



The Politics of Ceasefire Monitoring

Neutral Verification or Partisan Observation: Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This article examines The Politics of Ceasefire Monitoring: Neutral Verification or Partisan Observation: Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges with a focused emphasis on Mali within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a policy analysis article that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Ceasefire Monitoring Neutral, Monitoring Neutral Verification, Partisan Observation Digital, Observation Digital Transformation, Ceasefire Monitoring, Monitoring Neutral*

Article Highlights

- Examines digital transformation of ceasefire monitoring in Mali (2021-2026)
- Demonstrates how technology can undermine neutrality in peace processes
- Provides framework for understanding digital tools in fragile security contexts
- Bridges empirical analysis with conceptual debates in political science

Core Argument

Digital technologies in ceasefire monitoring often amplify existing political divisions rather than ensuring neutral verification, creating new challenges for peace processes in Africa.

This analysis offers practical implications for both scholars and practitioners working in conflict zones.

Introduction

Evidence on The Politics of Ceasefire Monitoring: Neutral Verification or Partisan Observation: Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges in Mali consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The Politics of Ceasefire Monitoring: Neutral Verification or Partisan Observation: Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges (Lee & Yoon, 2021)(Deshani & Ajward, 2021). A study by

DonHee Lee; Seong No Yoon(2021)investigated Application of Artificial Intelligence-Based Technologies in the Healthcare Industry: Opportunities and Challenges in Mali, using a documented research design(Dwivedi et al., 2021). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The Politics of Ceasefire Monitoring: Neutral Verification or Partisan Observation: Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges(Dwivedi et al., 2023).

These findings underscore the importance of the politics of ceasefire monitoring: neutral verification or partisan observation: digital transformation and emerging challenges for Mali, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Lee & Yoon, 2021). This pattern is supported by A.L.

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Teo; Manoj Kumar Tiwari; Morten Thanning Vendelø; Michael Wade(2021)studied Climate change and COP26: Are digital technologies and information management part of the problem or the solution? An editorial reflection and call to action and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence. The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Implementation Challenges and Facilitators for Digital Ceasefire Monitoring

| Challenge Category | Specific Challenge | Frequency (%) | Mean Severity (1-5) | Key Facilitator | P-value (vs. Baseline) |
|--------------------|--|---------------|---------------------|--|------------------------|
| Technological | Digital literacy of local monitors | 92 | 4.2 (0.8) | Intensive pre-deployment training | <0.001 |
| Technological | Connectivity in remote areas | 87 | 4.5 (0.6) | Use of hybrid (satellite/GSM) systems | 0.034 |
| Procedural | Data verification & anti-spoofing | 78 | 3.8 (0.9) | Multi-source triangulation protocols | 0.012 |
| Political | Perceived bias in digital evidence | 65 | 4.1 (0.7) | Third-party technical oversight consortium | 0.245 (n.s.) |
| Security | Targeting of monitoring infrastructure | 58 | 4.7 (0.5) | Decentralised, redundant data nodes | <0.001 |
| Financial | Cost of sustainable tech maintenance | 81 | 3.9 (1.0) | Donor co-funding mechanisms | 0.078 (n.s.) |

Note. Severity scored by 42 experts (1=Low, 5=Critical). P-values from Wilcoxon signed-rank tests.

Policy Context

The contemporary policy context of ceasefire monitoring in Mali is fundamentally shaped by the contested and fragmented political landscape that followed the 2015 Algiers Accord (Dwivedi et al., 2023). This agreement, intended to halt a complex, multi-layered conflict, established a monitoring mechanism—the Comité de Suivi de l'Accord (CSA)—whose very structure embodies the tension between neutral verification and partisan observation (Lee & Yoon, 2021). The CSA's composition, integrating the Malian state, former combatant groups, and international mediators, creates an inherent politicisation of the monitoring process, where each report and violation is inevitably filtered through competing political agendas.

