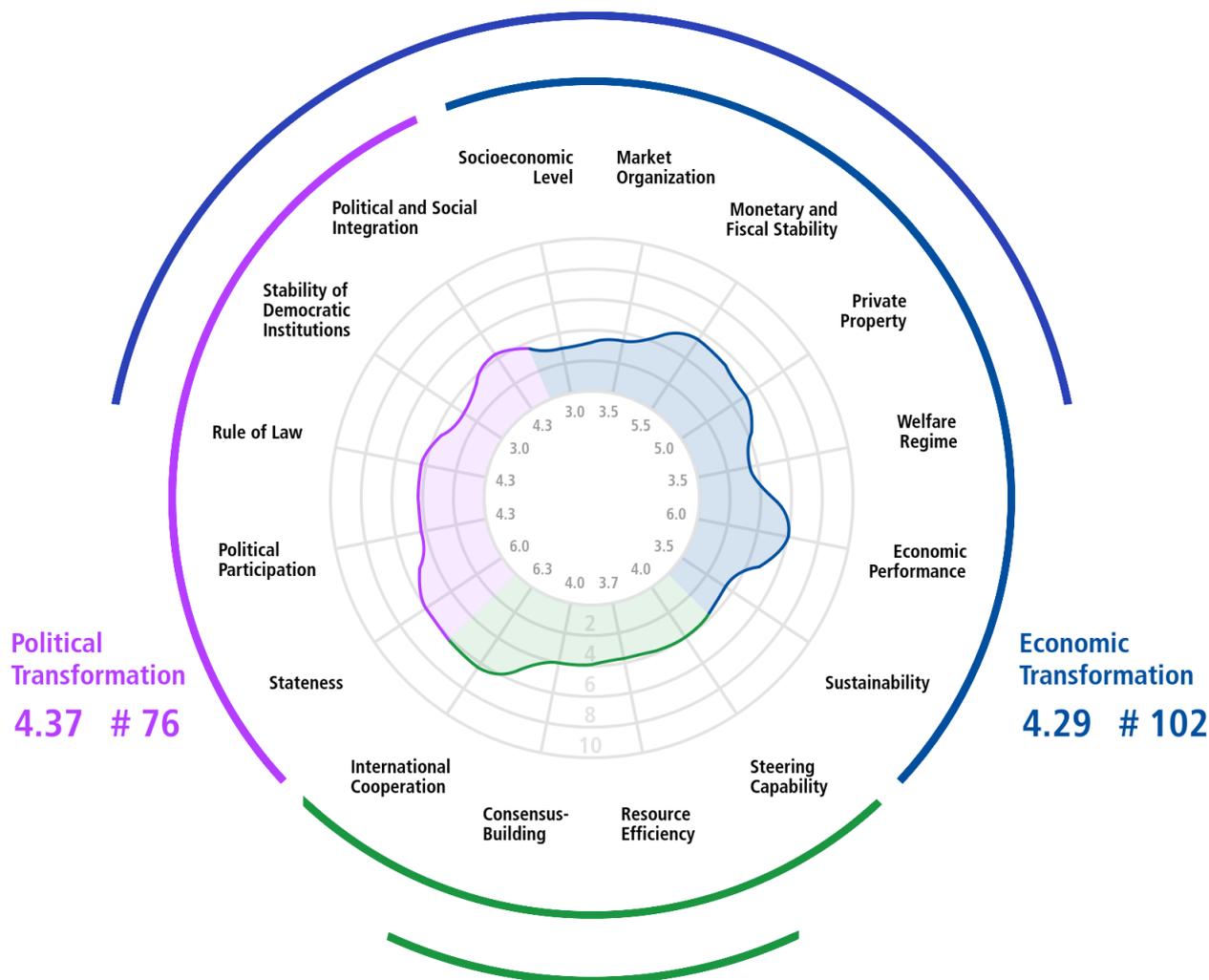


Mauritania

Status Index

4.33 # 93

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Political Transformation
4.37 # 76

Economic Transformation
4.29 # 102

Governance Index

4.25 # 85

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2026. It covers the period from February 1, 2023 to January 31, 2025. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

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Key Indicators

Population	M	5.2	HDI	0.563	GDP p.c., PPP \$	7271
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	2.9	HDI rank of 193	163	Gini Index	32.0
Life expectancy	years	68.5	UN Education Index	0.383	Poverty ³	% 25.8
Urban population	%	58.5	Gender inequality ²	0.603	Aid per capita \$	83.5

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2025. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

Mauritania held two key elections during the 2023 and 2024 period: parliamentary elections paired with regional and municipal elections in 2023, and then presidential elections in 2024. Both times, the ruling El Insaf party dominated, with incumbent President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani winning re-election. Meanwhile, a corruption inquiry against former President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz culminated in his conviction and sentencing in December 2023, although his case has been appealed. The rhythm of regular elections and an inquiry into the past administration are important components of democratic transformation, but the political playing field continues to be deeply uneven, as evidenced by serious allegations of electoral fraud, a crackdown on the opposition amid post-electoral protests and the possibility that the case against Ould Abdel Aziz is more motivated by politics than by a search for sweeping accountability. So far, moreover, Ould Ghazouani has proven to be a status quo president, empowering familiar members of the military elite, recruiting top officials heavily from among career technocratic insiders, and avoiding any major accountability or transformation on questions of human rights and systemic racism and patriarchy. The political opposition, including anti-slavery activist and politician Biram Dah Abeid and the Islamist Tewassoul party, remain a minority force in the National Assembly and continue to operate under constraints, including the possibility of arrest and/or removal of parliamentary immunity. Even dissidents outside the country are not beyond the reach of the security forces, as shown by the 2023 arrest and extradition of anti-slavery activist Youba Siby from Senegal. Mauritania's relative stability, especially in contrast with other Sahelian countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, is nevertheless partly predicated on the near monopolization of meaningful political power by a narrow stratum of the elite.

Regarding economic transformation, Mauritania's legal framework has been gradually updated during the 2010s and 2020s through new laws regulating property rights, state-owned enterprises, startups and more. The country has recovered from the economic shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a slight dip in growth in 2024 is projected by the World Bank to rebound in 2025 and 2026. Yet overall economic growth is partly failing to keep pace with a growing and youthful

population, and estimates of unemployment range as high as 44% for the population as a whole and as high as 47% for youth, according to Afrobarometer data. Mauritania is gradually reducing its budget deficit and has achieved some progress in the 2020s on debt restructuring. However, indebtedness and debt servicing are two key challenges highlighted by the African Development Bank and other observers. Other major economic transformation challenges include inadequate transportation and educational infrastructure as well as a lack of transparency regarding the management of public finances. Mauritania is additionally confronting the impacts of climate change – for example, desertification – which pose risks such as the prospect of rising farmer-herder conflict intensity. The ability to integrate youth into the education system and the economy, combat entrenched societal and economic discrimination, and mitigate climate-related risks while promoting greater transparency and inclusion will all be vital to Mauritania’s transformation and success.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

Mauritania became independent from France in 1960, after about 55 years of colonial rule that included only skeletal administrative structures. Mauritania entered its independent phase as a largely rural society with few university graduates and a small administration under the lawyer-turned-president Moktar Ould Daddah, who governed from 1960 to 1978. Ould Daddah consolidated power in what became a one-party state, aiming to rule through consensus-building among tribal and ethnic leaders. To briefly sketch Mauritanian society, the key social groups include the Bidan or “white” Arabic-speaking tribes, who are further divided into “warrior” and “clerical” tribes; the Haratine or “black” Arabic-speaking descendants of slaves, as well as many people currently enslaved or in quasi-enslaved conditions; and “Afro-Mauritanians,” meaning ethnic groups such as Wolof, Peul/Fulani, Bambara and Soninké. The Mauritanian political, military, business and religious elite has come primarily from the Bidan.

Ould Daddah was overthrown in 1978 in a military coup largely sparked by Mauritania’s disastrous involvement in the early phase of the Western Sahara war (1975 – 1991). This was followed by a period of military rule, which saw a series of short-lived military regimes before Maaouya Ould Sid’Ahmed Taya took power in a 1984 coup. Ould al-Taya went on to rule until 2005, presiding over a phase of intensive state-backed ethnic violence and displacement targeting Afro-Mauritanians in 1989 – 1992; Ould al-Taya also oversaw a relatively superficial transition to multiparty competitive elections in the 1990s amid global and continent-wide pressures for reform and liberalization. Following a serious coup attempt in 2003 and a jihadist attack in 2005, Ould al-Taya was overthrown by his own inner circle, including two officers each of whom would go on to hold the presidency: Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz and Mohamed Ould Ghazouani. A transitional phase followed from 2005 – 2008, including a brief period of civilian rule in 2007 – 2008, before President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi fell out with his generals and suffered a coup in 2008, led again by Ould Abdel Aziz and Ould Ghazouani.

