



Mali — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[formerly Soudan]

01/01/1892 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France]: In 1892 Mali fell under French colonial rule.¹ On 10/17/1899 French Sudan broke apart; the territory was split into Upper Senegal and Middle Niger. On 10/10/1902 it became the colony of Senegambia and Niger. On 10/18/1904 the country was renamed Upper Senegal-Niger. On 12/04/1920 it was renamed French Sudan. On 10/27/1946 it reached the status as a French overseas territory. In November elections to for three representatives of French Sudan in the French National Assembly took place. Therefore, LIED considers that multiparty legislative elections were held since 1946. According to our observations, this is a miscoding and only in 1956 was universal suffrage introduced.² According to LIED executive elections were absent during this period. For this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are absent until 1945 and as not really present afterwards. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive are limited, while V-Dem's LCE indicates no value from 1900-1946, as no parliament exists, and thus no legislative constraints on the executive are possible and between 1947-1957 are limited.

03/31/1957 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]: Keita and US-RDA emerged victorious in the first universal suffrage election on this date, having already eliminated or assimilated any semblance of opposition before the country gained independence (Vengroff/Kone 1995: 46). This date marks the beginning of a parliamentary system under the colonial administration, leading to the emergence of the US-RDA as the dominant political force. According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. Universal suffrage was present. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and not really present according to V-Dem's PCLI. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

11/24/1958 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]: On this date Mali became a self-governing member state of the French Community (Sudanese Republic). During this period, Modibo Keita was the key political leader. He was the head of the National Committee of the Revolution (CNR), which played a pivotal role in the country's transition. Keita was a prominent anti-colonial leader.³ While according to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held in 1959, during this specific short period no elections occurred. In 1958, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are not truly present. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

03/08/1959 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Autocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]:

Parliamentary elections took place in French Sudan on 03/08/1959. The Sudanese Union – African Democratic Rally (US-RDA) secured a decisive victory, winning all 80 seats. Voter turnout, however, was notably low at only 32.3%.⁴ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. On 03/31/1960, France consented to the full independence of the Federation of Mali.⁵ Full independence within the community was achieved on 06/20/1960 in association with Senegal, with which Sudan had joined in January 1959 to form a union known as the Federation of Mali. However, Senegal seceded from the federation on 08/20/1960. For the brief existence of the Mali Federation, the premier was Modibo Keita. In 1959, LIED states political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are not really present. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

09/22/1960 End Electoral Autocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under France, Liberal Democracy]/Start One-Party Autocracy [as independent country]: On this date, independence from France was declared. The Mali Federation collapsed after Senegal seceded, whereafter Soudan left the Franc Zone and became officially known as the Republic of Mali. The previous federation premier, socialist Modibo Keita, became the first president of the newly independent country.⁶ His party, the Union Soudanaise-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (US-RDA), dominated politics and started the repression of opposition parties since it gained power in 1957 (Nathan 2015) (winning all 80 seats in the Legislative Assembly 1959), and its monopoly on power was further enshrined in the 1960 constitution⁷, making Mali a de facto one-party autocracy and evening the way for the US-RDA to become the only legal party in 1962⁸ making Mali a de jure one-party state. In the following years Modibo Keita's policy of nationalization led to increasing economic deterioration and public dissatisfaction. The Mali government saw itself forced to rejoin the West African Franc Zone in 1967 in an attempt to regain some stability, however thereby undermining its legitimacy and further stirring disillusionment that culminated in subsequent events in 1968 (Englebert 2004: 635, Nathan 2015, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 77). According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held until 1963, from 1964 onward executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are not truly present. From 1960 to 1966, according to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. In 1967 and 1968, as per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations during this time. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

11/19/1968 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: In 1968, there were public protests against Keita's economic policies, so that his government was overthrown in a coup d'état led by Captain Diakhite and Lieutenant Traoré. The Comité Militaire pour la Liberation Nationale (Military Committee for National Liberation), a junta consisting of four captains and ten lieutenants was established. Traoré became head of the junta. Senior officers were dismissed (Bebler 1973: 87-90, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 77-78). In this time all political activity was banned, and the state was run as a police state by Captain Tiécoro Bagayoko. Traoré tried to move Mali towards a civilian rule with the change of the constitution for a 'Malian Second Republic' in 1974. It was finally issued four years later in 1978, but despite the effort, the military remained in power.⁹ In 1976, a new political party surfaced, named the 'Democratic Union of the Malian People,' founded on the principle of non-ideological democratic centralism¹⁰ and lead by Moussa Traoré. Upon the restoration of civilian rule in 1979, it became the only legal party in Mali.¹¹ According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Furthermore, LIED identifies political liberties as absent and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are not really present. As

per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations during this time. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

06/19/1979 End Military Autocracy/Start One-Party Autocracy: The first single-party presidential and legislative elections were held on 06/18/1979.¹² Moussa Traoré was the only presidential candidate and the Democratic Union of the Malian People the sole legal party. In the National Assembly elections, multiple UDPM candidates competed for each seat, resulting in a 44% turnover of incumbent MPs. The voter turnout was reported to be 97%.¹³ According to LIED executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held during this period. Per FH, for this regime period, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. For that period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are not truly present. As per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations during this time. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

