



MALI

Quick Facts

Population: 19,553,397 (July 2020 est.)

Area: 1,240,192 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Bambara 33.3%, Fulani (Peuhl) 13.3%, Sarakole/Soninke/Marka 9.8%, Senufo/Manianka 9.6%, Malinke 8.8%, Dogon 8.7%, Sonrai 5.9%, Bobo 2.1%, Tuareg/Bella 1.7%, other Malian 6%, from member of Economic Community of West Africa .4%, other .3% (2018 est.)

GDP (official exchange rate): \$15.37 billion (2017 est.)

Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated August 2020)

INTRODUCTION

The Malian government and international forces continue to struggle to adequately police the plethora of Islamist and non-Islamist armed groups active in the north and center of the country. Instability can be traced back to the 2012 Tuareg rebellion, itself a product of longstanding cleavages between the government in Bamako and aggrieved northern Tuareg tribes. In January 2012, Tuareg separatists began an offensive that overran Malian forces in the north, destabilizing the country and fomenting a military coup d'état. In the ensuing turmoil, Islamist groups wrested control of the country's north and threatened an invasion of the south, prompting an international intervention.

While intervention forces, led by the French and assisted by Malian and international troops, have regained control of major northern towns, large swathes of northern Mali remain unstable and insurgent groups launch frequent attacks. More recently, jihadist groups have spread to Mali's central Mopti region, exploiting rifts and fueling deadly conflicts between the Fulani (Peul), Bambara, and Dogon ethnic communities, which has led to a precipitous decline in the security situation therein.¹

Absent a major strategic shift in the country and wider Sahel region, the marked increase of Islamist activity is likely to continue unabated. Deadly attacks on Malian military personnel, United Nations (UN) peacekeepers, and civilians persist in both the northern and central regions of the country, including the January 2017 suicide bombing in the city of Gao that killed 47 people, the January 2019 attack in Aguelhok that killed 10 UN peacekeepers, and five major attacks from November 2019 to June 2020 that killed at least 145 Malian soldiers.² Furthermore, the October 2017 attack that killed four American soldiers stationed in Niger occurred near the Malian border. The attack was eventually claimed by a group that has pledged bayat (allegiance) to the Islamic State.³

Meanwhile, public trust in the Malian government continues to be undermined by the extrajudicial torture and murder of civilians by its forces and allied militias.⁴ The government of Mali has recognized this problem and has begun to reform the country's security sector to prevent abuses.⁵ However, the March 2019 massacre of at least 160 Fulani herders—reportedly perpetrated by the government-supported Dan Na Ambassagou militia—and subsequent resignation of the Malian government illustrates the difficult

road ahead.⁶ Similarly, the government has not been able to implement the June 2015 Algiers Accord, which would theoretically begin the process of reconciling moderates and countering extremist groups.⁷ In February 2020, the Malian government acknowledged that initial contact had been established with leaders of al Qaeda affiliate Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) to explore options for peace, a significant shift in six years of policy.⁸

Elections in the summer of 2018, though deemed credible by observers, were beset by violence, boycotts, and poll closures in the center and north.⁹ After disputed parliamentary elections in the spring of 2020, protests against the administration of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta erupted in Bamako that June. Protesters led by the president's former electoral opponents and popular imam Mahmoud Dicko accused the Keïta administration of corruption, economic mismanagement, and a failure to resolve the security crisis in the country.¹⁰ As of July 2020, the Malian government had responded to the protests with both deadly violence and concessions that fell short of protestor demands for Keïta's resignation. There are now fears that further instability in Mali will exacerbate an already deteriorating situation in the country.¹¹ Without significant reforms, a durable peace in Mali will remain elusive, and Salafi-jihadi groups will continue to use the country as a base to further destabilize the region.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Since Mali declared itself independent in 1960, Tuaregs (a Berber ethnic group) who live in the north have repeatedly launched secessionist rebellions. One such separatist group, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), was formed in October 2011. The MNLA is nominally secular but has allied with Islamist organizations at different points in its history. Armed with weapons and experience gained from the Libyan Civil War, MNLA-led rebellions in the north began early in 2012 and quickly handed the Malian military a string of defeats.¹² A group of disgruntled soldiers called the Green Berets attacked the presidential palace in Bamako and deposed President Amadou Toumani Touré out of frustration and a perceived lack of support from the government.

The National Council for the Recovery of Democracy and the Restoration of the State (CNRDRE), formed by the Green Berets after taking power, suspended Mali's constitution and dissolved its institutions, promising to restore civilian rule.¹³ The coup caused enough chaos to benefit the MNLA's cause. On April 2, 2012, the MNLA seized several major cities in the country's north, including Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu.¹⁴ The MNLA announced a ceasefire on April 6th of that year, claiming that they had enough land to form their own state of Azawad.¹⁵ The country was split in two, with Bamako in control of the south and the rebels holding the north.

The MNLA sought the assistance of Islamist groups in its rebellion. These groups included al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine, and the Movement for Unity & Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). In May 2012, the MNLA and Ansar Dine agreed to merge to form an Islamist state.¹⁶ Within less than a week, however, the two groups clashed over the degree to which *sharia* law would be enforced. MUJAO similarly united with the MNLA, and similarly fell out. Thereafter, MUJAO and Ansar Dine worked together to push the MNLA out of Gao in June 2012.¹⁷

In early December 2012, representatives of *Ansar Dine* and the MNLA agreed to a ceasefire with the government.¹⁸ However, Ansar Dine suspended this arrangement just one month later, accusing the government of using the reprieve to prepare for war.¹⁹ The Islamist militants then began aggressively moving south towards Bamako. By January 10th, Islamist rebels attacked and took control of Konna, a town less than 40 miles from Mopti, where the Malian army maintains a strategic base.²⁰

The French government responded by announcing Operation Serval, in which the French military would support Mali in rebuffing Islamist forces. With French support and deployed troops from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Malian army regained control of Konna.²¹

French, Malian, and ECOWAS troops quickly retook northern cities and towns in the weeks that followed. However, after military forces retook Gao, the Islamists regrouped and launched an insurgency.²² In August 2014, *Operation Serval* was replaced by Operation Barkhane. With a mandate focused more on counterterrorism, the Barkhane force is headquartered in Chad and operates across Western and Central Africa. Operation Barkhane was reinforced in January 2020 and is still active as of this writing.²³

The Malian government has signed ceasefires with several groups, including the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), which functions as an umbrella group for Tuareg and Arab separatists, among them the MNLA. The most recent, known as the Algiers Accord, was signed in June 2015. The agreement included provisions for former separatist fighters to be integrated into northern Malian security forces, better representation for northern regions in central government institutions, and the right for people in the north to form local institutions.²⁴ Implementation of the agreement has stagnated however, due to insecurity in the northern regions and lingering distrust between the government and the MNLA.²⁵

Islamist groups initially did not participate in the peace process, remaining active in the north and increasingly the south and center of the country. Roughly 1,350 to 3,160 Salafi-*jihadi* fighters were active in Mali as of 2018, and *jihadist* activities have only increased since.²⁶ While there are several distinct Islamist groups, membership between them tends to be fluid. The March 2017 creation of Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) from four disparate Islamist groups into a single al-Qaeda franchise has significantly escalated the threat posed by radical Islamists in the region.²⁷

Ansar Dine (“Defenders of the Faith”)

Iyad ag Ghaly formed Ansar Dine in 2011, with the group expanding its reach and power in northern Mali throughout 2012. As previously noted, the group initially worked with the MNLA to take over the north, but differing positions on the imposition of *sharia* caused the relationship between the two to deteriorate. *Ansar Dine*, in partnership with other Islamist groups such as MUJAO, expelled the MNLA and took control of Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao in June 2012.²⁸

