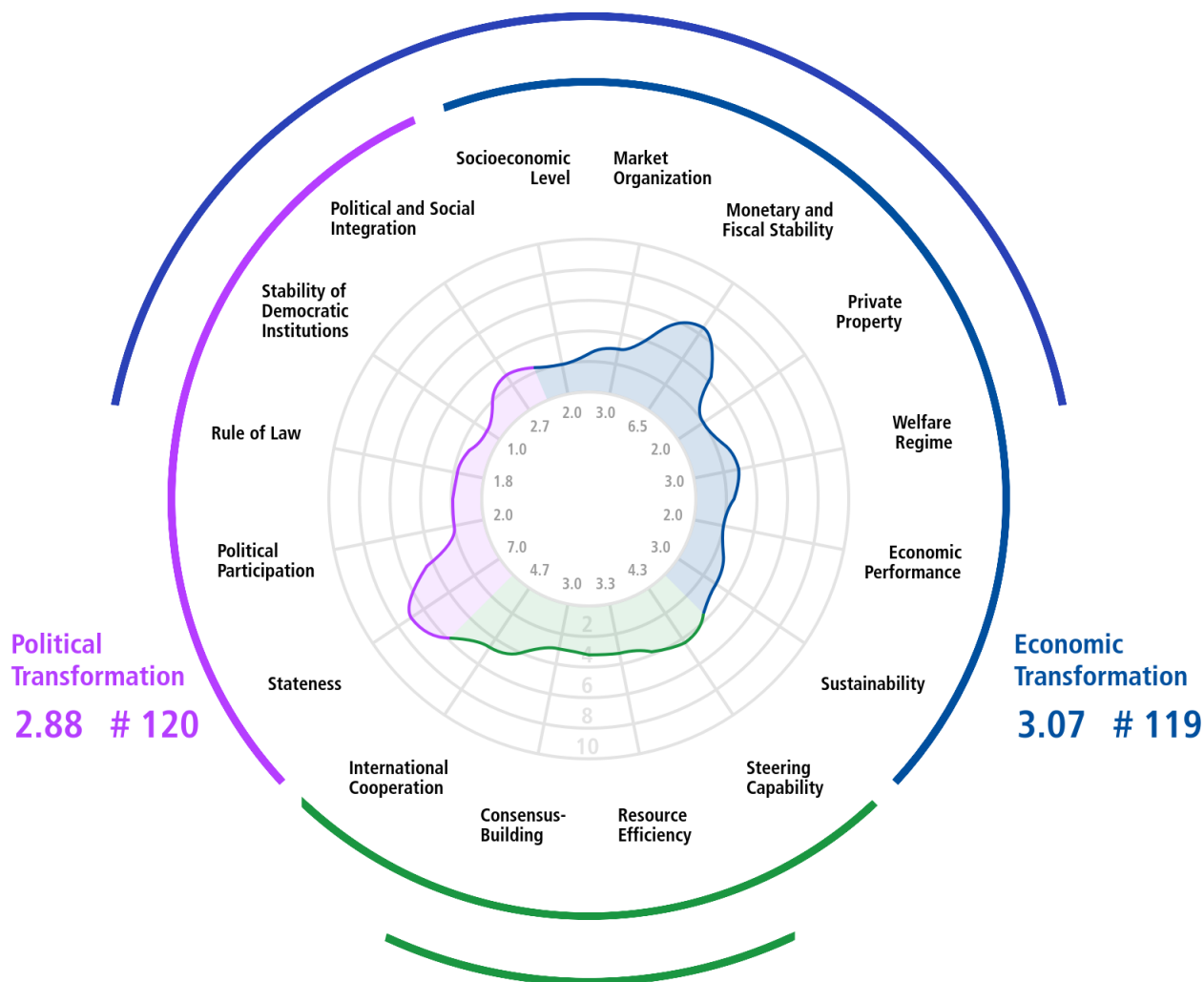


Equatorial Guinea

Status Index

2.98 # 122

on 1-10 scale out of 137



Governance Index

3.52 # 110

on 1-10 scale out of 137

This report is part of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024**. It covers the period from February 1, 2021 to January 31, 2023. The BTI assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries. More on the BTI at <https://www.bti-project.org>.

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Key Indicators

Population	M	1.7	HDI	0.596	GDP p.c., PPP \$	17396
Pop. growth ¹	% p.a.	2.4	HDI rank of 189	145	Gini Index	-
Life expectancy	years	60.6	UN Education Index	0.467	Poverty ³	% -
Urban population	%	74.0	Gender inequality ²	-	Aid per capita \$	7.8

Sources (as of December 2023): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | UNDP, Human Development Report 2021-22. Footnotes: (1) Average annual growth rate. (2) Gender Inequality Index (GII). (3) Percentage of population living on less than \$3.65 a day at 2017 international prices.

Executive Summary

Equatorial Guinea has managed to maintain a unique combination of long-term political continuity and economic volatility. As a small country with a single-minded leadership and an economy heavily reliant on oil, it faces significant challenges.

In November 2022, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo was re-elected for another seven-year term, extending his rule to almost half a century, if completed. Opposition party members, including the socialist *Convergencia para la Democracia Social* (CPDS) and the center-right *Ciudadanos por la Innovación* (CI), faced arrests and police violence in an oppressive environment. The electoral commission initially reported that 94.9% of the vote went to Obiang, later revising it to 99% when proclaiming him the elected candidate. This resulted in complete control of all parliamentary, senatorial and municipal council seats by the ruling *Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PDGE). Behind these seemingly absurd figures lies a significant story of effective power transfer. Attention now turns to the vice president and Obiang's first-born son, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, also known as Teodorín, who is heir apparent to the presidency.

The country's economy relies entirely on the export of off-shore oil and gas. The rise in liquefied natural gas (LNG) production, ranking it third in Africa after Nigeria and Angola (excluding gas giants in North Africa), and favorable international prices provided a boost. Between 2000 and 2013, the oil boom led to a twentyfold increase in GDP. However, GDP contracted by almost 60% in the subsequent five years due to falling oil prices and the depletion of oil fields. Then, it declined by another nearly 50% by 2020, primarily because of reduced demand from China, its primary export destination. Despite a prolonged recession for nearly a decade, the country has made no progress in terms of market liberalization, diversification, or political participation and plurality.

Initially, the IMF projected an exit from the long recession, but a small explosion at ExxonMobil's Zafiro off-shore oil field disrupted recovery. This ongoing economic contraction has fueled a cycle of political repression leading up to the 2022 elections, consolidating Teodorín's imminent succession. Nonetheless, the government appears confident about the near future, partly due to the successful marketing of underexploited gas reserves.

A significant economic shift occurred when Obiang secured a commitment in December 2022 from Chevron, a major new player in the oil industry. Chevron has decided to develop its regional plans in the shallow waters of the Bight of Biafra to boost LNG exports to Europe. The recent visits by high-profile American officials to the country were likely connected to the unconfirmed Chinese plan to construct its first Atlantic naval base in the port of Bata.

History and Characteristics of Transformation

Equatorial Guinea's history is characterized by a lack of civil war or political instability, having suffered only one coup in nearly 55 years since independence. This coup, which took place in August 1979, brought Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo to power. The coup was organized among the upper ranks of the state, with support from other senior government figures, as well as Gabon, France and Spain. Coups hold a significant place in the real and mythical history of Equatorial Guinea. Shortly after gaining independence in October 1968, an attempted coup by Spain-backed ministers and fellow independence leaders led to the transformation of the country under the rule of Francisco Macías Nguema, Equatorial Guinea's first and only democratically elected president. Macías established a single-party state and, by 1970, declared himself president for life. Obiang, who came from the same Mongomo region as Macías and also belonged to the Esangui clan (though not a relative), was a trusted confidant of Macías. A young lieutenant colonel trained at the prestigious Spanish military academy in Zaragoza, Obiang was appointed military governor of the island of Bioko by Macías for much of the 1970s.

The specter of coups and suspected coups, often with alleged involvement from former colonial powers, is a central ideological foundation of post-colonial Equatorial Guinea, spanning both regimes. After the failed coup attempt on March 5, 1969, Macías plunged the country into an increasingly volatile, tragic single-party state. This failed coup became the regime's mythical foundation, with March 5 commemorated as the "day of national liberation." It also marked the beginning of the brutal torture and assassination of Macías's political enemies. Similarly, Obiang turned his own coup on August 3, 1979, into the country's most important national holiday, known as the "Liberty Coup" (Golpe de Libertad).

With extensive support from both Spain and France, the country took significant steps toward economic and political liberalization. A progressive constitutional referendum in 1982 prepared the way for a multiparty system. In the 1993 legislative elections, the ruling PDGE party, founded in 1987, received less than 70% of the vote, its lowest result to date. The opposition party, Convergence for Social Democracy (CPDS), held its first congress in Bata in 1993. This was also

the first congress held by an opposition party in Equatorial Guinea. Prisoners of conscience serving sentences for conspiracy, incitement to rebellion and slander were also released at this time. However, the discovery and rapid exploitation of oil by U.S. companies in the mid-1990s led to a reversal of this liberalizing trend. The subsequent oil boom period was characterized by the widespread financial co-optation and appeasement of opposition figures through government appointments.

For historical reasons, coups or the loss of government power represent a regression or return to a colonized status. The country has experienced recent dramatic, foiled coup attempts. The root cause of these power struggles stems from the country's colonial history. Spanish colonists dominated the cocoa plantations and forestry exploitations, while the workforce primarily consisted of Nigerians. The small Bubi cocoa farmers and Fang coffee planters represented only a third of total production in 1968. Independence granted political power to the formerly colonized and economically marginalized majority. The leaders when independence occurred had all been colonial state officials, whose positions were their sole source of income, social status and power over others. This led to a post-colonial struggle among politicians for social and economic power, as access to government positions provided the only avenue for social status and economic privileges. Remaining outside government meant being stuck in the low socioeconomic status to which the formerly colonized "indigenous" people were relegated.

