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Guinea-Bissau: 30 years of militarized democratization (1991–2021)

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In Guinea-Bissau, democracy replaced a one-party dictatorship regime exercised by the African Party of Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde for 18 years. However, the governing powers have still not abandoned all authoritarian practices of the replaced regime, even three decades after the beginning of democratization process, as attested by the results of the present study. The power of the armed forces to determine the course of governance, more than democratically elected political representatives, is one example. The study qualitatively analyzes this complex sociopolitical context marked by coups d'état and military violence during the thirty years of democratization (1991–2021) using press sources, international organizations documents, and bibliographies. The discussion demonstrates how the armed forces held the real power in Guinea-Bissau and how dangerous is this reality to the democratization, in a country where political organizations, actors, and the military do not distance themselves from one another in the subversion of the democratic order.

KEYWORDS

Guinea-Bissau, democratization, coup d'état, armed forces, violence

1. Introduction

After independence on September 24, 1973, and the withdrawal of Portuguese colonial forces the following year, Guinea-Bissau was governed by a regime based on the socialist and Pan-Africanist ideals that characterized the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) since the liberation struggle period. In November 1980, 6 years after the country's political independence, this first regime of governance suffered a coup d'état. This was followed by periods of constant transition between governments that arose from subversion of the constitutional order and those that were democratically elected. In 1991, the country adopted multipartyism and consequently began democratization.

Guinea-Bissau's accession to the multiparty regime was not determined by the people's conscious choice, and much less guided by an endogenous political vision. It was an imposition of international donors who they depended on financially, represented throughout Africa, in the 1980s and 1990s, by economic entities, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB).

However, the economic reforms monitored by these external entities did not prove to be effective in minimizing the social effects of the economic crises that African countries were facing at the time, much less guaranteed the states improvements in the economic performance, in a context that many of them were experiencing the first years of their sovereign existence, as was the case of Guinea-Bissau.

Several factors have been indicated as causes for the failure of the economic reforms guided in Africa by the IMF and WB, from which I highlight, in the Guinean case, contradictions between the proposed economic development model and the diverse socioeconomic reality of the country owing to its ethnic diversity. In Guinea-Bissau, each ethnic community has its distinctive mode of social and economic organization, which makes it difficult to implement development programs based on a singular social model across the country; moreover, the corruption and low technical qualifications of many of the country's civil servants, including people in high government positions, are among these causes (Lopes, 1986; Handem, 1987; Temudo, 2009).

To correct the Structural Adjustment Programs failure in Africa, IMF and WB imposed political liberalization as one of the solutions, implemented through multiparty elections that dictated the end of the one-party system in many countries of the continent. It was also imposed through direct political influences by leaders of the former colonial powers in Africa; for instance, François Mitterrand, the then President of France, made a statement in 1990, that there would be occidental support, especially for countries that took the courage to move toward democratization of their institutions [cited in Te (2014), p. 95]. However, like the economic reforms that preceded political liberation, the transition to democracy still a long process, and in the third decade of democratization, countries like Guinea-Bissau are still facing problems of minimal functioning of their democratic institutions, both at the political-governmental and at the judicial and military levels.

What are the coups d'état factors of political change in Guinea-Bissau? How do the political disputes that precede and follow coups help understand the role of political actors in subverting constitutional normalcy? What are the main extra-political factors that facilitate examining the successive interventions of the military in political disputes for power? What responsibilities are shared by international organizations in the permanent political crisis in Guinea-Bissau and how can this chronic scenario of instabilities be overcome? To answer these questions, I adopted the qualitative method, the details of which are presented in the next section, supported by a critical reading of the relevant literature on democratization in Guinea-Bissau to define the boundaries between my study and the existing literature.

From the consulted bibliography, the studies closest to the analysis I propose on democratization in Guinea-Bissau are gathered in Guinea-Bissau—Micro-State to “Narco-State,” a collective work edited by Chabal and Green (2016). The articles in this collection make an interdisciplinary foray into the historical origins and evolution of the chronic political-military instabilities in the country and its social effects. The present study establishes dialogs with few chapters of this work, both to ensure greater consistency in our analytical perspective, which focuses on the problematization of the preponderant military role in producing political changes in Guinea-Bissau, and to discuss the unlightened shadow of previous research for a better understanding of political and military strategies that enable violent political changes in the country.

The difference of my study and, therefore, its innovation compared with academic works within the scope of studies on

political-military crises in the Guinean democratization, lies in the facts that, starting in 2017, a year after the publication of the collective work mentioned above and from the 2019 presidential elections, new analytical elements have emerged providing other angles of understanding that induce us to: (i) seek to understand the main political and military causes of coups d'état in Guinea-Bissau and how they define the de facto power of the armed forces still today in the country; (ii) analyze the reasons of ethnic character and those linked to drug trafficking with special relevance to its outlines since 2017 in political changes in Guinea-Bissau; (iii) deepen the reading on the role of international organizations during these 30 years of democratization in the country; and (iv) discuss equations searching for ways to strengthen the democratic institutions of the country.

Following the presentation of methodological perspective adopted herein, I contextualize this work through a literature review on the military legitimacy gained by the national armed forces through their leading role in the struggle that founded the Guinean State, as well as address the imposition of the multiparty opening by international economic and political organizations and how this influence is maintained through various forms of external intervention in the difficult political scenario prevailing in the country.

In the next sections, I analyze how multiparty elections and coups d'état coexist in a context marked by various subversions of constitutional legality, and how these events are linked with drug trafficking, ethnic and religious political instrumentalization, and the role of international community in this complex conflict. In the final considerations, I summarize the main arguments I defend in this study.

2. Methods and materials

This study qualitatively analyzes democratization in Guinea-Bissau. I collected relevant information and statements from political and military leaders of the period delimiting the study through two Guinean newspapers and four international press organs available online, respectively: *Nô Pintcha*, *O Democrata*, *Deutsche Welle* (DW for Africa), *Rádio e Televisão Portuguesa* (RTP), *Público* and *Expresso*. The largest hemerographic collection of these newspapers is that of *Nô Pintcha*, provided online by the History Center of the University of Lisbon, and covers issues from 1975 to 2000.

Three Guinean Human Rights League (LGDH) reports, from 2008 to 2016, “On the situation of human rights in Guinea-Bissau,” enabled the cross-checking of information with other sources on the political and military events transversal to these years as well as their connections to the political-military crises of previous years. I analyzed the political declaration of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) against terrorism within the sub-region and two political-military agreements sponsored by the same organization in its various political-military conflict mediations in Guinea-Bissau. These documents facilitated understanding of the leading role of this sub-regional organization in shaping the recurring political crises in the country and its contradictions and ties with other international organizations in

Guinea-Bissau, namely, the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), and the United Nations (UN). Other documents analyzed are three significant reports produced by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) in 2021, which helped to understand the UN's role in peacebuilding and fighting drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, while showing how this transnational crime, and illicit logging, can help to comprehend the complexity of the country's political crises, at least since 2005.

