Local Perceptions of UN Peacekeeping: A Look at the Data

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SEPTEMBER 2023

Executive Summary

Recent anti-UN protests have fueled concerns that some UN peacekeeping operations are facing a "crisis of legitimacy" among host-state populations. Without local legitimacy, there are questions about whether peacekeepers should be present. Peacekeeping operations also depend on local legitimacy to effectively implement their mandates. It is therefore important to understand how local populations perceive UN peacekeepers.

Limited data is one of the biggest barriers to analyzing local perceptions of UN peacekeeping. While some high-quality data does exist, much of the data on local perceptions is collected in an ad hoc manner or is not up-to-date, reflects a narrow snapshot of local perceptions, or is not publicly accessible or presented transparently. Nonetheless, available data can provide insights into local perceptions of UN peacekeepers.

Existing data reveals that it is difficult to generalize about confidence in UN peacekeeping. Perceptions differ between peacekeeping contexts, with more negative perceptions of the missions in Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) compared to the missions in the Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan. Perceptions also differ within peacekeeping contexts. For example, there is evidence that people who have more direct contact with peacekeepers often view them more positively, though this is not always the case. Perceptions can also vary depending on geographic area and demographic factors such as gender.

These local perceptions are in part shaped by how peacekeepers are perceived to act, including whether they are perceived as acting impartially or engaging in misconduct. However, the performance of peacekeepers in delivering results to local populations seems to play the most important role in shaping local perceptions. Peacekeepers' perceived effectiveness in responding to threats against civilians is particularly important.

Ultimately, considering the wide variation in perceptions of peacekeepers, both between and within peacekeeping contexts and across time, it rarely makes sense to talk about UN peacekeeping operations having or lacking "legitimacy." Instead, they have multiple "legitimacies." Understanding the factors behind these legitimacies requires better data on and nuanced analysis of local perceptions. Toward this end, UN peacekeeping operations and other researchers within and outside the UN should prioritize mixed-methods approaches, disaggregated data, data that covers the breadth of peacekeeping mandates, and transparent publishing of results.

Introduction

In June 2023, Mali's governing authorities asked the country's UN peacekeeping operation (MINUSMA) to leave following more than two years of growing tensions between the government and the UN. While this is the most extreme recent example of a breakdown in relations between a host government and a UN mission, it is not the only one. Tensions have also plagued the relationships between host governments and other current UN missions, including the multidimensional UN peacekeeping operations in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and South Sudan (UNMISS).[1] These tensions raise questions about the degree of host-state consent for the presence of UN peacekeepers—one of the central principles of peacekeeping.

Yet the host state is not the only relevant source of consent for UN peacekeeping operations. The consent of host-state populations has also attracted growing attention in the wake of recent anti-UN protests. In May, a few weeks before the Malian government asked MINUSMA to leave, thousands of Malians protested in Bamako to demand the withdrawal of the mission—one of many recent anti-UN protests in the country. Anti-UN protests have also regularly occurred in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), including a protest in Goma in August 2023 that government forces put down with deadly force.

Such protests have fueled concerns that some UN peacekeeping operations are facing a "crisis of

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legitimacy" among host-state populations.[2] The need for local legitimacy has long been enshrined in UN peacekeeping doctrine and recognized by scholars.[3] Local legitimacy is important for both normative and operational reasons. Normatively, there are questions about whether peacekeepers should be present if they lack legitimacy in the eyes of the people they are supposed to be protecting and serving. Operationally, peacekeeping operations depend on local cooperation to effectively engage in peacebuilding and other mandated areas, and people are unlikely to cooperate with a mission they see as illegitimate. For missions mandated to protect civilians, local perceptions may even be "the most important variable" for success.[4]

It is therefore important to understand how local populations perceive UN peacekeepers. While researchers have studied local perceptions within specific peacekeeping contexts, few have compared local perceptions of different missions. Moreover, researchers who have compared perceptions across missions have tended to rely on academic research on past peacekeeping operations rather than more recent survey data on current missions, resulting in a broadly positive assessment that does not reflect today's reality.[5] This article therefore explores existing data on local perceptions of the four current multidimensional UN peacekeeping operations: the missions in the Central African Republic (CAR), the DRC, Mali, and South Sudan. This data points to several cross-cutting insights that could help inform conversations around local perceptions of UN peacekeeping.

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1   Host-state consent is not a new challenge. Several past UN missions have also had tense relationships with host governments, including in Sudan and Chad. For more on this, see: Timothy Passmore, Johannes Karreth, and Jaroslav Tir, "Consent in Peacekeeping," in *Handbook on Peacekeeping and International Relations*, Han Dorussen, ed. (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022).

2   Jenna Russo, "Protests against UN in Eastern Congo Highlight Peace Mission's Crisis of Legitimacy," *The Conversation*, July 31, 2022; Anjali Dayal, "A Crisis of Consent in UN Peace Operations," *IPI Global Observatory*, August 2, 2022.

3   According to the UN Capstone Doctrine, for example, "United Nations peacekeeping operations must… be perceived as legitimate and credible, particularly in the eyes of the local population." UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS), "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines," 2008, p. 36. On recognition by scholars, see, for example: Béatrice Pouligny, *Peace Operations Seen from Below: UN Missions and Local People* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006).

4   Alison Giffen, "Community Perceptions as a Priority in Protection and Peacekeeping," Stimson, October 2013.

5   See, for example: Han Dorussen and Marian de Vooght, "The Local Perception of Peacekeepers," in *Handbook on Peacekeeping and International Relations*.

What Sources Do We Have for Data on Local Perceptions of Peacekeeping?

One of the biggest barriers to analyzing local perceptions of UN peacekeeping is that data is limited. While some high-quality data does exist, much of the data on local perceptions is collected in an ad hoc manner or is not up-to-date, reflects a narrow snapshot of local perceptions, or is not publicly accessible or presented transparently.

Protests, like the recent anti-UN protests in the DRC and Mali, are the most visible indicator of local perceptions.[6] However, they may not be the best indicator. Only a tiny fraction of the population in any given peacekeeping context has participated in anti-UN protests. Data on protests is also unreliable, as protests in cities where more journalists are present are likely to receive more media attention than protests in more remote areas. This can amplify the voices of people who do not depend on UN peacekeepers for protection over those who do. Moreover, in the DRC and Mali, UN officials have reported that, in some cases, people were given or promised payment for participating in anti-UN protests.[7] In Mali, many of the anti-UN protests have been organized by pro-Russia groups that are also involved in spreading Russian propaganda.[8]

It is therefore important to look at other data sources to understand local perceptions of UN peacekeepers. Missions themselves use several tools to collect data on local perceptions, not only of the mission itself but also of broader issues such as violence, governance, and justice. These data-gathering tools include surveys, focus groups, interviews, public meetings, traditional media monitoring, and social media monitoring.[9] Researchers in NGOs or academic institutions have used similar methods to gather data on local perceptions in peacekeeping contexts.

Public perception surveys can be an effective tool to gather representative, quantitative data on local perceptions. The UN has conducted representative perception surveys in several peacekeeping contexts, usually in partnership with other institutions (see Annex).[10] The UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) collaborated with MINUSCA and MONUSCO to conduct a series of perception surveys in CAR (2016–2021) and eastern DRC (2015–2021).[11] UNMISS has conducted a perception survey every year since 2019 (with the exception of 2022), and MINUSCA conducted a perception survey in 2022.[12] Within the past year, surveys asking about perceptions of UN peacekeeping have also been published by researchers at Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and Afrobarometer in Mali; the Congo Research Group (CRG) and Ebuteli in the DRC; and PAX in South Sudan.[13]

These surveys have limitations, however. Conducting surveys can be expensive, is often time-

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6   While most protests reported by the media over the past year have been in the DRC and Mali and have been in favor of the departure of UN peacekeepers, there have also been protests against the departure of UN peacekeepers, including in Darfur and South Sudan in 2020.

7   UN officials at closed-door conference, Montreal, March 16, 2023.

8   Alison Onyango, "Yerewolo, le groupe pro-russe du Mali qui exige le départ des forces de l'ONU," BBC Afrique, August 7, 2022.

9   UN DPKO and DFS, "Understanding and Integrating Local Perceptions in Multi-dimensional UN Peacekeeping," 2013. More broadly, UN missions also assess local perceptions through their community engagement and peacekeeping-intelligence work.

10 Beyond the surveys in multidimensional peacekeeping contexts mentioned here, the UN mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has also regularly conducted perception surveys.

11 For the 2016–2020 survey results in CAR and the 2015–2019 survey results in the DRC, see: Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and KoboToolbox, PeacebuildingData.org, available at http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/research/car and http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/research/drc .

12 For a summary of the results of UNMISS's 2023 survey, see: UNMISS, "UNMISS Perception and Public Opinion Survey 2022–23," June 20, 2023, available at https://unmiss.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unmiss_perception_survey_-_4_page_summary.pdf . For some historical data from UNMISS's surveys, see: UN Peacekeeping, "Action for Peacekeeping+ Third Progress Report," June 2023. MINUSCA's 2022 survey is not publicly available.

13 For reports on the 2012–2023 FES surveys in Mali, see: FES, "Mali-Mètre: Enquête d'opinion—'Que pensent les Maliens?'" available at https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/mali/10100/index.html . For the report on SIPRI's multiyear survey, see: SIPRI, "'Écoutez-nous!': Enquêtes sur les perceptions des populations au centre du Mali," SIPRI, May 2023, available at https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/listen_to_us-local_perceptions_of_populations_in_central_mali.pdf . For results from Afrobarometer's surveys in Mali, see: Afrobarometer, "Mali," available at https://www.afrobarometer.org/countries/mali/ . For the most recent summary of survey results from Congo Research Group (CRG) and Ebuteli, see: CRG and Ebuteli, "Majority of Congolese Reject East African Community Regional Force," February 2023, available at https://www.congoresearchgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/version-anglaise-sondage-gec-ebuteli-deuxieme-note-thematique-force-regionale.pdf . For a dashboard with some of the data from PAX's 2018–2022 surveys in South Sudan, see: PAX Protection of Civilians Team, "Human Security Survey South Sudan Dashboard," available at https://protectionofcivilians.org/infographic/hss-south-sudan-dashboard/ . The fourth wave of a multiyear survey by David Deng, Sophia Dawkins, Christopher Oringa, and Jan Pospisil also included questions about UNMISS, but the survey results have not yet been published. For results from the earlier waves of this survey, see: PeaceRep, Detcro, and US Institute of Peace, "Perceptions of Peace in South Sudan: Interactive Survey Data from South Sudan," available at https://peacerep.org/perceptions-peace-south-sudan/ .

consuming, and requires technical expertise that is not always available locally. In conflict-affected areas, surveys often need to be conducted face-to-face due to poor communications infrastructure, yet insecurity and logistical challenges can make some regions difficult to access. Surveys in socially polarized areas also need to account for social and political sensitivities and complexities, potentially requiring larger sample sizes to allow for disaggregation by different social groups.[14] Beyond these challenges conducting surveys, surveys can be difficult to analyze and compare because detailed results are not always published, and survey methodologies can vary significantly.[15]

Other methods such as interviews and focus groups can address some of these limitations. The UN and NGOs such as SIPRI, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), and the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) have regularly conducted interviews and focus groups to understand local perceptions of peacekeeping. These methods can provide more nuanced qualitative data, going beyond whether people have a positive or negative perception of the mission. However, these methods are unlikely to be representative of the broader population. This is especially the case when international personnel in UN missions consult their national colleagues in the mission as proxies for the broader population. Moreover, collecting qualitative data in conflict-affected areas entails many of the same challenges as quantitative surveys.[16]

Traditional media monitoring and social media monitoring have also become increasingly common methods for assessing local perceptions, both within missions and among non-UN researchers.[17] This monitoring is an important way for missions to keep track of prevalent narratives about the UN, including misinformation and disinformation.[18] For understanding broader public perceptions, however, media monitoring can give a skewed perspective. Across Africa, digital media is disproportionately used by men, young people, people who are more educated, and people living in urban areas.[19] Members of the diaspora are also likely overrepresented in digital media.[20] Moreover, missions' reporting on the sentiment analyses they conduct have sometimes been misleading or unclear.[21]

How Does Confidence in UN Peacekeepers Vary between and within Peacekeeping Contexts?

