

COUNTRY PROFILE: MALI

January 2005

COUNTRY

Formal Name: Republic of Mali (République de Mali).

Short Form: Mali.

Term for Citizen(s): Malian(s).

Capital: Bamako.

Major Cities: Bamako (more than 1 million inhabitants according to the 1998 census), Sikasso (113,813), Ségou (90,898), Mopti (79,840), Koutiala (74,153), Kayes (67,262), and Gao (54,903).

Independence: September 22, 1960, from France.

Public Holidays: In 2005 legal holidays in Mali include: January 1 (New Year's Day); January 20 (Armed Forces Day); January 21* (Tabaski, Feast of the Sacrifice); March 26 (Democracy Day); March 28* (Easter Monday); April 21* (Mouloud, Birthday of the Prophet); May 1 (Labor Day); May 25 (Africa Day); September 22 (Independence Day); November 3–5* (Korité, end of Ramadan); December 25 (Christmas Day). Dates marked with an asterisk vary according to calculations based on the Islamic lunar or Christian Gregorian calendar.

Flag:

Mali's flag consists of three equal vertical stripes of green, yellow, and red (viewed left to right, hoist side).



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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Early History: The area now constituting the nation of Mali was once part of three famed West African empires that controlled trans-Saharan trade in gold, salt, and other precious commodities. All of the empires arose in the area then known as the western Sudan, a vast region of savanna between the Sahara Desert to the north and the tropical rain forests along the Guinean coast to the south. All were characterized by strong leadership (matrilineal) and kin-based societies. None had rigid geopolitical boundaries or ethnic identities.

The earliest of these empires was the Ghana Empire, which arose along the Mali-Mauritania border, possibly as early as the fifth century A.D. but making its presence felt in the region by the eighth century. Although originally formed by Berbers, the empire was soon dominated by the Soninké, a Mande speaking people. From its capital in Kumbi Saleh on the edge of the

desert, the empire expanded throughout southeastern Mauritania, southwestern Mali, and northern Senegal from about A.D. 700–1078. The Soninké kings never fully adopted Islam, but the empire had good relations with Muslim traders. Nevertheless, the Ghana Empire fell in 1078 as a result of invasions by the Almoravids, nomadic Muslim Berbers who expanded and spread Islam throughout northwest Africa in the late eleventh century. Kumbi Saleh was destroyed in 1203 by a former vassal state, the anti-Muslim Soso Kingdom, which ultimately controlled the southern portions of the former Ghana Empire.

The Mali Empire arose from a small kingdom based on the upper Niger River that expanded rapidly in the thirteenth century under the Malinké ruler Sundiata Keita. Sundiata led a Mande revolt against the Soso king and then unified a vast region of the western Sudan into the Mali Empire. The empire reached the pinnacle of its power in the fourteenth century when it extended over a large area centered in the upper Niger and encompassed numerous vassal kingdoms and provinces. The most famous ruler of that century was Mansa Kankan Musa I (1312–37). Like other Mande rulers, who had adopted Islam fairly early, Musa was Muslim, and the Mali Empire's wealth in gold became renowned in both the Arab and Western worlds when he made the hajj to Mecca in 1324–25. Under the Mali Empire, the ancient trading cities of Djenné and Tombouctou (often seen as Timbuktu) were centers of both trade and Islamic learning. Subsequently, the empire declined as a result of court intrigue and disputes over the succession. Vassal provinces revolted in the late fourteenth century, and the Songhai Empire ultimately supplanted the Mali Empire in the fifteenth century.

The Songhai people originated in what is now northwestern Nigeria and gradually expanded up the Niger River in the eighth century. They were well established at Gao by 800 and accepted Islam in around 1000. For several centuries, they expanded and controlled neighboring states but were subject to the Mali Empire. In the late fourteenth century, the Songhai gradually gained independence from the Mali Empire and expanded, ultimately subsuming the entire eastern part of the Mali Empire. Further expansions occurred under the direction of Askia Muhammad, who established the Askia Dynasty (1492–1592). Tombouctou and Djenné prospered once again, as the rulers actively promoted Islam. The empire eventually collapsed as a result of both internal and external pressures, including a Moroccan Berber invasion in 1591. The fall of the Songhai Empire marked the end of the region's role as a trading crossroads. Following the establishment of sea routes by the European powers, the trans-Saharan trade routes lost their significance.

French Colonization and Independence: In the colonial era, Mali fell under the control of the French beginning in the late 1800s. By 1893, the French had appointed a civilian governor of the territory they called French Sudan, but active resistance to French rule continued. By 1905, most of the area was under firm French control. French Sudan was administered as part of the Federation of French West Africa and supplied labor to France's colonies on the coast of West Africa. In 1958 the renamed Sudanese Republic obtained complete internal autonomy and joined the French Community. In early 1959, the Sudanese Republic and Senegal formed the Federation of Mali, which gained full independence from France as part of the French Community on June 20, 1960. Following the withdrawal of Senegal from the federation in August 1960, the Sudanese Republic became the independent nation of Mali on September 22, 1960, with Modibo Keita as president. Keita quickly established a one-party state, withdrew from the French Community in 1962, adopted an independent African and socialist orientation with close ties to the Eastern

bloc, and implemented extensive nationalization of economic resources. Following a progressive economic decline, however, Mali was forced to rejoin the Franc Zone in 1967.

One-Party Rule: In November 1968, a group of junior army officers led by Lieutenant Moussa Traoré overthrew the Keita regime in a bloodless coup and established a 14-member Military Committee for National Liberation with Traoré as president. The military-led regime attempted to reform the economy, but its efforts were frustrated by both political turmoil and a devastating drought in the Sahel lasting from 1968 to 1974. Under the provisions of a new constitution approved in 1974, the Second Republic of Mali became a single-party state under the Democratic Union of the Malian People (Union Démocratique du Peuple Malien—UDPM). In subsequent single-party presidential and legislative elections held in June 1979, Traoré (now a general) garnered 99 percent of the votes cast. The Traoré regime faced student unrest beginning in the late 1970s as well as three coup attempts, but it successfully (and harshly) repressed all dissent until the late 1980s. Traoré was reelected, running unopposed, in 1985.

Attempting to address Mali's economic problems, the government implemented some reforms in the state enterprise system, created new incentives for private enterprise, and attempted to control public corruption. It also signed a new structural adjustment agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). But the populace became increasingly dissatisfied with the austerity measures imposed by the IMF plan as well as their perception that the ruling elite was not subject to the same strictures. In response to the growing demands for multiparty democracy then sweeping the continent, the Traoré regime did allow some limited political liberalization. In National Assembly elections in June 1988, multiple UDPM candidates were permitted to contest each seat, and the regime organized nationwide conferences to consider how to implement democracy within the one-party framework. Nevertheless, the regime refused to usher in a full-fledged democratic system.