To limit the theoretical scope, [Martins \(2013\)](#)'s chapter on "The Change," part of his work analyzing the democratic transition in Brazil, enabled me to scrutinize the way dictatorial (or authoritarian) regimes' typical practices coexist with behaviors shaping democratization processes—mainly in their early stages, but also continuously throughout political disputes that, given their complexity in transitional contexts, are marked by this hybridity between authoritarian and democratic elements. I find this same dynamic sense of transition in [Lindberg and Clark's \(2008\)](#)'s analysis of African democracies.

[Sanchez and Macuane \(2019\)](#)'s study helped examine the usefulness of elections for democratization in several African countries, while [Kulkova's \(2019\)](#) review opened possibilities to explore the EU's electoral missions in Africa, their characteristics, forces, and fragilities. EU has constituted one of the main foreign electoral observing missions over the years in Guinea-Bissau. [Obydenkova and Paffenholz's \(2021\)](#) brief but enlightening theoretical analysis on peace and democracy-building opened clues for this study's analysis on external actors' peacemaking and democracy-building involvements in Guinea-Bissau. These theoretical tools were reviewed with constant attention to the specificities of Guinean democratization to prevent the temptation that similar aspects in other contexts, especially African ones, might lead to distorted interpretations of my case study.

2.1. The liberation struggle, militarization of power and external imposition of democratization in Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau's independence resulted from a long struggle led by the PAIGC. The outcome of this struggle was determined by military guerrilla action, without disregarding its political involvement; characterized by Pan-Africanist and Marxist-Leninist ideologies; and involved skillful diplomacy in denouncing Portuguese colonialism to international organizations and forging alliances beyond ideological limits.

Under the leadership of Amílcar Cabral, a revolutionary and strategist globally renowned for his political, military, and intellectual skills, the liberation movement was conceived. A political project replacing colonial institutions in Guinea and Cape Verde was conceived at the beginning of the armed struggle, with the existence of the first liberated zones after 1964. In these territories free from colonial administration, the PAIGC began to implement what it believed to be new educational practices, models of justice, methods to guarantee security for villagers, and economic dynamics ([Lopes, 2015](#); [Cabral, 2018](#); [Monteiro, 2019](#)).

Even during the struggle for independence, Amílcar Cabral already spoke of establishing power exercised by the people. Cabral mentioned a Leninist "revolutionary democracy" wherein the PAIGC would be the institution responsible for the administration of the State. Furthermore, the PAIGC would be led by principles of "criticism and self-criticism, the collective and democratic centralism" ([Mendy, 1996](#), p. 23), a practice that would guarantee the people's participation in decision-making on the management of government affairs.

However, from the beginning of the administration of the liberated areas, problems arose regarding the abuse of power by representatives toward the populations they were supposed to protect. This was among the factors that forced the convening of the I (first) Congress of the PAIGC in Cassaca, in the south of Guinea, in 1964. This meeting would later influence the political-military agenda of the party for the rest of the struggle for independence ([Monteiro, 2019](#), p. 196–202).

Guinea-Bissau's independence was unilaterally proclaimed on September 24, 1973, in Madina de Boé. The PAIGC controlled more than two-thirds of the territory in dispute with colonial forces; however, its founding leader Amílcar Cabral was absent. Differences between the Guinean and Cape Verdean wings of the party were among the reasons for Cabral's murder on January 20 of the same year ([Nóbrega, 2003](#); [Monteiro, 2019](#)). The proclamation of independence was conducted by the National Popular Assembly (ANP), of which two-thirds and one-third of deputies were elected through grassroots congresses and the party, respectively. Led by João Bernardo "Nino" Vieira, the formation of this body is an example of the attempt to democratize the actions of the PAIGC by exercising power on behalf of the people of Guinea ([Mendy, 1996](#), p. 28).

In 1974, the April 25 revolution took place in Portugal, and colonial forces abandoned Guinea after recognizing its independence. The PAIGC inherited colonial institutions. However, given the lack of financial and human resources to replace this administrative apparatus, bureaucratic foundations remained despite declarations of Pan-Africanist and Marxist-Leninist ideological orientations. The years that followed independence were marked by serious crises within the liberating party. Disputes existed between Guinean and Cape Verdean combatants, along with interethnic and power disputes, in addition to economic crises. These outcomes were likely manifestations of the limitations of the retrograde century-long colonial system, the end of the Cold War, and dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, then the main ally of the PAIGC and the greatest global socialist power ([Nóbrega, 2003](#); [Monteiro, 2019](#)).

Many African countries won their independence through the "demand of popular sovereignty," that is, the end of colonial domination and the liberation of African people from all forms of oppression. The elements that characterized these demands "were in most cases outdated and even abandoned" ([Rudebeck, 1996](#), p. 358) by the political leaders of "new" states after their independence. Political persecution, police/military repression, and political powers distant from the popular masses abounded. [Lindberg and Clark \(2008\)](#) and [Martins \(2013\)](#)'s works discussed below provide a sound theoretical framework for the analysis of these and other characteristic elements of the transitional

periods mentioned so far—from struggles against colonialism to independence and from this to the exercise of power in a democracy.

Unable to contain dissension within the party-State, an influential part of the Guinean wing under the leadership of Nino Vieira conducted the first coup d'état in the country on November 14, 1980. To justify the military uprising unleashed by the self-proclaimed Movimento Reajustador (Readjustment Movement), Vieira pointed to deviation from the ideological principles of the PAIGC, emphasizing growing division within the party, distortion of the sense of unity in Guinea-Cape Verde, and serious economic crisis in the country. About the country's security, the new authorities listed—through the state-owned newspaper *Nô Pintcha* (1980, p. 4–5), in its first issue after the coup—five hundred people allegedly murdered during the seven years of the deposed regime. In 1981, these bodies—individuals who would be people against the new order in the country—were found in two mass graves (Mendy, 1996, p. 30).

While the party was already having difficulty dealing with the issues raised, greater setbacks manifested in the practice of its founding ideology during the years following the coup. Post-coup, unity with Cape Verde ended; the economic crisis also worsened, and one-party dictatorship continued (Nóbrega, 2003, p. 220; Monteiro, 2019, p. 275). These events proved that the promised changes were mere renewals and, often, aggravations of old practices performed by new protagonists. Power was called “political” but was exercised by subjecting the population to the order established by a military coup d'état.

To address economic difficulties, many African countries resorted to the services of international financial entities, namely, the IMF and the WB. In Guinea-Bissau, the regime led by Nino Vieira initiated a set of reforms that led to economic liberalization, through the adoption of the Economic Stabilization Program (ESP) in 1983. This paved the way for adherence to the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) from 1987 (Mendy, 1996, p. 40–41).

However, external indebtedness did not solve the socioeconomic problems of most African countries. The period of transition from colonialism to independence under a one-party regime in Guinea-Bissau was marked by other problems such as corruption, abuse of power by participants in the struggles for independence, and permanent conflict of interests for the possession of scarce resources that the country had. This manifest inability to solve problems that justified international financial support—combined with the impunity and ineffectiveness of entities that supervise political power such as the ANP (National Popular Assembly) and Courts—precipitated “donors” pressuring African governance regimes under their aid to assume democracy as a political model. Without alternatives and deeply dependent on financial assistance from the same international economic entities, the 1980s and 1990s were marked by the adherence of many African countries, including Guinea-Bissau, to the democratic regime (Archinger, 1996; Cardoso, 1996; Mendy, 1996; Semedo, 2021).

