

**ETHNIC TENSIONS AND DEMANDS FOR AUTONOMY IN GUINEA-BISSAU: CHALLENGES FOR ECOWAS UNITY**

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**Abstract**

Guinea-Bissau, a small nation in West Africa, has long grappled with deep-rooted ethnic tensions and persistent demands for autonomy, which undermine its stability and threaten the broader unity of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). These challenges stem from a complex interplay of historical, socio-political, and economic factors that have fueled marginalization and grievances among various ethnic groups. This study aims to investigate the root causes of these tensions and evaluate their impact on ECOWAS's regional integration efforts. Adopting a qualitative research methodology, the study relies on secondary data to assess governance dynamics, the role of local elites, and the effectiveness of ECOWAS interventions. Guided by conflict resolution and integration theories, the study emphasizes the importance of inclusive governance and equitable resource allocation in mitigating ethnic strife. Findings reveal that a lack of effective leadership, weak institutional frameworks, and inadequate conflict management strategies have exacerbated ethnic divisions, creating significant barriers to national unity and regional cohesion. ECOWAS's interventions, while commendable, often lack the necessary depth to address underlying grievances sustainably. The study concludes that resolving ethnic tensions and fostering unity in Guinea-Bissau requires a holistic approach that prioritizes inclusive dialogue, institutional reform, and economic empowerment. It recommends that ECOWAS adopt tailored, culturally sensitive conflict resolution mechanisms and strengthen its support for grassroots reconciliation initiatives. By addressing these challenges, Guinea-Bissau can become a cornerstone for stability and integration in West Africa.

**Keywords:** Ethnic Tensions, Demands for Autonomy, Ethnic Unity

**Introduction**

Guinea-Bissau, a small yet culturally vibrant nation in West Africa, stands as a testament to the richness of diversity on the African continent. Within its borders, over twenty distinct ethnic groups coexist, each contributing unique languages, customs, and traditions to the country's tapestry<sup>1</sup>. This cultural wealth represents an invaluable heritage, yet it has also proven to be a double-edged sword. The diversity that could unite and strengthen the nation has, in many instances, become a source of division and tension, particularly in the years following independence from Portuguese colonial rule in 1974.

The post-independence period in Guinea-Bissau has been marked by a complex interplay of ethnic grievances, economic disparity, and weak governance. Marginalized groups, often sidelined in political and economic decision-making, have voiced their discontent, with some even calling for greater autonomy<sup>2</sup>. These demands are not simply cries for recognition but are rooted in long-standing perceptions of exclusion and inequality. As these grievances fester, they threaten national cohesion, fueling periodic instability and undermining the prospects for sustainable development.

Amidst these internal struggles, the role of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) becomes pivotal. Established with the vision of promoting regional integration, peace, and economic cooperation, ECOWAS faces the daunting challenge of addressing Guinea-Bissau's internal conflicts while balancing its broader mandate in the region. The organization's efforts to mediate, reconcile, and foster unity in a nation fraught with ethnic and socio-political complexities are both commendable and instructive.

This article delves into the historical and socio-political underpinnings of ethnic tensions and autonomy demands in Guinea-Bissau, offering a critical examination of the factors that have shaped these dynamics. It further evaluates ECOWAS's role in mitigating these challenges, shedding light on the successes achieved, the limitations encountered, and the prospects for a more unified and stable Guinea-Bissau within the framework of regional integration.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

The topic "Ethnic Tensions and Demands for Autonomy in Guinea-Bissau: Challenges for ECOWAS Unity" necessitates a nuanced understanding of key concepts that underpin the discussion. These concepts include ethnic tensions, demands for autonomy, and ECOWAS unity. Each is integral to grasping the dynamics of the political and social issues confronting Guinea-Bissau and the broader West African region.

### **Ethnic Tensions**

Ethnic tensions refer to the strain and conflicts arising from differences between ethnic groups within a state. Such tensions often stem from historical grievances, competition for resources, political marginalization, or perceived inequalities in representation and rights<sup>3</sup>. Competition for limited resources intensifies these conflicts, as groups vie for access to land, jobs, or wealth. Political marginalization further exacerbates the situation, as excluded groups feel alienated and powerless, fostering resentment. Also, perceived inequalities in representation and rights deepen divisions, as marginalized communities view the political system as unjust and unresponsive to their needs. Together, these factors create an environment ripe for conflict and demands for autonomy.

