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Freedom in the World 2011 - Guinea

Capital: Conakry**Population:** 10,058,000

Political Rights Score: 5 *

Civil Liberties Score: 5 *

Status: Partly Free

Trend Arrow

Status Change Explanation

Guinea's political rights rating improved from 7 to 5, its civil liberties rating from 6 to 5, and its status from Not Free to Partly Free due to a transition from military to civilian rule, credible presidential elections held in November 2010, and heightened observance of freedoms of expression and association.

Overview

Following a turbulent year in 2009, Guinea saw modest progress towards establishing democratic institutions in 2010. Interim president Sékouba Konaté oversaw two rounds of presidential elections during the year, culminating in the inauguration of longtime opposition leader Alpha Condé as president in December. However, the run-up to the second round of elections in November was marred by significant violence and population displacements. New media laws passed in June sought to ease restrictions on journalists by removing prison sentences for press offenses.

Guinea gained independence from France in 1958 and grew increasingly impoverished under the repressive, one-party rule of President Ahmed Sékou Touré. After his death in 1984, a military junta led by Lieutenant Colonel Lansana Conté abolished all political parties and the constitution and began a program of economic liberalization.

A new constitution was adopted in 1990. Conté won the country's first multiparty presidential elections in 1993, but international observers said the polls were deeply flawed. Presidential, legislative, and municipal elections over the next 12 years were similarly marred by state patronage, media bias, broad manipulation of the electoral process, and opposition boycotts; all resulted in lopsided victories for Conté and the ruling Party for Unity and Progress (PUP).

In 2007, a general strike to protest corruption, the cost of basic goods, and inadequate government services grew into nationwide antigovernment demonstrations. Security forces opened fire on protesters, killing more than 130. The president declared martial law in the face of a near-revolt of unprecedented scale. With mediation by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), union leaders agreed to suspend a general strike, while Conté pledged to control inflation, organize legislative elections, and name a "consensus" prime minister backed by unions and civil society. He appointed veteran diplomat Lansana Kouyaté, but initial optimism faded as the prime minister's reform plan was stymied by structural challenges, back-room opposition from the president and his associates, and perceptions that Kouyaté was pursuing his own political agenda.

President Conté unilaterally dismissed Kouyaté in May 2008. A faction of the army mutinied later that month, and security forces brutally suppressed a police uprising in June as well as sporadic antigovernment demonstrations by civilians. The ailing president died in December, and junior officers quickly mounted a successful military coup, promising to hold elections in two years.

Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, the coup leader, initially enjoyed considerable popularity, especially as he sought to expose corruption among former officials. However, his arbitrary and personalized style of rule quickly engendered opposition. In August 2009, under international and domestic pressure, the ruling junta – known as the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD) – set presidential and legislative elections for January and March 2010, respectively. Following signs that Camara might renege on his earlier promise not to run for president, opposition forces mounted a massive rally in late September. The gathering was viciously suppressed by security forces, who killed more than 150 people and raped and beat hundreds of others. The international community, including ECOWAS, the African Union, the European Union, and the United States, roundly condemned the crackdown and imposed sanctions on the Guinean regime. However, China broke ranks and signed a \$9 billion mining agreement with the junta in October. In December, as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and a special UN panel investigated the September massacre, the commander of Guinea's presidential guard shot Camara in the head, seriously injuring him.

In 2010, the country took several steps towards opening up its political system. While Camara traveled to Burkina Faso to recuperate, his deputy, General Sékouba Konaté, became interim president. In January, Konaté negotiated an accord with Camara which established conditions for the upcoming presidential election. Prodemocracy opposition leader Jean-Marie Doré, who was named interim prime minister in January, was charged with leading the power-sharing government and facilitating a return to civilian rule. The accord also created a broad-based interim parliament, the Transitional National Council (TNC), composed of 101 members from political parties, civil society, and the military regime. In February, the ICC ruled that the September 2009 massacre was a crime against humanity and initiated proceedings.

