MEDIA COVERAGE OF MALI'S PRIME MINISTER CHOGUEL MAÏGA DISMISSAL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RFI, RT, AND XINHUA

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Abstract

This study, based on Galtung's theoretical framework of peace/conflict journalism and war/violence journalism, conducts a comparative analysis of the coverage by three internationally influential state-affiliated media outlets—Radio France Internationale (RFI), Russia Today (RT), and Xinhua News Agency—on Mali's 2024 political crisis, centering on the dismissal of Prime Minister Choguel Maïga. The study finds significant differences in narrative strategies among the three: RFI adopts a conflict-driven frame, emphasizing political repression and instability; RT constructs the crisis as part of Mali's assertion of sovereignty and distancing from Western influence; while Xinhua maintains a restrained, factual tone, focusing on elite political maneuvering and avoiding discussion of social impacts or reconciliation processes. These editorial choices not only reflect ideological positioning but also reveal the essential nature of media as tools of geopolitical soft power. This research underscores the importance of critically examining foreign media narratives on African political affairs and highlights the urgent need for African-centered storytelling within the global information order.

Keywords: *Peace/conflict journalism, war/violence journalism, media framing, Mali, Choguel Maïga, Radio France Internationale, Russia Today, Xinhua News Agency, political crisis, geopolitical influence.*

INTRODUCTION

The Sahel region, particularly Mali, has long been mired in political instability, rooted in neo-colonial exploitation and the struggle for control over critical resources. The 2024 dismissal of Prime Minister Choguel Maïga represents a pivotal moment in this ongoing political crisis, revealing

the rift between the oppressive ruling elite and a populace yearning for change. This crisis has been further exacerbated by imperialist interventions, highlighting class struggle within Mali and its pursuit of genuine sovereignty. While media outlets like Radio France Internationale (RFI) often align with imperialist forces and propagate narratives that support neo-colonial structures, others such as Russia Today (RT) and Xinhua News Agency offer alternative perspectives that emphasize Mali's assertions of sovereignty and resistance to Western influence. However, it is important to note that although these outlets provide counter-narratives, they still operate within the geopolitical strategies of Russia and China—each with its own strategic interests in Mali's repositioning. Thus, despite diverging from Western narratives, these media reflect strategic goals aimed at advancing their respective national interests, intensifying the geopolitical competition for influence in the Sahel region.

Renowned peace studies scholar Johan Galtung introduced the concepts of "peace journalism" and "conflict journalism" to distinguish between media approaches that perpetuate conflict versus those that seek resolution. War journalism tends to focus on violence, escalate conflict narratives, and present political struggles in zero-sum terms, while peace journalism offers a more nuanced and balanced depiction of conflict, emphasizing root causes and advocating for reconciliation and transformation (Galtung, Peace Journalism – A Challenge, 2002). This study adopts Galtung's theoretical framework to critically assess the reporting of RFI, RT, and Xinhua on Mali's political crisis, with particular focus on the dismissal of Prime Minister Maïga and the broader political dynamics underlying the event. By analyzing these outlets' coverage through the lenses of peace/conflict journalism and war/violence journalism, the study aims to understand how RFI, RT, and Xinhua shape perceptions of Mali's political landscape.

Through this focused analysis, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how international media influence public discourse surrounding Mali's political transformations and the complex web of international relations that accompany them.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE

This study focuses on how Radio France Internationale (RFI), Russia Today (RT), and Xinhua News Agency construct the image of Mali's political

crisis, particularly following the 2024 dismissal of Prime Minister Choguel Maïga, through the lens of peace/conflict journalism and war/violence journalism. Given the international significance of Mali's political turmoil and its ties with global powers such as France, China, and Russia, understanding how RFI, RT, and Xinhua frame these events is crucial for evaluating the broader influence of media on public opinion and international diplomacy.

The research aims to examine the narratives of these three selected media outlets and identify potential biases and emphasized perspectives— whether conflict-driven or solution-oriented. By applying Galtung's journalism model, the study will reveal how these media narratives may shape international perceptions of Mali's evolving political landscape.

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how international media construct narratives of political instability in Africa, and the potential impact of such narratives on public opinion and policymaking. The study delves into the role of journalism in conflict-prone regions and explores how different approaches to reporting influence global discourse on fragile state governance and international relations.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to critically examine how RFI, RT, and Xinhua frame political developments in Mali, particularly in the context of the 2024 dismissal of Prime Minister Choguel Maïga. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. *Analyze the application of peace/conflict journalism and war/violence journalism in these media's reporting on Mali's political crisis, focusing on how different journalistic approaches are used to report on political developments, military coups, and Mali's international relations with France, Russia, and China.*

2. *Examine the narratives and framing strategies used by RFI, RT, and Xinhua, evaluating how each media outlet constructs its portrayal of Mali's military regime and its relationships with global powers (particularly France, Russia, and China). This includes analyzing tone, language, and framing strategies to understand how political dynamics are presented.*

3. *Identify patterns and biases in the coverage of RFI, RT, and Xinhua, particularly how they emphasize or downplay certain aspects of Mali's political dynamics and foreign relations, with a focus on potential biases in reporting on the military regime and its international engagements.*

4. *Provide a comparative analysis of RFI, RT, and Xinhua's coverage of the Mali political crisis, highlighting how these three media outlets construct distinct frameworks from other international media in presenting the situation.*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have examined the application and impact of peace journalism in various contexts. The study by García-Perdomo, Harlow, and Brown (2022) investigated the reporting of the Colombian peace process by foreign and local media, revealing key differences in approach: foreign media tended to adopt peace journalism, while local newspapers placed greater emphasis on war journalism. Adegbola and Zhang (2020) studied Nigerian journalists' engagement with peace journalism, taking into account factors such as empathy, perceived reporting effectiveness, journalistic roles, and training. Their findings indicated a general inclination among Nigerian journalists toward peace journalism principles, with personal traits, background influences, and training playing important roles in fostering commitment to peace-oriented reporting. Bhowmik and Fisher (2023) conducted a textual analysis of CNN's coverage of the May 2021 Israel-Palestine conflict, using Galtung's theoretical framework. They found that CNN predominantly employed a war journalism approach, but the increasing focus on Palestinian human rights gradually shifted the framing toward peace journalism, demonstrating how counter-narratives can influence media coverage in conflict settings. In a different context, Ersoy and İşeri (2023) analyzed Russia's TASS and Turkey's Anadolu Agency coverage of the Syrian crisis through Galtung's lens. Their study highlighted how these state-controlled institutions, representing non-liberal regimes, constructed crisis narratives centered on state interests, thereby exacerbating conflict and limiting the potential for peace narratives. At the same time, Hussain and Ahmad (2022) explored the perspectives of journalists in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, emphasizing the complex relationship between war journalism and peace journalism. These findings align with Mora's (2020) study on media coverage of social protests in