After formally retiring from service, Ould Abdel Aziz won the presidential elections of 2009 and 2014. His administration presided over improvements on the security and economic front but also faced serious allegations of systemic corruption as well as the intimidation of dissidents and opponents. Hesitating over whether to seek a non-constitutional third term in 2019, Ould Abdel Aziz eventually tapped Ould Ghazouani – at the time his close collaborator – to be the ruling party’s candidate. Ould Ghazouani won the 2019 elections easily, but then fell out with Ould Abdel Aziz over control of the ruling party (then called Union for the Republic, but renamed El Insaf in 2022). Ould Abdel Aziz then found himself, from 2020 to the present, facing a major corruption inquiry that led to his conviction and sentencing in 2023; the case remained under appeal at the end of 2024. El Insaf and Ould Ghazouani, meanwhile, went on to handily win the parliamentary elections of 2023 and the presidential elections of 2024, respectively. In both the 2019 and 2024 elections, Ould Ghazouani’s most prominent challenger was Biram Dah Abeid, an anti-slavery activist who has become an outspoken opponent and critic of Ould Abdel Aziz, Ould Ghazouani and the Bidan elite in general.

Mauritania’s economy continues to feature several state-owned enterprises, most notably the Société Nationale Industrielle et Minière (National Industrial and Mining Company, SNIM). Still, Mauritania has sought to present itself as an investor-friendly, market-oriented country. Major tensions between Ould Abdel Aziz and leading entrepreneurs, along with ongoing government opacity, have been factors limiting private sector development. Widespread poverty, inadequate educational and transport infrastructure, and sharp inequalities along racial and gender lines also hinder development.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

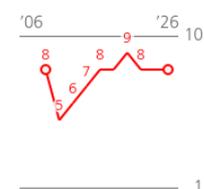
In general, the Mauritanian security forces exert considerable control over the country's territory. The northeast was placed under military control in 2008 and that status remains in effect; efforts to secure border zones, especially with Mali, even include the use of camel-mounted patrols. In 2024, however, there were serious jihadist attacks near the Mauritania-Mali border, for example a months-long jihadist blockade of the town of Léré. Meanwhile, operations by the Malian Armed Forces and their allies in the Kremlin-backed Wagner Group/Africa Corps affected Mauritanian citizens in Mali and also involved some cross-border incursions into refugee camps on Mauritanian soil. The Mauritanian authorities have also pursued programs to address the needs of pastoralists, suggesting some concern about the possibility of farmer-herder conflict.

Mauritania faces no serious secessionist movement, and the jihadist insurgency of 2005 – 2011 remained in abeyance through 2024. Figures who question the legitimacy of the state in religious terms either remain in prison, have relocated to the central Sahel or have gone quietist. However, serious tensions persist around the issues of race and belonging. The legacy of slavery and the domination of the state and the economy by the Bidan mean that many Haratin and Afro-Mauritanians feel structurally excluded from power and full rights, despite the presence of some individual Haratin and Afro-Mauritanians within the elite. Dah Abeid is the most prominent voice and symbol of this contestation and has argued that Mauritanian society remains deeply racist and unbalanced. Such figures do not question the legitimacy of the state as such, but rather the legitimacy of the existing configuration of power.

Question
Score

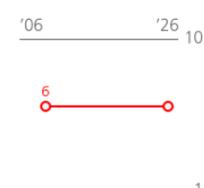
Monopoly on the
use of force

8



State identity

6



Mauritania is a virtually 100% Muslim society and is officially an Islamic Republic. The constitution mentions Islam numerous times, declares Islam to be “the religion of the people and the state” (Article 5), stipulates that the president be Muslim (Article 23) and establishes a High Islamic Council whose members are appointed by the president (Article 94). Overt expressions of atheism or religious skepticism can draw harsh responses; a recent case involves 19-year-old high school student Mariya Oubed, who is facing blasphemy charges for allegedly including “disrespectful” remarks about Prophet Muhammad in her 2023 Baccalauréat exam script. Religious scholars have at times held high positions within the state, especially in the 20th century. Mauritanian law officially considers Shariah as a source of legislation, and there is a state-run fatwa council, a Ministry of Religious Affairs as well as state-run religious education institutions. While power primarily rests with the military and business elite rather than with sheikhs and scholars, religion continues to play a significant role in shaping state policies and influencing public life. However, the blurred boundary between the secular and religious realms remains in many ways a source of strength for the state, as it provides legitimacy in the context of a deeply religious population.

No interference of religious dogmas

4

'06 _____ '26 10



The extent and quality of service provision vary throughout the country. Mauritania has several major infrastructure projects underway with regional partners – for example, a highway linking Algeria’s Tindouf with Mauritania’s Zouérat and a new bridge spanning the Senegal River at Rosso. At the same time, the African Development Bank and other institutions have pointed to the weakness of Mauritanian infrastructure, including in the transport and electricity sectors, a circumstance that constrains economic activity.

Basic administration

6

'06 _____ '26 10



According to the World Bank, 77.8% of the population in 2022 had basic access to a water source, 55.9% had access to basic sanitation and 49.0% had access to electricity.

Digitalization efforts have brought some improvements to governance. In 2022, the government launched the National Digital Transformation Agenda (2022 – 2025) aiming to digitalize the public administration. In recent years, various government sectors have introduced mobile applications, streamlining services such as passport and civil registry management, health care access, tax payments, and even the submission of complaints and feedback to government institutions.

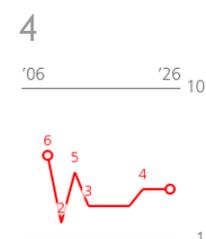
2 | Political Participation

The 2024 election, won handily by Ould Ghazouani, extends the long-term pattern in which military officers or retired military officers dominate the presidency. Observers such as the African Union praised the authorities for a peaceful day of voting and reported no irregularities, but expressed concern about post-election protests. Official estimates put the turnout rate at 55%. Ould Ghazouani's vote share of 56% in the first round likely reflects significant support within the population for his presidency and for the status quo, and some Mauritians may prefer relative stability under Ould Ghazouani to untested alternatives. Yet Dah Abeid and others made serious charges that the Independent National Election Commission had allowed fraud.

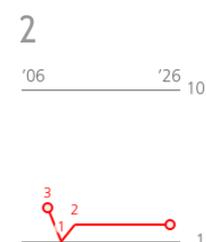
International observers, for example from the African Union and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, praised the professionalism of election workers and the security forces and noted that polling stations generally opened on time, had representatives of major candidates present and adhered to stated procedures for securing ballots. The AU did note that, in its view, a high number of ballots (more than 85,000 out of nearly 989,000 votes) were blank or damaged and therefore did not count, an issue the AU attributed to a lack of understanding and education among voters. The AU subsequently called on the authorities to do more to increase voters' awareness of voting procedures. The AU also called on authorities to do more to increase parties' confidence in the process and to increase access to public financing for parties. In terms of the post-electoral environment, major criticisms from observers inside and outside Mauritania focused on the 22-day internet shutdown in July amid post-election protests and also on security forces' treatment of protesters themselves.

A personalistic military-business network retains effective veto power despite Mauritania's regular presidential and legislative elections. President Ould Ghazouani is at the apex of this system, and his re-election in 2024 occurred on an uneven playing field that involved constraints on and intimidation of the opposition. Other active and retired generals, such as National Assembly President Mohamed Ould Meguett, are also politically prominent. The ruling El Insaf party has a substantial majority in the National Assembly (107 out of 176 seats) and is essentially an arm of the presidency. In addition to El Insaf, 10 other political parties allied with President Ghazouani control 42 seats in parliament. At the local level, El Insaf won control of 165 communes out of 238 in the 2023 elections.

Free and fair elections



Effective power to govern



The Mauritanian constitution guarantees freedom of assembly and association (Article 10), although laws governing associations (73-008 and 2021-004) give the authorities substantial discretion in determining who can assemble and when. Anti-government protests are often met with force including tear gas and arrests. This was the case for the post-electoral protests in July 2024 as well as other anti-government protests, such as those in R’Kiz over an alleged lack of transparency in an agricultural project.