In his speech at the opening of the II (second) Extraordinary Congress of PAIGC, held in 1991, Nino Vieira justified the opening to multipartyism this way: “It is a matter, as we said, of adapting our political superstructure to the new economic

base that emerged from the profound changes introduced in the liberalization process” (Nô Pintcha, 1991, p. 10).

The next section will seek to answer these questions: Will changes to articles of the Constitution and political statements be sufficient to ensure a full transition from dictatorship to democracy? Will elections be sufficient to guarantee that the right to delegate the responsibilities of exercising power is the exclusive responsibility of the people?

3. “Free, fair, and transparent elections” and permanent transition of government

A constitution that declares democracy, electoral cycles, and political speeches with overtones of freedom is insufficient to guarantee that a transitioning democracy does not govern like an abandoned dictatorship. In Guinea-Bissau, it is not uncommon to encounter speeches declaring oneself as democratic delivered by political leaders who behave as authoritarians and repress simpler forms of opposition. Their arguments often mention being chosen by the people through elections or freedom of expression and opinion. This is despite repression of day-to-day demonstrations, the media being prevented from functioning, and persecution of government critics. Further, over 30 years of democratization, the country has already had a civil war that ended with the dismissal of an elected President of the Republic and three coups d'état unleashed by the armed forces nicknamed “People's Revolutionaries.” One coup d'état culminated in the assassinations of a President of the Republic and a Chief of Staff General of the Armed Forces.

Since its inception, the democracy in Guinea-Bissau has had issues involving non-identification with the forms of exercise of power in pre-colonial African societies. Despite choosing “their leaders and representatives through discussions, consultations, and consensus” (Mendy, 1996, p. 16–17), which was a form of exercising popular power, institutional models, conflict resolution, and several traditions were disregarded by the State in favor of Western styles of democracy without adaptation to the local context. Further, attachment to what Rudebeck (1996, p. 358) calls the “constitutional aspect of the process” of democratization existed in various democracies in Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. These countries, Guinea-Bissau included, situated their democracies “*at the intersection between constitutionalism and popular sovereignty*” (Rudebeck, 1996, p. 364), that is, between laws that promulgate democracy and practices that deprive citizens of the real power that the originality of the regime confers to them. The holders of “real power” in Guinea-Bissau shall be discussed later in this study.

For now, it is important to emphasize what Chabal (1996, p. 325) discussed in 1993, a year before the first democratic elections were held in Guinea-Bissau. Democratization is a long, complex process “and not the result of political decisions consciously taken at a certain historical moment to implement a better political system.” This is in line with assertions by Martins (2013, p. 106) regarding the transition from one political regime to another—in this case from the one-party dictatorship to democracy—being processes without total replacement of the dictatorial patrimony

by the democratic patrimony. As observed in Guinea-Bissau, this transition is characterized by the coexistence of elements from multiple political systems, wherein, for example, the Constitution can determine respect for varied rights and freedoms. However, power remains authoritarian, displaying behaviors characteristic of dictatorship. Analyzing the coexistence of authoritarian and democratic elements in the transitional processes experienced in Africa, [Lindberg and Clark \(2008\)](#) considered the continent's democracy to be essentially electoralist, rather than a governance regime that enables improvements in people's living conditions.

From 1994 to 2021, Guinea-Bissau held nine elections, including presidential, legislative, and general elections. These yielded six Presidents of the Republic and five governments. However, the total number of Presidents of the Republic and Governments (elected and not elected by the people) is 11 and 23, respectively, which places the average number of years of governance per president at 2.4 and 1.1 per government (see the [Supplementary material](#)). Many factors explain the instabilities preventing mandates and legislatures from fulfilling the usual 5 and 4 years. One such factor underscored in this paper is the coups d'état carried out by the armed forces and their constant interference in democratic political disputes.

Generally considered by international observation missions as "free, fair, and transparent," the elections in Guinea-Bissau have never been synonymous with governmental stability and the consolidation of democratic institutions. In addition to the coups d'état, which strengthen the power of "Presidents and Transitional Governments," governments have been instituted on the initiative of democratically elected Presidents of the Republic who, in distortion of the powers assigned by the Constitution of the Republic, appoint executives without observing legal dictates.

Notably, between the 1998 and 1999 Civil War and the three coups d'état (2003, 2009, and 2012), political power is generally exercised by those appointed by political parties who assume governance in place of militaries that execute the subversion of the constitutional order. This so-called "devolution of power to civilians" often occurs under the auspices of international community organizations Guinea-Bissau is a member of, especially the ECOWAS, which is conducting its fourth military stabilization mission in the country. Two points may be conjectured. The speeches of political parties abound with contradictions (i.e., preaching the values of democracy and subsequent complicity in claiming power after military coups that violate the constitutional order). Furthermore, the peace and stabilization missions sent to Guinea-Bissau militarized. Successive military missions in the country reinforce the reality that power belongs to the armed forces, revealing the diplomatic weakness of ECOWAS, the principal organization in mediation of Guinean political conflicts.

The complex democratic framework in Guinea-Bissau still contains records of a presidential election interrupted by a coup d'état on the eve of its second round, in April 2012; and the term of a President of the Republic, José Mário Vaz, was expected to end within the usual 5-year period established by the Constitution, which had never happened before. However, Vaz remained in power despite strong contestations and negotiations for almost another year after the mandated term (June 2014 to February 2020).

Before taking a closer look at the coups d'état and other forms of military uprisings that led to political changes in the

country, drawing some observations about the focus of this section is crucial. As a context strongly influenced by the organizations from the so-called international community, the credibility of elections in Guinea-Bissau also depends heavily on the assessments of these entities. Therefore, to better support the consolidation of democracy in African countries, it is not enough that, following each voting process, the statement of "free, fair and transparent elections" is pronounced, when, in many cases, these international election observation missions do not cover most of the electoral districts. Moreover, cases are known where they have been used for the benefit of political actors disputing the elections, as [Kulkova \(2019, p. 23\)](#) discusses in her analysis of the European Union's election observation missions in Africa.

In Guinea-Bissau's particular case, international election monitoring bodies should focus on the electoral process organization by governing entities, and abandoning their supposed neutrality in this process, denounce obvious irregularities that are often used by the opposition and military to subvert the constitutional order.

As [Sanchez and Macuane \(2019\)](#)'s research on elections as vehicles for political change in Africa attests, it is inadequate to hold electoral cycles for regimes born from them to become democratic, notwithstanding the importance of elections in strengthening democracies. State institutions must function serving the populations by improving their survival conditions, and basic freedoms must be ensured to citizens, which have not been the reality in most African countries. Moreover, Guinea-Bissau's case is paradigmatic, which makes the country prone to violent interventions for changing governments.

3.1. Coups d'état and militarized democratization

The political legitimacy bestowed on the People's Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARP) given its central role in the struggle for the independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, is also evidenced by the active participation of its leaders in the PAIGC, even after the institution of a civil government in 1974. In the party organization chart referring to the beginnings of independence, the FARP naturally appears as part of its organs ([Semedo, 2021, p. 60](#)). After the democratic opening, this active role of the military in political disputes became further accentuated, either through coups d'état or links between senior FARP leaders and certain political sensitivities. Excessive martial power was considered by Amílcar Cabral as "corrosive to the future of the national project" ([Mendes, 2019, p. 142](#)). To this day, the successive authorities of the "nation forged in struggle" have been unable to avoid these dangers.

