Big Man Politics and Regime Instability

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Voices of the People: Society, Politics and Public Opinion in Guinea-Bissau

Miguel Carter and Carlos Cardoso, editors

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10

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This chapter addresses the affliction of the Guinean people with the nation's political life and seeks to explain the causes of this distress. The political regime's chronic instability has had a devastating impact on the country. The consequences of which have led to serious governance problems, including widespread corruption. All this has hindered the country's development, fostered a predatory and extractive economy, weakened civil society, delegitimized the state and its regime, undermined national sovereignty, and aggravated perceptions of failure. These predicaments are the upshot of "big man politics."

Strongman politics is key driver of regime instability in Guinea-Bissau. This pattern of political behavior is guided by informal rules rather than official norms. Political leaders exhibit strength by having many followers, which fuels a clientelist and patrimonial approach to the exercise of political power. The strong man displays a toxic form of masculinity that thrives on, and instigates, a zero-sum, winner-take-all politics. This stirs frequent and fierce power struggles to ensure self-preservation and access to material benefits, needed to secure the loyalty of the leader's allies and followers. The fight to assert political clout can be absorbing and deflects attention from efforts to deal with key development challenges.

The argument is advanced in five parts. The opening section presents data showing the breadth and depth of popular anguish over the nation's political situation. The second examines Guinea-Bissau's political regime through a comparative lens and uses Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) data to chart its evolution. The third part analyzes the regime's historical construction, focusing on the intricate and precarious electoral democratization that has taken place from the 1990s onwards. The fourth section explains Guinea-Bissau's big man politics. It probes the institutional, political, economic, and cultural conditions that make it possible, and examines its modus operandi. The fifth part reviews the detrimental consequences of this pattern of political behavior for the country's development and sense of national self-esteem.

At the outset, we must define two key concepts used throughout the study: regime and democracy. By 'regime,' we refer to the formal and informal rules used to access key government positions and exercise state power. 'Democracy' is a political regime based on the principle of popular sovereignty and constitutional procedures that allow citizens to participate in the selection of their public representatives through periodic, free, and competitive elections. Under this regime, citizens are guaranteed freedoms of association and expression to promote their interests beyond the electoral cycle. Democracies operate under the principle of limited majority rule, which protects minority rights on the basis of the rule of law.[1] Free and competitive election cannot assure that elected authorities will govern in a democratic way. Democratic regimes, then, offer a distinct way of gaining access to state power – and exercising it.

[1] Carter (2010: 10-11). This definition is inspired by the work of Robert Dahl (1971, 1989), Giovanni Sartori (1987), Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan (1996), among other renowned political scientists.

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Popular Distress

People in Guinea-Bissau feel a deep sense of anguish over the country's political life. The Voices of the People study describes numerous perceptions and sentiments that account for this.[2] Concerns over the regime's instability include fears of political violence arising from the country's factional disputes. Popular resentment towards political leaders is closely entwined with great frustration over Guinea-Bissau's problems of corruption, impunity, and misrule. Among a segment of the populace, this has triggered doubts over the nation's future viability.

The 2018 public opinion survey revealed that 88% of Guineans believe that political party leaders are more interested in serving their personal interests than serving the people (7%). No other country in West Africa displayed such critical views of their political leadership as those found in Guinea-Bissau, considering that the region's average stood at 70%. Adding to this, 87% of Guineans think that political rivalry in their country can lead to violent conflicts; well above the score found across West Africa, which averaged 63%. Frustration over the nation's political misrule and widespread poverty impact overall perceptions of the country. In Guinea-Bissau, 82% of people think that the country is heading in the wrong direction, 26 points above the West African average, and ten points above the countries closest to Guinea-Bissau: Togo and Mali, the latter in the midst of war at the time of the survey was produced.[3]

Popular affliction over the nation's political mismanagement is corroborated by the results of the focus group study, carried out in late 2019. When asked about the country's political situation, Bissau-Guineans from different parts of the country and a variety of social origins underscored their disapproval and disappointment, in expressions such as these:

> What has complicated the country until today is the November 14, 1980, coup d'état. Then came the [civil] war that started on June 7, 1998, which completely destroyed the country. Today no one is someone in front of anyone. Respect has been lost. The culture of "*matchundadi*" [masculine virility] completely blew the country apart.[4]
>
> The fight between politicians is the one thing that worries us most, because it can lead to a bigger conflict, where weapons are used. We have the example of the June 7 war. We don't want this to happen again.[5]
>
> Politicians only think about their pockets, their children, and women. They don't think about us. We are struggling day and night, but they do nothing for the people.[6]

The Political Regime

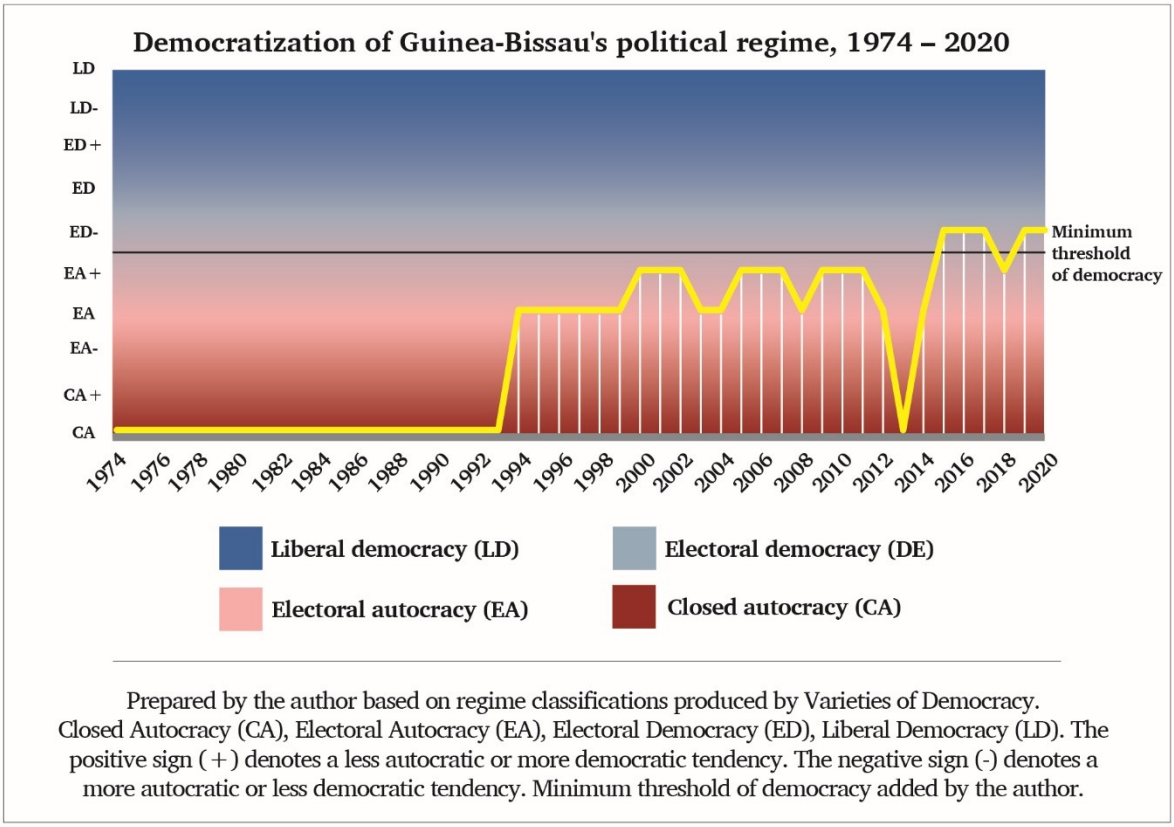
Guinea-Bissau's political regime has experienced various changes since national independence. In the 1990s, it embarked on a protracted, complex, and tenuous democratic

[2] In particular, see chapters 1, 5 and 6 in this volume.
[3] Carter (2020a); also see chapter 6, by Carter, in this volume.
[4] Interview with 51-year-old man in Bissau, Carter (2020).
[5] Interview with 33-year-old woman in Bissau, Carter (2020).
[6] Interview with 35-year-old woman in the village of Binhal, in Empada, Quínara, Carter (2020).

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transition, amidst great difficulties in establishing the rule of law. Data produced by Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), an international academic consortium based in Sweden, dedicated to global research on democracy, are illuminating in this regard. Using their classifications, we can map the regime's evolution between 1974 and 2020.

Figure 10.1



Prepared by the author based on regime classifications produced by Varieties of Democracy. Closed Autocracy (CA), Electoral Autocracy (EA), Electoral Democracy (ED), Liberal Democracy (LD). The positive sign (+) denotes a less autocratic or more democratic tendency. The negative sign (-) denotes a more autocratic or less democratic tendency. Minimum threshold of democracy added by the author.

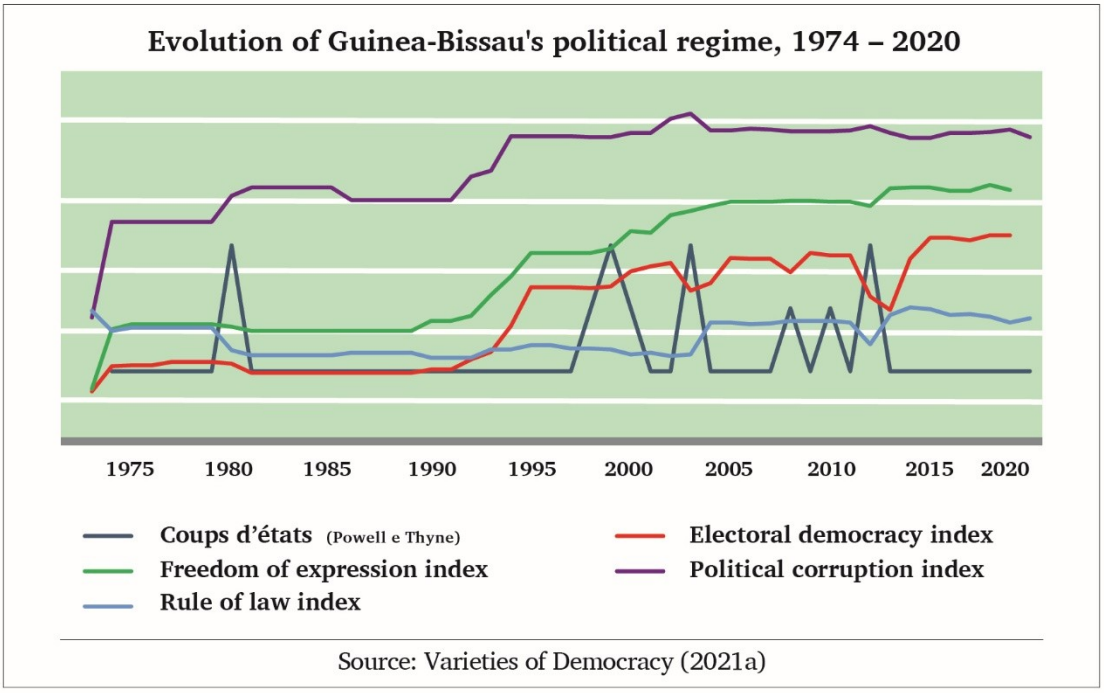
Guinea-Bissau was a closed autocracy during the first twenty years after independence, ruled by a one-party state. Despite the complete overhaul of the nation's leadership and other major changes that followed independence, the regime maintained an element of continuity with the system established under Portuguese rule. Both colonial and post-colonial regimes were authoritarian in nature, albeit of different strains. The country's first multiparty elections were conducted in 1994. This led to a transition from a closed autocratic regime to an electoral autocracy, with spates closer to the minimum democratic threshold between 2000 and 2011. This was interrupted by a military coup in 2012. Under strong international pressure, however, the nation resumed its democratic transition in 2014, with free elections for president and parliament. These developments raised the country's democratic standing.