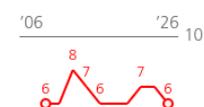
Mauritania continues to have some press freedom. Article 10 of the constitution guarantees liberty of expression, and in 2011, a revision to a 2006 press freedom law removed prison penalties for journalistic offenses. State outlets such as Radio Mauritanie, Agence Mauritanienne d’information and TVM have considerable reach, but independent outlets such as Sahara Medias and Alakhbar operate with substantial freedom. While there have not been major arrests of journalists in recent years, many practice self-censorship due to fear of legal repercussions. Since 2021, Law No. 2021-021 – commonly known as the Law of Symbols – has severely restricted freedom of expression by criminalizing any “insult” directed at the president of the republic. Over the past years, numerous individuals have been arrested under this law, including civil servant Ahmed Ould Samba, who was dismissed from his position as general inspector of finance and subsequently arrested in October 2024 for allegedly defaming the president and the government. In addition, the post-electoral internet shutdowns in 2019 and 2024 represent instances of overt state interference in freedom of expression.

3 | Rule of Law

There is relatively weak separation between the presidency and the National Assembly. President Ould Ghazouani’s El Insaf party dominates the single chamber, and legislative priorities appear closely aligned with presidential priorities – for example, parliament pursued a long-running investigation into alleged corruption under former President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz after he and Ould Ghazouani fell out in late 2019. Opposition deputies who challenge the president can also face consequences; in 2023, Mohamed Bouya Cheikh Mohammed Fadel spent several weeks in jail and had his parliamentary immunity lifted after he criticized the president. There is also relatively weak separation between the executive and the judiciary. The president of the Supreme Court, for example, is appointed by presidential decree to a five-year term; the current Supreme Court chief is Cheikh Ahmed Ould Sid Ahmed, a former minister and ambassador who is close to Ould Ghazouani. Meanwhile, the anti-corruption case against Ould Abdel Aziz has unfolded in a charged political atmosphere, with the former president repeatedly accusing the current president of pursuing a political vendetta. In any case, accountability has been weak for currently serving members of government.

Association /
assembly rights

6



1

Freedom of
expression

5



1

Separation of
powers

3



1

The president of the Supreme Court is a direct presidential appointee and is typically a political insider. The court system as a whole also falls largely under presidential control. The High Council for the Judiciary – headed by the president and including the minister of justice and the president of the Supreme Court along with other top judges – makes decisions about appointments and rotations of judicial personnel. In terms of territorial operability, Mauritania has courts for each administrative region but the upper courts – the Supreme Court and the four Appeals Courts – are concentrated in the south and west of the country (Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, Aleg and Kiffa). Displays of judicial independence can be costly; in 2024, Al Akhbar reported on the transfer of two top judges to more minor judicial posts, framing the move as punishment for their non-compliance in sending parliamentary deputy Mohamed Bouya Cheikh Mohamed Fadel to jail in 2023.

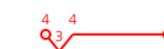
Since 2020, a key episode in Mauritanian politics has been the prosecution of former President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz and numerous associates on corruption charges. He received a five-year prison sentence in December 2023, but then appealed; the appeal opened in November 2024. While the case against the former president is credible, it is also politically advantageous for the current president, neutralizing a key rival. The two men fell out early into Ould Ghazouani’s presidency as they contested control of the ruling party. Other top officials were also caught up in the corruption investigation; in 2020, then-Prime Minister Ismail Ould Cheikh Sidiya and his cabinet resigned. However, several top co-defendants of Ould Abdel Aziz were acquitted in 2023, including former prime ministers Yahya Ould Hademine and Mohamed Ould Bechir, as well as former Petroleum Minister Taleb Ould Abdi Vall. Meanwhile, accountability for currently serving officials has been limited.

The Mauritanian constitution guarantees various freedoms, including the freedom of expression and the rights of assembly and property. A 2015 law banned torture after years of allegations that authorities had tortured dissidents, especially under Maaouya Ould Sid’Ahmed Taya (in power 1984 – 2005). However, serious allegations of torture have continued, including the torture of anti-slavery and anti-discrimination activists. Slavery and racial discrimination remain central issues with respect to inequality within the legal system. New measures and laws are added periodically – for example, a 2020 law added new measures against human trafficking – but activists allege that widespread slavery persists. Moreover, authorities have cracked down on anti-slavery activism, with their reach extending even beyond Mauritania’s borders, as the 2023 arrest and extradition of activist Youba Siby from Senegal to Mauritania showed. Accountability for cases of torture, arbitrary detention and discrimination has been very limited. An additional issue is freedom of conscience; the blogger Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed Mkhaitir, accused of blasphemy, was detained from 2014 – 2019 and was initially sentenced to death, but was ultimately released, whereupon he left the country. Amnesty International has called Mauritania “abolitionist in practice” concerning the death penalty, meaning that the penalty remains on the books but has not been enforced in over a decade.

Independent judiciary

4

'06 _____ '26 10



1

Prosecution of office abuse

5

'06 _____ '26 10



1

Civil rights

5

'06 _____ '26 10



1

4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

Mauritania has executive, legislative and judicial branches as well as 13 regions, including Nouakchott. The executive branch holds by far the dominant role within this system, with a historically pliant legislature and a deferential judiciary. Mauritania's 2024 presidential elections occurred on an uneven playing field, facilitating President Ould Ghazouani's decisive victory. The president mobilized much of the cabinet to double as campaign managers and surrogates, and also tapped a wide range of prominent supporters from the business sector. Former President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, who arguably has no standing to run because he already served two terms, had his candidacy rejected in what could be interpreted as a political move to favor Ould Ghazouani. Additionally, the Independent National Election Commission (Céni) was accused by runner-up Dah Abeid of pro-Ould Ghazouani partisanship and fraud. Céni's current 11 members – six selected by the ruling coalition and five by the opposition – were chosen after dialogue between the government and political parties in 2022. Céni's president, Al-Dah Ould 'Abd al-Jalil, is a former minister of the interior. The election was followed by protests from Dah Abeid and his supporters; at least three people died in the ensuing crackdown. In a repeat of the post-electoral crisis of 2019, authorities shut off the internet amid protests, limiting the ability of foreign and domestic journalists to cover the protests and assess the extent of the crackdown. Meanwhile, the legislature consists of a single chamber (the Senate was abolished through a 2017 constitutional referendum) while the judiciary consists of the Supreme Court, an appeals court, the regional courts and lower-level courts. Regional and local authorities are elected. Ultimately, much power rests with the executive, who wields that power both through appointments to powerful ministries and councils and through the dominance of the ruling party in the legislature and many of the regions.

Since the 2008–2009 transition, there has been considerable institutional stability in Mauritanian politics – elections occur regularly, then-President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz did not seek a third term in 2019, and the leadership of some key positions – National Assembly president, for example – changes fairly regularly. At the same time, the military-business elite has concentrated a vast amount of political power. Democratic institutions are not purely performative, but they are not vehicles for making deep changes in who rules and how.

Performance of democratic institutions

3

'06 '26 10



Commitment to democratic institutions

3

'06 '26 10

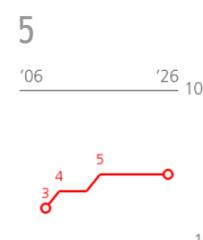


5 | Political and Social Integration

Mauritania's party system features a mix of personalistic and ideological or identity-based parties. A 2018 law dissolves minor parties that fail to participate in two successive municipal elections or that draw under 1% of the vote in two successive municipal contests, a provision that has greatly reduced the number of small parties in the country. The ruling El Insaf party (formerly the Union for the Republic until 2022) is largely a vehicle for President Ould Ghazaouani, much as the party was primarily a vehicle for former President Ould Abdel Aziz during his presidency (2009 – 2019). El Insaf is somewhat racially diverse in terms of its leadership (current party head Sidi Ahmad Wuld Muhammad is from the Haratine, for example), but overall it is a structure for maintaining the status quo. The government continues to refuse recognition to Dah Abeid's Refoundation for Comprehensive Action (also translated as Refoundation for Global Action, RAG), an outgrowth of anti-slavery activism. As a result, Dah Abeid has been forced to run as an independent candidate in the presidential elections (2014, 2019 and 2024) and has formed a coalition with the Sawab party to participate in legislative and municipal elections (2018 and 2023). The Islamist party Tewassoul remains the main opposition force, while other once-prominent opposition parties, such as the Rally of Democratic Forces, have significantly declined due to the aging of their longtime leaders and their failure to institutionalize.