On June 7, 1998, 4 years after the first multiparty elections, war broke out in Bissau between the self-styled Junta Militar, led by Brigadier Ansumane Mané, and the forces loyal to João Bernardo "Nino" Vieira, then President of the Republic. The origin of the conflict was the proven arms trafficking network under the guard of the FARP to the independence movement of Casamance, a Senegalese region in the northern vicinity of Guinea-Bissau. Ansumane Mané had been suspended by President Nino Vieira from his duties as Chief of Staff General of the Armed Forces

(CEMGFA) owing to suspicions about his responsibility in arms trafficking to the independentists of Casamance (Rudebeck, 2001). However, an inquiry by the National Popular Assembly (ANP) concluded the opposite and indicted several figures close to Nino Vieira, such as then Minister of Defense Samba Lamine Mané (Induta, 2001, p. 85).

The conclusions of the ANP inquiry, the authoritarianism and intransigence of Nino Vieira in resigning from the decision to exonerate Ansumane Mané from the leadership of the FARP, and the entry into the war of foreign troops from Senegal and neighboring Guinea alongside the government forces aggravated the tensions. The Junta Militar's decision to overthrow the president's regime was further radicalized, and an ANP resolution removed political confidence in Nino Vieira (Rudebeck, 2001, p. 23). This political defeat of the also President of the PAIGC resulted in even greater support from the political opposition and the population to the Junta Militar and its leader, Ansumane Mané (Rudebeck, 2001, p. 32). With the overthrow of the regime headed by Nino Vieira and the end of the war, the challenges of returning to democratization were prioritized in the public debate in Guinea-Bissau. The military did not distance itself from political disputes, as evidenced by proceeding events in the country.

The general elections held between November 1999 and January 2000 brought the Social Renewal Party (PRS) and its President Kumba Yalá to power. The country thus experienced, for the first time, a governance framework with the PAIGC in opposition. The liberators could not have faced greater consequences for their responsibility in the armed conflict of the previous year.

The struggles of a country emerging from war haunted Guinea-Bissau and, aggravating the tenseness of the situation, military forces outweighed political power (Kohl, 2016, p. 151). To mitigate the threat the armed forces posed to civilian political power resulting from the last general elections, Kumba Yalá first appointed the leader of the Junta Militar, Ansumane Mané, as his advisor. However, Mané did not join the inauguration ceremony. Later, in another attempt to calm the armed forces, Yalá appointed all the leaders of the Junta Militar (sixteen people, altogether) for governmental functions similar to those of ministers in the government (Kohl, 2016, p. 77–78).

Tensions between the military leadership and the political power directed by Kumba Yalá were escalating. On November 20, 2000, Ansumane Mané proclaimed himself Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. In an act of clear disavowal of the President of the Republic, Mané then ordered the removal of ranks from all officers promoted by Yalá in a ceremony he had refused to join in the previous week (Lopes, 2015, p. 111; Kohl, 2016, p. 159–160). On November 23 of the same year, intense clashes began between the faction of the armed forces loyal to the President of the Republic, Kumba Yalá, and the forces loyal to Ansumane Mané, entrenched in Air Force installations in Bissau. This episode would culminate on November 30 with the death of Ansumane Mané (Rudebeck, 2001, p. 105–106).

Far from resolving power disputes between the armed forces and civil politicians, Guinea-Bissau experienced 3 years of profound government instability. Consequences were seen at all levels, specifically in the recurring threats to freedom of expression,

the press, and human rights in general. Further illustrating the consequences of political strife were the poor labor conditions of workers with months of salary arrears and a null school year, 2002/2003. The period was also marked by the dissolution of the ANP in 2002 and constant postponement of legislative elections by the President of the Republic (Lopes, 2015, p. 125). Given these occurrences, on September 14, 2003, soldiers led by Veríssimo Correia Seabra ended the Kumba Yalá consulate through a coup d'état.

Henrique Pereira Rosa, a respected figure in civil society at the time, and Artur Sanhá, a PRS militant, were then appointed, as President of the Republic and Prime Minister, respectively, two weeks later, on September 28, 2003. This followed understandings that led to the adoption of a Political Transition Charter between the military, civil society organizations, and representatives of the political class.

The period encompassing the political transition between the coup that deposed the regime led by Kumba Yalá in 2003, the 2004 legislative, and the 2005 presidential elections was not peaceful. On October 6, 2004, a military uprising launched by soldiers who had participated in a peacekeeping mission in Liberia culminated in the murders of Veríssimo Correia Seabra, CEMGFA, and the army's spokesperson, Colonel Domingos Barros. The insurgents justified their action by citing their unpaid subsidies for their mission in Liberia, also denouncing what they considered to be corruption, patronage in the armed forces, and starvation in the barracks (Lopes, 2015, p. 138).

On July 24, 2005, João Bernardo "Nino" Vieira was elected President of the Republic after his controversial return to the country. On April 7 of the same year, Vieira landed via helicopter at Lino Correia Stadium, a few meters from the Presidential Palace and Prime Minister's office, without authorization from the country's government authorities. However, Nino Vieira was received by elements linked to defense and national security forces, with the aim to register for the presidential elections (Lopes, 2015, p. 141).

Attentive observers of the Guinean sociopolitical scenario regarded with reticence possible collaboration between Nino Vieira and the country's armed forces. Vieira was one of two main protagonists of the 1998–1999-armed conflict to be elected 5 years later and, again, for the position of President of the Republic. These events occurred without guarantee of erasing the remnants of the war that opposed him to the Junta Militar, whose members led the armed forces.

The first sign of a new phase of the chronic political-military crisis in Guinea-Bissau came when, on November 23, 2008, a group of soldiers launched an assassination attempt on the residence of Nino Vieira. This attempt came to fruition in the early hours of March 2, 2009, when Nino Vieira was savagely assassinated in circumstances that remain unclear today. Then military spokesperson Zamora Induta stated that the death of the President of the Republic was revenge for the bomb attack that killed then CEMGFA, Tagme Na Waie, the day before at the installations of the General Staff of the Armed Forces in Bissau (Público, 2009). Nino Vieira's last consulate became known for his and several other political and military figures' involvement in drug trafficking. This is analyzed in the next section.

During the years that followed the events described prior, the country was governed by PAIGC, which was led by Carlos Gomes Júnior as Prime Minister, following the 2008 legislative elections, and Malam Bacai Sanhá, a veteran leader of the same political formation, elected President of the Republic in 2009. Sanhá replaced Raimundo Pereira, who had been acting President of the Republic, since he was President of the ANP at the time of the assassination of Nino Vieira.