The BTI combines text analysis and numerical assessments. The score for each question is provided below its respective title. The scale ranges from 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Transformation Status

I. Political Transformation

1 | Stateness

The state's monopoly on the use of force is not contested. Urban police and rural gendarmes are ever-present in all regions of the country. There are no armed or unarmed clashes of any sort, nor any successful incursions to overthrow the government. There is a colorful history of thwarted coup attempts (the 2004 Wonga coup, when South African mercenaries backed by Margaret Thatcher's son were arrested in Zimbabwe) and a series of alleged attempts to assassinate Obiang (on Christmas day in 2017, when a few dozen mostly Chadian mercenaries were arrested in Cameroon). The presidential security detail includes or has included special forces from Israel and from a variety of other friendly states with strong militaries, such as Morocco. There is a strong military presence along key border areas, including tanks, helicopters and small trenches.

The vice president, Nguema Obiang (or Teodorín), holds the additional position of minister of defense and security. In May 2022, he announced Operación Limpieza, a campaign to "cleanse" the streets of urban gangs. Almost 1,000 police officers were deployed to impose nighttime curfews on adolescents in response to an alarming rise in domestic burglaries and gruesome murders committed by youth gangs.

There is a clear decline in international piracy incidents, due to a revamping of the navy and improved regional and international cooperation, prompted by a severe incident in 2020 when pirates from the Niger Delta attempted to take Marathon Oil employees hostage at the large LNG processing facility at Punta Europa, Malabo. State security forces fought them off. In December 2021, a container ship was attacked on the borders of Equatorial Guinea's territorial waters, 120 km southwest of Malabo. Six crew members were taken hostage into Nigerian waters, pursued by a Danish frigate, in line with an EU Coordinated Maritime Presence Plan, committing military assistance to the Gulf of Guinea. Airspace is under strict control, as shown during a July 2021 incident, when the head of the air force impounded a French military helicopter that was trying to refuel in Bata on its way to Libreville.

Question
Score

Monopoly on the
use of force

8

'06 '24 10

8

1

The country is one of the most ethnically homogeneous states in Africa. Around 90% of the population is Fang. The state is synonymous with the ruling Obiang regime. Members of both minority and majority ethnic groups are severely repressed when organizing political activities perceived to be in opposition to the ruling party. Both pro- and anti-government groups prize the Spanish language and their Hispanic legacy and use it to create distance from neighboring Francophone countries, which also have a large Fang population. This is the basis of the country's regionally distinct, strong nationalist identity. There is severe discrimination against the large laboring community of Francophone African immigrants, including a series of raids and deportations, which intensified in November 2021.

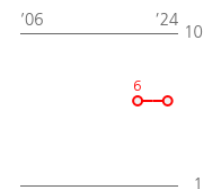
The main minority, the Bubi of the island of Bioko, have a longer history of political separatism, dating to the late colonial period. But since a severe wave of repressions in the 1970s and 1990s, the main Bubi political dissident group, the Movimiento para la Autodeterminación de la Isla de Bioko, has been entirely exiled. In July 2022, a group of Annobonese exiles in Spain declared, symbolically and rhetorically, the unilateral independence of their tiny island south of São Tomé.

The government often withdraws the passports of political dissidents either to force them to enter the country to renew their passports and arrest them or to prevent them from leaving. The large community of political exiles in Spain, Cameroon and many other countries is effectively permanently excluded from living in the country, under explicit or implicit threats of detention and likely torture. The only currently legalized and true opposition party is the CPDS. Their electoral program in November 2022, as in previous elections, was a lengthy academic document that starts with a theory of the state and liberal institutions in general, and then provides a blueprint for the entire legal and administrative structure of a new, still-imaginary state during and after the transition away from dictatorship.

The vast majority of the Equatoguinean population are Christians, with an estimated 87% subscribing to Catholicism. The country is one of the most proportionally Catholic on the continent. Five dioceses are established in the country, with the Vatican adding two in April 2017. A small percentage are Muslim, primarily recent Francophone West African immigrants and second-generation descendants of Nigerian Yoruba and Hausa immigrants. Both Malabo and Bata have mosques. There is a growing minority that participates in Pentecostal worship or adheres to local or syncretic cosmologies. Followers of these various congregations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. A 1992 presidential decree declared a preference for the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Church of Equatorial Guinea. This preference is manifested by the Catholic masses during national holidays. Catholicism is taught and encouraged in public schools. No policy is guided by the church. The president is officially polygamous, though reputed to be pious.

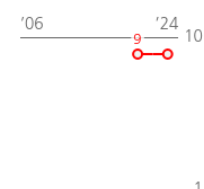
State identity

6



No interference of religious dogmas

9



Around 80% of the population lives in urban areas. The largest city is Bata on the mainland (380,084 inhabitants). Outside the main population centers of Malabo and Bata, people lack access to even the most rudimentary public provisions, such as water and reliable electricity. The country has a strong electrical grid powered by the hydrocarbon processing facility at Punta Europa on the island and a hydropower plant in the mainland region near Djibloho. Of the population, 66.7% have access to electricity according to the World Bank. Nevertheless, power outages are not uncommon and have led to hospitals being shut down, and even deaths, in Bata.

In the past decade, prestige projects have absorbed a large part of the country's budget, such as a stadium to host the Africa Cup of Nations in 2012 and 2015, and the town of Sipopo, built to host various African Union (AU) summits. Sipopo cost around €600 million to build, including 52 villas with swimming pools, one for each African head of state.

However, the main drain has been the new administrative capital city Djibloho, or Ciudad de la Paz ("City of Peace"). This interior city near Mongomo, with a vast presidential palace and parliament building, still under construction, swallowed up half of the 2016 budget and paralyzed the country's finances soon thereafter, forcing the government to seek an IMF bailout. Equatorial Guinea has repeatedly failed to meet Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) requirements for membership and is severely criticized by civil society for receiving IMF funds despite a lack of improvement.

2 | Political Participation

Since 1989, Equatorial Guinea has held elections every seven years, which have become a spectacle to legitimate Obiang's power. As the French journalist Vincent Hugué reported, Obiang recently confided to the French ambassador, Christian Bader, that "an election is not an election, it's a fete." Elections are formally regulated by the National Electoral Commission, which is headed by the interior minister, a member of the ruling party, the PDGE. Although the 1991 constitution calls for a multiparty republic, only one true opposition party is currently legal, the CPDS. All the other 14 parties are allied with the governing PDGE in a "democratic coalition," which in November 2022 won all of the 55 seats in the Senate (in addition to the 15 senators appointed by the president), all 100 seats in the parliament (Asamblea Nacional), and last but not least, all 588 seats on the municipal councils. The general elections held on November 20, 2022 to elect the president were merged with parliamentary and municipal elections due to what the regime called "economic constraints." The National Electoral Commission announced on November 26, 2022 that President Obiang won the presidential election with 94.9% of the vote and a turnout of 98%. Obiang won 99% of the vote in 1989, 98% in 1996, 97% in 2002, 95.8% in 2009, 93.5% in 2016.

Basic administration

5

'06 _____ '24 10



1

Free and fair elections

2

'06 _____ '24 10



1

On November 26, 2022, former Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos congratulated President Obiang for winning a “free and democratic election.” Moratinos is currently employed as a U.N. High Representative and added in his filmed oral message to the secretary-general of the U.N. that he, the “entire international community,” as well as the “people of Equatorial Guinea are satisfied and happy.” Days later, the EU Foreign Affairs and U.S. Department of State spokespersons noted that the “environment” had not been “propitious” for a “pluralistic and participatory election,” and that “credible allegations of significant election-related irregularities, including documented instances of fraud, intimidation, and coercion” should be investigated by the government

The legislature has no meaningful role in Equatorial Guinea, as the president, the PDGE and the ruling family work together to wield autocratic power. Unlike most other dynastic republics in the region, Equatorial Guinea has not yet witnessed a quasi-dynastic transfer of power from father to son. Instead, decision-making authorities are concentrated in the ruling family, with family members and in-laws holding significant political influence in various areas, such as security and the economy. Presidential decrees frequently supersede legislation, and all crucial decisions are made by the president and his chief of staff, Teodoro Biyogo Nsue, who also oversees the ministers. Notably, Biyogo Nsue is the brother of the politically influential First Lady Constanca Mangue.

The PDGE party exercises control over every branch of government and permeates all levels of the bureaucratic system. Through the confiscation of substantial oil revenues, the regime is able to employ patronage networks to ensure loyalty and implement its desired policies. International oil companies also play a significant role and inevitably support the current regime.

Protection of associations such as unionization is guaranteed by the constitution, but this is rarely if ever enforced. The only effective union is the farmers’ organization. The process of registering any kind of association is routinely met with bureaucratic and political hurdles. Political assemblies in particular are met with harassment or worse from the regime, which tolerates no challenges to its rule. Assembly is more or less monopolized by the state, which actively pressures citizens to participate in government events and rallies.

In June 2022, the leader of the opposition party CPDS, Andres Esono Ondo, retracted a call for party members to march in Malabo after the PDGE’s general secretary threateningly called such a public gathering a “threat to public order.” On September 19, 2022, the attorney general in Malabo summoned seven opposition figures to appear in his court in relation to a bizarre terrorist alert announced on television. The summoned leader of the banned party CI, Gabriel Nsé Obiang Obono, failed to appear. A judge then issued a warrant for his arrest on September 29, allowing the police to invade his home and party headquarters. Gabriel Nsé had been hosting a meeting of hundreds of CI members. After an almost weeklong siege, local media

Effective power to govern

2

'06 '24 10

2

1

Association / assembly rights

2

'06 '24 10

2

1

and the Spanish newspaper El Pais reported that storming the compound resulted in the deaths of three to nine CI members and one police officer by teargas inhalation and/or small arms gunfire. Up to 170 supporters, including children and the elderly, were bussed to the police headquarters, and 53 were moved to and remain in Black Beach Prison, including Gabriel Nsé. The CI was banned in 2018 by the attorney general after being accused of participation in a coup attempt.

A prominent activist, Anacleto Micha Ndong, founder and member of the local human rights associations GENuestra and Somos+, is still detained after he tried providing bottles of water to opposition party members when they were under siege. The founder of Somos+, Joaquín Eló Ayeto, known as Paysa, who has been tortured and imprisoned in the past, was again arrested on December 11, 2022 for organizing a private Human Rights Day event.

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed but not enforced in practice. Libel laws tend to be draconian, involving penal sanctions, and be wielded by the regime to suppress dissent. Censorship is the norm. Self-censorship is exercised by practically everyone, including diplomatic staff, university academics, business leaders and journalists. Equatorial Guinea’s media legislation is one of the toughest in Africa. Press offenses are not decriminalized, and lawsuits for slander or defamation are common, leading to permanent self-censorship.