Despite its shortcomings, available data can provide insights into local perceptions of UN peacekeeping operations. This data reveals that it is difficult to generalize about confidence in UN peacekeeping, either between or within peacekeeping contexts, due to wide variations in perceptions among different groups of people and over time. In comparing this data, it is also important to keep in mind the differences between peacekeeping contexts, including differences in mandates, troop deployments, relationships with the host government, and links to broader geopolitics.

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14 Written correspondence with UN official, August 2023. See also: Zeina N. Mneimneh et al., "Conducting Surveys in Areas of Armed Conflict," in *Hard-to-Survey Populations*, Roger Tourangeau et al., eds. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

15 For example, some surveys ask all respondents about their perceptions of UN peacekeepers, while others only ask those who say they are familiar with the mission or the mission is present in their area.

16 See, for example: Shourjya Deb and Virginie Baudais, "The Challenges of Data-Collection in Conflict-Affected Areas: A Case Study in the Liptako-Gourma Region," SIPRI, October 2022.

17 For one example of academic research on UN peacekeeping using social media data, see: Burak Giray, "Public Support for UN Missions and Attacks on Peacekeepers: Evidence from the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 28, no. 4 (2022).

18 See: Albert Trithart, "Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations," IPI, November 2022.

19 Jeffrey Conroy-Krutz and Joseph Koné, "Promise and Peril: In Changing Media Landscape, Africans Are Concerned about Social Media but Opposed to Restricting Access," Afrobarometer, February 2022, pp. 5–8.

20 Some of the most prominent francophone, pro-Russia online "influencers," such as Kemi Seba and Nathalie Yamb, are members of the African diaspora. In the DRC, the UN mission has established that many of the biggest spreaders of disinformation and hate speech are Congolese living outside the country. Interview with UN official, June 2022.

21 The UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) has reported on sentiment analysis as part of its monitoring of the Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+) priorities. The first A4P+ report (November 2021–April 2022) included metrics of sentiment analysis for seven missions. Some of these metrics combined positive and neutral mentions into a single figure, which could be misleading, while the meaning or significance of other metrics was ambiguous. The second report (May–October 2022) included a single metric on overall mentions of UN peacekeeping. The third report (November 2022–April 2023) switched from metrics based on sentiment analysis to the results of public perception surveys in South Sudan. See: UN Peacekeeping, "Action for Peacekeeping +," available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-peacekeeping .

Variation between Missions

At the macro level, the most recent survey data indicates low public confidence in the UN missions in Mali and the DRC, which have also seen the most anti-UN protests. National surveys in both countries have found that, as of 2023, less than a quarter of the population views MINUSMA and MONUSCO favorably (see Table 1). Moreover, in both countries, national-level support has declined considerably over the period covered by recent surveys (see Figures 1 and 2).[22] In early 2023, more than two-thirds of Congolese surveyed wanted MONUSCO to leave, and in mid-2022, three-quarters of Malians felt that MINUSMA's presence was no longer needed (see Table 2).[23]

However, these two missions may be the excep-

> It is difficult to generalize about confidence in UN peacekeeping, either between or within peace-keeping contexts, due to wide variations among different groups of people and over time.

tion more than the norm. Historically, surveys have found high levels of public confidence in several past UN peacekeeping operations, including the missions in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire, which large majorities of the population viewed positively.[24] Confidence in the current UN missions in CAR and South Sudan also appears relatively high. A 2022 MINUSCA survey found that more than seven in ten Central Africans had a positive perception of the mission.[25] And in a 2023 survey commissioned by UNMISS, around nine in ten South Sudanese agreed that UNMISS's presence promotes peace and stability (see Table 1) and positively assessed the mission's performance in protecting civilians and building a durable peace—a number that has grown since 2019 (see Figure 3).[26]

Table 1: Recent nationwide surveys asking about overall perceptions of UN peacekeeping operations

Country	Year	Survey conducted by	Question	Percent of respondents
Mali (urban areas only)	Feb. 2023	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)	Very or somewhat satisfied with the work of MINUSMA	23%
DRC	Jan. 2023	Congo Research Group (CRG)	Good or somewhat good opinion of MONUSCO	23%
CAR	May 2022	MINUSCA	Very favorable or favorable opinion of MINUSCA	71%
South Sudan	Jan.–Mar. 2023	UNMISS	Strongly or somewhat agree that UNMISS presence is helping South Sudan people to achieve peace and stability	88%

22 FES, "Mali-Mètre: Enquête d'opinion—'Que pensent les Malien(ne)s?'" February 2023; CRG and Ebuteli, "Majority of Congolese Reject East African Community Regional Force."

23 CRG and Ebuteli, "Majority of Congolese Reject East African Community Regional Force," p. 6; Afrobarometer, "Mali Round 9 résumé des résultats," February 2023, p. 88.

24 Jean Krasno, "Public Opinion Survey of UNAMSIL's Work in Sierra Leone," 2005; Jean Krasno, "Public Opinion Survey of UNMIL's Work in Liberia," 2006; Eric Mvukiyehe and Cyrus Samii, "Laying a Foundation for Peace? A Quantitative Impact Evaluation of the United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire," December 2008; Eric Mvukiyehe and Cyrus Samii, "Quantitative Impact Evaluation of the United Nations Mission in Liberia: Final Report," February 2010; Julia Leib and Samantha Ruppel, "The Dance of Peace and Justice: Local Perceptions of International Peacebuilding in West Africa," *International Peacekeeping* 28, no. 5 (2021). A survey conducted after the departure of the UN mission in Timor-Leste also found largely positive perceptions of the mission. Han Dorussen, "Security Perception after the Completion of UN Peacekeeping in Timor-Leste," *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 21, no. 4 (2015).

25 MINUSCA, "Excerpts from 2022 Guira-SCPI-MINUSCA Perception Survey," on file with author.

26 UNMISS, "UNMISS Perception and Public Opinion Survey 2022–23." It is worth bearing in mind that these surveys in CAR and South Sudan, while broadly representative, were commissioned by the UN missions themselves, while the surveys in Mali and the DRC were conducted by independent researchers.

Table 2. Recent nationwide surveys asking about whether peacekeeping operations should leave the country

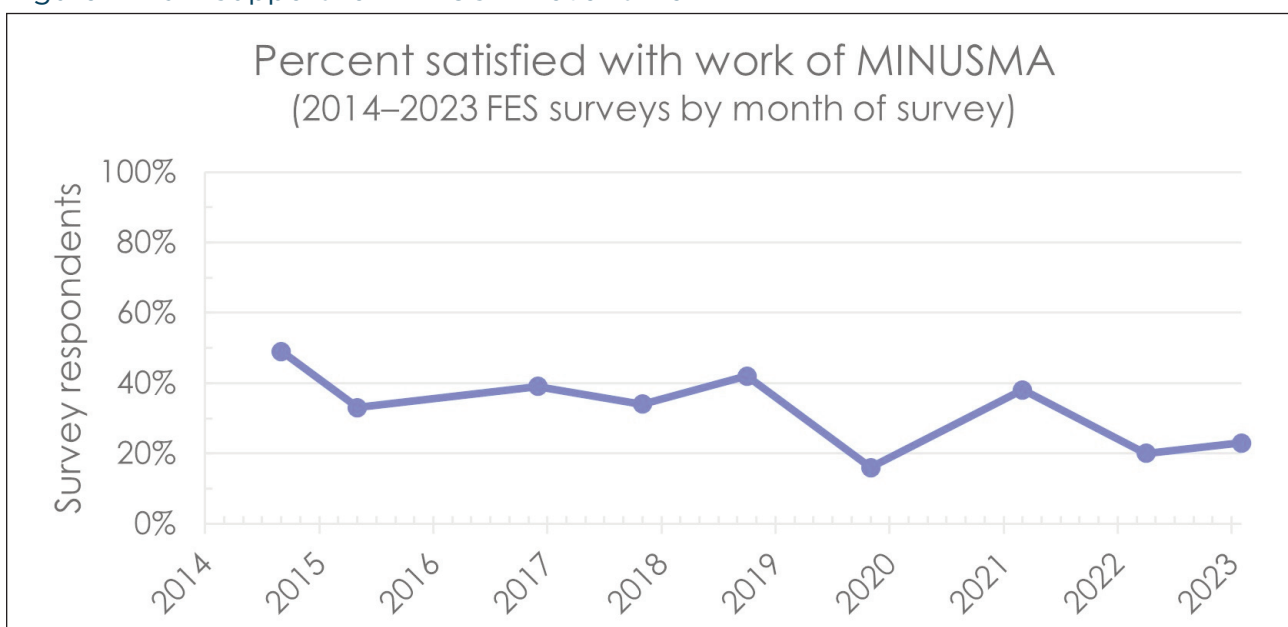| Country	Year	Survey conducted by	Question	Percent of respondents
Mali	July–Aug. 2022	Afrobarometer	Does Mali still need the following foreign forces [MINUSMA] to remain in Mali?	No: 75% Yes: 22%
DRC	Jan. 2023	Congo Research Group (CRG)	Should MONUSCO leave, downsize, or stay?	Leave: 67% Stay: 24%