Voter volatility and polarization are difficult to measure in Mauritania, but both Tewassoul and the RAG appear to have relatively loyal voters; Dah Abeid and the RAG have improved their vote totals in successive presidential elections, while Tewassoul's share in parliamentary and presidential elections since 2013/2014 has ranged from approximately 10% to 18%. The ruling party, as UPR and El Insaf, has also maintained a majority share across these contests. Volatility is seen most in the decline of older opposition parties such as the Rally of Democratic Forces and in the rise and fall of numerous small parties. The three leading parties or formations appear fairly socially rooted, with Dah Abeid and the RAG drawing on the Haratine and the civil society base of the anti-slavery movement, Tewassoul drawing on the Islamist movement and cultivating a significant urban presence, and the ruling party assembling and maintaining a wide coalition that includes military, business, tribal and other elements.

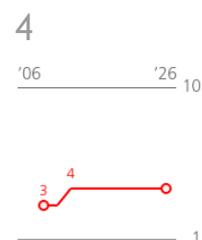
Party system



In terms of interest groups, the military and the business community are the most powerful. Religious leaders play a key role in mediating between society and the political system, but there can be consequences for dissent and independence; the prominent Sheikh Muhammad al-Hasan Ould al-Dedew had his educational institute shuttered by the authorities from 2018 to 2021. The state also seeks to domesticate some prominent scholars by giving them major positions as imams or as members of the government's fatwa council. Another important interest group is the country's tribes. Tribal affiliations can matter in shaping the balance of power within government and in shaping hiring decisions and political alliances; tribes such as the Oulad Daoud (to which Defense Minister Hanana Ould Sidi belongs), the Massouma and others have considerable political influence. As allies of the ruling elites, these groups largely serve to undermine democracy. Businessmen have mostly backed regime candidates in elections, while those who supported opposition parties faced severe consequences. Additionally, tribal coalitions exert significant influence over individual voter choices. As discussed throughout this report, anti-slavery and anti-discrimination activists are also prominent within Mauritanian society but sometimes face repression. Finally, labor unions and syndicates are a significant social force capable of making demands of the authorities; in 2024 alone, Mauritania saw strikes by dock workers, medical personnel, teachers and others.

According to Afrobarometer's 2022 survey of Mauritania (the most recent round available as of early 2025), levels of approval of democracy as a system are very high. Nearly 77% of respondents said democracy was preferable to any other system. Approximately 70% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea of a single-party system, while nearly 65% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea of military rule. However, only 54% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the military "should never intervene in the political affairs of the country." The significant minority of respondents who still see a role for the military in politics are perhaps influenced by Mauritania's long years of overt military rule and/or by the idea that the military should play a referee-like role vis-a-vis politics and institutions in moments of crisis. In terms of democratic performance, a striking 18% of respondents agreed with the stark statement "Mauritania is not a democracy," while 19% considered the country to be "a democracy, but with major problems." A significant majority (63%), however, said Mauritania was either a "full democracy" (26.4%) or a "democracy, but with minor problems" (36.2%). A slim majority (53%) rated the country as democratic as it was five years earlier, while roughly equal numbers rated the country less democratic (25%) or more democratic (20%). Substantial majorities of respondents said they felt "mostly free" (23%) or "entirely free" (54.5%) to express their opinions. At the same time, respondents seemed to view the president as hyper-powerful and unaccountable; a majority said the president ignored courts and laws "often" (40%) or "always" (17%) and that the president ignored the National Assembly "often" (37%) or "always" (20%). Thus, a mixed picture emerges from the survey of a population that prefers democracy, sees

Interest groups



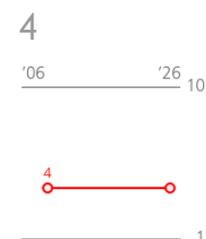
Approval of democracy



Mauritania as relatively democratic but also feels that the president is mostly unconstrained by other governmental and democratic institutions. Overtly anti-democratic discourses are somewhat uncommon in Mauritania, but some religious hardliners have denounced democracy as an ungodly system; this perspective appears to have relatively little traction among the general population.

As measured by responses in Afrobarometer’s most recent round (2022) of surveys in Mauritania, citizens feel a strong attachment to Mauritania and a strong connection to other Mauritians, but also believe the government discriminates on an ethnic basis. A total of 78% of respondents reported that they identified only as Mauritanian rather than as members of their ethnicity, while another 6% identified more with their national identity than with their ethnic identity. Half of respondents completely agreed with the statement “other Mauritians see me as a Mauritanian just like them,” while another 26% agreed with the statement. Seventeen percent strongly agreed with the statement “I feel strong ties with other Mauritians,” while another 62% agreed with the statement. A plurality of respondents (46%) said that ethnicities were never “unjustly treated by the government,” but significant percentages said that unfair government treatment happened sometimes (29%), often (10%) or always (6%). Taken together, those who believe discrimination occurs make up nearly the same percentage as those who believe discrimination never occurs. The voluntary associations that exist to advocate for particular groups, meanwhile, have a stronger presence in cities than in the countryside and can face crackdowns from the authorities.

Social capital



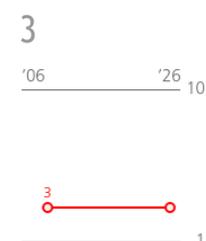
II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

Mauritania ranked 164th in the 2022 Human Development Index. On the Gini Index, Mauritania had a score of 32 as of 2019. The World Bank estimated that the poverty rate in Mauritania was 25.8% as of 2019, and classifies Mauritania as a lower-middle income economy, unlike the other Sahelian countries of Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, which are all considered lower-income economies (Mauritania’s neighbors Senegal and Morocco are also ranked lower-middle income, while Algeria is ranked upper-middle income). Meanwhile, in the UNDP’s most recent survey in 2021, that organization estimated that more than 58% of Mauritians were experiencing multidimensional poverty, while another 12% were vulnerable to poverty. The UNDP further estimates a 35% development loss in Mauritania due to inequality. Poverty rates are substantially higher in rural areas; according to the African Development Bank, which uses a different measure of poverty than the UNDP, the rural poverty

Question
Score

Socioeconomic
barriers



rate was 41% in 2019 compared with a rate of 14% in urban areas. Poverty is also correlated with exclusion along racial lines; it is difficult to reliably estimate the poverty rate among the Haratine, but systemic racism appears to lock many Haratine out of the best jobs and opportunities. In terms of gender inequality, Mauritania had a score of 0.6 on the 2022 Gender Inequality Index; its score has mostly been ticking slowly downward in recent years.

Economic indicators		2021	2022	2023	2024
GDP	\$ M	9222.5	9558.0	10651.7	10766.7
GDP growth	%	0.7	6.8	6.5	5.2
Inflation (CPI)	%	3.6	9.5	5.0	2.5
Unemployment	%	11.1	10.5	10.4	10.4
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	11.6	14.7	8.0	13.4
Export growth	%	-12.9	16.8	3.5	-
Import growth	%	-3.3	15.3	-1.5	-
Current account balance	\$ M	-807.9	-1424.1	-966.5	-1039.4
Public debt	% of GDP	54.5	50.5	47.1	42.8
External debt	\$ M	4814.1	4586.0	4603.6	-
Total debt service	\$ M	407.9	343.0	392.7	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	15.0	16.8	17.2	-
Public education spending	% of GDP	1.9	1.4	4.7	-
Public health spending	% of GDP	1.5	1.8	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	2.3	2.3	2.5	-

Sources (as of December 2025): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

The legal framework for market competition in Mauritania is regulated through the Investment Code of 2012 and the Commerce Code of 2015, but implementation is uneven amid persistent charges of systemic corruption. Meanwhile, although Ould Ghazouani welcomed back Mohamed Ould Bouamatou, the banking tycoon who lived in exile for part of Ould Abdel Aziz's presidency, in 2020, Ould Bouamatou's case illustrates the vulnerability of entrepreneurs to executive interference. For new businesses and for both foreign and domestic owners, licensing and permits can be complex to obtain. Mauritania has a few institutions for promoting the private sector, including the long-standing Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (created in 1958 and reformed in 2000) and the Agency for Promoting Investment in Mauritania. On the whole, however, the institutional framework remains weak.

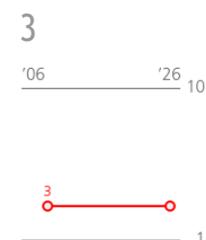
The government occasionally intervenes in price regulation in collaboration with the Mauritanian Employers' Union (UNPM), an organization that has maintained a close relationship with the political regime, particularly during the past decade.

