

The Guinean Presidential Elections

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Introduction



The Republic of Guinea was formerly known as French Guinea. Upon independence, it was called “Guinea Conakry” so as to be distinguished from its neighbor “Guinea Bissau.” Administratively, it is divided into 33 governorates, with a population of around 10 million, belonging to 23 ethnic groups, salient of which are the “Fula” Ethnic Group which constitutes around 43% of the total population and the “Malinke” Ethnic Group which constitutes around 35% of the total population.

Guinea Conakry lies on an area of around 246,000 km, with Guinea Bissau, Senegal and Mali to the North, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote D’Ivoire to the South and the Pacific Ocean to the West.

Guinea was formerly a part of the historic Guinea Emperor before being colonized by France in 1849. Guinea is a predominantly Islamic country with Muslims representing around 85% of the population and Christians representing around 10%, while 5% of the population remains on their traditional beliefs.

Such features represent the environment that witnessed the presidential elections on 11, 12 October, 2015, through various pivots, as follows:

First: Conflict over Presidency

The Guinean republic gained its independence in 1958 after a century under French colonialism. Ahmed Sekou Toure was the first president of the new state till his death in 1984. Then, Lansana Conte became the head of the state and remained in office without any elections till 1993 when he decided to hold multi-party elections in which he won a new presidential term. Furthermore, Conte also won the 1994 presidential elections to face the criticism of the opposition which, by then, started to solidify, especially with the appearance of the opposition leader Alpha Conde who was detained in 2000 and sentenced to a 5-year imprisonment before being released few months later before Conte organized a referendum over the possibility to nominate

himself for a third presidential term; in contradiction with the constitution that specifies only two presidential terms.

Nevertheless, Conte was elected for a third presidential term in 2003 amongst the boycott of all the organizations and opposition figures. This led the vocational syndicates to call for a national strike in 2007, the matter which was suppressed by the military forces leading to several death cases, before announcing the death of Lansana Conte on December 23, 2008, thus leading Moussa Dadis Camara to seize power in a military coup d'état, declaring a two-year transitional phase in Guinea.

However, upon the pressure imposed by the ECOWAS, Camara declared the organization of presidential elections in 2009. Thereupon, the country witnessed various movements and activities that had always proved to Camara the importance of fulfilling his promise on not nominating himself in the new presidential elections. Such activities were fiercely faced, leading to the murder of around 150-200 Guineans before the assassination attempt of Dadis Camara that was attributed to his assistant Abubakar Diakite known as "Toumba". Thereupon, Camara went to Morocco for treatment, and then headed to Burkina Faso for settlement.

Upon the departure of Camara, the authority of his country was trans-

ferred to his Minister of Defense, Sekouba Konate, who temporarily handled the post of the Head of the Government to the opposition in preparation for organizing free elections. Such elections took place in 2010 and were described as free and fair.

Thereupon, Alpha Conde became the president in competition with 23 candidates in the first round and against Cellou Dalein Diallo, a prominent opposition leader in the second round, with the participation of around 2.9% of the Guineans.

Second: Preparation for the Guinean Presidential Elections, 2015

Alpha Conde entered the presidential elections against seven other candidates, including one woman. On top of those candidates were Cellou Dalein Diallo, the candidate of the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea, the most important opposition party in the state.

Instead of presenting themselves, all candidates concentrated on criticizing Conde. They highlighted the bad economic condition, the retreating economic rates and the growth rate that did not exceed 5% since 2010. They also drew attention to the regression in the social and health services, especially in light of the prevalence of the "Ebola" epidemic that claimed around 2500 lives.

The Guinean Electoral College is formed of around 6000 citizens who were distributed among 14482 poll-

ing stations, under the supervision of 72,000 electoral delegates. Despite the fact that the Independent National Electoral Commission had announced that 90% of the electoral cards had been distributed hours before the beginning of the electoral process, yet Conde's competitors asserted otherwise, asking to postpone the elections due to non-completion of the supposed registration for a large number of voters, especially the under aged, in the electoral lists. Thereupon, such competitors issued a mutual declaration asserting in case that the required corrections are not made, that they will not recognize the results of the elections that are taking place in light of such irregularities and shortfalls.

