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COCAINE POLITICS IN WEST AFRICA

Guinea-Bissau's
protection networks

LUCIA BIRD

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CONTENTS

- Acronyms** vi
- Executive summary** **1**
 - Methodology 2
- Drivers of conflict in Guinea-Bissau** **3**
- Guinea-Bissau's resilient elite protection network** **6**
 - Cocaine politics 8
- The evolution of Guinea-Bissau's cocaine politics** **11**
 - Phase I: The origin of the cocaine economy (1998–2006) 12
 - Phase II: Transnational connections and political instability (2006–2013) 15
 - Phase III: Changing protection structures and reconstitution of the bulk transit trade (2013–2019) 16
- The current cocaine climate: Trafficking shrouded in increased opacity** **18**
 - Centralization of power in the office of the president: Growing isolation 20
 - Deployment of ECOWAS peacekeeping troops 21
 - Politicization of criminal justice weakens response to cocaine trafficking 23
- Conclusions and recommendations** **28**
 - Bissau's enduring reliance on illicit revenues 29
 - Recommendations 30
- Notes 33

ACRONYMS

AIRCOP JAITF	Airport Communication Project Joint Airport Interdiction Task Force
DEA	US Drug Enforcement Administration
ECOMIB	ECOWAS Mission for Guinea-Bissau
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
MADEM G15	Movement for a Democratic Alternative
MFDC	Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance
MISSANG	Angola military mission in Guinea-Bissau
PAIGC	African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde




A view of Bandim Market, Bissau, a hub for money laundering. © Xaume Olleros/Bloomberg via Getty Images



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A view of the governmental palace, where on 1 February sustained gunshots were heard that were later reported by authorities to have been a failed coup attempt. © Aaron Ross/Reuters via Getty Images



On 1 February 2022, gunshots at the governmental palace in Bissau signalled the beginning of a reported failed coup attempt in Guinea-Bissau, a country long known for its prominent role in international cocaine trafficking. Had the incident resulted in a military overthrow of power, it would have been the fifth successful coup in Guinea-Bissau's history, and also the fifth coup in West Africa in the preceding 12 months, hot on the heels of the seizure of power in Burkina Faso in late January.¹

Hours after the gunfire had begun, President Umaro Sissoco Embaló addressed the press, condemning the incident and declaring the perpetrators had failed. In press statements, he indicated that those behind the attack were involved in the drugs trade.² This implication appeared to echo history: a 2012 coup in Guinea-Bissau was so clearly motivated by competition for control over the country's lucrative cocaine markets that it has been dubbed the 'cocaine coup'.³

The nature of the February attack, and the identity of the perpetrators, is still unclear – as explored further below. However, arrests announced by the government following the attack include individuals with known links to the cocaine trade – most prominently Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto – underscoring the drug connection implied by the president.

Guinea-Bissau is a key entry point for cocaine into West Africa, a region that operates as a transit point on international cocaine trafficking routes between cultivation countries in Latin America and consumer end-markets in Europe. The country has played an important role in international cocaine trafficking dynamics since the late 1990s.

The close involvement of Guinea-Bissau's political-military elite in the cocaine market over the years has been a critical factor in Guinea-Bissau's repeated cycles of political turmoil. In turn, profits from the cocaine market have bankrolled a remarkably resilient elite protection network composed of elements of the state infrastructure.

Guinea-Bissau is at a critical juncture once again. The curious February incident has brought to the fore the country's cyclical tendency towards political volatility, and the president has deemed the country to be in 'political crisis' and dissolved the National Assembly. This report explores the role, past and present, of the cocaine trade both as a driver of political instability in the country and as a source of resilience for elite power-sharing arrangements.⁴

The report first considers the drivers of conflict in Guinea-Bissau, before focusing on the role of illicit markets, and more specifically the cocaine trade, in shaping Bissau's political settlement. It tracks the evolution of the country's cocaine trade, exploring how drug market dynamics have been closely intertwined with the political protagonists. Against this backdrop, the report outlines the key characteristics of the current phase of Guinea-Bissau's cocaine politics, applying historic precedent to offer a tentative look at what the future may hold for the country's political economy and efforts for stabilization.

Deep changes are underway within the balance of power between state and security institutions, and the relationship of the elite with civil society. Equally, there are changes in the wider geopolitical context in which Guinea-Bissau – and international actors – are operating. These power struggles may be disrupting the country's long-standing cocaine protection structures in an unprecedented manner.

Methodology

This report draws on information gathered from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime's (GI-TOC) networks in Guinea-Bissau, and the monitoring conducted by the GI-TOC's Observatory of Illicit Economies in Guinea-Bissau, a partnership venture.

To ensure reliability, the research for this report drew on multiple sources,⁵ including interviews with state and non-state actors, as well as those engaged in the criminal economy, in 2005, 2012 and 2014, and from 2019 to June 2022.⁶ Eleven community dialogues held between 2020 and 2022, each centring on the development and impacts of Guinea-Bissau's illicit economies, also fed into this report.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges to data collection, complicating in-person meetings and interviews, as well as travel. The detrimental effect of the pandemic on the research was mitigated, however, through a combination of online engagement and monitoring of the situation on the ground to leverage opportunities for safe and secure meetings.

Interviews were supplemented with a review of secondary material, including court records, lusophone and anglophone press reporting, and official and academic studies of cocaine trafficking in the country and the wider West African region. Where possible, available statistical data has also been drawn upon, both from government and UN sources.


The use of these different data sources enabled triangulation of key data points to underscore and support important conclusions about the current state of the cocaine trade in Guinea-Bissau. This included changes in the relationship between key players, and events that suggest collusion between actors in the illicit economy and members of the political class or state institutions. The aim of this approach is to move away from a solely descriptive account of organized crime to one that seeks to understand its interconnection with Guinea-Bissau's wider political and economic development.⁷



DRIVERS OF CONFLICT IN GUINEA-BISSAU

Mural on a Bissau street of Amílcar Cabral, a prominent Bissau-Guinean anti-colonial leader assassinated shortly before the country's independence. The country has experienced chronic political instability since its liberation war.

Photo: Supplied



Independence, born out of a protracted war for liberation, merely marked the beginning of chronic political instability in Guinea-Bissau, as evidenced by the political assassinations and 18 successful or attempted coups littering its history.⁸ Instability in Guinea-Bissau matters not only for the country itself, but for the wider West African region, as domestic dynamics repeatedly spill over national borders.⁹ The country has long operated as a platform for regional instability, incubating illicit markets, and operating as a safe haven for criminal actors and spoilers, which fuel conflict and corruption across the region.

The cycles of conflict have largely remained contained within the confines of the politico-military elite, with the notable exception of the 1998–1999 civil war which resulted in widespread damage. However, the wider consequences of chronic fragility, including on Guinea-Bissau's faltering economy, have been felt by ordinary citizens. While the drivers of instability are myriad, they can broadly be grouped in four categories.

Firstly, Guinea-Bissau's rentier economy entrenches inequality and shapes politics as a zero-sum game. Guinea-Bissau retained the extractive economic model inherited from the Portuguese colonial system, the benefits of which remain concentrated in the hands of a small politico-military elite, leaving 64% of the population in multi-dimensional poverty.¹⁰ Structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s which sought to liberalize the economy, instead further concentrated state and natural resources – including from the important cashew nut industry – in the hands of the elite.¹¹ Ensuing competition for control of rents – most prominently from the lucrative illicit markets, but also from licit enterprise – has fuelled instability.¹²

Secondly, the vast, and often unchecked, power of the military, and their enormous influence over both the country's illicit markets and politics. The high degree of legitimacy the military enjoy among the political elite is due to the military's direct evolution from the revolutionary guerrillas who fought for independence. The military's power is reflected in its disproportionate size and budgetary allocation: Guinea-Bissau's ratio of soldiers to inhabitants – at two per 1 000 – materially outstrips those of its regional neighbours.¹³ The military has repeatedly interfered in politics to safeguard its entrenched, and in some cases criminal, interests.

Thirdly, impunity is enjoyed by the elite throughout the coups, assassinations and violence characterizing Guinea-Bissau's post-independence landscape, crystallized in some instances through amnesty laws.¹⁴ Rents from licit and illicit activities have also financed longstanding patronage and protection networks, engendering a degree of resilience. Widespread impunity further facilitates elite involvement in illicit markets, and ensures there are limited repercussions for breaching the country's constitution or laws. This enables the use of force as a tool of political power, undermining accountability and stability.

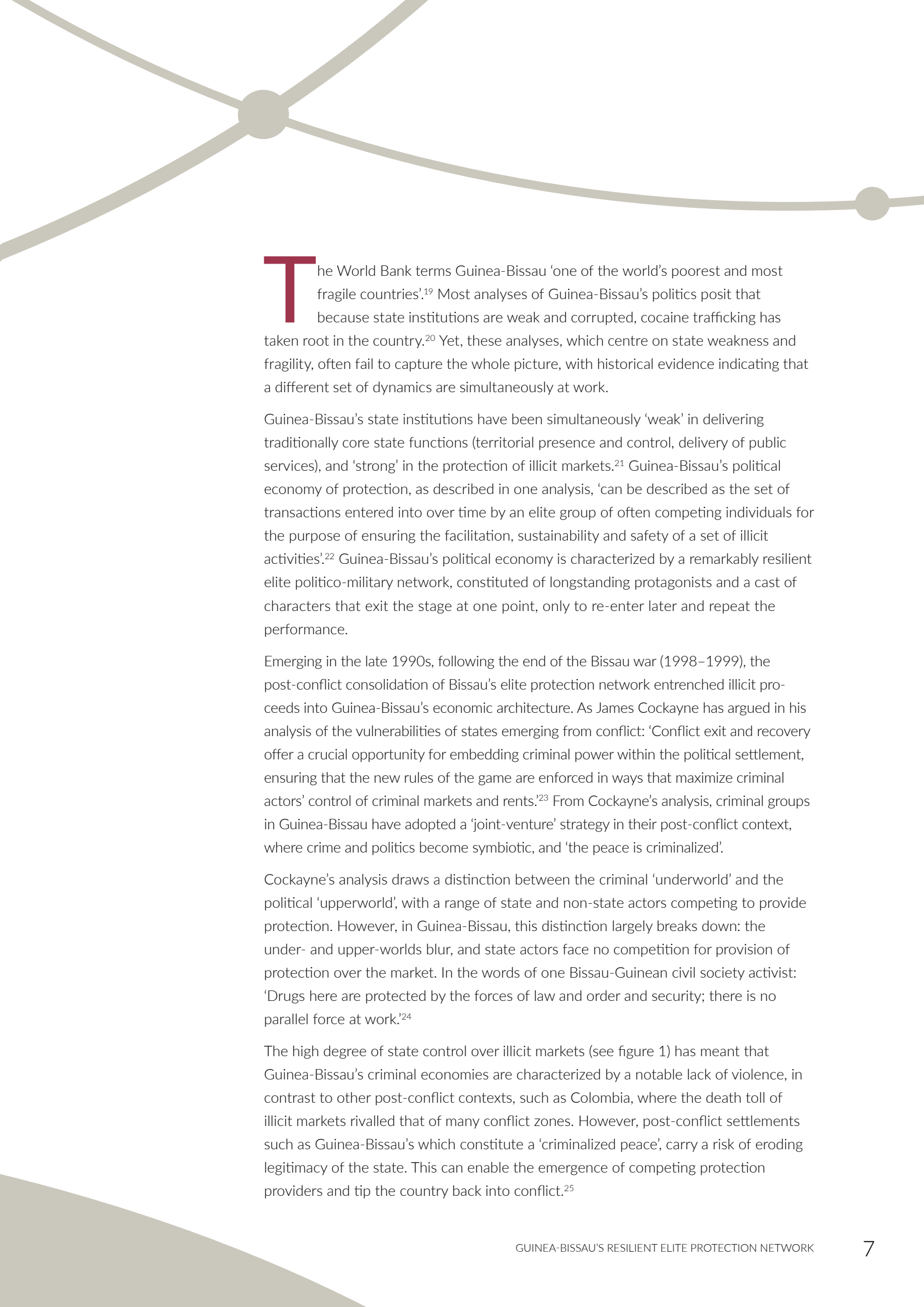
Finally, the political and military elite rely on the country's profitable illicit markets to supplement public budgets. This began with arms trafficking in the 1990s, but later evolved to cocaine and timber trafficking. The ability of the elite to access 'unearned' sources of revenue, both illicit and licit (in the form of external development assistance), has decreased reliance on taxation and economic growth as the principal source of income.¹⁵ This dilutes political will to expand the revenue base – reflecting this, Guinea-Bissau's tax revenue base is extremely low, with tax-to-GDP ratio long stagnating around 10% (the OECD average is 24%, although averages in West Africa are far lower).¹⁶ In turn, the low revenue base drives greater reliance on rents, in a self-perpetuating cycle that diminishes accountability and divorces the interests of the country's leaders from the needs of the populace.¹⁷

This report explores the role of this final, critical, driver of instability in Guinea-Bissau. While recognizing the importance of the illicit logging market in financing electoral processes and bankrolling prominent politicians, this report focuses instead on the lucrative cocaine trade.¹⁸ The report contextualizes recent flare-ups of political instability by first outlining the evolution of Guinea-Bissau's cocaine trade, and how it shapes political processes. It then charts the emergence of a new phase of ongoing, highly protected, cocaine trafficking throughout the country. This era of cocaine politics exists in a context of diminished state response and growing opacity, enabled by ever greater repression of critical voices in the country.



GUINEA-BISSAU'S RESILIENT ELITE PROTECTION NETWORK

In September 2019, the government of Guinea-Bissau seized a large consignment of cocaine as part of Operation Navarra. The image shows a seizure in Ilondé, between Bissau and Quinhamel. *Photo: Supplied*



The World Bank terms Guinea-Bissau ‘one of the world’s poorest and most fragile countries’.¹⁹ Most analyses of Guinea-Bissau’s politics posit that because state institutions are weak and corrupted, cocaine trafficking has taken root in the country.²⁰ Yet, these analyses, which centre on state weakness and fragility, often fail to capture the whole picture, with historical evidence indicating that a different set of dynamics are simultaneously at work.

Guinea-Bissau’s state institutions have been simultaneously ‘weak’ in delivering traditionally core state functions (territorial presence and control, delivery of public services), and ‘strong’ in the protection of illicit markets.²¹ Guinea-Bissau’s political economy of protection, as described in one analysis, ‘can be described as the set of transactions entered into over time by an elite group of often competing individuals for the purpose of ensuring the facilitation, sustainability and safety of a set of illicit activities.’²² Guinea-Bissau’s political economy is characterized by a remarkably resilient elite politico-military network, constituted of longstanding protagonists and a cast of characters that exit the stage at one point, only to re-enter later and repeat the performance.

