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Addressing the Political Impasse in Togo: Response from ECOWAS in Preventing Violent Armed Conflict

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Abstract

Africa faces a range of complex issues related to maintaining and advancing democratic stability. In this paper, we examine Togo, with a specific focus on the political impasses that could hinder the democratic development of the small West African coastal state in the face of threats such as violent extremism and terrorism. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) tried to address the situation in Togo, primarily by intensifying its diplomatic efforts to prevent the region from becoming a hub for military juntas. As a result, the paper examines the measures involved in implementing prevention measures against the political impasse in Togo. It does so by analysing the sources of Togo's political impasse and takes into consideration ECOWAS's attempt to resolve and prevent conflict. The study concludes that diplomatic strategies ought to be employed by ECOWAS to address the identified political challenges effectively. In addition, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should not only be vibrant but also work to identify gaps in the political situation and encourage people to understand that this does not call for violence. Furthermore, ECOWAS should review its Protocol on Good Governance to effectively address the issue of the third-term syndrome. ECOWAS should condemn coups, implement sanctions to encourage the leader to accept multi-party democracy, be vocal in denouncing poor governance, and engage the current leader to step down. In addition, the CSOs should be given the freedom to speak freely and demonstrate against bad governance in Togo. This means that all actors and stakeholders will be able to reach a peaceful agreement, promote good democratic values and human rights, enable multi-party participation in the country, promote participation in decision making, create an enabling environment for CSOs to operate without fear of intimidation, and build resilient and independent state institutions.

Keywords: Politics, Conflicts, Violence, Prevention, Togo.

Introduction

For the past two decades, West Africa has witnessed a concerning trend of unconstitutional changes of government, characterised by constitutional manipulations aimed at entrenching leaders in power (Reyntjens, 2020). Countries such as Burkina Faso, led by the then-President Blaise Compaoré, and Côte d'Ivoire under President Alassane Ouattara have had different outcomes, as leaders have tampered with or tried to extend presidential term limits (Reyntjens, 2020). Opposition parties heavily opposed Compaoré's eligibility to run for the 2005 elections, having already served two terms (Reyntjens, 2020). While some have resisted, others have succeeded, leaving a mark on the democratic landscape of the region (Reyntjens, 2020). Another form of unconstitutional change in government is military takeovers in Africa, which has been a cause of worry (Security Council Report, 2022). Since August 2020, it has been recorded that military coup have occurred eight times in six African states namely: (i) Burkina Faso in January 2022, and September 2022 (ii) Sudan in October (2021), (iii) Mali in August 2020 and again in May 2021, (iv) Chad in April (2021), Guinea in September (2021) (Security council Report, 2022), and Gabon in 2023 (Lawal, 2025).

Togo, a small West African country, is a distinctive case of political instability. On 25 March 2024, the Togolese parliament approved a constitutional amendment that allows the current President, Faure Gnassingbé, whose family has ruled the country since 1967, to run for two more terms, potentially extending his presidency until 2030 (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2024). Not only is this against the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) democratic norms, such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance ACDEG) Moreover, the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance is, in itself, a significant development. However, it is also part of a broader trend of constitutional manipulation in West Africa, which has raised questions about democracy within the sub-region. Article 2 of the ACDEG, for instance, discusses Democracy, Elections, and Governance (African Union, 2007). It stipulates promoting adherence, "each State party, to the universal values and principles of democracy and respect for human rights" (African Union, 2007, p. 3).

Furthermore, in the objectives of the ACDEG, states are to hold regular, free, and fair elections to institutionalise the legitimate authority of various governments and promote democratic change of governments (African Union, 2007). One important aspect of Article 2 is to prohibit, reject, and condemn any unconstitutional change in governance, which is considered a threat to stability, security, and development (African Union, 2007). In essence, states are to do the following:

consolidate good governance, build and strengthen governance institutions, encourage political pluralism and tolerance, enhance cooperation between the AU and the Regional Economic Communities, and the international community (African Union, 2007).

