

World  
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Research

## Mali: Full Country Dossier

January 2022



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Man from Mali (c) IMB

# Introduction

## World Watch List 2022

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
1	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	15.0	98	94	93	94	93
2	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	13.1	96	94	94	94	94
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.5	91	92	92	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.2	16.3	11.5	91	92	90	87	86
5	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	5.2	88	87	85	86	85
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.6	11.1	88	88	87	86	86
7	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.3	14.5	14.4	16.7	87	85	80	80	77
8	Pakistan	13.6	14.0	15.1	14.9	13.1	16.7	87	88	88	87	86
9	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.6	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	86	85	85	85
10	India	12.7	12.7	12.9	14.7	13.3	15.6	82	83	83	83	81
11	Saudi Arabia	15.1	15.1	15.0	15.9	16.7	3.1	81	78	79	77	79
12	Myanmar	12.4	11.5	13.8	13.4	13.1	14.8	79	74	73	71	65
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	14.3	13.6	15.7	8.5	79	79	85	87	87
14	Iraq	14.0	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	6.9	78	82	76	79	86
15	Syria	12.9	13.8	13.5	14.3	13.9	9.3	78	81	82	82	76
16	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.4	77	77	78	78	78
17	China	12.6	9.8	12.2	14.4	15.5	11.1	76	74	70	65	57
18	Qatar	14.2	14.1	11.1	13.0	14.3	7.2	74	67	66	62	63
19	Vietnam	11.3	9.7	12.7	14.1	14.5	8.7	71	72	72	70	69
20	Egypt	12.7	13.2	11.5	12.7	10.8	10.0	71	75	76	76	70
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	14.1	11.8	15.6	1.7	71	71	73	74	73
22	Algeria	14.0	14.0	11.1	13.4	14.1	4.1	71	70	73	70	58
23	Mauritania	14.3	13.9	13.1	14.0	14.1	0.9	70	71	68	67	57
24	Mali	9.4	8.2	13.9	10.3	12.8	15.0	70	67	66	68	59
25	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	13.3	15.7	0.6	69	70	70	69	68
26	Laos	12.0	10.3	13.2	13.3	14.1	5.9	69	71	72	71	67
27	Morocco	13.1	13.8	10.8	12.8	14.2	3.9	69	67	66	63	51
28	Indonesia	11.3	11.5	11.5	11.0	9.6	13.5	68	63	60	65	59
29	Bangladesh	11.8	10.7	12.9	11.3	10.2	11.3	68	67	63	58	58
30	Colombia	11.5	8.8	13.1	11.0	9.9	13.3	68	67	62	58	56
31	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.6	9.6	11.4	15.6	68	66	68	70	61
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.6	12.1	14.8	68	67	66	48	-
33	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.9	7.2	12.8	14.8	68	62	60	52	45
34	Bhutan	13.4	12.4	11.7	13.7	13.8	1.7	67	64	61	64	62
35	Tunisia	11.9	12.7	10.6	11.3	13.4	6.5	66	67	64	63	62
36	Oman	13.8	14.0	10.3	13.2	13.4	1.5	66	63	62	59	57
37	Cuba	12.3	8.1	12.6	13.2	14.0	5.9	66	62	52	49	49
38	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.3	12.3	9.8	66	65	63	65	62
39	Jordan	12.9	14.0	11.0	12.3	12.5	3.0	66	64	64	65	66
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	12.0	15.6	66	64	56	55	33
41	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	11.3	7.9	12.5	15.6	65	63	43	43	-
42	Turkey	12.6	11.5	11.4	13.2	11.6	4.6	65	69	63	66	62
43	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	10.8	10.3	12.6	65	64	60	61	59
44	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.4	65	64	60	54	38
45	Tajikistan	13.8	12.3	12.0	12.6	13.2	0.7	65	66	65	65	65
46	Brunei	14.8	14.5	10.3	11.0	13.2	0.6	64	64	63	63	64
47	Kazakhstan	13.4	11.6	11.1	12.6	13.5	1.7	64	64	64	63	63
48	Nepal	12.4	9.8	9.9	13.6	12.7	5.2	64	66	64	64	64
49	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	63	62	60	61
50	Malaysia	12.5	14.3	11.5	11.6	10.2	3.3	63	63	62	60	65

