



# Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailed analysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



**Mali**

**Population: 16.46 millions (#67 out of countries)**

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## Geography

**Area:** 1,240,192 square km. In sub-Sahara West Africa, Mali is landlocked and surrounded by Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania. The Sahara Desert occupies the northern half of Mali and savannahs in semi-arid and tropical areas cover the center and south. Three distinct seasons occur with a hot and dry season from February to June, a rainy and mild season from June to November, and a cool and dry season from November to February. Plains cover most of the landscape with some hilly terrain in the northeast and along the Guinean border. The Niger River flows through much of the south and provides water crucial for agriculture and sustaining life. Desertification, deforestation and soil erosion are serious environmental concerns. Little access to usable water in some areas and recurrent droughts challenge human development. Mali is divided into eight administrative regions.

**Population:** 13,443,225 (July 2009)

**Annual Growth Rate:** 2.594% (2009)

**Fertility Rate:** 6.62 children born per woman (2009)

**Life Expectancy:** male 50.21, female 53.4 (2009)

## Peoples

Mande: 50%

Peul: 17%

Voltaic: 12%

Tuareg and Moor: 10%

Songhai: 6%

Other: 5%

Mande peoples populate southwestern Mali. The Puel are related to Fulani peoples in West Africa and primarily reside in central Mali and a small area northwest of Bamako. Voltaic groups are concentrated near the border with Burkina Faso. The Tuareg and Moor reside in northern Mali. The Songhai populate areas in central and southeastern Mali along the Niger River.

**Languages:** Bambara (80%), other African languages and French (20%). French is the official language. Bambara and similar dialects are spoken in varying degrees of competence by as 80% of the population. 56 indigenous languages are spoken. Most spoken languages with less than one million speakers include Soninke, Kita Maninkakan, Dogon dialects, Tamasheq, Pulaar, Songhay dialects, and Tamajaq. Arabic has around 100,000 native speakers. Languages with over one million speakers include Bambara (2.7 million), Senoufo dialects (1.3 million), and Maasina Fulfulde [Fula] (1.0 million).

**Literacy:** 46.4% (2003)

## History

Several pre-colonial empires flourished in Mali. The Ghana, Mali, and Songhai Empires established centers for trade and learning and helped spread the influence of Islam. Moroccans invaded in the late 16th century collapsing the Songhai Empire prior to European exploration and colonization of the region. France took control of the region in the late 19th century and named it French Sudan. Mali gained independence from France in 1960 as a federation of the Sudanese Republic and Senegal, the latter withdrawing from the federation after a few months. Dictators controlled government until ousted by a military coup in 1991 under Amadou Toure. President Toure ushered in a democratic government resulting in elections deemed fair and free by international observers in 1992, 1997, 2002, and 2007. President Toure returned to power in 2007 and has helped established one of the strongest democratic nations in West Africa.

## Culture

Islam heavily influences society. During the Middle Ages, Mali was a center of Islamic learning. Mali is well known for its unique music and oral tradition continues to play an important role. Most eat food based from rice and millet. Polygamy is widespread. Soccer is the most popular sport.

## Economy

**GDP per capita:** \$1,100 (2008) [2.3% of US]

**Human Development Index:** 0.371

**Corruption Index:** 3.1

Mali ranks among the poorest nations in the world. It has struggled to develop economically as it is landlocked and two-thirds desert. No increase has occurred recently in GDP per capita and inequality of wealth is high. Agriculture accounts for 45% of the GDP and employs 80% of the workforce. Services and industry make up 38% and 17% of the GDP respectively. Unemployment is high (30%) and over a third of the population lives under the poverty line. Primary agriculture products include cotton, millet, and rice. Industry is limited to food processing, construction and phosphate and gold mining. Cotton and gold account for most exports. Primary export partners include China, Thailand and Denmark whereas primary import partners include Senegal, France and Cote d'Ivoire.

