

GUINEA'S STALLED TRANSITION: ASSESSING PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES THREE YEARS AFTER COUP

Emmanuel Yeboah

Key points

Three years after Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya's coup in September 2021, Guinea's transition remains stalled, with delays in key milestones like elections, a constitutional referendum, and a population census. The junta's extension of the timeline to 2025 has fueled public frustration and skepticism about its commitment to returning to civilian rule.

Guinea has witnessed escalating human rights violations, media crackdowns, and suppression of dissent under the junta. Protests against delays and socioeconomic hardships have been violently suppressed, leading to increasing disillusionment among the populace.

The draft constitution proposes critical reforms, such as limiting presidential powers, introducing bicameralism, and allowing independent candidates in elections. However, provisions like immunity for junta officials and potential participation of Doumbouya in elections raise doubts about democratic sincerity.

Guinea has strategically balanced relations with global powers like China and Russia while improving ties with ECOWAS and regional neighbors. This pragmatic diplomacy contrasts with isolationist stances of neighboring Sahelian states.

INTRODUCTION

It has been three years since Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya's military government overthrew President Alpha Condé in a coup on September 5, 2021. In the aftermath, the National Committee for Reconciliation and Development (CNRD), led by Doumbouya, outlined a two-year timetable for returning Guinea to constitutional order. This timetable, which began on January 1, 2023, was set to conclude by December 2024, with 10 key steps aimed at restoring civilian rule.

As the clock ticks down, it is increasingly clear that the military-led government is unlikely to honor its commitment, with the transition now expected to extend into 2025. The final stages of the process are marked by growing uncertainty, as many question whether the junta will ever follow through on its promises for democratic governance.

This paper provides an update to WADEMOS's February 2024¹ study on Guinea's transition, highlighting key developments and assessing the risks of a prolonged transition. Building on the previous study, this report evaluates the progress and challenges of the transition and provides an update on efforts to restore constitutional order in Guinea.

2.0 SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF TRANSITION PROCESS

On September 5, 2021, the National Committee for Reconciliation and Development (CNRD) led by Col. Doumbouya announced a takeover citing corruption, mismanagement, and constitutional manipulation by President Conde's government to extend his tenure beyond the constitutionally mandated two-term limit. Following the coup, many Guineans took to the streets in jubilation, seeing it as a resolution to years of perceived misgovernance and long suffering. However, history reminds us that military takeovers, despite initial popular support, seldom provide lasting solutions to governance challenges. The CNRD since its takeover has suppressed dissent voices, cracked down media freedoms, and imposed restrictions reminiscent of past military juntas.

While initially focusing on economic projects and physical infrastructure to garner support, the CNRD has not disclosed detailed plans or a timeline

¹ See: <https://wademosnetwork.org/2024/03/wademos-brief-on-guineas-transition-process-two-years-on/>

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for returning to civilian rule despite engaging in the process of drafting a new constitution as part of a 10-point agenda for transition. The transitional government's performance has left many Guineans disillusioned with doubt about their ability to address critical issues and maintain integrity. This growing uncertainty has resulted in a noticeable decline in public support. Recent findings from the Afrobarometer survey (R9 2021/2023) underscore this sentiment, revealing that nearly 70% of citizens believe Guinea is heading in the wrong direction². This marks a stark contrast to pre-coup sentiments (R8 2019/22021), where 63% expressed similar concerns.

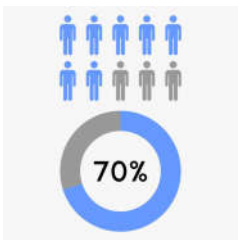
3.0 THE STATUS OF THE TRANSITION GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENTS

During the inception of the coup, the CNRD pledged to serve as a transitional government and adhere to the ECOWAS timetable for a return to civilian rule by December 2024. However, shortly after the government's dissolution³, in mid-march 2024, newly appointed prime minister Ahmadou Oury Bah announced the postponement⁴ of civilian rule to 2025.

Following the coup, the junta pledged to organize a constitutional referendum, draft an electoral code, and conduct a census by December – critical steps towards restoring constitutional order. Prime Minister Bah⁵ acknowledged these as lengthy processes, stating they are working around the clock to achieve civilian rule. However, despite these promises outlined in the CNRD's 10-step Action Plan, these activities are yet to commence. The delay in elections, anticipated by many, suggests that the junta aims to prolong military rule. This lack of progress has sparked frustration among the opposition and the public, leading to protests over electoral unpreparedness and continual delays. Many view these delays as an attempt to consolidate power indefinitely.