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018
51	Kenya	11.7	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	11.1	63	62	61	61	62
52	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.9	11.4	11.3	9.4	7.8	63	62	65	58	57
53	Comoros	12.7	11.1	11.2	12.4	14.2	0.9	63	62	57	56	56
54	UAE	13.4	13.6	10.1	11.8	12.2	1.3	62	62	60	58	58
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	13.7	61	58	55	52	53
56	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.9	9.3	11.0	13.4	3.3	60	56	57	57	57
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.4	9.8	10.2	12.0	0.9	59	58	60	57	60
58	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	11.1	10.0	12.2	0.7	59	56	56	56	56
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.1	11.1	10.4	12.0	1.5	58	58	57	56	54
60	Bahrain	12.5	13.2	9.1	11.1	10.2	0.9	57	56	55	55	57
61	Nicaragua	9.1	5.6	11.1	11.8	11.3	7.6	56	51	41	41	-
62	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.6	12.3	2.2	56	57	60	60	51
63	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.6	55	53	56	48	40
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.1	52	48	48	43	-
65	Venezuela	5.6	4.5	11.2	9.4	11.1	9.6	51	39	42	41	34
66	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	10.1	11.4	7.8	51	46	43	42	-
67	Rwanda	8.1	5.5	6.7	10.3	10.1	9.3	50	42	42	41	-
68	Honduras	7.2	5.1	10.5	7.7	9.2	8.7	48	46	39	38	-
69	Uganda	8.1	4.6	7.4	6.7	9.1	11.7	48	47	48	47	46
70	El Salvador	7.7	4.6	10.7	5.7	9.1	7.2	45	42	38	30	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	2.4	44	43	41	42	-
72	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.7	44	43	43	43	-
73	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	2.0	43	47	45	46	-
74	South Sudan	5.7	0.9	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	43	44	44	-
75	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	7.9	2.0	42	42	42	43	-
76	Israel	9.8	8.4	5.6	6.6	6.6	4.3	41	40	38	39	40

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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 2022 reporting period was 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2021.
- 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).

## Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, External experts, WWR analysts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that – as in the previous reporting period – WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

## External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

# WWL 2022 Situation in brief / Mali

## Brief country details

Mali: Population (UN estimate for 2021)	Christians	Chr%
20,893,000	476,000	2.3

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

## Map of country



Mali: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	70	24
WWL 2021	67	28
WWL 2020	66	29
WWL 2019	68	24
WWL 2018	59	37

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 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	Violent religious groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Government officials
Clan oppression	Ethnic group leaders

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. 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 operating NGOs.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

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

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

### Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **October 2020:** Kidnappers from the Islamic militant group *Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin* (JNIM) killed Swiss hostage Beatrice Stoeckli, a Christian missionary who had been held since 2016. Colombian nun, Sister Gloria Cecilia Argoti, who was kidnapped on 7 February 2017 in Karangasso, near Koutial, remained in captivity [until October 2021](#) (outside the WWL 2022 reporting period) (CNA, 19 October 2021).
- **November 2020 - end of March 2021:** In central Mali, seven Christians were abducted by militants. Those who have been released report being forced to speak in Arabic and recite Islamic prayers to make them deny their faith.
- **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.

### 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: until October 2021 - <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/249331/nun-released-nearly-five-years-after-kidnapping-in-mali-thanks-god>



# WWL 2022: Keys to understanding / Mali

## Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International country report	AI 2021	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/mali/">https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/mali/</a>	28 July 2021
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13881370">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13881370</a>	28 July 2021
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2020	BTI 2020	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-MLI.html">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard-MLI.html</a>	28 July 2021
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mali/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/mali/</a>	28 July 2021
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2020	EIU 2020	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/democracy-index-2020.pdf</a>	28 July 2021
FFP's Fragile States Index 2021	FSI 2021	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	28 July 2021
Freedom House's 2021 Democracy index (Mali is not included)	Freedom House/Democracy 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	
Freedom House's 2021 Global Freedom index	Freedom House/Global Freedom 2021	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/mali/freedom-world/2021">https://freedomhouse.org/country/mali/freedom-world/2021</a>	28 July 2021
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2020 report (Mali is not included)	Freedom House/Internet Freedom 2020	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores</a>	
Garda World country report	Garda World	<a href="https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/mali">https://www.garda.com/crisis24/country-reports/mali</a>	28 July 2021
Human Rights Watch World Report 2021	HRW 2021	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/mali">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/mali</a>	28 July 2021
Internet World Stats 2021	IWS 2021	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ml">https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ml</a>	28 July 2021
RSF's 2020 World Press Freedom Index	World Press Freedom 2020	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/mali">https://rsf.org/en/mali</a>	28 July 2021
Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index	CPI 2020	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/ml">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/ml</a>	28 July 2021
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators	HDI 2020	<a href="http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MLI">http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MLI</a>	28 July 2021
US State Department's 2020 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2020	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/">https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/</a>	28 July 2021
USCIRF 2021 country reports (Mali is not included)	USCIRF 2021	<a href="https://www.uscifr.gov/countries">https://www.uscifr.gov/countries</a>	
World Bank country report	World Bank	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mali">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mali</a>	28 July 2021

## 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. 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). 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 has 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 Soumailia 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 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."

