its ruling tactics will depend greatly on its ability to reverse these recent losses.

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Introduction

Civil-military relations in Africa have been shaped by the colonial experience. Within colonial borders, defense and security institutions often arose from either one region, one ethnic group, or one religion, and existed to protect the colonial enterprise at the expense of the population. Eventually, this approach favored some ethnic groups, pitting them against their fellow citizens. Today, notwithstanding their nationalist doctrines and names, these institutions retain colonial roots that continue to shape the military's relationship with civilian populations. Long after the original colonial powers left, the institutions they left behind skew the balance of power between civilian and military leaders, subverting the social contract. Mali, where the Bambara ethnic group dominates defense and security institutions, is no exception.[1] The country has been grappling with these remnants of colonialism since its 1960 independence from France; it experienced its first military coup d'état a mere eight years later.

Flashing forward, since 2020, when a military coup d'état removed President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta from office, Mali has been locked in a series of overlapping and reinforcing political and security crises. The 2020 coup ushered in a transitional period of military rule under the Comité National pour le Salut du Peuple (CNSP). Mali is experiencing a crisis of confidence that existed under democratic rule and that continues to undermine relationships between all state actors: the military, politicians, civil society, and average citizens. To untangle this gordian knot of politico-security crises, Malians need a fundamentally new understanding of the role of the state, and the state needs to rethink its relationship and responsibilities toward its people. The possibility that this can be achieved in the near term under the country's current political disposition appears remote.

For the United States, Mali is a confounding case that requires renewed attention if it hopes to address not only the underlying terrorist threats driving instability across the region, but also the malign internal politics and unhelpful foreign influences undermining any hope for a stable future for Mali, or the larger region. Not so long ago, Mali was heralded as a democratic success story. A close partner of the West, Mali chaired the Community of Democracies forum in 2005-07 and was celebrated as a close partner in a poor and unstable region that saw civil wars ravage Mali's neighbors in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire. Today, however, multiple crises– internal rebellion, rampant criminality, and terrorist attacks–threaten not only the country's unity but also endanger the wider region as it struggles with similar institutional and demographic challenges. The United States' inability to respond to and engage effectively in Mali puts a wider set of strategic objectives across West Africa at risk.

This report is based on field research conducted in Bamako, Mali, in winter-spring 2024. At the request of the interviewees, their comments have been kept anonymous. In conducting this study, the researchers met with a broad cross section of society: civilian leaders representing youth, women, and various ethnic and regional groups; current and former politicians; independent journalists; local political analysts and academics; military officers; international diplomats; and representatives of international organizations based in Bamako. Many respondents were not originally from Bamako and also shared their and their families' experiences and observations of life outside the capital in zones directly affected by the ongoing violence.

The West, which tends to plan its external engagements and think based on its own short-term interests and election cycles, needs to take a strategic pause in its interactions with Mali. Indeed, the reflexive reaction to force a return to civilian rule with the shortest possible delay has backfired time and again. Moreover, this almost knee-jerk response suggests a lack of awareness of the decades-long trauma in Mali that many respondents spoke of around elections, democracy, and civilian rule. Instead, what is needed is the fundamental reform of the state, its institutions, and its relationships with and among its citizens, an undertaking that will be many years in the making as it requires addressing essential issues dating back to Mali's colonial and immediate post-colonial periods. Those seeking to aid in Mali's transformation would do well to think on a timeline that is a decade or more, exercising what one Western diplomat referred to as "strategic patience."

Yet more hopefully, among those met by the research team, including representatives of the ruling military government, there was an amazing self-awareness and understanding of the country's complicated history and uneven political development that created the current crisis in which the country has been mired. Where stakeholders diverged was not in diagnosing the country's problems, but rather in prescribing remedies. Nevertheless, all involved parties cautioned against quick fixes or externally imposed formulae for addressing the country's history and plotting a new way forward.

