

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Equatorial Guinea

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>-5</td> <td>-5</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>5</td> <td>5</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>41</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	Polity:	-5	-5	0	Democ:	0	0	0	Autoc:	5	5	0	Durable:		41		Tentative:		No		
Score:	2009	2010	Change																						
Polity:	-5	-5	0																						
Democ:	0	0	0																						
Autoc:	5	5	0																						
Durable:		41																							
Tentative:		No																							
SCODE	EQG	CCODE	411	Date of Report	1 June 2011																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	0	0	2	4	2																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date	28 February 1969		Begin Date	1 March 1969																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1991																								
Executive(s)	President Obiang Nguema (PDGE); seized power, 3 August 1979; directly elected, 25 February 1996; reelected 29 November 2009																								
Legislature	Unicameral: National Assembly (100 seats; proportionally elected; most recent elections, 4 May 2008) Democratic Party for Equatorial Guinea (PDGE): 89 Electoral Coalition of PDGE and Democratic Opposition: 10 Convergence for Social Democracy (CPDS): 1																								
Judiciary	Supreme Tribunal																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Gradual Transition from Self-Selection (5)

In 1968 Spanish Guinea achieved independence as Equatorial Guinea. The country's current leader, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, seized power in 1979 after he staged a bloody coup against his uncle, President Francisco Macias Nguema. Facing numerous coup attempts throughout the 1980s, in the early 1990s President Obiang disbanded the Supreme Military Council and established a limited multiparty system. The country's first multi-party elections, held in 1993, were condemned by the international community and boycotted by the opposition and most of the electorate. The presidential elections of 1996 proved to be just as fraudulent, with President Obiang winning over ninety-eight percent of the vote.

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Despite recent multi-party elections in this country, true democracy is still a long way off. President Obiang uses the instruments of democracy to legitimize his dictatorial rule in the eyes of the international development assistance community but has shown only limited interest in sharing power with the opposition. In 1997 President Obiang and thirteen opposition parties signed a pact to liberalize the political system, however, little progress has been made in fulfilling this agreement. Indeed, President Obiang Nguema won almost 100% of the vote in the December 2002 presidential election after four opposition candidates withdrew from the poll at the last minute citing concerns over voter fraud. President Obiang also won election on 29 November 2009, claiming over 95% of the vote; opposition parties complained of harassment and intimidation during the campaign.

In recent years the succession issue has come to dominate politics in this country. Obiang's health has deteriorated over the past few years and many fear that if he should die, a bloody struggle to succeed him would result. One of the key characters likely to lead that struggle is his son, Teodorin, who is disliked by many in the military.

Executive Constraints: Slight Limitations (2)

Although a multiparty legislative assembly was established in Equatorial Guinea in 1993, this body largely serves as a rubber stamp institution for the decrees of President Obiang and the ruling Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE). Fraud and intimidation ensure the dominance of the legislature by members of the PDGE. In both 1999 and 2004 the PDGE won landslide victory in legislative elections that were condemned by the international community as blatantly fraudulent. Furthermore, the 2004 election was marred by mass opposition boycotts. While opposition candidates hold a limited number of seats in the legislature, their ability to check the powers of the chief executive are virtually non-existent. The judiciary is also dominated by the executive branch and does not provide a significant barrier to presidential activities. The only real check on the power of President Obiang comes from the PDGE. Representing the broader interests of the Mongomo clan of the dominant Fang ethnic group, the PDGE prevents executive power from becoming purely personalistic in nature. However, the powers of President Obiang continue to be closer to "unlimited" than they are to "constrained."

Political Participation: Restricted Competition (2)

After nearly 200 years of Spanish rule, Equatorial Guinea became independent in 1968 under the leadership of Francisco Macias Nguema. After a brief experimentation with multiparty politics, in 1970 the President assumed dictatorial powers with the backing of the military and banned all legal opposition. During the 1970s over one-third of the population was killed or fled the country under the brutal dictatorship of Macias Nguema. After establishing a one-party state under the guiding influence of the United National Party (PUN), in 1972 President Macias Nguema declared himself president for life. In 1979 he was overthrown in a coup led by his nephew, Colonel Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasgo, with the tacit approval of Spain. President Obiang institutionalized military rule in 1987 with the formation of the PDGE. Since 1992 opposition political parties have been able to legally operate and compete for elected office in Equatorial Guinea. In practice, however, this liberalization of political participation is largely a façade for the continuation of authoritarian rule in this impoverished land.

Despite the veneer of democratic institutions and organizations in Equatorial Guinea, President Obiang continues to rule in the repressive and dictatorial manner that has defined his rule for over twenty years. Opposition parties and leaders are subject to physical and legal harassment and their ability to mobilize their supporters, either through public demonstrations or the use of the mass media, is severely limited. President Obiang maintains his hold on power through electoral fraud, state patronage and political intimidation. While the government and thirteen opposition parties promulgated a pact in 1997 to expand the pace and scope of democratization in this country, President Obiang has dragged his feet in implementing most of the pact's provisions. The United Nations continues to call on the government of Equatorial Guinea to improve its dismal human rights record. Legislative elections held on 4 May 2008 were dominated by Obiang's ruling PDGE and its alliance partners, the so-called "Democratic Opposition."

The small Mongomo clan of the dominant Fang ethnic group has ruled this country continuously since independence in 1968. While ethnic divisions do not dominate politics in this country, nevertheless, ethnic and class divisions between the mainland region of Rio Muni (where 75% of the population live) and the island province of Bioko (where the remaining 25% of the population live and the capital city is found) has long been a source of tension in Equatorial Guinea. While the Fang ethnic group constitutes over ninety percent of the population in the poverty-stricken region of Rio Muni, nevertheless, Fangs and Creoles

comprise the comparatively wealthy population of Bioko. Moreover, calls for the secession of Bioko by the indigenous Bubi population have ebbed and flowed over the years and have resulted in numerous violent conflicts.

The sudden arrival of oil wealth in what until a few years back was one of the poorest countries in the world has helped create an explosive political mix in Equatorial Guinea. In the mid-1990s large oil and gas deposits were discovered off Bioko and, in subsequent years, Equatorial Guinea has become one of Africa's main energy exporters. However, the majority of the country's population continues to see few tangible rewards from this export. Competition over these oil revenues has not only intensified the movement for self-determination on Bioko but has also exacerbated the rivalry between the Fang and Bubi populations on the island. It has also made Obiang's "fortress regime" an attractive target for adventurers seeking to capture its concentrated wealth. An attempted coup by foreign mercenaries was thwarted in 2004, as was an attack on the presidential palace by militants from the Nigeria delta region in February 2009.

Despite elements of factionalism divided along ethnic (between the indigenous Bubi population on the oil-rich island of Bioko and the Fang majority), regional, (between inhabitants of Bioko and Rio Muni), and clan (within the Fang majority itself) lines, political competition in Equatorial Guinea continues to be closer to "restricted" than "factional" in nature. Limits on institutional channels of participation have resulted in numerous coup attempts over the past few years. The most publicized coup attempt came in March 2004 when 64 mercenaries flying a plane from South Africa were detained in Zimbabwe. President Obiang declared that the coup plot had been hatched by political opponents of the state, enemy powers and multinational corporations. In 2009 the alleged leader of the attempted coup, former British mercenary Simon Mann, was pardoned by the President. A subsequent attack on the presidential palace in February 2009 was blamed on Nigerian militants.