

Freedom in the World 2014 - Mali

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2014 Scores

Status: Partly Free

Freedom Rating (1 = best, 7 = worst): 4.5

Civil Liberties (1 = best, 7 = worst): 4

Political Rights (1 = best, 7 = worst): 5

Status Change Explanation:

Mali's political rights rating improved from 7 to 5, its civil liberties rating improved from 5 to 4, and its status improved from Not Free to Partly Free due to the defeat of Islamist rebels, an improved security situation in the north, and successful presidential and legislative elections that significantly reduced the role of the military in politics.

OVERVIEW

Mali took steps toward returning to democracy in 2013, holding both presidential and parliamentary elections after a coup the previous year in which mutinous soldiers led by Captain Amadou Sanogo overthrew the government due to its perceived inability to deal with the Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali. The coup had destabilized the country and allowed Tuareg separatists and Islamic militants to seize much of Mali's northern region.

In March 2012, mutinous soldiers led by Sanogo mounted a coup, removing democratically elected president Amadou Toumani Touré, suspending the constitution, and detaining government ministers. While some Malians welcomed the revolt, the international community condemned it, and the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) suspended Mali's membership. Sanogo handed power to interim president Dioncounda Traoré – the speaker of the National Assembly – in April, but the military maintained de facto authority over the civilian leadership until an elected president took office in September 2013.

Meanwhile, taking advantage of the turmoil in the capital, the Tuareg-led National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA) early in 2012 occupied the three main cities in Mali's north: Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao; by April it had also taken the city of Douentza in central Mali. Over the course of the summer, Islamist militant groups that had cooperated with the MNLA – Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and two splinter groups, Ansar Dine and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) – turned on the Tuaregs and seized much of Mali's northern territory. By July, the MNLA was seeking a possible compromise with Mali's transitional government that included a level of autonomy short of full secession. Meanwhile, the Islamist groups in the north committed human rights abuses and destroyed religious monuments deemed un-Islamic.

In early January 2013, French forces began Operation Serval against Islamist groups in the north. The first strikes consisted of aerial bombardment, followed by a ground offensive by French and Malian forces. In total, 550 French soldiers were involved in the mission. France was later joined in the operation by the UN-authorized African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), comprised of troops from mainly West and Central African countries. Between January until June 2013, the military government instituted a state of emergency, which gave the junta significant powers and severely limited freedom of assembly, by banning gathering of more than 50 people. The state of emergency was lifted in order to allow for elections campaigning.

By the end of January, the Islamist militants had been driven from Mali's northern cities; later in the year they turned to guerrilla tactics, including suicide bombings, raids, and landmines. In April 2013, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA), a peacekeeping force consisting of about 12,600 troops, began establishing itself on the ground; AFISMA formally transferred its authority to the UN force July. As of December 2013, about 6,800 military personnel were deployed with a mandate to stabilize key centers in northern Mali, to help reestablish the authority of the Malian government, and to assist with the elections.

On June 18, 2013, the transitional government signed a peace agreement with MNLA rebels who were in control of Kidal that would allow the army to reenter the city. Fighting reoccurred in September and after a brief lull in October, fighting picked up again between MNLA supporters and the Malian army, as well as the MNLA supporters and Islamist groups.

With the Islamic militants being driven underground and the Tuareg rebels agreeing to a fragile peace, Mali held presidential elections on July 28, with Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta emerging victorious. Legislative elections were in two rounds, on November 24 and December 15; Keïta's Rally for Mali (RPM) and its allies won an overwhelming majority.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 17 / 40 (+12)

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12 (+5)

According to the constitution – which had been suspended briefly in 2012 by the junta but was soon restored – the president, who appoints the prime minister, is elected by popular vote and can serve up to two five-year terms. Members of the 160-seat unicameral National Assembly serve five-year terms, with 13 seats reserved to represent Malians living abroad.

