



# Bible Access List

Where Bible access is most difficult, and Bible shortage is greatest

## Mali

Bible Restrictions Rank: **43**  
**CONSIDERABLE ACCESS RESTRICTIONS**

Bible Shortage Rank: **46**  
**Bible needs estimate between twenty five and fifty thousand**



## An Overview of Bible access in Mali

Mali, a West African nation of around 24 million people, is home to approximately over 540,000 Christians, just over 2% of the population. Estimates show that only around a quarter of believers have access to Scripture due to considerable restrictions. This represents a spiritual crisis for hundreds of thousands longing for the Word of God amid instability, violence, and poverty.

Although there are no nationwide legal restrictions on importing Bibles, the reality on the ground tells a different story. In roughly half of Mali, particularly in the northern and central regions, Christianity is under pressure due to the presence of armed Islamic extremist groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and affiliated local militias. In these areas, printing, storing, owning, and distributing Bibles is not just difficult; it's dangerous. For Christians living in these zones, the presence of a Bible can invite harassment, confiscation, or worse.

In many rural or conflict-affected regions, the presence of Christian literature is tightly surveilled. Even if internet access provides a digital alternative, it remains limited: just a third of the population is online, and a little over half have access to electricity. Literacy, too, is a significant barrier, with literacy sitting at just little over a third. These obstacles underscore the need for creative and innovative solutions to make the Bible more accessible.

Further compounding the challenge is the worsening security situation. In recent years, jihadist groups have gained territorial control, imposed harsh Sharia laws, and targeted Christians, churches, and missionaries. Hundreds of thousands of people are internally displaced, many from Christian areas, and violence continues to rise as government control erodes.

Before we continue, would you take a pause to pray for Mali?

### How can I pray for Mali?

- **Open Access.** Pray that God opens doors for Bibles to reach Christians in Mali, especially in regions under the strict surveillance of extremist groups. May the Lord create innovative pathways for Scripture distribution that remain invisible to those opposed to its spread.
- **End to Violence.** Lift up prayers for peace in Mali. Pray for the government's wisdom and strength to protect its citizens, especially Christians, allowing for a safe environment where the Bible can freely circulate without fear.
- **Global Partnerships.** Ask God to forge strong global partnerships that bring together resources, expertise, and the unified goal of increasing Bible access in Mali. Pray for collaborations that can navigate the complexities of local restrictions and logistical challenges, ensuring that every Christian in Mali has the opportunity to own and read a Bible.

After praying for Mali, continue reading on the next page to learn more.

### Bible Access Restrictions

#### Minimal Access Restrictions

- Import restrictions for part of the country
- Print restrictions for part of the country
- Storage restrictions for part of the country
- Ownership restrictions for part of the country
- Distribution restrictions for part of the country

#### Other Limiting Factors

#### Severe Other Factors

- Extremely poor
- Poor internet access
- Poor infrastructure
- 50-70% of population access to electricity
- <50% literacy

#### Bible Shortages Among Believers

- Bible ownership is very low, **estimated** Bible need is between 25 and 50 thousand
- Impacted by armed conflicts

**Main religion:** Islam

**Country population:** 24,016,000

**Christian population:**

542,000, 2.26% of total population

**World Watch List:** #14

# WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN MALI?

Access to Bibles in Mali is increasingly limited due to a convergence of severe political instability, the spread of violent extremism, and infrastructural underdevelopment.

## Widespread Insecurity and Extremist Control

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Since the 2012 civil war, large parts of northern and central Mali have fallen under the control of Islamist militant groups such as JNIM (al-Qaeda affiliate) and ISGS (Islamic State in the Greater Sahara). These groups impose strict Sharia law, enforce religious taxation (zakat), and violently punish those who deviate from their interpretation of Islam.

In these areas, churches have been burned, Christians targeted, and entire communities displaced—making it near impossible to distribute or even possess Bibles safely.

## Displacement and Fear

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Over 350,000 people are currently internally displaced, many of them Christians fleeing religious violence. Christian civil servants, including teachers and aid workers, are particularly vulnerable outside Bamako, forcing many churches and church-run institutions to shut down. This displacement creates fragmented communities with little access to consistent ministry or Scripture resources.

## Shrinking Mission Presence and Withdrawal of Peacekeepers

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Mali is in a humanitarian crisis. The withdrawal of French troops in 2022 and UN peacekeepers in 2023 has left a significant security vacuum. The resulting rise in jihadist activity has made it increasingly dangerous for missionaries, aid workers, and local believers involved in Bible distribution to operate, especially in the north and central regions.

