World
Watch
Research

# Mali: Full Country Dossier

January 2023

OpenDoors
Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

# Contents

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2023

| Rank | Country | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2023 | Total Score WWL 2022 | Total Score WWL 2021 | Total Score WWL 2020 | Total Score WWL 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | North Korea | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 14.4 | 98 | 96 | 94 | 94 | 94 |
| 2 | Somalia | 16.5 | 16.7 | 16.6 | 16.6 | 16.6 | 8.7 | 92 | 91 | 92 | 92 | 91 |
| 3 | Yemen | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 5.9 | 89 | 88 | 87 | 85 | 86 |
| 4 | Eritrea | 14.6 | 14.9 | 15.5 | 15.9 | 15.7 | 12.2 | 89 | 88 | 88 | 87 | 86 |
| 5 | Libya | 15.6 | 15.5 | 15.9 | 16.1 | 16.3 | 9.1 | 88 | 91 | 92 | 90 | 87 |
| 6 | Nigeria | 13.8 | 13.8 | 14.6 | 14.8 | 14.4 | 16.7 | 88 | 87 | 85 | 80 | 80 |
| 7 | Pakistan | 13.4 | 13.8 | 14.8 | 14.8 | 12.9 | 16.7 | 86 | 87 | 88 | 88 | 87 |
| 8 | Iran | 14.5 | 14.6 | 13.8 | 15.8 | 16.5 | 10.7 | 86 | 85 | 86 | 85 | 85 |
| 9 | Afghanistan | 15.4 | 15.7 | 15.4 | 16.1 | 16.6 | 4.6 | 84 | 98 | 94 | 93 | 94 |
| 10 | Sudan | 14.1 | 14.2 | 14.9 | 14.9 | 15.5 | 9.4 | 83 | 79 | 79 | 85 | 87 |
| 11 | India | 12.3 | 13.1 | 13.0 | 14.8 | 13.3 | 15.7 | 82 | 82 | 83 | 83 | 83 |
| 12 | Syria | 13.2 | 14.1 | 13.6 | 14.1 | 14.1 | 11.3 | 80 | 78 | 81 | 82 | 82 |
| 13 | Saudi Arabia | 15.2 | 15.3 | 14.9 | 15.8 | 16.7 | 2.4 | 80 | 81 | 78 | 79 | 77 |
| 14 | Myanmar | 12.5 | 11.6 | 13.9 | 13.9 | 12.9 | 15.4 | 80 | 79 | 74 | 73 | 71 |
| 15 | Maldives | 15.4 | 15.3 | 13.8 | 16.0 | 16.4 | 0.2 | 77 | 77 | 77 | 78 | 78 |
| 16 | China | 12.9 | 10.0 | 12.7 | 14.5 | 15.6 | 11.1 | 77 | 76 | 74 | 70 | 65 |
| 17 | Mali | 11.1 | 10.1 | 14.7 | 10.3 | 15.1 | 15.0 | 76 | 70 | 67 | 66 | 68 |
| 18 | Iraq | 14.1 | 14.6 | 14.0 | 14.8 | 13.9 | 4.6 | 76 | 78 | 82 | 76 | 79 |
| 19 | Algeria | 14.1 | 14.1 | 11.5 | 13.7 | 15.1 | 4.8 | 73 | 71 | 70 | 73 | 70 |
| 20 | Mauritania | 14.5 | 14.2 | 13.3 | 14.1 | 14.2 | 1.3 | 72 | 70 | 71 | 68 | 67 |
| 21 | Uzbekistan | 14.9 | 12.7 | 13.9 | 12.7 | 15.6 | 1.5 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 73 | 74 |
| 22 | Colombia | 11.8 | 8.9 | 13.1 | 11.3 | 10.4 | 15.4 | 71 | 68 | 67 | 62 | 58 |
| 23 | Burkina Faso | 9.4 | 9.7 | 12.5 | 9.6 | 13.8 | 15.6 | 71 | 68 | 67 | 66 | 48 |
| 24 | CAR | 10.3 | 8.6 | 13.9 | 9.6 | 12.2 | 15.6 | 70 | 68 | 66 | 68 | 70 |
| 25 | Vietnam | 11.8 | 9.6 | 12.8 | 14.6 | 14.4 | 6.9 | 70 | 71 | 72 | 72 | 70 |
| 26 | Turkmenistan | 14.5 | 11.3 | 13.6 | 14.1 | 15.7 | 0.6 | 70 | 69 | 70 | 70 | 69 |
| 27 | Cuba | 13.1 | 8.3 | 13.1 | 13.2 | 14.9 | 7.0 | 70 | 66 | 62 | 52 | 49 |
| 28 | Niger | 9.4 | 9.5 | 14.5 | 7.7 | 13.1 | 15.4 | 70 | 68 | 62 | 60 | 52 |
| 29 | Morocco | 13.2 | 13.8 | 10.9 | 12.2 | 14.5 | 4.8 | 69 | 69 | 67 | 66 | 63 |
| 30 | Bangladesh | 12.6 | 10.7 | 12.8 | 11.3 | 10.6 | 10.7 | 69 | 68 | 67 | 63 | 58 |
| 31 | Laos | 11.7 | 10.2 | 13.3 | 14.2 | 14.0 | 5.0 | 68 | 69 | 71 | 72 | 71 |
| 32 | Mozambique | 9.3 | 8.5 | 13.9 | 8.4 | 12.5 | 15.6 | 68 | 65 | 63 | 43 | 43 |
| 33 | Indonesia | 11.3 | 12.0 | 11.6 | 11.1 | 9.2 | 12.8 | 68 | 68 | 63 | 60 | 65 |
| 34 | Qatar | 14.2 | 14.1 | 10.5 | 13.2 | 14.4 | 1.5 | 68 | 74 | 67 | 66 | 62 |
| 35 | Egypt | 12.7 | 13.5 | 11.6 | 12.1 | 10.8 | 7.0 | 68 | 71 | 75 | 76 | 76 |
| 36 | Tunisia | 12.0 | 12.8 | 10.4 | 12.0 | 13.5 | 6.5 | 67 | 66 | 67 | 64 | 63 |
| 37 | DRC | 8.0 | 7.9 | 12.6 | 9.7 | 13.0 | 15.6 | 67 | 66 | 64 | 56 | 55 |
| 38 | Mexico | 10.3 | 8.3 | 12.5 | 11.0 | 10.5 | 13.9 | 67 | 65 | 64 | 60 | 61 |
| 39 | Ethiopia | 9.9 | 10.3 | 13.1 | 10.4 | 12.1 | 10.6 | 66 | 66 | 65 | 63 | 65 |
| 40 | Bhutan | 13.2 | 12.3 | 11.6 | 13.9 | 14.2 | 1.1 | 66 | 67 | 64 | 61 | 64 |
| 41 | Turkey | 12.8 | 11.5 | 11.8 | 13.0 | 11.5 | 5.7 | 66 | 65 | 69 | 63 | 66 |
| 42 | Comoros | 12.7 | 14.0 | 11.2 | 12.4 | 14.2 | 1.5 | 66 | 63 | 62 | 57 | 56 |
| 43 | Malaysia | 12.8 | 14.3 | 11.4 | 12.2 | 11.1 | 3.9 | 66 | 63 | 63 | 62 | 60 |
| 44 | Tajikistan | 13.8 | 12.2 | 12.3 | 12.8 | 13.4 | 1.1 | 66 | 65 | 66 | 65 | 65 |
| 45 | Cameroon | 8.8 | 7.6 | 12.6 | 7.2 | 13.1 | 15.9 | 65 | 65 | 64 | 60 | 54 |
| 46 | Brunei | 14.8 | 14.6 | 10.1 | 10.9 | 14.4 | 0.4 | 65 | 64 | 64 | 63 | 63 |
| 47 | Oman | 14.0 | 14.1 | 10.3 | 13.3 | 12.9 | 0.6 | 65 | 66 | 63 | 62 | 59 |
| 48 | Kazakhstan | 13.2 | 11.6 | 11.9 | 12.7 | 14.2 | 1.1 | 65 | 64 | 64 | 64 | 63 |
| 49 | Jordan | 13.0 | 14.0 | 10.5 | 12.3 | 12.7 | 2.0 | 65 | 66 | 64 | 64 | 65 |
| 50 | Nicaragua | 10.8 | 5.9 | 11.9 | 12.8 | 13.6 | 9.4 | 65 | 56 | 51 | 41 | 41 |