As Ansar Dine took control of more and more of northern Mali, it increasingly pushed a radical interpretation of Islam. On July 10, 2012, its militants destroyed two tombs at Timbuktu's ancient Djingareyber mud mosque, angering the city's residents and drawing international condemnation.²⁹ The Islamist group banned alcohol, smoking, Friday visits to cemeteries, and watching soccer, and required women to wear veils in public.³⁰ The group whipped and beat those who did not adhere to its strict interpretation of *sharia* law.³¹

In June 2016, ag Ghaly released his first video in almost two years, issuing new threats against the West and commending recent attacks against French forces and UN peacekeepers.³² On October 31, 2016, Mahmoud Dicko, president of Mali's High Islamic Council, told reporters that he has brokered a truce with Ag Ghaly.³³ Ansar Dine immediately denied the report, calling the claim “completely baseless.”³⁴ In March 2017, Ansar Dine joined JNIM and pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda, retaining its leader Iyad ag Ghaly atop the new organization.³⁵ As part of JNIM, Ansar Dine militants remained active through 2019, conducting attacks in Mali with allied Islamist organizations such as the Macina Liberation Front.³⁶

Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and Al-Mourabitoun (“The Sentinels”)

MUJAO is a West Africa-based militant Islamist organization that is allied with and has ties to AQIM.³⁷ Soon after its first public statement in December 2011, MUJAO reportedly concluded an agreement with both Ansar Dine and AQIM to pursue a common goal of spreading Islamism across the region.³⁸ The group appears to target West Africa more than other terror groups, and identifies itself as “an alliance between native Arab, Tuareg and Black African tribes and various *muhajirin* (“immigrants,” i.e. foreign *jihadists*) from North and West Africa.”³⁹ The group appears to fund itself through kidnapping activities.⁴⁰

Like Ansar Dine, MUJAO initially had a truce with the MNLA as they jointly fought to take control of Mali's north from Bamako.⁴¹ While Ansar Dine appeared to have taken control of Timbuktu with AQIM,

Gao was held by MUJAO.⁴² During its advance on Gao, MUJAO reportedly sacked Algeria's consulate and kidnapped seven Algerian diplomats.⁴³ Once in control of the city, MUJAO imposed a draconian interpretation of sharia law on Malians.⁴⁴ In August 2013, a significant faction of MUJAO merged with a militant group formerly associated with AQIM to form a new group called Al-Mourabitoun, leaving MUJAO largely defunct.⁴⁵

Al-Mourabitoun

Al-Mourabitoun was formed in August 2013 following a merger between a breakaway segment of AQIM led by Algerian commander Mokhtar Belmokhtar and a faction of MUJAO.⁴⁶ The group aims to unite Islamic movements and Muslims across Africa against secular influences, with a particular focus on attacking French interests and allies across the region.⁴⁷ Belmokhtar's faction, known as the al-Mulathamun Battalion ("the Masked Battalion"), had previously been part of AQIM, but split into a separate organization in late 2012 after an ongoing dispute with AQIM's *emir*, Abdelmalek Droukdel.⁴⁸ Under Belmokhtar's command, the group claimed responsibility for the January 2013 Tiguentourine gas facility attack, which killed 39 civilians.

Al-Mourabitoun's unified front may belie greater internal turmoil. In May 2015, al-Mourabitoun co-founder Adnan Abu Walid al Sahrawi pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and Abu Bakr al Baghdadi in an audiotape that was released to the Al Akhbar new agency.⁴⁹ Several days later, however, Belmokhtar dismissed the pledge, a move that indicated a split between al Sahrawi and al-Mourabitoun's *shura* council.⁵⁰ In the weeks that followed, local Malian media reported clashes between factions loyal to Belmokhtar and those loyal to al Sahrawi.⁵¹ Al Sahrawi's faction continued to launch attacks in the region, including on a military outpost in Burkina Faso near the border with Mali and on a high-security prison in Niger thought to house militants from Nigeria's Boko Haram and AQIM.⁵²

Questions about al-Mourabitoun's leadership persist. Founder Belmokhtar was reportedly killed by U.S. forces in Libya three separate times, the latest in 2016. Since then, it is rumored (though unsubstantiated) that Belmokhtar remains alive and at large. Irrespective of its leader's status, reports indicated that al-Mourabitoun reunited with AQIM following the Radisson Blu attack in November 2015.⁵³ This reconciliation was formalized by the March 2017 merger of multiple West African al-Qaeda affiliated groups to form JNIM.⁵⁴ In January 2017, al-Mourabitoun claimed responsibility for a suicide car bombing at a military camp in Gao that killed 47 people.⁵⁵

Al-Mourabitoun has been involved in several high-profile attacks against foreigners in central and southern Mali, including three attacks in Sévaré and Bamako in 2015 that collectively killed 37 people.⁵⁶ The group has also launched attacks outside of Mali, including collaborating with AQIM on an attack on the Splendid Hotel in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in January 2016 as well as on the March 2016 attack on the Grand Bassam beach resort in Côte d'Ivoire.

Macina Liberation Front (FLM)

The FLM emerged in January 2015 and is led by Amadou Koufa, an ethnically Fulani radical Islamic preacher. Koufa rose to prominence after he led a joint AQIM, Ansar Dine, and MUJAO offensive against the town of Konna in early January 2013, the capture of which triggered the French intervention in Mali. The term "Macina" refers to the 19th century Fulani-led Islamic Macina Empire that stretched across central Mali, and Koufa has proven adept at capitalizing on the sense of victimization among ethnic Fulani in this region.

FLM ideology blends Islamic extremism with a local ethnic radicalism that is a product of increased insecurity and competition between central Malian ethnic groups.⁵⁷ The group targets young Fulanis for recruitment through local radio stations. Koufa's Fulani-language sermons draw on a narrative of a mythical time when Fulani were the masters of a prosperous Islamic faith in West Africa.⁵⁸ However, far from heralding prosperity, Fulani-FLM collaboration has prompted significant reprisals against Fulani

communities by ethnic neighbors and government forces in central Mali.⁵⁹

FLM membership is estimated to be a few hundred fighters, often recruiting from the Fulani pastoral community; the small numbers have thus far prevented the group from independently conducting anything more than small-scale attacks using improvised explosive devices (IEDs).⁶⁰ However, the FLM often collaborates with other Islamist groups to launch high profile attacks on United Nations peacekeepers and civilian targets. The FLM claimed a role in the November 2015 attack on the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako and in the July 2016 attack on the Malian military base in the central Segou Region.⁶¹ The FLM also exploits the government's continual human rights abuses, such as extrajudicial executions and arrests, to curry favor with the Malian population.⁶² Rumors of the death of FLM leader Amadou Koufa in a November 2018 raid by French forces proved to be premature after Koufa reappeared in a video that circulated in March 2019.⁶³ Koufa was subsequently designated a Specially Designated Global Terrorist by the U.S. Department of State in November 2019.⁶⁴

Along with assisting the establishment of Ansarul Islam in December 2016, the FLM joined with other al-Qaeda affiliated groups in the Sahel to form JNIM in March 2017.⁶⁵

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Over time, AQIM has evolved from a local terrorist group seeking to replace Algeria's government with an Islamic one to an al-Qaeda group preaching global *jihad*. Formerly known as the Group Salafiste Pour la Predication et Combat (GSPC), AQIM has its roots in the Algerian Civil War of the 1990s. In Mali, the group has taken advantage of the country's sparsely populated, poorly governed northern regions to conduct operations. Mali's three northern regions—Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal—contain only 10 percent of the population, while accounting for two-thirds of the country's land.⁶⁶ As noted by analysts, the group has periodically turned to smuggling and criminality to raise funds. At its core, it has remained a highly resilient and pragmatic Islamist insurgency.⁶⁷

GSPC/AQIM, like many Islamist terrorist groups, finances itself through crime. Prior to its merger with al-Qaeda, the group achieved international notoriety when it ransomed 15 European tourists in Algeria in early 2003, receiving a reported sum of 5 million Euro.⁶⁸ Between 2007 and 2017, there were a number of additional, high profile kidnappings that illustrated the group's continued ability to operate in northern Mali. The kidnappings serve a dual purpose for AQIM; the activity itself drove foreign investment away from the region, while the ransom payments brought AQIM cash needed for weapons and supplies.⁶⁹ In addition to kidnapping, AQIM also engages in profitable smuggling operations with routes going through northern Mali.

