



How a military coup led to African agency

An analysis of Mali's foreign policy
changes under competitive
authoritarian rule.



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Abstract

The main objective of this thesis was to investigate Mali's foreign policy since the country's change from a democratic to a competitive authoritarian regime in 2020, as well as the country's current geopolitical position. The analysis in the first chapter reveals that, under democratic rule, Mali was heavily reliant on foreign assistance and colonial mechanisms such as French control over the country's policy decisions. From a postcolonial standpoint, it is then asserted that Mali's transition from democracy to competitive authoritarianism has been accompanied by a vehement rejection of colonial frameworks in the nation's foreign policy. This is how Mali exhibits African agency; its post-coup d'état foreign policy is marked by an independent posture. Malians' support for the current foreign policy of the country, explains the legitimacy of the present administration. The most prevalent understanding of the country's geopolitical situation among Malians supports this assertion. Namely, one that is still making an effort to extricate itself from imperial systems. Moreover, it is noted that Mali is more suited to cooperating with authoritarian states like Russia, Turkey, and China. This bolstered Mali's commitment to African agency in the nation's foreign policy by providing the country with the resources it needs to avoid dependence on France or any other postcolonial, imperial structure.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AOF	French West Africa
AU	African Union
BCEAO	The Central Bank of West African States
CA	Competitive Authoritarianism
CFA	African Financial Community
CNSP	National Committee for the Salvation of the People
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
G5	G5 Sahel
IBK	Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (Mali's president from 2013-2020)
ID	Identity Document
IO	International Organization
IR	International Relations
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
RPG	Rally of the Guinean People
UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union
UN	United Nations
UNSC`	United Nations Security Council
US	United States of America
USSR	Soviet Union

INTRODUCTION

*“Are you still not aware that it is France which finances our enemies against our children?
That there is no terrorist in Mali? That all what is going on is orchestrated by France?”¹*

On August 18, 2020, in the hills of the garrison town of Kati, 15 km from Bamako, the starting point of all the coups d'état in Mali, soldiers posing as members of the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP) detained President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (also known as IBK) and Prime Minister Boubou Cissé.² The overthrow of President Keita's democratically elected government, which came after weeks of protests by Malians demanding Keita's resignation, marked the fourth coup in Mali's 60-year post-independence history.³ The quote from above, which reflected a growing popular belief in Mali, partially explains the primary reason for President Keita's overthrow. The quote can be found in a 4:39-minute video that was posted to the official Facebook page of Famous Malian musician Salif Keita in November 2019.⁴ In the video, the 70-year-old musician pleaded with the president to see clearly understand and acknowledge France's part in funding the jihadist movements that were causing instability in Mali. “If you can't run this country and are afraid to tell France the truth, step down so that someone who isn't afraid can take over,” Keita admonished the President.⁵ Whether or not the musician's anti France claims were rightful, the transition from a democratically chosen government to a republic ruled by a military junta, was condemned by the international community. Nevertheless it was hailed as a liberation by the Malian people and experienced by the military themselves as a victory.⁶ The AU's immediate ban on Mali from participating in its institutions until the restoration of the rule of law is one example of how the international community condemned the military coup.⁷ The possibility of a French withdrawal from Mali didn't only concern the French, the AU and the UN, it has also

¹ Matthew Kirwin, Lassane Ouedraogo, and Jason Warner, “Fake News in the Sahel: ‘Afrancaux News,’ French Counterterrorism, and the Logics of User-Generated Media,” *African Studies Review* (May 2022), 1-28, there 3.

² Omorogbe, Eki Yemisi. “Communiqués 1001(2021), 1030(2021), and 1062(2022) Regarding the Re-Emergence of Coups D'état in West Africa (Afr. Union) by Eki Yemisi Omorogbe.” *International Legal Materials* (June 21, 2022) 1–14.

³ Adetayo Adetuyi, “Military Coup and its Effect on the Democratization Process in Mali and in the Region.” *Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS)* 15 (March 2021), 1-8.

⁴ Matthew Kirwin, Lassane Ouedraogo, and Jason Warner, “Fake News in the Sahel: ‘Afrancaux News,’ French Counterterrorism, and the Logics of User-Generated Media,” 1-28.

⁵ Ibidem

⁶ Christian Abadioko Sambou. “De Quoi Le Coup d'Etat Du 18 Août Au Mali Est-Il Le Nom ?” *La Tribune Afrique* (August 31, 2020). <https://afrique.la Tribune.fr/think-tank/tribunes/2020-08-31/de-quoi-le-coup-d-etat-du-18-aout-au-mali-est-il-le-nom-855980.html>.

⁷ Jeune Afrique, “Mali Coup d'Etat: Military proposes three-year transition” (August 24, 2020). <https://www.theafricareport.com/38911/mali-coup-detat-military-proposes-three-yeartransition>.

alarmed the US, which has pushed for the French to stay.⁸ The reduction in French political influence and involvement in Mali, combined with an increase in Russian political influence and involvement, indicates a shift in Mali's foreign policy since the regime change. The implied political relevancy of Mali's situation from the shown interest by diverse states and IOs in conjunction with the shift in governance system which is accompanied by a change in foreign policy is precisely where the exploration of this study draws its roots from. In order to analyze this to its greatest extent, the overarching research question is formulated as follows: *How was Mali's foreign policy affected by the country's transition from a democracy to a competitive authoritarian (CA) regime in 2020 and how do Malians view Mali's geopolitical position in this context?*

I was fortunate enough to conduct an interview with current Malian Foreign Affairs Minister Abdoulaye Diop, who was also the country's Foreign Affairs Minister between 2014 and 2017. Because he is central to the subject of the thesis, I specifically asked him the overarching research question so that he could provide his professional views and perceptions on the matter.

More specifically, the thesis will be divided into three chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of the overarching research question. The first chapter will constitute an exploration of Mali's foreign policy and geopolitical position during the presidency of Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. In this context, 2013 will serve as the historical starting point for events and policies that will be subject to analysis. The second chapter will serve as an analysis of Mali's foreign policy since its transition from a democracy to a competitive authoritarian regime in 2020. Finally, a third chapter will serve as a case study that will answer the following sub-question: Why were Malians so enthusiastic about the replacement of the French by the Russians? Answering this sub-question will help us gain a better understanding of Malian's views and perspectives on their geopolitical position.

⁸ Amy Mackinnon, Robbie Gramer, Colum Lynch, and Colum Lynch. "Russia Flounders in Ukraine but Doubles Down in Mali." *Foreign Policy* (April 14, 2022), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/14/russia-ukraine-mali-wagner-group-mercenaries/>.

Historiography: A lack of African agency

The complexity of Mali's governing system that is now ruled by a non-democratically chosen military junta makes the debate between democracy, and (competitive) authoritarianism relevant to this study. Hal Brands, professor at the Johns Hopkins University stated in an article he published in 2018 that, democracy and authoritarianism are in competition with one another in almost every facet of contemporary great-power rivalry.⁹ It is this competition that we can to a certain extent perceive in Mali's present political situation.

Nkrumah first persuasively argued for "one-party democracy" in 1957, followed by Nyerere, Sékou Touré, and Tom Mboya.¹⁰ According to Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, the one-party system naturally tends toward authoritarianism in underdeveloped nations.¹¹ This argument is less relevant to the case of Mali however as it has a multi-party system.

Political scientists in the 1960s and 1970s were puzzled by a number of issues, including why military intervention occurred so frequently in both the Francophone and Anglophone African states.¹² Some people looked to societal tensions, which they claimed more or less drew the military into the political vortex, for the solution.¹³ Paul Nugent draws the conclusion in his book on Africa since independence that military coups in Africa typically followed a pattern where the unpopularity of the ruling regime served as the motivation for the soldiers to take action. Military conspirators were much less likely to overthrow a legitimate regime if they could not be assured of a measure of popular support. This means that democracy in Africa is almost always substituted by authoritarianism only when there is a measure of popular support for it. From a historical perspective Mali's most recent coup d'états fit in the narrative portrayed by Nugent.

A valid explanation for what perplexed political scientists in the 1960s and 70s can be found in the book *"The Clash of Civilizations?"* where, according to Samuel Huntington, the emerging pattern of international politics and conflicts in the post-Cold War era can be explained by the essentialized cultural difference between the

⁹ Hal Brands, "Democracy vs Authoritarianism: How Ideology Shapes Great-Power Conflict." *Survival* 60, no. 5 (September 3, 2018), 61–114.

¹⁰ Peter Anyang 'Nyong'o, "Democratization Processes in Africa." *Review of African Political Economy* 19, no. 54 (July 1992) 97–102.

¹¹ Peter Anyang 'Nyong'o, "Democratization Processes in Africa." 97–102.

¹² Paul Nugent, *Africa since independence: A comparative History*. Houndmills Basingstoke Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan 205

¹³ Paul Nugent, *Africa since independence: A comparative History*, 205.

liberal, democratic, secular West and the "Rest," which includes the Islamic world, where Western values have little cultural resonance.¹⁴ This culturally based explanation applies to Mali's situation as it is culturally and ethnically diverse with an estimated 90 percent of its population being Muslim.¹⁵ Thus, from a cultural standpoint, the five coup d'états that have occurred in Mali since its independence and hindered the flourishing of western democracy there, are partly due to a clash between the cultural values of western democracy and those of local and regional cultures.

By the beginning of the 1980s discourses on development began to emphasize that the state was becoming a burden to development in Africa.¹⁶ Developmental dictatorships had failed in Africa.

Other scholarly debates surrounding states and governance that center on the political ideas of democracy and authoritarianism draw attention to the vast grey area in classification of the political system of states. In the 1990s, many post-Cold War states combined democratic principles with authoritarian rule. As African countries moved toward electoral democratization in the early 1990s, many remained essentially authoritarian while incorporating some democratic innovations to varying degrees.¹⁷ These governments were frequently regarded by academics as imperfect or transitory democracies.¹⁸ They got given a wide range of labels by academics, such as "hybrid regime," "semi-authoritarianism," "soft authoritarianism," "electoral authoritarianism," "virtual democracy," "pseudodemocracy," and "illiberal democracy."¹⁹ Steven Levitsky, assistant professor of government and social studies at Harvard University and Lucan A. Way, assistant professor of political science at Temple University believe that literature concerning these 'hybrid regimes' generally have two significant flaws.²⁰ First, democratizing bias is a common feature of many studies. Analysis frequently views mixed regimes as undergoing protracted democratic transitions or as partial or "diminished" forms of democracy.

Worldmaking After Empire, a pioneering work by Adom Getachew, provides a

¹⁴ Samuel P. Huntington. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993)

¹⁵ Benjamin Soares, "Rasta" Sufis and Muslim youth culture in Mali. *Being young and Muslim: New cultural politics in the global south and north*, (2010) 241-57.

¹⁶ Peter Anyang 'Nyong'o, "Democratization Processes in Africa." *Review of African Political Economy* 19, no. 54 (July 1992) 97-102.

