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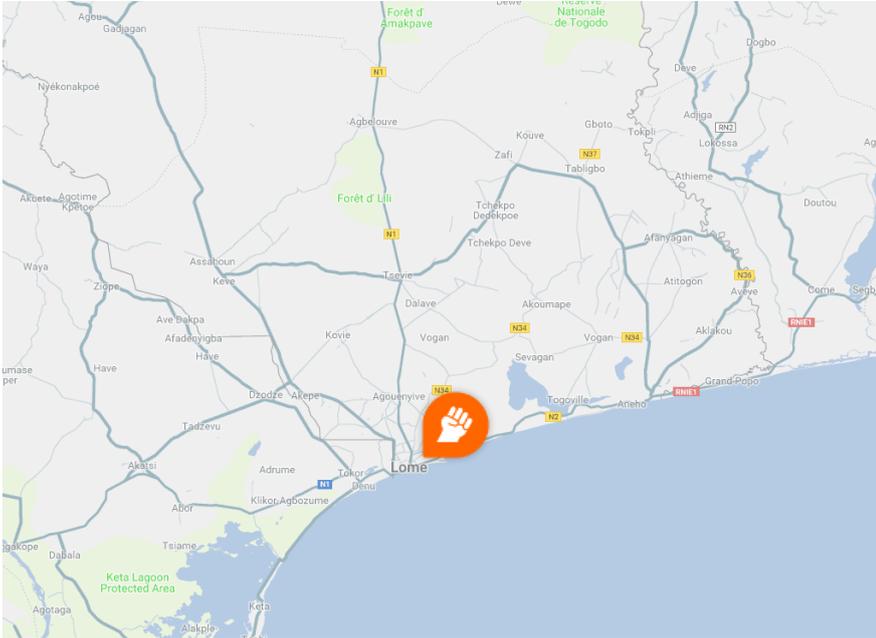
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TRAVEL ADVISORY



TRAVEL ADVISORY • 12 DECEMBER 2018

Opposition Protests Provoke Widespread Clashes with Security Forces



KEY EVENTS



Togo: MODERATE travel risk



Risk of Civil Unrest: **HIGH**

Lomé: urban centres: Avoid further anti-government protests in the build up to polling on 16; 20 December, anticipate clashes between security forces and opposition groups

TOGO (MODERATE) 

KEY POINTS

- Four people were killed, and multiple injuries were reported after security forces used live ammunition and tear gas in an attempt to disperse anti-government demonstrations on 8 December in the capital Lomé and other urban centres.
- The Togolese government had previously banned all demonstrations by the main opposition coalition on 5 December following their calls to boycott the upcoming referendum on constitutional reform and subsequent legislative elections.
- Further opposition protests are likely in the coming days, leading to clashes with security forces. Travellers in country should remain aware of any planned or ongoing demonstrations in their area and avoid all protests due to the risk of violence.

SITUATIONAL SUMMARY

Anti-government protests erupted in Lomé and other major urban centres in Togo on Saturday 8 December following calls by C1, a coalition of political parties to boycott a referendum on constitutional reform and the subsequent legislative elections. Four people were killed, and multiple others were injured, when tens of thousands took to the streets to oppose the proposed constitutional changes that will allow current incumbent, Faure Gnassingbé, who has ruled the country since the death of his father in 2005, to seek a further two terms as President. The biggest opposition party in Togo, the Alliance Nationale pour le Changement (ANC) are part of the 14-party coalition who have called for a deferral of the December polling to renegotiate the proposed constitutional changes. The C1 coalition have denounced the referendum process as unconstitutional and subsequently have not submitted candidates for the upcoming legislative elections.

In response to the call from opposition leaders for their supporters to protest, the ruling party, the Union for the Republic (UNIR), placed a ban on all opposition demonstrations from the 5 December stating fears of widespread public disorder. The ban did not deter opposition supporters from taking to the streets on the 8 December with protests in Lomé being attended by tens of thousands of people. Protesters erected road blocks and caused significant disruption in the centre of the city. In response to the protest ban, security forces used live ammunition and tear gas to disperse protesters and detained over 30 individuals. Wide-scale disruption and clashes between opposition supporters and security forces remains likely in the coming weeks. Travellers in Togo during the build up to the elections should avoid all election-related gatherings due to the credible threat of violence.