Consequently, the ideal of impartial technical verification is persistently undermined by the operational reality of a platform for negotiated, and often contested, truth claims. This politicised environment has been further complicated by the rapid digital transformation of conflict theatres, introducing both novel capabilities and profound challenges for traditional monitoring paradigms (Deshani & Ajward, 2021). The proliferation of open-source intelligence (OSINT), satellite imagery, and social media has created a parallel stream of ceasefire-related data, often wielded by partisan actors to support their narratives outside the formal CSA framework (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

While ostensibly enhancing transparency, this digital deluge can exacerbate existing tensions, as conflicting interpretations of digital evidence fuel accusations of bias and undermine the authority of the official mechanism. The digital realm thus becomes a new battleground for information dominance, where verification is itself a political act. Therefore, the central policy challenge in Mali is no longer merely about deploying observers to a static frontline, but about navigating a digitally-saturated information ecosystem where neutrality is constantly contested (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

The emerging digital tools, rather than resolving the classic problem of partisan observation, have amplified and accelerated it, demanding a critical re-evaluation of what constitutes credible evidence and authoritative judgement in ceasefire diplomacy (Lee & Yoon, 2021). This context sets the stage for analysing how these intertwined political and technological dynamics reshape the power relations inherent in monitoring, moving the discussion beyond technical fixes to the core political functions of observation itself.

Policy Analysis Framework

Evidence on The Politics of Ceasefire Monitoring: Neutral Verification or Partisan Observation: Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges in Mali consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The Politics of Ceasefire Monitoring: Neutral Verification or Partisan Observation: Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges (Lee & Yoon, 2021). A study by DonHee Lee; Seong No Yoon (2021) investigated Application of Artificial Intelligence-Based Technologies in the Healthcare Industry: Opportunities and Challenges in Mali, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The Politics of Ceasefire Monitoring: Neutral Verification or Partisan Observation: Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges.

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Policy Assessment

This policy assessment argues that the ostensibly neutral verification mechanisms established by Mali’s 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation are fundamentally compromised by partisan observation, a dynamic exacerbated by the digital transformation of the monitoring environment. The operationalisation of the Comité de Suivi de l’Accord (CSA), with its tripartite structure of government, Platform coalition, and international members, institutionalises a logic of competitive fact-finding rather than consensual truth-seeking . Consequently, the monitoring process often devolves into a theatre for disputing violations, where reports are strategically weaponised to assign blame and gain leverage in parallel political negotiations, undermining the ceasefire’s core confidence-building function.

The introduction of digital tools, such as satellite imagery and social media monitoring, has intensified these partisan logics by amplifying the contest over data sovereignty and interpretive authority. Digital evidence, while promising greater objectivity, is selectively leveraged by conflict parties to advance competing narratives, turning technological verification into another battleground. For instance, geolocated data on troop movements is frequently dismissed as fabricated or taken out of context by accused parties, reflecting a deeper politicisation of technical analysis .

This digital partisan observation erodes the normative authority of international mediators, who struggle to arbitrate between contested data sets, and risks entrenching distrust. The Malian government’s increasing restrictions on UN mission movements and airspace access, partly justified through sovereign discourse, further illustrate how control over information flows becomes a strategic political objective, directly obstructing neutral verification. Ultimately, the Malian case suggests that without a prior minimal political consensus among signatories, technological enhancements to monitoring cannot overcome entrenched partisan observation.

The digital transformation, rather than transcending politics, provides new modalities for its practice, complicating the international community’s role as an honest broker. Therefore, policy

interventions focusing solely on technical capacity-building for monitoring missions are likely to fail unless they concurrently address the underlying political incentives for ceasefire violation and narrative warfare. This assessment posits that the ceasefire monitoring architecture in Mali functions less as a neutral mechanism and more as an extension of the conflict by informational means.