There is no media pluralism. The population’s main source of news is the government-controlled radio and TV broadcaster, RTVGE. The only privately owned television channel, Asonga, was founded and is owned by Teodorín. The CPDS sporadically published a party newspaper, La Verdad [The Truth], which sometimes did not come out for years at a time. The social media accounts and websites of opposition leaders and exiled groups are the primary alternative news sources. Locally, there is also the widespread private sharing of political commentary through audio files on WhatsApp, led by podcasters known as “audistas,” such as Luis Nzo Ondo, who used the name “David contra Goliath” and was arrested in September 2022.

In the Reporters Without Borders 2021 press freedom index, Equatorial Guinea was ranked 164th out of 180 countries, citing strict censorship of media and journalists.

Freedom of
expression

2

'06 '24 10

2

1

3 | Rule of Law

The 1991 constitution, along with its 2011 amendments adopted via referendum, legally guarantees checks and balances. It outlines the independence and limitations of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. However, in reality, there is a lack of effective separation of powers.

The president is elected through universal suffrage and can serve up to two seven-year terms, as per the 2011 amendments. Although the legislature is deemed independent in theory, it is constrained both constitutionally and politically. Neither parliament nor the Senate possesses the constitutional authority to remove the president, while the president holds the power to dismiss members of parliament. In early 2018, the single opposition member belonging to Gabriel Nsé's party (CI) was removed from parliament after the CI contested the 2017 legislative elections and won the only seat held by an opposition party. Additionally, the president has the authority to appoint additional senators as deemed necessary by national legislation and can dissolve parliament. In practice, the ruling party exerts complete control over the parliament.

While the judiciary is theoretically independent and differentiated, it is ultimately dependent on the executive branch. President Obiang appoints all high-level judges, including those serving in the Constitutional Tribunal and the Supreme Court. Parliament ratifies their appointments.

In addition to the serious problems with judicial independence described above, the president is constitutionally the highest magistrate in the nation and "guarantees the independence of the jurisdictional function" (Title 2, Chapter V, Article 92).

In February 2020, it emerged that a former president of the Supreme Court had gone into hiding to escape the police, whom Teodorín controlled. The former court president had been fighting for judicial independence and refused to retract statements regarded as incendiary by the regime. The former president of the Supreme Court denounced that he had been persecuted since he declared in 2018 that another judge, José Esono Bindang, had died in police facilities. Following this complaint, he was dismissed, and the death of the late judge in Malabo's central police station was never investigated. In 2019, exiled and local opposition lawyers established the Equatoguinean Commission of Jurists. They compile and provide critical commentary on legislation and facilitate legal assistance for human rights activists.

Separation of powers

2

'06 '24 10

2

1

Independent judiciary

2

'06 '24 10

2

1

Officeholders who break the law and engage in corruption can usually do so with impunity and without adverse publicity. The consolidation of Teodorín's grip on power is evident in the arrest of his half-brother, Ruslan Obiang Nsue, in January 2023, precipitated by the sale in Spain of an airplane belonging to the national airline company Ceiba Intercontinental. Ruslan Obiang Nsue, former secretary of state for sports and youth, was first deputy director of Ceiba Intercontinental and then its managing director. He stands accused of corruption for receiving the proceeds of the sale in his personal bank account. He publicly defended himself in an Instagram video and seemed to implicate a daughter of Obiang, Anita Mbasogo Obiang, and her politically influential husband, as the main beneficiaries in the deal. The arrest of a member of the presidential family is unprecedented.

Several high-level corruption cases have been pursued in foreign countries, such as the "ill-gotten goods" affair pursued by French investigative judges. Teodorín was given a three-year suspended prison sentence by the French Court of Cassation in June 2020. Moreover, the court levied €30 million in fines and his assets in France were confiscated. This sentence was confirmed in July 2021 and again in June 2022, after the same Paris court rejected appeals by French lawyer Rachida Dati, a former minister of justice under Sarkozy. The appeal sought to invalidate the order to seize a mansion in the 16th arrondissement of Paris, now worth at least €150 million, purchased in 2004 by Teodorín in a "private" capacity, when he only held a position in the minor Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The six-story building, containing 101 rooms, is currently occupied by Equatorial Guinea diplomats. In September 2022, Equatorial Guinea initiated proceedings against France at the ICJ, alleging a violation of diplomatic property. In July 2021, the UK government also froze his financial assets and banned him from entering the UK in light of anti-corruption investigations there. Malabo closed its embassy in the country in protest.

Civil rights are granted by the constitution, which formally endorses the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. Article 13 of the constitution protects personal liberties, including the right to free expression and assembly, free movement, and free association, as well as the enjoyment of several due process rights.

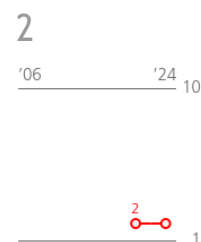
However, there are no mechanisms to protect civil liberties in Equatorial Guinea. Citizens are at the mercy of security forces, which routinely violate rights as basic as bodily integrity. Neither do citizens enjoy recourse in the courts. It is common, especially among members of the political opposition, to be denied a judicial hearing and held without charge. Black Beach Prison in Malabo is notorious for extrajudicial torture. Open expression of LGBTQ+ sexual orientations or publicly expressing a political preference for a group other than the PDGE both expose individuals to violations of their civil rights.

On January 17, 2023 dissident Julio Obama Mefuman, age 51, died in the Oveng Azem Prison of Mongomo, while serving a 60-year jail term after being kidnapped in South Sudan in 2019. He had initially been convicted in absentia for allegedly

Prosecution of office abuse



Civil rights



participating in an attempted coup against Obiang during Christmas 2017. Obama was a Spanish citizen, former legionnaire in the Spanish armed forces and part of the exiled MLGE3R movement, which stands for the Movement for the Liberation of the Equatorial Guinea, Third Republic. Based in Spain, the MLGE3R, primarily composed of and led by exiled government military personnel from Mongomo, accused the government of torturing people to death. Foreign Minister Simeon Oyono Esono Angue said Obama died in a Mongomo hospital “following illness.”

Obama died in less than two weeks after Spain’s High Court announced an investigation of his suspected kidnapping and torture, as well as of a second dissident who likewise held Spanish citizenship. It was disclosed that both were kidnapped in South Sudan in late 2019, together with two Equatorial Guinea nationals who reside in Spain, and flown to Equatorial Guinea on a presidential plane by Carmelo Ovono Obiang, another son of the president and head of foreign security, along with the two notorious heads of Internal and Presidential Security.

4 | Stability of Democratic Institutions

Institutions, from the national government to the municipal councils, are nominally democratic institutions and are de facto operated by the ruling PDGE. All political positions are considered pecuniary awards for party loyalty. Failure to express loyalty is met with removal, or worse, oppression and imprisonment. The outlook for the future is not promising. The 2011 constitutional amendments created a new post of vice president, to which the president can devolve considerable power. In effect, this sets up the country for a dynastic succession from President Obiang to his son, Vice President Nguema Obiang.

Nominally democratic institutions do exist, but they are universally held to be illegitimate by all dissident diaspora and non-government political groups. The government acts in the framework of these institutions, which are a facade of “electoral democracy.” An opposition does not exist within these institutions.

In March 2022, important exiled opposition parties (including the MLG3R) and local rights groups (such as GE Nuestra, Somos+) came together at the headquarters of a socialist trade union in Madrid and agreed to a “Pacto Político.” The pact seeks to coordinate a government in exile, demands a peaceful transition, renounces all political violence and renews the call for a boycott of any elections until the legalization of all parties. The prominent exiled politician Severo Moto, leader of the Partido del Progreso (Progress Party), reiterated that he was awaiting the implosion of the regime. Domestically, members of banned opposition parties such as the Progress Party, as well as the CPDS, deny the legitimacy of the country’s institutions at their own peril.

Performance of democratic institutions



Commitment to democratic institutions



5 | Political and Social Integration

The de facto single-party structure of the Equatoguinean political system ensures a high degree of political stability, which reduces fragmentation, polarization and voter volatility. The PDGE is formally part of a “democratic coalition” of 15 parties. But these other parties have very few members, sometimes only one, and most were either recently formed or have leaders already working in government or at state-owned enterprises. No opposition figures can work in the government or government-related sectors. They are usually independent professionals or artists.

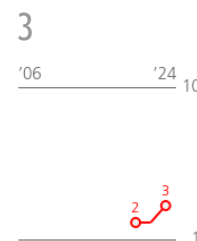
Despite obvious instances of fraud, the CPDS’s poor electoral results (less than 10,000 votes and only around 5,000 at the final count), which are even lower than in previous elections, can in large part be attributed to the widespread social pressures that compel people to conform and accept the PDGE as the primary or only source of direct and indirect income.

The only other legalized opposition party, the PCSD, received fewer than 3,000 votes. Its main noteworthy feature was that its acronym is similar to the CPDS. Gabriel Nsé, the leader of the CI, who was violently arrested and jailed at Black Beach in September 2022, has a relatively large and loyal support base that can be attributed to his military pedigree. Gabriel Nsé was head of Obiang’s military council in the 1990s and also his son-in-law. This contrasts with the academic style of the CPDS, whose leaders are mostly highly educated professionals trained at Spanish universities but are popularly seen as ineffective.

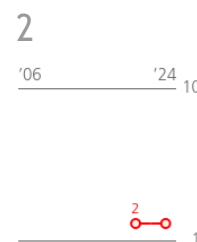
Apart from business organizations, which follow an authoritarian corporatist model, democratic interest groups representing society do not have much institutional support. The ruling regime does not uphold any fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of association. The environment is unfavorable, even hostile, to civil society work. The process for legalizing an interest group is long and full of obstacles. It requires promoters to submit to the Interior Ministry an affidavit certifying that it will undergo inspection on a quarterly basis, a favorable report from the ministry of the area in which the organization wishes to work, and another report from the provincial governor in its location. It also requires formalizing a constitution for the entity in front of a notary public, who, in turn, must obtain authorization from the Interior Ministry to validate this act. No legally constituted association is allowed to receive donations, local or foreign, private or public, over \$100 without prior authorization from the interior minister. With the exception of one, unions are not permitted in practice, despite legal protections, and professional associations are closely monitored by the regime.

