



A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSITION IN GUINEA CONAKRY: TWO YEARS AFTER THE COUP



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Introduction

Two years ago, on September 5, 2021, Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya of the Guinea special forces led a coup d'état and overthrew President Alpha Conde. The latter, a long-term opposition leader who eventually ascended to power in 2010, secured a contentious third term in 2020 by implementing a new and controversial constitution. This new constitution effectively weakened presidential term limits, resulting in widespread political turmoil throughout the country.

The coup leaders, who called themselves the National Committee for Reconciliation and Development (CNRD), accused Conde's government of corruption and mismanagement. Colonel Doumbouya announced the takeover, dissolved the government, constitution, and all institutions, citing reasons such as the trampling of citizens' rights and freedoms and disrespect for democratic principles and the rule of law.

On September 28, 2021, the CNRD unveiled its transitional charter defining the responsibilities and tasks of the interim government, with Doumbouya appointed as its leader. The coup faced significant international criticism, leading to Guinea's suspension from ECOWAS on September 8. Subsequently, on September 16, targeted sanctions were imposed on the coup leaders and their families, including travel bans and asset freezes.¹

According to a member of the National Committee for the Transition (CNT), the legislative body of the transition, the interim government had initially submitted a proposal for a 39-month transition. The CNT examined it, reduced it to 36 months, and adopted it. The interim president declined to promulgate it due to international pressure. The African Union, the European Union, ECOWAS, and Guinea's technical and financial partners found this 36-month period unacceptable. Finally, in October 2022, ECOWAS announced that "In a dynamic compromise, experts from ECOWAS and Guinea have jointly developed a consolidated timeline of the transition spread over twenty-four months" starting in January 2023.²

Through several key informant interviews, this report takes stock of the state

¹"World Report 2022: Rights Trends in Guinea," Human Rights Watch, January 13, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/guinea>.

²Key Informant interview with Hon. Salia Camara, member of Guinea Interim Parliament (CNT), May 2023



of the transition two years after the coup and one year before the end of the agreed timeline of the transition. The interview data is complemented by an analysis of documents pertaining to the transition. This report highlights the internal dynamics of the state of the transition and discusses the chances for a successful transition toward a civilian-led, democratic Guinea.

Promising Start and Institutional Overhaul

On November 25, 2022, under the leadership of Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya, the CNRD initiated an inclusive inter-Guinean dialogue, a platform aiming to foster constructive discussions between the government, political parties, and civil society around the transition. The transitional government appointed three women to lead the dialogue: Dr. Makalé Traoré, Madam Hadja Aicha Bah and Madam Guilao Josephine Lenaud. All three appointees are former ministers who are knowledgeable of Guinean politics.

However, three major political parties including the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) of Cellou Dalein Diallo, The Rally of the Guinean People (RPG) of former President Alpha Condé, and the Republican Union Forces (UFR) of Sidya Touré opted to boycott the dialogue. Nonetheless, the dialogue concluded following a nearly month-long consultation with the other parties and civil society. The facilitators unveiled the outcomes of the dialogue to the public on December 21 during a ceremony conducted at the presidential palace.³ The dialogue has unveiled 10 steps of the transition timetable. These steps are the general population census, the administrative census for civil registration purposes, the establishment of the electoral register, the drafting of the new constitution, the organization of the referendum, the elaboration of organic laws, the organization of local and then legislative elections, the establishment of national institutions derived from the new constitution, and finally, the organization of the presidential election.⁴

The initial months after Colonel Doumbouya's arrival at the head of the Guinea looked promising. The CNRD liberated political leaders, including Ousmane Gaoual Diallo, Ibrahima Chérif Bah, Etienne Soropogui,

³Key Informant interview with Hon. Salia Camara, member of Guinea Interim Parliament (CNT), May 2023

⁴Christian Eboulé, "Guinée : Une Fin de Transition En Dix Étapes et de Nombreuses Interrogations," TV5MONDE, March 30, 2023, <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/guinee-une-fin-de-transition-en-dix-etapes-et-de-nombreuses-interrogations-207995>.



