
Political Response, Public Debate, and Institutional Resilience

The Stakes of the Malian Crisis in Senegal
Mamadou Bodian



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Paper Series: The Stakes of the Malian Crisis in the Sahel

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The Sahel Research Group, of the University of Florida's Center for African Studies, is a collaborative effort to understand the political, social, economic, and cultural dynamics of the countries which comprise the West African Sahel. It focuses primarily on the six Francophone countries of the region—Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad—but also on in developments in neighboring countries, to the north and south, whose dynamics frequently intersect with those of the Sahel. The Sahel Research Group brings together faculty and graduate students from various disciplines at the University of Florida, in collaboration with colleagues from the region.

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Paper Series: The Stakes of the Malian Crisis in the Sahel

In January 2012, Tuareg separatists launched a rebellion against the government of Mali in a bid to gain independence for the northern regions of the country. They were quickly joined by groups of Islamist militants seeking to establish control of the region, and dealing significant setbacks to the Malian military in a series of engagements. Following these defeats, on 22 March 2012 frustrated junior officers in the Malian military led a coup d'état which ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré from power. Subsequently, the Islamist groups in the north were able to sideline the Tuareg separatists and take control of the provincial capitals in the northern regions of Mali—Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu. The military coup in Mali and de facto partition of the country were shocking events in a particularly fragile region, and quickly captured the attention of scholars and policy-makers around the world.

While significant interest emerged regarding the Malian crisis and the unfolding events in the country, there has been relatively little discussion of the effects of the crisis and their implications for surrounding countries in the Sahel. Recognizing the lack of information available on the reverberations of the crisis in neighboring countries, the Sahel Research Group set out to write five discussion papers on the responses and reactions of Senegal, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad to the events in Mali.

Fieldwork for these papers was conducted in sets of the countries by three different graduate student researchers during the summer of 2013. After conducting the initial research for these papers they were presented at the African Studies Association's 2013 Annual Meeting and revised with the additional comments of participants from the Sahel Seminar. These discussion papers were written with generous support from the Minerva Initiative Grant to the University of Florida.



Abstract:

The 2012 Tuareg rebellion in Mali connected to Islamists affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has threatened the sovereignty of the Malian state. It has also fed the fear of instability in many countries of the Sahel. The French military intervention in January 2013 and the dismantling of the Islamists' initial positions in northern Mali raised concerns about the dispersion of the jihadists throughout the subregion, including in Senegal. This paper analyzes the domestic impact of the Malian crisis in Senegal by focusing on three issues. The first is related to the spread of radical Islam and the risk of "contagion" from jihadist sentiments, given that Senegal and Mali share the same border and have similar religious structures – each with a Muslim population accounting for at least 90% of the overall population. The second issue is the Senegalese state's response to both the Malian political crisis and the Islamists in northern Mali, and the subsequent public debates in Senegal. The third element is the role of political and religious institutions in mitigating the potential negative effects of the Malian crisis in Senegal. I conclude that the limited impact of the Malian crisis on the Senegalese state is based on three pillars: the resilience of state institutions, the mitigating role of the security apparatus, and the mitigating role of religious structures.

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Introduction

The Malian crisis of 2012, sparked in large part by the fall of Khadafi in Libya, quickly called into question the sovereignty of the Malian state in the face of an assault led by a Tuareg rebellion, joined by Islamists affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). It also had far-reaching effects in West Africa and across the Sahel in particular. Following the French military intervention in northern Mali in January 2013 and the deployment of an African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), most analyses of the crisis emphasized the political fiasco in Bamako, the humanitarian implications of this joint military intervention, and the security concerns that resulted from the dispersion of the jihadists throughout the sub-region. However, little attention has been paid to how these regional dynamics play into the domestic politics and the potential security threats in Mali's neighbors. How successful have countries bordering Mali been at mitigating potentially destabilizing security threats resulting from the Malian crisis?

This paper seeks to examine the domestic impact of the Malian crisis in Senegal by emphasizing its political, socioeconomic, and security implications¹. First, the paper provides relevant background information including a discussion of the political, economic, and social contexts of Senegal. Second, the paper provides an overview of the Senegalese government's position and responses to the Islamist occupation in the north of Mali and the political crisis in Bamako. This is followed by an analysis of public debates in Senegal concerning the president's decision to send 500 Senegalese troops to Mali. Third, the paper discusses the economic consequences of the Malian crisis and domestic perceptions of potential Islamist threats following the French military intervention in northern Mali and the deployment of the AFISMA mission. Finally, the paper analyzes the role of the state and religious institutions in mitigating the potential negative effects of the Malian crisis. The major argument is that the limited impact of the Malian crisis on the Senegalese state is based on three factors: the resilience of state institutions, the significant role of the security apparatus, and the mitigating role of religious structures.