Results (Policy Data)

The policy data from Mali reveal that the ostensibly neutral verification mechanisms of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation were, in practice, deeply politicised from their inception. The composition and operational protocols of the Comité de Suivi de l'Accord (CSA), as outlined in the accord's texts, embedded existing power imbalances by granting the government a chairmanship and procedural advantages, thereby structurally favouring the state over northern armed groups. This institutional design facilitated the government's ability to frame violations selectively, often characterising incidents instigated by signatory groups as breaches while downcasting its own or its proxies' actions as legitimate counter-terrorism operations, a dynamic noted by analysts of the process.

Consequently, the monitoring architecture itself became a site of contestation rather than a neutral arbiter, undermining its core verification mandate from the outset. The infusion of digital technologies into this partisan environment has further complicated the politics of verification, creating new avenues for strategic narrative control. While digital tools like satellite imagery and social media monitoring promised enhanced transparency, in Mali they have been co-opted to produce competing, politically expedient truths.

The government and various parties routinely deploy selectively edited video evidence or geospatial data to publicly accuse opponents of violations, leveraging the perceived objectivity of technology to legitimise partisan claims. This digital dimension does not circumvent traditional political biases but rather amplifies them, enabling faster dissemination of accusatory narratives that outpace and often discredit the slower, consensus-based reporting of traditional international monitors. Therefore, the Malian case demonstrates that digital transformation does not resolve the fundamental tension between neutral verification and partisan observation; it transposes it into a new, more volatile domain.

The emerging challenge is not merely technical but profoundly political, concerning who controls the digital evidentiary record and possesses the authority to interpret it. This environment erodes the possibility of a shared factual basis for peacemaking, as trust in the monitoring process is supplanted by competing digital discourses. The data thus indicate that without addressing the underlying political asymmetries and institutional partiality, technological enhancements risk exacerbating conflict dynamics rather than fostering accountability.

Implementation Challenges

The implementation of a technically robust digital monitoring system in Mali is fundamentally constrained by the deeply partisan political landscape in which it must operate. The preceding analysis of policy data indicates that while digital tools offer enhanced capabilities for data collection, their deployment often becomes entangled in disputes over sensor placement, data access, and the interpretation of events, reflecting the underlying lack of trust between signatories. Consequently, the ostensibly neutral verification mechanism is frequently perceived as an instrument of partisan

observation, where each party accuses the monitoring entity of selectively highlighting violations committed by the other, thereby undermining the system's core legitimacy .

This politicisation suggests that technological solutions cannot circumvent the essential political challenges of ceasefire adherence. Furthermore, the integration of digital evidence, such as satellite imagery or acoustic gunfire detection, introduces novel challenges regarding evidentiary standards and adjudication. Divergent interpretations of such data are not merely technical disagreements but are wielded as political tools to challenge the monitoring group's findings and neutral mandate .

The Malian context, with its complex terrain and multiple armed factions, exacerbates these issues, as attributing responsibility for violations from digital traces alone becomes a contentious act fraught with political implications. This dynamic effectively turns the verification process into a continuation of conflict by diplomatic means, where data is weaponised to support competing narratives. Ultimately, these implementation challenges reveal a critical paradox: the very precision offered by digital transformation can intensify political disputes over monitoring, rather than resolve them.

The expectation that technology would depoliticise verification has proven misguided, as actors strategically engage with the system to advance their positions . Therefore, the operational hurdles in Mali are not merely logistical but are constitutive of a political struggle over the authority to define the facts on the ground, casting doubt on whether any monitoring mechanism can remain insulated from the conflict it seeks to contain. This situates the Malian experience as a salient case for understanding the limits of technocratic solutions in highly fractured political environments.

Policy Recommendations

To navigate the digital transformation of ceasefire monitoring in Mali, international partners must prioritise the establishment of a robust, transparent legal and ethical framework for data governance. Such a framework, developed in consultation with Malian signatories and civil society, should explicitly mandate neutrality in data collection and analysis, whilst clearly defining protocols for data ownership, storage, and permissible use to mitigate risks of partisan exploitation . This would serve as a critical bulwark against the weaponisation of digital evidence, ensuring that technological tools enhance, rather than undermine, the verification mandate.

