

Equatorial Guinea: Extremism and Terrorism

In January 2017, Equatorial Guinea granted former Gambian president Yahya Jammeh sanctuary after he was forced to end his 22-year rule of The Gambia and flee the country. Jammeh's regime had been accused of several human rights abuses, including the creation of a terror and assassination squad called the Junglers that he used to terrorize and kill political opponents. Jammeh was sanctioned by the United States in December 2017 for his record of human rights abuses and corruption. Nonetheless, Equatorial Guinea has continued to harbor Jammeh. "We are in full agreement that Yahya Jammeh must be protected. He must be respected as a former African leader," Equatoguinean President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo stated in January 2018. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [Guardian](#))

Overview

Equatorial Guinea is a small, oil-rich country on the west coast of Africa that has been ruled by two brutal dictators since it was granted independence from Spain in 1968. Its first president, Francisco Macias Nguema, killed or drove into exile nearly a third of its population. Macias Nguema ruled Equatorial Guinea until he was overthrown in a 1979 military coup led by his nephew, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who has become Africa's longest serving head of state. Obiang's regime has been accused of several human rights abuses, including torture, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearances. Equatorial Guinea also currently provides sanctuary to former Gambian president Yahya Jammeh, who was sanctioned by the United States in December 2017 for human rights abuses and corruption. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [BBC News](#), [Telegraph](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [OSAC](#), [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [Telegraph](#))

Corruption has been widespread in the government, especially since oil reserves were discovered in Equatorial Guinea in 1995. According to Human Rights Watch, the regime has used the "oil boom to entrench and enrich itself further at the expense of the country's people." The president and his small circle of elites enjoy lavish lifestyles while much of the population lives in poverty. At least a quarter of Equatoguinean children suffer from malnutrition, and over 40 percent do not attend primary school. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [BBC News](#), [Human Rights Watch](#))

Islamic extremism poses a low threat in Christian-majority Equatorial Guinea, and the country has not yet experienced any attacks from Boko Haram, as has neighboring Cameroon. However, the country experiences other types of political violence, such as the regime's violent repressive tactics frequently directed at political dissenters. There have also been attempts to derail the government itself. In 2004, a former British soldier led a coup attempt, and in 2009, militants attacked the presidential palace in the country's capital, Malabo. Equatoguinean authorities reported another alleged coup attempt in December 2017. (Sources: [OSAC](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Africa Review](#), [BBC News](#), [BBC News](#))

Equatorial Guinea does not have extensive domestic counterterrorism legislation in place, but its Penal Code bans terrorism and some activities that could be constituted as terrorist acts. The U.S. Department of State has assessed that the implementation and enforcement procedures for Equatorial Guinea's anti-money laundering laws are weak, and that terror financing poses a high risk in the country. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Georgetown Journal of International Affairs](#), [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#))

Equatorial Guinea has ratified several international conventions against terrorism, and has cooperated with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. As a member of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), it has also agreed to regulations on the suppression of terror financing and regional cooperation on criminal police matters. (Source: [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#), [United Nations](#))

Public opinion in Equatorial Guinea is difficult to gauge due to the ruling Democratic Party (PDGE)'s complete monopoly over politics and willingness to use violence against political opponents. There is no public opinion polling available, and elections are regularly boycotted by the opposition and condemned as fraudulent by foreign observers. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [eNCA](#))

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Islamic extremism poses a low threat in Equatorial Guinea, as there are few Muslims in the country. As a former Spanish colony, Equatorial Guinea's population is an estimated 93 percent Christian. Although other countries in the Gulf of Guinea—particularly Nigeria and neighboring Cameroon—have experienced deadly terrorist violence from Boko Haram, there have not been any reports of attacks carried out by extremist groups in the country to date, or of Equatoguineans joining extremist groups abroad. Nonetheless, since 2015, security forces in the country have grown increasingly concerned about terrorist violence in the region. In March 2015, President Obiang warned that the government had received