| Rank | Country | Private life | Family life | Community life | National life | Church life | Violence | Total Score WWL 2023 | Total Score WWL 2022 | Total Score WWL 2021 | Total Score WWL 2020 | Total Score WWL 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 51 | Kenya | 10.3 | 9.2 | 11.4 | 8.0 | 11.5 | 13.3 | 64 | 63 | 62 | 61 | 61 |
| 52 | Kuwait | 13.5 | 13.7 | 9.8 | 12.3 | 13.1 | 1.1 | 64 | 64 | 63 | 62 | 60 |
| 53 | Tanzania | 9.3 | 10.8 | 10.3 | 8.6 | 8.7 | 15.6 | 63 | 61 | 58 | 55 | 52 |
| 54 | UAE | 13.4 | 13.4 | 9.9 | 11.2 | 12.8 | 1.1 | 62 | 62 | 62 | 60 | 58 |
| 55 | Nepal | 12.0 | 9.8 | 9.4 | 13.0 | 12.6 | 4.4 | 61 | 64 | 66 | 64 | 64 |
| 56 | Djibouti | 12.3 | 12.6 | 12.7 | 10.1 | 12.3 | 0.6 | 60 | 59 | 56 | 56 | 56 |
| 57 | Palestinian Territories | 13.0 | 13.3 | 9.7 | 10.3 | 12.0 | 2.0 | 60 | 59 | 58 | 60 | 57 |
| 58 | Azerbaijan | 13.2 | 10.0 | 9.5 | 12.0 | 13.6 | 0.6 | 59 | 60 | 56 | 57 | 57 |
| 59 | Kyrgyzstan | 12.9 | 10.2 | 11.0 | 10.4 | 12.0 | 2.0 | 59 | 58 | 58 | 57 | 56 |
| 60 | Chad | 11.6 | 8.2 | 10.2 | 10.2 | 10.3 | 7.6 | 58 | 55 | 53 | 56 | 48 |
| 61 | Russian Federation | 12.3 | 7.9 | 10.3 | 11.8 | 12.8 | 2.0 | 57 | 56 | 57 | 60 | 60 |
| 62 | Sri Lanka | 12.8 | 9.1 | 10.6 | 11.3 | 9.5 | 3.9 | 57 | 63 | 62 | 65 | 58 |
| 63 | Rwanda | 9.4 | 7.7 | 9.0 | 10.4 | 11.7 | 8.9 | 57 | 50 | 42 | 42 | 41 |
| 64 | Venezuela | 6.0 | 4.6 | 11.7 | 10.2 | 11.4 | 11.7 | 56 | 51 | 39 | 42 | 41 |
| 65 | Burundi | 7.6 | 7.8 | 9.4 | 9.8 | 9.7 | 11.1 | 55 | 52 | 48 | 48 | 43 |
| 66 | Bahrain | 12.7 | 13.3 | 8.7 | 10.7 | 8.8 | 0.9 | 55 | 57 | 56 | 55 | 55 |
| 67 | Honduras | 7.1 | 5.0 | 11.9 | 7.6 | 9.8 | 11.9 | 53 | 48 | 46 | 39 | 38 |
| 68 | Angola | 6.8 | 6.7 | 8.1 | 11.5 | 11.4 | 7.2 | 52 | 51 | 46 | 43 | 42 |
| 69 | Uganda | 8.1 | 5.0 | 7.4 | 6.7 | 9.2 | 14.8 | 51 | 48 | 47 | 48 | 47 |
| 70 | Togo | 9.2 | 6.7 | 9.3 | 7.1 | 11.0 | 5.4 | 49 | 44 | 43 | 41 | 42 |
| 71 | Guinea | 10.3 | 7.5 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 10.5 | 3.0 | 48 | 43 | 47 | 45 | 46 |
| 72 | South Sudan | 5.7 | 4.4 | 7.0 | 6.3 | 7.6 | 15.0 | 46 | 43 | 43 | 44 | 44 |
| 73 | El Salvador | 7.7 | 4.2 | 10.6 | 7.4 | 9.1 | 6.7 | 46 | 45 | 42 | 38 | 30 |
| 74 | Ivory Coast | 12.0 | 6.5 | 8.7 | 5.9 | 8.0 | 3.3 | 44 | 42 | 42 | 42 | 43 |
| 75 | Gambia | 8.3 | 8.2 | 8.9 | 8.8 | 8.9 | 1.1 | 44 | 44 | 43 | 43 | 43 |
| 76 | Belarus | 9.5 | 3.8 | 4.8 | 9.4 | 12.1 | 3.3 | 43 | 33 | 30 | 28 | 35 |

