TOPONYMIC FACTFILE

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The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names

MALI
Edition 2, updated July 2018

Country name	Mali
State title	Republic of Mali
Name of citizen	Malian
Official language	French (fra)[1]
Country name in official language	Mali
State title in official language	République du Mali
Script	French is written in Roman script
Romanization System	*Not applicable*
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	ML/MLI
Capital	Bamako

Geographical names policy

Geographical names are for the most part found in a French style and should be taken as found on official Malian sources where possible. Maps produced by France's Institut Géographique National (IGN) or the French Ministry of Defence are good sources when Malian mapping is unavailable. All diacritical marks (see page 2 for details), apostrophes and hyphens should be retained. The difficulties of representing the many different African languages which have influenced the geographical names of the country have inhibited a consistent approach to spellings on many sources. In cases of uncertainty contact PCGN for advice.

Languages

Prior to 1960, colonial rule by France led to French serving as the language of education and of official administration. Since independence, French has continued to be the country's official language[2] and is perceived as a neutral "unifying" language but understanding of the language is largely limited to urban areas. The indigenous Bambara language (bam)[3] is the most widely spoken, and its intelligibility to as much as 80% of the population substantiates its position as the country's primary national language.

Due to the ethnic diversity of the peoples of Mali, more than 50 different indigenous languages are spoken. Some have orthographies based on Roman, Arabic, Tifinagh or even N'Ko[4] script, but despite official efforts to promote literacy in national languages[5], many remain unwritten.

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1 The ISO 639-3 languages codes are given for the languages mentioned in this Factfile.
2 Article 25; of the 1992 Constitution
3 Also seen as Bamanankan which is the local name
4 According to http://www.omniglot.com/writing/nko.htm, the N'Ko alphabet was devised in 1949 by Souleymane Kante of Guinea to furnish the peoples of West Africa with their own unique script to produce written records.
5 Demonstrated by Law no. 86 AN-RAM creating the Direction nationale de l'alphabétisation fonctionnelle et de la linguistique appliquée (DNAFLA)

13 of Mali's languages are legally designated "national languages"[6]; of these 6 are spoken by more than 400,000 people, namely Bambara (bam), Maasina Fulfulde (ffm) (a Fula dialect, also known as Macina), Kita Maninkakan (mwk) (also known as Malinke), Mamara Senufo (or Minyanka) (myk), Soninke (snk), and Songhay (or Songhai) dialects (ISO 639-2/5: son). Other major languages include Arabic (ara) and Amazigh (Berber) dialects (ber), introduced predominantly through trade with North Africa.

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings[7]):
French contains the following letter-diacritic combinations in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script[8]:

À	00C0	à	00E0	Â	00C2	â	00E2
Ç	00C7	ç	00E7	È	00C8	è	00E8
É	00C9	é	00E9	Ê	00CA	ê	00EA
Ë	00CB	ë	00EB	Î	00CE	î	00EE
Ï	00CF	ï	00EF	Ô	00D4	ô	00F4
Œ	0152	œ	0153	Ù	00D9	ù	00F9
Û	00DB	û	00FB	Ü	00DC	ü	00FC
Ÿ *	0178	ÿ *	00FF				

* rarely encountered

Administrative structure
At first-order administrative level (ADM1) Mali is divided into *régions* (Englsh: region) and the capital district of Bamako. The *régions* are sub-divided into *cercles* at the second-order level (ADM2). The *cercles* are themselves divided into communes and arrondissements at the third-order level (ADM3).

Prior to January 2016, there were 8 *régions*. Two new regions (Ménaka and Taoudénit) were created in northern Mali in January 2016, as one of the measures accompanying the peace and national reconciliation agreement, signed in Algiers in 2015. Despite having announced the creation of these two regions, the Malian government has not yet formally delineated them and there is no map available yet showing the boundaries of the new regions. PCGN believes that Ménaka was previously a cercle (ADM2) of Gao region; and Taoudénit was previously an arrondissement (ADM3) of Tombouctou cercle (ADM2), in Tombouctou region. In December 2017, the Minister for Territorial Administration, Tiéman Hubert Coulibaly, reported that Ménaka and Taoudénit were at an advanced stage of implementation. These two new regions are part of a 2012 law, which had created eleven new regions[9]. The remaining 9 regions mentioned in the law are still not operational, although legally these 9 regions exist.

