

RESEARCH PAPER



**POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN WEST AFRICA: A CRITICAL
ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS AND
POLITICAL PARTIES**

(With a focus on Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Nigeria and Togo)

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AC	Action Congress (political party, Nigeria)
ADEMA	Alliance for Democracy in Mali (political party)
ANDP – Zamana	Nigerian Alliance for Democracy and Progress (political party)
APC	All People’s Congress (political party, Sierra Leone)
APRC	Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (political party, The Gambia)
AWEPA	Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa
CDP	Congress for Democracy and Progress (political party, B. Faso)
CNDD	National Council for democracy and Development (military junta, Guinea)
CNDP	National Council for Political Dialogue (Niger)
CPP	Convention People’s Party (Ghana)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (Nigeria)
MNS	Nigerien Movement for Justice (rebel movement)
MNSD	National Movement of the Development Society (political party, Niger)
NDLF	Niger Delta Liberation Front (Nigeria)
ODP-MT	Organisation for People’s Democracy – Labour Movement (political party, Burkina Faso)
NDC	National Democratic Congress (political party, Ghana)
NDVF	Niger Delta Volunteer Front (Nigeria)
NPP	New Patriotic Party (Ghana)
PAIGC	African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde
PC	Parliamentary Centre
PDP	People’s Democratic Party (Nigeria)
PDS	Senegalese Democratic Party
PS	Socialist Party (Senegal)
PUP	Party for Unity and Progress (Guinea)
RPT	Rally of Togolese People (political party)
RADDHO	African Assembly for the Defense of Human Rights
SLPP	Sierra Leone People’s Party
UFC	Union of Forces of Change (political party, Togo)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

Executive Summary

- The **West Africa** sub-region has experienced a significant number of cases of political violence in recent years, including civil wars, military coups d'état, violent or violently crushed popular protests, election-related violence, and inter-communal clashes. While they are due to a multitude of factors, **poor governance** seems to be the overarching factor that gives rise to most of these instances of political violence. This puts a special responsibility on the shoulder of rulers to ensure adherence to principles of democratic governance and equitable distribution of the country's resources among its various composites.
- Political parties and parliamentarians are important actors in efforts to prevent and manage political violence in the region. Most West African political parties have a weak institutional base, which makes the role of individual actors within them, particularly the heads, very crucial. As such, responsible political actors often serve as agents of peace and dialogue through proper **civic education** of their followers and **collaborative work** with other actors, including political adversaries. But the actions of some political parties and actors could lead to the opposite effect. Such actors often instrumentalise group identities for particularistic political goals, especially during election periods.
- There is a need for the speedy ratification of the **2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance** and adherence to existing instruments with regard to **free and fair elections**. The mere adoption of such instruments can by no means be a panacea for the prevention of political violence, but once in place, political parties, parliamentarians and CSOs can advocate for their effective implementation, which can indeed contribute to holding credible elections and thus preventing election-related violence. Also, as one cannot rely solely on the conscience of political leaders for responsible behaviour, parliaments, in collaboration with other stakeholders, can adopt clear rules and procedures to ensure this is the case and to exercise its oversight function over the executive.
- The national parliaments of almost all **West African** countries are empowered by their respective constitutions and rules of procedure to effectively act on various issues, including crisis prevention and management. The practice is however different in most cases. Often, the executive branch does not provide them with the adequate funds necessary for their functioning; it interferes in their work either by trying to impose certain agendas or decisions on them or to prevent them from considering certain important matters. But some parliamentarians seem not to be aware of ways in which they could overcome this, through for example their power in voting national budget. For this and the general poor status of West African countries, most national parliaments are lacking in important human and material capacities, a situation that negatively impacts on their ability to effectively prevent or manage political violence.

- Many national parliaments in the region contribute to the prevention of political violence through legislation and direct involvement in peace and reconciliation processes. But they can best do this when they work with other stakeholders, such as CSOs, faith-based movements, women’s organisations and competent regional as well as continental bodies.
- **Partisanship** and **frequent floor crossing** (political nomadism) affect the effectiveness of parliamentary discipline and performance on various issues, including their work on the causes and manifestations of political violence. Some parliaments are finding ways to overcome some of these issues. But all would benefit from greater collaboration and commitment by the executive branch, regular exchange with other national parliaments in the region and beyond, working closely with civil society organisations, research centres and the media and continued support from development partners.
- While it is true that much of what leads to political violence is the work of undemocratic ruling parties, it is now widely acknowledged that undemocratic opposition parties can only produce undemocratic ruling ones. Development partners should therefore find ways to engage or widen their engagements with opposition political parties to build their capacities, particularly in civic education and the training of their cadres.
- Both local and international partners should urge and help the electoral commission and political parties to develop **codes of good conduct** that should guide the activities of all political actors during election time so as to avoid situations or incidents that could lead to political violence. To ensure its effective observance, there should be clear rules about the punishment of those that breach provisions of this code of conduct.
- Development partners and competent local CSOs and research institutions can help build the conflict prevention and management capabilities of national parliaments through knowledge and skills development for both parliamentarians and parliamentary support staff, the development of research capacity (e.g. research library, physical and/or electronic), the creation of opportunities for knowledge sharing, and the improvement or creation of office infrastructures, both physical (i.e. building) and material (e.g. computers and communication tools).
- Continued **financial assistance** to parliaments can greatly help them undertake certain conflict management and reconciliation missions across the country, organise seminars and forums of inter-community dialogue between conflicting communities, and undertake study tours in the region and beyond that could help them learn from the experiences of others in how to effectively prevent or manage political violence.

Introduction

The present study deals with the issue of “*political violence*” in West African and the role of parliamentarians and political parties in effectively preventing or managing it. **West Africa**, like many other regions on the African continent, has experienced many instances of political violence over the last two decades, making the region one of the most instable ones in the world (Adebajo & Rashid, 2004; Souaré, 2006). But the focus of this study is on recent and ongoing cases of political violence in the region, albeit it makes reference to cases that started at an earlier stage whenever that appears necessary to fathom recent and ongoing ones. By **West Africa**, reference is made here solely to the 15 member states of the Economic Community of West African States (**ECOWAS**).¹

While maintaining a regional outlook, the need for an in-depth analysis explains the focus of the study on some specific country cases. Thus, specific attention is paid to five country cases: **Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Nigeria** and **Togo**. The choice of these countries is mainly based on the pertinence of their recent experiences to illustrate the subject matter. With regard to the **research methodology**, it is worth noting that the study is based on both desk and empirical research. The latter consisted of **two main approaches**. The first approach entailed personal interviews through a pre-established questionnaire with Parliamentarians and political actors in **West Africa** in order to gather their insights, explanations and personal experiences with regard to the subject matter. The other approach was interaction with the same actors at a **regional seminar** that **UNDP** organised in *Accra* from 27 to 29 June 2010. In total, 28 parliamentarians and two parliamentary experts from 12 **ECOWAS** member states were interviewed, including nine women (See *Table A in appendices*).²

The **structure of the paper** is as follows: After defining the subject matter, the study looks at various manifestations of political violence in the region and considers the main explanatory factors of their occurrence or escalation. A synthesis of the main causes of political violence in the region is provided in a specific section, while the country studies provide illustrations of the theoretical explanations in this section. It is through a consistent attempt to contextualise the various cases of political violence in the five country studies and a special box on Côte d’Ivoire that the reader can clearly appreciate the causes and explanatory factors of these incidents of political violence.

As an important institution and change agents, the study takes a closer look at national parliaments and political parties in the region in view of identifying and analysing their usefulness, challenges and bottlenecks they face in dealing with political violence. The role of other change agents, such as civil society organisations, research institutions, traditional and religious leaders, is also pondered, particularly as far as they contribute to the prevention and management of political violence.

¹ The 15 **ECOWAS** member states are **Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone** and **Togo**. **Mauritania** was a founding member of the organisation but withdrew from it in December 2000. It is not therefore covered in this study.

² Due to various considerations, the identity of the interviewees will not be revealed when they are quoted.

1) Political Violence in West Africa

This section provides a general overview of political violence in **West Africa**. As noted above, this overview focuses on recent cases while referring to earlier ones whenever necessary. It defines the concept of political violence, presents the main types of the phenomenon in the region and analyses some of its main causes and/or explanatory factors.

1.1. Defining political violence

Most analysts that have looked at the phenomenon of political violence do not seem to have deemed it necessary to define it in theoretical terms. It would appear that they find the definition so obvious that their analysis is straightforwardly based on cases and types of political violence. This is for instance the case for *Nzongola-Ntalaja* (2004) who, in a journal article, analyses the relationship between *Citizenship, Political Violence and Democratization in Africa*. It is also the case for *Mamdani* (2002) in another article on political violence in postcolonial Africa, for *Bodea & Elbadawi* (2008), as well as for *Kalyvas* (2003) and *Sambanis* (2004), both of whom seem to reduce the concept to “civil wars”.

But some authors have indeed offered definitions for the concept. *Kirwin & Cho* (2009:3) define political violence as “the use of force to achieve a political outcome”. They consider civil wars, armed rebellions, violent political rallies, coercion of voters and post-election demonstrations or crackdowns as potential manifestations of political violence. *Lischer* (2000) distinguishes political violence from “criminal violence” and defines it as “organized violent activity for political goals”. As for *Los Rios* (2004:30), “political violence is about the acquisition of power through violent acts”.

The definition offered by *Lischer* is almost the same as the one provided by *Kirwin* and *Cho* although the latter suggests – through the examples cited – a broader application of the concept. While most of the examples they offer can be described as political violence, post-election demonstrations may not be, in themselves, a manifestation of political violence, for they could be peaceful. It is generally the crackdown and violent reaction to them that often turns them into an act of political violence. *Lischer’s* strict distinction between criminal and political violence also needs to be nuanced. For example, a peaceful demonstration for a political cause may turn violent because of the presence of criminal elements with pure criminal intents, which then blurs the boundary between the two, as it often happens (*Kalyvas*, 2003: 476-7).

Thus, for the purpose of the present study, political violence is regarded as: an organised violent or potentially violent activity or coordinated violent reaction to an organised activity to achieve political goals. This would apply to activities in which organisers initiate the use of violence, as well as peaceful or violent ones that a similarly organised group (often the State or rival groups) reacts to by violent means, such as peaceful demonstrations. It also covers various types of military coups, for while military putsches generally involve the use of violence and killings, there are instances where they are described as “bloodless”. But this qualification means that their nature is to be “bloody”, thus implying potential violence with the act.

1.2. Typologies of political violence in West Africa

Political violence, as defined above, can manifest itself in various ways with varying degrees of gravity. It includes genocide, inter-state wars, civil wars, military coups, violent or violently repressed manifestations, guerrilla wars, etc. There has not been a case of genocide (as defined by the **1948 UN Convention on genocide**) in **West Africa**, at least in recent times, and this study cannot delve into all manifestations of political violence in the region. Thus, the focus here will be on:

- i) Civil wars and insurgencies;
- ii) Military coups; and
- iii) Election-related violence.

Because the latter constitutes one of the main theatres of political violence in which parliamentarians and political parties play or can play a leading role, both in fomenting it and preventing or resolving it, it will be dealt with in more details. And without engaging in a lengthy theoretical discussion, these various types of political violence will be defined as follows:

A. Civil Wars and Insurgencies

Civil wars can be defined as organised armed conflicts that challenge the sovereignty of an internationally recognised state with a political claim, occur within the recognised boundaries of that state, involve the state as one of the principal parties to the conflict, and rebel elements consisted wholly or mainly of nationals of the state (*Souaré, 2006:28; Elbadawi & Sambanis, 2000*). This definition applies to many insurgencies, hence their association here with civil wars. The **West African** sub-region has experienced a number of civil wars and insurgencies in recent years. They include the civil wars of **Liberia** (1989-96/1999-2003), **Sierra Leone** (1991-2002), **Guinea-Bissau** (1998-99) and **Côte d'Ivoire** (2002-07), and insurgencies in northern **Mali** and **Niger** (otherwise known as *Tuareg rebellions*) in the early 1990s and since around 2006, the secessionist movement in the *Casamance* region of southern **Senegal**, and insurgent attacks in the **Niger Delta** region of southern **Nigeria**.

B. Military coup d'état

There have been a number of theories developed over the years to define and explain the occurrence of military coup d'état (*Bienen, 1968; Decalo, 1973; Johnson, Slater & McGowan, 1984; Kandeh, 2004; Souaré, 2006*). But for practical considerations, this study uses the policy-oriented definition provided by the July 2000 **Lomé Declaration** of the Organisation of African Unity (**OAU**) carried forward by the African Union (**AU**) in the 2007 **African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG)**. Military coups are considered here as an act of unconstitutional change of government (**UCG**). Both the **Lomé Declaration** and the **ACDEG** consider **four main situations** as constituting instances of **UCG**:

- a) The overthrow of a democratically elected government by military officers;
- b) Intervention by mercenaries to replace a democratically elected government;
- c) Replacement of democratically elected government by armed dissident groups and rebel movements; and
- d) The refusal by an incumbent government to relinquish power to the winning political party after free, fair and regular elections.

Article 23(5) of the **ACDEG** adds a fifth situation: “*Any amendment or revision of the constitution or legal instruments, which is an infringement on the principles of democratic change of government*” (see *Souaré, 2009b*).

While the fourth and fifth situations above may not necessarily involve political violence, they clearly have the potential of this, particularly through popular reactions and the reaction of the ruling regime, responsible for this act, to such popular protests. Since the year 2000, there have been five instances of “successful” unconstitutional changes of government in West Africa. Those happened in September 2003 in **Guinea-Bissau**, February 2005 in **Togo**, December 2008 in **Guinea**, December 2009 and February 2010 in **Niger**.³

C. Election-related violence

This is almost self-explanatory. It basically implies organised violence perpetrated by rival groups and/or the State in order to influence the outcome of an election or protest at it. *Fisher (2002:3)* defines it as “*any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay, or to otherwise influence an electoral process,*” whereas *Sisk (2008:5)* regards it as “*acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process or that arises in the context of electoral competition*” (see also *Laakso, 2007:224-52; UNDP, 2009*).

A sub-type of political violence, election-related violence may consist of killings, assassinations, beating and maiming opponents as well as threatening, intimidating and clashing with the latter and causing damage to private and/or public properties (*UNDP, 2009:4; Sisk, 2008:5-6*). As such, crafting ways in which this type of violence can be prevented or managed would significantly contribute to the prevention of political violence in the region. But this requires identifying the factors that contribute to election violence, which are generally linked to the type of elections and the stakes that political actors have in them, as well as their expectations from them (*UNDP, 2009:10; Sisk, 2008:8-10*).

Election violence has occurred in all sorts of polls (presidential, legislative and local) in **West Africa** in recent years. Some countries of the region have experienced widespread violence during presidential elections, mainly because the stakes are very high. The stakes are high here because controlling the state equals in most African states controlling the economy and, generally, all the privileges at the disposal of the state not only for the winning candidate, but also for his entire community and network of friends. More than this, it also means the exclusion of those in opposition. But how does this translate into violence? It does so through the attempt by one party, often the incumbent regime but not always exclusively so, to rig the poll and the refusal of the other parties to accept this practice, real or perceived.