Figure 1. Mali: Support for MINUSMA over time

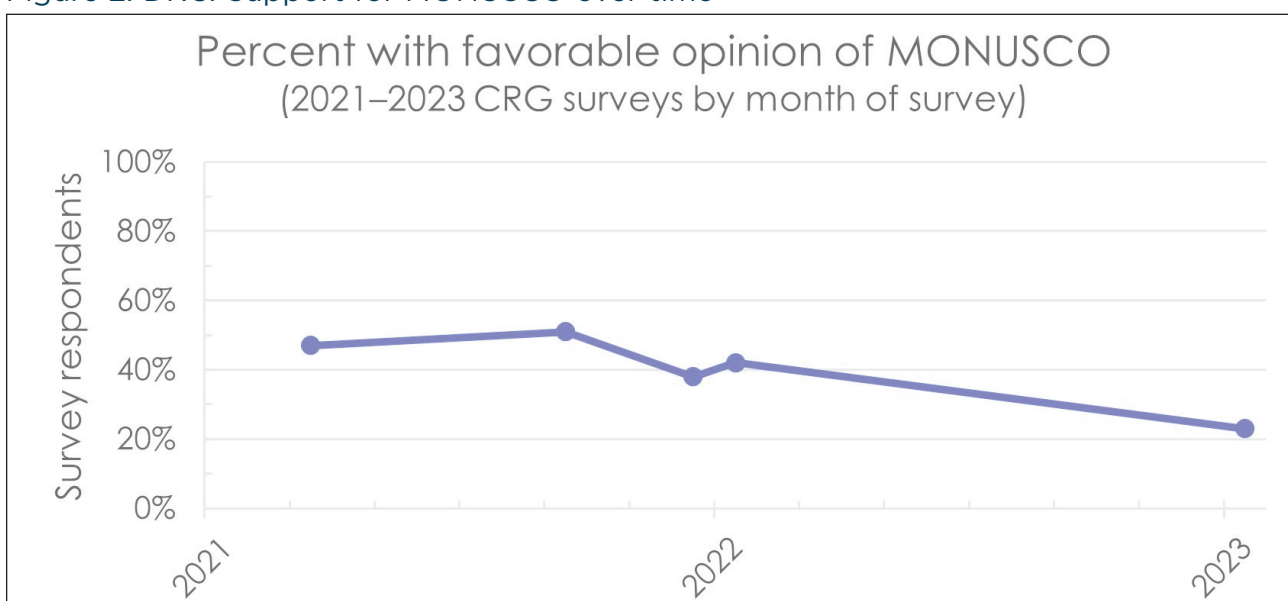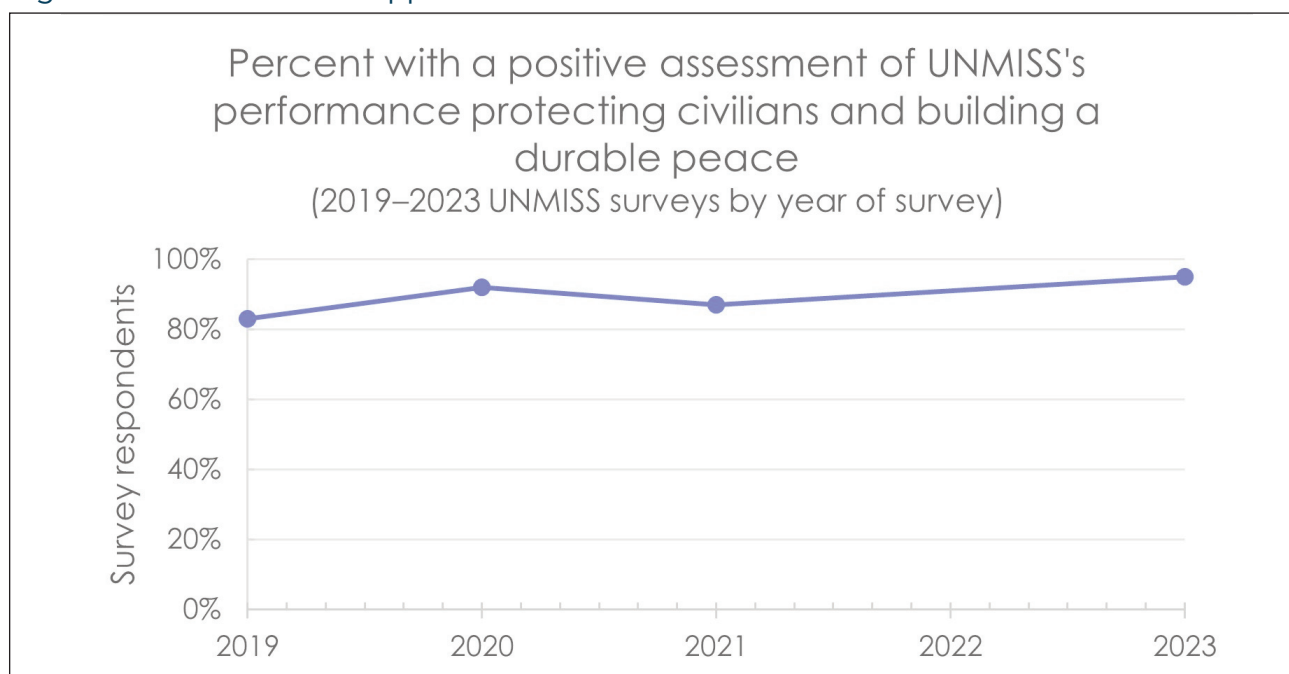Figure 2. DRC: Support for MONUSCO over time

Figure 3. South Sudan: Support for UNMISS over time

Variation by Level of Interaction with Peacekeepers

Confidence can also vary significantly within peacekeeping contexts. For example, there is evidence that people who directly interact with UN peacekeepers or live near where they are deployed may perceive them more positively than people who have little or no interaction with them. This could be because interacting with missions can make the positive contributions of their work more tangible.[27] Those who live near UN bases may also be more likely to view missions as sources of employment and economic development.[28]

For example, a 2018 survey in South Sudan found significantly more positive perceptions of UNMISS's performance in providing security in Central Equatoria state, where nearly two-thirds of respondents reported that UNMISS was present in their area, than in Jonglei state, where less than a

quarter reported UNMISS's presence (see Figure 4). Respondents in Jonglei were also significantly more likely to say that UNMISS had a negative effect on their personal security despite reporting the mission's lesser presence.[29]

Similarly, in Mali, a 2023 survey conducted in urban areas found that satisfaction with the mission was significantly higher in the north of the country, where many of MINUSMA's peacekeepers have been concentrated (58 percent satisfaction versus 23 percent for the population of Mali as a whole; see Figure 5). In the northern region of Ménaka, however, satisfaction is lower than in any other region of the country (15 percent), likely reflecting frustration with the mission's perceived inaction to combat the rising number of terrorist attacks. Perceptions of MINUSMA are also largely negative in central Mali, where the mission's mandate was extended in 2019.[30] These mixed results could point to the fact that people living in areas where peace-

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27 Thomas O'Mealia, Patrick Vinck, Anupah Makoond, Kennedy Kihangi Bindu, and Phuong Pham, "Seeing Blue Helmets Is Believing: Exposure to Peacekeepers and Civilian Perceptions of UN PKOs," in "Violence, Protection, and the Political Economy of Security Provision in Ongoing Conflicts" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2022), available at https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/172602 .

28 Bernd Beber et al., "The Promise and Peril of Peacekeeping Economies," *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2019).

29 Data provided by PAX Protection of Civilians Team. While PAX conducted surveys of the same regions in 2020 and 2022, respondents in those surveys were only asked about their perceptions of UNMISS if they reported that the mission was present in their area, resulting in very small sample sizes. See: PAX Protection of Civilians Team, "HSS South Sudan Dashboard." Another 2023 survey in South Sudan, whose results have not yet been published, also found that respondents in internally displaced persons camps, several of which were or are protection of civilians sites where UN peacekeepers directly provide security, more strongly agreed that the mission contributes to safety in their area than other survey respondents.

30 FES, "Mali-Mètre: Enquête d'opinion—'Que pensent les Malien(ne)s?'" February 2023, pp. 61–62.

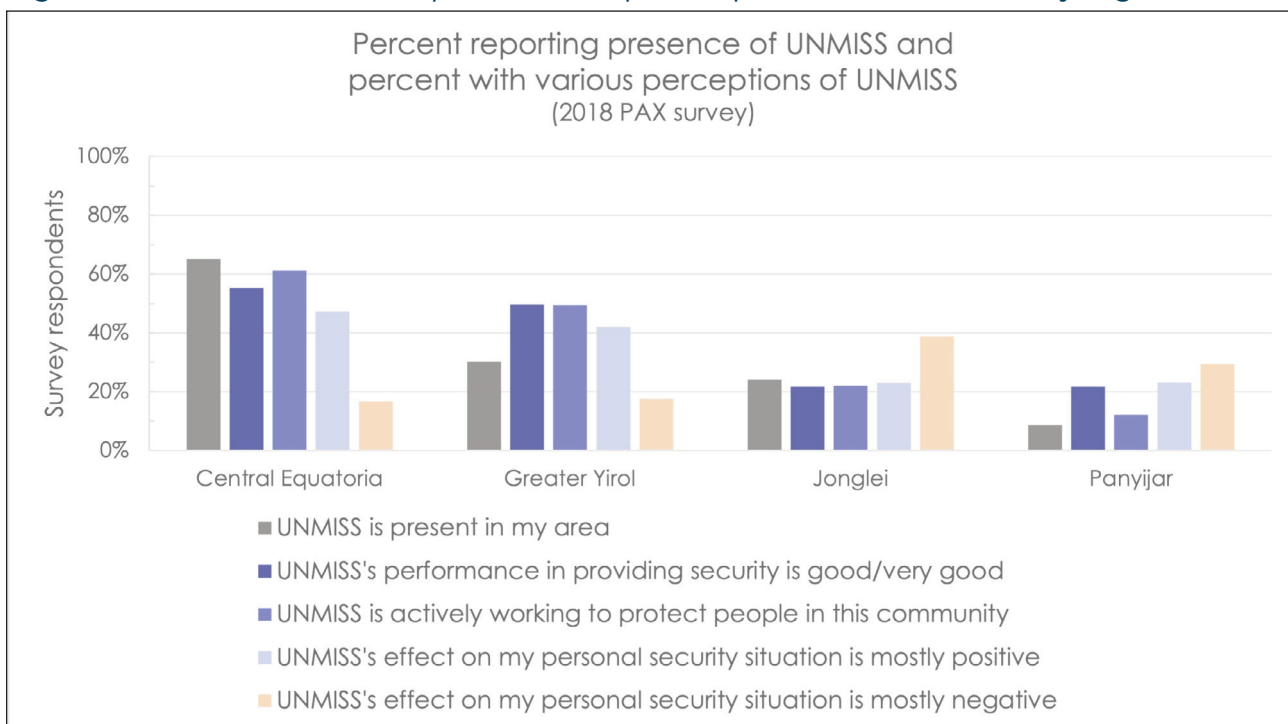## Figure 4. South Sudan: Perceptions and reported presence of UNMISS by region

Percent reporting presence of UNMISS and
percent with various perceptions of UNMISS
(2018 PAX survey)

- ■ UNMISS is present in my area
- ■ UNMISS's performance in providing security is good/very good
- ■ UNMISS is actively working to protect people in this community
- ■ UNMISS's effect on my personal security situation is mostly positive
- ■ UNMISS's effect on my personal security situation is mostly negative

Figure 5. Mali: Net satisfaction with the work of MINUSMA in urban areas

Difference between percent very/somewhat satisfied and percent
very/somewhat unsatisfied with the work of MINUSMA by region
(2023 FES survey)

Powered by Bing
© Microsoft, OpenStreetMap

Net satisfaction among survey respondents
-100%   100%
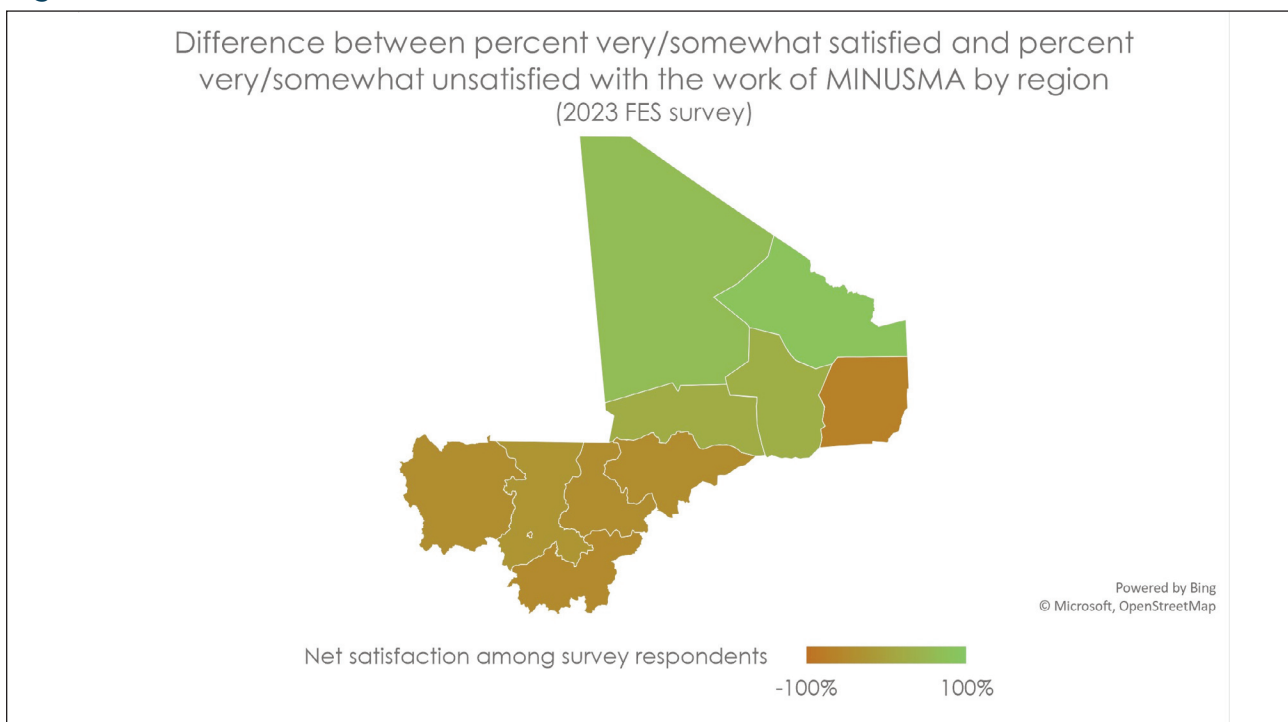
keepers are deployed may never interact with them or may not understand what they do.

