

Curbing Election-Related Conflict: A Comparative Study of ECOWAS-led Intervention in The Election Crises in Côte d'Ivoire (2010-2011) and The Gambia (2016)

Olanrewaju O. Ogunnubi

University of Duisburg-Essen, Duisburg, Germany

Correspondence: ogunnubiolanrewaju@gmail.com

Abstract

By drawing parallels between the failure of preventive diplomacy in the 2010/2011 election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and its success in the 2016 election crisis in The Gambia, this comparative study examines how international actors can prevent election-related conflict when dealing with an election crisis. The article identifies conflicting interests, support for military intervention and historical context as explanatory factors in understanding the success of preventive diplomacy in The Gambia and its failure in Côte d'Ivoire. It demonstrates the importance of coordination among international actors and concludes by advocating for a subsidiarity-based framework in implementing preventive diplomacy by international actors.

Keywords: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), preventive diplomacy, election, election-related conflict, election crisis, The Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire

Introduction

Since the wave of democratisation that swept much of Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s, periodic elections have become an integral aspect of African politics. This has however ushered in a new era of election-related crisis, which continues to gain momentum and has equally become a major trigger of violent conflict in Africa. While the idea of conflict is not particularly new in Africa, given its long history of ethnic and religious conflicts, election-related conflict has introduced a new dimension to conflict on the continent. Multiparty elections form the basic pillars of democracy and as such, the consolidation of African democracies has been deeply threatened by election-related conflict. Over the past decades, elections have been

linked to violent conflict in Côte d'Ivoire Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and others (Salehyan & Linebarger, 2015; Masunungure, 2012).

In managing election crises in Africa, regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) and The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have taken the responsibility of promoting good governance, commitment to electoral processes, and credible elections. In the event of an election crisis, they serve as peace brokers between opposing parties (Masunungure, 2012). Nevertheless, the role of regional organisations in negotiating an end to election crises has yielded varying results. While ECOWAS-led interventions in The Gambia during the 2016 election crisis successfully resulted in a relatively peaceful democratic transition, In the case of the 2010/2011 election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire interventions led by ECOWAS and the AU failed to avoid a major breakout of election-related conflict. Hence, by comparing both cases this paper aims to provide insight into how election-related conflict can be avoided in managing election crises.

Importantly, election crises heighten the vulnerability of state structures to instability, mass violence and humanitarian disaster. Thus, a comparative analysis of the two cases is important to highlight the role of regional organisations in mitigating the impact of election crises in order to safeguard political stability. It further provides meaningful insight into how election crises are influenced by the interventions of international actors and the strategies involved in resolving election crises. To this end the research is guided by the question: drawing a comparison between the cases of Côte d'Ivoire (2010-2011) and The Gambia (2016), how can international actors avoid election-related conflict when dealing with an election crisis?

The literature on regional interventions in election crises has profoundly discussed the peacemaking role of regional organisations in Côte d'Ivoire as well as their mediation efforts in The Gambia (Akanji, 2022; Hartmann, 2017), whereas the failure of preventive diplomacy

in Côte d'Ivoire as against its success in The Gambia has received little consideration. Additionally, while much has been discussed on the responsibility and institutional mandate of regional organisations in election monitoring, negotiation and conflict management, the potential of regional interventions in de-escalating election crises and preventing associated conflict remains understudied. This paper, therefore, aims to reconcile the gap through a focused comparison of the mentioned cases based on data gathered from both primary and secondary sources, and analysed using the most similar systems design.

The paper identifies three important differential elements as explanatory factors in the success of preventive diplomacy in The Gambia and its failure in Côte d'Ivoire. Firstly, conflicting interests between international actors hampered effective coordination and collaboration in Côte d'Ivoire while in The Gambia interests were more harmonious. Secondly, the lack of support for military intervention made convincing the Ivorian president to peacefully step down more problematic, however, in The Gambia, the clear threat of force compelled the incumbent to peacefully cede power. Lastly, the lingering effect of a civil war fuelled the entrenched and divisive interest of actors in resolving the Ivorian election crisis while in The Gambia, international cohesion was enhanced by a relatively stable context.

The rest of the paper is divided into seven sections. The next section provides a literature review that examines the link between elections, conflict and preventive action. This is followed by a section that expounds on preventive diplomacy as the analytical framework that guides the study as well as a section that discusses the research method. The fourth and fifth sections present an overview of the election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and The Gambia as well as the interventions of international actors respectively. The sixth section provides a comparative analysis of both cases and is followed by the final section, which presents some concluding thoughts.

