

# MALI'S DEFENCE SECTOR SYSTEMIC CORRUPTION RISK AMIDST ESCALATING VIOLENCE



This policy brief aims to highlight findings from the 2020 Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI) that are most pertinent to enhanced institutional resilience to corruption in the Mali's defence sector. It is based on a close reading of the GDI results for Mali, as well as context and problem analyses conducted by TI-DS, policy literature, and news reporting on Mali over the past decade.

## Key findings:

- Mali suffers from systemic weaknesses that not only provide opportunities for diversion of funds and influence-peddling, but also contribute to failures of equipment on the battlefield, and ongoing political and economic fragility.
- Mali's defence sector lacks transparency in most key defence governance functions. This is particularly true for procurement activities as no information is published, which impedes any internal or external review of military purchases and their use.
- Bolstering transparency and access to information is critical to building sustainable institutional resilience to corruption risk in Mali's defence sector. This includes release of key information on defence sector procurement and auditing mechanisms for opaque procurement and spending practices.

## Country context: Political instability and sub-national conflict

As one of the largest countries on the African continent, Mali faces a plethora of challenges related to its size, location, and geopolitics. Despite its increasing GDP from cotton production, extractive activities (lithium), and industrial gold production, almost 20% of Mali's highly dispersed population lives in extreme poverty, concentrated in the rural areas of the south of the country.<sup>1</sup> The country's economy grew by 3.5% in 2022 and 5.2% in 2023, after the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) lifted the economic and financial sanctions in 2022.

In January 2024 Mali announced its withdrawal from ECOWAS, alongside Niger and Burkina Faso. Following

the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States in September 2023, in which the three states cemented their defence pact, the triumvirate of military leaders continued to challenge the pre-existing ties with other regional and international partners.<sup>2,3</sup> In early July 2024, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso decided to further their alliance and formed a new confederation – the Confederation of Sahel States, emphasising both economic and military cooperation. They signed a treaty on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 2024 restating their sovereignty from France's influence in the region and in the ECOWAS organisation, as well as their aim to create a new common currency.<sup>4</sup>

1 World Bank Country Overview: Mali. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mali/overview#:~:text=Extreme%20poverty%20is%20set%20to,rural%20areas%20of%20the%20south>. Last accessed 09 July 2024.

2 Abdelhak Bassou, 'From the Alliance of Sahel States to the Confederation of Sahel States: The Road is Clear, But Full of Traps', Policy Center for the New South, April 24, 2024. [https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2024-04/PB\\_19-24\\_Bassou%20EN.pdf](https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2024-04/PB_19-24_Bassou%20EN.pdf)

3 Millar, Paul. 'Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso: How a triumvirate of military leaders are redrawing West Africa's map', *France24*, July 12, 2024. <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20240712-mali-niger-burkina-faso-how-a-triumvirate-of-military-leaders-are-redrawing-west-africa-s-map>

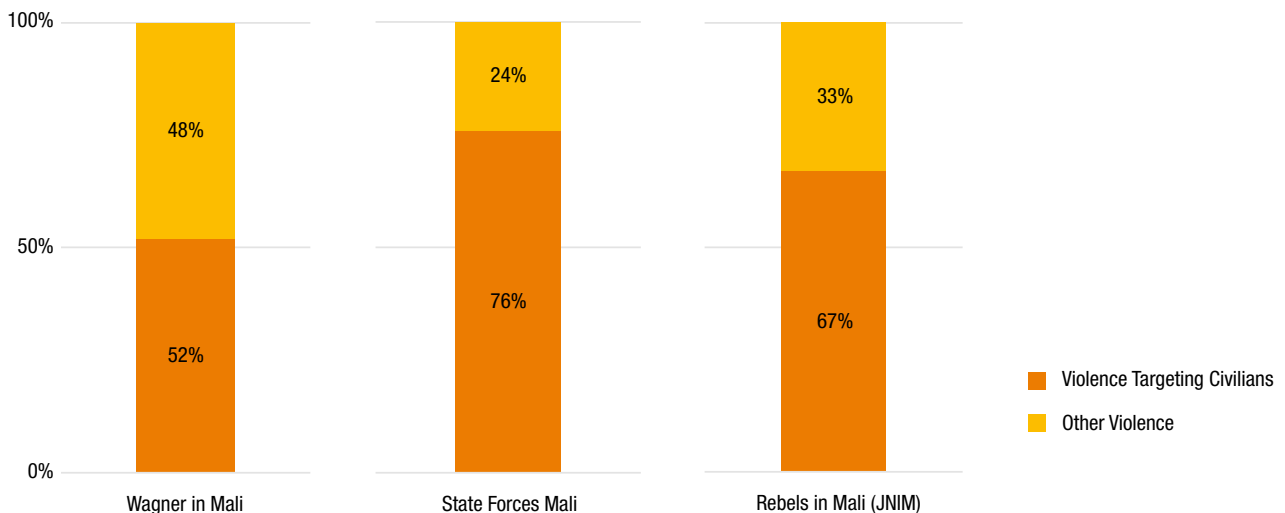
4 Ibid.

