



Mali

Assessment: Fair

Trend: ⇄

Capital: Bamako

Type of Government: Republic

Head of State: Amadou Toumani Toure
(since May 2002)

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Lassana Traore

Population: 11,008,518

Human Development Index Ranking 2002: 134

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mali has a **fair** record of support for democracy abroad. It has regularly made statements on the importance of democracy as one of its main foreign policy principles. But the rhetoric is often not matched by reality. There are few examples of Mali actively promoting democracy abroad. Moreover, Mali has refrained from criticizing the manipulation of electoral processes, maintained relations with entrenched dictators (such as Nigeria's Sani Abacha) and abstained on votes concerning democracy and human rights in the United Nations.

Mali, one of the poorest countries in the world, views itself as an increasingly important country in West Africa. Its steady progress on democratization makes Mali a potential role model for other emerging democracies struggling simultaneously to undertake political reforms and deliver improved standards of living to the population. Building on the leadership of former President Konare, who peacefully handed power to his successor following free and fair elections in 2002, Mali enjoys a significant degree of respect in the international community that allows it room to speak out on democracy issues and criticize non-democratic behavior.

It is unclear whether Mali's approach to promoting democracy abroad will change under the new administration of President Amadou Toumani Toure, but significant alterations are unlikely. The new president is likely to focus his attention on domestic issues, at least initially, as he does not enjoy the reputation or respect among his peers of his immediate predecessor.

FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

After sustaining democracy for more than a decade, and holding recent elections in which power transferred peacefully through the ballot box from one civilian administration to another, Mali is considered one of the leading democracies in Africa. The country remains woefully poor, but politically Mali is well-developed relative to many of its neighbors.

Mali's foreign relations objectives are generally limited to the West African sub-region. Foremost among them is promoting regional cohesion and cooperation. This goal took on greater significance when President Konare assumed the chairmanship of the 16-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1999. Another objective is conflict mediation and resolution in the sub-region, particularly in Sierra Leone, where Konare played an active role, and to a lesser extent in Liberia. Economic and monetary integration is a third objective; in addition to his ECOWAS post Konare recently served as president of the francophone regional economic grouping, l'Union Economique et Monetaire Oust-Africaine (UEMOA). Also important to Mali is border security and relations with its immediate neighbors, particularly Mauritania, which in the past has been accused of harboring dissident Tuaregs who launched raids into Mali. Promoting democracy and good governance is certainly among Mali's foreign relations objectives, but it cannot be said to be one of the highest priorities. As the evidence presented below suggests, economic objectives seem more often than not to trump political objectives. Mali's capacity to influence events in other countries remains



modest. Though it has become increasingly influential in recent years, in part due to the democratic progress it has achieved, Mali remains a relatively weak state with a small economy and no major resources to speak of. Mali has few carrots with which to motivate other states and as elaborated below, the country is particularly dependent on Nigeria, the regional hegemon. These factors account to a certain extent, but not entirely, for Mali's mixed record of democracy promotion abroad.

The primary tool employed by Mali in pursuing foreign policy goals is personal diplomacy, conducted most often by the head of state. As a respected statesman, former President Konare was relatively successful in conducting such diplomacy, but it remains to be seen whether his successor will be able to match this success. Foreign policy in Mali, as it is in many African states, is generally formed by a small handful of elites near the top of government, with little input from non-governmental actors.

RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS

Mali's response to the overthrow of democratically-elected governments has generally been good. Mali has been consistent in its condemnation of coups. President Konare, "has always been quick to denounce military coups in neighboring countries and has played an important role in regional peacekeeping."¹ According to Malian diplomat Mahamane Toure, Mali maintains a policy of condemning coups wherever they occur and of "working to isolate" coup leaders. It is not entirely clear, though, how Mali "isolates" illegitimate governments. Toure asserted that Mali "finds ways to give them the cold shoulder" and attempts to "show that we're not in bed with them." But there is little evidence of concrete actions, the severing of diplomatic relations or offering support to ousted regimes.