Interrogating the link between Elections, Conflict and Preventive Action

The potential of election as a conflict trigger has been well documented in the literature resulting in increasing recognition of the broader role of preventive action in managing the overall conduct of elections. This short review begins by examining the link between elections and conflict before moving on to the preventive action literature in relation to mitigating election-related conflict. Importantly, election plays a central role in democracy as it facilitates accountability, serves as a means for a peaceful transfer of power and provides political officeholders with both internal and external legitimacy (Höglund, 2009:414). From a normative perspective, elections provide a non-violent means for accessing political power. However, empirically, the conduct of multiparty elections in many democracies has been linked to social violence and conflict. Election-related conflict differs from other forms of political and social conflict in the sense that it has its roots in “an impending electoral contest or an announced electoral result” (Straus & Taylor 2012:19). Thus, election-related conflict can be empirically observed during electioneering periods and may occur before, during or after an election (Höglund, 2009:416).

Studies on election-related violence in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe have widely acknowledged the role of fraudulent elections as a potential catalyst for conflict and violence. While elections provide the opportunity for strong oppositions to emerge, electoral fraud eliminates anticipated victories resulting in violent mobilisation and conflict (Linebarger & Salehyan, 2020:262). Relatedly, research has shown that violence during elections can, on the one hand, aid unpopular incumbents in winning keenly contested elections. However, it can equally instigate conflict in the post-election period (Hafner-Burton et al., 2018). Studies have further revealed that election-related conflict is more likely to occur in autocratic and transitioning regimes, when a strong opposition is lacking, and when the legitimacy of

government is challenged by economic, environmental and demographic pressures (Smidt, 2016:227).

Focusing on the role of international actors, Daxecker (2014) argues that the threat of sanctions from international actors involved in observing elections deters both incumbents and non-state actors from engaging in violence during elections. Although this does not necessarily eliminate violence in the election cycle as it further encourages pre- and post-election violence, protests and party boycotts (Beaulieu, 2014; Daxecker, 2012). Other scholars have examined how election violence is affected by prevailing conditions of civil conflict. Flores & Nooruddin (2022) finds a significant link between civil conflict and electoral violence. They noted that incumbents in countries conducting elections during civil wars are more likely to engage in election violence in order to retain power. However, post-conflict elections are less likely to be characterised by violence.

The literature on elections and conflict in Africa has equally demonstrated that elections in the continent are closely linked with social conflict and violence. Although the majority of elections in Africa are often without violence, the prevalence of a weak institutional environment increases the likelihood of violent elections (Salehyan & Linebarger, 2015:41). In their study of electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa between 1990 and 2007, Straus & Taylor (2012) observed that 19% of all elections held in the continent during this period were characterised by significant cases of electoral violence. On the other hand, minor forms of electoral violence, which the authors termed as 'harassment' were about 39% and in about 42% of elections, no cases of electoral violence were reported. In addition, incumbents are more responsible for electoral violence than oppositions and in cases where the opposition engages in major violence, it is often carried out during the post-election period. While elections are certainly one of the many drivers of violence in Africa, they do not constitute a major source of violence and non-election years are more likely to be characterised by a greater magnitude

of violence (Straus & Taylor, 2012). Findings from the literature, therefore, provide further support to the general notion that elections in Africa are mostly peaceful. However, selected cases of electoral violence in Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe and a few others demonstrate the apparent threat to peaceful elections in several African countries.

Due to the tenuous dynamics of elections as a peculiar source of violent conflict, particularly in young democracies, preventive action has been increasingly incorporated by both local and international actors into the overall electoral process. Preventive action or conflict prevention is a normative framework that has been used to characterise actions taken by actors at the local, regional, national and international levels that are generally aimed at preventing the escalation of violent conflicts (Nathan, 2019:47; Lund, 2009; Väyrynen, 2006). Such actions within the context of elections can include the signing of peace agreements between major contenders, peace messaging, voter education, election observation missions and preventive diplomacy (Orji, 2017; Smidt, 2016:228; Nathan, 2018).

The literature on conflict prevention distinguishes between two strands of preventive action: structural and operational prevention. Structural prevention is concerned with the deep-rooted causes of violent conflicts and seeks to forestall escalation through comprehensive long-term interventions in areas cutting across civil society building, socio-economic and political stability, good governance, and human rights protection (Ackermann, 2003:341). Operational prevention is however concerned with addressing immediate threats to peace and stability. It is often applied “in crisis situations where there is a risk of imminent large-scale violence” (Nathan, 2019:47). Thus, the goal of operational preventive action is often to avert the potential escalation of a precarious crisis.

Boutros-Ghali (1992) proposes four preventive approaches for managing conflicts: peacemaking, peace-keeping, peace-building and preventive diplomacy. Peacemaking is defined as

“action to bring hostile parties to agreement, essentially through such peaceful means as those foreseen in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations” (Boutros-Ghali, 1992:204). Peaceful means in this regard, include “negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice” (UN, 1945: Chapter VI, Article 33). Thus, peacemaking denotes a diplomatic approach to resolving disputes involving negotiation, mediation, arbitration and other peaceful means that are deemed acceptable under international law. Peacekeeping is a form of intervention that is “designed to separate hostile parties, contain the severity of a conflict, reduce tensions and provide opportunities and incentives for resuming negotiation” (Bercovitch, 1996:243). Peacekeeping, therefore, involves efforts aimed at creating conditions that can facilitate peaceful negotiations to end conflict. It equally “expands the possibilities for both the prevention of conflict and the making of peace” and commonly involves the deployment of military and civilian personnel as ‘peacekeepers’ (Boutros-Ghali, 1992:204). Peacebuilding is often applied to post-conflict situations and it is aimed at preventing potential relapse to conflict by reinforcing structures that promote peace (Boutros-Ghali, 1992:204). It entails activities and actions that solidify “a sense of certainty, confidence, and security between previously hostile parties” (Bercovitch, 1996:244).