³ The December 2009 one refers to *Mamadou Tandja’s* stay in power beyond his constitutional term and without due process. It is considered here as an instance of UCG because **ECOWAS** considered it as such and suspended Niger’s membership from the regional organisation “*until constitutional legality is restored in the country in accordance with the ECOWAS [2001 additional] Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance*” (**ECOWAS, 2009**). Although this suspension came in October, the date of the UCG carried out by *Tandja* is put at 22 December here because this was the date on which his constitutional mandate expired.

This means that foretelling indicators for potential election violence in a presidential poll include:

- i) Whether there is an incumbent president or not;
- ii) Whether the incumbent is vying for re-election or not;
- iii) How much stakes does the outgoing incumbent has in his succession; and
- iv) How consensual – between the political actors – has the electoral process and management been.

Some of these issues will be revisited below. But with regard to the first factor, recent cases in **West Africa** show a low likelihood of violence in situations where there is no incumbent, which happens when elections are held after a transitional period in which the leaders of the transitional government were either not allowed to stand or could not control the electoral process, the latter having been entrusted into an internationally supervised independent electoral commission. Perhaps the most recent examples of this in the region are the 2005 presidential elections in **Guinea-Bissau** and **Liberia** and the anticipated 2009 presidential election in **Guinea-Bissau**.

The second scenario happens when the president has served the maximum number of constitutional terms and did not meddle with the provision of term-limit to extend his or her tenure. In most such cases, such as in **Mali** in 2002 (for *Alpha Oumar Konaré*), in **Benin** in 2006 (for *Matthew Kérékou*), in **Sierra Leone** in 2007 (for *Ahmed Tejan Kabbah*) and in **Ghana** in 2000 and 2008 (for *J. J. Rawlings* and *John Kufuor*, respectively), the outgoing leader is “generally neutral” in the process and is more concerned about his own legacy. In this case, the state security services and the state bureaucracy tend to play by the rules, which then minimises the likelihood of electoral violence. But if the incumbent leader is vying for re-election or has high stakes in his/her own succession and is facing a more or less strong opposition, then the likelihood of vote rigging and thus violence is high.

The most illustrative example of the latter scenario in recent times was seen during the April 2007 general elections in **Nigeria**, as outgoing president *Olusegun Obasanjo* had high stakes in his own succession. He had failed to amend the country’s constitution to allow him a third term, thanks partly to the opposition of his own vice-president who later formed an opposition political party and stood for the presidency (see *Ibrahim*, 2007; **EU Election Observation Mission’s report**, 2007; **NDI Report**, 2007). Other recent examples include the violence and political assassinations that accompanied, preceded or followed presidential elections in **Côte d’Ivoire** (October 2000), **Togo** (April 2005), **Nigeria** (April 2003), and **Guinea-Bissau** in June 2009. In **Nigeria**, the stakes for gubernatorial positions may be close to the presidency for some, and thus the same scenarios for presidential elections apply.

In the case of **parliamentary/legislative elections**, the likelihood of violence is higher when excluded candidates from party lists have joined other parties or stood as independent candidates and rigging is suspected. This means that violence tends to be limited to fiercely contested constituencies, although such constituencies may be many. The stakes in state assembly elections in **Nigeria** and regional assembly ones in countries such as **Mali** and **Niger** can somehow be equated to national legislative ones across the region. The April 2007 elections in **Nigeria** also offer an illustration of this type of electoral violence. Although largely peaceful, a few pockets of violence or intimidation between militants of rival parties were reported during the 2005 legislative (and presidential) elections in **Liberia**, the 2007 ones in **Sierra Leone**, the 2008 legislative polls in **Guinea-Bissau** and the 2008 legislative (and presidential) ones in **Ghana**.

As regards **local and municipal elections**, stakes may be very high for candidates vying for the control of resources for local development. And research on election violence reveals an alarming rate of violence at local levels, but which is often not reported as widely compared to incidents related to national elections (Sisk, 2008:9). It seems ironical that while decentralisation is considered as a strategy to ensure more responsive, effective and community-based governance, genuine decentralisation also raises the stakes of local contests and thus the likelihood of election-related violence (Sisk, 2008:9).

1.3. Main causes of political violence in West Africa

It would be naïve to reduce the occurrence of political violence in **West Africa** – or any other region of the world for that matter – to a single explanatory factor. More often than not, cases of political violence are due to a multitude of long-term structural causes, and approximate and triggering factors, some of which become submerged into the conflict's own dynamics. This notwithstanding, it could be argued that most cases of political violence in the **West Africa** sub-region are somehow related to governance. This is not to deny the fact that some warlords or coup-makers may actually launch rebellions or stage coups purely driven by greed and personal ambitions. However, it would appear that even if they were driven by egoistical considerations, there would mostly be something wrong in the polity, which they would claim to be concerned about and wanting to change or put an end to. This is mainly **bad governance** or one of its offspring factors (by-products), such as “relative deprivation” due to corruption.⁴

Thus, *Derriennic* (2001:135) argues that “**the search for justice** is one of the main motives that lead humans into conflict. This is true *even for those who are driven by other motives*, as they always claim justice in order to woo allies or discredit opponents” (italics added and quote translated). In the case of civil wars, secessionist movements and insurgencies, the likelihood of them occurring is higher when socio-economic inequalities are combined with political inequalities between various segments of society, otherwise known as “**horizontal inequalities**” (Stewart, 2008:3-24). Such inequalities may cause frustration amongst the groups that find themselves at disadvantage and it often leads them to resent whomever they perceive, rightly or wrongly, as responsible for their state of affairs. It becomes a governance issue when it is the result of acts of nepotism or sheer discrimination by those in political office.

In addition to this, and while acknowledging the role of personal ambition of some coup-makers, military coups can be explained by the **nature of the regime** overthrown. As it will be seen below, almost all the cases of successful military coups that have been recorded in **West Africa** since 2000 were mainly due to some **authoritarian actions** of the old regime. Such authoritarianism is epitomised by the near-total closure of the political space for peaceful change of leadership through the manipulation of the

⁴ Poverty per se does not lead to violence. It does so when it is “relative”, hence the notion of “relative deprivation”, as termed by **Ted Gurr**. This is a situation where a segment of the population is poor or made poor in an endowed country whose wealth is monopolised by a corrupt few. Such groups are likely to feel frustrated about their poor conditions because of real or perceived discrepancies between their value expectations and their value capabilities in the country. They can thus easily be won over by “political entrepreneurs” claiming to seek justice for them against the perceived culprits.

constitution and other legal instruments and processes (e.g. electoral laws and processes) pertaining to the regulation of power and power alternation in the country (Souaré, 2009b). This is what underpins **Kofi Annan's** statement when he noted:

"The nature of political power in many African States, together with the real and perceived consequences of capturing and maintaining power, is a key source of conflict across the continent" (Annan, 1998).

Parliamentarians interviewed in the course of writing this paper by and large concurred with this explanation, while adding a few specific explanatory variables (see Box 1 below). Those include chieftaincy disputes, droughts and other natural disasters as well as religious intolerance. In the case of **chieftaincy disputes** in the region, the most prevalent cases are found in the north of **Ghana**, but they tend to affect other parts of the country, particularly *Accra* due to the **politicisation of the disputes** by the central authorities. The problem stems mainly from a long-standing leadership dispute (since the 1930s) between the *Andani* and the *Abudu* houses of the *Dagbomba* royal family over the choice of the *Ya Na* (king of Dagbon). The stakes are high for members of the two houses of the royal family partly because people in the region are still attached to the traditional authorities, particularly in view of the apparent remoteness of the central government from the region. As this renders the position of the king very important, so does it make winning the allegiance of the king very crucial for those vying for the central government in *Accra* and want to obtain the support of the "*obedient subjects*" of the king (MacGaffey, 2006; Albert, 2008).

As a result of this, successive governments in *Accra* have, since the 1960s, aligned themselves with one house of the royal family against the other, occasioning instances of political violence in the succession battle, given the constant changes to the rules governing the succession.⁵ The latest violent encounter between the members of the two royal houses occurred in March 2002 in Yendi, the regional capital of the traditional authorities⁶, resulting in the death of 30 people, including the king from the *Andani* house. Occurring barely two years after the coming into power of the **NPP** and the murders being blamed on the royal faction supported by the new government, this only further fuelled tension, leading government to declare a state of emergency in the region for many months. And while relative peace prevailed in the region at the time this paper was completed, the fact that the historical alignments of the two houses of the kingdom to the two main political parties in the country are still in tact means that the chieftaincy dispute in this region is a main potential source of political violence in the country (Albert, 2008; Assefa, 2000; MacGaffey, 2006).

With regard to **religious intolerance**, this comes about and it becomes a source of violent conflict when people adhere to a specific interpretation of their religion, often misguided, and want to impose that interpretation on others. The most poignant and recent example of this in the region is the violence caused by the so-called *Boko Haram* movement in Bauchi, in the north-eastern **Nigeria** in July 2009. With a complete misrepresentation of Islam, this group, whose name literally means "*Western education is*

⁵ The *Abudu* house have historically been aligned with the *Danqua/Busia* tradition, represented today by the New Patriotic Party (**NPP**), while the *Andani* house is aligned to the **NDC** (Albert, 2006:52).

⁶ The administrative regional capital is **Tamale**.

forbidden” in Hausa, espoused the view that any education other than “Islamic” one is forbidden and went about attacking other people and eventually government authorities to impose that view, even in contradiction with Islamic teachings they claimed to represent. In any case, the point here is that their actions and the reaction of the state authorities led to the death of an estimated 700 people, and such acts of intolerance are a real or potential cause of political violence in this part of **Nigeria**.

Box 1: Causes of political violence – voices of parliamentarians from the region

- Unequal distribution of a country’s resources; authoritarianism of the executive; the incumbent wanting to hang onto power at all costs; political intolerance; bad management of elections; discrimination and human rights abuses [**Benin**]
- Incumbent wanting to hang onto power at all costs (abolition of the term-limits provision); food crisis either because of droughts or flooding [**Burkina Faso**]
- Bad governance; social and political discrimination [**Côte d’Ivoire**]
- The involvement of security forces in elections [**The Gambia**]
- Polarised stands of the two major political parties; non-transparent electoral process; ethnic and religious animosity; chieftaincy disputes [**Ghana**]
- Lack of dialogue; low level of civic education; low level of democratic culture; lack of culture of peace; ethno-regional strategies; lack of consultation between government and other socio-political actors; ill treatment of workers and violations of country’s laws [**Guinea**]
- Corruption; impunity; social exclusion; lack of dialogue between government and opposition [**Guinea Bissau**]
- Poverty; lack of preventive measures or credible mediators; lack of financial resources for MPs to mediate; discrimination; social difficulties [**Mali**]
- Electoral manipulation; political and economic exclusion; bad governance [**Niger**]
- Corruption; discrimination; winner-take-all attitude in quest for power [**Sierra Leone**]
- Poverty; wanting to conquer power by all means; irresponsible reporting by the media; unequal distribution of a country’s resources [**Togo**]

Sources: extracted from interview questionnaires [uncensored]

Election-related violence stems from similar factors. As it has been proven in the case of the December 2007 elections in **Kenya** (*Dersso, 2008; Murithi, 2008*), election-related violence, apart from sporadic ones, stem from deep-rooted socio-economic and political issues, which are brought to the fore by the electoral process. This is so because electoral contests are the means to reach the highest political offices in the country, and candidates often highlight these issues in a bid to garner popular support and/or discredit opponents (*UNDP, 2009:1-2*). Tensions created by the campaigns are then exacerbated and they even serve as triggers for violence when the electoral process is not transparent or is blatantly tilted in favour of a particular party, often the governing regime.

1.4. Overview of recent cases of political violence in West Africa: Five country studies

As noted above, the **West Africa** sub-region has seen a number of cases of political violence in the last few years. For space constraints and the need to focus the paper, this section provides an overview of **five country cases** with regard to their recent experiences with political violence. In so doing, it explains the causes of the various instances of political violence, so that the section constitutes both an extension and an illustration of the previous sub-section on the causes of political violence in the region.

1.4.1. Guinea

Three instances of political violence that Guinea has experienced in recent years merit a closer look here. Those are:

- i) The popular uprisings that paralysed the country for weeks in mid-2006 and early 2007;
- ii) Various mutinies by security forces culminating in the December 2008 military coup; and
- iii) The September 2009 massacre of opposition supporters by the military junta.

Regarding the first one, it is worth recalling that president *Lansana Conté*, in power since 1984, had been very ill since 2003 and had retreated to his village near the capital, *Conakry*, while abandoning the day-to-day running of the country to rival political entrepreneurs in government. The latter were linked to him through his various family members (*Sylla*, 2008:11-18). While *Conté's* various governments oversaw a ruined economy, characterised by severe hardship for ordinary people, they contributed to worsening this situation by scandalous acts of corruption and embezzlement of public funds, which they showed off lavishly.

It was in this context that **trade union organisations** resolved in May 2006 to stage a nationwide peaceful protest to force government to improve the working conditions of their members and, by extension, the general population. Suspended after government acquiesced to some of their demands, the protests were staged again in January 2007. While government's failure to honour its commitments under the deal reached the previous year was a major factor here, the triggering incidence came when President *Conté* went to the central prison of *Conakry* and freed two close associates who had been found guilty of grand corruption. Oppressed in extreme manners by the security forces, more than 200 protesters perished and thousands got severely injured across the country during the three weeks that the protests lasted. By the time **ECOWAS mediators** managed to convince the parties to settle for a negotiated arrangement, including the appointment of a new prime minister suggested by trade union organisations and civil society groups, many gross **violations of human rights** had been committed.

In relation to **army mutinies**, the first serious experience targeted president *Conté* himself in February 1996 when he was held by military officers for two days and was nearly toppled. Subsequent events took place in 2004, 2006 and 2008. Most of the cases were accompanied by violence and shootings in which ordinary people died and whole cities – particularly *Conakry* – were terrorised. The culmination of the mutinies was the **23 December 2008 military coup**, just hours after the announcement of President *Conté's* death.

Cheered by the population even as the international community condemned the coup, the **military junta** called *Conseil national pour la démocratie et le développement (CNDD)* or the National council for democracy and development began a few months later to renege on its initial promises that had endeared it to the populace. From a promise to combat corruption and insecurity, they engaged in the same and insecurity grew; and from an undertaking to hand over power to an elected civilian government by the end of 2009, the junta began campaigning for itself to remain in power (*Souaré*, 2009a; *Souaré & Handy*, 2009; *Delamou*, 2007). It was in protest at this situation that opposition leaders staged a massive rally on 28 September 2009 at the biggest football stadium of the country. But the military junta crushed the rally in blood. Although claims of "*premeditation*" advanced by some **human rights organisations** appear to be questionable in view of the circumstances in which the event took

place, many accounts confirm a horrible scene at the stadium. The oppression resulted in extreme violence against protesters, including the murder of more than 150 people, rape of scores of women and the maiming of hundreds more (*Human Rights Watch*, 2009). According to the **UN Commission of Inquiry**, set up by the Secretary-General following the event, 156 persons were killed (107) or disappeared (49), at least 109 women were subjected to rape and other sexual violence, some of whom “*died of their wounds following particularly cruel sexual attacks*” (*UN Commission of Inquiry*, 2009:2). In many accounts, this was the worst incidence of state-sponsored political violence **Guinea** had ever seen in its postcolonial history.

