

World
Watch
Research

Mali: Full Country Dossier

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OpenDoors

Serving persecuted Christians worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	71	75	76	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Mali

Brief country details

Mali: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
22,106,000	497,000	2.2

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



Mali: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	79	14
WWL 2023	76	17
WWL 2022	70	24
WWL 2021	67	28
WWL 2020	66	29

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Mali:	
Main persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Ethnic group leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family
Organized corruption and crime	Violent religious groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Government officials
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

In an increasingly chaotic environment marred by complex security challenges, the lives of Christians in Mali have become almost unbearable. The landscape is plagued not only by jihadist groups but also by traffickers and organized crime syndicates, all of which operate with increasing impunity due to the disintegration of the country's institutions. The devastation that began in 2012 when radical Islamic groups seized control of the northern regions continues to have a lingering impact. Churches were razed, and Christians were displaced, leaving them homeless and their places of worship in ruins. Although some have ventured back to their communities under the cover of police protection, the looming threat from jihadists has not receded. Rather, it has metastasized further south, intensifying the dangers faced by Christian congregations. Evangelical missionary work in the north is particularly vulnerable to violent attack and abduction by radical Islamic groups, as are Christians who have converted from Islam. Family and community pressures compound the difficulties faced by converts, making them targets for violence and social ostracization. Additionally, the volatile security situation has rendered the region increasingly inhospitable for NGOs.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Mali has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment \(CAT\)](#)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#)

Mali is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christian converts are killed on the spot if their conversion is discovered or merely suspected (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christians are targeted and killed by extremist groups on the basis of their faith (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christians are harassed and targeted for wearing religious symbols (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian converts are tortured and pressured to recant their conversion from Islam (ICCPR Arts. 7 and 18)
- Christian parents cannot raise their children according to their religious values (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Christians face harassment and violence if they discuss their faith or engage in proselytization (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 19)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **Resources denied:** In areas controlled more by radical Islamic groups than the Malian government, Christians are denied resources and prevented from accessing water and land to grow crops. This has been confirmed by local researchers.
- **Displacement:** Many Christians have been forced to flee their homes due to attacks by jihadist groups. Some of these are living in IDP Camps.
- **Schools targeted:** Several Christian schools and other institutions were destroyed or closed down. Some Muslim religious leaders made a demand that for the schools to open and operate, Islamic dress code should be introduced and Quran instruction should be included in the school curriculum (RFI, 11 November 2022).

Specific examples of positive developments

- In June 2023, Mali held a referendum on the adoption of a new constitution, a move seen as one that could pave way for the return to civilian rule, and the holding of new elections in 2024.
- Frustrations about spiraling insecurity spurred two military takeovers - in 2020 and 2021. In July 2022, the Economic Community of West African States lifted a set of trade and financial sanctions against Mali after the military government committed to a return to civilian rule by March 2024. Sanctions had been imposed in January 2022 when the military government was considering remaining in power for up to five years (Al-Jazeera, 16 June 2023).

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: demand - https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20221111-mali-un-chef-religieux-proche-des-islamistes-pose-ses-conditions-pour-la-r%C3%A9ouverture-des-%C3%A9coles?ref=tw_i&s=08
- Specific examples of positive developments: In July 2022 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/16/mali-divided-before-referendum-vote-to-pave-way-for-elections>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Mali

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 Mali report	AI Mali 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/mali/report-mali/	28 June 2023
BBC News Mali profile - updated 5 May 2023	BBC Mali profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13881370	28 June 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Mali Report 2022	https://btiproject.org/en/reports/country-report/MLI	28 June 2023
CIA World Factbook Mali - updated 20 June 2023	World Factbook Mali	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mali/	28 June 2023
Crisis24 Mali report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Mali report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/mali	28 June 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Mali profile 2023	EIU Mali profile 2023	https://country.eiu.com/mali	28 June 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Mali	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	28 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Mali not included	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Mali	https://freedomhouse.org/country/mali/freedom-world/2023	28 June 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report (Mali is not included)	Freedom on the Net 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores	
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Mali	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/mali/	28 June 2023
Girls Not Brides Mali report	Girls Not Brides Mali	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/mali/	28 June 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 - Mali country chapter	HRW 2023 Mali country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/mali	28 June 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Mali	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ml	28 June 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Mali	https://rsf.org/en/mali	28 June 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Mali	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/ml	28 June 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Mali	UNDP HDR Mali	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/MLI	28 June 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Mali	IRFR 2022 Mali	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mali/	28 June 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL, Mali not included	USCIRF 2023	https://www.uscirf.gov/countries	
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Mali - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Mali	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-mli.pdf	28 June 2023
World Bank Mali data 2021	World Bank Mali data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57bar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=MLI	28 June 2023
World Bank Mali overview – updated 30 March 2023	World Bank Mali overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mali/overview#1	28 June 2023

Recent history

Before modern-day Mali came into existence, there were several kingdoms and empires that flourished in the territory that covers part of Mali today. After the short-lived Wassoulou Empire, France established a colony called French Sudan in 1892. French colonial administration came to an end in 1960 and Mali became independent. After experimenting with one-party rule and military rule for decades, Mali adopted a new constitution in 1992 and made a successful transition to democratic rule. Before the coup that overthrew the democratically elected Malian government in March 2012, the country was considered exemplary among African countries for protecting civil liberties and political rights. The media, in particular, was vibrant and open and not subject to governmental pressure or restrictions. For instance, during the presidential election of 2007, the results were considered valid and there was little or no electoral violence. 70 parties ran in the election and the right to vote was extended to all citizens of Mali.

However, in 2012 Tuareg rebels (who had been active in northern Mali for a number of years) formed an alliance with radical Islamic groups, including some foreign fighters mainly coming from Algeria. They overran government forces and took control of several cities and a sizable portion of northern Mali. Consequently, a military coup ousted the civilian administration, but civilian administration was restored after the presidential election in 2013 was won by Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, a veteran politician and a former prime minister. The Malian government was able to push back the advance of the rebels and reclaim most of the occupied territory with the help of French troops. Despite the persistence of occasional clashes between rebels and government forces, a [ceasefire](#) was concluded in 2013 between the rebels and the government (The Guardian, 19 June 2013).

Despite the UN sending in a 12,000 strong peacekeeping force (called the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali), the central government has still not managed to regain control and assert its authority over a significant portion of Malian territory. In addition to this political problem, the country faces several economic challenges related to the high poverty level. Most people live in remote parts of the country which face various environmental problems like rapid desertification and lack of access to water.

In July/August 2018, the country conducted a successful presidential election in which President Keïta managed to win a second term. Despite [allegations of fraud](#) from the opposition, this was seen as a positive development (Al-Jazeera, 5 August 2018). However, in June and July 2020, the president faced opposition from protesters who demanded his resignation. [On 18 August 2020](#), President Keïta was ousted by a group of soldiers calling itself the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (BBC News, 19 August 2020). The UN, African Union and regional leaders all condemned the coup, but the coup leaders claimed to have saved the country from sliding into chaos and confirmed they would prepare elections within a reasonable time-frame. In May 2021, the 2020 coup leader, Colonel Assimi Goïta, [seized power](#), thus upending any transition progress achieved (The Guardian, 25 May 2021). In May 2022, [the Mali junta claimed](#) that Western-backed military officers had attempted a military coup to oust it from power (Reuters, 17 May 2022). See details below in: *Political and legal landscape*.

In June 2023 a [constitutional referendum](#) took place in which citizens agreed to give the head of state increased power over parliament and the country (Al-Jazeera, 23 June 2023). See further details below in: *Political and legal landscape*.

Political and legal landscape

Despite Mali's positive record on civil liberties and political rights, prior to 2012 there were notable inconsistencies on how these rights were applied in the northern two-thirds of the country, a reality which was often overlooked by foreign observers. Political power in Mali was concentrated in the southern one-third of the country, dominated by Muslim Sub-Saharan African tribes such as the Songhai and Zarma, while the more conservative Muslim northern tribes, such as the Tuareg and the Arabs, were often left out of power. While discrimination against the Tuareg and Arabs was not official policy, in practice they received a smaller proportion of government revenue and services, which had led the Tuareg into intermittent open rebellion over several decades.

The insecurity and instability that resulted from the 2012 civil war and the continued attacks by Islamic militants are major challenges in the current political landscape. The [2015 peace-deal](#) between the rebels and the government was not fully implemented and the grievances of the Tuareg were not fully addressed, making an improvement in the political situation unlikely (BBC News, 20 June 2015). This has meant continued insecurity and anxiety for Christians in the country.

French government involvement in the country's political affairs had been a major problem for the country. Although the country claimed its independence half a century ago, France continued to influence its political decisions. France was, for instance, the first country to send troops in order to contain the Tuareg uprising.