Business interests are the best organized pressure groups in the country, especially foreign businesses that collaborate with the ruling dynasty’s scions. There are a series of corporate social responsibility initiatives that collaborate with various organizations, including local NGOs focused on environmental conservation and cultural heritage.

Party system



Interest groups



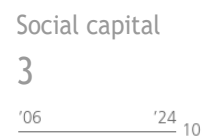
Both the Spanish and French cultural centers play a significant role in promoting groups and events that address politicized issues, such as human rights and even public health, which may expose the government to criticism. The U.S. Embassy is increasingly vocal in its support of the locally organized LGBTQ+ movement. Additionally, there are groups of independent lawyers in the country who actively express concerns about the rule of law, although they are not necessarily affiliated with opposition movements.

The regime is authoritarian in nature. There is no survey data available to determine the extent of citizens’ approval of democratic norms and procedures, unless one were to accept the 98% turnout rate reported by the government in the November 2022 elections. A large part of the population responds positively to the PDGE’s rhetoric of foreign and conspiratorial interference and Teodorín populist strongman policies. President Obiang is an unquestionable and also supernatural figure of power, almost royal, though it is unclear whether these qualities are equally transposed to his first-born son. In an interview, Obiang characterized Teodorín as a “political aficionado” who counts on the support of the “majority of young people” and said that it would “be unfair if his talent was not rewarded.”

There is a widespread social code to not “hablar de politica” or “talk politics” and social stigmatization of regime critics in their neighborhoods, though the government needs to rely on police instead of on informants or vigilante behavior. Lively religious and family networks in urban areas are the key social networks.

Apart from a default affiliation to the PDGE for anyone who wants to work in or near government, attachments to particular local political figures, who are recruited or promoted from across the country, are the key avenues for converting social capital to actual capital. These individuals represent or advance the interests of themselves or their relatives, their village neighbors, and the progressively wider, weaker, and more diffuse circles formed by the debtors and clients of their family, lineage, clan and ethnic group or subgroup.

Working for the state or state-owned enterprises (SOEs) is almost the exclusive source of income, the economic basis of social status, and the foundation of power and influence over others. There are large numbers of foreign migrant laborers employed in all kinds of menial, informal and commercial work. By official accounts, they constitute nearly 17.5% of the workforce, but in reality this figure is much higher. They have their own independently organized mutual aid and remittance networks.



II. Economic Transformation

6 | Level of Socioeconomic Development

The progress in human development in Equatorial Guinea falls significantly short of the country's economic potential, resulting in low levels of socioeconomic development compared to regional counterparts. In the 2021 HDI ranking, Equatorial Guinea was placed 145th out of 189 countries with a score of 0.596, dropping from 144th in 2017 (0.582). The IMF's 2022 staff country report warned of rising food prices, declining real GDP and living standards, as well as a projected downturn in the hydrocarbon sector for the next five years. The COVID-19 pandemic and explosions in a military barracks in the economic capital, Bata, in March 2021 exacerbated the already dire conditions in which the country's poorest demographic lives, causing widespread destruction and loss of life. Despite the lack of recent and reliable data on indicators, such as the Gini Index and GDI, the country faces staggering levels of inequality.

The poverty rate, estimated at 67% in 2020, has increased from 43.7% in 2011. The population is predominantly young, with around 56% of people under the age of 25, and largely resides in urban areas (88% on Bioko Island and around 71% on the mainland). While life expectancy and infant mortality have reportedly improved over the past decade, they remain worse than the regional average. Access to basic drinking water supplies and sanitation services is around 65% according to the WHO (2020), with higher rates in urban areas, highlighting significant urban-rural disparities. The health care budget is below the continental average, with a focus on urban hospitals, while preventive primary health care, particularly in rural areas, receives little attention. Sanitation services are also underdeveloped, although a wastewater sanitation network with a pumping station was recently completed in the capital, Malabo, financed by China.

Approximately 50% of the population is employed, while the unemployment rate is 20%, notably higher among young people. Of the working population, roughly 20% are engaged in unskilled labor, 20% work in agriculture, another 20% in retail and commerce, and a significant 20% are employed in professional or administrative services, predominantly in or associated with the government. The hydrocarbon sector employs only 4% of the workforce, including technically and vocationally trained personnel. Agriculture contributes less than 5% to GDP, and only 20% of the population meets their daily nutritional needs. Domestic food production meets less than 30% of the country's demand, with the rest met through imports, largely facilitated by the immigrant and foreign merchant population.

Question
Score

Socioeconomic
barriers

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The government directly employs at least 25,000 individuals, nearly a quarter of the employed population, and indirectly employs a significantly larger number. The proportion of women in the labor force remains low, with only 15% of civil servants being women. Approximately 5% of the workforce consists of “directors and managers” or individuals in the armed forces, which contributes to inequality, along with age and gender.

Economic indicators		2019	2020	2021	2022
GDP	\$ M	11364.1	10099.2	12269.4	11813.9
GDP growth	%	-5.5	-4.2	-0.9	3.1
Inflation (CPI)	%	1.5	4.8	-0.1	4.8
Unemployment	%	8.3	9.3	9.1	8.7
Foreign direct investment	% of GDP	4.0	4.1	3.7	3.9
Export growth	%	-13.5	-4.9	4.4	2.4
Import growth	%	-11.2	-10.8	12.5	6.2
Current account balance	\$ M	-	-	-	-
Public debt	% of GDP	43.2	49.4	42.1	34.6
External debt	\$ M	-	-	-	-
Total debt service	\$ M	-	-	-	-
Net lending/borrowing	% of GDP	1.9	-1.7	2.6	-
Tax revenue	% of GDP	9.3	7.8	5.4	-
Government consumption	% of GDP	25.5	29.5	25.2	23.7
Public education spending	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Public health spending	% of GDP	0.6	0.8	-	-
R&D expenditure	% of GDP	-	-	-	-
Military expenditure	% of GDP	1.3	1.6	1.5	1.1

Sources (as of December 2023): The World Bank, World Development Indicators | International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database.

7 | Organization of the Market and Competition

Starting a business in Equatorial Guinea is a challenging endeavor due to various factors. Administrative costs are high, wage costs are relatively elevated, and minority investors lack adequate protection. Owners are not required to disclose purchases to shareholders, which discourages private investments and hinders capital formation.

Although the country has taken some measures to enhance its business climate and attract new private investment, it still faces significant challenges. The largest oilfields have experienced a decline in productivity, leading to a marginal improvement in the business environment. In 2019, the government announced a streamlined administrative process for establishing a business that would take seven days. However, reliance on hydrocarbons remains substantial, accounting for 95% of total exports, 58% of government revenue, and 43% of GDP, according to IMF estimates for 2022. While these figures have decreased due to declines in the oil and gas sector, other sectors have not experienced significant growth to compensate.

The country's informal sector is relatively small and primarily linked to cross-border food provisioning and immigrant labor. In an effort to address rising prices, Teodorín announced a price cap on essential goods in May 2022, resulting in a 50% reduction in prices for items like rice and eggs. However, despite this measure, the costs of these goods remain higher than pre-COVID pandemic levels.

Much of the domestic economy relies on petrodollars circulating within the large government sector, which then flow into state-owned enterprises (SOEs) that hold monopolies or dominate industries such as telecommunications, fuel, travel and finance. Even in sectors such as mining, fisheries, agriculture and timber, the state plays a significant role. The government either purchases all production for export, primarily to China, or grants full concessions to Chinese contractors, without involving domestic processing or labor. The non-oil sector faces challenges due to the unfavorable business climate and a scarcity of skilled labor, particularly in sectors identified for economic diversification such as agriculture, industrial fishing, sea transport and electricity.

Although Equatorial Guinea is party to the Organization for the Harmonization of Business Laws in Africa, there is no effective agency that actively enforces competition laws. As a member of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), Equatorial Guinea has a regional competition regime without any formal authority. The public sector is so dominant that it forms a monopoly, while no private concerns in the non-hydrocarbons sector have reached a level of capitalization high enough to compete in key sectors. In particular, according to CEMAC regulations, when the parties to a concentration hold a combined market share of more than 30% in the CEMAC common market, or where those parties

Market
organization

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Competition policy

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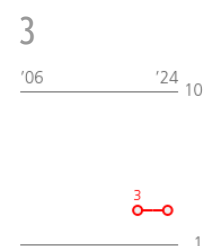


achieve a combined turnover of at least 10 billion CFA francs, the transaction is supposed to be announced at the CEMAC level, and the CEMAC Commission is supposed to have exclusive jurisdiction to review the merger. But no such actions have been taken, and it is doubtful whether or not the Obiang regime would accept such interference.

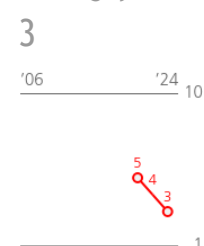
Since its establishment in 2008, the working party on membership in the WTO has made no progress. As a result, the country currently holds observer status and is one of the few non-member states worldwide. To compensate for this, Equatorial Guinea has relied on bilateral investment treaties with several countries. Despite its absence from the WTO, the country is a member of CEMAC (Central African Economic and Monetary Community) and recently ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area Pact, which came into effect on January 1, 2021. These memberships necessitate a nominal harmonization of import and export tariffs, as well as a common VAT. However, significant and arbitrary barriers to trade still exist in Equatorial Guinea that favor government-owned enterprises operated by the Obiang dynasty. These state-owned enterprises contribute substantially to the country's GDP, currently 47% of it.

Equatorial Guinea's financial landscape is dominated by a highly concentrated banking sector. The banking sector consists of five banks, three of which hold 84% of total assets: Afriland First's Caisse Commune d'Epargne et d'Investissement Guinée Equatoriale, the government-owned National Bank of Equatorial Guinea and Société Generale's SGBGE. Most multinational companies obtain financing from foreign sources. The Economist Intelligence Unit reported in 2022 that the Equatoguinean banking sector risk rating remains CCC. The IMF reported in 2022 that the banking system remains weak and exposed due to the oil crisis and the resulting economic recession. Almost half of the credit loaned in the past years has been to the public sector. Huge fees are levied on loans and other bank transactions, as illustrated by the 15% to 25% interest rate for private borrowing enterprises. There is stagnation regarding bank credit for the private sector due to an enormous share of non-performing loans to gross loans, caused by government arrears to private suppliers, which in turn fall into loan delinquency. Other pronounced risks include undercapitalization and extremely weak credit management. Most banks' liquidity and capital ratios have not yet fulfilled regulatory limits.