1.4.2. *Guinea-Bissau*

Over the last few years, the political scene in **Guinea-Bissau** has largely been characterised by instability and political violence through assassinations, military coups or attempted ones. The most immediate starting point of all this can be traced to the 1998-99 civil war that opposed soldiers loyal to the then President *João Bernardo “Nino” Vieira* and those siding with his renegade Army Chief of Staff, General *Ansumane Mane* (UN/ECOWAS, 1999; *Adebajo*, 2002:111-36; *Agbu*, 2006:55-58). While the conflict appears to have been triggered by disagreement between two men, *Agbu* (2006:55) contends that “*the war basically concerned the distribution of institutional political power against the background of the perceived illegitimacy of President Nino Vieira’s rule,*” an affirmation that makes it a matter of governance. *Adebajo* (2002:114) adopts a similar line of argument, citing alleged acts of cronyism, nepotism and misrule by *Vieira* as factors that had created frustrations in the country, particularly among the majority *Balante* ethnic group that he had marginalised.

Almost all other instances of political violence that ensued can somehow be linked to this war and the soared relationship it created between various political actors, particularly military and civilian actors of various ethnic or political camps. First, General *Mane* broke the promise he undertook a few months earlier in an agreement by ousting *Vieira* from power through a military coup on 7 May 1999.⁷ This action was widely condemned by the international community, particularly **ECOWAS** and the then **OAU** (*Agbu*, 2006:56; UN/ECOWAS, 1999; UN, 1999). New elections were eventually held in November 1999, which were won, in a runoff poll in January 2000, by opposition leader *Kumba Yala*. But a second military coup came four years later, in September 2003 against the democratically elected **government of Yala**. It has to be noted, however, that this followed many months of non-payment of civil servants’ salaries and unstable governments (four prime ministers in three years!), amid increasing allegations of bad governance on the part of *Yala*.

On this occasion, the **African Union** and **ECOWAS** sent delegates that persuaded the soldiers to hand over power to the civilians, which they did by nominating an interim civilian president, who led the country to new elections in June/July 2005 which the former president, *Vieira*, won in the second round as an independent candidate, having been expelled from the **African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC)**, the party he had presided over for close to 20 years. Yet, four years later, on 1st March 2009, the country’s Army Chief of Staff, General *Batista Tagme Na Waie*, was killed by

⁷ Despite the coup, *Mane* did not take power. Instead, the speaker of parliament, *Malam Bacai Sanha*, was inaugurated as interim president until the election of a new president. The government of national unity that had been put in place also remained so, while *Vieira* sought refuge at the Portuguese embassy in Bissau before being allowed to leave the country “*for medical treatment*” abroad, having promised to return to face trial, as demanded by the military junta.

a group of unknown soldiers that attacked his office at the army headquarters. It was reported that six other people were killed and part of *Waie's* office destroyed by rocket propelled grenades. The following day, in what looked like an act of revenge, President *Vieira* was himself killed by military elements as he attempted to flee his house following threats by officers loyal to the assassinated Chief of the Army to avenge his killing (*Zounmenou*, 2009).

As in previous cases, an interim government was appointed, led by the *Speaker of Parliament*, and new elections took place as planned on 28 June, with a run-off organised on 26 July. But in another act of political violence, a presidential candidate as well as a former Minister of Defence were assassinated on the eve of the official launch of the electoral campaign on 5 June. By the time this paper was completed, neither the authors of these two assassinations nor those responsible for the murder of *Vieira* and *Tagme* had been brought to book, while the country continued showing signs of **instability**, amid widespread and threatening activities of **Latin American drug barons**.

1.4.3. Niger

Recent cases of political violence in **Niger** are linked to two main issues. One is linked to the struggle for the presidency in Niamey, and the other is related to the so-called Tuareg rebellion in the north of the country. The first one can be traced to the coming into power, through a military coup, of General *Ibrahim Bare Mainassara* on 27 January 1996. Lacking political legitimacy and running the country with an iron fist, the spectre of a counter-coup always hung over *Mainassara*. This was so particularly that he employed the state security apparatus to suppress opposition leaders amid reports that there were cases of some sections in the army showing support to the opposition. *Mainassara* was eventually assassinated by elements of his entourage during a military coup in early April 1999 (*Abdourhamane*, 1999).

The **military junta** that took over kept its promise to organise fresh elections by the end of the year. *Mamadou Tandja*, of the *National movement of the development society (MNSD)*, won the second round of the presidential election held in November 1999 and he took office in December for a five-year term renewable once, according to the newly adopted constitution. Re-elected in 2004, *Tandja's* second and last constitutional mandate was due to run out on 22 December 2009. However, a few months before the end of this term, *Tandja* resolved to change the constitution in order to remain in power for another three years – without election – and remove limitations on presidential terms, despite the presence in the constitution of a clause (*Article 136*) likening the provision of term-limits (*Article 36*) to the republican nature of the state, and thus not subject to amendment, even in a referendum.⁸ In addition to this, *Tandja* faced growing oppositions both from within the country as well as from the regional grouping, **ECOWAS**, which dispatched many delegations to enjoin him to reconsider his decision.

Instead of heeding these calls, *Tandja* dissolved the **National Assembly**, the **Constitutional Court** and the **Electoral Commission**, all of which had opposed his designs. He went ahead with the organisation of a referendum and legislative elections, all of which he “won” as expected. It was against this backdrop that the 18 February 2010 military coup took place, overthrowing *Tandja* in a bloodless coup. The new

⁸ All constitutional arrangements referred to are taken from the new constitution of **Guinea** adopted in May 2010; the 1996 amended constitution of **Guinea-Bissau**; the suspended 1999 constitution of **Niger**; the 1999 constitution of **Nigeria**; and the 1992 constitution of **Togo** as amended in 2002. At the time this paper was completed, a constitution-making process was underway in **Niger**, but the new constitution (due to be finalised by the end of 2010) is not likely to radically, if at all, change the provisions being used here.

military authorities called their junta *Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSRD)* and promised to restore constitutional order in the country as soon as possible. To this end, at least to show the international community that they are serious, they have set up some transitional structures to draft a new constitution, revise the electoral code and suggest a timetable for the end of their rule and the holding of new presidential and legislative elections. After a proposal by the transitional parliament, formed mainly of some former parliamentarians, academics and members of the civil society, the junta has accepted to hold presidential elections by March 2011 in which none of their members or those of the transitional government would be candidates. At the time this paper was completed, a draft new electoral code had been prepared and the new constitution was being drafted.⁹

The other ground of political violence in **Niger** is the so-called **Tuareg rebellion** in the north of the country. Like in neighbouring **Mali**, the first phase of his rebellion began in the early 1990s but was ended by a peace accord signed in 1995. The current phase of the rebellion started in February 2007 by a group called the *Nigerien Movement for Justice (MNJ)* and based mainly in the northern regions of *Agadez* and *Air*. Although *Tandja's* regime called the **MNJ** a group of bandits and drogue traffickers and while banditry cannot be excluded in its activities, the resumption of the rebellion can be explained by a number of inter-related factors.

First, the emergence of a political entrepreneur in the person of *Ali Ag Alambo*, capable of rallying disillusioned young *Tuareg* elements to his cause. Secondly, the presence of a pool of possible recruits among the youth and former rebels not integrated into the national army. The integration of the latter was one of the points of the **1995 peace accord**. The lack of recruitment of some elements was due to integrated senior "*Tuareg*" officers, acting as intermediaries between the government and their communities. These officers used nepotism in identifying eligible individuals for integration, creating resentment in the ranks of those not recruited. Others had indeed been integrated but found the regular army either not suitable for them or they did not see great prospects for promotion, partly as a result of the same nepotistic practices. Some of those had left the army or deserted to join the forces of **MNJ**.

But the most salient factor is perhaps the lack of development and social-economic opportunities created for the local populations in the region, contrary to the provisions of the peace accord and despite the reliance of the central government on natural resources (i.e. uranium) extracted from the region. Partly due to the country's general level of poverty, this situation can also be attributed to corruption on the part of the central government in *Niamey*. Indeed, **Tandja's government** eventually recognised this fact, leading it in 2005 to team up with **UNDP** to launch a two-year project for the **Peace Consolidation** in the *Air* and *Azawak* (*Daycard*, 2007). In any case, the fact of the matter is that the rebellion has resulted in various cases of political violence, with regular abductions and kidnappings of foreign tourists as well as numerous deaths as result of fighting between rebel elements and government troops.

1.4.4. Nigeria

Of all the **West African** countries, **Nigeria** has seen the biggest number of fatalities related to acts of "*political violence*" while not engaged in war. And given the complex nature of the clashes resulting in these deaths, their accurate analysis is a daunting task. Since the turn of the new millennium, for

⁹ A member of the transitional parliament (also a former member of the dissolved **National Assembly**) confirmed to us that the new constitution is unlikely to introduce any radical changes to the 1999 constitution, apart from a few addition designed to provide more guarantees for the **rule of law** (Telephonic interview on 13 June 2010).

example, there have been numerous cases of violent clashes resulting in the death of hundreds of people. **Three main types** of clashes may be identified:

- i) The so-called inter-communal or identity-based (ethnic or religious) clashes;
- ii) The politically motivated violence around elections; and
- iii) Clashes largely attributed to social-economic grievances by elements of marginalised groups.

This makes it difficult to label all of them as political violence, but because most of them serve or are **instrumentalised** to serve political purposes, or target the state that is a political entity, they are considered as such for the purposes of the present study.

For the first category of clashes, *Osaghae and Suberu (2005)* catalogue a number of them and trace their history to the immediate post-colonial era in the country. In recent years, they identify various “*inter-religious*” clashes, particularly in the “*Middle-Belt and cultural borderline states of the Muslim north, where Muslim Hausa-Fulani groups have been pitted against non-Muslim ethnic groups*”, including the **Kaduna riots** of 2000 and the **Jos riots** of 2001. Indeed, the latest wave of these clashes happened in the same *Jos* and surrounding villages in January-March 2010, leaving hundreds dead. But the two authors also list many cases of “*inter-ethnic*” and “*intra-ethnic/intra-religious*” conflicts (*Suberu and Osaghae, 2005:19-20*), which make it difficult to settle for simple explanations or even descriptions of these clashes. In fact, *Fason and Omojola (2005)* provide a long list of the same clashes between 1991 and 2005 and conclude that the majority of them are due to land disputes and other social-economic matters rather than religion or ethnicity. As for *Ikelegbe (2005:77)*, they are political conflicts in that the political elites often instrumentalise ethnic and religious identities in their bid for power (see also *Ukiwo, 2008*).

With regard to election-related violence, both the 2003 and 2007 general elections caused the death of hundreds of people (*Ibrahim, 2007; UNDP, 2009:83-84*). The 2007 poll followed an aborted attempt by the outgoing president, *Olusegun Obasanjo*, to have the country’s constitution amended to allow him to stand for a third term in office beyond his maximum two constitutional terms permitted by the constitution. His Vice-President, *Atiku Abubakar*, having led the opposition to this bid, lost his favours to succeed him as the candidate of the ruling **People’s Democratic Party (PDP)** during the party’s primary in late 2006. *Atiku* had thus left the party and formed his own **Action Congress (AC)** party in a bid to win the presidency. *Obasanjo* and the ruling party were thus determined to have their chosen candidate, the now late *Umaru Musa Yar’Adua*, win the poll at all costs (*Musah, 2009:7*). As a result, not only was the process marred with widespread irregularities, but also hundreds of people perished due to the violence and inter-party clashes that characterised it across the country. Deadly violence continued to erupt in other parts of the country where the election results were fiercely contested, such as in the south-eastern state of *Anambra*.

As far as the third category is concerned, these acts of violence are generally identified with the **oil-rich Niger Delta region** in the south of the country. *Ikelegbe (2005:77)* explains them in terms of “*injustice, neglect, marginalisation, exclusion and domination*”. As a result, militias have blossomed in the region, spearheaded by the **Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)**, the **Niger Delta Liberation Front (NDLF)**, and the **Niger Delta Volunteer Front (NDVF)**. These groups and others often launch attacks on the state authority and oil installations and carry out regular kidnappings of foreign workers. It seems that some criminal elements have either infiltrated these politically motivated groups and/or set up their own movements to cause more violence in the region (*Musah, 2009*). *Okonta (2007:2)* looked at this issue and concluded: “*There is a distinction between [MEND] and the slew of copy-cat youth gangs that emerged in mid-2006 to exploit the new situation in the region for personal benefit.*” He added that **MEND** “*is a disciplined armed movement that has clear political goals, even if it*

utilises unorthodox methods to raise money to fund its project.” It is indeed these “unorthodox methods” that contribute to political violence.

1.4.5. Togo

Most acts of political violence in **Togo** in recent years have been around the democratisation process, generally around contested elections. It is worth recalling that the leadership in **Togo** – as those of most other **African** countries – was forced by internal and external pressures to open up the political space in the early 1990s after decades of authoritarian rule. For the previous two decades, since his military *coup d'état* in January 1967 to be precise, a single man, General *Gnassingbé Eyadema*, had dominated the political scene in the country, and continued to do so for the next decade and half until his death in February 2005 (*Attisso*, 2001; *Souaré*, 2005).

Manipulating the political process to remain in power at all costs, *Eyadema* and his party, *Rally of the Togolese People (RPT)*, were declared winners in all the subsequent presidential (1993, 98, 2003, 2005) and legislative (1994, 99, 2002, 2007) elections, often boycotted by opposition parties. Most of these elections gave rise to tensions, opposition protests and state repression, including the first presidential election of 1993 following the restoration of the multiparty system (*Pilon*, 1993). After the death of *Eyadema* on 5 February 2005, it was, according to the **1992 Constitution (article 65)**, for the president of the **National Assembly** to take the presidency and organize fresh elections in 60 days. However, military elements loyal to the deceased president suspended the Constitution and prevented the president of the National Assembly – who was on an official mission abroad – from returning home. They nominated one of the sons of the late president as the new Head of State, in the person of *Faure Eyadema*. Both **ECOWAS** and the **African Union** (and the wider international community) condemned this action that they considered an act of *coup d'état* and urged the military and their appointed Head of State to uphold the Constitution. The young *Eyadema* did agree under pressure to step down and contest in Fresh elections, but was declared winner of these when they were held on 24 April 2005 (*Souaré*, 2005).

Perhaps the bloodiest election-related instance of political violence in the country is what accompanied opposition protests at this coup (February) and the election (April), as it resulted in the death of a reported 400-500 people, mainly opposition supporters and perpetrated by state security forces, particularly in *Lomé*, *Atakpamé*, *Aného*, *Kpalimé*, *Sokodé* and *Mango*, according to a **UN commission of enquiry (OHCHR, 2005)**.¹⁰

A number of intertwined factors could help explain the recurrent acts of election-related political violence in the country. One is the nature of the **Eyadema regime**. In view of its lack of popular legitimacy, given the way in which he came to power and how he had been governing the country, one could argue that *Eyadema* was almost certain to lose any transparent election, most probably to the main opposition *Union of forces of change (UFC)* party. He thus relied heavily on the army, composed mainly of his relatively small *Kaybé* ethnic group – representing a reported 90 per cent of the officers and 70 per cent of soldiers (*Kandeh*, 2004:156). Heavily politicised, and lacking in professionalism, this army favoured oppression as a strategy to intimidate the opposition and thus preserve *Eyadema* in power.

