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Togo – 2013: Politics, economy and society in 2013

Dirk Kohnert ¹

Abstract: Peaceful but undemocratic legislative elections consolidated the power of the Gnassingbé regime in 2013. In view of the absolute majority gained by the ruling party, its inclination to implement meaningful reforms, as demanded by the opposition and the donor community, was reduced further. The growing Islamist threats in neighbouring countries meant that the donor community condoned the delays in democratic reforms including the conduct of local elections, which were pushed back several times. Promising growth prospects were overshadowed by increasing poverty and inequality.

Résumé: [*Le Togo - 2013: politique, économie et société en 2013*] Des élections législatives pacifiques mais non-démocratiques ont consolidé le pouvoir du régime Gnassingbé. Compte tenu de la majorité absolue acquise par le parti au pouvoir, son inclination à mettre en œuvre des réformes significatives, comme l'exigent l'opposition et la communauté des donateurs, a été encore réduite. Les menaces islamistes grandissantes dans les pays voisins signifiaient que la communauté des donateurs tolérait les retards dans les réformes démocratiques, y compris la conduite des élections locales, qui ont été repoussées à plusieurs reprises. Les perspectives de croissance prometteuses ont été éclipsées par l'augmentation de la pauvreté et des inégalités.

Keywords: countrywide study, Togo, West Africa, domestic politics, foreign affairs, socio-economic development

JEL-code: A14, F35, N97, O17, O55, Z13

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Peaceful but undemocratic legislative elections consolidated the power of the Gnassingbé regime. In view of the absolute majority gained by the ruling party, its inclination to implement meaningful reforms, as demanded by the opposition and the donor community, was reduced further. The growing Islamist threats in neighbouring countries meant that the donor community condoned the delays in democratic reforms including the conduct of local elections, which were pushed back several times. Promising growth prospects were overshadowed by increasing poverty and inequality.

Domestic Politics

The new year was heralded by two large fires, which ravaged the central markets of Lomé and Kara on the night of 10–11 January. The famous Adawlato market halls in Lomé, a hub of local and international traders, were completely destroyed. No loss of life was reported but merchants and the population suspected politically motivated arson, in view of the coincidence of the two simultaneous fires and other circumstances. The government was quick to promise an impartial investigation, assisted by two French police experts who arrived on the spot soon afterwards. However, before the experts concluded their probe, the public prosecutor accused leaders of the opposition alliance ‘Collectif Sauvons le Togo’ (CST) of masterminding the blaze. Almost all leaders were charged, most notably Zeus Ajavon, the CST co-ordinator, and 23 people were temporarily detained, including Agbéyomé Kodjo, former Prime Minister and leader of the opposition ‘Organisation pour Bâtir dans l’Union un Togo Solidaire’ (he was released on bail on 25 February), and CST Vice-president Gérard Adja. Thus, the fires fanned political flames at the start of the campaign for the postponed legislative elections, originally due in October 2012. In early March, two more opposition leaders were charged, Jean Pierre Fabre, leader of the CST’s principal component group ‘Alliance Nationale pour le Changement’ (ANC), and Frédéric Abass Kaboua, president of the ‘Mouvement des Républicains Centristes’. They were questioned at length and banned from leaving Lomé, while their party headquarters and homes were searched. The arrests triggered outrage, and the opposition organised demonstrations to protest against what it saw as a government attempt to discredit it ahead of the elections and to divert attention from the real political issues. As the much-awaited evaluation report of the French expert mission, promised for the end of February, was kept secret, the CST started its own investigations, but its final 19-page evaluation report arrived late, coming four months after the elections on 11 November; in its report, the opposition alliance accused eight regime officials of being the instigators of the fires. They included Ingrid Awadé, director General of customs and taxes, financial adviser to the cabinet and close intimate of President Faure Gnassingbé, and Colonel Félix Kadanga, then head of the army’s Rapid Intervention Force (who in 2005 had been accused of the arson attack on the Goethe Institute in Lomé).