The Political-Security Nexus in 2024

The CNSP has ruled Mali for nearly four years, and, despite an ever-weakening development and economic situation nationwide as well as a steady closing of civic space, the military appears

exceedingly popular, especially when compared to their civilian alternatives.[2] Indeed, even the politicians and pro-democracy analysts and activists the authors interviewed demonstrated a resignation that the status quo of military rule was likely the best option at the moment. One Western diplomat went so far as to note: "the conditions that precipitated the coup remain present so in the eyes of many their continued rule is still justified."[3]

Interestingly, political analysts, civil society, leaders, and democracy activists interviewed for this research widely shared a seemingly dichotomous view of the situation. Military leaders, they contended, lack any vision for the social and economic development of the country and present no vision for a set of durable solutions that might lead Mali out of the current interlocking web of social, political, and security crises. However, the same respondents agreed that, if elections had been held in the spring of 2024, as originally promised, the military would have won by an overwhelming margin.[4]

The military has used a combination of propaganda, disinformation, and growing restrictions on and harassment of the media and civil society organizations to drive a belief in its own ability to offer a genuinely better future, in many respects by silencing dissenting voices. High profile corruption cases targeting disgraced politicians, the reclaiming of strategic towns, and the reopening of key transportation routes have added to the aura of CNSP rule. One Western diplomat in Bamako observed, "A flag in Kidal means more than electricity in Bamako, which means more than elections across the country."[5] Beyond that, the CNSP tapped into a wellspring of nationalist sentiment by expelling French and UN forces; the military has capitalized on that nationalism to win backers and further justify their hold on power. Despite all this, many interviewees offered a counternarrative: that people were only "under the illusion that things are better because the French are gone. The reality is that none of the country's problems have been solved since the French left."

Other observers largely agreed with a similar sentiment: improving security is far and away the most important issue facing the country, as an improved security environment ultimately enables the long-term objectives of development and democracy. The military has demonstrated more than modest progress regarding security in the eyes of those interviewed. Despite data that suggests a worsening security environment, and a host of human rights accounts detailing substantial civilian casualties from security operations, the general sentiment among the diverse group interviewed was that the military was now succeeding where civilian leaders had failed–the military has begun to roll back jihadist forces.[6] Anecdotal accounts describe a situation where military forces now, more often than not, stay and fight rather than run away when confronted on the battlefield. Beyond symbolic victories, like the one in Kidal, those interviewed all reported substantially improved freedom of movement and greater security along main transport routes northward, with many others recounting being reunited with family members whose villages were previously inaccessible.[7] While the military continues to reject any responsibility for the substantial collateral damage their operations cause to the civilian population and is loath to admit to using Russian mercenaries, reports from independent media suggest that, in the midst of greater

security incidents, there was sufficient anecdotal evidence to demonstrate an overall improved security environment.

For many observers, the perception of an improved security environment has been sufficient to buy time and support for CNSP leaders, even as clear benchmarks for a return to civilian rule were missed or ignored entirely. Yet some argued that "civilians are drugged by the CNSP's lies," and believe that the military was able to "poison society, making governance impossible and presenting themselves as the only option for ruling" through its hollowing out of public institutions and civic space.[8] Most respondents agreed that the military had no interest in abandoning power, though some suggested that it, in fact, "has a detailed checklist of things it wants to accomplish before giving up power, that they intend to do on their own timeline and no one else's," including fighting corruption, reforming politics, modernizing the armed forces, and defeating terrorist insurgents.[9] Conveniently, the ambitious nature of such a program could also justify the military holding power indefinitely.

Elections Are Not the Answer

Against this backdrop of military rule, what also emerged is the degree to which politics have become militarized and the military has become politicized. In this caustic environment, the army and politicians have emerged as rivals for power, with both sides blaming the other for the decades of malfeasance that led to the country's current crisis. Most analysts interviewed observed that both sides had valid arguments, making the current political crisis appear only more intractable.

Several narratives emerged during discussions with local stakeholders around the subject of elections and democracy that diverged sharply from Western perspectives. Moreover, the authors' analysis suggests that focusing on the fundamental reforms necessary to create democratic conditions in the country, rather than on restoring democracy, is more important. Indeed, most observers believed that Mali had not been exhibiting democratic traits for more than a decade *before* the 2020 coup. The notion that elections would somehow "restore" democracy–viewed by many as largely absent from their day-to-day lives–felt like an unfair imposition of Western priorities that ignored local historical realities, a sort of "democratic disinformation." Reflecting this view, one Western diplomat suggested that the current political moment be referred to as a "repair process," rather than as a transition, implying that previous politics in the country were indeed broken. The diplomat wondered whether "we had the wrong expectations" for a country that needs a multifaceted approach.[10]

Politics as Usual

Everyone interviewed concurred that improved security was the essential condition for both democracy and development. There was similar agreement questioning how elections could be organized given the rampant insecurity in so much of the country. But most importantly, as one local political analyst noted, "Elections bring the wrong people to power and will just return Mali to its same broken politics."[11] Indeed, all those surveyed expressed extremely low opinions of past and current political leaders as well as of the elections that had previously brought them to power

and legitimized their rule. The fact that Western democracies largely endorsed those elections and leaders has done little to help them curry favor now, or even have their advice heeded when elections and democratic restoration is championed.

