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FREEDOM IN THE WORLD

Mali

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OVERVIEW:

On January 17, 2012, an ethnic Tuareg separatist group launched a rebellion in the north. Government forces fared poorly against the rebels, and on March 22, less than a month before scheduled elections, an army captain led a coup that ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré, suspended the constitution, and created a junta to rule the country. Under international pressure, the junta handed nominal power to interim president Dioncounda Traoré, but maintained a supervisory role. Meanwhile, Islamist militants sidelined the Tuareg rebels in the north, consolidated control over major towns, and committed serious human rights violations. As a result of the fighting and abuses, some 340,000 Malians were either internally displaced or became refugees. The Economic Community of West African States agreed to organize a military intervention in Mali, but it had yet to take action at the end of the year.

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

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

In the April 2007 presidential poll, Touré was reelected with 71 percent in the first round of voting; he ran as an independent candidate, but with support from the Alliance of Democracy and Progress (ADP) coalition, led by ADEMA. In July 2007 elections to the National Assembly, the ADP secured a total of 113 seats, with 51 going to ADEMA. The main opposition coalition, the Front for Democracy and the Republic, captured 15 seats, while a smaller party and a number of independents secured the remaining 19 seats. ADEMA captured more votes than any other party in the 2009 municipal elections.

Violence in the north between government forces and the marginalized ethnic Tuareg minority, which had flared in 2007, died down following a 2009 government offensive and a subsequent peace agreement. However, Islamist militants kidnapped a number of international aid workers and European tourists beginning in 2008, and several were killed. The terrorist organization

2013 SCORES

STATUS

Not Free

FREEDOM RATING

6.0

CIVIL LIBERTIES

5

POLITICAL RIGHTS

7

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) continued to threaten security in the north throughout 2010 and 2011.

In October 2011, Tuareg fighters formed the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA), which demanded independence for northern Mali. Following the Libyan revolution that year, soldiers who had fought for ousted Libyan dictator Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi joined the MNLA, bringing new weapons and equipment. The movement launched a rebellion on January 17, 2012, and on January 26 its fighters killed 50 soldiers. This led to protests throughout Mali, as the public reacted to army's lack of supplies and its inability to suppress the rebellion. Nevertheless, as of late February, Touré promised that the presidential election scheduled for April 29, from which he was barred by term limits, would take place as planned.

On March 21, mutinous soldiers led by Captain Amadou Sanogo mounted a coup, removing the president, suspending the constitution, detaining government ministers, and establishing the National Committee for the Return of Democracy and the Restoration of the State to rule the country. The junta leaders argued that the coup was necessary to end what they considered incompetent management of the situation in the north. While some Malians welcomed the revolt, the international community condemned it. The African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) suspended Mali's membership, and foreign aid was suspended as well. On March 28 the junta declared a new constitution, but after criticism it restored the old charter on April 1. On April 8, Touré resigned as president, and Sanogo agreed to hand power to interim president Dioncounda Traoré, the speaker of the National Assembly, on April 12. Nevertheless, the military maintained de facto authority over the civilian leadership. Soldiers from Touré's presidential guard attempted a counter coup, but they were quickly defeated by forces loyal to the junta. On May 21, supporters of the junta attacked Traoré in the presidential palace. He left the country for medical treatment and did not return until late July.

Taking advantage of the turmoil in the capital, the MNLA occupied the three main cities of the north—Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao. On April 6, the rebels took the city of Douentza in central Mali and declared independence for Azawad. However, over the course of the summer, Islamist militant groups that had cooperated with the MNLA—Ansar Dine and the AQIM-linked Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)—fought with and seized territory from the Tuareg separatist group. By July, the MNLA had shifted its demands toward a possible compromise with the government, seeking a level of autonomy short of full secession. Meanwhile, the Islamist groups committed human rights abuses and destroyed religious monuments they deemed un-Islamic in the areas under their control.

In November, army chiefs from ECOWAS adopted a plan to expel the rebels from northern Mali and agreed to send 3,300 troops. The plan was approved by the AU, and by the UN Security Council in December. However, the Security Council required that political efforts be exhausted before the start of military operations, and the UN peacekeeping chief predicted that military action would not begin until late 2013. UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon called for the government in Bamako to hold elections before any intervention. Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra resigned after being arrested by the junta on December 11, raising doubts about the government's ability to hold elections or cultivate the international legitimacy necessary to secure foreign military aid. Separately, the MNLA and Ansar Dine rebels signed a ceasefire to end their infighting on December 22.