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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 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the World Watch List Documentation page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

# WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Mali

## Brief country details

| Mali: Population (UN estimate for 2022) | Christians | Chr% |
|---|---|---|
| 21,474,000 | 490,000 | 2.3 |

*Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)*

## Map of country



| Mali: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|---|---|---|
| WWL 2023 | 76 | 17 |
| WWL 2022 | 70 | 24 |
| WWL 2021 | 67 | 28 |
| WWL 2020 | 66 | 29 |
| WWL 2019 | 68 | 24 |

*Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods*

## 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, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family |
| Organized corruption and crime | 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

When radical Islamic groups took control of the northern part of the country in 2012, churches were burned down and Christians had to flee. The displacement of Christians that occurred at that time still affects Christians who lost their homes and whose churches were destroyed. Although some Christians and congregations have returned to the north under police protection, they still live under the threat of attack by Islamic militants. In fact, the threat from jihadists has expanded into the south. Evangelistic activities in the north are especially risky and could lead to being attacked by radical Muslims. Christian missionaries operating in Mali also live under the constant threat of abduction by jihadists. Christians with a Muslim background risk violence (especially in the north) and pressure from their relatives and family members if their conversion to Christianity is discovered. This part of the country is also unsafe for NGOs to operate in. The country's institutions are breaking apart at a fast rate and this is encouraging jihadist groups to be more active in the country.

## 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 Islamists 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).
- *Abduction:* On 6 May 2022, unknown gunmen kidnapped a pastor from the village of Heremakono (Diabaly, Niono).

## Specific examples of positive developments

None

## 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&amp;s=08

# WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Mali

## Links for general background information

| Name | Quote Reference | Link | Last accessed on |
|---|---|---|---|
| Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries | AI country report 2021/22 (pp.245-247) | https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf | 9 June 2022 |
| BBC News country profile | BBC country profile | https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13881370 | 9 June 2022 |
| Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries | BTI report 2021 | https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/MLI | 9 June 2022 |
| CIA World Factbook | CIA Factbook | https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mali/ | 9 June 2022 |
| Crisis24 country report (Garda World) – covering 193 countries | Crisis24 country report | https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/mali | 9 June 2022 |
| Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries | EIU 2021 (p.58) | https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf | 9 June 2022 |
| FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries | FSI 2022 | https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/ | 22 July 2022 |
| Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – covering 29 countries, Mali not included | Democracy Index 2022 | https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores | |
| Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries | Global Freedom Index 2022 | https://freedomhouse.org/country/mali/freedom-world/2022 | 9 June 2022 |
| Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report (Mali is not included) | Freedom on the Net 2021 | https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores | |
| Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries | HRW 2022 country chapter | https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/mali | 9 June 2022 |
| Internet World Stats 2022 | IWS 2022 | https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ml | 9 June 2022 |
| RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries | World Press Freedom 2022 | https://rsf.org/en/mali | 9 June 2022 |
| Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries | CPI 2021 | https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/mli | 9 June 2022 |
| UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries | HDI profile | https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/MLI | 9 June 2022 |
| US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom (country profile) | IRFR 2021 | https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mali/ | 9 June 2022 |
| USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL, Mali not included | USCIRF 2022 | https://www.uscirf.gov/countries | |
| World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries | World Bank overview 2022 | https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mali/overview#1 | 9 June 2022 |
| World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries | World Bank profile | https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=MLI | 9 June 2022 |
| World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region) | Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (pp.56-57) | https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ssa.pdf | 9 June 2022 |

## 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 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*.

## 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 has been a major problem for the country. Although the country claimed its independence half a century ago, France continues 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 captured 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 possible withdrawal of French and UN forces (due to escalating tensions between the Malian government and multiple external actors in the region) and the consequent expansion of Islamic extremist insurgency could expose both Christian men and women to new levels of persecution (UN OCHA, April 2022).

**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. 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). 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. Girls Not Brides (accessed 9 August 2022) 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 (OECD, 2019).

# Religious landscape

| Mali: Religious context | Number of adherents | % |
|---|---|---|
| Christians | 490,000 | 2.3 |
| Muslim | 19,047,000 | 88.7 |
| Hindu | 0 | 0.0 |
| Buddhist | 0 | 0.0 |
| Ethno-religionist | 1,909,000 | 8.9 |
| Jewish | 0 | 0.0 |
| Bahai | 1,300 | 0.0 |
| Atheist | 520 | 0.0 |
| Agnostic | 25,300 | 0.1 |
| Other | 890 | 0.0 |
| *OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.* | | |

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

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 88.7% of the population are Muslim according to WCD 2022 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 Islamists, 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 Islamists took over. In the meantime, they destroyed churches and other Christian buildings. 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 2022 Macro Poverty Outlook for Sub-Saharan Africa (pp.56-57):

- *Economic growth:* "The economy grew by 3.1 percent, 0.1 percent in per capita terms, in 2021, driven by services and agriculture as the cotton sector recovered. Private consumption and public investment also rebounded." Outlook: "In 2022, the economy is expected to grow at 3.3 percent".
- *Inflation:* "Annual average inflation rose to 4 percent in 2021, reaching 8.9 percent (y/y) in December, driven by food (5.2 percent), particularly cereals (8.9 percent), and services." Outlook: "High levels of inflation will continue in 2022 but will normalize towards the regional target (2 percent) by 2024."