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“serious and adequate information” about the possibility of an imminent terror attack in Equatorial Guinea. Reports surfaced that Boko Haram might target state institutions in the capital. However, no attack was ultimately carried out. (Sources: [OSAC](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Africa Review](#), [Al Arabiya](#))

Political violence—especially on the part of the government—is common in Equatorial Guinea. The government frequently carries out violent activities directed at political dissenters. According to Human Rights Watch, the regime represses civil society groups and opposition politicians and regularly inflicts torture, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and unfair trials. The few private media outlets in Equatorial Guinea are owned by individuals with links to the government. (Sources: [OSAC](#), [Human Rights Watch](#))

Other violence in Equatorial Guinea has been directed at the government itself. On February 17, 2009, gunmen stormed the presidential palace in Malabo, but were repelled by security forces after a three-hour-long gun battle. The government blamed the attack on “rebel terrorists” from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), a Nigeria-based militant group that claims to fight for a fairer distribution of oil wealth. The group primarily conducts attacks on Nigerian state and security targets, and denied involvement in Equatorial Guinea. (Sources: [OSAC](#), [Guardian](#), [Africa Review](#), [BBC News](#))

Equatorial Guinea has also experienced multiple coup attempts since Obiang seized power in a military coup in 1979. In March 2004, over 75 people—including several South African and British citizens—were arrested in Zimbabwe and Equatorial Guinea for their involvement in a plot to overthrow Obiang, which was allegedly led by former British soldier Simon Mann. After his arrest in Zimbabwe, Mann was extradited to Equatorial Guinea, where he spent a year in prison before receiving an official pardon from Obiang. In January 2018, Equatoguinean authorities claimed that foreign mercenaries recruited by political opponents had attempted a coup on December 24, 2017, but that it had been thwarted with the assistance of Cameroonian security services. State television reported clashes with the alleged mercenaries on Equatorial Guinea’s border with Cameroon and claimed that one had been shot dead. Cameroon reported the arrest of 38 armed men from Chad, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic who were allegedly involved. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [BBC News](#), [EastAfrican](#), [EastAfrican](#), [BBC News](#))

In January 2017, Gambian president Yahya Jammeh was given sanctuary by Equatorial Guinea after he was forced to relinquish power and go into exile after a 22-year rule of The Gambia. Jammeh’s regime had been accused of several human rights abuses, including the creation of a terror and assassination squad called the Junglers that he used to terrorize and kill political opponents. Jammeh was sanctioned by the United States in December 2017 for his record of human rights abuses and corruption. Nonetheless, Equatorial Guinea has continued to harbor Jammeh, and though Obiang briefly expressed the possibility of allowing Jammeh to be extradited back to his home country, he quickly rescinded his statement. “We are in full agreement that Yahya Jammeh must be protected. He must be respected as a former African leader,” Obiang stated in January 2018. (Sources: [Reuters](#), [BBC News](#), [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [Telegraph](#), [Guardian](#))

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

- **January 23, 2018:** Obiang travels to Nigeria’s capital, Abuja, and meets with the country’s president, Muhammadu Buhari. Obiang praises Buhari for his efforts to fight Boko Haram and advocates for dialogue and greater cooperation between nations over security issues in the West African sub-region. Sources: [Africa Independent Television](#), [Vanguard](#)
- Obiang briefly expresses the possibility of allowing former Gambian president Yahya Jammeh to be extradited back to his home country, but quickly rescinds his statement. “We are in full agreement that Yahya Jammeh must be protected. He must be respected as a former African leader,” Obiang states. Sources: [Telegraph](#), [Guardian](#)
- Equatorial Guinea becomes a member of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee. Source: [United Nations](#)
- **December 24, 2017:** According to Equatoguinean authorities, foreign mercenaries recruited by political opponents attempt a coup that is thwarted with the assistance of Cameroonian security services. State television reports clashes with the alleged mercenaries on Equatorial Guinea’s border with Cameroon and claims that one was shot dead. Cameroon reports the arrest of 38 armed men from Chad, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic who were allegedly involved. Sources: [EastAfrican](#), [EastAfrican](#), [BBC News](#)
- **December 21, 2017:** Yahya Jammeh, the former Gambian president given sanctuary by Equatorial Guinea, is sanctioned by the United States for his record of human rights abuses and corruption. Source: [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#)
- Gambian president Yahya Jammeh, whose regime has been accused of several human rights abuses, is given sanctuary by Equatorial Guinea after he is forced to relinquish power and go into exile after a 22-year rule of The Gambia. Sources: [Reuters](#), [BBC News](#)
- **March 19, 2015:** In a televised broadcast, Obiang warns that the government received intelligence about the possibility of an imminent terror