Colombia, which, while primarily employing a peace journalism framework, also noted shifts toward war journalism, revealing the complex interplay of framing techniques in conflict reporting. This view is echoed by Gouse, Valentin-Llopis, Perry, and Nyamwange (2019), who examined Nigerian journalists' commitment to peace journalism, focusing on empathy, competence, perceived role, and training. Their findings underscored strong alignment with peace journalism principles and highlighted the importance of empathy and training in fostering peace-oriented reporting. Lynch and Freear (2023) conducted extensive research on journalism in Afghanistan before the Taliban's resurgence, applying Galtung's peace journalism model. Their study found that war journalism indicators were more prominent, emphasizing how media coverage often reinforces conflict-driven narratives and shapes public responses to violence. In terms of methodology, both My (2023) and Burr (2017) employed content analysis to study the application of peace journalism in media coverage. Focusing on the Westgate attack, they revealed significant differences between peace and war journalism in terms of framing techniques, demonstrating how such frames shape public perceptions of violent events. Similarly, Akinro (2016) examined the media's role in the Boko Haram conflict, showing how coverage could either exacerbate conflict or serve as a tool for peace advocacy. Ha et al. (2020) analyzed the U.S.-China trade conflict, showing how media framing of economic disputes can impact geopolitical relations. In contrast, Mazahir (2013) conducted a comprehensive review of war journalism, exploring how media coverage of major global events often amplifies conflict narratives and highlights the role of sensationalism. These findings collectively emphasize the media's significant influence on public understanding of war and peace, showing how different framing approaches can either hinder or promote peace efforts. Ratnam (2014) argued that while foreign media often adopt peace journalism frameworks, local newspapers tend to rely more on war journalism. This contrast highlights the influence of local and international perspectives on media narratives in conflict reporting. Most of the reviewed studies apply Johan Galtung's peace journalism framework to analyze media reporting in various conflict scenarios. However, some also explore the concept of war journalism, studying how media coverage is shaped by conflict-related dynamics and

journalistic practices. AYTEMĠZ (2020) analyzed the media portrayal of Turkey's "Wise People Committee" (WPC) during the peace process from a war journalism perspective. The study found that although peace journalism was predominant, media coverage often reflected party bias, suggesting that elite-driven perspectives may undermine the inclusive potential of peace journalism. Likewise, Jehangir (2023) examined how Pakistan's English-language media covered Afghan refugees, revealing the dominance of conflict-escalating frames and inflammatory content. The reliance on government and military sources highlighted the political influence on framing, aligning with war journalism indicators such as terrorism and nationalism. This literature review provides a solid foundation for understanding peace journalism, war journalism, and media framing—key concepts in analyzing how RFI, RT, and Xinhua reported on Mali's political and social landscape following the dismissal of Prime Minister Choguel Maïga. Peace journalism advocates for balanced, context-sensitive reporting that promotes reconciliation, while war journalism tends to emphasize conflict-driven narratives that may deepen polarization and fuel violence. Building on existing comparative media analysis research, this study systematically explores how peace/conflict journalism and war/violence journalism are applied in RFI, RT, and Xinhua's reporting on Mali and its diplomatic relations with France, Russia, and China.

CORE FRAMEWORK AND SUPPORTING THEORIES

This study primarily adopts Johan Galtung's theory of peace/conflict journalism as its analytical framework to assess media coverage of the political crisis in Mali. It is further supported by Framing Theory and the Political Context Model as background analytical tools, helping to explain how each media outlet's narrative strategies reflect deeper geopolitical interests and strategic positioning.

FRAMING THEORY

The concept of framing is essential for understanding how media construct narratives and shape audience perception. Although definitions of "frame" vary across theoretical perspectives, this study draws on Entman's (1993) comprehensive definition, which elaborates on how framing operates in communication. Framing functions across four dimensions:

1. Communicator – the frame originates from the communicator's belief system and decisions about what to emphasize;

2. *Text – the frame is embedded through language, tone, and structure;*
3. *Receiver – audiences interpret and make sense of the message, though their understanding may diverge from the communicator's intent;*
4. *Culture – frames are rooted in shared cultural contexts and represent broadly held cognitive structures.*

Framing involves selecting, emphasizing, and omitting certain elements to construct arguments about the causes, evaluations, and solutions to a given issue. This process operates on two levels:

- *Cognitive – frames exist in the minds of journalists, shaping how they interpret and present events;*
- *Textual – frames appear in the narrative itself, where journalists highlight and emphasize certain aspects of reality.*

Entman (1993) summarized framing as "selecting and highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation." This theory is highly relevant to the current study, as it examines how RFI, RT, and Xinhua frame Mali's political and social dynamics following the dismissal of Prime Minister Choguel Maïga—particularly focusing on how geopolitical and cultural contexts influence their narratives. By analyzing these reports, the study seeks to reveal how the descriptions offered by these media outlets reflect broader political dynamics in Mali, shaped by the interests, historical ties, and cultural influence of France, Russia, and China.

GALTUNG'S PEACE/CONFLICT JOURNALISM AND WAR/VIOLENCE JOURNALISM THEORY

Norwegian sociologist and peace studies pioneer Johan Galtung made groundbreaking contributions to the field of conflict resolution. In 1998, he proposed a foundational theoretical framework that categorizes journalistic reporting into two paradigms: Peace Journalism and War Journalism (also known as Peace/Conflict Journalism and War/Violence Journalism). Galtung argues that journalists, through their framing choices, play a crucial role in either escalating conflict or supporting peacebuilding. Peace journalism upholds non-partisanship and inclusivity, aiming to represent all stakeholders—especially ordinary people—give voice to the voiceless,

expose structural causes of conflict, foster empathy, and promote reconciliation and conflict resolution processes. In contrast, war journalism tends to align with elite interests, often serving as a mouthpiece for official narratives. It emphasizes violence and simplifies conflicts into binary, zero-sum games. This paradigm focuses on immediate events and visible wounds while neglecting deeper structural issues and long-term peacebuilding efforts.

Peace/conflict journalism	*War/violence journalism*
I. PEACE / CONFLICT-ORIENTED • *explore conflict formation, x parties, y goals, z issues, general "win, win" orientation.* • *Open space, open time; causes and outcomes anywhere, also in history/culture making conflicts transparent.* • *giving voice to all parties; empathy, understanding.* • *see conflict/war as problem, focus on conflict creativity.* • *humanization of all sides; more so the worse the weapons.* • *being proactive: prevention before any violence/war occurs.* • *focus on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/culture).*	**I. WAR/VIOLENCE – ORIENTED** • *Focus on conflict arena, 2 parties, one goal (win), war general zero-sum orientation.* • *closed space, closed time; causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone.* • *making wars opaque/secret.* • *"Us-them" journalism, propaganda, voice, for us".* • *see "them" as the problem, focus on who prevails in war.* • *dehumanization of "them"; more so the worse the weapon.* • *reactive: waiting for violence before reporting.* • *focus only on visible effect of violence (killed, wounded and material damage).*
II. TRUTH-ORIENTED • *expose untruths on all sides.* • *uncover all cover-ups.*	**II. PROPAGANDA-ORIENTED** • *expose "their" untruths.*

	• help "our" cover-ups/lies.
III. PEOPLE-ORIENTED • *focus on suffering all over; on women, aged, children, giving voice to the voiceless.* • *give name to all evil-doers.* • *focus on people peace-makers.*	**III. ELITE-ORIENTED** • *focus on "our" suffering; on able-bodied elite males, being their mouth-piece.* • *give name of their evil-doer.* • *focus on elite peace-makers.*
IV. SOLUTION-ORIENTED • *peace = nonviolence + creativity.* • *highlight peace initiatives, also to prevent more war.* • *focus on structure, culture the peaceful society.* • *Aftermath: resolution, reconstruction, reconciliation.*	**IV. IVICTORY-ORIENTED** • *peace = victory + cease-fire.* • *conceal peace-initiative, before victory is at hand.* • *focus on treaty, institution the controlled society.* • *leaving for another war, return if the old flares up*

This typology provides a concrete analytical framework for evaluating media coverage. In this study, the four dimensions of Galtung's model—conflict orientation, truth orientation, people/elite orientation, and solution orientation—serve as the core criteria for assessing how each media outlet frames the dismissal of Choguel Maïga and Mali's broader political crisis. By examining the reporting characteristics of RFI, RT, and Xinhua—including the causes they emphasize, the sources they adopt, and their tendency to either promote reconciliation or escalate conflict—this study can determine whether their coverage aligns more closely with the paradigm of peace journalism or war journalism. This structured analytical approach not only reveals the tone and content characteristics of the reporting but also helps uncover the underlying editorial values and geopolitical alignments embedded within each outlet's narrative.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT MODEL