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](#)).

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).

Mali scores poorly on [Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index \(2021/22\)](#), 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 28 July 2021) 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, Social Indicators and Gender Index 2019](#)).

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.

## Religious landscape

Mali: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	476,000	2.3
Muslim	18,571,000	88.9
Hindu	0	0.0
Buddhist	0	0.0
Ethno-religionist	1,820,000	8.7
Jewish	0	0.0
Bahai	1,200	0.0
Atheist	1,300	0.0
Agnostic	22,800	0.1
Other	820	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

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 88.9% of the population are Muslim according to WCD 2021 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 became

evident in 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 2021 Macro Poverty Outlook report](#):

- **Economic growth:** Real growth contracted by 2 percent (-4.9 percent in per capita terms) in 2020 due to the COVID-19 shock and August 2020 coup. The retail, construction and hospitality sectors declined. Agriculture was dampened by the poor performance of cotton and cereal production. In contrast, telecommunications, mining and industry were resilient. On the demand side, private consumption and investment declined. Inflation turned positive since July mainly due to increased food costs.
- **Inflation:** Inflation turned negative in 2019 at -0.4% with a continued downward trend.
- **Import/Export:** The current account deficit narrowed to 2.3 percent of GDP in 2020, due to improved terms of trade and despite regional economic sanctions (August to October) following the military coup. The deficit was mainly financed by foreign direct investment (FDI) and project grants in 2019, but external inflows declined in 2020, due to the pandemic and the postcoup donor disengagement.
- **Fiscal deficit:** The fiscal deficit rose to 5.5 percent of GDP in 2020.
- **Tax revenues:** Tax Revenues dropped at the beginning of the pandemic (-17.2 percent y/y in 2020Q1) but recovered since May, responding to the relaxation of containment measures and the end of tax reduction measures.
- **Total expenditure:** Expenditures increased (for wages and transfers) with cuts in nonessential investment.
- **Public debt:** This rose to 44.1 percent of GDP in 2020, though Mali remains at a moderate risk of debt distress.
- **Poverty:** The COVID-19 crisis has rolled back poverty reduction of the last five years. The poverty rate (US\$ 1.9/day in 2011 PPP) decreased from 45.6 percent in 2015 to 42.1 percent in 2019. However, in 2020, a combined loss of income and remittances and rising prices drove up the poverty rate by three percentage points to 45 percent (representing almost a million additional people living below the extreme poverty line).

According to [Theodora.com](https://www.theodora.com) (January 2020 update):

- 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 2021 Index of Economic Freedom](#):

- Mali's economy is ranked as the 133 freest with a score of 55.6 points. Mali is ranked 26th of the 47 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Against this backdrop of economic fragility, women and girls are particularly vulnerable due to lower education and employment rates ([UNESCO, 3 March 2021](#)) as well as discriminatory inheritance practices ([OECD, Social Indicators and Gender Index 2019](#)). While education and employment rates have improved for women and girls, more boys continue to attend secondary education and have greater employment opportunities ([Georgetown, 2019/20, p.20](#)). 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 29 July 2021):

- "Founded in the 5th century, the economic and cultural apogee of Timbuktu came about during the 15th and 16th centuries. It was an important center for the diffusion of Islamic culture with the University of Sankore, with 180 Koranic schools and 25,000 students. It was also a crossroads and an important market place where the trading of manuscripts was negotiated, and salt from Teghaza in the north, gold was sold, and cattle and grain from the south."
- Three sites in the country have been placed on UNESCO's [List of World Heritage in Danger](#) because of threats related to armed conflict: Old towns of Djenné (2016), Timbuktu (2012), Tomb of Askia (2012).

According to UNDP's Human Development Indicators report (HDI 2020) 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 [USAID](#) (Factsheet, 9 April 2020):

- **Refugees/IDPs:** "Armed conflict continues to exacerbate humanitarian needs across Mali, particularly in central and northern regions, generating widespread displacement and threatening livelihoods. As of late February, violence had displaced approximately 219,000 people across the country, an increase of nearly 100,000 people since February 2019, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The majority of Mali's IDPs currently reside in Gao, Ménaka, Mopti, Ségou, and Timbuktu regions."
- "The authorities in Mopti registered 11,000 IDPs from March 7 to 9, bringing the region's IDP count to 88,000 people as of mid-March and accounting for approximately 40 percent of the country's total IDP population, according to the UN. Further, the UN reports that nearly one-third of Mali's IDPs have been displaced more than once since fleeing their homes."
- "Maliens have continued to flee to neighboring countries due to ongoing violence. More than 142,000 Malian refugees were residing in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger as of late February, including approximately 25,000 Malian refugees in Burkina Faso, nearly 58,000 individuals in Mauritania, and an estimated 59,000 refugees in Niger, according to the Government of Mali and UNHCR."