## Poverty and Technological Limitations

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With a large part of the population living in extreme poverty, many cannot afford a printed Bible even if available. Technological alternatives are also limited: only 33% of the population has internet access, and social media penetration is just 9.1%. Fixed internet infrastructure is sparse outside of urban areas, and mobile data remains costly and unreliable in rural regions where many Christians reside.

## Legal and Bureaucratic Hurdles

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Although there are no laws directly banning Christianity or Bible ownership, churches, especially outside of Bamako, face difficulty obtaining registration or operating legally. This indirectly limits the ability to distribute Bibles or conduct outreach without risk.

# Rising Social Hostility and Religious Radicalization

The visible growth of Wahhabi-influenced Islamic groups has spread intolerance, even in previously moderate areas. Muslim Background believers or MBB now face intense pressure, and any effort to distribute Bibles in local languages is likely to be met with suspicion or aggression.

## Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Mali

Mali	Islamic Oppression	Religious Nationalism	Ethno-religious hostility	Clan oppression	Christian denominational oppression	Communist and post-Communist oppression	Secular intolerance	Dictatorial paranoia	Organized corruption and crime	Reference
Persecution Engines →										<p>The more fully shaded the circle in orange, the stronger the level of persecution. The number of "+" signs indicates the frequency or intensity of the driving factors behind it.</p>
Persecution Drivers ↓	Very strong	Not at all	Not at all	Strong	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	Medium	Very strong	
Government officials								+++		
Ethnic group leaders				++++						
Non-Christian religious leaders	+++++									
Christian religious leaders										
Violent religious groups	+++++									
Normal citizens	++++									
Extended family	++++									
Political parties										
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups										
Organized crime									+++++	
Multilateral org. & Embassies										

In Mali, multiple forces of persecution operate simultaneously to restrict Bible access, including **Islamic oppression, organized corruption and crime, clan oppression,** and **dictatorial paranoia.** These engines are primarily driven by violent religious groups, non-Christian religious leaders, organized crime cartels, ethnic group leaders, government officials, broader societal hostility, and even extended family members.

The World Watch List by Open Doors sheds light on the broader context of persecution of Christians. But now we have to ask the question: How does this affect Bible access? Furthermore, where can we pinpoint the problem so we can address the need and demand for Bibles in Mali?

## A CLOSER LOOK AT PERSECUTION ENGINES

A persecution engine is simply this: the source of persecution in the country. A persecution driver (or actor) is the one “driving” the persecution. Taking a closer look at these engines and drivers, in proper context, will give us insight on how we can solve the problems of Bible access in the country.



### Escalating Violence and Control

Islamic oppression is the most active and violent engine restricting Bible access in Mali. Islamist armed groups, including affiliates of al-Qaeda (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), have carried out brutal attacks across northern and central Mali. These groups enforce a strict interpretation of Sharia law, which includes the destruction of churches, implementation of religious taxes (zakat), and punishment through unofficial courts that deny Christians a fair hearing.

Under their control, entire communities have been displaced. Christian populations have fled or gone underground as militants target civilians, loot livestock, and burn homes. In a particularly devastating act of terror, over 120 people were killed in a single attack on a passenger boat traveling along the Niger River in September 2023. Such insecurity renders Bible delivery impossible and makes the possession of a Bible a potentially fatal risk.

Further compounding the crisis, known extremists like Al Hassan, who ruled Timbuktu under Ansar al-Din, were convicted by the ICC in 2024 for crimes including torture, rape, and destruction of religious sites. The pattern is clear: wherever these groups gain ground, Christian life is choked out, and access to the Scriptures is effectively erased.



### Trafficking Chaos and Funding Persecution

Mali's geographic positioning and vast ungoverned regions provide a perfect environment for organized criminal networks. These groups, involved in drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and human trafficking, exploit the country's instability, enriching themselves and funding extremist groups targeting Christian communities. Since the Tuareg rebellion in 2012, former rebel forces have shifted into organized criminal operations, often collaborating with radical Islamic groups. Christians and Bible distributors face threats, violence, and kidnapping, severely hindering their ability to safely transport or distribute Scripture.

