

Research Article

Conflict and Violence: Exploring the Causes and Consequences of Various Forms of Political Violence, Including Civil Wars, Ethnic Conflicts, and Coups

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Abstract

The modern international system has encountered several forms of political violence which include civil wars, insurgency, ethnic conflicts, terrorism, and military coups. According to recent trends observed in the world, violent conflicts have been on the increase by a sharp margin and 2024 is recorded as one of the most conflict-laden years since 1946 and the number of deaths in the year has been unprecedented. In this paper, Relative Deprivation Theory and Coup-Proofing Theory is used to express the underlying factors of political instability and violence. Relative Deprivation Theory emphasizes the role played by perceptions of inequalities between social groups, especially, horizontal inequalities, founded on ethnicity, religion, or regional identity in creating grievances that can stir collective violence. On the other hand, the Coup-Proofing Theory provides a description of how leaders manipulate the military structures, establish competing security agencies and politicize military forces to deter coups, and in the course of doing so, tend to fuel factional competition in the security world. The interaction between these dynamics to generate instability is empirically demonstrated in countries like Nigeria, Ethiopia, Sudan, Myanmar, Ukraine, Haiti, and a number of states in the Sahel. The structural imbalances between groups in most of these incidences generate unresolved grievances, whereas factional rivalry between the political elite and security agencies is a more contributing factor to bouts of violence and coup efforts. Moreover, there has been the increase of instability across regions through the diffusion process whereby conflicts and coups in a particular region have been used to instigate similar acts in other parts. Political violence has very far-reaching consequences. These are social trust erosion, democratic regression, budgetary crises, trade and economic activity derailment, and massive population displacement. The regional and international implications also result in these outcomes, which impact institutions like the ECOWAS and the African Union. These other spillover effects are evident in recent events such as the exit of certain Sahelian military regimes to ECOWAS and the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Sudan. The paper ends by giving recommendations that are aimed at preventing political violence with the major approach being reducing structural inequalities, professionalizing security forces, enhancing mediation mechanisms, and increasing institutional stability as alternatives.

Keyword

Political Violence, Civil War, Ethnic Conflict and Coup D'etat

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1. Introduction

The 21st century has not seen the end of political violence, but on the contrary, it has evolved and multiplied, becoming even more intense in many areas. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) reports 61 active state-based conflicts in 2024, the most since systematic records began in 1946, and 11 of them had escalated to become a war, or conflict with at least 1,000 battle-related fatalities. On average, the number of the victims annually throughout the entire planet was almost 160,000 [12]. This wave is representative of overlapping insurgencies between states and transnational and normative crises in governance that have destabilized whole regions, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East, and parts of Asia. Political violence is no longer in the margins but it is embedded within the global security trends that have rendered the conflicts less centralized but disaggregated.

The civil wars remain one of the most fatal types of political violence due to structural imbalance, weakness of the state, and outside interference. The literature of today highlights the importance of the horizontal inequalities, or the differences between ethnic and regional groups, as a good predictor of violent mobilization [21, 24]. Such disparities have created opportunities in places such as Ethiopia, Mali, and Myanmar to allow armed factions to amass supporters on identity lines, further fueling conflict cycles and making peace talks difficult. Civil wars do not only kill, but paralyze the activities of states, their belief in institutions and lead to a humanitarian crisis in the wake of massive displacement and food insecurity [38]. Civil wars are now a focal point of scholarship in the field of peacemaking and global security policy due to their drastic humanitarian impact.

The other key force behind political violence in the 21st century has been the renewal of ethnic wars and community violence which is sometimes coupled with weak governance systems and weak conflict management systems. Research indicates that ethnic mobilization is likely to become more intense where politics and resources clash and weak institutions contribute to the vulnerability [26]. This is exemplified by the Sahel region where armed militants take advantage of ethnic differences to sustain cross-border insurgency, with resultant destabilization of whole subregions. The threats of ethnic conflicts are peculiar: they not only disrupt the state on the domestic level but on the regional scale as well, where the effects of refugees and inter-country militancy [13]. When the subject of violence becomes civilians in the new dimension of violence when civilians become the target of violence as a pressure and a control mechanism, we are curious about the turning point of violence [12].

