



SUPPORTING
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Enabling Environment Baseline Snapshot

Guinea Bissau

November 2025



Context

Guinea-Bissau is experiencing a period of severe political instability and economic fragility, marked by institutional crises, popular dissatisfaction, and tensions between political parties and the armed forces. These tensions stem from a [long tradition](#) of military intervention in politics, institutional fragility, and the struggle for control of power, especially during election periods.

The general elections of 23 November 2025 took place amid unusual circumstances that culminated in a [coup d'état](#) by the military on 26 November, carried out by the self-proclaimed "Alto Comando para Restauração da Segurança e Ordem Pública". Notably, these elections occurred in a context of institutional rupture, as [Parliament had not convened](#) since December 2023, when it was dissolved by the president following clashes between the National Guard and the Presidential Guard in what was described as an attempted coup, leaving the country without effective legislative oversight. In this context, the country faces significant challenges in terms of guaranteeing democratic exercise and electoral transparency. These include the exclusion of key opposition actors from the electoral process; the detention of political figures; the kidnapping of officials and magistrates from the Public Prosecutor's Office at the headquarters of the National Elections Commission who were monitoring the vote count; the detention and beating of young people who took to the streets to demand the announcement of the results; and hostility from the military, including the constant persecution of presidential candidate Fernando Dias da Costa and African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) leader Eng. Domingos Simões Pereira.

Guinea-Bissau's economy registered a [growth of 5.5% in 2025](#), driven by a record cashew nut harvest of approximately 250,000 tons, benefiting from high prices in the international market. This performance, considered historic, was reflected in increased farmer incomes and attributed by the government to structural policies adopted in recent years. Over the past two years, Guinea-Bissau has continued to be considered a [strategic point for international cocaine trafficking](#) and a "narco-state," with increased domestic consumption due to poverty and drug availability, as well as the detention of foreign traffickers in September 2024 and their subsequent [convictions](#).

Political instability has exacerbated the problem, and even after the coup in November 2025, the new authorities promised ["zero tolerance"](#) against drug trafficking, supporting the argument that we are facing a state where drugs are a source of income for certain military and political elites.

Despite this promise, the "zero tolerance" policy against drug trafficking had no effect because there was no strategy to consolidate this policy.

The fundamental freedoms, including freedom of the press and access to information, [remain under pressure](#), as exemplified by what happened in September 2025 at the Supreme Court press conferences, where journalists from Capital FM, Quelele, and Pindjiguity radio stations were [expelled](#) from the room for being considered stations that attack the regime. Journalists are frequently persecuted and humiliated by the President of the Republic, who always calls them "[hired mouths](#)". [On 15 August 2025](#), the government ordered the immediate suspension and expulsion of [delegations from Lusa News Agency, RTP and RDP](#) from the country. This measure, classified as an attack on press freedom, occurred in a context of growing restriction on independent journalism, shortly before the elections.

Although the legal framework is favourable to the work of civil society actors, in practice there have been attempts to intimidate and silence those who are critical of this regime. For example, on 2 July 2025, the Public Prosecutor's Office [declared](#) the civil society organizations Frente Popular and Espaço de Concertação das Organizações da Sociedade Civil da Guiné-Bissau to be illegal and prohibited both structures from carrying out activities reserved for legal entities. Furthermore, Casa dos Direitos has been unjustifiably [raided](#) four times by the authorities since the military took power, interrupting the general elections, and in the last raid the European Union ambassador was expelled while visiting the location.

Regarding access to a secure digital environment, there is a complete lack of online security for civic actors. It is common for people to create fake accounts using other people's identities to post harmful content, including hate speech, cyberbullying, and phishing.