The highly contested elections in the summer of 2018 concluded with the re-election of Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta for a second term as president. Given that his election required a second round of voting and that his main challenger alleged that the election had been rigged, Keïta's mandate and legitimacy was weak, hampering his ability to tackle the political and security challenges his government faced effectively.

In 2020, despite the unfolding [COVID-19 crisis](#) and the kidnapping of opposition leader Soumalia Cisse, the country held the long-awaited parliamentary elections on 29 March 2020 (Deutsche Welle, 30 March 2020). These elections should have taken place after President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's 2018 re-election but were postponed several times due to security concerns. The voter turnout for the elections was extremely low (just 36%). It was not long before demonstrations took place with demands for the resignation of the president. The president's attempt to negotiate with the opposition failed. Neighboring countries and foreign powers became [uneasy](#) (US News, 10 July 2020): "Mali's neighbors and outside powers worry the impasse could further destabilize the country and jeopardize a joint military campaign against Islamist insurgents in the West African Sahel region."

The August 2020 coup

As a result, on 18 August 2020, elements of the army conducted a coup and the president and some of his cabinet were placed under arrest. The African Union (AU) [suspended](#) Mali's membership (France24, 19 August 2020) and the West African regional bloc (ECOWAS) also urged the coup leaders to transfer power to a civilian government. The back and forth between the regional leaders and the coup leaders ended in a mixed result that is summarized by the International Crisis Group (ICG) as follows:

"Following the military junta's seizure of power in August, Malian Prime Minister Moctar Ouane on Monday announced a new government. Crisis Group expert Jean-Hervé Jezequel says that while the formation of the new administration is ostensibly a positive step in accordance with the government's pledge to oversee an eighteen-month transition to civilian rule, the junta still maintains considerable influence. It holds four key government positions, including the defense and security portfolios, in addition to the head of the Junta serving as vice president. In a positive signal, however, the new cabinet marks the demise of an older generation of politicians who have dominated the government since the 1990s and whose failure to implement governance reforms contributed to the current crisis" ([ICG Weekly update, 9 October 2020](#)).

The May 2021 coup

While the Mali politicians and the regional bloc were busy negotiating a possible way forward, Islamic militants in the region were gaining in strength. However, another turn of events put the negotiations and the fighting against the jihadists at risk – a new coup. On 24 May 2021, the Malian army led by Vice President Assimi Goïta detained President Bah N'daw, Prime Minister Moctar Ouane and Minister of Defense Souleymane Doucouré and assumed power. On 30 May 2021, ECOWAS [suspended](#) Mali (France24, 30 May 2021). That was followed by suspension from the African Union on 2 June 2021. Not bothered by the suspensions, on 7 June 2021, Goïta [was sworn](#) in as interim president (Reuters, 7 June 2021).

Although there are no specific regulations or laws designed to restrict Christians compared to other religious groups, in practice, it is difficult for Christians to be able to get a license when applying for registration. This is especially the case outside Bamako. Furthermore, the [withdrawal of French forces](#) in August 2022 (France24, 15 August 2022) and [UN forces in December 2023](#) (BBC News, 31 December 2023) and the consequent expansion of Islamic extremist insurgency could expose both Christian men and women to new levels of persecution. The withdrawals took place due to [escalating tensions](#) between the Malian government and multiple external actors in the region (UN OCHA, April 2022).

The constitutional referendum

Mali is hoping to go back to civilian rule by adopting a new constitution. In June 2023, the military government held a referendum on the adoption of the new draft constitution, a move it claimed would pave the way for a return to constitutional and civilian rule by March 2024, a deadline set by the regional bloc ECOWAS. According to Al-Jazeera reporting on 23 June 2023:

- "Under the [constitutional changes](#), the president will 'determine the policies of the nation', a role allotted to the government under the country's current constitution, which dates to 1992. The head of state will have the right to hire and fire the prime minister and cabinet members, and the government will be answerable to him and not to parliament, as is the case currently."

Gender perspective

Mali scores poorly on Georgetown's 2021/22 Women, Peace and Security Index ranking 143rd out of 170 countries, reflecting in part discriminatory laws (GIWPS 2021 Mali). Men are allowed to take up to four wives (Family code, Article 366) and an obligatory dowry is set for brides (Article 288). The minimum legal age to marry is set at 16 for girls and 18 for boys but permits marriages to take place at an earlier age by judge and parental consent (Articles 281 and 284). According to Girls not Brides Mali, child marriage is particularly high in Mali, with 54% of girls marrying before 18 (compared to 2% of boys), and 16% by the age of 15. The Girls Not Brides report highlights several contributing factors behind these statistics, observing that harmful practices such as bride kidnapping and FGM remain prevalent. Wives are legally mandated to obey their husbands (Family code, Article 319) and domestic violence is not directly criminalized. Despite having equal divorce rights, many women remain in abusive situations as they lack the education or financial means to initiate the divorce proceedings.

Religious landscape

Mali: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	497,000	2.2
Muslim	19,674,000	89.0
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	1,907,000	8.6
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	1,300	0.0
Atheist	510	0.0
Agnostic	25,600	0.1
Other	900	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

As is typical for other West African states, Mali has been dominated by Islam for centuries (in a mostly moderate form) and by a constitutionally secular political system which prohibits religious political parties. Apart from the northern part of the country where the Christian minority had always faced discrimination at the hands of the Muslim majority, Christians used to enjoy a fair amount of freedom in Malian society, which also allowed the presence of foreign Christian missionaries. Malian Muslims had a reputation for being moderate and tolerant of other religious beliefs. There was also a high tolerance level towards converts to Christianity during the colonial period. This tolerance, however, faded as time went by and it is now highly dangerous to be known as a Christian of Muslim origin. Both Malian Christians (the majority being Roman Catholic) and Muslims tend to combine their faith with indigenous animist beliefs, since there is a significant presence of Ethno-religionists or Animists in the country. Even though most Malian Christians live in the south of the country, they have come under increasing pressure as a result of the threat from radical Islamic activities in the north.

An estimated 89.0% of the population are Muslim according to WCD 2023 data and most are adherents of Malikite Sunni Islam which is a version of Islam influenced by Sufism. This brand of Islam is moderate and tolerant of other faiths. In northern Mali, especially among the Arab and Tuareg tribes, the influence of more radical versions of Islam has grown over the past few years. These more radical versions have little respect for Sufi-influenced religious practices, as evidenced by the destruction of 13th century Sufi shrines in Timbuktu when radical Islamic groups controlled the city in 2012.

The situation in Mali changed abruptly in April 2012 when the creation of the independent state of Azawad in northern Mali was proclaimed. The radical Islamic rebels, most of whom can be identified as Wahhabis, soon established an Islamic state system with a strict Sharia regime in the north. Most Christians fled before the radical Islamic take-over. In the meantime, Islamic militants destroyed churches and other public Christian properties.

The Church in southern Mali has also been negatively affected by the increasing visibility of various Wahhabi groups. Although the rebels and the government reached a peace agreement in 2015 and international peacekeepers were brought in, Islamic radicalization in Malian society has continued and this has affected the whole region.

Economic landscape

Mali is one of the least developed countries in the world.

According to the World Bank's 2023 Macro Poverty Outlook Mali:

- **Economic growth:** "GDP growth fell to 1.8 percent in 2022 due to ECOWAS sanctions, high food inflation, and parasite infestations affecting cotton production. This led to negative per capita income growth, a 3.2 percentage points increase in poverty incidence, while delaying fiscal consolidation. Economic growth is projected to rebound to 4 percent in 2023".
- **Inflation:** "Inflation increased to 9.7 percent in 2022, driven by food inflation which accelerated to 13.9 percent as a result of persistent insecurity forcing farmers' displacements, the ECOWAS sanctions disrupting trade networks, and elevated global food prices. ... Annual inflation is projected to fall to 5 percent in 2023 due to the recovery of food agriculture and to normalize towards the midpoint of the regional target range (2 percent) by 2025."
- **Imports/Exports:** "Despite the deteriorating terms of trade, the The current account deficit (CAD) narrowed to 7 percent of GDP in 2022 as net imports were kept artificially low due to the ECOWAS sanctions disrupting regional trade and suspending regional financial transactions during the first half of 2022. Merchandise exports (-3.5 percent y/y) and imports (-15.1 percent y/y) declined significantly during the first three quarters of 2022."
- **Fiscal deficit:** "The fiscal deficit stabilized at an elevated level of 5 percent of GDP in 2022. After declining due to the sanctions, tax revenues recovered during the second half of 2022, and increased by 1 percent on the year despite fuel tax expenditures".
- **Poverty:** "[T]he extreme poverty rate is expected to have increased to 19.1 percent in 2022, a 3.2 percentage points increase compared to 2021. The relative incomes of poor households deteriorated, exposing them to food insecurity, especially in the center and north ... Extreme poverty incidence measured against the international poverty line (2.15\$PPP a day per capita) is expected to increase to 19.6 percent in 2023 before slightly decreasing to 18.8 percent in 2025."

