

The Right to Remain a Child

A Comparative Study of the Relationship between Norm Translation
and Child Soldiers



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Abstract

Despite the international norm against the recruitment and use of child soldiers, some rebel groups continue to recruit children while others do not. Why is this so? This thesis explores the relationship between the translation of child protection norms and child soldier recruitment in four countries of West Africa: Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Mali. Building on the three-dimension model of norm translation and theories on rebel decision-making, this study develops its own conceptual framework, and the four cases are selected using a Most Similar Systems Design. Thereafter, the cases are analyzed using the method of Structured Focused Comparison. The material used is gathered from secondary sources of governments and organizations. The study finds that the country with the highest degree of translation of child protection norms did not use child soldiers. The country with the lowest degree of norm translation used child soldiers. It was also the only country with over 20,000 child soldiers and the with the most brutal recruitment tactics. Countries with partially translated child protection norms used child soldiers in lower numbers. However, they did not use girls in heavy combat, in contrast to the country with the lowest degree of norm translation.

Keywords: Norm translation, Child Protection, Child Soldiers, Legitimacy, Rationality, Deterrence, OPAC, CRC

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List of abbreviations

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
CRC	Convention of the Rights of the Child
FAFN	Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles
FANCI	Forces armées nationales de Côte d'Ivoire
FRCI	Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ILO	International Labour Organization
INPFL	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MFDC	Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance
MJP	Mouvement pour la justice et la paix
MNLA	Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MPCI	Mouvement partiotique de Côte d'Ivoire
MPIGO	Mouvement Populaire ivoirien du Grand Ouest
MUJAO	Movement pour le Taqhid et du Jihad en Afrique
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
OPAC	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict
OPSC	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
SCSL	Special Court for Sierra Leone

1 Introduction

Since the turn of the century, more than 115,000 child soldiers have been released, largely due to international efforts like the 'Children, Not Soldiers' campaign by the UN, NGO activity, and treaties adopted (SRSG-CAAC, 2016: 10). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted in 1989 as the most rapidly ratified treaty ever, and the 2000s Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) is today ratified by 172 countries (SRSGCAAC, 2016). This indicates a widespread consensus on the protection of children in armed conflict (Singer, 2006: 232). Despite all these efforts, child soldiers continue to be a significant global challenge. According to UNICEF, 93,000 children were verified as child soldiers between 2005 and 2020 (UNICEF, 2021a). However, most scholars estimate this to be substantially higher, around 200,000-300,000 child soldiers (Lasley & Thyne, 2014: 290). Approximately 70% of the child soldiers are attributed to rebel groups (Jo, 2015: 147). Despite this large number, not all rebel groups recruit children. Why is this the case?

After reviewing the literature on child soldiering (section 2.1), two aspects are identified as inadequately researched. Firstly, most have focused on why rebel groups recruit child soldiers and not why they abstain. Secondly, most research has explained recruitment by referring to material factors, from rebel funding to resource constraints and light weapons (Singer, 2010; Faulkner, Powell & Lasley, 2019), while attention to non-material factors has been lacking. Therefore, I have chosen to study the concept of norms in relation to child soldiers. I consider whether the degree of translation of child protection norms in the country where rebel groups operate can explain the variation in child soldier recruitment.

1.1 Overview of international child protection norms

In 1989 the CRC was adopted, covering children's rights, and explicitly highlighting children participating in armed conflict (CRC, 1989: Article 38). This

treaty was ground-breaking in defining the role of children and childhood, from someone previously needing protection to someone with agency and holders of their own rights (Zimmerman, 2015: 108-109). Graça Machel in 1996 released a UN report that made children in armed conflict a top priority (SRSG-CAAC, 2016). Shortly after followed the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC). In 2005 a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and the Working Groups on Children and Armed Conflict were established to collect and verify information on violations against children in armed conflict (SRSG-CAAC, 2016: 20-26).

Resolution 1261 (1999) introduced the six grave violations of children in armed conflict (S/RES/1261). Annually, since 2001 the Secretary-General has released a report, the so-called naming and shaming report, where a violator of one or more of the following six violations is listed by name (Haer, 2019: 82).

1. Recruitment and use of children
2. Killing and maiming of children
3. Sexual violence against children
4. Attacks on schools and hospitals
5. Abduction of children
6. Denial of humanitarian access (SRSG-CAAC, 2016).

To be removed from the list, an action plan must be signed between the UN and the violating party that outlines how and what needs to be done to be delisted (SRSG-CAAC, 2016).

Article 77(2) of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Convention urges states to ensure that those under 15 do not take direct part in hostilities (ICRC, 2022a). Article 8(2)(b)(xxvi) and (e)(vii) of the Rome Statute considers the use of child soldiers under 15 to be a war crime (Rome Statute, 1998). The Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC) and on the sale of children, child prostitution, and pornography (OPSC) was the turning point. Created in 2000, they prohibited non-state actors from voluntary and compulsory recruitment of all children under 18 (OPAC, 2000: Article 4). Government forces were only banned from forcible recruitment and from using children under 18 in direct hostilities (OPAC, 2000: Article 1-3). The International Labor Organization's (ILO) Convention No. 182 also prohibits the use of children under 18 (ILO, 1999: Article 3).

1.2 Research question and purpose

This thesis aims to understand better why some armed groups continue to recruit child soldiers, despite the international norm against recruitment and why some abstain from doing so. To prevent this phenomenon from occurring, it is essential to understand why child soldiers are recruited and under what circumstances they are not, thereby working towards protecting the most vulnerable group in society. By looking at four countries in West Africa; Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Mali, this study will address the following research question:

What is the relationship between the translation of child protection norms and the recruitment of child soldiers?

2 Previous Research

2.1 Child soldiers

According to Haer (2019: 75), research on child soldiering revolves around four different approaches: structural factors, supply, demand, and consequences of child soldiering.

Regarding structural explanations, Singer (2010: 8) highlights three factors of importance; technological developments through smaller arms; new wars as more violent, decentralized, and less professional, often by non-state actors motivated by economic incentives and socio-economic changes following wars and globalization that have made children more vulnerable to recruitment (Singer, 2010: 3-4 & 8-10).

The supply-side arguments focus on push and pull factors (Haer, 2019). The pull factors concentrate on incentives for children to join; food, adventure, money, security, ideology, revenge, or fame is highlighted (Haer, 2019: 76). Push factors can be poverty or lack of educational and employment opportunities. These could increase the availability of vulnerable children to recruit (Faulkner, Powell & Lasley, 2019). However, "there are many more poor children who do not become child soldiers than do" (Achvarina & Reich, 2006: 134). Achvarina & Reich (2006: 163-164) instead argue that when refugee camps' protection fails, children are left unprotected and are an easier recruitment target.

The demand side focuses on why actors recruit children. Some emphasize children as easier to manipulate and control (Beber & Blattman, 2013: 69); others that children are only considered when there is a deficit of adult participants, a risk increasing as the conflict intensifies or is prolonged (Haer, 2019: 76). Many researchers have focused on the financial aspect. Groups with finances gained from lootable natural resources are more likely to use children than those seeking finances elsewhere or non-lootable resources (Faulkner, Powell & Lasley, 2019: 1017). Groups dependent on civilian support or have secessionist goals are also less

likely to recruit children (Haer, Faulkner & Whitaker, 2020: 236 & 240; Lasley & Thyne, 2014: 290).

Lastly, the consequences of child soldiering focus on the psychological pain and trauma caused by exposure to violence, societal exclusion, and loss of educational opportunities (Blattman & Annan, 2010: 895). Among the societal consequences, children raised and socialized in a violent environment might continue to engage in violence as adults (Achvarina & Reich, 2006: 130). These often go hand in hand with studies on Disarmament Demobilization Reintegration (DDR) initiatives (Haer, 2019: 78).