In 1990 cohesive opposition movements began to emerge, including the National Democratic Initiative Committee and the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (Alliance pour la Démocratie au Mali—Adema). The increasingly turbulent political situation was complicated by the rise of ethnic violence in the north in mid-1990. The return to Mali of large numbers of Tuareg who had migrated to Algeria and Libya during a prolonged drought increased tensions in the region between the nomadic Tuareg and the sedentary population. Ostensibly fearing a Tuareg secessionist movement in the north, the Traoré regime imposed a state of emergency and harshly repressed Tuareg unrest. Despite the signing of a peace accord in January 1991, unrest and periodic armed clashes continued.

Transition to Multiparty Democracy: After the fall of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in March 1991, Malians engaged in forceful demonstrations against the Traoré regime that degenerated into widespread rioting. Military forces fired on the protesters, killing more than 100, following which the regime was overturned by a military coup led by Amadou Toumani Touré, a lieutenant colonel in a paratroop battalion. The coup leaders soon formed a mostly civilian, 25-member Transitional Committee for the Salvation of the People, which then appointed a civilian-led transitional government. A national conference, including representatives of political groups, labor unions, student organizations, and other social groupings, was held in August 1991. It produced a draft constitution (approved in a national

referendum in January 1992) that created a multiparty democracy, officially the Third Republic. Simultaneously, ongoing efforts to resolve unrest in the north resulted in a national pact signed in April 2002 with rebel forces. Among the measures agreed on were the creation of a new administrative region of Kidal, the incorporation of Tuareg fighters into the armed forces, the demilitarization of the north, and the implementation of programs designed to promote greater economic and political integration of the Tuareg. Nevertheless, sporadic violence continued well into the late 1990s.

Elections were held in early 1992 to elect a president, National Assembly, and municipal councils. Touré did not run in the presidential election. Rather, Alpha Oumar Konaré, a historian and former education minister, was elected to the presidency as the candidate of Adema, which led a coalition of opposition parties. The Konaré administration, inaugurated in June 1992, was characterized by significant tensions between Adema and its coalition partners. The political tension was exacerbated by the flawed presidential and legislative elections of 1997. The Constitutional Court annulled the first round of the legislative elections, won overwhelmingly by Adema, because of “serious irregularities,” but Adema and its allies won the restaged elections handily as well. Opposition parties boycotted the presidential election, and voter turnout was low, easing Konaré’s reelection.

Konaré stepped down after his constitutionally mandated limit of two terms and did not run in the 2002 elections. Touré then reemerged, this time as a civilian. Running as an independent on a platform of national unity, Touré won the presidency in a runoff against the candidate of Adema, which had been divided by infighting and suffered from the creation of a spin-off party, the Rally for Mali (Rassemblement pour le Mali—RPM). Touré had retained great popularity because of his role in the transitional government in 1991–92. The 2002 election was a milestone, marking Mali’s first successful transition from one democratically elected president to another, despite the persistence of electoral irregularities and low voter turnout. In the 2002 legislative elections, no party gained a majority; Touré then appointed a politically inclusive government and pledged to tackle Mali’s pressing social and economic development problems.

GEOGRAPHY

Location: Mali is a landlocked nation in West Africa, located southwest of Algeria.

Size: At about 1.2 million square kilometers, Mali is almost twice the size of Texas or about equal to that of Texas and California combined.

Land Boundaries: Mali shares a total of 7,243 kilometers of land boundaries with seven bordering states: Algeria (1,376 kilometers) to the north and northeast, Niger (821 kilometers) to the east, Burkina Faso (1,000 kilometers) to the southeast, Côte d’Ivoire (532 kilometers) to the south, Guinea (858 kilometers) to the southwest, and Senegal (419 kilometers) and Mauritania (2,237 kilometers) to the west.



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Length of Coastline: None. Mali is landlocked.

Topography: Mali's territory encompasses three natural zones: the southern cultivated Sudanese zone, central semiarid Sahelian zone, and northern arid Saharan zone. The terrain is primarily savanna in the south and flat to rolling plains or high plateau (200–500 meters in elevation) in the north. There are rugged hills in the northeast, with elevations of up to 1,000 meters. Desert or semi-desert covers about 65 percent of the country's area. The Niger River creates a large and fertile inland delta as it arcs northeast through Mali from Guinea before turning south and eventually emptying into the Gulf of Guinea.

Principal Rivers: The Niger (with 1,693 kilometers in Mali) and Senegal are Mali's two largest rivers. The Niger is generally described as Mali's lifeblood, a source of food, drinking water, irrigation, and transportation.

Climate: The climate ranges from subtropical in the south to arid in the north. The country is mostly dry, with 4–5 months of rainy season. In Bamako, at an elevation of 340 meters above sea level, temperatures generally range from 16° C to 39° C. January is the coldest month, with temperatures ranging from 16° C to 33° C, and April is the hottest month, with temperatures averaging 34° C–39° C. Annual precipitation in Bamako averages 1,120 millimeters. The driest months are December and January with zero rainfall. The wettest month is August, which averages 220 millimeters of rainfall. Most of the country receives negligible rainfall, and droughts are a recurring problem. During dry seasons, a hot, dust-laden harmattan haze is also common. Flooding of the Niger River occurs regularly in the rainy season (approximately June/July–November/December).

Natural Resources: Mali is endowed with bauxite, copper, diamonds, gold, gypsum, iron ore, kaolin, limestone, lithium, manganese, phosphates, salt, silver, uranium, and zinc, but not all deposits are being exploited, and some may not be commercially viable. Mali also has ample hydropower.

Land Use: Sixty-five percent of Mali's land area is desert or semi-desert. According to estimates in 1998, only 3.8 percent of Mali's area can be classified as arable land, and less than 0.1 percent was planted to permanent crops in that year. Mali was estimated to have 1,380 square kilometers of irrigated land in 1998.

Environmental Factors: Mali faces numerous environmental challenges, including desertification, deforestation, soil erosion, drought, and inadequate supplies of potable water. Deforestation is an especially serious and growing problem. According to the Ministry of the Environment, Mali's population consumes 6 million tons of wood per year for timber and fuel. To meet this demand, 400,000 hectares of tree cover are lost annually, virtually ensuring destruction of the country's savanna woodlands.