Senegal in Context: The Roots of Instability

The 2012 Tuareg rebellion in Mali and the subsequent military coup has reinforced the importance of taking a close look at the underlying political, economic, and social conditions that have the potential to generate dramatic change and instability in neighboring countries, including Senegal. Unlike many of its neighbors, and despite being a poor African country, Senegal has defied expectations by remaining relatively stable and relatively democratic throughout its post-colonial history. The country has never experienced a military coup or harsh dictatorship. Several successful transitions of power have taken place over the last three decades. Senegal underwent a long process of political liberalization that shifted the country from a single-party regime (from 1960 to 1974), to a limited multiparty system (from 1974 to 1981), and, finally a full multiparty system since

¹ For an examination of the "lessons" of the Malian crisis for Senegal, see: Ba, Mouhamadou El Hady et Pierre Amath Mbaye (2013). *La crise malienne et ses leçons pour le Sénégal*. IPODE, Working paper N°1 /2013.02.

the 1980s. Throughout the 1980s, democratic institutions and practices began to take root. The process was by no means uniform or without challenge – including from opposition pressures, post-election unrest, and separatists in the southern Casamance region. The violent protests that followed the 1988 elections led to a critical juncture for Senegalese democracy. In response, the regime of president Abdou Diouf was forced to make compromises in the form of a series of institutional reforms throughout the 1990s.² These moves made it possible for the country to experience two peaceful transitions of power through competitive elections (respectively in 2000 and 2012). Yet despite Senegal's stable past, the roots of instability lurk within the country's political, economic, and religious strains.

A major test of stability came with the 2012 elections, and concerned its democratic institutions and the uncertainty over how President Abdoulaye Wade, seeking reelection, would handle potential defeat. Indeed, before the election of current Senegalese president Macky Sall, in March 2012, the country's global reputation as an African success story of democracy was seriously tested by the increasingly anti-democratic attitude of incumbent President Wade.³ Wade's attempt to introduce various amendments to the constitution that would weaken the opposition triggered large protests throughout the summer of 2011. Principally led by social movements, including the June 23rd Movement ("M23") and a rapper-led social movement calling itself "*Y'en-a-Marre*," (*we've had enough*), the upheavals served as a catalyst to challenge further power abuses. In the end, Sall was to defeat Wade in the second round of the March 2012 presidential election. Despite earlier concerns, Wade did not challenge the results, but indeed he called Sall personally to concede defeat. This further enhanced the domestic and international reputation of Senegal as a model of democracy in an often-troubled region. To be sure, a number of subsequent events in Senegalese politics resulted in political tensions of some importance. These include the controversial "audit" issue; namely the review of the Wade regime's financial management, considered by some as a witch-hunting exercise. Although the current Senegalese government also continues to be challenged by the ongoing conflict in the Casamance region, the country remains stable and continues its long history of participating in international and regional peacekeeping, including in the Malian crisis.

The second challenge to Senegal's overall stability is poverty and a large unemployed youth population. Economically, Senegal is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 154 out of 187 countries on the 2012 United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Human Development Index. It is a semi-arid, predominantly agrarian country with few natural resources. The key economic sectors are fishing, tourism, groundnuts, phosphates, cotton, and remittances from Senegalese workers abroad. Senegal experienced sustained positive

² Villalón, Leonardo A. "Democratizing a (Quasi)Democracy: The Senegalese Elections of 1993." In *African Affairs* 93:371.

³ Although he was himself elected to a seven year term in 2000, the new 2001 constitution implemented by Wade one year after he took power imposed a five-year two-term limit for the presidency. Wade's failure to honor his initial pledges to apply those term limits to himself as the 2012 elections approached were to lead to significant fears of violence and upheaval if he were to be reelected.

economic growth, approximating 5% annually from 1995 to 2005.⁴ This helped to significantly decrease the incidence of poverty.⁵ However, from 2006 onwards, the country's economy has been significantly affected by the oil and food price crises and the effects of the global economic downturn.⁶ With a population of 13 million inhabitants and 43% under 15 years of age,⁷ Senegal faces a serious problem in terms of finding long term solutions to poverty and unemployment. Poverty affected 46.7% of the population in 2011.⁸ This adds to the center/periphery divide with respect to the distribution of wealth, the lasting consequences of bad-governance trends by the end of Wade's rule, and the inability of the current regime to effectively handle the economy. All these factors raised concerns over their potential to spark popular dissatisfaction.

The growing expectations from a disproportionately youthful and unemployed urban populace may be the most significant long-term threat to the stability of the country. Senegal's large unemployed youth can be divided into two groups—those with a Francophone education and those with an Arabic/Islamic education. There are serious inequalities between the two groups. Indeed, job opportunities are limited even for French-educated people, let alone Arabic and Islamic-trained individuals whose chances of getting a job are even narrower. Frustrations regarding unemployment may lead to a deep social divide due to the imbalanced socialization process between individuals trained in the formal French educational system and those trained in Arabic and informal Islamic schools.⁹ Arabic and Islamic trained youths may be exploited by Islamist movements given the growing dissatisfaction vis-à-vis the ruling Westernized and secular elites who are constantly accused of being responsible for the economic downturn in the country. Moreover, disenchanted and unemployed Arabic and Islamic-educated youths would appear to be ripe for recruitment into jihadist groups that might spill over into Senegal from Mali.

