



## FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2020

# Guinea-Bissau

PARTLY FREE

# 46

/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	17/40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	29/60

## LAST YEAR'S SCORE &amp; STATUS

42/100    **Partly Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.



# Overview

Guinea-Bissau's political system has been hampered in recent years by divisions between the president and the parliament, and within the ruling party. A consensus transitional government was formed in 2018, and elections due that year were held in 2019 after a delay. Conditions for civil liberties have gradually improved as the country has recovered from the aftermath of a military coup in 2012, though police continue to disrupt some demonstrations. Corruption is a major problem that has been exacerbated by organized criminal activity, including drug trafficking.

## Key Developments in 2019

- The African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde (PAIGC) won the March parliamentary elections but lost its outright majority, leading it to form a coalition with three smaller parties.
- President José Mário Vaz continued to feud with the PAIGC over control of the premiership throughout the year, refusing to appoint PAIGC leader Domingos Simões Pereira after the March elections and eventually agreeing to reappoint incumbent Aristedes Gomes in June. Vaz attempted to unilaterally replace Gomes in October, but reversed course in November under international pressure.
- Vaz placed fourth in the first round of the presidential election in November, failing to advance to the December runoff between Pereira and Umaro Sissoco Embaló of the Movement for Democratic Alternation (Madem G15). Final results of the runoff were pending at year's end.
- Police seized a record 2,000 tons of cocaine in a September operation in Canchungo, underscoring the authorities' improved efforts to combat drug trafficking and related corruption in recent years.

## Political Rights

# A. Electoral Process

**A1** 0-4 pts

<p><b>Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?</b></p>	<p><b>2/4</b></p>
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The president is elected through a two-round voting system for up to two consecutive terms of five years. The prime minister is appointed by the president “in accordance with the election results” after consulting with the parliamentary parties, and the government must be dissolved if the parliament rejects its proposed budget.

José Mário Vaz was elected president as the nominee of the PAIGC in 2014, and the election was considered largely free and fair. However, Vaz’s 2015 dismissal of Pereira, the party leader, as prime minister touched off a political crisis. A series of subsequent governments appointed by Vaz failed to secure parliamentary approval. In 2017, the UN Security Council urged Vaz and other leaders to implement the internationally brokered Conakry Agreement of 2016, which called for an inclusive government led by a consensus prime minister. Under pressure from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Vaz in 2018 finally nominated a consensus figure, Aristides Gomes, who remained in office through the March 2019 parliamentary elections.

After the March elections, Vaz again refused to nominate Pereira as head of government, forcing the PAIGC to propose Gomes as its choice. He was officially reappointed in June; Vaz’s term technically expired that month, but he remained in office through year’s end. Vaz attempted to unilaterally replace Gomes with Faustino Imbali in October, reversing the move in November only after ECOWAS declared it unconstitutional and threatened sanctions.

The first round of the 2019 presidential election was held in November. After no candidate received 50 percent of the vote, a second round was held in December between Umaro Sissoco Embaló of the new party Madem G15—a PAIGC splinter

group—and Pereira of the PAIGC. Vaz placed fourth in the first round and did not take part in the runoff. Final results were pending at the end of the year.

**A2** 0-4 pts

<b>Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?</b>	<b>3/4</b>
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Members of the 102-seat National People’s Assembly are elected by popular vote for four-year terms. In 2018, the incumbent assembly’s mandate was repeatedly extended due to delays in the voter registration process.

In the March 2019 elections, the PAIGC remained the largest single party with 47 seats, though it lost its outright majority. Madem G15 won 27, the Party of Social Renewal (PRS) took 21, the United People’s Assembly–Democratic Party of Guinea-Bissau (APU-PDGB) took 5, and the Union for Change (UM) and the Party for a New Democracy (PND) each secured a single seat. The PAIGC formed a majority coalition with the latter three parties.

The United Nations and European Union praised the parliamentary elections as peaceful and orderly, and an observation mission from the African Union deemed them free and fair, though it noted some flaws in the process.

*Score Change: The score improved from 2 to 3 because the 2019 elections were generally considered credible despite delays and other difficulties, restoring the parliament’s democratic mandate after the previous term expired nearly a year earlier.*

**A3** 0-4 pts

<b>Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?</b>	<b>2/4</b>
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There are some problems with the country’s electoral laws and framework, including weak controls on campaign spending and vote buying and a lack of legal provisions

for domestic poll observers. Elections have been subject to delays in recent years, due in part to lack of funding and stalled voter registration processes.

In observing the 2019 parliamentary elections, the African Union noted a lack of resources at the National Electoral Commission (CNE), flaws in the voter registration process, and weaknesses in national election observation by civil society. In addition, the capacity of both electoral officials and party representatives in polling stations was deemed insufficient.

In the run-up to the November 2019 presidential election, the PAIGC-led government decided to review the voter registry in order to include some 25,000 people who were not able to vote in the parliamentary elections due to technical errors. The PRS and Madem G15 claimed that the changes were fraudulent, but ECOWAS rejected the opposition's demand for a new registration process.

