

The background of the cover is a photograph of a long line of white UN military vehicles, including ambulances and trucks, on a dirt road in a rural, hilly area. A person in a red vest is walking on the right side of the road. The text is overlaid on this image.

Assessing the Effectiveness

of the United Nations
Multidimensional Integrated
Stabilization Mission in the
Central African Republic / MINUSCA

Dr. Lise Morjé Howard

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Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)

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Abstract

The Central African Republic is emerging from a long history of slave raiding and trading, French concessionary colonialism, and authoritarian political rule. Before December 2012, however, its citizens had never experienced full-scale civil war. After several military mutinies in the 1990s, at least 12 different regional and international interventions did not help to bring a stable and prosperous peace. In late 2013, the civil war escalated, characterised by sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and near-genocidal fighting. After interventions by regional and French forces quelled the fighting, the United Nations (UN) Security Council authorised the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in April 2014 to deploy in September of that year, under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

According to a scholarly index, the Mission has the most complex of all current peacekeeping mandates. Of the three primary tasks in MINUSCA's original mandate: (1) protecting civilians, (2) overseeing a political transition, and (3) extending state authority, the operation has fulfilled the second task, and is effectively working toward achieving the first and third. The Mission has helped to avert wide-scale killings and possible genocide, mitigate sexual violence, monitor human rights, enable and protect vital humanitarian aid delivery. It has also enabled the development of female participation and leadership, worked to build state capacity (especially in policing and justice), protected itself, and is helping to create the conditions for peace.

The problems in Central Africa, however, in the words of the UN Secretary-General, may “exceed the capacities of a United Nations peacekeeping operation.” Although Central Africa has a democratically elected government, armed groups control 75-80% of this lush, resource-rich, and landlocked country (which is approximately the size of France). The 15,000 members of MINUSCA have worked to de-escalate local conflict spirals, and enabled the establishment

of 29 local peace and reconciliation committees in a creative, “bottom-up” approach to peace. The Mission has complemented this approach by enabling a “top-down,” high-level, regionally driven peace process that resulted in the landmark February 2019 Peace Accord – the first that all 14 armed groups signed.

Several groups, however, continue to spoil the peace. The political economy of the conflict tends toward strengthening armed groups and spoilers. Dis- and misinformation about many matters, including the 2020-21 elections and COVID-19, continue to undermine progress. MINUSCA is not very popular among many Central Africans, contributing to a legitimacy deficit. MINUSCA is helping to stabilise – providing a vital service to the country, region, and world – but it will be difficult to fully implement its mandate and depart a peaceful and prosperous Central Africa anytime soon.

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Because of our “off record” interview protocol, we are unable to name the nearly 200 people with whom we spoke. We would, however, like to thank some key figures. In the UN system, Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Nannette Ahmed in New York; in Bangui, Mankeur Ndiaye, Vivian Van de Perre, and Kenny Gluck facilitated significant access; Zeneda Feratllari provided excellent logistical support. In Central Africa, we thank the President, Prof. Faustin-Archange Touadéra, and his staff for their assistance. We would also like to thank Central African Ambassador to the US, Martial Ndoubou, and US Ambassador to Central Africa, Lucy Tamlyn. Thank you to the representatives from Russia, France, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). We remain forever grateful to the numerous Central Africans in academia, business and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the Community Liaison Assistants who generously gave of their time to speak with us.

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Acronyms

3R	Return, Restitution and Rehabilitation armed group (Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation)*
ACABQ	Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
AI	Amnesty International
AMISOM	AU Mission in Somalia
APPR	Accord for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic
AQIM	Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
AU RTF LRA	AU-led Regional Task Force on the LRA
BINUCA	UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (Le Bureau Intégré de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en Centrafrique)
BONUCA	UN Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic (Le Bureau des Nations Unies pour la consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique)
CAR	Central African Republic
CEMAC	Economic and Monetary Community of the Central African States
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
CLA	Community Liaison Assistant
CMOP	Committees for Prefectural Implementation
Congo	Democratic Republic of Congo

Congo-Brazzaville	Republic of Congo
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease (2019)
CPAS	Comprehensive Performance Assessment System
CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
CTS	Technical Security Committees
CVR	Community Violence Reduction
DDR	Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration
DDRR	Demobilisation, Disarmament, Reintegration, and Repatriation
DHPOL	German Police University
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations (now DPO)
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPON	Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network
EU	European Union
EUAM RCA	EU Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic
EUFOR RCA	EU Force in the Central African Republic
EUFOR Tchad/RCA	EU Force in Chad and the Central African Republic
EUTM	EU Training Mission
FACA	Central African Armed Forces (Les Forces armées centrafricaines)
FDPC	Democratic Front of the Central African People (La Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain)
FET	Female Engagement Team
FOMAC	Multinational Force of Central Africa (La Force multinationale de l'Afrique centrale)
FOMUC	Multinational Force in the Central African Republic (La Force multinationale en Centrafrique)
FPRC	Popular Front for the Rebirth of the Central African Republic (Le Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique)*
FPU	Formed Police Unit
FSI	Internal Security Forces (Les Forces de sécurité intérieure)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HDI	Human Development Index

HHI	Harvard Humanitarian Initiative
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISSAT	International Security Sector Advisory Team
JTFB	Joint Task Force Bangui
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MICOPAX	Peace Consolidation Mission in the Central African Republic (La Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique)
MINURCA	UN Mission in the Central African Republic (La Mission des Nations Unies en République centrafricaine)
MINURCAT	UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (La Mission des Nations unies en République centrafricaine et au Tchad)
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (La Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation au Mali)
MINUSCA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (La Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée de stabilisation des Nations unies en République centrafricaine)
MISAB	Inter-African Mission Monitoring the Bangui Agreements (La Mission interafricaine de surveillance des accords de Bangui)
MISCA	International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (La Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine)
MONUSCO	UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
MSF	Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans frontières)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NUPI	Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
OIOS	UN Office for Internal Oversight Services
P-5	Permanent Five Members of the UN Security Council
PK5	Kilometre cinq, a Muslim-majority neighbourhood in Bangui, Central Africa
POC	Protection of Civilians
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo

QIP	Quick Impact Project
QRF	Quick Reaction Force
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
SSR	Security Sector Reform
SVAC	Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict
TCC	Troop-Contributing Country
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
UCDP-GED	Uppsala Conflict Data Program Georeferenced Event Dataset
UMIRR	Central African Joint Rapid Response and Prevention Unit for Sexual Violence Against Women and Children (Unité Mixte d'Intervention Rapide et de Répression des violences sexuelles faites aux femmes et aux enfants)
UN	United Nations
UNAMID	UN-AU Mission in Darfur
UNICEF	UN International Children's Emergency Fund
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees/UN Refugee Agency
UNMISS	UN Mission in South Sudan
UNOCA	UN Regional Office for Central Africa
UNPOL	UN Police
UPC	Union for Peace in Central Africa (Unité pour la paix en Centrafrique)*
UNSC	UN Security Council
USMS	Special Joint Security Units (Unités spéciales mixtes de sécurité)
UTM	Urgent Temporary Measure
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

* These acronyms refer to three of the armed groups active in Central Africa. For a full list of armed groups and corresponding acronyms, see [Table 2](#).

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PART 1.

Introduction and Executive Summary

Peace operations are among the most important international mechanisms for contemporary conflict management, but their effectiveness often remains the subject of confusion and debate in both policy and academic communities. Various international organisations, including the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU), have come under increasing pressure to justify the effectiveness and impact of their peace operations.

To address this demand, in 2017, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), together with more than 40 research institutions, peacekeeping training centres, and think tanks from across the globe, established the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON). The network aims to provide independent, collaborative and research-based information about the effectiveness of specific peace operations using a shared methodology across case studies.

This report on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (known by its French acronym MINUSCA) follows the four other completed EPON reports to date on the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

EPON researchers apply a similar framework across all cases. Like the other reports, this study of MINUSCA aims to produce a comprehensive picture of the Mission's overall effectiveness, and analyse the sources or causes of the Mission's impact. It does so by evaluating MINUSCA using EPON's three-part framework designed to facilitate comparative analysis across peace operations. Each EPON study presents: (1) a historical *conflict analysis* of the country and region in question, and (2) an overview of the *effects* of the peace operation, i.e., whether the operation is implementing its specific mandate, as well as a more general picture of how the country is faring, as assessed by the major human development, governance, and fragility indices. Finally, (3) EPON studies evaluate *six explanatory factors*, or causal variables: political primacy; mandates and resources; people-centred approaches; legitimacy and credibility; women, peace and security (WPS); and coordination with partners.

The EPON-MINUSCA co-authors gathered primary source evidence for this study, mainly during the months of June, July and August in 2019 at UN headquarters in New York and in the Central African Republic. Our team conducted approximately 200 interviews with people in and around the UN system concerning Central Africa. We continued with follow-up interviews and integrated new sources in the final drafting of this report. We present here a summary of the report's three parts: the historical conflict analysis, a discussion of MINUSCA's effects, and the six EPON explanatory factors.

1.1 Conflict Analysis

The Central African Republic is a large, lush, resource-rich, and landlocked country with approximately 4.5 million citizens. The country has yet to enjoy a single decade of stable, non-abusive political rule, but until late 2012, it had not experienced widespread killing among its citizens. France annexed and named the territory Ubangi-Shari in the 1880s, after decades of Arab slave raiding and trading, both of which left a legacy of societal distrust of outsiders. Rather than investing the territory under centralised French state control, France partitioned out *private concessions* to rapaciously exploitative commercial firms in an atypical colonial arrangement.

Owners of colonial concessions worked Central Africans to their deaths, while introducing new diseases, such that the population of 1880 was halved from 1.5 million to 750,000 by 1940. The lingering question of "who belongs" as part of the Central African nation pervades contemporary society, and new forms of concessionary politics have become a way of life. The deep colonial legacies of violent modes of power acquisition, concessionary politics, and distrust of external actors are not easy to overcome. COVID-19 presents Central African citizens with a set of new fears, understandably invoking previous harms brought by outsiders. External action – even well-intentioned – may sometimes inadvertently reinforce the negative effects of these legacies rather than mitigating them.

In the 1990s, members of the armed forces mutinied several times over issues of representation, inadequate salaries, and corruption. In response, starting in 1997, regional and international actors deployed a series of different interventions (see [Table 1](#)). After François Bozizé seized power in 2003, the Central African Bush War smouldered from 2004–2007, resulting in displacement and uncertainty, but not large-scale death. Political corruption and intrigue continue to characterise relations in the capital city, Bangui, where about one-fifth of Central Africa’s 4.5 million people reside.

The nature of the violent conflict experienced today in Central Africa is complex and not easy to categorise. Historically, tensions have arisen between landed farmers and herders seeking pastures for cattle-grazing, especially during the dry season from roughly December to May, but traditional agro-pastoralist mediation practices prevented conflicts from escalating past the local level. The country is also rich in minerals, such as diamonds, gold, and uranium, over which people have had disputes, but these too often remained localised.

Local disputes began to take on more overtly religious Muslim-Christian tones in the 2000s. Groupings eventually coalesced between the mainly Christian and animist, loosely allied and structured “Anti-Balaka,” and the more hierarchically structured, mainly Muslim Séléka groups. Although the initial impetus for Séléka organising was to seek inclusion for people residing in the marginalised east, the movement shifted toward violence. In December 2012, the Séléka marched from the north, and took Bangui in a hugely destructive rampage, installing a new dictator, Michel Djotodia, by March 2013. Djotodia was unable to consolidate control, and uncertainty reigned.

The following year, the Central African Republic teetered on the edge of genocide as Anti-Balaka fighters sought revenge against the Séléka and perceived affiliates. Members of the Muslim community were killed, raped, and neighbourhoods looted. Most of the Muslim population fled their homes. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) committed by all parties was and remains a defining feature of this conflict, and sexual violence is more prevalent than killing. In the fighting between the Séléka and the Anti-Balaka, most government buildings and their contents were destroyed, including archives and official documents pertaining to land ownership and citizenry, rendering subsequent processes of economic recovery and justice extremely difficult.

Today’s lingering, lower-level violence lies both between and within different religious and ethnic groups. Because Central Africa is large and does not have many paved roads, many groups share more political, economic, and social relations with neighbouring states – South Sudan, Sudan, Chad, Cameroon, the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo) – than with the capital city, Bangui.

The Central African Republic is in what we call a “cycle of insecurity.” In this cycle, it is difficult if not impossible for average people to invest in work. If the productive sectors of society and government are not functioning, and schools are not educating citizens, prospects for future

productive life diminish. As a Central African businessperson explained to us, “Anyone with means has a house in another country. No one can really invest here.” With no tax base, it is difficult to create internal security forces (*les forces de sécurité intérieure*, or FSI), courts, or other institutions of a regulatory, bureaucratic state. In turn, this basic state incapacity leads to further insecurity, political and economic dependency, and the vicious cycle worsens. The question for both outsiders and Central Africans is how to break the cycle.

1.2 MINUSCA’s Mandate and Effects

In an attempt to stabilise the country and potentially break the cycle of insecurity, the UN Security Council authorised MINUSCA in April 2014, and the Mission became operational five months later. According to a scholarly index of all peace operations, MINUSCA’s mandate is the most complex of the current missions.¹ The three original, priority tasks included: (1) the protection of civilians, especially women and children, under threat of physical violence (within its capabilities and areas of deployment), and identifying and recording threats and attacks against civilians; (2) support for the transition process (from the transitional government under Catherine Samba-Panza from 2013-15 to a constitutional referendum and elections in 2015-2016); and (3) the extension of state authority and the preservation of territorial integrity through technical assistance, mediation and national dialogue. The mandate also lists a variety of other provisions, including the authority to arrest spoilers and criminals. Over time, the mandate has shifted. The central task remains (1) the protection of civilians, including furthering the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Others include (2) providing good offices in support of the February 2019 peace agreement, (3) assisting with the 2020-21 elections, (4) protecting UN personnel and infrastructure, (5) a variety of tasks pertaining to extending and building state authority, (6) monitoring human rights, (7) enabling humanitarian aid delivery, and (8) assisting the Panel of Experts in monitoring the weapons trade and collecting information about violence and incitement to violence.²

In May 2015, the UN and partners supported the Bangui Forum – an attempt at a broadly inclusive peace forum to work on a set of principles on which the country could rebuild, including the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) of the armed groups. The peace held through the transition to the 2015-16 democratic elections. During the years 2014-16, MINUSCA engaged in what multidimensional peacekeeping missions tend to perform well – supporting political and peace processes, patrolling, information sharing, policing, mediating, building the physical state infrastructure, and facilitating the training of future civil servants. The work of the UN peacekeepers was complemented by other forces with compelling military capacity.

1 Elio Amicarelli and Jessica Di Salvatore, “Introducing the PeaceKeeping Operations Corpus (PKOC)” February 2, 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3530404>.

2 “Mandate,” MINUSCA: United Nations multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, April 22, 2020, <https://minusca.unmissions.org/en/mandate>.

In late 2016, the peace broke down for a variety of reasons, among them the military vacuum left by the departure of French Sangaris Forces and the AU-led Regional Task Force on the Lord's Resistance Army (AU RTF LRA) featuring American and Ugandan Special Forces deployed in the southeast (hunting LRA leader Josef Kony). The United States and Ugandan military forces in the southeast served as a deterrent – inadvertently – against armed groups targeting civilians and spoiling the peace. The French Forces, however, had a specific mandate to exercise force to protect civilians. Peacekeeping missions such as MINUSCA are not structured to have an offensive or compellent military capacity like national or regional militaries.³ At the time, the Central African domestic security forces – the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), the national police, and gendarmerie – were unprepared to assume control, leaving a power vacuum.

Since no entity in Central Africa held a monopoly over the legitimate use of force, in 2017, violence against civilians and displacement resumed. MINUSCA adjusted quickly to react. The UN Security Council thus mandated MINUSCA to acquire a Portuguese Quick Reaction Force (QRF) and 900 additional troops in 2017. The Mission also shifted its political strategy toward fostering local peace committees, as well as engaging more in threat analysis and early-warning systems, and training uniformed personnel in the protection of civilians as well as the prevention of conflict-related SGBV. MINUSCA sent surge teams to a variety of towns to “reduce the risk of large-scale violence.”⁴ In Birao, Bria, and Ndélé, peacekeepers have also provided security to civilians seeking refuge near bases, reminiscent of the UN's protection of civilian camps in South Sudan. By 2018, the death rate declined again to mid-2014-2016 levels, indicating success in the Mission's strategic shifts.

Before the UN Security Council authorised MINUSCA, it created a Panel of Experts to monitor the arms embargo placed on the country.⁵ The Panel has monitored consistent and often increasing arms trafficking by armed groups, mainly across the borders with Sudan, Chad, and South Sudan. The underlying political economy of conflict – unfettered trafficking in arms and natural resources, accompanied by illegal taxation in areas not under the control of the government – means that the armed groups appear to be gaining in strength. Meanwhile, the government contends it is inhibited by international arms and resource embargos from assuming control.

After the dissolution of the Bangui Forum processes, some six partial peace accords were brokered. Finally, a breakthrough came in February 2019 when the government and all 14 armed groups signed a peace accord initiated by the AU, with buy-in from key regional organisations and states. MINUSCA, although a key facilitator of the process, was not designated a *guarantor* of the accord, leading to some confusion about who would manage spoilers of the peace accord and how they would do so.

3 Lise Morjé Howard, *Power in Peacekeeping* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

4 “S/2020/124” (2020), <https://undocs.org/S/2020/124>.

5 “S/RES/2127” (2013), https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4F-F96FF9%7D/S_res_2127.pdf.

In November 2019, the UN Security Council granted MINUSCA formal authority to assist with implementation of the accord. It also added the significant new tasks of ameliorating “institutional conditions,” controlling armed group activity, and assisting with the contentious upcoming elections, all without additional funding.⁶

In sum, if we take into consideration MINUSCA’s three initially mandated priority tasks: (1) the protection of civilians, (2) the support of a transitional political process, and (3) the restoration of state authority, the Mission has fulfilled the second task at the time of writing. The first and third tasks remain some of MINUSCA’s top priorities, and the operation has made significant progress on both fronts. MINUSCA has actively brought the civilian death rate down and prevented conflicts from escalating. It has helped in building and staffing prefectures, courts and prisons, and restoring the rule of law. Reforming the security sector, especially the military, has been more challenging, but there is important progress. Disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR) of armed group members remains weak. As one interviewee explained to us, “armed groups still provide security in their areas.” Many armed groups also tax the people residing in the territories under their control.

Although the operation has made significant progress, especially in limiting conflict-related civilian death and building state capacity and institutions, advances remain tenuous, and setbacks are numerous. The Central African Republic remains among the lowest-ranked countries on the Human Development Index (HDI), with weak governing institutions, limited civil liberties and political rights, and a fragile political economy. These broad trends in the Republic are not unique in the region.

Despite the general trends that challenge peace in the region and in Central Africa’s history, the Mission has worked creatively and decisively to promote peace from both the bottom-up and the top-down. As of February 2020, however, approximately one-fifth of the Central African population remained displaced within and outside of the country. During our field visits to Bria, Bambari and Birao, interviewees expressed a sense of movement toward peace and hope for the Accord for Peace and Reconciliation (APPR), but many felt that the Muslim-Christian and ethnic divides were not ameliorating. The country also remains one of the most dangerous places in the world for foreign workers, with attacks on humanitarians occurring at an average of one per day in 2019.⁷ That said, the dangers that may arise if MINUSCA or humanitarian organisations were to depart remain high. MINUSCA has helped to prevent major atrocities and undemocratic transfers of power. Many interviewees, both in the Mission and in civil society, expressed some version of the simple statement: “Without MINUSCA, there is no Central African Republic.”

6 In terms of other UNSC mandate alterations, in 2018, MINUSCA was the first mission to pilot a new “Comprehensive Performance Assessment System” (CPAS) in peacekeeping, designed to improve on-the-ground data collection in UN missions to monitor and improve impact.

7 S/2020/124.

1.3 The Six EPON Explanatory Factors

EPON reports hypothesise that six explanatory factors are the most important causal factors explaining the effectiveness of peace operations: political primacy, mandates and matching resources, people-centred approaches, legitimacy and credibility, women's inclusion and protection, and coordination. We briefly recap our findings on each.

Political Primacy

After the spike in civilian deaths in 2017, it took MINUSCA about one year to adjust its strategy to reduce civilian killings successfully. MINUSCA took “political primacy” seriously. For example, it worked in a “bottom-up” political fashion to facilitate the establishment of local peace and reconciliation committees in 29 towns throughout the country. Realising that establishing local peace was insufficient, it joined with the AU’s “top-down” political strategy, helping to facilitate the conclusion of the regionally guaranteed February 2019 Peace Accord. The accord granted all 14 armed group leaders positions in the government, among other positive incentives through DDRR and the Special Joint Security Units (USMS). By using political means in bottom-up and top-down peace processes, augmented by civilian protection camps, arrests, training, enforcing UN Security Council sanctions – and some more coercive measures to neutralise spoilers, such as military operations conducted by the QRF – the Mission is effectively limiting violence against civilians.

Mandates and Matching Resources

MINUSCA’s mandate is the most complex of all current peace operations according to an impartial, scholarly index of mandates. Its budget is sizeable, but our interviewees noted several issues. First, MINUSCA’s yearly budget is approximately three times the size of the Central African Republic’s annual national budget. Many fear this is creating state dependency on the UN: “The state is dependent on MINUSCA, but MINUSCA doesn’t have the capacity of a state.” Second, the mandate does not enable MINUSCA or others to tackle three essential drivers of conflict in Central Africa: the illicit political economy with actors in neighbouring states that fuels the armed groups; increasing criminality (not always associated with armed groups); or the history of societal trauma. Third, many interviewees in the Mission lamented resource problems, such as inadequate cell phone networks, inadequate airlift and road vehicle capacity, a lack of drones, and poor road conditions, as well as language barriers. Fourth, some interviewees estimated that Central Africa would need more than 11,000 FACA troops deployed in order to maintain security in the entire territory. After three years of EU Training Mission (EUTM) training, however, only 1,400 have co-deployed with MINUSCA troops, and they are not sustainable without MINUSCA’s support. There is international funding for about one-tenth of what military planners estimate the FACA needs. In short, missions are sometimes put in a

double bind. They are accused of creating state dependencies, but at the same time, missions are often held accountable for the whole mandate (as we are doing in this analysis), even when they may have neither a well-fitting, implementable mandate, nor sufficient means.

People-Centred Approaches

MINUSCA has developed a variety of effective, people-centred programmes, especially in its policing efforts. It has actively and effectively recruited women to the reforming Central African police and fostered gender-mindful institution-building in supporting the development of the Central African Joint Rapid Response and Prevention Unit for Sexual Violence Against Women and Children (UMIRR). It has also effectively engaged in elite and middle-level elite community violence reduction. But at the same time, some average Central Africans may not see MINUSCA's approach as sufficiently people-centred as a whole. As MINUSCA develops increasingly aggressive ways to manage armed groups and spoilers, the Mission's militarily robust measures may come into conflict with efforts to foster people-centred approaches.

Legitimacy and Credibility

Legitimacy and credibility remain challenges for MINUSCA. Gaps in credibility and strategic communications, and misconduct, are problems that stem in part from underlying circumstances beyond the scope of the Mission, such as societal distrust of external actors and cultural and linguistic misunderstandings. Prior high levels of sexual violence and domestic abuse in the country, in addition to restrictions by troop contributors on establishing internal policing mechanisms to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) within peacekeeping missions, contribute to continuing instances of SEA in the Mission. International news about the Mission often highlights UN peacekeeper abuse from 2014-15 (mistakenly focusing on the UN, rather than on non-UN Sangaris Forces abuse). The continuing problem of SEA in MINUSCA, however, is mainly one that concerns *international* legitimacy, rather than domestic.

MINUSCA's *domestic* legitimacy issues in Central Africa seem to have a different source than SEA. MINUSCA does not generally poll well among Central Africans, as shown in the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) public opinion polling (see Figures 11 and 16). Although our five focus group interviewees had many positive evaluations and suggestions for MINUSCA, Central African citizens in Bangui often expressed a desire for MINUSCA to exercise greater force against spoilers of the peace process. MINUSCA's legitimacy and credibility deficit appear to stem in part from the fact that rebel groups continue to arm and fund themselves through uncurbed illicit networks. Armed groups also continue to embark on massacres every four to six months (even if the attacks escalate less often now). These factors contribute to an ongoing and pervasive sense of instability, which undermines MINUSCA's credibility and legitimacy (and overshadows adjustments in any communication strategy).

Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

MINUSCA and the government of Central Africa are championing women's leadership by staffing high-level positions with women. Equality at the top, however, is not consistently filtering down through the ranks. Through UMIRR, MINUSCA is helping to develop national institutions to gather systematic and early-warning information that is integral to fostering gender equality and preventing gender-based violence. Supporting the creation and work of UMIRR is a significant sign of effectiveness in the WPS agenda, and ensuring that this new domestic institution functions into the future remains a priority.

Coordination

The underlying conditions for MINUSCA to function are both regional support and agreement among the permanent five members of the UN Security Council (P-5). Without these foundations, no peacekeeping mission will succeed. The AU played a key role in the negotiations leading to the February 2019 peace agreement; without AU support, there would not be an agreement. Although the AU remains supportive, emerging tensions between the P-5 members threaten the peace and undermine the underlying, important common interests they all share. Central Africa is a poor country and its resources are hard to regulate and exploit, especially as long as armed groups and illicit networks control territory. Despite what we view as status-oriented disagreements, all P-5 members share important, underlying interests. They support the current political leadership, agree that stabilisation and peace are important collective goods and that power vacuums are dangerous, and share a common interest in curbing violent religious extremism and terrorism. Cooperation is still possible and remains a necessary condition for eventual peace in Central Africa.

Conclusions

In short, MINUSCA has made significant contributions to peace and security in the Central African Republic. For most of 2019, MINUSCA did not have the technical, mandated authority to assist in implementing the February 2019 Peace Accord, even though it continued supporting the peace. Spoilers attacked one another and civilians, but it was unclear who would apply different types of consequences and under what authority – from political pressure to arrests, sanctions, and military counter-attacks. Compounding the confusion, Central Africa is planning for elections in 2020-21. MINUSCA (and its partners in the UN Development Programme (UNDP)) have the mandate, but not adequate funding, to assist with the elections. In the wake of dis- and misinformation campaigns about both the elections and COVID-19, peace in the Republic is very fragile.

If MINUSCA is to have a chance of increasing its effectiveness, it must receive adequate funding to continue its vital work. It must also work at listening to and communicating better with

Central Africans at all levels in order to increase mutual trust and build legitimacy. MINUSCA is currently helping to stabilise the country. Most likely, it will continue to meet this bar. It remains a crucial enabler of the peace process, reforming and building the capacity of state institutions, and facilitating the extension of state authority. In so doing, it has saved countless lives and contributed to a more stable region. The question now is whether the Mission will continue on the current, slow path of mere stabilisation, or whether the UN Security Council and other external actors will enable the Mission to move toward full implementation of its mandate, and eventual exit from a peaceful and prospering Central African Republic.

PART 2.

Methodology and Evidence Base

2.1 Introduction

The Effectiveness in Peace Operations Network (EPON) produces independent analyses of current, international, multidimensional peace operations.⁸ Members of the network focus on different peace missions' strategic-level effects on political processes and armed conflict dynamics in a host country. The guiding research question for all studies is: *How effective has peace operation X been over time period Y?*

EPON defines *effectiveness* as “the overall strategic impact of a peace operation, understood as reducing conflict dynamics in the area of operation over a particular period of time, in the context of its mandate and resources.” The goal is to produce comprehensive assessments that reflect the complexity of the objectives of a peace operation, the means at its disposal, and the key factors in the conflict system, rather than evaluating an operation as if it were operating in isolation.

⁸ EPON defines a *peace operation* as an international field deployment in a conflict-affected area, authorised or sanctioned by the UN Security Council or by the intergovernmental decision-making bodies of respective regional organisations, with an explicit mandate to contribute to one or more of the following objectives: preventing violent conflict, protecting civilians, increasing stability, and fostering sustainable peace.

EPON reports include three basic sections or “analytic tools”: a context analysis, an identification of mission effects, and an overview of the six potential explanatory factors that link outcomes with the efforts of the peace operation.

2.2 Overview of Analytic Tools

- a. The first analytic tool is an analysis of *the context in which the peace operation deploys*. This requires an analysis of local, regional and international conflict dynamics that comprise the principal characteristics of the situational context in which the peace operation takes place.
- b. The second analytical tool identifies and examines the *effects produced by the peace operation*. EPON researchers review the mission’s mandate and activities, and consider to what extent the mission has achieved its mandate. They also look broadly at descriptive statistics over time in the country in conflict that provide a picture of civilian protection and governance – these effects are not uniquely attributable to the actions of the mission. In this report on MINUSCA, we provide an overview of civilian death rates measured by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED); the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) displacement rates; and a variety of governance and well-being indicators, including the HDI, Freedom House, the Failed and Fragile State Index, and World Bank Governance Indicators. We also show data from the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset, comparing sexual violence levels in the Central African Republic with those of other countries hosting large peace operations such as Mali and Congo. EPON researchers aim to look beyond ‘simple’ mandate implementation and analyse how effective a peace operation has been in relation to the situation on the ground.

The three analytical tools used in the EPON research methodology:

- a) Context and Conflict Analysis
- b) Effects of the Peace Operation
- c) Explanatory Factors

- c. The third tool seeks to analyse the causal mechanisms by which the mission produced these effects. The EPON methodology focuses on a particular set of six explanatory factors: political primacy; mandates and resources; people-centred approaches; legitimacy and credibility; WPS; and coordination. Other factors may be relevant to explain outcomes – both intended and unintended – but these six form the basis for organising

research results and facilitating an eventual “structured-focused” comparative analysis of EPON findings across different missions.⁹

2.3 The Six EPON Explanatory Factors

EPON studies identify six crucial explanatory factors, asking a common set of questions about each.

Explanatory Factor 1: Political Primacy

Peace operations aid in facilitating political processes that overcome destructive, violent conflict. Therefore, peace operations must be accompanied by a viable political process and have adequate political direction and support.

a. A Viable Political Process

What was the political strategy that guided the peace operation? How clearly was it articulated? Who was involved in formulating the strategy?

b. Political Direction and Support

Who supported peace implementation efforts? How did they remain engaged throughout the period studied? Was there disagreement among different national and international stakeholders? What were the contentious issues, and how were disagreements overcome?

Explanatory Factor 2: Mandates and Matching Resources

There have long been calls for “clear and concise” peacekeeping mandates matched by necessary resources. The ability to formulate “realistic” mandates hinges on a thorough understanding of the context and the dynamics at play, or congruence. How realistic a mandate is will depend on its relevance to the conflict dynamics, as well as the capabilities allotted to the mission.

⁹ Structured, focused comparison is a qualitative research method where researchers ask the same set of questions for an array of cases in order to identify common patterns. On this method, see Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, (MIT Press, 2004) Chapter 3.

a. *Congruence and Relevance*

Did the mandate match the problems on the ground? How congruent were the peace operation's activities with its mandate? How effectively did it do what it was supposed to do according to the mandate? How did the peace operation address the conflict dynamics?

b. *Capabilities*

To what extent did the peace operation have access to appropriate and sufficient personnel, material, resources, and skills? What was missing? How did capabilities (or their absence) influence the effectiveness of the peace operation?

Explanatory Factor 3: People-Centred Approaches

Peace operations, like the UN itself, are state-centric. Their primary purpose is to (re)build peaceful, sovereign states. Nevertheless, missions cannot implement their mandates without active engagement with local populations and marginalised groups.¹⁰ Outreach involves learning from elite actors and top-level leadership, as well as from “middle-level” and “grassroots” national actors.¹¹ There are many factors to consider when assessing how a people-centred approach operates. For this study of MINUSCA, we consider national and local political outreach and ownership, elite inclusion, civil society outreach, as well as approaches to armed groups and spoilers to peace processes.

a. *National and Local Ownership*

To what degree are the host state government and parties to the conflict committed to the peace process? To what extent do they consent to and actively support the work of the peace operation?

b. *Civil Society*

To what extent and how has the peace operation involved different societal groups and communities, including youth, in its processes? How does it operate outside the capital? Does the population view the peace operation as being aware of their needs, fears and grievances? Has the mission contributed to the growth of civil society?

10 Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*, *Cambridge Studies in International Relations*, 115 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

11 On organisational learning in peacekeeping, see Howard, *UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); on levels of actors, see John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 1997).

c. *Armed Groups and Spoilers*

Who are the sceptics and spoilers, and what are their agendas and vested interests? How has the peace operation attempted to engage them? How have their presence and activities impacted effectiveness?

