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Foreign boots, local views: How violence shapes perceptions of French and Russian forces in Burkina Faso

Daniel Tuki[1]

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Abstract
Although considerable attention has been given to the growing realignment of many West African countries away from their former colonial ruler, France, and toward Russia—particularly in the realm of security cooperation—there remains a notable lack of large-N empirical research investigating how ordinary citizens perceive the effectiveness of foreign military forces from these countries. This study addresses that gap by focusing on Burkina Faso, a country that recently expelled French troops and welcomed Russian forces into its security landscape. Using nationally representative data from Afrobarometer, I examine how exposure to violence—both in the form of personal victimization and proximity to conflict—shapes public assessments of the contributions of French and Russian troops to national stability. Descriptive results indicate that citizens rate Russian forces significantly more favorably than their French counterparts. Regression analyses reveal that both victimization and conflict exposure are associated with more negative evaluations of French troops, although the relationship is relatively weak in the case of conflict exposure. In contrast, victimization is not correlated with perceptions of Russian troops, and while conflict exposure is positively associated with more favorable views of Russian forces, this finding is not robust when alternative measures of conflict exposure are used. Taken together, these results suggest that public attitudes toward foreign military actors may be shaped not only by security conditions on the ground but also by broader historical and geopolitical narratives.

Keywords
Burkina Faso, France, Russia, Violent conflict, Terrorism, Victimization, Military intervention, Security cooperation

JEL Classifications
D74, F51, F52, H56, O55

[1] Independent Researcher, Berlin, Germany (Correspondence: d.tuki@outlook.com)

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, Burkina Faso has grappled with escalating violence involving a jihadist insurgency led by groups such as Ansaroul Islam, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) (Institute for Economics & Peace 2025; Rukanga 2025; Demuynck & Coleman 2022; Druetz et al. 2020). A 2022 Afrobarometer survey revealed that 65% of the population believe the government has performed poorly in preventing and resolving violent conflicts nationwide. This perception is reflected in objective data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) (Raleigh et al. 2010), which reveals that Burkina Faso recorded 1,314 violent incidents and 7,845 associated fatalities in 2024 alone, marking it as the second most violent year since 1997.[2] Further underscoring the severity of the crisis, the 2025 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) identifies the Sahel as the world's most terrorism-affected region, with Burkina Faso ranking as the most impacted country both regionally and globally (Institute for Economics & Peace 2025). This level of instability stands in stark contrast to the period prior to 2015, when the country was considered relatively stable.[3]

The violence in Burkina Faso is partly driven by a contagion effect from neighboring Mali, which has been battling a jihadist insurgency since 2012. Porous borders and a limited state presence in peripheral regions have created ideal conditions for extremist groups to infiltrate and expand (Chin et al. 2024; Haavik et al. 2022; International Crisis Group 2020). Jihadist actors have further exploited longstanding intercommunal tensions, particularly between sedentary farmers—often of Mossi or Gourmantché ethnicity—and nomadic herders, especially from the Fulani (Peul) community, to advance their ideological and strategic goals (International Crisis Group 2023, 2020; Cline 2021). Some Fulani individuals have been drawn into or associated with jihadist groups, whether voluntarily, for reasons of protection or ideology, or under coercion. This association has fueled stigmatization and retaliatory violence by state forces and local self-defense militias, creating

[2] I define violent conflict as incidents that fall into one of the following three categories: battles, violence against civilians, and explosions/remote violence.
[3] See Figure 1.

a vicious cycle that further drives recruitment and deepens mistrust (Human Rights Watch 2025; International Crisis Group 2020; Benjaminsen & Ba 2018). Compounding these dynamics is the region's chronic poverty, high unemployment, and lack of opportunity, particularly among rural youth (Tapsoba et al. 2024). In such a context, jihadist groups often attract recruits by offering material benefits, a sense of belonging, or the promise of justice in areas where the state is absent or distrusted.

Since the ousting of President Blaise Compaoré in 2014—after 27 years in power (Frère & Englebert 2015; Chouli 2015; Reuters 2014)—Burkina Faso has experienced two military coups, both justified primarily on the grounds of worsening insecurity. The first took place in January 2022, when Lt. Col. Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba overthrew the civilian government of Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, who had been in office since December 2015. Damiba's coup was largely driven by mounting frustration over the government's failure to stem jihadist violence (Engels 2022). However, just eight months later, in September 2022, Captain Ibrahim Traoré launched a counter-coup, citing the continued deterioration of security under Damiba's leadership as the primary motivation for seizing power (Booty 2022; Human Rights Watch 2022).

In an effort to curb the spread of jihadist violence in Africa's Sahel region, France launched *Operation Serval* in 2013—a counterinsurgency mission aimed at halting jihadist advances in Mali and restoring the country's territorial integrity. Backed by Malian and other African forces, French troops were initially successful in pushing back jihadist groups and reclaiming key territory (Boeke & Schuurman 2025; Yates 2018). In 2014, *Operation Serval* was replaced by *Operation Barkhane*, a broader and longer-term counterterrorism initiative spanning Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania, with its headquarters based in N'Djamena, Chad (Yates 2018). Despite these joint efforts, jihadism has persisted across the Sahel, leading many regional governments and citizens to question the effectiveness of foreign military interventions. These doubts have been compounded by growing concerns over national sovereignty and perceptions that the presence of foreign troops, particularly French forces, undermines local control and legitimacy. These sovereignty concerns

have since evolved into broader political resistance to foreign involvement, shaping regional security dynamics and fueling nationalist sentiment (De Saugy 2025; Amza 2025).

In January 2023, Burkina Faso's military government formally terminated its 2018 defense agreement with France, giving French forces roughly one month to withdraw (France 24 2023). This move culminated in a flag-lowering ceremony near Ouagadougou the following month, symbolizing the official end of French military operations on Burkinabè soil (Ndiaga 2023). Burkina Faso is not alone in this strategic realignment. Military coups in both Mali and Niger have brought to power leaders who are similarly hostile to the continued presence of French forces (Tuki 2024; DW 2022). Chad, too, has ended its security cooperation with France—its former colonial power—citing the desire to reassert national sovereignty (Njie 2024; Fröhlich 2024). In the wake of these shifts, most of these countries have turned to Russia in pursuit of alternative security partnerships, seeking military assistance and political support outside the traditional Western framework (International Crisis Group 2025; AFR 2025; TRT Global 2025).

These rejections of French cooperation have been met with visible frustration by French President Emmanuel Macron, who accused the new Sahelian leaders of ingratitude, claiming that many states in the region would have lost their sovereignty and succumbed to jihadist insurgents without French military support (Rukanga 2025a). Macron's comments, however, have provoked backlash both domestically and internationally, with critics arguing that his remarks reflect a neocolonial attitude and contempt for Africa (The Arab Weekly 2025). Commentators have further questioned whether France has ever expressed comparable gratitude to the African soldiers who fought for its liberation during the World Wars (Ehl 2025; TRT Global 2025a).

Amid ongoing debates over the expulsion of French troops by several Sahelian countries and the emergence of new security and economic partnerships with Russia, there remains a significant gap in large-scale empirical research exploring how ordinary citizens perceive the role of French and other foreign forces in maintaining security. This study seeks to address that gap by focusing specifically on Burkina Faso. Drawing on data from Round 9 of the Afrobarometer survey

conducted in 2022 (n = 1200), it investigates how violence relates to individuals' exposure to violence and their evaluations of the contributions made by French and Russian troops to national stability.

