

### Presidential elections in Guinea Bissau 2005: a stabilizing factor in a fragile democracy or only a spot test of the state of affairs?

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## **Kurzbeitrag / Report**

Nuno Vaz / Iris Cordelia Rotzoll

### **Presidential elections in Guinea Bissau 2005**

**A stabilizing factor in a fragile democracy or only a spot test of the state of affairs?**

#### **Introduction**

On the hot afternoon of 7 April 2005 General João Bernardo “Nino” Vieira returned after six years of exile in Portugal to his native Guinea Bissau. Coming from Guinea Conakry, his helicopter landed at the 24 September Stadium in the heart of the city of Bissau. The ex-president had governed Guinea Bissau for 19 years, from 1980 when he took power from Amilcar Cabral’s half-brother, Luis Cabral, until 1999 when he was forced to leave the country following the 1998-1999 civil war. Now he was greeted by thousands of supporters and curious countrymen.

Just one day before, another ex-president’s announced intention to run in the summer presidential elections had raised concern at the UN Security Council: Koumba Yala led the country from 2000 until September 2003 when he was ousted in a bloodless coup. According to the constitution he was banned from returning to politics for five years following his deposition. He is known for his unconventional ways to make himself heard. This time he announced that he would take the presidency on his own, should he be not allowed to run.

The third key player in the June-July presidential elections was another ex-president, Malam Bacai Sanha of the post-independence PAIGC (*Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* - African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde).

The elections were supposed to mark the end of the transitional period that had started with the military’s intervention in 2003, ousting Koumba Yala and appointing Henrique Rosa as Interim President. Rosa’s duty was it to organize parliamentary elections in 2004 and presidential elections before May 2005. The international community was generously supporting the organization of the electoral process but had made clear beforehand that a legitimate government in place was the prerequisite of any additional financial

and technical assistance to Guinea Bissau.<sup>1</sup> Therefore a comparatively large amount of national and international attention was focused on the elections in this small country. The main candidates and the past months' events can be understood only when put in perspective with the country's recent history.

## Recent history, main candidates and political forces in the 2005 elections

PAIGC was the party that ruled the country from independence in 1973/1974 to 2000. It was founded by Amílcar Cabral. At the time when PAIGC was still a socialist party, it tried to reduce the political instrumentalization of ethnic identity and tension that the Portuguese had so much relied upon by systematically replacing village chiefs' authority (the so-called "régulos"), with village committees, the *Comités de Tabancas*. PAIGC was, according to the constitution, until 1991 the only recognized political force in the country. Still today, it is omnipresent in the political arena as a powerful machine. Most people in today's politics have passed through PAIGC one way or another.

PAIGC's first crisis came about in 1986 with the *Acontecimentos de 17 de Outubro*, the events of 17 October, when, following an alleged conspiracy, the president at that time, Nino Vieira, ordered the killing of key figures of PAIGC, Paulo Correia and Viriato Pan, as well as several military. Most of them were Balanta, the ethnic group that is still the most prominent in the country and in the military. The next blow for PAIGC came in 1991 when Nino Vieira, still the PAIGC president, agreed to open the country to a multi-party democracy, leading to serious internal divisions between the party's reformers and hardliners. Consequently, the first parliamentary and presidential elections were held in 1994. PAIGC gained only 62 of the 102 seats in parliament, and Nino Vieira won the run-off elections with 52 % against Koumba Yala. These elections marked the re-introduction of ethnicity as a major force in Guinea's politics.

By June 1998 Nino Vieira's style of government was marked by clientelism, corruption, a lack of concern for the population's well-being and economic stagnation. Nino Vieira, a general himself, grossly overestimated its own popularity when he decided to dismiss the army's chief of staff, Ansumane Mané, causing a rebellion within the armed forces and taking the conflict to the streets of Bissau. Vieira asked for military support from Senegal and Guinea Conakry, but after one year of military siege and physical and

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1 cf.: 'Multimillion Dollar Funds for Guinea Bissau as Countries Pledged to Support the Presidential Election', *The Independent* (Banjul) 21 February 2005 posted on the web 22 February 2005.

moral destruction of the capital Bissau, he took refuge in Portugal, where he lived in exile until his return in April 2005.