The West African sub-regional organisation, ECOWAS, is under immense pressure and criticism following its preventive diplomacy efforts, which could not secure the return of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger to the democratic spectrum. (Ghana Web, 2024). This has also resulted in immense pressure to address the situation in Togo, particularly to enhance its diplomatic efforts and prevent the region from becoming a hub for military juntas (Ghana Web, 2024). There are several studies on Togo, particularly on its constitution (Avoulete, 2024), political and socio-economic development (Kohnert, 2021), as well as an in-depth ethnographical approach to analyse the events leading to independence and its aftermath (Kuranga, 2012). The key novelty of this study lies in the country's political impasse and its implications for neighbouring states, such as Ghana, as well as how ECOWAS has responded to these issues, particularly as Togo considers becoming a member of the AES. This paper will employ the lens of prevention within the conflict resolution domain to examine and understand the reasons behind the political impasse in Togo, as well as the role of stakeholders in addressing the situation to prevent violent conflicts. The paper examines the limitations of ECOWAS's mechanisms on constitutional amendments and how it has addressed the situation.

This paper seeks to analyse the sources of Togo's political impasse, taking into consideration the response from the ECOWAS to address the impasse and implement measures to prevent armed conflict. This paper asks the question: What are the prevention measures against the political impasse? The paper will have five sections. After the introduction, the second section examines local interventions and efforts to address the political impasse, with a focus on the specific role of civil society organisations (CSOs). Section three focuses on international and domestic approaches for sustainable peace. The fourth section focuses on measures to prevent armed violence and ECOWAS' response to date. The concluding section focuses on the conclusion and provides recommendations for the way forward.

Conceptual Framework

Ramsbotham et al. (2016:34) argue that conflict is a universal feature which is attributed to every human society and thus seen as "the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups". Aten and Abazaami (2016) argue that conflict stems from existing relationships, so peace efforts should focus

on transforming those relationships. Miall (2004) argues that modern conflicts should be for mutual benefit. Basedau (2011) observes that most modern conflicts resemble civil wars and are frequently termed ethnic conflicts.

Disagreements are a characteristic of conflict, and these may lead to severe crises or result in armed violence, as noted by Hwedie and Rankopo (2012). They further assert that, there are numerous reasons for which conflict arises which includes: (i) greed, (ii) injustice, (iii) plain mischief, (iv) desire to attain political, social, and economical advantages, (v) lack of resources and inadequate distribution of the resources, and (vi) ego-related issues. However, Mitchell (2005) makes a strong point that, crucial as it may be, conflict can exist independently of the perceptions of the actors and parties involved.

This study adopts the concept of direct and structural prevention measures. These two classifications regarding conflict prevention were introduced by Ramsbotham et al. (2016). According to Zartman (2015:6), conflict prevention denotes “measures to inhibit actions that can lead to deadly violence” (Zartman, 2015, p. 6). In the works of Fisher et al. (2020), some of the factors noted to contribute to conflict prevention include the following: (i) building confidence and trust among the actors; (ii) conducting a thorough investigation into incidents to ascertain parties who are involved and know what exactly happened; (iii) conflict prevention also deals counteracting rumours to correct misunderstandings and malicious reports; (iv) facilitating and spearheading dialogue among the actors; and (v) shuttling negotiations between opposing actors at all levels.

Swanström and Weissman (2005) argue that there are two categories of prevention. They are direct and structural prevention. They further state that the direct prevention has to do with measures “aimed at preventing short-term, often imminent, escalation of a potential conflict”, which is often associated with armed violence Swanström and Weissman (2005: 19). Ramsbotham et al. (2016) stipulates that some of the direct prevention measures include mediation, conciliation, negotiation, and mediation. In contrast, Swanström and Weissman (2005:19) argue that the structural prevention concept places emphasis “on more long-term measures that address the underlying causes of a potential conflict along with potentially escalating and triggering factors”. Opportunities for adequate political and economic inclusiveness, economic development, and increased political participation, among others, are examples of the structural prevention mechanisms (Swanström & Weissman, 2005). Fisher et al. (2020) argue that government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and communities are multiple parties and actors involved in implementing direct and structural prevention measures.

Methodology and Data Collection

This paper uses a qualitative case study approach. According to Bell (1999), the case study approach enables a focused examination of a specific instance or situation to identify general information, facts, and findings. The narrative inquiry approach was also employed in this study, which enabled experts and respondents to provide detailed explanations of the facts for further follow-up. Semi-structured interviews were employed to gather primary data, using open-ended questions. Additionally, the primary data consisted of interviews with experts in the fields of governance, security, violent extremism, politics, and conflict. Experts from institutions like the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) were chosen for their extensive experience and research on governance, conflict, and political issues in Togo and West Africa. Experts were also drawn from CSOs, such as the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), the All-Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), the Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA), and the West Africa Centre for Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Extremism (WACCE). Some political analysts were interviewed about the subject matter. Views of analysts and experts were solicited during the 81st Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) Conference in the Gambia on October 17, 2024.