Explanatory Factor 4: Legitimacy and Credibility

Legitimacy and credibility affect a peace operation's ability to function and thus are central to its effectiveness. Legitimacy and credibility sometimes hinge on how a mission handles strategic communication and misconduct. Scholars have defined legitimacy in peace operations as "the belief by local actors that a peace operation and its goals are fair, right, and appropriate."¹² Scholars define credibility as "the capacity of an actor to present as an honest and believable provider of knowledge and services... in a sustained manner."¹³ In the UN Capstone Doctrine, the credibility of a peace operation is linked to its perceived ability to carry out and achieve its mandate.¹⁴ Perceived ability is predicated on adequate responses to, and accountability mechanisms for, misconduct. It also requires expert strategic communications.

a. *Legitimacy and Credibility*

How is the peace operation perceived? Do people in the host state go along with the wishes of the peace operation? To what extent is the peace operation perceived to be able to deliver on its mandate? Where are the strengths and weaknesses and how do they impact effectiveness?

b. *Strategic Communications*

What steps has the peace operation taken to improve its understanding of how it is perceived by the public? Has it conducted public perception surveys to gauge progress on key mandated tasks? How well does it grasp its impact on different communities and interest groups? How has it tried to manage expectations? How have these strategic communication efforts helped or hindered the peace operation's effectiveness?

12 Jeni Whalan, *How Peace Operations Work: Power, Legitimacy, and Effectiveness*, First Edition (Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6; see also Ian Hurd, *After Anarchy: Legitimacy and Power in the United Nations Security Council*, 3. print., 1. paperback print (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

13 Vanessa F. Newby, *Peacekeeping in South Lebanon: Credibility and Local Cooperation*, First Edition, Syracuse Studies on Peace and Conflict Resolution (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2018), 6.

14 "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines ('the Capstone Doctrine') - United Nations and the Rule of Law," accessed June 11, 2020, <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/blog/document/united-nations-peacekeeping-operations-principles-and-guidelines-the-capstone-doctrine/>.

c. Misconduct

What grievances does the population have about the peace operation's conduct? How has the peace operation managed cases of misconduct? What safeguards and response mechanisms does it have in place? Are they applied systematically? How have the Mission's responses affected its credibility and legitimacy?

Explanatory Factor 5: Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

There is a tendency to reduce gender to one dimension, such as equality in staffing or protection from conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and sexual gender-based violence (SGBV). However, making sure that women, along with all members of society, are treated equally in terms of opportunities, protection, access to resources and services, and participation in decision-making will render peace operations more effective, and societies more robust and resilient. Minimising the negative impact of conflict on women requires gender awareness throughout a peace operation's efforts, emphasising women's agency – rather than primarily viewing women as victims of a conflict. For a peace operation, promoting the WPS agenda also entails prioritising the prevention of, and response to, SEA, as well as incorporating CRSV into its protection strategy.

a. Gender Equality

How is the goal of gender equality reflected in the composition of the operation and in the operation's approach towards national counterparts? How have women participated in key decision making both within the operation, and as part of the peace process? Do established mechanisms for information gathering incorporate gendered early-warning indicators and integrate systematic and regular information about and from women?

b. Protection of Women and Girls from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV)

How has the peace operation promoted a holistic approach to preventing and protecting against SGBV and CRSV? What efforts has it put into ensuring the safety and dignity of survivors and their equal access to protection and justice?

Explanatory Factor 6: Coordination

UN peacekeeping operations are usually mandated to serve as the central coordinator of the overall international effort, clarifying the division of tasks among external actors, including NGOs and regional and international states and organisations.

a. Coordination

What is the role of the peace operation in the coordination of external actors? Which mechanisms or coordination frameworks exist?

b. Regional Involvement

What roles do regional states and organisations play in the conflict and peace processes? Where are tensions or synergies between the political engagement of the peace operation and that of regional actors?

c. Bilateral Interests

Who are the dominant bilateral actors and what is their interest in the conflict area or host country? How do their agendas align, and how do they interact with the peace operation?

EPON studies hypothesise that these six explanatory factors – political primacy, resources for mandate implementation, people-centred approaches, legitimacy and credibility, women’s inclusion and protection, and coordination with other actors – are the most important causal factors for explaining the varied effects of peace operations.

2.4 Evidence Base for this Study

The EPON team evaluating MINUSCA gathered primary source evidence for this report mainly during the months of June, July and August in 2019, both at UN headquarters in New York and in the Central African Republic. In accordance with the standard EPON interview protocol, all interviews – with the exception of an interview with President Prof. Touadéra and a few others – were off record and not for attribution.

Members of the team conducted some two dozen interviews in New York at UN headquarters, as well as with representatives of the Missions from Sudan, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic, the AU’s permanent representative to the UN, and members of the Panel of Experts.

The team visited all main offices in the MINUSCA mission in Bangui. We spoke with nearly all members of the Senior Management Team at that time, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and the two Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (DSRSGs), the Chief of Staff, Force Commander, Force Chief of Staff, and Deputy Police Commissioner. We also met with the heads or deputy heads and staff of Political Affairs, Civil Affairs, U5 Planning, U3 Operations, Joint Mission Analysis Centre, Joint Operation

Centre, Communications, Justice and Corrections, the Women's Protection Unit, Gender Affairs, Human Rights, Protection of Civilians (POC), and Security Sector Reform (SSR).

Team members visited five towns that are currently home to UN bases in Central Africa, including Bambari, Birao, Bria, Kaga Bandoro, and Paoa. This means the team heard from Central Africans and UN staff in each sector of the country and visited a variety of types of UN field bases.

Members of the EPON team met with the President of the country, two Ministers, other Central African officials, and many UN national staff, most notably Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs), in Bangui and in the field offices. We shared meals with a variety of Central Africans in academia, business, and NGOs. We conducted five focus groups with a broad cross-section of Central Africans in Bangui, including representatives and members of youth groups from four neighbourhoods (arrondissements 3, 4, 5, 8). We met with Central Africans in communications and media, other local NGOs, religious leaders of the primary faiths, and journalists.

Members of the team interviewed the Ambassadors to the Central African Republic from France, Russia, and the United States. We also interviewed Ambassadors and leaders of the missions from the AU and the EU, and members of several UN affiliates, including the UNDP.

In all, the team conducted approximately 200 interviews with people in and around the UN system concerning the Central African Republic. We continued with follow-up interviews through the final drafting of this report.

PART 3.

Historical Context and Conflict Analysis

3.1 Local and National Conflict System

The Central African Republic has yet to enjoy a single decade of stable, non-abusive political rule. Neither had it experienced widespread killing among its citizens until late 2012.

a. Traumatic History and the Advent of Concessionary Politics

The region in and around what we now call the Central African Republic suffers from multiple generations of traumatic experiences. After decades of Arab slave raiding and trading, which created a pervasive atmosphere of societal distrust, France annexed and named the territory Ubangi-Shari in the 1880s.¹⁵ Rather than investing Ubangi-Shari under centralised French state control, France partitioned out *private concessions* to rapaciously exploitative commercial

15 Louisa Lombard, *State of Rebellion: Violence and Intervention in the Central African Republic* (London: Zed Books, 2016); Christian Prioul, *Entre Oubangui et Chari Vers 1890*, Recherches Oubangiennes (Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative, 1981), 81; Dennis D. Cordell, "Blood Partnership in Theory and Practice: The Expansion of Muslim Power in Dar Al-Kuti," *The Journal of African History* 20, no. 3 (July 1979): 379–94, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700017370>.

firms, in an atypical colonial arrangement resembling the “terror-based” reign of King Leopold II just south of the border in Congo.¹⁶ The concessionary companies were unlike other colonial regimes in that private interests surpassed those of the state. Owners of colonial concessions worked Central Africans to their deaths, while introducing new diseases, such that between the years of 1880-1940, some half of the Central African population was reduced to a low count of 750,000 people.¹⁷ The lingering question of “who belongs” as part of the Central African nation pervades contemporary society, and concessionary politics have become a way of life.¹⁸ The deep colonial legacies of violent modes of power acquisition, concessionary politics, social trauma, and distrust of external actors are not easy to overcome. External action may sometimes inadvertently reinforce the negative effects of these legacies rather than abate them.¹⁹

The deep colonial legacies of violent modes of power acquisition, concessionary politics, social trauma, and distrust of external actors are not easy to overcome. External action may sometimes inadvertently reinforce the negative effects of these legacies rather than abate them.

b. Violent Modes of National-Level Power Acquisition and Social Trauma

Beginning in the 1920s, Central Africans initiated protests against cruel and unfair colonial treatment. Eventually, Central Africa gained representation in the French parliament by the widely respected leader, Barthélemy Boganda, although this did not end the unfair treatment. Boganda died in a plane crash in 1959, the year before independence. In 1966, army commander Jean-Bédél Bokassa seized power and later proclaimed himself president for life and “Emperor” of the “Central African Empire.” Bokassa’s violent patrimonial rule endured nearly 14 years – he was the longest-serving head of state thus far. During Bokassa’s reign, he consolidated something of a state and nation, alongside his own personal wealth.²⁰ Bokassa was eventually ousted in a coup in 1979, followed by five or six more coups, and one partially free election.²¹ “Elite

16 Stephen W Smith, “Central African Republic’s (CAR) History: The Past of a Tense Present,” in *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*, ed. Tatiana Carayannis and Louisa Lombard (London: Zed Books, 2015), 15.

17 Pierre Saulnier, *Le Centrafrique: Entre Mythe et Réalité*, Collection Etudes Africaines (Paris: Harmattan, 1998).

18 Etienne Goyémidé, *Le Dernier Survivant de La Caravane: Roman*, Collection Monde Noir Poche 32 (Paris: Hatier, 1985).

19 Tim Glawion and Lotje de Vries, “Ruptures Revoked: Why the Central African Republic’s Unprecedented Crisis Has Not Altered Deep-Seated Patterns of Governance,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 56, no. 3 (September 2018): 421–42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X18000307>.

20 Didier Bigo, *Pouvoir et obéissance en Centrafrique* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1988).

21 Andreas Mehler, “Reshaping Political Space? The Impact of the Armed Insurgency in the Central African Republic on Political Parties and Representation” (Working Paper, German Institute of Global and Area Studies, 2009), GIGA

insecurity” has been an important dimension of neopatrimonialism in Central Africa. Until 2015, all previous leaders’ regimes ended violently.²²

Elite insecurity has been an important dimension of neopatrimonialism in Central Africa. Until 2015, all previous leaders’ regimes ended violently.

c. Contemporary Concessionary Politics

The Central African Republic is a large, lush, landlocked, and resource-rich country, slightly smaller than the US state of Texas (or slightly larger than metropolitan France).²³ Throughout its history, the Central African State has struggled to extend its authority beyond the capital, Bangui. This important city is located on the southern edge of Central Africa, along the Ubangi River, and across from Congo. More than one-quarter of the country’s 4.5 million people reside in Bangui, where electricity is scarce, potable tap water is rare, and the vast majority of roads are unpaved (and unnamed). Many citizens of school-going age have not enjoyed an uninterrupted school year in more than 20 years.²⁴ Of the 187 countries classified on the HDI, Central Africa has ranked among the lowest for its short life expectancy, low GDP (the lowest purchasing power parity in the world), low levels of literacy, high unemployment, and high infant and maternal mortality rates.²⁵

The Central African State has been, and remains, the main employer in the Central African Republic. The state is highly dependent on external aid, salaries often go unpaid, and corruption runs deep. It has lacked “any meaningful institutional capacity at least since the fall of Emperor Bokassa in 1979.”²⁶ Since the first regional intervention in 1997, external actors have sought to rebuild the state, but outside of Bangui, life often remains “desperate and destitute, and in a

WP 116/2009, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1534590; Roland Marchal, “As Violence Persists, International Intervention in CAR Falls Short,” IPI Global Observatory (blog), February 5, 2014, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2014/02/as-violence-persists-international-intervention-in-car-falls-short/>; Smith, “CAR’s History: The Past of a Tense Present”; Glawion and Vries, “Ruptures Revoked.”

- 22 Gino Vlavonou, “An Uncertain Transition: Security, Violence, and Neopatrimonialism in the Central African Republic,” *Revue Tiers-Monde* 228, no. 4 (2016): 121–42. Neopatrimonialism is a system of governing where patrons employ state resources to induce the governed to abide by the system of rule.
- 23 The Central African Republic’s abundant natural resources include gold, diamonds, uranium, and timber.
- 24 Interview with Rebecca Hunter, State Department, Washington DC, April 14, 2015. In 2012, dozens of schools were repeatedly attacked and looted, mainly by factions of ex-Séléka (S/2016/133, paras. 34, 35, 56).
- 25 Note that in 2012, the Central African Republic was ranked 180 of 187 on the HDI. In 2017, it was the lowest (UNDP, 2017).
- 26 International Crisis Group (ICG), “Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State” (ICG, December 13, 2007), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-anatomy-phantom-state>; Laurent Gomina-Pampali, Un État, Ça Meurt Aussi! *Histoire de l’instabilité Politique et de La Violence Armée, Facteurs de La Déchéance de l’État Centrafricain: 1979–2015* (Yaoundé: UCAC, Presses de l’UCAC, 2017).

state of... insecurity.”²⁷ Non-state armed groups, private firms, NGOs, and multilateral organisations carry out many state functions. These are the main actors in today’s Central African concessionary politics.

Non-state armed groups, private firms, NGOs, and multilateral organisations carry out many state functions. These are the main actors in today’s Central African concessionary politics.

d. Who is Central African?

A major historical legacy of the Arab slave trade and French concessionary colonialism is a deep mistrust of outsiders. This legacy bears on contemporary Central African political discourse today, wherein an augmenting and contentious theme revolves around who is genuinely Central African, and who is an outsider, with particular focus on people from, or assumed to be from, Chad.²⁸ There are somewhere between seven and fifty ethnic groups in Central Africa, depending on how one designates the boundaries of an ethnic group.²⁹ The official national languages are French and Sango.³⁰ Although estimates of precise religious proportions vary, and many Christian and Muslim families are inter-married, about 50% of Central Africans are Catholic or Protestant (in roughly equal numbers, although probably more belong to the various Protestant churches), about 35% adhere to indigenous, animist beliefs (although this percentage is probably higher, and overlaps with other beliefs), and 15-20% profess some variant of Islam.³¹

Muslim Central Africans are diverse. Some indigenous peoples converted to Islam in the seventh century CE, along with much of North Africa. Others arrived several generations ago from Chad, Sudan, Cameroon, and Lebanon via slave raiding and various forms of trade. Since the 1980s, political opponents of neighbouring regimes have found refuge in Central Africa (using the territory as a rear base for future attacks back home). Many Muslims came to concentrate on commercial activities in Bangui.³² As one observer explains, “A lot of the Muslims, given the extreme poverty of the Central African Republic, were relatively wealthy.”³³

27 ICG, “Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State.”

28 Emmanuel Chauvin, “La guerre en Centrafrique: à l’ombre du Tchad. Une escalade conflictuelle régionale? L’Agence Française de Développement.” (Agence Française de Développement, 2018), <https://www.afd.fr/fr/ressources/la-guerre-en-centrafrique-lombre-du-tchad-une-escalade-conflictuelle-regionale>.

29 CIA, Central African Republic 2014; World Population Review 2018; Rogers Brubaker.

30 Marcel Diki-Kidiri, “Le Sango Dans La Formation de La Nation Centrafricaine,” *Politique Africaine* 23 (1986): 83–99.

31 “Central African Republic,” in CIA World Factbook (CIA, 2014), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/download/download-2014/index.html>; Tatiana Carayannis and Louisa Lombard, eds., *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* (London: Zed Books, 2015).

32 Faouzi Kilembe, “Local Dynamics in the PK5 District of Bangui,” in *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*.

33 Joanne Mariner, senior crisis response advisor at Amnesty International, quoted in Stein, 2014.

At the same time, many Central African Muslims are nomadic (especially Fulani or Peulh) and traditionally moved across current borders long before Central Africa gained independence. During the seasonal “transhumance” period, livestock and people move from neighbouring, drier territories in Chad and Sudan, through to the fertile grazing plains in the Central African Republic. They then move on to sell their beef in Bangui, other Central African cities, and neighbouring states.³⁴

Historically, tensions have risen between landed farmers and herders seeking pastures for cattle-grazing, especially during the dry season from December to May, but traditional agro-pastoralist mediation practices prevented conflicts from escalating past the local level, and these disputes did not take on overtly religious Muslim-Christian tones until the 2000s.³⁵ In the last twenty years, the discourse of overt bigotry, “both anti-Chadian, and anti-Muslim” has engulfed political, economic, and social interactions.³⁶

Historically, tensions have risen between landed farmers and herders seeking pastures for cattle-grazing, especially during the dry season from December to May, but traditional agro-pastoralist mediation practices prevented conflicts from escalating past the local level, and these disputes did not take on overtly religious Muslim-Christian tones until the 2000s.

The agro-pastoralist conflicts in the countryside have manifested themselves in a variety of ways, but often separately from conflicts in and around the capital Bangui, where tensions take other forms. In the capital, the political and economic elite have regularly appropriated resources from the state to the disadvantage of average citizens.

The state’s inability to serve the population is the main problem. In much of the countryside, conflict has often come in the form of road banditry, but it escalated when President Bozizé seized power in 2003 and began using his security forces to prey on populations outside of Bangui. The escalation sometimes fuelled rivalries between ethnic groups (for example, between

34 According to the ICG, there are at least ten different Muslim-herder groups and dozens of changing, transhumance routes. December 12, 2014.

35 Kasper Agger, “Behind the Headlines: Drivers of Violence in the Central African Republic,” The Enough Project (blog), May 1, 2014, <https://enoughproject.org/reports/behind-headlines-drivers-violence-central-african-republic>; Michael J. Brown and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, “Social Cohesion as Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic and Beyond,” *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 10, no. 1 (April 1, 2015): 10–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15423166.2015.1008349>; “The Central African Republic’s Hidden Conflict,” Crisis Group Africa Briefing (Nairobi/Brussels: ICG, 2014), 14, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b105-la-face-cachee-du-conflit-centrafricain.pdf>.

36 Chauvin, “La guerre en Centrafrique: à l’ombre du Tchad. Une escalade conflictuelle régionale? L’Agence Française de Développement,” 10. Note that in many parts of the Sahel, states have often marginalised pastoralist groups politically and socially.

Runga and Goula). In the absence of an impartial, bureaucratic state or more peaceful means of employment, young people have resorted to violence in response to threats and in order to make a living.³⁷ Polarised identity is thus a product, rather than a cause, of the violence.

Over the last ten years, both the tensions in the capital and in the countryside have increasingly morphed into conflicts over religious identity and belonging.

In the early 2010s, according to interviews, different groups were “not hardened against each other,” and many external observers assessed the violence as temporary, if horrific. Over the last ten years, however, both the tensions in the capital and in the countryside have increasingly morphed into conflicts over religious identity and belonging.³⁸ Even for people of mixed background, it is sometimes difficult to code Muslims as Central African.³⁹ Like the politics of the concessionary state, the politics of distrust of the outsider and bigotry stem from pre-colonial and colonial Central African history.

3.2 The Regional Conflict System, the Shift to Violence, and Multilateral Interventions

In 2012, violence in the Central African Republic broke out in part because of regional factors. The Republic is situated in a region characterised by fragility and violence, and the quest for stability and peace. Brutal, authoritarian colonial rule across the region transitioned in the 1960s to domestic, often authoritarian, rule. Many states continue to grapple with porous borders, resource curses, ethnic tensions, herder-settler tensions, illicit trafficking, and poverty. The weaknesses of regional states underpin the two main sub-regional organisations related to the Republic, where personal, as opposed to institutional, relations between heads of state dominate.⁴⁰

In the Central African Republic, regional and international actors responded to the deteriorating situation with more than a dozen different interventions before the start of the current UN

37 Marielle Debos, “Fluid Loyalties in a Regional Crisis: Chadian ‘Ex-Liberators’ in the Central African Republic,” *African Affairs* 107, no. 427 (April 1, 2008): 225–41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adn004>; L. Lombard and S. Batianga-Kinzi, “Violence, Popular Punishment, and War in the Central African Republic,” *African Affairs* 114, no. 454 (January 1, 2015): 52–71, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adu079>.

38 “Prioritizing and Sequencing Peacekeeping Mandates in 2019: The Case of MINUSCA” (International Peace Institute, October 24, 2019), <https://www.ipinst.org/2019/10/prioritizing-and-sequencing-peacekeeping-mandates-in-2019-the-case-of-minusca>.

39 As one focus group member expressed, “Everyone, including Muslims, we are all Central Africans. My mother is a Muslim and my father is a Central African.”

40 Central Africa is a member of both ECCAS and CEMAC.

mission, MINUSCA. This history of regional conflict and intervention is important to keep in mind when examining the challenges faced today by MINUSCA and the Central African State.

a. An Unstable Neighbourhood

The bordering states around the Central African Republic include South Sudan, Sudan (the Darfur region), Chad, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, and Congo. South Sudan and Sudan have suffered from civil war more often than not since 1955; the herder-farmer violence in Darfur has been characterised as genocidal; Chad has frequently endured civil unrest; and Congo-Brazzaville has experienced violent conflict in the recent past. The civil war in Congo killed more civilians than any other war since World War II.

Because of the distance and absence of roads between the Central African capital Bangui and the country's outer edges, many groups share more political, economic, and social relations with neighbouring states than with Bangui.

From the mid-1990s through the early 2010s, the violence in Congo, South Sudan, Darfur/Sudan, and Chad spilled over Central Africa's borders in a variety of ways, often in the form of refugees and proxy conflicts.⁴¹ From nearby Uganda, Joseph Kony led the infamous Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) into the southeast region of Central Africa to take advantage of its resources, including forcing children to join the army. More recently, neighbouring armed groups have sought to fuel their efforts with riches from Central Africa's mines.⁴² Because of the distance and absence of roads between the Central African capital Bangui and the country's outer edges, many groups share more political, economic, and social relations with neighbouring states than with Bangui.

b. The Dissolution of the FACA and Start of Multilateral Interventions

The influx of refugees and fighters from neighbouring states into the Central African Republic overlapped with problems in Central Africa's military, *les Forces Armées Centrafricaines* (FACA). In 1996 through early 1997, with state coffers diminishing and no remuneration in sight, the FACA mutinied three times. The international community responded by sending French forces to stabilise, followed by the Inter-African Mission Monitoring the Bangui Agreements

41 Roland Marchal, "CAR and the Regional (Dis)Order," in *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*.

42 "Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2399" (UN, December 14, 2019), <https://undocs.org/S/2018/1119>.

(MISAB), the first regional peace operation, which then re-hatted to the UN Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA), the first UN peacekeeping mission in Central Africa (see [Table 1](#)). MINURCA soon downsized to a “peacebuilding” mission, UN Peace-Building Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA), despite the pleas of the elected head of state, Ange-Félix Patassé, that the UN Mission remains more robust.⁴³ Then, in 2003 – thwarting some international and regional efforts – former FACA Chief of Staff, General Francois Bozizé, overthrew Patassé with the support of neighbouring Chad (and France). The regional and international peace forces watched the coup from the sidelines. The ensuing Central African Bush War smouldered from 2004–2007, resulting in displacement and uncertainty, but not large-scale death.

“Reports of FACA human rights abuses abounded and Bozizé defunded the military, not only to curb abuse, but also as a means of preventing a possible military coup.”

In 2007, the conflict in Darfur began to spill across Sudan’s borders, and rebels and refugees waged counter-attacks from new positions in neighbouring states. In response, the UN sent its Mission to the Central Africa Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) in an effort to stabilise southern Chad and the northeast of Central Africa. “Reports of FACA human rights abuses abounded and Bozizé defunded the military, not only to curb abuse, but also as a means of preventing a possible military coup.”⁴⁴ As overt violence diminished, the UN Mission transitioned to another peacebuilding mission, the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central Africa Republic (BINUCA), co-deployed at first with the regional Peace Consolidation Mission in the Central Africa Republic (MICOPAX), followed by the International Support Mission in the Central Africa Republic (MISCA) (see [Table 1](#)).

c. The Séléka and Anti-Balaka

By the early 2010s, the various regional and international missions were unable to counter the growing domestic dissatisfaction with poor governance, impunity, and instability. Local criminals, “Zaraguinas” or “coupeurs de route” (“road cutters”) began increasingly to attack herders during transhumance.⁴⁵ In response, herders armed themselves and sought revenge. After the implosion of Libya in 2011, light weapons spread across the region.

43 Jocelyn Coulon, Marie-Joëlle Zahar, and Damien Larramendy, *Consolidation de La Paix et Fragilité Étatique: L’ONU En République Centrafricaine*, Politique Mondiale (Montréal, Québec: Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2015).

44 HRW, “World Report 2007,” World Report (HRW, 2007), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2007>.

45 Emmanuel Chauvin and Christian Seignobos, “L’imbroglio centrafricain: État, rebelles et bandits,” *Afrique contemporaine* 248, no. 4 (2013): 119–48; ICG, “Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State”; Chauvin, “La guerre en Centrafrique: a l’ombre du Tchad. Une escalade conflictuelle régionale? L’Agence Française de Développement”; Peer Schouten and Soleil-Parfait Kalessopo, “The Politics of Pillage: The Political Economy of Roadblocks in the Central

Several Muslim-majority, loosely allied armed groups based mainly in the northeast banded together in the “Séléka,” or “alliance,” with Michel Djotodia as their leader. As the Séléka gained strength, Christian and animist “local defence” militias also gained in strength. The local defence neighbourhood groups came to call themselves the “Anti-Balaka,” which means both “Anti-machete” in Sango and is French for “Anti-balles AK” (“balles AK” means bullets from Automatic Kalashnikov rifles). The Anti-Balaka, generally less hierarchical or formal in their structure than the Séléka, allied with President Bozizé.

In the midst of the fighting between the Séléka and the Anti-Balaka, most government buildings and their contents were destroyed, including archives and official documents pertaining to land ownership and citizenry.

Violence between the two sides then erupted in two waves, from December 2012–March 2013, and again from December 2013–early 2014. During the first wave, the Séléka marched through the countryside, killing, looting, and raping, but pledging better rule. They were at first thwarted from taking Bangui by the regional MICOPAX mission. Bozizé also signed a deal with South Africa for military assistance. But regional and domestic resistance to the Séléka gave way in March 2013 when the FACA collapsed, Bozizé fled the country, and Djotodia, head of the Séléka, installed himself as head of state with help from neighbouring Chad.⁴⁶ Central Africans of all religions held hope that the new Séléka rulers would usher in better governance, but instead, the Séléka continued their plundering of the country, looting state armories, and plunging the Central African Republic “into a state of anarchy.”⁴⁷ In the midst of the fighting between the Séléka and the Anti-Balaka, most government buildings and their contents were destroyed, including archives and official documents pertaining to land ownership and citizenry.⁴⁸

The next wave of violence came in the latter months of 2013, when the Anti-Balaka rose against the Séléka in revenge. They struck back not only at military targets, but also against perceived members of the Muslim community. In December 2013, a new, 1,200-troop French Forces intervention, the “Sangaris”, began forcibly disarming mainly Séléka, effectively siding with the Anti-Balaka and rendering Muslims even more vulnerable. Also in December, the AU fielded a new 5,000-strong intervention force, MISCA, to help quell the violence, though they too were not viewed as impartial, because many troops hailed from neighbouring states. Both missions were authorised by the UN Security Council. In December 2013, the Central African Republic

African Republic” (IPIS/DIIS, 2017), <https://ipisresearch.be/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/1711-CAR-roadblocks-English.pdf>.

46 During this time, 13 South African troops were killed.

47 UN Information Department, 2013.

48 Interviews in Bangui, July 2019.

teetered on the edge of genocide, as mainly Muslims were killed, raped, and neighbourhoods looted in revenge attacks. Most of the Muslim population fled their homes.

In December 2013, the Central African Republic teetered on the edge of genocide, as mainly Muslims were killed, raped, and neighbourhoods looted in revenge attacks. Most of the Muslim population fled their homes.

d. Sexual Violence

During the worst of the fighting from 2012-14, out of a population of less than five million, nearly 7,000 people were killed, approximately one million were displaced, and tens of thousands of people were raped. According to one source, “more than 60,000 cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) were registered... by an inter-agency group headed by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), of which about 30,000 involved victims of sexual violence, including rape. That is about 100 people a day.”⁴⁹ Others put the numbers lower, but it is important to acknowledge that SGBV was and remains a defining feature of this conflict. Sexual violence was more prevalent than killing.

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Sexual violence was more prevalent than killing.

A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, based on interviews with 300 survivors, describes the nature of the violence:

Members of armed groups committed rape during attacks on towns and villages, sometimes during door-to-door searches for men and boys. Séléka and Anti-Balaka fighters also attacked women and girls as they carried out essential tasks such as going to markets, cultivating or harvesting crops, and going to and from school or work. Perpetrators often directed attacks at women and girls due to their presumed religious affiliation, with the predominantly Muslim Séléka fighters targeting women and girls from Christian communities, and the Anti-Balaka targeting Muslim women and girls... [Some boys and men were also sexually abused]. In many cases, survivors said their attackers used sexual violence as a form of retribution for perceived support of those on the other side of the sectarian divide.... Perpetrators also tortured women and girls by whipping them, tying

49 Dalia Al Achi, “Human Rights Day: Abuses Rife in Central African Republic,” UNHCR, December 10, 2015, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2015/12/5669a3a66/human-rights-day-abuses-rife-central-african-republic.html>.

them up for prolonged periods, burning them, and threatening them with death. Sexual slavery survivors were held captive for up to 18 months and repeatedly raped.⁵⁰

Sexual violence thus became a defining feature of the overall violence.

e. Stabilisation?

In January 2014, Idriss Déby of Chad called a regional summit during which Djotodia agreed to step down and the mayor of Bangui, Catherine Samba-Panza, came to serve as interim President of the Central African Republic. The following month, the UN Security Council voted to send a large, multidimensional peacekeeping force which deployed seven months later in September 2014. Before the UN Mission could deploy, sporadic violent attacks continued, including in Bangui and Bambari, where MISCA forces fired on residents protesting their presence.⁵¹ Despite objections from some Central African citizens, most MISCA troops exchanged their green national helmets for blue UN helmets in September 2015. The French Forces chain-of-command remained separate.

MINUSCA deployed in a context of deep, historical distrust of outsiders, entrenched concessionary state politics, and in the wake of numerous, largely ineffective, multilateral regional and international interventions.

In all, before the start of MINUSCA, Central Africa had hosted nearly a dozen different interventions (see [Table 1](#)). Over the course of the decade, as one analyst explained, the missions failed “to profit from periods of stability, and the search for cheap solutions lead to quick exits... peacebuilding efforts came to mirror Central Africa’s own government, existing more in name than in substance.”⁵² In other words, MINUSCA deployed in a context of deep, historical distrust of outsiders, entrenched concessionary state politics, and in the wake of numerous, largely ineffective, multilateral regional and international interventions.

50 Hillary Margolis and Lewis Mudge, “*They Said We Are Their Slaves*”: *Sexual Violence by Armed Groups in the Central African Republic* (New York, NY: HRW, 2017). See also HRW, Central African Republic: Amid Conflict, Rape, 17 December 2015, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/569578b74d73.html>.

51 Gemma Parellada and Laura Smith-Spark, “Protesters, Peacekeepers Clash in Central African Republic,” CNN, May 30, 2014, <https://www.cnn.com/2014/05/30/world/africa/central-african-republic-violence/index.html>.

52 Nathaniel Olin, “Pathologies of Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding in CAR,” in *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*.

3.3 The Cycle of Insecurity

The defining characteristic of current life for most Central African citizens is insecurity (see [Figure 1](#)). This insecurity, resulting from historical trauma and distrust, concessionary politics, and ineffective domestic institutions and external interventions, has led to a situation today where many Central Africans feel paralysed. A member of MINUSCA explained, “People are traumatised... We see increasingly religiously motivated killings of priests and imams. There is corruption at all levels of government. It’s too much for a peacekeeping mission.”

Our country’s economy rests on agriculture and herding, but insecurity has prevented those activities. Commerce is what’s needed. We need commerce to revitalise our economy.

