

CORRUPTION AND VIOLENCE IN AFRICA: WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

By Sarah Graveline

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Sarah Graveline is a Research Associate in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses.



On May 26, 2015, cars queue in front of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation headquarters to buy fuel in Abuja, Nigeria. Nigeria will start selling and buying oil and gasoline directly to cut out middlemen and curb graft. (Source: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba File.)

TURKEY AND AFRICA AFTER THE FAILED COUP

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July 2016, Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen speaks to members of the media at his compound, in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused Gulen of orchestrating the failed military coup attempt in Turkey, by placing his followers into positions of power decades ago. Gulen denies any involvement. (Source: AP Photo/Chris Post, FILE.)

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The Institute for Defense Analyses is a non-profit corporation operating in the public interest.

IDA’s three federally-funded research and development centers provide objective analyses of national security issues and related national challenges, particularly those requiring scientific and technical expertise.

IDA’s Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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Since its inception in 2013, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has become the deadliest of the United Nations' (UN) 16 ongoing peacekeeping operations worldwide. Through August 31, 2016, [106 UN peacekeepers](#) have perished in Mali, including 69 from acts of violence, especially by use of improvised explosive devices (IED). Fatalities in 2016 have already exceeded those of 2015. What is MINUSMA, how have IEDs affected its mission, and what are the UN's impediments to countering IEDs in Mali? [more...](#)

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Mali. (Source: CIA, "Mali," *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html>.)

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Corruption and Political Power: Pay to Play

Access to political power is a key factor driving corruption in Africa. Elites use corruption to build [personal wealth](#), but more perniciously, they leverage corruption to fund clientelist networks that enhance their political power. In a 1993 [article](#), Ernest Harsch reviewed academic literature describing the formation of these networks across Africa in the post-colonial period, finding that corruption has enabled the rise of powerful elites in an ideologically diverse group of countries across the continent.

Elites' ability to turn illicit gains into political power hinges on the development of patronage networks. As Inge Amundsen [argues](#), elites gain power by ensuring that the benefits of corruption flow in two ways: through extractive corruption, in which resources flow "from society to the state," and through redistributive corruption, in which financial benefits move from elites to the public. These flows are purposely imbalanced. Elites extract tangible resources from the public, including "money, wealth, and fiscal privilege," so that they can redistribute intangible resources, including "influence," "identity," and "security," which encourages self-perpetuating reliance on elites.

Patronage Improves State Cohesion ... Up to a Point

Although corruption has clear moral and financial costs, scholars find that it can actually strengthen state cohesion by lessening the risk of coups and civil war in the short term. [Leonardo Arriola](#) used cabinet appointments in 40 African countries as a proxy for the size of a leader's patronage network, finding that leaders with large networks were statistically less likely to be deposed in coups.

Similarly, Hannah Fjelde [studied](#) the onset of civil wars between 1985 and 1999, finding that countries with higher levels of corruption in their oil sectors were at less risk of entering into conflict than less corrupt oil-rich states. Fjelde hypothesized that this was because elites could use ill-gotten oil rents to co-opt potential spoilers.

These findings were supported in 2013, when Rabah Arezkie and Thorvaldur Gylfason [studied](#) resource rents and corruption in 29 African countries. The authors found that although higher resource rents indicated higher levels of corruption, states with the largest increases in resource rents were also the least likely to experience conflict because their leaders could "quell the masses through redistribution of rents to the public."



On May 26, 2015, cars queue in front of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation headquarters to buy fuel in Abuja, Nigeria. Nigeria will start selling and buying oil and gasoline directly to cut out middlemen and curb graft. (Source: AP Photo/Sunday Alamba File.)

In the long-term, however, scholars generally agree that patronage networks alone are not strong enough to hold a state together. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way [tested this hypothesis](#) in Kenya, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, finding that financial patronage was not enough to co-opt potential spoilers during times of crises and that elites were forced to rely on identity-based ties, such as ethnicity, to ensure compliance.

