

GUIDE ON EXTERNAL RISK FACTORS TO ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN WEST AFRICA (2022-2023)

Cases from Ghana, Liberia, Mali and Togo



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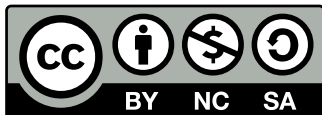
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INTRODUCTION

GUIDE ON EXTERNAL RISK FACTORS TO ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN WEST AFRICA (2022–2023): CASES FROM GHANA, LIBERIA, MALI AND TOGO

West Africa, a diverse region, has experienced multifaceted socio-political transformations. From the waves of post-colonial democratic transitions to grappling with challenges of ethnic divisions, economic disparities and external interference, the region's political landscape remains dynamic. In the past five years, there has been a resurgence of coups in West Africa with several transitional governments now in place. Democracy and electoral processes nevertheless continue to occupy a central role in governance of the region. Against this background, several West African nations are gearing up for pivotal elections and referendums in late 2023 and 2024—Ghana, Liberia, Mali and Togo—and there is a pressing need to understand the potential risks facing these contests.

This guide provides an overview of the external risk factors that could threaten the integrity and security of electoral processes taking place in West Africa between 2023 to 2024. The research was undertaken up until August 2023.

While symbolizing the resilience of democratic institutions, elections can also serve as flashpoints and triggers for uncertainties, given the prevailing external conditions. 'External risk factors' emerge from conditions outside the electoral process and have the potential to instigate, incite or otherwise play a role in election-related violence.

This assessment rests on the robust External Factors Guide of International IDEA's Election Risk Management (ERM) Tool. Such analyses are beneficial not just for policymakers, civil society and electoral bodies within these nations, but also for international

observers, potential investors and other global stakeholders committed to the stability and prosperity of the region. The International IDEA Electoral Risk Management Tool: External Factors Guide (Alihodžić and Uribe Burcher 2018) describes 10 external factors, framed within the human security framework (Box I.1). In the context of upcoming elections in West Africa, all 10 of them are relevant.

Box I.1. External risk factors for 2022–2023 elections in West Africa

1. Poor socio-economic indicators (Liberia, Mali)
2. Political and social exclusion (Ghana, Togo)
3. Conflict related to changing power dynamics (Liberia, Mali)
4. Gender discrimination and violence (Ghana, Togo)
5. Presence of non-state actors resulting in insecurity (Ghana, Mali)
6. Presence of organized crime (relevant to all focus countries but most prevalent in Ghana)
7. Grievances relating to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes (Liberia, Mali)
8. (Other) human rights violations (Mali, Togo)
9. Environmental hazards (Ghana, Togo)
10. Unethical media reporting and information disorder (Mali, Togo)
11. Undemocratic geopolitics and regional dynamics (Mali, Togo)

These risk factors present unique challenges and the potential to exacerbate electoral tensions, either singly or in combination. Each is examined in turn, followed by empirical evidence from the four countries. The Guide endeavours to provide a holistic view of the potential electoral risks faced by each of the concerned countries, bearing in mind their distinct historical, cultural and political contexts. Furthermore, it seeks to illuminate the interconnected nature of these risks, demonstrating how the socio-economic landscape of one nation can influence the politics of its neighbour. The intention is to offer insights that can contribute to fostering peace and security, and bolster ongoing efforts to nurture and consolidate democratic governance in the region.

An additional external risk factor not included in the External Risk Factors tool was also identified: *Geopolitics and regional dynamics*. This underlines the potential for regional dynamics, foreign blocs and illiberal actors to play a disruptive role in the upcoming elections.

Chapter 1

POOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

In all countries of focus, poor socio-economic conditions—manifesting in poverty, persisting and widening inequalities, and increasing unemployment—constitute a serious external risk factor to peaceful elections. Numerous studies (see e.g. Krug et al. 2002) indicate a clear connection between poverty, inequality and political upheaval, especially violence tied to elections. Even minor disputes can escalate into violence when compounded by poverty. Furthermore, individuals with little or nothing to lose are more readily drawn to violent acts (Laakso 2007: 228).

With over 30 per cent of the four countries' total population living below the respective national poverty lines (UNDP 2023), poor socio-economic conditions pose significant risk. With the Ghanaian currency—the cedi—depreciating by more than 45 per cent between December 2021 and February 2023 (IMF 2023), inflation and socio-economic conditions have taken a turn for the worse (Smith 2022), resulting in increasing inequalities. In Liberia, President George Weah's government has not brought the changes promised but instead overseen worsening socio-economic conditions, among them increased unemployment (Kollie 2019). In Mali, worsening socio-economic conditions and prevailing insecurity formed the pretext for the recent coups. With 30.6 per cent of the population estimated to be living in poverty, Togo is likewise confronted with a socio-economic crisis that could have implications for imminent legislative elections (World Bank 2023b). These poor socio-economic conditions, across the countries, are likely to increase incidents of vote buying and voter apathy.

In all countries of focus, poor socio-economic conditions—manifesting in poverty, persisting and widening inequalities, and increasing unemployment—constitute a serious external risk factor to peaceful elections.

With 52.3 per cent of its population categorized as multidimensionally poor (UNDP 2023) and increasing unemployment, poor socio-economic conditions pose a significant risk of election related violence, voter-apathy and vote buying in Liberia.

1.1. LIBERIA

With 52.3 per cent of its population categorized as multi-dimensionally poor (UNDP 2023) and increasing unemployment, poor socio-economic conditions pose a significant risk of election related violence, voter apathy and vote buying in Liberia. George Weah's administration has been unable to deliver on its platform of comprehensive change promised in the 2017 elections—as became clear early in its term (see e.g. Kollie 2018). The year 2023 saw the largest anti-government protests in the country since the war ended two decades earlier, with thousands of Liberians taking to the streets to protest rising inflation, poverty and corruption (Kollie 2019; Harmon 2023a). Ahead of the 10 October 2023 elections, violence and threats of violence are beginning to manifest. In a recent incident, supporters of President Weah paraded a casket through Monrovia adorned with a picture of Joseph Boakai, the principal opposition candidate (Harmon 2023b). This sparked widespread public indignation (Pailey and Weah 2023), yet received no intervention or response from the electoral authorities. Under these circumstances of low public satisfaction and confidence, a Weah win risks generating widespread perception of electoral fraud.

