



Desk study on aid and democracy

Mali

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This study is part of a series of country-focused desk studies on aid and democracy prepared under the project [The state and statebuilding in the Global South](#). They are prepared under the guidance of Rachel M. Gisselquist as background to a broader research effort on aid, governance, and democracy promotion. The studies follow a common template and each draws on the research literature and selected cross-national sources to discuss regime type and timeline, findings from the literature on democracy/democratization, findings from the literature on aid and democracy/democratization, aid flows and sources, and specific aid examples. This study addresses the case of Mali, from independence in 1960 and with focus on the post-Cold War period.

Key words: foreign aid, democratization, Mali, statebuilding, development

Note: The datasets and codebook used and drawn upon are listed after the reference list at the end of the study.

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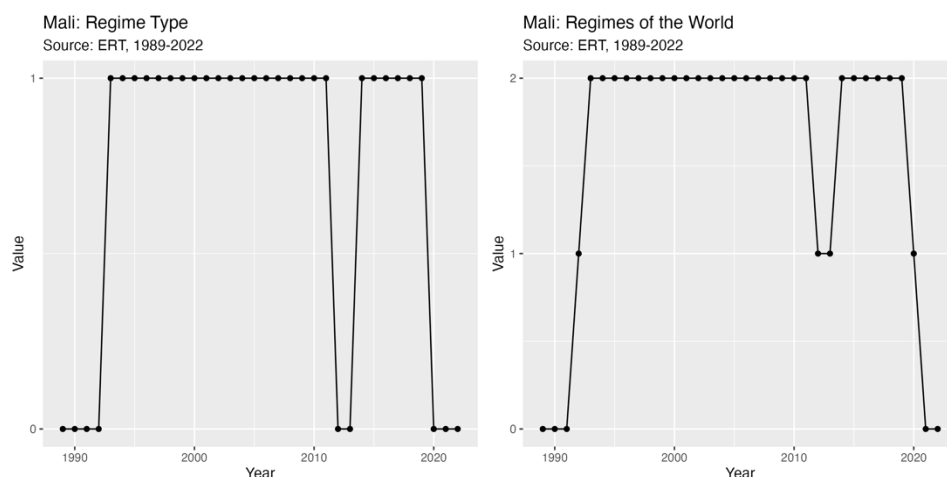
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1 Regime type and timeline

Mali's regime classification has been subject to wide-ranging fluctuations. According to Varieties of Democracy's (V-Dem) Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT) data, the country was an autocracy (0) from 1989 to 1992, 2012 to 2013, and 2020 to 2022, while in the intervening years, 1993–2011 and 2014–19, it was classified as a democracy (1). The Regimes of the World (RoW) offers a bit more nuance to these descriptions, classifying Mali as an electoral democracy (2), rather than full democracy, during its democratic duration. RoW also identifies Mali as a sporadic electoral autocracy (1) in 1992, 2012–13, and 2020 and a closed autocracy (0) from 1989 to 1991, as well as most recently from 2021 to 2022.

Figure 1: Mali's regime types

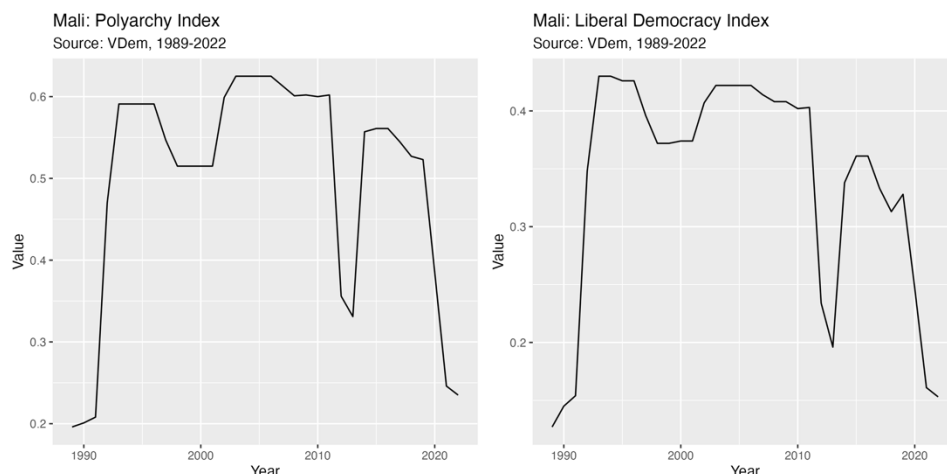


Source: author's construction based on Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT) data.

V-Dem's electoral and liberal democracy indices reflect Mali's regime oscillations. The country's polyarchy and liberal democracy scores both skyrocketed from 1992-1993. This increase coincides with the onset of its first democratic election in 1992, which brought President Konare into power and set Mali upon a course of becoming a stable electoral democracy for the next two decades. In 1990, Mali's polyarchy score was 0.201; by 1993, it jumped to 0.591 and, despite a slight decline from 1998 to 2001, its score would reach a height of 0.625 from 2003 to 2006. Its liberal democracy scores would experience a similar pattern, climbing from 0.145 in 1990 to an all-time high of 0.43 from 1993 to 1994; its liberal democracy scores were also sustained at 0.422 from 2003 to 2006.

The period 2003–06, according to the trends in these two quantitative regime measures, was the zenith of Malian democracy. The country's polyarchy and liberal democracy scores were at their relative height during these years, reflecting the successful democratic presidential election in 2002 that peacefully transitioned executive power to President Toure and seemed to cement Mali's status as a democracy.

Figure 2: Mali's electoral and liberal democracy index scores



Source: author's construction based on V-Dem data.

Where Mali's democracy index scores waver is in 2012, after the initiation of the Malian Civil War in January and a subsequent military coup seized power from President Toure in March. From 2012 to 2013, Mali was reclassified as an electoral autocracy. During those two years, its polyarchy scores plummeted to an average 0.344 and its liberal democracy scores dropped to an average of 0.215. However, once a president was re-elected and took office in 2013, both sets of scores made significant upward gains in 2014: polyarchy to 0.557 and liberal democracy to 0.338.