According to [Theodora.com](#) (Mali Economy - 2023):

- About 65% of Malian territory is arid or semi-arid making a significant portion of the country ill-suited for farming. Thus, Economic activity is largely confined to the riverine area irrigat-

ed by the Niger River. About 10% of the population is nomadic and about 80% of the labor force is engaged in farming and fishing. Industrial activity is concentrated on processing farm commodities. Mali is also rich in gold and other minerals, which are exploited by South African and European companies. The country's fiscal status fluctuates with gold and agricultural commodity prices and the harvest; cotton and gold exports make up around 80% of export earnings. Despite all this, Mali's economy heavily relies on foreign aid, including the World Bank and other international donors, and bilateral donations from the European Union, European countries and the USA.

- France is a main commercial partner and other countries (e.g. China and Middle Eastern states) also trade and invest in Mali. Mali used to have strong ties with Russia and a number of its elite were trained in Russia (including Dioncounda Traoré who served as president from April 2012 to September 2013 after the military coup). However, Russia no longer has a strong economic presence.

According to [Heritage World's 2022 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

- Mali's economic freedom score is 55.9, making its economy the 114th freest in the 2022 Index. Mali is ranked 18th among 47 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, and its overall score is above the regional average but below the world average. Protection of property rights is inadequate. There is no nationwide land registry. The president appoints all judges. The minister of justice supervises both law enforcement and judicial functions. Courts operate inefficiently. Civil servants resent having to declare their assets publicly, and corruption remains widespread in the public sector. Bribery and embezzlement of public funds are common, and impunity for corrupt officials is the norm.

Gender perspective

Against this backdrop of economic fragility, women and girls are particularly vulnerable due to [lower education and employment rates](#) (UN Women, Mali Country Factsheet, accessed 26 July 2023) as well as discriminatory inheritance practices. While education and employment rates have improved for women and girls in the last decade, more boys continue to attend secondary education and have greater employment opportunities (GIWPS 2021 Mali). This economic vulnerability can be exploited for the purpose of religious persecution of female converts to Christianity.

Social and cultural landscape

Mali is one of Africa's richest countries in terms of history and culture. It is the home of Timbuktu, one of the oldest trade and intellectual centers in the world and was added to the World Heritage List by UNESCO in 1988. According to [UNESCO/World Heritage Center/Timbuktu](#) (accessed 26 July 2023):

- "Founded in the 5th century, the economic and cultural apogee of Timbuktu came about during the 15th and 16th centuries. It was an important center for the diffusion of Islamic culture with the University of Sankore, with 180 Koranic schools and 25,000 students. It was also a crossroads and an important market place where the trading of manuscripts was negotiated, and salt from Teghaza in the north, gold was sold, and cattle and grain from the

south."

According to UNDP Human Development Report Mali and World Factbook Mali:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Bambara 33.3%, Fulani (/Peuhl) 13.3%, Sarakole/Soninke/Marka 9.8%, Senufo/Manianka 9.6%, Malinke 8.8%, Dogon 8.7%, Sonrai 5.9%, Bobo 2.1%, Tuareg/Bella 1.7%, other Malian 6% (2018 est.)
- **Main languages:** French (official), Bambara 46.3%, Peuhl/Foulfoulbe 9.4%, Dogon 7.2%, Maraka/Soninke 6.4%, Malinke 5.6%, Sonrhai/Djerma 5.6%
- **Population growth rate:** 2.97% (2021 est.)
- **Median age:** 16.3 years
- **Urban population:** 43.1% of the total population
- **Rate of urbanization:** 4.86% annual rate of change (2015-2020 est.)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 7.5 years (For girls the number of expected years is 6.8, compared to 8.1 for boys)
- **Literacy rate, adult (15 years and older):** 35.5%
- **Employment to population ratio (15 years and older):** 65.7%
- **Unemployment:** 7.2% of total labor force
- **Youth unemployment (15-24 years):** 14.7% of total labor force. The female to male ratio of youth unemployment is 1.22.

According to UNHCR's [Operational Data Portal](#) (accessed 26 July 2023):

- **Refugees:** 64,002 (last updated 30 June 2023):
- **IDPs:** 375,539 (last updated 30 April 2023):

According to UNDP HDR Mali:

- **Human Development Index:** Mali is ranked 184th out of 189 countries with a human development value of 0.434.
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 59.3 years.
- **Gender Development Index (GDI) score:** 0.821
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII) score:** 0.671 (This score is a composite measure reflecting inequality in relation to reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market).

Gender perspective

Mali's low GDI and GII scores reflect the challenges that face women and girls in Mali. There is broad [societal acceptance](#) for domestic violence (Iamaneh Schweiz, 2021); a gender study by [CARE](#) (published in May 2013) reported that 63% of men and 41.3% of women interviewed agreed with the statement "There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten". Within Mali's patriarchal context, women's access to economic life opportunities is limited, making it hard for them to escape abusive situations. Further endangering women and girls is the widespread social acceptance for - and practice of – [Female Genital Mutilation](#) (UNICEF, Division of Data Analytics, February 2022).

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Sudan):

- **Internet usage:** 58.8% of the population – survey date: December 2021
(Most recent at time of writing.)
- **Facebook usage:** 10.8% penetration rate – survey date: January 2022
According to the June 2023 Napoleon Cat study, 75.4% of [Facebook users](#) are men and 24.6% women.

According to World Bank Mali data:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 116.6 per 100 people.
Whilst more men use cell-phones than women, Georgetown's 2021/22 Women, Peace and Security Index notes that cell-phone use has risen by 5% since 2017 in Mali (GIWPS 2021 Mali).

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (publication date: January 2023):

- "Mali's topography includes large tracks of sparsely populated desert, with many settlements being hard to reach and thus rendering it difficult and expensive to provide effective fixed or mobile networks. Security issues have also been a concern, leading to delays in building the national backbone network."
- "Compounding these difficulties is the fact that underinvestment in fixed-line networks has meant that telecom infrastructure is barely adequate to serve consumer needs in most towns and is largely absent in most areas of the country. In addition, a combination of poverty, high illiteracy, and low PC use has led to a very low take-up of fixed-line internet services. In common with many other countries in the region, Mali has taken to mobile networks for voice and data services. Mobile networks account for about 98% of all telecom connections. Despite these challenges, there has been progress in fixed-line connectivity, particularly during 2020 and 2021."
- "Mali's landlocked location makes it dependent on neighboring countries for international bandwidth, which has kept internet prices high. Improvements in this sector can be expected from the recent arrival of several new international submarine cables in the region, while Orange Group has also been engaged in building a terrestrial network linking the capital cities of eight countries in the region, including Bamako."

To summarize: Mali is not well advanced in technology, although a university specializing in [science and technology](#) was established in Bamako in 2011 (UniRank, accessed 26 July 2023).

Security situation

Recent events

Mali requested [France to withdraw](#) its forces, which it did in August 2022 (VOA, 15 August 2022). Mali also asked the United Nations to withdraw its peacekeepers. [In June 2023](#), the interim military leadership stated that there was a "crisis of confidence" and that the UN forces should withdraw "without delay" (Reuters, 16 June 2023). Before this, the UN Security Council

had increased the number of peacekeeping troops in the country and also expanded its mandate to allow a more robust military action against militant groups. However, [UN forces did completely withdraw in December 2023](#) (BBC News, 31 December 2023).

Human Rights Watch reporting on the period January-June 2023 stated ([HRW, 13 July 2023](#)):

- "Islamist armed groups have carried out widespread killings, rapes, and lootings of villages in northeast Mali since January 2023 forcing thousands of people to flee."
- "Security in Ménaka and Gao regions has deteriorated sharply amid clashes between the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the rival Al-Qaeda-linked Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (*Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen*, JNIM), as both Islamist armed groups seek to control supply routes and increase their areas of influence. The UN reports that fighting across Mali has forced 375,539 people from their homes, 40 percent of whom are located in the Gao, Kidal, Ménaka, and Timbuktu regions, resulting in one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent years. The two groups use a strategy of displacement to demonstrate their power and impose their authority in Mali and neighboring Burkina Faso."
- "JNIM and ISGS fighters have also killed civilians in other parts of Mali during 2023, as well as Malian soldiers, government officials, and MINUSMA peacekeepers. Human Rights Watch investigated an April 22 attack in Sévaré, Mopti region, claimed by JNIM, that left at least 10 civilians dead and 60 injured, as well as more than 20 buildings destroyed. On April 21, JNIM also claimed responsibility for an [attack](#) on April 18 which killed the chief of staff of Mali's interim president, Oumar Traoré, and three others in Nara in Koulikoro region."