Mauritania has a robust informal sector which, according to the International Labor Organization, employs more than 56% of the working population.

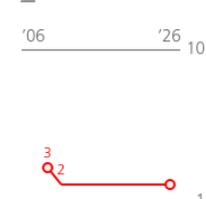
Anti-monopolistic provisions are included in the 2015 Commerce Code and the 2023 Law on Free Prices and Competition. The latter law includes stipulations against discriminatory purchasing or selling, for example, as well as against lowering the price of items upon resale. However, the law also leaves considerable discretion to courts and to the minister of the economy. In practice, state-owned enterprises exert a monopoly in a few sectors, notably iron mining, where the state holds a 78% stake in SNIM (multinational companies are active in other types of mining, such as copper mining). Some private companies have been criticized in the press for acting as "quasi-monopolies" – for example, the telecommunications company Moov Mauritel (although a few other operators exist, such as Chinguitel).

Mauritania has been a member of the WTO since 1995 and was a member of the GATT before that. According to the WTO's tariff profile, Mauritania's simple average of most favored nation applied total tariffs was 12.0% as of 2023. Major tariffs apply to agricultural products and staple foods as well as to rubber, clothing, textiles and transport equipment. Some major foreign firms have made substantial inroads in Mauritania. One such example is Morocco's Attijariwafa Bank, which has been present in Mauritania since 2010. Mauritania participates in initiatives such as the zone de libre-échange continentale africaine (African Continental Free Trade Zone). Mauritania also has its own initiatives such as the Nouadhibou Free Zone, created in 2013, and a free trade zone with Algeria, created in 2024 along with plans for a road linking Tindouf and Zouérate. However, Mauritania has been accused, for example by the U.S. Trade Administration, of applying tariffs and customs in an opaque and corrupt manner; customs duties can range from 0% to more than 20%, depending on the item.

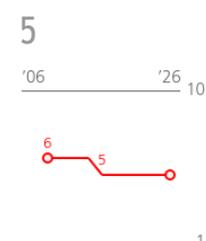
Market organization



Competition policy

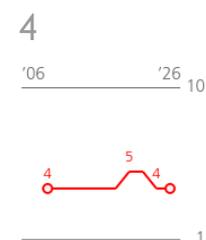


Liberalization of foreign trade



In the 1990s, many Mauritanian banks were privatized. The country now has several large private banks, such as the Banque Populaire de Mauritanie. The scale of non-performing loans has been a challenge, but the IMF has argued that growing concentration in the banking sector is allowing large banks to increase lending and absorb bad loans when needed. In terms of capital markets, Mauritania lacks a stock exchange, but the Banque Centrale de Mauritanie has partnered with the African Development Bank and the London Stock Exchange Group to pursue the Financial Infrastructure Modernization Programme; this multifaceted initiative aims to increase the central bank's visibility within the banking sector, expand its participation in interbank lending and integrate it further with the global financial system. Amid these modernization efforts, however, the banking sector remains highly politicized – with major bankers such as Mohamed Ould Bouamatou and Mohamed Ould Noueigued having had fraught relationships with President Ould Abdel Aziz during the 2010s. Finally, Mauritania has no restrictions on transferring convertible currencies and could be vulnerable to stops and reversals of capital flow.

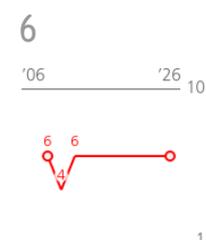
Banking system



8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

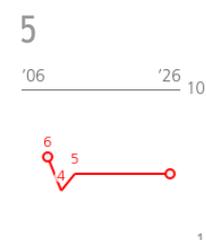
In 2024, Mauritania received some praise from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank for reducing inflation. The inflation rate dropped from 9.5% in 2022 to 5.0% in 2023 (latest figure at time of writing). The IMF, after its December 2024 consultation with Mauritania, wrote approvingly of the country's "prudent monetary and fiscal policies." Central bank Governor Mohamed Lemine Dhehby, who has been in office since March 2022, is a career bureaucrat with long service in the Ministry of Finance. He rose to head that ministry from 2019 – 2022 during Ould Ghazouani's first term; his appointment fits into a broader pattern in which insider technocrats are being named to many top government posts, bringing strong credentials but also a close proximity to the president. His tenure has so far been one of continuity; the last major shakeup in policy was the introduction of the new ouguiya in 2018.

Monetary stability



Mauritania reduced its deficit in 2023, with the World Bank projecting that trend to continue in 2024. According to the African Development Bank's (AfDB) figures, the deficit represented 3.6% of GDP in 2022 and fell to 2.3% of GDP in 2023, driven partly by rising tax receipts. Debt has been falling over time – as a percentage of GDP, debt fell from 56% in 2016 to 43% in 2022, according to the AfDB. Mauritania has restructured its debt with several bilateral lenders in recent years, including Saudi Arabia in 2023. Yet multilateral lenders and other observers remain concerned about Mauritania's indebtedness and the burden of debt servicing. The AfDB in particular has faulted Mauritania for a lack of transparency in the management of public finances.

Fiscal stability

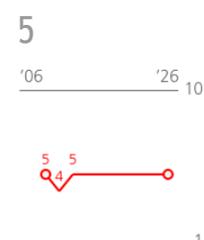


9 | Private Property

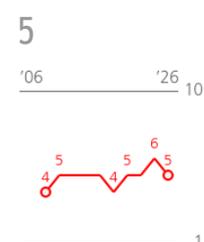
The constitution enshrines the right to property, and a 2017 law (2017-014) further defines property rights. The 2017 law gives the state the right to expropriate property for a public good and after paying a suitable indemnity. International watchdog groups such as the Land Matrix Initiative (LMI) have identified Mauritania as having one of the worst records in Africa when it comes to complying with international guidelines on land transactions. LMI faulted Mauritania in 2022 for violating customary land rights and failing to help relocate populations affected by transactions. Meanwhile, land conflicts in the Senegal River Valley have occurred since at least the colonial period and were exacerbated during the 1989 – 1992 “events” that featured mass violence and expulsions targeting Afro-Mauritanians. The return of some refugees has led to new waves of property conflict in that region, which the state has not managed effectively.

Private companies play a major role in Mauritania, especially in the banking sector, as seen in the careers of high-profile businessmen Mohamed Ould Bouamatou and Mohamed Ould Noueigued. At the same time, the careers of these individuals and their families demonstrate how top entrepreneurs can be vulnerable to shifts in political fortunes. Ould Bouamatou, after falling out with Ould Abdel Aziz in the 2010s, lived in exile until Ould Ghazouani facilitated his return in 2020. Ould Noueigued also experienced tensions with Ould Abdel Aziz; his father had prospered during the rule of Ould al-Taya, and came from the same Smassid tribe, and so the 2005 – 2008 transition disrupted the family. Ould Noueigued, like Ould Bouamatou, appears to have better relations with Ould Ghazouani, but has called on the administration to do more to promote the private sector. In terms of privatization, Mauritania operates well over 100 state-run enterprises. The country has faced criticism for some privatization efforts; for example, a 2018 civil society report by the Coalition of Mauritanian Organizations for Education and other groups stated that the sale of public school property and land to private actors was proceeding in an unregulated manner and without public consultation. In December 2024, the parliament adopted a law aiming to restructure and reinforce the state-owned enterprises. The law includes provisions aimed at strengthening governance and transparency in these enterprises, but its impact has not yet been felt at the time of writing.

Property rights



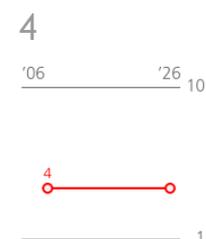
Private enterprise



10 | Welfare Regime

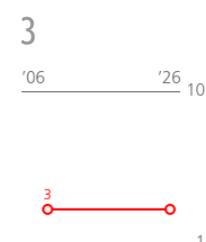
Rates of multidimensional poverty in Mauritania are high, and farmers, herders, youth and other social categories are highly vulnerable to shocks. Several social safety net programs exist, backed by multilateral funders. In 2015, the Mauritanian government created a framework called the Social Safety Net System Support Project, which includes a registry of poor and vulnerable households. The government followed in 2020 with the Taazour General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion; the Taazour program focuses on supplying training and resources to marginalized populations such as the Haratine. As part of the social safety net, the Tekavoul cash transfer program reached some 200,000 highly poor households as of 2024, according to the World Bank. Another important program is Elmaouna, which reached more than 130,000 households between 2017 – 2023, again according to the World Bank. Elmaouna provides assistance to refugees as well as to Mauritians affected by droughts, floods and food insecurity. These social safety net programs have received considerable external support from donors and lenders. However, overall social spending remains somewhat weak; according to the World Bank, Mauritania was annually spending approximately 4.12% of its gross domestic product on public health expenditures as of 2021. Mauritania has a National Social Security Fund (Caisse Nationale de Sécurité Sociale), which provides pensions (for old age, incapacity or death) for salaried workers and certain other categories.