Emerging in the late 1990s, following the end of the Bissau war (1998–1999), the post-conflict consolidation of Bissau’s elite protection network entrenched illicit proceeds into Guinea-Bissau’s economic architecture. As James Cockayne has argued in his analysis of the vulnerabilities of states emerging from conflict: ‘Conflict exit and recovery offer a crucial opportunity for embedding criminal power within the political settlement, ensuring that the new rules of the game are enforced in ways that maximize criminal actors’ control of criminal markets and rents.’²³ From Cockayne’s analysis, criminal groups in Guinea-Bissau have adopted a ‘joint-venture’ strategy in their post-conflict context, where crime and politics become symbiotic, and ‘the peace is criminalized’.

Cockayne’s analysis draws a distinction between the criminal ‘underworld’ and the political ‘upperworld’, with a range of state and non-state actors competing to provide protection. However, in Guinea-Bissau, this distinction largely breaks down: the under- and upper-worlds blur, and state actors face no competition for provision of protection over the market. In the words of one Bissau-Guinean civil society activist: ‘Drugs here are protected by the forces of law and order and security; there is no parallel force at work.’²⁴

The high degree of state control over illicit markets (see figure 1) has meant that Guinea-Bissau’s criminal economies are characterized by a notable lack of violence, in contrast to other post-conflict contexts, such as Colombia, where the death toll of illicit markets rivalled that of many conflict zones. However, post-conflict settlements such as Guinea-Bissau’s which constitute a ‘criminalized peace’, carry a risk of eroding legitimacy of the state. This can enable the emergence of competing protection providers and tip the country back into conflict.²⁵

	State control	Devolution	Mixed Control	Indirect Links	Mixed Local Control	Local Control
Roles	Full involvement of selected state actors. Direct protection or withdrawal of state actors at crucial times.	State as 'gatekeeper' for regional and local control. Selects partners.	Agreements between state and local actors on the ground where both have a presence.	Weak state positions itself as interlocutor and receives payment.	Local state security actors and local strong men based on agreement.	Full local provision of protection. No state involvement.
Provider of Protection	State security forces.	State forces and local armed groups linked to 'system of devolution'.	Local militias and state actors, often in agreement as to 'spheres of control'.	Armed group with 'quiet channel' to the state in exchange for payment.	Security forces without 'central permission'. Local armed actors.	Local armed groups.
Resource Flow	To senior levels of the state and/or security establishment. Small payouts at lower levels.	Senior state officials take a cut or an agreed tribute paid to state to maintain the system.	Local players with tribute paid at central state level.	Armed groups, but also to state actors who facilitate outside access.	Local security actors, state and nonstate.	Local players and leadership.
Implications	'Criminal state'. Limited violence is easily quashed by dominant state.	Potential to resource local strongmen or promote conflict with those excluded from the system.	Local state presence in parallel with armed groups.	State further compromised in ability to respond. Acquiring resources strengthens armed groups.	Increasing delinkage from the centre. Poor local service delivery. Conflict if alliances/agreements weaken.	Acquiring resources reinforces local territorial control.

FIGURE 1 Typologies of protection economies.

SOURCE: Mark Shaw, 'We pay, you pay': Protection economies, financial flows, and violence, in Hilary Matfess and Michael Miklaucic (eds), *Beyond Convergence, World Without Order*, Washington, DC: Center for Complex Operations, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2016, pp 235–250.

Cocaine politics

Illicit markets have certainly been contributing factors shaping the volatility of Bissau's politics. The elite are incentivized to retain their hold on power in order to safeguard their control over rents, casting politics as a zero sum game, and fuelling conflict. Yet while flashes of volatility in Bissau's political infrastructure can dislodge specific protagonists – as with the brutal assassination of former President Nuno Vieira during a spate of political killings in 2009 – the overall protection structure has survived largely intact. The remarkable resilience of this protection structure is traced in the phases of the evolution of Guinea-Bissau's cocaine politics outlined below.

The lucrative cocaine trafficking market can be understood as the glue holding together the constellation of uneasy power alliances in Bissau's elite protection structure. Bissau's elite protection network permit and oversee the flow of bulk cocaine through the country, ensuring risks of interception remain acceptably low. They allow the country to operate not only as a transit point, but as an important storage, repackaging and redistribution hub in international cocaine trafficking flows. Holding political, military and criminal elites fast, the cocaine trade makes it impossible for the political structures to evolve into a governance system of broad-based resource sharing and social protection.

This protection structure has not been fundamentally disrupted since its inception in the late 1990s, despite a range of external operations seeking to do exactly that. Two important examples of external interventions illustrate the role of illicit markets in engendering this resilience. One intervention – a 2013 sting operation by the US Drug Enforcement Administration – sought to disrupt the cocaine market protection network directly. It is arguably the intervention which had the most significant impact on the structures of the cocaine market. The second intervention sought to weaken the criminalized military elite by cutting off external funding sources (in the form of development aid), and drive the country towards a return to civilian government.

The 2013 US Drug Enforcement Administration sting operation invested significant resources to disrupt Bissau's protection structures by removing top players. The principal target of the operation was General Antonio Indjai, who led the military junta in power at the time. While failing to arrest Indjai, Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto, Tchamy Yala and Papis Djeme were successfully arrested, and later convicted in New York courts. In the wake of the sting operation, cocaine trafficking through Guinea-Bissau did appear to decrease, but a significant proportion of the flow was displaced to Guinea Conakry and Sierra Leone.²⁶ In addition, these events merely compounded the already-diminished flow through the country, likely due to an internal disruption in the protection economy driven by the military's attempt to corner a larger share of profits.

The sting was also a contributing factor to the growing prominence of civilian actors in Bissau's markets, although once again, this trend had already commenced. Ultimately, the operation did not break down the fundamental systems of protection controlled by the state, which continued to support the cocaine economy. Even the individuals convicted as a result of the operation have resurfaced as important players in Bissau's politique, and allegedly in its cocaine market.

In a separate but linked example, in the wake of the 2012 military coup led by Indjai, the international community imposed sanctions on the country's leadership. Various bodies cut off flows of external aid to the Guinea-Bissau, an important source of unearned revenue for military elites. Additional external factors also squeezed the military's budget. The 2013 collapse in cashew nut prices, Guinea-Bissau's main export crop,²⁷ was compounded by the temporary curtailment of the cocaine economy by the 2013 sting operation, as outlined above. Had the military leadership been unable to sustain financing required to fund its patronage networks, this could have severely weakened the elite control over the institution. However, the military leadership, with Indjai at the helm, turned to illicit logging as an alternative revenue stream, unofficially awarding logging concessions to officers in lieu of pay. Illicit logging surged across this period. According to a report by the Environmental Investigation Agency, timber exports from Guinea-Bissau to China reached 98 000 tonnes in 2014, the equivalent of about 255 000 trees²⁸ – and the military's patronage networks survived.

The dual role of the cocaine economy as a driver of political instability and a fortifier of the political status quo, is explored next through an analysis of 25 years of cocaine trafficking in Guinea-Bissau.

Typologies of protection in transit countries

It is widely recognized that the transit of high value commodities through states with endemic corruption typically engenders structured protection economies.²⁹ The type of protection economy which emerges around such high-value transit markets is distinct from those arising around criminal rents which are more labour-intensive which more often arise in areas of production. Examples include mineral extraction, the cultivation of illicit narcotics, and the illicit logging market. In production areas, popular support for the organization governing the illicit production is required, and revenue is shared among a broader base. This requires a greater degree of engagement between the rent-extracting organization, and the wider community. In Guinea-Bissau, actors involved in the illicit logging market are known to bribe community leaders to buy their support for logging activities – dynamics not reported in the cocaine market.³⁰

By contrast, in transit areas, particularly for high value economies, the resource sharing settlement can be far narrower, and the need for popular support is greatly diluted. Within transit areas, the protection requirements for the illicit economy are shaped by three key variables regarding the nature of the commodity: value, perishability, and the means of transport required. These factors are, in turn, linked to the volume, and volume-to-profit ratio, of the commodity. These variables shape the protection structures in key ways:

- **Value:** Protection networks for high value commodities are likely to reach the highest levels of the state, while lower-value commodities often rely on corruption at lower- and mid- levels of state institutions.
- **Perishability:** This shapes patterns of transit and storage. A low degree of perishability enables transit nodes with a particularly high degree of protection to operate as storage and redistribution hubs. Where perishability is high and storage is not possible, the comparative advantage of stable, high-level protection networks is diminished regarding the ability of areas to operate as storage hubs.
- **Transportation requirements:** When bulk transportation is not possible, it is less likely that a protection network at the highest levels of state will be involved, as the profits per consignment are tangibly lower. For example, trafficking illicit commodities via air passengers does not facilitate bulk consignments, and will not require protection at the highest levels of state. (Air trafficking using private planes, which enables movement of far larger consignments, or where trafficking is coordinated by air freight is more typically linked to higher-level protection.) Illustrating this – although trafficking through Oswaldo Vieira International Airport in Bissau is facilitated by state corruption, it is coordinated by a more fragmented set of criminal actors, including Nigerian networks. By contrast, there is a higher degree of high level state engagement with actors operating the bulk transit trade – where imports leverage maritime routes, and exports leverage sea or land routes.

The nature of Guinea-Bissau's bulk cocaine transit trade – high value, low perishability, enabling large consignments – contribute to the creation of narrow resource-sharing settlements, and a small, structured protection network which reaches to the highest echelons of the state. While a horizontal system of patronage interlinks the country's elite, vertical resource flows to ordinary people in the form of patronage is tiny, occurring largely at election time in the form of small cash payments and handouts of mobile phones, clothes (political T-shirts) and food.³¹


It is therefore unsurprising that most Bissau-Guineans flinch at the widely bandied labelling of their country as a 'narco state'. Not only is this label clearly pejorative, it implies widespread involvement in the drugs trade, wrongly tarnishing the vast majority of Bissau-Guineans who receive scant benefit from the lucrative cocaine trade.

Photo: Dogukan Keskinkilic/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images



THE EVOLUTION OF GUINEA-BISSAU'S COCAINE POLITICS

Supporters of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) ahead of the parliamentary elections, March 2019. © SEYLLLOU/AFP via Getty Images



Since Guinea-Bissau's illicit markets are underpinned by state structures, insight into power-sharing arrangements in the country is crucial to understanding the criminal economy. While Bissau's politics are best known for numerous abrupt power transitions, typically in the wake of a coup, the political protection structures surrounding the cocaine trade has remained consistent. Tracing the evolution of Guinea-Bissau's cocaine economy, and its steady relationship with the political and military elite, underscores this consistency. It also suggests that current shifts in power-sharing arrangements between individuals and institutions may challenge these long-lasting protection dynamics.³²

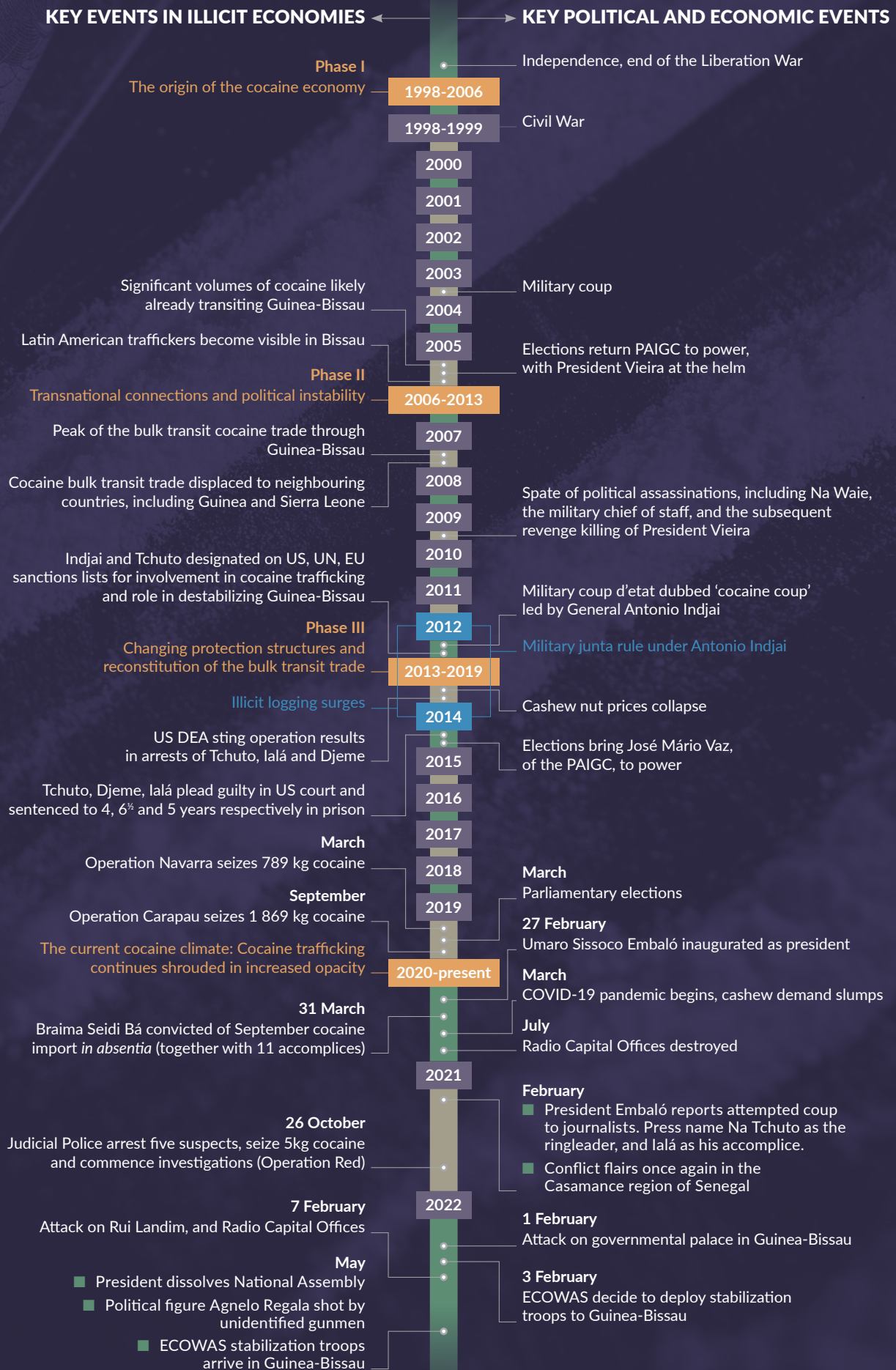
Phase I: The origin of the cocaine economy (1998–2006)