Between 2015 and 2017, Guinea-Bissau hovered above the minimum democratic threshold, a first time in its history, notwithstanding V-Dem's reservations about the quality of the regime. Failure to comply with the Conakry Agreement, signed between President José Mário Vaz and opposition leaders in 2016, led to the imposition of international sanctions on political figures linked to Vaz, which prompted V-Dem's downgrading in 2018. The 2019 legislative elections raised the regime's standing above the minimum threshold, yet with reservations about its democratic status.

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The ensuing graph traces the historical trajectory of the Guinean regime since independence, using five V-Dem indexes.

Figure 10.2



As can be observed, Guinea-Bissau's political democratization has been buoyed by the expansion of freedoms of expression, since the early 1990s, and the establishment of elements of an electoral democracy after 1994, with various fluctuations between 1998 and 2013.

since is the freedom of expression index, while the most problematic is the rule of law index, which explains the high levels of political corruption. Electoral democracy rises from 1994 onwards, but with several fluctuations between 1998 and 2013. As the rate of coups d'état shows, this was the period of greatest political instability in the country.

Using the same V-Dem indexes, once can compare Guinea-Bissau's trajectory in relation to four neighboring countries: Senegal, Guinea-Conakry, The Gambia, and Cape Verde. As the following graphs reveal, Cape Verde and Senegal share certain similarities in their stronger democratic standing. By contrast, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea-Conakry display lower scores on all four indexes. The difference between these pairs is notable with regards to the rule of law and political corruption indexes, where the two Guineas display a problematic performance. The Gambia, for its part, presents a strong variation as a result of the authoritarian regime led by Yahya Jammeh, between 1994 and January 2017.

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Figure 10.3

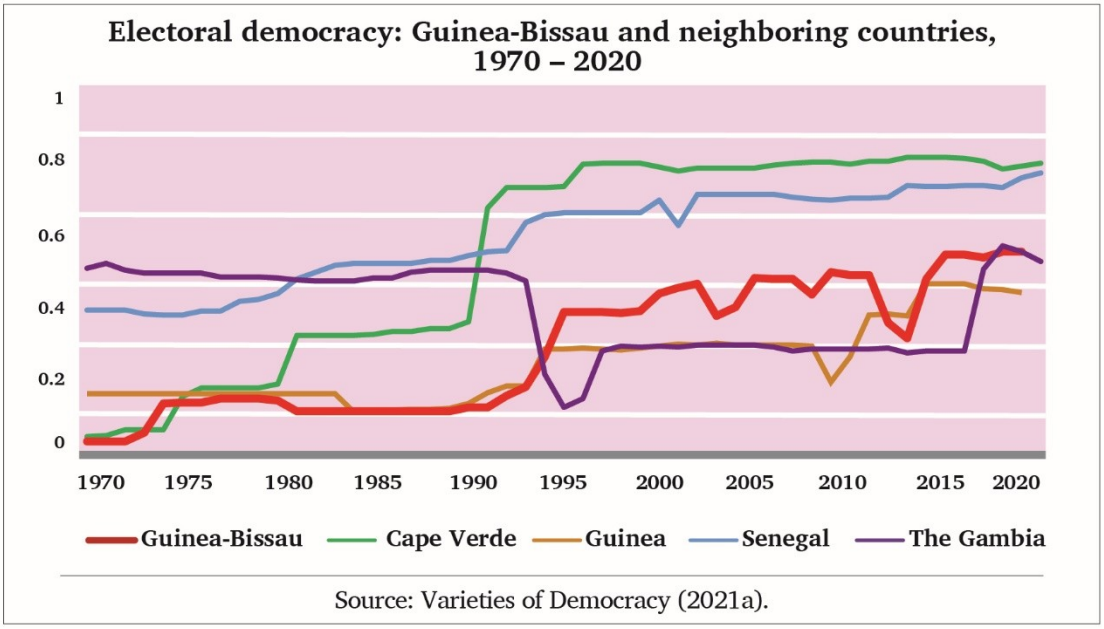
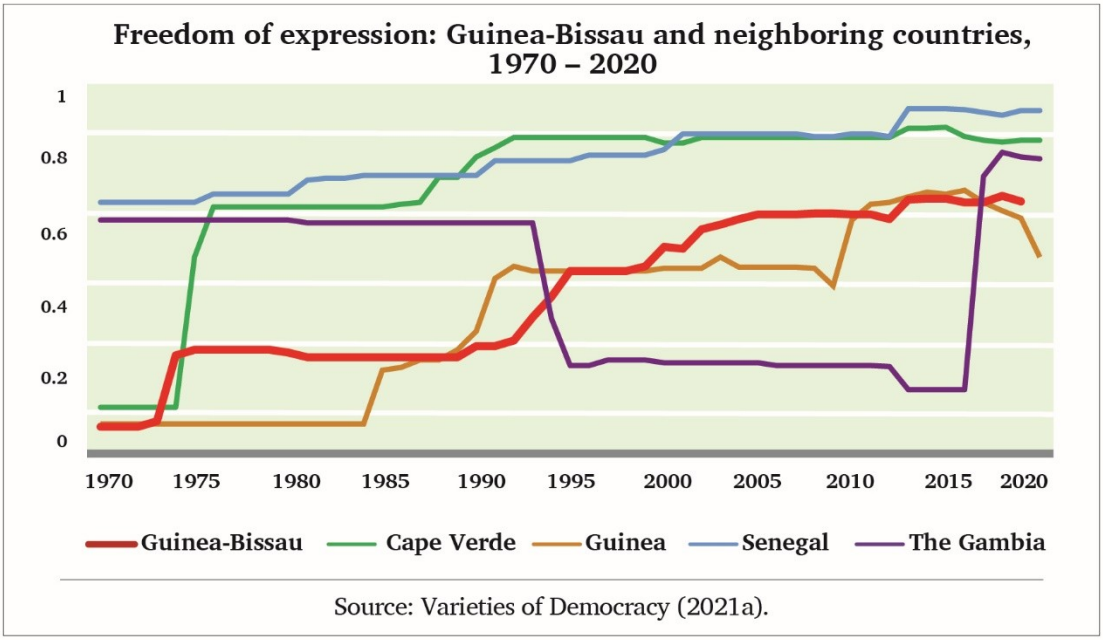


Figure 10.4



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Figure 10.5

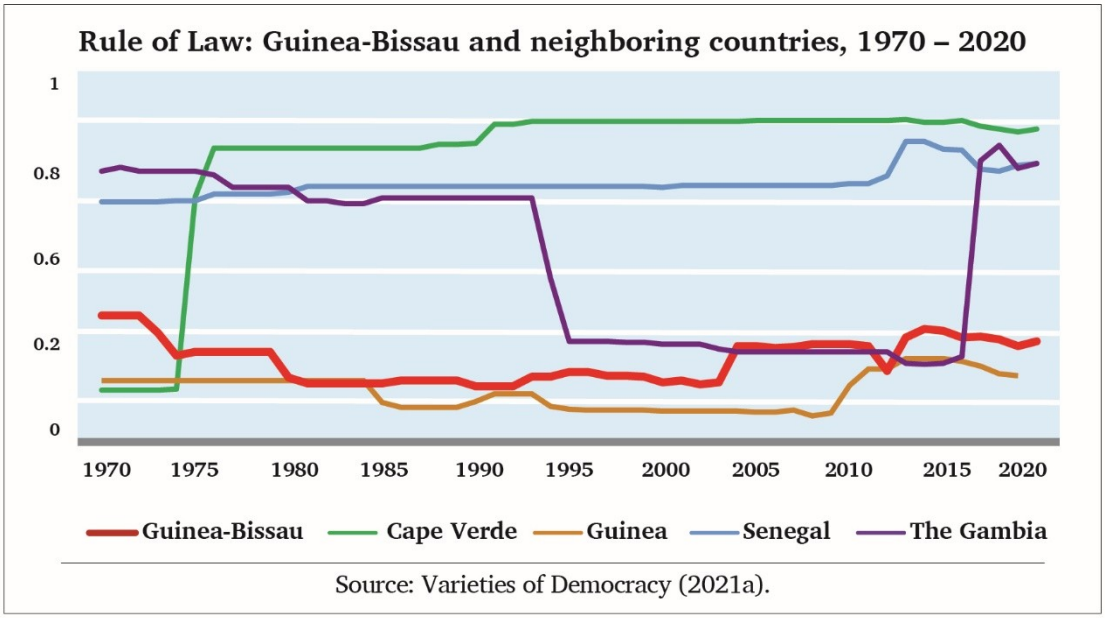
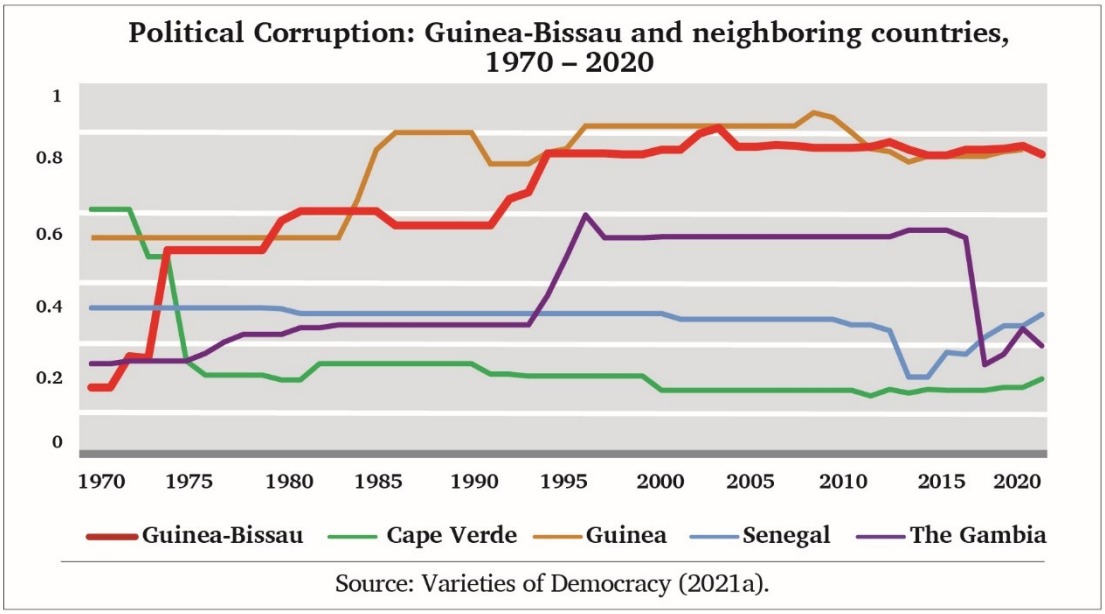


Figure 10.6



The trajectory of Guinea-Bissau's regime depicted through the V-Dem indexes reveals a prolonged, troubled, and fragile democratic transition. It has been a democratizing regime, at its main thrust, but one that is ambiguous, oscillating, precarious and personalized. *Ambiguous*, as it combines a democratic institutional framework with a weak – at times null – adherence to the rules of the democratic game. *Oscillating*, in that it wavers between a liberalized electoral autocracy, with possibilities of exercising various civil liberties, and a fragile electoral democracy of dubious quality. *Precarious*, due to its institutional weakness, inconsistent loyalty to democratic norms, and the fluidity of the political forces engaged in the regime. *Personalized*, as it revolves around a pattern of big man politics.