Time Zone: Greenwich Mean Time.

SOCIETY

Population: According to provisional figures from Mali's most recent census in April 1998, the population totaled nearly 9.8 million, which represented a 27 percent increase over the 1987 census total. In July 2004, the U.S. government estimated Mali's population at about 11.9 million, with an annual growth rate of 2.8 percent. Other estimates place the total population at 12–13 million. The population is predominantly rural (68 percent in 2002), and 5–10 percent of Malians are characterized as nomadic. Overall population density in 2003 was estimated at 10.5 inhabitants per square kilometer, but there are wide regional variations. More than 90 percent of the population lives in the southern part of the country, especially in Bamako, which had more than 1 million inhabitants according to the 1998 census. Mali had an estimated net migration rate of –0.33 migrants per 1,000 people in 2004. About 3 million Malians are believed to reside in Côte d'Ivoire and France. Conversely, according to a 2003 estimate, Mali hosts about 11,000 Mauritians; most are Fulani herders who routinely engage in cross-border migration. In addition, there are several thousand refugees from Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Liberia in Bamako and other urban areas of Mali.

Demography: According to 2004 estimates, about 47 percent of Malians are less than 15 years of age, 50 percent are 15–64 years of age, and 3 percent are 65 and older. The median age is 16.3 years (15.7 male and 16.9 female). The sex ratio for the total population is 0.96 males per female. The birthrate in 2004 was estimated at 47.3 births per 1,000 and the total fertility rate at 6.6 children born per woman. The death rate in 2004 was estimated at 19.1 deaths per 1,000. Estimated life expectancy at birth was 45.3 years total (44.7 for males and 45.9 for females). Mali is estimated to have one of the world's highest rates of infant mortality: 118 deaths per 1,000 live births according to a 2004 estimate by the U.S. government, but as high as 142 per 1,000 live births according to United Nations sources.

Ethnic Groups: Mali's population encompasses a number of sub-Saharan ethnic groups, most of which have historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious commonalities. The Bambara are by far the largest single ethnic group. Collectively, the Bambara (36.5 percent in the mid-1990s), Soninké (8.8 percent) and Malinké (6.6 percent), all part of the Mande language group, constitute more than 50 percent of Mali's population. Other significant groups are the Fulani, or Peul (13.9 percent), Sénoufo (9 percent), Dogon (8 percent), Songhai (7.2 percent), Diola (2.9 percent), and Bobo and Oulé (2.4 percent). In addition, Mali has significant numbers of Tuareg (1.7 percent) and Moors, or Maur (1.2 percent), desert nomads related to the North African Berbers. Mali historically has enjoyed reasonably good inter-ethnic relations, based on a long tradition of coexistence. Nevertheless, some hereditary servitude or bondage relationships persist, according to the U.S. Department of State's annual human rights report for 2003, as do ethnic tensions between the settled Songhai and the nomadic Tuareg in the north.

Languages: Mali's official language is French, but numerous (40 or more) African languages also are widely used by the various ethnic groups. About 80 percent of Mali's population can communicate in Bambara, which is the country's principal lingua franca and marketplace language.

Religion: An estimated 90 percent of Malians are Muslim, mostly Sunni; 9 percent of Malians adhere to indigenous or traditional animist beliefs; and 1 percent are Christian (about two-thirds Roman Catholic and one-third Protestant denominations). Atheism and agnosticism are believed to be rare among Malians, most of whom practice their religion on a daily basis.

According to the U.S. Department of State's annual report on religious freedom, Islam as traditionally practiced in Mali can be characterized as moderate, tolerant, and adapted to local conditions. Women participate in economic, social, and political activity and generally do not wear veils. The constitution establishes a secular state and provides for freedom of religion, and the government largely respects this right. Relations between Muslims and practitioners of minority religious faiths are generally amicable, and foreign missionary groups (both Muslim and non-Muslim) are tolerated.

Education and Literacy: Public education in Mali is in principle provided free of charge and is compulsory for nine years between the ages of seven and 16. The system encompasses six years of primary education beginning at age seven, followed by six years of secondary education, generally divided into two three-year cycles. However, Mali's actual primary school enrollment rate is low, in large part because families are unable to cover the cost of uniforms, books, supplies, and other fees required to attend even public school. In the 2000–01 school year, primary school enrollment was estimated to include only 61 percent of the appropriate age-group (71 percent of males and 51 percent of females). The primary school completion rate is also low: only 36 percent of students in 2003 (and lower for females). The majority of students reportedly leave school by age 12. The secondary school enrollment rate in the late 1990s was 15 percent (20 percent for males and 10 percent for females).

Government expenditures on education in 2000 constituted about 15.6 percent of total government expenditures and about 2.8 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). According to Malian government estimates for the 2003–04 school year, Mali had 318 pre-primary institutions with 971 teachers and 35,000 students; 8,714 general primary and secondary institutions with 36,064 teachers and 1,650,803 students; and 37,635 students in tertiary institutions. The education system is plagued by a lack of schools in rural areas, as well as shortages of teachers and materials.

According to U.S. government estimates, the adult literacy rate (defined as those over age 15 who can read and write) was 46.4 percent for the total population in 2003 (53.5 percent for males and 39.6 percent for females). According to United Nations sources, however, the literacy rate is actually much lower—only 27–30 percent overall and as low as 12 percent for females, among the lowest rates in Africa.

Health: Mali is ranked among the world's poorest nations and, as such, faces numerous health challenges related to poverty, malnutrition, and inadequate hygiene and sanitation. Its health and development indicators rank among the worst in the world. In 2000 only 62–65 percent of the population was estimated to have access to safe drinking water and only 69 percent to sanitation services of some kind; only 8 percent was estimated to have access to modern sanitation facilities. Only 20 percent of the nation's villages and livestock watering holes had modern water facilities.

Mali is dependent on international development organizations and foreign missionary groups for much of its health care. In 2001 general government expenditures on health constituted 6.8 percent of total general government expenditures and 4.3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), totaling only about US\$4 per capita at an average exchange rate. Medical facilities in Mali are very limited, especially outside of Bamako, and medicines are in short supply. There were only 5 physicians per 100,000 inhabitants in the 1990s and 24 hospital beds per 100,000 in 1998. In 1999 only 36 percent of Malians were estimated to have access to health services within a five-kilometer radius.

