5 Introduction to Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention in Mali

> First, they gunned down a few farmers in their fields and then in mid-March, dozens of them on motorcycles, firing in the air with AK-47s, returned. They burned a few houses, then, when we refused to leave, returned the next morning, burning the village east to west. Three elderly were killed... They couldn't flee fast enough. Three days later, a few of us returned to rescue sacks of grain and other belongings, but they fired at us, killing another man.
>
> Dogon elder describing communal violence by Fulani herders in Central Mali
> Interview with Human Rights Watch, April 25, 2019.

This chapter begins the second part of the book, which tests the main empirical implications of localized peace enforcement theory by drawing on different types of conflicts and peacekeeping within Mali, a landlocked country in West Africa (see Figure 5.1) that has become an epicenter for political violence of all sorts since the beginning of the large-scale violence there in 2012. Mali has experienced three coups, a separatist civil war, a proliferation of armed militias, and the growth of a multifaceted Islamic extremist insurgency fueled by the rise of Al Qaeda, the Islamic State, and local extremist organizations. However, no source of conflict over the past decade has been more fatal or detrimental to Malian society than communal violence. As the epigraph suggests, these clashes negatively impact the lives of civilians in Mali to an excruciating extent. Sadly, the threat of violence between members of different social groups living in the same community over local issues has become a pervasive part of life. How did relations deteriorate to such an extent? Are the features of communal life in Mali similar to those in other countries? What has the United Nations (UN) done to address these challenges? This chapter investigates these questions.

I start by providing a very brief history of identity-based conflict in the country, dating back to the early years of independence. I also place Mali within a broader historical context, and demonstrate that its experience of interethnic tensions is fairly representative of countries with colonial legacies. I then draw on detailed interviews with forty-eight local

(a) Map data ©2024 Google. (b) Source: Wikimedia Commons

Figure 5.1 Regional and political maps of Mali

leaders to describe what communal violence and peacekeeping look like in Mali at the time of writing from the residents' perspective. Given the importance that I place on domestic perceptions of peacekeepers, these interviews offer crucial insights into the plausibility of my theory. There are distinct advantages of studying the Malian case, which I describe later in a brief overview of international interventions by the UN and France since 2013. This section is crucial to understanding the analysis in Chapters 6 and 7. It concludes by previewing the findings of the upcoming chapters.

The History of Communal Tensions in Mali

From French colonial rule through Mali's independence in 1960 to the present, communal tensions between the largely northern-dwelling Tuareg ethnic group and Mali's southern ethnic groups have pervaded the country's politics (see Figure 5.2). Though the Tuareg constitute less than 2 percent of the total population, their ongoing struggle for increased autonomy from the southern government has played an outsized role in Mali's postcolonial political history. The Mandé[1] dominate the southern groups and comprise 56.5 percent of the country's overall population. Malians from other ethnic groups, primarily the Fulani (14.7 percent) and Dogon (8.9 percent), have been caught in the middle.

[1] Mandé refers to a collection of smaller ethnic groups that all speak a related language: Bambara (34.1 percent of the population), Sarakole/Soninke (10.8 percent), Malinke (8.7 percent), and Bobo (2.9 percent).

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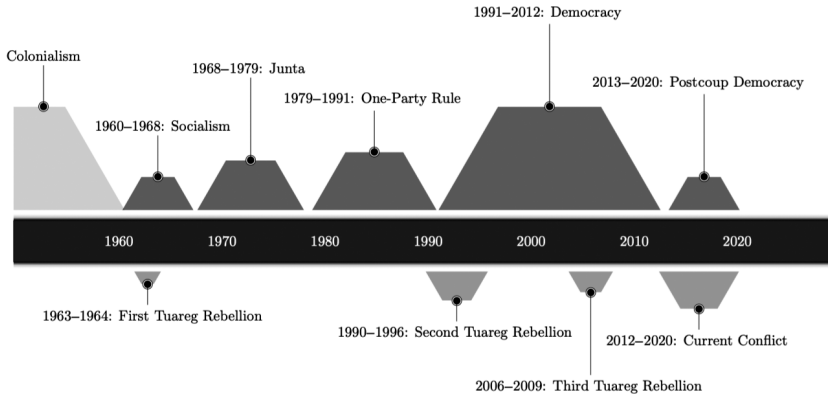

Figure 5.2 Timeline of Mali's history from colonialism to 2020

The Fulani and Dogon have frequently joined in the fighting, which has exacerbated interethnic tensions in the country, including in the ongoing conflict.

Colonial Legacies

The French directly and indirectly governed Mali as part of various configurations of its West African empire. France sent colonial administrators to the southern part of the country to govern directly and granted significant autonomy to Tuareg clan confederations in the North (Lecocq 2010; Lecocq and Klute 2013). Throughout the colonial period, the French relied on Malian soldiers from the South to serve in its campaigns abroad – in World War I, World War II, Indochina, and Algeria. Malians consider this military service a "blood debt" that France has yet to repay (Mann 2006).