In Guinea-Bissau, the presence of multiple ethnic groups, such as the Balanta, Fula, Mandinka, and Papel, creates a complex socio-political landscape where competing interests can foster division<sup>4</sup>. The interplay of cultural, linguistic, and historical distinctions exacerbates these tensions, particularly when ethnic identities intersect with political affiliations.

### **Demands for Autonomy**

Demands for autonomy encapsulate the aspirations of a group or region to achieve self-governance or increased control over local affairs while remaining within a sovereign state<sup>5</sup>. These demands are often fueled by perceptions of neglect or exclusion by the central government. In Guinea-Bissau, marginalized ethnic groups and regions have periodically called for autonomy as a means of asserting their rights and preserving their cultural identity<sup>6</sup>. However, such demands can challenge the cohesion of the state, especially in fragile political environments. Such demands can challenge state cohesion by threatening national unity, as calls for autonomy often foster separatist sentiments. In fragile political environments, where institutions are weak and governance is unstable, these demands can exacerbate divisions, undermine trust in central authorities, and fuel conflict. This can lead to fragmentation, making it difficult for the state to maintain control, ensure stability, and pursue collective national development.

### **ECOWAS Unity**

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional organization established to promote economic integration, peace, and security among its 15 member states<sup>7</sup>. Unity within ECOWAS is a critical goal, as it ensures collective action and regional stability. However, ethnic tensions and demands for autonomy in member states like Guinea-Bissau pose significant challenges to this unity. These issues can undermine ECOWAS's ability to mediate conflicts effectively and foster cooperation among its diverse members<sup>8</sup>. This is because internal divisions within member states complicate achieving consensus on solutions. Ethnic and political tensions often lead to distrust of external mediators, including ECOWAS, particularly if its actions are perceived as biased. Additionally, the organization's limited resources, competing regional priorities, and the need to balance national sovereignty with intervention further hinder its effectiveness in fostering cooperation and resolving conflicts.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To understand the complexities of ethnic tensions and demands for autonomy in Guinea-Bissau, as well as their implications for ECOWAS unity, this study is anchored in Conflict Resolution Theory and Integration Theory. These theories offer complementary perspectives for addressing the root causes of ethnic strife and fostering unity amidst diversity.

### **Conflict Resolution Theory**

Conflict resolution theory focuses on addressing the underlying causes of disputes and fostering sustainable peace through cooperative mechanisms<sup>9</sup>. This theory is particularly relevant in contexts where ethnic divisions and demands for autonomy threaten state cohesion. Pioneered by theorists such as John Burton<sup>10</sup> and Johan Galtung<sup>11</sup>, the theory emphasizes problem-solving and reconciliation rather than mere suppression of conflicts.

Burton's human needs theory suggests that conflicts often arise from unmet fundamental human needs, such as identity, security, and autonomy<sup>12</sup>. In Guinea-Bissau, ethnic groups demanding autonomy may be expressing unmet needs for political inclusion and cultural recognition. Galtung's concept of positive peace, which aims at addressing structural violence and fostering relationships, further underscores the importance of equitable governance structures and inclusive policies<sup>13</sup>.

By applying this theory, ECOWAS can employ mechanisms like mediation and dialogue to resolve ethnic tensions in Guinea-Bissau. For instance, engaging local leaders and fostering participatory governance can address grievances and create a platform for collaboration among diverse ethnic groups.

### **Integration Theory**

Integration theory examines how diverse groups or states come together to form cohesive systems while maintaining their distinct identities<sup>14</sup>. This theory is particularly relevant for understanding regional organizations like ECOWAS and their role in addressing ethnic tensions. Proponents like David Mitrany and Ernst B. Haas provide valuable insights into this process.

Mitrany's functionalism posits that cooperation in specific sectors, such as economics or security, can create interdependence and trust, gradually leading to broader integration<sup>15</sup>. In Guinea-Bissau, functional cooperation among ethnic groups on shared goals, such as economic development or infrastructure projects, could reduce tensions and foster unity.

Haas's neo-functionalism builds on this by highlighting the role of supranational institutions in fostering integration<sup>16</sup>. He emphasizes the concept of "spillover effects," where success in one area of cooperation leads to collaboration in others. ECOWAS can leverage its existing frameworks for economic and security cooperation to address ethnic tensions, thereby promoting regional stability and unity.