Malaria and other arthropod-borne diseases are prevalent in Mali, as are a number of infectious diseases such as cholera, hepatitis, meningitis, and tuberculosis. Mali's population also suffers from a high rate of child malnutrition and a low rate of immunization for childhood diseases such as measles. There were an estimated 140,000 cases of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) reported in 2003, and an estimated 1.9 percent of the adult population was afflicted with HIV/AIDS that year, among the lowest rates in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Welfare: Mali is one of the poorest nations in the world and has a very low standard of living, ranking 172d out of 175 on the 2003 United Nations Human Development Report, which attempts to measure quality of life. Nevertheless, the government is attempting to reduce poverty and to increase spending on education, health care, and rural development with the assistance of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and other international donor organizations. The Ministry of Promotion of Women, Child, and Family Affairs is working to promote the welfare of children, although child labor and international trafficking in children remain problems. Mali also has developed a national plan to promote the welfare of women by reducing inequities between men and women in education, health, employment, and legal rights.

ECONOMY

Overview: Mali is a developing nation with a fledgling market-based economy that is dominated by subsistence farming and herding. Most (80 percent) of the labor force is engaged in agriculture and fishing. Industrial activity is centered on food processing as well as some textile manufacturing and mining of gold and phosphates. The economy remains vulnerable to price fluctuations in its two main exports—gold and cotton. Most economic activity is focused along the Niger because more than 65 percent of the country's land area is desert or semi-desert. Economic development has been hampered by the state-led development strategy adopted at independence, which resulted in the proliferation of unwieldy and inefficient parastatals in key economic sectors, as well as the country's deficient economic infrastructure, administrative inefficiency, corruption, and poor social conditions, including a low literacy rate and high population growth rate.

Mali remains heavily dependent on foreign aid, but the government appears committed to implementing economic reforms, privatization, and free-market policies in order to meet the expectations of international donors and investors. It has had some success with structural

adjustments designed to help the economy grow, privatize, diversify, and attract foreign investment and is working to control government spending and consolidate the tax base. Economic growth averaged 5 percent in the 1996–2002 period. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is working with Mali to undertake structural reforms. In June 2004, the IMF approved a new poverty reduction and growth facility (PRGF) arrangement for Mali. The old PRGF expired in August 2003. The PRGF focused on a three-year plan aimed at fiscal consolidation, privatization, and reforms in the cotton sector.

Gross Domestic Product: Mali's gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated to be US\$3.4 billion in 2002 and US\$4.4 billion in 2003. Real GDP grew by an estimated 11.8 percent in 2001, 4.3 percent in 2002, and 6 percent in 2003, the latter largely as a result of record harvests and high cotton prices. A slightly lower growth rate (5 percent) was forecast for 2004, but the growth rate was projected to reach 6.1 percent in 2005 as a result of anticipated mining and manufacturing gains. GDP per capita was estimated at US\$269 in 2001. The primary sector accounted for 46.1 percent of GDP in 2002, the secondary sector for 20.1 percent, and the tertiary sector for 33.8 percent.

Government Budget: Government revenues were estimated at US\$764 million in 2002 and expenditures at US\$828 million. The deficit represented about 7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2000, 2001, and 2002 but dropped to about 5 percent in 2003 as a result of better tax collection. The deficit was expected to remain at about 5 percent of GDP in 2004 and 2005. Deficits are largely financed by external aid sources.

Inflation: Consumer price inflation in Mali has been relatively low in the 2000s, averaging about 5 percent in 2001 and 2002, dropping to 1.3 percent in 2003, and projected to run about 3 percent in both 2004 and 2005. Public-sector wages are adjusted for inflation.

Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing: Agricultural activity (mostly traditional small-scale farming and herding) produced about 46 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and occupied about 80 percent of the labor force in the early 2000s. Livestock accounts for about 20 percent of GDP on average each year. About 90 percent of the 1.4 million hectares under cultivation are devoted to subsistence farming, primarily of cereals such as corn, millet, and sorghum. The main agricultural products are corn, cotton, millet, peanuts, rice, sorghum, sugarcane, and vegetables, as well as livestock (cattle, goats, and sheep). Cotton and livestock are the primary agricultural exports. Mali, Sub-Saharan Africa's leading producer of cotton, produced an estimated 419,000 tons of raw cotton in 2002 and 612,000 tons in 2003, a record harvest, but in 2004 the country's agricultural sector was threatened by the prospect of a locust plague. Cotton production is mostly artisanal, with village co-operatives run by a government parastatal. Liberalization and reform of the cotton industry are key components of the government's economic reform program.

Mali's primary sector also includes some forestry and fishing activity. Most of Mali's forest products are used for fuelwood, on which the populace is heavily dependent for its energy needs. Artisanal fishing, mostly on the Niger River, also is an important economic activity, but it is vulnerable to drought, pollution, and changes resulting from the construction of dams and has

been in decline since the early 1980s. Mali's rivers produce about 100,000 tons of fish annually, 20 percent of which is exported, mostly to Côte d'Ivoire.

Mining and Minerals: Mining is a growth industry in Mali, accounting for about 16.9 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2002. Gold mining accounts for 80 percent of mining activity, and in the early 2000s gold surpassed cotton as Mali's most significant export. Mali is Sub-Saharan Africa's third largest gold producer, behind South Africa and Ghana, and is reported to have 600–800 tons of gold reserves. Mali produced about 66 tons of gold in 2002 and 73 tons in 2003. Phosphates, silver, gypsum, and salt also are mined.

Industry and Manufacturing: The main industries are food processing (especially raw sugar), construction, and mining (gold and phosphates). As part of its economic reform program, the government is placing increasing emphasis on producing more clothing and textiles. Industry as a whole accounted for about 17 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2001, but the manufacturing subsector is relatively insignificant, accounting for only 3 percent of GDP in the 1980s and 7.7 percent in 2002. Manufacturing, concentrated in Bamako, consists primarily of food processing, construction materials, and basic consumer goods. Development of the manufacturing subsector is hampered by energy shortages, smuggling, and competition from neighbors with more developed economies.

Energy: Energy provision in Mali has been rated as poor and costly, and energy shortages hamper economic development. Primary sources such as fuelwood and charcoal provide about 90 percent of energy needs. Hydropower generates most of Mali's electricity, but in the dry season power cuts are regular occurrences. However, privatization of the power and water parastatal and the construction of a dam on the Senegal River in the early 2000s were expected to increase energy production, even allowing Mali to export electricity to Senegal and Mauritania. Mali produced about 480.2 million kWh of electricity in 2001 and consumed about 446.6 million kWh. Fossil fuels provided 41.7 percent of electricity and hydropower sources, 58.3 percent. Mali does not produce any oil or gas of its own, but some exploration was underway in the mid-2000s.

