ASR Forum on Mali

Political Participation and Mobilization after Mali's 2012 Coup

Bruce Whitehouse

Abstract: If the sudden downfall of Mali's officially democratic system in early 2012 surprised many observers, the failings of the Malian state—including public disaffection with the political process, weak rule of law, and inadequate delivery of basic services—were widely known both at home and abroad. Focusing on activists based in Bamako, this article assesses Malian civil society's response to these challenges since the March 2012 military coup and considers prospects for wider political engagement by the Malian public.

Résumé: Si la chute soudaine du système officiellement démocratique du Mali au début de 2012 a surpris bon nombre d'observateurs, les défaillances de l'État malien—y compris le mécontentement public à l'égard du processus politique, la faiblesse de l'état de droit et une prestation insuffisante des services de base—étaient largement connus tant dans le pays qu'à l'étranger. Se concentrant sur les militants basés à Bamako, cet article examine la réponse de la société civile malienne à ces défis depuis le coup d'état militaire de mars 2012 et considère les perspectives d'un engagement politique plus large de la population malienne.

Keywords: Mali; politics; democracy; civil society

African Studies Review, Volume 60, Number 1 (April 2017), pp. 15–35

Bruce Whitehouse is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. His research has focused on transnational migration, marriage, and the state in postcolonial Africa. He is the author of *Migrants and Strangers in an African City* (Indiana University Press, 2012) and blogs at bridgesfrombamako.com. E-mail: brw208@lehigh.edu

© African Studies Association, 2017
doi:10.1017/asr.2017.9

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Introduction

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the theme of "Africa rising" has been a staple of magazine covers, scholarly publications, and conferences. As with the "African renaissance" trope of the 1990s, proponents of the "Africa rising" narrative point to successful "emerging" countries on the continent as exemplars of Africa's overall progression toward economic prosperity and democratic rule. One instance of this narrative is a 2010 book entitled *Emerging Africa: How 17 Countries Are Leading the Way* by Steven Radelet, a former chief economist with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The book, which features an introduction by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, is described on the back cover as a "meticulous and fascinating account of sub-Saharan Africa's most successful economies" by no less than the musician and activist Bono.

To illustrate its core contention that poverty in Africa fell by 20 percent between 1993 and 2005, *Emerging Africa* offers the following historical overview of developments in Mali:

> While under one-party military rule from 1968 to 1991, political rights deteriorated and the economy stagnated. Average income in 1991 was the same as in 1970, and 85 percent of the population lived in absolute poverty. But after protests and riots against the government, the military was forced out of power, and Mali became a multiparty democracy in 1992. The new government began to introduce a program of economic reforms, and with the 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc, the economy began to respond. GDP per capita has grown by a respectable 2.5 percent per year since the mid-1990s, and average income has increased 40 percent. The poverty rate fell sharply to below 60 percent in 2005. (Radelet 2010:35)

Citing rising economic growth (above 5.5 percent annually since the mid-1990s), falling infant mortality, and a doubling of primary school completion rates in the country, Radelet adds that "Mali, too, has established a thriving multiparty democracy with competitive elections, a free press, better protection of civil liberties and political rights, less corruption, and stronger governance" (2010:10).

Just eighteen months after the publication of *Emerging Africa*, the country's purportedly vibrant democratic system collapsed, its elected president fled into exile, and a military junta curtailed civil liberties, all amid public complaints of massive corruption. The Western view of Mali plummeted from an incarnation of "Africa rising" to a failed state, another scene of ethnic violence and barbarism. Yet Radelet's optimistic assessment of Mali was by no means unusual. Although a few observers (e.g., Roy 2005; Villalòn & Idrissa 2005) had remarked on the weakness of Mali's democratic institutions, for the most part the "international community," donor governments, development practitioners, and scholars alike failed to grasp the fragility of the Malian state and the severity of the risks it faced (Allen 2013).

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The end of Mali's status as a "donor darling" (see Bergamaschi 2014) might help temper, if only for a time, the appeal of simplifying narratives regarding complex processes of social, political, and economic change on the African continent. Mali's transformation was always more ambiguous and unruly than tidy assessments of the country's "emergence" allowed. The events unleashed by the military coup d'état in March 2012 did not only shake up outsiders' views of Mali, however; they also profoundly affected how Malians themselves conceived of their state, political system, and national identity. Malians were well aware of the problems afflicting their society and government. Corruption had long been a primary subject of critique and protest. In 2012, 69 percent of Malian respondents to the Afrobarometer survey rated their government as handling the fight against corruption "fairly badly" or "very badly," up from 51 percent in 2001 (Bratton, Coulibaly, & Machado 2002; Richmond & Alpin 2013). Poor governance and inadequate provision of basic services had been another perennial failing under successive regimes. Nevertheless, throughout the twenty years of Mali's officially democratic rule from March 1992 to March 2012, most Malian citizens did not seek to redress their grievances through their country's formal political process (e.g., by voting corrupt officials out of office), and they harbored considerable distrust toward the electoral, legal, and political institutions that supported this process—including those existing officially outside the state sphere.

In this article I consider these underlying vulnerabilities, how perceptions of them evolved, and how certain Bamako-based activists attempted to address them in the wake of the coup and during the phase of political "normalization" beginning in 2013. The coup and the series of disasters that followed—the collapse of the Malian armed forces, the occupation of the country's north by an alliance of separatist rebels and jihadists, and a period of international isolation (Lecocq et al. 2013), followed by intervention of French, African, and United Nations troops—led some Malians to pursue new ways of engaging their state and fellow citizens to address the root causes of their country's ills. By exposing the flaws of the Malian political system to both national and international scrutiny, these events opened a space in which new forms of public discourse and political participation became possible. Activists capitalized on this space and used social media to reach new audiences. After reviewing evidence from Malian and international media, from ethnographic research I conducted in Bamako during the months before and after the coup, and from interviews with a small number of Bamako-based activists, I interrogate this opening and consider what it might reveal about the relationship between politics and civil society.