According to the *Long War Journal*, AQIM affiliates launched 276 attacks in West Africa in 2017.⁷⁰ This marked a slight increase from 2016, and a nearly 150 percent increase from 2015.⁷¹ After the merger of AQIM into JNIM, attacks claimed exclusively by AQIM have become more difficult to separate and define. However, the pace of attacks continues to increase: in April 2018, AQIM claimed an attack that killed a United Nations peacekeeper and wounded seven French soldiers, and indicated that the strike was a retaliation against French operations that had killed AQIM members.⁷² In 2019, AQIM and its affiliates conducted two-thirds of the 800 attacks carried out by Salafi-*jihadist* groups in the Sahel, inflicting hundreds of casualties.⁷³ AQIM itself claimed responsibility for an attack that killed 10 UN peacekeepers in January of that year.⁷⁴

These attacks seem to underscore the group's ability to recalibrate its strategy and tactics in the face of ongoing counterterrorism efforts. Nevertheless, its influence has waned as a result of competition from other Islamist groups.⁷⁵ While AQIM remains loyal to al Qaeda, the group's roots in the Maghreb and leadership have proven a hurdle in the Sahel, when compared to its locally-affiliated rivals.⁷⁶ Indeed, since 2015, the group has faced increasing competition from the Islamic State, which was a potential impetus for AQIM's Sahara branch to merge with Ansar Dine, al-Mourabitoun, and the FLM to form JNIM in March 2017.⁷⁷ AQIM faced a devastating setback when French forces killed its leader Abdelmalek Droukdel and

several close associates in a gunfight on June 3, 2020.⁷⁸ This setback will certainly not erase AQIM as an acute threat to peace in Mali, but will likely hasten the group's decline in favor of locally-led groups such as Ansar Dine, Ansarul Islam, FLM, and Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS).

Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM, "Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims")

In March 2017, JNIM was founded through the merger of four al-Qaeda affiliated Salafi-jihadist groups in Mali and the greater Sahel region—Ansar Dine, AQIM, al-Mourabitoun, and the FLM. The group aims to impose *sharia* law in West Africa and expel Western forces (particularly the French). Ansar Dine leader ag Ghaly pledged *bayat* to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri on behalf of JNIM, cementing JNIM as the central al-Qaeda affiliate in the region.⁷⁹ JNIM was designated a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of State on September 5, 2018.⁸⁰

JNIM is estimated to number 2,000 fighters.⁸¹ The merger has increased available resources and coordination, thereby improving the group's operational capacity despite increased pressure from security forces, which have inflicted significant losses among JNIM's leadership, including Abdelmalek Droukdel himself.⁸² In Mali, JNIM was responsible for the April 2018 attack on a French and UN base in Timbuktu that wounded seven French soldiers. The group has also claimed a number of attacks against Malian, French, and UN forces as well as opposing militias and civilians, using tactics ranging from conventional assaults with light and heavy weapons, to IEDs and SVBIEDs (Suicide Vehicle-borne IEDs).⁸³ JNIM also conducts assassinations and kidnappings, and extorts resources from local people.⁸⁴ In the first half of 2020, JNIM claimed responsibility for multiple attacks, killing 69 Malian soldiers in just three particularly large assaults on military bases and convoys across central and northern Mali.⁸⁵ JNIM is also suspected of carrying out the June 2020 ambush that killed 24 Malian soldiers.⁸⁶

In February 2020, the Malian government admitted to contacting senior JNIM leadership, including Amadou Koufa and Iyad ag Galy. While no concrete dialogue has yet been established, JNIM nonetheless acknowledged talks with the government and issued demands for the withdrawal of French forces as a prerequisite to more serious peace discussions.⁸⁷ JNIM's present demands may not seem politically viable, but opposition leader and *imam* Mahmoud Dicko firmly believes in dialogue with Islamist groups, and Mali may yet adopt a policy of reconciliation with the al-Qaeda affiliate.

A potential consequence of talks with the Malian government was the breakdown of the *de facto* peace that had existed between al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates in the Sahel since 2015. In the spring of 2020, remote clashes devolved into open warfare among the two Islamist factions.⁸⁸ While neither group has gained supremacy, fierce attacks from ISGS can only decrease JNIM's capabilities to act against security forces, but threatens to inflict even more civilian casualties.

Ansarul Islam

Ansarul Islam is an Islamist group founded in Burkina Faso, but which reportedly maintains bases and has conducted attacks in northern Mali.⁸⁹ The first such group native to Burkina Faso, Ansarul Islam announced its presence shortly after it conducted its first attack in December 2016.

Ansarul Islam was founded by Malam Ibrahim Dicko, allegedly with the backing of FLM leader Amadou Koufa, and reportedly numbers 150-200 fighters.⁹⁰ Dicko allegedly passed due to natural causes in mid-2017 and Ansarul Islam is reportedly led by his brother Jafar as of early 2019.⁹¹ Ansarul Islam appears closely linked to Malian al-Qaeda affiliated *jihadist* groups and has received training from JNIM operatives.⁹² It also reportedly participates in JNIM operations in Mali: the two groups claimed involvement in the March 2017 attack on a Malian military base in Boulikessi that killed eleven Malian soldiers.⁹³ Ansarul Islam has also been ascribed responsibility for a number of IED and conventional attacks in Mali, such as one that killed a French soldier in April 2017.⁹⁴ The group has demonstrated its ability to grow as Sahelian states have been increasingly destabilized by Islamist violence. While many of its attacks occur in Burkina Faso, in October 2019 suspected Ansarul Islam fighters carried out a sophisticated attack on

two Malian military outposts, killing at least 25 soldiers.⁹⁵

The Islamic State Greater Sahara (ISGS)

After the loss of core territory and power in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State has broadened its territorial scope and interests to the Sahel region of North Africa.⁹⁶ The creation of an IS affiliate in the Sahel has been attributed to *jihadi* leader Adnan Abu Walid al Sahrawi, who was formerly affiliated with MUJAO and al-Mourabitoun.⁹⁷ While Sahrawi left al Qaeda and pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in May 2015, the depth of the connection remains obscure. Nevertheless, the Islamic State's official media channels acknowledged the group's *bayat* in 2016. In mid-2019, Islamic State incorporated its Sahelian affiliate into Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).⁹⁸

ISGS has demonstrated a high operational tempo since its founding in 2015, conducting a number of sophisticated attacks in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.⁹⁹ In October 2017, ISGS killed four U.S. Special Forces soldiers, as well as four Nigerien soldiers. The attack occurred in Tongo Tongo, near Niger's border with Mali.¹⁰⁰ As a result of this attack, ISGS and al-Sahrawi received a terrorist designation from the U.S. State Department in May 2018.¹⁰¹ ISGS has come under increasing pressure by security forces, particularly through the French Operation Barkhane. This pressure possibly facilitated the surrender of veteran *jihadist* Sultan Ould Bady to Algerian authorities in August 2018 and led to the capture of senior ISGS commander Mohamed Mrabat by French forces in May 2020.¹⁰²

