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Rebuilding trust in national police: The case of the UN mission in Mali

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Abstract

International interventions often aim to reinforce both capacity as well as perceived legitimacy of national security forces. However, how peacekeeping operations manage to improve trust in the national police has received limited attention. In this article, we evaluate whether and how UN missions can (re-)build trust in the national police focusing on the case of Mali. We combine data on UN local deployment and nationally representative survey rounds from the Afrobarometer. We use the wealth of information from the survey to disentangle the mechanisms linking UN peacekeeping to positive changes in trust in national police. Employing a difference-in-difference estimation, we find that respondents in locations that hosted UN police report higher trust toward the national police forces compared to respondents in the control group. We find that this may be due to UN police improving perceptions of safety, accessibility to and integrity of national police forces.

Along with trust in government, trust in the police and security institutions is one of the most important indicators of the population's overall trust in political institutions, especially in conflict-ridden contexts. The police are typically considered the most visible arm of the government, as they directly interact with local communities. Interactions with the police can shape how the state is perceived and accepted in the eyes of its population. However, police forces are seldom trusted in conflict settings. This is due to their potential active involvement in the conflict, their perception as highly corrupt, or the absence of functioning formal security institutions in most areas of the country. Hence, the relationship between the police and communities in conflict-affected countries is often characterized by deep distrust, even

in cases where community policing projects aim to increase cooperation and trust with civilians (Osland & Røysamb, 2022).

Acknowledging the importance of citizens' perceptions of law enforcement institutions, peacebuilding efforts undertaken by the United Nations (UN) often aim at reinforcing both capacity as well as perceived legitimacy of national police as integral components of stabilization and democratization agendas (Osland, 2019). Furthermore, scholars have underscored the critical link between policing and peacebuilding, emphasizing that effective and legitimate policing is essential for maintaining peace and stability in post-conflict states (Blair & Morse, 2021). Echoing this, peacebuilding literature highlights the importance of police reform in post-conflict and developing

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countries, focusing on the necessity to address issues of trust, legitimacy, and accountability within law enforcement institutions (Furuzawa, 2021). That is, the role of police reform in peace agreements and the influence of international involvement on domestic police reform processes have garnered significant scholarly attention (Ansorg et al., 2016). Importantly, as Osland notes (2019), UN missions' police component (UNPOL) plays a pivotal role in both maintaining security and restoring trust. Specifically, UNPOL's key task is "to realise effective, efficient, representative, responsive and accountable police services that serve and protect the population" (United Nations, 2016).

While almost all UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs) have been mandated with police reform-related tasks since 2000, we know very little about whether they do improve trust toward the national police. Research by Blair (2020) shows that peacekeeping missions with mandates and civilian expertise in security sector reforms can strengthen the rule of law, but whether this positive institutional outcome is accompanied by more positive citizens' attitudes toward the police remains unknown. In this article, we evaluate *whether and how UNPOL can build trust in the national police*. We base our analysis on three possible mechanisms linked to the provision of material and non-material support, as well as a reputational spillover. First, we posit that the presence of UN police might overall contribute to improved perceptions of safety, which can have spillover effects and positively affect the reputation of the national police. Second, UNPOL activities improve perceptions (and experiences) of reliability and responsiveness, possibly inducing citizens to rely more on police support and making access to such support easier. Finally, international oversight and attention to procedural justice should improve police integrity (i.e., perceptions of corruption and experiences of bribing). This is because UN police forces provide training and support for national police and implement monitoring and reporting mechanisms on the ground that can tackle police misconduct more efficiently.

We select Mali as our case study for two reasons. First, it presents a challenging test for our theory, given that the civil war was ongoing during the deployment of the UN mission, and the emergence of new armed groups added complexity to the conflict. This is common to other contemporary and prominent PKOs, such as UNMISS (South Sudan) and MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of the Congo). The war involved a complex interplay of ethnic, jihadist, and state actors. Initially, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) sought independence for northern Mali (Azawad) in 2012. However, jihadist groups like Ansar Dine and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) soon overpowered the MNLA, imposing strict Islamic rule. In response, the

Malian government, supported by French-led Operation Serval in 2013 (later Operation Barkhane), pushed back jihadist forces, though instability persisted. By 2016–2017, new jihadist groups emerged, specifically the Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which united several al-Qaeda-linked factions, and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), now Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP). While JNIM focused on local alliances, ISSP pursued a more violent, expansionist strategy, leading to direct clashes between the two groups from 2020 onwards.

Amid these dynamics, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was deployed in 2013 to monitor a peace agreement between the government and the Azawad movement, excluding Islamist organizations. MINUSMA's complex mandate encompassed security and peacebuilding goals. As part of this, UN police (UNPOL) advised the national police and gendarmerie on adhering to international human rights standards and promoting public order and the rule of law. These efforts aligned with broader UN peacekeeping objectives to enhance security, support the rule of law, and build sustainable peace in post-conflict settings. MINUSMA's mission ended abruptly in December 2023 when the Malian government requested its withdrawal.

Second, Mali offers valuable geocoded survey data on institutional trust before and after MINUSMA's deployment, enabling a more credible assessment of PKOs' impact on public trust in the police.

We test our expectations by combining data on subnational peacekeeping deployment with geocoded surveys conducted in Mali by the Afrobarometer. These surveys are nationally representative and usually include 1,500–2,500 individuals per country. Afrobarometer has conducted surveys in Mali nine times since 2001, also including participants in areas close to MINUSMA bases as well as in the epicenter of the Islamist violence in the Sahel, the Liptako-Gourma region. Afrobarometer also asks questions about trust of the respondent in state institutions including the *Police Nationale du Mali* or the *Gendarmerie Nationale du Mali*.¹ We merge geocoded information on respondents' location at the second-order administrative unit level with geocoded peacekeeper's presence in the same administrative unit (Cil et al., 2020). Based on a difference-in-difference estimation, our findings indicate that the deployment of UN Police under MINUSMA in Malian administrative units correlates with increased public trust in the national police, compared to areas without UNPOL presence. Upon further

¹ The gendarmerie is a military police force operating alongside the Police Nationale, primarily responsible for law enforcement in rural and non-urban areas. See wording of questions in Supporting Information (SI) pp. 2–3. Importantly for this article, UNPOL's mandate was to work with both national police and the gendarmerie.

investigation, we also find that this effect is likely driven by improvements in safety, responsiveness, and integrity that UNPOL may be contributing to because of the targeted and specific activities it is mandated to carry out. As a corollary, the deployment of UN troops does not exhibit the same positive association with trust in national police and, in fact, is found to potentially curb the beneficial effects of UNPOL in some cases. This underscores the specific and potentially unique role that UN police can play in engaging with local populations.

POLICE TRUST IN CONFLICT-RIDDEN ENVIRONMENTS

Beyond the challenging task of building trust in the police in an unstable environment, there is a wide range of scholarship assessing determinants of trust in the police more generally. Performance-related issues of the police, as well as procedural aspects of the police, are determinants of trust in the police. These can be the perception of security in the neighborhood, levels of crime, but also fair treatment by police officers (Goldsmith, 2005; Jackson & Bradford, 2010; Oberwittler & Roché, 2018; Tyler, 2005). The levels of corruption in the police are also a driver for low levels of trust (Malone & Dammert, 2021; Singh, 2022). Ethnic bias of the police, or authoritarian tendencies, also tend to have a negative effect on citizens' trust levels in the police (Curtice, 2021, 2022).

Conflict-affected societies often exhibit lower levels of institutional trust compared to more stable environments. Extensive research has explored the determinants and dynamics influencing this phenomenon. For instance, Habyarimana et al. (2007) argue that violence intensifies trauma, which in turn erodes trust between ethnic communities. Nevertheless, the findings vary across different societies. Hence, Rohner et al. (2013) and De Luca and Verpoorten (2015) observe that violence diminishes social trust in Uganda. Conversely, Bellows and Miguel (2009) and Gilligan et al. (2014) report increased trust in communities affected by violence in Sierra Leone and Nepal, respectively. Furthermore, Bakaki and Dorussen (2023), through a survey experiment in Haiti, demonstrate that trust levels vary depending on the type of institution involved. These contrasting findings highlight that violence not only affects individuals differently but also shapes trust in diverse ways, influenced by historical and cultural contexts (De Luca & Verpoorten, 2015; Ingelaere & Verpoorten, 2020). A common theme in this research is that distrust persists long after conflict ends, undermining social cohesion and stability (Celestina, 2018; Gibson, 2004). Rebuilding trust is particularly challenging in societies with unstable political and social relations (Benzing,

2020). While previous studies have extensively examined generalized (social) trust, this study centers on institutional trust—specifically, public confidence in formal institutions like the police—which is a distinct yet equally critical component of societal trust.²

Generally, the levels of trust in political institutions are associated with the performance of the government (Hetherington, 1998; Levi et al., 2009). In conflict or post-conflict countries, however, this relationship is severely disturbed due to years of instability, lack of social order, and ongoing violence. Research on conflict exposure and institutional trust suggests that individuals who directly experience conflict exhibit lower levels of overall institutional (as well as social) trust (Kibris & Gerling, 2022). This is due to the psychological impact of conflict on individuals' worldviews, which become more negative as a consequence of the traumatic experience. In fact, Kibris and Gerling (2022) show that trust toward security institutions (army and police) are not affected at all by direct exposure to conflict. Moreover, these are the only institutions for which no effect is detected in their analysis. This indicates the need for a deeper understanding of how conflict and peace interventions may shape trust in the security sector.