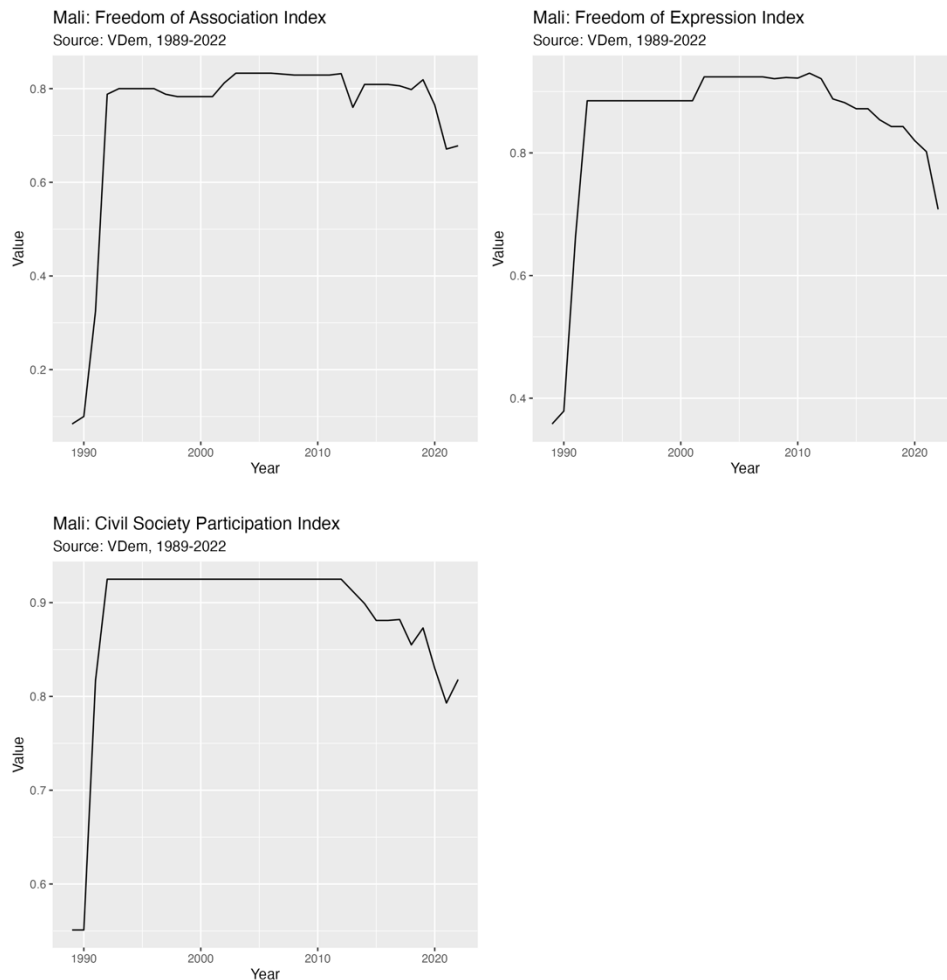
Despite the persistence of an active civil conflict in the country, from 2014 to 2019, with the return to a civilian democratic government, measures along both these regime indices almost returned to pre-coup levels. The average polyarchy score was 0.546 and average liberal democracy score was 0.339 during these years. The higher democracy measures recorded during this five-year period may reflect the impact of numerous foreign assistance, peacekeeping, and military interventions that arrived in the country starting in 2013: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) African-led International Support Mission to Mali (January 2013), French military intervention (January 2013), the European Union (EU) training and peacekeeping mission EUTM (January 2013), the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission MINUSMA (April 2013), the African Union (AU) Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) (August 2013), the EU capacity building and peacekeeping mission EUCAP (April 2014), and the G5-Sahel Joint Force (June 2017). The array of external missions, coupled with increased development assistance following the events in 2012, may have helped stabilize Mali's regime and allowed it to return it to an electoral democracy, but only temporarily.

In 2020, another coup occurred, which decimated Mali's polyarchy and liberal democracy scores again and plunged it back into authoritarianism. From the years 2021–22 Mali experienced its lowest polyarchy and liberal democracy scores since 1991; in fact, its 2022 liberal democracy score was even lower than that of 1991 (0.153). Mali's downward spiral back into autocracy corresponded to a series of international and regional sanctions against the country and a mass exodus of foreign interventions: Mali was suspended from ECOWAS and the AU in May 2021, it withdrew from the G5-Sahel Joint Force in May 2022, France ceased its military operations in June 2021 and withdrew formally in August 2022, and the UN's MINUSMA mission was officially terminated in July 2023. As of now, Mali's regime, under the current military junta, is a closed autocracy and, while it is unclear what will happen next, whatever does happen it will occur without a strong international presence on the ground.

What polyarchy and liberal democracy scores do not fully capture in Mali are the differences between the closed autocracy under President Traore from 1968 to 1991 and the current closed autocracy led by Colonel Goita and the military junta. While both governments score abysmally on regime measures, some regime subcomponent variables reveal striking differences between these two autocracies. Under

the Traore dictatorship, freedom of association and freedom of expression were practically non-existent. While both measures have seen notable declines since 2020 and political rights do appear to be under strain under this most recent military junta, freedom of association and freedom of expression still exist under the current regime. Similarly, whereas civil society organizations were fully marginalized under Traore's leadership, they continue to operate under the current regime, and the civil society index even experienced a slight increase as of 2022.

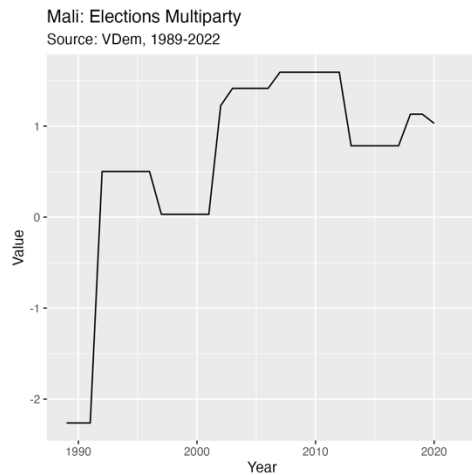
Figure 3: Freedom of association, freedom of expression, and civil society participation in Mali



Source: author's construction based on V-Dem data.