Descriptive analysis indicates that the population of Burkina Faso generally views Russian forces more favorably than French forces. While 50%—or one in two Burkinabè—believe that French forces have been completely ineffective in contributing to stability, only 11% hold this view regarding Russian forces. Regression analysis further reveals that higher levels of victimization and exposure to violent conflict significantly increase the likelihood of unfavorable assessments of the French forces' contribution to security, although the association is notably weaker when focusing solely on conflict exposure. In contrast, victimization shows no meaningful relationship with perceptions of Russian forces, and although a positive correlation emerges between conflict exposure and favorable views of Russian troops, this relationship is not robust when alternative conflict data are used. The more negative evaluation of French troops may be attributed to their longstanding presence in Burkina Faso's security landscape, which has allowed the public to form judgments over time—often framed by unmet expectations and historical grievances linked to France's colonial legacy. By comparison, Russian forces are relatively recent entrants to the region, and their limited footprint has yet to become strongly associated with local discontent or historical resentment, which may help explain the absence of a similarly negative correlation.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows: The next section briefly examines the evolution of violent conflict in Burkina Faso. I then discuss relevant theories and outline the hypotheses. Next, I describe the variables used in the regression analysis, present summary statistics, and outline the analytical strategy. This is followed by a discussion of the regression results. The final section summarizes the key findings and considers their implications for policy.

2. Trend of violent conflict in Burkina Faso

Figure 1, based on data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) (Raleigh et al., 2010), illustrates the annual trend in violent conflict incidents and associated fatalities

in Burkina Faso from 1997 to 2024. Over this period, the country experienced a total of 7,655 violent incidents and 27,741 fatalities, averaging approximately 283 incidents and 1,027 deaths per year. However, the figure reveals that both the frequency of conflict and the number of fatalities vary significantly across years. Notably, large-scale violence is a relatively recent phenomenon that began to escalate around 2014. In the years prior, violent conflict was rare: six of the years before 2014 recorded no incidents at all, and in the few years where incidents did occur, the numbers typically ranged from one to nine.

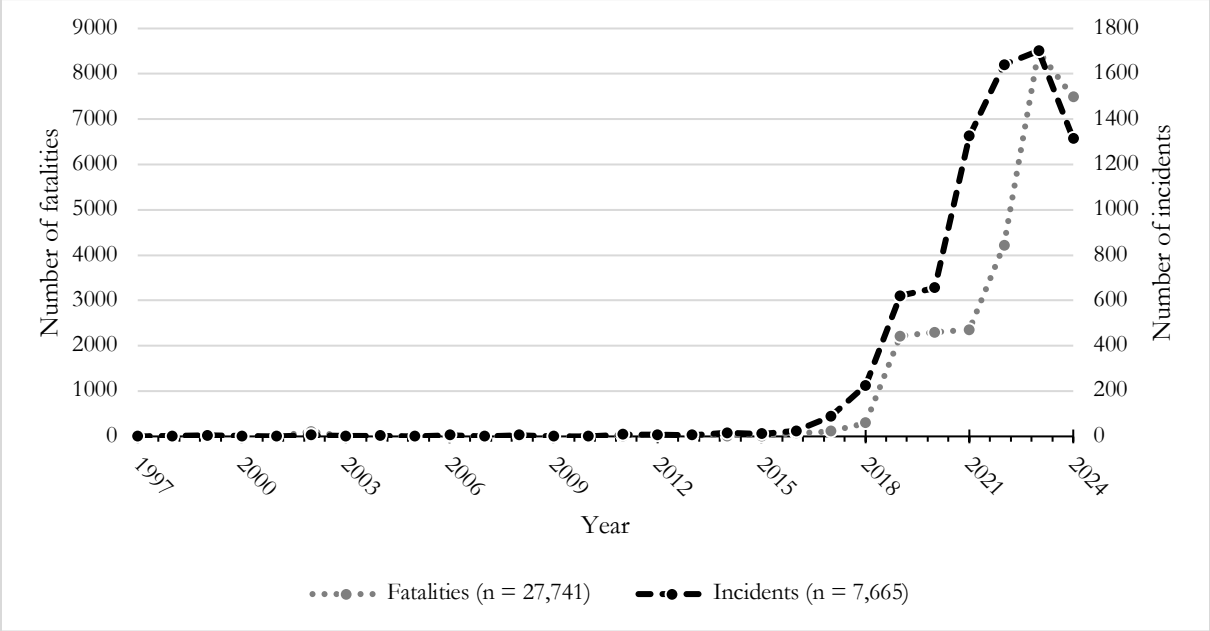

Figure 1: Violent conflicts and associated fatalities in Burkina Faso, 1997–2024

Note: The figure visualizes the incidence of violent conflicts in Burkina Faso and the associated fatalities from 1997 to 2024. The grey dotted line, which corresponds to the vertical axis on the left, shows the total annual fatalities, while the black dashed line, associated with the vertical axis on the right, shows the total annual number of incidents. The horizontal axis represents the year. Violent conflicts are defined as incidents that fall into one of the following three categories: battles, violence against civilians, and explosions/remote violence. The data were obtained from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) database.

The escalation began in 2014, with 15 recorded incidents and 8 associated fatalities. By 2019, these numbers had surged to 620 incidents and 2,208 fatalities, representing a staggering increase of approximately 4,033% in incidents and 27,500% in fatalities compared to 2014. The peak occurred in 2023, which marked the most violent year on record, with 1,701 incidents and 8,492 deaths. This was followed by a slight decline in 2024, when 1,314 incidents and 7,485 fatalities

were recorded. These trends underscore the sharp and recent escalation of violent conflict in Burkina Faso and the growing toll it has taken on civilian lives.

3. Theoretical considerations

Elite manipulation theory offers a valuable lens for understanding Burkinabè attitudes toward foreign troops. At its core, the theory emphasizes how political elites—those with access to power, resources, and institutions—strategically shape public opinion, group identities, and political outcomes to maintain their influence. To achieve these goals, elites often instrumentalize identity markers such as religion, ethnicity, and nationalism, mobilizing support or deepening divisions as needed.

A compelling example of this dynamic is found in the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India. Drawing on this case, Brass (2003) argues that communal violence is not rooted in ancient or deep-seated animosities but is instead the deliberate product of elite manipulation. He outlines a three-stage process through which such violence is orchestrated. First, during the preparation phase, elites spread rumors, stockpile weapons, mobilize divisive rhetoric, and manipulate public discourse to heighten intergroup tensions. This is followed by the activation phase, characterized by the actual eruption of violence—often facilitated by the tacit or active support of police and local authorities. Finally, the explanation phase unfolds in the aftermath, as political leaders and media outlets construct narratives that depict the violence as spontaneous or inevitable, thereby concealing its strategic and calculated origins.

A similar perspective is offered by Horowitz (1985) in his influential work *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. He rejects primordialist views that see ethnic identity as fixed and inherently conflictual. Instead, he emphasizes the malleable and instrumental nature of ethnicity, arguing that it is not simply a social or cultural identity, but a potent political resource. In ethnically divided societies, elites often exploit these identities—not because of deep-rooted ties, but because ethnicity serves as an effective tool for political mobilization and electoral gain. To counteract the dangers of elite-driven ethnic polarization, Horowitz advocates for institutional designs that incentivize cross-

ethnic cooperation. One such framework is centripetalism, which seeks to foster political moderation and intergroup accommodation by encouraging elites to reach beyond their own ethnic constituencies (Horowitz 2014; 1985).

