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Freedom in the World 2011 - Guinea-Bissau

Capital: Bissau

Population: 1,611,000

Political Rights Score: 4 *

Civil Liberties Score: 4 *

Status: Partly Free

Trend Arrow ↓

Guinea-Bissau received a downward trend arrow due to the military's interference in the country's politics and the civilian president's increasingly apparent willingness to acquiesce to its demands.

Overview

An army mutiny in April 2010 plunged Guinea-Bissau into another political crisis. President Malam Bacai Sanhá appointed the leader of the mutiny and a former navy chief with known ties to international drug cartels to top military posts in June and October. The appointments, which drew international condemnation, reflected the growing influence of the military and a severe weakening of civilian control over the government.

Guinea-Bissau declared independence from Portugal in 1973 following a 13-year guerrilla war by the leftist African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC). Luís Cabral became president in 1974, but disaffection with his repressive rule led to divisions within the PAIGC, and in 1980 he was toppled by the prime minister and former military commander *João Bernardo "Nino" Vieira*.

Vieira ruled from 1980 to 1984 as head of a Revolutionary Council, and was made head of state by a reconstituted single-party legislature in 1984. International pressure from donors eventually led to economic liberalization and, in 1994, the country's first multiparty legislative and presidential elections, in which Vieira won the presidency.

An army mutiny broke out in 1998 after Vieira fired General Ansu Mané, accusing him of smuggling arms to separatist rebels in Senegal's Casamance region. Hostilities escalated when Vieira called on troops from neighboring Senegal and Guinea to put down the uprising. The war that ensued displaced hundreds of thousands of people and destroyed the country's infrastructure and economy. Vieira was ousted in 1999 and went into exile.

in Portugal.

The 1999 presidential and legislative elections resulted in a sound defeat for the PAIGC and the election of Kumba Yalá, leader of the Social Renovation Party (PRS), as president. Mané declared himself head of the armed forces in 2000, inciting violence between the military factions supporting him and those backing Yalá. Mané was subsequently killed. In 2002, Yalá dissolved the parliament and ruled by decree until he was overthrown in a 2003 coup led by General Veríssimo Correia Seabra.

The PAIGC returned to power with a plurality of seats in the 2004 legislative elections, and Carlos Gomes Júnior became prime minister. Vieira returned from exile to stand for the 2005 presidential election as an independent candidate, and ultimately defeated both Yalá of the PRS and Malam Bacai Sanhá of the PAIGC.

Vieira soon dismissed Carlos Gomes Júnior and appointed former PAIGC ally Aristides Gomes to replace him as prime minister, causing tensions between Vieira's supporters and the opposition. After months of negotiations, the PAIGC, PRS, and United Social Democrat Party (PUSD) agreed on a national political stability pact in March 2007. Days later, the coalition passed a no-confidence vote against Gomes, leading to his resignation and the appointment of Martinho Ndafo Kabi of the PAIGC to the premiership.

The 2008 legislative elections resulted in a resounding victory for the PAIGC, which took 67 seats in the 100-seat legislature. The PRS took 28, and the Vieira-backed Republican Party for Independence and Development (PRID) captured three. Carlos Gomes Júnior of the PAIGC once again became prime minister.

In March 2009, Vieira and the chief of the armed forces, Batista Tagme Na Wai, were assassinated in separate attacks. A new presidential election was held in June despite serious political violence during the campaign, including the fatal shootings of presidential candidate Baciro Dabó and former defense minister Helder Proença. Following an inconclusive first round, Sanhá of the PAIGC defeated Yalá of the PRS in the July runoff, 63.3 percent to 36.7 percent. International observers reported that the voting itself was peaceful, free, and transparent. Sanhá took office in September, pledging to work on security-sector reform and to combat drug trafficking.

On April 1, 2010, mutinous soldiers led by the deputy chief of the armed forces, Antonio Indjai, detained Prime Minister Gomes as well as armed forces chief General José Zamora Induta and 40 of his subordinates. The same morning, soldiers stormed the UN building in Bissau to provide safe passage to former navy commander Rear Admiral José Américo Bubo Na Tchuto, who had sought protection at UN headquarters after his involvement in a 2008 coup attempt. With Na Tchuto at his side, Indjai proclaimed himself head of the armed forces, while Sanhá declared that the government remained in civilian hands. Gomes was released the following day and remained in office, but Induta and military intelligence chief Colonel Samba Diallo were detained without charges until late December 2010, when they were finally released. In June, Sanhá officially appointed Indjai as chief of the armed forces, a decision that drew condemnation from the international community. In October, Sanhá reappointed Na Tchuto as chief of the navy, just months after he had been named a drug kingpin by the U.S. Treasury Department.