The most visible current measure of insecurity is the fact that armed groups continue to massacre and rape people every four to six months.⁵³ The recent cycle of insecurity began with the Séléka coup in 2012. The basic lack of security means that internally displaced persons (IDPs) cannot return home, and thus farms and businesses cannot produce. As one focus group member explained, “Our country’s economy rests on agriculture and herding, but insecurity has prevented those activities. Commerce is what’s needed. We need commerce to revitalise our economy.” In a state of insecurity, it is difficult, if not impossible, for average people to invest in work or send children to school. If the productive sectors of society are not functioning, there is no base from which to tax citizens and businesses, children cannot attend school, and prospects for future productive life diminish. As a Central African businessperson explained, “Anyone with means has a house in another country. No one can really invest here.” With no tax base, there is no way to create internal security forces (*forces de sécurité intérieure*, or FSI), courts, or other institutions of a regulatory state. In turn, the lack of basic state capacity leads to further insecurity, and the vicious cycle worsens. The question for both outsiders and Central Africans is how domestic and international actors can effectively break the cycle that is producing insecurity.

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53 Focus group interviews, ACLED.

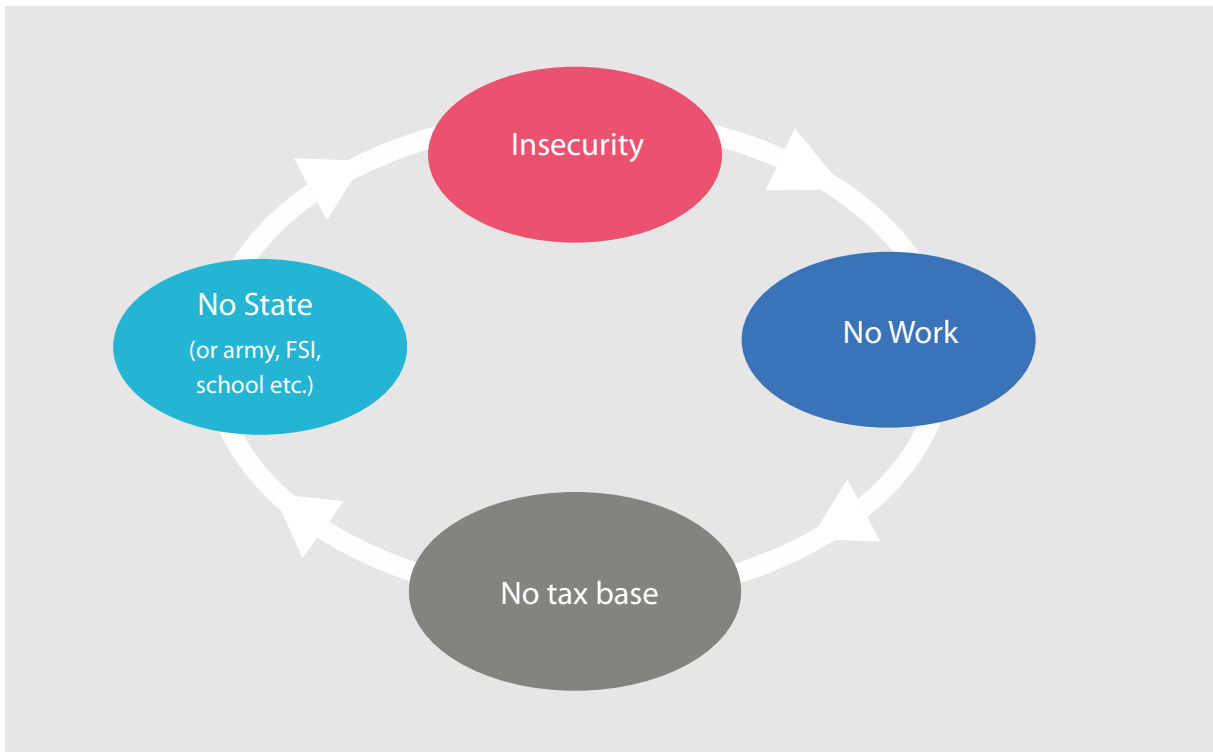


Figure 1: The Cycle of Insecurity in the Central Africa Republic

Date	African Regional Interventions	UN and EU Interventions
Jan. 1997 – Mar. 1998	Inter-African Mission Monitoring the Bangui Agreements (Mission Interafricaine de surveillance des Accords de Bangui) (MISAB)	
Mar. 1998 – Feb. 2000		UN Mission in the Central Africa Republic (Mission des Nations Unies en République Centrafricaine) (MINURCA) helps with Patassé elections
Feb. 2000 – Jan. 2010		UN Peace-Building Support Office in the Central African Republic (Le Bureau des Nations Unies pour la consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique) (BONUCA) peacebuilding mission
Dec. 2001	Qaddafi's Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) sends 300 troops to Bangui to defend Patassé against Bozizé	
Oct. 2002	Jean-Pierre Bemba's Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) supports CEN-SAD troops	
Oct. 2002 – Jul. 2008	Multinational Force in Central Africa (Force multinationale en Centrafrique) (FOMUC), deployed by the Economic and Monetary Community of the Central African States (CEMAC), replaces CEN-SAD	
Sept. 2007 – Dec. 2010		UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (Mission des Nations Unies en République centrafricaine et au Tchad) (MINURCAT)
Jul. 2008 – Jul. 2013	Peace Consolidation Mission in Central Africa (Mission de consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique) (MICOPAX) sent by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)	
Feb. 2008		EU Force Chad/Central African Republic (EUFOR Tchad/RCA)

Date	African Regional Interventions	UN and EU Interventions
Jan. 2010		UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Central Africa (Bureau Intégré de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en Centrafrique) (BINUCA) replaces BONUCA
Mar. 2011 (opened)		UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), Gabon
Apr. 2013 (deployed)	Multinational Force of Central Africa (La Force multinationale de l'Afrique centrale) (FOMAC) under the aegis of ECCAS	
Dec. 2013 – Sept. 2014	The AU's International Support Mission in Central Africa (Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine) (MISCA) replaces and reinforces MICOPAX	
Jan. 2014 – 2015		EU Force in the Central African Republic (EUFOR RCA)
Jul. 2016 – present		EU Training Mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM-RCA)
Sept. 2014 – present		UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA) deploys (approved by the UN Security Council (UNSC) in April 2014)

Table 1: Multilateral Interventions in the Central African Republic

Date	Events
2012 December	Séléka start to march to Bangui
2013 January	MICOPAX prevents Séléka from taking Bangui
2013 March	Séléka rebels storm through countryside and seize Bangui, with help from Chad. Bozizé ousted in coup, Djotodia installed. Massive killing of people associated with Bozizé; looting of state institutions and burning of documents; national military (FACA) disintegrates
2013 December	UNSC authorises France (Sangaris) and the AU to send forces to stabilise. Generalised violence; ethnic cleansing of Muslims
2014 January	Djotodia resigns; Samba-Panza becomes interim leader
2014 September	MINUSCA arrives, AU forces re-hatted to UN, Sangaris remains
2015 February	Battle for Bria
2015 May	Bangui Forum peace talks, displaced return home, economy grows
2015 August	Reports of sexual abuse surface, SRSF fired, several UN battalions sent home
2015 November	Pope visits
2015 December	New Constitution approved by referendum
2015 December – 2016 March	National elections
2016 February	Mathematics Professor and former Prime Minister Faustin-Archange Touadéra wins presidency in run-off
2016 October	Sangaris departs; uptick in violence in and displacement
2017 April	United States and Ugandan anti-LRA forces announce September departure; displacement soars again

Date	Events
2017 July	Several major western aid agencies depart amid increase in violence
2018 April	Sukula battle in the Muslim neighbourhood in Bangui known as PK5
2018 May	Russian troops (both state and private) arrive
2019 January	AU leads peace talks in Khartoum Sudan, with Russian and UN assistance
2019 February	All 14 armed groups and the Government sign the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (APPR)
2019 December	Bozizé returns to Bangui
2020 December	Elections scheduled

Table 2: Timeline of Major Recent Security Events in the Central African Republic

PART 4.

Effects since the Deployment of MINUSCA

4.1 Introduction

In a massive attempt to stop the violence, and break the cycle of insecurity in the Central African Republic, the UN Security Council voted in April 2014 to approve MINUSCA for a period of one year, starting on September 15, 2014.⁵⁴ Authorised under Chapter VII of the UN charter, MINUSCA was to take the reins from two other international interventions: the AU’s 6,000 strong, robust peace operation (MISCA), and the UN’s peacebuilding mission (BINUCA). Troops, staff, buildings and equipment from both operations would be re-assigned to MINUSCA in September 2014. In this section, we outline MINUSCA’s mandate. We attempt to evaluate the extent to which the Mission has fulfilled the mandate – the direct effects of MINUSCA.

We also depict a variety of governance and well-being indicators from the HDI, Freedom House, Failed and Fragile State Index, and World Bank Governance Indicators. We also show data from the HHI’s public polling on Central African perceptions of peace, justice, and security. These indices depict how the Central African Republic has fared both before and during

54 “S/RES/2149” (2014).

the Mission in relation to other countries that are housing large, multidimensional peacekeeping missions. Many of these effects are not attributable directly to the peace operation's efforts. The broad indicators suggest that what is occurring in the Central African Republic in terms of governance, health, and fragility are not new domestically and not unique in the region. Nevertheless, it is important to have a comparative sense of where things stand.

4.2 MINUSCA's Mandate

MINUSCA's mandate is the most complex of all of the current UN peace operations.⁵⁵ The full list of originally mandated tasks includes: (1) protecting civilians, especially women and children, under threat of physical violence (within its capabilities and areas of deployment), and identifying and recording threats and attacks against civilians; (2) supporting the transition process (from the transitional government under Catherine Samba-Panza from 2013-15 to a constitutional referendum and elections); (3) the extension of state authority, and the preservation of territorial integrity through technical assistance, mediation and national dialogue; (4) helping IDPs and refugees to return and facilitating humanitarian aid delivery; (5) protecting the UN itself and ensuring freedom of movement for staff; (6) promoting human rights, including monitoring and investigating abuses, supporting national and international justice processes by, among other actions, arresting war criminals for the International Criminal Court (ICC), building a new national justice system, and reinstating the police and criminal justice system; and (7) disarming, demobilising, reintegrating, and repatriating (DDRR) former combatants and armed elements, implementing community violence reduction and justice programmes, coordinating international DDRR assistance, and seizing, collecting, and storing arms in support of the international arms embargo imposed on the Central African Republic since 2013.⁵⁶

MINUSCA's mandate is the most complex of all of the current UN peace operations.

In addition, the UN Security Council bestowed on the Mission a variety of other tasks, such as helping to find the LRA, protecting and reintegrating child soldiers, incorporating gender advisors in DDRR processes, assisting regional political reconciliation efforts, helping the EU in its training missions, and instituting a zero-tolerance policy for SEA committed by international personnel.

⁵⁵ Amicarelli and Di Salvatore, "Introducing the Peacekeeping Operations Corpus (PKOC)."

⁵⁶ "S/RES/2127" (2013); S/RES/2149.

a. Urgent Temporary Measures (UTMs)

The most unusual part of the mandate is Paragraph 40 (of 51), wherein the UN Security Council decided that:

MINUSCA may, within the limits of its capacities and in areas of deployment, at the formal request of the Transitional Authorities and in areas where national security forces are not present or operational, adopt *urgent temporary measures* [UTMs]... to arrest and detain in order to maintain basic law and order and fight impunity and to pay particular attention in this regard to those engaging in or providing support for acts that undermine the peace, stability or security of the Central African Republic.⁵⁷

MINUSCA was granted the rare authority to arrest spoilers and criminals.

In other words, MINUSCA was granted the rare authority to arrest spoilers and criminals. Only the transitional administrations, such as in the UN's complex Mission in Timor Leste, have been granted such authority.⁵⁸

b. The UN Panel of Experts and French Special Forces

In addition to arrest powers, the Security Council bolstered the Mission with two other levers to keep spoilers to the peace in check. First, the Mission would “support the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) in collecting information about acts of incitement to violence, in particular on an ethnic or religious basis, that undermine the peace, stability or security of the Central African Republic.” The Panel of Experts would be allowed access to all areas of the country in order to document and make public the actions of any spoilers to the peace, including any arms and mineral trading they might witness. Second, the UN Security Council authorised France to use “all necessary means” to help MINUSCA carry out its mission (we explore the Sangaris’ mission in [Parts 5.4c](#) and [5.6c](#)).

The resolution also requested that the DPKO (now DPO) work on a “concept of operations” for sequencing the benchmarks and tasks in the mandate, while envisioning an exit strategy. It also requested frequent reports back to UN headquarters, including full Secretary-General Reports to the UN Security Council every four months. As one UN staff member remarked in 2015, “The mandate is twenty pages long. It’s very difficult to figure out what the priorities

⁵⁷ “S/RES/2499” (2019), para. 33.

⁵⁸ Several interviewees explained that Central Africa was a candidate to receive a transitional authority mandate – where the UN takes over the basic functions of the state for a limited time – but the UNSC did not have the appetite for another such expensive mission.

are, and to think about achieving anything concrete when we are mired in daily crises and constantly having to write reports.”⁵⁹

c. Russia, France, the Arms Embargo, and New “Peacekeeping Performance” Standards

Since its initial authorisation, the UN Security Council has renewed and revised the mandate regularly, but not without contention.⁶⁰ In 2017, the security situation in the Central African Republic was deteriorating. Armed groups were feeling increasingly emboldened after the departure of the French, American and Ugandan Special Forces. President Touadéra, having been popularly elected in 2016, came to the realisation that the weapons sanctions were affecting primarily his troops, but not the armed groups. The EU had helped to train hundreds of Central African troops, but the FACA remained unarmed because of the weapons sanctions: “our troops were training with mango branches. It was embarrassing.”⁶¹ President Touadéra appealed to France and the United States to lift the weapons embargo, and help him arm the FACA. Both countries refused, so he turned to other P-5 members of the UN Security Council.

In the summer of 2017, in light of the increasing insecurity, the government of the Central African Republic requested that the UN sanctions committee allow weapons seized off the coast of Somalia to be donated to the FACA. Russia objected, insisting that Central Africa’s weapons should come directly from Russia, and that only Russian trainers could train the FACA in Russian weaponry. Touadéra realised he had little choice but to turn to President Vladimir Putin of Russia for support.⁶² In November 2017, Russia requested a waiver to train the FACA and new Presidential Guard (officially, with five military and 170 civilian Russian instructors).⁶³ Several months later, Russian instructors also started training Central African police and gendarmes.⁶⁴

Furthermore, the November 2017 mandate renewal granted MINUSCA the authority to use force “the same way Sangaris had been using force.” The Mission was mandated to acquire a 200-member Portuguese QRF and 900 additional regular peacekeeping troops. But the augmented troops were slow to arrive and proved an insufficient match for the armed groups, who asserted control over 75-80% of the territory of the Central African Republic.⁶⁵

59 Author’s interview with senior UN Official, Bangui, Central African Republic, May 2015. Several field staff in 2015 and 2019 reported that they spent too much time writing reports, and not enough on action.

60 Resolutions 2121 (2013), 2127 (2013), 2134 (2014), 2149 (2014), 2181 (2014), 2196 (2015), 2212 (2015), 2217 (2015), 2262 (2016), 2264 (2016), 2272 (2016), 2281 (2016), 2301 (2016), 2339 (2017), 2387 (2017), 2399 (2018), and 2499 (2019).

61 Interviews with President Touadéra, April and July 2019.

62 Several interviewees maintained that French President Macron suggested that President Touadéra ask President Putin for assistance.

63 “S/2018/729” (2018) para. 12.

64 *Ibid*, para. 14

65 “S/RES/2387” (2017). See A/72/789 Add. 8, para. 6.

By 2018, members of the UNSC were expressing open and rare disagreement – for peacekeeping operations in Africa – over how to ameliorate the continuing decline in security in Central Africa.⁶⁶ The western powers insisted on maintaining a weapons ban on the whole country, including the democratically elected government, and that only the EU could train and rebuild the FACA in a way that would meet human rights, civil-military, and weapons protection standards. At the same time, however, the west refused to provide external, military-based security guarantees by sending western troops, or at least more training, as requested by the government.

Despite these disagreements, in the fall of 2018, the UN Security Council did agree on a Resolution that introduced new standards of performance in MINUSCA for evaluating all UN civilian and uniformed personnel with “objective methodologies based on clear and well-defined benchmarks to ensure accountability for underperformance and incentives and recognition for outstanding performance.”⁶⁷ The resolution lamented:

Inaction in the face of, in particular, imminent threats of physical violence against civilians, insufficient contingency planning to react to violence, conduct and discipline issues, risk averse leadership, lax force protection standards, inadequate operational readiness and preparedness, and inadequate integrated planning. [It also] noted with concern instances in which national caveats may have a detrimental effect on mandate implementation and performance.⁶⁸

Although the P-5 agreed on introducing new performance standards in peacekeeping, with MINUSCA as the first test case for the standards, they continued to struggle over how best to support the Mission. The mandate renewal of MINUSCA was scheduled for November 2018, but it took until December to work through differences. In the end, Russia and China issued rare “abstention” votes. As reported by the UN, the Russian ambassador Vassily Nebenzia:

supports MINUSCA but cannot support the resolution due to the manner in which work on the text was conducted. The penholders seemed to approach African countries as exclusive turf, he noted. Explaining that his suggestions for the text were intended to increase transparency and acceptance of the role of regional actors, he said that his contributions were not respected, adding that there was not even a minimum search for compromise. The situation demonstrates once again that the penholder system must be changed because it has been usurped by the “Western three,” he noted. The text ignores the role of Russian instructors in training the military, after the Russian Federation’s supplies of military equipment were obstructed. Using the pretext of consolidating support, the penholders are saying that their efforts are exclusive in nature, while the status quo

66 Richard Gowan, “Navigating the Storms at the UN Security Council,” ICG, February 5, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/navigating-storms-un-security-council>.

67 “S/RES/2436” (2018).

68 S/RES/2436.

leads to the deterioration of the situation, he argued. The Russian Federation will continue to work for the benefit of the people of the Central African Republic, he vowed.⁶⁹

We explore P-5 cooperation and disagreement in [Part 5.6c](#).

d. 2019 Additional Tasks and Changes

In February 2019, the government and 14 armed groups signed a comprehensive peace accord, brokered by the AU. MINUSCA was not designated as a guarantor of the accord, but rather a facilitator. Three months after the accord's signing, in May 2019, an armed group (known as 3R) massacred 49 civilians near Paoua.⁷⁰ Thereafter, massacres in different parts of the country continued every few months (although many violent episodes shifted from civilian killing to killing between armed actors). The November 2019 mandate renewal bestowed on the Mission the additional tasks of supporting the February 2019 Peace Agreement, and supporting preparations for the 2020 elections, but without allocating additional funds to the budget.⁷¹ It also directed the Mission to realise the “strategic objective of creating the political, security and institutional conditions conducive to sustainably reducing the presence of – and threat posed by – armed groups.”⁷²

The 2019 mandate renewal added the significant new tasks of changing institutional conditions, controlling armed group activity, and assisting with contentious upcoming elections, without additional funding.

In other words, the 2019 mandate renewal added the significant new tasks of changing institutional conditions, controlling armed group activity, and assisting with contentious upcoming elections, without additional funding.

69 “Security Council extends mandate of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Central African Republic,” UN: Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, December 13, 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13619>.

70 “Central African Republic: Armed Group Kills 46 Civilians,” HRW, July 18, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/18/central-african-republic-armed-group-kills-46-civilians>.

71 S/RES/2499.

72 The Council decided “that MINUSCA’s strategic objective is to support the creation of the political, security and institutional conditions conducive to the sustainable reduction of the presence of, and threat posed by, armed groups through a comprehensive approach and proactive and robust posture without prejudice to the basic principles of peacekeeping.” S/RES/2499 para. 29.

4.3 Measuring MINUSCA's Record of Mandate Implementation

In sum, MINUSCA has a long and complicated mandate, and disagreement among the P-5 is disquieting. If we take into consideration the three primary, initial tasks of MINUSCA: (1) the protection of civilians, (2) the support of a transitional political process, and (3) the restoration of state authority, as of this writing, the second task has been fulfilled, and the Mission has made significant progress on the first and third.

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What are the prospects that MINUSCA will be able to fulfil the new objective of “sustainably reducing” the presence and threat of armed groups? Given circumstances outside of the purview of the Mission, the answer to this question is less clear. In late 2019, even at the highest levels of the UN, “the Secretary-General was of the view that many of the problems facing the Central African Republic exceeded the capacities of a United Nations peacekeeping operation, considering the complexities of the crisis, the absence of the security apparatus and the almost non-existent capacity of the State.”⁷³ We outline here the extent to which the Mission has implemented different aspects of its mandate since its deployment in September 2015. We specify the extent to which MINUSCA has implemented the letter of its mandate, based mainly on UN Secretary-General Reports to the UN Security Council and assessments in interviews in the Central African Republic. We also provide an overview of civilian death rates and conflict instances measured by UCDP and ACLED. We depict data from the SVAC dataset, comparing sexual violence levels in the Central African Republic with those of other countries hosting large peace operations, such as in Mali and Congo. We also show UNHCR refugee and displacement rates over time. These datasets provide neutral, third-party indicators of how MINUSCA is implementing the mandated tasks of protecting civilians from death, sexual violence, and displacement, although again, these results cannot be attributed solely to MINUSCA.

73 S/RES/2499.

a. Civilian Protection

During the first two years of MINUSCA operations, the crisis in the country calmed down. Civilian death rates declined dramatically (see Figures 2 and 3). In 2015, the UN and partners facilitated the Bangui Forum – consultative peace talks that brought all parties together (including more than 500 people) for several days to discuss and agree on a path forward. In November 2015, Pope Francis visited the country, symbolising a high-level effort (supported by MINUSCA) to capitalise on the momentum toward peace. In 2015-16, the UN facilitated the first externally monitored democratic elections, during which Central Africans elected, in the second round, a Mathematics Professor from the University of Bangui, and former Prime Minister, Faustin-Archange Touadéra.

According to a 2018 Office for Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) report, in response to civilian protection incidents, “MINUSCA had the highest reported response rate (73 percent), followed by MONUSCO and UNAMID (56 percent) and MINUSMA (54 percent).”

From its inception in September 2014 through mid-2016, MINUSCA engaged in a variety of effective efforts to protect civilians – supporting political and peace processes, patrolling, information-sharing, policing, mediating, building state infrastructure, and facilitating the training of future civil servants.⁷⁴ In cooperating through the Joint Task Force Brigade, MINUSCA’s military battalions were under police command, undertaking policing actions to protect civilians, while the French Mission Sangaris focused on air power and military operations to respond to protection incidents.

In Birao, Bria, and Ndélé, UN peacekeepers have provided security to civilians seeking refuge near bases, reminiscent of the UN’s protection of civilian camps in South Sudan.

After the departure of Sangaris and the AU RTF LRA, as we see in Figures 2 and 3, violence against civilians spiked. MINUSCA shifted toward engaging more directly in threat analysis and early-warning systems, training uniformed personnel in the protection of civilians, and responding to protection incidents with military force.⁷⁵ MINUSCA has sent surge teams to

⁷⁴ Howard, *Power in Peacekeeping*, Chapter 4.

⁷⁵ S/2020/124 para. 42.

a variety of towns to “reduce the risk of large-scale violence.”⁷⁶ According to a 2018 Office for Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) report, in response to civilian protection incidents, “MINUSCA had the highest reported response rate (73 percent), followed by MONUSCO and UNAMID (56 percent) and MINUSMA (54 percent).”⁷⁷ Despite these efforts, according to the most recent UN Secretary-General’s report to the UN Security Council, the country is experiencing “an average of 602 protection-related incidents per month.”⁷⁸ In another development in Birao, Bria, and Ndélé, UN peacekeepers have provided security to civilians seeking refuge near bases, reminiscent of the UN’s protection of civilian camps in South Sudan.

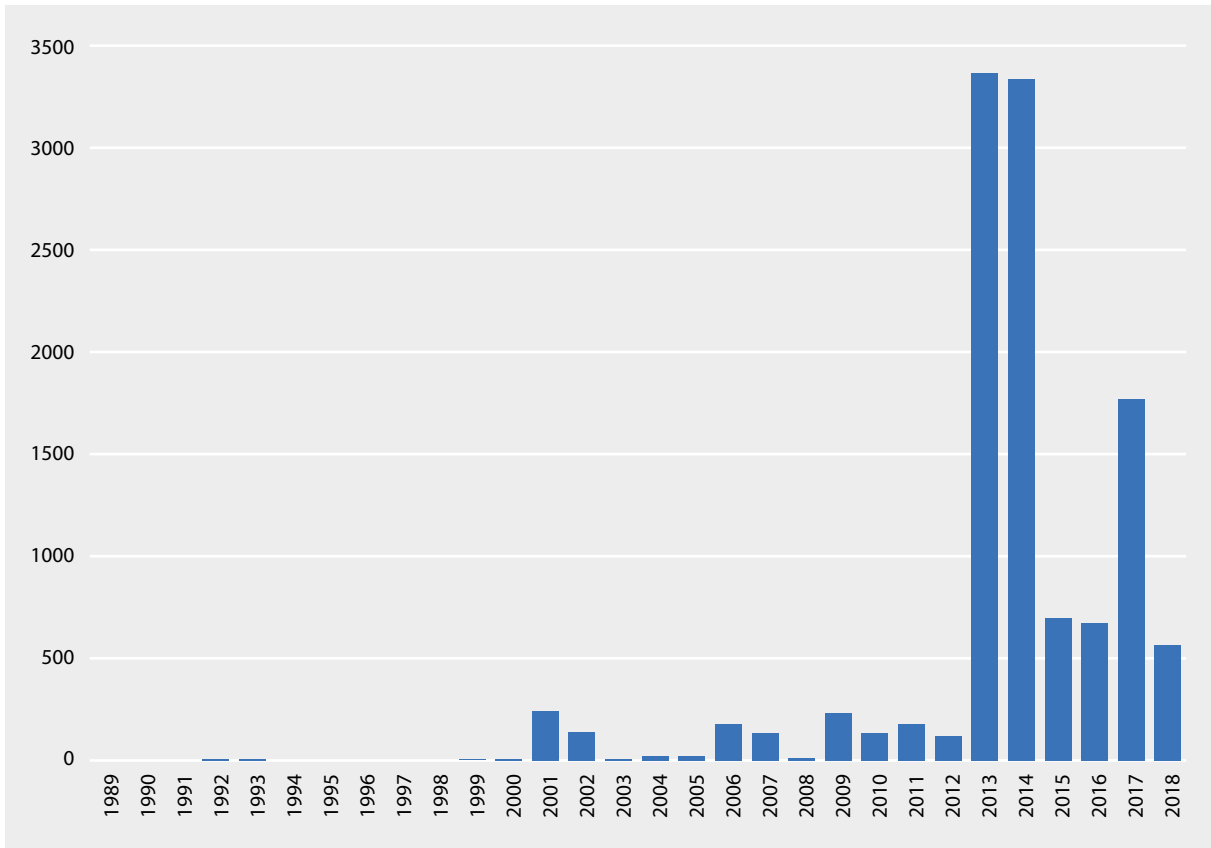


Figure 2: UCDP Annual Number of Battle Deaths, 1989-2018

76 S/2020/124.

77 “Inspection of the Performance of Missions’ Operational Responses to Protection of Civilians (POC) Related Incidents,” Inspection and Evaluation Division (OIOS: UN, July 30, 2018).

78 S/2020/124, para. 37.

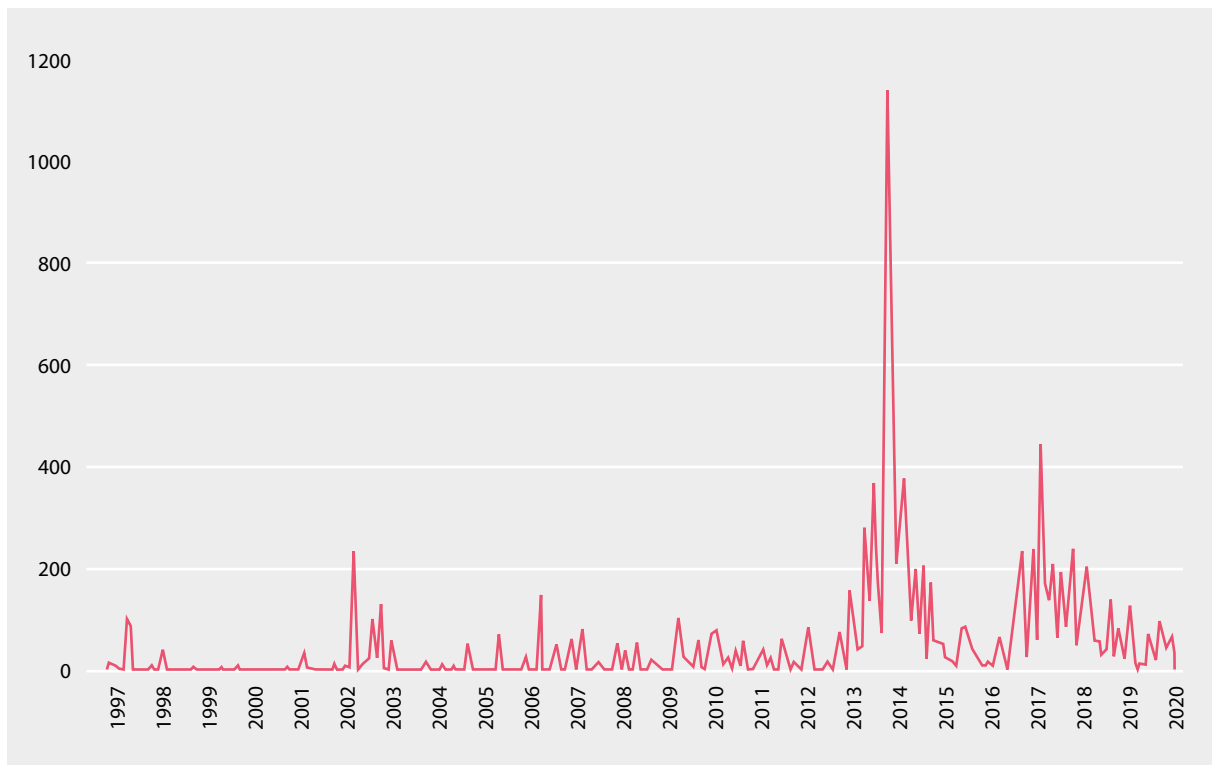


Figure 3: ACLED Yearly Violent Fatalities, 1997-2020

Figures 2 and 3 portray the trends over time in civilian deaths due to violence in Central Africa.⁷⁹ Figure 2 depicts the estimates of total fatalities occurring from an event and is drawn from the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset (UCDP-GED). Figure 3 from ACLED similarly tracks the number of reported fatalities that occurred during violent events.

Conflict has moved over time out of the centre and especially north-eastward, as former Séléka groups fight amongst themselves over mines, land, and people.

The UCDP and ACLED datasets count deaths in slightly different ways, and both acknowledge possible inaccuracies; nevertheless, both depict similar trends. We see that, in the last 30 years, although the Central African Republic did not witness a single decade without abusive political rule, this did not translate into a significant number of deaths. The Central African Bush War from 2004-2007 did not result in a spike in death rates. Death rates from battles spiked in 2013 and 2014, and declined dramatically by mid-2014, following the arrival of the regional and French forces in 2013, and MINUSCA in 2014. The Bangui Forum and the visit of Pope Francis mark low points in civilian death rates.

⁷⁹ See also IPIS, “Interactive Webmap of the Central African Republic,” IPIS Map CAR v.2, accessed June 16, 2020, <https://www.ipisresearch.be/mapping/webmapping/car/v2/#5.5/22/5.5/4/1/>.