Liberalization of foreign trade



Banking system



8 | Monetary and fiscal stability

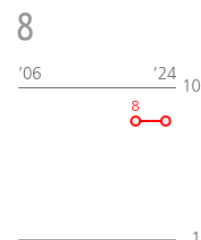
As a member of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), Equatorial Guinea uses the CFA franc as its currency. The CFA franc is pegged to the euro, which means its value is largely influenced by decisions made within the eurozone, and like the U.S. dollar, it has an official inflation rate. The central bank responsible for monetary policy in CEMAC countries is the Bank of Central African States, located in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The primary monetary policy objective is to maintain price stability. While the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of Central African States determines interest rates in the CEMAC region, the main national bank in Equatorial Guinea, BANGE, has the authority to set its own interest rates. For instance, mortgage rates range from 12–18%, due to the high default rate. The money supply has declined significantly over the past decade, indicating a recession that further limits credit availability for the economy.

Since CEMAC countries are predominantly oil exporters (with the exception of the Central African Republic), the IMF has pressured all member states to adopt anti-inflationary austerity measures in their economic policies. However, inflation remains high and volatile in Equatorial Guinea, primarily due to the country's heavy reliance on imported goods. The prolonged recession has depleted the government's foreign exchange reserves. A 100-page IMF staff country report in 2022 advised the government to use the ongoing windfall from liquefied natural gas (LNG) to rebuild its macroeconomic buffers and address its foreign currency arrears.

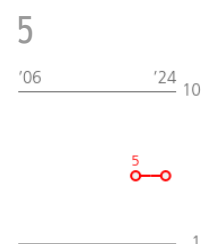
Due to the prolonged crisis in oil prices, Equatorial Guinea has experienced a steady decline in its current account balance. The surplus of \$529 million in 2013 has turned into a deficit of -\$327 million in 2022, primarily owed to the IMF. In the past, reserves were used to finance the deficit, but debt service to Chinese contractors has significantly depleted total reserves, which had reached almost \$5 billion. Government debt servicing has steadily increased, estimated at \$430 million in 2020 compared to \$332 million in 2017. As of 2021, the outstanding public debt was 42.8% of GDP. The country has also experienced a rise in domestic arrears owed to private enterprises, reaching 9.2% of GDP in 2021.

Between 2013 and 2017, public revenue contracted by 45%, leading to proportional decreases in expenditure. Funds allocated for public investment declined by 61% during the same period. Notably, the construction costs of Djibloho accounted for approximately 50% of public investment expenditure, and the project was halted for nearly two years due to the non-payment of foreign contractors. While more recent data is not readily available, it appears that the deterioration of the country's external and public accounts has either stabilized at these low levels or worsened further in 2022.

Monetary stability



Fiscal stability



Government expenditure seems to have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, partly due to the relative decline of other sectors. The national budget doubled from 27% of GDP in 2021 to 49% of GDP in 2022. Outstanding public debt remained high at 42.8% of GDP in 2022, although it is projected to decrease in line with IMF conditions. The austerity measures implemented between 2018 and 2021 resulted in significant cuts to public administration, infrastructure, and education, which ranged from -50% to -90%.

While gas production remains the most promising venture for Equatorial Guinea, significant revenues are not anticipated for a few more years. The country's main strategic asset, the Fortuna Gas Field located in Block R or EQ-27 near the maritime boundaries with Nigeria, has undergone significant development. After being abandoned by Ophir and Lukoil, interest in the Fortuna field resurfaced. In March 2022, it was reported that billionaires were working together to revive the FLNG (Floating Liquefied Natural Gas) project in Equatorial Guinea. The project is being developed by independent companies New Fortress and Golar, led by Wes Edens and Olav Troim, with the involvement of a leading Norwegian LNG vessel operator. Fortuna has substantial gas reserves of 80–100 billion cubic meters and a capacity of 2.5 million tons per annum. This represents approximately 0.5%–0.8% of the current global LNG supply. The deep-water gas field requires a floating LNG plant and terminal, requiring a \$2 billion investment that can be recouped in a single year, based on its projected output capacity at current market rates. Output levels are expected to remain at project rates for at least two decades.

9 | Private Property

The government has a long record of expropriating locally owned property, frequently offering little or no compensation. Land acquisition, benefits, use and sale are all difficult to realize and poorly regulated. Foreign property has not been nationalized or expropriated, despite there being alleged cases of local private companies that cooperate with the government to expropriate property from foreign investors, falsely blaming them for breach of contract. This practice has become less common since 2018, when the government eliminated the requirement for foreign investors to identify a local business partner.

In the World Bank's Land Administration Index, Equatorial Guinea scored four out of 30, falling well below the regional average. No electronic databases are maintained to keep track of encumbrances or record maps with specifically defined plots. When this information is available, only interested parties and intermediaries may consult it, and they are likely to find that not all properties are formally registered or even mapped.

No independent agency exists to verify identity documents, which means that litigation in cases of dispute remains highly costly and inefficient. In addition, no dispute resolution mechanism exists for those who engage in good-faith land transactions based on erroneous information (which is quite likely).

Property rights

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Under Law 4/2009 on Land Ownership, foreigners are not allowed to own land; yet, they can lease property from the government for up to 99 years. To secure a lease, a foreign national must request approval through the Office of Property Registry, which then requests authorization from the president in the form of a presidential decree. Only 12% of women own land, and married women face significant obstacles to exercising their right to own land.

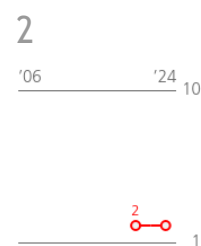
As noted above, SOEs and private firms run by the ruling family dominate the relatively small national economy. Private businesses are only very arduously and expensively established, while access to credit is extremely rare for the vast majority of the population. Further discouraging private enterprise is the regime's arbitrary and frequent non-compliance with international agreements on the resolution of disputes. Legal safeguards are ineffective given the deficient functioning of the judiciary. As of 2021, two American companies still waited for government payment for services rendered beginning in 2019. One claims the government owes it €5 million. Notwithstanding, the company's owners are reluctant to take legal action for fear of jeopardizing their other operations in the country. The second has been engaging in repeated renegotiations with the Ministry of Finance in an effort to receive payment.

10 | Welfare Regime

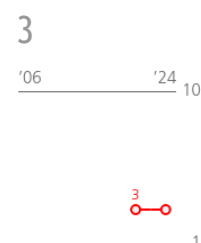
Social welfare legislation for the large number of formally employed Equatoguineans is in principle reasonable. There are earnings-adjusted old-age and disability insurance, work injury insurance, sickness and maternity leave, and even family allowances provided through pay-as-you-go. Only around 5,000 people receive government social security payouts in a given year, according to the 2022 government statistical yearbook, mostly in relation to retirement and special needs education. Outside the groups targeted by family allowances, allowances for the unemployed are nonexistent. In December 2021, parliament passed General Labor Law No. 4/2021, which updated the regulations that govern the country's labor law. With this new law, the retirement age was raised from 60 to 65.

Life expectancy in 2020 was among the world's lowest at around 60, due to the high infant mortality rate, which however has been reduced even during the long economic crisis. The government has not published more recent data. Many Equatoguineans also face chronic hunger. According to Human Rights Watch, one in four children is physically stunted due to poor nutrition. Poor sanitation and ineffective infection control increase the risk of diarrhea, malaria and tuberculosis. To address the social effects of the COVID-19 crisis, the government approved various measures in 2020, including a broad emergency health spending package (estimated by the IMF to have represented 1.0% of GDP).

Private enterprise



Social safety nets



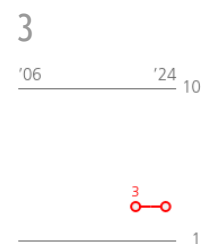
Although legal provisions are in place to protect all people on Equatoguinean territory, structural discrimination is rife. Gender discrimination is quite severe. The PDGE introduced a new electoral quota requiring at least 35% of all candidates to be women, and Teodorín took to Twitter to highlight his country’s “commitment to gender equality.” Women are severely under-represented in the civil service and in landownership, only around 10–15%. The official female labor force in 2021 remained steady at 37.7%, which is low even by regional standards. In 2018, 28.7% of women aged 15 to 49 years reported that they had been subject to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months. Women of reproductive age (15 to 49 years) often face barriers with respect to their sexual and reproductive health and rights. In addition, women have unequal de facto rights to land ownership. Due to the ban on pregnant schoolgirls and adolescent mothers attending public schools, female literacy (90.7%) lagged behind male literacy. The most egregious problem is female enrollment in schools. According to the World Bank in 2020, the ratio of females to males in secondary schools was 0.7, while the figure dropped to 0.5 for tertiary education. Along with abysmally low gross enrollment ratios (26.1% for secondary school and 1.9% for tertiary school), the country was among the most gender-unequal in the world.

Regional foreigners, especially immigrants from Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo and Cameroon, have for years faced legal and personal discrimination, in addition to arbitrary arrests. Teodorín regularly launches into tirades against Francophone African immigrants, accusing them of “draining” the country’s wealth. Amnesty International and the neighboring African press highlighted cases of prolonged detentions. In the run-up to the 2022 elections, hundreds of undocumented immigrants were deported across the border to Cameroon and received by the Red Cross. This vital commercial border is often closed off during elections or crises. Officials even discussed and prepared plans to “build a wall” in 2019, which they abandoned and then revived in 2022.

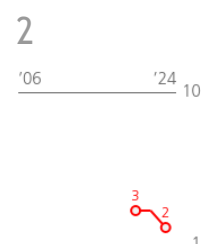
11 | Economic Performance

Despite being one of the five richest countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Equatorial Guinea’s GDP per capita has plummeted from its high of \$30,084 in 2012 to \$16,926 in 2019. It sank lower to \$16,080 in 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and a decline in oil prices. After a 10-year recession, excluding the barely positive uptick in 2014, economic activity rebounded in the first half of 2022, driven by LNG windfalls exported to Europe and an upturn in the construction and services sectors following the lifting of pandemic-related restrictive measures. Nevertheless, due to the catastrophic halting in September 2022 of the country’s prime oil concession, ExxonMobil’s Zafiro field, the IMF revised GDP downwards to -3.13%, making it the only country on the continent with negative growth in 2022.

