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Mali: Why have elections been delayed until 2024?

Mali has experienced two coups in as many years, raising concerns about its prospects of returning to a democratically elected civilian government.

The military-led Government plans to remain in place until early 2024, adding to these concerns.

This briefing discusses political developments in Mali in 2022.

Who is currently in charge?

In June 2021, [Colonel Assimi Goïta was sworn in as interim President](#).¹ Goïta led the coup that removed elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Kéïta in August 2020. He became vice-president in a civilian-led administration, before leading a second coup in May 2021 and taking power himself.

When were elections supposed to be held?

February 2022.

¹ [Mali coup leader Goita sworn in as interim president and appoints PM](#), Reuters, 7 June 2022

In September 2020, a month after the first coup, after [talks with opposition and civil society groups](#) and pressure from West African leaders, the interim Government agreed an 18-month transition timeline to return to civilian rule.²

In April 2021 the transitional administration confirmed legislative and presidential elections would take place on 27 February 2022.

Upon taking power in the second coup, Goïta indicated he was committed to the agreed election timetable. At his swearing in ceremony he said he was committed to implementing “[the organisation of credible, fair and transparent elections that are held as scheduled](#).”³

However, he has since extended his leadership of the transition period.

Presidential elections now slated for February 2024

Despite [continued pressure from ECOWAS](#), the Economic Community of West African States, to stick to the declared election schedule, in late 2021 the transitional authorities, now led by Goïta, indicated it [would not meet the February 2022 deadline](#).⁴

Goïta initially proposed 2026 for elections, before [revising it to 2025 after pressure from ECOWAS](#). After holding an extraordinary summit on Mali in January 2022, ECOWAS [said the proposed calendar was “totally unacceptable”](#):

This calendar simply means that an illegitimate military transition Government will take the Malian people hostage during the next five years.⁵

ECOWAS upheld sanctions imposed after the coup. It also [added new economic and financial sanctions](#), closed land and air borders with Mali and suspended most commercial and financial transactions.

The Malian authorities then announced in June, ahead of another ECOWAS summit, a [revised election timetable for the transition to end in 2024](#):

- **March 2023** – a referendum on a revised constitution

² [Mali coup: Military agrees to 18-month transition government](#), BBC News, 12 September 2020

³ [Mali coup leader Goita sworn in as interim president and appoints PM](#), Reuters, 7 June 2022

⁴ [ECOWAS delegation visits Mali, seeks assurance on elections](#), Africa News, 18 October 2021; [Mali leader promises election timetable by new year](#), Al Jazeera, 12 December 2021

⁵ [ECOWAS final communique on Summit on Mali](#), 10 January 2022

- **October/November 2023** – legislative elections
- **February 2024** – presidential election⁶

ECOWAS responded by [lifting economic and financial sanctions](#) and opening the borders, although some individual sanctions remain in place. Mali remains suspended from ECOWAS decision-making bodies.

It has also demanded that members of the transition authority are barred from standing in the elections.

What prompted the coups?

The current crisis in Mali has its roots in the events of 2012, when northern separatists and Islamist armed groups forced government forces out of northern Mali, and the military overthrew the Government. Fresh elections in 2013 and 2018, and a peace accord in 2015 between the Government and two northern separatist movements, brought hope of stability.

However, a continued Jihadist insurgency and attacks by a myriad of armed groups, little progress in implementing the 2015 accords and [anti-government demonstrations](#) by a coalition of opposition forces led to the removal of President Kéita in summer 2020.⁷ Library paper [UK deployments and recent political challenges in Mali](#) (24 September 2020) discusses the context of the coup in more detail.

Over the last few years hundreds of civilians have been killed and thousands more internally displaced by a [mixture of insecurity, poverty and the effects of climate change](#).⁸

Little progress on implementing the 2015 peace accords

There has been little progress in implementing the 2015 agreement on peace and reconciliation in Mali (also known as the Algiers accords). The Carter Center, the independent observer of the implementation of the agreement, has said “[implementation is at an unprecedented impasse](#)” (PDF). Reporting in June 2022, the Carter Center found the main bodies in the implementation process have “virtually stopped functioning” and

⁶ [Post-coup Mali sets timetable for vote ahead of key summit](#), France 24, 30 June 2022

⁷ [Mali coup: Thousands take to Bamako streets to celebrate](#), BBC News, 21 August 2020

⁸ [UK military in the Sahel: Developments in 2022](#), Commons Library paper CBP9634, 10 October 2022

the signatory parties have made no meaningful progress for nearly a year.⁹

Ferdaous Bouhleb, a specialist in the Sahel, warns the “[almost unprecedented deadlock](#)” risks escalating tension between the Government and the northern ex-rebels.¹⁰ One signatory to the accords, the Coordination of Azawad Movements (a coalition of Tuareg and Arab nationalist groups) expressed concern about the deteriorating socio-political situation in Mali. The group decried what it saw as the abandoning implementing the agreement by the transitional authorities.¹¹

A shift in foreign relations?

Goïta has also signalled a shift in how he uses international forces to address Mali’s security concerns.

A deteriorating relationship with France, Mali’s former colonial power, resulted in it withdrawing its military forces and ending its near decade long counter-terrorism operation in summer 2022. In a statement, France and its international partners said: “[the political, operational and legal conditions are no longer met to effectively continue their current military engagement in the fight against terrorism in Mali.](#)”¹²

There are also [clear tensions with the UN peacekeeping mission](#), MINUSMA, as the Malian authorities have at times restricted its freedom of movement and paused the rotation of forces.

The arrival of the controversial Russia-based private military company the Wagner Group (which is [sanctioned by the UK](#)), reportedly at Mali’s request, has also raised concerns. The UK Government has [described reports of human rights abuses](#) in Mali by the Wagner Group as “horrifying”.¹³ In April the EU suspended part its training mission in Mali, partly because of the lack of guarantees from authorities on the “[non-interference by the Wagner Group](#)”.¹⁴

The UK Government – which [has several hundred soldiers attached to the UN peacekeeping mission](#) - says it is closely monitoring the situation in Mali. Gillian Keegan, the Minister for Africa, has said that long term

⁹ [Report of the Independent Observer](#) (PDF), the Carter Centre, June 2022

¹⁰ [In Mali, ‘risks of political and military escalation’ between the government and ex-rebels of the north](#), The Africa Report, 25 July 2022

¹¹ [Mali Tuaregs accuse junta-led regime of ditching peace pact](#), The New Arab, 19 July 2022

¹² [Joint declaration on the fight against the terrorist threat and the support to peace and security in the Sahel and West Africa](#), Elysee, 17 February 2022

¹³ [PQ 49108 \[Mali: Private Military and Security Companies\], 22 September 2022](#)

¹⁴ [EU ends part of Mali training mission, fearing Russian interference, Borrell says](#), Euroactiv, 12 April 2022

stability in Mali will only come from [addressing the root causes of conflict](#), including governance.¹⁵

Risk of political unrest in the region

The number of coups or attempted coups in West Africa, [most recently in Burkina Faso](#), have raised concerns about [longer-term political stability](#) in the region.¹⁶

Recent political events in neighbouring Burkina Faso are discussed in Library paper [Burkina Faso: Second coup of 2022](#).

The UK's military involvement in Mali is discussed in Library paper [UK military in the Sahel: Developments in 2022](#).

¹⁵ [PQ 49108 \[Mali: Private Military and Security Companies\]](#), 22 September 2022

¹⁶ [Why West Africa has had so many coups and how to prevent more](#), The Conversation, 15 February 2022

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