

## THE 2012 CRISIS IN MALI: ONGOING EMPIRICAL STATE FAILURE

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### ABSTRACT

In 2012 Mali faced a crisis disrupting nearly twenty years of democratization – a coup and rebel insurgency. This article investigates policy priorities amongst rural Malians living on the border of state and rebel-controlled territory during the crisis. While academic and policy-making communities have focused largely on Mali’s recent and sudden regime and territorial breakdown, the villagers defined the crisis in terms of their unmet needs for public services and infrastructure amidst high food and water insecurity. Concern for the sudden ‘juridical state’ breakdown – the collapse of the democratic regime – was trumped by the focus on long-term ‘empirical state’ breakdown. Using recent Afrobarometer data on diverse dimensions of empirical statehood, we show that the problem of rural neglect emphasized by seminal scholars is persistent not only across Mali, but also across many African countries. The tendency of academics and policy makers to focus on the immediate or more volatile political problems of the coup and rebel insurgency facing the Malian state, while important, risks understating and underestimating the power of slow-moving crises of daily life that are more important to rural citizens.

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IN APRIL 2012, THE WORLD’S EYES TURNED to Mali’s political crisis – a coup and subsequent rebel takeover of three northern provinces. The coup disrupted nearly twenty years of multi-party elections, while armed movements, including those with secessionist and *jihadist* goals, took over nearly two-thirds of Mali’s geographical territory, causing over 400,000 Malians to flee. Academic, policy, and journalistic accounts of these events have focused on many aspects of the crisis, including determinants of the rebellion and coup, the French intervention, and the need to restore multi-party

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democracy.<sup>1</sup> However, domestic perspectives on the crisis, especially that of rural citizens,<sup>2</sup> have largely gone unheard. What are opinions of ordinary rural Malians on addressing the Mali 2012 crisis? Do they emphasize similar issues, or offer different opinions than those expressed in existing literature?

We investigate policy priorities of over 600 rural villagers living in 10 villages on the border of state and rebel-controlled territory before and during the coup and secession. Previous engagement with the villages prior to the crisis made it possible for the research team to revisit them in May and June/July 2012. Our approach to data collection, which we elaborate in greater detail in the research design section of the article, emphasized enabling respondent autonomy in revealing priorities. Specifically, villagers were (a) asked an open response question about their policy priorities if they were the country's leader; (b) able to select a pre-recorded radio clip from a range of topics; and (c) invited to record a message on any topic to US President Barack Obama.

Dominant accounts of the Mali crisis focus on a truncated period of juridical state failure: the 2012 rebellion, the coup, French intervention, and the 2013 presidential elections. By contrast, the villagers consistently prioritized issues concerning public services and infrastructure rather than broader macro-political concerns, both before and during the territorial and regime breakdown. Their voices make two overwhelming points. First, they did not define the crisis on the basis of which political actors or institutions governed specific territory – a 'juridical state' crisis – but instead on the basis of the failure of the Malian state to provide basic public services and infrastructure, or assistance to assuage food and water insecurity – an 'empirical state' crisis.<sup>3</sup> Second, for them the crisis was not new, but rather was ongoing. The recent coup and insurgency merely exacerbated existing state neglect. The prominence of this discourse in the context of the

1. On the French intervention see Roland Marchal, 'Briefing: Military (mis)adventures', *African Affairs* 112, 3 (2013), p. 486. On antecedents to the crisis, see Baz Lecocq, Gregory Mann, Bruce Whitehouse, Dida Badi, Lotte Pelckmans, Nadia Belalimat, Bruce Hall, and Wolfram Lacher, 'One hippopotamus and eight blind analysts: A multivocal analysis of the 2012 political crisis in the divided Republic of Mali', *Review of African Political Economy* 40, 137 (2013), pp. 343–57. On democratic backsliding, see Susanna Wing, 'Briefing: Mali: politics of a crisis', *African Affairs* 112, 448 (2013), pp. 476–85.

2. For broad public opinion polling in a later period of the crisis (December 2012), including rural attitudes, see Massa Coulibaly and Michael Bratton, 'Crisis in Mali: Ambivalent popular attitudes on the way forward', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2, 31 (2013), pp. 1–10.

3. According to Jackson and Rosberg, when states fail to fulfil domestic capacities to provide basic public services and infrastructure, the state has weak empirical statehood. Empirical statehood stands in contrast to juridical statehood – the formal international recognition of a regime as legitimately sovereign over a defined territory and population. Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg, 'Why Africa's weak states persist: the empirical and the juridical in statehood', *World Politics* 35, 1 (1982), pp. 1–24.

dramatic political events elevates the salience of these daily concerns to one of crisis.

We show the objective reality of rural under-provision of public services and infrastructure in Mali and Africa more broadly using diverse indicators collected by enumerators during the most recent round of Afrobarometer survey. Rural under-provision and large rural–urban gaps are pervasive. Taken together, these findings show that the problem of the weak empirical state continues to plague citizens across rural Africa. Indeed, the weakness of the African state in provision of public services, security, and infrastructure outside of major cities is a well-founded historical theme in the literature.<sup>4</sup>

The focus on the immediate or more volatile political problems of the coup and rebel insurgency facing the Malian state by academia, journalists, and the international policy community – while important – risks underestimating the power of slow-moving crises of daily life that are more important to citizens. These findings resonate with existing arguments about the weak rural African state,<sup>5</sup> but draw greater attention and urgency to its effect on the plight of rural citizens.

Finally, this study makes a methodological point. The Malian villagers' alternative viewpoints to the dominant discourse of the 2012 crisis surfaced largely because we enabled respondents to express themselves through open-ended attitudinal and behavioural measures rather than survey questions tailored to a pre-existing agenda. This study illustrates the importance of allowing individuals under study to inform the research agenda with their own narratives and ideas.

### *Mali's 2012 crisis*

During the fall of Libya in 2011, many Malian-born mercenaries returned home with arms from Khadafi's arsenal. This paramilitary spillover precipitated the fourth northern rebellion since independence (the previous three occurred in the years 1963–4, 1990s, and 2006–9).<sup>6</sup> In each rebellion,

4. For instance, the weak African state has been called 'the most prominent landmark on the African institutional landscape'. Michael Bratton, 'Beyond the state: civil society and associational life in Africa', *World Politics* 41, 3 (1989), p. 410. Jeffrey Herbst describes how 'the fundamental problem facing state-builders in Africa – be they pre-colonial kings, colonial governors, or presidents in the independent era – has been to project authority over inhospitable territories that contain relatively low densities of people'. *States and power in Africa: Comparative lessons in authority and control* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2000), p. 11.

5. See Pierre Englebert. *Africa: Unity, sovereignty, and sorrow* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 2010).

6. For historical context see Baz Lecocq, *Disputed desert* (Brill, London, 2010); Macartan Humphreys and Habaye Ag Mohamed, 'Senegal and Mali: A comparative study of rebellions in West Africa', in Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis (eds), *Understanding civil war* (The World Bank, Washington, DC, 2005), pp. 247–302.

insurgents, predominantly from the semi-nomadic Tuareg community, have claimed that northern populations have been ignored by the south-centric state, citing lack of public services and infrastructure. Prior to this iteration, the Malian state had become particularly weak in the northern hinterlands, where its shortcomings had opened up space for a host of alternative political authorities, including a growing presence of hard-line Islamist actors.<sup>7</sup> The government's inability to police its own territory led to the trafficking of humans, drugs, and cigarettes as well as kidnapping and banditry, which generated revenue for a new breed of would-be state challengers.<sup>8</sup>

In January 2012, three armed groups – the secessionist MNLA (the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad), the Islamist hard-liner group *Ansar Dine*, and the terrorist organization Al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) – launched attacks on military installations in northern Mali, where they defeated Malian troops (see Figure 1).<sup>9</sup> The country had already been experiencing a food crisis due to poor rains the previous planting season, and more than three million Malians were facing food insecurity. The conflict displaced around 400,000 people.