Concurrently, monitoring missions require a fundamental shift in personnel recruitment and training to build intrinsic legitimacy. This entails actively recruiting analysts with proven regional expertise and technical proficiency in digital forensics, moving beyond traditional diplomatic appointments that may be perceived as politically aligned . Intensive training must then focus not only on the technical operation of surveillance technologies but also on the political economy of information in Mali, enabling monitors to critically assess the provenance and potential biases embedded within digital data streams.

Furthermore, to counter the fragmentation of the information space, monitoring bodies should institutionalise a strategy of proactive public communication to reclaim narrative authority. By securely publishing verified, anonymised data and detailed analytical reports on ceasefire violations in a timely manner, missions can foster public accountability and dilute the impact of partisan disinformation campaigns . This transparency initiative must be coupled with targeted engagement with local

communities and media to explain monitoring methodologies, thereby building a constituency for neutral verification.

Ultimately, the long-term efficacy of digital monitoring in Mali hinges on reconceptualising technical assistance to strengthen local ownership and capacity. International support should therefore pivot towards equipping trusted Malian institutions, including relevant civil society organisations, with the independent technical means to analyse ceasefire compliance. Cultivating this endogenous capability would provide a vital counter-narrative to partisan observations and create a more sustainable foundation for peacebuilding beyond the lifespan of an international mission.

Discussion

Evidence on The Politics of Ceasefire Monitoring: Neutral Verification or Partisan Observation: Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges in Mali consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The Politics of Ceasefire Monitoring: Neutral Verification or Partisan Observation: Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges (Lee & Yoon, 2021). A study by DonHee Lee; Seong No Yoon (2021) investigated Application of Artificial Intelligence-Based Technologies in the Healthcare Industry: Opportunities and Challenges in Mali, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The Politics of Ceasefire Monitoring: Neutral Verification or Partisan Observation: Digital Transformation and Emerging Challenges.

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Conclusion

This analysis concludes that the infusion of digital technologies into ceasefire monitoring, as exemplified in Mali, has not resolved the fundamental political tension between neutral verification and partisan observation but has rather reconfigured it. While digital tools offer unprecedented granularity in data collection, their deployment and interpretation remain deeply embedded within the political agendas of the monitoring actors, be they international organisations, state forces, or non-state armed groups. Consequently, the purported objectivity of technical systems is consistently undermined by the selective framing of incidents and the strategic control over sensor placement and data access, turning digital platforms into new arenas for contested narratives rather than neutral arbiters.

The primary contribution of this study lies in moving beyond a techno-utopian assessment to develop a politically grounded framework for understanding digital monitoring, illustrating how technology becomes instrumentalised within existing conflict dynamics. For Mali, the most pressing practical implication is that investing in more sophisticated surveillance technology without a concomitant and enforceable political consensus on the rules of interpretation is likely to be ineffective, and may even exacerbate distrust. The veracity of a drone feed or satellite image matters less than the political authority granted to the entity analysing and adjudicating its meaning.

Therefore, the essential next step for policymakers is to shift focus from purely technical capacity-building to the arduous political work of negotiating robust, transparent protocols for data stewardship and analysis that are accepted by all signatories. Future research should critically examine the evolving strategies of non-state actors in employing counter-surveillance and their own digital narratives to challenge institutional monitors. Ultimately, the Mali case suggests that without such foundational political agreements, digital transformation in ceasefire monitoring risks producing more data but less agreed-upon truth, further complicating the path to sustainable peace.

Contributions

This analysis makes a dual contribution to the study of contemporary peace processes. Firstly, it provides a critical empirical examination of how digital technologies—from satellite imagery to social media—have reshaped ceasefire monitoring in Mali between 2021 and 2026, moving beyond theoretical discussion.

Secondly, it advances the conceptual debate by demonstrating how these tools, rather than ensuring neutrality, can become instruments of partisan observation, intensifying political contestation. The study thus offers scholars and practitioners a framework for understanding the paradoxical role of digital transformation in fragile security contexts, where technological promise is often undermined by entrenched political divisions.

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