Dependency theory also offers a valuable analytical lens for understanding Burkinabè attitudes toward the presence of foreign troops. It emerged as a direct critique of modernization theory, most notably advanced by Rostow (1960). Rostow conceptualized development as a linear progression through five sequential stages. The process begins with the "traditional society," characterized by underdevelopment and limited technological advancement. This is followed by the "preconditions for take-off," where foundational changes—such as improvements in infrastructure and institutions—begin to take shape. The third stage, "take-off," marks the beginning of sustained economic growth and industrialization. Next is the "drive to maturity," characterized by diversification and technological advancement across sectors. Finally, the process culminates in the "age of mass consumption," where economies are dominated by consumer goods and high living standards. Crucially, Rostow's model implies that industrialization intensifies as societies advance through each stage, culminating in full economic modernity.

In contrast, dependency theorists argue that underdevelopment in the Global South—or the periphery—stems not from internal deficiencies or a lack of modernization, but from structurally unequal and exploitative economic relationships with the Global North—the core (Amin 1990, 1972; Rodney 1982; Frank 1967). This relationship is characterized as parasitic: it benefits core countries while keeping peripheral countries in a state of perpetual poverty. The global capitalist system, they argue, is deliberately structured to disadvantage poorer nations by relegating them to the role of raw material suppliers for core industries, while simultaneously turning them into consumers of high-value manufactured goods. To escape this cycle of dependency and underdevelopment, the theory advocates that peripheral nations sever or significantly reduce their economic dependence on core countries. Instead, they should pursue self-

reliant development strategies, such as import substitution industrialization (ISI), aimed at fostering domestic industries and achieving long-term economic autonomy.

In light of the two theories discussed so far, the hostility of Burkina Faso's military government toward French forces can be interpreted as a strategic attempt to generate cohesion and bolster support among both the civilian population and the armed forces. By framing the presence of French troops as a major impediment to the country's full exercise of sovereignty, the military junta has positioned itself as the agent of national liberation. In doing so, it seeks to enhance its legitimacy by claiming credit for restoring autonomy and breaking free from the perceived stranglehold of French neocolonial influence.

This narrative is likely to resonate strongly with the general public, particularly given France's colonial history, its continued post-independence interference in the domestic affairs of former colonies, and its longstanding practice of supporting regimes aligned with its own strategic interests (Etogho et al. 2022; Yates 2018a; Harshe 1980; Martin 1995, 1985; Luckham 1982). These factors contribute to a deep reservoir of mistrust, which the junta can effectively tap into to strengthen its political position. Moreover, such perceptions may be especially pronounced among individuals who have been directly affected by violence. For these citizens, the failure of French troops to prevent or reduce insecurity may be viewed as a betrayal of their stated mission to protect civilians. As a result, growing hostility toward French forces may stem from the belief that they have been ineffective or indifferent—even if the worsening security situation is driven by broader structural factors, such as limited economic opportunities that increase the appeal of jihadist groups, or rising grievances among marginalized or disenchanted citizens. These underlying drivers of violence may be beyond the direct control of foreign troops, yet France is still held accountable, making it a convenient scapegoat for the military government.

In contrast, the military government's more favorable posture toward Russia—and Russia's recent entry into Burkina Faso's security landscape—may be met with less skepticism than the long-standing French presence. Unlike France, Russia is a relatively new actor in the region and

does not carry the historical baggage of colonialism or post-independence interference. This lack of a fraught past gives Russia a kind of "clean slate" in the eyes of the Burkinabè public. Within this context, the government's embrace of Russia may influence public opinion—including among those who have been victimized by violence—by framing Russia's involvement as a symbol of rupture from a violent and ineffective past, and the beginning of a new chapter marked by hope and the promise of security. The arrival of Russian forces could thus be interpreted as a turning point, offering an alternative to the perceived failures of France and suggesting a fresh approach to tackling insecurity.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that not all individuals affected by violence may view Russia positively. Some may respond with indifference rather than optimism, driven by skepticism about whether any foreign actor can meaningfully improve the security situation. For these individuals, support or approval may be conditional—with positive attitudes contingent upon Russia demonstrating tangible progress in delivering peace and stability. Until such outcomes materialize, their stance may remain cautious, reflecting a broader disillusionment with external interventions.

Building on the discussion so far, I seek to test the following hypotheses:

H1: *Violence reduces the likelihood that Burkinabè will assess French forces' contributions to stability positively.*

H2a: *Violence increases the likelihood that Burkinabè will assess Russian forces' contributions to stability positively.*

H2b: *Violence is uncorrelated with Burkinabè assessment of Russian forces' contributions to stability.*

4. Data and methodology

This study draws on data from Round 9 of the Afrobarometer survey, conducted in Burkina Faso in 2022, with a nationally representative sample of 1,200 respondents.[4] All participants were aged 18 or older, and the gender distribution was balanced at a 50:50 ratio. Due to Afrobarometer's use

[4] To access the Afrobarometer data and the survey questionnaire visit: https://www.afrobarometer.org/

of probability-based sampling, the data are broadly representative of the country's population.[5] However, an important limitation is that surveys are typically not conducted in areas experiencing active conflict or considered unsafe for fieldwork. As a result, populations living in the most insecure regions may be underrepresented in the data.

