POS4970 Senior Thesis

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Radicalization in the Sahel: A Comparative Study of AQIM in Mali and Boko Haram in Nigeria
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Abstract

This study undertakes a qualitative case analysis to consider the root causes that have allowed and still allow for AQIM and Boko Haram to radicalize and recruit individuals into their organizations in Mali and Nigeria. The radicalization process for individuals that have joined AQIM and Boko Haram can be initially understood by context-specific root causes in Mali and Nigeria. The preconditions or root causes that exist in both Mali and Nigeria and which factor in driving individuals to radicalize include poverty, unemployment, corruption, political and economic inequality, demographic pressure, lack of government services, marginalization, and ideology tailored to existing grievances. By understanding root causes of radicalization in both Mali and Nigeria, these states and other vested international actors can craft appropriate policy solutions to ameliorate the preconditions that set an individual on the path of radicalization. The durability of AQIM and Boko Haram throughout the first two decades of the 21st century despite military actions taken against them is due to the persistence of root causes that have not been fully ameliorated by the Malian and Nigerian governments. This study has implications for the future study of radicalization in the Sahel as well as future efforts by Malian, Nigerian, African, and Western interests in seeking to eliminate AQIM and Boko Haram.
Introduction

The conditions that lead to radicalization are a topic that has been broached by numerous scholars in the post-9/11 era. Despite a wide array of research on radicalization, there exists no clear consensus on the specific factors that drive an individual toward radicalizing. The range of theories that exist over the causes of radicalization undoubtedly leaves the plethora of states dealing with radicalization and terrorism without a clear blueprint to solving these issues. Lacking a clear understanding of what conditions drive vulnerable populations towards radicalizing means countries attempt to fit the proverbial “square peg in a round hole” with misguided policies and spending that seek to address radicalizing populations. Policies that do not address the specific structural conditions leading to radicalization and that rely heavily on military forces to put down terrorist groups are potentially exacerbating conditions of radicalization in their country leading to populations that may be increasingly prone to radicalization and terrorism.

Contending theories about radicalization offer a variety of focal points for how radicalization occurs that include group dynamics, poverty, unemployment, corrupt governments, religious ideology, economic and social inequality and deprivation, ethnic identity, weak family structures, individual psychology, and historical legacies of past discontent. The focus that often gets placed on one of these factors at the expense of the others results in an analysis of radicalization that may miss the collective effect that all these variables have on an individual undergoing the process of radicalizing. This is not to say that all factors play an equal role in radicalization, rather, some scholars point out the need for an explanation of radicalization that can fully assess all factors involved in the radicalization process (Hafez and Mullins 2015, 958-960; Doosje et al., 2016, 82; Boer 2017, 10-12). The utility of this type of analysis is that it
can provide an accurate and detailed assessment of how terrorist organizations are formed and sustained. A detriment of such a context-specific analysis is the lack of generalization across terrorist organizations that can be derived from closely examining the specific local and regional conditions that lead to radicalization.

Root cause analysis (RCA) is one such path that allows for a context-specific analysis of radicalization via exploration of the permissive structural factors and direct underlying grievances that can lead to radicalization within different environments. (Newman 2006, 751) Analysis from these factors and grievances can adeptly consider the local and regional factors that contribute toward radicalization. Root cause analysis (RCA) is a concept that “certain conditions provide a social environment and widespread grievances that, when combined with certain precipitant factors, result in the emergence of terrorist organizations and terrorist acts.” (Ibid., 750) Applying root cause analysis as a tool to understanding radicalization requires considering all factors that play a role in the radicalization process as well as determining the pathways that are used by terrorist organizations to recruit new members. In his description of root cause analysis, Newman writes that “qualitative case analyses that present a detailed picture of specific conflicts offer the most effective methodology for understanding the role of root causes in relation to other explanatory variables.” (Ibid., 770) The goal of this analysis is to examine AQIM in Mali and Boko Haram in Nigeria to assess root causes that have contributed towards individuals radicalizing and joining these organizations as well as to analyze if these root causes persist despite military action taken against both terrorist organizations.

The emergence of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mali and the Islamic State in West Africa (Boko Haram) in Nigeria during the first decade of the 21st century, despite different histories and trajectories, illustrates the cases of two terrorist organizations that share
similar attributes within the atmosphere that has resulted in their proliferation. These attributes include climates of poverty, unemployment, marginalization, corrupt government practices, youth bulge, economic and social inequality, and a lack of government services. The application of root cause analysis to both cases provides insight into the development of AQIM and Boko Haram over the past two decades as well as the future of these groups if the causes and conditions of radicalization are not properly addressed by the Malian and Nigerian governments. In these two cases, root cause analysis pinpoints social, economic, political, and historic factors as the key root causes of radicalization. There are divergences in both cases, but the presence of similar root cause factors exemplifies base conditions for which radicalization can occur.

This paper undertakes a qualitative case analysis of both AQIM in Mali and Boko Haram in Nigeria to assess the root causes that have resulted in radicalization and attempts to gauge if these root causes persist despite military action taken against both organizations. The first section of this paper reviews root cause analysis as an analytical tool for understanding radicalization. The second section describes the methodological process of gathering information on radicalization, AQIM, and Boko Haram and how root causes were assessed. The third section reviews existing literature on radicalization. The fourth section analyzes the historical backgrounds of Boko Haram in Nigeria and AQIM in Mali. The fifth section explores root causes in both AQIM in Mali and Boko Haram to determine which factors are shared and where there is divergence in the explanations for radicalization. The sixth section assesses the current conditions in Mali and Nigeria to determine if the root causes that assisted the development of AQIM and Boko Haram as terrorist organizations persist today. The seventh and final section will review potential policy solutions that have been recommended to the Malian and Nigerian governments that address the causes and conditions of radicalization.
Section One: Theoretical Background

The approach taken in this paper for understanding how radicalization has occurred in the contexts of AQIM and Boko Haram is a method of analysis called root cause analysis. Root cause analysis (RCA) is an analytical approach that is utilized across a multitude of subjects, from health care to education to radicalization studies. The process of RCA across all disciplines involves identifying the inceptive causes and conditions of a problem in order to solve it and reduce risk for that problem reoccurring in the future (Sobel 2017, 312-315). Problem scenarios that are most useful for RCA are those that involve multiple actors or organizations, complex causation with the target problem, and problems that require a high degree of expertise (Sobel 2017, 313). The primary benefits of utilizing RCA is the flexible nature that it requires which allows for all symptoms of a problem to be considered, as opposed to emphasis on a singular symptom. Another seminal benefit is that by identifying all symptoms of a problem, solutions can be constructed that target all root causes hopefully leading to improvement of a given problem (Menon et al. 2016, 22). Given its multifaceted and complex nature, radicalization provides a complex issue that meets the criteria for a problem that can benefit from the utilization of RCA to determine solutions and understand radicalization processes.

Newman (2006) identifies root cause analysis as a tool for understanding terrorism because it can be employed to identify the “indirect and underlying sources of conflict” that are important for understanding the causes of terrorism (Newman 2006, 750). Root causes “refer to causal factors without which the radicalization process would not have occurred” (Veldhuis and Staun 2009, 21). Although Newman addresses the root causes of terrorism, his analysis of these root causes can be applied to the root causes of radicalization. This is because “terrorism is a result of radicalization,” and the final stage of radicalization is “a person ready to act”, by
potentially committing an attack (Doosje et al 2016, 79-81). Although, terrorism is an act of violence, and radicalization “is a process through which people become increasingly motivated to use violent means”; the basic social, economic, political, and historical root causes for both are strikingly aligned (Ibid., 79).