Equal opportunity



Output strength



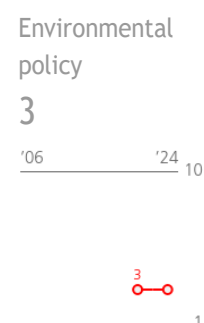
The country's overall economic performance is extremely dependent on hydrocarbon prices and rates of domestic production. In November 2022, Reuters reported that Exxon Mobil, whose discovery and rapid exploitation of Zafiro single-handedly kickstarted the oil boom in the mid-1990s, would decommission the Zafiro floating production unit and exit the country before its license expired in 2026. Equatorial Guinea's OPEC quota is 120,000 barrels per day (bpd), and BP's Statistical Review of World Energy 2022 had initially predicted that oil production would reach 140,000 bpd. These optimistic figures already represent a 50% decline from a decade ago and an even more precipitous decline from 2005, when Zafiro peaked at 375,000 bpd. By December, Argus, the business intelligence data provider, estimated that total oil production in the country dropped to just 60,000 bpd, with Zafiro only able to produce 15,000 bpd after the evacuation of its floating production unit in September 2022. Despite this severe crisis, the increase in oil prices helped mitigate the contraction, particularly as the Zafiro blend of crude oil sells at a large premium due to its low sulfur content.

Due to the reduced size of the formal sector and the large, and even growing, number of government jobs, unemployment has remained constant over the years with a rate of 9 – 20% for 2021, depending on the source. The country's tax revenues as a percentage of GDP remain among the lowest in the world. The IMF and the African Development Bank have proposed viable plans to improve tax collection and diversify the economy, without any concrete results.

12 | Sustainability

The country shares the Congo Basin forest. It has 13 protected areas and national parks (20% of the state's territory). A few years ago, it seemed that the revival of the main backbone of the colonial economy, timber production, was going to lead to further forest degradation. Large concessions were made to various national (Teodorin-linked) and Chinese and Asian logging companies, covering over half the state's territory. The decline in demand from China in the past few years, especially for the prized, relatively unique okoume wood, resulted in the dwindling of this old industry.

As a member of the Commission of Central African Forests, a contributor to the Fund for Climate Change in Africa, and a relatively recent member of the United Nations Environment Program and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, the country advertises itself as taking an active role in ecological conservation. Its lofty plans to advance ecological tourism are joined by public promises to focus on wind, solar and marine energy, as announced by the Ministry of Fishing and Environment and the Ministry of Mines, Industry and Energy. To the latter's credit, the Hydrocarbons Law requires that all extractive companies conduct environmental impact assessments and take an active role in conservation.



The government now publishes annual statistics on education. Even so, the available data paints a gloomy picture of public underinvestment, at well under 2% of GDP. Funding is volatile, decreasing by 95% between 2018 and 2020 due to education being the first item slashed during the IMF budget cuts. Currently, it is still only 50% of the 2018 level of public investment in education. The country has an almost complete literacy rate, which is, however, deteriorating.

Education is compulsory and free between ages seven and 13. However, according to the UNDP, only one in two pupils completes primary school. Public schools suffer from high dropout rates and low graduation rates. Only 25% of high school students pass the university entrance exam. The World Bank estimated that in 2018, only 26% of children of secondary school age attended school, while the percentage of university-age youth attending university was 1.8%. The national university (UNGE) has about 7,000 students, and the new^[L1]_[SEP] Afro-American University of Central Africa in the “City of Peace,” Djibloho, is operational, though at well under capacity with only a few hundred students. In the U.N. Education Index, Equatorial Guinea has a score of 0.467.

Education policy /
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Governance

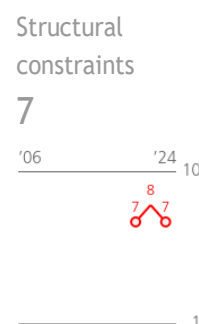
I. Level of Difficulty

The pursuit of good governance in Equatorial Guinea is constrained by certain structural factors, beyond the corrosive effects of public corruption. Geographically, Bioko Island, which hosts the country’s capital city of Malabo (population near 300,000), is 250 kilometers by sea from the country’s largest city of Bata (roughly 400,000) on the Rio Muni mainland. Both territories have well-developed road networks but rely on expensive flights to communicate. A single airplane from Ceiba International crosses the country’s large territorial waters Bight of Biafra several times a day. The islands of Corisco and Annobón, together inhabited by around slightly over 5,000 people, are rarely serviced by flights or ferries and are particularly marginalized.

Because of its underfunded education system, Equatorial Guinea suffers from a shortage of skilled labor. Local university graduates fill the lower level-ranks of the large government and related administrations. Mid- and high-level government officials are selected on the basis of loyalty and familiarity with key figures in the ruling party, and by having gained their education abroad on politically sponsored government scholarships. While there is little to no extreme poverty, three-quarters of the population are estimated to live below the relative poverty line.

Disease also plays a primary disabling role. UNAIDS estimated that in 2022, approximately 66,000 (6.9%) adults aged 15 to 49 were living with HIV. Malaria is also widespread. Most fevers test positive for malaria. Other common tropical ailments (e.g., sleeping sickness) abound. Though most of the structural constraints on governance performance do not result directly from government actions, they almost all suffer unduly from government inaction and corruption.

In the late colonial period, churches such as the Reformed Presbyterian Church and limited-issue organizations, such as the Red Cross, began working on local and regional, and social matters. According to the long-existing, now-banned Centro de Estudios e Iniciativas para el Desarrollo (CEID), led by Alfredo Okenve, of the roughly 250 CSOs active in 2010, 50% were NGOs, 23% were “community groups,” 19% were cooperatives and 8% were associations. The majority (70%) of CSOs had 10 to 20 members, limiting political participation.

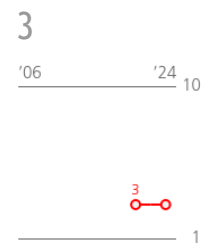


According to the Washington-based advocacy group EG Justice, community groups and associations are protected neither by the liberalization laws nor by presidential decree. The Law of General Associations 1992, though formally permitting their existence, requires CSOs to notify the government at least 72 hours before each meeting they hold. The law also authorizes “specially designated representatives” to monitor CSOs and seize documents if a criminal offense is suspected. CEID reported that roughly one-third of CSO members were unfamiliar with the laws governing their operation. CSOs in Equatorial Guinea are frequently subject to harassment, as well as imprisonment and even physical abuse of their members, especially if they criticize the government, among them Alfredo Okenve. Political opponents, human rights defenders, journalists and other activists are often subjected to harassment, intimidation, threats, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and, in numerous cases, extrajudicial killings, torture and violent physical attacks perpetrated by the authorities.

Ethnic minorities harbor resentment toward the Fang-dominated regime, which remains, if not expressly violent, then noxious toward them, especially the Bubi of Bioko Island and the Benga of Corisco, who comprise around 7% of the country’s total population. Intra-ethnic competition is rooted historically in the colonial and missionary preferences given to the Bubi and coastal minority groups in terms of education, advancement and economic subsidies. But today it is tempered by patronage. The ruling party is able to wield influence by using oil rents to buy loyalty with political appointments, including new Bubi Prime Minister Manuela Roka Botey. The Esangui clan of the ruling family, historically concentrated around a series of villages in Mongomo, is only one of the smaller of the several dozen ethnic Fang clans in Equatorial Guinea. The most pronounced political cleavages emerge from within the ruling clan, including defections by former military officials and political ambitions among the different sons of the president seeking to succeed him.

The years-long sibling rivalry between Hydrocarbon Minister Gabriel Mbagi Obiang Lima and Teodorín has ended with Teodorín’s meteoric rise in the regime, to vice president in 2016 and minister for defense and security in 2018, following First Lady Constancia’s strong preference for his succession. The post-election cabinet reshuffle in early 2023 saw Antonio “Tony” Oburu replace Gabriel Obiang Lima as the crucial minister of mines and hydrocarbons. Oburu had been the director of GEPetrol since 2015, when he married Constancia Mangué, the daughter of Teodoro Biyogo Nsue, the president’s brother and chief of staff. In early February 2023, Gabriel, or MOL (Mbagi Obiang Lima), as he is known, was rotated out into the still largely fictitious Ministry of Economic Planning and Diversification, a newly created unit that was separated from the Finance Ministry or treasury in 2023 and remains in the hands of key Teodorín allies. This is widely perceived as a domestic and political dead end, even a defenestration, resulting from Lima’s overseeing the severe decline in oil and gas output over the past decade, since his appointment as hydrocarbon minister in 2012. Some local and foreign, particularly French, observers had hoped that this

Conflict intensity



severe fraternal tension could hobble Teodorín’s presidency or even result in a dramatic palace coup by the U.S.-educated and seemingly more “Western-friendly” Gabriel MLO. This was a false, misleading expectation based on political hopes, since foreign intervention and political opposition have proved totally ineffective at curbing Teodorín’s power.

II. Governance Performance

14 | Steering Capability

The ruling class’s strategic priorities are not oriented toward democracy and only partially at best toward a market economy. However, since power and strategizing are highly concentrated among only a few members of the extended ruling family, the ability to maintain strategic priorities is strong. Concentration and centralization are maintained through regular cabinet reshuffles and the empowerment of national security agencies led by close relatives of President Obiang.

Effective political opponents do not exist. Therefore, no stalemates or transitions are able to impede coherent strategic actions. The regime uses crises, such as alleged or attempted coups, to suppress political dissent.

Policy priorities are generally agreed upon and serve almost exclusively to ensure the regime’s survival and enrichment. These include the expansion of the flagging hydrocarbons sector wherever and whenever possible – especially the gas industry – the procurement of bilateral lenders – especially from China – and a series of measures to win approval from the IMF and acquire multilateral loans. Teodorín has been subject to prosecution and lawsuits by Western governments, such as France and the United States. He has displayed an unwavering preference for non-Western aid and investment.