Findings have been similarly mixed in CAR. A 2020 survey found that positive perceptions of MINUSCA's work to protect civilians was 11 percentage points higher among those who reported that MINUSCA was present.[31] But in the same survey in 2017, perceptions were similar whether or not the mission was present.[32]

In the DRC, analysis of 2018 and 2019 survey data has shown that, overall, Congolese were more likely to have positive perceptions of MONUSCO's ability to provide security and stabilization if they had direct contact with the mission (though these positive perceptions quickly dissipated when peacekeepers departed). However, there is also evidence that proximity to MONUSCO peacekeepers may not make Congolese more likely to want the mission to stay. For example, a 2023 survey found that the population's desire for MONUSCO to leave the country was similar in North Kivu, where MONUSCO has one of its main bases, as in the country as a whole (69 percent versus 67 percent).[34] Surveys on past missions have also found mixed results.[35]

Variation by Demographic Group

Perceptions of UN peacekeepers also vary among demographic groups, reflecting the impossibility of speaking about a single "local population." According to some surveys, women are more likely to report favorable views of UN peacekeeping operations than men.[36] For example, a 2023 survey in Mali found that dissatisfaction with the work of MINUSMA was significantly higher among men than women (71 percent versus 43 percent).[37] Similarly, a 2022 survey found that Malian men were more likely to report feeling that MINUSMA forces were no longer needed (79 percent versus 70 percent).[38] And in a 2020 survey in CAR, 46 percent of women said MINUSCA protects the population compared to 36 percent of men.[39] Yet not all surveys find evidence of more favorable views among women, even within the same context. For example, in a 2018 survey in South Sudan, women had more favorable views of UNMISS than men across all regions surveyed (see Figure 6), but another 2023 survey in South Sudan found that women were less likely than men to agree that UNMISS contributed to safety in their area.[40]

Overall, it is difficult to draw cross-cutting conclusions about demographic variations in local perceptions of UN peacekeeping. Many surveys do not publish disaggregated data, and when they do, this data does not always point in the same direction. In some contexts, there may be an urban-rural divide in perceptions of UN peacekeeping operations. For example, one 2022 survey found that urban respondents were more likely than rural respondents to report feeling that MINUSMA forces were no longer needed (82 percent versus 72 percent).[41] This divide could skew survey results.[42] However, this urban-rural divide is not consistent across peacekeeping contexts. Similarly, there is no consistent pattern in perceptions of peacekeepers among different age groups.

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31   HHI, UNDP, Brigham and Women's Physicians Organization, and MINUSCA, "Peace, Security and Justice Polls Central African Republic: Report 5," November 2020, p. 12.

32   HHI, UNDP, MINUSCA, "Peace, Security and Justice Polls Central African Republic: Report 1," November 2017, p. 6.

33   The impact of exposure on trust was more pronounced among men than women. O'Mealia et al., "Seeing Blue Helmets Is Believing."

34   CRG and Ebuteli, "Majority of Congolese Reject East African Community Regional Force," p. 6.

35   See: Dorussen and de Vooght, "The Local Perception of Peacekeepers," p. 317.

36   This has also been true of some past missions. For example, one study found that Kosovo Albanian women were 5 percent less likely to be very dissatisfied with the UN mission in Kosovo than Kosovo Albanian men. Pellumb Kelmendi and Andrew Radin, "UNsatisfied? Public Support for Postconflict International Missions," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 5 (2018), p. 1,001.

37   FES, "Mali-Mètre: Enquête d'opinion—'Que pensent les Malien(ne)s?'" February 2023, p. 63.

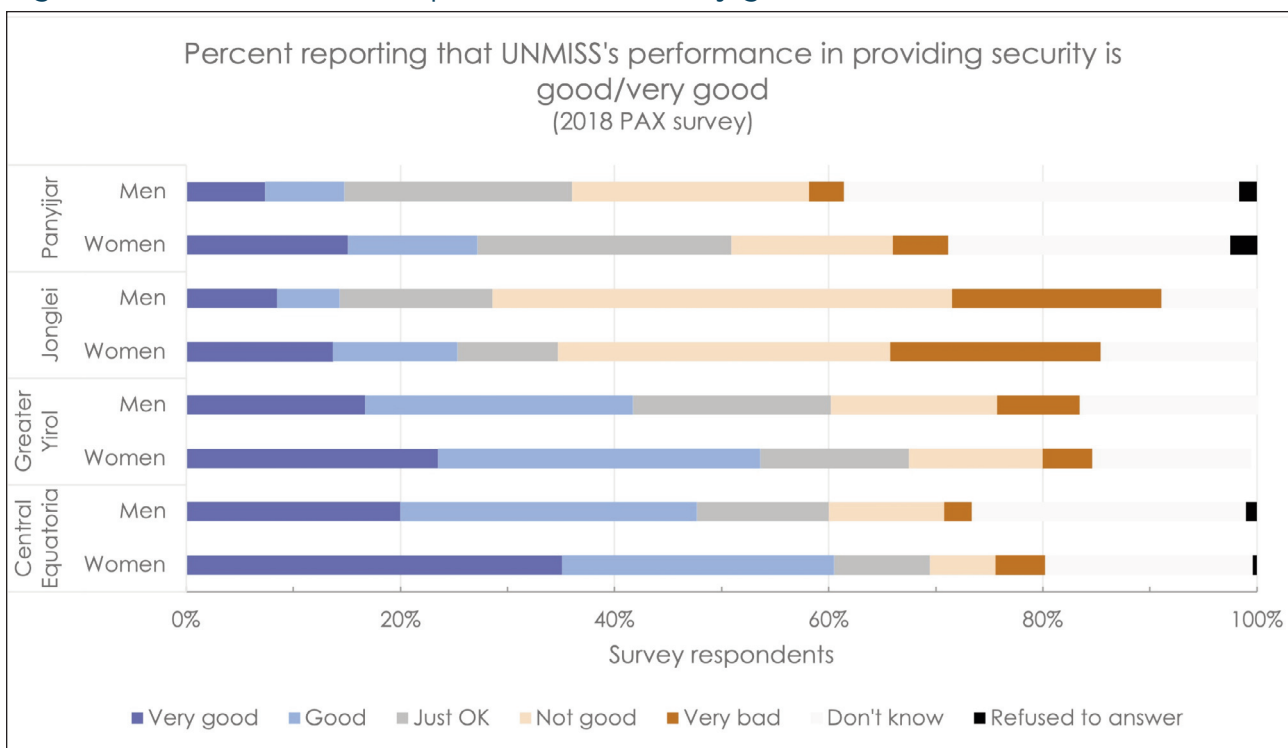38   Afrobarometer, "Mali Round 9 résumé des résultats," February 2023, p. 88.

39   This discrepancy could be related to another finding from the same survey: 42 percent of women said they had been helped by MINUSCA in the past 12 months, compared to just 12 percent of men. HHI, UNDP, Brigham and Women's Physicians Organization, and MINUSCA, "Peace, Security and Justice Polls Central African Republic: Report 5," November 2020, p. 11.

40   Data provided by PAX Protection of Civilians Team. The results of the second survey referenced have not yet been published.

41   Afrobarometer, "Mali Round 9 résumé des résultats," p. 88.

42   Most notably, FES's annual, nationwide survey of Mali only covers urban areas, which could give a more negative picture of local perceptions of MINUSMA. Perhaps tellingly, in a January 2017 Afrobarometer survey conducted in both urban and rural areas, 58 percent of respondents agreed that MINUSMA forces were useful in regaining Mali's territorial integrity, yet the November 2016 FES survey conducted only in urban areas found that just 39 percent of respondents were satisfied with the work of MINUSMA. Massa Coulibaly and Moussa Coulibaly, "Impacts et séquelles de la crise au Mali: psychologiques, économiques, et tenaces," Afrobarometer, February 2018, p. 10.

Figure 6. South Sudan: Perceptions of UNMISS by gender

Percent reporting that UNMISS's performance in providing security is
good/very good
(2018 PAX survey)

[Horizontal stacked bar chart showing survey responses for Men and Women across four regions: Panyijar, Jonglei, Greater Yirol, and Central Equatoria. X-axis: Survey respondents (0% to 100%). Categories: Very good, Good, Just OK, Not good, Very bad, Don't know, Refused to answer]

How Does Confidence in UN Peacekeepers Compare to Confidence in Domestic Security Actors?

Most surveys on local perceptions ask about the role of UN peacekeepers in providing security, alongside domestic security actors like the armed forces and police, which are ultimately responsible for protecting civilians. In fact, some surveys only ask about the role of peacekeepers in providing security, not about general perceptions of the mission. Yet these two indicators can vary significantly.

In Mali, perceptions of the role of MINUSMA in providing security are significantly more negative than overall perceptions of the mission. In northern Mali in 2023, for example, while 58 percent of respondents were satisfied with the work of

> While surveys tend to focus on the role of UN peacekeeping operations as "security actors," this is an unfair way to judge UN missions.

MINUSMA, only 7 percent named the mission as one of the actors they had confidence in to ensure their security, compared to 77 percent who named the armed forces (see Figure 7).[43] This reflects a long-term increase in Malians' confidence in domestic security actors and decrease in confidence in MINUSMA's ability to provide security, which could in part reflect MINUSMA's lack of a counterterrorism mandate (see Figure 8). Malians have also increasingly perceived UN peacekeepers unfavorably as security actors in comparison to Russian mercenaries deployed with the Wagner Group, who, like domestic security actors and unlike UN peacekeepers, are directly combating violent extremist groups. In the most extreme case, in the northern Malian region of Ménaka, 81 percent of the population named Russian soldiers as a source of security—behind only the Malian armed forces and God—versus just 2 percent who named MINUSMA.[44]