The roots of the drug transit trade in Guinea-Bissau can be traced to the 1998 Bissau war, an 11-month conflict between the country's political and military leadership sparked by elite involvement in illicit markets. The country was run by the Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), Guinea-Bissau's longest-standing political party, which remains active today. Senior officials in the cash-strapped Bissauan state had turned to trafficking arms to separatist fighters in the Casamance region of southern Senegal as a way of funding clientelist networks and political mobilization.³³ When this became public, President João Bernardo Vieira dismissed the armed forces chief of staff, General Ansumane Mané, who then mobilized elements in the army behind him, triggering the Bissau war, from which Mané emerged victorious.³⁴

Since the early 2000s, and particularly in the wake of the 2003 military coup that brought an end to the brief post-war period of civilian rule, the cocaine trade has been a prominent source of illicit rents for the Bissau-Guinean political elite. The cocaine transit trade escalated after the coup, with significant volumes transiting the country by early 2005.³⁵ By the 2005 elections, which returned the PAIGC to power with President Vieira at the helm, military and political protection of the trade went right to the top.³⁶

Alongside the politico-military matrix, two further sets of powerful actors emerged in this period. Firstly, a set of Latin American traffickers, mainly Colombians but also Venezuelans.³⁷ These groups first appeared in Guinea-Bissau in the months following the 2005 election, made conspicuous by their flashy taste in cars.³⁸ Within a year of elections, individuals close to the trafficking economy at the time suggest that there

EVOLUTION OF COCAINE TRAFFICKING IN GUINEA-BISSAU



were three Latin American cells operating in Guinea-Bissau, each protected by, and paying off, the military.³⁹

Secondly, there was an emergence of a number of regional criminal entrepreneurs who acted as intermediaries between the Latin American traffickers and regional state protection structures. These were typically businessmen who had spent time in Europe, where they had built connections to the drugs trade.⁴⁰ One prominent figure – Braima Seidi Bá, made connections with Latin American traffickers while living in Spain and Portugal. Bá was convicted on drug trafficking charges *in absentia* by Bissau-Guinean courts in 2020 and subsequently fled the country, allegedly continuing to operate outside the country. Bá’s conviction was overturned in June 2022 by the Supreme Court, as this report went to print. This ruling will receive further scrutiny in a forthcoming GI-TOC publication.⁴¹

These sets of actors form the three points of Guinea-Bissau’s triangular cocaine ecosystem (see Figure 2). The relationships between these actors are tense and dynamic, but retain an element of stability over time. However, the attempts of the politico-military elite to control the market, rather than merely protect transit flows in exchange for a fee, has been a significant factor driving cycles of conflict in Guinea-Bissau.⁴²

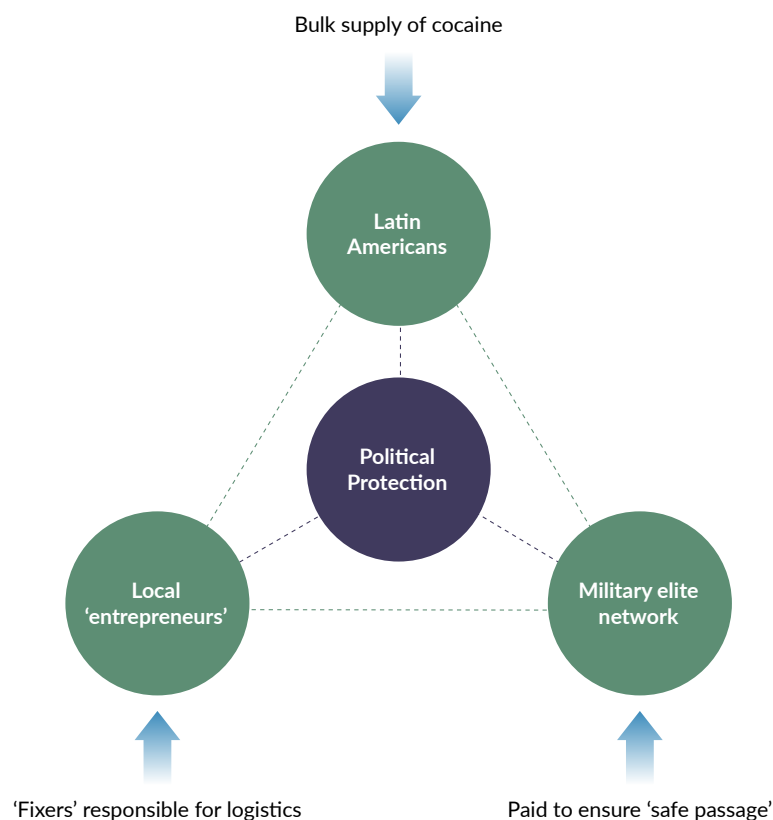


FIGURE 2 Triangle of key players in Guinea-Bissau.

SOURCE: Mark Shaw, Drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, 1998–2014: The evolution of an elite protection network, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 53, 3, 347

Phase II: Transnational connections and political instability (2006–2013)

By 2006, a foundation for future expansion of the trade had been built, with cocaine trafficking through Guinea-Bissau reaching its peak in 2007.

Up until that point, senior military figures had consolidated their control over the bulk transit trade, syphoning off a large share of profits, reportedly between 13% and 15%.⁴³ The state's involvement in the cocaine trade had become increasingly brazen. For example, while initially clandestine runways were used for aircraft trafficking cocaine into and out of the country, main international airports began to be used in this period.⁴⁴

The role of the local criminal entrepreneurs had expanded, and they were increasingly active not only in negotiating with European traffickers for the sale of drugs, but also in arranging the transport of drugs from Guinea-Bissau in smaller quantities. Large consignments were brought into Guinea-Bissau and its neighbouring coastal countries, stored under military protection, and then broken up into smaller consignments for onward transport to end-markets by local couriers.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, Latin American traffickers had become a prominent feature of Bissau.⁴⁶ Although they had a presence across West Africa, the protection offered by the highest echelons of government made Guinea-Bissau a pivotal operating platform for them.⁴⁷

This all changed in 2007, which marked the end of the bulk transit trade. Strong evidence suggests that the military began stealing from the Latin American traffickers at this point, triggering them to move operations into neighbouring states.⁴⁸ The breakdown in trust weakened the military's hold on the market, empowering regional intermediaries, including Braima Seidi Bá, and a range of smaller operators, including locals, Senegalese and Nigerians.⁴⁹

The end of the bulk transit trade drastically diminished the profits available to the military. This fed into wider political tensions within the elite, which escalated into a series of high-profile assassinations including, the murder of military chief of staff Na Waie and the revenge killing of President Vieira in 2009.⁵⁰

A series of weak civilian leaders, who ruled under significant military influence, followed the murder of Vieira. Although operations became more discrete, accusations around drug trafficking dogged public discourse, money from drug trafficking remained visible in Bissau (including in the flashy cars and newly refurbished homes of elements of the military), and international coverage of Guinea-Bissau as a 'narco state' grew.⁵¹

Competition for control of the cocaine trade was reportedly an important contributing factor to the 2012 military seizure of power led by Antonio Indjai, labelled the 'cocaine coup' by some commentators and civil-society leaders.⁵² Once in power, starved of alternative sources of revenue by international sanctions and desperate for bigger returns from cocaine trafficking, the military was drawn into a US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) sting operation.⁵³ The 2013 climax of the operation, which resulted in several arrests including that of Rear Admiral José Américo Bubo Na Tchuto, spooked traffickers and triggered a further decline in cocaine transiting Guinea-Bissau.

Phase III: Changing protection structures and reconstitution of the bulk transit trade (2013–2019)

The election of José Mário Vaz as president in 2014 was initially seen to mark a new dawn in the country's politics.⁵⁴ Many hoped that a new reformist government under Prime Minister Domingos Simões Pereira would implement policies that would benefit ordinary Bissau-Guineans, long suspicious of the government's ability to deliver. These hopes were quickly dashed as conflict within the PAIGC led to the sacking of Pereira in 2015, the near paralysis of government and the splintering of the PAIGC. In 2018 this splinter group formed a new political party, the Movement for a Democratic Alternative (MADEM G15), which seized power in 2020.

Across this period, the system of protection around cocaine trafficking shifted. The military's hold on the trade weakened further, and a more complex network of military and civilian actors, particularly within the criminal justice system, emerged to protect the trade. The military remained pivotal cogs in the cocaine protection network, but regional criminal entrepreneurs played a larger role in coordinating the trade.

Coordination of trafficking appeared to consolidate in the hands of two 'businessmen'-style criminal operators: Braima Seidi Bá, a Bissau-Guinean businessman, and a prominent political figure in the current administration (who cannot be named). While the Latin American cartels retained a presence in Bissau, they kept a low profile, preferring to stay in houses, rather than hotels, and outside Bissau.⁵⁵

Widespread speculation driven by a lack of seizures between 2015 and 2018 posited that Guinea-Bissau no longer operated as a significant transit point in international cocaine trafficking. However, two bumper seizures in 2019 – 869 kilograms in March and 1 869 kilograms in September – countered this narrative. It appears far more likely that trafficking through Guinea-Bissau continued throughout this period, undisturbed by law enforcement.

The successful 2019 seizures by the Judicial Police, and the severe sentences handed down by the courts to the actors behind both seizures, were widely perceived by the international community as heralding a 'new era of anti-drug action', characterized by a newly effective criminal justice system.⁵⁶

Key cocaine flows through Guinea-Bissau

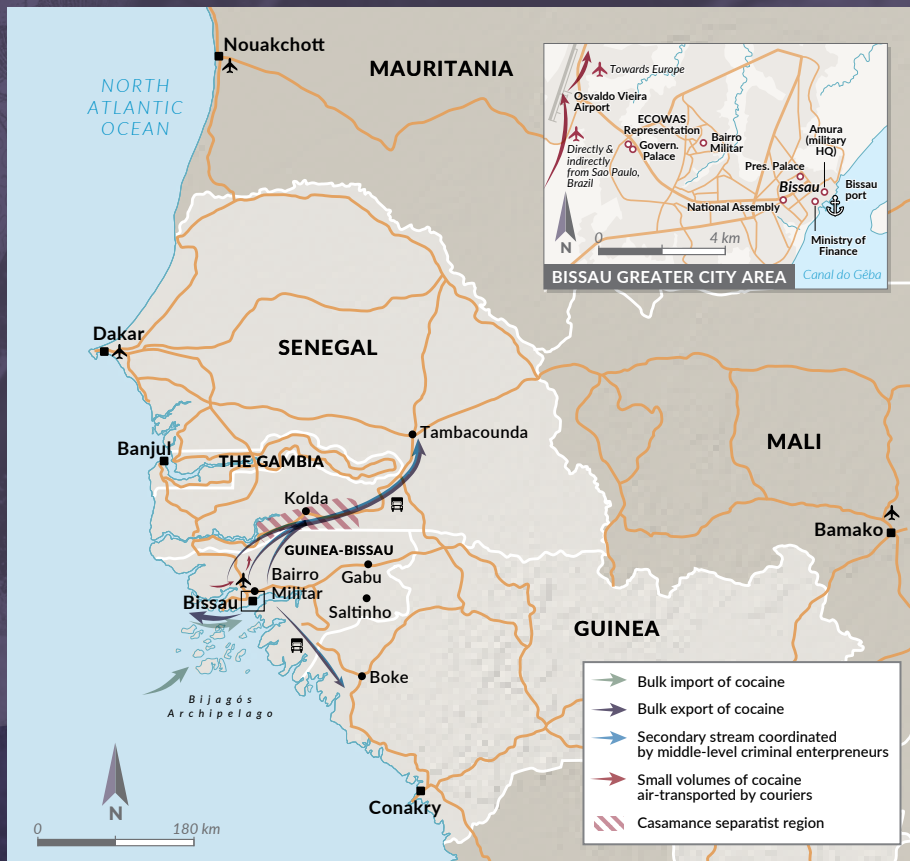


FIGURE 3 Principal cocaine trafficking streams through Guinea-Bissau.

The bulk supply of cocaine: This stream enters Guinea-Bissau by sea either through Bissau port or, more commonly, by leveraging the many informal entry points along the coastline. Reflecting its chronic vulnerability, the Bijagós archipelago was the entry point for both imports seized in 2019. This stream is largely controlled by a limited number of higher-level criminal entrepreneurs who leverage their connections with politicians and selected members of the military. These actors have contact with suppliers in Latin America and individuals across neighbouring West African countries.⁵⁷ Bulk supplies of drugs are primarily transferred from Guinea-Bissau by road. The 789-kilogram consignment seized in the bottom of a truck in March 2019 is an example of this bulk transit flow, and was likely bound for Mali via Senegal. Some bulk supplies are also re-exported by sea. The two key land routes for trafficking cocaine out of Guinea-Bissau are the coastal route via Senegal to Mauritania, and the route via Mali, into Mauritania, further into the interior and up into the Middle East.⁵⁸ Both bisect the Casamance region in southern Senegal and move via Tambacounda, the biggest town in eastern Senegal, which sits on an intersection of trunk roads between Mali, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau.

Secondary stream coordinated by middle-level criminal entrepreneurs: These actors buy from the bulk suppliers, and then transfer smaller quantities northwards. The criminal entrepreneurs come from a number of regional countries,

but also Europe (mainly the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain). Several people in this network may have both Bissau-Guinean and European passports. To feed this network of entrepreneurs, drugs are stockpiled in Guinea-Bissau and then broken up into smaller quantities for onward movement, often using the Senegal/Mali-Mauritania route. This is evidenced by a regular trickle of low volume seizures on the main land route exiting Guinea-Bissau via southern Senegal.


Small volumes of drugs air-transported by couriers: Cocaine is transported in small quantities to Bissau and onwards to Europe by air passengers. There are three key air routings, all beginning in Sao Paulo, Brazil.⁵⁹ The first moves via Lisbon (where couriers are not searched in transit or pass their load to another courier) onto Bissau.⁶⁰ In the second route, cocaine is trafficked from Sao Paulo to Bissau, and after a few days on to Lisbon. In the third route, which has diminished somewhat in popularity since 2019, traffickers leveraged the Royal Air Maroc connection from São Paulo through Casablanca to Bissau. Once in Bissau, cocaine can be transferred by land, then boat as outlined above, to elsewhere in the region before onward transfer to Europe or elsewhere. Seizure data from 2019–2020 highlighted an additional route where Bissau-Guinean nationals were driving to the international airport in Banjul, The Gambia, before ingesting the cocaine and travelling to Las Palmas in the Canary Islands. Routes regularly adapt to evade law enforcement.