This paper is based on interviews conducted in Ghana and the Gambia, specifically in Accra, from February to March 2025. An interview was conducted with a representative from AACC, specifically an official from the Lomé-Togo Office, during a conference held in Gambia. Two individuals from the WANEP office in Togo and three individuals from state agencies participated in the interviews. Amid the numerous stakeholders involved in conflict prevention, key respondents were identified from the stakeholder spectrum by personal contact. The primary source of data for this study was obtained through a semi-structured interview. These respondents are not only occupying managerial positions but are also experienced in their respective roles, bringing vast knowledge and expertise to African issues. A total of 15 key respondents were contacted: two from WANEP, one each from FOSDA, AACC, and WACCE, five KAIPTC officials, and a former African diplomat with UN experience in governance and development. Regarding the secondary sources of data, the study focused on academic literature, specifically journal articles that are published.

Table 1: List of Interviews Conducted[3]

No.	Respondent	Organization	Status	Location	No.	Date
1	NGO	WANEP	Senior official named (A)	Greater Accra	1	February 09, 2025
2	NGO	WANEP	Senior Official (H and Z)	Togo	2	March 27, 2025
3	Informants	State agencies	Senior officials (C, E, and F)	Togo	3	March 27, 2025
4	NGO	FOSDA	Senior official named (B)	Greater Accra	1	March 11, 2025
5	NGO	AACC	Senior official named (T)	Gambia	1	October 13, 2024
6	NGO	WACCE	Senior official named (M)	Greater Accra	1	March 11, 2025
7	CSO/Academic institution	KAIPTC	Senior officials named (M, A, N, E, V)	Greater Accra	5	February 23, 2025
8	Expert	Former African Diplomat, Governance and Development Expert	Senior official named (S)	Greater Accra	1	2024 and February 23, 2025
9	Total				15	

Source: Authors' field findings, February to March 2025

An Overview of Togo's Socio-Political State

Despite efforts to democratise in the early 2000s, Togo continues to grapple with political and socio-economic challenges. Furthermore, the shocking departure of the Prime Minister and his government before the October 2012 elections raised concerns about insecurity and instability (GIABA, 2018). One important and prominent characteristic of Togo's political arena is the dominance of the ruling party, known as the Union for the Republic (UNIR). His Excellency, President Faure Gnassingbé, notably heads the UNIR. He has been the country's leader since 2005. Despite some attempts at

[3] Interviews conducted with informants and respondents in Accra are all experts who have extensive knowledge on the Political dynamics in Togo.

political liberalisation and reforms related to the constitution, coupled with the introduction of term limits for presidents in 2009, critics argue that there is no level playing field for politicians, as politicking in that space has always been tilted in their favour (Kohnert, 2021). There have been reforms aimed at ensuring that the West African state will shift from a presidential system of governance to a parliamentary system. By that, parliament would appoint a president, and as the parliament is filled with the current President Gnassingbé's cronies, he will likely be appointed. Therefore, the opposition has claimed that the move was orchestrated to maintain President Faure Gnassingbé, who is already in his fourth term (Avoulete, 2024).

Togo has experienced periodic waves of protests and demonstrations, often triggered by grievances over governance issues, human rights abuses, and socioeconomic disparities. The government's reactions to such protests have, from time to time, come under criticism for being too forceful, including reports of excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests (Amnesty International, 2023) . The potential for armed clashes and political instability in Togo is influenced by many factors, like disputed and disrupted elections as well as allegations of electoral fraud, which have led to tensions between the ruling party and the opposition, undermining political stability and legitimacy (United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2023). The concentration of power within the ruling elite and limited political freedoms, characteristic of authoritarian governance practices, also contribute to social resentment and opposition. Marginalised groups, including ethnic minorities and rural communities, often feel excluded from the political process, exacerbating social tensions. Moreover, high levels of socio-economic issues such as unemployment among the youth, especially coupled with scarce economic opportunities and prospects, result in disillusionment amid the frustration, making individuals more susceptible to recruitment by extremist or insurgent groups (United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2023). Togo's geopolitical position in West Africa, combined with its history of regional conflicts and border disputes, further complicates its political landscape and increases the risk of armed clashes (Amnesty International, 2023).

