



SUPPORTING  
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT  
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

# Enabling Environment Snapshot

Mali

July 2025

## Context

Mali remains gripped by a [multidimensional crisis](#) that has destabilised its political, security, and social institutions. Under military rule since 2020, the transitional government has pursued sweeping reforms, including a new Constitution, penal code and code of criminal procedure. While the Constitution enshrines fundamental rights and anti-corruption measures, it has been [widely criticized](#) for centralising power in the presidency and being adopted [without broad consensus](#) during a period of authoritarian governance. This raises concerns about democratic legitimacy.

Compounding these issues, [the new penal code](#) criminalises same-sex sexual relationships, marking [a sharp regression](#) in human rights protections. The [law not only penalizes consensual same-sex acts](#) but also bans any perceived promotion of homosexuality, exacerbating stigma and exposing LGBTQ+ individuals to arbitrary arrest and violence. These developments reflect a broader trend of shrinking civic space, where dissent is increasingly suppressed and legal reforms serve to entrench control rather than expand freedoms. However, the promulgation of a [Charter for Peace and Reconciliation](#) has been commended as a positive step.

The withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the [suspension of the Algiers Agreement](#) signal a retreat from regional cooperation and negotiated peace frameworks, raising concerns about Mali's long-term stability and diplomatic isolation. The creation [of the Alliance of Sahel States](#) (AES), while framed as a sovereign alternative, remains nascent and untested in its capacity to replace established multilateral mechanisms. Meanwhile, the extension of the transition period without broad consensus undermines trust in the transitional authorities and delays the restoration of constitutional order. These shifts complicate collaboration with traditional partners and donors, many of whom are recalibrating their engagement strategies in response to Mali's evolving political landscape. For civil society, this environment presents both risks and strategic uncertainties, as shrinking external support and contested domestic reforms threaten their operational space and advocacy efforts.

In this context, civil society faces [heightened constraints](#), with limited avenues for meaningful engagement. While reforms are framed as steps toward stability, their substance and implementation risk undermining the inclusive governance and rights-based environment essential for peace and social cohesion.

## 1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

The [Constitution of 22 July 2023](#) guarantees respect and promotion of human rights, whereas, unlike the 2001 Code, the new [Criminal Code](#) and the [Code of Criminal Procedure](#) introduce several notable human rights protections such as sanctions for gender-based violence, the criminalisation of descent-based slavery practices, and the internationalisation of offences drawn from community legislation. Despite these progressive reforms, Malian civil society is experiencing a steady and ongoing restriction of its operational space nationwide, currently classified as "[repressed](#)" by the CIVICUS Monitor.

This assessment reflects a situation where the authorities impose severe [legal and practical restrictions](#) on freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Recent actions include the banning of foreign media, the dissolution or threat of [dissolution](#) of [civil society](#)

[organisations](#) and [political parties](#), as well as the arrest and enforced disappearance of civilians critical of the government.

Freedom of assembly and demonstration is severely [restricted in Mali](#). Civil society actors are frequently victims of intimidation, harassment, and [illegal arrests](#). In addition, peaceful demonstrations organised by dissident voices, including political parties, political associations, human rights defenders, activists and political leaders, are frequently [banned or restricted](#).

Freedom of association is also under severe pressure. Measures such as the suspension of political parties and political associations, [the repeal of association](#) and [the outright dissolution](#) of political parties and political associations reflect a legal and political environment that is unfavourable to the functioning of civil society in Mali.

Freedom of expression in Mali remains seriously compromised, particularly affecting civil society actors and journalists. In recent months, several cases have been documented, such as that of journalist [Alfousseini Togo](#), who was arrested and sentenced after criticising the Ministry of Justice in an article, while [Yeri Bocoum](#) was abducted and detained after covering a banned demonstration. Independent media outlets are also censored, such as [Joliba TV News](#), whose broadcasts were interrupted after airing critical debates about the authorities. In addition, several international media outlets ([TV5 Monde](#), RFI, France 24) are [banned from broadcasting in Mali](#), which reduces access to pluralistic information. These cases illustrate an environment that is not conducive to the exercise of freedom of expression and the right to information.

## 2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

The regulation of civil society organisations in Mali is governed by [Ordinance No. 2024-008/PT-RM](#) of 28 March 2024, amending [Law No. 04-038 of 5 August 2004 on associations](#), governing the creation, operation and financing of associations and NGOs. This law requires prior registration with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation (MATD), via the Directorate General of Territorial Administration (DGAT), for any organisation wishing to operate legally in the country. Registration is mandatory for both local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), under penalty of nullity of their activities. While framed as a measure to improve governance and public order, the law significantly alters the enabling environment for civil society.