The extent to which the government achieves strategic priorities has depended on particular projects’ impact on the regime’s longevity and prosperity. The regime’s most important priority, the revival and expansion of the hydrocarbons sector, suffers from depleting reserves, administrative red tape, political tensions and reshuffles.

The much-discussed priority of economic diversification toward tourism and a revival of agriculture, fisheries and forestry have been dead in the water, with only tertiary-sector activities appearing to grow and even predominate in the past several years. But this was mainly a statistical illusion due to the rapidly shrinking oil sector. The goal of energy independence has been achieved as the turbo gas power plant at Punta Europa and the Sendje hydroelectric dam power the country at excess capacity, with the aim to export electricity to adjacent countries.

Question
Score

Prioritization

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Implementation

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Gabriel MOL has pushed externally imposed priorities by the IMF and the African Development Bank to improve the business climate, but they have fallen short of full realization. Business-friendly measures to reduce taxes and obligations in the national financial system, increase transparency in contract bidding, and make data and legislation readily available have seen some progress, but these all addressed large oil and gas companies, and investors.

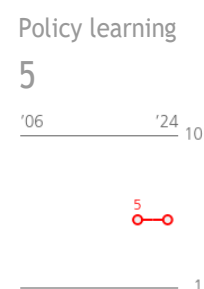
All monitoring and evaluation are externally induced, in particular by the IMF, which has successfully pushed its demands to digitize government data to aid the compilation of statistics and to identify inefficiencies. The IMF has even had large management consultancies, such as Deloitte and PwC, conduct unprecedented audits of SOEs, including the state oil and gas companies, with data, however, only pertaining to 2016/2017. Local auditors and experts are legally enabled but not operational.

There is no coordination among bilateral aid agencies (French, Spanish, Chinese and Cuban cooperation agencies, USAID, and the agencies of the United Nations), though they roughly divide themselves into three working groups under coordination by the UNDP: education, HIV/AIDS and agro-environmental concerns. Various key ministries are heavily advised by world-class, usually U.S.-based, legal advisers and empowered representatives. For its most important recent strategic priorities, such as the turn to gas exports, the regime has continued to rely on advice and connections from the energy advocacy group Centurion, and its African Energy Chamber series of conferences and publications, headed by N.J. Ayuk. Gabriel MOL's departure to the Ministry of Economic Planning and Diversification is a strategic deployment to have him serve as the agreeable face for international technical and financial cooperation, particularly with the IMF, the World Bank and the African Development Bank. The total absence of a sustainable training strategy and of exhaustive and reliable statistics has only been redressed in recent years, but the lack of a national regulatory entity responsible for carrying out such duties remains.

15 | Resource Efficiency

The government makes very little use of available human resources. This is partially because it is a rentier state dependent on exports and foreign expertise. Usually, foreign advisers beholden to and financed through their concrete relationships with high-level figures are favored. There is also a trend to employ and promote highly educated members of the non-political diaspora in secondary and supporting roles.

The budget is relatively balanced. Debt, though rising fast, is offset by loans from the IMF and ADB. Their conditions primarily revolve around strengthening administrative transparency and collecting social and economic data to improve governance and accountability, in particular in the realms of public finances, revenue collection and efficient public expenditure management. The new National Institute

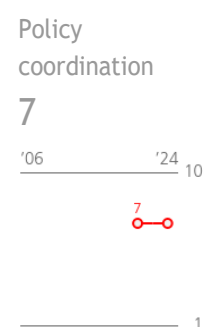


of Statistics of Equatorial Guinea publishes a range of data in its statistical yearbooks compiled with data from the treasury and other ministries. The IMF congratulated the government for its national development strategy (2022 – 2025) regarding statistics, stating that different government ministries are aligned with the strategy, including digitalization, new frameworks for data collection and quality assurance, as well as implementing statistical services in all sectoral departments. This emphasis and insistence on transparency is less than half a decade old and has obvious shortcomings and blind spots, in particular with regards to sensitive data from the hydrocarbon sector.

Equatorial Guinea is subject to a personalist and highly centralized style of policy coordination. The constitution grants President Obiang the power to convene a Council of Ministers, which enjoys considerable powers to direct state policy. As it is filled with the president's closest kin and in-laws, all of whom must defer to him, a certain level of coherence is to be expected. Friction between competing policy objectives is resolved by the independently pursuing competing policy objectives and sharing any results with the president himself, who decides and oversees the direction, promotion and priority status of all policies, international contracts and public investments. Clashes between the all-important Hydrocarbon Ministry (a redundancy with the Ministry of Industry and Energy) and the vice president's office, in charge of national defense and security (a redundancy with the Defense Ministry), appear to be resolved in this manner, despite outward signs of friction. Other potentially competing ministries (e.g., the Ministry of Agriculture) defer to the person of the president and thus have no capacity to interfere with policy goals.

Government implementation of a variety of IMF- and U.S. Embassy-related policies on administrative and economic transparency initiatives is, even if half-hearted, related to the need to increase the country's bottom-rung ranking in various corruption and doing business indices. It is widely speculated and likely that Teodorín not only amassed but has spent around \$500 million nationally and internationally, which is enough to cover several years of total state expenditures at current government spending levels. Equatorial Guinea's almost decade-long recession has motivated the government to focus on attracting new FDI, and, at the same time, revise and renegotiate oil and gas contract-sharing deals on more favorable terms.

As part of the IMF agreement, Equatorial Guinea ratified the U.N. Convention on Corruption (2018) and set up an anti-corruption commission (2020), which became operational in May 2022. Bloomberg memorably reported on this with the headline "World's Longest-Serving Ruler Must Reveal His Assets for an IMF Bailout." However, no such thing has occurred. The web of international bank accounts, shell companies and undeclared assets, as well as payments to the president and ruling family, is quite legendary. The new commission is supposed to prevent, detect, and investigate bribery and illicit enrichment, including by high-ranking officials. The Equatoguinean Commission of Jurists critiqued the law for specifically targeting civil



society organizations and excluding private companies, the most frequent actors in corruption offenses, and omission of the president and the vice president from the list of “figures of interest” in Article 11.2 of the new anti-corruption law.

The government prosecutes certain high-profile figures for corruption, but it is well understood that any anti-corruption drives are merely actions by the regime taken to purge unwanted competition. American and French judges have carried out prosecutions in their own national courts accusing Obiang and Teodorin of unlawful gains and embezzlement. The regime’s application to join the EITI was rejected in 2020. In addition, the ruling PDGE receives extralegal financing that opposition parties do not.

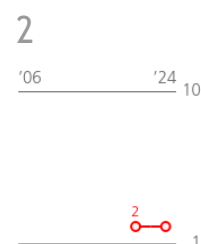
16 | Consensus-Building

There is no consensus on the adoption of democracy by any political actors with influence or resources. The degree of control over resources exercised by the ruling elite is extreme, relative to the small size of the voting population (420,000 eligible voters, according to the electoral census of 2022). Much of the opposition typically masquerades as civil society actors and, even so, are marginalized. The Equatoguinean diaspora is not sufficiently organized or well-endowed to have political influence.

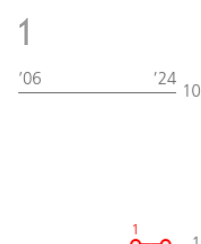
There appears to be a growing interest in a market economy from within the ruling class as a backstop to further decline in the hydrocarbons sector. Improvements to the abysmal business climate reflect this, but real consensus is still desperately lacking. All relevant actors with political clout stand to benefit from the status quo, which is a particularly predatory brand of state-led capitalism.

In Equatorial Guinea, there are no political actors with enough power to initiate reform. Given the regime’s extreme control over institutional and financial resources, any reformers with clout would undoubtedly be subject to co-optation or face repression. The ruling party is the most important obstacle to reform. In a spectacle of electioneering, Obiang Nguema was declared the winner with 99% of the votes.

Consensus on goals



Anti-democratic actors



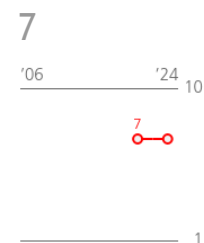
Despite the regime's excessive control of domestic political affairs, it is in fact interested in de-escalating any potential social cleavages that might affect political stability. Cleavages are not reflected in the party system, which is de facto a single-party structure, despite nominal opposition parties that owe allegiance to the ruling PDGE. Potential class conflicts are prevented through rhetoric about the nation being a united and peaceful single unity or by classifying dissident and anti-government activity as threatening and even terrorist acts. Beyond cultural cleavages that marginalize ethnic minorities, the most significant political cleavage is in the ostensibly monolithic Mongomo-based ruling clan, which is full of schisms and dissent.

The government is extremely suspicious of the idea of civil society and NGOs as it perceives them as conduits for conspiratorial foreign interference and outlets for exposing its many failings. Charities, scientists and community-based organizations are involved in depoliticized issues, often in collaboration with foreign embassies and oil companies' corporate social responsibility programs, such as HIV prevention or preserving the environment. Even then, they face conflicting government attempts to pre-empt any programs that the local population might see as a potential reason to oppose the regime.

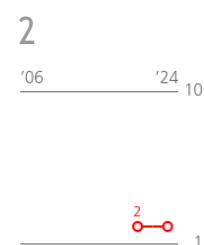
Perhaps the closest the government came to involving CSOs in the political process was in 2008, when Equatorial Guinea became a candidate member of the EITI. Local CSO appointees to the EITI National Committee experienced intimidation and willful obstruction of their efforts, and foreign journalists were even deported. In 2020, the EITI Board concluded that the application Equatorial Guinea submitted to be readmitted in November 2019 did not provide sufficient evidence of any real commitment to EITI's civil society protocol or its five admission requirements. In any case, many of the EITI's steps are being partially fulfilled within the 2019/22 IMF conditionality framework and continue to be encouraged by the U.S. Embassy, except of course revealing details of the gains and beneficiaries of concessions and oil proceeds, which constitute a state secret closely guarded by the Hydrocarbon Ministry.

During the rule of Francisco Macias, non-Fang minorities (especially the Bubi, Benga and Annobonese) were targets of discrimination, political violence and even cultural genocide. Similar moments of severe state-led repression against these ethnic minorities and their attempts at insurgency reoccurred in the 1990s. Since 1979, the Obiang regime has often called for national dialogues and provided amnesty for prisoners and exiles as a means to improve its international image and incorporate and placate certain elements of the political opposition. After each national dialogue, the commitments the regime had made to opening up the political system to an increased number of parties turned into further waves of targeted repression and outlawing of political parties, such as the case of Gabriel Nsé and the CI in 2016.

