



Analysis of Violent Extremism in Mali

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I. Summary

Since 2010, there have been almost 2,500 conflict deaths in Mali, with nearly 500 directly attributed to the actions of violent extremist organizations (VEOs). In 2015, Embassy Bamako tracked approximately 100 violent incidents in Mali carried out by VEOs, including two terrorist attacks in the capital, one in the central city of Mopti, and rising insecurity along the borders with Cote d'Ivoire, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso. On November 20, 2015 gunmen stormed the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako. Twenty people were killed and 170 were taken hostage before Malian commandos stormed the hotel. Macina Liberation Front (FLM), Ansar Dine, Al-Mourabitoun and AQIM took joint responsibility for the attack, signaling a degree of unity amongst extremist groups. Other recent attacks struck MINUSMA, Malian forces, soldiers from the French *Operation Barkhane*, as well as various soft targets. IEDs and land mines continue to be responsible for the majority of attacks against UN peacekeepers. Violent extremist tactics also include rocket or mortar fire, suicide bombings, and asymmetric warfare as evidenced by hotel attacks in Bamako, Mopti and Sevare. MINUSMA noted an approximate 42 percent increase in such attacks between January and November 2015 (the most recent reporting available). Overall, notable attacks attributed to VEOs in Mali increased from 11 in 2014, to 21 in 2015. 2016 is on track to be even more violent with 15 attacks recorded in the first five months of this year. While these attacks are overwhelmingly force on force engagements, deliberate killing of civilians by VEOs in Mali has been a persistent threat, with 22% of VEO attacks directed against civilians in 2014, and 17% of VEO attacks in 2015. However, VEO killings of civilians constitute an ever greater share of overall fatalities attributed to VEOs, increasing from 13% of overall fatalities in 2014, to 29% of overall fatalities in 2015.

A number of VEOs operate in northern Mali: these include, al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Murabitoun, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), the Macina Liberation Front (FLM), and Ansar al-Dine. These VEOs operate in a space vacated by the Malian government as a result of its own inability to resolve separatist movements. Since independence, the Malian government has entered into four peace agreements, each with a different separatist organization and each poorly implemented. While the demands remain similar over the years, none of these groups fully represented the diverse northern populations, leading to dissatisfaction and the rise of other restive groups. The 2013 Ouagadougou Peace Accord remains mostly unimplemented, and rebel groups have failed to sign on to the more recent Algiers Peace Process, as northern communities become even more fractured than ever. Lack of Government influence and disunity among and within the various ethnic groups created an environment primed for both transnational criminal groups and the spread of transnational VEOs, in particular the spread of AQIM from Algeria. In the context of this persistent insecurity, the three major jihadist groups joined with MNLA to occupy the northern areas until the French intervention in 2013. Despite this significant intervention, jihadist groups in Mali continue to exercise influence and project force, as evidenced by the high profile attack on the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako in November 2015. Terrorist groups in Mali are continually changing and reorganizing, and there are significant divisions between groups. The recent AQIM and al-Murabitoun merger, and the emergence of a new (but very weak) pro-Da'esh group in northern Mali could increase the potential for terrorist group rivalry. Some attribute the

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recent AQIM and al-Murabitoun's attacks on targets frequented by Westerners to be a result of Al-Qaeda/Da'esh competition.

This analysis suggests that Mali faces a mix of both country-specific and globally-consistent risks for increasing violent extremism, and projects that Mali will experience a significant uptick in terrorist attacks in 2016. Factors currently placing Mali at risk for escalation and the potential emergence of new VEOs include a higher than average level of state sponsored violence and abuse and the lack of sustained and robust CT efforts by security forces. A weakening of the central government is one factor that would substantially increase these macro level risks. Overall, the evidence in this assessment reinforces the narrative that the core of the VE threat in Mali is not strong support or sympathy for violent extremism among local populations. Rather, the core threat is a function of the conditions which make the country attractive for VEOs from across the region. Ethnic and regional grievances, poor governance and abusive security force practices, and the resulting armed conflict by a multitude of local actors create conditions which are suitable for VEOs to exploit.

In terms of countering violent extremism, it is important to distinguish between the factors that may contribute to support for local and regional separatist movements versus those that may contribute to the support of ideological extremism and transnational terrorism.

II. Methodology and Approach

The following desk-based analysis led by the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to identify a set of factors or dynamics that are relevant to violent extremism in Mali and to help prioritize programmatic and diplomatic efforts in 2016 and 2017. To the extent feasible given available data and information, the assessment examines the following key facets of violent extremism including: i) factors driving the creation or emergence of new VEOs, or the evolution of existing "non-extremist" groups into VEOs; ii) factors driving the expansion of existing VEOs; iii) escalation of VEO activity; iv) factors that drive individuals and communities to support (for tactical, strategic, or ideological reasons) violent extremism (as a concept) or specific VEOs themselves; and v) factors related to the flow of foreign fighters. A number of analytical tools and products were used to assess the environment and generate these findings in support of the FY16 Counterterrorism Partnership Fund (CTPF) process. These include:

Risk Factors -- Trends and Projections

- An extensive review of the academic literature on violent extremism and empirical studies conducted by CSO Advanced Analytics to examine factors that consistently appeared as potential drivers of violent extremism;ⁱ
- A review of existing country-specific reports and assessments conducted by the Department of State and USAID;ⁱⁱ
- Consultations with State Department and other regional and thematic experts, academics, the National Intelligence Council (NIC), and other interagency stakeholders; Survey data on perceptions of violent extremism in a given country, where available

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Quantitative Models

- A global quantitative model developed in collaboration with the CIA's Office of Advanced Analytics specifically for the CTPF process to assess the political, sociocultural, security, and economic situations in each country of interest using aggregated data concerning terrorism and insurgency linked to extremist groups. The model takes information from thousands of time series datasets and produces an estimate of the year-to-year change in the number of terrorist attacks for each country of interest;ⁱⁱⁱ
- A statistical model developed by CSO to estimate a country's risk of having an official Da'esh province (*wilayah*) established within its borders in the next 12 months, which takes into account existing Da'esh provinces certain national characteristics^{iv}

Characteristics of Sub-national Armed Groups

- An assessment of the characteristics of subnational armed actors in Mali based on ideology and tactics to understand the landscape of VEOs and potential VEOs.