¹⁷ Aili Mari Tripp, "The Changing Face of Authoritarianism in Africa: The Case of Uganda." *Africa Today* 50, no. 3 (2004) 3-26.

¹⁸ Steven Levitsky, and Lucan Way. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002) 51-65.

¹⁹ Steven Levitsky, and Lucan Way. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." 51-65.

²⁰ *Ibidem*

postcolonial viewpoint on the topic of unsatisfactory democracies on the African continent. While a former colony may achieve national independence and put an end to formal imperial control from outside interference, she contends that a condition of dominance in the international order persists because of ingrained racial, political, and economic hierarchies that unequally distribute rights and obligations.²¹ In this regard, by examining the works of black anticolonial leaders, writers and thinkers, she highlights the possibility of a shared anti-colonial nationalist spirit.²² In the same sense, the third chapter of this study will provide examples of widespread anti-colonial nationalist perceptions with regard to Mali and West Africa in general. Arashi Davari, however, contends that Getachew does not reconstruct anticolonial nationalism for us. She identifies a potential turning point: from the counterrevolutionary present to an as-yet-undefined future resurrection of anticolonial worldmaking.²³ The writing of Getachew raises the question of whether IR theory is shifting toward a model in which the global south is also significant in international relations and politics. In this setting, this thesis will advance the conversation by highlighting African agency in Mali's present foreign policy that is driven by anticolonial sentiments in the nation and West Africa in general. Getachew's claim that anticolonial worldmaking in IR is conceivable is supported by the way Mali's foreign policy influences imperial ties with Western nations.

When it comes to Mali's foreign policy from a historical perspective the most notable literature is written by Mali's first President Modibo Keita. In "The Foreign policy of Mali" he lays out his views on Mali's foreign policy.²⁴ From his work several noticeable key differences between the newly born Republic of Mali's foreign policy and that of today can be perceived. In an article from *International Affairs* in 1961 Keita went in depth on Mali's foreign policy. He here stated that "...when a country or a man finds himself in difficulties and seeks for a solution of these difficulties, he does not worry about the colour of the help which is offered to him."²⁵ Implying that Mali, a poor landlocked state, was open to work with any state or institution that could offer them aid. Keita's analogy is certainly relevant to the analysis of Mali's present political situation as the difficulties Mali has faced in the past decade can be seen as

²¹ Adam Dahl, "Self-Determination between World and Nation." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, no. 3 (December 1, 2020) 613–21.

²² Arash Davari. "On Inexactitude in Decolonization." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, no. 3 (December 1, 2020) 627–35.

²³ Arash Davari. "On Inexactitude in Decolonization." 627–35.

²⁴ Modibo Keita, "The Foreign Policy of Mali." *International Affairs* 37, no. 4 (October 1961) 432–39.

²⁵ Modibo Keita, "The Foreign Policy of Mali." 432–39.

a justification for having prioritized security over the development of democratic institutions.

In a comparative analysis of Mali's foreign policy from 1960 to 1980, Philippe Decraene explains how a coup d'état in Mali in 1968, followed by an authoritarian military regime, did not fundamentally alter Mali's foreign policy.²⁶ Decraene contends that, in contrast to what can be said about the present, the change of government had no impact on the alliance between Mali and France.

Ibrahima Sidibé explains how Mali's democratic image in the 1990s following its return to democracy helped to revitalize its relations with the United States and how the nation's foreign policy became more understandable on the African scene.²⁷ The first chapter will demonstrate a consistency in foreign policy as IBK also employs Mali's democratic image as a foreign policy tool.

When it comes to the alliance between France and Mali with regard to Malian foreign policy, Yves Gounin wrote that books about Mali are really books about France.²⁸ Tony Chafer, for instance, contends that the French military intervention in Mali may be rationally explained by the new Africa policy that was developed under French President Hollande.²⁹

Besides the French perspective, most historical work on the matter is written from a non-African perspective. For instance, Alessandro Landolo examines the concepts that drove Soviet involvement in West Africa, describing how Mali and other West-African nations looked to the USSR as an example to strengthen their political and economic independence.³⁰ Similarly, Sergey Mazov wrote about Soviet policy towards newly independent West-African states.³¹ Mazov uncovered shortcomings in Soviet policy toward Africa, which ultimately prevented it from competing with the United States for the hearts and minds of Africans.

The historiography indicates that there hasn't been much research done on Mali's foreign policy, which partly gives this thesis its academic relevance. In larger

²⁶ Philippe Decraene, "Deux Décennies de Politique Extérieure Malienne (1960-1980)." *Politique Étrangère* 45, no. 2 (1980) 437–51

²⁷ Ibrahima Baba Sidibé, "Mali: Le Remodelage De La Politique Étrangère Autour De La Démocratie Et Des Droits De L'homme." *Afrique Politique* (2000) 209-219.

²⁸ Yves Gounin, 'Le Mali.' *Politique étrangère* 3 (2014) 192-195. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-etrangere-2014-3-page-192.htm>

²⁹ Tony Chafer, "France in Mali: Towards a new Africa strategy?." *International journal of francophone studies* 19, no. 2 (July 2016) 119-141.

³⁰ Alessandro Landolo. "Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1968." (2022).

³¹ Sergey Mazov, "A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956–1964." Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Press, (2010).

discussions about (West-)African agency, diplomacy, democracy, and most importantly the recent rise of authoritarianism on the African continent, understanding Mali's foreign policy from an African perspective as well as its mode of governance offers a frequently overlooked non-Eurocentric perspective. By providing a comparative analysis of Mali's foreign policy in two distinct eras, this study will contribute to the growing body of literature on the country's geopolitical position. Furthermore, Mali's political environment is ideal for advancing our knowledge of regime stability and change in relation to a more general discussion of democracy and authoritarianism.

Additionally, given Mali's geopolitical position, the current Mali case is especially pertinent on a global scale. In November 2019, on Russia Today, Mikhail Marguelov, Putin's special envoy for Africa, said that "Mali represents the intersection of geopolitical and economic interests of the world's leading countries in Africa, but also of Russia." He also recalled that Mali was considered the most important country in Africa in terms of gold, uranium, oil and gas extraction.³²

Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial IR - Competitive Authoritarianism

Asli Calkivik makes the case in a chapter on foreign policy from the global south that the conceptual frameworks of conventional approaches are too narrow, which makes it difficult for them to account for and comprehend the foreign policies of the global south.³³ Realist and liberal theories on world politics in general and, by extension, foreign policy analyses in particular all have their roots in and bear the imprint of a specific experience: that of the West. This is demonstrated by realist categories of thought that are Eurocentric and liberal which is driven by imperial motives.³⁴

Postcolonial IR will be used as a theoretical framework for analyzing the foreign policy of Mali, a nation in the global south. The initial focus of postcolonialism as a theoretical framework was on the social, cultural, political, and economic repercussions of European colonialism.³⁵ Through a focus on (post-)colonial

³² Niarela.net. "Exclusive: Le Mali, Un Pays Riche En Hydrogène, Bientôt Exportateur d'électricité ?" (November 28, 2019) <https://niarela.net/economie/exclusive-le-mali-un-pays-riche-en-hydrogene-bientot-exportateur-delectricite>.

³³ Arlene B Tickner, Karen Smith (Editors) *International Relations from the Global South: Worlds of Difference*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, Series: Wording beyond the West, (2020) 1st Edition, 202

³⁴ Tickner, A. B., & Smith, K. (Eds.). (2020). Page 202

³⁵ Jan Wilkens. "Postcolonialism in International Relations." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*. (November 20, 2017)

practices and conditions in various contexts, postcolonialism has grown into a multiplicity of ideas and concepts that inform academic scholarship and social activism since the 1970s.³⁶ The bifocal approach, which aims to empirically analyze (post-)colonial power relations and derive normative strategies to resist or decolonize dominant historiographies as well as epistemological and ontological assumptions that draw on Eurocentric experiences, is a key concept in postcolonial scholarship. According to postcolonial scholars like McClintock, even though direct rule has officially ended, colonial structures still define current power dynamics in international politics, which has been referred to as "imperialism-without-colonies."³⁷ One illustration of what McClintock tries to explain here is France's interference in Mali's domestic affairs.

With postcolonial theory serving as the theoretical framework for understanding and analyzing international relations, competitive authoritarianism will provide a theoretical lens through which Mali's mode(s) of governance can be better understood. Formal democratic institutions are frequently seen as the primary means of obtaining and exercising political power in competitive authoritarian regimes.³⁸ However, because the rules of these institutions are consistently and severely broken, the regime does not meet the minimal requirements for democracy.³⁹ In their study of post-Cold War competitive authoritarianism(CA), Levitsky and Way explain how competitive authoritarian regimes are hybrid regimes in which formal democratic institutions are seen as the main route to power, but in which incumbent abuse seriously impairs the opposition's ability to compete.⁴⁰ In such states the judiciary, security forces, tax agencies, and electoral authorities are just a few examples of how incumbents politicize state institutions and use them against challengers.⁴¹ Thus, competitive authoritarian regimes are authoritarian regimes that contain some democratic components.⁴²

Competitive authoritarianism is pertinent to the Mali situation because it offers a framework for understanding Mali's political system. This makes it possible to comprehend Mali's foreign policy more thoroughly because the country's system of

³⁶ Jan Wilkens, "Postcolonialism in International Relations."

³⁷ Patrick Williams, "Problems of Post-Colonialism." *Paragraph* 16, no. 1 (1993): 91–102.

³⁸ Steven Levitsky, and Lucan Way. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." 51–65..

³⁹ Ibidem

⁴⁰ Steven Levitsky, James Loxton, "Populism and competitive authoritarianism in the Andes", *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (January 2013)107-136

⁴¹ Steven Levitsky, James Loxton, "Populism and competitive authoritarianism in the Andes". 107-136

⁴² Stephan Giersdorf, Aurel Croissant. "Civil Society and Competitive Authoritarianism in Malaysia." *Journal of Civil Society* 7, no. 1 (April 2011) 1–21.

government provides a solid justification for it.

While competitive authoritarianism will be used as a tool to understand and categorize Mali's governance system, it does not provide us with a full explanation on why Mali's foreign policy as well as its governance system is the way it is. It is for this reason that this study will rely on postcolonial IR to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the causal mechanisms that explains Mali's foreign policy as a competitive authoritarian regime. This is because postcolonialism examines how societies, governments, and peoples in the formerly colonized regions of the world experience international relations.⁴³ In this context, the first chapter will show the influence of colonial structures on Mali's foreign policy, which is in contrast with the lack of the latter in the second chapter.