Mamadou Cellou Balde and Abdoulaye Bah who were jailed by the overthrown president. Amnesty International applauded the decision to either drop charges or proceed with trials for at least 97 individuals including the above politicians who had been held in pretrial detention since their arrest during the protest against the presidential election in October. For Amnesty International, this development is a significant stride towards safeguarding liberties and ensuring fair trial principles in Guinea.⁵

Simultaneously, Doumbouya embarked on a resolute mission to enact substantial institutional reforms, commencing on October 12, 2021, within the military establishment. By capitalizing on this opportunity skillfully, he orchestrated the retirement of forty generals and two admirals, strategically positioning trusted confidants in crucial positions. Furthermore, he undertook the reorganization of the administrative framework, state-owned enterprises and tactfully recalled thirty ambassadors, fostering a comprehensive transformation across various domains. According to Dr. Saikou Oumar Baldé, a specialist in Guinea political affairs, these initial actions garnered popular support, as they reflected the aspirations of the general population for a profound and positive societal transformation.⁶

To combat the endemic corruption, Colonel Doumbouya unveiled a formidable weapon: the CRIEF, an acronym for the Court for the Repression of Economic and Financial Offenses. This judicial institution swiftly transformed into a nightmare for the barons of the deposed RPG regime who brazenly conducted construction projects and investments, shielded by a cloak of impunity. The CNRD vowed that with the CRIEF in action, no miscreant shall escape unscathed from the clutches of justice.

Besides the comprehensive institutional reforms and the anti-corruption initiative, significant development projects were initiated, focusing on key infrastructures such as roads, schools, and hospitals. These endeavours aimed to enhance the socio-economic landscape of Guinea and propel its progress forward.

⁵Amnesty International, “Guinée. La Récente Libération de Prisonniers Ne Doit Pas Faire Oublier Le Maintien En Détention de Près de 60 Autres Depuis La Période Électorale,” Amnesty International, August 17, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/press-release/2021/07/guinee-la-liberation-de-prisonniers-ne-doit-pas-faire-oublier/>.

⁶Informant interview with Dr. Saikou Balde. Professor and Specialist of Guinea, April 2023



Furthermore, despite facing an ECOWAS embargo, General Doumbouya managed to reduce the public debt from 7.203 billion dollars in the first quarter to 7.018 billion in the following quarter, while successfully revitalizing the Guinean Franc. However, those macro-economic successes did not directly translate into improved living conditions for the people, as global inflation continued to impact Guinean consumers, leading to increased prices of basic consumer goods. The CNRD initially reduced fuel prices by 9%, but subsequent external factors, such as the Ukraine crisis fallout, forced the government to raise prices by 16%. Consequently, the strong support the government once enjoyed among civil society organizations and the Guinean youth began to erode gradually.⁷

Discordant Voices

Historically, the political landscape of Guinea has persistently exhibited identity-driven polarizations. Ethnocentrism, tribalism, regionalism, and communalism are entrenched cleavages that are hard to part with. The closed authoritarian regime (1958-1984), the authoritarian electoral regime (1993-2008), and the open multiparty regime (2010-2013) have all instrumentalized ethnic identity to shape their rule.⁸ Despite the transitional government's cautious approach, the deep-rooted identity cleavages within Guinea's societal fabric persist. These divisions have become so ingrained in the Guinean collective consciousness that every political action is inevitably interpreted and filtered through the lens of these cleavages. While the transitional government may strive to transcend these divisions, the overarching influence of identity-based perceptions continues to shape the country's understanding and evaluation of political developments.

General Doumbouya's purportedly tranquil transition in Guinea, when contrasted with the transitional regimes in Mali and Burkina Faso, may seem deceptively calm to external observers. Within the country's borders, an intricate internal dynamic is challenging this perception. The military interim government, accused by Guinea's opposition of stifling dissent, faces staunch opposition and a lack of collaboration regarding the conditions of the transitional phase. Leading the charge is the National Front for the Defense of the Constitution (FNDC), an alliance comprising opposition parties and

⁷Idrissa Keita, "Guinée: Quel Bilan Du CNRD Après Un an de Transition," Afrimag, September 12, 2022, <https://afrimag.net/guinee-quel-bilan-du-cnr-d-apres-un-an-de-transition/>.

⁸Diallo, Ousmane. 2013. Instrumentalisation des identités ethniques et régimes politiques : le cas de la Guinée postcoloniale. p. 19 https://ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/24109/1/Ousmane_Diallo_2013_memoire.pdf



civil society organizations, whose recurrent mobilization manifests in protest rallies.

In particular, Colonel Doumbouya's earnest endeavour to cleanse the Guinean political arena faces a substantial hurdle attributable to the entrenched and wide-ranging corruption permeating the state apparatus. As one informant put it, "Removing Alpha Conde did not mean removing the dirty system President Conde combated and the even dirtier one his decade in power contributed to establish."⁹ Unsurprisingly, the ambitious restorative project pursued by the CNRD encounters noteworthy resistance despite its initial surge of popular support during its early months.

