



Contraditório think-tank

Briefing

2012 Presidential Elections in Guinea-Bissau | Matilde Stoleroff

On the 20th of January Guinea-Bissau's Interim President, Raimundo Pereira, declared that there are acceptable political and legal conditions in the country for holding the anticipated presidential elections on the 18th of March.

Since 1994, when the first democratic elections were held in Guinea-Bissau, no President has completed a full five-year mandate. However, this is the first time in the history of this small West African state that a President has not ended his term with the violent “help” of others: President Malam Bacai Sanhã, who suffered from acute diabetes and heart problems, died in Val de Grâce hospital, Paris on the 9th of January 2012. Given that previous presidencies had been interrupted by civil war, coup d'état or assassination, this can perhaps be seen as a positive development for the stability of the country.¹

¹In 2009 the President, Nino Vieira, was killed in a raid upon his home.

This is not to say that Sanhã's presidency had been exempt from political turmoil and military strife. For example, the incidents of April 1, 2010 exemplified the fragility of the political situation during Sanhã's presidency. On that day, a group of soldiers, under the command of António Indjai, the Vice-Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, abducted the Prime-Minister, Carlos Gomes Júnior, and the General Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Zamora Induta.² These incidents provoked an unprecedented response for Guinea-Bissau: within hours of the abduction, ordinary citizens mobilized and gathered in front of the Government's headquarters and residence demanding the release of the Prime-Minister, resulting in his return to his Cabinet that same day. On the one hand this manifestation of support for the Prime-Minister can be explained by the populations' weariness of

²“Soldiers Seize Primer and Army Chief in Guinea-Bissau”, 1 April 2010, The New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/02/world/africa/02guinea.html?_r=1&ref=guineabissau



coups d'état; on the other, it was a sign of generalized satisfaction with his performance in gaining back the confidence of international donors and his government's ability to pay public functionaries' salaries on a regular basis. Shortly after, the present navy Chief of Staff, Bubo Na Tchuto – who, at the time was hiding in the United Nations building in Bissau³ - securely and safely left his UN “office” with the support of a group of loyal soldiers and appeared publicly with a new ally, none other than António Indjai, who had meanwhile been nominated in June 2010 as General Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces by presidential decree.

Between April 2010 and December 2011, the country seemed to be getting somewhat back on its feet, although with various episodes of tension between the President and the Prime-Minister, related to the internal struggles between factions within the African Party for Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape

³Bubo Na Tchuto had previously been a fugitive in Gambia, having fled for being accused of plotting a coup d'état. He had also been accused by the United States Treasury Department of being one of the main figures behind the incursion of the drug trade in Guinea-Bissau. “Former Exile Holds Power in West African Nation”, *The New York Times*, 25 May 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/26/world/africa/26bissau.html> and also “Treasury Designates Two Narcotics Traffickers in Guinea-Bissau”, U.S Treasury Department Office of Public Affairs, 8 April 2010

Verde (PAIGC)⁴ and some other moments of agitation from opposition parties⁵ and the Armed Forces.⁶ This fragile stability came to an end on the 26th of December when 50 soldiers were detained after an exchange of gunfire between factions of the Army that apparently had forced the Prime-Minister to seek protection in the Angolan Embassy. The situation was brought under control within a couple of hours and was considered to be an

⁴The PAIGC, the sole party until political liberalization in the early 1990's, is the biggest and most influential party, however since the civil war in 1998-1999 it has succumbed to internal divisions. The dispute in October 2010 between the Prime-Minister and the Minister of Interior, Satu Camará, a close ally of President Malam Bacai Sanhá, is representative of the two main factions inside the PAIGC. More on this see “Au-delá des compromis: les perspectives de réforme en Guinée-Bissau”, *International Crisis Group*, N° 183, 23 January 2012, pp. 8 - 10

⁵In July 2011 opposition parties demonstrated through the streets of Bissau demanding that justice be made in relation to the 2009 assassinations and asking for the Prime-Minister's resignation, who they hold responsible for such incidents, and accusing the President of acting incoherently. “Guiné-Bissau: Oposição promove mais manifestações até ao governo cair”, *Voz Da América*, 14 July 2011.

⁶In September 2011, the General Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces was accused by military of his own ethnicity, the Balantas, of not defending their interests and of receiving money from the Prime-Minister while in turn providing him with political protection (“Rumores acusam Tenente General António Indjai de receber dinheiro do Primeiro-Ministro para o manter no poder”, *O Defensor*, 28 September 2011). Such rumours and accusations are revealing of the tensions inherent in the Armed Forces and suspicions from the part of some officials regarding the Security Sector Reform. On this see “Angola na Reforma das FA da Guiné-Bissau”, *Lusomonitor*, 30 May 2011



attempt to “change the constitutional order”.⁷ The following day Bubo Na Tchuto was imprisoned having been pointed out as one of the men behind the ordeal. While immediate suspicions related the episode to the narcotraffic,⁸ the motives behind it still remain to be clarified. The outcome, however, appeared to be a reinforcement of the power of the Prime-Minister, Carlos Gomes Júnior, and the General Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces that would ease the path for the implementation of the Security Sector Reform (SSR).

