

Mali



The landlocked West African country of Mali - one of the poorest in the world - experienced rapid economic growth after the 1990s, coupled with a flourishing democracy and relative social stability. This all hung in the balance in early 2012, when the steady collapse of state control over the north of the country was followed by an inconclusive military coup and West African regional plans for

armed intervention with UN backing and some European support.

For several decades after independence from France in 1960, Mali suffered droughts, rebellions, a coup and 23 years of military dictatorship until democratic elections in 1992.

The core of ancient empires going back to the fourth century, Mali was conquered by the French in the middle of the 19th century.

After a brief experiment in federation with Senegal, Mali became independent in 1960.

Although swathes of Mali are barren, the country is self-sufficient in food thanks to the fertile Niger river basin in the south and east.

It is one of Africa's major cotton producers, and has lobbied against subsidies to cotton farmers in richer countries, particularly the US.

A chronic foreign trade deficit makes it nonetheless heavily dependent on foreign aid and remittances from Malians working abroad.

Islamists capture north

In the early 1990s the nomadic Tuareg of the north began an insurgency over land and cultural rights that persists to this day, despite central government attempts at military and negotiated solutions.

The insurgency gathered pace in 2007, and was exacerbated by an influx of arms from the 2011 Libyan civil war.

The Saharan branch of al-Qaeda was quick to move into this increasingly lawless area, and seized control of the Tuareg north after the March 2012 military coup, effectively seceding from the rest of Mali and establishing a harsh form of Islamic law.

The West African regional grouping Ecowas agreed to launch a coordinated military expedition to recapture the north at a meeting in Nigeria in November, with UN backing. Preparations are expected to take several months.

Music stars

Despite its political travails, Mali is renowned worldwide for having produced some of the stars of African music, most notably Salif Keita. The annual Festival in the Desert celebrates this talent.



The Great Mosque of Djenné is the largest mud brick building in the world and is a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site

- **Full name:** The Republic of Mali
- **Population:** 15.8 million (UN, 2011)
- **Capital:** Bamako
- **Area:** 1.25 million sq km (482,077 sq miles)
- **Major languages:** French, Bambara, Berber, Arabic
- **Major religions:** Islam, indigenous beliefs
- **Life expectancy:** 51 years (men), 53 years (women) (UN)
- **Monetary unit:** 1 CFA (Communaute Financiere Africaine) franc = 100 centimes
- **Main exports:** Cotton, gold, livestock
- **GNI per capita:** US \$610 (World Bank, 2011)
- **Internet domain:** .ml
- **International dialling code:** +223

Interim president: Dioncounda Traore



Dioncounda Traore was inaugurated in April 2012, marking a return to civilian rule after the military coup in March that toppled his predecessor, Amadou Toumani Toure.

Army officers, led by Captain Amadou Sanogo, said they were taking over because of Mr Toure's mishandling of a Tuareg-led insurrection in the north.

Under a deal with the military brokered by regional powers, Mr Traore named a prime minister, Cheick Modibo Diarra to head a "unity administration" including the military until new elections can be held.

Captain Sanogo agreed in May 2012 to let President Traore remain in office for a year to oversee the full transition to civilian rule.

Mr Traore, a former speaker of parliament, vowed to respect the constitution and preserve democracy. He also won UN Security Council backing for an expeditionary force by the West African Ecowas grouping to oust Tuareg Islamist separatists in the north, which is expected to be launched in early 2013.

Discontent among military leaders about the Ecowas intervention plan boiled over in December, however, and led to the resignation of Prime Minister Diarra - a strong proponent of the expeditionary force. President Traore quickly appointed an aide, Django Sissoko, to the post, but faces possible US and UN sanctions over the alleged army intervention and the derailment of the Ecowas plan.

Ex-president Amadou Toumani Toure is known as Mali's "soldier of democracy"



Amadou Toumani Toure, dubbed the "soldier of democracy", was an army general who was credited with rescuing Mali from military dictatorship and establishing democracy.

He came to power in 1991 after overthrowing military ruler Moussa Traore, and won presidential polls in 2002 and 2007.

He had been due to step aside at the end of his current term. Presidential elections were to have been held in April 2012.

Mr Toure formally resigned after the coup and left Mali for Senegal, although his supporters continued attacks on the new authorities in the capital, Bamako, into May.

A chronology of key events:

11th century - Empire of Mali becomes dominant force in the upper Niger basin, its period of greatness beginning under King Sundiata in 1235 and peaking under Mansa Musa who ruled between 1312 and 1337 and extended empire to the Atlantic.

14th-15th centuries - Decline of the Empire of Mali, which loses dominance of the gold trade to the Songhai Empire, which makes its base in Timbuktu - historically important as a focal point of Islamic culture and a trading post on the trans-Saharan caravan route.

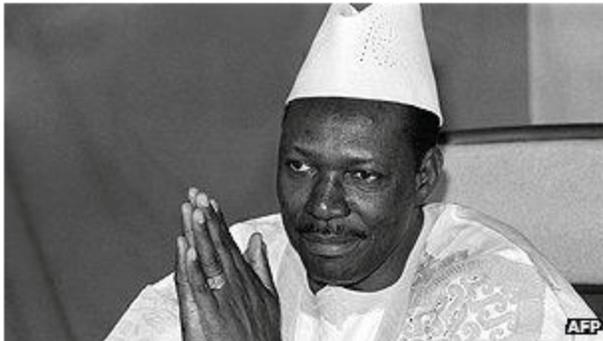
Late 16th century - Moroccans defeat the Songhai, make Timbuktu their capital and rule until their decline in the 18th century.