1.2. MALI

In Mali, the national poverty rate is thought to have increased from 42.5 per cent in 2019 to 44.4 per cent in 2021, pushing an estimated 375,000 additional people into extreme poverty (World Bank 2023a). This, alongside other indicators of increasing inequalities, was at the root of the recent coups in the country and also poses a significant

Table 1.1. Poor socio-economic conditions in Liberia: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|--|---|
| 2. Political and social exclusion | 8. Inadequate electoral security arrangements |
| 7. Grievances relating to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes | |

Table 1.2. Poor socio-economic conditions in Mali: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|---|---|
| 2. Political and social exclusion | 4. Unfit legal and institutional framework to deal with emerging challenges |
| 3. Conflict emerging from changing power dynamics | 16. Unequal media access and favouritism |
| 8. (Other) human rights violations | |

risk to peaceful general elections in 2024, should they go ahead. Socio-economic conditions have been worsened in part by armed violence and insecurity in central and northern parts of the country. Armed violence, which started with the insurgent Tuareg group's armed protest of social and political exclusion, has transformed into violent extremist attacks and farmer-herder conflicts. The latter have resulted in food scarcity and unemployment, in addition to the risk to life. In the quest for survival amid prevailing insecurity, this may impact how citizens participate in the forthcoming elections.

Observable indicators

1. Comprehensiveness of legal instruments to address social and health inequalities.
2. Extent to which there is access to land, food, resources and other commodities for the population in general, or restricted for particular regional populations or disenfranchised groups.
3. High or increasing levels of unemployment, in particular among young people.
4. Existence of resources and institutional capacity to address social security and to implement poverty reduction strategies within disenfranchised groups and marginalized regions.

Recommendations

- Conduct an expert review of the legal instruments that address social inequalities. Consider the impact on different social groups (including young people and women) and map areas where these may represent risks to elections.
- Collate historical and current statistical data on poverty, inequality and high/increasing unemployment and consider how these

conditions may trigger (or contribute to triggering) election-related violence. Produce and analyse risk maps and trend charts.

- Collate media reports relating to the economic situation and analyse the language used when addressing the economic situation of disenfranchised groups, for example, there is any indication of inflammatory language and bullying. Distinguish between different media, geographical coverage, media ownership and victims. Map and observe trends and the dimension of the problem.

Chapter 2

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Being sidelined from political and social participation due to economic, spatial, ethnic or religious reasons can indicate potential for election-related violence. This is because marginalized groups might turn to violence to either disrupt the electoral process or contest its outcomes. Conversely, marginalized status may be partially a result of violent processes of state/party formation, maintenance and expansion in the past; hence it may recur in the course of dominant or incumbent groups insulating their own status from democratic challenge. A key trait of minority groups is their non-dominant status, irrespective of their numerical strength. The term 'minority' can also encompass groups that are marginalized based on political allegiance, disability or other factors (UNHCHR 2010: 2–3). In all four countries of focus, there are issues and cases of perceived or real marginalization affecting people's lived experiences and political and social status. Across all countries, exclusion issues are mostly rooted in identity on the basis of cultural, social and/or ethnic identity. These exclusions can be systematic and intentional.

2.1. GHANA

In Ghana, poverty eradication efforts have been uneven, and significant inequalities still exist, especially between the south and the north—where the majority of the population lives on less than a dollar a day (Cooke, Hague and McKay 2016). On issues of social exclusion, the longstanding chieftaincy conflict between Ghana's Kusasis and Mamprusis, originating before Ghana's independence, is one that has historically triggered electoral violence. After 13 years of relative peace, this particular conflict intensified in 2022. Between

Being sidelined from political and social participation due to economic, spatial, ethnic, or religious reasons can indicate potential for election-related violence.

Across all countries, exclusion issues are mostly rooted in identity on the basis of cultural, social and/or ethnic identity. These exclusions can be systematic and intentional.

Table 2.1. Political and social exclusion in Ghana: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Poor socio-economic conditions | 13. Problematic voter registration |
| 3. Conflict related to changing power dynamics | 18. Provocative party rallying |
| 5. Presence of non-state armed groups | 26. Rejection of the election results |

September 2022 and February 2023, an estimated 200 people died in clashes, according to an anonymous local police chief (Mensah 2023). Historically, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) party aligns with the Kusasi claims to the Bawku Naba chieftaincy, while the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) supports the Mamprusis. Consequently, each electoral cycle sees violence between these groups as they use aggression to advance their favoured party's position. The Bawku Naba chieftaincy is a coveted one because the title holder controls all the agricultural land (Kendie, Osei-Kufuor and Boakye 2014) and has a say in the political appointments of local government representatives (Bukari 2013) in the Upper East region of northern Ghana. In 2008, the presidential and legislative elections also saw clashes between Kusasi and Mamprusi migrant communities in Accra. This source of risk is also heightened with the term-limited NPP incumbent leaving power in 2024 and the dynamics of power changing.

The way in which a country governs and distributes its resources can either promote stability or drive conflict.

2.2. TOGO

With sharp distinctions in poverty rates between urban (26.5 per cent) and rural areas (58.8 per cent), economic exclusion in Togo is heavily spatial and related to endemic corruption. The way in which a country governs and distributes its resources can either promote stability or drive conflict. Given that the same family has been in power for over five decades, perceptions of state capture by the elite can contribute to inter-group conflict in the lead up to elections. In June 2022, Togo imposed a state of emergency in the north to curtail extremist violence (Africa News 2022). The extreme poverty of Togo's rural and

northern regions, and their socio-economic disadvantage vis-a-vis the more urban coast, increases the risk of political extremism taking root in the former (USIP 2022).

Observable indicators

1. Level of exclusion of minorities from citizenship, constitutional and other legal rights enjoyed by dominant community groups.
2. Level of impunity, in particular with offences against minority groups.
3. Existence of adequate and efficient legal instruments for social integration.
4. Existence of longstanding rivalries between different ethnic, religious, linguistic or cultural groups that have historically peaked and been expressed violently during electoral periods.
5. Use of inflammatory language by politicians, other leaders and media towards minority/marginalized groups.

Table 2.2. Political and social exclusion in Togo: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Poor socio-economic conditions | 18. Provocative party rallying 26. Rejection of the election results |

Chapter 3

CONFLICT RELATED TO CHANGING POWER DYNAMICS

Institutional shortcomings in managing heightened tensions during shifts towards post-conflict settings or civilian governance are likely to result in election-related violence.

The balance of power within a country is fragile and can be swayed by political processes and institutional agreements like constitutional amendments or socio-economic and legal reforms that either benefit or marginalize certain citizen groups. Institutional shortcomings in managing heightened tensions during post-conflict settings or civilian governance are likely to result in election-related violence (Sisk 2007: 7; Ndulo and Lulo 2010: 160, 165). In addition to the tussle between political institutions and actors, there is also a dimension of generational change with the burgeoning youth population seeking to replace ageing political elites.