ISGS' core strength has been estimated at around 200 to 300 fighters, but it is believed that it can call upon or hire upward of 1,000.¹⁰³ The group has risen to become the primary enemy of French forces and its Sahelian allies operating in the region. In a period of less than two months in late 2019, for instance, ISGS attacks killed over 300 people across the Sahel.¹⁰⁴

Despite controversy between Belmokhtar and al Sahrawi after ISGS' split from Al-Mourabitoun, the Islamic State and al Qaeda-affiliated groups refrained from open hostilities from 2015 until 2020.¹⁰⁵ While there are likely many facets to the conflict, Al Naba, Islamic State's central news agency, has accused JNIM of initiating hostilities and betraying the Islamist cause by speaking to the Malian government.¹⁰⁶ The fighting remains inconclusive as of mid-2020, but JNIM maintains a larger force, which may blunt the rising power of ISGS in Mali and the Sahel, but the latter will likely remain a major threat.

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Mali has a significant Muslim majority, with nearly 94 percent of the population adhering to the Islamic faith as of 2018.¹⁰⁷ While the northern and central regions have experienced a significant uptick in radical Islamist activity, it is not clear that this reflects the broader sentiments of the Malian people. Islamists, their radical teachings, and their harsh imposition of justice have reportedly not been embraced by northerners, many of whom have fled into refugee camps in neighboring Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Niger.¹⁰⁸ One reason may lie in the practice of Malian Islam, which is not typical of other Islamic nations. Malian religious practices incorporate animist traditions from the region, including "absorbing mystical elements [and] ancestor veneration."¹⁰⁹ Mali's lengthy history figures prominently in the country's contemporary culture; Malians "regularly invoke Muslim rulers of various pre-colonial states and empires and past Muslim clerics, saints, and miracle-workers from the distant and more recent colonial and post-colonial past."¹¹⁰ Islam and animism, in other words, have coexisted in Mali for centuries, which is counter to many Islamist's strict interpretation of the religion.¹¹¹

Since Islamists took over the north, several French MPs have received reports that Qatar was financing the MNLA, Ansar Dine, and MUJAO.¹¹² Iran has also attempted to peddle influence in Mali.¹¹³ Malian officials, however, have disparaged such efforts. Before his ouster, President Touré commented that: "Mali is a very old Islamic country where tolerance is part of our tradition."¹¹⁴

When Islamists were in control of the north, they sought to impose their beliefs on the region and purge any dissonant practices. There have been several instances of Islamist militants destroying shrines and mausoleums in the north, particularly in Timbuktu, claiming that the veneration of Sufi saints and scholars was sacrilegious. Sixteen of the mausoleums destroyed as part of this effort were listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.¹¹⁵ The destruction of these historic shrines was recently ruled a war crime by the International Criminal Court, which sentenced one fighter involved, Ahmad al-Mahdi, to nine years in prison for his participation.¹¹⁶

While people in the north initially welcomed French intervention, frustrations have grown as the French and UN peacekeepers struggle to effectively provide security. There has also been discontent regarding certain provisions of the 2015 Algiers Accord. In July 2016, three people were killed and dozens wounded when the Malian military opened fire on protestors demonstrating against the nomination of former militants to government positions, as specified by the Algiers Accord.¹¹⁷

Young people between the ages of 18 and 35 form the largest number of recruits for armed non-state actors in Mali.¹¹⁸ Over 19 million people live in Mali, and nearly 70 percent of the population is under the age of 24.¹¹⁹ A potential draw to militant groups for young people is a “governance vacuum,” in which most rural communities feel ignored or abandoned by their government while militant groups are seen as potentially better sources of protection.¹²⁰ Islamist recruitment, in turn, is bolstered by increasing insecurity in the northern and central regions of the country, as well as abuses by security forces. As of mid-2020, the UNHCR estimated that 141,000 Malian refugees have been forced to flee the country, while an additional 250,998 were classified as Internally Displaced Persons.¹²¹

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Religion in Mali “is understood as private and confessional.”¹²² The Malian constitution, adopted in 1992, mandates a secular state. However, the 1990s saw a dramatic increase in the number of Islamic associations throughout the country, each with varying motivations and religious interpretations.¹²³ The government formed the High Islamic Council (Haut Conseil Islamique) in 2002.¹²⁴ While religious political parties are banned under the constitution, Mali’s government supports the High Islamic Council as an “official and unique interlocutor of political authorities for all questions relative to the practice of Islam.”¹²⁵

The Bush administration began the Pan Sahel Initiative in October 2002 to train African security forces in counterterrorism.¹²⁶ In June 2005, the program expanded to include more countries from the region, becoming the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP).¹²⁷ The Partnership’s Operation Flintlock provides anti-insurgency training to the armies of the seven participating states, which includes Mali.¹²⁸ Operation Flintlock has been reprised on several occasions, most recently in February 2020.¹²⁹ However, a shift in U.S. military priorities and increasing concerns over abuses by security forces active in the region may jeopardize future aid.¹³⁰ In 2020, the U.S. appointed a new special envoy for the Sahel to address the aggressive expansion of extremist Islamist groups in the region.¹³¹

Mali and its neighbors have made efforts to coordinate their counterterrorism activities. Algeria held a conference in March 2010 inviting leaders from some West African countries to build a joint counter-jihad security plan.¹³² Subsequently, Algeria, Mauritania, Niger, and Mali established a joint military base in Tamanrasset, southern Algeria.¹³³ In 2014, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger founded the Group of Five (G5) Sahel, a regional institution aimed at coordinating development and security policies. The joint force for the G5 Sahel (FC-G5S) was formed in 2017, with the objective of countering regional Islamist militant activities. However, while the FC-G5S has secured a modicum of international financial support in the interim, it is relatively new and unproven in the fight against Islamists in the Sahel region.¹³⁴

From March 27 to April 2, 2017, Mali held a Conference of National Understanding, as part of the requirements of the 2015 peace agreement. The conference participants recommended that the Malian

government should open negotiations with *jihadists*. The Malian government initially indicated interest, but its French allies were not as enthusiastic.¹³⁵ Nothing conclusive has emerged from initial contact with *jihadist* groups but the desire of Malians to negotiate have been expressed by Mahmoud Dicko, who represents the large body protestors who have called for the government's removal.¹³⁶

Under Operation Barkhane, France has continued its regional counterterrorism operations and support. The over 5,000-member force has had successes in the killing of AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel and the capture of senior ISGS commander Mohamed Mrabat. MINUSMA, the UN mission to Mali, renewed its mandate for another year in June 2020, maintaining over 15,000 military and police personnel in Mali.¹³⁷

Overall, the government response to Islamist groups has focused heavily on security solutions and building policing capacity. This has catalyzed two problems. The heavy-handed practices of Malian security forces have exacerbated local grievances, risking increasing support for Islamist groups. This has already happened with Mali's Fulani populations, and groups like the FLM have found success recruiting among young Fulani people aggrieved by abuses.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, these abuses continue.¹³⁹

Second, Mali's focus on security solutions has come at the expense of addressing local social and economic issues in the north. Unfortunately, despite a close relationship between the Malian government and its international partners, President Keita's tenure has been hampered by allegations of corruption and his administration's inability to solve the security crisis, which has boiled over into popular protest.¹⁴⁰ As increasing unrest wracks Mali's capital and southern regions, Islamist groups expand their reach and carry out attacks in the country's north and south. Without improving trust in state institutions, service delivery mechanisms, and accountability, it will be difficult for the Malian government to effectively protect against the allure of Islamist groups, which will continue to capitalize on local crises and insecurity.¹⁴¹