Research also identifies interventions that can foster positive attitudes toward police in post-conflict contexts. In an experimental setting in post-conflict Liberia, Karim (2020) finds that interactions with state agents such as police officers can increase trust in the police. Blair et al. (2019) illustrate how patrolling and information campaign by Liberian Police Support Unit improved citizens' awareness of Liberian police forces and produced tangible reductions in some forms of crime. However, they find no evidence that the program shaped trust toward police. One of the motivations they provide for this null finding is that “perceptions are sticky and hard to change” (Blair et al., 2019, p. 653). Related to this, we suggest that more comprehensive interventions may elicit a stronger response from citizens. Hence, our focus on a longer, sustained, and nationwide intervention (i.e., a multidimensional UN peace mission) can shed light on which interventions can positively change perceptions of police forces.

UN PKOs play a pivotal role in rebuilding the security sector in conflict-affected countries. UN PKOs assist host nations in re-establishing the rule of law and strengthening security institutions, including the national police, to foster sustainable peace (e.g., Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions [OROLSI]). Blair (2021) finds that UN peacekeeping does improve the rule of law when it has a mandate and the civilian expertise to support security sector reforms. Further-

² Research shows that institutional and generalized trust are positively but weakly correlated with each other (Carlsson et al., 2024).

more, citizens also tend to rely more heavily on state over non-state authorities when it comes to the most serious incidents of crime. Using Afrobarometer survey data from Liberia, Di Salvatore (2022) finds a positive effect on exposure to peacekeeping troops and citizens' trust toward the government. However, she also reports important legitimacy trade-off between facilitating effective governance to boost popular support and replacing national governments in their key functions (p. 1).

UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS AND TRUST TO POLICE

This research bridges two key areas: what shapes public trust in the police and the role of UN PKOs in strengthening national institutions. UN peacekeeping missions, particularly through their police components, not only help maintain security in conflict zones but also support the development and reform of host-state law enforcement agencies. By focusing on how peacekeeping interventions shape institutional trust, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of post-conflict state-building processes. Research on PKOs has shown that UN missions in conflict and post-conflict countries tend to reduce violence and effectively protect civilians (Haass & Ansorg, 2018; Hegre et al., 2019; Hultman et al., 2013). Furthermore, peacekeeping missions have been found to reduce conflict intensity and casualties, highlighting their role in mitigating the negative effects of conflict on households' economic well-being (Bove et al., 2022; Di Salvatore, 2019). But over the years, UN peacekeeping has evolved from traditional operations to more articulated missions that include peacebuilding goals. The so-called peacebuilding turn in UN peacekeeping has resulted in mandates that focus on democratic elections, security sector reform, and support of an independent media and civil society (Campbell & Di Salvatore, 2023). Most contemporary UN missions include tasks related to the reform of the security sector and support to the national police. Even more importantly, all UN peacekeeping missions have a UN police component whose key role is to support, train, and help rebuilding national police.

Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to examine the role that PKOs—and specifically the UN police component—can play in fostering trust in national police institutions. In fact, the concept of trust varies significantly across contexts and subjects, making its analysis inherently complex. Broadly, trust refers to the formation of expectations about the risk involved in interacting with others (Rousseau et al., 1998). Scholarly literature distinguishes between several types of trust based on their focus. This article focuses specif-

ically on trust toward the police as a form of *institutional trust*—defined as the confidence individuals place in formal institutions (Nannestad, 2008; Uslaner & Conley, 2003). As we explain later, our analysis draws on data from the Afrobarometer, which captures precisely metrics related to generalized, and institutional trust by simply asking how much a respondent trusts an institution or other people in general.

In relation to UN missions, we contend that through their UNPOL contingent, UN missions can significantly shape individuals' trust in the police, especially in areas where UNPOL operates alongside national police forces. First, UNPOL increasingly engage with local communities to support peace processes in war-torn countries (Smidt, 2019), which can in turn contribute to building trust in local law enforcement. The level of cooperation required in PKOs, not only between different national military contingents but also between militaries and international police and civilian staff, personnel from local institutions and municipalities, and local communities, highlights the collaborative nature of peacekeeping efforts, which can foster trust in local police (Bakaki & Dorussen, 2023; Dorussen et al., 2021; Singleton & Holohan, 2017). Evidently, the deployment of MINUSMA incorporated both police and military forces simultaneously because the mission had to address both security threats and governance issues in a complex, unstable environment. In addition, good governance implies higher levels of political trust. That is, trust is undermined when governments fail to address local concerns (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016, p. 69). Therefore, UN police as part of PKOs can, through their engagement with local communities and collaboration with national police, contribute to increasing trust in local police forces. On January 20, 2018, UNPOL and Malian police conducted a joint night patrol in Mopti and Sévaré aimed at combating banditry and safeguarding civilians. Local responses indicate that such operations enhance public reassurance and exemplify effective cooperation between MINUSMA and national security actors (UK Ministry of Defence, 2020). In the case of Mali, UNPOL “strengthen and restore security through their presence in communities” and “provide advice to national police services” (Homepage MINUSMA), thus actively contributing to trust in national police. Second, among its many tasks, UNPOL trains national security forces and ultimately has a beneficial effect on the rule of law. In fact, these positive outcomes are mostly driven by the work carried by UNPOL and other personnel assigned to rule of law (Blair, 2020). As re-establishing the rule of laws implies that “disputes can be resolved through transparent, publicly promulgated laws enforced by *fair and accountable* security and justice institutions” (Blair, 2020, p. 51), we expect that these positive insti-

tutional changes will be reflected in more positive perceptions of police. In Mali, UNPOL's mandate includes to "train and strengthen the national police" and "provide expertise and assistance to the national police"³. We expect that better training and adherence to international standards of human rights will contribute to increased trust in police forces as better conduct of the police will lead to improved relationships between police and civilians. Furthermore, the reform and professionalization of the police carried out with UNPOL support, such as in Mali as part of MINUSMA, have the potential to enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of the police, thereby contributing to increased trust among the population (Furuzawa, 2021).

To this end, Figure 1 visualizes the presence of police stations across Mali through all Afrobarometer survey rounds before and after the deployment of MINUSMA. The enumerator is asked to report whether there is any police station in the enumeration area they survey, so this excludes *cercles*⁴ that were not sampled in a given wave. We find that there is an increase of about 38% in the presence of police stations within the Primary Sampling Unit or Enumeration Area, from survey round 6 (start of the UNPOL deployment) to round 7. In lack of better data on national police deployment, we note that the expansion maps onto UNPOL's presence, hence suggesting higher chances that UNPOL and national police would be able to cooperate.

Hence, our first, overarching hypothesis is as follows:

H1. *Individuals exposed to UNPOL presence experience higher trust toward the national police.*

Next, the question raised is how does UNPOL rebuild trust in police? The specific mechanisms through which UNPOL activities may foster trust toward the police are linked to two main activities they carry out, namely, operational support and capacity building and development (CBD). By carrying out these activities, which we detail below, UNPOL can:

1. make the national police more effective at performing their job thanks to training and enhancing capacity (material support),
2. improve interactions between police and citizens through policing practices and citizens' awareness (non-material support), and
3. give legitimacy to the national police by working together with them in activities that are highly visible to citizens (reputational spillover).

Through such mechanisms, CBD and operational support activities are likely to improve perceptions of

safety, reliability, and responsiveness and integrity of national police in the eyes of citizens. Although CBD activities are carried out by UNPOL, we do not exclude the possibility that the presence of military forces in MINUSMA has also played a crucial role in enhancing security and stability, and thus overall safety in the area so that CBD activities can be carried out. The military forces in MINUSMA were deployed to, among other things, providing logistical and force protection for the broader mission. We will return to this and the related issue of military and police co-deployment in the empirical part of the article.

