

Togo: Legislative Elections of July 2013[☆]



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1. Background

Togolese politics under President Faure Gnassingbé continues to follow the same pattern established under the dictatorial regime of his father Eyadéma Gnassingbé (1967–2005). The backbone of Togo's political establishment is the military where at least two-thirds (65%) of the army are Kabyè, which is the ethnic group of the Gnassingbé family (Toulabor, 1999:106–107). France has provided military advisors and logistical support to the Togolese armed forces since the 1963 coup d'état in which Eyadéma Gnassingbé took an active part. Five presidential and five legislative elections (including the polls in question) have been held since the reintroduction of multipartism in 1991. State repression, violence, fraud, disagreements about legal frameworks and procedures, public protests, frustration, opposition boycotts, and disunity have characterized political competition over the last three decades, although the situation has been less violent in recent years (Roberts, 2008; Seely, 2006, 2011).

Togolese politics are geographically and ethno-regionally structured. The largest ethno-linguistic political grouping, the Ewe, constitute close to half (45%) of the population and they mainly inhabit the southern quarter of Togo. The Kabyè whose original homeland lies in the northern third of the country form about 15% of the population. Apart from the long-standing competition between the Ewe and Kabyè for power and resources, Togo is a patchwork of up to fifty ethnic and ethno-linguistic groups that vary in size, historical relatedness and political

awareness. Most of them do not automatically align with either the Ewe or Kabyè. The majority of Togolese parties have an ethno-regional core. Geography is the second important factor that has shaped Togolese electoral politics. Togo is a narrow strip of land running in a north-south direction to the Gulf of Guinea; the country is economically and culturally dominated by the capital Lomé: one of the most important deep sea ports in West Africa. The south was exposed to German, and later French, colonial influence for a more prolonged period than the northern part of Togo. With independence, southern Togo (the Ewe heartland) inherited a better infrastructure, had a more westernized elite and its inhabitants felt culturally superior to the northern peoples. In terms of occupational roles, French and German colonizers tended to employ Ewe 'southerners' in their bureaucracy and 'northerners', including the Kabyè, in the army. When Ewe nationalists lobbied the international community to secede and found their own state along the Gulf of Guinea coast in the 1940s and 1950s, northern political elites aligned with the French colonial administration because they feared being squeezed between the flat grasslands of the Sahel to the north and an Ewe dominated state along the coast on the south that would cut them off from the modern world. However, when the Ewe failed in their national aspirations and re-oriented their effort towards immediate independence of the French Togoland as a whole, large numbers of northerners started to support the Ewe at the expense of their own conservative political elites (Labante, 2010; Toulabor, 1986). Thus, the key legislative elections of 1958 were won by the Ewe dominated *Comité de l'unité togolaise* (CUT) led by Sylvanus Olympio, Togo's first post-colonial president following independence in 1960. The military coup of 1963, during which President Olympio was assassinated, shifted the power balance back to the north. President Eyadéma Gnassingbé's dictatorship, which lasted for almost four decades, was deeply unpopular among most Togolese. It survived due a combination of brute force and the co-optation of ethno-regional elites including the southern ones.

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2. Electoral system

Formally, Togo has a bicameral parliamentary system, but only the National Assembly has been established. In contrast to many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, direct parliamentary and presidential elections are not held simultaneously. The mandate of all Togolese national political representatives is five years. Since 2007, the electoral system for the National Assembly has been proportional representation with closed party lists. The territory is divided into 30 multi-member constituencies electing 91 members of parliament to the lower chamber.¹ Togo's electoral system has been criticized in two regards. Firstly, there are large variations in the sizes of the electorates and number of constituency seats across the 30 electoral districts (MOE UE, 2007: 16–17, 52–55). For example, in the Grand Lomé electoral district, a Ewe stronghold, there were about 85,000 registered voters per seat in 2013 while in the Binah, a Kabyè stronghold, there were approximately 20,000 voters per seat. Secondly, the mandate allocation follows the rule of the highest averages while district magnitudes are low (MOE UE, 2007: 17, 52–55). For example, in the 2013 legislative elections, 26 districts (out of 30) had only 2 or 3 seats. These circumstances enable the party with the largest proportion of votes within a district to obtain additional seats. In sum, the Togolese electoral system tends to limit Ewe electoral influence and to turn a weak countrywide majority of votes into a strong majority of seats which favours the incumbent party at the expense of the fragmented opposition.

