

Case Study: Guinea

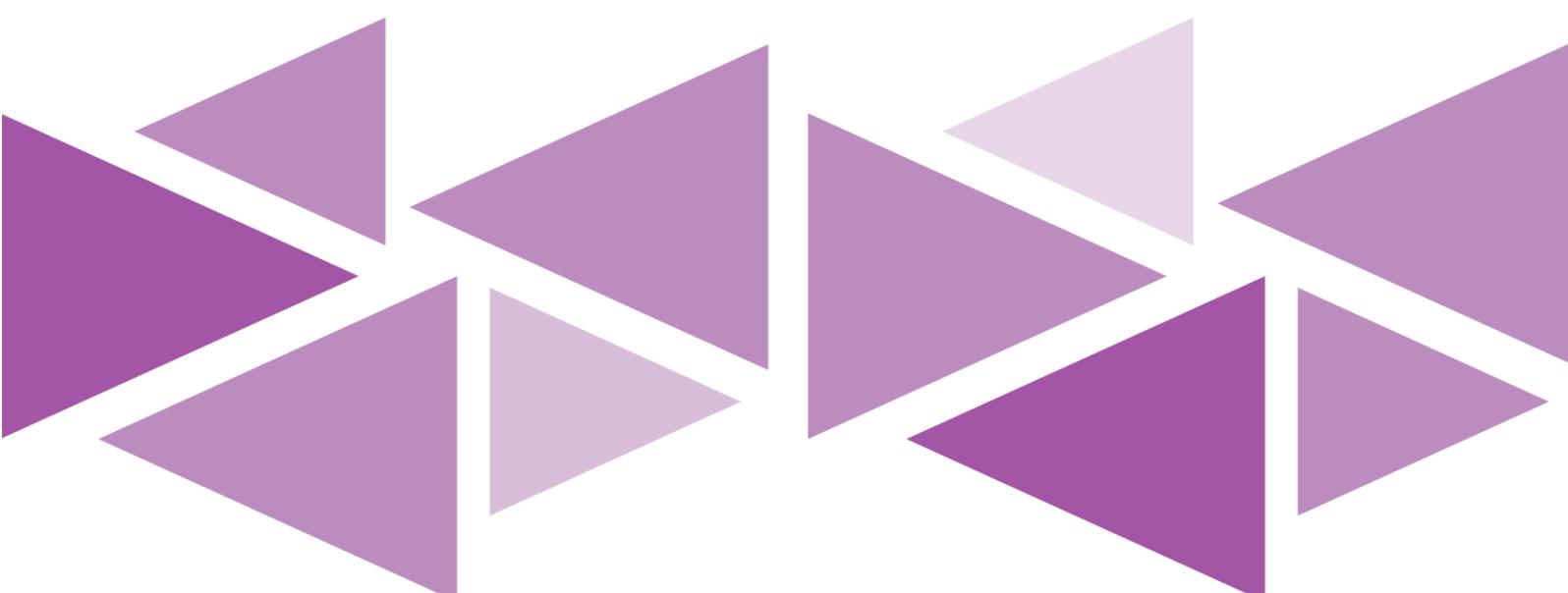
The National Front for the Defense of the Constitution (FNDC):

A citizens' movement against an authoritarian regime

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A decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping triangles in various shades of purple, ranging from light lavender to deep magenta. The triangles are arranged in a scattered, abstract pattern across the bottom half of the page.

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Executive summary

The National Front for the Defense of the Constitution (*Front National pour la Défense de la Constitution* - FNDC) was established in April 2019 to oppose President Alpha Condé's maneuvers to secure a third term. The movement coalesced within the context of a deadlocked political environment, marked by both ethnicization and repression.

The FNDC, a hybrid movement combining civil society and political parties, emerged from a specific ecosystem: the meeting of a new generation of Guinean civil society – particularly interested in the issue of "governance" and "rights", beyond a "technical" vision centered on "development" – with powerful opposition political parties, who alone were incapable of preventing Alpha Condé from changing the Constitution.

This ecosystem, which, on the side of civil society, articulates militancy and professionalization, owes much to the support provided over the 2010s by a range of international, governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental donors. While the Condé regime has not hesitated to put pressure on these donors, some of them, particularly non-governmental ones, now openly assume their political position and have played a role in the resilience of the FNDC.

Combining demonstrations and advocacy at national and international levels, the FNDC has waged a long and difficult struggle throughout the country, on social networks, and abroad. This struggle has been marked by the suppression of protests resulting in dozens of deaths, by the repeated arrests of its leaders and activists, and by the exile of a number of them.

Certain characteristics of the FNDC have contributed to its success and resilience: its collective and multi-ethnic leadership, its lack of formalization, its mastery of social networks, and its skillful management of its alliance with opposition parties, particularly the two most powerful of them, the UFDG and the UFR. This alliance between FNDC and the opposition parties eventually broke down on the issue of participation in the 2021 presidential election, with the FNDC increasingly refocusing on its core civil society members.

In the end, the Condé regime was able, through direct repression and partly also thanks to the Covid-19 epidemic, to significantly tamp down FNDC demonstration activity. The regime succeeded in imposing the change to the constitution by public referendum on March 22, 2020, while also winning the legislative elections held on the same day, boycotted by the opposition. The regime then ensured Alpha Condé's victory in the presidential election of October 18, 2020 in a vote viewed by the international community as having very little credibility. These maneuvers and violence cost Condé the remains of his legitimacy.

The fate of the Condé regime was ultimately decided not in the political sphere, but in the military sphere, with the coup d'état perpetrated on 5 September 2021 by Lieutenant-Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya, commander of the Guinean army's Special Forces Group. It is clear, however, that the loss in legitimacy of the Condé regime encouraged Doumbouya to embark

on the endeavor, which was applauded by a large part of the population and key opposition political leaders.

The junta, going by the name of the National Committee for Unity and Development (*Comité national du rassemblement et du développement* – CNRD), initially seemed to want to reduce tensions with the FNDC, releasing political prisoners from the FNDC and facilitating the return of its exiles. However, discussions between the CNRD and the FNDC did not lead to a compromise. Informed by the example of previous civil society participation in political transitions, the FNDC made significant demands, notably that a member of the FNDC be appointed as president of the National Transitional Council (*Conseil National de la Transition* - CNT), whereas the CNRD wanted to limit the FNDC's influence within transitional bodies. In the absence of an agreement, the CNRD chose to appoint Dr. Dansa Kourouma, a civil society figure who was not well regarded by the FNDC, and tried to co-opt its members, with limited success.

As of June 2022, the CNRD has tried to impose a prolonged transition, maintaining a worrying vagueness about its timetable and bypassing the established political class, which is demanding a rapid return to constitutional order. The FNDC and political parties are coming together again. They are now calling for the opening of dialogue on the conduct of the transition, the terms of which they are negotiating fiercely, with the Alpha Condé experience and the sham dialogues he organized on everyone's mind. It remains to be seen whether the FNDC is still powerful enough to obtain concessions from a junta whose legitimacy remains strong for having driven Condé out.

Recommendations

To the FNDC

1. The FNDC should retain its form as an ad hoc movement, without a legal existence. This form allows for the maintenance of a collective leadership that gives it resilience in the face of co-optation and repression, facilitates the formation of coalitions, encourages citizens to take individual initiatives, and reduces the risk of internal conflicts for leadership.
2. The FNDC should strengthen its system of monitoring and documenting the repression of protesters. To do this, it needs to strengthen the monitoring and documentation skills of its branch offices, which are the basis for this work.
3. The National Coordination should respond to the frustrations of the leaders of the branches by improving the internal communication of the movement, involving the coordinators of the main branches in certain decisions, and doing more to empower the branches, which are on the front line during the demonstrations.
4. As the issues at stake in the transition are more complex than the question of the third term, the FNDC and its member organizations should step up their efforts to raise awareness and inform the population about issues such as the risks of

instrumentalization of the Court of Repression of Economic and Financial Offences (*Cour de répression des infractions économiques et financières* – CRIEF) and the justice system in general, the role of the transitional charter, the process of revising the Constitution (or drafting a new Constitution), the role of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the way to replace a discredited Independent National Electoral Commission (*Commission électorale nationale indépendante* – CENI), etc. This work of training and informing citizens is decisive.

