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Freedom in the World 2012 - Mali

2012 Scores

Status: Free
Freedom Rating: 2.5
Civil Liberties: 3
Political Rights: 2

Overview

In 2011, Mali began preparations for the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections, which will bring an end to President Amadou Toumani Touré's 10 years in power, and the political atmosphere intensified as parties began to put forth potential candidates. The potential for terrorist attacks remained high throughout 2011, and at the end of the year, three European aid workers kidnapped in Algeria were still being held in Mali by a group affiliated with the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

Mali was ruled by military and one-party regimes for more than 30 years following independence from France in 1960. After soldiers killed more than 100 demonstrators demanding a multiparty system in 1991, President Moussa Traoré was overthrown by the military. Alpha Oumar Konaré of the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) won the presidency in the 1992 elections, which were deemed credible by most observers. He secured a second and final term in 1997 amid an opposition boycott. Several opposition parties also boycotted that year's National Assembly elections, in which ADEMA captured a majority of seats.

In the 2002 presidential election, independent candidate Amadou Toumani Touré, a popular former military officer who had led Mali during the post-Traoré transition period, defeated his ADEMA opponent. During legislative elections that year, the opposition Hope 2002 coalition, led by the Rally for Mali party, emerged victorious over an ADEMA-led coalition.

In the April 2007 presidential poll, Touré was reelected with 71 percent in the first round of voting; he had run as an independent candidate, but with support from the Alliance of Democracy and Progress (ADP) coalition, led by ADEMA. In July 2007 elections to the National Assembly, the ADP secured a total of 113 seats, with 51 going to ADEMA. The main opposition coalition, the Front for Democracy and the Republic, captured 15 seats, while a smaller party and a number of independents secured the remaining 19 seats.

Meanwhile, ADEMA captured more votes than any other party in the 2009 municipal elections.

While violence between government forces and the marginalized ethnic Tuareg minority flared in the late 2000s, clashes died down somewhat following a 2009 offensive by the Malian army and a subsequent peace agreement between government and Tuareg forces. By 2010, the North Mali Tuareg Alliance for Change, a former rebel faction, was working cooperatively with government troops to police drug-smuggling routes. In 2010, the government announced that a joint operation with Mauritanian forces had resulted in the capture of key members of one of the largest drug-trafficking networks in the Sahel.

A number of international aid workers and European tourists have been kidnapped since 2008, and several have been killed. The terrorist organization Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) continued to threaten security in the north throughout 2010 and 2011. In February 2010, Mali liberated four AQIM fighters to secure the release of a French hostage in AQIM custody, prompting Algeria and Mauritania to recall their ambassadors from Bamako. Nonetheless, regional cooperation improved following a September 2010 meeting at which military representatives from Mali, Mauritania, Algeria, and Niger signed an agreement on the creation of a shared intelligence command. In October 2011, Islamist rebels kidnapped three aid workers in Algeria, and held them in Mali; Malian officials said the rebels belonged to an AQIM faction.

In October 2011, Mali set April 29, 2012, as the official date for the first round of much-anticipated 2012 presidential elections. In preparation, Mali established a nonpermanent National Independent Electoral Commission. While presidential candidates are technically allowed to formally register only 45 days before polling, some political parties in 2011 were already nominating candidates. Touré is constitutionally barred from running again. Mali will also hold legislative elections in 2012 with the first and second rounds in July. In 2011, the government worked to propose changes to the constitution, including the creation of a Senate and an independent regulatory body for broadcasting, and set the date for a constitutional referendum in 2012.

Although it is one of the world's least developed countries, Mali has undertaken significant political and economic reforms since the early 1990s, including a decentralization program that gave greater autonomy to local communities. Mali has benefited from international debt relief, and is currently working with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to enact economic reforms and promote foreign investment.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Mali is an electoral democracy. The 2007 presidential election was peaceful, and the results were deemed valid by domestic and international observers. The president, who appoints the prime minister, is elected by popular vote and can serve up to two five-year terms. In 2011, Mali saw its first woman prime minister rise to power, Cissé Mariam Kaïdama Sidibé. Members of the 160-seat unicameral National Assembly serve five-year terms, with 13 seats reserved to represent Malians living abroad.

In 2011, a wide variety of political parties and coalitions – often organized around leading personalities – operated in fluid and frequently shifting electoral coalitions. The largest party, ADEMA, participated in the ADP coalition to back President Amadou Toumani Touré during the 2007 elections. A new political party, the Project for Economic and Social Development (PDES), was formed in July 2010 in preparation for the 2012 presidential election; PDES was established as a successor to the Citizen Movement, Touré's nonpartisan political association.

A number of anticorruption initiatives have been launched under Touré's administration, including the creation of a general auditor's office. However, corruption remains a problem in government, public procurement, and both public and private contracting. Between 2010 and 2011, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria suspended and terminated several grants to Mali worth millions of dollars due to government embezzlement and fraud. Mali was ranked 118 out of 183 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Mali's media is considered among the freest in Africa. Criminal libel laws have not been invoked by authorities since 2007, and there were no reports of harassment or intimidation of journalists in 2011. Throughout the year, various workshops were held to strengthen the media's capacity before the 2012 elections. The government does not restrict internet access, although less than 1 percent of the population had access in 2011.

While Mali's population is predominantly Muslim, and the High Islamic Council has significant influence over politics, the state is secular, and minority religious rights are protected by law. Academic freedom is respected.

Freedoms of assembly and association are respected. Many civic groups and nongovernmental organizations operate actively without interference. The constitution guarantees workers the right to form unions and to strike. However, some workers who perform services deemed essential are required to provide limited services during strikes, and in some cases the labor minister can force strikers into arbitration.

The judiciary, whose members are appointed by the executive, is not independent. Traditional authorities decide the majority of disputes in rural areas. A 2010 law calls for the establishment of Centers for Access to Rights and Justice, which would provide citizens with information about their legal rights and judicial procedures. The centers were not yet operational at year's end. Detainees are not always charged within the 48-hour period set by law, and there are lengthy delays in bringing defendants to trial. Police brutality has been reported, though courts have convicted some perpetrators. Prison conditions are harsh, and while human rights monitors are permitted to visit prisons, cumbersome administrative procedures reportedly make investigations difficult.

No ethnic group predominates in the government or security forces. Long-standing tensions between the more populous nonpastoralist ethnic groups and the Moor and Tuareg pastoralist groups have fueled intermittent instability.

Women are underrepresented in high political posts, and only a few cabinet ministers are women. Domestic violence against women is widespread, and cultural traditions have hindered reform. 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 trafficking 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.

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