In all four case studies, the current power dynamics are going to be put to the test on the ballot. In Ghana, the NPP is coming to the end of its two terms, with the party's search for a viable candidate to be keenly contested internally with the eventual choice of incumbent Vice President, Bawumia, as the NPP flagbearer. The NDC is going with former Ghanaian President John Mahama, its flag bearer in three consecutive elections. The stakes are high for the ruling NPP to stay on in power given the profile and political notoriety of the NDC candidate. In Liberia, the incumbent is vying for re-election. In Togo, the hegemony of the ruling party will be tested, especially after a constitutional amendment. In Mali, the 2024 elections were postponed from 2022 and will be organized by a transitional government headed by the military.

3.1. MALI

The most glaring instance of changing power dynamics surrounding upcoming elections is in Mali. With two coups d'état in the past three years, and significant constitutional changes enhancing the power of the president and armed forces, the February 2024 elections in Mali will be organized by a transitional government after an initial failed attempt in 2022. Though a republic is a form of government in which a state is ruled by elected representatives, interim President Colonel Assimi Goita has declared the beginning of a 'Fourth Republic'. It is also expected that the military leader may put himself forward as a candidate in the push for a Mali Kura—New Mali—political rhetoric that alludes to the glory of the ancient, pre-colonial Malian empire. Success of current military officials at the polls would mean displacing the pre-coup political class. Also closely linked to this are the generational dynamics and the presence of a more politically conscious and involved youth population. For pre-coup political elites and the military government, the elections are high stakes, and it could lead parties to deploy the necessary machinery, which may include violence, to secure victory at the polls.

Also closely linked to this are the generational dynamics and the presence of a more politically conscious and involved youth population.

3.2. LIBERIA

The political landscape of Liberia's 2023 election is characterized by accumulated dissatisfaction with President Weah's administration, soaring food prices and rampant corruption (Poquie 2023). Numerous analysts believe that these issues will prevent Weah from

Table 3.1. Conflict and changing power dynamics in Mali: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Poor socio-economic conditions | 1. Contested electoral law |
| 2. Political and social exclusion | 8. Inadequate electoral security arrangements |
| 5. Presence of non-state armed groups | 19. Provocative and violent actions by political parties |
| *Geopolitics and regional dynamics | 26. Rejection of the election results |

Political machinations could escalate tensions both domestically and internationally in the lead-up to the 10 October 2023 election.

securing a second term, which would make him the first elected president since 2003 to serve only a single term. However, given his incumbent status and his control of the state machinery, there are concerns that the elections may be rigged in his favour. The fragmentation of the Collaborating Political Parties, the opposition coalition, also appears to be diminishing the chances of a transfer of power in the October 2023 election. The main opposition candidate, former Vice President Boakai—who finished second behind President Weah in 2017—does not represent ‘the new’ given his erstwhile involvement in executive government. Political machinations could escalate tensions both domestically and internationally in the lead-up to the 10 October 2023 election.

Observable indicators

1. Extent to which a weak transitional framework, such as a DDR (demobilization, disarmament and reintegration) programme, a trade agreement or a new constitution, changes key political actors’ relative power.
2. Level of civic support for or resentment of a political decision or actor.
3. Existence and efficiency of mechanisms to promote a culture of political party dialogue.
4. Level of media freedom.

Table 3.2. Conflict and changing power dynamics in Liberia: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Poor socio-economic conditions | 8. Inadequate electoral security arrangements |
| *Geopolitics and regional dynamics | 19. Provocative and violent actions by political parties |
| | 26. Rejection of the election results |

Chapter 4

GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

Across all the countries of focus, women are poorly represented in politics—chiefly due to patriarchal traditions dismissive of women in politics, the monetary cost of elections and tactical intimidation, harassment or violence against female politicians. In certain scenarios, elections have ignited violent episodes where women and girls become primary victims. Furthermore, female voters are more frequently subjected to election-related violence or threats, deterring them from the polling station more than their male counterparts (OSCE/ODIHR 2009). Perpetrators of gender-based violence range from state entities and private military forces to police agencies, rebel groups, and individuals. When state institutions—already undermined by corruption, inefficiency, public distrust and limited operational capability—are further incapacitated by election-induced turmoil, their ability to deter or address gender-based atrocities is almost non-existent.

Female voters are more frequently subjected to election-related violence or threats, deterring them from the polling station more than their male counterparts.

4.1. TOGO

Ranked 127 out of 144 countries on the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Gender Index (Equal Measures 2019), Togo has recently reformed repressive laws against women's rights, access to resources and political representation. Under these reforms, women can now claim full (instead of partial) indemnity following workplace dismissal (Pettinotti and Raga 2023). Widows and divorced women's rights to inheritance are also now guaranteed, at least in theory. But questions regarding enforcement of these reforms abound, especially as they have implications for women's ability to contest and win elections in Togo.

Table 4.1. Gender-based discrimination and violence in Togo: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Poor socio-economic conditions | 8. Inadequate electoral security arrangements |
| 8. (Other) human rights violations | 17. Unequal media access, party visibility and favouritism |
| | 24. Poor management of election results |

The upward surge in costs between election cycles has amplified money's role in politics, limiting political participation for most women.

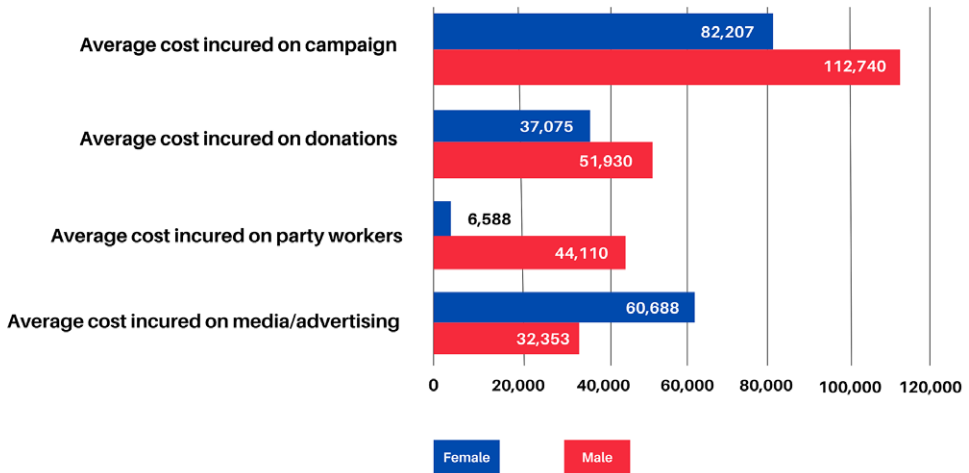
4.2. GHANA

In Ghana as in many other West African nations, participating in multiparty elections is a financially burdensome endeavour for both aspiring and incumbent MPs. A report by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy revealed that between 2012 and 2016, the cost of running for political office increased by 59 per cent (WFD 2022). This upward surge in costs between election cycles has amplified money's role in politics, limiting political participation for most women. On average, candidates in 2016 were required to amass approximately GHS 389,803 (roughly USD 85,000) to secure their party's primary nomination and stand within their respective constituencies (Figure 4.1). The financial barriers are even more substantial for presidential candidates. WFD's research indicates that male candidates have the upper hand in accessing funds, consistently outspending their female counterparts. Competing in elections for Ghana's two dominant political parties, the NDC and the NPP—whose candidates have a higher chance of winning—also entails substantial expense. In Ghana, the ability to spend the most money is, by and large, a critical factor in successfully contesting a seat.