THE CURRENT COCAINE CLIMATE

TRAFFICKING SHROUDED
IN INCREASED OPACITY

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When President Umaro Sissoco Embaló came to power in February 2020 following a military-backed electoral victory labelled a ‘coup’ by critics, it marked the beginning of a new phase in the country’s drug economy.⁶¹ Alongside the new administration, a number of figures in Guinea-Bissau’s political and military establishment with longstanding links to cocaine trafficking, including a number of individuals on UN and US sanctions lists, returned to prominence.⁶²

The presidential inauguration was preceded by the military’s occupation of a range of government buildings, marking the end of a six-year spell – unprecedented in the country’s independent history – of military non-interference in political events.⁶³ While some analysts feared a return to the previous dynamics of an interventionist military, this proved to preface a period of deep-rooted change in the power balance between the country’s institutions.

The tenure of the administration, which took power in February 2020, has been characterized by growing concentration of power in the hands of the president, tensions between the president and military, and mounting political instability. This instability climaxed in the February 2022 attack on the governmental palace, explored further below.

A marked acceleration in the politicization of criminal justice infrastructure has gone hand in hand with a diminishing focus on cocaine trafficking, and a growing gap between rhetoric and practice regarding responses to the drug trade. These developments have unfolded in growing opacity, as the space for freedom of expression and civil society critique has shrunk.

Although many stakeholders often lament that Guinea-Bissau appears mired in stasis, changes are underway in the traditional balance of power between state and security institutions, the relationship of the elite with civil society, and the geopolitical context in which Guinea-Bissau and international actors are operating. If these changes concretize, they could have long-lasting effects on the country’s power-sharing settlement, and on its cocaine markets.

Centralization of power in the office of the president: Growing isolation

The steps Embaló has taken to consolidate power have fuelled a rift within the government, with knock-on effects on his relationship with the powerful military. The deteriorating relationship between the president and powerful factions of the military forms the backdrop to unfolding events in Bissau. Most prominent is the February 2022 coup attempt, and the ensuing mobilization of stabilization troops by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).



Undermined: Prime Minister Nuno Gomes Nabiam © Seyllou/AFP via Getty Images

Presidential moves to centralize power have driven tensions with Embaló-aligned political parties. The PRS party was notably excluded from Embaló's reconstituted cabinet on 10 June, possibly indicating a breakdown in the relationship. While growing antagonism between the president and Braima Camara, head of the MADEM G-15 party, which supported Embaló's presidential candidacy in 2019, could signal a coming schism, which would leave the president isolated in the country's political landscape.⁶⁴

A central element of the president's strategy to centralize power has been the repeated undermining of the power of his prime minister, Nuno Gomes Nabiam. Notably, he appointed Soares Sambu, an ally, as the 'Vice Prime Minister' – a newly created and unconstitutional role. The President has also repeatedly acted as head of the Council of Ministers, constitutionally dictated to be the responsibility of the Prime Minister, except in exceptional circumstances.⁶⁵

To date, Embaló has remained heavily dependent on Nabiam, largely due to his strong ethnic links with the

dominant Balanta military hierarchy.⁶⁶ Yet, this dependence may be waning, as the president has taken steps to dislodge the Balanta grip on military power, which has remained intact since independence. For example, the president has sent scores of new Fulani soldiers for training in the DRC, Turkey and Israel, and integrated them into the force.⁶⁷ This has fuelled a growing distance between the president and elements of the military hierarchy, with reports that some senior members have not met with the president for extended periods of time.⁶⁸

Ominously, the increasingly alienated Balanta elements of the military have previously stated that if Nabiam is dismissed as prime minister, Embaló will 'accompany him'.⁶⁹ Such statements, which highlighted the potential vulnerability and isolation of the president, have fuelled fears of a pending coup among Bissauan stakeholders since early 2021.

In February 2021 the president appeared to fan such fears by reporting a coup attempt to the press. Bubo Na Tchuto, former head of the navy, was named as the ringleader by journalists, and Tchamy Ialá as his accomplice.⁷⁰ (Both Tchuto and Ialá were previously convicted in a New York court for conspiring to traffic drugs following the US DEA sting operation in 2013.) No arrests were made following Embaló's statements, and the nature or veracity of the alleged coup attempt remains unclear.⁷¹

According to official accounts, fears of a coup materialized one year later, on 1 February 2022, when the governmental palace was attacked by heavily armed men, resulting in five hours of heavy gunfire.⁷² The attack was eventually repulsed, and termed a failed coup attempt by the government. Eleven individuals were killed in the attack – a low figure according to security experts, given the length and intensity of the gunfire.

In press statements immediately after the failed attack, Embaló appeared flanked by Nabiam in a show of unity that belies the growing tension between the two men, and quickly tied the incident to the country's cocaine trade, stating: 'Some individuals involved

in this cowardly and barbaric act were already being investigated for drug trafficking'.⁷³ The arrest of a number of men, including Tchuto appeared to underscore this connection.⁷⁴ At least seven men have been arrested in connection with the attack, although three were released in early April.⁷⁵

Many national stakeholders, including political figures, members of civil society and former government officials, remain sceptical of the nature of the February attack. Some have suggested it may have been staged by the current administration to garner support.⁷⁶ The low number of casualties given the extensive fighting with heavy weapons, the apparently sudden decision to stop the attack and the mysterious escape of the attackers into the empty streets of Bissau have all been cited as oddities which cast doubt on official accounts. The inconclusiveness of ongoing official investigations to date has failed to quash such doubts.

Among those who believe the attack was a genuine coup attempt, eyes quickly turned to the military as possible culprits – a logical suspect given the country's turbulent past and the military's prominent role in previous coups. Suspicions were further fuelled by the 'strange' lack of reaction from the military barracks, a mere 300 metres away from the governmental palace, as underscored by PAIGC opposition leader Domingos Simões Pereira in statements to international media.⁷⁷

Perhaps in response to such tacit claims, Nabiam publicly stated on 17 February that no serving members of the country's armed forces were complicit in the attack.⁷⁸ However, a number of different sources close to the investigation in Bissau report that members of the military hierarchy, with one key

exception, were aware of the planned attack and had agreed not to interfere.⁷⁹ (This exception was reportedly Biague N'tam, the chief of the armed forces, who was in Spain at the time of the attack receiving medical treatment. N'tam is known for his belief that the military should not interfere in politics.)

According to such sources, the attackers spoke Wolof, one of Senegal's national languages, and are believed to be members of the Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC), a separatist rebel group operating in the Casamance region just north of the Senegalese border with Guinea-Bissau. The Casamance region, which together with Guinea-Bissau forms part of the Senegambia conflict system, has been in a state of low-level insurgency since the mid-1980s. The rebels, which pursue a separatist agenda, have long used Guinea-Bissau as a safe haven from Senegalese forces.

In February 2021, President Embaló granted permission to Senegalese troops to pursue Casamance separatist rebels into Bissau-Guinean territory, and fighting between Senegalese forces and Casamance rebels flared up once again, breaking an uneasy truce that had prevailed for a number of years.⁸⁰ Embaló's decision triggered backlash from elements of the Balanta military hierarchy, who argued that it encroached on national sovereignty. The Casamance conflict has remained acute since February, with a March 2022 offensive by Senegalese troops displacing thousands of people into neighbouring Gambia.⁸¹

If reports that the governmental palace attackers were Casamance rebels are correct, this would tie the incident closely to Embaló's support for the Senegalese state in the Casamance conflict, and the tensions between the president and military.

Deployment of ECOWAS peacekeeping troops

A pivotal consequence of the February incident was the decision by ECOWAS to re-deploy a stabilization force to Guinea-Bissau.⁸² Announced on 3 February, this came a mere 18 months after ECOWAS had agreed to withdraw its previous stabilization force, the ECOWAS Mission for Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB),

at the request of Embaló. This withdrawal, which was accompanied by the closure of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau on 31 December 2020, had ended over 20 years of peacekeeping presence in the country.⁸³ In hindsight, the withdrawals merely constituted a brief hiatus.

ECOWAS's willingness to redeploy stabilization troops was likely shaped by acute concerns regarding the growing number of coups in the region.

ECOWAS's willingness to redeploy stabilization troops was likely shaped by acute concerns regarding the growing number of coups in the region. It was also likely facilitated by the close relationship of Embaló with the heads of state in the ECOWAS Council of Ministers.⁸⁴ He has particularly strong relationships with Muhammadu Buhari, president of Nigeria, and Macky Sall, president of Senegal, both of whom share Embaló's Fulani ethnicity and are dominant players in the bloc. This closeness is unprecedented for Guinea-Bissau's leaders, and appears to shield Embaló from criticism of his moves to centralize power in the office of the president.

The long-standing alliance between Embaló and Sall has engendered unprecedented intermingling of domestic interests. This includes the contentious grant of Bissau-Guinean offshore oil exploration rights to Senegal,⁸⁵ and the presidential permission given to Senegalese troops to pursue Casamance separatist rebels into Bissau-Guinean territory cited above.⁸⁶ Notably, the stabilization troops deployed to Guinea-Bissau, like those currently deployed in Gambia, are predominantly Senegalese.

The deployment significantly strengthens the president's position in the country, creating a buffer against the Bissau-Guinean military, and potentially deterring actions to topple the president on the part of the Balanta elements of the military.⁸⁷ There is precedent for Guinea-Bissau's military taking action to stave off perceived threats to its influence within the country. The 2011 deployment of a 270-strong force of military advisors from Angola, the Angola military mission in Guinea-Bissau (MISSANG), was one factor behind the military seizure of power in April 2012.⁸⁸

The decision to deploy ECOWAS stabilization troops has been heavily criticized by political, military and civil society stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau, many of whom deem the deployment unconstitutional.⁸⁹ On 4 February, the day after the ECOWAS decision at the Accra summit, a Superior Council of Defence meeting convening senior military figures reportedly concluded in a decision by the majority to reject the return of ECO-MIB troops.⁹⁰ The move is no more popular among civil society. Fodé Mane, a lawyer in



In May, just days before the arrival of ECOWAS troops, President Embaló dissolved the National Assembly. © Issouf Sanogo/AFP via Getty Images

Guinea-Bissau, stated: 'We from the Bissau-Guinean civil society do not have a good feeling about this mission. No one here believes that this stabilization force will solve our problems.'⁹¹ Representatives of the National Assembly labelled the ECOWAS mission 'occupation troops', and challenged the legality of the deployment given the lack of prior consultation and approval from the body.⁹²

On 13 May, four days prior to the official arrival of ECOWAS troops in Guinea-Bissau, President Embaló dissolved the National Assembly.⁹³ The presidential statement attributed the dissolution to the fact that 'the Tenth Legislature has converted the People's National Assembly into a space of political guerrilla warfare, of conspiracy. Many deputies have persistently combined their efforts to weaken the institutions of the Republic instead of doing everything to strengthen them'.⁹⁴ However, the timing of the move implies links to the National Assembly's resistance to ECOWAS troop deployment, and to the president's constitutional review process, widely perceived as unlawful.⁹⁵ The dissolution further demolished the already-limited and shrinking checks on presidential power in Guinea-Bissau, making the

political landscape increasingly precarious in the run-up to elections scheduled for December 2022.

Growing political volatility has manifested in increasing violence against critics. On 7 May, unidentified assailants shot and wounded Agnelo Regala, legislator and president of the opposition União para a Mudança political party, outside his residence in Bissau. Regala had been open in his criticism of the deployment of ECOWAS troops to the country. In press statements following the attack, Regala noted the presence of 'international powers in the governance of our country'. Regala's statements have been widely perceived as critical of the current administration.⁹⁶

The move against Regala, a widely respected political actor with a long history of cross-party engagement, is merely the latest attack perpetrated against political and civil society critics of the current administration. The space for criticizing the government has closed since early 2020,⁹⁷ and particularly since the February 2022 attack, which brought in its wake an escalation in attacks against government critics.⁹⁸

Politicization of criminal justice weakens response to cocaine trafficking

President Embaló has publicly stated to international media that his inauguration as president 'closed a chapter' in Guinea-Bissau's history, referring to the country's long-running operation as a cocaine

trafficking hub.⁹⁹ Embaló's inauguration has indeed been accompanied by a sharp decline in the volume of cocaine seized in Guinea-Bissau. The volume of cocaine seized in 2020 and 2021 (around 7 kilograms



Packets of seized cocaine are displayed at a police station in Bissau, 2012. © Issouf Sanogo/AFP via Getty Images

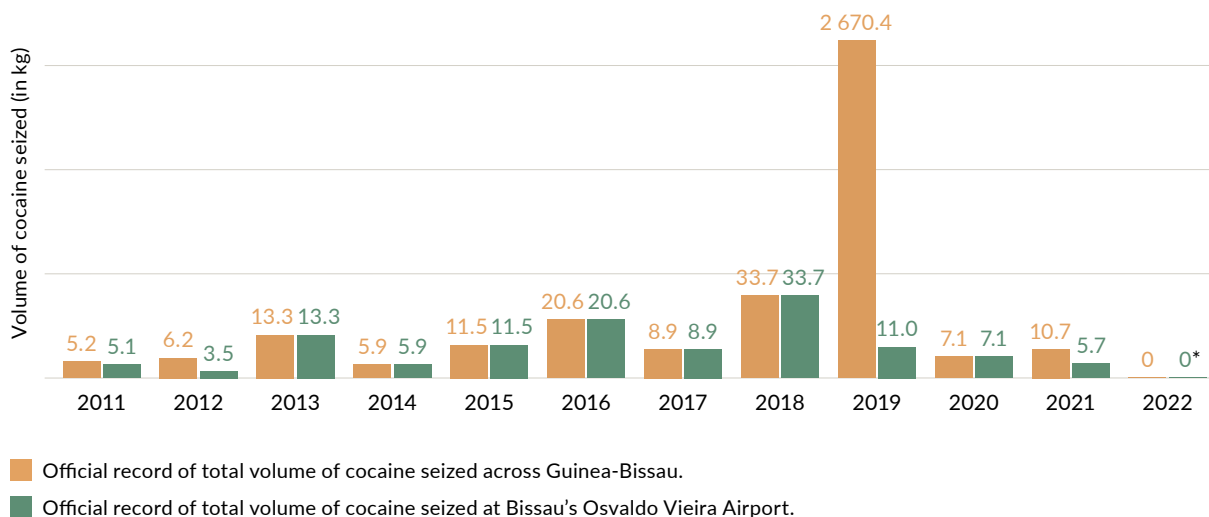


FIGURE 4 Cocaine seizures in Guinea-Bissau, 2011–2022.

NOTE: One minor seizure has been tracked in 2022, however the exact volume is unknown.

and 10 kilograms, respectively) are the lowest recorded in the last five years. As of 30 June 2022, there had only been one reported seizure of cocaine that year.