"Politiki A Man Nyi": Politics and Legitimacy in Question

Mali's president for the decade leading up to the coup was Amadou Toumani Touré, a former army general who rose to fame by helping oust the unpopular President Moussa Traoré in 1991 and paving the way for multiparty elections the following year. Touré, whom Malians universally

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

call "ATT," stepped down in 1992, returning to politics with a successful presidential bid ten years later. Affiliated with no political party, he cast himself as above the partisan fray. His governing strategy was supposedly consensus based, drawing legitimacy from historical precedents dating to the thirteenth-century Empire of Mali (see Baudais & Chauzal 2006; Baudais 2015). While the appearance of social harmony under ATT enabled the government to expand its foreign support,[1] clientelism was the dominant mode of politics: party leaders, potential rivals, and representatives of Malian civil society were allowed access to public resources in return for their support, or at least their unwillingness to criticize the president and his regime openly. There was little meaningful opposition or debate (Keita 2013). The Malian playwright Sirafily Diango described the ethos of consensus under ATT as "Mangez tous, mais taisez-vous"—"Everybody eat up, but keep quiet" (Tulet 2014; see also Radio France International 2012).

ATT's political approach was a delicate balancing act that maintained Mali's positive image abroad and yielded expensive and highly publicized infrastructure projects at home (including highways, bridges, new government buildings, and subsidized housing). Yet his government could not meet many basic needs. As the second decade of the twenty-first century dawned amid rapid demographic growth and urbanization, those needs became acute and the public mood turned sour.[2] The government school system remained dysfunctional even as primary enrollment tripled over two decades (Bleck 2013, 2015). State health clinics routinely ran short of medicine, disinfectant, and other necessities. Meanwhile, cities and towns saw the proliferation of private schools and clinics, often run by moonlighting civil servants; many Malians associated this change with the gradual shift away from the state and toward nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in all areas of public activity, a shift that had been under way for decades (Mann 2015). The benefits of this neoliberal trend, however, did not live up to expectations. During ATT's second five-year term (2007–2012), the government's own survey data showed that many of the socioeconomic gains of the previous decade stagnated or regressed. For example, Bamako residents saw no improvement in access to electricity after 2006, and school enrollment in the city actually dropped 10 percent from 2006 to 2010, reflecting popular frustration with the troubled public education system (INSTAT 2011). As the government's attempts to reduce poverty faltered, particularly in fast-expanding urban areas, popular frustration mounted: the percentage of Malians indicating they were "satisfied with democracy" fell from 57 percent in 2005 to 31 percent in 2012 (Coulibaly & Bratton 2013).

Perhaps the most deeply rooted problem in Mali during this period was the erosion of legality. To be fair, state institutions and the rule of law had been weak even before ATT's rise to power. In his second term, however, many Malians lost faith in the state's capacity to protect them in the face of two surging threats: expropriation of their property and criminal violence. With respect to property rights, a growing phenomenon of land speculation fueled by burgeoning urban growth left Malians at the mercy of the

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

powerful and politically connected, who could easily buy court rulings or municipal decrees to force owners off their property, particularly in peri-urban zones where many lacked legal title to land that had been in their families for generations. Over the past decade dozens of associations have sprung up throughout the country uniting people driven off their land; there is even an umbrella NGO to coordinate their activities and counter state repression. The *démunis*, or "destitute," had little hope of finding justice through official institutions, and as Siméant (2014) points out, even if they received a court ruling in their favor, there was no guarantee of enforcement. A similar sense of desperation concerned urban crime: vigilante violence against alleged thieves rose in Bamako in 2011 and early 2012. Suspects were beaten and often killed by mobs, sometimes after being removed from police custody. Such violence expressed widespread outrage at authorities' perceived incapacity to fight crime, and even their collusion with criminals.[3] Siméant (2014:94) describes vigilante violence as "a protest against police accused of doing nothing and judges accused of freeing bandits."

Throughout this period Malians remained wary of the political process. They often regarded contemporary politics as intrinsically dishonest, requiring theft and even bloodshed from its practitioners; a common expression in the Bamanan language, "politiki a man nyi," means "politics are bad" (Bleck 2015:44ff).[4] Like many of their neighbors in West Africa, Malians had little trust in their political parties, which they associated with opportunism and injustice, and little faith in the power of elections to improve their situation. Even in a region characterized by low degrees of political participation, however, Malians' level of disengagement from political activity was remarkable: in every election from 1992 until the coup, voter turnout never exceeded 40 percent, the lowest in West Africa (Bleck 2015; Bleck & van de Walle 2011). Nearly two-thirds of Malians surveyed expressed "no interest" in politics (Bratton, Coulibaly & Machado 2002:205). Malians also largely failed to identify with their political leaders who, as in many African states, had been drawn since independence from a small cadre of graduates from French-language schools identifying with the secular foundations of the postcolonial state (Siméant 2014), a profile that scarcely reflects Malian society. Negative perceptions, distrust, and feeble public participation contributed to a gulf between ordinary citizens and the individuals and groups ostensibly representing them in Mali's political institutions. Surveys conducted in Bamako documented a widespread belief that Malian political parties acted out of self-interest or even a desire to do harm and create anarchy during the country's political crisis, while fewer than one-quarter of respondents could name their elected representative in the National Assembly (Friedrich Ebert Foundation 2012, 2013). When surveyors asked Malians about the principal causes of their country's crisis in December 2012, the most common response was "leaders' lack of patriotism" (Afrobarometer 2013). The fundamental legitimacy of Mali's democratic institutions was very much in doubt, at least in the eyes of the populations they were meant to govern.

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Given the Malian political system's failings, it is not surprising that the portion of Malians expressing satisfaction with the country's democracy on nationwide surveys plummeted from 63 percent in 2002 to 36 percent in 2012 (Dulani 2014). The few in Bamako who openly criticized the government during this period were activists and opposition leaders of the radical left, notably those allied with the SADI (Solidarité Africaine pour le Développement et l'Indépendance) party. For years they had described the country's political institutions as illegitimate, denouncing what they saw as their leaders' powerlessness against, or complicity with, a plot by the global forces of neocolonialism to strip Mali of its sovereignty. Their influence within the state was quite limited (see Siméant 2014), yet it was precisely their rhetoric that a military junta echoed to justify its intervention in March 2012, mere weeks before scheduled presidential elections.