Long-standing security challenges, endemic corruption and a culture of mistrust have transformed the Malian political arena into an exercise for personal enrichment. Leading to the gradual rollback of the state, and further alienation of communities in the north and centre, the fourth Tuareg uprising in 2012 triggered another security crisis. This vacuum has proved a boon for armed and jihadist groups who have seized on government failings to position themselves as alternative models of governance. Skyrocketing violence from jihadist terrorism has also plunged Mali into a near-civil war over the past years. Much of the north of the country has come under the de facto rule of militant Islamist group since the coups of 2020 and 2021, when military juntas took power from democratically elected officials, citing security concerns.<sup>5</sup> This new wave of violence further aggravated pre-existing grievances. Malian military officials responded to the deteriorating security situation by negotiating the deployment of 1,000 troops from the Russian paramilitary group Wagner. This is part of a deal costing USD10.9 million per month that also provides Wagner access to Malian gold mines.<sup>6</sup>

The language of corruption is pervasive in armed groups propaganda, condemning the greed of authorities in Bamako and extolling the virtues of armed actors who can better represent and provide for local communities.<sup>7</sup> In parallel, since 2020 the Malian government continues to intimidate the media and target journalists and human rights defenders, further restricting civic space.<sup>8</sup> The military's grip on the country has tightened in the last two years. The junta organised a constitutional referendum in June 2023 further enhancing the powers of the president and the armed forces.<sup>9</sup> The changes were backed by 97% of the votes cast, but presidential elections that were supposed to take place in February 2024 have been postponed indefinitely.

However, violence targeting civilians increased by 38% in Mali in 2023.<sup>10</sup> Mali saw almost over 1,000 violent events involving militant Islamist groups in 2023, eclipsing 2022's record levels of violence and a nearly three-fold increase from when the junta seized power in 2020.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 1: Percentage of Organised Political Violence Events Targeting Civilians Timeframe: 1 December 2021 - 31 August 2023**  
Source: ACLED



5 Dion Ena and Joseph Sany, "After Two Coups, Mali Needs Regional Support to Bolster Democracy", United States Institute of Peace, December 9, 2021. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/12/after-two-coups-mali-needs-regional-support-bolster-democracy>

6 Africa Center for Strategic Studies. 2023. "Mali Catastrophe Accelerating under Junta Rule." July 10, 2023. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mali-catastrophe-accelerating-under-junta-rule/>.

7 TI-DS. 2021. "The Common Denominator: How Corruption in the Security Sector Fuels Insecurity in West Africa." Policy Brief. London: Transparency International, Defence & Security. <https://ti-defence.org/publications/west-africa-security-defence-sector-corruption-insecurity-conflict/>.

8 UN News. "Mali: les autorités doivent respecter la liberté d'expression (expert)," February 20, 2023. <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2023/02/1132467>.

9 Booty, Natasha and Marc Pivac. 'Assimi Goïta: President gets sweeping powers in new Mali constitution', *BBC News*, July 23, 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-66282417>.

10 ACLED. 2023. "Fact Sheet: Attacks on Civilians Spike in Mali as Security Deteriorates Across the Sahel", September 21, 2023. <https://acleddata.com/2023/09/21/fact-sheet-attacks-on-civilians-spike-in-mali-as-security-deteriorates-across-the-sahel>.

11 Africa Center for Strategic Studies. 2023. "Mali Catastrophe Accelerating under Junta Rule."

As the country is shifting from traditional Western security, the Malian government also requested the immediate withdrawal of the UN Peacekeeping Force in 2023. Consequently, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) departed in December 2023, while the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) ended its 11 years presence in the country in May 2024.<sup>12,13</sup> It is not yet clear whether the security vacuum of the decade-long peacekeeping mission will facilitate further instability.

Mali has struggled with corruption for decades, but recent years has seen organised crime entrench itself into both formal and informal economies amid escalating conflict. Organised crime groups have established footholds in arms, drugs, and human trafficking. Cases from two decades ago on collusion between army officials and drug shipments highlight the deeply rooted involvement of Malian political and military officials at all levels.<sup>14,15</sup>

The effect of systemic corruption in the defence forces can be seen through devastating reports of low ammunition, faulty weapons, and poorly performing protective gear abound. Combined with weak leadership in battle, this has resulted in the deaths of thousands of soldiers.<sup>16</sup> The succession of political crises and the degradation of security with which Malians have had to contend, along with the evidence of corruption, mismanagement and impunity for senior officials have also seriously harmed the public's trust in democratic institutions. Afrobarometer's Mali survey in April 2020 showed that 86% of Malian believed their country was headed in the wrong direction, with 74% also seeing corruption as increasing.<sup>17,18</sup> Trust in institutions and leaders was also low, especially toward the National Assembly (37%) and ruling coalition (38%).<sup>19</sup> These perceptions provided ideal conditions for the coups to take place.