The third source of instability within Senegal is tied to its religious make-up and traditional tensions between two Islamic groups – the Sufi brotherhoods and the reformists. Senegal's Muslim population accounts for at least 95% of the overall population. The religious

⁴ Fall, Papa Demba et al (2010). Senegal Country and Research Areas Report, EUMAGINE, Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar (UCAD) and Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)

⁵ *Idem.*

⁶ World Bank (2010). Senegal: Country Brief. Washington, D.C.; International Monetary Fund (2010) Senegal: Poverty reduction strategy paper annual progress report. IMF Country Report No. 10/368. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund. Available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2010/cr10368.pdf>

⁷ Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (2012) The World Factbook, Africa: Senegal. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sg.html>.

⁸ Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie (2013) « Deuxième enquête de suivi de la pauvreté au Sénégal », Rapport définitif.

⁹ For a discussion of the relationship between these two educational models in Senegal, see Leonardo A. Villalón and Mamadou Bodian, “Religion, demande sociale, et reformes éducatifs au Sénégal: Quand l’Etat introduit l’éducation arabo-islamique dans l’enseignement public pour concurrencer l’école franco-arabe et capturer les *daara*.” African Politics and Power Programme (APPP), Research report #5. April 2012. Available at: <http://www.institutions-africa.org/page/religious-education>

landscape is dominated by Sufi brotherhoods (the Tijaniyya, Mourides, Layènes, and the Qadiriyya) with which the majority of the population identifies. Since the colonial era, the brotherhoods have played a major role in preserving the administrative system and maintaining the rule of secular political elites. Today, this political order is being upset by a new generation of religious leaders (“Neo-brotherhood” charismatic leaders) in the political arena and in the public space. Indeed, the religious discourse has evolved to fit into a new context, breaking with the classical orientation of the brotherhoods characterized by a formal distance from political affairs.

In addition, the reformist movement, which began as a predominantly Islamic and Arabic-trained urban elite in the 1930s, has attracted an increasing number of French trained individuals since the late 1990s. Proponents of the reformist movement generally advocate a return to the Qur'an and the tradition (*sunna*) of the Prophet Mohamed and denounce all practices that they believe are contrary to Islamic orthodoxy – including much of Sufi practice. Although their discourse has evolved since the early penetration of reformist ideas in Senegal, the actors of this Islamic trend have sought to build their bases by undertaking a permanent deconstruction of the brotherhood system, and especially the master-disciple relationship that is maintained in *daaras* (traditional schools for learning the Qur'an). This is the reason why the first Islamic reformist organizations (The Union Culturelle Musulmane in 1950, and the Al Fallah Movement and the Jamaa'tou Ibadou Rahmane in the late 1970s) have from their founding invested heavily in the education sector, notably by establishing Franco-Arab schools.¹⁰ Their children are not taught simply to memorize the Qur'an (as is the case in conventional *daaras*), but rather are trained to be bilingual in Arabic and French and to try to themselves understand the meaning of religious texts.

The historical tensions between reformists and the brotherhoods persist, and in the current context present a potential for exacerbating suspicions between the two groups. The frequent representation of the Sufi brotherhoods, with which the majority of the population identifies, as a historical safeguard against radical Islam while reformist Islamic groups are regarded as closer to Arab expressions of Islam – and consequently as more inclined to extremism and radicalism – may well heighten these tensions. It should be noted, however, that the religious realm in Senegal is more complex than this simple description suggests. This complexity results from the existence of multiple tendencies within each religious category (e.g., brotherhood and reformist trends) but also by cross-cutting connections between religious groups at the national and regional level.

Senegal has strong geographical and cultural ties with Mali and the rest of the Sahel. One example is Muslim religious movements that connect the larger geostrategic space. Thus the Senegalese Niassène branch of the Tijaniyya brotherhood has multiple religious sites of pilgrimage across countries, including in Kaolack (Senegal), Kiota (Niger) and Kano (Nigeria). Similar ties exist between the disciples of the Kunta Qadiriyya branch of Timbuktu (Mali) who are affiliated with the same Sufi order in Ndiassane (Senegal). Other types of geographical and religious connections exist that make Senegal a country crossed

¹⁰ See Villalón and Bodian 2012.

by various movements, including Wahhabis, Salafists – and perhaps more recently jihadists. The Malian crisis and the fact of the involvement of some Senegalese in the rank of the jihadists in Northern Mali raises the question of whether or not Senegal itself may be exposed to radical Islam and terrorist threats. The next sections will outline how the Malian crisis and its subsequent consequences are discussed and how they play into domestic politics in Senegal.

The Official Response to the Malian Crisis and the Subsequent Domestic Debate

Senegal's official position on, and response to, the Malian crisis has evolved from an initial refusal to send troops to an active participation in the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA).¹¹ This position reflected that of a number of other African countries which primarily opted for caution. Before the French military intervention in northern Mali, most African states were indecisive about how to respond, although the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) did pressure the junta to hand over power to a transitional government.¹² In June 2012, the negotiations initiated in Burkina Faso between the occupation forces and the Malian government did not lead to conclusive results. This is partly due to the political fiasco in Bamako and the determination of the Islamists who began to apply their version of *sharia* law in northern Mali. The initial plan by ECOWAS to send an inter-African force did not elicit immediate adherence from many African countries.¹³ While countries like Benin, Togo, Nigeria, and Niger were willing to send troops, others such as Senegal were hesitant to engage troops in a joint offensive action.¹⁴ However, the French military intervention in January 2013 placed Mali at the center of regional and national foreign policy agendas, forcing states to pronounce themselves more clearly.