The utility of a root cause approach to understanding radicalization and subsequently terrorism can be useful to law enforcement and intelligence agencies for surveillance purposes of vulnerable populations, but, perhaps more significantly, it can be used by governments and international coalitions as a way to shape policy initiatives that may target the root causes that lead vulnerable populations on a path towards radicalizing (Kundnani 2012, 8). Another useful facet of root cause analysis is that it can be used as a starting point to investigate and understand how radicalization occurs in certain environments (Veldhuis and Staun 2009, 21). Veldhuis and Staun (2009) break down root causes into three categories: macro-level factors, micro-level societal factors, and micro-level individual factors; each of these levels of root causes are essential to understanding how an individual radicalizes and the weight of each of these factors varies across those who radicalize and their environments (Veldhuis and Staun 2009, 22). Given the broad range of factors that root causes can encompass, this paper will focus on macro-level root causes such as poverty, unemployment, marginalization by the state, demographic pressure, and corruption. Veldhuis and Staun (2009) define macro-level factors as “preconditions for a climate that is conducive to radicalism” and assert that macro-level factors can never form the whole picture of radicalization; instead, they must be evaluated in conjunction with micro-level factors (Ibid., 24-25). Micro-level social factors “describe how individuals are embedded within social structures that relate people through social interactions and identification” and micro-level individual factors “describe how individual experiences and characteristics affect how people
perceive and respond to their social and environmental context” (Ibid., 62). Micro-level societal factors are a means of understanding how individuals interact with their social environments as well as how individuals affect the social environment (Ibid., 39). This includes examining how individuals self-categorize and what their social identity is, their interactions as a group, the relative deprivation individuals may face or perceive in their selected groups, and how recruitment and trigger events affect an individual and their group (Ibid., 40-50). Religious ideology plays a significant role in the cases of AQIM and Boko Haram as a micro-level societal factor that influences many of the social interactions for individuals that radicalize.

Another way to break down root causes of radicalization is via Newman’s (2006) classification of root causes into two camps: permissive structural factors and direct underlying grievances (Newman 2006, 751). Permissive structural factors are described as creating “an enabling environment that, alone, is of no explanatory value but when in conjunction with other factors, may have explanatory value” (Ibid., 751). These factors include conditions of poverty, environmental degradation, demographics, urbanization, historical legacies of uprisings, unemployment, and social change (Newman 2006, 764). Direct underlying grievances are classified as “more than merely structural: they represent tangible political issues,” and, for this analysis, encompass economic grievances in Mali and Nigeria as well (Ibid., 751). These grievances stem from political, economic, and social inequality and create a sense of resentment/alienation from society or the state, exclusion from political and economic processes, and perceived or experienced oppression from the state (Ibid., 764). In conjunction, permissive structural factors and direct underlying grievances form the root causes for specific environments where radicalization occurs. Newman (2006) identifies a third key factor as well, which, is not a root cause of terrorism or radicalization, but instead serves as an intervening variable for root
causes; Newman (2006) refers to this factor as a catalytic condition. Catalytic conditions are identified as leadership, funding, and state sponsorship (Ibid., 764). To sum up Newton’s (2006) classification of root causes, “an underlying grievance, in the context of a permissive enabling environment, gives rise to the emergence of a terrorist organization and terrorist activity as a result of precipitant factors and catalytic forces. The structural factors and underlying grievances provide a source of terrorist recruits, an ideology, and operational base. The precipitant factors provide a political agenda, opportunity, leadership, and organization.” (Ibid., 754) From this explanation, the macro level factors as described by Veldhuis and Staun (2009) can be sorted into Newman’s breakdown of permissive structural factors and underlying grievances. There are limitations to this type of analysis, as Newman argues, “root causes can never form the whole picture” for what explains terrorism or radicalization, but by understanding root causes as common features across different terrorist organizations, greater clarity can be given to how radicalization is understood (Newman 2006, 756). Ultimately, root cause analysis can be a useful starting tool for understanding the conditions where radicalization can occur.

Section Two: Methodology

The goal of this paper is to utilize root cause analysis in a qualitative case analysis of AQIM in Mali and Boko Haram in Nigeria to identify shared and divergent root causes of radicalization. This paper largely focuses on a broad set of macro-level root causes leading to radicalization in Mali and Nigeria—such as political and economic factors, poverty, inequality, historical legacies of discontent, and demographic changes. In examining the root causes that led to the emergence of both groups in Mali and Nigeria, this paper will also seek to gauge if the root cause conditions are persisting today that first enabled an environment for individuals to radicalize despite military efforts taken to degrade AQIM and Boko Haram in the last decade.
The case analysis for this paper utilizes the two illustrative cases of Mali and Nigeria to focus on environments where easily observable root causes have led to instances of radicalization, in this case, for the terrorist organizations AQIM and Boko Haram. The discussion of positive cases for this research does leave out a possible control environment, wherein the root causes discussed may be similar in another environment, but no radicalization is occurring by way of grievances that lead one to join international or domestic terrorist group. Therefore, no strong causal inferences can be assessed from the root causes exemplified in Mali and Nigeria to fully explain radicalization in other countries, rather the research that this paper undertakes is intended to shape a context-specific understanding of what root causes are, how they may induce an individual to radicalize, and how AQIM and Boko Haram have exploited root causes in Mali and Nigeria.

To gather research for this topic, I have searched academic databases created by the University of Florida libraries for information on radicalization and terrorism, AQIM in Mali, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and root cause analysis. Additionally, I have used online databases such as the World Bank World Development Indicators, the Nigeria Security Tracker, the CrisisWatch violence tracker, and the Global Terrorism Database in order to evaluate attacks from Boko Haram and AQIM as well as political, social, and economic indicators related to root causes. Comparing these databases with the qualitative information found in journals and articles written about radicalization, AQIM in Mali, and Boko Haram in Nigeria has enabled me to comparatively analyze the two cases and identify the macro-level root causes for radicalization in the two environments.
Section Three: Literature Review of Radicalization

The scope of literature on radicalization that has emerged in the aftermath of 9/11 is widespread and varied in terms of how it explains why individuals radicalize and subsequently join terrorist organizations. In examining the drivers of radicalization among terrorist organizations, most scholars maintain that there are common derivatives among those that radicalize and also that radicalization is too context-specific of a process for one common derivative to be a universal driver of radicalization, instead all factors of radicalization come into play differently depending on the circumstance (Moore and Lakha 2006; Borum 2004; Hafez and Mullins 2015, 970).