Perhaps some of the resilience of Mali's scores on measures of political rights under the current autocratic government is merely a reflection of a new regime still working to consolidate power. But it may equally be an echo of the country's 20-year experience as a functioning democracy. In addition to the recognition of these individual political rights, other practices have also carried over from Mali's democratic past. For instance, the government continues to hold elections, even amidst the ongoing civil war and growing factionalism within the country. That Mali's V-Dem multiparty election index has generally inclined over the years rather than declined, as we might expect under a closed autocracy, is suggestive of the fact that the autocratic regime currently in power in Mali is distinct from the autocratic regime that ended in 1991. In any case, examining some of Mali's subcomponent regime measures reveal that the current closed autocratic regime is distinct from the one that had reigned in the country up until 1991.

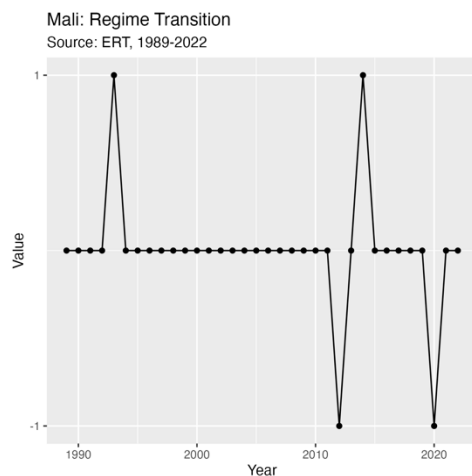
Figure 4: Mali's multiparty elections indicator



Source: author's construction based on V-Dem data.

Regardless of how the regimes that have ruled the country are classified, Mali's recent history has been peppered with regime transitions and political coups. The ERT does not collect data on coups or coup attempts, but Mali has experienced many of them. Its first coup in 1968 led by General Traore resulted in a decades-long dictatorship, while its second coup in 1991¹ resulted in Mali's decades-long transition to democracy. Its democracy was also largely dismantled by coups in 2012, 2020, and 2021. ERT data catalogue instances of regime transition and identifies four in Mali: in 1993, 2012, 2014, and 2020. Two of these years—1993 and 2014—initiated transitions to democracy (1), while the other two—2012 and 2020—initiated transitions to autocracy (-1). Three of these transitions also correspond to and are the result of political coups: the transitions in 1993, 2012, and 2020.

Figure 5: Mali's regime transition variable



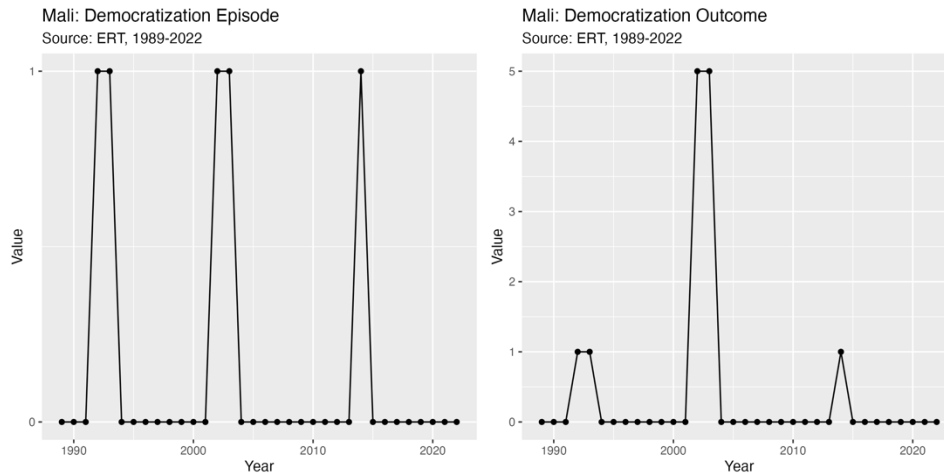
Source: author's construction based on ERT data.

ERT also identifies three periods of democratizing episodes in Mali: 1992—93, 2002—03, and in 2014. Two of these episodes coincide with elections that resulted in a democratic transition. In 1993, Mali's first democratic election was held, and President Konare's victory in these elections initiated a smooth transition of power away from the Traore dictatorship and subsequent interim military leadership. As a

¹ This coup was led by then head of President Traore's personal security force Amadou Toure, who would eventually be democratically elected as a civilian president in 2002 and in 2007.

result, this episode from 1992 to 1993 brought about a democratic regime transition (1). The successful democratic election of President Keita in 2013, following the 2012 military coup, was another election that steered Mali back toward democracy. This 2014 democratizing episode therefore produced another democratic transition (1).

Figure 6: Mali's democratization episodes and outcomes

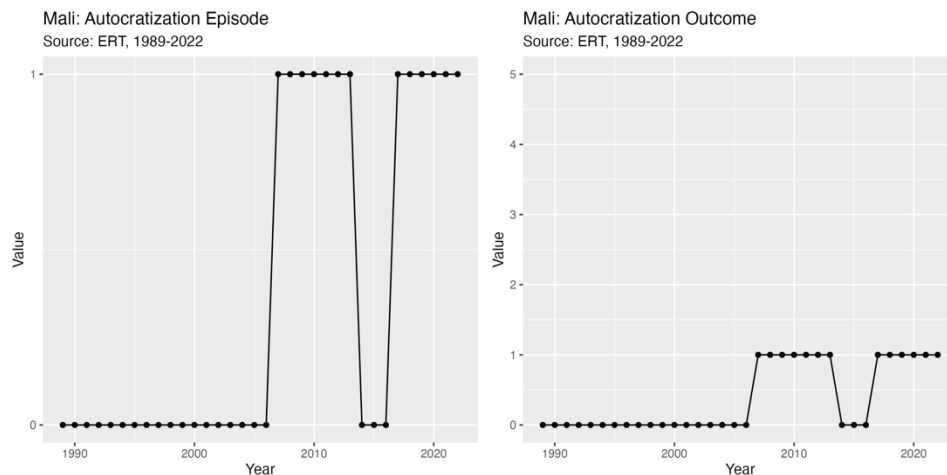


Source: author's construction based on ERT data.

The democratization episode from 2002 to 2003 resulted in democratic deepening (5). This episode corresponds to the peaceful democratic election of President Toure as a civilian president in 2002. The success of this election, which marked the first transition of power between executives via democratic process in Mali, reiterated the country's commitment to its constitutional presidential term limits and democratic process. In doing so, Mali's polyarchy and liberal democracy scores were boosted, and its democracy was strengthened overall.