## Democracy and governance across the continent: Afrobarometer findings 2022

- Clear majorities of Africans express support for democracy and accountable governance.
  - Two-thirds (66%) say they prefer democracy to any other system of government.
  - Even larger majorities reject non-democratic alternatives: “one-man rule” (80%), “one-party rule” (78%), and military rule (67%).
- Majorities also endorse norms, institutions, and practices associated with democratic governance, including choosing political leaders through the ballot box (75%), placing constitutional limits on presidential tenure (74%), multiparty competition (64%), free media (65%), and government accountability (61%).
- Across 30 countries surveyed consistently between 2014/2015 and 2021/2022, citizens have been largely consistent over time in their demand for democracy and accountable governance across many indicators.
- **However, preference for democracy is now a minority opinion in four countries – Mali (39%), South Africa (43%), Angola (47%), and Lesotho (49%). Between 2014 and 2022, support for democracy has declined sharply in several countries: Mali (down by 36 percentage points), Burkina Faso (-26 points), South Africa (-21 points), and Guinea (-15 points).**

12 Ruth Namatovu. 2023. “UN Withdrawal from Mali: Consequences and Containment Strategies for Peacekeeping.” Wilson Center, Africa Up Close. August 23, 2023.

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/un-withdrawal-mali-consequences-and-containment-strategies-peacekeeping>

13 European Union External Action, End of mandate EUTM Mali. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/end-mandate-eutm-mali\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/end-mandate-eutm-mali_en)

14 Peter Tinti. 2022. *Whose crime is it anyway? Organized crime and international stabilization efforts in Mali*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC). <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Whose-crime-is-it-anyway-web.pdf>

15 Wolfram Lacher. “Organized crime and conflict in the Sahel-Sahara region”. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2012. [https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/files\\_sahel\\_sahara.pdf](https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/files_sahel_sahara.pdf)

16 BBC. 2021. “Mali insurgency: Investigating corruption allegations in the military.” <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-57946367>, July 26, 2021.

17 Afrobarometer, ‘Maliens, Though Eager for Change from Failing State and Economy, Still Demand Democracy’, <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad386-maliens-though-eager-change-failing-state-and-economy-still-demand-democracy>

18 Afrobarometer, ‘Is Democracy in Mali Dying? Not if Citizens’ Voices are Heard’, August 28, 2020. <https://afrobarometer.org/blogs/democracy-mali-dying-not-if-citizens-voices-are-heard>

19 Ibid.



French troops of Operation Barkhane in Ansongo, Mali (December 2015) © Fred Marie, Shutterstock

## Global trends, domestic challenges

The Sahel was declared the epicentre of terrorism for 2023, with Mali being of particular concern.<sup>20</sup> The country is widely considered to be one of the world's fastest growing Islamist insurgencies in what is a key migration route to Europe and what had previously been the focus of major international counter-terrorism efforts from the United States, the EU and France, up until the coups of 2020 and 2021.<sup>21</sup> Prior to these coups, Mali relied heavily on security assistance, with one estimate of support from the US, France and the EU putting it at around 75% of the government's total revenue.<sup>22</sup> Foreign assistance under the aegis of the Americans and Europeans focused overwhelmingly on strengthening the forces at the expense of improving security sector governance. Of the USD79 million in US foreign development assistance that Mali received in 2020, just 1% was for governance and only 5% for security

programming that was not direct aid to security forces, such as peacebuilding.<sup>23</sup> This funding strengthened the military, equipping them with more sophisticated weapons and greater tactical readiness, but without building up corresponding institutional resilience, good governance mechanisms or safeguards to corruption.

Criminal networks and illicit economies thrive in Mali and are deeply embedded within formal and informal political and security structures with Northern Mali, which is often considered as the epicentre of trafficking in weapons, drugs, contraband and people.<sup>24</sup> Over the years, there have been numerous cases of defence and security involvement with these networks and of direct collaboration between the military and organised crime.<sup>25</sup> The head of Mali's main intelligence directorate was arrested in 2019, alleged to have provided protection for traffickers in exchange for payments from a representative in Mali's National Assembly who has a long affiliation with drug trafficking.<sup>26</sup> The Malian state has frequently co-opted traffickers as a method to

20 Global Terrorism Index (2023), Institute for Economics and Peace.

21 Danielle Paquette, "Mali army struggles against fastest-growing Islamist revolt", *The Independent*, March 12, 2020. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/mali-islamist-africa-terrorism-revolution-revolt-troops-a9396591.html>

22 Ena Dion & Emily Cole, 'How International Security Support Contributed to Mali's Coup', *USIP*, September 21, 2020. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/09/how-international-security-support-contributed-malis-coup>

23 Foreign Assistance.gov, 'Mali – 2020', <https://foreignassistance.gov/explore/country/Mali>

24 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC), 'Crime After Mali's Coup: Business as Usual?', 31 August 31, 2020. <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/crime-after-malis-coup-business-as-usual/>

25 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC), *After The Storm: Organised Crime Across the Sahel-Sahara Following Upheaval in Libya and Mali*, GI-TOC, Geneva, 2019, p. 13, [https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/After\\_the\\_storm\\_GI-TOC.pdf](https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/After_the_storm_GI-TOC.pdf)

26 United Nations, 'Final Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) on Mali and Renewed Pursuant to Resolution 2484 (2019)', S/2020/785/Rev.1, p. 19, <https://undocs.org/S/2020/785/Rev.1>

silence revolt and reward allies, allowing gangs access to trafficking routes in exchange for military support against rebels. Organised crime groups have gained such power that the Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC) has called this fight “Mali’s hidden war.”<sup>27</sup> The power of these traffickers means that current efforts to extend the central government’s authority to the North will inevitably mean the government and army seeking agreements with the *grand messieurs* – the region’s influential businessmen involved in legal and illegal activities.<sup>28</sup> On top of this, there are signs that organised crime activity are spreading south, with banditry, drug and arms seizures all increasing in the centre and southern regions since 2014.<sup>29</sup> This situation presents clear corruption risks for Mali’s defence sector and its record of collusion with organised crime elements are the ideal breeding ground for corruption. The presence of powerful organised crime groups, connected to the military, also opens the door to foreign actors to exert undue influence over defence forces.

