



## Freedom in the World - Mali (2010)

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Capital:  
Bamako

Population:  
12,700,000

Political Rights Score: 2 \*

Civil Liberties Score: 3 \*

Status: Free

### Overview

**Although a government military offensive in early 2009 appeared to have resolved some of the conflict with the Tuareg rebels in the north, increased threats from the regional terrorist organization, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, within Mali kept the country's security situation tenuous. A new family law that had been under review for 10 years stalled again after religious groups protested the legislature's approval of the legislation in August.**

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Mali was ruled by military and one-party regimes for more than 30 years following independence from France in 1960. After soldiers killed more than 100 demonstrators demanding a multiparty system in 1991, President Moussa Traore was overthrown by the military.

Alpha Oumar Konare of the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) won the presidency in 1992 elections that were deemed credible by most observers. He secured a second and final term in 1997 amid a boycott by most of the opposition. Several opposition parties also boycotted that year's National Assembly elections, in which ADEMA captured 128 of 147 seats.

In the 2002 presidential election, independent candidate Amadou Toumani Toure, a popular former general who had led Mali during the post-Traore transition period, defeated his ADEMA opponent. During legislative elections that year, the Hope 2002 coalition emerged victorious over the ADEMA-led coalition.

Toure, running as the candidate of the Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ADP) coalition, was reelected with 71 percent of the second-round vote in the April 2007 presidential election. The ADP secured 113 seats, with 51 going to ADEMA, its largest constituent party, in elections for the National Assembly in July. The main opposition coalition, the Front for Democracy and the Republic (FDR), captured 15 seats, with a smaller party and independents securing the remaining 19 seats.

In the April 2009 municipal elections, ADEMA captured 30 percent of the available seats and five of the eight regional assemblies in the capital. While the government did not restrict opposition political parties from operating before or during the

election, they did not perform well. The largest single opposition party, Rally for Mali (RPM), lost the only district it controlled in the capital, and a number of its young politicians broke off to form new political parties that performed well in the polls.

Tensions between the government and the marginalized ethnic Tuareg minority have erupted into violence over the years. Following a 1991 peace agreement and more than a decade of relative calm, a group of Tuareg army deserters attacked military barracks in 2006, demanding greater autonomy and development assistance. From 2006 to 2008, fighting continued amid a series of negotiations and ceasefires between the government and Tuareg rebels. Despite a 2008 peace agreement, the North Mali Tuareg Alliance for Change (ATNMC)—a rebel faction led by Ibrahim Bahanga—intensified its insurgency efforts. Violence throughout 2008 culminated in a December assault on an army base, followed by direct attacks on two pro-Toure Tuareg politicians that same month. The conflict had been transformed from a purely military operation isolated in the north to one that was both political and nationwide in scope, confirming President Toure's belief that negotiations with Bahanga were no longer possible. The army subsequently intensified its efforts, destroying the ATNMC's main base in January 2009. By April, hundreds of rebels had laid down their weapons and signed the 2008 agreement, while Bahanga fled to Libya.

While government relations with the Tuareg rebels appeared to have stabilized by the end of 2009, security in the north continued to be threatened by the growing activity of the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). As AQIM increases its operations, work or travel in the region has become nearly impossible, particularly for foreigners and known government supporters. At the end of 2008, AQIM kidnapped four European tourists, and one of them—a British national—was decapitated in May 2009 after the British government refused to release a radical cleric. While the other three hostages were released in July, the group assassinated a senior army intelligence officer in June, killed nearly 30 soldiers in an ambush on a military convoy in July, and took another European hostage in December. Originating during the Algerian civil war, AQIM is motivated by ideology rather than cultural grievances as the Tuareg rebels had been.

Although it is one of the world's least developed countries, Mali has undertaken significant political and economic reforms since the early 1990s, including a decentralization program that gave greater autonomy to local communities. Mali has benefited from international debt relief, and is currently working with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to meet the targets under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility to improve Mali's budget.

### **Political Rights and Civil Liberties**

Mali is an electoral democracy. During the 2007 presidential election, voting was peaceful, and international observers declared the results valid. The president, who appoints the prime minister, is elected by popular vote to serve up to two five-year

terms. Members of the 147-seat unicameral National Assembly serve five-year terms, with 13 seats reserved to represent Malians living abroad.

Nearly 70 political parties operate in shifting electoral coalitions and are often organized around leading personalities, patronage, and ethnic or regional interests. The largest party is ADEMA, currently part of the ruling ADP coalition.

President Amadou Toumani Toure's government has launched anticorruption initiatives, including the creation of the Office of the General Auditor. However, corruption remains a problem, particularly in public procurement and contracting. Mali was ranked 111 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Mali's media have been considered among the freest in Africa. While dormant criminal libel laws were invoked by authorities in 2007 resulting in fines and suspended jail sentences, there have been no subsequent libel prosecutions, and there were no reports of harassment or intimidation of journalists in 2009. The government does not restrict internet access, although less than one percent of the population had access in 2009.

While Mali's population is predominantly Muslim and the High Islamic Council has a great deal of influence over politics, the state is secular, and minority religious rights are protected by law. Academic freedom is respected. In May 2009, the government launched a 10-year research and higher education reform plan in an effort improve both access to and quality of education at the nation's only institution of higher learning, the University of Bamako.

Freedoms of assembly and association are respected. In August 2009, some 50,000 people demonstrated peacefully in Bamako against the legislature's approval of a new family law. Many civic groups and nongovernmental organizations, including human rights groups, operate without interference, though the security situation in the north makes it very difficult to function there. The constitution guarantees workers the right to unionize, with the exception of those who provide "essential services," such as security force personnel or school principals.

The judiciary is not independent of the executive and is too weak to provide an adequate check on the other two branches of government. Local chiefs decide the majority of disputes in rural areas. Detainees are not always charged within the 48-hour period set by law, and there are lengthy delays in bringing defendants to trial. Police brutality has been reported, though courts have convicted some perpetrators. Prison conditions are harsh, and while human rights monitors are permitted to visit prisons, cumbersome administrative procedures reportedly make investigations difficult.

No ethnic group predominates in the government or security forces. Long-standing

tensions between the marginalized Moor and Tuareg pastoralist groups on the one hand, and the more populous nonpastoralist ethnic groups on the other, have fueled intermittent instability.

Women are underrepresented in high political posts; 14 were elected to the National Assembly in 2007, and 5 of 27 cabinet ministers are women. Domestic violence against women is widespread, and cultural traditions have hindered reform. In August 2009, the National Assembly passed a new family law that had been under discussion for 10 years. The law would have raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 years and made both men and women the legal heads of the household. However, the law's approval was met with widespread opposition, including fervent protest from the High Islamic Council, and a 50,000-person demonstration. In response, the president asked the National Assembly to "reconsider" its decision and review the law before he approved it, leaving the law in limbo at year's end.

Although the constitution prohibits forced labor and child trafficking is punishable by 20 years in prison, adult trafficking is not criminalized. The U.S. State Department classifies Mali as a source, transit point, and destination country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. While there were no child-trafficking prosecutions in 2009, a number of traffickers reportedly attempted to leave Mali with children; suspects were usually detained briefly and released without charge. Slavery remains a problem, particularly in the north, and according to some rights groups, there may be thousands living in conditions of servitude.

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*\* Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom. Click [here](#) for a full explanation of Freedom in the World methodology.*