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Beyond institutional blueprints: hybrid security provision and democratic practice in Mali

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Chapter 6

Multiparty democracy turned into a militiacracy?

In the aftermath of the crisis
(2013-2018)

INTRODUCTION

When things fell apart in Mali, a French-led military intervention dislodged an opaque alliance of jihadists from the main urban centres across the north of the country. Shortly thereafter, elections marked the return of a democratic regime. The UN Security Council deployed a stabilisation mission (MINUSMA) to assist Malian authorities, amongst others, to extend and re-establish the state administration throughout the country. By mid-2015, the Malian government signed an internationally brokered Peace and Reconciliation Agreement with the main northern armed groups. That same year, representatives of more than 60 countries, multilateral institutions and the private sector pledged \$3.25 billion in support of Mali.

Nevertheless, a heterarchical political order only anchored during the five years that followed the 2012 crisis, despite considerable international efforts and the restoration of a democratic regime. The Malian state did not substantially expand its position in or influence over other power poles in society. In 2018, public expenditure by the Malian state covered a mere 20 per cent of the national territory, as noted in the introductory chapter. More than two thirds of Malian state representatives were not present at their duty stations in the northern and central regions. The state remained largely confined to isolated urban pockets. Its role in the realm of security provision remained particularly restricted. Craven-Matthews and Englebert (2018) contended that, “[t]he Malian military may have barracks and people wearing uniforms, but it still appears to have none of the basic operational dimensions of an actual military.”⁴³⁷ A wide variety of non-state armed groups and international military forces played a leading role in performing this core statehood function in practice.

This final chapter examines, in an explorative manner, why Malian state authority remained so restricted and non-state armed groups endured as influential power poles across the northern and central regions in the period between 2013 and 2018. This chapter mainly focuses on the security realm and decentralised administration.

⁴³⁷ Craven-Matthews, C. and Englebert, P. (2018), p. 6.

The first part adopts an analytical perspective “from below.” It illustrates the deteriorating security trends and considerable contribution made by non-state armed actors to providing some basic form of protection amidst state absence. Consistent with the approach adopted in Chapter 2, this analysis is restricted to the “supply side” of security. Additional empirically grounded research is certainly required to take popular perceptions of the different security actors and their efforts more prominently into account. The section ends with a reflection inspired by the notion that “protection from violence” constituted an increasingly important source of legitimacy in a context of widespread insecurity. The literature suggests that, “[t]hose who are able to offer protection from violence are at the same time those with the best chances to accumulate power and position.”⁴³⁸ Accordingly, this section explores the extent to which the prominent role of non-state armed actors in the security realm evolved into a broader role in the area of decentralised administration.

The second part of the chapter adds a perspective “from above.” It first analyses Mali’s protracted peace process and its subsequent implementation phase. State authorities and leaders of the northern armed groups largely dominated both processes. This part first demonstrates that the persistent efforts aimed at re-integrating the northern armed groups into reconstituted and unified state security and governance structures yielded few results. It subsequently illustrates how patterns of hybrid security provision by the Malian state as well as international actors prevailed in that context.

The third and final part of the chapter briefly assesses prevailing challenges to Malian democracy in the post-crisis years. More specifically, it examines prevailing patterns of popular participation, representation and accountability in order to assess democracy’s contribution to enhancing state legitimacy in the aftermath of the 2012 crisis.

6.1. SEEN FROM BELOW: DISPERSED DISPUTES AND A FRAGMENTED SECURITY LANDSCAPE

6.1.1. Rise and geographical spread of the terrorist threat

In 2012, a loose alliance of terrorist organisations still occupied northern Mali while severe power struggles between military and civil factions paralysed the state at the centre. Unsurprisingly, most Malian citizens believed their country was moving in the wrong direction.⁴³⁹ Just 12 per cent of all Malians and three per cent of citizens living in the occupied

⁴³⁸ Hüsken, T. and Klute, G. (2015), p. 116.

⁴³⁹ Afrobarometer ‘Round 5, Afrobarometer Survey’, available at: <https://afrobarometer.org/>.

northern regions felt secure. After the French-led international military intervention in 2013, two thirds of the Malian population now believed the country was moving in the right direction. More than six out of ten citizens felt secure and 76 per cent of (urban) citizens in northern Mali indicated that a basic level of security had been restored. Based on an assessment of Afrobarometer survey data, Penar and Bratton (2014) concluded that these positive perceptions about the security situation in the country significantly contributed to the overall optimistic mood in the country.⁴⁴⁰

However, already from 2015 onwards, Malian citizens faced a sharp increase in the number of violent incidents of a different nature than they were used to. Armed confrontations involving non-terrorist armed groups and Malian Defence and Security forces decreased. In contrast, extremist violence became ever more prominent. Moreover, the geographical pattern of violent incidents changed. Whereas violent incidents used to be concentrated in Mali's northern regions, they now moved southwards to the central Mopti region and spread across borders.⁴⁴¹

The year 2017 marked a real turnaround in terms of intensity of violence and the geographical locus of incidents. It recorded more violent incidents than witnessed in the previous 20 years.⁴⁴² The formation of the jihadist coalition Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) constituted a major driving force behind these rising patterns of insecurity. Various jihadist organisations that controlled different parts of northern Mali established JNIM together with the Maacina Liberation Front, a network of jihadist groups that gained ground across central Mali. The leader of the alliance, Iyad Ag Ghali, pleaded allegiance to Al-Qaeda. This merger enabled the organisation to improve coordination between the individual branches and to intensify recruitment efforts. Between October 2017 and February 2018, JNIM conducted an average of 12 terrorist attacks per month. Most attacks took place in central Mali.⁴⁴³

Another major development constituted the formation of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) by a former spokesperson of MUJAO, which concentrated its efforts around Mali's border area with Niger.⁴⁴⁴ From early 2018 onwards, the group managed to establish a considerable local support base and expanded its activities.

⁴⁴⁰ Bratton, M. and Penar, P. (2014) 'Mali's Public Mood Reflects New Found Hope', Afrobarometer Policy Paper, No.9, p. 5.

⁴⁴¹ ACLED (2015) 'Mali – July 2015 Update', 10 July 2015.

⁴⁴² ACLED (2017) 'Mali – March 2017 Update', 11 April 2017; *idem* (2018) '2018: The Year in Overview', 11 January 2019.

⁴⁴³ ACLED (2018) 'Mali: The Regionalization of Armed Rebellion', 16 February 2018.

⁴⁴⁴ Warner, J. (2017) 'Sub-Saharan Africa's Three "New" Islamic State Affiliates', *CTC Sentinel*, (10):1.

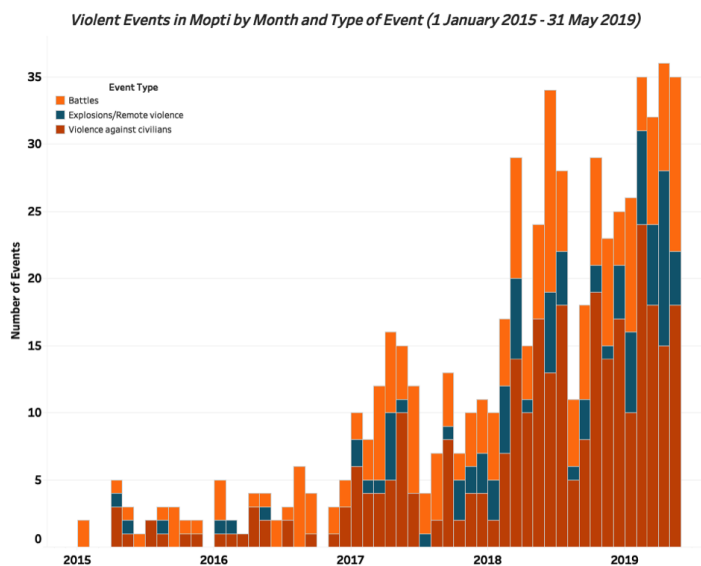


Figure 5: Rising levels of insecurity in Mopti, central Mali (© ACLED)

These terrorist organisations targeted civilians as well as Malian, non-state and international armed forces. After several terrorist assaults on restaurants and hotels in Mali’s capital, a complex suicide attack on a military camp in Gao killed more than 70 people.

During 2018, the number of violent incidents increased by another 40 per cent compared to the year before.⁴⁴⁵ In the third quarter of 2018 alone, 287 Malian civilians were killed, 38 injured and 67 were abducted.⁴⁴⁶ The national army also faced heavy losses. The UN recorded over 300 fatalities and many more serious injuries amongst the rank-and-file of the Malian army between mid-2016 and late 2018.⁴⁴⁷ The UN mission MINUSMA itself faced 177 fatalities between early 2013 and late 2018.

This significant rise in terrorist attacks successfully compounded the return of the Malian state administration across the northern regions. It also incited the departure of state representatives from the central region. In 2018, as noted above, a mere 30 per cent of state officials occupied their duty station in the northern regions and central Mopti region.⁴⁴⁸ Defence and Security forces operated in urban areas and near isolated military camps but lacked presence across the rural areas where terrorist organisations expanded their influence.

⁴⁴⁵ ACLED (2018) ‘The Year in Overview’, 11 January 2019.

⁴⁴⁶ UNSG report on the situation in Mali, 25 September 2018, available at: <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/reports>.

⁴⁴⁷ UNSG reports on the situation in Mali.

⁴⁴⁸ UNSG report of on the situation in Mali, 6 June 2018.

In this context, as shown below, non-state actors increasingly filled that void and constituted pivotal security providers – at a very basic level – across the rural areas.

By 2018, the popular mood in the country had radically altered compared to the widespread optimism noted in 2013. Two thirds of Malian citizens now indicated that the country was again moving in the wrong direction. Up until 2017, national priorities, in the eyes of Malian citizens, continued to be dominated by socio-economic matters, most notably food security, youth employment as well as access to health services and water. In 2018, security constituted the primary concern of citizens in northern and central Mali. One year later, it had become the overarching national priority.⁴⁴⁹ By this time, around 90 per cent of people in Timbuktu, Segou and Mopti noted a deteriorating security situation during the course of the previous year.⁴⁵⁰

Between 2015 and 2018, jihadist organisations present in Mali also expanded their activities into neighbouring countries guided by a Salafist-jihadist policy of “Sahelisation.”⁴⁵¹ From 2016 onwards, the number of attacks beyond Mali’s border significantly increased (see Figure 6). Terrorists conducted deadly attacks on hotels and restaurants in Burkina Faso, quite similar to those in Mali. In Burkina Faso, a locally anchored group, Ansarul Islam, which maintained ties to Malian jihadist groups, had conducted dozens of attacks since December 2016.⁴⁵² Niger witnessed a similar rise in assaults throughout this period. In 2016, Boko Haram was still responsible for the vast majority of attacks conducted on Nigerien soil. However, 2017 marked a considerable shift, as attacks conducted in Niger by Al-Qaeda and IS-related groups based in Mali grew in importance.⁴⁵³

In sum, security threats involving northern armed groups and the Malian state gradually faded into the background between 2013-2018. Yet, the terrorist threat significantly intensified and gradually shifted to central Mali and towards neighbouring countries. The following section illustrates how Jihadist organisations anchored into the socio-cultural fabric by exploiting local grievances vis-à-vis the state and existing tensions within and between communities in both northern and central Mali.