The application of conflict resolution and integration theories offers a dual approach to addressing ethnic tensions and demands for autonomy in Guinea-Bissau. Conflict resolution theory provides tools for understanding and managing disputes, while integration theory highlights pathways for fostering unity within Guinea-Bissau and across ECOWAS. Together, these frameworks guide strategies for mitigating ethnic conflicts, addressing demands for autonomy, and strengthening regional integration.

By resolving underlying grievances and fostering cooperation, ECOWAS can uphold its mandate of promoting peace and stability in the region. This approach aligns with the organization's goals of maintaining unity amidst diversity and ensuring sustainable development across West Africa.

### **Historical Context**

Guinea-Bissau's colonial history under Portuguese rule set the stage for enduring ethnic stratification and political imbalance<sup>17</sup>. The colonial administration systematically divided and ranked ethnic groups, granting privileges to some while marginalizing others. Favoritism was evident in policies that prioritized select groups for education, military recruitment, and administrative roles. This deliberate strategy created a hierarchy of privilege, reinforcing divisions among the population. Those excluded from such opportunities were denied political representation and economic advancement, leaving them relegated to lower socioeconomic positions. These policies not only fragmented society but also sowed the seeds of ethnic disparities that persisted long after independence, fueling grievances and demands for greater autonomy.

The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), which led the liberation struggle, briefly bridged these ethnic divides in pursuit of a common goal: independence from Portuguese colonial domination<sup>18</sup>. The

shared struggle against an oppressive regime offered a temporary sense of unity, reflecting the principles of integration theory, which emphasizes collective identity in the face of shared challenges. However, this unity proved superficial and tactical rather than transformative. Upon achieving independence in 1974, the PAIGC failed to institutionalize equitable policies that could address the deep-seated ethnic and socioeconomic inequalities fostered during colonial rule. Instead, governance structures reinforced the existing disparities, with political and economic power concentrated in the hands of the minority Cape Verdean elite. The inability to resolve these underlying grievances, a critical element in conflict resolution theory, allowed latent ethnic tensions to resurface, undermining the foundations of national cohesion.

The post-independence period saw the Balanta, the largest ethnic group in Guinea-Bissau, increasingly marginalized from the political process<sup>19</sup>. Their exclusion from decision-making power, despite their demographic significance, sparked resentment and sporadic uprisings. This discontent was exacerbated by successive coups and the politicization of ethnic identities, which further entrenched divisions. Conflict resolution theory underscores the importance of addressing structural inequalities and fostering inclusive governance to prevent such grievances from escalating. Yet, successive regimes in Guinea-Bissau failed to implement mechanisms for equitable resource distribution or representation. These inequalities often manifest as disparities in access to resources, political representation, and economic opportunities. When left unaddressed, they create fertile ground for resentment, alienation, and conflict, particularly in multi-ethnic societies like Guinea-Bissau. Inclusive governance—where all groups feel represented and valued—is a key mechanism for mitigating such tensions, as it fosters trust in state institutions and reduces the likelihood of marginalized groups resorting to rebellion or separatist demands.

In Guinea-Bissau, successive regimes failed to uphold these principles. After independence, power was disproportionately concentrated in the hands of the minority Cape Verdean elite, sidelining larger ethnic groups such as the Balanta. Despite their demographic majority, the Balanta were excluded from meaningful participation in governance and decision-making processes. This exclusion was not merely symbolic but extended to unequal access to state resources, economic opportunities, and public services.

Instead of addressing these disparities, Guinea-Bissau's post-independence leaders perpetuated colonial patterns of favoritism and exclusion, deepening divisions rather than fostering national integration. Mechanisms such as equitable resource allocation, decentralized governance, or proportional representation, which could have diffused tensions, were either absent or poorly implemented. Conflict resolution theory suggests that such mechanisms are essential for transforming potential sources of conflict into opportunities for collaboration.

By failing to establish systems of inclusive governance, the state created a perception of systemic injustice, where marginalized groups viewed the political system as a tool for perpetuating their subordination. This perception fueled grievances, leading to periodic uprisings and a cycle of instability. The failure to adopt a conflict resolution approach, focusing on structural reforms and equity, not only hindered national cohesion but also undermined the legitimacy of successive regimes, making the state more susceptible to coups and external interventions.

Integration theory emphasizes that fostering a shared national identity is essential for uniting diverse ethnic, cultural, or social groups within a state. This shared identity acts as a cohesive force, promoting loyalty to the state rather than to ethnic or regional affiliations. It involves deliberate policies and frameworks that encourage collaboration, mutual understanding, and equitable participation in governance and resource allocation. When integration policies are implemented effectively, they help reduce ethnic divisions, mitigate grievances, and create a sense of belonging among all groups, which is critical for long-term stability and unity.