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43 This was an open-ended question that asked respondents "What are the actors you have confidence in for the securitization of your region?" Ibid., pp. 62, 74.
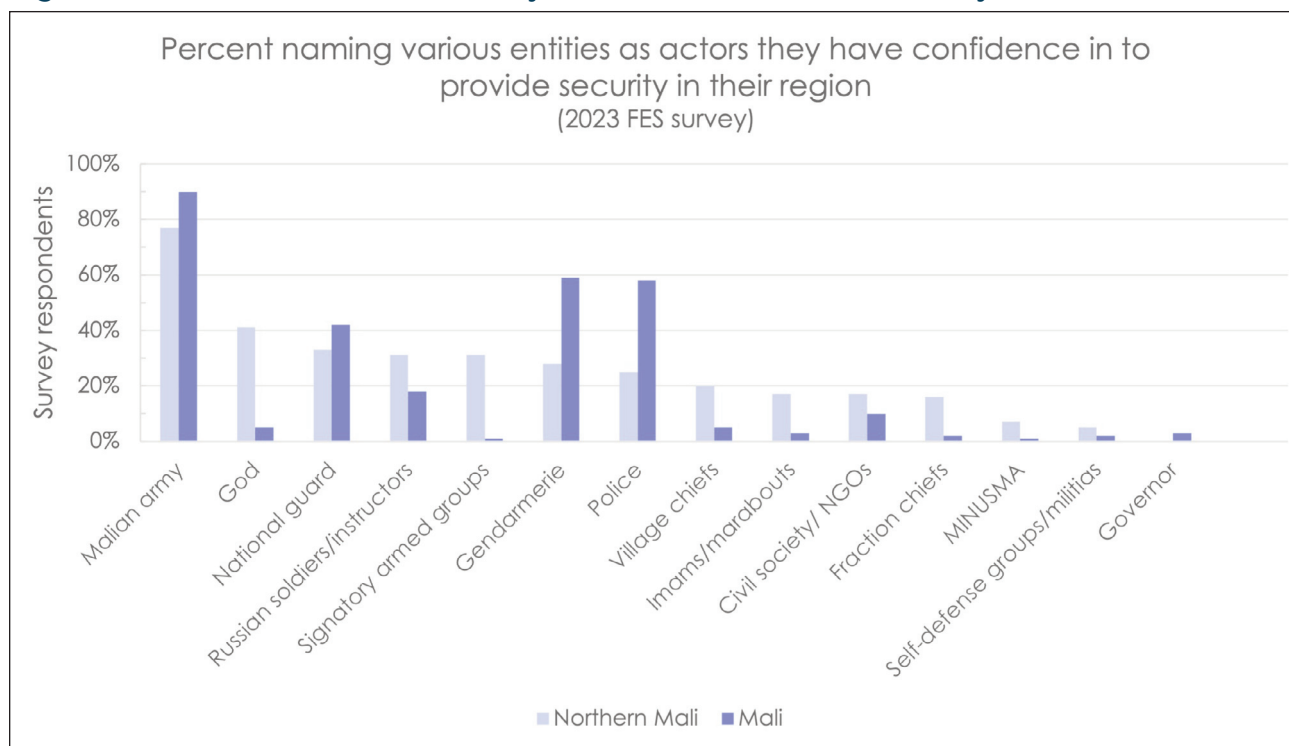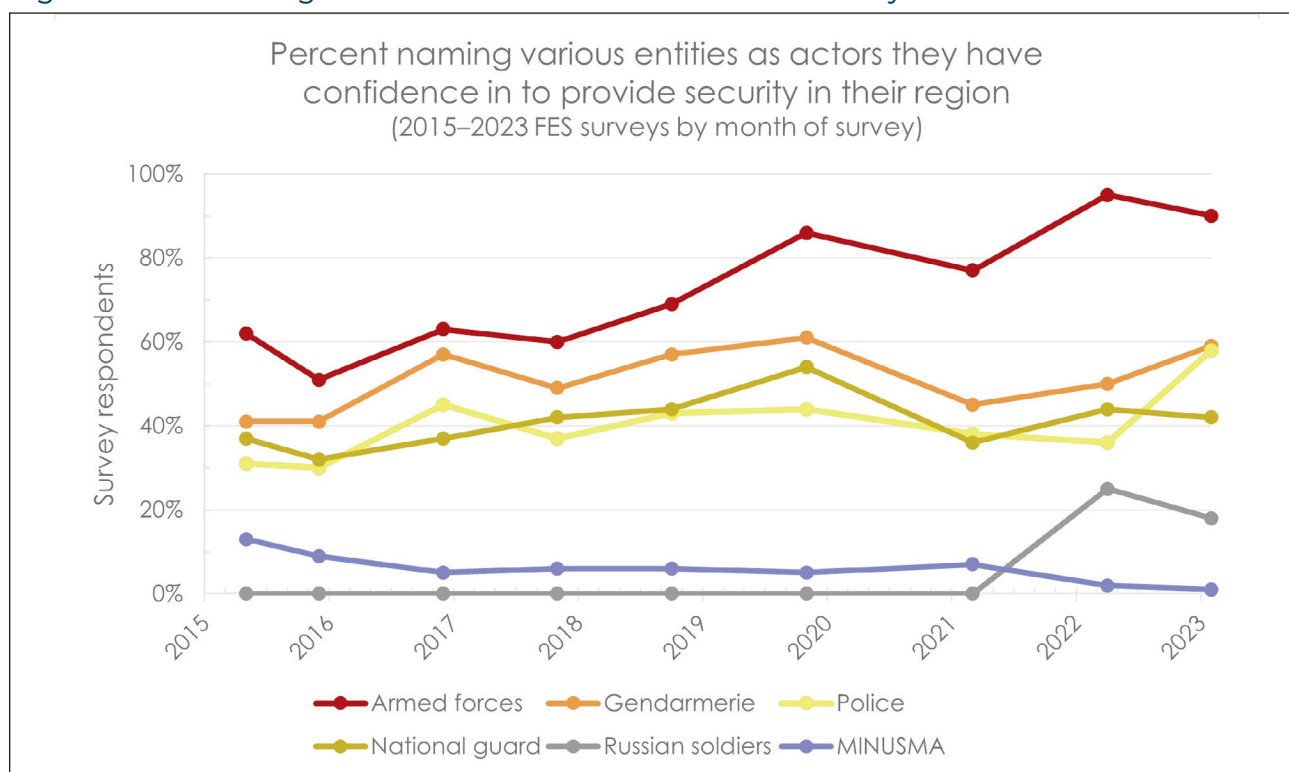44 Ibid.

Figure 7. Mali: Confidence in security actors in north versus country as a whole[45]

Percent naming various entities as actors they have confidence in to provide security in their region
(2023 FES survey)

Figure 8. Mali: Change in national-level confidence in security actors over time

Percent naming various entities as actors they have confidence in to provide security in their region
(2015–2023 FES surveys by month of survey)

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45 Northern Mali includes the regions of Tombouctou, Gao, Kidal, Ménaka, and Taoudéni.

While the data in the DRC is less recent, surveys from several years ago show a similar gap in public confidence in domestic security actors and the UN mission. Between 2013 and 2019, respondents in the three provinces of eastern DRC consistently expressed more confidence in the police and national armed forces to ensure their security than in MONUSCO.[46] This gap widened over time, from twice as many respondents who had confidence in the Congolese armed forces compared to MONUSCO in 2013 to four times as many in 2019 (see Figure 9). This could reflect growing disillusionment in MONUSCO

as a security actor between 2013, when the mission supported the Congolese armed forces in militarily defeating the M23 rebel group, and subsequent years, when the mission has been less able to deal with other armed groups and M23's eventual return.

This gap is smaller in CAR. In fact, surveys in CAR in 2017 found that perceptions of MINUSCA were slightly more positive than those of domestic security actors. By 2020, however, perceptions of MINUSCA had fallen below those of the armed forces (though perceptions of the armed forces also declined; see Figure 10).[47]

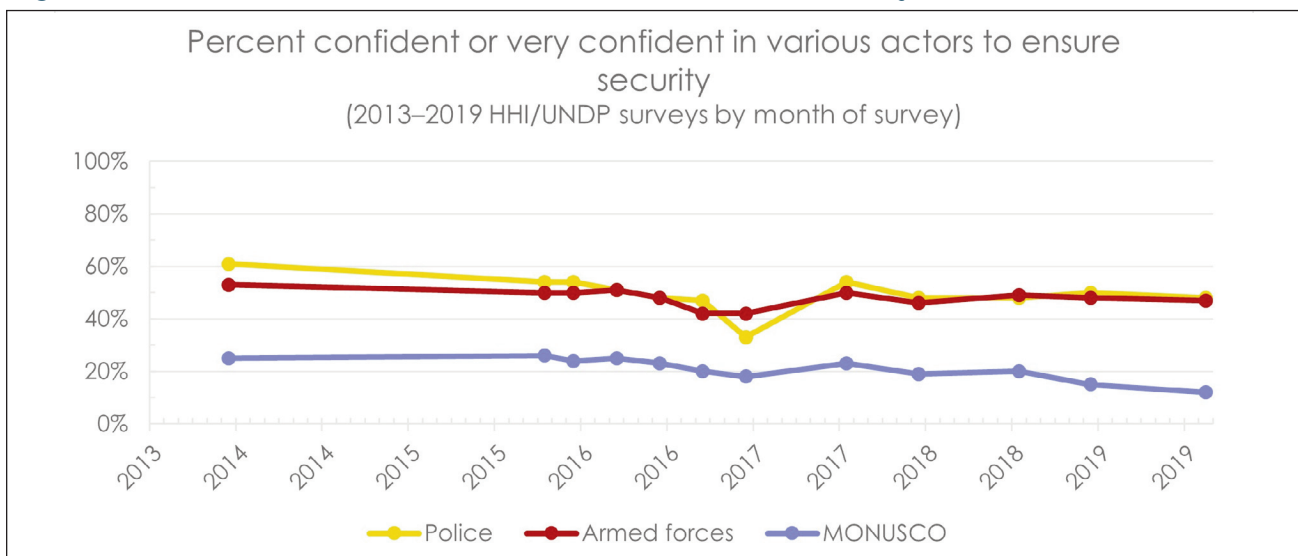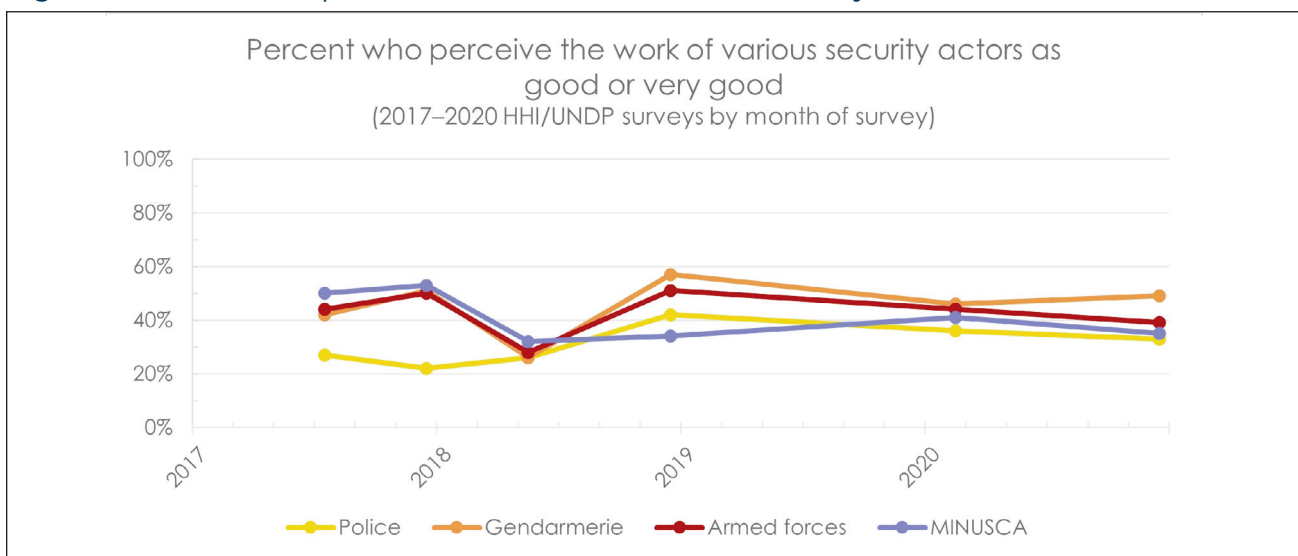Figure 9. DRC: Confidence in various actors to ensure security

Figure 10. CAR: Perceptions of the work of various security actors

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46 HHI, "Peacebuilding and Reconstruction Polls in Eastern DRC," available at http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/interactivemaps/drc-polls#/?series=Latest&indicator=8_9_1 . Similar findings have emerged from interview-based research. See: Jaïr van der Lijn, et al., "Securing Legitimate Stability in the DRC: External Assumptions and Local Perspectives," SIPRI, September 2019, p. 4.