UNPOL's operational support is critical in conflict-affected contexts where states are rebuilding their security apparatus. Operational support involves assisting the national police in key policing activities. Under operational support, UNPOL conducts joint patrols and joint operations, public order management, and investigations with the national police. In doing so, UNPOL's assistance enhances the effectiveness of the police, which research shows to be associated with trust (Torres, 2017). Furthermore, working alongside UNPOL may benefit the reputation of national police. UNPOL contingents are found to reduce civilian deaths (Hultman et al., 2013) and is the only UN armed contingent associated with lower criminal violence (Di Salvatore, 2019). Given their contribution to public safety, UNPOL's joint activities with national police may be particularly prone to shape citizens' perceptions of safety, which are likely reinforced by the visibility of the regular joint patrolling. For example, since the reopening of the market in Konna in central Mali in late 2013, one of the epicenters of Mali's violent conflict, regular joint foot patrols and "market walks" of UNPOL and Malian Security Forces have helped build confidence and foster a sense of stability among the local community while contributing to durable peace in the area (UK Ministry of Defence, 2020).⁵ Hence, we expect trust toward the police to be higher due to actual improvements in effectiveness due to UNPOL's material support as well as the reputational spillover according to which citizens attribute UNPOL's security improvements to national police that works with them. To summarize, we have the following hypothesis:

H2. *Individuals exposed to UNPOL presence report to feel safer.*

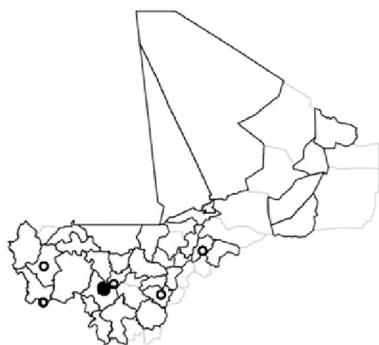
However, improving safety may not be enough to reinforce trust toward the police if safety comes at the expenses of accountable and fair policing practices. Acknowledging this, UNPOL capacity-building activities aim at fostering community policing, which

³ Available at: <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/minusma-police>

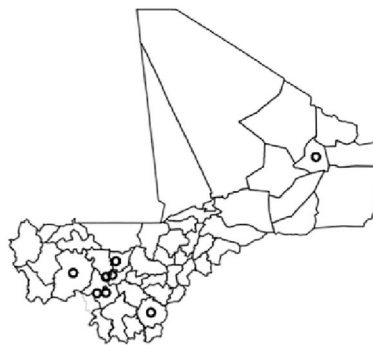
⁴ Malian administrative term.

⁵ Available at: <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/news/how-regional-market-started-flourishing-due-un-patrols>.

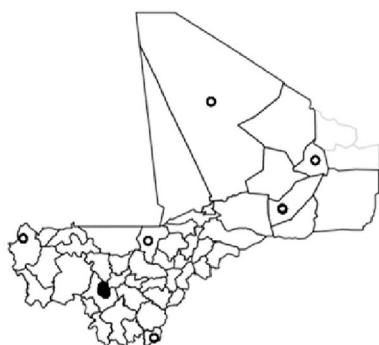
(a) Police stations, round 2



(b) Police stations, round 3



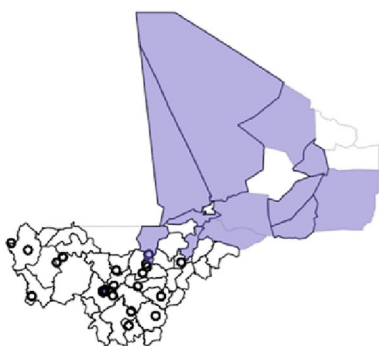
(c) Police stations, round 4



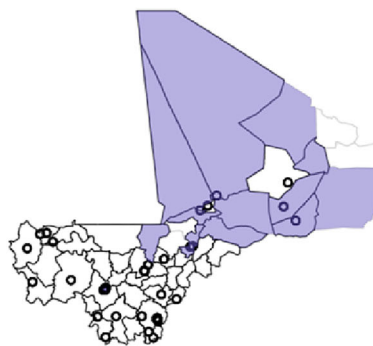
(d) Police stations, round 5



(e) Police stations, round 6



(f) Police stations, round 7



 MINUSMA
  Afb sampled
  Malian police stations

FIGURE 1 Police stations in Mali before and after the deployment of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). *Notes:* The figure maps the presence of police stations (hollow circles) in Malian *cercles* over all Afrobarometer survey rounds, as well as information on MINUSMA's deployment (in purple).

focuses on the relationship between police and citizens. Responsiveness, reliability, and integrity in policing are more likely to foster cooperation from civilians. Along these lines, Blair et al. (2021) report that community-oriented policing in the Global South has no effect on citizens' trust toward the police. Some of the causes behind this relate to, among others, the lack of will, ability, and resources needed to enable the shift toward community policing and implement it effectively. Senior officers may be unwilling or unable to commit to the shift, frequent rotations required repeated training of new officers, and community-policing tasks were often assigned without considering adequate resourcing. We argue that these challenges can be mitigated by the CBD activities carried out by UNPOL since training, resources, and mobilization of political will are exactly what the UN can bring in to support a more community-oriented policing that can foster trust. In Mali specifically UNPOL "assist[ed] national police in their strategic planning and provide[d] technical support" alongside operational assessments and training of police⁶. In other words, community policing implemented with the support of the UN is more likely to succeed and boost trust in national police.

Indeed, research has shown that peacebuilding initiatives, such as those involving police training and capacity-building programs, can contribute to enhancing citizens' knowledge of the police and the legal system, thereby increasing trust and reliance on the police (Albrecht & Edu-Afful, 2024). To this aim, UNPOL and national police can conduct public information and awareness campaigns and ensure access to police services 24/7. This should increase the likelihood that citizens will at least attempt to reach and get police support, if needed. In Mali, UNPOL assisted with specific tasks in field sites where expertise is lacking, for example, in the area of child and women protection (Hunt, 2020, p. 10). This in turn created a greater reliance of the population on the police in these areas.

Moreover, we expect that the training and capacity building such as carried out by UNPOL in Mali should be beneficial to daily citizens-police interactions too, that is, on *how* policing is conducted. UNPOL's training of the national police also conveys a sense of compliance with international standards of human rights and promotes public order and the rule of law. For instance, as of January 2020, UNPOL under MINUSMA had trained 140 Malian police officers (89 men and 51 women) to combat human trafficking and smuggling. With the support of UNPOL, Malian police units were able to rescue Guinean women exploited in prostitution in Mali (UNODC, 2020). These interactions are crucial in building police legitimacy as

they can be used by citizens to "update their priors about the competence and professionalism of the police force as a whole" (Blair et al., 2019, p. 643). Citizens' encounters with police involve dialogue, neutrality, respect, and trustworthy motives, and are more likely to improve legitimacy and foster compliance with police (Mazerolle et al., 2013). Such positive interactions enhancing perceptions of fairness are found to significantly contribute to trust toward the police, sometimes more than the actual performances of state agents (Hinds & Murphy, 2007; Jackson & Bradford, 2010). Research from criminology has largely focused on these effects in relatively stable contexts, but research on conflict-affected and post-conflict countries provides similar support for the importance of procedural justice as a condition for police legitimacy (Abril et al., 2025; Blair et al., 2019). Besides advising and training national police to set international policing standards, UNPOL—as in the case of Mali—is also involved in community engagement activities with national police as well as in monitoring police compliance with the abovementioned policing standards, for example, on issues such as bribery and corruption (UNODC, n.d.). We expect these activities to improve perceptions of police integrity and reduce citizens' reporting of police misconduct, that is, bribe-taking.

H3. *Individuals exposed to UNPOL presence report more reliance on national police.*

H4a. *Individuals exposed to UNPOL presence have lower perceptions of corruption within national police.*

H4b. *Individuals exposed to UNPOL presence are less likely to report bribing practices carried out by the national police.*

Figure 2 outlines this theoretical framework succinctly.

EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

To assess the impact of peacekeeping on trust toward the national police, we focus on the case of Mali and the UN stabilization mission (MINUSMA) authorized in 2013. More specifically, we use two key geocoded data sources. We combine the geocoded survey data on citizens' perceptions from the Afrobarometer (BenYishay et al., 2017) with information of subnational deployment of the MINUSMA's police (GeoPKO Data, Cil et al., 2020). Our unit of analysis is the individual respondents participating in each of the Afrobarometer survey rounds between 2002 and 2017 (survey rounds 2 to 7).⁷ Afrobarometer

⁶ Available at: <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/minusma-police>

⁷ Round 1 is not geocoded, and we do not include it in our analysis. Given the time period covered by GeoPKO, we cannot include more recent rounds.