Among scholars, some point to radicalization as a continuous process that transforms from one stage to the next. There are several important theories for how this may occur and what may cause an individual to move from one stage to the next. Moghaddam (2005) views the process of radicalization metaphorically as an individual going up the staircase of a five-story building. In this metaphor, Moghaddam (2005) argues that perceptions of fairness and feelings of relative deprivation make up the ground floor and that those who rise to the first floor seek solutions to the perceptions and feelings of the ground floor. As an individual ascends higher up the building, they experience increased anger and frustration, eventually culminating in the engagement and joining of terrorist organizations (Moghaddam 2005, 162). The view of radicalization as process-like emerged popularly in the aftermath of 9/11 as attempts were made by intelligence communities to craft profiles of those ascending the “staircase”. della Porta (2018) identifies a similar process-like approach to understanding radicalization; arguing that radicalization should be understood from a relational perspective whereby radicalization occurs from a “complex and contingent set of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutional
actors” (della Porta 1995, 2013; Bosi & della Porta 2012; Alimi et al. 2015). This perspective focuses on the social movements of individuals and groups undergoing the process of radicalization and the “friction of intergroup competition and conflict that heats both sides” which eventually produces radicalized individuals that become more willing to take violent action (della Porta 2018, 471). Related to this relational perspective on radicalization, Bartlett and Miller argue that relationships among individuals and groups create pathways to radicalization through emotional pulls to act in the face of injustice, thrill-seeking, excitement, coolness, status, internal code of honor, and peer pressure (Bartlett and Miller 2012, 13). The emotional factor pulling individuals into radicalizing is key to consider alongside the rational, religious, or intellectual reasons which serve to radicalize individuals (Ibid., 17). The power of social networks to facilitate radicalization is a seminal part of understanding the anatomy of radical or terrorist organizations; indeed, some studies have shown that individuals that are attracted to the global jihad are not deeply religious, rather the influence of their social networks creates the most influential pathways for their radicalization (Khan and Azam 2008, 75; Atran 2010).

On the other hand, many other key studies in radicalization literature place primary emphasis on the religious motivations and ideologies that motivate people to radicalize. Indeed, these studies have had key salience in the decade following 9/11 as aspects of Islam have been placed under scrutiny as a main cause that drives people to radicalize. This is abetted by the fact that media coverage of conflicts in the Arab World often place the religious characteristics of Islam at the forefront to understanding conflicts as opposed to underlying socio-economic and political factors that drive conflict (Hippler 1995; Poole 2002). Certainly, Islamic terrorist groups often promote their radical approaches through the religious discourse of Islam, but scholars
have pointed out that radicalization has been an issue for other major world religions as well and that those that radicalize based on motivation from a major world religion are a small number of the millions of other peaceful practicing people of that religion, therefore causation is difficult to prove regarding religion and radicalization (d’Anieri 2011, 232-235). Armstrong (2001) argues that a better way to think about the relationship of religion and radicalization is to view religion as a vehicle to build on existing discontent in the radicalization process; Bartlett and Miller (2012) similarly view religion as vehicle through which other grievances are expressed—such as inequality, lack of opportunity, and poverty (Armstrong 2001, 27; Bartlett and Miller 2012, 9). Consequently, whether religious ideology serves as one of the primary factors to radicalize is disputed—some analysts identify religion as one of the main drivers toward radicalizing while others identify religion as playing a minimal role in an individual radicalizing (Aly and Striegher 2012, 859-860; Vidino 2010, 1; Mandaville and Nozell 2017, 3-5).

The lack of consensus on a generalized explanation for how radicalization occurs has some analysts arguing for understanding radicalization not as a phase or linear process, but instead as a “multifactor and contextual approach” (Hafez and Mullins 2015, 959). From this approach, several factors can be identified that, once conjoined, often result in an individual radicalizing—such as individual and collective grievances, social networks and ties, political, religious, and cultural ideologies, and enabling environments and support structures (Hafez and Mullins, 95; United Nations 2010). In each circumstance of radicalization across the globe these factors vary in their effects and weight on an individual radicalizing. Approaching radicalization as a multifactor and contextual approach has widened the door for the utility of root cause analysis in understanding how radicalization occurs due to the broad range of issues RCA encompasses (Newman 2006, 751).
Section Four: Overview of AQIM in Mali and Boko Haram in Nigeria

The application of root cause analysis to the cases of AQIM in Mali and Boko Haram in Nigeria first requires an understanding of the historical contexts in which both organizations developed in. The combined experiences of Mali and Nigeria with these organizations has resulted in thousands of deaths, millions displaced, and heavy economic and infrastructural losses. Boko Haram in Nigeria has far exceeded the damage that AQIM has inflicted on Mali. Through the kidnappings of Chibok schoolgirls and other students, repeated attacks on civilian and security forces, and the displacement of millions in Nigeria, the Boko Haram conflict has been an extremely devastating one in Africa. This devastation can be visualized through data acquired from the Global Terrorism Database, which has been formatted into a graph to illustrate the comparisons in fatalities inflicted by AQIM and Boko Haram against Mali and Nigeria.

Source: GTD

This graph acquired from the GTD illustrates the number of fatalities that AQIM and Boko Haram have caused through terrorist attacks. The x-axis shows how many fatalities occurred in each attack and the y-axis is the number of times that an attack for a specific number of
fatalities has occurred. The graph demonstrates the disproportional impact that Boko Haram has had in Nigeria compared to AQIM in Mali.

An essential aspect to the development of both AQIM and Boko Haram is that they did not emerge out-of-the-blue in contemporary circumstances, instead these organizations have historical momentum related to the unrest, uprisings, and other discontent that has been experienced in their regions of the Sahel. Additionally, both groups share similar primary objectives related to ridding their country/region of Western influence and instilling fundamentalist Islamic regions in their country/region. Despite these similarities, the two groups have emerged in largely distinct contexts, via different mechanisms, and have developed in unique ways.

