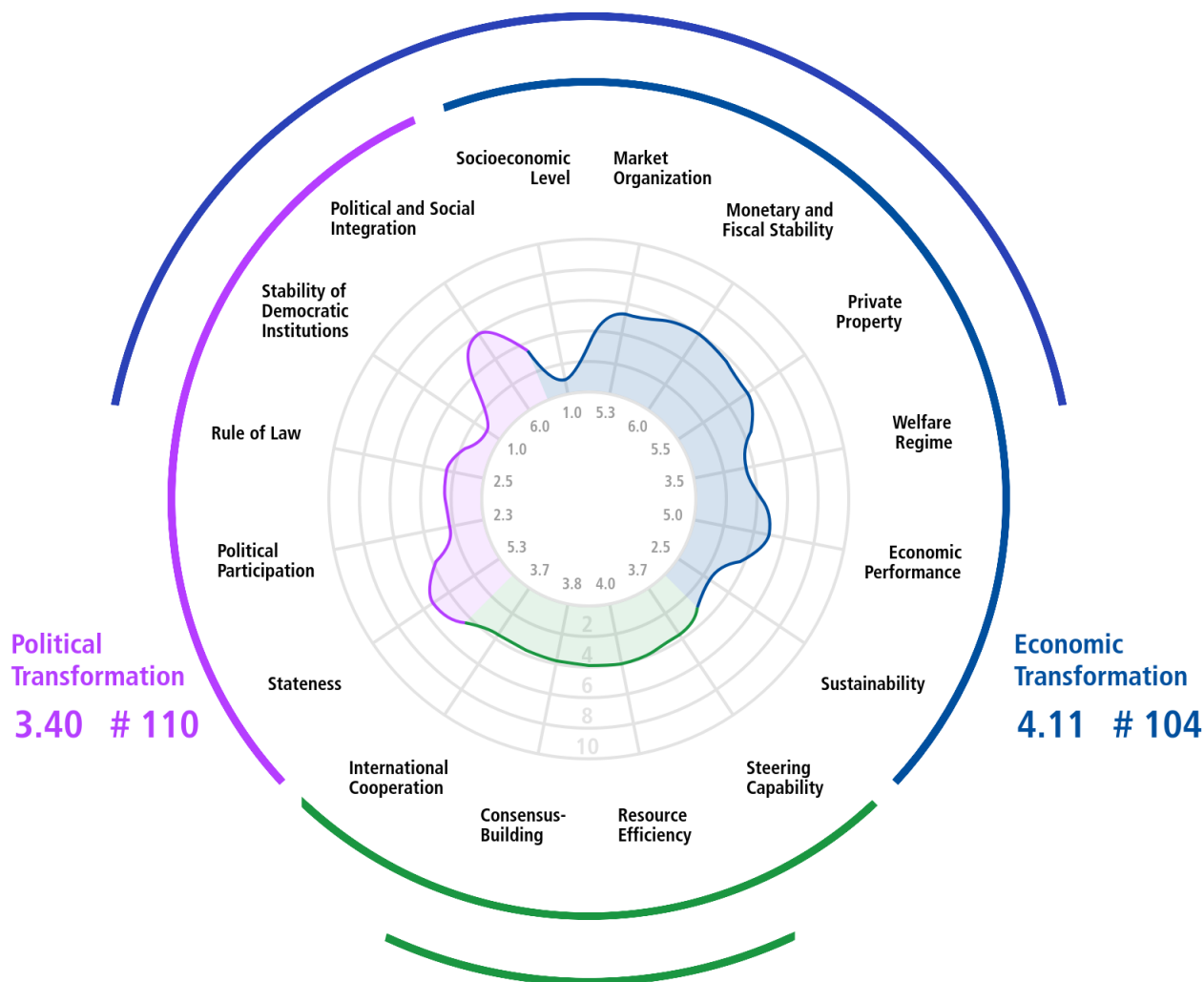


Mali

Status Index

3.75 # 111

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Political Transformation
3.40 # 110

Economic Transformation
4.11 # 104

Governance Index

3.60 # 108

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024**. It covers the period from February 1, 2021 to January 31, 2023. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

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Key Indicators

Population	M	22.6	HDI	0.428	GDP p.c., PPP \$	2517
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	3.1	HDI rank of 189	186	Gini Index	36.0
Life expectancy	years	58.9	UN Education Index	0.283	Poverty ³	% 48.2
Urban population	%	45.4	Gender inequality ²	0.613	Aid per capita \$	64.7

Sources (as of December 2023): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2021-22. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

Mali's trajectory during the period under review has been mainly influenced by the conflict in its central and northern regions, resulting in significant increases in the number of deaths over time. Violence and instability continue to pose the greatest threats to democracy and a liberal market economy. The country's resilience has been undermined by a decade of violence, prompting its citizens to resort to drastic measures.

The suspension of Mali's flawed democracy has further paralyzed the country. A first coup in 2020, followed by a second one in 2021, in which the same military junta ousted a civilian transitional government, has led the country toward increasing authoritarianism. Since coming into power, the military junta has continuously attacked freedom of speech, imprisoned numerous civil society leaders and intensified human rights violations while conducting military operations.

The National Transition Council, intended to function as a legislative assembly, has been unable to act as a counterpower despite the junta's appointment of several civil society members. Additionally, the transitional government has yet to fulfill its commitment to an election timetable, established after six months of regional sanctions in July 2022. So far, concrete actions have not been taken to implement this timetable.

Polls promised for February 2024 are unlikely to occur then, while the junta's refusal to rule out its participation in the election raises questions of legitimacy. Democratic norms are at stake because the junta has weakened all institutions, particularly the justice system, creating uncertainty about a return to a normal constitutional order. Restrictions on civic space have rendered civil society unable to influence the government. The exception to this are religious leaders, who have emerged as the sole group capable of mobilizing followers without limitations.

The transitional government struggled to keep the country afloat. Mali's economy suffered from the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic, with its annual GDP growth shrinking by -1.2% in 2020. Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sanctions and poor governmental planning further damaged the economy, which was already suffering from instability. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine resulted in increasing inflation in Mali because the country depends on cereals and fertilizers from Ukraine. Under military rule, the country returned to more isolationist policies and turned its back on its traditional allies, notably France and the United States, while aligning with Russia and demonstrating hostility toward its neighbors Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire.

Its rapprochement with Guinea and Burkina Faso – two countries that endured coups – is a temporary alliance of convenience but has not replaced Mali's cooperative and committed partners, with which Mali shares a common currency and a customs union. Both are important given that Mali is in a landlocked position. Its isolationist political rhetoric makes security partnerships fragile. Mali's recent alliance with Russian security providers resulted in the withdrawal of European military support and strained relations with Western bilateral donors. The government has significantly restricted the ability of the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to fulfill its mandate, raising doubts about the mission's survival and increasing the prospects of instability.

The transitional government has taken steps to improve the business environment by updating the mining code and implementing new investment policies. However, some of these reforms do not demonstrate a commitment to a liberal economy; instead, they signal to the business community a willingness to renegotiate deals based on political objectives.

The government has launched several investigations into corruption and embezzlement against the previous president's relatives, which were perceived more as politically motivated than a genuine commitment to integrity. Several corruption scandals, particularly regarding the allocation of subsidized housing to the family of the transitional prime minister, reveal how institutions are being exploited for political purposes. The deterioration of the rule of law has resulted in the removal of various checks and balances, replacing due process with threats.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

Mali's reputation as a model of democratization has recently been tarnished. Several gains since the 1991 transition have been stymied by an increasingly authoritarian military junta, acting as the transitional government since 2020.

In 1991, Mali became a textbook case of how a coup can end in a functioning democracy. At the time, after 23 years of a brutal military dictatorship, a junta seized power following weeks of violently repressed protests, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds. Within a few months, political parties were permitted to compete freely in a fair election, while an emerging civil society enhanced political debates.

The challenges were manifold – newly elected President Alpha Oumar Konaré had to contend with years of economic neglect, empty state coffers and lack of basic services. He successfully attracted support from bilateral and multilateral donors, notably the IMF's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries program in 1999. His successor, Amadou Toumani Touré, secured roughly \$540 million in debt relief in 2005. The policies of the two successive governments jettisoned years of political and economic isolationism. Mali embraced a liberal economy, implementing economic reforms, including the privatization of several dysfunctional public companies and better regularization. These reforms led to the GDP, in 2015 constant dollars, growing from \$4.69 billion in 1991 to \$11.36 billion in 2011. Despite this growth, Mali remained one of the world's poorest countries, ranking at the bottom of the World Development Index. Economic and political reforms were limited by essential governance issues, with the education and health sectors underperforming.

Still, Mali's politics were based on consensus and co-optation rather than accountability and legitimacy, which caused frustration among those not represented in the political system. In 2008, insecurity became a severe threat to the country's stability as al-Qaeda-linked groups increased their activity and several kidnappings of westerners occurred in northern Mali. In 2009, a reform of the family code was abandoned after Islamist groups initiated protests and increased their influence in political discussions. Historical marginalization of northerners led to a clash when Tuareg fighters seized weapons following previous rebellions that had ended with political settlements that the government never fully implemented. On March 21, 2012, a month before the presidential elections in which the incumbent, President Touré, was not a candidate, a coup brought a junta into power. The chaos in Bamako led to a military collapse in the north, with two-thirds of Mali's territory falling under the control of jihadists who expelled Tuareg groups, which had initially launched the conflict. The transition faced several hiccups, and no solution was provided for the northern problem. In January 2013, a French-led mission helped Mali regain its sovereignty and facilitated the return of democracy.

President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, who was re-elected in 2018, had a mandate to reform the fragile state but failed to do so, which meant there was no return to normalcy. President Keita initiated several economic reforms, leading to an increase in foreign investments and various fiscal reforms. However, he was unsuccessful in resolving the most pressing issues. The 2015 Algiers Peace

Agreement presented a significant opportunity to enact political reforms but quickly stalled as many sections of the agreement were never implemented. Additionally, security incidents in the north and center of the country increased exponentially, despite the presence of the United Nations Mission, MINUSMA. Meanwhile, there were allegations against the president and his close supporters of corruption, embezzlement and nepotism. In addition, several claims of fraud during the 2020 legislative elections led to mass street protests. After weeks of contestation, a military junta, marking the fourth in Mali's history, ousted the president and seized control.