## B. Political Pluralism and Participation

### B1 0-4 pts

<p><b>Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?</b></p>	<p><b>3/4</b></p>
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There are no major constraints on party formation. Dozens of political parties are active in Guinea-Bissau, and 21 competed in the 2019 parliamentary elections, up from 15 in 2014. However, the political crisis since 2015 has led to some instances of violence and intimidation among partisan groups.

### B2 0-4 pts

<p><b>Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?</b></p>	<p><b>2/4</b></p>
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Guinea-Bissau has a limited record of democratic power transfers between rival political parties, as the PAIGC or military rulers have governed for most of the period since independence. In 2014, Vaz succeeded an independent who had served as acting president in the wake of the 2012 coup. Nevertheless, despite the repeated delays and tensions between the president and the PAIGC, opposition forces increased their representation in the 2019 legislative elections.

**B3** 0-4 pts

<p><b>Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?</b></p>	<p><b>1/4</b></p>
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The military has apparently refrained from interfering in politics since 2014, but the choices of voters and politicians continue to be influenced by corruption and patronage networks. Organized crime linked to drug trafficking and money laundering has contributed to the country’s political instability in recent decades.

**B4** 0-4 pts

<p><b>Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?</b></p>	<p><b>2/4</b></p>
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Women enjoy equal political rights, but their participation is limited in practice by cultural obstacles, and they are underrepresented in leadership positions. Just 14 women won seats in the March 2019 parliamentary elections, the same number as in 2014. A 2018 law requires 36 percent of candidates on party lists to be women.

Ethnicity plays a role in politics, reducing the extent to which all groups’ interests are represented. For example, one of the larger groups, the Balanta, have traditionally dominated the military and cast votes for the PRS.

## C. Functioning of Government

**C1** 0-4 pts

<b>Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?</b>	<b>1/4</b>
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Governance has been impaired by the political crisis that began in 2015, and election delays have undermined the democratic legitimacy of incumbent officials. The original term of the parliament that was replaced by the March 2019 elections had expired nearly a year earlier, and President Vaz's term expired in June. This contributed to doubts about the legal and constitutional validity of the president's multiple attempts to control the appointment of the prime minister during the year. Aristides Gomes was the seventh prime minister to be appointed since Vaz took office in 2014. Meanwhile, the full legislature has convened only sporadically in recent years.

**C2** 0-4 pts

<b>Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?</b>	<b>1/4</b>
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Corruption is pervasive, including among senior government figures. Both military and civilian officials have been accused of involvement in the illegal drug trade. Critics of past corruption investigations targeting former high-ranking officials have argued that they were politically motivated.

However, an August 2019 report from the UN secretary general praised the country's progress on strengthening its law enforcement capacity and suppressing the transnational drug trade, which had long fueled official corruption. The report noted several recent trials and convictions in trafficking and organized crime cases. In September, an operation by Guinea-Bissau's judicial police seized a record 2,000 tons of cocaine. Those arrested in the operation included three people from Colombia, one from Mali, and four Guineans.

*Score Change: The score improved from 0 to 1 due to authorities' reported progress in combating the transnational drug trade, which has long played a central role in*

*official corruption.*

**C3** 0-4 pts

<b>Does the government operate with openness and transparency?</b>	<b>0</b> / 4
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There are no effective legal provisions to facilitate public access to government information, and government officials do not disclose their personal financial information as required by law. The political impasse and related parliamentary dysfunction have further obstructed oversight of government spending in recent years. The lack of transparency contributes to chronic budget shortfalls, frequent delays in public-sector wages, and doubts about the management of foreign assistance.

## Civil Liberties

### D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

**D1** 0-4 pts

<b>Are there free and independent media?</b>	<b>2</b> / 4
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The constitution provides for freedom of the press, and there is some media diversity. However, journalists regularly face harassment and intimidation, including pressure regarding their coverage from political figures and government officials.

Employees mounted a partial strike at the national public television broadcaster, Televisão da Guiné-Bissau (TGB), in January 2019 to protest political meddling and demand an end to censorship. In August, the station's director general was suspended by the government; Reporters Without Borders argued that the move was

likely intended to reinforce political control ahead of the presidential election. In October, media regulators shut down two private radio stations that were critical of Vaz, accusing them of operating without a license.

**D2** 0-4 pts

<b>Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?</b>	<b>3/4</b>
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Religious freedom is legally protected and usually respected in practice. Government licensing requirements are not onerous and often disregarded. Some Muslims have reportedly raised concerns about the influence of foreign imams who preach a more rigorous or austere form of Islam, threatening religious tolerance.

**D3** 0-4 pts

<b>Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?</b>	<b>3/4</b>
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Academic freedom is guaranteed and generally upheld, though the education system is poor in terms of access, quality, and basic resources. Public schools were closed for much of 2018 and 2019 due to ongoing teachers' strikes, and police have at times used force on campus in response to related protests.

**D4** 0-4 pts

<b>Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?</b>	<b>3/4</b>
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Individuals are relatively free to express their views on political topics in the private and social sphere, though some more public figures have faced the threat of arrest or charges in retaliation for their remarks in recent years.