"The West doesn't understand that there is a national trauma around elections; we assume that they are all rigged. Why would we want to repeat them before we have confidence that our political system is fixed?"[12] noted one local democracy activist whose sentiments were widely echoed. Others remarked that from a practical perspective there is little difference between how the military rules presently and how civilians ruled previously, except that CNSP leaders appear to be making greater gains in reestablishing security and fighting corruption–the two biggest priorities interviewees expressed, even over democracy and development.[13]

Despite the political and security conditions that brought the military to power remaining largely unchanged, there was a clear understanding of why the military held power now. Many even expressed a preference for continued military rule, at least until the security situation stabilized. Moreover, there remains a palpable disdain for previous periods of Western-style democratic rule and very little appeal for a return to that system without the country first tackling historical and structural deficiencies that have gone unaddressed for so long. As one local analyst noted, "Until people believe that politics can be done differently, the army will maintain the confidence of the population."[14]

Mali's History Informs Its Current Struggles

There can be no discussion about Mali's political future without first reckoning with its past. A constant refrain ran through the authors' interviews: neither the state, nor its institutions–particularly the army–had evolved much from their pre-independence formation and, overall, the government still largely functioned as a colonial state.

Many of those interviewed pointed out that, despite years of Western military training and joint exercises around the region, the army remains dedicated to the protection of the regime and not to the people of Mali. Similarly, they expressed doubt about the claims of the army to be the guarantor of the constitution, as it was the army that had promulgated the latest constitution. The military's defense of the constitution was seen, in fact, as a self-serving defense of their own hold on power.

The irony of the rejection of French colonial rule as being a prime motivator of political discourse, while at the same time accepting a form of colonial governance that saw the administration of violence as the prime tool of control and governance, was not lost on anyone met by the research team. In fact, many saw the army itself as a colonial actor, acting in defense of its own elite class and interests. Moreover, others argued that, with upward of 90 percent of members of the present-day military being the sons of current officers, the army was little more than "a club that reproduces itself," echoing the belief that the military exists first and foremost to protect the interests of its own members. This nepotistic recruitment process has severely impacted the quality of both soldiers and officers, with interviewees pointing to the battlefield (the army's losses to jihadists) and to villages across Mali (the army does not reflect the country's tribal, regional, or linguistic diversity) for proof.[15]

Any long-term effort to rebuild and reform the state must include a reform of the security sector. Interviewees argued that any effort to reinforce government must center on a postcolonial and decentralized version of the state. However, even before taking steps toward decolonization and decentralization, people need to understand what the role of the state should be after reforms. Time and again, speakers argued that there currently exist two countries and two populations in Mali: Bamako, with its surrounding environs, and everywhere else. Most people outside of Bamako had no real conception of what the state was or should be. In addition, they had no sense of what democracy was or what it should look like in their local context. This fundamental lack of understanding led them to voice a preference for service delivery over democratic governance, as services are something that can be seen and felt. Some analysts saw civil society as partly responsible for this situation as it had failed to help local communities understand the role of the state and the importance of the constitution as Mali's most fundamental law.[16] Under this reality, the demand for democracy would remain severely limited to those outside the capital and be constrained by the use of force and propaganda inside the capital.

Many argued that the state must be decentralized, and colonial-era approaches to government broken down before the state itself can be rebuilt. Others reflected nostalgically on efforts by leaders like Alpha Oumar Konaré to begin the process, only to see it reversed by leaders like Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré, a civilian leader drawn from the military.

Ironically, it was Colonel Touré who, in 1991, deposed President Moussa Traoré, the strongman who had ruled Mali for 23 years and led the year-long military-to-civilian transition that set the country back on the path to democratic rule. After retiring from the army in 2001, Touré entered politics and won the 2002 presidential election. Even though he had been very popular once and won his first term with 64 percent of the vote, Touré's second term was marred by allegations of corruption and accusations of incompetence, particularly in the wake of the insurgency in northern Mali. In 2012, Touré was overthrown by Captain Amadou Sanogo, an army officer who had trained at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, and Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, through the United States International Military Education and Training Program.

