

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Land:	Guinea
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Guinea (2006)

Polity:

No polity available

Political Rights:

6

Civil Liberties:

5

Status:

Not Free

Population:

9,500,000

GNI/Capita:

\$430

Life Expectancy:

49

Religious Groups:

Muslim (85 percent), Christian (8 percent), indigenous beliefs (7 percent)

Ethnic Groups:

Peuhl (40 percent), Malinke (30 percent), Soussou (20 percent), other (10 percent)

Capital:

Conakry

Additional Info:

[Freedom in the World 2005](#)

[Freedom of the Press 2005](#)

[Nations in Transit 2004](#)

[Countries at the Crossroads 2005](#)

Overview

The government of President Lansana Conte announced that local elections would be held in December 2005. The polls are considered to be a test of Guinea's commitment to democratic reform as concerns mount over the country's potential transition should the ailing Conte die before his term expires in 2010. Conte survived an assassination attempt in January 2005. In an effort to win back much needed foreign aid, the government in August liberalized Guinea's broadcast media.

Under Ahmed Sekou Toure, Guinea declared independence from France in 1958. Alone among France's many African colonies, Guinea rejected continued close ties with France. Paris retaliated quickly, removing or destroying all "colonial property" and enforcing an unofficial but devastating economic boycott. Sekou Toure's one-party rule became highly repressive, and Guinea was increasingly impoverished under his Soviet-style economic policies. Lansana Conte seized power in a 1984 coup and was nearly toppled by a 1996 army mutiny. In the midst of general looting in Conakry, he rallied loyal troops and reestablished his rule.

Conte was returned to office in a 1998 presidential election that was marked by state patronage, media that strongly backed the incumbent, broad manipulation of the electoral process, and opposition disunity. Although the polls were an improvement over past elections, hundreds of people were arrested after the vote, including the official third-place finisher, Alpha Conde. The June 2002 People's National Assembly elections, in which the ruling Progress and Unity Party easily won a two-thirds majority, were not considered

fair because of an opposition boycott and the government's control of the electoral process. Conte won a third presidential term in a December 2003 election that was boycotted by the country's major opposition parties and that international observers criticized as neither free nor fair.

Guinea's first municipal elections in a decade were scheduled for December 2005. They are among reforms Guinea has begun taking to win back foreign aid that has dropped off because of concerns over the country's record on governance and human rights. Donors have also called on Guinea to revise electoral lists and set up an independent electoral commission.

The Brussels-based International Crisis Group said in a June 2005 report, "Stopping Guinea's Slide," that the local elections would determine the quality

of Guinean democracy: "If they fail, the presidential succession will likely be disastrous." The group maintained that Guinea risked becoming West Africa's "next failed state" unless efforts were made to assure a peaceful transition following Conte's departure, arguing that tension between military-backed political agitators and the opposition could split the country along ethnic lines or open it up to former fighters in the West African region.

Conte survived an assassination attempt in Conakry in January 2005 when armed men fired several shots at the car in which he was riding. He has been in poor health in recent years and has sought treatment abroad; reports citing diplomats say Conte suffers from diabetes and a suspected heart ailment. Investigators with the Special Court for Sierra Leone have said that former Liberian president Charles Taylor was behind the assassination attempt; Conte had allegedly backed a group of rebels who ousted Taylor in 2003. In recent years, Guinean fighters have participated in conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, while Liberian and Sierra Leonean fighters have fought in Guinea.

Guinea is one of the world's largest producers of bauxite and is also rich in gold, diamonds, and iron ore. However, corruption, mismanagement, and conflict have negatively affected the economy. In the past two years, the government has struggled to stem mounting public discontent over high prices for staple goods, which have been blamed on corruption. The World Bank in 2004 halted the disbursement of further loans to Guinea and suspended field projects following the government's failure to pay off debt-servicing arrears. Lenders have cited Guinea for bad governance, lack of transparency, corruption, and improper economic practices.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Citizens of Guinea cannot change their government democratically. A referendum held in 2001 proposed to extend presidential terms from five to seven years, allow for unlimited terms in office, and eliminate presidential age limits. The provisions in the referendum were approved in a flawed vote that was boycotted by members of the opposition and marked by low turnout. The referendum also granted President Lansana Conte the power to appoint local officials and Supreme Court judges. The 114 members of the unicameral People's National Assembly are elected by direct, popular vote to serve five-year terms. The prime minister is head of government.