It has also been re-discovered that the comeback of coups d'état has become one of the primary characteristics of modern political violence, especially in Africa. Coups and attempted coups on the continent were also extremely high during 2020-2023, following declines in the years before and as

part of a broader trend of democratic backsliding [11]. Such renewal is credited by experts to the autocratization process, in which the leadership weakens the democratic institutions, politicizes the security services, and gives the military elites a free pass to power [13]. Coups cause high costs in politics and economics: constitutional order is undermined, repression intensified, and international collaboration disrupted, and their cost of borrowing increases and sends foreign investors away [12]. The resurgence of popular coups highlights the shifting character of political violence that not only destabilizes a country but also compromises the peace and world security in the region.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

1) Political Violence

Political violence is defined more broadly as the application or even a threat of force by a state or non-state actors in the achievement of a political objective. It involves a very broad range of phenomena such as civil wars, insurgency, repression, terrorism and coups. Political violence is the opposite of criminal violence and should have a well-defined goal to change the balance of power and governance system [19]. Political violence may be exercised by state actors by repressing, killing victims extrajudicially, or militarizing the crackdown, and by non-state actors by insurgency, terrorism, and guerrilla wars. According to recent data available worldwide, political violence is growing more fragmented, with three or more armed groups vying over the rightful legitimacy and power, especially in weak and violence-ridden states [25]. It must be added, that transnational insurgency or violence extremist groups have also been formed, which is why the political violence of the modern world is not limited to a single state, in fact, it can quite well be seen as a subset of the regional or global security processes.

2) Civil War

Civil war is one of the worst and the most devastating forms of political violence, characterized as a systematic military conflict between the state and a domestic armed force (or forces) and the lack of significant battle-related casualties. Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) considers civil war to be any conflict and any war to be any conflict. They are generally protracted, deadly, and disruptive civil wars that weaken governance, development, and social trust. The examples include civil wars in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and in Syria, which create humanitarian crises that reach well beyond national borders. Literature has found that a combination of horizontal inequalities, an underperforming state apparatus, and external intervention tendencies are typically a key catalyst in civil unrest and hard to overcome. What is more, it is the legacies of civil war that undermine institutions, militarize politics, and trigger vengeance that render post-war societies highly susceptible to relapsing into new conflict [8]

3) *Ethnic Conflict*

Ethnic conflict refers to any violent conflict in which group mobilization, grievance, and targets are determined mainly in ethnic or communal terms. Such conflicts are typically justified by the perceived or real inequalities in terms of political representation, distribution, and access to resources and access to state institutions [9]. Ethnic conflicts are especially difficult to resolve since they include both deep-seated identity claims and symbolic struggles over status hierarchies and recognition as well as ideologically motivated conflicts. As recent studies demonstrate, the denial of ethnic groups of state power is a serious factor contributing to the risk of mobilization and the escalation to violence [26]. In places like the Sahel, Myanmar and the Horn of Africa, there are instances of ethnic fault lines being exploited by political elites or insurgent leaders to create justification and gather support through violence. Since ethnic conflicts are usually intertwined with poor governance and fragile states, they are a major threat not just to the security of a nation but also to the peace of a region and global security.

4) *Coups D'État*

Coups d'état are unlawful, explicit efforts of either the military or sections of the state elites to overthrow the executive, successful, unsuccessful, or merely conspiratorial. They are a unique form of political violence in the sense that they are based inside state institutions, when the source of such political violence is not the opposition movements or insurgents [26]. The current database such as Cline Center Coupe d -etat Project has the failed and the successful coups in a sort of sequence and maybe it is in this way that we are conscious of the number of coups that were created, the reasons that caused the coups and the results of the coups [11]. The new study suggests coups returned in the 2020s specifically in Africa and have inverted recession patterns and broader tendencies toward democratic reversal and institutional vulnerability [13]. Coup effects go beyond switching regimes: they tend to enhance repression, destabilize economic growth, erode investor confidence and create flows of refugees. Others argue that coups occasionally open a path to democratization, yet all the clues suggested that coups are disruptive processes with negative effects in the long term on development and government [22].