The heat maps in Figures 4-7 are drawn from ACLED's violent events data. They show the spike in violence, located mostly in the middle of the country, from December 2012-September 2014. In the following figure, we see the reduction in violence in the ensuing years, coinciding with the Bangui Forum and the presidential elections. In Figure 6, we see a resurgence in violent events in 2016. In Figure 7, we see violence spreading, but lessening. The resurgence in 2016 coincided with the withdrawal of French and American Special Forces, and the growing schisms between the Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central Africa (FPRC) and the Union for Peace in Central Africa (UPC), and other armed group fragmentation. The figures also illustrate how conflict has moved over time out of the centre and especially north-eastward, as former Séléka groups fight amongst themselves over mines, land, and people. After MINUSCA shifted its political strategy toward building local peace committees, among other efforts, and gained a Portuguese QRF and 900 additional troops in late 2017, the death rate declined again in 2018 (as demonstrated in Figures 2 and 3).⁸⁰

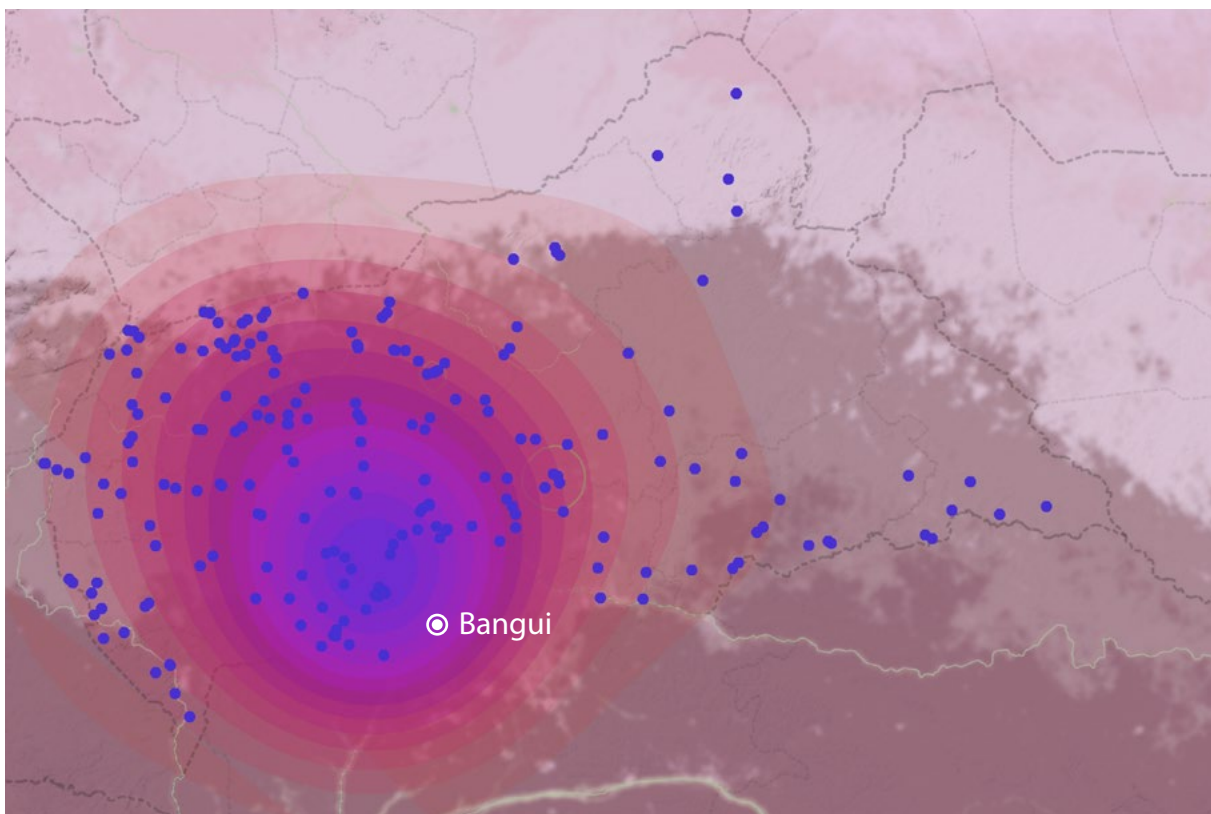


Figure 4: Heat Map #1, December 2012-October 2014

80 Note that when MINUSCA pushed UPC leader Ali Darassa out of Bambari, the conflict appears to have moved with him. See Marie-Joëlle Zahar and Delphine Mechoulan, "Peace by Pieces? Local Mediation and Sustainable Peace in the Central African Republic" (International Peace Institute, November 2017), https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/1701_Peace-by-Pieces.pdf, pp. 25-27.

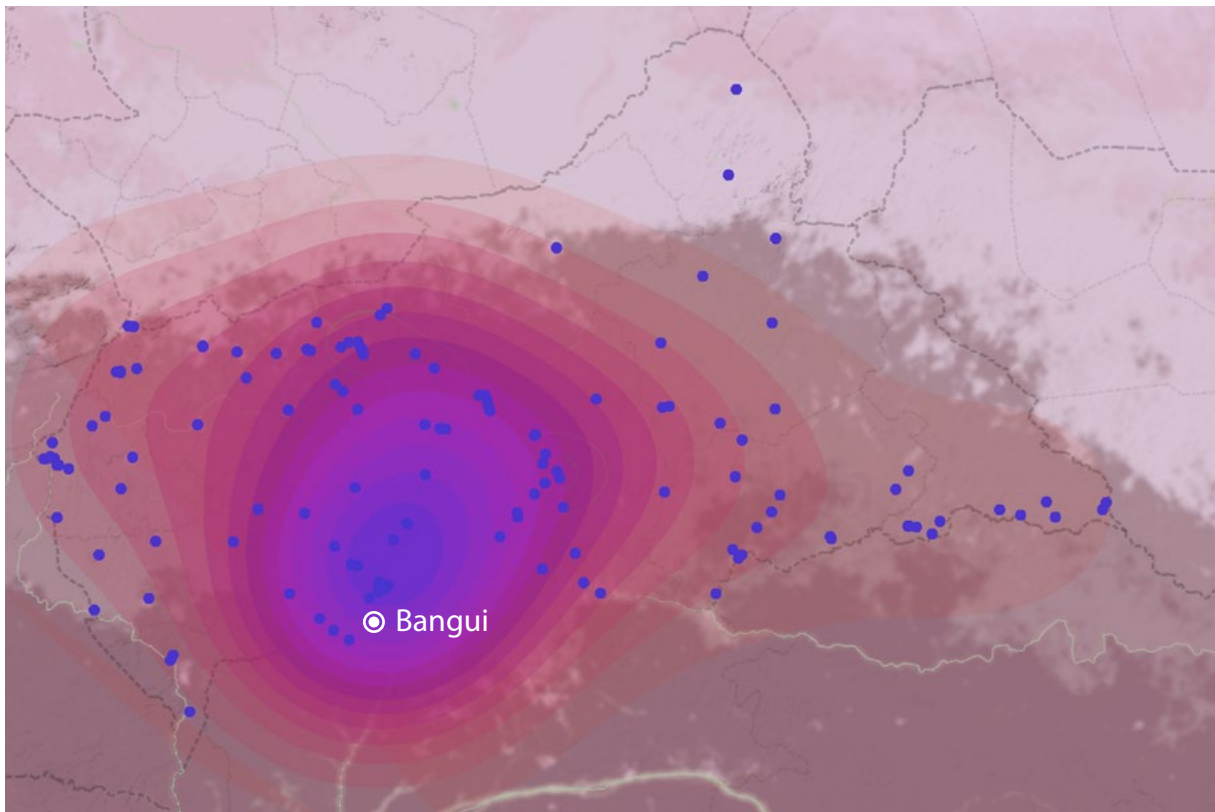


Figure 5: Heat Map #2, October 2014-October 2016

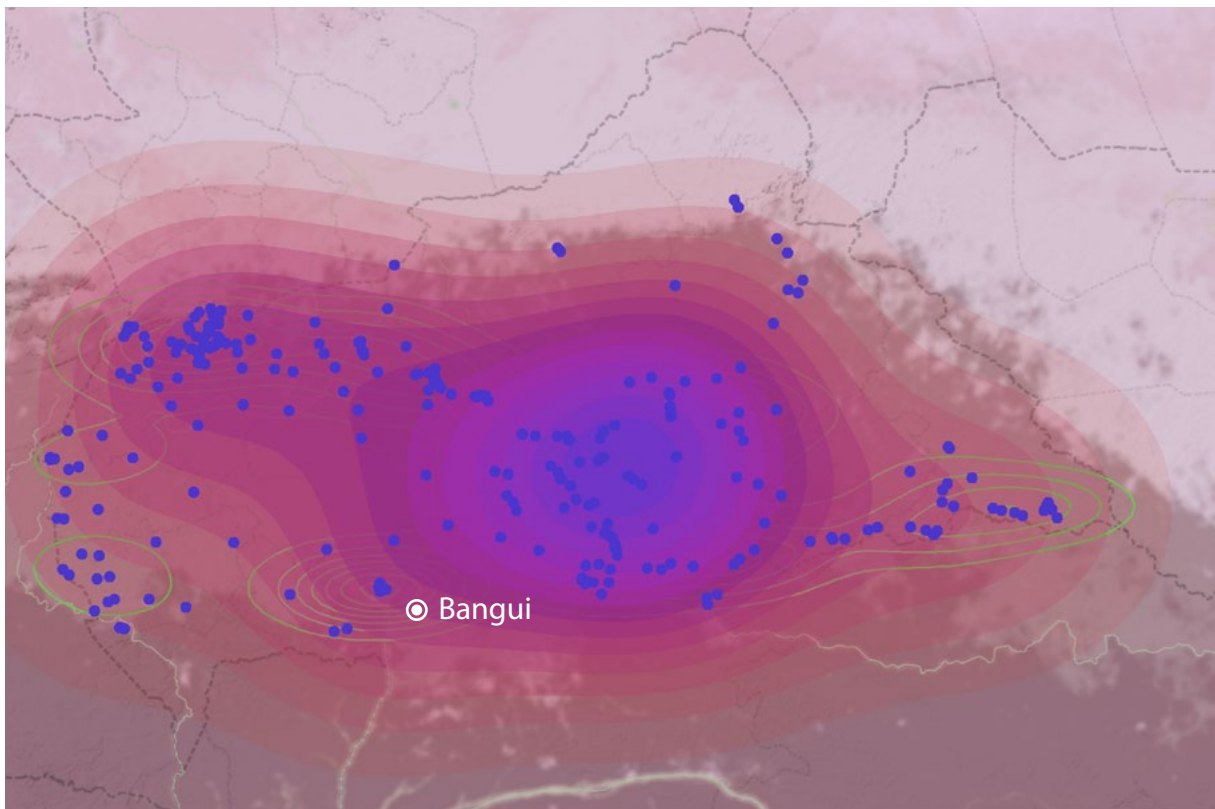


Figure 6: Heat Map #3, November 2016-November 2018

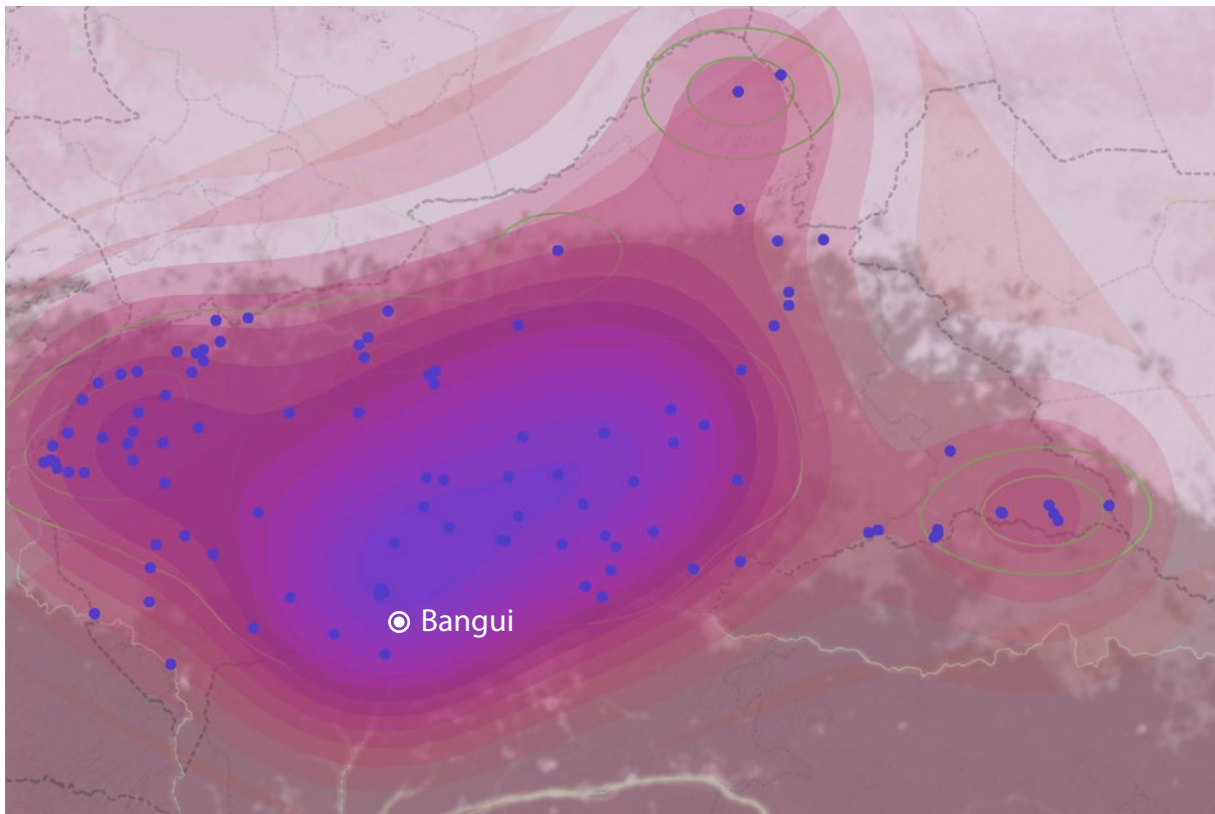


Figure 7: Heat Map #4, December 2018-May 2020

b. Gender-Based Violence

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is a major feature of this conflict, possibly the most striking and defining feature. The UNFPA reported that during the height of the conflict in 2013 through early 2014, “more than 60,000 cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) were registered” including about 100 cases of rape per day.⁸¹ Several of our interviewees in Central Africa suggested that those numbers were unreliably high. At the same time, however, interviewees in the Mission explained that reporting mechanisms for SGBV produced unreliably low numbers because often SGBV is under-reported: “we don’t even have reporting teams in one third of the country” because of instability in the east. Several sources said that each year, “there is an enormous peak during transhumance, especially in February-March.” Some interviewees explained that different agencies have different reporting standards. As we understand, some reporting sources, such as the police, will only report violations if there is a substantiated claim, including multiple sources of information about the attacker and the supposed purposes of the attack. Others, such as *Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans frontières)* (MSF) base their statistics on the demand for SGBV medical treatment alone. Regardless, “the armed conflict

81 Al Achi, “Human Rights Day.”

provided an environment in which perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence enjoyed unbridled impunity as a result of dysfunctional or collapsed institutions.”⁸²

“The armed conflict provided an environment in which perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence enjoyed unbridled impunity.”

According to an internal round table briefing with members of MINUSCA, the Team of Experts and UNDP in July 2019, the number of gender-based attacks were as follows:

Year	Cases
2014	6,758
2015	7,000+
2016	11,110
2017	8,321
2018	10,055

Table 3: Gender-based Attacks, 2014-2018

In other words, during the peace in 2016, the number of SGBV cases appears to rise, but during the spike in killing of 2017 (see Figures 2 and 3), reported sexual violence decreased. We had expected that sexual violence and killing would rise and fall in tandem. Our interviewees were not able to account for these puzzling trends, other than to say that reporting is unreliable, especially during periods of high instability. In other words, when insecurity and killing are widespread, the opportunity to report sexual violence is low. As security improves, people are better able to access humanitarians, police, and other actors who can take reports of sexual violence and facilitate medical treatment. Regardless, it is clear that levels of SGBV in the Central African Republic are exceedingly high.

82 “Report of the Mapping Project Documenting Serious Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Committed within the Territory of the Central African Republic between January 2003 and December 2015,” Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (UN, May 2017), 17.

In contrast to UN reporting, third-party measures depict a growing problem of SGBV in Central Africa dating back to 2010, but then a decrease in 2015. The Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset⁸³ reports the following overall trends per year in Central Africa, Mali, Congo, Somalia, and South Sudan.⁸⁴ Their data ends in 2015, so other than some positive news in 2015, we do not know SGBV rates for most of MINUSCA’s tenure thus far.

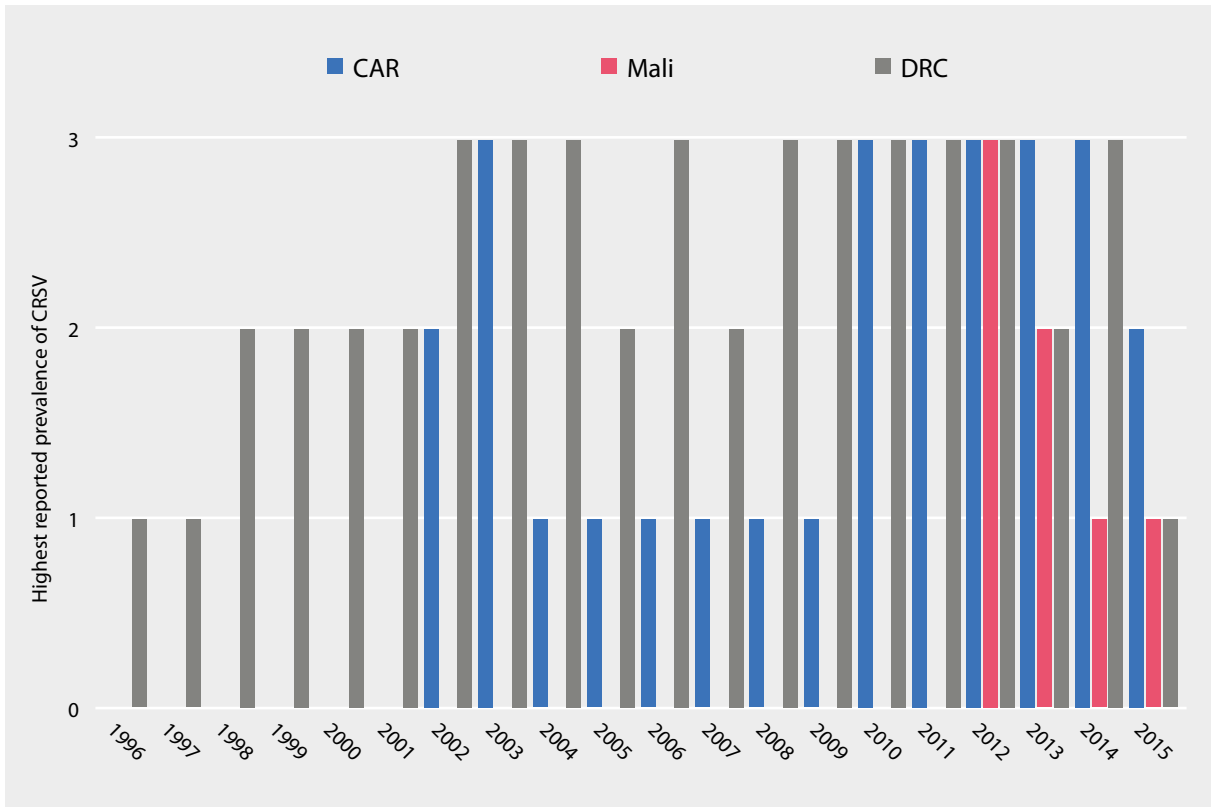


Figure 8: Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) – Central Africa, Mali and Congo

83 Dara Kay Cohen and Ragnhild Nordås, “Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Introducing the SVAC Dataset, 1989–2009,” *Journal of Peace Research*, May 8, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343314523028>.

84 Note that for this analysis we aggregated the three prevalence scores across all actors in a conflict year into one score. The figures show the highest reported prevalence by any actor in the country in a given year. This means, if the highest reported prevalence was a ‘1’ – isolated reports of SVAC by any actor – the year is coded as ‘1’. If multiple actors had a prevalence score of ‘1’, we did not add them. If one conflict actor was reported to have perpetrated widespread SVAC (2) and another actor reported to have isolated cases (1), we coded the conflict year as ‘2’. This is an overall conservative coding approach that likely underestimates the prevalence of sexual violence because in conflicts with SVAC it is seldom limited to a single actor.

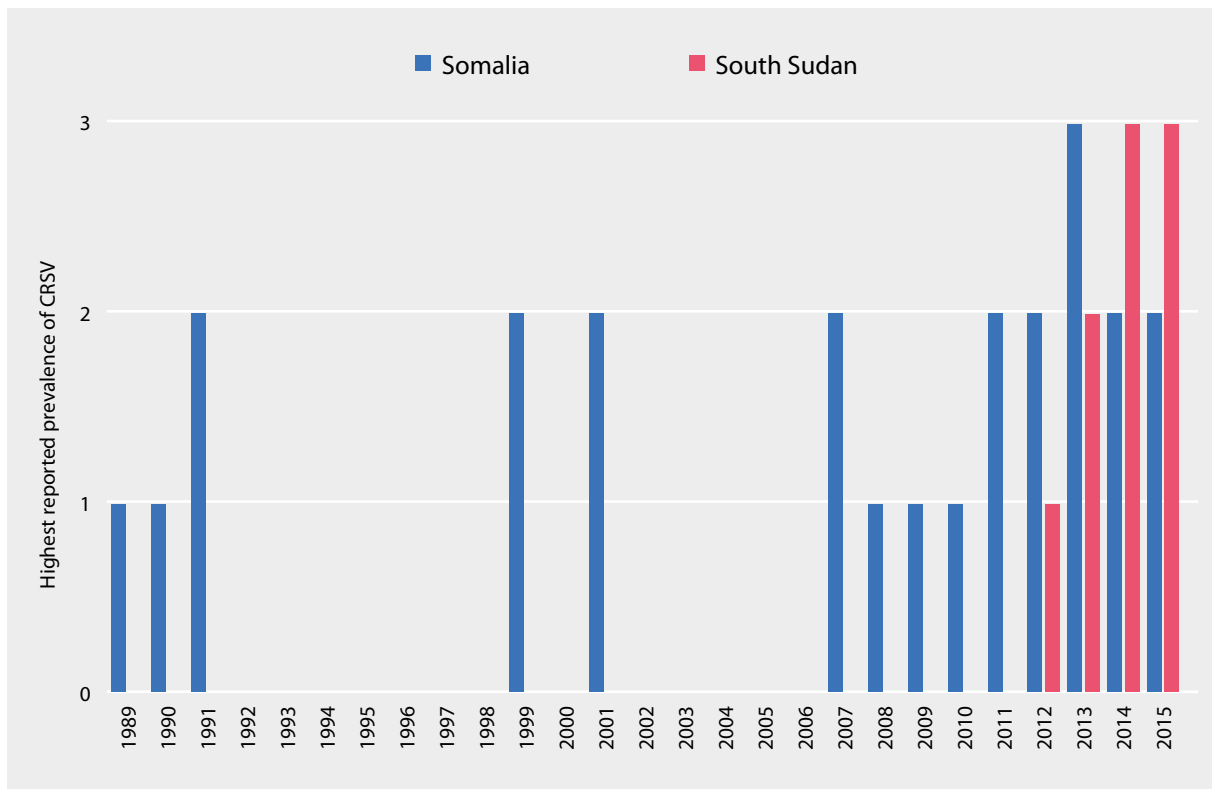


Figure 9: SVAC – Somalia and South Sudan

Figures 8 and 9 show the highest reported prevalence of SVAC, including seven distinct forms: (1) rape, (2) sexual slavery, (3) forced prostitution, (4) forced pregnancy, (5) forced sterilisation or abortion, (6) sexual mutilation, and (7) sexual torture. The SVAC dataset includes four prevalence scores (0 – no reports of SVAC; 1 – isolated; 2 – numerous; 3 – massive). Prevalence is coded based on the three sources, State Department reports (SD), Amnesty International reports (AI), and Human Rights Watch reports (HRW). SVAC includes prevalence scores for each conflict actor that the UCDP identifies.

SGBV was not only committed by the belligerents in the conflict. Violations were also perpetrated by external forces, including soldiers of MISCA, the EU Forces (EUFOR RCA), the French Sangaris, and MINUSCA.⁸⁵ According to the OIOS, MINUSCA had the second-highest number of allegations of SEA in peacekeeping, and the highest number of pending cases.⁸⁶ In 2015, the OIOS reported 22 allegations of SEA by MINUSCA (compared with more than 7,000 cases of domestic abuse in the same year). If we take these figures at face value – which we fully admit is problematic – the rate of reported abuse by peacekeepers is many times lower than

85 “Report of the Mapping Project Documenting Serious Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Committed within the Territory of the Central African Republic between January 2003 and December 2015,” 226.

86 “Sexual Exploitation and Abuse,” Conduct in UN Field Missions, December 1, 2016, <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-investigations>.

by domestic actors in the Central African Republic.⁸⁷ It is also extremely difficult to know with certainty when, how, and why conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in Central Africa and SEA perpetrated by peacekeepers has changed over time. The system needs improved mechanisms for (1) establishing the extent of sexual violence; (2) curbing sexual violence – including through both socialisation and punishment; and (3) assisting victims of sexual violence. (See [Part 5.4c](#) for further discussion.)

c. Extension of State Authority, Justice, Rule of Law, and DDDR

The restoration of state authority is one of MINUSCA’s top-mandated priorities, often considered second place after the protection of civilians (though note that unlike MONUSCO’s mandate, for example, the original UN Security Council resolution did not specify the rank of each task). It is also assumed an essential component of civilian protection, as the more the state functions, the better protected its citizens should be. Extending state authority, according to MINUSCA’s mandate, includes three inter-related types of action: (1) building prefectures, courts and prisons, training staff, and helping restore the rule of law; (2) reforming the security sector – the national police, gendarmerie, and military; and (3) DDDR of armed group members.

“Youth centres are especially important in order to get young people off the streets because they are unemployed, bored and get quickly influenced by armed groups when they have nothing to do or are in need. Youth are especially at risk.”

First, since MINUSCA deployed in 2014, it has helped to build or refurbish prefecture buildings in all 16 prefectures in the country. In June 2019, the government decreed that all prefecture personnel deploy to their offices. As of February 2020, “67 of 76 sub-prefects were at their posts.”⁸⁸ But given that armed groups control 75-80% of the territory, and there is no banking system by which to pay civil servants, deployment has proven inconsistent. The UN has documented that, in 2019, 3,418 civil servants (including 386 women) deployed across the country, including in many remote areas (compared with 1,315 in 2015).⁸⁹ Civil servants, however, often find themselves back in Bangui, both to pick up paychecks and to stay safe.

87 We know from earlier scholarly work on sexual violence and peacekeeping that rates of SEA among peacekeepers tend to be higher in countries that have high rates of CRSV. Ragnhild Nordås and Siri C. A. Rustad, “Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by Peacekeepers: Understanding Variation,” *International Interactions* 39, no. 4 (September 1, 2013): 511–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2013.805128>.

88 S/2020/124 para. 43.

89 “S/2019/822” (2019), para. 45. MINUSCA is working with the UNDP to track civil servant training and deployment.

In our interviews with community members in Bangui, many cited building restoration as one of the most effective aspects of MINUSCA. For example, one explained:

There is a collective conscience of the community that MINUSCA helps, and this has ameliorated and deepened since 2015. Quick impact projects (QIPs) are having a big impact on the community. For example, the rehabilitation of the youth centre (maison de jeunes), and the Mairie in the 2eme. Cooperation with local youth associations on that (associations de jeunesse) is also effective. Youth centres are especially important in order to get young people off the streets because they are unemployed, bored and get quickly influenced by armed groups when they have nothing to do or are in need. Youth are especially at risk.

Another community member presented similar ideas: “MINUSCA helped to restore the University of Bangui (built in 1969/1970), which is the only university in the Central African Republic. This effort has contributed to the return of the students and to the restoration of trust and hope for the future.”

A significant part of MINUSCA’s institution-building efforts focuses on the restoration of the judicial system in the wake of the burning and looting of all official buildings in 2013. MINUSCA, UNDP, and the Central African Government have worked together to build a “Special Criminal Court,” which is an international-domestic hybrid court designed to try the extreme cases during the violence. The court and partners established a new law on legal aid, including services for victims and witness protection programmes, and began investigating cases in 2019. The Mission has also worked with local authorities such that 16 first-instance and appellate courts, including the Bangui Court of Appeal, opened by 2020, and these courts are staffed by 129 judicial personnel.⁹⁰ Parliament will soon vote on the Truth, Justice, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission.

The Mission has helped to build more than a dozen prisons and detention centres throughout the country, and to train dozens of prison personnel, including a significant percentage of women; however, “prison security in the prefectures remains a concern owing to the lack of corrections personnel.”⁹¹ In the absence of a functioning police force, under the authority of the UTMs, MINUSCA has arrested dozens of suspects and submitted them to the nascent Central African justice system.

Second, security sector reform (SSR) remains an important and difficult dimension of extending state authority. The UN police (UNPOL) includes approximately 2,000 police personnel who operate throughout the country: “In [Central Africa], UNPOL substitutes the national police

⁹⁰ S/2020/124, para. 51.

⁹¹ S/2020/124, para. 53.

and gendarmerie in most places outside the capital.”⁹² As of 2019, approximately 1,000 local police and gendarmerie have deployed outside of Bangui. The Ministry of the Interior’s 2018 national deployment plan for the Central African police and gendarmerie seeks to deploy 5,000 police officers and 5,000 gendarmes throughout the country by 2023.⁹³ As explored further in [Part 5.3 a](#) on national and local ownership, UNPOL and Central African FSI are working on a “bottom-up” strategy of joint patrols, co-locations, training, and recruitment assistance in order to re-shape and re-build the internal security structures. The 2019 recruitment drive yielded nearly 19,000 applications, of which nearly one-quarter were from women. They are currently undergoing vetting and training.

Several interlocutors suggested that UNPOL specifically, and MINUSCA in general, have made slow progress in FSI capacity-building and training, not for lack of efforts, but because of multiple problems stemming from decades of conflict and under-development. Interviewees also mentioned that UNPOL was somewhat lacking an advising capacity at the strategic level, and is not prioritising advising the Ministry of the Interior and related directorates.⁹⁴

In terms of training and deploying the FACA, the EUTM has led the international effort to train Central African troops. Russia is also helping to train the FACA, especially in using heavy weapons supplied by Russia. All told, approximately 8,000 FACA troops (including 619 women) have undergone training programmes, and 1,400 have deployed to 20 locations throughout the country.⁹⁵ 3,270 soldiers and 745 internal security forces received post-graduate training from Russian trainers, and 6,000 (most overlapping) from the EUTM. Unfortunately, because of a lack of funding, the training programmes have been delayed, but the programmes in Bangui and Bouar were completed in November 2019, with 1,000 trained troops (about 10% of whom were women).⁹⁶

A third component of extending state authority involves the DDRR of former combatants and armed elements, implementing community violence reduction and justice programmes, coordinating international DDRR assistance, and seizing, collecting, and storing arms in support of the international arms embargo.

According to the February 2019 Peace Accord, DDRR was supposed to conclude by April 2019. When that date passed, a new date of January 2020 was set, but the deadline was not

92 Charles T. Hunt, “To Serve and Protect: The Role of UN Police in Protecting Civilians,” IPI Global Observatory (blog), September 20, 2019, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/09/to-serve-and-protect-the-role-of-un-police-protecting-civilians/>.

93 International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT), “Central African Republic Background Note,” ISSAT, accessed June 16, 2020, <http://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn/Resource-Library/Country-Profiles/Central-African-Republic-Background-Note>; Adedeji Ebo and Heiner Hänggi, “UN Support to SSR in Peacekeeping Contexts: A Case Study of the Central African Republic,” in *The United Nations and Security Sector Reform: Policy and Practice* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2020), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2348981>.

94 Interviews in Bangui, July 2019.

95 Interviews, Bangui, July 2019; S/2019/822 15 October, 2019, para. 49; S/2020/124, para. 14.

96 S/2020/124 para. 45.

met.⁹⁷ Part of the DDRR efforts includes “community violence reduction” (CVR) projects, orchestrated by MINUSCA, in conjunction with the UN Office for Project Services, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Peacebuilding Fund. Thousands of Central Africans, about one-third of them women, have benefitted from these programmes.⁹⁸

Another programme related to DDRR is the Special Joint Security Unit (Unités Spéciales Mixtes de Sécurité) (USMS). The February 2019 Peace Accord envisioned units composed of 40% government and 60% armed group soldiers, designed to foster trust, civilian protection, public order, and to help with seasonal transhumance. The first unit was established in Bouar in October 2019 (although the leader of the regional rebel group 3R, “Sidiki,” has been holding out on participating). More than one thousand former combatants have been disarmed and demobilised, and more than 250 further vetted and incorporated into the USMS – far short of the 2,000 participants envisioned in the peace accord. We noted that more demobilised combatants belong to Anti-Balaka rather than the ex-Séléka.

In sum, MINUSCA has made considerable progress in building prefectures, courts and prisons, training staff, and restoring the rule of law. Reforming the security sector – the national police, gendarmerie, and military – has been more challenging, but there is important progress. Disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR) of armed group members remains weak.