III. Characteristics of Violent Extremist Organizations in Mali

Definitions: A working definition of violent extremism (VE) is violence motivated by extremist ideology and committed or willingly supported by non-state actors to further political goals. By political goals we mean, any goals associated with a broader political or religious cause. These would be distinct from criminal goals. By extremist ideology, we mean any ideology based on a worldview which is "incompatible" with other worldviews. For example, a worldview which calls for the extermination of certain groups of people would be considered "incompatible" with other worldviews.

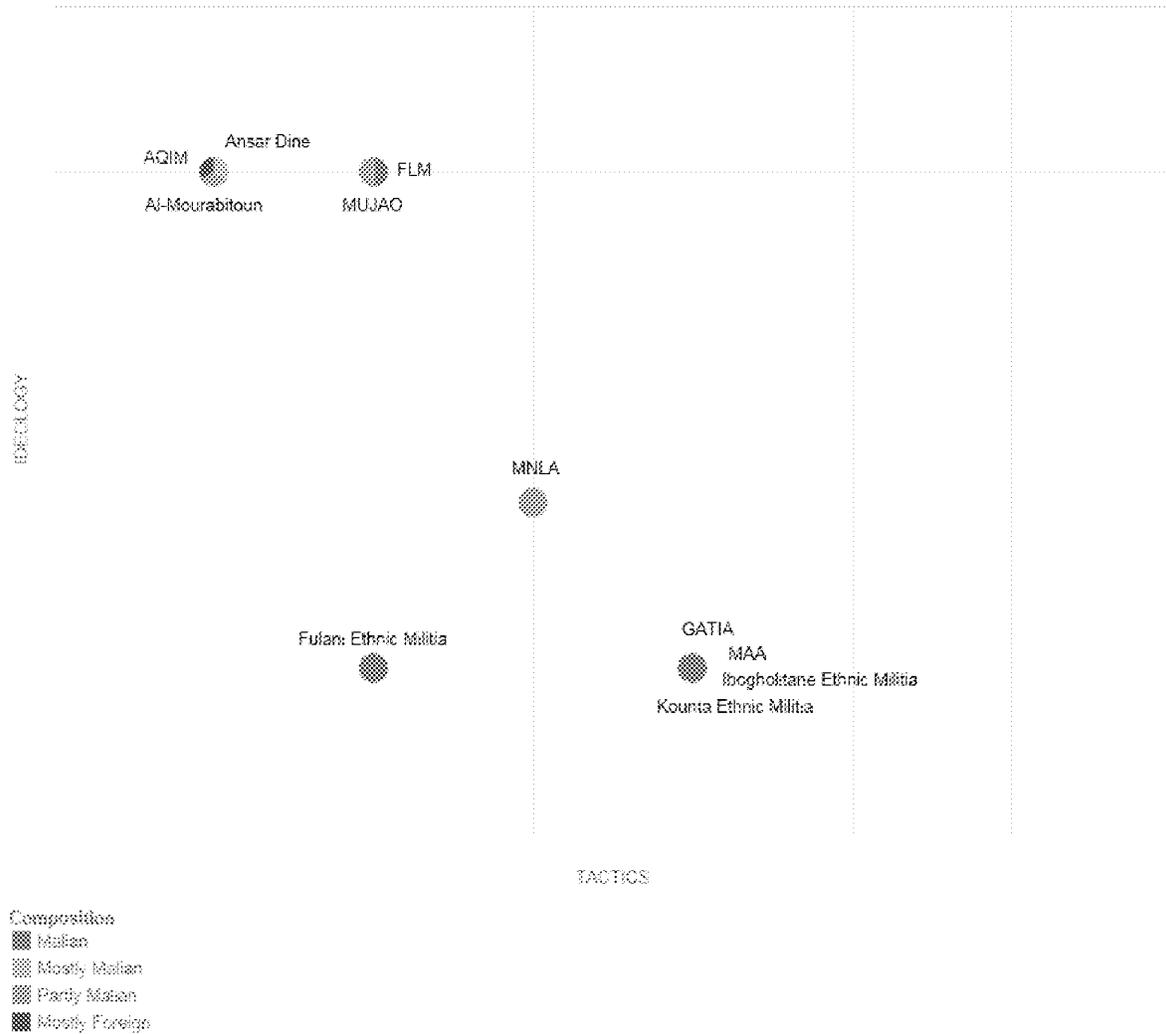
Logically, it follows that any framework for defining Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) should depend on two basic factors: ideology and tactics. A group that has an extremist ideology and employs either violent or extremist tactics is considered to be a VEO. These are groups with extremist ideology using extreme tactics, for example, the deliberate, systematic targeting of civilians. These are also groups with extremist ideology using violent tactics (targeting security forces, for example).

Because of the complex landscape of subnational armed actors in Mali, it is helpful to understand where these groups fall when assessed on their ideology and tactics. The figure below shows all subnational armed groups in Mali that were responsible for at least five fatalities from January 2010 – May 2016 in the ACLED dataset. These organizations have then been roughly assessed on their tactics (based on a review of acts of violence attributed to them) and their ideology (based on a review of sources which describe the ideology of these groups).

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Landscape of VEOs and Subnational Armed Actors in Mali



According to the visual above, five groups meet the criteria for VEOs.

