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Freedom in the World 2014 - Central African Republic

Status Change Explanation:

The Central African Republic's political rights rating declined from 5 to 7, its civil liberties rating declined from 5 to 7, and its status declined from Partly Free to Not Free due to the Séléka rebel group's ouster of the incumbent president and legislature, the suspension of the constitution, and a general proliferation of violence by criminal bands and militias, spurring clashes between Muslim and Christian communities.

Overview:

A rebellion against the government of President François Bozizé that began in December 2012 culminated in a coup in March 2013, leading the situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) to deteriorate significantly throughout 2013. The rebel group responsible for the coup was known as Séléka; it was created in August 2012 from three older rebel groups: a faction of the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UDFR); an offshoot of the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP) known as the Fundamental CPJP; and a lesser-known group, the Convention of Patriots for Salvation and Kodro. Séléka's original demands were for the proper implementation of earlier peace accords between the government and rebel groups, including payments for demobilized rebels fighters and release of prisoners. The group was led by Michel Djotodia, who came from the CAR's predominantly Muslim northeast. Most of Seleka's soldiers come from the same region, although Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries have also played an important role in the group's actions.

As the rebels advanced and the central government quickly lost control over large areas of the country, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) decided in late December 2012 to send a multinational force to the CAR and the Chadian government pledged a force of 2,000 soldiers. January 2013 meetings in Libreville, the capital of Gabon, between Séléka representatives and Bozizé produced a power-sharing agreement that seemed to have the potential to deescalate the situation by creating a unity government; Djotodia would become vice prime minister and Bozizé would retain the presidency until his term ended in 2016. However, Séléka did not halt its military campaign, taking control of towns in northern and southeastern CAR, and finally seizing Bangui on March 24 in an attack that killed 13 South African soldiers and wounded

27. Bozizé immediately fled the country, and Djotodia suspended the constitution, dissolved the parliament, and declared himself president. Soon after, he created a transitional government and promised elections within 18 months of the swearing in of a transitional president. In August, Djotodia was sworn in to that position and a transitional charter went into effect.

The coup left the CAR internationally isolated, with the African Union (AU) suspending the country and foreign governments refusing to recognize Djotodia as its leader. In September, Djotodia ordered Séléka to disband, but the order had little practical effect.

The CAR was already plagued by various armed groups, including combatants from the Lord's Resistance Army in the southeast of the country and poachers and traffickers from neighboring countries in the Vakaga region. The coup and subsequent instability led to a proliferation of armed groups and an increase in weapons in the country. Infighting within Séléka itself has further heightened tensions.

In early October, at the request of France, the UN Security Council resolution asked for the creation of MISCA (The International Support Mission to CAR), led by the African Union, which already had troops on the ground. On December 5, the Security Council authorized MISCA with a one year mandate that allows the use of force to protect civilians. By the end of December, MISCA was comprised of 4,000 soldiers with 2,000 more to be added by the beginning of 2014. During this time, France increased its troops to 1,600 soldiers.

This troop increase was in response to the worsening of violence during the end of November and particularly December. By early November, and in response to Seleka targeting of Christian civilians, a new Christian militia—the anti-Balaka—that includes ex-army soldiers and supporters of ex-president Bozize, started fighting both Seleka and attacking Muslim communities throughout the country. As a result of a Seleka attack in Bangui, by the end of December over 1,000 civilians were killed while nearly half the population of the city fled. Similarly, hundreds of Muslims have been killed by anti-Balaka militias and entire villages burned. Both groups have recruited child soldiers and by the end of the year, the UN estimates that up to 6,000 children are fighting for one of the rebel factions.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 0 / 40 (-16) [\[Key\]](#)

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12 (-7)

Bozizé came to power through a coup in 2003, but his government transitioned to civilian rule and voters approved a new constitution in 2004. According to the constitution, members of the unicameral, 105-seat National Assembly were elected by popular vote for five-year terms. The president, who was elected for a five-year term and eligible for a second term, appointed the cabinet and dominated the legislative and judicial branches.

Presidential and legislative elections were held in January 2011 after being delayed twice the previous year. Bozizé, with the backing of the National Convergence Kwa Na Kwa (KNK)

coalition, won the presidential poll, defeating four candidates with 66 percent of the vote, later revised downward to 64 percent by the Constitutional Court. The KNK won 63 out of the 105 seats in concurrent National Assembly elections. The polls were considered free, and security officers did not intimidate voters as they had in previous elections. However, the opposition criticized both elections as unfair.

In the March 2013 coup, the self-appointed president, Djotodia, suspended both the constitution and parliament. He also appointed the members of the weak transitional government. The transitional charter was put in place in August, but there were no specific plans to write a new constitution.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 1 / 16 (-6)

Prior to the coup, the KNK coalition was the country's leading political force, and other parties operated freely. In 2012, the government sometimes withheld approval for meetings of opposition groups.