Corruption Decreases Barriers of Entry to Conflict

Corruption can make conflict more likely. Access to large sums of illicit money can drive the price of patronage to an unsustainable level, leading to a fracturing of the elites and formation of new armed groups. Alex de Waal [argues](#) that this occurred in South Sudan following the oil shutdown in 2012 and ultimately caused the ensuing civil war. Unsustainable patronage networks have also played a role in the fractionalization of militias in the eastern [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), leading to increased conflict from 2012 to 2015.

Corruption also can ensure that elite spoilers have access to the cash necessary to fund militias, thereby increasing the ease with which elites can use violence for political means. In a 2002 [article](#), William Reno argues that in failed states the fractionalization of patronage networks has led to increased violence because patrons can easily provide weapons to small groups, leading those who would pursue large-scale political change to be subsumed in the proliferation of violent feuds between local rivals.

Similarly, [CMI researchers](#) documented this trend through qualitative interviews with elites, finding that elites themselves recognize the destabilizing impact of violently targeting opponents, but believe this self-perpetuating trend cannot be easily overcome because the financial barriers to violence are so low.

Corruption Makes States Fragile from the Bottom Up

Corruption's most pernicious impact is increased state fragility. This increase occurs as citizens grow disillusioned with the prevalence and impact of kleptocratic networks on their daily lives. As [scholars](#) have [documented](#), not only does corruption weaken macroeconomic growth, but the daily experience of being shut out of patronage networks and coerced into paying excessive bribes also generates grievances that weaken state cohesion. As Abhijit Banerjee argued in a 1997 paper on [misgovernance](#), governments that purport to serve the poor experience agency problems in which government officials' best interests align with corruption, rather than the people they serve.

This conflict of interest can frequently take on regional and ethnic dimensions. For example, Tarila Marclint Ebiede [argues](#) that corruption has led directly to conflict in the Niger Delta because locals believe violence is the only way to reclaim the financial benefits of oil production from corrupt government officials. Similarly, in *It's Our Turn to Eat*, Michela Wrong ties Kenya's 2007–2008 post-election violence directly to corruption organized along ethnic lines, arguing, “had all Kenyans believed they enjoyed equal access to state resources, there would have been no explosion [of violence].”

Vertical Kleptocracies Increase Insecurity

As Sarah Chayes documents in *Thieves of State*, in pernicious kleptocracies, corruption enables security forces to abuse local populations. This abuse can lead locals to support insurgencies and terrorism. In these countries, kickbacks flow from the lowliest policemen to the highest politicians. This vertical structure means that it is in elites' best interests to ensure that even the most junior police and soldiers have complete impunity because any accountability would negatively affect elites' bottom lines.

Elites' protection of low-ranking security officials leads to abuse, as shown by [Human Rights Watch](#) in Nigeria. Maria Eriksson Baaz and Ola Olsson also [document](#) this vertical structure in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, using qualitative interviews to show how ordinary citizens and high-ranking authorities collude to ensure property crime goes unpunished when it benefits dominant groups. The World Bank also recognizes this risk. In its 2011 [report](#) “Conflict, Security, and Development,” the World Bank argued that when governments do not protect citizens from corruption or provide access to justice, violent conflict becomes more likely.

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Conclusion

Academic research on the links between corruption and conflict shows both the importance of stemming corruption and the risk that narrow interventions may do more harm than good. Efforts to cut off illicit financial flows could inadvertently lead to the fractionalization of patronage networks by increasing competition over the remaining financial resources. There is little to stop this heightened competition from spilling over into violence.

Ultimately, corruption is both a political and a financial challenge. Although the international community can limit access to many of the financial tools that enable corruption, changes in political norms seem required to make significant steps toward its eradication.