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attack.

Following reports that Boko Haram might target state institutions in the capital, Malabo, “impressive numbers” of security forces are deployed throughout the city. Sources: [Al Arabiya](#), [Africa Review](#)

- **February 17, 2009:** Gunmen storm the presidential palace in Malabo, but are repelled by security forces after a three hour-long gun battle. The government blames the attack on “rebel terrorists” from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, a Nigeria-based militant group. Sources: [Guardian](#), [Africa Review](#)

Domestic Counter-Extremism

Equatorial Guinea does not have extensive domestic counterterrorism legislation in place, but its Penal Code bans terrorism and other activities that could be constituted as terrorist acts, such as the destruction of aircraft and the taking of hostages. Though Equatorial Guinea has anti-money laundering laws, the U.S. Department of State has assessed that their implementation and enforcement procedures are weak. High levels of corruption at the government level and the illegal international transfer of money by corrupt companies increase the risk of terror financing activities in the country. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Georgetown Journal of International Affairs](#), [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#))

In March 2015, in a televised broadcast, Obiang warned that the government had received intelligence about the possibility of an imminent terror attack. Following reports that Boko Haram might target state institutions in the capital, Malabo—which is located on an island, “impressive numbers” of security forces were deployed throughout the city, and Obiang stated that the navy and air force were also ready to respond. Television broadcasts showed footage of troops conducting counter-insurgency military exercises. (Sources: [Africa Review](#), [Al Arabiya](#))

International Counter-Extremism

According to a 2008 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Equatorial Guinea has ratified several international conventions against terrorism. As a member of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), Equatorial Guinea has adopted CEMAC’s regulations on the suppression of terror financing and has agreed to regional cooperation on criminal police matters. Equatorial Guinea also cooperates with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to strengthen its domestic counter-terrorism initiatives, and became a member of the Counter-Terrorism Committee in 2018. (Source: [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#), [United Nations](#))

Equatoguinean authorities reported that they had collaborated with Cameroonian security services to thwart an alleged coup attempt in December 2017. Equatoguinean state television reported clashes with the alleged mercenaries on Equatorial Guinea’s border with Cameroon. Cameroon reported the arrest of 38 armed men from Chad, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic who were allegedly involved. (Source: [EastAfrican](#), [BBC News](#))

In January 2018, Obiang traveled to Nigeria’s capital, Abuja, to meet with the country’s president, Muhammadu Buhari. Obiang praised Buhari for his efforts to fight Boko Haram and advocated for dialogue and greater cooperation between nations over security issues in the West African sub-region. (Sources: [Africa Independent Television](#), [Vanguard](#))

Public Opinion

Public opinion in Equatorial Guinea is difficult to gauge due to the ruling Democratic Party (PDGE)’s complete monopoly over politics and willingness to use violence against political opponents. There are no public opinion polls available, and the few private media outlets in Equatorial Guinea are owned by individuals with links to the government. Elections are regularly boycotted by the opposition and condemned as fraudulent by foreign observers. In past elections, Obiang, who has ruled the country since 1979, has claimed to have won 99 percent or 100 percent of the vote. Obiang claimed to have won 93.7 percent of the vote in the latest presidential elections, which were held in April 2016 and announced only six weeks prior. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), [eNCA](#))