⁴⁴⁹ FES (2020) ‘Mali-Mètre’, N.11, March 2020; FES (2018) ‘Mali-Mètre’, N.10, October 2018.

⁴⁵⁰ FES (2018).

⁴⁵¹ Dentice, G. (2018) ‘Terrorism in the Sahel Region: An Evolving Threat on Europe’s Doorstep’, EuroMesco Policy Brief, N. 80, p. 4; Lounas, D. (2018) ‘Jihadist Groups in Northern Africa and the Sahel: Between Disintegration, Reconfiguration and Resilience’, MENARA, October 2018 (Working Paper No.16).

⁴⁵² IPI (2017) ‘Extremist Expansion in Burkina Faso: Origins and Solutions’, 12 May 2017; ICG (2018) ‘Burkina Faso’s Alarming Escalation of Jihadist Violence’, Commentary, 5 March 2018.

⁴⁵³ Small Arms Survey (2017) *Insecurity, Terrorism, and Arms Trafficking in Niger*, Geneva: Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

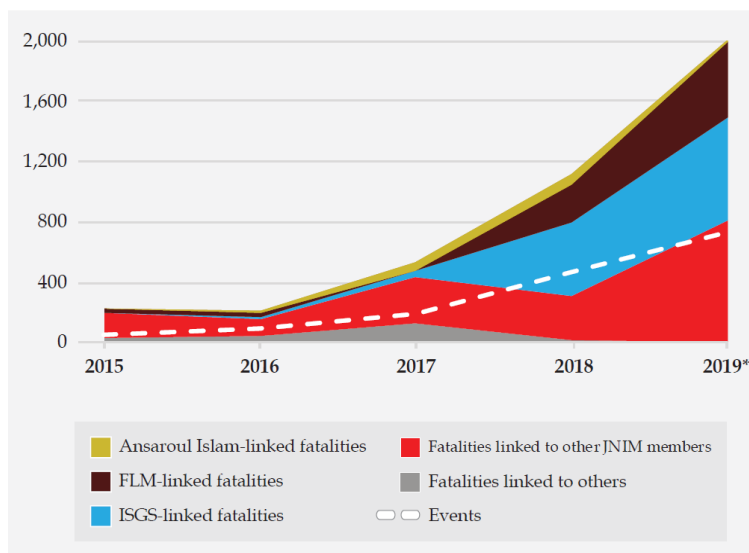


Figure 6: Trends in militant Islamist group activity in the Sahel (@Africacenter.org).

6.1.2. Dispersed disputes: Exploiting local fault lines and exacerbating violent conflict

Previous parts of this thesis (cf. Chapters 4 and 5) revealed that youth constituencies, (semi-) nomadic herders and the wider rural population increasingly resisted the Malian state, which instituted its authority based on exclusive clientelistic ties with regional powerbrokers. Jihadist organisations strategically allied with marginalised sections of the population across both northern and central Mali. They exploited grievances towards the central state and local elites. These factions considered the state as either absent, predatory, corrupt or obstructive to their basic livelihoods.⁴⁵⁴ In response, terrorist organisations adopted an anti-elitist and pro-pastoralist agenda vis-à-vis marginalised constituencies while offering avenues for economic, financial and social status mobilisation and emancipation.⁴⁵⁵

The Maacina *katiba* active in central Mali constituted a noteworthy example in this regard. After an initial attempt to establish a broad inter-ethnic support base, it eventually aligned with marginalised Fulani constituencies.⁴⁵⁶ The leader of the Maacina *katiba* linked his calls for

⁴⁵⁴ ICG (2017); Tobie, A. and Sangare, B. (2019) 'The Impact of Armed Groups on the Populations of Central and Northern Mali', October 2019, SIPRI; Namie di Razza (2018) 'Protecting Civilians in the Context of Violent Extremism: The Dilemmas of UN Peacekeeping', IPI, 28 October 2018 (Policy Brief).

⁴⁵⁵ Tobie, A. and Sangare, B. (2019).

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Jihad to the Fulani identity.⁴⁵⁷ He recurrently referred to the ancient Maacina Empire, an historical period of Fulani hegemony that sharply contrasted with their present-day marginalisation in central Mali. Although unable to cater for public services on a large scale, the organisation instituted new forms of governance that regulated and improved access to critical natural resources for its supporters. Moreover, they exploited frustrations amongst Fulani youth vis-à-vis traditional authorities who maintained preferential ties with the central state administration but had failed to cater for the wider needs of the community. These ties between individual Fulani and terrorist groups tended to be conflated in popular perceptions as a relationship between terrorism and the entire Fulani community, which obviously seriously undermined the level of inter-communal distrust in the central region.

Jihadist groups indeed strategically exploited – and thereby aggravated – intercommunal rivalries. Conflicting interests over the use of scarce natural resources – especially land and water – or competition over economic opportunities, including high-value smuggling networks, all contributed to these rising tensions. The central regions Mopti and Segou witnessed a particularly dramatic surge in inter-communal violence. The overall number of conflict-related fatalities in Mopti alone grew more than tenfold between 2015 and 2018.⁴⁵⁸ A 2018 report by Human Rights Watch identified over 200 civilians died in inter-communal violence in the Mopti region.⁴⁵⁹ Moreover, traditionally subordinate factions challenged stringent social stratification and local hierarchies. While these tensions regularly erupted into violent clashes in the past, the scale of such conflicts amplified in recent years.

The anchoring of MUJAO in the area around Menaka and the Malian border with Niger revealed how terrorist groups exploited existing intercommunal tensions. This area has long been prone to (violent) confrontations opposing Doussak Tuareg and Tolebe Fulani herders. Conflicts mostly centred on access to natural resources or banditry (e.g. cattle theft). The Tuareg faction first joined the ranks of the MNLA, the armed group that led the secessionist struggle against the Malian Defence and Security forces in 2012. Later, they created their own armed group, the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA). Their increased armed capabilities encouraged, amongst others, Fulani youngsters in the area to align with and seek protection through MUJAO.⁴⁶⁰ A Nigerien state official reiterated, “Young Peuls [Fulani] don’t join

⁴⁵⁷ ICG (2019) ‘Speaking with the Bad Guys: Towards Dialogue with Central Mali’s Jihadists’, 28 May 2019, (Africa Report No. 276).

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ HRW (2018) “‘We Used to Be Brothers’, Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central-Mali’, December 2018.

⁴⁶⁰ Guichaoua, Y. and Pellerin, M. (2018) ‘Faire la paix et construire l’état. Les relations entre pouvoir central et périphérie sahéliennes au Niger et Mali’, IRSEM, July 2017.

MUJAO to fight jihad but to protect themselves against the Tuaregs with whom they are in conflict over resources.”⁴⁶¹ MUJAO indeed sided with Fulani factions in this area and defended their interests in cases of intercommunal land disputes. This stance greatly contrasted with the Malian state, which had frequently frustrated or simply ignored their needs.⁴⁶² MUJAO also cancelled state taxes and abolished the fees that herders were charged by landowners to obtain access to grazing lands. While MUJAO established its authority by coercion, it also offered education, military training and salaries to numerous Fulani youngsters who thereby enhanced their social status, future prospects and religious identity. Yet, the divergent trajectories of Fulani youngsters should also be emphasised as some joined other militias and many did not take part in any of the armed groups at all.⁴⁶³

In sum, the local anchoring of jihadist groups clearly perpetuated and exacerbated violent conflict within and amongst communities in northern and central Mali. It is in this context that a myriad of local militias, self-defence and vigilant youth groups were created to defend local territorial or wider factional interests and to fill the security vacuum across northern and central Mali, as the next section illustrates.

*6.1.3. An archipelago of “micro-zones of influence” in the sand*⁴⁶⁴

As state presence remained largely confined to the main urban pockets across northern and central Mali, an archipelago of local armed groups and militias controlled bits and pieces of the vast rural territory in ever shifting alliances. The rise of factional and geographically concentrated armed groups – increasingly organised along narrow community, clan or cast lines – served a combination of interests. This included the protection of constituents, personal ambitions of its leadership, defending lucrative interests in the smuggling economy or expanding influence in the political realm over other local factions.

Surveys conducted by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) revealed that local communities across northern and central Mali predominantly relied on local non-state security initiatives in the absence of state security.⁴⁶⁵ Citizens, for example, indicated

⁴⁶¹ Small Arms survey (2017), p. 30.

⁴⁶² De Bruijn, M. and Both, J. (2017).

⁴⁶³ Pelckmans, L. (2013) ‘Mali: Intra-ethnic Fragmentation and the Emergence of New (in)security Actors’, in: ‘Protection and (In)security beyond the State: Insights from Eastern Africa and the Sahel’, Danish Institute for International Studies, Research Report, pp. 43-50.

⁴⁶⁴ A useful term for depicting the prevailing pattern of local armed groups instituting their authority in compact territories, taken from: Thurston, A. (2018) ‘State Fragility in Mali’, Policy Brief, June 2020, Clingendael.