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Three Phases of Turkish Engagement with Sub-Saharan Africa

The history of Turkish relations with sub-Saharan Africa can be divided into [three periods](#). The first covers the centuries-long existence of the Ottoman State. During that time, the territories of several future African countries were part of the Ottoman Empire. In sub-Saharan Africa, that included enclaves on the Horn of Africa and political and security relationships in northwest Africa. As Ambassador David Shinn argues in a Chatham House [paper](#), Turkish influence on sub-Saharan Africa during this period was not significant.

During Turkey's republican era beginning in 1923, Turkish-African relations were [downgraded](#). Turkey was focused on its internal modernization and on developing strong relationships with the countries of the West. Turkey became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and a candidate for membership in the European Union (EU). It did, however, establish diplomatic relationships with some of the newly independent states of Africa.

The third period of Turkey's relations with sub-Saharan Africa began in 1998 with an [opening toward Africa](#). The opening was in part a reaction by the Turkish government to the EU's failure to recognize Turkey as a candidate state in 1997. It was also propelled by an outpouring of [private Turkish humanitarian assistance](#) to conflict-ridden Somalia in 1996 and to Ethiopia in 1999–2000. The government's Action Plan, prepared in 1998, provided a roadmap for expanded political, economic, and cultural cooperation with Africa. The Plan was essentially on hold until 2005 due to a variety of Turkish internal and political problems, but it began to blossom in 2005 when the government of then-Prime Minister Erdogan proclaimed "the year of Africa."

Aid, Education, Infrastructure, and Guns

Turkey became a major player in sub-Saharan Africa in a remarkably short period of time. Its success was largely due to the comprehensive nature of its engagement. At the government leadership level, Turkey has paid a great deal of attention to sub-Saharan Africa. President Erdogan's June 2016 visit to Kenya and Uganda was his [10th official trip](#) to the region. The Turkish leader took a robust business delegation with him on this trip, and he noted that Turkey's trade with sub-Saharan Africa had grown eightfold to \$6 billion annually since 2000. Other aspects of Turkish engagement include humanitarian assistance, expansion into sub-Saharan Africa by Turkish Airlines, and large-scale educational and cultural programs.

Turkish engagement in Somalia provides the best example of President Erdogan's strategy. As reported by the [World Policy Institute](#), Erdogan touched off a new era for Somalia when he landed in Mogadishu on August 19, 2011, with two plane loads of Turkish politicians, businesspeople, journalists, and even a reality television star. The visit occurred only weeks after al-Shabaab had given up control of the city. Even before the visit, the Turkish Red Crescent organization had been active in Mogadishu decontaminating water supplies; clearing mountains of trash; and setting up schools, clinics, and refugee centers. In the year following Erdogan's visit, 1,200 Somali students were provided full scholarships for university studies in Turkey. During 2011, the Turkish private sector provided \$365 million in aid to Somalia, and the government added \$49 million. Turkey took the courageous step of setting up a resident embassy in Mogadishu, and Turkish construction firms undertook large-scale infrastructure projects. The UN's deputy humanitarian coordinator in Somalia praised Turkey, stating that the Turks had accomplished more in a few months than any other nation or aid group in 21 years. Ordinary Somalis were impressed that Turks in Mogadishu often lived [among the people](#) rather than in fortified compounds.

The Hizmet Factor—Before and After the Coup Attempt

Hizmet, or "Service," is the [movement](#) connected to Fethullah Gulen, the Muslim cleric who was once one of President Erdogan's most enthusiastic supporters. Gulen fell out of favor when police and prosecutors seen as sympathetic to him opened a corruption investigation into Erdogan's inner circle in 2013. Gulen sought refuge in the United States, where he continues to live. Following the June 2016 failed coup, Erdogan accused Gulen of having been the principal instigator, and he has launched a campaign against Gulen's interests worldwide, including in sub-Saharan Africa.