First introduced by Wolfsfeld (1997), emphasizes the competition among political actors to influence media narratives as part of a broader struggle

*for political dominance. This model identifies two key dimensions: structural accessibility, which determines whose voices and perspectives gain visibility in media coverage, and cultural significance, which focuses on how events are framed to align with broader political or societal narratives. The creation of media frames, according to Wolfsfeld, is a dynamic process shaped by professional norms (e.g., journalistic practices) and political agendas, resulting in a "clash of frames" as competing parties attempt to shape how events are understood. In recent years, Wolfsfeld, Sheafer, and Althaus (2022) introduced the Politics-Media-Politics (PMP) Approach, which builds upon the original model to provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamic interactions between political systems and media environments. The PMP Approach posits that the role of media in politics is best understood through two central propositions, one is Politics First Proposition: According to the Politics First Proposition, political contexts determine the communication systems, values, practices, and resources that govern media production. France, with its historical ties to Mali as a former colonizer, maintains a dominant position in the media space through outlets like **RFI** and **France 24**, shaping public discourse in line with its geopolitical interests, particularly in promoting narratives of stability and counterterrorism Mihoubi (2019). China, on the other hand, has leveraged its soft power to influence media in Mali by investing in media infrastructure, training journalists, and broadcasting Chinese content, thus aligning media narratives with its broader foreign policy goals of fostering Sino-African relations and presenting itself as a development partner (Mihoubi, 2019). Russia's influence, driven by a desire to challenge Western dominance, is increasingly evident through outlets like **RT** and **Sputnik**, which selectively amplify anti-French sentiment and support Russian geopolitical interests. Russia, however, is not directly responsible for creating the anti-French sentiment but has been leveraging it to its advantage, using tools like troll factories and fake accounts to further spread disinformation (Cognard, 2022). The second is Media Selection and Transformation Proposition: According to the Media Selection and Transformation Proposition, these media outlets do not merely reflect political realities but actively select and transform political events to serve their respective national interests. French media, for instance, frame Mali's political crisis through the lens of insecurity and anti-jihadist intervention,*

*reinforcing France's role as a stabilizing force in the region. Chinese media, by contrast, frame political events as part of a broader narrative of development and mutual benefit, positioning China as a trusted partner in Mali's growth. Russian media, leveraging contribution to reshaping Mali's political discourse by challenging Western narratives and promoting Russia as an alternative to French influence. Through these strategic media actions, France, China, and Russia actively transform public opinion in Mali, influencing not only how events are perceived domestically but also how they shape international political dynamics. This updated framework provides a comprehensive basis for analyzing how **RFI**, **RT** and **Xinhua** construct narratives about the Mali government regime and their relationships with France, Russia and China, while considering the influence of globalized media environments and digital platforms.*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*This study employs a qualitative content analysis to examine how **RFI**, **RT** and **Xinhua** frames the specific event of Prime Minister Choguel Maïga's dismissal, focusing on its political and social implications for Mali. The research applies the theoretical frameworks of Peace Journalism, Conflict Journalism, and War/Violence Journalism, as outlined by Johan Galtung (1998), to analyze how RFI's reporting represents the political shifts and tensions surrounding this event.*

*The study will analyze a selection of **RFI**, **RT** and **Xinhua** content related to the dismissal of Prime Minister Maïga, identifying key themes such as reconciliation, conflict escalation, and political power struggles. And in the main time analyzing some article published by these media outlet in the period of time covered by this research. The goal is to understand how these external media framing influences public perception of the event and its impact on Mali's political landscape, particularly within the context of the AES Alliance.*

*By focusing exclusively on this event, the research will provide insights into how **RFI**,**RT** and **Xinhua** narrative shapes the international understanding of Mali's political developments and its diplomatic dynamics, framed through the lenses of Peace Journalism and War Journalism.*

Data Collection

*News articles, opinion pieces, and reports were collected from **RFI**,**RT** and **Xinhua** official website, focusing on the period from November 2024 to December 2024, which includes the dismissal of Prime Minister Choguel Maïga. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select content that specifically covers the political and social implications of this event. This selection process ensures that the analysis captures how these medias frames the dismissal and its broader impact on Mali's political landscape and international relations.*

Johan Galtung, a renowned Norwegian sociologist and pioneer in peace research, made significant contributions to the field of conflict resolution and peace studies. In 1998, he developed a framework that divides journalism into two primary paradigms: Peace Journalism and War Journalism (also referred to as peace/Conflict Journalism and war/Violence Journalism). This model underscores the profound influence of media in shaping public perceptions and responses to conflicts. According to Galtung (1998), the way conflicts are framed by the media can either escalate and sustain violence or promote a more comprehensive and constructive understanding that fosters peacebuilding.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1- *How do the Peace Journalism and War/Violence Journalism approaches manifest in **RFI**, **RT** and **Xinhua** coverage of Prime Minister Choguel Maïga's dismissal and its political implications for Mali?*

2- *In what ways do these journalistic approaches shape the portrayal of political instability in Mali, particularly in the context of the event?*

3- *How do **RFI**, **RT** and **Xinhua** coverage and the application of these media journalistic approaches align with Galtung's model, focusing on conflict framing, truth and propaganda, representation of people's voices, and proposed solutions?*

4- *How the framing orientation of each outlet is linked to their represented countries ideology in Africa?*

5- *What implications do the findings of this study have for understanding the role of external media in shaping international perceptions of political developments in West African nations like Mali?*

RESEARCH TIME FRAME

*This research examines **RFI**, **RT** and **Xinhua** coverage from November 20, 2024, following the dismissal of Prime Minister Choguel Maïga, to*

*December 2024. This extended time frame captures the key political transitions surrounding the dismissal, providing insight into how the event has been framed by **RFI**,**RT** and **Xinhua** and its broader impact on Mali's political landscape.*

EXCLUSIONS

*Certain media outlets were excluded from this study to ensure a focused and in-depth analysis of **RFI**, **RT** and **Xinhua** coverage of the dismissal of Prime Minister Choguel Maïga. International and local platforms, such as France 24, Jeune Afrique, and regional West African radio stations, were not considered due to their reliance on aggregated content or secondary reporting, rather than original, event-specific journalism. Additionally, local media stations in West Africa, though vital for regional news dissemination due to their ability to broadcast in various local dialects, were excluded because the linguistic diversity in the Sahel region presents challenges for consistent comparative analysis. By narrowing the scope to **RFI**,**RT** and **Xinhua**, this study aims to maintain a clear focus on how these outlet frames the political event and its broader implications.*