To the FNDC's international governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners

5. While it is difficult for many organizations to directly support an ad hoc movement like the FNDC, international partners can support the civil society organizations that are members of the FNDC, which provide it with its human resources, internal expertise and some of its material resources.
6. International partners should strengthen their support to Guinean human rights organizations to accompany the FNDC in monitoring and documenting the repression.
7. International partners should help to set up, in conjunction with Guinean human rights organizations, a fund to provide financial support to those injured, imprisoned and bereaved by the political violence in Guinea since 2010.
8. Given the importance of digital technology in preserving the public sphere and organizing citizen struggles, international partners should strengthen support for digital resilience and protection for civil society and the media.

To the transitional authorities

9. In order to finally bring the country out of the spiral of suspicion in which it has been trapped since 2010, the transitional authorities should agree to an open dialogue under the conditions set by the FNDC and the most influential political parties, in accordance with the transitional charter, which provides for this. It is within the framework of this dialogue that fundamental aspects of the transition, starting with its duration, should be decided in a calm, inclusive and credible manner.
10. The dialogue should result in the appointment of consensual personalities to certain sensitive functions of the transition.
11. To ensure an open public space, the transitional authorities should undertake a review of the laws governing civil society organizations and cybercrime adopted under the Condé regime.

General introduction

The National Front for the Defense of the Constitution (FNDC) was created in April 2019 to fight against President Alpha Condé's maneuvers to change the Constitution and grant himself a third term. Forged around a small core of civil society members, the FNDC formed a coalition with political parties opposed to President Condé. It waged a determined struggle, despite the many victims of the repression of demonstrations, arrests and the exile of some of its militants. This resistance, while it was not able to prevent Condé from securing a third term in office, cost him his remaining legitimacy, and he was eventually removed from power on September 5, 2021 by a military coup. As of June 2022, the FNDC is now at the forefront of mobilizations to urge the military junta to ensure a rapid return to civilian rule. This report aims to analyze the trajectory of the FNDC and to suggest ways in which the movement itself can continue its contribution to the democratization of Guinean society, and ways in which the transitional authorities and the international partners involved can help it.

This report is based on interviews conducted in May and June 2022 in France and Guinea with a number of actors involved in Guinea's recent trajectory, including FNDC leaders and activists in Conakry, Labé, Boké and Nzérékoré, political party leaders, Guinean civil society actors not affiliated with the FNDC, journalists, diplomats and leaders of international organizations.

I. A social-political movement within a deadlocked political context

1. A blocked political scene

After more than fifty years of dictatorship, and despite the controversies surrounding the 2010 elections, the election of Alpha Condé had raised a lot of hope among Guineans, including many of those who subsequently led the FNDC. Opinion saw Condé as the man who would democratize and develop Guinea. He had three advantages: he had been the 'historic opponent'; he had never governed (unlike his three main competitors Cellou Dalein Diallo, Sidya Touré and Lansana Kouyaté, who had served as prime ministers under Lansana Conté) and was therefore not associated with the poor record of the Conté regime; and his prestigious studies and long career in France seemed to make him a guarantee of modernity and freedom. Unfortunately, this hope was gradually dashed.

Firstly, the election that brought Condé to power was extremely troubled. On the one hand, there were intense controversies surrounding the 2010 elections themselves, and thus a lack of legitimacy of the electoral process – a lack that has persisted. On the other hand, Guinea experienced an acute ethnicization of its political sphere. Indeed, in the second round of the 2010 elections which saw Alpha Condé's RPG and Cellou Dalein Diallo's UFDG confront each other, both mobilized strongly along ethno-regional lines - the RPG among the Malinke of Upper Guinea and the UFDG among the Peul of Middle Guinea. Each party accused the other of serving communal ambitions or using ethnic resentment to mobilize support. Violence with

an ethno-political connotation even occurred during the electoral process within the so-called 'poisoned water' affair.¹

The fault lines of the 2010 elections marked the first term of Alpha Condé. The regime, uncertain of its electoral base, deliberately delayed the organization of legislative elections. Planned for 2011, they did not take place until 2013, after opposition protests that resulted in the death of several dozen demonstrators. The election was largely perceived as lacking legitimacy, and the opposition denounced massive fraud. The 2015 presidential election was no more satisfactory, again giving rise to protests marked by the death of demonstrators, as well as controversy over their credibility.

The situation became even more stalemated as the authorities deliberately manipulated the dynamics of 'dialogue', 'mediation' and 'consultation', starting and suspending them *a volo*, manipulating their conditions and terms as well as the implementation of the agreements that were painstakingly reached. The international actors who tried to contribute to the resolution of tensions by participating in these 'dialogues', notably ECOWAS and UNOWAS, lost much credibility in the eyes of the opposition and civil society.

During Alpha Condé's first term and half of his second term, while political parties, notably the UFDG, mobilized strongly, no major social movement challenged the governance of the RPG. The regime was able to co-opt the opposition forces of the 2006-2007² period, in particular the trade unions as well as the National Council of Civil Society Organizations (*Conseil National des Organisations de la Société Civile – CNOSC*), which was the main platform for civil society at the time. It was thus able to prevent any form of dissent or protest outside political parties. It was not until 2017-2018 that large-scale social movements reappeared.

2. From the "Social Forces" to the FNDC: from a social movement to a citizen movement

While Alpha Condé's first term in office was marked by a stalemate of the political scene and the co-opting of many of the established civil society actors, it also saw the emergence of a new generation of civil society leaders. Like the previous generation, this generation was largely dependent on international funding. Where the previous generation had gained a lot from the support, from 2007 onwards, of the Concerted Program to Strengthen the Capacities of Guinean Civil Society and Youth Organizations (*Programme Concerté de Renforcement des Capacités des Organisations de la société civile et de la jeunesse guinéenne – Projeg*), supported by Aide et Action and financed by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the new generation benefited from the funding generated in Guinea by both new concerns (the massacre of a hundred demonstrators in a stadium in Conakry on September 28, 2009, and

¹ Between the two rounds of the presidential election, a rumour emerged that a water company run by a Peul had poisoned water sachets distributed at RPG rallies. This rumour led to attacks against Peul in some localities in the predominantly Malinke region of Upper Guinea.

² In 2006-2007, as the regime of President Lansana Conté (who finally died in late 2008) faltered, civil society, trade unions and opposition political parties joined forces to organise massive demonstrations and secured the appointment of a new prime minister.

electoral controversies) and new opportunities (the designation of an elected president). To take one imperfect indicator, according to OECD DAC data, bilateral and multilateral development aid for Guinea, which hovered around \$205 million annually between 2005 and 2011, reached \$560 million by 2014. In addition, an increasing proportion of this aid was directed towards civil society and focused on issues of governance, human rights, citizen participation, public policy and electoral observation. Civil society, previously confined to "development", was thus entering the political arena quite directly. Important actors in this evolution were the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), an organization financed by the Soros Foundation³, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). A whole ecosystem was thus created, where young activists began to professionalize, driven by their commitment to democratic norms and a desire to centralize their careers around their activism.

In the face of the lost legitimacy of the CNOSC due to it being co-opted by the Condé regime and accusations of embezzlement, new civil society organizations (CSOs) were emerging. These included the National Platform of Citizens United for Development (*Plateforme Nationale des Citoyens Unis pour le Développement* – PCUD), an organization founded in 2011 by Abdourahmane Sano and which was trying to provide an alternative CSO federation to the CNOSC, the Association of Guinean Bloggers (Ablogui), founded in 2011 by Fodé Sanikayi Kouyaté, and the *Balai Citoyen*, founded in 2015 by Sékou Koundouno. Together with others, these three associations worked in different ways to promote good governance, development and respect for human rights. It is from these organizations that a significant proportion of the members of the FNDC's national coordination come, namely – in addition to their respective founders – Ibrahima Diallo, Abdoulaye Diallo "Calcaj"⁴, Saikou Yaya Diallo and Alsény Farinta Camara for the PCUD and Abdoulaye Oumou Sow for Ablogui. Fonike Menguè and Billo Bah hail from the Parliament of Young Guinean Civil Society Leaders, which was supported by the US embassy and aimed to promote the participation of young people in political life. Several of these young activists - including Fonike Menguè, Ibrahima Diallo, Sékou Koundouno, Billo Bah and Bailo Barry - came together in 2016 to create the Voix du Peuple (VDP) platform. This platform seized upon Independence Day, which had been neglected by the government at the time, as a way of calling on citizens to come together around a national event, going beyond ethnic affiliations. In the PCUD as in the VDP, there was great concern about the ethnic division of the political sphere and how it could impact the broader society.