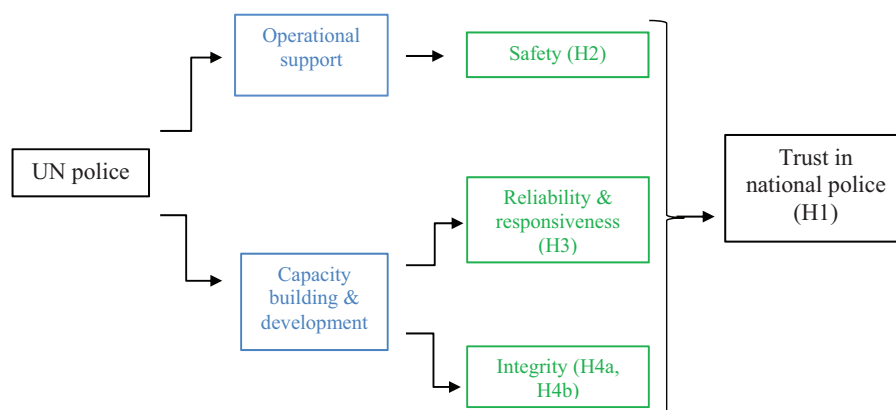


FIGURE 2 United Nations Police (UNPOL's) activities linked to trust toward national police. *Notes:* Outline of theoretical framework. In blue, we indicate UNPOL core activities; in green, we identify citizens' perceptions these activities are expected to shape.

uses stratified random sampling to ensure representation across key demographic groups and to enhance generalizability by reducing selection bias. Area stratification minimizes the risk of excluding specific ethnic or language groups. Politically significant populations are often intentionally oversampled to allow for meaningful subsample analysis. The sampling process begins with the random selection of enumeration areas to capture both urban and rural regions. Within each area, households are randomly chosen, followed by the random selection of one adult per household, typically using the next-birthday rule.⁸

In Mali, the Afrobarometer carried out survey rounds 1 to 7 from 2002 to 2017; thus, we have survey data before and after the arrival of MINUSMA (though geocoding is only available from round 2 onwards). Rounds 6 and 7 were carried out after the deployment of MINUSMA had started. The GeoPKO data on MINUSMA's bases are geocoded at the level of the second-order administrative unit (*cercles*). A respondent is considered as exposed to MINUSMA (treated) if its village located in a *cercle* that also hosts MINUSMA police units.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the Afrobarometer respondents across all waves as well as the deployment of MINUSMA in Malian *cercles*. On average, each unit accounts for about 2% of respondents from the Afrobarometer, with the capital Bamako hosting up to 12%. The Northern part of the country is more rural and with lower population density as it overlaps with the Sahara Desert region. Therefore, it is expected to see more Afrobarometer respondents sampled in the South. Although the PKO mission is largely spread across the country, they also address conflict hot spots (Ruggeri, Dorussen, and Gizelis 2018) and in areas where there is a significant need for the mission's presence, that is, the North of Mali partially controlled by

the Azawad movements who claim to represent Tuareg people fighting for their independence, as well as the Liptako-Gourma region, which is a hotbed for violent extremism in the Sahel.

Dependent variable

For the dependent variable, *trust in police*, we use the information provided by the Afrobarometer, using the question "how much do you trust the police/gendarmerie?"⁹ This is an ordinal variable that ranges from not at all (0), just a little (1), somewhat (2), to a lot (3). In our sample across all survey rounds, 36.5% of the participants indicated they trust the police a lot, and 20% of the participants said they do not trust the police at all. To simplify interpretation of our main analysis, we recoded this variable to a binary item where 0 refers to no or little trust and 1 is somewhat and a lot of trust. We show results using both the ordinal and dichotomous measures in our analysis.

We further explore additional paths linking UNPOL to increased trust toward national police and more specifically exploring more disaggregated measures that imply trust to national police. To this aim, we select additional questions related to safety, reliability, and responsiveness, and integrity as closely as possible. First, we measure *safety perceptions* using the survey questions that ask respondents whether they personally feel safe from crime and violence and 0 otherwise. We find that about 77% of the participants expressed a feeling of safety from crime and violence across all rounds. To capture citizens' perceptions of police reliability and responsiveness, we use two dichotomous measures. The first codes whether respondents tried to reach out to police for assistance, hence proxying whether citizens thought they

⁸ Available at <https://www.afrobarometer.org/surveys-and-methods/sampling/>.

⁹ Refer to the SI pp. 2–3 for detailed wording of the survey questions.

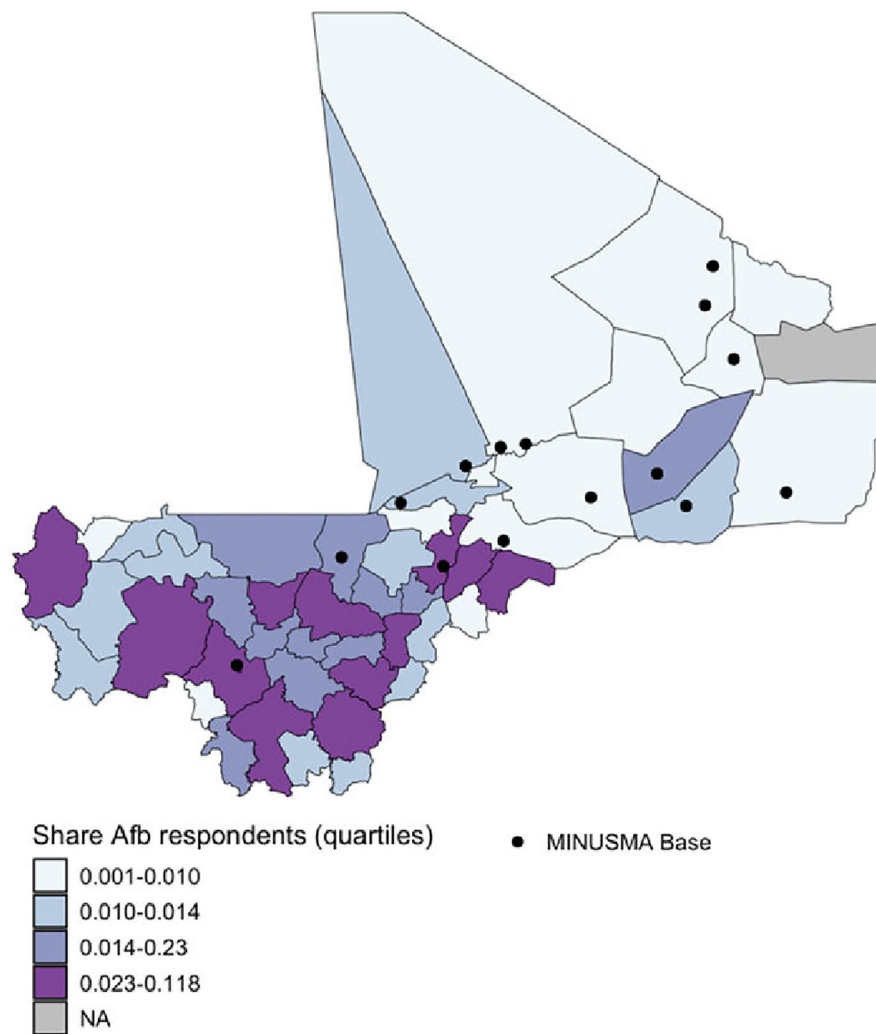


FIGURE 3 Distribution of Afrobarometer respondents and the deployment of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). *Notes:* Black circles indicate the presence of MINUSMA deployments in Malian cercles. Darker shades indicate a higher share of respondents in that cercle being surveyed in the Afrobarometer in our sample.

could rely on the national police; another question focuses on whether respondents found it easier to get police assistance compared to the past. About 38% of respondents tried to get support from the police, and among them 42% found it relatively easy to get assistance. Furthermore, we also look at the perceptions of integrity using two additional measures: one measuring the extent to which citizens believe the police is corrupt (from 0 for “none is corrupt” to 3 for “all are corrupt”) and another one measuring respondents had to pay bribes to avoid problems with the police. On the former, on average citizens assess police corruption to be relatively common but not extremely widespread (1.7, but with a standard deviation of 1). The latter variable captures the quality of interaction with the national police, hence proxying notions of procedural justice discussed in the theory. About 14% of respondents report bribing the police to avoid problems. Notably, while bribes are expected to correlate with perceptions of corruption, we find that

this may not necessarily be the case as the correlation between the two variables is relatively weak (.14). This could be due to the underreporting of bribing, although the wording of the bribing questions tends to put the blame on the police and framing the respondent as a victim of this malpractice. The questions indeed ask respondents to indicate how often they had to pay a bribe to get assistance from the police or to avoid problems with the police. In any case, perceptions of corruptions are only in part driven by interactions with the police, which justifies the use of both indicators (see also Daxecker et al., 2019, on the discrepancy between actual and perceived electoral fraud in Nigeria).