1. OVERVIEW OF THE CRISIS IN MALI AND THE SAHEL REGION

The political instability in Mali culminated in two coups in recent years, the first on August 18, 2020, when Colonel Assimi Goïta and a group of soldiers ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, following widespread protests against corruption, security failures, and governance issues. The second coup occurred on May 24, 2021, when Goïta, having initially helped to form the transitional government, led a military takeover after the dismissal of key officials, including Prime Minister Moctar Ouane. These events were driven by multiple factors, including escalating insecurity from extremist groups, economic mismanagement, and public dissatisfaction with ineffective civilian leadership (Morgan 2020). The military's intervention was perceived by many as a necessary response to these failures, promising to restore order, combat corruption, and strengthen national security. Additionally, the coups reflected a broader geopolitical shift, with a growing anti-imperialist sentiment, particularly towards France, which many Malians viewed as complicit in perpetuating the country's struggles. A significant portion of the population, including the working class, youth, and

middle class, supported the military's actions, seeing them as a break from a corrupt, foreign-influenced political system. The coup in Mali shares similarities with military takeovers in other regions, such as Niger and Burkina Faso. In Niger, the transition government, like those in Burkina Faso, justified their actions as a response to the deep-rooted corruption and governance issues under the previous regimes. Between 2011 and 2023, Niger experienced widespread corruption, exemplified by the embezzlement of nearly 12.1 billion FCFA (approximately 18.5 million euros) within the Ministry of National Defense. Other scandals, particularly related to the opaque management of public funds, plagued the administrations of the Renaissance I and II (under Mahamadou ISSOUFOU, 2011-2021) and III (under Mohamed BAZOUM, 2021-2023). General Tchiani, at the helm of the National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP), successfully rallied the military to his cause and thwarted any attempts at mediation. The standoff between the CNSP and France, which continued to recognize Bazoum as the legitimate president, was pivotal in galvanizing support from the youth, who mobilized to demand the withdrawal of French forces from Niger and protested against the sanctions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The actions of France and ECOWAS pushed General Tchiani to reconsider his relationships with the West. Ibro, a key figure in the discourse, emphasized that the challenges facing Niger were a result of imperialist-driven efforts to weaken the country. He argued that fragility arises from the inability to respond effectively to external shocks, which has left Niger vulnerable. The National Strategy, Evaluation, and Foresight Institute, under Ibro's leadership, identified over fifteen factors of fragility in Niger, focusing on structural analysis. Among these, five key factors emerged as the primary drivers of fragility: international power dynamics, particularly the influence of the IMF and World Bank; the vastness of the country's territory; the absence of a forward-looking vision for development; and the weakness of national development policies. These factors contributed to Niger's deepening insecurity, particularly along porous borders, which made effective governance challenging. It was in this context of state decay, insecurity, and loss of sovereignty that the coup of September 26, 2023, took place by widespread popular support. The military, alongside civil society and the vast majority of the population, formed a coalition aimed at

restoring sovereignty and national dignity. Niger has also strengthened its regional alliances, notably with Mali and Burkina Faso, by forming the Sahel States Alliance (AES), a coalition committed to defending sovereignty against external pressures. This partnership has played a crucial role in preventing military intervention in Niger, contrasting with the fate of Libya. The CNSP in Niger has also initiated the development of a political doctrine centered on sovereignty and self-reliance, signaling a shift toward a more autonomous and self-determined future. As part of this movement, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso called for the removal of foreign military bases from their soil, denounced certain regional and international agreements that undermined national sovereignty, and initiated steps toward controlling their natural resources. A significant aspect of this new national policy was the opposition to the use of the CFA franc, which has long been criticized for perpetuating a form of economic dependence. The CFA franc has long been a contentious issue in Africa's struggle for economic sovereignty. In "L'arme invisible de la Françafrique", Ndongo Sylla and Fanny Pigeaud (2018) argue that the CFA system, established by France, perpetuates economic dependence through four key principles: fixed exchange rates, free transferability, unlimited convertibility, and centralized foreign reserves. These mechanisms, which were designed during the colonial era, prevent African nations from fully controlling their monetary policies. The system relies on an "operations account" where all foreign currency transactions by CFA member states pass through France. The central banks of these countries are required to deposit at least 50% of their foreign reserves in this account, under the risk of paying interest to the French Treasury if they fail to comply. This setup not only restricts the economic autonomy of African nations but also allows France to monitor and influence their foreign trade. Throughout history, several African leaders have attempted to challenge this system. Notable examples include Guinea's 1959 "Operation Persil," Mali's temporary withdrawal from the CFA zone, and the assassination of Sylvanus Olympio, President of Togo. The most prominent resistance came from Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, who was assassinated for his opposition to the CFA franc and his broader efforts to restore national sovereignty. In this context, the AES's move to reject the CFA franc and pursue economic independence is part of a broader regional

trend. By distancing themselves from the CFA system, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso aims to reclaim control over its resources and economic policies, marking a significant step toward national sovereignty. These coups reflect a common narrative in which the military portrays themselves as the only force capable of addressing national crises, and they highlight widespread dissatisfaction with governance and the perceived failure of democratic institutions.

2. WESTERN AND LOCAL MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF THE MALI COUPS

Western and local media portray the coups in Mali through divergent lenses, influenced by cultural, political, and geopolitical contexts. Western media often emphasizes the authoritarian nature of military rule, framing the coups as setbacks for democracy and stability (Issaev. 2023). Some outlets typically focus on the risks of growing Russian influence and the potential destabilizing effects on the region. In contrast, local media outlets tend to highlight the broader context of economic hardship, corruption, and governance failures that led to the coups. They often frame the military intervention as a necessary corrective measure to restore order and security, in alignment with the public's growing frustration with the civilian government (Baudais, 2021; Jatula, 2019). This difference in media representation underscores the broader divide between local and Western narratives on governance and military rule. While Western media stresses democratic norms and the dangers of authoritarianism, local media tends to emphasize sovereignty, regional stability, and national self-determination, framing the military's actions as a legitimate response to structural political and economic crises.

Amidst the political upheavals in Mali, the portrayal of the military-led government by both local and international media has sparked significant debate, reflecting larger discussions about the legitimacy of military rule and the misrepresentation of African political contexts. Alain Foka, a renowned figure in African media, has been a strong advocate for reshaping the narrative surrounding African governance, emphasizing the importance of presenting African perspectives free from external biases. Foka, who spent over three decades at RFI, left the network in October 2023 due to his growing frustration with how African issues were covered. On his digital platform, Alain Foka Officiel, which now boasts millions of followers, he

continues to challenge the mainstream portrayal of Africa and promote a more nuanced and independent voice on African political affairs.

*After 32 years at **RFI**, Alain Foka expressed his dissatisfaction with how African issues were covered in international media, including RFI itself[1]. In his first interview after leaving **RFI**, he explained that his decision to leave was driven by a desire to speak freely and address African issues without editorial constraints, particularly the pervasive bias he perceived in mainstream coverage of the continent[2]. Foka criticized the way African affairs are often depicted by international media, arguing that the narratives are not sufficiently direct or accurate. He emphasized the necessity for Africa to control its own narrative, highlighting that "the story of hunting must stop being told solely from the hunter's point of view," suggesting the urgent need for African media to amplify the continent's voice and vision in global discourse. His move reflects a broader trend of African media professionals advocating for a shift toward more authentic and representative portrayals of African affairs, as well as a growing call for Africa to leverage its "soft power" in the international arena to reshape the narratives surrounding it. This departure from mainstream media underscores the critical need for alternative African platforms to address the skewed portrayals often found in international media coverage.*

3. CHOGUEL MAÏGA'S DISMISSAL, WHAT REALLY HAPPENED ?

*The dismissal of **Choguel Maïga** as Prime Minister of Mali on November 20, 2024, represents a critical moment in the ongoing class struggle within the country. Initially, **Maïga** was a key figure in legitimizing the military transition rise to power following the 2020 coup, which overthrew President **Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta** (Jatula, 2019). His role was pivotal in reinforcing the narrative that the military regime was a necessary force to rid Mali of its imperialist-aligned civilian leadership and restore the country's sovereignty. However, as the military transition continued, Maïga's growing critique of the military government to organize elections as promised, exposed the contradictions within the military elite and*

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[1] Alain Foka : Mes adieux à RFI. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3Y4SHGv-3I
[2] Alain FOKA se livre pour la première fois depuis sa démission. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjcNjHuzoZw

*revealed the deepening divide between military rule and **Maiga's** demand for civilian governance. **Maïga's** public challenge to Colonel **Assimi Goïta** during the military commemoration in Kidal (northern part of Mali) marked a rupture with **Goïta**.*

*   **Maïga's** position reflects the competing interests within Mali's ruling class. While initially aligned with the military regime as a response to the oppressive neoliberal regimes that had been subservient to imperialism, **Maïga's** push for civilian elections and a return to civilian rule reflects an attempt to channel popular satisfaction of the military regime into a form of governance that would still be entrenched within the capitalist system and may not allow some degree of reformist politics. **Maïga**, by pushing for a return to civilian rule, seeks to reclaim control in a capitalist and neocolonial system that benefits an elite which, while claiming to fight corruption, seeks to preserve its own privileges under the influence of imperialist forces. Unlike the aspirations of the popular masses, who support the military government for its fight against imperialism and for national sovereignty, **Maïga**, as a representative of the local bourgeoisie, represents a return to a governance system that, even under democratic appearances, would only deepen Mali's economic and political dependence on the West. The internal division within the **M5-RFP**, the coalition that helped overthrow **Keïta** and supported the military's initial coup, reflects this broader crisis of political legitimacy. The coalition, which was initially united in its opposition to imperialism and neoliberalism, now faces fractures, with Maïga's ousting weakening the movement's ability to present a unified challenge to imperialist exploitation. On one hand, there is an anti-imperialist sentiment among the masses, particularly in relation to France's role in Mali, but on the other hand, there are elite factions within the ruling class that seek to re-establish civilian rule while keeping Mali bound to the imperialist economic system. This division is not simply a clash between civilian and military rule, but a battle for control over Mali's political future within a capitalist system that serves the interests of imperialist powers.*

*   The role of external forces, particularly France, ECOWAS, and other imperialist powers, in this political turmoil cannot be underestimated. The removal of **Maïga** comes at a time when Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso are taking a clearly anti-imperialist regional stance, challenging the foreign military presence and economic domination that have long perpetuated their*

dependency. While the military leadership fights for national sovereignty, the delay in organizing elections and the consolidation of power by the military regime should not be seen as failures but as a necessary response to external pressures and the persistent influence of imperialist powers and corrupt local elites. The real struggle is not only against foreign military occupation, but against a neocolonial capitalist system that benefits from the complicity of a national elite seeking to maintain Mali's economic dependence on the West. The dismissal of Maïga, who, although an ally of the military regime, advocated for a moderate reform and a quick return to civilian rule, reveals his own compromise with the imperialist system. Maïga failed to understand that the true liberation of Mali requires a complete break from imperialist interests and a full reaffirmation of the country's sovereignty. His position does not reflect the popular will to resist France's influence and that of other colonial powers but rather that of a compromise that would keep Mali within the imperialist fold, under the guise of democracy. The military regime, on the other hand, represents the resistance and the desire to restore an independent Mali, free from the economic chains imposed by the West.

4. **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE ON THE DISMISSAL OF CHOGUEL MAÏGA: A GALTUNG FRAMEWORK APPROACH TO RT, RFI, AND XINHUA**

This section conducts a comparative analysis of how RT, RFI, and Xinhua reported on the dismissal of Choguel Maïga, using Johan Galtung's five dimensions of peace/conflict and war/violence journalism. The aim is to explore the framing strategies of each outlet and assess their overall journalistic orientation.

4.1. CONFLICT FRAMING

Beginning with RFI, the article titled "Choguel Maïga n'est plus à la primature, mais prépare son retour à la vie politique"[3] immediately signals a personalized and politicized focus, suggesting a political rivalry narrative rather than a systemic conflict. Galtung's first peace criterion—exploring conflict formation across multiple parties, goals, and issues—is entirely

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[3]   https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20241125-mali-choguel-ma%C3%AFga-n-est-plus-%C3%A0-la-primature-mais-pr%C3%A9pare-son-retour-%C3%A0-la-vie-politique

absent. The article centers exclusively on struggle: Maïga versus the transitional government, with no mention of the broader societal or institutional dimensions that shaped the conflict. The title and lead emphasize Maïga's resistance and plans to return to the political scene, implying a zero-sum, winner-loser dynamic consistent with war/violence journalism. No attempt is made to map structural causes or explore different interpretations of the power shift. Galtung's second criterion—open time and open space—is also missing. The article provides no historical reference to the 2020 or 2021 coups, the ECOWAS-mandated transition, or Mali's long-standing civil-military tensions. Instead, it treats Maïga's dismissal as an isolated political event stripped of background, effectively closing both time and space around the narrative. The article is deeply unbalanced in its attribution of voice, another core peace indicator. It quotes Maïga's allies extensively—"Il a été souvent incompris..." and "nous demanderions à Choguel de se présenter"—but offers no voice from the Government, civil society, or other political actors. This selective sourcing reinforces an "us-versus-them" frame, where the transitional goverment is described with emotionally charged language as having "brutalement débarqué" Maïga, while he is humanized and portrayed as rational and misunderstood. Galtung warns against such moral dualism because it obscures the complexity of conflicts and closes the door to reconciliation. Moreover, the article is reactive, covering events only after the dismissal and revealing no proactive journalistic attempt to anticipate, prevent, or unpack the deeper tensions. It lacks any discussion of invisible effects—no mention of how this leadership shift affects public trust, civil institutions, or Mali's democratic roadmap. There is no call for dialogue or resolution; instead, the story concludes with Maïga's intentions to re-enter politics, reinforcing a narrative of continued political confrontation. Taking all these textual features into account—narrow scope, emotionally charged language, selective sourcing, absent historical context, binary conflict construction, and reactive timing—it is clear that RFI's coverage embodies a war/violence-oriented frame as defined by Galtung. In contrast, RT's coverage, titled "Mali's Prime Minister Fired"[4], adopts a more neutral and structurally informed approach, incorporating several indicators of

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[4]https://www.rt.com/africa/607985-mali-fires-prime-minister/

peace/conflict journalism. The title itself avoids emotional cues or personalization, immediately distancing the article from dramatization. RT opens time and space by situating the event within a timeline of prior political developments: "Mali experienced back-to-back coups in 2020 and 2021... The military government had originally proposed a five-year transition period..." This wider temporal framing satisfies Galtung's call for historical depth and contextual transparency. Additionally, the article presents multiple parties and positions: Maïga's frustration is conveyed in direct quotes such as "Everything is happening in total opacity...", while official government action is reported through institutional channels (the presidential decree read on state television). This dual perspective avoids polarizing binaries and reflects an attempt at balanced voice attribution—a key component of peace-oriented coverage. RT does not frame Maïga or the transitional government as moral opposites; instead, the tone remains factual and descriptive, avoiding judgmental language or emotional embellishment. However, RT is not without limitations. While it includes structural references, the report remains elite-centered, with no perspectives from civil society, opposition groups, or the public. Furthermore, it does not explicitly address invisible effects of the conflict—no mention is made of public disillusionment, institutional strain, or the psychological toll of recurring power shifts. It also stops short of exploring solutions or reconciliation paths, focusing instead on the mechanics of dismissal and replacement. Despite these gaps, the article satisfies more of Galtung's peace criteria than RFI or Xinhua, particularly in its balanced tone, historical framing, and multiplicity of voices. Thus, RT's coverage can be classified as moderately peace/conflict-oriented, though limited in depth and social inclusivity. Finally, Xinhua's report, titled simply "Malian Prime Minister Dismissed"[5], exemplifies what might be termed violence-oriented minimalism. The title is stripped of emotional or political markers, but the text's framing fails nearly all of Galtung's peace indicators. There is no exploration of conflict formation—Maïga's dismissal is presented as a self-contained event, without cause, context, or consequences. The report

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[5]https://english.news.cn/africa/20241121/f8fd03e98e0542a18fa4dd8ef8894aee/c.html

includes only one vague allusion to Maïga's "muscular outburst" at a political meeting but does not explain the substance of his critique or the political stakes involved. Time and space are entirely closed; there is no reference to Mali's prior coups, the ECOWAS transition, or any systemic instability. No voices are heard—not Maïga's, not the government's, not the publics. Instead, the article relies solely on a state-issued decree, rendering the conflict opaque and reducing it to an administrative update. There is no humanization, no complexity, no empathy—nor is there any mention of visible or invisible impacts, such as public unrest, democratic backsliding, or structural implications. While Xinhua avoids polarizing language, its erasure of political context and stakeholder agency aligns it with Galtung's concept of war journalism by silence: a form of reporting that, by neglecting the substance of conflict, undermines public understanding and obstructs peace-oriented discourse.