3. Theoretical Framework

To explain the causes and dynamics of political violence, it is important to rely on the widely accepted theories explaining the formation, intensification, and substantiation of the ultimate institutional consequences of conflicts. Some of the latest explanations are all focused on three (3) major theoretical approaches: Relative Deprivation Theory, Coup-Proofing Theory, and Historical Institutionalism/Path Dependence. Collectively, these frameworks give us a multidimensional perception of grievances, organizational rivalry, elite rivalry and institutional remnants of rivalry.

3.1. Relative Deprivation Theory (Gurr, 1970)

Relative Deprivation Theory assumes political violence will develop when there is a perceived difference between the expectations and the real situation of people or groups of people. Gurr (1970) has maintained that, the grievances of marginalized people can build to the point of rebellion when they feel separately disenfranchised by the refusal of access to political, economic, or social opportunities. This theory is also closely connected with the notion of horizontal inequalities that emphasizes the differences between ethnic, religious, or regional groups. On the indicative scale, where the less fortunate groups identify themselves with the more fortunate groups, individuals experience a sense of system injustice, which encourages resentment and even mobilization of the state. Such a framework can be used to understand why there are recurrent violence in some multi-ethnic societies and why some relatively peaceful multi-ethnic societies have diversity.

A more recent example is that of Nigeria: socioeconomic and political marginalization of the northeast has been a contributing factor to the Boko Haram insurgency [2]. In the same vein, the statelessness of Rohingya Muslim and denial of political representation in Myanmar has led to many grievances, which, in their turn, resulted in violent persecution by the state and insurrections [16]. Economic disparities between groups are also pointed out by recent cross-national studies as being predictive of increased risks of low-intensity conflict and the onset of civil wars [9]. Therefore, relative deprivation stands as a very strong paradigm to explain why grievances based on enduring inequalities still fuel conflicts in the world, particularly in weak and fragmented societies.

3.2. Coup-Proofing Theory (Quinlivan, 1999; Belkin & Schofer, 2003)

Coup-Proofing Theory is the study of how rulers seek to avert military seizures, and also of the structural circumstances which render coups more or less probable. Quinlivan, (1999) maintained that the coups-proofing measures that were employed by most autocrats included the creation of parallel security structures, favoring loyal ethnic groups in the military, and decentralizing coercive authority to rival agencies. This was expanded by Belkin and Schofer (2003) who demonstrated that the risk of a coup is conditioned by a larger set of structural factors including regime type, institutional accountability and factionalism. Although such steps can help discourage coups in the short term, they tend to weaken the effectiveness of states, promote corruption, and put regimes in a weak position in the longer term [15].

The modern examples of coup-proofing can be seen as effective and ineffective. He was also aided by patronage networks and security forces (loyal to Robert Mugabe) to maintain his control over Zimbabwe until his ousting in 2017, when coup-proofing failed [20]. In the current wave

of coups in Africa (e.g. Mali in 2020, Guinea in 2021, Niger in 2023, and Gabon in 2023), most leaders had subverted their systems by finding ways to prove resistant to coups by employing elite patronage and loyalty networks, but their regimes became susceptible due to economic decline, unpopular autocratization, and intra-elite rivalries [27]. On the contrary, examples of coup-proofing, especially the existence of several security institutions and the use of foreign military assistance, have so far helped to maintain the regimes in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies [3]. The examples show that coup-proofing is one of the most effective instruments of dictators, its loss changes the system of repression, political and legitimacy.