The Coup and Malian "Civil Society"

What drove ATT from power in the final days of his second term of office was by no means a premeditated coup d'état. It began as a mutiny among junior officers and enlisted personnel at an army barracks in Kati, 13 kilometers outside Bamako. The troops were angry with their commanders and civilian leaders, whom they accused of complicity with northern rebels who had enjoyed a string of military successes against the Malian armed forces in early 2012. After a series of disorderly protest marches in January and February, army wives from Kati confronted and upbraided ATT on live television.[5] A few weeks later, on the morning of March 21, a visit by the defense minister to the Kati barracks degenerated into a melee, mutineers converged on Bamako, and by evening they had taken over the presidential palace and state broadcasting center. Bloodshed was limited: the presidential guard put up scant resistance, ATT went into hiding, and the rest of the security forces quickly sided with the mutineers. Not until early the next morning did soldiers take to the airwaves to announce the suspension of Mali's 1992 Constitution and the establishment of a new military regime, the CNRDRE, the Comité national pour le redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l'État (National Committee for the Recovery of Democracy and the Restoration of the State) (Lecocq et al. 2013).

In statements on Malian television, CNRDRE officers listed multiple grievances to explain their actions. In the coup's immediate aftermath, they emphasized military-specific complaints. "We came first to require good living conditions and treatment, salary, all the things needed for the operation of a noble, professional and efficient army," junta leader Captain Amadou Sanogo said in one of his first media interviews, broadcast on March 22 (Africable 2012). Within a few days, however, their grievances shifted to address the Malian state in general; the soldiers claimed that the country's politicians had fostered a climate of corruption, impunity, and lawlessness that had precipitated their military defeats in the north.

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

They likened the state to a crumbling wall, and said that their mission was to knock it down and erect a stronger one in its place.

Mali's political establishment was divided in its response to the coup. A small but vocal coalition of organizations, known as the Coordination des Organisations Patriotiques du Mali (Coordination of Malian Patriotic Organizations), or COPAM, emerged in support of the junta, with SADI leaders playing a prominent role within the coalition. Its members' critique of the entire Malian political establishment resonated with the soldiers' own message. COPAM activists cast the coup as a "people's revolution," a golden opportunity to oust the corrupt elite and build a new government from the ground up, and their rallies in Bamako drew thousands. They sought to dismantle the country's existing political institutions and organize a sovereign national conference. A group of young men calling themselves Yerewolo Ton (a name translated as "Group of Worthy Sons") positioned themselves around the National Assembly and blocked legislators from entering (Gavelle, Siméant, & Traoré 2013; Siméant 2014). At the same time, Mali's largest parties and civic organizations organized under the banner of the FDR, the Front uni pour la sauvegarde de la démocratie et de la République (United Front to Safeguard Democracy and the Republic). The FDR condemned the coup, calling for the preservation of existing institutions and a speedy return to constitutional rule, and held rallies of its own. The Bamako press, mostly owned by or affiliated with various party bosses, tended to align either with the pro-putsch camp or with the FDR (Hagberg & Körling 2012), and a polarization of public debate ensued as each side cast its opponents as enemies of democracy.

Large segments of the Malian public, in Bamako and in the provinces, responded positively to the junta's populist rhetoric (Gavelle, Siméant, & Traoré 2013), and Malians were largely relieved to see ATT gone.[6] Many, however, felt alienated by the partisan rancor between COPAM and the FDR. They saw merely different emanations of the same elite, obsessed with power and out of touch with the people. They were similarly distrustful toward Malian civil society as it had been formally constituted—NGOs, trade unions, and other groups supposed to embody the interests of the population.[7] Malians generally did not see these groups as representing their own interests or as acting to counterbalance state power (Friedrich Ebert Foundation 2012), in part because their leaders and the political elite were drawn from the same circles. Leaders in politics and civil society often moved through a "revolving door" as they switched employment from one setting to another, or maintained positions in both settings simultaneously (Siméant 2014). In short, the heads of Malian advocacy groups, political parties, and media outlets were bound by the same clientelist networks as Malian public officials, meaning that none could credibly challenge the state and the political elite that monopolized it (Roy 2005). Many Malians considered civil society, locally defined as voluntary organizations operating outside but engaging with the Malian state, as thoroughly compromised by its links to state power and foreign funding (Jonckers 2011). Accordingly, junta

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

leaders were as wary of Mali's civil society leaders as they were of its political class (Gavelle, Siméant, & Traoré 2013). One could ask whether Mali even had a civil society worthy of the name, one capable of protecting the public good and acting as a counterweight to state power.

It was against this backdrop that Malians sought, in the days and weeks after the coup, to assess their country's woes and decide how to respond. The situation was grave: by April 2012, with the Malian armed forces in full retreat, the north of the country—an area the size of Texas—had fallen under separatist and jihadist occupation. An interim civilian government was put in place in Bamako, but the junta retained considerable power. How could the divided country be reunited? How could meaningful democratic rule be established? How could the state be rebuilt to serve the needs of ordinary people? These questions weighed on the minds of everyone I encountered in Bamako at that time, and a deep sense of shame at the country's string of humiliations pervaded everyday conversations (Gavelle, Siméant, & Traoré 2013).

Paths to Engagement and Activism

The events described above spurred many Malians to action. They organized meetings, formed new political associations, and sometimes communicated through state or private media in Bamako on behalf of their organizations during the months that followed the coup. In this sense they had something in common with the FDR, COPAM, and Yerewolo Ton, but they explicitly distanced themselves from those groups, from Mali's political parties, and in some cases from Malian civil society in general. The activists I interviewed were Bamako residents in their thirties and early forties who had come of age during Mali's post-1991 "democratic experiment." They were highly educated graduates of French-language schools and universities; some had also studied in the United States. Below I present the perspectives of five individuals representing four different groups. This small, nonrandom sample of interviewees is not intended to be representative of democracy activists in Bamako or in Mali. Nevertheless, the experiences of these individuals might offer insight into different paths toward mobilization, and inform future research on political engagement in Mali and elsewhere.

Fanta: GEMACO and SOS Démocratie

Fanta (a pseudonym) is an engineer with an American university degree. She had no history of activism before 2012. For her, the coup served as a rude awakening to the realities and weaknesses of the Malian state. "I had no idea that we were sitting on a bomb," she said during a telephone interview in June 2014.[8] She described her former sense of complacency toward her country's political affairs: "We thought the politicians are doing what they need to do, taking care of the country. This is a specific field. We just

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

go to work, take care of our families, do our own things. Our own future and well-being—we let somebody else manage that for us, without knowing. So the coup was very much an eye-opener for us."