A growing dynamic in Mali, and Sub-Saharan Africa more broadly, is the use of private military and security companies (PMSCs) and the outsourcing of the state’s security and defence function to these private actors. The continued insecurity across Mali and the struggles the defence and security forces have had in dealing with the diversity of threats, has favoured PMSCs.<sup>30</sup> Until recently, there were no legal standards relating to recruitment or training procedures for PSCs and no comprehensive policy or mechanisms for how the government can scrutinise the conduct of private security contractors.<sup>31</sup>

The weak legislative framework surrounding private security actors means the activities of more than 300 private security actors operating in Mali are largely

unregulated, despite recent efforts to impose greater government control over them. This raises significant risks of poor conduct, abuses of power and corruption in the exercise of their activities. Despite the existence of an inspection regime, effective oversight of these actors is rare or non-existent, with very few actual inspections being carried out. A lack of resources and personnel mean that violations are often accepted by the authorities and legal provisions are ignored.<sup>32</sup> At low rates of pay and given the sensitive positions they occupy, these local staff are susceptible to bribery and to collusion with criminal actors.<sup>33</sup> In addition, inadequate training also presents serious challenges. Agents with insufficient knowledge of their mandate, human rights and use of force laws, are at risk of engaging in inappropriate behaviour and abuse of power.<sup>34</sup> This also raises significant and as of yet, unresolved questions around how and when they should cooperate with state defence and security forces.

Large international firms, such as G4S and Wagner Group, are allowed to operate freely despite Malian law requiring directors to be nationals.<sup>35</sup> Wagner, in particular, has extended its reach far into the Sahel, now operating freely in Mali, the Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, and was recently invited into Niger to prop up the ruling military junta.<sup>36</sup> Wagner is closely linked to the Russian state and has been implicated in hundreds of human rights abuses alongside the country’s military, including a 2022 massacre in Mali that killed 500 civilians.<sup>37</sup> It has intervened in the affairs of African countries, providing military and security support while expanding Moscow’s foreign policy influence across the continent,<sup>38</sup> as well as leaving a trail of violence and increased insecurity in its wake.<sup>39</sup> In Mali, Wagner has established two mining companies, and now partially owns at least three artisanal gold sites south of Bamako, further solidifying its ability

27 GI-TOC, *After the Storm*, p. 25.

28 Ivan Briscoe, ‘Crime after jihad: Armed groups, the state and illicit business in post-conflict Mali’, *Clingendael Institute*, May 2014, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/crime-after-jihad-armed-groups-the-state-and-illicit-business-in-post-conflict-mali/>

29 Maliweb.net, *Lutte contre le trafic de drogue au Mali de janvier 2014 à juin 2018: 455 personnes de 13 nationalités ont été interpellées*, January 15, 2019, <https://www.maliweb.net/societe/lutte-contre-le-traffic-de-droque-au-mali-de-janvier-2014-a-juin-2018-455-personnes-de-13-nationalites-ont-ete-interpelees-2796832.html>

30 Kadidia Sangaré Coulibaly, ‘Mali’, in Alan Bryden (ed.), *The Privatisation of Security in Africa: Challenges and Lessons from Cote d’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal*, DCAF, Geneva, 2016, pp. 77-100, (p. 78).

31 aBamako, ‘Sociétés privées de surveillance et de gardiennage, de transport de fonds et de protection de personnes: Une nouvelle loi pour assurer un exercice efficace de la profession’, 19 May 2017. <http://news.abamako.com/h/161225.html>

32 Kadidia Sangaré Coulibaly, ‘Mali’, p. 89.

33 C. M. Traoré, ‘Mali : Sociétés de sécurité privées : La menace terroriste ne fait pas exploser la demande’, *MaliActu*, February 4, 2016, <http://maliactu.net/mali-societes-de-securite-privees-la-menace-terroriste-ne-fait-pas-exploser-la-demande/>

34 Kadidia Sangaré Coulibaly, ‘Mali’, p. 88.

35 Kadidia Sangaré Coulibaly, ‘Mali’, p. 86-87.

36 Mednick, Sam. “Niger’s Junta Asks for Help from Russian Group Wagner as It Faces Military Intervention Threat.” *AP News*, August 5, 2023. World News. <https://apnews.com/article/wagner-russia-coup-niger-military-force>.

37 UN News. “Moura: Over 500 Killed by Malian Troops, Foreign Military Personnel in 2022 Operation,” May 12, 2023. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/05/1136607>.

38 Rampe, William. 2023. “What Is Russia’s Wagner Group Doing in Africa?” Council on Foreign Relations, May 23, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/what-russias-wagner-group-doing-africa>.