The coup happened at the apex of public discontent, which had spiked after Tuareg rebels executed more than 80 Malian soldiers and civilians during an offensive in the town of Aguelhok.[17] Captain Sanogo and his associates exposed the tension between the civilian leaders and the military, as well as the massive challenges inherent in civilian oversight of the armed forces and in civil-military relations writ large.

More recently, the CNSP's rejection of the 2015 Algiers Accord was seen as an effort, inter alia, to avoid the adoption of the agreement's decentralizing components. Despite the government's failure to implement the Algiers Accord, all interviewees agreed that the notions underpinning it were sound. Mali's society is highly decentralized, but the state and its governance are not. Unless and until that gap can be bridged, the fissures that have created tension and rebellion between the state and society will only widen.

War, Security, and Civil-Military Relations

War, particularly the asymmetric nature of violent extremism and the fight against terrorism, tends to push governments and security institutions to impose regimes of exception or a state of siege. While the state justifies such actions by citing emergency circumstances–the need to defeat an enemy or to restore state authority and peace–these measures are fraught with human rights abuses. Moreover, this approach to countering violent extremism breeds resentment in frontline communities, which are often caught between the fighting sides, both of which see both sides as potential enemies and treat them as such. These communities are thus exposed to violence from all sides and are left to fend for themselves by creating local defense groups or militias, joining one side, or serving both.

When mismanaged, conflict of this nature often not only widens the mistrust between the communities and the defense and security institutions but also exacerbates the fragile relations between the civilian leadership and those institutions which consider themselves as the guardians of the state.

In 2012, Captain Sanogo and his colleagues cited the civilian leadership's mismanagement of the conflict in northern Mali as a reason for the coup. Today, security remains at the center of the defense and security institutions and the military government, which took over at a critical time in the ongoing conflict. The quest for security has driven the militarization of key public institutions, another source of instability in some communities.

Besides Colonel Assimi Goïta, the current transitional president, four other colonels co-lead the CNSP and run key state institutions. Malick N'Diaw, Sadio Camara, Modibo Koné, and Ismaël Wagué are the heads of the National Traditional Council (the appointed National Assembly), the Ministry of Defense and Veterans Affairs, the National Agency for State Security (Intelligence), and the Ministry of National Reconciliation, respectively. Little is known about the five men's internal dynamics, and this lack of transparency prevents analysts from making reliable evaluations about the internal cohesion of the CNSP or judgements about its longevity.

It is clear, however, that the CNSP has publicly claimed that security is its top priority and has defined its relationships with the citizenry through that lens. Security also seems to be at the center of its regional and international engagements. The CNSP's frustration with and disagreement over security agreements with France and the UN peacekeeping mission led to the end of those partnerships.[18] The military leaders' current position seems to meet the expectations of the Malians who want improved security and peace. The CNSP has seized on the popularity of this stance to build a stronger relationship with the population, using various platforms and means.

For instance, during civilian rule, the government did not regularly communicate or share information on the state of military operations. Since the coup, however, the CNSP has invested immensely in communication, helping to ensure that their version of events becomes the established narrative locally. Colonel-Major Souleymane Dembele, the spokesperson of the Forces Armées Maliennes, is a household name. The military government's communication strategy has been effective in firming up popular support in part because it targets segments of the population

that had previously been excluded: the uneducated, those on the margins of society, and the vast population outside of Bamako, many whom do not read or speak French. The government communicates in Bambara, a language spoken by an estimated 40 percent of Malians, and not in French. This approach has helped military leaders tap into a substantial reservoir of nationalism that has helped reinforce their own popularity.

Despite, or perhaps because of, digital technology options, traditional media outlets have been unable to match the government's substantial investment in public communication. This inability to communicate is as much about the information flow as it is about control of the infrastructure. Media networks must contend with low standing and bad reputations within the population, as well as the wide variety of information outlets available. The government has capitalized on this reality and controls information flow, thereby improving the population's appreciation of the military, while also further weakening independent media's ability to serve as a check on the government.