The divisions between ethnic groups, just like France's governance strategy, were largely due to the substantial differences in topography and climate between north, central, and south Mali. The northern part is blanketed entirely by the Saharan desert. The dryness and heat let up slightly in the central Sahelian belt. The southernmost part of the country has a tropical climate. Although French administrators could directly govern the milder parts of the territory, they relied upon a vast network of informal authorities to indirectly govern the central and northern parts.

The transition from a French colony to the independent Republic of Mali was slow and gradual, culminating in a peaceful separation from France in 1960 (Chafer 2002) along with thirteen other former French colonies. While other countries experienced more tense

separations from France, Mali had one of the most complicated. From 1880 to 1958, the territory now known as Mali was under French colonial occupation. With a few exceptions due to French colonial administrative reorganizing,[2] it was known as French Sudan (*Soudan français*). On November 24, 1958, Mali declared itself an autonomous republic known as the Sudanese Republic (*République soudanaise*) within the "French Community," an association of French colonies with internal autonomy still tied to France. The Sudanese Republic joined with the former colony of Senegal to form the Mali Federation on April 4, 1959. After a series of talks with France, the Mali Federation became independent on June 20, 1960. Senegal withdrew from the federation a month later over disagreements about the structure of governance institutions. The Sudanese Republic dissolved the federation and became the independent Republic of Mali on September 22, 1960, which it now marks as its independence day.

Ethnic Power Relations in Mali

Mandé leaders in the South dominated the negotiations and discussions about independence; groups like the Fulani in the center of the country and the Tuareg in the North were largely excluded. Immediate postcolonial Mandé leaders emphasized their group's culture and history, even taking the name of the new state from the legendary precolonial Mandé-based Mali empire. From education to the arts, Malian society became Mandé society (Snyder 1967; Jones 1972). Shortly before independence from France, the Malian central government promised the Tuareg their own independent state, known as "Azawad" (Lecocq 2010). The new government reneged on this promise and sought to transform political life in the North to align with the Mandé Malian vision of the state. These postcolonial Malian government policies toward the Tuareg led to a civil war in 1963. In response to grievances stemming from Mandé-focused nation-building policies, the leaders of the powerful Tuareg clan confederation Kel Adagh launched the first Tuareg rebellion against the government (Lecocq 2010). Although the Malian military brutally suppressed the rebellion, its legacies loom large in the country's contemporary history. Tuareg Malians typically consider the postcolonial governance by the central Bamako government (i.e., from 1960 to the present), which Malians and outside observers generally agree was dominated by the Mandé ethnic groups, as even worse than French colonial rule (Lecocq 2010).

[2] For example, from 1902 to 1904, the territory was incorporated along with the territory of present-day Niger and Senegal into the colony known as *Sénégambie et Niger*.

After intermittent fighting with little progress for most of the immediate independence period, the Tuareg launched a second full-scale rebellion in 1990. The decades between the two rebellions featured severe droughts that hit Tuareg communities, who live in arid terrain, especially hard. Politically, central Malian governments had done little to integrate the Tuareg or to help them overcome decades of financial hardship. However, the memory of the brutal response to the 1963–1964 rebellion deterred many from taking any sort of political action at first (Lecocq 2010; Pezard and Shurkin 2015). Instead, the Tuareg pursued economic opportunities outside of Mali. Many Tuareg men sought work abroad in Muammar Qaddafi's Islamic Legion. After gaining fighting experience, they returned in 1990 to use violence against the Malian government to secure their political goals (Boilley 1999; Pezard and Shurkin 2015). One of the primary leaders of the 1990 rebellion was Iyad ag-Ghaly, a Tuareg soldier with substantial experience fighting abroad who remains a key leader in the current rebellion. The second rebellion culminated in the 1991 Tamanrasset settlement and the 1992 National Pact, though the fighting only ended completely in 1996.

These accords did not give the Tuareg their own state in the North but ensured substantial autonomy by gradually decentralizing authority away from Bamako, the capital in the South (Wing 2008). The government generally succeeded in decentralizing governance. The number of third-order districts (*communes*) increased from 19 in 1992 to 703 in 1999. Free and fair local elections were held in these *communes* in 1998 and 1999 (Wing and Kassibo 2014). However, the government did a poor job implementing the nonpolitical provisions of the 1992 National Pact. It did not integrate former combatants into the Malian army, which made security sector reform impossible and left many capable Tuareg fighters unemployed and unoccupied. Although these efforts seemed superficially successful (1,500 Tuareg gained civilian or military positions), very few of those who were integrated were combatants (Wing 2013). Disarmament efforts also failed, leaving much of this population armed (Pezard and Shurkin 2015).

Tuareg veterans from the rebellion in the 1990s, aggrieved by the partial implementation of the 1992 National Pact, launched a new rebellion in 2006. Eager to quell the fighting, the Malian government signed the Algiers Accord in 2006, which reiterated many of the terms of the 1992 agreement (Wing 2013; Pezard and Shurkin 2015). The bulk of the fighting only lasted from May to July 2006. A splinter group continued fighting until 2009, but by then government counterinsurgency efforts and progress in integration via the Algiers Accord had reduced support for this group. Finally, the emergence of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM) in the North forced the Malian government

to decentralize power since it needed the support of Tuareg clans to secure the area and prevent AQIM from establishing a stronghold (Rabasa et al. 2011).