Since the coup, the junta has aggressively suppressed dissent through violent means, imposing bans on protests and shutting down media outlets critical of the government. This brazen disregard for freedom of expression and press freedom has severely curtailed the influence of civil society and silenced dissent voices. The government's reshuffle in March 2024 occurred amidst reports of multiple attempted coups against Col. Doumbouya. In January, some individuals accused of involvement in one of these plots, including military officers and civilians, were publicly coerced into confessing on national television and subsequently granted presidential pardon without official trial, raising concerns about the circumstances and validity over the incident.

Additionally, since September 12, 2024, rumors have been widely circulated on social media networks and shared by several credible journalists indicating that the transitional president had mentioned to his ministers the possibility of him being a candidate in the next elections. To date, no communication from the government has cleared up the ambiguity about Doumbouya's intention to run for president.



NEARLY 70% OF CITIZENS BELIEVE GUINEA IS HEADING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION, A STARK CONTRAST TO PRE-COUP SENTIMENTS.

² See: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/>

³ See: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/guinea-junta-temporarily-dissolves-government-presidency-says-2024-02-19/>

⁴ See: <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/guinee-le-premier-ministre-amadou-oury-bah-refuse-de-sengager-sur-un-retour-des-civils-au>

⁵ See: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/podcasts/le-grand-invite-C3%A9-afrique/20240612-bah-oury-on-va-tout-faire-pour-que-la-guin-C3%A9e-C3%A9volue-dans-une-dynamique-de-dialogue>

On September 18, 2024, on the sidelines of the Ministerial Conference of the Francophonie (CMF), the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Morissanda Kouyaté, announced that elections will be held in 2025, potentially starting with the presidential election. This statement contradicts earlier pronouncements by General Doumbouya, who had consistently stated that elections would be held from bottom-up, in accordance with the established timetable.

These differences of opinion between the transitional president and his foreign minister raise significant concerns about the sincerity of the process. There is growing skepticism about whether there is a genuine commitment to returning to civilian rule or if this is a strategy aimed at manipulating national and international public opinion.

4.0 ESCALATING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS

Shrinking civic space and human rights violations are key challenges hindering Guinea's transition. On February 26, two days before Bah announced his Cabinet, labor unions called a nationwide strike protesting a high cost of living and inflation, and the release of Sekou Jamal Pendessa, Secretary General of the Union of Guinean Press Professionals, who was arrested in January on charges of participation in a “non-authorized protest”⁶.

Three members of the Guinean opposition – Oumar Sylla (also known as Foniké Menguè), Mamadou Billo Bah, and Mohammed Cissé – were arrested at Menguè's home in Conakry on July 9, 2024, and taken to a detention facility on Kissa, an island off Conakry, where they were allegedly tortured⁷. While Cissé was eventually released, Menguè and Bah remain unaccounted for. Their wives have filed a lawsuit against Guinea's junta leader, Mamady Doumbouya, claiming he ordered their forced disappearance. These abductions represent a pattern of escalating harassment, jailings, and trials against critics of the junta, including popular rapper Djani Alfa. The junta has banned public protests – yet when Guinean citizens and civil society groups protest, they are violently suppressed.

Since the junta's takeover, there have been three general strikes, at least 500 journalists detained, 47 protest-related deaths⁸, and restricted internet access. In fact, members of the bar in August 2024 embarked on a series of strike actions to protest the arbitrary arrests and unlawful detentions of Guinean citizens.

Media outlets that report on the protests or criticize the junta face closure. Journalists and media regulators who implicate the Doumbouya regime with corruption have been imprisoned for “defaming the head of state.” These actions contradict the transitional government's commitment to protect press freedom, justified under national security and vague contract violations, highlighting the CNRD's authoritarian tendencies.

The lack of support for the transitional government stems from perceptions of exclusion, distrust of military rule, and worsening socioeconomic conditions. Acute food insecurity has surged to an estimated 11 percent of Guinea's 14 million population, a significant increase from 2.6 percent in 2020. Over a million Guineans are currently facing a food crisis⁹.

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6 See: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20240227-two-dead-in-clashes-as-guinea-conakry-keeps-up-general-strike-media-censorship-journalists-junta>

7 See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/12/guinea-fears-torture-forcibly-disappeared-opponents>

8 See: <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2024/05/guinee-les-victimes-dusage-illegal-de-la-force-en-attente-de-soins-et-de-justice/>

9 See: <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/stagnant-transition-guinea/>

5.0 GUINEA STRENGTHENS INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS WHILE BALANCING REGIONAL RELATIONS

Under Col. Doumbouya, Guinea's transitional government has prioritized maintaining diverse international and regional relationships, strategically balancing ties with major powers such as France, the U.S., China, and Turkey. China, for instance, has continued supporting Guinea through projects like Simandou iron project¹⁰, educational aid, and other foreign direct investments.