By making legal recognition conditional on state approval, the law increases the risk of arbitrary exclusion, particularly for organisations engaged in advocacy or critical of government policies. The threat of nullification of activities for non-compliant organisations creates a climate of legal uncertainty and discourages grassroots mobilisation. Combined with [dissolutions of CSOs](#) and [bans on foreign funding](#), this regulatory tightening undermines freedom of association and restricts access to vital resources. Rather than fostering transparency and accountability, the law consolidates state control over civic space, weakening civil society's ability to operate independently and contribute meaningfully to democratic governance and social cohesion.

The financing and implementation of projects in Mali are subject to significant restrictions. NGOs and foundations, whether national or international, as well as national associations, must now obtain a [Notice of Non-Objection \(ANO\)](#) from the Ministry of Territorial

Administration and Decentralisation (MATD) in order to carry out their projects. This requirement introduces opaque and restrictive regulations, as ANO refusals are often neither justified nor legally framed, which reinforces administrative arbitrariness to hinder the work of CSOs.

In addition, a [new draft law](#) on associations and NGOs that is currently under negotiation could tighten the conditions for registration, operation and funding of CSOs and associations. For example, it establishes registration fees that vary according to the type of organisation and a [mandatory](#) 10% [contribution](#) to the State of the funding of NGOs and associations operating in Mali. These proposed provisions, which could have an impact on the financial autonomy of CSOs and their ability to carry out their projects, are a [cause for concern](#).

### 3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Malian civil society organisations face significant [challenges in mobilising funds](#), as they are heavily dependent on grants from international donors. [Mali's withdrawal from ECOWAS](#) and diplomatic tensions with several bilateral and multilateral partners and international organisations significantly reduce the resources available to civil society. This situation is exacerbated by the almost total absence of public funding for local organisations in Mali.

Funding for civil society organisations in Mali is mainly focused on specific, often short-term projects, which limits their autonomy and sustainability. This situation is exacerbated by administrative requirements such as obtaining a [Notice of Non-Objection \(ANO\)](#), which can delay access to funds and compromise the implementation of projects that are essential for local communities. Furthermore, recent budget cuts by USAID in 2025 have had a direct impact on Malian CSOs. According to [a report by Mali Health](#), the cessation of US funding has jeopardised vital projects for vulnerable populations, profoundly affecting social sectors such as education, agriculture, health and food security. In addition, an [estimated](#) 38% in USAID funding in 2025 has been observed, leading to the closure of health, education and governance projects. With regard to tax exemptions, Mali grants tax exemptions to donors and CSOs, particularly in relation to VAT, but these benefits are often subject to complex administrative procedures, which can be an additional obstacle for local CSOs. For example, according to the [Grant Thornton Tax Practice Guide](#), although Malian legislation provides for tax exemptions for NGOs, the effective implementation of these exemptions can be hampered by cumbersome administrative procedures and a lack of clarity in tax guidelines.

With regard to opening bank accounts, Malian CSOs are subject to restrictive regulations, with strict requirements in terms of [documentation and compliance](#), which may limit their ability to manage their funds effectively and maintain their financial independence.

### 4. State openness and responsiveness

Article 15 of [Mali's 2023](#) Constitution stipulates that "freedom of the press and the right of access to information are recognised and guaranteed". Despite this legal provision, effective access to information [remains limited](#). According to a [report by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation](#), although the right to information is enshrined in law, its implementation is hampered by complex administrative procedures, a lack of transparency and an institutional culture that is not conducive to the disclosure of information. Requests for access to information are often dealt with slowly or even dismissively by public authorities, which discourages civil society from actively participating in decision-making processes.

With regard to civil society participation in decision-making processes, mechanisms exist, such as the [Forum of International NGOs](#) in Mali (FONGIM), the [Pole of National Organisations](#) Active in Humanitarian Affairs (PONAH), the [National Council of Civil Society](#) (CNSC) and the [Forum of National NGO Collectives](#) (FECONG), which serve as platforms for dialogue between the state and civil society actors. These structures facilitate coordination, advocacy and representation of CSOs in political discussions. However, effective civil society participation is often limited. CSO contributions are frequently ignored or marginalised, particularly when they come from [dissenting voices](#). The government tends to favour organisations aligned with the ruling power, thereby reducing the space for inclusive and constructive dialogue.

