



Equatorial Guinea — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[formerly (during colonial rule) known as Spanish Guinea]

03/11/1778 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Spain]: The Spanish colony in the Guinea region was established in 1778, by the “Treaty of El Pardo”, signed on 03/11/1778,¹ between the Spanish and the Portuguese Empire.² In 1926 Río Muni, Fernando Póo, and Annobón were united as Spanish Guinea. On 06/30/1959 Spanish Guinea became an overseas province of Spain.³ Following pressure from the UN and exiled Guinean nationalists to allow for more self-governance in Spanish Guinea, the Spanish Council of Ministers drafted the “Basic Law of the Autonomous Regime”. A referendum was held on 12/15/1963, regarding the adoption of this set of laws and a move toward more autonomy in Spanish Guinea, which passed with 62% in favor.⁴ The Basic Law introduced universal suffrage. Universal suffrage was again confirmed upon independence in 1968.⁵ Under the Act of Independence of 12/20/1963, Spanish Guinea was granted administrative autonomy under a local general assembly and a government council.⁶

01/01/1964 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Spain, Right-Wing (Corporatist) Autocracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of Spain, Right-Wing (Corporatist) Autocracy]: Through the referendum of 1963 and the following Act of Independence, Spanish Guinea was granted autonomy starting on the 01/01/1964 by the Spanish Government. The General Assembly was formed from representatives of the two provinces of Spanish Guinea, Fernando Póo and Río Muni, and had the initiative in formulating laws and regulations. The Government Council was charged with the local administration. The Spanish national government was represented by a commissioner-general, who retained extensive powers in sanctioning the laws formulated by the General Assembly.⁷ Bonifacio Ondó Edu became Prime Minister of the Government Council on 01/01/1964, the council further included eight ministers, including Ondó Edu’s deputy Francisco Macías Nguema. Council members were elected through the General Assembly.⁸ Elections to the Provincial Councils of the two provinces were held in May 1964.⁹ On 12/20/1966, the UN General Assembly urged Spain to conduct elections in Equatorial Guinea. Subsequently, a constitutional conference convened on 10/30/1967 at the Palace of Santa Cruz in Madrid to deliberate on Equatorial Guinea’s independence. Leading the Equatorial Guinea delegation was Federico Ngomo Nandong, the President of the General Assembly. Other delegation members included Enrique Gori (Vice-President of the General Assembly), Antonio Ndongo, Bonifacio Ondó Edu (Chairman of the Governing Council), and Francisco Macías Nguema (Vice-President of the Governing Council). The Constitutional Conference concluded on 06/22/1968, proposing a constitution that established a federal republic with two autonomous provinces.¹⁰ According to LIED no multiparty legislative elections were held and universal suffrage was introduced in 1968. LIED classifies political liberties as absent for this period. Political liberties were absent until 1963 and not really present from 1964 onward according to V-Dem’s PCLI. In 1968, based on Polity5’s assessment, the executive faced slight limitations on power during this period. From 1900 to 1959, V-Dem’s JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem’s LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For the rest of the regime period, V-Dem’s JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem’s LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

10/12/1968 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of Spain, Right-Wing (Corporatist) Autocracy]/Start Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy: On this date the Republic of Equatorial Guinea achieved full independence (Lansford 2021:509, Marshall 2018c). Shortly before Francisco Macías Nguema was elected in the last free and fair elections until 1993.¹¹ President Macías promptly abolished the 1968 Constitution under his regime, swiftly suppressing opposition and consolidating absolute power through a period of terror. The ruthless internal repression carried out by the Macías administration resulted in the disappearance of two-thirds of the members of the 1968 National Assembly by the end of his tenure. This oppressive atmosphere led to the mass exodus of one-third of the population, including almost all individuals from skilled and educated strata (Fleischhacker 1999a). Since after independence Nguema ruled the country undemocratically from the start the regime is classified as an electoral autocracy. While the regime had a strong personalist character from the start it has to be taken into account that Nguema's rule was legitimized by relatively free presidential elections.¹² Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED affirms that competitiveness was absent. V-Dem's CEI underlines no clean elections, whereas V-Dem's EF&FI considers the overall conditions as somewhat free and fair. Besides, both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI confirm that political liberties were not achieved. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