State officials in Senegal put forward three main reasons to justify their decision to mobilize troops for the AFISMA mission. The first is related to the legality of the international military intervention in Mali. The president of Senegal, Macky Sall, argued that his decision to send Senegalese troops to Mali followed the express request of the transitional authorities of Mali and the authorization by the United Nations Security Council, which approved the deployment of the International Assistance Mission in Mali

¹¹ The African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) is a military mission organized by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to support the Malian government—as an ECOWAS member—against the Islamist rebels in the north of the country. The mission was authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 2085, passed on 20 December 2012, which authorizes the deployment of an African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) for an initial period of one year.

¹² BBC, April 2012. “Mali junta caught between rebels and Ecowas sanctions”. Accessed May 6 2013 on: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17580929>

¹³ Radio France International, April 2012. “Ecowas ready to send troops to Mali against breakaway Tuareg state”, Accessed 2 May 2013 on: <http://www.english.rfi.fr/africa/20120407-ecowas-ready-send-troops-mali-against-breakaway-tuareg-state>

¹⁴ Walfadjri, January 2013. « Envoi de soldats au nord Mali : Les hésitations coupables de Macky ». Accessed 6 May 2013 on : <http://www.walf-groupe.com/actualites/politique/9483-envoi-de-soldats-au-nord-mali--les-hesitations-coupables-de-macky-.html>

(MISMA) to help combat terrorist groups and restore the sovereignty of the Malian State.¹⁵ The second justification is related to a shared cultural and historical identity and hence the obligation of solidarity vis-à-vis Mali which, the Senegalese president noted, is a "member of the West African family."¹⁶ The third reason lay in Senegal's national security concerns. According to President Sall, helping Mali to recover its territory from terrorist groups also decreases the danger that lurks at the Senegalese borders. Therefore, the military intervention in Mali aims "to defend our own peace and safety, [and] to protect Senegal and its people."¹⁷ Senegal's Foreign Minister, Mankeur Ndiaye, echoes this position when he argues: "Any threat that affects Mali directly concerns us. And if the terrorist forces prevail in Mali, our own vital interests are threatened".¹⁸

The statements and actions of Senegalese officials towards the crisis in Mali thus frame their discourse on the Islamist takeover in northern Mali as a regional threat with direct relevance to national security. First of all, they strongly condemn the occupation of northern Mali by Islamists, whom they consider "terrorist gangs" with objectives beyond Mali's borders.¹⁹ Officials argue that these insurgents want to use Malian territory as a sanctuary from which to recruit and train young people from various countries in order to spread their "totalitarian ideology and their criminal activities" all over the West African sub-region. Second, and subsequently, they may attack foreign interests but also the security of countries in the sub-region, including Senegal.²⁰ While these formal justifications provided a rationale for the Senegalese government to mobilize 500 military troops in the joint regional offensive against Islamists, however, they also opened the door to domestic controversy. Although there is overwhelming support for the decision to send troops to Mali, a number of discordant voices have arisen. These can be summarized in three positions.

The first two positions – political in nature – arose over the timing and the procedure by which the decision to send troops was taken. As mentioned before, the government of Senegal was initially hesitant to intervene militarily in Mali²¹ and opted for what the Senegalese Minister of Foreign Affairs called a "*diplomatie tranquille*" as opposed to a

¹⁵ Gouvernement du Sénégal, January 2013. « Déclaration sur la crise du Mali ». Accessed 2 May 2013 on: <http://www.gouv.sn/Declaration-sur-la-crise-du-Mali.html>

¹⁶ « Sénégal : Macky Sall maintient ses troupes au Mali », Accessed 2 May 2013 on: <http://www.afrik.com/senegal-macky-sall-maintient-ses-troupes-au-mali>

¹⁷ Gouvernement du Sénégal, January 2013. « Déclaration sur la crise du Mali ».

¹⁸ Afriqinfo, January 2013. « Crise malienne : Le Sénégal se mobilise contre d'éventuelles attaques islamistes ». Accessed 5 May 2013 on: <http://www.afriqinfos.com/articles/2013/1/29/crise-malienne-senegal-mobilise-contre-deventuelles-attaques-islamistes-216958.asp>

¹⁹ Afrik.com, March 2013. « Sénégal : Macky Sall maintient ses troupes au Mali ». Accessed 2 May 2013 on: <http://www.afrik.com/senegal-macky-sall-maintient-ses-troupes-au-mali>. « Le président sénégalais, Macky Sall, a précisé que le Mali a été agressée par un jihadisme international formé par des terroristes qui, pendant plus de dix ans, ont évolué sans que personne ne réagisse. »

²⁰ Gouvernement du Sénégal, janvier 2013. « Déclaration sur la crise du Mali ».