Preventive diplomacy refers to actions taken to avert potential conflicts, prevent escalation of existing disputes into conflict and curb the spread of violent conflict (Boutros-Ghali, 1992:204). The goal of preventive diplomacy is conflict prevention; as such it aims to “resolve disputes before violence breaks out” (Boutros-Ghali, 1992:204). While peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding are all relevant concepts within the conflict prevention framework, preventive diplomacy presents an appropriate analytical framework for this study given that the study is primarily concerned with efforts taken by international actors to prevent the break out of violence following disputes surrounding the outcome of elections in Côte

d'Ivoire (2010-2011) and The Gambia (2016). The next section presents preventive diplomacy as the analytical framework that guides this study.

Analytical Framework: Preventive Diplomacy

Two important aspects of preventive diplomacy are relevant for this study, the first relates to the conceptualisation of preventive diplomacy as distinct from other forms of diplomacy and conflict prevention approaches. The second relates to the instruments involved in preventive diplomacy. Preventive diplomacy was popularised by former UN. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his 1992 publication, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping*. In its earlier usage, which scholars have traced to the second Secretary-General of the UN, Dag Hammarskjöld, the concept was initially understood as actions that are designed to prevent local conflicts from inflaming global confrontation between two superpowers (Habro et al., 2021:495; Utsaha et al., 2007:11). This earlier conceptualisation of preventive diplomacy was in tandem with the geopolitical nature of conflict in the cold war era and the need to forestall potential large-scale confrontation between the two political and military alliances of this period. However, following the adoption of the agenda for peace in 1992, preventive diplomacy has subsequently been interpreted as measures taken by actors to prevent the advent, escalation and spread of conflict. The concept has since drawn the attention of researchers and policymakers alike as it represents an integral aspect of the global shift from conflict resolution to conflict prevention that has characterised the post cold War era.

The notion of preventive diplomacy is underscored by the normative understanding that early identification and action in crisis situations can mitigate or avert the outbreak of violent conflict, save lives and foster peaceful settlements between contending parties. It, therefore, entails the activities of state and non-state actors that are directed towards preventing the occurrence of violent conflicts. As Habro et al., (2021:495) put it:

Preventive diplomacy is the official diplomatic activity of international organizations, states, their governments, aimed at preventing conflicts at the beginning of their escalation, stopping their growth, creating conditions for peace. It includes political, economic, military, and other types of activities for restoring trust between hostilities and for the earlier conflict warning.

In order to address ambiguity in the understanding of preventive diplomacy, Jentleson (1996) provides a framework for differentiating preventive diplomacy from other forms of diplomacy. Jentleson's framework identifies four forms of diplomacy: normal, developmentalist, preventive and war diplomacy, based on "the likelihood of mass violent conflict, the intended time-frame in which the diplomatic activity seeks to impact, and the principal objective of the diplomatic action" (1996:7).

Figure 1. Differentiating Preventive Diplomacy

	Normal Diplomacy	Developmentalist Diplomacy	Preventive Diplomacy	War Diplomacy
Likelihood of violent conflict	Low	Potential	Imminent	Existing
Timeframe	Ongoing	Long-term	Short, Medium term	Immediate
Principal Objectives	Mgmt. of relations	Economic deve- lopment, state building	Prevent crises and wars	War limitation and termination

Source: Jentleson, 1996:7

Normal diplomacy refers to the everyday interaction between sovereign states, which is often characterised by the usual diplomatic disagreement between states without any apparent danger of mass violence or a pressing timeframe. Developmentalist diplomacy denotes diplomatic actions designed to address long-term social problems that may eventually transform into a source of violent conflict if allowed to fester for too long. War diplomacy relates to situations

in which there is an existing outbreak of violent conflict. It is therefore concerned with preventing further escalation or ending an ongoing conflict. Unlike war diplomacy, preventive diplomacy occurs when parties are on the verge of violent conflict. In other words, there is a looming threat of violent mass conflict, which is yet to take place. Thus, preventive diplomacy is applicable to

situations in which the likelihood of violent mass conflict is imminent—not yet existing but also not low or just potential; the time frame is short to medium term—not immediate but also not just a matter of ongoing relations or the long-term; and the objectives are to take the necessary diplomatic action within the limited time frame to prevent those crises or wars which seem imminent (Jentleson, 1996:7).