According to UNDP's Human Development Indicators report (HDI 2020):

- **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).

Mali's low GDI and GII scores reflect the challenges that face women and girls in Mali. There is broad societal acceptance for domestic violence ([World Bank, 2016](#)); 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 ([CEDAW, 2016](#)), making it hard for them to escape abusive situations. Further endangering women and girls is the widespread social acceptance for - and practice of - Female Genital Mutilation ([UN Women, 2018](#)).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2021):

- **Internet usage:** 59.8% of the population – survey date: 31 December 2020
- **Facebook usage:** 9.7% of the population – survey date 31 December 2020  
According to a February 2019 [Napoleon Cat study](#), 75.4% of Facebook users are men, compared to 24.6% of women.

According to World Bank:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 116.6 per 100 people  
Whilst more men use cell-phones than women, [Georgetown's 2019/20 Women, Peace and Security Index](#) notes that cell-phone use has risen by 5% since 2017 in Mali).

According to [BuddeComm Research](#) (update 22 April 2020):

- "Mobile penetration in Mali is relatively high and given the sparse nature of the fixed-line infrastructure there is considerable potential for mobile broadband services. Nevertheless, Mali's landlocked location makes it dependent on neighboring countries for international bandwidth, which has kept prices high. Improvements in this sector can be expected from the recent arrival of several new competitive international submarine fibre optic cables in the region, while the government in late 2017 set in motion plans for a local Internet Exchange Point."

To summarize: Mali is not well advanced in technology, although a university specializing in science and technology has been opened in Bamako.

## Security situation

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, 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. In 2021, attacks by militant groups in the Sahel have intensified.



According to CNBC Africa / APO Group (29 June 2021) for the period January-June 2021:

- "There have been repeated attacks over the last six months by groups such as the *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin* (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), as well as violence across communal lines, all resulting in civilian casualties."
- "The Human Rights and Protection Division of the UN Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) recorded 617 human rights abuses, including 165 killings (147 men, nine women, seven boys and two girls) by armed groups from January to June 2021. This represents an increase of some 37 per cent on the 449 abuses, among them 121 killings, documented from August to December 2020."
- "A striking example of the deteriorating human rights situation across Mali is a steep rise in abductions, largely by community-based armed groups and militias in central Mali, notably the *Da Na Ambassagou militia*, and also by armed groups such as the *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin* (JNIM). During the first six months of 2021, MINUSMA documented at least 328 abductions (307 men, 11 boys, nine women and one girl), significantly more than the 187 cases documented during 2020 and a four-fold increase on abductions in 2019."

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 was 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 has increased the number of peacekeeping troops in the country and has also expanded its mandate to allow a more robust military action against militant groups. The situation in Mali is still fragile and it will take a number of years before there is peace and stability in the country. In July 2019, the UK government also decided to send troops to fight Islamic militants in the country.

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.

Notable attacks by Islamic militants include:

- [24 January 2021](#): Six soldiers were killed when suspected jihadist attacked the army in central Mali (France24, 24 January, 2021)
- [3 February 2021](#): At least nine troops were killed when their camp at Boni, located between Douentza and Hombori in the Mopti region came under attack from jihadists (Africanews, 3 February 2021).

- [19 February 2021](#): At least nine people were killed and others were missing or wounded in a spate of attacks near Bandiagara in the central Mopti region (Reuters, 19 February 2021).
- [1 March 2021](#) : Suspected Islamist militants killed nine civilians in attacks on three villages in central Mali (Reuters, 1 March 2021).
- [17 March 2021](#): At least 31 soldiers were killed in an attack on a military post southwest of the town of Ansongo, near the borders with Burkina Faso and Niger (France 24, 17 February 2021).
- [2 April 2021](#): Four UN peacekeepers and two Malian soldiers were killed and several others wounded in two terrorist attacks in Mali's Mopti and Kidal regions (Andalou Agency, 2 April 2021).

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.

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. They may also be forcibly recruited into the ranks of armed groups and, if Christian, forced to convert to Islam. Violent groups have exploited diverted military resources during the COVID-19 pandemic to upscale attacks ([Council on Foreign Relations, 3 April 2020](#)) and child trafficking ([UN News, 1 December 2020](#)).