3.3. Historical Institutionalism and Path Dependence Theory (Mahoney, 2000; Pierson, 2004)

In particular, the concept of Path Dependence, which is one of the main approaches of the historical Institutionalism, offers an insight on the reasons why civil wars and other significant crises have a long-term impact on institutions and governance. According to Mahoney (2000) and Pierson (2004), critical junctures in history are moments of disruption like war, revolution, coup, etc., which lead to new institutional arrangements that are the basis of long-term trajectories. After the reconfiguring of the institutions it creates self-reinforcing processes that limit subsequent political decisions, trapping states in a certain direction of development. This framework is used to explain why same conflicts often result in different outcomes: some post-conflict societies are consolidated and democratized, and others recede to dictatorship or the new outbreak of armed conflicts.

A good case in point is Rwanda following the 1994 genocide, when the Rwandan Patriotic Front unified a highly centralized and authoritarian regime that continues to this very day, with little room to express views in opposition to it [5]. However, in the more successful instance of what a critical junction can give birth to the inclusive system we may also speak of the situation in South Africa in 1990s when the system of apartheid was already fading before our eyes in the face of the more inclusive one yet the already existing inequalities which remain were becoming even less exclusionary [23]. In more precise terms, the example of Iraq and the civil war in Libya shows that the failure of the institutional reorganization during the critical transition can lead to the further destabilization, institutionalization of the militia ruling, and collapse of a state [4]. Historical Institutionalism emphasises the institutional effects of violent conflict in the long run, emphasising why post-conflict peacebuilding strategies should target institutional legacies of a deeper structural nature in addition to the short-term stability required.

When combined, these three theories, Relative Depriva-

tion, Coup-Proofing, and Historical Institutionalism, provide complementary explanations of how political violence works. Relative Deprivation helps us understand how inequalities leads to grievances and Coup-Proofing Theory helps us understand how failure of authoritarian governments in resisting demands of elites and Historical Institutionalism helps us understand how conflicts are the turning points leading to long-run remaking of political and social orders. With these views combined, a researcher and policy-maker can gain better insights into the short-term stimuli as well as the long-term legacies of political conflict and implement more effective strategies to prevent, control, and reconstruct the post-conflict world.

4. Main Thrust of the Paper

4.1. Causes of Political Violence

Political violence has many multidimensional causes influenced by structural inequalities, organizational forces, regime paths, and regional or global diffusion. All these processes work together to answer not only the question about the origin of conflicts but also the spread and duration of conflicts.

Structural inequalities and exclusion, especially ethnicity, regional or religious, is one of the oldest explanations. Political and economic differences between groups generate resentments that elevate mobilization, particularly in societies in which the outcast groups believe that their power and economic resources are being systematically deprived. These inequalities tend to overlap with demographic strains, including rapid population increase or urbanization, and with center-periphery dualities in which resource-rich areas or borderlands feel disfavored by central governments. The marginalization of the northeast of Nigeria is sufficient to allow Boko Haram to gain momentum, yet in Ethiopia, the ethnical lines were the basis of the conflict between Tigray and the federal government. Similarly, in Myanmar, stateless Rohingya Muslims intensified grievances and brought about violence, and the Darfur conflict (2003) in Sudan shows that ethnic and regional marginalization in the long term generates grievances. Outside of Africa and Asia, Colombia had a decades-long armed conflict that was a consequence of inequalities in the countryside and land exclusion, and the Northern Ireland. These instances are examples of how horizontal inequalities will always be relevant as a source of conflict [10].

In addition to structural grievances, there is organizational competition and competitive interaction that are central to increasing violence. As opposition formations become fragmented, groups tend to struggle to win legitimacy and material resources, by radicalizing their needs and actions. It has been noted in Syria, where ISIS and al-Nusra Front competed to draw the largest share of extremities and in Iraq, where after 2003 sectarian militias competed to kill more civilians. In Afghanistan, the war lasted long because the Taliban groups and other Islamist groups were competing against one another by

launching violent attacks. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Africa has experienced endless factional division among rebel factions, and in Somalia, al-Shabaab is fighting with clan militias and competing jihadist groups. Outbidding forces are present even in the absence of active civil wars: in Palestine, Hamas and Fatah have played the game of competition to radicalize their demands in times of negotiation. Additional instances can be found in the Sahel region with jihadist organisations in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger attempting to assert power against governments and their opponents by increasing violence.