The state of relations between defense and security institutions–national and local–and the Malian population is as complex as it is nuanced. In the words of one local security analyst, "The civilian population in Mali seems to have confidence in the defense and security forces."[19] This observation is borne out in a recent (January 2024) Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Mali-Mètre opinion poll that shows 99 percent of Malians as satisfied with the work of the security forces. However, the more local police and gendarmerie do not fare as well; they are viewed as corrupt.[20]

Urban populations tend to adopt the government's nationalist narrative and relate better with defense and security institutions. This is the case in Mali's southern and western regions, which have experienced relatively few military operations. In contrast, the populations more affected by conflict–in the central, eastern, and northern regions, such Timbuktu, Gao, and Mopti–do not identify with defense forces.[21] In these more rural regions, according to one security analyst, "The operating methods of the armed forces and their auxiliaries are often denounced by human rights organizations, which report serious human rights violations such as extrajudicial mass executions, kidnappings, targeted assassinations, torture, mistaken targeting of drone strikes, etc."[22] In these areas, civil-military relations are driven by mistrust and, often, misunderstanding.

Civil society groups and nongovernmental organizations have been working with the military to help improve relations with the civilian populations. These groups have employed cultural activities, sports, and engagement with community leaders or with the activists and advocates who speak on behalf of affected communities.[23] The Malian military has also undertaken its own initiatives in communities, including food and water distribution and health and medical outreach. But, given the years of conflict and abuses, the trust deficit persists.

There are a few fora, such as the security advisory committees and the Inter-Malian Dialogue, that convene key stakeholders from across the armed forces, community leaders, and civil society organizations in order to address security-related challenges and recommend potential solutions.[24] However, with the government restricting the political space and freedom of expression, stakeholders cannot speak freely or contribute adequately.[25]

While the authors' interlocutors on the ground acknowledged the popularity of the military government, they also pointed out a few key facts that cannot be ignored in any meaningful analysis of security developments and partner engagement. Popularity alone does not guarantee stability. Prior to the CNSP, leaders, such as Amani Toumani Touré and Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, also had enjoyed high levels of popularity, until they did not.[26] Their times in office ended with coups, as Mali had not truly been a functioning democracy; ultimately this led to the current situation. In the end, Malians will evaluate their leaders based on whether they meet the expectations they set with their own promises. The interviewees also called on the international community to help the military leaders to transition the country back to civilian rule.[27]

Mali is entangled in a politico-security knot that requires drastic and urgent action. Security, particularly human security, is as much a social and economic matter as it is the purview of defense and security institutions. In Mali, as is the case across the region, political leaders (civilian and military) have fallen short of people's expectations. From 1960, when Mali became independent, to 2012, when Captain Sanogo deposed President Touré, the country has experienced three coups (in 1968, 1991, and 2012), an average of one every 17 years. More recently (2012-24), Mali has had two coups (2020 and 2021), averaging a coup every six years, suggesting an overall weakening of state institutions.

3

Recommendations

The crisis of confidence and the trust deficit between civilian and military leaders have created a self-sustained and alternating cycle of civilian and military rule that has stymied Mali's economic development and stability. In the authors' final analysis, the results seem to be the same: each camp seeks to maximize and serve the interests of its leaders. To rebuild credibility and reclaim the people's trust, the state and its institutions should be restructured along a noncolonial, nonpredatory model centered on the social contract. Malians need a state that matters in their daily lives. Moreover, as the national legislative body, the National Assembly should reclaim its elected character so that the representatives have the constitutional mandate to represent and speak for their communities.

All of this means that at the center of policymaking should be local organizations, particularly those civil society groups representing the youth and women who mobilized behind or against coup leaders. More avenues and channels should be opened for dialogue with the various populations to address their grievances and chart realistic and achievable solutions for the pressing challenges, including insecurity. The government's current civil-military initiatives are important but insufficient to build trust and strengthen relations between the defense and security institutions and the populations in conflict-affected areas.

Accordingly, the CNSP should consider several steps to help stabilize Mali's internal political situation and lay the groundwork for an eventual return to civilian rule by pursuing the following steps:

- Rebuilding trust between the state and the citizens by depoliticizing the defense and security institutions (i.e., the army and police), which can be realized by expanding the security parameters to include food security and human rights, among other areas, and by building partnerships with civil society groups and nongovernmental organizations.

- Implementing confidence-building measures to enable civilians to identify with the defense and security institutions and vice versa. This can be done by multiplying civil-military cooperative actions, promoting dialogue between the defense and security institutions and the local population through discussion forums or open meetings, implementing military operations in compliance with international humanitarian law, and by considering the specific concerns of the population, especially women and young people.

- Fostering strong relations and relationships of trust between the defense and security institutions and civilian populations by expanding the number of security advisory committees (composed of civilians and security officials) and ensuring that participants can speak freely without reprisals.