After pressure from the West African organization, ECOWAS, a transitional government was established but then overthrown on May 24, 2021, when the original coup leaders regained control.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

The state's monopoly on force is challenged in certain regions of the country, as the 2015 Peace Accord, which was supposed to re-establish this monopoly, remains challenged because its implementation stalled.

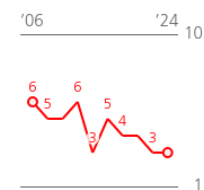
The Malian state has not fully controlled its entire territory since the 2012 military collapse in the north. The state's monopoly on the use of force is further eroded as the crisis deepens. It now shares its monopoly with a plethora of armed groups operating throughout the country. These include two umbrellas for armed groups, the Coordination of the Movements of the Azawad (CMA) and the Plateforme, as well as several non-terrorist armed groups that have not signed the peace agreements. In central Mali, several militias, despite supporting the government's agenda, challenged its control rather than supporting the return of strong state institutions. Although the armed forces are present in the north (which represents about two-thirds of the country) and in the center, they have not been able to secure these parts of the country.

International actors have supported the return of the state monopoly on the use of force after the French-led Operation Serval in 2012. The 2021 coup d'état introduced a new administration that decided to seek new partnerships, alienating a decade of relations with European and U.N. partners, and therefore causing several contingent withdrawals. The withdrawal of the French force, Barkhane – operation Serval's successor – as well as limitations to the U.N. forces, have yet to be fully understood, but early assessments indicate that terrorist armed groups, notably Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State-Sahel Province (ISSP) now control a large part of northern Mali. Attacks in October 2022 in the Menaka Region by the ISSP and the Boni Blockade in July 2022 by the JNIM demonstrate the inability of the Malian armed forces to control vast territories of its state. Meanwhile, the JNIM and ethnic militias have increased their influence in central Mali. The Malian security forces have conducted some retaliation expeditions, with Russian support, but have slowly lost control of entire regions.

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

3



The legitimacy of the nation-state is rarely questioned among the majority but is questioned among minorities located far from the center of power.

There are no official statistics on the ethnic fabric of the country. About 50% of the population are Mandingo, which includes the main ethnic group, the Bambaras, as well as the Soninke and the Malinke. Other groups include the Fulanis (about 18%), the Voltaic (about 12%), the Songhay (6%) and Tuaregs and Arabs (10%).

While the Bambaras dominated the south, the north, which is much less populated, is predominantly composed of Songhay, Tuareg and Arab, populations that experience a sense of marginalization from Bamako. Calls to revive Azawad, the northernmost territory in the country, as an independent state have increased in the last few years because the 2015 Algiers Peace Agreement was not fully implemented. Northerners, especially Malians of Tamasheq origin, express a sense of marginalization from the central government and formed armed groups to fight it. Lack of progress in the implementation of the accord has led armed groups to increasingly voice secessionist rhetoric.

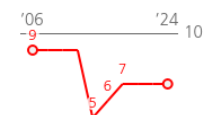
Several northerners still struggle to have their citizenship recognized but are now able to receive birth certificates, which would allow them to register as citizens. While there are no laws or processes to deny them citizenship, the absence of the state (or the delays in the state's return since the 2012 rebellion) remains a significant factor in preventing some citizens from receiving recognition of their civil rights.

By law, Mali is a secular state. The separation of church and state is enshrined in the constitution. However, the reality is that Mali's constitution only pays lip service to secularism, since religious leaders wield significant influence over government affairs. In Mali, a predominantly Muslim country, the social, religious and political spheres are heavily intertwined. Shariah, or Islamic law, is not directly followed, but the rights of individuals largely adhere to Islamic principles. Matters pertaining to inheritance, parentage, baptism, marriage and funeral ceremonies are governed by Islamic law. It is worth noting that the word "Shariah," which is often pronounced in Bamanankan as [sà.ri.ya], has been adopted into that language to simply mean law and regulation, devoid of any Islamic connotation.

The main religious leaders – the president of the High Islamic Council, Sufi Chérif Ousmane Madani Haïdara (spiritual leader of the Ançar Dine Association, not to be confused with the terrorist group Ansar Dine); the former president of the High Islamic Council, Mahmoud Dicko; and Chérif of Nioro, the "Guide" of the Hamalliyya/Hamawiyya Sufi Brotherhood – have traditionally played a significant role in the public and political sphere. They have effectively established themselves as a conservative force capable of influencing political decisions and imposing a social order that engages the entire society. From the regime of Amadou Toumani Touré (2002 – 2012) to that of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (2013 – 2020), all public confrontations between the state and Islamic organizations over social reforms, such as the reform of the family and personal codes, have resulted in victories for Islamic actors.

State identity

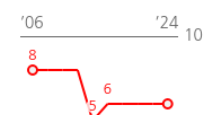
7



1

No interference of religious dogmas

6



1

Whether the three mentioned leaders form an alliance or are opposed to each other is influenced by their individual interests. They may collaborate to back a political figure, or they may be at odds with each other in their selection, particularly during elections. However, in general, they unite on matters pertaining to religion or the defense of Muslim values. For instance, Imam Mahmoud Dicko and Chérif Ousmane Madani Haïdara – who are ideologically opposed, recently urged their followers to take to the streets in an official protest against an anti-Islamic video.

Mali has a clear administrative structure throughout its territory. It comprises one district, the capital Bamako, as well as 19 regions, 156 “cercles” (second-level administrative units), 819 communes and 12,712 villages.

Maliens face a significant shortage of electricity, sanitation, and water. In 2021, only 48% of Malians had access to electricity. In 2020, approximately 45% had access to basic sanitation. In 2022, about 40% had access to drinking water. Urban and rural areas, and various regions, have unequal access to basic amenities, with northern regions being severely deficient. These services suffer from underfunding, resulting in inadequate maintenance and leaving them unable to cope with pressures from a growing population. Additionally, the sparse population living across a vast territory presents challenges for reaching and serving communities.

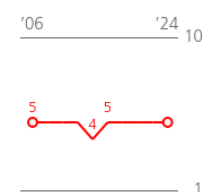
Insecurity in central and northern Mali has led to the closure of several state administrations, particularly city halls and courts, thus resulting in significant gaps in service delivery. Law enforcement and justice are inaccessible to a majority of Malians.

In 2017, the nominated interim authorities mandated by the 2015 Algiers Peace Accord took measures to support the return of the state. Five years later, a lack of capacity means they are unable to ensure service deliveries.

2 | Political Participation

The 2020 coup followed multiple protests throughout the country about the unfairness of the 2020 legislative elections and was meant as a first step toward political transition. In May 2021, a coup within a coup was the effective end of an attempt at implementing a civilian-led transition. Since then, the military junta has increased its powers, muting any opposition voices and naming a transitional legislative body. The Transition Council members were selected by the junta in an attempt to project a veil of legitimacy; they are not representative of the population and remain a highly consultative body whose influence over state processes remains minimal. The junta has missed every deadline to introduce the effective return of constitutional rule and the organization of elections. There are no set dates yet for elections, and the junta does not make this a priority.

Basic administration
5



Free and fair elections
1



Meanwhile, the last general elections, legislative ones in 2020, had several irregularities and instances of electoral fraud, while many voters could not vote due to the security situation. The electoral commission faced significant logistic shortfalls, which undermined its ability to ensure smooth operations. Complaints from political parties and candidates were ignored, while international observers also condemned several issues affecting the transparency and the fairness of the process. In the Gao Region, allegations of ballot stuffing led to the unilateral annulment of votes from several polling stations, the constitutionality of which remains unclear.

The irregularities during the 2020 elections were a major reason for the protests that eventually led to the coup d'état, with the military entering into play.

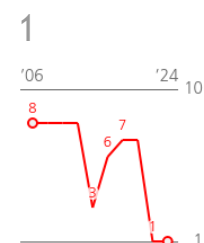
Since the coup on August 18, 2020, Mali has been ruled by a civilian-military transitional government, with the military predominating in key government positions. The military junta was officially dissolved in January 2021. The strong militarization of the administration began with the second coup d'état (the coup within the coup), which occurred on May 24, 2021, overthrowing the transitional president, Bah N'Daw, a retired military officer, and the diplomat Moctar Ouane, who was serving as prime minister.

Since then, several incidents have caused the consolidation of power by the five members of the junta as the prefects and regional governors – who are the heads of the regional executive – are military. Colonel Abdoulaye Maiga, minister of territorial administration, served only temporarily as prime minister before Choguel Maiga returned to his post.

There are also military personnel directing several services. For example, the directors of the international airport, the Gabriel Touré University Hospital and the National Health Insurance Fund, among others, are all military personnel. Initially, the junta offered some positions to a coalition of opponents, the June 5th Movement–Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5-RFP) umbrella. However, leaders who did not comply with the desires of the junta were slowly discarded. The creation of a transitional legislative body, the National Council of Transition, was meant to increase popular representation. Nevertheless, the junta appoints all the council's members, whom they can reshuffle at will. In October 2022, they added 26 new council members.

President Assima Goita assumed power without any input from democratically elected officials. The junta has arrested opponents and initiated investigations into influential figures from past regimes, including former Prime Ministers Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga (who died in custody) and Boubou Cissé. It has also detained numerous civil society figures and restricted freedom of speech. Additionally, several individuals were compelled to flee the country, such as long-standing opposition member Oumar Marico, who had exposed human rights violations defense and security forces committed against civilians.

Effective power to govern



The junta has curbed the rights of association and assembly and limited the activities of civic groups in 2022. Mali's constitution guarantees the rights of association and assembly; this was inscribed in the 1992 constitution and reaffirmed in the 2022 new draft constitution. In practice, the current government has not undermined these rights. The government has launched a review of all NGO accreditation and has made it impossible for new civic organizations to get accreditation.

The military government arbitrarily arrested several members of civil society deemed too critical of its actions, notably Étienne Fakaba Sissoko, in January 2022. Aminata Dicko, head of a human rights organization, testified before the U.N. Security Council on January 27, 2023 about the abuses the Malian army and its Russian auxiliaries perpetrated against Fulani civilians. After receiving threats and an attempt to arrest her, Dicko took refuge in the headquarters of MINUSMA, which exfiltrated her. Similarly, several political leaders were arrested, notably Oumar Mariko, in December 2021, for criticizing the prime minister. Issa Kaou D'jim, a member of the M5-RFP umbrella who supported the coup, was also arrested in 2021. These arrests have caused civic space to shrink, with several civil society groups now engaging in self-censorship. In November 2022, the interdiction of French NGOs and funding from France, an essential donor to Mali's civil society, was perceived as a direct attempt to curb civic groups and ensure compliance.