Services: The services sector as a whole accounted for 38 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2001. Retail activities and trade accounted for 16 percent of GDP in 2000, but much of this activity occurs in the informal sector and is not included in official statistics. In addition, significant smuggling across the nation's porous borders goes unrecorded.

Banking and Finance: Mali's banking sector and monetary policy are controlled by a regional central bank, the Central Bank of the West African States (Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest—BCEAO), based in Dakar, Senegal. Mali has seven commercial banks, one agricultural bank, and one housing bank. The sector has long been characterized by heavy government ownership, but privatization efforts are underway and are expected to enhance financial services. Financial services remain heavily concentrated in urban areas.

Tourism: Mali has potential as a tourist destination, with its rich cultural heritage, ancient cities and archaeological sites, and the government has launched programs to develop tourism.

Nevertheless, tourism remains a very small subsector of the economy, and tourist facilities are limited. In 2000 some 91,000 tourists visited Mali, generating income of about US\$50 million.

Labor: Estimates of the total labor force range from 3.9 million (U.S. Government, 2001) to 5.9 million (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, mid-2002). About 80 percent of the labor force is engaged in agriculture and fishing. Unemployment in the early 2000s was estimated at 14.6 percent in urban areas and 5.3 percent in rural areas. Underemployment is also a significant problem. Salaried employment is quite low and is centered primarily in the state sector and in businesses in the formal sector in Bamako.

The constitution and the Labor Code guarantee laborers the right to form and join unions (except for military and paramilitary forces), and most salaried employees (about 28 percent of the work force) are organized into labor unions. The main union federation called a two-day general strike in October 2003, the nation's first such general strike. Both miners and teachers engaged in strike actions in 2004, seeking better working conditions and higher pay.

The Labor Code establishes standards and regulates conditions of employment, such as hours, wages, health care, and social security. Nevertheless, the minimum wage (raised in 2004) and benefits are inadequate, especially for families, and most salaried employees are forced to supplement their income with subsistence farming or employment in the informal sector. Child labor is common, especially in agriculture and domestic services.

Foreign Economic Relations: Mali has strong relations with bilateral and multilateral donors and is committed to the concept of regional economic integration. Since 1975, Mali has been a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), based in Nigeria, whose objective is to establish a customs union and a common market for West African States. In 1994 Mali joined seven other mainly francophone members of ECOWAS in forming the West African Economic and Monetary Union (Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest-Africaine—UEMOA), whose members have a common currency.

Imports: Mali imported an estimated US\$707 million (free on board) of goods in 2002 and US\$867 million in 2003. Imports were projected to increase to US\$1,030 in 2004 and to US\$1,150 in 2005. In 2003 the main imports were capital goods (36.8 percent), petroleum products (17.4), and foodstuffs (13 percent). The main sources of imports in 2002 were Côte d'Ivoire (18 percent), France (14.3 percent), Germany (4 percent) and South Africa (2.5 percent). Working with international investors, Mali is seeking to achieve self-sufficiency in cement and sugar, two commodities it currently acquires largely through imports (98 percent of cement and 80 percent of sugar are imported).

Exports: Mali's exports are estimated to have totaled US\$896 million (free on board) in 2002 and US\$967 million in 2003, with projected increases to US\$1,140 million in 2004 and US\$1,300 million in 2005. The main commodities exported in 2002 were gold, cotton, and livestock, which together account for about 90 percent of exports. In 2002 gold accounted for 64.4 percent of exports, cotton 22.8 percent, and livestock and livestock products 4.3 percent. The primary destinations of exports that year were Thailand (14.3 percent), Italy (10.1 percent), India (7.9 percent), and Germany (5.1 percent).

Trade Balance: Mali had a trade surplus of about US\$100 million in 2003. Both imports and exports were expected to increase in the mid-2000s, but exports were expected to continue to exceed imports in value. This prognosis was based, among other factors, on projected increases in cotton production and cotton prices as well as the resumption of livestock exports to Côte d'Ivoire following the resolution of unrest in that country.

Balance of Payments: Although Mali has a trade surplus, its deficit in the services account (due in large part to high transport costs, high insurance premiums, and high interest payments on the external debt) resulted in a current account deficit of US\$99 million in 2002 and US\$176 million in 2003, or about 4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2003. The current account deficit was projected to equal 4.2 percent of GDP in 2004 and 5.4 percent of GDP in 2005. However, inflows of foreign aid and foreign remittances generally result in an overall balance of payments surplus, as was the case in 2003, when the balance of payments showed a surplus of US\$94 million (up from US\$83 million in 2002).

External Debt: The total external debt was reported to equal US\$2.9 billion in 2001 and US\$2.8 billion in 2002. Mali receives debt relief under the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative of the International Money Fund and World Bank.

Foreign Investment: Mali has very limited foreign investment. According to the World Bank, foreign direct investment totaled US\$102.2 million in 2002. China established some joint business ventures with Mali in 1999–2002 and opened a Chinese investment center in Mali. Attracting foreign investment is one of the key components of Mali's economic reform program.

Foreign Aid: Mali is heavily dependent on foreign aid and is a major recipient of both multilateral and bilateral aid. Multilateral donors include the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, African Development Bank, Arab Funds, and European Union. Bilateral donors include France, the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, China, and Germany. Foreign aid was estimated at US\$596.4 million in 2001. In 2003 U.S. aid totaled US\$44.2 million. As economic reforms progress, the government is hoping to move from budgetary and balance of payments assistance to social development aid.

Currency and Exchange Rate: Mali uses the Communauté Financière Africaine franc (CFA franc—CFAfr), which had an average value of CFAfr581.20 per US\$1 in 2003, compared with an average value of CFAfr697.0 per US\$1 in 2002. In late December 2004, the exchange rate was CFAfr482 per US\$1, and in early January 2005 the exchange rate was about CFAfr500 to US\$1. The CFA franc has a fixed exchange rate with the euro of CFAfr656 per euro. The currency was devalued by 50 percent in January 1994.

Fiscal Year: Calendar year.

TRANSPORTATION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Overview: Mali's transportation and communications infrastructure is regarded as poor, even by regional standards, and deficiencies have limited economic growth and development. Nevertheless, improvements have been noted in the early 2000s. A number of road and airport projects were initiated prior to Mali's hosting of the African Nations Cup football tournament in 2002.

