



# Freedom in the World 2015 - Central African Republic

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## 2015 Scores

Status: Not Free

Freedom Rating (1 = best, 7 = worst): 7.0

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

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

## OVERVIEW

The political landscape of the conflict-torn Central African Republic (CAR) took a potential step toward stability in January 2014 following the resignation of president and Muslim military leader Michel Djotodia and the election of interim president Catherine Samba-Panza. Samba-Panza has no affiliation to any of the rebel groups involved in the conflict.

Political instability, violence, religious cleansing, and the massive internal displacement of more than one million people in the ongoing conflict between the largely Muslim Séléka forces responsible for the 2013 coup and Christian militias known as anti-Balaka, who include supporters of ousted president François Bozizé, continued to worsen the country's humanitarian crisis. In February 2014, UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon launched the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Central African Republic (MINUSCA), authorizing more than 11,000 UN troops to join the African-led peacekeeping forces already stationed in CAR since 2013.

In July 2014, Séléka and anti-Balaka signed a cease-fire agreement, but implementation of the accord proved short-lived. Séléka military chief Joseph Zoundeiko ignored the cease-fire and called for a partition of the country along religious lines.

In September 2014, the International Criminal Court (ICC) opened a probe into the CAR conflict, citing widespread incidences of rape, murder, forced displacement, persecution, and pillaging since 2012. According to the Associated Press, more than 5,000 people were killed from December 2013 to September 2014, and this is likely a vast underestimation due to the difficulty of collecting accurate data.

## **POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES**

### **Political Rights: 0 / 40**

#### *A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12*

Until the start of the civil war in 2012, CAR experienced a decade of relative stability under President Bozizé. In March 2013, Séléka rebels seized the capital and Bozizé fled the country. Djotodia appointed himself president, suspending both the constitution and parliament. He appointed a weak transitional government and put a transitional charter into place. Djotodia announced his resignation in early January 2014, along with his prime minister, amid mounting international outcry over ballooning violence and human rights abuses. The National Transitional Council (CNT) elected Catherine Samba-Panza as interim president on January 23, 2014. She beat her opponent, Désiré Kolingba, in a second round of voting with 75 votes to his 53. She appointed André Nzapayeké as her prime minister. In August, Nzapayeké resigned in the wake of the broken cease-fire deal. Mahamat Kamoun was appointed as the country's first Muslim prime minister, though he lacked Séléka's support.

The current parliament is the 105-seat CNT appointed after the coup. The CNT is charged with creating a new constitution. In December 2014 the UN Development Programme (UNDP) announced that it will support the organization of a constitutional referendum and parliamentary and presidential elections by August 2015.

#### *B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 1 / 16*

Political participation came to a standstill in 2013 when Séléka took over the government, armed groups proliferated, and sectarian tensions and violence escalated. The situation did not change significantly in 2014, as violence between Séléka and anti-Balaka continued throughout the year. While the main political parties – such as the National Convergence "Kwa Na Kwa" associated with ex-president Bozizé, the Movement for the Liberation of the Central African People, and the Central African Democratic Rally – remain legal, the CNT is not elected. No laws prohibit new parties, but the transitional government and instability make party competition difficult. Elections are scheduled for 2015, but no campaigning occurred during 2014. Due to the sectarian and religious nature of the political tensions, political pluralism and participation have been heavily curtailed.

#### *C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12*

The 2013 coup removed all elected office holders from power and imposed a nontransparent, unelected regime. The security situation means the new government cannot provide basic protection and services.

Until the coup, corruption remained pervasive in all branches of government, despite some steps toward reform in recent years. Diamonds accounted for about half of the country's export earnings, but a large percentage circumvented official channels. Fighting corruption is not possible under the current security situation. In 2014, President Samba-Panza was implicated in a corruption scandal involving embezzlement of more than one billion francs (\$2 million) given to the CAR by Angola. CAR was ranked 150 of 175 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

### **Discretionary Political Rights Question B: -1 / 0**

The deliberate targeting of Christian civilians by Séléka has sparked unprecedented clashes between the country's Muslim and Christian populations. The creation of the Christian anti-Balaka militia in 2013 has led to regular targeting of Muslim civilians as well, including waves of anti-Muslim violence in early 2014. Thousands from each group have gone into hiding or fled abroad. Those remaining live in enclaves.