Freedom of expression faced multiple threats in 2022. The authorities have threatened or closed several media outlets. Both the 1992 constitution and the 2022 draft constitution protect freedom of expression. Despite this, the military junta has aggressively attempted to curtail freedom of speech. Libeling a state official is a criminal offense. The radio host, Mohamed Bathily, was arrested in December 2020 and later found guilty of insulting the head of state and members of the judiciary.

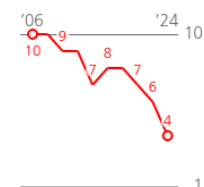
Several media have been banned. Djoliba TV News had its license suspended in November 2022 for broadcasting a commentary deemed too critical of the government. Malian journalist Malick Konaté has faced threats for his investigative work on groups close to the transitional government, who refuse to protect him. For having contributed to a report broadcast on the French television channel BFM TV, deemed too critical of the Malian army, Konaté was subject to threats that forced him to leave the country. Many journalists are either censored or choose self-censorship, so that they will not have problems. Media outlets that do not adhere to the official discourse fear repression, leading to a decreasing plurality of opinions in the public sphere.

Foreign journalists are no longer able to work freely in the country. French media RFI and France 24 were banned from airing in Mali in April 2022. In February 2022, French journalist Benjamin Roger, whom authorities granted a visa but refused accreditation, was expelled from Mali for not having proper documentation. Senegalese journalist Mamadou Sylla was arrested in July 2022. All accredited foreign journalists based in Mali had their accreditations revoked.

The authorities have arrested several bloggers and social media users for posting critical messages, while several pro-junta online activists have attacked critics.

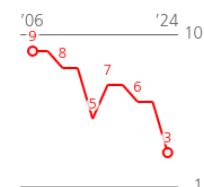
Association / assembly rights

4



Freedom of expression

3



3 | Rule of Law

There is no longer a separation of powers. The country is ruled by a military junta, whose authoritarianism and hold on power have increased in 2022. The junta did not suspend the constitution and it established a Transition Charter in October 2020. Nevertheless, it can do whatever it wants when it comes to the governance of state affairs.

President Assimi Goita and the four other junta members all have executive powers. A civilian prime minister, Choguel Maiga, was appointed. Maiga suffered a stroke, and Colonel Abdoulaye Maiga was appointed interim prime minister, until Maiga reassumed his post. The junta created the National Transition Committee, intended to act as a legislative assembly. All its members were chosen by the executive and may be dismissed at its will. Former pro-junta opposition leader Issa Kaou N'Djim was expelled in 2021 after criticizing the junta. The judiciary branch has remained silent and is unable to ensure checks and balances. The Supreme Court does not yet have a president, although the junta has named several new justices.

While the constitution guarantees the independence of the judiciary, Mali has always struggled to put this principle into practice. On several occasions, the judiciary has appeared to be under political pressure. This has become more pronounced since the military came to power. The most evident indication of this is the transitional government's annulment of the decree nominating Cheick Mohamed Chérif Koné in 2021, which resulted in his dismissal as a judge.

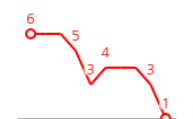
Numerous civilians and military persons have been falsely imprisoned under suspicion of attempting to destabilize the state. In 2022, several prosecuted cases were perceived as politically charged, notably charges against former Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga, chamber of commerce director Youssouf Bathily and businessman Bakary Togola. Like other people who were prosecuted, they were close to ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita or to opponents of the transitional government.

The national government allocates only 1% of its overall budget to the judiciary. Many regions in northern and central Mali do not have access to any judiciary services or infrastructure. Citizens encounter significant delays in processing cases, which requires numerous appeals to the bureaucracy. This is time-consuming and costly. Court decisions are rarely enforced, so citizens often seek alternatives to the state's judiciary system, which they perceive as corrupt and impotent.

Separation of powers

1

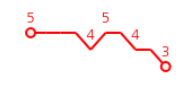
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Independent judiciary

3

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Corruption in Mali is common and systematic. According to a Mali-Mètre poll conducted in 2022, 67% of Malians believe that levels of corruption are extremely high. According to the poll, 53% of Malians cite the judiciary as the most corrupt sector in Mali, followed by the police (41%) and customs (30%).

Several organs have been created to investigate corruption. One is the General Auditor and the Office for the Fight against Illicit Enrichment in Mali (an independent body that can take cases directly to court). The Economic Judiciary Pole, which was created to facilitate the prosecution of corruption cases, remained biased in its selection of cases to pursue. Several high-stake corruption cases were brought to court in 2022, notably against former Prime Ministers Boubou Cissé and Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga and other political figures. These were likely politically charged, as other allegations of corruption against members of the transitional government – notably against transitional Prime Minister Choguel Maiga himself – remain uninvestigated. Relatives of the transitional prime minister – including his own children – were allocated public housing in May 2022. Other accusations of illegal enrichment have also tarnished the junta.

The 1992 constitution remains valid, despite the transitional government initiating the process of writing a new one. According to the draft that has already been made public, the new constitution should guarantee the same civil rights as the previous constitution. The draft constitution is still under discussion. There is strong opposition in the country among some political organizations, which state that the task of adopting a new constitution should not be left to unelected leaders. There are also members of the Muslim religious class who want secularism totally banned from the new constitution. In early 2023, a commission set up by transitional President Assimi Goita completed the first draft. Another commission was set up thereafter to work on the first draft with the aim of making it more inclusive.

In practice, there are multiple violations of civil rights and the fundamental rights listed in the constitution. For example, economist and civil society activist Étienne Fakaba Sissoko and opposition leader Oumar Mariko were both arrested for criticizing the government. The government has curtailed free speech and freedom of assembly, leading to several unlawful arrests by the state security services. The absence of the state in parts of northern Mali and its severely limited authority in several regions of central Mali mean that there are no mechanisms to protect civil rights.

The armed forces during anti-terrorist operations in central and northern Mali have committed civil rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture and arbitrary arrests. Hundreds of civilians were killed during operations in Moura by the armed forces and Russian Wagner operatives in March 2022. Security forces are rarely prosecuted for civil rights violations. Not all citizens have the same rights. Women face significant legal barriers, notably in terms of inheritance.

Prosecution of office abuse

3

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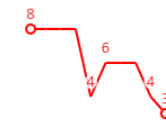


1

Civil rights

3

'06 _____ '24 10



1

4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

Mali's constitutional order was suspended on August 18, 2020, when a coup deposed the elected president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. On May 24, 2021, a second coup occurred when the previous junta leaders seized power from the civilian transitional government and increased their control over the state. The Transition National Council (CNT) was meant to act as a legislative assembly, but the junta chose all its members.

Despite representation and diversity criteria, the CNT has little authority to stop the dismantling of democratic institutions. Members of the CNT who express criticism have been expelled, notably Issa Kaou Djim. A new constitution is being drafted. No clear timetable for the next elections has been adopted. Delays in organizing them have continued to the point that it seems increasingly clear that the junta has no intention of relinquishing power at the agreed-upon time in early 2024.

There are no functioning democratic institutions. The military is in power, and no form of democratic governance is functioning. The five military officers who seized power under the National Committee for the People's Salvation are the de facto rulers of Mali. They ousted the previous, elected government and dissolved the National Assembly. Their creation of a non-elected legislative assembly, the National Transition Council, does not reflect democratic efforts. Several major political parties or civil society groups were excluded. Loyalty to the junta appears to be the most critical selection criteria, despite the inclusion of several ethnic, religious and civil society groups. At the local level, mayors were generally retained until elections could be held. In some areas where elections could not occur, interim authorities were named in accordance with armed group affiliation as a negotiated part of the 2015 Algiers Peace Agreement, thus challenging local legitimacy.

5 | Political and Social Integration

Mali's constitution and charter of political parties regulate the party system. Before the coup d'état on March 22, 2012, Mali had a burgeoning political party system, with 273 parties registered. Registering a party was never difficult. State subsidies ensured a low entrance fee in the political arena. Most of these parties had no representation in the legislative assembly nor had they forwarded a presidential candidate in the most recent elections and, therefore, made no contribution to political debates.

Parties' platforms tended to rely on political personalities rather than explicitly identified ideologies. Election victories often relied on elite bargaining, clientelism and coalition-making, creating a highly volatile political system. These parties evinced no interest in social problems but relied on the co-optation of community leaders, whose stakes parties sometimes defended. Party affiliation was completely

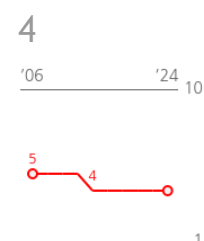
Performance of democratic institutions



Commitment to democratic institutions



Party system



ignored in the creation of the National Transition Council. Career politicians were not invited to join. Parties are not represented in any transitional institutions. They struggle to offer a political agenda for the future. The deaths of three political leaders elected during the last legislative elections in 2020, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, Soumaila Cissé and Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga, introduced an additional challenge to party mobilization.

Mali has a vibrant network of interest groups defending social interests, although cleavages between them are prone to instrumentalization and conflict. The 2020 coup occurred after weeks of demonstrations, when the M5RFP, an umbrella group of civil society, religious and political organizations, took to the streets to protest against electoral fraud and corruption in a stark manifestation of popular strength.

Members of various interest groups are represented in the National Transition Council. Unions in Mali have always played a significant role, particularly the National Union of Mali's Workers, which was quite vocal in 2012 regarding inflation. Business-oriented interest groups have also been influential in crafting policies, notably the Chamber of Commerce and the Mining Chamber. Religious organizations like the Islamic High Council play a significant role and have mobilized supporters for protests despite the emergency state laws, including a protest on November 4, 2022.

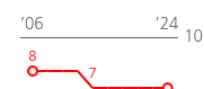
Religious leaders can mobilize the public without the authorities bothering them and can even force the government to modify its positions. Traditional leaders are also an essential interest group capable of affecting authorities' decisions, but their capacity for influence varies depending on the community. Several associations support women, youth and ethnic groups. Armed groups from both central and northern Mali have acted as interest groups; these have become significant catalyzers of violence, increasing ethnicization and polarization.