The years following the war were marked by rapidly changing governments and instability. The ousted Ansumane Mané headed a Military Junta that later nominated Malam Bacai Sanha Interim President in order to prepare elections in 1999/2000. At that time the prestige of PAIGC was at its all time low. Whereas PAIGC came in only third in these elections, Koumba Yala and his PRS<sup>2</sup> became the country's first political force. Koumba Yala's term in office was marked by authoritarian rule, a disrespect of the already weak constitutional institutions and an appeal to tribalism. He was deposed by the military in 2003 making way for another transitional government under President Henrique Rosa with the mandate to organize legislative elections in March 2004, and presidential elections within eighteen months.

In May 2005 the Supreme Court decided to admit a total of thirteen candidates for the presidential elections, amongst them Nino Vieira and Koumba Yala, both of whom were still banned from holding any political post.<sup>3</sup> Though heavily criticized, the court's decision went unchallenged and had important political implications.

PAIGC's candidate for this year's election was Malam Banca Sanha, a 52-year-old Muslim from the ethnic minority Biafada, from the Quinara region. He studied in former East Germany and has held important posts within PAIGC and the government, including Provincial Governor to President of the Workers Union UNTG, Minister of Information and President of the National Assembly and finally Interim President in the years 1999-2000.

Nino Vieira, 66, who did not succeed in being nominated PAIGC candidate, decided to run as an independent candidate, but he took with him important strategists from PAIGC, such as Aristides Gomes. This was an important change in Guinea Bissauian party structure. Nino's attributes, as hero of the anti-colonial struggle, side by side with Amilcar Cabral, as founder of PAIGC and a military general, his inherent connection with the shaping of the country's first years of independence, now for the first time were not precisely linked to PAIGC's national party structure. This stirred up voters' loyalty to PAIGC. Nino's message upon his return from Portugal now was one of national reconciliation, of a reform of the armed forces, including their re-

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2 PRS – Partido da Renovação Social (Social Renovation Party).

3 cf. Kumba Yala y "Nino" Vieira präsidentiables, Monique Mas, RFI 11/05/2005; Yala was granted the right to run on the election after the Supreme Court had declared invalid his letter of resignation from the presidency, on the grounds it had been signed under the pressure of a coup d'état. And because his letter of resignation was considered invalid now, Koumba Yala decided to occupy the Presidential Palace for a short time on May 25<sup>th</sup> before being evicted, a fact that a few days later he denied to ever have occurred, both the intrusion and the eviction.

integration into their genuine role in a democratic society. Nino is of Papel origin, an ethnic group that lives mostly in Bissau and Biombo.

Koumba Yala was the founder of PRS (*Partido da Renovação Social* - Party for Social Renovation) and was said to have studied philosophy in Portugal and political science in RDA. He was the only Balanta candidate, an ethnic group that includes roughly 30 % of the population and is important in the armed forces.

Of all of the candidates of the first round, Malam Bacai Sanha, Nino Vieira and Koumba Yala taken together obtained 89,32 % of all votes. All other candidates gained only a small fraction of votes and that only in certain regions (cf. Table 2, annex). That applied even to popular names like Francisco Fadul, a former Prime Minister under the transitional government following the 1998-1999 war. The only woman candidate, Antoineta Rosa Gomes, came in second to last with 0,37 %.

## Electoral campaign

According to Guinean election law, there are fifteen days of electoral campaigning preceding a silent day and election day.

The electoral campaign of the three main contenders relied on visibility of strength expressed in numbers of supporters, not in arguments. Malam Bacai Sanha and Nino Vieira used trucks to drive around large numbers of chanting and dancing young people, dressed in t-shirts depicting their favorite candidate. Both candidates also used donations of rural tools, motorcycles and cellular phones in an attempt to influence people's voting decision.