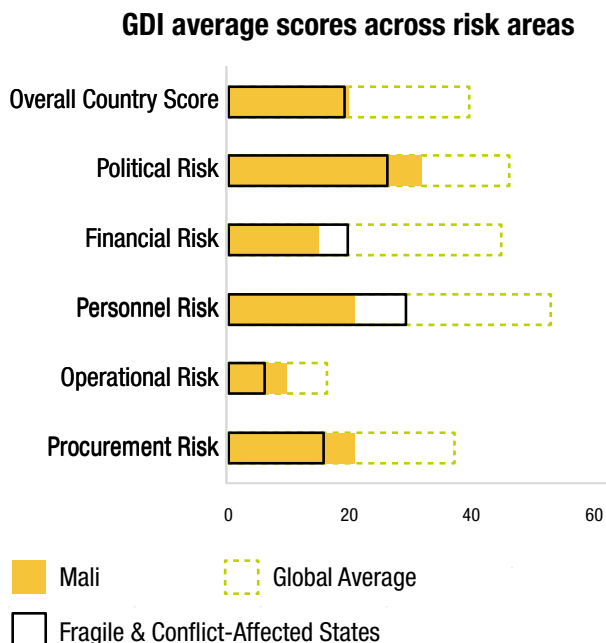
39 Turse, Nick. “Wagner Group Disappeared and Executed Civilians in Mali.” *The Intercept*, July 24, 2023. <https://theintercept.com/2023/07/24/wagner-group-mali/>; Human Rights Watch. “Mali: New Atrocities by Malian Army, Apparent Wagner Fighters,” July 24, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/24/mali-new-atrocities-malian-army-apparent-wagner-fighters>.

to traffic gold via Dubai.<sup>40</sup> As recently as July 2023, the United States Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned three Malian transition government and military officials for facilitating the deployment and expansion of Wagner activities in Mali.<sup>41</sup>

## Institutional resilience in defence governance

Mali was assessed at a very high level of corruption risk in the 2020 GDI.<sup>42</sup> This is mirrored in the historical trend of other fragile and conflict-affected states, with weak institutions not just in the defence sector, but across government. The effects of a sustained lack of institutional resilience to corruption has been profound in Mali and reflects a systemic weakness that not only provides opportunities for diversion of funds and influence-peddling, but also contributes to failures of equipment and tactics on the battlefield, and ongoing political and economic fragility.<sup>43</sup>

Figure 2: 2020 GDI scores across the five risk areas, index averages



**THERE IS NO ACCESS TO INFORMATION LAW OR DECREE,**



**NOR IS A RIGHT TO INFORMATION SPECIFIED IN THE NEW CONSTITUTION RECENTLY APPROVED BY REFERENDUM IN 2023**

Even before the military junta took power, Mali faced a severe lack of transparency in its defence governance. It sits in the bottom quarter of the GDI 2020, alongside most of the countries from sub-Saharan Africa. This reflects a lack of transparency that is prevalent across government. There is no access to information law or decree, nor is a right to information specified in the new constitution recently approved by referendum in 2023.

The functioning of the security and defence committee was limited prior to the coups, but now that parliament has been supplanted by a military junta, defence committee functions have been completely displaced, including democratic oversight of defence policymaking, budgets, acquisition planning, and arms deals. Administrative oversight by civil servants and public sector institutions is also severely lacking, even when compared to overall index averages.

There is almost no internal auditing done of defence activities, and external auditing is compromised by a lack of access to information and cooperation by the Ministry of Defence. Article 8 of the Procurement Code exempts purchases related to national security from public procurement legislation and effectively shields them from any scrutiny.<sup>44</sup> There are no oversight mechanisms for procurement, and very little information is released or retained about purchases.

40 Africa Center for Strategic Studies. 2023. "Mali Catastrophe Accelerating under Junta Rule.," Matthew T. Page, and Jodi Vittori, eds. 2020. *Dubai's Role in Facilitating Corruption and Global Illicit Financial Flows*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/07/07/dubai-s-role-in-facilitating-corruption-and-global-illicit-financial-flows-pub-82180>.

41 US Department of the Treasury. "Treasury Targets Malian Officials Facilitating Wagner Group," July 24, 2023. <https://www.state.gov/imposing-sanctions-on-malian-officials-in-connection-with-the-wagner-group/>.

42 Transparency International Defence & Security, Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI) 2020, Mali country assessment and brief. Available here: <https://ti-defence.org/gdi/countries/mali/>.

43 Transparency International Defence & Security. "GDI 2020 Global Report: Disruption, Democracy, and Corruption Risk in Defence Sectors." London: Transparency International UK, November 2021.

44 Transparency International Defence & Security, Government Defence Integrity Index (GDI) 2020, Mali country assessment and brief. Available here: <https://ti-defence.org/gdi/countries/mali/>.