4.1. Dependent variables

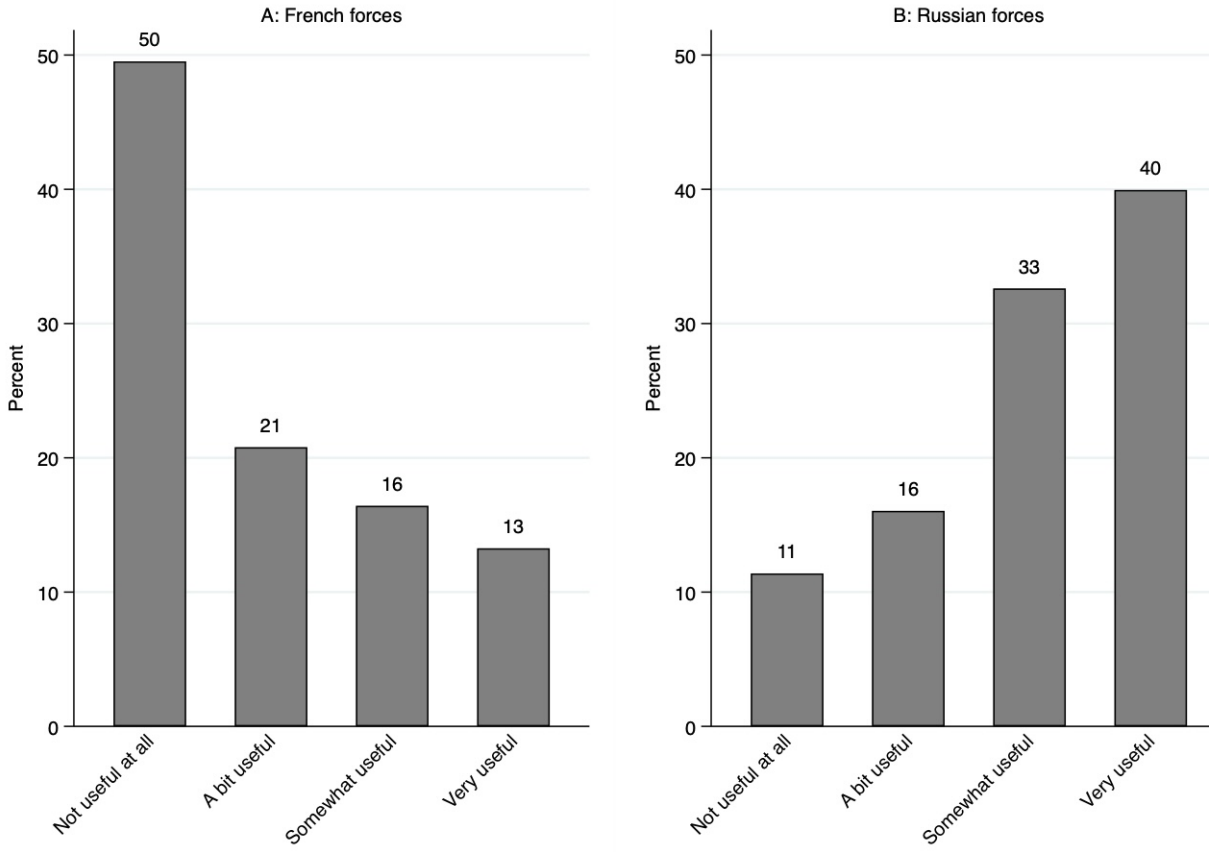

Figure 2: Perceived contribution of French and Russian forces to stability in Burkina Faso

Note: Panel A presents Burkinabè assessments of the contribution of French troops to their country's stability, while Panel B displays assessments of Russian troops. The figure is based on data from Round 9 of the Afrobarometer survey, conducted in Burkina Faso in 2022.

I consider two dependent variables—*French forces useful* and *Russian forces useful*. These variables capture the extent to which respondents believe that French and Russian troops have contributed to stability in Burkina Faso. Specifically, they are based on responses to the following two questions: "In your opinion, how useful are the following forces in helping Burkina Faso recover its territorial integrity and national unity, or have you not heard enough about them to say? (a) The

[5] For more information on Afrobarometer's sampling strategy visit: https://www.afrobarometer.org/surveys-and-methods/sampling/

French forces, (b) The Russian forces." The responses were measured on four-point ordinal scale ranging from "1 = No use at all" to "4 = Very useful." I treated "Don't know" and "Refused to answer" responses as missing observations. I applied this rule to all variables derived from the Afrobarometer survey.

Figure 2 displays the two dependent variables using a simple bar chart. The results reveal a clear contrast in public perceptions: Burkinabè view Russian troops far more favorably than French troops. Specifically, 50% of the population believe that French forces have not been useful at all in contributing to the country's stability, while the other 50% consider them at least a bit useful. In contrast, only 11% express a negative view of Russian forces, with the remaining 89% believing they have been at least a bit useful.

4.2. Independent variables

I examine two explanatory variables: *Victimization index* and *Violent conflict (UCDP)*. The *Victimization Index* captures the extent to which respondents and their family members have been directly affected by violence. This index was created by summing responses to the following eight items: "Please tell me if you personally or members of your family have been affected by the security crisis in any of the following ways: (a) Leaving your home to relocate to other areas within Burkina Faso, (b) Leaving your home to relocate to places outside of Burkina Faso, (c) Taking in internally displaced persons (IDPs) in your home, (d) Destruction or closure of your business(es), (e) Job loss, (f) Changing occupation because of the conflict, (g) Intimidation or threat, (h) Witness to injuries or killings." Each item was answered with a binary response: "0 = No" and "1 = Yes." Notably, the eight items yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, indicating strong internal reliability. The resulting index ranges from 0 to 8, where 8 represents the highest level of victimization and 0 indicates no victimization. Overall, 40% of respondents reported experiencing victimization in at least one dimension, while 22% had been victimized in three or more dimensions.

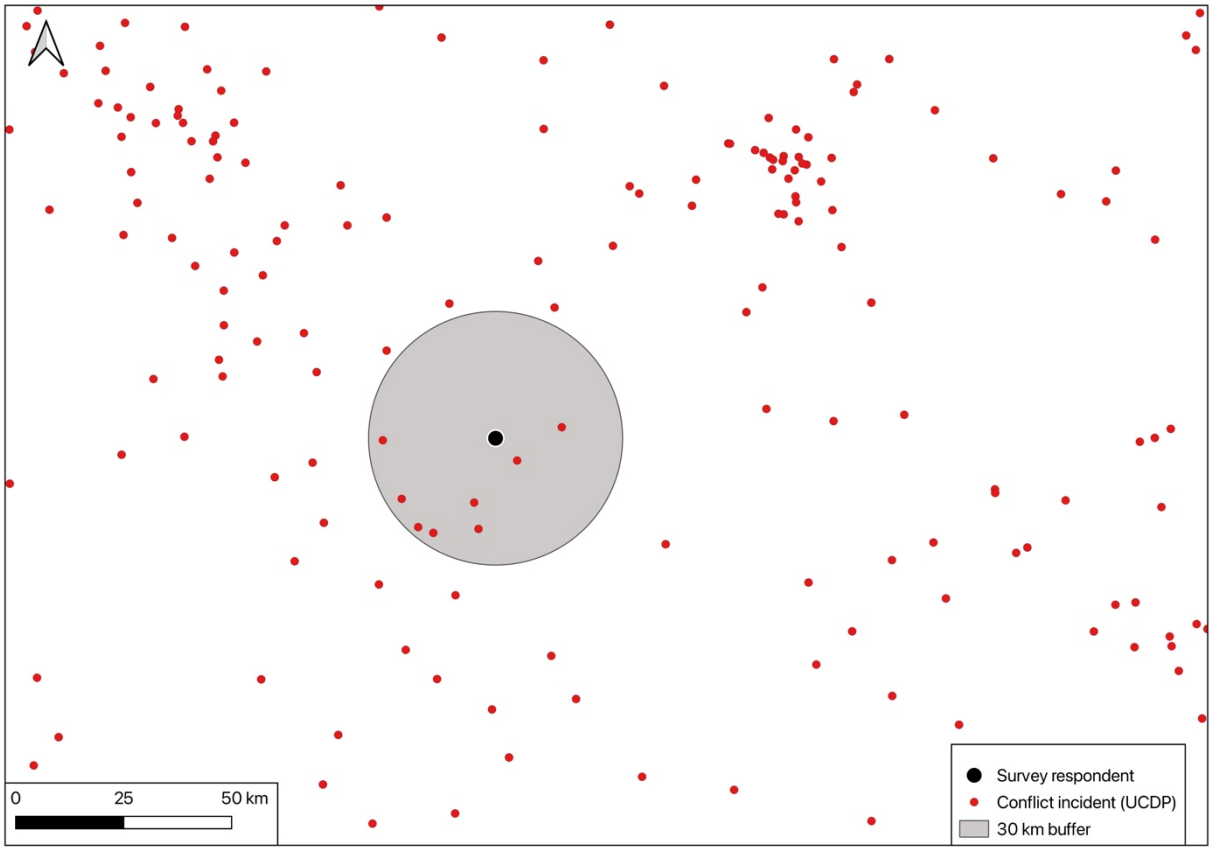

Figure 3: Measuring exposure to violent conflict

Note: The figure displays the geolocation of a hypothetical respondent, a 30 km buffer surrounding their dwelling, and the locations of nearby conflict incidents.