- **AQIM** uses both extremist tactics and is motivated by an extremist Salafist Jihadist ideology. Formed in 2007, it is mostly comprised of non-Malians, with a membership is mostly drawn from Tuaregs and Berabiche tribal clans across the Sahara, including Algeria, Morocco, and Mali. AQIM and Al-Mourabitoun announced a merger in late 2015 (although many observers doubt the durability of this arrangement).^v
- **Al-Mourabitoun** also uses extremist tactics and is motivated by an extremist Salafist Jihadist ideology. Al-Mourabitoun was formed in 2002 is composed mostly of Tuaregs and Arabs from the northern Mali regions of Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao, but also includes Algerians, Tunisians and other nationalities.^{vi}

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- **Ansar Dine** uses extremist tactics and is motivated by an extremist Islamist ideology, and therefore meets the criteria for a VEO. The group was formed around 2012 and is predominately Malian, drawing mainly from the Ifora tribe in the southern part of the Tuaregs' homeland.^{vii} A number of its members are Tuareg fighters who returned from Libya after fighting alongside Muammar Gaddafi's troops in the 2011 Libyan civil war.^{viii}
- **MUJAO** is also considered a VEO, with an extremist Salafist Jihadist ideology. The group uses extreme tactics, although to a lesser extent than AQIM, Ansar Dine, and Al-Mourabitoun. A review of events attributed to MUJAO suggests most of their attacks involve the use of force on force, but there are some extreme tactics, such as the killings of diplomats, aid workers, and suspected collaborators. MUJAO broke off from AQIM in 2011, with the intended goal of spreading jihad across a larger section of West Africa, though operations have been limited to southern Algeria and northern Mali. The group is partly Malian.^{ix x}
- The **FLM** is also considered a VEO. The group is motivated by an extremist Salafist Jihadist ideology. The group is almost completely comprised of Malians, predominately drawn from ethnic Fulani communities. The FLM has been fairly inactive. The group has employed extreme tactics, but only on a very limited basis.
- The **MNLA** is primarily motivated by Tuareg nationalist ideology and does not generally use extreme tactics. A review of events attributed to the group reveals some irregular use of extreme tactics, but not systematic; the vast majority of violent events attributed to the MNLA are force on force engagements. The movement is made up of Libyan and Malian Tuaregs, and some of them are believed to have previously fought in the Libyan army during the 2011 civil war. While the MNLA is listed here as a single entity here, it is a notoriously fractured organization (yet the tactics and ideology across its various splinter groups tend to remain consistent).^{xi}

There are a number of other violent subnational actors which do not fit the criteria to be considered VEOs. The Fulani ethnic militia has used extreme tactics (such as the massacre of almost 50 Tuaregs in 2014) but is not motivated by an extremist ideology and rarely engages in conflict. There are several other ethnic and government-aligned militias which neither use extremist tactics, nor appear to be motivated by an extremist ideology.

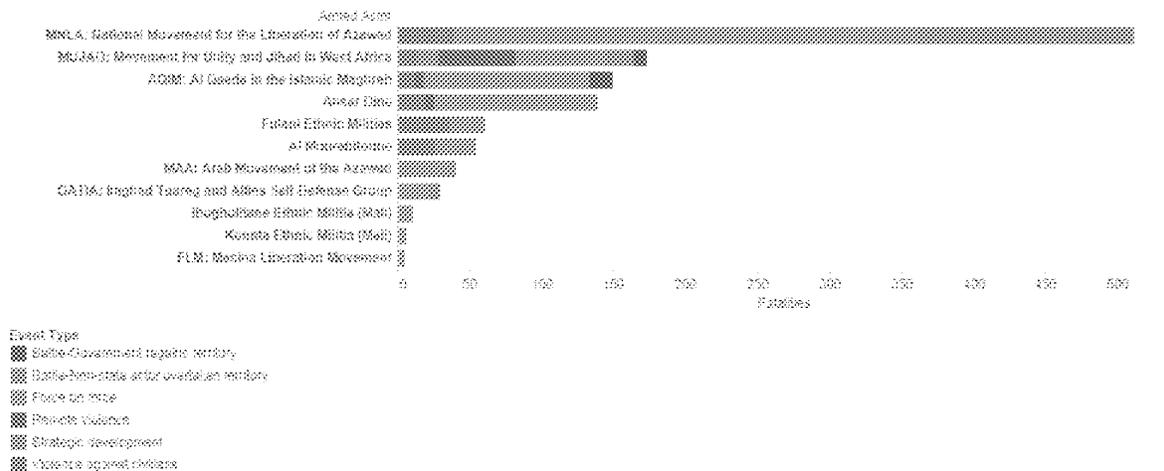
In order to get a sense of the level of activity of subnational armed actors in Mali, the visual below depicts all groups reportedly responsible for killing at least five individuals from January 2010 – May 2016, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED) dataset. Note that Jahba East Africa, the group which recently pledged allegiance to Da'esh is not shown below (or on the previous graph) due to an extremely low level of activity.^{xii} The visual below also depicts the types of events which resulted in fatalities, which is useful in understanding the tactics employed by various armed actors in Mali.

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Fatalities and Event Types Attributed to Subnational Armed Actors in Mali

January 2010 – May 2016, Data source: ACLED



This investigation of the landscape, tactics, ideology, and composition of subnational armed actors in Mali largely supports the narrative that the most extreme armed actors (tactically and ideologically) are predominately foreign. Malians do, however, make up at least some of the membership in most of these organizations. While much of this may be opportunistic, in some cases – such as Ansar Dine, a highly active, predominately Malian VEO – there does appear to be a very real threat of local Malian extremism.

IV. VEO Activity – Trends and Projections

Data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED) illustrates how conflict and terrorism have developed in Mali from January 1, 2010 – May 1, 2016. Since 2010, ACLED records 2,398 deaths associated with conflict or terrorism in Mali, 341 attributed to known VEOs.^{xiii} The map and graph below depict fatalities attributed to known VEOs, shown in orange, and fatalities attributed to other groups and actors, including unaffiliated terrorist actors and unknown actors, shown in blue. Fatalities shown in blue also include fatalities that result from security force operations. Some notable recent events include the high profile attack on the Radison Blu hotel carried out by FLM, Ansar Dine, Al-Mourabitoun and AQIM; and a spate of fatal attacks by suspected Ansar Dine and AQIM militants on Malian security forces and UN peacekeeping forces in February 2016.