In Guinea-Bissau, the absence of such meaningful integration policies has had severe consequences. After independence, rather than cultivating a national identity that transcended ethnic affiliations, the state perpetuated divisions created during colonial rule. Ethnic groups were left to compete for power and resources in a system that lacked inclusive representation or fair distribution mechanisms. The failure to establish common symbols, narratives, or institutions that represented all groups equally undermined efforts to build a unified national identity.

This lack of integration left the state vulnerable to fragmentation. Ethnic groups, feeling excluded or marginalized, began to prioritize their own interests over those of the state. The Balanta, for example, grew increasingly resentful of

their exclusion from political power despite being the largest ethnic group. Periodic uprisings and political instability became manifestations of this alienation, as marginalized groups sought to assert their rights or challenge the status quo. Entrenched divisions were further exacerbated by successive coups and the politicization of ethnicity, deepening mistrust among groups and eroding national unity.

Without integration policies, governance in Guinea-Bissau has struggled to maintain legitimacy. The state has been unable to mediate conflicts effectively or foster cooperation among its diverse population, as groups view the government as favoring some while excluding others. This lack of trust undermines state authority and makes it difficult to implement reforms or pursue collective national goals. Integration theory underscores that without deliberate efforts to reconcile ethnic differences and promote inclusivity, unresolved grievances will continue to challenge state legitimacy and stability.

Also, the absence of integration policies in Guinea-Bissau appears to have prevented the development of a cohesive national identity, leaving the state fragmented and vulnerable to instability.

### **Socio-Political Dynamics**

In Guinea-Bissau, the complex interplay between ethnic identity and political power has been a defining characteristic of the country's socio-political landscape. Ethnic divisions, instead of being addressed through inclusive governance and national integration, have been exacerbated by political elites who manipulate ethnic loyalties to consolidate power. This practice undermines national unity and fosters mistrust among ethnic groups<sup>20</sup>. According to conflict resolution theory, political manipulation of ethnic identities deepens societal divisions and perpetuates grievances, creating a cycle of instability and conflict. Rather than uniting the diverse population under a shared vision, this approach has entrenched ethnic divisions, making it difficult for Guinea-Bissau to achieve national cohesion.

One example of this dynamic is the periodic clashes between the Balanta and Fula ethnic groups over resource allocation and political representation<sup>21</sup>. The Balanta, as the largest ethnic group, have often felt marginalized in political processes, while the Fula have similarly sought greater recognition and access to resources. These clashes are not merely the result of competing interests but are rooted in historical grievances, unequal power dynamics, and a lack of trust in the central government. Conflict resolution theory emphasizes the need for equitable systems that address such grievances through dialogue, negotiation, and structural reforms. Yet, Guinea-Bissau has consistently lacked mechanisms to mediate these conflicts, allowing tensions to escalate and spill over into violence.

Adding to this volatile dynamic are demands for autonomy by ethnic groups residing in resource-rich regions<sup>22</sup>. These demands are driven by perceptions of neglect and exploitation by the central government, which is viewed as prioritizing the interests of the political elite over the needs of marginalized communities. While these demands are partly economic, they are also deeply tied to historical grievances and cultural pride. Groups in these regions see autonomy as a means of reclaiming control over their resources and asserting their identity, which they feel has been eroded or ignored by the state. Integration theory highlights the importance of fostering a sense of shared identity and mutual interdependence to bridge such divides. However, Guinea-Bissau's failure to implement policies that promote inclusivity and equitable development has left these groups feeling alienated, reinforcing calls for autonomy.

The manipulation of ethnic identities and the neglect of marginalized groups have compounded Guinea-Bissau's socio-political challenges. Instead of fostering a unified national identity, the state has allowed ethnic divisions to dictate political alliances and resource distribution. This has resulted in a fragile political environment where groups compete for dominance rather than collaborate for collective progress. Conflict resolution theory advocates for the establishment of fair governance structures that address grievances, redistribute power equitably, and encourage dialogue among competing groups. Integration theory advocates for the creation of a unified national identity that goes beyond ethnic divisions, ensuring that all groups within a state feel represented and included in the nation's development. This requires policies that promote social cohesion, equal access to resources, and political inclusion. In Guinea-Bissau, the failure to foster such a shared vision has left ethnic groups feeling alienated and marginalized, which has exacerbated their sense of disconnection from the central government. By neglecting these principles, the government has inadvertently encouraged the persistence of ethnic-based political loyalty, where groups prioritize their own ethnic interests over national unity. This has made it difficult to build a cohesive national identity that could bind the country together, particularly in times of crisis.