It was during Alpha Condé's second term that the social movement took off again, beginning with the teachers' strikes of 2017-2018. The PCUD and the VDP got closer to the trade unions and supported the strikers; they understood that the struggle for democracy had to be linked to social demands to be truly mobilizing. The same organizations then tried to structure the

³ The Soros Foundation occupied a particularly interesting spot in Guinea as, in Condé's early years, it provided technical support to the Condé presidency on a number of key issues, including major public works and investment and the reform of the mining code.

⁴ He was a founding member of the PCUD but soon left.

spontaneous protests of the population in the face of the increase in the price of fuel (one of the central factors in the cost of living in Guinea), which was raised on July 1, 2018 from 8,000 to 10,000 GNF. The "Social Forces" were thus formed, with the slogan "8,000 is good". But the leadership of this social movement was disputed between the PCUD and the CNOSC, led at the time by Dansa Kourouma, who had a much more moderate position towards the government. The government played on the internal divisions within the movement to extinguish it, and some leaders were accused of having been bought off.

Disappointed by this failure and seeing the third term becoming a reality, some of the leaders of the Social Forces gathered together, still around the leadership of Sano and the PCUD – it was in the PCUD premises that the initial meetings were held. On 3 September 2018, they organized a public oath-taking on the Koran and the Bible, pledging to defend the charter and values of the Social Forces, an unusual procedure and an indication of the problem of trust that then existed within civil society. A core group of about ten people thus formed around Sano. At the same time, the opposition parties began to discuss a common objective: to prevent Alpha Condé from clinging to power. After contacts between these two groups, the idea of a common front was formed, which borrowed from both endogenous (the 2006-2007 struggles) and exogenous (the Senegalese M23⁵) models. The FNDC was officially launched on April 3, 2019. It called on all social and political actors to join the movement and encouraged citizens to organize locally and form branches throughout the country.

Significant opposition parties joined the movement, including the UFDG, the UFR, the PADES, the PEDN, the BL, the MoDeL and the RGD. The UFDG, a major player in the mobilizations against Condé over the years, had understood the limits of exclusively partisan mobilization, which have a problematic ethnic subtext, and the need to broaden the struggle into a frontline strategy. This coalition was undoubtedly facilitated by the extreme simplicity of the demand: the refusal to change the constitution and the issue of the third term. For its part, the RPG created, via affiliated CSOs, the Democratic Coalition for the New Constitution (CODENOC), which organized demonstrations in support of the change of constitution promoted by Alpha Condé, arguing among other things that the previous constitution lacked provisions protecting women. The aim was to make it appear that the constitutional change was popular, though CODENOC did not mobilize in any significant way.

3. The typical profile of the FNDC leader: a young civil society activist in the process of becoming a professional

Apart from Sano and Calcaj, who are older, the members of the national coordination of FNDC all have the same profile: they are based in Conakry, they are in their thirties, they have completed higher education in Guinea, they have been involved in civil society since they were

⁵ The M23 was formed in 2011 to fight against then Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade's bid for a third term. It brought together civil society organisations, Y'en A Marre, a youth movement comparable to the FNDC, and opposition political parties.

at university, they have never been involved in political parties, and they derive at least part of their personal resources from their work in civil society, even if they do not generally live exclusively from it. Some of them have professional obligations in addition to their role within FNDC, but often with some connection to that role, for example as journalists or lawyers. At the time the FNDC was formed, they had all known each other for several years, in the context of civil society initiatives, and their links were sometimes much older, dating from high school or university.

Sékou Koundouno, who holds a degree in law, founded the *Balai Citoyen* in 2015 - a direct reference to the movement that had led the fight in Burkina Faso against a new term for President Blaise Compaoré - and quickly established himself as one of the most dynamic and prominent activists in the country, denouncing bad governance, corruption or violence committed by the Security and Defense Forces (*Forces de Défense et de Sécurité* – FDS). *Balai Citoyen* notably distinguished itself by denouncing calls for ethnic hatred by RPG and UFDG political activists on social networks, going so far as to sue them. The *Balai Citoyen*, supported in particular by OSIWA, is a member of the continental network Afrikki, created in 2016 to bring together citizen organizations such as the *Balai Citoyen* in Burkina Faso, *Y'en a marre* in Senegal or the *Lucha* in the Democratic Republic of Congo – Afrikki is just one of the forums, supported by a variety of donors, where these movements can discuss their respective experience. Ibrahima Diallo, who also has a law degree, founded the NGO *Protégeons les droits humains* in 2011 during his studies. This NGO, supported by OSIWA, was involved in the protection of women's rights, working on such issues as early marriage, polygamy and female genital mutilation. This NGO was a member of the CNOSC and left it in 2014 to join the PCUD, after the CNOSC was accused of embezzling money from a project funded by the European Union. He was able to benefit from its activities to travel in the sub-region and develop relationships with other citizens' movements there. Fonike Menguè, who holds a degree in economics, is a member of the Parliament of Young Guinean Civil Society Leaders. He founded the *Mouvement Sékoutouréiste* in 2018, an organization that aims to promote the memory of the country's first president - this has earned him criticism, given the controversies that the person and regime of Sékou Touré still generate in Guinea today.

The experience these young activists have gained in civil society has enabled them to develop activist skills such as communication on social networks and in the press and skills mobilization demonstrations or conducting advocacy. Most of them have gained experience abroad and with international partners, so they master the codes of these environments and are well equipped to develop relationships with embassies or international human rights organizations. These skills have even enabled them to set up a web-TV and a web-radio, run by Abdoulaye Oumou Sow, a journalist at Ablogui, and his team.

Conclusion of Part 1

The FNDC was born of a favorable socio-political configuration. The previous generation of CSOs, embodied by the CNOSC, after having been at the forefront of the struggle, lost credibility when it was co-opted by Alpha Condé. From the 2010 election of Alpha Condé onwards, development aid increased in Guinea and CSOs expanded to a large extent, particularly by approaching more political issues, such as governance or electoral observation. A new generation of CSOs emerged, including notably the PCUD led by Abdourahmane Sano who played a major role in structuring this generation. The political scene remained in gridlock. Alpha Condé won all elections during his tenure in an authoritarian and non-transparent manner by playing on ethnic tensions to divide the citizens. At the same time, the government organized numerous "dialogues" and "consultations" while emptying them of their meaning through incessant manipulation. The new CSOs, supported in particular by OSIWA, grew in strength throughout Alpha Condé's tenure until their leaders joined forces with the opposition political parties to form the FNDC. The FNDC was all the more powerful because it represented a national and non-partisan opposition in a country where ethnic divisions were gaining depth and political parties were rejected by part of the population.

II. A national movement with flexible operations

4. Operating flexibly

The FNDC has never had any formal legal existence. Under Alpha Condé, it chose not to register as a legal entity, and it has maintained this position since the CNRD took power. The fact that the movement does not have a legal existence has served as a form of protection. The state has no authority or mechanism to dissolve the organization or prosecute it, and as the organization has no institutional donors, these donors cannot be pressured. The risks in this regard are real, as several leaders of formalized CSOs have testified: when faced with organizations deemed too critical, the Condé regime has refused to respond to their requests for renewal of accreditation or has put pressure on the organizations' donors to end their funding (often successfully). Moreover, this flexible form prevents the organization from being too closely identified with a single individual (its official president, for example⁶). The choice of titles itself is symptomatic of this mistrust of excessive verticality, since the FNDC has a "national coordinator", and no "president".

⁶ On the other hand, this mode of operation undoubtedly undermined the dynamism of those organisations that were led by FNDC members, who no longer had the time to look after their respective CSOs and ended up leaving them, such as Sékou Koundouno with the *Balai Citoyen*, or Abdourahmane Sano and Ibrahima Diallo with the PCUD.

Until the 2020 presidential election, the FNDC was structured on three levels: a steering committee, a national coordination and a plenary assembly, to which local branches and collectives were added.

The steering committee, which disappeared de facto after the re-election of Alpha Condé in October 2020, was composed of the leaders of the political parties that were members of the FNDC and some members of the national coordination. At first, Abdourahmane Sano was the only civil society representative on the steering committee, but he quickly realized that he needed the support of other civil society members to have more influence over the political parties. Thus, Sékou Koundouno, Ibrahima Diallo and Fonike Menguè joined the committee. The role of the steering committee was to determine the strategic orientations of the movement.