Three radio and TV debates between three and four different candidates consisted mostly of each candidate's announcing his own experience and voicing his opinions rather than arguing about issues. In addition, the Government decreed that the radio and TV stations had to provide free air time to all candidates in order to publish their programs and make them known to the public. But no reimbursement of campaign costs was planned by the Government<sup>4</sup>. This is why the smaller parties did not seem to be able to mobilize sufficient funds to show their presence, but rather relied on door to door campaigning. In that way there was a direct relation between money invested in campaigning and scores in the election results, even though, obviously, more criteria came into play. Also, the candidates chose carefully where to campaign, notably in their major constituency, as was the case for Aregado Manteque in Cacheu. In the second round the candidates chose neighborhoods for their generally impressive campaign presence where they perceived

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4 This measure contributed to limiting the number of candidates who would run only in order to receive a reimbursement of campaign costs.

they would need to show off most in order to convince the still undecided. The results of the first round are presented in table 2 (cf. annex).

On 24 June, a few days after the publication of these results, a demonstration by supporters of PRS in downtown Bissau was dispersed by the police with live ammunition, which resulted in bloodshed<sup>5</sup>. The objective of the demonstration was not all clear, but it happened in the context of Koumba Yala's contention that Malam Bacai Sanha and Nino Vieira had not come in first and second, but rather him. These unfortunate events underlined Nino Vieira's arguments, that the government could only resort to brute force and that against Balanta, thus diverting attention from the fact that he himself had been accused of killing Balanta following the *Acontecimentos de 17 de Outubro 1986*, an occurrence many Balanta cannot forgive and which would keep them from voting in Nino's favor.

A few days later all three candidates, Malam Bacai Sanha, Nino Vieira and Koumba Yala met with Senegal's President Abdoulaye Wade in Dakar. There were rumors about rather large sums of money changing hands.

What followed were negotiations among all parties and candidates, with the result that Nino Vieira united the support of almost all candidates of the first round of elections, including the important players Koumba Yala and Francisco Fadul, whereas PAIGC's Malam Bacai was left with only small support. Several parties seemed to break up in different factions between those supporting openly the announced course and others that rather supported the other candidate.

On 15 July there were several attacks on police and military installations in Bissau. One policeman on guard duty was killed in the process. According to RFI<sup>6</sup> a total of four attacks took place at the same time<sup>7</sup>. Investigations by the authorities were slow, and the tendency to downplay the events became clear. Rumors spread that these were acts of revenge from the families of the dead of the 24 June demonstration. Others assumed an attempt to get back a suitcase with money that had been confiscated some days earlier at the airport from an entrepreneur who supported Nino.

As the second election day approached, the campaign language became more insulting and even less content was transmitted.<sup>8</sup> In several incidents violence broke out between followers of the two candidates, stones were thrown, people were hurt and one truck's windshield smashed, the mounted

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5 Some say 2 to 3 PRS supporters and one policeman were killed; others claim the victims were by-standers.

6 RFI - Radio France International.

7 Tentative de putsch ou « incident isolé », Monique Mas, RFI 17/07/2005.

8 Just like in previous elections, Malam Bacai Sanha was depicted as a cow, a play on words with his name (*vaca* meaning "cow" in Portuguese sounds just like Baca). The same went for the Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Jr. Or candidates were characterized as suffering from cholera and HIV/AIDS).

sound system was destroyed. Only very clear statements made by police and transmitted time and time again by radio and TV, calmed down the situation. On the last campaign day, 22 July, an overwhelming demonstration of support in the streets of Bissau could be evidenced, unprecedented in Guinea Bissauian history. Thousand and thousands of followers were lining the main street leading from the airport into the city center, waiting for their candidates to come back from the interior where they had been campaigning in the past days. Even though Nino Vieira with Koumba Yala and Francisco Fadul came in only short time before Malam Bacai Sanha, there was no confrontation between the people from the different factions.