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Historical Construction

From Colonial Rule to a One-Party State

The nation-state of Guinea-Bissau emerged as result of Portuguese colonization of a territory inhabited historically by a variety of indigenous peoples and local resistance to this foreign occupation. Until the end of the nineteenth century, Portuguese colonial rule was restricted to a few towns and almost imperceptible in rural areas. Under pressure from the main colonial powers in Africa, Portugal embarked upon a process of territorial conquest and domination of Guinea-Bissau. This intensified under the military campaign led by Major Teixeira Pinto, between 1913 and 1915, and executed with extreme violence by Abdul Injai, a Senegalese mercenary. Thousands of lives were decimated through a policy of state terrorism, inflicted mainly upon non-Islamized communities. The colonial regime established in the aftermath of its military conquest was highly authoritarian, akin, in its severity, to South Africa's apartheid system, in the way it discriminated against the native population and restricted their civil rights.[7]

Resistance to the colonial regime gained greater impetus in the wake of the Pindjiguiti massacre, in 1959. A dockers' strike in the port of Bissau, prompted Portuguese troops to open fire and kill 50 workers, while leaving more than 100 people injured. This episode led to the militarization of the *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (PAIGC), the country's main force advocating national independence. Under the charismatic leadership of Amílcar Cabral, the PAIGC established a vertical party structure. While providing spaces for representation and internal debate, the PAIGC operated largely under the aegis of a strong man – an affable intellectual, who lived austerely and held intense political convictions.[8]

Amílcar Cabral's assassination in January 1973 deprived the PAIGC of its main political leader, eight months before the party declared Guinea-Bissau's independence and began to take over the reins of the country. The demise of Portugal's authoritarian regime and departure of colonial troops in 1974 bolstered the nation's independence. Once in power, the PAIGC established what Juan J. Linz defined as a "post-independence mobilizational authoritarian regime." According to Linz,

> Single-party mobilizational authoritarian regimes created by political leaders emerging from and mobilizing the grassroots, and not from above by the ruler, were possible in societies of low economic development, particularly with a relatively egalitarian peasant rural structure, where the modern economic elite was small.[9]

Regimes of this type permeated much of the African continent in the 1960s and 1970s. In Guinea-Bissau, the single-party era – from 1974 to 1994 – had two distinct periods. The first

[7] On the conquest of Bissau-Guinean territory and the colonial regime, see Forrest (2003: 105-141). Comparison with South Africa based on V-DEM (2021a) scores for its civil liberty index between 1948 and 1972.

[8] On Amílcar Cabral's leadership, see Mendy (2019), Chabal (2003) and Dhada (1993).

[9] Linz adds: "The weakness of traditional authority and the lack of understanding of complexities of legal rational authority made the emerge of at least a semblance of charismatic leadership possible" (2000: 227-229).

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phase took place under the presidency of Luis Cabral, Amílcar Cabral's half-brother. During Luis Cabral's government, the regime's main repressive powers were exercised by the political police. A military coup in 1980 ushered in the presidency of General João Bernardo (Nino) Vieira, a prominent military commander during the liberation war. Vieira enhanced the power of the Armed Forces under the single-party regime.

The 1980 coup was fueled by the economic failures of the Cabral government, due to excessive state control of the economy and misguided development policies. These had prioritized large industrial projects in a country based overwhelmingly on a peasant economy. High inflation and scarcity of basic foodstuffs and supplies created a deep sense of malaise. All this took place in an atmosphere beset by police repression and a mounting detachment between the nation's political elite and the popular masses. This situation exacerbated identity cleavages between the revolutionary elite of Cabo Verdean and Bissau-Guinean origin. These internal PAIGC disputes and the climate of social unrest triggered the 1980 military uprising. Its promoters described the event as a "Readjustment Movement." This coup led to a break up between Cabo Verde and Guinea-Bissau. The PAIGC retained power in Bissau, yet underwent, in Linz's terms, through a:

> Transformation of the single party from a disciplined, ideological mass movement into a flexible machine that maintained solidarity among its members by appealing to their self-interest, while allowing for the play of factions and for recurrent reconciliation, relying characteristically on the attraction of material rewards rather than enthusiasm for political principles.[10]

Nino Vieira maintained a statist economic policy during the initial years. He also centralized state-party decision-making in an autocratic manner, and intensified persecution of regime opponents. The statist economic model proved unsustainable in the early 1980s, as the support provided by the socialist bloc began to crumble. Runaway inflation, high costs of maintaining the security apparatus, and the state's inability to provide public services and offer essential consumer goods through *Armazéns do Povo* (People's Stores), aggravated the nation's economic and social crisis. Moreover, the Vieira regime was beset by growing international pressure to adopt state reforms, while facing increasing internal conflicts.

In October 1985, Nino Vieira accused more than 50 senior civil servants and army officers of "planning a coup d'état." These involved the Minister of Justice, the former Attorney General, dozens of top-rank military officers, including from the presidential guard. Twelve dissidents were tried and sentenced to death, six of whom were executed in 1986. The episode accentuated President Vieira's authoritarian drift and generated significant internal and external condemnation. These developments led to the formation of an anti-authoritarian movement based in Portugal.[11]

[10] Following Linz, this is how "nationalist leaders became political bosses," operators of a clientelist party machine (2000: 231). On Guinea-Bissau's single-party regime, see Semedo (2021).
[11] The leading opposition to the single-party regime – the Guinea-Bissau Resistance / Bafatá Movement (RGB-MB) – was founded in Lisbon, in 1986.

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Faced with various economic and political adversities, the Vieira government agreed to adopt the IMF and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Program, in 1986.[12] This led to the liberalization of the economy overall, and commerce in particular. Most public companies were privatized during this time, to the benefit of PAIGC stalwarts, few of whom had any business experience. The distribution of state assets to key political allies led to the rise of a network of PAIGC politicians with strong business interests. In subsequent years, these men would play an influential role in the country's public affairs.[13]

Electoral Democratization

Under the impetus of the country's economic liberalization and mounting pressure from international donors, the regime agreed to sponsor a political opening in the 1990s. The Constitution was revised in 1991 to liberalize the political regime, guaranteeing freedoms of expression and association. This resulted in the formation of new political parties. In 1993, the Constitution was amended again to democratize the political system and establish proper guarantees for the holding of free and fair elections. These reforms led to the creation of the National Electoral Commission and instituted a law which required the president to be a civilian. As a result, President Nino Vieira was compelled to relinquish his position as an active-duty general in the armed forces.[14]

The 1993 constitutional revision led to the adoption of "a semi-presidential system, with a strong presidential bent."[15] In Guinea-Bissau, the president appoints the prime minister and can dismiss the government after holding consultations. The president chairs the Council of Ministers, which, in principle, allows the head of state to direct the government at will. Furthermore, the president can issue executive decrees and veto legislative acts, which require a two-thirds vote of the National Assembly to be overruled. The president can also dissolve parliament within a certain time frame. In addition, the president appoints the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, the Attorney General, ambassadors, and designates the members of the Superior Council of the Judiciary, responsible for court appointments. On top, the president is responsible for handling the country's foreign affairs.[16]

The 1991 and 1996 constitutional reforms laid the foundations for the decentralization of administrative power and the election of local authorities. But these laws were never enforced. As a result, political power in Guinea-Bissau has remained highly concentrated in Bissau. This is the upshot of decisions taken during the era of state-party rule, which retained centralist policies adopted under colonial rule. Three decades after these legal reforms, all

[12] The first Economic Stabilization Plan, sponsored by the IMF and World Bank, was adopted in 1983. On the Impact of the Structural Adjustment Program, see Monteiro (1996).
[13] According to Raul Mendes Fernandes, economic liberalization led to the "transformation of the state bureaucratic class into a commercial and land-owning bourgeoisie," which, "for lack of solid economic bases, remained linked to the state apparatus centered on the figure of the President" (1994: 31, 35).
[14] On the onset of the democratic transition, see Augel and Cardoso (1996), Koudawo and Mendy (1996).
[15] Azevedo (2009: 139).
[16] Azevedo (2009: 144-149). The new constitution approved by the National Assembly, in 2001, granted greater powers to the parliament, but was vetoed by Kumba Yalá, who insisted on maintaining his presidential prerogatives.

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eight regional governors, the mayor of Bissau, and administrators of the country's 37 municipalities, continue to be appointed by the central government.

Guinea-Bissau's first multi-party election history took place in July 1994, after a year-long delay. The election proved to be spirited and competitive. The new political freedoms facilitated a lively public debate. Nino Vieira, the PAICG presidential candidate was reelected to office, after defeating Kumba Yalá, of the PRS (*Partido da Renovação Social*), by a small margin. The PAIGC also won a majority of the vote for the National Assembly.

Between 1994 and 2019, Guinea-Bissau held ten competitive electoral cycles: seven presidential and six legislative elections, three of which were simultaneous.[17] Considering the second-round vote in six presidential elections, the country held 18 national votes in 26 years. This is an unprecedented development in Guinea-Bissau's history. All the more considering that these were not sham elections, but actually competitive disputes. After Kumba Yala's election and PRS victory in 1999, Bissau-Guinean votes have resulted in presidential and legislative party alternations in power and enabled the rise of new political leaders. Losing candidates have often attributed their defeat to acts of "fraud."[18] International observers, however, have deemed all these elections sufficiently "free and fair."[19]

The intense mutual suspicions and rough play among contending parties – at times, laced by acts of disloyalty – can be attributed to the transitional nature of these contests. On occasions, these acts culminated in restrictions to the exercise of the power conferred through the ballot box. Arbitrary measures of this kind triggered intense political crises, such as the military uprisings of 1998, 2003 and 2012; the assassination of President Nino Vieira in 2009; and, more recently, the president's attempt to prevent the appointment of a PAIGC prime minister, after the party's victory in the 2019 legislative elections.

Instances of precarious loyalty to the rules of the game expose other deficits in the quality of elections in Guinea-Bissau. The opacity of campaign finance, for one, has facilitated the use of funds derived from illicit sources, notably the drug trade. Adding to this, elections have also suffered from the improper use of public resources and clientelist practices. Elite appeals made to voters based on ethnic identities have been a regular phenomenon since 1994. Not all politicians have resorted to this campaign tactic, which tends to attract minor segments of the electorate. Still, the recourse to these electoral strategies risk politicizing tribal identities.

[17] The electoral cycles took place in 1994 (simultaneous: legislative and presidential), 1999 (simultaneous), 2004 (legislative), 2005 (presidential), 2008 (legislative), 2009 (presidential), 2012 (presidential, interrupted by a military coup before the second round), 2014 (simultaneous), 2019 (legislative), 2019 (presidential).

[18] For instance, Kumba Yalá denounced as "fraudulent" all the elections in which he was defeated (in 1994, 2005 and 2012), except his setback in the 2009 second-round contest with Malam Bacai Sanhá. The legislative elections of 2004 and the presidential vote in 2019 triggered major controversies regarding the actual management and judicial review of electoral disputes. For detailed information on these legal conflicts, see Mendy and Lobban Jr. (2013) and Monteiro (2020).

[19] The Voices of the People survey revealed, in 2018, that 75% of Bissau-Guineans think that elections in their country are "completely free;" 8% say they are "relatively free;" while only 9% say they are "not free at all."

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The democratic transition initiated in the 1990s fostered the development of Bissau-Guinean civil society. [20] This arena had been the subject of severe restrictions under colonial rule and the one-party state. Political liberalization undermined the PAIGC's hegemony over the nation's popular organizations and the news media. The rise of various new social organizations, including independent trade unions, women's and youth groups, began to reshape the nation's societal dynamics. This activism was supported to a considerable extent by newly established NGOs and religious organizations, notably the Catholic Church. New radio stations and privately-owned newspapers were created during this time, which fueled the political opening through the exercise of newfound press freedoms and access to public information. These developments, nonetheless, have been hampered at times by sporadic acts of repression, enduring financial constraints, and the concentration of activities and resources in Bissau, to the detriment of the creation of civic networks of national scope and presence.