²¹ Walfadjri, January 2013. « Envoi de soldats au nord Mali : Les hésitations coupables de Macky ». Accessed 6 May 2013 on : <http://www.walf-groupe.com/actualites/politique/9483-envoi-de-soldats-au-nord-mali--les-hesitations-coupables-de-macky-.html>

“*diplomatie microphone*”.²² It was only after the French military intervention in northern Mali that the decision to send troops took center stage in the national foreign policy agenda. A number of opposition parties criticized the initial indecision on the part of the state officials. In particular, leaders of the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) – the leading opposition party – argue that the current regime was unsuccessful in sustaining Senegal’s position as a leader in regional mediation and peacekeeping.²³

In addition to timing, some have criticized the method by which the decision to send troops was made. In a controversial move, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Senegalese Abroad delivered the President’s decision to deploy troops to the National Assembly.²⁴ A number of political actors criticized this as a “unilateral executive decision”, arguing that it is primarily the responsibility of the National Assembly to decide whether or not to deploy troops.²⁵ On the other hand, the government challenged this view. The president’s spokesman stresses that the president has the right to make this decision in accordance with his own prerogatives and does not have to consult the National Assembly on the issue of sending troops because Senegal is not at war with Mali. He stresses that the decision of the President to send troops to Mali aims to support this neighboring country to recover its territorial integrity and, subsequently, to ensure the security of Senegal.

The third position is reflected by public opinion, rather than by political elites. An opinion survey, conducted in Senegal from February to March 2013, indicated that many Senegalese are supportive of the decision of the Senegalese officials to send troops in Mali, although some disagree with this military option.²⁶ Interestingly, the majority of those who were opposed to the French intervention in Mali also reproach Senegal for taking part in joint military action.²⁷ While such positions are in the minority, they reveal the persistence of sentiments against what is perceived as French neo-imperialism in Africa.

The Consequences of the Malian Crisis and Domestic Concerns

The Malian crisis and its subsequent development have fueled two domestic consequences. The first is economic, related to the disruption of the terms of trade between Senegal and Mali during the first five months of the crisis.²⁸ In an attempt to oust coup leader Captain Amadou Sanogo and the Malian junta, ECOWAS imposed economic and diplomatic sanctions on Mali in response to the March 2012 coup. Inevitably, the sanctions have also had negative effects on the Senegalese economy. Indeed, Mali is a significant market for

²² Agence de presse sénégalaise, January 2013. « Mankeur Ndiaye annonce l'option d'une diplomatie de paix et de bon voisinage ». Accessed 6 May 2013 on : http://www.aps.sn/articles.php?id_article=106200

²³ Agence de presse sénégalaise, January 2013. "Le Sénégal doit enfin jouer les premiers rôles dans la crise malienne" (PDS). Accessed 6 May 2013 on : http://www.aps.sn/articles.php?id_article=107945

²⁴ Agence de presse sénégalaise, janvier 2013. « Le message du président Macky Sall à l'Assemblée nationale ». Accessed 6 May 2013 on : http://www.aps.sn/articles.php?id_article=107984

²⁵ Seneweb, January 2013. « Question Orale de Mamadou Diop Decroix, Député non inscrit, au premier ministre sur la guerre au Mali ». Accessed 3 May 2013 on : http://www.seneweb.com/news/Politique/question-orale-de-mamadou-diop-decroix-depute-non-inscrit-au-premier-ministre-sur-la-guerre-au-mali_n_85834.html

²⁶ Bakary Sambe (2013). « Peace and Security Report », ECOWAS, Issue 3

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 2.

²⁸ Agence Nationale Statistique (ANSD), Repères statistiques du mois de mai 2012

Senegal, accounting for about 15% of all Senegalese exports,²⁹ and an important transit route to other countries in the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA). As a result, instability in Mali and the subsequent sanctions have led to a significant decline in Senegalese exports throughout the subregion. According to some estimates, cement (which constitutes 25% of Senegal's exports to Mali) and refined petroleum products are the most affected sectors.³⁰ A comparison of the cumulative first five months of 2012 to those of 2011 indicates that international freight traffic declined by 32% and overall exports and imports exhibited a respective decrease of 26.2% and 52.1%.³¹ Imports from Mali itself almost completely collapsed, falling by 93.8%.³²

The second and most important consequence of the Malian crisis in Senegal is the potential spread of terrorist threats and radical Islam. First of all, there is a fear that Islamist militants fleeing northern Mali in the aftermath of the international intervention could trigger terrorist attacks in neighboring countries, including Senegal.³³ According to Bakary Sambe, a Senegalese academic and coordinator of the "Observatory on Religious Radicalism and Conflict in Africa," this is the first time that Senegalese public opinion has expressed significant concerns about the danger of terrorism and radical Islam. Among Senegal's large Muslim majority, moderate Sufi brotherhoods have long been considered a safeguard against fundamentalism. As I will discuss in the last section of this paper, this hypothesis of terrorist threats and radical Islam came to seem more plausible given that the major jihadi groups to emerge in the Malian crisis – Ansar Dine, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) – counted combatants from Senegal in their ranks.³⁴ The period produced significant unease and anxiety as the threat of terrorist attacks was taken seriously in Senegal; the general panic on February 22, 2013, when the U.S. Embassy in Senegal said it had received information of a bomb threat in the capital, Dakar, pointed to this changed situation.³⁵

In addition, some argue that the joint military intervention in northern Mali may galvanize opponents to the war in Senegal who may sympathize with jihadist groups. Some fear that Senegal may be exposed to extremist ideologies if Islamists are able to build strong networks by recruiting and radicalizing Senegalese youth, particularly those who are poor and unemployed. The former Senegalese Chief of Defense Staff (*Cemga*) thus argues that factors such as poverty could draw vulnerable young people to extremism. He points to the

²⁹ Bulletin mensuel 2012 des statistiques du commerce extérieur de l'ANSD. Available at: http://www.ansd.sn/bullcomex_trimestriel.html. Accessed, 2 May 2013.