Approval of democratic norms was high in previous polls, but perceptions have changed since the last coup. Malians evince strong support for the military government. About nine out of 10 are satisfied with the current transitional government (67% are very satisfied and 28% somewhat satisfied), according to a poll by Mali-Mètre. Approval varies widely in different regions of the country, and the national survey does not include the populations facing insecurity in central and northern Mali. The poll notes an absence of popular pressure to return to a democratic regime. Less than 5% see the organization of elections as a priority, according to the same poll.

A number of elements have contributed to popular support for the junta: its fight against corruption has led to the imprisonment of several politicians; ending relations with France (which many Malians consider part of the problem); and rapprochement with Russia, which is perceived as playing a positive role in the security situation. Many Malians also see the junta as capable of controlling the security crisis, even if reality on the ground does not demonstrate this.

Interest groups

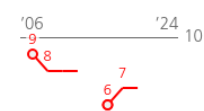
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Approval of democracy

n/a



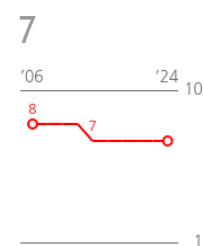
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Mali's citizens have always shared a high level of trust. There are numerous civic organizations that are self-organized and autonomous. These groups are a vibrant part of Malian society and include student unions, women's groups and sports teams. They can organize without constraints.

Mali's current cycle of violence has weakened the country's social fabric. Tensions between Tuareg and mostly southern groups have been a significant cause of conflict since 2012. Since 2015, central Mali has endured a civil conflict, because of which ethnic groups self-organized for protection but also experienced increasing interethnic cleavages. In these areas, the level of trust in the population is low.

Nevertheless, Malians express solidarity in numerous ways. Religious leaders are essential to building trust and bringing groups together. In a 2022 Afrobarometer survey, 65.7% of respondents claim to have high trust in religious leaders. These leaders have served as mediators in local conflicts and have brought communities together. Meanwhile, Malians maintain a sense of resilience through consensus and "joking cousin" relationships (or *sinankuya* in *bamananka*), a traditional form of social appeasement between ethnic groups. Ad hoc discussion groups around drinking tea, called "grin," are also a significant source of social cohesion as these informal gatherings transcend ethnicities and cultures.

Social capital



II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world, with a score of 0.428 on the 2021 UNDP Human Development Index. This ranking places Mali 186th out of 191 countries. Approximately 47.5% of its population lives on less than \$3.20 at 2011 international prices adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP).

Inequality is significant. The UNDP considers this to result in a 32% overall loss in HDI. According to the 2022 World Bank Gini index, gender inequality was 0.613 in 2021, highlighting a substantial gap between genders.

Poverty is as much a rural as it is an urban problem, although there are significant regional variations, with the north facing much more sustained poverty than other regions. Over the last decade, the crisis in central Mali has exacerbated poverty and inequality in a region that used to provide essential income from tourism and agriculture. Since the 2020 coup, the national budget, highly dependent on international aid, has diminished, weakening a national economy that has shown signs of resilience since 2012.

Question Score

Socioeconomic barriers



Economic indicators		2019	2020	2021	2022
GDP	\$ M	17280.3	17465.4	19309.5	18827.2
GDP growth	%	4.8	-1.2	3.1	3.7
Inflation (CPI)	%	-1.7	0.4	3.9	-
Unemployment	%	1.6	3.5	2.6	2.8
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	5.0	3.1	3.3	1.3
Export growth	%	2.3	0.5	-1.0	4.0
Import growth	%	5.9	-2.9	14.1	3.5
Current account balance	\$ M	-1288.8	-379.7	-1468.5	-
Public debt	% of GDP	40.7	46.9	50.4	51.7
External debt	\$ M	5009.2	5833.9	6459.8	-
Total debt service	\$ M	213.4	254.2	292.8	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-1.6	-4.1	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	14.5	14.2	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	15.7	15.8	16.2	16.7
Public education spending	% of GDP	3.6	4.0	4.4	4.0
Public health spending	% of GDP	1.3	1.5	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	0.2	-	0.2	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	2.8	3.4	3.4	2.8

Sources (as of December 2023): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

Mali's market economy faces significant pressures, particularly due to intricate legislation and a cumbersome bureaucracy.

Mali's economic freedom score is 55.9, making its economy the 114th most free economy in the 2022 Heritage Index. Its rank improved among sub-Saharan African countries, moving from 20th in 2021 to 18th in 2022, out of 47 countries assessed. Despite it remaining fairly easy to invest in the country's economy, issues with the rule of law make securing investments challenging.

Mali's economy is heavily reliant on the informal sector – approximately 94% of employed Malians work informally. Taxation continues to be a significant problem due to corruption, which hinders the development of Mali's economic infrastructure. This impediment further limits the creation of an improved competitive environment.

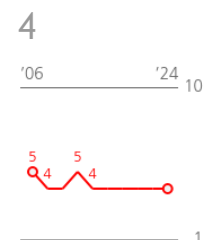
Competition is protected by law but faces significant barriers in practice. Although several antitrust laws exist, they are outdated and not applied because there are no overseeing bodies. The National Directorate of Trade and Competition, attached to the Ministry of Economy and Finance, is the main organ responsible for oversight. However, it has no capacity to enforce its mandate. Various national actors have quasi-monopolies over vast sectors of the economy, particularly those that require public bidding. The restricted telecommunications sector is frequently accused of abusing its position.

The significant role of the informal sector guarantees a competitive market for food staples and household items. The state has established specific prices for several products, including essential commodities such as rice, sugar, oil, milk, flour, domestic gas (butane) and even construction materials, such as cement.

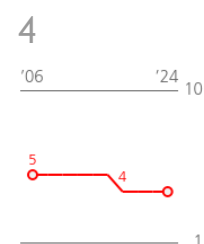
Mali is a member of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Both organizations set Common External Tariffs (CET) to regulate tariffs. Mali, however, has the authority to impose additional taxes on products from neighboring countries, specifically spirits, livestock and mining goods. Moreover, it can apply extra taxes to non-WAEMU items, particularly sugar and industrial products. In 2020, Mali's Most Favored Nation (MFN) implemented a total tariff rate of 9.24%, representing a 2.01% increase compared to 2019.

ECOWAS sanctions, in place for the first six months of 2022, challenged the status quo, leading to several counter-sanctions and conflicts over tariffs with neighbors. Although Mali's customs officials often impose random fees on imports, there are few legal restrictions on imports and exports. Mali had a negative trade balance of -\$318 million in the third quarter of 2022. Mali does not subsidize exports, but it used the dumping of its cotton production to keep its finances afloat while facing regional sanctions in 2022.

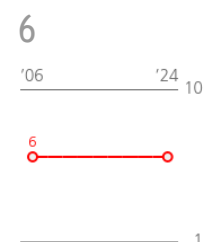
Market
organization



Competition policy



Liberalization of
foreign trade



Mali's banking system comprises 14 commercial banks and three financial institutions. The second-largest bank, Banque Internationale du Mali, is owned by a Moroccan entity.

The Central Bank of the West African States (BCEAO), which includes all countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), is responsible for setting banking standards and ensuring financial flow in the region. This facilitates the emergence of banking partnerships. There is no control over foreign exchange. Mobile banking has gained traction in the last year. According to the BCEAO, Mali's global access rate to financial services was 48% in 2020. The regional agreement is one of the main reasons capital flows have been resilient, despite a 10-year security crisis and the latest wave of coups.

Mali's capitalization ratio was 21.0% in 2021, making it the highest among BCEAO members, which have an average of 15.5%. However, in 2022, ECOWAS sanctions complicated banking operations, notably affecting the country's credit notation on the world market. The transitional government sent warnings to banks, trying to pressure them not to respect the rules set by the central bank, thus threatening the independence of the banking system. The latest World Bank assessment of the financial sector, conducted in 2015, suggested that weak prudential standards and lax enforcement pose potential problems for banking stability. Reforms have been slow to be implemented. Moreover, a more recent report has revealed the limitations of banking institutions when it comes to stimulating private business.

8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

Mali has consistently demonstrated a relatively strong capacity to control inflation, supported by harmonized policies that help maintain regional stability. In 2021, the inflation rate was 3.9%, which was below the global average. However, in 2022, the imposition of ECOWAS sanctions and the country's reliance on fuel and food staple imports pushed inflation up to 7.8%, according to the African Development Bank. It should be noted that final figures were not available at the time of writing. Over the past decade, Mali has experienced volatile inflation, and the significant economic downturn caused by COVID-19 resulted in a contraction in 2020.

Mali uses the CFA franc, for which stabilization is the responsibility of the BCEAO. The CFA franc is pegged to the euro (€1 = XOF 655.31). Although the BCEAO is fully independent, its policies are still influenced by the European Central Bank's anti-inflation policy. The BCEAO establishes regional objectives, which may not always be the most optimal course of action for Mali. Its monetary policies are implemented with minimal political influence, particularly from Mali, whose impact within the WAEMU is limited due to its relatively small regional economic presence.

Banking system

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Monetary stability

8

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The 2020 and 2021 coups have threatened fiscal stability in Mali. Over the past decade, Mali has maintained robust cooperation with the IMF, World Bank and other international donors. However, the coups challenged these relationships. The World Bank has suspended operation, while aggressive anti-Western rhetoric from the Malian junta has caused several donors to reduce their support. This includes France, which suspended “public development aid” to Mali in 2022. In July 2022, Mali temporarily defaulted on its debt but immediately repaid it once sanctions were lifted. The transitional government has struggled to maintain economic stability, leaving international fiscal organizations worried about the sustainability of Mali’s public finances.

Total debt service reached \$292 million in 2021 – a historical record – and is projected to increase in 2022. Public debt reached \$9.0 billion in 2021, accounting for 51.94% of the country’s GDP, with an external debt of \$6.0 billion.

In 2022, Mali did not recover from the economic contraction COVID-19 caused. The budget deficit reached XOF 273.2 billion in September 2022, compared to XOF 127.86 billion in September 2021. This is because fiscal revenues decreased by 12.55% in the same period, while expenditures only decreased by 1.7%. To bridge the gap, the government initiated a sovereign bond campaign.