4.2. TRUTH ORIENTED VS PROPAGANDA ORIENTED

In evaluating the coverage of Choguel Maïga's dismissal through the lens of Galtung's truth vs. propaganda orientation, it becomes clear that each outlet selectively frames truth to serve national or ideological narratives. Starting with RFI, the article frames Maïga's removal as a consequence of his resistance to the junta, quoting only his allies and omitting any challenge to his narrative or scrutiny of his political history. For example, the article presents Maïga as a misunderstood figure with the line "Il a été souvent incompris, il prendra le temps de s'expliquer," while portraying the junta as antagonistic without offering their official rationale or response. This asymmetry in representation suggests that RFI is not truth-oriented, as it fails to expose untruths or contradictions on all sides. Rather than investigating the broader power dynamics, potential shortcomings in Maïga's governance, or inconsistencies in both narratives, RFI focuses on amplifying Maïga's perspective and portraying him as the moral center. In doing so, it implicitly engages in propaganda journalism, where "our side"—the pro-democracy figure in a former French colony—is protected and valorized, while "their side"—the junta—is reduced to a shadowy antagonist. No attempt is made to uncover state or institutional failures on the French or international front, nor to question Maïga's own political agenda. This selective exposure of "their" flaws while shielding "ours" points clearly to propaganda-oriented reporting. RT, on the other hand,

takes a more nuanced approach. The article includes Maïga's accusations of opacity within the government—"Everything is happening in total opacity, without the knowledge of the prime minister"—but also reports that his remarks "sparked outrage among the authorities' supporters," who then demanded his resignation. This dual presentation reflects an attempt to expose internal contradictions within the military-led government, suggesting a partial truth orientation. Furthermore, the article references the military's shifting electoral commitments, noting how the transition was postponed unilaterally, despite previous agreements with ECOWAS. These elements point to a willingness to expose institutional cover-ups, at least when they involve the ruling junta. However, RT does not investigate potential flaws in Maïga's political record, nor does it challenge Russian-friendly narratives about foreign influence in Mali. It also omits any mention of Russia's growing media and paramilitary presence in the region, which is geopolitically relevant. While RT presents more complexity than RFI or Xinhua, it still leans subtly toward propaganda orientation by failing to critique narratives aligned with Russia's strategic interests in Mali. In short, RT balances some truth exposure with strategic silence, making its position mixed but leaning propaganda-oriented. Xinhua's article reflects the clearest example of propaganda-oriented reporting through omission. The article presents only the official state narrative, citing a decree issued by President Assimi Goïta and referencing a vague "muscular outburst" by Maïga as the trigger for his dismissal. It fails to specify what was said, provides no quotes, and does not verify whether this explanation has been contested. Moreover, the article references public protests calling for Maïga's resignation but does not explore whether these were state-sponsored or reflect broader dissatisfaction. By repeating the government's position without scrutiny, and by excluding Maïga's version entirely, Xinhua violates both of Galtung's truth-oriented criteria: it exposes no untruths on either side and makes no effort to uncover potential cover-ups. There is no examination of the junta's delay in transition, no mention of contested democratic processes, and no contextualization of China's own strategic positioning in Mali. This silence ensures that Xinhua functions squarely within the realm of propaganda journalism, serving the narrative priorities of the Chinese state and its partners without critical inquiry or narrative

balance.

4.3. PEOPLES ORIENTED VS ELITE ORIENTED

When viewed through Galtung's lens of people-oriented versus elite-oriented journalism, the reporting on Choguel Maïga's dismissal by RFI, RT, and Xinhua reveals a pronounced privileging of elite narratives over public voices and human consequences. With RFI, the article is unmistakably elite-oriented. The title "Choguel Maïga n'est plus à la primature, mais prépare son retour à la vie politique" immediately centers the story on a high-level male political actor and his future ambitions. The entire narrative orbits around Maïga's party strategy, his political calculations, and the support of his inner circle. For instance, one line reads: "Il va continuer à défendre l'armée nationale, rassembler politiquement autour de lui"—showcasing elite ambition and intra-party positioning rather than broader civic engagement. The article quotes only elite male figures, such as his aides and former collaborators, without any mention of public reaction, let alone voices from women, youth, the poor, or displaced populations—all of whom are deeply affected by Mali's ongoing instability. Additionally, RFI fails to reference any grassroots movements, civil society, or peace initiatives. The military is described as "brutal," yet no specific officials are named or held accountable. Rather than illuminating the social effects of the conflict or the perspectives of the voiceless, RFI amplifies the personal and strategic trajectory of a single powerful man. This alignment with elite framing reinforces Galtung's claim that war journalism often acts as a "mouthpiece of the elite", sidelining the lived experiences of the broader population.

RT, while more structurally balanced in tone, also exhibits a dominantly elite-oriented framing. The article covers the dynamics between Maïga, the military government, and ECOWAS, with quotes from Maïga like "Everything is happening in total opacity..." and summaries of Goïta's decrees. It focuses on power struggles, institutional processes, and delayed electoral promises. However, it completely excludes social actors: no citizens, protestors, civil organizations, or marginalized groups are quoted or even referenced. The only mention of public participation is that the Collective for the Defense of the Military organized protests calling for Maïga's resignation. Even this is reported through the lens of elite-aligned activism, not independent civic unrest. There is no attempt to show how

ordinary Malians perceive this transition, nor any coverage of the women-led grassroots movements, community leaders, or victims of governance failure. Like RFI, RT also avoids naming specific perpetrators of political opacity or institutional failure, focusing instead on generalized structures and anonymous authorities. While more balanced and less overtly partisan than RFI, RT still remains firmly situated within an elite journalistic logic, engaging mostly with powerful male figures and formal processes. Xinhua's coverage offers the most stripped-down elite orientation, to the point of rendering the public almost non-existent. The article's title, "Malian Prime Minister Dismissed", is followed by a short summary that references only the president's decree and a vague "muscular outburst" by Maïga. There are no individual voices quoted, not even Maïga himself. The only societal reference is to unspecified "demonstrators in the capital"—a passing nod to public involvement, presented without context, voices, or explanation. The article includes no names of officials responsible for Maïga's removal, no exploration of the people's suffering, and no space for bottom-up narratives. It offers no platform to civil society or independent peace-builders. Instead, Xinhua functions entirely within the logic of state power communication: summarizing government actions with no accountability, no plurality of voices, and no interrogation of elite decision-making. This mode of reporting reflects Galtung's definition of pure elite-oriented journalism, where media serve as transmitters of official discourse, bypassing the people entirely.