Methodology: African Agency

According to Chipaike and Knowledge, African agency is the capacity of an African actor to bargain and negotiate with external actors in a way that benefits Africans themselves.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Olonisakin and Tofa define African agency as the use of power to affect non-African structures and spaces.⁴⁵ The primary distinction between the two definitions is that the first one includes a component of why. African Agency is viewed as a phenomenon that aids Africans rather than being an inert phenomenon. An example of both definitions is given by Frank Gerits as he demonstrates the agency of African leaders in international affairs by examining the Non-Alignment case of Nkrumah.⁴⁶ In 1961 Nkrumah addressed the basic principles of non-alignment at the Belgrade conference where he also proposed a reorganization of the United Nations.⁴⁷ While this is a clear example of the Olonisakin and Tofa definition, a thorough examination of Nkrumah's policy revealed that he actually adopted a more flexible form of non-alignment to protect his pan-African

⁴³ Chowdhry Geeta, Sheila Nai. *Power, postcolonialism and international relations: Reading race, gender and class*. Routledge. (2013)

⁴⁴ Ronald Chipaike, Matarutse H Knowledge. "The question of African agency in international relations." *Cogent Social Sciences* 4, no 1 (2018).

⁴⁵ Elijah Nyaga Munyi, David Mwambari, and Aleksy Ylönen, eds. *Beyond History. African Agency in Development, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution*. Africa: Past, Present and Prospects Ser. (2020) 16

⁴⁶ Frank Gerits. "When the Bull Elephants Fight: Kwame Nkrumah, Non-Alignment, and Pan-Africanism as an Interventionist Ideology in the Global Cold War (1957–66)." *The International History Review* 37, no. 5 (August 6, 2015) 951–69.

⁴⁷ Frank Gerits. "When the Bull Elephants Fight: Kwame Nkrumah, Non-Alignment, and Pan-Africanism as an Interventionist Ideology in the Global Cold War (1957–66)." 951

goals, which means he negotiated with external actors in a way that benefits Africans themselves. By bringing to the fore its relevance in the authoritarian debate as well as the postcolonial theory, this thesis will contribute to the growing body of literature on African agency. The methodology used in this thesis will thus constitute the recognition of African agency in the sources that will be consulted.

Primary sources that will be used in this multilevel analysis include my transcribed interview with Malian minister of foreign affairs Abdoulaye Diop that I conducted on November the 4th, 2022, in Bamako. These will be supplemented with published Malian governmental statements (spoken and written), official government documents, official government statements, policy reports, transcribed interviews, and discourses by government officials. These sources will be accessed via governmental channels such as the Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' social media channels as well as their official website. Additionally, meetings, statements, and conferences between or by various state officials and IOs like the AU and the UN will be used. An example hereof is a tweet by French President Emmanuel Macron in May 2021 where he condemned the military coup in Mali and stated that France was ready to impose sanctions.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Macron, Twitter post, May 25, 2021, 5:29 p.m., <https://twitter.com/emmanuelmacron/status/1397213118569357315>

CHAPTER 1: Postcolonial influences on Mali's foreign policy

Despite the perceived threat that the Mali crisis posed to global peace and security since it began in 2012, the Global North did nothing to resolve it for nearly ten months.⁴⁹ Mali only moved to the top of the international political agenda as a result of the French military intervention. French decision-makers used geographic proximity and the close ties between Africa and Europe to frame the Malian crisis as an impending threat to the European continent to justify the country's 2013 military intervention.⁵⁰ Gaining peace in Mali had thus become a matter of international security rather than a mere national conflict.

The democratically elected presidents of Mali, Alpha Oumar Konaré (1992–1997; 1997–2002) and President Amadou Toumani Touré (2002–2007; 2007–2012), presided over the country without interruption from 1992 to 2012. Despite having one of the lowest voter turnout rates on the continent due in large part to outdated voter lists, instances of reported electoral and voter fraud, issues with voter IDs, registries, and ballots, most Malian elections have been deemed free and fair by international observers.⁵¹ After a coup d'état in 2012 the country returned to democracy in 2013 with their democratically elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (IBK). He was reelected in 2017 but was usurped of his presidency in 2020 as aforementioned in the introduction. The Mali conflict, which started in 2012 and is still ongoing, has had immense ramifications on the political stability, the economic development and security of the country. The set of events that took place since the start of the Mali conflict constitutes the causal mechanisms that led to the change of regime in 2020. An analysis of Mali's foreign policy during the democratic reign of President Keïta will be the focus of this first chapter. By examining the African agency displayed by Mali's government, I will work to reveal the extent to which the country's foreign policy was influenced by colonial structures. This will form the basis for a more comprehensive understanding of Mali's current foreign policy and geopolitical position. In this context I argue that Mali's foreign policy during the presidency of IBK was characterized by a lack of African agency.

⁴⁹ David J. Francis. "The regional impact of the armed conflict and French intervention in Mali." *Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre*. (April, 2013)

⁵⁰ Benedikt Erforth. "Mental Maps and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Eurafrique and the French Military Intervention in Mali", *European Review of International Studies* 3, 2 (2016) 38-57

⁵¹ Adetayo Adetuyi, "Military Coup and its Effect on the Democratization Process in Mali and in the Region." *Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS)* 15 (March 2021), 1-8.

Mali's foreign aid dependency

Mali's democratic regime actively benefited from the increased international attention Mali had received in the wake of the French intervention. For example, Mali's free and fair election process, which took place a few months after the French intervention, secured the country billions of euros in financial support.⁵² This supports the postcolonial argument which states that colonial structures still define current power dynamics in international relations. The free and fair election process also excludes Mali from the frequently regarded imperfect or transitory democracies of post- Cold War states in Africa that was mentioned in the historiography. The inauguration of IBK as the new leader of the Republic of Mali was celebrated by the international community on September 19, 2013. François Hollande, the president of France, was one of more than twenty heads of state who attended the celebration in Bamako.⁵³ Inviting a variety of heads of states to celebrate the start of his presidency can be seen as a strategic act of foreign policy. It not only strengthened ties between Mali and the invited nations, but it also served as a tool for promoting Mali's democratic values to the rest of the world, which had clearly proven to be profitable not only politically but also financially. The promotion of the nation's democratic image is the same form of foreign policy that Ibrahima Sidibé described as being used in the 1990s to rekindle Mali's relationship with the United States.⁵⁴

In purpose of national reconciliation, which was a priority of the newly formed government, a Ministry had been dedicated with the aim to establish a dialogue between communities, and in particular between the Tuaregs, the Songhay, the Peuls and the Arabs.⁵⁵ While these are domestic policy goals, the establishment of such a Ministry can be seen as part of the country's foreign policy. Appointing a ministry for national reconciliation demonstrated Mali's determination to advance the peace process to the world. Another example that highlights Mali's attempt to portray a reconciled and unified state was the appointment of Zahabi Ould Sidi Mohamed, an Arab and former rebel leader of the Arab Islamic Front of Azawad as Mali's minister

⁵² Sergei Boeke, Bart Schuurman. "Operation 'Serval': A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali, 2013–2014" *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 38,6, (2015) 801-825

⁵³ Le Soleil, 'Après les élections port-conflit, quel avenir pour la paix au Mali?.' (September 13, 2013) https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Arsene-Brice-Bado-2/publication/262562028_Apres_les_elections_post-conflit_quel_avenir_pour_la_paix_au_Mali/links/0deec53801682101cd000000/Apres-les-elections-post-conflit-quel-avenir-pour-la-paix-au-Mali.pdf

⁵⁴ Ibrahima Baba Sidibé, "Mali: Le Remodelage De La Politique Étrangère Autour De La Démocratie Et Des Droits De L'homme." *Afrique Politique* (2000) 209-219.

⁵⁵ Le Soleil, 'Après les élections port-conflit, quel avenir pour la paix au Mali?.' (September 13, 2013)

of foreign affairs in 2013.⁵⁶ This was important because Mali depended heavily on foreign aid when attempting to achieve their main priority of reconciliation. The postcolonial framework is demonstrated here by the nation's reliant foreign policy.

While the promotion of the country's democratic image has resulted in the country's access to large amounts of foreign aid, it is also what partly explains the lack of African agency in the country's foreign policy. Mali's foreign policy at the beginning of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's administration was primarily driven by the need to ensure continuous foreign aid in order to obtain security. Foreign aid represented 10% of Mali's gross domestic product and a staggering 75% of all central government spending in 2015.⁵⁷ Dependence on foreign aid has been a reality for Mali from a historical viewpoint. After democratization in the early 1990s, Mali received considerable sums of foreign aid over the next two decades and was seen as a 'donor darling'.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Mali is still ranked 175th out of 188 countries in the Human Development Index in 2015 despite improvements in key metrics.⁵⁹ In this regard Stephen Brown argues that donors are more able to impose their will in Mali than they are elsewhere due to the country's low capability and high level of aid dependence.⁶⁰ In other words, IBK has followed Mali's practice of using the image of its democracy to attract aid from outside, but due to its limited capacity, it has not been able to exert policy-level control over the funds it has received. This is what partly explains the lack of agency in Mali's foreign policy. In the case of Mali, it also links democracy to dependency on foreign aid and a lack of African agency.

The lack of African agency that characterized Mali's foreign policy becomes clearer when analyzing the country's security situation. A low army capacity had forced the Malian government to depend on foreign military aid.⁶¹ Since the start of the conflict several international peacekeeping missions, mostly orchestrated by France, have attempted to bring peace to the sovereign state of Mali. The biggest one being the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in

⁵⁶ Le Soleil, 'Après les élections port-conflit, quel avenir pour la paix au Mali?.' (September 13, 2013)

⁵⁷ Stephen Brown. "Foreign aid and national ownership in Mali and Ghana." *Forum for Development Studies* 44, No. 3 (September 2017) 342.

⁵⁸ Isaline Bergamaschi. "The Fall of a Donor Darling: the Role of Aid in Mali's Crisis." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 52, no. 3(2014) 347-378.

⁵⁹ Stephen Brown. "Foreign aid and national ownership in Mali and Ghana." 335-356.

⁶⁰ Ibidem

⁶¹ *Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali*, (March 2013)
https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/n1326964_eng.pdf

Mali (MINUSMA).⁶² Since the deployment of the UN's volatile mission in Mali in 2013, it has been the deadliest of all current UN peacekeeping operations.⁶³ The failure of the mission meant Mali continued to have the same security issues and low army capacity, which caused them to remain dependent on foreign actors to resolve their domestic issues.

In 2014, the pattern of dependency on colonial structures persisted as Mali's foreign policy imitated France's regional initiatives. The French military operation changed from operation 'Serval' to operation 'Barkhane'. The new operation effectively combined Serval with the long-running Épervier operation in Chad, and it was expanded to include Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger.⁶⁴ At the time of Barkhane's creation, these countries, along with Mali and Chad, formed a new regional arrangement known as the Group of Five for the Sahel (better known as the G5- Sahel). While the organization is not solely militaristic and does support regional development, it now has its own intervention force, the G5 Cross-border Joint Force.⁶⁵ Mali essentially followed the French's more regional strategy by cooperating with its neighbors who were facing similar problems to themselves. While the G5- Sahel can be viewed as an example of African agency, from the perspective of Mali, it did not signify a complete change in foreign policy. This is because the G5-Sahel collaborated closely with Barkhane and other international missions to address regional security threats. This demonstrates the persistence of French influence over Mali's foreign policy. The G5-Sahel's emergence as a complying reaction to French initiatives also calls into question the claim that it serves as an example of African agency. In short, by using a postcolonial lens, we can see that Mali's democratic government lacked African agency due to their reliance on France.