On 21 March, Malian soldiers, frustrated at fighting the northern insurgency with inadequate arms and supplies, staged a coup about a month before scheduled national elections.<sup>10</sup> The junta's initial call for better weapons and support for their campaign in the north quickly transformed to incorporate broader popular grievances around poor public service and infrastructure provision, as well as the corruption of the *classe politique*.<sup>11</sup> Many urbanites viewed the coup, while unfortunate, as injecting a much-needed shock into Mali's deteriorating democracy.<sup>12</sup> President Amadou Toumani Touré's willingness to negotiate with all actors, even those suspected of illicit activities in the north, coupled with Mali's culture of

7. Dowd and Raleigh argue against calling the north 'ungoverned territory'; instead, they point out, poor policy and government complicity allowed illicit activity to flourish. Caitriona Dowd and Clionadh Raleigh, 'Briefing: The myth of global Islamic terrorism and local conflict in Mali and the Sahel', *African Affairs* 112, 3 (2013), pp. 498–509.

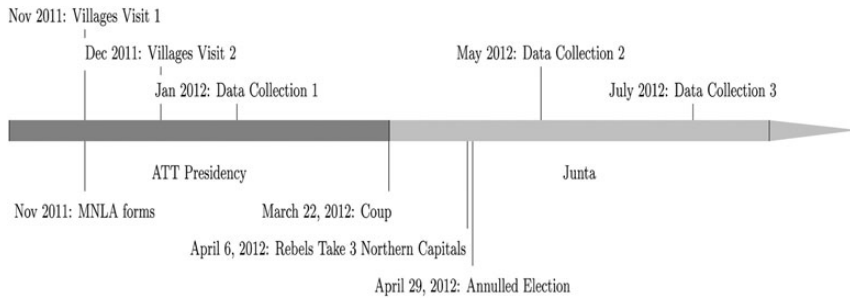
8. Peter Tinti, 'Illicit trafficking and instability in Mali: Past, present, and future' (Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, Series on Democracy, Governance, and State Fragility, Geneva, 2014); Morten Boas and Liv Elin Torheim, 'The trouble in Mali: Corruption, collusion, resistance', *Third World Quarterly* 34, 7 (2013), pp. 1279–92.

9. On relations between these groups, see Lecocq *et al.*, 'One hippopotamus and eight blind analysts', pp. 4, 7–9.

10. There is debate as to what degree the coup was "accidental". See Bruce Whitehouse, 'What went wrong in Mali', *London Review of Books* 34, 16, (2012), pp. 17–18.

11. See Wing, 'Briefing'; Bruce Whitehouse, 'A festival of brigands: In search of democracy and political legitimacy in Mali', *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 35, 2 (2013), pp. 35–52.

12. In 'Crisis in Mali', Coulibaly and Bratton show declining satisfaction with democracy over the course of ATT's second term.



*Figure 1.* Research and events timeline

*Notes:* Research events labeled above the timeline, political events below timeline. Timeline shaded to indicate democratic control (dark gray) versus putschist control (light gray).

amnesty,<sup>13</sup> had fuelled rumours of high-ranking government officials' involvement in illicit trafficking, embezzlement, and corruption.<sup>14</sup> A post-coup poll in Bamako found 65 percent of respondents supported the junta's actions.<sup>15</sup> However, the international community denounced the coup and immediately imposed sanctions. The insecurity brought the tourism industry, already in decline, to a standstill and the Malian economy took a dramatic hit.

The trio of insurgent groups quickly capitalized on the political chaos in Bamako. Within less than a week of the coup, they occupied the northern regions of Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao, and eventually made their way down into Mopti region. They proclaimed an independent state of Azawad. The shaded northern region in Figure 2 represents the area proclaimed as an independent state. Within two months, an AQIM splinter movement, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in the Sahel (MUJAO), and Ansar Dine had displaced the secular MNLA, leaving residents of northern capitals subject to the strict Shari'a law. Competition between armed groups and recruitment along ethnic and clan cleavages exacerbated existing tension in communities. After a nine-month political stalemate, the coalition of

13. Isaie Dougnon, 'In a time of crisis, why are the academics so quiet?' *University World News* 262 (2013), <<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20130308124745395>> (5 May 2014).

14. For example, see Susanna Wing, 'Mali's precarious democracy and the causes of conflict' (US Institute of Peace, Briefing Paper 331, Washington, DC, 2013).

15. Sidiki Guindo, 'Analyse des résultats de l'enquête d'opinion sur la crise Malienne' (working paper, 2012), available at <<http://www.gisse.org>> (13 March 2014). Further, anti-junta demonstrations were smaller than pro-junta demonstrations. Jessica Gottlieb, 'Civic and political behavior in Mali: constraints and possibilities', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2, 19 (2013), pp. 1–5.



*Figure 2.* Map of Mali in which rebel claimed territory is shaded dark gray and research area is circled.

Islamists headed south towards government-controlled territory. The French countered with an intervention of more than 4,000 troops, thus restoring Malian ‘sovereignty’ in all regions except Kidal.

The prevailing accounts of the crisis summarized above have tended to focus on the acute political crisis, beginning with the newest Malian insurgency leading to the French intervention and restoration of Malian juridical sovereignty. However, we adopt an inductive approach to understand better how villagers in a unique area on the border of state and rebel-claimed territory view the crisis. As will be shown below, the pre-eminent challenge for these rural Malians was not territorial or regime breakdown, but their daily struggle to survive without support or protection from the Malian state.

#### *Introducing rural perspectives of the crisis*

In the wake of the 2012 coup and secession, we collected perspectives on the crisis from rural villagers living on the border of state and rebel-controlled territory. The research area is circled in Figure 2. We make use of attitudinal and behavioural data from mixed-method research over a nine-month period with over 600 villagers. Given their location, we anticipated that the villagers would express interesting policy priorities on handling the crisis. Perhaps they would offer alternatives outside the dialogue of

international policy makers, journalists, and Bamako urbanites, or affirm some of their suggested paths forward.

In November 2011, our research team endeavoured to locate ten predominantly Bamana and Fulani<sup>16</sup> villages between Mopti and Timbuktu in preparation for a study regarding the then-upcoming 2012 presidential elections. The team leaders visited village chiefs to pay customary respects and gain permission to return to conduct research. The villages were visited a second time in December 2011 to build further rapport with the chief and villagers prior to data collection. In January 2012, we conducted our first data collection. The research team was comprised primarily of enumerators from the local area.<sup>17</sup> In each village, we randomly sampled men and women under the age of 40 by first drawing up a census of extended families (*du* in Bamana, *galê* in Fula)<sup>18</sup> and selecting between 25 and 30 respondents in each village via a public lottery.<sup>19</sup> Next, a lottery was held at the level of the extended family for one woman and one man. In total, there were over 600 respondents in the sample. There was low-level rebel activity in the north at the time of the baseline, but it was three months prior to the coup and northern occupation.

Our target population included those who were not village leaders, including women and younger males aged 40 and under. We excluded men over 40, who were few in number but comprise the village leadership. The reason for this was that our initial research agenda targeted ordinary and not elite villagers.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the inferences made from the data should be made to ordinary villagers, and not elite men. However, we conducted semi-structured interviews with elite men and incorporate their qualitative insights.

We note that it was challenging to incorporate female voices, aside from the usual difficulties resulting from women's disproportionate share of household and agricultural labour.<sup>21</sup> First, stating opinions on public affairs is seen as the role of the (male) head of the household. In order to

16. Across all villages, 42 percent of respondents spoke Fula and 58 percent Bamana.

17. This is consistent with findings that local co-ethnic enumerators improve data quality. See Claire Adida, Karen Ferree, Daniel Posner, and Amanda L. Robinson, 'Social desirability bias in African survey data' (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, 2013), pp. 3–6.

18. The use of 'family' in subsequent paragraphs refers to these extended families.

19. By doing a household census and randomly selecting the households from a complete census list, we improve upon other studies that use a design based on every *n*th house from a randomly selected starting location, or other studies limited in ability to conduct a census.

20. Jaimie Bleck and Kristin Michelitch, 'Capturing the airwaves, capturing the nation: Citizen response to putschist controlled radio' (Unpublished working paper, 2015). The study initially aimed to evaluate the impact of a solar radio distribution programme on attitudes and behaviour in the upcoming (annulled) election.