Intrastate Violence in Mali 2012–2020

The Reemergence of Tuareg Separatism

The Malian government ultimately failed to stop Tuareg separatism and the emergence of AQIM as a source of large-scale violence. In January 2012, Tuareg separatists formed a new armed group, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), and launched a new rebellion against the government. As with the previous rebellions, the core grievance driving the separatists was the lack of inclusion and autonomy for the Tuareg in the North. Fighters from prior clashes had ready access to a large quantity of weapons (Pezard and Shurkin 2015), which facilitated armed resistance.

Although analysts disagree about whether the Tuaregs' experience fighting in the Libyan Civil War was the primary driver of the violence that began in 2012, it was certainly a key tipping point (Lecocq et al. 2013; Shurkin 2014). Tuareg fighters returned from Libya with more arms and experience (Shurkin 2014). In addition, AQIM ran a series of convoys from Libya to northern Mali to protect its weapons from confiscation, allowing fighting materiel to enter Mali (Lecocq et al. 2013). Bolstered by their shared experience fighting in Libya, the MNLA allied with Malian Islamist groups that it had fought against in the later stages of the 2006–2009 conflict, assuming they could control the extremists. Chief among these were AQIM, Ansar Dine, and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa – a violent extremist organization known for using terror tactics like suicide bombings. Tuareg-led violence had been sporadic since the end of the Third Tuareg Rebellion in 2009 (Pezard and Shurkin 2015), but the MNLA-led offensive in January 2012 drastically increased the frequency and intensity of the fighting. Although the MNLA and the Islamist extremists shared the goal of ejecting the Malian government and military from the North, disagreements over what tactics to use and how far to extend military operations (Lecocq et al. 2013) eventually undermined the alliance.

From January to March 2012, the Tuareg military units that were supposed to integrate with government forces in the North led mutinies against (and desertion from) the Malian army, which quickly found itself outgunned and outnumbered in the region. Many Tuareg in the Malian military defected to the MNLA. After a string of rebel victories, low-ranking Malian soldiers in the South were fed up with the losses and

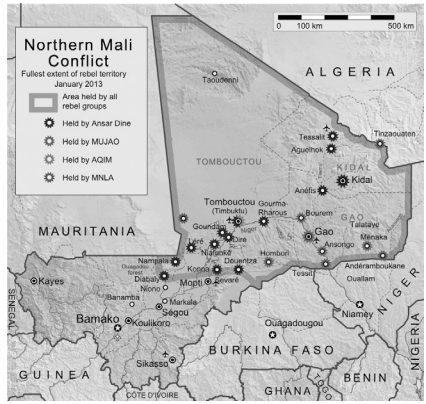

Figure 5.3 Fullest extent of armed group control of territory in Mali (January 2013)
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

what they perceived to be a lack of resources devoted to putting down the Tuareg uprising. They overthrew the government on March 21, 2012 (McGovern 2013). The MNLA exploited the disorder caused by the coup to seize control of northern Mali. Its Islamic extremist partners soon split with it to take over the same areas in the North, paying off some MNLA fighters and overwhelming others (Lecocq et al. 2013). By the end of 2012, Mali was effectively partitioned: The government only controlled the South, and the North was under full rebel control (see Figure 5.3).

On January 10, 2013, the Islamist extremists attacked Konna, a strategically located town just north of the capital, Bamako. Fearing that an Islamic extremist takeover would provide a base of operations for increased terror attacks on French soil, the French government intervened with a small military force to repel the extremists' advance (Shurkin 2014). The resulting mission, Operation Serval, succeeded in pushing the extremists north. In April 2013, the United Nations Security Council authorized the deployment of a peacekeeping operation (PKO), MINUSMA, under a Chapter VII mandate to support peace and stability (Marchal 2013; Olsen 2014).[3] In August 2014, France replaced Operation Serval with Operation Barkhane, a transnational counterinsurgency and local-level peacekeeping effort (Wing 2016).

[3] As discussed in Chapter 2, Chapter VII mandates give PKOs the maximum possible authority to intervene in an intrastate conflict.

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Though the Islamic extremists fled north following the French military intervention, corrupt rule, inadequate social services, and damaged infrastructure remained critical governance issues even as the government consolidated its intervention gains into a tentative peace (Wing 2013). Yet peace remained fragile throughout the country: The extremists attacked the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako on November 20, 2015 and the European Union training mission on March 21, 2016.

The major Tuareg (i.e., non-Islamist extremist) armed groups signed the Algiers peace accord in June 2015. The main parties to the accord were the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA), which is largely driven by the MNLA, and the Platform, a coalition of militias and progovernment armed groups.

Mali's current status does not fit into traditional peace studies paradigms. On the one hand, it can be considered to have implemented a successful negotiated settlement since wartime deaths and displacements have decreased since 2013. On the other hand, fighting continues in the North, largely because extremist rebel groups – Mali's spoilers – were excluded from the 2015 peace accord.