Furthermore, Guinea-Bissau's socio-political dynamics are a clear illustration of the negative consequences of ignoring conflict resolution principles. Conflict resolution theory emphasizes the importance of addressing underlying grievances, promoting dialogue, and establishing mechanisms for equitable power-sharing and resource distribution. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, however, political elites have often ignored these principles, choosing instead to exploit ethnic divisions for political gain. This has led to a vicious cycle of conflict, where each ethnic group sees itself as either a victim of or a competitor to the others, thus perpetuating a fragmented political landscape. The absence of effective conflict resolution strategies has also resulted in the entrenchment of long-standing ethnic grievances, with no clear path for reconciliation or healing.

The politicization of ethnic identities further deepens these divisions. When political actors use ethnic identity as a tool for mobilization or control, they play into historical narratives of exclusion and marginalization. Instead of addressing the root causes of inequality, such as unequal distribution of resources or political power, the government's failure to implement inclusive policies perpetuates a sense of injustice and fuels ethnic tensions. This dynamic contributes to the growing demand for autonomy among marginalized ethnic groups, who see independence or greater regional control as a way to safeguard their interests and cultural identity.

Also, the consequences of neglecting both conflict resolution and integration theories are profound in Guinea-Bissau. The failure to resolve ethnic grievances and to build a shared national vision has led to a fragmented political environment, where ethnic divisions remain entrenched. These divisions, fueled by political manipulation and a lack of inclusivity, have made it difficult for Guinea-Bissau to establish a cohesive national identity and stable governance.

### **ECOWAS and the Challenges of Regional Unity**

As the principal regional organization in West Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has assumed a critical role in the conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts within Guinea-Bissau. Over the years, ECOWAS has engaged in a range of interventions, from diplomatic mediation to the deployment of peacekeeping forces, particularly during moments of acute political crises<sup>23</sup>. These efforts, while instrumental in managing immediate disruptions, have also highlighted significant challenges in addressing the deeper, systemic causes of instability that persist in Guinea-Bissau. These challenges, underscored by the limitations of ECOWAS's approach, reveal the complexities of balancing short-term peace with long-term stability in a region marked by diverse ethnic dynamics and fragile governance structures.

One of the primary criticisms of ECOWAS's interventions in Guinea-Bissau is the organization's tendency to adopt a reactive approach rather than a preventive one. According to conflict resolution theory, effective peacebuilding hinges on addressing the root causes of conflict before they escalate. In Guinea-Bissau, however, ECOWAS's responses have often been focused on restoring short-term stability by intervening during or after crises, such as coups or violent conflicts. This reactive approach can stabilize the country temporarily, but it does not engage with the underlying issues, such as ethnic marginalization, unequal resource distribution, and governance deficits, that fuel recurrent tensions. By prioritizing immediate peace over long-term conflict resolution, ECOWAS has inadvertently overlooked the necessity of systemic reforms that could eliminate the structural inequalities contributing to political instability<sup>24</sup>. Conflict resolution theory emphasizes a comprehensive and long-term approach to addressing the root causes of conflict rather than merely focusing on the symptoms. It argues that true peace cannot be achieved by simply stopping violence or calming tensions; instead, it requires addressing the systemic issues that lead to conflict in the first place. These issues often include social, economic, and political inequalities, historical grievances, and marginalization of certain groups.

In the case of Guinea-Bissau, the conflict is deeply rooted in ethnic divisions, political exclusion, and historical inequalities. Various ethnic groups, such as the Balanta and Fula, have long felt marginalized in the distribution of power, resources, and opportunities. These grievances are not new; they have been building over decades, exacerbated by the colonial legacy, poor governance, and lack of inclusive political systems after independence. When these deep-seated grievances remain unaddressed, tensions can flare into violence, coups, and instability.

A holistic conflict resolution approach would first focus on identifying these grievances and understanding the specific issues that different groups face. This could include creating platforms for dialogue, reconciliation processes, and the establishment of inclusive political systems that ensure all groups have a voice. Conflict resolution theory also stresses

the importance of rebuilding trust between groups through joint initiatives, equitable distribution of resources, and empowerment of marginalized communities. In Guinea-Bissau, this could mean not only addressing political power imbalances but also creating economic policies that benefit all regions and communities fairly.