A second factor is the nature of the opposition and what the ruling regime suspected, rightly or wrongly, to be its political agenda, particularly the main opposition party, **UFC**. This perception is not detached

¹⁰ In addition to this and media reports, this repression was confirmed to the author in an interview with some Togolese refugees in *Cotonou*, **Benin**, in December 2007.

from the identity of the head of this party until recently, who is none other than *Gilchrist Olympio*, the son of the first president of independent Togo. *Sylvanus Olympio* had been assassinated in January 1963 during the first military coup in the country and Eyadema is widely suspected of involvement in this assassination (*Agbobli*, 1992). Any victory therefore of the junior *Olympio* was considered by the **Eyadema regime** as giving the opposition leader an opportunity to revenge the murder of his father. These two factors, together with the history of generalised oppression and bad governance created a third one, which could be qualified as a constant paranoia for what might happen to the regime and its dignitaries in case of losing power, particularly in view of the inflammatory language used by some opposition supporters.

However, as the *Eyadema* junior does not necessarily carry this bag, the multi-regional lineage of his parents (his mother being from the south, the opposition stronghold), and given an apparent turn of fortunes of *Olympio* within his party, there seems to be a trend of moderation if not waning down of these acts of oppression, illustrated by the relatively peaceful post-election opposition protests after the March 2010 presidential election. Above all, UFC agreed in late May 2010 to join a government of national unity led by Faure.

Box 2: Côte d'Ivoire: From a land of hospitality to one of hostility

On 19 September 2002, a fratricidal civil war broke out in **Côte d'Ivoire**, which soon divided the country into a rebel-held North and a government-controlled South. While a foreign hand in some aspects of the conflict, as suggested by some, may not be entirely excluded, the internal factors seem to carry more explanatory weight than the external ones, particularly with regard to the initiation of the war. Those are bad governance epitomised by discriminatory policies that successive governments since 1993 were applying or maintaining against Ivoirians from the North, through the concept of "*Ivoirité*". Many trace the roots of these discriminatory policies and the resulting human rights abuses to the accession to power of *Henri Konan Bédié*, after the death of the country's first president, *Félix Houphouët-Boigny*, on 7 December 1993. Having succeeded his adopted father and ruled the country for the remainder of his term until a controversial presidential election in 1995, *Bédié* was determined to wall off the perceived threat posed by the announced candidature of the popular former Prime Minister *Alassane Ouattara* for the presidential elections of October 2000. He thus tried unsuccessfully to dissuade *Ouattara*, and eventually found his saviour in adopting a kind of chauvinistic discourse with an attempt to re-conceptualise Ivorian citizenship or nationality, portraying *Ouattara*, from the North, as a foreigner and in extension most northern Ivoirians. This was accompanied by many discriminatory and sometimes violent acts against Ivoirians of the North, including the exclusion of *Ouattara* from the presidential race, even though *Bédié* was ousted from power before the poll. However, both General *Robert Guéi*, who succeeded *Bédié* after the December 1999 coup, and President *Laurent Gbagbo*, the current president who came to power after the controversial 2000 presidential elections, maintained the discriminatory policies so long as they helped them eliminate *Ouattara* from the race for presidency.

After many rounds of negotiations and unsuccessful peace agreements over the following five years, a global political agreement was finally reached in March 2007 between the Ivorian government and the rebel movements now called *Forces nouvelles (FN)*, or new forces, under the auspices of President *Blaise Compaoré* of **Burkina Faso**. The initial target date for the implementation of the agreement was 4 January 2008, but four supplementary agreements have since been signed, the latest (**Ouagadougou IV**) being the 22 December 2008 one. According to the **20 May 2010 Report of the UN Secretary General**, some good progress has been made and the holding of presidential elections, disarmament of formal combatants and militias and the reunification of the country are now the only – albeit salient – outstanding issues to complete the implementation of the agreement. Many times postponed, elections are finally expected by the end of 2010 with the participation of *Gbagbo*, *Bédié* and *Ouattara* as candidates, alongside others.

Sources: *Souaré* (2006); UN (2001, 2010); *Soro* (2005); *Koulibaly et al.* (2003), *Goba* (2000); *N'Goran* (2000); *Djéréké* (2003).

2) Political Parties and their Role in Preventing Political Violence

This section takes a closer look at the role of **West African** political parties as actors in preventing and managing political violence or, in some cases, as contributors to it. In so doing, it examines the **nature of political parties and their conduct in elections**, stressing cases of best practice in the region. It also identifies other change agents that political parties work or could work with in view of preventing or managing political violence, particularly those related to elections.

2.1. Nature of Political Parties in West Africa

The nature of political parties in a given country or region can best be comprehended through an examination of the party system, their institutionalisation and internal governance systems, and how they act in pursuit of their objectives, particularly as it relates to the conquest of power. Regarding the party system, understood here as “*the system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition*” (Sartori, 1976), it should be noted from the outset that all **West African** countries “*legally*” operate a **multiparty system** since the early 1990s. But the number and competitiveness of political parties differ in various countries of the region.

In a **study** of political parties in **West Africa**, *Adejumobi* (2007:27) identifies **two main party systems** in the region:

- ✓ Multiparty competitive systems;
- ✓ Multiparty systems with a dominant party in practice, with **Côte d’Ivoire** being excluded due to the conflict situation there.

But a closer look at the party systems in the region in the last few years would identify a **third system**, namely two-party systems. It should be noted that the history of various parties might have some impact on how they relate to political violence. Is the party an avatar of a military junta, a liberation movement or an erstwhile single party in the country, which is still in power? The region does count a number of such parties (*see Box 3 below*).

Box 3: Party systems in West Africa

Party System:	The system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition, number of parties, their characteristics and level of institutionalisation.
Single-party system:	A system in which only the governing party is “ <i>legally</i> ” allowed to exist. De facto single party systems are those in which other parties are legally allowed to exist but cannot “ <i>practically</i> ” do so. Both two systems dominated West African polities in the 1960s through to the late 1980s.
Multi-party system:	A political system in which the creation of multiple political parties is legally guaranteed (as is the case of most West African states today).
Two-Party system:	A system in which two political parties, “ <i>amongst others</i> ”, dominate the political scene in consecutive elections in a more or less equal footing (i.e. Cape Verde, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau).
Dominant-party system:	A multiparty system in which the ruling party dominates the scene by winning consecutive elections vis-à-vis ineffective or politically hindered opposition parties (i.e. Burkina Faso, Gambia, Guinea until 12/2008, Mali* , Nigeria since 1999, Togo).

Former juntas:** Congress for democracy and progress (**CDP**) in **Burkina Faso**; Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (**APRC**) in the **Gambia**; Party for unity and progress (**PUP**) in **Guinea** until 12/2008; and **RPT** in **Togo**.

* Since July 2002, **Mali** is governed by **Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT)**, who is not officially affiliated to a political party. The **Alliance for democracy in Mali (ADEMA)**, which ruled the country from 1992 to 2002, is still the dominant party in the National Assembly, counting **51 out of 147** members following the July 2007 elections, and part of the coalition supporting **ATT**.

** President **Blaise Compaoré** came to power through a military coup in October 1987. He transformed his junta into the **Organisation for people's democracy-Labour movement (ODP-MT)** for the first multi-party elections in 1991. The party adopted the current name shortly before the May 1997 legislative elections. **Yaya Jameh** also came to power in 1994 through a putsch before transforming his junta into **APRC**. The same is true for **Lansana Conté**, the late Guinean ruler who had come to power through a coup in 1984 and formed **PUP** out of the junta in 1991; and **Eyadema** in **Togo** who had come to power in 1967 through a coup before creating **RPT** in the early 1990s in replacement of the junta.

Sources: Author's own compilation with reference to *Adejumobi* (2007) and <http://africanelections.tripod.com/index.html>

Regarding their **institutionalisation** and **internal democratic norms**, a cursory look at party statutes and manifestos show formal bottom-up and inclusive mechanisms for decision making, with guarantees for the participation of members in the decision-making process, and in the choice of candidates, leaders and policies. However, the reality is that most **West African** political parties have very weak structures, are dominated by the president who is generally the founder and the main financier of the party, while members – who often do not contribute financially – are seldom consulted for party policies and nominations/appointments (*Gentili, 2005*).

Another characteristic of **West African** and generally **African** political parties is the central role that **ethno-regional** considerations seem to play in their structures, policies and even leadership appointments (*Mozaffar & Scarritt, 2005; Dowd & Diressen, 2008; Boafo-Arthur, 2003*). Most of them are based on a single or a coalition of ethno-regional groups, despite national constitutions and political party acts prohibiting their formal identification with a particular region, religion, ethnic group or other particularistic cleavages.

2.2. Political Parties as Agents of Stability in West Africa

Following the previous section which focuses on the role of some political parties - both in power and in opposition - in fomenting violence (as in **Togo** and **Nigeria**), this section deals with political parties and their role in crisis prevention and management, particularly as it relates to the aforementioned types of political violence. A text box will look at the role of some political parties in contributing to political violence, particularly through the **instrumentalisation** of the youth. But first, a general overview is in order.

2.2.1. General overview

Political parties play a crucial role as agents of stability or instability in **West Africa**, particularly in view of the fact that most cases of political violence in the region are linked to efforts for the conquest or conservation of political power. Political parties are the main actors in these conquests, even when independent non-partisan candidates are involved in the race (UNDP, 2009:13). This role is well captured in the following quote:

[Political] parties in a democratic system serve several purposes. They aggregate interests by persuading voters to support various issues, and they lend coherence to voter choices... In conflict situations, they can be crucial in determining whether there is a move forward into recovery or a relapse back into hostilities [...]. An institutionalized party system can hold elected politicians accountable (UNDP, 2006:9).

Such is their importance as either “*fire fighters*” or “*arsonists*”. But given the **weak level of institutionalization** for most of them, as noted above, the stance and decisions of leaders of political parties are also very crucial in addition to the overall role of the party itself. How have political parties played this role studying the region in recent times, and what lessons are there to be learned from other countries? Who are the other **change agents** that political parties work with in doing so? This is the thrust of the next three sub-sections.

2.2.2. West African political parties and the prevention and management of various types of political violence

This sub-section looks at the role of **West African** political parties in the prevention or management of the three main types of political violence identified in Section 1 above.

2.2.2.1. Political parties, civil wars/insurgencies and military coups

Civil wars and military coups are combined in this sub-section because of the similarities between their causes, as far as the role of political actors is concerned. In the case of the former, it was noted above that **bad governance** is the main factor that leads to civil wars and insurgencies in **West Africa**, even if other factors were at play. It was also noted that the likelihood of them occurring is higher when **socio-economic inequalities** are combined with **political inequalities** between various segments of society. Political inequality speaks to the **exclusion or marginalisation**, in government appointments or promotions, of politically savvy elements of some specific culturally (ethnic or religious) defined communities in the country. This is so because the presence of socio-economic inequalities may not be sufficient to generate violence, given that an armed conflict requires mobilisation, which in turn requires leaders. But such leaders are likely to emerge when the disadvantaged groups are also deprived of political participation in government, parliament, the army, etc. This is where the importance of leadership of political actors lies, be they in power or in opposition.

A specific case in point, albeit on the negative side, is the role that the discriminatory policies and chauvinistic discourses adopted by *Bédié* and his successors played in the outbreak of the **Ivorian civil war**. These policies were directed at *Ivoirians* of the north or those considered as such. It is these discriminatory policies that the rebel movements used to justify their taking up of arms in September 2002 (*Soro, 2005; Souaré, 2006*).

On the positive side, it must first be acknowledged that proving the role of an actor in conflict prevention is a difficult task, given that success in this case is measured by the absence of conflict. But there are some many cases where political parties and actors contributed to the prevention of potential civil wars and insurgencies. In **Guinea**, for example, the candidate of the ruling **PUP** party was declared winner of the 1993 and 1998 presidential elections¹¹, but it is widely thought that the electoral processes were flawed and that the votes had been rigged. Impatient militants of some political parties publically called on their leaders to authorise them to take to the streets in order to protest against the “*stealing*” of their votes, or even to force the regime out of power. But all these political leaders declined, arguing that they did not come to rule over graves (*Faye, 2008*). Clearly, and regardless of whether they may have succeeded or not, some political leaders could have well fomented violence at a large scale. This apparent responsible behaviour by political leaders could therefore be considered as one of the reasons that explain why **Guinea** did not slide into civil war despite the presence of almost all the conditions under *Lansana Conté*.

2.2.2.2. Political parties and election-related violence

Compared to the other two types of political violence, it is in election-related violence that political parties can play a more crucial role, be it positive or negative. On the **negative side**, political parties and actors could contribute to electoral violence through hate or inflammatory speech, incitement to violence or even direct organisation of it. It has been explained above how ruling parties in countries like **Nigeria** (2003 and 2007) and **Togo** (2005) organised political violence. But in the case of **Nigeria**, at least, the **EU electoral observation mission** found that both the ruling **PDP** party and the main opposition **AC** and *All Nigerians People’s Party (ANPP)* were involved in electoral violence in 2007 against each other’s supporters, but more so between **PDP** and opposition parties (**EUEOM report on Nigeria, 2007:21; Sisk, 2009:84**). In fact, even before the election started, *Ibrahim* (2007:4) noted that “*the country’s four leading political parties are enmeshed in internal crisis with a high level of violence*”, both within them and against supporters of other parties. He cites the case of assassination of some political leaders in 2006 already. The use of unemployed youth and thugs seems to be a common practice by Nigerian politicians at election, as explained in **Box 4** below.

Box 4: Youth and political violence

The use of youth as child soldiers during the civil wars in **Liberia** and **Sierra Leone** is well-known and well documented. They also constitute the bulk of people involved in political protests (often by the opposition) and counter-protests. For example, the majority of protesters during the mass uprisings in **Guinea** in 2006 and 2007 were young, sometimes unemployed or uneducated boys in the suburbs of **Conakry** and other parts of the country. Also, when junta leader, *Moussa Dadis Camara* was campaigning for his candidacy in 2009, it was through a youth group called “*Dadis doit rester*” (*Dadis should stay on*) that some peaceful opposition rallies calling for *Dadis’* departure in mid-2009 were disrupted.

¹¹ All the opposition parties boycotted the 2003 one except for a “*satellite*” party, thought to have been set up by President *Conté* to give a semblance of competition to the poll.

According to the **EU EOM to Nigeria**, young, unemployed and uneducated “area boys”, sometimes addicted to drugs and often armed were widely used by various political parties in **Nigeria** during both the 2003 and 2007 elections. In 2007, violent incidents involving such groups were reported in several states across the country and were apparently sponsored by political parties in areas they considered as electoral fiefs. The ruling **PDP** party and local government structures are accused of hiring young area boys called “*Kalare boys*” to foment violence against their opponents in *Gombe*.

Even in the largely peaceful election in **Ghana** in 2008, there are reports of vigilante, often youth groups of the two main parties intimidating opponents in their territories in *Accra*, the *Volta*, *Northern* and *Ashanti* regions.

Sources: Richards, 1996; EU EOM on Nigeria, 2007.

But political parties have many opportunities to prevent election-related violence and some have indeed seized on such opportunities in the region. It has been pointed out that most electoral violence stems from suspicion about the electoral process and accuracy of its outcome, but also the way in which political actors behave themselves around the time of elections. Therefore, crisis prevention opportunities for political parties in this regard lie in how to ensure a trustworthy electoral process and a more responsible comportment by political actors of which they are part. A few **mechanisms** can be identified, including the following:

- ✓ advocating for the inclusiveness and transparency of the process;
- ✓ making compromises on contentious issues to avoid stalemate;
- ✓ inter-party dialogue to ensure more responsible campaigning; and
- ✓ civic and voter education of their militants.