Meanwhile, the ERT identifies two episodes of autocratization in Mali, both of which resulted in democratic breakdown (1). The first period from 2007 to 2013 begins with the contested re-election of President Toure in April 2007 and a series of large-scale insurgency attacks in northern Mali in August 2007. Tuareg uprisings would continue in north-eastern Mali for the next few years. The influx of returnee soldiers from Libya in 2011—often attributed as the catalyst for its civil conflict—actually re-entered a country context where conflict, insurgency, and ceasefire negotiations were already a political reality. The country's vulnerable security status was confirmed with the onset of the Malian Civil War in January 2012 and subsequent coup against the president two months later. These events induced Mali's democratic reversal and initiated a temporary period of autocracy.

Figure 7: Mali's autocratization episode and outcome



Source: author's construction based on ERT data.

The autocratization period from 2017 to 2022 is a little more arbitrary in its time frame. Some of the years of this second episode (2017–19) overlap with Mali's status as a democracy, revealing both the vulnerable nature of its democracy and the non-democratic undercurrents at work within the country at the time. Instead of 2017, perhaps a more empirically consistent initiation point of this episode is 2018, when protests and violence emerged ahead of the 2018 presidential elections. President Keita, who had been first elected in 2013, was successfully re-elected in 2018 despite opposition to his rule. In his oversight on Mali's tenuous return to democracy, his administration faced increasing economic and security challenges after 2018, as the insurgency continued to worsen. Mounting pressures against President Keita's administration and its acquiescence to external (especially French) intervention eventually instigated a coup against him and his forced resignation in August 2020. These events resulted in a military junta and Mali's renewed status as an autocracy.

The conceptualization of these two periods of autocratization are somewhat misleading. Certainly, democratic institutions and processes were put under significant strain during these moments. Nonetheless, what primarily characterizes these two autocratization periods are sustained outbreaks of violence and conflict, rather than only institutional political machinations for power. To the extent that these periods did both result in coups and democratic backsliding makes it convenient to characterize them as episodes of autocratization, but that label to some extent masks the underlying securitization concerns that largely characterized these two time periods. It is important to note that both of Mali's episodes of autocratization are simultaneously episodes of political instability.

Mali's regime has been subject to significant transitions and political upheavals, many of which cannot fully be captured by quantitative figures and measures alone. Although currently a closed autocracy, it differs greatly along several key subcomponent variable indices from its previous experience with authoritarian rule, indicating a regime different either in kind or in degree. Although Mali has as recently as 2019 been classified as a democracy, the extent of its democratic quality is also up for debate. During this latest period of democracy from 2014 to 2019, the country remained fragile and engaged in civil war. And even while Mali was considered and praised as one of the most stable African democracies from 1993 to 2011, the literature has also begun to retrospectively question how robust Mali's democratic regime was during that period of time as well.

2 Findings from the literature on democracy/democratization

The literature on Mali's democratization is divided between research published before 2012 and after 2012. Prior to 2012, there was an overarching consensus of Mali's 'darling' status as a robust and stable democracy, especially in comparison to its neighbours at the time.

Mali's transition to democracy in 1993 was admired as a model case of democratization in Africa. The onset of the 1991 coup in Mali that deposed General Traore was largely instigated by domestic opposition and cross-social, pro-democracy movements, and its democracy flourished in subsequent years. Pre-2012 literature points to the initiation of deliberative politics (Wing 2008), the development of a strong party and electoral system (Vengroff 1993, 1994), and even domestic economic interests (Bingen 1998) in the sustainability of Malian democracy. Despite its status as an underdeveloped, low-income country, Mali was able to maintain its democratic regime, making it a key example in the literature for potential democratic durability in unlikely contexts (Smith 2001; Martin et al. 2002). Its democracy was not perfect and demonstrated signs of flaws early on, including fraudulent legislative elections, ongoing tensions between the president and legislature, and a boycotted presidential election in 1997. However, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Mali had developed into what seemed to be a relatively stable and reliable democracy.

There were some serious weaknesses and vulnerabilities in Mali's democratic model. The most glaring issue was its status as a highly aid-dependent country. Because of its low economic development and high aid dependency, Mali was prone to 'donor-driven ownership' that initiated development along donor, rather than domestic, priorities and stunted wholesale democracy building (Bergamaschi 2008). Donor assistance was instrumental in propping up the government and democratic regime (Van de Walle 2012; Bergamaschi 2014b), which proved to be an unsustainable situation, especially given the growing unrest in its northern territories.

Conflict and violence had been a chronic issue for Mali, even prior to its transition to democracy. Since at least 1990, Mali experienced systemic insurgency from Tuareg groups seeking autonomy or, at the very least, greater recognition from the government. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, these groups posed a relatively consistent threat to the Malian state, initiating rebellions from 1990 to 1995 and again from 2007 to 2009. President Konare signed a peace agreement with Tuareg groups in 1995. Later, President Toure, with the help of Algerian diplomats, granted Tuareg groups greater autonomy in 2006 and jointly negotiated, signed, and upheld another peace agreement with Libya and Algeria in 2007 and 2009. Despite seemingly stable democratic politics in the capital, civil conflict was a persistent and consistent threat in the country that put additional strain upon its political resources and institutions.

Although the literature on Malian democracy is relatively optimistic prior to 2012, by 2012 it became very clear that the country's democracy was indeed quite fragile. Mali was scheduled to carry out its fifth democratic presidential election in 2012, which would have marked the end of President Toure's second term. However, the election never came to fruition that year, because of a military coup that was carried out in March 2012. The coup was led by Captain Sanogo, who took power and proclaimed himself de-facto leader of the country. The military's ousting of President Toure was in response to his handling of the insurgency situation in the north and the state's weak security capacity. Several months before, the US and France had warned the Malian government to increase its border security, particularly as men returned home from fighting in Libya, but Mali was either unwilling or unable to increase its military resources for this purpose. Issues of securitization thus added substantial strain to Mali's democracy and political stability.

