



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

A group affair: understanding involvement in terrorism in Mali

Heide, E.J. van der

Citation

Heide, E. J. van der. (2022, May 11). *A group affair: understanding involvement in terrorism in Mali*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3304008>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3304008>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

In the past years, Mali has experienced an unprecedented rise in terrorism. After twenty years of relative peace, the country was shaken to its core in 2012 when a Tuareg-led rebellion overthrew the government and the northern parts of the country quickly turned into a safe haven for terrorist groups including Al Qaeda and – in later years – the Islamic State. From 2012 to 2022, a country that was once considered a prime example of African democracy, has been faced with a rapidly downward cycle in terms of stability and security. In the past three years alone, the military staged two coups and Mali is now ruled by a military regime. Two major military and political interventions by the French, operations Serval and Barkhane, the multiple efforts of ECOWAS, and a large UN-mission to the country, MINUSMA, were not able to turn the tide.

In a country where it is already a challenge to draw clear lines between the multitude of terrorist, separatist, guerilla and auto-defense groups, it is even more difficult to understand how individuals become involved in terrorist groups. Seeking the answer to that question is the central aim of this study. Based on extensive research among policymakers, prison staff, the international community and those accused and/or sentenced for terrorism, this thesis conducts a multilevel analysis of the process of involvement in terrorism in Mali. The findings suggest that group-level factors including peer pressure, group think, societal tensions and fusion of values were best able to shed light on how individuals become involved with terrorist groups. Especially the relationship between citizens and the state turned out to be an important factor, with prisoners arguing they do not recognize the ruling elite, foreign actors or the borders of the country as they are drawn.

With the combination of access to and analysis of unique primary source material, this study offers a nuanced and empirically grounded contribution to the academic and societal debate on terrorism involvement in Mali – with wider implications for the West-African context. While taking into account the inherently subjective nature of narratives, this thesis provides us with a better understanding of why individuals become terrorists given the specific cultural, historical and geographical context within which they have shared their stories.

A GROUP AFFAIR UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM INVOLVEMENT IN MALI
LIESBETH VAN DER HEIDE

A GROUP AFFAIR

UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM INVOLVEMENT IN MALI

LIESBETH VAN DER HEIDE



**Universiteit
Leiden**
The Netherlands