In sum, MINUSCA has made considerable progress in building prefectures, courts and prisons, training staff, and restoring the rule of law. Reforming the security sector – the national police, gendarmerie, and military – has been more challenging, but there is important progress. Disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR) of armed group members remains weak.

d. Armed Groups and the Preservation of Territorial Integrity through Peace Processes

Efforts to extend state authority intersect with the mandated goal of preserving territorial integrity. The UN has undoubtedly fulfilled many technical aspects of extending the state throughout

97 S/2020/124, para. 4.

98 S/2020/124 para. 50.

the country. Nevertheless, armed groups continue to control somewhere between 75 and 80% of the territory. See [Table 2](#) for a list of recognised armed groups.⁹⁹

According to our interviews with MINUSCA officials, the UN's first impulse to preserve territorial integrity is "through technical assistance, mediation and national dialogue." Along these lines, MINUSCA has helped to establish 29 local peace and reconciliation committees in almost all of the main towns in the country.¹⁰⁰ These committees have the intent of fostering local reconciliation between Muslim and Christian communities in a "bottom-up" approach to establishing peace. This approach has been augmented by a "top-down," domestic, regional, and international peace process that resulted in the landmark February 2019 Peace Accord, which all 14 armed groups signed.

The Mission has worked creatively and decisively to promote peace and territorial integrity from both the bottom-up, and the top-down; however, there are more formalised armed groups than when the Mission arrived, and they continue to hold sway over 75-80% of the territory.

According to our focus group sessions, these efforts have had mixed results. One focus group member explained, "You ask us to evaluate MINUSCA's effectiveness. In 2013, before MINUSCA arrived in Central Africa, there were the Séléka and the Anti-Balaka. Now, there are 14 armed groups. How could the UN facilitate such a result? There is no mechanism to end the war." (Note that the Bangui Forum recognised ten official armed groups, nine of which signed the accord). Another lamented, "Armed groups provide security in their areas." Some observers contend that the peace processes have favoured the formalisation of armed groups, some of which, in turn, view the process as a mechanism to extract concessions from the state, while strengthening their hold over territory. For example, the FPRC has been taxing people who reside in the territory they control. They also occasionally call for secession from the Central African Republic, which MINUSCA has thus far successfully averted.¹⁰¹ In other words, the Mission has worked creatively and decisively to promote peace and territorial integrity from both the bottom-up, and the top-down; however, there are more formalised armed groups than when the Mission arrived, and they continue to hold sway over 75-80% of the territory.

99 One interviewee clarified, "There are four main armed groups: FPRC, UPC, MPC, and 3R, the others are not serious threats." Another explained, "Many of the armed groups have no real political ambition – they're just warlords."

100 S/2019/822, para. 23.

101 Anthony Fouchard and James Andre, "Reporters - Centrafrique: à la rencontre des ex-rebelles putschistes," France24, July 13, 2018, <https://www.france24.com/fr/20180713-reporters-doc-centrafrique-voie-armes-seleka-logone-ndele-independance-autonomie>.

Acronym or name	Full name in French	Main Leader(s) *APPR Signatory
Ex-Séléka Groups		
UPC	Union pour la paix en Centrafrique	*Ali Darassa Mahamat
CNDS	Commission nationale de défense et de sécurité (part of UPC)	Abdoulaye Hissène
FPRC	Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique	Michel Djotodia *Nourredine Adam
MPC	Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique Movement	*Al-Khatim Mahamat
MLCJ	Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice	*Gilbert Toumou Deya Achafi Daoud Assabour (aka Seigneur de guerre)
RPRC	Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique	*Herbert Gotran Djono-Ahaba Zakaria Damane
UFR	Union des Forces Républicaines	*Bernard Francois Wagramale
Séléka rénovée	Séléka rénovée	Mohamed Moussa Dhaffane *Hisseine Akacha
Anti-Balaka Groups		
AB-Mokom	Anti-Balaka – Mokom Branch	*Maxime Mokom
AB-Bozizé	Anti-Balaka	François Bozizé Francis Bozizé (son)

Acronym or name	Full name in French	Main Leader(s) *APPR Signatory
AB-Ngaïssona	Anti-Balaka – Ngaïssona Branch	*Dieudonné Ndomaté
UFR-F	Union des Forces Républicains-Fondamentales	*Anicet Simplicie Mackoumou Dieu-Bénit Christian Gbeya-Kikobet
Armed Groups from neighbouring countries		
3R	Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation (Pastoral)	*Bi-Sidi Soulemane (aka Sidiki)
FDPC	Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain (Sudan)	*Martin Koumtamadji (aka Abdoulaye Miskine)
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army (Uganda)	Joseph Kony
Armed Groups tied to Patassé Regime		
RJ - Sayo	Révolution justice	*Armel Mingatoloum Sayo
RJ - Belanga	Révolution justice – Belanga Branch	*Esther Audrienne Guetel-Moïba Bertrand Belanga (deceased)

Table 4: Armed Groups in the Central African Republic¹⁰²

102 Nathalia Dukhan, “Splintered Warfare II. How Foreign Interference is Fueling Kleptocracy, Warlordism, and an Escalating Violent Crisis in the Central African Republic,” (The Enough Project, November 2018), https://enoughproject.org/wp-content/uploads/SplinteredWarfare2_Enough_Nov2018-web.pdf; S/2019/145 (2019), Section XI.

e. IDPs and Refugees Return

As of February 2020, approximately one-fifth of the Central African population remained displaced both within and outside of the country, and “voluntary returns in safety and dignity remained precarious owing to insecurity.”¹⁰³

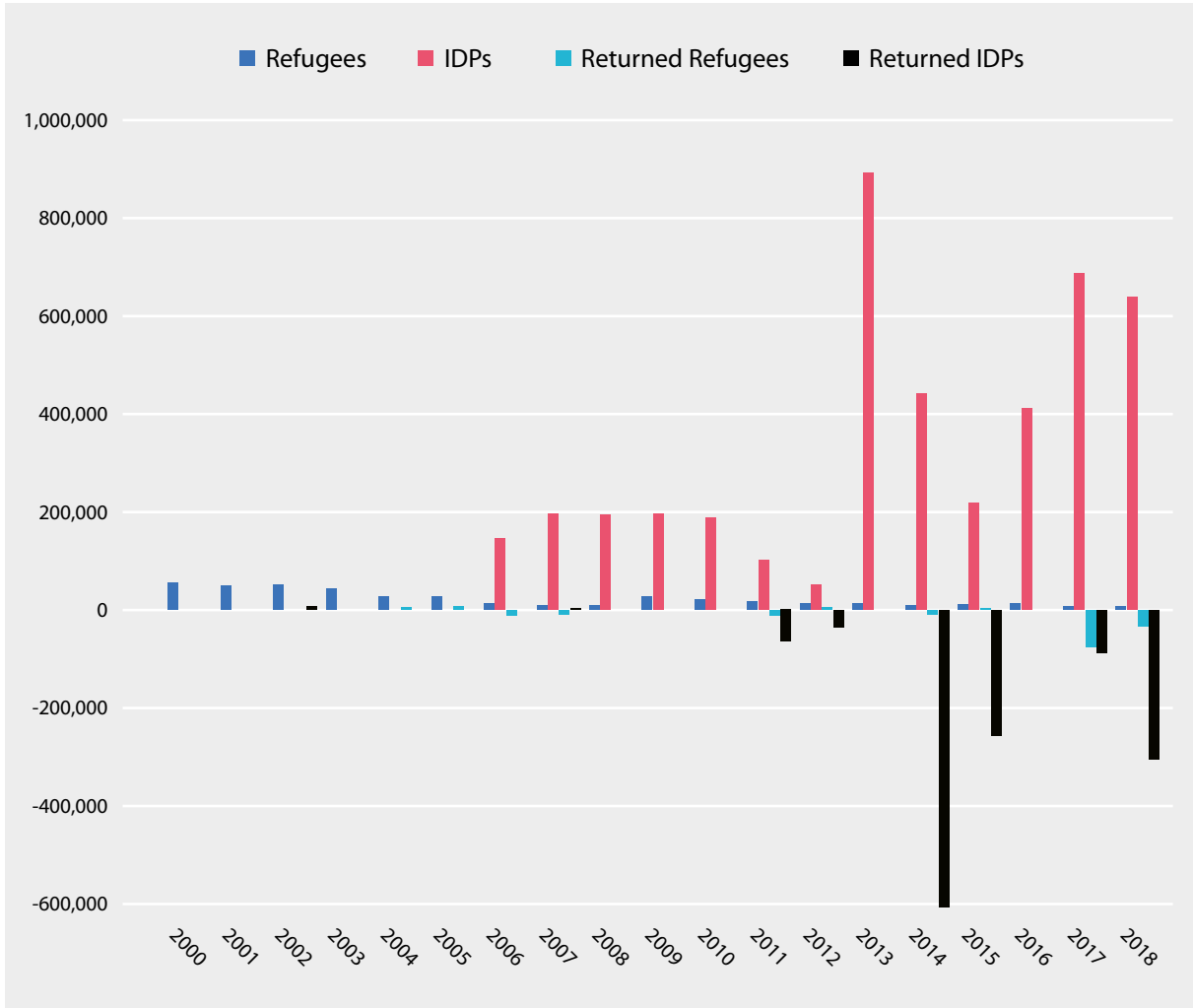


Figure 10: UNHCR Annual Number of Refugees, IDPs, and Returned Persons, 2000-2018

As of February 2020, approximately one-fifth of the Central African population remained displaced both within and outside of the country

Figure 10 shows the yearly number of refugees, IDPs, and the number of returned refugees and IDPs from 2000 to 2018, drawn from UNHCR data. As seen from the figure, the number of

¹⁰³ S/2020/124 para. 36; S/2019/822 para. 37.

IDPs increased substantially in 2013 and remained at high levels, corresponding to the increase in battle-related fatalities evident during this year (shown in Figures 2-3 above). In 2014 and 2015, with the arrival of international troops, the peace process, and a democratically elected government, IDPs began to return home. In 2017, people were fleeing again, but by 2018, we see people returning.

f. Humanitarian Aid Delivery and Freedom of Movement

More than half of the Central African population has been in dire humanitarian need since 2013. In 2019, there was an initial slight decrease in the number of people in dire humanitarian need (from 2.9 to 2.6 million people), but that trend reversed by the end of the year, due to renewed fighting in the countryside, and flooding along the Ubangui river, including in Bangui, which affected nearly 100,000 people.¹⁰⁴ The October 2019 flooding caused “the destruction of more than 10,000 homes, the overflowing of more than 1,000 wells and latrines, and the flooding of fields in rural areas, which had an impact on protection and food security.”¹⁰⁵

The Central African Republic remains one of the most dangerous places in the world for foreign workers, with attacks on humanitarians occurring an average of one per day in 2019.

MINUSCA facilitates the delivery of humanitarian aid by providing air and other forms of transportation and protecting convoys. Although the 2019 humanitarian response plan was funded at 70% (which is significantly higher than in previous years), humanitarian work had to be suspended in several regions in late 2019 due to renewed violence and environmental challenges. The Central African Republic remains one of the most dangerous places in the world for foreign workers, with attacks on humanitarians occurring an average of one per day in 2019.¹⁰⁶ Also in 2019, five humanitarian workers were killed, 42 injured, and dozens were robbed or harassed in other ways.¹⁰⁷

g. Human Rights

Human rights in the Central African Republic have been under threat for decades. The UN’s human rights “Mapping Project 2003-2015” documents serious violations of human rights and

¹⁰⁴ S/2019/822, para. 36; S/2020/124, para. 36.

¹⁰⁵ S/2020/124, para. 39.

¹⁰⁶ S/2020/124, para. 40.

¹⁰⁷ S/2020/124, para. 40.

international humanitarian law, mainly during 2013-14.¹⁰⁸ The report details thousands of cases of extrajudicial killings, SGBV, maiming, torture, rape, severe ill-treatment, forced displacement, and killing (in 370 pages of detail).¹⁰⁹ Human rights violations continue to afflict thousands of Central Africans per year, including “attacks against civilians, sexual violence, restrictions on freedom of movement, and abductions,” although the overall number of victims declined in 2019 as compared to 2018, especially after the signing of the February 2019 Peace Accord.¹¹⁰

People in Central Africa know what human rights are. Our work is reaching people. Most want to respect human rights, but the problems are too deep. No one has ever really governed this country.

Human rights experts have also noted underlying and seemingly unchanging trends in such violations as harm against women accused of witchcraft, female genital mutilation, and early marriage. Every year, hundreds of schools are attacked and many are occupied, which means children are being systematically deprived of an education. Economic, social, and cultural rights are disrespected. From 2014 to 2018, nearly 20,000 citizens (39% women) participated in labour-intensive state-building projects in seven prefectures, as part of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan designed to foster a sense of belonging and mutual respect. However, experts also note that hate speech continues to be spread “via both traditional media, including radio, and online media... [with] incitement to violence and hatred, including on religious and ethnic grounds.”¹¹¹ Some of the messages call for racial or religious hatred, discrimination, xenophobia, hostility or violence, and sometimes even advocate genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.¹¹² In Bangui, human rights experts expressed disappointment: “people in Central Africa know what human rights are. Our work is reaching people. Most want to respect human rights, but the problems are too deep. No one has ever really governed this country.” MINUSCA assiduously monitors and informs Central Africans about human rights, even if the results are not consistently positive.

108 “Report of the Mapping Project Documenting Serious Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Committed within the Territory of the Central African Republic between January 2003 and December 2015.”

109 The researchers drew on more than 1,200 confidential and verified sources. They did not, however, seek to establish criminal responsibility. That is for the courts to adjudicate.

110 “Human Rights Situation in the Central African Republic: Report of the Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in the Central African Republic,” (UNHRC, August 9, 2019), <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/G1924101.pdf>.

111 “A/HRC/42/61” para. 66, 67, 74.

112 Ibid, para. 41

h. Arms Embargo and Restrictions on Natural Resources

The UN Security Council placed an international arms embargo on the Central African Republic in 2013 to be monitored by a Panel of Experts who report to the Council every six months (including on Kimberley Process trade). Although MINUSCA has a mandate to seize, collect, and store arms, it does not have the mandate to enforce Kimberley Process restrictions on trading in diamonds, nor a mandate to regulate gold and timber exports.

Since the start of its deployment, the panel of experts has monitored consistent and often increasing arms trafficking by armed groups, mainly across the borders with Sudan, Chad, and South Sudan.

Since the start of its deployment, the panel of experts has monitored consistent and often increasing arms trafficking by armed groups, mainly across the borders with Sudan, Chad, and South Sudan. The experts have witnessed arms sales and recruiting by all armed groups, most notably in recent months by the FPRC, the UPC, and the Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice (MLCJ) (see [Table 2](#) for more information on these groups).¹¹³

The underlying political economy of conflict – unfettered trafficking in arms and natural resources, accompanied by illegal taxation in areas not under the control of the government – means that the armed groups are gaining in strength while the government is inhibited by international arms and resource embargos, and the absence of regulatory institutions.

The experts have also witnessed natural resource trafficking in all regions of the country, as well as in recent months new taxation schemes by ex-Séléka factions.¹¹⁴ They report that despite formal Kimberley Process restrictions, especially in the east and north, “Nearly the entirety of the country’s [diamond] production continued to be smuggled through neighbouring countries.”¹¹⁵ They further explain that there are no “national framework or regulations regarding the traceability and the origins of the gold exported. As a result of that absence, although most of the gold originated from sites located in areas under the control – or relative control – of the

113 “S/2019/930” (2019), para. 72-78.

114 S/2019/930, summary.

115 S/2019/930, para. 153.

Government, the Central African Republic has certainly continued to export gold from sites where armed groups collect taxes.”¹¹⁶

The underlying political economy of conflict – unfettered trafficking in arms and natural resources, accompanied by illegal taxation in areas not under the control of the government – means that the armed groups are gaining in strength while the government is inhibited by international arms and resource embargos, and the absence of regulatory institutions. In 2018, President Prof. Touadéra began an international campaign to lift the arms embargo, and more recently, one to lift the Kimberley Process restrictions, decrying that international efforts were having the perverse effects of strengthening armed groups and not the legitimate authorities. Since then, China and Russia have tried to convince the UN Security Council to weaken the arms embargo, and Russia has received a limited waiver to train and equip. However, France and some MINUSCA members maintain that the embargo should remain until there are better storage facilities and other controls in place to ensure the country’s armed forces do not revert to abusing the population, as had been standard practice in the past and a root cause of the violence.¹¹⁷

In 2018, MINUSCA was the first mission to pilot a new “Comprehensive Performance Assessment System” (CPAS) in peacekeeping designed to improve on-the-ground data collection in UN missions to monitor and improve impact.

i. Performance Standards

In 2018, MINUSCA was the first mission to pilot a new “Comprehensive Performance Assessment System” (CPAS) in peacekeeping designed to improve on-the-ground data collection in UN missions to monitor and improve impact. Part of the CPAS project includes a “Force Commanders’ Unit Evaluation.” The first published assessment identifies weaknesses in “the organization and collection of intelligence, in communication with the local population owing to language barriers and in the protection of temporary operational bases.”¹¹⁸ The assessment notes equipment shortages, and that “infrastructure remains a serious impediment to troop mobility. MINUSCA constantly maintains and repairs bridges and roads so that the force can be mobile when the dry season begins.”¹¹⁹ Most troops currently in the Mission do not come from

116 S/2019/930, para. 157.

117 “Security Council Renews Central African Republic Arms Embargo,” UN News, January 31, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/01/1056472>.

118 S/2020/124, para. 72.

119 S/2020/124, para. 74.

French language countries.¹²⁰ As one member of the Mission lamented, “70% of the Mission is Anglophone and they are often cut off from the reality of what’s going on.” Note, however, that compared to the other current, large missions, MINUSCA has the highest response rate to protection of civilians incidents.¹²¹ This response rate is enabled by the Mission’s CLAs, who possess the linguistic, social, and cultural skills to facilitate communication and action.

Members of the Mission expressed varying opinions about the possible effects of the new performance standards. Some felt that they would mean that the Mission would have better tools to evaluate and discipline under-performing troops. But others warned that such assessment tools create reporting incentives that may inhibit the ability of peacekeepers to adapt to new situations and deal creatively with emerging problems.

j. 2019 Peace Accord Signing and Implementation

The Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (known by its French acronym, APPR), was negotiated in Khartoum, Sudan, and signed in Bangui in February 2019. The accord is the result of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, with the support of the AU, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (including support from specific countries such as Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Gabon, and Sudan). MINUSCA provided logistical and technical support, from facilitating dialogue to drafting sections of the accord, to translation services. Russia facilitated in a variety of ways behind the scenes, including by physically transporting leaders of armed groups to Khartoum, according to interviews. Although in recent years some six peace accords have been signed by different groups, the APPR was the first to have buy-in from the government, all officially recognised 14 armed groups, and all relevant regional organisations and states. As the accord says, “there can be no peace in the Central African Republic without a common shared vision of mutual respect that includes all communities comprising the nation and incorporating forgiveness, national reconciliation and unity of purpose with neighbouring States and the sub region as a whole.”¹²²

In terms of MINUSCA’s role in the accord’s implementation, unlike in some other peace accords, the UN was not listed as a “guarantor,” but rather a “facilitator” of the accord.¹²³ The guarantors of the agreement are the AU and the sub-regional organisation, ECCAS. Neither the AU nor ECCAS have forces on the ground that might be capable of guaranteeing or enforcing adherence. Therefore, despite the absence of such a mandate, the task essentially fell on MINUSCA. Article 35 of the agreement specifies “punitive or coercive measures” for not implementing the

120 S/2020/124, Annex 1.

121 “Inspection of the Performance of Missions’ Operational Responses to Protection of Civilians (POC) Related Incidents,” Inspection and Evaluation Division (OIOS: UN, July 30, 2018).

122 S/2019/145, preamble.

123 Interviewees explained that when legal affairs in New York vetted the language of the accord, they diminished the authority of MINUSCA to act as a guarantor.

accord. However, for several months, it remained unclear who exactly would punish violators of the APPR, or how. The accord indicates that sanctions would be the most coercive enforcement tool (although MINUSCA obviously has a mandate to use force to protect civilians).

Although in recent years some six peace accords have been signed by different groups, the APPR was the first to have buy-in from the government, all officially recognised 14 armed groups, and all relevant regional organisations and states.

Representatives of all major armed groups were granted positions in the national government; however, many group members continue to violate the accord daily. Several interviewees explained in July 2019, “We have about 60 violations of the APPR per month.” As of MINUSCA’s mandate renewal in November 2019, the Mission has the legal authority to help enforce the agreement. Since then, MINUSCA’s QRF has deployed at least twice to curb armed group aggression. Moreover, “all 15 committees for prefectural implementation (CMOP), and 13 of the 17 technical security committees (CTS) have been put in place.”¹²⁴ According to the most recent Secretary-General report, “One year after the signing of the Agreement, violence has decreased overall, although intermittent but serious incidents of violence and human rights violations continued.”¹²⁵ The question remains of how to manage spoilers of the peace most effectively.

4.4 Overall Security Perceptions and Other Indicators of Conditions in Central Africa

Beyond MINUSCA’s mandate lie broader questions of security, human development, governance and political freedoms in the Central African Republic. None of these is a specifically mandated task for MINUSCA, but changes may occur as a result of MINUSCA’s action.

We turn first to the question of perceptions of security. Based on the only publicly available polling data, perceptions of security are slowly increasing, but remain fragile. Men feel more secure than women do. During our field visits to Bria, Bambari, and Birao, interviewees expressed a sense of movement toward peace, and hope for the APPR, but many felt that Muslim-Christian and ethnic divides were not ameliorating. Several noted that despite the 3R killings in Paoua several months after the group had signed the accord, there was no retaliatory attack or subsequent escalation, which they viewed as progress.

124 MINUSCA twitter announcement, Feb. 4 2019.

125 S/2020/124, para. 3.

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Prior to the APPR’s signing, the HHI conducted a series of surveys of Central Africans. In terms of the population’s confidence in the main security actors, as we see in Figure 11, confidence in the police, gendarmerie, and the FACA was rising over the course of 2017-18, which could be attributed in part to MINUSCA and partner assistance with vetting, training, equipping, and deploying these forces. Confidence in MINUSCA, however, remained low, and most likely decreased as people learned of the failed “Sukula” operation in the PK-5 neighbourhood of Bangui in April 2018, and an inability to contain all violence.¹²⁶

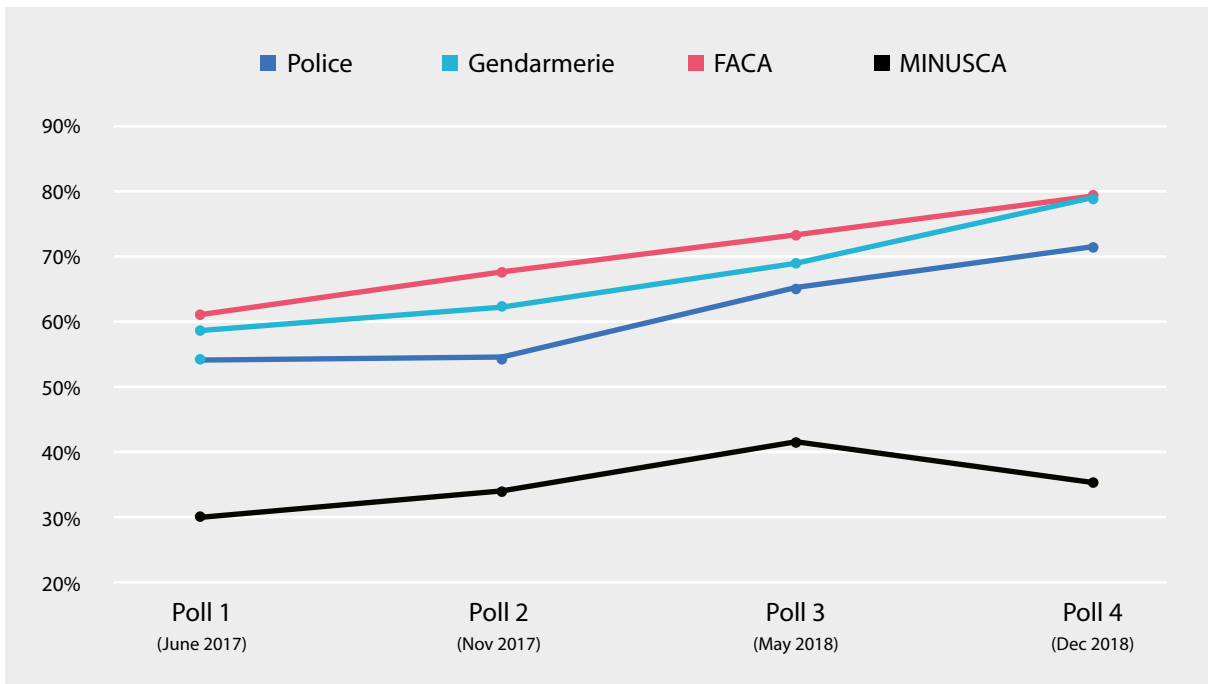


Figure 11: HHI Survey Confidence in Security Actors over Time, 2017-2018

The following figures place the Central African Republic in comparative perspective with other countries that are also hosting large, multidimensional peace operations in Africa. We present measures from a variety of indices to show broad trends over time in human development, governance, political freedoms, and fragility.

¹²⁶ The HHI has not yet released new polling data from 2019.

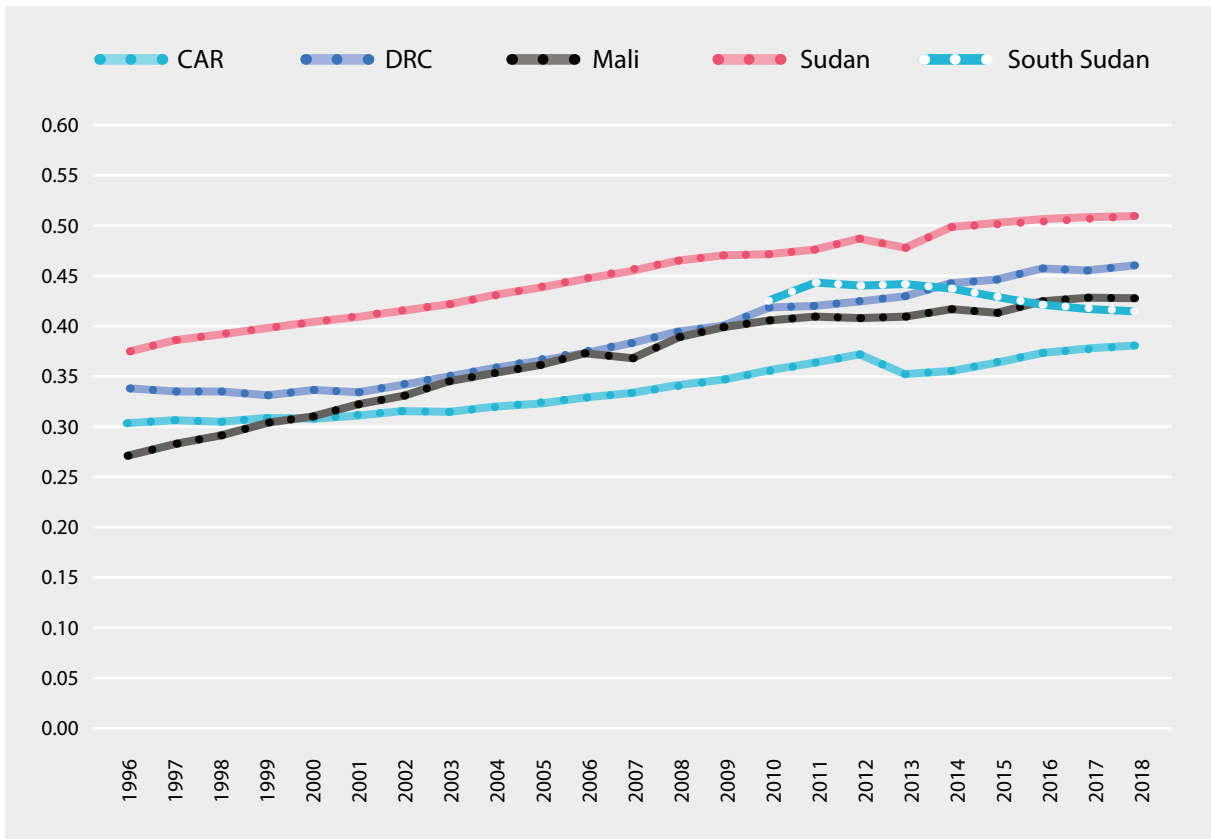


Figure 12: Human Development Index (HDI) Scores, 1996-2018

Figure 12 shows the HDI scores for the Central African Republic, Congo, Mali, South Sudan and Sudan from 1996 to 2018, as calculated by the UNDP. The HDI is a generalised measure of three dimensions of human development, including life expectancy and health, education, and standard of living. The scale ranges from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating the lowest level of human development. As evident from the graph, the Central African Republic has been outperformed by the other four countries since 2000 (long before the start of MINUSCA). Congo has made the steadiest gains.

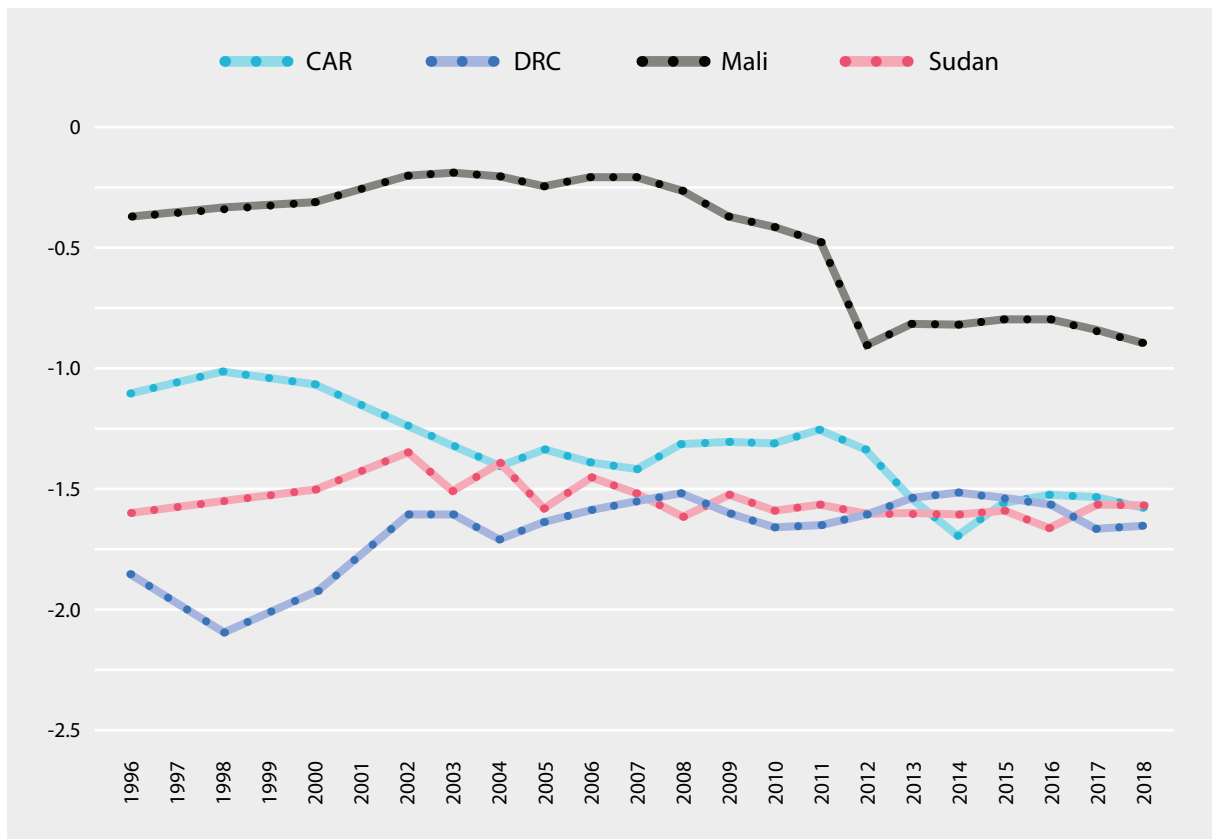


Figure 13: World Bank Governance Indicators (Average), 1996-2018

Figure 13 displays governance indicators compiled by the World Bank. The indicators measure six dimensions of governance, including voice and accountability; political stability and absence of violence; government effectiveness; regulatory quality; rule of law; and control of corruption. The figure shows the average value across all six dimensions. The scale of the indicator ranges from -2.5 to 2.5, with higher values indicating better governance. The world average value is fixed at zero, which means all four countries have below-average governance scores. In the Central African Republic, a negative shift can again be observed in the 2012-2014 period.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Some caution should be exercised when assessing the difference between countries. As the margins of error may overlap across countries in a given year, the visualised absolute differences may not be statistically significant.