ENDNOTES

1. Ibrahim Yahaya Ibrahim and Mollie Zapata, "Regions at Risk: Preventing Mass Atrocities in Mali," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, April 2018, https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Mali_Report_English_FINAL_April_2018.pdf; "Mali Villagers Killed in Armed Raid in Mopti Region," BBC, January 1, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46732703>.
2. Angela Dewan, "Mali suicide bombing: Al Qaeda-linked group claims responsibility," *CNN*, January 19, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/01/19/africa/mali-military-bombing/index.html>; "Mali: Ten UN peacekeepers killed in 'jihadist' attack," *BBC*, January 20, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46941711>; "Militants kill 54 in attack on Mali army post; IS claims responsibility," Reuters, November 1, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-security/militants-kill-54-in-attack-on-mali-army-post-is-claims-responsibility-idUSKB-N1XB4W7>; "Mali army loses 24 soldiers in Niger border attack," *BBC*, November 19, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50466025>; "At least 20 Mali soldiers killed in JNIM attack on Sokolo camp," *The Defense Post*, January 27, 2020, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/01/27/mali-soldiers-killed-jnim-sokolo-segou/>; Baba Ahmed, "25 soldiers killed in attack in Mali's north, army says," Associated Press, April 7, 2020, <https://apnews.com/ab5e933f95c2ce435469c81e504b23be>; "24 Malian soldiers killed in ambush near Mauritania border," Associated Press, June 15, 2020, <https://apnews.com/ba3e87fb3fa8e257c82555f-01807c6ce>.
3. Rukmini Callimachi, "ISIS Affiliate Claims October Attack on U.S. Troops in Niger," *New York Times*, January 13, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/13/world/africa/niger-isis-green-berets-attack.html>.
4. "Mali: Deaths, Torture in Army Detention," Human Rights Watch, April 9, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/09/mali-deaths-torture-army-detention>.
5. "Mali's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Discuss Security Sector Reform," Atlan-

- tic Council, March 27, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/events/past-events/mali-s-prime-minister-and-foreign-minister-discuss-security-sector>.
6. “Insider Insight: Explaining the Mali Massacre,” *African Arguments*, March 26, 2019, <https://africanarguments.org/2019/03/26/insiders-insight-explaining-the-mali-massacre/>; “Mali Government Resigns After Massacre,” *Voice of America*, April 18, 2019, https://www.voanews.com/a/mali-government-resigns-after-massacre/4882666.html?utm_source=Media+Review+for+April+19%2C+2019&utm_campaign=Media+Review+for+April+19%2C+2019&utm_medium=email.
 7. J. Peter Pham, “After Mali’s Runoff, Challenges Remain,” *AfricaSource*, August 13, 2018, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/after-mali-s-runoff-challenges-remain>.
 8. Aïssatou Diallo, “Mahmoud Dicko: ‘The dialogue with the jihadists must hold,’” *The Africa Report*, March 24, 2020, <https://www.theafricareport.com/24932/mahmoud-dicko-the-dialogue-with-the-jihadists-must-hold/>.
 9. “Freedom in the World 2018: Mali Profile,” Freedom House, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/mali>; Clair MacDougall, “Keïta Gets 2nd Term as Mali President with Runoff Victory,” *New York Times*, August 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/16/world/africa/keita-mali-election.html>.
 10. Diallo, “Mahmoud Dicko: ‘The dialogue with the jihadists must hold.’”
 11. “Mali’s President Keïta dissolves constitutional court amid unrest,” *BBC*, July 12, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53378433>; Paul Melly, “Mahmoud Dicko: Mali imam challenges President Keïta,” *BBC*, June 28, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53176083>.
 12. Xan Rice, “Mali Steps Up Battle Against Tuareg Revolt,” *Financial Times*, February 19, 2012, <https://www.ft.com/content/056fc1e8-5ae4-11e1-a2b3-00144feabdc0#axzz1n4Z-8DUN6>.
 13. Adam Nossiter, “Soldiers Overthrow Mali Government in Setback for Democracy in Africa,” *New York Times*, March 22, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/23/world/africa/mali-coup-france-calls-for-elections.html>.
 14. Neal Conan and Ofeibe Quist-Arcton, “Turmoil in Mali Deepens After Military Coup,” *National Public Radio*, April 5, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2012/04/05/150072681/a-military-coup-creates-political-crisis-in-mali>.
 15. “Mali Rebels Announce Ceasefire,” *ABC News*, April 6, 2012, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-04-06/mali-rebels-announce-ceasefire/3936824>.
 16. “Mali Tuareg and Islamist Rebels Agree on Islamist State,” *BBC*, May 27, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-18224004?print=true>.
 17. “Mali: Islamists Seize Gao from Tuareg Rebels,” *BBC*, June 27, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-18610618>.
 18. Monica Mark, “Mali Rebel Groups Agree Ceasefire,” *Guardian* (London), December 5, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/05/malian-rebel-groups-agree-ceasefire>.
 19. “Mali Islamist Group ‘Suspends’ Ceasefire,” *VOA News*, January 4, 2013, <https://www.voanews.com/a/mali-islamist-group-suspends-ceasefire/1577693.html>.
 20. Afua Hirsch, “French Troops Arrive in Mali to Stem Rebel Advance,” *Guardian* (London), January 11, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jan/11/france-intervene-mali-conflict>.
 21. Ibid.; Christopher Isiguzo and Damilola Oyedele, “Nigeria: Air Force Sends War Planes to Mali Thursday,” *ThisDay*, January 17, 2013, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201301170615.html>.
 22. David Lewis, “In Mali Town, Counter-Insurgency Task Ties Down French,” *Reuters*, February 14, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-rebels-gao/in-mali-town-counter-insurgency-task-ties-down-french-idUSBRE91D1EV20130214?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews>.
 23. Fergus Kelly, “Barkhane: France to deploy 220 experienced troops ‘accustomed to operating in the Sahel,’” *The Defense Post*, January 17, 2020, <https://www.thedefensepost>.