In theory, preventive diplomacy assumes that the root causes of conflict are embedded in material, social, political and economic factors, which can be identified and neutralised through a combination of conflict management instruments by actors at the local, national and international levels (Akiba, 2020:2). As a result, the past decades have witnessed increasing advocacy by international and regional actors such as the UN, AU and ECOWAS for preventive action against violent conflict. In many cases, this has equally been corroborated by the emergence of conflict prevention institutions, frameworks and warning systems.

In basic terms, preventive diplomacy makes use of instruments that are in broad agreement with well-known conflict management tools, which no doubt underscores its methodological similarity with the previously discussed preventive approaches for managing conflicts. The instruments include but are not limited to, early warning systems, diplomatic mediation and negotiation, preventive deployment of armed forces, and demilitarized zones (Strachan, 2013:5; Utsaha et al., 2007:11; Jentleson, 1996). Scholars often disagree on whether the

instruments of preventive diplomacy should be limited to noncoercive measures or should include both coercive and noncoercive strategies (Utsaha et al., 2007:11; Jentleson, 1996:9). It should be noted that the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) recognises “early warning, mediation, conciliation, preventive disarmament and preventive deployment using interactive means, such as good offices and the ECOWAS Standby Force” as preventive instruments (ECPF, 2008: Section IV 19a).

To analyse ECOWAS-led interventions in the election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire (2010-2011) and The Gambia (2016), this paper adopts Jentleson's (1996) conceptualisation of preventive diplomacy. Furthermore, in agreement with the ECPF, the study recognises both coercive and noncoercive measures as relevant instruments for preventive diplomacy. Thus, preventive diplomacy for the respective case studies includes actions taken by international actors under the leadership of ECOWAS to prevent the breakout of violent conflict during the period of crisis that followed the declaration of opposition candidates as the winners of the presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire (2010-2011) and The Gambia (2016). These actions primarily include diplomatic mediations and preventive deployment of armed forces. Diplomatic mediation denotes active negotiations and dialogue coordinated by a third party to avert, manage or settle a conflict (Akanji, 2022:145) while preventive deployment of armed forces is associated with military intervention.

The events that followed the rejection of the election results by the incumbent presidents in Côte d'Ivoire and The Gambia in the 2010 and 2016 presidential elections respectively, created situations that heightened the likelihood of violent conflict, thereby, prompting international actors led by ECOWAS and the AU to engage in preventive diplomacy. While the international community was able to engineer a peaceful transfer of power in The Gambia, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire was resolved through violent conflict between forces loyal to Ouattara and Gbagbo, the two major parties in the crisis. Thus, The Gambia case study represents a

successful case of preventive diplomacy by international actors, whereas Côte d'Ivoire illustrates a failed case study.

Methods and Case Study Justification

This study adopts the most similar systems design (MSSD), which dates back to Mill's method of difference and remains one of the key methods for focused comparison. The MSSD is most appropriate for comparing cases that produce varying results despite sharing various similar attributes (Seawright & Gerring, 2008:304). An MSSD analysis is concerned with observing differences between similar cases in order to draw causal conclusions (Kuhlmann & Seyfried, 2020:184). Observed differences in cases form the basis for explaining differences in outcomes, while similarities are considered to have no explanatory relevance (Faure, 1994:312). In this study, the election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire (2010-2011) and The Gambia (2016) are compared to explore how regional organisations can effectively avoid violent conflict when dealing with an election crisis. In analysing the two cases, which are similar in several aspects but differ in their respective outcomes, the MSSD provides a profound analytical tool that enables the research to identify key factors that contributed to the divergent results. Furthermore, the regional relevance, timing and similarities in the nature of the electoral crises make the two cases ideal for comparison. Both countries are members of ECOWAS, the AU and the UN, making them subject to similar international laws and obligations. Similarly, they both experienced a similar case of election crises in which an incumbent lost in an election but refused to vacate office. Thus, valuable lessons on managing election crises to prevent conflict can be drawn by comparing these two cases.

The study combines data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official publications, resolutions and communiqués from ECOWAS, the AU and the UN as well as their affiliated agencies and institutions. These documents provide direct insight into the

official positions, decisions and actions of the international actors. Additionally, secondary sources including peer-reviewed journals, books, newspaper articles, and internet-sourced materials are used to provide supplementary data for a robust analysis.

A Short Overview of the Election Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire (2010-2011) and ECOWAS-led intervention

The Côte d'Ivoire presidential runoff election that took place on 28 November 2010, which was keenly contested between the then incumbent president, Laurent Gbagbo, and former prime minister, Alassane Ouattara, ushered Côte d'Ivoire into a precarious period of electoral crisis in which both parties claimed to have won the election. Importantly, the 2010 presidential election was conducted against the backdrop of a civil war that lasted from 2002 to 2007. The election was therefore perceived as a vital step towards a long-standing conflict resolution and stabilisation of the country (Banegas, 2011:457; Zounmenou & Lamin, 2011:8). As such, the conduct of a transparent election was part of the many peace agreements including the 2007 Ouagadougou Peace Agreement that ultimately led to the cessation of hostilities (Mitchell, 2012:183; Yabi, 2012; Zounmenou & Lamin, 2011). However, the conflict transformation potential of the election did not come to fruition as the election triggered a major crisis that further exacerbated deep-rooted divisions and led to a brief relapse to violent conflict.