Chronic Instability

Efforts to advance Guinea-Bissau's democratic development have taken place in a highly unstable political environment, fed by a weak and politicized state.[21] The 1980 coup boosted the role of the military in the nation's political life, adding clout to the aura attained during the national liberation struggle. Military leaders were particularly engaged in politics between 1998 and 2013, at the height of the country's bout of institutional volatility. The following chart illustrates the main crises that contributed to Guinea-Bissau's political instability since independence. These include the civil war of 1998-1999; three military coups; the assassination of the president in 2009; the violent elimination of three Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces; the murder or execution of 21 political, military, and social leaders; 16 military uprisings and attempted coups d'état;[22] 21 dismissals of prime ministers; and the arbitrary removal and detention of the highest judicial authorities in 2002. The classification of each of these 58 incidents between 1974 and 2019, with scores attributed in varying scale based on the gravity of the facts, enabled the following depiction of Guinea-Bissau's checkered political trajectory.[23]

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[20] Civil society, here, refers to a modern arena social interaction, distinct from the state, political society, market society, the family and individual life (Carter 2010: 13). Guinea-Bissau has a rich social history tied to community life and ethnic traditions. Hybrid organizations generated in these settings, combining modern and traditional traits, such as inter-village associations, have contributed to the rise of contemporary civil society in rural areas. On the history of civil society in Guinea-Bissau, see Forrest (2003) and Cardoso (2008).

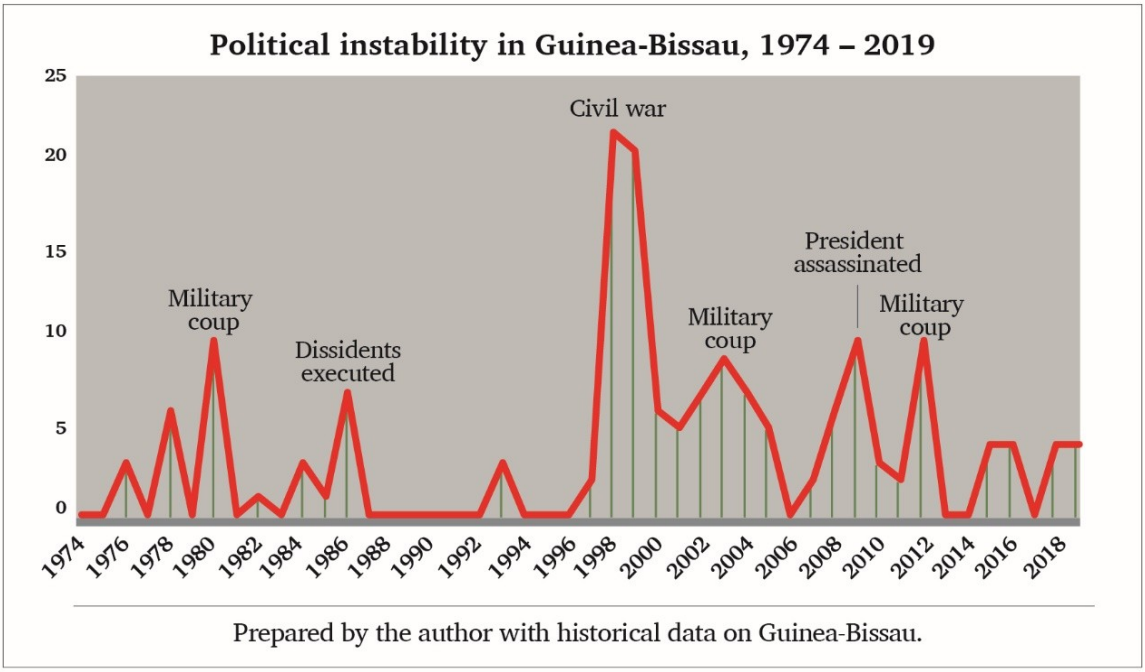
[21] The literature on Guinea-Bissau's political instability has developed substantially in the last two decades, see Bijagó (2011, 2017), Bordonaro (2009), Carvalho (2014), Daju (2016), International Crisis Group (2012, 2014), Jarju (2019), Nóbrega (2003, 2015), Rudebeck (2001, 2011), Sangreman (2019a), and Storeloff (2013).

[22] Coup d'états, their attempt and rumors of, were so frequent in Guinea-Bissau that people began to make distinctions between *intentonas* (actual attempts) and *inventonas* (fictious attempts), used mostly as an excuse to repress political opponents.

[23] The political instability chart draws on historical data provided by Mendy and Lobban Jr. (2013) and various news sources. The score given to each episode was based on the following classification: civil war (20 points); coup d'état (7 points); assassination of the president (5 points); violent elimination of the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces (3 points); assassination of other political, military and social leaders (1 point); military uprisings and attempted – real or invented – coup d'état (serious cases

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Figure 10.7



The most dramatic episode during this period was the civil war of 1998-1999, which ended with the overthrow of President Nino Vieira. The conflict centered mostly in Bissau. Still, it claimed the lives of close to 2,000 people, led to the internal displacement of about 400,000 Bissau-Guineans and more than 5,000 seeking refuge abroad. Moreover, it destroyed approximately 5,000 homes and public buildings, including the presidential palace.[24] The ensuing years, leading up to the 2012 military coup, were of significant political turmoil. Between 2014 and 2019, following the resumption of the democratic transition, there were no coups, military uprisings, or political assassinations. During this time, the main outbursts of instability took place after President José Mário Vaz dismissed the government of Prime Minister Domingos Simões Pereira, in August 2015. At the time, Simões Pereira was PAIGC leader. This decision strained relations with the National Assembly, dominated by the PAIGC. The political impasse led to frequent changes in government. During the Vaz presidency, Guinea-Bissau had nine prime ministers. On average, these governments stayed in power for only six months. This created a situation of great flux and paralysis in the management of the state's apparatus.[25]

The 1980 coup unleashed a sequence of political ruptures and tensions which reinforced the historical weakness of the Bissau-Guinean state and further politicized its public

involving attacks on a national authorities, a high number of deaths or prisoners taken, 3 points – minor incidents, 1 point); prime-ministerial dismissals (by the president, a parliament vote of no confidence or coup d'état, 2 points); arbitrary removal and detention of the highest judicial authorities (3 points).

[24] Mendy and Lobban Jr. (2013: 95-96).

[25] Of the nine prime ministers appointed during Vaz's presidency, two were designated twice, Baciro Djá and Aristides Gomes. During this time, the prime ministers who stayed in office the longest were Umaro Sissoco Embaló (14 months) and Domingos Simões Pereira (13 months). On the political dynamics of this period, see Sangreman, Martins and Proença (2019: 12-21).

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management. According to the Fund for Peace, between 2012 and 2021, Guinea-Bissau ranked 17 among the most fragile states in the world, on par with Burundi, Ethiopia, and Niger.[26] On the basis of this index, the main sources of state fragility in Guinea-Bissau are the strong divisions among political elites, lack of state legitimacy, low quality of public services, high levels of social inequality, and recurrent external intervention in the country's affairs.

Other indexes highlight Guinea-Bissau's shortcomings in public administration and the rule of law.[27] These problems are closely entwined with the extensive practice of corruption, discussed in Cardoso and Sanhá's chapter in this volume. The politicized state in Guinea-Bissau's is one in which power is personified and public decisions are personalized. As a Bissau-Guinean public prosecutor explained, this setting, "prevents legal enforcement. This is reinforced by high levels of impunity. In the judicial system and public administration, the rules are not observed, and this is not punished, because some individuals are protected. Legal decisions are taken thinking more about the person involved rather than the law."[28] The country's judicial disarray was described by the president of the Supreme Court of Justice, in 2017, as a "turbulent term … we mostly had our hands tied and were unable to do anything".[29]

These statements confirm the low ratings given to institutions meant to uphold the rule of law in Guinea-Bissau. Over the first two decades of the twentieth century, the World Governance Indicators, produced by The World Bank, placed Guinea-Bissau in the 16th lowest rank in terms of the capacity to enforce legal norms, on par with Guinea-Conakry and the Yemen.[30]

International impact

Guinea-Bissau's democratic transition was strongly influenced by international trends and forces. The regime's political overture was preceded by the adoption of economic liberalization policies, promoted by the IMF and the World Bank. The global wave of democratization in the 1990s, fueled by the fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1989, added momentum to this impetus for change. Among various Bissau-Guinean circles, this *Zeitgeist* or spirit of the times fueled hope and actions in support of a democratic transition.

The government's extensive reliance on foreign aid made it highly receptive to ideas and initiatives promoted by the country's main donors, notably, the World Bank, European Union, United Nations, and Portugal. Between 1974 and 2019, Guinea-Bissau received US$10.3 billion in development assistance from its international partners, an amount that averaged 32% of the country's gross national income. Foreign aid reached its highest peaks between 1986 and 1998, during the incubation of the democratization process. During this period,

[26] The Fund for Peace (2021) rankings covers 178 nations and territories around the globe.
[27] According to the Economist (2021), Guinea-Bissau and Mali have the lowest scores in sub-Saharan Africa for functioning of government. The Ibrahim Index of African Governance (2021), however, ranks Guinea-Bissau better on matters of rule of law and access to justice, placing it in the 28th position among 54 African countries. Yet on corruption, Guinea-Bissau drops to 47th place.
[28] Manuela Lopes Mendes, interviewed by Miguel Carter, Bissau, February 20, 2020.
[29] Supreme Court Justice, Paulo Sanhá, cited in Sangreman, Martins and Proença (2019: 30).
[30] The rule of law index covers 200 countries and territories, see World Bank (2021b).

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international donors contributed, on average, 57% of Guinea-Bissau's gross national income.[31] External support for the country's democratization can be discerned in smaller – yet crucial – donations. These included financial assistance to help organize all elections held in Guinea-Bissau since 1994, paid for mostly by the European Union and its member countries.

The wave of political crises unleashed in 1998 triggered several external interventions. During the 1998-1999 civil war, Senegal and Guinea-Conakry sent close to 2,400 soldiers to bolster the government of Nino Vieira. This decision exacerbated nationalist reaction among the rebel troops led by General Ansumane Mané, opposed to President Vieira. The international community made various efforts to mediate between belligerent factions in this and other conflicts. Most attempts were led by ECOWAS in coordination – albeit at times in competition – with the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) and other international actors. These diplomatic undertakings produced the short-lived 1998 Abuja Accord; the restoration of the democratic transition after the 2003 and 2012 military coups; and the Conakry Agreement in 2016, in an effort to ease the political impasse between President Vaz and the PAIGC. Adding to these endeavors, the United Nations established a peace mission in Bissau, between 1999 and 2020, widely known as UNIOGBIS.[32]

As a result, Guinea-Bissau experienced a constant presence of foreign troops in the wake of its civil war. Aside from the military forces dispatched by Senegal and Guinea-Conakry during this confrontation, ECOWAS sent a mission, known as ECOMOG, between 1998 and 1999, with a reduced number of soldiers. Between 2011 and 2012 Angola dispatched a military mission to Guinea-Bissau (MISSANG). The presence of Angolan troops stirred a political crisis that eventually sparked the 2012 coup. ECOWAS subsequently replaced the Angolan force with ECOMIB, which operated from 2012 to 2020. The ECOMIB force involved troops from various countries in the region, funded after 2015, by the European Union.

Guinea-Bissau's political instability has rendered the nation highly susceptible to geopolitical influences and the penetration of global drug trafficking networks. The region's variegated political environment has shaped many of these occurrences, amid instances of democratic progress and setback, in countries led for the mostly by powerful big men. Autocratic strongmen such as Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, Guinea-Conakry's Lansana Conté, The Gambia's Yayha Jammeh, and Angola's José Eduardo dos Santos, provided negative leadership models for Guinea-Bissau's democratization. A full appraisal of the role of international forces on the nation's regime must recognize its variable and even contradictory effects. At times, they have contributed to democratization; at other moments they have strengthened authoritarian impulses. On occasions, foreign actors have exacerbated existing tensions, while in other circumstances they have buttressed stability.