Furthermore, sustainable peace requires long-term structural changes, such as reforming the security sector, ensuring the rule of law, and providing basic social services like education and healthcare to historically underserved areas. Without such reforms, any peace achieved through short-term interventions may be fragile and prone to relapse, as seen in Guinea-Bissau's history of coups and political instability.

Thus, for ECOWAS to break the cycle of instability in Guinea-Bissau, it must move beyond short-term stabilization efforts and adopt a more holistic approach, addressing the root causes of conflict through inclusive governance, equitable development, and social justice. This requires sustained political will, cooperation from both domestic actors and regional stakeholders, and a commitment to long-term peacebuilding.

Furthermore, ECOWAS's interventions are continually challenged by the need to balance national sovereignty with the goal of regional integration. The tension between these two objectives is particularly pronounced in Guinea-Bissau, where ethnic divisions and the political fragmentation of power complicate the organization's efforts to foster unity. The integration theory posits that regional unity can only be achieved when diverse states align their national interests with the collective goals of the region, creating a shared sense of belonging and mutual benefit. However, in Guinea-Bissau, ECOWAS's interventions often walk a fine line between upholding the country's sovereignty and promoting regional cohesion. The sovereignty of member states is a fundamental principle of ECOWAS, but when domestic issues—such as ethnic marginalization or political instability—spill over into broader regional concerns, the organization must act decisively. Unfortunately, in some instances, ECOWAS's approach has been perceived as intrusive, with interventions seen as encroaching on national sovereignty. At the same time, the organization has also struggled to promote regional integration in a state like Guinea-Bissau, where governance structures remain fractured along ethnic lines and political allegiances are divided. This dual challenge—respecting national autonomy while promoting regional unity—underscores the complexities of fostering peace in a highly diverse and politically unstable region<sup>25</sup>.

Moreover, Guinea-Bissau's instability has significant implications for the broader ECOWAS bloc, challenging the cohesion and unity of the organization itself. Ethnic tensions, demands for autonomy, and political fragmentation in Guinea-Bissau, if left unresolved, could inspire similar movements in other ECOWAS member states. This potential for spillover effects is particularly concerning in a region where ethnic identity, historical grievances, and political exclusion continue to fuel tensions. If ECOWAS fails to address the root causes of instability in Guinea-Bissau, there is a risk that these challenges could catalyze similar conflicts in neighboring states, ultimately undermining regional cohesion and integration. ECOWAS's success in promoting regional unity relies not only on resolving specific crises but also on preventing the spread of destabilizing forces across the region. As integration theory suggests, the success of regional integration depends on the collective commitment of all member states to shared values of stability, cooperation, and mutual respect. Thus, ECOWAS must adopt a more proactive strategy that addresses the systemic issues within Guinea-Bissau and the broader region to prevent the further erosion of regional unity<sup>26</sup>.

Therefore, ECOWAS's role in Guinea-Bissau highlights the delicate balancing act between conflict resolution and regional integration. While the organization's interventions have been crucial in managing immediate crises, its reactive approach and the challenge of navigating national sovereignty against regional unity have limited its effectiveness in fostering lasting peace. The principles of conflict resolution and integration theory both point to the need for more comprehensive and proactive strategies—ones that address the structural causes of instability and promote inclusive governance, resource equity, and social cohesion.

## **Conclusion**

Ethnic tensions and demands for autonomy in Guinea-Bissau present formidable challenges for the nation's stability and ECOWAS's quest for regional unity. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. Through inclusive governance, economic development, and proactive regional interventions, Guinea-Bissau can overcome its divisions and contribute meaningfully to West African integration. For ECOWAS, this case underscores the importance of addressing the structural causes of instability to achieve its vision of a united and prosperous region.

### Recommendations

1. Inclusive Governance: The government must ensure equitable representation of all ethnic groups in political and economic decision-making processes.
2. Economic Development: Addressing economic disparities through targeted investments in marginalized regions can mitigate grievances.
3. Cultural Integration: Promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and cultural exchange programs can foster mutual understanding and national unity.
4. Strengthened ECOWAS Role: ECOWAS must adopt a more proactive approach, emphasizing preventive diplomacy and capacity-building initiatives in Guinea-Bissau.

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