- *Import/Export:* "The current account deficit (CAD) widened in 2021 to 4.3 percent of GDP, as the terms of trade deteriorated following the gold price stabilization and oil price rise. Exports declined from lower gold and cotton exports, while imports rose from higher domestic demand." Outlook: "The CAD is projected to stabilize around 4.2 percent of GDP in 2022 and narrow to 3.5 per cent of GDP by 2025 with the easing of oil prices."
- *Fiscal deficit:* "The fiscal deficit stayed high, at 5.5 per cent of GDP". Outlook: "The fiscal deficit is expected to narrow to 4.5 percent of GDP in 2022, as part of a fiscal consolidation program that targets returning to the regional ceiling of 3 percent of GDP by 2024."
- *Poverty:* "With near zero per capita income growth, the extreme poverty rate (US$1.90/day per capita, 2011 PPP) remained at 17.6 percent, though high food inflation and insecurity disproportionately impact poor and vulnerable households, who spend 46 percent of the budget on food, compared with 31 percent for the non-poor." Outlook: "The extreme poverty rate is projected to stagnate at around 17.5 percent in 2022, due to the high projected population growth rate of 2.9 percent over 2021-2023. Protracted sanctions may reduce employment and incomes for the urban poor engaged in construction, transport, commerce and hospitality."

According to [Theodora.com](Theodora.com) (27 January 2020):

- 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 irrigated 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:](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 as well as discriminatory inheritance practices (OECD, 2019; UN Women, 2022). 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 (Georgetown, 2021). This economic vulnerability can be exploited for the purpose of religious persecution of female converts.

## 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 22 July 2022):

- "Founded in the 5th century, the economic and cultural apogee of Timbuktu came about during the15th 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's Human Development Indicators (HDI profile) and the CIA Factbook:

- *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 (last updated 30 June 2022):

- *Refugees:* 52,683
- *IDPs:* 370,548

However, according to [Humanitarian Action / Mali](#), published on 29 November 2022, the figures quoted from "Mali CMP Figures as of 30 September 2022" are higher: "The growing insecurity triggered the displacement of more than 440,436 mostly children (63 per cent) and women (54 per cent), exceeding the peak of 350,000 IDPs in June 2013. In addition, Mali hosts 57,444 refugees from neighbouring countries, and 182,107 Malian refugees remain in neighbouring countries."

Back in 2020, according to [USAID](#) (Factsheet, 9 April 2020):

- Due to ongoing violence, more than 142,000 Malian refugees were residing in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger.
- The majority of Mali's IDPs were residing in Gao, Ménaka, Mopti, Ségou, and Timbuktu regions.

According to UNDP's Human Development Indicators (HDI profile):

- **_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 (Human Development Report, 2020). 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 (OECD, 2019). Further endangering women and girls is the widespread social acceptance for - and practice of – [Female Genital Mutilation](#) (UNICEF, 2022).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **_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 December 2022 Napoleon Cat study, 75.2% of [Facebook users](#) are men and 24.8% women.

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **_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.)

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 neighbouring 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 9 January 2023).

## Security situation

Due to its better democratic and civil liberties record compared to other Muslim majority countries in the region - as well as the influence of Sufiism - 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 target UN peacekeepers in particular. The UN Security Council increased the number of peacekeeping troops in the country and also expanded its mandate to allow a more robust military action against militant groups. Instability and violence have created fear and chaos in the country. Impunity is rampant and the government is not 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 is becoming 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, 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 2021):

- "Throughout the year [2021], 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 Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS), 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-GS controlled significant territory in the northern and central regions. According to NGOs and security experts, armed groups in some instances coopted preexisting intercommunal and ethnic tensions to further sow instability and violence, and it was not possible to attribute some incidents entirely to religious motives. Several of JNIM's public messages repeated an intent to govern the country according to sharia."

According to Crisis 24 country 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 neighbouring 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."

Notable attacks by Islamic militants in 2022 include:

- *June 2022:* According to the Malian government, an attack on three villages in the Mopti region killing 132 people on 18-19 June 2022 was carried out by jihadist rebels of the Katiba group. The attack - the deadliest since President Keita was ousted nearly two years ago - shows that Islamist violence is spreading from Mali's north to more central areas (VOA News, 21 June 2022).
- *June 2022:* An armed group killed at least 20 civilians in attacks on villages near the northern town of Gao on 18-19 June 2022. A landmine also killed a UN peacekeeper on 19 June as he was out on patrol further north in Kidal (VOA News, 20 June 2022).

- *June 2022:* An armed group killed 8 people and wounded 8 others in an [attack at a checkpoint](#) in the city of Koutiala in southern Mali on 10 June 2022. This attack comes less than a month after an Italian family and a Togolese citizen were abducted by unidentified individuals in the same area (AA, 13 June 2022).

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

**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 2022 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 are 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 and UN peacekeepers are still unable to establish the authority of the government in some parts of the country. Despite all the challenges the country faced, it managed to hold a relatively peaceful and successful presidential election in 2018. However, two coups were conducted in less than one year (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.

### 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 improvized 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 a military officers backed by the western countries of attempting 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.