The West African state (Togo) has many challenges, including socio-economic disparities, high levels of poverty, particularly in rural areas, where it reaches 58.8%, compared to 26.5% in urban areas ('BTI Transformation Index', 2024). Economic growth is concentrated in the capital and other metropolitan cities, leaving large parts of the population with limited access to quality services. Women, especially those in female-headed households, are disproportionately affected due to limited economic opportunities and restricted access to education and healthcare (The World Bank Group,

2024). Recent developments in Togo, which include preparations for legislative and regional elections in 2024, as announced by President Faure Gnassingbé, follow significant public participation in the electoral census and the validation of the electoral register by international observers, despite opposition claims of irregularities (Africa News, 2023). Additionally, Togo's political landscape is set to change with the implementation of a new constitution, which seeks to transition the country to a parliamentary system, potentially altering the power dynamics within the government (The World Bank Group, 2024).

The case of Togo reflects a troubling pattern seen across the West African sub-region, where leaders have sought to extend their tenure through constitutional amendments. For instance, in Côte d'Ivoire, former president Laurent Gbagbo took a considerable risk of trying to amend the country's legislation in a personal bid to prolong his tenure before being ousted April 2011 (Reyntjens, 2020) as well as current president Ouattara's bid in 2020 to extend his term limit for the third consecutive time, despite assurances he gave would not happen but would step down after his term. Similarly, in Nigeria, the Senate had to reject an attempt by then-President Olusegun Obasanjo to modify the constitution, which would have allowed him a third term in office in 2006 (Salihu & Muhammad). Another attempt occurred when former president Muhammadu Buhari faced criticism for attempting to extend his presidency despite the term limits established in the constitution (Uwakwe, 2020). To reiterate, Reyntjens (2020) argues that leaders of African states such as Burkina Faso, led by the then Blaise Campaore, tried to extend the presidential term limit that would have given him eligibility to run for a third term in 2005, but this move was very much opposed, resulting in his resignation. His resignation came because of violent protests against his bid for a third term, which would have extended his 27-year rule in Burkina Faso (BBC, 2014).

These examples highlight the varying successes and failures of West African leaders in manipulating constitutional provisions, revealing a complex interplay between governance, public sentiment, and political accountability. As seen in Togo, the approval of constitutional amendments to prolong presidential terms can exacerbate tensions, leading to unrest and conflict. This manipulation of constitutions underscores a worrying trend in West Africa, where political survival has been a far more significant concern than the democratic principles that many leaders hold dear. Constitutional amendments have passed without regard for popular opinion and democratic norms. These measures threaten democracy and raise discontent and potential uprisings among the populace (Osei et al., 2020).

Local Interventions and Conflict Prevention Approaches in Addressing the Political Impasse in Togo

Within Togo, local actors have played a critical role in mediating political tensions, albeit with limited success. Religious leaders, notably the Togolese Conference of Bishops, have called for dialogue and reforms and attempted to bridge the divide between the government and its opposition. This corroborates the views of Aten and Abazaami (2016) that measures aimed at conflict prevention and peace should focus on transforming the existing relationship between the conflict parties. The efforts of the religious leaders have been central to peacebuilding initiatives, advocating for national unity in times of crisis (Ludovic, 2021). Reiterating the views of Ludovic (2021), Senior official T added that, “We the stakeholders including CSOs need to use all diplomatic means available to address whatever issues that will not result in peaceful means” (Interview with Senior Official T on, October 13, 2024). As Miall (2004) asserted, conflict in contemporary days should be such that processes to address it are geared towards a win-win result. The study found that "the political situation is very sensitive; no one can predict when there will be social unrest, protests, which could lead to violence and result in disrupting the peace and economic activities" (Interview with Sr. Official Bon, March 11, 2025). Respondent B's statement aligns with Hwedie and Rankopo (2012), who observe that most modern conflicts are associated with the attributes of domestic or civil disputes.