Thus, in a country where political alliances change in the blink of an eye and where bullets rule over ballots, whoever wins the forthcoming elections on March 18 will face a challenging and difficult path ahead. The National Supreme Court received fourteen candidacies, only 10 of which were considered to fulfill the legal requirements. At the moment there remain nine candidates since Ibraima Alfa Djaló of the African National Congress Party (CNA) recently left the race stating that he would not partake in an electoral process that is unfair and

fraudulent from the start.⁹ Out of these nine, four names are predicted to come first in the electoral results.

Let us start with the PAIGC candidate, Prime-Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior. Cadogo, as he is also known, not only has the support of his party¹⁰ but currently seems to be on good terms with the CEMFGA, António Indjai. While it is important to bare in mind that these alliances, as previously mentioned, do tend to be easily broken, this is an essential factor in order to survive politically and physically, as well as being an indispensable condition for the implementation of the much needed reform of the Armed Forces. He is also a favourite amongst international and bilateral partners. Concerning the latter, it is important to take into account Angola’s weight in Guinea-Bissau’s present state of affairs. With around 200 military personnel composing its military mission (Missang) in Bissau, Angola is the main actor in the monitoring of the SSR. This, together with its commercial interests in Guinea-Bissau’s

⁷António Injai’s, CEMFGA, statement on the incident, Lusa, 26 December 2011

⁸“Guiné-Bissau: Narcótico na origem de agitação com fins políticos”, *africamonitor*, 27 December 2011

⁹“Candidato Alfa Djaló desiste”, Lusa, 5 March 2012

¹⁰On February 3rd, and 4th, the Political Bureau and Central Committee of the PAIGC chose CGJ as their internal candidate with 244 votes in favour, 12 against and 10 abstentions. “Carlos Gomes Júnior é o candidato do PAIGC”, Lusa, 4 February 2012



minerals (namely, bauxite) keep Angola's eye fixed on the electoral developments. Angola, as well as other bilateral, and multilateral partners, consider Carlos Gomes Júnior to be their preferred interlocutor. CGJ was able to practically unify the PAIGC's powerful machine to back him up and since the official start of the electoral campaign on March 2, there has been a massive movement in his support. As a result there is a possibility that Carlos Gomes Júnior could win in the first round.

The Party was practically unified, but not completely. This brings us to the following candidate, Serifo Nhamadjo. Serifo, interim president of the National Assembly and member of the PAIGC, is running independently. Serifo has declared that he intends to continue the legacy of President Malam and, in his own words, he will be a man who "will unify the people, not divide them".¹¹ In a press conference he explained that his independent candidacy also emerged in reaction to the way that the Central Committee of the PAIGC had selected its candidate; he sustains that members of his

party felt intimidated on the day of the election due to the presence of armed police and the military and the open voting method, which is contrary to common procedure in the party.¹² In sum, Serifo represents old existing divergences inside the PAIGC and by his side are those who were close to President Malam as well as some who were pro-Nino.

Kumba Yala, who was President from 2000 until 2003, when he was ousted out of power by a coup d'état, is the founder and candidate for the main opposition party, the Social Renovation Party (PRS). His presidency had been characterized by what has been called the "Balantisation" of the state apparatus since he consolidated his power by surrounding himself by military men and officials of Balanta ethnicity, one of the largest ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau. Therefore, his support comes primarily from dissatisfied Balantas, mainly from the army's lower ranks,¹³ and he is quick to take advantage of such grudges in order to obtain votes in his favour. In the last years the PRS

¹²Nhamadjo, Presidente interino da ANP "candidato independente às eleições", *Gazeta de Notícias*, 17 February 2012

¹³"Guinea-Bissau - Beyond the rule of the gun", International Crisis Group, *Africa Briefing* N° 61, 25 June 2009

¹¹"Serifo Nhamadjo candidato a presidente disputa apoio do PAIGC com PM", *Angola Press*, 29 January 2012



has accused the Prime-Minister of blocking inquiries into the 2009 assassinations and has publicly come out saying that the SSR is against Balanta interests, hoping in this way to gain military support.¹⁴ According to the latest International Crisis Group report, the party is far from being united and in fact some of its members consider Carlos Gomes Júnior to be the best option for the country.¹⁵

Lastly, there is the independent candidate Henrique Rosa. Interim President in 2003, Presidential candidate in 2005 and again in 2009 (losing against Malam Bacai Sanhá), businessman Henrique Rosa sustains that, in order to bring about positive change in Guinea-Bissau, the country needs someone completely independent of the system, especially someone who is not linked to the PAIGC.¹⁶ Considered to be a man of values and well respected amongst the Bissau intellectual elite, the question remains as how long he would last in power if elected: taking into consideration the patrimonial mode of

governance and the “rules of the game” of the political scene in Guinea-Bissau it is difficult to imagine political survival without “playing” the game.

