



Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

Maliens defeat dictator, gain free election (March Revolution), 1991

- African Democracy Campaigns (early 1990s)

Time period notes: Although ADEMA and the Mali Pupils and Students Association (AEEM) had been organizing for democracy previously, the first apparent nonviolent action leading to an organized campaign was AEEM's funeral march on March 17

March 17,
1991

to: March 26,
1991

Country: Mali

Location City/State/Province: Bamako

Goals:

The resignation of General Moussa Traoré; free, multiparty elections

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 045. Demonstrative funerals › National Day of Martyrs

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 062. Student strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 171. Nonviolent interjection

Methods in 5th segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 013. Deputations
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents

Methods in 6th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 120. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 125. Boycott of government employment and positions
- 148. Mutiny

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Group characterization:

- a coalition of democratic opposition groups led by ADEMA
- students
- trade unions

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA); ADEMA Leader Alpha Oumar Konaré; Mali Pupils and Students Association (AEEM)

Partners:

Malian Party of Labor; Malian Party for Revolution and Democracy; Democratic People's Front of Mali; National Democratic People's Front

(These groups eventually joined to create ADEMA); Trade Unions; Teachers; Health Professionals

External allies:

Soldiers; Party Secretary Djibril Diallo

Involvement of social elites:

Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Toure; General Traoré's second in command, Djibril Diallo, resigned as a show of support for the protesters demanding a multi-party system

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Malian Bar Association
- National Union of Workers
- Republic of the Congo's National Conference
- Trade Unions

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Djibril Diallo
- Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Toure
- soldiers
- workers

Segment Length: *Approximately 1.5 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

General Moussa Traoré's regime

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

There were scattered acts of rioting and vandalism of public buildings following the March 22nd shootings, but the campaign was primarily nonviolent and the leaders did not support campaigner violence.

The campaign ended when a group of military leaders arrested General Traoré. It is not clear how violent this action was, but it is significant that it was a military arrest and there were deaths (including of Traoré's supporters) after the arrest

Repressive Violence:

Malian troops fired on demonstrators, killing several hundred of them

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Success in Achieving Specific Demands/Goals: 6. General Traoré resigned, a democracy was created and a new constitution was written, and the country had free multiparty elections in April 1992.

Survival: 1.

Growth: 3. The campaign was initiated by students and ADEMA. As the campaign continued, ADEMA was joined by other opposition groups and students were joined by trade unions.

General Moussa Traoré obtained power in Mali in 1968 when he led a military coup d'état that overthrew the left-leaning nationalist government that had ruled since 1960. Opposition towards Traoré grew during the 1980s, but didn't fully emerge until the 1990s. During this time, Traoré imposed programs to satisfy demands of the International Monetary Fund, which brought increased hardship upon the country's population while elites lived in luxury.

By early 1991, the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA), an opposition group led by Alpha Oumar Konaré and Abdourahmane Baba Toure, moved to the forefront of dissent against General Traoré. ADEMA helped to initiate the mass demands for a multi-party system and greater democracy in Mali and foreshadowed the March Revolution campaign for democracy even in January 1991 when ADEMA began plans to foster mass demonstrations. ADEMA was joined in this demand for a multi-party system by the National Committee for Democratic Initiative (CNID) and the Mali Pupils and Students Association (AEEM), which organized students for protest against the government. Following demonstrations and some rioting in late January, several leaders of AEEM were arrested and released some weeks later.

Talks between the government and these democracy groups failed in late February as ADEMA, CNID, and AEEM's demands for greater political openness and investigations into the previous deaths of demonstrators were left unanswered.

On March 17, 1991, the three groups led a funeral march in Mali's capital city, Bamako, to commemorate of the deaths of previous pro-democracy activists. Approximately 100,000 people attended this "National Day of Martyrs" demonstration, (which also included an exhibition of photos and poetry readings). During this action the student group AEEM, with ADEMA and CNID, iterated a clear demand for a national congress to establish a multi-party system.