Another example of Mali's lack of African agency that characterized the country's foreign policy is the Algiers agreement. Between May and June 2015, under the auspices of the international community, the Government of Mali and several armed rebel groups signed the Algiers Process's Agreement for Peace and

⁶² Karine Bannelier, Theodore Christakis. "Under the UN Security Council's Watchful Eyes: Military Intervention by Invitation in the Malian Conflict." *Leiden Journal of International Law* 26, no. 4 (2013) 855-874.

⁶³ Natasja Rupesinghe, John Karlsrud, Linda Darkwa, Tobias von Gienanth, Fiifi Edu-Afful, Noura Abouelnasr, and Tofayel Ahmed. "Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)." *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs* (2019).

⁶⁴ František Novotný. "Multiple peace operations in Mali." (Prague, 2021)

⁶⁵ Tony Chafer, Gordon D. Cumming, and Roel van der Velde. "France's Interventions in Mali and the Sahel: A Historical Institutional Perspective." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43, no. 4 (March 16, 2020) 482–507.

Reconciliation in Mali.⁶⁶ When asked about Mali's foreign policy at the time of IBK, the country's minister of foreign affairs, Diop, responded that many diplomatic actions were directed toward the restoration of peace.⁶⁷ This really justified Mali's involvement in the negotiation and signing of the agreement for peace and reconciliation that resulted from the Algiers process, which involved many of Mali's partners; Algeria as the leader, all neighboring countries that are part of the mediation team, the African Union, the United Nations, ECOWAS, and the Islamic Cooperation Organization. There has not been much advancement in the agreement's implementation since it was signed. According to French researcher Pellerin Mathieu, the latter is solely attributable to a lack of political will.⁶⁸ It is important to note that the agreement is still perceived as primarily an externally imposed peace which indicates a lack of African agency in the matter.⁶⁹ It also shows how non-African states and institutions are to blame for this absence of African agency, further supporting the postcolonial idea. Examining the justification offered by Mali's prime minister for the agreement's failure in 2015 makes this even more obvious. The Plan for Sustainable recovery in Mali for the years 2013–2014 included commitments to help Mali in the amount of about CFA 2.155 billion francs, of which 25% were to be in the form of loans and 75% were to be in the form of direct donations, the prime minister Moussa Mara recalled.⁷⁰ He continued by describing how almost two thirds of the funds disbursed were used without the involvement of any national agencies. He conclusively questioned how, under these conditions, the agreement resulting from the Algiers process, which is associated with certain costs, could be effectively implemented in a frail state where aid partners control the purse strings.⁷¹ The prime minister's statements not only confirmed the country's dependence on foreign aid, but they also simultaneously undermined the state institutions lack of agency. From this vantage point, Mara made an effort to attribute

⁶⁶ Aditi Gorur. "The Political Strategy of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Mali." *United Nations University Center for Policy Research*. (2020)

⁶⁷ Interview with Abdoulaye Diop. (Malian minister of foreign Affairs), in discussion with author, (November 4, 2022), Bamako, Mali.

⁶⁸ Matthieu Pellerin. "Mali's Algiers Peace Agreement, Five Years On: An Uneasy Calm." *International Crisis Group* (June 24, 2020)

⁶⁹ Bruno Charbonneau. "Intervention in Mali: building peace between peacekeeping and counterterrorism." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 35, no. 4. (2017) 415-431

⁷⁰ Naffet Keita. "Agreement for peace and reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers process Between euphoria and scepticism: traces of peace." *Friedrich-Erbert-Stiftung Report*. (2017).

⁷¹ Naffet Keita. "Agreement for peace and reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers process Between euphoria and scepticism: traces of peace."

their failure to a lack of agency and funding, perhaps in the hopes that this would result in his government receiving more funding in the (near) future. Unfortunately, this did not transpire because it was noted in 2017 that the humanitarian crisis in Mali was one of the least funded in the world.⁷²

Diop stated that Mali's foreign policy during the presidency of IBK was marked by a very close proximity with France.⁷³ In example, in the two years following the military operation in 2013, Hollande said that France had given 300 million euros to Mali. 'We will do even more in 2015-2017.' 'It will be roughly 360 million euros, with 80 million going to the north,' he said at a joint news conference with Mali's president, IBK.⁷⁴ Diop explained that Mali's relation with France was a continuation of rapprochement that had begun with President Dioncounda Traoré. Traoré led Mali's transitional government in 2012, when it requested France for foreign military assistance to retake northern Mali.⁷⁵ This is significant because it confirms that Mali's dependent foreign policy persisted throughout IBK's entire administration. It is also what gave rise to Malians' anti-French sentiments in the latter years of his presidency, which was the primary driving force for IBK's usurpation. This can be viewed as the first spark of African agency being expressed by Malians themselves, and in the next chapter, we shall see how that agency has been conveyed to their present junta-ruled government.

⁷² Naffet Keita. "Agreement for peace and reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers process Between euphoria and scepticism: traces of peace."

⁷³ Interview with Abdoulaye Diop.

⁷⁴ Reuters Staff. "France Awards 360 Million Euros in Aid to Mali - Hollande." Reuters (October 21, 2015). <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-france-mali-aid-idUKKCN0SF2CG20151021>

⁷⁵ Allard Duursma. "Information processing challenges in peacekeeping operations: A case study on peacekeeping information collection efforts in Mali." *International Peacekeeping* 25, no. 3 (2018) 446-468.

Sub-conclusion

This chapter has taught us that that Mali's foreign policy during the presidency of IBK was characterized by a lack of African agency. The lack of agency has been attributed to the nation's reliance on colonial structures. This was primarily caused by Mali's dependence on its former colonial patron, France. The above led to the nation's foreign policy being primarily focused on securing support and cooperation from other nations. When Mali's prime minister stated that a lack of control over foreign aid was to blame for the lack of agency and capacity of the government to address internal challenges, it served as an illustration of how this dependent foreign policy led to a lack of African agency. In short, Mali's democratic system of government guaranteed them access to aid and support from abroad but deprived them of their freedom in foreign policy, which explains the lack of African agency in the latter. The subsequent chapter will illustrate a significant change in foreign policy that is accompanied by an increase in African agency since Mali's system of administration changed in 2020.

CHAPTER 2 : Mali as Competitive Authoritarian regime

By denouncing the military junta's ascent to power in Mali in 2020 the international community hoped for a swift return to democracy. The AU for example, suspended Mali from participating in their respective institutions pending a return to constitutional order.⁷⁶ Negotiations brokered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) resulted in an agreement in which civilians were installed to lead the 18-month transition period, the AU lifted its sanctions.⁷⁷ Accordingly, Bah N'Daw was sworn in as president, Moctar Ouane was appointed as prime minister, Goita was named deputy prime minister, and four senior army officers joined the cabinet. As a result of a second coup d'état that took place in 2021, the agreement's initially effective sanctions did not last long, and Mali once more fell into the third CA route. This second coup saw Goita become President. He selected a civilian as Prime Minister (Choguel Kokalla Maïga) and declared that elections were to take place as scheduled in February 2022. The AU, ECOWAS, and MINUSMA, who make up the local transition monitoring team, responded again by jointly denouncing the coup.⁷⁸

According to Levitsky and Way, the demise of a democratic administration, as seen in the instance of Mali, is a path towards competitive authoritarianism in the post-Cold War era.⁷⁹ In these instances, severe and frequently pervasive political and economic crises produced circumstances in which democratic institutions were undermined by freely chosen governments, either through a presidential "self-coup" or through targeted, incremental abuses.⁸⁰

Mali's foreign policy has undergone significant changes as a result of the regime change. Understanding Mali's government as a competitive authoritarian regime provides a framework within which we can attempt to make sense of the country's drastic foreign policy changes. To highlight the differences in agency and policy between the present and under democratic rule, this chapter will serve as an exploration of Mali's foreign policy as a CA. In this context, I contend that Mali's switch from a democracy to a CA has led to a breakdown of the colonial order, which is demonstrated by acts of African agency in the nation's foreign policy. Analysis of

⁷⁶ Jeune Afrique. "Mali Coup d'Etat: Military proposes three-year transition." (Aug. 24, 2020).

<https://www.theafricareport.com/38911/mali-coup-detat-military-proposes-three-year-transition/>.

⁷⁷ The Africa Report. "Mali Coup d'État : Military Proposes Three-Year Transition," (August 24, 2020).

<https://www.theafricareport.com/38911/mali-coup-detat-military-proposes-three-year-transition/>.

⁷⁸ The Africa Report. "Mali Coup d'État : Military Proposes Three-Year Transition,"

⁷⁹ Steven Levitsky, and Lucan Way. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." 51–65..

⁸⁰ Ibidem.

the recent shifts in foreign policy and acknowledgment of African agency—which contrasts with the absence of agency seen during IBK's presidential rule—will be used to support this claim.

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Mali's foreign policy, we must first consider the elements that have stayed constant before delving deeply into the changes. 'In terms of foreign policy, there are some issues that have remained constant.'⁸¹ Diop continued by citing a few examples of foreign policy continuity, such as the commitment to non-alignment as well as other initiatives like promoting regional integration, defending national sovereignty, and engaging in development diplomacy. From a historical standpoint, Mali's adherence to non-alignment extends back to the administration of the country's first president. Mali's first president, Modibo Keita, was an African socialist.⁸² Even though Keita was a socialist, at the time of his presidency Mali was part of the Non-Aligned Movement.⁸³ In 1961 Keita assured former US President Kennedy, when they met in Washington, that Mali was neither for the East nor the West.⁸⁴ He stated that condemning either side would have undermined his mission. Similarly, while Mali is cooperating with Russia, Diop made it clear that Mali has stated unequivocally that it is not in a position to say that it is Russia versus the West.⁸⁵ He implies here the continuity of non-alignment, which he mentioned earlier in our conversation as one of the constants in Mali's foreign policy.

Diplomatic divorce between Mali & France

As a result of its shift to from a democratic to a CA administration, the rift in Mali's relations with France is what had the biggest impact on the country's foreign policy. 'Now, since this second phase of the rectification of the transition, there are elements of important ruptures, notably with France, which is marking our diplomatic action because in this second phase there is an attitude of great hostility of France towards Mali.'⁸⁶ Diop explained this rupture as a result of France's great hostility towards Mali. Sharing the same political views as a majority of Malians, the Malian junta repeatedly

⁸¹ Interview with Abdoulaye Diop.

⁸² Modibo Keita, "The Foreign Policy of Mali." 432–39..

⁸³ Robert B. Rakove. "The Rise and Fall of Non-Aligned Mediation, 1961–6" *The International History Review* 37, no. 5. (2015) 991-1013.

⁸⁴ Robert B. Rakove. "The Rise and Fall of Non-Aligned Mediation, 1961–6" 991-1013.

⁸⁵ Interview with Abdoulaye Diop.