Apart from the violent protest of some young unregistered voters in the end of February¹⁷ and threats to peace from some dissidents of the opposition coalition (Colectivo de Oposição Democrática) if Carlos Gomes Jr.’s candidacy goes forward,¹⁸ the electoral campaign has thus far been running smoothly. In fact, the outbreak of violence prior to and immediately following elections has not been a common occurrence in Guinea-Bissau. Political disorder has tended to occur some time into the presidential mandate. Alex de Waal’s terminology of “political marketplaces”,¹⁹ meaning the purchase of loyalties and the threat or use of violence as a bargaining tool, may be a good starting point to understand this reality. Political allegiances

¹⁷“Guiné-Bissau: CNE justifica falta de recenseamento”, *Voz da América*, 22 February 2012

¹⁸The opposition sustains the unconstitutionality of Carlos Gomes Júnior’s candidacy (they invoke that an interim president does not have the power to exonerate a Prime-Minister) and his misuse of state money for campaign purposes. “Oposição na Guiné-Bissau ameaça impedir que campanha eleitoral decorra ‘num clima de paz e serenidade’”, *Lusa*, 28 February 2012

¹⁹Waal, Alex (2009), “Mission without end? Peacekeeping in the African political marketplace”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 1, pp 99 - 11

¹⁴“Guiné-Bissau: Nova manifestação exige demissão de Gomes Júnior”, *Voz da América*, 5 August 2012

¹⁵“Au-delà des compromis: les perspectives de réforme en Guinée-Bissau”, *International Crisis Group*, N° 183, 23 January 2012, pp. 21

¹⁶“Henrique Rosa condena governo e primeiro-ministro em comício”, *Lusa*, 5 March 2012



are in constant flux and during elections and their immediate aftermath these pacts are constantly shifting and being negotiated as elite contenders emerge and as existing ones lose power. When these bargains appear to be forged, and this may take a while, those excluded from the negotiations, having been unable to secure their interests will mobilize and try to reconfigure these bargains, using violent means if necessary.²⁰ In other words, the breakdown of order occurs perhaps only later on when those out of the marketplace seek to find their place in the market or when those in the marketplace lose their place.

Though imprudent to make predictions in a country where the unpredictable is more predictable than the predictable, all points to Carlos Gomes Júnior making the second round, if indeed he is not victorious in the first. He has been campaigning fiercely throughout the country and has greater financial means than his opponents. Let us not

²⁰While emphasizing the utility of this approach to the configuration of power coalitions, it is nevertheless extremely dependent upon economic and rationalistic orientations; the political beliefs and ideologies of political leaders and parties should not be disregarded as a result of the use of such a rationalistic approach. There are certainly cases where actors' allegiances and loyalties are not for sale and any attempt to buy them may fall short of stability objectives. An analysis of a particular marketplace would be distorted if political motivations, aspirations and beliefs of leaders and groups are not taken into consideration and controlled for.

however underestimate the opposition. Serifo, has been keeping up in the electoral race and if a second round takes place, there is the possibility of a united force against CGJ. If the decision depended on external actors there would be little room for mistaken forecasts: CGJ is the most apt politician to take the country forward.

A concluding remark - When elections take place in developing countries, international organizations, election observation missions, political commentators and so forth are heard claiming that these are crucial and decisive moments. Every four or five years these democracies are tested: if elections are held in a free, fair and transparent manner, with no pre- or post-electoral violence, they pass. However, while the holding of democratic elections may qualify as a constitutional democracy, without institutional, economic and social development it may be far from a full fledged democracy.²¹ In Guinea-Bissau, a country where institutions are feeble, where political violence is a constant, where the access to water, electricity, education, health are a luxury, where the average life

²¹More on this see Rudebeck, Lars (2011), "Electoral Democratization in Post-Civil War Guinea-Bissau 1999 – 2008", Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Discussion Paper 66, Uppsala



expectancy is estimated at 46 years, what is indeed crucial and decisive is the manner in which politics and policies are conducted, not the electoral act in itself.

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