## 5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

The prevailing political culture in Mali is increasingly characterised by a securitised narrative that conflates civil society critique with threats to national sovereignty. This framing, often propagated through state-aligned traditional media and amplified by sympathetic social media channels, systematically delegitimises dissenting voices. This trend is rooted in the military-led government's "[sovereignist](#)" turn, which has reshaped domestic and foreign policy since the 2021 coups. The authorities have actively promoted nationalist and pan-Africanist rhetoric, often framing dissent as undermining the state's autonomy and unity. This narrative has gained traction among younger Malians and is amplified through state-aligned media and social platforms. The securitisation of public discourse has coincided with [a broader rollback of democratic norms](#), including the dissolution of political parties and repression of civil society actors, raising concerns about authoritarian drift and the shrinking space for civic engagement. The emergence of [non-professional digital actors](#)—commonly referred to as “videomen”—further intensifies this dynamic by disseminating inflammatory and polarising content aimed at civil society organisations (CSOs). This convergence of official rhetoric and informal digital activism creates a hostile discursive environment that undermines the credibility and perceived legitimacy of CSOs. As a result, civil society actors face reputational risks and social backlash, which erodes public trust and weakens their capacity to mobilise citizens. The stigmatisation particularly discourages participation among youth and women, who are often more vulnerable to social and political marginalisation.

In effect, these factors constrict the enabling environment for civil society by fostering fear, reducing civic space, and deterring inclusive engagement. The cumulative impact is a diminished role for CSOs in democratic governance, accountability, and social cohesion—functions that are essential for a resilient and participatory political system.

## 6. Access to a secure digital environment

Access to a safe and secure digital environment in Mali faces major challenges due to existing legislation, regulatory actions by the authorities and implications for fundamental freedoms. Although [Law No. 2019-056 of 5 December 2019](#) is presented as a cybersecurity instrument in Mali, it raises significant concerns about the creation of a truly safe and conducive digital environment. While its objectives, namely combating cyber fraud, harassment and the dissemination of harmful content, are legitimate, its broad provisions and severe penalties risk restricting fundamental freedoms. The penalties, ranging from six months to 20 years' imprisonment and heavy fines, appear disproportionate when applied to vaguely defined



offences such as ‘hateful’ or ‘defamatory’ content. This approach encourages self-censorship, particularly among journalists, activists and citizens expressing critical opinions.

Articles 74 to 86, in particular, grant judicial authorities extensive powers of electronic surveillance, including remote searches, seizure of digital data without notification, and real-time monitoring of data flows. The obligation on internet service providers and telecom operators to cooperate effectively institutionalises state [surveillance](#) without guarantees or independent oversight. This undermines privacy, reduces online expression and erodes trust in cyberspace as a space for mobilisation, debate and civic responsibility.

In practice, these powers are likely to be exploited to target dissenting voices, restrict independent media and criminalise digital activism. Rather than promoting a safe and secure digital environment, the law tends to strengthen state control over cyberspace, thereby weakening the protections necessary for the proper functioning of civil society online.

At the same time, the High Authority for Communication (HAC), created by [Ordinance No. 2014-006/P-RM](#), regulates the communications sector, including digital media. It monitors [digital activities](#) and imposes sanctions on those who refuse to cooperate with the authorities, with penalties ranging from six months to two years in prison and fines of 500,000 to 2,000,000 CFA francs. Although these measures are intended to protect the digital environment, they raise [concerns](#) about fundamental freedoms. Certain provisions, such as the [requirement for internet service providers to facilitate the interception of communications](#), are perceived as [restrictive to freedom of expression](#) online. Furthermore, the HAC's actions, such as suspending political activities and banning [coverage of political party activities](#), have been criticised as infringements on fundamental freedoms. Malian civil society therefore finds itself in a delicate position, facing cybersecurity challenges in an environment where fundamental freedoms are sometimes restricted. [Human rights experts](#) and organisations are calling for a review of laws and regulatory practices to ensure a balance between digital security and respect for human rights.

## Challenges and opportunities

Malian civil society is likely to face several challenges in the coming months. Among these, the ongoing reform of the legal framework governing NGOs and associations could strengthen the government's control over CSOs, which would pose a direct threat to an environment conducive to their work and limit their access to funding at a time when organisations are heavily dependent on grants.

While the existence of a framework for dialogue between the government and NGOs could, in theory, be an opportunity, the likelihood of genuine dialogue taking place in the current context in Mali remains very limited. Indeed, criticism of the government by NGOs and differences of opinion make genuine consultation unlikely. According to [the UN, May 2025](#), “no genuine consultation is possible in the current climate of repression of civic space, where opponents and independent journalists have reason to fear that freedom of expression will be punished, particularly with the suppression of all political parties”.

In this context, it would be more realistic to consider that opportunities for dialogue have potential but are highly restricted and conditional. Civil society actors can nevertheless attempt to take advantage of existing mechanisms to assert their positions and strengthen advocacy for a law that supports the autonomous intervention of NGOs and associations, but these efforts face significant constraints. The opportunity therefore exists mainly in theory, and its

realisation will depend on the evolution of the political climate and effective respect for fundamental freedoms.

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