47 HHI, "Central African Republic," available at http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/research/car .
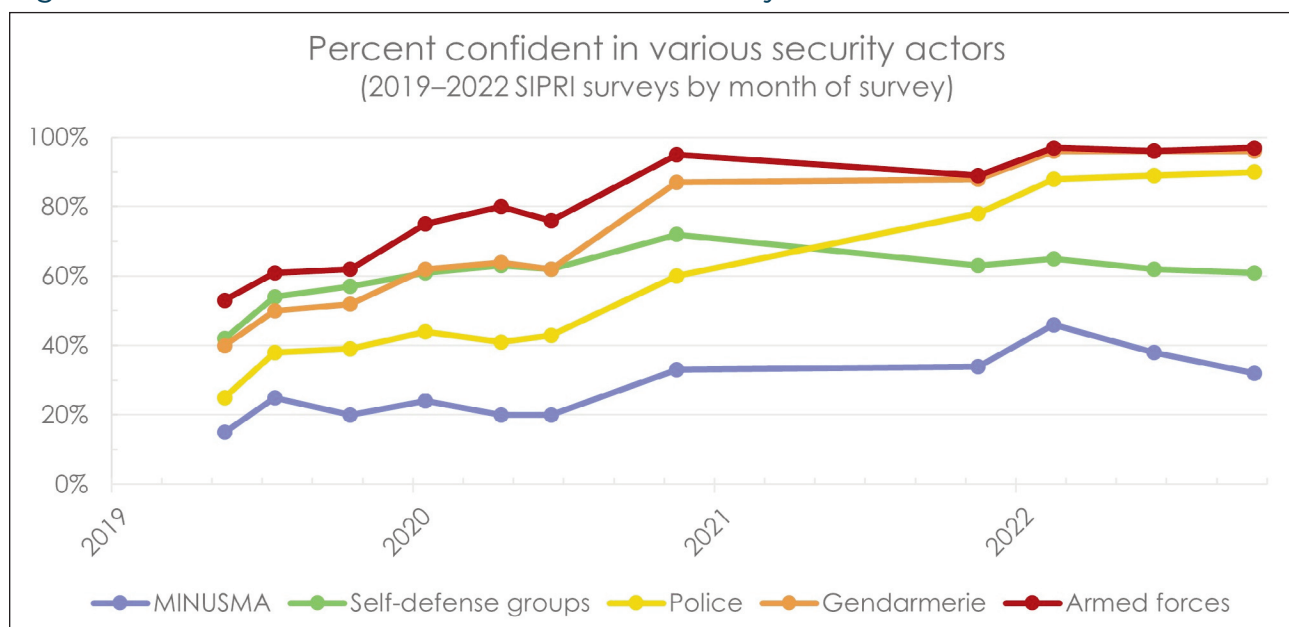
In contrast to the other current multidimensional missions, South Sudanese perceptions of UNMISS's role in providing security remain positive. A 2023 survey commissioned by UNMISS found that 95 percent of respondents had a very or somewhat positive impression of the mission's performance in protecting civilians and building durable peace, 90 percent said that UN peace-keepers made them feel much or a little bit safer, and 75 percent felt that the mission's presence and activities made women safer.[48] This likely in part reflects the particular peacekeeping context in South Sudan, including broader improvements in perceptions of peace and security among South Sudanese since the signing of a peace agreement in 2018.[49]

In general, however, focusing on the role of UN peacekeeping operations as "security actors"—as many surveys do—is an unfair way to judge UN missions. The protection of civilians is only one part of the mandates of multidimensional UN peacekeeping operations, and the provision of physical security is only one part of their protection of civilians mandates. Responsibility for security ultimately rests with domestic security actors, and these domestic actors have significantly more personnel and larger geographic footprints. In Bamako, for example, it is unsurprising that no survey respondents named MINUSMA as an actor providing security in their region, because uniformed MINUSMA personnel do not, and are not mandated to, provide security in Bamako.[50]

Nonetheless, confidence in UN peacekeepers as security actors may rise when they expand their physical presence to new areas. For example, while central Malians' confidence in MINUSMA remains much lower than their confidence in domestic security actors, it steadily rose in the years after the mission's mandate was extended to central Mali in 2019, from 15 percent in May 2019 to 46 percent in February 2022 (though confidence had dropped back to 32 percent by October 2022; see Figure 11).[51] That said, there are numerous other variables that could also have impacted confidence in MINUSMA during this period, including the military coups in 2020 and 2021.

Figure 11. Central Mali: Confidence in various security actors

Percent confident in various security actors
(2019–2022 SIPRI surveys by month of survey)

Legend: MINUSMA, Self-defense groups, Police, Gendarmerie, Armed forces

48   The survey did not ask the same question about domestic security actors. UNMISS, "UNMISS Perception and Public Opinion Survey 2022–23," pp. 3–4. Another 2023 survey in South Sudan, whose results have not yet been published, found that a markedly lower—though still relatively high—proportion of respondents agreed that UNMISS contributed to safety in their area.

49   See: PeaceRep, "Perceptions of Peace in South Sudan: Interactive Survey Data from South Sudan," available at https://peacerep.org/perceptions-peace-south-sudan/ .

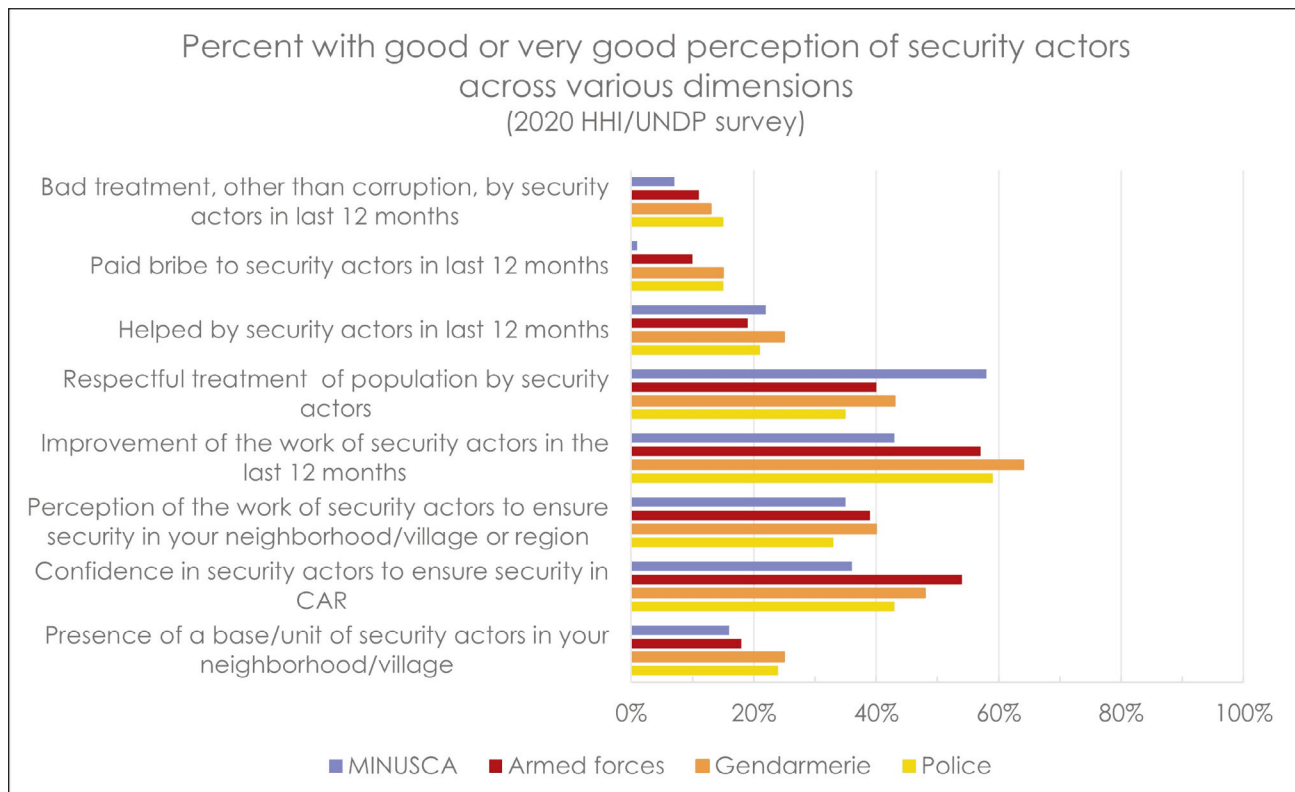50   FES, "Mali-Mètre: Enquête d'opinion—'Que pensent les Malien(ne)s?'" February 2023, p. 104.

51   SIPRI, "'Écoutez-nous!'" pp. 188–189, 202.

Even when respondents have more trust in domestic security actors to ensure their security, they may also continue to see UN peacekeeping operations as more principled. In a 2020 survey in CAR, for example, when respondents were asked about their confidence in various actors to ensure security in the country, their positive perceptions of the armed forces exceeded those of MINUSCA by 18 percentage points. But when respondents were asked about how different security actors treat the population, the results were reversed, with positive perceptions of MINUSCA exceeding those of the armed forces by 18 percentage points. Respondents were also dramatically less likely to report having paid a bribe to MINUSCA within the past year (see Figure 12).[52]

It is also worth considering that, historically, UN peacekeeping operations have at times been significantly *more* trusted to provide security than domestic security actors. In Darfur, for example, a 2020 study found that the joint UN-African Union mission (UNAMID) was one of the actors people were most likely to turn to if they had concerns about their security—behind the national police and traditional or community leaders but well ahead of the armed forces.[53] Surveys in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia also found that civilians were more likely to turn to the UN mission than to the national armed forces if their physical security was threated.[54] It is therefore important not to let the current lack of confidence in uniformed UN peace-keepers in Mali and the DRC obscure other instances, both historical and contemporary, when UN peacekeepers have been perceived more positively.

Figure 12. CAR: Perceptions of security actors

Percent with good or very good perception of security actors across various dimensions
(2020 HHI/UNDP survey)

■ MINUSCA   ■ Armed forces   ■ Gendarmerie   ■ Police

52 HHI, "Central African Republic Poll 6," available at http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/kmaps/maps/car06/#/ .

53 Ralph Mamiya and Wibke Hansen, "Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations–African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID)," NUPI, 2020, p. 66.

54 It should be noted, however, that both surveys were conducted after the end of major hostilities. Mvukiyehe and Samii, "A Quantitative Impact Evaluation of the United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire," p. 16; Mvukiyehe and Samii, "Quantitative Impact Evaluation of the United Nations Mission in Liberia," p. 12.

What Factors Most Influence Local Perceptions of UN Peacekeepers?

While it is helpful to know whether host-state populations have broadly positive or negative perceptions of UN peacekeeping operations, it is just as important to understand why they perceive peacekeepers the way they do. What factors contribute to the local legitimacy or illegitimacy of UN peacekeepers? Scholars studying the local legitimacy of UN peacekeeping operations have identified two types of legitimacy that are especially relevant for UN peacekeeping operations: procedural legitimacy and performance legitimacy.[55] Data from surveys and other research on local perceptions point to the importance of both types of legitimacy, though especially to performance legitimacy.

Procedural Legitimacy

Procedural legitimacy is associated with the way UN peacekeepers are perceived to act once they are deployed, including whether they are perceived to behave in a principled manner. One example is the degree to which peacekeepers are perceived as impartial or nondiscriminatory, which can have a major impact on local perceptions.[56] In central Mali, for example, the proportion of the population that thinks MINUSMA respects the population without discrimination is very low.[57] In CAR, where overall support for the mission is higher, a majority reported that MINUSCA treats all ethnic and religious groups equally, though many still complained of "discrimination" in general.[58]

Perceived collusion with armed groups can also impact missions' local legitimacy. At least since 2015, Malians' second most common critique of MINUSMA has been that the mission is "complicit with armed groups," with 42 percent of respondents naming this critique in 2023 (see Figure 13).[59] Similarly, a 2019 study in CAR found that many interviewees accused the mission of "collaborating with rebels," resulting in some people being "ready to disrupt the efforts of MINUSCA."[60] Protesters in the DRC have regularly accused the UN of collaborating with rebels. Across all three of these countries, this perception of UN complicity with rebel groups has been a prominent subject of anti-UN disinformation campaigns.[61]

Other forms of misconduct—real or perceived—can also impact local perceptions of UN peacekeepers. For example, in a 2022 survey, 32 percent of Congolese perceived MONUSCO to be "very corrupt" (just slightly better than the armed forces, at 37 percent).[62] This perception was even more widespread, at 57 percent, in Ituri province in eastern DRC, where people are more likely to encounter UN peacekeepers. UN missions have also faced protests resulting from anger over deaths caused by peacekeepers (including due to the use of force and traffic accidents), disapproval of the location of UN bases, and grievances from local contractors or employees.[63]

Misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse, can also have an impact on local perceptions of peacekeepers. While there is little data available for current missions, a 2011 survey in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, found that people who reported having "personally seen a peacekeeper steal,

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55 Scholars use various terms for these two types of legitimacy. For example, "procedural" legitimacy is also referred to as "ideological" or "throughput" legitimacy, and "performance" legitimacy is also referred to as "pragmatic" or "output" legitimacy. See: Sophia Sabrow, "Local Perceptions of the Legitimacy of Peace Operations by the UN, Regional Organizations and Individual States: A Case Study of the Mali Conflict," *International Peacekeeping* 27, no. 1 (2017); Sarah B. K. von Billerbeck, "UN Peace Operations and Conflicting Legitimacies," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11, no. 3 (2017); Aineias Engstrom, "Enhancing Local Ownership of UN Peace Operations: A Legitimacy Analysis Framework" (master's thesis, Geneva Graduate Institute, 2023).