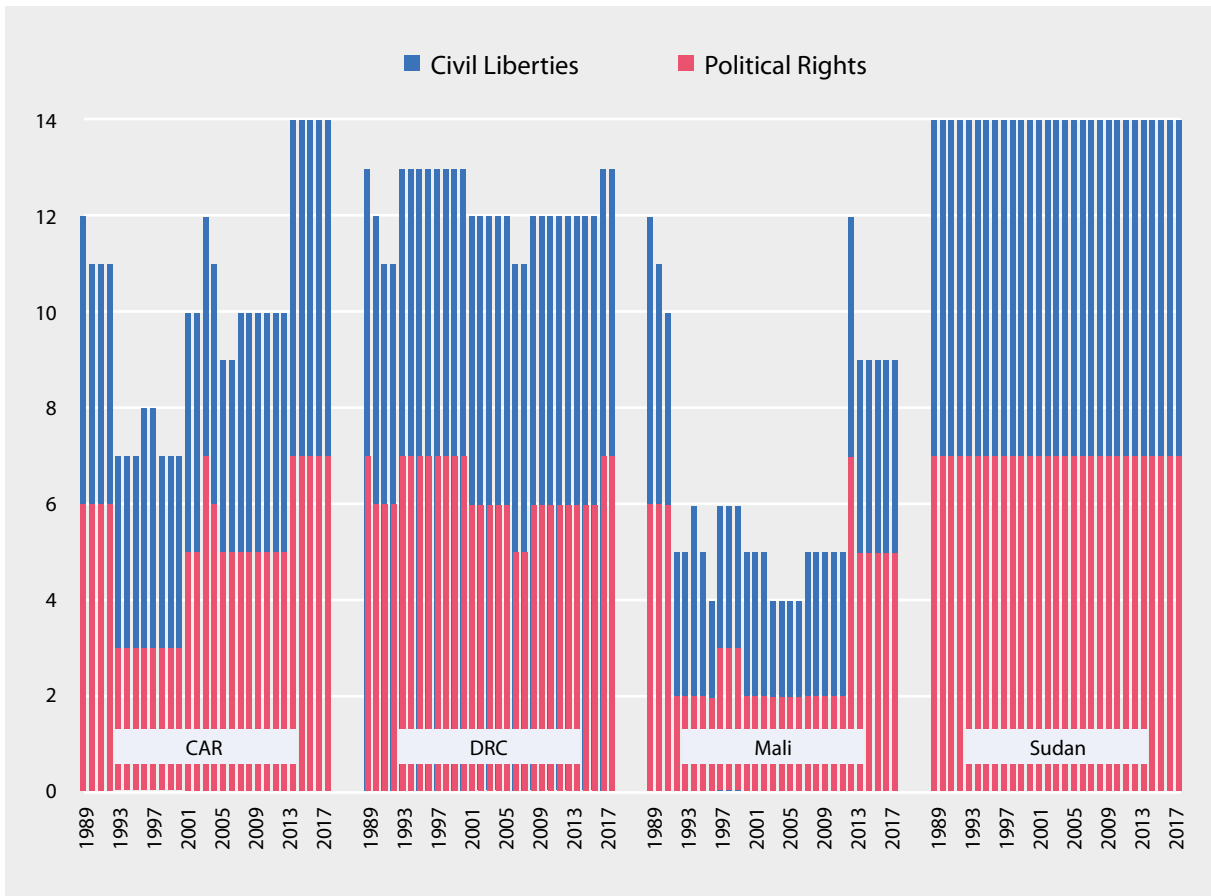


Figure 14: Freedom House Scores for Central Africa, Congo, Mali and Sudan, 1989-2017

Figure 14 shows the Freedom House Index scores for Central Africa, Congo, Mali and Sudan from 1989 to 2017 (last available data). Freedom House measures two dimensions of freedom – civil liberties and political rights. The scale on each dimension ranges from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free). Countries that have an average score of over 5.5 on both dimensions are classified as not free. Since 2013, despite the 2015 elections, Freedom House has ranked the Central African Republic in the “least free” category on both civil liberties and political rights.

Although the operation has made important progress, especially in building state capacity and institutions, advances remain tenuous, and setbacks are numerous. At the same time, many interviewees, both in the Mission and in civil society, expressed some version of the simple statement: “Without MINUSCA, there is no Central African Republic.”

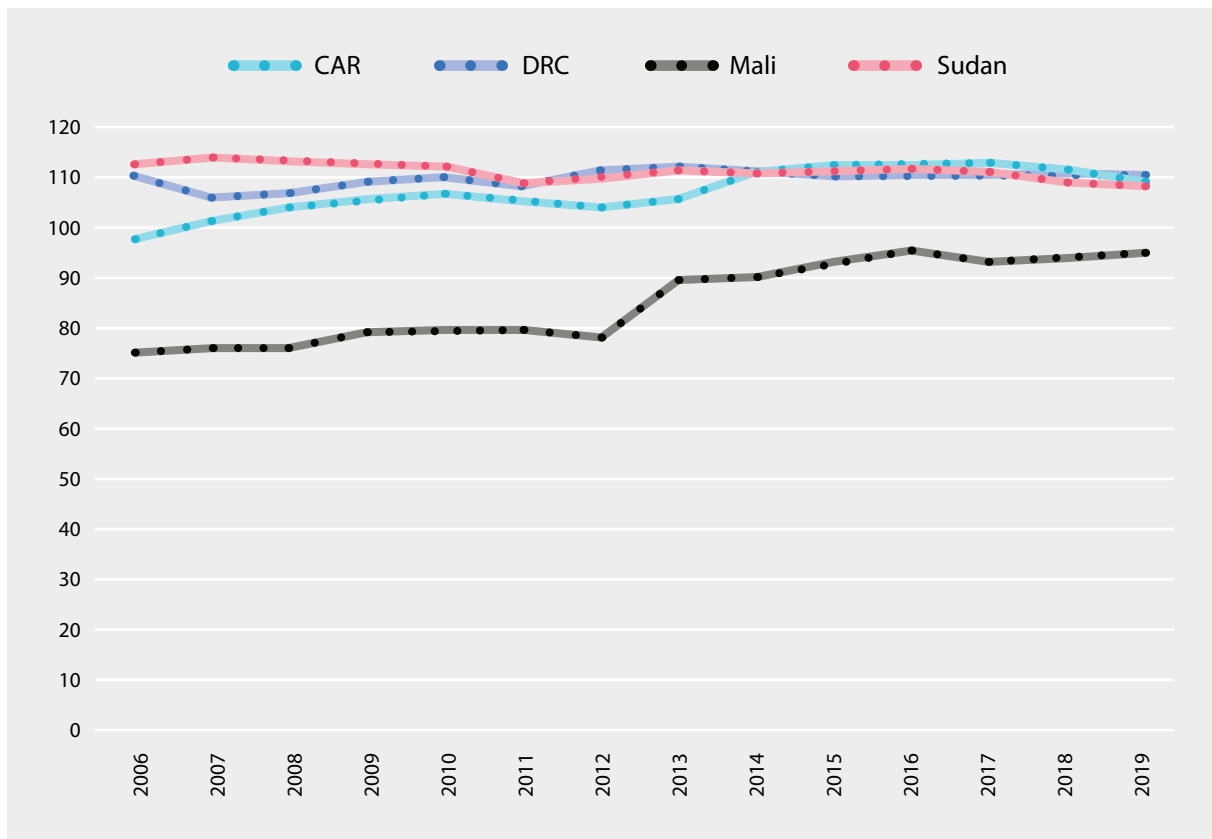


Figure 15: Fragile State Index for Central Africa, Congo, Mali, and Sudan, 2006-2019

Figure 15 visualises the scores of Central Africa, Congo, Mali and Sudan on the Fragile States Index. The index is composed of twelve indicators, measuring social and political cohesion; economic development; state legitimacy, public services and rule of law; demography and refugees; and external intervention. The total score ranges from zero to a maximum of 120, with higher values indicating greater state fragility. The Central African Republic's fragility appears to be holding and possibly decreasing, but the country, along with Congo and Sudan, remains highly fragile.¹²⁸

4.5 Conclusion

In sum, as of this writing, the Mission has worked assiduously to accomplish many goals. Regarding the two priority tasks – protection of civilians, and restoration of state authority – almost all interlocutors with whom we interacted estimated that without the Mission, many more civilians would die and that the state would have less capacity. Several said that the main armed groups – the FRPC and the UPC – could probably have assumed control over the entire state. Several others maintain that the Mission helped to avert a near-certain genocide. The

¹²⁸ When assessing the difference between countries regarding the Fragile State Index, some caution should be exercised as there are enormous differences between and within the most fragile states (see Glawion, de Vries and Mehler, 2018).

Mission has been fighting an uphill battle to reduce gender-based violence (including by itself and other external actors), preserve territorial integrity, help the displaced return home, increase respect for human rights, monitor the arms embargo, increase performance standards, implement the 2019 Peace Accord, and ensure overall security. Although the operation has made important progress, especially in building state capacity and institutions, advances remain tenuous, and setbacks are numerous. At the same time, many interviewees, both in the Mission and in civil society, expressed some version of the simple statement: “Without MINUSCA, there is no Central African Republic.”

PART 5.

The Six EPON Explanatory Factors

The previous two Parts presented a conflict analysis, and an overview of the effects of MINUSCA including general features of the Central African Republic (in comparison with its recent past, and compared to other countries with similar, large peace operations). Many important features of Central African life cannot be directly attributed to the actions of MINUSCA or any singular factor. Nevertheless, we provided an assessment of the extent to which MINUSCA has implemented its far-reaching mandate, and some important general effects of the Mission, such as averting wide-scale killing and potential genocide, human rights monitoring, humanitarian aid delivery, and helping to build state capacity.

In this section, we analyse the actions of MINUSCA and how they worked to produce various outcomes. EPON studies suggest six potential explanatory factors that might contribute to varying outcomes: Political Primacy, Mandates and Resources, People-Centred Approaches, Legitimacy and Credibility, WPS, and Coordination. We provide evidence of how each of these factors contributed (or not) to the Missions' effectiveness.

5.1 Political Primacy

a. Viable Political Processes and the Erosion of Peace in Late 2016

MINUSCA deployed in September 2014, before there was a peace deal or a viable political process in place. Thus part of the initial strategy for implementing part two of the mandate

– supporting the transitional process – meant helping to create a transitional process with broad buy-in. From the start, the Mission has privileged dialogue, mediation, training, and institution-building in order to help bring peace to the Central African Republic. In other words, the operation has actively supported political processes and sought to foster viable political solutions to the violence. Although there have been six or so peace initiatives since the violence erupted, the two most important remain the Bangui Forum in May 2015, and the APPR, signed in February 2019. The peace processes leading to these plans were very different. The Bangui Forum was a broad, inclusive, largely domestic process. The APPR was driven more by regional and international efforts and negotiated between the main combatants – the 14 official armed groups and the government. We outline each below.

The Bangui Forum was facilitated by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Central Africa, Professor Abdoulaye Bathily. It was an inclusive and deliberative debate, with more than 500 representatives from all sectors of Central African society gathered in the National Assembly building in Bangui. The Bangui Forum resulted in the Republican Pact for Peace, the National Reconciliation and Reconstruction Plan, and the DDRR agreement among nine of ten armed groups.¹²⁹ It also paved the way for approximately 10,000 child soldiers to participate in DDRR programmes sponsored by UNICEF. According to interviews with both local and international actors, the Bangui Forum enabled a fragile peace that lasted approximately two years – until October 2016.

Several factors contributed to the erosion of the peace. First, MINUSCA originally deployed as a police-oriented mission, with the main battalions in Bangui under police, rather than military command, coordinating through the Joint Task Force Bangui (JTFB). This division of labour allowed peacekeepers to focus on policing tactics, while non-blue-helmeted military forces, especially the French Sangaris, concentrated on military action against spoilers to the peace.¹³⁰ This successful division of labour held until approximately mid-way through 2016.

Second, in September 2016, the French Sangaris Forces departed, and the American and Ugandan Special Forces (who hunted unsuccessfully for Joseph Kony) departed several months later. President Touadéra requested that they remain because the FACA and internal security forces were not yet operational, but the western powers refused. Due to the drop in violence, the UN Security Council underestimated the power vacuum that would ensue after these forces departed. A leading figure in MINUSCA, however, lamented, “We knew what would happen. The armed groups would come back with a vengeance.” And indeed, they did.

129 “Ban Welcomes Central African Republic Peace Pact as Reflection of People’s Aspirations.” UN News, May 11, 2015, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2015/05/498392#.VZE3VPntBd>.

130 The JTFB is still responsible for securing Bangui, developing an integrated plan for maintaining and restoring public order as well as for developing a reaction plan in the event of a coup. The JTFB is also responsible for escorting delegations, money transports and transferring detainees. The JTFB is often charged with the security and the protection of MINUSCA personnel in Bangui, the President of the national assembly, the prime minister, minister of justice, the special criminal court including the four international judges of the SCC Court and two of the national magistrates, and the SRSG’s residence. The JTFB continues to function as a special military-police operational cell, but its control has moved from MINUSCA Police to military Force command.

Third, several interviewees suggested that the armed groups were using the peace of the post-Bangui Forum as a time to regroup and resupply, waiting for a moment when no one would stop them from taking the territories and mines that they wanted.

Fourth, the international arms and mineral embargos were enabling the armed groups to strengthen while the government forces, playing by the international rules, weakened.¹³¹ Fifth, neighbouring states – and factions within them – seeing the growing weakness across the border, contributed to strengthening different armed groups. Finally, several interviewees argued that the international push for divisive, winner-takes-all elections, rather than integrative and restorative political processes, worked to divide the country rather than unite it.

After the rise of violence in late 2016, it took MINUSCA about one year to adjust its strategy. After facilitating local peace agreements while providing military consequences to neutralise spoilers, we see the results in reduced civilian killings.

As we see in Figures 2 and 3 (Part 4.3 a), the death toll climbed dramatically in 2017 and declined in 2018. In 2017, MINUSCA shifted its strategy to focus on facilitating innovative local peace agreements. The addition of a (Portuguese) QRF and 900 troops appear also to have influenced these positive 2018 civilian death figures. In addition to more proactive measures by MINUSCA, by mid-late 2018, regional actors became more involved in the peace process. Domestic, regional, and international actors relied on the support of MINUSCA's political and logistical support, "Without MINUSCA, the APPR would not have happened. Morning, noon, and night, we provided the technical information to the panel members, some of whom didn't know Central Africa at all." MINUSCA also coordinated logistics and provided language and phrasing suggestions for the final accord. (In Part 4.3 j above, we outline the process by which the government and 14 armed groups signed the February 2019 peace deal.) In sum, when the bilateral forces supporting the government departed before the government had stood up its own military and FSI, armed groups stepped into the power vacuum. After the rise of violence in late 2016, it took MINUSCA about one year to adjust its strategy. After facilitating local peace agreements while providing military consequences to neutralise spoilers, we see the results in reduced civilian killings.

131 John Jeffay, "Road Map to Lift Rough Diamond Ban on Parts of Central African Republic," IDEX, March 1, 2020, <http://www.idexonline.com/FullArticle?Id=45605>. The Government, with the help of Russia, is trying to lift the Kimberley Process ban on diamond trading.

b. Political Direction, Support, and Disagreement

The APPR and accompanying UN Security Council Resolution “urges the Central African authorities to address the presence and activity of armed groups in Central Africa by implementing a comprehensive strategy that prioritises dialogue and the urgent implementation of an inclusive, gender-sensitive... special mixed security units [USMS] following vetting, disarmament, demobilisation and training, to promote trust and confidence between signatory parties and as a platform for the deployment of State authority.”¹³²

Our interviewees were divided on how to assess the accord and its implementation thus far. Some were supportive. As one explained, “It was very courageous of Touadéra to make deals with so many armed groups. It was a huge political move to sign that accord, even if imperfect.” The armed group leaders were granted key ministerial positions in the government. According to President Touadéra, he has done everything in his power to keep dissenting rebel leaders on board with the political process.

Other interviewees, however, expressed concerns about a variety of problems with the accord. As one explained, “Regular people are upset to have bandits in the government.” Some members of civil society remain divided, and fear the process will lead to impunity – people are concerned with questions of overlooked justice and amnesty for war criminals. Others maintain that “non-supporters use the language of impunity as a way to fight enemies,” and that various sectors of society would like UN peacekeepers to fight and defeat their enemies for them.

After a spike in civilian deaths in 2017, MINUSCA helped to bring the death rate back down. MINUSCA’s main approach to protecting civilians (its top-mandated task), is by using political means in bottom-up and top-down peace processes, augmented by some more coercive measures, such as military operations conducted by the QRF and imposing UN Security Council sanctions.

Many interviewees expressed concern over the accord’s provisions for DDR and the USMS (see [Part 4.3 b](#)). The APPR sets out a timeline for DDR, and the establishment of the USMS, that “was totally impossible.” Indeed, the deadlines for both have changed several times. Moreover, the accord envisions a phased DDR process to start in the west, and move east, but as one interviewee commented: “DDR has to be simultaneous – you can’t disarm one town at a time.” The

132 S/RES/2499, para. 12.

USMS provide for the formation of battalions with a 40:60 ratio of armed groups to FACA. In general, the armed groups appear to be supportive of the USMS concept, more so than DDR, causing some international observers to voice scepticism, “The USMS come with a very high-risk potential. After all, we are actively training and arming members of the armed groups.” Another declared “The USMS are a terrible idea... The armed groups want to command the battalions.”

Other interviewees expressed a variety of concerns about the persistence of the armed groups, and how to handle spoilers to the peace accord. Article 35 of the APPR addresses mechanisms that could be applied against spoilers to the peace process: “individuals or entities that undermine peace and stability in the Central African Republic could be listed for targeted measures pursuant to resolution 2454 (2019),”¹³³ namely, financial sanctions and legal actions. For example, Abdoulaye Miskine, leader of the FDPC rebel group, came under UN Security Council sanctions in April 2020 after the panel of experts documented how he had been undermining the APPR by continuing to recruit fighters and refusing to take up his post in the government.¹³⁴

The operation also has the authority to “maintain a proactive deployment and a mobile, flexible and robust posture, including by conducting active patrolling, in particular in high risk areas,” but privileges “local mediation efforts to prevent escalation of violence.”¹³⁵ In other words, the official mechanisms for handling spoilers as specified in the APPR remain limited.

In June 2019, the government of Central Africa presented their priorities to the International Support Group meeting in Bangui; representatives highlighted:

inter alia, the cessation of hostilities, raising awareness of the Peace Agreement, the operationalisation of the monitoring and implementation mechanisms, the launch of the inclusive commission on justice and of the Truth, Justice, Reparations and Reconciliation commission, the continuation of the disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and repatriation (DDRR) process, the establishment of the special mixed security units, the adoption of laws on decentralisation, the status of former heads of state and political parties, the preparation of 2020/2021 elections, the reinforcement of local reconciliation mechanisms, and the provision of basic services to the population.¹³⁶

Most of these plans and processes remain in flux. Regional support remains a decisive factor. As one interviewee explained, “Every armed group has at least one external country supporting it,

133 S/RES/2499.

134 “UN Slaps Sanctions On central Africa Rebel Chief,” *AFP--Agence France Presse*, April 21, 2020, <https://www.barrons.com/news/un-slaps-sanctions-on-central-africa-rebel-chief-01587447607>.

135 S/RES/2499, para. 32. One interviewee relayed to us that MINUSCA had undertaken “seven major military operations against the armed groups in order to neutralise and forcibly disarm them.” Our team was unable to obtain the details of these operations.

136 S/RES/2499.

even today.” Another lamented: “Russia and France are competing for influence in the region, which can exacerbate divisions.”

In sum, after a spike in civilian deaths in 2017, MINUSCA helped to bring the death rate back down. MINUSCA’s main approach to protecting civilians (its top-mandated task), entails using political means in bottom-up and top-down peace processes, augmented by some more coercive measures, such as military operations conducted by the QRF and imposing UN Security Council sanctions.

5.2 Mandates and Matching Resources

MINUSCA’s mandate is long and complex (see [Part 4.2](#)). Its budget is nearly \$1 billion for approximately 15,000 personnel.¹³⁷ The 2019–20 budget recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) was approximately \$10 million less than the UN Secretary-General had requested for the Mission, at \$917,157,500.¹³⁸ The ACABQ denied most requests for personnel augmentation or alteration, even though the Security Council added the task of election monitoring in 2020 and other tasks. A member of the operation lamented, “The mandate is too large and doesn’t have a budget that supports it – human rights, justice, gender etc. And now they want to add monitoring of forthcoming elections.” Others felt that the budget was sufficient: “The Mission has all the resources it needs, but we’re not deploying them effectively.” One point many interviewees noted was that MINUSCA’s yearly budget is approximately three times the size of the Central African Republic’s annual national budget and that such a large expense is creating state dependency on the UN: “The state is dependent on MINUSCA, but MINUSCA doesn’t have the capacity of a state.”

MINUSCA’s yearly budget is approximately three times the size of the Central African Republic’s annual national budget: “The state is dependent on MINUSCA, but MINUSCA doesn’t have the capacity of a state.”

137 “MINUSCA Fact Sheet,” UN Peacekeeping, accessed June 19, 2020, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minusca>.

138 Report of the ACABQ, “Financing of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic,” A/70/604, 1 May 2019,

a. Congruence and Relevance

We heard several views on the relevance of the mandate for the situation in the Central African Republic, and the congruence of MINUSCA's activities with its mandate – whether its activities are consistent with the mandated tasks. Interviewees expressed two types of issues: first, disagreement over whether MINUSCA should fight armed groups, and second, tension over the length of the mandate vs. those who feel that the Mission should be tackling the political economy of the conflict and helping to mend internal social divisions.

“We are here for peace, but our mandate says that we can fight the armed groups... how is the Mission supposed to achieve its ends – politically or militarily?”

First, in terms of the general approach of the Mission, we found internal disagreement about how to protect civilians, and how best to thwart spoilers of the peace: “We are here for peace, but our mandate says that we can fight the armed groups... how is the Mission supposed to achieve its ends – politically or militarily?” Several interviewees maintained that “only Sangaris represented a credible force.” They further explained that although the operation has had some success in neutralising armed groups, members of the Mission were concerned about being drawn into sustained violent conflict and siding with the government (negating the peacekeeping principles of consent, the limited use of force and impartiality).

The mandate does not enable MINUSCA to tackle three essential problems in Central Africa: the illicit political economy with neighbouring states that fuels the armed groups; increasing criminality (not always associated with armed groups); and the history of societal trauma.

Second, several interviewees expressed concern that the “the mandate has too much in it. We have too many little projects.” At the same time, however, others contended that it does not adequately match the nature of the conflict. The mandate does not enable MINUSCA to tackle three essential problems in Central Africa: the illicit political economy with neighbouring states that fuels the armed groups; increasing criminality (not always associated with armed groups); and the history of societal trauma: “we haven't recognised the societal paralysis stemming from a long history of external abuse.” On the political economy, an interviewee in a MINUSCA field office in Bria stated, “to be able to address the political economy question here, Chad and Sudan need to come on board. Only then can we tackle the illegal chain of smuggling. We do not have

the mandate to take over the mines. We need more manpower and the control of [the] border is essential. Only then can the country control the means of production.”

MINUSCA’s mandate is complex, and MINUSCA’s activities are consistent with its mandated tasks. That said the mandate is not entirely relevant for the specific problems in the Central African Republic, namely, the political economy of conflict, corruption, criminality, and societal distrust.

In sum, MINUSCA’s mandate is complex, and MINUSCA’s activities are consistent with its mandated tasks. That said the mandate is not entirely relevant for the specific problems in the Central African Republic, namely, the political economy of conflict, corruption, criminality, and societal distrust.

b. Capabilities

Interviewees discussed three problems associated with the extent to which MINUSCA has the “right” and sufficient personnel and material resources in order to be effective, as well as a positive example of how increased and well-matched resources can make a difference. The points include (1) concerns over basic material needs for the Mission, (2) personnel decisions, (3) adequate training for the FACA, and (4) an example of increasing prison capacity having positive effects.

Many interviewees lamented problems of language barriers, inadequate cell phone network, inadequate lift capacity, a lack of drones, and poor road conditions.

First, in terms of the Mission's basic needs, many interviewees lamented problems of language barriers, inadequate cell phone network, inadequate lift capacity, a lack of drones, and poor road conditions. Different people in Bangui volunteered differing priorities of problems:

The main enemy in this country is the roads. Then lack of strategic communications... We don't know what's going on, and we can't get anywhere easily, even if we find out.

We don't have a good intelligence network to verify information. We need drones and images.

The Security Council is well aware that the Mission does not have adequate resources policing, or in military helicopters.

In a field office, a MINUSCA official explained:

A problem that we have is related to the cell phone network. It takes a lot of time to relay information. Even downtown here when we want to organise meetings, it takes a lot of time because we cannot communicate. I have to go out and meet people individually to get a meeting. At times when I get to people's home, they are not around, or left for several hours or days. It is difficult to organise meetings.

A second cause for concern is over personnel deployments. In Bangui, a member of the Mission explained, "80% of our personnel are occupied with escort and they cannot protect civilians. We need more effective coordination of the Force." In a field office, another lamented, "70% of the staff are in Bangui and the other 30% is in the province and they are not even the most competent ones."

The FACA "will need more than 11,000 deployed in order to maintain security in the entire territory. After three years of EUTM training, only 1,400 have been deployed. We have international funding for about one tenth of what's needed."

A third source of concern over capabilities lies in capacity-building in the FACA. We heard varying estimates on the overall number of armed group members, somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 total. As of this writing, the FACA had deployed 1,400 members outside Bangui, trained by the EU (with some additional Russian training in heavy weapons). But according to one knowledgeable interviewee, the FACA "will need more than 11,000 deployed in order to maintain security in the entire territory. After three years of EUTM training, only 1,400 have been deployed. We have international funding for about one tenth of what's needed." In other words, the FACA training has been slow and insufficient, given the problems in the country. After the

training, the FACA then deploys with the support of UN peacekeepers, often in co-deployments. Several interviewees remarked that the FACA “cannot function without MINUSCA,” as they rely on the Mission for transportation and other logistics.¹³⁹

Members of MINUSCA also noted language and communication problems with co-deployments of FACA and MINUSCA troops up country: “we see cultural differences as well as language issues with joint patrols. There is no big problem when it is a French-speaking UN battalion but when it is the English speaking ones, it is more difficult to support the FACA.” Interviewees also expressed concern over the quality of troops: “There is also a question of leadership of the battalions, both the MINUSCA and the FACA. The FACA do not send high-ranking officers here, so the soldiers do not execute orders.”

We also heard concerns about FACA returning to habits of old, despite the training: “There are new cases of indiscipline and human rights abuses by the FACA. Members of MINUSCA raise the issue with the government, but there is no follow-up... In Bangui, they send the soldiers to the indiscipline committee but the sanctions are not strong.”

Missions are held accountable for the whole mandate (as we are doing in this report), even when they have neither a well-fitting, implementable mandate nor the sufficient means.

Finally, not all of the reflections regarding capacity were negative. One interviewee provided an example of how increased capacity can have positive effects. In September 2015, there was a large jailbreak in Bangui due to inadequate staffing:

Our capacity was very limited... Since then, justice and corrections have improved tremendously. We shifted from focusing on human resources and training prison staff, to focusing on the security of prisons. We brought in 68 international staff into prison authority lines. Since then, we have had no major escapes. Some limited, due to corruption, but no major jailbreaks.

In sum, there is a considerable gap between the mandate and the resources of the Mission. On the one hand, the mandate is long and detailed. But on the other, it does not tackle some of the root causes of conflict (the illicit political economy that fuels the armed groups, criminality, corruption, and the history of societal trauma), rendering final mandate implementation and eventual exit difficult. Missions are held accountable for the whole mandate (as we are doing in this report), even when they have neither a well-fitting, implementable mandate nor the sufficient means. The UNSC also has not given sufficient direction on priorities (although they are

¹³⁹ The government does not have an economic base for the taxation that would allow the FACA to function independently from MINUSCA. See [Figure 1: The Cycle of Insecurity in the Central African Republic](#).

now starting to do that more clearly than before), which means the Mission is trying to: (a) do a bit of everything to show that it is acting on all aspects of the mandate, while (b) focusing its limited resources on two priorities: civilian protection and extension of state authority.

5.3 People-Centred Approaches

The Mission has centred its work – to the extent that the mandate allows – on the needs of Central Africans. However, the people of Central Africa, as we describe in [Part 2](#), are often fearful of outsiders for longstanding, historical, and rational reasons. Over the years, outsiders of all sorts have brought societal trauma. Violent political transitions, state dysfunction, concessionary politics, and general insecurity have meant that many Central Africans feel paralysed, divided, and unable to invest in productive sectors or schooling. Sorcery and witchcraft, rumours, and information manipulation are constant menaces. Given these difficult conditions for both Central Africans and UN peacekeepers, developing inclusive, people-centred approaches has sometimes proven challenging. We heard important examples of both progress and problems.

a. National and Local Ownership

MINUSCA engages in a variety of projects that involve Central Africans and members of the Mission, including the FACA joint patrols, UMIRR (see [Part 5.5 b](#)), community development projects, and policing. In policing, UNPOL has engaged in innovative measures, such as deploying specialised police teams to assist local counterparts in averting SGBV, and crime analysis. We focus here on three aspects of MINUSCA’s policing programmes.

MINUSCA seeks to build national ownership and capacity in community policing by engaging in a wide variety of “bottom-up” actions, such as (1) joint patrols, (2) co-locations and training, and (3) recruitment drives for new members, especially women. First, as one interviewee explained, on a day-to-day basis the community policing capacity-building “mostly involves daily joint patrols (on foot) with the internal security forces [FSI] and direct contact with the population. These patrols are key because they demonstrate both the presence of the FSI and of MINUSCA’s UNPOL. What also works pretty well are our daily visits to the commissariat and controls regarding the respect of human rights by Central African police officers.” The door-to-door interaction with the population enables socialisation on crosscutting issues, such as SGBV, social cohesion, education and school attendance, the role of the police, human rights, and children and women’s rights. An interlocutor highlighted the UNPOL mass “sensitisation” campaigns in Bangui as one of the most effective measures UNPOL MINUSCA has taken so far.

A second important aspect of building local capacity and ownership, both in Bangui and throughout the country, entails the physical co-location of individual UNPOL and national police and gendarmerie. In these locations, UNPOL provides monitoring, mentoring and advice,

thus supporting FSI through capacity-building via the co-location structure. Co-locations of UNPOL and FSI aim to support criminal investigations and implement community police, security patrols and law enforcement services. According to interviewees, the co-locations provide better visibility of both UNPOL and FSI, foster community policing structures in including local CLAs responsible for the specific neighbourhood in daily patrols, and facilitate local community engagement. Some interlocutors pointed out various benefits from the co-location system, such as the reconstruction and expansion of the commissariats and FSI structures, the joint development of specific projects, and the increase in the visibility of security structures in general. Interviewees also pointed out that co-locations are an important means to improve the trust of the population in security and protection.

Third, MINUSCA has facilitated recruitment drives for new members of the Central African security structures. For example, UNPOL and a Specialized Police Team are supporting the mixed rapid reaction unit against sexual violence against women and children (UMIRR) in Bangui in the forms of joint co-location, security and construction. In addition, female UNPOL have had success in recruiting Central African women and girls to join.¹⁴⁰ For example, in Birao, MINUSCA has actively engaged in FACA and police recruitment drives, working with local authorities, going door-to-door, and using megaphones in the streets and markets to explain how to register to be recruited. They have reached both men and women (approximately 20% women, according to interviews) using these methods, thus growing the ranks of the national police.

MINUSCA has successfully helped to build policing capacity in the Central African Republic through joint patrols, co-locations, training, and recruitment drives. It has assisted in increasing the number of women police and in fostering Central African institutions to counter sexual violence.

However, the underlying insecurity means that the state cannot collect adequate taxes in order to build its own independent capacities.

According to a UN internal assessment, however, national ownership of FSI reform, follow-up approval of policies and laws, as well as of practical implementation remains insufficient. Although security in Bangui is increasing, and people increasingly trust the national police, there are still not enough FSI deployed throughout the country to counter impunity. Several interviewees expressed another concern: that rather than fostering local ownership, the government is becoming dependent on MINUSCA. As one interviewee in the town of Paoua

140 Note also that UNPOL is supporting FSI leadership with the elaboration of the national action plan for gender (“*Plan ministériel d’intégration de la dimension genre*”), including the development of a gender strategy for recruitment.

explained, “the prefect is here, and the sub-prefect, but they have no means. MINUSCA has to provide logistical support and at times, there is a problem of competence of the state officials. The FACA are present here, but they cannot function without MINUSCA. They have the means (vehicles) but no gasoline.” Another interviewee in Bangui lamented, “The state cannot build itself without us. We deploy FACA and then what? The FACA have nothing – no vehicles, no payment systems. We can support them now but it is not sustainable.” How to transition from MINUSCA’s control to local ownership remains unclear.