Moreover, CSOs have become vital in advocating for democracy and human rights. Despite facing repression from the government, these organisations have successfully mobilised public opinion against authoritarianism and have been instrumental in organising protests and promoting political awareness among citizens (Osei et al., 2020). The field study corroborated the assertion that “civil society space is closing, CSOs do not have the opportunity to speak and operate; this undermines all efforts made with regard to peace” (Interview with Sr. Official H and Z on March 27, 2025). CSOs need freedom to function and support multiparty democracy. The influence of these local actors is critical in challenging the status quo and fostering a culture of accountability in Togo. A notable example is the Togolese civil society coalition, also known as the Coalition of 14 (C14), which has played a pivotal role in organising protests and advocating for political reform (Amegboh, 2018). Their efforts have underscored the need for improved democratic governance and accountability, highlighting the importance of citizen participation in the political process (Amegboh, 2018). The study found that CSOs, together with 12 political parties, issued a joint statement labelled the Declaration of March 20, urging the people of Togo to reject what they described as a constitutional coup (Interview with Sr. Official H and Z on March 27, 2025). The joint statement also urged the

people of Togo to be alert, as a legal vacuum could occur after May 4, 2025, marking the end of the current President's tenure of office (Interview with Sr. Official H and Z on March 27, 2025). CSOs have implemented dialogue and mediation approaches in the past between the opposition and the central government, geared towards enhancing peace, and more importantly, finding common ground (Interview with Sr. Official T, on October 13, 2024). A consortium of CSOs has already been engaged, and I suggest there should be more engagement in that area (Interview with Sr. Official H and Z on March 27, 2025).

The situation has prompted CSOs to be very vibrant and support the promotion of good democratic values and human rights goals (Interview with Sr. Official Ton, October 13, 2024). The National Alliance for Change (ANC) party condemned what it described as the excessive concentration of power and authority in the hands of the President of the Council and the weakening of parliamentary oversight under articles 50 and 54 of the new constitution (Interview with Snr Official H and Z on March 27, 2025). Traditional authorities have also contributed to the discourse on peace over the years (Interview with Snr. Official T, October 13, 2024). Their role involved influencing leadership using their traditional leverage and credibility (Interview with Sr. Official Ton, October 13, 2024). The study found that the activities of the CSOs have been highly beneficial; these organisations have intervened in the situation, preventing any violence (Interview with Sr. Official H and Z on March 27, 2025). There are contestations, but no violent incidents yet, according to respondents H and Z in an interview on March 27, 2025. At this critical moment in the country's governance, there is nothing to return to; people believe that the new constitution offers them no benefits (Interview with informants C, E, and F on March 27, 2025). People do not understand the new constitution and the power linkages between the actors to achieve the intended purpose by the leading actor (Interview with informants C, E, and F on March 27, 2025). There is a gap in understanding among the people regarding the role of the constitution, and CSOs need to address this gap to help people comprehend the new constitution and the power linkage between legislation and the leading actor (Interview with Sr. Official H and Z on March 27, 2025).

The new constitution does not provide any clear indication of ownership (Interview with Sr. Officials H and Z on March 27, 2025). The situation is being monitored by the CSOs and relevant stakeholders, international community, ECOWAS, and Early warning systems are being implemented by the WANEP to prevent conflict (Interview with informants H, Z, C, E, and F on March 27, 2025). Conflict prevention approaches, such as mediation and dialogue by the state agencies such as the Ministry of Human Rights and Relations, are in place and should be sustained by the ministry together

with CSOs and youth groups to prevent conflict (Interview with informants C, E, and F on March 27, 2025).

Preventing Armed Violence: What has been ECOWAS' Response?

In 2005, ECOWAS lifted several of the sanctions it had imposed on Togo. This was after President Faure Gnassingbe stepped down as President of Togo in compliance with the demand of the sub-regional body's Extraordinary Summit of February 9, 2005 (ECOWAS, 2005). ECOWAS then went ahead and pleaded with all parties and stakeholders in Togo to respect the provisions of the 1992 Togolese Constitution, as amended in 2002, and subsequently hold elections within sixty (60) days, pledging assistance in that regard (ECOWAS, 2005). It also called for support from the regional organisation, the African Union (AU), as well as international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), to assist and provide the necessary capacity for the elections (ECOWAS, 2005).

ECOWAS mediated in the aftermath of the 2005 elections, which helped avert a prolonged conflict and facilitated a more inclusive political process (Maluleke & Bennett, 2022). However, its effectiveness in enforcing democratic principles, such as term limits, has been questioned. The much-touted Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance of ECOWAS outlines clear mandates regarding the respect for constitutional term limits (ECOWAS, 2001). West African states, such as Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, have already amended their constitutions to extend presidential terms, threatening democratic consolidation in the region (Levitsky & Way, 2010). This has undermined the organisation's credibility when calling for democratic governance in Togo. The regional organisation's capacity to enforce compliance with democratic norms and human rights standards is often limited by the sovereignty of its members, the will of its membership, and the complexity of internal dynamics within these countries (African News Agency, 2023). The failure of the ECOWAS to prevent the unconstitutional changes in Togo highlights its limitations in ensuring compliance with its democratic protocols (African News Agency, 2023).