Third: The Electoral System on Selecting the Guinean President of the Republic

The Guinean presidential elections are held in two rounds in case that no candidate obtained more than 50% from the first round. The constitution stipulates that the presidency is only limited to two terms, the matter which permits Alpha Conde to present himself for a second term. During the electoral campaigns, candidates gave lots of promises. The Guinean system also permits postponing the elections if an adjudication is issued from the Supreme Court; the matter which

Cellou Dalein Diallo tried to take advantage of through presenting a plea to the court to postpone the elections. However, his plea was refused and elections were held on October 11, 12, 2015.

Fourth: Electoral Propaganda and Alliances

One of the most important features of the Guinean presidential elections is the alliances and the realignment among parties, entities and figures that were previously known with their vast differences. Such developments could have a clear impact on the future of the political pluralism. In this respect, the opposition tried to form an alliance against Alpha Conde, similar to Dalein Diallo and Sidi Toure's alliance in 2010 elections. However, such an alliance had witnessed several splits; especially that Toure is always considered the second man of Diallo. Moreover, the alliance of 2015 elections had witnessed a rapprochement between Sidi Toure and Alpha Conde. Some witnesses assert that such alliance led to a rapprochement between Dalein Diallo and the exiled to Burkina Faso former President Dadis Camara who tried to return to Guinea during the electoral propaganda, but the Guinean authorities refused his return on the background of his conviction of committing 2009 massacre that claimed the lives of more than 157 citizens; the

matter which, according to some opinions, paved the way to the victory of Alpha Conde.

In his electoral campaign, Alpha Conde relied on his history in the opposition to the ruling regime since the independence of Guinea, although he believes that the “Ebola” epidemic had negatively influenced his popularity. However, he tried to compensate this by presenting various reform projects in the army and the judiciary, in addition to the hydropower plant project that aims at alleviating the severe reduction in electricity, asserting that he will adopt transparency while signing the mines’ contracts.

The other candidates made various promises on realizing the socio-economic stability and development. *In such elections*, Dalein Diallo’s logos were revolving around reducing unemployment among youths and providing a decent life for the Guineans through offering decent health care, suitable housing, water, electricity for the people, in addition to laying the foundations of justice and safety in the country. He also promised to adopt a reform in various state bodies and to eradicate the Ebola epidemic.

Upon the failure of the various attempts to postpone the elections, Dalein Diallo called the members of his campaign to work hard for sake of winning the elections and not to

allow any other party to steal the victory of his campaign.

However, he signed the mutual statement with other candidates asserting his intention of not recognizing the elections results, emphasizing that the electoral campaigns suffer from a lot of deviations and irregularities, especially that of Alpha Conde; referring to the clashes that occurred between his and Conde’s campaign, upon which an embargo was imposed in some places.

Fifth: Running Elections and Declaring Results

Some candidates tried to give the electoral conflict an ethnic nature, especially that Conde belongs to the Malinke, while Cellou Dalein Diallo belongs to the Fula. Competition between those two ethnic groups appears every now and then according to the nature of the events. This was clearly manifested in 2010 elections and 2013 legislative elections when Conde’s party (Rally of the Guinean People) failed to obtain the majority, winning 53 seats only out of a total of 114 seats, while Diallo’s Party (The Union of the Democratic Forces of Guinea) obtained 37 seats, thus asserting the importance of the ethnic role in winning the competition.

Despite the fact that the elections results were declared on October 31, 2015, yet the preliminary indicators showed that Alpha Conde will re-

main in his office without the need of a second round; the matter which led his main competitor to withdraw from the elections, even before the official declaration of results, asserting that the elections had been rigged.

Conclusion:

The nature of the political practices and the electoral alliances emphasize the interaction between the ethnic and the political aspects, as the various electoral campaigns tried to stir up the preliminary loyalties and prejudices in order to influence the orientations and choices of the voters, thus leading to the disruption of violence and disturbances upon the declaration of the results, especially with the long heritage of violence in Guinea and its relation

with the presidential and parliamentary elections.

Despite the fact that the opposition recognized the results of 2010 presidential election, yet they continued to assert that such elections are marred by fraud and dishonesty and that the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bernard Kouchner, is the one behind the victory of Alpha Conde in the second round, not to mention the South African Waymark Company which changed the track of the elections. Thereupon, Diallo tried to change his allies and to attract an ethnic group of a huge political experience and weight. However, the policies of his government and Conde's alliances prevented him from realizing his aims.