⁸⁶ Interview with Abdoulaye Diop.

accused Paris of interference in the country's affairs.⁸⁷ An example hereof is when Choguel Kokalla Maïga, the interim prime minister of Mali, spoke out against the French military presence in his country, calling it "unbalanced" and stating that Mali "cannot even fly over its territory without France's permission."⁸⁸ Relations between the two sovereign states continued to worsen after ECOWAS sanctions. Nicolas de Rivière, the French ambassador to the UN, reaffirmed Paris' full support for the ECOWAS sanctions due to the Malian government's disregard for the organization's demands and commitments regarding a swift return to the democratic process.⁸⁹ Mali's resistance to an immediate return to democracy serves as an example of African agency since they wish to determine their own course of government. In the same manner, Mali's rejection to French influence in its domestic affairs—which did not exist under democratic rule—is also an act of African agency because Mali influenced external actors in a way that allows Mali's government to have more control over domestic affairs. An example hereof is when, on January 31, Mali expelled the French ambassador and gave him 72 hours to leave the country as part of its ongoing opposition to French influence there. Thus, there are a few insights we can gain from the change in Mali-France relations. First, it demonstrates a rejection of the colonial framework established by France, which was still in place under IBK's administration. Second, by defying all the sanctions levied on them, the CA government's actions have served as an example of an independent posture in Mali's foreign policy. In this sense, there is a causal relationship between Mali's foreign policy and the rejection of the (neo)colonial structure. Looking back at the historiography however this has not always been true in the case of Mali. Philippe Decraene explained how a coup d'état in Mali in 1968, followed by an authoritarian military regime, did not fundamentally alter Mali's foreign policy.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ John Pike. "Mali - Foreign Relations." Mali - Foreign Relations. (2022). <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/africa/ml-forrel-fr.htm>.

⁸⁸ John Pike. "Mali - Foreign Relations." Mali - Foreign Relations. (2022).

⁸⁹ Kribsoo Diallo. "Why Protests Erupted in Mali, With People Demanding France Out and Thanking Russia for Support - Toward Freedom." Toward Freedom, (February 10, 2022).

⁹⁰ Philippe Decraene, "Deux Décennies de Politique Extérieure Malienne (1960-1980)." *Politique Étrangère* 45, no. 2 (1980) 437–51

Mali opposes African sanctions

The display of African agency in the case of Mali went beyond simply opposing the colonial order. Diop stated that the tension and rupture with France constitutes the major axis of Mali's change in foreign policy. He then explained the importance of the affirmation of Mali's sovereignty in the sense that 'we want to manage our country, ensure security, and we also demand the respect of our partners and friends to consider that we are a state, not a half-state.'⁹¹ Therefore, the Malian government now exhibits an independent stance that was absent from its previous democratic administration. An illustration of this was Mali's opposition to the sanctions imposed on them by West African institutions. After Mali's military leaders proposed a six months to 5 year delay on elections, economic and diplomatic sanctions against Mali were imposed on the country on January 9 2022 by the West African nations of ECOWAS and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (also referred to by the French acronym UEMOA).⁹² The Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO), the central banks of the member nations of ECOWAS, and the Malian authorities have all been subject to sanctions. These sanctions include the freezing of Malian assets in these institutions. Additionally, they halted business with Mali, shut down the borders between Mali and ECOWAS member states, and stopped providing financial aid to Mali. Despite these steps, the Malian government has not adopted the same cooperative foreign policy that it had during its democratic rule. Instead, while France, the US, and the European Union supported ECOWAS' strategy, the Malian regime, the majority of Malians, many political actors in the sub-region, and neighboring Guinea's ruling junta, who refused to close their borders to Mali, have all denounced these sanctions.⁹³ On January 14, 2022, tens of thousands of people, many of whom back the government, demonstrated against the sanctions in Bamako, the country's capital. Some held signs that read "Down with ECOWAS" and "Down with France," while others carried other messages.⁹⁴ The protesters, who also included many residents of nearby nations, reaffirmed their allegiance to the junta.⁹⁵ Malians' opposition to African institutions means that their desire to determine their

⁹¹ Interview with Abdoulaye Diop.

⁹² Komlan Avoulete. "Should ECOWAS Rethink its Approach to Coups?" *Foreign Policy Research Institute*. (2022).

⁹³ Komlan Avoulete. "Should ECOWAS Rethink its Approach to Coups?" .

⁹⁴ Sharmila Devi. "Aid agencies warn of health consequences of Mali sanctions." *The Lancet* (January 5, 2022). 510.

⁹⁵ Komlan Avoulete. "Should ECOWAS Rethink its Approach to Coups?"

own course for government constitutes the overarching act of African agency. This is what serves as a valid justification for both their opposition to France and (African) IOs.

Moreover, the desire of Malians to determine their own course for government is consistent with the postcolonial IR perspective of Subaltern Realism. This is because Subaltern Realism convincingly contends, in contrast to Neorealism, that because the majority of states are still in the early stages of state formation, the desire for domestic order is a stronger driving force behind state behavior in the international system than the need for power over other states.⁹⁶

Mali's authoritarian allies

While Mali has opposed any structure that attempted to deny their independent course of actions, it has also made new allies on the international scene. This is important because it highlights the country's free choice in deciding who to collaborate with and who not to. An example of these decisions is Mali's current engagement with Russia. Because the US believed a democratic, civilian-led government offered the best chance for Mali and the larger Sahel region to achieve security and prosperity, they supported the joint condemnation of ECOWAS and the African Union in May 2021.⁹⁷ The majority of western UN members supported the sanctions ECOWAS and the AU imposed on Mali, but the UN Security Council did not come to an unanimous decision. China and Russia intervened to prevent the adoption of a text that France had proposed to demonstrate a unified front.⁹⁸ In the Security Council, Russia supported the military junta in line with the general sentiment in Mali, arguing that elections held at this time would not be legitimate.⁹⁹ Russia demanded that we comprehend the authorities' stance in Mali. Dmitry Polyansky, the assistant Russian ambassador to the UN, urged members of the UN Security Council to show the Republic of Mali the respect they deserved for their efforts to restore order in the country and to recognize the challenges they face. He

⁹⁶ Rob Gray. "Rehabilitating Realism Through Mohammed Ayoob's "Subaltern Realism" Theory." (December 23, 2020) <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/12/23/rehabilitating-realism-through-mohammed-ayoobs-subaltern-realism-theory/>

⁹⁷ John Pike. "Mali - US Relations." Mali - US Relations. (2021).

<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/africa/ml-forrel-us.htm>.

⁹⁸ Komlan Avoulete. "Should ECOWAS Rethink its Approach to Coups?"

⁹⁹ Kribsoo Diallo. "Why Protests Erupted in Mali, With People Demanding France Out and Thanking Russia for Support - Toward Freedom." Toward Freedom, (February 10, 2022).

<https://towardfreedom.org/story/archives/africa-archives/why-protests-erupted-in-mali-with-people-demanding-france-out-and-thanking-russia-for-support/>.

made a case for state legitimacy and authority, stating that many areas of the country could not be considered legitimate without the restoration of the state's authority. This was during a meeting of the UN Security Council devoted to West Africa and the Sahel region. Russia has been challenging the EU and France in Mali since the overthrowing of President Keita.¹⁰⁰ Joyous supporters of the President's usurpation flooded the streets of Bamako during the coup in Mali in 2020. Many Malian celebrators hoisted Russian flags and portraits of Vladimir Putin while chanting praises for their country's cooperation and support with Russia.¹⁰¹ Malians' clear preference for collaboration with Russia over France show their independent choice as an act of African agency. An illustration hereof is when Jean-Yves Le Drian, France's minister of foreign affairs, said in September 2021 that the presence of Russian paramilitaries in Mali is 'absolutely irreconcilable' with that of French forces.¹⁰² This indicates that Mali's decision to work with Russia upset the French. A little more than six months later, in May 2022, Sergey Lavrov, the foreign minister of Russia, addressed the issue and claimed that France's displeasure with the intention of the Malian government to seek assistance from external security forces, was nothing more than a recurrence of colonial mentality.¹⁰³ Thus, the competition between France and Russia for influence over Mali's geopolitical position serves as an illustration of how external parties have been impacted by Mali's foreign policy choices. This gave Mali's current CA regime advantages, including Russian protection in the UNSC. Therefore, Mali's choice to collaborate with Russia rather than France can be seen an act of African agency. The decision to oppose the French and invite the Russians in Mali was highlighted further when French peace and counterinsurgency operations, which began in 2013, were recently hampered by Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group. This is also what indirectly contributed to the removal of the French ambassador from Mali in January 2022.¹⁰⁴ A few hundred of these private soldiers are currently in Mali. In addition, Russian military

¹⁰⁰ Eglantine Staunton. "A Useful Failure: Macron's Overture to Russia." *Survival* 64, no. 2. (April 1, 2022) 17-24.

¹⁰¹ Josephine Nchedo Oguine. THE HITS AND MISSES OF RUSSIA-AFRICA TIE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION. *ScienceOpen Preprints*. (June 17, 2022).

¹⁰² David Rich. "France and Russia Make a Stand over Which Country Will Have the Greater Influence in Mali." *France 24*, (September 18, 2021). <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210918-in-mali-france-and-russia-are-facing-off-over-who-will-have-the-greater-influence-in-the-country>.

¹⁰³ TRT World. "Russia Accuses France of 'colonial Mentality' in Mali." Russia accuses France of "colonial mentality" in Mali, (May 20, 2022). <https://www.trtworld.com/europe/russia-accuses-france-of-colonial-mentality-in-mali-57313>.

¹⁰⁴ Staunton, Eglantine. "A Useful Failure: Macron's Overture to Russia." 17-24.

advisors have been deployed in early 2022, including to Timbuktu.¹⁰⁵ Lastly, while ‘meddling’ in Ukraine, Russia did not forget about its interests in Mali ; on March 30 2022, as Russian forces continued their assault on Ukrainian cities, Russian arms suppliers sent a pair of menacing Mi-35M attack helicopters and a cutting-edge air radar to Bamako, the capital of Mali.¹⁰⁶ Conclusively, having found a new security ally in Russia, Mali has in part substituted French political and military presence for Russian military and political influence. Mali’s foreign affairs minister, Diop, explained that Mali had to make choices to ensure its security and decided to ‘strengthen our cooperation with Russia which is a historical partner of Mali since the time of Modibo Keita until today.’¹⁰⁷ He here provides us with a historical justification for cooperation. Namely, Malian politicians’ desire, rooted in decolonization, to be independent. The minister went on to explain the differences Mali had encountered when cooperating with Russia versus other countries. To begin, Diop describes Mali-Russia cooperation as equal transactions with no strings attached, which he claims is not the case with Western countries. ‘We are not given things as a gift. It is made up of elements, helicopters, planes, and weapons purchased with money from Mali. The only difference with Russia is that if we have the money, they will give it to us. Even if we have the money, the western countries will not give it to us without a lot of complications and conditions.’¹⁰⁸ Accepting these statements as true from a postcolonial perspective implies that imperial structures hampered Mali’s ability to make independent decisions. In this regard, the assertion of African agency that freed them from colonial frameworks has been reinforced by their successful independence. This becomes clearer by analyzing the next statements Diop made; ‘Because we are a country fighting terrorist groups, we will go where it is in our best interests, where we are given the means, and where we are allowed to defend our country.’¹⁰⁹ He said something similar to what Modibo Keita stated in his 1961 article on Mali’s foreign policy, which is cited in the historiography. According to Diop, Mali’s cooperation with Russia is advantageous since it enables them to protect their nation

¹⁰⁵ Le Figaro. “Mali : Wagner pille «déjà» le pays mais ne cherche pas à remplacer les Européens, affirme Jean-Yves Le Drian.” Le Figaro International (2022). <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/wagner-pille-deja-le-mali-mais-ne-cherche-pas-a-replacer-les-europeens-affirme-paris-20220130>

¹⁰⁶ Amy Mackinnon, Robbie Gramer, Colum Lynch, Colum Lynch, and Robbie Gramer. “Russia Flounders in Ukraine but Doubles Down in Mali.” Foreign Policy (April 14, 2022). <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/14/russia-ukraine-mali-wagner-group-mercenaries/>.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Abdoulaye Diop.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem

on their own. In other words, Mali's partnership with Russia reinforces the African agency that freed the country from colonial structures by giving Mali more control over how they protect their independent state. Contrary to the IBK administration, this enables the country to maintain its independence in terms of its foreign policy choices.

