

DV435 Economic and Political Geography of Mali

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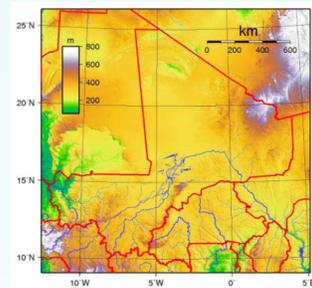


This poster analyzes the economic and political geography of Mali systematically. It has four main groups of analysis, starting with the location, physical geography, colonial economy and institutions, and leading to the contemporary economic structure and political institutions and competitions. Within each group, it pays attention to two dimensions of comparison: subnational spatial differences and changes over time.

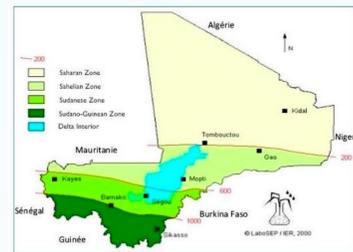
Location and Endowment

I. i Location

Mali is the 8th largest African country, spanning 124m ha (FAO, 2018). The relief is characterised by plateaus and plains. It is landlocked and crossed by two of Africa's major river systems: the Niger and the Senegal. The Niger functions as the main trading and transport artery in the country, and the capital Bamako was linked to the Senegal River transportation corridor by railroad in 1904 (Becker, 2004), but services have not run since 2009. Several main paved roads extend from Bamako, and a railroad track connects Mali with the Senegalese railway to Dakar. Mali's arable land area increased from 1.7m ha (1972) to 6.4m ha (2016), while 5% of the total area is cultivated (FAO, 2018).



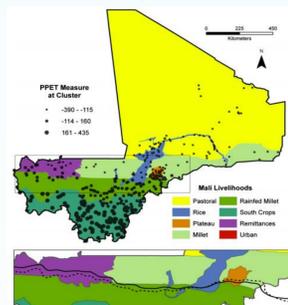
Source: Mapland



Source: Laboratoire Sol-Eau-Plantes de Sotuba / Institut d'Economie Rurale (IER), 2000

I. iii Natural resources

The Malian cotton zone is situated in the south-eastern corner of the country, bordering Guinea, the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso (Becker, 2004). Colonial Mali had a centralised state authority over natural resources; forests were nationalised in 1904. Restricted-access reserves were established to channel wood to the metropole and promote satellite capitalist production. Political decentralisation began in the 1980s, encouraging participatory control of natural resources. 80,000 ha of Faya Forest have since been divided between neighbouring villages which used them prior to colonial appropriation (Becker, 2004). Agriculture is the dominant economic sector, accounting for 97% of total water withdrawal in 2006, while industrial water withdrawal made up less than 1% (FAO, 2018).



Source: Jankowska, M.M., et al., (2011) Applied Geography, 1-12

I. iv Population

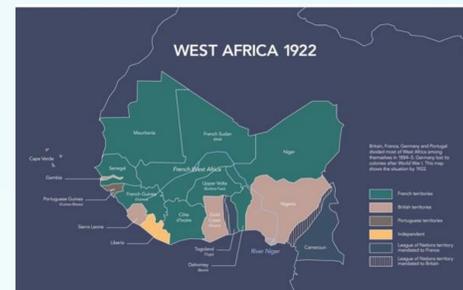
The 1972 population of 6m has increased to 18m today. Most human activity is concentrated in southerly regions, due to inhospitable desert conditions in the north. Villages are located close to topographic depressions, as this is where the most fertile soils are found (Benjaminsen et al., 2010); hence, the pattern of population density follows agro-ecological patterns. Mali's population density has increased from 5/km2 in 1972, to 15/km2 in 2017 (FAO, 2018). The rural population has always been greater than the urban population, and the difference between the two became most pronounced at the turn of the 21st C. The rural population stands at 11m, while 7m occupy urban areas (FAO, 2018). The settlement patterns of Malians are divided into the nomadic region (Sahel and Sahara) and the agricultural region (Sudanic). Agricultural growth is occurring in the hinterlands of municipalities, and Bamako's population is growing rapidly due to increased migration from rural areas: 200,000 in 1969, to 2.6m in 2020. (FAO, 2018)

