Introduction

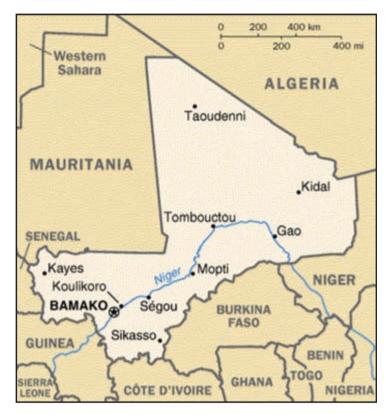> I am persuaded that Mali can no longer be like before.
> —Bellah community leader[1]

In the aftermath of Mali's annus horribilis of 2012 and its rescue by France in January 2013, Mali's friends and partners are interested in ensuring that, *this* time, peace and stability will endure. This interest is particularly keen given the newfound recognition that Mali's terrorism problem—which is a key driver of U.S. and French involvement—cannot be addressed on a long-term basis without addressing Mali's broader political and security challenges.

The challenge of ensuring peace in northern Mali is daunting for a variety of reasons. First, it has been tried before. Since 1991, the year Mali returned to civilian rule, the government has signed four peace accords with Tuareg and Arab armed groups. (See Figure 1.1 for a map of the region.) Second, in the mid-1990s, Mali began a major effort to decentralize and democratize the country by standing up numerous subnational administrations, run, in many cases, by elected officials. On paper at least, northern Malians have as much opportunity to participate in regional and national political processes as any other Malians have and thus cannot credibly claim to be disenfranchised. Northerners from many different communities, for example, ran in legislative elections and were elected to sit in the National Assembly in Bamako. Third, instability and insecurity have persisted, even though

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[1] Bellah leader, interview with Michael Shurkin, Bamako, October 8, 2013.

**Figure 1.1
Map of Mali**

SOURCE: Central Intelligence Agency, "Mali," last updated June 20, 2014a.
RAND *RR892-1.1*

many former combatants from northern rebel groups were integrated into the Malian armed forces. These three dynamics have led many observers to see Mali's problems as intractable.

Although the repetition of the conflict/peace accord cycle in Mali might seem disheartening, it also offers valuable lessons on what peace-building measures have worked or not over time. In other words, a historical examination of Mali's past peace accords and how they were implemented can provide insights into what might be needed for the current peace talks to finally bring lasting stability to Mali.

This report examines the content and results of northern Mali's peace settlements since the early 1990s to identify flaws and successes. Looking at these past agreements in the context of the problems Mali faces today, this report identifies five recurrent issues: the lack of representativeness of the peace-accord signatories, who represent little more than small minorities within minorities; a flawed understanding of decentralization and democracy; Bamako's limited perceived legitimacy in the north; persistent insecurity; and an absence of transitional justice and reconciliation. This report further discusses how building representativeness (through improved democratic processes, political inclusion of traditional chiefs, and skillful handling of armed groups) can address all five issues simultaneously and help craft a peaceful way forward for Mali. A final section in this report takes a more regional view to examine how Mali's neighbor Niger, although faced with similar challenges, succeeded in remaining at peace. That section explores whether Niger owes its survival to a more favorable context, shrewd policies, or sheer luck and whether it could offer a model of resilience for northern Mali.

The methods used for this study have been to survey Malian media and the literature pertaining to northern Malian political and societal dynamics. Because of the paucity of published resources in that area, however, interviews with local regional experts, academics, and members of relevant Malian communities in Bamako have been essential to refining the data collected from other sources. Interviews focused on foreign and local actors experienced with past Malian peace accords or regional and local dynamics.

Clearly, northern Mali is not all of Mali, and there are many more institutional issues to solve in Mali than the ones pertaining to the administration and stability of the regions of Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu. It is also important to remember that Arabs and Tuareg, whose dynamics this report focuses on, represent minorities in a country that is majority-populated by Bambara, a sedentary ethnic group. Considering how disruptive political turmoil in the north has been since the country's independence from France, however, addressing these issues would go a long way in providing Bamako with the environment it needs to strengthen its institutions and in preventing the future resur-

gence of a scenario similar to the one that played out in 2012–2013 and led to the quasi-collapse of the Malian state and the deployment of French and African troops in the country.