56 However, impartiality does not necessarily improve local perceptions of UN peacekeepers. For example, one study found that Kosovo's majority Albanian population was more likely to support the UN mission in Kosovo when the mission was more partial in support of Kosovo's independence. Kelmendi and Radin, "Unsatisfied," p. 1,004.

57 SIPRI, "'Écoutez-nous!'" p. 191.

58 HHI, UNDP, Brigham and Women's Physicians Organization, and MINUSCA, "Peace, Security and Justice Polls Central African Republic: Report 5," November 2020.

59 FES, "Mali-Mètre: Enquête d'opinion—'Que pensent les Malien(ne)s?'" February 2023, p. 64.

60 Tim Glawion, Jaïr van der Lijn, and Nikki de Zwaan, "Securing Legitimate Stability in CAR: External Assumptions and Local Perspectives," SIPRI, September 2019, p. 8.

61 Trithart, "Disinformation against UN Peacekeeping Operations," pp. 3–4.

62 CRG and Ebuteli, "Les Congolais toujours préoccupés par la situation sécuritaire," August 2022, p. 3.

63 Based on data on riots and protests from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).

unjustly use force, abuse women or pay for sex" were dramatically less likely to perceive peace-keepers as effective and benevolent.[64] A 2017 study in Haiti also found that many people living near UN bases had concerns about sexual exploitation and abuse, but these concerns were often juxta-posed with positive perceptions of the work the mission was carrying out.[65] Similarly, a 2006 survey in Liberia found that 22 percet of respondents said that some peacekeepers had raped women or young children or encouraged prostitution among young girls, yet less than 2 percent rated the conduct of peacekeepers as poor (compared to 91 percent as very good or good).[66] This could indicate that some people distinguish between the bad conduct of individual peacekeepers and their overall perception of a UN mission.

> Many people lose confidence in UN peacekeepers if they fail to deliver, regardless of how well they might behave.

Performance Legitimacy

This apparent disconnect between perceptions of peacekeeper conduct and overall perceptions of peacekeeping operations speaks to the second type of legitimacy: performance legitimacy. Performance legitimacy is associated with the outcomes of UN peacekeeping, such as a greater sense of security for local populations. Ultimately, the evidence seems to point to performance legiti-macy as the most important type of legitimacy for UN missions. While procedural legitimacy is important, it is insufficient. Many people lose confidence in UN peacekeepers if they fail to deliver, regardless of how well they might behave. And on the flip side, for some people, the perceived positive contributions of UN peacekeepers may

balance out their perceived indiscretions.[67] This may be particularly true for the general population: a study in the DRC found that elites and the broader public may have different understandings of the UN's legitimacy, with the broader public more concerned about performance than conduct.[68]

When considering performance legitimacy, local perceptions of current multidimensional UN missions seem tied above all to missions' perceived performance in protecting civilians, though it is important to keep in mind the differences between various missions' approaches to protection and the different challenges they face.[69] The data is especially striking in Mali, where every year since 2015, Malians' most common critique of MINUSMA—by far—has been that it does not protect the population. The proportion of Malians expressing this critique has grown over time, from 40 percent in May 2015 to 72 percent in February 2023 (see Figure 13).[70] Similarly, a multiyear study in central Mali found that only around a third of respondents had confi-dence in MINUSMA, with the principal criticism being peacekeepers' failure to provide security.[71] More generally, when asked about their expecta-tions for international partners, the fight against insecurity was by far Malians' top response (78 percent), with other mandated areas of the mission falling far lower.[72]

Likewise, the perception that UN peacekeepers do not provide adequate security seems to be the primary driver of negative perceptions of UN peacekeepers in the DRC. A 2019 study in the DRC

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64 Grant M. Gordon and Lauren E. Young, "Cooperation, Information, and Keeping the Peace: Civilian Engagement with Peacekeepers in Haiti," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (2017).

65 Carla King et al., "'MINUSTAH Is Doing Positive Things Just as They Do Negative Things': Nuanced Perceptions of a UN Peacekeeping Operation amidst Peacekeeper-Perpetrated Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Haiti," *Conflict, Security & Development* 21, no. 6 (2021).

66 Krasno, "Public Opinion Survey of UNMIL's Work in Liberia," p. 17.

67 For example, a 2011 survey in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, found that while abuse significantly undermined perceptions of peacekeepers, these perceptions did not translate into a decreased willingness to cooperate with peacekeepers. The authors conclude that "peacekeepers seeking to cultivate cooperation may get a larger payoff from investments in relief and security than in restraing from abuse." Gordon and Young, "Cooperation, Information, and Keeping the Peace," p. 76.
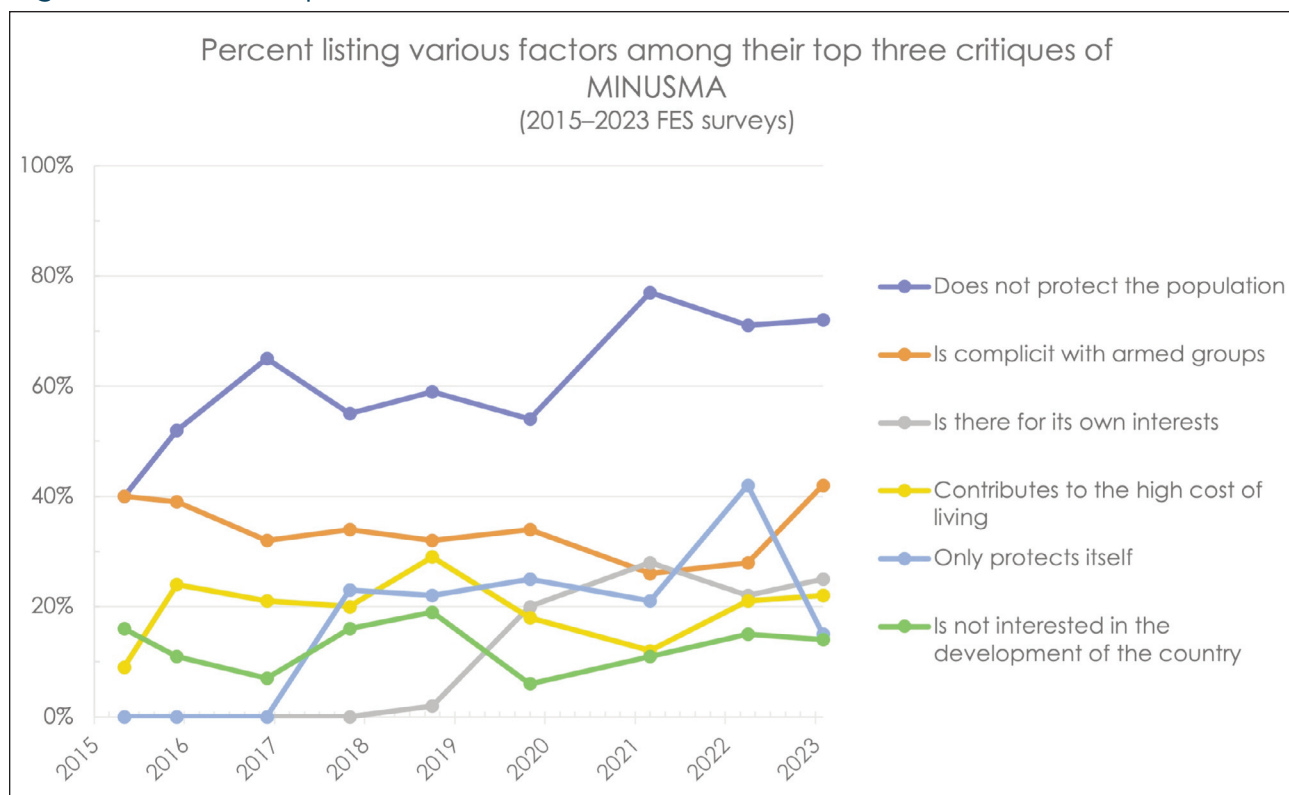
68 Von Billerbeck, "UN Peace Operations and Conflicting Legitimacies."

69 A 2011 survey in Port-au-Prince provides an example of this. The survey revealed that direct experience with UN peacekeepers providing both security (patrols or arrests) and relief (food distributions) was associated with more positive perceptions of peacekeepers' effectiveness, though the correlation was stronger for security. Gordon and Young, "Cooperation, Information, and Keeping the Peace."

70 FES, "Mali-Mètre: Enquête d'opinion—'Que pensent les Maliens?'"

71 SIPRI, "'Écoutez-nous!'" p. 205.

72 For example, only 8 percent named the success of the transition, 5 percent the organization of elections, 4 percent management of the "problem in the north," and 3 percent revision of the peace agreement. FES, "Mali-Mètre: Enquête d'opinion—'Que pensent les Malien(ne)s?'" February 2023, p. 60.

Figure 13. Mali: Critiques of MINUSMA[73]

Percent listing various factors among their top three critiques of MINUSMA
(2015–2023 FES surveys)

found that "a general point of criticism of MONUSCO by the local population is that even where MONUSCO has a presence and is warned of an incident by an early warning network, reaction in time is highly unlikely."[74] In eastern DRC, anti-MONUSCO protests have regularly broken out due to anger that the mission failed to prevent attacks by armed groups.

In South Sudan, by contrast, more positive perceptions of UNMISS are underpinned by a higher level of confidence in the mission's ability to protect civilians, as discussed above. And in northern Mali, where MINUSMA is generally perceived more positively than in the rest of the country, there is also a more positive perception of its role in providing protection. In Gao and Timbuktu, for example, a 2019 study found that the mission was generally perceived as a deterrent against violent conflict.[75]

It therefore seems that UN peacekeepers' performance in providing security likely plays a central role in shaping local perceptions, even though the protection of civilians is only one part of their mandate. At the same time, there is less data on public perceptions of the performance of UN peacekeepers in other mandated areas, as recent surveys have tended to ask respondents about UN missions as one of several "security actors" (alongside the national armed forces, police, etc.). There are exceptions, however, including the 2023 survey conducted by UNMISS, which asked about perceptions of the mission's work on peacebuilding, human rights, security provision, maintenance of civilian protection sites, and conflict resolution (the mission reported that perceptions were positive across all areas, including 84 percent for the mission's human rights work and 95 percent for its protection of civilians and peacebuilding work).[76]

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73 Other critiques (in descending order of their prevalence in 2023) included that the mission contributes to moral degradation, its mandate is not well known enough, it gives less attention to human rights violations, it supports the partition of the country, it responds too slowly to stabilization challenges, it does not support the government enough, it lacks contact with the population, and it is leaving the territory.

74 Hans Hoebekke, Jaïr van der Lijn, Tim Glawion, and Nikki de Zwaan, "Securing Legitimate Stability in the DRC: External Assumptions and Local Perspectives," SIPRI, September 2019, p. 9.

75 Jaïr van der Lijn, "Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in Mali/MINUSMA," NUPI, 2019, p. 80.

76 UNMISS, "UNMISS Perception and Public Opinion Survey 2022–23." Additional data points from correspondence with UN official, July 2023.

Local populations' perceptions of UN missions can also be shaped by their impact in areas unrelated to their mandate, particularly their economic impact. For example, a 2012 survey in Monrovia, Liberia, found that respondents who derived direct economic benefits from the mission were more likely not only to want the mission to stay but also to feel that it had improved the city's security and their own personal security.[77] On the other hand, a 2023 survey in Mali found that the fourth most common critique of the mission was that it "contributes to the high cost of living" (see Figure 13).[78]

Conclusion

Existing data on local perceptions of UN peace-keepers offers two broad takeaways. First, local perceptions are often closely tied to peacekeepers' perceived effectiveness in responding to threats against civilians. In many cases, however, peacekeepers lack the capacity or—in the case of terrorism in Mali—the mandate to respond to these threats. The proposed solution is often for missions to better manage local expectations of how much protection they can provide and to better explain their mandate through strategic communications.