The election was initially planned for 2005 but eventually took place in 2010 after it was postponed six times due to disagreements over demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration process as well as issues relating to the credibility of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI in French) and voter registration (Zounmenou & Lamin, 2011). The first round of the election eventually took place on 31 October 2010 and none of the 14 presidential candidates was able to obtain the required 50% threshold. Gbagbo, Ouattara and Bédié emerged as the three leading candidates in the first round with 38.3%, 32.08% and 25.24% of votes

respectively. This resulted in a second round between Gbagbo and Ouattara in which the CEI declared Ouattara as the winner with 54.1% of votes. The result was subsequently certified by the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). Although the result declared by the CEI was widely accepted by international actors and observers including ECOWAS, EU, AU, UN, the United States of America and France, Gbagbo rejected the result claiming that the election was riddled with malpractices, particularly in the northern region, where Ouattara hails from (Akanji, 2022:151; Mitchell, 2012; Zounmenou & Lamin, 2011).

The controversy took a more perilous dimension after the President of the Constitutional Council overturned the election result and declared Gbagbo as the rightful winner, following the annulment of about 600,000 votes mainly in the central and northern part of the country, which are pro-Ouattara regions (Yabi, 2012). The election crisis took another unusual turn on 4 December 2010 when both Gbagbo and Ouattara took their oath of office and formed their government. Thus, from December 2010 to April 2011, Côte d'Ivoire was administered by two presidents, Gbagbo and his cabinet in the official government house in Abidjan and Ouattara with his cabinet at the *Hotél du Golf* (Gulf Hotel), which was guarded by UNOCI (Akanji, 2022).

In response to the election crisis the international community, particularly ECOWAS, the AU and the UN embarked upon various diplomatic and mediation interventions as part of their efforts to resolve the crisis and prevent violent conflict. Following an extraordinary session on the Ivorian election crisis, ECOWAS issued a communique on 7 December 2010 that recognised Alassane Ouattara as the legitimate president and equally announced the immediate suspension of Côte d'Ivoire from the organisation (ECOWAS, 2010a). On 24 December 2010, ECOWAS issued a communique in which it urged Gbagbo to yield to a peaceful resolution and further threatened to take other measures, including the potential use of legitimate force should Gbagbo refuse to embrace a peaceful transition (ECOWAS (2010b). In addition, ECOWAS

sent a special high-level delegation comprising the presidents of Benin, Sierra Leone and Cape Verde to Côte d'Ivoire as part of diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis, while at the same time, the ECOWAS Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff (CCDS) convened twice (in Abuja, Nigeria, on 29-30 December 2010 and in Bamako, Mali, On 18-19 January 2011) on a potential military plan (ECOWAS, 2011a; *The New Humanitarian*, 2011).

On the part of the AU, the regional organisation aligned with the decision of ECOWAS by endorsing ECOWAS' recognition of Ouattara as the duly elected president and equally suspended Côte d'Ivoire from participating in all AU activities (AU PSC, 2010). The AU also sent former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, on a two-day mediation mission that ultimately failed to resolve the crisis (Al Jazeera, 2010). It is important to note that Mbeki had earlier served as AU mediator in the first Ivorian civil war from November 2004 to October 2006 but was subsequently replaced upon his request. During his time as mediator, Mbeki was accused of being biased in favour of Gbagbo's government and was rejected as a mediator by the rebel forces sympathetic to Ouattara (Reuters, 2006). Hence, the choice of Mbeki as a mediator in the 2010 election crisis puts into question the sincerity of the mediation efforts of the AU.

In a joint intervention between the AU and ECOWAS, a high-level panel that was mandated to evaluate the crisis and provide recommendations for political solutions was inaugurated by the AU Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) on 28 January 2011. Members of the panel include Presidents Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz of Mauritania, Jacob Zuma of South Africa, Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania and Idriss Déby Itno of Chad, along with the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Jean Ping, and the President of the ECOWAS Commission, James Victor Gbeho (AU PSC, 2011a). The panel was also supported by a team of experts. The panel's report did not differ from the popular perception of the international community. It reaffirmed Ouattara's victory in the election and called on Gbagbo to respect the

choice of the Ivorian people and immediately cede power. The report further made proposals for the establishment of a National Union and Reconciliation Government to support healing and confidence-building measures (AU PSC, 2011b). While the proposal was accepted by Ouattara, it was ultimately rejected by Gbagbo leading to another diplomatic stalemate (AU PSC, 2011b).