The government's approach to regional organizations like ECOWAS contrasts with neighboring Sahelian states. ECOWAS recently lifted sanctions on Guinea, moving away from punitive measures to encourage dialogue with military-led regimes. On September 3, 2024, the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) parliament relocated one of its key meetings to Conakry. This session of the Joint Commission on Health, Education, Science and Culture, Telecommunications and IT, Industry, and the Private Sector marked a significant step toward mending relations between Guinea's government and ECOWAS, signaling a clear effort to foster closer cooperation.

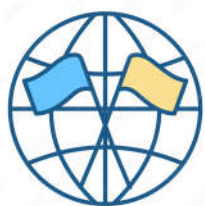
This shift comes as Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso have announced intentions to withdraw from the bloc.

Guinea's relations with neighboring African countries have generally been positive, exemplified by Senegalese President Faye's visit¹¹ to Doumbouya to promote pan-Africanism and regional integration in early May. Bilateral cooperation with Rwanda has also strengthened, focusing on digital initiatives, trade, and investments¹² and an establishment of a new embassy with direct flights between Conakry and Kigali.

5.1 China – Guinea Ties

Guinea was part of the 54 African countries that participated in this year's China-Africa Summit. On September 2, 2024, President Xi Jinping met with Guinean President Mamadi Doumbouya in Beijing¹³, marking the 65th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Guinea. The meeting underscored the longstanding mutual respect and cooperation between the two nations, with Xi Jinping highlighting the importance of strengthening ties in infrastructure, resource development, rural development, poverty reduction, and healthcare.

Doumbouya expressed gratitude for China's support in Guinea's economic and social development, emphasizing China's role in enhancing Guinea's development and fostering mutual benefit¹⁴. This engagement aligns with Guinea's strategy of maintaining diverse international relationships and contrasts with the more isolationist stances of some neighboring Sahelian states. Upon Doumbouya's return to Guinea, the CNRD organized a lavish and pompous celebration, to welcome him back to Conakry on September 11, 2024.



ECOWAS RECENTLY LIFTED SANCTIONS ON GUINEA, ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE WITH MILITARY-LED REGIMES.

10 See: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3264037/mega-simandou-iron-ore-project-guinea-start-production-next-year>

11 See: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240526-bassirou-diomaye-faye-de-retour-de-guin%C3%A9-nouvelle-%C3%A9tape-de-sa-tourn%C3%A9-r%C3%A9gionale>

12 See: <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240513-la-visite-de-paul-kagame-%C3%A0-conakry-illustre-un-renforcement-de-la-coop%C3%A9ration-entre-guin%C3%A9-et-rwanda>

13 See: http://gb.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgyw/202409/t20240903_11484270.htm

14 Ibid

5.2 Russia's Populist Push for Influence Amid shifts in Alliances

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov arrived in Guinea on June 3, 2024, for an official visit¹⁵. During his talks with Guinea's Foreign Minister Morissanda Kouyaté, Lavrov emphasized the longstanding friendship between Russia and Guinea, dating back to Guinea's independence. Lavrov expressed appreciation for Guinea's participation in Russia-Africa summits and highlighted mutual economic and investment ties.

He mentioned Russia's commitment to continue and expand cooperation in areas such as geological prospecting, mineral resources, infrastructure, fisheries, agriculture, and energy. Lavrov also noted that Russian companies operating in Guinea, like Rusal, focus on social responsibility and contribute to the local economy and social programs. He proposed resuming the work of the Russian-Guinean Intergovernmental Commission on Economic, Scientific, Technical, and Trade Cooperation, which has not met since 2019¹⁶.

Lavrov's visit to Guinea is part of a broader Russian strategy to strengthen ties with African nations amid growing discontent with traditional allies like France. Lavrov has visited several African countries seeking support or neutrality regarding Russia's actions in Ukraine. The visit comes as part of efforts to expand Russia's influence in regions where Western popularity is waning. Lavrov's meetings included discussions on military support and economic cooperation, reflecting Russia's increasing role in West African countries that have experienced coups and military takeovers.