21. In order to participate in the study, the extended family needed to consent to the following sampling procedure or they would be ineligible and resampled. While sampling often took some discussion, no family opted out.

gain women's participation, we sampled one man *and* one woman from each family rather than only one man *or* one woman per family.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the family was ensured a man would voice his opinion, facilitating consent to include a woman. A second barrier was that women might be disallowed by male family members or too intimidated to speak openly with a male enumerator, a stranger. In order to overcome this barrier, we invested in recruiting and training female enumerators, many of whom had little previous survey experience. Each interview team comprised one male and one female enumerator, who simultaneously interviewed male and female respondents to prevent men from observing or influencing women's responses.

The research team slept in the villages and conducted semi-structured interviews with chiefs and informal interviews with villagers. Indeed, spending nights in the villages allowed for candid conversation around tea and meals. Importantly, during the first wave of the survey, both of the authors travelled with the research team to the six predominantly Bambara-speaking villages.<sup>23</sup> We were able to observe the lived reality of villagers and exchange directly with them. One of the authors is proficient in Bamana and was able to speak directly to chiefs and villagers in Bamana-speaking villages.

After the coup and capture of the north, the villages found themselves ambiguously on the border of what the northern secessionists proclaimed as the independent state of Azawad and the state of Mali. The villages remained unoccupied by either side, but were only 25–50 kilometres away from towns that the rebels and army either controlled or frequented.<sup>24</sup> The research team returned in May for a second data collection, and June/July for a third.<sup>25</sup> We created data collection protocols that were sensitive to gathering the truthful opinions of youth and women in the rural Malian context. A standard survey environment often leads to frequent 'I don't know' responses, socially desirable responses (for example, mentions of Islam), systematically biased responses (such as disproportionately first choices – 'primacy'), and acquiescence (such as agreeing with any assertion, regardless of content). Such responses are examples of 'satisficing', when respondents offer up responses that seem reasonable enough, but are neither truthful nor complete.<sup>26</sup>

22. We thank residents of two villages from Koulikoro region for their input on the sampling design.

23. Over the course of the crisis, the authors were not able to return to the villages for security reasons, but were able to speak directly with the village chiefs by telephone.

24. The villages did not experience an influx of displaced persons, either.

25. This visit was concurrent with planting season. To encourage participation and compensate individuals for their time across the data collection waves, we slaughtered cows and distributed meat.

26. Jon A. Krosnick, 'Survey research', *Annual Review of Psychology* 50, 1 (1999), pp. 537–67.



Two major problems can lead to ‘satisficing’ in this context. First, in a standard survey environment, respondents are often given only (or mostly) questions where respondents pick from a list of answer choices. However, in rural Mali individuals almost never encounter situations in which they must pick from a list of options when discussing their views. Not only might it be difficult for respondents to remember all possible choices simultaneously, but they might also be unwilling to contradict the list of available answer options with their truthful ‘other’ response (if that option was understood to be permissible), as it might be seen as bold or rude. Second, a standard survey environment typically bombards respondents with questions on diverse topics for up to an hour. Individuals are not used to stating direct and complete opinions after the first prompt and then moving onto a different question. In the context of rural Mali, conversation partners typically acknowledge one another’s ideas by repeating them and allowing individuals’ opinions to emerge gradually. Indeed, marginalized populations such as women and youth, who are often not invited to or allowed to participate in village meetings, may not be used to voicing so many opinions on politics, especially to enumerators from outside the village.

Taking lessons from qualitative research scholarship, we wanted to allow these villagers to express the policy priorities of greatest interest to them.<sup>27</sup> To do this, we employed a variety of techniques. First, to elicit attitudes about national policy priorities, we asked an open-ended question: *What would you do if you were the leader of the country?* This question was asked in the first and third data collections, allowing us to contrast views before and after the onset of state breakdown. In each wave, enumerators used follow-up prompts asking the respondents to explain further. Second, we asked respondents in the first and third round of data collection to pick from a set of radio clips on different news topics: agriculture, health, music, current regional political events, current national political events, sports, or no clip. Enumerators stated: *We have a few radio excerpts that we can play for you. Choose your preferred clip and we will play it.* Respondents were shown icons representing the options, which are illustrated in Figure 3. The audio clips and icons allowed illiterate respondents – the vast majority – simultaneously and easily to consider the options and reveal their priority for new information through behavioural choice. Respondents would then listen to their choice of radio clip in their mother tongue. All respondents chose to listen to a radio clip, perhaps reflecting the information-constrained environment.

27. Recent scholarship stresses the need to be open to respondents’ ideas when they depart from a researcher’s agenda. Under these tenets, researchers need to leave space for respondents to define the topic of research. See Diana Kapiszewski, Lauren MacLean, and Ben Read, *Field research in political science* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015), p. 182.

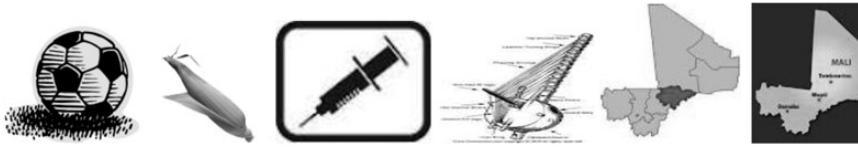


Figure 3. Listening option icons

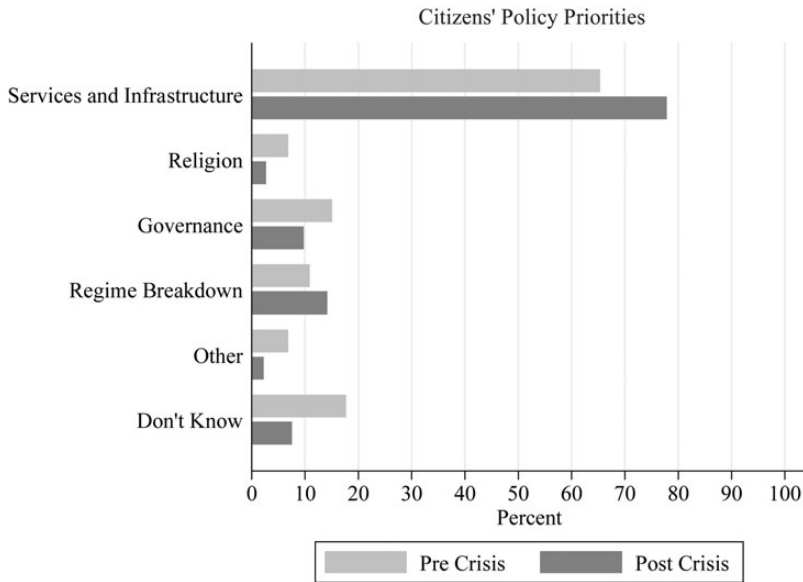
Third, we asked respondents if they would like to record a verbal message to US President Obama in the third data collection.<sup>28</sup> Respondents were told they could say anything they wanted and could come back any time in the day to record the message, and that their messages would reach the US government and a news outlet. The messages were transcribed, translated, and coded into categories for statistical analysis. The messages were indeed sent to representatives from US government agencies, including the State Department and USAID. Further, the authors wrote a *Monkey Cage* post, now a syndicated column for the Washington Post, as well as a short article in the United Nations University Newsletter to reach the media and policy makers.<sup>29</sup>

*Citizen voices: State neglect amidst food and water insecurity*

We expected that the villagers would be very focused on the regime and territorial breakdowns, especially given their location on the border of rebel and Malian territory. Consistently across the indicators and the semi-structured interviews, the villagers were overwhelmingly focused on what they perceived as a much more important crisis: the lack of state public services and infrastructure. The coup and insurgency merely exacerbated state abandonment that had been ongoing. Voices elicited through broader, more open-ended questions redefined the meaning of the crisis.

28. Why President Obama? First, the authors were able to truthfully promise to report the opinions through multiple channels to reach President Obama. The authors did not want to deceive human subjects by picking actors to whom they could not report opinions. Second, President Obama as the head of government of the United States was considered at the time to be one of the few prominent actors who might have played a role in addressing the insurgency and coup.