⁴⁶⁵ Tobie, A. and Chauzal, G. (2018).

that Malian Defence and Security Forces were much less present than non-state security actors were in the administrative *cercles* in central Mali (Mopti and Segou). They also considered the latter more effective. Over 60 per cent of citizens relied on local militias for their protection against banditry, other militias or jihadist groups.⁴⁶⁶

Across central Mali, local militias and self-defence groups emerged to protect local constituencies from attacks by jihadists or other communal groups in the absence of the state. They often originated as loose alliances of small village-based groups. Some evolved into broader and more structured organisations with an increasingly prominent communal and ethnic profile. Beyond self-defence, local militias played a role in securing improved access to land and water by (the threat of) force or by ensuring financial opportunities for disenchanted youth. The selling of stolen cattle, for example, evolved into a lucrative industry and incited the creation or expansion of local militias.⁴⁶⁷ The Dozo (or Donsos) constituted a militia with a particularly strong communal profile. It regrouped traditional Bambara hunters from many village-based self-defence groups across central Mali that aimed to protect villagers against the rising terrorist threat and other communal militias. These highly localised groups evolved into a wider regional self-defence operational structure, amidst continued state absence. The Dan na Ambassagou group also expanded its organisational capacity by uniting multiple Dogon self-defence groups from different villages across the border area between Mali and Burkina Faso. Yet, Dogon citizens in the Douentza area established their own loose alliance of village-based armed groups. Several Fulani, in turn, created the Alliance for the Salvation of the Sahel to protect themselves, notably against other militias.⁴⁶⁸ During 2018, the level of intercommunal violence in central Mali amplified in a context already clarified above. The increased numbers of deadly clashes involved numerous armed self-defence groups. Many horrifying retaliatory killings of ordinary citizens of different communities took place. The UN, amongst others, expressed particular concerns about the “indiscriminate targeting of members of the Fulani [...] community.”⁴⁶⁹ Ursu (2018) noted that divisive issues at the origin of group tensions, such as competing access to natural resources, translated into more intense ethnic divisions as these conflicts escalated and intercommunal ties militarised.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁶ Tobie, A. and Sangare, B. (2019).

⁴⁶⁷ Guichaoua, Y. and Pellerin, M. (2018).

⁴⁶⁸ HRW (2018); Tobie, A. and Sangare, B. (2019).

⁴⁶⁹ OHCHR ‘Press Briefing Notes on Nicaragua, Mali and Kashmir,’ July 17, 2018. Quoted in HRW (2018), p. 36.

⁴⁷⁰ Ursu, A-E. (2018) *Under the Gun: Resource Conflicts and Embattled Traditional Authorities in Central Mali*, The Hague: Clingendael Institute; ICG (2018); *idem* (2016) ‘Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?’, 6 July 2016, (Africa Report No. 238).

Across northern Mali, (coalitions of) armed groups dispersed along faction lines and localised territorial interests in the five-year period that followed the 2012 crisis. The trajectory of the MNLA illustrated this prevailing pattern of fragmentation. Initially, the group obtained a broad support base amongst multiple Tuareg clans with strongholds in both Kidal and Menaka as clarified in Chapter 2.⁴⁷¹ In March 2014, the MNLA faced a first breakaway due to mounting tensions between influential Idnane and Ifoghas Tuareg leaders. The MNLA leadership expelled Ibrahim Ag Assaleh, whom it considered to be too closely aligned to the government. This former Member of Parliament for Bourem in the Gao region subsequently created his own movement, the Coalition of the People for Azawad (CPA). The CPA had a modest military presence on the ground, so the breakaway was not that big a blow for the MNLA. The creation of the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) led to a more significant weakening of the MNLA. It constituted a breakaway of the Menaka wing and the departure of most of its militants from the Doussak and Chamanamas Tuareg factions.⁴⁷² They complained that the MNLA was far too focused on Kidal and invested little in protecting (the interests of) the Menaka area. Yet, clan-based tensions subsequently also weakened the MSA. The group eventually split into a separate Doussak and Chamanamas Tuareg armed faction.⁴⁷³ In October 2016, another substantial breakaway occurred when Tuareg clans from the Timbuktu region, mainly linked to the Kel Antessar Tuareg faction, left the MNLA. Together with clan members in civil society, they formed the Congress for Justice in Azawad.⁴⁷⁴

Unity in the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA), founded in 2012, also proved short-lived as the group had already split into two factions by 2013.⁴⁷⁵ One united Gao-based Arab factions aligned to the Malian government, while the other drew much of its support from both

⁴⁷¹ By the time the MNLA was ousted from Kidal by Ansar Al-Din, led by former seasoned Tuareg-rebel-turned-jihadist leader, Iyad Ag Ghali, numerous MNLA rank-and-file had already joined Ansar Al-Din in 2012.

⁴⁷² Moussa Ag Acharatoumane, co-founder of both the MNLA and MSA, criticised the dominance of the Kidal-based Ifoghas with respect to coordination and the lack of support received for Menaka-centred security challenges; Lebovitch, A. (2017) 'Reconstructing Local Orders in Mali: Historical Perspectives and Future Challenges', Washington, DC: Brookings (Local orders paper series No. 7); 'Mali. Le mouvement pour le salut de l'Azawad, nouveau groupe politico-militaire', (*RFI*, 11 September 2016); Sandor, A. (2017) 'Insecurity, the Breakdown of Social Trust, and Armed Actor Governance in Central and Northern Mali', August 2017, Centre Francopaix en résolution des conflits et missions de paix.

⁴⁷³ Boutellis, A. and Zahar, M.-J. (2017) *A Process in Search of Peace: Lessons from the Inter-Malian Agreement*, New York: International Peace Institute, available at: <https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/IPI-Rpt-Inter-Malian-Agreement.pdf>; Bencherif, A. (2018) 'Le Mali post "Accord Algiers". Une période intérimaire entre conflits et négociations', *Politique Africaine*, 2(150): 179-201.

⁴⁷⁴ McGregor, A. (2017) 'Anarchy in Azawad: A Guide to Non-State Armed Groups in Northern Mali', *Terrorism Monitor* (15)2; Bencherif, A. (2018).

⁴⁷⁵ The MAA was established out of the Arab Nationalistic Liberation Front (FNLA) and former members of an Arab militia led by Colonel Ould Meydou, upon which former President Touré leaned to counter a small Tuareg rebellion in the mid-2000s. The split in 2013 occurred along clan lines and was fuelled by territorial as well as commercial interests between competing smuggling networks, as illustrated below.

Berabiche Arabs in the Timbuktu region and some Tilemsi Arabs, and joined an anti-government coalition of armed groups.

The smuggling economy remained a key arena in which armed groups competed for influence and profit. Armed groups in northern Mali supported traffickers by securing the transport of high-value illicit goods. In return, they received the financial means to fund the salaries of their recruits, vehicles and weapons. Obtaining control or considerable influence over specific strategic hubs along the main smuggling routes therefore constituted an important source of revenue. These nodes were situated along the road that enters western Mali from Mauritania with hubs around Lere, Ber and Lerneb as well as a second route that heads to Gao and Algeria via Tarkint, Tabankort, the Tilemsi Valley, Kidal and In-Khalil. For example, competing trafficking networks of Berabiche and Lamhar Arabs, linked to the Arab-dominated armed group MAA, on the one hand, and Tuareg Idnanes, a core constituency in the MNLA on the other, regularly clashed in their attempt to control Il-Khalil and Ber.

This kind of rivalry between local factions, shaped along clan and cast lines, characterised wider patterns of armed governance in the realm of the decentralised administration. The next section illustrates that armed groups expanded their role vis-à-vis other power poles in a context of state absence and widespread insecurity.

6.1.4. Armed governance and decentralised administration

Several authors demonstrated that decentralisation across northern and central Mali intensified power struggles between different factions struggling to control the local administration and its related advantages.⁴⁷⁶ Fierce competition between local clans or casts sometimes erupted into violent confrontations. Lecocq and Klute (2013) contended that old and new conflicts about tribal hierarchies and other disputes, most notably access to natural resources, “were fought both within the new game of decentralised [...] administration and local democracy.”⁴⁷⁷ Exactly how these patterns of competition between local factions played out and whether they turned violent or not, obviously differed from one place to the other. However, people referred to the fusion of violence and democracy as “demokalashi” for a reason.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁶ Hesselting, G. & Van Dijk, H. ‘Administrative Decentralisation and Political Conflict in Mali’, in Patrick Chabal, Ulf Engel and Anna-Maria Gentili (eds.) (2005) *Is Violence Inevitable in Africa? Theories of Conflict and Approaches to Conflict Prevention*. Leiden: Brill; Pezard, S. and Shurkin, M. (2015), pp. 15 & 30.

⁴⁷⁷ Lecocq, B. and Klute, G. (2013), p. 428.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Since the ousting of the Malian state in 2012 and its modest return subsequently, armed governance gained further prominence and the role of armed groups in the local decentralised administration increased in northern Mali. It became crucial for the leadership of local clans or castes to obtain strong representation in the realm of armed governance in order to defend and promote their interests vis-à-vis other factions. The (historic) rivalry between Ifoghas and Imghad Tuareg factions clearly illustrates this point. The traditional leadership of the Ifoghas Tuareg (see Chapter 2), long dominated other Tuareg factions. Its representatives emerged as the principle regional powerbroker of the central state in the Kidal region. Yet, both Idnane and Imghad factions, amongst others, increasingly contested Ifoghas supremacy. Imghad Tuareg, for example, successfully secured key local representative positions and the parliamentary seat for Kidal in 2013, at the expense of Ifoghas candidates. The Ifoghas chieftaincy was equally concerned about its limited influence over the main Tuareg armed groups in the area. The Idnane and many young Tuareg dominated the MNLA while the forceful Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés (GATIA) promoted the interests of Imghad Tuareg and its allies. The traditional Ifoghas leadership obtained scant control over both movements and worked through the armed group Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad (HCUA) to defend its interests.⁴⁷⁹ Together with the MNLA and an Arab armed group, the HCUA established a coalition called the Coordination of Azawad Movements ("the Coordination"). In the words of Thurston (2018), this primarily constituted "something of an *Ifoghas-Arab* front that could face down challenges from [...] the *Imghad*."⁴⁸⁰ As noted above, over time, the MNLA's influence reduced because of the many splits it faced. Consequently, the HCUA gradually became the leading force in this armed coalition.

Clearly, decentralised administration, armed governance and factional politics along local clan and caste lines became increasingly intertwined. In the end, all politics is indeed local. Traditional authorities and the leadership of armed groups maintained close ties, as illustrated above. On the ground, representatives of the armed groups increasingly sidelined and overtook functions and responsibilities of both traditional leaders and the – very distant – state. Empirical research across northern Mali by Molenaar *et al.* (2019) revealed that:

⁴⁷⁹ The HCUA emerged from a merger in May 2013 of the Higher Council for Azawad and the Islamic Movement of Azawad. The latter constituted an opportunistic spin-off by several senior Ifoghas leaders from Ansar Eddine, a movement labelled as a terrorist organisation by the UN Security Council and listed by the UN Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee in March 2013. The formation of HCUA thus enabled these Ifoghas leaders to avoid being officially branded as terrorists.

⁴⁸⁰ Thurston, A. (2018), p. 27.