Despite the recent political unrest, the government demonstrated some commitment to reining in public spending in 2010. In July, it reported the completion of a census of civil servants, the first step in its efforts to eliminate large numbers of "ghost workers" on government payrolls. Strict spending restrictions for government officials were also announced in July. However, the success of these and other reforms rested on the government's ability to maintain political stability and donor funding, both of which were disrupted by the events of April 1.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Guinea-Bissau is not an electoral democracy. Legislative and presidential elections have

generally been declared free and fair by international observers, but military intervention and the influence of the drug trade have undermined the authority of elected officials. The 100 members of the unicameral National People's Assembly are elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms. The president is elected for a five-year term, and there are no term limits. The prime minister is appointed by the president after consultation with party leaders in the legislature.

Political parties in Guinea-Bissau are competitive but institutionally weak. They routinely suffer from military interference and shifting personal cliques. Party leaders are often unable or unwilling to fully carry out their constitutional functions and policy agendas, as military factions have repeatedly shown a readiness to maintain or expand their own interests through coups, assassinations, and threats. The illegal arrest of the prime minister on April 1, 2010, represented a major blow to the integrity of democratic governance, and the president's subsequent military appointments rendered the government all but powerless to reform the security sector and strengthen the rule of law.

Corruption is pervasive, driven in large part by the illicit drug trade. With weak institutions and porous borders, Guinea-Bissau has become a major transit point for Latin American drug traffickers moving cocaine to Europe. Powerful segments of the military, police, and government are reportedly complicit in the trade. The 2010 reappointment of Rear Admiral José Américo Bubo Na Tchuto in particular has bolstered claims that the country is fast becoming a "narcostate." Guinea-Bissau ranked 154 out of 178 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Although the constitution provides for freedoms of speech and press, these freedoms are not always respected. Journalists regularly face harassment and intimidation, and practice self-censorship. In May 2010, newspaper owner João de Barros was attacked for publishing stories on drug trafficking in the country. There are a number of private and community radio stations in addition to the national broadcasters, and several private newspapers publish sporadically. Internet access is unrestricted.

Religious freedom is legally protected and usually respected in practice. Academic freedom is similarly guaranteed and upheld.

Freedoms of assembly and association are recognized and usually respected, but security forces have occasionally suppressed public demonstrations. When citizens gathered in Bissau to protest the illegal detention of the prime minister in April 2010, General Antonio Indjai threatened to kill the elected leader if the crowd did not disperse; he later retracted his statement. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate freely, though members of local human rights organizations have at times been subject to harassment and even physical attack. Workers are allowed to form and join independent trade unions, but few work in the wage-earning formal sector. The right to strike is protected, and government workers frequently exercise this right.

Scant resources and endemic corruption severely challenge judicial independence. The U.S. State Department has reported that there are essentially no resources to conduct criminal investigations and few formal detention facilities. With support from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, work was completed in late 2010 on the refurbishment of two jails in Mansôa and Bafatá, making them the only secure prisons in the country. However, no prisoners had been transferred by the end of the year. Judges and magistrates are poorly trained, irregularly paid, and highly susceptible to corruption. A culture of impunity prevails, especially in the military. A 2008 law provides amnesty to persons who have committed political crimes. Investigations into the assassinations of the president and the chief of the armed forces in 2009 were deemed inconclusive. Admiral Na Tchuto was reappointed as head of the navy despite repeated calls for his arrest due to his involvement in earlier coup plots and his role in the illicit drug trade.

Ethnic identity is an important factor in politics, and the military is dominated by the country's largest ethnic group, the Balanta.

Women face significant traditional and societal discrimination, despite some legal protections. They generally do not receive equal pay for equal work and have fewer opportunities in education and employment. Women of certain ethnic groups cannot own or manage land or inherit property. Domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and early marriage are widespread. Trafficking in persons, especially children, is a significant problem, despite efforts by NGOs to raise awareness, improve law enforcement, and repatriate victims.

** Countries are ranked on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom.*

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