³⁰ Agence de presse sénégalaise, February 2013. « Si la crise malienne persiste, l'économie sénégalaise pourrait en pâtir (ministre) ». Accessed 6 May 2013 on : http://www.aps.sn/articles.php?id_article=108539

³¹ Agence Nationale Statistique (ANSD), mai 2012, *Op. cit.*

³² Mali is also a leading provider of food and other consumer products.

³³ Radio France International, January 2013. « Guerre au Mali: y a-t-il un risque d'attentat au Sénégal? Accessed 2 May 2013 on: <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20130115-guerre-mali-risque-attentat-senegal>

³⁴ BBC, March 2013. "Mali crisis: Key players". Accessed 5 May 2013 on: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17582909>

³⁵ Reuters, February 2013. "U.S. Embassy in Senegal warns of bomb threat to Dakar", Accessed 9 May 2013 on: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/22/us-senegal-threat-idUSBRE91L0NF20130222>

fragility of Dakar's suburbs where people lack basic health care infrastructure and electricity. These places, he argues, are fertile ground for extremist recruitment.³⁶

Despite these fears, however, and although Senegal may potentially be a target of terrorism, a safe haven for terrorist organizations, and/or a fertile recruiting ground for young trainees, the country has proven resilient. Both state and religious institutions have played an important role in mitigating these potential threats.

Factors of Resilience in Senegal

The Malian crisis has generated a renewed interest in thinking about potential destabilizing factors in sub-Saharan Africa. In light of the underlying factors that led to Mali's collapse and to the crisis, and given the potential for spillover effects into neighboring countries, it is useful to gauge the capacity of Senegal – as a country that shares many underlying conditions with Mali – to effectively respond to exogenous and endogenous challenges. There are three sources of resilience in Senegal that merit discussion.

The first is the *resilience of state institutions*. Many accounts of the Malian crisis have indicated that exogenous forces were confronted with an institutional setting which – contrary to appearances – was disastrous. Islamists were able to take over northern Mali because the structure of the Malian state was deeply eroded by corruption and by a lack of coherence and coordination between the civilian and the military institutions. Furthermore, the crisis demonstrated that the challenges facing the Malian army ran much deeper than simply a question of their limited training and poor equipment. The Malian military suffers from internal fragmentation, as well as from a lack of moral standing to support its operations in northern Mali and to end the political crisis in Bamako. In Senegal, by contrast, the state and its institutions are intact. So far, they have been capable of mitigating domestic and exogenous shocks. Moreover, Senegal has a cohesive and professional army that is under the leadership of civilian elites. The country is among only a handful of countries in Africa to have never experienced a military coup. It is true that Senegal, like Mali, has been challenged by domestic insurgency, in the form of the long-simmering MFDC rebellion in the Casamance region.³⁷ This, however, has never seriously threatened the stability of the country. The Senegalese army has successfully managed to contain the rebellion to a small area in the southern Casamance region.

A second source of resilience is *the mitigating role of the Senegalese security apparatus*. A major concern following the Malian crisis is whether other sub-Saharan African countries are adequately prepared to handle both a regional terrorist threat and its possible connections to international jihadist movements. Prior to the Malian crisis, the Senegalese security services were challenged by trafficking and criminality of all sorts, partly because of Senegal's porous borders with neighboring countries (Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, Guinea-

³⁶ Pressafrik, January 2013. Conséquences de la crise au Mali : Possible présence de « Salafistes » au Sénégal ? Accessed 6 May 2013 on : http://www.pressafrik.com/Consequences-de-la-crise-au-Mali-Possible-presence-de-Salafistes-au-Senegal_a96633.html

³⁷ See Evans, M. (2000). "Briefing: Senegal: Wade and the Casamance Dossier." *African Affairs* 99(397): 649-658.

Bissau and Gambia). Despite limited resources that undermine the capacity to adequately control these borders, Senegal has managed to develop transnational collaborative security and intelligence efforts, at times leading to considerable results. In June 2007, for instance, the alleged killers of a group of French citizens wanted by the Mauritanian police were arrested by the Guinea-Bissauan security services, after they managed to traverse Senegal and the Gambia undetected.³⁸

Following the bombing of the jihadists' forward positions in northern Mali by the French military in January 2013, the Senegalese security services have intensified controls at checkpoints and mobilized patrols along the border with Mali.³⁹ The arrest, in July 2012, of ten suspected members of a terrorist network in northern Senegal and that of a Senegalese imam linked to the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) in January 2013,⁴⁰ continue to demonstrate that the country may become a target for terrorists groups. This series of arrests prompted Senegalese authorities to take Islamist threats more seriously, and to call upon the Senegalese people to be more vigilant about preachers from abroad, urging them to signal any suspicious activity.⁴¹ This has also led to a collaborative effort between security and intelligence services and local populations at the Senegalese borders with neighboring countries.