A logic of armed politics has captured the regions of Kidal and Ménaka, in which non-state armed actors of both the pro-autonomy alliance *Coordination des mouvement de l'Azawad* (CMA) in Kidal and the pro-central state *Platform coalition* in Ménaka have successfully extended their leverage vis-à-vis modern state authorities and traditional authorities.⁴⁸¹

The growing role of the CMA undermined elected officials, as the Mayor of Kidal noted:

My position and power as Mayor has changed since the arrival of the new masters who drove the Malian state out, even though I am the emanation of the people who chose me through the ballot.⁴⁸²

Displaying its authority in administrating the region of Kidal, the leadership of the CMA:

published a set of policy measures for the region including regulations for road traffic, narcotics, and alcohol trafficking, settling territorial disputes, health issues, and the role of religious authorities in dispute settlement. [...] To underline the CMA's ability to enforce these regulations, Ag Intallah also announced the launch of Operation Re-education, a two-week police operation.⁴⁸³

Bøås and Strazzari (2020) noted that this ability to use force indeed constituted one of the key resources required to establish and uphold authority across northern Mali.⁴⁸⁴ The CMA, for example, ran a local policing body in Kidal alongside its branch of armed militants. Traditional justice actors in the region increasingly relied on armed groups to help enforce their decisions. Ordinary citizens also began to address issues of law and order directly with representatives of armed groups instead of contacting traditional authorities.⁴⁸⁵

In central Mali, the security landscape, as demonstrated in the previous section, appeared even more fractured compared to the northern regions. Initial research suggested that the wider

⁴⁸¹ Molenaar, F. et al. (2019), p. 88. The *Platform Coalition* assembled groups that opposed the secessionist Tuareg rebellion and frequently aligned with the Malian authorities. It included the Coordination of Patriotic Movements and Forces of the Resistance (CMFPR), a branch of the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA), an early offshoot of a Tuareg armed group, the Coalition of the People for Azawad (CPA) and later also GATIA.

⁴⁸² Molenaar, F. et al. (2019), p. 100.

⁴⁸³ Heide, van der L. (2019) 'Dumping One Government Won't Fix Mali', Opinion Piece, *Foreign Policy*, 20 April 2019.

⁴⁸⁴ Bøås, M. and Strazzari, F. (2020), p.11.

⁴⁸⁵ Molenaar, F. et al. (2019), p. 106.

role of local militias or terrorist groups in the realm of decentralised governance was linked to issues of law and order, as well as some social service provision to the most marginalised constituencies.⁴⁸⁶

Hence, the armed groups derived a form of “basic legitimacy of protection from violence.” This source of legitimacy suggests that, “[t]hose who are able to offer protection from violence are at the same time those with the best chances to accumulate power and position.”⁴⁸⁷ Previous chapters have already revealed the importance of indigenous, religious and liberal democratic sources of legitimacy in Mali’s heterarchical order. This chapter thus highlights the rise of another key source of legitimacy that is particularly relevant in an insecure environment. Again, much more empirically grounded research is needed to examine the ability of armed groups to provide services in daily practice and the ways in which citizens perceive the increased role of different armed groups. The above sections merely assessed the supply side of security and power balance between different actors involved in armed governance.

In sum, five years after the French-led military intervention, the role of the state remained very limited and often confined to urban pockets across both northern and central Mali. In contrast, the role of armed groups in offering basic protection and shaping decentralised administration clearly expanded on the ground. Between 2013 and 2018, Mali’s heterarchical political order became ever more heterogeneous as a myriad of armed groups, militias and other power poles instituted their authority across in many “micro-zones” of influence.

The next part assesses the Malian peace process and the subsequent implementation process of the peace accord that were both dominated by northern armed groups and Malian state authorities. The number of violent incidents between these former adversaries significantly dropped. However, the overall objective of the peace process in terms of unifying the northern armed groups and state representatives into reformed state structures yielded few results.

6.2. SEEN FROM ABOVE: PREVALENCE OF HYBRID SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE PATTERNS

6.2.1. The peace process: Pacification without unification

During the 2012 crisis, Malian state authority completely vanished across the northern regions. A French-led military intervention subsequently dislodged the terrorists from all main urban areas and helped the Malian state back on its feet. Building on its strong informal ties with all

⁴⁸⁶ Tobie, A. and Sangare, B. (2019); ICG (2019) ‘Speaking with the ‘Bad Guys’.

⁴⁸⁷ Hüsken, T. and Klute, G. (2015), p. 116.

actors across involved, the Burkinabe government swiftly brokered a preliminary peace agreement between the Malian interim government and northern armed groups. The deal acknowledged Mali's territorial integrity, the unitary state and paved the way for a new round of elections to restore state legitimacy. In terms of participants, importantly, the preliminary deal sought to separate the "good guys" amongst the northern armed groups from the "bad guys," who refused to distance themselves from terrorist activities. However, it took until mid-2014 before Mali's newly elected state authorities and the leaders of the "compliant" (e.g. non-terrorist) northern armed groups engaged in an official peace process. The process was a clear attempt to unify compliant northern armed groups and the Malian state into reconstituted, more inclusive and effective state structures. This would enable a joint response against the terrorist threat caused by "non-compliant" groups. Hence, the stage seemed to be set for the Malian state to expand and re-institute its authority in society.

The Algiers peace process: Armed groups in the driving seat

Between mid-2014 and early 2015, an Algeria-led mediation, with direct and active involvement of the wider international community, provided a platform for five rounds of negotiations. These negotiations centred on Malian authorities and two grand coalitions of northern armed groups already mentioned above, the "Platform" and "Coordination." However, members of the latter coalition refused to negotiate with the armed groups gathered in the Platform coalition, as they had not been a direct party to the conflict in 2012. Unable to unite the three parties around the same table at the same time, a two-track diplomatic approach eventually prevailed. Formal negotiations between the mediators and the two individual coalitions took place separately for most of the time.

The set-up of the Algiers process thus privileged the armed groups and Malian authorities. As a result, the armed groups significantly expanded their sphere of influence to the detriment of other power poles in society, including civil society organisations, religious and traditional leaders and youth networks. Moreover, the structure did not enable local community representatives or ordinary citizens to participate or contribute in a meaningful way. Tellingly, 83 per cent of Malian citizens indicated not having "any" or only "poor" knowledge of the Malian peace agreement two years – and again four years – after it had been signed.⁴⁸⁸

The top-down, exclusive negotiations between the parties frequently took place outside Mali and were poorly suited to address rising levels of mistrust amongst and within northern

⁴⁸⁸ FES, 'Mali-Mètre', N.9, November 2017.

communities or Malian society at large. The negotiating parties regularly consulted with their own constituencies and handpicked a number of “civil society” representatives to provide input during one of the rounds of negotiations. However, the entire process remained a far cry from the locally driven, community-based, reconciliatory processes that positively influenced the peace process in the 1990s, as highlighted in Chapter 2.

The negotiations centred on four thematic areas: (i) the institutional set-up of the Malian state; (ii) defence and security aspects; (iii) justice/reconciliation mechanisms; and (iv) socio-economic and cultural aspects. Consensus building on the institutional set-up and distribution of power in the political system proved particularly challenging and remained an important point of divergence. While the Coordination pushed for a federal state model that provided maximum autonomy to the northern regions within the confines of the national state, both the Platform and the government called for enhanced decentralisation (“regionalisation”). The peace process proved unable to build genuine consensus on the outcome document. In the end, the Algerian-led international mediation team submitted a final peace agreement to all parties built around profound institutional regionalisation and quotas for improved political representation of northern communities. While state authorities and the Platform initialled the agreement, the Coordination refused to accept the final proposal, which they believed failed to incorporate their main political aspiration. The Coordination eventually signed the deal in June 2015 after considerable international pressure and a soft commitment that some of their observations could be addressed during the implementation phase. The agreement indeed defined a two-year implementation period. However, the deadline was recurrently extended amidst a lack of progress. Five years after the signing of the agreement, it was still ongoing.

In the same vein as the *peace* process, armed groups and Malian authorities largely dominated the actual *implementation* process. Their representatives met during regular meetings of the follow-up committee (the Comité de Suivi de l’Accord). The next section first reveals the poor level of implementation of key aspects of the peace accord that aimed to establish reconstituted inclusive state institutions. The subsequent section then shows the prevalence of particularistic interests of these actors that superseded issues of national interest throughout the implementation process, which originally covered a two years period but was ongoing at the end of 2018.

The implementation phase: State building and the national interest into the background

Of the four main subjects central to the Malian peace agreement, the parties mostly focused on the political and security aspects. The Independent Observer noted that justice and reconciliation as well as developments aspects of the accord received much less attention.⁴⁸⁹

The establishment of a specific Development Fund for the northern regions constituted an important element of the peace agreement. It could generate a peace dividend that reinforced societal buy-in to the peace process. Nonetheless, the fund had not been established by the end of the two-year implementation period. The Malian government regularly reiterated its reluctance to transfer resources to the northern regions in the absence of state officials. Moreover, ministers questioned the geographical focus of the fund. Malians living in the southern regions would perceive it as a reward for rebellion.⁴⁹⁰ By the end of 2018, little progress had been achieved across the northern regions in terms of peace dividends as the government struggled to develop tangible implementation modalities of the fund during the two-years implementation period. The Independent Observer also reported that the signatory groups largely neglected justice issues throughout the two-year implementation phase. This sharply contrasted with the importance that Malian citizens attached to these matters. A majority of people even considered the fight against impunity amongst the top priorities of the entire process.⁴⁹¹ In 2018, the Independent Expert for Human Rights in Mali reported that:

No significant progress has been observed on a judicial level since the signing of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, in which the Government had committed to ending impunity. Most perpetrators of abuses and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law go unpunished.⁴⁹²

The Human Rights division of the UN's stabilization mission to Mali recorded over 600 cases of human rights violations, involving more than 1400 victims during the two-year

⁴⁸⁹ The Carter Center, 'Report of the Independent Observer: Observations on the Implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, Emanating from the Algiers Process. Observation Period January 15 to April 30 2018, May 2018, available at: <https://www.cartercenter.org/>. According to Article 63 of the 2015 peace agreement, the Independent Observer's job is to impartially identify blockages in the implementation process and recommend steps for enhancing implementation. The Center's role as the Independent Observer was recognised by the United Nations Security Council in Resolution 2391 in December 2017.

⁴⁹⁰ Boutellis, A. and Zahar, M-J. (2017).

⁴⁹¹ Moreover, when asked to choose, a large majority of Malians prefers retributive justice – meaning that offenders will be punished – rather than restorative justice – meaning that victims will be compensated (See: https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Policy%20papers/ab_r5_policypaperno13.pdf).

