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Freedom in the World 2010 - Togo

Capital: Lome
Population: 6,619,000

Political Rights Score: 5 *
Civil Liberties Score: 4 *
Status: Partly Free

Ratings Change

Togo's civil liberties rating improved from 5 to 4 due to the launch of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate past human rights abuses, as well as a decrease in violence throughout the country.

Overview

The government oversaw notable reforms to the electoral code and election commission in 2009 as the country prepared for a presidential election in early 2010. The political environment was generally more peaceful than in previous years, and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was launched in May to address past human rights abuses. However, President Faure Gnassingbe's tolerance for dissent remained limited, and in April the army violently repressed an alleged coup plot led by his brother.

Originally part of a German colony that fell under the control of France after World War I, Togo gained its independence in 1960. Gnassingbe Eyadema, a demobilized sergeant, overthrew the civilian government in a bloodless coup in 1967. Using mock elections and a loyal military, he then presided over close to 40 years of repressive rule.

In 1991, under pressure from European governments, Eyadema agreed to set up a transitional government and prepare for free elections. However, his soldiers and secret police attacked opposition supporters, ultimately forcing thousands to flee abroad, and the transitional government was later dissolved. A series of elections were held during the 1990s under a new constitution approved in 1992, but military harassment and legal manipulation ensured that Eyadema and his Rally of the Togolese People (RPT) party remained in power. The president secured a new five-year term with 57 percent of the vote in 2003, defeating Emmanuel Bob-Akitani, who ran for the opposition Union of Forces for Change (UFC) after candidate Gilchrist Olympio was eliminated through a

manufactured technicality.

Eyadema died in February 2005, and the military quickly installed his son, Faure Gnassingbe, in his stead. Protests and opposition activity were formally banned, but demonstrations were nonetheless frequent, and the police response was brutal.

Under international pressure, Gnassingbe held an April 2005 election that confirmed him as president. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was the only international organization to endorse the poll, which featured over a million phantom voters on the electoral rolls, widespread intimidation, and a complete communications blackout on election day. Subsequent clashes between opposition supporters and security forces killed almost 500 people, injured thousands, and forced 40,000 to flee the country. According to the United Nations, most of the victims were killed by security forces in their homes.

In August 2006, the promise of renewed economic aid from the European Union (EU) – which had cut off support in 1993 – spurred the RPT and opposition parties to form a unity government and schedule legislative elections. The RPT won 50 of the 81 National Assembly seats in the October 2007 polls, with 85 percent voter turnout. The UFC secured 27 seats, while the Action Committee for Renewal (CAR), another opposition party, captured the remainder. Many observers noted that the lopsided electoral system enabled the RPT to win 62 percent of the seats with just 39 percent of the vote. Nonetheless, most international election monitors deemed the polls to have been transparent.

By the end of 2008, the EU had restored full economic aid, and the World Bank and International Monetary Fund also resumed cooperation that year. Relations with international donors were bolstered in part by Gnassingbe's appointment of Gilbert Fossoun Houngbo, a former UN Development Programme official, as prime minister in September.

In June 2009, the government, opposition parties, and civil society members reached agreement on the reformation of the electoral code and the composition of the main electoral commission in preparation for the 2010 presidential election. By October, the government had agreed to drop residency requirements that previously barred Gilchrist Olympio of the UFC from running, and the electoral code reform was adopted by year's end. However, in November both major opposition parties threatened to boycott the poll unless the government agreed to hold a runoff if no candidate won a majority in the first round.

While there were a number of minor confrontations between security forces and opposition demonstrators during 2009, Gnassingbe showed the least tolerance for opposition within the RPT and his own family. In April, the army raided the home of his elder brother, Kpatcha, on suspicion that he was planning a coup. The raid led to a gun battle that left three people dead. Kpatcha Gnassingbe, 18 soldiers, and 10 civilians were eventually arrested and charged with rebellion.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Togo is not an electoral democracy. Despite international consensus that the 2007 legislative elections were relatively free and fair, the 2005 presidential vote was blatantly fraudulent and marked by serious violence. The president is elected to five-year terms and appoints the prime minister. Members of the 81-seat, unicameral National Assembly are also elected to five-year terms, using a party-list system in multimember districts. The RPT remains the dominant party, but the opposition UFC and CAR parties won a significant share of seats in 2007.

Corruption continues to be a serious impediment to development, and the government took no significant steps to tackle the problem in 2009. Togo was ranked 111 of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of the press is guaranteed by law, though it is often disregarded. Blatant impunity for past crimes against journalists encourages self-censorship. Following the crackdown on Kpatcha Gnassingbe's alleged coup plot in April 2009, the government announced a temporary ban on all call-in radio and television programs, ostensibly to "prevent public opinion from prejudicing the case against Kpatcha." In October, a new law gave the state broadcasting council the power to impose severe penalties, including suspending publications for up to six months, withdrawing press cards, and seizing equipment, on journalists responsible for "serious errors." The government runs Togo's only daily newspaper, *Togo Press*, as well as the only national television station. Private print and broadcast outlets exist, but they are limited in capacity and often heavily politicized. Access to the internet is generally unrestricted, but few people use the medium due to high costs.

Constitutionally protected religious freedom is generally respected, though tensions sometimes arise between Togo's southern Christian majority and northern Muslim minority. Islam and Christianity are recognized as official religions, but other religious groups must register as associations. Political discussion is prohibited on religious radio and television outlets.

While government informers and security forces are believed to maintain a presence on university campuses and in other public places, ordinary citizens are now able to speak more openly than in previous years.

Respect for freedoms of assembly and association has improved since 2006. In 2009, a number of opposition and civil society demonstrations were held in Lome, and only a few drew a police response. Togo's constitution guarantees the right to form and join labor unions, and most workers have the right to strike, but collective bargaining is limited to a single nationwide wage agreement. Workers' right to organize is restricted in export-processing zones.

The judicial system is understaffed, inadequately funded, and heavily influenced by the presidency. While the death penalty was abolished in 2008, extrajudicial killings remain a serious concern. Human rights groups and victims have repeatedly called for the prosecution of those responsible for the campaign of killings, abductions, and intimidation linked to the 2005 presidential election. In May 2009, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formally launched, with representatives from academia, civic and religious groups, and business, but not from political parties. The commission does not have the power to prosecute perpetrators, and can only recommend such action.

Discrimination is common among the country's 40 ethnic groups, and tensions have historically divided the country between north and south. While President Faure Gnassingbe's father came from the northern Kabiye group and his mother is an Ewe from the south, Kpatcha Gnassingbe is fully Kabiye. The army is traditionally composed primarily of Kabiye soldiers.

Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, women's opportunities for education and employment are limited. Nonetheless, in 2009 Victoire Dogbe Tomegah became the first woman to serve as presidential chief of staff. Customary law discriminates against women in divorce and inheritance, giving them the legal rights of minors, and a husband may legally bar his wife from working or choose to receive her earnings. As in much of West Africa, child trafficking for the purpose of slavery is a serious problem in Togo. Prosecutions under a 2005 child-trafficking law are rare.

**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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