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SOLACE GLOBAL COMMENT

Togo is currently in the midst of a political crisis that appears to be coming to a head as the referendum and elections approach. In 2015, President Faure Gnassingbé, was re-elected for his third five-year term, following changes to the constitution in 2002 removing presidential term limits. In 2017, protests engulfed the country following the introduction of a bill in parliament that would see Togo return to a two-term presidential limit but would subsequently allow Gnassingbé to run for two further five years terms, potentially keeping him in power till 2030. Opposition politicians boycotted the bill, resulting in the bill failing to reach the four-fifths majority required to pass and would subsequently be decided by the upcoming referendum on 16 December.

A coalition of opposition parties, supported by the three main religious institutes in the country, are calling for reforms prior to the referendum and legislative elections on 16 and 18 December respectively that would ensure that Gnassingbé could not run in 2020 presidential elections. They have also called for a return to a two-round voting system and allowing Togolese diaspora to be able to cast their ballots in both legislative and presidential elections.

Faure Gnassingbé's father, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, came to power following a bloodless coup in 1967 and ruled the country for 38 years until his death in 2005. His son won the disputed April 2005 presidential elections, maintaining the families grip on power, but the polls were strongly condemned by opposition groups as being fraudulent. Widespread unrest followed the 2002 election resulting in street clashes between security forces and protesters. Between 400 and 500 people were subsequently killed. The Gnassingbé family, who belong to the minority Kabyé ethnic group, have ruled the country for over 50 years.

Togo is dominated by two main ethnic groups, the Kabyé in the North and the majority Ewé in the south. While the Kabyé only represent about 12% of the country's ethnic demographic, the Gnassingbé family, supported by the former colonial power France, ensured that the upper ranks of the military, police and government were dominated by the members of the Kabyé ethnic group and therefore in support of Gnassingbé. The Ewé, who represent around 40% of the country, have increasingly sought to challenge the status quo by either removing themselves from the political process or taking part in widespread protest action. The recent proposed constitution reforms, alongside the lack of transparency during elections and longstanding nepotism, has prompted an increase in civil action demanding an end to the Gnassingbé family rule.

The latest round of protests has seen an escalation in previous tensions and an increasingly forceful response by security forces. The government ban on protesting by opposition groups is a further development that is likely to incite violent clashes between protesters and security forces. On 11 December, a further anti-government protest occurred in the centre of Sokode, Togo's second largest city. As protesters attempted to assemble road blocks, security forces used tear gas and fired live ammunition at the group, leading to the death of two protesters and causing multiple injuries. The opposition coalition has called on their supporters to continue demonstrating up until the 18 December.

Further opposition protests remain likely in the coming days and will lead to violent clashes with security forces. Heightened security is expected in urban centres in the coming days leading to potential travel disruption. Gnassingbé and his government will likely ignore calls for change, creating further political instability throughout the country. In the build up to the 2020 presidential elections, Togo is likely to experience increasingly more severe bouts of unrest leading to a deterioration in the security environment.



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MODERATE TRAVEL RISK



- Consider minimising movement in the capital Lomé and other urban centres until after the 18 December, due to the credible threat posed by clashes between demonstrators and security forces.
- Travellers should avoid all opposition-related gatherings due to the risk of violence. Consult local media, in country contacts and Solace Global Alerts for details of any planned or ongoing demonstrations in your area.
- Update your escalation and evacuation plans for Togo, focusing on what protocols staff members should follow in the event there is major deterioration in the security environment.
- Significant traffic disruption is likely near such protests, especially in major urban centres, on major routes and around key transport and business hubs. Plan routes circumventing areas prone to unrest, alternatively allow additional time if travel through affected areas is unavoidable.
- Anticipate heightened security at public venues, at rally locations and in the vicinity of election-related venues. Exercise vigilance around protest areas and polling stations; follow all official directives.
- Always Carry personal identification documents in the event that you need to transit through a security checkpoint.



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