Figure 3: Results of the 2020 GDI on the transparency of key defence governance functions

### TRANSPARENCY OF KEY DEFENCE GOVERNANCE FUNCTIONS

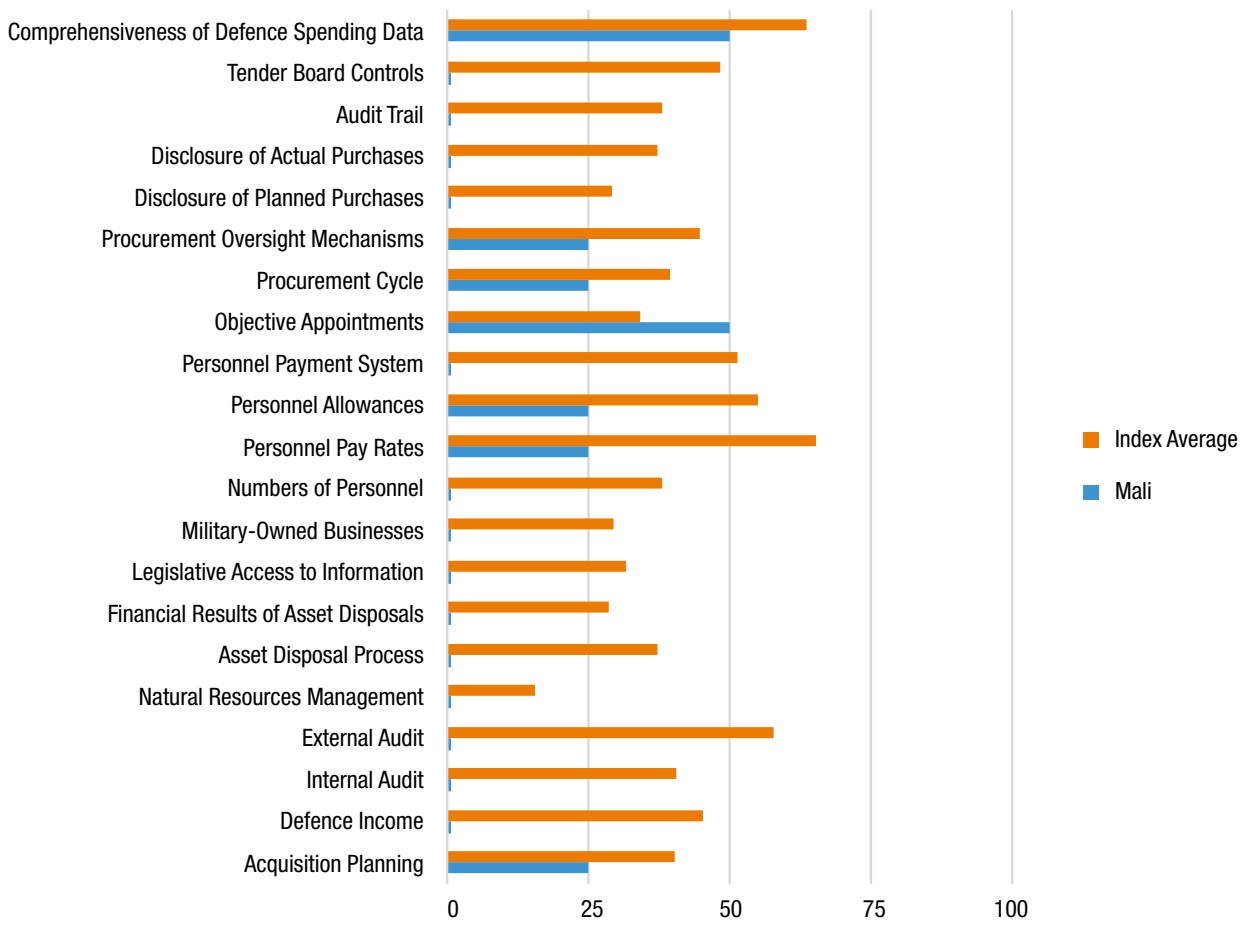
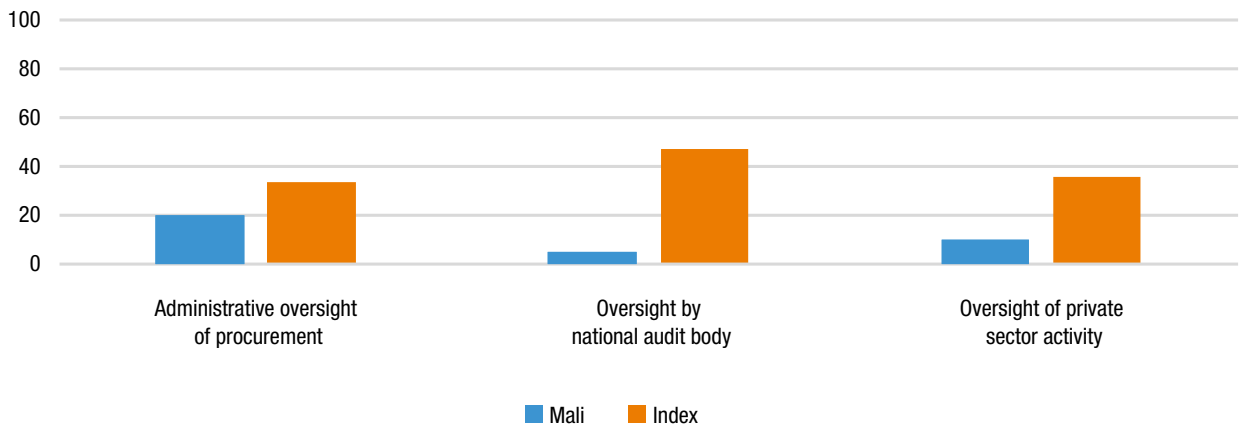