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6 Article 1 of Decree 159 PG-RM of 19 July 1982

7 See www.unicode.org

8 Characters can be manually input into Microsoft word documents by typing in these character codes and then holding down the ALT key and pressing /x/. The code will change to the required character. The letter can be copied and pasted into other programmes if required. Alternatively, the 'Insert – Symbol' command can be used; the code can be entered into the 'Character code' box which will show the corresponding letter.
A GeoNames Soft-Copy Keyboard can be downloaded from the NGA website and used to enter the required letter-diacritic combinations for a particular region: http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/gns_services.html

9 In 2012 the Malian government announced a territorial reorganization into 19 regions, entailing the creation of 11 new regions. Other proposed regions under Loi No. 2012-017 of 2 March 2012, establishing administrative districts in the Republic of Mali, were: Nioro du Sahel, Kita, Doïla (Doïla is the spelling in the text of the law but Dioïla is more usual), Nara, Koutiala, Bougouni, San, Douentza, Bandiagara (http://mali-web.org/societe/les-nouvelles-regions-du-mali-des-gouverneurs-dans-deux-deja).

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The first-order administrative divisions (ADM1s) of Mali are listed in the table below.

Name of Region		Location of Region*	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative Centre (PPLA)	Location of Centre	Variant Names	Status
Short Form	**Full Form**						
Bamako	District de Bamako	12° 36' 30" N 007° 58' 30" W	ML-BKO	Bamako	12° 39' 00" N 008° 00' 00" W	Bko	Existed pre-2016
Gao	Région de Gao	16° 50' 00" N 001° 30' 00" E	ML-7	Gao	16° 16' 18" N 000° 02' 41" W	Septième Région; Seventh Region; Région VII	Existed pre-2016
Kayes	Région de Kayes	13° 50' 00" N 010° 15' 00" W	ML-1	Kayes	14° 26' 49" N 011° 26' 40" W	Première Région; First Region; Région I	Existed pre-2016
Kidal	Région de Kidal	19° 30' 00" N 001° 05' 00" E	ML-8	Kidal	18° 26' 28" N 001° 24' 28" E	Huitième Région; Eighth Region; Région VIII	Existed pre-2016
Koulikoro	Région de Koulikoro	13° 40' 00" N 007° 40' 00" W	ML-2	Koulikoro	12° 51' 46" N 007° 33' 35" W	Kkoro; Deuxième Région; Second Region; Région II	Existed pre-2016
Mopti	Région de Mopti	14° 40' 00" N 003° 30' 00" W	ML-5	Mopti	14° 29' 21" N 004° 11' 34" W	Cinquième Région; Fifth Region; Région V	Existed pre-2016
Ségou	Région de Ségou	13° 50' 00" N 005° 50' 00" W	ML-4	Ségou	13° 25' 54" N 006° 12' 57" W	Quatrième Région; Fourth Region; Région IV	Existed pre-2016
Sikasso	Région de Sikasso	11° 15' 00" N 006° 35' 00" W	ML-3	Sikasso	11° 18' 49" N 005° 40' 11" W	Troisième Région; Third Region; Région III	Existed pre-2016
Tombouctou	Région de Tombouctou	20° 00' 00" N 003° 30' 00" W	ML-6	Tombouctou (Timbuktu)	16° 46' 14" N 003° 00' 20" W	Tombo; Sixième Région; Sixth Region; Région VI	Existed pre-2016
Taoudénit	*Région de Taoudénit*	*unconfirmed*	*ML-10*	*Taoudénit*	*22° 40' 28" N 003° 58' 44" W*	*Taoudenni; Taoudéni*	*Established January 2016 – boundaries unconfirmed*
Ménaka	*Région de Ménaka*	*unconfirmed*	*ML-9*	*Ménaka*	*15° 55' 06" N 002° 24' 08" E*	*-*	*Established January 2016 – boundaries unconfirmed*

* Centre point pre-2016. Centre points unavailable for newest regions

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Useful references

- BBC country profile: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1021454.stm
- CIA World Factbook: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html
- Ethnologue report on languages of Mali: http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=mali
- FCO country profile: http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/country-profile/sub-saharan-africa/mali
- Government of Mali official portal: http://www.primature.gov.ml/
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- Loi N°99-035/ du 10 août 1999 portant création des collectivités territoriales de cercles et de régions.
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- Ministère de l'administration territorial: http://www.matcl.gov.ml/
- Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of France: http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/ministere_817/publications_827/cooperation-internationale-developpement_3030/serie-evaluations_4632/evaluations-2003_4660/evaluation-cooperation-decentralisee-franco-malienne_4663/cooperation-decentralisee-franco-malienne-etat-lieux_11737.html
- Omniglot writing systems and languages of the world: http://www.omniglot.com
- UN Geospatial Information Section map of Mali administrative divisions: http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/english/htmain.htm
- UNHCR report on Mali: http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/897ce24a48d43c82802565f700407640?Opendocument
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server: http://earth-info.nga.mil/gns/html/index.html
- Wikitravel http://wikitravel.org/en/Mali