⁴⁹² Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Mali, 2 February 2018, A/HRC/37/78.

implementation period.⁴⁹³ It is noteworthy that groups labelled as terrorist armed groups committed only a small minority (39) of these offences, while the armed groups (246) and Malian Defence and Security forces (288) were responsible for the majority of cases. The authorities launched very few investigations and hardly any legal proceedings took place, revealing persistent levels of impunity in recent years.⁴⁹⁴

When it came to national reconciliation, the peace accord called for the organisation of a National Conference to discuss the root causes of Mali's recurrent crises. The outcome was supposed to emanate in a National Charter for Peace, Unity and Reconciliation that could be integrated into the revised constitution. Organised between 27 March and 2 April 2017, the National Conference united more than 1000 people and offered representatives from a wide variety of organisations, armed groups, regions, professional and ethnic background a (one-off) opportunity to engage with one another on fundamental matters of mutual concern.⁴⁹⁵ The initiative was widely appreciated. The status of the conference, however, remained unclear and the authorities failed to integrate the outcomes into the constitutional reform process.⁴⁹⁶ Beyond the conference, the Algiers accord did not foresee the set-up of a nationwide and locally driven reconciliatory process.

State authorities and the northern armed groups, as noted above, primarily focused on the security and political components in the agreement. Nevertheless, a stalemate between the two subjects soon obstructed any substantial progress towards unified state institutions. Malian political elites were unwilling to implement key political reforms by transferring substantial powers and resources to subnational levels of government if the armed groups did not disarm first. The latter, in turn, refused to hand over their (heavy) weaponry in the absence of a viable political track. Both parties thus refused to restrain their own power base in the collective interest. The impasse persisted throughout the five years covered by this chapter.

The security aspects of the peace agreement proved particularly illustrative in this regard. The objective was to "reconstitute" the Malian Defence and Security forces so that they became more inclusive, representative and efficient. However, by the end of 2018, the UN Under-

⁴⁹³ Available at: https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/executive_summary_english.pdf.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ The outcome of the conference is available at: <http://www.malinet.net/editorial/rapport-general-de-la-conference-dentente-nationale-bamako-du-27-mars-au-02-avril-2017/>. For a comprehensive analysis of the conference, see Sy, O. Dakouo, A. and Traore, K. (2018), *La Conférence d'Entente Nationale. Mise en oeuvre et leçons apprises pour le dialogue national au Mali*. Berlin: Berghoff Foundation.

⁴⁹⁶ The authorities did develop legislation on national reconciliation, peace building and amnesty that, somewhat ironically, proved more divisive than unifying. The proposed bill was fiercely criticized by Malian human rights associations who indicated that it risked instituting a culture of impunity, which had already proven detrimental to Mali's longer-term stabilization efforts.

Secretary General for Peacekeeping noted that the foreseen security reforms were operationalised.⁴⁹⁷ The unification of different influential armed power poles under a single chain of command and control proved extremely challenging. The security paragraphs of the peace agreement foresaw a vast Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) as well as Security Sector Reform (SSR) programme. In December 2015, Malian authorities formally launched the Commission for Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR). Nevertheless, it took another year before the authorities nominated its president. In practice, the Ministry of Defence long considered DDR a “lower priority” and mainly an avenue for “rebel groups to benefit from more resources.”⁴⁹⁸ Many officers in the armed forces resisted the integration of Tuareg rebels, some of whom had been integrated in the 1990s but had deserted again in the run-up to the 2012 rebellion. During an official meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the implementation process, the Minister of Defence openly stated that he did not feel committed to or restrained by the peace agreement. The armed groups, in turn, long refrained from presenting lists of combatants who could go through the motions from cantonment to reintegration. The cantonment of their fighters and handover of arms would seriously weaken their local power position and leverage vis-à-vis the government and other power poles. In September 2018, the parties eventually reached an initial agreement on the criteria for reintegration of armed combatants. However, conflicts over rank, the number of combatants, their salaries and per diems persisted.⁴⁹⁹ None of the armed parties showed up to the official launch of the reintegration process on 6 November 2018.

During the implementation period of the Algiers peace agreement, the security situation in the central region Mopti dramatically deteriorated, as revealed above. The region was effectively sidelined from the entire peace process that centred on the northern armed groups. Representatives of several communities in central Mali, particularly Fulani, felt “that history is repeating itself: peace is being built without them if not against them.” Many believed that “you need to take up arms to be heard.”⁵⁰⁰ In March 2018, a delegation composed of Malian authorities, Members of Parliament, NGOs and local community leaders visited central Mali. In October, Prime Minister Maiga promised that local militia members would benefit from a

⁴⁹⁷ Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Peace-Keeping operations to the UNSC, 19 October 2018.

⁴⁹⁸ For an elaborate assessment of security sector reforms, see: Bagayoko, N. (2018) ‘*Le processus de réforme du secteur de la sécurité au Mali*.’ Centre FrancoPaix en résolution des conflits et missions de paix, 1 February 2018; Bencherif, A. (2018); Le Cam, M. (2018) ‘Dans le Nord du Mali, l’incertitude du désarmement’, (*Le Monde*, 8 November 2018).

⁴⁹⁹ Bencherif, A. (2018); Le Cam, M. (2018).

⁵⁰⁰ ICG (2016).

Demobilisation, Disarmament, and Reinsertion (DDR) programme.⁵⁰¹ A few months later, the authorities indeed managed to launch the preparatory works for an accelerated DDR programme to the benefit of non-state militias present in the Mopti region.⁵⁰² However, it proved extremely difficult to convince or force militias across the region to hand over their arms in a context characterised by recurrent terrorist attacks, violent intercommunal conflicts and scant protection offered by state institutions outside the urban pockets. When a couple of hundred fighters did agree to be cantoned, the state and international partners proved unable to swiftly move forward with the DDR process and the fighters eventually took up arms again.

In sum, by the end of 2018 some incremental steps towards reformed and unified state institutions had been taken. Yet, the different power poles in Mali's heterarchical political order safeguarded their own sphere of influence as the next section reveals. In its capacity as Independent Observer of the actual implementation of the peace accord, the Carter Center reported that Malian armed groups and political elites predominantly focused on short-term measures to their own benefit, often without a clear relation to or even at the expense of key tenets in the peace agreement and the national interest.⁵⁰³

Particularistic interests dominating the implementation process

Compared to the minimal efforts and advances in the above areas of national interest, the Malian parties devoted much more time and energy to negotiating so-called interim measures of the peace agreement. Certainly, they benefitted directly from these measures in the area of security and the decentralised administration. They were originally intended to build confidence between all parties during a three-month period after the signing of the peace agreement ahead of more comprehensive institutional reforms. In practice, these "interim" clauses became the main focus of negotiations between the armed groups and Mali's political leadership for many years. The creation of so-called interim authorities proved to be a case in point.

The peace agreement stipulated that elected members of local and regional councils in northern Mali would be replaced by people designated by the armed groups and Malian government. These interim authorities thereby (temporarily) institutionalised a hybrid form of decentralised administration that officially anchored the position of armed groups in the realm

⁵⁰¹ HRW (2018).

⁵⁰² 'Mali. Le difficile processus de désarmement dans le Centre, confronté à la présence de jihadistes', (*Jeune Afrique*, 28 December 2018).

⁵⁰³ The Carter Center, 'Report of the Independent Observer: Observations on the Implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, Emanating from the Algiers Process. Observation Period January 15 to April 30 2018, May 2018, available at: <https://www.cartercenter.org/>.

of local governance. Representation in and control over these institutions enabled the armed groups to position themselves in the run-up to future elections and express claims of regional authority. Malian opposition parties and local citizens fiercely contested the legitimacy of the interim authorities. They questioned the legality of instituting different governance arrangements between northern and southern Mali, but the Constitutional Court allowed for it. In addition, they criticised the undemocratic character of their composition by people representing state officials and non-state armed groups based on an exclusive deal struck between the signatory parties outside the realm of a legislative process. In Gao, youth and civil society groups protested against the fact that these interim authorities were imposed in a top-down manner without their consent. People also contested their legitimacy in other regions.⁵⁰⁴

While the interim authorities should have been established three months after the peace agreement had been signed, it took a full year before state authorities and representatives of the Coordination and Platform reached a power-sharing agreement that underpinned their establishment. The Coordination obtained the presidency of the regional authorities in Kidal, Timbuktu and Taoudeni while the Platform would lead Gao and Ménaka. The deal also provided additional positions to the armed groups, including advisors to regional governors and lower-level state officials. However, it took until April 2017, almost two years after the peace agreement had been signed, before the regional authorities were officially installed in all five regions amidst persistent tensions over proposed candidates and representational challenges. In Timbuktu, for example, armed splinter groups pressed for their inclusion into these institutions by sieging the regional council building. In the end, they obtained positions as advisors in the decentralised administration. Various Arab and Tuareg factions also raised concerns about their underrepresentation, which led to additional delays. The operationalisation of the interim authorities thus continued to be hampered by controversies about their level of inclusivity. These challenges clearly reflected the complexities of Mali's extremely heterogeneous heterarchical order, as illustrated in the first part of this chapter.

Similar patterns characterised the implementation of interim measures in the security realm. The peace agreement defined an interim period during which representatives of the compliant armed groups and state Defence and Security forces would conduct joint military patrols in order to restore mutual confidence ahead of more comprehensive security reforms. To this end, the agreement envisaged the creation of temporary regional military command structures, so-called Operational Coordination Mechanisms ("MOCs"), which supervised these joint patrols.

⁵⁰⁴ FIDH (2017) 'Mali. Terrorisme et impunité font chanceler un accord de paix fragile', (Note de position, May 2017, No.692f).

The MOCs regrouped 200 representatives of the Malian army and another 200 representatives from each of the two coalitions of armed groups in Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal. All parties were expected to handover light and heavy arms to enable the MOCs to function.

In practice, however, the armed groups refrained from handing over vital equipment and sufficient personnel that could make the instrument work in the collective interest but would, at the same time, weaken their authority in their own stronghold.

In May 2018, after almost three years of negotiation – instead of the three months foreseen by the peace accord – the parties officially launched the MOCs. Yet, they remained ineffective in the case of Gao and largely non-existent in both Timbuktu and Kidal. By October 2018, the MOC battalion in Gao consisted of 725 soldiers but obtained only six heavy weapons, all provided by the government.⁵⁰⁵ In Kidal and Timbuktu, the parties managed to fill just one third of the MOC positions. In 2017, a complex terrorist attack targeted the MOC in Gao killing more than 70 people. The MOC was poorly equipped to protect itself, let alone Malian citizens. The mechanism was also unable to effectively contribute to security efforts during the 2018 presidential elections and conducted few patrols in practice.⁵⁰⁶ In November 2018, the CMA coalition officially reiterated its stance to refrain from transferring its heavy weaponry to the MOCs. It limited its contribution to some combatants and light weapons. Clearly, the attempt to unify different state and non-state armed forces in order to protect Malian citizens against the rising terrorist threat had achieved few results by the end of 2018.