Roads: Mali had a road network totaling about 18,563 kilometers in 2000, including about 4,450 kilometers of paved roads. Mali's main economic link to the coast is a paved road between Bamako and Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire. The European Development Fund is financing construction of a road linking Bamako and Dakar, Senegal. The African Development Bank is funding the construction of a road linking Bamako and Kankan in Guinea. There are also plans for a trans-Saharan road linking Mali with Algeria. In general, road conditions outside of urban areas are hazardous, especially at night. Because of isolation, poor road conditions, and the prevalence of banditry, overland travel to the north of Mali is regarded as especially dangerous; flying or traveling by boat is reported to be preferable where possible. Many of Mali's major thoroughfares in the north are little more than desert tracks with long isolated stretches.

Railroads: Mali has only one railroad, including 729 kilometers in Mali, which runs from the port of Koulikoro via Bamako to the border with Senegal and continues on to Dakar. The Bamako-Dakar line, which has been described as dilapidated, is owned by a joint company established by Mali and Senegal in 1995, with the eventual goal of privatization. In 2003 the two countries sold a 25-year concession to run the rail line to a Canadian company, which has pledged to upgrade equipment and infrastructure. The Malian portion of the railroad carried an estimated 536,000 tons of freight and 778,000 passengers in 1999, but the track is in poor condition and the line is closed frequently during the rainy season. The line is potentially significant because it links landlocked Mali to the port of Dakar, increasingly of interest for Malian exports in the face of the disruption of access to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, as a result of civil conflict in that country beginning in late 2002. In the early 2000s, there also were plans to construct a new rail line between Bamako and Kouroussa and Kankan in Guinea.

Ports: Mali has no seaports because it is landlocked, but Koulikoro on the Niger River near Bamako, serves as a principal river port. Traditionally, Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire has been Mali's main seaport, handling as much as 70 percent of Mali's trade (except for gold exports). Mali's export trade suffered when turbulence in Côte d'Ivoire in the early 2000s interrupted that trade route.

Inland Waterways: Mali has 1,815 kilometers of inland waterways, principally the Niger River, some portions of which are navigable for medium and large shipping during the rainy season (June/July–November/December) in years of normal rainfall. Parts of the Senegal River also are navigable, providing year-round access to the Atlantic from Kayes to St. Louis in Senegal.

Civil Aviation and Airports: In 2003 Mali reportedly had 27 airports, 8 of which had paved runways. The main airport is at Bamako, which offers flights to neighboring countries and to Europe. As part of infrastructure improvements in 2002, the runway at Bamako was extended,

and new airstrips were built in previously isolated areas of the west—Kayes, Mopti, and Sikasso. Air Mali was liquidated in April 2003, but intercontinental services from Bamako are provided by Air France and a Belgian airline, among others.

Pipelines: None.

Telecommunications: Mali's telecommunications system is characterized by high costs and poor coverage, but the government is seeking to make improvements. With the help of the International Monetary Fund, attempts are being made to liberalize the sector and to open it to private investors. In 2002 Mali was estimated to have 56,600 main telephone lines in use and 52,600 mobile cellular phones, up from 49,900 and 45,300, respectively, in 2001. Phone service is characterized as minimal and unreliable but improving. The government's goal is to increase the number of main telephone lines to a rate of one per 100 people (up from the 0.5 lines/100 noted in 2001). In 2001 there were one AM, 28 FM, and one shortwave radio broadcast stations as well as one television broadcast station. An estimated 570,000 radios were in use in 1997 and 160,000 televisions in 2000, representing about 1.4 televisions per 100 people. According to estimates in the early 2000s, Mali had about 14,000 PCs, five Internet service providers, and 30,000 Internet users. Internet usage was increasing, and Internet cafés were becoming more common in urban areas. Nevertheless, given the cost of hardware and the poor infrastructure, it appeared likely that most of the population would lack access to the Internet for some time to come and that Internet use would remain relatively low.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Political Overview: Mali is a constitutional democracy, officially the Third Republic of Mali, inaugurated in 1992. Longstanding single-party rule ended in 1991, and a transitional government was formed to oversee the drafting of a new constitution and the transition to a democratic form of government. Amadou Toumani Touré took office on June 8, 2002, as Mali's second democratically elected president. The Touré administration includes representatives of many parties, in order to minimize partisan politics and promote a climate of consensus. The government's stated goals are to concentrate on long-term development, alleviate poverty, and implement social programs.

Constitution: Mali is governed by the constitution of January 12, 1992, which was approved by a national referendum on that date. Like its two predecessors, the 1992 constitution is based on the French model. The constitution was amended in 1999 to incorporate some revisions of the electoral system and strengthen the judicial system, but the amended document was never put to a popular referendum for approval.

Branches of Government: The constitution provides for a separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. The system of government can be described as "semi-presidential." Executive power is vested in a president, who is elected to a five-year term by universal suffrage and is constitutionally limited to two terms. The president serves as chief of state and commander in chief of the armed forces. A prime minister appointed by the president serves as head of government and in turn appoints the Council of Ministers,

which, as of July 2004, consisted of the prime minister and 26 cabinet ministers. The Council formulates and implements government policy and submits legislative proposals to the National Assembly. The prime minister is accountable to parliament, but the president has the power to dissolve parliament.

The unicameral National Assembly is Mali's sole legislative body, consisting of 147 members popularly elected to five-year terms. Following the 2002 elections, 16 political parties, grouped into several parliamentary coalitions, were represented in the assembly. No single party or coalition held a majority of seats following the elections, but the Rally for Mali (Rassemblement Pour le Mali—RPM) party and affiliated parties in the Hope 2002 (Espoir 2002) coalition replaced the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (Alliance pour la Démocratie au Mali—Adema) party as the predominant political force, controlling 66 of the 147 seats. The assembly holds two regular sessions each year, during which it debates and votes on legislation that has been submitted by a member or by the government. The constitution also empowers the assembly to question government ministers about government policy and actions.

Mali's constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but the executive continues to exercise influence over the judiciary by virtue of its power to appoint judges and oversee both judicial functions and law enforcement. The judicial system includes the Supreme Court, which has both judicial and administrative powers, and a separate Constitutional Court, established in March 1994, that provides judicial review of legislative acts and serves as an election arbiter. According to the constitution, a High Court of Justice would be convened to try senior government officials for treason. Below the Supreme Court are three courts of appeal, seven courts of first instance, or Magistrates' Courts, and labor courts. Lower-court decisions may be appealed up the hierarchy to the Supreme Court. Village chiefs and elders resolve most local disputes in rural areas.

Administrative Divisions: Mali is subdivided into eight administrative regions and a capital district: Gao, Kayes, Kidal, Koulikoro, Mopti, Ségou, Sikasso, and Tombouctou and the capital district of Bamako.