The sustained manifestation of Mali's independent stance, which African agency is a consequence of, can be understood by viewing Mali through the prism of competitive authoritarianism. According to Diop, Mali does not have the same problems working with Russia, Turkey, and China, three arguably authoritarian states, as it did when it cooperated with France and other western nations.¹¹⁰ Christian Von Soest argues that the goal of providing support to fellow autocrats is to maximize the chances of one's own regime's survival by preventing negative spillovers from democratization, as well as to foster geostrategic and developmental interests.¹¹¹ Despite Diop's explanation that cooperation with Russia is based on simple transactions between two sovereign states, we should not forget that Russia used its voice in the UN Security Council in May 2021 to protect Mali's current regime. In this situation, Von Soest's claim that authoritarian regimes support other authoritarian regimes in part to minimize unfavorable effects of democratization remains true. In addition to giving Mali an advantage in getting military supplies, collaboration with Russia also led to Russia defending their present CA regime in the UNSC. Thus, looking at Mali through the CA lens in this instance exposes the propensity for cooperating with other authoritarian governments and vice versa.

This is exemplified by Mali's current relation with Turkey. On Friday the 3rd of June 2022 Turkish president Erdogan and Malian (interim) president Goita exchanged ideas on bilateral relations as well as Mali's regional issues during a phone call.¹¹² President Erdogan emphasized that his nation will continue to support Mali in the fight against terrorism while also mentioning that Turkey will continue to support Mali during its political transition period. Erdogan further stated that his country is delighted to support Mali's growth and highlighted that actions will soon be taken to deepen bilateral trade and economic ties.¹¹³ A few months earlier, in Ankara,

¹¹⁰ Interview with Abdoulaye Diop.

¹¹¹ Christian Von Soest. "Democracy prevention: The international collaboration of authoritarian regimes." *European Journal of Political Research* 54, no. 4. (2015). 623-638.

¹¹² Merve Berker. "Türkiye, Mali Discuss Bilateral Relations, Regional Issues." (June 4, 2022). <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkiye-mali-discuss-bilateral-relations-regional-issues/2605300>.

¹¹³ Merve Berker. "Türkiye, Mali Discuss Bilateral Relations, Regional Issues."

Turkiye's defense minister Hulusi Akar and his Malian counterpart Camara held a one-on-one meeting behind closed doors.¹¹⁴ According to the Turkish Defense Ministry, Akar and Camara discussed bilateral and regional defense and security issues, as well as defense industry cooperation.¹¹⁵ In their article on the limits of authoritarian solidarity Daniel Odinius and Philipp Kuntz argue that when authoritarian regimes believe that other nations' conditions are identical to their own, helping other authoritarian regimes is the only appropriate course of action.¹¹⁶ Considering Mali's current rapprochement with Turkey through the lens of competitive authoritarianism makes Kuntz and Odinius' argument a plausible justification for cooperation. Having said that, it can also be argued that since IBK made Mali's first presidential visit to Turkey in 2015, the country's democratic government has generally had cordial relations with Turkey.¹¹⁷ The key distinction however is that, as opposed to before, when Mali predominantly collaborated with democratic countries and organizations like France, the EU, and ECOWAS, they now primarily collaborate with (competitive) authoritarian governments.

Current China-Mali relations further support this claim. China continues to provide support and assistance for Mali's stable development. State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop in New York on September 20, 2022, outside of the UN General Assembly.¹¹⁸ Wang Yi stated that China is prepared to work with Mali to understand, support, and trust each other, carry forward the longstanding friendship between China and Mali, and enhance mutually beneficial cooperation at a time when the international situation is complex, volatile, and full of increasing uncertainties.¹¹⁹ China, Diop expressed to Wang Yi, is Mali's good ally and partner. Mali expresses its heartfelt gratitude to China for demonstrating friendship and solidarity with the country, helping to protect

¹¹⁴ Daily Sabah with AA. "Turkey Ready for Counterterrorism Cooperation with Africa: Akar." Turkey ready for counterterrorism cooperation with Africa: Akar | Daily Sabah, (April 6, 2022.) <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/war-on-terror/turkey-ready-for-counterterrorism-cooperation-with-africa-akar>.

¹¹⁵ Daily Sabah with AA. "Turkey Ready for Counterterrorism Cooperation with Africa: Akar."

¹¹⁶ Daniel Odinius, Philipp Kuntz. "The limits of authoritarian solidarity: The Gulf monarchies and preserving authoritarian rule during the Arab Spring." *European Journal of Political Research* 54, no. 4.(2015) 639-654.

¹¹⁷ Presidency of the Republic of Turkiye. "We would like to further improve our relations with Mali, with which we share a common, deep-rooted historical legacy". (February 3, 2022). <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/3418/we-would-like-to-further-improve-our-relations-with-mali-with-which-we-share-a-common-deep-rooted-historical-legacy>

¹¹⁸ Ministry of foreign affairs of the People's republic of China. "Wang Yi Meets with Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop of Mali." (September 21, 2022) https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/activities_663312/202209/t20220923_10770366.html

¹¹⁹ Ministry of foreign affairs of the People's republic of China. "Wang Yi Meets with Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop of Mali."

its independence, sovereignty, and political stability, as well as for contributing significantly to the country's economic and social growth. China supports Mali in its efforts to combat terrorism and preserve national unity. Moreover, the Malian people are encouraged by China to independently select a development path that best suits their national circumstances. Because the overthrow of Mali's democratic government was hailed as a liberation by the people of Mali, encouraging them to choose their own development path implies that China favors Mali's CA regime over a democratic one. It also means that China is encouraging the continuation of African agency by Mali(ans). Therefore, from the Chinese point of view, Mali's persistent demonstration of African agency is what can maintain their government's authoritarian nature.

Sub-conclusion

The above allows us to conclude the following on Mali's foreign policy: The competitive authoritarian nature of Mali's government has drove them to collaborate more closely with other authoritarian regimes. Consequently, as became clear in the analysis of Mali's cooperation with Russia, Mali has been able to maintain independent in their foreign policy choices because of the lack of imperial tendencies present in the collaboration with other authoritarian regimes. Thus, Mali's CA regime has enabled sustained African agency in the nation's foreign policy, but at the same time, African agency has been necessary for the Malian government to maintain the CA system and avoid dependence on colonial structures. The African agency Malians had demonstrated that started the transition from a democratic regime to a competitive authoritarian one was ultimately what set off this cycle. In this context, the views and perceptions of Malians that have motivated their country's display of African agency is what will be explored in the following chapter. This will be accomplished by analyzing France's substitution by Russia as a case study. The historical argument for substitution that will be presented in this context is comparable to that of landolo, who outlined how Mali and other West-African countries looked to the USSR as an example to improve their political and economic independence.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Alessandro landolo. "Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1968. " *Cornell University Press*. (2022).

CHAPTER 3: The coloniality of Mali's geopolitical position (2021-2022)

Prior to the second coup d'état in 2021, which resulted in the installation of the current Malian government, enmity between Mali and France was not as intense as it is today. On January 20, 2021, in the nation's capital of Bamako, Malian security forces opened fire with tear gas canisters at protesters opposed to the presence of the French anti-jihadist force Barkhane.¹²¹ Even though Mali could no longer be considered a democracy, protesters were still unhappy about French military presence in their country. Paul Nugent stated that military coups in Africa typically followed a pattern where the unpopularity of the ruling regime served as the motivation for the soldiers to take action.¹²² Military conspirators were much less likely to overthrow a legitimate regime if they could not be assured of a measure of popular support. This means that democracy in Africa is almost always substituted by authoritarianism only when there is a measure of popular support for it. In this respect, the junta's adamant opposition to France can be used to explain the general public's support for Mali's present CA rule. It supports the claim that African agency was portrayed by Malians to oust the colonial structure. Therefore, further examination of Malians' perspectives on their nation's geopolitical environment will aid in our comprehension of the causal processes underlying Mali's governance structure and foreign policy.

In this context, this chapter will be an attempt at answering the following question: Why were Malians so enthusiastic about the replacement of the French by the Russians? Answering this particular question suggest Malians viewed their geopolitical position as one that is still struggling to emerge from the constraints of imperial structures. Additionally, it will give us more insight into the causal mechanisms behind the current display of African agency in Mali's foreign policy.

¹²¹ Histoire en Rafale. "Mali : Une Manifestation Contre La Présence de La Force Barkhane – Les Guerres d'hier Au Jour Le Jour," (January 20, 2021). <http://lhistoireenrafale.lunion.fr/2021/01/20/mali-une-manifestation-contre-la-presence-de-la-force-barkhane/>.

¹²² Paul Nugent, *Africa since independence: A comparative History*. 205

Malians' anti-colonial concerns

Two opposing viewpoints have existed in Mali since the military junta that is currently in power, under the leadership of colonel Assimi Gota, detained Mali's interim president N'daw and his prime minister Ouane in 2021. According to Malian academic Boubacar Haidara, the executives who were arrested reflect the first point of view, which is perceived as being allied with France.¹²³ The second point of view he argued, representing the junta, rejects the influence of Mali's former colonizer and advocates for improved relations with Russia.¹²⁴ Haidara contends that this latter point is particularly persuasive to people who oppose French military actions in Mali and frequently demonstrate against them. Mali's CA regime continues to have widespread support, which indicates that the colonial structure-opposing perspective is dominant. An example that supports this claim occurred recently. On November 21, 2022, following the announcement by France of the suspension of its development aid in Mali, the Malian government issued a statement.¹²⁵ The statement reminds readers that the declaration by France is nothing more than a ruse intended to mislead and manipulate public opinion on a national and international scale to destabilize and isolate Mali. Consequently, the Malian government decided to immediately suspend all activities carried out by NGOs operating in Mali that are supported financially or technically by France.¹²⁶ Evidently, the Malian government still opposes France in their foreign policy.