However, absence of seizures alone is no indication that cocaine trafficking has actually diminished. Instead, numerous well-positioned sources point to an increase in cocaine trafficking over this period. For example, Ruth Monteiro, former Bissau-Guinean Minister of Justice, has identified an ‘upsurge’ since early 2020.¹⁰⁰ Intelligence from national and international law enforcement authorities point to the continued, and escalating, discharge of cocaine from mother ships in Bissau-Guinean territorial waters, transhipped onto smaller vessels for disembarkation across the coastline.¹⁰¹ Notably, two indicators used to compose the fragile states index, namely those relating to state legitimacy and public services, show a marked increase in fragility since 2020.¹⁰²

Stakeholders close to the investigations into cocaine seizures in the territorial waters and ports of neighbouring countries, most prominently Senegal and Gambia, have repeatedly pointed to Guinea-Bissau as the intended destination of the consignments.¹⁰³ For example, the 2 026 kilograms of cocaine seized on the vessel *La Rosa* in waters off Dakar in October 2021, is believed to have been en route to Guinea-Bissau.¹⁰⁴

Seizure data must be treated with caution as an analytical metric for underlying trafficking dynamics. Underscoring this, the marked decline in seizures in Guinea-Bissau since early 2020 appear closely linked to the drastically diminished operational freedoms among the criminal justice infrastructure, including the Judicial Police, as opposed to a decrease in cocaine trafficking through Guinea-Bissau.

Although there is a long precedence for political influence over criminal justice infrastructure in Guinea-Bissau, it has accelerated since the current administration came to power in early 2020.¹⁰⁵ This has been highlighted as a trend of concern both by civil society commentators and members of the criminal justice infrastructure in Guinea-Bissau. For example, Basílio Sanca, president of the Bar Association, speaking at the opening ceremony of the Judicial Year in February 2021, noted the growing influence of politics over the Bissau-Guinean judiciary, holding the Public Prosecution Service and Supreme Court as particularly responsible for the ‘enormous’ undermining of the rule of law in the country. (In an illuminating response mere days after Sanca’s comments, President Embaló ordered the eviction of the Bar Association from their headquarters next to the Palace of the Republic.)¹⁰⁶

Changes to the triangle of key players?

Braima Seidí Bá, arguably Guinea-Bissau's most notorious criminal entrepreneur, fled Bissau in March 2020 following his conviction *in absentia* by Bissau courts on drug trafficking charges relating to the import of 1 869 kilograms of cocaine, which were seized in Operation Navarra in September 2019.¹⁰⁷ Bá is believed to be residing in Senegambia, a touristic area of The Gambia close to Banjul.¹⁰⁸ Curiously, Bá's relocation appears to have occurred in parallel to The Gambia playing an increasingly prominent role in the subregional cocaine trafficking ecosystem.¹⁰⁹

The partial exit of Bá from the Bissau scene may have left a gap in the market, which other players have stepped into. This is not to say that Bá has stopped operating, which seems unlikely, but that he appears less prominent in Bissau. Some sources refute this, arguing instead that Bá regularly visits Bissau, and continues to play a major role in coordinating dynamics in the country. Bá's acquittal by the Supreme Court in June 2022 may well herald his return to prominence in Bissau.

Either way, the Judicial Police have gathered evidence regarding a different group that is engaging in direct negotiations with networks in Latin America. This network has used private airplanes to travel to Latin America, reportedly for negotiations with cocaine suppliers.¹¹⁰ Well-informed foreign officials link this new group to elements of the military.¹¹¹ If correct, this would indicate that the military have sought to cut out the 'middleman' between themselves and Latin American cartels, traditionally the regional criminal entrepreneur identified in the triangle above. This would not be the first time that players in the military have sought to move from their role of protecting the cocaine trade to directly coordinating it, likely in search of greater profits.¹¹²

The functions of controlling and co-ordinating illicit economies, and protecting their operations are almost always separate.¹¹³ They form the two axes of protection economies, where payment is given in exchange for security.¹¹⁴ Were the military to move into direct coordination of trafficking, this could blur the distinction, although the control and protection roles may still be fulfilled by different elements within the military.

Other well-connected players who previously were less involved in the cocaine trafficking market also appear to have benefitted from the vacuum left by Bá's departure. This includes high-level political players who have turned to profits from the cocaine trade as alternative revenue streams have dwindled.



Braima Seidí Bá was sentenced in the Regional Court for his involvement in a cocaine trans-shipment. His conviction was overturned in June 2022 by the Supreme Court.

Since early 2020, executive influence has increased over key nodes of the criminal justice system, namely the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Judiciary (whose apex is the Supreme Court), and the Judicial Police. While an acceleration of this trend commenced around 2006, if coupled with effective disempowerment of elements of the military traditionally pivotal to the cocaine trade, the importance of the military elite as providers of protection could diminish over the long term.

The current head of the Public Prosecutor's Office, Bacari Biai, was appointed to the role in November 2021. The attorney general, a presidential appointee, sits between the executive and judicial branches. With the power to stymie investigations, the position is ideally positioned to safeguard impunity for protected players.¹¹⁵ During his previous service as prosecutor general (2017–2019),¹¹⁶ Biai had a mixed reputation and was perceived by some to have blocked certain investigations.¹¹⁷

The constitutionally independent appointment procedure for the head of the Supreme Court has traditionally enabled an element of independence in the judiciary. However, executive involvement in the appointment process of the head of the Supreme Court secured the position for Mamadú Saïdo Baldé in May 2021, a close ally of the president, potentially further diluting judicial checks on executive power.¹¹⁸ Following Baldé's death in August 2021, José Pedro Sambú was appointed, also known to be close to the president. The appointment of Sambú, the former president of the national election commission in Guinea-Bissau – a body that played a key role in accepting the results of the controversial and contested 2019 presidential elections – was highly controversial. Sambú was initially rejected as a candidate for the role as he did not meet the

required criteria, however, through a highly irregular process he was later appointed. The appointment of an additional seven new judges was also allegedly in breach of procedure; all these appointments may result in further alignment of the judiciary with the imperatives of the executive.¹¹⁹ The surprise and controversial 23 June 2022 acquittal by the Supreme Court of Seidi Bá, together with Ricardo Monje, his alleged co-conspirator, will no doubt fuel suspicions that the Supreme Court is operating on political imperatives, and of a further weakened criminal justice response to cocaine trafficking.¹²⁰

As the primary body for investigating organized crime, which has long operated with a remarkable degree of integrity given the prevailing institutional context, the Judicial Police also report significantly decreased independence in operations. Bissau-Guinean civil society organizations, including the Guinean Human Rights League and media outlets, have criticized the growing politicization of the body.¹²¹ The Judicial Police have opened significantly fewer cases into drug trafficking since early 2020, and it is clear that organized crime, and particularly cocaine trafficking, is no longer a strategic priority for the force (in line with executive direction).¹²² Instead, the president has leveraged the force to investigate political opponents, often on charges of corruption.¹²³

With one exception, no seizures of cocaine have been made by the Judicial Police in Guinea-Bissau since early 2020. (All cocaine seizures in 2020, 2021 and 2022 were made by the airport's AIRCOP JAIF unit on individuals leaving Guinea-Bissau through the airport.) The one exception, a Judicial Police seizure of 5 kilograms of cocaine in October 2021 as part of Operation Red, supports the notion of ongoing penetration of vested interests in the cocaine trade within Guinea-Bissau's politico-military institutions.

Operation Red

The only Judicial Police cocaine seizure since early 2020 was a 5-kilogram import seized on 26 October 2021 as part of an investigation dubbed 'Operation Red'. Operation Red was triggered by reports that two individuals – Ivan Sampaio and Lucas Rocha – had been kidnapped. Amado Lamine Conte (alias Du), a military officer, Ernesto Augusto Ndengle and Domingos Vasco Nbatcha were arrested in connection with the kidnapping.¹²⁴

Operation Red suspect testimonies claimed that Du, one of the alleged ringleaders, was acting under orders from General Antonio Indjai, a longstanding player in Bissau's politics, and the subject of a US international arrest warrant issued in August 2021.¹²⁵ Du has been linked to significant cocaine seizures in the subregion, including the 2 026 kilograms intercepted on the vessel *La Rosa* in October 2021, and is known to be close to Indjai.¹²⁶

Judicial Police investigations revealed that the kidnappings were linked to the cocaine trade. The victims were in possession of cocaine allegedly stolen from their military partners. Sampaio and Rocha had been taken to Bissorã, a town 75 kilometres from the capital by road, tied up and tortured in connection with the theft of around 980 kilograms of cocaine and €170 000 (CFA 112 000 000) allegedly stolen from Rocha's house by Carlos Elitiano Silva (alias Ely), a high-ranking officer of the Rapid Intervention Police, and Nuno Miguel Mané Sanha (alias Samory).¹²⁷

The Judicial Police initially detained six people in connection with Operation Red.¹²⁸ (Tchami lala, one of the three men convicted in a New York court following the 2013 DEA sting operation, was brought in for questioning at the time, but was not detained.)¹²⁹ While the Judicial Police concluded that the participants committed the crimes of kidnapping, drug trafficking, criminal association, money laundering and use of prohibited weapons, the Public Prosecutor's Office only charged the men with two of these crimes.¹³⁰ This is a common approach of selective charging which facilitates later exculpation or diminishment of sentences.¹³¹

Biai tasked a three-magistrate commission with the prosecution of this case, in breach of Bissau-Guinean law.¹³² Former members of the Bissau-Guinean judicial system point to the chequered past of the appointed magistrates. For example, Mário lala reportedly sought to intervene in the March 2019 Carapau investigation by seeking to order Judicial Police officers to release the refrigerated truck ahead of being searched. Once searched, the truck was found to contain 789 kilograms of cocaine.¹³³

In April, the Regional Court of Bissau handed down suspended sentences of three years to Lucas Roche and ten months to Domingos Mbathe for drug charges, and charges against public order. The remaining eight accused, including Du, the military official, were acquitted of all crimes.¹³⁴



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Supporters of President Embaló's party, MADEM-G15, ahead of the parliamentary elections in 2019.
© Seyllou/AFP via Getty Images



Bissau's enduring reliance on illicit revenues

Guinea-Bissau's current financial outlook, and the forthcoming parliamentary elections, provide the key backdrop for analysing the likely trajectory of the cocaine trade in the country.

Guinea-Bissau is currently experiencing multi-faceted economic stresses. The country experienced economic contraction in 2020, in part linked to the global impacts of COVID-19, but also due to a fall in demand for cashew nuts.¹³⁵ This time, however, external aid (primarily from the IMF) has been more forthcoming than in 2013,¹³⁶ where a drop in cashew prices contributed to reliance on illicit logging.¹³⁷ Despite a 2022 cashew harvest broadly perceived in-country as relatively poor, the June IMF review concluded in overall positive commentary of the economic outlook.¹³⁸ Although this macro-economic assessment was positive, on the ground communities are suffering. Globally spiralling inflation rates connected with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, together with the steep increase in oil prices, are exerting pressure on Guinea-Bissau's external account balance, presenting risks to the country's economic trajectory.¹³⁹ The price of bread – a key staple – has doubled, while the price of rice, also a central foodstuff, has also increased sharply in line with inflation. Finally, were the political situation to become increasingly volatile, this could also present economic risks.

Elements of the Bissau-Guinean state have, at various points throughout history, turned to illicit markets as a source of revenue when alternative revenue streams have dried up. The reliance of the government on the arms trafficking market in the 1990s, and the military junta on illicit logging markets between 2012 and 2014, are but two examples. This is particularly true in periods of elections – as explored below.

Following Embaló's dissolution of the National Assembly, Guinea-Bissau finds itself once again on the bumpy path towards legislative elections in 2022, and presidential elections in late-2023. Since 2005, when rumours fingered the cocaine economy as the source of funds behind President Vieira's notably well-funded campaign, profits from the country's illicit markets have become ever more entangled in Guinea-Bissau's democratic processes. The 2005 elections also marked a steep escalation in electoral campaigning costs, which have cost over €30 million since. This is a staggering amount in a country where the minimum wage is around €80 per month.¹⁴⁰

Illicit markets have been well positioned to provide urgently needed funds for the spiralling costs of political mobilization. 'It is not possible to practise politics effectively in Guinea-Bissau without access to money,' explained a prominent academic in Bissau. Money is needed, he said, to fund mobile campaigning and campaign materials, and for gifts to hand out to the electorate, to help win them over.¹⁴¹

Over time, the illicit logging and cocaine markets have counterbalanced each other – enabling the political elite to shift between the two in times of boom and bust. Illicit logging played a strong role ahead of the 2014 and 2018 elections.¹⁴² The timing of the March 2019 cocaine import on the eve of parliamentary elections is widely perceived to mean that the cocaine consignment had been intended to fund campaigning.¹⁴³

Recommendations

Guinea-Bissau has entered a new phase in its cocaine politics, one marked by growing repression of dissent and critique, and a gulf between rhetoric and action. Interests in the cocaine market continue to shape alliances among the political and military elite, and to be linked to episodes of political volatility. In this context, continuing engagement in the country, through civil society together with diplomacy, is paramount. Failing to retain these engagements would leave those who speak out with even weaker protection.

The state protection structures of Guinea-Bissau's illicit markets present the greatest obstacle to supporting responses to the cocaine market. Yet the ultimate aim of engagement must continue to be disruption of the current political settlement, which is a self-reinforcing cycle of clientelism amongst the political, military and business elite. In this system, resources buy political influence, which in turn offers the most lucrative means of capturing rents from both the licit and the illicit economy, and provides few incentives for changing the system.

The proposed engagement strategy serves two interlinked goals: weakening state complicity in illicit markets by delinking political processes from rent-seeking practices and resource predation, and thereby strengthening state responses to illicit

These external factors suggest that elements of the elite may turn once more to illicit markets to supplement strained public purses, and provide financing for electoral campaigning.¹⁴⁴ The sustained growth in cocaine cultivation in Latin America, and demand in Europe, means the cocaine economy is well positioned to operate as an escalating source of revenue for political figures on opposing sides. The timing of the acquittal of Seidi Bá and Ricardo Monje in June 2022, previously convicted in connection with record-breaking cocaine imports, just months before parliamentary elections being scheduled for December 2022, may fuel suspicion that the cocaine market is already being fingered as a potential source of electoral financing.

markets, particularly by bolstering the criminal justice system.

Empower civil society and communities to better advocate for responses to the illicit economy.

Given the context of increasing pressure on civil society, seeking to undermine their role as a check on power, the need for external support is pressing. Linking civil society to international voices enhances their credibility and protection, enabling it to work more effectively within a wider regional and global network of civil society. Enhancing the safety and security of civil society is particularly crucial given the context of increasing assaults on bloggers and journalists, and increasingly challenging operating environment for civil society organizations. Supporting platforms that enable individual elements of civil society to speak as one – such as Espaço de Concerção – is one approach tailored to reducing risks associated with critique.¹⁴⁵

As Guinea-Bissau moves into a pre-election period, drive for national reform on political party and campaign funding.