According to Crisis 24 Mali report:

- "The interim military-led government is radically charting its own way, having essentially cut ties with traditional ally France and looking to Russia for military, diplomatic, and financial support."
- "Russia's Wagner private military company has moved into bases vacated by French troops, whose pullout from Mali is due for completion in August 2022. However, the disengagement of Western troops from Mali has opened up security vacuums exploited by jihadists, particularly Islamic State, whose activities are likely to expand in northern and central Mali. The Menaka area is a particular hotspot. Although Western troops are redeploying to neighboring Niger, military personnel will likely be reduced and operations curtailed. Fighting for territorial control between Al-Qaeda- and Islamic State-linked jihadist groups, is likely to intensify, posing further challenges to the security environment. MINUSMA operations are likely to face obstacles, such as overflight and patrolling restrictions, by the military authorities, exacerbated by the announced withdrawal of several countries from the mission in 2023. On 20 October [2022], the interim parliament approved a law on the police forces' integration into the army to support Mali's increasingly stretched armed forces."

Mali's inability to contain the jihadist situation has caused demonstrations by the general public to be held. The protestors are critical of the government's continued failure to stem Mali's extremist insurgency and inter-community bloodshed. As a result of the lack of security, Chris-

tians face the risk of being targeted, kidnapped and killed. Church-run schools have also been forced to close down.

History

Due to its better democratic and civil liberties record compared to other Muslim majority countries in the region - as well as the influence of Sufism - Mali had once been considered a relatively tolerant country for Christians. However, the 2012 civil war and the opportunity that it gave Islamic militant groups changed this situation and since then there has been a serious risk and challenge to Christians. Militant Islamic groups - such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) - are still active, especially in the northern region, and had targeted UN peacekeepers in particular.

Instability and violence have created fear and chaos in the country. Impunity is rampant and the government has not been in a position to stop or bring the perpetrators to justice. Over the past years, many attacks have been conducted by [Islamic militants](#) (International Crisis Group, 28 May 2019); armed Fulani herdsmen have also committed atrocities. From 2021 onwards, attacks by militant groups in the Sahel intensified: With the proliferation of jihadist groups like Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, the vast territory of Mali that is not under effective government control has become a sanctuary for Islamic militants who are a threat to the security of the entire region. As Mali is located in the Sahel, one of the hotbed regions for jihadists, the situation in the country cannot be seen in isolation; it is part of the overall rise of Islamic militancy and Wahhabism in the entire [Sahel region](#) (WWR, The Sahel - Rising Islamic militancy and persecution of Christians, August 2016). Therefore, the trajectory of the political and security situation in the whole region is crucial for the future of Mali. Furthermore, even if the government of Mali and other regional states manage to crush the armed Islamic groups like AQIM, the radicalization of the youth and society at large by this group is a more intractable problem and is creating a hostile environment for Christians for years to come.

As reported by the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Mali):

- "Throughout the year [2022], mostly in the central and northern regions, domestic and transnational terrorist groups (including al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb and its affiliates Ansar al-Din, Macina Liberation Front, and al-Mourabitoune), united under the umbrella group JNIM, and the Islamic State in the Sahel (ISIS Sahel), both U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations, continued attacks on domestic and international security forces, UN peacekeepers, civilians, and others they reportedly perceived as not adhering to their interpretation of Islam. Both JNIM and ISIS-Sahel controlled significant territory in the northern and central regions. According to nongovernmental organizations and security experts, armed groups in some instances coopted preexisting intercommunal and ethnic tensions to further sow instability and violence".

Gender perspective

There is a gendered component to this context of insecurity and fragility; militant groups are more likely to kidnap girls for forced marriage, whereas men and boys are especially vulnerable to violent physical attacks (HRW 2023 Mali country chapter). They may also be forcibly recruited

into the ranks of armed groups and, if Christian, forced to convert to Islam. Violent groups reportedly [exploited](#) the diversion of military resources during the COVID-19 pandemic to [upscale](#) attacks and [child trafficking](#) (Council on Foreign Relations, 3 April 2020; CSIS, May 2020; UN News, 1 December 2020). Christian foreign missionaries, especially women, are prime targets of jihadi rebels and have been typically used to negotiate prisoner swaps or, for ransom ([BBC News](#), 31 March 2021).

Trends analysis

1) Islamic militancy is a major challenge

The main trend facing Mali is the growing influence of militant Islam and Wahhabism. It will take a long time to build up a Christian presence again in the north of Mali. Islamic militants continue to be active in Mali (notwithstanding the peace-deal that was [signed in 2015](#)) and will remain a threat in the years to come (BBC News, 20 June 2022). The peace-deal is very fragile, and the government is unable to establish control in some parts of the country. Despite all the challenges, Mali managed to hold a relatively peaceful and successful presidential election in 2018. However, two coups were conducted in less than 12 months (2020 and 2021) and the generals who led these coups often claim that the government had failed to fight the jihadists effectively. Yet, they too have made little progress in containing the jihadist threat which would seem to be growing fast. In 2022 and 2023 (WWL 2024 reporting period), radical Islamic groups have increased their pressure on the Malian government and the Wagner group has been locked in fighting these insurgents (at the same time violating human rights of the civilian populations). The fighting between different radical groups for supremacy in the country is causing added chaos. In its meeting in April 2023, the [UN Security Council](#) noted "surging clashes between non-State armed groups, massive displacement and a 'catastrophic' humanitarian situation."

2) Lawlessness is expanding

The past 10 years have been very challenging for Christians in particular since the whole region faces acute insecurity created by the presence of various jihadist groups.

After the fall of Gadaffi in Libya, the Sahel region became filled with rebel groups and Mali paid the highest price with civil war and military coups. As reported by [BBC News](#) on 22 March 2012: "The trouble began when hundreds of Malian combatants who had fought to defend the late Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, fled back home with weapons at the end of last year and formed the most powerful Tuareg-led rebel group the region has known - the Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA)." The region is still in turmoil from the COVID-19 crisis and is facing a spill-over effect from the situation in the neighboring countries.

According to [Humanitarian Action / Mali](#), published on 29 November 2022:

- "Mali's multidimensional crisis fuelled by insecurity, conflicts, climate change and lack of access to basic social services is causing dire humanitarian needs. The economic sanctions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States in the first half of 2022 worsened the existing living conditions and reduced the State's investment required for a return of State authorities and the provision of social services in conflict-affected areas."

- "An increase in the number of attacks, armed groups' blockades of villages, restrictions on civilians' freedom of movement, and denial to basic social services and livelihoods is reported. The insecurity is compounded by the extension of the armed actors' areas of influence, the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and military operations. This resulted in the shrinking of humanitarian space and restricted humanitarian operations. Control over the mining and illicit trafficking routes is a main driver of the increased conflict between armed actors in the north, west and south-eastern border regions as well as the conflict in Burkina Faso."

3) The series of governance crises continues

Mali was once hailed as a symbol of African democracy. However, in the last decade, the country has been through a series of governance crises. First, in March 2012, there was a coup with a militant jihadist group taking control of the vast majority of the country. Then, the continued protests demanding the resignation of the country's president led to a further military coup in August 2020. While the coup leaders pledged to oversee an eighteen-month transition to civilian rule, they maintained a considerable influence which was far from democratic. That coup was followed by another seizure of power in May 2021. In 2022, the Junta decided it needed to stay in power for a number of years. The Junta also accused military officers of being backed by Western countries to stage a further coup. The political instability will continue to be of grave concern for all citizens. The Wagner mercenaries are also creating another level of chaos in the country. They have caused immense suffering among the civilian population.

4) Impact of COVID-19 and Russia-Ukraine War

Militant groups became more potent in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, when governments in the region shifted their priorities from fighting jihadists to fighting the pandemic. Given the recent spate of attacks in Mali and beyond, it is evident that groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group are exploiting all possible avenues – including poverty and ethnic grievances – to incite violence throughout the Sahel region. Before recovery from the pandemic was possible, the Ukraine-Russia caused a sudden increase in energy and food prices. This is hindering the country in its ability to address the social crises created by COVID-19 and the relentless attacks by jihadists. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis is still being felt in 2023.

5) Geopolitical shift: Mali is moving away from the West

Mali has recently taken significant steps to distance itself from its traditional partners, particularly France and other Western countries. The leader of the military junta delivered a speech at the UN General Assembly, accusing the French government of working against the interests of the Malian people. In response, the junta leader requested the withdrawal of French troops from the country, and the French government complied with this request. Furthermore, in June 2023, Mali called for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to withdraw its peacekeeping forces, which was duly carried out in December 2023.