Interestingly, the dissension predominantly arises from the political elite rather than primarily from the civilian population, with the former regarding the CNRD's investigations into recent instances of misappropriation of state funds as a malicious witch-hunt. In fact, an Afro Barometer survey found that a whopping 54% of Guineans "agree" or "strongly agree" with the performance of the President of the Transition in the exercise of his functions. Over the same period, the same survey found that at least 47% held the same view for the National Council of the Transition. Still, 72.65% of respondents said they believe their country is going on the wrong direction while 30.5% of them believe it is going in the right direction.¹⁰

The CNRD's assumed mantle of a rectifying interim government, seeking to construct a constitutional bridge and diligently laying the institutional groundwork for a civilian-led democracy, faces several challenges.

The implementation of the agenda of the interim government presented in ten (10) key action points requires the support from multilateral and bilateral donors of Guinea. This is leading some Guinean observers to question the interim government diverting national resources to development projects such as the construction of roads.¹¹

In any case, coup d'états and interim military governments are not new phenomena in Guinea. Also, from its independence in 1958 to 2020, Guinea

⁹Informant interview with Sally Bilally Sow, Civil society leader, Civictech Guinée, May 21, 2023

¹⁰Afrobarometer, survey Round 9, 2022, p.11 https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/GUI_AB_R9_Resume-des-resultats_9Feb23.pdf

¹¹Informant interview with Sally Bilally Sow, Civil society leader, Civictech Guinée, May 21, 2023



had written and adopted five (5) constitutions.¹² The one being written now will be the sixth constitution. To date, there has not been a single power handover from an elected president to the next.¹³ So the constitutional project of the current interim government which will (at least in theory) guarantee the principles of democracy in Guinea appears like a déjà vu for most observers.

Growing Restriction of the Civic and Media Space

Despite the previous regime's efforts to suppress it, Guinea's media landscape remains politically diverse, showcasing the resilience and multiplicity of political voices within the nation, as highlighted by RSF. The enactment of the press freedom law in 2010, a pivotal milestone that abolished imprisonment for press-related offences, marked a substantial advancement in protecting journalists' rights. However, despite the existence of this pluralistic media environment, Guinea's press freedom ranking in the RSF index for 2022 stood at a modest 84th out of 180 countries. In 2023, the country lost one place in its ranking, indicating a worsening situation.

The transition is lacking foresight in alienating the press and turning it against itself. On May 18, 2023, a team of gendarmes claiming to act on behalf of the Post and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (ARPT) dismantled and carried away the transmitters of Sabari FM, a private radio close to the deposed Condé regime. The following day, civil society and media houses denounced internet throttling, which started at the beginning of the week when they had called for protests in the following days.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the government argues that it is not responsible for any attempts to slow down or cut the internet.

On May 23, this year major press organizations, including public and private TV, radio, newspapers, and news sites declared "a No Media Day", a one-day boycott of news to protest pressures from the authorities. According to AFP, the announcement of the protest came in response to the government's action of closing two radio stations belonging to the Afric Vision Group, imposing limitations on access to widely used websites and social media platforms and making threats of media shutdown against any entity deemed

¹²Bissiriou Kandjoura. 2021 La difficile Stabilisation du Regime Politique Guinéen. hal-03339945

¹³Saikou Balde, 2020 Les chemins ambigus de la démocratie ouest-africaine entre progrès et dérives autoritaires La Côte d'Ivoire, la Guinée et le Mali à la croisée des chemins

¹⁴Key informant Interview with Alfa Diallo, Association des blogueurs de Guinée, Sept 5 2023



detrimental to “national unity.”¹⁵

This protest was a direct response to Government spokesman and telecommunications minister Ousmane Gaoual Diallo who warned a few days earlier that media that bring dissension in the country will be shut down. Guinean media have been vocal against the ARPT’s perceived overreach. They denounced this censorship as threatening democracy and declared they would not participate in the government’s information and communication event this week.¹⁶

Besides the restriction of media, the CNRD also limited the activities of political parties to their headquarters. It prohibited civil society and political parties from demonstrating in the public space. The government argues that such measures are taken to encourage constructive dialogue and harmonious collaboration toward a transfer of power to a civilian government.¹⁷ Meanwhile, opposition parties and some civil society reject it as a restriction of civil liberties.

In such an intricate socio-political terrain, prospects of a continued meaningful dialogue are hampered by the lack of trust between the political actors and media. A demonstration held in February 2023, demanding the release of political prisoners and the restoration of civilian rule, tragically claimed the lives of two civilians on the outskirts of Conakry, the nation’s capital.

On May 17, 2023, the army was requisitioned to counter demonstrations staged by the FNDC. The minister of the territorial administration in a television announcement called the demonstration an urban guerrilla. The recent wave of arrests targeting prominent political figures and dissenting civil society actors and the initiation of judicial investigations have created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation in the country.