Two aspects are identified that have received less focus in relation to child soldiering. First, researchers have focused on material factors. Second, several explanations are identified as to why groups recruit children, but lesser research has focused on why some abstain. Jo (2015) shows that rebels abstain when they want legitimacy to become a viable political party. Haer, Faulkner & Whitaker (2020: 236 & 240) state that groups are more likely to abstain when dependent on civilian support. Lasley & Thyne (2014: 202) state that secessionist groups abstain because it could hurt their chances for international recognition and independence. They show that rebel groups historically have changed their message, tactics, and use of violence to be more appealing to the international community and receive international support (Lasley & Thyne, 2014: 294-295). Is it the same when wanting domestic support? Could we assume that if a country has highly translated norms of child protection, the rebel groups seeking legitimacy and support will be less likely to recruit child soldiers than in countries with a lower degree of translation? Why rebels are assumed to strive for legitimacy will be outlined in my conceptual framework (section 3.2.2), but in short, I define rebel groups as "armed organizations that fight against a government in an internal armed conflict in order to advance their political and/or military agenda" (Jo, 2015: 8). Since my definition of rebel groups defines them as fighting against a government, I assume that support is essential to achieve their goals vis-à-vis the Government.

2.2 Norm diffusion

Norms in the following thesis are defined as "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity" (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998: 891). What is described as appropriate is done in contrast to what is not, a norm-breaking behavior met with stigma, condemnation, or punishment (Björkdahl, 2002: 14).

The socialization approach looks at whether a norm, as a "thing" with a particular fixed meaning, is implemented rather than if/how it changes when it is adopted in a new context (Krook & True, 2010: 104 & 106; Zimmerman, 2017: 7). By following the *logic of consequentiality*, the focus turns to the norm-senders' tactics to enforce the norm and the cost-benefit calculation of the norm-takers. Methods used could be coercion, conditionality, or increasing costs of noncompliance (Zimmerman, 2017: 23-24). The *logic of appropriateness* instead focuses on adoption by wanting to follow the appropriate behavior (Zimmerman, 2017: 32-33). Socialization treats norms as a linear process, from full adoption to full rejection, with partial compliance in-between. It, to some extent, implies that the goal is full adoption of the international meaning of the norm (Zimmerman, 2017: 29 & 37).

In contrast, the localization perspective focus on how local actors interpret international norms and, through that, remake or modify them to fit the local context (Acharya, 2004: 244). The actors are treated with greater independence and agency, and through the localization, the norm gains more credibility and stability (Zimmerman, 2017: 42). Despite this, Zimmerman argues that the focus is exclusively on the local, while the socialization perspective overly focuses on the international level (Zimmerman, 2017: 39). Based on these shortcomings, Zimmerman developed the *norm translation* framework.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Norm translation

Zimmerman's three-dimension model explains norm translation from the global to the local level. Norm translation means taking a norm and reshaping, adapting, or adopting it to a new context (Zimmerman, 2017: 18). This occurs by translating norms into discourse, law, and/or implementation. Zimmerman argues that we cannot assume that a norm becomes stable, permanent, or complete. What we can do, is "study temporally stabilized outcomes on the three dimensions" (Zimmerman, 2017: 54).

First, the translation of a norm into discourse, often political or media discourse, is analyzed. To understand this, the concept of frames is used that focus on how the norm is interpreted, how the norms are argued around, and what actors support or reject this set of norms (Zimmerman, 2017: 56 & 19). These are either frames of resistance, criticism, or support. Second, the translation into law is analyzed. This makes a norm more embedded and permanent. The focus is on how global norms or standards are translated into local legislation (Zimmerman, 2016: 106). It can vary from translating the dominant perspective of the political discourse, or it can become a negotiation process between different interpretations (Zimmerman, 2017: 57). The norms' translation into implementation can be seen through three types: rejection, reshaping, or full adoption. Third, translation into implementation focus on translating the norm into policies, creating institutions to enforce them, and how they are seen in the political process and life in general (Zimmerman, 2017: 58). Here, we can also distinguish three types: rejection, reshaping, or full adoption.

The framework of norm translation will be used to analyze the degree of norm translation in each chosen country. Further details on the operationalization of this will be given in section 4.2.1.

3.2 Why do rebels comply?

3.2.1 The rational rebel

I assume that it is the rebel leadership itself that determines when children ultimately are and are not to be recruited (Wood, 2019: 19). This does not exclude the agency of children, but without the rebel leaders' permission to recruit children, it will not occur, regardless of how many children volunteer (Wood, 2019: 40). I also assume that rebels are rational and that individual actions shape their choices. A strategy, in this case recruiting child soldiers, will be chosen if the perceived benefits of doing so will outweigh the potential costs (Demmers, 2017: 108). The first step is to determine the rational behavior, then analyze whether this corresponds to reality (Demmers, 2017: 114). I am aware of the individual agency of rebels, but I will not account for individual-level explanations. Instead, I will focus on the group as a coherent entity in decision-making (Jo, 2015: 39).

The concept of thick rationality assumes that actors can strive for material and non-material benefits such as prestige, safety, or legitimacy (Demmers, 2017: 113-114). The actor can make calculated rational decisions, influenced but not determined by the context the actor is situated in (Demmers, 2017: 115). Woods also highlights the connections between rebels and society. Rebels need support from local communities, and what norms that guide these communities will also influence the calculation of rebels (Wood, 2019: 45).

3.2.2 Strategic legitimacy theory of rebel compliance

This theory argues that rebel groups comply with international law when they want legitimacy (Jo, 2015: 14). Persistent compliers consistently choose legitimacy over law-breaking behavior, while switchover compliers alternate (Jo, 2015: 91).

Rebel groups can follow local norms and international law because it aligns with their values (as the logic of appropriateness) or choose to comply for strategic reasons (as the logic of consequentiality). The latter is called strategic legitimacy. Compliance occurs when rebels find it strategically beneficial (Jo, 2015: 31).

Legitimacy is defined as "support and recognition that a rebel group is a viable political authority" (Jo, 2015: 27). While international legitimacy is essential, domestic legitimacy is crucial (Jo, 2015: 15). The definition of a rebel group (see section 2.1) states that they fight against a government to reach their goal, and to achieve this, the rebellion will need support. Therefore, I argue that most rebels strive for legitimacy. There are exceptions, but based on the time limits of this thesis, some assumptions regarding rebels are made. First, rebels are rational. Second, rebels seek legitimacy.

Furthermore, the theory accounts for different ways child soldiers are recruited and employed. When rebels who are not expected to use child soldiers still do, they are assumed not to deploy them to direct combat and rely on voluntary recruitment. Rebels who are expected to recruit children are more violent and rely on forcible recruitment (Jo, 2015: 153).

Recruiting children can be cheaper; they can be easier to indoctrinate and increase troop numbers. The benefits of compliance must therefore outweigh this. If a country has highly translated child protection norms, the social and political (legitimacy) costs of recruiting children would be too high compared to the potential benefits, and rebels would more likely abstain. How much legitimacy the group will risk losing by recruitment will depend on the degree of norm translation in the country. Underlying this assumption is that when norms are highly translated, most will agree on them, including the rebel group supporters.

3.2.3 Deterrence

The deterrence logic assumes that prosecuting and/or punishing perpetrators can deter future crimes or prevent the escalation of ongoing crimes by impacting the cost-benefit calculus of potential perpetrators (Cronin-Furman, 2013: 437). The threat of prosecution and punishment must be credible and the penalty severe (Cronin-Furman, 2013: 441). The International Criminal Court (ICC) aims to make it too costly for actors to commit crimes that they will choose to abstain by investigating, prosecuting and convicting actors (Cronin-Furman, 2013: 439). On a domestic level, Nagin (2013: 202) argues that the certainty of getting convicted and not the severity of the crime determines the deterrence effect. The stronger the

legislation and enforcement of child protection, the more significant the deterrence effect.