Observable indicators

1. Adequacy of constitutional provisions or other legal acts which ensure or promote equality of rights and opportunities between men and women, particularly when it comes to political representation.
2. Existence of legal and policy mechanisms designed to reduce various types of inequalities between women and men in public life, for example, in employment, education and health services.

Figure 4.1. Expenditure variations by gender in USD, 2016 parliamentary election



Source: Designed by the author, based on Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), 'The Cost of Politics in Ghana', February 2022, <https://www.wfd.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Cost_Of_Politics_Ghana.pdf>, accessed 23 November 2023.

3. Existence of effective victim protection and crime prosecution mechanisms, particularly for crimes of gender-based violence.
4. Existence of policies within the state agencies, including the law enforcement and security sector agencies (SSAs), aimed at protecting and promoting human rights, including women's rights, and combating gender-based discrimination.

Table 4.2. Gender-based discrimination and violence in Ghana: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Poor socio-economic conditions | 9. Inadequate funding, financing, and budgeting of elections |
| 2. Political and social exclusion | |

5. Level of female vulnerability to sexual crimes, such as rape and sexual assault, in times of peace.
6. Extent to which perpetrators of gender-based violence in times of conflict and unrest enjoy impunity.
7. Levels of stigmatization for victims of gender-based crimes and consequent lack of reporting by the victims.
8. The number of cases of violence and harassment against politicians and civil society organizations advocating better conditions for women, increased participation of women and gender equality reforms.
9. Number of cases or reports of links between political parties/actors and violent groups that use sexual violence.
10. Extent to which the media use derogatory and inflammatory language when referring to advocates of women's issues and gender equality.
11. Extent to which gender-based discrimination and violence are omitted from media coverage.

Chapter 5

PRESENCE OF NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS

Non-state armed actors are entities or individuals employing violence to fulfil their aims, operating outside of official state forces or institutions. This category encompasses rebels, militias, paramilitaries, armed tribal leaders, warlords, terrorists, mercenaries and private security firms. Though their actions are more felt when they operate within a country, tensions also rise if non-state armed groups are based in neighbouring nations—as these groups often ignore international borders or use adjacent territories for refuge or resource gathering. Such groups can amplify instability during periods of elections to further their political (if any) or economic objectives. In at least three of the four countries, the presence of non-state armed groups is impacting everyday life and could be of consequence for levels of violence in the upcoming elections.

In at least three of the four countries, the presence of non-state armed groups is impacting everyday life and could be of consequence for levels of violence in the upcoming elections.

5.1. MALI

Since 2012, Mali has been confronted by a series of armed conflicts with insurgent groups. Starting with the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), a Tuareg rebel group, there are now threats from Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Great Sahara (ISGS), among others. Despite counter-insurgency efforts undertaken by Mali, support from French troops and the UN-operated Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in the recent past, these conflicts have made for insecurity in the north of the country for over a decade. The Malian state has been dispossessed of large swathes of land; its failure to eliminate insurgency has been a pretext for the coups that have taken place since 2020 and affects its international

relationships, most importantly with France. French troops were present in Mali from 2013 but ejected in 2022 after military leaders seized control of the country. MINUSMA's 12,000-strong force recently ended its operations in the country (BBC News 2023; Africa News/AFP 2023b).

The activities of Wagner PMC in the country have led to civilian casualties that could impact on the electorate's view of the state.

Against this background, the 'Wagner PMC' group—a Kremlin-linked mercenary force active in Syria, Russian-occupied Ukraine and elsewhere—is in the employ of the Malian administration as part of its efforts to counter insurgency. The activities of Wagner PMC in the country have led to civilian casualties that could impact on the electorate's view of the state. In a 2023 referendum, residents of the northern cities of Kidal and Timbuktu were unable to cast their votes due to threat of attack by armed groups (Al Jazeera 2023c).

5.2. GHANA

Though there are no organized non-state armed groups known to be active in Ghana, there has been a spillover of insecurity arising from the presence of such actors in neighbouring Burkina Faso. As violence in Burkina Faso spread southward during 2022, an estimated 22,000 of its people fled towards Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo by the end of that year. It was reported that in response, Ghana deported hundreds of Burkina Faso's refugees (Reuters 2023). Though Ghana claims that no deportations occurred, this underlines the extent to which the country is being impacted by the presence of non-state actors outside its borders. Pre-existing ethnic clashes

Table 5.1. Non-state armed groups in Mali: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|---|---|
| 2. Political and social exclusion *Geopolitics and regional dynamics | 1. Contested electoral law 4. Unfit legal and institutional framework to deal with emerging challenges 8. Inadequate electoral security arrangements 22. Problematic election-day operations |

between the Kusasis and Mamprusis in northern Ghana may also have intensified due to foreign influences (Mensah 2023). Combined with the proliferation of illegal small arms production in the country, violence around elections remains a pressing risk.

Observable indicators

1. Presence of non-state armed actors based in the country or infiltrating it from neighbours; places where they are present and the number of cases of interference by them.
2. Existence and location of territories outside the effective control of the central government.
3. Capacity of the SSAs to effectively neutralize non-state armed groups.
4. Flows of small arms and light weapons, and ease of access to them.
5. Existence and type of clandestine links between state institutions, government officials or political candidates on the one hand, and non-state armed actors on the other.
6. Number of incidents of non-state actors perpetrating violence.

Combined with the proliferation of illegal small arms production in the country violence around elections remains a pressing risk.

Table 5.2. Non-state armed groups in Ghana: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|--|---|
| 2. Political and social exclusion | 4. Unfit legal and institutional framework to deal with emerging challenges |
| 3. Conflict arising from changing power dynamics | 8. Inadequate electoral security arrangements |
| 5. The presence of organized crime | 22. Problematic election-day operations |

Chapter 6

PRESENCE OF ORGANIZED CRIME

Though not always politically motivated, they seek to control local bureaucracies and influence electoral processes, sometimes using violence to maintain territorial dominance.

Organized crime refers to groups systematically engaging in serious crimes for financial or material benefits, commonly involving human and drug trafficking, cybercrime and other illicit activities (UNODC 2007). These groups aim to 'capture' state institutions to further their economic goals, often employing corruption and extortion to undermine state functionality and political legitimacy. Though not always politically motivated, they seek to control local bureaucracies and influence electoral processes, sometimes using violence to maintain territorial dominance (Dunne 2006; Ferreira et al. 2011).