ECOWAS's weak response to security and political challenges in the region has reduced its legitimacy (Wilen & Aning, 2025). Several challenges persist in the region, including: (i) interruptions in democratic processes across multiple ECOWAS member states, (ii) a significant incidence of coups, (iii) consistently low levels of economic growth, and (iv) evidence of democratic backsliding (Wilen & Aning, 2025). This connotes that ECOWAS has unintentionally aided an enabling environment for

the recurrence of military coups, which challenge the political order and disrupt the democratic dispensation (Wilen & Aning, 2025). Togo and Côte d'Ivoire have been able to manipulate their respective constitutions to extend their stays in power, resulting in tensions and violent protests regarding the situation in Togo (Wilen & Aning, 2025).

Promoting peace and stability across the region requires a tactical approach, and ECOWAS plays a significant role in this regard. As a statutory regional bloc currently comprising 12 African States with the exit of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso to establish the Alliance des Etats du Sahel/Alliance of Sahel States (AES), ECOWAS was initially set up to foster integration and trade, but has expanded its mandate to include political and security issues. The organisation's efforts are essential in addressing various forms of conflict, including violent extremism, organised crime, and election-related violence, which are prevalent in the region (Sany, 2024). There have been efforts to foster dialogue and reconciliation between the government and opposition factions. The National Dialogue, in conjunction with the facilitation efforts of regional organisations such as ECOWAS, has sought to address some underlying tensions and advance political stability. However, achieving genuine national consensus and inclusivity remains an ongoing challenge. Additionally, ECOWAS has provided election monitoring and technical assistance to ensure fair and transparent electoral processes in Togo (Sany, 2024; Malukeke & Bennett, 2022).

More recently, ECOWAS has focused on enhancing Togo's capacity for conflict prevention and management. ECOWAS has also provided capacity-building and training for state authorities and security agencies to enhance their skills in managing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. This includes setting up national response centres as part of a regional early warning system for crises, which helps monitor and address potential conflicts before they escalate (GIZ, 2021). ECOWAS' effectiveness in its interventions in Togo, however, has been mixed. On the one hand, the organisation's mediation efforts and support for electoral processes have significantly prevented larger-scale conflicts and promoted dialogue between political factions (GIZ, 2021).

Togo is building ties with AES, which makes the situation very uncertain. ECOWAS is powerless in this instance (Interview with Snr Official H and Z on March 27, 2025). Togo is acting as a mediator for the three states (AES) and ECOWAS to return to the sub-regional block (Interview with informants C, E, and F on March 27, 2025). With the establishment of the free port in Togo, it becomes difficult for ECOWAS to sanction Togo, as the AES is exploring the use of the port and Togo stands to gain from this (Interview with Sr. Official H and Z on March 27, 2025). Togo could

be a de facto member of the AES while maintaining its membership and position within ECOWAS simultaneously (Interview with Sr. Officials H and Z on March 27, 2025). The prospects of ECOWAS could be bleaker with no success in sight regarding the AES (Interview with Snr Official H and Z on March 27, 2025). This corroborates the study's findings, as articulated by respondents H and Z, who do not think ECOWAS can do much more, regardless of what it has already implemented (Interview with Snr. Officials H and Z on March 27, 2025). They can only issue statements, and that is all there is to it (Interview with Sr. Official H and Z on March 27, 2025).

Although ECOWAS has made some efforts and commitments to prevent armed violence in Togo, the challenges faced by ECOWAS and its current efforts to resolve the democratic challenges in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, to return these states to democratic rule, have had no success, sending a worrying signal to other states in the sub-region. (Interview with Senior Official A on February 9, 2025) ECOWAS needs to focus on prevention by strengthening good governance and promoting social justice through better distribution of national resources (Respondents from the ACHPR Conference, Gambia, 2024). ECOWAS should enforce its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance to prevent political instability in Togo, address the issues of dictatorship, economic hardship, injustice, and human rights abuses (Respondents from the ACHPR Conference, Gambia, 2024). ECOWAS has evolved into what I term the Economic Community of Coastal States, excluding Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (Interview with Sr. Official A, February 23, 2025). This is due to ECOWAS's inability to address issues related not only to the change of government through coups, but to the issue of constitutional tempering to favour incumbent leaders (Interview with Sr. Official A on February 23, 2025).