Social safety nets



Access to opportunity is unequal in Mauritania due to discrimination along racial and gender lines. The Haratine and Afro-Mauritians, as well as women and refugees, face entrenched discrimination and barriers. Discrimination along racial lines can take numerous forms, from unequal access to formal sector employment to conditions of de facto slavery; documenting that discrimination can be difficult, given the intimidation that NGOs and human rights groups can face when working on issues of racial inequality. In 2022, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery visited Mauritania and stated that some progress had been made, but that multiple forms of slavery persisted in the country. Regarding gender discrimination, women and girls lag behind by several key measures, including literacy rates (62% for women versus nearly 72% for men). In 2023, after a visit to Mauritania, the U.N. Working Group on discrimination against women and girls praised the government for its legal and constitutional frameworks prohibiting gender-based discrimination as well as for its engagement with international frameworks on women's rights, including its ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Yet the U.N. delegation also highlighted an array of issues, including a low workforce participation rate among women (26.4%), the large share of women working in informal employment (76.5% of working women) and low female representation as business owners (11%) and top managers (5%). There is also intersectional discrimination, with Haratine women in particular facing major barriers to economic and social

Equal opportunity

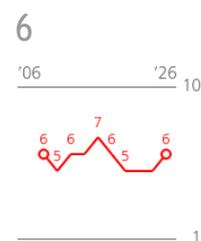


inclusion. Finally, refugees – whose number stood at around 250,000 in late 2024 – have largely struggled to integrate into meaningful work in Mauritania, facing barriers due to lack of education and Mauritanian nationality.

11 | Economic Performance

According to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, economic growth continued during the review period as Mauritania's recovery from the COVID-era shocks progressed. The World Bank calculated Mauritania's GDP growth rate at 6.8% in 2022 and 6.5% in 2023; in its July 2024 update, the Bank estimated that GDP growth would tick upward in 2024, and again in 2025 and 2026. GDP per capita is also rising in Mauritania, though more slowly given the pace of population growth. In 2023 it stood at 6,934 current international dollars. The World Bank, which uses relatively conservative estimates of unemployment worldwide, put Mauritania's unemployment rate at 10.5% in 2023, a slight decline from the pandemic years. Worth noting is that the African Development Bank put forth a much lower figure for Mauritania's GDP growth in 2023 – 3.4% – which the AfDB attributed to weak performance in industry and fishing. The World Bank and the AfDB, however, agree that Mauritania has brought the inflation rate down.

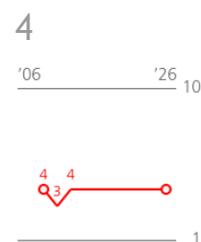
Output strength



12 | Sustainability

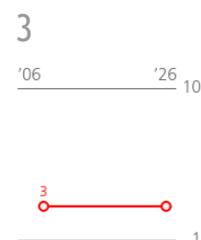
Mauritania's leaders are clearly aware of the devastating impacts that climate change can bring to a country as precarious as theirs. Mauritania has a Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development as well as a National Strategy for Environment and Sustainable Development. According to Our World in Data, Mauritania's CO₂ emissions steadily rose until 2020 and have, on the whole, ticked slightly downward since then. In its 2021 submission of Nationally Determined Contributions to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, Mauritania pledged to reduce emissions by 11% in 2030 and may meet that goal. Mauritania also promotes itself to investors as a country with vast potential for renewable energy, including solar, wind and hydroelectric power. Along with Senegal and Guinea, Mauritania is a member of the Organisation pour la mise en valeur du fleuve Sénégal (Organization for Developing the Senegal River). At the same time, growth priorities largely outweigh environmental concerns – the exploitation of gas, mineral and fishing resources all have substantial environmental costs, and construction activity often proceeds without concern for environmental impacts.

Environmental policy



The education sector in Mauritania is lagging and experiencing numerous problems. In 2023, spending on education stood at 2.6% of GDP. A 2024 UNESCO report, mostly covering the period 2012 – 2019, found that enrollments are trending upward, especially at the primary level, but that secondary enrollment rates remain under 50% at the “college” level and under 30% at the “lycée” level. With a population growth rate of 2.6%, Mauritania is also struggling to absorb a youthful population. Meanwhile, a 2022 law aiming to move private schools toward Arabic instruction generated unintended consequences, leading to overcrowding in public schools and a drop in private school enrollment. At the tertiary level, Mauritania’s offerings are limited and clustered in the capital, with the University of Nouakchott and several specialized institutions such as the Higher Institute for Digital Technology; there is also a Higher Institute for Technological Instruction in Rosso. Mauritania has made substantial investments in education, relative to its means – according to UNICEF, as of 2022 education was the second-highest budget category after economic affairs, and education is key to Mauritania’s Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity (SCAPP) development strategy for 2030. Yet limited resources, persistent inequalities (racial, gender, urban/rural) and policy impacts all limit the education sector’s progress. Finally, research and development is very limited in Mauritania, especially beyond the University of Nouakchott and the handful of other tertiary institutes.

Education policy /
R&D



Governance

I. Level of Difficulty

Much of Mauritania is desert – the Food and Agriculture Organization, along with many other governmental and non-governmental sources, estimate that the country is 90% desert. Although the country has resources such as iron, gas and fish, the harsh terrain and poor infrastructure serve as powerful constraints on development. In regions in the north and east, military control and insecurity in nearby Mali contribute to isolation. Climate change also affects Mauritania in various ways; challenges for the present and future include desertification, rising sea levels and flooding. Meanwhile, high levels of multidimensional poverty among the population both reflect and reinforce relatively low educational attainment – according to UNICEF, only 63% of children complete primary school and only 29% attend secondary school. Finally, Mauritania struggles with legacies of authoritarian rule and racism, which have concentrated power in a narrow stratum.

Mauritanian civil society exists and operates within serious constraints, given the country’s long history of authoritarian rule and the subordination of many civil society voices to the dictates of the political-military-business elite. There are pockets of independence but also a relatively weak matrix of groups with the capacity to push back against the state. Mauritania has various long-standing components of civil society, including Sufi orders (Muslim social groups that take spiritual instruction from a hierarchy of sheikhs) as well as large numbers of community-run Islamic schools called mahadir (singular mahdara). Labor unions and student unions are another major component of civil society, with some capacity to conduct strikes and other actions that pressure the authorities. The country is also home to some important human rights groups, including the Mauritanian Human Rights Association (AMDH) and anti-slavery activists, who play a controversial role in society but who have managed to persist for a fairly long period of time; the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement, for example, has existed since 2008. There are important women’s groups as well, such as the Association of Women Heads of Households, founded in 1999. However, civil society organizations face the twin challenges of state co-optation or state repression, which can limit their influence.

Structural
constraints

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Civil society
traditions

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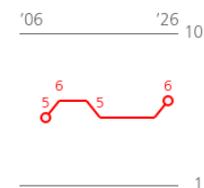
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The 2019 and 2024 elections were both followed by protests that were forcibly repressed by authorities. However, day-to-day politics in Mauritania remains largely nonviolent. The centralization of power within the Beydane community is a major source of social tension, though it only occasionally leads to violent conflict. While no large-scale violence has erupted, the society's deep polarization along racial and ethnic lines makes it fragile. Key potential flashpoints for violent conflict include election outcomes as well as government policies on language, education and the management of slavery-related issues. Meanwhile, the jihadist attacks that affected the country from approximately 2005 – 2011 have not resumed since a multipronged strategy of dialogue and security was put in place. Authorities do appear somewhat concerned about the potential for farmer-herder conflict, and in November 2024 Mauritania hosted a high-level regional meeting focusing on the future of pastoralism in the region. Through 2024, however, there were minimal incidents of farmer-herder violence.