The tensions underlying Mali's democracy are made evident when looked at through the lens of security. Domestically, the Malian government's restraint toward securitization led not only to renewed instability in the northern territories, but it also instigated a national-level coup and civil war. Meanwhile, the international community has been critiqued for prioritizing securitization in Mali over local ownership, domestic interests, or other development goals (Bere 2017; Crawford and Kacarska 2019; Gazeley

2022). In some sense, external donors appeared more fixated on security than the actual state was. As a result of this mismatch of priorities and practice, ultimately, both securitization and democratization within the country have suffered.

After 2012, the literature on democratization in Mali is much more cautious and pessimistic, identifying the many causes for Mali's democratic breakdown in hindsight. V-Dem indicators reclassify Mali as a democracy after its reimplementation of the presidential election in 2013, two years after its coup. However, the literature starting in 2012 is already much less hopeful about prospects for re-building democracy in Mali. Instead, research re-shifted its focus to the reasons for the coup and the many ways that Mali's democracy was flawed and had been flawed all along.

There are many arguments as to why Mali, once considered a democratic favourite, suffered such a stark reversal of democracy in 2012. The literature has since attributed Mali's political shortcomings and regime reversal to a variety of structural and political causes including: poor governance practices (Allen 2013); weak legislatures (Van Vliet 2014); a growing gap between political elites and the population (Van de Walle 2012; Elischer and Lawrance 2022); a broader 'pandemic of coups' brought upon by systemic global conditions (Zulueta-Fülscher and Noël 2021); the ongoing security threats, civil conflict, and insurgency within the country (Bøås and Torheim 2013; Boeke and De Valk 2021), and— notably—the role of foreign assistance and international aid donors (Bräutigam and Knack 2004; Van de Walle 2012; Resnick and Van de Walle 2013). Mali's citizens may also have played a role. The country experiences routinely low voter turnout,² indicating that while democratic elections have occurred within the country, their ability to function as a mechanism for democracy was weak. Without adequate education and exposure to policy information, citizen engagement and willingness to express political preference had actually remained quite limited in Mali (Gottlieb 2016). Whether from citizen apathy, institutional failure, or larger structural conditions, the consensus in the literature after 2012 was that Mali's democracy is in crisis.

Mali currently faces significant challenges in reigniting its democracy. At the institutional level, several democratic institutions and practices have been overridden—for instance, judicial independence has decreased and repression against political opposition has increased. Even though many democratic institutions remain—elections, the legislature, etc.—their ability to enact democratic governance has been eroded. At the societal level, recent political events in Mali have also taken their toll. There are signs that amongst local populations the civil conflict has weakened national identity and patriotic affiliations with the state, even outside of direct conflict zones (Ananyev and Poyker 2023). Similarly, Malians also appear to be increasingly more inclined to turn to informal, local, or traditional institutions—considered less corrupt and more expedient—over formalized state structures in legal-political resolution or matters of justice (Winters and Conroy-Krutz 2021). As a result, current political and conflict conditions have undermined interpersonal and institutional trust amongst the population (Bratton 2016). This does not necessarily mean that the desire for democracy within the country has been erased, but democratization within such an environment of weak social cohesion and diminished institutional trust will be extremely difficult to achieve.

3 Findings from the literature on aid and democracy/democratization

The literature—especially literature published after 2012—highly associates the outcomes of democracy and its reversal in Mali with foreign aid and international influence. International donors are often attributed to shouldering a degree of responsibility for Mali's political outcomes, largely because of how aid dependent the country had been during its democratic period. On the one hand, some research suggests that international aid donors and external actors were unaware of the full extent of

² Since 2002, Mali's average turnout for national-level elections has been approximately 37%, which is significantly lower than its neighbours and an objectively low figure.

Mali's vulnerable political system and the potential role they played in it (Allen 2013; Esquith 2013). On the other hand, other research suggests that international donors were well aware of these flaws, yet continued to pour aid into the country regardless (Boeke and De Valk 2021). Faulty donor assessments about Mali's robust democratic status may also have been the product of a mismatch of available data on the country. Quantitative data weakly capture informal arrangements and processes, qualitative data are often unverifiable and subject to bias, and empirical data collected by practitioners and scholars often prioritize state agendas over local grievances (Bleck and Michelitch 2015; Boeke and De Valk 2021).³ Either way, the events of 2012 exposed serious gaps in political transparency, institutional capacity, and government accountability in the country and began to shed light on the role that the international community played in both contributing to this crisis and responding to it.

External assistance has been a major focus of analysis within the context of Mali's democratic regime breakdown post-2012 and post-2020. The channels through which aid may have interacted with Mali's democracy are manifold. Primarily, foreign aid's influence upon Mali's political outcomes is less a result of direct external impact and more a product of change from 'within' the regime (Leininger 2012). Within this framework, foreign assistance has played an indirect role by deteriorating democratic institutions and eliminating incentives for political accountability. The presence of foreign aid, especially in the volumes in which it was distributed, reduced governance outcomes (Bergamaschi 2014a) and provided domestic political stakeholders prime opportunity to take—legally or not—advantage of these income inflows, at the expense of the welfare of the population (Esquith 2013). Since political elites were largely the ones to benefit off this system of high aid flows, there was little incentive to reform or reconsider the aid regime in the country. Because of the country's need for income flows, Malian officials were also often willing to align with donor intents and drafted vague or inclusive assistance plans to fit those parameters, in order to continue securing high volumes of donor support for themselves (Brown 2016). It became easy then for donors to overlook the implementation of these plan or reassess how inclusive the aid actually was in Mali's political and economic development, so long as the working relationship between donor and recipient was so seemingly in alignment.

Ultimately, the façade of international support masked underlying corruption and political mismanagement (Bøås and Torheim 2013). Even the close networks between donor and recipient officials, which often constitute the basis for positive aid flows, were increasingly vulnerable to corruption and negligence (Leininger 2012). Aid, especially democracy aid, was also being channelled to a regime that was growing less capable in governance, less popular amongst large portions of the population, and overseeing uneven development and imbalanced distribution of resources; this influx of assistance exacerbated the state's fragile status and may have even ignited sympathies across society for the insurgent groups battling the state (Bergamaschi 2014b). Aid also did little to benefit economic development in the country and contributed to many of the structural constraints that limited democracy building, including exacerbating cleavages and gaps between government branches, amongst regions, and between elites and citizens (Van de Walle 2012).