Mali remains as dangerous as ever, especially for potential peacebuilders and civilian populations, and Southerners express frequent frustration with the separatist movements. The Malian government continues to categorically deny the Tuareg people a separate state. As the Malian minister for national reconciliation said on the eve of signing the 2015 agreement, "the people of Azawad [the Tuareg state] as an entity does not exist. This concept does not exist."

Beyond Tuareg Separatism: Fulani, Mandé, and Dogon Communal Violence

Violence spread during 2015–2020 from northern Mali to central Mali (Mopti and Segou). Attacks from the Islamic extremist Tuareg separatist movement in both parts of the country spiked in early 2013. At this time the Malian government and French intervention forces pushed the insurgency back to the North. Although UN peacekeepers deployed in April 2013, violence in central Mali reemerged in late 2014. By 2017, the number of violent events in central areas began to surpass those in the North.

The emergence of a newly salient dimension of ethnic conflict in Mali – between Fulani and non-Fulani Malians – explains the shift of violence to the Center. Many of these conflicts began as localized disputes between individuals, families, tribes, and clans over matters such as land, the rule of law, and other parochial grievances (International Crisis Group 2016). However, the disputes took on an ethnic dimension for three reasons.

First, individuals organized responses to their disputes along ethnic lines. Second, many disputes were among fishermen, merchant, pastoralist, and agricultural families, which mirror ethnic divisions. For example, members of the Dogon ethnic group tend to be farmers, while those from the Fulani ethnic group tend to be cattle herders (Imperato and Imperato 2008). Thus, when a dispute breaks out in a village in central Mali between farmers and herders, it is very likely to take on an ethnic dimension. Third, elite narratives from Malian authorities and armed groups have increasingly framed disputes in central Mali as ethnic in nature (Tull 2019*a*).

The agitation of outside groups that recruit internally has complicated disputes since 2012. Islamic extremist organizations, both transnational and domestic, have had a strong presence in northern Mali since early 2012. However, increased instability in central areas has allowed extremists to spread further south in three ways. First, while established Islamist extremist groups such as Ansar Dine have traditionally recruited among northern Tuareg, predatory behavior by the Mandé (non-Fulani) government in Bamako has offered a new opportunity for them to recruit among the Fulani in central Mali. Extremist groups have used attacks by the Malian armed forces (*Les Forces armé es maliennes* or FAMA) to bolster resistance against the Malian government and MINUSMA. Second, new Fulani-based rebel groups have emerged, including the Macina Liberation Front (MLF), a jihadist group associated with Ansar Dine, and the Alliance for the Safeguarding of Fulani Identity and the Restoration of Justice (*l'Alliance nationale pour la sauvegarde de l'identité peule et la restauration de la justice* or ANSIPRJ). In July 2016, an attack on the FAMA military base in Nampala (in the Segou region of central Mali) killed nineteen soldiers and wounded thirty-five (Human Rights Watch 2016). Both MLF and ANSIPRJ claimed responsibility. In 2017, Fulani-based (e.g., MLF) and non-Fulani-based Islamic extremist groups (e.g., Ansar Dine) joined forces to create Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), one of the most potent threats to peacebuilding operations in the region (Tull 2019*a*). Finally, the spread of Islamic extremist groups and the rise of Fulani-based groups have inspired the creation of non-Fulani militias that fight these Fulani rebel groups; Dozo militias, named after the Bambara word for hunter, are the most prominent (Diallo 2017).

After decades of tension, violence, discrimination, and distance, there is very little trust between Mandé and Tuareg Malians (Lecocq et al. 2013). There is also little trust between Mandé Malians and Dogon Malians on the one hand and Fulani Malians on the other. This is due to an escalating conflict between the Malian military, Mandé militias, and Dogon militias on one side and Fulani militias and Fulani-based

Islamic extremist groups on the other (Diallo 2017; Tull 2019*a*, *b*). Recent violence between the Dogon and Fulani in central Mali has further complicated interethnic relations. The status of Fulani–Tuareg trust is unclear, given that both are pursuing campaigns against the Mandé-based central government. While the Dogon and Tuareg have historically enjoyed good relations, if the Dogon perceive the Tuareg as allied with the Fulani, this could jeopardize that trust.

An additional concern related to trust is the abuse of power by Malian military forces as part of their violent campaign to reestablish order in central Mali. The military has grown to resent perceived local support of the Islamic extremist groups that occupied central Mali in late 2012 (Diallo 2017). After France and the UN pushed the extremists north, FAMA returned to central Mali and violently repressed members of the Fulani ethnic group in central Mali. In July 2015, FAMA soldiers beat, tied up, and suspended ten Fulani men by a pole, including a 55-year-old Fulani chief, an important authority figure in the community. Their families found the men's bodies at a military base at Nampala in the Segou region of central Mali. In another reported incident, a soldier shoved his gun into the mouth of a 60-year-old Fulani man, who lost several teeth. Abuses and violent events like this have pervaded central Mali (Human Rights Watch 2016). Most violence is currently at the local level, with armed groups and militias fighting against each other. However, the tendency of order contestations to turn violent in Mali increases the general risk that conflicts will escalate. The involvement of transnational extremist groups like JNIM and local militia attacks on Malian military bases also serve as threat multipliers that could lead to broader destabilization.