Political Learning

Bissau-Guineans experienced a process of political learning amid the country's prolonged and turbulent political democratization. Influential actors in politics and civil society and citizens at-large, have taken part of this didactic curve. Considering its long autocratic past, Guinea-

[31] The total figures for overseas development assistance are in constant values, based on a 2005 index. The data and deflator used are from The World Bank (2021a).
[32] On the impact of international organizations on Bissau-Guinean politics, see Carvalho (2016).

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Bissau made substantial democratic progress between 1991 and 2020. During this time, it adopted a democratic constitution; established free and competitive elections, with parties alternating in power and high levels of popular participation in the electoral process; and enabled the rise of a pluralist and modern civil society, with capacity to advance new ideas and foster change. After 2014, it also saw diminished military involvement in political affairs; and in 2020, witnessed the first uninterrupted completion of a presidential term, with José Maria Vaz's departure from office, amongst other signs of progress.

For all its troubles, Guinea-Bissau's democratic development since the 1990s has been unprecedented. During the colonial era and one-party state, the populace lived under a closed autocracy, fearful of voicing dissent. Many citizens resented the abuse of power, human rights violations, corruption and gross mismanagement of the state under the authoritarian regime and pushed for the nation's democratization. Others sized the winds of change. The chronic political instability that ensued, amid a protracted and tenuous transition, beset by big man politics, has caused great harm; yet also imparted several hard lessons.

The pedagogic process has raised self-awareness, nurtured attitudinal change and contributed to an element of political moderation. External sanctions on proscribed political behavior have played a part in this as well. Restrictions imposed by the United Nations and the European Union on the 2012 coup leaders, and the arrest of Admiral José Américo Bubo Na Tchuto by US government agents, on drug trafficking charges, have raised the cost of blatant violations of international norms. Such forms of deterrence can also induce political learning.

The adoption of democratic attitudes among Bissau-Guinean political elites has been uneven – halfhearted, at times, when not superficial. Still, it remains an acquired experience. Signs of this can be construed from the fact that at the start of the twenty-first century's third decade, none of the country's major players appears to show a distinct appetite for autocratic practices of yore, involving outright, *manu militari* suppression of democratic procedures. This might seem like a modest achievement. But in Guinea-Bissau it is not. Assumed with honesty or hypocrisy, this disposition alone can be viewed as a tentative sign of progress.

Big Man Politics

Big man politics has been a crucial source of regime instability in Guinea-Bissau.[33] This pattern of politics is driven by a leadership style that exhibits elements or pretensions of charismatic authority. Its roots lie deep in various processes embedded in the country's history, including its war of national liberation. The long-drawn-out transition to democracy, initiated in the 1990s, created a more fluid and competitive setting that intensified power disputes among rival strongmen. This section explores the institutional environment, political context, economic conditions, and cultural heritage that have shaped and nourished big man politics in

[33] The concept of big man politics is taken from Hyden (2013) and is synonymous to the notion of strongman politics. In Guinea-Bissau, the term "big man" (*homem grande*) refers to elders: older men, presumed to be wiser. Thus, in Portuguese the best translation of "big man" would be *homem forte* (or strongman). The classic study of personal rule in Africa is by Jackson and Rosberg (1982). A more recent appraisal, which underscores popular disapproval with 'big man rule' in Africa, can be found in Dulani and Tengatenga (2019).

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this West African nation. The analysis concludes with a review of strongman politics, its modus operandi and effects on political democratization.

Institutional Environment

Big man politics in Guinea-Bissau gained an added impulse with the rise of a competitive electoral regime in a milieu distinguished for its weak observance of formal rules. Constitutional design flaws have amplified possibilities for political conflicts that personalized power struggles.

Establishment of a competitive electoral regime. The new institutional framework set up in the early 1990s altered Guinea-Bissau's political tempo in fundamental ways. Political liberalization and the introduction of a competitive electoral system ushered-in an element of democratic uncertainty that changed power dynamics in the selection of the country's leadership. The intensely competitive nature of this regime can be ascertained by the political alterations that took place after the 1999, 2005, 2009 and 2019 elections, and the narrow electoral margins observed in several contests. In the aftermath of the civil war and the coups in 2003 and 2012, key political leaders, civil society representatives, and members of the international community were quick to call for the restoration of the nation's democratic framework. Guinea-Bissau's spirited multiparty regime has created a competitive arena where politicians of various stripes vie to be a 'big man.'

Weak observance of formal rules. Informal institutions are prevalent in Guinea-Bissau. Personal relations can trump or bend impersonal rules. The fragility of state formation in this country, during and after the colonial era, the novelty and weak enforcement of legal precepts, and political habits acquired prior to the democratic transition account for much of the casual attachment to official norms. Authoritarian legacies and the penchant towards informal politics have intensified perceptions of uncertainty arising from the nation's difficult and complex regime transition. Throughout this period, Guinea-Bissau has experienced two distinct types of political uncertainty. The first derives from the country's intense electoral competition and the indeterminate quality of the voting results. This form of uncertainty is commonplace in any setting with democratic inclinations. The second type of uncertainty relates to Guinea-Bissau's precarious and protracted transition, due, in no small measure, to elite deficit in compliance with institutional rules and mistrust generated by this. The double uncertainty of outcome and procedure creates an environment conducive to political skirmish and informal dealings. This bodes well for those disposed to find cover allies within the military and secure illicit campaign funds. Great uncertainty over a prolonged period of time is likely to breed ambiguity in the observance of democratic norms, albeit in varying measures.[34]

Problematic institutional design. Big man politics has flourished in Guinea-Bissau as a result of political bottlenecks enabled by constitutional design. The country's semi-presidential-cum-presidential system is a key factor in all this. As Juan J. Linz and other political scientists have underscored, these arrangements are afflicted with the perils of presidentialism. Presidential systems have dual sources of democratic legitimacy. Voters select the head of the

[34] Carter (2021).

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executive office and members of the legislative body in separate ballots. This duality allows for stalemate and potential conflict between the two branches of government. In addition, presidents have fixed terms in office and are difficult to remove through constitutional procedure. Presidentialism also favors a majoritarian system where winners-take-all and losers get nothing.[35] Semi-presidential regimes include an added source of possible friction between the president and prime minister; aggravated in countries where strongman politics is prevalent. Bissau-Guineans have a popular saying to describe this menace: "two roosters cannot crow in the same chicken pen."[36] Leading experts in the field agree that a semi-presidential-cum-presidential system is highly problematic for young democracies.[37] In Guinea-Bissau, these problems are aggravated by excessive concentration of power in the nation's capital, to the detriment of the country's subnational governments, at both regional and local levels. All in all, heightened state centralization incentivizes big man politics by raising the stakes involved in the quest to run the national government.

Political Context

Various political dynamics in Guinea-Bissau – notably, the dispersion and fluidity of political forces, fissures within the dominant party, and military involvement in politics – have created an auspicious milieu for strongman politics.

Dispersion and fluidity of political forces. The democratic transition led to the rise of new political forces and leaders, which expanded and intensified competition for power. PAIGC lost the political hegemony established during the war of national liberation. The wear and tear of internal attrition, the rise of new electoral competitors, and the 1998-1999 civil war, which led to the confrontation between military forces tied historically to the PAIGC, weakened the party's political grip. PAIGC's electoral defeat in 1999 crystallized this fact. The ascent of *Partido da Renovação Social* (PRS) strongman Kumba Yalá, and his chaotic and arbitrary rule, added to the erosion of the president's authority and reputation. Rifts within the PAIGC, other political parties, and the Armed Forces led to fierce conflicts on various fronts. The lack of stable political actors and alliances – and strong counterweights in the private sector and civil society – created a power vacuum. These exacerbated perceptions of institutional disarray. The context of political fluidity and endemic power struggles among new and old political elites, unleashed a momentum that produced a new cohort of military and civilian strongmen.

Splits within the dominant party. PAIGC infighting and breakaways have been a major source of political instability since the struggle for independence. Practically all the parties that emerged during the democratic transition resulted from internal divisions within the PAIGC. The *Partido da Renovação Social* (PRS) was created after the arrest of several military and political officials, on October 17, 1985, accused of plotting a coup d'état. Most of these PAIGC leaders were of the Balanta ethnic group; several were tortured; six were subsequently executed, including the former vice president of the republic. An important number of

[35] Linz (1994).

[36] Interview with 49-year-old man in Buba, see Carter (2020).

[37] Elgie (2005), Azevedo (2009), Lobo and Amorim Neto (2009). Kafft (2016), on the other hand, defends the idea of a presidential system in Guinea-Bissau, yet does so on the basis of a superficial review of the existing literature.

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Balanta leaders left the PAIGC as a result of this episode, and created the PRS in 1992, a major PAIGC rival in the ensuing elections. The main contest during the 2005 presidential vote took place between two emblematic PAIGC figures: Nino Vieira and Malam Bacai Sanhá. Vieira ran as an independent candidate and won the election, in a challenge widely viewed as an effort to settle old scores among rival PAIGC factions. In 2018, leaders from another important ethnic base of the PAIGC, the Mandinga and Fula, created a new political party, the *Movimento de Alternância Democrática* (MADEM), as a result of an intra-party dispute between Domingos Simões Pereira and Braima Camará, an ally of president Umaro Sissoco Embaló. Over the years, PAIGC's internal disputes have fed the regime's penchant towards big man politics.[38]

Military involvement in politics. The People's Revolutionary Armed Forces played a decisive role in securing Guinea-Bissau's independence, which conferred the military with a special status. Their crucial role in the 1980 coup that overthrew the nation's first civilian president opened the gateway for military participation in practically all subsequent power transfers. General Nino Vieira's ascent to the presidency established de facto military supremacy. The victory of General Ansumane Mané's rebel forces in the 1998-1999 civil war reinforced the power and authority of armed actors. Mané's soldiers were mostly former combatants in the liberation struggle. After the war, the military became the informal "regulators" of the nation's public life.[39] This fundamental shift in orientation explains their critical impact on the country's political life between 2000 and 2014.

In 2000, Mané rebelled against President Kumba Yalá and was killed soon after by soldiers loyal to the president. Yalá was overthrown in 2003, in a military coup supported by the main opposition parties. In 2009, a group of soldiers killed President Nino Vieira, in retaliation for the physical elimination of the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Batista Tagme Na Waié, earlier that day. In 2010, General António Indjai kidnapped Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior for a few hours. His mutiny forced the removal of the military Chief of Staff. Indjai's appointment as Chief of Staff shortly afterwards generated widespread controversy. In 2012, a military coup led by Indjai thwarted the presidential run-off vote to prevent the expected of Gomes Junior, the PAIGC candidate. Yalá and other political leaders defeated in the first-round vote, supported the military's intervention.

International sanctions imposed on the leaders of the 2012 coup decreased military engagement in Bissau-Guinean politics. This was reinforced in 2013 with the arrest of Admiral Na Tchuto by US anti-drug agents, and the international warrant issued by the US Department of Justice for the arrest of General Indjai on charges of drug trafficking. Indjai was subsequently removed as military Chief of Staff in 2014, by President Vaz. In the following years, the military exhibited a more discreet and respectful attitude towards civilian authorities. Still, the Armed Forces have preserved informal prerogatives, which have hindered full civilian control and oversight of their institution.

Economic Conditions

[38] On the formation, behavior and intrigues of the country's political elites, especially the PAIGC, see Cardoso (2002), Nóbrega (2003) and Storeloff (2013).
[39] Koudawo (2001). On the military and its political influence, see Embaló (2012) and Djau (2016).

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Informal economic practices, a feeble national bourgeoisie, and elements of an illicit political economy have also nurtured an environment conducive to big man politics.