Figure 4: Public Sector Oversight of Defence Governance

### PUBLIC SECTOR OVERSIGHT OF DEFENCE GOVERNANCE





## 2020 GDI Results for Mali: Tender Boards and Audit Trails<sup>45</sup>



In November 2016, London-based audit company Grant Thornton conducted an assessment of the audit practices of the Malian procurement authority (Autorité de Régulation des Marchés Publics' or ARMDS).<sup>46</sup> It found evidence of poor record keeping that often made it impossible to identify the key individuals involved in awarding specific public contracts. Firstly, it noted the frequent absence of signatures from members of the tender boards attesting to the non-existence of any conflicts of interest. It also cited that in many cases, there had been no publication of the result of the tender, leaving it unclear to the public which company had been successful. Similarly, it recorded that, of the open competitive tenders it had analysed, 54% of them failed to obtain the signatures of the contract holder, the contracting authority or the stamp of approval from the financial controller. Such absences left gaping holes in the audit trail. Grant Thornton reported that such gaps were found in 11 of the 19 administrative bodies it assessed.

Despite support for the military junta, and a general distrust of democracy, Mali's civic engagement scores are equal to or surpass overall index averages. By engaging in public discourse and making demands of government, Malian civil society actors are in a much stronger position than its weak GDI scores would otherwise indicate.

There has also been considerable work done by both civil society actors and international organisations to establish relationships between the armed forces and civilian communities, as a means of providing better safety and security to local populations. The Malian Forum of Civil Society Organisations-Defence and

Security - *Forum des Organisations de la Société Civile dans le Secteur de la Défense et Sécurité* (FOSC-DS) was launched in 2019, with a strategy that calls for reforms in internal security, modernisation, protections for civilians, and corruption risk mitigation. Despite the fact that defence institutions have historically been closed off from civil society engagement, and the ongoing restrictions on civic space, there is continued pressure for change. Therefore, findings on transparency, information access, and external accountability are considered key to identifying a path forward for defence governance reform.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Autorité de régulation des marchés publics et des délégations de service public (ARMDS) (République du Mali) : Revue indépendante de la conformité de la passation des marchés des autorités contractantes (Gestion 2015) Rapport de synthèse sur la procédure de passation [ARMDS: independent revue of the conformity of contracting parties to public procurement (2015 management) Summary report on the procurement process] (London: Grant Thornton, 2016)



# RECOMMENDATIONS

While the GDI offers a comprehensive assessment of institutional strengths and weaknesses that are crucial for corruption risk mitigation, it is important to understand how its findings can be best applied. Rather than capturing information about one specific area of interest, the GDI captures information about the entire system that contributes to defence governance. This means that findings apply to a range of actors, (e.g., parliament, civil service, armed forces, media, civil society organisations, etc.) and a range of activities (e.g., policymaking, personnel management, financial management, procurement, operations). As a result, it extends well beyond the remit of what one organisation can address effectively. The expertise needed to address problems will be found across a range of international and national entities. Partnership is thus crucial to effective use of GDI findings.

Due to the current political climate in Mali, these recommendations may not apply all at once. Regardless, it is important to note that access to information is a foundational element of functioning governance systems. Even in the absence of democratic norms, information is a tool to demand transparency and accountability from those in power. Without key information about government activity, including the outcomes of their actions and spending practices, it is nearly impossible for reliable budgets to be drafted and executed, for public services to reach citizens, or for funding to arrive at its intended and legitimate destination.

The recommendations below distinguish between actions that TI-DS is well-placed to lead in partnership with other civil society organisations or international actors, and actions that should consist of providing advisory or advocacy support to non-TI lead actors.

**THE EXPERTISE NEEDED  
TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS  
WILL BE FOUND ACROSS  
A RANGE OF INTERNATIONAL  
AND NATIONAL ENTITIES**

**PARTNERSHIP**

**IS THUS CRUCIAL TO EFFECTIVE  
USE OF GDI FINDINGS**



## In partnership with civil society:

- 1** Continue support of the FOSC-DS where civil society actors provide input into national security strategy discussions and implementing policies.
- 2** Draft an internationally accepted range of exceptions for defence and security that can be used in the development of legal frameworks, specifically in the right to information (RTI) law. This is also important for regulations governing procurement transparency and budget transparency.<sup>47</sup>
- 3** Advocate for public disclosure of critical information about the defence sector, including defence budgets, single source and competitive contracting, military acquisitions, defence income and foreign assistance, external audits, disaggregated expenditures, and asset disposals.<sup>48</sup>
- 4** Conduct a review of the newly approved constitution with the aim of generating a set of recommendations for improvements in defence governance.<sup>49</sup> Most concerning as of 2023 is the consolidation of power in the executive, the lack of legislative oversight over the military, and the expanded role of the defence forces in state governance. Also important is whether a new Court of Auditors will have a mandate to review the finances of the defence establishment.

47 "The Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information (Tshwane Principles)." Open Society Justice Initiative, 2013.