In the wake of the coup, Fanta felt anguished and helpless, then angry with Mali's political class, and finally upset with herself for her previous inaction and lack of engagement. She knew many peers who shared her frustrations, but she did not see their concerns reflected by Mali's civil society, including youth organizations like the CNJ (a national youth council) and the AEEM (a student union), both of which were highly politicized. "We saw the leadership of civil society speak on our behalf, but we didn't espouse most of the things that came out of their mouths," she said. Fanta began meeting with peers, a few of whom had already been involved in civic organizations, and helped develop a charter for a new association, Génération malienne consciente (Conscious Malian Generation), or GEMACO. This group aimed to mobilize young Malians who, like her, had felt apathetic toward or alienated by the country's political and civil society establishments. GEMACO brought together scores of existing groups oriented toward young people and aiming to promote national unity, youth empowerment, and justice (see Sanogo 2012). In February 2013 Fanta worked to establish another group, SOS Démocratie, which focused on educating Malians about upcoming presidential elections and encouraging them to take part. The group did not endorse any party or candidate, but sought to make ordinary citizens understand what was at stake and what they stood to lose. They held town hall–style meetings throughout Bamako and in six of Mali's eight regional capitals, using short theater pieces about voting to launch participatory discussions about politics and the responsibilities of citizens. Significantly, all these activities were conducted in local languages rather than in French, which enabled the group to reach a wider audience. As Fanta said in her interview,

> We didn't hold any town-hall meeting where there wasn't at least one person attending who would get up and say "Where were you twenty years ago? Why are you only speaking up now? Where were you twenty years ago, because the message you're giving us now should have come ahead of democracy. We wish we had known this twenty years ago." . . . So it was very important for the message to be perceived and for people to comprehend. And also no town hall [had] us speaking without the community speaking. We just did a skit to teach people about their own behavior, then we let them speak. And they so much appreciated that. And seeing that our visions were not that far away from each other—that really helped build trust.

SOS Démocratie also recorded Bamanan-language theater sketches for Malian television explaining the electoral process and the proper role and responsibilities of elected officials. Although the group received funding for its outreach activities from the U.S. Agency for International Development

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(USAID), the Swiss development agency Cooperation Suisse, and the international NGOs Oxfam and One World UK, Fanta emphasized that the group's members worked strictly on a volunteer basis. During the two rounds of voting to choose a presidential candidate in July and August 2013, SOS Démocratie took part in poll monitoring and established a website and hotline where voters could report instances of fraud or poor organization. They repeated this work for subsequent parliamentary voting in November and December.

Mohamed and Oussou: Les Sofas de la République

Mohamed Bathily is a part-time law student and former leader in Mali's Rastafarian movement. He is also the son of a former cabinet minister. He still identifies as a Rastafarian, though he now wears his hair close-cropped and spends time with rappers, particularly members of the politically engaged group Tata Pound (see Morgan 2014). The day after ATT's ouster, he met with some friends to discuss how to respond. The coup, he said during a June 2012 interview in Bamako, was

> like a slap in the face to all of us. It knocked us out and we awoke the next day to see pickups full of police, which we had never seen before except in foreign films. We thought we were living in a dramatic film, but twenty-four hours later we realized it was real. In the streets there were armed police firing into the air. *Le pouvoir* [state power] didn't exist anymore. There was no state. It was the rule of Kalashnikovs and bullets. So after twenty years of democracy we were back to square one in a country without a state, without laws, without anything.

Mohamed and his friends were alarmed at the polarization of political discourse in Bamako between the pro-putsch MP-22 and anti-putsch FDR. "Between these two blocs, we couldn't see anyone really concerned with the fate of citizens who were at risk of being taken hostage, victimized again, by these two radical and antithetical positions," he said.

During the days immediately following the coup, Mohamed met with several peers, including members of Tata Pound and Oussou Touré, a filmmaker and former Tata Pound manager. Like Fanta, none of them had previously been involved in what they considered civil society organizations, all of them were shocked by Mali's situation, and all were looking for ways to make their voices heard. They formed a collective named Les Sofas de la République ("sofas" being a term for warriors in the army of the anticolonial resistance leader Samory Touré). As Oussou told me in a telephone interview in July 2014,

> We didn't have any headquarters so my house became the headquarters. And we decided that some members of the Sofas would not be known, technically, in case we get arrested or killed or [suffered] any harm at all, that the fight will not stop, so those whose faces are not known as Sofas will

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> continue, and we'd reorganize things and find another way of carrying the messages out. So that's how we were created. It moved very quickly, because the situation required that we act very quickly.

The Sofas took a firm, very public stand against the junta and for a return to constitutionality. They distributed tracts in crowded Bamako marketplaces and held press conferences challenging political leaders' positions, particularly what they regarded as self-interested interpretations of constitutional provisions for an interim president once an elected president could not complete his term. (It helped that Mohamed and one of his fellow Sofas, the rapper Ismaila Doucouré, a.k.a. "Master Soumy," had both studied law at university and could offer informed perspectives on the Malian Constitution.)

The Sofas' critique was not limited to the political elite; it also targeted the complicity of ordinary Malians with their leaders' misrule. Mohamed put it this way:

> If we elected an inept government, it's because in the run-up to elections we weren't interested in the credibility of the men for whom we were going to vote. Nobody was interested in their social platform, in their morality, we just wanted the cash and the T-shirts they were giving away. Even though they took advantage of our ignorance, our poverty, and our vulnerability to offer us trifles, we never had this civic reflex to vote for a platform, not for a man. It was this error we made, the result of which was the election of an incompetent government, the loss of two-thirds of our territory, chaotic governance in every domain, no economy, no jobs, no health care, you see, nothing was working! So we said, "This must never happen again." So this self-critique, this recognition of our own responsibility must lead to an active civic awareness. And it's through this new active awareness that we can have elections leading to a competent government made up of patriotic men of integrity.