Throughout much of the crisis, ECOWAS continued to combine diplomatic negotiations with the threat of force. On 25 March 2011, ECOWAS issued a press statement reaffirming its commitment to military intervention if the situation remains unchanged. It further pledged to provide necessary legal and diplomatic support to Ouattara's parallel government and called on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to expand the mandate of the UNOCI to better protect civilians (ECOWAS, 2011b). Consistent with the position of ECOWAS, the UNSC reiterated its duty to protect civilians and authorised a robust response to the crisis (UNSC, 2011). Following months of failed diplomatic mediation and negotiation by ECOWAS, the AU and the UN, a military offensive was eventually launched on 28 March 2011 by armed militias loyal to Ouattara and supported by French forces, plunging the crisis-ridden country into another episode of civil war, which continued until Gbagbo was arrested on 11 April 2011 marking an end to the Second Ivorian Civil War (Apuuli, 2012:138).

A Short Overview of the Election Crisis in The Gambia (2016) and ECOWAS-led intervention

Barely five years after the violent resolution of the election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, the West African region was once again faced with another political imbroglio arising from an unexpected electoral crisis in The Gambia. The crisis was unforeseen given the repressive character of President Yahya Jammeh's government, which had maintained a strong grip on power since Jammeh became head of state in a bloodless coup in 1994. He was elected as

president in 1996 with re-elections in 2001, 2006 and 2011 in electoral contexts that failed to meet international standards of free and fair elections (Hartmann, 2017:86). In the build-up to the 2016 elections, the use of state forces to repress opposition and journalists significantly increased, including a clamp down on members of the United Democratic Party, which was the major opposition party at that time (Ateku, 2020:682). In addition, international observers were mostly prevented from participating in the election, except for a small delegate from the AU and the internet was shut down on election day (Hartmann, 2017). Thus, through a combination of widespread intimidation and media control, Jammeh was poised to win yet another controversial electoral victory. It is against this backdrop that Jammeh confidently proclaimed on election day that he would win the election with “the biggest landslide in the history of the country” (Petesch, 2016).

As captured by (Ateku, 2020:683), contrary to popular fears the election was characterised by three surprising turn of events that marked a watershed in the democratic history of The Gambia. Firstly, evidence of electoral malpractices was significantly minimised as the election featured for the first time on-the-spot vote counting. Secondly, Adama Barrow recorded a decisive electoral victory against the incumbent president, Jammeh. And thirdly, Jammeh graciously conceded defeat and affirmed his decision to not contest the election results in a televised broadcast a day after the election (Ateku, 2020:683). Just when The Gambia seemed to be prepared to take a significant step towards democratic consolidation, the international community was again surprised by another unusual turn of events, just a week after Jammeh’s noble broadcast. In a speech on 9 December 2016, Jammeh made a sudden U-turn, in which he rejected the results and called for a fresh election to be conducted by a “God-fearing and independent electoral commission” (BBC, 2016). Jammeh’s decision to reject the election result came shortly after the country’s electoral commission revised the election result due to a collation error. While the revision did not affect the overall result, it reduced Barrow’s margin

of victory from 9% to 4% (BBC, 2016). Not surprisingly, the rejection of the result by Jammeh did not only face strong condemnation from Barrow and the international community, it equally plunged the country into a fragile period of election crisis.

In a joint statement by ECOWAS, the AU and the UN, the international organisations called on the Gambian government to respect the verdict of the people as expressed in the ballot and “to abide by its constitutional responsibilities and international obligations” (UNOWAS, 2016). As part of ECOWAS's commitment to a diplomatic resolution of the crisis, a mediation team comprising Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia and Chairperson of ECOWAS Authority, Muhammadu Buhari, President of Nigeria, Ernest Koroma, President of Sierra Leone, and John Dramani Mahama, former President of Ghana, were sent to Banjul on 13 December 2016 to mediate an end to the crisis (ECOWAS, 2016). The mediation mission however failed to yield tangible results. Thus, the political situation in The Gambia became one of the major areas of concern in ECOWAS' 50th ordinary session held on 17 December 2016. Among other things, ECOWAS resolved to proceed with the inauguration of Adama Barrow as president on 19 January 2017 in line with the Gambian constitution; appoint the president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari and president of Ghana, John Dramani Mahama, as mediator and co-mediator in The Gambia respectively; demand the support and endorsement of the AU and the UN on all decisions taken by ECOWAS regarding the crisis; and affirm its commitment to “take all necessary actions to enforce the results of 1 December 2016 elections” (ECOWAS, 2016).