The national coordination is composed of a small number of civil society members, currently Fonike Menguè⁷, Sékou Koundouno, Ibrahima Diallo, Billo Bah, Saikou Yaya Diallo, Abdoulaye Oumou Sow, Abdoulaye Diallo "Calcaj", Alsény Farinta Camara⁸ and Djanii Alfa⁹. Four members have left the national coordination since the coup d'état of September 2021, namely Abdourahmane Sano, Fodé Sanikayi Kouyaté, Mamoudou Nagnalen Barry and Bailo Barry, the last two having accepted to be appointed respectively Minister of Agriculture and Livestock in the transitional government and to the national council of the reconciliation conference. The role of the national coordination is to implement the decisions taken by the steering committee and approved by a vote of the plenary.

The plenary assembly of the FNDC brings together about a hundred associations, political parties and collectives that have joined. Its role is to vote on the strategic orientations of the movement proposed by the steering committee or, since the disappearance of the steering committee, by the national coordination.

In fact, as is often the case in organizations, the permanent executive body – in this case the coordination, i.e. exclusively representatives of civil society – has had a dominant influence. The tasks are divided among the members of the coordination: communication, relations with the branches, monitoring of human rights violations, legal and administrative management, etc. The collective and relatively horizontal nature of the coordination is a major factor in its success. It guarantees its resilience in the face of repression and co-optation. Thus, when about half of the members of the coordination were arrested on October 11, 2019, shortly before the first demonstration in Conakry on October 14, the coordination was able to recompose itself in order to continue to function: Fonike Menguè was appointed interim

⁷ National coordinator since the departure of Abdourahmane Sano in February 2022.

⁸ Initially coordinator of the Kindia branch, he later joined the national coordination. He was imprisoned after a demonstration in Kindia, which forced him to return to Conakry for security reasons.

⁹ Djanii Alfa joined the coordination in March 2022.

national coordinator, two members of political parties were integrated¹⁰ and members of local branches were involved in decision-making.

The movement was really born in Conakry. It was only later that branches were set up in all the prefectures of the national territory and in foreign countries where the presence of the Guinean diaspora is important. They were headed by a member of civil society. Generally, they were structured in a restricted coordination and an extended bureau. The larger ones set up working committees (administration, information, communication, mobilization/action). In Guinea, the role of the branches was mainly to coordinate mobilization at the local level and to organize events. Externally, they played an advocacy role with the authorities of the countries where they were located - they had meetings for instance with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in France, the State Department in the United States or the European Union in Brussels.

In addition to these structures, the FNDC includes collectives of lawyers, representatives of victims of repression, artists and women. The lawyers' collective is made up of a dozen volunteer lawyers who defend FNDC members and demonstrators in police custody or under judicial investigation pro bono. The collective of victims' representatives was made up of a few volunteers, including members of political parties, who took part, in collaboration with the political parties, human rights associations and the national coordination, in the reporting and documentation of acts of repression.

The Artists' Collective is made up of about 100 committed artists and its spokesperson is the popular rapper Djani Alfa. The collective, which at one time included reggae singer Elie Kamano¹¹ and rapper Bill de Sam, has played a key role in the struggle against the repression. The artists' collective played an important role in mobilizing citizens by putting FNDC slogans into song, denouncing the regime and encouraging citizens to demonstrate. The aim was to get messages across to a population that is partly illiterate and does not follow the press or social networks. As for the women's collective, it was composed of several dozen women members of political parties or associations. Women mobilized strongly and went out in large numbers during the demonstrations. When the repression was at its strongest, specific women's demonstrations, supposedly better protected against repression, were organized and made an impression on public opinion.

¹⁰ Namely Bill de Sam, member of the UFR and currently Minister of Culture, Tourism and Handicrafts, and Ismaël Doukouré, member of the UFDG. They were withdrawn after the 2020 presidential election, when the FNDC restructured and many political parties left the movement.

¹¹ He left the FNDC shortly after the 22 March 2020 referendum, before declaring, on the subject of a possible appointment as a minister by Alpha Condé: "If the proposal presents itself, I will work for my country". <https://maguineeinfos.com/elie-si-la-proposition-dun-poste-de-responsabilite-se-presente-je-travaillerais-pour-mon-pays/>

5. Representing the nation in the face of ethnopolitical danger

The issue of ethnic communities and the nation has become a central concern for Guinean civil society in the 2010s; in 2010, a UN report even addressed the risk of genocide in Guinea, and while it dismissed the possibility of genocide, it confirmed the ethnicization of politics was a serious issue¹². The CSOs that federate in the FNDC share that concern, and the organization and functioning of the FNDC aim to represent the united nation.

The very composition of the FNDC is conceived to address the issue – an alliance of various political parties with diverse ethno-regional strongholds, the multiplication of FNDC branches are about giving a national character to the struggle. The presence of Ousmane Kaba's PADES, a Malinke like Alpha Condé, and the strong mobilizations in Lower Guinea and Forest Guinea have counteracted attempts by the authorities to malign the FNDC as an extension of the UFDG or a representative body of the Peul.

Many Guineans see their country as organized into four large ethno-regional communities, thus the FNDC put forward four figures – Abdourahmane Sano, Sékou Koundouno, Ibrahima Diallo and Fonike Menguè – each from one of these four communities¹³. Thus, in a calculated or not so calculated way, the national coordination has underlined its national character by downplaying regional affiliations. The FNDC also chose to leave the operational management (the "national coordination") of the movement to civil society and to allow only its own symbols (and not the symbols of the powerful member parties) to be used during the demonstrations, again in an attempt to disarm criticism from Alpha Condé's supporters who claimed that the FNDC was simply an instrument of the UFDG and/or the Peul community¹⁴. The member parties of the FNDC had themselves understood the interest in breaking out of this ethnic framing of the political game, and they played along.

6. Mobilizing resources

The FNDC has no legal existence and therefore no resources of its own. As an informal federation of associations and parties, it mobilized the resources of these associations and parties, starting of course with human resources, since for many of the leaders, the activities in their respective CSOs and the activities of the FNDC were easily linked.

The mobilization of resources worked on an ad hoc basis, through contributions, which varied each time, from the various member organizations of the FNDC for specific actions:

¹² Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, "Report on his Mission to Guinea from 7 to 22 March 2010", United Nations, 2010.

¹³ On this quadripartition, see Odile Goerg, "Couper la Guinée en quatre ou comment la colonisation a imaginé l'Afrique", *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, n°111, 2011, p. 73-88.

¹⁴ This concern is explicit in the speech made on 24 October by Foniké Menguè, then interim coordinator of the FNDC. He read out the names of the arrested leaders and emphasised: 'Looking at the seven names I have just mentioned, one remark stands out: no region of our country has been spared the illegal arrests of our brave FNDC leaders'. "Citizens' march of Thursday 24 October: here is the speech of the interim national coordinator", www.fndcguinee.com.

organization of demonstrations, support for detainees, support for the injured, support for bereaved families. The general resources of the member organizations were largely made available to the FNDC, such as premises for meetings, the equipment needed to run the web-TV, vehicles and sound equipment, etc. Regarding the mobilization of funds, the involvement of the political parties was decisive, in particular the UFR and the UFDG, since these parties have significant resources at their disposal, thanks to some of their supporters and wealthy leaders. The political parties were certainly the biggest financial contributors.

The political parties also made their specific know-how available. For example, the UFDG made available to the FNDC its informal emergency medical service and its network of private clinics that could clandestinely treat injured demonstrators while public hospitals were forbidden to receive them. Similarly, the support system for victims and their families set up by the UFDG was put at the service of the FNDC.

In addition, the FNDC received some support from prosperous sympathizers based in Guinea but especially in the diaspora, mainly to assist prisoners, the injured and bereaved families. Finally, when members of the coordination were directly affected by the repression, whether they were detained or forced into exile, they survived thanks to family support, but also thanks to access to funds to help CSO activists at risk set up by a variety of non-governmental organizations such as Front-Line Defenders, Freedom House, *Tournons La Page* or Amnesty International.

7. Intervening throughout the country

The particular contexts of three prefectures provided a particularly fertile ground for mobilization, namely Boké (Lower Guinea), Labé (Middle Guinea) and Nzérékoré (Forest Guinea). The specific history of each of these towns created a context in which the single, national demand made by the FNDC resonated powerfully. The branches were formed in each case after a call from the national coordination to organize locally. Members of the national coordination carried out missions in the summer of 2019 to "validate" the branches in the main towns, which were then able to form branches in the neighborhoods of the main towns and in neighboring secondary towns. A member of the national coordination was responsible for coordinating these branches and liaising between the national and local levels.