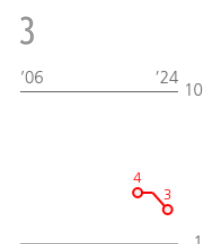
Cleavage /
conflict
management



Public
consultation



Reconciliation



Any unity of the political opposition is further complicated by the checkered history of many of its actors, such as the well-known fact that Gabriel Nsé Obiang, as head of the military council of Bioko was in charge of suppressing the Bubi rebellion in 1998 and oversaw the torture of many Bubi political figures before his exile to Spain in 2001. This is also the case for the most well-known exile, Severo Moto, who was a propagandist under Macias and an active minister during Obiang's early rule.

17 | International Cooperation

The United States and China are the only two foreign powers with significant influence in the country. Historically, Texan companies have held a monopoly on oil and gas production while, more recently, Chinese contractors have begun to invest in large infrastructure projects related to oil.

The period under review has been quite eventful regarding the Chinese scheme to build out its first Atlantic naval base in the deep port of Bata, which civil engineers and workers from the China Road and Bridge Corporation built and recently inaugurated. In late 2021, the Wall Street Journal published an exclusive report based on intelligence sources from the U.S. Embassy in Malabo. General Stephen Townsend, former head of the U.S. Africa Command (Africom), further disseminated the story through reputable media outlets following special briefings on national security challenges in the U.S. Senate and Congress. Foreign Policy's story "Biden Plays Nice With Equatorial Guinea to Spoil China's Atlantic Ambitions" included statements from two anonymous U.S. officials, who noted that it was a "transparent" attempt to play "Washington off Beijing for more clout and influence from each country, and Washington, for its part, is playing right into it."

In the past two years, a stream of high-profile American officials have passed through the Presidential Palace in Malabo, including the deputy director of the CIA, who also paid a visit to Teodorín's palace in Bata in November 2022. This is most likely a sign of U.S. rapprochement with the regime, due to the renewed heavy Texan oil and gas firms' involvement in the country, this time framed within an expedient narrative that it is necessary to fend off competing Chinese patronage.

Equatorial Guinea became a member of OPEC in 2017. Minister of Mines and Hydrocarbons Gabriel Mbagha Obiang Lima assumed the presidency of both OPEC and the gas OPEC, the GECF, for 2023. This role has now passed on to the new minister and amounts to a massive marketing strategy for new investments and regime lifelines. For the Middle East-based global energy cartels, it makes sense to have an African lead with the opportune slogan "make energy poverty history" in the face of competing international demands to transition out and divest from fossil fuels.

The IMF concluded its three-year rapid financing instrument in December 2022. The government's finances were still in such a dire state that it asked the IMF to extend the program one more year. The IMF's main conditions, including privatization of government companies, did not occur, even though the government announced in April 2022 that it was taking steps in this direction.

Effective use of support

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While the government enjoys little credibility in Europe, it looks different to the rest of the world. Western European political strategies mostly appear through non-governmental sites, such as the courts, the European Parliament, prominent international NGOs and several U.N. agencies focused on transparency. Unfulfilled commitments to human rights conventions have been well documented not only by journalists and watchdogs but also by the UNHRC's Universal Period Review, which confirmed multiple violations and made recommendations ranging from banning torture to guaranteeing childhood education.

A Paris court's ongoing pursuit of Teodorín, initially encouraged by a prominent exile in Transparency International, is often headline news. Officials from Equatorial Guinea and elsewhere perceive it primarily as a political attack, an unfair singling out of the families of a Central African leader, which occurred after realization that the French oil company Total, ever-present in the region, would receive no oil and gas concessions, and after the state oil and telecom companies, GEPetrol and GETESA, respectively, pushed back against and even eliminated long-standing French monopoly contracts in gasoline distribution and telecommunications. French efforts to halt the rise of a hostile Teodorín, who was educated in France and even held a French passport, are complemented by the failed efforts of French Foreign Ministry intelligence actors to promote the narrative of a reliable, alternative leader in the figure of his half-brother, Gabriel Obiang Lima.

The U.S. Department of State and associated multilateral organizations, like the IMF, monitor the government's economic planning very closely in order to furnish encouraging or discouraging guidelines to the PDGE and international companies as a form of political pressure. The 2022 IMF staff report acknowledged "substantial progress," that is, audits of state-owned oil and gas companies, while insisting "more progress" could be made in terms of creating a more business-friendly and transparent investment climate.

In December 2022, Obiang hosted Carlos Rafael Faría, the Venezuelan foreign minister who was previously ambassador to Moscow. The meeting included an extra-hospitable trip to a traditional Fang aba, or "palaver" house. Teodorín also met with the Serbian foreign minister in Malabo and then went to Belgrade to meet the Serbian president in June 2022 to discuss food supply shipments, defense equipment and visa-free travel for Equatorial Guinea officials. As a non-member of the WTO, the country is not subject to that body's dispute resolution mechanisms. Neither is the country party to the International Criminal Court (ICC). In January 2023, Equatorial Guinea, Sudan and Gabon were in arrears on paying dues to the United Nations' operating budget and joined the six nations that have lost their voting rights in the 193-member General Assembly.

Credibility

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Equatorial Guinea is a member of a number of regional organizations, including the AU, and other organizations like the CEMAC and the Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP, associate). Except for importing food, ships and labor migrants from neighboring countries, Equatorial Guinea has very little regional economic integration or political dependency with its neighbors, though the hydrocarbon ministries in Cameroon and Nigeria took successful steps independently to secure the laying of new undersea gas pipelines to feed the LNG production facility at Punta Europa, which still operates well under capacity.

Obiang met with Olusegun Obasanjo, who traveled to Malabo in August 2022, albeit formally outside of his role as AU High Representative. According to the prominent exiled politician, Severo Moto, Obiang was asked to step down and hand over power, which he had promised during the previous elections in 2016, when he announced that this would be his “final term.”

In late November 2022, the AU and the Communauté Economique des Etats de l’Afrique Centrale (CEEAC), which sent large teams on election observation missions for the entirety of November, sent their congratulations to Obiang on winning a “peaceful” election.

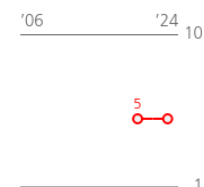
Only the presidents of São Tomé, Zimbabwe, Burundi, Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic attended Obiang’s last inauguration in December 2022, along with high representatives from Morocco, Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

During a 2022 Executive Council meeting of the AU, the Equatorial Guinean foreign minister highlighted his country’s financing of the joint intelligence headquarters in Addis Ababa, CISSA (the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa). This signals the extent of the government’s interest in “cooperation,” that is, thwarting possible coup d’états, such as the apparent assassination attempt on Obiang at his palace in Mongomo over Christmas in 2017.

In May 2022, 25 mercenaries, mostly from Chad and the Central African Republic, but also including an American citizen, arrested in southern Cameroon on their way to Mongomo in late 2017, were sentenced to over 30 years by a Cameroonian military tribunal for conspiracy and possession of illegal arms and munitions.

Regional
cooperation

5



Strategic Outlook

Equatorial Guinea gained independence from Franco-led Spain through a U.N.-mandated and supervised constitutional referendum in 1968, which remains the only free and fair election in the country's history. One possible strategy for the future with a historical precedent would be a new U.N.-mandated election, representing a second "decolonization" to dismantle the Nguemist dictatorships that followed.

Equatorial Guinea has been characterized in various ways, including as a unique form of "Afro-fascism" with strong Spanish colonial influences and even "Francoist characteristics." It is seen as a rentier state heavily reliant on oil and gas, with major involvement from U.S. oil companies, resulting in a distinct state capitalist totalitarian monarchy in a region without a precolonial history of statehood or markets. The country has received colorful, contemptuous labels: an "African sultanate" in the Gulf of Guinea and "Obiangistan." Due to unfounded, largely postcolonial reasons, this highly totalitarian country is perceived as more amenable to change than states located in the Arabian Gulf.

The opposition, both in exile and within the country, is united in their call for the regime to step down and advocates for a transition modeled after Spain's peaceful transition to a liberal democracy after Franco's death. NGOs and international groups channel the hopeful aspirations of exiles, believing that the country's poor reputation with regard to freedom of association and the press, and businesses could generate increased pressure from Western powers to bring about regime change. Teodorín's imminent succession will likely involve a new election. While there are no real political divisions or apparent struggles, the opposition focuses on human rights abuses and his extravagant lifestyle. Teodorín, who was appointed campaign manager for the November 2022 elections, engages with the party base and civil servants in a spontaneous and lively manner, receiving cheers that are rarely documented abroad. He even jokingly embraces his international notoriety for "luxury living," which strengthens his charismatic appeal and is not seen as a source of shame or illegitimacy inside the country. He is expected to win the next elections by a large margin by mobilizing populist sentiment.

Based on historical precedent, it is highly unlikely that the government and its oil and gas backers will vote themselves out of power. The ongoing economic contraction has not led to unexpected political or economic reforms. The recession seems to have coincided with an increasing turn toward authoritarianism, reminiscent of Obiang's early rule during the oil boom of the 1990s, characterized by significant political repression. Neighboring and global powers with regional interests show no inclination to unilaterally impose regime change or support a coup. Such attempts would only strengthen the regime's legitimizing ideology, fueled by real or imagined fears of foreign-sponsored coups. Prosecuting leading government figures for corruption in France and the United States is viewed as a slow "coup" to remove the president and install his chosen successor. Government perception of foreign interference in domestic affairs is met with indignant reproaches, invoking pseudo-anticolonial arguments about the double standards of European

governments and the universal standards of international NGOs that do not fully understand local political realities and differences. Teodorín appears to possess strong political instincts and has a significant following and allies, both domestically and internationally, including the United States, China and OPEC states. The opposition in the country requires continuous international support to build local support and to avoid arrest, torture and death in the growing number of overcrowded prisons.

While there are currently no immediate prospects for political or economic improvement, national policy aims to address the ongoing economic collapse. It is likely that 2022 represented a low point, and there is at least the illusion of potential progress and improvement moving forward.