## 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. 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 lead these coups often claim that the government failed to fight the jihadists. Yet, when they assume power via coup, these generals fail to fight the jihadists as well. As a result, the jihadist threat is expanding.

### 2) Lawlessness is increasing

After the fall of Gaddafi in Libya, the region became filled with rebel groups and Mali paid the highest price with civil war and a coup. 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)." As the region is still in turmoil with the COVID-19 crisis only exacerbating

the problem, Mali is facing a spill-over effect from the situation in the neighboring countries. In 2020 and 2021, many soldiers have been killed and thousands of civilians have fled to [IDP camps](#) (Global Humanitarian Overview, accessed 5 January 2022). The past 10 years have been very challenging for Christians in particular as the whole region faces acute insecurity created by the presence of the various jihadist groups.

### 3) The series of governance crises continues

In the last decade, Mali has been through a series of governance crises. A country that was once hailed as a symbol of African democracy experienced a coup and a militant jihadist group controlling the vast majority of the country. Then, during the WWL 2022 reporting period, the continued protests demanding the resignation of the country's leader 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 seizing of power in May 2021.

### 4) Impact of COVID-19

Militant groups are becoming more potent in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, as governments in the region have shifted their priorities from fighting jihadists to fighting the pandemic. Given the recent spate of attacks, 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. If the governments in the region launch a major offensive in 2022 to regain the territories they abandoned during the height of the pandemic, it is likely that violent jihadist attacks will only increase.

## 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>
- 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: Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index (2021/22) - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/WPS-Index-2021.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: Girls Not Brides - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/mali>

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- Economic landscape: World Bank's 2021 Macro Poverty Outlook report - <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/720441492455091991/mpo-ssa.pdf>
- Economic landscape: Theodora.com - [https://theodora.com/wfbcurrent/mali/mali\\_economy.html](https://theodora.com/wfbcurrent/mali/mali_economy.html)
- Economic landscape: Heritage World's 2021 Index of Economic Freedom: - <https://www.heritage.org/index/country/mali>
- Economic landscape: UNESCO, 3 March 2021 - <http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/mali-gender-equality-investment-future-13688>
- Economic landscape: OECD, Social Indications and Gender Index 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/ML.pdf>
- Economic landscape: Georgetown, 2019/20, p.20 - <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>
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- Technological landscape: Georgetown's 2019/20 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>
- Security situation: Islamic militants - <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/276-speaking-bad-guys-toward-dialogue-central-malis-jihadists>
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- Security situation: 24 January 2021 - <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210124-suspected-jihadist-attacks-on-army-in-mali-kill-three-soldiers>
- Security situation: 3 February 2021 - <https://www.africanews.com/2021/02/03/at-least-nine-malian-soldiers-killed-in-suspected-militant-attack/>
- Security situation: 19 February 2021: - <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-burkina-security-idUSKBN2AJ0U6>
- Security situation: 1 March 2021 - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-security-idUSKCN2AT2HV>
- Security situation: 17 March 2021: - <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210317-dozens-of-soldiers-killed-in-attack-on-northern-mali-army-base>
- Security situation: 2 April 2021 - <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/mali-6-soldiers-killed-several-wounded-in-2-attacks/2196648>
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- Security situation: UN News, 1 December 2020 - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1078982>
- 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>
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## WWL 2022: Church information / Mali

### Christian origins

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

### Church spectrum today

Mali: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	284,000	59.7
Protestant	164,000	34.5
Independent	25,900	5.4
Unaffiliated	1,700	0.4
Doubly-affiliated Christians	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>475,600</b>	<b>99.9</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	172,000	36.1
Renewalist movement	51,900	10.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2021)

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

The main 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).

# WWL 2022: Persecution Dynamics / Mali

## Reporting period

1 October 2020 - 30 September 2021

## Position on the World Watch List

Mali: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2022	70	24
WWL 2021	67	28
WWL 2020	66	29
WWL 2019	68	24
WWL 2018	59	37

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2018-2022 reporting periods

The three-point increase in WWL 2022 was due to an increase in pressure. Jihadists are expanding and the general situation in the country is deteriorating fast. The country has seen coup after coup (two coups in less than a year – one in August 2020 and the recent one in May 2021). These recent coups happened at a time when the country is struggling to contain the expansion of jihadists in the country. It seems that the government is only effective in major cities and those areas outside are in the hands (directly or indirectly) of jihadists who provide social services and entice the youth into joining their ranks. Pressure in the *Community* and *Church spheres* remained very high as jihadists have utilized the security vacuum left by the government due to the COVID-19 crisis. If the current trend of jihadist expansion continues unabated, it is likely that the country's score will rise further in the future.