- [com/2020/01/17/france-220-troops-sahel-barkhane/](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/malian-rivals-sign-peace-deal-150620173301883.html).
24. “Malian rivals sign peace deal,” *Al Jazeera* (Doha), June 21, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/malian-rivals-sign-peace-deal-150620173301883.html>.
 25. “Briefing by the Former Executive President of the Coordination of Azawad Movements,” Atlantic Council, January 11, 2018, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/events/past-events/briefing-by-the-former-executive-president-of-the-coordination-of-azawad-movements>.
 26. Seth G. Jones et. al., “The Evolution of the Salafi-Jihadist Threat: Current and Future Challenges from the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, and Other Groups,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2018, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/181221_EvolvingTerroristThreat.pdf.
 27. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, “State Department Terrorist Designation of Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM),” September 5, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/09/285705.htm>.
 28. “‘Lion of the Desert’: Ex-Partner of Germany Leads Malian Islamists,” *Der Spiegel* (Hamburg), January 13, 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/leader-of-malian-islamists-once-helped-german-government-a-878724.html>.
 29. “Ansar Dine Destroy More Shrines in Mali,” *Al Jazeera* (Doha), July 10, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/07/201271012301347496.html>.
 30. Michael Lambert and Jason Warner, “Who is Ansar Dine?” *CNN*, August 14, 2012, <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/08/14/who-are-ansar-dine/>.
 31. Adam Nossiter, “Burkina Faso Official Goes to Islamist-Held Northern Mali in Effort to Avert War,” *New York Times*, August 7, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/08/world/africa/burkina-faso-official-visits-mali-in-effort-to-avert-war.html>.
 32. Conor Gaffey, “Who is Iyad Ag Ghaly, Mali’s Veteran Jihadi?” *Newsweek*, June 29, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/who-iyad-ag-ghaly-malis-veteran-jihadi-475473>.
 33. Idriss Fall, “Mali: Insurgent Group Accepts Cease-fire but With Conditions,” *Voice of America*, October 31, 2016, <http://www.voanews.com/a/mali-insurgent-group-ansar-dine-accepts-cease-fire/3573301.html>.
 34. “Mali Islamists Still Waging War, Dismiss Ceasefire Report,” *Voice of America*, November 2, 2016, <http://www.voanews.com/a/mali-dicko-ansar-dine/3576634.html>.
 35. “Backgrounder: Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM),” Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 25, 2018, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/180927_JNIM_Backgrounder.pdf?CXpU5VJRYdLDg819YAoD_NA0WgloBybV.
 36. Pauline Le Roux, “Confronting Central Mali’s Extremist Threat,” Africa Center for Strategic Studies, February 22, 2019, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/confronting-central-malis-extremist-threat/>; Fergus Kelly, “Mali: UN Peacekeeper Injured in Attack on Kidal MINUSMA Base,” *The Defense Post*, April 4, 2019.
 37. Nossiter, “Burkina Faso Official Goes to Islamist-Held Northern Mali in Effort to Avert War.”
 38. “Some Things We May Think About MUJWA,” *The Moor Next Door*, May 30, 2012, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20120718_Report%20on%20Northern%20Mali.pdf.
 39. Andrew McGregor, “Islamist Groups Mount Joint Offensive in Mali,” *Jamestown Foundation Militant Leadership Monitor* XI, iss. 1, January 10, 2013, https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/TM_01_Issue01_01.pdf.
 40. Sanders and Moseley, “A Political, Security and Humanitarian Crisis: Northern Mali.”
 41. “‘Dozens killed’ in Northern Mali Fighting,” *Al Jazeera* (Doha), June 28, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/06/201262891738152474.html>.
 42. Nossiter, “Burkina Faso Official Goes to Islamist-Held Northern Mali in Effort to Avert War.”
 43. “Some Things We May Think About MUJWA,” *The Moor Next Door*.
 44. Serge Daniel, “North Mali Residents Ready to Resist Islamist Groups,” *American Free Press*, August 14, 2012, <https://www.egyptindependent.com/north-mali-residents-ready-resist-islamist-groups/>.

45. Bill Roggio, "Al Qaeda Group Led by Belmokhtar, MUJAO Unite to Form Al-Murabitoun," *Long War Journal*, August 22, 2013, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/08/al_qaeda_groups_lead_by_belmok.php.
46. Ibid.
47. Government of Australia, "Australian National Security: Al-Murabitun," November 5, 2014, <https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Listedterroristorganisations/Pages/Al-Murabitun.aspx>.
48. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013*, April 2014, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/225886.pdf>.
49. Thomas Joscelyn, "Confusion Surrounds West African Jihadists' Loyalty to Islamic State," *Long War Journal*, May 17, 2015, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/05/confusion-surrounds-west-african-jihadists-loyalty-to-islamic-state.php>.
50. "Sahara Islamist Leader Belmokhtar Dismisses Islamic State Pledge: Report," Reuters, May 17, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sahara-militants/sahara-islamist-leader-belmokhtar-dismisses-islamic-state-pledge-report-idUSKBN0020R020150517>.
51. Thomas Joscelyn and Caleb Weiss, "Islamic State Recognizes Oath of Allegiance from Jihadists in Mali," *Long War Journal*, October 31, 2016, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/10/islamic-state-recognizes-oath-of-allegiance-from-jihadists-in-west-africa.php>.
52. Conor Gaffey, "Niger Repels Attack on Prison Holding Jihadis from Mali and Nigeria," *Newsweek*, October 17, 2016, <https://www.newsweek.com/niger-repels-attack-prison-holding-jihadis-mali-and-nigeria-510618>.
53. "Mali Extremists Join with Al-Qaeda-linked North Africa Group," Associated Press, December 4, 2015, <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/mali-extremists-join-al-qaida-linked-north-af-rica-group>.
54. "Backgrounder: Jama't Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin," Center for Strategic and International Studies.
55. Angela Dewan, "Mali suicide bombing."
56. "Mali Hotel Siege: Several Killed in Severe, Four UN Workers Saved," *BBC*, August 9, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33833363>; "Al-Qaeda-Linked Group Claims Mali Restaurant Attack," *Al Jazeera* (Doha), March 9, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/03/al-qaeda-linked-group-claims-mali-restaurant-attack-150309072613760.html>; "Two Arrested in Connection with Bamako Hotel Attack," *Guardian* (London), November 27, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/27/two-arrested-in-connection-with-bamako-hotel-attack>.
57. Michael Shurkin, "How to Defeat a New Boko Haram In Mali," *Newsweek*, September 7, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/how-defeat-new-boko-haram-mali-369430>.
58. "Mali Islamists Armed Group Push Fighting Beyond Conflict-hit North," *Telegraph* (London), September 23, 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/mali/11884570/Mali-Islamists-armed-group-push-fighting-beyond-conflict-hit-north.html>; Yvan Guichau and Dougoukolo Alpha Oumar Ba-Konaré, "Central Mali Gripped by a Dangerous Brew of Jihad, Revolt and Self-Defence," *The Conversation*, November 13, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/central-mali-gripped-by-a-dangerous-brew-of-jihad-revolt-and-self-defence-67668>.
59. "'I Have Lost Everything': In Central Mali, Rising Extremism Stirs Inter-communal Conflict," IRIN News, September 4, 2018, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2018/09/04/mali-fulani-dogon-extremism-stirs-intercommunal>.
60. Rida Lyammouri, "Attack Highlights Poor Resources of Malian Army and Underscores Collaboration between Islamist Militants," IHS Jane's *Terrorism and Insurgency Monitor* 16, iss. 8, September 2016.
61. "Mali: Une Seconde Revendication de L'attaque de L'hôtel Radisson," *Radio France Internationale Afrique*, November 23, 2015, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20151123-mali-revendication-attaque-hotel-radisson-front-liberation-macina-bamako>; Lyammouri, "Attack Highlights Poor Resources of Malian Army and Underscores Collaboration between Islamist Militants."