03/26/1991 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: Traoré faced a huge popular uprising over labor and economic concerns. When it reached a climax, General Touré betrayed Traoré and seized power. On 03/26/1991 Traoré was apprehended in reaction to widespread riots, leading to the establishment of a predominantly civilian transitional government within a brief period. Subsequently, in July-August 1991, a National Conference convened to draft a new constitution, paving the way for fair and competitive elections overseen by the transitional government in April 1992 (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 77-78).¹⁴ According to LIED no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during this period. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. In 1991, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are somewhat present. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

04/12/1992 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date, elections were won by Alpha Oumar Konaré and The Alliance for Democracy (Adema) (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 41). The presidential and parliamentary elections in 2002 were characterized as fair and transparent by international observers. Nonetheless, allegations of fraud and corruption raised by the opposition persisted.¹⁵ In the 1997 elections many opposition parties and candidates boycotted the elections.¹⁶ Alpha Oumar Konaré was the first president who stood down after his two constitutionally allowed terms.¹⁷ During the 2002 presidential elections many procedural irregularities were detected by electoral observers.¹⁸ The election results 2007 were not accepted by all contestants who claimed irregularities. Independent observers, however, endorsed the election as free and fair.¹⁹ Severe deficits in the electoral process during this period therefore existed. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. According to LIED electoral competitiveness was present for the entire time. V-Dem's CEI indicates ambiguous cleanliness scores between 1992 and 1997 and 2002 and 2011. For the remaining years not really cleanliness was given. V-Dem's EF&FI considers the elections as somewhat free and fair except from 1997 to 2001, when ambiguous outcomes were scored. Furthermore, the judiciary was not independent of the executive, but still reached relatively autonomous decisions. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country fluctuates between 4 and 6, free and partly free, which we interpret as moving between free and rather free. Political and civil liberties were generally accepted.²⁰ Additionally, political liberties were absent according to LIED. But V-Dem's PCLI already classifies them as fully present for the entire time. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as

indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate between 1992-2001 and limited between 2002-2012. In January 2012, Northern Mali saw the onset of a Tuareg uprising spearheaded by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA).²¹ The country was classified as partly free by FH in this period. GWF, REIGN and BR classified the period as democratic, LIED, MCM and HTW as a multiparty/electoral autocracy. According to our standards the regime is classified as an electoral hybrid regime.

03/21/2012 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, there was a successful coup by Malian soldiers led by Captain Amadou Sanogo against President Amadou Toumani Touré.²² Following Sanogo's seizure of power, he cited Touré's failures in suppressing the rebellion as justification. This action led to sanctions and an embargo imposed by the Economic Community of West African States.²³ The coup resulted in the partition of Mali between its northern and southern regions. The MNLA attempted to declare independence as 'Azawad,' resulting in a short-lived unrecognized state that existed from 2012 to 2013.²⁴ Islamist groups that helped the MNLA to defeat the government took control of the north with the goal of implementing the sharia in Mali. On 04/12/2012 an interim president was selected through the involvement of countries belonging to the Economic Community of West African States. These nations entered into a comprehensive agreement with the coup leaders, delineating the content and plan of the transition, thereby enabling a partial return to constitutional normality.²⁵ French Armed Forces intervened on 01/11/2013 at the request of the interim Government. On 01/30/2013 Malian and French troops reclaimed Kidal, the last Islamist stronghold. On 02/02/2013 French President François Hollande accompanied Mali's interim President Dioncounda Traoré in a public appearance in the recently liberated Timbuktu.²⁶ Traoré held his function as interim president until 09/04/2013.²⁷ Because of the impossibility to schedule elections as prescribed by constitution in 2012, the period of transition extended to 07/28/2013 after the election of a new president.²⁸ Based on our observations, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Per FH, for 2012, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. In 2013 Mali scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. LIED still identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are present. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. Mali classifies in this period as Military Autocracy rather than Non-Electoral Transitional Regime because the decisive criterion is legitimization pattern, and Captain Sanogo's military junta employed guardianship legitimization by citing „Touré's failures in suppressing the rebellion“ to justify the coup, invoking crisis and military necessity rather than temporary procedural facilitation. The Va-PoReg codebook explicitly states that military-led 'transitional' regimes code as military autocracy regardless of transitional rhetoric, electoral promises, civilian participation in advisory roles, or announced timelines for elections, which applies directly to Mali despite the 04/12/2012 ECOWAS-brokered agreement establishing interim President Traoré and a transition framework. The ongoing security crisis (northern rebellion, MNLA separatism, Islamist occupation) provided continuous justification for military authority based on guardianship claims rather than self-limiting caretaker legitimization, with the coup leaders retaining effective veto power over the transition process through their capacity to consent to or reject the ECOWAS agreement terms.