As it will be clear now, political parties cannot exclusively deal with all of these issues, as some require parliamentary action or partnering with other change agents. The idea here is therefore to identify all the opportunities and other actors that are required to fully seize them. With this remark, it should be noted, in the case of the first issue, that ensuring inclusiveness and transparency of the electoral process is generally a matter for electoral management bodies (EMBs), which normally have a set of rules and guidelines. Political parties could however influence this process in a number of ways. First, working with the EMB, law-makers and other stakeholders, they could advocate for electoral reforms, mechanisms needed to ensure greater transparency, a consensual and a more objective set of rules and conditions of eligibility, particularly when certain rules are likely to exclude some candidates with the potential of violent contestation from the latter’s supporters.

In **Ghana**, the *Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC)*, created by political parties to address important election-related matters in consultation with the **Electoral Commission**, is thought to have contributed to major electoral reforms, including the decision to use transparent ballot boxes and to declare election results at polling stations (*Accra Colloquium*, 2009:8).¹² Likewise, in the run-up to the 27 June 2010 presidential elections in Guinea, there were calls from the public to exclude some aspirants suspected of involvement in corruption and embezzlement of public funds when they served as cabinet ministers or prime ministers under *Lansana Conté*. There were also calls for the restoration of the maximum 70-year-age limit for potential candidates, which had been removed by *Conté* in 2001. Strictly applying either of these measures was clearly going to exclude some “popular” candidates who were very likely to cry foul

¹² This refers to a colloquium held in *Accra* in the period from 11-14 November 2009, and attended by leaders from election management bodies, political parties, security services and civil society groups from over twenty **African** countries with the objective to assess recent elections across the continent and identify best practices.

with the potential of serious incidents of violence. With a *Transitional National Council (CNT)* mainly composed of political parties and civil society organisations, and charged with task of drafting a new constitution and electoral code, it was agreed to postpone any such audits until after the elections and to do away with the maximum age limit. Political parties may sometimes fail to obtain the collaboration of the **EMB** or lawmakers, despite serious efforts, as it seems to have been the case of Nigerian political parties before the 2007 general elections (*Ibrahim, 2007*), but this does not mean that they should not try or persevere.

With regard to the transparency of the polls, the presence of party agents at polling stations is one way of ensuring its transparency and creating opposition confidence and trust in the process. The electoral laws of some countries allow this already. But political parties in countries where this is not allowed can campaign for this and for the unhindered access of their agents. In fact, and while this does not seem to be the case anywhere yet in **West Africa**, it might be in the best interest of all and an important crisis prevention mechanism to make this compulsory on both the EMBs and political parties. The rationale and practicality of getting EMBs to accept this is clear. As for making it compulsory on political parties to have party agents at each polling station may be regarded as unrealistic (as some parties may not be able to do so) or unnecessary. But this objection can be answered by at least **three points**.

- i) It is necessary to dissipate any suspicion or unfounded contestation by any candidate of the results, which often create tensions and leads to violence. With party agents at polling stations having to sign the result sheets, and with mechanisms that such signed sheets will not be altered, no candidate will have a reason to doubt the result.
- ii) Secondly, as far as its practicability is concerned, this can be dealt with if it is made another condition for candidature. In other words, any candidate for the presidency that cannot appoint an agent at each polling station should be considered as having failed to meet an important requirement. Those that cannot do it on their own could be allowed to share agents and sign a legal document that binds them to accept the judgment of such a joint agent.
- iii) Regarding its potential discriminatory role, finally, it should be noted that there are already many "*legally and politically accepted*" discriminatory conditions of eligibility, such as age limits, the need to pay a deposit (about US\$80,000 for the June 2010 presidential election in **Guinea**), or having to collect a certain number of sponsoring signatures from a certain number of constituencies across the country, etc. The key should be consensus and political parties can advocate for this and work on it with the **EMB** and lawmakers. It could even help avoid the plethora of presidential candidates, which is causing logistical problems for many **EMBs** in the region.

An opportunity for political parties to prevent election-related political violence is to make compromises on contentious issues to avoid stalemate that could lead to crises. This clearly does not mean agreement on everything, but simply an accommodation of the interests of other actors through moving to a middle ground or giving up certain demands. The ongoing consultations and compromises between the principal political stakeholders in the **Ivorian crisis** over the implementation of various clauses of the **Ouagadougou Agreement** could be explained by the power balance being somehow in favour of President *Gbagbo* over his main political opponents (*Bédié and Ouattara*). It appears however that the latter could still act in a way that could compromise the relative peace prevailing in the country since 2007; a recent case being the last-minute cancellation of a planned opposition protest in mid-May 2010 following talks with *Gbagbo* and in the context of heightened tensions over the electoral process.

Another recent example can be found in **Guinea-Bissau** over the date of holding the anticipated presidential election occasioned by the assassination of President *Vieira* in March 2009. There was a high risk of a constitutional crisis over conflicting provisions regarding the organisation of the poll: the constitution providing for a 60-day period after the swearing-in of an interim president, while the electoral law envisages a longer timeframe for this. A prolonged or acute constitutional crisis in a violence-prone country like **Guinea-Bissau** could have well led to either a military intervention or a more serious political crisis. According to the **UN Secretary General**, it took some negotiations between the interim Speaker of parliament, the Prime Minister and the two main parties represented in parliament as well as a memorandum of understanding to agree to a 120-day period for the holding of the election (UN, S/2009/302).

Inter-party dialogue and civic education of militants are other ways in which political parties can contribute to election-related crisis prevention. For example, electoral competitions in **Niger** have generally been peaceful in recent years. According to the parliamentarians interviewed for this paper, this can partly be explained by the civic education and sensitisation that political parties do with their militants at election times. One interviewee also highlighted the role of certain consensus-building structures put in place at the initiative of political parties to provide a forum for formal and informal interaction between various stakeholders. In particular, the *National Council for Political Dialogue (CNDP)*, created in 2004 and presided by the Prime Minister, is thought to offer an excellent forum for such interactions. It allows for harmonisation of views on potentially contentious matters related to elections. But another important institution in this regard is the **election management body** (see Box 5).

In addition to such forums and activities, adopting a code of conduct for the election period is becoming a common strategy by political parties to ensure responsible behaviour during electoral campaigns. Various election observer missions praised the conduct of recent presidential and legislative elections in **Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana** and **Guinea-Bissau**, and attribute this partly to civic education of voters that preceded the polls. Political parties, civil society organisations and development partners carried out those exercises. Of course, some political leaders may not always abide by such regulations, but there are ways in which they could be made more enforceable. And this is why political parties need to work with parliaments and other change agents, as it will be highlighted below.

2.2.3. The role of other change agents

Neither political parties/leaders nor parliamentarians can effectively prevent political violence on their own. There are other local and international actors whose efforts play a pivotal role in aiding those of political parties and parliamentarians. Those include civil society organisations, women's organisations, research institutions, faith-based movements, traditional leaders, the media and development partners. It is not necessary here to provide a detailed analysis of the role of each of these actors. Suffice to highlight a few cases illustrating their contribution in crisis prevention.

Due to their expected **non-partisan nature**, calls for certain reforms or opposition to certain designs are best made by these actors than by political parties or parliamentarians and their joining hand with the latter often gives more weight and visibility to the efforts of political parties and MPs. For example, **Nigerian** political parties and some politicians played a leading role in the defeat of *Obasanjo's* third term ambition in 2006. Members of the National Assembly and Senate were also the ones that had the final say in defeating it. But these successes might not have been that easy had civil society organisations and the media not joined the fray to vehemently oppose the design. In particular, a group called the *National Civil Society Coalition Against Third Term Agenda (NACATT)* played a pivotal role, in

collaboration with the media, to expose the dangers of *Obasanjo's* plan, denounce legislators who had reportedly been promised bribes to vote for the plan, and sensitise the general population about the plan. They did this through a series of publications, public seminars and debates (see *Ibrahim*, 2007).

Regarding responsible conduct during electoral campaigns, these agents can prove invaluable in advocating that political actors abide by agreed upon codes of conduct. While some **media** might foment violence through irresponsible reporting, many private media outlets have contributed to voter and civic education, exposing bad practices, giving a voice to opposition candidates where state medias do not, and helping in parallel tabulation of votes. **Civil society organisations** can also play a leading role in ensuring that election officials are not intimidated or that they respect rules of fair play between the various candidates. Calls by religious leaders that their followers behave responsibly and showing how their faith disallows certain actions can go a long way into defusing tensions and thus preventing violence.

In many **West African** countries, nonpartisan domestic electoral observer groups and their independent monitoring and tallies can be an important confidence-building measure by the general population and even candidates in the electoral process. Participants at the aforementioned **Accra Colloquium** (2009:11) highlighted the positive role played by the *Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO)* during the 2008 elections in **Ghana**, as their “*findings helped to convince members of the public and political parties to accept the results announced by the election commission*”.

Another important contribution of **CSOs** and **research institutions** in preventing violent crisis is their role in organising classes of civic education and providing fora for well structure public debates between candidates at election time. And this is one way to increase camaraderie among candidates from different parties and lower political tension among their supporters (**Accra Colloquium**, 2009:7). Indeed, the financial and logistical support lent to these groups by development partners makes a crucial contribution to crisis prevention.

Box 5: EMB AND PEACEFUL ELECTIONS IN SIERRA LEONE, 2007

The 2007 presidential elections in **Sierra Leone** came at a crucial moment in the country's history: it came after a decade-long brutal civil war (1991-2002); both **ECOWAS** and **UN peacekeepers** had left the country; and the power-balance between the incumbent *Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)* and main opposition *All People's Congress (APC)* was quite close. As *Spies* and *Nyathi* (2009:87) note, the elections “*had to be transparent, credible and peaceful as possible for their outcome and result to be respected by all parties ... and for ensuring the durable peace and stability that Sierra Leone so strongly required and desired*”.

While the relatively peaceful outcome was due to the role various stakeholders played, such as **political parties** (particularly the responsible conduct of outgoing President *Ahmed Tejan Kabbah*), the **police**, the active involvement of various **UN agencies**, the **National Electoral Commission (NEC)** played a leading role in the whole process. It was a strengthened and a more credible body, which had been transformed into a new, stronger and independent institution. It conducted a technically sound and transparent election process with a major decrease in cases of electoral irregularities and fraud compared to previous elections.

Sources: *Spies & Nyathi* (2009); Conversations with Ms Christiana Thorpe, Head of NEC, Dakar, 4th March 2010.

Last but not least, a new set of actors that have recently been discovered and are being utilised by governments, political parties, CSOs and development partners for the purpose of crisis prevention are the “**artists and musicians**”. During the 2005 elections in **Liberia** and the 2009 polls in **Guinea-Bissau**, local artists were used to organise street theatres and plays and compose songs calling for peace and

national reconciliation. In early June 2010, a coalition of **Guinean CSOs** partnered with some 30 local artists (from various linguistic groups) and a number of presidential candidates to compose a 10-minute song titled “*National Reconciliation*”. The politicians appear towards the end of the clip, each calling on his supporters to behave responsibly and accept the outcome of the poll regardless of who wins.

2.2.4. Lessons learned from other experiences in the region

The **conduct of political parties/actors** in other **West African** countries offers valuable lessons for the rest of the region. **Ghana** and **Senegal** are good examples in this regard. The conduct of the outgoing long-time ruling **Socialist Party (PS)** in **Senegal’s 2000 presidential elections** is a case in point. The **PS** had been in power since its creation in 1974 or since independence, considering the fact that it was the first-post independence president of the country that founded it. The outcome of the immediate previous two elections in 1988 and 1993 had been fiercely contested by opposition parties, which organised a wave of public street protests (*Villalon, 1994*). The incumbent **PS** president had also inconclusively won the first round of the 2000 poll with some **41% of the votes** compared to the **31%** share of its main opposition challenger, *Abdoulaye Wade* of the **Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS)**. With the opposition leader winning the run-off election, thanks to a broad opposition alliance, the outgoing president swiftly called *Wade* and congratulated him, thereby pre-empting any potential acts of violence from his supporters. A similar conduct was observed following the **February 2007 election**, where the main challenger of the returned incumbent (now *Wade*) called him to concede defeat. Other candidates that initially had contested the preliminary results did so through the constitutional court and not through street protests that could have led to violence.

A similar conduct prevailed during the **2008 presidential election in Ghana**. Since multiparty system was reintroduced in the country in 1992, **Ghana** had successfully organised four presidential elections when voters were called to the polls in December 2008. By mid-2008, it had become clear that the election was going to be a tight race between the two major parties, the incumbent **New Patriotic Party (NPP)** and the former ruling **National Democratic Congress (NDC)** party.¹³ However, the behaviour of political parties during the elections, though it occasionally caused alarm, constituted an important pillar in the successful electoral process. The outgoing **NPP** wanted to contest part of the run-off election and even filed a motion with the **Accra Fast Track High Court** on 1st January 2009 to stop the **Electoral Commission** from announcing the final results until its claims that the **NDC** had committed electoral malpractices in the **Volta Region** during the run-off election were investigated. With the high tension created by this state of affairs, and although the leadership of the two main parties sometimes resorted to negative tactics, alarmism, and brinkmanship, they eventually restrained themselves and heeded the calls of various national and foreign actors, enjoining them to ensure a peaceful election (*Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Zounmenou, 2009; Whitfield, 2009*).

In particular, outgoing president *John Kufuor* released a press statement encouraging everyone to accept the results declared by the **Commission** and indicated his willingness to meet the constitutional requirement of handing over power on 7 January 2009. Also, when the **Commission** announced the final results of the presidential election on 3 January and the victory of the **NDC** candidate, his **NPP** counterpart acknowledged the result and publicly conceded defeat the same day (*Gyimah-Boadi, 2009: 145; Whitfield, 2009:625*).

¹³ Author’s field observations and interviews with several militants and party leaders in the country, including attendance at the primaries of the **Convention People’s Party** (in *Kumasi*) and the ruling **NPP** (in *Accra*) in December 2007.

3) Parliaments as Conflict Prevention and Peace Building Actors

The important role played by political parties in conflict prevention and peace-building, as described above, can be exercised in various settings. Parliament is undoubtedly one of these settings, particularly in countries where only political parties can elect representatives in this important institution (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: West African political parties and their competition with independent candidates for presidential and legislative positions

An exclusive game of political parties	Open competition at all levels
Guinea; Nigeria	Cape Verde; Côte d'Ivoire; Ghana, Guinea-Bissau; Liberia; Mali; Niger; Senegal; Togo
Open competition for presidency only	Open competition for parliament or local councils only
Benin; Burkina Faso	The Gambia (P); Sierra Leone (LC)

Source: compiled by the author in reference to national constitutions

But the ability of parliament or political actors through parliament to do this depends on a number of issues, including the statutes of parliament, and the human and material resources available to it. The objective of this section is to take a closer look at some of these issues in **West African** parliaments, particularly those of the five country studies, in view of highlighting their successes and shortcomings in their efforts to prevent and manage political violence in the region. This will be a prelude to suggesting, in the concluding section, ways in which these successes could be consolidated and shortcomings overcome.