The case of Boké: a mining center

Boké is the main mining area of the country, and several multinational companies extract bauxite there. The population is very frustrated by the gap between, on the one hand, the promises made by the revision of the mining code and the new investments and, on the other hand, the low returns from mining activity to the communities. With the increase in global demand for minerals, particularly bauxite, new mining companies have set up operations in

the recent years, including SMB in 2014, a company with known links to the Condé regime¹⁵. This increase in mining activity is a source of much tension. The opening of mines in the immediate vicinity of the town causes pollution and deforestation which affects the inhabitants. Moreover, the SMB is accused – rightly or wrongly – of hiring Chinese workers, which is forbidden by law, and of favoring Malinke in recruitment, to the detriment of the local population¹⁶, whose opportunities for salaried employment remain very rare. The development of mining activity has also led to a significant increase in cost of living, particularly for land and property, and the population is protesting against the virtual absence of electricity and the poor condition of the roads in town. In rural areas, villagers often feel aggrieved by the conditions under which they are expropriated for the benefit of mining companies and by the pollution of water and crops. People, especially the unemployed, are exasperated by the lack of urban development, even though mining produces a lot of wealth and part of the profits are supposed to be spent on local development. The alleged misappropriation of this financial windfall or its use for clientelist purposes and the resulting feeling of injustice are powerful mobilizing factors.

Thus, since 2017, Boké and other towns in Lower Guinea have seen significant protests ("insurrections" according to some interlocutors), led by young unemployed people, that paralyze mining activities. The employees of the mining companies do not participate much in these movements, for fear of being fired.

The FNDC therefore had no difficulty in establishing itself in this prefecture, building on these tensions and on the methods and networks of previous mobilizations. The coordination of the Boké branch was essentially composed of members of the UFR and the UFDG, and led by a trade unionist, a SMB engineer¹⁷. The members of the coordination, some of whom had participated in the 2017-2018 protests, remobilized the same protestors under the FNDC banner, which led one of our interlocutors to say that citizens were mobilizing more for social reasons than for political and constitutional reasons. In Boké, the FNDC employed the strategy developed in previous social movements: blocking roads and railways to paralyze mining activity and cause financial losses to the Guinean state. This strategy paid off because the government did not dare to repress the demonstrators for fear of causing a total blockade of mining activities. According to the interlocutors we met, there were no deaths during the FNDC demonstrations in Boké.

¹⁵ Olivier Blamangin and alii, "[Les bons comptes offshore du champion de la bauxite guinéenne](#)", Afrique XXI, 10 February 2022.

¹⁶ Accusations also made against the Institut supérieur des mines et de la géologie de Boké, which trains mining engineers.

¹⁷ He was one of the few trade unionists who dared to be publicly visible in social movements. In the end, his fixed-term contract was not extended.

The case of Labé: a UFDG stronghold

Labé, the birthplace of Cellou Dalein Diallo, is the 'stronghold' of the UFDG, the main opposition party to Alpha Condé. This city has been engaged in protests ever since the 2010 presidential election. Since then, as the regime's electoral maneuvers have progressed, the UFDG has mobilized, demanding the holding of legislative and municipal elections that have been postponed many times, denouncing fraud. Aside from the outskirts of Conakry where the UFDG is very influential, it is in Labé and in Middle Guinea as a whole that Diallo's party is most deeply rooted. It has experienced significant repression there, suffering several casualties.

The coordination of the Labé branch was essentially made up of members of political parties and in particular the UFDG, but the coordinator came from a small citizen's movement called "*Osons oser*", which was formed shortly before the launch of the FNDC. While the rule within the FNDC was to put members of civil society at the head of the branches, the UFDG initially tried to place one of its cadres but eventually desisted. The FNDC was able to resist on this specific point, but it must be noted that most of the forces mobilized in Labé came from the UFDG and that it was the UFDG that was in fact responsible for the logistics of the demonstrations. One episode illustrates this tension between the FNDC and the UFDG in Labé: the coordinator of the branch office had once protested because, at the end of a demonstration, the UFDG cadres had spoken much more than the other members of the FNDC, thus overshadowing the other components of the movement.

In this very favorable local context, the FNDC benefited from strong popular support and solidarity. The UFDG mayor never banned demonstrations, and it was the prefect and the governor who intervened to do so. Wealthy citizens and the diaspora contributed to finance medical care for the injured and support the families of victims. Health workers were able to facilitate access to care for the injured. Repression was harsh in Labé with, depending on the interlocutors, between 4 and 8 people killed during the FNDC demonstrations.

The case of Nzérékoré: an intercommunal fault line

Nzérékoré has been an area of high ethno-political tension since the 1990s. The introduction of a multiparty system and the first municipal elections in 1993 occasioned a great deal of violence, which has recurred since then. The main fault line is between the Konianké community, identified with the Malinké – supposedly allochthonous and representing a significant part of the region's population – and the various forest communities, the "Forestiers" (Guerzé, Toma, Kissi, etc.) supposedly indigenous¹⁸. While Alpha Condé was able to mobilize a significant part of the Forestier electorate in 2010, he saw this support erode over the course of his mandate.

¹⁸ On the complexity and evolution of ethnic identifications in Forest Guinea, see Mike McGovern, *Unmasking the State. Making Guinea modern*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013.

The region has experienced various episodes of ethnic violence, notably between 2010 and 2015, which have gone unpunished, fostering mutual resentment between Malinke and “Forestiers”. The establishment of mining operations has not materialized in earnest, despite much anticipation by the local population. Demonstrators were massacred in Zogota after protesting against the recruitment policy of the Brazilian mining company Vale¹⁹. Mining operations have not yet been undertaken at Mount Simandou, despite its immense iron reserves. In addition, the “Forestiers” expected Alpha Condé to allow the return of Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, leader of the 2008 military junta and of “Forestier” origin, who has retained immense popularity in his region and who has been in exile since the September 28 massacre. Camara had brought many “Forestiers” into the army, a policy that Alpha Condé did not pursue – he even excluded some “Forestiers” who had completed their training. Moreover, Forest Guinea suffered the full force of the Ebola epidemic in 2013-2016, while CSOs and the media denounced the misappropriation of aid intended to combat it. Finally, more generally, the region is landlocked and only had access to electricity under the CNRD, and the population feels abandoned by the central government.

In Nzérékoré, as in Boké and Labé, the context was thus also favorable to a mass mobilization against the regime of Alpha Condé. It was in Nzérékoré that the first major demonstration of the FNDC took place in June 2019. But this mobilization was the occasion of new deadly ethnic tensions. During the March 2020 referendum, FNDC militants tried to block the polling stations, provoking clashes with militias of traditional Malinke hunters, the “Donzos”, protected by the defense and security forces (DSF). These clashes reportedly left at least thirty people dead²⁰. Although around fifty people were indicted, mainly among the “Forestiers”, the speedy trial organized afterwards only resulted in one conviction and did not shed any light on the facts.

Conclusion of Part 2

The FNDC set up a flexible structure, which was not legally formalized, preventing it from being dissolved. Within this structure, the national coordination, composed exclusively of civil society activists, played a major role and allowed the organization to remain in control despite the participation of powerful political parties. In return, these political parties benefited from the FNDC's image which transcended ethnic identities. In exchange, they contributed significant resources, especially in terms of protest capacity, to the movement. The setting up of local branches of the movement made it possible to give a national character to the movement by organizing demonstrations throughout the country.

¹⁹ Agnès Faivre, "[Guinée : justice pour les victimes du « massacre de Zogota »](#)", Le Point Afrique, 10 November 2020.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, "[« Ils ont laissé les gens s'entretuer ». Violences à Nzérékoré lors du référendum constitutionnel et des élections législatives en Guinée](#)", 25 September 2020 ; Collectif des ONG de défense des droits de l'Homme en Guinée forestière, "[Rapport d'enquête sur les atteintes et violations des droits humains à la suite des violences inter communautaires nées des élections législative et référendaire du 22 mars 2020](#)", April 2020.

III. An evolutive strategy in a repressive context

8. Combining and adapting modes of action

The FNDC first tried to dissuade Alpha Condé from changing the Constitution by organizing massive demonstrations and calling on the international community to put pressure on the regime. In a second phase, when Alpha Condé had the new constitution adopted, the FNDC implicitly called on the DSF to overthrow the regime, or at least to let the demonstrators oust Alpha Condé, asking them to "take [their] responsibilities" and "stand behind the aspirations of the people of Guinea"²¹. Alongside the demonstrations, and increasingly when they became impossible, the FNDC worked to undermine the legitimacy of the regime, including through legal action and advocacy targeted to the international community.