Provincial and Local Government: The eight regions and the capital district of Bamako are headed by appointed high commissioners. Each region is subdivided into five to nine districts (*cercles*) headed by *préfets*, which are in turn divided into communes, or municipalities, and then into villages or quarters. Communes are governed by elected mayors and elected local councils. As a result of a major restructuring of local government in 1999 and further minor revisions in 2001, the number of elected local councils increased from less than 20 to more than 700. The result of this decentralization has been less administrative control by the central government and greater local control over finances and issues such as health, education, and water supply. Local governments receive central government subsidies but also have the power to collect local taxes. The most recent local elections were held in May 2004.

Judicial and Legal System: Mali's legal system is based on French civil law codes inherited at independence from France and on customary law. The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and guarantees suspects the right to legal counsel. Court-appointed lawyers are provided free of charge to those who cannot afford legal representation. In principle, warrants are required to make arrests, and suspects are to be charged or released within 48 hours. However, in

practice pretrial detention is often extended and trials significantly delayed because of administrative backlogs. Trials are public, except for minors. Defendants are presumed innocent and are entitled to be present at their trials, to have access to government evidence against them, and to confront witnesses. Decisions may be appealed to the Supreme Court.

Electoral System: The constitution provides for universal suffrage at age 18. The president is elected by popular vote to a five-year term, with a two-term limit. Members of the National Assembly are elected both directly and by party list to five-year terms, with elections held in two rounds. Representation in the assembly is apportioned based on the population of administrative districts. Mali's most recent presidential election was held in May 2002; national parliamentary elections were held in July 2002. The next presidential election will be held in April 2007 and parliamentary elections in July 2007. Prior to the 2002 elections, the government conducted a general census and completed a new voters' list with the support of all political parties, all of which then participated in the elections. According the U.S. Department of State's 2003 human rights report, the 2002 presidential and legislative elections were judged to be generally free and fair despite some administrative irregularities, and local elections in 2004 received a similar rating.

Politics and Political Parties: The constitution provides for a multiparty democracy but prohibits parties based on ethnicity, religion, region, or gender. In 2002 Mali had a reported 87 active political groups. Sixteen national parties, grouped into several coalitions, and a handful of independents gained representation in the National Assembly based on the 2002 election results. In addition, other regional or local parties are active in local councils. The Hope 2002 (Espoir 2002) coalition, headed by the Rally for Mali (Rassemblement Pour le Mali—RPM) party, was the most successful coalition in the 2002 elections, winning 66 of the 147 seats in the National Assembly. The RPM-led coalition displaced the former ruling party, the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (Alliance Pour la Démocratie au Mali—Adema), which had won the National Assembly majority in the 1992 and 1997 elections, securing more than 80 percent of the seats. In 2002 Adema was part of the Alliance for the Republic and Democracy (Alliance pour la République et la Démocratie—ARD) coalition, which won 59 seats. No party or coalition won enough seats to hold a parliamentary majority. The president, an independent, appointed a government that included representatives from all of the parties that won seats in parliament as well as a number of independents and technocrats (many of whom were loosely organized for electoral purposes in the Citizen Movement, a civic organization that supported Touré in the presidential election). The administration voiced its intent to focus primarily on poverty reduction.

Mass Media: Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are guaranteed by the constitution and generally observed by the government. The Superior Council of Communication regulates the media. During election campaigns, the constitutionally mandated Committee of Equal Access to State Media is charged with guaranteeing that all political parties have equal access to government-controlled media. Radio is the primary means of mass communication. In practice, widespread poverty and the low literacy rate, as well as poor distribution outside of Bamako, limit access to television and print media. Mali has more than 125 radio stations as well as one television station. The former government-controlled radio and television broadcasting company is officially autonomous, but it has been accused by the political opposition of having a pro-government bias. There has been an explosion of print media since 1992 in conjunction with the

initiation of multiparty democracy. In 2003 print media included 42 private newspapers and journals (39 in Bamako and one each in Tombouctou, Mopti, and Sikasso) published in French, Arabic, and various local languages. Newspapers must register with the Ministry of Communications, but registration is routine. The expression of a broad range of views, including those critical of the government, is permitted. Foreign radio programs are widely available through local media, and foreign satellite and cable television programs also are accessible, especially in Bamako. The government does not restrict access to or use of the Internet, but in practice Internet use is very limited because of the cost of computers and licenses to operate servers.

Foreign Relations: Following independence in 1960, Mali initially followed a socialist path and was aligned ideologically with the communist bloc. But Mali's foreign policy orientation became increasingly pragmatic and pro-Western over time. Since the institution of a democratic form of government in 2002, Mali's relations with the West in general and the United States in particular have improved significantly. U.S.-Malian relations are described by the U.S. Department of State as "excellent and expanding," especially given Mali's recent record of democratic stability in the volatile area of West Africa and its avowed support of the war on terrorism. Mali is reported to be one of the largest recipients of U.S. aid in Africa.

Mali has a longstanding relationship with France, its former colonial ruler, but relations have been described as ambivalent rather than close. Mali dropped out of the Franc Zone shortly after independence, not rejoining until 1967. One contentious issue between the two nations is the frequent expulsion of illegal Malian immigrants from France since 1996.

Mali is active in regional organizations such as the African Union. Working to control and resolve regional conflicts, such as in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, is one of Mali's major foreign policy goals. Mali feels threatened by the potential for the spillover of conflicts in neighboring states, and relations with those neighbors are often uneasy. General insecurity along borders in the north, including cross-border banditry and terrorism, remain troubling issues in regional relations.

Membership in International Organizations: Mali is a member of the United Nations and most of its specialized agencies, as well as a number of regional organizations. Major memberships include the African Development Bank, African Union, European Union (associate member), International Labour Organization, International Monetary Fund, International Telecommunication Union, Non-Aligned Movement, Organization of the Islamic Conference, Universal Postal Union, and World Bank. Mali is also an active participant in the Economic Community of West African States and the West African Economic and Monetary Union, as well as the Community of Sahel-Saharan States, Niger River Commission, Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel, and Senegal River Valley Development Organization.