Independent variable

To define our treatment variable, we consider presence (or absence) of UN police in an administrative

unit based on subnational deployment data from GeoPKO (Cil et al., 2020). We measure this as a binary variable that equals 1 when UN police are deployed to a *cercle* at a given time, and 0 otherwise. MINUSMA's deployment starts in July 2013, hence we have treated individuals from the Afrobarometer survey in rounds 6 and 7. In rounds 6 and 7, 20% of the respondents are "treated," meaning they are interviewed in a *cercle* hosting a UNPOL base. The deployment remains almost unchanged in this period as also shown in Figure 5, hence allowing us to implement a difference-in-difference estimation without any staggering.

Control variables

We include a set of control variables at the individual level, and some at the country level. We start with some demographic information such as respondents' age and reported gender (female is coded as 1). We also consider a categorical indicator on education level of respondents (0 to 9) as education is highly correlated with political attitudes and behavioral patterns (Schlozman et al., 2012).

We then incorporate a set of indicators that capture political engagement and preferences. Trust to an institution may be related to individuals' overall trust to government or authorities because it influences how individuals perceive and interact with political systems, institutions, and actors. First, we include an indicator on satisfaction with democracy (from 0 for "not satisfied" to 4 for "very satisfied"). It reflects trust in democratic processes and institutions. Higher satisfaction with democracy suggests that individuals feel their political system is functioning well, which can positively correlate with a willingness to engage in political activities such as voting, participating in civic discussions, or advocating for changes (Zmerli & Newton, 2008). Second, we add a binary variable to control participants being active community members who may have stronger ties to social networks, access to information, and a sense of responsibility for collective well-being (Marsh & Akram, 2015). Third, we ask whether they trust the government (president in the case of Mali) as this may be associated with a general level of trust toward formal institutions in general. Fourth, we control for public political engagement that influences voting behavior or participation in protests or movements, questioning the extent to which participants discuss politics with friends/relatives (never to frequently, 0 to 2), and their perception of unfair treatment from the government due to their ethnic affiliation. The latter is relevant particularly considering ethnic cleavages of the civil war. People who perceive that they are being unfairly treated by the government due to their ethnic background may be less

likely to trust political institutions and/or the police (see also Morgan & Kelly, 2021).

Urban and rural areas often have different social, economic, and political dynamics that can shape people's interactions with political systems and institutions. Hence, we also control for the location of the participants in terms of population density where urban is coded as 1 and 0 otherwise (Cattaneo et al., 2022). Before the full outbreak of war, violence in Mali was primarily localized and centered around insurgent-state clashes, such as the Tuareg rebellions of the 1990s and 2000s, with limited one-sided violence against civilians. Importantly, even increased military presence in the north prior to 2012 did not lead to widespread civilian targeting, reflecting significant variation in the nature and scale of violence over time. At the *cercle* level, we use ACLED data (Raleigh et al., 2010) to control for the average number of violent events recorded in the *cercle* before survey round at time t and the previous survey round, by disaggregating violence against civilians and battle-related deaths. We employ the mean value, calculated by summing all recorded violent events and battle-related deaths in the *cercle* up to the interview date and dividing by the number of data points. Our model also includes a dummy that codes presence of UN troops deployment (1 when UN troops are deployed to a *cercle* at a given time, and 0 otherwise) without UNPOL so that the reference group for the treatment is no UN presence at all. It is therefore, likely, and according to our data that UN troops presence appears in instances where the UN police is not present (yet not the other way around). This is consistent with our theoretical framework; UN troops often provide the security umbrella that enables other mission components to carry out tasks beyond physical protection, such as the ones UNPOL is tasked with. Other work finds that UNPOL may mitigate some unintended effects of military deployments (Di Salvatore, 2019) due to its specific activities and tasks. We interpret our results accordingly, as we expect that co-deployment of UNPOL along with troops is more beneficial to trust than the deployment of troops alone.

We finally include *cercles* and survey round fixed effects in our models to control for time-invariant features on *cercles* as well as round-specific differences. The latter may include temporal shocks to the conflict, such as the arrival of transnational Jihadist groups to the country. Table 1 presents descriptive information for all covariates employed in the models.

Our estimation strategy uses a difference-in-difference approach as specified in the equation below:

$$Y_{ijt} = \alpha_i + \delta (UNPOL_{jt} * Post_t) + \gamma X_{ijt} + \Theta Z_{jt} + \mu_j + \eta_t + \epsilon_{ijt},$$

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics

	Obs	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
United Nations Police (UNPOL) (post-deployment)	1,440	0.33	0.47	0	1
Trust to police binary	7,102	0.59	0.49	0	1
Trust to police categorical	7,102	1.75	1.15	0	3
Safety	6,042	0.77	0.42	0	1
Tried to reach police	5,995	0.38	0.49	0	1
Police assistance easy	2,303	0.42	0.49	0	1
Police corruption	6,825	1.66	1.00	0	3
Paid bribe to police	3,794	0.14	0.34	0	1
Female	7,359	0.50	0.50	0	1
Age	7,267	40.22	15.24	18	115
Education	7,352	3.62	3.46	0	9
Urban location	7,359	0.33	0.47	0	1
Active community member	7,355	0.05	0.22	0	1
Satisfaction with democracy	7,153	2.44	1.08	0	4
Not discriminated	7,072	0.85	0.36	0	1
Discuss politics	6,063	0.85	0.73	0	2
Trust for president	7,122	0.67	0.47	0	1
One-sided violence events	7,359	0.22	0.85	0	7.50
Battle-related events	7,359	0.45	1.86	0	21.80
UN military (post-deployment)	1,440	0.38	0.49	0	1

Note: Summary statistics of all variables included in the analysis.

where Y_{ijt} is respondents i 's trust toward the national police (or one of the other dependent variable of interest) in *cercle* j and Afrobarometer round t ; $UNPOL_j$ indicates the presence of MINUSMA police in the *cercle* throughout the deployment phase, and is interacted with a dummy for the post-deployment period $Post_t$. The vectors X_{ijt} and Z_{jt} include respondents' characteristics and time-varying *cercle*'s characteristics (i.e., violence) over time. Finally, we include *cercles* and survey rounds fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at the treatment level, that is, *cercles*.

IDENTIFYING THE EFFECT OF UNITED NATIONS DEPLOYMENT

The credibility of the diff-in-diff estimates we present here hinges upon the parallel trends assumption, that is, trends in trust between treated and control units should be similar before the treatment occurred. This assumption could be violated if, for example, the UN selected deployment locations based on levels of trust toward the police or based on other factors that shaped trust (e.g., intensity of violence). Figure 4 provides some diagnostics regarding the parallel pre-trends' assumption behind the difference-in-difference estimation (results are shown in SI p. 4). The models

used to test the assumption control for the same variables added to the difference-in-difference model, hence including previous violence. The results show that particularly the linear trend model depicts parallel pre-trends for the control and treatment groups.

Even so, if violence explains both levels of trust toward the police and UN deployment patterns, this is a significant threat to the identification of a causal effect. To reinforce the credibility of our results, we perform four additional checks. To begin with, we show and report that MINUSMA's deployment pattern does not change over time, hence does not clearly follow violence as expected. Figure 5 below shows MINUSMA bases in 2014 (first year of deployment) and 2017 (last year of deployment we include in the analysis). Overall, there are no major changes in the deployment, except two new bases in Niafunké and Timbuktu. Note that Timbuktu was already hosting a base since 2014, hence respondents in that unit were already considered as treated anyway. Hence, this shows that deployment does not necessarily move with violence in Mali, and other time-invariant factors driving it are already captured by unit fixed effects.