Empirical modeling of global terrorism risk conducted in collaboration with the CIA's Office of Advanced Analytics predicts a significant increase (around 35%) in the number of terrorist attacks in Mali in 2016. This risk is a function of many political, economic, and social factors. While few of the factors demonstrated a high degree of individual significance, the overall model was fairly accurate in assessing the trajectory of terrorist attacks.^{xiv} One factor identified as contributing to increased risk is a lack of publicly reported CT operations by security forces. In

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2015, Mali had only about 15 CT operations, down from 22 in 2014, and 93 in 2013; research suggests that this reduction places Mali at higher risk for an escalation in terrorist attacks than countries with more robust CT efforts.

Another way to determine if VEO activity is likely to increase is to consider the risk of Da'esh influence in a country. On the spectrum of Da'esh influence, the recognition of formal Da'esh affiliates, or wilayahs, represents a significant level of Da'esh threat. This constitutes a sign that Da'esh believes that there is sufficient local support and capacity for Da'esh's influence to grow, as well as an indication of the willingness of local jihadist elements to submit to Da'esh direction. In order to assess the risk of the emergence of official Da'esh affiliates with territorial control, CSO developed a statistical model that estimates a country's risk of having an official Da'esh province (wilayah) established within its borders in the next 12 months. The model took into account the locations of existing Da'esh provinces and certain indicators and national characteristics, including pledges of allegiance (bay'at) by Sunni militant groups to the Islamic State's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi; the portion of each country's population that practices Sunni Islam; the presence of anocratic governance processes (which can also be interpreted as a weak or ineffective government); and state-sponsored violence and abuse. This model assessed the effect of changing conditions in a country of interest on the probability that an official Da'esh province will be established in the next 12 months. Pledges of allegiance to the IS leader (al-Baghdadi) by Sunni jihadist groups within the country had the greatest impact on probability, and both government weakness and the level of state sponsored violence and abuse also had moderate effects.

The risk that a Da'esh province will be established in Mali is about 12%, which is relatively low. This risk is based on a relatively high degree of state-sponsored violence (3.67 on a scale of 1 to 5), and on one group pledging allegiance to the Da'esh leader (al-Baghdadi) in 2015. If all else remains the same, an additional group pledging themselves to Da'esh could raise Mali's risk to over 58%. Similarly, an uptick in state-sponsored violence would raise it to 25%. While Mali's government is relatively stable, a significant weakening of the government could raise the risk that Da'esh establishes a formal branch to 55%. These findings indicate that some suitable conditions exist in Mali for an increase in Da'esh influence. Currently, these conditions contribute to a fairly low level of risk, but this risk could change dramatically as some factors evolve.

To determine if VEO activity is likely to increase, CSO also conducted a broader assessment to determine the risk that a new *major* VEO might emerge. Major VEOs were defined as VEOs which went on to kill 100 or more individuals following their emergence.^{xv} In this case, emergence includes both the development of new VEOs and the evolution of existing groups into VEOs. It could also include the emergence of a VEO in Mali affiliated with a VEO in a different country. Significant risk factors included the level of state sponsored violence and abuse, the magnitude of internal violence, external conflict/interventions, and significant Sunni Muslim populations.^{xvi} Based on these indicators, Mali's current risk of the emergence of a major VEO is low, in the 2-10% range. However, a significant increase in the level of internal conflict in Mali or a significant increase in the level of state-sponsored violence and abuse would significantly increase the risk.

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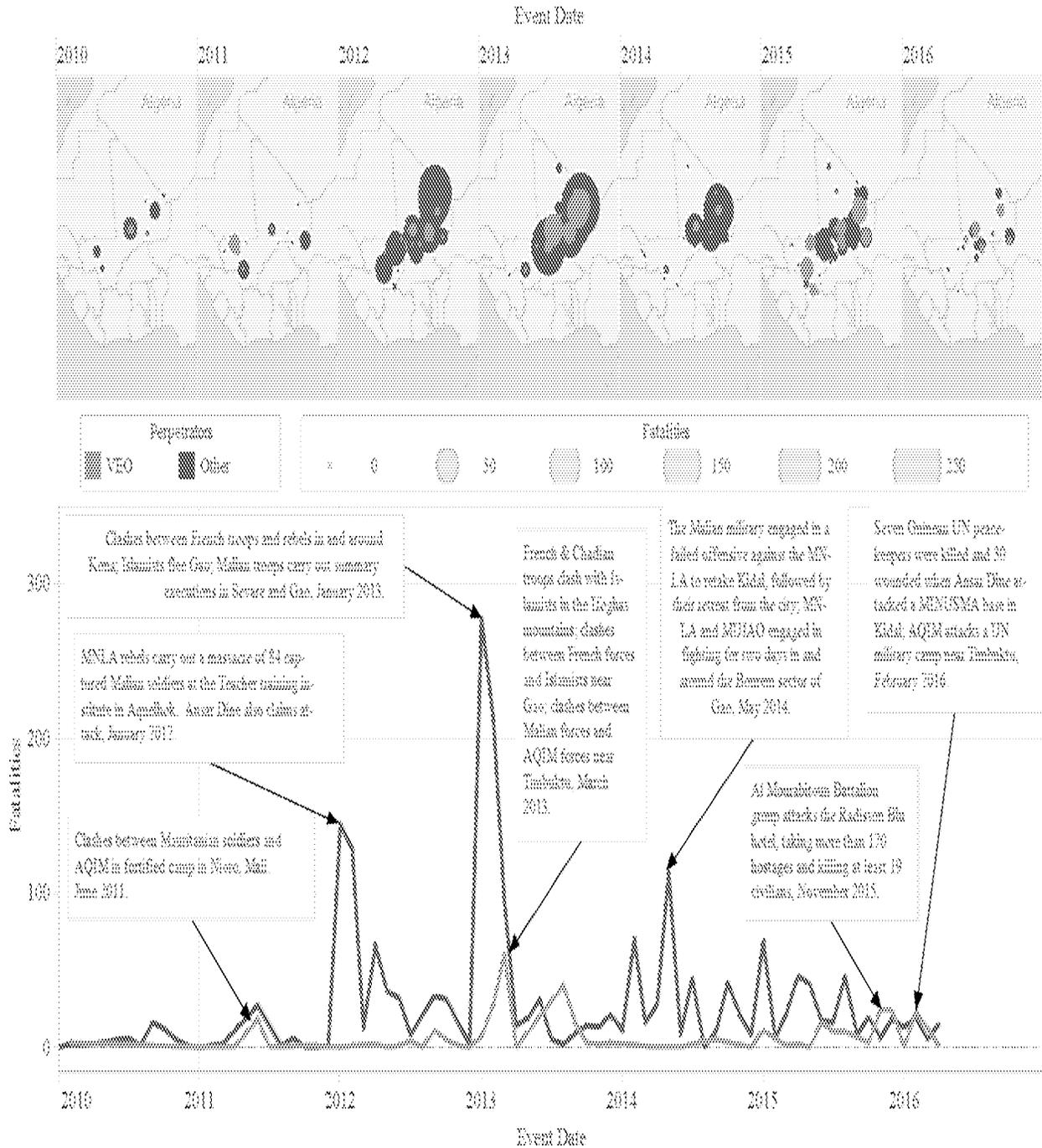
In sum, we expect a significant increase in the number of VEO attacks in 2016, but these will largely be the result of existing groups. Major new groups are not likely to emerge on the scene and those that do exist are not likely to strengthen significantly. While some will make common cause with Da'esh or its affiliates there is low risk that any will attain sufficient influence or capacity to serve as the basis for a Da'esh wilayah.