The voting on the following Sunday 24 July was a lot less conflictive than expected by many. Logistics were the same as a month before; counting and tabulation were made much easier by having only two candidates running. In a large majority of the polling stations there were party agents present throughout the day. Also during the regional consolidation the presence of party agents from both candidates was widespread. Likewise EU observers and party agents were present at all stages of the regional consolidation and digitalization. The results of the second round were the following:

**Table 1: Results of second round of Guinean Presidential Elections 2005 (by candidate and regions)**

Region	Candidate	votes	TOTAL
Bissau	J. B. Vieira	58.482 (49.86%)	117.300
	M. B. Sanha	58.818 (50.14%)	
Tombali	J. B. Vieira	14.091	25.136
	M. B. Sanha	11.045	
Quinara	J. B. Vieira	6.608	17.045
	M. B. Sanha	10.437	
Oio	J. B. Vieira	27.432	59.002
	M. B. Sanha	31.570	
Biombo	J. B. Vieira	24.034	27.048
	M. B. Sanha	3.014	
Bilama	J. B. Vieira	7.901	11.542
	M. B. Sanha	3.641	
Bafata	J. B. Vieira	28.189	56.790
	M. B. Sanha	28.601	
Gabú	J. B. Vieira	29.920	58.086
	M. B. Sanha	28.166	
Cacheu	J. B. Vieira	19.510	40.977
	M. B. Sanha	21.467	
% Total	J. B. Vieira	52.35%	100.00%
	M. B. Sanha	47.65%	

Source: CNE, Bissau, Departamento de Estatística e Informatica, Julho 14, 2005

On 19 August, and more than a week later than prescribed by law, the *Comissão Nacional de Eleições* (National Electoral Commission) announced the official results, Nino Vieira won with 52,35 %, Malam Bacai Sanha was defeated with 47,65 %. The same day PAIGC submitted a complaint to the Supreme Court pointing out irregularities and demanding a recount in Bissau and in the Biombo region.

## The importance of ethnic voting in Guinea-Bissau's political culture

The ethnic card was too much of a temptation not to be played by the candidates in this country with its distinct ethnic differences. Generally people tend to vote for the candidate of their own ethnic group.

Koumba Yala put all his political chances into courting the Balanta vote. But the two other strong candidates, Nino Vieira and Malam Bacai Sanha, had to make compromises, as both were part of an ethnic minority, Papel and Biafada respectively. In the first round, Koumba Yala united only the large majority of the Balanta vote, and did not get enough votes to make it to the second round. Nevertheless this did put him in a rather privileged position when negotiating with the candidates of the second round. Finally he announced his support for Nino Vieira. Even though this made it more likely that Nino would win, at this stage it was nevertheless far from being predictable, because neither it was clear that all the Balanta would follow Koumba Yala's voting intention, nor everybody in Guinea Bissau who accepts gifts ends up voting for the candidate connected to the gifts received.

When analyzing the electoral behaviour in Guinea-Bissau, it should be kept in mind that the "ethnic vote" is often bought. Regional and local leaders based on ethnicity are open for persuasion from candidates, and the decision to vote is often a collective one, decided in accordance with local power structures, in which money or goods change hands. Especially in rural areas, once the leader decides where his vote will go, the community is likely to follow. Consequently, the one who invests most will be rewarded by a favourable electoral result.

Another ethnic group heavily courted was the Fula, one of the largest ethnic groups in Guinea-Bissau. The Fula vote was as important as unpredictable: Some say that the true socio-cultural difference in today's Guinea Bissau is between Islamized<sup>9</sup> and non-Islamized groups of population, and that Fula, Mandinga and Biafada might use the ethnic card more explicitly in their future political strategies. This would explain the Balanta behaviour in these

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9 Islamized in the sense that Muslims in Guinea-Bissau do not fit in the common notion existing in Western society. Islam in Guinea-Bissau is much more mitigated and blended with local practices (cf.: Nóbrega, A. *A luta pelo poder na Guiné-Bissau* ISCSF Lisboa, 2003 pp.).

elections. The Balanta are primarily Animists and thus more easily support the Christian Nino Vieira than the Muslim Malam Bacai Sanha. Additionally, Malam Bacai Sanha failed to obtain the Muslim vote as such. This was probably a result of the historic hostility between the Fula and the Mandinga: instead of opting for a Muslim candidate, the Fula refrained from voting for a Biafada - Mandinga candidate. In this case, in terms of incidence of social identity in electoral behavior, ethnic solidarity and donations turned out to be more relevant than religious affiliation.