3.3 Conceptual framework

This study constructs its own conceptual framework by combining the theoretical arguments and concepts above. Zimmerman's three-dimension model of norm translation is built upon to understand the degree of norm translation in three dimensions: discourse, law, and implementation. Since the degree of translation in each country is analyzed, and not how specific actors reshape the norm, the subtypes used in Zimmerman's model are not applicable. I will instead analyze the degree of translation by categorizing each dimension into complete translation, partial translation, and low translation. The theories on why rebels comply will be used to understand under what circumstances rebels are assumed to engage in normbreaking behavior, under what circumstances they comply with the norm, and how to identify what the rational behavior is. Further, also to understand why some use forced recruitment and deploy children to heavy combat. The thick rationality helps to understand the interplay between the society and the rebels and how domestic norms can increase or decrease recruitment costs in the cost-benefit calculus. Lastly, deterrence will be used to understand how and when prosecution and punishment could impact the rebels. Only the relevant aspects to understand the research question have been included. Together they will constitute the conceptual framework used to understand the relationship between the translation of child protection norms and child soldier recruitment.

4 Research Design

4.1 Method of analysis

For this thesis, a comparative research design is chosen. This will enable the illustration of differences and similarities between the countries and, through that, try to understand better the relationship between the translation of child protection norms and child soldier recruitment. It is important to remember that the purpose of this study is not to establish causation between child protection norms and child soldiering but to understand the relationship between the two.

A comparison of the four countries will be made by a qualitative analysis of the material (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 231-232). A small-N study is chosen based on wanting a more in-depth understanding of the relationship and to provide helpful context for the cases that would not be possible with large-N. This method, therefore, has a stronger internal validity; however, the results will to some extent, become context-dependent and therefore come at the expense of the external validity (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 162-168). To address this weakness, the cases are chosen with a Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 239).

For the empirical analysis, the method of structured focused comparison (SFC) will be used. This structures the empirical material around the theoretical assumptions, and from them develops the same standardized and general questions asked to each chosen case. Doing this ensures equal attention to all cases (George & Bennet, 2005: 68-70). Furthermore, the method is focused only on the most theoretically relevant aspects and assumptions (George & Bennet, 2005: 70).

4.2 Operationalization

4.2.1 Translation of child protection norms

The outcome of norm translation is analyzed in three dimensions: discourse, law, and implementation. Each dimension is thereafter categorized into complete, partial, and low translation. If one dimension fulfills all criteria for complete translation except one, it is classified as partial translation (+). (+) indicates that it is close to the complete translation category, while partial translation (-) would suggest that it is closer to the lower category.

Translation into discourse

How the state has received and interpreted international norms is one way to analyze translation into discourse. The signing and ratification of a treaty can be a clear statement of a country's willingness to comply with child protection norms, how a state can express its commitment to it and whether it is rejected or accepted in political life in general (Jo, 2015: 75). Based on the overview in section 1.1, the following treaties/conventions are chosen: CRC, OPAC, OPSC, ILO Convention, and the Rome Statute. Since focusing on Western Africa, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC, 1990) is included.

Questions

- i. Has the country signed and/or ratified the relevant treaties/conventions?
- ii. Has the country made any reservations towards these?
- iii. Has the country made any relevant abstentions in the UNSC against any important resolutions? (See specific resolutions in [appendix B](#)).

Translation into law

The translation into law makes the norm embedded and more permanent, often dependent on the translation into discourse. Without translation into law, the ratification is meaningless. The child protection legislation will be analyzed based on themes identified in the treaties/conventions above. Child soldiering (OPAC),

child labor (ILO), child trafficking and sale (OPSC), criminal responsibility (Rome Statute), and child marriage (ACRWC, 1990: Article 21(2)).

Questions

- i. What is the minimum age for joining the military? Do or did the military use children?
- ii. Do any relevant national legislation/policies exist focusing on child soldiers? Does child soldiering constitute a crime?
- iii. What is the minimum age for employment? Do any legislation/policies exist on child labor? How do these correspond to the international standard? The minimum age for employment in line with the ILO Convention 138 is 15. 14 years for developing countries and 13 for light work (ACPF, 2018: 35).
- iv. Do any relevant national legislation/policies exist focusing on child trafficking and sale?
- v. What is the minimum age for criminal responsibility? Is it in line with the international standard? The absolute minimum, according to the CRC, is 12 years (UN, 2007: 11).
- vi. What is the minimum age for marriage? How well does this correspond to the international minimum age of 18 (ACRWC, 1990: Article 21(3))?

Translation into implementation

Laws are in themselves not enough if they are not implemented and respected. Implementation can be seen by creating institutions to enforce the laws and in the actual number of atrocities committed against children. What atrocities to analyze are based on the chosen treaties/conventions and identified themes above.

Questions

- i. Has there been any creation of state institutions to enforce child protection norms?
- ii. Are there children in child labor? Have cases of child trafficking been reported? Is any child under 12 held criminally responsible? Are any children under 18 married?

- iii. Has there been any international or national court cases regarding child soldiers? Has ICC opened any investigations related to the country?

This operationalization will not capture the whole range of translation of child protection norms, and other aspects that could have been included are issues related to children's health, birth registration, education, or poverty. However, I argue that the chosen questions provide a good overall representation of the concept.

The time perspective for each conflict will be illustrated in the contextual background, and each dimension of norm translation will be analyzed during the respective conflict period. Only when data is not available, data from later years will be used, which is required to give an overall picture of the norm translation.

4.2.2 Child soldier recruitment

A child in this thesis is defined as every person under 18 (CRC, 1989: Article 1). However, not all agree that children become adults at a certain age. This can differ between ethnicities, gender, religions, cultures, or other factors (Kononenko, 2016: 92). Jo (2015: 149) shows that a child becomes an adult in several Muslim countries at 15. A girl can, according to Islamic law, be considered an adult after her first menstruation, and children can therefore become adults way before turning 18 (Ibrahim, Hussain & Aziz, 2012: 52). The definition of a child soldier used in this thesis

refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities (UNICEF, 2007: 2(1)).

Depending on the data available the actual number of child soldiers will be presented along with this number in relation to the total number of rebels, what roles they are assigned and how they were recruited. Each country will be categorized into high (over 10,000), moderate (100-10,000), or low/no (below 100) use of child soldiers.

Questions

- i. Has there been any recruitment and use of child soldiers by rebel groups in the country? Has this behavior been consistent or changed?
- ii. Have rebel groups signed any statements, policies, or agreements on child soldiers or where they committed to respecting human rights?
- iii. Has any rebel group signed any action plans? Were there any UNSC sanctions imposed? Has any rebel group been listed on the UN naming and shaming list? This annual report lists violators of the six grave violations.
- iv. Has there been any reporting on the roles assigned to child soldiers? Any reporting on forced versus voluntary recruitment?