FAMA's abuses have led to a series of reprisals by Fulani in interethnic communities against ethnic groups perceived to support the government or the military. The Fulani perceive FAMA as agents of the Malian government, and thus no longer believe they can rely upon peaceful means and official enforcement authorities to resolve disputes with members of other ethnic groups. Many have turned to violence. In July 2015, a land dispute between members of the Fulani and non-Fulani communities in a village in central Mali led to a group of Fulani men killing six non-Fulani residents. An eyewitness from the non-Fulani community described it as follows:

> Tension was high after the Fulani grazed their cows in a field where the grain was just breaking through the soil. The [non-Fulani] got angry and killed a few of their animals; the [Fulani] said the [non-Fulani] had planted their crops in the middle of a grazing route so it was their fault.
>
> As I reached my village I saw four motorcycles with armed men, dressed in the beige boubous worn by the Niger [River] [Fulani] – their turbans are tied in a distinct way. All had long guns – AKs [meaning AK-47s] – one had a string

of bullets almost dragging in the sand. I hid, immediately, but heard them order everyone to the ground, face down, then I heard several gunshots. About 20 minutes later, I saw the armed men leaving – some carrying clothing, food they'd looted. I ran to the village. Women were crying, I saw my relative, dead, and another man lay wounded, but gravely. He died minutes later. They went on to kill four others in two nearby farms. We used to talk through these problems, but this time, it turned so violent (quoted in Human Rights Watch (2016).)

The eyewitness lamented that residents once peacefully resolved such disputes but now they escalate quickly and uncontrollably. This reflects a more general decline in social trust as a result of the violence in central and northern Mali, which highlights the disastrous consequences of unchecked communal violence. As I describe in greater detail in the next section, the UN deployed peacekeepers to Mali partly as a backstop to prevent communal violence at this scale.

UN Peacekeeping in Mali

In response to the fighting between the government and the Tuareg separatist organization MNLA that erupted in 2012, UN Security Council Resolution 2085 established the United Nations Mission in Mali (UNOM) on December 20, 2012. Its primary mandate was to support the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), a small military intervention organized by the Economic Community of West African States. After the French intervention in January 2013, Security Council Resolution 2100 subsumed UNOM and AFISMA into the new United Nations Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in April 2013. This resolution authorized a multidimensional peacekeeping force of 11,200 military personnel to use all necessary means to reestablish and maintain order in Mali under a Chapter VII mandate. This mission received annual renewals until June 30, 2023 when the UN Security Council voted to dissolve the mission upon the request of the Malian government.

Multidimensional Peacebuilding

The UN has worked to improve the resilience of Malian society in three ways. First, much like Operation Barkhane, MINUSMA has played a critical role in maintaining order in northern and central Mali. The primary goal of the initial UN mandate was to stabilize key population centers and provide support to reestablish state authority throughout the country (Security Council 2013). The UN has also attempted to support national reconciliation and preliminary agreements to stop large-scale

fighting in Mali. Some non-Islamist rebel groups, including the MNLA and the Malian government, signed a preliminary agreement in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso on June 18, 2013. The UN took the lead on a host of measures as part of this agreement, including the cantonment (or garrisoning) of rebels and their weapons in Kidal town and its surroundings. MINUSMA provided logistical support as well as food and water to combatants at the cantonment sites. Recognizing the intercommunal issues that may arise due to the increased presence of former combatants, MINUSMA also established community-level initiatives to integrate the cantonment camps into local areas (Wing 2016).

Second, the UN uses two types of local-level operations to foster resilience through social trust. On the one hand, UN police patrols help promote safe and secure interethnic interactions, which encourages the development of generalized trust (Nomikos 2022). On the other hand, the UN has adopted local conflict mediation efforts to promote the peaceful resolution of interethnic disputes in the absence of generalized trust (Duursma 2018). Given the myriad challenges to social trust in Mali, the UN's ability to successfully foster resilience in these ways is critical to preventing further violent conflict.

Third, the UN has sought to increase the legitimacy of the Malian state in two ways. First, it has employed a bottom-up dialogue-centric approach that mirrors the constitution-building tactic that Malian politicians used during the democratization era in the 1990s (Wing 2008, 2013). For example, MINUSMA held an open forum with more than 150 women in the northern town of Kidal to discuss their concerns about the Ouagadougou agreement and the role of women in national reconciliation (Sabrow 2017). The second way in which the UN has sought to increase state legitimacy is to address the corruption and lack of accountability that have undermined governance in Mali since at least the arrival of the first international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) during the late 1960s under the rule of Moussa Traore (1968–1991). MINUSMA has used the UN independent expert on the situation of human rights in Mali, who catalogs all human rights violations and obstacles to accountability, to directly address corruption. For example, the Malian transitional government established a Dialogue and Reconciliation Commission on March 6, 2013, shortly after most major hostilities ended. The commission was tasked with identifying the political and social forces affecting the dialogue and reconciliation process. The UN independent expert met with various Malians inside and outside the government to discuss the commission's progress; many criticized it for failing to involve civil society or victims of human rights violations. The independent expert relayed these grievances to the UN and pushed the commission to adopt a more participatory approach, an issue that he

and the UN continue to monitor (Report of the Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Mali 2013).