On March 20, AEEM announced a 48-hour student strike to begin the next day and a march to take place on March 22 at the end of the strike. In response, the government stationed riot police and armored cars in the capital, preparing to repress the planned demonstrations. Following the student group's call, tens of thousands of students and other citizens filled Bamako's streets on March 22. The exact order of events on this day is not clear. The demonstrations seemed to begin peacefully until military troops opened fire on the protesters, killing at least 22. Following this, some groups began rioting and setting fire to buildings and government vehicles. The protesters had also blockaded bridges and streets using their bodies, burning tires and other objects. However, soon after the military repression, the streets were quickly deserted except for soldiers. Citizens calling for democracy took part in similar, smaller demonstrations in other areas throughout Mali.

Women played an important role in the campaign, as their participation in demonstrations was meant to diminish the amount of violence used against the campaigners. Nonetheless, soldiers killed five women during a march for peace on March 23. The women in this demonstration, who numbered nearly 2,000, were deploring the death of protesters at the hands of the military. By that point, the death toll of protesters was estimated to be between 30 and 80, with hundreds more injured.

After instating a curfew and state of emergency the day before, General Traoré met with opposition and religious leaders on March 23. Protesters remained in the streets the next day—although their numbers had decreased to several thousand—and police and soldiers continued their violent repression of the campaigners. Soldiers had even burned a shopping center where protesters had taken refuge, killing dozens more people. Attempting to calm the demonstrations, General Traoré offered to release political prisoners and announced that the ruling party was considering a multi-party system, but he refused to resign from the presidency.

Also on March 23, opposition groups, labor unions, and the country's Bar Association signed a declaration demanding Traore's resignation and the appointment of an interim government to plan new, multi-party elections. Meanwhile, the National Union of Workers called for a general strike to begin on March 25 meant to last until General Traoré resigned. And despite the rampant repressive violence, there seemed to be growing dissent against Traoré within the armed forces. Amongst all this action General Traoré's government continued talks with the opposition groups and agreed to lift the state of emergency.

On Monday March 25, thousands of workers took part in the general strike. Later in the day approximately 45,000 people

attended a pro-democracy rally in the capital, listening to speeches and joining in loud shouts of “Down with Traoré!” Finally, during this rally, violence from both the military and any demonstrators had ceased. That day, General Traoré’s second in command, Djibril Diallo, resigned as a show of support for the protesters demanding a multi-party system.

In response to the days of pro-democracy demonstrations, early on March 26 the military put down their arms and joined the protesters. A military group, led by Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré, placed General Traoré under arrest and promised to organize a multi-party democracy with elections in the near future. After this coup there were 59 deaths reported, including two of Traoré’s close allies, but the circumstances of these are not clear.

In response to the announcement of Traoré’s arrest, Malians cheered and set off firecrackers in celebration. Despite intermittent rioting, massive repressive violence, and Traoré’s refusal to resign, the military had joined the pro-democracy forces and helped to oust the Traoré regime. Within two months, opposition parties were legalized, a national congress of civil and political groups met to draft a new democratic constitution, and ADEMA leader Alpha Oumar Konare was the new, democratically-elected president.

Research Notes

Influences:

Benin and the Republic of the Congo's similar campaigns for multi-party elections influenced this campaign (1).

Sources:

Benjaminsen, Tor A. "Natural Resource Management, Paradigm Shifts, and the Decentralization Reform in Mali." *Human Ecology* 25.1 (1997): 121-43. Print.

"Movements and Campaigns." Learn about Nonviolent Conflict and Civil Resistance. Web. 16 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/index.php/movements-and-campaigns/movements-and-campaigns-summaries?sobi2Task=sobi2Details&sobi2Id=10>>.

Pringle, Robert. "Democratization in Mali: Putting History to Work." *Peaceworks* 58 (2006). Print.