4.3 Case selection

In small-N, cases must be carefully selected to minimize the risk of selection bias. The MSSD enables the inclusion of theoretically relevant characteristics from previous research. To avoid an omitted variable bias, ideally, all theoretically important variables should be included. However, this will not be possible, and a careful selection will be made (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 240). If countries share specific characteristics but reach different outcomes, one can be more confident that the proposed relationship is accurate. The literature review identifies conflict intensity, poverty, and limited education opportunities as explanations for child soldiering. Since the unit of analysis is countries, group factors like dependence on natural resources or troop shortages will not be included

Singer describes Africa as "the epicenter of child soldiering" (Singer, 2006: 32). Achvarina and Reich (2006: 131) state that Africa has the fastest growth of child soldiers. Therefore, only countries in Africa are chosen, and since striving for similar countries, only countries in West Africa. To select the four cases, I conducted a pre-analysis of all West African countries. All detailed tables are found in the appendix ([see appendix A](#)). For data collection purposes, the first step eliminates countries without intrastate armed conflicts after 1989, defined as "a contested incompatibility that [...] results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one

calendar year" (UCDP, 2022i). To account for levels of intensity, only cases within the range of 2,000-30,000 battle-related deaths are included ([see appendix A](#)).

The second step introduces the criterion of armed conflict for at least five consecutive years ([see appendix A](#)). The third step introduces the Human Development Index (life expectancy, education, and GNI/capita) as a measurement of poverty and education. Countries with values above six and below four are excluded. However, no such cases were found.

Halperin & Heath (2020: 244-245) criticize selecting cases on the dependent variable. I assume that the translation of child protection norms can influence child soldier recruitment, and to account for this criticism, I will include variations in the degree of norm translation as selection criteria. Based on the operationalization in the previous section, I determine the degree of translation superficially based on the signing and ratification of OPAC and the Rome Statute (discourse) and the minimum age of military recruitment (law). If the minimum age of 18 is respected, it is marked in green, while in red if it is not ([see appendix A](#)) (WVI, 2022).

The fourth step categorizes all countries into norm translation categories. One country from each category is chosen. Since three countries were categorized as discourse and law, two from this category were chosen. These choices are based on data availability, and Sierra Leone is excluded because it is very well researched in relation to child soldiering (Haer, 2019: 79). The countries I am left with are Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Mali ([see appendix A](#)). soldiering.

It should be acknowledged that among the four cases, Liberia is somewhat deviant regarding battle-related deaths with more than twice the number of Mali, the second highest. However, since Liberia is the only case that fit the translation into law category, it is chosen, but this aspect should be highlighted.

4.4 Material

The material used is gathered from secondary sources of qualitative reports, academic sources, and quantitative statistics collected by governments and organizations. Using secondary data presents several challenges and potential biases regarding who funded and collected the data and for what purposes (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 196). In this study, high child labor rates could reflect negatively

on the Government, a fact that could lead them to modifying the data (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 202). When possible, to address this problem, I cross-check for equivalent levels of, for example, child labor from different sources, a method called triangulation. Doing this can increase the reliability of the material and, in turn, the credibility of the results (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 177-178). I also use a variety of reliable sources like UN agencies and UCDP. Furthermore, one must be aware of the stigma surrounding violations against children, which could mean hidden statistics and also the difficulties with collecting statistics during armed conflicts.

5 Result

5.1 Senegal

5.1.1 Contextual background

The intrastate conflict started in 1990 and reached conflict intensity in 2011 after seven non-conflict years (UCDP, 2022a). The conflict has revolved around the independence claim of the Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC) for Casamance in southern Senegal (UCDP, 2022a). The MFDC was created as a political party and continues to have an active political wing. Peace talks have been conducted since 2012, and in 2014 an agreement was signed. However, not all MFDC rebels abide by the agreement (UCDP, 2022b). Violence has at times been extremely brutal, including ambushes from rebels, civilian targeting, summary executions by the Government, and operations of clearance (UCDP, 2022b).

5.1.2 Empirical observations

Translation into discourse	
Convention	Signed/Ratified
CRC	1990/1990 (UNTC, 2022a)
ILO	2000/2000 (ILO, 2022)
Rome Statute	1998/1999 (UNTC, 2002b)
OPAC	2000/2004 (UNTC, 2022c)
OPSC	2000/2003 (OHCHR, 2022)
ACRWC	1992/1998 (AU, 2019)

Table 1. Signatures and ratifications of the chosen conventions/treaties.

Senegal was a member of the UNSC in 1968-1969, 1988-1989, and 2016-2017 (UN, 2022a). Since no relevant resolutions were adopted during this period no abstentions were made. No reservations against the treaties were observed. Senegal is categorized as complete translation.

Translation into law

The minimum age for voluntary military service is 18 and 20 years for selective conscription (WVI, 2022). Senegal's Penal Code (1965/2007) state that conscription or enrolling minors in armed groups constitutes a war crime (ICRC, 2022a). However, the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (2022: 3) report that no law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children aged 15-18. There is no evidence that children under 18 were used in the army (Child Soldiers International, 2000).

Ratified treaties have superiority over domestic laws, and a draft of a Children's Code exists, but in 2021 it was not yet finalized (UNICEF, 2021b). The minimum age for employment is 15 years, and 18 years for hazardous work. Several legislations exist on child labor (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020a: 2). They also have legislation prohibiting child trafficking (Law no. 2005-02), sexual harassment, pedophilia, and FGM (Law No. 99-05/1999) (CRIN, 2012). The punishment for the abduction of minors varies from 5-to 30 years in prison, and no child under 13 can be criminally responsible (ACPF, 2013a; CRIN, 2022b). The minimum age for marriage is 16 for girls and 18 for boys (ACPF, 2018: 110). Therefore, Senegal is categorized into partial translation (+).

Translation into implementation

Senegal has a Ministry of Women, Family, Gender, and Child Protection and several state mechanisms to protect children, such as the Childhood Protection Unit. The National Strategy on Child Protection received in 2021 an 18\$ million budget to improve children's social protection system (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2022: 4-6).

31 % of women aged 20-24 were married before turning 18, and sexual violence is one of the biggest threats to girls. Around 15,000 have reported sexual violence (ACPF, 2018: 111; UNICEF, 2022). Talibé students within the Quranic boarding schools are particularly vulnerable; approximately 100,000 must beg daily to satisfy their survival needs. They are deprived of food and medical care and suffer physical

punishments (HRW; 2022). According to Senegalese law, exploitation and forced begging is human trafficking, and major enforcement is lacking despite some having been prosecuted for this (HRW; 2022). 53% of children aged 5-14 attend school, 22.3% work, and 13.9% combine the two (Bureau of International Organization Affairs, 2022: 1). No child under 13 is imprisoned (CRIN, 2022a). No domestic or international court cases were found on child soldiering. Senegal is categorized as partial implementation.

Child soldier recruitment

Some indications that MFDC had an unspecified number of child soldiers were found (Child Soldiers International, 2000), but neither Lasley & Thyne (2014: 301) nor Jo (2015: 159) report on the existence of child soldiers, and Child Soldiers International (2008) could not confirm any cases. MFDC has engaged in dialogue toward banning anti-personnel mines (Jo, 2015: 264). No reporting was done on rebel group commitment to human rights. However, MFDC have, on several occasions, let ICRC visit their detainees and cooperated to facilitate their release (ICRC, 2022b).

5.2 Côte d'Ivoire

5.2.1 Contextual background

Since introducing a multiparty system in the 90s, the central distinction in politics has revolved around the "Ivorianité", natives versus non-natives (UCDP, 2022c). Following a coup by Gbagbo in 1999 rebellion started by Mouvement patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI), who later merged with Mouvement pour la justice et la paix (MJP) and Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest (MPIGO) under the umbrella organization Forces Nouvelles (FAFN) (UCDP, 2022c). After the peace agreement in 2004, FAFN became part of the National Reconciliation Government (UCDP, 2022d). In 2010 a presidential election was organized, despite ongoing instability. Ouattara won the election, however, Gbagbo

refused to resign, and violence erupted between Gbagbo’s troops and Ouattara’s newly created Forces Républicaines de Côte d’Ivoire (FRCI) (Nationalencyklopedin, 2022a). Both sides committed repeated human rights violations throughout the year, and around 1000 people were killed (UCDP, 2022d). In late 2011 Gbagbo was captured, and a new election was arranged where Ouattara was declared the winner (Nationalencyklopedin, 2022a).