Major International Treaties: Mali is a party to a number of international environmental conventions, including those on Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Ozone Layer Protection, and Wetlands. Mali also has signed various international conventions and treaties

covering biological and chemical weapons, genocide, human rights, and intellectual property, as well as the Geneva Conventions and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Armed Forces Overview: Mali's military forces consist of an army, which includes land forces and a small navy and air force, as well as the paramilitary Gendarmerie and Republican Guard, all of which are under the control of the Ministry of Defense and Veterans, headed by a civilian. The military is underpaid, poorly equipped, and in need of rationalization. Its organization has suffered from the incorporation of Tuareg irregular forces into the regular military following a 1992 agreement between the government and Tuareg rebel forces. The military has generally kept a low profile since the democratic transition of 1992. The incumbent president, Amadou Toumani Touré (elected in 2002), is a former army general and as such reportedly enjoys widespread military support. In its annual human rights report for 2003, the U.S. Department of State rated civilian control of security forces as generally effective but noted a few "instances in which elements of the security forces acted independently of government authority."

Foreign Military Relations: In the early post-independence era, Mali's military relied on the former Soviet Union for matériel and training, but Mali now looks more to the West. Malian forces have received limited military assistance and training from the United States, France, and Germany. Mali is an active contributor to peacekeeping forces in West and Central Africa and has supported initiatives to create an African military crisis-response force.

External Threat: Mali has been adversely affected by the spillover of terrorism from Algeria to the north, instability from Côte d'Ivoire on the southern border, and general insecurity in its vast northern desert area bordering Algeria, Mauritania, and Niger. Poorly defined borders have led to problems with Mauritania, which Mali has accused of supporting Tuareg rebels, and with Burkina Faso, with which Mali engaged in brief hostilities arising from a border dispute in 1985.

Defense Budget: Defense expenditures in 2003 were estimated at US\$51.1 million. They constituted about 13 percent of the national budget and 1.3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

Major Military Units: The army has a total of 7,350 active personnel, including 6,900 land forces and a much smaller air force (400) and navy (50). Land forces are organized into two tank, four infantry, one airborne, two artillery, one engineer, and one special forces battalions, as well as two air defense and one surface-to-air (SAM) missile batteries. The navy operates from bases in Bamako, Mopti, Ségou, and Tombouctou.

Major Military Equipment: According to *The Military Balance, 2004–2005*, the army's land forces were equipped with 33 main battle tanks, 18 light tanks, 20 reconnaissance vehicles, 50 armored personnel carriers, 20 towed artillery, 2 multiple rocket launchers, 30 mortars, 12 air defense guns, and 12 surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) as well as an unspecified number of antitank guided weapons and rocket launchers. The navy had three river patrol craft. The air

force had 16 MiG combat aircraft, including 5 ground-attack fighters and 11 fighter aircraft, as well as 3 transport aircraft, 13 training aircraft, and 4 helicopters (not armed).

Military Service: Military service is based on selective conscription for two years, with eligibility for the draft beginning at age 18. According to 2004 estimates, the manpower pool included 2.5 million males aged 15–49, of whom about 1.5 million were estimated to be fit for military service.

Paramilitary Forces: Paramilitary forces in 2004 included the Gendarmerie (1,800 personnel organized into eight companies), Republican Guard (2,000), and militia (3,000). The Gendarmerie, subordinate to the Ministry of Defense and Veterans, shares responsibility for internal security with the civilian national police force (1,000).

Foreign Military Forces: Mali hosts a small number of U.S. military instructors. In the late 1990s, U.S. military instructors trained Malian forces for peacekeeping missions. In early 2004, the United States sent military personnel to Mali to provide training in combating banditry and terrorism. Under the Pan-Sahel Initiative, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad each received U.S. training and equipment for a 150-member rapid-reaction company. A proposed follow-on program called the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI) would provide additional security assistance to nations in the region and foster greater regional cooperation and information sharing in the war on terrorism.

Military Forces Abroad: In 2004 Mali was participating in peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (28 personnel including 27 observers), Liberia (252 personnel, including 4 observers), and Sierra Leone (3 observers). In 1997–2000, Mali had sent a military contingent to the Central African Republic.

Police: Mali's national police force, numbering about 1,000 personnel in 2004, is subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Security and Civil Protection. The police force shares responsibility for internal security with the paramilitary Gendarmerie. Police responsibilities are concentrated exclusively in urban areas. Local police districts are headed by commissioners, who report to regional directors at national police headquarters. The police force is judged to be moderately effective despite deficiencies in resources and training and the persistence of corruption.

Internal Threat: Mali's far north is regarded as insecure because of the presence of an Algerian terrorist group with reputed ties to Al Qaeda, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat—GSPC), and other armed groups, as well as the prevalence of banditry in the vast desert area and along the borders with Mauritania and Niger. In addition, the nomadic Tuareg traditionally have opposed the central government in the quest for greater regional autonomy in the north. Hostilities broke out in June 1990, and rebel forces succeeded in routing government forces on several occasions. In April 1992, the government signed a pact with rebel forces to end the fighting and restore stability in the north. Among the measures agreed on were the creation of a new administrative region of Kidal, the incorporation of Tuareg fighters into the armed forces, the demilitarization of the north, and the implementation of steps designed to promote greater economic and political integration of the

Tuareg. Nevertheless, conditions remained anarchic until the mid-1990s, and periodic outbreaks of violence, banditry, kidnaping, and other acts of lawlessness persist.

Terrorism: Members of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat—GSPC), a terrorist group seeking to overthrow the Algerian government and reportedly linked to Al Qaeda, took shelter in the far north of Mali in mid-2003 along with their 15 European hostages. The government assisted in securing the release of the hostages, thus earning considerable good will from the U.S. government, which has since provided both economic aid and military training. In general, the Malian government has been vocal in its support of the U.S.-led war on terrorism in the early to mid-2000s. In March 2004, Mali announced its intention of increasing counterterrorism cooperation with Algeria, Chad, and Niger. In the face of continued activity by the GSPC in 2004, including some armed clashes with Malian military forces, Mali has increased military patrols in the region.

Human Rights: According to the U.S. Department of State's annual human rights report for 2003, Mali's government generally respects the human rights of its citizens and observes relevant constitutional provisions (e.g., freedom of speech and of the press, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of religion) and prohibitions (e.g., arbitrary arrest and detention, forced exile, torture, and discrimination based on race, sex, disability, language, or social status). There have been no reports of political prisoners or politically motivated disappearances in Mali. But prison conditions are poor (overcrowded, with inadequate medical facilities and food supplies), and there are occasional instances of arbitrary arrest or detention. Moreover, the judicial system has a large case backlog, which has caused significant delays in trials as well as long periods of pretrial detention. Men play a dominant role in society, and women continue to suffer from widespread discrimination and domestic violence. Child labor and trafficking in children as forced labor remain serious problems. Relationships based on hereditary servitude and bondage persist between some ethnic groups.