The flows of aid and the heavy presence of international donors were also instrumental in creating the aid dependency that worked to undermine Malian democracy. Bergamaschi categorically identifies Mali's dependency upon aid as a significant issue in its democratization. She attributes the country's reliance upon aid over the long term as reducing the state's legitimacy and political agency in crafting its own regime outcomes (Bergamaschi 2008). The 'donor-driven ownership' that resulted instead often emphasized donor interests over local preferences (Bergamaschi 2014b). Within this paradigm—of aid

³ The main issue with this line of reasoning that incomplete data led to an oversight of Mali's looming political crisis is that such data issues are true for many other countries and political contexts, where observers similarly attempt to make inferences based upon imperfect information. Therefore, it seems that either donors did know about Mali's fragile democracy and did not act, or that they indeed were not aware, either because they were not looking for signs of a crisis or those signs were being withheld from them. Either situation is important in considering the role of foreign actors in Mali's regime outcomes.

dependency usurping national political ownership—international donors and their behaviours bear responsibility in Mali’s recent upheavals, particularly as their ‘interventions, objectives, modalities, and content’ (Bergamaschi 2008) dictated the socio-political impact and outcomes of that assistance.

Post-2012, the literature has also retroactively begun to question the effectiveness of aid in fragile contexts to begin with. While early studies on Mali tended to praise its democracy, despite the many systemic and situational challenges it faced, recently there has been a push to reassess how effective aid can be within fragile or dependent states. Research in Mali specifically suggests that foreign aid is not effective in producing political stability⁴ or in bringing about good governance practices, especially under the country’s current conditions, characterized by conflict and weakened institutional infrastructures (Zürcher 2022).

On the flip side, aid has been attributed to benefiting some aspects of Mali’s development. Van de Walle (2012) makes note that aid distributions helped build up democratic institutions, increase literacy rates and health outcomes, and foster civil society activity. In fact, perhaps one of aid’s most positive achievements in Mali has been its role in supporting civil society. Local associations have emerged and been successful in Mali, partially because of strong international and NGO backing (Josserand and Bingen 1995; Docking 2005; Van de Walle 2012). Civil society participation continues to exist in the country today and may even be slightly increasing under this closed autocratic regime, hinting at the potentially lingering impact of foreign aid. Given civil society’s fundamental role within theories of democratization, this effect has the potential to reshape future regime outcomes in Mali as well.

Nonetheless, the consensus within the literature at the moment is that foreign aid’s net effect in Mali has not been positive. In fact, the role of foreign aid and the way it was implemented in Mali—in large volumes and with minimal oversight—instead of bolstering democracy, as it was intended to, was ironically one of the main architects of democracy’s demise in the country (Leininger 2012). Instead of serving as a model of democratization, the country now stands as a cautionary tale for how the overexuberance of aid flows can undermine democratization in the long term.

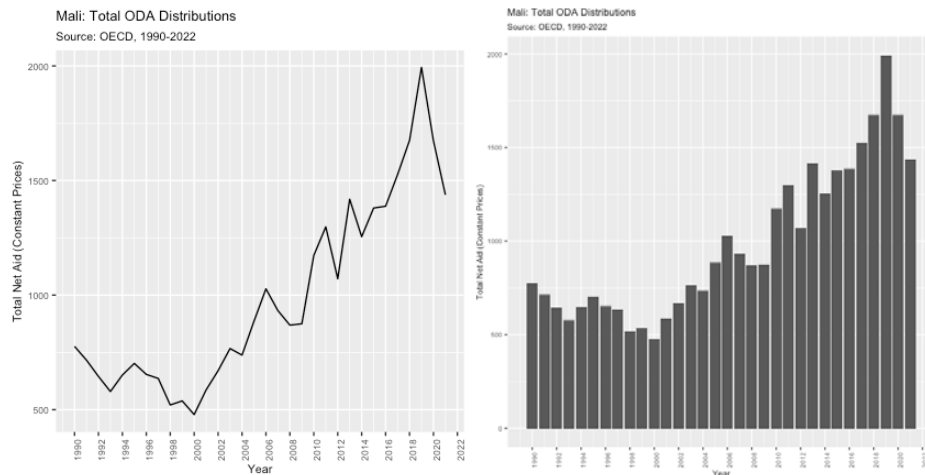
4 Aid flows and sources

The role of foreign aid in Mali cannot be understated. After 1993 and especially from 2000 to 2010, foreign aid commitments grew substantially to the country. World Development Indicators suggest that prior to the 2012 coup, between 80 to 100% of Mali’s government expenditures were from foreign aid. After the coup, donors continued to send large quantities of aid, especially political and democratic aid, totalling over \$5 billion (Zürcher 2022). Up until 2012, Mali routinely received 12–15% of its GNI in foreign aid, accounting for 50% of its annual budget (Van de Walle 2012).

OECD data also demonstrate that flows of ODA have increased over time. Since the year 2000, aid distributions have steadily increased, reaching their pinnacle in 2019. Aid flows during the 1990s, the low point of Mali’s status as an aid recipient, averaged around \$500 million per year from 1993 to 1999. That figure escalated in the early and mid-2000s, averaging \$900 million per year from 2000 to 2010. In 2019, \$1.9 billion in official development assistance (ODA) was distributed to Mali. This precipitous climb of aid flows confirms not only the extent to which aid’s crippling effect could have impacted regime outcomes, it is also illustrative of Mali’s severe aid dependency.

⁴ This finding in Mali is interesting, since research in Burundi and Liberia suggests the opposite: that external assistance was instrumental in bringing about peace and returning that state to political stability.