Alongside these developments, Mali has received support from the Wagner mercenary group, despite the group facing accusations of committing serious human rights violations. This shift in alliances and partnerships indicates a growing departure from the country's traditional partners

who had previously played a role in restoring stability following the crisis in 2011.

These recent actions by Mali reflect a significant change in its geopolitical dynamics and a repositioning away from its previous reliance on Western countries. The evolving alliances and reliance on other actors such as the Wagner mercenary group highlight a shift in the country's approach to international cooperation and stabilization efforts. It remains to be seen how these changes will shape Mali's future trajectory and its ability to maintain stability and address human rights concerns.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: ceasefire - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/19/mali-peace-deal-tuareg-insurgents-aid>
- Recent history: allegations of fraud - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/08/mali-candidate-soumaila-cisse-court-alleging-vote-fraud-180805154952537.html>
- Recent history: On 18 August 2020 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53833925>
- Recent history: seized power - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/24/mali-president-prime-minister-and-defence-minister-arrested-sources-say>
- Recent history: the Mali junta claimed - <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/mali-junta-says-western-backed-military-officers-attempted-coup-2022-05-16/>
- Recent history: constitutional referendum - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/23/mali-approves-constitutional-amendments-in-a-referendum>
- Political and legal landscape: 2015 peace-deal - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-33213931>
- Political and legal landscape: COVID-19 crisis - <https://www.dw.com/en/mali-legislative-elections-hampered-by-low-voter-turnout/a-52958735>
- Political and legal landscape: uneasy - <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-07-10/protesters-rally-in-mali-after-rejecting-presidents-concessions>
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WWL 2024: Church information / Mali

Christian origins

The present area called Mali was dominated by various Muslim empires and kingdoms before the French colonization. Especially the northern part of the country was predominantly Muslim and there were some followers of traditional African religion in parts of the southern areas. It was the White Fathers, a Roman Catholic missionary order, who brought Christianity to Mali in 1895. However, the growth of Christianity in Mali was very slow. Most of today's Christians are descendants of former Muslims and Animists who converted to Christianity during the colonial period. It was only in 1936 that the first African Roman Catholic priest was ordained, and it was only in 1962 that the first Malian bishop was consecrated. Protestants came to the country in 1919 via the Gospel Missionary Union (GMU) from the USA. That was followed by the arrival of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in 1923.

Church spectrum today

Mali: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	295,000	59.4
Protestant	172,000	34.6
Independent	27,900	5.6
Unaffiliated	1,800	0.4
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
Total	496,700	99.9
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	183,000	36.8
Renewalist movement	55,800	11.2

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox.

Roman Catholics: All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

The main Christian denomination in Mali is the Roman Catholic Church but there are many Protestant church communities too. Christians are mainly located in major cities, especially around the Bamako area. Those Christians who live outside the major cities face extreme danger even as civil servants (e.g. as teachers).

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Christians experience most difficulties for their faith in the areas where jihadists and Fulani herdsmen are active in [the north and the north-eastern](#) part of the country (IRIN, 20 November 2015). To some extent, there are small pockets of intense persecution in the southern part of the country as well.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation in Mali and so this category is therefore not included in WWL scoring and analysis.

Historical Christian communities: Of the 2.3% of Malians who are Christian, the majority belong to historical Christian communities. These include Roman Catholic churches and a significant number of Protestant denominations. Those living in the southern part of the country enjoy freedom of religion in relative terms in comparison to their counterparts in the north. Neverthe-

less, although the degree and intensity of the threat of attacks by Islamic militants is greater in the north than in the south, those in the south also have to face threats of attack and kidnapping.

Converts to Christianity: Christians with a Muslim background are mainly to be found among the Bozo and the Dogon, but there are also converts living elsewhere in the country. In addition to the threat from Islamic militants that most Malian Christians face, it is converts to Christianity who additionally face varying degrees of pressure from their family members, relatives and neighbors to renounce Christianity.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Mali has a small number of Charismatic and Pentecostal churches mainly found in the southern part of the country. Due to their style of worship and their likelihood to be more engaged in evangelism, such communities are likely to draw the ire and hostility of society at large.

External Links - Church information

- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: the north and the north-eastern -
<http://newirin.irinnews.org/dataviz/2015/11/20/map-of-conflict-in-mali-2015>

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Mali

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Mali: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	79	14
WWL 2023	76	17
WWL 2022	70	24
WWL 2021	67	28
WWL 2020	66	29

Mali's overall score rose by three points in WWL 2024, a significant increase following a rise of six points in WWL 2023. This escalation stemmed from heightened pressure across various *Spheres of life* and a slight uptick in violence by 0.6 points. The country grapples with a weakened, corrupt, and anti-Western government that views certain Christian groups as being affiliated with Western nations. Mali's situation is rapidly deteriorating, marked by successive coups, including two within a year—August 2020 and May 2021. These coups occurred amid the government's struggle to contain jihadist expansion, particularly evident in regions outside major cities where jihadists wield influence, providing services and recruiting the youth. Russian (Wagner) mercenaries, aiding the military junta, have targeted civilians, including Christians, exacerbating the already extreme pressure felt in the *Community* and *Church spheres*. Despite being recognized for their effectiveness against jihadsts, Wagner groups' actions have also en-

dangered civilians. Economic struggles and security lapses have facilitated organized crime and corruption. Over the past five years, Mali's score has steadily risen from 66 points in WWL 2020 to 79 points in WWL 2024.

Persecution engines

Mali: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Not at all
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Medium
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very strong

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Islamic oppression (Very strong)

Mali has been dominated by Islam for centuries (in a mostly moderate form). However, in April 2012, Islamists (mostly Wahhabis) set up a strict Sharia regime in the north, destroying churches and other Christian buildings. The Church in southern Mali also faces an increasing influence of Wahhabi groups and as a result, Islamic radicalization and hostility towards Christians is growing.

Organized corruption and crime (Very strong)

The country is situated in the Sahel region of West Africa where there are vast desert and arid areas that are difficult to control. Criminal gangs use this as an opportunity to expand their activities for transporting illegal substances to Western Europe. Most criminal organizations have allied themselves with radical Islamic groups and persecute Christians. The former Tuareg rebel forces have now basically become criminal operators.

Clan oppression (Strong)

Although most of the Malian population are Muslims, they still mix their Islamic beliefs with several forms of witchcraft and sorcery. The current Wahhabi movement is trying to 'purify' Islam from such traditional practices. Many Malian Christians also combine tribal practices with Christian beliefs. Most tribal or ethnic leaders in the remote parts of the country are hostile towards Muslims or Christians who oppose such practices and there have been clashes between tribal leaders and Christians in some instances.

Dictatorial paranoia (Medium)

While there has been a blatant dereliction of duty from government officials to protect Christians from persecution, the issue of *Dictatorial paranoia* as an engine has come to light in recent years, especially after the most recent coup. In this context, virtually any Christian group that seeks security or protection under the law is seen as a threat to the military regime's power.

Drivers of persecution

Mali: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			STRONG				MEDIUM	VERY STRONG
Government officials	Weak							Medium	Medium
Ethnic group leaders	Strong			Strong					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong								
Violent religious groups	Very strong								Very strong
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong								
One's own (extended) family	Strong								
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very strong								Very strong

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of Islamic oppression

- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** The main drivers of Islamic oppression in Mali are militant Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) who are active mainly in the northern part of the country but also conduct attacks and kidnappings in southern regions. Segments of the population influenced by the radical and intolerant teaching of Wahhabism are also drivers of persecution and especially target Christians with a Muslim background.
- **Organized crime cartels/networks (Very strong):** This gives the jihadists the means and method to stay afloat. It is through this driver that they finance their operations.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very strong):** In some areas where jihadists are operating, Muslim religious leaders teach the same radical sentiment. These religious leaders provide a platform for the jihadists to have a strong presence in the community.
- **Clan leaders (Strong):** Islamic oppression in Mali is combined with ethnic motivation as well. Tuareg and Fulani group leaders are also drivers of persecution, opposing any advance of Christianity in Mali. A country expert states: "Indigenous ethnic communities with minor-

ity Christian numbers have complained of persecution by Fulani and Tuareg herders who they accuse of destroying their farms and means of subsistence, including the looting of food stores, as well as maiming and killing them and burning their houses."

- **Citizens (people from the broader society) (Strong):** Society in general does not see Christianity positively. This is particularly true in the case of converts.
- **Family (Strong):** This varies from family to family. However, it is common for extended family members to exert pressure and use violence against family members who decide to join Christianity (or simply leave Islam).