The mass demonstrations in Conakry and in the interior of the country were a way of showing Alpha Condé that his project was a minority project, lacking the support of the Guineans. In fact, two ministers resigned after the FNDC's action began, expressing their disagreement with the project²², and some voices in the RPG sought to dissuade Alpha Condé from carrying it out. On the other hand, the mass protests were also intended to demonstrate to the international community that the majority of Guineans rejected this project and that they could rely on the FNDC to put pressure on the regime.

Depending on the reactions of the authorities, the FNDC alternated between "peaceful marches" and "explosive demonstrations"²³. When the authorities did not prohibit them, the FNDC organized vast "peaceful" marches, which gathered massively on the main roads of Conakry, combined with calls for a halt to economic activities²⁴. According to a UFDG official, the FNDC widely disseminated a code of conduct in the media and during the demonstrations which, among other things, prohibited violence, a real innovation compared to the marches of political parties.

In the event of a ban on demonstrations, the FNDC called for split multiple small-scale demonstrations. The FNDC branches played a key part in this, and were able to operate even as the national leadership was being arrested or exiled. In this case, the citizens demonstrated in their neighborhoods, blocking crossroads and traffic, and therefore impacting economic activities, particularly mining activities in Lower Guinea. This is exactly what happened with the first call to demonstrate, launched October 14, 2019: after the authorities banned the demonstration and arrested a good half of the coordination a few days before, the FNDC

²¹ "[L'opposition guinéenne publie une liste de gens à exclure de la transition](#)", Voice of America, 24 September 2021.

²² Cheick Sako, Minister of Justice, on 20 May 2019, and Abdoulaye Yéro Baldé, Minister of Higher Education, on 27 February 2020. In addition, Gassama Diaby, Minister of National Unity and Citizenship, resigned on 14 November 2018, following the repression of the demonstrations of social forces.

²³ Also known as "active and permanent citizen resistance".

²⁴ See for example "[Conakry : le FNDC appelle à des manifs dès le 14 octobre en Guinée et à l'étranger \(déclaration\)](#)", guineenews.org, 7 October 2019.

reacted by launching decentralized protests that lasted three days. Faced with the strength and duration of the mobilization, authorities gave in and authorized demonstrations for a time. Overall, the protests were widely met with violent repression, resulting in dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries over the period, as well as hundreds of arrests. The repression did not deter the demonstrators from continuing to "come out", proving their determination. The deployment by the DSF of "*points d'appui*" – reinforced control and intervention checkpoints throughout the city of Conakry – as early as November 2018, very quickly after the start of FNDC's mobilization, clearly indicates that the regime was caught off guard.

The mobilization strategy relied heavily on social networks. The communication of the FNDC was very careful, thanks to the skills of the leaders and activists in this area. In addition to the "official" effort led by the FNDC (which included a web TV), FNDC supporters created many Facebook pages and other social media contributions to relay the slogans, saturate social networks and ensure that the Guinean private press picked them up. This digital battle aimed to win the support of the undecided by arousing their indignation, particularly by denouncing the repression carried out by the DSF. The government was unable to block this digital activity. A law on cybercrime was passed in 2016, and it has been used on several occasions against media outlets, but without much effect. One source reports a few attempted computer attacks from abroad - presumably by mercenary hackers - but they have not been sustained enough to affect the movement.

In addition, the FNDC carried out operations in the judicial field to increase the pressure on the regime's cadres. These operations were based on previous work carried out by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International and their Guinean partner organizations, which reported extensively on human rights violations and communiqués. The FNDC also had the original idea of publishing a "black list" of regime officials allegedly responsible for crimes committed by the DSF, including the Ministers of Defense and Security as well as DSF commanders²⁵. The aim of the list was to encourage Guinea's international partners to adopt individual sanctions – which has not been done before – so as to put pressure on the individuals mentioned, reminding them that they could be brought to justice for crimes committed by the DSF, and thus to discourage the repressive apparatus. In the context of a country marked by the September 28, 2009 massacre, with senior security officials under investigation by the Guinean judiciary and the situation monitored closely by the International Criminal Court (ICC), this pressure carried weight.

Based on this list, FNDC lawyers filed complaints in Guinean courts, and the French law firm Bourdon made referrals to the ICC. While the ICC has not opened legal proceedings for the repression of the demonstrations, it has issued a statement denouncing "pre-election violence

²⁵ Including Lieutenant-Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya, then commander of the special forces grouping. The FNDC removed him from the list after the coup he led.

and ethnic tensions"²⁶. The FNDC's lawyers also appealed to the ECOWAS Court of Justice to challenge the change in the constitution, which they thought contrary to ECOWAS norms. The Court postponed the deliberation to November 2021, but the coup d'état took place before the judgement.

In terms of international advocacy, the FNDC targeted four main actors: sub-regional actors, the EU, the US and France. The FNDC benefited from Ibrahima Diallo's participation in the Niamey Summit, a meeting organized by NDI in October 2019 on the issue of constitutional term limits, to meet with former heads of state from the sub-region as well as the president of Niger, then president of ECOWAS. Following this forum, in December 2019, Nicéphore Soglo, former president of Benin, and Goodluck Jonathan, former president of Nigeria, conducted a mission to Guinea at the invitation of NDI and the Koffi Annan Foundation, but Alpha Condé refused to receive them. This communication stunt drew attention to Alpha Condé's desire to hold on to power, while the presidents in office in various ECOWAS states hesitated to take a clear-cut position on the issue for fear of provoking a diplomatic crisis or being accused of interference. The FNDC denounced the lack of a clear position of ECOWAS. It also positioned itself as an interlocutor for the sub-regional and regional bodies by receiving a joint mission of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWAS), ECOWAS and the African Union, shortly before the presidential election. While these meetings did not yield material results, they did strengthen the credibility of the FNDC – while several of its members had contacts with Western embassies and international institutions, it is rare for citizens' movements to engage in public dialogue with such organizations.

For its advocacy in France and with the European Union, the FNDC relied on partner CSOs, notably ACAT, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, LDH and TLP, as well as on member political parties, in particular the UFDG and UFR, which are very well connected at the international level, as both Cellou Dalein Diallo and Sidya Touré once served as prime ministers. These contacts gave the FNDC access to political and institutional actors in Europe and the United States, European and national deputies or diplomats.

Considering that the change in the Constitution was illegal and illegitimate, the FNDC called for a boycott and blockade of the referendum, which was held in a very irregular manner and led to significant violence²⁷. This did not prevent Alpha Condé from passing the new constitution with almost 90% of the vote. After the referendum, the FNDC called on the army to restore the law in the face of a "constitutional coup"²⁸. This appeal must have worried the authorities, particularly in a context when the army was experiencing internal tensions, as

²⁶ [Déclaration du Procureur sur les violences préélectorales et les tensions ethniques croissantes : "La Guinée peut et doit prouver sa volonté de combattre l'impunité et de prévenir de nouveaux cycles de violence et sa capacité à le faire"](#), International Criminal Court, 9 October 2020.

²⁷ The case of Nzérékoré is discussed above.

²⁸ ["Guinée : l'opposition crie au "coup d'État" constitutionnel"](#), TV5 Monde, 20 December 2019.

evidenced by two failed mutinies, two days before the referendum and two days before the presidential election²⁹.

The national coordination of the FNDC decided to boycott the presidential election, causing a rift between civil society and some member political parties. Indeed, the UFDG and the PADES announced in September 2020 their willingness to participate in the election, and were excluded from the FNDC as a result. The government again directly attacked the leadership of the FNDC, arresting Fonike Menguè. Several other members of the national coordination, including Ibrahima Diallo and Sékou Koundouno, went into exile. After Condé's predictable victory in the October 18, 2020 election, the repression intensified further, hitting demonstrators who were contesting the outcome of the vote, resulting in a dozen more deaths and hundreds of arrests³⁰. The demonstrations ceased definitively at this point, especially since the government used the Covid-19 pandemic as an excuse to ban protests and militarized the country's main cities. Faced with the intensification of repression, the FNDC's strategy focused on international advocacy and on the battle for opinion on social networks.

9. Resisting repression through internal and external support

The FNDC has set up a system for monitoring victims of repression. This is a database jointly maintained by the FNDC (via its branches in particular), the UFDG, the OGDH, the lawyers' collective and the collective of victims' representatives, which serves to identify and count the demonstrators injured or killed and to document the violence. This database has been of great importance in supporting victims and filing complaints. However, due to a lack of resources and the long-term imprisonment of those responsible for the database, many actors agree that it remains incomplete. The 99 deaths recorded by the FNDC may be an underestimation³¹.