62. Sperber, "What Can Save Mali?"
63. "'Dead' Mali Jihadist Amadou Koufa Reappears in Video," *BBC*, March 2, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47428246>.
64. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "State Department Terrorist Designation of Amadou Kouffa," November 17, 2019.
65. Katherine Zimmerman, "Salafi-Jihadi Ecosystem in the Sahel," AEI Critical Threats Project, April 2020, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Salafi-Jihadi-Ecosystem-in-the-Sahel.pdf>
66. William B. Farrell and Carla M. Komich, "USAID/DCHA/CMM Assessment: Northern Mali," Management Systems International, June 17, 2004.
67. J. Peter Pham, "The Dangerous 'Pragmatism' of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Journal of Middle East and Africa* no. 2, 2011, 15-29.
68. Stephen Harmon, "From GSPC to AQIM: The Evolution of an Algerian Islamist Terrorist Group into an Al-Qa'ida Affiliate and its Implications for the Sahara-Sahel Region," *Concerned African Scholars Bulletin* no. 85, Spring 2010, 17, <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/bulletin85harmon.pdf>; Raffi Khatchadourian, "Pursuing Terrorists in the Great Desert," *The Village Voice*, January 12, 2006, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2006-01-17/news/pursuing-terrorists-in-the-great-desert/>.
69. Michael Petrou, "Al-Qaeda in North Africa," *Maclean's*, May 11, 2009.
70. Caleb Weiss, "Al Qaeda maintains operational tempo in West Africa in 2017," *Long War Journal*, January 5, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/01/al-qaeda-maintains-operational-tempo-in-west-africa-in-2017.php>.
71. Caleb Weiss, "Al Qaeda linked to more than 250 West African attacks in 2016," *Long War Journal*, January 8, 2017, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/01/over-250-al-qaeda-linked-attacks-in-west-africa-in-2016.php>.
72. "Al-Qaida claims deadly attack on French, UN forces in Mali," Associated Press, April 20, 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/al-qaida-claims-deadly-attack-on-french-un-forces-in-mali>.
73. "Africa's Active Militant Groups," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, January 2020, <https://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Threat-from-African-Militant-Islamist-Groups-Expanding-Diversifying-printable.pdf>.
74. "Mali: Ten UN peacekeepers killed in 'jihadist' attack," *BBC*, January 20, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46941711>.
75. Anwar Boukhars, "How West Africa Became Fertile Ground for AQIM and ISIS," *World Politics Review*, November 29, 2016, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/20556/how-west-africa-became-fertile-ground-for-aqim-and-isis>.
76. Peter Tinti, "Al-Qaida and ISIS Turn On Each Other in the Sahel, With Civilians in the Crossfire," *World Politics Review*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28838/al-qaida-isis-turn-on-each-other-in-the-sahel-with-civilians-in-the-crossfire>.
77. Sergei Boeke, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Terrorism, Insurgency, or Organized Crime?" *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 5, 2016, 914-936, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09592318.2016.1208280>.
78. Caleb Weiss, "AQIM confirms leader's death," *Long War Journal*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/06/aqim-confirms-leaders-death.php>.
79. "Backgrounder: JNIM," Center for Strategic and International Studies.
80. U.S. State Department, "State Department Terrorist Designation of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin."
81. "Backgrounder: Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM)," Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 25, 2018, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/180927_JNIM_Backgrounder.pdf?CXpU5VJRYdLDg819YAoD_NA0WgloBybV; Jacob Zenn, "Negotiating With Jihadists in the Sahel and Nigeria," *Lawfare*, June 14, 2020, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/negotiating-jihadists-sahel-and-nigeria>.

82. Caleb Weiss, “JNIM Confirms Death of Co-founder, Senior Leaders in French Raids,” *Long War Journal*, March 4, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/03/jnim-confirms-deaths-of-co-founder-senior-leaders-in-french-raids.php>; Caleb Weiss, “AQIM Emir Confirms Death of Jihadist Commander in Mali,” *Long War Journal*, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/12/aqim-emir-confirms-death-of-jihadist-commander-in-mali.php>.
83. Caleb Weiss, “Al Qaeda’s JNIM Claims Suicide Assault in Timbuktu,” *Long War Journal*, April 20, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/04/al-qaedas-jnim-claims-suicide-assault-in-timbuktu.php>.
84. Rida Lyammouri, “Mali – Sahel: June 2017 Violent Incidents Related to As-Qaeda Affiliate JNIM, Ansaroul islam, and Other Security Incidents,” *Sahel Memo*, August 2, 2017, <http://www.sahelmemo.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/June-2017-Monthly-Tracker-Mali-Sahel.pdf>
85. Caleb Weiss, “JNIM targets military bases in central Mali,” *Long War Journal*, January 27, 2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/01/jnim-targets-military-bases-in-central-mali.php>; “Mali: JNIM claims responsibility for April 6 attack in Bamba (Gao region),” *GardaWorld*, April 11, 2020, <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/331511/mali-jnim-claims-responsibility-for-april-6-attack-in-bamba-gao-region-update-1>; Caleb Weiss, “JNIM kills dozens in Mali base attack,” *Long War Journal*, March 22, 2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/03/jnim-kills-dozens-in-mali-base-attack.php>.
86. Tiemoko Diallo, “Mali says 24 soldiers killed in ambush on Sunday,” Reuters, June 15, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-security/mali-says-24-soldiers-killed-in-ambush-on-sunday-idUSKBN23M200>.
87. “Mali’s president admits to holding talks with senior jihadist leaders,” *France24*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200210-exclusive-mali-s-president-acknowledges-dialogue-with-jihadist-leaders>; Thomas Joscelyn, “Al Qaeda’s West African branch seeks French withdrawal, then negotiations,” *Long War Journal*, March 10, 2020, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2020/03/al-qaedas-west-african-branch-seeks-french-withdrawal-then-negotiations.php>.
88. Peter Tinti, “Al-Qaida and ISIS Turn On Each Other in the Sahel, With Civilians in the Crossfire,” *World Politics Review*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28838/al-qaida-isis-turn-on-each-other-in-the-sahel-with-civilians-in-the-crossfire>.
89. Héni Nsaibia and Caleb Weiss, “Ansaroul Islam and the Growing Terrorist Insurgency in Burkina Faso,” *Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point CTC Sentinel* no. 11, March 2018, 3, <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/03/CTC-Sentinel-Vol11Iss3.pdf>.
90. Morgane Le Cam, “Burkina Faso : confessions d’un ancien djihadiste,” *Le Monde*, December 10, 2017, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/12/10/confessions-d-un-djihadiste-du-burkina-vu-ce-que-font-les-forces-de-securite-a-nos-parents-je-ne-regretterai-jamais-leur-mort_5227587_3212.html; “Mali-Burkina Faso : Une vaste operation de ratissage de soldats français, Burkinabès et Maliens est en cours dans la province de Soum,” *Nord Sud Journal*, April 4, 2017, <https://www.nordsudjournal.com/mali-burkina-faso-une-vaste-operation-de-ratissage-de-soldats-francais-burkinabes-et-maliens-est-en-cours-dans-la-province-de-soum/>.
91. Nsaiba and Weiss, “Ansaroul Islam”; Morgane Le Cam, “Comment est né Ansaroul Islam, premier groupe djihadiste de l’Histoire du Burkina Faso,” *Le Monde Afrique*, April 11, 2017, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/04/11/comment-est-ne-ansaroul-islam-premier-groupe-djihadiste-de-l-histoire-du-burkina-faso_5109520_3212.html.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibidem; “Critical Threats Today: March 13, 2017,” *Critical Threats*, March 12, 2017, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/critical-threats-today/critical-threats-today-march-13-2017>; “Soldiers Killed in Mali Attack as Violence Surges,” *Al Jazeera* (Doha), March 6, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/03/soldiers-killed-mali-attack-violence-surges-170306043203675.html>.
94. Nsaiba and Weiss, “Ansaroul Islam.”