The long-anticipated presidential election took place in June, though no candidate was able to garner more than 50 percent of the vote. In a run-off election held in November, longtime opposition leader Alpha Condé of the Rally of the Guinean People Party defeated former prime minister Cellou Dalein Diallo of the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea by 52 to 48 percent of the vote. The election was deemed legitimate and representative of popular opinion by most domestic and international observers, and Diallo eventually accepted the results. However, violence and voter intimidation in Guinea's eastern region, including beatings, shootings, and the vandalizing of homes by mobs, resulted in the displacement of thousands of ethnic Peul supporters of Diallo.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Guinea is not an electoral democracy. While the 2010 presidential election process was deemed free and fair by observers, legislative elections had not been held by year's end. Elections under former presidents Ahmed Sékou Touré and Lansana Conté were heavily manipulated. The 2010 elections represented the country's first ever peaceful rotation of power. In May 2010, President Sékouba Konaté approved a new constitution which reinforces democratic rights, including explicitly outlining the legal status of the prime minister and establishing a number of bodies such as an independent electoral commission, a national human rights body, and a constitutional court. There are several significant political parties, most of which have clear regional and ethnic bases.

Corruption has been cited as a serious problem by international donors, and many government activities are shrouded in secrecy. Under Moussa Dadis Camara, the CNDD had promised to crack down on corruption, but instead it oversaw a continued disintegration of the rule of law and legal institutions. While President Konaté sought to reestablish a state of law through adoption of the new constitution, the global economic crisis combined with a deeply ingrained culture of corruption made sustained progress difficult. Guinea was ranked 164 out of 178 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index.

In June 2010, the TNC passed two new media laws to replace restrictive legislation from 1991. One of the laws decriminalized press offenses and more clearly defined defamation provisions, while the other provided for the creation of a new media regulatory body, the Higher Authority of Communication (HAC). The new laws, which were written in consultation with journalists and media executives, are applied to online and state-owned media in addition to print outlets. Prison sentences for most press offenses were eliminated, though journalists can still face high fines. Libel against the head of state remains a criminal offense, and the country continues to lack a freedom of information law. The state controls the national radio station and the only television broadcaster, but permits the airing of a range of viewpoints. A variety of newspapers publish and appear on the internet. Internet access is limited to urban areas, but has generally not been restricted by the government when available. Under the 2010 media laws, news websites must register with the HAC.

Religious rights are generally respected in practice, though there have been cases of

discrimination against non-Muslims in government employment, as well as restrictions on Muslims' freedom to convert to other religions. Academic freedom has been hampered to some degree by government influence over hiring and curriculum content. Free private discussion, which had been limited under previous authoritarian governments and Camara's repressive and erratic rule, improved in 2010.

Freedoms of association and assembly, which had been seriously circumscribed, were generally respected in 2010. In May, a Special Force for a Safe Electoral Process was created which effectively provided security for the presidential elections. However, the unit was criticized for lacking restraint and using excessive force, among other violations, when responding to political violence prior to the run-off election. Many established and emerging nongovernmental organizations and civil society groups expanded their activities in 2010 as a result of the more open political environment. Trade unions enjoyed greater freedoms in 2010. In contrast to previous years, there were no reports of intervention into strike activities or official discrimination against unions.

Under former president Conté, the nominally independent courts were marred by corruption, a lack of resources, nepotism, ethnic bias, and political interference. The judicial system demonstrated a modest degree of independence in 2010; a panel of magistrates was empowered to investigate the September 2009 massacre, though no perpetrators were brought to justice by year's end. More than 100 prisoners who were judged to have been held in lengthy pretrial detention were released in May. Informal customary justice mechanisms continue to operate in addition to official courts.

Security forces have long engaged in arbitrary arrests, torture of detainees, and extrajudicial execution with impunity. According to Human Rights Watch, they used excessive force and displayed a lack of political neutrality when responding to election-related violence in November 2010. Prison conditions remain harsh and sometimes life threatening.

While the law prohibits ethnic discrimination, human rights reports have noted societal discrimination in employment, housing, and marriage patterns. Ethnic clashes during the campaign for the second round of presidential elections in 2010 pitted the principally Peul supporters of Cellou Dalein Diallo against Malinké partisans of Condé.

Societal discrimination against women is common, and while women have legal access to land, credit, and business, inheritance laws and the traditional justice system favor men. Security personnel openly raped dozens of women in the 2007 and 2009 crackdowns. Human Rights Watch has reported that thousands of young girls serving as unpaid domestic workers in Guinea are subject to beatings or rape by their employers. Location and political instability have made Guinea a source and transit point for many irregular migrants heading to Europe. Advocacy groups are working to eradicate the illegal but nearly ubiquitous practice of female genital mutilation.

** 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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