> It rarely makes sense to talk about UN peacekeeping operations having or lacking "legitimacy." Instead, they have multiple "legitimacies," which can sometimes be in conflict.

While missions would do well to improve their strategic communications, it is unclear whether simply managing expectations and explaining the mandate is enough.[79] This point was articulated by Jaïr van der Lijn in a 2019 study that examined local perceptions of MINUSMA:

> Many Malian and international actors often say that MINUSMA has the support of only half the population because the population lacks under-standing of its mandate. However, it is more likely that the limited support for the Mission results from incomplete ownership over its

mandate and the disagreement over what MINUSMA should ideally be doing.[80]

The same could be true in the DRC, where local perceptions of the mission are also largely negative. If local populations want UN peacekeepers to protect them but feel they are not doing so, knowing that they should not expect protection from peace-keepers is unlikely to inspire greater confidence. Instead, low expectations about what the mission can accomplish could increase perceptions that the mission's presence is not necessary or desirable.

The second takeaway is that it is impossible—and irresponsible—to generalize about local perceptions of UN peacekeeping operations. At the global level, there is a massive gulf between the average level of confidence among Malians and South Sudanese. Within each peacekeeping context, perceptions can differ significantly among different demographic groups, between different parts of the country, and over time. These differences can warp our understanding of what local people think. We are more likely to hear from a well-off, educated man in Bamako about how he perceives the UN mission than we are a woman living in a rural area in northern Mali even though her perspective may be more relevant to judging the mission's effectiveness and the potential impact of its departure.

These differences in perception between different parts of the population are worth considering not only for existing UN peacekeeping operations but also for potential future deployments. In Haiti, for example, the Haitian president and both US and UN officials have called for foreign intervention to forestall spiraling violence (though not necessarily an intervention led by the UN). This proposal has been opposed by a coalition of the country's largest opposition and civil society groups, contributing to a narrative that "few want foreign intervention."[81] Yet surveys in 2023 have found that around two-

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77 For example, 65 percent of respondents who did not report receiving something of value from UN personnel felt that the mission had improved their personal security versus 80 percent among those who did report receiving something of value. Beber et al., "The Promise and Peril of Peacekeeping Economies."

78 FES, "Mali-Mètre: Enquête d'opinion—'Que pensent les Malien(ne)s?'" February 2023, p. 64.

79 On improving strategic communications in UN peace operations, see: Jake Sherman and Albert Trithart, "Strategic Communications in UN Peace Operations: From an Afterthought to an Operational Necessity," IPI, August 2021.

80 Van der Lijn, "Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in Mali/MINUSMA," p. 91.

81 Eyder Peralta, "Reporter's Notebook: Haiti's at a Breaking Point but Few Want Foreign Intervention," NPR, November 4, 2022.

thirds of Haitians support an intervention force, reflecting a deep divide in opinion between elites and the general population.[82]

Seemingly conflicting perceptions can exist even at the individual level. This complexity is captured in a recent interview with a Haitian woman who had been raped by a military peacekeeper deployed to the former UN mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) but who nonetheless supported the redeployment of UN peacekeepers to her country: "I'm not a big fan of the United Nations, but the country was stable. We did not have this gang violence going on…. It would be best if the UN sent MINUSTAH back here so people can go on with their lives freely."[83]

With such varied perceptions not only between and within countries and communities but even within individuals, it rarely makes sense to talk about UN peacekeeping operations having or lacking "legitimacy." Instead, they have multiple "legitimacies," which can sometimes be in conflict, as articulated by Jeni Whalan:

> Given their multiple audiences, there will be no one, single local legitimation of peacekeepers. Local perceptions cannot be aggregated into a legitimacy measure—at least not one of any conceptual or policy utility…. Perceptions change over time and vary among local groups; in practice, this means that peace operations need to constantly monitor how their peacekeepers are perceived by the local actors whose compliance and cooperation is essential for operational effectiveness.[84]

This requires better data on local perceptions and nuanced analysis of the data that does exist. There is also a need for data on local perceptions not only of peacekeepers who have already been deployed but also of prospective deployments as part of pre-deployment assessments and planning. Toward this end, UN peacekeeping operations and other researchers within and outside the UN could prior-

itize the following:

- **Mixed-methods approaches:** Every method for gathering data on local perceptions has advantages and disadvantages, so missions should draw on data from multiple sources. For example, quantitative surveys weighted by key demographic variables can provide a representative overview of local perceptions, while interviews and other qualitative methods can add nuance and complexity to these findings. Similarly, data from surveys with different methodologies can complement each other.[85] Missions should be particularly cautious about using data gathered from social media analysis as a metric of public perceptions, as this data is likely to be highly unrepresentative.

- **Disaggregated data:** Because local perceptions of peacekeepers can vary significantly among different demographic groups, researchers conducting surveys should strive to disaggregate this data whenever possible, including by respondents' gender, age, and geographic region and whether they live in urban or rural areas. Disaggregating by the degree and nature of respondents' interaction with peacekeepers could also provide valuable insights. For some variables, however, disaggregation will only be possible with large sample sizes.

- **Data that covers the breadth of peacekeeping mandates:** Surveys often focus on the role of UN peacekeepers in providing security, with few or no questions about other aspects of their mandates. More data is needed on local perceptions of peacekeepers' role in carrying out other mandated tasks such as peacebuilding and support to elections and political processes, as well as their impact in non-mandated areas such as economic development.

- **Transparent publishing of results:** UN missions, as well as independent researchers,

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82 The most recent survey, conducted in August, found that 63 percent support an intervention force, slightly down from 69 percent in the same survey in January. There is majority support for an intervention force across all departments of Haiti, as well as among both men and women, all age groups, and all education levels. There is a major difference by education level, however (support is 42 percentage points higher than opposition among those with no formal education versus 14 percentage points higher among those with a university education). Only 29 percent of those who support an intervention force want a deployment similar to MINUSTAH. Alliance pour la Gestion des Risques et al Continuité des Activités, "Rapport d'étude: 2e sondage auprès de la population haïtienne sur l'évolution de la situation d'insécurité du pays," August 2023.

83 Evens Mary and Paula Dupraz-Dobias, "Haiti's Gang Violence Keeps a Population Captive," *New Humanitarian*, February 21, 2023.

84 Jeni Whalan, "The Local Legitimacy of Peacekeepers," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 11, no. 3 (2017), p. 314.

85 For example, FES's Mali survey covers urban areas across the entire country, while SIPRI's Mali survey covers both urban and rural areas but only in central Mali.

are inconsistent in their level of transparency in publishing the results of perception surveys and reporting on data derived from social media analyses. When results are published, they are often partial. More transparent and user-friendly methods for sharing and visualizing data, such as the interactive maps created by HHI to visualize their survey data from CAR and the DRC, would be useful to both researchers and decision-makers.

Ultimately, however, it is not enough simply to gather data on public perceptions. This data is only useful if policymakers in New York and leaders in missions use it in their decision-making. All decisions, whether before or during peacekeeping deployments, should be grounded in an understanding of what local populations want and need.

Annex: Surveys Asking About Local Perceptions of Multidimensional UN Peacekeeping Operations

Country	Institution conducting survey	Geographic coverage	Frequency and years	Respon-dents	Questions asked about the mission[86]	Availability of results
CAR	HHI/ UNDP	Most of country (13/16 prefectures and Bangui)	6x (2017–2021)	5,206–6,555	• Principal people or group that ensure security in your neighborhood/village (mission listed as one option) • Presence of a base or unit in your neighborhood/village (mission listed as one option) • Confidence in the mission to ensure security in CAR • Perception of the mission's work to ensure security in your region • Improvement of the mission's work over the past 12 months • Respectful treatment by the mission of the population • Whether you have: - Been helped by the mission in the past 12 months - Personally paid a bribe to the mission in the past 12 months - Been badly treated by the mission in the past 12 months (apart from corruption)	Full results for CAR published in reports and interactive online maps
	MINUSCA	National	1x (2022)	1,000	• Opinion of the mission • Reason for opinion of the mission • Satisfaction with communication of the mission • Suggestions for improving the mission's communication	Results not published

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86 All of these questions were not necessarily asked in every round of each survey.

Country	Institution conducting survey	Geographic coverage	Frequency and years	Respon-dents	Questions asked about the mission	Availability of results
DRC	Congo Research Group/ Ebuteli	National	5x (2021–2023)	3,632	• Whether the mission does not contribute much and should leave or does an important job and should stay • Whether the mission should leave now, in the next 2 years, in the next 5 years, or not until the end of conflict in the east • Opinion of the mission	Summary of results published in periodic reports
	HHI/ UNDP	East (North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri)	19x (2015–2019)	834–7,730	• Principal actor that ensures security in your neighbor-hood/village (mission listed as one option) • Level of security when encountering soldiers from the mission • Frequency of observing the mission • Sufficient presence of the mission in your neighbor-hood/village • Confidence in the mission to: - Ensure security in your neighborhood/village - Protect you from armed groups - Protect you from robbers and other bandits - Help you in case of need - Take into account your needs and vulnerabilities • Understanding of the mission's work • Whether in the past 12 months you have been: - Personally helped by the mission - A victim of bad behavior by the mission • Contribution of the mission to your security • Contribution of the mission to: - Protecting the population - Contributing to peaceful elections	Full results for DRC published in reports and interactive online maps

Country	Institution conducting survey	Geographic coverage	Frequency and years	Respon-dents	Questions asked about the mission	Availability of results
					- Contributing to credible elections -Demobilizing and integrating ex-combatants - Helping victims of crimes - Fighting armed groups - Maintaining peace - Creating the conditions for peace • Effect of the mission's departure on your security	
Mali	FES	National (Bamako and regional)	15x (2012–2023)	385–5,053	• Satisfaction with the work of the mission • Three principal critiques of the mission • Source of information on peace accord (mission listed as one option) • Confidence in actors for the security of your region (mission listed as one option)	Full results published in reports
	SIPRI	Center (Ségou and Mopti)	12x (2019–2022)	1,800–2,160	• Confidence in the mission • Perception that the mission is present • Reasons the mission is a source of insecurity • Whether the mission respects the population without discrimination	Summary of results published in report
	Afrobaro-meter	National	2x (2017, 2022)[87]	1,200	• Whether Mali still needs the following foreign forces to stay in Mali (mission listed as one option) • How useful the following forces are in helping Mali regain its territorial integrity and national unity (mission listed as one option)	Full results published online
	UNMISS	National	4x (2019–2023)	2,000	• Performance of mission in protecting civilians and building durable peace • Effect of mission's presence and activities on women's safety	Summary of results on select questions published in report

87 Afrobarometer has conducted nine rounds of surveys in Mali, but only the seventh and ninth included a question on MINUSMA.

Country	Institution conducting survey	Geographic coverage	Frequency and years	Respon-dents	Questions asked about the mission	Availability of results
					• Effect of mission's human rights work • Effect of peacekeepers patrolling and providing security on personal safety • Performance of mission on protection of civilians compared to one year ago	
South Sudan	PAX Protection of Civilians Team	Five locations (parts of Central Equatoria, Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei, Lakes, and Unity states)	4x (2016–2022)	Approxi-mately 2,000–3,000	• Presence of mission in area • Performance of mission in providing security • Agreement that: - Out of the security actors in your area, you trust the mission the most - You would first contact the mission in the case of a family member being killed/murdered - The mission needs to be more visible, for instance through patrols - The mission needs to be more responsive to civilians - The mission is the most likely perpetrator of violence against you - The mission is actively working to protect people in this community - The mission's effect on your personal security is mostly positive - You need more presence of the mission - The mission needs to be better armed or equipped - You rely more on the mission than you did before	Summary of results on select questions published in reports and online dashboard

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