3.1. Parliaments as peace-builders

It has been pointed out that **poor governance** is one of the main causes of **political violence** in **West Africa**. It has also been shown that **discrimination** and **marginalisation** of some segments of society are a manifestation of poor governance. In light of these observations, it is only logical to note that reversing marginalisation through **genuine representation**, and poor governance through **accountability** of rulers constitutes an important mechanism or strategy to prevent and manage political violence. This is where lies the importance of duly elected and representative parliaments (Molukanele, 2007:40-41).

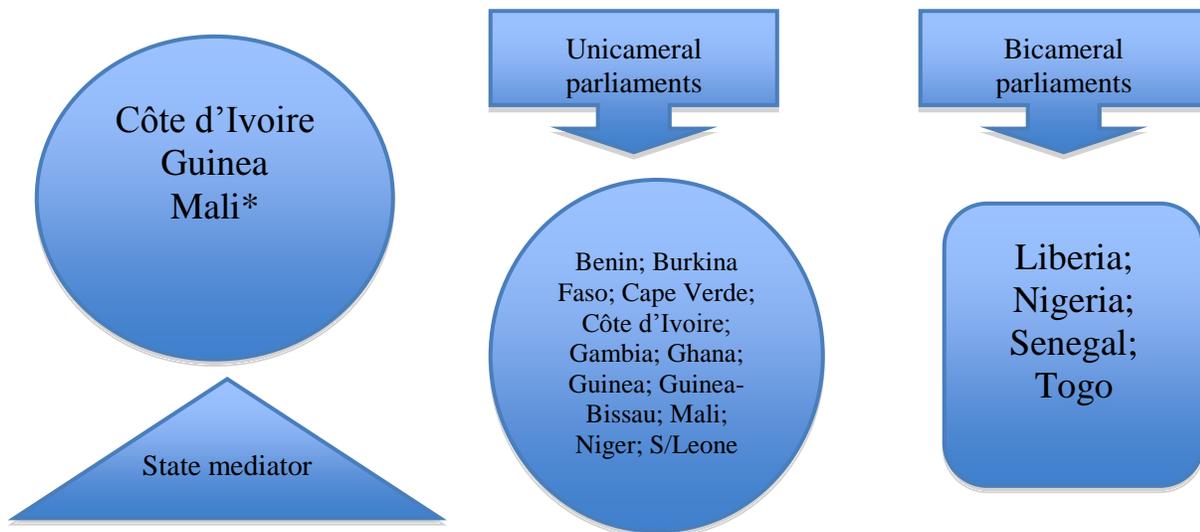
Indeed, most parliamentarians and many long-term observers of their work acknowledge this crucial role (O'Brien, 2005; Parliamentary Centre, 2004). For example, the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA) finds the role of **parliamentary committees** "especially important in the post-conflict period." This is so because these committees can provide a mechanism that allows the disadvantaged and minority parties to express their grievances in open debates, which could then act "as an important pressure-release valve and cross-party confidence-building measure" in a conflict setting (AWEPA, 2006:17). **West African** parliaments performed these tasks through both oversight of

government policies and direct involvement in peace processes. Asked to describe why he believes Parliament can successfully address cases of political violence in his country, a parliamentarian from **Togo** with three years in the legislature contended that parliament could do this by “*revising fundamental legal texts that are problematic*” in terms of their implications for social cohesion in the country, as well as through “*awareness-raising activities targeting ordinary people*”.

Indeed, the constitutions of almost all **West African** countries confer on parliamentarians legislative and oversight powers that could enable them to play an effective role in conflict prevention and management. In the case of the five country studies of this paper, it should first be noted that **Nigeria** and **Togo** have *bicameral parliaments*, with a National Assembly and a Senate, while **Guinea**, **Guinea-Bissau** and **Niger** have *unicameral parliaments*. The importance of this precision is that legislative powers are shared between the two chambers of *bicameral parliaments*, while all the powers are naturally invested in the single chamber of *unicameral legislatures*.

For example, in **Nigeria**, both houses of the National Assembly (House of Representatives and Senate) seem to have the same powers and they can even have joint sessions, although in this case, the Senate appears to have more powers, as its president chairs the meeting (article 53(2)). In **Togo**, both deputies (members of the National Assembly) and senators can be involved in crisis prevention and management. However, deputies seem to have more powers in this regard than their colleagues of the Senate. Besides, they are all directly elected by universal suffrage, contrary to senators, a third of whom are “*appointed*” by the head of state (article 52).

Figure 1: Composition of West African parliaments and their conflict management role



Sources: National constitutions.¹⁴

¹⁴ **Senegal** had a short-lived *bicameral parliament* between 1999 and 2001 when the newly created upper house (Senate) was abrogated by a constitutional referendum in January 2001. The same house was re-established following a constitutional amendment in February 2007 (see *Thiam*, 2007). While **Mali** had a *bicameral parliament*

But as it can be observed in **Figure 1** above, in addition to parliaments, some **West African** countries have a dedicated “**State Mediator**” (*Médiateur de la République*). While appointed by the Head of State, the holder of this position has almost the same immunities as members of parliament, but a more secure tenure than the latter, for he may not be removed from office before the expiry of his/her single term of six (**Côte d’Ivoire**) or seven (**Guinea**) years unless in the case of permanent incapacitation. In any case, he or she is charged with the task of mediating between governmental structures and agents and ordinary people in any real or potential conflict matter. This makes the holder of this post an important role player in preventing and managing political violence; an actor that parliamentarians stand to gain from working with.

Other countries have elected state (**Nigeria**) or regional (**Mali**) assemblies that act as parliaments at the local level. Others (e.g. **Gambia** and **Sierra Leone**) have traditional leaders or chiefs represented in parliament, while others (such as **Ghana** and **Nigeria**) have traditional monarchies or royal families still operating alongside the state and wielding some social importance in their areas of operation. Religious groups add to this list of institutions that parliament may work with for the purpose of crisis management.

3.2. West African parliaments and crisis prevention and management: some successes and opportunities

This sub-section is about the role played and mechanisms used by parliamentarians in some **West African** countries in some of the above-mentioned cases of political violence, including how they partnered with other **national and regional actors**, such as the media, civil society organisations (CSOs) and religious groups, and how parliamentarians assess their regular work and their impact on the conflict. Did the review and adoption of specific legislation address the root causes of the conflict/violence, or did it neglect even accelerate it? Did parliamentarians engage with victims of political violence?

3.2.1. Preventing and managing political violence through legislation

Parliament’s contribution to the prevention or management of political violence through legislation could be achieved either by way of enacting new legislation or defending existing ones the removal of which could beget political violence. Generally, in most **West African** countries that have experienced major civil wars in recent years (i.e. **Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau**), parliaments or transitional legislatures had to enact laws in order to incorporate provisions of peace agreements necessary for the resolution of the conflict, such as the 1999 **Lomé agreement** for **Sierra Leone** and the 2003 **Comprehensive Peace Agreement** that ended the second phase of the **Liberian civil war**. The role of the two houses of the **Nigerian parliament** in passing the **Niger Delta Development Commission Act** (2000,

at the time this paper was completed, a constitutional referendum proposed by President *Amadou Toumani Touré* to be held by the end of 2010 is likely to create a second chamber and the position of a State Mediator, as its draft bill notes (see *Souaré & Handy*, 2010). Also, **Burkina Faso** had a *bicameral parliament* until an amendment of **Article 78** of the constitution in January 2002, which abolished the House of Representatives, and made the legislature a *unicameral* one.

no 6) in July 2000 and the approval of the **Amnesty Law** proposed by late President *Umaru Musa Yar'Adua* for armed insurgents in the region also illustrate this. The **Amnesty Law** for militant groups in this troubled region of southern **Nigeria**, passed in mid-2009, contributed to easing tensions in the region and allowing for more serious and direct negotiations with militants. Although it was a proposal by the executive, it might not have materialised without a supporting role by legislators.

Set up by military juntas as transitional parliaments to review the country's fundamental legal texts, the work of the **Guinean CNT** (officially established in February 2010) and its Nigerien equivalent created in March 2010 fall under the same category. The Guinean one has adopted a new constitution, electoral code and media law that allow greater freedom of expression.

On the preventive side, the aforementioned vote of Nigerian legislators in May 2006 to defeat *Obasanjo's* plan to have a third term is a case in point. In **Niger**, while parliament was eventually dissolved for its stance against former president *Tandja's* attempt to do the same with the Nigerien constitution in mid-2009, that stance and the continued opposition of "*former*" parliamentarians even outside parliament was meant to prevent the change of this crucial constitutional clause. But the concrete link between this provision and crisis prevention can be appreciated through an understanding of the apparent link between this provision and peaceful leadership change in **Africa**, which is necessary for the prevention of violent conflicts on the continent.

It is worth noting here that the re-introduction of **political liberalisation** and **multiparty system** in **Africa** in the 1990s saw all but 11 of the continent's 54 or so countries introducing provisions for **presidential term-limits** in their constitutions. This provision seems to be a veritable instrument for facilitating peaceful leadership alternation on the continent in that most of the **African** leaders that have peacefully left power since 1990 did so after serving their maximum constitutional terms. There has not been a peaceful change of leadership in any of the nine countries (**Guinea**, 2001; **Tunisia & Togo**, 2002; **Gabon**, 2003; **Chad**, 2004; **Uganda**, 2005; **Cameroon & Algeria**, 2008; **Djibouti**, 2010) whose leaders have done away with this provision since. The point is that once this provision is removed, particularly the way it has generally been, some political actors or even the military might be convinced that peaceful avenues of leadership change have now been closed and that the only way to gain power or remove the incumbent is through unconstitutional means.

From this, one could identify an opportunity for **West African** parliamentarians to seize in order to contribute to the prevention of political violence due to the removal of this constitutional provision. Currently, all **ECOWAS** member states have this provision except for **The Gambia** (which has never had it) and **Togo** (which removed it in 2002).¹⁵ It is true that the 2001 **Additional Protocol on Governance**, adopted by **ECOWAS** member states, make provisions for the respect of constitutional regulations, particularly as they relate to elections and governance. It was based on a provision of this Protocol that **ECOWAS** was able to take a firm stance on *Tandja* in **Niger** in 2009. But this was only possible because of a technicality: *Tandja* resolved to temper with the constitution with less than six months before the presidential elections due by 22 December, which is prohibited by the Protocol. But had he done it well before the six-month window, **ECOWAS** would have found it difficult to take the position it did. Thus, national parliaments of the 13 countries that currently have this provision should unite to put a lock on

¹⁵ The May 2010 constitution in **Guinea** has restored the provision and the new constitution in **Niger** is likely to do so, which explains why **Niger** is not considered here to have done away with it.

this provision, regardless of any timeframe in relation to elections. They should then campaign for **Togo** to restore it and for **The Gambia** to adopt it, and then lead a bottom-up effort for the **ECOWAS** to adopt a legally binding instrument to this effect. This strategy stands to be more effective than the current arrangements.

Another opportunity relates to the prevention of election-related violence and military coups. This could be through the expeditious ratification of the 2007 **African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance**. With regard to elections, this Charter contains many provisions for the holding of free and fair elections in Africa and the punishment of those that violate them. As regards military coups, it is worth noting that the prospect of “*converting*” an unconstitutional regime to a constitutional one after coming to power through a coup could be an incentive for some military officers to stage a coup even if they know that their act will initially be condemned by the international community as per existing rules in this regard. But knowing that this is no longer possible might deter would-be coup-makers. Yet, of all the existing policy instruments on unconstitutional changes of government in **Africa (Lomé Declaration, the AU’s Constitutive Act, and this Charter)**, it is only this charter that prohibits the possibility of “*auto-*

“The perpetrators of unconstitutional change of government shall not be allowed to participate in elections held to restore the democratic order or to hold any position of responsibility in political institutions of their State” (article 25-d).

legitimisation” of coup-makers by stating:

But this charter requires at least **15 ratifications** in order to become operational and binding. At the time this paper was completed, only **four countries** had done so, with **Sierra Leone** being the only **West African** one (in addition to **Mauritania**), which ratified it in December 2009.

Adopting these **national and regional legal frameworks** can by no means be a magic stick to prevent political violence, as there must also be **political will** on the part of implementers. But once they are in place, parliamentarians can work with other stakeholders, such as CSOs and the media, to popularise them and advocate for their effective implementation and adherence to them.

3.2.2. Parliaments and direct engagement in peace processes

Parliamentarians can contribute to efforts of conflict prevention by directly engaging, individually or collectively, in peace and reconciliation processes. For example, **Niger’s** parliament was involved, before its dissolution in mid-2009, in efforts to resolve the **Tuareg rebellion** in the north of the country. An opposition parliamentarian recalls his personal effort in mediating between conflicting communities in his *Pasker* constituency where *Tuareg* and *Tubu* ethnic groups live side by side. According to the parliamentarian, about **32 people** had died in clashes between the two communities when he decided, in November 2005, to organise a discussion forum between them so as to reconcile the communities. He did so through bringing them together to dialogue and discuss the contentious issues while suggesting ways to overcome them, which apparently worked and the clashes ceased. As a result, according to him, even when the latest wave of **Tuareg rebellion** began in 2007, this locality was spared all confrontations.

Another member of the dissolved parliament from the opposition *Nigerien Alliance for Democracy and Progress-Zaman Lahiya (ANDP-Zaman Lahiya)* relates the role played by parliament on the latest **Tuareg rebellion** that began in early 2007. She contends that parliament was initially hindered to be effectively

involved in this particular case. This was because government was describing it as an “*act of banditry*” and not rebellion. In the words of the former parliamentarian:

“Parliament was in a difficult situation. We knew what was going on was more serious than mere banditry, even though criminal activities were involved. We thus summoned the Minister of internal affairs in 2008 to come and brief parliament about government’s real position and respond to our questions.”

Although the minister tooled the line of government, parliament eventually succeeded in convincing the executive to consider the crisis as more serious than simple banditry.

The result of this change of position by government was the dispatch, in mid-2008, to both **Libya** and **Algeria** of **joint government/parliament delegations** to meet with authorities in these countries in view of initiating dialogue with the rebels. These two countries are important in the management of the **Tuareg rebellion** because they host big *Tuareg* communities, both indigenous and of Nigerien origin, including refugees from both **Niger** and **Mali**. But parliament was dissolved in mid-2009 before the fruits of these efforts could mature.

Another recent case in point is the **reconciliation process** launched in June 2010 by the **Guinean transitional parliament**. The opening ceremony, on 21 June 2010, saw the interim president calling on Guineans to reconcile and forgive past wrongs, while promising to ensure that those will no longer get repeated in future. In the spirit of reconciliation, the **CNT** plans to tour the whole country to popularise the newly adopted constitutions, particularly its provisions on citizens’ rights, and to call on electors to vote peacefully during the June/July presidential elections.

Another way in which parliamentarians can contribute to conflict prevention is to set up credible **commissions of enquiry** following violent incidents in order to establish the facts and make useful recommendations for **reparations for victims**. This will contribute to confidence-building between the state and the general populations.

Finally in this regard, parliament has a role in ensuring the implementation of some of the measures identified above with political parties. Adherence to codes of good conduct by political actors and the media should not always be left to their own discretion. There must sometimes be binding rules to ensure this and parliament could greatly help political parties and CSOs to legalise such arrangements. The same is also true for certain electoral reforms.