In sum, MINUSCA has successfully helped to build policing capacity in the Central African Republic through joint patrols, co-locations, training, and recruitment drives. It has assisted in increasing the number of women police and in fostering Central African institutions to counter sexual violence. However, the underlying insecurity means that the state cannot collect adequate taxes in order to build its own independent capacities.

b. Civil Society

MINUSCA has engaged in a variety of efforts to bring various members of society and civil society organisations into its efforts. MINUSCA leaders have worked with religious and other community leaders to help better understand divisions and to learn how the Mission might better serve the population. Interviewees often cited MINUSCA’s Community Violence Reduction (CVR) programmes. One focus group member explained, “CVR is an initiative of MINUSCA that benefits the civilian population. We chefs de quartier accompany the people via the local peace committees. Especially the youth. In that context, MINUSCA works well. I exchange with MINUSCA about security regularly.”

In other words, community leaders tended to see MINUSCA’s outreach efforts in a positive light, but not everyone agrees. Some groups see MINUSCA playing into the hands of armed groups against the state. Until the meaning of peace is contextualised, indigenised and localised by and within society, the work of MINUSCA will still be questioned by some local communities.¹⁴¹

There may be something of a divide between national and community-level leaders, who support and appreciate the Mission’s engagement, and members of the public, who may feel that MINUSCA’s approach is insufficiently people-centred.

141 Yvan Yenda Ilunga, “How Sustainable Is the Peace Agreement in the Central African Republic?” Fragile States Forum, March 22, 2019, <https://fragilestates.org/2019/03/22/sustainable-peace-agreement-central-african-republic-yvan-yenda-ilunga/>.

As a current university student explained, the Mission enjoys support from political elites but less so from some sectors of civil society who feel that the nation is “sous tutelle,” or under guardianship. Others expressed dismay at what they perceived to be MINUSCA’s lack of interest in controlling criminal activity. A citizen in Bangui related that MINUSCA is:

ineffective on criminal violence. For example, in my neighbourhood (5e arrondissement) we did a mapping of where criminals were, in order to help MINUSCA make the neighbourhood safer. But it wasn’t taken into account by MINUSCA, they didn’t do anything after several calls. We asked whether the decision not to engage was made at the level of MINUSCA [in Bangui] or at the level of New York. We were told it was a robust mandate but we didn’t hear a response on this issue.

In another interview in Bria, when asked about controlling criminality, an interviewee explained, “That is up to local authorities. It is a security issue we will not be able to address.” In sum, there may be something of a divide between national and community-level leaders, who support and appreciate the Mission’s engagement, and members of the public, who may feel that MINUSCA’s approach is insufficiently people-centred.¹⁴²

c. Armed Groups and Spoilers

As we explained above, the main means for MINUSCA to manage spoilers remain political, but the Mission has also engaged in militarily-robust measures to curb armed group spoiling with notable effectiveness in Bria, Bambari, Paoua, Bouar, and more recently, in Bangui. Our interviewees provided us with examples largely assessing MINUSCA’s actions against spoilers as effective, especially in terms of dampening reprisal attacks from various groups.

One political officer in Bria reported, “there was the case of the attack of a church (in July 2019) but we do not know who committed the attack. There were armed men and they covered their faces. The church is headed by an Anti-Balaka pastor. When MINUSCA heard the alert, the Zambian battalion quickly intervened. There was no escalation after. For us, this is very positive.”

In Paoua, we heard similar reasoning. After the APPR signing, the 3R engaged in an attack on civilians that killed approximately two dozen people, even though 3R leader Sidiki had signed the peace agreement.¹⁴³ A member of MINUSCA explained, “A positive action for us is that after the 3R massacre, we noticed that there was no retaliation from the local population. The work that we have been doing, our network of contact and reaching out activities have allowed the conflict not to escalate.”

142 Public opinion surveys could be helpful in determining the nature of the different perceptions.

143 “Centrafrique : le groupe 3R, accusé d’un massacre, livre trois de ses éléments à la justice – Jeune Afrique,” *JeuneAfrique.com* (blog), May 25, 2019, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/779886/societe/centrafrique-le-groupe-3r-accuse-dun-massacre-livre-trois-de-ses-elements-a-la-justice/>.

In Bambari, UN peacekeepers have assisted parties in arriving at mediated settlements to disputes on many occasions.¹⁴⁴ After these mechanisms broke down in 2017, MINUSCA took steps to “neutralise” armed group spoiling, especially with specific battalions taking on specific functions. The MINUSCA/Portuguese QRF chased the UPC armed group led by Ali Darassa from the town centre, while the Nepalese battalion put a cordon around the town and confiscated weapons. An interviewee summarised that MINUSCA “has pushed UPC leader Ali Darassa out of Bambari through military engagement. This action has influenced everyday life of the people. There is freer movement in the city, although the city is still divided along religious lines.”

Near Bouar, in April 2019, after the APPR signing, Abdoulaye Miskine of the FDPC took armed control over the main transport route between Bangui and Bouar which leads to the border with Cameroon.¹⁴⁵ Members of MINUSCA engaged in armed action to re-open this vital trade route. More recently, in April 2020, after Miskine’s continued violations of the APPR, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions against him.¹⁴⁶

In sum, MINUSCA has developed a variety of effective, people-centred programmes in its policing efforts. It has actively and effectively recruited women into the reforming Central African police and fostered gender-mindful institution-building in supporting the development of UMIRR. It has also effectively engaged in elite and middle-level elite community violence reduction. At the same time, some average Central Africans may not see MINUSCA’s approach as sufficiently people-centred. Moreover, as MINUSCA develops increasingly aggressive ways to manage armed groups and spoilers, the Mission’s militarily robust measures may come into conflict with efforts to foster people-centred approaches.

5.4 Legitimacy, Credibility, Communications and Misconduct

Legitimacy in peace operations is the belief by local actors that a peace operation is appropriate and that its directives ought to be followed. Credibility concerns the capacity and the perceived ability of a peace operation to deliver. Legitimacy and credibility are contingent on an effective communications strategy and behaviour that lives up to the institutions and ideals that the Mission seeks to foster in a post-conflict society.

144 Zahar and Mechoulan, “Peace by Pieces? Local Mediation and Sustainable Peace in the Central African Republic.”

145 “Le chef rebelle centrafricain Abdoulaye Miskine paralyse le transport entre la RCA et le Cameroun,” *centrafrique-presse*, accessed June 19, 2020, <http://centrafrique-presse.over-blog.com/2019/04/le-chef-rebelle-centrafricain-abdoulaye-miskine-paralyse-le-transport-entre-la-rca-et-le-cameroun.html>.

146 “UN Slaps Sanctions On Central Africa Rebel Chief.”

a. Legitimacy and Credibility

We consulted with Central Africans in five focus group sessions (of four to ten people each), and about six CLAs to gain a sense of how Central Africans perceive MINUSCA. We heard some very positive evaluations, but also instances of misperception and unmet expectations.

First, many Central Africans in our focus groups expressed some form of the following statement: “The arrival of MINUSCA was welcome in Central Africa. They came in a crisis. MINUSCA worked very well in the beginning. We had the Bangui Forum, elected a president, we had lots of positive changes in the country, including the redeployment of the administration.” Another focus group member explained, “MINUSCA has opened Central Africans’ eyes. They gave us information. They help victims to access justice, rehabilitate damaged zones, etc.”

Second and less encouragingly, we heard both from Central Africans and members of MINUSCA that there are issues of perceived partiality. Central Africans of Christian backgrounds expressed that they feel that MINUSCA had not taken their side: “The Mauritians in Bambari took the rebels’ side and didn’t use force to protect civilians;” “In Bangassou, the Moroccan contingent was not neutral. They took a certain side;” “The only arrests are against Anti-Balaka.” On the other hand, some Muslim Central Africans pointed out that MINUSCA and the government seemed to be working against them since the most important peace enforcement operations in Bangui, Bria, and Bambari have targeted ex-Séléka groups. At the same time, MINUSCA must work with armed groups that control territory. For example, in Kaga Bandoro, “We work a lot with the armed groups. They do not boycott our sensitisation sessions.”

Third, we heard some important misperceptions and lack of understanding regarding the purpose of the Mission. A member of MINUSCA explained, “Perceptions shift depending on the event. A few months ago, we were applauded... the following week, we do not know why, they threw rocks at us.” Sometimes the misperceptions are serious. Several focus group members suggested that the UN was “lighting fires and then claiming to be the firemen.” Others seemed exasperated with the Mission, saying, “We don’t understand what it means that MINUSCA is neutral. They need to explain it to us... Why do they sometimes go after one group, like in Sukula?” Other complaints and questions were heard, including “Is MINUSCA’s mandate defensive or offensive? They seem to be here only to protect themselves. MINUSCA is here for its own interests, not those of Central Africans.”

Fourth, in general, it seemed that people expected more from MINUSCA than it could deliver. As one CLA explained:

People expect a lot from MINUSCA. For example, in Obo [in the southeast] armed groups kill and destroy villages. The local police [FSI] don’t react due to a lack of capability. MINUSCA has the capability, but does not take action. People expect UNPOL to

arrest criminals. If MINUSCA is not practicing arrest as they should, they will decline in legitimacy. The population has more trust in FSI than in MINUSCA.

A focus group member echoed this sentiment: “When we have trouble, we call the chef de quartier not MINUSCA. MINUSCA is always giving out a hotline number to call to report sexual violence. But if you call that number, they do not answer.” Several focus group members reported that they do not know how to contact MINUSCA.

These reflections are borne out more broadly in the HHI public opinion testing from 2017-18. As we see in Figure 16, when asked “Who ensures your security?” a plurality say that it is the informal “chefs the quartier” or “district leaders.” In terms of formal authorities, it is the gendarmerie.

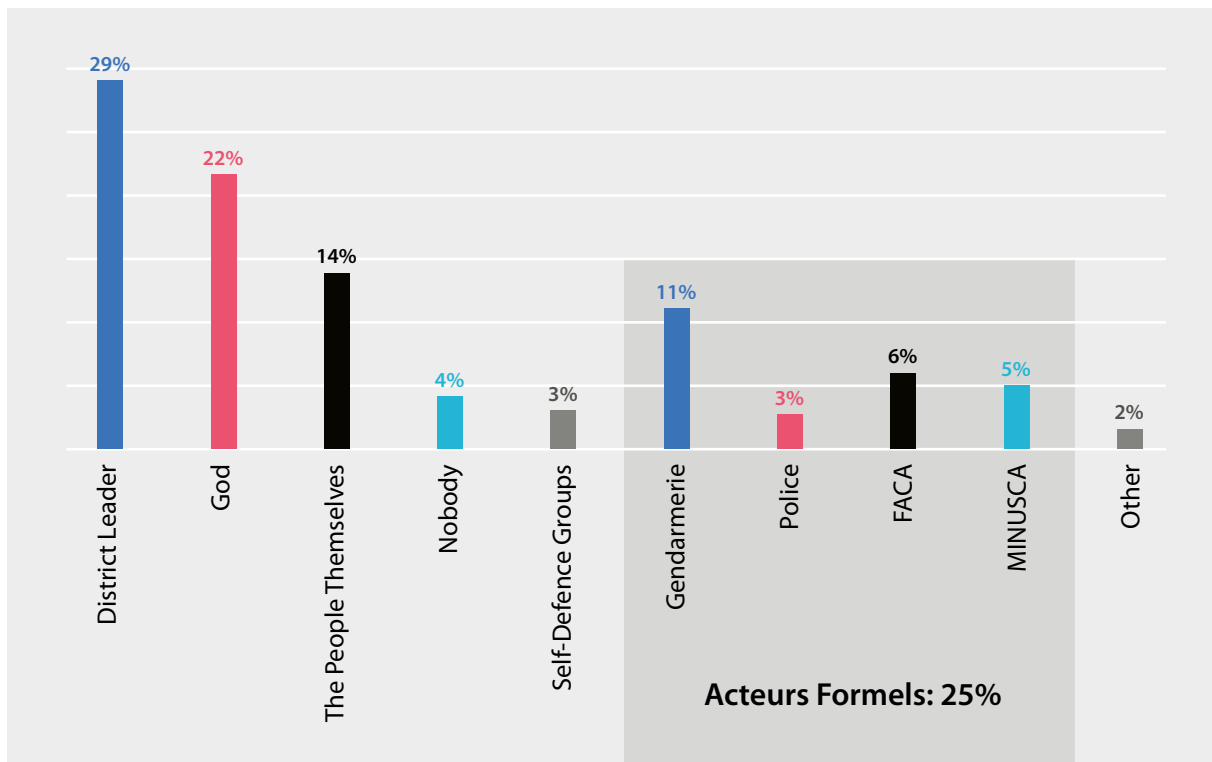


Figure 16: HHI Survey: Who Assures Your Security? (2017-18)

We should point out that in our interviews with UNPOL in 2019, the division had implemented night patrols in Bangui in response to community complaints about criminal activity at night, especially shoplifting, but also serious and organised crime. UNPOL took the decision to shift toward focusing on criminality, the reopening of the police commissariats in the 3eme arrondissement (notably the PK5 neighbourhood), as well as the mass information and socialisation campaigns and training for FSI.

Several members of UNPOL reported that because of these new efforts, they perceive growing trust between the MINUSCA police forces and the Central African Police. Several also

reported that they perceive that people in Bangui have started to trust UNPOL-MINUSCA more, as indicated by an increasing number of people providing UNPOL with information about potential criminals and criminal activities in Bangui neighbourhoods.

Finally, Central Africans expressed a desire for more from MINUSCA, especially more action against disruptors of the peace. They also requested more training programmes and more funds going directly to Central Africans as potential ways to build MINUSCA's credibility and legitimacy.

b. Strategic Communications

Rumour and fake news are prolific in the Central African Republic, and voices of blame and condemnation are often loud. Most citizens tend to obtain their news from inter-personal interactions and to a certain extent by radio, but less so by digital means. The media available is not always helpful. As one CLA explained, "Media are not helping for bringing peace. A lot of media try to influence the people against the president, against MINUSCA, and are in favor of the armed groups." Some focus group members expressed that information from MINUSCA is helpful, and that "MINUSCA has opened Central Africans' eyes." However, "MINUSCA is informing people with media [that rely on electricity] when we do not have electricity."¹⁴⁷

■ We need massive, new campaigns to counter political rumours.

A representative of MINUSCA explained that radio has become the main means of strategic communications between MINUSCA and the population, with MINUSCA hosting its own radio station, Radio Guira FM, but that there has been a steep learning curve:

We thought that our show through Radio Guira, "l'arbre à palabres," was a very popular UN show. But we weren't broadcasting in Sango. We were playing lots of music, but not enough Central African music. When we read a Harvard Humanitarian Initiative survey about our efforts, it was quite ego-shaking. Only 17% of the population was listening or liked what they heard. We've increased that now to 34%, which is significant. We have doubled our reach and interest in a very short time... We're in the process of distributing 50,000 battery-powered radios to reach even more people.

In terms of the content of communication and the accompanying strategy, one MINUSCA member lamented, "We had a new communications strategy every year, so everything was always

147 Note that only approximately 14% of the Central African Republic (which is larger in land mass than continental France) has access to electricity, and that approximately 37% of the population is literate. CIA Factbook, 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ct.html>.

changing. Now we have moved to a two-year strategy...We need massive, new campaigns to counter political rumours, and sensitise more people on SEA and witchcraft.”

Many focus group members characterised MINUSCA as a “machine” or a “big machine” that was difficult to approach or communicate with.

Some Central Africans in focus groups had suggestions for MINUSCA: “MINUSCA should clearly explain to the population that they’re here to protect civilians and not to wage a war to control armed groups.” Others offered, “We would like to have MINUSCA representatives in each neighbourhood, to act as a liaison between the community and the ‘big machine.’” Many focus group members characterised MINUSCA as a “machine” or a “big machine” that was difficult to approach or communicate with. Some complained, “They drink and dance a lot. They are arrogant. They speak to authorities as if they’re the boss. They act as if they’re in command.” These observations of misconduct are mild compared to the actions for which MINUSCA has garnered the most international press: sexual abuse.

c. Misconduct

In May of 2015, it came to light that one year earlier (before MINUSCA had even deployed), French Sangaris forces had been sexually abusing young Central Africans at the IDP camp at M’Poko Airport. The abuse was reported to be regular – soldiers were exchanging water and food for sex with young people, often boys. Major international newspapers such as *The New York Times* reported the story of abuse as being committed by “French peacekeepers,” blaming the UN for covering up the story, and implying that the forces were under UN command.¹⁴⁸ At the time, there were no “French peacekeepers” in the Central African Republic. There were French Forces deployed as part of a separate French stabilisation mission (Sangaris) under French command. MINUSCA’s peacekeepers did not deploy until September of 2014. Conflating French Forces abuse in Central Africa with UN peacekeeper abuse continues to influence international perceptions of the Mission negatively.¹⁴⁹

That is not to say, however, that this Mission has been free of problems of sexual abuse. In 2015, 22 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by MINUSCA personnel were

148 *The New York Times* used this phrasing in at least a dozen articles. See, for example, Somini Sengupta, “U.N. Official Quits Amid Scrutiny of Response to Sex Abuse Accusations,” *The New York Times*, July 22, 2015, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/23/world/africa/un-official-flavia-pansieri-resigns-central-african-republic-peacekeeper-sex-abuse.html>.

149 See, for example, the PBS Frontline documentary, Sam Collyns, *UN Sex Abuse Scandal*, (PBS Frontline, 2018), <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/un-sex-abuse-scandal/>.

reported.¹⁵⁰ The following year, the Security Council recognised the problem in the Mission's mandate renewal, declaring that "sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers undermine the implementation of peacekeeping mandates, as well as the credibility of United Nations peacekeeping, and reaffirming its support for the United Nations zero tolerance policy on all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse."¹⁵¹ Overall, according to the OIOS, MINUSCA has the second-highest number of reports of SEA in peacekeeping, and the highest number of pending cases.¹⁵²

In response to ineffective measures to decrease SEA by UN peacekeepers, MINUSCA's first SRSG, Babacar Gaye, was forced by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to retire in August 2015. It is the first time in history that a Special-Representative has been removed from office for SEA. The Mission also increased the efforts of its Conduct and Discipline Team by training both civilians and troops in the definitions of SEA and making punishment for misconduct clear. Several battalions (from Congo, Congo-Brazzaville, and Senegal) were sent home. More recently, individuals from Gabon and Burundi have been repatriated. A female member of MINUSCA stated, "The [MINUSCA] Force Commander has been very vocal about SEA, which is very good. He has even ordered some suspensions over SEA." The Mission has also set up a Victim Assistance Fund to provide financial and psychological services. However, as one interviewee explained, "Our hands are tied. Member states will not allow us the legal institutions or the budget to investigate. The only way to punish abusers in peacekeeping is to send them home, and for the troop contributing state to investigate and prosecute."¹⁵³

Conflating UN peacekeeper sexual abuse with French Forces abuse in Central Africa continues to influence international perceptions of the Mission negatively.

Researchers have demonstrated that poverty and high levels of sexual violence during conflict correlate with higher rates of SEA in peacekeeping.¹⁵⁴ These findings certainly bear out in the context of the Central African Republic. One interviewee explained, "There is one incident of sexual violence every 60 minutes in this country. It's partly linked to endemic factors and cultural norms but it's one of the worst things I've seen." Several interviewees also suggested to us that, given that Central Africa is the poorest country in the world, people may allege victimhood in order to receive support. Others strongly disagree with this allegation: "So long as disbelief remains the first response to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) allegations against UN

150 "Sexual Exploitation and Abuse."

151 S/RES/2272 (2016).

152 "Sexual Exploitation and Abuse."

153 Victim Assistance Funds were also set up in Liberia and Congo. <https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/content/trust-fund>.

154 Ragnhild Nordås and Siri C. A. Rustad, "Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by Peacekeepers: Understanding Variation," *International Interactions* 39, no. 4 (2013): 511-534.

personnel, continuous efforts to improve the prevention and response of such crimes will likely go nowhere.”¹⁵⁵ Our research team did not see any evidence of high-level victim-blaming, but individual troops might still harbour an attitude that would inhibit the Mission’s effectiveness in adequately addressing the problems of SEA.

In 2015, the Mission helped to create UMIRR, which became operational in early 2017. This unit aims to reduce sexual violence against women and children (see [Part 5.5 b](#)). Members of MINUSCA have worked with domestic partners to advertise a hotline for reporting SEA. Several members of civil society, however, lamented, “We all know how to contact MINUSCA to report sexual abuse by peacekeepers, but we do not know how to report armed group activity or peace accord violations.” In focus groups, our research team noted that no one volunteered SEA committed by peacekeepers as a reason why they were upset with MINUSCA. It is also important to note, however, that SEA is under-reported and under-discussed in general, because of societal stigmatisation. According to the most recent HHI survey, only 39% of victims of sexual aggression say they reported it to the authorities.¹⁵⁶

In sum, legitimacy and credibility remain challenges for MINUSCA. Gaps in credibility, strategic communications, and misconduct are problems that stem in part from underlying circumstances beyond the scope of the Mission, including societal distrust of external actors, misunderstanding and illiteracy, prior high levels of sexual violence and domestic abuse in the country, and restrictions by member states and troop contributors on establishing internal policing mechanisms within peacekeeping missions. MINUSCA thus faces an uphill battle in the quest for legitimacy, but one well worth the fight. Focusing more on increasing legitimacy will, in turn, increase the effectiveness of the Mission.

5.5 Women, Peace and Security (WPS)

One of the most notable aspects of the tremendous violence in the Central African Republic in 2012-13 was the sexual and gender-based nature of it (see [Part 3.2 d](#)). Although men and boys were often under-reported victims, there is no denying that women suffered the vast majority of the conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Similarly, women are experiencing disproportionate insecurity in the form of discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the post-conflict period.

Apart from the episodes of acute conflict, beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft have led to the extensive abuse and imprisonment of women and girls. Compounding the difficulties, of all peacekeeping missions, MINUSCA is arguably most known for the sexual abuse scandals in 2015,

155 Enrica Picco, “How Delays and Disbelief Let down Sex Abuse Victims in Central African Republic,” *The New Humanitarian*, November 26, 2019, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/first-person/2019/11/26/car-sex-abuse-op>.

156 HHI, “Sondages Paix, Justice et Sécurité, République Centrafricaine,” Rapport 04 May 2019, 21.

which led to the firing of its first SRSG (see [Part 5.4 c](#)). In light of these grave circumstances, the Mission has taken important steps toward embracing gender equality and reducing SGBV and CRSV within MINUSCA and in the Central African Republic.

a. Gender Equality

MINUSCA has a very active Gender Section.¹⁵⁷ The Mission has employed proportionally more women in uniform than any other current UN peace operation.¹⁵⁸ Both of the DSRSGs are currently women, and women play leading roles in the Senior Management Team, including the Chief of Staff. These factors together suggest that MINUSCA has taken important steps toward women’s leadership and gender equality within the Mission. Full equality, however, remains unachieved. The ACABQ’s most recent report noted “the overall low level of female representation, in particular among national staff, and encouraged the Mission to intensify its efforts to achieve gender balance among its civilian personnel.”¹⁵⁹

What is very important is not to decide unilaterally what activities to engage in but to decide together with the women and the community.

In Central African Republic elite politics, we also see progress in the midst of many challenges. Although only one of the 14 armed groups that signed the APPR was represented by a woman, the central government has generally taken a different approach. The two-year transition from 2014-2016 was led by the former mayor of Bangui, Catherine Samba-Panza. Current President Touadéra has expressed egalitarian views in a variety of ways (unlike many of his peers). He lives in a modest house and continues to teach higher-level Mathematics at the University of Bangui. Most notably, he has appointed women to top posts in his cabinet – Defence Minister, Minister of the Economy, and Foreign Minister.

I think our work is valued inside MINUSCA.

MINUSCA actively encourages female leadership and participation in peacekeeping as a way to model women’s inclusion in society. As an illustration of the effectiveness of female deployments, in the northernmost town of Birao, near the contentious borders with Chad and Sudan, MINUSCA has deployed a female engagement team (FET) within the Zambian battalion. The

157 “Women, Peace and Security,” MINUSCA, July 6, 2015, <https://minusca.unmissions.org/en/gender>.

158 “Gender,” UN Peacekeeping, accessed June 19, 2020, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/gender>.

159 Report of the ACABQ, “Financing of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic,” A/70/604, May 1, 2019, para. 49.

FET has become known for helping the community in a variety of ways, from sweeping the markets alongside locals in the morning to providing impartial obstetrical services – even to the wives of armed group leaders. The brigade has facilitated a sense of unity of purpose between locals and internationals and led to a fragile peace in a contentious town.¹⁶⁰ In the textbox, we provide extensive notes from an interview with the FET in July 2019.

160 We note that recently, the peace is breaking down. Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, "Central African Republic – Clashes in Birao," France Diplomacy - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, September 14, 2019, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/central-african-republic/events/article/central-african-republic-clashes-in-birao-14-09-19>.

Notes from the Female Engagement Team (FET) Interviews in Birao

I do not have problems being a woman in the UN system. People respect me. I think I even have a greater impact being a woman at the regional office in Birao. A lot of women see me as a model for their daughters. They tell them: "See, if you go to school and study hard you can find a good job." Women and girls here were scared to go out of their houses for years. For them, to see a woman outside, working and communicating with everybody gives them hope.

Our main strategy is to focus on community activities, such as sport activities (e.g. soccer). We also cook and share meals such as porridge together. We also do activities, such as cleaning the local hospital, gardening, building market booths, organising a joint march on women's day etc., and a lot of activities on international peacekeepers day. These activities are not only useful to start communication with the women. I think our goal, to put a smile on people's face, is pretty impactful. What is also very important is not to decide unilaterally what activities to engage in but to decide together with the women and the community. I think our outreach is effective because we are supporting women and working with them. Women are mediators between MINUSCA and the men in the community.

Women testified to us that before the deployment of our FET, women and girls were scared to leave the house. They testified to us that some of them did not leave the house for the last three years. There were lots of areas where only men could move, because for the last three years, women and children would be attacked. The visibility of MINUSCA and especially the FET are very important for helping people find the courage to leave the house and to start their businesses again. Women testify to us that they are finding hope again. People are so thirsty for peace, they are happy that somebody takes the time and talk to them and spends time with them.

We are not only reaching out to women, we are also engaging with men and children. Now, men are also engaging and interacting more. We are also communicating with community leaders, the majority of whom are men, but also of course women leaders. A lot of us are francophone, but we also work with interpreters. The work with Community Liaison Assistants is also very important. There are 50% female Community Liaison Assistants in Birao. The problem is that most of the educated women leave the country.

I think we have a positive impact, but of course we could even maximise what we are doing. I am thinking about collaborations with NGOs who are working in the region, for example, for medical supplies (right now, the FET even sometimes distribute their own medicine to the women), or to work together on clean water. We should set goals together with NGOs. There aren't many NGOs in the region, but I do not think that a lack of NGOs is a problem. I think our biggest challenge is the weak infrastructure.

In general, the working conditions for our FET are good. We have female sanitation facilities, men at the base respect us, and I think our work is valued inside MINUSCA.

Yes, there are complaints that MINUSCA is not engaging enough with the communities, but we do not have this problem in Birao. In general, it is easier for blue helmets to engage and reach out in a smaller town.

b. Protection of Women and Girls from SGBV and CRSV

Aside from the Gender Section, the Mission's main approach to preventing SGBV and CRSV has been to assist in the creation of the Joint Rapid Response and Prevention Unit for Sexual Violence against Women and Children (*L'Unité Mixte d'Intervention Rapide et de Répression des violences sexuelles faites aux femmes et aux enfants*) (UMIRR) (see also [Part 5.4 c](#)). The UMIRR is comprised of Central African national police, gendarmes, and civilians working together to advocate better treatment for women and children during times of both peace and conflict. UMIRR personnel work with the Ministries of Justice, Public Health, Public Security, and Social Affairs to gather information, support victims, and prosecute violators.

By assisting UMIRR, MINUSCA is helping to develop national institutions to gather systematic and early-warning information that is integral to fostering gender equality and preventing gender-based violence.

Based in Bangui, UMIRR has offices across the country. UMIRR began its operations in early 2017, with the explicit aim of reducing sexual violence against women and children. Its hotline has become extremely well known among Central Africans, as reported by members of our focus groups. In its first year of operation (2017-2018), UMIRR initiated 734 verbal indictments to domestic criminal tribunals, but far fewer in its second year. The UMIRR's leaders are in the process of investigating why the numbers decreased, and how best to ensure victims have access to justice. In all, UMIRR has worked with the Central African Republic Government to denounce sexual violence, protect victims, bring perpetrators to justice, and increase women's security.

By assisting UMIRR, MINUSCA is helping to develop national institutions to gather systematic and early-warning information that is integral to fostering gender equality and preventing gender-based violence.

In sum, MINUSCA and the government of Central Africa are championing women's leadership by staffing high-level positions with women. Equality at the top, however, is not consistently filtering down through the ranks. Assisting in the creation of UMIRR is a significant sign of effectiveness in the WPS agenda, but ensuring that it functions into the future remains a priority.

5.6 Coordination with Partners

One of the most important functions of a UN peacekeeping mission is to serve as the central coordinator and facilitator of local, regional, and international activity in a (post) conflict zone. Missions serve to coordinate and clarify the division of labour between the peace operation, inter-governmental organisations and NGOs, and regional states and organisations. UN peacekeeping missions are the product of P-5 UN Security Council agreement. Without their agreement, no peacekeeping mission will function.

a. Coordination

MINUSCA is the lead international presence in the Central African Republic, with a budget that dwarfs all others. Dozens of inter-governmental organisations and NGOs operate in the country (which some have suggested is the current form of concessionary state politics in Central Africa). Aside from the UN's peacekeeping mission, the UNDP, AU and EU, among many others, have active programmes and coordinate regularly with MINUSCA.¹⁶¹ From its start, MINUSCA has been an "integrated" mission, with two DSRSGs. One serves as DSRSG and Deputy Head of the Mission; the other wears a "triple hat," as Resident Coordinator (in charge of development projects and the UNDP), Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), and DSRSG. Some of the most important international coordination tasks as of this writing are in (1) assisting with the implementation of the APPR in conjunction with regional players, (2) preparing for the 2020–21 elections with the UNDP, and (3) FACA training in coordination with the EU.

First, in terms of coordination as it relates to the APPR, the UN does not play the role of "guarantor" of the peace accord, but rather as a "facilitator."¹⁶² The guarantors of the accord are the AU and the sub-regional organisation, ECCAS.¹⁶³ The AU has an office across the street from MINUSCA headquarters, but neither the AU nor ECCAS have large enough forces or civilian actors on the ground who might be capable of actually guaranteeing implementation. MINUSCA does, however, have such capabilities, as well as the mandate to "coordinate international support and assistance to the peace process," which falls short of an official "guarantor" mandate.¹⁶⁴

The APPR mandates political dialogue and inclusive government as the main forms of dispute resolution. Article 35 of the APPR specifies "punitive or coercive measures" against spoilers who

161 Note, for example, that since September 2014 and by request of the national authorities, the Prosecutor of the ICC is conducting an investigation into alleged crimes committed since 2012. Anti-Balaka leader Alfred Yékatom was the first Central African to be indicted.

162 Interviewees explained that when legal affairs in New York vetted the language of the accord, they diminished the authority of MINUSCA from guarantor to facilitator.

163 S/2019/822, para. 4.

164 S/RES/2499, para. 32b.

refuse to implement the accord, but these only include sanctions and arrest. It does not indicate military or compellent measures for spoiling, although given that MINUSCA does have the mandate to use force to protect civilians, the Mission is de facto using force to implement the accord.¹⁶⁵

Second, in terms of the next elections, the UNDP is responsible for their management. As one interviewee explained, “The UNDP is our main implementing agency, and works with [other partners] who have a stake in Central Africa to define the road map and strategies. Since the UNDP operates on its own mandate, it is sometimes much easier to rely on their resources and flexibility to push for a pragmatic strategy.”