Mali was quick to condemn the December 1999 coup in Cote D'Ivoire in which General Robert Guei seized power from President Henri Konan Bedie. But while Malian officials have claimed that official policy is to refuse to recognize governments that come to power through coups, Mali maintained diplomatic relations with Cote D'Ivoire under Guei. Konare pressured Guei through personal diplomacy to hold legitimate elections, but there were no concrete

actions taken against Guei's regime. Similarly, Mali condemned the 1996 coup in Niger but did not take any substantive action against the regime.

RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Mali has generally remained quiet on the manipulation of electoral processes both in West Africa and beyond. The exception is the Ivorian elections of 2000, as Mali did respond to Guei's attempts to manipulate the process. In the confusing and tense weeks preceding the election, Mali was involved in mediation efforts as the ECOWAS Chairman dispatched a delegation to Abidjan, comprising the Malian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Chairman of the Mediation and Security Council, and the ECOWAS Executive Secretary. Mali had long been rumored to support Alassane Ouattara, a northern Ivorian politician barred by Guei from running in the elections, ostensibly because of his supposed Burkinabe citizenship. Konare made strong statements against the disqualification of Ouattara and several other popular candidates. One of the few remaining viable candidates, Laurent Ghagbo, defeated Guei in the election, but Mali's relations with Cote d'Ivoire under Ghagbo have remained uneasy.

More recently, Mali passed on the opportunity to condemn Robert Mugabe's obvious rigging of Zimbabwe's 2002 elections and blatantly corrupt behavior. The Malian government remained completely silent. Unlike Cote d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe is of little strategic or economic importance to Mali. In remaining silent, Mali missed an opportunity to enhance its stature on the continent as a leader in promoting and defending democracy. This was the approach adopted by a select few African leaders, such as President Abdoulaye Wade in Senegal, and to a lesser extent President John Kufuor in Ghana, both of whom spoke out against Mugabe's actions. Malian diplomat Mahamane Toure's explanation was that Zimbabwe is an issue for members of the Southern African Development Community (southern Africa's regional organization).

Closer to home, Mali maintained close relations with Nigeria throughout the period of manipulated and annulled elections under Generals Babangida and Abacha. Nor was there much of a response from Mali to Nigeria's 1999 elections, won by Olesgun Obasanjo, in which it is generally agreed that all of the major parties



engaged in fraudulent activities. Like many other West African states, Mali is economically dependent on Nigeria and thus cannot afford to risk damaging relations with Abuja by being seen as meddling in its domestic affairs.

PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Mali has a mixed record of support for international democracy. Former President Konare was active in promoting democracy on the international stage, and Mali recently held an important international symposium on democracy. But Mali was less consistent in supporting democracy promotion efforts in the UN.

Konare is a respected regional statesman. As a result of his leadership, Mali has been involved in many conflict resolution initiatives in West Africa. He was one of the strongest forces behind the 1999 Organization of African Unity resolution banning leaders who came to power through the use of force from admittance to the OAU or participation in its summit meetings.² He made a point to espouse democracy in his public statements. For example, in a speech during his trip to Washington in 2001, Konare said “African leaders perfectly realize that in order to combat hunger they must undertake political and economic reforms that lead to democratization, decentralization, market economies, fights against corruption, respect for human and minority rights, and for diversity, and more important, the implementation of peace-seeking policies.”³ Further, Mali has played a constructive role as a member of the Convening Group of the Community of Democracies. Konare addressed the participants at the inaugural forum in Warsaw. Overall, Konare has made a significant contribution to international democracy promotion efforts.

It is also important to consider the international symposium concerning democracy and related issues held in November 2000 in Bamako, Mali’s capital city. Organized by the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, it focused on the role of human rights in the French-speaking world. The symposium resulted in the *Declaration de Bamako*, a substantial document, much of which deals with democracy and human rights in francophone countries. It states that “democracy, a universal value system, is founded on the recognition of the inalienable character of the dignity and equal value of all humans; each

one has the right to have an influence on social, professional and political life and to benefit from the right to development.”⁴ It is also of note that Mali strongly supported the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, adopted in late 2001.