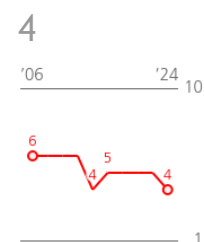
Since 2020, Mali has implemented a number of reforms aimed at improving fiscal practices. In 2019 and 2020, the country enacted a new mining code and an implementing decree, which enhance fiscal oversight and modernized the government’s primary revenue stream. Additionally, in 2020, Mali adopted new investment regulations, and a new tax code and procedures book. These measures introduced mandatory registration for all taxpayers, updated procedures for Value Added Tax (VAT) payments, and digitized tax returns and payments. These initiatives are crucial to achieving better control over fiscal affairs.

9 | Private Property

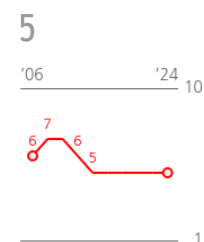
Mali’s constitution ensures property rights and has a significant body of law to protect acquisitions, benefits, use and sales of property. In practice, however, defending these rights is challenging. One major obstacle is the reputation of the courts, which are known for corruption. Its corruption earned Mali a ranking of 137th out of 180 countries on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index in 2022, placing it at the bottom.

Defending property rights is difficult for citizens in Mali. Additionally, land registries are limited to a few urban areas, and their inefficiency is a well-known result of resource shortages and bureaucratic burdens. Moreover, the majority of Malians lack official ownership documents. Officially allocating land to a specific individual is unusual there. Several Malians may possess legitimate land titles for the same parcel

Fiscal stability



Property rights



of land simultaneously. In particular, land disputes can escalate into violence, particularly in rural regions where traditional land rights govern access rather than a well-defined legal framework.

Mali's National Land Agency (Direction Nationale des Domaines et du Cadastre) is responsible for land administration. The land code was amended in October 2021 to streamline land title processing by establishing a unified office for all procedures. Although the new system seems to improve legal safeguards for rural agricultural communities, giving them a means to assert their land rights, pastoralists see it as unjust because it does not address their rights to access water sources. Additionally, this policy bestows all unattributed land to government ownership and eliminates prefectural and gubernatorial authority over land.

The government created the Malian Center for the Promotion of Industrial Property (CEMAPI) to implement a legal regime to protect property rights that includes the World Trade Organization's agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property. Two agencies are responsible for protecting intellectual property rights: CEMAPI and the Malian Office of the Rights of the Author.

Private companies are permitted and protected, but the sector faces significant structural issues. The U.S. State Department's 2022 Investment Climate Statements note that there "are significant obstacles to investing in Mali, including political instability, economic sanctions, allegations of corruption, poor infrastructure, and ongoing insecurity throughout the country."

Weak political and economic governance makes the public sector fragile. Economic governance is unfavorable for the development of small and medium businesses and hampers the development of a value chain. Budget deficits mean that government budgetary efforts are mobilized first toward the defense sector, with limited funds to support economic development, as well as increasing pressure on state companies.

Agriculture remains the primary activity of the private sector, accounting for approximately 40% of Mali's GDP in 2021 and employing 58% of the working-age population, both directly and indirectly, thereby supporting the livelihoods of 11 million Malians. Mining continues to be the largest source of foreign direct investment, especially in the gold sector, contributing around 70% of the state's revenue. Despite the introduction of a new mining code in 2020, which restricts foreign ownership of mines to 90%, the transitional government consistently threatens to revoke licenses from compliant operators, undermining business development as a result of its arbitrary decisions.

Private enterprise

6



10 | Welfare Regime

Mali's social safety nets are limited by the government's low revenues and the state's lack of capacities. Moreover, 10 years of conflict have limited the presence of the state in central and northern Mali and have had a significant impact on the delivery of social services in those regions. This contributes to Mali having one of the world's lowest life expectancies of 59.7 years of age.

Mali spent 1.9% of its GDP on health spending, placing it among countries with low spending (ranked 170th out of 181 countries). A national network of dispensaries offers health services across the entire country but is underfunded and inaccessible to many Malians.

A national health insurance scheme, the Assurance Maladie Obligatoire, provides state-subsidized basic health coverage at an affordable premium to both employees and civil service agents. It is also available to employees in the private sector and the informal sector, as long as they are subject to making contributions. However, for many Malians in conflict or rural areas, subscribing to and participating in this scheme is difficult.

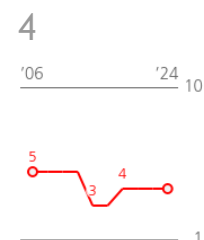
Other social programs have limited outreach to Malians. The Institut national de prévoyance sociale offers a retirement scheme for both civil servants and contributing private sector workers, thus excluding the majority of Malians. Although there are some initiatives aimed at youth employment and poverty alleviation, these programs often encounter significant funding challenges due to the government's substantial budget deficits since the 2020 coup.

The government has initiated various social housing programs, which are supposed to benefit all socio-professional categories. However, these programs primarily focus on urban areas, and there have been cases of corruption in the allocation process. Approximately 5,000 new subsidized housing units were made available in 2022, exclusively within Bamako.

Public education remains problematic. The post-2012 crisis further weakened an already-fragile school system, resulting in the closure of thousands of schools and a shortage of qualified teachers. Additionally, the security crisis has caused over a thousand schools to close in the central region alone, leaving many children without any other educational opportunities. A lack of educational facilities in rural regions exacerbates the urban-rural divide. In certain areas, the only educational option for children is Quranic school.

Solidarity remains the primary source of social safety for Malians, especially in rural areas where the state is absent. Social safety also depends to a great extent on NGOs and humanitarian actors, with the result that the population has no systematic support.

Social safety nets



There are several barriers to equality of opportunity in Mali. These have multiplied rapidly during the ongoing conflict, which has left a significant share of the population to fend for themselves.

Women face significant barriers to education, public office, employment and full civic participation. They have one of the world's lowest literacy rates, at 22.1% in 2018 compared to 31.3% for men. Only 5.5% of women make it to university. Women represent about 43% of the labor force, but they work in the informal economy and other income-generating activities rather than benefiting from full, formal employment.

By law, women are not equal to men. All attempts to reform the Family Code have failed, meaning that women legally continue to face discrimination in terms of inheritance and civic participation. In most areas of the country, customary and religious laws prevail over national laws, increasing the inequalities women face.

Several other groups in Mali continue to face discrimination. Notably, the “djons” and the “bellah” are subject to forced labor in certain regions and have their civic rights unrecognized due to the prevailing customary laws. Discrimination also persists in terms of access to land, particularly in central Mali, where state laws favor farmers over pastoralists.

11 | Economic Performance

Mali's economy has remained resilient despite a decade of conflict, primarily because its core economic activities are located in the south, far from the multidimensional crisis in central and northern Mali. The country has maintained an average GDP growth of 4% since 2012. However, since the 2020 coup, Mali's economic performance has shown signs of lagging due to ECOWAS sanctions and inadequate economic planning, which have gradually weakened the economy.

While macroeconomic perspectives are not too bleak in light of the context, the economy faces significant challenges: a high youth unemployment rate, a low industrialization rate, energy shortages, dependency on several imports and an undiversified economy. The economy's primary drivers are cotton production, agricultural goods and gold extraction.

Mali faced weaker-than-expected growth in 2022, according to the African Development Bank. GDP growth was expected to increase by 3.2% in 2022 but only grew by 2.1%. In 2021, GDP per capita grew by 0.1%, revealing a slow recovery from COVID-19. Meanwhile, its public debt reached a historic high, anticipated at 55.9% of GDP by the end of 2022, but far below the regional average of around 70%. Exports decreased by 6% in the second and third quarters of 2022 compared to 2021.

Equal opportunity

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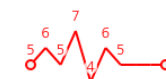


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Output strength

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Mali's primary economic challenge, in addition to its political crisis, is its insufficient response to rising global prices. As a landlocked country heavily reliant on grain and fuel imports, Mali is ill-prepared for inflation, which reached a staggering 13.9% in July 2022. The average inflation rate for the remainder of 2022 is expected to be around 8%, significantly higher than the 3.9% yearly average in 2021, as reported by the Mali National Institute for Statistics. Inflation has been highest for staple foods, with a yearly increase of 3.9% in 2021. Furthermore, national grain production declined by 10.5% in 2022, intensifying pressure on an already-strained market due to restrictions on imports from Ukraine and Russia. In terms of foreign direct investments, Mali attracted \$640 million in 2021.

The economic prospects for 2022 were buoyed by a strong cotton harvest of 800,000 tons in 2021/22, which allowed the country to reclaim the title of the biggest African producer of cotton.

The latest data on unemployment dates from 2021, when the rate was 7.7%. It is inaccurate because the vast majority of Malians work in the informal economy.

12 | Sustainability

Mali, like all the Sahel countries, is severely threatened by climate change – classified as the eighth most fragile country in the world due to its arid environment – demographic pressure and exacerbated environmental degradation. Mali ranks 159th out of 180 countries in 2022 in the Environmental Performance Index. Its ecosystems are threatened. In 2022, it suffered a tree cover loss of 8% and a wetland loss of 39.80%.

Mali's funding for environmental protection remains low, at just 1.9% of the budget in 2021. Protection remains minimal, as the environment is a low priority for the government. The energy sector, one of the most polluting sectors, remains untouched by environmental protection initiatives. Electricity was produced by an energy mix of 61.5% thermal power stations and 38.5% renewable energy in 2020, leaving untapped the country's solar and hydroelectric potential.

Mali's government has committed to fighting climate change. The National Policy for the Protection of the Environment and the National Policy for Climate Change (first adopted in 2011 and redrafted in 2021) are the two main frameworks for addressing environmental concerns. These plans focus on agriculture, forestry, energy and waste, but also improve the country's carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas reduction strategies. While these strategies are comprehensive, the funding gap is substantial, with little progress in their implementation and few deliverables.

Environmental
policy

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Mali's education system has significant structural shortages that predate the current multidimensional crisis. Even before the 2012 conflict forced school closings in central and northern Mali, Mali had some of the world's worst statistics for education. It currently scores 0.283 on the U.N. Education Index, just above its neighbor Niger, and has one of the lowest literacy rates, at 30.8% in 2021. Barriers to universal access to education are high, with unequal access for girls and rural populations. Mali's national budget allocated 3.8% of the national GDP for education in 2021, but funding remains insufficient and dependent on foreign aid.