Localized Peace Enforcement by MINUSMA

Although MINUSMA has had a robust mandate from the beginning, the Security Council extended its mandate after the first year to focus on expanding the peacekeeping and police footprint and visibility in Mali (Security Council 2013, 2016). Peacekeepers engage in long-range patrols from the twenty-one UN bases throughout the country, frequently using enforcement to promote local and intergroup cooperation.[4]

The MINUSMA police force also plays a critical role in enforcing intergroup cooperation through both lone patrols and joint patrols with the Malian police. Its short-range patrols target communities, which offers them an opportunity to report crimes and register local grievances. MINUSMA police also engage in long-range patrols that accompany Malians to weekly markets outside major population centers to encourage trade and protect them from intergroup predation. These police patrols are designed to prevent violence and protect civilians who engage in cooperative behavior like trade with other ethnic groups.[5] For instance, UN police patrols in northern Mali routinely accompany cow herders to markets outside of secure city centers to make sure they (and the farmers they interact with) do not cheat or steal from their trading partners, who are frequently from another ethnic group.[6]

My localized peace enforcement theory (presented in Chapter 3) emphasizes the role of domestic perceptions of peacekeepers in explaining outcomes. While this section offers insights into peacekeepers' *practices*, to find out what locals think of them I conducted forty-eight interviews with local leaders and surveyed almost 1,500 civilians throughout the country. In the following section, I discuss the responses to the interviews. I analyze the survey data to some extent here and then more fully in Chapter 6.

Interviews with Local Leaders in Mali

In spring 2021, I conducted semistructured interviews with forty-eight community leaders in Mali (thirty men, eighteen women), twelve of whom were active in Bamako. The remainder worked in Mopti, Gao,

[4] For an example of these efforts in the Gao, Kidal, and Tomboctou regions of northern Mali, see UN Secretary General (2016*a*, III. 29).
[5] Author interview with MINUSMA Deputy Police Commissioner, August 3, 2016.
[6] For an example of these UN activities, see UN Secretary General (2016*b*, III. 19–21).

and Tomboctou *regions*, the three areas of Mali with the highest levels of communal conflict in the past decade. I chose twelve from each area. The interviewees were members of civil society organizations, local government, youth organizations, NGOs, women's organizations, religious authorities, and traditional leaders. They also represented many different ethnic groups – Dogon, Fulani, Tuareg, Bambara, Sonhrai, Soninké, Malinké, and Bozo. This sampling strategy produced a fairly representative slice of Malian society.

I designed the interview questions with Allison Grossman, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Tulane University. Because of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted over the phone with the assistance of researchers at the Innovation for Poverty Action's office in Mali. The interview questions sought to: (1) pinpoint the most salient problems facing communities, (2) evaluate the demand for intervention from the state as well as international actors, (3) assess the existence of informal conflict resolution mechanisms, and (4) understand general perceptions of international actors.

In general, the interviewees expressed a desire for local government leadership, but frustration at the government's absence and lack of response to communal violence. They identified armed group violence and poverty as the most important problems facing the country. They explicitly tied poverty and other economic issues directly to local-level insecurity – particularly in the areas of property rights and youth unemployment, which they maintained had catalyzed the rise of communal violence in Mali. Ultimately, the leaders demanded more international intervention, especially from the UN and, to a lesser extent, the United States.

The interviewees agreed that local governments were primarily responsible for addressing instability and delivering public goods. But they were pessimistic about the direction of dispute resolution, stability, and peace. They described disagreements over land and property as central to communal disputes. However, because the government has been unwilling and unable to enforce private property rights, land owned by the poor is appropriated or violently seized. Many Malians have turned to self-defense groups in response. Some interviewees valued the efforts of these groups, but most feared them.

Leaders in Bamako reported that disputes over land and property are becoming more frequent, particularly where many people claim access to the same land. They attributed these problems to an unfair justice system that disproportionately favors the wealthy. Those in Tomboctou said that security in big cities had improved, but remains a key problem in the countryside. They cited the need to increase social cohesion and reduce conflict among ethnic groups as key concerns.

Leaders in Mopti and Gao were even more pessimistic. The former mentioned that communal disputes were a main source of instability, exacerbated by state absence and the government's inability to act. Some mentioned informal local committees that have ameliorated disputes, while others indicated that some religious leaders have the trust of armed groups. Interviewees in Gao expressed very little confidence in the government, and greater trust in traditional and religious leaders. As in Tomboctou, they expressed a pervasive fear of violent attacks and robberies outside of urban areas.

A 30-year-old female Tuareg community leader in Gao painted a dire picture of life: "The state is not totally present so the population is left to itself, which has cut the wire between the local government and several remote areas of the region. This is what pushed the people of these areas to [communal violence]." A 47-year-old Sonhrai civil society leader similarly pointed to "the absence or weakness of the state," which "gives rise to all kinds of conflicts between members of different ethnic groups." A Sonhrai women's leader agreed that communal violence was the worst problem facing Mali: "The robberies and kidnappings of children followed by their assassination have become our daily life. To this we can also add the conflicts between herders and farmers in certain areas of the region."