01/01/1970 End Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy/Start Personalist Autocracy: In 1970 Nguema formed the United National Workers' Party as a vehicle for his power and issued a decree suppressing all existing political parties in the country. We count this as a self-coup. On 07/14/1972 Nguema "consolidated power by establishing an extreme cult of personality, a one-party state ruled by his United National Workers' Party and declaring himself president for life on this date, which was then ratified by a referendum the following year".¹³ In a reign of terror approximately 80.000 out of 300.000 citizens were reportedly killed.¹⁴ On 06/29/1973 a constitutional referendum installed a one-party system under the 'United National Workers' Party' and was accepted by 99% of the voters.¹⁵ Macías Nguema proceeded to institute a totalitarian regime supported by three key pillars: the United National Workers' Party, the Juventud en Marcha con Macías (JMM; English: Youth on the March with Macías) militia/youth group, and the Esangui clan of Río Muni. The tools of repression in the country, including the military and the presidential bodyguard, were under the complete control of Macías Nguema's relatives and members of his clan.¹⁶ The regime is a borderline case between a one-party autocracy and a personalist autocracy. However, because Nguema was declared president for life no other party member had a chance to obtain the leadership. According to LIED executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held in 1970, in 1971 only executive elections were held, from 1972 onward no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. In addition to that, political liberties remained absent according to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

08/03/1979 End Personalist Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: After Nguema began to execute members of his own family and ruling circle, his nephew and military commander Teodoro Obiang overthrew him on this date. He established himself as the chairman of a military junta.¹⁷ After the coup the only political party United National Worker's Party had been banned. Later that year, he appointed himself president. Nevertheless, the so called Supreme Military Council ruled Equatorial Guinea until the adoption of a new constitution, which was passed in a referendum in 1982.¹⁸ Nguema was sentenced to death for the crime of genocide against the Bubi people and other crimes committed.¹⁹ According to LIED no multiparty executive

and legislative elections were held. Per FH, for this regime period, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. For this period, political liberties are coded as absent by both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

08/15/1982 End Military Autocracy/Start Personalist Autocracy: On that day the new constitution, which had been drafted with the help of the United Nations, was passed through a popular referendum. 95,8% voted in favor of the new constitution. Through the referendum, Teodoro Obiang officially became president for a seven-year term.²⁰ Equatorial Guinea nominally returned to a civilian rule.²¹ Although the constitution entailed provisions for human rights, democratic principles and a free-market economy, it also granted Obiang widespread powers. These encompassed unilateral powers, granting control over aspects like cabinet appointments and the authority to govern through decrees.²² It was only in 1987 that Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE) was founded by President Teodoro Obiang. It stayed the only political organization until 1991. The main purpose of the party was to support Obiang.²³ In the parliamentary elections in 1988, therefore, only the PDGE presented candidates, specifically a "single list of 60 candidates for the 60 seats."²⁴ Obiang was reelected as president in 1989, and analogous to the parliamentary elections, he was the only candidate.²⁵ Like his uncle, Teodoro Obiang established a cult of personality.²⁶ In 1991, another constitutional referendum took place, leading to the first parliamentary multi-party elections in 1993.²⁷ The regime classification is disputed. HTW classifies it as one-party regime, REIGN as personal regime, and MCM as well as AF classify it as a military regime. We classify it as personalist autocracy because Teodoro Obiang Mbasogo was de facto the sole ruler of the regime. His powers were far-reaching and were not really limited by other institutions or challenged in any way by other candidates. The PDGE was a regime-party with no political aspirations or vision of its own. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held in 1982, from 1983 onward executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Moreover, political liberties were still not present (LIED, V-Dem PCLI). From 1982 to 1992, as per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations during this time. In 1993, the executive faced weak constraints, classified as Intermediate Category 1 between unlimited authority and slight limitations. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