As Barrow's inauguration date drew nearer, another round of negotiation between ECOWAS mediators and Jammeh concluded on 13 January 2017 without a resolution, making the prospect of a military intervention even more likely (Hartmann, 2017). Thus, on 14 January 2017, the CCDS convened in Abuja in preparation for the establishment of ECOWAS Military Intervention in The Gambia (ECOMIG) and on 18 January 2017, ECOWAS forces comprising

troops mainly from Senegal with a contingent from Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Togo began to advance towards the Gambian border, while Nigerian forces also carried out a naval blockade (Hartmann, 2017). Despite the apparent threat of force, Jammeh remained resolute in his decision to not relinquish power. Notwithstanding, ECOWAS proceeded to conduct the swearing-in ceremony of Barrow on 19 January 2017 at the Gambian embassy in Dakar, Senegal. In a resolution that was unanimously adopted by the UNSC, the security council endorsed the decision of ECOWAS and the AU to recognise Barrow as president while equally expressing its support to ECOWAS “in its commitment to ensuring, by political means first, the respect of the will of the people of The Gambia” (UNSC, 2017). Members of the UNSC however noted that the resolution should not be interpreted as an endorsement of the use of force, given that the political crisis did not pose a threat to international peace and security (UNSC, 2017).

Following Barrow’s inauguration, ECOMIG forces gradually advanced into The Gambia, sparking a brief exchange of fire that was however quickly suspended through last-minute diplomatic mediation brokered by Guinea’s president, Alpha Condé, Mauritania’s president, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, and the UN Special Representative for West Africa, Ibn Chambas. In the face of an impending military intervention and lack of support from his army chief, Jammeh was compelled to step down and go into exile, thereby, marking an end to the election crisis as ECOWAS was able to peacefully “restore democracy” in The Gambia (Hartmann, 2017).

Comparative Analysis and Discussion

In comparing the two case studies, three differential factors provide explanatory insight into the success of preventive diplomacy in The Gambia and its failure in Côte d'Ivoire. These include conflicting interests of actors, support for military intervention and the prevailing local

political context in which the crisis emerged. Compared to the Gambian election crisis, the international actors (ECOWAS, the AU and the UN) did not cooperate coherently in managing the election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire but had conflicting interests on how to best address the conflict. While ECOWAS was unequivocal about its position, that is, its recognition of Ouattara as the winner of the November 2010 election and its commitment to ensuring a democratic transition, the AU and the UN however took ambivalent positions. For instance, South Africa, which served as one of AU's initial mediators, consistently pushed for a power-sharing agreement and further claimed that the election result had been marred by electoral irregularities (Apuuli, 2012:151). Not surprisingly, the idea of a power-sharing arrangement was widely rejected by many West African countries as it would not only undermine ECOWAS' position but equally provide Gbagbo, who had lost the election, a controversial and unjustifiable lifeline that can potentially threaten the prospect of democratic elections and political transitions in Africa (Mitchell, 2012:185-186). This position was best echoed in the statement of the African Union Mediator to the crisis, Kenyan Prime Minister, Raila Odinga who stated categorically "When people lose elections, they want to take to power in the hopes that they can negotiate a kind of power-sharing arrangement with their opponent. And I did tell him (Gbagbo) that that option is not available here" (Stearns, 2011). Despite lacking popular support, South Africa again proposed the idea of power-sharing in late February 2011, thereby frustrating efforts at facilitating a peaceful transition (Mitchell, 2012:185). Additionally, Yoweri Museveni, the president of Uganda called for a probe into the election, dismissing the legitimacy of the acceptance of Ouattara by the international community (Apuuli, 2012:151). At the UNSC, opposition from Russia, South Africa and Brazil stifled the efforts of the UNSC throughout much of the crisis (Yabi, 2012:4).

Due to the conflicting interests in the Ivorian election crisis, mediation efforts by ECOWAS and the AU were mostly coordinated separately, with a few exceptions such as the high-level

panel that was set up by the AU on 28 January 2011 which included the President of the ECOWAS Commission, James Victor Gbeho. The situation continued to worsen such that by February 2011, it appeared as though ECOWAS and the AU were pursuing completely different objectives, while at the same time, Gbagbo continued to receive passive support from members of the AU. In a February 2011 speech that highlighted the lack of unity between ECOWAS and the AU in their approach to the crisis, the President of the ECOWAS Commission, James Victor Gbeho stated that “the concern we (ECOWAS) have is that apart from some geo-political interests by some countries, there are others that are encouraging Gbagbo not to leave” (The New Humanitarian, 2011). Gbeho further accused South Africa of deploying a warship to Côte d'Ivoire's coastal water, which the South African Defence Ministry claimed was conducting a routine training exercise in West Africa (The New Humanitarian, 2011). Be that as it may, the timing of the so-called training exercise further highlights the controversial role of South Africa and other key AU members in the Ivorian election crisis. Importantly, throughout much of the election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, International cooperation between the UN, AU and ECOWAS was lacking, resulting in conflicting and overlapping diplomatic efforts as well as confusing and contradictory messages that ultimately frustrated a peaceful resolution (Yabi, 2012).

In the case of The Gambia, there was better cooperation between ECOWAS, the AU and the UN, resulting in coherent and consistent diplomatic efforts that eventually averted what could have been an outbreak of mass violence. As previously noted, the UNSC through its resolution 2337 endorsed the recognition of Barrow as the president of The Gambia and supported the diplomatic efforts of ECOWAS to resolve the crisis. Similarly, throughout the period of the crisis ECOWAS, the AU and the UN continued to release joint statements that signalled a strong synergy between the international actors.