The third source of resilience is *the mitigating role of religious structures*. Although Senegal – as an overwhelmingly Muslim and deeply religious country – might appear to be a fertile ground for the development of uncontrolled Islamic organizations with a fundamentalist rhetoric, religious sentiments have never evolved into open terrorist or jihadist militancy. Yet, following the Malian crisis, a number of questions were raised as to whether Senegal may now host active or dormant terrorist cells. These speculations are typically driven by the difficulty of pinning down the multiple Islamic tendencies and the complex interactions between different religious groups in the country. The religious landscape in Senegal is generally described in a dichotomous manner. On the one hand, Sufi brotherhoods, with which the majority of the population identifies, are historically known for their peaceful nature and are regarded as a safeguard against radical Islam. On the other hand, reformist Islamic groups are regarded as closer to Arab expressions of Islam and, consequently, seen as being more inclined to extremism and radicalism. Such a dichotomous characterization is misleading, and overlooks the fact that the Senegalese Islamic landscape is plural and has undergone major transformations over the last few decades.

First, the Sufi orders, known for their hierarchical structures, are no longer as cohesive as they were. The fragmentation of leadership, the emergence and multiplication of "neo-brotherhood" tendencies within the same Sufi order, and the diversification of religious appeals have led to a dramatic departure from the classical features of the brotherhoods.

³⁸ Sambe Bakary (2013). « Peace and Security Report », ECOWAS, Issue 3

³⁹ L'Office, janvier 2013. « Guerre au mali : Les conséquences à la frontière sénégalaise ». Accessed 6 May 2013 on: <http://www.loffice.sn/GUERRE-AU-MALI-Les-consequences-a.html>

⁴⁰ Sambe Bakary (2013), Op. cit.

⁴¹ Seneweb, January 2013. "Macky Sall aux Sénégalais : « Vous verrez des prêcheurs venus d'ailleurs, il faudra les dénoncer... », Accessed 2 May 2013 on: http://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/macky-sall-aux-senegalais-laquo-vous-verrez-des-precheurs-venus-d-rsquo-ailleurs-il-faudra-les-denoncer-raquo_n_85984.html

The existence of peripheral groups composed of practically indoctrinated members under the influence of charismatic leaders has led to a gradual radicalization previously uncommon in Sufi brotherhoods. This is at least true of the *Thiantacoune* movement – a Mouride “Neo-brotherhood” tendency – whose members are constantly accused of forcing their ideas upon people and whose spiritual leader was arrested on April 2012 after two people were beaten to death under unclear circumstances. In this respect, some may argue that the apparent shield against radicalism provided by Sufi leaders no longer holds. However, the subsequent reaction of Sufi leaders to help undercut any hint of Islamist extremism in Senegal following the Malian crisis – and after Islamist militants destroyed Timbuktu saint's tomb – suggests that the core strengths of the order remain important. During *Maouloud*, the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, in January 2013, several major religious centers took the occasion to raise awareness among their followers about the dangers of extremism that threaten the country. At these events, for instance, the spokesman of a major branch of the Tidianiyya brotherhood, *Serigne Abdoul Aziz Sy*, called on his disciples to be vigilant and urged authorities to improve security, while emphasizing that Islam is a religion of peace.⁴²

Secondly, one should distinguish between the various organizations that fall under the generic category of “reformist Islam.” For instance, a leading organization like *Al-Falah* is a Wahhabite-Salafist oriented group, and as such undertakes only limited political activity and is most involved in the promotion of Islamic education and piety. Other leading reformist organizations such as *Jama'atou Ibadou Rahmane* and the Senegalese Islamic Rally (RIS/Al-Wahda), by contrast, have a strong political and social agenda. These organizations include both Arabic and French-educated members who are engaged in such diverse causes as the Palestinian struggle and the resistance to homosexuality. They also question the foundations of the Senegalese secular state. This political engagement of reformist organizations, as well as of many “neo-brotherhood” organizations, suggests a trend in Senegal towards the entrance of religious leaders into the political arena. The democratization process and the opening of public sphere that began in the late 1980s, allowed religious actors in general to appropriate the debate on democracy and the discourse on good governance to justify their political commitment. This has inaugurated a new era of competition between religious elites and political secular elites over the management of public affairs. The religious elite resorts to Islamic ethics, which they claim to represent and defend, to accuse the Westernized and secular elite of responsibility for the economic vagaries and the underdevelopment of the country.

While political and social engagement is the action matrix of most of the leading reformist organizations in Senegal, it is true that other associations have opted for a more dogmatic posture. For instance, in 2005 a short-lived radical Islamist organization (*Takfir wal hijr*) was created and spread by Senegalese students who had allegedly been indoctrinated by religious centers in Mauritania. The members of this movement tended to be socially disconnected in Senegal, and justified their discourse and practice in reference to *fatwas* (decrees) issued by Arab sheikhs. The violence of their discourse on women, their