48 Transparency International Defence & Security, 2024; "Unlocking Access: Balancing National Security and Transparency in Defence". London: Transparency International, UK.

49 Journal Officiel de la Republique du Mali, Decret N°2023-0276/PT-RM DU 05 Mai 2023. <https://sgg-mali.ml/JO/2023/mali-jo-2023-05-sp.pdf>



Bamako, Mali - Circa February 2012 © Thomas Dutour, Shutterstock

**In partnership with civil society and NATO Building Integrity Programme (NATO-BI), Norwegian Centre for Integrity in the Defence Sector (CIDS), or Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF):**

- 5** Incorporate corruption risk mitigation into military operations, in collaboration with Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Armed Forces. Priority areas are:
  - a. Corruption risk in military doctrine and forward planning.<sup>50</sup>
  - b. Integration of anticorruption into operational training.
- 6** Strengthen personnel management systems for both military and civilian personnel, in collaboration with MOD and Armed Forces. Priority areas are:
  - a. Payment systems, including numbers of personnel, pay rates, and allowances. An electronic payment system was initiated in 2022 for payment of wages for government employees, but it has not yet been extended to the defence and security forces.<sup>51</sup>
  - b. Integrity standards in defence personnel management (code of conduct, anti-bribery, recruitment, promotions, anticorruption training, etc).
  - c. Accountability standards in holding personnel accountable for human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> This is an issue across the index, with low scores reported for almost every country assessed.

<sup>51</sup> IMF. 2023. "Mali: 2023 Article IV Consultation." 14 June 2023. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2023/06/14/Mali-2023-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-Staff-Report-Staff-Supplement-and-Statement-534760>; Seán Smith. 2019. "Building Integrity in Mali's Defence and Security Sector: An Overview of the Institutional Safeguards." London: Transparency International, Defence & Security. <https://ti-defence.org/publications/building-integrity-in-malis-defence-and-security-sector/>.

<sup>52</sup> National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 and related resolutions of the United Nations Security Council on the agenda for Women, Peace and Security in Mali (2019-2023). Unofficial translation, funded by ARC DP160100212 CI Shepherd. <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Mali-2019-2023.pdf>

## In partnership with TI chapters in the Sahel and relevant international actors:

- 7** Support the development of a regional civil society initiative on the regulation of private military and security companies, emphasising that this issue is too pervasive for one country to tackle alone, and requires a collective action for solutions.<sup>53</sup>

## In collaboration with, or providing advisory support to, other actors, including national civil society actors and international actors such as donor governments, multilateral institutions, or transnational NGOs:

- 8** Support civil-military cooperation for national and gender-sensitive security solutions, bringing an awareness of corruption risks as threats to stability, and advocating for measures to counter small arms proliferation. It is important to note that not all illicit markets in Mali are destabilising, and many are driven by communities who are seeking security, protection and economic opportunities within a highly volatile security environment.<sup>54</sup>
- 9** Strengthen legal frameworks, emphasising that well-designed laws provide effective counter-corruption foundations, and that defence and security must be included in any governing laws. If possible, regulations are preferable to executive decrees, as they are more difficult to overturn or rescind. Priority areas are:
- Right to information law, including proactive disclosure.
  - Anticorruption law.
- 10** Strengthen institutional resilience, emphasising that transparency and integrity are critical to building and sustaining effective organisational practices. Priority areas are:
- Information sharing across and within government – information must be shared with oversight authorities and departments with shared responsibilities. This includes budgets, audits, expenditures, secret items, intelligence, and military acquisition plans.
  - Open budgets, with a focus on public participation, as well as budget transparency and accessibility.<sup>55</sup>
  - Procurement transparency and oversight. In particular, reviewing the legal exemptions in Article 8 of the Procurement Code for military and defence purchases and recommending changes that enhance transparency and accountability, and reviewing the Military Programming Law (LOPM) to determine how to institute a more robust acquisition planning process.



<sup>53</sup> The GDI indicators on PMSCs were not scored, as it was impossible to determine effective policy or practice. Efforts to build coalitions around this issue would help to identify international standards for the GDI on PMSC indicators. It is worth noting that ECOWAS issued guidance on this issue in its 2022 Policy Framework for SSR/G, stating that member states may wish to adhere to the following international norms, in order to promote respect for human rights and international humanitarian law: (1) Montreux Document on Pertinent International Legal Obligations and Good Practices for States Related to Operations of Private Military and Security Companies During Armed Conflict and (2) International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers and the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights. (See <https://ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ecowas-policy-framework-on-ssrg-english-adopted-1.pdf>)

<sup>54</sup> Peter Tinti. 2022. *Whose crime is it anyway? Organized crime and international stabilization efforts in Mali*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC). <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Whose-crime-is-it-anyway-web.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> International Budget Partnership, country results Mali. <https://internationalbudget.org/open-budget-survey/country-results/2021/mali>



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**Authors:** Stephanie Trapnell, Sabrina White, Denitsa Zhelyazkova, Léa Clamadieu

**Contributors:** Yi Kang Choo, Matthew Steadman

**Reviewers:** Alexander Thurston, Alexander Knapp

**Editor:** Michael Ofori-Mensah

**Design:** Colin Foo



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