Hizmet has been the [cornerstone](#) of the Turkish approach to Africa. On its own, Hizmet has sponsored the establishment of 110 primary, middle, and secondary schools and one university in sub-Saharan Africa. These schools enjoy generally excellent reputations and often serve the families of top officials and business leaders. The Hizmet presence extends beyond education. The movement has had a close relationship with TUSKON, a nongovernmental and nonprofit umbrella organization that represents Turkish business federations and associations and Turkish entrepreneurs and companies. TUSKON has been the most important Turkish organization involved in trade and investment promotion in Africa.

Even before the failed coup, President Erdogan was [actively campaigning](#) in Africa to limit the influence of Gulen, even demanding that African countries close Gulen schools. This campaign has intensified [following the coup](#). African responses have varied. Somalia shut down premises belonging to the Gulen movement hours after the coup attempt. In Nigeria, on the other hand, the request of the Turkish ambassador that Gulen schools be shut down was met by a storm of protest.

Conclusion

The problem for President Erdogan—and for sub-Saharan Africa—is that Gulenist organizations have been the motors of the Turkish opening toward Africa. Without the support of Gulen, some Turkish businesspeople may be less likely to invest in Africa. And even if current Gulen schools continue to operate, it is unlikely that the movement will be able to establish many additional ones on its own. President Erdogan himself may be too distracted by internal security concerns to invest much time in the relationship with Africa, especially if governments on the continent do not yield to his demands. All in all, it appears that there may be a pause in the Turkish opening to Africa. Coming at a time when the continent is facing significant economic headwinds, a decline in Turkish engagement would be a negative development.

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Establishment of MINUSMA

[MINUSMA](#) was established following a rebellion in northern Mali. In January 2012, militants from the nomadic Tuareg ethnic group calling themselves "Mouvement national pour la liberation de l'Azawad" (MNLA), supported by al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other Islamist groups, [declared independence](#) and overran government positions. Fighters destroyed Islamic shrines and imposed Sharia law. In March 2012, disaffected Malian soldiers overthrew the government in Bamako. With Islamic fighters pushing south and its army in disarray, Mali's transitional government requested and received French military intervention ([Operation Serval](#)) in January 2013. MINUSMA was authorized by Security Council [Resolution 2100](#) in April 2013, and a [ceasefire and preliminary peace agreement](#) were accepted by all parties in June 2013.



Mali. (Source: CIA, "Mali," *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html>.)

Ceasefire Breaks Down and Peacekeepers Are Targeted

By the end of 2013, hostilities resumed, making it impossible for MINUSMA to carry out its mission as intended. [As one scholar commented](#): "They are peacekeepers in what is generally not a peacekeeping mission . . . It is still an active insurgency." While peacekeepers have died from illness and accidents, most fatalities have been due to what the UN calls "malicious acts." These include rocket attacks and ambushes, but most casualties have been caused by IEDs, which [the UN confirmed](#) have "emerged as a weapon of choice for perpetrators of violence in Mali." [In May 2016 alone](#), there were five IED attacks against UN forces on patrol, resulting in 11 killed and 10 injured. One of these attacks was a suicide vehicle-borne IED attack and the others were IEDs detonated remotely or by proximity activator. Insurgent tactics have adapted and, by mid-2016, most IED attacks were followed by ambushes. One [French officer](#) commented on the evolving tactics of the insurgency: "They are watching us all the time and they adapt very quickly . . . They put an IED in one place, and if it doesn't work, they put it 10 km away to fit our technology. At present, one is more likely to be affected by an IED than get shot."

Impediments to Countering IEDs

- **Lack of Counter-IED Policy.** [The UN considered the IED problem](#) before the initial deployment of MINUSMA, but decided to send peacekeepers despite the absence of a comprehensive counter-IED policy and strategies for training and tactics. The UN continued its [ad hoc approach](#) even after casualties mounted in 2014 and 2015. Historically, most UN peacekeepers regardless of location have not been authorized to disarm or destroy "operational" IEDs (as opposed to "remnant" or abandoned IEDs) for fear of reprisal against UN personnel or assets.