Just ten days after the coup, the Sofas released a rap song and accompanying video entitled "Ca Suffit!" ("That's Enough!"), with lyrics in Bamanan calling to account the nation's corrupt leaders, demagogues, and profiteering soldiers. It was an immediate sensation, and within two days the Sofas had more than five thousand Facebook friends. The Sofas attempted new forms of community engagement. They started a cleanup campaign in a Bamako market, and the media attention they received shamed local authorities (who had been collecting approximately U.S.$2000 daily in taxes meant to fund market cleanup) into taking action to address the problem themselves. They also held community discussions, similar to those conducted by SOS Démocratie, in the run-up to the 2013 elections. "We didn't tell people 'You should vote for this candidate or that candidate,'" Oussou said. "We just mentioned the fact that it's very important to vote, and we made them understand that their vote will change things." To encourage young people to register to vote, the Sofas organized a popular

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

series of rap concerts around the country; to gain admission, one had only to show one's voter ID card. In support of their pre-electoral campaign, the Sofas—who had previously funded their activities out of their own pockets—received a grant from the U.S. Embassy in Bamako. They planned to conduct similar programs in advance of future municipal elections.

Mariam: Plus Jamais Ça

Mariam Sy is an architect who had no prior involvement with political movements, although, like Mohamed, she is the child of a former cabinet minister. Like the activists profiled above, she was distressed by the events of early 2012. "Before the coup d'état, we were caught up in the illusion that we were in a stable, democratic country that worked well," she said in a July 2014 telephone interview. "Even if there was a lot of corruption and we weren't happy with the way things were going, we had the illusion that there was something holding things together. But after the coup, we realized that there was nothing holding it together at all." Mariam was opposed to the coup d'état, but didn't agree with the position of the FDR and other established political parties, which she considered more interested in squabbling over power than bringing the country back together. She joined a group of like-minded peers, including the son of a former Malian head of state, who decided to call their group Plus Jamais Ça ("Never Again"). Their goal was preventing another coup by raising public awareness about state institutions and the role of citizens in making them function. "Our view was that all this had happened because the people had been disinterested in how the state was run, so our goal was to see that the people woke up about the state," she said.

One of the members of Plus Jamais Ça was a well-known rapper known as Amkoullel, who in late 2011 recorded a song about the perilous state of the country. He agreed to release the song, "S.O.S.," with a video under the association's name.[9] In April 2012, coordinating with other groups, Plus Jamais Ça organized a human chain around a prominent Bamako landmark, the Monument de l'Indépendance. "At that time people were only talking about the coup, not much about the occupation of the north. We wanted to say to everyone, 'We're part of the same country, we are all brothers and sisters, and if we help each other out we will find solutions,'" Mariam recalled. The group subsequently launched other protests to condemn attacks on journalists by the junta and by northern rebels. They joined a new umbrella association, "Ensemble Nous Sommes un Peuple" ("Together We Are a People"), uniting over sixty youth-oriented associations to promote democratic discussion, peace, and national unity. The group planned a new project to monitor the National Assembly and inform the public about the activities of its elected representatives through radio and social media. Apart from contributions by its own members, however, Plus Jamais Ça secured no funding.

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Kassim: The JCIM

Kassim Fomba is an employee of USAID in Mali and vice president of the Junior Chamber International–Mali (JCIM), affiliated with Junior Chamber International (North American branches of which are known as the Jaycees). Through its thirty-two chapters around the country, the JCIM has long been involved in efforts to promote causes like education and public health. In 2012, however, Kassim was struck by the fragility of the Malian state and public apathy toward the political system. "We thought we had a democracy that was solid, well established, et cetera," he said in a telephone interview in July 2014.

> But with the coup we saw that it was just a façade. The other thing we noticed with respect to politics is that there was a lack of conviction. In truth, during the elections that had happened, people didn't go to vote for a political party because everyone was rather disappointed by the parties. . . . People said that all politicians were the same, their only concern was their own self-interest.

As preparations for Mali's 2013 elections began, Kassim and his fellow JCIM members chose to mount a public outreach campaign, handing out flyers and T-shirts and sponsoring radio announcements to explain the details of the electoral system, such as how to obtain a voter ID card and how to avoid damaging one's paper ballot. They warned people against allowing politicians to buy their votes. Working through their local chapters, they held public forums to spread awareness of the voting process. Finding considerable public confusion between the role of a local mayor and that of a deputy in the National Assembly, they explained the difference between these two positions. Their activities were conducted in local languages, with the exception of messages broadcast in French on national media.

The concern of the JCIM, Kassim told me, was to prevent voter manipulation on two fronts:

> The first is that you'll tell poor people with no money, "Here, I'll give you money if you'll vote for me," and they'll take that money. Some will be clever, take the money and then not vote for you, but others will. The other factor of instrumentalization is our religious leaders. These are the people who carry the most weight here in Mali. A religious leader can bring out thirty, forty, even fifty thousand people. No political party leader, not a single one, can mobilize that many people, it's impossible. But the religious leaders can. So when your leader tells you to vote for someone, you vote for him without even knowing him because that's what your religious leader said.

The JCIM's activities, funded through member dues, extended throughout the presidential campaign in June and July 2013. Mali's national elections commission (the Independent National Electoral Commission, or CENI)

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

asked the JCIM to provide poll monitors for both presidential and parliamentary elections that year. Like the Sofas de la République, the group planned to conduct similar programs ahead of subsequent municipal elections.

Questioning Civil Society

On the face of it, efforts by groups like those described above to mobilize the public to join in the political process met their objectives. In the two rounds of presidential voting in July and August 2013 a record number of Malians turned out to cast ballots despite inadequate distribution of voter cards, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of potential voters due to conflict, and a poorly organized process overall.[10] Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, a veteran politician, emerged victorious, garnering more than 77 percent of second-round votes. After nearly eighteen months without an elected head of state, the Malian government became newly legitimate to observers both at home and abroad when Keita took office in September 2013. Following the elections, polls revealed Malians' renewed faith in their state institutions and their leaders, even if they continued to admire the military (Dulani 2014).