29. The vast majority of respondents, 531, opted to record a message. Messages are publicly available <[www.jaimiebleck.com](http://www.jaimiebleck.com)> and highlighted in an Op-Ed, 'Voices from contested territory: 531 messages for President Obama from northern Mali, 17 January 2013', *The Monkey Cage*, <<http://themonkeycage.org/2013/01/17/voices-from-contested-territory-531-messages-for-president-obama-from-northern-mali/>> (25 May 2015), 'Voices from fragile states: The resilient problem of human development', *UN University World Institute for Development Economics Research: WIDER ANGLE, MARCH 2013*, <[http://www.wider.unu.edu/publications/newsletter/articles-2013/en\\_GB/03-2013-JBKM/](http://www.wider.unu.edu/publications/newsletter/articles-2013/en_GB/03-2013-JBKM/)> (25 May 2015).



*Figure 4.* Citizens' policy priorities if they were leader of the country

We begin by providing some descriptive statistics about respondents' answers. First, what priorities would citizens pursue if they were the leader? The vast majority of citizens, both before and after the coup and insurgency, would prioritize public services including education, health, agricultural extension, and social welfare along with infrastructure such as water and roads. The percentage citing such public services rose from 65 percent before the coup and secession to 78 percent after. As depicted in Figure 4, statements addressing the territorial or regime breakdown were mentioned by far fewer people. Eleven percent of respondents mentioned they would address the low-level northern insurgency that existed before the coup and secession. After the coup and secession, this number only increased three percentage points to 14 percent.<sup>30</sup> Of those making substantive responses, women are less likely to name territorial/regime breakdown (pre-crisis by 7 percentage points and post-crisis by 6 percentage points).<sup>31</sup>

30. Respondents could reference multiple categories of issues. Therefore, percentages do not add up to 100.

31. Women were significantly more likely to choose the 'I don't know' or 'Other' response (pre-crisis by 27 and 8 percentage points, and post-crisis by 9 and 2 percentage points respectively). Men make comments over a broader range of subtopics, with 28 percent of men and only 9 percent of women referencing more than one category of policy initiatives pre-crisis and 16 percent of men and only 12 percent of women referencing multiple categories post-crisis. Difference in proportions tests were significant at the .05 level.

Next, we turn to the radio programmes that were selected by respondents. We anticipated that, after the coup and secession, many more respondents would be interested in regional and national news. Figure 5 shows listening preferences before and after the crisis. The data demonstrate that health and agriculture were the preferred topics for most respondents, both before and after the onset of political crisis. There was an increase in those respondents prioritizing regional news (from 3 percent to 8 percent of respondents) and national news (from 3 percent to 12 percent), but the vast majority of respondents were most concerned with development topics both before and during the crisis. Women were significantly more likely to pick health, while men were significantly more likely to select national political news.<sup>32</sup>

The messages to US President Barack Obama recorded in the third data collection reflect the same trend in focusing on unmet basic needs and requests for public services and infrastructure rather than on the coup or secession. As Figure 6 demonstrates, 72 percent of messages concerned food and water insecurity, 36 percent health, 32 percent agricultural production and animal husbandry, and 25 percent infrastructure such as roads and schools. By comparison, only 11 percent of messages mentioned the political crisis, often referring to general peace and stability or the need to restore the territorial integrity of Mali (4 percent specifically referenced the insurgency and 2 percent the coup).<sup>33</sup> Women were significantly more likely to mention food and water insecurity as well as infrastructure, while men were more likely to mention the political crisis.<sup>34</sup>

Many messages and policy priorities articulated the primacy of food and water insecurity, addressing poverty generally, or improving agricultural means to mitigate famine. One villager stated her policy priority succinctly: 'Agriculture is the most important thing in the world' (#1106708).<sup>35</sup> According to another villager, 'We are hungry and we don't have enough water. A person who does not have anything to eat or drink cannot lead a normal life. Therefore we ask for humanitarian aid' (#37). This respondent stresses that when human development is so low, people are incapable of engaging in 'normal' activities. Overwhelmingly, respondents emphasized

32. Difference in proportions tests for the results were significant at the .001 and .05 levels respectively.

33. Opinions could reference for both the female and male within a family; we do not have a way of knowing the gender for those individuals.

34. Difference in proportions tests were significant at the .001, .1, and .001 levels. We can only examine response categories across gender for the subset of the sample for which we know the gender of the respondent: 200 women and 201 men. In the Obama message exercise, one of our enumerators unfortunately failed to record respondent gender.

35. These unique response ID numbers were generated by enumerators for each transcribed voice message (1-600) or by i-survey software for qualitative response recorded in the context of the survey (six or seven digit numbers).

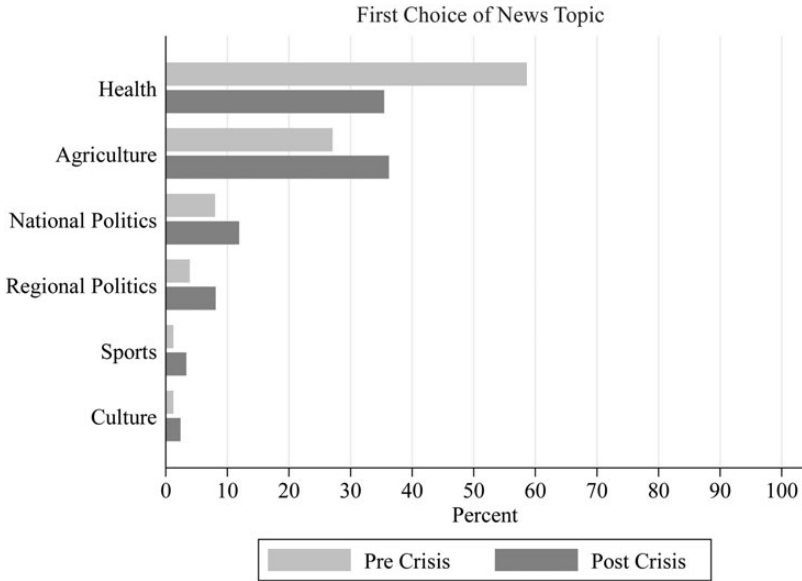


Figure 5. Citizens' first choice of news topic

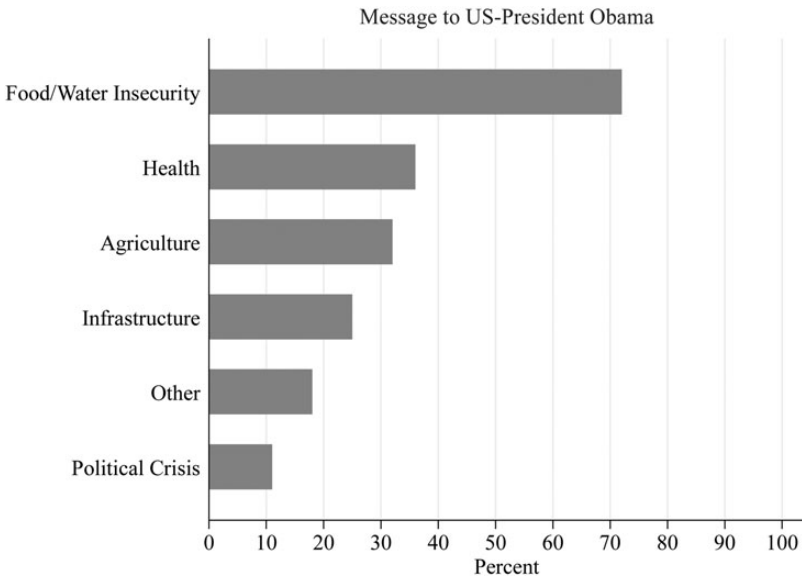


Figure 6. Topics of citizen messages to US President Obama

the lack of public services and infrastructure as compounding the level of poverty in the area. As one villager explained:

[O]ur concerns are health and the food supply. We live in a rural area, which has no infrastructure so health and sanitation are major concerns ... we have nothing. (#70)

Often, villagers mentioned how weak infrastructure compounded unavailability of services:

A problem that we face is the need for health facilities; we must travel to [location] to receive medical care. However, money to pay for transportation to this health centre is not easy to come by because we don't have any way to earn this money. Furthermore, the roads are impassable and can cause problems for pregnant women. If we had a health centre in our area, many of our problems would be solved. Additionally, we have problems with the water supply. (#90)

The desire for provision of basic services was incredibly strong. As one man said, if he were the country's leader, he 'would construct health centres, schools, and therefore assure food security for all' (#612540). We note that in many appeals to President Obama, citizens described universal problems facing rural Mali rather than the localized needs of their villages.<sup>36</sup> As described in the quote below, these were not merely appeals for targeted development projects within their own villages; rather, respondents recognized the need for more comprehensive service provision – not just in their own villages, but throughout rural Mali:

American President, we, the men of this village, are confronted by many problems. We don't have money, no roads, no health structures, a slaughterhouse to vaccinate our herds, no school. We would especially like to highlight the need for a school. We would like your aid in all of these areas of life, but not just for us, it's [a problem for] all of Mali. (# 132)

Villagers lamented that the state had abandoned their community. In the words of one of our respondents:

We are not in Mali. We don't eat, we don't sleep, we don't have any health or sanitation infrastructure, no schools, no water. ... The state has abandoned us. There is nothing for us but poverty and the misery of peasants.<sup>37</sup>

While this lack of public services and infrastructure was an ongoing lived crisis, the occupation and coup also led some villagers to state specifically that they felt even more abandoned and disconnected from the state. They watched as civil servants fled out of rural areas subsequent to the occupation.<sup>38</sup> Other respondents relayed similar fears, for example:

36. Unlike prominent discourse from Bamako, not a single respondent mentioned the word 'corruption' in their message to Obama. This may reflect the difference between poorly functioning bureaucracy (urban areas) as compared to non-existent bureaucracy (rural areas).

37. Interview, village council member, Village Five, Mali, 22 June 2012.

38. A 2013 survey found that displaced persons had higher than average levels of education (33 percent had secondary school or higher, compared to a national average of 12 percent) and

In the area, our main concern is food insecurity, the need for health facilities and agricultural equipment, and the lack of roads to our village. Additionally, the school is (now) abandoned, left to its own fate. Who knows what the future holds? (#61)

Other respondents openly questioned the allegiance of their village to the Malian state, saying:

Most importantly, we have heard that there are agricultural subsidies for farmers, but we have not received any subsidies. I request that President Obama ask his counterpart in Mali if (village name) is not a part of Mali, because the authorities do nothing for us. (#341)

Respondents lamented that the state had never really been present in the villages. They received no agricultural extension services or state assistance to combat severe drought and ongoing climate fluctuations, with detrimental effects on agricultural output. During the January 2012 data collection, farmers pointed to spoiled fields where they had planted rice on five hectares, but only harvested enough crops to fill two bags (approximately 100 kilos) with peeled rice. Village chiefs reported little interaction with the state outside of tax agents from the department of forestry, who annually tax each household's firewood consumption for cooking as a penalty for living in the increasingly desertified zone.<sup>39</sup> As a result, chiefs wondered whether they would be able to justify continued tax collection. Abandonment by the state at the height of the crisis also provoked questions about the obligations citizens should have to the state. As one chief told us, 'How can I continue to convince my constituency to pay taxes to a state that vanishes in the face of the earliest threat? How can we continue to pay taxes to a government that doesn't protect us?'<sup>40</sup>

Of the few people mentioning regime breakdown, messages were predominantly concerned with the effect the crises had on basic livelihoods, public services, and infrastructure. For example, respondents complained about decreased freedom of movement for grazing animals: 'We want [Obama] to bring us food. The rebels tire us a lot, our goats, our cattle can no longer be brought to graze in the north because they risk being stolen' (#441). Other respondents explained that infrastructure gaps had worsened during the dual state breakdown because state employees, including teachers and state security agents, left the area: 'In [village name], we have a school, but it does not have any directors. Additionally, the building of a

were disproportionately from urban zones (70 percent). Jaimie Bleck, Abdoulaye Dembele, and Sidiki Guindo, 'Reconstructing the Malian state: Perspectives of internally displaced persons— results from a survey conducted June 2013', <[www.jaimiebleck.com](http://www.jaimiebleck.com)> (15 March 2015).

39. Interviews, Chiefs, Villages 1–5, January 2012. See Tor R. Benjaminson 'Does supply-induced scarcity drive violent conflicts in the African Sahel? The case of the Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali', *Journal of Peace Research* 45, 6 (2008), p. 829 on the forest service's exploitation of rural populations in northern Mali.

40. Interview, Village Chief, Village 1, via telephone, 8 April 2012.

health centre was about to begin, but the coup has put this project in jeopardy' (#341). Price increases subsequent to the political crisis were also a large concern; villagers reported sugar prices increasing from 400 FCFA to 600 FCFA a kilo,<sup>41</sup> fewer public transport vehicles, and stymied remittance flows from children living outside the village.

Indeed, the villages had very little in the way of public services and infrastructure. None of the villages were electrified, nor connected to a paved road. There were no police stations, no piped water, no sewerage systems. There were no health centres in any of the villages and only five of the villages had access to state schools within walking distance. Cell phone signals were weak to non-existent, subject to weather such as wind and sand storms. Only one radio station emission – national public radio – reached the area, the only real connection between villagers and the distant state. The schools had been built very recently, as reflected in the fact that only 8 percent of respondents had been able to attend state school.

Active non-state authorities were fulfilling state functions. In contrast to low public school enrolment, 80 percent of respondents had been to Qur'anic school, which were present in every village.<sup>42</sup> Given such weak state presence, village chiefs and imams were cited as providing the majority of services and infrastructure for the villages.<sup>43</sup> When asked who was most responsible for bringing development to the villages – for example, in the area of bridges, wells, and schools – in our sample 42 percent named the village chief and 21 percent named the imam. Only 12 percent cited state actors and 25 percent didn't know. Thus, 63 percent of citizens cited local-level, non-state authorities.

Respondents' justifications for naming traditional authorities further illuminate the primacy of such actors, rather than the state, as the relevant political authorities.<sup>44</sup> Some respondents stated reasons of patriarchy or hierarchy: they named the chief as responsible because 'the village is his property'. Others explained that the chief was more knowledgeable about village problems: 'he is from the village and knows the problems of the village'. Other respondents cited past accomplishments in the area of public service and infrastructure provision ('he has built wells here') as well

41. From approximately US\$0.80 to \$1.20 a kilo, based on a 500 Franc Communauté Financière Africaine (FCFA) to the dollar.

42. Unlike *médersas* (or madrasas), Qur'anic schools are run by private instructors and receive no formal assistance, monitoring, or recognition from the Malian state.

43. Mali attempted to decentralize in the 1990s, introducing elections in 703 municipalities and devolving power and responsibility for welfare service provision to locally elected officials. The creation of elected municipal authorities diverged from the previous regime's reliance on local elites. However, decentralization largely failed to improve service provision. See Susanna Wing and Brehima Kassibo, 'Comparative assessment of decentralization in Africa: Mali desk study' (United States Agency for International Development, Washington, DC, 2010).

44. Respondents were asked a follow-up question – why they thought the actor they cited was most responsible.



as his capacity to resolve disputes ('he established rules between us [the farmers] and the herders' and 'he resolves problems between people'). Last, respondents mentioned personal redistribution in the village. As one respondent said, 'truthfully, [the village chief] plays a very large role, he uses his own money to help the rest of us'.

*Persistence of rural neglect in Mali and Africa as a whole*

Despite being located on the border of state and rebel-controlled territory in the aftermath of a coup, the Malian villagers in this study were focused on a lack of access to public services and infrastructure. As the villagers' testimonies relate, the lack of public service provision was weak and surely a contributing factor to ongoing food and water insecurity. That the villagers could be experiencing such an extreme and sudden macro-political state breakdown, and nonetheless prioritize provision of basic public services and infrastructure, shows the sheer primacy of the latter. Citizens may not be able to consider larger problems of democracy and territorial integrity when basic needs are not met.<sup>45</sup>

Mali is one of the poorest countries in Africa and suffers from ongoing environmental crises such as climate fluctuations, particularly in the area of study, that challenge citizens' livelihoods.<sup>46</sup> Thus, it is important to ask whether the villagers' experience is anomalous or can be generalized to Mali as well as to Africa as a whole. To examine rural under-provision of services and infrastructure, we use Afrobarometer data from the most recent Round Five (2011–13).<sup>47</sup> These data give us insight into many dimensions of public service and infrastructure provision by collecting objective measures of respondents' access to electricity, piped water, paved roads, sewerage, police stations, schools, health clinics, and market stalls.<sup>48</sup> Enumeration teams were responsible for assessing and reporting whether public services and infrastructure were present in an enumeration area.<sup>49</sup> Further, Afrobarometer collects public opinion on food and water

45. Modernization theorists have argued that individuals need to have a basic level of socio-economic resources to engage with politics in a meaningful way. Among others, see Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Some social requisites of democracy: Economic development and political legitimacy', *American Political Science Review* 53, 1 (1959), pp. 69–105.