Malians perceive Mali's geopolitical position as one that is still attempting to break free from the colonial framework. This assertion was substantiated by Diop when he stated that there are many Africans and Malians in today's world who share our indignation that individuals do not wish to adhere to colonial or neo-colonial ideologies.¹²⁷ This claim of shared views and perceptions between the Malian government and African and Malian populations is supported by data-analysis findings. According to an Afrobarometer survey released in October 2021, 82% of

¹²³ Boubacar Haidara. "Inside Mali's Coup within a Coup." *The Conversation* (May 26, 2021).

<http://theconversation.com/inside-malis-coup-within-a-coup-161621>.

¹²⁴ Boubacar Haidara. "Inside Mali's Coup within a Coup."

¹²⁵ News Wires. "Mali Junta Bans Activities of NGOs Funded by France." *France 24* (November 21, 2022).

<https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20221121-mali-junta-bans-activities-of-ngos-funded-by-france>.

¹²⁶ RFI. "French NGOs in Mali Concerned for Civilians in Wake of Suspension." *RFI* (November 24, 2022).

<https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20221124-french-ngos-in-mali-concerned-for-civilians-in-wake-of-suspension>.

¹²⁷ Interview with Abdoulaye Diop.

Maliens say they trust the military 'somewhat' or 'a lot.'¹²⁸ Therefore, in contrast to the transitory administration that came before them, the legitimacy and public support of Mali's present CA regime are essentially founded on the country's opposition to the colonial system. The public support for Mali's CA regime is further explained by Maliens' trust in their president Assimi Goïta as authoritarian leader. According to a study published in 2022 by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Maliens have the most confidence in the president of Mali (72%). Thirteen percent of the population claims they have the same amount of faith in all authorities, while 10% say they have more confidence in the transitional government.¹²⁹ These results show that the authoritarian character of the current government contributes to a disparity in public trust between Mali's democratic regime and its CA administration.

West-Africans' shared anti-colonial perspectives

Analyzing political developments in Mali's neighboring countries further support the claim that the main motivator of African actors are the anti-colonial perspectives expressed by Maliens. Following the two coups in Mali in August 2020 and May 2021, there was a coup in Guinea in September 2021, as well as one in Burkina Faso in 2022.¹³⁰ Both of these nations share borders with Mali and are member states of ECOWAS. A constitutional referendum in Guinea that permitted Alpha Condé to run for a third term in office and competitive legislative elections in which Condé's party, the Rally of the Guinean People (RPG), won a majority of seats both served as the catalyst for a year of violent protests.¹³¹ The protests act as a prelude to the coup d'état in 2021, which demonstrates the relevancy of anticolonial ideas on governance in Africa. On September 5, Guinean Colonel Mamady Doumbouya made an announcement on state television that President Alpha Condé had been arrested and the constitution had been dissolved as protests grew quickly throughout the nation.¹³² Similar to how the coup in Mali was immediately denounced by regional leaders, the entire international community, including the United States, the UN, and

¹²⁸ Afrobarometer. "Mali Round 8 Résumé Des Résultats." Mali Round 8 résumé des résultats – Afrobarometer (October 28, 2021). <https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/resume-des-resultats-enquete-afrobarometer-round-8-au-mali-2020-0/>.

¹²⁹ Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. "Enquête d'opinion ; "Que pensent les Maliens?". (May 2022). <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/mali/10100/2022-13.pdf>

¹³⁰ Chilaka Francis Chigozie, Peter Thankgod Oyinmiebi. (2022). "RESURGENCE OF MILITARY COUPS IN WEST AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR ECOWAS." *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research* 5, no. 2 (2022). 52-64

¹³¹ Aljazeera. "ECOWAS Suspends Guinea after Coup, Says It Will Send Mediators." ECOWAS suspends Guinea after coup, says it will send mediators | Military News | Al Jazeera (September 8, 2021).

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/8/west-african-bloc-suspends-guineas-membership-following-coup>.

¹³² Aljazeera. "ECOWAS Suspends Guinea after Coup, Says It Will Send Mediators."

the African Union, denounced the coup in Guinea as well. ECOWAS expressed its strong opposition to the military takeover, suspended Guinea's participation, and imposed sanctions on the junta government.¹³³ In Burkina Faso, Burkinabe President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was forced to resign on January 24, 2022. A Patriotic Movement for 'Safeguard and Restoration', chaired by Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, announced that it had seized power. The Burkinabe military received swift international condemnation, much like Guinea and Mali had recently. Burkina Faso's exclusion from all AU activities had been announced by the continental body.¹³⁴ Additionally, the nation had been expelled from ECOWAS.¹³⁵ The national legislature was disbanded and the constitution was suspended in each of the nations by their respective military juntas.¹³⁶ According to Joseph Sany, vice president of the US Institute of Peace's Africa Center, the economic and social effects of the Covid-19 outbreak, combined with anti-French and anti-colonial sentiments, created 'an explosive cocktail' that was the driving force behind these coups.¹³⁷ The dissolution of the national assembly and constitution of the respective countries, as well as the coups, are therefore primarily motivated by African anti-colonial sentiments.

Another example that illustrates this is the following: Kémi Séba, a prominent anti-colonial personality in Francophone Africa, intended to go from his native Benin to Mali in January 2020 while IBK was still the country's president.¹³⁸ However, Malian authorities forbade him from boarding the plane. Séba was not permitted because of his capacity to organize sizable demonstrations against the nation's former colonial ruler. However, two years later, Séba was personally invited to Mali by local authorities headed by Colonel Assimi Goïta, the current president of Mali, to deliver a stirring address against neo-colonialism in the nation's capital, Bamako. This demonstrates how a strong antagonism to colonial structures has been present

¹³³ Katarina Höjje. "Uncertainty in Guinea after Military Coup Removes Alpha Conde." *Uncertainty in Guinea after military coup removes Alpha Conde | News | Al Jazeera* (September 11, 2021).

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/11/uncertainty-in-guinea-after-military-coup-topple-alpha-conde>.

¹³⁴ Le Monde, AFP. "Coup d'Etat Au Burkina Faso : La Junte Rétablit La Constitution et Modifie Les Institutions." *Le Monde.fr*, January 31, 2022. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/01/31/coup-d-etat-au-burkina-faso-le-pays-suspendu-par-l-union-africaine_6111721_3212.html.

¹³⁵ Le Monde, AFP. "Coup d'Etat Au Burkina Faso : La Junte Rétablit La Constitution et Modifie Les Institutions."

¹³⁶ Sebastian Elischer, Benjamin N. Lawrence. "Reassessing Africa's New Post-Coup Landscape." *African Studies Review* 65, no. 1 (2022) 1-7.

¹³⁷ Ellen Loanes. "How to Understand the Recent Coups in Africa." *Vox* (February 5, 2022).

<https://www.vox.com/2022/2/5/22919160/coup-guinea-bissau-afrique-burkina-faso-sudan-why>.

¹³⁸ Tom Collins. "New Wave of Anti-Colonial Populism Sweeps Francophone Africa;" *Quartz* (June 6, 2022). <https://qz.com/africa/2173650/new-wave-of-anti-colonial-populism-sweeps-francophone-africa/>.

since Mali's transition from a democracy to a CA government. Additionally, it supports the assertion that, contrary to other democratic periods, current government actions in Mali are aligned with the population's popular beliefs.

Since Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea are all former colonies of France, the popular support that saw Mali's display of African agency free their country from colonial structures can be seen as a motivator for the coup d'états in Guinea and Burkina Faso. This becomes clearer by analyzing an emergency summit in the Ghanaian capital Accra in February 2022 in response to the recent spate of coups.¹³⁹ In his opening remarks at the summit, Nana Akufo-Addo, the ECOWAS chairman and Ghanaian President, claimed that a coup in Mali had been "contagious" and had sparked additional military coups throughout the region.¹⁴⁰ He here confirms that coup d'états in Burkina Faso and Guinea have followed the example of Mali. The desire to reject the colonial system explains why the case of Mali is considered as a model to be followed by people in neighboring countries. This argument is strengthened by Bettina Engels, who said that more and more Africans believe French interventions are marked by a neo-colonial 'Françafrique' attitude that they are no longer ready to accept.¹⁴¹ In example, protests against France's presence in West Africa erupted in late 2021, when crowds gathered to block the path of a French military convoy traveling from Côte d'Ivoire through Burkina Faso to Niger.¹⁴²

Whether these anticolonial attitudes are more of a cultural, political, or economic nature can be questioned. West-Africans' attitudes appear to be mostly political, yet there is no clear answer to this query. Antoine Glazer explained how for a large section of the West-African populace, French military presence conveys the impression that Paris still wants to control things in a traditional Francophone manner.¹⁴³ This suggests that the perceptions are mostly political in nature.

In short, Malians believe(d) their geopolitical position was/is characterized by a dependence on France as a colonial structure, which led to the set of events that

¹³⁹ Aljazeera. "ECOWAS Holds Emergency Summit after Coups in West Africa." ECOWAS holds emergency summit after coups in West Africa | Military News | Al Jazeera (February 3, 2022). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/3/ecowas-emergency-summit-coups-west-africa>.

¹⁴⁰ Aljazeera. "ECOWAS Holds Emergency Summit after Coups in West Africa."

¹⁴¹ Bettina Engels. Popular struggles and the search for alternative democracies. *Review of African Political Economy* 49, no. 172 (2022) 201-208.

¹⁴² Le Figaro. "« Armée française dégage »: un convoi militaire bloqué au Burkina par des milliers de manifestants." Le Figaro (November 20, 2021). <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/armee-francaise-degage-un-convoi-militaire-bloque-au-burkina-par-des-milliers-de-manifestants-20211120>.

¹⁴³ Cyrielle Cabot. "In Mali, 'France Is Paying the Price for Its Own Ambiguity,' Expert Says." France 24 (January 14, 2022). <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220114-in-mali-france-is-paying-the-price-for-its-own-ambiguity-expert-says>.

aimed to alter Mali's geopolitical position. The parallelism of anticolonial attitudes and perceptions in Guinea and Burkina Faso, which have had coup d'états with comparable justifications, lends credence to these pages. Furthermore, Getachew's assertion that there may be a future revival of anticolonial worldmaking is supported by the widespread anti-colonial attitude in West Africa.¹⁴⁴

Maliens' trust in Russia

While the anti-colonial viewpoint explains Malians' perceived geopolitical position, an examination of Mali's recent rapprochement with Russia is needed to complete the picture. This is because the wish for independence in their domestic and foreign policies are accompanied by a need for national security. In an Afrobarometer survey published in October 2021, Malians were asked to identify the most pressing issues confronting the country that the government should address.¹⁴⁵ Of the 29 possible responses, 23.8% chose 'crime and insecurity' as an answer. The next most popular categories were education (14.6 percent) and food insecurity (11.8 percent). In this sense, Malians saw their political position as one in which they needed to break free from the colonial structure, but also as one in which their government needed to address the country's security issues. As mentioned by Diop, Mali's cooperation with Russia is based on equal exchanges without the presence of colonial impulses. Thus, the perceived need to address security issues combined with the wish for independence in governance is what explains images of Malians hoisting Russian flags and portraits of Vladimir Putin while chanting praises for their country's cooperation and support with Russia.¹⁴⁶

But why specifically Russia? Malians could have been contending with any cooperative state that is not known for their colonial tendencies. The answer to this is found by analyzing the matter from a historical viewpoint. By doing so, I will argue that Malians seek international partners in whom they can place some trust. This is because, despite the reality that the French provided security solutions to Mali through military interventions, the coloniality of Malians' view of their geopolitical

¹⁴⁴ Arash Davari. "On Inexactitude in Decolonization." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, no. 3 (December 1, 2020) 627–35.