1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Since 2020, civic space in Guinea-Bissau has been severely restricted, and civil society participation in the country's development process has been rigidly controlled, restricting freedom of expression, assembly, and demonstration. The authorities, both before and after the 2025 military coup, have used blanket bans on protests, for example, the attempts to organise [demonstrations](#) before the high-level visit of ECOWAS on January 11th in Bissau by the Revolutionary Movement "[Pó di Terra](#)", whose leader, Vigário Luís Balanta, was repeatedly threatened and

persecuted by the military regime that seized power in Guinea-Bissau. These restrictions have been accompanied by the frequent and excessive use of force against protesters, including the massive deployment of security forces to disperse gatherings, intimidation tactics, arbitrary arrests, and reports of [detention and torture](#) of activists protesting against what they describe as an increasingly authoritarian and “dictatorial” regime.

On 15 January 2024, protests were [prohibited indefinitely](#) by a simple declaration from the Ministry of the Interior, under the pretext that search and seizure operations for firearms were under way. This ban remained in effect, therefore, during a vigil held by Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos on 22 December 2025, when security forces [raided](#) Casa dos Direitos and beat two employees of the Ministry of the Interior. This restriction of freedom was aggravated in January when the “Alto Comando Militar” [prohibited](#) press conferences and unauthorised public statements.

Bubacar Turé, president of the Guinean League for Human Rights (LGDH), was the [target](#) of threats, intimidation, harassment and attempted illegal arrest in April 2025 for having denounced, during a seminar on violence against women and girls, irregularities at the Simão Mendes Hospital, including several deaths after treatment at the Haemodialysis Unit. This included an [illegal search](#) during his absence at his residence by police officers on 12 April and [threats](#) by the then President Umaro Sissoco Embaló, on 17 April, to dissolve LGDH on accusations it had been conducting political activities.

On 10 October 2025, lawyer and human rights defender Luís Vaz Martins, head of the Human Rights Commission of the Bar Association of Guinea-Bissau, was abducted from his office in Bissau by armed men, assaulted and subsequently abandoned in an open field on the outskirts of Bissau. The incident reportedly occurred after Luis Vaz Martins denounced corruption in road construction during a [radio interview](#). The lawyer has been the target of threats and intimidation since 2021, due to comments made on a weekly radio programme. Furthermore, on 27 July 2025, journalist Waldir Araújo, from RTP África, was [physically assaulted](#) by armed men, as was Vigário Luís Balanta, leader of the “Pó di Terra” movement, which opposed the coup d'état in Guinea-Bissau and demanded the release of the results of the November 2025 presidential elections through various demonstrations in Bissau. He was [brutally beaten to death](#) and his body abandoned on the outskirts of N'Dam, about 30 km from Bissau.

2. Supportive legal and regulatory framework

The guarantee of freedom of association was a landmark of Guinea-Bissau's democratic transition, especially after the 1991 constitutional revision, which opened the way for a multi-party system. This fundamental right is enshrined in Title II – Fundamental Rights, Freedoms, Guarantees and Duties, specifically in Articles 45 (Freedom of association), 54 (Right to peaceful assembly) and 55 (Right to form associations without interference from public authorities). Even with the approval of the new constitution in January 2026 by the National Transitional Council, which assumes parliamentary functions, this new Constitution of the Republic did not alter the Catalogue of Fundamental Rights, meaning that freedom of association remained intact in the Guinean legal system. Also, with the political opening of 1991, laws were adapted to support the actions of civil society organisations and, consequently, allow them to advocate for the improvement of basic rights at the societal level.

Therefore, the legal framework governing the creation and operation of civil society organisations (CSOs)—including the Constitution of the Republic, Decree-Law No. 23/92, and the Civil Code—while insufficient to fully address the diversity of civil society actors in Guinea-Bissau, formally upholds and protects the exercise of freedom of association. In practice, however, these legal guarantees are routinely violated. Authorities have [imposed](#) indefinite bans on public meetings and demonstrations through executive statements, notably in [January 2024](#) and again on [10 January 2026](#) following the coup d'état. These measures have also extended to the [prohibition of press conferences](#) and so-called “unauthorised” public statements, severely restricting civic space.

