

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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Guinea Summary 26 March 2020

Guinea is, so far, one of the countries in Africa least affected by the Covid-19 outbreak but the government has taken measures to curtail its spread. Violence occurs during Guinea's constitutional referendum and legislative elections, held simultaneously on 22 March. The government reports six deaths as a result of electoral violence but the opposition and Front Nationale pour la Défense de la Constitution (FNDC) claim 11 protesters were killed. China is on the verge of authorising its companies to pursue the development of the Simandou iron ore deposit. Canada-based think tank, the Fraser Institute, ranks Guinea in its annual Mining Policy Perception Index, as the mining jurisdiction with the most attractive mining potential in Africa.

Guinea braces itself for Covid-19

To date **Guinea** is one of the countries least affected on the continent by **Covid-19**, but the government has nevertheless put in place basic measures to curtail its spread. At time of writing, Guinea had registered four cases of Covid-19.¹ However, if numbers increase, the government's measures are likely to be insufficient.

Guinea recorded its first Covid-19 case on 14 March, a **Belgian** national who had spent February in Belgium and **France** and arrived in the capital, **Conakry**, from **Brussels** (Belgium) on 3 March.² The patient was diagnosed with Covid-19 at Conakry's **Centre de Traitement des Epidemies de Ndongo (CTE)** (disease treatment centre).³ Conakry governor General **Marthurin Bangoura** subsequently banned gatherings with more than 100 people.⁴ The Guinean national football league was also suspended from 16 March.⁵

With legislative elections and a constitutional referendum set to take place on 22 March (see below), there were calls for their postponement due to the risk of spreading Covid-19. However, health minister **Amara Sompore** assured that elections could be held in a controlled context, outlining preventive measures such as spacing voters in queues and systematically washing hands before entering polling stations.⁶

Guinea's third and fourth cases – a couple from France who had been in Guinea since 14 March – were discovered on 23 March and the couple isolated at the **Agence Nationale de la Sécurité Sanitaire (ANSS)** (national agency for health security).⁷ Higher education and scientific research minister **Khader Barry** cancelled schools, which were set to reopen, from 25 March till further notice.⁸ The **Aéroport de Conakry** (Conakry airport), Guinea's largest international airport, has also been closed to curb the spread of the pandemic.⁹

¹ Guineenews.org, 23 Mar 2020

² RFI, 14 Mar 2020

³ RFI, 14 Mar 2020

⁴ RFI, 14 Mar 2020

⁵ Aminata.com, 16 Mar 2020

⁶ RFI, 20 Mar 2020

⁷ Guineenews.org, 20 Mar 2020

⁸ Guineenews.org, 24 Mar 2020

⁹ Guineenews.org, 23 Mar 2020

As one of three countries hardest hit, alongside **Liberia** and **Sierra Leone**, by the 2014 **Ebola** outbreak, Guinea has experience dealing with pandemics. However, the government is yet to put out a comprehensive Covid-19 emergency plan and its measures to date are not drastic. Economically, the outbreak of the virus could have a serious impact on Guinea's trade with **China**, particularly with respect to the export of minerals such as bauxite and the execution of large-scale infrastructure projects by Chinese firms. The Guinean government has pledged to allocate 300 billion Guinean Francs (GNF) (\$31.4m) towards the fight against Covid-19.¹⁰

Double election marked by violence and several deaths

Violence occurred throughout Guinea during the constitutional referendum and legislative elections held simultaneously on 22 March.¹¹ The double elections took place in a climate of significant political tension. Civil society and opposition groups claimed there were 11 deaths related to electoral violence, while the Guinean government reports six election-related deaths.¹² The electoral violence is a continuation of the tensions that have emerged since October and are likely to increase upon announcement of the election results.