Armed groups also protected their territorial influence sphere in the context of the MOC. In November 2018, the CMA coalition blocked over 170 combatants from four armed groups that arrived from Gao and Menaka and intended to participate in Kidal's MOC. The CMA declared that the inclusivity of the MOC needed to reflect "realities on the ground." As three of the four movements had no solid support base in the Kidal region, the CMA blocked them from partaking in the MOC and sent them back to Gao and Menaka. It did not want other groups to increase their presence in the CMA's influence sphere. Likewise, CMA representatives from Kidal had previously been blocked from participating in Gao's MOC.

In light of the limited progress achieved in fostering inclusive national defence and security institutions, the next section reveals that hybrid patterns of security provision prevailed in the five-year period that followed the 2012 crisis.

⁵⁰⁵ Carter Center, October 2018.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.* ; Savey, A. and Boisvert, M-A. (2019) *The Process of DDR in Mali: A Journey Full of Pitfalls*, Paris: Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (Observatoire du monde arabo-musulman et du Sahel), 21 December 2018.

6.2.2. The prevalence of hybrid security provision in the aftermath of the crisis

Fragmentation of hybrid security provision

Soon after the 2012 crisis, Malian authorities revived hybrid security patterns witnessed during the Touré era (2002-2012) and previous regimes, as demonstrated in Chapter 2. In 2014, the Malian army attempted to take control of Kidal, the stronghold of the Tuareg rebellion, by force. It did so on the basis of a complementary form of hybrid security provision as both official army soldiers and representatives of an unofficial Imghad militia took part in the assault. In May 2014, Prime Minister Mara was adamant to demonstrate that Kidal was part of Mali's national territory and should be administered by representatives of the state rather than Tuareg armed groups. He insisted on visiting the town on 17 May. This period preceded the Algiers peace talks and the non-state armed groups as well as Kidal-based civil society movements vociferously protested his visit, in the absence of a functioning peace process. Demonstrators successfully blocked the airstrip and prevented an airplane transporting Malian ministers from landing in Kidal. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Mara managed to avoid the runway by travelling in a UN helicopter. Army General and leading Imghad representative Ag Gamou accompanied the prime minister that day. Soon after Mara arrived in Kidal, the Governor's office was set on fire. The prime minister was extracted from the scene and taken to the UN base in Kidal. Nevertheless, eight people, including six Malian civil servants, died that day. This provoked furious reactions across the country. The government issued a statement describing the events in Kidal as a declaration of war and indicated that an appropriate response would follow.⁵⁰⁷

In the early morning of 21 May, the Malian army – supported by an Imghad dominated militia – attacked Kidal with the objective of regaining control over the city by force.⁵⁰⁸ However, it was defeated in five hours. The armed groups subsequently regained control of several northern cities, including Aguelhoc, Menaka, Tessalit, Tessit and Anefif, significantly altering the power balance between the authorities and armed groups.⁵⁰⁹ Barely two years after the secessionist rebellion had driven out the Malian state of the northern regions, its presence was again reduced in several northern localities. The participation of the Imghad Tuareg militia infuriated other Tuareg factions in control of Kidal at that point in time.⁵¹⁰ The first part of this

⁵⁰⁷ 'Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali', 9 June 2014. S/2014/403.

⁵⁰⁸ McGregor, A. (2016) 'The Fox of Kidal: A Profile of Mali's Tuareg General, al-Hadjj ag Gamou', *Militant Leadership Monitor*, (7)11.

⁵⁰⁹ Bencherif, A. (2018).; Boutellis, A. and Zahar, M-J. (2017).

⁵¹⁰ 'Mali. El Hadj Ag Gamou, le renard de Kidal' (*Jeune Afrique*, 10 June 2014).

chapter referred to the fierce competition between Ifoghas and Imghad Tuareg factions in Kidal. After the defeat and retreat of the Malian army from large parts of northeastern Mali, a group of 66 Imghad Tuareg, fearing retaliatory attacks, sought refuge at a nearby UN camp.

From then on, the Malian state relied on more delegatory forms of hybrid security provision. Only months after the defeat of the Malian army, the Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés (GATIA) was established to protect the interests of Imghad Tuareg and its allies. It did not take GATIA long to launch a series of attacks against non-state armed groups that had been part of the rebellion against the Malian state with the aim of regaining territorial control. The group had a strong military posture and indeed managed to dislodge the MNLA in various localities across the Gao region.⁵¹¹ GATIA also established checkpoints around the city of Kidal in order to gain a form of territorial control along the main transport routes. The advances secured by GATIA on the battlefield benefitted the Malian state. The militia transferred the control over some of its territories to Malian armed forces.⁵¹² International security personnel stationed in northern Mali witnessed joint movements and the use of similar (transport) equipment by the national army and GATIA. In an official Facebook post by the American Embassy in Bamako, the US Ambassador called upon the Malian government to:

Put a stop to all ties both public and private with GATIA, a group of armed militia that is not contributing to peace in the north.⁵¹³

Similar to the Touré era, Malian authorities allowed loyal factions to profit from illicit trafficking, also to prevent non-allied movements from benefitting too much from this lucrative trade. A case in point constituted the arrest of alleged trafficker Yoro Ould Daha in early 2014 by the French military for his activities under the banner of terrorist organisation MUJAO. A week later, Malian authorities released him and he then played an important role in support of loyalist armed groups that ousted groups opposing the state from Menaka.⁵¹⁴ The authorities could build on well-established networks with individual powerbrokers across the northern regions, thereby exerting influence indirectly.

This was not the case in central Mali, where loosely organised local militias operated at much greater distance from the state. Malian authorities or the Defence and Security forces did not

⁵¹¹ Boutellis, A. and Zahar, M-J. (2017).

⁵¹² 'Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali', 23 December 2014, S/2014/943.

⁵¹³ 'US Calls on Mali Government to Sever Ties with Northern Militia', (*Reuters*, 28 September 2016).

⁵¹⁴ Raineri, L. and Strazzari, F. (2015).

officially support specific local militias in terms of training, arms delivery or funding. Yet, influential political and military state actors initially tolerated the rise of some militias in the region anticipating their contribution to counterterrorism efforts in the rural areas, where the state was particularly weak.⁵¹⁵ Several militias also received support from individual representatives – often fellow community members – in the central state.⁵¹⁶ Moreover, numerous accounts, including those provided by Malian state officials, referred to joint patrols conducted by Dozo or Bambara militias and state security forces. These militias also reportedly escorted state representatives across the region.⁵¹⁷ In an indirect delegation of security provision to Dogon and Bambara militias, a 2018 motorcycle ban along transport routes in Mopti was widely perceived to be selectively implemented. Malian state officials enabled these militias to roam freely in the region, in large numbers, while restraining other militias, most notably Fulani, from doing so.⁵¹⁸ Dogon militias continued to man checkpoints and check ID cards of passing citizens along different roads. As the level of communal violence rose, the capacity of the central state to exert real influence over the militias appeared to be very limited. Those militias initially tolerated by the government hardly contributed to counterterrorism objectives and prioritised their own localised interests, such as improving access to natural resources through violent means against other villages and communities. Moreover, the state failed to impose and implement the aforementioned ordonnance, aimed at disarming militias, as well as its commitment to investigate flagrant cases of human rights abuses allegedly conducted by militias. Quite to the contrary, military operations by the Malian army reportedly resulted in serious human rights violations including extrajudicial killings, torture and arbitrary arrests.⁵¹⁹

In the border areas between Mali and Niger, the Malian state aligned itself with specific local militias during anti-terrorist operations. In 2015, as noted in the first part of this chapter, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) settled in the area. Numerous Fulani Tolebe youngsters joined or realigned their self-defence militias with this terrorist organisation.⁵²⁰ By then, local Doussaks Tuareg youngsters had established an armed group that allied with GATIA.⁵²¹ Historic rivalries between the two communities over access to pasture, land, water

⁵¹⁵ ICG (2019) 'Central Mali: Putting an End to Ethnic Cleansing', 25 March 2019.

⁵¹⁶ HRW (2018); FIDH (2018).

⁵¹⁷ Tobie, A. and Sangare, B. (2019).

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*; HRW (2018).

⁵¹⁹ HRW (2017) 'Mali: Unchecked Abuses in Military Operations', 8 September 2017.

⁵²⁰ Ibrahim, I.Y. and Zapata, M. (2018) 'Early Warning Report. Regions At Risk. Preventing Mass Atrocities in Mali', April 2018, available at: https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Mali_Report_English_FINAL_April_2018.pdf.

⁵²¹ GATIA was dominated by Imghad Tuareg, aligned with the Platform coalition and (tacitly) supported by Malian Defence and Security Forces.

and economic opportunities were now being played out in the context of terrorism. State forces allied with Tuareg armed groups to counter ISGS and affiliated Fulani militias.

In sum, hybrid security patterns showed a great deal of continuity despite becoming more diffused in the years that followed the 2012 crisis. The security landscape was now composed of a myriad of local armed groups and militias. The following section reveals how international actors and military interventions were shaped in the context of this heterogeneous context.

Internationalisation of hybrid security provision

Ever since the French-led military intervention in 2013, international military actors continued to play a crucial role in Mali including with respect to the growing terrorist threat in the following years. In 2014, the French regional counterterrorist mission Barkhane replaced the Mali-based Serval operation. It stationed approximately 1000 of its troops in northern Mali. In addition, UN stabilisation mission MINUSMA deployed up to 13,000 military personnel and almost 2000 police officers. Around 70 per cent of its staff operated from either northern or central Mali. Craven-Matthews and Engelbert (2018) estimated that the budget of these two missions corresponded to 75 per cent of the Malian state's domestic revenues.⁵²² The EU deployed over 500 experts for its training missions to build the capacity of Mali's military (EUTM) and police (EUCAP) personnel. The Malian state clearly continued to considerably depend upon international actors to provide security across its national territory after the 2012 crisis.

The UN Security Council recurrently emphasised that Malian Security and Defence Forces were primarily responsible for providing security across the country. The UN mission MINUSMA merely aimed to support and certainly not to replace Malian state institutions. However, considering the extremely limited presence of the state in northern and central Mali, the UN mission was forced to operate and patrol without the involvement of Malian security forces in several localities. In these areas, security provision was de facto delegated to international actors such as MINUSMA and to the French force Barkhane.