On 19–20 February, a meeting of government and opposition representatives took place in an attempt to overcome persistent differences over the technicalities concerning the conduct of the local and parliamentary elections, as had been originally agreed in the 2006 ‘Accord Politique Global’ (APG). The meeting, in which all major donors took part, was facilitated by Archbishop Nicodème Barrigah, former president of the ‘Commission Vérité, Justice et Réconciliation’, and was organised by the US ambassador, Robert Whitehead. It focussed on electoral reforms, and five major issues were discussed. First, the biased composition of the ‘Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante’, whose 17 members included only three who belonged to the opposition. Second, electoral boundaries: a decree of 10 April on the division of parliamentary seats by constituency increased the number of National Assembly seats from 81 to 91, but

this still ignored the imbalance between distribution of seats and the low population density in the Northern constituencies – stronghold of the ruling ‘Union pour la République’ (UNIR). Third, the voting system, which since the 2002 constitutional coup had provided for a single-ballot in presidential elections, and which favoured the incumbent. Fourth, a limit to presidential terms: the APG provided for a return to the 1992 limitation of two consecutive terms, which had been cancelled in 2002. While the government agreed, it demanded that this rule should be applied only from 2015 onwards. The opposition objected because this would allow Faure Gnassingbé to stand for a third and a fourth term. Fifth and finally, equitable access to the media for political parties. The debate on these issues did not lead to an agreement, as the opposition saw consensus on these points as a precondition for the elections, while the government first wanted to await the outcome of the parliamentary polls.

Strikes during subsequent months by health workers and teachers demanding substantial pay increases led to school closures and developed political undercurrents as demonstrations by pupils met with violent suppression by the authorities. This escalated on 15 April with the shooting of a 12 -year -old schoolboy in Dapaong, the northernmost prefectural capital, when the police tried to stop a crowd from storming a government building. The unrest spread to several areas.

Nevertheless, the government continued with preparations for the polls. Voter registration, completed in April, totalled 3.1 m voters out of a population of 6.6 m. The legislative elections, rescheduled for 24 March and then 21 July, finally took place on 25 July, although the electoral reforms had not been implemented. All in all 1,174 candidates, including 159 women, stood for 91 seats by means of a party list, with the seats to be allocated on the basis of proportional representation. The opposition, which had threatened a boycott up to 8 July, was again outwitted by the President and confronted with a Hobson’s choice. Although it was always likely to be defeated in view of the biased electoral system, it had to participate if it wanted to retain some influence on future constitutional reforms, notably any extension of President Gnassingbé’s mandate in the 2015 polls. As expected, the elections resulted in a landslide for UNIR, which won 62 out of 91 seats, a two-thirds majority. The CST came second with 19 seats and the moderate opposition coalition ‘Arc-en-Ciel’ was third with six. The ‘Union des Forces de Changement’ (UFC) of Gilchrist Olympio, the main opposition party until its 2010 coalition with the RPT (‘Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais’)/UNIR, was crushed, retaining just three of its 27 seats.

The results, contested by the opposition, were confirmed by the constitutional court on 12 August, although UNIR had won an absolute majority with fewer votes than the opposition. The gerrymandering of constitutional borders had resulted again (as in 2007) in a disproportionate high victory of UNIR which won with 880,608 (46.7% of the votes, they took 68.1% of Assembly seats. The CST became according to a bill passed in June, one month before the election, the only opposition party with the status of a parliamentary group (for which 10% of seats is the required minimum), and Fabre became the formal leader of the opposition, providing him with greater prerogatives and benefits.

Local elections, scheduled to run concurrently with the parliamentary polls, were postponed sine die. On 4 November, The ANC accused the government of violating the constitution by continuing to appoint its favourites to the posts of municipal and prefectural councillors. (They should have been elected, but the last local elections took place in 1987.) The ongoing postponement could be interpreted as another indication of the refusal of the ruling class to honour the obligations of the APG and the 22

commitments vis -à -vis the EU, entered into in 2004, towards democratising and decentralising political power.