Conflict intensity

6



II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

The government clearly engages in long-range thinking regarding security policy – the military has taken direct supervision of border zones in the east for what is now approaching two decades, and the authorities appear to think strategically and in a long-term manner about their relations with the European Union, the United States and others when it comes to bolstering Mauritania's security capabilities and positioning the country as a partner for the EU on migration control. The government also sets strategic priorities in the extractive sector, for example with the Greater Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA) gas project. In other areas, however, such as economic policy and development, policymaking appears more short term. Mauritania has a long-term development plan called the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity (French acronym SCAPP), covering the period 2016 – 2030; the strategy lays out goals for transforming sectors such as industry, fishing and agriculture. At the same time, the document appears heavily oriented toward speaking to donor institutions such as the IMF and meeting the requirements of those institutions; while not entirely vacuous, the plan has not produced robust results and is not mentioned frequently in Mauritanian news.

Question
Score

Prioritization

4



The government has successfully maintained some key programs aimed at promoting social progress, such as the Tekavoul and Elmaouna social safety net initiatives, and has gradually passed pieces of legislation to promote reform in sectors including state-owned enterprises, property rights, startups and technology. Still, the overall policy direction appears to maintain the status quo in a way that benefits the political-military-business elite. There is a basic conflict between the stated aim of promoting inclusive growth and the reality of a stratified society in which power is highly concentrated. There are also relatively few channels for institutional dissent and debate, given the hierarchical and insular quality of the executive branch and the domination of the executive branch and the ruling party over the legislature.

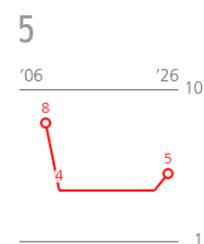
Mauritania is routinely criticized by the African Development Bank and others for a lack of transparency – which also makes it hard to assess how much policy learning is taking place. On the whole, however, personnel appointments appear to favor 1) insiders and 2) those who have the personal confidence of the executive. This trend has led to policymaking stagnation, with policies largely changing slowly and in a limited fashion in response to external pressures but largely serving to maintain the status quo.

In terms of learning, Mauritania shows some diplomatic flexibility and has adapted quickly to the change of presidents in Senegal while maintaining a working relationship – even amid serious tensions – with the military authorities in Mali. In the security arena, too, Mauritania has demonstrated significant learning, especially beginning in the late 2000s and early 2010s as it shifted away from a reactive approach toward the present, more methodical and multipillar model. In the economic realm, Mauritanian authorities have demonstrated less learning, continuing to rely on a few key natural resources to fuel the country’s economy. The GTA project represents an opportunity for some learning, especially in terms of co-managing the gas field with Senegal and BP, but also reinforces the country’s dependence on extractives.

15 | Resource Efficiency

According to the World Bank, the AfDB and other observers, Mauritania’s budget deficit narrowed from 2022 to 2023 and is projected to have declined further still in 2024. At the same time, indebtedness remains a major concern. Total public sector debt stood at nearly \$4.6 billion at the end of 2023, with debt servicing costs estimated to have consumed roughly 5% of GDP in both 2023 and 2024. The International Monetary Fund classifies Mauritania as having “moderate” risk of “debt distress.” In terms of personnel, there are clear paths for advancement for career bureaucrats, especially those who are well connected, but hiring processes are somewhat opaque; low-level civil servants such as teachers complain regularly about delays and inconsistencies in receiving pay and allowances. Meanwhile, decentralization is a stated policy priority, but much decision-making and control of resources remains centralized with the presidency.

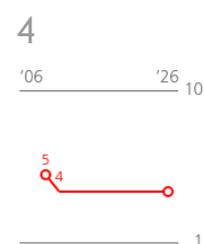
Implementation



Policy learning



Efficient use of assets



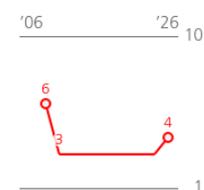
Government policymaking is coherent and coordinated in the sense that high-priority sectors such as security and natural resource extraction are comparatively well-resourced and staffed. In another sense, there are conflicting objectives that lead to shortcomings such as the inadequacy of the education system, gaps in transport infrastructure, poor management of the environment and others. The security forces remain fairly efficient and coherent and do not show many signs of the “coup-proofing” pattern in which the executive multiplies security agencies with overlapping functions in order to maintain control and keep potential coup plotters off balance. Nevertheless, the Groupement de sécurité présidentielle (formerly the BASEP, a unit that Ould Abdel Aziz once commanded) remains a key part of the security infrastructure with the partial function of coup prevention, and Ould Ghazouani has controlled it carefully.

Mauritania has an anti-corruption police force, an anti-corruption prosecutor and an anti-corruption court, but corruption and opaque policymaking and spending remain serious problems. The anti-corruption case against President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz and several senior associates is based on considerable evidence and plausible arguments, but also appears politically motivated with regard to its timing and target – the case began only after Ould Ghazouani and Ould Abdel Aziz had fallen out. The ruling elite functions as a network of interconnected, mostly Bidan military officers and technocrats, many of whom share tribal and familial ties. The financing for Ould Ghazouani’s 2024 campaign was opaque, with individuals such as Mauritanian Football Federation President Ahmed Ould Yahya (who served as youth outreach director) reportedly contributing their personal funds.

In terms of access to information, Mauritania has formally expressed a commitment to transparency and free access to information, and in 2024 the country joined the International Partnership on Information and Democracy. However, as the NGO Paradigm Initiative points out in its 2023 report on Mauritania, access to information and freedom of expression are often restricted in practice. For example, authorities have shut down the internet amid some protests and post-electoral tensions, and a 2016 cybercrime law and a 2021 defamation law restrict the expression of certain religious and political viewpoints. There have been some audits of Mauritania’s public expenditures, for example through the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) program. PEFA’s 2024 report found that there was weak management and transparency of public expenditures, including in terms of transparent communication with the National Assembly. Regarding procurement, the authorities launched a National Portal for Government Procurement (Portail de Marchés Publiques) in 2024 with the goal of boosting transparency, but as PEFA and others have noted, documentation of how state funds are spent remains weak.

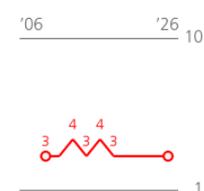
Policy coordination

4



Anti-corruption policy

3



16 | Consensus-Building

Commitment to procedural democracy is strong among major political actors – the president, the ruling party and the major opposition parties all support regular elections, broad respect for the constitution and the rule of law, etc. However, the political-military elite seems fundamentally averse to fostering fully open and democratic competition. Opposition figures such as Dah Abeid and opposition parties such as Tewassoul are given some space to disseminate their messages, compete in elections and hold seats in parliament, but ultimately they are excluded from power.

Major actors, especially the political-military-business elite, appear committed to moving further, albeit gradually, toward a market economy. However, key state-owned enterprises are likely to maintain a vital role in the economy and in providing state revenues. Additionally, the business sector is partly dependent on relations with the executive, which limits competitiveness for both existing economic players and new entrants.

The military-political-business establishment is the main anti-democratic veto actor in Mauritania, along with tribal hierarchies to some extent. The pattern of elections from 2009 to 2024, in which either Ould Abdel Aziz or Ould Ghazouani won, always in the first round, shows the relatively tight grip that senior retired officers have had on power. Given the hyperpresidential system and the executive's historic control over the ruling party, it is difficult for reformers and the opposition to make much headway. At the same time, Ould Ghazouani and his circle appear invested in the maintenance of the status quo – meaning they also appear not to want any regression from the current partly democratic system. Looking ahead, a key test will come as Ould Ghazouani approaches the 2029 elections: Will another retired general take over, or will the process open up to candidates beyond the usual pool of military-backed rulers?

Mauritanian authorities have sought to reduce tensions in some spheres. For example, intrareligious tensions among Muslims have been managed through supervision of preaching, but also by giving Muslims of various theological orientations fairly wide latitude to build audiences and careers, as long as they do not question the legitimacy of the Mauritanian state or advocate for violence within Mauritania. The legalization of the Islamist Tewassoul political party also continues to act as a pressure release valve. The authorities are also attuned to the management and prevention of farmer-herder conflict and have pursued national and regional strategies aiming to improve the lives of pastoralists. The major cleavage that has gone unaddressed, however, is racial tension, which was once again evident in the post-electoral protests after the 2024 vote and has emerged in periodic cases of alleged police brutality against black Mauritanians. The authorities seek to manage these cleavages mostly through repression in times of crisis, by limiting representation of black Mauritanians within

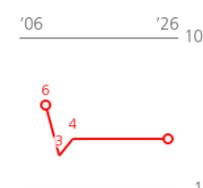
Consensus on goals

3



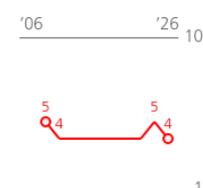
Anti-democratic actors

4



Cleavage / conflict management

4



the elite and by stonewalling when it comes to pressure for accountability for the “events” of 1989 – 1992. By maintaining a high degree of public silence – or sometimes promoting superficial commentary – around key cleavages such as race, the authorities exacerbate those cleavages.