Government has aggressively fought widespread corruption but with unsuccessful results. Companies frequently report that they are forced to pay bribes in order to obtain contracts or accomplish their goals.<sup>[1]</sup> Corruption dissuades foreign investment and further setbacks economic development and greater distribution of wealth.

## Faiths

Muslim: 90%

Christian: 1%

Indigenous beliefs: 9%

## Christians

### Denominations Members Congregations

Catholic: 200,000

Seventh-Day Adventists 1,473 3

Jehovah's Witnesses 255 7

Latter-Day Saints less than 50 0

## Religion

Most Malians are Muslims. Islam is followed with greater tolerance of minority religious groups than in other Muslim-majority nations. Many Muslims follow Islam due to their culture and upbringing. Most Christians are Catholics. Protestant denominations have a small and growing presence in urban areas.

## Religious Freedom

### Persecution Index:

Religious freedom is protected by the constitution and respected by the government. Government does not tolerate religious abuse or discrimination. Although Islam is the dominant religion, the constitution states that Mali is a secular state. Foreign missionaries may operate in the country.[\[2\]](#)

## Largest Cities

Urban: 32%

**Bamako, Sikasso, Mopti, Segou, Koutiala, Kayes, Nioro, Kati, Markala, Gao.**

None of the 10 largest cities have a congregation. 12.5% of the national population lives in the 10 largest cities.

## LDS History

The First Malians joined the Church in the 1980s in Mali and other nations such as Canada. Modibo Diarra was likely the first Malian convert baptized in Mali in 1981. Sacrament meetings began to be held in 1981.[\[3\]](#) Church meetings were held as early as the mid 1980s. No branch was established and members likely met as a group. Some members returned to their homeland and participated with foreign members for meetings. Three American member families lived in Bamako in early 1988.[\[4\]](#) The first Malian to serve a mission was Amadou Diarra, the son of Modibo Diarra, in the early 1990s in French-speaking Canada where he helped many Muslim Africans join the Church. By mid-1993 the only known Church member in Mali was Modibo Diarra.[\[5\]](#)

## Membership Growth

**LDS Membership:** less than 50 (2008)

The Church has not reported membership totals for Mali as of early 2010 as there is no official presence. There are likely fewer than 50 members. Several Malians with Muslim backgrounds have joined the Church in the United States in recent years. Church members who speak Bambara have numbered enough to merit the translation of a couple of Church materials.

## Congregational Growth

**Branches:** 0

Mali was included in the Africa West Area following its creation in 1998. In early 2010, members may have met in a group for Sunday meetings. Mali has never been associated with a mission and stewardship for Mali falls under the Africa West Area.

## **Activity and Retention**

Members who follow Church teachings may be a fraction of the small local membership.

## **Language Materials**

**Languages with LDS Scripture:** French, Arabic

All LDS scriptures and nearly all Church materials are available in French. The Church has translated all LDS scriptures in Arabic and many unit, priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, young men, young women, primary, missionary, family history, and audiovisual materials. The Church has translated Gospel Principles and The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony in Bambara.

## **Meetinghouses**

Church meetings likely occur in members' homes or in a rented space.

## **Health and Safety**

HIV/AIDS infects 1.5% of the population. Poor sanitation and medical care may have influenced the Church to not establish an official presence.

## **Humanitarian and Development Work**

The Church sent Atmit to Mali in 2005 to relieve hunger and famine in the region.[\[6\]](#)

## **Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects**

### **Religious Freedom**

The Church has yet to utilize the religious freedom present in Mali. Few Muslim majority nations permit foreign missionaries to enter and allow proselytizing. No legal challenges appear to have delayed the Church's establishment.

### **Cultural Issues**

The influence of Islam may be the largest obstacle for the Church to face. Muslims have been much more tolerant of minority religious groups and should not pose a challenge to proselytism. However Islam's influences on daily life and family may produce challenges for Muslim converts who may face ridicule and ostracism for joining the Church. Low literacy rates for men and women challenge potential converts' ability to deepen doctrine understanding and serve in the Church. Those who desire to join the Church participating in a polygamous marriage must end these relations in divorce and be interviewed by a member of the mission presidency.