A common thread in the interviews was that leaders want the international community – and especially MINUSMA – to do more. However, as my theory's main hypothesis (Hypothesis 1) predicts, the interviewees grounded this desire in the fact that they see peacekeepers as incredibly effective at protecting civilians in communal disputes. Furthermore, as Hypothesis 2 predicts, many interviewees highlighted peacekeepers' impartiality. Some did so implicitly by referring to their belief that the UN will come to the aid of anyone who asks. Others did so more directly, frequently using the word *impartiale* or its local language equivalent.

For example, a 32-year-old Dogon youth council leader in Mopti named communal violence as the most important problem facing his community and country. He remarked that "ten years ago there was no such conflict."[7] He praised MINUSMA because they "come to aid us by protecting populations who are threatened." When asked who specifically receives their help, he said "anyone who feels in danger," emphasizing that "there are no criteria." A 48-year-old Bozo leader of a women's rights NGO said in her interview that she wanted "the deployment of UN forces everywhere to ensure the security of people and their property."

Many interviewees explicitly contrasted the UN and France. Another Dogon leader in Mopti also wanted a larger UN presence, saying that

[7] Interview conducted in French, my translation.

peacekeepers "must go where the villages are burned to ensure security." However, he also said that "France must leave us alone. Because of their selfish interests [France] participates in the destabilization of our [communities]," and explained that he views France as aligned with certain groups. A 60-year-old Sonhrai religious leader in Tomboctou agreed, stating that "France has not been fair in its management of [communal violence]." A Dogon women's leader echoed these sentiments, saying that "France does nothing for us except defend its interests." A community leader in Bamako went further, claiming that "France defends her interests alongside armed groups."

Advantages of Studying the Mali Case

I selected Mali as a case study because it generalizes well to other settings for two reasons. First, communal violence is widespread – and rising. It frequently erupts over land disputes between cattle herders and farmers, as it does across sub-Saharan Africa, which makes it a realistic context for studying the dynamics of communal conflict. Second, the UN presence in Mali is similar in size and mandate to other recent operations characterized by substantial levels of communal violence, including in Côte d'Ivoire, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Smidt 2020*a*; Krause 2019*b*; Autesserre 2010; Howard 2019*b*).

While the Malian case may be fairly representative of the region on important dimensions, a number of idiosyncratic features of communal violence and international peacekeeping facilitated my empirical analysis. Although few of these features are completely unique to Mali, together they made it a particularly advantageous case study. They allowed me to compile rich data on UN peacekeeping deployments and communal violence across the country, and to develop careful strategies for measuring the effectiveness of local-level UN PKOs.

Mali's history also allows me to compare the effect of two different types of international interventions in the same setting: The French military intervention and subsequent PKO, which began in January 2013, and MINUSMA, which deployed starting in April 2013. In response to ongoing communal violence, France has engaged in activities similar to those of the UN. For example, the Support for Cross-border Cooperation in the Sahel project (*Appui à la coopération transfrontalière au Sahel* or ACTS) is a French-driven peacebuilding project launched in December 2013 that seeks to build community connections to protect civilians from violence arising due to armed group violence, intergroup conflict, and extremism. The key component of ACTS is that French soldiers explicitly patrol villages to build community cohesion with the hope of

fostering cooperation from the ground up. It remains in place at the time of writing.

Furthermore, the simultaneous UN and French deployments allow me to compare the effectiveness of the UN to that of a former colonial power that is likely to be perceived as biased. I conducted surveys in Mali to gauge the plausibility of the claim that locals perceive the UN as impartial. These surveys provide robust evidence of this perception. When asked about the UN's motives for becoming involved in Malian affairs, 57 percent of the 512 respondents to a survey I conducted in February–March 2016 did not associate it with any particular favoritism or bias (they said the UN was intervening "for all of Mali"); about 11 percent said for peace, and 21 percent replied that it was in the UN's own self-interest. With the exception of French interests (4 percent) and "great power" interests (1 percent), respondents did not mention any particular national interest dominating the motives of the UN. About 1 percent of the respondents suggested that the UN intervened for the Tuareg or northern rebels.[8]

It is also unlikely that UN bias manifests in the interests of the contributing states or the identity of individual peacekeepers (Benson and Kathman 2014). In another survey I conducted in July–August 2016, Malians said they generally think of UN peacekeepers as international rather than from a particular state. When I asked respondents where they perceive individual UN peacekeepers as coming from, only 28 percent said "a specific country." Another 54 percent simply said the "UN." An additional 10 percent mentioned "a part of the world" (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and East Asia).[9]

My survey evidence further supports the idea that Malians perceive the UN as more impartial than France. I administered a series of surveys in the capital (Bamako) and central Mali to 864 respondents to compare perceptions of UN and French bias.[10] I asked respondents whether they believed that the UN or France was biased in favor of a particular ethnic group in Mali. Two-thirds (67 percent) said they perceived the UN as impartial, while only 41 percent perceived France as impartial; this difference is substantively and statistically significant.