Violent conflict (UCDP) is measured as the cumulative number of conflict incidents resulting in at least one death that occurred within a 30-kilometer radius of respondents' residences between 1989 and 2021 (see Figure 3). I constructed this variable using QGIS software, leveraging the georeferenced dimension of both the Afrobarometer survey data and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's Georeferenced Event Dataset (UCDP-GED) (Sundberg & Melander 2013).[6] The analysis spans a long time period because previous research has shown that the effects of violence can persist and continue to influence perceptions over time (Tuki 2025, 2024a). The start year, 1989, was selected because it marks the beginning of UCDP-GED data availability. The end point, 2021, provides a one-year lag relative to the 2022 survey date, helping to mitigate potential concerns about reverse causation. 48% of respondents had at least one incident within the 30 km radius of their dwellings.

[6] To access the UCDP-GED dataset visit: https://ucdp.uu.se/

To ensure that the results are not biased by reliance on a single source of conflict data, I constructed two additional measures of violent conflict: Violent Conflict (ACLED) and Violent Conflict (GTD). The former is based on data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (Raleigh et al. 2010) and captures the cumulative number of violent conflict incidents that occurred within a 30-kilometer radius of respondents' dwellings between 1997 and 2021.[7] The latter draws on data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism 2022) and measures the cumulative number of terrorist incidents occurring within the same radius from 1970 to 2020.[8] Notably, unlike the UCDP, both ACLED and the GTD include all violent incidents—regardless of whether they resulted in fatalities—offering a broader perspective on local exposure to violence.

4.3. Control variables

I include a series of control variables related to respondents' socioeconomic status, demographic characteristics, news consumption habits, and perceptions of security—all of which could potentially confound the relationship between the explanatory and outcome variables. Socioeconomic status is measured using an additive poverty index that captures how frequently respondents and members of their households lacked access to five basic necessities: food, clean water, medicines when sick, cooking fuel, and income. Responses were recorded on a five-point ordinal scale ranging from "0 = Never" to "4 = Always." I constructed the index by summing responses across the five items, yielding a range from 0 to 20, with higher scores indicating greater levels of deprivation. Notably, the five-item index demonstrates acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.69.

News consumption is measured similarly, using an additive index that sums the frequency with which respondents obtain news from radio, television, newspapers, the internet, and social media. These responses were also recorded on a five-point ordinal scale, from "0 = Never" to "4

[7] The measure derived from ACLED includes only events classified as battles, explosions/remote violence, and violence against civilians. The dataset can be accessed at: https://acleddata.com.
[8] To access the GTD dataset visit: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/

= Every day," resulting in an index that ranges from 0 to 20. The internal consistency of this scale is strong, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.72. Urban residence is captured using a binary variable coded 1 for individuals living in urban centers and 0 for rural residents. Perceived insecurity is measured with a dummy variable coded 1 if the respondent reported feeling unsafe at least once while walking in their neighborhood during the past year, and 0 otherwise. Educational attainment is recorded on a ten-point ordinal scale ranging from "0 = No formal education" to "9 = Post-graduate education." Gender is coded as 1 for male and 0 for female, while age is measured in years.

Table 1 presents the summary statistics for all variables included in the regression models.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

Variable	Total observations	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
French forces useful$^{\Phi}$	1169	1.934	1.089	1	4
Russian forces useful$^{\Phi}$	1159	3.011	1.008	1	4
Victimization index	1197	1.41	2.259	0	8
Violent conflict (UCDP)	1200	2.173	3.205	0	16
Violent conflict (GTD)	1200	3.113	5.244	0	15
Violent conflict (ACLED)	1200	16.713	19.962	0	56
News index	1186	7.35	5.037	0	20
Urban (Ref: Rural)	1200	0.347	0.476	0	1
Unsafe	1199	0.767	0.423	0	1
Poverty index	1198	6.707	3.736	0	18
Educational level	1199	1.796	2.221	0	9
Age	1200	38.022	14.033	18	93
Male (Ref: Female)	1200	0.501	0.5	0	1

Note: Φ indicates the dependent variable, while "Ref" indicates the reference category.

3.4. Analytical technique

To determine how victimization and exposure to violent conflict relate to perceptions of the effectiveness of French and Russian forces in promoting stability in Burkina Faso, I estimate a model of the following general form:

$$\gamma_{ij} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Violence_i + \alpha_2 \varphi'_i + \Pi_j + \mu_i \quad (1)$$

In this equation, γ_{ij} is the dependent variable, which measures the extent to which R$espondent\ i$ who resides in $Region\ j$ believes either the French or Russian forces have contributed to stability in Burkina Faso. $Violence_i$ denotes the explanatory variable, which could be either victimization

or exposure to violent conflict. φ'_i is a vector of control variables that have already been discussed in Section 4.3; Π_j denotes regional fixed effects, which accounts for time invariant factors that are unique to the respective regions such as physical geography, distance to the administrative center, and contiguity to the international border, which may confound the relationship between the explanatory and control variables; α_0 denotes the intercept; α_1 and α_2 denote the coefficient of the explanatory and control variables, respectively; while μ_i denotes the error term.

Because the dependent variables are measured on an ordinal scale with a limited number of categories, I estimated the model using an ordered logit regression. This approach has the advantage of respecting the ordered structure of the outcome variable while allowing for the estimation of the association between the explanatory variables and the likelihood of falling into each category of the dependent variable. To address the potential for intra-regional correlation among observations, standard errors were clustered at the regional level.

It is important to emphasize that this study does not make causal claims. The potential issue of endogeneity cannot be entirely ruled out. While the analysis includes several control variables to account for factors that might confound the relationship between violence and perceptions of foreign troops, it is not possible to control for all potential sources of bias. Despite its correlational design, the study remains valuable for its contribution to an underexplored area of research. By shifting focus away from official government narratives and toward the perspectives of ordinary citizens, it offers important insights into public attitudes that are often overlooked in discussions about foreign military presence.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. French forces

Table 2 presents the results of ordered logit regression models examining the relationship between violence and perceptions of the French forces' contribution to maintaining stability in Burkina Faso. Models 1 through 3 focus on the victimization index, while Models 4 through 6 analyze

exposure to violent conflict. In Model 1, which includes only the victimization index, the coefficient is negative and statistically significant at the 1% level. This finding, which supports Hypothesis 1, suggests that higher levels of victimization are associated with a lower likelihood of perceiving French forces positively. One possible explanation is that victims of violence may feel French troops have failed to provide adequate security or protection, resulting in frustration and negative evaluations of their role. Model 2 shows that this relationship remains robust after controlling for additional variables, and Model 3 further confirms its robustness by incorporating region-level fixed effects. Notably, Model 3 has the lowest Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) value—2,663—among the three models, indicating it provides the best fit to the data.