The use of digital technology was a crucial means of mobilizing while escaping repression. The FNDC's internal communication works with loop systems on encrypted messaging systems, preventing the authorities from spying on or hacking into the data. The use of these loops also makes it possible to dispense with physical meetings, which is particularly useful when the risk of arrest is high or when members are in hiding. The accounts created on social networks were managed from abroad, by people who were not at risk of arrest. And to ensure the completeness of communications, the FNDC benefited from the cybersecurity skills of some members of civil society and political parties. These individuals also participated in computer security training provided by NGOs, such as AfricTivists, on behalf of their respective organizations (and not the FNDC).

²⁹ There is no evidence that the mutineers were responding to calls from the FNDC. They were likely to be concerned about pay.

³⁰ Amnesty International, "[Guinée. Des forces de défense et de sécurité ont commis des homicides dans des quartiers favorables à l'opposition après l'élection présidentielle](#)", 15 December 2020.

³¹ The OGDH, with a stricter methodology, counts about 60.

Ibrahima Diallo's and Sékou Koundouno's departure into exile, first to Senegal and then to Belgium, was facilitated by their many contacts, particularly in civil society around the world. In Dakar, other civil society activists and personal connections provided them with material support to facilitate their stay and enable them to continue their activities. In Europe, they benefited from an activist support fund provided by a collective of organizations including Front Line Defender, Freedom House, *Tournons La Page* and Amnesty International. The trip to Europe was an opportunity to continue advocacy activities, particularly with the European Union.

The FNDC used imprisonment and trials as occasions for powerful political theater, dramatizing the struggle, demonstrating resolve and denouncing the Condé regime. Arbitrarily arrested in September 2020, Foniké Menguè was detained for several months before he obtained his trial after a highly publicized hunger strike. At a huge cost to himself, he built a heroic image through his intransigence with the regime. Human rights organizations took up his case and made it a global cause célèbre, as Foniké Menguè, very weak, was hospitalized³².

Conclusion of Part 3

The FNDC's strategy was initially to dissuade Alpha Condé from amending the Constitution and then, once the new Constitution was adopted, to create the conditions for his overthrow. To achieve this, the FNDC tried to exert pressure internally by organizing mass demonstrations, even when the authorities forbade them, while using international advocacy to discredit the regime. The citizens' mobilization persisted for a long time despite the deadly repression by the DSF, thanks to the support the FNDC received, notably from international partners. This two-pronged struggle did not prevent Alpha Condé from obtaining a third term in office, but it did weaken him sufficiently to create the conditions for a coup d'état.

IV. The FNDC in the face of military transition

10. FNDC-CNRD: a missed appointment?

While Condé, by dint of repression, finally obtained his third term, it was Lieutenant-Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya who achieved the objective set by the FNDC: his departure. But if Doumbouya was able to take advantage of the erosion of Condé's legitimacy, to which the FNDC contributed a great deal, he carried out the coup first and foremost for reasons having little to do with the defense of the constitution; he and his unit, the *Groupe des Forces Spéciales*, were threatened by the power games in President Condé's entourage.

³² Fonike Menguè was released in September 2021 by the CNRD after the coup.

In his first speech, Doumbouya tried to be reassuring, referring to the Ghanaian military putschist Jerry Rawlings, a popular figure in West Africa for having overthrown an authoritarian and corrupt regime, establishing a multi-party system and ensuring the democratization of his country³³. The FNDC initially limited itself to "taking note", recalling that the regime "led by the dictator Alpha Condé was illegitimate and unconstitutional" and calling for "the urgent holding of a meeting between social and political actors on the situation"³⁴, while Cellou Dalein Diallo explicitly marked his "support"³⁵ to the coup plotters. The junta immediately proceeded to release political prisoners, including Fonike Menguè, and authorized the return of exiles, including Ibrahima Diallo, Sékou Koundouno, Fodé Sanikayi Kouyaté, Saikou Yaya Diallo and Djanii Alfa. The latter were welcomed in triumph in Conakry before the FNDC national coordination was officially received by Mamadi Doumbouya. While ECOWAS was wary of the putschists, the FNDC toured the heads of state of the sub-region³⁶ to ask them to support the CNRD³⁷. The FNDC also welcomed some of the CNRD's measures, such as the creation of the Court for the Repression of Economic and Financial Offenses (*Cour de répression des infractions économiques et financières* – CRIEF), designed to fight corruption. All this suggested that an agreement was possible.

However, discussions between the CNRD and the FNDC broke down. The FNDC informed its strategy on previous civil society participation in power in 2007, 2009 and 2010, where civil society had been relegated to secondary roles and had failed to bring about fundamental transformations. It therefore made high demands, in particular for the chairmanship of the CNT. The CNRD did not want to tie its hands and made more modest proposals - including positions in the CNT and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, a way of confining the FNDC to the 'youth' box. In the end, the CNRD chose Dansa Kourouma, the leader of the CNOSC, to chair the CNT. This choice was not without irony; it was precisely because of the co-opting of the main leaders of the CNOSC by the Condé regime that the PCUD, the central component of the FNDC, had been formed. In addition, Kourouma himself had taken an ambiguous position on Condé's third term and had not participated in the struggle. Even more than other decisions taken by the CNRD, this choice undoubtedly contributed to frosty relations.

Despite this lack of agreement, the CNRD tried to appropriate part of the FNDC's image by attempting to co-opt a number of its leaders. Many of them claim to have refused the proposals made, though some felt it was preferable to collaborate with the new authorities,

³³ It should be recalled that Rawlings had held power for 11 years in an autocratic manner and had notably carried out important economic reforms before proceeding to a democratic opening.

³⁴ "[Arrestation d'Alpha Condé : Le FNDC prend acte et appelle à une réunion d'urgence](#)", GuinéeNews.org, 5 September 2021.

³⁵ "[Cellou Dalein Diallo : 'le CNRD peut compter sur le soutien de l'ANAD'](#)", Ledjely.com, 7 septembre 2021.

³⁶ The FNDC has been invited by Umaro Sissoco Embaló (Guinea-Bissau) on 11 October 2021, Nana Akufo-Addo (Ghana and ECOWAS) on 14 October 2021, Mohamed Bazoum and Mahamadou Issoufou (Niger) on 21 October 2021, Julius Maada Bio (Sierra Leone) on 29 October 2021.

³⁷ ECOWAS has so far not taken any sanctions against Guinea, which has simply been suspended from the proceedings. It is expected to decide on possible sanctions on 3 July.

such as Bill de Sam, Mamoudou Nagnalen Barry and Bailo Barry, respectively Minister of Culture, Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, and member of the National Council for Reconciliation. But the FNDC has defined a clear line against these co-optations: members of the national coordination who want to take up important positions under the transition must leave the FNDC.

11. Towards a new mobilization?

As of June 2022, the junta is trying to impose a prolonged transition. On May 11, 2022, the CNT set the transition at 36 months and the government spokesperson then maintained a surprising vagueness about the beginning of the countdown: the coup d'état in September 2021? The adoption of the timetable by the CNT? Yet another date?³⁸ Moreover, the junta has chosen to keep both the political class and the FNDC at a distance. A new mobilization is on the horizon in which the FNDC intends to play a central role.

The estrangement between the FNDC and the political parties that were members, which began during the presidential election with the exclusion of the UFDG, was initially confirmed after the fall of Condé, but the situation has already been reversed³⁹. The political parties, initially tempted to negotiate with the CNRD and obtain its support, realized that the junta did not leave them any space, conceding them a small place in the CNT and no place at all in the government⁴⁰. The junta then began to exert judicial pressure on their leaders – the CRIEF opened a judicial investigation against Cellou Dalein Diallo in the context of the Air Guinée⁴¹ affair and the authorities seized houses belonging to Cellou Dalein Diallo and Sidya Touré as part of the "recovery of state property" operation. Diallo and Touré seem to have since chosen exile⁴². Kept at a distance by the CNRD, the FNDC and the political parties are now naturally gravitating towards each other again.

Today, the FNDC is trying to obtain a return to constitutional order within a "reasonable timeframe" – in a memorandum published in April 2022, it had proposed a 24-month transition starting on 5 September 2021. To date, the FNDC's demands are⁴³:

³⁸ The government spokesman, Ousmane Gaoual Diallo, maintains both that "the transition begins when we start to unfold the steps" (without specifying what he means by steps) and that "the transition is since September 5".

³⁹ The parties that remained within the FNDC, the UFR and the MoDeL, are running a "political FNDC" to try to capture some of the movement's aura. Although it has kept the name, the "political FNDC" no longer has operational links with the FNDC.