## The role of the international community and the electoral observation effort

Far from being a comprehensive analysis of all observation missions of the presidential elections in Guinea-Bissau, this is primarily an outline of the efforts of different actors willing to contribute to stability and democracy in Guinea-Bissau, as well as a portrayal of the intentions and motivations behind some of these efforts.

There were observation missions from six institutions, from the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), the European Union<sup>10</sup> (EU); the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries<sup>11</sup> (CPLP); the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and from the United States Embassy in Dakar. They differed in the financial and human resources available to them and in their level of experience. No national election observers were admitted.

The first objective of all the missions was to show that the international community was concerned and paying special attention to the recent political events in the country, not only because of the internal crisis itself, but also because of the possible spilling over effect in the overall context of the West African region. At the same time their presence put political pressure on the parties and candidates to respect the election results no matter who won. The second objective was to promote human rights, to stabilize democratization efforts, and to build local capacity to conduct free and transparent elections. Furthermore it was understood by many Guineans that if the elections were organized in a transparent manner, the international community would honor this commitment by increasing current levels of aid or investment.

All the electoral observation missions except the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) operated under the UN umbrella. UNOGBIS, the United Nations' Peace-Building Office for Guinea Bissau, had the mandate to coordinate the international donors' support for the organiza-

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10 <http://www.eueombissau.org/>

11 <http://www.cplp.org>

tion of the elections, and, as such, the different observation missions in the country. The EU's decision to opt for a more independent approach was due to EU's general observation procedure and methodology applied in all countries where there are EOMs deployed. The EU generally signs a memorandum of understanding with the host government that outlines exactly the rights and obligations of the mission and the observers. The other five observer organizations at first did not appreciate the EU approach, insisting that the observation should be complementary and required a lot of coordination. At the end, though, all recognized the suitability of the EU's decision. UNOGBIS did not have sufficient resources to assume the role most expected it to assume, namely to take charge of the observation process, appoint specific tasks to observers, and to collect, process and analyze information observed. This is why at the end each organization had to organize its own work. This ultimately proved to be quite difficult. CPLP observers, for example, were not given sufficient means of communication and transportation in the first round, obviously limiting the scope of the observation capacity of the team, whereas the methodology followed in all EU Electoral Observation Missions is to set up their own transportation and communication capacity and data analysis system. This makes possible a fluent contact between the field and the Core Team in the capital, and enables the mission to follow up in a timely manner the opening of the polling stations, the voting and the counting of the ballots at all levels.

As far as the Portuguese Speaking Countries Community (CPLP) was concerned, all corresponding member-states took part in the mission, except Guinea-Bissau, the host country. It was not the first time CPLP participated in an electoral observation, and this time it turned out rather successfully, leading CPLP to a more solid recognition by the international community as a group based on linguistic criteria. In spite of the above-mentioned lack of logistical resources, not due to a lack of funding, a good coordination was achieved between CPLP, UNOGBIS, and all the other election observation missions.

The final declarations issued after both rounds were written and agreed upon by all organizations working under the UN umbrella, and were announced by the CPLP Chief of Mission, the representative from São Tomé e Príncipe, a fact that gave CPLP a considerable degree of visibility. The presence of a representative from East-Timor was also very welcomed, a fact President Henrique Rosa specially underlined in a meeting with CPLP observers that took place after the first round.

The International Community present in Bissau was pleased with the developing of the electoral process, and urged Guinea-Bissau to keep moving in the right direction. The elections were declared fair and transparent by all observation missions. In practical terms, the EU issued the most credible statement, since its information gathering system and its analysis capability

backed its statements, whereas all other missions under the UN umbrella issued a simple two-page-statement where, together, they declared the elections as free and transparent, but did not present any findings, conclusions or recommendation based on observed facts and figures issued from any analysis of data reported on the observation forms. All agreed that the National Electoral Commission had done an enormous organizational effort and had performed very well.