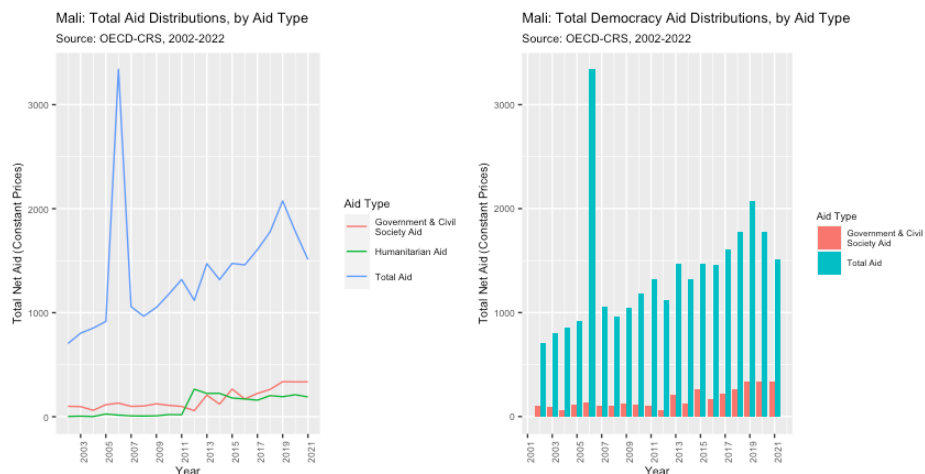
Figure 8: Mali's total official development assistance distributions



Source: author's construction based on OECD data.

The aid to Mali has primarily been given as general developmental aid flows, although the country has received democracy aid distributions over the years as well. OECD Creditor Reporting System (OECD-CRS) data demonstrate that total economic aid flows far outweigh aid given for humanitarian or governance and civil society purposes. Recently, more aid has been distributed to Mali for democratising purposes. The democracy aid that does arrive to the country is also only provided by a handful of bilateral donors—primarily from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)—and the only two multilateral donors to offer democracy assistance to Mali are the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the EU (Van de Walle 2012). Yet for the most part, assistance to government and civil society has not constituted a large portion of total aid flows to Mali.

Figure 9: Mali's total aid, humanitarian aid, and government and civil society aid distributions



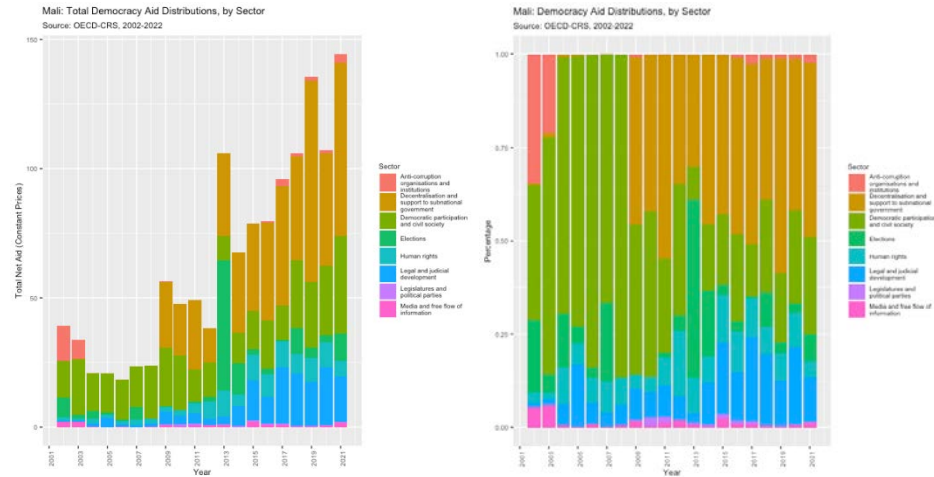
Source: author's construction based on OECD Creditor Reporting System (OECD-CRS) data.

Analysis of the subcomponent categories of democracy aid⁵ reveals that this assistance has really focused upon two objectives. Steady aid has been given for democratic participation and civil society, a priority of democracy aid in the mid-2000s. Substantial flows have also been given to subnational governance initiatives. A fair amount of aid is regularly given to assist with elections, human rights, and

⁵ In the CRS data, purpose codes are selected that correspond most closely to democracy building to reflect democracy aid. Some aid flows, for instance public finance management or public sector policy, that are coded under Government and Civil Society purpose codes are excluded in this conceptualization of democracy aid.

legal development. Meanwhile, aid for legislatures, political parties, anti-corruption efforts, and media support has not been a primary priority of donor assistance. Assessing how effective these particular aid flows are—especially aid for democratic participation and civil society—in generating positive regime outcomes is an important research question that still needs to be addressed.

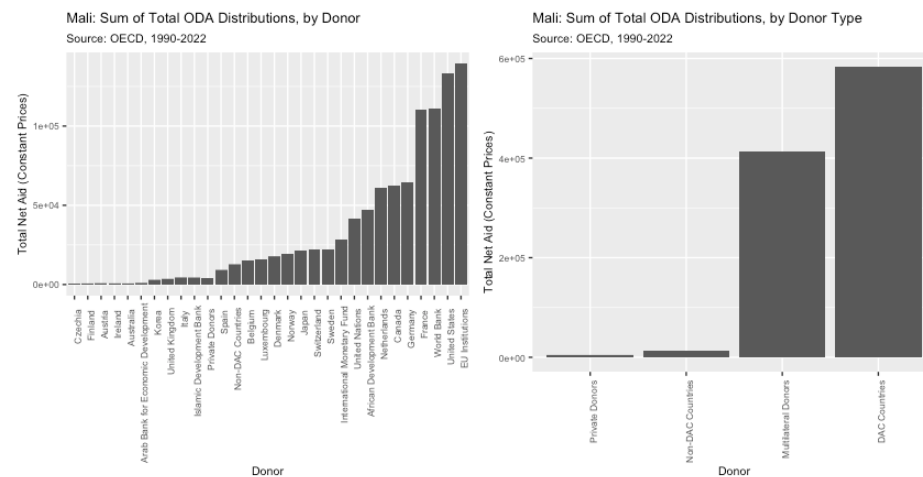
Figure 10: Mali's democracy aid by sector



Source: Source: author's construction based on OECD-CRS data.

Foreign assistance to Mali is also largely distributed through bilateral donors. In terms of total aid, multilateral donors have historically given less aid to the country than have bilateral Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors, including the United States, France, Germany, Canada, and the Netherlands. The EU remains Mali's largest multilateral donor, and the UN has also been an active multilateral donor to the country, but distributions from DAC countries and bilateral states far outpace multilateral assistance.