07/28/2013 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date legislative elections took place, with the second round on 08/11/2013. Concerning voter fraud, the majority of political and civil society leaders demanded that a biometric electoral list in 2012 be implemented in order to reduce electoral fraud during preparation for the elections.²⁹ About 6.9 million registered voters casted 3 million valid votes (a success rate of 43% valid votes and 57% not voting).³⁰ In 2013 Mali had democratic elections in place, that faced numerous challenges, which affected the stability and functions of the democratic system. Challenges that arose during the election were for instance providing security on ballot stations, restoring administrative

services in northern Mali or the creation of the biometric electoral list civil, that society and political leaders advocated for, despite persistent problems with census data.³¹ In the 2013 presidential elections Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta was elected president of the republic.³² Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. During this transformation process, LIED confirms the presence of competitive elections. However, V-Dem's CEI scores no cleanliness for the 2013 elections. Since 2014, ambiguous cleanliness is provided. Whereas V-Dem's EF&FI states somewhat free and fair conditions since 2013, except for 2018 and 2019 when ambiguous outcomes are scored. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free. With the exception of 2018, when the country receives a score of 8, which we interpret as falling into the rather not free category. LIED scores concerning political liberties remained absent. Whereas V-Dem's PCLI outcomes also remained the same, underlining full political liberties. According to the Polity5 indicator, during this period, the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

08/18/2020 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Military Autocracy: On this date members of the Malian Armed Forces started a military coup. The soldiers apprehended numerous government officials, including President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, who subsequently resigned and dissolved the government.³³ The five colonels leading the coup called themselves The National Committee for the Salvation of the People and were led by Colonel Assimi Goïta.³⁴

09/12/2020 End Military Autocracy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: The committee agreed to a political transition to civilian rule. By a group of 17 members of the committee, Bah N'daw was elected transitional interim president and took over office on 09/25/2020. Bah N'daw, a retired military officer, appointed Moctar Ouane, a civilian, as Prime Minister to comply with the demands of ECOWAS. This transitional period was supposed to last 18 months.³⁵ According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. Per FH, for this regime period, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. In 2020, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as suggesting that political liberties are somewhat present. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

05/24/2021 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Military Autocracy: On this date a second coup in less than a year ousted transitional president Bah N'daw and prime minister Moctar Ouane who had attempted to form a new government excluding key military officers. The military government put the transitional process to a halt.³⁶ On 06/07/2021, Assimi Goïta, Mali's military commander, took the oath of office as the new interim president.³⁷ On 06/11/2025, Mali remained within the category of military autocracy. The junta passed a law granting Assimi Goïta a renewable five-year presidential mandate, concentrating power more visibly in his hands.³⁸ However, this did not alter the regime's legitimating principle: power continued to rest with the military as an institution, not with Goïta's personalist rule. As in the case of Augusto Pinochet in Chile, personal concentration of authority within a military regime does not transform it into a personalist autocracy. It remains classified as military autocracy, meaning no regime change is coded. LIED offers no information on this period, except for 2021, during which no multiparty executive or legislative elections took place. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Since 2021, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are somewhat present. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent.

Military Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Bennett 1975, Hanke 2001, Mozaffar 1999)

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Mali
- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/November_1946_French_legislative_election_in_French_Sudan
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modibo_Ke%C3%AFta
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1959_French_Sudan_parliamentary_election
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Mali
- ⁶ <https://www.thoughtco.com/brief-history-of-mali-44272>
- ⁷ <https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/constit/ml1960-2.htm>
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sudanese_Union_%E2%80%93_African_Democratic_Rally
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moussa_Traor%C3%A9
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moussa_Traor%C3%A9
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Union_of_the_Malian_People
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1979_Malian_general_election
- ¹³ https://1997-2001.state.gov/background_notes/mali_0006_bgn.html
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1992_Malian_parliamentary_election
- ¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1992_Malian_parliamentary_election; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1997_Malian_presidential_election
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpha_Oumar_Konar%C3%A9
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2002_Malian_presidential_election
- ¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007_Malian_presidential_election
- ¹⁹ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5278c9453.html>
- ²⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mali>
- ²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2012_Malian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat
- ²² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mali>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1979_Malian_general_election
- ²³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azawad>
- ²⁴ <https://tsep.africa.ufl.edu/the-electoral-system/mali/>
- ²⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mali>
- ²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_heads_of_state_of_Mali
- ²⁷ <https://tsep.africa.ufl.edu/the-electoral-system/mali/>
- ²⁸ <https://tsep.africa.ufl.edu/the-electoral-system/mali/>
- ²⁹ <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2278/>
- ³⁰ <https://tsep.africa.ufl.edu/the-administration-of-elections/mali-3/>
- ³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibrahim_Boubacar_Ke%C3%AFta
- ³² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Malian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat
- ³³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Malian_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat
- ³⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah_Ndaw
- ³⁵ <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/mali-bundeswehr-einsatz-abzug-100.html>
- ³⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mali>
- ³⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mali>
- ³⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mali>

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