Teachers' absenteeism and frequent strikes have become a significant barrier to quality education, delaying students' graduations and increasing drop-out rates. Some students stay in the same class for three consecutive years, mainly because of strikes. In February 2023, the first-year students at the Institut Universitaire de Gestion of Bamako went on strike for having spent three years at that level.

There is an average of one teacher per 41 students in primary education. Significant shortfalls in the public system force parents to seek alternatives in the private sector, which are a viable option only for urban families with the means to afford them. In rural and peri-urban areas, Quranic schools are the only schools available to many parents and their children.

Mali's education system has a high attrition rate, with few pupils graduating and advancing to the next level. About 76% of children are enrolled in primary education, but only 49% finish elementary school. Enrollment at the secondary level was 41% in 2019. Tertiary level enrollment was 5% in 2019 (7% for men and 3% for women). Only 2% of Malians hold a university degree. High unemployment among graduates also discourages students from pursuing higher education.

Research and development are underfunded, accounting for only 0.2% of Mali's GDP. The government has created several institutions, notably the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologique, as well as several agencies devoted to agriculture and health issues, like malaria or sickle cell disease. However, these agencies' budgets are dependent on international aid and partnerships. There is no budget for industrial or technological research and no government policy to develop this sector.

Education policy /
R&D

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Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

Mali's government faces several severe structural constraints, poverty being the most significant one.

Mali faces extreme poverty, making it one of the world's most fragile countries. With a score of 0.428, Mali ranks 186th out of 190 countries on the 2021 Human Development Index. About 42.3% of its population lives in extreme poverty. 47.69% of its population is 0 to 14 years old, according to estimates from 2020, making the population's median age 16. With 41.07 births per 1,000 population (2022 est.), it has the world's fourth-highest birth rate. Its current population of 20 million is projected to reach 27 million by 2030.

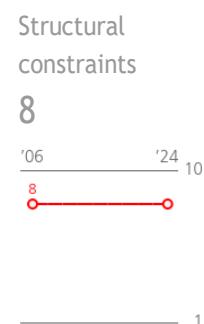
Rural poverty is a major issue. Roughly 90% of the country's poverty is in populated southern rural areas, which results in a high rate of urbanization. In 2022, 46.2% of Mali's population lived in urban areas, while facing an annual population growth of 4.57% (2020 – 2025 est.). Low education rates, high illiteracy and a considerable gender gap mean that youth have few work opportunities outside the informal economy.

Mali is a landlocked country. Due to poor road infrastructure, goods must travel slowly, limiting trade connections. Only 35.1% of the population has access to electricity, which costs \$0.17/kWh to produce, one of the most expensive kilowatt hours in the world. According to the Ministry of Hydraulics, in 2022, only 40.0% of Malians had access to drinking water. A low internet penetration rate, 29.9% in 2022, excludes it from the global digital economy.

Climate change is a serious issue in an arid country, the north of which the Sahara crosses. Rising temperatures, droughts, unstable rainfalls and floods are substantial threats, particularly because 80% of the population lives off agriculture, and 95% of that population depends on rainfall for their livelihood.

Mali faces conflicts that, since 2012, have introduced violence into its central and northern regions. In October 2022, the UNHCR estimated that armed conflicts had caused 13,000 Malians to become refugees abroad and 440,432 to become internally displaced persons.

Mali scores 27th among 54 African countries on the Global Health Security Index. While its health system remains fragile and health services are nonexistent in most of the north of the country, it displayed resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Mali's democratic awakening after the 1991 coup led to the creation of a vibrant civil society. Over 60,000 civil society groups are currently registered. They support various sectors of society: education, health, poverty alleviation and so on. Officials often consult civil society leaders from across the country. They participate in governance and are almost always consulted on significant decisions concerning life in the nation: for example, for the Dialogue National Inclusif (Inclusive National Dialogue) in 2019 during Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's presidency and on the Assises Nationales pour la Refondation de l'Etat (National Conferences for the Rebuilding of the State) organized by the current transitional government in 2021.

Mali has had several success stories, notably the Coordination des Associations Féminines et ONG du Mali, a national umbrella organization for all of the women's NGOs and associations. In certain parts of the country, NGOs are palliative in the absence of the state, providing humanitarian support and aid. For many Malians, NGOs are the sole resort beyond their own communities.

The inclusion of civil society leaders into the transitional parliament is an essential recognition of the social role of civic associations in Malians' lives. Nevertheless, since the 2021 coup, civic space has shrunk as the military junta took steps to reduce their freedom of action. The authorities have targeted Tabital Pulaaku, an NGO defending Fulani rights, particularly two of their leaders who spoke out about human rights violations.

After political differences between Mali and France, Mali's authorities enforced a ban on French funding in December, increasing pressure on NGOs to generate paperwork. Meanwhile, several NGO leaders have been arrested or investigated by authorities, often arbitrarily. The military authorities particularly target human rights activists and associations, seeing their activities as targeting the armed forces.

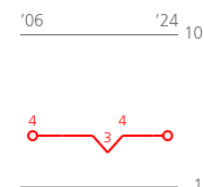
Mali faces a multidimensional conflict that threatens every aspect of his society; this conflict is political, social, ethnic and religious.

Since gaining independence, Mali has experienced multiple Tuareg insurrections. Although the north is home to less than 10% of the country's population, it accounts for about two-thirds of the state's territory and is believed to be rich in resources. The central government's neglect of the north has contributed to Malian Tuaregs' marginalization and poverty, fueling their fight against a government they perceive as prejudiced. The most recent rebellion, starting on January 17, 2012, triggered a series of events that resulted in Salafi jihadist groups taking control of the entire northern region.

While a French-led operation in 2013 allowed a partial return of the state government to the north, the region faces constant violent attacks by terrorist groups. The Tuareg armed independence groups signed a peace agreement in 2015, which has yet to make a difference as implementation remains slow. The U.N. mission, known as MINUSMA, has become the world's deadliest peace mission.

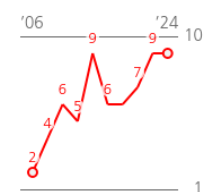
Civil society traditions

4



Conflict intensity

9



Since 2015, central Mali has also experienced attacks by a Salafi jihadist group called the Katiba Macina composed mostly of Fulani fighters. The group is led by Fulani preacher Amadou Kouffa. The Katiba Macina is affiliated with the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin. The increasing number of terrorist attacks carried out by the Katiba Macina has created a civil conflict in which ethnic communities are now in conflict with each other, particularly the Fulani and the Dogon. The Dogon accuse the Fulani of having close ties and collaborating with the jihadists. Additionally, Mali's armed forces and their Russian auxiliaries are frequently accused of committing human rights abuses, further exacerbating the cycle of violence.

In southern Mali, the coups of 2020 and 2021 brought a military junta to power. It seized control of all aspects of power and established a transitional charter while drafting a new Malian constitution. The junta has appointed a transitional government and a parliament known as the National Transitional Council. Although doubts remain about the junta's commitment to honoring it, there is an electoral calendar, and preparations for a new constitution are underway.

In central Mali, there has been a steep increase in ethnic violence. The arrival of the private Russian military company Wagner has fueled tensions between communities, with the government siding with certain communities over others. Meanwhile, the lack of progress to implement existing peace agreements has increased tensions, causing northern armed groups to abandon peace efforts and prepare for war.

At the end of 2022, it was unclear when the country would return to democracy. The military authorities have increased the number of arrests, clamping down on civic space and limiting freedom of speech. Mali's current government's aggressive political rhetoric has alienated several former partners, including Côte d'Ivoire, France and Denmark – isolating the country on the international stage – since more than half of its budget comes from international aid.

II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

Mali's transitional government struggles to set strategic priorities. The country faces an acute political crisis, which re-enforces short-term interests and authoritarianism over coherence, sustainability and a strategic agenda. Elections are postponed until 2024.

On August 18, 2020, a military junta seized power, deposing elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, known as IBK, after weeks of street protests. On May 24, 2021, the same military junta took control again from a civilian transitional administration and tightened its grip on power. Junta leader Assimi Goita then became president of the transitional administration.

Despite initially proposing several reforms, the government has prioritized military spending. A lack of economic planning threatens the progress of reforms. The government also laid out three other priorities: a new social pact, fighting corruption and education reforms, but again, it has taken no concrete steps to realize them.

The June 2021 nomination of a civilian prime minister, Choguel Kokalla Maïga, a leading figure of the June 5th Movement–Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5-RFP), the umbrella group behind the anti-IBK protests, was perceived as a sign of openness. His strategic priorities were abandoned, however, after he had a stroke and a junta member assumed his interim position.

Transition President Assimi Goita, during that time, further increased his powers. Sanctions from ECOWAS and significant national budget gaps choked the country's economy, forcing the administration to reconsider its priorities. Renegotiation of mining deals has increased economic uncertainties, as gold remains the government's primary source of revenue. A good cotton harvest in 2022 offered a lifeline to the national economy, but not enough to ensure that it's strong. Meanwhile, the government's populist and nationalist rhetoric alienated several partners, creating crises that weaken its agenda.

The National Council of Transition was created in December 2020 as a non-elected legislative body to support the transitional government. At first, it was inclusive, including civil society activists, political opponents, armed group leaders and several atypical members. It voted for a new constitution that was not significantly different from the previous one. The council plays a relatively limited role in shaping governance. The expulsion of Issa Kaou Djim for criticizing the government is perceived as an example of its lack of independence and subservience to the transitional government.

Question
Score

Prioritization

4

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1

Since 2020, Mali's transitional government has struggled to implement its policy priorities, which are undermined by political instability. Beyond this, poor economic planning and ECOWAS sanctions, which reduced revenues, have undercut the current transition government's spending capacity.

In June 2021, the transitional prime minister, Choguel Kokalla Maiga, set as priorities: 1) improving security; 2) political reforms; 3) organizing free and fair elections; 4) reducing government expenditures; 5) introducing morality into public life; and 6) ending impunity. He was criticized, even by the transitional president, for a lack of progress on any of these points and was under constant pressure from a member of the military junta who sought to impose his own political priorities. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Maiga always publicly enjoyed the support of Transitional President Assimi Goita. However, the president of the National Transitional Council, one of the five members of the junta, Colonel Malick Diaw, criticized Maiga and summoned him before the council to describe the progress made by his government.