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Fatalities from Conflict and Terrorism in Mali, January 2010 – April 2016

Data Source: Armed Conflict and Event Location Dataset (ACLED)



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V. Underlying Structural Factors Contributing to VE

Empirical testing by CSO identified a number of structural, or “push” factors that correlate with increased support for violent extremism, the adoption of increasingly extreme tactics or ideology by groups, and the emergence of new violent extremist organizations. Building on this research, this analysis also reviewed academic literature and prior assessments of the violent extremism problem set in Mali. Based on this research, the following factors were cited as helping to drive the emergence and spread of violent extremism and/or violent extremist organizations in Mali.

Jihadist groups in Mali frequently align themselves with local leaders and portray their organization as *defending local interests*, often against perceived predation by the state and security services. In this way, VEOs in Mali have benefited from both the limited presence of security forces in many areas, as well as the widespread abuse and lack of professionalism demonstrated by security forces in areas where they regularly operate. These groups have won tacit acceptance among some local populations by *filling the void left by Malian authorities* through the provision of basic services, security, rule of law and humanitarian assistance.^{xvii} Similarly, factors cited as drivers of violent extremism in the Sahel region include *bad governance, insecurity, poverty, and ongoing issues related to unresolved separatist movements and failed peace agreements*.^{xviii,xix}

The lack of critical thinking in the type of Qur’anic education in madrassas in Mali has been identified in several studies as a contributing factor in support for violent extremism. There has been a dramatic increase in both Shia and Sunni madrassas in recent years, and in many communities in Mali they serve as the only source for education.^{xx} The potential for Qur’anic education to fill the gap in education opportunities is underscored by the fact that Mali has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, estimated at round 34%.^{xxi} Another potential problem is that the growth of Qur’anic education in Mali has spurred competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, injecting sectarian and inter-state political agendas into the educational sphere.^{xxii} ***Socio-economic exclusion and deprivation*** are also cited as important drivers of radicalization in Mali and other African countries: “***Poverty and under-development*** create grievances that can be easily exploited by extremist groups. In instances where such exclusion at the community level ***coincides with weak or nonexistent governance processes – and/or religious, ethnic or political cleavages*** – radicalization can flourish.”^{xxiii}

Mali is an extremely poor country, and the northern regions are no exception. According to Oxford University’s Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which captures a wide range of socio-economic indicators, such as schooling, nutrition, and sanitation, 45.9% of Malians are considered to be multi-dimensionally poor (meaning, they are deprived in at least one third of ten socio-economic indicators).^{xxiv} The rates of multidimensional poverty are also quite high in the Northern regions, with approximately 61% in Timbuktu, 48% in Kidal, 55% in Gao, and 62% in Mopti living in multidimensional poverty.^{xxv} While poverty rates in the north are similar to rates across the rest of the country, the economy in the north, which is based largely on livestock and agriculture, is much more vulnerable to shocks (primarily from drought, which are expected to become longer and more frequent)^{xxvi} than the economy in the South.^{xxvii} High levels of poverty and deprivation, combined with frequent economic shocks, add to existing perceptions of ethnic and regional neglect by the central government.

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In addition, the central government has failed to develop mining resources in the north, largely due to concerns over instability and concerns that such development would further exacerbate separatist sentiment. This lack of development is largely seen in the north as further evidence of the government's intentional neglect and marginalization of the region.

The evidence points to poverty and underdevelopment in the north as a factor which contributes to ethnic and regional grievances against the central government. These grievances play a central role in generating armed opposition to the Malian government. While it could be a leap to argue that poverty increases the risk for violent extremism in Mali, the evidence suggests that poverty contributes to existing grievances and creates the conditions for armed conflict, which results in instability. The resulting instability creates favorable conditions for armed Jihadist groups from neighboring countries to operate with minimal constraints on their activity.