- Training members of the national assembly and their staff to build the expertise needed for effective oversight of defense and security institutions through exchange programs with legislative bodies of partner countries, including the U.S. State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program.

- Creating avenues and platforms to allow conversations with and input from civil society organizations in matters of security and law and order.

The Sahel region has been an area of focus for Western powers due to threatening security developments and evolving regional and geopolitical power dynamics and their potential impact on Western interests. Until recently, the United States maintained military bases in the region. Mali is a critical locus of U.S. engagement, acting as a potential buffer to the littoral states as they face violent extremism threats from the Sahel. Currently, Mali is under Section 7008 sanctions related to its military coup, but the United States should consider the present societal situation and help the country address the crisis of confidence that plagues relations between all state actors: military, politicians, civil society, and average citizens. While this may send a mixed message, the West's withdrawal signals abandonment, which opens the door for worse actors to step in and displace the West even more. Given these dynamics, the following steps are warranted:

- The United States should look for the flexibility available in U.S. legislation, such as Section 7008, and provide civil-military assistance focused on nonlethal means aimed at improving civilian-military relations.

- Through its own funding, the Department of Defense (DOD) should host Malian officers and civil society actors for training on civil-military relations at conferences or workshops through DOD organizations such as the Africa Center for Strategic Studies.

- The U.S. ambassador to Mali should use available channels to host scholars and civil society actors at universities through exchange programs such as the International Visitor Leadership Program for training in civil-military relations.

Nobody is naïve about the track record of this military government, and the CNSP has not yet demonstrated a willingness to return to civilian rule. These recommendations are not ignorant of that, but rather are in recognition of the fact that, if the United States does not move to close it, the gap between the Malian military leadership and the West will widen and will push the military government further down the nondemocratic path they are on.

About the Authors

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Endnotes

1   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with NGO manager, Bamako, Mali, June 19, 2024.

2   Dizolele and Hudson, interviews with politicians, analysts, activists, NGO employees, and   diplomats, Bamako, Mali, February 2–9, 2024.

3   Dizolele and Hudson, conversation with diplomats, Bamako, Mali, February 9, 2024.

4   Dizolele and Hudson, interviews with politicians, analysts, activists, NGO employees, and diplomats, Bamako, Mali, February 2–9, 2024.

5   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with diplomat, Bamako, Mali, February 4, 2024.

6   Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, "Attacks on Civilians Spike in Mali as Security Deterio-rates Across the Sahel," September 21, 2023, https://acleddata.com/2023/09/21/fact-sheet-attacks-on-ci-vilians-spike-in-mali-as-security-deteriorates-across-the-sahel/.

7   Dizolele and Hudson, interviews with politicians, analysts, activists, NGO employees, and diplomats, Bamako, Mali, February 2–9, 2024.

8   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with political analysts, Bamako, Mali, February 5, 2024.

9   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with diplomat, Bamako, Mali, February 5, 2024.

10   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with diplomat, Bamako, Mali, February 6, 2024.

11   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with political analyst, Bamako, Mali, February 6, 2024.

12   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with decentralization expert, Bamako, Mali, February 4, 2024.

13   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with elections expert, Bamako, Mali, February 4, 2024.

14   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with political scientist, Bamako, Mali, February 4, 2024.

15   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with politician, Bamako, Mali, February 5, 2024.

16   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with journalist, Bamako, Mali, February 4, 2024.

17   Radio France Internationale, "Tuareg Rebels Behind January Killings, Confirms Mali Army," February 13, 2012, https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20120213-tuareg-rebels-behind-january-killings-confirms-mali-army.

18   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with senior Malian army officer, Bamako, Mali, February 7, 2024.

19   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with Malian security analyst, Bamako, Mali, June 19, 2024.

20   Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, "Que Pensent les Malien (nes)," *Mali-Mètre, Enquête d'Opinion*, March 2014, https://mali.fes.de/e/mali-metre-2024.html.

21   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with NGO manager, Bamako, Mali, June 19, 2024.

22   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with Malian security analyst, Bamako, Mali, June 19, 2024.

23   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with NGO manager, Bamako, Mali, June 19, 2024.

24   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with Malian security analyst, Bamako, Mali, June 19, 2024.

25   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with NGO manager, Bamako, Mali, June 19, 2024.

26   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with NGO manager, Bamako, Mali, June 19, 2024.

27   Dizolele and Hudson, interview with elections expert, Bamako, Mali, February 4, 2024.

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