The costs of elections in Guinea-Bissau, as in many countries in Africa, have increased sharply over the years. Yet, funding sources remain shrouded in



A soldier patrols the government palace area in Bissau, where on 1 February gunfire was heard near the seat of government.
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secrecy. This provides enormous incentives for politicians to draw rents from illicit markets to fund political campaigns. In turn, the toxically symbiotic relationship between politics and illicit markets fundamentally undermines governance and the provision of public services.

While confronting the issue of campaign financing is extremely difficult in Guinea-Bissau, breaking reliance on illicit sources of revenue (whether external or internal) in order to reinforce political power must be a priority. In the long term, this should manifest in reduced campaign financing costs and political party financing. This can be achieved by bolstering enforcement of financial reporting by political parties, and enacting wider information disclosure laws. A recent drive by the Public Ministry to enforce compliance with legislation requiring all political parties contesting elections to submit the origins of funding for their electoral campaigns within 30 days of the date of the election appears *prima facie* a move in the right direction. However, close observers in Bissau note that this enforcement drive is likely to be weaponised as a way of identifying, and dissuading, opposition sources of funding. Any figures provided are likely to be inaccurate.¹⁴⁶

An informed civil society that is ready and able to investigate and report on campaign financing is an essential partner to legal and institutional reforms. It is therefore key to bolster oversight and reporting of electoral campaigning (and public procurement more broadly) by independent and civil society groups. This should include the publication and dissemination of electoral campaigning costs of different parties.

International partners should ensure that the topic of transparency on campaign financing remains prominent on the political agenda as the country moves into a pre-election phase, with legislative elections currently scheduled for December 2022. Such transparency should be required across the political spectrum, not just of opposition candidates.

Strengthen the integrity and capacity of the judiciary.

The judiciary in Guinea-Bissau remains highly vulnerable to external influence, particularly from the executive. Even where other branches of law enforcement, such as the Judicial Police, operate effectively, the impact is undermined by weak judicial processes. Further, as evidenced in the progression of the Seidi Bá trial through the judicial system,

strong responses by the judiciary working in lower courts can be easily undermined by co-opted benches in the higher courts.¹⁴⁷ Civil society representatives repeatedly emphasize the need to continue building both capacity and oversight of the judiciary to 'ensure a more robust criminal justice administration'.¹⁴⁸

Although the influence of the executive over the judiciary is currently at a particularly high point, this should not dissuade efforts to strengthen elements of the institution. In particular, the establishment of a single, well-funded and protected court where high-level drug cases can be tried could be a promising avenue for further discussion. A degree of protection for judges operating with integrity, and a shield against outside influence, could be achieved through a programme that provides higher levels of oversight by, and collaboration with, foreign lusophone counterparts (for example, from Angola, Brazil or Portugal). More broadly, civil society oversight of judicial processes should be promoted to increase pressure for due process to be followed and the human rights of the accused respected. Supporting the work of the Guinea-Bissau Human Rights League in this area provides one avenue for such engagement.

Provide strategic support to the Judicial Police.

An effective and adequately resourced Judicial Police is the lynchpin to creating an effective deterrent for drug traffickers, local criminal entrepreneurs and their political protectors. Future support and engagement can build on the existing capacity and elements of independence. The reportedly decreasing independence of the Judicial Police is a key concern, but should shape the strategic targeting of support, rather than negate it.

In order to mitigate against executive influence over the director of the Judicial Police, it is key to advocate for regulations that clearly regulate the independent appointment, reporting and dismissal processes for the position. Further, additional programming support by international partners for the Judicial Police should be contingent on clear statements by the government of Guinea-Bissau prohibiting any external interference in the work of the body. The Judicial Police has often been described as an 'island of integrity' in Guinea-Bissau's criminal justice infrastructure. Bridges must be built from this island to effective elements within the other branches of the criminal justice system, most urgently the judiciary, to safeguard achievements by the Judicial Police from being undermined at later stages in the process. Programming should aim to build a network of nodes of integrity across the criminal justice infrastructure, which are shielded from executive influence.

NOTES

- 1 Aaron Ross, Factbox: Recent coups in West and Central Africa, Reuters, 1 February 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/recent-coups-west-central-africa-2022-02-01/>.
- 2 Some individuals involved in this cowardly and barbaric act were already being investigated for drug trafficking.
- 3 Aaron Ross, Failed coup attempt puts spotlight back on Guinea-Bissau's role in cocaine trade, 11 February 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/failed-coup-puts-spotlight-back-guinea-bissaus-role-cocaine-trade-2022-02-11/>.
- 4 Antonio Cascais, Guinea-Bissau: Are drug cartels behind the attempted coup?, *Deutsche Welle*, 3 February 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/guinea-bissau-drug-cartels-behind-attempted-coup/a-60651513>.
- 5 For an overview of source material in organized crime research, see Dick Hobbs and Georgios Antonopoulos, How to research organized crime, in Letizia Paoli (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp 96–117.
- 6 Following best practice, interviews were generally open discussions. A checklist of key issues guided the interviews, and these were repeatedly discussed during interviews. Interviews were conducted in confidence, and following methodological and ethical guidelines, no interviewee was identified to others. To protect their identities, interviewees are identified in the footnotes by a description of their general designation.
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- 8 UNDP Guinea-Bissau, *Avaliação da Fragilidade*, March 2017, p 31.
- 9 Guinea-Bissau is part of the Senegambia conflict system, which also spans Senegal and Gambia. Alexandre Marc, Neelam Verjee and Stephen Mogaka, The challenge of stability and security in West Africa, World Bank Group, 2015, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/publication/the-challenge-of-stability-and-security-in-west-africa>.
- 10 Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, UNDP, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021*, https://ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/UNDP_OPHI_GMPI_2021_Report_Unmasking.pdf.
- 11 The most prominent of these is the Structural Adjustment Programme (1987 to 1994), which centred on cashew promotion and exchange with other crops, <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/document/guinea-bissau-structural-adjustment-programme-9685>; Mark Shaw, Drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, 1998–2014: The evolution of an elite protection network, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 53, 3, 347, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-modern-african-studies/article/drug-trafficking-in-guineabissau-19982014-the-evolution-of-an-elite-protection-network/3D32B19B009F1C44E69964FEACE7106C>.
- 12 Ordinary people in focus groups have also made this point. See Tuesday Reitano and Mark Shaw, People's perspectives of organized crime in West Africa and the Sahel, *Institute for Security Studies*, Paper 254, 2014.
- 13 Institute of Security Studies, UNIOGBIS, *Relaunching defence and security sector reforms in Guinea-Bissau*, Policy Brief 5, May 2018.
- 14 Instituto Padre António Vieira, *Em Nome da Paz - Relatório Final da Consulta Nacional sobre Paz, Reconciliação e*

- Desenvolvimento (2009-2017)*, 2018; LGDH, *Quarenta Anos de Impunidade na Guiné-Bissau*, Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos, 2013; UNIOGBIS, Analysis of the key drivers of instability and UN strategy for Guinea-Bissau (2013–2017).
- 15 OECD, International drivers of corruption: A tool for analysis, 2012, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/accountable-effective-institutions/49263997.pdf>.
 - 16 World Bank Group, Guinea-Bissau public expenditure review Seizing the moment: Managing public finance for development, 2018, <https://issat.dcaf.ch/download/135600/2768661>; OECD, African Union Commission and African Tax Administration Forum, Revenue statistics in Africa 1990–2018, 2020, <https://www.oecdilibrary.org/docserver/14e1edb1enfr.pdf?expires=1612522832&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=D8549D11EF9F24CA4BF3523B067CD368>.
 - 17 Sources of revenue are core in shaping the incentives and strategies of the ruling elite: where rulers need to 'earn' revenue by taxing citizens this creates pressures for public accountability and a strong incentive for rulers to nurture productive investment and build the capability to raise and manage public revenues. Where revenues are 'unearned', no such accountability mechanism exists, driving instead 'exclusive political behaviour', namely predation, corruption, rent seeking and political patronage (contrasting to 'inclusive political behaviour' centred around the provision of public goods). Unearned revenues have corrosive power regardless of whether they are licit (for example, the 'resource curse', where countries' natural resources fetch high prices on international commodity markets and translate into inflated corruption and dwindling domestic governance, such as copper in Zambia) or illicit. The nature of the revenue source – whether licit or illicit – shapes the strategies of the elite in power, in part because the latter can be directly appropriated. The former must typically be obtained through taxation, for example of mineral extraction companies. The 'unearned' and 'illicit' nature of profits from criminal markets makes them highly corrupting of state officials. See OECD, International drivers of corruption: A tool for analysis, 2012, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/accountable-effective-institutions/49263997.pdf>.
 - 18 The role of the illicit logging trade is explored in depth in a separate publication: Lucia Bird and A. Gomes, Deep rooted interests: Licensing illicit logging in Guinea-Bissau, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), May 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/illicit-logging-guinea-bissau/>.
 - 19 The World Bank, Guinea-Bissau overview, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guineabissau/overview#1>.
 - 20 Emmanuel Uzuegbu-Wilson, A critical review of evolutionary trends of drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, 10 October 2019, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3467484>. A weak executive in the face of a strong military has also been identified as an important 'vulnerability' of Guinea-Bissau, leaving it open to cocaine trafficking. See UNODC, Cocaine trafficking in West Africa: The threat to stability and development (with special reference to Guinea-Bissau), 2017, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/west_africa_cocaine_report_2007-12_en.pdf.
 - 21 In a state 'organized around strategies of material survival and personal gain', notes one analysis, which draws on the voices of ordinary Bissau-Guineans, the two trends of state contraction and reliance on external resources have been mutually reinforcing. Interpeace, Roots of conflict in Guinea-Bissau: The voices of the people, Bissau: Interpeace/Voz di Paz, 2010, p 13.
 - 22 Mark Shaw, Drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, 1998–2014: The evolution of an elite protection network, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 53, 339–364.
 - 23 James Cockayne, Chasing shadows: Strategic responses to organised crime in conflict-affected situations, *The RUSI Journal*, 158, 2.
 - 24 Interview with Fodé Mané, Bissau, December 2020.
 - 25 James Cockayne, Chasing shadows: Strategic responses to organised crime in conflict-affected situations, *The RUSI Journal*, 158, 2.
 - 26 Mark Shaw, Drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, 1998–2014: the evolution of an elite protection network, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 53, 339–364.
 - 27 Prices for cashew nuts dropped to less than US\$0.40 per kilogram, according to an interview with a member of the industry, August 2019.
 - 28 Environmental Investigation Agency, Authorized plunder: The rosewood stockpile sale, 2018, https://content.eia-global.org/posts/documents/000/000/802/original/EIA_US_GuineaBissau_report_0918_US_Format_FINAL_MEDRES.pdf?1547131805.
 - 29 Mark Shaw, 'We pay, you pay': Protection economies, financial flows, and violence, in Hilary Matfess and Michael Miklaucic (eds), *Beyond Convergence, World Without Order*, Washington, DC: Center for Complex Operations, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2016, pp 235–250.
 - 30 For further details see: Lucia Bird and A. Gomes, Deep rooted interests: Licensing illicit logging in Guinea-Bissau, GI-TOC, May 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/illicit-logging-guinea-bissau/>.
 - 31 Outcome of focus group discussions in selected districts around the country, Institute for Security Studies, 2012. See Tuesday Reitano and Mark Shaw, People's perspectives of organized crime in West Africa and the Sahel, *Institute for Security Studies*, Paper 254, 2014.
 - 32 This section draws heavily on previous analysis conducted by Mark Shaw, which was also based upon

- extensive qualitative interviewing, both in Guinea-Bissau and elsewhere, with state and non-state actors, including those engaged in the criminal economy, in 2005, 2012, 2014 and 2019. All the interviews referred to in this section dated prior to 2019 were conducted by Mark Shaw, together with a team of supporting researchers. Interviews from 2020 onwards were conducted by the author, together with a team of supporting researchers.
- 33 This was the context in which the economic and political liberalization of the 1990s favoured certain non-government commercial enterprises (although many were run by previous state officials) over state-centred accumulation, reducing access to resources for key politicians and military officers. Marina Padroã Temudo, From 'People's struggle' to this 'war of today': Entanglements of peace and conflict in Guinea-Bissau, *Africa*, 78, 2, May 2008, pp. 245–263.
- 34 For an overview, see: Lars Rudebeck, Guinea-Bissau: Military fighting breaks out, *Review of African Political Economy*, 25, 77, 484–486.
- 35 The sworn 2015 testimony in a New York courtroom of Mamadu Serifi Bai, a local 'fixer' in Bissau, shows that he began assisting Latin American traffickers in 2003 and 2004. The volume of drugs being shipped was substantial. In that two-year period alone, Bai said that he assisted with approximately seven flights, each with cargoes of around 600 kilograms of cocaine; testimony of Mamadu Serifo Baia, Case 1:12-cr-00839-JSR Document 85 Filed 04/24/15, 87–89.
- 36 Leadership of all three arms of the military services – namely General Batista Tagme Na Waie, then military chief of staff (representing the interests of the territorial army); Bubo Na Tchuto, former head of the navy; and Ibraima Papa Camará, air force chief (who remained in post until February 2021) – were linked to trafficking. As regards President Vieira, while there is some debate as to how close he came to the drug trade, it appears clear that at the very least that he was aware of, and benefited from, the trade. Interviews, Bissau, July 2019.
- 37 The Mexican drug cartels – Los Zetas, the Sinaloa cartel, and the Jalisco New Generation cartels – are said to have been the first to connect through West Africa with shipments destined for the EU. In particular, Italy was identified as a destination, with evidence that the Italian 'Ndrangheta was involved. Germán de los Santos, Africa: New drug trafficking route, *El Universal*, 1 July 2017, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/english/2017/07/1/africa-new-drug-trafficking-route>; Interview with an individual with close links to drug traffickers, Bissau, July 2019.
- 38 This included several Hummers. A number of public officials seemed to have a taste for new cars, and Vieira himself also acquired a Hummer. While they moved between Bissau, Dakar and Conakry, Guinea-Bissau was particularly attractive due to the lack of US diplomatic presence on the ground as a result of the hostility between the country's elite (many of whom had been schooled in Russia or Cuba) and the US. By contrast, Guinea-Conakry was seen as a greater challenge for the traffickers because the US maintained a large embassy there; interview with an individual with close links to traffickers, Bissau, July 2019.
- 39 Interview with an individual with close links to the trafficking economy, Bissau, July 2019; interviews with local senior law-enforcement officers, Bissau, July 2019; Interviews with military officers, Bissau, 2015.
- 40 The Latin American traffickers had strong connections not only with traffickers in Guinea-Bissau, but across West Africa, including with well-established Nigerian criminal networks; interview with an individual with close links to traffickers, Bissau, July 2019.
- 41 The Seidi Bá cocaine trial: A smokescreen for impunity? GI-TOC, Risk Bulletin, 20 January 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/seidi-ba-cocaine-trial-bissau/>. Agreement NQ 4/2022, Republica Da Guinea-Bissau, Supreme Court of Justice, Criminal Court, 23 June 2022.
- 42 This is consistent with studies of mafia groups in other contexts. Mark Shaw, Drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, 1998–2014: the evolution of an elite protection network, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 53, 339–364.
- 43 The military negotiated a deal where they would be paid 15% of the value of shipments based on the current prices for cocaine. The price used at the time was between €11 000 to €12 000 per kilogram, meaning that the military took approximately €1 650 per kilogram for their work. That amounts to €1.6 million per tonne of cocaine that moved through Guinea-Bissau. Other interviews generally refer to a lower amount – approximately €1 million per tonne – and it is possible that this was the 'protection fee' agreed for earlier transfers. In the DEA sting operation, a 13% fee was negotiated, which may have been lower because the military were at the time desperate for a deal. It is hard to judge from these discussions exactly how much cocaine was moving through the country, but between November 2007 and January 2008, an insider to the trade estimated there to have been at least six shipments, with a minimum total of between six and eight tonnes. Interviews with individuals close to the trafficking networks at the time, Bissau, July 2019; interviews with senior local law-enforcement officials, Bissau, July 2019.
- 44 Evidence from a series of law-enforcement seizures of cocaine underscores the active role of government officials in protecting the trade. Interviews with government officials and civil society, Bissau, 2015.
- 45 One clear indication of this trend is the number of Bissau-Guineans arrested and convicted for trafficking offences elsewhere, which spiked from 18 to 109 between 2006