Citations (1)
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Colonial Economy and Institutions

II. i Colonial Conquest

Seeking military outposts from its colony in Senegal, France conquered most of western Sudan in the mid-19th century. France ruled the territory under a number of titles, but it was predominantly known as French Sudan. The modern-day borders of Mali were established in 1947. France viewed this territory as less significant economically and politically than its neighbors and emphasized peasant production (Britannica).



Map of West Africa in 1922, the British Library

II. ii Labour Practices

The French used forced labour, conscription, and taxation to extract wealth from the region. In both World War I and II, France recruited heavily from French Sudan. Veterans returning to French Sudan were given preference within the colonial state (Britannica).

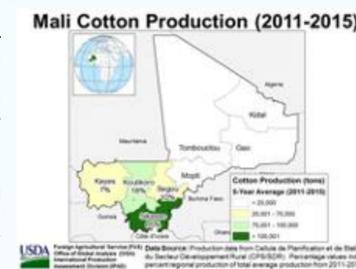
II. iii Intensifying Division

The French exacerbated divisions between northern, traditionally nomadic people and the southern, more agrarian people by educating a ruling class composed primarily of southerners. These southerners inherited colonial political authority after Mali's independence, which posed challenges for governing the new country as a whole. Strategies for controlling the north included patronage systems, economic marginalization, and military control. This division, aggravated by inherited colonial institutions, brought about northern rebellions (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015), most recently in March 2012 and in August 2020 (United States Institute of Peace, 2020).

II. iv Agriculture and Industry

For much of French rule, the economy consisted primarily of subsistence agriculture with limited cash crop production. The colonial state began irrigation projects in 1921 in an effort to rely on cotton. This project initially relied on families to voluntarily resettle along the irrigated land. When that failed, the colonial state forcibly resettled farmers through its Office du Niger. As a result, Mali became the second-largest cotton producer in Africa, and it still constitutes a significant sector of Mali's economy (Becker 1994, University of Michigan African Studies Center). Mali has extensive mineral resources, including gold, salt, marble, and limestone. The Empire of Mali mined gold resource in precolonial times, but these were not widely exploited in colonial times. Although gold has become Mali's largest export since 1999, agriculture still employs roughly 80% of Mali's workforce (Britannica).

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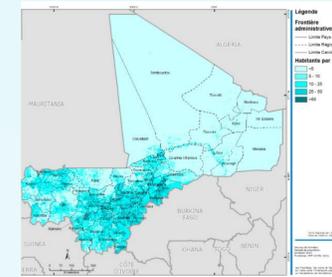
United States Department of Agriculture, International Production Assessment Division, Crop Production Map

Economic Geography

III. i Spatial Inequality: Economic Activities and Poverty Incidence

Mali exhibits a low income, undiversified, economy. The country is vulnerable to price shocks especially regarding its main exporting products, gold and cotton. Mali displays a high fertility rate of six children per woman in 2017 and food security is put at great risk by climate fluctuations (World Bank, 2020).

After having witnessed a rise between 2011 and 2015 because of the insecurity situation, Mali's extreme poverty rate diminished to 42.7% by 2019. This amelioration can be attributed to an incredible agricultural productivity between 2015 and 2019. Poverty is concentrated in rural areas of the south and where the population density is at its highest (World Bank, 2020).



Population map (Geonode.wfp.org)

III. ii Sectoral Economies

Mali's economy is centered around agriculture. 80% of the population is working in the sector that steadily constitutes around 40% of the country's GDP since 1995. However agricultural production is low, due to a lack of infrastructure in rural areas, climate variability and insecurity. Only Sikasso region can autonomously sustain its food needs. (Cia.gov, 2020)

Since the creation of the first gold mining society in Kalana in 1984, the gold industry constantly grew (Nations Unies, 2005), Mali is now the third producer of gold in Africa. The two main export products of the country are gold and cotton amounting to 2.59 billion dollars and 93 million dollars respectively in 2018 (OEC.world, 2020).