The example of nonstate organizations like the ones profiled above might also appear to augur well for the future of Malian civil society. Groups that formed more or less spontaneously in early 2012, unconnected to existing political structures, managed to make their voices heard and influence the political process. In most cases they did so without the support of the Malian government: some groups were not initially recognized by the state, while state media would not air the political critiques and appeals of rappers like Amkoullel or the Sofas, deeming them too controversial.[11] Activists partially circumvented such restrictions via the internet, social media, and private radio and television stations; they rebuffed efforts by the junta and politicians to co-opt them, and offered a critique of existing civil society organizations—though not, notably, of the concept of civil society itself. "Civil society is very much one of the pillars of governance," Fanta said during her interview. "If civil society had played its role and fulfilled its responsibilities in the past twenty years, we would never have had a coup. The coup, security issues, and bad governance have all happened because civil society decided to play hooky and not get serious on activism or proactive constructive criticism."

A hopeful reading of events in Mali since 2012 would highlight the new public consciousness and sense of civic responsibility embodied by these groups and their ability to connect with young people. It would take heart in the power of Malian hip-hop artists to foster political consciousness among the youth, just as their peers are doing throughout the Muslim world (Aidi 2014). Mali's rappers have generally been more willing than its griots to engage in overt political critique, and many have bravely spoken truth to power (Morgan 2014).[12] Signs like these could indicate a shift in

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

political consciousness. "Two years after the coup, I still see a broken Mali, but I'm not at all pessimistic," the playwright Sirafily Diango told Radio France International, "because the situation allowed Malians to understand, to see the true face of the politicians above all. Malians will no longer agree to follow them for a packet of sugar, a tee-shirt or some tea" (Tulet 2014). The coup and ensuing political crisis prompted activists to confront harsh realities and ultimately transformed them. Fanta, for example, described herself as "a citizen who has been reborn."

Their example, however, also raises potentially troubling questions about the nature of civil society in Mali. First, can a civil society group's official independence from the state outweigh its leaders' close connections to the same political elite which their activities seek to bypass? As we have seen, both Mohamed and Mariam are children of former cabinet ministers. Many leading this wave of democratic activism are the offspring of the leaders of the previous wave of the early 1990s. Their critique of the Malian political establishment in 2012 might be taken as an implicit critique of their parents' generation and its handling of their country's affairs over the past two decades.

Second, can groups like the ones profiled above achieve their aims without foreign support? Donor agencies of European and North American governments, as well as certain Western NGOs, were instrumental in helping groups like the Sofas de la République and SOS Démocratie scale up their activities and reach wider audiences. Even if these groups survive Mali's current process of "normalization," it remains to be seen whether they can maintain independence in setting priorities that may diverge from their funders' agendas.

Finally, and most crucially, can civil society groups truly make a difference in Mali? One could argue that despite the momentary elation produced by the 2013 elections, the institutions of the Malian state remain fundamentally dysfunctional and the Malian political class as rapacious and self-serving as ever (see Baudais 2015).[13] Such an assessment would be supported by key events since 2013, including a scandal involving President Keita's alleged ties to a French mafia figure; the suspension of aid payments by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and European Union over lack of financial transparency; and resurgent tensions in the north resulting in the Malian army's renewed defeat by separatist rebels (*Africa Confidential* 2014). A national survey in late 2015 indicated that most Malians were dissatisfied with their government's management of the country (Friedrich Ebert Foundation 2016). With insecurity still rampant in the north and making inroads farther south, few Malians could contend that the "successful" election of 2013 changed their situation for the better. "Mali guvernansi dun be ko Bresilien filmuw/A si daminè tè kèlèn ye, a bèè conclusion kèlèn," rapped Master Soumy on his June 2014 release "Fasso kunkan": "Mali's governments are like Brazilian TV series/None begins the same way, but they all have the same ending." Soumy's comrade from the Sofas, Mohamed, was arrested in August 2016 after criticizing President Keita on a Bamako radio station. When protestors gathered to

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

call for his release, police shot one of them dead (Reuters 2016). On the day of the shooting, Facebook and Twitter users in Mali found themselves mysteriously unable to access their accounts, though the government denied any role in the outage.

Clearly the 2013 election did not deliver the political transformation so many Malians desperately hoped for. Public disappointment with this outcome poses a considerable obstacle for the work of Malian civil society activists. The women and men I interviewed realize that elections alone do not offer salvation. Civic-minded voters need civic-minded candidates to choose from, but given the strong negative associations with the political system and electoral politics in Mali, such individuals may be unwilling to run for office. "There are many people who can do a lot of good by governing well, by proposing good plans for the community, but unfortunately they don't want to get involved in politics," Kassim remarked. "That's a problem. So some of us go out and tell people, 'If you don't want to do it, someone else perhaps less worthy will do it instead.'" Groups like SOS Démocratie and the JCIM told voters in 2013 that if they find no candidate to their liking, they should cast blank ballots as a sign of disapproval. Although few such ballots were cast, more voters may resort to this form of protest in future elections if candidates responsive to their concerns fail to emerge.

Reflections on Mali's Public Sphere

Mali's 2012 coup created a space, however fraught with challenges and risks, in which a new generation of activists articulated messages in new ways and connected with new audiences in a bid to make politics accessible to a wider range of citizens. While the limited scope of my findings does not permit me to make claims about this generation's impact on the political process in Mali (which, in any case, it is too early to assess), I hope that further scholarship will illuminate the importance of grassroots civil society groups emerging in the country since 2012. Furthermore, my research highlights two interrelated tensions with respect to civil society and political participation which deserve further investigation.

First, civil society in Mali struggles to distinguish itself, if only in public perception, from the domain of politics. As we have seen, Malians take a dim view of state politics, seeing it as an essentially dishonest, corrupt, and even violent realm of activity. Getting involved in politics risks compromising one's virtue. Malians are not alone in this regard: Walton observes that among Turks, "political society, as such, is conceived as a domain of problematic entanglement within which the ways and means of power taint more authentic identities and aspirations" (2013:193). By encouraging members of the public to vote, civil society activists may themselves become politically entangled even without endorsing a particular candidate. Will widespread disillusionment with Mali's current democratically elected regime make it all the more challenging for activists to mobilize people to vote in the future? If Malian civil society has thus far failed to represent

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

identities that are, in Walton's terms, "primordially authentic and prepolitical" (2013:193), can it manage to reposition itself? And if so, how?