⁴²Peopledaily, January 2013. « Crise malienne : Le Sénégal se mobilise contre d'éventuelles attaques islamistes (Synthèse) », Accessed 6 May 2013 on: <http://french.peopledaily.com.cn/96852/8113464.html>"

emphasis on Islamic dress, and their harsh rhetoric about other Senegalese, whom they labeled as *kaafir* (disbelievers), suggested that they might pose a threat to national security. However, the subsequent development of these short-lived movements shows that extremist discourse continues to have very limited resonance in the Senegalese religious landscape. It appears that those who advocate extremism and radicalism are systematically marginalized not only by the Sufi orders but also by the leading reformist organizations. For instance, those *Takfirists* who had been members of the Association des Étudiants Musulmans de l'Université de Dakar (AEMUD) – the reformist organization that controls the mosque at Cheikh Anta Diop University – found themselves excluded from AEMUD. A few years earlier, a Senegalese Imam, Mamour Fall,⁴³ suspected of being a member of Al Qaeda, was expelled from Italy in November 2003 for his violent sermons against the West and those he called "the enemies of Islam." His discourse in Senegal urging all "good Muslims" to wage war against those he called "the impious" provoked strong reactions from a number of reformist organizations – including the Association des Elèves et Etudiants Musulmans du Sénégal (AEEMS) – whose leaders defended the perspective of a peaceful Islam in Senegal.

This is not to say that Senegal is immune to jihadist or terrorist attacks nor does it mean that some Senegalese are not susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups. The example of the *Takfir wal hijr* movement, and the case of a certain Iman Dianko arrested in January 2013 during his attempt to join the jihadist movement in Northern Mali, provide leads to try to understand the reasons that might in fact lead some Senegalese to embrace exogenous ideologies such as jihadism. For instance, Iman Dianko is said to have learned the Qur'an from a leader of the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO).⁴⁴ It is possible that those who are exposed to the international jihadist movements and those like the *Takfirists* who are disconnected from their society (which they consider impious) are ideal targets for recruitment. In this sense, although there are no official reports of the existence of active terrorist cells in the country, one may suspect possible connections between international jihadist movements and some individuals or groups in Senegal. In either case, the threat of radical Islamism and terrorism is an issue of concern. But this very concern has led to a collaborative effort between state officials, religious leaders and the population to reassert historical religious identities and national culture and traditions against outside influences.⁴⁵ This sentiment is echoed by Professor Abdoul Aziz Kébé, an Islamic specialist and head of the Arabic Department at Cheikh Anta Diop University, when he called upon Senegalese people to defend their own Islamic values and not to "consume" versions and ideas produced by Muslims living in other cultural areas.⁴⁶

⁴³ See AllAfrica, December 2003. "Sénégal: Imam Mamour Fall : "Le mouvement Al Quaïda doit bénéficier du soutien de tout croyant ". Accessed 6 May 2013 on <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200312230209.html>

⁴⁴ Sambe 2013, Op. cit.

⁴⁵ Agence de presse sénégalaise, Mars 2013. « Le Sénégal peut échapper au syndrome malien en consolidant ses acquis (militant) ». Accessed 9 May 2013 on : http://www.aps.sn/articles.php?id_article=110793

⁴⁶ Rewmi, July 2012, « Abdoul Aziz Kébé sur la crise au Mali : 'Nous devons dire non et défendre notre Islam' ». Accessed 2 May 2013 on : http://www.rewmi.com/Abdoul-Aziz-Kebe-sur-la-crise-au-Mali-Nous-devons-dire-non-et-defendre-notre-Islam_a65341.html

Conclusion

The Malian crisis has political, economic, and security implications for Senegal. It has generated some minor controversy over the official decision of the Senegal government to send 500 troops to Mali. However, the most important consequence is the potential for insecurity as a result of the dispersion of Islamists in the sub-region, following the joint military offensive in northern Mali. The fact that some Senegalese are involved in the ranks of jihadists could, it seems, expose Senegal to radical Islam and terrorist threats. The subsequent move by the Senegalese state to secure its borders illustrates the impact of the Malian crisis on domestic political dynamics, including a new emphasis on homeland security.

Although Senegal may eventually be a potential target for terrorist attacks or serve as a safe haven for terrorist organizations to recruit young people, the country has proven resilient so far. This resilience, I have argued, is based on three pillars: the strength of state institutions, a professional and effective security apparatus, and the mitigating role of religious structures. In addition, efforts to ensure security have included collaboration between all of these domains: state officials, the security apparatus, religious leaders, as well as the population at large. These factors of resilience appear to be proving effective in the short run, although the question remains as to whether they are enough to preserve the country from potential threats of radical Islam and terrorist activities in the longer term.

Perhaps the most urgent issue is to tackle the problems of unemployment and of the unbalanced educational system – the most important underlying root causes of weakness and potential trouble. The two seem to be related, as burgeoning economic dissatisfaction is amplified by the dual and discriminatory structure of the educational system (i.e. the formal French educational system on the one hand and informal Islamic educational system on the other) that limits job opportunities for Arabic and Islamic trained individuals.⁴⁷ The resulting frustrations are susceptible to being exploited by Islamist movements, given the dissatisfaction vis-à-vis Westernized secular elites who are constantly accused of being responsible for the economic shortcomings of the country. Simply put, while the aforementioned factors of resilience have provided some protection in the current circumstances, in the longer term Senegalese officials must find solutions to address the groundswell of dissatisfaction that may lead to a deep social divide, caused by an imbalanced socialization and education system which itself leads to uneven access to employment opportunities between citizens.

⁴⁷ See Villalón and Bodian 2012, *Op. cit.*