This finding is consistent with multiple empirical studies which have found that higher levels of internal conflict (whether related to violent extremism or not) greatly increase the risk of the expansion of VEO activity, the emergence of new VEOs, and the escalation of VEO activity.^{xxxviii}

VI. Support and Sympathy for Violent Extremism

Analysis of U.S. government commissioned survey data from Mali in December 2015 reveals that support for Al-Qaeda and Da'esh is extremely low, with only around 4% of respondents reporting that Al-Qaeda or Da'esh is having a positive influence on Mali and fewer than 5% agreeing that Al-Qaeda's violent actions are justified under Islamic law.^{xxxix} While response rates indicating favorability toward VEOs are generally low in survey data, the rates in this survey were particularly low when compared to other African countries with significant Muslim populations. For example, in surveys conducted by Pew in 2014, 18% of respondents in Nigeria and 10% of respondents in Senegal expressed a positive view of Al-Qaeda.^{xxx} This observation is consistent with the narrative that there is little domestic inclination toward VEOs in Mali, and that the presence and activity of VEOs is primarily a function environment conditions favorable to VEO activity. These conditions include ethnic and regional grievances which spur conflict and instability, and in some cases allow for opportunistic alliances (such 2012 alliance between the MNLA and various VEO actors, which was motivated more by tactical advantage than ideological affinity).^{xxxi}

Analysis of a non-U.S. government survey conducted in July 2015 identified several factors which were positively associated with respondents reporting that they had personally used violence for political reasons.^{xxxii} This measurement casts a wider net than desired in determining violent extremist behavior, but not so wide as to negate its usefulness. It meets the basic criteria for violent extremist behavior – violent tactics used by subnational actors to further an ideology - but this also captures those individuals using violent tactics motivated by an ideology that might not be extreme. In addition, it may also capture individuals who are paid to carry out violent acts on behalf of political actors or parties. With that caveat in mind, factors associated with the personal use of political violence in Mali included the following: the personal experience of corruption; having high levels of education and poor living conditions at the same time (a measure of underemployment); having a negative outlook on the economy; and the frequency that respondents reported their ethnic group had been treated unfairly by the government. This last point underscores the important role that perceptions of ethnic

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marginalization play in political violence in Mali. The manner in which political violence is manifested is varied and complex. In some cases, ethnic grievances are expressed through separatist agitation, with goals and motivations very different from the goals and motivations of violent extremists.^{xxxiii}

The relationship between perceptions of ethnic-marginalization and instability is clearer. Given the established links between instability and increased risk for VEO expansion, emergence, and escalation, the impact of ethnic-marginalization on VE risk is likely meaningful but indirect.

VII. Synthesis

Fatalities from violent extremism in Mali have been fairly low, but constant and destabilizing, since 2011. Empirical modeling projects a substantial escalation of terrorist attacks in 2016, due to a variety of factors, including the almost complete lack of CT operations conducted by the Malian government.

Mali is at low risk for the emergence of an official Da'esh affiliate, due to active Sunni jihadist groups, one of which has already pledged allegiance to Da'esh, and a relatively high degree of state-sponsored violence and abuse. A further uptick in state-sponsored violence and abuse, and a slide toward greater state fragility would both put Mali at much greater risk for the establishment of an official IS province.

In terms of countering violent extremism, it is important to distinguish between the factors that may contribute to support for local and regional separatist movements versus those that may contribute to the support of ideological extremism and transnational terrorism. Another core challenge is removing other factors, such as porous borders and the spread of extremist organizations from neighboring countries that have contributed to the emergence and growth of ideologically extreme organizations in Mali.

Overall, the evidence in this assessment reinforces the narrative that the core of the VE threat in Mali is the conditions which make the country attractive for VEOs from across the region. Ethnic and regional grievances, poor governance and abusive security force practices, and the resulting armed conflict by a multitude of local actors create conditions which are suitable for VEOs to exploit.

VIII. Areas for Further Investigation

The lack of suitable survey data on violent extremism in Mali poses a significant challenge. Better data about the perceptions, sympathy, and support for violent extremism across Mali would help address one of the largest gaps in our understanding of terrorism risk in Mali. While support for specific, well-known VEOs appears to be quite low, a better understanding of the communities who are susceptible to cooperation with VEOs, and under what conditions, which greatly increase our understanding of VE risk in Mali.

Information on characteristics of the individuals who join terrorist groups in Mali and participate in terrorist attacks is also incomplete. An unclassified dataset of foreign terrorist fighters registered by the Islamic State in 2013 and 2014 included only one fighter of Malian nationality

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– a 26 year old married man with no children. No further details were provided on this individual, in contrast to the level of biographical information provided on several thousand other fighters from other countries. Visibility on the types of individuals drawn to VEOs in Mali is extremely limited and should be a central area for future investigation. It may be the case that very few foreign terrorist fighters have emerged from Mali, but there are certainly more than one instance of this occurring, and additional data would increase our understanding of such individuals. In addition to foreign fighters, the characteristics of the indigenous Malians who are apt to collaborate with VEOs under certain conditions would be beneficial.

Another area for future study is an examination of access to education. A lack of access to secular education has been cited as contributing to extremism in Mali but we have little visibility on the scope of secular education opportunities by type and location. It is clear that Mali has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world – at around 34% - and religious education often constitutes the only option for Malians to develop intellectually.^{xxxiv}

In addition, we have limited visibility on the type of Qur’anic education being taught, whether it tends to promote a religiously intolerant worldview, and if there are external sources of funding and support that can be identified. This is a delicate issue, given the indigenous presence of traditionally conservative forms of Islamic education, which in many cases may promote an intolerant worldview absent external support or interference.^{xxxv} Nonetheless, a greater understanding of these dynamics will be an essential component of a well-developed strategy to counter sympathy and support for violent extremism in Mali.

Another area for further study is the role of traditional Sufi Islam in mitigating support for violent extremism in Mali. Many Malians see religious extremism as something imposed by foreigners, and point out that religion in Mali, and Sufi Islam in particular, have historically been practiced in the spirit of tolerance and coexistence.

At the same time, the risk of more extreme political philosophies taking root, with underlying political agendas, should be investigated. Iranian efforts to spread orthodox Shiism have gained traction among Sufis in West Africa, based on a natural affinity for the important role of saints in Islam, and Saudi Arabia has increasingly sought to counter such efforts by supporting efforts to expand Salafi Sunni Islam in Mali.^{xxxvi}

Additional qualitative research could also track the orientation of individual leaders of VEOs or groups at risk of evolving into VEOs in an attempt to identify which leaders merit specific interventions.