Table 2: Ordered logit models regressing perceived effectiveness of French forces on violence

French forces useful$^{\Phi}$	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**
Victimization index	-0.144***	-0.111***	-0.105**			
	(0.036)	(0.033)	(0.041)			
Violent conflict (UCDP)				-0.087**	-0.053*	0.002
				(0.039)	(0.03)	(0.014)
News index		-0.1***	-0.09***		-0.103***	-0.094***
		(0.023)	(0.022)		(0.024)	(0.024)
Urban (Ref: Rural)		-0.133	0.037		-0.082	-0.031
		(0.18)	(0.179)		(0.17)	(0.16)
Unsafe		0.155	0.123		0.095	0.081
		(0.159)	(0.181)		(0.144)	(0.179)
Poverty index		-0.06**	-0.064**		-0.059**	-0.064**
		(0.025)	(0.028)		(0.026)	(0.028)
Educational level		-0.044	-0.067**		-0.036	-0.058*
		(0.031)	(0.027)		(0.033)	(0.03)
Age		0.001	0.003		0.002	0.004
		(0.005)	(0.004)		(0.005)	(0.004)
Male (Ref: Female)		-0.49***	-0.546***		-0.511***	-0.562***
		(0.165)	(0.165)		(0.166)	(0.17)
Intercept 1	-0.224**	-1.553***	-1.402***	-0.206	-1.497***	-1.308***
	(0.107)	(0.337)	(0.328)	(0.13)	(0.354)	(0.327)
Intercept 2	0.68***	-0.558	-0.374	0.69***	-0.512	-0.292
	(0.094)	(0.352)	(0.35)	(0.103)	(0.376)	(0.36)
Intercept 3	1.707***	0.552	0.764**	1.718***	0.597	0.844**
	(0.15)	(0.343)	(0.321)	(0.137)	(0.368)	(0.335)
Region fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	1166	1149	1149	1169	1152	1152
Pseudo R^2	0.011	0.055	0.072	0.008	0.051	0.067
Log pseudolikelihood	-1429.02	-1345.639	-1321.542	-1437.161	-1353.772	-1330.88
AIC statistic	2866.04	2713.278	2663.085	2882.322	2729.543	2681.76
BIC statistic	2886.286	2768.791	2713.551	2902.578	2785.085	2732.252

Note: Φ indicates the dependent variable; "Ref" indicates the reference category; "FE" denotes fixed effects. Clustered robust standard errors are in parentheses. *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10. All models are estimated using ordered logit (Ologit) regression. The dependent is measured on a four-point ordinal scale ranging from "1 = No use at all" to "5 = Very useful." AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. The regression models are based on data from Rounds 9 of the Afrobarometer survey, conducted in Burkina Faso in 2022.

Among the control variables, news consumption, poverty, educational level, and gender emerged as statistically significant predictors. The negative coefficient for news consumption indicates that higher levels of news consumption reduce the likelihood of individuals assessing French forces favorably. This may be because frequent news consumers are exposed to outlets that often criticize foreign military interventions, highlighting failures such as civilian casualties or controversies involving French troops, thereby shaping negative public opinion. Additionally, increased news consumption can raise awareness of broader political issues—such as concerns over sovereignty, allegations of foreign interference, or dissatisfaction with government alliances—which may further contribute to unfavorable views of foreign military presence.

Similarly, the negative coefficient for the poverty index suggests that higher levels of deprivation are linked to a lower likelihood of positive assessments of French forces. Poorer communities often bear the brunt of conflict and instability, experiencing more frequent violence, displacement, and loss of livelihoods. When French troops are perceived as failing to protect these vulnerable populations, negative evaluations become more common. Moreover, if French forces are seen as primarily protecting government elites or wealthy interests while neglecting the struggles of the poor, this perception can deepen existing resentments and amplify negative sentiments.

The negative coefficient for educational attainment indicates that higher levels of education are associated with a lower likelihood of assessing French forces favorably. This may be because education often broadens individuals' awareness of political, historical, and social contexts. Educated respondents tend to be more critical of foreign military interventions, particularly regarding issues of sovereignty, neo-colonialism, and the overall effectiveness of such operations.

Similarly, the negative coefficient for gender suggests that men are less likely than women to view French troops favorably. In many patriarchal societies, men often bear primary responsibility for income generation and may be more sensitive to disruptions caused by conflict or military operations, which can fuel dissatisfaction with foreign forces. Additionally, men—especially young men—are more likely to be directly involved in or affected by violent conflict,

whether as combatants, victims, or community defenders. These experiences may lead them to judge foreign military forces more harshly, particularly if they perceive these forces as ineffective or harmful.

In Model 4, the analysis shifts focus from direct victimization to exposure to violent conflict. When considering only violent conflict, the variable has a negative coefficient and is statistically significant at the 1% level. this finding, which provides further support for Hypothesis 1, suggests that higher levels of conflict exposure are associated with a lower likelihood of assessing French forces favorably. However, in Model 5, after including control variables, the statistical significance of conflict exposure decreases to the 10% level. In Model 6, which incorporates fixed effects for respondents' regions of residence, the variable becomes statistically insignificant, with a p-value of 0.9. This indicates that exposure to violent conflict is a relatively weak predictor of attitudes toward French troops compared to direct victimization. To check whether these results are influenced by the source of conflict data, I replicated Models 4, 5, and 6 using alternative measures of violent conflict derived from the ACLED and GTD datasets. As shown in Table A1 in the appendix, these alternative measures similarly prove to be poor predictors of attitudes toward French forces.

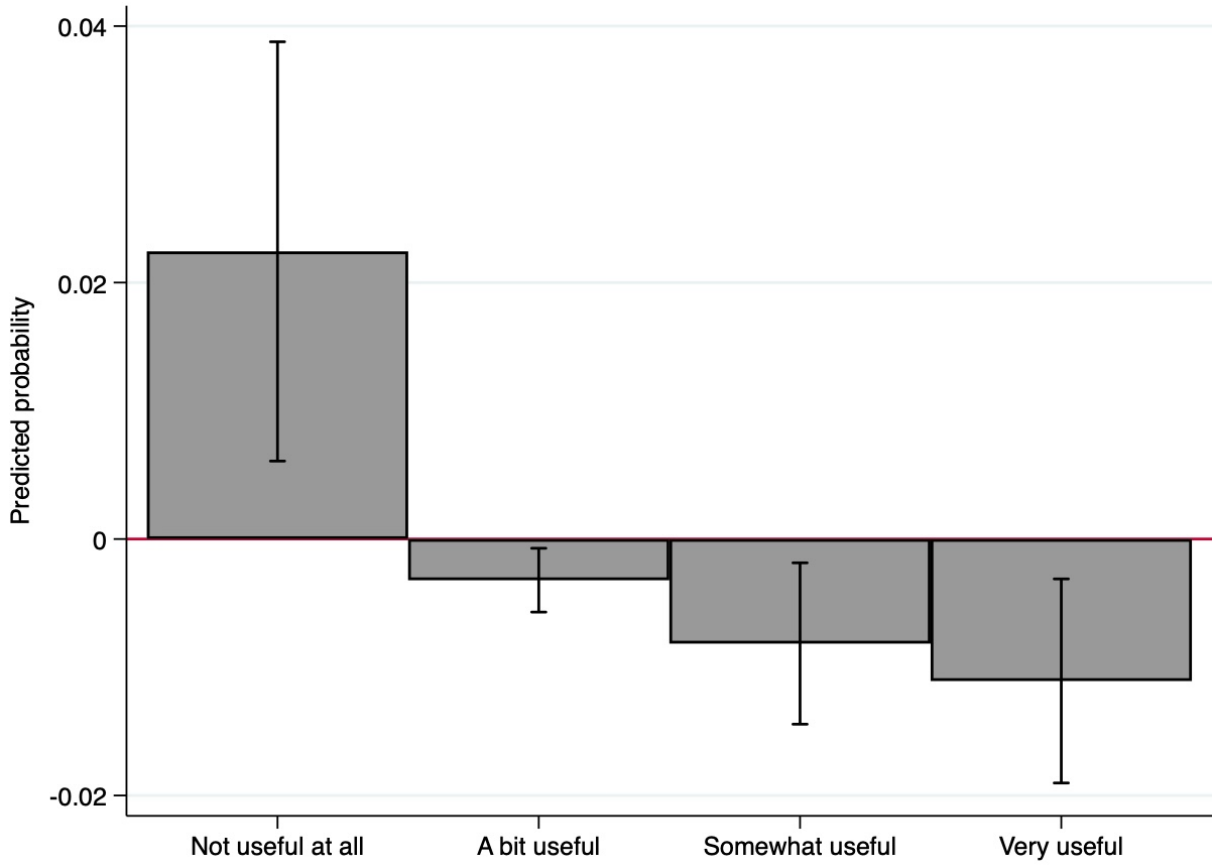

Figure 4: Predicted probabilities showing the associations between victimization and perceived contribution of French forces to stability in Burkina Faso

Note: The figure, based on Model 3 in Table 2, illustrates the association between the victimization index and each category of the dependent variable, which measures respondents' assessment of French forces' contribution to stability in Burkina Faso. The horizontal axis represents different levels of assessment, while the vertical axis shows the predicted probabilities. Confidence intervals are set at the 95% level. The figure is based on data from Round 9 of the Afrobarometer survey conducted in Burkina Faso in 2022.