Although Malian authorities persistently increased the national Defence and Security budget, Craven-Matthews and Engelbert (2018) noted that the Malian economy simply extracted insufficient domestic resources to singlehandedly fund the security personnel and material currently provided by external actors.

⁵²² Craven-Matthews, C. and Englebert, P. (2018), p. 14.

Considering the state's absence in most rural areas across northern and central Mali, it came as no surprise that hybrid forms of cooperation between international forces and local militias also emerged. Chapter 2 briefly noted that collaboration between the French mission Serval and the MNLA provided valuable intelligence to the French military during the 2013 intervention. In subsequent years, the Barkhane operation also cooperated with non-state armed groups, such as the MSA and GATIA. These armed groups participated in operations against Islamic State in the border area between Mali and Niger.⁵²³ Their representatives attended high-level security meetings in Paris.⁵²⁴ This clearly showed that international actors became part of Mali's fractured and fragmented security landscape, dominated by non-state actors. While these pragmatic forms of cooperation are effective from a military point of view, they undermine longer-term state building initiatives. In line with the analysis of the local anchorage of jihadists in northern and central Mali provided above, Ibrahim and Zapata (2018) also cautioned that, "[a] surge in counterterrorism operations against jihadists in Menaka risks inadvertently exacerbating a longstanding intercommunal conflict."⁵²⁵

Individual regional powerbrokers equally shaped transnational security practices and reinforced the position of armed groups. Pellerin and Guichaoua (2018) noted that countries like Mauritania and Morocco provided resources to specific armed groups in an attempt to influence the course of events in Mali and to prevent security threats to cross borders.⁵²⁶ The very same held for Algeria, long-time mediator in recurrent Malian crises, which used its historical ties with key Tuareg leaders in the Kidal region to prevent the quest for independence amongst some Malian Tuareg to affect Algerian Tuaregs.⁵²⁷ Moreover, Algeria and Libya long competed for influence in northern Mali and established networks of supporters in Kidal in particular. This was equally true for the longstanding rivalry between Algeria and Morocco that at one point risked spilling over into and affecting the Malian crisis.⁵²⁸ Hence, many of Mali's neighbours provided financial, diplomatic or material support to specific armed groups also based on long-standing sociopolitical and cultural ties. Although the terms "proxy" or

⁵²³ 'Le chef djihadiste Al-Sahraoui accuse et menace deux communautés du Mali', (*RFI*, 28 June 2018); ACLED (2018) 'From the Mali-Niger Borderlands to Rural Gao: Tactical and Geographical Shifts of Violence', 6 June 2018; Sandor, A. (2017).

⁵²⁴ 'Ag Gamou et Ag Acharatoumane en visite de travail à Paris', (*Jeune Afrique*, 24 Mai 2017).

⁵²⁵ Ibrahim, I.Y. and Zapata, M. (2018).

⁵²⁶ Guichaoua, Y. and Pellerin, M. (2018).

⁵²⁷ Ammour, L.A. (2013) 'Algeria's Role in the Sahelian Security Crisis', *International Journal of Security and Development* (2)2, 28: 1-11.

⁵²⁸ Wing, S.D. (2016) 'French Intervention in Mali: Strategic Alliances, Long-Term Regional Presence?', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27(1): 59-80.

“satellite” groups is too strong, these transnational ties certainly influenced security dynamics in Mali.

Even the, at first sight, technocratic support provided by the EU to raise the capacity of the Malian Security and Defence forces proved to be sensitive. The International Crisis Group (2014) reported that tensions between Tuareg factions influenced the actual (non-) deployment of military units trained by the EU.⁵²⁹ The very same held for the selection of a Malian battalion for the regional G5-Sahel force. In early 2017, regional authorities from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger established this joint military force in the wake of the rapidly deteriorating security situation in the Liptako-Gourma border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.⁵³⁰ They mandated the force to tackle, amongst others, cross-border terrorist threats and trafficking and to support the restoration of state authority, public services and humanitarian support in fragile border areas.⁵³¹ In Mali, however, the composition and effective operationalisation of the Malian battalions under the command of the G5-Sahel was constrained by the limited progress in reconstituting an inclusive national army.

In sum, during the five years that followed the 2012 crisis, both non-state armed groups and external partners played a major role in shaping one of the most pivotal tasks of statehood. Rather than moving towards a state-centred hierarchical order, a form of transnational security provision emerged that cut across global/local and state/non-state boundaries.

The following and final part of this chapter offers a brief assessment of the functioning of Malian democracy during the five-year period that followed the 2012 crisis. It reveals remarkable patterns of continuity with pre-crisis period under President Touré and similar challenges that restrained democracy’s contribution to state legitimacy.

6.3. STATE LEGITIMACY CHALLENGED DURING THE POST-CRISIS PERIOD

In the years before the 2012 crisis, popular satisfaction with the leadership of President Touré and the democratic regime type had dwindled. The previous chapters revealed critical challenges related to political participation, representation and accountability that undermined

⁵²⁹ ICG (2014).

⁵³⁰ The set-up of a comprehensive joint force is a long-term objective. The countries prioritised mutually coordinated military operations, under joint command, in border areas during a preliminary period. The cross-border management cooperation between Chad and Sudan as well as the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram served as examples.

⁵³¹ While the border area between Chad/Niger and Mali/Mauritania are included as operational areas, the Liptako-Gourma area at the very heart of the G5-Sahel’s territory received priority.

and gradually eroded state legitimacy. This section examines, in an explorative way, key trends in these three areas in the years that followed the series of dramatic events in 2012.

The international community had a strong interest in restoring Mali's constitutional order. Following its military intervention, France wanted to avoid a prolonged unconstitutional period at all costs, while several donors could only allocate foreign aid to the Malian state once it obtained a formal democratic status. Moreover, the operationalisation of MINUSMA's mandate required the re-establishment of constitutional order.⁵³²

Soon after the French-led military intervention, Mali organised presidential elections in July (first round) and August 2013 (second round) in every region across the country, including the stronghold of the Tuareg armed groups Kidal. Turnout figures were quite high by Malian standards. Moreover, the mere fact that the elections were organised in areas until recently far beyond state control marked the initial success of Mali's return to democratic rule.⁵³³ Citizens widely perceived these elections as free and fair and overall support for democracy increased from 62 per cent in 2012 to 75 per cent in 2013. Malian democracy thus got off to a relatively good start. Former Prime Minister and Speaker of Parliament, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) secured a landslide victory in the 2013 presidential elections. He obtained more than 77 per cent of the votes during the second round of these elections. Openly supported by influential religious leaders, he capitalised on his reputation as a sturdy politician who had restored civil oversight over the army and effectively tackled social unrest during the 1990s. He campaigned with a pledge to "put Mali first" and restore the country's honour.

The legislative elections took place on 25 November (first round) and 15 December (second round) 2013. The separate organisation of the presidential and legislative elections significantly favoured the president elect. Now that Keita had secured the presidency, influential local powerbrokers strategically shifted allegiance in support of his party – the Rassemblement Pour le Mali (RPM) – in the run-up to these legislative elections. By doing so, they maintained their individual networks with the executive intact, which were critical for nourishing their support base. Several regional powerbrokers in the former ruling party ADEMA also defected to RPM in the run-up to the legislative elections.⁵³⁴ Most noteworthy and controversial was the move by two leading representatives of the Tuareg armed rebellion, Hamada Ag Bibi (MNLA) and Mohamed Ag Intallah (HCUA) and the subsequent decision by the IBK regime to lift the arrest

⁵³² Boutellis, A. and Zahar, M-J. (2017).

⁵³³ Almost 50 per cent of the population above 18 years old casted their vote. In Mali, voter turnout is calculated on the basis of all citizens above 18 years old while in many other West African countries this is done on the basis of those voters who have registered themselves, a system that usually leads to higher turnout figures.

⁵³⁴ Thurston, A. (2018) 'Mali's Tragic but Persistent Status Quo.'

warrants issued against them. The personal interests of the leadership of these state and non-state power poles converged in the run-up to the elections.

The creation of two new northern regions, Taoudeni and Menaka, illustrated how informal trade-offs between national elites and regional power poles in society continued to shape interest representation through the political system. Former president Touré had taken the initiative to create these two regions in December 2011 but never managed to implement this decision because of the Tuareg rebellion that broke out and the subsequent coup. Arab leaders fiercely lobbied the Bamako-based political elites to provide them with “their” own region and “their own parliamentarians” by creating the region of Taoudeni.⁵³⁵ On 28 February 2018, the Malian government officially approved the creation of Taoudeni and Menaka. These regions were situated above hydrocarbon basins and strategically located alongside trafficking networks.⁵³⁶ Their establishment was perceived as:

An attempt to buy off powerful traffickers and businessmen by giving them control over resources and the movement of people and goods within their regions.⁵³⁷

The decision also provided President Keita with a firm political support basis for his re-election in 2018. A local RPM party official in Taoudeni recalled:

Our faction leaders made a commitment to IBK: to provide him with a gift after having granted Taoudeni an official status as region. What gift is better than to thank him during the elections?⁵³⁸

In a similar vein, the creation of the Menaka region enabled Iwellemmdan Tuareg to position themselves as critical powerbrokers of the state in this area and to enhance their position vis-à-vis other Tuareg factions. Thurston (2018) aptly noted that building a political support basis by reviving informal networks with regional powerbrokers:

⁵³⁵ ICG (2014).

⁵³⁶ Blanc, F. (2015) ‘Menaka, nouvel enjeu du dénouement de la crise politico-sécuritaire au Mali’, *Territoire de Paix*, 12 June 2015.

⁵³⁷ Lebovich, A. (2017) ‘Reconstructing Local Orders in Mali: Historical Perspectives and Future Challenges’, (Local Orders Paper Series). Section 6.3.1. below further elaborates upon the impact of transnational (trafficking) networks on local political, security and social dynamics.

⁵³⁸ ‘Présidentielle au Mali. Comment IBK a conquis les voix du Nord’, (*Jeune Afrique*, 24 August 2018).

Perpetuated the perception that electoral politics do not necessarily function to place popularly legitimate actors in office, but rather reinforce behind-the-scenes negotiations for positions and influence amongst national and regional elites.⁵³⁹

Many regional powerbrokers predominantly used their privileged access to government networks and resources to their own advantage.⁵⁴⁰ This revival of informal networks between the state and regional powerbrokers resembled the dynamics witnessed during the Touré era.