In contrast to their perceptions of the UN, non-Tuareg Malians largely perceive of France as favoring Tuareg Malians. The significant autonomy the French granted Tuareg clans during the colonial period (1880–1960), coupled with France's iron-fist approach to non-Tuareg

[8] See Chapter 4 for more discussion of the survey's sample and Chapter 6 for more discussion of the survey itself.

[9] These responses are drawn from Round 1 of the surveys discussed in Chapter 4.

[10] Chapter 4 discusses the sampling procedure for these surveys.

Malians and conscription of non-Tuareg youth, set these expectations (Mann 2006). Stories about France's favorable treatment of Tuareg Malians linger in modern-day Mali. Non-Tuareg Malians recount French soldiers allowing the Tuareg to dominate governance, trade, and life in certain parts of Mali. A prominent example is the ongoing battle over the northern town of Kidal, where the Malian government has struggled to retain control. In July 2016, the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA), a coalition of Tuareg armed groups, again seized control of Kidal, further fueling suspicions of French favoritism. Malian newspapers reported on the story with headlines such as "France Saves the CMA (Again)" (L'Aube 2016). In places like Kidal, French peacebuilders struggle to promote intergroup cooperation because non-Tuareg Malians believe the French will allow Tuareg Malians to take advantage of any attempts to establish cooperation. Several Malian interlocutors mentioned Kidal to me as an example of why they did not trust French forces, why they believe they are biased, and why they suspect the French favor Tuareg Malians.

There is also significant variation within UN peacekeeping in Mali, which allows me to examine the effectiveness of different contributors. Bove, Ruffa and Ruggeri (2020) suggest that Mali is a "high field diversity" case for this reason (p. 63); fifty-nine countries have contributed troops to MINUSMA. Civilian staff and police officers may come from even more countries, though UN reports suggest that these fifty-nine nationalities contribute the most of any type of staff. With the exception of Bangladesh, Sweden, and Netherlands, three traditionally heavy contributors to UN peacekeeping missions, the largest contributors to MINUSMA are other West African states – Burkina Faso, Chad, Ghana, Guinea, Niger, Senegal, and Togo. This allows me to compare the effects of peacekeepers who are relatively similar on many dimensions but who do not come from countries with similar identity cleavages as Mali.

Finally, Mali is a least-likely test of my theory. It is one of sub-Saharan Africa's poorest and most underdeveloped states, and its government lacks the institutional capacity to enforce violations of intergroup cooperation. Moreover, the perpetual salience of communal violence along multiple group dimensions makes intergroup cooperation a difficult proposition. In addition, the convergence of French and UN peace operations should make local-level UN peacekeeping less effective in Mali than in other settings. France and the UN deployed at nearly the same time in Mali (January and April 2013, respectively), and both actors have invested in a multidimensional peacekeeping strategy that employs peacekeepers in active conflict zones. These similarities should in theory mean that the two actors have very similar peacekeeping outcomes. Moreover, the length of time the UN has been deployed makes it more

likely to be perceived with suspicion – and more likely that questions will arise about why this seemingly all-powerful force is still there, reminiscent of some aspects of the country's colonial experience. These challenges have influenced citizens' perceptions of the UN. Though the vast majority of my survey respondents perceived the UN as impartial, roughly a quarter said they thought it favored the Tuareg. Such doubts suggest that if the theory applies to this case, it is likely to be even more robust in others.

Combining Field Research with Quantitative Causal Inference

The complex nature of PKOs at the local level required a pluralistic and nimble data collection strategy in Mali. On the one hand, I needed rich and in-depth information from conflict and postconflict settings with PKOs to understand how individuals think of the UN peacekeepers in their midst. On the other hand, I wanted to see how the deployment of peacekeepers shaped actual violence, not only at the local level but also across time and space. In addition, the fact that PKOs by their nature select into violent settings, complicating any naive comparison of settings with peacekeepers to those without, required special attention. At each level of analysis, I needed to account for confounding variables in order to make causal inference possible.

I therefore combined multiple methods of data collection at different intensities and geographic scopes. My goal was for the structure of the empirical analysis to mirror the book's primary argument – to show how peacekeeping works from the bottom up, from the individual to the community to the country as a whole. The analysis builds from twenty-four sites where I conducted intensive qualitative, survey, and experimental research to the area near the border between Mali and Burkina Faso. I collected novel georeferenced data on communal disputes as well as peacekeeping troop deployments to Mali as a whole.

In the following chapters, I begin by investigating the effect of peacekeepers at the individual level. In Chapter 6, I use a lab-in-the-field experiment to operationalize local residents' willingness to cooperate. I randomly vary whether participants are told that peacekeepers from the UN, troops from France, or no peacekeepers are monitoring an interaction with members of a different social group. I then ask them to play a straightforward cooperation game under controlled conditions to see how their behavior changes. Chapter 6 also presents the results of a survey that asked respondents to assess whether they think a communal dispute will become violent based on whether a peacekeeping patrol discovered the dispute. Chapter 7 incorporates original observational data

in two parts. First, I compare central Mali and northern Burkina Faso to show that disputes in communities with UN peacekeepers are less likely to escalate than those in similar communities without UN peacekeepers. Second, I investigate perceptions of UN impartiality based on peacekeepers' nationalities by leveraging the diversity of contributing countries deployed to Mali.