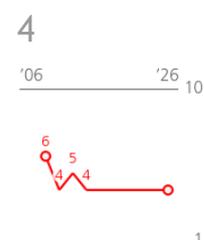
The main path to positions of power is to be part of the existing hierarchy. In Mauritania, prime ministers and other cabinet ministers often lack their own constituency unless they also come from the military. Most top officials are selected and empowered by the president, and many are promoted from within the state bureaucracy – civil society, in other words, seldom influences top appointments. The state does maintain a regular calendar of conferences and workshops on various themes – pastoralism, youth, education, etc. – at which civil society actors often have a chance to speak, but this does not necessarily equal genuine consultation on key policy decisions. Opportunities for civil society groups to monitor the performance of the authorities are limited; watchdog groups do exist, such as the Observatoire mauritanien des droits de l’homme et de la démocratie (Mauritanian Human Rights and Democracy Observatory), but have only a small impact on decision-making.

Formal processes of reconciliation remain elusive in Mauritania, especially regarding the 1989 – 1992 “events” that saw major state-backed and sometimes state-led violence targeting Afro-Mauritians. A 1993 amnesty law has been criticized by human rights groups as providing legal cover to perpetrators of violence, and both President Ould Abdel Aziz and President Ould Ghazouani have responded coolly to international pressure from the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the U.N. Committee on Enforced Disappearances, and other bodies to pursue reconciliation initiatives. The authorities did pursue reconciliation of a sort in a different sphere – namely, the dialogue with imprisoned, accused jihadists that began in 2010 and resulted in the release of some prisoners. The authorities have also sometimes lifted bans on particular associations, parties or institutions. But the 1989 – 1992 “events” have a deep resonance within Mauritanian society and the lack of reconciliation is particularly acute on that issue.

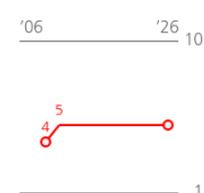
17 | International Cooperation

Mauritania’s SCAPP (Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity) laid out three “levers” that the state aimed to activate on the road to 2030 – inclusive and durable growth, developing human capital and social services, and reinforcing governance. The SCAPP mostly describes an internally driven process. Mauritania works with multilateral lenders such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Bank, demonstrating some openness to the recommendations and initiatives of those lenders – except in certain key ways, for example when it comes to transparency of financial management or robust engagement on reducing racial discrimination. Other elements of international

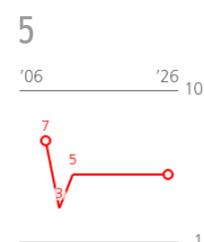
Public consultation



Reconciliation



Effective use of support



cooperation are almost blatantly transactional, as in Mauritania's 2024 agreement with the European Union on migration control or in Mauritania's military cooperation with the United States. Those efforts do not necessarily feed into a long-term development strategy, but rather involve Mauritanian authorities catering to external priorities in order to receive funding and equipment.

Despite successive Mauritanian leaders' apparent desire to maintain a relatively low international profile, Mauritania participates enthusiastically in international cooperation efforts. For example, Mauritania received a 94.25 "spillover score" from the Sustainable Development Report, indicating it has mostly positive effects on the global environment. Mauritania also largely avoids disputes in the international sphere; it has no open disputes at the World Trade Organization, for example. Many of Mauritania's key partnerships focus on security, migration or development, and on the issue of security Mauritania appears to be a credible interlocutor in the eyes of France, the United States and the European Union. The EU has made Mauritania one of its key partners in migration control. At the level of Mauritania-EU relations, both sides appear satisfied with the partnership, though there are significant negative consequences for migrants as well as a strong possibility that migration control funding will exacerbate corruption – as seen in accusations against a group of police in 2024.

Mauritania has good working relationships with Senegal, Morocco and Algeria, while relations with Mali's military-led government have been strained. Regarding Senegal, the 2024 elections there brought to power a new president, Diomaye Faye, and a new prime minister, Ousmane Sonko, who promise an ambitious reform agenda. That agenda, Faye and Sonko hope, will be partly driven by energy revenues, including from the Greater Tortue Ahmeyim offshore gas project, which involves a partnership between Senegal and Mauritania. After taking office in April, Faye's first foreign trip was to Mauritania, and Sonko paid a three-day visit to Mauritania in January 2025. So far, then, relations between Faye's administration and Mauritania have been warm. Regarding Morocco and Algeria, Mauritania has a balancing act to achieve given the rivalry and hostility between its two northern neighbors. Ould Ghazouani's solution has been to accept investments and joint projects from both, including in the electricity, transportation and mining sectors, among others. Mauritania continues to recognize the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in the disputed Western Sahara territory, and SADR leader Brahim Ghali attended Ould Ghazouani's inauguration in 2024. However, Mauritania and Morocco have skirted this issue as they have cooperated in other spheres. Finally, regarding Mali, the escalating insecurity along the border, combined with the Malian Armed Forces' rough treatment of Mauritanian citizens on several occasions – including rough treatment by mercenaries in the Wagner Group, a partner of the Malian junta – have caused tensions for several years.

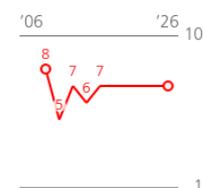
Credibility

7



Regional cooperation

7



Strategic Outlook

Five priorities stand out for achieving transformation in Mauritania: greater political inclusivity, the management of security risks along the border with Mali, poverty mitigation, climate change adaptation, and the creation of a more predictability and competitive environment for business. In the area of inclusivity, tensions could be reduced if the state were initiate a robust formal process of reconciliation around the “events” of 1989 – 1992, and further avoid crackdowns on the opposition after. On the issue of security risks, keeping diplomatic pressure on the authorities in Bamako could help reduce cross-border incursions by Malian/Wagner forces and reduce Malian/Wagner harassment of Mauritanian citizens in Mali. Reinforcing border security could also help prevent the spillover of violence. Additionally, opening or maintaining dialogue with Mauritanian and Malian hardliners could reduce the chances of Mauritania becoming a renewed target. On poverty mitigation, expanding the Tekavoul and Elmaouna social safety net programs while redoubling efforts to boost secondary school enrollment rates are key strategies respectively for the short and long term. On the issue of climate change adaptation, Mauritanian authorities should continue building on their efforts to support pastoralists and prevent and reduce farmer-herder conflict. The environmental impacts of new and existing resource extraction projects also merit careful attention. Finally, the authorities should follow the recommendation from multilateral institutions such as the AfDB to promote greater governance transparency, which would in turn make the country more attractive for domestic and international entrepreneurs. One sign of greater transparency and accountability would be to make data on contracts and procurement more robustly available; another would be to ensure that current senior officials, not just former officials and low-level personnel, were held accountable for corruption.

International actors, meanwhile, should continue to support Mauritania’s economic growth and development while avoiding partnerships that prioritize security at the expense of human rights and political inclusion. The European Union’s migration deal with Mauritania has already been persuasively criticized by rights groups and independent analysts as a framework that creates incentives for corruption and abuse. Partnerships on migration and counter-terrorism can also inadvertently diminish outside actors’ ability and willingness to pressure Mauritania’s authorities on issues of political freedom and human rights. This dynamic will be particularly important with the approach of the 2029 elections, which could soon start generating speculation about a possible third term for Ould Ghazouani. For multilateral lenders, meanwhile, supporting debt relief for Mauritania could help reduce the deficit burden and promote economic growth. Additionally, as Mauritania takes another look at the structure and governance of its state-owned enterprises, lenders and donors should encourage Mauritania to ensure any privatization efforts are undertaken transparently and in a manner that does not cause economic shocks by laying off large numbers of salaried employees, and thereby producing ripple effects in the economy as a whole. Finally, infrastructure development is key for Mauritania’s transformation, in particular the need to expand and improve transport infrastructure, schools and electrification. Maintaining and increasing investments in infrastructure can contribute to the goals of reducing poverty, generating entrepreneurship and fostering a more connected society.