Challenges lie not only in the regulations being scarce and outdated, but also in processes for CSOs to acquire legal personality. This requires official registration with the Central Notary Service of Bissau, the only authority with the power to register CSOs and grant them legal personality. Although there are no cases of impediment or rejection of registration, this requirement obliges all interested parties to travel in person to the capital, which is cost- and time-consuming, in particular for small, rural or community-based organisations; also, reflecting a clear trend towards centralised control over civil society.

Even so, the government of Guinea-Bissau recognised CSOs as public service providers, and granted them a [tax exemption](#) regime as a demonstration of state support for CSOs in the country, under the terms of [Law 26/93](#), which regulates the control of customs exemptions on imports made by NGOs, and [Law No. 2/95](#), which regulates the possible situations for the application of tax and customs exemptions. However, this support was suspended through MF Order 66/22 in September 2022 and remains suspended to date. In the [official statement](#), the Ministry of

Finance explains that the decision was taken within the framework of the process of reviewing and regulating customs and tax exemptions granted under the General Exemption Regime.

3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Since the government in Guinea-Bissau provides no funding for CSOs, these organisations rely on foreign funding from international partners, such as United Nations (UN) agencies, bilateral donors, the European Union Delegation, or through international philanthropy.

Regarding access to funding, it is important to emphasise that the selection process for each funder is different, however, access to resources from different UN agencies and foreign government aid agencies is quite bureaucratic. The dynamics driven by the growing number of associations focused on development and human rights have increased competitiveness for access to funds. At the United Nations system level, there are a range of documents required for grant applications, including CSO statutes, audited financial reports, and a detailed project proposal. Many CSOs, in particular smaller, rural and community-based CSOs, cannot meet these requirements and, consequently, are ineligible for funding.

In terms of sustainability, the majority of funding does not cover the overall and ongoing needs of the organisations. This leaves CSOs very precarious in that few CSOs receive basic funding, and those that do are the older and more consolidated organisations that have cultivated strong partnerships with donors over the years.

In some cases, the support provided fails to adequately reflect local realities, limiting its effectiveness and impact on the communities it is intended to serve. This challenge is further exacerbated by a broader decline in international support for civil society. In particular, reductions in funding from the United States, including through USAID, have significantly affected the operational capacity of many CSOs, forcing some to scale down or suspend key programmes. At the same time, several [bilateral donors](#) have reduced or reoriented their funding away from civil society actors, contributing to an increasingly [constrained financial environment](#). This is compounded by the fact that some UN agencies are also reducing their support to civil society, while others are withdrawing from the country altogether due to its chronic instability.

4. Open and responsive state

Since the beginning of the regime of the then President of the Republic, the interaction between civil society and successive governments of that regime has decreased drastically. An example of this was the expulsion and closure of the headquarters of the Bar Association on February 10, 2021, invoking security reasons, without dialogue or negotiation with the Bar Association. Subsequently, the President of the Bar Association of Guinea-Bissau, Januário Pedro Correia, [was prevented](#) from taking part in the opening ceremony of the 2023 judicial year, an official event that was attended by President Umaro Sissoco Embaló.

Political tensions in Guinea-Bissau continued to affect the relationship between state institutions and society, alongside a deterioration in human and civil rights. President Umaro Sissoco Embaló relied on a [divide-and-rule approach](#), while opposition and civil society groups, as well as media outlets, reported an atmosphere of intimidation and repression.

The government banned demonstrations in January 2024, and security forces enforced this measure aggressively. [Police used tear gas](#) to prevent legislators from entering parliament after its dissolution, and a Popular Front demonstration in May 2024 was met with police violence, arrests, and allegations of torture and kidnapping.

Journalists and human rights activists were [subjected to threats, assaults, and intimidation](#), and opposition politicians, journalists, and human rights activists described a climate of fear and restrictions on political participation during 2023–2024.

Collaboration between civil society and state authorities is almost non-existent, aggravated by attacks and persecution of human rights activists, [journalists](#) and human rights organisations, that were targeted by former president Umaro Sissoco Embaló and the transitional authorities after the coup d'état.