## 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/
- 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
- Political and legal landscape: suspended  -  https://www.france24.com/en/20200819-mali-coup-leaders-face-international-condemnation-au-suspends-membership
- Political and legal landscape: ICG Weekly update, 9 October 2020  -  https://mailchi.mp/crisisgroup.org/this-week-in-conflict-crisis-x7ndmp7lm0-2389408?e=b87d31638c
- Political and legal landscape: suspended  -  https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210530-west-african-bloc-ecowas-suspends-mali-from-its-institutions-after-coup
- Political and legal landscape: was sworn  -  https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/mali-coup-leader-assimi-goita-sworn-transitional-president-2021-06-07/
- Political and legal landscape: escalating tensions  -  https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/what-are-international-military-options-sahel
- Political and legal landscape: Georgetown's 2021/22 Women, Peace and Security Index  -  https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WPS-Index-2021.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: Child marriage  -  https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/mali
- Political and legal landscape: divorce proceedings  -  https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/ML.pdf
- Economic landscape: Theodora.com  -  https://theodora.com/wfbcurrent/mali/mali_economy.html
- Economic landscape: Heritage World's 2022 Index of Economic Freedom:  -  https://www.heritage.org/index/country/mali
- Economic landscape: lower education and employment rates  -  https://data.unwomen.org/country/mali
- Economic landscape: inheritance practices  -  https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/ML.pdf
- Economic landscape: education and employment rates  -  https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WPS-Index-2021.pdf
- Social and cultural landscape: UNESCO/World Heritage Center/Timbuktu  -  https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/119
- Social and cultural landscape: Operational Data Portal  -  https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/mli
- Social and cultural landscape: Humanitarian Action / Mali  -  https://humanitarianaction.info/article/mali-0
- Social and cultural landscape: USAID  -  https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/04.09.20%20-%20USAID-DCHA%20Mali%20Complex%20Emergency%20Fact%20Sheet%20%231.pdf
- Social and cultural landscape: low GDI and GII  -  https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/MLI.pdf
- Social and cultural landscape: societal acceptance  -  https://www.iamaneh.ch/en/projects/mali/
- Social and cultural landscape: CARE  -  https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CARE-IMAGES-Mali-Summary-Report-FINAL.pdf
- Social and cultural landscape: limited  -  https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/ML.pdf
- Social and cultural landscape: Female Genital Mutilation  -  https://www.unicef.org/mali/media/3536/file/FGM%20Mali_EN_HR.pdf
- Technological landscape: Facebook users  -  https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-mali/2022/12/

- Technological landscape: Georgetown's 2021/22 Women, Peace and Security Index - https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf
- Technological landscape: BuddeComm Research - https://www.budde.com.au/Research/Mali-Telecoms-Mobile-and-Broadband-Statistics-and-Analyses
- Technological landscape: science and technology - https://www.4icu.org/reviews/universities-english/15618.html#:~:text=Established%20in%202011%2C%20Universit%C3%A9%20des%20sciences%2C%20des%20techniques,%28population%20range%20of%201%2C000%2C000-5%2C000%2C000%20inhabitants%29%2C%20Bamako%20Capital%20District.
- Security situation: Islamic militants - https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/276-speaking-bad-guys-toward-dialogue-central-malis-jihadists
- Security situation: Sahel region - http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Sahel-Rising-Islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-Christians-in-the-region-2016.pdf
- Security situation: killing 132 people - https://www.voanews.com/a/6626488.html
- Security situation: killed at least 20 civilians - https://www.voanews.com/a/armed-men-kill-at-least-20-civilians-in-mali-/6624551.html
- Security situation: attack at a checkpoint - https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/8-killed-in-terrorist-attack-in-mali/2612116
- Security situation: exploited - https://www.cfr.org/blog/how-jihadi-groups-africa-will-exploit-covid-19
- Security situation: upscale - https://www.csis.org/analysis/extremist-groups-stepping-operations-during-covid-19-outbreak-sub-saharan-africa
- Security situation: child trafficking - https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1078982
- Security situation: BBC News - https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-56589924
- Trends analysis: signed in 2015 - https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-33213931
- Trends analysis: BBC News - https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17481114
- Trends analysis: Humanitarian Action / Mali - https://humanitarianaction.info/article/mali-0

# WWL 2023: 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

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).

| Mali: Church networks | Christians | % |
|---|---|---|
| Orthodox | 0 | 0.0 |
| Catholic | 293,000 | 59.8 |
| Protestant | 168,000 | 34.3 |
| Independent | 26,900 | 5.5 |
| Unaffiliated | 1,700 | 0.3 |
| Doubly-affiliated Christians | 0 | 0.0 |
| **Total** | **489,600** | **99.9** |
| *(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)* | | |
| Evangelical movement | 177,000 | 36.1 |
| Renewalist movement | 53,800 | 11.0 |

*Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)*

***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.*

## 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. Nevertheless, 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 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Mali

## Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

## Position on the World Watch List

| Mali: World Watch List | Points | WWL Rank |
|---|---|---|
| WWL 2023 | 76 | 17 |
| WWL 2022 | 70 | 24 |
| WWL 2021 | 67 | 28 |
| WWL 2020 | 66 | 29 |
| WWL 2019 | 68 | 24 |

*Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods*

The significant rise in overall WWL 2023 score was due to an increase in pressure in many *spheres of life*. The  weak and corrupt (as well as anti-Western) government regards some Christian groups as being linked to Western governments. The general situation is deteriorating fast and the country has seen coup after coup (two coups in less than a year – one in August 2020 and one in May 2021). These recent coups happened at a time when the country is struggling to contain the expansion of jihadist activities in the country. It seems that the government is only in control in major cities; areas outside are in the hands (directly or indirectly) of jihadists who provide social services and entice the youth into joining their ranks. The military junta is being assisted by Russian (Wagner) mercenaries, who have also targeted civilians - including Christians.  Pressure in the *Community* and *Church spheres* remained at an extreme level as jihadists have been utilizing the security vacuum left by the government which has been unable to maintain a well-organized army.

## 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 (Medium)**

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 | Very weak | | | | | | | Medium | Medium |
| Ethnic group leaders | | | | Strong | | | | | |
| Non-Christian religious leaders | Very strong | | | | | | | | |
| Violent religious groups | 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. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". 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.
- ***Non-Christian religious leaders (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 minority 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) (Medium):*** Society in general does not see Christianity positively. This is particularly true in the case of converts.

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- **Family (Medium)**: 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 leave Islam).
- **Organized crime cartels/networks (Strong):** This gives the jihadists the means and method to stay afloat. It is through this driver that they finance their operations.

**Drivers of Organized corruption and crime**

- **Organized crime networks (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. Corrupt government officials who turn a blind eye to incidents targeting Christians are also a factor behind the persecution.
- **Violent religious groups (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.