**Boko Haram in Nigeria:**

Boko Haram emerged in northern Nigeria in the early 2000s as a “religious cult with political undertones” (Varin 2016, 84). Officially formed as Boko Haram in 2002, the group’s full name is Jama’atu Ahlus Sunah Lid Da’awati Wal Jihad which means People Committed to the Prophet’s Teachings for Propagation and Jihad (Smith 2015, x). The name Boko Haram translates to “Western education is forbidden” although another translation is “Western culture is forbidden” (Antwi-boateng 2017, 258). Given the decentralized nature of many of the group’s cells and the splinter groups that have emerged from Boko Haram, the name Boko Haram is meant to encompass the insurgency as a whole (Smith 2015, x). Boko Haram was founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf in Borno state in the city of Maiduguri. Yusuf developed a mosque and school in the city wherein he began his religious teachings. Yusuf established a following due to his strong opposition to Western education, his credibility concerning his knowledge of Islam, and his effective, charismatic preaching and public speaking skills (Smith 2015, 80).
Yusuf’s views were formulated through his instruction in Salafi radicalism and from the influence he drew from Ibn Taymiyyah (Agbiboa 2013, 146). These views developed through the perspective that the inception of the Nigerian state out of British colonial rule had created a way of life in Nigeria that was in opposition to Islam—mainly due to the presence of a Western style education system, a legal system organized around Western principles, and a British democratic system of government (Smith 2015, 80). To fix the supposedly sacrilegious Nigerian state, Yusuf publicly urged for the creation of a state centered around the principles of Islam and sharia law (Smith 2015, 80). Consequently, Yusuf’s beliefs and preaching’s “against the backdrop of crushing poverty” that his followers experienced in daily life gained him a large following in northeastern Nigeria (Smith 2015, 83). In the early days of Boko Haram’s development in the early 2000s, the group was able to grow its membership partly due to regional politics in northern Nigeria. Specifically, a former governor of Borno state, Ali Modu Sheriff “promised he would institute strict sharia law in order to gain the backing of Boko Haram followers in the 2003 vote” but he ended up not following up on this promise after his election to the position of governor (Smith 2015, 85). Despite this, Sheriff did appoint a disciple of Yusuf to the Commissioner for Religious Affairs which enabled Boko Haram to fund its activities via allegations that “the governor funneled money to Yusuf through his commissioner” (Smith 2015, 87; Iyekekpolo 2016, 2221-2222). When Sheriff reneged on his campaign promise to implement sharia law, Yusuf began espousing a harder message against politicians in the region; this also enabled Yusuf to gain the support of more radical followers who were dissatisfied with the regional government’s perceived limited support for Islam (Iyekekpolo 2016, 2221-2222). Political opportunities such as this enabled Yusuf to gradually spread his message to an increased number of people. As this movement built up, Yusuf’s sermons were copied and distributed
across northeast Nigeria enabling a further increase in his followership (Smith 2015, 87-88). The popularity of Yusuf’s growing movement drew the attention of Nigeria’s security and intelligence agencies who were not certain of the intentions of the movement (Ibid., 89). Given the historical legacy of uprisings and discontent in the northeast region of the country, government officials were concerned with Yusuf’s messages to his followers which often squarely placed the blame for the economic, social, and political problems in the northeast region on political elites and the government (Ibid., 89-95). Boko Haram’s message attracted a high degree of popularity in the region and its membership between 2002 and 2009 is estimated to have been between 4,000-10,000 followers (Varin 2016,60). Boko Haram’s followers were largely drawn from disaffected, poor, and unemployed young men, though some reports indicate that Boko Haram’s followership also included a number of professors, students, and civil servants (Smith 2015, 86; Aghedo and Osumah 2012, 858). It is likely that from these economically better-off members, Boko Haram was able to fund some of its activities early on as Yusuf encouraged members to “sell their goods and property and commit to the cause” (Smith 2015, 86-87). Although, Boko Haram originally was perceived “as a religious community seeking to practice its faith without political interference,” Yusuf’s preaching’s became more critical of Nigeria as he portrayed Boko Haram as a “struggle together against the evil of the world and the Nigerian state” (Varin 2016, 59; Smith 2015, 90-91). The increasingly violent nature and aggressive stance of Yusuf and Boko Haram’s teachings created further distrust between police forces in Borno state and the organization. Conflict with security forces first began in 2004 due to a police and military assault on a closely-affiliated organization with Boko Haram (Varin 2016, 61). Boko Haram members responded with revenge attacks that resulted in police stations targeted, prison breaks initiated, and a series of assassinations against political
and religious persons (Ibid., 61). The gradual militarization of the sect was further abetted through an effort by police forces attempting to “enforce crash helmet laws and restrictions on the movement of motorcycles at night,” which consequently resulted in further contact between Boko Haram members and security forces, increasing the friction of the environment (Varin 2015, 61). The distrust and friction between security forces and Boko Haram members in Maiduguri eventually built up when in 2009, Boko Haram was brought into national publicity.

The uprisings of 2009 in northeastern Nigeria resulted due to violent encounters “between security officials and some members of Boko Haram” (Ibid., 61). These encounters initially began when security forces halted a group of Boko Haram members on the way to a cemetery for a funeral on the basis of the crash helmet law. The Boko Haram members resisted the attempts by the security forces to stop the procession, whereupon the security forces applied the use of force and injured 17 Boko Haram members (Ibid., 62). Following this event, Yusuf asserted that there would be revenge and subsequently a series of tit-for-tat clashes between security forces and Boko Haram occurred escalating the level of violence and resulting in the deaths of police forces. Eventually, military forces were brought in to quell the riots and attacks by Boko Haram, and 800 Boko Haram members were killed and a multitude of others were arrested, including Yusuf (Ibid., 62). Shortly after, police forces reported that they had killed Yusuf after he allegedly tried to escape custody. Yusuf’s death dramatically altered the trajectory of Boko Haram and ignited a conflict that Nigeria would not be initially prepared to deal with for some time.

There was no major activity in Boko Haram for around a year following Yusuf’s death. The rise of Abubkar Shekau as leader after Yusuf’s death resulted in a dramatically more militant Boko Haram focused on revenge against the police and security forces of the state that
killed Yusuf. After some time spent underground, Boko Haram emerged in 2010 with a succession of attacks against the Nigerian state. These attacks ranged from bombings, suicide attacks, and abductions with the targets mainly focused on police and security facilities as well as schools and mosques (Ani and Ojakorotu 2017, 19). Boko Haram also launched an effective media campaign during this period that utilized social media and video platforms, which enabled the group to recruit and radicalize members (Varin 2016, 63). The frequency and intensity of attacks by Boko Haram increased rapidly over the following five years as Boko Haram inflicted heavy civilian casualties and expanded its territory in northeastern Nigeria. The decentralized, independent cells of Boko Haram enabled the organization to recruit effectively from local populations and stay under the radar from security forces (Ibid., 67).

By 2012, the federal government of Nigeria declared a state of emergency in several local governments in response to the buildup in violent attacks by Boko Haram; Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states all followed with declarations of a state of emergency in 2013 (Ibid., 75). The increase in frequency of attacks by Boko Haram occurred alongside its ability to carry out more sophisticated attacks as a result of domestic and international funding to the group, Boko Haram sending its members to train in Mali with AQIM during its civil war, and due to the advanced munitions that were acquired from AQIM in Mali (Ibid., 74-75). The election of President Buhari in May 2015 brought about a change in military strategy for challenging Boko Haram. President Buhari worked with other countries such as Chad and Cameroon to build a military coalition to combat and work regionally to degrade Boko Haram. President Buhari also relocated the military headquarters to Maiduguri—making it easier for the military to operate against Boko Haram and he heavily utilized mercenary forces to challenge Boko Haram’s forces and degrade the territory it had acquired (Varin 2016, 89-90). The determined efforts by President Buhari to
push back the militants has been effective since 2015, with Boko Haram taking heavy losses and losing much of their accrued territory in northeastern Nigeria. Despite this, the organization has still been able to inflict heavy casualties through suicide attacks and mass kidnappings.

The lasting impact of Boko Haram’s emergence after Yusuf’s death and military success from 2010-2015 resulted in the deaths of thousands of people, millions of dollars in cost to the Nigerian state, and millions displaced across Nigeria due to violence from the conflict. Boko Haram persists as an organization, but an extremely weakened one from its peak in early 2015. The organization has faced conflicts internally due to splits in the group over the killing of Muslims, allegiance to ISIS, and disagreement with Shekau’s violent leadership of the group. There is concern within the Nigerian state that the emergence of new leadership may rejuvenate support for Boko Haram and enable them to draw on more recruits in a region with high instability due to the degradation of infrastructure, security force abuses, and the lack of economic opportunity (Ibid., 94).

AQIM in Mali:

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb or AQIM emerged in much different circumstances than Boko Haram did in Nigeria. AQIM acquired its new namesake following the allegiance made by the organization the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and al-Qaeda in 2007. AQIM did not originate in Mali, instead the group originally formed in Algeria during the 1990s as GSPC after it broke off from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) during the Algerian Civil War (Laub and Masters 2014). GSPC moved its operations gradually into Mali around 2003 due to the success of the Algerian security forces in stymying GSPC’s Algerian operations, which financially and militarily degraded the organization (Grobbelaar and Solomon 2015, 151). The move into Mali came from an objective of survival for the group and to attempt to recoup
military and financial resources through recruitment of Mali’s historically disenfranchised northern populations and through engagement in the extensive criminal and smuggling networks flowing through northern Mali (Grobbelaar and Solomon 2015, 150-155). AQIM originally utilized Mali as a resource area for the financial and military losses it was incurring in Algeria but the Libyan civil war in 2011 and subsequent fall of Qaddafi created a flow of arms and fighters into Mali, paving the way for AQIM to cement itself further into Mali (Baker 2017, 11).