"Threadster.com » Blog Archive » Mali’s March to Democracy - Adventures in Photography." Threadster.com - Adventures in Photography. Web. 18 Feb. 2011. <<http://www.threadster.com/2009/03/mali-march-to-democracy/>>.

"Southern Africa In Brief; Mali Opposition Figure Interviewed on Struggle for Multi-Party System." BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. Feb 2, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Mali student leader released; 32 still detained." BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. Feb 2, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Continued Student Unrest Reported in Mali." BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. Feb 21, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Mali Pro-democracy groups' meeting with government ends in 'stalemate'" BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. Feb 27, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Mali 'over 100,000' march to commemorate death of student 11 years ago." BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. Mar 19, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Mali students' strike call brings armoured cars and police onto Bamako streets." BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. Mar 21, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

Faul, Michelle. "Soldiers Fire on Protesters in Mali, Kill 22." The Associated Press. Mar 22, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Mali 10 reportedly killed in demonstrations." BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. Mar 23, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

Faul, Michelle. "Witnesses: Soldiers Fire on Crowd, Set Building Ablaze." The Associated Press. Mar 23, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

Reuters. "Riot-wracked Mali declares emergency; 19 killed in pro-democracy push." The Globe and Mail (Canada). Mar 23, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

Huband, Mark. "More anti-government demonstrators reported killed." United Press International. Mar 23, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

Faul, Michelle. "Witnesses: Troops Fire on Protesters, Block Hospitals." The Associated Press. Mar 24, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Army in Mali 'kills 80'." The Independent (London). Mar 24, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

AP-CP. "Scores die in fire set by soldiers in Mali." The Toronto Star. Mar 24, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

Faul, Michelle. "Thousands Strike to Demand President's Resignation." The Associated Press. Mar 25, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Mali Protest Leaves 100 Dead in City." Courier-Mail. Mar 25, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Congo's National Conference tells Malian Government to 'listen to the people'." BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. Mar 26, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

Kane, Larry. "Army Has Taken Over West African Nation of Mali." CBS News Transcripts. Mar 26, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Military Overthrows Mali Dictator, Promises Democracy." The Associated Press. Mar 26, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

Huband, Mark. "Mali lifts state of emergency after strike." The Guardian (London). Mar 26, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Mali National Reconciliation Council Communiqués Announce End of Traoré Regime." BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. Mar 27, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Mali radio reports resignation of ruling party's political secretary." BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. Mar 27, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

"Mali general strike to continue; deputy party leader said to have resigned." BBC Summary of World Broadcasts. Mar 27, 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis Academic on May 23, 2011

Additional Notes:

One unique strategy leading up to the March Revolution was the use of "griots," musicians that spread the historical roots of democracy in Mali. Griots mobilized the 70% illiterate population to resist Traoré's regime. Due to their work, the idea of "mari segi," which means, "bringing power home," became a national tradition and goal.

The elections on April 12th and 26th in 1992 named ADEMA leader Alpha Oumar Konaré president of the new democratic nation.

Traoré and three associates were later tried and convicted and received the death sentence for their part in the decisions made on March 22, 1991.

The case ended when a group of military leaders arrested General Traoré and took over the government. While this marked a success for the campaigners and the military leaders probably would not have arrested Traoré without the pressure from campaigners (they were killing demonstrators just the day before), this action would not be considered nonviolent. Thus it is an interesting circumstance to consider in this case.

This case was originally written by Aly Passanante (20/02/2011). The narrative and case information was later supplemented using contemporary periodical sources by Max Rennebohm (25/05/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Aly Passanante, 20/02/2011, and Max Rennebohm, 23/05/2011

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>.

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

Source URL (retrieved on 05/24/2020 - 22:59): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/malians-defeat-dictator-gain-free-election-march-revolution-1991>

Links:

[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/movement-clusters/african-democracy-campaigns-early-1990s>

[2] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-people-color>

[3] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/example-regime-change>

[4] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/included-participation-more-one-social-class>