ECOWAS is unable to respond effectively and efficiently to various political and security challenges in the African Sub-region, resulting in a significant loss of its legitimacy (Wilen & Aning, 2025). This is a result of the instances where democratic processes are fragmented in most of its member states (Wilen & Aning, 2025). Unconstitutional changes of government, especially coups, are challenging not only the political order but also the democratic processes and the principles outlined in the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol of 2000 (Wilen & Aning, 2025). ECOWAS needs to be proactive in the Togo situation because the issue of manipulating the constitution to serve personal and elite interests is escalating (Interview with Sr. Official A on February 23, 2025). The sub-regional organisation, as per its mandate, has done little to stop this menace of unconstitutional stay in power, specifically the extension of term limits, which often leads to violence (Interview with Sr. Official A on February 23, 2025).

Preventing Cross-Border Conflict: Impact of Togo's Political Situation on Neighbouring Countries, Especially Ghana

Ghana's relationship with Togo is strategic; should Togo's situation deteriorate, there will be significant implications for Ghana (Interview with Respondent S on, February 23, 2025). Ghana is located in the eastern part of West Africa and is a close, strong neighbour. There are several impacts if the situation in Togo deteriorates. They include border crossing and a high influx of asylum seekers (Interview with Sr. Official M & Respondent S, on March 11, 2025, and February 23, 2025).

Togo's potential collaboration with the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) raises concerns for Ghana, given its longstanding bilateral relations with Togo (Official B on, March 11, 2025). This move will enable the AES states to have unfettered access to Togo's ports in Lomé and the sea in general for trade purposes, primarily to facilitate the export and import of essential goods and commodities (Olamikan, 2025). Meanwhile, local gun manufacturers will make a profitable business manufacturing locally made weapons for use by secessionists and other criminals (Interview with Snr Official B on March 11, 2025). Secessionist groups in Ghana's Volta region (remnants of the groups that existed as of the time of data collection) would gradually gain a firm hold on the region, which could result in a state of emergency in the area (Interview with Respondent S, February 23, 2025). Togo's political instability directly threatens Ghana's security, primarily due to the shared border, which is quite porous (Interview with Snr Officials M, A, N, E, & V on February 23, 2025). In past crises, such as the post-election violence in Togo in 2005, over 18,500 refugees fled to Ghana and Benin (UNHCR, 2005). With Togo now facing heightened political tension, similar mass displacements are likely, straining Ghana's resources, including its social services, security, and local infrastructure (Obeng-Odoom, 2014). Given this volatility, Ghana must intensify its border management and humanitarian emergency preparedness (Obeng-Odoom, 2014).

There is cause for concern, given Ghana's geographical location, and economic implications are also probable; thus, trade, commerce, and investment could have significant consequences on the local economy and the citizens of both states (Interview with Respondent S, February 23, 2025). As we approach the 2024 general elections in Ghana (at the time of collecting data for the study), the situation in Togo could lead to increased military activity in the Volta region (Interview with Respondent S, in the year 2024). This could result in the electorate being prevented from voting due to fear (Interview with Respondent S, in the year 2024). Additionally, this could potentially cause the

National Democratic Congress (NDC), a political party with a strong presence in the Volta region, to begin agitating as it may lose votes (Interview with Respondent S, in the year 2024). Due to Ghana's diplomatic relations with Togo, any political turmoil in Togo could destroy bilateral relations. Ghana may need to engage in mediation efforts or support regional initiatives to address the political crisis in Togo (Interview with Respondent S, on February 23, 2025). Both countries need to foster good diplomatic relations and channels to resolve issues (Interview with Sr. Officials C, E, F, H, and Z on March 27, 2025). The border issues must be well settled, and the demarcation of borders improved to prevent such situations (Interview with Sr. Official H and Z on March 27, 2025). Togo lacks a dedicated immigration system, resulting in a significant gap in the system (Interview with Sr. Officials H and Z on March 27, 2025).