6.1. GHANA

The availability of these small arms has militarized Ghanaian politics and sections of Ghanaian society.

In Ghana, there is a proliferation of illegal small arms production which could facilitate violence around the 2024 elections. Statistics from Ghana's National Small Arms Commission indicate that more than 1.2 million unregistered firearms and light weapons are in circulation (KAIPTC 2021). The availability of these small arms has militarized Ghanaian politics and sections of Ghanaian society. Research in 2010 indicated that blacksmiths illegally manufactured up to 200,000 guns annually at that time, with at least 2,500 blacksmiths capable of producing these weapons in one of Ghana's 10 regions alone (Aning 2010). A BBC report in 2019 noted that these firearms can be purchased for minimal amounts, starting at GBP 7.00, and are commonly utilized in armed robberies and organized crime (Lansah 2019). In the past, Ghanaian armed non-state actors like the Azonto and Bulga boys have been aligned with political parties and have used small arms to threaten and main opponents during elections.

Table 6.1. Organized crime in Ghana: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Poor socio-economic conditions | 8. Inadequate electoral security arrangements |
| 5. Presence of non-state armed groups | 19. Provocative and violent actions by political parties |

Observable indicators

1. Existence of adequate legal mechanisms and policies to address the problem of organized crime in the country.
2. Existence of accountability mechanisms for the actions of the security sector.
3. Presence of organized crime groups in the country, and their number and locations.
4. Existence and type of clandestine links between organized crime groups on the one hand, and state institutions (including SSAs, government officials and political candidates) on the other.
5. Number of violent incidents related to organized crime actors.
6. Numbers of instances recorded where organized crime groups have affected the integrity of electoral processes.
7. Existence of economic interests of organized crime actors to influence political agendas.

Chapter 7

GRIEVANCES RELATING TO GENOCIDE, CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY AND WAR CRIMES

Genocide involves intentionally targeting and killing members of a specific national, ethnic, racial or religious group with the aim of partial or complete eradication. Crimes against humanity encompass widespread or systematic attacks against civilians, including actions such as murder, torture and forced displacement. War crimes refer to severe breaches of the Geneva conventions and other violations in both international and non-international armed conflicts, primarily actions against civilians (Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court—UN 1998). The foregoing crimes have lasting impacts that can influence electoral processes. In their aftermath, ethnic tensions often persist, heightening the risk of election-related violence. Similarly, internal displacement can disrupt elections (Brancati and Snyder 2012: 26). When relocated, internally displaced persons (IDPs) can become a factor of friction and conflict in host areas and face threats at election time; if they return, past tensions can re-emerge, with elections aggravating both old and new disputes (Brun 2003: 276–97; Norberg and Obi 2007: 7). Of the four countries of focus, Liberia and Mali are the ones with a recent history of deadly civil conflict.

7.1. LIBERIA

Liberia endured conflicts that killed approximately 250,000 people between 1989 and 2003. It ended when Charles Taylor, who seized power in a coup that sparked the rebellion, stepped down. Thousands of people were mutilated and raped in the fighting which involved drugged fighters and child soldiers (Vines 2023). Liberia therefore has a legacy of war crimes and crimes against humanity that still

reverberates in the country. A period of political change, like the October 2023 elections, could bring grievances to the fore as many victims of these crimes have not received redress, though trials (HRW 2022b) and court sessions (Al Jazeera 2023a) prosecuting alleged war criminals continue outside the country under the principle of universal jurisdiction.

Unresolved grievances are strongly felt and compounded by the slow pace of economic recovery two decades on from the war. Weah's election in 2017 was the first peaceful transition of power from one democratically elected president to another in Liberia (ICG 2012). Following continuous advocacy by local and international groups and agitations (HRW 2019a; Front Page Africa 2018), the incumbent President Weah endorsed the setting up of an Economic and War Crimes Court (HRW 2019b). However, little to no progress has been made in practical terms since. This goes against the recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2009.

Failure to implement the full recommendations of the TRC continues to be an election issue, as it was in previous electoral cycles.

Failure to implement the full recommendations of the TRC continue to be an election issue, as it was in previous electoral cycles.

7.2. MALI

The military-led transitional government, supported by Wagner PMC, is allegedly involved in war crimes in Mali (Peltier 2023). In January 2023, United Nations experts urged a thorough investigation into possible grave human rights violations and potential crimes against humanity in Mali occurring since 2021. This stems from unverified

Table 7.1. War crimes/related grievances in Liberia: Interrelated factors

| External factors | Internal factors |
|--|--|
| 1. Poor socio-economic conditions | 11. Lack of training of security sector agencies |
| 3. Conflict related to changing power dynamics | 16. Unequal media access and favouritism |
| | 19. Provocative and violent actions by political parties |

**Table 7.2. War crimes/related grievances in Mali:
Interrelated factors**

| External | Internal |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 2. Political and social exclusion | 16. Unequal media access and favouritism |
| 5. Presence of non-state armed groups | 19. Provocative and violent actions by political parties |

reports from Mopti and various other regions detailing instances of executions, mass graves, torture, sexual violence, looting, arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances, primarily orchestrated by the Malian armed forces and their allies (UN 2023). In late March 2022, several hundred people were reportedly executed in the central Malian village of Moura, predominantly occupied by the Peuhl minority community, in a joint operation involving Malian forces and personnel believed to be from the Wagner group (HRW 2022a). The victims face substantial barriers in their search for justice and redress for the abuses perpetrated. This critical issue could significantly influence the upcoming elections, particularly if military officials decide to run for office, with the affected community's grievances becoming a focal point of concern.

Observable indicators

1. Number and locations of recorded instances of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.
2. Extent of change in a country's ethnic and political landscape due to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.
3. Existence of a legal framework and adequate mechanisms (a) to protect vulnerable populations, such as IDPs and other victims of conflict; and (b) to promote their participation in the political life of the country.
4. Existence of criminal justice policy frameworks for addressing crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes.
5. Extent to which prosecutions and trials during an electoral process exacerbate existing grievances between groups.
6. The number and locations of IDPs and refugees.
7. Existence of conditions for return and actual return figures.
8. Number of incidents involving attacks on IDPs and returnees.
9. Existence and effects of reconciliation programmes.

Chapter 8

(OTHER) HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

States must uphold and promote human rights as they are inherent to all individuals. States breach these rights when their security agencies use force unnecessarily or disproportionately (Steiner 2006: 772). In nations lacking a strong rule of law and human rights protections, electoral periods see heightened risks of violence. For instance, insufficient police training for political rallies and weak accountability can escalate security-service-led violence (Alston 2011: 15). Across all four countries in focus, there are issues of human rights abuse and violation perpetuated by a multiplicity of actors: security agencies, armed vigilantes, foreign mercenaries, violent extremist groups and private companies. In Liberia, a country with a history of forced recruitment and other exploitation of workers, labour rights among others are often breached. Firestone, the timber and tyre producing company, has been implicated in gross human rights abuses with a lingering case of arbitrary terminations and unlawful evictions (Paquette 2020).