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Organized crime networks (Very strong):** There are several criminal organizations operating in Mali. The country's geographical situation with its vast desert and arid areas has helped the expansion of these organizations. These criminal networks are involved with radical Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) and persecute Christians.
- **Violent religious groups (Very strong):** Militant Islamic groups such as al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) are active mainly in the northern part of the country. These jihadists have established or joined already established crime syndicates. Through these syndicates, they are able to buy weapons, carry out kidnappings and act with impunity.
- **Government officials (Medium):** Corrupt government officials who turn a blind eye to incidents targeting Christians are also a factor behind persecution.

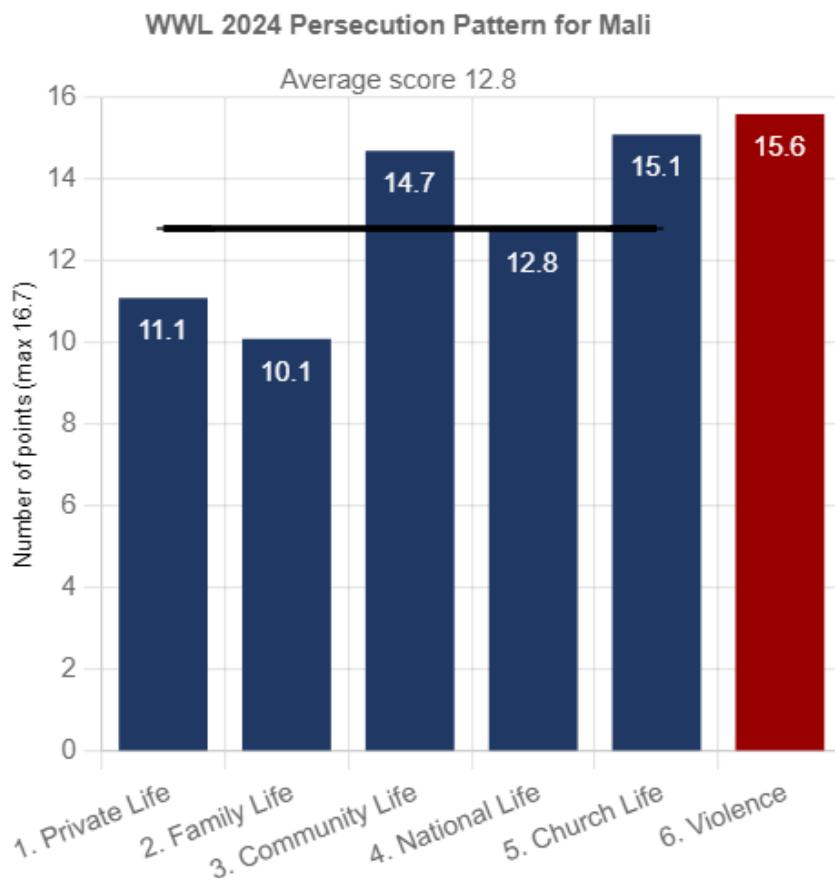
Drivers of Clan oppression

- **Clan leaders (Strong):** Most ethnic tribal leaders (such as Tuareg tribal leaders) are involved in the persecution of Christians. Traditional animist tribal leaders in the south are also hostile toward Christians and attempt to prevent the advancement of Christianity. They especially target Christian groups that try to remove elements of African traditional beliefs from Christian expressions of faith.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials (Medium):** In the last two years, there has been an increasingly visible anti-Christian/anti-Western sentiment among some government officials. These officials speak out against Christians who try to bring to public attention cases of injustice and atrocities committed in the country. These officials label Christian groups doing that as 'pro-French'. This label is dangerous in the current political discourse in the country.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 persecution pattern for Mali shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Mali is very high at 12.8 points, a rise from 12.3 points in WWL 2023.
- Pressure is strongest and at an extreme level in the *Church sphere* (15.1 points) and *Community sphere* (14.7 points).
- The level of violence against Christians is extreme with a score of 15.6 points - an increase from 15.0 points in WWL 2023.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the "WWL Scoring example" in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.00 points)

Conversion is a serious concern for individuals with a Muslim background, as jihadists actively seek to rid the country of non-believers. Radical Islamic ideology is pushing society towards an ultra-conservative state. This radical shift has made conversions perilous.

Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.00 points)

In regions where jihadist groups enforce strict Sharia law and exert influence, expressing one's faith in written form is dangerous for Christians. The severe restrictions have led many to conceal their religious identity or seek refuge in IDP camps, while online platforms also pose dangers, putting converts in particular at risk if they openly share their beliefs.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.00 points)

Christians face grave risks when it comes to openly displaying Christian images or symbols. As jihadist groups strive to enforce their interpretation of Sharia law and extend their influence, Christians are compelled to conceal their faith as they navigate a restricted private life. Many find themselves compelled to adopt an outward appearance of non-religiosity or even become internally displaced persons (IDPs) in search of safety. The presence of these extremist groups in certain areas, along with their sway over local communities, has led to the destruction of Christian properties, schools, and health centers, further stifling the expression of Christian faith.

Block 1.6: It has been risky for Christians to access Christian radio or TV, or Christian material on the Internet. (2.75 points)

Christians face significant risks when attempting to access Christian radio, TV, or material on the Internet. The rise of jihadist groups aiming to enforce an uncompromising interpretation of Sharia law has severely curtailed the private lives of Christians, pushing many to the margins of society or displacing them altogether as IDPs.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.50 points)

Children of Christians in Mali are singled out for discrimination because of their parents' faith, leading to various challenges in their education and cultural practices. Christian families grapple with restrictions on practicing their faith within an environment marked by Islamic dominance, clan pressure and organized crime, resulting in discrimination and harassment against these children and affecting family life in Mali.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.00 points)

Parents in Mali are hindered in their efforts to raise their children in accordance with their Christian beliefs due to significant limitations. The closure and destruction of many Christian schools restricts children's access to Christian education, making it difficult for parents to instill their religious values in a suitable learning environment.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.00 points)

The pressure on Christian children in Mali to attend Islamic schools significantly impacts their ability to grow in their faith. This influence restricts their access to a faith-aligned education, potentially eroding their Christian beliefs and values over time.

Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (3.00 points)

Convert spouses frequently experience prolonged isolation, often being denied custody for extended periods, and in some cases, they are compelled to flee for their personal safety. The challenges faced by convert spouses can thus include enduring years of separation.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.75 points)

Christians in various regions, notably in the northern, eastern, and western areas, face severe persecution due to their faith. This includes harassment, discrimination, expulsion, and obstruction of daily lives due to threats, especially for converts. The presence of jihadist groups exacerbates the hostile environment, leading to denial of resources, fair treatment, and participation in public discourse. Despite government efforts, the strong support for the new draft constitution in the June 2023 referendum highlights the ongoing marginalization and isolation of Christians, preventing them from living ordinary lives without fear and discrimination.

Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (3.75 points)

In Mali's challenging environment, Christians face intense surveillance and monitoring by their local communities and private groups, leading to reporting of their whereabouts and activities. This is part of a broader strategy to control the Christian population, particularly converts, in regions under strong jihadist group influence, perpetuating fear, suspicion, and isolation despite government democratization efforts and a new draft constitution.

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.75 points)

Christians in Mali, particularly converts, face the grave threat of abduction and forced marriage by extremist groups, especially in the northern, eastern, and western regions.

Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.75 points)

In northern, eastern, and western regions, Christians, including converts, are systematically excluded from accessing crucial community resources due to their faith. The expansion of these extremist groups further deepens the challenges faced by all Christians, leaving them marginalized and often cut off from community resources that are essential for their well-being and survival.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)

In Mali's turbulent state of affairs, Christians face obstacles when expressing their views publicly, given the ongoing jihadist activity and geopolitical influences. The coup has shifted Mali's focus towards confrontation with Western powers, diverting attention from addressing the persistent jihadist insurgency. The arrival of the Wagner mercenary group adds complexity. Wagner itself limits Christians' ability to freely express their views amidst security challenges and doubts about the effectiveness of current strategies.

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.50 points)

While there are no explicit laws in Mali that directly contradict the rights outlined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there are practical challenges that fundamentally undermine these rights. Instances include restrictions on having places of worship and difficulties in possessing Christian materials at home.

Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Christians in Mali face significant limitations in traveling for faith-related reasons, particularly outside Bamako. There are serious risks associated with such travel, including the potential threats of kidnapping or even death.

Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)

Christians have faced discrimination when engaging with authorities, including local administration, government, and the army, for faith-related reasons. This discrimination has hindered their ability to interact with these entities in a fair and equal manner, further underscoring the challenges they encounter in practicing their faith while at the same time getting fair treatment.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.75 points)

Christian churches face monitoring, hindrance, disturbance, and obstruction due to the increasing influence of jihadist groups. These extremist elements systematically target churches, leading to the destruction of places of worship, creating a hostile environment that hinders congregations from gathering for worship and other communal activities. Church leaders' mobility is severely restricted, impacting their ability to provide spiritual guidance and support across different locations. Distributing religious materials is also perilous, exposing individuals to violence and contributing to the larger pattern of persecution against Christians in the country.