¹⁴⁵ Afrobarometer. "Mali Round 8 Résumé Des Résultats." Mali Round 8 résumé des résultats – Afrobarometer (October 28, 2021). <https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/resume-des-resultats-enquete-afrobarometer-round-8-au-mali-2020-0/>.

¹⁴⁶ Josephine Nchedo Oguine. THE HITS AND MISSES OF RUSSIA-AFRICA TIE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION. *ScienceOpen Preprints*. (17 June 2022).

position grew to be accompanied by a distrust of France. In this context, Catrina Doxsee argues that France failed in Mali in part because it lost the public's trust.¹⁴⁷ This was caused, in part, by a lack of transparency regarding civilian casualties during military operations. To put it briefly, Malians viewed their geopolitical position as requiring a security ally who can be trusted to some degree and does not have any colonial tendencies.

Understanding Mali's relation with Russia from a historical perspective sheds more light on how Malians view their country's geopolitical position. It explains why, even before it had proven effective, Malians were enthusiastic about Mali's partnership with Russia. In 1960 Khrushchev called on representatives from Africa during the 15th United Nations General Assembly and told them: "We are prepared to provide aid whenever you request it."¹⁴⁸ As well as India, Guinea, Egypt and Ghana, Mali was seen by the Soviet Union as a desirable aid recipient due in large part to the ideologies of its respective leaders. This aid was accepted by Keita and so the Eastern bloc became one of Mali's main trading partners, accounting for 42.8% of trade in the years 1964-1965, far ahead of the United States (2.3%).¹⁴⁹ Nearly all of the Soviet Union's assistance to Mali was contingent on large industrial projects in its public sectors.¹⁵⁰ This aid was regarded as the primary tool for implementing Soviet policy and strategy, however it did not come for free.¹⁵¹ The first Soviet-Malian cooperation agreement was signed on the 21st of February 1961. Through this agreement, Modibo Keita entrusted the USSR with mining research on his territory.¹⁵² The Soviets thus took over the mining office of the AOF (French West Africa), filling the void left by France.¹⁵³ Comparable to the present, ties with the Soviet-Union strengthened as ties with France had weakened. Moreover, the cooperation between the two sovereign states was similar to the present in that it involved fair transactions in which both sides were aware of the ways in which they stood to gain. In this context, Oumar Cissé, a well-known peace activist in the unrest-ridden Mopti region, claimed that Russia had been a longtime ally of the Malian army. In contrast to

¹⁴⁷ Catrina Doxsee. "The End of Operation Barkhane and the Future of Counterterrorism in Mali." *The End of Operation Barkhane and the Future of Counterterrorism in Mali* | Center for Strategic and International Studies (November 11, 2022). <https://www.csis.org/analysis/end-operation-barkhane-and-future-counterterrorism-mali>.

¹⁴⁸ Gu Guan-Fu. "Soviet aid to the third world, an analysis of its strategy." *Soviet Studies*. 35, no. 1 (1983) 71-89.

¹⁴⁹ Manon Touron. *Le Mali, 1960-1968. Exporter la Guerre froide dans le pré carré français*. *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin* (2017) 83-95.

¹⁵⁰ Gu Guan-Fu. "Soviet aid to the third world, an analysis of its strategy." 71-89.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*

¹⁵² Manon Touron. *Le Mali, 1960-1968. Exporter la Guerre froide dans le pré carré français*. 83-95.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*

France, which controls the crisis in accordance with its political and economic objectives, Russia has no interest in Malian politics, he told the BBC.¹⁵⁴ This demonstrates the trust Malians have in their nation's cooperation with Russia, which they no longer have in France. Cissé's perspective agrees with that of Diop, Mali's minister of foreign affairs, who claimed that Mali does not experience the same difficulties when dealing with Russia as they do with the West. In summary, Malians' satisfaction with the state of relations between Mali and Russia can be attributed to an absence of colonial inclinations in Russia's foreign policy, its ability to provide security, as well as the relatively favorable historical links between the two states.

Sub-conclusion

This chapter has shown us that Malians have two main viewpoints on the country's geopolitical position. The more prevalent viewpoint opposes France's influence and calls for closer ties with Russia, whereas the first is allied with France. Malians see Mali's geopolitical situation as one that is still struggling to emerge from the constraints of colonial structures in this way. This theory is supported by the similarity of anticolonial sentiments and perceptions in Guinea and Burkina Faso, both of which experienced coup d'états with related explanations. Finally, Mali's cooperation with Russia demonstrates how the Malians views security in light of their state's geopolitical position, namely the need for a security ally it can partially trust and that lacks colonial attitudes.

¹⁵⁴ Moses Rono. "Mali's Plan for Russia Mercenaries to Replace French Troops Unsettles Sahel." BBC News (October 2, 2021). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58751423>.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the following research question: How was Mali's foreign policy affected by the country's transition from a democracy to a competitive authoritarian (CA) regime in 2020 and how do Malians view Mali's geopolitical position in this context? The main research question has been addressed using two theoretical frameworks. Specifically, competitive authoritarianism and postcolonial IR. The methodology used to investigate this question has been the identification of African agency in the consulted sources.

Utilizing the postcolonial framework, the first chapter found that the need to guarantee ongoing foreign aid in order to attain security was the main driver of Mali's foreign policy during Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's presidency (2013–2020). For example, the free and fair elections in Mali, which were held a few months after the French intervention, led to the nation receiving billions of euros in aid. More specifically, in 2015, Mali's central government spent a startling 75% of its budget on foreign aid, accounting for 10% of the country's GDP. Mali was unable to exercise policy-level control over the cash it had received, however, due to its minimal capabilities as a fragile state. Thus, Mali's reliance on colonial systems has been cited as the cause of the country's perceived lack of agency in its foreign policy. This was largely owing to its proximity to and dependence on France.

In the second chapter, it was revealed that Mali's foreign policy had undergone three major shifts since it went from a democratic to a competitive authoritarian system. The presence of African agency in the country's foreign policy is a common feature of these changes. First, Mali's adamant hostility to France since 2021 has led to a reduction in its reliance on colonial structures, which previously prevented agency in the nation's policies. This can be explained from a postcolonial standpoint because, as a result of the break in the connections between Mali and France, colonial structures had less of an impact on Mali's politics. A prime example of this was when Mali ordered the French ambassador to leave in 2021, therefore emphatically declaring its opposition to French interference in Mali.

Second, in contrast to when Mali was a democracy, its relationship with (West)-African institutions has deteriorated into hostility. For example, ECOWAS has enacted a number of sanctions against Mali. They ceased trading with Mali, closed the borders between Mali and ECOWAS member states, and stopped providing

financial aid to Mali. Despite these steps, the Malian government has not adopted the same cooperative foreign policy that it had during its democratic rule. Given that ECOWAS is not a colonial structure, Mali's opposition to African institutions means that their desire to determine their own course for government constitutes the overarching act of African agency. This is what serves as a valid justification for both their opposition to France and (African) IOs.

Third, viewing Mali's foreign policy through the lens of competitive authoritarianism explains how Mali – in contrast to when the country was a democracy – upholds its display of African agency. Mali as a CA has substituted French political and military presence for Russian military aid. Diop claims that because Russian aid does not come with stipulations of an imperial kind, Mali does not have the same difficulties when cooperating with Russia as it does when cooperating with Western nations. By resisting all sanctions imposed by Western and African states and IOs, Mali's choice to work with Russia is an act of African agency in that Mali refused to budge from its stance that it is free to decide who it cooperates with and who not.

The authoritarian nature of Mali's government made it easier to cooperate with other authoritarian regimes. This is illustrated by Mali's improved diplomatic relations with not only Russia, but also Turkey and China. The reasoning behind these cooperations is explained by Daniel Odinius and Philipp Kuntz. They stated that aiding other authoritarian regimes is the only reasonable response when authoritarian regimes believe that the situation in other countries are the same as their own. Thus, Mali has been able to be less dependent in their foreign policy decisions because of the lack of colonial tendencies present in their cooperation with authoritarian regimes. This is partly what allows the country to continuously oppose any state or institution that has imposed sanctions on them.

In short, Mali's transition from democracy to CA led to a more independent posture in its foreign policy, hence the argument that Mali demonstrates more African agency. From a postcolonial perspective, this could only have been achieved by rejecting the colonial structures that hampered agency in Mali's policy decisions. Through the lens of competitive authoritarianism, we observed how Mali's current political structure is better suited to work with both authoritarian states like Russia, and China, and semi-authoritarian states like Turkey. By giving Mali the resources required to avoid dependency on France or any other postcolonial, imperial structure,

Mali's strengthened its commitment to pursue a foreign policy that is more in line with the principles of African agency. In the third chapter, an examination of how Malians perceive their geopolitical position contributed to developing a more thorough understanding of the developments in Mali's foreign policy. This is because the legitimacy of Mali's ruling CA regime is explained by Malians' popular support for the display of African agency that characterizes the country's present foreign policy. This claim is substantiated by Malians' most common perception of their country's geopolitical position. Namely, one that is still struggling to break free from imperial structures. Moreover, Mali's cooperation with Russia indicates how Malians perceive security in light of their country's geopolitical position, specifically the necessity for a security ally it can partially trust and that does not harbor colonial tendencies. Therefore, Malians' views and perceptions can be considered a contributor to foreign policy decisions because they are in line with those made by their country.

Further research could focus on how Mali's transition from democracy to competitive authoritarianism—along with related shifts in foreign policy—has affected Mali's security situation. For example, has food insecurity increased in Mali or not? If so, to what extent can this be attributed to Mali's foreign policy decisions? Moreover, how are democracy and authoritarianism influencing African agency? Is Mali politically, economically and or culturally benefiting from their cooperation with Russia? These are all questions that have yet to be subject to extensive analyses and could therefore be the center of exploration in future research on Mali's foreign policy, its security situation, African agency, and a larger debate surrounding democracy and authoritarianism on the African continent.

List of Images

Image 1: Protesters in Mali's capital, Bamako, waved Russian flags during an anti-France demonstration in May 2021

Retrieved from: Rono, Moses. "Mali's Plan for Russia Mercenaries to Replace French Troops Unsettles Sahel." BBC News (October 2, 2021). <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58751423>.

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