Second, we replicate our main models using Afrobarometer rounds 5 to 7 only (Table S13 on p. 5). Round 5 was carried out just 7 months before MINUSMA deployed to Mali, hence it provides an ideal pre-

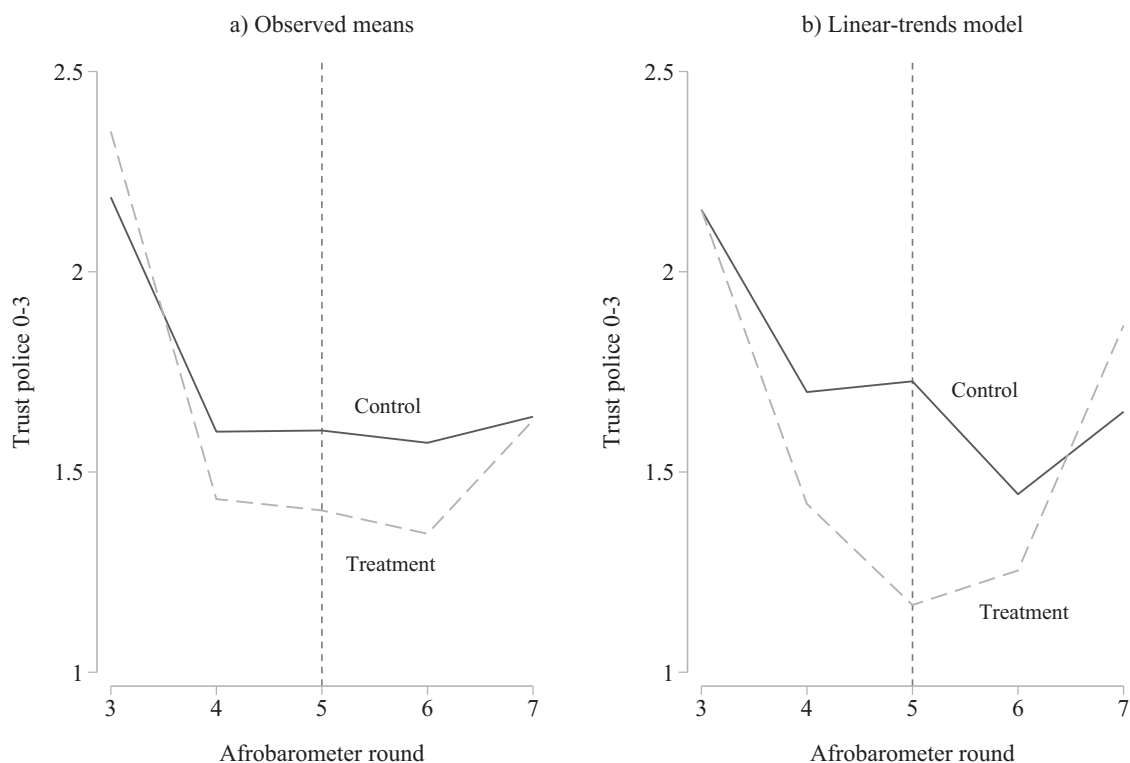


FIGURE 4 Diagnostics for parallel trends. *Notes:* Testing the parallel-trends assumption, results based on Table S12. Control variables and fixed effects added.

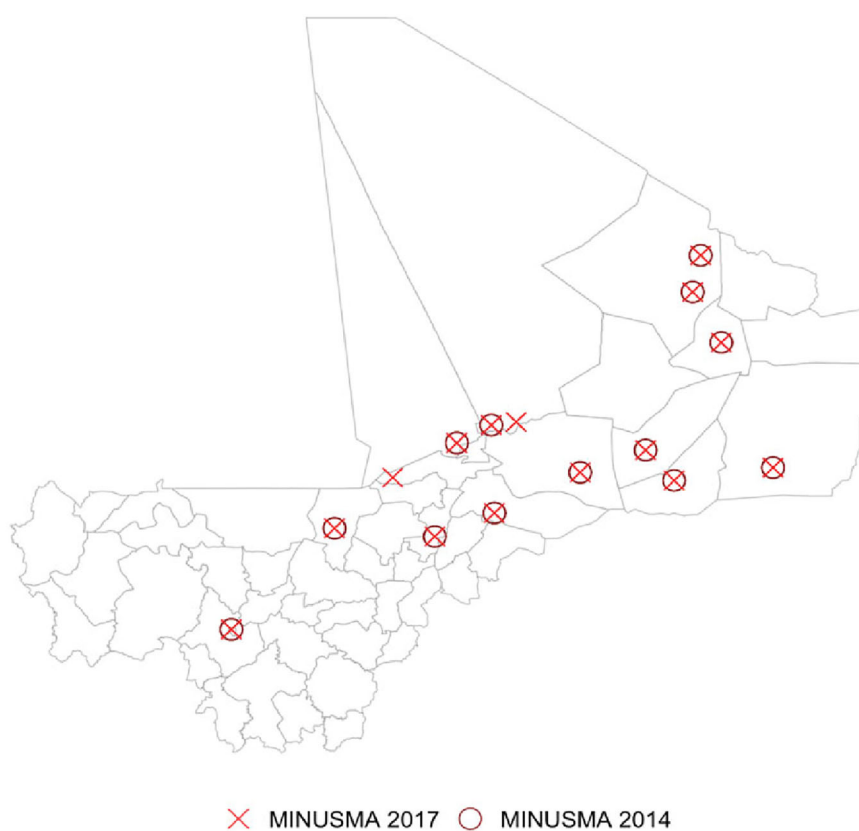


FIGURE 5 Changes in United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) deployment. *Notes:* Comparison between MINUSMA bases' location in 2014 and 2017.

deployment reference for our estimation. By doing so, we exclude the possibility that the results are driven by the inclusion of earlier rounds (although our regressions include survey rounds fixed effects along with unit-level fixed effects).

Next, we use coarsened exact matching (Iacus et al., 2012) to further reduce potential imbalance among observations that could be due to pretreatment levels of violence or levels of trust. We already control for violence before the Afrobarometer round but with matching we further reduce potential imbalances between treated and control units by matching observations based on pre-deployment levels of violence and trust toward the police. This is to ensure the results are not driven by (i) difference in violence that may influence the selection of deployment locations or (ii) pre-existing levels of low trust in deployment locations. Details on the procedure and the results are reported in the SI (Table SI4, p. 6) and are consistent with what we present in our main analysis.

Finally, we include a falsification test. If our results are fully driven by the selection process through which MINUSMA picks locations with more violence or other factors that shape trust, we should find an association between deployment and trust toward other institutions too. Also, while trust toward police and trust toward the government likely correlate, the mechanisms through which UNPOL should shape trust for the police are not expected to boost trust toward *any* institution. The falsification test evaluates whether our treatment correlates with changes in trust toward other institutions namely government (the president, in the case of Mali), parliament, the ruling party, the opposition party, and traditional leaders. We replicate the main difference-in-difference model we have estimated when using the degree of trust toward national police. Models in the SI (Table SI5, p. 7) do not detect any significant association between UNPOL and trust toward any of these institutions. This supports an interpretation of our results in line with the argument that UNPOL seems particularly well-suited to foster trust toward national police, as intended by the UN.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Figure 6 shows the results of our difference-in-difference linear regression estimation by comparing dichotomous and ordinal measures of trust.¹⁰ In both cases, we find that the deployment of UNPOL (which to reiterate, occurs along with UN troops in MINUSMA) in administrative units is associated with an increase in (the likelihood of) trust toward national police compared to units that never received UN

police deployment. This is in line with the anecdotal evidence of UNPOL deployments in local communities in Mali's conflict hotspots reported above. In more substantive terms, the probability of trusting police increases by 13 percentage points. On the ordinal scale, the coefficient .32 corresponds to an increase of approximately 28% of a standard deviation for trust toward police. Additionally, UN military deployments report a negative coefficient, hence the opposite effect of UNPOL. However, this result is only statistically significant when we measure trust with a binary measurement. We also replicate our analysis with an ordered logit model using the raw ordinal variable for trust in police as an alternative measurement (SI, Table SI6, p. 8). We also follow a simplified approach to examine our hypothesis employing a logit and an ordered logit model instead of the linear regression with the difference-in-difference estimation (Models 3 and 4, respectively, in Table SI6, p. 8). The results remain qualitatively the same with our main analysis showing a positive and significant relationship between UN police and trust in police.

For the control variables, we find that female respondents are somewhat more likely to trust the national police, while educational attainment is negatively associated with trust. Unsurprisingly, citizens that do not perceive to be discriminated against by the government and that also trust the president are also more likely to trust the police.¹¹

Given that we find an overall positive effect of UNPOL on trust toward police, we now consider the possible theoretical paths proposed in Figure 2. In other words, we aim to identify which channel leading to higher trust is more likely affected by UNPOL's work with national police. To this end, we investigate how UNPOL's presence has affected respondents' perceived safety, their assessment of the police's responsiveness and reliability, as well as police integrity (tables are in the SI, pp. 9–11).