Political violence risks are also strongly influenced by politics of regime type, autocratization, and security-sector dynamics, especially by coups and unconstitutional transitions of power. Democratic backsliding is usually associated with an increase in the risk of coup because executives undermine accountability institutions and fuel intra-elite contests within the security apparatus. This trend is also exemplified by recent coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021), Niger (2023) and Gabon (2023) that were caused by disputed elections, governance crises, or anti-insurgency crises. A military takeover in Chad (2021) after the death of President Déby on the grounds of security threats, and a coup in Sudan (2021) derailing its already weak democracy transition. Elsewhere, Thailand has experienced a succession of coups (2006, 2014) related to polarization and elite competition, and in Turkey (2016) a coup attempt was unsuccessful, a fact that reinforced the notion that civilmilitary tensions do not disappear in semi-authoritarian regimes. Likewise, Venezuela has had several coup attempts and conspiracies as part of its authoritarian drift. These illustrations highlight how the loss of democratic protection, the politicization of defence armies, and the process of autocratization increases the risks of coups [17].

What follows is the role of shocks and diffusion in explaining why political violence does not occur uniformly but is, rather, clustered in space and time. War often crosses boundaries when warriors, weapons and patterns of devastation infiltrate into the surrounding country. This is complicated by the fact that the Sudanese war of 2023 is exporting fighters and weapons to Chad and South Sudan. The Sahel is a perfect example of regional dispersion, with insurgencies expanding out of Mali into Burkina Faso and Niger. In the same manner, Syrian civil war has caused spillover instabilities by displacing foreign fighters in Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan. The war of Ukraine initiated by Russia in Europe (2014, 2022 to date) created refugee crises and militarization in Eastern Europe and in Latin America, the civil war in Colombia spilled over into Venezuela and Ecuador. There is also temporal diffusion, coups in Mali and Guinea seem to encourage military takeovers in Niger and Gabon, expanding on previous waves of coup in West Africa in the 1960s-1980s. These instances underscore the point that conflict is seldom within boundaries, and that a shock like sanctions, an election, or foreign intervention redistributes the incentives of violence.

Collectively, these examples of Nigeria, Ethiopia, Myanmar,

Sudan, Colombia, Northern Ireland, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, DRC, Somalia, Palestine, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Gabon, Chad, Thailand, Turkey and Ukraine, among many others, reveal the extent of political violence in the world. They demonstrate the interaction of structural inequalities, organizational competition, regime processes and diffusion to influence the initiation, intensification and contagion of conflict in the 21st century.

4.2. Consequences of Political Violence

The effects of political violence go well beyond the realities on the battlefield and their impacts on societies, institutions, and economies that decades after the fighting has ceased. The long term effects of civil wars, insurgencies and coups on human security, political stability, economic growth and stability in a region are deep and long lasting.

Among the most obvious effects are the decay of social fabric and human security. Political violence does not only leave casualties but also social cleavages that take long to heal the trust within the various communities. In post-genocide Rwanda, suspicions between the two ethnicities exist even under the policy of formal reconciliation, and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the territorial divisions instituted by the Dayton Agreement still influence education, politics and interethnic relationships decades after the war. Similarly, it could be perceived that the sectarian violence that took place in the mid-2000s derailed the relationships between the Sunni and the Shia population due to the lack of trust in the process of peacebuilding in the Iraq scenario. Recent micro-studies show that wartime trauma and displacement reduce the likelihood of cross-identity cooperation to an absolute minimum and that the outcome of such processes is heterogeneous recovery [6]. These permanent divisions explain how wars not only ruin lives, but they also tear apart the social fabric needed to maintain sustainable peace.