Nevertheless after the announcement of the results, violence broke out in the streets of Bissau, mainly due to provocations between Nino Vieira and Malam Bacai's supporters and fuelled by the close vicinity of their headquarters. In a vigorous speech, Malam Bacai Sanha refused to accept the results, demanded a recount in two provinces where he expected to have been more successful, Bissau and Biombo, and stated that he would never accept defeat. In this context, the International Electoral Observation Missions broadened their initial mandate to a much more important role by conducting informal conflict prevention activities. The presence and the role played by high level international observers like the UN General Secretary's Special Envoy, former Mozambique President, Joaquim Chissano, and former Burundi President, Pierre Buyoya, contributed in calming down the tension risen. Chissano met with politicians and representatives of civil society, as well as with members of the armed forces reminding them of their commitment to supporting the process of fair and transparent elections. After the rejection of the results by Malam Bacai Sanhá, high level observers that were still in the country likewise participated in this dialogue in order to contain the situation, rather than merely observing the process.

Nino Vieira could now easily base his arguments on the final statements of the international observation missions. Furthermore he insisted that it was precisely the PAIGC government organizing the elections, therefore having a much larger opportunity had they wanted to, to commit fraud than anybody in the opposition.

This underlined the importance of the credibility of any observation mission's statements. They should be based on observed facts, statistical and measurable information, and not only on simple opinions and impressions.

## Outlook

A larger difference in the number of votes obtained between the two presidential candidates Nino Vieira and Malam Bacai Sanha would have provided more solid institutional conditions for peace and a reconciliation of the Guinea-Bissauian society, regardless of who came in first.

It can only be speculated which of the two candidates of the second round would be more beneficial to the country's future, but a PAIGC sup-

ported President would provide, hypothetically, a more stable political environment for the regular functioning of the recently elected PAIGC government.

The military's position will have to be closely watched, as nothing in Guinean politics can be achieved against the will of the military. Given the large numbers of Balanta in the military, Nino Vieira will probably be able to run a more stable government by controlling and including the military in strategic decisions in a more convincing way than his opponent could have been able to do. On the other hand, some say there is too much in the past, namely the *Acontecimentos de 17 de Outubro*, that might prevent the institutional coexistence created by the election's result to last.

The international community has an important role to play in the future of the country and the region, by keeping watch on the political situation and taking an active stand, more than merely financing development. There is an urgent need for a 'whistle-blower' and for effective confidence-building measures whenever social peace is threatened by ambitious and unscrupulous politicians, much to the general population's disadvantage.

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Annex:

Table 2: Results of first round of Guinean Presidential Elections 2005 (by candidate and regions)

Region Candidate	Bissau	Tombali	Quinara	Oio	Biombo	Bolama	Bafata	Gabú	Cacheu	Total	% Total
Malam Bacai Sanha	50.585	8.384	9.402	26.698	2.019	2.992	22.409	20.340	15.447	158.276	<b>35,45</b>
João Bernardo Vieira	37.023	4.420	2.047	6.459	19.157	7.636	19.776	24.600	7.800	128.918	<b>28,87</b>
Koumba Yala	24.407	13.899	6.593	30.725	5.367	472	8.989	5.910	15.244	111.606	<b>25,00</b>
Francisco J. Fadul	6.544	473	273	871	359	294	895	1.156	1.868	12.733	<b>2,85</b>
Aregado Mantenque	1.456	182	105	489	216	142	805	734	4.871	9.000	<b>2,02</b>
Mamadou Iaia Djalo	1.317	588	168	375	84	101	1.526	2.470	483	7.112	<b>1,59</b>
Total valid votes										446.493	100 %
votes	127.740	30.990	19.998	72.269	29.871	12.715	62.177	63.393	52.690	471.843	87,63 %
non-voters	16.276	5.270	2.614	8.261	2.643	2.243	8.826	9.120	11.375	66.628	12,37 %
voters registered	144.016	36.260	22.612	80.530	32.514	14.958	71.003	72.513	64.065	538.471	100,00 %

Source: CNE, Bissau, Departamento de Estatística e Informática, June 19, 2005