The narrative surrounding Togo's history of authoritarian rule, civil unrest, and recent jihadist attacks by armed groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) in 2022 particularly the northern part of Togo has contributed to the volatile environment that has the potential to spill over to neighbouring states (Respondent S, personal communication, February 23, 2025). One of the respondents (Official M), assessed Ghana's borders are as vulnerable to potential jihadist threats (Snr Official M, personal communication, March 11, 2025). Although Jihadists are known to be very active in the northern part of Togo, I believe these armed groups cannot take advantage and orchestrate an attack (Interview with Snr Official H and Z on March 27, 2025). Since the change in the constitution, attacks have not occurred (Interview with Sr. Official H and Z on March 27, 2025). There has been a decrease in attacks; however, the situation can prompt armed groups to take advantage and attack if political actors and stakeholders in Togo engage in violence (Interview with Sr. Official H and Z, March 27, 2025). However, for now, all appears calm (Interview with Senior Official H and Z on March 27, 2025).

There has also been an investment in preventing extremism and radicalisation by ECOWAS through seminars and workshops (Interview with senior A and M on February 9, March 11, 2025). In December 2023, Togo was host to a regional seminar on the prevention of violent extremism and the management of conventional weapons in West Africa which saw 15 West African states to participate in a discussion on mechanisms to prevent violence and promote human security; this was one of conflict prevention mechanisms implemented to ensure Togo becomes aware of promoting peace and ensuring fundamental human rights (Snr Official A, personal communication, February 9, 2025).

The fragile political landscape of Togo also makes it prone to terrorist exploitation, similar to what has happened in other West African countries, including Nigeria and Mali. In the event of Togo's further degradation into total political unrest, extremist groups could be established, posing another security threat to Ghana (Adebajo, 2002). Therein again lies the ability of ECOWAS, Togo, and Ghana to reinvigorate shared intelligence gathering and border security (Adebajo, 2002). Beyond these effects, Ghana also risks losing the newly acquired regional leadership mantle for peacebuilding and democracy (Adebajo, 2002). Indeed, Ghana has consistently sought to resolve regional disputes related to its role in conflict prevention through the deployment of peacekeeping personnel and the use of diplomacy in areas such as the West African coastal states of Liberia and Sierra Leone on the southwestern coast of Africa (Adebajo, 2002). The Situation in Togo has heightened tensions but offers an excellent opportunity for Ghana to show its interest in peace and democracy, mediating tensions with local and international actors to ensure a peaceful resolution (Adebajo, 2002). Ghanaian CSOs and religious leaders could play pivotal roles in these efforts, leveraging their domestic influence to advocate for conflict resolution in Togo, much like they have in Ghana (Karim, 2017).

Conclusion

This paper analysed the sources of Togo's political impasse, taking into consideration the approaches by stakeholders, such as CSOs and ECOWAS, to address the political impasse and prevent conflict. The current political situation in Togo, according to field findings, is uncertain due to the high-handedness of the state security in addressing the impasse and the entrenched position taken by the President to maintain power. The study has shown that CSOs in their coalition are engaging to prevent the current president from extending his tenure. The respondents within the CSO front have described these efforts as bold; however, the space for CSOs' work is limited. CSOs encourage the state to create an opportunity for multi-party inclusivity. The study found that, although the CSO is vibrant in Togo, they do not have enough freedom to utilise the existing gap to articulate the new constitution's interpretations effectively to the populace. It is also relevant to note that addressing political instability, governance deficits, socioeconomic inequality, and ethnic tensions in Togo can be achieved by creating an open and level playing field for all political stakeholders, fostering an inclusive and resilient society.

The international community and international organisations, such as the UN, should condemn President Faure Gnassingbe's actions regarding the proposed constitutional change. This move will deter other leaders with similar ideologies from rescinding their decisions. ECOWAS should consider

a comprehensive review of its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance; this will serve as an effective yardstick to deal efficiently with the third-term syndrome, condemn coups, and bad governance. Similarly, ECOWAS should support sustained engagement with all stakeholders and enforce adherence to the democratic principles outlined in its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. Reiterating the point made by the CSO in Togo, the prospects for the sub-regional organisation ECOWAS could be bleaker, with no success in sight regarding the political impasse, not only concerning AES but also in Togo. ECOWAS should consider using economic sanctions against Togo as a tool to encourage the President to adopt a multi-party democracy, as this will lead to greater democratic inclusivity. CSOs should have the freedom to speak out more and express dissatisfaction against poor governance in Togo, enabling the populace to make informed decisions on who governs them. CSOs—including academia, think tanks, and media—should be supported to ensure press freedom, free expression, and accurate reporting, which help combat misinformation and disinformation. CSOs should invest more in early warning to detect signs of imminent political disturbances which could destabilise the peace.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors have reported no potential conflict of interest.

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