The lead-up to the elections, which have been postponed several times, was tumultuous. Major opposition parties had maintained since December that they would not participate in the legislative elections (see *ARC Briefing Guinea January 2020*). The opposition viewed the constitutional referendum as a way for President **Alpha Condé** (2010-present) to pursue a third term in office. The elections were originally scheduled to take place in 2018, then postponed to 16 February 2020. However, a presidential decree postponed them once again to 1 March.¹³

The possibility of holding elections on 1 March became uncertain when the **Organisation de la Francophonie (OIF)** suspended its participation in the electoral process.¹⁴ The OIF had been providing technical assistance to Guinean electoral authorities alongside the **European Union (EU)** since 2018, when they carried out an audit of Guinea's electoral register.¹⁵ The OIF withdrew, claiming that there were 2.4 million "problematic" voters on the electoral register, and stated that it could not work with Guinean electoral officials in these circumstances.¹⁶

The Guinean opposition had made similar claims about the existence of ghost voters on the electoral register.¹⁷ Opposition **Union des Forces Démocratiques de Guinée (UFDG)** president **Cellou Dalein Diallo** and the **Front Nationale pour la Défense de la Constitution (FNDC)**, a collective of opposition parties and civil society organisations to oppose the proposed constitutional change, praised the OIF's decision.¹⁸ Both Dalein Diallo and the FNDC called on Guineans to boycott the upcoming vote and accused President Condé of violating the constitution by calling for the referendum.¹⁹ **Commission Electorale Nationale et Indépendante (CENI)** (independent electoral commission) president **Amadou Salif Kebe** said he was "surprised" by the OIF's decision.²⁰ The OIF officially announced on 27 February that it would not send an observer mission for the elections because of the issues related to the electoral register.²¹ On the same day, the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** commission also stated it would not send an observer mission.²²

¹⁰ Guineenews.org, 18 Mar 2020

¹¹ RFI, 23 Mar 2020

¹² Jeune Afrique, 24 Mar 2020

¹³ Jeune Afrique, 5 Feb 2020

¹⁴ RFI, 25 Mar 2020

¹⁵ RFI, 25 Mar 2020

¹⁶ RFI, 25 Mar 2020

¹⁷ RFI, 25 Mar 2020

¹⁸ RFI, 25 Mar 2020

¹⁹ RFI, 25 Mar 2020

²⁰ RFI, 25 Mar 2020

²¹ Jeune Afrique, 28 Feb 2020

²² Jeune Afrique, 28 Feb 2020

African Union (AU) chairperson **Moussa Faki** announced on 28 February that the AU would also not send a team of observers, in-line with the ECOWAS decision.²³ In the wake of the withdrawal of support from international partners, President Condé announced on 28 February that the elections would be postponed for the fourth time, “*out of national and sub-regional solidarity*”.²⁴ He said the postponement was “*neither a capitulation nor a retreat*”, citing that the elections could be held in two weeks and that the **Cour Constitutionnelle** (constitutional court) would be consulted.²⁵ France-based publication **Jeune Afrique** reported that President Condé had sought the intervention of the AU, **South Africa’s** President **Cyril Ramaphosa** (2018-present) and **Ivorian** president **Alassane Ouattara** (2010-present) to have AU and ECOWAS delegations observe the elections.²⁶

Dalein Diallo accused President Condé of taking the decision only to protect his international image, and accused him of failing to call for peace and dialogue.²⁷ However, ruling **Rassemblement du Peuple Guinéen Arc-e-Ciel (RPG Arc-en-Ciel)** parliamentary group president **Amadou Damara Camara** observed, “*If this brings more understanding between the political classes, this is better.*”²⁸ The OIF and ECOWAS announced on 2 March that they would send technical experts to assist with the electoral list audit.²⁹ UFDG vice president **Fode Oussou Fofana** noted that although analysis of the voter register was fundamental, it would take much longer than a fortnight.³⁰ FNDC head of operations **Ibrahima Diallo** suggested that “*the heart of the problem is the continuation of the referendum for a new constitution*”.³¹ The FNDC announced it would hold protests on 5 March.³² However, Conakry officials banned the planned protests on the grounds that they would disrupt the visit of the ECOWAS delegation.³³ Clashes nevertheless took place between protesters and security officials.³⁴

CENI announced on 13 March that the proposed date for elections would be 22 March, which President Condé confirmed by presidential decree.³⁵ Upon completion of the ECOWAS and OIF joint mission, the OIF published a report calling into question CENI’s ability to organise free and fair elections.³⁶ The report noted that in addition to the 2.4 million unaccounted voters, voters’ cards had not been distributed and that CENI was too politicised, since all the members belong to political parties.³⁷ A delegation of ECOWAS leaders consisting of **Ghana’s** President **Nana Akufo Ado** (2016-present), **Burkinabe** president **Roch Christian Kabore** (2015-present) and **Nigeria’s** President **Muhammadu Buhari** (2015-present) were set to meet President Condé regarding the progress of elections but due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic (see above), the meeting did not take place.³⁸ The FNDC once again called for an election boycott and for protests to take place on 21 March.³⁹