The Malian government, due to a historic legacy of political and economic neglect of the north has been largely unable to secure the northern border or northern regions, creating a vacuum for criminal networks and jihadist organizations such as AQIM to easily embed in local populations (Francis 2013, 13). By intermarrying with local populations, engaging with existing criminal networks, and by providing social services such as medical aid, food, and education, AQIM was successfully able to make in-roads with local Malian populations enabling it to embed itself in the profits from smuggling and gain access to a pool of recruits (Chauzal and van Damme 2015, 50). From 2003-2011, AQIM continued embedding itself in northern Malian populations and operated as a “loose association of armed bands” that carried out kidnappings-for-ransom, engaged in drug trafficking, and spread its Salafi-jihadist ideology through the region (Baker 2017, 11; Laub and Masters 2014, 3).

AQIM operates largely through independent cells that come together periodically for terrorist attacks or when their interests align on arm trafficking or drug smuggling (Laub and Masters 2014, 4). From an ideological standpoint, AQIM “blends global Salafi-jihadist dogma with regionally resonant elements, including references to the early Islamic conquest of the Maghreb and the Iberian Peninsula” and seeks to establish an Islamist political system governed by sharia law (Laub and Masters 2014, 3; Strazzari 2015, 1). AQIM identifies the states in the
Sahel as “near enemies” and France and Spain as “far enemies” and primarily views the northern regions of Mali as an area to stage further crime and terrorist operations due to the ineffective control that Mali has over those regions (Laub and Masters 2014, 3).

In 2012, AQIM’s trajectory in Mali transformed as a rebellion initiated by Tuareg groups and a military coup in Mali’s military created an opening for AQIM to expand and entrench itself in a wider territory of northern Mali. Tuareg groups in Mali have historically been socially, politically, and economically marginalized since Mali’s independence and this has resulted in several revolts by Tuareg groups since 1960. A rebellion in January 2012 was launched by highly organized and armed Tuareg militants against a Malian military base in the city of Menaka (Chauzal and van Damme 2015, 10). These militants had such advanced military capabilities largely due to the exodus of Tuareg fighters and arms from Libya in 2011 and the creation of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) by Tuaregs which organized the fighters (Chauzal and van Damme 2015, 10). The unity and organization of Tuareg forces did not last long, shortly after the first attack in Menaka a group of Tuareg fighters broke off to form Ansar Dine, led by Iyad ag Ghali, who had affiliations with AQIM and lobbied for the implementation of sharia law in northern Mali (Chauzal and van Damme 2015, 11). AQIM and other jihadist groups joined Ansar Dine’s efforts and worked alongside the original Tuareg rebels to capture territory in northern Mali from the military. As the rebellion made gains across northern Mali, the Malian military faced a coup due to ineffectiveness in its ability counter the rebels as well as deep discontent that built up among the general population toward the country’s ruling elite for their failure to stop the rebellion and provide peace (Chauzal and van Damme 2015, 12). With the Malian military and government in disarray, AQIM and its jihadist group allies commandeered the rebellion by turning “on the secular Tuareg forces, driving them out of
the seized cities and enforcing Sharia law on the population” (Chivis 2015, 70-71). AQIM and its allies had effectively secured vast amounts of northern territory by the end of 2012 and had ambitions to attack Bamako, the capital, and expand southward (Baker 2017, 16).

With Mali on the verge of being overrun by the insurgent forces, France and other African partners such as Chad stepped in militarily with the launch of Operation Serval which drove the insurgent forces from the northern cities they had captured (Thurston and Faber 2017, 16). Operation Serval was completed in 2014 and was subsequently followed by Operation Barkhane in 2014 which was intended to support counterterrorism and stability efforts in northern Mali against the dispersed insurgent forces of AQIM, Ansar Dine, MUJAO, and MNLA (Keenan 2016). The reduction in French military forces that followed the transition between Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane created an opening for AQIM rebuild its operations in northern Mali allowing it to increase its attacks across the region (Baker 2017, 46). Tuareg groups and the government of Mali reached a peace accord in 2015 under the Algiers Accord yet the jihadist groups continued carrying out attacks against the Malian government, the MINUSMA mission, and other international forces present in the region (Lapegna 2016). Specifically, AQIM has continued to engage in KFR (kidnappings-for-ransom), smuggling networks, and terrorist attacks against targets in Mali, all of which have served to increase the organization’s financial and recruitment capabilities (Laub and Masters 2015). One estimate is that AQIM has generated $65 million from its kidnapping of foreign nationals, and that from this revenue AQIM embeds itself further into criminal and smuggling networks through the investments it makes in expanding those networks (Aing & Pokoo 2013, 8; Strazzari 2015, 3-4). The continued instability created by the rebellion in 2012, the reduction in military forces following Operation Serval, and the activity of other jihadi groups in the region have all enabled
AQIM to “retrench and expand” despite the military and territory losses it took from French and UN forces (Laub and Masters 2015). Compared to other jihadi groups in the region such as Ansar Dine, Al-Mourabitoun, and the Macina Liberation Front (MLF), AQIM is considered the largest, but in March 2017 these organizations joined together to form Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin or the Supporters of Islam and Muslim Groups (JNIM) led by Ansar Dine’s leader, Iyad-Ag Ghali (Guitta 2010, 56; Baker 2017, 1). The combining of groups under one organization allows the groups “to display unity and strength, consolidate their resources, and perhaps expand their list of targets in the region” (Wing 2017, 192). Through this new organization, JNIM has been able to expand its operations to other countries and has been responsible for terrorist attacks in central Mali, Burkina Faso, and has listed Senegal as one of its target countries as well (Rouse 2018, irinnews.org).

**Section Five: Root Causes in Mali and Nigeria that enabled Radicalization**

AQIM’s presence in Mali and Boko Haram’s development in Nigeria emerged from different historical circumstances, propelled by different ideological perspectives, and through leaders that carried out the objectives of their organizations in separate ways. Despite the differences that have affected the trajectories of both organizations, they have been effective in radicalizing new members and addressing the local grievances of their target populations. Although the radicalization process in Mali and Nigeria is affected by a multitude of factors, there are similar root causes in both countries that have contributed toward AQIM and Boko Haram effectively radicalizing thousands to their causes. These root causes offer the chance to explore some of the components that start individuals on the complex path of radicalization. In the cases of Mali and Nigeria, there are several social, political, and economic factors that help drive the discontent and grievances of individuals that end up radicalizing and subsequently
become vulnerable to recruitment by AQIM and Boko Haram. These include governments that are perceived as marginalizing their northern populations through political means or corruption, demographics that are resulting in a large youth bulge, economies that are dominated by the southern parts of the country, northern regions of the country plagued by poverty and unemployment, and countries with widespread social and economic inequality. These factors are broken down into permissive structural factors and direct underlying grievances which help to form the root causes for radicalization.