## 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	Not at all
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.

### 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.

### 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.

## Drivers of persecution

Mali:									
Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			STRONG					VERY STRONG
Government officials	Weak								Medium
Ethnic group leaders				Strong					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong								
Violent religious groups	Very strong								Very strong
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong								

Mali:									
Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			STRONG					VERY 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.
- **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 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 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.

## 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

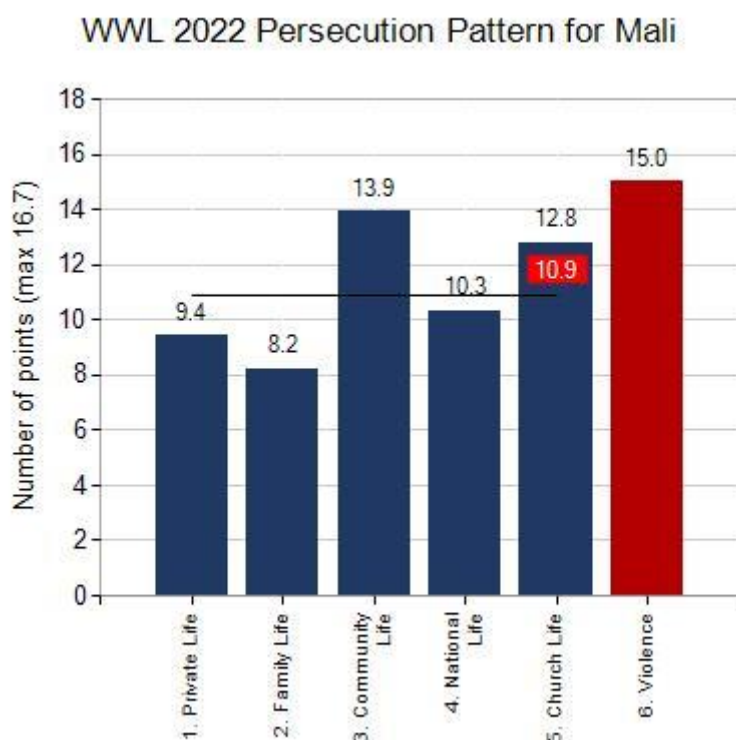
**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation in Mali and so this category is therefore not included in WWL scoring and analysis.

**Historical Christian communities:** Of the less than 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.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2022 persecution pattern for Mali shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Mali is very high at 10.9 points, rising from 10.4 points in WWL 2021.
- Pressure is strongest and at an extreme level in the *Community sphere* (13.9 points). Pressure is also very high in the *Church sphere* (12.8 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 2021.

## 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 2021 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. (2.75 points)**

Tolerance, a hallmark of the 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.). (2.50 points)**

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 in Dohara and Bodwall where Catholic churches have been attacked in the past.

**Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (2.50 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.). (2.25 points)**

It has been observed that in some situations jihadists are 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; any deviance from Islamic rites is easily detected and will lead to persecution.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

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 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.00 points)**

During WWL 2022, jihadists have gained ground. In the context of the ongoing crisis 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 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (2.75 points)**

In areas that are influenced by the jihadists or 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. (2.75 points)**

This issue has been the case for the last couple of 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)**

The situation in the country is getting worse as days go by. The north is most severe, but harassment in central Mali is increasing: Although the government is forbidding religious propaganda, radio and sermons in mosques are becoming 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. Although Christians in places like Bamako are more free in general, they also report 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)**

Jihadists in Mali have informants 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 one of the countries where jihadists abduct Christians and then demand ransom. In the last years, several Christians have been abducted for ransom and some are still believed to be in captivity. Some reportedly have been killed. Due to the growth in radical Islam and lack of security, the number of forced marriages of Christian girls to Muslim men is high in many areas.

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

Religion is a fundamental component in 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. Again, as a matter of policy, the government is more sympathetic towards Islam".

## Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

Freedom of expression is shrinking in Mali as 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)**

Working as an NGO worker in the country has become extremely challenging. NGOs are forced to relocate or close down in the majority Muslim areas due to the threat posed by the jihadists. 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 Muslims. Quite frequently, Christians have been pressured into converting to Islam and to act against their conscience in certain professional positions. Such pressure is particularly prevalent in the Malian army and other security agencies and also, for instance, in the public health and banking sectors (among others).