Figure 11: Mali's total official development assistance distributions, by donor and donor type

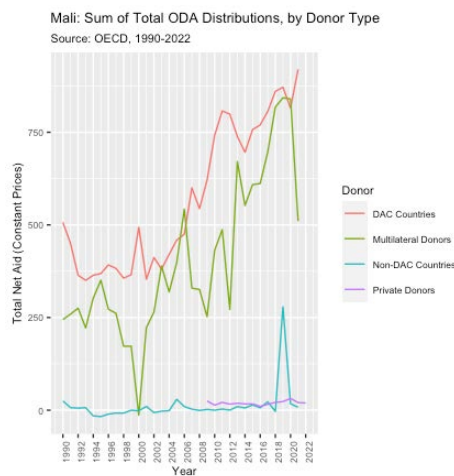


Source: author's construction based on OECD data.

There is also some indication that DAC donors may not be the only donors looking to offer support to Mali. DAC and multilateral aid combined still very much account for the vast majority of foreign assistance to Mali, but recently private donors and non-DAC countries have also been contributing aid. Non-DAC donors have had a longstanding presence in Mali, but 2019 saw a spike in donor assistance from non-DAC countries. While difficult to verify which aid projects or which donors this aid was channelled from, this trend does coincide with both Russia's reassertion of itself in the African continent

as a potential development and security partner, as well as the Chinese expansion of its Belt and Road Initiative into several African countries, including Mali.

Figure 12: Mali's official development assistance distributions, by donor type



Source: author's construction based on OECD data.

Beyond foreign aid, Mali has recently sought out new security partnerships as well. Its security co-operation with the Russian-affiliated Wagner Group has provided the current military junta with alternative sources of foreign funding and assistance (Elischer 2022). China too has engaged with Mali under a 'development–security nexus' that offers both developmental and military assistance (Benabdallah and Large 2020). The presence of non-DAC states, who offer Mali alternatives for development and security support, call into question the extent to which traditional mechanisms for inducing democratization exogenously—conditionalities, accountability, aid partnerships, etc.—can still effectively work in the country.

There are also some hints in the literature that the way that aid is distributed in Mali may account for its effectiveness. Assistance is increasingly circumventing direct government channels in Mali, and there is often disconnect between aid distributions and the officials charged with carrying out these strategies on the ground (Brown 2016). Therefore, despite the massive flows of aid that have entered the country, there is often a lack of coordination and capacity in their implementation, which has ultimately limited the effectiveness of this assistance.

5 Specific aid examples

Given the historically robust flows of aid to Mali, there is certainly more research to be done on specific aid programmes in the country. However, a few key projects have been highlighted in the literature. Technical assistance, capacity building projects, electoral support programmes, civil society assistance, and specific military or peacekeeping interventions⁶ are often discussed and analysed. These projects have been assessed with having varying degrees of success, but the broad opinion is that most aid projects have not been very effective.

Bergamaschi (2014a) provides close insight on aid activities from Mali's Poverty Reduction Strategy technical unit. This technical assistance programme, heavily supported by the EU, was intended to provide the Malian government with support in policy development and implementation. In reality, the

⁶ While not technically aid projects, it is important to point out that a great deal has been written on military and peacekeeping interventions in Mali. However, there is much less literature on how these military and peacekeeping interventions have interacted with regime outcomes.

programme had limited impact in the country, to some extent because of bureaucracy within the unit itself.

Meanwhile, Van de Walle (2012) highlights some of the projects aimed at democracy building in Mali. The US and Canada have offered legislative, media, electoral, and human rights support. But the most positive effective aid programmes in Mali, according to his assessment, are those targeting civil society. Donor aid flows to civil society have had cascading positive effects: they directly bolster the formation and activities of local associations, provide locals with valuable experiences working within civil society organizations, and help instil civic values within society. Civil society assistance offers a promising avenue in understanding effective aid strategies in Mali and is therefore deserving of more research.

Zürcher (2022) also identifies several aid projects and interventions, including targeted assistance to mass media, economic and fiscal support, conflict resolution, and reconciliation efforts. Ultimately, using both political stability and project evaluations as a metric for success, he concludes that none of these projects were particularly effective in Mali. He does, however, spotlight a UNDP electoral support project in 2013 and 2016 that does seem to have effectively supported elections in the country; this support did not positively impact democracy or regime outcomes, but it did allow Mali to conduct clean elections.

This last project mentioned—the UNDP electoral support project—highlights a particular aspect of aid delivery in Mali that may be worth exploring further: delivery of aid through the UN. Especially in contrast to French intervention in Mali, research suggests that the UN presence is much more openly received by the population (Elischer 2022). UN peacekeepers, in comparison to French forces, actually appear to instil a sense of stability and optimism amongst citizens, especially amongst those with low institutional trust (Nomikos 2022). These findings with respect to peacekeepers and military interventions, combined with the previous success of UNDP aid, offers insight to potentially preferred channels of future aid distributions. Because Malians appear to be more receptive to the UN presence, future aid projects might best be channelled through the UN, or perhaps through multilateral donors in general.

6 Conclusions

While much has been written on Mali, there are still major gaps in this literature to be filled. Van de Walle (2012) does assess the impact of democracy assistance to Mali, although a more recent and updated analysis of democracy aid is still needed. No research has yet comprehensively investigated the subcomponents of democratic aid. Several authors mention assistance projects to elections, media, or governance, but none assesses them side by side in a quantitative or comparative fashion.

Further research is also needed in terms of sanctions and how effective bilateral and UN sanction regimes have been upon both economic and political outcomes. Regional, international, and bilateral sanctions, travel bans, and embargos have been levelled against Mali's regime since 2012, but the literature has been relatively silent on the impact of those actions. The recent influx of non-DAC donor aid and military support is also an interesting aspect that should be followed closely.

Given the unique situation in Mali, whereby external support has also come in the form of military and peacekeeping interventions, it would also be a worthwhile endeavour to study the ways in which these forms of external support work to reinforce or undermine one another in Mali, a research project which to my knowledge has not yet been conducted. Finally, it would be expedient to analyse more carefully the effectiveness of bilateral versus multilateral aid projects or interventions in Mali, given that there does appear to be circumstantial evidence in support of a multilateral delivery to the country.

At the moment, foreign aid distributions may not be the most preferable vehicle for reintroducing democratization into Mali, given the messy track record foreign assistance and donors have had in the country. However, understanding the most effective, receptive, and sensitive ways in which to provide assistance to the country is critical in rebuilding donor relationships and reputations within Mali and

when thinking about the mechanisms that may best produce political stability and democratization for the country in the future.

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