6.0 ANALYSIS OF GUINEA'S DRAFT CONSTITUTION RELEASED ON JULY 29, 2024

On July 29, 2024, the National Transitional Council (NTC), acting as the parliament under Guinea's interim regime, presented a new draft constitution. This proposed constitution introduces several significant changes, including the reduction and setting of presidential term limits and the potential eligibility of current military leader Mamady Doumbouya to run in the next presidential election and the immunity to officials of the military government and transitional council for their actions during the transition.

If approved, the draft constitution will elect the president for a five-year term, renewable once, and reducing the presidential term from six years as stipulated in the 2020 constitution. This change is part of a broader set of innovations aimed at strengthening Guinea's democratic framework and preventing the concentration of power.

6.1 Key Innovations in the Draft Constitution

Creation of New Institutions and Parliamentary Bicameralism

The draft constitution proposes the establishment of a bicameral parliament, consisting of a general assembly and a senate. This two-tier system aims to create a more balanced legislative process. One of the Senate's key responsibilities will be



THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION WILL ELECT THE PRESIDENT FOR A FIVE-YEAR TERM, RENEWABLE ONCE.

15 See: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/06/03/russian-foreign-minister-visits-guinea-on-africa-influence-tour-a85298>

16 See: https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1954321/



The draft constitution limits the powers of the President. It clarifies the relationship between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, aiming to ensure a more balanced distribution of power.



to approve appointments to high civil service and military positions.

Reduction in Presidential Powers

To address concerns of reinforced presidentialism, the draft constitution limits the powers of the President. It clarifies the relationship between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, aiming to ensure a more balanced distribution of power.

Judicial Independence

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Political Party Reorganization and Introduction of Independent Candidates

In an effort to reduce the hegemony of political parties and refocus citizens at the heart of political life, the draft constitution introduces the concept of independent candidates in national elections (excluding proportional representation). This innovation seeks to diversify political representation and empower individuals outside of established party structures.

Free Education and Military Service

The draft constitution stipulates that education will be free until the age of 16, underscoring the government's commitment to accessible education for all. Additionally, it mandates compulsory military service from the age of 18, according to rules defined by the state, highlighting a focus on national service and discipline.

Following the release of the draft, the next steps include thematic dialogues with national stakeholders and the popularization of the text. However, there are disagreements among political parties, civil society, and the NTC, particularly regarding the introduction of independent candidates in elections.

Opposition Stance

Opposition leaders are insisting that the elections be held as planned by December 2024. They have called for independent bodies to manage both the voter registration and election administration. The opposition also disputes the necessity of a new constitution at this time and argues that any constitutional reforms should wait until there is a legitimate, democratically elected government in place.

Critiques and Concerns

One of the primary critiques of the proposed constitution is the provision granting immunity to officials of the military government and transitional council for their actions during the transition. Additionally, the potential participation of Mamady Doumbouya in the next presidential election raises concerns about the sincerity of the transition process and casts doubt on the junta's commitment to genuine democratic reforms.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GUINEA TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT

1. *Adherence to Transition Timeline*

Reaffirm commitment to the ECOWAS-agreed timetable for a return to civilian rule. Any delays should be transparently communicated through an inclusive national dialogue, with clear justifications and timelines.

2. *Expedite Processes Toward the Attainment of the 10-Point Action Plan*

Expedite the publication of the draft constitution, organization of the constitutional referendum, and the conduct of the population census. These are critical steps toward restoring constitutional order and should commence without further delay.

3. *Protection of Civil Liberties*

Protect freedom of expression and press by lifting bans on protests and media outlets. Immediate cease arbitrary arrests and release those detained for peaceful political activities.

7.1 Recommendations for Regional Institutions and Civil Society ECOWAS Commission

ECOWAS should revise its approach to addressing coups and unconstitutional changes of government among its member states. Open dialogues with the transitional authorities to negotiate their interests, offer support, and push them to uphold democratic commitments and advance electoral preparations.

African Union

Launch electoral observation missions (AUEOM) to provide proactive technical assistance and monitoring groups. Collaborate with CSOs and ECOWAS to enforce constitutionalism and democratic standards.

Recommendations for Civil Society

Maintain pressure on the government through peaceful means, such as advocacy, public awareness campaigns, and the creation of transition monitoring groups and international partnerships. Ensure that the transition process remains on track and that the voices of the Guinean people are heard and respected.



MAINTAIN PRESSURE ON THE GOVERNMENT THROUGH ADVOCACY, PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS, AND THE CREATION OF TRANSITION MONITORING GROUPS AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS.

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