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

This is one of the toughest issues that face Christians in the country; it is not the law hindering travel but the danger. Missionaries, in particular, require an enormous amount of security to travel to the north. This is a very dangerous place to travel. Christians were 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)**

Christians in the north have been experiencing great problems in repairing or building places of Christian worship. Let alone building or renovating, maintaining what they have is becoming impossible as many have been forced to close their churches and relocate.

**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 any fear. In the majority of the country where it is dangerous to identify as a Christian or carry out evangelism, it is the lack of security which is hindering outside activities. In fact, Christians have been forced to close their churches and relocate to Bamako or IDP camps.

**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 schools where militants go round schools and intimidate teachers into not teaching anything to do with Christianity or secularism. The government is also keen on detecting 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. In the rest of the country, churches need permission from the government before they can carry out outdoor activities.

## 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/>.

**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.*

<b>Mali: Violence Block question</b>	<b>WWL 2022</b>	<b>WWL 2021</b>
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	10 *	33
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 *	2
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	2	21
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 *	100*
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 *	1000*
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1	40

## 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

Mali: WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2022	10.9
2021	10.4
2020	10.4
2019	10.4
2018	9.9

Except during the WWL 2018 reporting period, the average pressure on Christians score has been consistently above 10.0 points. In WWL 2019 - WWL 2021 pressure stabilized at the high level of 10.4 points, but rose in WWL 2022. This increase is a worrying sign that the situation in the country is not going in the right direction. It shows that Islamic militants and other intolerant groups have maintained their influence in the country.

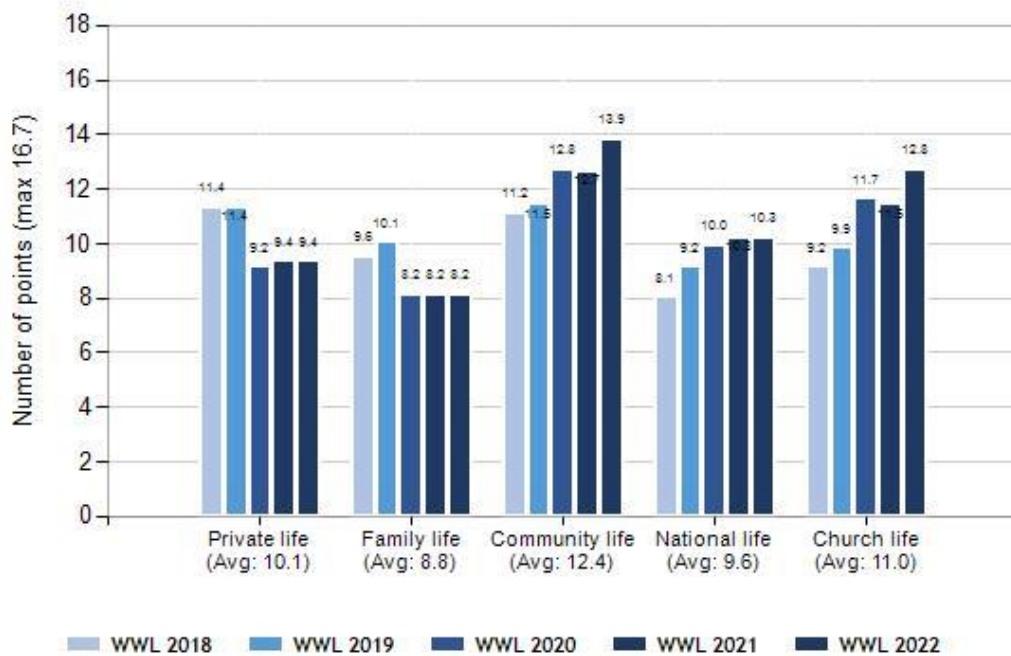
### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life

Over the five WWL reporting periods, there has been a consistent rise in scores for *Community*, *Church* and *National life*. In contrast, pressure in *Private* and *Family life* has decreased and now stabilized at the 9.4 and 8.2 mark respectively. Public space for Christians is shrinking. This is partly and indirectly helped by the weak and fragile central government which is unable to pro-