This also held for the centripetal forces of parliamentary coalition building characterised by the rallying of most political forces around the Executive (cf. Chapters 3 and 4). The Rassemblement pour le Mali (RPM) secured 66 seats in parliament during the 2013 elections, a notable increase from the 11 seats it secured during the second mandate of President Touré. However, the party subsequently managed to establish a dominant parliamentary coalition in support of the president of as much as 115 seats.⁵⁴¹ This comfortable two-thirds majority constituted a “light version” of president Touré’s one-coalition dominance (cf. Chapter 3). During parliamentary debates, members of the presidential majority coalition vigorously defended rather than scrutinised the executive.⁵⁴² Locally, a similar pattern of realignment with the presidential party was witnessed as numerous powerbrokers rallied behind the RPM in the run-up to the municipal elections of 20 November 2016.⁵⁴³ RPM increased its local council seats from a mere 300 in 2009 to more than 2500 in 2016.

President Keita (IBK) maintained a firm grip over the government by frequently changing Prime Ministers. He appointed no less than five different Prime Ministers in the period after 2013, each serving, on average, only a year.⁵⁴⁴ Although not formally mandated to dismiss the prime minister, “the frequency with which IBK has changed Prime-Ministers during his first term in office is strong evidence of the president’s informal powers.”⁵⁴⁵ He used the government

⁵³⁹ Thurston, A. (2018).

⁵⁴⁰ ICG. (2014).

⁵⁴¹ ‘Déclaration de groupe parlementaire. 11 parties créent l’alliance pour le Mali (APM) de 26 députés pour soutenir IBK’, (*Indépendant*, 21 January 2014); ‘La transhumance offre la majorité absolue à RPM’, (*RFI*, 7 July 2014).

⁵⁴² ‘Entorse au principe de la séparation des pouvoirs. Quand les députés de la majorité deviennent des auxiliaires de la Primature’, (*Le Prétoire*, 26 June 2015).

⁵⁴³ The elections were boycotted by the Coordination in Kidal. The armed groups opposed these elections as it believed that, according to the Algiers accord, the concerted nomination of local interim authorities by the Malian government and armed groups should have prevailed the holding of these municipal elections. In approximately 40 municipalities, in mostly northern and some central regions, the elections did not take place due to security challenges.

⁵⁴⁴ Also see Chauzal, G. (2015) ‘Commentary: Bamako’s new government’, 11 February 2015, available at: <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/commentary-bamakos-new-government>.

⁵⁴⁵ Sears, J. (2018) ‘Mali’s 2018 Election: A Turning Point?’, Reliefweb, 24 September 2018; Moestrup, S. (2018) ‘Mali – Fifth Time’s the Charm: IBK’s New Winning Team?’, *Presidential Power*, 15 January 2018.

as an arena to carefully manage a delicate support base amongst Mali's political class rather than to promote policies in a consistent and durable manner. The president's son became chair of the prestigious parliamentary Commission of National Defence, Internal Security and Civil Protection; his father-in-law the Speaker of the National Assembly; and one of his nephews was appointed Secretary-General of the Presidency. Malian citizens indicated that IBK was putting his "family first" rather than "Mali first."⁵⁴⁶

The rallying of most political actors and influential power brokers around the new president weakened the political basis for democratic accountability. Keita also tried to further increase the – already considerable – institutional power base vested in his office. He did so by influencing a constitutional reform process that intended to legally anchor the outcome of the Algiers peace agreement. In 2016, Malian authorities tasked a Constitutional Reform Commission to develop proposals that reflected the Algiers accord and "other shortcomings" in the constitution, without further specifying the latter.⁵⁴⁷ The prime minister initially established the commission but President Keita reversed this decision and took the process firmly into his own hands.⁵⁴⁸ In March 2017, the Malian government presented a constitutional reform bill to parliament introducing several changes to the original proposal drafted by the Commission. Importantly, they further enhanced the powers of the president by allowing him to remove the Prime Minister, to appoint one third of the newly created Senate as well as the head of the Constitutional Court.⁵⁴⁹ The authorities clearly used the reform process to further enhance the already omnipotent presidency instead of reshaping the distribution of powers in Mali's democratic regime. Parliament initially rubberstamped the bill. Again, executive oversight had to come from outside the democratic channels. Keita's move provoked mass protests in Bamako and other urban areas. Popular demonstrations continued to swell and the government eventually felt compelled to postpone the referendum on the constitution. An opinion poll indicated that 35 per cent of citizens opposed the reform, 11 per cent supported it while a majority stated not to be informed or to have an opinion.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁶ Craven-Matthews, C. and Englebert, P. (2018), p. 7.

⁵⁴⁷ Sylla, K. (2019) 'Mali's Proposed Constitutional Reform: Mal-Intentioned, or Merely Inept?', 26 June 2019, available at: <https://bridgesfrombamako.com/>.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁹ The Bill also proposed dropping the prerequisite of a referendum for most future constitutional changes and did not include specific positions for youth, women and traditional leaders in the senate as stipulated by the peace agreement.

⁵⁵⁰ FES, 'Mali-Mètre', No. 9, November 2017.

Hence, patterns of democratic accountability remained extremely weak and contributed to the gradual erosion of state legitimacy during Keita’s first term in office. Corruption and deteriorating governance flourished easily in this context. Although the president declared the year 2014 as “the year to fight corruption,” high-level scandals surfaced that allegedly involved people close to the president’s inner circle. This included the purchase of an expensive presidential plane, kept outside the regular state budget, and new equipment for the army at artificially inflated prices as well as the unlawful usage of no-bid clauses.⁵⁵¹ The International Monetary Fund (IMF) subsequently suspended its support programmes to Mali. The overall quality of governance deteriorated considerably during IBK’s term in office. Between 2014 and 2018, Mali’s score in the Mo Ibrahim corruption index decreased by 20 points (on a 0–100 scale).⁵⁵² In the Afrobarometer survey for 2014/2015, Malian citizens displayed their dissatisfaction with government efforts to tackle corruption.⁵⁵³ In the 2016/2018 round, 44.2 per cent of 1,200 informants believed corruption had increased a lot and a further 27.2 per cent said that corruption had increased somewhat or stayed the same.⁵⁵⁴

After a hopeful start in 2013, popular satisfaction with the way democracy functioned dropped again, close to the (low) pre-coup levels, during the course of IBK’s term in office.

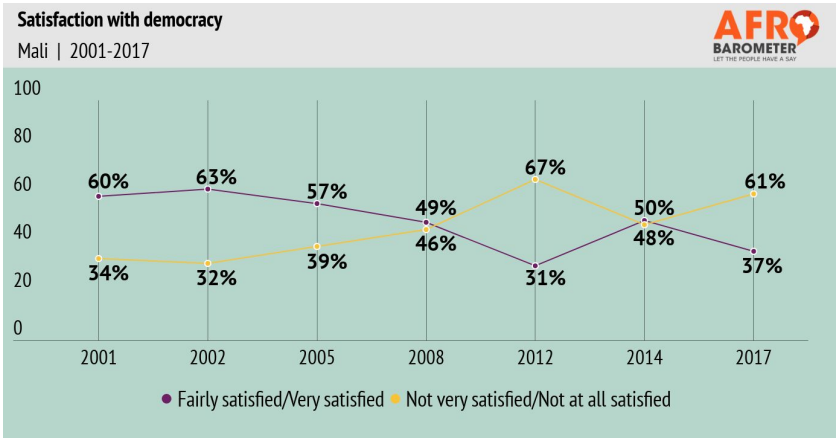


Figure 7: Decreasing levels of satisfaction with Mali (© Afrobarometer).

⁵⁵¹ BTI 2018 Country Report Mali, available at: www.bti-project.org; Shipley, T. (2017) ‘Mali: Overview of Corruption and Anti-Corruption’, U4 Anti-corruption Centre, Chr. Michelsen Institute.

⁵⁵² Craven-Matthews, C. and Englebert, P. (2018).

⁵⁵³ Bleck, J. Dembele, A. and Guindo, S., (2016).

⁵⁵⁴ Shipley, T. (2017).

Although sketched in an exploratory manner, prevailing patterns of political participation, representation and accountability shaped through the democratic channels certainly did not enhance the position of the state vis-à-vis other power poles in the context of Mali's heterarchical order. In fact, the functioning of Malian democracy in the years after the 2012 crisis made people turn away from the state towards alternative power poles. As Mali's exclusive and inaccessible democratic institutions persistently failed to channel citizens' mobilisation, interest representation or popular frustrations with the state, non-state institutions are likely to gain ever more ground in society.

6.4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the context of a rapidly deteriorating security situation, state presence beyond urban pockets in northern and central Mali remained extremely limited. As the exercise of public authority became increasingly tied to the ability to use force, armed groups extended their influence over other power poles in the realm of decentralised administration in Mali's heterarchical political context. A wide variety of armed groups, communal militias, loosely organised and highly localised security initiatives emerged and anchored across specific territorial strongholds. Amidst this highly diffused security landscape, leaders of non-state armed groups operated at the intersection of multiple networks from which they drew material and immaterial resources. They maintained ties across the formal/informal and local/national/global divide with traditional authorities, central state representatives, political leaders, other armed groups, transnational networks, international military actors and many others.

Initiatives that aimed to strengthen and boost the inclusivity of state institutions yielded very few results in the aftermath of the 2012 crisis. Instead, informal ties between national elites and regional powerbrokers continued to bridge the wide divide between the political urban centre and periphery. Again, the leadership of armed groups played a prominent role in this regard. Not least because of their privileged position in the peace process and the prevalence of hybrid forms of security cooperation with the central state and international military missions.

Hence, far from moving in the direction of a hierarchical and state-centred political order, Mali's heterarchical order has become increasingly diversified in recent years with a more prominent role for armed groups amidst other power poles in both northern and central Mali. None of the state or non-state actors emerged as a dominant hegemonic force in the five years that followed the 2012 crisis. On the contrary, high levels of volatility and fluidity prevailed as armed groups fragmented, reconfigured and alliances recurrently shifted.

Finally, one of the most striking features of the post-crisis period constituted the limited influence that Malian citizens could exert over the way out. They were marginalised in the peace process, could make little contribution to national reconciliation and increasingly relied on armed actors, who they had not chosen but who offered some form of protection. By 2018, the country formerly known as a flagship of democracy seemingly moved towards a militiocracy. More in-depth empirical research is definitely required to assess popular perceptions about the different actors instituting their authority, in particular the armed groups, and their (in)ability to contribute to public service provision in the context of Mali's increasingly fragmented heterarchical political order.