- **UN Has Emphasized Land Mines, Not IEDs.** The UN agency responsible for countering IEDs is the United Nations Mine Action Service ([UNMAS](#)), founded in 1997 to rid the world of abandoned landmines—“explosive remnants of war” (ERW). The UNMAS engagement in Mali, which predated MINUSMA, was oriented toward removal of ERW, a mission that continues today. UNMAS now also provides counter-IED support to MINUSMA, largely through private companies, such as the British-based [Optima Group, which was contracted](#) to train peacekeepers in IED awareness. Most contributing nations have little to no experience operating against IEDs, and they lack training, technology, and equipment to provide adequate force protection.
- **Lack of Equipment.** Vehicle design is a critical aspect of force protection from IEDs. Mine resistant ambush-protected vehicles (MRAP), with V-shaped hulls to deflect explosive blast, were not in MINUSMA’s inventory in 2013, and there were only [about six MRAPs as of May 2016](#). Given the hundreds of miles between garrisons and the requirement for frequent patrols and resupply, more MRAPs are needed. [UN Security Council Resolution 2295](#) (June 2016) approved deployment of additional mine-protected vehicles to Mali. Besides citing the need for MRAPs, [experts have long recommended](#) acquisition of counter-IED equipment, including electronic countermeasures; ground-penetrating radar; and reconnaissance technologies such as small, tactical, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). Often, deployment of sophisticated equipment depends on donations from countries with advanced militaries.
- **Operations-Intelligence Integration—A New Concept?** Locating IEDs is an intelligence-driven process. [The Netherlands](#), which provided 450 military personnel, led establishment of MINUSMA’s All Sources Intelligence Fusion Unit in 2015, and Resolution 2295 sought to buttress intelligence capabilities even further. While “ops-intel” integration is routinely executed by NATO nations, soldiers from developing countries are not necessarily accustomed to this concept. For example, when asked how to counter Islamist fighters’ use of IEDs, Burkina Faso [Brigadier General Sidike Treore described](#) intelligence as a “new” tool.

Current Status

In 2015, [MINUSMA’s mission was expanded to include](#) supporting, monitoring, and supervising implementation of the peace agreement; stabilizing the country; protecting civilians; and providing humanitarian assistance. In June 2016, the [UN extended MINUSMA’s mandate](#) through June 30, 2017. Of note, French forces have continued their national counterinsurgency mission in Mali (and other Sahel countries) via [Operation BARKHANE](#), which includes an air and ground campaign and cross-border operations against groups opposed to Mali’s central government.

Today, [MINUSMA has 15,209 members](#), including an additional 2,500 approved in June 2016. MINUSMA has an annual budget of \$933 million and is commanded by [Major General Michael Lollesgaard, Danish Army](#). There are nearly [50 contributing countries](#), with two-thirds of the force coming from 22 African countries. The top three force providers are Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, and Chad. [Troops are garrisoned in 14 locations](#), with large concentrations in Bamako (HQ), Gao, Kidal, Timbuktu, and Tessalit.

The Way Forward

While progress has been slow, the UN recognizes the need for a comprehensive policy on countering IEDs. Operational changes, though, will likely continue to be defensive in nature to ensure the UN’s neutrality. For example, the UN does not currently permit MINUSMA to destroy proactively IED assembly facilities or target personnel involved in IED production.

[Several thousand peacekeepers have received IED awareness or response training](#), and for the first time last year, training was conducted in peacekeepers’ home countries before their troops were deployed. High IED-related casualties in 2016 may be due in part to Islamist fighters’ ability to adapt to UN tactics.

Casualties may fall if more MRAPs join the MINUSMA fleet. Improvements in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems and processes could help as well.

Conclusion

The UN appears committed to improving force protection for MINUSMA peacekeepers. Whether those improvements result in lower casualties in 2017 remain to be seen.

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