Political violence also weakens political order and the quality of democracy and tends to hasten democratic backsliding. Civil wars give governments an excuse to exercise emergency powers, limit freedoms, and crack down opposition, and coup makes government direct military and suspends democracy. Freedom House (2024) announced another year of global deterioration of rights and liberties, specifically in the states with armed conflict or disputed elections like Myanmar, Sudan, Mali and Nicaragua. In Myanmar, a decade of democratisation was rolled back by the 2021 coup, which resulted in repression of a large population, and democratisation in Niger was stopped by the 2023 coup, which further empowered the military elites. Armed resistance has even been used to justify authoritarian actions in partial democracies, as in Turkey after the 2016 coup attempt, in which the government extended its repression under emergency rule. These examples highlight political violence as one of the most dominant causes of democratic erosion in the world.

Political violence is equally expensive in terms of economic

and fiscal costs. Coups and armed conflicts ruin investment climates and raise the cost of sovereign borrowing and channel public funds to security spending not to development. Coups will contribute to the spread of sovereign debt, as it has been found that the occurrence of coups will signal to investors that institutional instability has taken place [4]. This can include the drastic devaluation of the sovereign bonds of Gabon after the 2023 coup, and the failure of Sudan to default on her international financial aid and debt relief negotiations after the 2021 coup. Civil wars also discourage investment and erase productive capacity, as occurred in Syria where 10 years of war have destroyed infrastructure and caused GDP declines of more than 60%. In Yemen, the situation is almost complete breakdown of the formal economy after years of conflict, huge fiscal deficits, and food insecurity. In addition to direct destruction, governments in conflict with insurgencies tend to spend more on defense than on social services, a pattern that has played out in Nigeria, where ongoing counter-insurgency operations against Boko Haram have burdened federal budgets [28].

Large-scale displacement and regional spillovers are some of the outcomes of political violence that lead to humanitarian crises and destabilize other states. War and violence lead to refugee exodus which puts pressure on the host nation, and coups and suppression frequently motivate political exiles abroad. Sudan (2023) is simply worsening the situation in the region, because the conflict has forced millions of people to leave the country in favor of Chad, South Sudan, and Egypt. Overlapping conflicts in Sahel Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have generated displacement movements of the region that strain the resources of regional structures like ECOWAS and the African Union. The civil war in Syria in the Middle East displaced more than six million refugees in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, changing the demographics and politics of the region. Similarly, the political and dictatorial turn of Venezuela has caused more than seven million immigrants to leave the country, straining politics and society. According to the latest literature, it is discovered that autocratic or failed coups increase the probability of oppression and exile to foreign nations that expands the number of loads placed in the region [27]. Combined, these outcomes reflect the fact that political violence does not necessarily stay on the battlefield. It redefines social reality, destabilizes democratic leadership, is economically prohibitive, and produces dire humanitarian externalities. These outcomes are critical to understanding not only what the real costs of war and coup are but also how to design effective peacebuilding and governance approaches in the post-conflict setting.

4.3. Contemporary Illustrations

One of the most obvious examples of the interaction of insurgencies and coups in the formation of the modern conflict processes is the Sahel and West African region. A series of coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022, two times), Niger (2023), and Gabon (2023) have really changed the course of governance in the region since 2020

[9, 27]. All of these power expropriations were driven by security failures, contested elections, and frustration with the established elites, and also happened to coincide with the escalation of jihadist violence in the MaliBurkina FasoNiger border area. Weak states have been used by armed groups linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State to enlarge their territorial reach and, in the process, kill thousands of people each year and displace millions [1]. There is also the international aspect to the crisis: in January 2024, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger officially left the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), citing sanctions and foreign influence and announced the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES)- a new military and political alliance [18]. This transformation is a reflection of how conflict is transforming domestic politics as well as regional institutions.

Reconstructions of external relationships have added another layer to the security dilemma in the Sahel. As Russian troops in the Wagner Group soon occupied the vacuum created by French Operation Barkhane forces and the withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in the end of 2023, the space was soon filled by the Wagner Group led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, reorganized as Africa Corps after his death [31]. This has changed the dynamic of military support with juntas becoming more and more dependent on Moscow in terms of training and equipment and breaking links with the West. These convergences reflect the internationalization of regional politics as domestic politics collide with international politics. It has helped institutionalise dictatorship that views defence of regimes as new normal and ugly price of democracy building [7]. The Sahelian example illuminates the functioning of political violence as both a local security crisis and as a point in a broader geopolitical rivalry.