Another major difference between the two case studies relates to support for military intervention, particularly among ECOWAS member states. During the Ivorian election crisis,

although ECOWAS threatened to use legitimate force if necessary and the CCDS also met twice to discuss the prospect of military intervention in Côte d'Ivoire, support for military intervention among ECOWAS countries was lacking. For example, Ghana openly disclosed its position to not involve its troops in ECOWAS' military intervention, noting that its troops were already overstretched in various peacekeeping missions, and at the same time, Nigeria also did not commit itself to a military intervention in Côte d'Ivoire despite endorsing the use of force (Hartmann, 2017:93; The New Humanitarian, 2011). Similarly, Mali and Liberia raised concerns about the effects of military intervention, while The Gambia – the only ECOWAS country to openly support Gbagbo – objected military intervention, claiming that ECOWAS' position was based on "pressure from some Western powers whose vested interests in the natural resources of Côte d'Ivoire is an open secret" (The New Humanitarian, 2011). Due to the lack of support from its members, ECOWAS was unable to pose any major threat of military intervention that could have compelled Gbagbo to peacefully step down.

In the Gambian election crisis, the idea of military intervention received sufficient support among ECOWAS members. Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, and Togo demonstrated keen readiness to deploy troops that later became part of ECOMIG. The operation to intervene in The Gambia was codenamed "Operation Restore Democracy" and was expected to involve the deployment of about 7,000 troops (Babani and Can, 2019:65). While a full-scale military intervention was eventually avoided, the imminent threat of force was integral to the success of ECOWAS' diplomatic negotiations in The Gambia, as it compelled Jammeh to peacefully step down (Hartmann, 2017).

Beyond conflict of interest and support for military intervention, a final differentiating factor that equally shaped the outcome of the election crises in both cases was the local political context in which the election crisis emerged. As previously indicated the 2010 election in Côte d'Ivoire was conducted following a devastating civil war that had deeply divided not just the

country into north and south but also the interest of international actors. For instance, South Africa's continued support of Gbagbo, despite convincing evidence of Ouattara's victory in the election, is not unconnected to its position during the Ivorian civil war, in which former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, served as a mediator but was later replaced after he was accused of favouring Gbagbo's side in the conflict. On the other hand, since the Gambia's return to multiparty elections in 1996, the country had continued to witness relative political stability until the 2016 election crisis. Hence diplomatic efforts to resolve the 2016 crisis did not have to deal with a backlog of political conflict that could have potentially caused a rift between international actors as was the case in Côte d'Ivoire. Unlike the Ivorian election crisis in which the diplomatic efforts of international actors were influenced by the lingering and divisive effects of a recent violent conflict, the relatively stable local political context under which the Gambian election crisis emerged facilitated harmonious international response and coordination.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in this paper, the coordination of preventive action by international actors goes a long way in influencing the outbreak of violent conflict. This becomes more instructive when multiple international actors are involved in managing a crisis. Conflicting interests between international actors create conditions that prolong crises and heighten the possibility of the crises escalating to a breaking point where violent conflict becomes inevitable. Thus, the need for cohesive and collaborative coordination between international actors cannot be overemphasised. Given the fragile nature of crises, the principle of subsidiarity provides a viable framework for coordinating preventive diplomacy. Thus, as was the case in the election crisis in The Gambia, regional organisations such as ECOWAS are better positioned to take the lead in executing preventive diplomacy in local crises, while the international community provides needed support and readily intervenes when invited to do so by the coordinating

regional organisation. In a world divided by geopolitical interests, this will not only ensure effective coordination of preventive action but will further moderate the influence of conflicting interests on local crises.

It is important to note that the commitment of powerful ECOWAS countries such as Nigeria and Senegal to implementing the decisions of ECOWAS, including providing troops and military assets for a potential military intervention was vital to the success of preventive diplomacy in The Gambia. This is not surprising given that the effectiveness of international organisations continues to hinge upon the collaboration of powerful member states and their willingness to implement the decisions of international actors. However, this raises important concerns, such as what happens when powerful states require interventions? Should international interventions be construed as existing only for weaker countries? The hesitation of several countries to support military intervention in Cote d'Ivoire, which is more powerful compared to The Gambia, further illustrates this predicament.

On the whole, as African countries continue to embrace multiparty elections, there is a need to carefully consider and prepare for the possibility of future election crises. The scope and practice of preventive diplomacy should be broadened to include active diplomatic negotiations with political parties and candidates in order to affirm their commitment to democratic processes. Similarly, regional organisations should be actively involved in pre-election peace agreements that have already become a standard practice in countries like Nigeria and should also encourage such agreements in countries with fragile electoral politics. Given the periodic nature of elections, the mandate of early warning systems such as the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) and the AU's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), should be deepened to include a special focus on elections as a significant trigger of violent conflict.

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