Gold extraction is unhindered by the rampant insecurity in the country. The main gold mines of the country are in the extreme south of the country. An area where no belligerent group has a stronghold. Consequently, gold production in Mali should remain as a steady income source in the country, especially during the current pandemic..

However, faced with falling prices, Malian cotton producers are diminishing production. The area sown has fallen by three-quarters, from 735,000 hectares in the previous season to 170,000 hectares in the coming season. Production will thus inevitably fall in the same proportion (Franceinfo, 2020). Mali is only expected to produce 310,000 bales of cotton. This is a derisory level compared to the 1.35 million of the previous seasons (Commodafrica, 2020). While production has been hampered by combats in the past, the reason today is solely the worldwide decrease in demand for cotton induced by the pandemic.

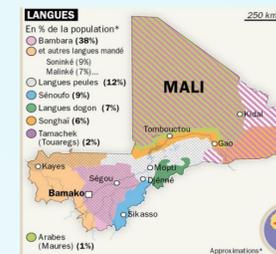
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Political Geography

IV. i Administrative Boundaries and Political Economic Significance

Modern Mali has a wide range of different ethnic groups and languages. French Sudan changed shape greatly during the colonial period from 1890, and territory has been difficult for central Government to control to this day. Smaller regions within modern Mali largely map onto French colonial administrative 'cercles'. Governing is difficult due to the high population density in the South West, and away from northern deserts, making Mali a 'hinterland country' (Herbst, 2000). Ethnicity has a low effect on political voting type in Mali - instead a 'joking kinship' or 'cousinage' is more likely to affect voting type (Dunning and Harrison, 2010).



Languages in Mali



Colonial Map of French Sudan, 1930s

IV. ii Resistance and Political Mobilisation in the Colonial Era

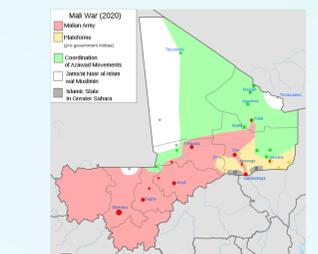
The French Government encouraged Islamic Law in French Sudan in the hope of using its law as a proxy colonial power, though also hoped the religion wouldn't spread more widely. The population is around 95% muslim. There was violence and protest between Sunni and Shia groups in the 1950s (Mann, 2003). The influence of Islam in politics continues to this day, with imam Mahmoud Dicko a key part of the 2020 coup. These, along with national movements and French moving away from the colonial model, meant that Mali achieved independence in 1960.

IV.iii Geographical Electoral Patterns and Territorial Cleavages

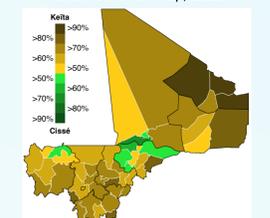
Between 1968 and 1991 Moussa Traore ruled as a dictator, and there were no democratic elections. The North of Mali has long held resentment against the South of the state due to inequality and lack of representation (CRU Netherlands report, 2015).

Mali is currently in Civil war, as Tuareg rebels and others began a conflict in 2012. The Government lost effective control of the North of the country, a situation which continues to this day, despite French intervention in 2013. There has been ethnic conflict in the Mopti central region of the country in recent years, with Bambara and Dogon accused of killing pastoral Peuhl or Fulani people in 2018. In 2020 there was another coup d'etat, with president Keita ousted and a military Government claiming power. Voting patterns have geographical cleavages too, though these are more complex. A central region voted for challenger Cisse in 2018, while both Bamako and the north broadly supported Keita.

Previously, Mali was once held up as a successful democracy in the 1990s and beyond. There were attempts by regimes to draw local boundaries from the 'bottom down' (Idleman, 2009)



Malian Civil War map, 2020



Voting type in Mali, Keita and Cissé run off in 2018

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