**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.

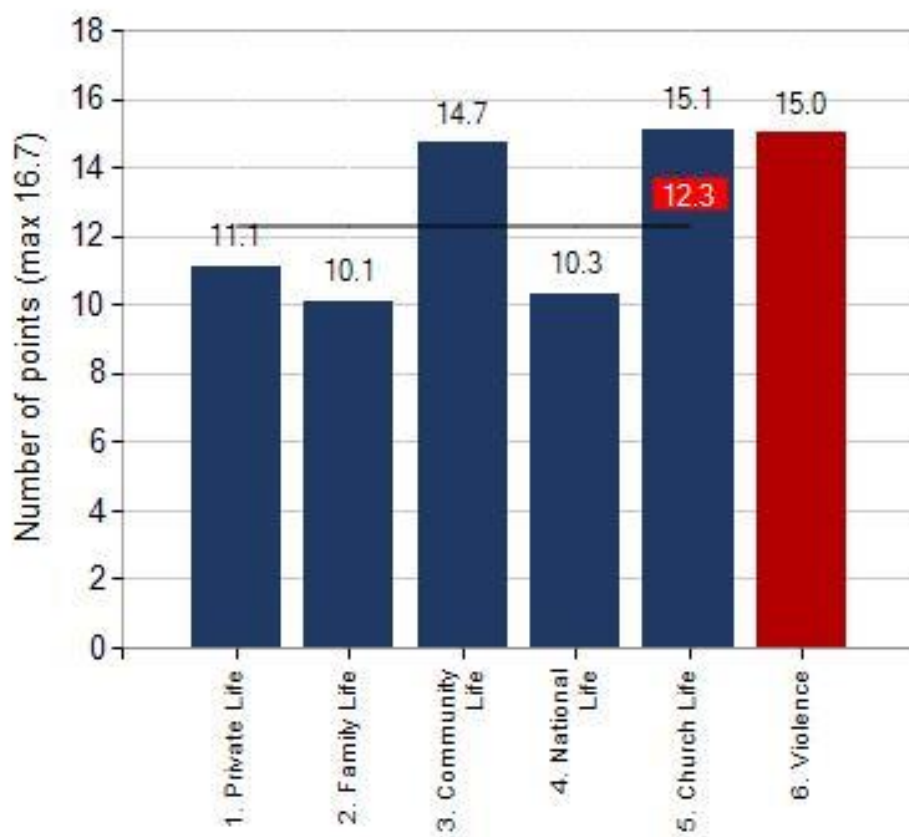**Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia**

- **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 2023 persecution pattern for Mali shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Mali is very high at 12.3 a rise from 10.9 points in WWL 2022.
- 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 15.0 points - a slight decrease from 15.4 points in WWL 2022.

## WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Mali



## 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 2023 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)**

This issue has existed for years, but has been exacerbated by the ever expanding jihadist influence. Tolerance, previously a hallmark of Malian society, has disappeared. Religious fundamentalism is deepening its roots in the society. Thus, converts with a Muslim background experience most difficulties in this *sphere of life* compared to other Christians. Pressure to recant is exerted by family and community members.

**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)**

This is also another area that has become increasingly dangerous. Mali is becoming a country where jihadists are operating and expanding into neighboring nations. Non-convert Christians living in the northern parts of the country face several forms of hindrances in their daily lives and have become increasingly in danger of attack even when they express their Christian faith privately. One country researcher reported that hatred towards Christians is especially on the increase across the country.

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

Jihadists are trying to establish a sharia state, hence it has been very risky in northern Mali for Christians to display images and symbols of Christianity. In the south, Christians have been denied land for building new churches and denied permission to rent places for worship. This is more prevalent in areas where Christians openly display images and symbols such as the cross or religious statues.

**Block 1.2: It has been risky for Christians to conduct acts of Christian worship by themselves (e.g. prayer, Bible reading, etc.). (2.75 points)**

Christians in many parts of the country avoid keeping Christian materials in their houses, due in part to jihadists sporadically conducting house to house searches. All Christians in the northern part of the country face massive problems in conducting any act of worship. Converts particularly cannot express their Christian beliefs openly or practice their faith in private due to the customary living arrangements in which any deviance from Islamic rites is easily detected and will lead to persecution.

## 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)**

It is not only the parents, children are also under serious pressure. Jihadists have gained ground and In the context of the ongoing crises in the country, Christians are being targeted at schools, public places and other social gatherings. Children of Christians often bear the brunt of harassment and bullying by Muslims: In northern Mali in particular, Christian children are made to feel like second class citizens and they are often referred to as 'infidels'.

**Block 2.3: Christians have been hindered in celebrating a Christian wedding for faith-related reasons. (3.00 points)**

A Christian wedding or similar event will be monitored intensely. This is more a security issue than formal prohibition. In the northern part of the country, a Christian celebration would mean exposing oneself to jihadists in the region.

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

Some Christians have no option but to attend non-Christian schools or ceremonies. In areas that are influenced by jihadists and their supporters in the community, radical Islamic teaching has taken root. Teachers have been intimidated and children forced to attend Quranic classes. In many parts of Mali, Islamic militants have tried to stop the use of French as the main language for instruction, and replace it with Arabic. They have also demanded that these schools, many of which are operated by Christian organizations, be converted into Islamic schools.

**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)**

Forcing a couple to separate is done to discourage people from marrying a Christian person. This issue has been the case for the last few WWL reporting periods. Muslim families will not tolerate any conversion of a family member, including the conversion of a spouse. For reasons of family honor, having a convert within the family could make the whole family vulnerable to ostracism by the community. Particularly in the northern region, the extended family of any Christian with a Muslim background is likely to exert pressure with the aim of making them renounce Christianity.