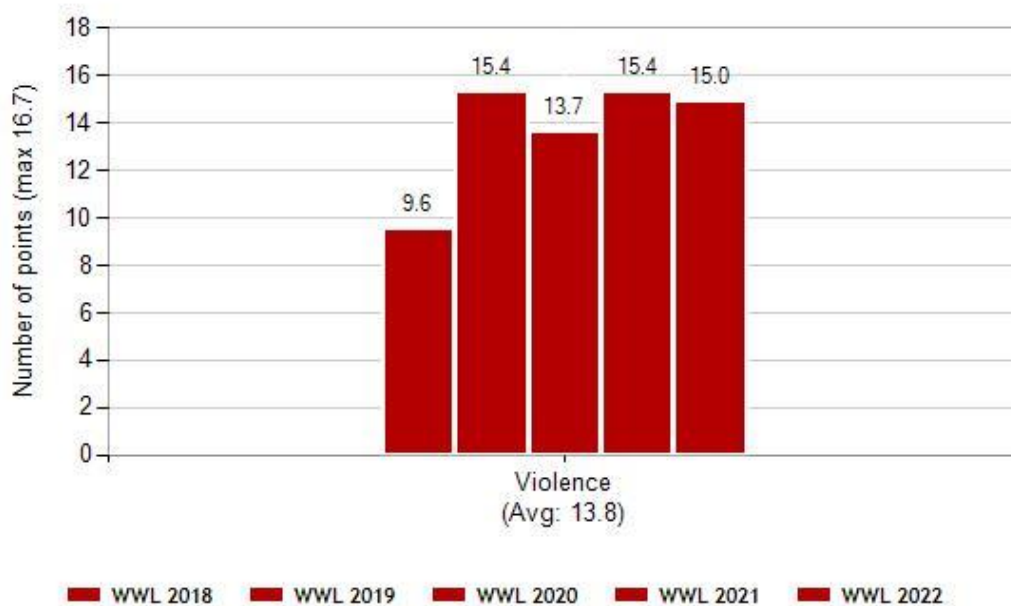
protect Christians from jihadist influence and attack. The persistent coups have not helped to mitigate the situation.

WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Mali (Spheres of life)



### 5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

WWL 2018 - WWL 2022 Persecution Pattern for Mali (Violence)



The graph above shows that the average score for violence is extremely high at 13.8 points. The score for violence peaked at the 15.4 point level in the WWL 2019 and WWL 2021 reporting periods.

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced divorce; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

There has been a resurgence of attacks by Islamic militants since late 2019, in a broader context of instability. Militant groups kidnap girls, forcibly marry them to some of their members, and keep girls in 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: “Abducting Christian girls and forced marriage is considered as one means of spreading Islam by the extremist groups.”

Christian women live in an ambiance of Islamic culture with its imposed dress code. They experience social rejection and when facing persecution, the children suffer repercussions of whatever befalls their parents. When parents are separated, or fathers are killed or some other loss of subsistence income occurs, some Christian girls feel they have no option to survive but prostitution. Widows are also 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 be supported or fed, making them extremely vulnerable. Although there are national laws that protect women and girls in general, traditional and cultural practices and gender norms make women more vulnerable to such treatment. 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).

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

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	-
Political and Legal	Forced divorce
Security	Abduction; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

As violent militant attacks continue across Mali, Christian men and boys are particularly subject to death-threats and violent, physical attacks because of their faith. Targeted attacks on Christian homes and businesses are effectively being used to impoverish families. This dire situation for Christians can be exacerbated by the targeted social rejection or the blocking of access to positions of responsibility and scholarships. Converts face the greatest level of persecution in this regard. 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, 22 October 2020). 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. Furthermore, loss of men and boys mean less protection for the family and weakens the Church in Mali.

### Persecution of other religious minorities

Apart from Christians, those adhering to indigenous traditional belief systems are also 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. Freedom House reported in its ([Freedom in the World 2019 Report](#)): “Islamist armed groups have reportedly compelled civilians to attend lectures at mosques, at which they promote their interpretations of Islam and discourage residents from having contact with the government and UN and French peacekeeping forces. There were a number of reports of armed attacks on mosques, as well as detentions and murders committed within.” For these Islamic militants, Muslims who do not follow their strict interpretation of Islam are not proper Muslims.

## Future outlook

**Note about the current government situation:** Although the [National Transitional Council](#) had begun to function (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. In the WWL 2022 reporting period, jihadists stepped up their attacks, making the country unsafe for Christians, even in the capital city, Bamako. Communal violence 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 is being used by the 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.

### 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.

### 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 pandemic has only strengthened them due to government's decision to prioritize public health rather than combatting the organized crime cartels.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- 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>
- 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/2021/10/22/mali-alleged-disappearances-executions-security-forces>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Freedom in the World 2019 Report - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/mali/freedom-world/2019>
- 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 World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Mali>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Mali>
- [The Sahel – Rising-islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-christians-in-the-region – 2016](#)

## External Links - Further useful reports

- Further useful reports: The Sahel – Rising-islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-christians-in-the-region – 2016 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Sahel-Rising-Islamic-militancy-and-the-persecution-of-Christians-in-the-region-2016.pdf>