95. “At least 25 killed in Mali militant attack,” *BBC*, October 2, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49904226>.
96. Kersten Knipp, “‘Islamic State’ seeks new foothold in Africa,” *Deutsche Welle*, January 2, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/islamic-state-seeks-new-foothold-in-africa/a-41977922>.
97. “Islamic State affiliate claims deadly attack on U.S. troops in Niger,” Reuters, January 13, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-niger-security/islamic-state-affiliate-claims-deadly-attack-on-u-s-troops-in-niger-idUSKBN1F20L3>.
98. “Islamic State replaces al-Qaeda as Enemy No. 1 in Sahel,” *France24*, January 15, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200115-islamic-state-replaces-al-qaeda-as-enemy-no-1-in-sahel>.
99. “Militant Islamic Group Activity in the Sahel Rises,” Africa Center for Strategic Studies, October 29, 2018, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/militant-islamist-group-activity-sahel-rises/>.
100. Callimachi, “ISIS Affiliate Claims October Attack on U.S. Troops in Niger.”
101. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, “State Department Designations of ISIS in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS) and Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi,” May 16, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/05/282168.htm>.
102. Caleb Weiss, “Veteran Jihadist Surrenders to Algeria,” *Long War Journal*, August 12, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/08/veteran-malian-jihadist-surrenders-to-algeria.php>; “Al-Qaeda chief in north Africa Abdelmalek Droukdel killed – France,” *BBC*, June 5, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52943692>.
103. Jacob Zenn, “Negotiating With Jihadists in the Sahel and Nigeria,” *Lawfare*, June 14, 2020, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/negotiating-jihadists-sahel-and-nigeria>; “Islamic State replaces al-Qaeda as Enemy No. 1 in Sahel,” *France24*, January 15, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200115-islamic-state-replaces-al-qaeda-as-enemy-no-1-in-sahel>.
104. “Militants kills 54 in attack on Mali army post; IS claims responsibility,” Reuters, November 1, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-security/militants-kill-54-in-attack-on-mali-army-post-is-claims-responsibility-idUSKBN1XB4W7>.
105. Peter Tinti, “Al-Qaida and ISIS Turn On Each Other in the Sahel, With Civilians in the Crossfire,” *World Politics Review*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28838/al-qaida-isis-turn-on-each-other-in-the-sahel-with-civilians-in-the-crossfire>.
106. Mina Al-Lami. “Africa’s Sahel becomes latest al-Qaeda-IS battleground,” *BBC*, May 11, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52614579>.
107. “Mali,” *CIA World Factbook*, January 2020, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html>.
108. Kate Thomas, “In Limbo: Malian Refugees in Burkina Faso,” *Refugees Deeply*, April 20, 2016, <https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/community/2016/04/20/in-limbo-malian-refugees-in-burkina-faso>.
109. Lisa Anderson, “Democracy, Islam share a home in Mali,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 15, 2004, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2004-12-15/news/0412150328_1_mali-islamic-cinq.
110. Soares, “Islam in Mali in the Neoliberal Era,” 212.
111. Robert Pringle, “Democratization in Mali: Putting History To Work,” United States Institute of Peace *Peaceworks* no. 58, October 2006, 27, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2006/10/democratization-mali-putting-history-work>.
112. Ségolène Allemandou, “Is Qatar Fuelling the Crisis in North Mali?” *France 24*, January 23, 2013, <http://www.france24.com/en/20130121-qatar-mali-france-ansar-dine-mnla-al-qaeda-sunni-islam-doha>.
113. Willy Stern, “Moderate Islam, African-Style,” *Weekly Standard*, August 4, 2008, <https://www.weeklystandard.com/willy-stern/moderate-islam-african-style>.
114. Anderson, “Democracy, Islam Share a Home in Mali.”
115. Joshua Hammer, “The Race to Save Mali’s Priceless Artifacts,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, January 2014, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/Race-Save-Mali-Artifacts-180947965/>.
116. “ICC: Mali Fighter Jailed for Destroying Timbuktu Sites,” *Al Jazeera* (Doha), September 27,

- 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/09/icc-mali-fighter-jailed-destroying-timbuk-tu-sites-160927093507739.html>.
117. Kamissa Camara, “Violent Protests Have Erupted in Mali. Here’s What is Driving Them,” *Washington Post*, August 15, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/08/15/whats-the-role-for-malis-youth-after-the-2015-peace-accord-not-enough-protesters-say/>.
 118. Anthony Morland, “Why Some Malians Join Armed Groups,” *IRIN News*, January 25, 2018, <http://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2018/01/25/why-some-malians-join-armed-groups>.
 119. “Mali,” *CIA World Factbook*, May 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/Publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html>.
 120. Morland, “Why Some Malians Join Armed Groups.”
 121. “Sahel Crisis,” *R4Sahel*, June 30, 2020, <https://r4sahel.info/en/situations/sahelcrisis>; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Mali” December 31, 2019, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/mali>.
 122. Soares, “Islam in Mali in the Neoliberal Era,” 214.
 123. Nicolas Colombant, “Mali’s Muslims Steer Back to Spiritual Roots,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 26, 2002, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0226/p08s02-woaf.html>.
 124. Colombant, “Mali’s Muslims Steer Back to Spiritual Roots.”
 125. Soares, “Islam in Mali in the Neoliberal Era,” 215.
 126. Harmon, “From GSPC to AQIM,” 22.
 127. *Ibid.*, 23.
 128. *Ibidem*.
 129. Emanuelle Landais, “US led Flintlock counter-terrorism exercises end in Senegal,” *Deutsche Welle*, February 29, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/us-led-flintlock-counter-terrorism-exercises-end-in-senegal/a-19083235>; U.S. Africa Command, “Press Release: Flintlock 2019 Announced,” January 28, 2019, <https://www.africom.mil/media-room/pressrelease/31465/flintlock-2019-announced>.
 130. Lara Seligan and Robbie Gramer, “U.S. Officials Worry Looming Military Cuts in Africa Are ‘About Politics’” *Foreign Policy*, January 28, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/28/us-officials-worry-military-cuts-africa-political-sahel/>; “U.S. warns aid at risk unless alleged abuses in West Africa’s Sahel region addressed,” Reuters, July 9, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sahel-security-usa/us-warns-aid-at-risk-unless-alleged-abuses-in-west-africas-sahel-region-addressed-idUSKBN24A223>.
 131. Humeyra Pamuk, “U.S. creates new envoy position to counter rising terrorism in Sahel,” Reuters, March 6, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-sahel/u-s-creates-new-envoy-position-to-counter-rising-terrorism-in-sahel-idUSKBN20T2ZJ>.
 132. “Al-Qaida Digs in to Resist Region’s Armies,” United Press International, July 6, 2010, <https://www.upi.com/Al-Qaida-digs-in-to-resist-regions-armies/14121278441085/>.
 133. “Brief: Saharan Countries’ Cooperation Against AQIM,” *Stratfor*, April 21, 2010, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/brief-saharan-countries-cooperation-against-aqim>.
 134. Matthieu Fernandez, “Looking for Unity in the Sahel,” *AfricaSource*, December 10, 2018, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/looking-for-unity-in-the-sahel>.
 135. Alex Thurston, “Speaking with Jihadists: Mali Weighs Its Options,” *The Global Observatory*, May 25, 2017, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/05/jihadism-mali-al-qaeda-france-keita/>.
 136. Paul Melly, “Mahmoud Dicko: Mali imam challenges President Keita,” *BBC*, June 28, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53176083>.
 137. “UN renews Mali peacekeeping force MINUSMA without personnel cuts,” *Al-Jazeera* (Doha), June 29, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/renews-mali-peacekeeping-force-minusma-personnel-cuts-200629202039321.html>.
 138. Boukhars, “How West Africa Became Fertile Ground for AQIM and ISIS.”
 139. “Mali” Deaths, Torture in Army Detention,” Human Rights Watch, April 9, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/04/09/mali-deaths-torture-army-detention>.

Mali

140. Grégory Chauzal, “A Snapshot of Mali Three Years After the 2012 Crisis,” Netherlands Institute of International Relations, June 8, 2015, <https://www.clingendael.nl/publication/snapshot-mali-three-years-after-2012-crisis>; Paul Melly, “Mahmoud Dicko: Mali imam challenges President Keïta,” *BBC*, June 28, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53176083>.
141. Boukhars, “How West Africa Became Fertile Ground for AQIM and ISIS.”