Informal economic practices. These arrangements are prevalent in Guinea-Bissau and be discerned from the fact that 83% of the economically active population is self-employed.[40] Popular markets are scarcely regulated, if at all. Contraband accounts for a substantial portion of the country's trade. Informality and the predominant peasant economy, engaged mostly in cashew nut and rice farming cultivated on family-size plots, in villages with firm communal ties, has restricted the impact of capitalist social relations in rural areas. This is the upshot of the country's economic underdevelopment and limited expansion of capital. Over the last two decades, foreign direct investment in Guinea-Bissau has been one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa, with an annual average of 1.7% of the gross domestic product (GDP). Compared to its neighboring countries, Guinea-Bissau's average rate was 59% lower.[41] High levels of informality disaggregate and weak representation of class interests. The country's communal ethos and economic informality have reinforced the personalization of public life and, with it, the practice of strongman politics.

Feeble national bourgeoisie. This is the result of the country's historic underdevelopment and private sector dependence on political privileges. In Guinea-Bissau, politics dominates the economy, rather than the other way around, as generally observed in advanced capitalism. The supremacy of politics is a legacy of the anti-colonial struggle, and the result of the historical weakness of national economic actors.[42] Private sector development has been hamstrung by monopoly of finance capital in the hands of political actors. The prevailing business model in Guinea-Bissau, as in other African countries, is that of the politician-entrepreneur, who uses his personal influence to obtain state favors and concessions. Crony business practices have exacerbated corruption. Above all, they have led to the misappropriation of the country's natural wealth: its timber, fisheries, and heavy mineral sands. This has generated personal fortunes used to fund the political involvement of these entrepreneurs.

Illicit political economy. Drug trafficking, in particular, but also smuggling and illegal timber trade have served to enrich their political patrons, finance election campaigns and ensure the impunity of the actors involved. Forged around drug trafficking, smuggling, and the illicit timber trade have served to finance electoral campaigns and ensure the impunity of the actors involved. Drug trafficking reached a peak in 2005, thanks to the mediation of local businessmen and the protection accorded by prominent military and political authorities.[43] During this time, Guinea-Bissau gained worldwide fame as a transit point for cocaine from South America, as it transshipped close to 20 tons of cocaine per year, if not more.[44] The

[40] Estimate obtained from the Voices of the People survey. In rural areas, this figure involves 94% of the economically active population. On economic informality, see Forrest (1992, 2003).

[41] Senegal, Guinea-Conakry, The Gambia, and Cape Verde.

[42] Hyden (2013: 28). On Guinea-Bissau's political economy, see Sangreman (2019b).

[43] Shaw (2015), Kohl (2016). Both authors report that Nino Vieira's costly presidential campaign in 2005 was largely financed through drug trafficking.

[44] Tonnage estimated by the director of UNODC in Guinea-Bissau, see Loewenstein (2019: 66). On the impact of drug trafficking on Bissau-Guinean politics and the region, see Ceesay (2016). According to the Voices of the People survey, in 2018, 37% of Bissau-Guineans noted they have seen people enrich themselves with drug trafficking. In Bissau, this finding increased to 46% of the population.

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narcotics trade fostered corruption and aggravated the country's political instability. It has played a role in instigating political assassinations, influenced developments leading up to the 2012 military coup, and fostered renewed political tensions in 2019, following the apprehension of close to 2.7 tons of cocaine, in two anti-narcotic operations.[45] The 2012 coup ushered-in a period of massive illegal logging of native hardwood trees for export to China. These activities were overseen by top brass.[46] The illicit political economy has bankrolled Bissau-Guinean strongmen and shaped its politics in acute ways.

Cultural Heritage

Big man politics is reinforced by cultural norms and patterns of social behavior that affect the exercise of power relations in Guinea-Bissau. Here, we underscore three aspects of political culture: the control over people – rather than territorial domination – as a source of power; strong communal traditions; and the culture of *matchundadi* or cult of extreme masculinity.

Control over people as a key source of power. Africa's expansive geography, ill-defined frontiers and porous borders established a different historical tradition in the exercise political authority and control.[47] As Goran Hyden explains, in Africa, the "purpose of politics in precolonial society was to accumulate subjects in order to rule, not land."[48] This approach differs considerably from that found in the more densely-populated European continent and much of the Americas as well, where state authority was defined by the command over a well-defined territory. In these parts of the world, power is often attached to individual land possession, hence the importance of its delimitation. By contrast, in Guinea-Bissau and other parts of Africa, historically, because of the relative ease with which people could move from territory to the other, authorities derived their main political strength from the ability to retain people's loyalty. This derives from the custom of communal land ownership, which differs considerably from individual possession adopted mostly in Western countries. The need to maintain control over people creates a more fluid and transactional political dynamic. Leaders must invest considerable efforts to attract and maintain followers and create alliances – and if needed, instill fear of their wrath.[49] This practice tends to personify power relations as leaders strive to cultivate popular support, hence the affinity with big man politics.

Strong communal traditions. The long history of Guinea-Bissau has been that of rural society, organized around resilient communities, with shared arrangements to manage land and other natural resources held in common. Social bonds derived from this setting are built on primordial loyalties related to family clans, the place of origin, neighborly ties, friendships, ethnic and religious connections. In this milieu, authority is exercised in personalized ways, which creates an ambiance of greater flexibility. Personal relations become a priority, in a setting where the unspoken rule is to maintain good ties with the leader and his entourage, including family, friends, followers, and allies. The social ethos that emanates from these

[45] Pereira (2022). The reputed collaboration between state agents, political elites and international crime networks in Guinea-Bissau alludes to various elements of "state criminalization," as discussed in Bayart, Ellis and Hibou (1999).
[46] Environmental Investigation Agency (2018). According to the UNDP (2021), between 1990 and 2016, Guinea-Bissau had a deforestation rate of 11.5%.
[47] Herbst (2000).
[48] Hyden (2013: 56).
[49] Hyden (2013: 56-57).

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networks is geared largely to solving particular problems rather than to promote universal policies. The history of communal society in Guinea-Bissau is associated with practices that have fostered interethnic ties and coexistence among neighboring villages through transactional alliances.[50] The legacy derived from this includes the ability to relate to different groups, build coalitions and deploy transactional politics to ensure success.

The culture of *matchundadi*. The cult of extreme virility embodies a set of values and practices that underscore hyper-masculine notions of strength, courage and insubordination, including the ability to stand above the law and intimidate others through the use physical and symbolic acts of violence.[51] The cult of extreme masculinity stems from a patriarchal understanding of society. In Guinea-Bissau, this has been reinforced by the demonstration of male power under various ethnic traditions, Portuguese colonialism, and in the fight for national liberation and strongman politics of the post-independence era. The *matchu* [macho] seeks to impose his authority by means of force, whether in a domestic, communal, religious, or political context. The constant battle to enforce his power, even amongst allies, creates continuous friction and instability. Big man politics thrives on this fluid and restless political culture.

Institutional, political, economic, and cultural settings can describe the conditions that enabled big man politics to rise and flourish in Guinea-Bissau. But they cannot fully account for its main characteristics involved in this mode of political leadership, hence the importance of examining its *modus operandi*.

Modus Operandi

This section provides a series of elements that allow us to outline a typology of big man politics, to better assess the informal norms that guide much of Bissau-Guinean politics. The conceptual analysis draws on the work of various social scientists, and especially Goran Hyden's review of African politics. The goal, here, is to assess key traits and patterns of interaction that account for the way these strongmen work. Their modus operandi can be discerned through the following practices and dispositions, which:

Are guided by informal rules. Power relations are personal and informal. Unwritten rules prevail over formal ones. Informal practices are, in effect, institutionalized. They are the dominant way formal institutions operate. Rules are often bent or adapted to suit habitual forms of exercising power. The supremacy of politics rests on a social logic, oriented by personal and affective ties.[52] The absence of clear rules and the prevalence of unwritten norms fosters a more ambiguous and uncertain environment. Politics, in these settings, is less restrained, more ambiguous, fluid, and personalized. This raises the stakes for politicians and amplifies a sense of insecurity among the general public.[53]

[50] According to Forrest (2003), this multi-ethnic coexistence explains the remarkable popular resistance to the implantation of Portuguese colonial rule in the 19th and 20th centuries.
[51] Moreira (2017: 2).
[52] Hyden (2013: 74). On informal institutions, see Helmke and Levitsky (2006), and in African politics, see Chabal and Daloz (1999).
[53] Hyden (2013: 97). One of the key informal rules of Guinea-Bissau's politics is to maintain a good relationship with the military and traditional powers, and in particular, with the *régulos* [traditional leaders].

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Need a lot of followers. The leader must accumulate supporters and allies to build his power base. This is achieved in three ways: *(i)* By showing his personal strength, through the display of energetic attitudes and a sense of charismatic vigor;[54] *(ii)* by "spending money conspicuously" and sharing this wealth in ways that will allow the leader to amass a following and demonstrate he has one to others;[55] *(iii)* by establishing a clientelist base, based on the exchange of goods and services for political support. To sustain his base, the leader must accumulate resources and brandish his wealth.[56]

Generate high transaction costs. Narrow coalitions pose a threat to the ruler's control, given competing reciprocities and risk of alliance breakaways. To gain and preserve power, leaders have a rational incentive to maximize coalitions and coopt other players. "Nurturing the myriad of reciprocal relations on which it rests takes a lot of personal energy and resources. Personal accumulation of resources by the ruler becomes necessary in order to sustain these relations. Much of this is comes through misappropriation of public funds."[57] The main challenge for leaders operating in such environments are not the high transaction costs, but the cost of transgression. The greatest fear among strongmen is the disloyalty of their followers and allies.[58]

Respond to a communal sense of politics. Political rationality is embedded in a context of primordial reciprocities that involve local demands and interests. This creates an ecosystem where "rulers continue to see their interests tied to local communities rather than to systems of abstract rule. They act at the level of the state as they do in their community."[59]

Nurture patrimonial and clientelist practices. Under systems of personal rule, "participation in power [...] provides a hold of the economy, much more than the opposite."[60] These favor arrangements that merge public and private interests. In such settings, corruption becomes a normal way of doing politics. However, the scale of funds diverted, their destination, and the ways in which they are misappropriated, can vary considerably. Big men usually view their followers as clients rather than citizens. The need to garner votes in a multiparty regime provides an opportunity to reinforce clientelist relations and the affective ties that often bind them.[61]

Exhibit strategic, affective, and opportunistic patterns of behavior. Big men usually display a complex set of personal and political motivations. The leader can be pragmatic and temperamental, to the point of sporting an air of charisma. He can be impetuous and abrasive in his show of passion, and thus exacerbate conflicts. His strategic demeanor, however, is

[54] Charismatic qualities displayed by strongmen help bridge the gap between formal and informal institutions, Hyden (2013: 56, 84).
[55] Hyden (2013: 76).
[56] Hyden (2013: 104).
[57] Hyden (2013: 105-106).
[58] Nino Vieira underscored his own fixation with the costs of infidelity, describing Guinea-Bissau as "a country of betrayals," see Nóbrega (2003: 187).
[59] Hyden (2013: 115).
[60] George Balandier apud Bayart (2009: 70).
[61] Hyden (2013: 81), Moreira (2017: 268-269). On the intricate nature of political clientelism, also see Auyero (2000).

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fueled by a significant measure of opportunism, liable to ally with his foes and betray his partners.

Foster zero-sum politics. The big-man style of leadership is not inclined to make concessions or agree to inclusive solutions based on win-win formulas.[62] Instead, what prevails is 'winner-takes-all' politics. The tendency for mutual punishment between rivals can be significant. Strongmen thrive in a context of animosity and conflict. All this aggravates instability.[63] Because of the pervasive sense of insecurity, political bosses are inclined to conspire against their perceived enemies, while striving to safeguard or amass power, and secure the resources need to sustain their political clout.