It may also be helpful to have a better understanding of whether poverty, lack of development, marginalization have an ethnic dimension too. A better understand of each group’s grievances will help towards resolving them an build resiliency to jihadist ideology.

IX. Implications and Opportunities for Policymakers

Based on the above analysis, trends to track in Mali in the near term should include: 1) trends in the level of state-sponsored violence and abuse; 2) trends in democracy/autocracy in Mali (to assess the risk of a drift toward anocracy); 3) growing support for extremist ideas among

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vulnerable communities; and 4) changing conditions or incentives which may facilitate the collaboration of local armed actors with VEOs.

A priority for policy and possibly programming is increasing the likelihood of a resolution to the lingering issues surrounding demands for autonomy in the North. Such a resolution will likely require the development of real options for economic growth and development in that region. As part of that process, an assessment should be made as to the feasibility of a workable agreement between separatist elements and the central government. If renewed efforts ultimately end in failure and disappointment, the result may deepen grievances and exacerbate risk of increased sympathy for violent extremism rather become than a mechanism to mitigate such risks.

Empirical studies have not found strong evidence that negotiated outcomes to internal conflicts tend to result in decreased activity by VEOs in countries where VEOs are already active.^{xxxvii} This is likely because VEOs are rarely included as direct participants in such negotiations. There is also a body of empirical work which has found that in a country/issue context with multiple VEOs, negotiating with one VEO may lead to increased bad behavior by VEOs left out of negotiations.^{xxxviii}

The implication for Mali is that unless groups such as AQIM, Ansar Dine, and MUJAO are included as direct participants (something which is highly unlikely to occur for variety of reasons), negotiations are unlikely to have any impact on their activity in Mali. In other words, resolving the Tuareg autonomy issue may have limited impact on the actions of transnational jihadist groups not indigenous to Mali. However, in the longer term, a resolution to the Tuareg autonomy issue would certainly reduce the conditions for instability.

Given the elevated risk for both emergence and escalation of violent extremism that results from state sponsored violence and abuse, another line of effort should address abuses by security forces and pro-government militias. These events should be monitored, and a deeper understanding of local perceptions of security force behavior, both positive and negative, should be developed.

Even as the U.S. government and partners pursue the objectives noted above, preventing a further slide on key risk factors in Mali will be critically important. A significant increase in state-sponsored violence and abuse, the emergence of even a minor Da'esh affiliate, a significant weakening of the central government, or increased marginalization of ethnic groups could further destabilize the country, increase the regional risks, and exacerbate the threats to civilians and U.S. interests. In short, a defensible strategy for countering violent extremism in Mali should, at a bare minimum, include an objective study of the feasibility, costs, and benefits of a renewed inclusive effort to settle outstanding issues in the north, with an eye toward the impact of such an effort on violent extremism.

In addition, a study should also be undertaken to understand the principal grievances and incentives motivating non-extremists in the north to make common cause with extremists. Finally, the government of Mali and its partners must improve performance in the security sector, particularly as it relates to measures of state sponsored violence and abuse, and prevent the central government from weakening further. These efforts would potentially allow for future targeted programming in at-risk communities.

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ⁱ These factors include: state-sponsored violence and abuse; existing intra-state conflict; inter-state conflict; internal conflict in bordering states; perception of foreign interference; religious intolerance/supremacy, which relates to the idea that others must be violently coerced to conform to one's worldview (as separate and distinct from religious devotion); the personal experience of corruption (having to pay bribes for basic services); the personal experience of physical violence (from state actors and otherwise); the systematic marginalization of ethnic/religious groups; influence of gulf Arab media; technology access and usage (for organizing and recruitment purposes); perception of foreign interference/actual foreign interference (or inter-state conflict); underemployment (tested through the interaction of higher levels of education and poverty or income); designation of Sunni Islam as the official religion of the state, and the presence of significant Sunni populations.

ⁱⁱ Reports and assessments collected within the Department of State and USAID identified these additional factors: general income inequality; rural vs. urban income inequality; resistance to Western cultural influence; border insecurity; government restrictions/regulation on religious space; youth unemployment; security force corruption; growing influence of Wahhabism; inadequate provision of basic services; and lack of trust in the government.

ⁱⁱⁱ We have moderate confidence in the quality of the model's forecasts. The model has a pseudo-R² value of 0.46, suggesting that it can explain approximately half of the variation in the year-to-year changes in numbers of attacks in a particular country. Despite this relatively high score for this type of model, the root mean squared error of the model's forecasts on out-of-sample data (data not used to train the model) was a relatively high 0.42, reducing our confidence in its ability to predict well.

^{iv} This includes pledges of allegiance (*bay'at*) by Sunni militant groups to the Da'esh leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi; the portion of each country's population that practices Sunni Islam; the presence of anocratic governance processes as indicated by values between -5 and +5 on the polity scale (this could also be interpreted as a weak or ineffective government); and state-sponsored violence expressed on a scale of 1 (no state-sponsored violence/abuse) to 5 (widespread state-sponsored violence/abuse). This model is used herein to assess the effect of changing conditions in the countries of interest on the probability that an official province will be established.

^v <http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb-aqim/p12717>

^{vi} <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20140514-mali-etat-jihadistes-apres-mort-emir-al-mourabitoune-aqmi-al-qaida-mujao-belmokhtar/>

^{vii} <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/ansar-dine>

^{viii} <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17582909>

^{ix} <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/movement-unity-and-jihad-west-africa-mujao>

^x <http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/movement-unity-and-jihad-west-africa-mujao>

^{xi} <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/01/20131139522812326.html>

^{xii} <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/isis-new-terrorist-group-jahba-east-africa-pledges-allegiance-to-islamic-state-in-somalia-a6974476.html>

^{xiii} Imperfect coding of perpetrators in the ACLED dataset leads to totals for named groups which are low. This estimate is probably conservative.

