



Freedom in the World 2015 - Mali

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2015 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

OVERVIEW

After significant progress in returning to democracy in 2013 following a 2012 coup and an Islamic rebellion in the country's North, Mali entered an uncertain holding pattern in 2014. Diplomatic talks went on throughout the year, even as violence and instability continued. Ensuring security and combatting violent attacks while addressing northern separatists' demands for greater autonomy remained the primary task for the government and its international allies.

President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta appointed a former electoral rival, Moussa Mara, as the country's new prime minister on April 5. Former prime minister Oumar Tatam Ly had resigned with no official explanation, but it later emerged that he had felt unable to institute needed reforms. Corruption remains a deep problem within a system dominated by the executive; in 2014, the government disappointed observers with its apparent unwillingness and inability to combat corruption.

In July, the government and six armed groups signed a ceasefire agreement and a roadmap for further talks. Two more round of talks took place in September and November, with little resolution except to continue the effort. The degree of autonomy sought by the Tuareg rebel groups remains a thorny and chronically divisive issue. Talks are scheduled to resume in early 2015. Meanwhile, the cease-fire remained fragile, with Tuareg groups and Islamist militants clashing with Malian, French, and UN troops. Governance in the North remained tenuous.

Mali reported eight cases of the Ebola virus in 2014 in total, and six deaths. By year's end, there were no new cases of the disease in Mali and no individuals were being quarantined.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 17 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12

According to the constitution, 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.

The constitution was suspended after a 2012 military coup, but it was eventually restored, leading to elections in 2013. In the second round of presidential elections, Keïta, a former prime minister known by his initials IBK, won about 40 percent of the vote and defeated Soumaïla Cissé, a former finance minister who received about 20 percent. Observers deemed the elections generally free and fair, 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.

Legislative elections in November and December 2013 resulted in Keïta's Rally for Mali (RPM) party winning 66 seats, with its allies winning an additional 49 seats. The Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD) won 17 seats, and the Alliance for Democracy (ADEMA) party won 16. Foreign observers, including from the European Union and the United Nations, declared both elections to have been conducted within the norm, despite high security. A new electoral framework, which had been prepared for elections that were cancelled due to the 2012 coup, as well as new biometric voter lists streamlined the elections process, though some criticism remained that such measures excluded the participation of those who did not receive their biometric voter ID cards on time.

On April 5, 2014, Prime Minister Tatam Ly resigned, and IBK tapped Moussa Mara to replace him the same day. Mara is perceived as relatively untouched by government corruption.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 7 / 16

The 2013 defeat of the Islamists in the North and the ousting of the military junta led to circumstances in which political pluralism could return, with parties having relatively equal chances of winning the 2013 presidential and legislative elections. The main parties in the 2013 elections were the RPM, the URD, and 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 in the North have fueled instability over the decades, leading up to the rebellion of 2012. The rebellion was fueled by the involvement of Islamist extremists. 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; political participation in the North in particular remains deeply constrained by continued insecurity, a significant population of internally displaced people, and lack of territorial control by the government. External actors such as Algeria, Morocco, and France also have deep interests in the region.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12

Mali did not have an elected government between March 2012 and September 2013, but the tentative consolidation of the government in 2014 and the appointment of a prime minister have improved the governance situation.

Corruption remains a problem in government, public procurement, and both public and private contracting. The return of elected government in 2013 unlocked some \$4 billion in foreign assistance that, while promising for economic development and stability, could have a corrosive effect on transparency.

The president declared 2014 to be a year dedicated to the fight against corruption in Mali. However, corruption is seen by many as one of the factors that contributed to the Islamist takeover in the North, and several reports involve IBK in lavish expenses during his tenure as prime minister from 1994 to 2000. More recently, IBK has been criticized for appointing family members to key posts. His son,

Karim Keïta, is a parliamentary deputy and president of the parliamentary defense commission.

A high-profile spending scandal emerged over the government's \$40 million purchase in April 2014 of a new Boeing 737 for the president's use, and a \$200 million loan guarantee the government had made to a private company contracted to supply the Malian military. The scandals led the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international donors to suspend some of their aid to Mali. The IMF restored the suspended aid in December, after Mali had undergone two independent audits and had taken agreed-upon steps to address spending irregularities. Mali was ranked 115 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Civil Liberties: 27 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16

Mali's media were considered among the freest in Africa before the 2012 rebellion and coup. During 2012, however, an unprecedented number of journalists were illegally detained and tortured by the military and Islamist militants. While attacks on journalists subsequently decreased significantly, in 2013 Reporters Without Borders accused the Malian government of censoring reporting on government abuses in the volatile North. Reporting on the situation in the North remains the deepest challenge to freedom of information and expression. The capital and the South have returned to a semblance of normalcy.