- and 2010. This comes from data shared by UNODC, collated through ARQ responses.
- 46 They often stayed at the Palace Hotel, where they dined with President Vieira on numerous occasions. Interviews with past staff at the Palace Hotel, Bissau, July 2019.
- 47 The degree of state penetration was evidenced by a whiteboard sketch found in a 2007 raid by the Judicial Police on a warehouse rented by Braima Seidi Bá. The sketch showed a network of key government players – including deputies in the national assembly, the chief of the army, the president of the supreme court, as well as special advisors to the president – and the connections between them. Five names were legible on the board. At the top was João Bernardo Vieira (the president), who was linked through an intermediary to four other stick figures: Bubo Na Tchuto, head of the navy; Bacro Dabo, minister of the interior; Tagme Na Waie, chief of staff of the armed forces; and Hélder Proença, minister of defence. A photograph of the board is in the possession of the authors.
- 48 Operations were most prominently moved to Guinea, which became the major transit route with Conakry as the new base. Sierra Leone and Liberia also became key transit points, although to a lesser extent than Guinea. Interview with senior law-enforcement official, Bissau, July 2019; Lansana Gberie, *Crime, violence and politics: Drug trafficking and counternarcotics policy in Mali and Guinea*, Brookings Institution, Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence, Latin America Initiative, 2016; BBC News, *Liberia in record cocaine seizure*, 1 February 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7222809.stm>.
- 49 Seidi Bá is reported to have started purchasing protection from lower ranks of the military during this period, excluding the most senior players; interview with an individual with close connections to the traffickers, Bissau, July 2019.
- 50 In February 2009, Na Waie was killed by a bomb blast in the main headquarters of the armed forces. On 2 March 2009, a group of soldiers loyal to the assassinated chief of staff attacked the president's house and brutally beat and killed Vieira. Hélder Proença, minister of defence, and Bacro Dabo, minister of the interior, were also assassinated in this period. Judicial Police sources remain convinced that the killings, which once again plunged Guinea-Bissau into a period of profound instability, were linked to control of the drug trade. Interviews, Bissau and Lisbon, 2012, 2015, July 2019.
- 51 Interviews with diplomats and UN staff, Bissau, July 2019.
- 52 Interviews with civil-society leaders and political commentators, Bissau, July 2019.
- 53 Shortly after the coup, the DEA initiated an investigation 'to identify organizations and individuals from Colombia that had knowledge of trafficking routes into West Africa specifically Guinea Bissau'. Once information had been gathered over the subsequent months, the investigation targeted a series of individuals, including the subject of the trial Rafael Garavito and General Indjai, the leader of the 'cocaine coup'. Testimony from Stephen Casey, DEA Special Agent, Special Operations Division, 12 CR 839 (JSR), Case 1:12-cr-00939-JSR Document 75, Filed 04/24/15, p 46, 49.
- 54 Christoph Kohl, *Ethnicity and the political system post-1998*, in P Chabal and T Green (eds), *Guinea-Bissau: Micro State to Narco State*. London: Hurst, 2016, p 162.
- 55 Interviews with foreign and local law-enforcement officials, Bissau, July 2019.
- 56 Interpol, *Guinea-Bissau: triple prison conviction marks new era of anti-drug action with INTERPOL*, 27 December 2019, <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2019/Guinea-Bissau-triple-prison-conviction-marks-new-era-of-anti-drug-action-with-INTERPOL>; UNODC, *Guinea-Bissau: Drug smugglers receive record 16-year-jail sentences as justice system strengthened by UNODC*, 10 April 2020, <https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/2020-04-02-jugement-navara-guinee-bissau.html>.
- 57 Additional arrests and further investigations following the two 2019 seizures revealed networks of individuals spanning across five West African countries (Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Guinea, together with a wider set of actors in Niger linked to regional protection structures), together with a group of Latin American traffickers based between Bissau, Conakry and Dakar.
- 58 Smaller routes also move through Guinea.
- 59 This stream is largely controlled by Nigerians and is closely linked to the large number of Nigerian residents in Brazil.
- 60 Drugs are either exchanged between couriers in the transit area or between couriers travelling different segments of the route; interviews, AIRCOP officials and international law-enforcement representatives, Dakar and Bissau, June and July 2019.
- 61 Antonio Cascais, *Guinea-Bissau: Coup or legitimate change of power?*, 4 March 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/guinea-bissau-coup-or-legitimate-change-of-power/a-52632844>.
- 62 Mark Shaw and A. Gomes, *Breaking the vicious cycle: Cocaine politics in Guinea-Bissau*, GI-TOC, May 2020, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Guinea-Bissau_Policy-Brief_Final2.pdf.
- 63 The military intervened after the Supreme Court ruled in favour of opposition and reformist candidate Domingos Simões Pereira, who alleged electoral irregularities and ordered a recount. The National Electoral Commission refused to recount the votes from the beginning, and recounted the results from regional electoral commissions. On 27 February 2020, Embaló was self-inaugurated as president. The following day, the national

- broadcaster was temporarily suspended as the military occupied government ministries, including the Palace of Justice, marking an abrupt return to politics.
- 64 Camara has reportedly criticized the movement of Guinea-Bissau towards a fully presidential system (away from its traditional semi-presidential system). Returning to Bissau on 20 June following 10 months abroad, Camara reportedly found that his security detail had been removed due to instruction from interior ministry.
- 65 Soares Sambu sworn in as deputy prime minister, *No Pintcha Journal*, 6 November 2020, <http://jornalnopintcha.gw/2020/11/06/soares-sambu-empossado-no-cargo-de-vice-primeiro-ministro/>.
- 66 The Balanta are a key political constituency who vote in a unified way, generally along ethnic lines.
- 67 Mussá Baldé, *211 novos militares foram incorporados nas Forças Armadas na Guiné-Bissau*, RFI, 6 June 2021, [https://www.rfi.fr/pt/guine-bissau/20210606-211-novos-militares-foram-hoje-incorporados-nas-forças-armadas;interviews with international officials and Bissau-Guinean journalists, June 2021](https://www.rfi.fr/pt/guine-bissau/20210606-211-novos-militares-foram-hoje-incorporados-nas-forcas-armadas;interviews%20with%20international%20officials%20and%20Bissau-Guinean%20journalists,%20June%202021).
- 68 A number of reshuffles made by Embaló in February 2021 across government and military, reportedly without consultation with Nabiam, are likely to further antagonize the military. The replacement of Ibraima Papa Camará, part of the military old guard, with Joaquim Filinto Ferreira as Head of the Air Force is one such move.
- 69 In public Embaló negates rumours that he is preparing to replace Nabiam, describing Nabiam's position in government as 'non-negotiable'. However, in private the President reportedly cites corruption, including Nabiam's widely known involvement in the illicit logging sector, as a key driver for pending dismissal. While tensions between the office holders have long precedent, Nabiam's close alliance with the military mean they have far-reaching consequences. See *Capital News*, Umamo Sissoco Embaló states that: 'Nuno Nabiam's position is non-negotiable', 7 October 2020, <https://capitalnews.gw/umamo-sissoco-embalo-afirma-que-lugar-de-nuno-nabiam-nao-e-negociavel/>; Mussá Baldé, *Guiné-Bissau: Umamo Sissoco Embaló segura Nuno Nabian como primeiro-ministro*, RFI, 7 October 2020, <https://www.rfi.fr/pt/guine-bissau/20201007-guine-bissau-umamo-sis-soco-embalo-segura-nuno-nabian-como-primeiro-ministro>; E-Global, *Militares em prevenção devido a rumores conspiracionistas*, Guinea-Bissau, 8 February 2021, <https://e-global.pt/noticias/lusofonia/guine-bissau/guine-bissau-militares-em-prevencao-devido-a-rumores-conspiracionistas/>.
- Lucia Bird and A. Gomes, *Deep rooted interests: Licensing illicit logging in Guinea-Bissau*, GI-TOC, May 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/illicit-logging-guinea-bissau/>.
- 70 E-Global, *Guinea-Bissau: Militares em prevencao devido a rumores conspiracionistas*, 8 February 2021, <https://e-global.pt/noticias/lusofonia/guine-bissau/guine-bissau-militares-em-prevencao-devido-a-rumores-conspiracionistas/>.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Henrique Almeida and Yinka Ibukun, *Drug traffickers blamed for latest coup attempt in Guinea-Bissau*, Bloomberg, 2 February 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-02/drug-traffickers-blamed-for-latest-coup-attempt-in-guinea-bissau>.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Djeme was the third in the trio convicted following the DEA sting. Tchuto received a four-year prison sentence, Tchamy a five-year sentence and Djeme a six-and-a-half-year sentence.
- 75 Official statement of release of three suspects originally arrested in connection with the coup, 8 April 2022.
- 76 See: Lucia Bird, *A very strange coup attempt*, GI-TOC, 4 February 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/coup-attempt-guinea-bissau>.
- 77 Pereira noted this in an interview given to *Deutsche Welle* in May 2022. Antonio Cascais, *ECOWAS criticized over West African coups*, *Deutsche Welle*, 5 May 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/ecowas-criticized-over-west-african-coups/a-61685721>.
- 78 Lusa, *Guiné-Bissau: Forças de defesa não estiveram envolvidas no ataque*, *Deutsche Welle*, 17 February 2022, <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/guine-bissau-forças-de-defesa-não-estiveram-envolvidas-no-ataque/a-60818500>.
- 79 Interviews with sources close to the investigation, Bissau, February-March 2022.
- 80 E-Global, *Militares em prevenção devido a rumores conspiracionistas*, 8 February 2021, <https://e-global.pt/noticias/lusofonia/guine-bissau/guine-bissau-militares-em-prevencao-devido-a-rumores-conspiracionistas/>.
- 81 Annika Hammerschlag, *Conflict in Senegal displaces thousands*, VOA, 17 March 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/conflict-in-senegal-displaces-thousands-/6489729.html>.
- 82 On 3 February, during an extraordinary conference of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, which took place in Accra, the regional body decided to send a stabilization force to Guinea-Bissau. See Arnaldo Vieira, *Ecowas to send troops to Guinea-Bissau*, *The East African*, 4 February 2022, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/rest-of-africa/ecowas-to-send-troops-to-guinea-bissau-3705036>.
- 83 Summer Walker and A. Gomes, *Mission not accomplished? UNIOGBIS closes amid uncertainty in Guinea-Bissau*, GI-TOC, April 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/uniogbis-guinea-bissau/>.
- 84 Embaló's notably cold relationship with Alpha Conde, former President of Guinea, was the key exception to this before the September 2021 coup in Guinea.