On balance, the elections were not free and fair but were largely peaceful, which was hailed by leaders of the churches, Togolese Muslims and the international community. However, the decline in voter turnout from 85% in the previous legislative elections (2007) to 65.8% pointed to increasing dissatisfaction on the part of the electorate, as also exemplified by various evaluations of human development and happiness research. According to the UN World Happiness Report 2013, the index of subjective well-being of the Togolese was the lowest worldwide of 156 states, with falling tendency since the last evaluation 2005 to 2007.

On 2 September, UNIR's MPs unanimously elected one of their members, Dama Dramani, as National Assembly chair. An old regime stalwart who had served as minister and chief of protocol during the late General Eyadéma's presidency, Dramani succeeded Abass Bonfoh, who had occupied the Assembly office for the previous 11 years. The opposition boycotted his election. A **cabinet reshuffle** on 17 September reduced the number of ministers from 31 to 26, including six women. (17.9). Ahoomey Zunnu remained prime minister. The all but annihilated UFC, which had joined the cabinet of national unity in 2010, held on to only three of its former seven ministries. The rest of the opposition refused to join the government. Robert Dussey, a political scientist and theologian, became foreign minister, replacing Elliot Ohin of the UFC. The reverend Kofi Essaw replaced Tchitchao Tchelim, the conservative lawyer from Pya (home of the Gnassingbé family) as minister of justice. The security portfolio remained with Colonel Damehane Yark, and the defence ministry continued as a de facto branch of the presidency to prevent potential coup attempts.

In a reshuffle exercise in the **armed forces**, the chief of defence staff, Major General Atcha Titikpina, was replaced by Félix Abalo Kadanga, who had been promoted already one year ago as Chief of Staff of the Togolese Army (land forces of FAT). Kadanga is brother -in -law of Kpatcha Gnassingbé, the imprisoned former minister of defence), who had been promoted one year earlier to the chief of staff of the army's land forces, which post was taken by Colonel M'Ba Koffi Batanda, former head of the Presidential Guard. Rumours had it that Titikpina had been accused of secretly amassing weapons, possibly to stage a coup d'état; arms trafficking could have been another possibility, although not mentioned in the sources. The Navy was entrusted to Captain Adjo Vignon Kwassiv and Captain Takougnadi Nayo was appointed Chief of Military Staff of the President.

The informal group of **presidential advisers** changed, too, although the longstanding legal advisor, Charles Debbasch, a notorious French lawyer labelled a 'white collar mercenary' by the AU, stayed in place. However, at year's end the powerful Ingrid Awadé, DG of customs and taxes, a Kabyé like the Gnassingbés and confidante of the president since 2006, had to make way for her adversary, minister for economy and finance Adji Otèth Ayassor, who besides his ministerial duties became a key presidential adviser. Raymond Germanos, a retired French five-star general and a freemason with a criminal record for paedophilia, became security adviser, a function he had previously exercised for the president of Cameroon.

Corruption and nepotism remained endemic. According to representative analyses by Afrobarometer published in November, Togo was ranked 4th from the bottom of the list of 16 African states investigated; 66% of respondents said the government was not making sufficient efforts to fight corruption, which was estimated to be especially rampant among custom officials (48%), judges (45%), police (43%) and central government bureaucrats (40%). TI, which relies in its annual surveys on the perception

of the business community, ranked Togo in the lower third of the countries surveyed (123rd out of 177).

On 19 February, parliament approved more rigid media controls, including granting sweeping powers of censorship to the government-dominated media watchdog, 'Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication'. Although the Constitutional Court annulled some of these repressive amendments in March, the lack of press freedom remained a point of concern for national and international human rights bodies. On 19 December, the special rapporteurs of the UN Commission on Human Rights published a report in which they called for a general popular appraisal ('états généraux') of the justice system. The special UN rapporteur on Human Rights, Margaret Sekaggya, had already taken the government to task in October because of the hostile environment in which human rights activists had to carry out their work, although the situation had improved since the last evaluation in 2008. The New York-based, Committee to Protect Journalists complained on 2 October about media censorship, including the forcible closure of private radio stations. In the annual ranking of the Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders, Togo fell by four places (to 83rd out of 179 countries).