4.4. SOLUTION ORIENTED VS VICTORY ORIENTED

The international coverage of Choguel Maïga's dismissal reveals a consistent failure to embrace peace as a creative, structural, and people-driven process. Instead, these narratives tend to reduce peace to a matter of elite replacement, institutional reshuffling, or political survival — revealing how international media often struggle to engage with the deeper work of building sovereign, post-colonial peace. RFI's coverage, for instance, is clearly victory-oriented. The article presents Maïga's dismissal and future political plans as part of an ongoing elite power struggle, with little reference to conflict transformation or national healing. The focus remains on Maïga's personal trajectory — "il prépare son retour sur la scène politique locale" — implying that political peace will be achieved through his return to power, not through structural change or reconciliation. There

is no mention of peace initiatives, civil dialogue, or efforts at rebuilding trust between citizens and institutions. Nor does the piece explore the cultural shifts required to sustain peace in a post-interventionist Mali. The entire event is treated as an episode in a competitive political saga, devoid of any real examination of the underlying social fabric. RFI's orientation thus aligns with a Western liberal definition of peace as procedural and elite-controlled, where resolution equals a change in leadership — not a transformation of power relations or societal healing. This reading is especially inadequate, as it overlooks the very anti-imperialist struggle that animates popular support for Mali's transitional government. RT's article, while more balanced in tone, still aligns more closely with a victory frame, though with subtle gestures toward solution-oriented thinking. It provides some institutional context — referencing delayed elections, the ECOWAS timeline, and Maïga's exclusion from key decisions — and it does not sensationalize the dismissal. However, RT stops short of highlighting any peacebuilding efforts, whether initiated by the transitional government or by local actors. There is no reference to national dialogue, no mention of civil reconciliation, and no attention to grassroots Pan-African movements actively working toward stability and transformation in the Sahel. The framing positions peace as something tied to formal processes and elite cooperation, not as a creative societal reimagining. Even Maïga's criticisms "Everything is happening in total opacity" — are reported in a way that centers dysfunction, not potential pathways forward. Though less transactional than RFI's coverage, RT's article ultimately conceives peace as the result of procedural governance — a hallmark of the "controlled society" model Galtung associates with victory orientation. Xinhua's coverage demonstrates the clearest form of victory orientation through omission. The report treats the dismissal as an executive action: the president issues a decree, the prime minister is removed, a new figure steps in. Nowhere does the article reference any national healing efforts, popular reform initiatives, or cultural dimensions of the political transition. No commentary is offered on how the change might contribute to long-term peacebuilding, and no voice is given to Malians themselves — not even the transitional authorities. In this way, peace is reduced to institutional continuity: the replacement of one official by another. This narrative is especially limiting, as it sidelines the wider project of decolonization,

reconstruction, and sovereignty restoration that defines the political moment in Mali and across the Sahel. Xinhua's silence on local solutions reflects a form of status quo internationalism, where the mechanics of state power are reported neutrally, but the energy of liberation and popular renewal is completely absent. It reflects the classic Galtung warning: if peace is reduced to ceasefires and personnel changes, then the roots of conflict remain unchallenged, and imperial systems are left intact.

FRAMING MALI'S CRISIS: PEACE/CONFLICT VS. WAR/VIOLENCE JOURNALISM IN RFI, RT, AND XINHUA'S COVERAGE

Among the three media outlets examined in this study, Radio France Internationale (RFI) most consistently and distinctly embodies what Johan Galtung defines as "war/violence journalism." The outlet not only framed Choguel Maïga's dismissal as part of political repression and power struggles, but also extended this narrative style to other contemporaneous reports, demonstrating a deliberate editorial preference for conflict, polarization and binary opposition, while leaving little room for reconciliation, dialogue or structural reform. This pattern was particularly evident in RFI's coverage of the December 30, 2024 sentencing of Issa Kaou N'Djim[6]. The report emphasized the government's intention to "silence" the individual, a lexical choice that directly evokes associations with censorship, oppression and fear. The article neither explained specific legal charges nor examined judicial procedures, instead implying that state machinery was being weaponized to suppress dissent—a classic victory-oriented narrative where regimes assert authority by punishing critics. The same narrative logic reappeared in the December 29 report on the alleged kidnapping of opposition figure Ibrahim Nabi Togola[7]. The report sensationalized the dramatic disappearance without providing diverse sources or constructive interpretation. Violence wasn't examined but deliberately highlighted, drawing readers into a performative space of uncertainty rather than clear analysis. Even when covering cultural events like Mali's renaming of French

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[6]https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20241230-mali-issa-kaou-n-djim-figure-politico-m%C3%A9diatique-condamn%C3%A9-%C3%A0-deux-ans-de-prison-dont-un-ferme
[7]https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20241230-mali-l-opposant-ibrahim-nabi-togola-enlev%C3%A9-%C3%A0-bamako

and ECOWAS-related place names (December 25), RFI employed an adversarial prism. What could have been presented as a moment of decolonial assertion and cultural confidence was reinforced as a geopolitical conflict framework, pitting Mali against neighboring countries and former allies. This narrative subtly portrayed Mali as politically isolated and combative, downplaying domestic popular support or long-term cultural significance. Similar patterns permeated other RFI reports: coverage of political detainees (December 22) focused on violent details while ignoring judicial accountability mechanisms; reporting on diaspora leader arrests (December 20) emphasized conspiracy theories; and legal disputes with Barrick Gold (December 19)[8] were simplified into another confrontation devoid of economic analysis. The common denominator: emphasizing conflict over root causes, highlighting outcomes over possibilities. This editorial tendency culminated in RFI's flagship report on Maïga's dismissal. The headline "Dismissed Wednesday after criticizing Bamako's ruling junta" set the tone. The use of "junta" is particularly noteworthy. As Frederick M. Nunn (2016) noted, this term is often misused in Western reporting to oversimplify military or hybrid regimes in the Global South, evoking images of illegal rule—a label that predetermines narrative trajectories. For Mali's transitional government comprising civilian members and enjoying considerable popular legitimacy, such terminology flattens complex political realities into simplistic tyranny-versus-resistance binaries. By portraying Maïga as a rebel "preparing his political comeback," RFI sharpened this binary: oppressive state versus victimized opposition. The report relied on vague elite sources ("close associates") without clarifying political affiliations or relationships. Government responses, constitutional basis or civil society voices were conspicuously absent, as were ordinary Malians' perspectives. Readers were presented with a carefully constructed bipolar power struggle, as if Mali's political future could be reduced to the next round of confrontation. This exemplifies Galtung's war/violence journalism: personalized conflict, zero-sum outcomes, and absent solutions. However, this isn't merely an editorial style but a product of institutional and geopolitical structures. As France's state-owned media, RFI's positioning is inseparable from French strategic

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[8]https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20241219-mali-compagnie-mini%C3%A8re-barrick-gold-canada-lance-une-proc%C3%A9dure-d-arbitrage

interests in West Africa. According to the "political first proposition" of Political Media Processing (PMP) theory, media systems are shaped by political conditions—and RFI is a prime example. Its historical roots as "Le Poste colonial" and later "Paris-Mondial" reveal its longstanding role as a soft power tool projecting French values abroad. As Marie-Soleil Frère (2016) noted, RFI's programming reflects France's evolving diplomatic agenda, particularly toward former colonies like Mali. Though nominally editorially independent, the French government retains oversight powers, especially regarding international reporting. This framing aligns with France's Sahel narrative where instability justifies military presence and diplomatic pressure. By portraying Mali's transitional government as authoritarian and capricious, RFI indirectly sustains the notion that "external supervision remains necessary." Thus, RFI's reporting isn't merely editorial choice but French foreign policy logic shaping reality construction. Its selective focus on conflict transforms complexity into crisis, reproducing the "Africa always needs intervention" stereotype rather than amplifying local voices or exploring rebuilding efforts.