5.2.2 Empirical observations

Translation into discourse

Convention	Signed/Ratified
CRC	1990/1991 (UNTC, 2022a)
ILO	2003/2003 (ILO, 2022)
Rome Statute	1998/2013 (UNTC, 2002b)
OPAC	Not signed/2012 (UNTC, 2022c)
OPSC	Not signed/2013 (OHCHR, 2022)
ACRWC	2004/2002 (AU, 2019)

Table 2. Signatures and ratifications of the chosen conventions/treaties.

No reservations could be found against any treaties. Côte d’Ivoire was a member of the UNSC in 1964-1965, 1990-1991, and 2018-2019 (UN, 2022a), when no resolutions were adopted, and therefore no abstentions found. During the conflict, only the CRC, ILO, and ACRWC were ratified. Therefore, they are categorized as partial translation.

Translation into law

Military recruitment is voluntary, and the minimum age is 18. A birth certificate requirement exists to prove this prior to enlistment (UNTC, 2022c). However, all nationals must have completed 18 months of military service before turning 30, with exceptions for higher education (UNTC, 2022c). According to the Penal Code (1981/2015), conscripting or enlisting children under 15 constitutes a war crime. During armed conflict, legislation differs between children under 15 and under 18 (ICRC, 2022a). Government use of child soldiers was reported in 2003 (A/58/546S72003/1053: 10).

Child labor is prohibited from 16, and hazardous work from 18 (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020a: 3). The country lacks a specific Children's Act but is one of few countries with legislation specifically on child trafficking, with penalties of 10-20 years in prison (ACPF, 2013a; ACPF, 2016: 28). The minimum age for marriage is 18 for girls and 20 for boys (ACPF, 2018: 110). The lowest age for criminal responsibility is ten years, not in accordance with the CRC (CRIN, 2022b).

Translation into implementation

In 2020, an anti-trafficking unit was created, which deployed 10-20 officers to cities known for child labor and trafficking (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020a). The Ministry of Women, Family, and Children is responsible for child protection, and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights for child-related prosecutions. Despite several mechanisms for child trafficking and labor, they lack funding and enforcement. In 2001 critique was received for lacking guarantees of children's rights in accordance with the CRC (CRIN, 2012b).

63.5% of children aged 5-14 attend school, 31.5% work, and 21.5% combine the two (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2015). 27% of women aged 20-24 were married before turning 18 (ACPF, 2018: 111). Severe problems with juvenile justice and detention facilities exist, and children aged 10 are subject to criminal responsibility (CRIN, 2012b; CRIN, 2022a). 138 children were in 2020 saved from trafficking, but during the conflict, sexual violence was the most frequently reoccurring child crime (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020a: 1; A/68/878 S/2014/339: 12-13).

In October 2011, ICC opened an investigation meant for both sides, but currently, only Gbagbo, his wife, and Blé Goudé have been investigated, and all cases were closed in 2019 (ICC, 2022, ICC-02/12). Child soldier recruitment was not included in the investigations (ICC, 2017). In 2011 a Special Investigative and Examination Cell was created that accused around 20 individuals of crimes against humanity and war crimes. However, in 2019 Ouattara introduced an amnesty for crimes related to the electoral crisis, including for several of those listed (HRW, 2019a). Côte d'Ivoire is categorized as partial translation.

Child soldier recruitment

Child soldier use was first reported in 2003 by all parties. Those listed were FANCI, MPJ, MPIGO, and MPCCI (A/58/546-S/2003/1053: 10). In 2005 FAFN signed an action plan in which compliance with children's rights and cooperation with the UN was stated (S/2006/835: 4). They released 273 child soldiers, but recruitment continued, and FAFN were in addition listed for rape and sexual violence towards children (A/59/695-S/2005/72: 3). In 2006 four militia groups signed action plans that confirmed the release of all child soldiers, DDR cooperation, and the end of recruitment (A/61/529-S/2006/826: 28-29). Furthermore, UNSC sanctions against rebel leaders were imposed (UN, 2006). MPCCI rejected their use of child soldiers, stating that their adult soldiers looked like children due to undernourishment (Child Soldiers International, 2004). However, they were all forcibly recruiting children and using them in heavy combat.

UN estimated that around 4,000 child soldiers were present among FAFN; many below 15, and often as young as 10-12, the youngest reported was nine years old. The French military intelligence reported in 2004 that FAFN consisted of around 20,000 fighters, and ONUCI reported in 2006 around 42,000 fighters (ICC-OTP, 2014: 7). This would mean that child soldiers constituted around 10-20% of FAFN troops. While children were offered financial compensation to fight, they were harassed and threatened if refused (Child Soldiers International, 2004). No girls were used in combat; however, several abduction cases for sexual slavery were reported (Child Soldiers International, 2004). In 2012 child soldiering was once again reported, and 37 children were verified. All parties were delisted in 2007 and have not been mentioned since 2016 (A/69/926-S/2015/409: 57).

5.3 Liberia

5.3.1 Contextual background

Liberia was founded by formerly enslaved persons from the US, a minority of 5 % (UCDP, 2022f). The indigenous Liberians were marginalized, and these

inequalities have been a source of long conflict (UCDP, 2022e). In 1980 a coup replaced the Americo-Liberian rule, and in 1989 an armed conflict erupted (UCDP, 2022e). The first episode (1989-1996) took place between the Government, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). NPFL reformed into the political party NPP led by Charles Taylor, who seized power after the conflict. The second episode (2000-2003) took place between the Government, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) (UCDP, 2022f). In 2003 international negotiations led to a power shift, Taylor left the country in exile, and a peace accord was signed between MODEL, LURD, and the Government (UCDP, 2022f). UNMIL was deployed with 15,000 troops, and in 2005 the conflict ended (UCDP, 2022f).

5.3.2 Empirical observations

Translation into discourse

Convention	Signed/Ratified
CRC	1990/1993 (UNTC, 2022a)
ILO	2003/2003 (ILO, 2022)
Rome Statute	1998/2004 (UNTC, 2002b)
OPAC	2004/Not ratified (UNTC, 2022c)
OPSC	2004/Not ratified (OHCHR, 2022)
ACRWC	1992/2007 (AU, 2019)

Table 3. Signatures and ratifications of the chosen conventions/treaties.

No reservations against any treaties have been identified. Liberia was a member of the UNSC in 1961 when no relevant resolutions were adopted (UN, 2022a). Since only one resolution was ratified during the conflict, Liberia is categorized as low translation.

Translation into law

The minimum age for joining the army is 18 (ICRC, 2022a), but Amnesty (2004) reported that it in practice was 16. The Children's Law from 2011 (after the conflict) made child recruitment for armed conflict a first-degree felony (ICRC;

2022). However, the Children's Law was not in accordance with the CRC regarding the minimum age for criminal responsibility which was seven years old (CRIN, 2013a). The minimum employment age is 15 and 18 for hazardous work (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020b: 1-2). Children under 15 are allowed to work if they attend school, which does correspond to the international standard (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020b: 3). Several policies exist on child labor, trafficking, and child welfare, but most were adopted after the conflict ended in 2005 (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020b: 7; ACPF, 2019a). The minimum penalty for child trafficking is five years of prison (ACPF, 2013b). Previously children could marry at 16 with parental consent, but in 2012 this exception was removed. How this has been enforced remains unclear (Humanium, 2022). Legally, the minimum age is 18. International treaties must be accepted through legislation, but 20 years after the CRC ratification, it remains unclear whether it has gained legal status (CRIN, 2013a). Liberia is categorized as partial translation (-).