3.3. Obstacles to West African Parliamentarians in managing political violence

Almost all national parliaments in **West Africa** have renewed their legislatures at least twice since the restoration of multiparty democracy in the early 1990s. With time and experience, quality has somehow improved in most parliaments in terms of parliamentary debates and parliament’s engagement with the executive. First parliaments in the early 1990s were composed mainly of people who had never had any

parliamentary experience in their career, and only a few had experience in single-party, rubberstamp parliaments. But this qualification is only relative, as **West African** parliaments and parliamentarians still lack many human and material attributes necessary for the effectiveness of their work. This section looks at some of those shortcomings.

3.3.1. *Capacity and material limitations*

All the parliamentarians and parliamentary experts interviewed in the course of writing this paper asserted that national parliaments are lacking in important **material resources**. They all acknowledged improvements made in recent years in this regard, particularly through the support of national governments (in some cases) and, most importantly, development partners. UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (**UNFPA**) and the **European Union** are frequently mentioned in this regard. The most cited material limitations include lack of research library or documents, office space, assistant staff and computers for parliamentarians, including meeting rooms for parliamentary committees, and funds to finance regular fact-finding and mediation missions. These limitations are said to have a negative impact on their work, as they hinder the pursuit of certain initiatives susceptible to prevent or manage cases of political violence.

With regard to **human capacity lacuna**, it has to be noted that people are generally elected to parliament to represent certain interests and based on their popularity within their constituencies. While the ideal situation would be for all parliamentarians to be competent in various governance-related issues, this is often not the case for a good number of them. **Lack of competence and expertise** on certain critical issues is therefore a major challenge facing **West African** parliaments, including within parliamentary committees. Yet, without certain aptitudes, parliamentarians cannot effectively oversee government actions or even find innovative ways to address certain critical issues, like political violence.

3.3.2. *Political challenges*

In addition to material problems, most **West African** parliaments face some serious political challenges. One could even argue that most material shortcomings stem from these challenges. The most apparent of these political obstacles is the tendency of the executive to either interfere in parliamentary actions or not take parliament's decisions and recommendations seriously. The interference can take the form of trying to impose certain agendas or decisions on parliament without due process, making it a rubberstamp for the executive's diktats, or hinder parliament from considering certain matters.

A second challenge that contributes to the latter is the partisan nature of most parliaments in the region in the absence of clearly defined rules and procedures to overcome this. In other words, most parliamentarians, instead of voting according to their own conscience and in the general interest, tend to vote along party lines if not according to party instructions, and party whips are there to call the "*rebellious*" colleagues to "*order*". Parliamentarians interviewed from **Sierra Leone** complained about **Article 77** (1-L) of the constitution. This article makes it an offence liable for disqualification from parliament that a parliamentarian regularly sits or votes with members of a different party other than his or hers in a way that can be construed as s/he having left the party that elected him/her into parliament.

Likewise, **Ghana's** democratic system, including the vibrancy of its parliament, is widely praised. But at the end of a three-day workshop of Ghanaian parliamentarians, facilitated by the *Parliamentary Centre (PC)* in July 2004, there was a general agreement that parliament is polarised along party lines,

particularly that two political parties overwhelmingly dominate the political scene (PC, 2004). This was confirmed by the four Ghanaian parliamentarians and parliamentary experts interviewed for the purpose of this paper. It was also thanks to partisanship that the **RPT-dominated National Assembly** in **Togo** amended in December 2002 **Article 59** of the **1992 constitution**, making presidential tenure in office limitless. While this is almost a global trend, some rules and procedures, adopted by parliament itself, could help reduce the negative effect of this on certain important issues. Indeed, some parliamentarians manage to form **ad hoc inter-party regional caucuses** to deal with certain issues prevalent in the region. This is the case, for example, of the northern caucus in **Mali** and **Niger's** dissolved parliament, which had led efforts in parliament's involvement with the **Tuareg rebellions** in both countries. The same is also true for **Nigerian** parliamentarians from the trouble **Niger Delta region** in terms of their work on the **Niger Delta Development Commission** and its projects.

Another major political challenge relates to the **legitimacy of parliament** in the eyes of the very people they are expected to serve. Parliament could lack legitimacy in at least two ways. On the one hand, parliament could have a legitimacy deficit if it was formed, or some of its members were elected following a discredited electoral process, as it happened in **Nigeria** in 2007. Indeed, *Musah* (2009:7) shows that by June 2008, election tribunals had overturned **10** gubernatorial, **12** senatorial, **11** House of Representative, and **15** (out of **36**) state assembly results stemming from the discredited April 2007 elections in the country. The same applies if parliament is maintained in place after the expiry of its term without due process. Parliament could also be decried if it fails, collectively or through some individual members to act where the populace expect it to, as in the case of the **Guinean parliament** at the time of the military coup of December 2008. Indeed, a general characteristic of most **African** parliamentarians is that they seldom visit their constituencies outside election periods, and this has an impact on how their constituents perceive them.

Table 2: A SWOT assessment of West African parliaments regarding political violence

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative powers enshrined in national constitutions and parliament's own rules of procedure • The fact that parliamentarians are the representatives of the people and closer to them than other branches of government • Some parliaments vote their own budget (e.g. Mali) and parliamentarians (as in Nigeria) have constituency development budgets • Financial and technical support provided by development partners and some civil society organisations • Most West African parliaments have the power to summon members of the executive on various issues related to their actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many parliaments do not have control over their own budget and parliamentarians do not have constituency development funds • General lack of funds for parliamentary engagement with issues of, or susceptible to lead to, political violence • Lack of adequate office infrastructure, equipment and capacity for both parliamentarians and parliamentary support staff • Most parliaments are dominated by the ruling party, which makes it difficult for parliament to exercise its full independence oversight role over government • High turn-over rate of parliamentarians averaging 75% at each election in most countries • ECOWAS Parliament does not have a specific mandate to deal with issues of political violence and does not have any direct link with the regional early warning system (ECOWARN) • Parliamentarians are prevented to consider certain important matters because the executive consider them as "sensitive issues of national security"

Threats	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive interference in the work of parliament, either by trying to impose decisions on it or prevent it from considering important matters • Lack of funding from government and the possibility of donor fatigue for external funding • Political instability that could render parliament sidelined • The power of the head of state to dissolve parliament • Possible disagreements between the two houses of bicameral parliaments • Partisanship in parliament • Lack of trust and hostility towards parliament from members of the public that blame parliamentarians for various political and socioeconomic crises and shortcomings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given that most parliaments vote the national budget, this could be used as a bargaining tool with the executive to have sufficient funds for parliament’s own activities • Opposition MPs could work with their colleagues from the ruling party to ensure proper funding from the executive • National parliaments could find ways in which they could work with the decentralised zonal bureaus of the ECOWAS early warning system to enable them to have timely information about looming cases of political violence • National parliaments could utilise local and regional CSOS, the media, research institutions for capacity-building and use the media to popularise their work • As is the case in Benin (CAPAN),¹⁶ national parliaments could set up a special unit for research, composed of competent and independent experts in various domains • National parliaments could work collaboratively with other stakeholders for the purposes of mediation and national reconciliation • There is an opportunity to adopt a region-wide legally binding instrument for the respect of presidential term-limits, given that 13 of the 15 member states of ECOWAS already have this provision in their constitutions.

Source: General literature and assessments of MPs during the UNDP June 2010 seminar in Accra

3.3.3. Legal and constitutional challenges

National parliaments in **West Africa** also face legal and constitutional challenges. There are often other bodies and structures, sometime window dressing, set up by the executive to deal with certain matters that fall squarely under the prerogatives of parliament. Some **national commissions of enquiry** or **human rights commissions** fall under this category. It is not yet clear what would be the ultimate role of **State mediators** in the three **West African** countries that have or propose to have one. Only **Côte d’Ivoire** has had the post for a few years. **Guinea’s** was only initiated by the newly adopted constitution in May 2010 and the position is yet to be created, while **Mali’s** is still dependent on a constitutional referendum not yet held.

Another major constitutional challenge facing **West African** parliaments is the power of the executive to dissolve them when the Head of State thinks there is a major disagreement with parliament that could not be overcome according to his desires. The power of the executive in this regard differs from country to another. Parliament could also “*impeach*” the Head of state, but this is often subjected to more stringent conditions than the decision of the Head of state to dissolve parliament. It is this weapon that the former **Nigerien** leader, *Tandja*, used to dissolve parliament and other state institutions in mid-2009 over a political crisis that eventually caused his downfall.

¹⁶ Cellule d’analyse des politiques de l’Assemblée nationale (Unit of analysis of political developments of the National Assembly).

4) Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This paper looked at the role of two important actors with regard to political violence in **West Africa** in recent years, focusing on five country cases. The two actors are political parties and parliamentarians, although the two could sometimes be reduced to one in that parliamentarians are drawn from political parties. The paper first defined political violence, identified the main types of the phenomenon, and analysed the factors contributing to their occurrence in **West Africa**.

With regard to the role of political parties, this role was mainly considered in its positive manifestation, when political parties act as agents of peace and dialogue. But it was noted that some political parties could contribute to political violence, either through irresponsible declarations or deliberate effort to foment violence, especially during election periods. As for parliamentarians, the crucial role their institution can play in efforts to prevent and manage cases of political violence was highlighted. The paper also shows that national parliaments in **West Africa** are theoretically empowered by their respective constitutions and rules of procedure. In practice, however, they are faced with a multitude of human, material, political and legal challenges, which have an impact on their effectiveness as actors in crisis/conflict prevention and management.

From the foregoing, a number of **policy recommendations** can be formulated in order to render national parliaments more effective in the management and prevention of political violence in the region.

4.1. For political parties

I. Ruling parties

- ✓ Ruling parties should ensure respect for principles of good governance, particularly the fundamental legal texts of the country and only amend them in a consensual and consultative process with other political principals. Avoid creating frustrations in certain communities by discriminating against them and treating their political representatives unfairly;
- ✓ Expeditiously ratify the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and adhere to its principles;
- ✓ Ensure fair distribution of the country's resources between its various regions and groups by avoiding nepotism and discriminatory distribution of the same;
- ✓ Avoid inflammatory language in public pronouncements and consider the opposition as a political adversaries rather than as enemies;
- ✓ In times of tension between communities or popular contestation of the state authority or decision, call for credible dialogue with a view of finding solutions to the contentious issues;
- ✓ Work with the media and civil society organisations for greater dissemination of government actions and allow freedom of expression for constructive media scrutiny of government actions.

II. *Opposition political parties*

- ✓ As members of the ruling party, opposition leaders should also avoid inflammatory language in public pronouncements and work within the legal channels (parliament, courts, special commissions, etc.) to address grievances and abide by the rulings of the latter so as to avoid confrontations that could lead to political violence;
- ✓ Where the electoral process is lacking, advocate, in concert with parliament, other parties as well as CSOs, for genuine reforms and clear procedures and regulatory frameworks, including the right to send party agents to polling stations at election times;
- ✓ Adopt democratic principles in internal party structures and minimise the monopoly of the party by a few individuals. This should then help involve more party members in party activities, including funding through membership fees. Also, develop a civic culture within the party by regularly organising civic education courses for militants;
- ✓ Educate militants and party members about the country's legal texts, particularly the constitution and the electoral laws, as well as voting procedures.

4.2. For parliamentarians

I. *Oversight functions*

- ✓ Ensure respect, by the executive, for constitutional norms and oppose any undue change to them, such as term-limits. If parliament cannot do this alone, parliamentarians should work with **CSOs** and the **media**, but also involve the **ECOWAS parliament** (as Nigerien parliamentarians did in 2009) or even the **Pan-African Parliament** through their representatives in those institutions and/or direct communication with their secretariats. This is likely to give a regional or continental visibility to their proposals.

II. *Legislative functions*

- ✓ Parliamentarians should be proactive in proposing new legislation in order to prevent political violence in the country and should not always wait for the executive to initiate reforms before they can act;
- ✓ They should pass laws that ensure internal democracy within political parties, such as making it necessary that they hold primaries for the election of their candidates in various elections and that those primaries be supervised by the *national electoral commission*, as is currently the case in **Ghana**;
- ✓ Make efforts, in collaboration with other national parliaments in the region, to have a region-wide legally binding instrument on the provision of presidential term-limits in **West Africa** and put a lock on it. This should not be very difficult given that **13 out of 15** member states of **ECOWAS** already have this in their constitutions;
- ✓ Make efforts to ensure the ratification of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and work with the *electoral commission* to ensure reforms identified by parliamentarians, political parties or the general public.

III. Parliamentary administration and capacity improvement

- ✓ In countries emerging from conflict or experiencing serious political crises, parliaments should consider creating a special committee on peace, mediation and conflict prevention and work closely with and/or follow developments within **regional** (*ECOWAS Panel of the Wise, Peace and Mediation Council*) and **continental** (*AU's Panel of the Wise, Peace and Security Council*) **conflict prevention structures**, as well as **CSOs** and **research institutions** working in this domain;
- ✓ Parliamentarians should ensure that they have adequate funding from government through the national budget. Members representing the ruling party can take the lead in negotiating this with government. This will allow them to have adequate funds for conflict prevention purposes as well as other activities;
- ✓ With regard to material and human capacity shortfalls, national parliaments should closely work with existing **national and regional civil society groups** and **research organisations** for capacity-building, including inviting them for expert briefings. The **media** and **civil society groups** can also be used for spreading a message of tolerance and peace, particularly at times of tension and political crises, as well as to popularise the work of parliament and explain certain complex issues to the public so as to avoid misunderstanding;
- ✓ The **portal for parliamentary development (AGORA)** is an invaluable source of information on parliamentary development and an excellent meeting point for the exchange of knowledge and know-how between parliamentarians. **West African** members of parliament and parliamentary support staff should embrace this tool and utilise it for various self-learning and capacity-building purposes.

IV. Direct involvement in peace processes

- ✓ Parliamentarians should advocate and ensure that they can use the decentralised focal points of the **ECOWAS early warning system** across the region for the purpose of updating themselves on looming crises and acting on the latter in a proactive manner;
- ✓ Parliamentarians, either individually or collectively, should regularly engage with the public at constituency level so as to create confidence between them and those they represent and build their concerns and recommendations into their actions and deliberations;
- ✓ As representatives of the people, parliamentarians should actively engage in mediation and inter-community dialogue processes to prevent political violence and ensure peace and harmony in the country.
- ✓ Where other national bodies exist with apparent overlapping mandates with parliament, such as commissions of enquiry and anti-corruption bodies set up by government, and national security agencies (for security sector oversight), parliamentarians should craft ways of engaging those bodies to work collaboratively on issues of common interest;

4.3. To development partners (including UNDP)

- ✓ Development partners should find ways to engage or widen their engagements with political parties to build their capacities, particularly in civic education and the training of their cadres. This can be done both through funding or providing training opportunities.
- ✓ Development partners and competent local CSOs and research institutions should help build the conflict prevention and management capabilities of national parliaments through knowledge and skills development for both parliamentarians and parliamentary support staff, the development of research capacity (e.g. research library, physical and/or electronic), the creation of opportunities for knowledge sharing, and the improvement or creation of office infrastructures, both physical (i.e. building) and material (e.g. computers and communication tools).
- ✓ Provide continued financial assistance to parliaments in order to help them undertake certain conflict management and reconciliation missions across the country, organise seminars and forums of inter-community dialogue between conflicting communities, and undertake study tours in the region and beyond that could help them learn from the experiences of others in how to effectively prevent or manage political violence.