In sharp contrast, RT's Mali coverage during the research period adopted a sovereignty-centered, peace/conflict-oriented narrative framework. Its core theme wasn't chaos but political and geopolitical reconfiguration. This editorial stance was evident not only in Maïga's dismissal coverage but throughout five other contemporaneous reports, collectively constructing discourses of strategic cooperation, anti-colonial assertion and continental autonomy. For instance, the November 27 report "Africans showing great interest in Russian universities" broke from Western media's crisis template by highlighting reciprocal knowledge-sharing in Russia-Africa educational cooperation—aligning with Galtung's peace journalism emphasizing positive interaction. The November 29 report on Russian delegations visiting African states further presented Mali as active participants in global diplomacy, avoiding objectification narratives. However, RT didn't completely eschew conflict logic, especially regarding Western or corporate actors. Its December 6 report on Mali ordering a Canadian mining CEO's arrest subtly reinforced "state resisting foreign exploitation" narratives through selective silencing. More nuanced was the December 16 ECOWAS coverage presenting conflict as negotiable rather

than inevitable. Most representative was the December 26 report framing Mali's lithium project as win-win cooperation, positioning Mali as sustainable development partner rather than resource battleground. This developmental narrative reconstruction intertextualized with RT's Maïga coverage: while noting his dismissal for criticizing delayed elections, it contextualized Mali's post-2020 political autonomy trajectory. RT's uniqueness lies in framing Mali's crisis as strategic transformation rather than collapse—a conscious sovereignty assertion process. This editorial approach deeply interlocks with Russia's African geopolitics, recasting African regimes as "resisting Western hegemony" agents, ingeniously inverting Galtung's "us versus them" binary. As political context theory reveals, state-funded RT selectively constructs political reality serving national interests. Cayley Clifford & Steven Gruzd (2022) show RT's African expansion synchronizes with Moscow's need for alternative narratives and "reliable partner" image-building. Thus RT's practice can't be simply deemed neutral. Despite restrained wording, its systematic neglect of reconciliation paths and grassroots initiatives exposes solution-oriented limitations—focusing on elite-level diplomatic turns over social transformation. Unlike Western media stigmatizing African sovereignty efforts as turmoil, RT tends to construct them as necessary ruptures toward post-colonial rebirth. Its reporting maintains delicate balance between peace journalism and strategic orientation: while lacking comprehensive peace blueprints, it preserves discursive space for African dignity and legitimacy in resource and policy sovereignty. Ultimately, through calculated framing, RT presents Mali's transition as geopolitical narrative contestation—where the focus isn't violence per se, but who controls sovereignty storytelling. Compared to RFI and RT, Xinhua's Mali coverage was markedly sparse—only two reports besides the Maïga dismissal piece. This limited output reflects not just editorial choice but structural media strategy—strict adherence to cautious diplomatic postures aligned with China's "non-interference" principle. Yet even within this constrained sample, tensions between factual neutrality and implicit conflict frameworks place Xinhua at Galtung's ambiguous peace/conflict-war/violence journalism intersection. The November 21-22 report on Mali's new prime minister typifies Xinhua's default procedural reporting mode: neutral language stating personnel changes while avoiding emotional framing or

attribution. It neither analyzed dismissal contexts nor addressed political reactions, strictly following "event-centric" reporting. Yet this minimalism represents missed opportunities—collective silence on root causes, public concerns or democratic process impacts. The reporting stops at surface phenomena: tonally steady but substantively hollow. The December 12 (updated 16th) ECOWAS report slightly engaged geopolitical framing. While covering diplomatic efforts to retain Mali, it used "military juntas"— a term with conflict connotations—to reference the regimes. Though less radical than RFI's "junta," it still carries transitional/illegitimacy implications subtly influencing audience perceptions. The article briefly touched on peace journalism's negotiation elements by describing grace periods as regional cooperation maintenance, yet didn't explore dialogue mechanisms or expected outcomes. This selective shallow engagement mirrors Xinhua's Maïga dismissal framing: merely stating facts— presidential decree, state TV announcement, passing reference to Maïga's "strong remarks." No sensationalism, no speculative language—but equally no analysis of political signals, governing coalition tensions or public reactions. Its neutrality remains procedural rather than peace-oriented, neither fostering understanding nor advancing dialogue—Galtung's core peace journalism elements. This restraint reflects deeper media philosophy. As Zhao Xin and Xiang Yu (2019) note, as CPC Central Committee-affiliated media, Xinhua primarily disseminates state-approved narratives rather than stimulating debate. Its African presence since establishing Guinea's first bureau in 1959 has served China's soft power strategy emphasizing developmental cooperation and narrative control (Wu Yushan 2012). Yet compared to RFI and RT's engaged Mali crisis coverage, this strategy's limitations emerge. While others actively interpreted political tensions surrounding Maïga's dismissal, Xinhua retreated, treating it as isolated incident rather than sociopolitical process component. This isn't just editorial restraint but stems from China's "avoid local political entanglements" positioning. In this process, Xinhua missed opportunities to transform into more responsive media—especially in Sahel where narratives increasingly shape global legitimacy and sovereignty perceptions. Ultimately, Xinhua's reporting presents technocratic "sanitized" politics: neat, stable and decontextualized. While avoiding sensationalism or

ideological overreach, it remains distant from complex political transformation realities—particularly for post-coup states like Mali. Its reports neither incite conflict nor promote peace, maintaining carefully crafted detachment. Yet in legitimacy-fragile, narrative-contested Sahel, neutrality itself becomes peculiar silence.

CONCLUSION

This study, through analyzing the reporting frameworks employed by RFI, RT, and Xinhua in covering the dismissal of Malian Prime Minister Choguel Maïga and subsequent political developments, reveals the deeply embedded geopolitical logics underlying media practices. Drawing upon Johan Galtung's peace/war journalism theory and political context theory, the research demonstrates that: RFI adopts a distinctly conflict-oriented narrative, with its destabilization-reinforcing reporting model closely aligned with France's geopolitical strategy in the Sahel; RT, while maintaining neutral rhetoric, situates crises within a discourse of Mali's sovereign resistance against Western influence, subtly echoing Russia's strategic African narrative; whereas Xinhua adheres to cautious fact-based reporting that avoids deeper contradictions and peace processes, reflecting China's "non-interference" principle and elite-centric official communication paradigm. Though all three outlets ostensibly follow journalistic principles, their framing choices expose how news narratives serve diplomatic objectives rather than informational needs. This confirms a more profound, persistent issue: African realities are being mediated through external lenses—as international media project Africa's political developments through their strategic prisms, local dynamics become distorted, public voices marginalized, and complex national conditions reduced to binary labels of stability/chaos or ally/opponent.

The study acknowledges several limitations, including how the specific timeframe and small sample size may not fully capture long-term editorial characteristics. Future research could employ multimodal analysis (visual content, headline strategies, social media dissemination) and audience reception studies to examine how African publics receive, resist, or internalize these external narratives. Comparative studies with African local and independent media would also help assess how regional perspectives differ from the narrative constructions of global media powers. Ultimately, the findings highlight an urgent imperative: Africa must reclaim its

sovereignty over storytelling, image, and discourse. In a media environment still dominated by former colonial powers and geopolitical actors, initiatives like the joint media platform (including a planned online TV channel) established by Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso represent only preliminary steps toward narrative autonomy. Symbolic actions remain insufficient. For African media to achieve truly transformative competitiveness, they must not only produce content but also control framing power, agenda-setting authority, and interpretive rights rooted in local realities, Pan-African values, and popular aspirations. Only then can the continent transcend its "spoken-for" object status and achieve genuine subjectivity in self-representation.

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