Translation into implementation

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection monitors child protection and human rights compliance but remains underfunded and lacks adequate training. The Women and Children Protection Section investigate crimes against children. Two commissions on child labor and one anti-human trafficking task force exist (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020b: 3-6). Sexual violence, exploitation, rape, and forced marriages were common among young girls (Amnesty, 2004: 11). Around 36 % of women under 18 are married (ACPF, 2018: 111), and children aged seven are subjected to criminal responsibility (CRIN, 2022a). 16.6 % of children work, 75% attend school, and 14% combine both (Bureau of International Labor Affareportsirs, 2020b: 2-3).

No domestic prosecution has been reported, but prosecutions have taken place in Europe and the US (HRW, 2019b). In 2005 Liberia established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act to refer court cases and collect testimonies. They identified 200 to face prosecution and around 50 politicians who should be suspended from politics for 30 years (UCDP, 2022f). The perpetrators identified by the Commission still go unpunished (HRW, 2019b). Charles Taylor was sentenced to 50 years in prison by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) for crimes,

including child recruitment, however only related to the conflict in Sierra Leone (UCDP, 2022f). In 2021 *the Guardian* reported the first court case of war crimes in Liberia (including child soldier recruitment) (Bondo, 2021). Liberia is categorized as partial translation (-).

Child soldier recruitment

During the first episode of the conflict, around 20% of all combatants were children (TNH, 2003). Amnesty suspects that 10% of Liberian children were recruited during the conflict, and around 21,000 child soldiers have been identified as combatants (Amnesty, 2004: 24). Around 80% of all children in the rebel groups were combatants (Singer, 2006: 87). In some rebel groups, child soldiers constituted 70% of the troops (Singer, 2006: 92). Children were forcibly recruited under threat and exposed to severe violence if refused. Child soldiers were also subjected to death penalties (Singer, 2006: 41). The youngest was seven years, and child soldiers were used in the front of the heavy combat, often after short and limited training and under drug influence. Boys were combatants, subjected to forced heavy labor, looting, and child soldier recruitment. Girls were combatants, but usually not the youngest, and service providers (Watchlist, 2004: 28-29). Around 75% of all demobilized girls reported suffering from sexual violence, exploitation, or rape during their time as child soldiers (A/59/695-S/2005/72: 7).

INPFL, LURD, and NPFL used child soldiers between 1989-2009 (Jo, 2015: 286-289). Prior to Charles Taylor's election, 18% of NPFL forces were children, 27% aged 12-14 (Child Soldiers International, 2000). The Government denied all allegations of child soldier use; however, Child Soldiers International (2000), amongst others, reported that they brutally recruited children by forcing them to kill close family to show loyalty and obedience. Government use lies outside the scope of this essay, but since government forces shifted between being rebels and the Government throughout the conflict, it is briefly mentioned.

In 2002 the Government and LURD were listed (S/2002/1299: 14). In 2003, a sharp increase in numbers was reported, and MODEL and Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) were listed (A/58/546-S/2003/1053: 9 & 21). LURD reported having Standard Operating Procedures prohibiting several human rights violations, for example, rape and summary executions of civilians with punishments for violations

(HRW, 2002). They were, however, listed for rapes, looting, and child soldier recruitment but denied the latter (HRW, 2002).

In 2005 10,000 children were demobilized, all parties were delisted, and from 2006 UN made no observations of the recruitment or use of child soldiers (A/59/695-S/2005/72: 7; A/61/529-S/2006/826: 12-13). In 2016 UNSC terminated the 13-year arms embargo against non-state actors in Liberia (UN, 2016).

5.4 Mali

5.4.1 Contextual background

Mali has experienced conflict since 1989, but it intensified drastically during the last decade (UCDP, 2022g). In 1992 a new constitution was adopted that consolidated Mali as a secular, democratic and multiparty state. Around 90% of Malians are Muslim (Nationalencyklopedin, 2022b). In 2012 the Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad (MNLA) seized power in the north and claimed independence of Azawad (Nationalencyklopedin, 2022b). Shortly after, a coup toppled the Government, based mainly on dissatisfaction with the inability to control northern Mali. An interim government was formed, but the military junta orchestrating the coup continued influencing (Nationalencyklopedin, 2022b). The secular MNLA wanted independence in the north, while Ansar Dine, a SalafiJihadist movement, fought for an Islamist state in all of Mali (UCDP,2022h). Despite initially cooperating, conflict erupted, and Ansar Dine, with allies, took territorial control over the north (Nationalencyklopedin, 2022b). In 2012 Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Movement pour le Taqhid et du Jihad en Afrique (MUJAO) grew, both sharing the Salafi-Jihadist traits (ICC-OTP, 2013a: 10). Despite a peace agreement in 2015, the conflict is ongoing and military coups reoccurred in 2020 and 2021 (Nationalencyklopedin, 2022b).

5.4.2 Empirical observations

Translation into discourse

Convention	Signed/Ratified
CRC	1990/1990 (UNTC, 2022a)
ILO	2000/2000 (ILO, 2022)
Rome Statute	1998/2000 (UNTC, 2002b)
OPAC	2000/2002 (UNTC, 2022c)
OPSC	Not signed/2002 (OHCHR, 2022)
ACRWC	1996/1998 (AU, 2019)

Table 4. Signatures and ratifications of the chosen conventions/treaties.

Mali made a reservation against article 16 of the CRC that outlines children's protection from "arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honor and reputation" (CRC, 1989). Article 16 was not in line with their Family Code (ICRC, 2022c). Mali was a member of the UNSC between 1966-1967 and 2000-2001, during which two resolutions were adopted, both of which Mali voted in favor (UN, 2022b; UN, 2022c). They are categorized as partial translation (+).

Translation into law

The minimum age for voluntary recruitment is 18, and recruitment of children under 15 constitutes a war crime (UNTC, 2022c; ICRC, 2022a). Recruiting children over 15 is not punishable by law (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020c: 5). A protocol exists for preventing and protecting children from armed groups, and in 2020 70 children were rescued. Regardless, these policies remain underfunded, and most lack effective implementation (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020c: 8-9).

Treaties should have precedence over Malian laws, but the question remains whether this is respected (CRIN, 2013b). In 2019 the African Court ruled that the Family Code was inconsistent with human rights on several points, like the minimum age of marriage for girls being 16, 15 with consent from the father while 18 for boys (International Justice Resource Center, 2018). In 2012 the AntiTrafficking law was changed to make the trafficking of children under 18, instead of the previous 15, illegal (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020c: 4).

The minimum age for employment is 15 and 18 for hazardous work, but since children under 13 are allowed to work outside of school, it is not in line with the international standard. Several policies considering child labor and trafficking have been adopted (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020c: 2-4 & 8-10). A child is criminally responsible at 13 (CRIN, 2022b).

Translation into implementation

The Ministry of Labor and the National Unit to Fight Against Child Labor (CNLTE) focus on child labor. The Ministry of Internal Security's Police Brigades investigate child protection crimes, and the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children, and the Family implements policies against children. However, in 2019 the CNLTE lost 40% of its funding (International Labor Affairs, 2020c: 5). Among children aged 5-14, 49.2% work, 43.3% attend school and 26.0% combine the two (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020c: 1-2). In 2020 an increase was reported in trafficking, forced labor, child soldier recruitment, and hereditary slavery, partly attributed to the lack of law enforcement during the conflict (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2020c: 7). No child under 13 is held criminally responsible (CRIN, 2022a). Around 52% of girls aged 20-24 were married before turning 18 (ACPF, 2018: 111).