The indicators of conflict are also at an all-time high across the world. Since 2000 alone, more than 55 active conflicts have been documented [14] and according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) a greater number of state-based conflicts were reported in 2024 than at any previous time in the 21st century. Russia has also been slowly but surely killing more people in mass conflicts mainly in Ukraine where Russia has been invaded since 2022 and in Sudan where in April 2023 a vicious civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces erupted and left more than 8 million people homeless [11]. During the years that followed the coup in 2021 in Myanmar and the increase in the power of the ethnic armed forces, along with the People Defense Forces, the opposition to the military junta became even more active [18]. Meanwhile, the new war between Israel and Hamas that erupted in October 2023 has already taken tens of thousands of lives and shifted the Middle Eastern balance of power, including that of the world superpowers [7]. The reason why the environment in the world is dangerous nowadays is proven by SIPRI (2024), which determined that in 2024, more people died due to conflicts than it was in 2019.

In addition to the traditional wars, there are other instances that support the claim that political violence is slowly blurring the boundaries between armed conflict, organized crime, and governance crises. Haiti is already turning into a literal civil war among gangs as different factions take control of major sections of the capital, Port-au-Prince, and argue over the measures of international intervention. Ethiopia remains vulnerable to violence in the Amhara and Oromia areas since the fragile peace in November 2022 following the Tigray ceasefire could be easily undone when fears of a fully resumed war threaten to engulf the country once again [29]. A new war with M23 group rebels in 2023 displaced hundreds of thousands of people in Democratic Republic of Congo, and a dispute over elections has eroded the legitimacy of the state. These cases show that the conflicts of today are regionalized, transnational and multidimensional, which supports the causal framework presented above: structural inequalities, fragmentation of organizations, autocratization, and diffusion are all factors that contribute to the political violence of the present generation.

5. Conclusions

Political violence in the 21st century is not spontaneous or pre-determined; it is systemic in its drivers and supported by mutually reinforcing international processes. As shown in the analysis above, structural inequalities, especially those underpinned by ethnicity, region, and religion present grievances that make communities more vulnerable to mobilization. These are compounded by institutional rivalry, in which disjointed movements increase violence to out-bid the competition, and elite interests in weak or autocratic states, in which a coup plot and authoritarian crackdown are the new normal. These mechanisms together with regional shocks and diffusion create clusters of instability that cross national boundaries, and are strikingly evident in the Sahel, Sudan, and Myanmar.

Such violence has multidimensional and mutually reinforcing consequences. Coupled with direct death, civil wars and coups destroy the social fabric through diminishing trust and polarizing societies. Due to the erosion of political orders to establish authoritarian entrenchment, the emerging powers and militarized ruling do not support the freedoms of democracies. Conflict is economically expensive because it prevents investment, stretches the public money, and increases sovereign risk. It destroys the lives of millions of people at the human level, spreading crisis to other states and putting pressure on weak regional organizations such as ECOWAS and the African Union. Global surveillance organizations like Freedom House, SIPRI, and UCDP confirm that the number of killings in conflicts, erosion of democracy, and forced displacement have all been at historic highs in the 2020s, which highlights the urgency of prevention and mitigation.

But there is also evidence to support the fact that it can be prevented. Grievance-based mobilization can be reduced with policies that decrease horizontal inequalities by distributing

resources equally, including all in governance, and applying selective development. Ensuring that security institutions become more professional and accountable will lower the incentive to engage in coups and will also reduce politicization of the militaries. Simultaneously, by making politics impervious to zero-sum elite conflicts, by means of plausible electoral processes, enhanced judicial checks and balances, and regional security assurances, we can curtail esterification. International relations focusing more on diplomacy, development, and institution-building, as opposed to a counterterrorism/regime-survival-centered approach, present the most promising way to sustainable peace. The survival or extinction of political violence will be ultimately determined by how well states and international actors can study how to deal with its structural causes, as they adjust to its changing global forms.