The coup and the precarious security situation around the country have effectively blocked political participation throughout 2013. Although there are no laws prohibiting new parties, the coup and the security situation make competitive political groupings impossible, and the lack of explicit plans to hold elections makes it impossible for opposition parties to organize through elections in the immediate future. Séléka and anti-Balaka rebels have terrorized the population, other armed groups have proliferated, and sectarian tensions and violence have skyrocketed, rendering free political choice meaningless. Due to the sectarian and religious nature of these tensions, political pluralism and participation have been heavily curtailed.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12 (-2)

The coup removed all elected office holders from power and imposed a nontransparent, unelected regime. The deteriorating security situation means the new government cannot provide basic protection and services.

Until the March 2013 coup, corruption remained pervasive in all branches of government, despite some steps toward reform in recent years. Diamonds accounted for about half of the country's export earnings, but a large percentage circumvented official channels. Since the coup, Séléka has taken control of the diamond industry. Without a functioning government, the CAR cannot protect or regulate the extraction of natural resources, and the Kimberley Process, a multi-government scheme to stop the trade of "conflict diamonds," suspended exports of the country's diamonds in May.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: -1 / 0 (-1)

The deliberate targeting of Christians by Séléka sparked unprecedented clashes between the country's Muslim and Christian populations, and the creation of the Christian anti-Balaka militias as a response has further exacerbated these clashes.

Civil Liberties: 6 / 60 (-13)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16 (-4)

Until Bozizé's ouster in March, the government generally respected the right to free speech, but many journalists practiced self-censorship. It was illegal to broadcast information that was "false" or that could incite ethnic or religious tension. The state dominated the broadcast media, but private radio stations existed. Several private newspapers offered competing views, though they had limited influence due to low literacy levels and high poverty rates. There were no government restrictions on the internet, but the vast majority of the population is unable to access it. The progressive decline of the security situation as a result of the rebel advance and coup severely restricted the movement of journalists and their ability to report. Although freedom of speech and the press are protected under the transitional charter, there were reports of threats and violence against journalists at the hands of Seleka and of the transitional government. Both radio stations and newspapers stopped operating for a few days in early and late December, as a result of the increase in violence during this period.

Before the coup, the constitution guaranteed religious freedom, but the Bozizé government prohibited activities that it considered subversive or fundamentalist, and the constitution banned the formation of religious-based parties. However, since the Séléka takeover, sectarian violence between Muslims, mostly aligned with the rebels, and the country's Christian population has increased severely. In early October 2013, over 70 people were killed in separate incidents between Muslims and Christians in Bangassou and Gaga, while anti-Balaka revenge killings in early December led to the bloodiest Seleka attack, with over 1,000 civilians killed in the capital, Bangui.

Academic freedom was generally respected under Bozizé, but in 2013 universities have had difficulty functioning due to the security situation. By early 2013, as many as half of the schools were closed and taken over by militia groups, with universities shutting down as well. The coup also had a chilling effect on private political discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 1 / 12 (-3)

Until the March 2013 coup, freedoms of assembly and association were constitutionally protected and generally upheld in practice. However, permission was required to hold public meetings and demonstrations, and authorities sometimes denied such requests. The rights to unionize and strike were constitutionally protected and generally respected, though only a small percentage of workers were unionized.

Since the coup, however, freedom of assembly is effectively curtailed as a result of the security situation, which has also made it impossible for organizations to operate effectively. Members of

humanitarian organizations were harassed and attacked, both by Séléka members and forces loyal to Bozizé, and the offices of international aid organizations were looted. The security situation also made it difficult for unions to function properly.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16 (-3)

Prior to the coup, corruption, political interference, and lack of training had undermined the judiciary. The president appointed judges, and proceedings were prone to executive influence. Limitations on police searches and detention were often ignored. While the penal code prohibited torture, police brutality remained a serious problem. The military and members of the presidential guard continued to commit human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, with impunity. Prison conditions remained poor.

The rule of law was severely compromised by the coup, after which the judiciary operated under the threat of the rebel government. There were widespread reports of atrocities, including torture and extrajudicial killings, committed by Séléka and by anti-Balaka groups. The violence greatly exacerbated existing insecurity in the CAR, where several armed groups—including the Ugandan rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army—already operated. Djotodia was unsuccessful in his attempt to disband Seleka, and reports indicated that fighting between various factions of Séléka was contributing to the overall violence.

The humanitarian situation was dire: in late December, the United Nations estimated that over 710,000 people had been displaced within the CAR; about 100,000 people were sheltering at Bangui's airport at the end of the year. According to the United Nations, about 71,500 additional people had fled to nearby countries. Food security was a major concern. Additionally, Muslim civilians were deliberately targeted by Seleka rebels, while anti-Balaka militias targeted Christian civilians in return, sending thousands from each group in hiding.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 1 / 16 (-3)

In 2013, increased insecurity restricted the movement of citizens and greatly undermined the protection of private property. Private businesses were looted and destroyed regularly by both of the major rebel groups and Séléka mined diamond-producing areas for its own benefit.

Even before the coup, constitutional guarantees for women's rights were not enforced, especially in rural areas. There was no specific law criminalizing domestic abuse, which is widespread, and there was a high incidence of sexual violence against women by state and nonstate actors.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

[Full Methodology](#)

2014 Scores

Status

Not Free

Freedom Rating

(1 = best, 7 = worst)

7.0

Civil Liberties

(1 = best, 7 = worst)

7

Political Rights

(1 = best, 7 = worst)

7

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