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2014 Scores

Status: Partly Free

Freedom Rating (1 = best, 7 = worst): 5.0

Civil Liberties (1 = best, 7 = worst): 5

Political Rights (1 = best, 7 = worst): 5

OVERVIEW

In September, Guinea held its first parliamentary elections since a 2008 coup and the violent suppression of opposition protests that followed. The months preceding the elections were marred by violence, leaving dozens of people dead and hundreds injured, and the election results were criticized as unfair by a coalition of opposition parties.

Also during the year, Guinea continued to be plagued by corruption scandals, one of which involved an inquiry by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and there was little progress on the adjudication of atrocities committed by security forces during the 2009 antigovernment protests.

Despite its rich natural resources – Guinea is the world's largest exporter of bauxite, an aluminum ore – the majority of the population lives in poverty. Investment in the country's lucrative mining sector continues to lag as a result of ongoing political instability. Guinea's economic growth underperformed forecasts by a full percentage point in 2012, and the Ministry of Finance warned that investor wariness linked to political uncertainty threatened growth targets for 2013 as well.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 17 / 40 (+2)

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12 (+1)

The president is elected by popular vote for up to two five-year terms. The legislature was dissolved in 2008 amid a coup precipitated by the death of incumbent president Lansana Conté. The leader of the coup, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, was shot and seriously injured in late 2009 by a member of his own guard following the violent repression of an opposition rally, in which security forces killed more than 150 people and raped and beat hundreds of others. A political accord then facilitated a return to civilian rule in 2010, establishing a power-sharing government and an interim legislature, the 155-member National Transitional Council (CNT).

In a presidential election held later in 2010, 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) in a runoff vote, 52.5 percent to 47.5 percent. Most domestic and international observers validated the election, and Diallo eventually accepted the results.

The first parliamentary elections since the 2008 coup were held in September 2013 after repeated delays. The months preceding the elections were marred by violence, ethnic and religious tensions, and disputes over the rules governing the polls, which opposition parties alleged were designed to favor the RPG. Recurrent protests resulted in over 50 deaths between January and September; in the week before the elections, opposition protesters shot and killed a police officer in training, provoking clashes that left 70 people wounded.

The election results were released three weeks after ballots were cast. The RPG won a total of 53 seats in the National Assembly, which serves five-year terms. Of the assembly's 114 seats, 38 are awarded through single-member constituency races, and 76 are filled through nationwide proportional representation. The opposition UFDG won 37 seats, the Union of Republican Forces (URF) won 10, and a dozen smaller parties divided the remainder. In October, a coalition of opposition parties declined to participate in further vote counting and called for the results of the elections to be annulled. The National Electoral Commission (CENI) admitted to irregularities, but nevertheless defended the validity of the results.

The new constitution that was adopted as part of the political transition in 2010 established a number of independent entities to secure democratic rights, including the CENI, a national human rights body, and a constitutional court.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 8 / 16

The main political parties are the RPG and the UFDG. There are more than 130 registered parties, most of which have clear ethnic or regional bases. In October 2012, 44 political parties merged with the RPG to form the RPG-Rainbow coalition. Many of these parties signed a joint declaration in April 2013 that disavowed violence and fraud in the months leading up to the parliamentary elections, though the declaration did little to prevent abuses before or during the polls. During the elections, some 1,700 candidates vied for the 114 parliamentary seats.

UN-backed reforms continue to bring the country's notoriously undisciplined armed forces under civilian oversight and to prevent military meddling in politics. In February, President Condé appointed a close ally as head of the armed forces when a plane crash killed his predecessor and five other top army officials.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12 (+1)

Corruption is a serious problem, and many government activities are shrouded in secrecy. A scandal erupted in 2013 over former president Conté's decision to award a mining license worth billions of dollars to BSG Resources, a company owned by Israeli diamond magnate Beny Steinmetz. The FBI launched an investigation into the deal in January due to its possible violation of the United States's Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. Investigators accused Conté's wife, Mamadie Touré, of receiving kickbacks from BSG, and the Conté regime of destroying evidence that it received millions of dollars in bribes in return for its cooperation in the deal. President Alpha Condé has cooperated with the investigation in the expectation that the mining concession would ultimately be returned to state control. In the wake of the scandal, the government created a commission to reevaluate all 18 mining contracts in effect in Guinea. However, critics contend that the commission is powerless and that reform will depend on companies' willingness to voluntarily renegotiate the terms of their contracts.