Mali referred its situation to the ICC in 2012 and an investigation was opened in 2013 (ICC, 2022b). They investigated war crimes under article 8, including conscripting and enlisting children in armed groups by MNLA, Ansar Dine, AQIM, MUJAO, militia groups, and supporters of the military junta (ICC-OTP, 2013a: 13-14 & 20-25). Until today, 2 cases have been opened, Al Mahdi (Ansar Dine) was found guilty in 2016 and Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz (Ansar Dine) is charged with war crimes, but neither case included child soldier recruitment (ICC, 2022b; ICC, 2022c). No child soldier investigations were found on a national level (International Labor Affairs, 2020c: 7). Since lacking territorial control and law enforcement Mali is categorized as partial translation (-).

Child soldier recruitment

In 2013 MNLA, MUJAO, Ansar Dine, and AQIM are mentioned for the first time as child soldier recruiters, but pro-government military groups were also found using child soldiers (A/67/845-S/2013/245: 21). Children were used mostly for

patrolling and monitoring checkpoints but also in combat. They were both voluntarily and forcibly recruited. Most were boys between 12-15, but some were as young as 9 (Amnesty, 2013: 31). Girls were used in supportive roles; however, indications were found that some were trained for combat (S/2020/1105: 5-6).

In 2015 a peace agreement was negotiated between the Government, the progovernment Platform, and MNLA (ICG, 2020). MNLA also signed local command orders prohibiting the six child violations (A/69/926-S/2015/409: 22-23). Despite this, an increase in violence and child soldier recruitment was reported in 2016 (A/70/836-S/2016/360: 16). In 2017, MNLA signed an action plan but continued to recruit child soldiers (A/72/361-S/2017/821: 17-18). Since 2017, sanctions have been imposed on Mali (S/RES/2374, 2017). In 2018, Platform was listed and together with MNLA and Ansar Dine, and continues to be until today, which shows no actual implementation of the plans. In 2020, 516 cases were verified, but the unverified cases are suspected to be much higher (A/72/865-S/2018/465: 39; A/75/873-S/2021/437: 39-40). The groups most frequently listed make up around 11,000 fighters. AQIM and Ansar Dine together in 2013 constituted around 700-1100 fighters, and in 2017 around 800 (UCDP, 2022g; Browne, 2018). MNLA of around 10,000 fighters, and MUJAO around 300 (ICC-OTP, 2013a: 18-19). No record of the number of fighters in Platform could be found. Based on these estimations, child soldiers constitute around 5% of the troops, however, since data is lacking, conclusions based on these figures should be done with care.

In 2020 only 23% of what was agreed upon in the peace agreement had been implemented (ICG, 2020), and in August 2021, Platform signed an action plan (UN, 2022d).

6 Discussion

6.1 Summary of cases

	Senegal	Côte d'Ivoire	Liberia	Mali
Discourse	Complete	Partial	Low	Partial (+)
Law	Partial (+)	Partial	Partial (-)	Partial
Implementation	Partial	Partial	Partial (-)	Partial (-)
Child soldiers	Low/No	Moderate (4,000)	High (21,000)	Moderate (516)

Table 5. Categorization during the armed conflict, when possible. Otherwise, categorization is based on available info.

6.2 Discussion

According to the conceptual framework, rebels are assumed to make the recruitment decision based on how much legitimacy they could lose by recruiting child soldiers, in contrast to what they could win. In countries with highly translated norms, the risk of losing legitimacy by child soldier recruitment is higher than in countries with a low degree of norm translation.

Senegal was the only country with a relatively high degree of norm translation. The rational calculation would lead to the conclusion of abstaining from child soldier recruitment because the cost of losing legitimacy would be too high in relation to the potential benefits. As expected, Senegal did not use child soldiers.

Liberia had the lowest degree of norm translation, so legitimacy might not have been as connected to child soldiering as in Senegal. Therefore, the potential

legitimacy lost by using child soldiers would not outweigh the strategic benefits gained. The rational thing to do is to maximize the benefits, in this case, to use child soldiers. Liberia had by far the highest use of child soldiers. They forcibly recruited children using brutal tactics and both boys and girls were deployed to the absolute front of the heavy combat, often under drug influence and lacking adequate training. This corresponds to the theoretical claim that rebel groups who are expected to recruit child soldiers will do so forcibly and use them in combat.

Côte d'Ivoire has partially translated the norms in all dimensions. What the rational behavior regarding child soldiers should be, remains unclear. Since they are switchover compliers, it could indicate that they were somewhat acting in accordance with what was expected, not consistently using and recruiting child soldiers. They differ between children of 15 and 18 during armed conflict, have not signed OPAC, and the Government used child soldiers. From this perspective, despite being in the middle category that could tip in either direction, it might not be as surprising that they had moderate levels of child soldiers. Regardless, since they were not fully expected to use child soldiers, one could assume that they would avoid recruiting and using children in the violent way Liberia did, based on the theoretical assumption of rebels who unexpectedly recruit children. This assumption does not hold, both forcible recruitment and the use of children in heavy combat were reported. But what differs with Liberia is that despite arming both boys and girls for surveillance tasks, girls were not used in active combat in Côte d'Ivoire.

The action plans, human rights compliance statements, and the MPCCI statement rejecting their child soldier use by arguing that their soldiers looked like children because of undernourishment but were not, indicate a willingness to be perceived as a non-child soldier recruiter. This could signal that child protection norms impact rebel decisions in partially translated countries but are not what finally determines the decision, in line with the thick rationality approach. The benefits of child soldiering might outweigh the costs, but legitimacy costs that they want to mitigate through these statements still exist.

In 1992, Mali was described as "one of Western Africa's most stable democracies" (Nationalencyklopedin, 2022b). In 2021, Freedom House classified Mali as not free, scoring 33/100 on the global freedom score (Freedom House, 2021). Malian legislation has been inconsistent with human rights, and law

enforcement is almost nonexistent. Regardless degree of translation, the government lacks territorial control, and therefore translation of child protection cannot be generalized to the same level throughout the country.

MNLA stated that they were committed to international law and the six grave violations and did not recruit children. This could indicate that they suspect that legitimacy and support may be lost by recruiting child soldiers. Despite this, as with Côte d'Ivoire, the benefits of using child soldiers outweighed the costs. No such statements were found by the Islamist groups. The cost-benefit calculus and what is deemed rational could arguably look different for an Islamist group than for a secular group. Compliance with international child protection norms might not be legitimacy gaining; instead, other norms in line with the Sharia Laws might be. Most Malians are Muslims, and a child, according to Islam, becomes an adult by maturity and not age. Therefore, it might be no surprise that almost half of the girls are married before turning 18, around 75 % of children work full or part-time, and they use child soldiers. Rebel groups might not even see most child soldiers as children but rather as adults. Like Côte d'Ivoire, Mali can be expected to recruit and use child soldiers in a less violent manner. Contrary, they forcibly recruited and used children in combat. However, as in Côte d'Ivoire, girls were not used in combat. Traditional norms on girls as service providers and not combatants seem to influence. What logic is behind this reasoning in Côte d'Ivoire should be addressed in detail by future studies. Since child soldiering increased in Mali as late as 2021, comparisons with the other cases where child soldiers have been demobilized and the possibility of gathering accurate statistics for years should be made with care.

The theoretical assumption of deterrence is that prosecution or punishment of perpetrators can deter future crimes and work preventively towards the escalation of ongoing conflicts. The only investigation opened during the conflict was Mali, and therefore the only one that could work preventively towards child soldiering. However, since no child soldiering charges were included in the prosecution nor conviction, and child soldiering only increased, this did not have the intended effect that the Prosecutor nor the UNSC with the naming and shaming reports had hoped for (ICC-OTP, 2013b: 24-25). Côte d'Ivoire did not lead to prosecution and did not include child soldiering, but it has been argued that it prevented the post-electoral violence from escalating into a genocide (Akhavan, 2009: 636-640). Regardless, the use of child soldiers did not stop. The parties were listed in 2003, and all were

delisted in 2007. Arguably, the naming and shaming report could have had some deterrence effect by calling perpetrators out, because when child soldiering returned after 2010, only 37 cases were reported, way fewer than previously. Regardless, we cannot assume that this results from a deterrence effect. However, since it is considered to have "prevented a genocide", it could, to some extent, have impacted child soldiering.

