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Freedom in the World 2012 - Guinea-Bissau

2012 Scores

Status: Partly Free
Freedom Rating: 4.0
Civil Liberties: 4
Political Rights: 4

Overview

In 2011, Guinea-Bissau – with the support of the international community – attempted to implement security sector reforms in the wake of a 2010 army mutiny. Tensions between Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior and President Malam Bacai Sanhá eased somewhat. However, in late December, Guinea-Bissau was rocked by military clashes that led to the arrest of Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto on charges of plotting a coup d'état.

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 prime minister and former military commander João Bernardo "Nino" Vieira toppled him.

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 Ansumane Mané. 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 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.

The PAIGC returned to power after winning a plurality of seats in the 2004 legislative elections, and Carlos Gomes Júnior became prime minister. Vieira returned from exile to stand in 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 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 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. 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.

In April 2010, mutinous soldiers led by the deputy chief of the armed forces, Antonio Indjai, detained Gomes as well as the armed forces chief, General José Zamora Induta, and 40 of his subordinates. Gomes was released the following day and remained in office, but Induta and the military intelligence chief, Colonel Samba Diallo, were detained without charges until late December. 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 Rear Admiral José Américo Na Tchuto as chief of the navy, just months after he had been named a drug kingpin by the U.S. Treasury Department.

The year 2011 was marked by some progress in security sector reform, which aimed to create a smaller, more professional army, improve conditions in the barracks, and provide adequate pensions to retiring members of security forces. Guinea-Bissau received technical and financial support to implement these reforms from several international actors, including the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, and the governments of Angola and Brazil. In view of the progress in security sector reform, donors such as the European Union gradually resumed the external assistance that is critical for the country's economic stability.

On December 26, armed military personnel attacked military targets, demanding pay increases. The clashes occurred while Sanhá was undergoing medical treatment in France. The days that followed saw a return to violent infighting between different branches of the military, and Admiral Na Tchuto was arrested for plotting a coup d'état.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Guinea-Bissau is not an electoral democracy. 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 president appoints the prime minister 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. In this context, Guinea-Bissau was ranked 44 out of 53 countries surveyed in the 2011 Ibrahim Index of African Governance.

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, and the judiciary – either through lack of resources or collusion in the crimes – did not investigate or prosecute corruption cases. UNIOGBIS and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) are helping the government tackle this growing problem as part of an Economic Community of West African States regional action plan. Guinea-Bissau was ranked 154 out of 183 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Although the constitution provides for freedoms of speech and of the press, these freedoms are not always respected. Journalists regularly face harassment and intimidation, especially regarding the military's alleged involvement in drug trafficking, and some practice self-censorship. In April 2011, the government threatened to suspend the newspaper *Última Hora* after it ran a front-page article accusing soldiers loyal to then-deputy armed forces chief of staff Antonio Indjai of the 2009 assassination of President João Bernardo "Nino" Vieira; the threat was subsequently dropped. Several journalists have become advisers of politicians, helping them manage their images. 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. 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 UNODC, the government rehabilitated the Mansôa and Bafatá prisons. These facilities, currently the only secure prisons in Guinea-Bissau, started receiving their first prisoners in June 2011. Judges and magistrates are poorly trained, irregularly paid, and highly susceptible to corruption and political pressure. A culture of impunity prevails, especially in the military. A commission formed in 2009 to probe that year's assassinations of Vieira and the chief of the armed forces, Batista Tagme Na Wai, did not make any progress in 2011.

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

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 (FGM), and early marriage are widespread. The National People's Assembly in June 2011 approved a law banning FGM; it provided for penalties of up to five years in prison for violators. Trafficking in persons, especially children, is a significant problem, despite efforts by NGOs to raise awareness, improve law enforcement, and repatriate victims.