



# Mali

## Mali: Introduction

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Chart 1: Political map of Mali

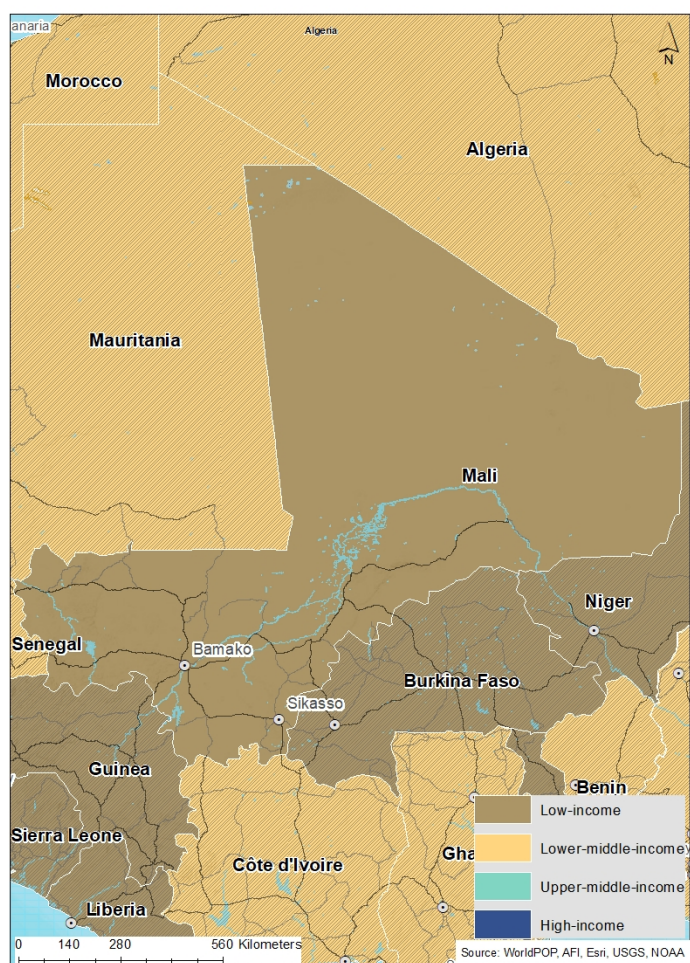


Chart 1 is a political map of Mali.

Mali is a low-income country in north-west Africa. The country has been a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) since 1975, but its military leadership following the 2020 coup decided in January 2024 to withdraw from the organisation, together with Burkina Faso and Niger, with whom it formed the Confederation of Sahel States in August 2024. The country however remains a member of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU, or UEMOA in French). Mali is also a member of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), which has had minimal activity following the turmoil in Libya, where its secretariat was initially based, although it has now been relocated to Chad.

The desert nation of Mali is characterised by its Sahelian climate—a transitional zone between the arid Sahara desert in the north of Africa and savannas to the south. The country is divided into three natural zones: the cultivated Sudanese zone in the south, the semi-arid Sahelian zone in the centre, and the arid Saharan zone in the north. The desert covers 30% of the country, and 59% of the country is classified as having annual rainfall of less than 400 mm. As a result, the country is characterised by drought, desertification and the overexploitation of natural resources that are under the pressure of a rapidly growing population.

The Sahel region has historically been highly porous. Ancient trans-Saharan trade routes facilitated cross-border trade and

a transhumance lifestyle for hundreds of years, predating the French colonial period. This way of life is now under dire threat. Climate change is having a devastating impact on the Sahel countries. The [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC) notes that the Sahel has 'experienced the most substantial and sustained decline in rainfall recorded anywhere in the world within the period of instrumental measurements during the 1980s.' Environmental degradation and violent conflict have [displaced](#) millions of people and will continue to worsen the environmental crisis in the area. Furthermore, the Sahel countries will experience some of the most severe climate change impacts globally as early as 2030. These [impacts](#) range from increasingly variable rainfall, rising temperatures and more frequent droughts to prolonged heatwaves.

Mali gained independence in 1960, with President Modibo Keita as the first president of a socialist one-party state. However, the 1968 military coup led by Lieutenant Moussa Traoré truncated Keita's presidency. A new constitution in 1979 paved the way for a fresh election, which was won by President Moussa Traoré and ushered the country into its second republic. A [military coup](#) in March 1991 ousted the Traoré administration and replaced it with a transitional committee led by Amadou Toumani Touré who organised the country's first democratic elections in 1992. These elections saw the victory of Alpha Oumar Konaré, who was re-elected for a second term in 1997. Touré, the author of the 1991 putsch, would return to power, winning presidential elections in 2002 and re-election in 2007.

In January 2012, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) started the fifth rebellion in the country's history, taking control of two-thirds of the country's territory. Since its independence, the country has been struggling against irredentist movements from the Tuareg communities in the north, who periodically re-emerge (1963, 1986, 1990, 2006, 2012) and call for autonomy.

The fifth rebellion prompted military officers in Bamako to overthrow President Touré's government in March 2012, citing his inability to deal with the Tuareg rebellion.

Under pressure from ECOWAS, the coup leaders ceded [power](#) the following month to an interim civilian government led by then President of the National Assembly Dioncounda Traoré as leader.

However, the crisis in the north provided an opportunist context for the occupation of these regions by violent extremist groups (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, Ansar Dine), who ousted the MNLA rebels in June 2012. Despite the intervention of French operation Serval/Barkhane, ECOWAS and the deployment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) from 2013 onwards to tackle the jihadist threat, terrorist attacks expanded from 2015 onwards to central Mali, then towards Burkina, Niger and the coastal countries of West Africa.

The signing of a preliminary agreement between the government and MNLA rebels in June 2013 paved the way for the organisation of general elections in September 2013, with the support of MINUSMA. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita won the election and Keita was re-elected in June 2018. However, rising violence and insecurity in northern and central Mali and poorly organised 2020 parliamentary election results triggered nationwide protests, ultimately leading to [Keita's ouster](#) as military officers removed him from power in August 2020.

A transitional government has since ruled over Mali, with Colonel Assimi Goïta declared Head of State by the Constitutional Court in May 2021. Also, the [National Transition Council](#) replaced the National Assembly until the country returned to constitutional rule. The military regime drastically overhauled Mali's external relations, ending its longstanding bilateral cooperation with France in 2022 and moving closer to Russia. The French military, which had been supporting Mali's counterterrorism efforts since 2013 through operations Serval and Barkhane, was requested to depart and, in 2023, Mali also requested the withdrawal of the MINUSMA.

Meanwhile, various efforts and consultations have occurred between the government, political parties and civil society organisations to return to constitutional rule. A new **constitution**, approved through a referendum in June 2023, paved the way for the announcement of general elections to restore constitutional rule. Under a **timetable** agreed upon with ECOWAS, national legislative elections were tentatively scheduled for October and November 2023, while presidential elections were scheduled for February 2024. However, the elections were indefinitely **suspended** by the military government junta in September 2023, citing technical difficulties. After it was sanctioned by ECOWAS in response to the coup, Mali announced its withdrawal from ECOWAS and formally exited the Community on 29 January 2025. Together with Burkina Faso and Niger, it formed the Confederation of Sahel States (CSS) in August 2024. Although the CSS is still part of WAEMU and uses the West African Franc (CFA), it has announced its intention to create a common currency to end the use of the CFA.

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