First, we explore the element of safety asking whether UN police make people feel safer. Our results in Figure 7 show a positive and significant effect of UN police to people's perceptions of safety. Respondents are much more likely to report safety perceptions (31 percentage points) in locations hosting UNPOL. This finding aligns with our hypothesis on a spillover effect from the presence of the UN police to safety because the UN police work closely with national police (including in highly visible activities such as joint patrolling). The positive assessment on safety is likely translating into more positive views of the

¹⁰ We provide the full regression table in the SI, p. 8.

¹¹ Model 5 in Table SI6 of the SI (p. 8) presents our analysis without the post-treatment variables of one-sided violence and battle-related deaths as these may introduce selection bias creating a spurious association between the treatment and outcome (see also Dworschak, 2024).

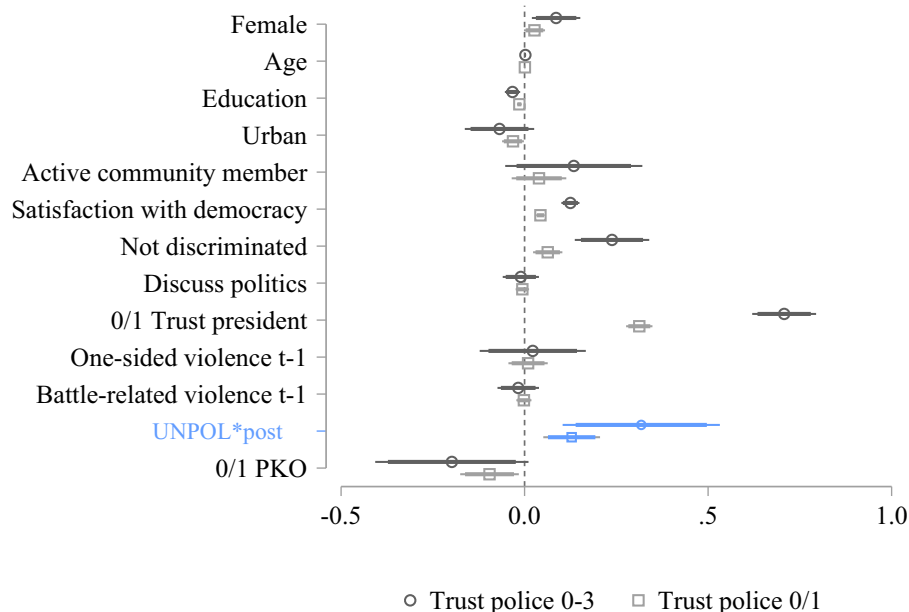


FIGURE 6 Difference-in-difference estimations. *Notes:* Coefficients based on the diff-in-diff models in Table S16; 90% (thick bars) and 95% confidence intervals reported (thin bars).

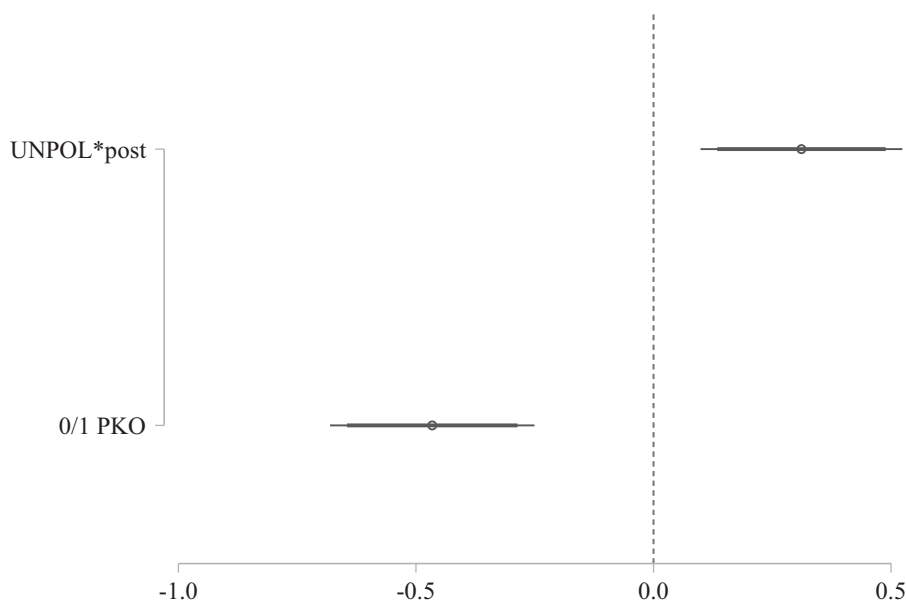


FIGURE 7 United Nations Police (UNPOL's) effect on safety perceptions. *Notes:* Coefficients based on Table S17; 90% (thick bars) and 95% confidence intervals reported (thin bars).

national police. On the contrary, the presence of UN military has a negative and significant impact on people's perceptions of safety, although research shows UN troops with successfully lower levels of violence (cf. Haass & Ansorg, 2018; Hegre et al., 2019; Hultman et al., 2013). This indicates a potential discrepancy between what local populations perceive, and the

changes UN missions may introduce to the security domain.

Second, we are investigating how the presence of UN police affects the extent to which citizens rely on the national police and how easy they find to get the assistance they need. Figure 8 shows that citizens do not necessarily seek more assistance from the police,

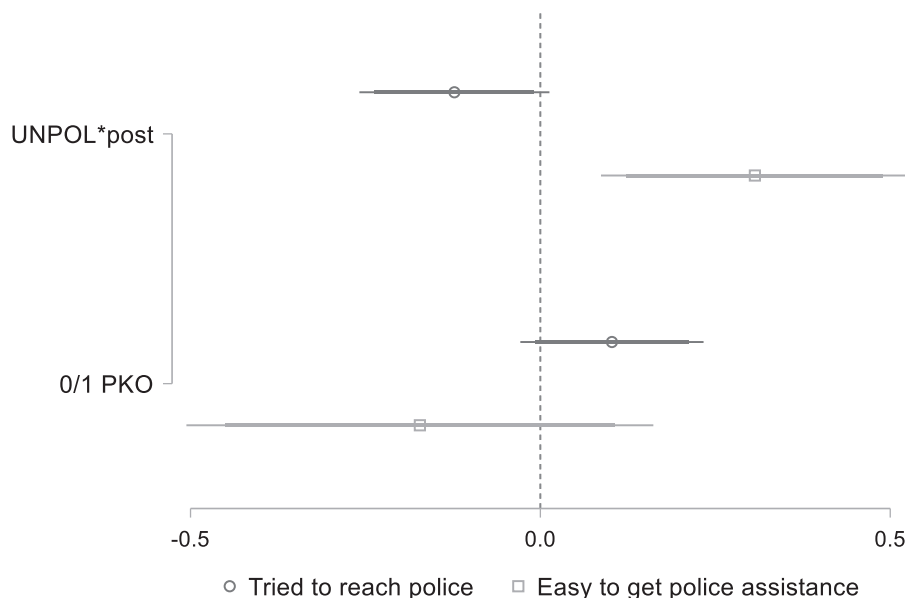


FIGURE 8 United Nations Police (UNPOL's) effect on reliability and responsiveness. *Notes:* Coefficients based on the diff-in-diff models (Table S18); 90% (thick bars) and 95% confidence intervals reported (thin bars).

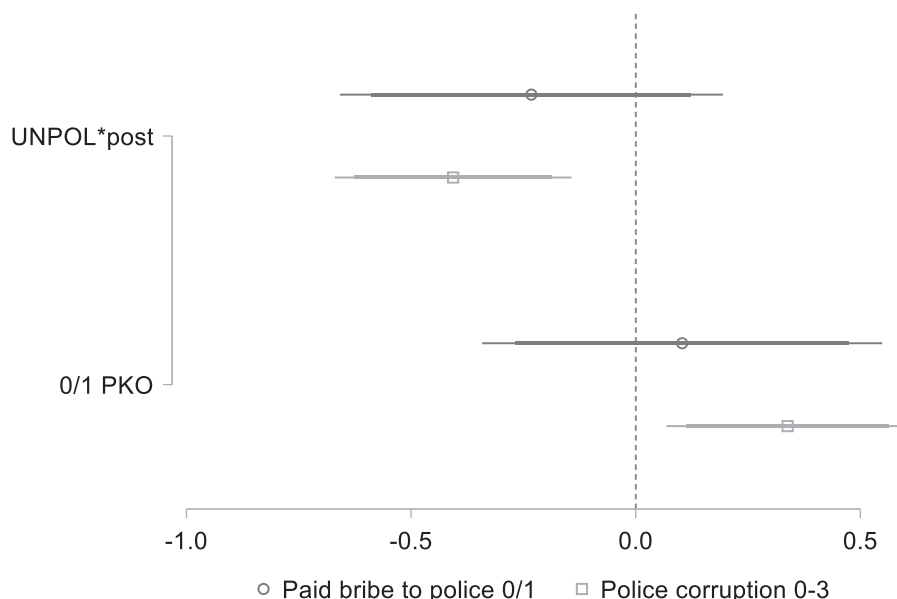


FIGURE 9 United Nations Police (UNPOL's) effect on integrity. *Notes:* Coefficients based on the diff-in-diff models (Table S19); 90% (thick bars) and 95% confidence intervals reported (thin bars).

but they are 31 percentage points more likely to report that, when needed, they receive support relatively easily. Hence, it is possible that citizens' willingness to rely more on support from the national police is an outcome rather than a mechanism increasing trust. Also, if those who seek assistance believe this can be accessed easily, this may drive more positive attitudes toward the police as we find in the main analysis and show in our theoretical expectations in Figure 2.