Considering Liberia, both the conviction of Charles Taylor and the European and American prosecutions occurred after the conflict. The inclusion on the naming and shaming list could impact the international legitimacy of the group. Still, this list alone will most likely not create a noticeable effect if not accompanied by the possibility of enforcing a prosecution. Both Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia had mechanisms to investigate child soldiering, but in the former case, amnesties minimized a future deterrence effect, while general impunity hindered in the latter. Despite identifying 200 people for prosecution, due to lack of enforcement, it undermined any credible deterrence effect on the national level. Since domestic deterrence focuses on the certainty of getting prosecuted, it probably had minimal deterrence effect.

Regarding Senegal, no court cases were found on child soldier recruitment. However, they had strong legislation on child protection. They ratified all relevant conventions, so it could be argued that the threat of prosecution for child soldier recruitment may have been credible. One cannot argue for an apparent deterrence effect, but it cannot be excluded that the treaties had a deterring impact.

7 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to better understand the relationship between the translation of child protection norms and child soldier recruitment. Senegal, which had the highest degree of translation, was the only country that did not use child soldiers. No country using child soldiers had complete translation in either of the three dimensions. Liberia, with the lowest degree of translation, was the only country with high use of child soldiers. However, Liberia was also the country with the highest (by far) battle-related deaths, and since conflict intensity according to the previous research does impact child soldier recruitment, the analysis of Liberia must be conducted with caution. The two countries with partial translation had moderate levels of child soldiers. This could indicate that norms need to be closer to highly translated for rebels to perceive the costs of recruiting children as too high. If using Senegal as an example, complete translation into discourse and almost complete translation in law are needed. According to the conclusion from these four cases, a partial translation is not enough to prevent child soldiering. We cannot conclude that a low degree of translation always will mean a high child soldier presence, which is not the purpose of this thesis. What we can say is that there is a relationship between high/low translation of child protection norms and the nonuse/use of child soldiers.

All three countries with child soldiers deployed children into heavy combat and, to some extent, used forcible recruitment. Still, rebel groups in Liberia were the most violent users and the only country that extensively used girls in combat. Côte d'Ivoire and Mali both had partially translated the child protection norm and did not use girls in combat. The deterrence effect was not visible in any of the countries with child soldiers. However, it has been argued that the deterrence effect from ICC prevented a genocide in Côte d'Ivoire, which in turn would have posed a risk of increase in child soldiering. What prevented any deterrence effect at a domestic level was the lack of law enforcement, hindered by amnesties and a lack of general effort.

Since this study only examines four cases, no universally applicable conclusions can be reached. However, based on the case selection method used, these findings could be argued to represent the West African region. Further, similar logic could be applied to cases that fulfill the selection criteria used outside this region. To increase the validity of these conclusions and their generalizability, they should be tested in more cases outside of Western Africa and possibly through large-N studies to be able to draw statistically significant conclusions.

This study constitutes a good starting point for future research on norm translation and child soldiers. However, since the definition of child protection norms used in this study left out several aspects that could have been included, future studies should widen the scope by including more indicators in the measurement to see if similar conclusions are reached.

Two additional aspects for future research can be identified based on the findings. First, future studies should investigate the relationship between rebel groups and their use of female child soldiers more specifically. Second, based on the conclusions from Mali, studies should examine the relationship between different ideological groups and their use of child soldiers.

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Appendices

8.1 Appendix A

Steps of case selection

Steps	Criteria
Step 1	Armed conflict with intensity over 2000 battle-related deaths and under 30 000 since 1989 in the chosen region.
Step 2	Armed conflict during five consecutive years
Step 3	HDI-index and translation of child protection norms.
Step 4	Categorization: translation into discourse, translation into law, translation into both discourse and law, no translation.

First step of case selection

Countries in West Africa	Intensity
Benin	1
Burkina Faso	2688
Cape Verde	0
The Gambia	10
Ghana	2434
Guinea	1147
Guinea-Bissau	706
Côte d'Ivoire	3599
Liberia	23247
Mali	8672
Mauritania	179

Niger	3315
Nigeria	60243
Senegal	2074
Sierra Leone	20443
Togo	562

Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Programme.

Second step of case selection

Country	Five consecutive years of armed conflict
Burkina Faso	No
Ghana	No
Côte d'Ivoire	Yes
Liberia	Yes
Mali	Yes
Niger	Yes
Senegal	Yes
Sierra Leone	Yes

Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Programme.

Third step of case selection

Country	HDI-index	OPAC (signed/ratified)	Rome Statute (signed/ratified)	Minimum age for joining the military	Norm translation
Côte d'Ivoire	0.538	No/Yes	Yes/Yes	18	Discourse and law
Liberia	0.48	Yes/No	Yes/No	18	Law
Mali	0.434	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	18	Discourse
Niger	0.494	No/Yes	Yes/Yes	18	Discourse and law
Senegal	0.512	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	18	Discourse and law
Sierra Leone	0.452	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	18	Discourse

Source: UNDP, 2022; UNTC, 2022c; UNTC, 2002b; WVI, 2022.

Fourth step of case selection

Country	Norm translation
Côte d'Ivoire	Discourse and law
Niger	Discourse and law
Senegal	Discourse and law
Liberia	Law
Mali	Discourse
Sierra Leone	Discourse

The final four cases

Country	Senegal	Côte d'Ivoire	Liberia	Mali
<i>Similarities</i>				
Region	Western Africa	Western Africa	Western Africa	Western Africa
Conflict intensity	2074	3599	23247	8672
Active conflict for 5 years	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
HDI-index	0.512	0.538	0.48	0.434
<i>Crucial differences</i>				
OPAC (signed/ratified)	Yes/Yes	No/Yes	Yes/No	Yes/Yes
Rome Statute (signed/ratified)	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	Yes/No	Yes/Yes
Global Recruitment index (WVI, 2022).	18	18	18	18
Norm translation	Translation into discourse and law	Translation into discourse and law	Translation into law	Translation into discourse

Source: UNDP, 2022; UNTC, 2022c; UNTC, 2002b; WVI, 2022.

8.2 Appendix B

Resolution	Content
RES 1261 (1999).	The first declaration covering the topic of children in armed conflict.
RES1314 (2000).	Covering the topic of deliberate targeting of children and civilians in armed conflict.
RES 1379 (2001)	Agreement to create the 'naming and shaming' list of parties in armed conflict that recruit and use children.
RES 1460 (2003)	Development of the action plans between the violating party and the UN
RES 1539 (2004)	MRM implemented to gather and verify information on recruitment of children
RES 1612 (2005)	Creation of the working group to support MRM
RES 1882 (2009)	Includes killing and maiming of children and rape and sexual violence as triggers for listing violating parties
RES 1998 (2011)	Attacks on schools and hospitals are included as as triggers for listing violating parties
RES 2068 (2012)	Possibility to impose sanctions against parties who violate the six grave violations
RES 2225 (2015)	Abduction of children becomes a trigger for listing violating parties
RES 2427 (2018)	Mainstreaming child protection and children's rights and wellbeing during conflict and peace
RES 2601 (2021)	Importance of continuation of education during conflict

Source: SGSR/CAAC, 2016; Security Council Report, 2022.