The country's economic situation had improved and, unusual for the Guineans, public workers' salaries were paid regularly. However, security remained chaotic. On the eve of the 2009 presidential elections, Baciro Dabó and Hélder Proença were murdered, accused of attempting a coup d'état, according to a statement from the Directorate-General for the Information Services of the State of Guinea-Bissau broadcast by RTP (2009). The same statement indicted several other political and civil figures arrested and subjected to physical aggression, namely, Faustino Imbali, a former Prime Minister; Domingos Brosca, a musician; and Iaia Dabó, agent of the State Security Services and Baciro Dabó's brother (Mendes, 2013, p. 90). Hélder and Baciro were two PAIGC political figures close to Nino Vieira, and the second had even declared himself a candidate for the elections during the pre-campaign.

On April 1, 2010, António Indjai arrested Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior and CEMGFA Zamora Induta. The PAIGC President and Prime Minister were released hours later following a strong popular demonstration in the streets of Bissau in his support. However, the following day, António Indjai, who would later assume the functions of CEMGFA, informed the press that Zamora Induta would not resume his duties, having also apologized in a statement that downplayed the event as a simple incident (RTP, 2010). On April 12, 2012, the incident turned into a coup d'état and interrupted a presidential election on the eve of the second round. This period was characterized by numerous violations of human rights, beatings of opposition politicians against the coup d'état, and threats to the integrity of activists from the Guinean League of Human Rights, as reported by the institution in its report for 2010–2012.

However, before the April 2012 event, Roberto Ferreira Cacheu, a well-known PAIGC militant, mysteriously disappeared following yet another alleged coup d'état attempt in December 2011. In the wake of this event, Vladimir Lenine Crato, an agent of security, was allegedly hit by bullets during the dismantling operation in preparation for the coup at Roberto Cacheu's residence. As revenge for the agent's death, Rapid Intervention Police colleagues executed Major Iaia Dabó, accused of being Vladimir Crato's killer. On March 18, 2012, the victim was Samba Djaló, former head of Military Counterintelligence and former director of the State Information Service. As in previous murder cases, the perpetrators were never legally held accountable (Mendes, 2013, p. 90–91).

In April 2012, the country held elections with several incidents of instability, as reported in a special online edition of the Deutsche Welle for África (Deutsche Welle, 2012). During the voter registration process, there were several complaints from opposition parties led by PRS regarding the lack of electoral roll updates. Further, Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior, unilaterally suspended his duties to run for president chair; this behavior was

criticized by several fringes of society, since it was in the last year of the legislature started in 2008. The candidate supported by PAIGC argued that no constitutional impediment to his competition for the position of President of the Republic existed.

The coup d'état occurred when five of the candidates defeated in the first round of the elections—Kumba Yalá, Serifo Nhamadjo, Henrique Pereira Rosa, Afonso Té, and Serifo Baldé—contested the results announced by the National Elections Commission (CNE), claiming that there had been fraud benefiting Carlos Gomes Júnior. Kumba Yalá even categorically stated that there would not be a second round of presidential elections. His prediction was consummated. The military assumed the interruption of the process on April 12, 2012, justifying the coup d'état with alleged intentions of aggression that the Angolan military mission in the country would be preparing against the FARP, at the behest of Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior (Deutsche Welle, 2012).

From 2014 to 2020, Guinea-Bissau experienced 6 years of political instability characterized mainly by strong popular and political protests against the then President of the Republic José Mário Vaz. In late 2019, the presidential election that dictated the removal of José Mário Vaz from the Presidency of the Republic was held. However, the defeat of JOMAV did not result in the defeat of the political sensibility that accompanied him during more than 5 years of troubled political disputes that characterized his mandate.

In the second round of election, the outgoing President joined Carlos Gomes Júnior (former Prime Minister), Nuno Gomes Nabiam (supported by António Indjai since 2014), and PRS in backing Umaro Sissoco Embaló's candidature, who was facing PAIGC candidate Domingos Simões Pereira. The election outcome was not peaceful, as Domingos Simões Pereira filed an electoral lawsuit in the Supreme Court of Justice (STJ). This candidate, who was declared the loser of the election by the National Electoral Commission (CNE), was complaining of alleged fraud in the electoral process. Without waiting for the Supreme Court to assess the election results, Umaro Sissoco Embaló proclaimed himself President of Guinea-Bissau in a ceremony presided by Nuno Gomes Nabiam, the then vice-president of ANP, in a hotel in Bissau, with strong support of the armed forces (O Democrata, 2020). Notably, the STJ produced several contradictory rulings on the same electoral case, thereby helping to complicate the process' outcome.

Considering the events that complicate the constant process of transition from democratic to martial powers, with the occasional approval of some political sensitivities and the ANP itself, the beginnings of the process of accession to democracy in Guinea-Bissau, considered somewhat peaceful by Cardoso (1996, p. 154) compared with other African contexts, evolved over the last 26 years to practices of militarization of power, coups d'état, political assassinations, and violent repressions, being today part of "cleavages" (Cardoso, 1996, p. 154–158) that the same author identified within the political class at that time. These facts confirms that the simultaneity of elements of two political systems in transition periods—dictatorship and democracy—as Martins (2013) theory points out, can't be seen as outdated practices by simple vocabulary changes in political speeches and changes in the country's legislative framework.

Moreover, as Lindberg and Clark (2008, p. 93, 95) warned in their study, the discussion in this section demonstrates that authoritarian behaviors of regimes borne from elections can be precedents for military coups, even if they do not subsequently result in progress toward democratization in the country.

3.2. The maze of drug trafficking and political changes

Several academic studies, GI-TOC, and LGDH's reports attest the relationship between drug trafficking and violent political changes in Guinea-Bissau. According to LGDH (2010, 2013), drug trafficking is one of the major reasons for recurrent political-military crises in the country, by involving significant numbers of military officials and political figures.

Analyzing the course of this complex drug trafficking network in the country, Shaw (2015), Ceesay (2016), and GI-TOC (2021a) situate its origin in the political context of Nino Vieira's return to the President position in 2005. Shaw points to top figures in political and military hierarchies as being involved in the narco-trafficking networks. The LGDH reports on the period extending from 2008 to 2013, marked by political assassinations and coups d'état with links to drug trafficking, confirm the consistencies of both Shaw and Ceesay's studies as well as the GI-TOC report.

LGDH (2010, p. 54) analyze Nino Vieira's attempted assassination in November 2008 and its 2009 consummation as consequences of a struggle between the military and certain political sectors to control drug trafficking networks in Guinea-Bissau. Two events illustrate how the military and politicians were already fighting for control of the drug trafficking networks by then. In 2006, a drug amount estimated at US\$39 million had been seized by the Judicial Policy (PJ) and placed in safekeeping of the public treasury. Shaw (2015, p. 349), quoting a UN source, state that the drugs had been removed from the treasury by a military group. The fate of the drugs remained uncertain since then. Following investigations on this case, in 2007, according to the same author, the PJ arrested two Colombian citizens as the faces of the business. The process took an enlightening turn on how the judiciary and political sectors in Guinea-Bissau have hands in drug trafficking. The two drug traffickers were released by judicial decision on €95,000 bail, and a PJ official assured that there was intervention from the then Prime Minister, Aristides Gomes, to get the two individuals released.