11/21/1993 End Personalist Autocracy/Start Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy: On this date the first parliamentary first multi-party elections were held in Equatorial Guinea since the pre-independence elections of 1968. Although seven parties were allowed to run in the election, the ruling PDGE maintained its grip on power, winning 68 of the 80 seats in the enlarged Chamber of People's Representatives. They were described as not free and fair.²⁸ The government imposed a ban on unauthorized demonstrations and included no opposition members in the new cabinet (Lansford 2012a: 510). Obiang was re-elected in 1996 and 2002 with 98 percent of the vote in elections condemned as fraudulent by international observers. In 2002, for instance, at least one voting district was recorded as giving Obiang 103 percent of the vote. He was re-elected for a fourth term in 2009 with 97% of the vote, again amid accusations of voter fraud and intimidation beating opposition leader Plácido Micó Abogo.²⁹ The cult of personality still exists. Obiang gave himself various titles. For example, "gentleman of the great island of Bioko, Annobón and Río Muni", he made comments about his God-like power and his special relationship and contact with God, and he also likes to call himself El Jefe.³⁰ In November 2022, Obiang secured re-election in the 2022 Equatorial Guinean general election with 99.7% of the vote, amidst allegations of fraud raised by the opposition.³¹ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations

of LIED. LIED categorizes all elections in the country as not competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI score them as neither free, fair nor clean. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Moreover, both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI still categorizes the political liberties as constantly absent for the whole time. In 1994 and 1995, as per Polity5's categorization, the executive experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. Since 1996, based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive operated with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

Electoral (Personalist) Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Wood 2004)

Notes

- ¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_El_Pardo_\(1778\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_El_Pardo_(1778))
- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Guinea
- ³ <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/spanish-guinea-1950-1968/>
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1963_Spanish_Guinean_autonomy_referendum
- ⁵ <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/GQ/GQ-UC01/elections/historical-data-on-women/>
- ⁶ <https://opil.ouplaw.com/display/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e928>
- ⁷ <https://opil.ouplaw.com/display/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e928>
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonifacio_Ond%C3%B3_Ed%C3%BA#Prime_minister_of_Spanish_Guinea
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1964_Spanish_Guinean_provincial_election
- ¹⁰ <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/spanish-guinea-1950-1968/>
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_Spanish_Guinean_general_election
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_Spanish_Guinean_general_election
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francisco_Mac%C3%ADas_Nguema#Early_career;
<https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/people-global-african-history/francisco-macias-nguema-1924-1979/>
- ¹⁴ <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/GNQ>
- ¹⁵ <https://africanelections.tripod.com/gq.html>
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francisco_Mac%C3%ADas_Nguema
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francisco_Mac%C3%ADas_Nguema
- ¹⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Military_Council_\(Equatorial_Guinea\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Military_Council_(Equatorial_Guinea))
- ¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1979_Equatorial_Guinea_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat
- ²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1982_Equatorial_Guinea_constitution
- ²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teodoro_Obiang_Nguema_Mbasogo
- ²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1982_Equatorial_Guinea_constitution
- ²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Party_of_Equatorial_Guinea
- ²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1988_Equatorial_Guinean_parliamentary_election
- ²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teodoro_Obiang_Nguema_Mbasogo
- ²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cults_of_personality
- ²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1991_Equatorial_Guinean_constitutional_referendum;
https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Equatorial_Guinea_2012?lang=en
- ²⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1993_Equatorial_Guinean_legislative_election
- ²⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teodoro_Obiang_Nguema_Mbasogo
- ³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cults_of_personality
- ³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equatorial_Guinea#History

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