Guinea was ranked 150 out of 177 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Civil Liberties: 24 / 40

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

The 2010 constitution guarantees media freedom. In June 2010, the CNT passed two new media laws: one decriminalized press offenses and more clearly defined defamation provisions, while the other created a new media regulatory body. Nevertheless, attacks on the press persist. In August 2013, soldiers in the president's personal security detail assaulted and closed a privately owned radio station for its coverage of local protests against a presidential visit, then beat several journalists associated with the station over the next several days. The press also came under increased scrutiny in the months preceding the September parliamentary polls, and some reporters were accused of intentionally inciting ethnic and partisan tensions.

There are more than 200 newspapers in Guinea, though most have small circulations. While the state controls the national radio station and the only television broadcaster, there are more than 30 radio stations. Due to the high illiteracy rate, most of the population accesses information through radio; internet access remains limited to urban areas.

Religious rights are respected in practice, although there have been rare 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, limited under previous authoritarian governments, continued to improve in 2013.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

Freedom of assembly is enshrined in the constitution but repressed in practice. Clashes between protesters and state security forces were routine in the months prior to the 2013 parliamentary elections, resulting in dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries. Freedom of association is generally respected, and there were no reports of government harassment of human rights activists in 2013.

Although workers are allowed to form trade unions, strike, and bargain collectively, they must provide 10 days' notice before striking, and strikes are banned in broadly defined essential services. Members of Guinea's labor unions were active in calling for the annulment of mining licenses awarded under dubious circumstances during Conté's presidency.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

The judicial system has demonstrated some degree of independence since 2010, and the government made modest efforts in 2013 to prosecute human rights violations committed over the last several years. In particular, these efforts have focused on identifying and charging the perpetrators of the massacre of opposition protesters at Conakry stadium in 2009. A panel of magistrates was empowered to investigate the massacre, and Lieutenant Colonel Moussa Tiégboro Camara and Colonel Abdoulaye Chérif Diaby were indicted in 2012 for their involvement. Another high-profile suspect, Lieutenant Colonel Claude Pivi – Guinea's minister for presidential security – was charged in June 2013. However, a lack of political and financial support has stymied progress in the investigations. Pivi remained at his post at year's end, a request to interview former military ruler Camara was still pending, and some suspects have languished in pretrial detention for longer than the two years permitted under Guinean law.

The courts are severely understaffed and underfunded, and security forces continue to engage in arbitrary arrests, torture of detainees, and extrajudicial executions with impunity. Prison conditions remain harsh and are sometimes life threatening.

While the law prohibits discrimination based on race or ethnicity, discrimination by the country's three major ethnic groups – the Peul, Malinké, and Soussou – in employment and place of residence is common. Tensions among these groups are common as well, and multiple incidents of violence before the parliamentary elections in September pitted progovernment Malinké tribesmen against the largely opposition-oriented Peul.

Antidiscrimination laws do not protect LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. Gay and lesbian sexual activity is a criminal offense that can be punished with up to three years in prison, and although this law is rarely enforced, LGBT people have been arrested on lesser charges.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

Freedom of movement is hindered by rampant crime and bribe-seeking soldiers at security checkpoints, and private business activity is hampered by corruption and political instability, among other factors. A new centralized Agency for the Promotion of Private Investments was established in December 2011 to improve the country's business environment by making the registration process faster and less expensive.

Societal discrimination against women is pervasive. While women have legal access to land, credit, and business, they are disadvantaged by inheritance laws and the traditional justice system. Guinean law allows husbands to forbid their wives from working. Rape and sexual harassment are prevalent but underreported due to fears of stigmatization. Security personnel openly raped more than 100 women during 2007 and 2009 crackdowns on protesters. Advocacy groups are working to eradicate the illegal but nearly ubiquitous practice of female genital mutilation, which according to some estimates affects up to 96 percent of all girls and women in Guinea.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received
Y = Best Possible Score
Z = Change from Previous Year

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