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.75 points)

The plight of Christians has grown increasingly dire due to the escalating influence of jihadist groups, severely obstructing their ability to build, renovate, or reclaim church buildings and historical places of worship. These extremist elements have systematically targeted churches, leading to their destruction and severely limiting spaces for congregational worship and religious activities. Church leaders, vital to the spiritual well-being of their communities, face restrictions on mobility, limiting their ability to oversee construction projects or advocate for the reclamation of historical religious sites. This hostile environment has made it nearly impossible for Christians to undertake the crucial task of rebuilding or renovating damaged churches, effectively erasing their physical presence in some parts of the country.

Block 5.4: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities inside their place of worship. (3.75 points)

In Mali, the influence of jihadist groups has severely hindered churches from organizing Christian activities within their places of worship. The systematic destruction of churches limits spaces for congregational worship and disrupts their ability to conduct essential religious activities.

Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.75 points)

In many areas of Mali, the influence of jihadist groups severely hinders churches from organizing any Christian activities at all. Visible activities outside church buildings would be seen in many areas as a provocation and probably lead to attacks.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced

Possible reasons for this may be:

- Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.
- In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.
- If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.
- In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

3. The use of symbolic numbers

In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Mali: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	10 *	10 *
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	0	0
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10 *	10
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	10 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	1000 *	100 *
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	10 *
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	10
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	100
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	0

5 Year trends

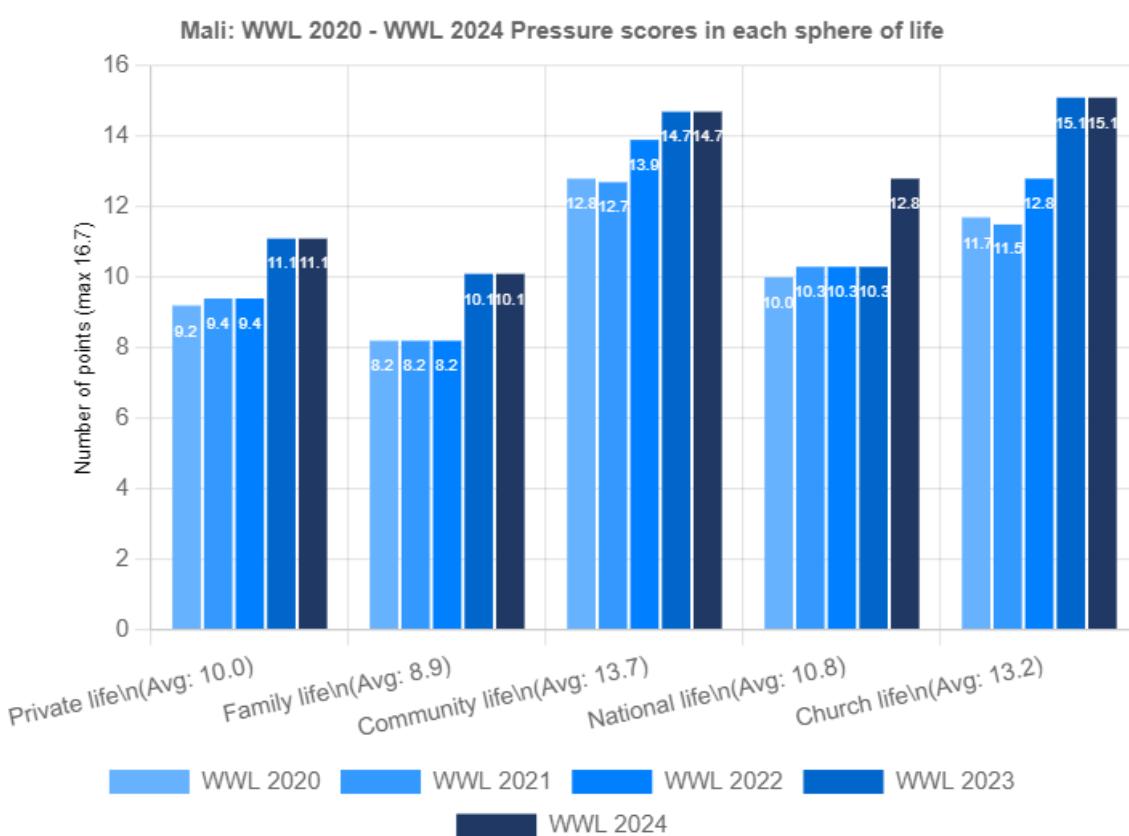
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

As can be seen in the table below, in WWL 2020–2021, pressure seemed stable at the high level of 10.4 points but rose in WWL 2022, and then again more sharply in WWL 2023 and WWL 2024. This is a worrying sign that Islamic militants and other intolerant groups have maintained their influence in the country, and the weak state structure is making their expansion easier.

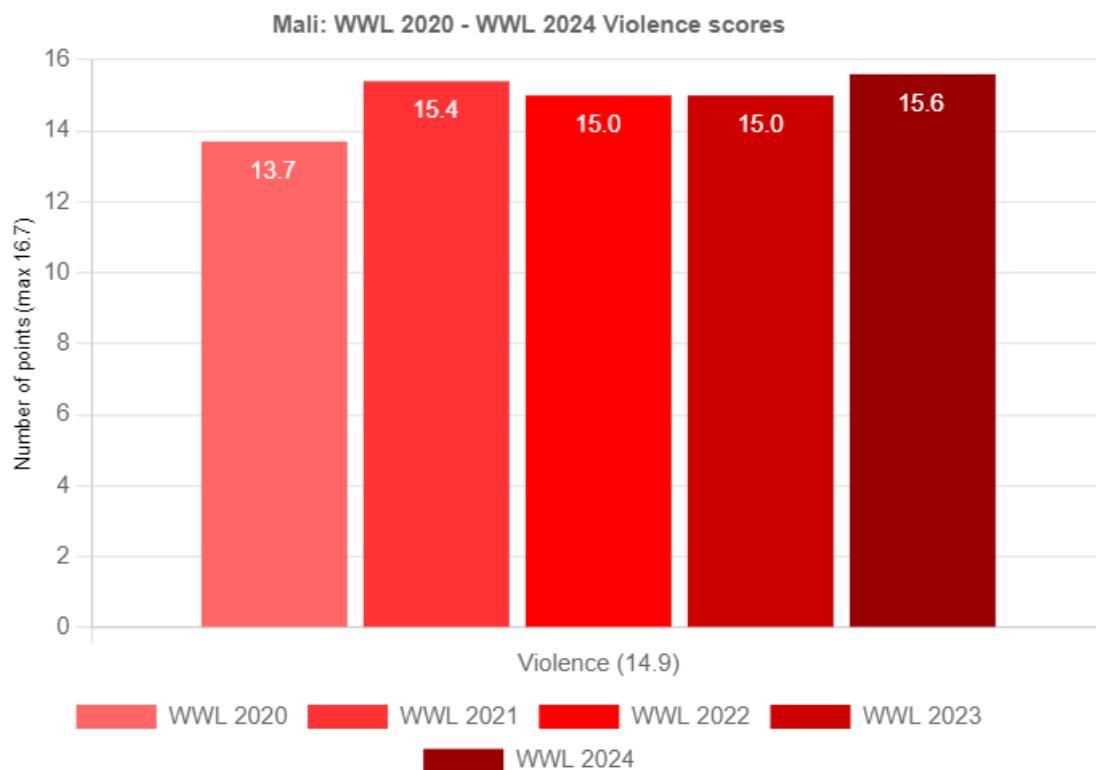
Mali: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024		Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024		12.8
2023		12.3
2022		10.9
2021		10.4
2020		10.4

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



As can be seen in the chart above, after a more or less consistent rise in score for Community and Church life, this appears now to have levelled off at 14.7 and 15.1 points respectively. Public space for Christians is shrinking. This is partly and indirectly helped by the weak and fragile central government, which is unable to protect Christians from jihadist influence and attack. The persistent coups have not helped to mitigate the situation. The mounting pressure on Christians in Mali has forced many to flee their homes across several regions. Numerous churches have closed down, alongside Christian schools and various businesses, signaling a challenging environment for the Christian community.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The data depicted in the chart above illustrates a persistent very high/extreme level of violence in Mali targeting Christians. Following a score of 13.7 points in WWL 2020, the violence rating consistently remained at 15.0 points or above, reaching its peak in WWL 2024.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Mali has been battling an Islamist insurgency and the country's military rulers, who seized power in coups in 2020 and 2021 and who teamed up with Russia's Wagner mercenary group in 2021. There has been a resurgence of attacks by Islamic militants since late 2019, within a broader context of instability. Mali is experiencing political upheaval and escalating security concerns which have exacerbated trends of conflict-related sexual violence, in particular in the northern and central regions. There has been rising concern over Wagner's activities in Mali, particularly

in regard to the use of violence against women to spread terror among populations ([Reuters, 8 August 2023](#)).