Struggle for power and its privileges. The main political fights, here, are over the spoils of power. In essence, this involves a dispute about being able to "sit at the table," and not be excluded. Those who are not accommodated "are left to languish in the wilderness."[64] The distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' defines key dynamics of political life. This environment is conducive to the idea that 'friends get everything' and 'opponents must be annihilated.' The latter can be accomplished through various means. Opponents can be crushed through the use of legal instruments as political weapons. They can also be attacked through orchestrated campaigns and repeated use of lies to defame their public image. In extreme cases, they can be suppressed with physical violence. Disputes over ideology or political programs are greatly diluted in such environments. Distinctions between conservatives and progressives, or right and left, are obfuscated, or barely relevant at all. What matters is the power struggle between the ruler and his rivals, and the groups attached with each.

Display a toxic masculinity. The big man is a macho leader who personifies power. This feeling entitles him to stand above the law and make discretionary use of state authority and resources.[65] The strongman believes in the rule of force and demonstrate this treading on formal rules, or simply ignoring them. He thrives while flaunting his impunity. Big men are often aggressive and vindictive, to the point of trying to humiliate their opponents – or, if possible, eliminate them.[66] Still, these leaders can be generous with their followers and seductive in their demeanor, especially in the quest to prove their manliness with women. Rhetorically, the macho leader is inclined to take on a hypermasculine pose and use dramatic, even vitriolic forms of speech that can evoke persecutory traits.[67]

Draw on African witchcraft to pursue power. Big men have been known to resort to African rituals mediated by masters of the occult, to establish 'contracts with ancestral spirits' in the quest to attain and preserve political power. In this cosmovision, access to power derives from the ability to honor agreements made with these spirits. Political power, here, is attained through the spiritual design unleashed by ancient forces embedded in local traditions. Though carried out in a discreet manner, witchcraft rituals have conferred the diviners –

[62] Hyden (2013: 87).
[63] Hyden (2013: 130, 93).
[64] Bratton and Walle (2002: 86).
[65] Moreira (2017: 194, 210, 269).
[66] Moreira (2017: 201, 228, 240).
[67] Moreira (2017: 237, 252-253).

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djambakós and *baloberu* for animists, and *murus* among the Muslims – with considerable influence over these political leaders. Strongmen usually seek guidance from these warlocks, and the mystical forces they invoke, prior to taking important decisions. The high-risk environment, constant suspicion and political uncertainty create a psychological need for protection. This has led several Bissau-Guinean political and military leaders to invoke assurances from hidden sources of power conferred through African witchcraft rituals.[68]

Big Man Politics and Democratization

Leaders such as Nino Vieira, Kumba Yalá, Ansumane Mané and António Indjai exemplify the idea of the big and strong man, in military affairs and politics. Vieira was president of the republic for almost 21 years. Yalá was his main opponent and president for three and a half years. Mané led the military rebellion that deposed Vieira. Indjai was commander of the Armed Forces during a troubled period of national life. Viera and Yalá drew up the main contours of the big man approach to leadership in government and opposition. Their political conduct created a precedent that influenced a generation of leaders linked to the country's two main political parties, PAIGC and PRS. All four strongmen were combatants in the war of national liberation; Vieira was the most famous and feared of them all. Vieira, Mané and Indjai illustrate the key role played by the armed forces in the formation of Guinea-Bissau's strongmen.

In their heyday, each of these four figures personified political power. All were embroiled in conspiracies and coups d'états and exercised their power in arbitrary ways – by operating above and beyond the rule of law. Viera and Mané experienced tragic deaths. Yalá died of illness. Indjai still has an international arrest warrant pending for involvement in drug trafficking. To be a strongman in Guinea-Bissau is to lead a life on the edge.

Big man politics has been a pivotal source of regime instability in Guinea-Bissau, and thus, a major impediment to its democratic progress. In spite of these drawbacks, all four leaders embraced an element of democratic ambiguity. Notwithstanding his authoritarian past, Vieira ushered in a democratic transition during the 1990s. Yalá competed in the first four national elections, and eventually conceded defeat in two of them. Faced with significant domestic and foreign pressing, Mané and Indjai authorized competitive elections after leading their respective coups d'états. These developments evoke the following paradox: in Guinea-Bissau, democratic progress has taken place despite big man politics, yet also with support of its strongmen.

As we have seen, Guinea-Bissau's precarious democratization is the result of a combination of several process. Pressure exerted by a number of international donors played a critical role. Though more understated, the Bissau-Guinean diaspora also as had a distinct impact. The demand for democracy within Guinea-Bissau – from its political and civil society actors, and public opinion at large – added a discernable push to this impetus.[69] This demand was shaped

[68] The appeal to occult powers in Guinea-Bissau is described by Jarju (2019: 99-101), and in Africa, Chabal and Daloz (1999: 65-69). Miguel de Barros contributed valuable ideas on this subject.

[69] Public opinion attitudes in favor of democracy, were recorded in the Voices of the People survey, presented in chapters 1 and 2 of this volume. The demand for democracy in Guinea-Bissau is akin to that found in other African countries, see Gyimah-Boadi, Logan, and Sanny (2021).

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through a process of political learning among Bissau-Guinean elites and citizens. The gradual assimilation of democratic norms owes much to the fact that its electoral principles are widely accepted across the globe as a suitable formula to attain political legitimacy.

These conditions shed light on a discreet affinity between big man politics and electoral contests. Elections offer a mechanism through which strongmen can display their clout, vie for power and legitimize their ascent to public office. However fragile the institutional setting, under a competitive electoral regime, big men can learn to channel their disputes in a more restrained way. Doing so over a period of time, can create habits and instill a "civilizing process," as explained by Norbert Elias.[70] Periodic use of formal rules, even in volatile settings, can attenuate or mollify informal ones. Acquired habits can gradually reinforce the legitimacy of electoral institutions and raise the cost of their suppression. Any move to restrict the competitive process would engender a strong reaction from political rivals, among them, aspiring strongmen. Curtailing competitive elections under these conditions would elicit a high cost, since it would eliminate a familiar venue through which strongmen – and their contenders – can vie for power. Elite interest in preserving the nation's electoral framework among Bissau-Guineans mirrors this calculus.

The broader lessons derived from this assessment dovetail Dankwart A. Rustow's seminal argument on the origins of democracies.[71] Democracy, in this view, does not emanate from a set of social conditions, smart institutional blueprint or surging 'democratic spirit'. Rather than this, democracies arise from the quest to pacify political conflicts; to reduce their damage and avert the worst. With time, the democratic strategy used to foster coexistence creates enduring habits and interests tied to its self-preservation. As Rustow explains, in conflictive environments, democracy is not born as "the original or primary aim" of the political actors involved but is "sought as a means to some other end" or comes "as a fortuitous by-product of [their] struggle."[72] This line of reasoning suggests that big man politics in Guinea-Bissau is amenable to a slow process of political maturation. The result of which may well attenuate the regime's chronic instability and help democratize its strongman politics.

Consequences

The consequences of big man politics have been nefarious for Guinea-Bissau's governance, development and self-esteem. It has fueled chronic regime instability, fostered a predatory economy, and undermined the state's integrity, efficacy and legitimacy. The effects involved are multifarious. This section underscores seven crucial outcomes of strongman politics. These consequences are entwined in a feedback loop, where outputs turn out to be inputs that keep the vicious cycle going. Breaking through this tailspin requires a clear understanding

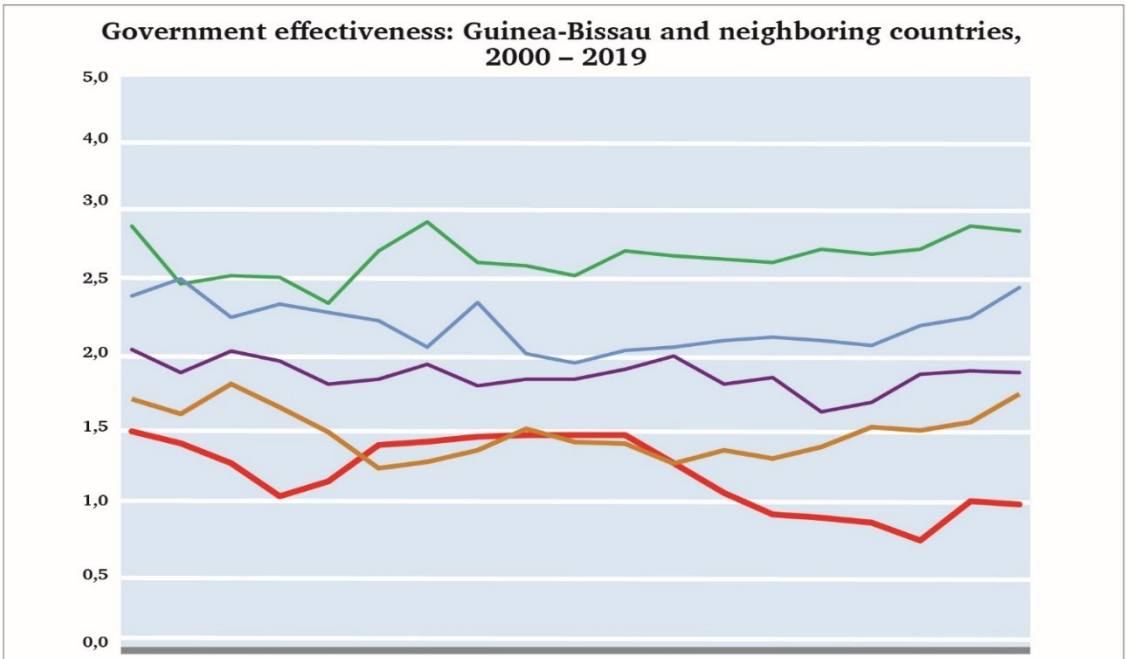
[70] According to Elias (1982), the civilizing process involves a gradual disciplining of passions and other raw impulses in a more methodical forms of behavior.
[71] Rustow's classic study on transitions to democracy was published originally in 1970 and reprinted in Anderson's (1999) collection of essays which probe the lasting impact of Rustow's argument.
[72] Rustow (1999: 28). In the same text, the author points out that incipient democracies do not have "lukewarm struggles but [rather] a hot family feud," with highly uncertain political outcomes. "The fight may go on and on till the protagonists weary and the issues fade away without the emergence of any democratic solution along the way" (1999: 29).

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of the problem and willingness to find creative solutions. The closing comments outline some ideas in this regard.

1. Poor governance and widespread corruption. Political instability since the onset of the war for national liberation, in the 1960s, has been a key obstacle to development and good governance in Guinea-Bissau. Efforts to establish a durable regime after independence fell prey to recurrent political conflicts: a civil war, numerous coup d'états, political assassinations and feuds that have led to government paralysis and decay. Political conflicts over elite capture of the state aggravated problems of politicization and corruption within the public administration, the judiciary, and security forces. These multiple setbacks produced one of the globe's most inefficient governments. During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, according to the World Governance Indicators, Guinea-Bissau ranked 19th among the least effective governments in the world.[73] In West Africa, only Togo and Liberia, which suffered a civil war between 1989 to 2003, scored lower. Among neighboring countries, Guinea-Conakry is the only one that comes close to Guinea-Bissau, as can be observed in the following chart.

Figure 10.8



Produced with data from the World Governance Indicators. The original score has been modified to facilitate the presentation of data, but the scale (from 0 to 5 points) remained the same.
Source: World Bank (2021b).

The same World Bank indicators show that perceptions of corruption in Guinea-Bissau are among the highest in the globe. Between 2000 and 2019, on average, Guinea-Bissau stood

[73] The government effectiveness index covers 195 countries and territories and "reflects perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies," World Bank (2021b).

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among the 13 most corrupt countries in the world.[74] No other West African nation received such a problematic score. Political instability, then, has fueled misgovernance and corruption.