Over 200,000 people from the north were internally displaced at year's end, while roughly 140,000 were refugees in neighboring countries.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES:

Mali is not an electoral democracy. In 2012 the country was split between an interim government overseen by a military junta in the south and Islamist militant groups in the north. However, previous elections were peaceful and generally considered fair. According to the constitution, the president, who

appoints the prime minister, is elected by popular vote and can serve up to two five-year terms. Members of the 160-seat unicameral National Assembly serve five-year terms, with 13 seats reserved to represent Malians living abroad.

In 2011, a wide variety of political parties formed fluid and frequently shifting coalitions in preparation for the elections scheduled for April 2012, which were canceled after the March coup. Party leaders were repeatedly harassed and arrested by the military during 2012.

A number of anticorruption initiatives had been launched under President Amadou Toumani Touré's administration, including the creation of a general auditor's office. However, corruption remained a problem in government, public procurement, and both public and private contracting. Mali was ranked 105 out of 176 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Mali's media were considered among the freest in Africa before the 2012 rebellion and coup. Criminal libel laws had not been invoked by authorities since 2007, and there were no reports of harassment or intimidation of journalists in 2011. During 2012, however, an unprecedented number of journalists were illegally detained and tortured by the military and Islamist militants. Interviews with former president Touré and rebels were forbidden by the junta, and the national broadcaster was stormed by the military in April. The attacks on journalists decreased significantly in the second half of the year.

Mali's population is predominantly Muslim, and the High Islamic Council has a significant influence over politics. However, the state is secular, and minority religious rights are protected by law. In the north during 2012, Islamist militants imposed a crude form of Sharia (Islamic law) and destroyed Sufi Muslim shrines and other sacred sites that they deemed un-Islamic. Academic freedom was also suppressed in the rebel-held north.

Freedoms of assembly and association were respected prior to the coup, and nongovernmental organizations operated actively without interference. The constitution guarantees workers the right to form unions and to strike, with some limitations regarding essential services and compulsory arbitration. Since the rebellion and coup, people's ability to protest, engage in civic advocacy, or assert labor rights has been sharply curtailed across the country, particularly in the north.

The judiciary, whose members were appointed by the executive under the constitution, was not independent. Traditional authorities decided the majority of disputes in rural areas. A 2010 law called for the establishment of Centers for Access to Rights and Justice, which would provide citizens with information about their legal rights and judicial procedures, but the facilities were not operational by the time of the coup. Under the elected government, detainees were not always charged within the 48-hour period set by law, and police brutality had been reported, though the courts convicted some perpetrators. During 2012, however, people accused of crimes or perceived moral offenses were summarily punished and even executed in the north, while the junta regularly engaged in arbitrary arrests and detentions in the south.

No ethnic group predominates in the government or security forces. Long-standing tensions between the more populous nonpastoralist ethnic groups and the Moor and Tuareg pastoralist groups have often fueled intermittent instability, leading up to the rebellion of 2012.

Women have been underrepresented in high political posts. Mali's first woman prime minister took office in 2011. Domestic violence against women is widespread, and cultural traditions have hindered reform. Despite the creation of the National Coordinating Committee for the Fight Against Trafficking and Related Activities in 2011, adult trafficking has not been criminalized, and Mali remains a source, destination, and transit country for women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. Prosecution of suspected traffickers is infrequent, with only two convictions in 2011. Traditional forms of slavery and debt bondage persist, particularly in the north, with thousands of people estimated to be living in conditions of servitude. Women faced heightened harassment, threats, and violence in the north in 2012 due to militants' enforcement of harsh restrictions on dress and behavior.

STATUS CHANGE EXPLANATION:

Mali's political rights rating declined from 2 to 7, its civil liberties rating declined from 3 to 5, and its status declined from Free to Not Free due to a military coup that deposed the democratically elected president; the ensuing repression of the media, political actors, and freedom of movement in the south; and the occupation of the north by militants who harshly suppressed fundamental rights in areas under their control.

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