



Country Profile: Guinea-Bissau

Since independence in 1974, Guinea-Bissau has endured military revolts, a civil war and several coups, the latest one in April 2012.

After a long struggle for independence, spearheaded by the Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), Guinea Bissau became independent from Portugal in 1974. The left-wing post-independence leader Luis Cabral became the first president of the country. Under his rule, several thousand local soldiers who had fought along with the Portuguese army against the PAIGC guerrillas were slaughtered. The most notorious massacre took place in Bissorã.

In 1980, Luis Cabral was overthrown by a coup led by Joao Vieira, who would lead the country until 1998. In 1994 Cabral was elected president in Guinea Bissau's first free elections. In 1998, an army uprising ousted the president, triggering a civil war between the government (backed by neighboring states) and rebels.

Following foreign mediation, the war ended and presidential elections were held in 2000. However, this did not mean the end of political instability. The winner of the 2000 election, Kumba lala was ousted in a bloodless military coup in September 2003. New presidential elections were held in June 2005 and were won by former president Vieira. His rule was abruptly ended in March 2009, when he was assassinated by soldiers, several hours after his old rival, General Batista Tagme Na Waie, was killed. Following these assassinations, Malam Bacai Sanha took power. He died in January 2012 in a French hospital.

The latest military coup took place in April 2012, just before the second round of voting in presidential elections was scheduled to take place. Both the Interim President Raimundo Pereira and outgoing Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior - who was the frontrunner in the presidential poll- were detained.

The coup leaders claimed that Carlos Gomes intended to reduce the size of the army. The coup was largely opposed by the international community and Guinea Bissau was suspended from the African Union. On April 27, 2012, the coup leaders bowed to ECOWAS pressure and the President and Prime Minister were freed. However, the country is still under military rule.

The ongoing political instability has undermined the economy and made Guinea Bissau a transshipment point for Latin American drugs. The coastline has numerous off-shore islands that are ideal landing places for small planes to load drugs shipped by boat from Latin America. The drugs are then flown to Europe. The government and military receive bribes to ignore this drug trafficking.

Because of the dangers related to military rule and drug lords, Genocide Watch considers Guinea-Bissau to be at Stage 6: Preparation.