Civil society in Guinea-Bissau participates in political processes only to [a limited extent](#), concentrated in a few policy areas. Dialogue between the state and citizens remains highly centralised, in part because the government lacks a clear strategy for coordinating with civil society. In some policy areas, government departments have worked with civil society, international organisations, and members of parliament in working groups. However, civil society organisations [have not been invited to co-develop policies or take part in high-level decision-making](#). Citizens often [report](#) feeling excluded from political participation, with this concern being especially pronounced among women, young people, and residents of the interior of the country.

Following the coup d'état in Guinea-Bissau in November 2025, the headquarters of Casa dos Direitos in Bissau were [invaded and blocked](#) by agents of the Public Order Police and the Rapid Intervention Police attached to the Ministry of the Interior. The blockade prevented access for employees and lasted three days.

Therefore, the philosophy that CSOs are partners of the State, which translated into greater openness and support, has been replaced by one of suspicion and, consequently, has resulted in little collaboration between the parties.

5. Supportive public culture and discourses on civil society

Despite the State's Duty to Protect and the state's responsibilities, these are not always met, often leaving CSOs as spokespersons for those representing communities, women, minorities, and marginalised groups.

In recent years, since the inauguration of President Umaro Sissoco Embaló on 27 February 2020, there have been several setbacks in the capacity for action by civil society in general, due, among others, to a disinformation campaign launched on social networks, and public defamation in speeches by political figures linked to the regime, including the President of the Republic, aimed at discrediting the leaders of CSOs and media professionals, calling them "hired mouths." Following President Umaro Sissoco Embaló's dissolution of parliament in December 2023 amid a foiled coup and escalating political tension, press freedom in Guinea-Bissau has deteriorated sharply. [In July 2024](#), radio journalist Ussumane Mané was publicly sworn at and told to "go fuck yourself" by Embaló after asking whether a presidential election would take place that year, an incident that sparked a broader standoff: the journalists' union Sinjotecs called for a media boycott of the president, and Embaló retaliated by boycotting the union and ordering the Attorney General to investigate it. Since July, [at least 16 journalists have been obstructed, expelled, or attacked by police](#) and government officials, including two female reporters hit by a police vehicle and beaten while covering a teachers' protest, more than a dozen journalists barred from covering the airport arrival of key ally Braima Camará, and RTP journalist Indira Baldé expelled from a health ministry press conference under a "superior order from the presidency." Therefore, when the then President of the Republic scheduled a meeting with journalists on 5 August 2024, the Union of Journalists and Social Communication Technicians of Guinea-Bissau

(SINJOTECS) called on media professionals to boycott the meeting due to the President's "recurring acts" that "go against freedom of the press". Another example was when the same President used obscene language or vulgar expressions towards journalist Ussumane Mané of Radio Sol Mansi on 29 August 2024, when the latter questioned him about the scheduling of the presidential elections.

On the other hand, there is increased government repression, which impedes freedom of assembly and protest against the government, with public attacks on leaders of civil society organisations and activists, thus creating enormous fragility in terms of their actions. An example of this is what happened when the President of LGDH denounced the deaths in the specialised haemodialysis unit at the Simão Mendes National Hospital. Úmaro Sissoco Embaló reacted to the denunciation on 15 August 2025, [accusing the President of the Guinean League for Human Rights](#) of being a founding member of the MADEM-G15 political party. He had made the same accusation at the opening ceremony of the second group of criminal investigation agent training courses, held on 2 December 2024, where he [insinuated](#) a political link between the President of the LGDH and the PAIGC.

Given the government's repeated failure to meet citizens' basic needs, expressions of dissatisfaction from civil society now mirror the criticisms long voiced by political opposition groups. As a result, civil society actors are increasingly portrayed as covert extensions of political parties and are subjected to violent attacks.