While the National Assembly was not dissolved following the coup, it was the interim government with Prime Minister Cheikh Modibo Diarra, appointed by interim President Dioncounda Traoré, that was in charge of preparing the parliamentary and presidential elections. The announcement was made in May 2013, with campaigning to start in early July. The military, however, remained ostensibly in charge until the new government of September 2013, and during the first half of the year it coordinated the military strategy with the French operation in the North.

The 2013 presidential elections were held over two rounds, on July 28 and August 11. Keïta, a former prime minister, won the presidency, taking about 40 percent of the vote and defeating Soumaïla Cissé – a former finance minister and leader of the Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD) party – who received about 20 percent. The elections were deemed generally free and fair by observers, and Cissé conceded shortly after the second round.

Security during the elections was overseen by French and AU forces; although there were several incidents of violence, the elections were generally peaceful. Turnout for the presidential elections was relatively high, at 49 percent. Keïta was sworn into office in September.

Legislative elections were held over two rounds, on November 24 and December 15. Keïta's RPM party won 66 seats; its allies won an additional 49 seats. The URD won 17 seats, and the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) party won 16. Turnout for parliamentary elections was lower than the presidential elections, at 38 percent. Foreign observers, including the EU mission and UN observers, declared both elections to have been conducted within the norm, despite high security.

A new electoral framework that was prepared for the cancelled elections prior to the 2012 coup as well as new biometric voter lists streamlined the elections process, although some criticism remained that such measures excluded the participation of those who did not receive their biometric voter ID cards on time.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 7 / 16 (+4)

The defeat of the Islamists in the north and the ousting of Sonogo's military junta led to circumstances in which political pluralism could return and all parties had equal chances of winning the presidential and legislative elections. The main parties in the 2013 elections were Rally for Mali (RPM), Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD), and Alliance for Democracy in Mali-Pan-African Party for Liberty, Solidarity and Justice (ADEMA).

No ethnic group dominates the government or security forces. Long-standing tensions between the more populous nonpastoralist ethnic groups and the Moor and Tuareg pastoralist groups have often fueled intermittent instability, leading up to the rebellion of 2012. Although the military government in the south and the Islamic militants in the north were ousted, Mali remains in a precarious position where insecurity limits full political rights.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12 (+2)

Although Mali did not have an elected government through September 2013, the improving security situation has raised prospects of a functioning government moving forward.

A number of anticorruption initiatives had been launched under the administration of ousted president Touré, including the creation of a general auditor's office. However, while this office uncovered corruption in 2012, no legal proceedings have followed. However, corruption remained a problem in government, public procurement, and both public and private contracting. Seen by many as one of the main problems that led to the Islamist takeover in the North, fighting corruption is one of President Keita's main goals after winning elections, although several reports involve him in lavish expenses during his tenure as prime minister in 2000. Mali was ranked 127 out of 177 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: 0 / 0 (+1)

The takeover of the north by Islamist militants in 2012 had resulted in the destruction of cultural heritage sites and imposition of a harsh version of Sharia (Islamic law) on the population there. This situation improved in 2013 due to the reduced influence of the Islamists in the region.

Civil Liberties: 27 / 60 (+8)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16 (+3)

Mali's media were considered among the freest in Africa before the 2012 rebellion and coup. Criminal libel laws had not been invoked by authorities since 2007, and there were no reports of harassment or intimidation of journalists in 2011. During 2012, however, an unprecedented number of journalists were illegally detained and tortured by the military and Islamist militants. Interviews with Touré and rebels were forbidden by the junta, and the national broadcaster was stormed by the military in April. The attacks on journalists decreased significantly in the second half of 2012. However, during 2013 Reporters Without Borders accused the Malian government of censoring reporters from reporting government abuses in the north and doing little to ensure their security. In November, two French journalists were kidnapped and murdered in the north. Mali is ranked 99th out of 179 countries in the 2013 Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index, a fall of 74 places since 2012.