# E. Associational and Organizational Rights

**E1** 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	<b>2/4</b>
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Freedom of assembly is frequently restricted. The authorities have repeatedly interfered with demonstrations linked to the political tensions between the president and the legislature. In February 2019, police violently suppressed a student march related to teachers' strikes and school closures. A planned series of similar marches, set to begin in May, were not permitted by authorities, and police dispersed those who assembled for the initial event.

One protester was reportedly killed in October as police sought to block a PRS demonstration calling for a new voter registration process. Nevertheless, other demonstrations and political rallies associated with the year's parliamentary and presidential election campaigns generally proceeded peacefully, reflecting modest improvements in freedom of assembly since the restoration of civilian rule.

*Score Change: The score improved from 1 to 2 because, despite authorities' efforts to suppress some protests during the year, a number of election-related demonstrations proceeded peacefully.*

**E2** 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?	<b>3/4</b>
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Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are generally able to operate. Some groups have faced intimidation and other obstacles, particularly those that are associated

with street demonstrations, but no major cases of repressive measures against NGOs were reported during 2019.

**E3** 0-4 pts

<b>Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?</b>	<b>3/4</b>
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Workers are allowed to form and join independent trade unions, but few work in the wage-earning formal sector. Private employers sometimes engage in improper interference with union organizing and other activities. The right to strike is protected, and government workers frequently exercise this right. Several strikes took place during 2019, including actions by civil servants, teachers, and state media employees.

## F. Rule of Law

**F1** 0-4 pts

<b>Is there an independent judiciary?</b>	<b>1/4</b>
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Judges are highly susceptible to corruption and political pressure, and the court system as a whole lacks the resources and capacity to function effectively.

**F2** 0-4 pts

<b>Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?</b>	<b>0/4</b>
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Corruption is common among police, and officers often fail to observe legal safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention. Very few criminal cases are brought to trial or successfully prosecuted, partly due to the limited material and human

resources available to investigators. Most of the population lacks access to the justice system in practice.

**F3** 0-4 pts

<b>Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?</b>	<b>2/4</b>
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Conditions in prisons and detention centers are often extremely poor, and law enforcement personnel generally enjoy impunity for abuses. Because of its weak institutions and porous borders, Guinea-Bissau has become a transit point for criminal organizations trafficking various types of contraband. The armed forces and some other state entities have been linked to drug trafficking. However, the authorities have made some progress in combating the drug trade and organized crime in recent years, and violence associated with political unrest has continued to recede since the restoration of elected civilian rule.

A low-intensity conflict in Senegal's Casamance region occasionally affects security across the border in Guinea-Bissau, where the Senegalese rebels sometimes operate.

*Score Change: The score improved from 1 to 2 because efforts to strengthen elected civilian governance and suppress organized criminal activity have continued to yield modest gains in physical security in recent years.*

**F4** 0-4 pts

<b>Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?</b>	<b>2/4</b>
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Women face significant societal discrimination and traditional biases, despite some legal protections. They generally do not receive equal pay for similar work and have fewer opportunities for education and employment.

There are virtually no effective legal protections against discrimination on other grounds, including ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, though same-sex

sexual activity is not specifically criminalized.

## G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

**G1** 0-4 pts

<b>Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?</b>	<b>2/4</b>
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There are few formal restrictions on freedom of movement, but widespread corruption among police and other public officials can limit this right in practice, as can criminal activity. The potential for Senegalese rebel activity may restrict movement in the border area.

**G2** 0-4 pts

<b>Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?</b>	<b>1/4</b>
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Illegal economic activity, including logging, by organized groups remains a problem. The quality of enforcement of property rights is generally poor, and the formal procedures for establishing a business are relatively onerous.

Women, particularly those from certain ethnic groups in rural areas, face restrictions on their ability to own and inherit property.

**G3** 0-4 pts

<b>Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?</b>	<b>1/4</b>
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There are multiple constraints on personal social freedoms. Early and forced marriages remain common, especially in rural areas. The government, international organizations, and community leaders have worked to eliminate female genital mutilation, though nearly half of the country's women have undergone such traditional practices. Despite the 2014 promulgation of a law to address domestic violence, the problem is reportedly widespread; victims of rape and domestic abuse rarely report the crimes to authorities.

**G4** 0-4 pts

<b>Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?</b>	<b>1/4</b>
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Guinea-Bissau is one of the world's poorest countries, with most families relying on unstable employment in the informal economy or remittances from migrant workers abroad. Public services have deteriorated in recent years amid irregular payment of public-sector workers.

Boys are vulnerable to organized exploitation through forced begging and to forced labor in sectors including mining and agriculture. Girls are frequently victims of sexual exploitation or domestic servitude. Government officials have been accused of complicity in trafficking activity, including sex tourism schemes in the Bijagós islands.



#### On Guinea-Bissau

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#### *Country Facts*

Global Freedom Score

**46/100** Partly Free

*Other Years*

2019
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