A stark example is seen in the regions of Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu, where since early 2023, armed clashes between rival extremist factions and criminal networks have intensified. These groups frequently loot villages, intercept transportation routes, and abduct Christians suspected of distributing Bibles. In August 2023, fighters linked to these criminal networks and extremist groups reportedly attacked and looted homes and businesses in the village of Bodio, resulting in the death of 15 civilians and extensive property damage. This violent environment has practically halted Bible distribution, leaving believers isolated and without access to Scripture.



### Tribal Loyalties Weaponized Against Christianity

In Mali, traditional tribal loyalties significantly exacerbate the persecution of Christians, especially among ethnic groups such as the Fulani and Tuareg. Clan leaders perceive Christianity as a threat to their traditional and Islamic identities, often responding with violence to halt its spread within their communities.

Throughout recent years, Fulani and Tuareg herders have repeatedly targeted Christian communities, destroying farms, stealing livestock, and burning homes. In 2023, Human Rights Watch documented multiple incidents where Fulani groups, emboldened by their leaders, specifically targeted Christian-majority villages in central and northeastern Mali, forcibly displacing thousands and disrupting any organized efforts for Bible distribution or Christian gatherings. Christian converts within these ethnic groups face intense pressure from their extended families and community leaders.

There have been cases where converts have been expelled from their villages or forcibly divorced from their spouses to prevent the spread of Christianity, further isolating them from accessing Bibles or any Christian community support.



## A Paranoid Government Incapable of Security

Since the 2020 coup and subsequent power grab by Colonel Assimi Goïta, Mali has been under military rule. Although the junta has promised elections, these have been repeatedly delayed, and a 2023 constitutional referendum expanded presidential powers while reducing parliamentary oversight. This has created a climate of fear and distrust, particularly for minority groups like Christians.

Government control over civil society has become increasingly strict. Although there are no formal anti-Christian laws, church registration, especially outside of Bamako, faces bureaucratic obstruction. As Islamic militants expand their territory, the Malian military's inability to protect Christian communities has only worsened Bible access. The withdrawal of French forces in 2022 and UN peacekeepers in 2023 further exposed Christian areas to attacks without recourse or protection.

Furthermore, the government's reliance on private military contractors such as the Kremlin-linked Wagner Group has led to documented human rights abuses during counterterrorism operations, further destabilizing regions and leaving civilians, including Christians, caught in the crossfire.

# THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN MALI

In Mali, Bible access remains critically low. A number of **up to 50,000 Bibles** can bridge the gap and make a huge difference, meeting the spiritual needs of the growing Christian community in spite of violence and persecution.

## A Growing Church, A Growing Demand

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The urgency is heightened by the growth of the church in Mali in the past five years. With dire situation in the country, this underscores an immediate need to provide sufficient Scriptures to sustain the spiritual growth of new and existing believers. Solving Bible access can ensure our brothers and sisters have the essential resources for discipleship and evangelism.

## Bible Formats for Diverse Needs

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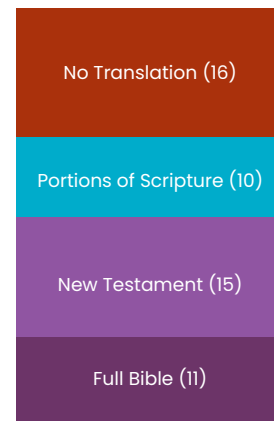
In Mali, **printed Bibles** remain the highest priority due to limited infrastructure and widespread poverty, which restrict digital access. **Bibles accessed through the internet** play an increasingly supportive role in connected regions.

# The Challenge of Bible Translations

Language diversity significantly compounds Bible distribution efforts. Christians in Mali speak at least 52 different languages. Of these languages:

- Only **11** languages have a complete Bible translation
- **15** languages have only the New Testament translated
- **10** languages have partial translations of Scripture
- **Alarmingly, 16 languages have no portion of the Scripture available at all**

This leaves entire communities spiritually underserved and cut off from the life-changing power of the gospel.



Spoken Languages with Believers in Mali

## THE CLARION CALL

The need for Bibles in Mali transcends logistical barriers; it represents a profound spiritual hunger and a desperate cry for hope amid ongoing persecution, poverty, and isolation. The global Church has an urgent opportunity and responsibility to respond.

By providing Bibles in necessary formats and accelerating vital translation efforts, we can equip every believer in Mali with the transformative power and hope of God's Word.

Now is the time to stand alongside the Malian Church in ensuring no believer remains without access to Scripture.