As a result of increasing piracy, and drug trafficking, increasingly affecting Togo and neighbouring countries, maritime insurance companies classified Togo's coast and that of neighbouring countries as high-risk zones, which had the potential to negatively impact on trade for Lomé's deep-water port. Since 2012 the coastal waters of Nigeria, Benin and Togo recorded more attacks notably on tankers than the Somalian coast. On 19 September, the EU representative in Benin launched the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Route project, (CRIMGO), a pilot-project of seven African countries, including Togo, to enhance maritime security. Lomé, which had already served as a hub in West Africa's cocaine trade for several years, now also entered heroin trade networks connecting Asia with Europe. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the proceeds of trafficking were increasingly going to Islamist terrorist groups.

Foreign Affairs

Because it was generally believed that the legislative elections would have a crucial impact on the presidential elections in 2015 the international community attached considerable attention to election observation. The EU co-financed non-profit Centre for Democracy, Development and Culture, based in Gorée (Senegal) started an electoral assistance mission already in December 2012. The Gorée Institute cooperated with SYCED a consortium of 35 Togolese CSOs supported by the German INGO Hanns Seidel Foundation. The EU itself was rather ambiguous in this respect because it was obvious that Lomé had not honoured the recommendations of the previous EU election observation missions (EU EOM of 2007 and 2010). On 11 February, Nicholas Westcott, director general of the EU Africa Department, reaffirmed the EU's demand that the government respect the APG and the relevant EU recommendations as a pre-condition for electoral support. At the end of June, the EU sent a two-man election expert mission to observe the electoral process. Just two days after the elections, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton congratulated the country on the conduct of the polls. Overriding concerns over sub-regional security and Lomé's active role in UN peacekeeping missions apparently played a role in this assessment, although it contradicted the analysis of the EU's own expert mission, which on 7 August had pointed to certain "dysfunctions" in the election process. The observation missions of the AU, ECOWAS, UEMOA and the OIF (Francophonie) followed suit and declared the elections credible, free and transparent. For years now, Togo had been a reliable

troop provider in support of UN peacekeeping missions. A first contingent of 100 Togolese **peacekeeping troops** arrived in Bamako on 17 January to take part in ECOWAS' African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA); 400 more were to follow. In April, Lomé sent its 18th contingent of 258 (of 500) troops to join the UN troops in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). On 1 August, the US provided \$ 1.5 m for the training and equipment of 150 Togolese policemen and gendarmes within the framework of the peacekeeping operation in Mali, thus honouring Togo's role as the very first African state to have mobilised its troops for the French-led intervention mission. During a state visit to Paris on 13–15 November, Faure Gnassingbé and French President Hollande confirmed their common commitment in fighting terrorism.

On 8 November, The EU announced the allocation of € 216 m in **development aid** on account of the 11th EDF, a 70% increase on the previous EDF (2008–13). It focused on governance, consolidation of the rule of law and development of regional urban centres and their surrounding river basins. At the same time, the EU insisted on binding arrangements concerning the conduct of local elections, which should be in line with the APG and include a calendar to be announced before the end of the year.

In May, Togo assumed the monthly rotating presidency of the **UNSC**. In October, Chad was elected to succeed Togo as a non-permanent member as of 2014. In the same month, Gnassingbé participated in two **sub-regional summits** in Dakar: the UEMOA meeting focused on the economic situation in the CFA zone whilst that of ECOWAS centred on the controversial EPAs to be negotiated with the EU. Early in November, Gnassingbé visited the Republic of Congo, where he was apparently initiated into the Freemasons on the recommendation of Congo's President Sassou-Nguesso, his godfather and reportedly a masonic grand master.