To illustrate the relationship between the victimization index and assessments of French forces' contribution to security, I plotted the predicted probabilities from the full model (Model 3 in Table 2) in Figure 4. A clear pattern emerges: the strongest association is seen in the "Not useful at all" category of the dependent variable, where the association is also positive. Specifically, the results show that a 1-unit increase in the victimization index raises the probability of an individual selecting the "Not useful at all" response by 2.2 percentage points when assessing French forces' role in enhancing the country's stability. Conversely, this increase in victimization decreases the probability of choosing the "Very useful" category by 1.1 percentage points.

5.2. Russian forces

Table 3: Ordered logit models regressing perceived effectiveness of French forces on violence

Russian forces useful$^{\Phi}$	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**
Victimization index	-0.026	-0.024	-0.029			
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.026)			
Violent conflict (UCDP)				0.009	0.018	0.018**
				(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.008)
News index		-0.016	-0.014		-0.018	-0.016
		(0.015)	(0.012)		(0.015)	(0.013)
Urban (Ref: Rural)		0.03	0.271		-0.025	0.249
		(0.194)	(0.205)		(0.211)	(0.206)
Unsafe		0.009	-0.139		0.00	-0.147
		(0.145)	(0.166)		(0.144)	(0.167)
Poverty index		0.00	-0.01		-0.003	-0.012
		(0.017)	(0.016)		(0.017)	(0.017)
Educational level		-0.028	-0.037		-0.025	-0.036
		(0.032)	(0.026)		(0.032)	(0.025)
Age		0.002	0.001		0.002	0.001
		(0.003)	(0.003)		(0.003)	(0.003)
Male (Ref: Female)		0.02	0.011		0.025	0.013
		(0.061)	(0.07)		(0.061)	(0.07)
Intercept 1	-2.087***	-2.14***	-1.641***	-2.033***	-2.136***	-1.641***
	(0.176)	(0.265)	(0.202)	(0.178)	(0.256)	(0.197)
Intercept 2	-1.007***	-1.056***	-0.52***	-0.953***	-1.052***	-0.521***
	(0.153)	(0.235)	(0.155)	(0.163)	(0.228)	(0.149)
Intercept 3	0.37***	0.321	0.928***	0.427***	0.329	0.931***
	(0.142)	(0.247)	(0.174)	(0.152)	(0.243)	(0.17)
Region fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	1156	1140	1140	1159	1143	1143
Pseudo R^2	0.00	0.002	0.027	0.00	0.002	0.027
Log pseudolikelihood	-1471.662	-1452.063	-1415.874	-1475.294	-1455.18	-1419.537
AIC statistic	2951.324	2926.126	2851.747	2958.588	2932.361	2859.075
BIC statistic	2971.535	2981.553	2902.135	2978.809	2987.816	2909.489

Note: Φ indicates the dependent variable; "Ref" indicates the reference category; "FE" denotes fixed effects. Clustered robust standard errors are in parentheses. *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10. All models are estimated using ordered logit (Ologit) regression. The dependent variable is measured on a four-point ordinal scale ranging from "1 = No use at all" to "5 = Very useful." AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. The regression models are based on data from Rounds 9 of the Afrobarometer survey, conducted in Burkina Faso in 2022.

Having examined how victimization and conflict exposure relate to perceptions of French forces' contribution to stability in Burkina Faso, I now shift the focus of the analysis to Russian forces. Table 3 presents the results. As in the previous analysis, Models 1 to 3 focus on the victimization index, while Models 4 to 6 examine exposure to violent conflict. In Model 1, which includes only the victimization index, the coefficient is statistically insignificant. This result, which supports Hypothesis 2b, suggests that victimization is not associated with perceptions of Russian forces' contribution to stability. The finding remains consistent in Model 2, which includes control

variables, and in Model 3, which additionally incorporates fixed effects for the regions in which respondents reside.

Similarly, in Model 4, which includes only the measure of exposure to violent conflict, the variable is statistically insignificant. This lack of significance persists in Model 5, which incorporates control variables. However, in Model 6—where regional fixed effects are included—exposure to violent conflict becomes statistically significant for the first time. The positive coefficient, which supports Hypothesis 2a, suggests that higher levels of conflict exposure are associated with more favorable assessments of the Russian forces' contribution to security. To assess the robustness of these results, I replicated Models 4, 5, and 6 using alternative measures of violent conflict from the ACLED and GTD datasets. As shown in Table A2 of the appendix, these alternative indicators remained statistically insignificant across all models, including those with regional fixed effects. Notably, none of the control variables reach statistical significance in any of the models (Models 1 through 6), underscoring the contrast with the findings for French forces.

One plausible explanation for the lack of a correlation between victimization and perceptions of Russian forces—and the weak, non-robust association between violent conflict and such perceptions—is that Russian actors are relatively new to Burkina Faso's security landscape. Their recent arrival means they may not yet be strongly associated with local grievances or historical burdens. This stands in sharp contrast to French troops, who have maintained a long-standing and highly visible presence in Burkina Faso and the broader Sahel. Their involvement is often linked to France's colonial legacy and ongoing political influence in the region, making them a more likely target of public criticism.

Furthermore, Russian forces—or affiliated private military contractors—may be perceived by some as more assertive or effective in combating insurgents, even if such perceptions are shaped by state-driven propaganda or favorable media portrayals. For individuals who have experienced victimization, Russian forces may not yet be seen as directly responsible for their suffering,

particularly if they are viewed as stepping in to fill the security vacuum left by the departure of French forces.

Moreover, domestic media and political discourse often frame French troops more critically, emphasizing operational failures, civilian casualties, or broken promises. These narratives likely resonate more with individuals who have experienced violence. In contrast, Russian forces may benefit from more positive or neutral portrayals and may even be seen as a welcomed alternative. This divergence in narrative framing and historical association likely contributes to the absence of a significant negative correlation between victimization and perceptions of Russian forces.

