

## **AS MALI GOES INTO SECOND ROUND POLLING IN ITS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

### **Background**

On July 29, 2018, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) observed the election processes as Malians went to poll in an election that was crucial and expected to improve security and economic conditions in the country. A total of 24 candidates competed for the presidential race, with President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita (IBK) and opposition frontrunner Soumaila Cisse as the two leading candidates. Of the 24 candidates, Madame Djeneba N'diaye is the only female contestant for the presidential election; contested as an independent candidate, scoring a total vote cast of 11,609, representing 0.36%.

### **Election Issues**

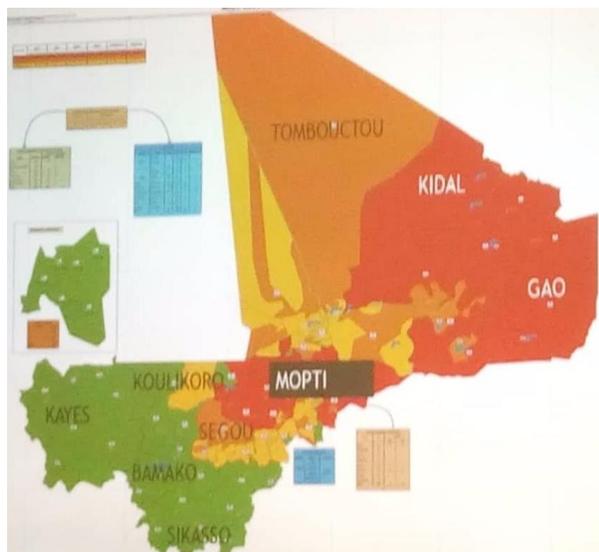
Election campaign took place from July 7 to July 27; candidates had focused on their party's manifestoes and issues based platform. However, the security situation, especially in the northern region, limited the campaigning activities to most of the north region. The Malian presidential election was organised and held in the face of significant political and security issues. Preparation for the election was also marked with challenges such as workers strike, which affected the collection of voter cards and eventually disfranchised many people, arguably despite the provisions of the electoral law that allows the distribution of voting cards on Election Day. Few days to the election, the main opposition had accused the government of connivance with the election management authorities of fraud, alarming anomalies in the electoral register. The Ministry of Territorial Affairs jointly administers elections in Mali, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) and the General Office of Elections (DGE). Each of these entities has a specified role in the overall administration of elections. The opposition condemned the inconsistencies between the electoral register audited by international experts and the one posted on the site of the DGE. They accused the government of wanting to use the opportunity to rig the elections.

Following the conclusion of the first round of the election, none of the candidates was elected winner of the poll; the Malian constitution stipulates that a winner shall emerge having scored at least a total of 50% plus one vote. In this instance, the presidential election will go to a runoff vote with incumbent President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita scoring 41.1% of the total votes cast and his main rival Soumaila Cisse scoring 17.8% to take the runner-up position. In 2013 presidential election, both candidates also went to a runoff vote, that saw IBK winning the runoff and elected president.

Generally, polling in most parts of Mali as observed went on without any significant challenge. However, considerable improvement can be made to the process; for instance, the length of polling time can be adjusted. While the closing of the poll is proper, it denies many voters their right to a ballot. The electoral process needs to allow all voters present on the queue by the close

of poll. Taking a cue from Nigeria's electoral process, poll opens at 8:00 am and closes at 2:00 pm. However, voters on the queue at the closing of the poll are allowed to vote. Following good practice, sorting and counting of the ballot in the dark aren't in the interest of the process.

CDD commend the adequate involvement of women as polling officials and party agents. Of particular note is the inclusion of young people in the process, this should be sustained and improved. The need to avoid sorting and counting of the ballot in the dark is crucial - the voting period should be reduced from 10 hours to eight (8) hours, (8:00hrs – 16:00hrs) allowing sorting and counting to be done in earnest before dark. It is essential to bring to the fore that the closing of the poll at 1800hrs is laudable but this disenfranchises many voters, CDD observed voters on the queue before the hour of closing, who were denied ballot. As recommended above, if poll closes at 1600hrs, voters on queue should be allowed to vote, until the last person on the line by 1600hrs had voted.



Hotspots as Mali Decides

Mali has a population of 17 million people, including 6.5 million women; representing 51% of the population and 6.3 million men representing 49% of the population.



Nursing mother observed serving as party agent. A good number of women have been observed playing good roles in the process.

Mali is dominated by 90% Muslim citizens, 9% Africa traditional believers & 1% Christian representation. The country is landlocked, and previously considered a model of African democracy, but recently descended into chaos in 2012, when mid-ranking officers toppled a twice-elected government in the southern capital of Bamako. The military coup removed the then-President Amadou Toumani Toure, leading the country into pandemonium, thereby paving the way for separatist rebels to seize control of some part of the country, particularly in Kidal Region, North of the country.

Mali is faced with several challenges, including security; economy; unemployment and poverty. The country ranked as third-largest gold producer and among the poorest in the world despite its

vast natural resource – Mali continues to face financial distresses and food insecurity. Mali's next President's task, include solving the economic challenges, as well as dealing with the reoccurring security problems.

The presidential election was conducted in an acceptable condition with liberty and transparency, in voting centres monitored by CDD, a majority of polling stations opened at 8:00 am, the stipulated hour of opening, with electoral materials available. Accreditation, voting and counting were also conducted in a fair and transparent manner. However, violent attacks impeded the process in 716 polling stations in Mopti -- Inner Niger Delta region of Mali, Segou Tomboktu and Gao.

A total of 8,000,462 voters were registered to vote in the election, in 23,041 polling stations cutting across the eight regions of the country. However, only 3,204,461 voters participated in the election, representing 43% of the total registered voters.

As the runoff set for August 12<sup>th</sup>, CDD will be observing the 2nd round of the Malian election, which will be between the opponent Soumaïla Cissé and President Ibrahim Keita. Regardless of the outcome, it will be the democracy that wins.



First-time voters at Ecole Plateau II, Kayes Region. They are also party agents. They are excited and hope the process goes peacefully and transparently.