19th century - French colonial advance, and Islamic religious wars which lead to creation of theocratic states.

1898 - France completes conquest of Mali, then called French Sudan.

1959 - Mali and Senegal form the Mali Federation, which splits a year later.

Independence



Moussa Traore took power in a 1968 coup and ruled until 1991

Traore re-elected president.

1985 - Mali and Burkina Faso engage in border fighting.

1991 - Traore deposed in coup and replaced by transitional committee.

Democracy

1992 - Alpha Konare wins multiparty elections to become Mali's first democratically-elected president.

1995 - Peace agreement with Tuareg tribes leads to return of thousands of refugees.

1960 - Mali becomes independent with Modibo Keita as president. It becomes a one-party, socialist state and withdraws from the Franc zone.

1968 - Keita ousted in coup led by Lieutenant Moussa Traore.

1977 - Protests erupt following Keita's death in prison.

1979 - New constitution provides for elections;

1999 - Former President Moussa Traore sentenced to death on corruption charges, but has his sentence commuted to life imprisonment by President Konare.

1999 October - Several people killed in fighting in the north between members of the Kunta tribe and an Arab community over local disputes.

2000 February - Konare appoints former International Monetary Fund official Mande Sidibe prime minister.

2001 December - Manantali dam in southwest produces its first megawatt of hydro-electricity, 13 years after it was completed.

Amadou Toure

2002 April - Amadou Toumani Toure elected president by landslide. Poll is marred by allegations of fraud.

2002 September - France says it will cancel 40% of debts owed to it by Mali, amounting to some 80m euros (\$79m, £51m).

2002 October - Government resigns, without public explanation. New "government of national unity" is unveiled.

2003 August - Clashes between rival Muslim groups in west kill at least 10 people.

2004 April - Prime Minister Mohamed Ag Amani resigns and is replaced by Ousmane Issoufi Maiga.

2004 September - Agriculture minister says severe locust plague has cut cereal harvest by up to 45%.

2005 June - World Food Programme warns of severe food shortages, the result of drought and locust infestations in 2004.

Mali's popular annual Desert Festival - described as a Saharan Woodstock - was moved closer to Timbuktu because of security concerns

2006 June - The government signs an Algerian-brokered peace deal with Tuareg rebels seeking greater autonomy for their northern desert region. The rebels looted weapons in the town of Kidal in May, raising fears of a new rebellion.

2007 April - President Toure wins a second five-year term in elections.

2007 July - The ruling coalition, Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ADP), strengthens its hold on parliament in elections.

Rebel activity

2007 August - Suspected Tuareg rebels abduct government soldiers in separate incidents near the Niger and Algerian borders.

2008 May - Tuareg rebels kill 17 soldiers in attack on an army post in the northeast, despite a ceasefire agreed a month earlier.

2008 December - At least 20 people are killed and several taken hostage in an attack by Tuareg rebels on a military base in northern Mali.

2009 February - Government says the army has taken control of all the bases of the most active Tuareg rebel group. A week later, 700 rebels surrender their weapons in ceremony marking their return to the peace process.



Figure 1 Conflict in the north of the country prompted thousands to flee

because of security fears.

2009 May - Algeria begins sending military equipment to Mali in preparation for a joint operation against Islamic militants linked to al-Qaeda.

2009 August - New law boosts women's rights, prompts some protests.

2010 January - Annual music event - Festival in the Desert - is moved from a desert oasis to Timbuktu

Terror challenge

2010 April - Mali, Algeria, Mauritania and Niger set up joint command to tackle threat of terrorism.

2012 January - Fears of new Tuareg rebellion following attacks on northern towns which prompt civilians to flee into Mauritania.

Political crisis - 2012



President is ousted in coup, Tuareg rebels and Islamists seize north of country and declare independence

2012 March - Military officers depose President Toure ahead of the April presidential elections, accusing him of failing to deal effectively with the Tuareg rebellion. African Union suspends Mali.

2012 April - Tuareg rebels seize control of northern Mali, declare independence.

Military hands over to a civilian interim government, led by President Dioncounda Traore.

2012 May - Junta reasserts control after an alleged coup attempt by supporters of ousted President Toure in Bamako.

Pro-junta protesters storm presidential compound and beat Mr Traore unconscious.

The Tuareg MNLA and Islamist Ansar Dine rebel groups merge and declare northern Mali to be an Islamic state. Ansar Dine begins to impose Islamic law in Timbuktu. Al-Qaeda in North Africa endorses the deal.

2012 June-July - Ansar Dine and its Al-Qaeda ally turn on the MNLA and capture the main northern cities of Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao. They begin to destroy many Muslim shrines that offend their puritan views.

2012 August - Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra forms a new government of national unity in order to satisfy regional demands for a transition from military-dominated rule. The cabinet of 31 ministers includes five seen as close to coup leader Capt Amadou Sanogo.



2012 Autumn-Winter - Northern Islamist rebels consolidate their hold on the north. They seize strategically important town of Douentza in September, crossing into the central part of Mali and closer to the government-held south-west. In November they say they and al-Qaeda fighters capture Menaka, a town on the border with Niger, from the Azawad Tuareg rebels.

2012 November - The West African regional grouping Ecowas agrees to launch a coordinated military expedition to recapture the north at a meeting in Nigeria, with UN and African Union backing. Preparations are expected to take several months.

2012 December - Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra resigns, allegedly under pressure from army leaders who oppose plans for Ecowas military intervention. President Traore appoints a presidential official, Django Sissoko, to succeed him. The UN and US threaten sanctions over the move.