In nations lacking a strong rule of law and human rights protections, electoral periods see heightened risks of violence.

8.1. MALI

The civilian population in Mali continues to face grave human rights violations and humanitarian challenges. These violations are persistently meted out by a variety of actors: violent extremist factions, security agencies, vigilantes, and government-allied foreign mercenaries. As noted above, it was alleged that in March 2022 Malian security forces and allied mercenaries carried out the extrajudicial killings of more than 300 men, including those suspected of being violent extremists, in the central Malian town of Moura (HRW 2022a). During the same year, the military regime has

Citizens' ability to make informed choices in the forthcoming election may also be impacted by the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation.

progressively restricted press freedom (Risemberg 2022), freedom of speech and peaceful assembly.

The military-headed transitional government has in the past clamped down on both local and international media including RFI, France 24 and social media critics (RFI 2022). The foregoing is not without consequences for the 2024 elections, to be organized by the same government. There are fears that the junta may clamp down on media during the electoral cycle. Citizens' ability to make informed choices in the forthcoming election may also be impacted by the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation.

8.2. TOGO

In Togo, consistent repression of opposition groups has been a hallmark of the political landscape since 2005. The family of the incumbent President Faure Gnassingbé has retained power for over 50 years, a period frequently characterized by human rights violations, including harassment and the kidnapping of opposition members, and the suppression of peaceful protests (Afrol 2010; RFI 2018; Africa News/AFP 2023a). The government's grip on power has persisted despite protests, which are often met with police brutality resulting in numerous fatalities. Perpetrators of human rights violations are rarely prosecuted. This oppressive environment has spurred a significant refugee situation, exemplified in May 2005 when 767 young Togolese opposition sympathizers sought refuge with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees in Cotonou, Benin (Afrol 2005).

Table 8.1. (Other) human rights violations in Mali: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|--|--|
| 3. Conflict relating to changing power dynamics | 2. Unfit electoral law judicial system |
| 5. Presence of non-state armed groups | XX. Weak accountability systems |
| 10. Unethical media reporting and information disorder | |

**Table 8.2. (Other) human rights violations in Togo:
Interrelated factors**

| External | Internal |
|---|--|
| 3. Conflict relating to changing power dynamics | 1. Contested electoral law |
| 4. Presence of non-state armed groups | 5. Disputed EMB (electoral management body) design and composition |
| | 11. Lack of training of security sector agencies |
| | 16. Unequal media access and favouritism |
| | 19. Provocative and violent actions by political parties |
| | 26. Rejection of results. |

The ruling Union for the Republic party has upheld its dominance in parliament despite persistent opposition efforts, including notable protests from a 14-party coalition (the C14) in 2018, which resulted in several deaths including a minor. As Togo approaches its 2023 legislative and regional elections, rising opposition discontent suggests a potential recurrence of conflict, threatening the momentum for implementing a constitutional two-term limit. The uninterrupted dominance of the Union for the Republic party significantly undermines the prospects of addressing these longstanding grievances and fostering a more inclusive political climate.

Observable indicators

1. Number of historical and recent recorded instances of human rights violations related to but beyond the electoral context, that is, associated with political interests and involving political actors as victims or perpetrators, as well as journalists, civil society activists, intellectuals and others.
2. Existence of an adequate legal framework, procedures and training aiming to secure control of the security sector and accountability mechanisms for its actions.
3. Extent to which perpetrators of human rights violations are prosecuted, including the ordinary and military penal systems.

Chapter 9

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Elections in the aftermath of a natural disaster are often very complex as they face not only extraordinary logistical challenges but also a high risk of unrest and violence that can derail the electoral process.

Environmental hazards are a substance, state or event which poses a threat to the natural environment or is adversely affecting people's health. They include chemical, biological and natural hazards—for instance, flooding; an oil spill; an epidemic or a sudden outbreak of cholera (Strand et al. 2004). The multiple layers of disruption that natural hazards can trigger, from the collapse of infrastructure and communications to the total destruction of villages and cities, have an impact on the political life of a country (Buchanan-Smith and Christoplos 2004). In some cases, these disruptions are an invitation to violence (WHO 2005). Elections in the aftermath of a natural disaster are often very complex as they face not only extraordinary logistical challenges but also a high risk of unrest and violence that can derail the electoral process. In all countries of focus, there are recurrent environmental hazards with potential to create human displacement and to negatively impact the conduct of elections.

There has been an increase in internal displacement linked to environmental conditions; with at least 12,000 IDPs due to natural disasters in 2021, Ghana's 2024 elections could be impacted.

9.1. GHANA

Between mid-May and September, flooding is a regular occurrence in Ghana negatively impacting the population, environment and economy. Soil erosion, coastal degradation and deforestation amplify flood effects, with the past decade seeing particularly severe consequences. Given the susceptibility of the country to recurrent flooding, there has been an increase in internal displacement linked to environmental conditions; with at least 12,000 IDPs due to natural disasters in 2021, Ghana's 2024 elections could be impacted. This could also serve as a pretext to bolster narratives favouring their marginalization and exclusion in parts of the country.

Table 9.1. Environmental hazards in Ghana: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Poor socio-economic conditions | 1. Contested electoral system |
| 2. Political and social exclusion | 22. Problematic election-day operations |
| 3. Changing power dynamics | 26. Rejection of the election results |

9.2. TOGO

Due to urban planning failures and other economic factors, floods are a common occurrence during the annual rainy season in Togo (Klassou 1997; Ekpawou 2019). Despite government efforts and climate financing mechanisms deployed by the World Bank in the coastal state (AFD 2018), heavy rains and violent winds still have devastating flooding effects and cause people to be internally displaced (Afreepress 2023). Together with displacement engendered by spillover insecurity in Burkina Faso, this may impact voters' ability to access the polls in the forthcoming elections.

Observable indicators

1. Extent to which a country's regions are exposed or prone to environmental hazards, such as biohazards (cholera, influenza, HIV/AIDS, Covid-19, malaria); natural hazards (volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and droughts); and chemical

Table 9.2. Environmental hazards in Togo: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Poor socio-economic conditions | 22. Problematic election-day operations |
| 5. Presence of non-state armed groups | 26. Rejection of the election results |

Together with displacement engendered by spillover insecurity in Burkina Faso, this may impact voters' ability to access the polls in the forthcoming elections.