President Condé promised on 21 March that the elections would be transparent but Faki expressed concern about the possibility of violence occurring during the elections.⁴⁰ Confirming his fears,

²³ Jeune Afrique, 28 Feb 2020

²⁴ Jeune Afrique, 28 Feb 2020

²⁵ Jeune Afrique, 28 Feb 2020

²⁶ Jeune Afrique, 2 Mar 2020

²⁷ RFI, 29 Feb 2020

²⁸ RFI, 29 Feb 2020

²⁹ DW, 2 Mar 2020

³⁰ RFI, 29 Feb 2020

³¹ RFI, 29 Feb 2020

³² Aminata.com, 4 Mar 2020

³³ Le Pays, 5 Mar 2020

³⁴ DW, 5 Mar 2020

³⁵ Jeune Afrique, 13 Mar 2020

³⁶ RFI, 16 Feb 2020

³⁷ RFI, 16 Feb 2020

³⁸ Jeune Afrique, 16 Mar 2020

³⁹ Aminata.com, 17 Mar 2020

⁴⁰ RFI, 21 Mar 2020

election day violence took place in the opposition strongholds of **Kolema** and **Ratoma** in Conakry.⁴¹ Security minister **Albert Damantang Camara** said six people had died and security forces had injured nine people during the clashes, contradicting the FNDC's claim of 11 deaths.⁴² After the elections, violence continued in the locality of **Nzérékoré**, which led to 90 individuals being injured.⁴³

Guinea's political environment is becoming increasingly violent. This scenario will persist if the FNDC, major opposition parties and the presidential majority are not brought together to dialogue and build a consensus around contentious issues. In particular, the topic of President Condé's apparent desire to pursue a third presidential term needs to be addressed. However, failure to pursue such an initiative is likely to lead to further politically motivated violence and deaths.

China pushing for development of world's largest iron ore deposit

United States-based media firm **Bloomberg** reports that China is on the verge of authorising its state-owned companies to pursue the development of the **Simandou** iron ore deposit.⁴⁴ If China can secure support for the development of the project, it will enable Guinea to become one of the world's leading iron ore producers and stimulate investments that will benefit other aspects of its economy.

China's **State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC)** is actively pushing for the Simandou project to go ahead.⁴⁵ SASAC oversees the activities of China's largest state-owned enterprises (SOEs).⁴⁶ Simandou has one of the largest high-grade iron ore deposits in the world, with over 2 billion tonnes.⁴⁷ Its deposits have been undeveloped due to a seven-year legal dispute between the former owner of Simandou block 1 and 2, **Franco-Israeli** billionaire **Beny Steinmetz**, **Anglo-Australian** miner **Rio Tinto Group** and the Guinean government.⁴⁸ However, in February 2019, a settlement was reached between Steinmetz and the Guinean government, in which Steinmetz relinquished ownership of the Simandou concession in exchange for a smaller iron ore deposit (see *ARC Briefing Guinea March 2019*).⁴⁹ Subsequently, the Guinean government took steps to find a new owner. Following the launch of an international tender, a Chinese-Guinean-**Singaporean** consortium, **Société Minière de Boke (SMB)**, was granted the Simandou block 1 and 2 concession rights in November, over Australia-based **Fortescue Mining Group (FMG)** (see *ARC Briefing Guinea November 2019*).⁵⁰

Simandou could see the production of 100m tonnes of iron ore per year, which would make Guinea the third largest iron ore producer in the world after Australia and **Brazil**.⁵¹ Eyeing this potential, the Chinese are keen to develop the deposit and start production within five years.⁵² SASAC has been in talks with other Chinese SOEs, such as **Aluminum Corporation of China (Chinalco)** to become involved with the construction of costly infrastructure.⁵³ Chinalco owns Simandou blocks 3 and 4 alongside Rio Tinto.⁵⁴ Some of the infrastructure to be constructed includes the 650 km **Transguinean** railway and the deep-water port at **Matakong**.⁵⁵ SMB intends to invest \$3 billion in rail and port infrastructure, but the overall estimated cost for these two is \$13 billion.⁵⁶ SASAC