Our last theoretical argument is on policy integrity and perceptions of corruption, assessed in Figure 9. We hypothesize that improvements in police integrity can be a channel through which trust toward the police will increase. To assess whether this is the case, we consider both perceptions and quality of interactions with the national police. More specifically, we test whether UNPOL has improved perceptions of self-reported police bribing and police corruption, controlling for respondents attempting to contact the

police in the first place. Notably, asking respondents how often they paid bribes to the police may suffer from significant underreporting—indeed, across all waves, only about 7% of respondents reported that they had to bribe the police often or few times. The results of the analysis indicate less common self-reported bribing post UNPOL's arrival, though this is not statistically significant. However, we find that UNPOL's deployment is associated with more moderate perceptions of police corruption. As we control for attempts to contact the police, this may be due to an actual improvement in the quality of policing as experienced by respondents.

To summarize, our results are optimistic about the role of UNPOL in conflict-ridden societies showing the positive impact of their day-to-day activities in increasing trust to political institutions and specifically trust to national police. In fact, we find that the deployment of UNPOL in administrative units is associated with an increase in trust toward national police compared to units that never experienced UN police deployment. Importantly, our findings highlight three key mechanisms driving this trust-building process: First, the improved perceptions of safety associated with the deployments of UNPOL appear to have spillover effects that enhance the public's trust in national police. Second, UNPOL's presence is associated with more positive experiences in terms of access to police support among citizens that reach out to state agents. Finally, the presence of UNPOL helps to alleviate concerns about corrupt policing practices, possibly as a result of training, support, and oversight that mitigates perceptions of misconduct and corruption. Given that respondents do not report fewer instances of bribe-taking from police, we posit that the presence of international oversight and reform efforts supported by UNPOL might be sufficient to engender improvements in perceived corruption, at least to an extent. Relatedly, it is important to note that while UNPOL had a positive impact on trust through these mechanisms, other trust-building mechanisms (e.g., procedural justice and citizens' willingness to reach out to national police for support) may be more resistant to change or insufficiently addressed by UNPOL, underscoring the complexity of rebuilding police legitimacy in fragile contexts.

ROBUSTNESS CHECKS

In addition to the main findings, we provide a range of supplementary analyses in the SI to examine the robustness of results. As it happens in other missions, UNPOL co-deploys with UN military in MINUSMA. This means that our independent variable captures the co-deployment of UN police and troops rather than police only. While we do not focus on the effect

of UN troops on trust, we expect MINUSMA's UNPOL to exert a beneficial effect on trust toward the police, possibly enabled by the co-deployment with troops that can effectively protect them. We may not be able to fully isolate the impact of UN police alone in the diff-in-diff setup (see discussion of UNPOL dummy in the data section), we further explore their quantitative differences by examining the impact of the forces (UN police vs. UN troops) in the SI (Table SI10, p. 12). This has two purposes. First, we would expect that the larger the deployment, the larger exposure to the UN, and we should therefore receive a positive correlation with trust toward police. In addition, separating UNPOL size and UN troops size allows to estimate how changes in UNPOL size shape trust toward police, holding UN troops presence constant. This should provide more support to the conclusion that UNPOL may have a beneficial effect on trust toward national police. We therefore replace the variable of UNPOL with the estimated size of deployment (based on formed police units' deployment, that is, 150 personnel for a company, based on NATO and UN standard military unit numbers).¹² Here, we also replace the presence of UN troops variable with the size of the UN force troops to examine the comparative impact of the two forces on trust to national police and provide further evidence on the role of co-deployment on trust to national police. We find that trust in police increases when the UN police deployment increases, but it decreases when the size of troops increases. This implies that although UNPOL and UN military deploy together, they yet influence trust to national police differently.

Furthermore, we replicate our main results using a road distance-based measure of exposure to MINUSMA. We use data on Mali's road network from the World Bank database (Foster & Briceño-Garmendia, 2019) to calculate the inverse road distance between respondents and the closest MINUSMA base (SI, Table SI11, p. 13). By doing so, we introduce variation in exposure to the treatment among respondents within the same administrative unit (as respondents may be in the same unit but in different villages, see Figure SI, p. 14).

CONCLUSION

This research set out to explore whether and how UN PKOs, particularly the presence of UN police (UNPOL), can build trust in national police forces in conflict-affected settings. Using the case of Mali and geocoded survey data from the Afrobarometer, we find that the deployment of UNPOL as part of the MINUSMA mission was associated with a significant

¹² Hence, this excludes individual police officers.

increase in trust toward national police. By employing a difference-in-difference model, we compare changes in trust over time between citizens in proximity or not of UNPOL deployment, revealing a positive and statistically significant association between the presence of UN police and increased trust in the national police. We complemented this analysis by looking at specific mechanisms of trust as in safety, reliability and responsiveness, and integrity. This allows us to strengthen the implications of this study on the role of UN police in conflict-affected environments.

First, we found perceptions of safety to improve with the presence of UN police. The close working relationship between UN police and national police, especially in visible activities such as joint patrols, may contribute to this enhanced sense of safety. Improved feelings of safety likely spill over into greater trust in national police, suggesting that the visible and cooperative nature of UNPOL's work can contribute to a more favorable public perception of domestic policing institutions. This confirms the first causal mechanism outlined in our theoretical framework.

In addition to perceptions of safety, interactions between the public and the national police also appear to improve with UNPOL presence. Specifically, the results show that individuals are less likely to report paying bribes to national police following the arrival of UNPOL. This reduction in bribery indicates that the presence of UN police may contribute to fostering more accountable and transparent interactions between citizens and the police. By lowering instances of corruption, UNPOL may help improve public trust in the integrity and professionalism of national police.

However, the findings also indicate that UNPOL's presence does not significantly affect some aspects of trust-building. For example, there was no statistically significant change in people's willingness to reach out to the police or the ease of contacting the police, except when respondents were asked to explicitly compare the ease of reaching police support before and after the arrival of UNPOL in round 7. Moreover, perceptions of corruption in the national police remained largely unchanged despite the deployment of UNPOL. This finding aligns with the expectation that perceptions of corruption are deeply ingrained and difficult to shift over short periods (Beesley & Hawkins, 2022; Sacks & Larizza, 2012), even in the presence of international oversight and reform efforts. Corruption perceptions may require more sustained and targeted efforts beyond the presence of UNPOL to undergo significant change.

Our theoretical and empirical approach point to the important role that UNPOL can play in fostering trust in national police institutions, but they also highlight the complexity of how different elements of

PKOs influence public perceptions. Particularly, the deployment of UN military forces does not show a similarly positive correlation with trust and, in fact, in many cases seems to counter the beneficial impact of UNPOL. Hence, the results underscore the specific and potentially unique role that UN police play in engaging with local populations in conflict-affected settings to boost trust, which has become a key policy goal of UNPOL activities for the UN as well.

This study makes several contributions to the scholarship on peacekeeping and police reform by providing empirical evidence of the positive role that UN police can play in fostering trust in national law enforcement. It also offers practical insights for decision-makers involved in designing future PKO mandates, emphasizing the importance of integrating police reform into broader peacebuilding strategies (cf. Campbell & Di Salvatore, 2023). Further research should continue to investigate the long-term sustainability of these trust-building effects, as well as explore how the dynamics of police trust may vary across different conflict contexts and types of peacekeeping missions. Our exploration of trust-enhancing mechanisms suggests that some activities carried out by UNPOL are more effective in building trust than others. Future peacekeeping missions aiming to build trust in local institutions should consider the specific mechanisms through which trust is cultivated, and tailor interventions to target the complex and multifaceted factors that shape public perceptions of the police.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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