- hazards (industrial accidents; chemical spillages; pollution of the water supply; accidental release of toxic materials).
2. Number and character of historical consequences of environmental and natural disasters, including political destabilization, humanitarian crises, increased criminality, economic losses, and destruction of infrastructure.
 3. Existence and quality of local, national and regional systems for early warning, risk reduction and responses to environmental and natural disasters.

Recommendations

- Collect historical data including statistics, reports, maps and other relevant information on environmental or natural disasters. Disaggregate data to identify cycles of occurrences of disasters, seasonal/calendar patterns and regions affected. Create geographical risk maps. Chart trend lines to demonstrate seasonal risks.
- Collect historical data on the consequences of environmental or natural disasters. Analyse instances where a disaster has triggered political instability. Collect data and analyse other effects of disasters on electoral processes such as inability to conduct elections in a particular electoral district or place due to a disaster; and the negative impact of a disaster on citizens' participation, if any (and disaggregate by certain groups affected). Map regions where disasters have the potential to derail or negatively affect electoral processes.
- Conduct an expert analysis on national and regional capacities and readiness to respond to environmental and natural disasters, actual or potential. Map regions of concern.

Chapter 10

UNETHICAL MEDIA REPORTING AND INFORMATION DISORDER

Ethical journalistic practices—that is, reporting accurately, fairly and responsibly—are crucial due to the news media's broad public influence. In already divided societies, unethical journalism can intensify disputes and instigate violence. Such unethical practices can arise from political manipulation of the news media (Frohardt and Temin 2003: 1–4) or sensationalist reporting (Ramadhan 2013).

However, with the introduction of social media and other new media tools including tools for artificial intelligence (AI) and other generative media, the concern is no longer restricted to traditional media. What we now term 'information disorder' has become a recurrent feature of elections across the region (Oboh 2016). This can manifest through mass disinformation and misinformation campaigns, fabricated news, and digitally manipulated media. At the start of this trend in West Africa, campaigns focused on vaccine diplomacy and generating anti-Western sentiments. However, as projected by Hassan and Hiebert (2022), they now mostly focus on influencing electoral outcomes, building support for authoritarian control of domestic cyberspace, and generating public approval for military groups to assert themselves or insert themselves into national politics.

To increase their chances of victory, politicians and their supporters are now taking advantage of the Internet's 'veil of anonymity' to spread narratives that disparage their opponents (Tijani 2023). Foreign firms with vested interests and other illiberal actors also impact elections through disinformation. In recent years, they have become key players in the influence industry and information ecosystem. Widely circulated, digitally manipulated content on

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Widely circulated, digitally manipulated content on social networks (such as WhatsApp) means that fake news is rapidly exacerbating tensions and sowing confusion in the region.

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social networks (such as WhatsApp) means that fake news is rapidly exacerbating tensions and sowing confusion in the region.

10.1. MALI

The militancy which began in Mali in 2012 now extends to Burkina Faso and Niger, and has resulted in thousands of deaths and the displacement of two million people. This has paved the way for manipulated and simplified narratives, often aiming to portray France or regional alliances negatively. A surge in fake news has been observed since October 2021, coinciding with increased political tensions across the Sahel. Relations between Mali and its international partners, especially France, have soured since the military takeover in 2020. It is challenging to determine the origin and extent of deliberately biased, falsified or fabricated content, much of which is shared on platforms like WhatsApp. One subset of content is videos, often with robotic voiceover, which criticize French involvement while supporting Russian intervention. However, a rise in well-edited fake news packages was also observed from late 2021 (Africa News/AFP 2022). This surge is considered part of an 'information war', with tensions between European democracies and adversaries, like Russia, at its core. The above-described information disorder could become an instigator of violence in Mali's 2024 elections.

Table 10.1. Media/(dis)information challenges in Mali: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|---|--|
| 2. Political and social exclusion | 16. Unequal media access and favouritism |
| 3. Conflict relating to changing power dynamics | 17. Provocative use of media and campaign strategies |
| *Geopolitics and regional dynamics | |

10.2. TOGO

In 2019, Facebook announced that it had removed over 265 accounts linked to the Israeli electoral influence company Archimedes Group targeting elections in Africa including Togo (Gleicher 2019). Operating from Israel, the propaganda network utilized fake accounts to manage pages, amplify their content, and manipulate engagement metrics. Posing as local entities, including news outlets, they circulated purported leaks about politicians. According to Facebook, the network had almost three million followers and spent over USD 800,000 running advertisements on that platform. The administrators often engaged in political discourse, discussing elections and candidate perspectives, and critiquing political adversaries. Given the likelihood that the electoral influence network was in the employ of politicians, information disorder remains a concern ahead of Togo's elections. Similarly, the Ureputation Company—owned by Tunisian businessman Lotfi Bel Hadj—was behind a Facebook campaign targeting Togolese in the diaspora to support the re-election of President Faure Gnassingbé in 2020.

Given the likelihood that the electoral influence network was in the employ of politicians, information disorder remains a concern ahead of Togo's elections.

Observable indicators

1. Existence of a media code of ethics.
2. Extent to which media houses (national and local) respect the code of ethics.
3. Degree to which rules and regulations defining media roles and responsibilities in electoral processes are enforced by the relevant agencies.

Table 10.2. Media/(dis)information challenges in Togo: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Poor socio-economic conditions | 16. Unequal media access and favouritism |
| 2. Political and social exclusion | 17. Provocative use of media and campaign strategies |
| 3. Geopolitics and regional dynamics | |

Chapter 11

UNDEMOCRATIC GEOPOLITICS AND REGIONAL DYNAMICS

Rising geopolitical competition worldwide means that illiberal states are taking greater interest in West Africa (Hassan and Hiebert 2022). This factor¹ concerns the impact of regional dynamics, as well as foreign blocs and other illiberal actors on the upcoming elections. Beyond disinformation, there is also a deployment of financial and military aid, mostly by illiberal actors who are not afraid of supporting coups and autocratic regimes to advance their own interests. This dynamic is set to play out in some of the elections under consideration, particularly in Mali, and to some extent in Liberia. In the latter case, the opposition is rumoured to be courting Russia in contrast to the incumbent's association with Liberia's longtime associate, the United States. In addition to wider geopolitics, regional and electoral dynamics around francophone West Africa's 'coup belt' are also worth considering when analysing election risks for Togo.

Given the widening scope and intensity of information disorder, there is potential for this geopolitical conflict to bleed into the Sahel and threaten peaceful elections and power transitions in the region.

11.1. MALI

Malian authorities have strategically pivoted from France to Russia for military support. This means that relations with Western and regional partners have deteriorated; the shift threatens the regional stabilization structure established since 2013 and risks isolating the national government (ICG 2023). Given the widening scope and intensity of information disorder, there is potential for this geopolitical conflict to bleed into the Sahel and threaten peaceful elections and power transitions in the region. Depending on the reaction of regional

¹ An additional external risk factor not included in the ERM Tool.

and Western partners, Mali's 2024 elections could face a significant risk of vote manipulation and perceived fraud.