⁴¹ Jeune Afrique, 24 Mar 2020

⁴² Jeune Afrique, 24 Mar 2020

⁴³ RFI, 25 Mar 2020

⁴⁴ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

⁴⁵ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

⁴⁶ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

⁴⁷ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

⁴⁸ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

⁴⁹ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

⁵⁰ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

⁵¹ Bloomberg, 4 Mar 2020

⁵² Jeune Afrique, 20 Mar 2020

⁵³ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

⁵⁴ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

⁵⁵ African Business Magazine, 6 Feb 2020

⁵⁶ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

intends to approach **China Development Bank** and the **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)** to secure funding for these projects.⁵⁷ China's actions to accelerate the evolution of the Simandou project have put Rio Group on the edge, as a direct rival could produce significant amounts of Rio Tinto's most important mineral.⁵⁸ Rio Tinto CEO **Jean Sebastien Jacques** met with SASAC officials in **Beijing** (China) in January to discuss the possibility of Rio Tinto partnering with Chinese SOEs.⁵⁹

Canada-based think tank, the **Fraser Institute**, in its annual **Mining Policy Perception Index** survey comprising 76 countries, ranked Guinea as the mining jurisdiction with the most attractive mining potential in **Africa**.⁶⁰ Globally it was 20th out of 76. Other developments that attest to the growing prominence of Guinea's mining sector include the purchase by Canadian-American mining billionaire **Robert Friedland** of the **Nimba** iron deposit in September (see *ARC Briefing Guinea September 2019*), the commencement by **Niron Metal's** of operations in the **Zagata** iron ore deposit in February (see *ARC Briefing Guinea March 2019*), and the dramatic rise of **SMB**.⁶¹

Planner

(Date TBA due to Covid-19) **Conakry (Guinea)** Transform Africa Conference;
4-6 June 2020 **Bordeaux (France)** France-Afrique Summit;
Oct 2020 **(Guinea)** Presidential elections (date to be determined)

Chronology

25 Mar 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *RFI*. Election related violence leaves 90 injured in the locality of **Nzérékoré**;

24 Mar 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Jeune Afrique*. The **Front Nationale pour la Défense de la Constitution (FNDC)** claims that 11 protesters were killed during the 22 March elections, while the ministry of security says six people were killed;

23 Mar 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Guineenews.org*. Guinea registers its fourth **Covid-19** case;

23 Mar 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Guineenews.org*. Guinea closes the **Aéroport de Conakry** as a preventive measure to curb the spread of **Covid-19**;

18 Mar 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Guineenews.org*. The government pledges to allocate 300 billion GNF (\$31.4m) to fight against the spread of **Covid-19** in Guinea;

16 Mar 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *RFI*. The **Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)** suggests in a report that Guinea's electoral commission does not have the ability to organise free and fair local elections;

14 Mar 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *RFI*. Guinea registers its first **Covid-19** case, a **Belgian** national, who is an employee of the local **European Union (EU)** delegation;

13 Mar 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *RFI*. President **Alpha Condé** sets 22 March as the date for legislative elections and constitutional referendum;

5 Mar 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Bloomberg*. **China** is actively seeking support from its **State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC)**, to attract companies that can help develop infrastructure for the **Simandou** iron ore deposit;

5 Mar 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Aminata.com*. The **Front National pour la Défense de la**

⁵⁷ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

⁵⁸ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

⁵⁹ Bloomberg, 5 Mar 2020

⁶⁰ Agence Ecofin, 29 Feb 2020

⁶¹ Bloomberg, 4 Feb 2020

Constitution (FNDC) holds protests against the organisation of elections and the constitutional referendum;

1 Mar 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Guineenews.org*. **Canada**-based think tank **The Fraser Institute** indicates in its **Mining Policy Perception Index** that Guinea is the mining jurisdiction with the most attractive mining potential;

28 Feb 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Agence Ecofin*. **Aluminium Corporation of China (Chinalco)** has made its first bauxite export from its **Boffa** mine, a 55,000 shipment to **China**;

28 Feb 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *Jeune Afrique*. President **Alpha Condé** announces the postponement of the legislative elections and the constitutional referendum vote that was scheduled to take place on 1 March;

27 Feb 2020 **Conakry (Guinea)** *RFI*. The **Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)** and **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** announce they will not send observers to the legislative elections and constitutional referendum set to take place on 1 March;

About Africa Risk Consulting:

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