



In brief: Mali – Ibrahim Boubacar Keita wins the presidential election

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On 11 August Mali held the second round of its presidential election. The [overwhelming winner](#) with 77.6% of the vote was Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK). He beat Soumaila Cisse, who won 22.4% of the vote. The first round had taken place on 28 July. IBK had won the largest share of the vote then too, but not enough to avoid a second round. However, most of the candidates who dropped out of the contest – which included Mali's first two female candidates – called on their supporters to back IBK in the second round. Soumaila Cisse won plaudits for his relatively graceful concession of defeat. IBK's inauguration has been set for 19 September.

Many had been pessimistic about the prospects for fair or credible elections given the extremely tight timetable, the lack of security in parts of the country – in particular, the northern region – and the fact that they were taking place at the height of the rainy season. However, with strong donor support and the achievement of some semblance of state authority over Kidal following a ceasefire agreement in June with the Tuareg nationalist group, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), the elections passed off as successfully as could have been hoped. The authorities were motivated by the fact that more than \$4 billion pledged at an [international donor conference](#) in May was conditional on the election being held. There is a donor consensus that, while imperfect, the election has been a [success](#), so the funds can now begin to be disbursed.

Voter turn-out for the second round was 45.8% -- healthy by the standards of Mali. But it was patchy in the north, particularly in Kidal, and most of the 170,000 refugees currently in neighbouring Burkina Faso were reportedly unable to vote. The challenge now is to address the root causes of Mali's crisis. IBK has a credible mandate and has pledged to push ahead with [national reconciliation](#), tackle corruption and rebuild the country's collapsed economy.

The 69-year old IBK (like his defeated opponent) is a veteran on the Malian political scene but was able to present himself plausibly as representing at least a partial break with Mali's past. Between 1994 and 2000 he was prime minister under Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT), the president overthrown in the March 2012 coup, but he fell out with ATT and then twice unsuccessfully stood against him in 2002 and 2007 for the presidency. He is seen as a strong and effective leader. He is known as '[Kankeletigui](#)' by his supporters, which in Bambara means 'a man of his word'. France's preferred candidate, he also has the backing of Mali's Islamic religious leadership in the High Islamic Council of Mali.

Human rights groups have expressed concern that national reconciliation may come at the expense of justice and respect for human rights. IBK's victory coincided with the promotion from captain to lieutenant-general of the man who led the March 2012 coup which plunged the country into crisis in the first place, Amadou Sanogo. Sanogo heads a 'Military Reform

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Committee', with which the EU Training Mission has little contact. The Malian army remains in a parlous state. For the moment, security depends almost entirely on France and the UN Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), whose mandate began on 1 July.

A crucial element in achieving national reconciliation will be turning the [ceasefire agreement](#) reached in June with the MNLA into something more permanent. The MNLA has restricted its forces to bases in the north, but it is unlikely to disarm voluntarily unless a substantive offer of extensive autonomy for the north is made by IBK. However, the MNLA was quick to [congratulate IBK](#) and its warm words have raised hopes that the two will be able to do business, as they have done in the past. But many in Bamako will be suspicious of too many concessions to the MNLA. In addition, the MNLA does not represent all the groups of the north; indeed, it does not even represent all Tuareg groups. So a deal with the MNLA will certainly not be enough by itself to guarantee peace. The grievances and interests of other groups in the region will also have to be addressed.

The north is a complex and perpetually shifting social and political mosaic. A broad-based, inclusive agreement to create a new political dispensation is possible but will be difficult to achieve or sustain. Decentralisation was introduced by ATT, who was pushed out of power by the March 2012 coup, but his version failed. Bamako held onto the purse-strings and used them to pay for corrupt deals with favoured local elites and other 'divide-and-rule' ploys. Despite this, there may be no alternative to trying again, but this time on a more constructive basis – one that would genuinely address the north's economic underdevelopment. Recalling the [successful peace process of the 1990s](#) in Mali, some analysts argue that there are powerful local and national peace-making resources that Malians could revive to this end. These might also act as a counter to the claims of Salafist Islam which have attracted many people in the north – and which could yet have growing resonance in the south too.

At the moment, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) are generally viewed as 'beyond the pale' when it comes to future negotiations. On 22 August, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who earlier this year was inaccurately reported to have been killed, announced that his group had merged with MUJAO. There have been several small-scale militant attacks in the north over recent months, but a [greater source of violence](#) has been that between herders and displaced people returning from abroad over access to scarce grazing land. High levels of insecurity and the resultant disruption of the pastoral economy have left many herders dependent upon food aid from the ICRC. Banditry is also a growing problem in the north.

There is general agreement that effective peace-making in Mali must be part of a wider effort to stabilise the Sahel and Sahara. There is already evidence that armed Islamists pushed out of Mali have shifted to neighbouring countries, including Niger – where a French-owned uranium mine at Arlit was recently attacked by MUJAO fighters – and southern Libya. UN envoy Romano Prodi's report on an ['integrated strategy'](#) for the Sahel region was finally published in June. It sets out three strategic goals: enhancing inclusive and effective governance in the region; ensuring the capacity of national and regional security structures to address cross-border threats; and developing long-term resilience through integrated humanitarian and development efforts. The Security Council endorsed the strategy in July.

Further reading: ["In Brief: International Military Forces in Mali"](#), Library Note SN06615, 19 August 2013; ["The crisis in Mali: current military action and upholding humanitarian law"](#), Library Note SN06531, 5 February 2013; Relief Web page on the [humanitarian crisis](#) in Mali; Bruce Whitehouse, [Bridges from Bamako](#) blog; [Three new briefings on Mali from African Affairs](#) (links are provided via an [African Arguments](#) blog of 20 June 2013).