Besides, the recent deployment of the red berets in maintaining security served as a grim reminder of the 2009 massacre, causing fear and apprehension among the Guinean population. Under Captain Moussa Dadis

¹⁵AfricaNews, “‘A Day without Press’ in Guinea as the Media Snubs Ruling Junta,” Africanews, May 24, 2023, <https://www.africanews.com/2023/05/24/a-day-without-press-in-guinea-as-the-media-snubs-ruling-junta/>.

¹⁶Abdoulaye Sadio Diallo, “Journée Sans Presse En Guinée Pour Dire ‘Non’ Aux Pressions – DW – 23/05/2023,” dw.com, May 24, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/fr/guinee-journee-sans-presse-protestation-journalistes-militaires-pouvoir-gouvernement/a-65712499>.

¹⁷Key Informant interview with Hon. Salia Camara, member of Guinea Interim Parliament (CNT), May 2023



Camara's leadership, the members of the beret rouge unit were involved in the tragic events of September 28 2009, when over 150 civilian lives were lost, and women and girls suffered countless cases of sexual violence during protests against military rule. The reappearance of the beret rouge intensifies deep-rooted concerns among certain Guineans, who dread a repetition of past atrocities and the ongoing erosion of their rights and safety.

Conclusion

Guinea is the first Francophone African country to obtain independence from France in 1958. The country had never had a democratic political transition of power. Two years after Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya led a coup d'état in Guinea, the nation stands at a critical juncture in its transition to democracy. The overthrow of President Alpha Conde and the subsequent establishment of the National Committee for Reconciliation and Development (CNRD) marked a significant turning point in Guinea's political history. However, as the agreed timeline for the transition draws closer, challenges and uncertainties loom over the future of democracy in the country.

As the interim government navigates its path to democracy, it faces significant challenges and uncertainties. The transitional government's ability to address corruption, promote inclusivity, and engage in meaningful dialogue will be crucial for its success. However, the recent growing restriction of civic and media space raises concerns about the preservation of democratic principles. To ensure a successful transition, it is imperative that the transitional government works towards building trust, fostering inclusivity, and upholding the rights and safety of its citizens. It is urgent to restore the right to protest, explicitly stated in the transition charter. The international community's support and vigilance in monitoring Guinea's progress will also play a pivotal role in shaping the success of the transition and the country's democratic future.

International partners, including the United Nations, the International Organization of Francophonie (OIF), and France, have actively engaged experts to assist local counterparts in formulating a new constitution.

²Ibid

³All graphs have a linear trendline labeled as 'Linear.' The trend line applies only to the data indicated. In this graph, the trend line is for Overall Fatalities.

⁴"Why Fuel Prices Increased to N617 per Litre - NNPC," accessed July 22, 2023,

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/610502-why-fuel-prices-increased-to-n617-per-litre-annpc.html>.

⁵Amaka Anagor, "SMEs, Startups Facing Challenges as Nigeria's Inflation Soars – Jiji Nigeria," *Businessday NG*, July 21, 2023, <https://businessday.ng/companies/article/smes-startups-facing-challenges-as-nigerias-inflation-soars-jiji-nigeria/>.



However, the Guinean lack of complete transparency during the process already represents a significant obstacle to its success. A notable concern until September 2022, was the reluctance of the National Committee for Development Rally (CNRD), the interim government, to disclose its membership list despite opposition requests. This opacity raised suspicions that undisclosed CNRD members may seek key positions at the conclusion of the transition and that the CNRD will exert its influence to ensure their victory. Such plausible agendas could undermine the integrity of the transition process and the legitimacy of a government that will emerge at the end of the transition.

Furthermore, excluding members from certain opposition parties from participating in the constitution-drafting process could potentially hinder the outcome. Their absence limits the inclusivity and diversity of perspectives, diminishing the legitimacy of the new constitution.

²Ibid

³All graphs have a linear trendline labeled as 'Linear.' The trend line applies only to the data indicated. In this graph, the trend line is for Overall Fatalities.

⁴"Why Fuel Prices Increased to N617 per Litre - NNPC," accessed July 22, 2023,

<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/610502-why-fuel-prices-increased-to-n617-per-litre-annpc.html>.

⁵Amaka Anagor, "SMEs, Startups Facing Challenges as Nigeria's Inflation Soars – Jiji Nigeria," *Businessday NG*, July 21, 2023, <https://businessday.ng/companies/article/smes-startups-facing-challenges-as-nigerias-inflation-soars-jiji-nigeria/>.

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