The second tension concerns the relationship between civil society and religious life. The reservations expressed by Kassim above about religious leaders' voting instructions to their followers embody the secular elite's deep-seated worries about religious involvement in politics. As Comaroff and Comaroff (2001:22) point out, conceptions of civil society have generally been hostile toward Islam and other "cultures deemed marginal to the 'modern script.'" In Mali, however, where more than 90 percent of the population is Muslim, people tend to have positive views of the roles of religious leaders in their society (Friedrich Ebert Foundation 2012, 2013). Public dissatisfaction with the politics of the Malian state is increasingly finding expression in Islamic associations, a kind of "civil society from below" that is in no way antithetical to the existence of a secular state (Jonckers 2011). This century has seen the emergence of a set of leaders in politics, business, and civic life who claim a clear and shared Islamic orientation, leading to an emerging "Islamic public space" enjoying more popular legitimacy than the state and its associated political elite (Holder 2013:145).

Since Mali's colonial era, as Bleck (2013:401) observes, "Western-educated elites have held a monopoly over national-level politics." Their narrow background has occasionally led them to pursue policies, such as the abandoned attempt to reform Mali's Family Code (Soares 2009), which have been deeply unpopular with the public. Malians for whom Islam is a primary identity component have been less likely than their more secular peers to vote, and their concerns have seldom been articulated by secular activists. To foster truly extensive political participation in Mali, will Malian civil society ultimately need to include leaders whose identities are not explicitly secular? "The discussion of certain contentious issues, such as privatization and traditional values, may require the emergence of political actors from different backgrounds with non-Western backing, or simply of creative politicians who decide to seize the opportunity to win votes," write Bleck and van de Walle (2011:1139). Graduates of Mali's burgeoning network of private Islamic schools may prove able to fill this void; Bleck (2015) has found Islamic schools as likely as secular schools to empower citizens to gain political knowledge.

More research is needed to explore religion's potential to occupy a larger place in Malian public life. Given the gravity of the economic and security threats facing Mali today, it is not difficult to imagine the country's secular and religious activists finding the common ground necessary to work together to strengthen their society against these threats.

References

Africa Confidential. 2014. "IBK Ducks the Blame for Kidal." *Africa Confidential* 55 (11). www.africa-confidential.com.

Africable. 2012. "Entretien avec Capitaine Amadou H. Sanogo." March 22. http://youtu.be/frvhWhcX_-s.

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Afrobarometer. 2013. *Sommaire des résultats, Round 5*. http://www.afrobarometer.org.
Aidi, Hisham. 2014. *Rebel Music: Race, Empire and the New Muslim Youth Culture*. New York: Pantheon.
Allen, Nathaniel D. F. 2013. "Misreading Mali's Collapse: Governance, Foreign Aid, and Political Instability in Emerging Democracies." *Journal of Public and International Affairs* 23: 7–28.
Bah, Tahirou. 2010. *Mali: Le procès permanent*. Paris: Karthala.
Baudais, Virginie. 2015. *Les Trajectoires de l'État au Mali*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
Baudais, Virginie, and Gregory Chauzal. 2006. "Les partis politiques et l' 'indépendance partisane' d'Amadou Toumani Touré." *Politique Africaine* 104: 61–80.
Bergamaschi, Isaline. 2014. "The Fall of a Donor Darling: The Role of Aid in Mali's Crisis." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 52 (3): 1–32.
Bleck, Jaimie. 2013. "Do Francophone and Islamic Schooling Communities Participate Differently? Disaggregating Parents' Political Behaviour in Mali." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 53: 377–408.
———. 2015. *Education and Empowered Citizenship in Mali*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Bleck, Jaimie, and Nicolas van de Walle. 2011. "Parties and Issues in Francophone West Africa: Towards a Theory of Non-Mobilization." *Democratization* 18: 1125–45.
Bratton, Michael, Massa Coulibaly, and Fabiana Machado. 2002. "Popular Views of the Legitimacy of the State in Mali." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 36: 197–238.
Chazan, Naomi. 1992. "Africa's Democratic Challenge." *World Policy Journal* 9: 279–307.
Comaroff, John L., and Jean Comaroff. 2001. "Introduction." In *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa*, edited by John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, 1–43. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Coulibaly, Massa, and Michael Bratton. 2013. "Crisis in Mali: Ambivalent Popular Attitudes on the Way Forward." *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 2: 1–10.
Dulani, Boniface. 2014. "Malian Democracy Recovering/Military Rule Still Admired." Afrobarometer Policy Paper 12. www.afrobarometer.org.
Friedrich Ebert Foundation. 2012. "Mali-Mètre 1: Que veulent les Maliens?" www.fes-mali.org.
———. 2013. "Mali-Mètre 2: Que pensent les Maliens?" www.fes-mali.org.
———. 2016. "Mali-Mètre 7: Que pensent les Maliens?" www.fes-mali.org.
Gavelle, Johanna Siméant, and Laure Traoré. 2013. "Le court terme de la légitimité: Prises de position, rumeurs et perceptions entre janvier et septembre 2012 à Bamako." *Politique Africaine* 130: 23–46.
Guindo, Sidiki. 2012. "Résultat d'une enquête d'opinion sur la crise post coup d'état du 22 mars:—52% de la population veut une transition dirigée par Dioncounda Traoréz—54% des Maliens optent pour l'utilisation de la force pour libérer le Nord." June 1. www.maliactu.net.
Hagberg, Sten, and Gabriella Körling. 2012. "Socio-political Turmoil in Mali: The Public Debate Following the Coup d'Etat on 22 March 2012." *Africa Spectrum* 47 (2–3): 111–25.
Holder, Gilles. 2013. "Un pays musulman en quête d'Etat-nation." In *La tragédie malienne*, edited by Patrick Gonin, Nathalie Kolok, and Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, 131–57. Paris: Vendémiaire.

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

INSTAT (Institut National de la Statistique). 2011. *Enquête légère intégrée auprès des ménages (ELIM)* 2010. Bamako: Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances.

Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). n.d. "Voter Turnout Data for Mali." http://download.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=145.

Jonckers, Danielle. 2011. "Associations Islamiques et Démocratie Participative au Mali." In *Les sociétés civiles dans le monde musulman*, edited by Anna Bozzo and Pierre-Jean Luizard, 227–48. Paris: La Decouverte.