The last major political change of that period in Guinea-Bissau closely linked to drug trafficking was the coup d'état of April 2012. In February of this year, as reported by LGDH (2013, p. 116), an aircraft of unknown origin and protected by heavily armed military landed in Mansôa, the birth sector and later residence of the then Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces, António Indjai. The League does not make direct connection between this event and drug trafficking, perhaps to protect its activists. However, in the next paragraph of the same page, where the report refers to this case, this civil society organization states that drug trafficking serves as an illicit enrichment through which senior military officers have consolidated their power in the country. Meanwhile, the GI-TOC report (2021a, 10) calls the 2012 military uprising a "cocaine coup"

and, for Shaw (2015, p. 360), one of the principal reasons for this coup was for military officers to ensure effective control of drug dealing in the country. The context of 2012–2014 was further marked by intense deforestation and timber trafficking, involving António Indjai and his main political ally Nuno Nabiam (GI-TOC, 2021c).

The 2014 general elections ended the administration of the "transitional government" born from the 2012 coup. This government was heavily dependent on the military leadership, although the ruling figures were civilian politicians, and despite the intervention of ECOWAS in mediating the crisis.

The swiftness of JOMAV, the elected President, in exonerating António Indjai from the command of the armed forces made many intellectual sectors, politicians, and international organizations expectant of advancements in reforms within the military and, consequently, in combating drug trafficking. Shaw (2015, p. 361) lets this sentiment shine in the conclusion of his study, although he draws attention to the non-dissolution of the network of intermediaries and military personnel involved in narco-trafficking. Such expectations lasted no longer than a year, as a new episode of governmental instability in Guinea-Bissau paved the way for the consolidation of the military's de facto power over political rule. According to LGDH (2016, p. 64), during the election campaign that led to JOMAV's election, António Indjai ordered the beatings of Mário Fambé and Faustino Imbali, two well-known Balantas militants of PRS, as they refused to support Nuno Nabiam, his candidate in the presidential elections. These actions were clearly aimed at building a military-backed Balanta political agenda around Nabiam's candidacy.

As I mentioned in the preceding section, after the 2019 presidential elections, the military continued to prove its key role in the political changes in Guinea-Bissau and its connection to drug trafficking networks remains up to date. In its April 8 edition of 2022, the Portuguese newspaper Expresso published a report entitled "The Bissau Corridor," signed by the journalist Micael Pereira. The article results from in-depth investigative work carried out on drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau. According to the piece, 6 months before Umaro Sissoco Embaló's inauguration, two major cocaine seizures occurred in Guinea-Bissau. In the first, coded "Operação Carapau," the PJ apprehended 789 kg of cocaine from Senegal in a truck, allegedly to buy "carapau," a fish variety abundant in the Guinean seas. The second operation was nicknamed "Navarra," and was carried out in the Bijagós archipelago, to where a fishing boat had transported about two tons of drugs. The outcome of this operation occurred between Caió and Canchungo, two villages in the North of the country. This case of drug trafficking was commanded by Braima Seidi Bá, a Guinean involved in the narcotics trade since 2007, and his Colombian boss, Ricardo Ariza Monjes. One of the GI-TOC reports (2021b) read in the framework of this study demonstrates how Seidi Bá commands the largest drug trafficking network in Guinea-Bissau.

After his unilateral inauguration, one of Umaro Sissoco's first official acts was to appoint Nabiam as Prime Minister. At the swearing-in ceremony attended by high-ranking military officers, attention was focused on the figure of António Indjai, former-CEMGFA wanted by the US authorities for his involvement in transnational drug trafficking. The two other military officers present at the ceremony held in the palace are on the US and UN

sanctions lists since 2012: Papa Camará, the Air Force Chief of Staff, and Mamadu N'krumah, vice-CEMGFA (GI-TOC, 2021b).

In the interview with Micael Pereira, in *Expresso*, Sissoco Embaló rejected any connection with the drug trafficking networks and justified António Indjai's presence in Nuno Nabiam's inauguration as he is the nephew of the former Chief of Staff. However, since the other two officers at the ceremony were also accused of drug trafficking and did not make any reference to them in his justification to the *Expresso* journalist, an important observation must be made: The presence of António Indjai at Nabiam's inauguration, who he openly supported in the 2014 presidential election while he was chief of the armed forces, highlights not only his continuing role in producing political power in Guinea-Bissau undemocratically but also the narcotraffic's role in shaping the country's political and military institutions.

Following Nabiam's inauguration, Ramon and Seidi Bá returned to Bissau, and, despite a 5-year prison sentence hanging over them, Seidi Bá lives freely in the capital, protected by the regime and the Ministry of the Interior, state department in charge of the country's security. In a July 2022 ruling, the STJ acquitted the two Navarre ringleaders, although paradoxically maintaining the decision of the Court of Appeals which confiscated the belongings seized by the PJ in the same operation (O Democrata, 2022). The outcome of this case leaves no doubt on how important sectors of Guinea-Bissau's political, judicial, and military authorities remain linked to the transcontinental drug trafficking cartel.

In his interview with Micael Pereira, the Prime Minister dismissed by Umaro Sissoco Embaló in 2020, Aristides Gomes not only alleged to have been threatened by traffickers arrested in the Navarra operation but also said that he received a phone call from the then President of the Republic, JOMAV, intervening to release the truck seized by the PJ in the Carapau operation. When asked whether he was accusing JOMAV of being involved in drug trafficking, Aristides replied expressively: "That is for historians to tell 1 day." It is worthwhile to return to the similar attitude of Aristides Gomes in 2007, while Prime Minister, pressuring the PJ for the release of traffickers detained by this Guinean security corporation.

These episodes of drug trafficking worthy of an action movie were brilliantly fictionalized by Dafé (2022) in his recent novel entitled *A Cidade que Tudo Devorou* (*The City that Devoured Everything*), the latest publication by one of the most talented authors of Guinean's new wave of writers. Such happenings reinforce the sense of how the relationship between politicians, the military, and international drug cartels is a factor in maintaining political instability in Guinea-Bissau as well as insecurity across the West African coast.

3.3. Identity instrumentalizations in political disputes and the danger to pluri-ethnic coexistence

The instrumentalization of ethnic identity belonging proved to partially structure the democratic opening in 1991 (Cardoso, 1995; Nóbrega, 2003; Temudo, 2009). This occurred to the extent

that disputes within the PAIGC also became based on behind-the-scenes debates about the positions that the mestizos of Cape Verdean origin and the natives would occupy in organs of the party. Further, the PRS took advantage of Balanta's anger over the events of October 17 to gain electoral sympathy with this ethnic group. On that day, in 1986, several military officers and some PAIGC leaders who opposed the totalitarian pretensions of then President of the Republic Nino Vieira were shot and accused of attempted coup d'état. According to a list published in a book by Induta (2001, p. 26–33), most of the dead persons belonged to the Balanta ethnic group. The existing bibliography on this event highlights the personalities of respected intellectuals with recognized charisma within their ethnic group: Paulo Correia, then Vice-President of the Council of the State, and Viriato Pã (Induta, 2001).

Since the first elections, symbolisms assumed by certain parties and political personalities left no room to doubt their intentions (Monteiro, 2019, p. 277). Kumba Yalá adopted the red cap with cultural significance among the Balanta. This practice remains sacred among PRS leaders but is also seen during public events of the Assembly of the United People—Democratic Party of Guinea-Bissau (APU-PDGB), whose leader is a political affiliate of Kumba Yalá, founding leader of the PRS. In fact, according to Nóbrega (2003, p. 288), the design of the new gallons containing rice stems, coincidentally part of the PRS symbol, would be among the reasons why Ansumane Mané ordered the removal of patents from the newly promoted soldiers in an act of disallowing President Kumba Yalá mentioned above.