The government controls the national election commission, as well as registration and election procedures, including the casting and counting of votes. In the December 2003 presidential election, Conte, who reportedly captured more than 90 percent of the vote, faced only one relatively unknown opponent in the poll; a Supreme Court panel had disqualified six other presidential hopefuls for reasons ranging from a failure to pay the application fee to questionable dates of birth. Main opposition parties boycotted the election, and members of the opposition accused Conte of taking control of the electoral commission and of using state funds to finance his campaign. Although the government said turnout was more than 80 percent, human rights groups estimated that it was less than 15 percent and cited several instances of blatant

vote rigging.

A key opposition leader, Alpha Conde, returned to Guinea in 2005 after two years in self-imposed exile. He was arrested in the run-up to the 1998 presidential election and was charged with plotting to topple Conte. He spent more than two years in prison before being pardoned by presidential decree.

The cabinet and armed forces leadership include members of all major ethnic groups in Guinea, but a disproportionate number of senior military officers come from Conte's Soussou ethnic group. Politics and parties are largely defined along ethnic lines.

Corruption has been cited as a serious problem in the country by both the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Guinea was not ranked by Transparency International in its 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index.

The government has wide powers to bar any communications that insult the president or disturb the peace, and defamation and slander are considered criminal offenses. A restrictive press law allows the government to censor or shutter publications on broad and ill-defined bases. Several newspapers in Conakry offer sharp criticism of the government despite frequent harassment. The print media have little impact in rural areas, where incomes are low and illiteracy is high. Foreign-based publications, such as the French news weekly *Jeune Afrique L'Intelligent*, are occasionally seized by authorities and prevented from being distributed if they carry articles on sensitive topics, such as the president's health. Internet access is unrestricted.

In August, Conte signed a decree to end a decades-long state monopoly on broadcasting by allowing private radio and television to operate. The decree excludes political parties and religious movements from broadcasting. "This is an important first step, but the true test will be whether the government uses political criteria in granting licenses, and whether stations are allowed to broadcast freely," said the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

Constitutionally protected religious rights are respected in practice, although the main body representing the country's Muslims, who constitute a majority of the population, is government controlled. In January, authorities briefly detained dozens of people at a mosque located near the site of the alleged assassination attempt against Conte.

Academic freedom is generally respected, but the government influences hiring and the content of curriculums. A handful of students were detained in March following a walkout by students at Guinea's main university. Authorities disbanded the university's student union after the strike, which was the latest in a series of protests against plans to demolish dormitories.

Several statutes restrict freedom of association and assembly in apparent contravention of constitutional guarantees. The government may ban any gathering that "threatens national unity." Nevertheless, several human rights groups and many other nongovernmental groups operate openly in Guinea. The

constitution provides for the right to form and join unions. Several labor confederations compete and have the right to bargain collectively. Unions in rural areas sometimes face harassment and government interference. Police fired on demonstrators demanding their wages in a rural mining town in December 2004, killing one man. There were several strikes and demands for higher wages by miners, teachers, and others in 2005.

While nominally independent, the judicial system remains affected by corruption, nepotism, ethnic bias, and political interference, and lacks resources and training. Minor civil cases are often handled by traditional ethnic-based courts. Arbitrary arrests and detention are common, and there are reports of persistent maltreatment and torture of detainees. Prison conditions are harsh and sometimes life threatening. Security forces commit abuses, including torture and extrajudicial execution, with impunity.

Ethnic identification is strong in Guinea, and there is widespread societal discrimination by members of all major ethnic groups. The ruling party is more ethnically integrated than opposition parties, which have clear regional and ethnic bases. The International Crisis Group has warned that squabbling for power among Guinea's three main ethnic groups-the Soussou, the Peuhl, and the Malinke-and among the country's different political and military factions could plunge the country into the kind of chaos seen in neighboring Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire.

Women have far fewer educational and employment opportunities than men, and many societal customs discriminate against women. Constitutionally protected women's rights are often unrealized. Women have access to land, credit, and business, but inheritance laws favor men. Violence against women is said to be prevalent. Spousal abuse is a criminal offense, but security forces rarely intervene in domestic matters. Women's groups are working to eradicate the illegal, but widespread, practice of female genital mutilation.