This is not an isolated case. Political instability and frequent changes in administration have constantly undermined policy agendas. Mali has had ten different prime ministers in the last decade and two coups since 2020.

The conflict has also reduced the government's capacity to govern Mali's entire population. It still lacks authority in several regions of the country. The 2015 Algiers Peace Agreement's implementation stalled, delaying the complete return of the government to the northern part of the country, while increasing violence in the center has crippled the government there.

The government does not demonstrate policy learning since the current political crisis does not allow public policy debates to occur.

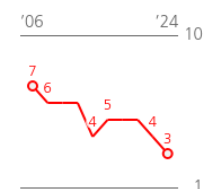
The National Transition Council is a non-elected legislative body composed of various actors with different experiences. This variety could potentially guarantee diversity in policy debates. However, when such debates occur, there is no indication that they influence governmental policies. Efforts to draft a new constitution represent well the inability to learn, as the current draft contains only a few innovations compared to the 1991 constitution and fails to engage with citizens' desires.

The 2020 coup ended a regime that was often described as controlled by a rent-seeking elite that surrounded President IBK. Several reports accused him and some of his close collaborators of corruption, nepotism and lack of understanding of national issues. His regime did not succeed in finding solutions to Mali's biggest problems, including insecurity and poverty.

The current regime is selective regarding whom it listens to and declined from "partly free" in 2018 to a "not free" country in the Freedom House 2022 index. While the 2020 coup was enabled by weeks of civil society mobilization, there have been several signs of civil space shrinking.

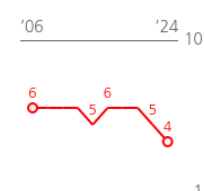
Implementation

3



Policy learning

4



Meanwhile, the military junta has arrested journalists and forced the closure of media outlets. Previously, the Malian press was relatively free. Initially, several high-profile intellectuals joined the transitional government in 2021, showing a strong desire to reform the country. Most of them left a few months later, as the five original putschists concentrated power in their hands and muted divergent voices.

15 | Resource Efficiency

Mali's administration faces shortfalls in terms of the government's allocation of resources. The current security and political crises exacerbate already-existing shortages.

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Malian public debt reached a 22-year record in 2022 and is likely to increase in 2023. The transitional government's poor planning has let the country's deficit grow, increasing to XOF 273.2 billion in 2022. The IMF has expressed concern over a lack of corrective measures and reforms. Meanwhile, Mali launched a sovereign bond campaign to support its budget. Its GDP in 2021 stagnated, according to the World Bank.

Mali faces significant barriers to effectively using its human, financial and organizational resources. Most of the resources, especially state ones, are under the control of Bamako, creating significant disparities in the allocation of state resources. Previous attempts at decentralization have been unsuccessful. Local governments are underfunded and understaffed, creating significant service gaps in the country.

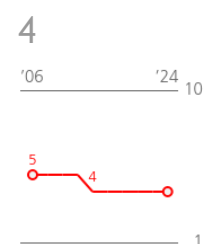
Mali's public auditor and the Cour des Comptes, two institutions with auditing capacities, have published reports that list several charges of embezzlement and corruption, which the judicial branch rarely follows up on. Mali's Transparency International Corruption Perception Index score decreased to 29% in 2021.

Policy coherence has been problematic since the 2020 coup. The administration struggles to maintain its objectives. For example, the budget of the National State Security Agency (the intelligence services) increased from XOF 13 billion to XOF 113 billion in 2022, without any explanation from the government.

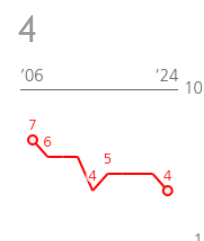
Many observers saw this increase as a masked way for the government to pay the private Russian military company, Wagner, without creating a dedicated budget line in the public finances (so as not to leave a trace).

The security crisis prevents the administration from fulfilling its work on most of the country's territory. COVID-19 affected the country's finances, while the political crisis affected the government's capacity for economic planning. The budget deficit limited the government's ability to attain its objectives, leaving several departments underfunded while favoring security forces.

Efficient use of assets



Policy coordination



Maliens witnessed purchases of military equipment without receiving any figures as to their cost. No political debate has been held about these purchases. This could present an opportunity for corruption, as no control is possible at present.

Meanwhile, the transitional government does not communicate its objectives, leaving doubts about the coherence and involvement at the governmental levels, particularly the civil service.

The junta's nationalist rhetoric has created tensions with regional coordinating bodies, particularly ECOWAS and WAEMU, two significant economic and political organizations that coordinate Mali's trade and monetary policy. Mali's withdrawal from the G5-Sahel, which was created in 2014 to ensure regional cooperation on security, has also undermined the country's ability to fight against terrorist armed groups.

After the transitional government alienated its international partners in 2022, the World Bank temporarily stopped disbursing funds, while traditional bilateral donors like France and the United States decreased their financial support. The government banned French NGOs from working in Mali in 2022 and created bureaucratic constraints on all NGOs, therefore stopping the work of organizations that were the only service providers in certain regions.

The transitional government has issued multiple declarations about fighting corruption since it took power, but its integrity mechanisms are generally ineffective for fighting decades of corruption. Moreover, the fight against corruption appears, in some respects, to be instrumentalized as a means for the junta to remove all "disturbing" actors who may constitute threats to the longevity of its rule.

Mali has multiple institutions to audit and fight corruption: the Cour des Comptes, the Office of the Auditor-General, the State Inspectorate of Public Services and the Central Office for the Fight against Illicit Enrichment. The Office of the Auditor-General is the most important institution in the country, launching investigations into public management; an investigation can be launched by the auditor or by demand of any citizen or institution. The auditor's reports are often critical of the administration and independent. There are multiple audit reports per year and multiple investigations. In 2021, the Office of the Auditor-General published 11 reports, including one focusing on the government's COVID-19 response.

The other institutions are less independent than the Office of the Auditor General. The Cour des Comptes is an organ of the Supreme Court, the role of which is to ensure the regularity of public accounts. The Central Office for the Fight against Illicit Enrichment plays several roles in promoting and fighting corruption. None of these institutions has a prosecution role. Government officials are rarely prosecuted for corruption.

Anti-corruption
policy

4

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1

When Malians took to the streets in 2020, a significant reason for their anger was alleged corruption by IBK. His administration faced numerous corruption scandals, notably ones regarding a presidential plane, military equipment and other procurement issues.

Since it took power, fighting corruption has been one of the junta's priorities. Several high-profile members of the deposed government were arrested on corruption allegations, notably former Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga. The justice system also issued multiple warrants, often with respect to investigations initiated by several institutions. While they have substance, these allegations are nonetheless perceived as politically motivated.

Meanwhile, the transitional government is also accused of corruption, embezzlement and favoritism, notably regarding subsidized housing allocation and government contracts. The military junta has threatened journalists and media outlets attempting to publicize these allegations.

The legal framework to prevent corruption remains weak. Only the president must declare his assets by law but does not have to do so publicly. The current transitional president has not declared his assets, and there have been no consequences. Other government officials and civil servants are not required to declare their assets.

Political parties receive public funding, but there is a lot of secrecy concerning how this works. Moreover, parties do not disclose private funding, and the regulatory framework concerning election funding has significant gaps.

16 | Consensus-Building

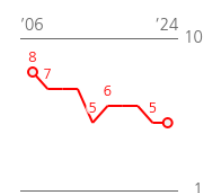
The 2020 coup's suspension of democratic order reveals conflicting stances regarding democracy. While citizens evince support for democracy, they also strongly supported the junta, especially because they were strongly disaffected by their previous political leaders. As a first step toward reforming democratic rule, the junta launched several national consultations. The creation of the Transition National Council was a significant attempt to gather an unelected yet diverse group of citizens to build consensus.

Drafting a new constitution has convened a variety of actors, launching a debate on the transformation of the state. Political actors, however, are mostly left out of the discussion. Representativeness and accountability remain low.

There has been a consensus since 1991 about the benefits of a market economy, despite vast poverty and inequality. The majority of Malians work in the informal economy and struggle to make ends meet. Northerners face economic marginalization, alienating them from the government in Bamako and causing them to support armed groups.

Consensus on goals

5



1

A transitional government, tightly controlled by a military junta, currently rules Mali. This is the fifth coup d'état in the country (1968, 1991, 2012, 2020, and 2021), demonstrating the ease with which undemocratic actors can enter the political arena and seize power.

In June 2022, the government adopted an electoral calendar that scheduled presidential elections for February 2024. By the end of 2022, the government had already missed several deadlines in the lead-up to those elections.

General Abdoulaye Maïga became interim prime minister when the civilian Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maïga had a stroke in July 2022. The former's rule ended in December 2022, but several observers note that the original five putschists had tightened their control over power by then. The future of democracy in Mali remains on hold. Politicians have been completely excluded from transitional government institutions, and there is no democratic accountability.

The 1991 coup and subsequent establishment of democracy in 1992 made Mali a poster child for democratization since it had achieved meaningful institutional changes that fostered consensus and civic participation. Since 2012, three coups and violence in the central and northern parts of the country have introduced multiple, cleavage-based conflicts there.

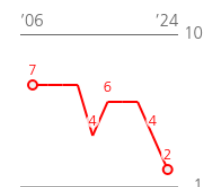
In northern Mali, Tuareg launched a rebellion, demanding autonomy and a decrease in marginalization. While a peace agreement was signed in 2015, there has been no progress in the accord's implementation. The state, which is the main implementor, has shown little political will to develop a sustainable process. Armed groups remain fully mobilized and peace remains fragile as terrorist groups continue to gain ground.

In central Mali in 2018, long-lasting conflicts over resources transformed into violent civil strife between competing communities. Some fighting factions there perceive the government as biased. Terrorist groups instrumentalize tensions to exacerbate cleavages. The number of deaths skyrocketed in 2022.

In Bamako, the transitional government members have adopted an aggressive stance against whomever they see as not supporting them, leading to several illegal arrests and the repression of opposition actors.

Anti-democratic actors

2



Cleavage / conflict management

3



Mali’s reversal of constitutional order by a military junta has challenged its former strong civil society involvement in all state institutions. Pre-coup protests, which played an essential role in overthrowing the elected government, were organized by an umbrella civil society group. The transitional government has been sensitive to popular movements and included several civil society leaders on the National Transition Council.