Within the United Nations, Mali has been less consistent in its support for democracy promotion efforts. Mali has a history of abstaining on important UN votes concerning democracy and human rights.⁵ Such abstentions are often tantamount to “no” votes under such circumstances. In both 2001 (Res 56/173) and 2000 (Res 55/117) Mali abstained on resolutions concerning the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Mali also abstained on similar resolutions concerning human rights in Nigeria under Abacha in 1997 (Res 52/144) and 1996 (Res 51/109), though it voted in favor of the resolution in 1995 (Res 50/199). In addition, Mali abstained on resolutions on human right in the Sudan in 2001 (Res 56/175), 2000 (Res 55/116), 1999 (Res 54/182) and 1997 (Res 52/140). Further from home, Mali also abstained on a resolution on human rights in Iraq in 1997 (Res 52/141). Diplomat Toure said part of the explanation for this pattern is that Mali attempts to avoid resolutions that involve “name calling,” despite the clear evidence of transgressions of international norms in those cases. In Mali’s favor, it voted for a 1997 resolution recognizing the necessity of periodic and genuine elections (Res 52/129).

POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS

Mali’s record of relations with entrenched dictatorships in the West African sub-region reflects its reluctance to jeopardize otherwise stable relations with its neighbors. Mali maintained close relations with Nigeria under the brutal dictatorship of Sani Abacha, and Mali’s leadership apparently never seriously considered severing diplomatic relations or supporting economic sanctions despite Abacha’s numerous human rights abuses and opposition to democratic reforms. In fact, according to Toure, Mali’s relations with military-ruled Nigeria under Abacha were better than current relations with a semi-democratic Nigeria under Obasanjo. There was a close personal relationship between Konare and Abacha, and their respective wives were apparently good friends as well. Toure explained this as a



consequence of Nigeria's power in the region. "We said that we can't isolate Nigeria," he said. "We have to find ways to involve Nigeria. We need Nigeria for regional integration and cooperation. There was no other option."

Meanwhile, Mali maintains minimal relations with Sudan, as geography and ethnicity make them physically and ideologically distant from one another. But, as noted above, Mali has abstained on votes in the UN concerning human rights in Sudan.

Before leaving office President Konare indicated his willingness to support imposing

sanctions on Liberia's Charles Taylor. A credible report stated that "in a specific reference to Liberian leader Charles Taylor, Konare said he and other West African leaders approve of limited and carefully focused sanctions, 'but also dialogue – dialogue to force him to behave well, to force him to have dialogue with his opponents.'"⁶ According to Mahamane Toure there was no relationship between Konare and Taylor, nor was there much of a relationship between Konare and another regional quasi-dictator, Togo's President Gnassingbe Eyadema.

¹ Smith, Zeric Kay, "Mali's Decade of Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 12:3 (2001), p. 78.

² Fomunyoh, Christopher, "Democratization in Fits and Starts," *Journal of Democracy* 12:3 (2001), p. 41.

³ Konare, Alpha Oumar, "Speech of President Alpha Oumar Konare of Mali to the conference of the partnership to Cut Hunger in Africa, State Dept., Washington, D.C. June 27, 2001" <<http://www.africanhunger.org/konare.htm>>.

⁴ Organization of African Unity. *Declaration de Bamako*. Bamako: 1 Dec. 2000, p. 1.

⁵ UN voting records at <<http://www.libraries.psu.edu/crsweb/docs/unvote.pdf> & <http://unbisnet.un.org/webpac-bin/wgbroker?new+-access+top.vote>>.

⁶ Cobb Jr., Charles, "Africa Offers Opportunity, Says Mali President," 28 June 2001. *AllAfrica.com* 3 Oct. 2002. <<http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200106280644.html>>.