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^{xiv} Other factors include the fact that Mali experienced a dramatic uptick in its rate of GNP growth from 2013 to 2014; the model indicates that such upticks in GNP growth rates have historically been associated with a slightly elevated terrorism risk. We do not know why this has historically been the case. Mali, like all the other African countries of interest except Tunisia, experienced a reduction in imports from Sub-Saharan African countries in 2015. These changes have historically been associated with an increase in terrorism risk. This variable probably is a marker for some other factor we have not identified because, although that historical relationship exists, we do not believe it to be causal.

^{xv} Fatalities for this threshold are measured using the University of Maryland's Global Terrorism Dataset (GTD).

^{xvi} Global Risk of Emerging Violent Extremism, CSO, July 2015. The study examined 159 countries from 1995-2014.

^{xvii} *Trust versus belief: Countering violent extremism in Mali by working with communities*, Rida Lyammouri, April 25, 2016:

^{xviii} *Understanding the causes of violent extremism in West Africa*, IRIN News, May 2013:
<http://www.irinnews.org/news/2013/05/10>

^{xix} Bratton, M., Massa Coulibaly, & Fabiana Machado. (2002). Popular Views of the Legitimacy of the State in Mali. *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines*, 36(2), 197-238. doi:1. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4107205> doi:1

^{xx} *Countering Violent Extremism in Gounzoureye, Gao: Cluster Evaluation*, USAID, December 2015 and *Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa: A Development Approach*, UNDP, 2015.

^{xxi} <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS>

^{xxii} <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/19/the-iran-saudi-proxy-wars-come-to-mali-shiite-sunni-islam/>

^{xxiii} *Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa: A Development Approach*, UNDP, pg. 9, 2015.

^{xxiv} A person is identified as multidimensionally poor (or 'MPI poor') if they are deprived in at least one third of the weighted indicators shown above; in other words, the cutoff for poverty (k) is 33.33%. The proportion of the population that is multidimensionally poor is the incidence of poverty, or headcount ratio (H). The average proportion of indicators in which poor people are deprived is described as the intensity of their poverty (A). The MPI is calculated by multiplying the incidence of poverty by the average intensity of poverty across the poor (MPI = H x A); as a result, it reflects both the share of people in poverty and the degree to which they are deprived.

^{xxv} Source: OPHI Country Briefing June 2016: Mali, pg. 6.

^{xxvi} <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-climatechange-mali-conflict-idUSKBN0NI16M20150427>

^{xxvii} The roots of Mali's conflict Moving beyond the 2012 crisis

^{xxviii} *Factors Associated with Difference Facets of Violent Extremism*, CSO, December 2016.

^{xxix} AFRICOM survey of 1,803 respondents concluded in December of 2015. The Source: OPHI Country Briefing June 2016: Mali survey was representative at the national level.

^{xxx} <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/07/01/concerns-about-islamic-extremism-on-the-rise-in-middle-east/pg-2014-07-01-islamic-extremism-03/>

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^{xxxvi} The roots of Mali's conflict: Moving beyond the 2012 crisis, CRU, March 2015.

^{xxxvii} The nationally-representative survey of 1,200 Malians was conducted by Afro Barometer.

^{xxxviii} Rasmussen, S. (2007). Re-Formations of the Sacred, the Secular, and Modernity: Nuances of Religious Experience among the Tuareg (Kel Tamajaq). *Ethnology*, 46(3), 185-203. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20456624>

^{xxxix} <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS>

^{xl} Soares, B. (2006). Islam in Mali in the Neoliberal Era. *African Affairs*, 105(418), 77-95. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3518789>

^{xli} <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/19/the-iran-saudi-proxy-wars-come-to-mali-shiite-sunni-islam/>

^{xlii} An empirical assessment conducted by CSO using two different samples – one of violent extremist prone-countries, and one of conflict prone-countries – from 1995 to 2014, found no empirical evidence that the achievement of formal negotiated agreements, regardless of the nature or characteristics of such agreements, lead to decreased violent extremist activity, even after extended periods of time. Similar to armed conflict, however, violent extremist activity is shown to decline significantly following outright military victory. This suggests that while negotiated outcomes may be preferable in certain contexts, if the goal is reducing violent extremist activity, outright military victory should not be ignored as an option. This study did not specifically examine the effectiveness of negotiation processes which directly involved violent extremist organizations. It is possible that negotiations which directly involve violent extremists would produce different results than negotiations which are focused more broadly on conflict resolution.

^{xliiii} Credit to University of Maryland's START/Foxtrot project for identifying consistent empirical evidence to support this finding: "When a state faces multiple challengers, there are important bargaining issues to consider. Beginning with Schelling (1960), economists have offered game theoretic arguments and hypotheses about successful strategies of bargaining during conflict. One canonical game, the Chain Store Paradox (Kreps and Wilson 1980) suggests that a state respond disproportionately to challengers when a game could be repeated with that challenger or other potential challengers. In these bargaining games, reputation is a critical factor that can dissuade future challengers (Walter 2003, 2006, 2009). States that build "tough" or "strong" reputations may encourage future VEOs to abandon their efforts. Economists and evolutionary biologists have done most of the theoretical work on the topic (e.g. Schelling 1960; Kreps and Wilson 1980; McElreath 2003), while political scientists have been interested in the application of these ideas to ethnic, civil, terrorist and low-level conflicts with multiple challengers (Bloom 2005, Cronin 2009, Cunningham 2006, Kydd and Walter 2002, Walter 2003, 2006, 2009). In general, it seems that governments definitely are concerned with reputation and future "bad behavior" from VEOs and thus are less likely to negotiate with VEOs when there are multiple challengers present. One finding that is fairly robust is that when a group makes peace with the state (peace processes/treaty negotiations), other parties are likely to use violence to "spoil the peace" (Stedman 1997; Kydd and Walter 2002)." Source: <http://start.foxtrotdev.com/sites/default/files/matrixfiles/98.pdf>

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