Socioeconomic Developments

The primary and secondary sectors (contributing 38% and 21% of GDP, respectively), particularly cotton and phosphates, contributed most to growth. Agriculture (27% of GDP) remained the backbone of the economy. Although prospects for growth had been promising in recent years (real economic growth rising from 4.5% in 2010–11 to 5.75% in 2012–13), it had not been sustainable and inclusive. The IMF staff report of 20 November, therefore, urged the government to work towards meeting popular expectations and address the country's development needs. This also necessitated a focus on growing inequality. According to the AfDB's economic outlook, poverty (afflicting 61.7% of the population) fell by 3% in the period 2006–11, partly as a result of internal migration. However, extreme poverty rose from 28.6% to 30.4%. Increasing fiscal deficits caused additional concern. At the end of the year, parliament approved the budget for 2014 (totalling CFAfr 832.2 bn), which provided for an increase of 19.5% compared with 2013. At the start of the year, the government announced its aim to reduce **unemployment** from 30% to 15% by 2017. According to the National employment agency, there were 60,000 new entrants into the labour market every year, including 10,000 young graduates. The government provided the 'Agence Nationale de Promotion du Volontariat' with a budget of \$ 6 m to reduce unemployment by at least 0.5% – and under-employment by 1.0% – per year. On 12 March, 750 new graduates entered the 'Programme de Volontariat National au Togo', bringing the total enlisted in this kind of community service to 3,530 since its foundation in September 2011.

Togo continued to profit from substantial donor support. On 9 September, the IMF granted a three-year ECF of some \$ 55 m in SDR, subject, however, to approval by its Executive Board. In addition, on 5 December, the World Bank endorsed an IDA credit line of \$ 14 m; this represented the Bank's sixth loan to Togo since the

resumption of aid in 2008. The Bank's 2013 Doing Business report indicated an improved ranking (156th of 185 countries), five higher than in 2012.

In January, the government issued Two gold exploration permits in the Dapaong area, and Togo attained the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) compliant status in April. This was in addition to the large manganese prospects at Nayega accorded to Ferrex already in 2012, both in the northern Savanes region. On 28 May, the president launched the state-owned Togo Investment Corporation (TIC) with an initial capital outlay of \$ 40 m. Its purpose was to enhance the 750 km North-South development corridor with infrastructure projects to promote the mining ventures in the North and improve communications with land-locked Burkina Faso and Niger.

In December, bloody confrontations took place between Fulbe nomadic cattle herders and peasants in Moba (Borgou) in the far North. Five people died and numerous others sustained injuries. The minister for Territorial administration and decentralisation Gilbert Bawara used the occasion to warn local authorities against corruption and action privileging nomadic interests, as this could fuel the frustration of the local population and even lead to lynchings.

The OECD gender index reported nearly half of Togo's population to be practising polygamy. A legal social arrangement that is particularly widespread in rural areas and among the illiterate population, polygamy is a deeply rooted custom conferring social status. Even President Gnassingbé is said to have eight wives, none of them serving officially as first lady. At the end of the year, the admission of Faure Gnassingbé to the Free Mason was in the news. Apparently, he was initiated via his godfather Denis Sassou, the head of state of Congo Brazzaville, whom he had paid an official visit in early November.

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Zusammenfassung: Friedliche, aber undemokratische Parlamentswahlen festigten die Macht des Gnassingbé-Regimes im Jahr 2013. Angesichts der absoluten Mehrheit, die die Regierungspartei errungen hatte, wurde ihre Bereitschaft zu notwendigen politischen Reformen, wie sie von der Opposition und der Gebergemeinschaft gefordert wurden, weiter reduziert. Die wachsende islamistische Bedrohung in den Nachbarländern haben dazu geführt, dass die Gebergemeinschaft die Verzögerungen bei den demokratischen Reformen einschließlich der Durchführung von Kommunalwahlen, die bereits seit vielen Jahren immer wieder verschoben wurden, geduldet hat. Vielversprechende Wachstumsaussichten wurden von zunehmender Armut und Ungleichheit überschattet.