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Freedom in the World 2012 - Guinea

2012 Scores

Status: Partly Free
Freedom Rating: 5.0
Civil Liberties: 5
Political Rights: 5

Overview

In July 2011, dissident army officers carried out an unsuccessful assassination attempt on President Alpha Condé. The run-up to December legislative elections – seen as the final step in cementing Guinea's return to civilian rule after a 2008 military coup – was marred by violence and political infighting, including a police crackdown on a September opposition protest in which at least two people were killed. The elections were ultimately postponed due to objections from the opposition.

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 election in 1993, but international observers said the poll was deeply flawed. Presidential, legislative, and municipal elections over the next 12 years were similarly marred by serious irregularities; all resulted in victories for Conté and the ruling party.

Security forces killed more than 130 people during nationwide antigovernment demonstrations in 2007, and martial law was declared. Union leaders agreed to suspend a general strike in exchange for Conté's pledge to implement political and economic reforms. Conté died in December 2008, 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, following signs that Camara might renege on his earlier promise not to run in a presidential election set for January 2010, opposition forces mounted a massive rally on September 28, 2009. The gathering was viciously suppressed by security forces, who killed more than 150 people and raped and beat hundreds of others. The international community

condemned the crackdown and imposed sanctions on the regime. In December, the commander of the presidential guard shot and seriously injured Camara.

While Camara recuperated in Burkina Faso, his deputy, General Sékouba Konaté, became interim president. In January 2010, Konaté negotiated an accord with Camara that established conditions for the upcoming presidential election. Prodemocracy opposition leader Jean-Marie Doré, who was named interim prime minister later in January, was charged with leading a power-sharing government and facilitating a return to civilian rule. The accord also created a broad-based, 155-member interim parliament, the National Transitional Council. In February, the International Criminal Court (ICC) found that the September 2009 massacre was a crime against humanity, and called on Guinean courts to try the perpetrators or allow the ICC to do so.

The presidential election took place in June 2010, though no candidate garnered more than 50 percent of the vote. In the November run-off election, longtime opposition leader Alpha Condé of the Rally of the Guinean People (RPG) defeated former prime minister Cellou Dalein Diallo of the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG), 52.5 percent to 47.5 percent. 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 resulted in the displacement of thousands of ethnic Peul supporters of Diallo.

Progress toward consolidating democratic gains in early 2011 was hampered by ongoing ethnic tensions, with Condé facing accusations of awarding government posts to members of his Malinké group. The new president also had a fraught relationship with the military, parts of which had difficulty accepting their diminished status under a civilian government. In July 2011, former army officers led an unsuccessful assassination attempt, firing rocket-propelled grenades into Condé's walled compound and exchanging fire with the presidential guard. Among the some 50 soldiers and civilians arrested for the attack was former army chief Nouhou Thiam and former members of Konaté's presidential guard.

At least two people were killed and scores more injured when police and opposition demonstrators clashed on September 27. The demonstrators, who gathered in several neighborhoods of Conakry, were demanding electoral reforms ahead of December legislative elections, and had planned to meet at the stadium where the September 28, 2009, massacre had taken place. The government responded by stationing police vehicles and paramilitary forces around the stadium. Security forces arrested 322 people during the demonstrations, according to the government.

In mid-December, parliamentary elections scheduled for December 29 were officially postponed, following objections from opposition members that they had not been consulted about the date; Condé agreed to delay the elections and to open dialogue with the opposition.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Guinea is not an electoral democracy. The president is elected by popular vote for up to two five-year terms. The legislature was dissolved in 2008, and replaced in 2010 by an appointed 155-member National Transitional Council that acts in its stead. A new date for the delayed legislative elections originally scheduled for December 29, 2011, was not decided by year's end. The 2010 election represented the country's first ever peaceful rotation of power. In May 2010, interim president Sékouba Konaté approved a new constitution that 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. That constitution remained in place at the end of 2011.

The main political parties are President Alpha Condé's RPG and former prime minister Cellou Dalein Diallo's opposition UFDG. There are more than 130 other registered parties, most of which have clear ethnic or regional bases.

Corruption has been cited as a serious problem by international donors, and many government activities are shrouded in secrecy. Despite its rich natural resources – Guinea

is the world's largest bauxite exporter – the majority of the population lives in poverty. A May 2011 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report called for the creation of an anticorruption commission to address misappropriation of the nation's vast mineral wealth. Condé has faced criticism for bringing corrupt officials from Conté's regime into his government. Guinea was ranked 164 out of 183 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index.

The 2010 constitution guarantees media freedom. In June 2010, the National Transitional Council passed two new media laws, one of which decriminalized press offenses and more clearly defined defamation provisions, while the other provided for the creation of a new media regulatory body. However, these laws had yet to be implemented under Condé. In 2011, Condé's government harassed, suspended, or arrested journalists at both independent and state-owned media outlets for reporting that was either critical of the government or favorable to the opposition. The regulatory body imposed a brief media blackout after the July assassination attempt. The state controls the national radio station and the only television broadcaster and daily newspaper. Due to the high illiteracy rate, most of the population accesses information via radio. Internet access is limited to urban areas, but has generally not been restricted by the government.

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, continued to improve in 2011.

Respect for freedoms of association and assembly, which had been seriously circumscribed under Conté and the military junta, improved in 2011. However, the crackdown on the September 2011 demonstrations was evidence that these freedoms have yet to be fully guaranteed. Trade unions enjoyed greater freedoms in 2011. There were reports of strike activities in the mining industry, including a violent protest by locals in September at a gold processing plant owned by Canada's Semafo against the use of expatriate workers.

The judicial system demonstrated a modest degree of independence beginning in 2010; a panel of magistrates was empowered to investigate the September 2009 massacre, though no perpetrators were brought to justice by the end of 2011. HRW's May 2011 report found that the courts are severely underfunded. 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. Amnesty International called for an investigation into the security forces' actions during the September 2011 demonstrations, alleging that they resorted to tactics used under past repressive regimes. 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 the 2010 presidential elections pitted the principally Peul supporters of 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. HRW 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.

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