The UN warns that the sexual violence by Mali's troops and their foreign security partners is "systematic" (Reuters, 8 August 2023). There has been a spike in the number of cases of conflict-related sexual violence, despite underreporting owing to stigma, insecurity and the constraints placed on humanitarian access, compounded by the restrictions and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic ([UN, Mali, 30 March 2021](#)).

The proliferation of illicit small arms and a surge of intercommunal violence has propelled civilian displacement, making women and girls more vulnerable to trafficking (UN, Mali, 30 March 2021) Militant groups kidnap girls and sometimes even married women, in order to attempt to forcibly 'marry' or 'remarry' them to some of their members, a life of sexual slavery. Whilst this does not affect Christian girls alone, it is considered a common tactic used by Islamic militants to spread Islam, and is a widely feared threat for female Christians. A country expert commented: "In many places, Christian girls are being pushed into marriages with Muslim men on a large scale because of the rise of radical Islam and a lack of security."

Despite national laws protecting women and girls, traditional and cultural practices as well as gender norms, mean that Christian women are especially vulnerable within the Islamic culture. They experience social rejection and when facing persecution, the children suffer repercussions of whatever befalls their parents. When parents are separated, or fathers are killed or some other loss of subsistence income occurs, some Christian girls feel they have no option to survive by prostitution which also increases their vulnerability to human trafficking. Widows are particularly vulnerable to this.

In Mali, female converts to Christianity are most vulnerable to pressure and violence for their faith. They are exposed to harassment and threats, sexual abuse, physical violence and even killings. A country expert described a situation where a woman in Bamako was subject to death threats from her husband because of her conversion to Christianity. The situation escalated when he tried to kill her with his car.

Single female converts will likely be forcibly married to a Muslim, in order to reduce the shame brought upon the family. Those that converted after getting married face forced divorce and the possibility of losing their children. This is particularly common in northern Mali. Women have also reportedly been expelled from their homes. Even where it is tolerated that they live in the vicinity, they may not be supported or fed, making them extremely vulnerable. Although there are national laws that protect women and girls in general, traditional and cultural practices and gender norms make women more vulnerable to such treatment. Indeed, the human rights violations associated with Mali's political insecurity and insurgency occur within a context of structural gender inequality and harmful social norms, with 89% of women and girls between 15 and 49 years of age having undergone female genital mutilation (UN, Mali, 30 March 2021). and 54% of girls being married before the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides, 2022).

As a result of the traumatizing pressures that Christian women and girls face, families and communities are weakened.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Forced divorce
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

As violent militant attacks continue in a volatile manner across Mali, Christian men and boys are particularly subject to death-threats and violent, physical attacks because of their faith. They are subject to numerous forms of intolerance, discrimination, and violent hostilities including gender-based violence, sexual assault, forced recruitment into armed groups and torture. Church leaders are also closely monitored and face strict restrictions on movement within remote communities. Targeted attacks on Christian homes and businesses are effectively being used to impoverish families. For men, especially Christian leaders, this dire situation is exacerbated by the targeted social rejection and constant violent harassment of their families. A country expert commented that "... children, and others who are associated with Christian leaders are targeted." Many have been forced to flee as a result. Converts face the greatest level of persecution in this regard and married males may additionally be forcibly divorced by their wives.

Within the context of widespread poverty and [ongoing violence](#) in one of Africa's poorest nations, men and boys are exposed to recruitment by jihadist groups where, according to reports, they will be forcibly converted to Islam (Human Rights Watch, 27 October 2022). They may also be abducted by such groups and killed. Those living in rural and remote areas in northern parts of the country are especially vulnerable to forced recruitment into violent groups. This has a devastating effect on their families and fellow Christians who are traumatized by such persecution. In an attempt to protect Christian boys, they may be separated from their parents and moved to safer areas, but this creates other challenges. Whilst divorce is not a common practice, country experts report that when a man converts from Islam to Christianity, their families force the spouse to leave them. Non-convert Christians can even be killed for marrying converts: According to one report, a Christian man was killed by militants for his faith and for marrying an ex-Muslim.

The loss of Christian men and boys financially weakens families, as males are the primary providers in Mali. It also weakens the health of the Church in Mali, making the Christian communities more vulnerable and fragile.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Those adhering to indigenous traditional belief systems also form a religious minority in Mali. Although historically such beliefs have co-existed with Islam, with the rise of more militant and intolerant versions of Islam, that coexistence has been seriously challenged. The jihadists have also gone to the extent of holding mass lectures for the people.

The US State Department (IRFR 2022) reported that "local Shia often faced discrimination from followers of different schools of Islam that perceive Shia practices to be incorrect."

Future outlook

Note about the current government situation

Mali undertook a constitutional referendum, affirming its status as a secular state. The government continued accusations directed at France, alleging interference in Mali's internal affairs. Furthermore, the country ordered the departure of UN peacekeepers, a withdrawal completed in 2023. Concurrently, the presence of the Wagner Group has been increasingly entrenched, impacting Mali's security and economic landscape. These dynamics, coupled with the emergence of a National Transitional Council since 2020, might lead to a scenario where the central government weakens, aligning with the hopes of radical Islamic groups who thrive on governmental fragility within the Sahel region. This situation presents a profoundly unsettling prospect for the entire region.

Apart from the above consideration, here is the outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression

Christians in Mali have suffered greatly from the chaos and instability in the country caused by violent Islamic groups. Islamic militants have worked hard to destroy evidence of any Christian presence in the northern part of the country. The restoration of law and order and of government authority in the northern part of the country are a prerequisite for any improvement in the situation for Christians. Jihadists have stepped up their attacks, making the country unsafe for Christians, even in the capital city, Bamako. Communal violence has also continued. The presence of international troops was used by Islamic militants as a recruiting tool. As it stands, *Islamic oppression* will continue to affect Christians in the country and in the region for many years to come. It is possible that jihadists, especially those who are leading mosques, will become influential political kingmakers. In fact one of the leading figures of Muslim religious leaders made a precondition for schools in the northern part of the country to reopen. He demands that those schools must have Arabic and Quran teaching as an integral part of the school curriculum. Whether this demand is going to be met remains to be seen, but what is known is that the situation in the country is a fertile ground for jihadists to even expand more. The more they expanded, the more they radicalize the general population as well.

Organized corruption and crime

Islamic militants in the country survive through the existence of crime cartels and use kidnapping for ransom as a means of generating income. Jihadists also control the routes for human trafficking and trafficking in goods (especially gold). There are also reports that Islamic fighters are participating in drug trafficking by linking up with criminal cartels in Latin America. Due to the current absence of law and order, this will likely continue unabated. This is a very powerful tool for the jihadists, as they are using the income to fund their operations and purchase weapons and ammunition. The Russia-Ukraine war, which is highly affecting African countries in terms of food, energy and fertilizer prices, is also affecting Mali. Tackling this Persecution engine will require addressing the governance crisis. If the country remains weak and the threats posed by the jihadists are not tackled, organized crime and widespread corruption will remain a potent threat to Christians in the region.

Clan oppression

Ethnicity, religion and politics overlap at times. Jihadists and religious leaders both use ethnicity and religion (Islam) to influence and control their supporters. There is also communal violence as a result of ethnic conflict, which can result in Christians being targeted. This situation will likely continue.

Dictatorial paranoia

There have been frequent changes in government, and the current military rulers in power are trying to align the country with Russia and China while opposing the French and its allies. Despite the help of Russian mercenaries (i.e., the Wagner group), the jihadists are still very potent in limiting the function of the government. In June 2023, a referendum on the content of the constitution was conducted. If the leadership follows what is included in the constitution, the possibility of civilian rule and democracy is there; however, if the government remains in power in its current form and approach toward civil society and Christians, the likelihood of 'increased persecution' is high.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (Reuters, 8 August 2023). -
<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/malis-troops-foreign-partners-target-women-spread-terror-un-report-2023-08-08/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: (UN, Mali, 30 March 2021). -
<https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/countries/mali/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: ongoing violence -
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/27/mali-coordinated-massacres-islamist-armed-groups>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/reports/africa-recent-upsurge-in-military-coups>

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Mali>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- [https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Sahel-Rising-Islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-Christians-in-the-region-2016.pdf.](https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Sahel-Rising-Islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-Christians-in-the-region-2016.pdf)