For example, on 27 December 2025, social activist Abubacar Martins Sambú, Coordinator of the Guinean Movement for Democracy and Development, was [brutally attacked](#) by ten armed and hooded men at his residence in Bissau, after having criticised the current situation in the country during a press conference on 12 December 2025. On 28 December, lawyer Augusto Nansambé was kidnapped from his residence in Bissau and [detained for an extended period](#) in the cells of the Second Police Station in Bissau, for having criticised on his Facebook account on 27 December his ethnic group (Balanta) for being a factor of instability in Guinea-Bissau. The media, through its professionals, has been monitoring and disseminating the work of CSOs as a way to strengthen the social impact of their actions. As a result of this monitoring, some radio stations are attacked and discriminated against. For example, on 31 March 2026, after waves of condemnations by human rights organisations of the assassination of the leader of "Pó di Terra", the Ministry of Social Communication [suspended](#) the broadcasts of ten radio stations under the pretext of non-payment of licences. This decision was [revoked](#) at the end

of the day on 31 March, after much criticism and intervention from the Private Radio Forum.

6. Access to a secure digital environment

The internet has played a [crucial role](#) in mobilisation for civil society, enabling the coordination of protests, the public denunciation of human rights violations, and the construction of solidarity networks, both national and transnational, connecting local activists and those in the diaspora. The liberalisation of the telecommunications industry in 1999 with the creation of the national .GW domain was a fundamental milestone for the continuation of social movements' struggles, offering new possibilities for the organisation and expansion of political protest.

On the other hand, it is understood that cyberactivism not only challenges the authoritarianism imposed by the regime in Guinea-Bissau since 2020, but also redefines the paradigms of political participation and the exercise of activism in a context of political persecution, insofar as social activists, especially from the diaspora, use social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok to discourage acts by the regime that violate democracy and the rule of law, in a context of restriction of fundamental freedoms. These platforms have become the main channels of political resistance and articulation between local and diaspora activists.

However, there is a need for broad debate involving CSOs to develop a law that guarantees digital security and a public policy to raise awareness and train people in the use of tools that provide digital security, in order to allow users of social networks and people working in CSOs to take advantage of these tools in a safe way in their work within the civil sphere.

On 20 May 2026, the National Transition Council [approved](#) the Law on the Dissemination of False Information on the Internet as an attempt to silence the voices that use digital platforms to dismantle the regime's intention and interests in restricting civic space through alerts coming from sources close to the military and the regime that supports Umaro Sissoco Embaló.

Another challenge concerns access to the internet and the quality of services provided by telecommunications companies. While the National Regulatory Authority for Information and Communication Technologies of Guinea-Bissau is making efforts to improve access to quality internet, such as the [granting of a provisional licence to Starlink](#) in December 2024, which allows for some progress in digital transformation, the country still faces many challenges in the areas of internet penetration and access. Coverage is around 10.5%, and internet access is frequently slow and, in

some places, non-existent, which prevents CSOs from accessing the internet, affecting their work, access to funding opportunities, and mobilisation.

Challenges and Opportunities

The challenges and opportunities arising from the principles of an enabling environment for civil society persist. Since 2020, civic space in Guinea-Bissau has been severely restricted, and civil society participation in the country's development process has been rigidly controlled with an iron fist, restricting freedom of expression, assembly, and demonstration.

The authorities have used widespread bans on protests. These restrictions have been accompanied by the frequent and excessive use of force against protesters, including the massive deployment of security forces to disperse gatherings, intimidation tactics, arbitrary arrests, and the detention of activists protesting against an increasingly authoritarian and "dictatorial" regime, culminating in the assassination of Vigário Luís Balanta. Despite this, acts of denunciation have been carried out, for example, regarding irregularities in the health sector with the implementation of the Haemodialysis Unit at the Simão Mendes Hospital, a denunciation of corruption in road construction made by lawyer Luís Vaz Martins, and various denunciations and demands made through a press conference by the "PÓ di Terra" movement demanding the disclosure of the results of the November 2025 elections.