⁴⁰ The only politicians who entered the government are Ousmane Gaoual Diallo, a leading UFDG figure whose disagreements with Cellou Dalein Diallo are well known, and Bill de Sam, of the UFR, who was probably recruited because of his role in the FNDC and his reputation as a committed artist. They both entered the government on their own initiative, and were not appointed by their respective parties.

⁴¹ Cellou Dalein Diallo is suspected of having sold off the assets of the state-owned company, while he was Minister of Transport and Public Works.

⁴² The fact that several officials of the former RPG regime were summoned by the CRIEF and remanded in custody and that requests for bail were denied was undoubtedly a signal.

⁴³ <https://www.facebook.com/frontnationalGN/photos/pcb.1102747297323867/1102747213990542/>

1. The opening of a dialogue between the CNRD, political parties and civil society, under the auspices of ECOWAS;
2. The setting of a reasonable and consensual duration of the transition;
3. The publication of the list of members of the CNRD and the declaration of the assets of the transition authorities;
4. Respect for human rights and in particular the right to demonstrate;
5. The opening of trials for the blood crimes committed in the context of the protests against the third term.

The FNDC denies the CNT any value as a representative institution and calls for the opening of a dialogue on the conditions of the transition. Like the political parties, the FNDC considered that the "inclusive consultation framework" between political actors and members of civil society inaugurated on 15 April by the CNRD did not meet its expectations: Guinea does not need a "consultation" organized by transitional authorities with weak legitimacy, it needs a "dialogue" between the transitional authorities, the political parties and civil society supervised by the country's international partners. The syntactic and organizational nuance may seem unimportant, even ridiculous, but the FNDC clearly has in mind the numerous phases of consultation organized by Alpha Condé throughout his tenure, systematically emptied of meaning by the maneuvering and tinkering of the authorities and the concessions to which the opposition has been forced, with the result that we know. The FNDC's maximalist stance can be explained by this experience, which is still fresh in the minds of many Guineans: to make concessions to the authorities on principles is to have already lost. In this context, as the CNRD ignores the demands of the FNDC and the political parties, the resumption of demonstrations, banned by the CNRD "until the electoral campaign period"⁴⁴, seems to be the last resort.

A new front is therefore being formed, with the UFDG and the UFR in particular. No doubt in order to spare the pride of each party, the mobilization is no longer under the banner of the FNDC, but under that of a newly minted coalition, the "Forces vives". However, the general principles seem to be largely the same.

The contextual parameters are however partly different. The junta seems to have lost some of its popularity and if some of its measures are appreciated, it is beginning to be criticized both for its political management and for the socio-economic situation⁴⁵. Perhaps inflation has begun to activate a social anger that could resonate with political demands - after all, the price of petrol, which had been at the heart of the FNDC's prodrome, the "Forces sociales", has just risen from 10,000 to 12,000 GNF. There is also the question of the place of the RPG, the party of Alpha Condé, which is opposing the junta. The UFDG recently held discussions with the RPG, before distancing itself from it and in the upcoming "Forces vives" mobilization,

⁴⁴ "[Guinée : la junte interdit les manifestations politiques](#)", Deutsche Welle, 15 May 2022.

⁴⁵ "[CNRD et transition : La cote de popularité de la junte dégringole](#)", Le Lynx, 27 April 2022.

to which the RPG is not an official stakeholder. Finally, there is the question of the dissenting FNDC branches that led the protest against the National Coordination in February 2022.

In this struggle, the FNDC's demands 3 and 5 seem to be effective pressure tactics capable of putting the CNRD in a difficult situation. By publishing the list of its members, the CNRD could be discredited by appearing to be a restricted and mono-ethnic clan⁴⁶. On his Facebook page, Foniké Menguè asked the CRIEF to look into the twelve-story building supposedly owned by Mamadi Doumbouya in Kipé, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Conakry⁴⁷. Finally, trials for blood crimes committed during the FNDC demonstrations could catch up with the CNRD, as the role of the special forces (and other CNRD officials) in the repression has not been clarified. The Bourdon law firm has sent batches of evidence to prosecutor Charles Wright, who has launched legal proceedings against Alpha Condé and members of his regime, but not against members of the special forces.

Doubts remain about the FNDC's ability to mobilize demonstrations nationwide. A number of branch leaders had protested after Foniké Menguè was elected national coordinator in February 2022, following the departure of Abdourahmane Sano. They denounced the fact that they had not been involved in this decision and that financial management of the FNDC was opaque. While some claim that this rebellion was teleguided by the CNRD, the list of grievances is broader: lack of recognition and valorization of the work of the branches by the national coordination, lack of communication and consultation within the movement. Some leaders of the branches also criticized the coordination for not reaching out to local activists after the coup, and for not informing them of the content of discussions during meetings with the heads of state of the sub-region and with the CNRD. The conditions of Foniké Menguè's election were, for them, the element that triggered this rebellion. Discussions were held to iron out the differences between the coordination and these branch leaders, some of whom were dismissed. It is difficult to know for the moment whether this rebellion will affect the FNDC's capacity to mobilize.

⁴⁶ Alpha Condé had promoted many Malinke officers, including Doumbouya himself, to operational command positions in the army.

⁴⁷ Foniké Menguè, "[La CRIEF ne fait-elle pas dans la sélectivité, autrement dit du deux poids et deux mesures ?](#)", Facebook.com, 17 April 2022.

Conclusion of Part 4

The coup d'état led by Lieutenant-Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya on September 5, 2021 that ended the presidency of Alpha Condé created a new situation in which the FNDC had to redefine its positioning, objectives and strategy. While it seemed at first that the FNDC and the CNRD junta could find common ground, in the end they did not. They are now on a collision course. After trying to co-opt the FNDC at low cost, the new government ended up resorting to other civil society figures who had not been involved in the struggle against Alpha Condé's abuses. Faced with a CNRD that wants to prolong the transition as long as possible, the FNDC relaunched the struggle and renewed its ties with the main political parties with which it had collaborated. Their main demand is now the opening of a framework for sincere dialogue to negotiate a shorter transition period, using the threat of protests as a means of pressure. It remains to be seen whether the FNDC will be able to mobilize as powerfully against the CNRD as against Alpha Condé. Indeed, some of the leaders of the movement's branches have come to criticize the functioning of the movement, and Guinean citizens remain exhausted by the long and taxing struggle against Condé.

General conclusion

Inspired by a self-critical reflection on the trajectory of Guinean civil society and by the Senegalese and Burkinabe examples, the FNDC has been able to ally itself with political parties in order to react to the slow deterioration of the political space under the Condé regime. The movement, led by a new generation of civil society involved in governance issues and supported by an ecosystem of national and international organizations, has managed to manage a complex collaboration with political parties, while keeping a fair distance. With a simple, specific and narrow agenda, it has made a decisive contribution to revitalizing the political space and carrying a credible, non-partisan and non-ethnic voice. Caught between repression and Covid-19, the FNDC was unable to prevent Alpha Condé's third term, but it did force Condé to a Pyrrhic victory, as he was quickly overthrown by a coup d'état. The CNRD junta and the FNDC, after having tried to discuss, have not found common ground. The FNDC is in the process of reclaiming its place as a demanding critic, still articulated to the same simple and specific agenda, that of political rights.

Acronyms and abbreviations

Ablogui: Association of Guinean bloggers

ACAT: Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture

BL: Liberal Bloc

CNOSC: National Council of Civil Society Organisations

CNRD: Comité national du rassemblement et du développement

CNT: Conseil National de la Transition

CODENOC: Democratic Coalition for the New Constitution

CRIEF: Court for the Repression of Economic and Financial Offences

CSO: Civil society organisation

DSF: Defence and Security Forces

ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States

FNDC: National Front for the Defence of the Constitution

GNF: Guinean Franc

ICC: International Criminal Court

IFES: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

LDH: Ligue des droits de l'Homme

MoDeL: Liberal Democratic Movement

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

NDI: National Democratic Institute

OGDH: Guinean Organisation for the Defence of Human Rights

Osiwa: Open Society Initiative for West Africa

PADES: Party of Democrats for Hope

PCUD: National Platform of Citizens United for Development

PEDN: Party of Hope for National Development

Projeg: Concerted program to strengthen the capacities of Guinean civil society and youth organizations

RGD: Guinean Rally for Development

RPG: Rassemblement du Peuple de Guinée

SMB: Société minière de Boké

UFDG: Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea

UFR: Union of Republican Forces

UNOWAS: United Nations Office for West Africa

VDP: Voice of the People

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