11.2. TOGO

One of the few francophone countries in Africa with a civilian government and no active armed conflicts, Togo is one to watch. Gabon's August 2023 coup shows what could happen where current legislators and long entrenched leaders want to cling on to power. Though the presidential election is not until 2025, the legislative and regional elections in December 2023 can bear on the tendencies of the presidential election. Like Gabon's, Togo's President has had a dynastic affiliation to the presidency since 1967, yet unlike Gabon the country has not significantly improved its socio-economic indicators and rate of development, with the poverty rate still being as high as 45 per cent in rural areas.

Observable indicators

1. Existence of a concise, transparent and accountable multilateral framework.
2. Extent to which technology is shaping geopolitics.
3. How far politicians, parties and foreign companies observe the code of ethics.
4. Degree to which democratic principles define geopolitical relationships, particularly regarding enforcement of international electoral principles by relevant agencies.

Table 11.1. Geopolitics and regional dynamics in Togo: Interrelated factors

| External | Internal |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Poor socio-economic conditions 2. Political and social exclusion | 26. Rejection of the election results |

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Annex A. Methodology of data

Poor socio-economic conditions (Liberia, Mali)

Methodology: Conduct an expert review of legal instruments focusing on their effects on various social groups, particularly young people and women, and identify areas of risk. This involves collecting and analyzing historical and current statistical data on poverty, inequality, and unemployment to understand how these conditions may trigger election-related violence, and producing risk maps and trend charts. Additionally, gather and analyze media reports on the economic situation of disenfranchised groups, paying attention to inflammatory language. This analysis should consider different media types, geographical coverage, media ownership, and victims to map and observe trends and the dimensions of the problem.

Political and social exclusion (Ghana, Togo)

Methodology: Conduct an expert review of constitutional and citizenship rights and the legal status of minority and marginalized groups. Identify particular groups which face social and political exclusion of different kinds. Map geographical areas affected.

Conflict related to changing power dynamics (Mali, Liberia)

Methodology: Assess the extent to which a weak transitional framework, such as a DDR (demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration) programme, a trade agreement, or a new constitution, alters the relative power of key political actors. This includes evaluating the level of civic support for or resentment toward political decisions or actors. Additionally, examine the existence and efficiency of mechanisms that promote a culture of political party dialogue. Finally, analyze the level of media freedom to determine its impact on political stability and power dynamic

Gender-based discrimination and violence (Ghana, Togo)

Methodology: Compile the most important legal frameworks and instruments related to gender equality with focus on (a) access to employment, resources and education for men and women; (b) civil rights for women, in particular concerning marriage, divorce, parental rights, land tenure and related subjects; (c) mechanisms for prosecuting perpetrators of gender-based violence and for the protection of the victims; and (d) gender policies within the public administration, mainly within the security sector. Analyse legislation to identify any deficiencies. Use maps to mark areas where local legislation is not harmonized or where the existing legal framework is deficient.

Presence of non-state armed groups (Mali, Ghana)

Methodology: Gather historical and up-to-date data on the presence and activities of non-state armed actors. Collect statistics, reports, maps, and other relevant data (from SSAs and other organizations with specific knowledge and data) on the presence and actions thereof.

Presence of organized crime (prevalent in Ghana)

Methodology: Compile and analyse the quality of legal instruments and policies created to address the problem of organized crime in the country, as well as the legal mechanisms for accountability of the security forces. Map regions where laws are not harmonized or implemented.

Grievances relating to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes (Liberia, Mali)

Methodology: Collect historical data on genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Create maps to indicate the extent of crimes committed. Label the geographical locations of atrocities by using static markers.

(Other) Human rights violations (Liberia, Mali)

Methodology: Collect historical and current situation data including statistics, reports, maps, and other relevant information from multiple sources (governmental, civil society and academia) regarding human rights violations. If the data are not comprehensive, organize data collection through surveys and interviews with different social groups. Ensure gender representation. Distinguish between human rights violations which have political, ethnic, religious, gender and other connotations. Create maps to indicate the extent of human rights violations. Place static markers to show the geographical location of incidents. Chart and compare trend lines. Present data in columns for respective categories (e.g. victims/perpetrators).

Environmental hazards (Ghana, Togo)

Methodology: Collect data on environmental hazards in Ghana, Mali, Liberia and Togo. Map regions affected and analyse trends over time.

Unethical media reporting and information disorder (Mali, Togo)

Methodology: Examine historical records of unethical media reporting for the actors involved and scale of activity. Use relevant reports and media records, and interview experts. Map regions of historical risk and locations of incidents, and create trend charts to gain insight on critical electoral phases. Cooperate with media monitoring, regulatory, civil society and fact-checking organizations to map areas where unethical media reporting is occurring (including e.g. local newspapers and radio) as well as where complaints have been received. Generate colour-coded maps to distinguish regions based on the magnitude of the problem. Use

cumulative factors to present and monitor the number of incidents and complaints received. Generate charts to analyse trends.

About the author

Idayat Hassan, who serves as a Senior Associate (Non-Resident) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), has dedicated two decades to advancing peace, democracy, and development across West Africa. Renowned for her leadership in assessing the impacts of social media, elections, security challenges, and governance, Hassan has significantly contributed to elevating the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), under her leadership, to notable heights within global think tank rankings.

Her strategic approach to counter-insurgency, coupled with profound insights into regional security issues, and substantial contributions to both policy making and academic discourse, highlights her deep-seated expertise. Hassan's recent endeavors have been centered on exploring the intersection of technology with democracy and the integrity of elections. This focus is further emphasized by her active involvement with various national and regional institutions, alongside numerous advisory boards, showcasing her all-encompassing commitment to fostering a stable and democratic West Africa.

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The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with 35 Member States founded in 1995, with a mandate to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

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In the dynamically shifting landscape of West Africa, where socio-political transformations challenge the fabric of democracy, *Guide on External Risk Factors to Electoral Processes in West Africa (2022–2023): Cases from Ghana, Liberia, Mali and Togo* emerges as a beacon of insight. This Guide delves into the multifaceted external risk factors (ERFs) that loom over the electoral horizon in nations like Ghana, Liberia, Mali and Togo. Through meticulous analysis, it illuminates the potent mix of socio-economic conditions, political and social exclusions, and the spectre of election-related violence, among other critical elements, that could influence the outcomes and integrity of the imminent elections.

Targeting a diverse audience of policymakers, civil society organizations, electoral bodies, international observers and potential investors, this Guide serves as an essential tool for understanding and navigating the external challenges to electoral processes. By providing a holistic view of potential risks, set against the distinct historical, cultural and political backdrops of each country, it aims to foster an environment conducive to peaceful, free and fair elections.

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