Keita, Naffet. 2013. "Y a-t-il un gouvernement légimite au Mali?" In *La tragédie malienne*, edited by Patrick Gonin, Nathalie Kolok, and Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, 83–91. Paris: Vendémiaire.

Lecocq, Baz, et al. 2013. "One Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts: A Multivocal Analysis of the 2012 Political Crisis in the Divided Republic of Mali." *Review of African Political Economy* 40: 343–57.

Mann, Gregory. 2015. *From Empire to NGOs in the West African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Morgan, Andy. 2014. "The Voice of the Voiceless: An In-Depth Portrait of Mali's Hip Hop Scene." www.redbullmusicacademy.com.

Radelet, Steven C. 2010. *Emerging Africa: How 17 Countries Are Leading the Way*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Global Development.

Radio France International. 2012. "La chute d'Amadou Toumani Touré au Mali ou la défaite d'une politique de consensus." March 23. http://www.rfi.fr.

Reuters. 2016. "One Dead in Protest in Mali Capital over Arrest of Talk Show Host." August 17. http://www.reuters.com.

Richmond, Samantha, and Carmen Alpin. 2013. "Governments Falter in Fight to Curb Corruption." Afrobarometer Policy Paper 4. http://www.afrobarometer.org.

Roy, Alexis. 2005. "La société civile dans le débat politique au Mali." *Cahiers d'études africaines* 178: 573–84.

Sanogo, Amy. 2012. "Mme Traore Coumba Bah, présidente de génération malienne consciente (GEMACO): 'J'ai eu un sentiment de colère à l'endroit des anciens dignitaires de ces 20 dernières années, soit disant démocratiques.'" *Inter de Bamako*, October 9. http://news.abamako.com.

Siméant, Johanna. 2014. *Contester au Mali: Formes de mobilisation et de la critique à Bamako*. Paris: Karthala.

Soares, Benjamin. 2009. "The Attempt to Reform Family Law in Mali." *Die Welt des Islams* 49: 398–428.

Tulet, Amélie. 2014. "Mali: Sirafily Diango, le théâtre face à la 'responsabilité générale.'" Radio France International, April 27. http://www.rfi.fr.

Villalòn, Leonardo A., and Abdourahmane Idrissa. 2005. "The Tribulations of a Successful Transition: Institutional Dynamics and Elite Rivalry in Mali." In *The Fate of Africa's Democratic Experiments: Elites and Institutions*, edited by Leonardo Villalòn and Peter VonDoepp, 49–74. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Walton, Jeremy. 2013. "Confessional Pluralism and the Civil Society Effect: Liberal Mediations of Islam and Secularism in Contemporary Turkey." *American Ethnologist* 40: 182–200.

Whitehouse, Bruce. 2013. "'A Festival of Brigands': In Search of Democracy and Political Legitimacy in Mali." *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 35 (2): 35–52.

———. 2014. "Suspecting the State: How Mass Suspicion Brought Down a President in Mali, West Africa." Paper presentation, American Anthropology Association, Washington, D.C., December 4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Notes

1. According to World Bank data cited by Allen (2013), net official development assistance to Mali more than doubled between 2000 and 2010.
2. Sources such as the CIA World Factbook and the City Mayors Foundation estimate Bamako's rate of population growth between 4.4 and 6 percent annually, making it one of the fastest-growing cities on earth. The same sources put Mali's national urbanization rate at approximately 5 percent per annum.
3. See Whitehouse (2013) for a more detailed overview of the weakening of the rule of law during ATT's reign. On land expropriation, see Bah (2010).
4. Also consider the refrain (sung in English) of the song "Politic Amagni" by the popular Malian duo Amadou et Mariam (from their 2005 recording *Dimanche à Bamako*): "Politics needs blood, politics needs cries/Politics needs human beings, politics needs votes/That's why, my friend, it's in evidence/Politics is violence."
5. Malian state television broadcast this encounter on February 4, 2012, apparently with the intention of quashing rumors, regaining control of the narrative about recent events in the north, and alleviating public suspicion toward the head of state. Unfortunately, the government's media strategy proved unsuccessful: my interactions with Bamako residents at the time suggested that those who had watched the broadcast were more likely to remember the women's indirect accusations than the president's detailed replies. In retrospect, airing the footage of the encounter only exacerbated public perceptions of Touré's illegitimacy. On March 19, six weeks after the broadcast, and following a second military defeat in the north, another demonstration was organized in Kati. This time the protesters openly called for Touré's resignation. See Whitehouse (2014).
6. It is notable that no mobilization openly took place in Bamako to advocate reinstating the ousted head of state. ATT was so unpopular by the time of the putsch that hardly anyone was willing to demand his return, and a poll conducted in Bamako one month after the coup found that strong support for his ouster coexisted with strong support for a return to constitutional rule (Guindo 2012).
7. Following Chazan (1992:287), I understand civil society groups as interacting with but autonomous from the state. They must also have "specific and well-defined objectives, participatory governing structures, discrete constituencies, activities that go beyond catering to the immediate interests of their members, and an ability to form alliances with other groups with quite different declared purposes."
8. With the exception of Fanta's interview, conducted in English, all other interviews were conducted in French. All translations are my own.
9. The lyrics to "S.O.S." read, in part, "The people are enraged, their dreams are being killed / They don't know what to believe in, falsehood is raised up while the truth gets buried" (my translation). The video is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMJWoDeBRcg.
10. Approximately 45 percent of registered voters actually cast ballots, but turnout represented less than 41 percent of the voting-age population; see IDEA (n.d.).
11. According to Mariam, Plus Jamais Ça was finally allowed to register with Mali's Ministry of Territorial Administration in January 2014.

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press

12. Morgan (2014) cautions that Mali's most successful rappers are not necessarily its most politically outspoken: he draws a contrast between "le rap populiste," performed by artists whose concerts can fill stadiums, and "le rap moraliste" of less popular artists like Amkoullel and Tata Pound.
13. Commenting on the results of the December 2013 Afrobarometer survey, Dulani (2014:15) writes that "public opinion might be skewed by the euphoria of a return to democracy and a honeymoon period for President Keita's administration. Indeed, previous survey evidence has shown that new leaders in Mali often enjoy high trust levels at the start of their presidency but that this progressively declines over time."

https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.9 Published online by Cambridge University Press