46. Benjaminsen, 'Does supply-induced scarcity drive violent conflicts in the African Sahel?'

47. The survey draws on a nationally representative sample, but we remind the reader that these are not census data. We therefore encourage readers to focus more on trends rather than point estimates, thus allowing for sampling error. See <[www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)> for methodology details.

48. One advantage of the Afrobarometer is that there are many more dimensions of public services and infrastructure. Other studies, by contrast, typically investigate public service delivery along a single dimension.

49. The criterion for access is whether the infrastructure was within the enumeration area/primary sampling unit or within 'easy walking distance'.

insecurity. The Malian survey was fielded roughly six months after our last data collection (in December 2012 and January 2013). The Malian survey only includes data from the six southern regions, excluding Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu. These regions hold only 10 percent of the Malian population and typically have less access to state infrastructure, and thus the data might overestimate actual provision in rural areas.

Figures 7–9 display the percentage of rural citizens (triangles) and urban citizens (circles) with access to electricity, piped water, and paved roads, listed by country in order from the lowest to the highest levels of rural provision. Other results, including access to sewerage systems, market stalls, schools, health clinics, and police stations, can be found in the online appendix.<sup>50</sup> While there is variation in provision of rural public services and infrastructure cross-nationally, the level of rural provision in the majority of countries, including Mali, remains extremely low. Further, rural provision is much lower than urban provision. In 20 of the 28 countries, fewer than half of rural citizens have access to electricity or piped water and less than a third to paved roads. In 24 of the 28 countries, less than a tenth of rural citizens' communities have access to a sewerage system and less than a third have a police station. These indicators are good measures of state provision of public services and infrastructure to citizens, because the state is solely responsible.

Public services that can be provided by non-state actors such as religious foundations, international aid, or local community members are available at much higher rates than infrastructure, for which the state is the exclusive provider. Schools and, to a lesser extent, health clinics and market stalls reach many more rural citizens than electricity or sewerage.<sup>51</sup> While at least 80 percent of children in 24 of the 28 countries are within walking distance of a school, in 17 of the 28 countries less than half of citizens are located within walking distance of a health clinic.

As the Malian villagers stated in their answers, the absence of vital public services and infrastructure contributes to acute food and water insecurity. This sentiment is corroborated both within and beyond Mali by the Afrobarometer data. Around one half of rural Malians reported food and water insecurity. Across the continent, 45 and 44 percent of rural citizens and 30 and 32 percent of urbanites reported food and water insecurity

50. The appendix is free to download from the *African Affairs* website.

51. Primary school expansion was due largely to the influx of donor funding into the education sector as well as the proliferation of private schools and community schools after education sector liberalization. See Jaimie Bleck, *Education and empowered citizenship in Mali* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2015). Furthermore, governments in many African countries have made primary school free and expanded education infrastructure. Robin Harding and David Stasavage, 'What democracy does (and doesn't do) for basic services: school fees, school inputs, and African elections', *The Journal of Politics* 76, 1 (2014), pp. 229–45.

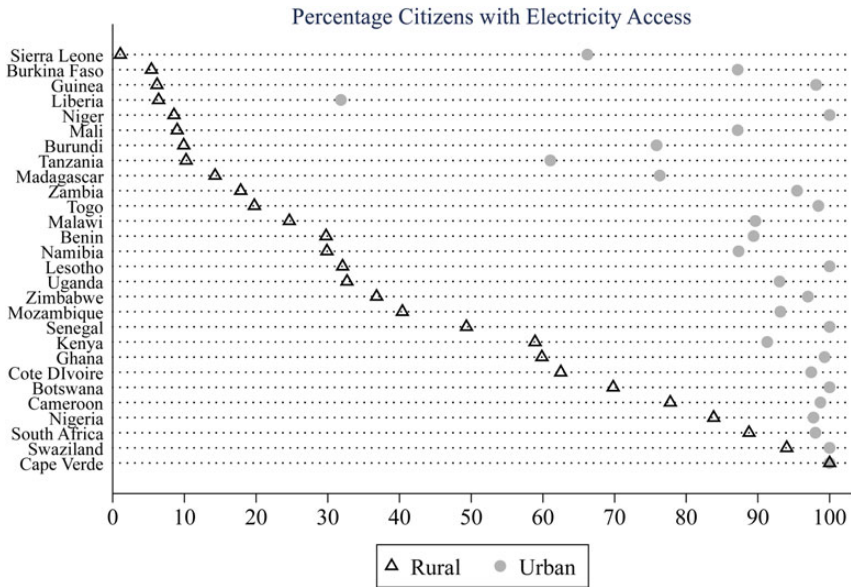


Figure 7. Citizens' access to electricity

respectively.<sup>52</sup> Although substantial variation exists cross-nationally, the level of rural African citizens going without meals and water is high, as well as by and large much higher than urbanites. Further evidence of this is presented in the online appendix.

*The Malian crisis of 2012 in the context of Africanist state-building literature*

Policy analysis and prescriptions for the Malian crisis have focused mainly on re-establishing and consolidating democracy, as well as quelling future secessions and violent extremism. While the coup and rebellion garnered worldwide attention, the routine failure of the Malians state to deliver public goods and services to 80 percent of its population living in rural areas has received less attention. Based on the voices of the Malian villagers and the external validity of their discourse in the Afrobarometer data, we join the few scholars who depart from the narration of a crisis centred on the juridical state to underscore the importance of empirical state failure.

Hillel Soifer, drawing on Michael Mann's work, provides a useful typology for disaggregating the various dimensions of empirical state

52. Food or water insecurity is defined as going without food or water several times, many times, or always in the last year.

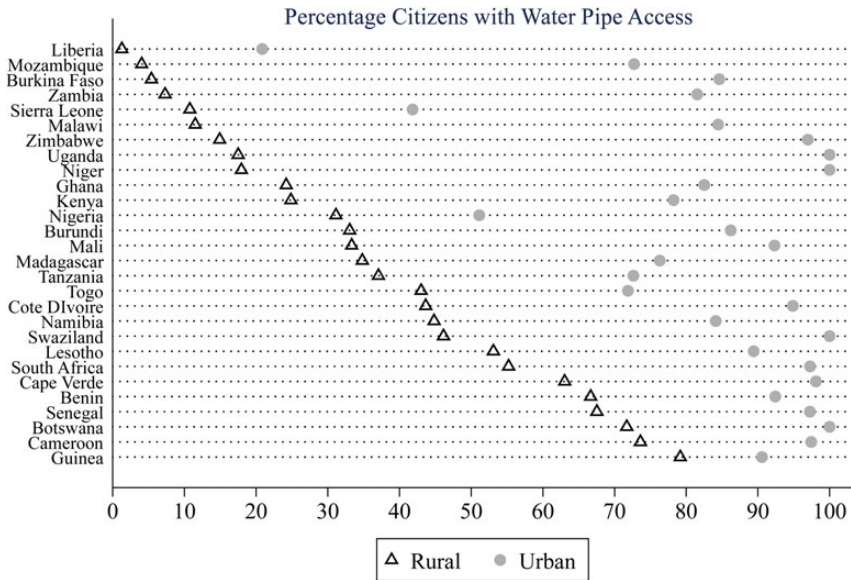


Figure 8. Citizens' access to piped water

strength.<sup>53</sup> The dimensions include (1) capabilities of the central state, which emphasizes 'the extent of resources at its disposal for exercising power via its institutions of control';<sup>54</sup> (2) the effects of the state on society, or 'how the exercise of state power shapes the society it controls, delineating its effects on the actions, and even the identities, of societal actors';<sup>55</sup> and (3) the state's territorial reach, or 'the varied ability of a particular state to exercise control within its territory'.<sup>56</sup>

Existing critiques of empirical state weakness in the context of Mali's 2012 crisis have focused on the first two dimensions: central state weakness,<sup>57</sup> and

53. Hillel Soifer, 'State infrastructural power: approaches to conceptualization and measurement', *Studies in Comparative International Development* 43 (2008), pp. 231–51. Michael Mann, *The autonomous power of the state* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1984).

54. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

57. For example, authors have discussed the endemic corruption among governing elites and military, as well as the continued reliance on foreign aid for the Malian state budget. Martin van Vilet shows that Malian members of the National Assembly neglect their general constituency to channel support to their personal support networks. 'Weak legislatures, failing MPs, and the collapse of democracy in Mali', *African Affairs* 113, 450 (2013), pp. 45–66. Caryn Pfeiffer and Pierre Englebert discuss increases in corruption in Mali between 1996 and 2010. 'Extraversion, vulnerability to donors, and political liberalization in Africa', *African Affairs* 111, 444 (2012), pp. 355–78. On foreign aid reliance, see Nicolas van de Walle, 'Foreign aid in dangerous places: the donors and Mali's democracy' (Working Paper No.

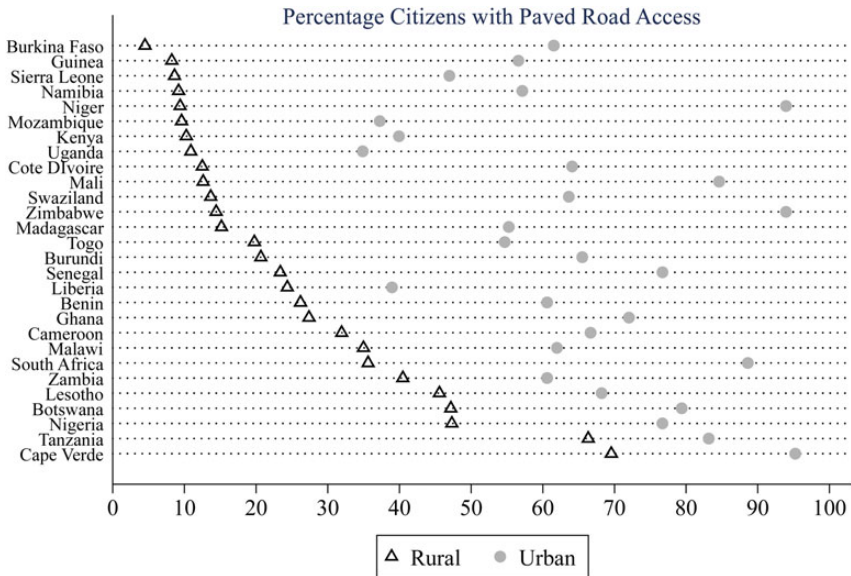


Figure 9. Citizens' access to paved roads

the state's inability to control non-state actors.<sup>58</sup> We emphasize the third dimension: geographical variation in state strength, and in particular the state's failure to deliver public services and infrastructure in rural areas.<sup>59</sup> Here we discuss both domestic and international determinants responsible for ongoing empirical state failure in Mali's rural areas.

The first domestic barrier is related to the state's ability to provide public services and infrastructure across rural areas. While the geographical problem is 'timeless', Herbst relates that the freezing of colonial boundaries, laid down for colonial conquest and extractive purposes rather than state-building goals, left some states with more intractable geographies and thereby worse off for broadcasting power throughout their territory.<sup>60</sup> Mali falls into the latter camp, being categorized as a 'hinterland country',

2012/61, United Nations University, 2012) and Isaline Bergmaschi, 'The fall of a donor darling: aid in Mali's crisis', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 52, 3 (2014), pp. 347–78.

58. The emergence of powerful armed actors in the north has brought attention to the state's inability to control societal networks of non-state actors. Raleigh and Dowd, 'Briefing', note the emergence of powerful non-state actors in the north; Boas and Torheim describe the state's decentralization efforts as hijacked by regional and national elites, 'The trouble in Mali,' p. 1280.

59. van de Walle acknowledges spatial inequality between Bamako and the rest of the country, 'Foreign aid in dangerous places', p. 13.

60. Herbst, *States and power in Africa*.

an exceptionally large country with small areas of high and medium population density and vast areas with low population density.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world and did not inherit much in the way of public services and infrastructure upon independence from France in 1960. The difficulty of providing public services and infrastructure across such a dispersed and needy rural population is certainly a factor determining the Malian state's under-provision of public services and infrastructure in rural areas.

The second domestic factor relates not to the state's ability, but rather its willingness to provide public services and infrastructure in rural areas. Elected officials in rural areas demonstrate poor political accountability when they budget and monitor public services and infrastructure delivery. Decentralization reform throughout the 1990s was aimed at improving political accountability by bringing government closer to rural citizens in Mali, but these localized initiatives were never funded adequately, nor were they effective in limiting central state control.<sup>62</sup> Corruption and poor accountability at the national level has simply been duplicated at the lower levels of government.<sup>63</sup>

Such unresponsive government performance persists in part because citizens in rural Mali have weak ability and willingness to hold government accountable through the democratic process. First, citizens' ability to monitor and sanction government performance stems from low levels of education and information about government performance,<sup>64</sup> as well as low expectations and understanding of what government is legally obligated to provide.<sup>65</sup> Further, women are often not included in everyday village-level

61. Mali ranks 209th of 238 countries in terms of scarcely populated territory, see Index Mundi, 'Territory Rankings', 2012, <<http://www.indexmundi.com/g/r.aspx?v=21000>> (25 April 2015).

62. Susanna Wing and Brehima Kassibo, 'Decentralization in Mali: Political incentives and democratic challenges', in Tyler Dickovick and James S. Wunsch (eds), *Decentralization in Africa* (Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 2014).

63. Jessica Gottlieb demonstrates that poorer public service and infrastructure provision is more likely in rural areas where all political parties win seats in the local commune council as opposed to commune councils with an unelected opposition. Parties can collude together effectively without an unelected opposition to provide some degree of oversight. Jessica Gottlieb, 'The logic of party collusion in a democracy: Evidence from Mali', *World Politics* 67, 1 (2015), pp. 1–36.

64. Mali has relatively weak penetration of radio into rural zones and some citizens have no access to private radio – Bleck and Michelitch, 'Capturing the airwaves, capturing the nation'. High levels of illiteracy (nearly 70 percent) further constrain citizens' ability to access information. Bleck finds that higher levels of education among Malian citizens are associated with greater political knowledge. Bleck, *Education and empowered citizenship*.

65. However, improving civic education improves the ability of rural Malians to sanction local government actors. Jessica Gottlieb, 'Greater expectations? A field experiment to improve accountability in Mali', *American Journal of Political Science*, forthcoming.



politics,<sup>66</sup> stymying their ability to gain the skills for political participation within the state. Decentralized infrastructure through which citizens can voice complaints or receive information about government performance does not yet exist in Mali.<sup>67</sup> Taken together, these factors mean that it is difficult for citizens to participate politically by monitoring government within or between elections.

Low citizen willingness to hold government accountable stems from frustration or apathy towards the state. Indeed, Mali has one of the lowest voter turnout rates in Africa.<sup>68</sup> Low ongoing provision renders expectations for future provision extremely low. Politics is seen as dirty, corrupt, and extractive, and citizens without formal French education often experience lower levels of internal political efficacy, and are thus reluctant to engage with Malian bureaucracy on their own.<sup>69</sup> The levels of state provision of public services and infrastructure, and citizen engagement with the state, are mutually reinforcing. When citizens do not use state-provided public services and infrastructure, there is little willingness to pay taxes<sup>70</sup> or voice concerns, allowing the state to fall into 'cycles of slack'.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, the villagers in our sample related that they felt abandoned by the state. However, recent studies have shown that when citizens are able to consume state public services and infrastructure, they become more politically engaged in a 'policy feedback cycle'.<sup>72</sup>

66. Traditional authorities are not formally recognized as part of the state apparatus, come to power via heredity, and rule with institutions of their own choosing that are largely exclusionary of women and young men. In our sample, 47 percent of women and 12 percent of men reported *not* being invited to village meetings. Village discussions, while often cited as consensus-based, are steeped in hierarchy. Jonathan M. Sears, *Deepening democracy and cultural context in the Republic of Mali, 1992–2002* (Unpublished dissertation, Queen's University, 2007).