## 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)**

This is probably the most common form of persecution in Mali: The north is most severe, but harassment in central Mali is increasing. Although the government forbids religious propaganda, radio and sermons in mosques are becoming increasingly radical in their opposition towards Christian faith and practice. Pressure is being put on local communities in central Mali to adopt Sharia law, although this is against the state law. Despite Christians in places like Bamako enjoying more freedom in general, they also report cases of 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 the context of the situation Mali where jihadists are expanding and jihadist ideology is firmly taking root, monitoring has increased. Jihadists in Mali have informers in many places. So, in some areas (particularly in the north), Islamic groups have been monitoring churches and Christians. Local citizens and community leaders like to know where Christian groups might be planning to establish new churches or build schools and hospitals. They also seek information about conversions.

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

Mali is known for abductions, especially the abduction of Christians for ransom by jihadist groups. Over the last years, several Christians have been abducted for ransom; while some have been killed, others are still believed to be in captivity. There is a also a link between the abduction of young Christian girls and the high number of forced marriages to Muslim men.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.50 points)**

Religion is a fundamental component of Malian society, with jihadists wanting to have the whole of Mali for Muslims. A country expert noted: "Christians in Mali are under constant threat to renounce their faith. Such threats come in the context of national narrative - where Christians are considered as following the wrong religion. Life is made difficult for Christians considering the lack of tolerance, respect, and regard for Christian beliefs in Mali."

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

**Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)**

All categories of Christian community in Mall, especially those resident outside of Bamako, need to avoid public attention. Freedom of expression is shrinking in Mali since jihadists are directly or indirectly influencing the majority of the country. In the context of the ongoing conflict, Christians face serious reprisals if they speak out about Islamist activities and the atrocities militants are committing.

**Block 4.9: Christian civil society organizations or political parties have been hindered in their functioning or forbidden because of their Christian convictions. (3.50 points)**

NGOs have become prized targets for jihadists. NGOs are forced to relocate or close down in the majority Muslim areas due to the threat posed by the jihadists. Working as an NGO worker in the country has thus become extremely challenging.

There is no existing political party in Mali founded on the basis of the Christian faith. The few Christian civil society organizations in existence are closely monitored under the suspicion that they are actively promoting conversion from Islam.

**Block 4.3: Christians have been forced by law or in practice to act against their conscience, e.g. regarding military service or in certain professions. (3.25 points)**

Jihadists want all people in Mali to be strict Muslims. On many occasions, Christians are forced to do things that are contrary to their faith: In certain professional positions, Christians have been forced to act against their conscience and have succumbed to pressure to converting to Islam. Such pressure is particularly prevalent in the Malian army and other security agencies and also, for instance, in the public health and banking sectors.

**Block 4.4: Christians have been hindered in travelling for faith-related reasons. (3.25 points)**

Christians are literally under threat in all areas of Mali and travelling has become particularly hazardous. Indeed, this is one of the toughest issues that face Christians in the country. Missionaries, in particular, require an enormous amount of security to travel to the north. Christians have been kidnaped and some of them were killed while working or travelling in areas where jihadists operate.

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

**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)**

Many churches and public Christian properties have been closed. Christians in many parts of the country have been experiencing great problems in repairing or building places of Christian worship. Even just maintaining what they have as buildings is becoming impossible and many have been forced to close their churches and relocate to Bamako or IDP camps..

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

Mali has become a country where jihadists roam the countryside without fear, hence organizing any outdoor Christian activities is fraught with danger. There is a constant lack of security in the majority of the country, making it dangerous to carry out evangelism etc. In general, churches need permission from the government before they can carry out outdoor activities. During WWL 2023, this issue have become more worrying that in the previous periods.

**Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.75 points)**

Islamist groups often monitor Christian teaching and published materials. This is also happening in education, where militants go round schools and intimidate teachers into not teaching anything to do with Christianity or secularism. The government is also keen to detect any 'hate-speech' occurring in schools and churches.

**Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.50 points)**

In the areas outside the major cities, Christians and churches are being monitored by Islamist groups. Elsewhere, the government does this by requiring permission to be received for certain activities and checks that there is no 'hate-speech' occurring.

# 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 5 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. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor's article dated 13 November 2013 available at:*
[https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/](https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/)*.*

*4. 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.*

*5. The symbol "x" in the table: This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.*

| Mali: Violence Block question | WWL 2023 | WWL 2022 |
|---|---|---|
| 6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)? | 10 * | 10 * |
| 6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (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)? | 100 * | 2 |
| 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? | 10 * | 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? | 10 | 10 * |
| 6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons? | 100 | 100 * |
| 6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons? | 0 | 1 |

## 5 Year trends

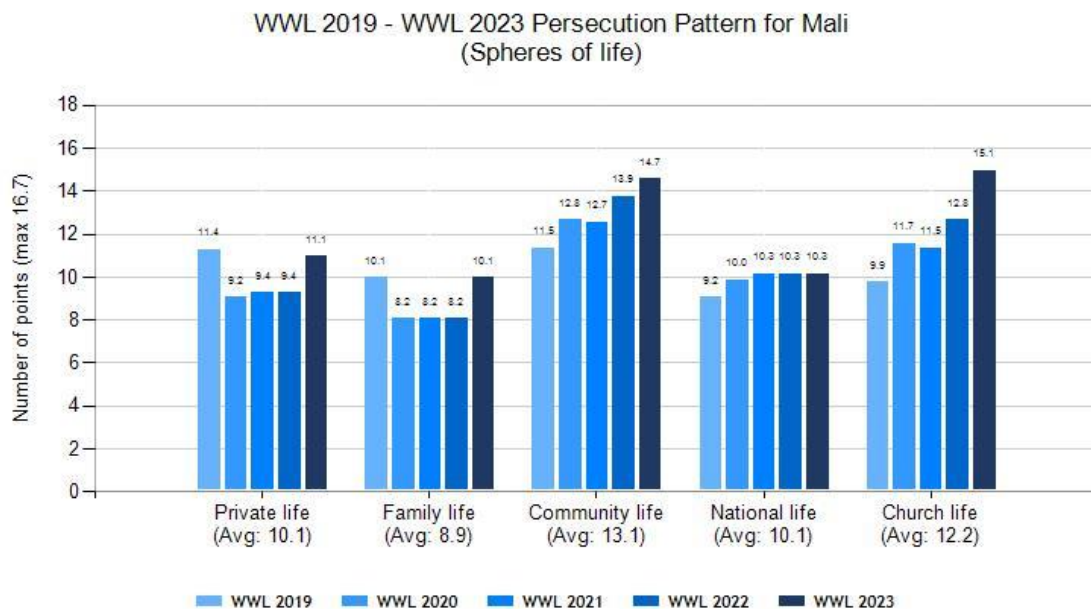The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