**Permissive Structural Factors**

Permissive structural factors can be defined as creating “an enabling environment that, alone, is of no explanatory value but when in conjunction with other factors, may have explanatory value” (Newman 2006, 751). Within Mali and Nigeria, there exist several notable permissive structural factors that help make up the root causes of radicalization. The economies of both countries can be observed as having a distinguishable north-south divide in that the southern parts of the countries drive the economy, while the northern regions often do not have as viable of economic systems. Structural economic issues due to the construction and makeup of the economies in Mali and Nigeria are one of the permissive structural factors that contribute toward radicalization. Tandem to this is that within both Nigeria and Mali, the northern economies are far more dependent on livestock and agriculture as a means of living which are sectors that are at higher risks of exogenous shocks through the market or through the climate. Although oil revenue is a huge component of Nigeria’s economy, the revenue derived from oil has been historically mismanaged by Nigerian elites, thereby not properly supporting the northern Nigerian economy (Iyekekpolo 2016, 2222). In addition, the southwest portion of Nigeria is characterized by large commercial and business hubs while the area around the Niger
Delta has supplied the most federal revenue in the form of crude oil (Varin 2016, 16). In comparison, the northern region of Nigeria does not have the economic dominance as these other regions of the country. Economic problems are not exclusive to just the northern part of Nigeria; economic issues are pervasive throughout the country, but they are exacerbated in the northern part of the economy due to the lack of industry and commercialization. Some scholars attribute Nigeria’s structural economic and political problems due to the resource curse that results from Nigeria’s reliance on oil (Ko 2014; Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian 2012, 610).

In Mali, there also exists economic structural problems that result in the northern regions left largely vulnerable to exogenous shocks and with a disproportional amount of wealth compared to the south. In northern regions of Mali, livestock and agriculture makeup 42.7% of GDP with tourism making up the next largest component (Chauzal and van Damme 2015, 25). The livestock and agriculture sectors are highly vulnerable to climate effects such as drought as well as market fluctuations in prices. For instance, crises in Libya in 2011 and Algeria in the 1990s have disrupted the export of livestock out of northern Mali (Ibid., 25). On top of this, the northern economy also has “difficulties in endogenous development (including technical and security obstacles to the exploitation of natural resources)” and the Malian government favors the economic interests of the south—which has been exemplified through the exclusion of northern Mali from economic programs (Ibid., 25). Additionally, the southern economy of Mali is strengthened through a strong agriculture sector, the endowment of natural resources, and it receives additional assistance from international donors (Ibid., 25).

The insecurity and structural disadvantage that the northern economies of Mali and Nigeria are endowed with create a host of issues for their respective populations. The unequal structure of the Malian and Nigerian economy is not entirely due to the different geographies and
resources that the northern parts of the country have to utilize versus what the southern parts have. The economic disparities within both countries also exist due to the political structure of the two governments which are heavily influenced by the legacy of colonization. The political and economic structure of Mali and Nigeria has created conducive environments for corruption to flourish. According to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, which shows “perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and businesspeople,” Nigeria ranks 148/180 and Mali ranks 122/180 (Transparency International). High levels of corruption enabled by the political and economic structures of Mali and Nigeria can result in cynical, negative views of the state by the population which create the direct underlying grievances encompassed in root causes of radicalization.

The political structure of both countries represents the second key permissive structural factor that creates an enabling environment for radicalization. Mali and Nigeria, in the aftermath of colonial rule, constructed governments that have historically marginalized large portions of the population. Post-colonial rule in both countries meant periods of military dictatorship followed by civilian governments that resulted in political power being held by northern, southern, and military elites in Nigeria and southern and military elites in Mali at the expense of their northern populaces (Francis 2013, 4). For example, following Mali’s independence in 1960 the government “promoted aggressive unity [in the south] and constant marginalization [in the north]” which served to build the foundations for resentment among the northern Tuareg and Arab populations (Chauzel and van Damme 2015, 19). Southern political elites in Mali often selected certain northern elites whom were picked without consultation from local communities to “manage” problems in the north resulting in further tension due to undemocratic appointments (Ibid., 21). Given the dichotomy of the Malian population, with most of the population living in
the South, political representation by the north was historically limited in parliament and the
government (Ibid., 19). The inadequate efforts by the government in Bamako to ensure proper
representation by the north in the government and its divisive appointments of controversial
northern officials to oversee the northern populations resulted in strong distrust of the Malian
government by Tuareg and Arab populations. This distrust has escalated into “four Tuareg and
agreements following these uprisings have resulted in the Bamako government lessening its grip
on affairs in the north in order to appease the northern populations, this relinquishment has
enabled vast portions of northern Mali to be infiltrated by criminal and illicit activities as well as
for groups outside the country to enter and exit without government scrutiny (Ibid., 14). Despite
being hailed as a “poster child for democracy” due to its democratic transition from military rule
and its institutional development, the political structure of the Malian government has created
deep resentment and distrust in the minority northern populations (Ibid., 13). Mali’s political
history since independence is characterized by a populous, economically and politically
dominant south that has neglected the minority Tuareg and Arab populations in the north through
denial of adequate political representation, development programs and government services.

Nigeria’s experience following independence in 1960 shares some similar themes with
Mali due to the construction of the government that followed the end of British colonial rule, but
unlike Mali, Nigeria’s north is more populated than the south and therefore does have stronger
political power. The political structure and history of the Nigerian government has created deep
rifts between the Christian south and the Muslim north. Rule of Nigeria has alternated between
military regimes often deriving from northern military officials and civilian governments led
largely by the Christian south (Varin 2016, 33). While the Nigerian government has taken steps
to ensure that the Muslim north of the country is not left out of the civilian government political system through “zoning”, political inequality has still resulted due to the southern populations feeding into and making up a large portion of the Nigerian bureaucracy (Ibid., 17). Also, since independence in 1960, Christians in the south have feared “political domination from the more populated Muslim north,” which reflects efforts by southern elites to maintain control over the Nigerian government through alleged meddling in elections (Ibid., 11). The constant vying of political power between the north and south to control Nigeria’s wealth has enabled corruption to flourish and the democratic process to be eroded. These factors along with “inequitable distribution of power and resources among regional, ethnic and religious divides” have resulted in a Nigerian state characterized by insecurity (Aghedo and Osumah 2012, 857). For most of the 21st century up until President Buhari’s election in 2015, Nigeria has been ruled by Christian presidents which has served to politically marginalize the populations of northern Nigeria (Varin 2016, 33). The legacy in Nigeria of rule coming from military coups or questionably elected civilian governments, combined with the backdrop of a populous, but poor, Muslim north and a wealthy, Christian south, has produced deep distrust between the north and south as well as growing political and economic disparities.

Another permissive structural factor in the formula of root causes that is present in Mali and Nigeria is a rapidly growing population that exerts economic pressure on the existing populace. In Mali, the birth rate in 2017 was 43.9 (births/1,000 population), ranking third worldwide (CIA). The population percentage of those aged 0-14 in Mali in 2016 was 47.8% of the total population (World Bank). In Nigeria, the birth rate in 2017 was 36.9 (births/1,000 population), ranking 13th worldwide (CIA). The population percentage of those aged 0-14 in Nigeria in 2016 was 44.1% of the total population (World Bank). The rapid growth of
populations in both countries and the disproportionate size of the youth population that has followed that growth has increased urbanization and unemployment as the predominately younger population takes to the cities in search of jobs. One result of rapid population growth in situations like Mali and Nigeria is youth age bulge, which is defined as “substantial increase in the proportional size of the young male population with insecure employment prospects” (Khan and Azam 2008, 73).