6. Recommendations

1) Horizontal Inequality of Target:

A solution to group inequalities is important to curtail the causes of grievances that lead to political violence. It is up to governments to increase fair service provision, enact inclusive budgets and ensure positive representation in marginalized areas. As an example, the federal character principle (used irregularly, but still in force in Nigeria) exemplifies the reasoning behind making sure that people of different types are included in social offices. An attempt to tie fiscal transfer to transparent group-sensitive development indicators would contribute to depoliticizing the process of resource allocation, especially in weak states where groups oppressed by the system feel neglected. The recent World Bank results highlight the importance of inequality between regions in fragile settings as a contributor to the threat of insurgency.

2) Invest in Prevention and Interception of Conflicts and early warning:

The measures to prevent conflict include powerful early-warning mechanisms and mediation mechanisms. UCDP/PRIO-style data systems funded nationally would produce locally generated conflict surveillance to inform quick response. These can be coupled with mediation infrastructures, like Kenya National Cohesion and Integration Commission, which can help to curb election-related violence. The National Peace Council of Ghana has demonstrated through evidence that institutionalized mediation decreases the possibility of violence in elections as a result of disputes between elections. The costs associated with such preventive diplomacy are lower than those of post-conflict interventions, but in most fragile states such diplomacy is not sufficiently funded.

3) Professionalize and De-politicize Sectors of Security:

Professional security institutions eliminate the risk of coups and authoritarian drift. Merit promotions, civil control, and legal checkpoints are all ways of taming fractionalization by the military. The Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger coups highlight the extent to which politicization of militaries negatively af-

fects regime stability. Analyses of new data about coup-proofing measures reveal that promotions based on patronage tend to elicit intra-military rivalries in governments dependent on such promotions. Political reforms that minimize politicization, at the same time preserving professionalism, may provide stability dividends in weak states.

4) Oppose Competition within Organizations to Protect Civilians:

The protection of civilians needs priority in disintegrated conflict settings where parties tend to aggravate violence as a signaling strategy. Civilian targeting as a war-fighting tool should be punished by conditional aid and specific sanctions on leaders who employ this measure. Recently, the U.S. Global Magnitsky Act has levied penalties in Sudan and Ethiopia in an effort to limit atrocities. Mechanisms of community-level dialogue, including peace committees in northern Kenya or interfaith councils in Nigeria, serve to discourage spoiler incentives at the negotiation table.

5) Build Regional Architectures:

The crisis management instruments of regional organizations such as ECOWAS must be adjusted. Blanket sanctions tend to negatively affect civilians and can lead to the juntas taking alternative sides. The experience of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso withdrawing out of ECOWAS in 2024 demonstrates the effects of over-dependence on punitive programs, as these countries shifted to the Alliance of Sahel States and the Africa Corps of Russia. Flexible tools will help ECOWAS regain its legitimacy without jeopardizing the effect of credible deterrence, such as graduated sanctions, humanitarian carve-outs, and inclusive security cooperation.

6) Address Fiscal Fragility:

International financial institutions (IFIs) must be able to respond to the fiscal impact of coups and conflicts. Political instability tends to increase the cost of borrowing, puts pressure on revenue bases, and increases the risk of sovereignty. As a sign, the sovereign bonds of Niger were punished right after the coup in 2023, and the civil conflict in Sudan has brought the state to the edge of fiscal default. To allow governments that have reformed to access stabilization funds on transparent terms, IFIs need to build conflict contingent financing facilities (IMF, 2024). These mechanisms would help to dampen fiscal shocks and incentives to engage in predatory taxation or unsustainable debt accumulation.

Abbreviations

ECOWAS	Economic community of West Africa States
IMF	International Monetary Funds
MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program
IFI	International Financial Institutions

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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