## 5 Year trends: Average pressure

In WWL 2019 - WWL 2021 pressure stabilized at the high level of 10.4 points, but rose in WWL 2022 and then again more sharply in WWL 2023. 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 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history | Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life |
|---|---|
| 2023 | 12.3 |
| 2022 | 10.9 |
| 2021 | 10.4 |
| 2020 | 10.4 |
| 2019 | 10.4 |

## 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Mali
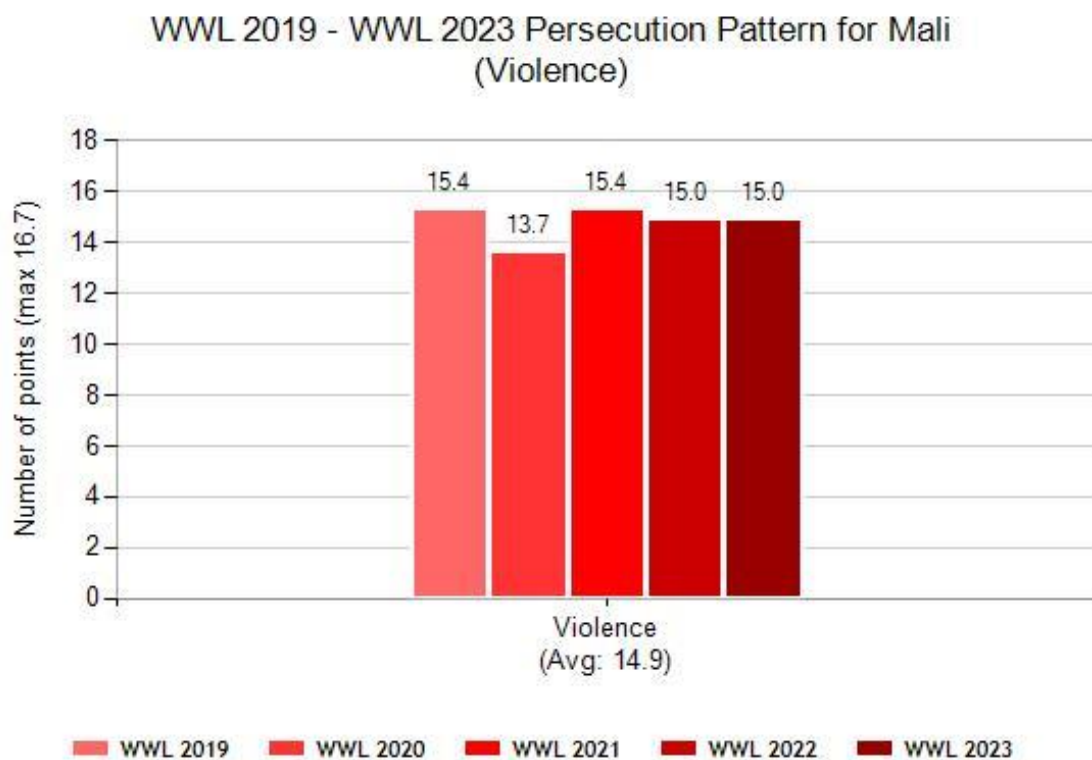(Spheres of life)

Over the five WWL reporting periods, there has been a more or less consistent rise in score for *Community* and *Church life*. 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.

## 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

Although there was a dip in WWL 2020, the chart below shows that the scores for violence against Christians have otherwise consistently reached 15.0 points or above.

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Mali
(Violence)



## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

| Group | Female Pressure Points |
|---|---|
| Economic | Economic harassment via business/job/work access |
| Political and Legal | Denied custody of children; Forced marriage |
| Security | Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual |
| Social and Cultural | Denied access to social community/networks; Denied food or water; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal |
| Technological | - |

There has been a resurgence of attacks by Islamic militants since late 2019, within a broader context of instability. 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 comments: "In many places, Christian girls are being pushed into marriages with Muslim males 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 ambient Islamic culture. They experience social rejection and when facing persecution, the children suffer reper-

cussions 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 but prostitution for survival, 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. Single converts will likely be forcibly married to a Muslim, in order to reduce the shame brought upon the family. Married converts 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 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. Mali has one of the world's highest rates of child marriage in the world, with 54% of girls married before the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides, 2022).

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

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

| Group | Male Pressure Points |
|---|---|
| Economic | - |
| Political and Legal | Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Travel bans/restrictions on movement |
| Security | Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical |
| Social and Cultural | Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal |
| 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. 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. 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 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.

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.

## 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 2021) 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:** Although the National Transitional Council had begun to function in 2020 (BBC News, 5 December 2020), if a proper transition that allows free and fair election does not materialize, the August 2020 and May 2021 coups could lead to a situation where the central government simply becomes weaker and weaker. That is exactly what the jihadists are hoping for, since they thrive on the weakness of the governments in the Sahel region. This is a very frightening situation for the whole 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. International peacekeepers are struggling to contain the level of violence but there are no signs that they can swiftly get the situation under control. The presence of international troops has been 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 put a precondition for schools in the northern part of the country to reopen. He puts that those schools must put 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 for 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 COVID-19 crisis only served to strengthen them due to the government's decision to prioritize public health rather than combatting the organized crime cartels. That exacerbated by the Russia-Ukraine war which is highly affecting african countries in terms of food, energy and fertilizer prices.  Tackling this 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 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 junta in power is trying to align itself 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. 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: highest rates  - https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/mali/
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: ongoing violence  - https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/27/mali-coordinated-massacres-islamist-armed-groups
- Future outlook: National Transitional Council  -  https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55198934

# Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/
- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Mali
- https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Sahel-Rising-Islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-Christians-in-the-region-2016.pdf16.pdf