Third, the EU is another important actor for coordination in Central Africa. It works in close cooperation with MINUSCA to help train the FACA (see [Part 4.3 c](#)) and has been developing a new mission, the EU Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic (EUAM RCA). That said, EU interest in Central Africa is not significant. One interviewee stated, “There are no terrorists. No migration issues. [We can] live with the current level of instability in Central Africa.” The EU is currently in the process of launching a new EU “Advisory Mission.”¹⁶⁶

b. Regional Involvement

According to MINUSCA’s mandate, the Mission is to “provide technical expertise to the Central African authorities in its engagement with neighbouring countries, the ECCAS, and the AU, in consultation and coordination with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) to resolve issues of common and bilateral interest and to promote their continued and full support for the Peace Agreement.” However, regional neighbouring states and armed groups within them have fuelled and continue to support different armed groups in Central Africa. Thus neighbours are essential for peace, as well as MINUSCA’s effectiveness.

According to some interviewees, the AU played a “back seat role” in the Central African Republic for many years. However, with a change in leadership, the AU has become much more active in recent years and proved to be the driving force behind the APPR signing. The African initiative known as “Silencing the Guns by 2020” also plays a role.

Senior officials in Central Africa also note that the interest in establishing regional peace is mutual: “The crisis in Central Africa is no longer a national crisis only, but regional. The conflict has the potential to further destabilise the entire region, and therefore aiding in the efforts to find peace became everyone’s interests.” That said, others note, “The AU is trying, but lacks

165 Note that although UNDP assists with pre-DDR and DDR programmes, according to one interviewee, the UNDP “won’t touch the USMS. IOM is stepping up in supplying all of the necessary equipment for USMS.”

166 “Central African Republic: New Head of EUAM Mission Appointed,” Council of the European Union, accessed June 19, 2020, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/12/17/central-african-republic-new-head-of-euam-mission-appointed/>.

capacities to carry the Mission without the support from Western countries. The budget issues complicate things” because the AU relies on Europe for funding.

Without regional and bilateral coordination and cooperation, the Mission will not only lag in effectiveness, it will fail.

In the most recent mandate renewal, the Security Council was explicit about which regional actors play an important role. The resolution:

Calls on Central African authorities and the authorities of neighbouring countries to cooperate at the regional level to investigate and combat transnational criminal networks and armed groups involved in arms trafficking and in the illegal exploitation of natural resources, calls for the reactivation of joint bilateral commissions between Central Africa and neighbouring countries to address cross-border issues, including issues related to arms trafficking, and urges the joint bilateral commissions between Central Africa and Cameroon and Central Africa and the Republic of Congo to take agreed next steps to secure common borders.¹⁶⁷

These proposals, however, have not yet consistently come to fruition. Without regional and bilateral coordination and cooperation, the Mission will not only lag in effectiveness, it will fail.

c. Bilateral Interests

France has been the dominant historical international actor in the Central African Republic (see [Part 3.1 a](#)). Since 2018, however, Russia has come to play an increasingly important role. Other major bilateral international actors include the United States and China. Some researchers have suggested that the competition between France and Russia has become ground zero in a new “scramble for Africa.”¹⁶⁸ The emerging rivalries have manifested in some ways in MINUSCA, but for now, all P-5 members have managed to work out their differences and, for the most part, agree to support both MINUSCA and the government of President Touadéra.

France has deployed several military interventions since Central African independence in 1960, and France remains the country’s largest external trading partner. The most recent and largest military intervention was the 3,000-strong Sangaris Mission deployed in December 2013. Originally, the forces focused on stopping and disarming the ex-Séléka, which unintentionally almost sparked a genocide against the Central African Muslim community. The French forces then quickly corrected course and stabilised the fighting. After the sexual abuse scandal, the

¹⁶⁷ S/RES/2499.

¹⁶⁸ Robert Harms, “What a New Scramble Could Mean for Africans,” *Washington Post*, December 3, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/12/03/what-new-scramble-could-mean-africans/>.

force – which was always supposed to have a short-term deployment – departed in October 2016.

One interviewee explained that although the Sangaris made significant mistakes at the beginning and end of their deployment, “As long as Sangaris was deployed, no armed groups could move.” Sangaris had significant airpower, but a very limited mandate. It boiled down to: “tu bouges t’es mort” – if you move [attack civilians], you’re dead.” Spoilers faced clear consequences, and both the Central African government and MINUSCA relied on these forces to perform this important coercive, military function. Sangaris departed against the wishes of the government because the FACA had not yet been reconstituted and the country remained under an international weapons ban, limiting its ability to counter armed groups.

Predating the French Sangaris deployment, starting in 2012, the United States had Special Operations Forces, in conjunction with Ugandan forces, in the southeast on a mission to “capture and kill” Joseph Kony. In 2017, the forces abruptly departed, citing cost concerns, without accomplishing either goal. (The military vacuum led to an increase in fighting in the southeast that MINUSCA and the FACA were unable to contain for more than one year, as noted in [Part 3.2](#)). The United States remains a popular actor among our focus group interviewees, but the Trump administration has not expressed interest in helping Central Africa or the UN in general. Several observers noted that as United States involvement in Central Africa decreased, Russian engagement increased.

After the French, American, and Ugandan forces departed Central Africa, by early 2017, the violence resumed, and armed groups asserted control over some 75-80% of the territory. President Touadéra appealed to French President Emmanuel Macron in the second half of 2017 for military aid and, allegedly, Macron suggested that Touadéra turn to President Putin of Russia, which he did.

As the violence spiralled, Putin deployed both official Russian forces and Russian military contractors to train FACA troops, advise President Touadéra, and ensure the personal safety of Touadéra.¹⁶⁹ Several interviewees maintained that Russia has a private bilateral agreement with the Central African Government, but that MINUSCA has not been informed of its contents. One interviewee lamented further, “MINUSCA has no direct contact with the Russian troops. We see them land, talk to armed groups, and take off again. We don’t know the details.” We asked several interviewees what motivates Russia to engage in the Central African Republic. Some suggested maybe natural resources could be of interest, but others pointed out that Russia has diamonds, gold and timber at home and thus questioned why they would travel to one of the poorest and hard-to-access countries in the world for these resources. The answer appears to lie in great power competition. As one interviewee explained, “The Russians don’t need any of the natural resources here. It’s about status.”

169 Kimberly Marten, “Russia’s Use of Semi-State Security Forces: The Case of the Wagner Group,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35, no. 3 (May 4, 2019): 181–204, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1591142>.

Over the course of the last year, France and Russia have engaged in disinformation campaigns about each other. Sometimes they have not invited representatives of the other nation to coordination meetings. In the past, French forces were a regular part of the Bangui Joint Task Force coordination meetings. It was unclear to us how much Russian forces participate in coordination with MINUSCA and other bilateral and multilateral actors in Central Africa.

France and Russia are not the only P-5 actors in the Central African Republic. Interviewees said China has gained the rights to somewhere between 10 and 14 mines. The Chinese Government is also working on reforming the banking sector in Central Africa, evidenced in the massive new building that towers near the Central African National Assembly.

Despite some status-oriented disagreements, all P-5 members share important, underlying interests. They support the current political leadership, agree that stabilisation and peace are important collective goods, and share a common interest in curbing violent religious extremism and terrorism. Cooperation is still possible, and remains a necessary condition for eventual peace in Central Africa.

The underlying condition for MINUSCA to function is agreement among the permanent five members of the UN Security Council (bolstered by regional support). Without P-5 coordination at its foundation, no peacekeeping mission will succeed. The emerging tensions between the P-5 members threaten to undermine the underlying critical common interests they share. The Central African Republic is a poor country and its riches are hard to access, especially as long as armed groups reign.

Despite some status-oriented disagreements, all P-5 members share important, underlying interests. They support the current political leadership, agree that stabilisation and peace are important collective goods, and share a common interest in curbing violent religious extremism and terrorism. Cooperation is still possible, and remains a necessary condition for eventual peace in Central Africa.

PART 6.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Central African Republic has endured a traumatic history, largely at the hands of outside actors. The terrors of the Arab slave trade and French concessionary colonial rule resulted in the death of some half of the population. Violent political transitions and concessionary politics have been the norm since independence in 1960, but Central Africans had worked out many local and national methods to de-escalate and resolve disputes. Beginning in the mid-1990s and often during violent political transitions, small regional and/or international interventions deployed in an effort to assist in re-establishing peace and development (see [Table 1](#)). None was particularly effective. In late 2012, Central Africans turned on each other, in mass killing, rape, pillage, and displacement, and the country teetered on the edge of genocide. In 2014, following the African Regional (MISCA) and bilateral (French Sangaris) missions, the UN deployed the largest of all previous external interventions in Central Africa, MINUSCA, with nearly 15,000 total personnel.

MINUSCA has proven effective in many ways. As one focus group member explained, “The UN has done a lot of good. There are democratic institutions, thanks to the UN. Without MINUSCA we could not even live in Bangui. We could not get food. The UN has renovated buildings and improved others. The UN supported the Khartoum [APPR] accord.”

Although MINUSCA is known in the international press for problems of SEA, that is not what Central Africans discussed in our focus groups. Another focus group member summarised the thoughts of many:

If MINUSCA weren't here, there would be total chaos... MINUSCA is doing many things well: constructing roads and providing transportation, fighting against sexual violence, supporting the return of the state. Their human rights work is excellent. They have good economic revitalisation projects. They support civil society and enable the free press. Journalists are free to say what they want here. It's just the question of security. MINUSCA does not provide security.¹⁷⁰

If we measure MINUSCA's effectiveness against the letter of its mandate, it is apparent that members of MINUSCA have steadily worked toward implementation. The Mission has protected civilians and mitigated the plague of SGBV. MINUSCA has trained thousands of civil servants, police, and military personnel, and built and refurbished key buildings, thus extending state authority by building capacity. UNPOL and MINUSCA forces have engaged in extensive outreach to women and girls and MINUSCA's troops, along with civilian counterparts, are increasing female engagement and leadership, both in the peace operation and in the Central African state. MINUSCA has enabled the delivery of humanitarian assistance, researched and upheld human rights, tracked violations of the arms embargo, and has assiduously worked to establish peace, employing both bottom-up inclusive, and top-down approaches. MINUSCA first worked locally, through the local peace and reconciliation committees, and more recently regionally and nationally, enabling the government and 14 official armed groups to sign and begin implementing the February 2019 APPR.

MINUSCA has worked to fulfil most dimensions of its complex mandate. At the same time, despite important and indisputable points of progress, nearly six years after MINUSCA's deployment, insecurity and instability remain palpable.

MINUSCA has worked to fulfil most dimensions of its complex mandate. At the same time, despite important and indisputable points of progress, nearly six years after MINUSCA's deployment, insecurity and instability remain palpable. The instability means that few Central Africans feel safe enough to invest in businesses, farms, or schools. Without production and learning, there is no tax base or way to build state institutions that might ensure security in the future (see [Figure 1](#)). How might MINUSCA and other external actors reverse the historical trend and assist the Central African Republic in ways that are more effective?

170 Note, however, that some interviewees disagreed with the assessment that journalists are free to report as they want.

In [Part 5](#) of the report, we provided evidence of the six EPON explanatory factors at work: political primacy, mandates and resources, people-centred approaches, legitimacy and credibility, WPS, and coordination. We conclude here by highlighting nine dimensions to consider. We address (1) the mandate’s scope, (2) spoiler and armed group engagement, (3) political primacy and impartiality, (4) support for the APPR, (5) the 2020 elections, (6) the COVID-19 threat (7) P-5 relations, (8) recommendations from Central African civil society, and (9) four options for the Mission’s future.

6.1 MINUSCA’s Mandate

The mandate is very long and comprehensive. Officials in MINUSCA often mused: “The MINUSCA mandate is just too large... we try to solve everything... we focus too much on the mandate... not enough building local capacities.” At the same time, however, many officials also felt that the Mission was not addressing the root causes of the conflict: polarised identity, “getting teachers educated and deployed,” youth recruitment into armed groups, and the political economy of the conflict. Most importantly, without curbing the illicit networks that trade in weapons and minerals, armed groups will continue to gain in number and in strength. The EPON team suggests that the UN Security Council work with MINUSCA, Central African leadership, the World Bank, and regional actors toward a joint strategy and a coordinated system for resource control and management.

6.2 Armed Groups and Spoiler Engagement

In Central Africa today, there are more official armed groups than when MINUSCA arrived, and they hold more territory now than in 2014 (although the government and MINUSCA have managed to gain some control in cities outside of Bangui). The problem of armed group proliferation and expansion is important in the Central African context. However, because this problem exists across several current large, multidimensional peace operations – most notably in Congo, Mali, and Darfur – it is not clearly a Central African, isolated domestic issue. The phenomenon of increasing armed group strength appears to be emerging as a systemic or structural one, and thus merits further EPON analysis and policy attention.

Another point for both specific and general consideration is how to manage spoilers to peace agreements. When non-state armed groups sign a peace accord, and then take actions against that accord, they move into the category of “spoiler.”¹⁷¹ All of the “big five” UN missions are confronting the problem of how best to manage spoilers to the peace processes (especially those who are motivated more by a financial than a political agenda).

171 Stephen John Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes,” *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 5–53, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539366>.

MINUSCA has been conflicted in terms of how best to manage armed groups and spoilers. On the one hand, commendably, the first impulse has been to pursue “political primacy” (see [Part 5.1](#)). On the other hand, MINUSCA has been compelled to resort to the use of force to protect civilians against armed groups and spoilers. The force has had to assume a very robust posture since many of the regional MISCA troops folded into MINUSCA (instead of possibly remaining separate, with a use-of-force mandate), and even more so after the departure of the French Sangaris in late 2016, and then the United States and Ugandan forces in early 2017 (see [Part 5.6c](#)).

Citing successful manoeuvres in Bambari and Bria to neutralise (chase out) armed groups from the town centres, several focus group participants said that there is a common perception that MINUSCA could defeat the armed groups if it chose to do so (and they were surprised it chose not to). At the same time, many mention the unsuccessful “Sukula” Mission in the PK-5 neighbourhood in Bangui in April 2018, which resulted in dozens of deaths and widespread anger against MINUSCA. (Note, however, that a somewhat similar mission to Sukula in early January 2020 in the PK-5 neighbourhood in Bangui by the Portuguese QRF was successful.¹⁷²)

Over time, as state capacity increases, the Mission may help the government to extend its authority and control over more territory. In the meantime, unless something drastic changes, the government and the UN have little choice but to coexist with armed groups in this state of insecurity.

MINUSCA has successfully prioritised protecting civilians and establishing local peace agreements rather than liberating territory from armed groups. As Zahar and Mechoulan explain in a 2017 paper, “MINUSCA’s strategy to support local and national mediation could become a pilot project for similar engagements in other contexts.”¹⁷³ Peacekeepers by definition and design lack the capacity and resources to wage offensive, counterinsurgency campaigns against armed groups on the side of governments using a “clear, hold, build” strategy. Such counterinsurgency campaigns often result in sharp increases in civilian casualties and displacement, which are counter to UN interests and ethics. Moreover, because the Central African state and the UN lack the capacity to “hold” territory, even if the UN were to try to shoot its way to clearing territory, the same or other armed groups would probably fill the vacuum, or simply be displaced elsewhere. Considering these factors, we reason the Mission is correct to focus on political, mediation-oriented avenues for civilian protection, local peace agreements, building and extending state capacity, and security sector reform. Over time, as state capacity increases, the Mission may help the government to extend its authority and control over more territory. In

172 Ahmed Idris, “Central African Republic: UN Steps in for Peace Efforts,” *Al Jazeera*, January 1, 2020.

173 Zahar and Mechoulan, “Peace by Pieces? Local Mediation and Sustainable Peace in the Central African Republic,” p. 38.

the meantime, unless something drastic changes, the government and the UN have little choice but to coexist with armed groups in this state of insecurity.

6.3 MINUSCA, Political Primacy, and Impartiality

Robust spoiler management leads directly to concerns about violating the three foundational rules of peacekeeping: consent of the parties, impartiality, and the limited use of force.¹⁷⁴ Dating back to peacekeeping's founding after World War II, the principles are the precursor to today's concept of "political primacy."¹⁷⁵ Several MINUSCA officials expressed concern about undermining the principles of peacekeeping. At the same time, however, spoilers have been spoiling the peace; there is a legitimately elected government in Central Africa; the government does not have the capacity to secure the country; MINUSCA has a mandate to use force to protect civilians; and MINUSCA has the only sizeable military presence in the country. These factors tend to go against foregrounding basic peacekeeping principles or political primacy.

We recommend greater awareness of the slippery slope toward counterinsurgency, and away from the basic principles of peacekeeping, because most contemporary counterinsurgencies are neither effective nor successful.

Compounding the general challenges of pursuing political primacy, many Central Africans in our focus groups expressed the belief that MINUSCA *ought* to be using force: "MINUSCA should impose peace by using force." Another participant explained further, "Most Central Africans do not like MINUSCA because there are cases when they don't intervene."¹⁷⁶ Central Africans appear to view MINUSCA's use of force as legitimate. A CLA elaborated:

Being part of MINUSCA and being Central African, I think that MINUSCA has to adapt its mandate to the real needs of the population. Peace has to be enforced when it is necessary and where there is a real threat to peace and to security of civilians. Protection of civilians has to be more robust when necessary. There are some armed groups who do not want peace, because they profit from the war economy. This is why politicians and MINUSCA should only speak to armed groups who really want peace, and enforce peace

174 Lise Howard, *Power in Peacekeeping*.

175 António Guterres, "Action for Peacekeeping," March 2018, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p>.

176 Several focus group members also accused MINUSCA battalions from Christian-majority countries of siding with Central African Christians and Anti-Balaka groups, and battalions from Muslim-majority states of siding with Muslims and ex-Séléka groups.

where it is necessary against the others. In Central Africa at this moment, we need peace enforcement if we want peace to succeed.

In other words, both the circumstances in Central Africa and Central African citizens themselves are pushing MINUSCA toward privileging force over politics and diplomacy. However, we recommend greater awareness of the slippery slope toward counterinsurgency, and away from the basic principles of peacekeeping, because most contemporary counterinsurgencies are neither effective nor successful.

6.4 APPR Support

The recent peace agreement, the APPR, is a reason for hope, but it is fragile. Most of our interviewees felt that the APPR presents a positive framework, especially because it is the first agreement to enjoy not only armed group but also neighbouring state and regional buy-in (see [Part 5.1](#)). However, many interviewees were concerned about the processes of DDRR, and the mixed armed group-FACA security units (USMS). Many members of our focus groups did not approve the inclusion of armed groups in the government, and felt that civilians had to suffer more impunity as a price for peace. At the same time, however, interviewees were unclear about viable alternatives. There are no easy solutions to peace/justice trade-offs, but the Mission's new strategy of building peace processes both top-down and bottom-up is logical and appears to be bearing fruit.

There are no easy solutions to peace/justice trade-offs, but the Mission's new strategy of building peace processes both top-down and bottom-up is logical and appears to be bearing fruit.

6.5 The 2020 Elections

The next Presidential and Parliamentary elections are to be held in December 2020, with the second round of Presidential elections (if needed) in early 2021. Many scholars and policy-makers have warned that elections in already-fragile states can be a destabilising cause for war.¹⁷⁷ Former authoritarian rulers and coup-winners Bozizé and Djotodia have returned to foment discord within their historical bases of support. As one focus group member explained, “The elections will be disrupted by violence. There is a coalition of rebels but they are not all on the same page. I think we are heading toward a crisis. Everything will be demanded of Touadéra,

¹⁷⁷ Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (MIT Press, 2007).

but not he, nor the government, nor MINUSCA, nor can the EU make the elections successful.” Another participant warned, “The armed groups do not want elections. They are going to resist.” The elections are an important cause for concern.

As of November 2019, MINUSCA has the mandate, but not sufficient funding, to assist in holding free and fair elections.

As of November 2019, MINUSCA has the mandate, but not sufficient funding, to assist in holding free and fair elections. As of May 2020, the Coronavirus threatens elections the world over. We deem that Central Africa, MINUSCA, and the EU have little choice but to continue elections preparations as best possible. Postponing or cancelling would produce even less trust in and legitimacy for the current authorities. However, the Mission must invest more in outreach and strategic communications to offset rampant and destabilising disinformation campaigns.

6.6 The Coronavirus and Peacekeeping

The world suffers from a lack of reliable scientific information about the Coronavirus, which increases the possibility of dis- and mis-information campaigns.¹⁷⁸ A recent messaging effort in Central Africa sought to blame the Coronavirus on MINUSCA, dubbing it the “Minuscavirus.”¹⁷⁹ The Central African Minister of Health has issued a code of conduct for reporting on the outbreak responsibly, among other efforts to counteract the “infodemic.”

These two factors – Central African historical distrust of disease-bearing foreigners and the fact that UN peacekeepers have spread disease elsewhere – contribute to growing tensions between Central Africans and foreigners associated with the UN.

Central Africans have a historical and justifiable social distrust in external actors given that 100 years ago, disease spread by foreigners contributed in part to the eradication of some half of the population (Part 3.1 a). It is also true that UN peacekeepers inadvertently brought cholera

178 France24, “Conspiracy Theories and Fake News: Fighting the COVID-19 ‘Infodemic,’” April 26, 2020.

179 Jack Losh, “Foreigners Targeted in Central African Republic as Coronavirus Fears Grow,” *The Guardian*, April 10, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/10/foreigners-central-african-republic-coronavirus-fears-grow>.

to Haiti, which resulted in the deaths of thousands of Haitians.¹⁸⁰ These two factors – Central African historical distrust of disease-bearing foreigners and the fact that UN peacekeepers have spread disease elsewhere – contribute to growing tensions between Central Africans and foreigners associated with the UN, regardless of any disinformation.

MINUSCA’s expressions of understanding and solidarity with Central Africans represent important steps toward building necessary mutual trust and cooperation.

The DSRSG in charge of humanitarian coordination, Denise Brown, explained, “Of course there’s frustration. People’s everyday lives are really difficult. They suffer from armed conflict, tuberculosis, horrible malaria, diarrhoea, and now all of a sudden there’s something called the coronavirus that might arrive and infect lots of people... All of that contributes to tension. We need to understand that tension.”¹⁸¹ MINUSCA’s expressions of understanding and solidarity with Central Africans represent important steps toward building necessary mutual trust and cooperation.

According to the Central African health authorities and the World Health Organization, an Italian citizen infected with Coronavirus carried it to the Central African Republic on March 7, 2020.¹⁸² The Coronavirus and resulting deaths have mainly hit countries where people move frequently for work and tourism, and where many people have comorbidities, such as heart disease and diabetes. At the time of this writing, people in countries with less contact with the outside world, such as Central Africa, have been safer than in the more developed world. Central Africa also has the advantages of low population density and a young population. Moreover, the African continent in general has more recent experience in effectively managing infectious diseases such as Ebola.¹⁸³ The situation, however, may change.

The only way for more people in the world to be safe from the virus is for a vaccine to be available to everyone who may want one, that it be distributed equitably, and at a low or no cost. Such an occurrence, however, may be a long time away. In the short term, peacekeepers are taking every precaution to prevent the spread of disease. As the Head of UN Peacekeeping, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, has explained, peacekeepers must stay the course.¹⁸⁴ The alternative of peacekeepers departing conflict zones would undoubtedly be even more destabilising and result in more deaths.

180 Jonathan M. Katz, “UN Admits Role in Cholera Epidemic in Haiti,” *New York Times*, August 17 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/18/world/americas/united-nations-haiti-cholera.html>.

181 Jack Losh, “Foreigners Targeted in Central African Republic as Coronavirus Fears Grow.”

182 “Central African Republic Confirms First Coronavirus Case - WHO,” Reuters, March 14, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-centralafrica-idUSL8N2B62KD>.

183 “Mapping COVID-19 Risk Factors,” Africa Center for Strategic Studies (blog), accessed June 19, 2020, <https://africa-center.org/spotlight/mapping-risk-factors-spread-covid-19-africa/>.

184 Jean-Pierre Lacroix, “UN Peacekeepers Must Stay the Course,” April 23, 2020, The Global Observatory, International Peace Institute. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/by/jean-pierre-lacroix/>.

6.7 The P-5

As it stands now in Central Africa, the permanent five members of the UN Security Council are unified in their support for the elections, the APPR, and the incumbent government, despite status-oriented disagreements (see [Part 5.6c](#)). Although tensions between the US, Russia, and China are on the rise, the three powers share important common interests in Central Africa and in fragile states in general. For example, they all agree that peace is a collective good; stable, open markets are effective drivers of development; and domestic and global institutions should work to curb violent extremism and terrorism. This unity is of critical importance for peace in the Central African Republic and elsewhere. It is also critical that the P-5 work toward greater transparency in their political and economic dealings in Central Africa if they want MINUSCA to implement its mandate effectively and successfully. A successful peace operation lies in everyone's official state interest.

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6.8 Central African Voices

In this report, we have sought to gather the evaluations of Central Africans themselves on the effectiveness of MINUSCA. Central Africans offered a wide variety of opinions and ideas for MINUSCA. We present here a brief summary of suggestions not yet made elsewhere in this report:

Assisting Youth

- "We need more support for young victims. They will become perpetrators tomorrow... there should be two options if you're a victim: go to justice or to a fund."
- "We would like an international activist exchange program to learn how activism is done in other countries."
- "There is a general problem of a common national conscience. People should ask themselves more: what can I personally do for helping my country in the direction of peace? The best way to develop such a conscience is to develop a national education policy."
- "Youth unemployment is a huge challenge - these unemployed youth are very vulnerable to armed group recruitment. [MINUSCA should] focus on them."

Collaborating on Capacity Building

- “MINUSCA should collaborate more with the population, and explain better what they are doing.”
- “MINUSCA should train more community and administrative leaders.”
- “Many people do not have ID cards. We need a national registration.”
- “Perhaps MINUSCA could help us more with roads, water, electricity, and education.”
- “Can MINUSCA help the government to facilitate the return of the displaced?”
- “MINUSCA should stop hiring only cleaners and chauffeurs. Central Africans can do more than that.”

Bolstering Security

- “We need FACA to ensure security along the transhumance corridors.”
- “The cause of the arms embargo was that there were too many weapons. The state could not control the flow, and the population should not be over-armed. But today people still possess weapons [while the FACA do not]. There should be serious DDR so that the weapons are not in neighbourhoods. Only then should we speak of lifting the embargo.”
- “MINUSCA should deploy more police closer to the population.”
- “Patrols of UNPOL are an important factor for bringing security to Bangui because the population of Central Africa does not trust FSI and FACA yet.”
- “Many seem to ignore the problem of human trafficking. We want to stop that from happening. Traffickers use the fragility in Central Africa and move across Sudan, Libya and Europe.”
- “The Jihadists are coming here. There aren’t many yet, but it’s happening... MINUSCA is not prepared.”

6.9 Final Reflections and Four Options for MINUSCA’s Future

Some Central Africans and international actors have, in effect, asked MINUSCA to substitute for the Central African state. This peace operation cannot perform such a role, because it does not have the mandate, the means, or the legitimacy. MINUSCA does have the capacity to *assist* the state in re-building. As one UN official explained, “The presence of the state opens the possibility of stability. That is why we are focused on increasing the state presence, through prefectures, justice and corrections, and deploying FACA and FSI to help open markets, schools, and health clinics.” However, the end of the Mission is not in sight.

In terms of monopolising legitimate violence to establish a state, MINUSCA, the FACA, and the armed groups all remain weak. Although MINUSCA is beginning to make headway in protecting civilians using a robust posture, it is difficult to ignore that the Mission was most effective in 2014–2016, when it was accompanied by a separate military presence (with a limited mandate to attack anyone who attacked civilians). This division of labour allowed MINUSCA to focus on the more political, institutional, and developmental aspects of peacekeeping.

MINUSCA has saved countless civilian lives, helped to ensure the transitional administration in 2014–16, and is assisting in the extension of state authority – the three top tasks in its mandate.

Since 2019, all members of MINUSCA’s senior leadership – the SRSG, DSRSGs, Police and Force Commanders – are new to their offices, and many members of the Senior Management Team are women. EPON is encouraged by the possibility that the new and diverse leadership might bring new energy and ideas. A recent report by the International Crisis Group notes progress in APPR implementation.¹⁸⁵ MINUSCA has saved countless civilian lives, helped to ensure the transitional administration in 2014–16, and is assisting in the extension of state authority – the three top tasks in its mandate. A senior Central African official explained, “Do you know that without MINUSCA, today we would not be talking about CAR as a country? These men and women give their best to help us have a country.” Although MINUSCA has faced and will continue to confront many challenges, the Mission remains a vital force for peace and stability in the Central African Republic and in the region. We sketch four possible options for MINUSCA’s future below.

1. Downsize or withdraw immediately

This option would open up a power vacuum with dangerous consequences. MINUSCA helped to prevent a possible genocide against the Muslim community, but would-be *genocidaires* are still active.¹⁸⁶ On the other side, Muslim extremist movements have gained a foothold in Africa, from Al Shabaab in the East to Boko Haram, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and others in the West. The Central African Republic lies at the halfway point between East and West Africa and it is rich in natural resources, including the uranium used to make France’s first nuclear weapon. For now, the groups in the East and West are not united, and the world must prevent such an occurrence. We do not view withdrawal as a realistic option. The other three options, however, are.

185 ICG, “In Search of the State in the Central African Republic,” March 13, 2020.

186 Ty McCormick, “One Day We Will Start a Big War,” *Foreign Policy*, February 5, 2017.

2. Stay the course

MINUSCA was designed with stabilisation in mind – indeed, the word is used in its very title. MINUSCA has stabilised Central Africa. It could continue on this course, preventing high levels of civilian deaths and slowly extending state authority. The end, however, is not in sight.

3. External partners step up

Ending the conflict in Central Africa in the near future would require external partners to step up, both economically and militarily. In terms of the economy, external partners could rein in the illicit trade in natural resources that fuels the armed groups (and corruption), while bolstering economic development, such as they did in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Militarily, all of the recent large, multidimensional peacekeeping missions that successfully implemented their mandates and exited were co-deployed with formal, parallel military forces that provided spoilers with clear consequences for violent behaviour (this pattern occurred in Eastern Slavonia/Croatia, Timor Leste, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Liberia). France played such a role in Central Africa from 2014-16, and may once again, but its history with Central Africans is fraught. An impartial, French-speaking country with significant air capacity (Canada, for example) could effectively fill this void, and allow peacekeepers to focus on what peacekeepers have tended to perform best, which is not military operations, but rather assisting with state-building. This formula for the division of labour is what has worked most effectively in the past, but it may not be an option for MINUSCA.

4. Build and augment from within

Alternatively, MINUSCA could augment both its communications and spoiler management strategies from within. MINUSCA has a legitimacy deficit with Central Africans that it must take seriously if it wants to foster political progress. MINUSCA could also work more with the government and society to foster greater awareness of Muslim marginalisation and enhance Muslim inclusion (especially with regard to the upcoming elections). In terms of managing spoilers using military coercion, MINUSCA's Portuguese QRF has proven effective, but it is very small. Augmenting MINUSCA's compellent capacity from within (rather than dividing the labour with an external, non-UN force, as in option 3 above) could provide a workable solution, allowing time for the peace deal to take hold, and eventually paving the way for MINUSCA's departure from a peaceful and prosperous Central African Republic.

The Central African Republic is emerging from a long history of slave raiding and trading, French concessionary colonialism, and authoritarian political rule. In December 2012, tensions escalated into civil war characterised by sexual and gender-based violence and near-genocidal fighting. The United Nations Security Council authorised the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) to deploy in September 2014, under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

The Mission has the most complex of all current peacekeeping mandates. Of the three primary tasks in MINUSCA's original mandate: (1) protecting civilians, (2) overseeing a political transition, and (3) extending state authority, the operation has fulfilled the second task, and is effectively working toward achieving the first and third. The Mission has helped to avert wide-scale killings and possible genocide, mitigate sexual violence, monitor human rights, protect vital humanitarian aid delivery, enable the development of female participation and leadership, build state capacity (especially in policing and justice), and enable democratic elections.

In a creative, "bottom-up" approach to peace, the 15,000 members of MINUSCA have helped to establish dozens of local peace and reconciliation committees. Regional powers and MINUSCA have complemented this approach with a "top-down," high-level, peace process that resulted in the landmark February 2019 Peace Accord. Several groups, however, continue to spoil the peace. Armed groups control 75-80% of this lush, resource-rich, and land-locked country. The political economy of the conflict tends toward strengthening armed groups and spoilers. MINUSCA remains unpopular among many Central Africans. Dis- and misinformation about the upcoming 2020-21 elections and COVID-19 continue to undermine progress. MINUSCA is helping to stabilise – providing a vital service to the country, region, and world – but it will be difficult to fully implement its mandate and depart a peaceful and prosperous Central Africa anytime soon.