67. Politician report cards and complaint reporting systems have arisen in other countries in the region. Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, 'Policing politicians: citizen empowerment and political accountability in Uganda preliminary analysis' (Working Paper, Columbia University, 2009), <<http://cu-csds.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/ABCDE-paper.pdf>> (15 March 2015). A 'question and answer assembly' exists at the central state level, but has received inadequate resources. Wing, 'Briefing', p. 478.

68. Gottlieb, 'Civic and political behavior in Mali', highlights the weak social contract and apathy toward the democratic process among rural citizens and the state. Malian citizens prefer to turn to traditional or religious elites rather than elected or bureaucratic authority. Massa Coulibaly and Amadou Diarra, 'Démocratie et légitimation du marche: rapport d'enquête Afrobarometer au Mali, Décembre 2002' (Working Paper 35, Afrobarometer, Lansing, Michigan, 2004).

69. Scepticism around electoral politics is pervasive. Jaimie Bleck, 'Islamic schooling in Malian democracy: disaggregating parents' political behavior', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 51, 3 (2013), pp. 377–408.

70. Claire Bodea and Adrienne LeBas, 'The origins of voluntary compliance: attitudes toward taxation in urban Nigeria', *British Journal of Political Science*, available online, 10 September 2014, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S000712341400026X>>.

71. This term refers to institutional decay without feedback from citizens or consumers. Albert Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970).

72. Lauren MacLean, 'State retrenchment and the exercise of citizenship in Africa', *Comparative Political Studies* 44 (2012), pp. 1238–66.

In addition to domestic factors, there are two major international factors weakening the empirical state in rural Mali. First, secular and religious foreign interventions at the micro-level circumvent the state by simply substituting for it (for example, building schools and clinics). While improving livelihoods, such measures can often weaken the political accountability loop between citizens and the state.<sup>73</sup> If a non-state actor is providing public services or infrastructure, there is little incentive for the state to undertake provision. Moreover, citizens may become disengaged from the state, as they become reliant on and owe allegiance to non-state providers such as religious schools or health clinics.<sup>74</sup> In sum, when non-state actors bolster, supplement, or circumvent the state, they run the risk of undermining the responsibility of the state to fulfil its duties in providing public services and infrastructure to its people.

Second, as argued prominently by Jackson and Rosberg, along with Pierre Englebert, the international community continues to bolster the juridical statehood of failed empirical states in Africa.<sup>75</sup> Along with legal recognition of statehood,<sup>76</sup> such support includes armed interventions to quell insurgencies and foreign aid to state budgets. This support does not force governments to cultivate their own bureaucratic capabilities. Further, international incentives to hold elections to legitimize a regime as democratic as soon as possible<sup>77</sup> may risk leaving many citizens unable to vote or drawing disproportionate attention to the polls as a proxy for properly functioning democratic institutions.

Each northern rebellion in Mali, including the fourth in 2012, has cited the goal of achieving self-rule based on ongoing empirical state neglect by the Bamako (and southern Mali) centric state. Similarly, the putschists

73. Melanie Cammett and Lauren MacLean, 'Introduction: The political consequences of non-state social welfare in the global south', *Studies in Comparative International Development* 46 (2011), pp. 1–21. However, emerging research is demonstrating that sometimes foreign projects can improve citizens' ability to hold government accountable through increasing their socio-economic status and civic skills. Jennifer Brass, 'Blurring boundaries: The integration of NGOs into governance in Kenya', *Governance* 25, 2 (2012), pp. 209–35. We need to understand better the conditions and factors that affect the impact of non-state provision on state strength, accountability, and citizen allegiance.

74. Bleck finds that parents of public school children participate more in Malian elections than other Malian citizens, while parents of children in *médersas* (also called madrasas) vote less than other Malian citizens. Bleck, 'Islamic schooling in Malian democracy.'

75. We note that there is dramatic variation in state strength and service provision in rural Africa (as seen in figures 7–9), as well as strength of domestic revenue and institutions. Mali is among those states with the weakest empirical performance.

76. This legal recognition gives poorly performing states a monopoly over rule, discounting what Englebert refers to as legal sovereignty, and in doing so discredits any territorial challenges – even those that may be more capable of providing empirical statehood. Englebert, *Africa: Unity, sovereignty, and sorrow*.

77. Pfeiffer and Englebert, 'Extraversion, vulnerability to donors, and political liberalization in Africa', note that governments with few natural resource deposits, like Mali, are most vulnerable to international pressure for elections.



were civil servants aggrieved by the state's inability to provide them with adequate resources to do their job (in this case low-ranking military officers without adequate pay, weapons, and supplies). Thus, there is a common point being made by both the insurgents and the putschists: the empirical state is an empty shell and it deserves to be supplanted.<sup>78</sup> When these domestic actors rebelled against the failed empirical state, the international community sought to restore Mali's juridical statehood. Despite lack of territorial control and the inability of many citizens to vote, the 2013 elections were pushed forward quickly, allowing donors to remove sanctions placed on the putschist regime and resume aid flows to supplement the state budget. The French intervention and subsequent UN mission "restored" Mali's internationally recognized borders.<sup>79</sup>

Such foreign intervention creates conditions under which state actors hone strategies of extraversion, or focus on serving the international community rather than serving domestic constituencies. Two years later, this bolstering of the juridical state has not improved empirical state strength in rural areas. Insecurity lingers throughout the country; over 200,000 Malians continue to live as refugees or displaced persons. Indeed, the number of attacks on UN and government installations has *increased* since the second half of 2014, as has the frequency of inter-ethnic and inter-clan fighting.<sup>80</sup> There has been little improvement in the capacity of the army, as demonstrated by the defeat of the Malian army at Kidal in May 2014. There is no tangible evidence that the outreach of services to rural areas has increased. The municipal elections have been postponed repeatedly for security reasons, so it remains to be seen how and if state performance in rural areas will improve at the most local level.

### *Conclusion*

In the aftermath of the 2012 Malian coup and insurgency, villagers on the border of state and rebel-controlled territory expressed the crisis as one of unmet need for public services and infrastructure as well as resultant food and water insecurity. In contrast, most accounts of the crisis of 2012 in Mali focus on territorial and regime breakdown in the form of the rebel insurgency and coup. The way in which Malian villagers define the crisis as

78. However, Englebort warns that local actors often attempt secession to win a larger slice of the state's 'legal command' in order to extract associated resources. Englebort, *Africa: Unity, sovereignty, and sorrow*.

79. We recognize that the case of Kidal is far more complicated. French support of the MNLA departs from a simple narrative about 'restoring status quo' juridical sovereignty. Wing, 'Briefing', p. 483.

80. International Crisis Group, 'Mali: last chance in Algiers' (Africa Briefing Report 104, Dakar/Brussels, 2014).

one of weak state provision of public services and infrastructure, amidst significant territorial and regime breakdown, should act as a *cri de coeur* to redirect our attention to the ongoing failure of state weakness to address rural livelihoods in Mali. Importantly, empirical state breakdown did not just occur in the minds of villagers; the coup and rebel insurgency merely exacerbated what was an ongoing empirical state failure. As we see in the Malian case, countries that have won international juridical acclaim by hitting democratic benchmarks (freedom of press, executive alternations), but fail to provide the empirical goods of statehood, remain in a very vulnerable position.

Using the most recent round of Afrobarometer data, we showed that state under-provision in public service and infrastructure provision across many dimensions, as well as food and water insecurity, was present in Mali as a whole and across the sub-Saharan African continent (see also the online appendix). Other studies of rural under-provision (or urban–rural gaps) have typically been limited to one type of service or infrastructure.<sup>81</sup>

As political scientists we have a tendency to focus on the spikes and tremors associated with regime change or insurgency. The priorities identified by Malian villagers came to light because they were allowed to express themselves through open-ended attitudinal and behavioural measures rather than closed survey questions guided by our agenda. By providing respondents with a large degree of autonomy to reveal policy priorities, this research remained open to rural Malians' redefinition of the crisis on their own terms rather than guided by those themes that we initially envisioned.<sup>82</sup> This demonstrates the value of incorporating open-ended policy priority questions and making available the verbatim sentiments of citizens, as well as quantified categories.

81. Herbst, *States and power in Africa*, measures rural under-provision with roads data.

82. Kapiszewski *et al.*, *Field research in political science*.