In an interview to Nô Pintcha (2000, p. 7), following the death of Ansumane Mané, Emilio Costa, then vice-CEMGFA, justified the choice of rice for the military ranks as a way of replacing colonial symbols, which remained on Guinean military uniforms, but also because rice "is the richness of Guinean people" and is used "in national shield." However, the image of rice used in the ranks of the graduation promoted by Kumba Yalá is more identified with PRS symbols than the Guinean national shield.

This identity instrumentalization is no longer a simple expression of ethnic sympathy between candidates for important political positions and voters from certain ethnic groups, but an intentional exploitation of ethnic and/or religious affinities for electoral purposes and, occasionally, a means of approaching the armed forces, as PRS does. The most recent examples are from the last presidential elections. The current President of Guinea-Bissau, Umaro Sissoco Embaló and his supporters, used *kaalá*—a scarf worn around the neck or covering the head, common among elders of Islamized Guinean ethnicities. Embaló used this as an act of high political significance for him, even refusing its ethnic symbolism. Such behavior is not new from Sissoco Embaló. In 2017, in a meeting with the Guinean Islamic community in Hamburg, Germany, in the garb of country's Prime Minister, he ostensibly appealed for religious vote, speaking on the high percentage of Guinean Muslims that would be enough for him to be elected president of the country. The video of that meeting was widely shared and debated on social media at the time.

Despite the pacific interethnic and interreligious coexistence among Guineans, as Kohl (2016) and Sarró and Barros (2016) proved in their very well-grounded socio-anthropological studies, the reality forged during the 2019 presidential election and the

proved complicity between military and certain political parties alert us to the need of vigilance that should be kept in the analysis of the political use of ethnicities and religions in Guinea-Bissau. The last presidential election intensified political disputes within the social media platform, which widens the sphere of discussions and where political and civic positioning clearly includes elements of ethnic and religious identities. Therefore, Kumba Yalá's political mobilization strategy, seen as similar to that of Amílcar Cabral in the liberation struggle, as both have their main bases of support in rural areas—as Green (2016, p. 33) has stated, citing Chabal—can become dangerous. In other words, while Yalá instrumentalized the Balanta ethnicity to be the main support base of the PRS, a practice still present in the party, Cabral was clear in condemning any form of division among Guineans, particularly since “unity and struggle” was the PAIGC's main ideological basis during the liberation struggle (cf. Cabral, 1974).

In Guinea-Bissau, since the end of the political-military conflict in 1999 and the assassination of Ansumane Mané in 2000, only one Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces has not come from the Balanta ethnic group, namely, Veríssimo Correia Seabra. Far from constructing a scapegoat, reference to this issue demonstrates that the choices of military leaders are no longer purely political and derived from questions of military strategy that are not scrutinized here. Rather, decisions are also dependent on the most dominant ethnic group in armed forces structures.

Temudo (2009) analyzed the origins of Balanta domination of the Guinean armed forces, mainly for his role in Guinea-Bissau's struggle for independence, and how PRS exploited the marginalization of this ethnic group for its political agenda. However, she highlights the danger of using ethnicity for political disputes in terms of the country's progress as it shifts the debate toward the terrain of identities instead of political projects and ideologies for the people's wellbeing.

3.4. International organizations and the peace building failure in Guinea-Bissau

In the section reviewing the relevant literature to contextualize the transition to multipartyism in Guinea-Bissau in the early 1990s, I addressed the decisive role of international organizations' pressure on the Guinean authorities to adopt the democratization course owing to the country's dependence on loans from the IMF and WB. According to Shaw (2015, p. 344), the decreasing values of these loans is one of the factors that explain why Guinean political elite members resort to illicit businesses such as drug trafficking, and, as I mentioned, arms trafficking, which was the click point to the 1998–1999 conflict, and illegal logging. These illicit businesses ensure their survival in the power struggle. Given the prominence of international organizations in Guinea-Bissau, the analysis in this study would be incomplete if we omit the discussion of their role in the country's political-military crises.

During the 1998 war, ECOWAS led the mediation process known as the “Abuja Agreement” (USIP, 1998). This document owes its name to the fact that it was signed in the Nigerian capital, where Nino Vieira and Ansumane Mané, leaders of the factions in

conflict, signed a ceasefire agreement to allow, among other acts, the entry of humanitarian aid to Guinea-Bissau as well as a sub-regional interposition force, ECOMOG, which would enable the withdrawal of the Senegalese and Guinean troops that were fighting for Nino Vieira. This was the beginning of ECOWAS' influence in the country's political chess. Following the conflict, in 1999, the UN established UNIOGBIS in Bissau to assist the Guinean authorities in peace building, thus strengthening its democratic process and implementing the Abuja Agreement (GI-TOC, 2021a, p. 6).

From that period to 2021, which is the focus of this study, there have been continuous involvement of such international entities in the quest of political and governance stability in Guinea-Bissau. ECOWAS has been among them playing the most prominent role, usually relying on supports of the other international bodies intervening in the country (ECOWAS, 2016), namely, the UN, the EU, the AU, and the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP). However, these particular or coordinated interventions by international organizations in Guinea-Bissau are not immune from contradictions, rivalries, and conflicts of interest fostered by member states' agendas.

According to LGDH's report (LGDH, 2010, p. 111) for the years 2010–2012, “geopolitical divergence between ECOWAS and CPLP” was a driving factor of political instability in Guinea-Bissau. This LGDH finding coincides with Massey (2016, p. 178–179)'s analysis, which demonstrates how the rivalry between these two organizations was manifested in the 1998–1999 political-military conflict, in which ECOWAS leaned in support of Nino Vieira's faction and the CPLP on Ansumane Mané's side. Later, in the scenario that led to the 2012 coup d'état, the CPLP's attempts to consolidate Lusophone influence in the country was seen by ECOWAS as threatening its sub-regional agenda.

Such evidence corrects Day, Khisa and Reno (2020) analysis, which includes Guinea-Bissau among the countries where interventions by sub-regional organizations would have exerted notable influences on improving civil-military relations. Even in the AU case extolled by these scholars, Sanches and Macuane (2019, p. 21)'s study is assertive in noting how the contradiction between the principles proclaimed by this continental organization and its performance toward authoritarian regimes in Africa. This is part of what Massey (Sanches and Macuane, 2019) calls AU ambiguities, particularly in its support to ECOWAS in the problematic 2012 post-coup crises mediation in Guinea-Bissau.

Serious inconsistencies equally abound in the UN's interventions in Guinea-Bissau. According to GI-TOC (2021a, p. 16), while the UN Secretary-General's 2020 report on the country pointed to increasing authoritarianism and violence against the voices opposing the regime led by Umaro Sissoco Embaló, the same organization's representative for West Africa and the Sahel claimed that the UN was supporting the views and policies of President Embaló. All these obvious contradictions in international organizations' positions on the recurring political-military crises in Guinea-Bissau show how they are part of constraints hindering peace building in the country, alongside lack of political will and military officers' resistance to embrace deep reforms in the armed forces.