Mali's population is predominantly Muslim, and the High Islamic Council has a significant influence over politics, especially by throwing their support for political candidates and parties. However, the state is secular, and minority religious rights are protected by law. In the north during 2012, Islamist militants imposed a crude form of Sharia (Islamic law) and destroyed Sufi Muslim shrines and other sacred sites that they deemed un-Islamic. Academic freedom was also suppressed in the rebel-held north. The situation improved in the second half of 2013, as the defeat of the Islamists allowed greater freedom of speech and belief, as well as increased academic freedom.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12 (+2)

Freedoms of assembly and association were respected prior to the coup, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operated actively without interference. The constitution guarantees workers the right to form unions and to strike, with some limitations regarding essential services and compulsory arbitration. Under the state of emergency that was in effect from January to July 2013, gatherings of more than 50 people were banned. However, with the overthrow of the rebels in the

north and the restoration of an elected government in Bamako, people's freedom to protest, engage in civic advocacy, and assert labor rights has improved.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16 (+3)

The judiciary, whose members were appointed by the executive under the constitution, was not independent. Traditional authorities decided the majority of disputes in rural areas. The interim government made some improvements in 2012, including firing corrupt prosecutors. The situation also improved in 2013, relative to 2012, because coup leaders no longer controlled the judiciary after the elections, and Islamists in the North were no longer in control and committing extra-judicial executions. In a sign of relative independence from the military, the coup leader was arrested in November.

Detainees are not always charged within the 48-hour period set by law, and police brutality has been reported, though the courts have convicted some perpetrators. During 2012, however, people accused of crimes or perceived moral offenses were summarily punished and even executed in the north, while the junta regularly engaged in arbitrary arrests and detentions in the south.

In 2013, extrajudicial killings between Tuareg, Arab, and Malian army soldiers took place in northern Mali. There is also evidence that Tuareg and Arab populations in the north have been punished in an extrajudicial manner by Malian army troops. According to Human Rights Watch, there were at least 26 extrajudicial executions, 11 enforced disappearances, and over 50 cases of torture or mistreatment committed by the Malian army during the year. In November, a mass grave containing 21 soldiers was discovered near a military site in Kati, 30 km north of Bamako. These are the remains of mutinous soldiers who opposed General Sanogo and were summarily executed in 2012.

In November 2013, authorities arrested Sanogo, the leader of the 2012 coup. Sanogo was initially charged only with kidnapping, though prosecutors said they expected to add charges for the mass murder and torture of soldiers who opposed his coup.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

As a result of the intense fighting in 2012 and 2013, there was a significant uptick in Malian refugees fleeing into neighboring countries. As of the end of September, the UN Refugee Agency was attempting to address the needs of 152,856 Malian refugees in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger. The estimated number of internally displaced persons inside Mali is about 254,822 according to the Commission of Movements of Populations. According to the UN, over 1.3 million people in Mali are at risk of food insecurity as a result of climatic hazards and insecurity.

Women have been underrepresented in high political posts in Mali. The country's first female prime minister took office in 2011. Women won 14 seats, or about 9.5 percent, in the late 2013 legislative elections. Domestic violence against women is widespread, and cultural traditions hinder reform. Women faced heightened harassment, threats, and violence in the north in 2012 due to militants' enforcement of harsh restrictions on dress and behavior. The situation improved slightly in 2013 after the ouster of the militants.

Despite the creation of the National Coordinating Committee for the Fight Against Trafficking and Related Activities in 2011, adult trafficking has not been criminalized, and Mali remains a source, destination, and transit country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. Prosecution of suspected traffickers is infrequent, with only two convictions in 2011. Traditional forms of slavery and debt bondage persist, particularly in the north, with thousands of people estimated to be living in conditions of servitude. The 2013 U.S. Trafficking in Persons' report placed Mali on its Tier 2 Watch List.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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