At under 3 percent, internet penetration is one of the lowest in West Africa. However, internet news websites are popular with the educated elite.

Mali's population is predominantly Muslim, and the High Islamic Council has a significant influence over politics, especially through support for political candidates and parties. However, the state is secular, and minority religious rights are protected by law.

In 2012 in the North, Islamist militants imposed a 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 rebel-held regions. The situation improved in the second half of 2013 and into 2014, as the defeat of the Islamists allowed greater freedom of belief, as well as more academic freedom. In 2014, Academic Freedom Monitor reported no violations of academic freedom, in contrast to 2013 incidents in Bamako.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

Under the state of emergency that was in effect in 2013, gatherings of more than 50 people were banned. However, with the reduction of the rebels' strength 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 improved in 2014, especially in the South. The constitution guarantees workers the right to form unions and to strike, with some limitations regarding essential services and compulsory arbitration. In February 2014, 2,000 gold mine workers in Sadiola and Yatela went on a five-day strike, though mining operations continued.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

The judiciary, whose members are appointed by the president under the constitution, is beholden to the executive. Traditional authorities decide the majority of disputes in rural areas. In a sign of relative judicial independence from military control, the 2012 coup leader, Amadou Sanogo, was arrested in November 2013. Sanogo was initially charged only with kidnapping, but the charge was changed to conspiracy to murder following the discovery of approximately 30 bodies in mass graves; the dead were believed to be mutinous soldiers who had opposed Sanogo and had been summarily executed in 2012. Sanogo remains in detention pending trial.

Detainees are not always charged within the 48-hour period set by law, and police brutality has been reported; the courts have convicted some perpetrators. According to Human Rights Watch, the Malian army committed at least 26 extrajudicial executions, 11 forced disappearances, and more than 50 cases of torture or mistreatment during 2013. In 2014 there were fewer reports of extrajudicial killings, but the numbers are inconclusive given constraints on reporting in the North. Because of the ongoing peace talks, there is considerable ambiguity about whether those responsible for crimes will be held accountable.

The Malian justice system – which was already out of reach to many ordinary Malians – has so far largely failed to provide justice to victims of the 2012-13 violence, and the national justice system remains largely absent in the North. Amnesty International reported in August 2014 that many juveniles between ages 16 and 18 accused by the government of belonging to armed groups during the unrest were being detained alongside adult prisoners without access to representation or to their families.

Two incidents of violence against humanitarian workers in 2014 highlighted the continued insecurity in the North. In February, five Malian aid workers, four of whom worked for the International Committee for the Red Cross, were kidnapped by members of the Islamist militant group the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa; French forces freed the captives in April. In May, two Malian aid workers for the Norwegian Refugee Council were killed by a roadside land mine near Timbuktu.

Black Tamasheqs face societal discrimination, including slavery-like treatment and hereditary servitude. Authorities sometimes deny them official documents or discriminate against them in housing, schooling, and police protection.

Same-sex sexual acts are legal, but LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face discrimination, including cases of violence with the aim of changing gender identity.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

During the intense fighting in 2012 and 2013, there was a significant uptick in Malian refugees fleeing into neighboring countries. Despite a somewhat improved security situation in 2014, conditions in northern Mali left many refugees unable to return. According to the UN Refugee Agency, more than 147,000 Malian refugees lived outside the country and there were more than 128,000 internally displaced persons inside the country as of July 2014. The World Food Program reported that more than 1.5 million people in Mali were experiencing food insecurity in March 2014, with the number expected to rise to 1.9 million later in the year.

Mali's economy has a large informal sector. Citizens have the right to own property and conduct business activity. Nonetheless, the economy remained weak in 2014.

Mali had its first female prime minister in 2011. Women won 14 seats in the 2013 legislative elections. In February 2014, a group of legal and gender experts drafted a law to establish a 30 percent quota of female candidates for each political party's list; the National Assembly had not voted on the legislation by the end of the year.

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 had improved slightly by 2014.

Despite the creation of the National Coordinating Committee for the Fight Against Trafficking and Related Activities in 2011, trafficking in adults has not been criminalized, and Mali remains a source, destination, and transit country for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. Prosecution of suspected traffickers is infrequent. Traditional forms of slavery and debt bondage persist,

particularly in the North, with thousands of people estimated to be living in conditions of servitude. In 2014, the U.S. State Department again placed Mali on the Tier 2 Watch List in its Trafficking in Persons Report.

Significant concerns about child labor persist, especially in the artisanal gold-mining sector. Regulation is challenging because of the decentralized nature of the mining. According to a December 2011 report by Human Rights Watch, children as young as 6 years old were working in the sector, exposed to mercury and other hazards.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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