### **Civil Liberties: 6 / 60**

#### *D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16*

The 2004 constitution guarantees freedom of the press, though criminal penalties remain for some defamation charges. Given the security situation, these have not been enforced, and there has been some easing of the environment for journalism since President Samba-Panza came to power. Nevertheless, reporting is extremely difficult. French photojournalist Camille LePage was killed in an ambush in the western Bouar region in May 2014 while embedded with the anti-Balaka. Désiré Sayenga, editor at *Le Démocrate* newspaper, and René Padou of the Protestant radio station Voix de la Grâce were killed in May.

The conflict has forced most community radio stations to close, and residents outside the capital have very little access to media. Very few people have access to the internet.

The free practice of religion has become impossible. Since the Séléka takeover, sectarian violence between Muslims, mostly aligned with Séléka, and the country's Christian population has increased dramatically. During 2014, clashes between Christian and Muslim groups remained constant and severe, with thousands killed.

Academic freedom was generally respected under Bozizé, but since the start of civil conflict universities have had difficulty functioning. By early 2013, as many as half of the country's schools were closed and taken over by militia groups; universities shut down as well.

The coup had a chilling effect on private political discussion. In June 2014, the Ministry of Communication temporarily banned text messaging. However, some private discussion persists in practice, as the government of President Samba-Panza does not have the means to curtail it.

#### *E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 1 / 12*

The security situation has effectively curtailed freedom of assembly and made it impossible for nongovernmental organizations to operate effectively. The ongoing violence has also made it difficult for unions to function properly.

#### *F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16*

Precoup corruption, political interference, and lack of training in the judiciary worsened under the influence of the Djotodia administration. There are widespread reports of atrocities, including torture and extrajudicial killings, committed by both Séléka and anti-Balaka militias. These problems persist under the government of President Samba-Panza, which does not have the resources to enact reforms.

In June 2014, Samba-Panza requested ICC help in dealing with ethnic crimes given that the ongoing violence prevents local courts from investigations. In September, the ICC opened a probe into the CAR conflict, citing widespread incidences of rape, murder, forced displacement, persecution, and pillaging since 2012. The humanitarian situation is dire. In December 2014, the United Nations estimated that more than 500,000 people had been internally displaced, and more than 414,000 others have fled to neighboring countries.

Particularly violent clashes between anti-Balaka and police forces occurred in the first two weeks of October, with at least 13 people killed in Bangui and dozens kidnapped. At least 28 people were killed in December during further clashes between anti-Balaka and Séléka militias.

MISCA forces have been accused of numerous human rights abuses as well. In a March 2014 incident, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported at least 24 people killed and more than 100 wounded after Chadian soldiers opened fire on civilians in Bangui. HRW criticized the disappearance and presumed executions of at least 11 civilians from the town of Boali the same month. These abuses have not been investigated.

Same-sex sexual acts are illegal, punishable by fines and imprisonment, though there have not been reports that this law has been enforced. However, societal discrimination against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people remains strong, and many hide their gender identity.

#### *G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 1 / 16*

Widespread violence and religious persecution have severely hindered the movement of citizens and undermined the protection of private property. Large areas of the country are unreachable due to the intense violence. Attacks on the airport during clashes between anti-Balaka and police forces in early October 2014 caused it to close temporarily. In November, Séléka rebels blocked two highways through Bangui and exchanged fire with UN peacekeepers.

Private businesses and homes are regularly looted and destroyed by militants on both sides of the conflict. The agricultural economy, the livelihood of 75 percent of the population, has come to a halt, with 77 percent of livestock destroyed and food reserves down by 40 percent. Since the coup, Séléka forces have taken control of the diamond industry, and the government cannot protect or regulate the extraction of natural resources. The Kimberley Process, a multigovernment scheme to stop the trade of "conflict diamonds," suspended exports from CAR in May 2013.

Even before the coup, constitutional guarantees for women's rights were not enforced, especially in rural areas. No specific law criminalizes domestic abuse, which is widespread, and there is a high incidence of sexual violence against women by state and nonstate actors.

### Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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