Stronger states' geopolitical agendas within international organizations constitute another constraint to be highlighted as

a factor of what we could call lack of interest in peacebuilding within fragile states. In Guinea-Bissau's case, the interest in exploiting natural resources by so-called international partners can be scrutinized regarding two cases. First, Angola's investment in the country between 2011 and 2012 via CPLP for defense and security sectors reforms was accompanied by the interest in exploiting important bauxite mines located in the East of the country. The latest case originated in Senegalese President Macky Sall's support for Umaro Sissoco Embaló in the 2019 election. The most significant occasion of this support for our analysis is the Senegalese President's sponsorship, in Dakar, of the agreement signing that guaranteed Embaló the support of Nuno Nabiam, despite the two having engaged in serious mutual accusations during the political struggles from 2017 to 2019.

The most obvious counterpart to the Senegalese President's role in the election of Sissoco Embaló was the agreement secretly signed between Macky and Embaló in November 2021 for oil exploration in a controversial maritime area shared by Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. Under strong opposition from civil society, the parliament revoked the agreement between the two presidents, thus aggravating the already existing conflict between the organ and the President of the Republic, who wanted to impose a constitutional change on the legislature. More recently, [Kosta \(2022\)](#) analyzed the historical role of the colonial states of France and Portugal which, in 1964, initialed an agreement on this territorial domain with still present consequences in the relationship between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. The author argues the illegality of the agreement, which he considers to be seriously prejudicial to Guinea-Bissau.

The political instability in Guinea-Bissau, the growth of various forms of authoritarianism in West Africa, and the serious security problems caused by rebel groups and terrorists at many points in the sub-region are examples of ECOWAS' major challenges in quest for peace and consolidation of democracy in the sub-region. Moreover, among the problems analyzed in this study regarding the militarized democratization in Guinea-Bissau, [ECOWAS \(2013, p. 19–20\)](#) identifies three of them as factors making its area vulnerable to terrorist action: coups d'état, ethnic-religious conflicts, and drug trafficking. In the latter case, the proven connections between drug trafficking networks in different countries of the sub-region and the involvement of its political and military elites in this illicit business ([Shaw, 2015](#); [Expresso, 2022](#)) are demonstrative of how imperative it is for the ECOWAS to review its posture in the fight against drug trafficking and in strengthening democracy in its member states.

One of the main reasons for ECOWAS successive failures on intervening in Guinea-Bissau and other sub-regional countries relates to the fact that many of the most influential political leaders within the organization are leading authoritarianism in their respective countries—some of them even becoming leaders of ECOWAS structures. This fact agrees with [Obydenkova and Paffenholz's \(2021, p. 3\)](#) findings on reasons for the failure of international organizations' interventions in peace and democracy-building in many global contexts.

4. Final considerations

This study does not attribute to the militarization of power all the responsibility for the constraints that the democratization

faced the last three decades in Guinea-Bissau. Rather, it underscores the persistence of military power as among the factors that have contributed decisively to the permanent violation of democratic principles in the country. The presence of the armed forces in the political circle can be seen as legitimization that it acquired throughout the existence of the State of Guinea-Bissau, starting with the decisive role they played in the struggle for independence. Since then, they have been the real power holders in the country.

Alongside what is considered the militarization of democracy, factors such as corruption; the power struggle, of which the first element is an essential part and often resorting to the instrumentalization of feelings of ethnic belonging; and the dispute over the natural and financial resources of the country have remained constant among governance regimes in Guinea-Bissau.

This simultaneity of dictatorial and democratic elements over time can still be understood through the nomenclature of certain entities present in the separate phases of transition and the discursive elements of their main actors. Such are the cases of the "Revolutionary Armed Forces of the People" or the "Readjusting Movement" and the designation of 1991 as the "year of democratization." If these armed forces were indeed the vanguard for the independence of the Guinean people from Portuguese colonial domination, the role they continue to play in depriving the people of the legitimacy of being the holder of power in a pretended democracy must also be remembered.

Therefore, continuing with the attribute of being "of the people" is contradictory. As for the "Readjusting Movement," the years that followed the coup d'état that touted "readjusting" the ideological and governmental direction of the PAIGC brought little or nothing new to the country. Finally, the designation of 1991 as the "year of democratization" reveals the error of looking at the transitional process as a static event; this mistake is confirmed by the constant instability and weakness of Guinean democracy from its beginnings to the present.

The ongoing transition in search of the consolidation of democratic institutions is not peaceful. The transition is characterized by various political-military dissensions, constant risk of subversion of the constitutional order, and the co-option of popular participation in the supervision of governmental action using mechanisms of repression by those who govern and dysfunctional institutions such as the ANP and the Judiciary. These include the absence of judicial punishment of the possible murderers of soldiers, politicians, and civilians, even when the leaders of the acts were known, as in the case of coups d'état. Judicial processes were almost always forgotten or simply shelved, such as the investigations into the murder of Nino Vieira, filed by the Attorney General's Office in 2017 ([Deutsche Welle, 2017](#)). Self-amnesty was also a recurrent practice of the authors of the coups d'état that took place in Guinea-Bissau, in some of these cases benefiting from the approval of the ANP, in a wide-ranging institutionalization of impunity ([Mendes, 2013](#)). This vicious picture of impunity and command of weapons can be further exemplified by the violent events were discussed in this study.

Studies on militarizing political disputes in Africa attest to the correlation between ethnic armed forces, authoritarianism, and violent political change in the continent ([Harkness, 2017](#); [Allen, 2019](#); [Day et al., 2020](#)). As an approach to addressing these threats to democratization in Africa, Harkness points to the ethnic diversity of the Senegalese armed forces as preventing them from

being used for ethnic based political agendas. Indeed, besides the necessary reforms of military laws and improvement of their working conditions, including through the professionalization of their cadres, reform in the Guinean armed forces should include interethnic equilibrium in military structures. This measure will surely face opposition of various nature; however, no effective military reforms is possible without the courage of facing the real problems found within the armed forces.

However, as LGDH (2010, 2013, 2016) has been urging, such reforms should be carried out also in the country's judicial apparatus, in order to depoliticize and demilitarize its structures and laws. Alongside this, it is necessary to reform intervention policies, which are often cloaked in objectionable geostrategic intentions as well as leadership choices within the international organizations intervening in Guinea-Bissau, particularly those of ECOWAS and the AU, as it is unreasonable that authoritarian leaders with questionable or dubious relationships leading these entities will transmit a minimum of confidence in carrying out their duties.

Conditions shall remain status quo if the country's political organizations, actors, and the military do not distance themselves from one another and, above all, if the political actors and organizations do not delineate their political activities, in speech and action, far from all influences and relations with the armed forces. This shall transform the political space into a place of disputes between projects with consistent proposals for improving people's lives. For this, as Sanches and Macuane (2019, p. 21) discussed, the role of opposition is crucial in practicing democracy values within their structures and particularly when given the opportunity to rule the country. In this regard, Lindberg and Clark's (2008, p. 100) observation is indispensable: The best way to avoid military intervention to violent political change is to improve the people's living conditions.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2023.1078771/full#supplementary-material>

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