Regarding a legal framework favourable to civil society actors, the challenges lie not only in the scarcity and obsolescence of regulations, but also in the processes for CSOs to acquire legal personality. This requires official registration with the Central Notary Service of Bissau, the only authority competent to register CSOs and grant them legal personality. This requirement obliges all interested parties to travel in person to Bissau to register their organisations, which is very expensive in terms of time and resources, especially for small organisations in rural and community areas. Another challenge concerns the imposition of indefinite bans on meetings and demonstrations through administrative orders issued in January 2024, and on 10 January 2026, following the coup d'état. These illegal measures extended to the prohibition of press conferences and unauthorised public statements.

There are no instances where registration of organisations has been impeded or rejected, and even with the approval of the new Constitution by the National Transition Council in January 2026, the new Constitution of the Republic did not alter the Catalogue of Fundamental Rights, which

means that freedom of association remained intact in the Guinean legal system. Furthermore, laws continue to be adapted to support the actions of civil society organisations and, consequently, allow them to advocate for the improvement of basic social rights.

Regarding the accessibility and sustainability of resources for CSOs, the challenge lies in the lack of funding for CSOs from the State of Guinea-Bissau and their dependence on external funding from international partners through international philanthropy. To obtain funds from international partners, the selection processes for each funder are increasingly stringent and quite bureaucratic. Due to the growing number of associations focused on development and human rights, competition for funds has increased. In terms of sustainability, most of these projects do not cover basic needs and are short-term. The organisations that receive funding that covers basic needs are the older ones that have cultivated solid partnerships over the years. Therefore, we recommend to international and bilateral partners to revisit their funding conditions, making them more flexible for local and small CSOs to apply, and to contribute to their sustainability and permanent work .

Despite these challenges, small funding opportunities continue to exist that support the activities of organisations on the ground. Many of these opportunities arise from the United Nations system and at the European Union level. To obtain funding, national organisations apply as co-applicants with a European civil society organisation or a foreign organisation that collaborates with the European Union. At the embassy level, there is almost no funding available in the few embassies accredited in the country.

Regarding the State's openness and receptiveness in its relationship with CSOs, the challenges are enormous. Since the beginning of the regime of the then President of the Republic in February 2020, interaction between civil society and successive governments has drastically decreased. An example of this was the expulsion and closure of the headquarters of the Bar Association on 10 February 2021, under the pretext of security, without dialogue or negotiation with that professional body. Subsequently, the President of the Bar Association of Guinea-Bissau was prevented from participating in the opening ceremony of the 2023 judicial year, an official event attended by President Umaro Sissoco Embaló.

Collaboration between civil society and state authorities is practically nonexistent, aggravated by attacks and persecution of labour unions, journalists, and human rights organisations.

Therefore, the philosophy that CSOs are partners of the State, which translated into greater openness and support, has been replaced by suspicion and, consequently, has resulted in little collaboration between the parties. The few opportunities that exist are lobbying and advocacy actions with the then Prime Minister, Mr. Rui Duarte de Barros, and some Ministries and public institutes to achieve certain results in terms of actions. An example is the holding of the Forum of the First “Ação Cidadã”, on [6 July 2024](#), in which issues of interest to the population were debated from the perspective of the participation of civil society organisations, namely the issues of gender and women, inclusion, human rights, health, education, climate change, food security, youth, employment, local power and decentralisation, media and civic monitoring, and State reforms.

Regarding access to a safe digital environment, the challenge lies in the quality of internet provided by telecommunications companies, within a context of restricted fundamental freedoms, with the approval of the Law on the Dissemination of False Information on the Internet by the National Transitional Council on 20 May 2026 as an attempt to silence voices using digital platforms against the regime. The opportunity arises because the internet has played a crucial role in mobilising civil society, enabling the coordination of protests, the public denunciation of human rights violations, and the construction of solidarity networks, both national and transnational, connecting local activists and those in the diaspora.



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