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Annexes

A) Aggregate list of interviews

No	Country	Male	Female	Total
1	Benin	02	00	02
2	Burkina Faso	02	00	02
3	Côte d'Ivoire	01	00	01
4	Gambia	02	00	02
5	Ghana	01	01	02
6	Guinea	03	02	05
7	Guinea-Bissau	01	01	02
8	Liberia	01	01	02
9	Mali	02	01	03
10	Niger	02	01	03
11	Sierra Leone	01	01	02
12	Togo	02	00	02
13	Experts	01	01	02
TOTALS		21	09	30

B) List of interviewed parliamentarians (all through a questionnaire)

No	Name	Country	Gender	Mode of interview
1	Justin Sagui-Yotto	Benin	M	Face to face
2	Jocelyn Degbey	Benin	M	Face to face
3	Niquiébo Fancani	Burkina Faso	M	Face to face
4	Meng-Néré F. Kientega	Burkina Faso	M	Face to face
5	Mamy Diomandé	Côte d'Ivoire	M	Face to face
6	Momodou L. K. Sanneh	The Gambia	M	Face to face
7	Essa Saïdykhan	The Gambia	M	Face to face
8	A. Frema Osei-Opere	Ghana	F	Face to face
9	William Ofori Boafo	Ghana	M	Face to face
10	Belly Aribot	Guinea (2002-08)	F	Phone & email
11	Dia Kanté	Guinea (2002-08)	M	Phone & email
12	Mohamed Diané	Guinea (1995-02)	M	Phone
13	Me Abdoulaye Touré	Guinea	M	Face to face
14	Hadja Taïbou Diallo	Guinea	F	Face to face
15	Vesa Gomes Naluak	Guinea-Bissau	M	Face to face
16	Nhima Sissé	Guinea-Bissau	F	Face to face
17	Prince Yormie Johnson	Liberia	M	Face to face
18	Alomiza M. Ennos	Liberia	F	Face to face
19	Mohamed I. Touré	Mali	M	Face to face
20	Aichata Haidara	Mali	F	Face to face
21	Sékou Diaby	Mali	M	Face to face
22	Mohamed Bazoum	Niger	M	Phone
23	Haoua Baraze	Niger	F	Phone
24	Ibrahim Yacouba	Niger	M	Face to face
25	Bernadette Lahai	Sierra Leone	F	Face to face
26	Hassan B. Sheriff	Sierra Leone	M	Face to face
27	N'térantémou Kouagou	Togo	M	Face to face
28	Ayitou Singo	Togo	M	Email
29	Rasheed Dramane	Expert (PC)	M	Email
30	Nansata Yakubu	Expert (PC)	F	Email

C) Interview questionnaires

1 - Questionnaire for parliamentary experts

QUESTIONNAIRE THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN ADDRESSING CRISIS /CONFLICT

Note: your answers to this questionnaire should be based on your knowledge of West African parliaments and MPs, so you're expected to answer some questions on their behalf.

I. Main Oversight Powers of Parliament

Main powers of WA parliaments in addressing political violence	
Which other national bodies do parliaments share some of these powers with and how is cooperation working with such bodies?	
Number and topic of recent plenary debates held to address conflict/crisis	
Please describe Parliaments' relationship to the Executive in developing conflict-related national strategies, please provide specific examples	

II. The Institution of Parliament

What are the material and human resources available to WA Parliaments in addressing conflict/crisis? How does this help their work?	
What are the material and human resource limitations of Parliaments in addressing conflict/crisis? How does this impact on your work? Please specify	
How does the public perceive Parliament's legitimacy?	

What is the impact of this perception on their work?	
Do MPs generally act according to personal beliefs or do they generally follow party instructions?	
What is the impact (positive or negative) of this on their work?	
To what extent and how have political party caucuses played a role in conflict issues? Please specify	Promoting cross-party dialogue
	Sponsoring cross-party legislation
	Conducting cross-party hearings
	Other
How has Parliament engaged other regional or international parliaments on conflict issues? Please specify	Direct communication
	Parliamentary fora
	Conferences
	Study tours
Other	

III. Support for parliament

Question	Answer
Please briefly describe why you believe Parliaments can successfully address cases of political violence in West Africa	
Please describe what you believe Parliaments can do to address political violence in West Africa and how	
Please briefly describe the main challenges faced by Parliaments in dealing with political violence in West Africa	
Please briefly outline how UNDP, PC, and other regional and international partners could do to support Parliaments' efforts to address political violence in the region	

Any other comments / specifications?

QUESTIONNAIRE
LE ROLE DES PARLEMENTAIRES/MEMBRES DU CNT DANS LA GESTION DES
CRISES/CONFLITS : GUINEE

I. Renseignements personnels

Nom au complet		Genre	
Nom du parti politique		Nombre d'années au Parlement	
Circonscription représentée			

II. Le Parlement et des conflits/crises spécifiques

Question	Réponse	
	Veuillez fournir, ci-dessous, des exemples précis en appui aux réponses :	
Combien le Parlement/CNT a-t-il été impliqué, ces dernières années, dans la gestion des conflits/crises en Guinée?		
Cas 1: Les crises sociopolitiques de 2006 et 2007 (jan/fév.)	Qu'est-ce qu'a fait le Parlement? Qu'est-ce qui explique son succès ou son échec ?	
	Qu'est-ce pouvait-il faire le Parlement et qu'est-ce qui l'en a empêché?	
	Autres commentaires?	
Cas 2: Crise de succession au Gén. Lansana Conté/coup d'état du CNDD	Qu'est-ce qu'a fait le Parlement/CNT? Qu'est-ce qui explique son succès ou son échec ?	
	Qu'est-ce pouvait-il faire le Parlement/CNT et qu'est-ce qui l'en a	

	empêché?	
	Autres commentaires?	
Cas 3: Massacre du 28 septembre 2009	Qu'est-ce qu'a fait le CNT? Qu'est-ce qui explique son succès ou son échec ?	
	Qu'est-ce pouvait-il faire le CNT et qu'est-ce qui l'en a empêché?	
	Autres commentaires?	
Autre cas 1:	Qu'est-ce qu'a fait le Parlement/CNT? Qu'est-ce qui explique son succès ou son échec ?	
	Qu'est-ce pouvait-il faire le Parlement/CNT et qu'est-ce qui l'en a empêché?	
	Autres commentaires?	

III. Soutien au parlement

Question	Réponse
Veillez décrire, brièvement, les facteurs qui peuvent générer des conflits ou de la violence politique en Guinée que vous souhaiteriez adresser	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, les causes principales des facteurs qui peuvent générer des conflits ou la violence politique en Guinée	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, les raisons pour lesquelles vous croyez que le Parlement/CNT peut gérer les conflits ou la violence politique avec succès	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, ce que vous pensez que le	

Parlement/CNT puisse faire pour gérer les conflits ou la violence politique en Guinée (législation, contrôle, représentation, etc.)	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, si vous croyez que le Parlement/CNT (membres individuels, commissions, groupes parlementaires) a la volonté de gérer les conflits ou la violence politique en Guinée	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, les principaux défis auxquels le Parlement/CNT est confronté par rapport au rôle mentionné ci-dessus	
Veillez expliquer, brièvement, de quelles façons le Pnud et autres partenaires régionaux et internationaux peuvent appuyer les efforts du Parlement/CNT en matière de gestion des conflits ou de la violence politique en Guinée (renforcement des capacités, structures, groupes parlementaires, etc.)	

QUESTIONNAIRE
LE RÔLE DES PARLEMENTAIRES DANS LA GESTION DES
CRISES/CONFLITS : GUINÉE-BISSAU

I. Renseignements personnels

Nom au complet		Genre	
Nom du parti politique/ indépendant ?		Nombre d'années au Parlement	
Circonscription représentée			

II. Le Parlement et des conflits/crises spécifiques

Question	Réponse	
	Veuillez fournir, ci-dessous, des exemples précis en appui aux réponses :	
Combien le Parlement a-t-il été impliqué, ces dernières années, dans la gestion des conflits/crises en Guinée-Bissau ?		
Cas 1: Le double assassinat du Gén. T. N. Wai et du président Vieira et les facteurs qui y ont contribué	Qu'est-ce qu'a fait le Parlement? Qu'est-ce qui explique son succès ou son échec ?	
	Qu'est-ce pouvait-il faire le Parlement et qu'est-ce qui l'en a empêché?	
	Autres commentaires?	
Cas 2: Trafic de drogue	Qu'est-ce qu'a fait le Parlement? Qu'est-ce qui explique son succès ou son échec ?	
	Qu'est-ce pouvait-il	

	faire le Parlement et qu'est-ce qui l'en a empêché?	
	Autres commentaires?	
Cas 3: Rébellion casamançaise du MFDC	Qu'est-ce qu'a fait le Parlement? Qu'est-ce qui explique son succès ou son échec ?	
	Qu'est-ce pouvait-il faire le Parlement et qu'est-ce qui l'en a empêché?	
	Autres commentaires?	
Cas 4: Arrestation du premier ministre, Gomes, et du chef d'état major de l'armée en début 2010	Qu'est-ce qu'a fait le Parlement? Qu'est-ce qui explique son succès ou son échec ?	
	Qu'est-ce pouvait-il faire le Parlement et qu'est-ce qui l'en a empêché?	
	Autres commentaires?	

III. Soutien au parlement

Question	Réponse
Veillez décrire, brièvement, les facteurs qui peuvent générer des conflits ou de la violence politique en Guinée-Bissau que vous souhaiteriez adresser	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, les causes principales des facteurs qui peuvent générer des conflits ou la violence politique en Guinée-Bissau	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, les raisons pour lesquelles vous croyez que le Parlement peut gérer les conflits ou la violence politique	

avec succès	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, ce que vous pensez que le Parlement puisse faire pour gérer les conflits ou la violence politique en Guinée-Bissau (législation, contrôle, représentation, etc.)	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, si vous croyez que le Parlement (membres individuels, commissions, groupes parlementaires) a la volonté de gérer les conflits ou la violence politique en Guinée-Bissau	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, les principaux défis auxquels le Parlement est confronté par rapport au rôle mentionné ci-dessus	
Veillez expliquer, brièvement, de quelles façons le Pnud et autres partenaires régionaux et internationaux peuvent appuyer les efforts du Parlement en matière de gestion des conflits ou de la violence politique en Guinée-Bissau (renforcement des capacités, structures, groupes parlementaires, etc.)	

QUESTIONNAIRE**LE ROLE DES PARLEMENTAIRES DANS LA GESTION DES CRISES/CONFLITS : NIGER****I. Renseignements personnels**

Nom au complet		Genre	
Nom du parti politique		Nombre d'années au Parlement	
Circonscription représentée			

II. Le Parlement et des conflits/crises spécifiques

Question	Réponse	
	Veuillez fournir, ci-dessous, des exemples précis en appui aux réponses :	
Combien le Parlement a-t-il été impliqué, ces dernières années, dans la gestion des conflits/crises au Niger?		
Cas 1: Conflit « touareg » au Nord du pays	Qu'est-ce qu'a fait le Parlement? Qu'est-ce qui explique son succès ou son échec ?	
	Qu'est-ce pouvait-il faire le Parlement et qu'est-ce qui l'en a empêché?	
	Autres commentaires?	
Cas 2: Crise constitutionnelle de la mi-2009	Qu'est-ce qu'a fait le Parlement? Qu'est-ce qui explique son succès ou son échec ?	
	Qu'est-ce pouvait-il faire le Parlement et qu'est-ce qui l'en a empêché?	
	Autres	

	commentaires?	
Cas 3: Prise d'otages étrangers au Nord du pays	Qu'est-ce qu'a fait le Parlement? Qu'est-ce qui explique son succès ou son échec ?	
	Qu'est-ce pouvait-il faire le Parlement et qu'est-ce qui l'en a empêché?	
	Autres commentaires?	
Cas 4: Coup d'Etat militaire du 18 février 2010	Qu'est-ce qu'a fait le Parlement? Qu'est-ce qui explique son succès ou son échec ?	
	Qu'est-ce pouvait-il faire le Parlement et qu'est-ce qui l'en a empêché?	
	Autres commentaires?	

III. Soutien au parlement

Question	Réponse
Veillez décrire, brièvement, les facteurs qui peuvent générer des conflits ou de la violence politique que vous souhaiteriez adresser	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, les causes principales des facteurs qui peuvent générer des conflits ou la violence politique au Niger	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, les raisons pour lesquelles vous croyez que le Parlement peut gérer les conflits ou la violence politique avec succès	
Veillez décrire, brièvement, ce que vous pensez que le Parlement puisse faire pour gérer les conflits ou la violence politique au Niger (législation, contrôle, représentation, etc.)	

<p>Veillez décrire, brièvement, si vous croyez que le Parlement (membres individuels, commissions, groupes parlementaires) a la volonté de gérer les conflits ou la violence politique au Niger</p>	
<p>Veillez décrire, brièvement, les principaux défis auxquels le Parlement est confronté par rapport au rôle mentionné ci-dessus</p>	
<p>Veillez expliquer, brièvement, de quelles façons le Pnud et autres partenaires régionaux et internationaux peuvent appuyer les efforts du Parlement en matière de gestion des conflits ou de la violence politique au Niger (renforcement des capacités, structures, groupes parlementaires, etc.)</p>	

QUESTIONNAIRE
THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN ADDRESSING CRISIS /CONFLICT: NIGERIA

I. Personal Information

Full name		Gender	
Name of party		Years in parliament	
Constituency represented		Which house?	

II. Main Oversight Powers of Parliament

Main powers of parliament to address political violence	
Which other national bodies does parliament share some of these powers with and how is cooperation working with such bodies?	
Number and topic of recent plenary debates held to address conflict/crisis	
Number and topic of hearings held to address conflict/crisis	
Number and type of standing committees to address conflict/crisis	
Recent ad hoc committees to address political violence/crisis	
Number and topic of recent oversight parliamentary investigations to address conflict/crisis	Details:
	Results:
Number and type of interventions/briefings by experts, CSOs and ordinary citizens to a committee	
Please describe Parliament's relationship to the Executive in developing conflict-related national strategies, please provide specific examples	

III. Parliament and specific conflicts/crises

Question	Answer	
	Please describe and give some specific examples below:	
How involved has Parliament been in managing cases of political violence in Nigeria over the last few years?		
Case 1: Niger Delta crisis	What has Parliament done, what explains the success/failure?	
	What could parliament do, and why it is not?	
	Other comments?	
Case 2: Inter-communal clashes	What has Parliament been doing, what explains the success/failure?	
	What could parliament do, and why it didn't/hasn't?	
	Other comments?	
Example 3: Election-related violence	What did Parliament do, what explains the success?	
	What could parliament do, and why it didn't?	
	Other comments?	

IV. Support for parliament

Question	Answer
Please briefly describe issues that may provoke political violence that you want to address	
Please briefly describe the root	

causes of political violence in Nigeria	
Please briefly describe why you believe Parliament can successfully address cases of political violence in Nigeria	
Please describe what you believe Parliament can do to address political violence in Nigeria and how?	
Please describe whether you believe that Parliament (individual members, committees, caucuses) has the will to address political violence	
Please briefly describe the main challenges faced by Parliament in dealing with political violence in Nigeria	
Please briefly outline how UNDP and other regional and international partners could do to support Parliament's efforts to address political violence	