

Title	Freedom in the World 2010 - Guinea-Bissau
Publisher	Freedom House
Country	Guinea-Bissau
Publication Date	1 June 2010
Cite as	Freedom House, <i>Freedom in the World 2010 - Guinea-Bissau</i> , 1 June 2010, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c1a1ea828.html [accessed 24 November 2010]

Freedom in the World 2010 - Guinea-Bissau

Capital: Bissau

Population: 1,611,000

Political Rights Score: 4 *

Civil Liberties Score: 4 *

Status: Partly Free

Overview

The assassinations of General Batista Tagme Na Wai and President Joao Bernardo Vieira in March 2009 plunged Guinea-Bissau into a period of acute disorder. However, despite an upsurge in political violence following the assassinations, Malam Bacai Sanha was elected president in a two-round vote in June and July that was deemed free and fair by international observers. The country's chronic instability continued to be fueled by military interference in politics and the influence of international drug cartels.

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). Luis 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, former military commander Joao Bernardo "Nino" Vieira.

Vieira ruled from 1980 to 1984 as head of a Revolutionary Council composed primarily of military figures. A reconstituted single-party National People's Assembly approved a new constitution in 1984 and elected Vieira as head of state. His authoritarian grip on power was challenged by coup plots in 1983, 1985, and 1993, and international pressure from donors eventually led to economic liberalization and political reform. In 1994, the country held its first multiparty legislative and presidential elections, and Vieira was elected president.

An army mutiny broke out in June 1998 after Vieira fired General Ansumane Mane, 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 May 1999 and went into exile in Portugal.

Presidential and legislative elections in November 1999 resulted in a sound defeat for

the PAIGC. Kumba Yala, leader of the Social Renovation Party (PRS), became president in early 2000. Fighting broke out that year between military factions backing Yala and Mane after Mane declared himself head of the armed forces. Mane was subsequently killed. In 2002, Yala dissolved the parliament and called early elections, which were then postponed. The president ruled by decree until he was overthrown in a 2003 coup led by General Verissimo Correia Seabra.

Legislative elections held in March 2004 were declared free and fair by international observers, and the PAIGC returned with a plurality of seats. A new government was formed, and Carlos Gomes Junior became prime minister. Vieira returned from exile to stand for the June 2005 presidential election as an independent candidate, challenging Yala of the PRS and Malam Bacai Sanha of the PAIGC. Vieira was declared winner of the July presidential runoff, which international observers also judged to be free and fair, though many Bissau-Guineans insisted otherwise.

Vieira dismissed Gomes Junior and appointed former PAIGC ally Aristide Gomes to replace him as prime minister. This caused tensions between Vieira's supporters and the parliamentary opposition. After months of negotiations, the three dominant parties in the National People's Assembly – the PAIGC, the PRC, and the United Social Democrat Party (PUSD) – agreed on a national political stability pact in March 2007. Days later, the coalition passed a vote of no confidence against the prime minister. Gomes resigned, and despite considerable resistance from Vieira, Martinho Ndafo Cabi of the PAIGC took over the premiership.

Legislative elections scheduled for March 2008 were postponed to November due to insufficient funds and planning. Although the run-up to the voting was marred by uncertainty and an alleged coup plot by navy commander Bubo Na Tchuto, the PAIGC won a resounding victory, and the polls were hailed by the international community and Bissau-Guineans as free and transparent. The PAIGC won 67 seats in the 100-seat legislature, while the PRS won 28 and a newly created party backed by Vieira, the Republican Party for Independence and Development (PRID), won three. Carlos Gomes Junior of the PAIGC once again became prime minister.

On March 1, 2009, General Batista Tagme Na Wai, the armed forces chief of staff, was killed in a bombing at military headquarters. The following morning, soldiers attacked the presidential palace and assassinated Vieira. National People's Assembly speaker Raimundo Pereira was sworn in as interim president on March 3, in keeping with the constitution, and a new presidential election was eventually scheduled for June 28. Political violence escalated during the campaign. On June 5, presidential candidate Baciro Dabo and former defense minister Helder Proenca were both killed; the Interior Ministry claimed that they were shot while resisting arrest for involvement in an alleged coup plot. Several other prominent political figures were also arrested that day.

Despite a wave of violence and intimidation tactics, the first round of the presidential election was held as scheduled. Sanha of the PAIGC placed first with 39.6 percent of the vote, followed by Yala of the PRS with 29.4 percent and independent Henrique Rosa with 24.2 percent. In the July 26 runoff, Sanha defeated Yala, 63.5 percent to 36.5 percent. International observers reported that both rounds were peaceful, free, and transparent. Sanha was sworn in as president in September, pledging to work on security-sector reform and combat drug trafficking.

Guinea-Bissau, one of the world's poorest countries, is currently carrying out reforms to improve fiscal stability as part of a \$5.6 million Emergency Post-Conflict Assistance (EPCA) program initiated by the International Monetary Fund. Discussions are under way to begin work on a Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) program in 2010. Angolan investment in bauxite mining and a European Union-financed project to rehabilitate roadways have also been announced.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Guinea-Bissau is an electoral democracy. 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 five-year terms. Legislative and presidential elections held in 2008 and 2009 were declared free and fair by international observers. However, military intervention is a constant threat to democratically elected governments.

Political parties in Guinea-Bissau are competitive. While the PAIGC has been the dominant party for most of the country's history and currently holds power, it has also been in the opposition. Political parties and party leaders often suffer from military interference and shifting personal cliques.

Corruption is pervasive, driven in large part by the drug trade. Guinea-Bissau ranked 162 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perception Index (CPI).

Although the constitution provides for freedoms of speech and the press, the political disorder of 2009 led to grave violations. In March, former prime minister Jose Fadul and prominent lawyer Pedro Infanda were beaten and tortured respectively for criticizing the military. When Guinea-Bissau Human Rights League president Luis Vaz Martins condemned the violence, he was pursued by armed men who threatened to kill him. Journalists face harassment and practice self-censorship. There are a number of private and community radio stations in addition to the national broadcasters, and several private newspapers publish sporadically, largely due to financial constraints. 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. Nongovernmental organizations generally operate freely. Workers are allowed to form and join independent trade unions, though 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 no formal detention facilities. Judges and magistrates sometimes go for months without pay and are highly susceptible to corruption. A culture of impunity is prevalent, particularly in the military. A law passed in 2008 provides amnesty to persons who have committed political crimes. High-level investigations of the assassinations of the president and army chief in 2009 were deemed inconclusive.

With its weak institutions and porous borders, Guinea-Bissau has become a major transit point for Latin American drug cartels moving cocaine to Europe. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime has estimated that as much as \$2 billion in drugs are trafficked through the country each year. Powerful segments of the military, police, and government are reportedly complicit in the trade. Moreover, the absence of the rule of law has impeded legitimate private enterprise.

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

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 for education and jobs in the small formal sector. Women of certain ethnic groups cannot own or manage land or inherit property. Domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and early marriage are widespread.

**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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