The combined effects in Mali and Nigeria of asymmetrical economies, political systems characterized by corruption and insecurity, and burgeoning youth populations has led to high unemployment, food insecurity, increased urbanization, lack of government services, environmental degradation, and widespread poverty. The political, social, and economic structures in Mali and Nigeria and their subsequent effects are the permissive structural background that, when, conjoined with direct underlying conditions make up the initial part of the equation for those that have become radicalized and joined AQIM and Boko Haram.

**Direct Underlying Grievances**

Direct underlying grievances derive from the aforementioned permissive structural factors, and in the cases of Mali and Nigeria are feelings that originate from political, economic, and social inequality—such as marginalization, sense of resentment and alienation, and perceived or experienced oppression from the state (Newman 2006, 764). Indeed, there is ample evidence that these factors are a major driver of those who radicalize and join AQIM and Boko Haram. Underlying grievances in the context of Mali and Nigeria result from action or lack thereof by the government that feed into existing sentiments about one’s self, religion, or country. The conditions that stem from underlying grievances “provide oxygen for terrorist organizations” such as AQIM and Boko Haram (Ibid., 755).
The population of Northern Mali has experienced these direct underlying grievances due to the neglect that the Malian government has exhibited toward the northern parts of the country. Historical marginalization in the form of political exclusion for much of northern Mali has created a sense of alienation among the northern populace that has repeatedly sought for an improved level of representation and control (Wing 2017, 193). The history of rebellion in northern Mali by Arab and Tuareg groups is indicative of the some of the resentments northern Malians feel when their regions of the country are not provided with as great of access to health care, decent schools, and other government services (Wing 2017, 190-193). The lack of political representation and social services in northern Mali feed dislike of the Malian government and continue the low-levels of trust seen in the government by the Tuareg and Arab north. Indeed, the ideology of AQIM is “couched increasingly in language that is opposed to the weak, ineffective, and corrupt” national and regional governments in Mali (Keenan 2016). There is no greater evidence of the direct underlying grievances in northern Mali than the rhetoric and actions AQIM have taken to gain support among the local northern populations. AQIM inserted itself into regions of Mali characterized by widespread grievances of resentment and alienation stemming from poverty and unemployment and provided a government-like role in those regions. AQIM has provided services such as medicine, treatment of the sick, food aid, schooling, and financial donations for marriages (Chauzal and van Damme 2015, 34-50). By feeding into the resentments among northern Mali and filling in for the state’s role, AQIM has been able to position itself for recruitment. Other grievances that stem from northern Mali include economic inequality that often results in a build up in frustration for young males who want to improve their social position within society. A sense of victimization can develop for these young men due to the lack of opportunities, education, and support they receive from the
government (Newman 2006, 763-764). Indeed, young men are driven to socially navigate through their environment and they seek “status, money, and power”, which, when they are denied those can result in strong feelings of dissatisfaction and hopelessness (Haugegaard 2017, 6). Within northern Mali, the flourishing criminal economy has offered young men a chance to improve their social and economic situations by offering them status and an income; the efforts by AQIM to ingrain itself within this criminal economy has served as an opportunistisch chance to improve the group’s finances and recruitment (Chauval and van Damme 2015, 27).

In Nigeria, the direct underlying grievances that exist as a result of the social, political, and economic structures in the country are similar to those seen in Mali. Profiles of those that have joined Boko Haram highlight the belief that the imposition of Sharia law can work to improve levels of poverty, corruption, and unemployment (Agbiboa 2013, 148; Adelaja et al. 2018, 35). Social welfare implemented by Boko Haram in Borno state sought to capitalize on these feelings and brought it into contact with potential recruits (Varin 2016, 59). A survey of public opinion on the Nigerian public brings the evidence of resentment and grievances to light; a majority of the public agree that the root causes of Boko Haram are “unemployment, poverty and economic problems, dislike for government, extreme religious feelings and manipulation by some politicians”. (Adelaja et al., 2018, 35). Insecurity stemming from lack of government services in the region, unemployment, and poverty have provided “a fertile soil for nurturing anti-state groups such as Boko Haram” (Aghedo, 95-113). As with Mali, large populations of young men in northeastern Nigeria feel societal pressure to do well socially and economically, and given the limited economic opportunities and the lack of status poverty brings, many young men are enfolded by feelings of resentment and alienation toward the state for not providing them adequate opportunities for mobility. Boko Haram’s rhetoric that Nigeria is a “corrupt and
abusive government” that has failed its people and that returning Nigeria “to a state of religious purity” can solve the societal and economic problems that so many face in northeastern Nigeria has allowed it to capitalize off the direct underlying grievances of Nigeria for recruitment (Varin 2016, 58). Rhetoric like this and rhetoric similarly used by AQIM in Mali are indicative of the many direct underlying grievances that exist among the vulnerable populations of Mali and Nigeria.

An essential part of the direct underlying grievances that exist in Mali and Nigeria that equate into the process of radicalization is the manner in which religious ideology is tailored to address the grievances and discontent felt in both countries. While AQIM and Boko Haram are driven and shaped by different beliefs of Islam, both groups have utilized Islamic messaging in their rhetoric to offer a message of what can be done to ameliorate the harsh living environments and discontent of their followers and recruits. Given the split among scholars whether radicalization is merely a vehicle for existing discontents or if it is an essential cause of radicalism, it is hard to assess the exact role religion plays in the lives of those radicalized by AQIM and Boko Haram versus the role of social, economic, and political grievances. What can be noted is that AQIM and Boko Haram have heavily utilized religious appeals to address the widespread grievances felt by their targeted recruitment populations (Thurston and Fabel 2017, 47; Iyekekpolo 2016, 2222-2223). Belief that the imposition of Sharia law will help solve the problems that northern Malians and northeastern Nigerians face works as a radicalizing tactic because of the grievances those populations face. Additionally, the role of groups like AQIM and Boko Haram in offering social services along with their religious teachings does offer a pathway for them to shape public opinion positively in their embedded communities (Antwi-Boateng 2017, 267).
Taken together, permissive structural factors and the direct underlying grievances that stem from these factors help form the root causes for those that become radicalized by AQIM and Boko Haram. Root causes cannot explain the exact factors for why individuals join these groups; instead, by understanding root causes a better picture can be developed of “how, where and why” radicalization occurs (Newman 2006, 750).

**Section Six: Contemporary Root Causes in Mali and Nigeria**

Now that the root causes of radicalization in Mali and Nigeria have been explored that played a role in the development of AQIM and Boko Haram, the question now exists of whether these root causes persist despite the setbacks AQIM and Boko Haram have taken since military action was employed against them. To reemphasize “the broad idea that root cause analysis of radicalization captures is that human insecurity, which include conditions such as poverty, inequality, corruption, and demographic change, is the enabler for conditions of terrorism and radicalization” (O’Neill 2002b, 20). Mali, Nigeria, and other international actors have taken strong military action against AQIM and Boko Haram, but the efforts by these actors to address the human insecurity that existed before the conflicts and that has become exacerbated by these conflicts continues to persist.