- 85 An agreement signed by President Embaló in October 2020 has been criticized for being detrimental to Bissau-Guinean interests. Further, pursuant to the Bissau-Guinean constitution, the president has no competence to execute international treaties. Instead, presidential powers are limited to ratification of such international treaties/agreements after the agreement has been negotiated and signed by the government, and approved by the national parliament (Articles 68, 85(1) Bissau-Guinean Constitution).
- 86 E-Global, *Militares em prevenção devido a rumores conspiracionistas*, Guinea-Bissau, 8 February 2021, <https://e-global.pt/noticias/lusofonia/guine-bissau/guine-bissau-militares-em-prevencao-devido-a-rumores-conspiracionistas/>.
- 87 The mandate for the stabilization force has not yet been revealed, but it is expected to track that of the previous ECOMIB force. The troops are expected to be stationed by both the presidential and prime minister's residence, and possibly to oversee an awaited executive-led restructure of the military. Written briefing by former Bissau-Guinean government official, 5 February 2022.
- 88 The deployment of MISSANG was the result of a bilateral initiative by the Community of Portuguese Countries.
- 89 An international law enforcement expert stationed in Guinea-Bissau highlighted the following provisions of the constitution in their analysis of the unconstitutional nature of the move: articles 85, and 86: (85/1h) It is incumbent on the ANP to approve treaties involving Guinea-Bissau's participation in international organizations, treaties of friendship, peace, defence, border rectification and any others that the government may decide to submit to it. Article 86(c): The ANP has exclusive competence to legislate on the following matters: c) organization of national defence.
- 90 Discussions with international and national stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau, Bissau, February 2022.
- 91 António Cascais, ECOWAS criticized over West African coups, *Deutsche Welle*, 5 May 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/ecowas-criticized-over-west-african-coups/a-61685721>
- 92 See footnote 89 for Constitutional Articles supporting this interpretation.
- 93 Article 69 of the Bissau-Guinean constitution allows for the dissolution of the ANP if there is 'grave political crisis'.
- 94 Official Presidential Statement, Bissau, May 16, 2022.
- 95 The dissolution surprised few, given Embaló's repeated threats since mid-2020, and ongoing steps to undermine Nabiam's government. A lack of constitutional clarity regarding the distinct roles of each organ of state, and individual office-holders fuels political instability. In recognition of this, a parliamentary committee on constitutional reform has been working on addressing this since 2007, however, progress has been slow. The chronic instability that characterized the term of former President Vaz, where the government was crippled by repeated clashes between state bodies and officeholders, lent the process greater urgency. ECOWAS demanded a proposal for constitutional reform to be submitted by October 2020, however, the deadline was breached. In parallel, President Embaló launched a parallel independent constitutional reform commission in May 2020, which has been heavily criticized for breaching the constitutionally prescribed process.
- 96 Agnelo Regalla, *Líder da oposição na Guiné-Bissau foi atingido a tiro*, RTP, 8 May 2022, https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/agnelo-regalla-lider-da-oposicao-na-guine-bissau-foi-atingido-a-tiro_v1403613.
- 97 The country fell by six places to rank 94th in the Press Freedoms Index published by Reporters Without Borders in 2020 and remained at 92nd place in 2021 (rising only due to an overall worsening in press freedoms internationally, rather than an improvement in Guinea-Bissau). The brazenness of violence used against journalists and bloggers, particularly from March 2021, is new. The daylight abduction and severe beating of blogger Aly Silva from central Bissau, his car left empty and unlocked in the middle of a busy street, is only one example. Interviews with journalists, civil society representatives and lawyers in Bissau in February, March and June 2021, and February and March 2022, further emphasized this escalating repression.
- 98 The suspension of around 80 Bissau-Guinean Radio stations on 7 April, allegedly due to failure to comply with licensing requirements, further increased the silence surrounding unfolding events in Bissau. For further discussion of the repression of critical voices; see GI-TOC, West Africa Risk Bulletin, Issue 3, March 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/WEA-Obs-RB3.pdf>.
- 99 Micael Pereira, *Até onde vai a rota do narcotráfico que passa na Guiné-Bissau? Veja o vídeo da grande reportagem 'Na rota da coca'*, *Expresso*, 9 April 2022, <https://expresso.pt/multimedia/video/2022-04-09-Ate-onde-vai-a-rota-do-narcotrafico-que-passa-na-Guine-Bissau-Veja-o-video-da-grande-reportagem-Na-rota-da-coca-00bf5661>.
- 100 Interview with Ruth Monteiro, June 2022, by phone.
- 101 Between March 2020 and December 2021, law enforcement authorities tracked the offloading of at least four large cocaine consignments in Bissau-Guinean territorial waters. Authorities were reportedly unable to act due to high-level political and military protection of the operations. The Port of Bissau, known to be highly corrupt, is unlikely to be playing a significant role in cocaine trafficking currently as throughput has significantly diminished since shipping company Maersk stopped operating at the port. Interviews with sources

- close to law enforcement authorities in Guinea-Bissau, January-March 2022.
- 102 Fragile States Index, Country Data, Accessed 6 June 2022, <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>.
- 103 Interviews with law enforcement officials in Dakar, Senegal and Banjul, Gambia, October–December 2021.
- 104 Interviews with security officials in Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and Gambia, October–December 2021.
- 105 Intimidation and harassment of independent elements of the judiciary have driven some, including Paulo Sanhá, president of the Supreme Court, to leave the country., The Seidi Bá cocaine trial: A smokescreen for impunity? Risk Bulletin, GI-TOC, 20 January 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/seidi-ba-cocaine-trial-bissau/>.
- 106 The president's office cited 'national security concerns', but the eviction is widely seen as retribution for Sanca's criticism. On 17 February 2021, the Regional Court of Bissau ordered the provisional restoration of the building back to the Bar Association. This has not yet occurred – another example of executive non-compliance with judicial decrees. See *Agência de Notícias da Guiné, Bastonário da Ordem dos Advogados critica que as decisões judiciais têm sido marcadas pela influência política*, 2 February 2021, angnoticias.blogspot.com.
- 107 The Seidi Bá cocaine trial: A smokescreen for impunity?, GI-TOC, 20 January 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/guinea-bissau-obs-rb1/>.
- 108 The Gambia has repeatedly operated as a refuge for criminal actors fleeing Bissau. For example, Nuno Miguel Sanhá (known as Samory), who was tried and acquitted *in absentia* in connection with Operation Red (see below for details), similarly fled to Senegambia. Samory has been seen frequenting the same bars and establishments Bá is known to favour. Videos seen by the GI-TOC show Sanhá at nightclubs in Senegambia. Efforts to extradite Samory to Guinea-Bissau – reportedly aborted midway following high-level interference – point to significant political protection.
- 109 In January 2021, 3 tonnes of cocaine were seized in the Port of Banjul. Investigations by regional law enforcement following seizures in the territorial waters of Senegal have repeatedly pointed to subregional networks with nodes residing in The Gambia. The cocaine consignment resulting in Operation Red was reportedly imported from The Gambia.
- 110 Judicial Police documents relating to the Operation Red investigation, October 2021.
- 111 Interviews with international officials, Bissau and remotely, November 2021–February 2022.
- 112 Interview with senior law-enforcement official, Bissau, July 2019.
- 113 William Reno, Understanding criminality in West African conflicts, In John Cockayne and Adam Lupel (eds), *Peace Operations and Organized Crime: Enemies or allies?* London: Routledge, 2011; Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- 114 Mark Shaw, 'We pay, you pay': Protection economies, financial flows, and violence, in Hilary Matfess and Michael Miklaucic (eds), *Beyond Convergence, World Without Order*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Complex Operations, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2016, pp 235-250.
- 115 Fernando Gomes, the attorney general first appointed following Embaló's inauguration, seems to have followed in the footsteps of his predecessor, Bacari Biai, who repeatedly exercised this obstructive power. The investigation into former President Aristedes Gomes, and the arrest warrant issued for opposition leader Pereira, are seen as clear markers of Fernando Gomes aligning investigations with the 'political agenda, properly orchestrated by the power holders', in the words of the letter received from Aristedes Gomes. Fernando Gomes is under investigation (albeit a currently stalled one) for corruption allegations linked to previous government posts. This is unprecedented and perceived to strengthen the credibility of Embaló's self-declared battle against corruption. Letter received by GI-TOC from Aristides Gomes on 20 January 2021 authored by The Collective of Lawyers of Dr Aristides Gomes, titled: Denouncement of the blatant misdeeds of the Attorney General of the Republic, Bissau, 13 January 2021.
- 116 ECOWAS accused the MADEM G-15 and some associates as being an impediment to the formulation of a new government and stability in the country, and they were targeted for sanctions by ECOWAS states, which included travel bans and asset freezes. The sanctions list included the then prosecutor general, Bacari Biai, a point of some significance in relation to drug trafficking, as will be discussed later. Interviews with ECOWAS officials, Bissau, July 2019.
- 117 Interviews with diplomats, Dakar and Bissau, July 2019; Interviews with senior law-enforcement officials, Bissau, July 2019.
- 118 Mussá Baldé, Guiné-Bissau: Mamadu Saido Baldé, novo presidente do Supremo Tribunal de Justiça, RFI, 26 May 2021; <https://www.voaportugues.com/a/josé-pedro-sambú-eleito-presidente-do-supremo-tribunal-de-justiça-da-guiné-bissau/6349315.html>.
- 119 Raquel Loureiro, *Guiné-Bissau: Nomeação de juizes do STJ é irregular, aponta jurista*, Deutsche Welle, Guiné-Bissau, 19 November 2021, <https://www.dw.com/pt-002/guiné-bissau-nomeação-de-ju%C3%ADzes-do-stj-é-irregular-aponta-jurista/a-59883183>. RFI, *Candidatura de Pedro Sambú ao STJ "ilegível"*, 8 October 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/pt/guiné-bissau/20210526-guiné-bissau-mamadu-saido-baldé-novo-presidente-do-supremo-tribunal-de-justiça>.

- 120 Agreement NQ 4/2022, Republica Da Guinea-Bissau, Supreme Court of Justice, Criminal Court, 23 June 2022.
- 121 Public statement made by the Guinean Human Rights League on 23 January 2021; Raquel Loureiro, *Guiné-Bissau: Nomeação de juízes do STJ é irregular, aponta jurista*, *Deutsche Welle*, Guiné-Bissau, 19 November 2021.
- 122 For example, according to Judicial Police officers interviewed by Bissau Digital in February 2021, the force has not conducted any investigations into drug trafficking since early 2020, and organized crime is no longer a strategic priority. Bissau Digital, *Guinean Judicial Police on the brink of explosion*, 25 February 2021.
- 123 Interviews with journalists, international officials and Judicial Police, January-June 2021.
- 124 Judicial police documentation of Operation Red investigation, October 2021.
- 125 US Department of State, Department of State offers reward for information to bring Guinea-Bissau narcotics trafficker to justice, 19 August 2021, <https://www.state.gov/department-of-state-offers-reward-for-information-to-bring-guinea-bissau-narcotics-trafficker-to-justice/>.
- 126 Babacar Dione and Carley Petesch, *Senegal seizes 2 tons of cocaine off coast; Arrests 5*, ABC News, 20 October 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/senegal-seizes-tons-cocaine-off-coast-arrests-80683528>.
- 127 See footnote 109 for further details regarding the role of Samory. Testimonies in the case reaffirmed the role of Mercado de Bandim, in Bissau, in money laundering as it was used to transfer US\$800 000 from Dubai to Bissau. The GI-TOC has seen photographs of the victims showing evidence of torture.
- 128 *Polícia Judiciária, Guinea-Bissau, Operação red – 06 guineenses detidos por tráfico de cocaína e rapto*, 11 March 2021, <https://www.pjguineabissau.com/artigos/operacao-red-a-pj-detem-seis6-guineenses-com-cinco5-placas-de-droga/>.
- 129 Ernesto Augusto Ndengle, a suspect detained under Operation Red, claimed to have been contacted by Tchami Yala, allegedly his brother, in the context of the cocaine consignment. However, Yala was quickly released, despite his long track record of involvement in cocaine trafficking. Former members of the Bissau-Guinean judicial system note that this is odd. Judicial report of arrest, Ndengle statement; Written briefings from former member of Bissau-Guinean judicial system, January 2022.
- 130 The Public Prosecutor's office levied the charges of money laundering and drug trafficking, and left open the charge of criminal association. *OPERAÇÃO RED – 06 GUINEENSES DETIDOS POR TRAFICO DE COCAINA E RAPTO*, Regional Court of Bissau, File n. 19/2022, 21 April 2022.
- 131 Accusation of Magistrate Lassana Cassama, file no. 979/2021.
- 132 According to a senior lawyer, previously part of the Bissau Guinean administration: It is illegal to create commissions to investigate and bring charges against suspects of the commission of crimes. The Organic Law of the Public Prosecutor's Office does not provide for any collective body with the power to investigate and bring charges. Strictly speaking, all acts carried out by the commission are illegal and any sentence resulting from a trial based on the indictment issued by the commission can be annulled by the Court of Appeal.
- 133 Written statement by official Bissau-Guinean Government spokesperson, 13 November 2019.
- 134 Regional Court of Bissau, File n. 19/2022, 21 April 2022.
- 135 The World Bank, *Guinea-Bissau country overview*, Accessed 6 June 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guineabissau/overview#1>.
- 136 Elements of the Bissau-Guinean state have, at various points throughout history, turned to illicit markets as a source of revenue when alternative revenue streams have dried up. The reliance of the government on the arms trafficking market in the 1990s, and the military junta on illicit logging markets between 2012-2014, are but two examples.
- 137 On 25 January 2021, the IMF approved US\$20.47 million in emergency support to the country. IMF Executive Board approves US\$20.47 million emergency assistance for Guinea-Bissau to address the COVID-19 pandemic, 25 January 2021, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2021/01/25/pr2121guinea-bissau-imf-executive-board-approves-emergency-assistance-to-address-covid-19>.
- 138 Notably part of this outlook appeared premised on an assessment of the political context as 'relatively stable' in comparison to the country's past. This appears to be a miscalculation of the current situation, and could mean the positive outlook is too optimistic. International Monetary Fund, *Guinea-Bissau:2022 Article IV Consultation and Third Review under the Staff-Monitored Program*; Press Release; and Statement by the Executive Director for Guinea-Bissau, 27 June 2022, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2022/06/26/Guinea-Bissau-2022-Article-IV-Consultation-and-Third-Review-under-the-Staff-Monitored-520008>
- 139 The World Bank, *Guinea-Bissau country overview*, Accessed 6 June 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/guineabissau/overview#1>.
- 140 Interview with Fodé Mané, Bissau, December 2020. Mané teaches at the Faculty of Law of Bissau, permanent researcher at the National Institute of Studies and Research INEP, and vice president of the Human Rights Observatory.
- 141 Interview with a Bissau-Guinean academic, Bissau, July 2019.

- 142 In 2014, profits were reportedly used by General Indjai in support of Nuno Nabiam's ultimately unsuccessful campaign. Further, mere months ahead of the May 2018 elections, then Prime Minister Embaló suddenly announced a partial lifting of the logging moratorium, enabling the export of 1 500 containers filled with logs which had been stockpiled at Bissau port since 2015. Interviews in the capital revealed suspicions that the moratorium had been lifted by the ruling party as a means to raise campaign funds and support for the ensuing elections. For further detail, see: Tuesday Reitano et al, Razing Africa: Combatting criminal consortia in the logging sector, 2018, ENACT, <https://enactafrica.org/research/research-papers/razing-africa-combatting-criminal-consortia-in-the-logging-sector>.
- 143 For further detail, see: Mark Shaw and A. Gomes, Breaking the vicious cycle: Cocaine politics in Guinea-Bissau, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, May 2020, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Guinea-Bissau_Policy-Brief_Final2.pdf.
- 144 The logging market is also set to play a role in election financing. The executive declaration announcing that the moratorium on logging would be lifted, and the ongoing involvement of high-level political players in the market support this assessment. For further analysis of the logging market, see: Lucia Bird and A. Gomes, Deep rooted interests: Licensing illicit logging in Guinea-Bissau, GI-TOC, May 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/illicit-logging-guinea>.
- 145 A platform of Bissau-Guinean civil society organizations established in 2020 in order to national civil society speak with one voice on issues concerning drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. The platform currently counts 28 members, and is set to continue growing.
- 146 Discussions with international and national commentators, Bissau, June 2022.
- 147 The sentences handed down in the trial of the Seidi Bá network were drastically diluted by the Court of Appeal. For further analysis see: The Seidi Bá cocaine trial: A smokescreen for impunity? January 2021, GI-TOC, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/seidi-ba-cocaine-trial-bissau/>. For the June 2022 acquittal: Agreement NQ 4/2022, Republica Da Guinea-Bissau, Supreme Court of Justice, Criminal Court, 23 June 2022.
- 148 Discussion with UNODC, Bissau, February 2020.



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