6. Conclusion

Drawing on data from Round 9 of the Afrobarometer survey conducted in Burkina Faso in 2022, this study examines the relationship between experiences of violence and citizens' assessments of the contributions of French and Russian forces to national stability. Descriptive analysis reveals that Russian forces are viewed significantly more favorably than their French counterparts: 50% of Burkinabè believe that French forces have been of no use at all, compared to just 11% who say the same about Russian forces. Regression results show that both direct victimization and exposure to violent conflict reduce the likelihood of positively evaluating French forces, although the association is considerably weaker for conflict exposure. In contrast, victimization shows no correlation with perceptions of Russian forces, and while conflict exposure is positively associated with favorable assessments of Russian troops, this relationship is not robust when alternative measures of conflict exposure are used. The more negative attitudes toward French troops may stem from their longstanding presence in Burkina Faso's security landscape, which has enabled the public to evaluate their performance over time—often through the lens of unmet expectations and historical grievances rooted in France's colonial legacy. Russian forces, by contrast, are relatively new actors in the region, and their limited footprint may not yet be strongly associated with local

discontent or historical baggage, potentially explaining the absence of a comparable negative association.

These findings carry important implications for both domestic policymakers in Burkina Faso and international actors engaged in security cooperation across the Sahel. The results suggest that even when foreign forces possess strategic or tactical capabilities, their effectiveness may be undermined if they are perceived by the public—particularly those directly affected by violence—as illegitimate or untrustworthy. As such, foreign military partnerships must go beyond operational objectives to include deliberate efforts to build public trust through transparency, meaningful community engagement, and accountability for harm, especially in cases involving civilian casualties.

Moreover, the findings underscore the fluid and context-dependent nature of public perceptions. Burkinabè authorities should not assume that current support for Russian forces is stable or enduring. Favorable views may erode as foreign actors become more embedded in the security landscape or if their actions generate local resentment. Consequently, domestic leaders should regularly monitor public sentiment and avoid overreliance on any single foreign partner—particularly in a context of ongoing instability and political uncertainty.

A key limitation of this study is its correlational design, which precludes making causal claims. Future research should aim to examine these relationships using experimental or quasi-experimental methods that mitigate the effects of confounding variables, thereby making causal inference more feasible. Additionally, while the use of large-scale quantitative data offers broad insights into public perceptions, it falls short of capturing the depth of individual experiences and the specific motivations underlying attitudes toward foreign troops. To address this gap, future studies should incorporate qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, which can provide richer, more nuanced understandings of these perceptions.

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Appendix

Table A1: Replicating the results in models 4, 5, and 6 in Table 2 using measures of violent conflict derived from ACLED and GTD (French forces)

French forces useful$^{\Phi}$	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**
Violent conflict (GTD)	-0.045***	-0.026***	0.035			
	(0.011)	(0.01)	(0.024)			
Violent conflict (ACLED)				-0.012***	-0.007**	0.007
				(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.008)
News index		-0.105***	-0.094***		-0.105***	-0.094***
		(0.025)	(0.024)		(0.024)	(0.024)
Urban (Ref: Rural)		-0.073	-0.061		-0.058	-0.058
		(0.194)	(0.159)		(0.164)	(0.143)
Unsafe		0.084	0.076		0.085	0.083
		(0.144)	(0.179)		(0.144)	(0.18)
Poverty index		-0.064**	-0.065**		-0.062**	-0.065**
		(0.026)	(0.028)		(0.026)	(0.028)
Educational level		-0.031	-0.059*		-0.033	-0.057*
		(0.035)	(0.03)		(0.034)	(0.03)
Age		0.002	0.004		0.002	0.004
		(0.005)	(0.004)		(0.005)	(0.004)
Male (Ref: Female)		-0.515***	-0.561***		-0.512***	-0.56***
		(0.167)	(0.17)		(0.166)	(0.169)
Intercept 1	-0.162	-1.51***	-1.277***	-0.229	-1.529***	-1.297***
	(0.131)	(0.356)	(0.327)	(0.143)	(0.353)	(0.323)
Intercept 2	0.73***	-0.528	-0.261	0.664***	-0.547	-0.28
	(0.106)	(0.379)	(0.362)	(0.113)	(0.375)	(0.357)
Intercept 3	1.756***	0.581	.876***	1.692***	0.562	0.856***
	(0.151)	(0.369)	(0.338)	(0.157)	(0.366)	(0.331)
Region fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	1169	1152	1152	1169	1152	1152
Pseudo R^2	0.006	0.05	0.068	0.007	0.05	0.068
Log pseudolikelihood	-1439.579	-1355.055	-1330.598	-1438.6	-1355.105	-1330.643
AIC statistic	2887.157	2732.11	2681.195	2885.199	2732.211	2681.286
BIC statistic	2907.413	2787.652	2731.688	2905.455	2787.752	2731.779

Note: Φ indicates the dependent variable; "Ref" indicates the reference category; "FE" denotes fixed effects. Clustered robust standard errors are in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$. All models are estimated using ordered logit (Ologit) regression. The dependent variable is measured on a four-point ordinal scale ranging from "1 = No use at all" to "5 = Very useful." AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. The regression models are based on data from Rounds 9 of the Afrobarometer survey, conducted in Burkina Faso in 2022.

Table A2: Replicating the results in models 4, 5, and 6 in Table 3 using measures of violent conflict derived from ACLED and GTD (Russian forces)

Russian forces useful$^{\Phi}$	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**
Violent conflict (GTD)	-0.014	-0.013	-0.003			
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.02)			
Violent conflict (ACLED)				-0.002	-0.002	0.005
				(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.006)
News index		-0.018	-0.016		-0.017	-0.016
		(0.015)	(0.012)		(0.015)	(0.013)
Urban (Ref: Rural)		0.099	0.263		0.063	0.236
		(0.238)	(0.206)		(0.242)	(0.215)
Unsafe		-0.007	-0.148		-0.004	-0.146
		(0.139)	(0.166)		(0.141)	(0.166)
Poverty index		-0.002	-0.012		-0.001	-0.012
		(0.019)	(0.017)		(0.018)	(0.017)
Educational level		-0.025	-0.035		-0.026	-0.035
		(0.031)	(0.025)		(0.032)	(0.025)
Age		0.002	0.001		0.002	0.001
		(0.003)	(0.003)		(0.003)	(0.003)
Male (Ref: Female)		0.019	0.012		0.021	0.013
		(0.06)	(0.07)		(0.06)	(0.071)
Intercept 1	-2.1***	-2.16***	-1.639***	-2.094***	-2.155***	-1.63***
	(0.205)	(0.282)	(0.193)	(0.224)	(0.296)	(0.197)
Intercept 2	-1.02***	-1.075***	-0.52***	-1.015***	-1.071***	-0.511***
	(0.175)	(0.242)	(0.146)	(0.197)	(0.257)	(0.15)
Intercept 3	0.363**	0.307	0.932***	0.367**	0.31	0.941***
	(0.158)	(0.252)	(0.166)	(0.185)	(0.269)	(0.171)
Region fixed effects	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Observations	1159	1143	1143	1159	1143	1143
Pseudo R^2	0.001	0.002	0.027	0.00	0.002	0.027
Log pseudolikelihood	-1474.42	-1455.038	-1419.764	-1475.009	-1455.507	-1419.597
AIC statistic	2956.839	2932.075	2859.527	2958.017	2933.015	2859.194
BIC statistic	2977.06	2987.531	2909.941	2978.238	2988.47	2909.608

Note: Φ indicates the dependent variable; "Ref" indicates the reference category; "FE" denotes fixed effects. Clustered robust standard errors are in parentheses. *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10. All models are estimated using ordered logit (Ologit) regression. The dependent variable is measured on a four-point ordinal scale ranging from "1 = No use at all" to "5 = Very useful." AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. The regression models are based on data from Rounds 9 of the Afrobarometer survey, conducted in Burkina Faso in 2022.