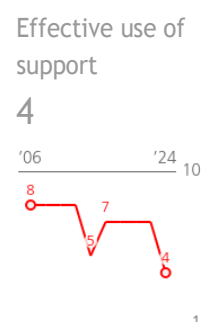
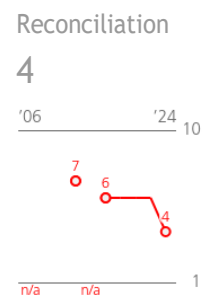
Civil society remains the sole counterpower to the junta, especially religious leaders who have retained an independent voice. On several occasions, Imam Mahmoud Dicko, head of the High Islamic Council and one of the main leaders of the Coordination of Movements and Association of Support, has demonstrated the ability to mobilize his followers to pressure the government. Other religious figures, like Chérif Ousmane Madani Haïdara and Chérif de Niono, have likewise shown that they can influence policies.

Historical acts of injustice remain a vivid issue, as a sense of marginalization and perceptions of unfair treatment fuel the conflicts in Mali. After 1991, the country adopted several initiatives to foster reconciliation between the state and the victims of 30 years of military dictatorship. After 2012, efforts to reconcile victims and perpetrators stalled. The families of victims of the 2012 coup were dealt a blow when all the charges against those responsible were dropped. Similarly, efforts at reconciliation between warring parties have rapidly stalled, as most of the clauses of the 2015 peace agreement have not been implemented. The Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission created in 2014 must establish the truth about the crimes committed in the north between 1960 and 2013. Since its inception, it has held meetings and produced several reports, but has taken few concrete steps to find sustained justice for the victims.

17 | International Cooperation

Mali’s trajectory since 2020 has been one of increasing isolationism. The junta’s aspirations for reform, especially in improving security and fighting corruption, have not led to major changes, while economic and political development have stalled. The transitional government committed to the return of democracy in 2024, but its policy agenda until then remains unclear and changes monthly. Rent-seeking and political score-settling take precedence over sustainable and sound strategies.

Prior to the 2020 coup, Mali’s political leadership developed multiple partnerships to ensure economic development and maintain good relations with donors, while dependency on aid constantly increased. The 2020 coup changed these dynamics, sending contradictory signals after the transitional government initiated multiple conflicts with bilateral and international donors. The government announced that it would subject international assistance to a review. Some donors curbed their funding, notably the French Development Fund, one of Mali’s most significant bilateral



donors, and the World Bank. Varying year-on-year, Mali receives foreign aid that amounts to roughly 12–15% of its GDP, more than half its national state budget.

Despite having made security a priority, the government has made little progress in this area, as 2022 was the deadliest year ever in Mali. There is no strategy to build peace. The 2015 peace agreement has stalled. The government established a new partnership with Russian partners on security. This created a political crisis that brought the end of the French Operation Barkhane, leading to the withdrawal of about 5,000 soldiers and the virtual end of the European Union Training Mission. The government took a hostile stance against the U.N. mission, the MINUSMA, making several aggressive declarations and increasing operational barriers.

The increasing connections with Russia mean Mali has turned back on European and American donors, which have significantly decreased the amount of aid they provide. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to increasing inflation in Mali, which is dependent on imports of Ukrainian cereals and fertilizers.

Mali's reforms to the mining and investment codes, as well as initiatives to reform the tax codes, which have yet to be fully implemented, have been welcomed as necessary steps for improving the business environment.

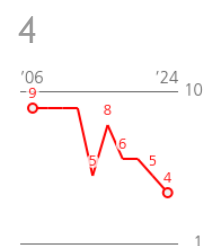
Since 1991, successive Malian administrations have maintained good relationships with the international community, despite demonstrating a lack of clear short-, medium- and long-term goals. Mali's post-coup transitional government has seriously undermined these relationships. The new government's actions have made the country a less reliable and credible partner than it was, the objectives of which are incomprehensible to the international community.

In September 2022, the interim transitional prime minister gave a speech before the U.N. General Assembly in which he blamed the United Nations, France and several of Mali's West African regional neighbors for destabilizing the country and supporting terrorist groups. This declaration was one of many from a transitional government that has alienated many bilateral and multilateral partners. Several donors stopped support to Mali after receiving threats.

The transitional government has adopted an aggressive stance toward regional organizations, particularly the WAMEU and ECOWAS, threatening withdrawal. In 2022, ECOWAS imposed sanctions on Mali for six months; they were lifted in July after Mali committed to an electoral timetable. Its relationships with its neighbors remained tense.

Mali arrested 46 Ivoirian soldiers on arrival at the airport, accusing them of being mercenaries coming to destabilize the country. The Côte d'Ivoire described them as participants in the U.N. mission. The soldiers were liberated in January 2023, but diplomatic tensions between the neighbors remain acute. Several analysts saw this as retaliation against Côte d'Ivoire for not deporting important high-level members of

Credibility



the previous Malian government, who sought refuge in Côte d'Ivoire during the coup, and also for the alleged role of Ivorian President Alassane Dramane Ouattara in ECOWAS sanctions against Mali.

Mali's relationship with several bilateral and multilateral actors has reached a low point, abruptly ending a decade of collaboration intended to stabilize the country and combat insecurity. The country imposed air restrictions on the MINUSMA and introduced obstacles to staff rotation, leading to announcements of withdrawal from Germany, the United Kingdom and Côte d'Ivoire. MINUSMA is unable to pursue investigations in most of the regions suffering from conflict and faces several other obstructions from the transitional government.

Diplomatic tensions with France led to the expulsion of the French ambassador and the end of the French military operation Barkhane. The European Union also called off its military operation, Takuba, and downsized its military training mission, EUTM, after Mali imposed restrictions that led to the expulsion of Danish soldiers.

The military junta has also undermined Mali's commitment to international norms, especially human rights. Mali accused the MINUSMA and several NGOs of supporting terrorists because they published reports condemning Mali's armed forces for alleged human rights violations. The state still collaborates with the International Criminal Court and the international judicial system. Mali has continued to be active in international climate change and environmental forums, playing an active role in COP27 in 2022.

Mali has attempted to develop new partnerships, particularly with Russian actors, but also with two neighbors that are also ruled by military juntas: Burkina Faso and Guinea.

The 2015 peace accord has stalled under the transitional government. The government called for a review of the agreement and has not honored its previous engagements with signatories.

Mali's transitional government has severely damaged its regional and international relationships. The country faced two series of sanctions in 2020 and 2022 from ECOWAS. The sanctions were lifted when the country committed to an electoral agenda in July 2022. Instead of cooperating, Mali's authorities have continued to position themselves aggressively against regional organizations, even proclaiming a national holiday on January 14 to celebrate "regaining sovereignty" from ECOWAS sanctions.

Mali's relations with the regional organization ECOWAS are at an all-time low. Additionally, it is suspended from the African Union, leaving it isolated in Africa. Consequently, Mali has endeavored to enhance its cooperation with two other countries in similar circumstances: Burkina Faso and Guinea.

Regional
cooperation

3



Mali's recent partnership with Russia has resulted in a significant foreign policy shift, as the country now supports Russia's military actions in Ukraine. Mali has aligned itself closely with Russia, particularly in its voting behavior in the United Nations. The government's official stance is that Russia has sent "military trainers" to Mali, who are widely recognized as operatives from the Russian security firm Wagner. Additionally, Mali has acquired used military equipment from Russia.

Strategic Outlook

Mali's most urgent problem remains its security crisis, which formerly was in the north but now also includes the center. At the same time, several terrorist attacks in the south in 2022 suggest that violence is approaching the capital. The transitional government has prioritized security and has taken several steps to reverse the worsening situation. Meanwhile, the 2015 Algiers Peace Accord has yet to be implemented, leaving signatory armed groups at a standstill. Peace and reconciliation should be high on the agenda, as armed groups need to be part of an effective response to terrorism.

The government must carry on with the transition and ensure a return to democracy. Thus far, commitment to organizing fair and transparent elections across the entire national territory has been weak. No progress has been made in implementing the electoral timeline announced in July 2022. There are suspicions that the military junta members will attempt to put themselves on the ballot, despite reassurances that they will not.

The restoration of democratic norms is the initial step to curbing the increase of authoritarian measures and the erosion of government accountability, as all state institutions are gradually losing their significance and autonomy. The deaths of the deposed president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, and the primary opposition leader, Soumaila Cissé, pave the way for rejuvenating the political landscape, provided that subsequent electoral cycles adhere to a just and competitive process.

The shrinking of civic space is a significant threat to healthy political debates. An increasing number of government threats against civil society members have already muted powerful voices. The state must recommit to democratic values, not only respect electoral deadlines.

The next administration will need to bring the economy back on track. This begins with implementing sound fiscal policies to reduce current deficits and address the country's rapidly growing debt. The isolationist measures advocated by the transitional government have proven unsustainable for a landlocked country.

Mali needs strong cooperation with its neighbors, as it shares a common customs and monetary union. The transitional government has adopted a hostile stance toward its closest partners. Increasing its ties with the Guinean military junta has allowed Mali to pursue economic objectives. However, the limited infrastructure connecting the countries and Mali's lack of integration with Guinea mean that new allies cannot replace the durable, well-coordinated relations with the rest of the WAEMU.

While the transitional government has improved the mining code and promised to enhance the business environment, it must keep that promise – especially with regards to the mining sector, which is the primary source of foreign investment. It also needs to commit to inclusive growth and offer sustainable opportunities, especially to women, who continue to be excluded from the economy.

With 65% of its population under 25 years old, Mali's youth is one of its most important sources of capital. However, with high underemployment and a weak education system, the country has yet to tap into this strength and prevent it from turning into a ticking bomb. To address this issue, Mali must re-invest massively in training and infrastructure to increase opportunities for youth who are trapped between poverty and migration. Therefore, a new strategy is needed to specifically address the needs of both urban and rural youth, as well as young women.

Finally, the judicial system has been cited as one of the weakest state institutions in Mali, plagued with accusations of corruption, partiality and inefficiency. Only residents in a few urban areas have access to the courts – a major trigger of conflict in central Mali. Malians need to regain trust in their judiciary institutions, from the lower courts that offer fair settlements in land claim issues to the highest level, which is capable of ending an electoral crisis.