3. Recent developments

Togo's party system, which crystallized between 1991 and 1994, remained stable until 2010. Thereafter, it changed rapidly for a number of reasons. The legislative elections of 2007 were the first legislative polls since the end of the Cold War that had full participation by all parties and only the second such election since 1958. In 2007, the opposition *Union des forces de changement* (UFC), led by Gilchrist Olympio (who is son of the first post-independence president) gained 27 seats out of 81 and another opposition party, the *Comité d'action pour le renouveau* (CAR) obtained 4 seats. The ruling *Rassemblement du peuple togolais* (RPT), led by Faure Gnassingbé, won the remaining 50 seats (Roberts, 2008). Two and half years later, Olympio did not stand as the UFC candidate in the March 2010 Presidential Election, ostensibly because he was suffering from acute health problems. Consequently, the Ewe dominated UFC nominated at the last minute its General Secretary, Jean-Pierre Fabre, as the party's presidential candidate. The official election tally gave 61% of the popular vote to the incumbent, Faure Gnassingbé, and 34% to Fabre (Seely, 2011). In May 2010, it was discovered that Olympio, without the knowledge of the UFC national committee, had struck a power-sharing deal with the RPT that gave 7 ministerial portfolios to the UFC in the new government.

¹ For the 2013 elections, the Golfe district was merged with the Grand Lomé district. Also, the total number of MPs in the National Assembly was increased from 81 to 91.

This revelation led to the breakup of the UFC. Olympio's minority faction managed to retain the UFC party label while the majority faction headed by Fabre founded a new party, called the *Alliance nationale pour le changement* (ANC) in October 2010. In the National Assembly, 18 UFC legislators switched to the ANC; however, Togo's Constitutional Court deprived nine of them (Fabre included) of their mandate in November 2010 because they had signed a letter of allegiance to the UFC. The Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) later annulled this decision but the Togolese Constitutional Court did not re-instate the expelled MPs.

In April 2012, Faure Gnassingbé took the bold step of dissolving his own party, the RPT, which was founded by his father in 1969 and was instrumental in maintaining the regime for more than 40 years. Simultaneously, a "general assembly of founders" launched a new party called *Union pour la République* (UNIR) selecting Faure Gnassingbé as president of the party. Significantly, many of the national and middle ranking members of RPT did not always secure similar positions in UNIR as there was as a process of (re) application and many higher-level party structures were formed anew. The UNIR founding assembly intentionally met in Atakpamé, the most southern large urban centre not dominated by Ewe speakers.

In April 2012, several opposition parties (including the ANC) and civil society groups united in a coalition called *Collectif sauvons le Togo* (CST, or the Save Togo Collective). In June 2012, CST organized a series of demonstrations in the capital, Lomé. The coalition raised a wide range of demands related to elections (e.g. redrawing electoral district boundaries, returning to a two term cap on presidential mandates, and presidential election with two rounds), institutional reforms (e.g. reinstating nine expelled opposition deputies and an independent judiciary) as well as grievances concerning the excessive use of violence by the security forces, economic mismanagement, etc. These protests are noteworthy because they were the first mass meetings held in Togo since the bloody Presidential Election of 2005. Similar demonstrations also took place in the second largest city, Sokodé, 340 km north of Lomé; and later in Dapaong, a market town in the very north of Togo.

CST mass demonstrations continued mainly in Lomé until the legislative elections in July 2013. These protests were accompanied by arrests and running battles with the security forces where at least one person was killed (RFI, 2013a; CST, 2014). These opposition CST activities formed part of a wider pattern of social unrest in Togo which included demonstrations by university students and members of the state employees' trade union *Synergie des travailleurs du Togo* in large urban centres across the country (RFI, 2013a). One of the responses to the consolidation of opposition around CST, was the emergence of a second opposition coalition called *Arc-en-ciel* (or the 'rainbow' coalition) in August 2012. This 'rainbow' coalition was led by the *Comité d'action pour le renouveau* (CAR) and distanced itself from the confrontational CST organized street protests.

In the meantime, the changing political environment spurred the Gnassingbé regime to make changes within the

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