The reduction in French military forces following Operation Serval and inability of the Malian government to establish control in northern Mali following the rebellion in 2012 has allowed AQIM and other jihadist groups to retrench and expand (Laub and Masters 2015). Part of the resilience in AQIM’s ability to do this was from its efforts since arriving in Mali to make inroads with different local communities via enmeshment in the criminal and illicit economies of northern Mali, provision of social services to local populations, and marrying among the local populations (Goita 2011, 5; Chauval and van Damme 2015, 50). From these inroads, AQIM has
placed itself in a position to continue to capitalize on the human insecurity of northern Mali for recruitment by listening to the local population and tailoring its rhetoric to their grievances (Sperber 2017). Grievances that local populations have with the Malian government in the past five years include the failure by the government to provide adequate health or education infrastructure or employment for young men that have been displaced or economically affected by the 2012 rebellion (Camara 2016). AQIM’s proficient kidnapping-for-ransom campaign out of northern Mali has effectively shut down the tourism industry that used to contribute toward the northern Mali population, producing further unemployment and poverty in an already precarious region (Guitta 2010, 59). Also, the Malian government has maintained a political system of corrupt payoffs and management of problems in the northern parts of the country via local agents (Sperber 2017). Finally, the merger of AQIM and other jihadist groups into Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin or the Supporters of Islam and Muslim Groups (JNIM) may allow this new organization greater access to vulnerable populations in northern Mali and other countries in the Sahel due to the combined resources and networks it now has access to. Mali’s focus on military action against the jihadist groups following the 2012 rebellion and not social development as well has left the permissive structural factors and direct underlying grievances that form the basis for the root causes of radicalization to persist. Food insecurity due to drought has only exacerbated these conditions resulting in a population affected by insecurity that has not diminished since the early 2000s when AQIM first moved into northern Mali.

Military action taken against Boko Haram has been far more encompassing given the destruction and fatalities inflicted by Boko Haram against northeast Nigeria and Nigerian security forces. Boko Haram’s territory now includes a few villages and areas of the countryside near the Lake Chad basin, but they have continued a wave of suicide attacks against mosques,
schools, and security forces in northeast Nigeria (Campbell and Harwood 2018). Boko Haram’s impact on northeast Nigeria has been widespread and devastating on the population. The UN estimates that 2.4 million people have been displaced across northeast Nigeria due to the conflict (Ibid. 2018). Amnesty International has reported that war crimes have been committed by Nigerian security forces against captured Boko Haram militants and the millions of IDPs in the form of sexual violence, torture, and killings (Amnesty International 2017). The continuation and increase in suicide attacks by Boko Haram militants the last two years has prevented international relief organizations and donor countries from delivering humanitarian aid to the populations in Nigeria that have been affected by the conflict (Campbell and Harwood 2018). Also, Boko Haram’s continued presence in Nigeria via suicide attacks and kidnappings has prevented the government from focusing on development and infrastructure plans that would benefit northeast Nigeria. These factors limit the ability for development to occur in the damaged regions of northeast Nigeria, exacerbating matters of human insecurity. Although, splits among Boko Haram’s leadership due to its alliance with ISIS may detrimentally affect the group’s ability to coherently establish a recruiting message, conduct attacks, and regain its foothold in Nigeria, denying it the chance to effectively act on the insecurity plaguing Nigeria as it did leading up to its rise. Similar to Mali, the persistence of root causes of radicalization that originally allowed Boko Haram a populace to recruit from and tailor a message to has continued or been further exacerbated by the conflict Boko Haram has perpetuated against Nigeria. On the other hand, Boko Haram has been far more affected by military action taken against the group that became increasingly effective under President Buhari’s leadership and coordination with regional allies.
The root causes of radicalization in Mali and Nigeria which are characterized by widespread insecurity in the northern parts of the countries have persisted since AQIM and Boko Haram first began establishing their followings in the two countries. Following military campaigns against both organizations, development programs or efforts by the Malian and Nigerian governments to ameliorate the insecurity through means other than military action has not occurred. Unless these root causes are addressed by Mali and Nigeria, AQIM and Boko Haram may continue to have vulnerable populations at risk of radicalization in the region to recruit and gain support from.

**Section Seven: Policy Recommendations and Conclusion**

Root cause analysis of radicalization in Mali and Nigeria indicates several elements of human insecurity that have put AQIM and Boko Haram in a position to capitalize on collective grievances and recruit vulnerable populations. Poverty, unemployment, corruption, inequality, and demographic pressure have affected populations in northern Mali and northeastern Nigeria, especially in the last two decades, creating feelings of resentment, alienation, marginalization, and frustration. These feelings and root causes are just a small part of the complicated process of radicalization, but they are important ones to observe and study in order for governments to craft solutions to insecurity and terrorism within their borders. The success of AQIM and Boko Haram to engrain themselves among vulnerable populations has had devastating effects in Mali and Nigeria. Military efforts in response to AQIM and Mali has resulted in pressure on the groups, forcing them to flee from large territorial swaths they had claimed at the peaks of their success.

Today, AQIM remains a major player in northern Mali as porous borders and limited governance allow the group to retrench and expand. Having established itself in local northern communities and enmeshed itself in the criminal and smuggling networks of northern Mali,
AQIM has maintained a presence that allows it to plan and conduct attacks on Malian and Sahelian targets. Though it was setback following the 2012 rebellion by African and French military forces, AQIM has merged with other jihadist groups in the region and appears poised to continue its campaign of criminal activities and terror across the region.

Nigeria has maintained a strong military effort under President Buhari to degrade Boko Haram from its peak strength in 2015, in which the group inflicted heavy devastation on Nigerian security forces and civilians. The Nigerian populace is still reeling from Boko Haram’s campaign as 2.4 million people are still displaced. Boko Haram’s territory is limited to a few small towns and parts of the countryside, but despite this the group has been able to inflict an increasing amount of suicide attacks since 2016 on civilian and police targets (Campbell and Harwood 2018). The situation in northeastern Nigeria pre-Boko Haram was already a region characterized by insecurity through unemployment, poverty, and rampant corruption, but since Boko Haram’s rise and its military campaign against Nigeria, the region has been further detrimentally impacted. Splits in Boko Haram’s leadership cast uncertainty on how the group will maneuver and try and reestablish itself, but the populations in northeastern Nigeria remain vulnerable to radicalization given the war crimes and abuse the Nigerian military has inflicted in its campaign against Boko Haram.

Given the root causes of radicalization stemming from matters of human insecurity in Mali and Nigeria, there are policy steps both countries could take to correcting the environments that their citizens face. These options will have to be weighed against the effectiveness of military action, which can provide tangible results in the short term against AQIM and Boko Haram militants. Policy steps addressing root causes will require a long-term financial commitment by Mali, Nigeria, and other vested international actors. These steps need to be
socially, politically, and economically oriented in order to relieve the simmering resentments, alienation, and discontent that regions of Mali and Nigeria feel, and which have allowed terrorist organizations to recruit from. These policy steps include: investing in social and economic development in troubled regions such as health facilities and schools, creating social policies that improve wealth and reduce inequality, developing tighter border control around areas where combatants and illicit goods flow in from, tightening down on corruption and political practices that reward those in power, create better storage system for grains and water to mitigate the adverse effects of drought and market fluctuations, maintain security forces in at-risk regions and regulate their actions to prevent overly harsh punishments and war crimes, and collaborate with other affected governments to monitor the movement and recruitment efforts of AQIM and Boko Haram (Alexander 2017, 14; Laub and Masters 2015; Baker 2017, 48-51; Burgoon 2006, 176-184). Taken together, these steps need to bring improvement to all aspects of human insecurity—poverty, unemployment, political and economic inequality, and religious extremism in northern Mali and northeast Nigeria (Burgoon 2004, 184). If these policy steps can be appropriately taken, then the chances of radicalization in the historically troubled regions of Mali and Nigeria can be diminished.
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