

MISTRUST & IMBALANCE: THE COLLAPSE OF INTER COMMUNAL RELATIONS & THE RISE OF ARMED COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION OF THE NIGER-MALI BORDER

This fact sheet provides a snapshot of conclusions from a case study in Niger of the RESOLVE Network's Community-Based Armed Groups Research Initiative that investigates the dynamics of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) to identify potential approaches to engage, manage, and transform them. Southwest Niger is punctuated by anti-state attacks, the targeted killing of traditional chiefs, and attacks on markets and other socioeconomic convening locales. Community-based armed groups (CBAGs) of Fulani and Tuareg ethnicity have aligned themselves with outside actors carrying out operations in the region. This factsheet provides a summary of ongoing conflict dynamics and the knowledge and attitudes around actors participating in the violence. To learn more about the research methodology and detailed findings, please refer to the RESOLVE Research Report by Rahmane Idrissa and Bethany McGann: [Mistrust & Imbalance: The Collapse of Intercommunal Relations and the Rise of Armed Community Mobilization on the Niger-Mali Border](#).

KEY FINDINGS



The state of war in the region, waged through subterfuge, mass killings, and violence perceived by civilians as unregulated has created an ambiance of mistrust and “psychosis” in the border regions. There is a sense of confusion within local populations regarding who the perpetrators of violence are and why they are perpetrating violence.



Dissatisfaction with governance, especially from the central state, is prevalent. The difference in outcomes between the two research sites, Ayorou and Abala, suggests that government policy can make a difference in perceptions of the government's ability to be an effective actor in reducing inter-communal conflicts.



Collapse of the balancing mechanisms has removed the checks on limited violence and reprisals carried out by ethnic, caste, and identity-based militias. Without checks, and few interlocutors who can safely intercede in inter-communal violence due to the presence of jihadists, score-settling from decades of resource competition and political reformation drive additional violence beneath the surface of the conflict in the region.



Relations between and within communities rest on economic interdependence. However, when communal interdependence is premised on inequality and marginalization of one of the groups in the relationships, the potential gains of alliances with external actors to shift the balance of power in these relations might drive individual recruitment into violent extremist groups or realpolitik deal-making with violent extremist actors.



Armed groups operating in Niger have largely exhausted the recruitment drivers stemming from community-level crises. Current dynamics suggest more of a large-scale hostage-taking than active participation. Unlike Mali, CBAGs did not reach the same level of organization and establishment in Niger.

MOVING FORWARD

01

The central government should better understand sociopolitical issues to stem the spread of the conflicts. Economic interdependence means that the conflicts are damaging for all communities. Specific local political economy analysis is required to understand interdependence, negotiation, and cooperation over resources. Given that inter- and intracommunal relations are vital to peacekeeping, state agents, especially in the security sector, should be trained to learn the culture and histories of the locales and address corruption and abuses.

02

Establish a High Authority for Peace Consolidation (HACP) or similar agency that focuses on emergencies and investigates caste and class-related political issues to step up crisis prevention, conflict analysis, and peacebuilding efforts.

03

Improve the interplay of institutional mechanisms to regain conditions of balance. More research, perhaps social network analysis, could show the precise nature of the interactions between personal relationships at the local level and their feedback into formal governance structures.

04

The Nigerien government should professionalize the traditional chiefs. While chiefs may resist further formalization as destructive to their informal privileges, the real resistance comes from the central government. High professional standards would increase trust in chiefs to act in complex social settings, especially proximity chiefs (village, tribe), the least professional and least integrated into the administrative scheme.

05

The mandate of local elected officials should be extended to land issues. Land issues, including access to natural resources, i.e., the demarcation between pastureland and farmlands, would become less of a source of conflict if they were subjected to local democracy with the norms of accountability, transparency, and publicity.

06

The national leadership should develop its vision of peace and launch a sustainable campaign of persuasion. The emotional appeal of culture is critical in this context, especially as a response to the Salafist message. Messaging through social networks and other informational techniques adapted to the context will strengthen the strategy.

07

Policymakers may be inclined to attempt ethnic-specific interventions, given the enduring grievances between and within ethnic groups and how they motivate youth to support militancy and jihad. However, main barriers to inter- and intracommunal conflict resolution stem from communities' inability to participate in the public square and lack of access to decision-makers. Policymakers should support platforms allowing local communities to articulate their needs, frustrations, and potential solutions.

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