### **National Outreach**

No mission outreach occurs in Mali. Only those with association to members have contact with the Church. It is likely difficult for members who move to Mali to locate the Church as the Church does not publish any information concerning its presence. The greatest opportunity for outreach is in Bamako. Bamako is one of the most rapidly growing cities in Africa and will become an important city for the Church to spread to other large cities.

### **Member Activity and Convert Retention**

With the exception of only a handful of Malians baptized in the 1980s, no converts have joined the Church in Mali. The degree

of understanding of Church doctrine and depth of conversion are likely reflected on the quality of teaching and fellowship received in the nations in which they join the Church. Many Malians who have joined the Church in the United States have received high quality teaching and strong member fellowship and have developed a habit of regular Church attendance prior to baptism.

## **Ethnic Issues and Integration**

French and Bambara will assist the Church in integrating ethnic groups into the same congregation if necessary. Some of the peoples in the south have stronger animist backgrounds and will likely differ in their needs from the backgrounds of Muslim or Catholic converts. The Catholic community may provide strength to the Church as a source of investigators with a Christian background open to learning about the teachings of the Church. Ethnic groups tend to be separated by distance, but the high ethnic diversity in Mali will challenge future mission outreach.

## **Language Issues**

The Church has some materials available in Bambara which will greatly facilitate the establishment of the Church in Mali. Modibo Diarra assisted in the translation of these materials.<sup>[7]</sup> Most Malians speak Bambara or French, which lessens the demand for additional native language materials. In some African nations with limited membership and high ethnic diversity, the Church has required converts to demonstrate some proficiency in the country's official language to ensure that they can be taught or pastored with resources and leadership speaking their language. This procedure may be applied in Mali if directed by the area presidency.

## **Leadership**

Mali has potential for strong local leadership with few members. Returned missionaries are very few, yet may assist in the Church's formal establishment.

## **Temple**

Mali is not assigned to a temple district, but members would likely travel to the Accra Ghana Temple.

## **Comparative Growth**

Only a handful of African nations have had native members for as long as Mali yet do not have an official Church presence. Burundi, Gabon and Somalia are additional countries which have seen past Church activity without a Church presence in early 2010.

Christian denominations in Mali struggle to gain greater national outreach and rapid growth. Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses both experience slow growth. Protestant groups have operated for several decades in Mali and have converted less than one percent of the population. Few Muslims have converted to Christianity.

## **Future Prospects**

Formal Church establishment is possible in the near future due to Christian tolerance and a small number of native members. Malians who joined the Church abroad and return to their homeland will likely be instrumental in the Church's establishment. Once established, the Church may face slow membership and congregational growth like other Christian denominations.

[1] Chene, Marie. "Overview of corruption and government's efforts against corruption in Mali." Transparency International, 7 March 2008. <http://www.u4.no/helpdesk/helpdesk/query.cfm?id=159>

[2] "Mali," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127243.htm>

[3] Arnold, Chirley. "Trials increase record keeper's faith," LDS Church News, 25 February 1989. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/19006/Trials-increase-record-keepers-faith.html>

[4] "Mali LDS Church participate in sacrament meeting presentation," LDS Church News, 30 January 1988. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/17925/Mali-LDS-children-participate-in-sacrament-meeting-presentation.html>

[5] Diarra, Modibo. "After my trial came blessings," Liahona, August 1993, p. 8.

[6] Weaver, Sarah Jean. "Efforts to help starving children in Niger," LDS Church News, 20 August 2005.  
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/47709/Efforts-to-help-starving-children-in-Niger.html>

[7] Diarra, Modibo. "After my trial came blessings," Liahona, August 1993, p. 8.