2. Arrested development. Frequent government turnovers, state disarray and corruption produced by big man politics have contributed significantly to Guinea-Bissau's status as one of the poorest nations in the world. In 2019, it ranked at the bottom 14 of the UNDP's human development index, on par with Congo, Liberia and Guinea-Conakry. Life expectancy among its citizens was just 58.3 years. Only seven countries in the world, all of them in Africa, had a lower life expectancy. Gross national income (GNI) per capita in 2017 was barely US$1,996 per year, measured in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). This placed Guinea-Bissau among the 14 most impoverished nations in the world, close to Haiti and South Sudan. Per capita income in Guinea-Bissau was 46% lower than the average for all sub-Saharan African countries.[75] Public investment in education in Guinea-Bissau – only 2.1% of its GDP – was lower than all but four nations in the world: South Sudan, Congo, Papua New Guinea, and Bangladesh.[76] As the Voices of the People research has shown, popular aversion towards these disconcerting trends has been enormous in Guinea-Bissau.[77]

3. Extractive economy. Over the last three decades, Guinea-Bissau has reinforced an extractive model of economic development, based on the exploitation of its natural resources and export of raw materials. The bulk of the wealth generated through this system has remained concentrated in a handful of elites, with political connections and links to international trade circles.[78] The Structural Adjustment Program, adopted in the mid-1980s, strengthened a pattern of growth based on the export of agricultural monocrops, notably cashew nuts, but also logging and fisheries. Cashew nuts represent almost 90% of the country's exports and are the main source of employment for 80% of the rural workforce. It is estimated, however, that up to 60% of the wealth generated through the cashew harvest remains in the hands of the big traders: national exporters and foreign importers, and especially the latter.[79] Because of its disproportionate reliance on cashew nut exports, generated through rainfed farming, Guinea-Bissau remains strikingly vulnerable to international commodity price variations, agricultural pests and climate shocks.

Commercial fishing and logging, often carried out in unlawful ways, have reinforced the country's dependence on the exploitation of its natural resources. Illegal trawling off the coast of Guinea-Bissau has contributed to the depletion of its marine fisheries. Commercial boats from several have been involved in these practices, notably from China and Russia, and smaller vessels from Senegal and Guinea. In 2017, 63% of the wealth generated through industrial-scale fishing, worth US$ 260.7 million, was extracted illicitly.[80] These predatory

[74] The corruption index covers 197 countries and territories, World Bank (2021b).
[75] UNDP (2020a: 345-346). According to the World Bank (2021a), Guinea's gross national product per capita (GNP) grew by only 11% between 2000 and 2020, at an annual rate of just 0.5%. In Senegal, the growth rate over the same period was double this amount.
[76] UNDP (2021).
[77] On this popular aversion, see Carter's chapters 5 and 6 in this volume, in particular.
[78] On extractive elites and their penchant for wealth hoarding, see Acemoglou and Robinson (2012).
[79] It is estimated that up to 42% of the wealth generated by Guinea-Bissau's cashew economy remains with the importers, mostly from India. In contrast, farmers receive close to 25% of the wealth produced. Figures calculated from data cited in Barry, Creppy and Wodon (2007: 80).
[80] Intchama, Belhabib and Jumpe (2018: 9).

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practices match the massive and illegal cutting of rosewood trees in 2012-2013. Guinea-Bissau's historic reliance on a handful of raw exports, with no added economic value, has hampered wealth creation. The nation's extractive development model, political instability and elite state capture have been a major impediment to economic growth.

4. Fragile civil society. Guinea-Bissau's democratic reforms in the 1990s allowed for the development of its civil society. New actors emerged on the scene, with better prepared cadres, improved access to mass and social media, enhanced networking abilities, and greater influence on public opinion. Still, for all these advancements, Bissau-Guinean civil society displays many limitations. NGOs in particular, are highly dependent on external funding and, therefore, susceptible to the agendas advanced by international agencies.[81] Guinea-Bissau's authoritarian legacies, patrimonial state, regime instability and political clientelism have hampered the formation of this societal arena and civic values. These conditions have reinforced localized interactions that revolve around community groups and limited the possibilities of scaling up demands through national organizations. State weakness and disarray have discouraged many activists from making claims on the government or putting pressure on its authorities. These difficulties have nurtured an informal and opportunistic ethos. Civil society in Guinea-Bissau reflects, in many ways, patterns of conduct found in the state – particularly in its penchant towards improvisation, personalism, fragmentation, nepotism, corruption, and difficulties in shaping the public agenda.[82]

5. Delegitimized state and regime. Big man politics debilitates formal institutions. It personalizes conflicts over elite state capture and triggers fierce disputes between those who are 'in' and 'out' of power. The absence of clear and stable rules to channel these conflicts exacerbates the climate of political uncertainty. Popular discontent with this situation has been remarkable: in Guinea-Bissau, 88% of the people think that politicians only look after their personal interests; 64% feel abandoned by the state; and 81% believe their country is unjust.[83] Popular frustration is compounded by perceptions of widespread corruption, abuse of power, political favoritism, disrespect for democratic norms, and elite impunity and detachment from the people. These sentiments were vividly captured in the Voices of the People focus group study:

> Guinea-Bissau's situation is shameful. They say the Bissau-Guinean people have their rights, that they are the ones in charge. But the truth is that the rights of the people are never respected. Politicians negotiated in Abuja [the capital of Nigeria] the formation of the government, and we saw what happened during the [2019 legislative] elections. When parties appoint their candidates for legislative elections, they indicate their choice for future prime minister. But the election was held, one party was victorious. The party nominated its leader to be the prime minister, but the president refused to appoint him, and that's what happened. We are all suffering from this situation. And that's why I ask, what rights do people have? Because the people vote and choose who they want, but their will is not respected. Should we continue to hold elections? [...] People no longer care about the politicians because the Bissau-Guinean people do not depend on the

[81] Barros (2012, 2016, 2019), Teixeira (2015).

[82] On Bissau-Guinean civil society's failings, also see Cardoso (2008).

[83] For these and other Voices of the People survey results, see chapter 1, by Miguel Carter, in this volume.

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> government. What does the government do for the population? We have no good roads, no hospitals, no schools. The people are tired. We are not resigned, we just decided to despise them.[84]

6. Eroded national sovereignty. Political unrest has left Guinea-Bissau susceptible to frequent external interventions. Foreign troops have been deployed in the country on a regular basis since the outset of the civil war in 1998, with a hiatus only in 2021. International mediation to appease the nation's quarrels has been a constant phenomenon. As an illustration, the dismissal of Prime Minister Simões Pereira, in 2015, led to an intense political impasse that stirred a flurry of activities by a host of international actors. In 2016 alone, ECOWAS sent the former president of Nigeria to Bissau twice, and on other occasions three presidents of the region: those of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. These visits laid the groundwork for the Conakry Agreement signed, in October 2016, by President José Mario Vaz and key opposition leaders. The accord, facilitated by ECOWAS, was supported by the UN, European Union, CPLP and the African Union. That same year, the UN, CPLP, African Union and a regional interparliamentary commission sent five high-level missions to Bissau.[85] In early 2018, ECOWAS imposed sanctions on 19 Bissau-Guinean political figures, including President Vaz's son, for failure to comply with the Conakry Agreement.

The significant internationalization of Bissau-Guinean politics draws attention to the country's extreme vulnerability to geopolitical interests. The Fund for Peace's external intervention index ranks Guinea-Bissau in 21st place among the countries most affected by foreign interests. Its lowest scores were registered between 2009 and 2018.[86]

7. Perception of failure. Big man politics has impaired Guinea-Bissau's development prospects and stoked a sense of deep frustration over the nation's fate. The epithets describing this country as a 'failed state', 'narco-state', 'dysfunctional' or a 'fiasco,' often reinforced from abroad, accentuate this climate of defeat. Self-deprecating and somber views of the nation that insist on the repeated history of failure can of foster a "fracasomania complex," as Albert O. Hirschman explains.[87] Dispositions of this kind breed low self-esteem, skepticism, and discouragement, which undermine efforts needed to bring about constructive change. As the Voices of the People study revealed, many Bissau-Guineans feelings of great frustration and despondency:

> Everywhere you listen, Bissau-Guineans are saying that there is nothing to be done. It's because they are tired […] We gained independence but are still not free. Senegal asked the King of Morocco for tractors, and our members of parliament asked for cars. This shows that they don't think about the people. Our rulers only think about their belly. They only think about themselves and their children.[88]

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[84] Interview with 46-year-old man in Canchungo, see Carter (2020).
[85] Adding to this, the P5 group, made up of representatives from the UN, European Union, ECOWAS, CPLP and African Union, played an intensive role in Bissau, issuing joint statements and holding several meetings with President Vaz and other authorities, in effort to resolve the political gridlock.
[86] The Fund for Peace (2021) ranking includes 178 countries and territories, from 2007 to 2021.
[87] Hirschman (1981: 155-156).
[88] Interview with 73-year-old man in the village of Candjadja, Mansabá, Oio, Carter (2020).

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> If our politicians can't get along, we're going to bring back our system of traditional authority. We didn't have all these problems during our grandparents' time [...] If we can't take care of ourselves, we'll bring the Portuguese back. It will be better to hand the country over to white people and let them run it.[89]

> There is no law in this country [...] Forty-odd years since independence and we still haven't developed the country. It is very sad. We are ashamed of Guinea-Bissau.[90]

Conclusion

Big man politics is a social construction. It has historical roots and a context that makes it possible but is not an inevitable or immutable development. A solid diagnosis can propose alternative pathways and outline the steps needed to get there. Given the prevalence of this informal institution and the forces that sustain it, any process of change would take time, require attention on multiple fronts, and perseverance in the mission. A necessary first step would be to mitigate the most harmful practices of these strongmen.

A proactive agenda in support of democratic stability would include actions that seek to:

- Prepare a new generation of political and civic leaders committed to democratic values and practices.

- Empower women's public participation and political engagement.

- Promote civic education and popular awareness.

- Revise the political system's institutional blueprint to:

  - Avoid or reduce the impact of 'winner-takes-all' formulas.
  - Limit presidential powers.
  - Strengthen the National Assembly and its relationship with the Prime Minister.
  - Decentralize the state.

- Support for these and other reforms require a sharp understanding of Bissau-Guinean politics and society. This is needed to make sure institutional improvements are able to draw on local insights, practices and values, rather than simply copy-paste formulas from abroad.

- Devise strategies based on local knowledge and experience to enhance the autonomy and integrity of the judicial system.

- Build on efforts to improve the election management council by promoting electoral transparency and integrity, particularly with regards to campaign finance.

[89] Interview with 32-year-old man in the village of Candjadja, Mansabá, Oio, Carter (2020). The idea of "handing over the country to the *brancos* [whites]" can be found in currents of opinion in Bissau, some of which have called for leaving the government administration to the UN, see Semedo (2020).
[90] Interview with 56-year-old man in the village of Candjadja, Mansabá, Oio, Carter (2020).

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- Shore up the nation's political parties by bolstering their democratic vocation and capacity for public deliberation.

- Create opportunities for civic engagement and boost capabilities for civil society and private sector representation and involvement in shaping the public agenda.

- Curb incentive structures that underpin the nation's illicit economy.

Change, of course, will not come easily. Still, Guinea-Bissau is a young country, with open possibilities. Meanwhile, amid its people, one is apt to find enduring signs of resilience, a trait for which Bissau-Guineans are well-known. In the words of a Balanta elder and farmer from Oio:

> We can say that there is no solution. We can't help but elect them. They [the politicians] are the ones that do not understand. It's our finger [on election day] that gives them work. We vote because maybe one day we will choose the right person to develop the country. That's why we always vote. We are voting all the time. I've seen several elections, but I haven't seen anything good yet. We vote to vote. Those who take power by force do not govern well. But those who receive the people's vote, who are elected, can manage to govern. We know that even if we vote, we will continue on the same path. Yet one day we will make the right choice. God will help us make a good choice! They say that hope is the last to die. Then let's not give up hope. I may die, but those here will stay, and one day they will vote and choose the right person. We will ask God.[91]

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[91] Interview with a 67-year-old man from the village of Glak Iala, Mansoa, Oio, Carter (2020).

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